The Anapaestoid Tradition in Welsh Poetry

Toby D. Griffen
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

The identification of meter in poetry is often seen as a rather superficial and obvious task, for the meter proceeds directly from the natural phonetic system of the language. For example, English and German maintain a prominent stress accent. An English word such as *attitude* consists of an initial stressed syllable followed by two relatively unstressed (or lesser stressed) syllables. If the word were to appear as a single foot within a line of poetry, it would have to be used as a dactyl – a foot with an initial stress-accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables.

Classical Greek, on the other hand, maintained a phonetic system in which the difference in vowel length (and hence in syllable length) was distinctive. In conjunction with accompanying music which also accentuated the difference between long notes and short notes, Greek poetry developed a quantitative metrical pattern.[1] In quantity, ἄξιος 'of like value' maintains an initial long syllable followed by two short syllables – a Classical Greek quantitative dactyl.

When we turn our attention to Welsh, however, we encounter a problem. There are two independent accent systems: a stress accent on the penult or on the ultima of certain words (and, of course, in monosyllables) and a pitch accent on the ultima. Thus, a word such as *darganfod* 'discovery' will maintain the stress accent on the syllable *gan* and the pitch accent on the syllable *fod*.[2]

As for which accent is more prominent in the language and should therefore be used as the basis of meter, there is no clear answer. Some phonological alternations are based upon the stress accent, such as the reappearance of the historical *h* in the stressed syllables of certain words (for example, *brenin* 'king' and *brenhines* 'queen'); while some phonological alternations are based upon the pitch accent, such as the "clear" realization of *y* (for example, *mynydd* 'mountain' and *mynyddoedd* 'mountains').

---

[1] See, for example, the discussion of Greek, Sanskrit, and Latin metrical development in Mason Hammond, *Latin: A Historic and Linguistic Handbook* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 202-206.

[2] On the competing accent patterns in Welsh, see D.M. Jones, "The Accent in Modern Welsh," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 13 (1949), 63-64; Briony J. Williams, *Stress in Modern Welsh* (Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1989); Toby D. Griffen, "On Phonological Stress in Welsh," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 28 (1979), 106-12.

Pitch Accent and *Cynghanedd*

In order to determine which accent pattern has been used for the poetic meter, we must examine the poetry of a "Golden Age" – an age in which poetry is perceived to be most natural and of the highest quality. For Welsh, such a Golden Age would be that of the *cynghanedd* ('correspondence') poetry of the *Cywyddwyr*, poets who flourished roughly between 1375 and 1525.[3]

It has always been assumed that the *cynghanedd* metrical system of the *Cywyddwyr* was based upon stress accent, rather than upon pitch accent. When we base the meter on stress, however, we come up with some rather complicated rules. For example, Eurys Rowlands posits the following:[4]

> *Emphasis and consonantal correspondence*: the line is divided into two parts, each ending in an emphasized word (and it should be noted that words not normally stressed, such as prepositions, can be emphasized for this metrical purpose at the end of the first part of the line). Consonants correspond absolutely, in order, in each of the two parts of the line, before the accented vowel of the emphasized word. If the word has more than one syllable, and is accented on the penultimate syllable, the consonant(s) between the accented penult and the unaccented last vowel must be taken into account. Words in Welsh are either (1) monosyllables or polysyllables with the last syllable accented or (2) polysyllables with the penultimate syllable accented. It follows, therefore, that there are four possible classes of consonant correspondence: with both emphasized words similarly accented (*cytbwys*) or differently accented (*anghytbwys*), and the last emphasized word in the line ending in an accented syllable (*acennog*) or in an unaccented syllable (*diacen*).
>
> 1. *cytbwys acennog*   ´   ´
> 2. *cytbwys diacen*   ´ �‍˘   ´ ˘
> 3. *anghytbwys acennog*   ´   ´ ˘
> 4. *anghytbwys diacen*   ´ ˘   ´
>
> In 1, 2, 3, 4, the consonants correspond in front of the accent. In 2, 3, 4, the consonants also correspond after the accent. In 1 the consonants do not correspond after the accent, as this would mean that the two emphasized words would end in identical consonants. This might not be wrong in all cases, but rhyme (*odl*) must be avoided as must *proest* (half-rhyme, where the consonants are identical and the vocalic elements belong to the same class). It is a general

---

[3]See especially Eurys I. Rowlands, *Poems of the Cywyddwyr: A Selection of Cywyddau c. 1375-1525* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976). See also John Morris Jones, *Cerdd Dafod* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), for a complete discussion; and J.J. Evans, *Llawlyfr y Cynganeddion* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1951), for a summary of the rules.

[4]Rowlands, pp. xxviii-xxiv.

rule that *odl* and *proest* must be avoided between the emphasized words in a line
of *cynghanedd*.

