ARTHUR'S TWELVE BATTLES AND SOUTHERN SCOTLAND: SOME RECENT VIEWS

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Andrew Breeze[1]

Did King Arthur exist? Was he as real and historical as Macbeth or Robert the Bruce or the Young Pretender? The answer is apparently 'Yes, and we can say much about him.' He will not have been a king, but a sixth-century British commander, active in the region between the Forth and Hadrian's Wall, where he attacked other Britons (not the English) and was killed at Camlan *or Castlesteads (east-north-east of Carlisle) in 537. He thus had no connection with the British victory over West Saxons at Mount 'Badon' in 493. Most of this can be deduced from the passage on his Twelve Battles in the ninth-century Welsh-Latin* Historia Brittonum. *In this article's first part we therefore locate those combats ('Badon' excepted) in what are now southern Scotland and northern England. In our second part we turn to Bernard Mees's recent criticism of the identifications, answering his linguistic objections and defending the original conclusions. If correct, they will cheer those to whom Dumfriesshire and Galloway are dear and familiar. Local patriots can warm themselves on the thought that 'King' Arthur fought close to (and even in) their ancient realms.*

1. Arthur's Battles: Discussion 1904–2023

We start with Sir John Rhŷs (d. 1915), who referred briefly to Arthur's supposed greatest triumph, that of Mount 'Badon' in (according to Bede, here certainly correct) the year 493, and who mentioned further Arthurian engagements 'between the Roman Walls', where an abundance of 'Arthur's Hills' or 'Arthur's Seats' contrasts with their scarcity north of Stirling.[2] Thereafter, in a respected handbook, is a statement on *Historia Brittonum* and how victories there 'ascribed to Arthur may have been won in Scotland'.[3] Sir John Lloyd (d. 1947) yet located most of the conflicts in Britain's 'South and East' (in Lincolnshire, for example), if admitting that some 'belong to the North' and support 'the theory of a Northern Arthur'.[4] The objective of this paper is to demolish all claims regarding southern Britain, excepting 'Badon', a battle (as stated) of 493 and not fought by Arthur (d. 537).

Now for two authorities of the 1920s, both fundamental. First is a major survey of Scottish toponymy by William Watson (d. 1948). Amongst forms or places noted by him are (obsolete) *Pennango*, in Roxburghshire/Borders; *Draway* or Dreva, on the Tweed west of Peebles; Carwinning, a hill-fort near Dalry, North Ayrshire; *Karig Lion*, at the eastern end of the Antonine Wall; *Casteltarras* or Carstairs, with its junction on the Glasgow–Carlisle railway; Tarras Water, in Eskdale (just north of the Border); and the River

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[2] John Rhŷs, *Celtic Britain*, 3rd edn (London, 1904), 108, 237–8.

[3] Alan O. Anderson, *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers* (London, 1908), vii.

[4] J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1911), 126.

Douglas, flowing into the Clyde.[5] Watson's patient researches allow us to locate nine of Arthur's Twelve Battles. As for *Historia Brittonum*, its battle-list is conveniently found in another classic monograph, that of the Shakespeare scholar Sir Edmund Chambers (d. 1954). The twelve battles therein were: (a) 'at the mouth of the river called Glein'; (b–e) on a river known as 'Dubglas, in the region of Linnuis' (four conflicts); (f) on the 'river called Bassas'; (g) in the 'wood of Celidon' or Caledonia; (h) at the 'fortress of Guinnion'; (i) 'in the city of the Legion'; (j) on a river-bank called 'Tribruit'; (k) on a hill known as 'Agned'; (l) at the hill of 'Badon'. Chambers also helpfully supplied the *Annales Cambriae* entry for 537 (not 539) on Arthur's death at Camlan.[6] A century ago these two scholars (unbeknown to each other) forged a key to unlock Arthurian mysteries. It yet took time to notice.

