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Later Arthurian Traditions in Wales and Ireland

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Welsh and Irish literature of the later Middle Ages and early modern period stands apart, in many ways, from continental models, but although the traditions of both Wales and Ireland share certain characteristics, evidence of any cross-influence between sources in Welsh and in Irish at this time is strictly limited; the languages were not mutually comprehensible and not then recognised as related[1]. Nevertheless, affinities can be observed between the nature and circumstances of production and reception of narratives and other texts in the two countries. Furthermore, the same characteristics which the two traditions share are those which set them apart from French literature; they likewise reflect their different history in terms of social organisation and material culture as well as in the role of the native vernacular in coexistence with other languages, each with its particular, sometimes contested, domains of power and influence. Both countries had experienced invasions and, ultimately, English conquest, which inevitably affected the evolution of their literatures.

One of the most obvious of these shared characteristics is a clear functional distinction between poetry and prose from the earliest times, with poetry the domain of a distinct class of practitioners who had undergone a lengthy apprenticeship. The Welsh *beirdd* and Irish *filid* (« bards, poets ») held high status within a hierarchical social structure, and their work, composed and transmitted orally, was, typically, intricate and ornamented; lower status was accorded to the storyteller. Within this system poetry and prose developed in very different ways, even though both might essentially draw on a shared body of legend, with prose emerging as the primary vehicle for narrative. Poems might evoke stories but were not themselves strictly narrative. This does not mean that there was no mutual influence between

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[1] On possible literary borrowings, see Patrick SIMS-WILLIAMS, *Irish Influence on medieval Welsh literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

the two genres: in both languages stanzas of poetry might be interpolated in a prose tale, as in the Welsh *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* (« Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* ») or the Irish *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (« Cattle Raid of Cooley »)[2].

The fundamental distinction between prose and verse in Irish and Welsh means that the French phenomenon of a shift from verse to prose as a vehicle of romance, or indeed narrative in general, simply did not exist. Similarly, the late development of printing as a medium for the dissemination of literature meant that the written tradition of these two Celtic languages follows a different path to that of other European cultures such as French or English. In Wales the first authorised printing house was not set up until 1718, and though Welsh texts had been published by printers in England and Italy from the sixteenth-century onwards, these were mainly devotional or practical and did not encompass narrative literature[3]. A similar situation obtained in Ireland where the earliest forays into printing in Irish were associated with Tudor politico-religious reform at the tail end of the 1500s. Printed editions of Irish-language literature only began to appear in any significant number in the 1800s[4]. Consequently, in both countries literary texts continued to be preserved in manuscript copies, the tradition persisting into the nineteenth century. It was only then, too, that tales preserved in manuscript form began to appear in print for the first time. The late arrival of printed copies and persistence of oral storytelling and performance allowed interaction between written and oral transmission, so that tales about a particular protagonist, for example, might continue to evolve as they passed to and fro between the two contexts[5]. There

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[2] See further, Proinsias MAC CANA, « Prosimetrum in Insular Celtic Literature », *in* Joseph HARRIS and Karl REICHL (dir.), *Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1997, p. 99-130.

[3] Printing in Wales had been inhibited by the English Printing Act, which did not lapse until 1695. See Philip Henry JONES and Eiluned REES (dir.), *A Nation and its books. A History of the book in Wales*, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 1998, especially p. 55-65, 93-107, 123.

[4] Colm LENNON, « The Print Trade : 1550-1700 », *in* Raymond GILLESPIE and Andrew HADFIELD (dir.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, vol iii : The Irish Book in English*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 61-73.

[5] For example, in Welsh the version of *Owain* (an adaptation, probably from the thirteenth century, of Chrétien's *Yvain*) preserved in an early-seventeenth century manuscript shows clear signs of having evolved in oral

may therefore be considerable variation between witnesses of the same basic narrative focused on the same protagonist, so that fluidity and textual instability are common. Dating is often problematic : surviving written copies may be much later than their content, which in many cases can only be dated very approximately, relying primarily on linguistic or circumstantial evidence. Given these conditions of production and transmission, tales are usually not ascribed to an author and the concept of a single author is unhelpful when approaching a work which may have been through several hands and is a product of collective – and continuing – composition.

Arthurian literature plays a very different role on either side of the Irish Sea. In Wales the Arthurian legend which, by the later Middle Ages, had spread through western Europe from the twelfth century onwards, was seen to have its roots in Welsh tradition. Arthur and associated protagonists appear in the earliest Welsh literature and in the twelfth century Geoffrey of Monmouth drew on Welsh genealogies in composing his *Historia regum Britanniae*. Thus the Arthurian narratives which had developed elsewhere, notably in continental romance, in the wake of the popularity of Geoffrey's work, could be reappropriated by Welsh redactors and added to the native stock. The first adaptations of French narratives, the thirteenth-century tales of *Peredur*, *Owain* and *Geraint*, are based loosely on Chrétien's *Perceval*, *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*, but each in its different way is recast in a Welsh mould, often incorporating material from native tradition. In the later medieval period and beyond, Arthurian tales continued to be both inward- and outward-looking, drawing on literary works from abroad while preserving native narrative traditions in terms of genre and narrative techniques. In Wales, too, Arthurian literature lent itself conveniently to political commentary in the centuries following the loss of independence, after the killing of the last native prince in 1282 and subsequent conquest by king Edward I of

tradition. See Sioned DAVIES, « O Gaer Llion i Benybenglog : Testun Llanstephan 58 o "Iarlles y Ffynnon" », *in* Iestyn DANIEL, Marged HAYCOCK, Dafydd JOHNSTON and Jenny ROWLAND (dir.), *Cyfoeth y testun. Ysgrifau ar lenyddiaeth Gymraeg yr Oesoedd Canol*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003, p. 326-348.