These rules are quite complex, and their complexity derives not from the natural structure
of the language, but from a need to account for apparent exceptions. For example, the basic rule
1 must be revised in rules 2, 3, and 4 to account for correspondences after the accent. The reason
why rule 1 is necessary in the first place, however, is to avoid a rhyme scheme that actually
should not have anything to do with the metrical pattern anyway. Indeed, all of the rules can be
violated by an accepted "fault," *crych a llyfn*, which occurs "when a consonant is misplaced in
relation to the accent of one of the emphasized words:

| cal<u>on</u> | engyli<u>on</u> | Englont | 2.7 |
| | ng l n | ́ng l nt"[5] | |

What if, on the other hand, we were to base the meter not on the penultimate or ultimate
stress accent, but upon the ultimate pitch accent? If we did this, we could reduce the rules to one
simple, straightforward rule:[6]

Consonants correspond absolutely, in order, in each of the two parts of the line,
before the pitch-accented vowel of the emphasized word.

This single pitch-based rule eliminates all of the complexities we encounter with the
stress-based rules and obviates any need for an acceptable "fault." The elegance of this rule
derives from the fact that it accommodates the natural structure of the language, provided that the
natural structure of the language is based upon the primacy of the pitch accent.
We should note that the Golden Age of *cynghanedd* poetry was designated as such by the
naturalness and the beauty of the poetry itself. The rules were devised later by grammarians
trying to determine how it was that the poetry was of such a high quality. The poets themselves
did not follow these rules, but rather they composed their poetry on the basis of the natural
structure of the language.
It should be rather obvious that this natural structure of Welsh – for the *Cywyddwyr* at
least – indeed included the pitch accent as the basis for poetic meter. Following the awkward
stress-based rules learned as it were by rote, later poets have never been able to attain the level in
cynghanedd poetry of those poets who simply wrote the poetry as it sounded natural to them.
Moreover, basing the meter on pitch accent rather than on stress accent accounts for
another oddity of Welsh poetry, the "accented-unaccented" rhyme. Viewed from the position of
stress, the accented ultima or monosyllable must rhyme with the unaccented ultima of a word
with an accented penult. For example, we find the following rhymed couplets:[7]

---

[5]Rowlands, p. xlvi.

[6]See Toby D. Griffen, "A Single Accent Rule for *Cynghanedd*," *Journal of Celtic Linguistics*
6 (1997), 125-135.

[7]Rowlands, p. 40.

a'i llyw main yn tyllu m<u>ôr</u>
a'i dengwart ai' dau án<u>gor</u>
a'i hywylbren hi fal bronh<u>áu</u>
a'i naw bwned yn bénn<u>au</u>.

The concept that a stressed vowel should rhyme with an unstressed vowel has problems that go beyond the poetic to the phonetic. Indeed, in the couplets noted above, the stressed syllables not only have a different accent level than their unstressed counterparts, but they are also longer and less centralized. This would be tantamount in English to rhyming *going* with *ring*.

If, on the other hand, we consider pitch to be the pertinent poetic accent, then the rhyming syllables are of equal accent. Since the length and centralization are phonetically predictable, we achieve a phonologically appropriate rhyme scheme.

Anapaestoids in *The Black Book of Carmarthen*

The recognition of pitch accent as the primary accent for the metrical pattern of *cynghanedd* poetry should lead us to consider the situation in Old Welsh. The Old Welsh accent was on the ultima – the final syllable – and may or may not have been accompanied by a cooccurring stress accent. Indeed, while the question of an Old-Welsh stress-accent shift or development may have provided some controversy in linguistics, the basic facts that there was an ultimate accent and that it did involve pitch are by no means in question.[8]

Let us go back in time from the *Cywyddwyr*, then, and see what the situation was in the oldest manuscript in Welsh literature – *The Black Book of Carmarthen*.[9] While the final redaction of this collection was completed in the thirteenth century, some of the poems were certainly passed on from the Old Welsh tradition. It is among these poems that we should seek our meter.

When we search the poetry in the *Black Book* for evidence of a pitch-based metrical pattern, we are struck by the first half of *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* 'The Conversation of Myrddin and Taliesin'.[10] The traditional analysis of the poem on the basis of the stress accent has led to the positing of different meters without any means of predicting when one would be used rather than another.[11] Let us instead mark the phrase-prominent pitch accents with a macron (¯)

---

[8]See Toby D. Griffen, "Epenthesis and the Old Welsh Accent Shift," *Studia Celtica* 26/27 (1991), 163-74); also Griffen, "A Single Accent Rule for *Cynghanedd*."

[9]See especially W.F. Skene (ed.), *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, (Edinburgh, 1868); J. Gwenogvryn Evans (ed.), *Black Book of Carmarthen*. (Lanbedrog, 1906); A.O.H. Jarman (ed.), *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982). On the status of the book as the oldest manuscript in the Welsh language, see Meic Stephens (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 41.

[10]This particular poem is discussed at great length in A.O.H. Jarman (ed.), *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin (O Lyfr Du Caerfyrddin)* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967).