The 1930s brought further progress, as well as a relapse that held back Arthurian Studies for nearly eighty years. The progress came from the Chadwicks in Cambridge. They proposed that the battle-catalogue of *Historia Brittonum* had a bardic eulogy as its source. Behind its awkward Latin prose was the ghost of a praise-poem in Old Welsh or Old Cumbric. It would have resembled bellicose Welsh catalogue-poems in the fifteenth-century Red Book of Hergest and elsewhere.[7] Place-names in those paeans being of real locations, we take those in *Historia Brittonum* as similarly authentic. They were not invented.

Now for the relapse, promoted by Robin Collingwood (d. 1943), Oxford philosopher and archaeologist. Few notions have hamstrung medievalists more than this one. Collingwood seized upon a link between the twelve battle-names and 'Roman military practice'. He saw (rightly) that the names are 'genuine'. Believing (wrongly) that they denoted sites up and down Britain, he created the image of Arthur as 'commander of a mobile field-army' with 'the lately-established supremacy of the cavalry arm'.[8] Thus began the glamorous mirage of Arthur, Romanized leader of dragoons or knights on horseback, boldly attacking Saxon invaders in defence of Britain's Christian civilization.

In contrast to Collingwood's seductive intellectual chimera are two other works of the 1930s, together allowing identification of Mount 'Badon' in 493. In the first, the element *brad-* 'treason, treachery, betrayal; plot, conspiracy' is identified in various Welsh toponyms. In north Powys, for example, is Bradnant 'treacherous stream', either because it was prone to sudden and dangerous floods, or because its valley sheltered murderers and thieves. On the sense compare the Welsh noun *bradpwll*, 'pit used by hunters to trap wild animals'.[9] The second book relates to the forest of Braydon, five miles west-north-west of Swindon. Its name will be pre-English, with an etymology thought 'obscure'.[10]

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[5] W.J. Watson, *A History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 354, 363, 366, 383–4, 386–7, 458.

[6] E.K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London, 1927), 239, 241.

[7] H.M. Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature: The Ancient Literatures of Europe* (Cambridge, 1932), 154–5.

[8] R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1937), 322.

[9] R.J. Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1938), 3–4.

[10] J.E.B. Gover, Allen Mawer, F.M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Wiltshire* (Cambridge, 1939), 11, 40.

However, by relating Welsh book to English book, we can explain *Braydon* as 'place of *brad* or betrayal', because woods in Britain were (until early modern times) notoriously the haunts of robbers, lying in wait for unsuspecting travellers. More importantly, we also solve the enigma of 'Badon', which will be Celtic, but (as it stands) resembles nothing in British nomenclature. Why? Because the form has suffered corruption, a careless scribe having left out the 'r' of a British-Latin toponym. Read *Bradon* and we remove the difficulty, also locating the conflict of Mount 'Badon' at modern Braydon, west of the Roman highway from Winchester to Cirencester, where the hillfort of Ringsbury (at NGR SU 0786) will be where the siege of 493 took place, ending in a crushing British victory over the West Saxons, a triumph surely due to the Ambrosius Aurelianus praised by Gildas (and *not* to Arthur).

By the time that World War II broke out, then, evidence was in print for the identification both of Arthurian conflicts and of Arthur himself. The machinery had been assembled. Nothing was needed, except somebody to come and switch it on. Yet that long interval had its insights. Salutary was the cold eye cast on Arthur by Kenneth Jackson (d. 1991), to whom he was a 'shadowy figure' on whose life 'nothing useful can be said' and who 'may or may not' have defeated the West Saxons at 'Badon' in 493.[11] More forthcoming was his pupil Rachel Bromwich (d. 2010), who consistently regarded Arthur as a Northern hero (despite equally consistent criticisms from her ex-teacher), as indicated by the engagement at the 'Caledonian Wood', to be placed not in the Highlands but in the Southern Uplands, around Beattock Summit with its strategic pass.[12] Her advocacy for Arthur the North Briton produced a characteristic growl from her former instructor. He asserted that 'proponents of this view' would find 'little to support it' in philological analysis of the toponyms involved.[13] Which shows even a great scholar erring greatly.

