

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy: A historical narrative?

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Synopsis

This thesis is concerned with the medieval Welsh prose tale *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. The theory of cultural memory as formulated by Jan Assmann is employed as a theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of the text.

Assmann argues that writing functions as a medium of memory and that one therefore may speak of a cultural memory. This memory soon becomes vast and diverse. He claims that man sees himself in relation to the cultural memory and that it shapes his identity. The identity of both collective and individual is thus based on the past, but memory and thereby the view of the past is also influenced by man's need of identity and security. Accordingly, history may be said to be governed not so much by the search for "the truth" as by people's need of a past. With background in this theoretical framework the thesis argues for a historical interpretation of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*.

Initially, the dream of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is analysed in order to detect how it portrays the past, and through analysing a number of historical accounts important for the cultural memory of the Welsh the depiction of the past in the dream is put in a greater perspective. The frame tale is further analysed as an account of the society of the author and seen in relation to the depiction of the past in the dream. Finally, the depiction of the past in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is discussed with regard to the impact of its context and it is demonstrated how the dream may function as a historical narrative.

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1. Introduction

The object of this study is the analysis of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, which is one of the two extant Welsh prose tales about King Arthur. The story about Arthur is located within a dream which is precluded by an introductory sequence set in the 12th century and followed by a short epilogue. *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* differs radically from *Culhwch ac Olwen*, which is the other Welsh tale about Arthur¹. With regard to the Welsh tradition, Arthur is often described by scholars as a multifaceted character, and there has been a tendency to separate between the Arthur found in literature and the historical Arthur.² The Arthur depicted in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, however, differs from both these categories.

Due to its individuality, the studies of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* have concentrated on the tale's relation to medieval Welsh literature in general, and to the Arthurian tradition in particular. Scholars have scrutinised its contents, structure and literary devices and have come up with various interpretations of the tale and of the author's intentions. In this thesis I will approach *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* through the theory of cultural memory as formulated by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann. I believe his thoughts concerning the relationship between text, context, history and identity will shed new light upon this enigmatic tale. As opposed to the majority of studies of the tale, which has interpreted it in the light of the contemporary political situation or with regard to the status of storytelling, I will stress its relation to and implications for the apprehension of the past.

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy may, in spite of its peculiarities, be characterised as a dream tale. In the following I will account for the view on dreams current in the Middle Ages and some of the most prominent texts with regard to the development of the genre. Finally I will discuss the manuscript context of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*.

¹ *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* diverges also from the Arthurian romances in prose and verse from the continent, of which three Welsh adaptations were made, namely *Owain*, *Peredur fab Efrog* and *Geraint fab Erbin*.

² See for example Koch, J. T., "Arthur, the historical evidence", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, ABC-CLIO, Oxford 2006, 117-122; and Roberts, B., "Arthurian literature [3] Welsh", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 124-126.

Dream and its usage in literature

Dream in literary context cannot be seen isolated from dream as a human experience, as the former ultimately is inspired by the latter. There was already in the classical period a vast literature concerned with the nature and interpretation of dreams, and the thoughts articulated then retained their influence throughout the Middle Ages. Macrobius is probably the most prominent among the classical authorities on dreams. He presented in his commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, which dates to about 400, a scheme for a classification of dreams. Of his five categories, two are regarded as insignificant while three are viewed as meaningful. According to Macrobius, *Insomnium* (nightmare) stems from distress or anxiety, while *visum* (apparition) appears to a person who is in the phase right between sleep and being awake. Both these categories of dreams are meaningless. *Somnium* (enigmatic dream) conveys a message, but appears as ambiguous and allegorical. Therefore it has to be interpreted. *Visio* (prophetic vision) shows a future event, while the dreamer in *oraculum* (oracular dream) is addressed by a person or being of high authority who gives valuable information or advice.³

Christian intellectuals such as Augustine and Gregory the Great accepted these thoughts. Furthermore they stressed the dual nature of the dream, which was already visible in Macrobius' separation between profitable and insignificant dreams, by introducing the opposition of good and evil. According to these authorities a dream could be brought by an angel or a demon, but the nature of the dream was often difficult for the dreamer to recognise and one should therefore be careful in believing what was told or shown in a dream.⁴ In the 13th century Aristotle's works became influential, in which he argued that dreams are caused by psychological and physiological processes and consequently ruled out any otherworldly causes. Despite the Aristotelian influence, the ideas of the classical and ecclesiastical authorities stayed remarkably strong throughout the Middle Ages (Kruger 1993: 84, 85, 119).

The usage of dreams and visions in literature has a long history, and in the following I will briefly account for some of the most influential texts in this respect. In the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, the main characters visit the otherworld through visions. Subsequently, this became a common motif. Another central classical text is the above mentioned *Somnium*

³ Spearing, A. C., *Medieval Dream Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976, 8-10.

⁴ Kruger, S. F., *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993, 44-52.