[11]Compare Jarman, *Ymddiddan*, pp. 5-8.

and the nontonic syllables with a micron (˘).[12] When we do this, we uncover the following meter:

Mor truan genhyf mor truan	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘	˘ ˘ –
A deryv am deduyv a chaduan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Oed llachar kyulauar kyuflauan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Oed yscuid o tryuruyd o tryuan.	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Oed maelgun a uelun in imuan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	5
Y teulu rac troyuulu ny thauant.	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –

Rac deuur ineutur y tirran,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Rac errith a gurrith y ar welugan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Mein wineu in diheu a dygan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Moch guelher y niuer gan elgan.	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	10
Och ae leith maur a teith y deuthan.	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –

Rys undant oet ruchvant y tarian,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Hid attad yd aith rad kyulau[a]n,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Llas kyndur tra messur y kuynan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Llas haelon o dinon tra uuan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	15
Tryuir not maur eu clod gan elgan.	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –

Truy a thrui, ruy a ruy y doethan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Trav a thrau im doth brau am elgan,	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Llat dyuel oe divet kyulauan	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	˘ ˘ –
Ab erbin ae uerin a wnaethant.	˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ –	20

What we find here are highly regular pitch-based anapaests – so regular in fact that we can easily pick out the missing syllable in line 1 and conclude that the original word rhymed in -*an*. Moreover, what makes this pattern even more striking is the fact that the first two feet rhyme internally while the final foot rhymes externally. This rhyming pattern makes the meter not only feasible, but obvious and natural. Recalling what we have learned from metrical patterns in general and from the *cynghanedd* metrical pattern in particular, this should come as no surprise. With or without the stress accent, there was an accent in the ultima, and that accent was taken to be the primary accent for metrical poetry. That such metrical poetry should exist in Old Welsh and that it should be anapaestoid should come as no more of a surprise than the fact that English *attitude* is interpreted as a stress-accent-based dactyl.

---

[12]To be sure, this notation is borrowed from the Classical Greek tradition of quantitative accent. On the other hand, it is widely used to represent the stress-based systems of English, German, Late Latin, and others; so its use here for pitch accent should be neither confusing nor unprecedented.

There are four other poems in the *Black Book* that maintain what we can call hyperanapaests.[13] Instead of two nontonic syllables followed by an accented rhyming syllable, these feet consist of three nontonic syllables followed by the accented rhyming syllable. Moreover, the longer feet allow another interesting characteristic: Not only do the first two feet rhyme internally and the third foot externally, but the third foot contains a repetition of the internal rhyme. For example, the following is the final stanza of the poem *I Hywell Ap Goronwy* 'To Hywell Son of Goronwy'.[14]

Vy rypuched y colowin ked. clod pedrydant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ − 35
Ryuel dywal vrien haval. arial vytheint.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Gurisc gueilgi dowyn. kyvid hehowin colofyn milcant. ˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	
Llugirn deudor. lluoet agor. gur. bangor breint.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Prydus *per*chen *pri*odaur ben. pen pop kinweint.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Gorev breenhin or gollewin. hid in llundein.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ − 40
Haelaw lariaw. levaf teccaf. o adaw plant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Gwerlig haelaw haeton gvaut veitiadon vaton vetveint. ˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	
Goruir menic mur gweren*n*ic gurhid gormant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Terruin am tir. ri reith kywir. o hil morgant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
O morccanhvc o rieinvc radev rvytheint.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ − 45
O teernon kywrid leon. galon reibeint.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Vn vid veneid y ellyspp bid. gelleist porthant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Hoethil hir ac ew. a chein y atew trvi artuniant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −
Vrten arnav. rad ac anaw. a ffav a phlant.	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −	˘ ˘ ˘ −

This stanza is adjusted here for several well-known and documented devices. Line 37 and line 48 contain nonsyllabics and epenthetics, and line 42 contains a blatant scribal error corrected elsewhere in the collection and noted (without any prior considerations of the rhyme scheme) by A.O.H. Jarman.[15] Taking all of this into consideration, the stanza is completely regular in its hyperanapaestic trimeter.

---

[13]Using the numbering from Jarman, *Llyfr Du*, these include (3) *Devs Ren Rymaw Y Awen*, (4) *Hervit Vrten Autyl Kyrridven*, (11) *Mawl I Dduw*, and (22) *I Hywell Ap Goronwy*.

[14]Jarman, *Llyfr Du*, p. 51.

[15]See Jarman, *Lyfr Du*, p. 107.

Anapaestoids in *Armes Prydein*

The discovery of anapaestoid trimeter in some of the poems of *The Black Book of Carmarthen* should prompt us to examine the monument of Old Welsh poetry – *Armes Prydein* 'The Prophecy of Britain.'[16] According to Sir Ifor Williams, this 199-line poem was composed around A.D. 930 by a "monk of south Wales"[17] in a meter known as *Cyhydedd Naw Ban* ('nine-peak line' – henceforth CNB) maintaining five syllables in the first half-line and four in the second.[18]

The problem with the *Armes* meter is that barely half of the lines adhere to the CNB. A closer examination of this poem, moreover, reveals the residue of an earlier meter based not on a half-line structure, but on a trimetrical structure. At this point, let us designate the earlier, trimetrical poet as the A Poet and the later, CNB poet as the B Poet.