For all that, Jackson later allowed a Northern location for some of the Arthurian Twelve, placed in the context of a further breakthrough of the 1930s. In 1935 the archaeologist O.G.S. Crawford equated the *Camlan* of the Welsh annal for 537 with *Camboglanna* on the Wall of Hadrian (this fort previously being regarded as Birdoswald, but since the 1970s known to be Castlesteads, next in line to the west). Jackson described Crawford's proposal as 'ingenious and by no means impossible'. On other forms he thought that *Glein* was the River Glen of north Northumberland (or its namesake in the east Midlands?); the 'Wood of Caledonia' was in the south of Strathclyde; and 'Badon' was in Wessex. To these he added an extra form. A late copy of *Historia Brittonum* refers 'Agned' to *Brewyn*; and Jackson pointed out that Welsh *Brewyn* = British-Latin *Bremenium* or High Rochester, a Roman fort in the Cheviot region of Northumberland. Unfortunately, Jackson still related other terms to Chester and similar locations far from North Britain, so that he interpreted them together as 'built up at random' from 'dim' traditional reminiscences by 'some early antiquarian'.[14] That preconception strangled rational interpretation of the fourteen toponyms from Arthur's martial career. So much appeared again

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[11] K.H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 116, 199.

[12] Rachel Bromwich, 'The Character of the Early Welsh Tradition', in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1954), 83–136, at 124.

[13] K.H. Jackson, 'The Britons in Southern Scotland', *Antiquity*, xxix (1955), 77–88, at 81.

[14] K.H. Jackson, 'The Arthur of History', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), 1–11, at 5, 8.

in Jackson's final broadside on the matter, launched both at Collingwood's 'romantic' picture of Arthur the commander of 'Roman cavalry officers' and (more curtly) at Arthur the 'Northern leader', supposed testimony for which, in Aneirin's seventh-century *Gododdin,* being rejected as possessing 'no logic whatever'.[15]

It was in the 1970s that Collingwood's visionary construction of Arthur, Roman champion, was extended still higher into an ill-founded edifice (its duration short) of Arthur, Emperor of Britain. Crucial to the monument-built-on-sand of Arthur, generalissimo, were the archaeologist Leslie Alcock (d. 2006) and ancient historian John Morris (d. 1977); crucial to its demolition and replacement by Arthur the folk-legend have been the palaeographer David N. Dumville (d. 2024) and place-name scholar Oliver Padel (b. 1948). For the first pair he was a British Caesar or Justinian; for the second pair, an illusion; for us now, a lesson on two academic schools, both in error.

A malaise common to enthusiasts and doubters alike is revealed by a map of supposed Arthurian conflicts, which extend from the Scottish Highlands to 'Badon', the latter at no fewer than six possible locations between Lincolnshire and Dorset.[16] The Scottish Highlands can at once be dismissed, because Jackson and Bromwich knew that, for the Welsh, the Caledonian Forest was in the Southern Uplands, between Glasgow and Carlisle; while the Lincolnshire to Dorset half-dozen will be irrelevant to Arthur, who had nothing to do with the victory of 'Badon' in 493 CE. We can say more. On the four conflicts by the River Douglas in 'Linnuis', routinely understood as Lindsey or north Lincolnshire (despite its having *no* River Douglas), a solution at this time became accessible. A violent bardic propaganda poem of 940 speaks of Irish and Manx and Cornish and *Cludwys* coming to aid the Welsh in their struggle against English tyranny. The *Cludwys* are the people on the *Clud* or River Clyde, and hence Strathclyders.[17] They solve the puzzle of 'Linnuis'. It will be a scribal corruption of Old Welsh *Clutuis*, the *Cludwys* or 'Strathclyders' through whose lands there flows to this day the River Douglas 'in the region of *Clutuis* = people of Strathclyde'. Arthurian conflicts between Lincoln and the Humber will be one of British historiography's mare's nests, to be dismissed for all time.