Scipionis written by Cicero on which Macrobius wrote his commentary. Here we are told of Scipio Aemilianus, who is visited in a dream by his famous grandfather Scipio Africanus. Scipio Africanus foresees his grandson's future and share his wisdom with him (Spearing 1976: 7-9). Dreams play an important role within religious texts already in the Old Testament, but it was those of the New Testament which proved to be the more influential in the Middle Ages. The most prominent among them is probably the dream described in the book of Revelation, where John of Patmos beholds how the world will come to an end and the evil forces will be defeated. The most influential text which followed in this ecclesiastical tradition was *Visio Pauli* (third century) which tells of life after death (*op. cit.* 12-13), and of which we have preserved a Middle Welsh translation.⁵ Parallel with the religious visions which became popular during the Middle Ages, there existed a tradition of local character in medieval Britain and Ireland, a well-known example of which is *Aislinge Oengusa*. The story tells of Oengus who dreams of a fair woman whom he longs for upon waking. After searching the island for her, he finally reunites with the girl who appears to be from the otherworld.⁶ The most typical representative of this tradition in Welsh literature is probably *Breuddwyd Macsen*.

Together with *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, *Breuddwyd Macsen* offers the most prominent example of the use of dream in medieval Welsh literature. In this late 12th century tale we are told of the Roman emperor Macsen who gets drowsy while hunting and goes to sleep.⁷ He dreams that he flies over a beautiful landscape and across the sea before finally coming to an island. Here he sees a castle which he enters. Inside he finds a beautiful maid with whom he falls in love before he suddenly wakes up. The dream is followed by the search for the castle which his men locate in Gwynedd. Here Macsen finds the girl and takes her as his spouse. The rest of the tale is only to a rather low degree connected with the dream, and concerns itself with how Macsen regains the title of Roman emperor with the help of his wife's brothers, one of whom later colonizes Brittany.⁸ To dream of a beautiful woman is a well-known motif found in for example *Aislinge Oengusa*; the love motif is, however, absent from *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. As we shall see, the relationship between the dream and the rest of the tale is quite different in *Breuddwyd Macsen* from that in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, as in

⁵ Mittendorf, I., "Breudwyd Pawl Ebostol", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 282.

⁶ Gantz, J., *Early Irish Myth and Sagas*, Penguin Books, London 1981, 108-112.

⁷ Breeze, A., *Medieval Welsh Literature*, Four Court Press, Dublin 1997, 82.

⁸ Gantz, J., *The Mabinogion*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1976, 119-127.

the former the dream only constitutes one fourth of the text and makes up merely one episode in the story.

The textual tradition of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy is only preserved in one medieval manuscript: *The Red Book of Hergest*. The manuscript has been dated to the period 1382 to 1410, measures 13 by 8 inches and consists of 362 bicolunar folios, some of them being damaged or blank (Breeze 1997: 31, 63). *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* occupies column 555.10 to 571.⁹ The manuscript was written by Hywel Fychan ap Hywel Goch, a professional scribe from Builth of whom we have preserved several other manuscripts. He copied it for Hopcyn ap Tomas ap Einion of Ynys Tawe (Breeze 1997: 32-33).

The Red Book of Hergest is by far the largest extant medieval Welsh manuscript and contains a great variety of material. Both poetry and prose are found within this great codex, but it contains neither religious prose nor any legal material. The manuscript begins with five texts concerning the history of the Welsh, of which *Brut y Brenhinoedd* and *Brut y Tywysogion* are the most prominent. These are succeeded by four texts about Charlemagne, translated from French. Then follows miscellaneous prose texts, poetry about Myrddin, two prose texts, triads, romances, *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi*, more romances, medical tracts, another section of miscellaneous prose, nature poetry, *englynion* about Llywarch Hen, miscellaneous poetry and a few other texts of varied content and form. The manuscript ends with a section of *Gogynfeirdd* poetry.

It is worth studying the manuscript context of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in greater detail as it might give a different perspective on the tale compared with the context in which it has been seen since the 19th century. *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is situated in the section consisting of different prose texts between the tales about Charlemagne and the Myrddin poetry. The majority of the texts in this group are adaptations and translations of foreign texts, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* being the only text of Welsh origin in the section together with a short chronicle.

From what is stated above we can conclude that the manuscript context of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is different from the context with which the modern reader is

⁹ All information about the order of contents of *The Red Book* are taken from the following website: <http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk/en/ms-home.php?ms=Jesus111>.

familiar, namely the collection of eleven prose tales entitled *Mabinogion*. About 50 columns separate *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* from the closest of the other *Mabinogion* tales, *Owain*. The other ten texts follow each other, but not in the order we know from the editions of Lady Charlotte Guest, Thomas and Gwyn Jones and Jeffrey Gantz. The manuscript context should promote a more careful use of the term *Mabinogion* and warn us about taking the unity of the texts for granted.¹⁰ This point may seem particularly significant with regard to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*.