The task facing the B Poet was how to incorporate the lines of the A Poet into the later CNB meter. Evidently the A Poet wrote in a meter in which there were three syllables in the first part, three in the second part, and four in the third part. In order to reduce the line to the nine syllables of CNB, the B Poet had to reduce one of the parts (preferably the first or second) by one syllable. For example, lines 150 and 151 show the rhyme scheme quite clearly, with the first revealing an elimination in the second foot and the second revealing an elimination in the first foot. In each case, the affected foot loses its rhyme, which is preserved in the other foot and within the third foot, as follows:

> rewinyawt · y gat : rwyccawt lluyd.   ˘ ˘ ‐   ˘ ‐   ˘ ˘ ˘ ‐
> Dybi · o Alclut : gwyr drut diweir   ˘ ‐   ˘ ˘ ‐   ˘ ˘ ˘ ‐

When we examine this residue, we can reconstruct a meter in which there are two anapaests followed by a hyperanapaest. Just as in the *Black Book*, the first two parts rhyme internally and the third rhymes externally. Moreover, there is a repetition of the internal rhyme in the third, hyperanapaestic foot. This is quite clearly a mixed anapaestoid trimeter following what we can now see as an established metrical pattern.

What makes the pattern more obvious is the fact that the B Poet recognized what we may term the "mesotomic" syllable.[19] It has been found that where two identical vowels precede the tonic syllable, they are counted for metrical purposes as one extralong vowel "cut through the

---

[16]The text used here is Ifor Williams, *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain: From the Book of Taliesin* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972). See also J. Gwenogvryn Evans (ed.), *Facsimile and Text of the Book of Taliesin* (Llanbedrog, 1910).

[17]Williams, p. xxvi.

[18]Williams, p. lii.

[19]On the mesotomic syllable, see Toby D. Griffen, "Mesotomic Syllables in the *Armes Prydein*," *Linguistics of Welsh Literature* (= *Language Sciences*, special issue 15/2), ed. by T.D. Griffen, 91-106 (Oxford: Pergamon, 1993). This and other poetic phenomena are treated in Toby D. Griffen, *Phonetic Regularity in Welsh Poetry* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, in press).

middle." For example, line 2 appears to have one too many syllables in the first half-line of CNB meter:[20]

<p style="text-align:center">maraned a meued : a hed genhyn</p>

When we take into account, however, the fact that the word *maraned* 'treasure' fits the pattern of the mesotomic syllable, we can reduce it to a disyllabic word which fits the CNB meter. As has been demonstrated at length and in detail elsewhere, whenever the mesotomic pattern appears in *Armes Prydein*, there is one too many syllables in the half-line, an apparent metrical error corrected by mesotomy. Moreover, there is no case in which mesotomy reduces the line below the proper number of syllables.[21] The B Poet thus quite carefully observed the rule of the mesotomic syllable.

On the other hand, the A Poet did not recognize mesotomy. Where these lines show the residue of the old trimetrical structure, counting the mesotomic syllable as two syllables restores the A Poet's original anapaestoid trimeter. Thus, in the line cited above, without the later mesotomy, the meter in which the first two anapaests rhyme internally while the final hyperanapaest rhymes externally and contains a repetition of the internal rhyme is restored, as follows:

<p style="text-align:center">maraned a meued a hed genhyn   ˘ ˘ ‒   ˘ ˘ ‒   ˘ ˘ ˘ ‒</p>

The ultimate proof of the A Poet's existence, of course, lies in the relationship between the content of his lines and that of the B Poet's lines. When we isolate those lines that show the greatest evidence of the anapaestoid trimeter, we discover that the entire nature of the prophecy changes – and changes quite consistently. In the appendix, there is a necessarily awkward, literal half-line *per* half-line translation of *Armes Prydein*. Those lines and parts of lines that are most likely remnants of the A Poet are in boldface, those that are likely at least largely to be remnants of the A Poet are in italics, and those that may contain something of the A Poet are marked with a dagger.

When we allow the unmarked lines to fade into the background, all references to Wales and the Welsh fade away as well. Indeed, the names of peoples and places that are lost reflect the rather limited geographical knowledge of a South Welsh monk of the tenth century. Those that remain, on the other hand, betray a far greater geographical knowledge; but the most important area clearly lies in the North. Such references as that in line 78, should have alerted us to this before, for the proposed campaign is planned against the Saxons in the south – if the protagonists had been Welsh, they would have planned a campaign in the east.

Through the marked lines, we further gain a rather clear picture as to who these people were: They were warriors from the North holding a council of war. In this respect, lines 10 and 11 are particularly revealing, for they match up such people of the North as those from Strathclyde with people from Cornwall – *Cornyw*. To fit the A Poet's meter and rhyme, the word *Cornyw* should have one more syllable and should have a rhyme in -*wys*. Apparently, the B Poet was faced with a name that he did not fully recognize and that had to lose one syllable. It

---

[20]Williams, p. 1.