Which leads to John Morris's *The Age of Arthur*: a well-written book but based upon poor reasoning and poor philology, the result being assurances on 'Arthur, a supreme commander who defeated the English' and a 'just and powerful ruler who long maintained in years of peace the empire of Britain, that his arms had recovered and restored'.[18] Such hubris brought nemesis. It did not come in Rachel Bromwich's fundamental guide to bardic tradition, which has nothing on Morris, but does have judicious mention of 'an early Northern source' for the Twelve Battles in *Historia Brittonum*; plus comment on the striking (and significant) absence of 'Badon' from early Welsh vernacular lore, even though Latin sources make it out as his supreme victory.[19] Doom came instead with a famous article by her pupil David N. Dumville. Its impact was dramatic. Critics hastened to dissociate themselves from the 'Arthur of History'. It was a strange spectacle. On the one

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[15] K.H. Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), 85–6, 112.

[16] Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* (London, 1971), 62.

[17] *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain, From the Book of Taliesin*, ed. Ifor Williams (Dublin, 1972), 22.

[18] John Morris, *The Age of Arthur* (London, 1973), 116.

[19] Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1978), 276, 545.

hand, accumulating testimony for the historical Arthur; on the other, professors loudly declaiming the lack of such evidence.

That emphatic denial was unfortunate. In the same period came citation (in a majestic scholarly work) of Crawford's paper from 1935 on *Camlan* as *Camboglanna*, which (thanks to a 1976 publication by M.W.C. Hassall) is now known to be the Roman fort at Castlesteads, not that of Birdoswald to the east of it.[20] On the other side was confusion and bewilderment, so that the assault on John Morris's assertions led by David Dumville now drew admissions of how it cast 'so much doubt' on written sources for Arthur that one felt 'even less confident' about him than ever.[21] In like vein another writer quoted Dumville's claim that 'there is no historical evidence about Arthur'.[22] A jolt, then, to read words (appearing posthumously) on how Arthur was Britain's 'emperor, the last Roman Emperor in Britain'.[23] Arthur as Caesar Augustus, or Arthur mythical as King Lud or Robin Hood? For the time being, negation was in the ascendant. Alcock himself eventually wrote a *mea culpa*, acknowledging how 'the sustained minimalist criticism of the historicity of Arthur' in the late 1970s had made him jettison his earlier views on the British hero.[24] In the 1990s, Dumville's pronouncements on *Historia Brittonum*'s shakiness for anything regarding 'the end of Roman Britain' were still treated with respect.[25] It was the same in the twenty-first century, Dr Oliver Padel being cited on how all sources for Arthur are mythical or legendary, the conclusion being that 'no historical Arthur ever existed'.[26] No surprise, then, if the first volume of Oxford's History of Wales is silent on Arthur's Twelve Battles, despite material there on *Historia Brittonum*'s debt to seventh-century North British texts.[27] Not silent at all is another Oxford history, with unOxonian upper-case letters on how 'THE LOCATIONS OF ALL OF THESE BATTLES ARE UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWABLE'.[28] Or, again, Dr Padel's declaration that for the twelve conflicts 'safe identification is impossible for the most part'.[29] Or, for a final instance, the conclusion that Arthur 'began life as a British folk-hero, or even as a god', only later acquiring 'a bogus historical reality'.[30] A difficulty of this last view is that it fails to explain why Arthur had a name of Latin derivation, from *Artorius* (an etymology proved by Jackson). Why should a self-respecting Celtic god call himself after some Roman? Would

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[20] A.L.F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (Princeton, 1979), 293–4.

[21] Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), 485, 501.

[22] Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (Berkeley, 1981), 245.

[23] John Morris, *Londinium: London in the Roman Empire* (London, 1982), 340.

[24] Leslie Alcock, *Cadbury Castle, Somerset* (Cardiff, 1995), 6.

[25] S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*, 2nd edn (London, 1996), 168, 170.

[26] Alan Lane, 'The End of Roman Britain', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (London, 2012), 15–29, at 16.

[27] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), 347–59.