The location of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in *The Red Book of Hergest* may be relevant to the important question of whether this text existed in other manuscripts. *The White Book of Rhydderch* (1350), which contains the other ten *Mabinogion* tales, has been the most frequently discussed candidate for a possible locus of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. J. Gwenovryn Evans argues that the tale was originally found in the missing folios (219-226) between the fragments of *Cyffranc Lludd a Llefelys* and *Owain* together with the ending of the former and the beginning of the latter. The pasting in of these parts from *The Red Book of Hergest* would fill the missing folios in *The White Book* rather neatly, and Evans states on this background that “This fact practically proves that the *White Book* contained this curious story...”.¹¹ Melville Richards has supported this thesis and refers to Sir Ifor Williams, who holds that the scribe of *The Red Book* copied at least *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* from *The White Book*, sometimes modernising the language and sometimes correcting mistakes. Richards claims to have found traces of such activity in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, which he takes as an indication of a *White Book* origin (Richards 1948: x).

Richards’ argument seems rather weak as the traces he refers to, if they really are modified and corrected forms, could stem from the copying of any old manuscript available to the scribe. This could be, for example, one of the manuscripts containing texts extant in *The Red Book* that are not found in *The White Book*. While I find Evans’ thesis reasonable, there is nothing that can prove that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in fact occupied the lost folios. In this context I think it is important to keep in mind *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*’s location in *The Red Book* in a section of translations and adaptations of foreign works. In effect, it is placed between *Chwedlau Saith Ddoethion Rhufain* (Tales of the Seven Sages of Rome) and *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth* (Prophecy of the wise Sibyl). This constitutes an argument

¹⁰ This impression is further enhanced if we consider the placing of tales in *The White Book of Rhydderch* and *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*’s absence from it (see below).

¹¹ Richards, M., *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd 1948, x.

against Evans' suggestion to situate it between *Cyffranc Lludd a Llefelys* and *Owain*. It is tempting to reason that if *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* originally was included in *The White Book*, it would be found in *Peniarth 5* together with *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth*.¹² I will leave the question open, as there is no conclusive evidence either for or against *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* ever being a part of *The White Book*. However, at the present time I don't believe we can exclude the possibility that the text postdates the mid 14th century, to which the date of *The White Book* has been estimated.

Leaving out *The White Book*, I would argue that there is strong evidence for the tale's existence in other manuscripts as well. There are, according to Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, scribal errors in the text which would be best explained as faulty copying from another written source. There are, therefore, indications that the tale has existed in at least one other manuscript.¹³ Further, the expansive and elaborate nature of the manuscript may be taken as an indication of the status of the texts which it contains. With the possible exceptions of the latest praise poetry, which may have had a contemporary performative function, and of the translations and adaptations of foreign texts, I believe the texts found here had circulated for some time. I find it likely that the texts would have had to obtain a certain status before they would be found worthy of occupying any columns in this great compilation. A premise for attaining such a status would be that the text was widely known, which again would require a number of manuscript copies.

Patrick Sims-Williams has shown that the conditions for the preservation of Welsh manuscripts have for several reasons been particularly poor. Therefore the representability of what has been preserved is uncertain. He argues that there may have been considerable scribal activity and manuscript production in Wales in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ There seems therefore to be a distinct possibility that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and other texts now extant in only one copy were at the time relatively widely read and copied.

¹² *The White Book* was separated in modern times into the manuscripts now entitled *Peniarth 4* and *5*; <http://www.llgc.org.uk/index.php?id=whitebookofrhydderchpeniarth>

¹³ Lloyd-Morgan, C., "Breuddwyd Rhonabwy and Later Arthurian Literature", in Bromwich, R., Jarman, A. O. H., Roberts, B. F. (eds.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1991, 183-184.

¹⁴ Sims-Williams, P., "The uses of writing in early medieval Wales", in Pryce, H. (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, 21-33.

2. State of the art

In this chapter I will account for the work that has been done on *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. I will first focus on the different interpretations of the meaning of the tale which have been given. Thereafter I will present a survey of the different suggestions offered by scholars concerning the dating of the text. The chapter will be concluded by a sketch of some general tendencies within the history of scholarship and a discussion of the respective topics.

What is the meaning of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*?

Thomas Parry writes in his *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1900* (1944) that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* distinguishes itself from the other medieval Welsh tales by being satirical. He gives plenty of examples of how the author handles his material, and holds that he spares no one. *Rhonabwy* and his fellows as well as Arthur and his knights are satirised. Parry argues that the author consciously exaggerates the usage of literary devices, for example descriptions, to create a mocking tale about Arthur.¹⁵

In the introduction to his edition of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* from 1948, Melville Richards focuses peculiarly little on the meaning of the text. He believes there is a humorous element present in the less heroic aspects of Arthur, in the splashing down of the emperor and the bishop, and in the bards' praise of Arthur after the *gwyddbwyll*. He maintains that the tale mocks the literary tradition (Richards 1948: ix, xlv). Nevertheless, Richards seems to claim that the main intention of the author was to show the contrast between the splendour of Arthur's era and the poverty of his own. Further, he sees the author's agenda in the light of the misfortune of Powys in the 13th century. Richards argues that the author employs the 12th century ruler Madawc in the frame tale in order to make the criticism against the contemporary noblemen less evident (*op. cit.* xxxviii, xxxix).¹⁶ Furthermore, he perceives the many descriptions in both the frame and the dream as means for making the contrast evident (*op. cit.* xli). The lack of an end to the frame tale could in such a perspective be accounted for in that the dichotomy is illustrated through the introduction and the dream, and