England. The first generation of adaptations of foreign narratives emerge in the last period of pre-conquest princely rule, but with the extinction of that line the system of patronage depended on members of the gentry class, many of whom gradually came to an accommodation with English governance while still retaining a strong sense of Welsh identity.

Although there was no major indigenous tradition of Arthur as the *rex quondam et futurus* who would return to free his land from the foreign usurper – that role would belong primarily to the character of Owain in Welsh tradition[6] – the enticing Galfridian model of Arthur as the British (*scilicet* Welsh) king who vanquished the invading Saxons and united the whole of the island of Britain under his rule, was quickly adopted. *Brut y Brenhinedd,* the Welsh translations of Geoffrey's *Historia*, became the most frequently copied narrative text, with its vision of history continuing to inform historical writing well into the modern period. The Galfridian-Arthurian vision became not only the standard historical narrative but also an important political model, explicitly invoked in Welsh textual culture[7]. By 1485, following the Battle of Bosworth, the English crown had been won by Henry Tudor who made much of his Welsh descent and as king Henry VII was claimed to fulfil the prophecy that a Welshman would, like a new Arthur, hold sway over *Ynys Prydain*, the « island of Britain ».

Perhaps the earliest Welsh Arthurian text to indicate a break with the older storytelling traditions was *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* (« The Dream of Rhonabwy »), which stands apart from its forerunners for its overtly satirical narrative and style. The tale is of uncertain date, but its unique manuscript witness, the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms. Jesus College 111), was copied between 1382 and 1405[8]. Passages in extravagant rhetorical style,

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[6] Elissa R. HENKEN, *National Redeemer : Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996.

[7] The last witness was *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* (« The Mirror of the Chief Ages ») by Theophilus EVANS (1716).

[8] The White Book of Rhydderch (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, ms. Peniarth 4-5) copied c. 1350, includes all the other Middle Welsh tales known at the time, among them four Arthurian tales : *Culhwch ac Olwen*, *Owain*, *Geraint* and *Peredur* – but not *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. The loss of folios from the White Book

replete with compound adjectives, coupled with a rich web of allusions, a critique of Arthur as a *roi fainéant* and sophisticated use of the dream as a structural device, indicate that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, unlike earlier Welsh tales which appear to have evolved from an oral context to written form, is our earliest example of a narrative work composed by a single, autonomous author. This in turn implies a shift to written composition, a point made in the epilogue:

> « A llyma yr achaws na wyr neb y breidwyt, na bard na chyfarwyd, heb lyuyr, o achaws y geniuer lliw a oed ar y me[i]rch, a hynny o amrauael liw odidawc ac ar yr aruev ac eu kyweirdebeu, ac ar y llenneu gwerthuawr a'r mein rinwedawl.[9] »

> « This is why no one knows the dream – neither poet nor storyteller – without a book, because of the number of colours on the horses, and the many unusual colours both on the armour and their trappings, and on the precious mantles and the magic stones.[10] »

The author's evident familiarity with earlier Welsh Arthurian traditions and *topoi*, many of which are undercut or turned on their heads for ridicule, suggests that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* postdates not only the earlier native tales but also *Owain*, *Geraint* and *Peredur*. The thrust of its satire is that Wales is in a period of decline, that the age of heroes, from the semi-legendary figures of the *Brut* to more recent, twelfth-century regional rulers, is now past. The tale ends inconclusively, allowing for the possibility of resurgence. Although the extravagant and satirical vein of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is otherwise found only in what appear to be the *exercices de style* known as *areithiau* (« orations »), found in manuscripts

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has led some scholars to suppose that it was contained in them, but Daniel HUWS, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000, p. 246n, has shown that this is unlikely.
[9] *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, ed. Melville RICHARDS, p. 21.10-14.
[10] *The Mabinogion*, trad. Sioned DAVIES, p. 226. See also Pierre-Yves LAMBERT (trad.), *Les Quatre Branches du* Mabinogi, p. 205.

from the later fifteenth century onwards[11], its theme of decline and need of hope for a better future for the Welsh would, at the very least, be apposite when the tale was written in the Red Book of Hergest, against the background of continuing post-conquest unrest, culminating in 1400 in what would be a decade of war led by Owain Glyndŵr against English power. Contemporary reality interacted with history and legend when Glyndŵr consulted the Red Book's patron, Hopcyn ap Thomas of Glamorgan, about the prognosis of the campaign, because Hopcyn was known as a « maister of Brut »[12], while Glyndŵr, whose own end was mysterious, would himself quickly become part of the fabric of legend, identified as the Owain prophesied to return to liberate his people[13]. Hopcyn ap Thomas's enthusiasm for Arthurian material is amply demonstrated by the texts copied by the group of scribes working for him or his household : the Red Book itself contains *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the largely French-derived *Owain*, *Peredur* and *Geraint*, and *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, together with *Brut y Brenhinedd* of which two further copies were made in the same context[14]. The presence of the three tales largely adapted from Chrétien's romances demonstrates the longstanding and continuing interest in traditions from outside Wales, notably from France, with whom Wales had long maintained direct contact, especially through religious orders, trade and politics; the influence of Norman French as a spoken and written language was slow to wane and English literary influence slow to develop. French manuscripts were in Welsh hands – a copy of the *Roman de la Rose* is attested in 1318[15] – and by 1400 at least three romances of the Lancelot-Grail or Vulgate Cycle – the *Queste del Saint Graal*, *Merlin* and *Prose Lancelot* were

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[11] *Yr Areithiau Prôs,* ed. D. Gwenallt JONES, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1934.

[12] On Hopcyn ap Thomas see, for example, Huws, *Medieval Welsh manuscripts*, p. 16, 80-3.