[28] Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur* (Oxford, 2013), 67.

[29] O.J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature*, rev. edn (Cardiff, 2013), 3.

[30] Barbara Yorke, 'Britain and Ireland, *c*. 500', in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Pauline Stafford (London, 2013), 41–56, at 42.

one accept this if he had instead been known as (say) Donatus or Liberalis or Tacitus? Wiser, then, was an observation by an independent scholar on the annal for Arthur's death at *Camlan* in 537, that its 'terseness and phrasing' give it 'a strong claim for being historical'.[31]

In 2015, identifications were set out by the present writer (with NGR one-kilometre references) for all fourteen of the Arthurian locations in *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae*. They are as follows.

a. 'The mouth of the river called Glein': on the River Glen (NT 9732), Northumberland (as thought possible by Jackson).

b–e. The river known as 'Dubglas, in the region of Linnuis': Douglas Water (NS 8330), South Lanarkshire, with 'Linnuis' emended to Old Welsh *Clutuis* 'Strathclyders'.

f. The 'river called Bassas'. Either (emending to *Tarras*) the crossing (NS 9045) on what is now Mouse Water, near Carstairs, South Lanarkshire; or Tarras Water (NY 3781), Dumfries and Galloway.

g. 'The Wood of Caledonia': the vicinity of Beattock Summit (NS 9915), on the South Lanarkshire/Dumfries and Galloway border (as noted by Jackson and others).

h. 'Guinnion Fort'. The hill-fort of Carwinning (NS 2852), North Ayrshire. For this proposal thanks are due to Dr Tim Clarkson of Manchester, who disproved the present writer's earlier suggestion.

i. The 'city of the Legion'. Emend to *Karig Lion* 'rock of the legion', the cliff (NS 9880) by Kinneil House, Falkirk, near the Antonine Wall's eastern end.

j. A river-bank called 'Tribruit': Dreva (NT 1335), Peebleshire/Borders, looking down from the north upon the River Tweed.

k. A hill known as 'Agned'. Emend to Old Welsh *Agheu* 'death' and identify as *Pennango* 'death hill', an obsolete toponym from near Newmill (NT 4510), Roxburghshire/Borders.

l. At the hill of 'Badon'. Read *Bradon* and take as Ringsbury Hill (SU 0786), with its 'rings' or hill-fort above Braydon Forest, Wiltshire.

m. *Camlan*. The Roman fort of *Camboglanna* or Castlesteads (NY 5163), Hadrian's Wall, Cumbria.

n. *Brewyn*, placed near *Agned* in a later version of *Historia Brittonum*, will be the Roman fort of *Bremenium* (NY 8398) or High Rochester, Northumberland (as proposed by Kenneth Jackson). It is twenty-five miles from 'Agned' above.

All this was set out in 2015, with the implications that Arthur was a North Briton; led raids for cattle and the like against British neighbouring peoples during the great famine of 536–7; was killed on one such raid close to Hadrian's Wall in 537; never fought the

[31] Flint Johnson, *Evidence of Arthur* (Jefferson, 2014), 17.

English (despite the presuppositions of *Historia Brittonum*'s compiler); and thus had no connection with Mount 'Badon' in 493.[32]

Naturally, consequences of the above have needed time to sink in. An exception is a book that should be better known and more widely used than it is, its author having taken considerable trouble to reproduce detailed maps of sites mentioned, such as the remote hill-fort of Carwinning, North Ayrshire.[33] In contrast is Professor Higham, still confident that the *Historia Brittonum* list 'cannot be historical' and that the conflicts were fought 'by a variety of champions against different enemies'.[34] Why then, one wonders, can all but one of the battles (that of 'Badon') be placed in north Britain? Why, too, did the uncommon name 'Arthur' have a vogue amongst late-sixth-century Britons in the North and beyond (as shown by royal genealogies)? Why, again, did the glossator responsible for *Brewyn* know that 'Agned' was in North Britain? To these we are given no coherent answer, as restatement of the arguments thereafter demonstrated.[35]