[21]Once again, see Griffen "Mesotomic Syllables in *Armes Prydein*."

began with *Cor-*, however, and this prompted him to provide a version of Cornwall. Reconstructing the original problematic word from these hints, though, we arrive at *Cornowys* 'Cornovii' – a people of the North between North Wales and Strathclyde, well before the time of the B Poet. This one adjustment thus provides the correct rhyme, meter, morphology, geography, and chronology.

Making further corrections to this pair of lines, we can identify the Men of Ireland, the Gaels of Man and Scotland, and the Men of Cornovia and Strathclyde. But this is not the entire council – only the invited guests. There is one nation of the North that is not included and must therefore be the hosts: the Gododdin, or Votadini.

Identifying the Gododdin further identifies the nature of the war council. First of all, there is much drinking – the warriors will earn their mead or ale with victory. This we learn in line 8 (reinforced in line 179). As we ascertain from his notes, Sir Ifor was troubled by the word *gwehyn* in this line, because its basic meaning should have been 'to drain (water), pour it out, empty, exhale, breathe out'.[22] This meaning, however, did not fit the overall context of the B Poet's vaticinatory poem. Once we take the line out of the B Poet's vatication and place it within the A Poet's mead-induced boasting of warriors, however, it makes perfect sense – the mead and/or ale were being emptied out of the flagons like water.

The purpose of the council drives the wedge between the A Poet and the B Poet even deeper. Since the B Poet was a monk, he had to attribute the victory to God, which he does in the final lines of the poem. Thus, the final rendition of *Armes Prydein* had to be vaticinatory. When we examine the A Poet's work, on the other hand, all religious references except common expressions and oaths disappear, and the B Poet's God and King can be seen as a human "king" – or more precisely, as a high king or *dux bellorum* chosen by the council to lead the united army. The concept of a military high king for a campaign was well known to the early Britons, but it would have been unknown and even anathema to a tenth-century Welsh monk.

In a lengthy work in progress, these and other aspects of the A Poet's unwitting contribution to *Armes Prydein* are being investigated. It is rather clear though that this council was called by the Gododdin for a southern campaign.

The Battle of Winwaed

The anapaestoid meter of the A Poet also provides some hints as to who the *dux bellorum* – or more precisely, the *duces bellorum* – may have been and when and where the campaign may have been waged.

First of all, Cadwaladr fits the A Poet's anapaestoid meter quite precisely in three of the four lines in which it occurs (lines 81, 91, and 163; the fourth line, 184, is extremely problematic metrically and semantically). While the B Poet may have seen him as returning from the past to help save the Britons, the A Poet was describing the actions of the historical figure himself. After the fall of Edinburgh in A.D. 638 and the collapse of the Gododdin in the North, Cadwaladr – as the direct descendant of Cunedda in Gwynedd – would quite rightly have claimed to be the king of the remaining Gododdin – the remnants of the Britons mentioned in line 12.

---

[22]Williams, p. 20.

In line 170, we learn from the A Poet that there are two bears at bay, not one. The image of the bear as a leader of the Britons certainly goes back to Arthur or Arturus – the 'Bear-man'.[23] Although the B Poet identifies the second leader as Cynan, this is problematic for the A Poet, for his name violates the anapaestoid meter every time it occurs (lines 89, 163, and 182). For the meter (at least in lines 89 and 182 – line 163 cannot have had any personal name in that position), we need a three-syllable name; for the alliteration, we need a name beginning with *C*-; and for the rhyme, we need a name ending in -*an*. Moreover, we also need the name of a prominent leader contemporary with Cadwaladr – not one called up from the past.

Here let us return to the Cornovii noted in line 11 – a people absorbed by the Saxons and by Powys in the seventh century and unfamiliar to the B Poet in the tenth. It is actually not so much expected that the Cornovii would be addressed as present in a council of war with the more northerly nations noted in lines 10 and 11. The king of the Cornovii contemporary with Cadwaladr, however, would have been Cynddylan – our trisyllabic name beginning with *C*- and ending in -*an*. Moreover, the "reduction" of Cynddylan to Cynan is quite consistent with the manner in which the B Poet reduced Cornowys to Cornyw.

While we may object that the B Poet would certainly not have removed the name of such a prominent hero as Cynddylan just to fit his CNB meter, we must remember that the work that made Cynddylan famous was written in Powys around the B Poet's lifetime (if not later).[24] It is highly doubtful that our South Welsh monk had ever heard of him; and if he had, Cynddylan would not have been as compelling a name as Cynan either for historical or for geographical or for metrical reasons.[25] Moreover, the B Poet, calling upon dead heroes to return, had no reason to make his leaders contemporary with one another.