[13] Elissa R. HENKEN, *op. cit.* The sixteenth-century chronicler Elis Gruffydd records the story from popular tradition that Owain Glyndŵr was told by the abbot of Valle Crucis, out on an early morning walk, that he had risen« a hundred years too early » : Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, ms. NLW 3054iD, fol. 285v.

[14] On the Red Book, its scribes and content, see Gifford CHARLES-EDWARDS, « The scribes of the Red Book »', *National Library of Wales Journal*, nº 20, 1979-1980, p. 246-56; Daniel HUWS, « Llyfr Coch Hergest », in *Cyfoeth y Testun*, p. 1-30, and *idem*, *Medieval Welsh manuscripts*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[15] Listed among the forfeited goods of the rebel Llywelyn Bren. See John Hobson MATTHEWS, *Cardiff Records : being materials for a history of the county borough from the earliest times*, Cardiff, Cardiff Corporation, 1898-1911, vol. iv. p. 58.

available to the scribes working for Hopcyn ap Thomas, most likely in a single manuscript. Their presence is demonstrated by two texts which appear for the first time in Hopcyn's *milieu* : *Y Seint Greal* and an account of Arthur's life from birth to coronation.

Y Seint Greal, which appears to have been produced shortly before the Red Book of Hergest was compiled, is a translation of the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Perlesvaus*[16], a combination not without its difficulties, as the Parisian compiler of the 1516 printed volume *L'Hystoire du Sainct Greal* would find[17]. In Wales, the choice may have been dictated partly by availability; although fewer copies of the *Perlesvaus* than of the *Queste* have survived, some of those are of English provenance, at least one being associated with Glastonbury Abbey, which had important Welsh links[18]. Another motive might have been a desire to acquire two significant grail narratives, representing the two different grail heroes, Perlesvaus/Perceval and Galaad. Translations from French, including *chansons de geste* and the Norman *Boeve de Hamtone*, appear as early as the thirteenth century, but *Y Seint Greal* is a landmark as the first Welsh translation of French Arthurian romances. Whereas *Owain*, *Peredur* and *Geraint* were loose adaptations, *Y Seint Greal* follows its sources closely and is explicitly presented as a translation[19]. Furthermore it introduces the word *greal* for the first time: the earlier tale of *Peredur* may have had close parallels with parts of Chrétien's *Conte del Graal*, including the strange procession where a lance and a salver (in the Welsh case bearing a severed head) are carried, but had rigorously eschewed the term.

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[16] *Y Seint Greal* (*Selections from the Hengwrt Manuscripts*, vol. ii), ed. Robert WILLIAMS, London, Thomas Richards, 1876; for the *Queste* section, see also *Ystoryaeu Seint Greal. Rhan i: Y Keis*, ed. Thomas Jones, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999.

[17] Hélène BOUGET, « Recomposer le roman arthurien au début du xvie siècle : *Lhystoire du Sainct Greaal* (1516-23) », *in* Christine FERLAMPIN ACHER (dir.), *Artus de Bretagne. Du manuscrit à l'imprimé*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 237-251.

[18] Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « From Ynys Wydrin to Glasynbri : Glastonbury in Welsh Vernacular Tradition », *in* James P. CARLEY (dir.), *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian tradition*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2001, p. 161-177, and James P. CARLEY, « A Fragment of *Perlesvaus* at Wells Cathedral Library », *in* James P. CARLEY, *Glastonbury Abbey*, *op. cit*., p. 309-335.

[19] The translator explicitly refers to himself as *trossyawdyr* (« translator ») and discusses his difficulties in dealing with French proper names.

For the first time, then, in *Y Seint Greal* we can observe a Welsh translator at work on an Arthurian text and see what changes have been made in order to accommodate the needs of the target audience, and what strategies the translator uses to facilitate the passage of French content into its new context. Changes include adaptations of detail relating to material culture, as French finery is transformed into humbler wares, silk and linen giving way to hempen or woollen cloth, for example[20]. Abridgement of certain passages, especially those of meditation or exegesis in the *Queste*, subtly shift the emphasis from spirituality to physical action, with some expansion of descriptions of combat by incorporation of formulaic phrases familiar from earlier Welsh texts. More specifically, the translator actively seeks Welsh equivalents for French personal names, proof that the links between the *matière de Bretagne* and older, home-grown characters were obvious to Welsh medieval writers. Thus Perceval/Perlesvaus could easily become Peredur, Gauvain replaced by Gwalchmei and so on. Less well-known characters could cause difficulty, however. For example, Arthur's son Loholt in the *Perlesvaus* section is not at first identified, so his name is simply adapted to Welsh pronunciation and spelling as Loawt, until the translator eventually realises that he corresponds to Llacheu in Welsh tradition[21]. To further integrate the French material into Welsh tradition, the translator occasionally incorporates details from earlier Welsh tales, notably *Peredur*, including verbal echoes and adjustments to the protagonist's family history. In forging such links between the two traditions, *Y Seint Greal* demonstrates that it was deemed appropriate that the adventures of French characters (many of them identifiable with Welsh counterparts) could and should be assimilated into the corpus of Welsh tradition, extending and revitalising it with fresh material. The length of *Y Seint Greal* and the internal references to readers (« darlleodron ») mark a clear move to private reading. Similar references are found in *Claddedigaeth Arthur* (« The Burial of Arthur »), a narrative adapted

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[20] *La Queste del Saint Graal*, éd. A. PAUPHILET, p. 105.1-2, « de lin ou de soie », *Ystoryaeu Seint Greal*, ed. Thomas JONES, l. 2251-2, « ae o vrethyn ae o hemp ».
[21] *Y Seint Greal*, ed. Robert WILLIAMS, p. 278.6, 304.29.

from two eye-witness accounts by Giraldus Cambrensis of the supposed exhumation at Glastonbury of the remains of Arthur and his queen in 1191[22]; the earliest extant manuscript, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 4, is again the work of one of the Red Book of Hergest scribes. Hand in hand with this shift to private reading goes textual stability. Whereas the tale of *Owain*, for example, still evidences a continuing movement between written copies and oral transmission in the early modern period, there is no evidence of this occurring with *Y Seint Greal*[23].