It can be compared with writings by others. In a popular book we hear that evidence 'for any sort of Arthur' is 'hopelessly thin and inadequate'.[36] (Not so, we think.) Elsewhere we read that Arthur's place 'on the historiographical radar' is doubtful.[37] (*Non credo*.) True, there then came Peter Field, subscribing to a belief (based on above assembled evidence) 'that Arthur was a real person'.[38] The root problem is a simplistic trust of historians in the ability of scribes (making copies of copies of copies) faultlessly to reproduce place-names from texts before them, especially toponyms in languages that they did not know, like Cumbric. Rid ourselves of that presumption, and we shall be free men and women. We may flee the cave occupied by one recent writer who (for early texts) sees no need 'to ignore the obvious and seek corruptions, misspellings, and other twisted etymologies [*sic*]'.[39] But that is not the experience of textual scholars (such as Scaliger, Bentley, Porson, Lachmann, Housman), who scrutinize manuscripts in order to untwist the gibberish there, and so establish what authors wrote and what they meant by it. Further samples of such untwisting are set out elsewhere.[40] Other instances cast light on writings of Gildas (d. 570) or Latin lives of Kentigern (d. 612), Glasgow's patron saint.[41]

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[32] A. Breeze, 'The Historical Arthur and Sixth-Century Scotland', *Northern History*, lii (2015), 158–81.

[33] Kurt Liebhard, *Suche nach dem historischen Arthur* (Weissenthurn, 2016), 117.

[34] N.J. Higham, *King Arthur: The Making of the Legend* (New Haven, 2018), 194.

[35] A. Breeze, *British Battles 493–937: Mount Badon to Brunanburh* (London, 2020), 1–24.

[36] Marc Morris, *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 2021), 41.

[37] Rory Naismith, *Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2021), 89.

[38] P.J.C. Field, 'King Arthur: Hero or Legend?', in *The Arthurian World*, ed. V. Coldham-Fussell, M. Edlich-Mutt, Renée Ward (London, 2022), 25–34, at 32.

[39] Tony Sullivan, *The Battles of King Arthur* (Barnsley, 2022), 214.

[40] A. Breeze, *The Historical Arthur and the 'Gawain' Poet* (Lanham, 2023), 3–37.

[41] A. Breeze, *England's Earliest Woman Writer and Other Studies on Dark-Age Christianity* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2024), 106, 174–6.

2. Bernard Mees's *King Arthur and the Languages of Britain*

Now for this paper's second part and comment on Arthur's battles by the Australian linguist Bernard Mees. His book deserves attention, because it is by a scholar trained in the Celtic languages. We deal with the conflicts after their order in *Historia Brittonum*, from which Mees's analysis sometimes differs.[42]

a. 'The mouth of the river called Glein': on the River Glen (NT 9732), Northumberland. The identification is accepted by Mees, who also provides an etymology 'clean one, she who is pure'. The Lincolnshire namesake can be dismissed. It is too far south for a raid by a North Briton like Arthur.

b–e. The river known as 'Dubglas, in the region of Linnuis': Douglas Water (NS 8330), South Lanarkshire, with 'Linnuis' emended to Old Welsh *Clutuis* 'Strathclyders'. There are two misconceptions here. First is Mees's general remark after Higham that Northern locations are unlikely, since Arthur was fighting 'Anglo-Saxon forces'. But Higham positions cart before horse. We do not know that Arthur fought the English, although *Historia Brittonum*'s compiler naturally imagined that he did, the English of the ninth century being Wales's enemy number one. Second, Mees rejects emendation to *Clutuis*, instead relating 'Linnuis' to early *Linelis* or Linnels near the *Divelis* or Devil's Water south of Hexham, Northumberland (known from Bede's account of Cadwallon's liquidation there in 634). To that there are three objections. (i) *Linelis* or Linnel Hill (NY 9559), a farm looking down on Devil's Water, is tiny. It could not possibly be known to the Welsh in the way that the great Kingdom of the *Cludwys* 'Strathclyders' was. (ii) Arthur fought four times on *Dubglas*, which makes sense for Douglas Water, a river crucial for defence of Strathclyde against other North Britons, but not for Devil's Water, of little military importance. (iii) Most obviously, when the Welsh themselves described how Northumbrians troops wiped out Cadwallon and his men, they made no reference whatever to Linnel, instead (mis)translating *Hexham* 'young warrior's village' by the Old Welsh book-term *Cantscaul* 'young warrior's enclosure' (itself noted by Mees), an interpretation brilliantly made by Kenneth Jackson.[43] The case for Arthur's four conflicts on Douglas Water holds.