¹⁵ Parry T., *A History of Welsh Literature*, translated from Welsh by Bell, H. I., The Clarendon Press, London, 1955, 83-84.

that the frame tale has thus served its purpose (*op. cit.* xlv-xlv). Mary Giffin, on the other hand, focuses on the descriptions of Arthur's knights and squires, stating that their coats of arms and heraldry are similar to that of the rulers of Powys in the late 13th century. On the background of this resemblance, she suggests that the author's intention was to show that Powys was more honourable in his own day (see below) than during Madawc's reign.¹⁷

Angela Carson is of the opinion that the tale is structured around four tripartite relations consisting of two opponents and their messengers.¹⁸ The introduction, presenting the first of these relations, tells us that Iorwoerth had rebelled against his brother Madawc uab Maredudd. The latter had sent his men to search for him and Ronabwy was among these (*op. cit.* 292). The second of these relations is found in the story of Idawc Cord Prydein. He tells Ronabwy that he was sent as a messenger by Arthur to his cousin Medrawd in order to secure peace between him and Arthur at Camlan. Idawc explains how Arthur's effort failed because he did not repeat Arthur's gentle words, but insulted him, thus provoking the battle of Camlan (*op. cit.* 296). The third repetition of the pattern consists of the *gwyddbwyll* game between Arthur and Owein uab Uryen mirrored in the battle between Arthur's knights and Owein's ravens. Here messengers from both sides bring news of the battle to the players. She suggests, after analysing the heraldry of their messengers, that Owein might here represent the nationalist side of the Welsh aristocracy while Arthur, who was held in high esteem by the English in the Middle Ages, might represent the Welsh lords who were inclined to swear allegiance to the king of England (*op. cit.* 298-301).

The fourth and last instance of the tripartite relations occurs when messengers from Osla Gyllellwa[w]r reach Arthur and ask for a truce. Carson interprets this offer as a result of the cessation of hostilities between Owein's ravens and Arthur's knights as their truce may seem to trigger Osla's inquiry. The conflict between Arthur and Osla, whom she identifies with Offa of Mercia, is different from the aforementioned conflicts since Osla was a Saxon and a proper enemy of the Welsh, while the other conflicts are between Welshmen and could be regarded as rather futile. Furthermore, this conflict is cancelled through the truce and consequently the battle of Badon does not take place. She believes the author tries

¹⁶ The names of characters mentioned in the tale will be spelled in conformity with Richards' edition

¹⁷ Giffin, M., "The Date of the 'Dream of Rhonabwy'", in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, London 1958, 40.

¹⁸ Carson, A., "The Structure and Meaning of The Dream of Rhonabwy, in *Philological Quarterly* 53, The University of Iowa, Iowa City 1974, 290.

to tell his audience that conflicts between brothers, or Welshmen in general, are unprofitable, and that they should stand together against the English (*op. cit.* 301-303).

Dafydd Glyn Jones argues in *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol* (1974) that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is a complex satire operating on many levels.¹⁹ He reads the tale as a satire on the belief in dreams and their role in literature. Jones claims that in medieval literature dreams usually constituted short, precise passages in which the dreamer received unambiguous information concerning the future which would be of vital importance later in the tale. Ronabwy's dream, on the other hand, is about the past and provides no guidance with regard to the future, and it swallows the tale in making up by far the greater part of it. Furthermore, the dream has, according to Jones, no connection with the frame tale, and the reader receives no explanation of it (Jones 1974: 179-180).

Jones argues that the storyline is carried forward through a series of interferences which interrupt the scenes and shift the attention of Ronabwy and the readers towards new events, such as the appearance of new characters. The author plays with his audience by changing scenes without giving answers to the questions generated by the odd storyline and the elaborate use of details. Jones claims that the author makes an extreme use of the literary device of digression, breaking its rules by never returning to the main thread. This hinders a normal development of the tale (*op. cit.* 182, 185-188, 190-191). His way of using the literary conventions is most evident in the *gwyddbwyll* section. This section is marked by the structural formality created by repetitions and tripartite patterns, as well as the almost ceremonial and mechanical way in which the characters act. This gives it an artificial and comical quality (*op. cit.* 82-84).

Jones claims that the constant interruptions make the storyline chaotic and that it is dominated by anachronisms, inconsistencies and a general lack of any sense. He believes the tale would give the audience a good laugh by its exaggerated usage of literary devices and the breaking of literary conventions, which results in its appearing absurd (*op. cit.* 182, 185, 189, 191). He states that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* pokes fun at the literature of his day by presenting the mythology it is based upon in such a strange fashion (*op. cit.* 194-195).

¹⁹ Jones, D. G., "Breuddwyd Rhonabwy", in Bowen, G. (ed.), *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol*, Gwasg Gomer, Llandysul 1974, 177.