Although that translation remains quite close to its sources, the *Queste* and *Perlesvaus* were not the only French romances known to the translator, for he adds details about Boors being tricked by magic into fathering Elyan le Blanc, which could only have been drawn from the *Prose Lancelot*[24]. Yet another romance of the Vulgate cycle, the *Prose Merlin*, was one of the main sources of the Welsh tale known today as *The Birth of Arthur*[25]. The earliest extant manuscript witness, National Library of Wales, ms. Llanstephan 4, is in the hand of one of the main scribes of the Red Book of Hergest, thus emerging from the same *milieu* as both the Red Book itself and the earliest manuscript of *Y Seint Greal*, and dateable between the 1380s and about 1405. *The Birth of Arthur*, which is followed in the manuscript by the *Claddedigaeth* mentioned above, traces the story of Arthur from his conception at Tintagel to his coronation. The earlier part of the narrative is heavily indebted to Geoffrey of Monmouth, almost certainly via *Brut y Brenhinedd*. However, the presence of Blasius (Blaise) as Myrddin's father-confessor (« tat eneit ») and secretary recording all his prophecies

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[22] Timothy LEWIS and J. Douglas BRUCE, « The pretended exhumation of Arthur and Guinevere », *Revue celtique* nº 3, 1912, p. 432-451; D. Simon EVANS, « Dau gopi o destun », *Trivium*, nº 3, 1968, p. 30-47, Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « Blending and rebottling old wines: the Birth and Burial of Arthur in Middle Welsh », *in* Axel HARLOS and Neele HARLOS (dir.), *Adapting Texts and Styles in a Celtic Context*, Münster, Nodus, *à paraître* 2016, p. 155-175.

[23] On the transmission of *Owain*, see Sioned DAVIES, « O Gaer Llion i Benybenglog », *art. cit.*, p. 326-48.

[24] Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « Lancelot in Wales », *in* Karen PRATT (dir.), *Shifts and transpositions in medieval narrative : A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1994, p. 169-179 (p. 176-177).

[25] « A Welsh version of the Birth of Arthur », J. H. DAVIES, *Y Cymmrodor*, nº 24, 1913, p. 247-264; C. LLOYD-MORGAN, « Blending and rebottling old wines », *art. cit.*, p. 156-163.

(« ysgrivennyd cwbyl oi broffwydolaethev[26] » and the inclusion of the sword in the stone episode, reveal that the *Prose Merlin* was an equally important source, which is followed quite closely at times[27].

The romances of the French Vulgate cycle continued to provide grist to the Welsh mill in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, not in the form of translations but in borrowing proper names and snippets of story. These might be combined with material from Welsh tradition, as in the mid-fifteenth century *Darogan yr Olew Bendigaid* (« The Prophecy of the Holy Oil »)[28]. This text combines elements from the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and *Prose Merlin*, as well as the *Perlesvaus* section of *Y Seint Greal*, *Brut y Brenhinedd* and other Welsh sources, with a tale of Thomas Becket drawn from Latin chronicles. Preceded by a prologue deploring the present days of Welsh decline under the heel of the English, the text uses the repeated motif of the loss of a heaven-sent oil used to consecrate Christian kings – received first by Arthur and then Becket – and its later recovery, heralding the defeat of pagan enemies and their expulsion from the kingdom. Together the Arthurian and non-Arthurian sections exemplify the cyclical nature of history and the turning of Fortune's wheel to provide some hope and consolation for the Welsh in the period following the collapse of the Glyndŵr rising in 1410.

Nonetheless, Arthurian elements do not always imply a political message or subtext. In the case of certain genealogical texts preserved in sixteenth-century manuscripts there would seem to be little more than a desire to display a breadth of erudition. Here names are drawn, in some cases apparently at random, from both Welsh tradition and four romances of the

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[26] J. H. DAVIES, *art. cit.*, p. 252.
[27] See further Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « Blending and Rebottling », *op.cit.*, p. 157-163, and ead, « Récrire les Enfances d'Arthur en gallois, au pays de Galles et à Calais », in Hélène TETREL & Géraldine VEYSSEYRE (dir.), *L'Historia regum Britanniae de Geoffroy de Monmouth et les "Bruts" en Europe*, vol. 1, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2015), p. 105-125 (p. 105-115).
[28] R. WALLIS EVANS, « *Darogan yr Olew Bendigaid* a *Hystdori yr Olew Bendigaid* », *Llên Cymru*, nº 14, 1981-1982, p. 86-91 ; Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « *Darogan yr Olew Bendigaid*: Chwedl o'r bymthegfed ganrif », *Llên Cymru*, nº 14, 1981-1982, p. 64-85.

Vulgate cycle: the *Estoire*, the *Queste*, *Prose Merlin* and *Prose Lancelot*, testifying to the continuing interest in material of French origin, and perhaps to what was available[29].

Similarly, Arthurian names of both Welsh and French origin were deployed in praise poetry as comparators for patrons, regardless of the latter's political affiliations.