f. The 'river called Bassas'. Either (emending to *Tarras*) the crossing (NS 9045) on Mouse Water, near Carstairs, South Lanarkshire; or Tarras Water (NY 3781), Dumfries and Galloway. On Mees's discussion, two things may be said. First, he mentions Tarras Water only, with nothing on Mouse Water, its older name preserved in *Carstairs* 'fortress of (the River) Tarras'. Second, he would interpret 'Bassas' not as a hydronym but as a poetic term 'shallow strife' (hardly persuasive, *sas* being a late Welsh form, perhaps borrowed from Middle English *chase*). Whether Arthur fought on Mouse Water or else in Eskdale, it is impossible to say. But emendation of 'Bassas' (unknown as a river-name) to *Tarras* (which *is* known) is readily defended, especially if one compares the likeness of 'r' and

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[42] Bernard Mees, *King Arthur and the Languages of Britain* (London, 2025), 109, 118, 124, 125, 127–9, 130, 131, 132, 135, 144.

[43] K.H. Jackson, 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius', in *Celt and Saxon*, ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1963), 20–62, at 34.

's' in minuscule script, demonstrated (for example) by *feruens* in the eleventh-century Psalter of Rhygyfarch.[44]

g. 'The Wood of Caledonia': the vicinity of Beattock Summit (NS 9915), on the South Lanarkshire/Dumfries and Galloway border. There is no dispute on this; and one might think it strong proof (with *Camlan* = Castlesteads) that Arthur's campaigns were in North Britain.

h. 'Guinnion Fort'. The hill-fort of Carwinning (NS 2852), North Ayrshire. This identification is due to Dr Tim Clarkson, correcting the present writer, who in his books of 2020 and 2023 withdrew his earlier suggestion. Unfortunately, the correction is unnoticed by Dr Mees, who instead relates *Guinnion* to *Vinovia* or Binchester (a Roman fort north of Bishop Auckland, near Durham), and on that basis has Arthur in combat 'against the Anglo-Saxons of Bernicia'. There are two objections here. *Carwinning* is perfectly equivalent to 'Guinnion Fort', but *Vinovia* suits neither (Mees's quoted adjectival Latin *Vinoensis* being irrelevant to a *Celtic* toponym); and the 530s is too early for North Britons to be fighting the English on the Upper Wear. Dr Clarkson's Carwinning remains the sole contender.

i. The 'city of the Legion'. Emend to *Karig Lion* 'rock of the legion', the cliff (NS 9880) by Kinneil House, West Lothian, at the Antonine Wall's eastern end. Mees neither rejecting nor supporting this, we say again how easily a Gwynedd scribe (on the principle of *lectio facilior*) could misunderstand and misplace the toponym as *Caerlleon* 'fortress/city of the legion' or Chester, which he would know well, as he would not know the obscure Northern *Karig Lion* 'rock of the legion', a term (one might add) locally still current in the seventeenth century, when it was recorded by Johannes Blaeu (d. 1673), Dutch cartographer.

j. A river-bank called 'Tribruit': Dreva (NT 1335), Peebleshire/Borders, by the Tweed's north bank. Correctly repeating Jackson's translation 'very variegated', Mees incorrectly applies it not to a river-bank but a river. Yet, for the original Latin phrase *in litore fluminis quod vocatur Tribruit*, it will be the *litus* that is multicoloured, not the *flumen*. Hence an identification with Dreva, with an old Cumbric name in new guise, on a slope north of the Tweed.