In the first volume of *A Guide to Welsh Literature* (1976), Brynley F. Roberts points at the contrast between the cold realism in the frame and the rather incoherent and fantastic dream.²⁰ He describes the structure of the latter as “a number of independent but incomplete scenes... which follow one another in quick succession, but which give almost no sense of progression...” (*op. cit.* 233). Roberts regards Arthur’s comparison of Ronabwy with the men of former times as a critical remark on contemporary society. However, the myths of the Arthurian era are mocked as well, as the heroic atmosphere created by the descriptions is never mirrored by heroic actions. He therefore considers the text to be a commentary upon the literary tradition. Roberts suggests that its deliberate incoherence may be taken as a parody of the romance authors’ tendency of creating a story by alternating between several independent threads. He furthermore regards the characters that are taken out of their traditional context and the meaningless storyline as parts of a satire (*op. cit.* 233-234).

John K. Bollard considers *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* to be a parody on the literary style of the romances. He argues that the author intends to move the readers’ focus from the storyline to the literary devices, and that the epilogue from such a perspective works as a conclusion by concerning itself with the descriptions.²¹ He demonstrates that the descriptions of men, which are usually of low importance for the storyline and which increase in scale throughout the tale, follow a pattern which makes them simple to create and remember for the storyteller and that the epilogue is therefore counterfactual (*op. cit.* 156-159). Together with the use of composite adjectives and the list of heroes, both common features of contemporary literature, the exaggerated usage of descriptions drowns the storyline which, on the whole, is rather weak (*op. cit.* 159-160). The tale appears confusing and meaningless, consisting of scenes which are barely connected with each other, thereby making the plot hard to remember. Bollard suggests that the tale may be a parody on the literary devices of amplification and digression in particular. These could often make tales confusing and incoherent (*op. cit.* 162-163).

Like Carson, Edgar Slotkin attempts to explain the purpose of the tale by focusing on its structure. He, however, concentrates more on its satirical elements and usage of literary devices. He points out how Ronabwy’s dream simulates a real dream and how different this

²⁰ Roberts, B., “Tales and Romances”, in Jarman, A. O. H., Hughes, G. R. (eds.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature* vol i, Christopher Davies, Swansea 1976, 232-233.

²¹ Bollard, J. K., “Traddodiad a Dychn yn Breuddwyd Rhonabwy”, in *Llên Cymru* 13, Caerdydd 1980-1981, 155-156.

dream-vision is from other vision tales, considering it partly as a satire on that genre.²² He analyses the structure of the tale by applying a formalistic approach, distinguishing between three narrative layers within a given tale. He defines *text* as the linguistic substance of a narrative and *fabula* as its narrative elements, while *story* is defined as a particular ordering of these. Narrative elements include events, actors, chronology and locations, which in the *fabula* are rather abstract and become concrete or realised in the *story* (*op. cit.* 91-93).

He believes that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, the *text* through which we access a particular *story*, gains a lot of its surrealistic effect by inverting the traditional tale about Arthur. The traditional tale may be regarded as the *fabula*. The inversion becomes apparent when Idawc tells about how he caused the battle of Camlan, in which Arthur fell according to tradition, and then introduces Ronabwy to Arthur himself. After a while Arthur starts preparing for the battle of Badon, which is known as a great victory he gained years before Camlan (*op. cit.* 96-97). In contrast to Carson, Slotkin regards Osla as one of Arthur's men mentioned in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. He considers the identification of him as Arthur's enemy as a part of the satire. Slotkin emphasises that the battle of Badon, which should have been won a long time before the battle of Camlan, never takes place (*op. cit.* 97-98).

Slotkin considers the lavish usage of descriptions to be a strategy dedicated to hindering any development in the tale. Descriptions play an important role in both vision tales and Arthurian literature, but in this case, where about one third of the text consists of descriptions, they do not promote a heroic impression of the tale in the long run since they overrun the story as such (*op. cit.* 98, 101-102). He regards the description of the hideous house in the frame tale as a symbol for the 12th century Powys, which is contrasted with the glorious and heroic descriptions in the dream that give an idea of the Arthurian era. On the other hand, the descriptions in the dream do not match well with its storyline (*op. cit.* 102). Slotkin points to the lack of an end of the frame tale, a feature which he claims gives an impression of discontinuity. He states that the ending offers no conclusion of the frame tale, and that the meaning of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* therefore seems to be hidden within the dream (*op. cit.* 104-105).

Slotkin argues that the *gwyddbwyll* episode appears as quite static through its symmetry and the lavish descriptions of messengers. He takes the meaninglessness of this

²² Slotkin, E. M., "The Fabula, Story and Text of Breuddwyd Rhonabwy", in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18, Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies, Cambridge 1989, 93-94.

conflict and of all the descriptions in this section as an illustration of the author's view on the Arthurian literature (*op. cit.* 106-107). Slotkin concludes that the tale is a complex satire carefully created, and that its incoherencies make for an untraditional relationship between *story* and *fabula*. He believes the author sought to solve the problem embedded in the tragic ending of the Arthurian fabula by not allowing any heroic actions to be undertaken, and that he thereby consciously satirises the whole tradition (*op. cit.* 105).