However, this reflects the paradox at the heart of the development of Arthurian literature in Welsh. There remained the nostalgia of the conquered for the lost glory of an imaginary past when the island of Britain, as in the *Brut*, was united under a single British – that is, Welsh – ruler; at the same time, however, the gentry families who funded the production of literature and the manuscripts in which it was preserved, were increasingly becoming, pragmatically, integrated into the English state which offered them career opportunities, power, status and wealth. There is a deep irony in the praise poems sung by the poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where lords by now very much part of the English establishment, powerful at court in London or leading armies on behalf of the crown, were equated with prominent figures from Arthurian literature. We may detect a further layer of pragmatism and irony in certain references in poems by Lewys Glyn Cothi or Guto'r Glyn in the fifteenth century or Lewys Morgannwg in the sixteenth, where the eulogised patron is compared to characters drawn from French romances, mainly via Welsh translations or other existing borrowings[30]. The assimilation of the French knights, such as Galaad or Lancelot, into the Welsh Arthurian canon parallels the increasing assimilation of Welsh gentry into the English establishment, especially after the accession in 1485 of the part-Welsh Henry Tudor to the English throne.

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[29] Peter C. BARTRUM, « Arthuriana from genealogical manuscripts', *National Library of Wales Journal*, nº 14, 1965, p. 242-245; Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « Nodiadau Ychwanegol ar Achau Arthuraidd a'u ffynonellau Ffrangeg », *National Library of Wales Journal*, nº 21, 1980, p. 329-339.

[30] Barry LEWIS, « Les archives de la poésie galloise révelées : identité galloise et/contre identité anglaise durant la guerre de Cent ans », *in* Anne HELLEGOUARC'H-BRYCE et Heather WILLIAMS (dir.), *Regards croisés sur la Bretagne et le pays de Galles/Cross-Cultural Essays on Wales and Brittany,* Brest, Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique, and Aberystwyth, University of Wales Centre Advanced for Welsh and Celtic Studies, 2013, p. 225-249.

This is perfectly exemplified by the chronicler Elis Gruffydd (c. 1490–post 1556), our first named author of Arthurian prose. Born into a minor gentry family in north-east Wales, he spent his career in English employment, first as a soldier, then as assistant to the diplomat, Sir Robert Wingfield, and finally, from 1530, as part of the garrison in Calais, where he became a Protestant. There he wrote, in Welsh, a vast chronicle of the history of the world to 1552, drawing on multiple sources in Welsh, French, Latin and English[31]. Already widely read in Welsh, as witness his first manuscript, Cardiff City Libraries, ms. 3.4, a miscellany of Welsh poetry and prose completed in London in 1527, he now had access to a greater range of books and, thanks to the Calais book trade, to the new learning. He thus developed a critical approach to the construction of history, especially British history, comparing every possible source in search of agreement which might indicate reliable evidence. He could not, however, conceal his own complex attitude to the British history.

He includes in his chronicle an account of Arthur's life from his conception at Tintagel to his departure after the final battle against his nephew, Morddred. Underpinned by the Galfridian history, the biography's direct sources include the *Prose Lancelot* and *Mort Artu* from the French Lancelot-Grail cycle, earlier Welsh texts such as *Brut y Brenhinedd*, *Darogan yr Olew Bendigaid* and *The Birth of Arthur*, as well as tales and traditions evidently drawn from Welsh oral tradition[32]. However, this section of the Chronicle relies most heavily on the printed English Chronicles of William Caxton (1480), Robert Fabyan (1516) and John Rastell (c. 1530). Thus, while Elis Gruffydd was following the late medieval tradition not only in choosing the « Six Ages' model of world history for his Chronicle as a whole, but also continuing the Welsh practice of combining material from the oral as well as the written

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[31] Apart from some extracts, the Chronicle, preserved in a single, holograph manuscript (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, ms. NLW 5276i-iiD, NLW 3054i-iiD) is still unpublished. An edition of the Arthurian section is in preparation by C. Lloyd-Morgan.

[32] Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « Welsh Tradition in Calais : Elis Gruffydd and his biography of King Arthur », *in* Norris J. LACY (dir.), *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2005, p. 77-91 ; Ceridwen LLOYD-MORGAN, « Récrire les Enfances d'Arthur en gallois », *op. cit.*, p. 115-124; *ead.*, « Oral et écrit dans la chronique d'Elis Gruffydd », *Kreiz. Etudes sur Bretagne et les Pays Celtiques*, n° 5, 1996, p. 179-86.

(manuscript) tradition, and from French romances as well as Welsh texts, at the same time he was breaking new ground by borrowing heavily from English, printed sources too. The contradictions between the sources did not escape him, and after Arthur disappears from view, escorted from the lakeside by a group of women, the chronicler launches into several pages of discussion of the historicity of Arthur, exploring the often dubious evidence in favour of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but noting that many authoritative writers still believe he exists. Much of this discussion is directly derived from John Rastell's chronicle, *Pastyme of people*, but Elis Gruffydd does add his own opinion, echoed elsewhere in the Chronicle, that although the Welsh are criticised by the English for their supposed belief in Arthur, it is in fact the English who make the greatest fuss about him and assert that he is sleeping under a hill, on the English side of the border, and will rise again.

Elis Gruffydd's attitude to Arthur as a (pseudo)-historical figure exemplifies the contradictions and compromises in his own life, as very much a Welshman of his time. He was a pragmatic, multilingual servant of the Tudor state, defending the last English possession in France, yet chose to write his Chronicle in Welsh, sending it home to a relative on completion. Intellectually, and as a Protestant, he was ready to question and explore, but at heart he was still drawn to the traditional lore of his homeland and the romantic idea of a glorious, though perhaps imagined, past. But whilst his contemporary, the Oxford-educated Sir John Prise (1501/2-1555), would use Welsh sources in his *Historiae Brytannicae Defensio* (posthumously published in 1573) to counter Polydore Vergil's arguments against the Galfridian history[33], the humbler « Soldier of Calais » adopted a more measured, modern view.