The final clue as to where and when the campaign took place is found in the references to the *casus belli* – the collection of taxes by the Saxons of the south (cited in nine of the most-likely lines of the A Poet's text – 19, 24, 72, 78, 84, 86, 103, 144, and 145). As John Morris points out, this was the motivation for the alliance between a number of British kings and King Penda of Mercia.[26] While the Saxon sources and even Geoffrey of Monmouth record this

---

[23] See Toby D. Griffen, *Names from the Dawn of British Legend* (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1994), chapter 5.

[24] The Cynddylan poem from *Canu Heledd* dates from 9th or 10th century – Stephens, *The Oxford Campanion*, 1986), p. 72. The date is set in the 9th century by Rachel Bromwich, *Trioed Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), p. 321. In any case, it is doubtful that the monk in South Wales would have come across the manuscript produced in Powys.

[25] To be sure, the association of Cadwaladr and Cynan is found in Evans, *The Book of Taliesin: Text*, p. 31 (ll. 12-13). These lines are not anapaestoid, however, and they may well be drawn from *Armes Prydein* or at least duplicate the historical error made by the B Poet.

[26] See John Morris, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650*, vol. II: The Successor States (London: Phillimore, 1977), p. 243.

alliance, the identity of the British kings is never reliably revealed. Nonetheless, the sources agree that the British contingent was very large and included a number of kings.[27]

The choice of Cadwaladr of Gwynedd/Gododdin and Cynddylan of the Cornovii as *duces bellorum* and the battle to rid the Britons of the Saxon taxation leads us to a single possible battle – the Battle of Winwaed in A.D. 655. This was the last great battle of a British alliance. Indeed, it was in this battle or in a subsequent skirmish that Cynddylan was killed by a Saxon host.

While such a conclusion is necessarily conjectural, it is rather strongly supported by the A Poet's meter, alliteration practices, and rhyme. It is also supported by the information conveyed in those lines most reliably attributed to the A Poet. Finally, it is supported by the known historical events. Once again, this will be treated in greater detail in a work in progress.

The Anapaestoid School

Returning to the anapaestoid trimeter, we see in these remnants an earlier poem within *Armes Prydein* – one that consistently describes a much earlier situation. The remaining question now is: When was it written?

Examining the recent reconstruction of *Canu Aneirin* by John Koch,[28] we find further evidence for a school of poetry in which the pitch-based anapaestoid meter formed the natural poetic structure. For example, let us consider the first six lines from "GODOÐIN, BREITHYELL VANAŴYT, CATVANNAN":[29]

> Caïoc connimiat, | coulat | ruït,
> rüthr erïr | ïn-epïr | pan·lithûït,
> ï·ammot | haï·bü not | haï·catuûït.
> Guell-guraït | ï·armaïth: | nï·ciliuït.
> Rac bodin | Guotodin | guotechûït,
> hïtr compell | ar·breithgell | Manauûït.
> Nï·nodi (. . .) na·sceth na·scuït.
> Nï·gellir ounët ro-maïthpuït,

---

[27]The composition of the campaign can be pieced together from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price, rev. by R.E. Latham (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 183-84; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966), pp. 279-80; Michael Swanton (ed. & trans.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 29. Of course, the English and the British sources exaggerate the contribution of their own side. Nonetheless, the basic concept of an alliance is quite prominent – compare, for example, Geoffrey Ashe, *Kings and Queens of Early Britain* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1990), pp. 196-201. A helpful summary of the evidence can be found on the internet in Richard Marsden, "The Battle of Winwaed, 655 AD," http://www.cix.co.uk/~rigel/winwaed.htm.

[28]John T. Koch (ed.), *The Gododdin of Aneirin: Text and Context from Dark-Age North Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

[29]Koch, p. 54.

rac ercït Catmannan catuûït■

Here, making a minor correction in the first line, we find a meter that is almost identical to that of the A Poet – two anapaests with internal rhyme followed by a hyperanapaest with external rhyme. The only difference is an apparent deficiency in the poem from *Canu Aneirin*: the lack of a repetition of the internal rhyme in the final foot.

Professor Koch suggests that the last composition of this particular stanza was early Old Welsh or modernized earlier material.[30] Trusting in this assessment, we can surmise that the high-point of the anapaestoid tradition – the Anapaestoid School, as it were – occurred sometime between this stanza and the work of the A Poet. It must have been early enough to develop from the later redactions of stanzas from *Canu Aneirin* and late enough still to be recognized by the B Poet and to have been included rather faithfully in the *Black Book*. By that time, however, it was weak enough not to be continued as anapaestoid, but simply as the pitch-based meter that evolved into the *cynghanedd* poetry of the *Cywyddwyr*.

We might conjecture that this Anapaestoid School flourished around the first half of the ninth century. It was perhaps a Golden Age of the Anapaestoid School that set the pitch accent as the firm and only basis for Welsh poetic meter, at least through the Golden Age of the *Cywyddwyr*. And it is likely that the bardic tradition which Thomas Parry holds responsible for so many misunderstandings of the early poetry[31] is likewise responsible for its demise. On the basis of Late Latin (and English) stress-based meter, the bardic grammarians decreed that the early poetry must have been stress-based as well, and hence they led the Welsh poetic tradition down an unnatural and non-Cymric path that has barred any recurrence of a metrical Golden Age. Clearly, however, the Welsh poetic tradition lies not in the Germanic beat, but in the native pitch-based anapaestoid tradition.