k. A hill known as 'Agned'. Emend to Old Welsh *Agheu* 'death' and identify as *Pennango* 'death hill', an obsolete toponym from near Newmill (NT 4510), Roxburghshire/Borders, where topography and medieval records will (Mees's doubts notwithstanding) be convincing 'supporting evidence' for emendation of a form meaningless as it stands.

l. At the hill of 'Badon'. Read *Bradon* and take as Ringsbury Hill (SU 0786), with its 'rings' or hill-fort above Braydon Forest, Wiltshire. Attempting to retain the manuscript reading, Mees seeks an etymology from Irish *buide* 'yellow', which is unpersuasive, no cognate in Brittonic being recorded for it. In contrast is the alternative *brad*, a word common in Welsh to this day (as with Saunders Lewis's sobering play *Brad*, on the July Plot of 1944). Better is Mees's note on a 'key problem' here, a second Battle of Mount Badon in *Annales Cambriae* for 665, which he thinks perhaps from a 'northern chronicle', although mentioning how there fell in the combat a certain Morgan, a Glamorgan king

[44] N. Denholm-Young, *Handwriting in England and Wales*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1964), plate 7.

whose name figures in the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff. Mees has not, apparently, noticed how this question was answered in this writer's book of 2020, with the latter engagement of 665 taken to be a (misdated) reference to that for 661 in Old English sources, on how the Mercian ruler Wulfhere 'ravaged from Ashdown' or the Berkshire Downs in southern England. Those uplands being near Braydon, north Wiltshire, the difficulty seemingly vanishes. If it is asked why we do not have a reading 'Bradon' for 665, the answer is that 'r' in the *obsessio Bradonici montis* of Gildas (writing in 536) must have been lost early on, because the same corrupt reading 'Badon' appears even in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* of 731. Hence a misspelling 'Badon' twice in *Annales Cambriae*.

m. *Camlan*. The Roman stronghold of *Camboglanna* or Castlesteads (NY 5163), Cumbria. Where Arthur in 537 died a hero's death should be uncontentious. Although Mees cites two places in Wales called *Camlan*, he admits that no 'military use' is recorded for them. One might add that, if Arthur had been killed in what is now Wales, the bards (who never forgot the disaster of Camlan) would remember exactly where it was. Once more, a Northern location removes all difficulties.

n. *Brewyn*, placed near 'Agned' in a later recension of *Historia Brittonum*, will be the Roman stronghold of *Bremenium* (NY 8398) or High Rochester, Northumberland (as proposed by Kenneth Jackson). It is twenty-five miles from 'Agned' above. The whereabouts of this Old and Middle Welsh toponym will be unproblematic.

Conclusion: Arthur's genuine combats may be located between the Firth of Forth and Hadrian's Wall, so that he will have been a North British *dux bellorum* or *penteulu* or captain of the royal warband (a position of evident power, revealed by Welsh laws as second only to that of the king himself, and often held by his son or nephew). In the mid-530s he fought, seemingly, on behalf of Strathclyders against the men of Gododdin (in Lothian and the Merse) and Rheged (in Cumbria and around the Solway Firth). His conflicts in the Caledonian Forest, and perhaps that on Tarras Water (if Mouse Water by Carstairs can be dismissed), would be in what is now Dumfries and Galloway. Arthur's fame thus enhances the region's historic lustre. But he did not attack the English, and thus had no connection with the British triumph in 493 at 'Badon' or *Bradon* or Braydon, Wiltshire. Sixth-century Arthur can, therefore, be added to Scotland's line of courageous warriors and commanders, to be traced (through time past and passing and to come) from the *Calgacus* 'Swordsman' who in 84 CE sought to defend his royal Pictish domains (below *Mons Cripius* 'crested hill' or Bennachie, in the Grampians?) against the Roman legions of Agricola.

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