In Ireland, the historical and political ramifications of the Arthurian legend are considerably less significant than they were in Wales. Arthur is not an Irish hero. The only

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[33] John PRISE, *Historiae Britannicae Defensio. A Defence of the British History*, ed. Ceri DAVIES, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015.

notable political use of Arthur in an Irish context is the account by <mark>Giraldus Cambrensis</mark> of the « fivefold right of the English king to rule Ireland »[34]. In this chapter of the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Giraldus justifies the English claim to Ireland on the basis of two ancient precedents and three more recent events. The precedents are both drawn from Geoffrey of Monmouth and include his statement that the kings of Ireland paid tribute to Arthur. However, the centrality of Arthur to Giraldus's vision of insular history can be overstated. Arthur is not the only (nor the most ancient) example of British authority in Ireland and Giraldus places a good deal more emphasis on recent events, such as the oaths sworn by Irish lords to Henry II and the apparent papal grant of Ireland to the kings of England. The impact of the Galfridian tradition, with its more « historical » view of Arthur, is negligible in the Arthurian narratives that survive from medieval and early modern Ireland. These treatments of Arthur do not tend to have an obvious political dimension and there is little trace of the concern with insular territorial politics that features so prominently in the Welsh tradition. Many of the surviving narratives from Ireland are light-hearted in tone, even comic. Irish adaptors typically seem interested in the world of Arthur as a realm of adventure and of marvels; the most « serious » of the surviving narratives is focused on religion, rather than on politics. It is, therefore, unsurprising that members of the Gaelic families were just as likely to own manuscripts of Irish Arthurian narratives as the (often Irish-speaking) descendants of the Norman settlers in Ireland.

Arthur's historical marginality may be partly responsible for how very late in the Middle Ages Arthurian narratives appear on the scene in Ireland. No manuscript of an Arthurian text in Irish survives before the mid-fifteenth century; indeed, the vast majority of

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[34] GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS, *Expugnatio Hibernica : The Conquest of Ireland*, ed. A. B. SCOTT and F. X. MARTIN, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 1978, p. 148.

manuscripts date from the seventeenth century or later[35]. However, there is nothing anomalous about the very late emergence of Arthurian literature when we consider Irish engagement with foreign vernacular literatures more generally. There is little evidence of any translation from literature in French or English before the fifteenth century when a substantial body of Irish translations of foreign narratives finally appears[36]. The reasons for this rather sudden shift in cultural perspective have never been closely examined and a constellation of social, economic and political factors may be at play. Perhaps most significantly, Ireland enjoyed a period of comparative stability in the fifteenth century and, as a result, cultural activities seem to gather pace and manuscript production in general appears to have increased. This period also sees the consolidation of a series of regional power bases that were larger and wealthier than those that had gone before, creating more fertile ground for literary patronage. Finally, it was not until the fifteenth century that the friars began to gain a foothold in the Irish-speaking regions of the country[37]. Religious orders like the Franciscans seem to have played a significant role in cross-linguistic exchange and in the transmission of foreign texts into Irish-speaking Ireland[38].

The corpus of Irish Arthurian material is rather small, consisting of one prose translation of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* and five romances, generally termed « romantic tales », which have no obvious sources, but which certainly have affinities with surviving material in English and French. The earliest of these texts, though not by much, seems to be *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha*, the Irish translation of the *Queste del Saint*

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[35] For an overview of the evidence for earlier knowledge of Arthur and of the corpus of surviving narrative texts see Joseph Falaky NAGY, « Arthur and the Irish », *in* Helen FULTON (dir.), *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 117-127 (p. 124).

[36] On the translation of non-native material in medieval Ireland generally, see Robin FLOWER, *The Irish Tradition*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947, p. 120-141 ; Nessa Ní SHÉAGHDHA, « Translations and adaptations into Irish », *Celtica*, nᵒ 16, 1984, p. 107-124 ; and Proinsias MAC CANA, « La traduction des épopées étrangères en irlandais », *in* Geneviève CONTAMINE (dir.), *Traduction et Traducteurs au Moyen Âge,* Paris, CNRS, 1989, p. 77-84.

[37] Colmán Ó CLABAIGH, *The Friars in Ireland: 1224-1540*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2012, p. 53-86.

[38] Robin FLOWER, *op. cit.*, p. 121. See further, Aisling BYRNE, « Language Networks, Literary Translation and the Friars in Late Medieval Ireland », *in* Mary CARRUTHERS (dir.), *Language Networks in Medieval Britain*, Donington, Shaun Tyas, 2015, p. 166-178.

Graal, which was probably produced in the middle of the 1400s[39]. The five surviving

romantic tales are *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* (« The Adventure of the Cropped Dog »),

Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair (« The Adventure of the Noble Youth of the Eagle »)[40],

Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe (« The Visit of Grey-Thigh »)[41], *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* (« The

Adventure of the Great Fool »)[42], and *Eachtra Mhelóra agus Orlando* (« The Adventure of

Melora and Orlando »)[43]. *Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe* and *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* appear in

a late fifteenth century contents list and early sixteenth century manuscript respectively.

There is no clear evidence that would place the remaining three any earlier than 1600 and

Eachtra Mhelóra agus Orlando seems unlikely to be earlier than the 1650s. Only *Eachtra an*

Mhadra Mhaoil and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair* survive in a high number of manuscripts

and both were copied right up until the waning of the Irish manuscript tradition in the 1800s.