---

[30]Koch, p. 178.

[31]Compare Thomas Parry, *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. x. For background on the bardic grammarians, see G.J. Williams and E.J. Jones, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaidd* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1934).

APPENDIX

Boldface = most likely
Italics = likely
Dagger= possible

Suggested corrections to text in braces {}.

Line	English (literal translation *per* half-line)
1	muse prophesies foretells
2	**treasure and wealth and peace to us**
3	**and extensive lordship and generosity of leaders**
4	*and after domestic turmoil* in every place
5	brave men **in battle, immovable warriors**
6	**swift in battle**, stubborn defense
7	warriors as far as Caer Weir, (he) scatters foreigners
8	(they) make *rejoicing, having emptied*
9	and reconciliation of the Cambrians and the men of Dublin
10	**{Men of Ireland, Gaels of Man and Scotland}**
11	**Men of {Cornovia} and Strathclyde, their welcome with us**
12	**remnants will be Britons** after prevailing
13†	long was prophesied, time will come
14	**princes and nobles** taking possession of them
15	**Men of the North in council** round about
16	**in the center of their vanguard** of the attack
17	Myrddin prophesies, these meet
18	*on {the River of Death} henchmen* of the great king
19	and although it be **by right death will be their booty**
20	with one desire of intent, they will meet in battle
21	henchmen their taxes collect
22	in treasuries of the Cambrians, there was not (one) who would pay
23	it is a noble man who says this

24	**(he) would not come and pay in slavery**
25	**great Son of Mary who (is the) Word**, when not burst forth
26	against the lordship of the Saxons and their arrogance
27	far away be those scoundrels of Vortigern
28	there will be driving of foreigners into exile
29	no one will receive, does not have land
30	**they do not know why they wander** in every river
31	when they had bought *Thanet by deceit of skill*
32	as Hors and Hengys were in power
33	their gain was from us ignobly
34	by virtue of death, slaves of the crown
35	great intoxication follows a drink of mead
36	need follows the death of many
37	sorrow follows the tear of women
38	**grief** erupts **illegitimate lordship**
39	sorrow follows a world gone awry
40	when were the scoundrels of Thanet our princes
41	*Trinity* wards off *blow that is intended*
42	to destruction of *the land of Britons, and Saxons in settlement*
43	(no) sooner was their departure into exile
44	than Cambrians came into homelessness
45	**great Son of Mary who (is the) Word**, when will they not burst forth
46†	Cambrians against the shame of lord and chieftain
47	**protectors of clients**, rightly they lament
48	**one faction of one council, they are one way**
49	it was not for the pride that they did not speak
50	but to save shame that they did not reconcile
51	to God and David, they commend themselves
52	**payment (he) avoids, deceit to the foreigners**

53	they make **shame, the need for a home**
54	**{Britons} and Saxons**, they meet
55	to destroy each other on the bank and attack
56	**from a great land of a great warrior**, when they contest one another
57	and on the hill, **blades and battle shouts and thrusting**
58†	and on the Wye, words against words for the bright waters
59	and banner drops, cruel attacks
60	and like *martens, Saxons they fall*
61	**{the protectors} of clients**, united they array
62	**vanguard on rearguard of pale faces**, they are encircled
63	henchmen earning *their treachery, as they cut them down*
64	**their army soaked in blood** about them
65	others **on their feet, they flee through the forest**
66	through the fortress of **the city, the foxes they route**
67	**war without return** to the land of Scotland/Britain
68	**back by a decisive hand, like sea they slip away**
69	henchmen of Caer Geri, bitterly they lament
70	**some to valley and hill**, they do not deny
71	to {the river of Death} they did not come (to) good fortune
72	**sorrow (is) taxes** they collect
73	twenty-nine hundred men, they advance
74	**great mockery, save four** they do not return
75	*disaster for their wives whom they tell*
76	*their tunics* full *of blood that they wash*
77	**{the protectors} of clients, reckless of life**
78	**Men of the South, their taxes** they fight for
79	keen sharpened blades, completely they kill
80	there will be no gain for the physician for what they do
81†	the armies of Catwaladyr, brave they come

82	may the Cambrians attack, battle (is) what they make
83	*inescapable death* may they seek
84	in the end (for) **their taxes, death (is) what they make**
85	**others on slopes**, may they pierce
86	**forever their taxes**, they do not collect
87	in forest, in field, [in dale,] on hill
88	**a candle in darkness** that travels with us
89	**{Cynddylan} in vanguard** in every attack
90	**Saxons, not Britons**, lamentation (is) what they sing
91	**Catwaladyr with spear** by the chieftain
92	**with skill completely** seeking them out
93	when they fall, their people across their border
94	**in sorrow and red blood on the cheeks of foreigners**
95	at the end of **every repulse, of (every) brave foray**
96	**Saxon straightway to Winchester (?), as quickly as possible they flee**
97	happy are Cambrians, when they say
98	the Trinity delivers from the late troubles
99	**Dyfed does not tremble**, nor Glywyssyng
100	let there be not praise of the henchmen of the great king
101	nor of *the champions of Saxons*, though they be boastful
102	let there be no enjoyment of intoxication with us
103	**without paying from destiny,** as much as they obtain
104	from orphan sons and others left destitute
105	through the intercession of David and the saints of Britain
106	to the River Ailego, there retreat the foreigners
107	muse prophesies, the day comes
108	when men of Sussex may come to one council
109	**one faction of one council** for torching Saxony