Slotkin considers the humour of the tale as being retrospective and goes on to argue that the tale has a deeper meaning (*op. cit.* 107). He believes that the author, through the usage of literary devices and the meaningless storyline, tries to communicate the emptiness of the whole genre and the values it promotes. Slotkin argues that the act of storytelling appears as highly problematic in the tale, and he arrives at the conclusion that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is about the narrative tradition itself. His hypothesis is that the author rejects the Arthurian world and its symbols, and tells us that to follow its values would lead to ruin, symbolised by Heilyn's house. The author communicates this through running the well known *fabula* backwards starting at the hideous house, which symbolises the end of Arthur's reign. He then moves to the battle of Camlan, and from there to the battle of Badon which is pushed further into the future. During all this time he keeps the characters from acting in a heroic manner and thereby prevents the dream from having any consequences. The satire is, in Slotkin's mind, aimed at the heroic literature and the bards and storytellers who produce it (*op. cit.* 109-111).

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan states that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* doesn't contribute significantly to our understanding of Arthur, but that the author uses traditional material in a new way to create a sophisticated satire. The inversion of the chronology and the aggression among the Britons themselves which overshadows the war against the Saxons show, according to Lloyd-Morgan, that "all the normal rules are broken" (Lloyd Morgan 1991: 184-185). She claims that the tale appears as static and lacks violence apart from the clash between the ravens and the knights, and that this makes it stand out from other tales about Arthur (*op. cit.* 186). She points to the way in which everything that is usually portrayed as positive and honourable is set in a negative light in this tale. The same tendency can be seen in the way the author disappoints his audience through the unfulfilled expectations concerning Ronabwy's quest for Iorwoerth, the sleeping on the ox skin and the battle of Badon (*op. cit.* 185, 188-189). Lloyd-Morgan regards the story as a parody on the vision tales and the Arthurian tradition (*op. cit.* 189, 192).

In *The Mabionogi* (1991), Proinsias Mac Cana argues that the tale can be viewed as metatextual, and that the author aimed at writing a commentary on the literary tradition. He finds it plausible that literary devices and motifs from both the traditional oral storytelling and the more professionalised romance tradition have been objects for the author's parody.²³ Mac Cana states that the text consists of short scenes embellished with literary devices, and lacks plot, progression and ending. We are offered a setting and characters, but no story comes out of it. He believes the aim of the author was to make fun of the storytellers (*op. cit.* 86-89).

What separates Mac Cana's view from Slotkin's is his interpretation of the tale as a good-humoured parody on the literature itself, and not as a satire or serious commentary on the values promoted by the literature. Mac Cana argues, on the one hand, that it cannot be seen as a serious mourning of a glorious past since the descriptions of the splendour of Arthur's court are beyond any measure. Furthermore, he rejects that the parody is aimed at the men of Madawc's time, and sees the remark made during the meeting between Arthur and Ronabwy as a possible humorous comment on the tendency of viewing old heroes as huge (*op. cit.* 89). He argues that the way in which Ronabwy ends up on the ox-hide is a parody on the ritual known as *tarbh feis* in the Irish tradition since it happens under such unworthy conditions and the vision has the past, rather than the future, as its object. In contrast to Slotkin he views the lengthy descriptions as a way of playing with the expectations of the readers, seemingly without any further aim (*op. cit.* 89-90).

Helen Fulton argues that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is a political commentary on the situation in Powys in the first half of the 13th century. She claims the author presents two alternative political systems in his tale, the frame representing that of the past while the dream represents the system current when the tale was written. She claims the tale should be read on the background of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's conquest of Powys in 1215, from which perspective the author looks back on the time of Madawc, when Wales was ruled by independent princes. The frame may be interpreted as a demonstration of the faults of this political system and of how Powys during that period was constantly caught between England and Gwynedd. In this perspective, Iorwerth's raids in England represent the drop

²³ Mac Cana, P., *The Mabinogi*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1992, 83-86.

which could always tip the balance (by shattering the fragile alliance between Powys and England) during the princely ruling and thereby cause the extinction of the kingdom.²⁴

Fulton states that the author uses traditional scenery in the dream in order to say something about the present. She argues that Arthur represents Llywelyn and that Arthur's national leadership in the dream is to be identified with Gwynedd's great power during Llywelyn's reign. The portrayal of Arthur in the dream is negative. He might be powerful and wealthy, but he is also brutal and ineffective, and he does not enjoy the loyalty of his noblemen. This is a description Fulton believes would have fitted Llywelyn from a Powesian point of view (*op. cit.* 47-50, 52-53). She claims furthermore that Ryt y Groes should be associated with a meeting which took place there in 1215 between Llywelyn and King John of England, which in the tale is represented by Osla. In the dream the English threat is neutralised through the truce with Osla. However, the menace of the national leadership is intimidating; Arthur rules through force and not through the loyalty of his vassals. The national leadership appears thus rather gloomy from a Powesian point of view (*op. cit.* 51-53), and the dream works therefore as a satire on the prophecies about the liberating king which the bards foresaw would lead the nation as Arthur once had done. The national leadership which the bards longed for is, according to Fulton, judged by the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as no better than the former rule of the princes (*op. cit.* 48-49, 52, 54).