The translation of the *Queste del Saint Graal* seems to have been relatively widely

disseminated. It survives in three manuscripts – quite a reasonable number for a translated

text – and there are references to it in bardic poems. Irish translations of foreign-language

romance do not tend to depart radically from the original, and the translation of the *Queste* is

particularly conservative. There is little noticeable adjustment of the material to fit an Irish

literary or cultural context. In contrast to the Welsh *Y Seint Greal*, there are no clues as to the

circumstances of its translation or the source text. The text's first editor thought the exemplar

was an (otherwise unattested) English translation of the *Queste*, though subsequent opinion

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[39] *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha. An Early Modern Irish Translation of the "Quest of the Holy Grail"*,
ed. Sheila FALCONER, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953.
[40] These two texts were edited with translations in *Two Irish Arthurian Romances: Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil,
Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair*, ed. R. A. S. MACALISTER, London, Irish Texts Society, 1908, see also *Eachtra
Mhacaoimh an Iolair*, ed. Iorard DE TEILTIÚN and Seosamh LAOIDE, Dublin, Hodges Figgis, 1912.
[41] *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta: mar atá Eachtra Mhélora agus Orlando agus Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe*, ed. Máire
MHAC AN TSAOI, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946.
[42] « An t-Amadán Mór », ed. Tadhg Ó RABHARTAIGH and Douglas HYDE, *Lia Fáil*, nᵒ 2, 1927, p. 191-228.
[43] There are two editions of this text: « Orlando agus Melora », ed. A. M. E. Draak, *Béaloideas* nᵒ 16, 1946-
1948, p. 3-48 and in *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta*, ed. MHAC AN TSAOI, *op. cit.*

has favoured a French-language source[44]. Another point of contrast with the Welsh treatment of the narrative is that the devotional dimension of the *Queste* is by no means downplayed; if anything, it is highlighted[45]. Of course, the mystical flavour of the *Queste* is a factor that sets it apart from the mainstream of Arthurian literature. In an Irish context where Arthurian material was not well known, it seems plausible that the *Queste*'s religious content was of more interest to its translator than the fact that it was a tale of Arthur[46]. Ownership evidence in the surviving manuscripts appears to underline this. The earliest manuscript (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy ms. D 4 2), seems to have originated at a Carmelite friary in the midlands of Ireland and another surviving fragment (Dublin, University College ms. A 10), was in Franciscan hands at an early stage[47].

As in the Welsh tradition a century earlier, the translation of the *Queste* into Irish seems to occupy a pivotal position. Given how quickly the Arthurian romances begin to appear after its translation, it is tempting to suggest the *Lorgaireacht* popularized the story of Arthur in Ireland[48]. Even if the translator's primary interest may have been in the text's religious dimension, rather than in its Arthurian setting, early audiences of the work need not have been of the same mind. However, significant distinctions can be made between the translation of the *Queste* and the romantic tales. The origins of the tales are rather obscure, but their content and surviving manuscript contexts suggest their audience was a lay one, and that their status was as purely secular entertainment. The *Lorgaireacht* is considerably more « literary »

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[44] *Lorgaireacht*, p. xxxi. On the likelihood of a French source, see Rachel BROMWICH, « Review of *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha*, ed. Sheila Falconer », *Medium Aevum*, n° 25, 1956, p. 92-95 (p. 93) and Aisling BYRNE, « Malory's sources for the *Tale of the Sankgreal*: Some overlooked evidence from *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha* », *Arthurian Literature*, n° 30, 2013, p. 87-100.
[45] Falconer, ed. *Lorgaireacht*, p. xvi.
[46] Rachel BROMWICH, *art.cit.*, p. 93.
[47] For accounts of these manuscripts and their origins, see Kathleen MULCHRONE, Thomas F. O'RAHILLY, Elizabeth FITZPATRICK, and A. I. PEARSON (dir.), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 8 vols, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 1926-1970, fasc. xxvi, 1943, p. 3297-3307, and Myles DILLON, Canice MOONEY et Pádraig DE BRÚN (dir.), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Franciscan Library, Killiney*, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1969, p. 21.

[48] Joseph Falaky NAGY, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

than the indigenous romances. Like *Y Seint Greal*, it appears to be a very close translation of a French source with <mark>minimal</mark> variation across the surviving manuscripts. The translator must have had a manuscript of the *Queste* in front of him as he worked. None of the romantic tales seem to replicate this – they are rather more loosely structured than the *Lorgaireacht* and exhibit a much higher degree of variation across their manuscripts. As we shall see, oral report may have played a large part in their transmission to Ireland. The *Lorgaireacht* and the Irish Arthurian romances can readily be seen as representatives of two related, but rather distinct, literary movements in late medieval Ireland. The *Lorgaireacht* can readily be grouped with the Irish translations of various non-Arthurian romances, like *Guy of Warwick* and *Fierabras*, that appear between the mid-fifteenth century and the very early 1500s. These translations tend to exhibit only minor adaptations of their sources. By contrast, the other five Arthurian texts fall within the category of story generally dubbed *scéalta rómánsaíochta* (« romantic tales »)[49]. *Scéalta rómánsaíochta* are very similar in structure and tone to popular romances from the wider European tradition, though they only appear in Ireland from the fifteenth century onwards. The texts that fall under this heading are very numerous, but they have received very little scholarly attention. They continued to be copied well into the nineteenth century. It is not implausible that translation of foreign texts, particularly romances, might have stimulated the production of the romantic tales[50].