110†	the hope of shame on our fair ones' battle
111	and a journey *for foreigners, and daily flight*
112	(he) does not know where concealment (he) makes; where he (goes) where to be
113†	let them attack, braying like a bear from a mountain
114	to pay vengeance (for) the blood of their companions
115	there be *spear-thrusting, earnest, devoid of passion*
116	may kinsmen not save, body to opponent
117	there be head split open without brains
118†	there be wives widowed and horses riderless
119	there be dreadful *wailing for the waste of warriors*
120†	and a multitude of wounded hands, though strewn by armies
121	**the expedition of death**, it meets
122	when corpses may stand before their enemies
123	there is avenging the tax in daily payment
124	in frequent **expeditions for deceitful armies**
125	Cambrians prophesy, through battle
126	**readily unanimous**, with one voice and mind
127	Cambrians prophesy (determine) the order of that battle
128	and many people of the land, they gather
129	*with the holy banner* of David *which they raise*
130	Irish lead by bleached linen
131†	and the tribes of Dublin, with us they stand
132	when they come to the battle, they will not refuse
133	they ask the Saxons what they seek
134	how much their claim of the land that they possess
135	where is their raid when they had embarked
136	where are their people, what vale when they came
137	that time of Vortigern, with us they oppressed

138	*there is obtaining by right patrimony of our people*
139	*or privilege of holy saints* they had trampled down
140	or the laws of holy David they had broken
141	Cambrians guard themselves when they come face to face
142	may foreigners not go from the pinnacle (where) they stand
143	until they may pay sevenfold (as) payment (for) what they have done
144	**and certain death in payment of their injury**
145	**there is paying from the coward (to) {the great Hero's friends}**
146	the four years and four hundred
147†	brave men of long hair, masters of blows
148†	from exile Saxons from Ireland will come
149	will come from Lego a rapacious fleet
150	there will be destroying **in battle, there will be rending of armies**
151	will come **from Dumbarton daring faithful men**
152	to exile **from Britain, noble armies**
153†	will come from Brittany, a splendid company
154†	warriors on war-horses, does not spare his enemy
155†	Saxons from every place, the disgrace will come to them
156†	their age died, (they) have no country
157	death will happen to the black company
158	**sickness** that flows **and no salvation**
159	after gold and silver and adornments
160	*may a hedge be their refuge in return for their bad faith*
161	**may sea, may anchor be** their councillors
162	**may blood, may death be their company**
163	Cynan and **Catwaladyr, brave in hosts**
164	there is praising *until Judgement Day, fate will come to them*
165	two stubborn lords, deep their council
166	two conquerors of Saxons from the side of the Lord

167	two noblemen, two generous (ones) of a land of cattleraiders
168	two fearless *ready (ones), one fate, one faith*
169	two defenders of *Britain, splendid hosts*
170	**two bears** who do not make shame **daily standing at bay**
171	Druids prophesy, great that will be
172	**from Mynaw to Britanny, in their hands it will be**
173	**from Dyfed to Thanet**, it will be theirs
174	from the Wall **to the Firth of Forth, to their estuaries**
175	spreads their lordship across the Echwyd
176	back **to the tribes of Saxons it will not be**
177	may Irish return to their friends
178	may Cambrians rise up, a brave company
179†	hosts at ale and the clamor of warriors
180	and the princes of God (who) kept the faith
181	Men of Wessex to every *fleet, clamorous it will be*
182	and the concord of **{Cynddylan} with his companion**
183	there will not be a calling of tribes as warriors
184	but (as) scoundrels of Catwaladyr, his hucksters
185	the descendent of a Cambrian, merry (and) effusive that will be
186	concerning the **oppressors** of the island, **a swarm it will be**
187	when corpses may stand before their enemies
188	up to the River *Sandwich, blessed it will be*
189	**foreigners starting out** to exile
190	one after another to their friends
191	Saxons *at anchor, daily to (the) sea*
192	venerable Cambrians will be victorious until Judgement Day
193	may they not seek *a sorcerer nor a greedy poet*
194	the prophecy of this island, except for this will not be
195	we beseech to (the) Lord who created heaven and earth

196	may David be the leader of the warriors
197	in the straights of the fortress of heaven, it is for God
198	**who neither dies nor escapes nor will flee**
199	nor will fade **nor rejects nor wavers nor diminishes**