When was *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* written?

The dating of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is one of the most debated issues concerning the tale. Disagreement concerning dating is by no means something exclusive to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and applies to most of the medieval Welsh prose tales, but the scholars' suggestions stretch in this case over an unusually long period. Dating of prose on linguistic evidence within the Middle Welsh period has proved to be so problematic that the great majority of the arguments concerning the dating of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* are based on the content of the tale and external evidence. As distinct from many of the Irish prose tales and Welsh tales like *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *Cyffranc Lludd a Llefelys*, we can with regard to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* rule out any period of oral transmission since the text appears to have

²⁴ Fulton, H., "Cydd-destun Gwleidyddol *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*", in *Llên Cymru* 22, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd 1999, 42-45, 51.

been a written work throughout. This does not mean, however, that the tale doesn't contain traces of an oral mode of expression, traditional motifs and material.

Thomas Parry takes the mentioning of Madawc uab Maredudd in the frame tale as a point of departure. On the basis that Madawc died in 1160, he argues that since it "is fair to suppose that some time elapsed between his death and the use of his name in a story" (Parry 1955: 83), a date around 1250 would seem plausible.

Melville Richards bases his dating upon the presumption that the purpose of the tale is to illustrate the difference between the author's epoch and the era of Arthur. At the same time, he sees an element of sorrow and nostalgia in the opening sentence, where we are told about the days when Powys was still a unity, and he agrees with Parry that one would expect some time to pass before the names of Madawc and Iorwerth were used in a tale. Richards remarks that the state of Powys became increasingly worse after Madawc's reign due to dynastic feuding, division of the kingdom and Gwynedd's aggression. He believes the period after Gwenwynwyn's death in 1216 were particularly gloomy with regard to the Powesians, as the hope of reunification died with him and the rest of the aristocracy did homage to Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. Richards claims that this is a likely background for a writer pointing out that the noblemen of his period were a sorry lot compared to the heroes of the Arthurian era, and suggests 1220-1225 as a likely period of composition (Richards 1948: xxxvii-xxxix).

By comparing the descriptions of clothing, armor and coat of arms in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* with other accounts of how knights were dressed and equipped, Mary Giffin arrives at a different date. She points out that descriptions of horse trappings and men's clothing found in documents concerning the campaigns of Edward 1. correspond to a considerable degree with those in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* (Giffin 1958: 34-35). Her material dates to around 1300, and she argues that armor went through a period of decisive development in this period and that the cost of arms, and therefore the focus on them, increased considerably. Giffin believes this corresponds well with the detailed descriptions in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* (*op. cit.* 35). On the basis of the changes in equipment around 1300 and the correspondence between heraldry and coats of arms in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and the outfit used by Owain ap Gruffydd while serving in Edward's army, she argues that the text can be dated within the reign of his son Gruffydd ap Owain (1293-1309) (*op cit.* 38).

In his contribution to the vast volume *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (1961), Idris Llewelyn Foster claims that the tale was written during the hundred years after

Madawc's death. He seems to argue for such a dating on the basis of the idea that the people living in this period would still be familiar with the conflict mentioned in the frame tale. He finds Richards' dating of the story to the period 1220-1225 the most plausible.²⁵

Thomas Charles-Edward's suggestion is also dependent on the frame tale, but he stresses the significance of the relationship between the reader and the content even more. He claims the story is a satire aimed at the men of Powys in Madawc's reign, an interpretation he supports by referring to the meeting between Arthur and Ronabwy. He argues that a satire on Madawc's Powys would be pointless if it wasn't more or less contemporary, and he arrives at a date between 1150 and 1160.²⁶ Charles-Edward's suggestion has been supported by Eric Hamp who asserts that to satirise men who had been long gone would be viewed as distasteful.²⁷

Angela Carson focuses on the frame tale as well, but instead of discussing the link between the conflict of Madawc and Iorwoerth and the authorship, she concentrates on the owner of the house that Ronabwy enters. With references to historical documents she argues that the house was a well known landmark, and that Heilyn Goch uab Kadwgawn was a historical figure who owned the house in the later part of the 14th century. Due to her estimations of his age, she concludes that the tale couldn't have been written before 1385 (Carson 1974: 292-293).

Edgar Slotkin does not focus on the date of the tale, but argues that the satire is aimed just as much at the Arthurian world as at the Powys of Madawc's time, and he vaguely suggests a dating "some time after Madawc's death" (Slotkin 1989: 111). He reads the tale as a satire aimed at the literary tradition. I interpret Slotkin as claiming that we cannot date the story based upon the intention of the author since the motivation behind the work could be present during the whole period from roughly 1150 to 1400. Slotkin does not offer a method of dating the text, but argues that the dating suggestions which are based on the aim of the satire have to be considered as mere guesswork (*op. cit.* 111).