Arthur's world has a rather hybrid quality in the romantic tales. There is a certain amount of cultural adjustment; for instance, Arthur's well-known refusal to eat before he has seen a wonder is « translated » for an Irish context. It is described as a *geis*, a form of ritual taboo common in medieval Irish narratives[51]. Similarly, chivalry and courtesy – concepts that were by no means central to Irish literary culture in the Middle Ages – are not the ethical

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[49] The fullest account of this rather underexplored group of texts is Alan BRUFORD, « Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediaeval Romances : A Study of the Early Modern Irish "Romantic Tales" and their Oral Derivatives », *Beáloideas*, 34 (1966), p. 1-285.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[51] Bernadette SMELIK, « Koning Arthur wil niet eten, Van gewoonte tot *geis* », *Madoc*, nº 15, 2001, p. 19-27.

touchstones they are in English and French Arthuriana. Perhaps less predictably, characters and places from the well-established Irish mythological narratives intrude into the world of Arthur. A member of the Tuatha Dé Danann (« People of the Goddess Danu ») – a pantheon of supernatural beings who feature prominently in Irish myth – makes an appearance in *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir*[52]. It also seems clear that the various authors of the romantic tales did not have a particularly in-depth knowledge of the Arthurian legend. The essentials are all there – the Round Table, Camelot, Guinevere and Gawain – but that is about the limit of the recognisably « Arthurian » detail in these works. Indeed, Camelot itself is referenced rather less frequently than a uniquely Irish seat for Arthur : *Dún an Halla Dheirg* (« the Fortress of the Red Hall »).

Only one of the Irish romances can be clearly linked to a known Arthurian narrative, albeit very obliquely. *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* has clear parallels with the *Perceval* story, although many of the narrative details differ[53]. The *amadán* (« fool ») of the title is never given a proper name, but is identified as Arthur's nephew and is raised away from his uncle's court. When the fool finally arrives at Arthur's court he undertakes a series of comic adventures, few of which have any clear analogues in the *Perceval* tradition[54]. It seems clear that some version of the *Perceval* story lies in the background of this narrative, albeit at a considerable remove. The picture one could paint of the *Lorgaireacht*'s translator, working carefully on his text with a manuscript of his source in front of him, seems irrelevant here. *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* can only be classed as a translation in the broadest sense – it retains the broad outline of *Perceval*, but there is hardly any overlap in its narrative details and it includes many episodes and details that do not feature in any known version of *Perceval*.

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[52] Joseph Falaky NAGY, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
[53] Linda GOWANS, « The *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* as a Response to the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes », *Arthurian Literature*, nᵒ 19, 2003, p. 199-230.
[54] Joseph Falaky NAGY, *art.cit.*, p. 124.

The best evidence for the background of the romantic tales of Arthur is a note in the earliest manuscript of *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*, dating from 1651:

« Bíodh a fhios agad, a léughthoir an sgeóil-si, gurab amhlaidh do fuair misi .i. Brían Ó Corcrán cnámha an sgéil so ag duine úasal a dubhairt gurab as Fraincis do chúalaidh sé féin dá innisin é, agus mur do fúair misi sbéis ann do dheachtaigh mur so é 7 do chuirsim na laoithe beaga-sa mur chumáoin air, 7 ní raibhe an sgél féin a nGáoidheilg ariamh conuige sin.[55] »

« Know, O reader of this story, that it is the case that I, Brian Ó Corcráin, got the bones of this story from a noble person who said that he heard it being told in French, and when I became interested in it he composed it like this and added these little lays to it, and the story had never been in Irish until then.[56] »

We follow Caoimhín Breatnach's translation here, but other scholars have understood this note to suggest that Brian Ó Corcráin himself, not the « noble person », was responsible for <mark>translating</mark> the story into Irish and for the « little lays ». The precise identity of Ó Corcráin is unclear. He may be a seventeenth century poet of that name, or possibly a clergyman in Fermanagh who died in 1487[57]. Regardless of who translated the text, the note paints an entirely plausible picture of the sorts of processes of adaptation that might have been at work in these romantic tales. The note suggests the gist of the narrative came to Ireland orally, from someone who had heard it being told in French. Whether this person had witnessed a reading from a written text, or had heard the narrative being recited from memory, is unclear.

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[55] *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*, ed DE TEILTIÚN and LAOIDE, p. xix.
[56] Caoimhín BREATNACH, « Brian Ó Corcráin and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* », *Éigse*, n° 34, 2004, p. 44-48 (p. 47).
[57] *Ibid*., p. 46.

What seems certain is that the Irish adaptor(s) intervened heavily in the text. We are told explicitly that the « little lays » were added in Ireland. *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* is the only Arthurian text which uses the mixture of prose and verse sometimes associated with Irish and Welsh medieval literature. However, if only « the bones of the story » were brought to Ireland, a good deal more prose material must also have been supplied by the Irish adaptor. In its modern edition, the Irish text of *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* runs to 61 printed pages of about thirty lines per page – the « little lays » constitute only a tiny portion of this. It seems that the Irish adaptor put a great deal of flesh on the « bones » of the French narrative. We cannot be sure whether the other romances have a similar background, but it would be consistent with how suggestive, but also non-specific, are their echoes of French and English Arthurian material.

Even at an earlier period both Ireland and Wales, thanks largely to their early Christianisation and strong traditions of Latin learning, had had access to the wider world of textual culture, whilst at the same time maintaining and developing their own literary traditions rooted within distinct and formalised social structures. Neither country was immune to the infectious pan-European enthusiasm for Arthurian tales, and Welsh and Irish Arthurian literature from the later Middle Ages and early modern period illustrates how new literary fashions from outside could be accommodated within native word-based cultures. As texts in French and later in English, composed within a written context, became available, rather than displacing an oral inheritance they brought new grist to the mill, to be appropriated and assimilated, extending and enriching the native traditions. Adapted to the taste and concerns – whether social, political or religious – of their new audiences, the narratives which emerge at this period locate themselves at the juncture between the domains of written and oral, native and foreign, testifying to the continuing confidence and vitality of these evolving cultures.