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan makes some considerations about the place of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in the Welsh literary tradition that are relevant for its dating. She states that the

²⁵ Foster, I. L., "Culhwch ac Olwen and Rhonabwy's Dream", in Loomis, R. S. (ed.), *The Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1961, 41.

²⁶ Charles-Edwards, T. M., "The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi", in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, The Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion, London 1970-1971, 266.

²⁷ Hamp, E. P., "On Dating Archaism in the Pedair Kainc", in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, The Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion, London 1972-1973, 99.

only reference to the story in the poetry is found in an *awdl* from the second half of the 14th century, in which Madog Dwygraig compares himself with Ronabwy. The tale must consequently predate this poem. On the other end of the scale, she finds it unlikely that it was written as early as the 1220s, since the tale is not found in *The White Book of Rhydderch* or in any other medieval Welsh manuscript. She regards the tale as a satire on Arthurian literature and argues therefore that it probably postdates the three romances *Peredur fab Efrog*, *Owain* and *Geraint fab Erbin*, which she places in the first half of the 13th century. Lloyd-Morgan concludes thereby that a date in the late 1200s or the early 1300s seems most plausible (Lloyd-Morgan 1991: 191-192).

For his suggestion of dating, Andrew Breeze seems to invert Charles-Edwards' argument for the dating of *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi*. Charles-Edwards dates these four tales by, among other things, seeing himself able to date *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and then estimate the time span between it and *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* based upon the difference in the amount of French loan words (Charles-Edwards 1970-71: 265-266). He finds three French loan words in the four tales altogether compared to a dozen in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and if considering the number of pages the stories cover, one may conclude that there are twenty times more loan words in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. Breeze's point of departure is that *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* dates to the late 1120s, and with regard to the loan words he thinks a date in the late 12th century or early 13th is most likely (Breeze 1997: 86).

Simon Rodway bases an attempt at dating the medieval Welsh prose on the occurrence of *-ws/-wys* and *-awd* as verbal endings in the third person preterite tense. He uses the more easily datable court poetry as a scale for his examination of the verbs in the prose tales based on the presumption that, although the poets employed certain archaisms, their language did not lag far behind the colloquial language which were used in the prose. The tendency in the poetry is that in the period 1100-1150 *-ws/-wys* was the only ending employed, while by 1300 *-awd* had replaced it entirely, and there seems to be a clear shift around 1250. *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* has a *-ws/-wys* percentage at 80, higher than *Pwyll*, *Math* and the three romances, and should from this measurement be older.²⁸ On the other hand, Rodway points out that the low number of tokens in the text makes the statistics less reliable (*op. cit.* 70), and that the author of this pastiche "may well have deliberately used

²⁸ Rodway S., "The where, who, when and why of Medieval Welsh Prose Texts", in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 41, Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth 2007, 66-70.

archaic sounding forms to ape the usage of the tales he was satirizing” (*op. cit.* 73). He ends up with dating *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* to some time before 1250.

Concluding remarks

As this survey shows, there are several different opinions on what the author’s intention was, and because of the scholars’ different approaches to the tale, their views are difficult to compare. Parry and Mac Cana seem to regard it as an overall mocking tale with Parry labelling it satirical while the latter scholar sees it as a parody, a genre he considers more good-humoured and less serious. Bollard, Slotkin, Roberts and Lloyd-Morgan read it first and foremost as a satire on the Arthurian literature. Giffin is of the opinion that the author’s intention is to satirise the 12th century Powesians in order to put the Powesian aristocracy of the late 13th century in a positive light. Richards, Carson and Fulton are less interested in the question of satire and read the tale as a commentary on the political context in which the author lived. In such an attempt to compare and systemise different views there is, however, always a danger of oversimplifying.

The scholars are faced with problems concerning the task of tracing an author’s intention and the question of how to reach a valid interpretation. One possible position would be to make allowance for the ambiguities in a given text, and take into account the possibility that the text could have been written with more than one intention in mind and understood in various ways by even the contemporary audience. From this point of view one could, at least to some degree, employ Carson’s, Slotkin’s and Mac Cana’s interpretations of the text irrespectively of each other and thereby gain a broader understanding of the text. This doesn’t make the act of interpretation trivial and arbitrary as one still has to argue for a reading. I will therefore claim that interpretations to a considerable degree depend on the scholars’ approach. Much work has been done so far on how the literary devices are applied and how to understand the humour. There has been a tendency of either seeing it from a literary point of view in relationship to and in contrast with the Arthurian literature or as a commentary on the contemporary political scene.

As far as I can see no attempt has been made at reading it as a commentary upon history or as a historical narrative. Where *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* has been seen in relation to the historical genre the focus has been on the literary aspect, and the political approaches may be those that come closest to a historical interpretation. A historical reading may seem far fetched as the tale may appear rather absurd and surrealistic, but, as Slotkin has argued,

the author may have created the dreamlike atmosphere in order to promote a serious message (Slotkin 1989: 94).

There is considerable disagreement between scholars concerning the dating of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. To base a dating on the satirical function of the tale has proved to be difficult. Charles-Edwards has stated that the satire would be pointless if the persons or society it was aimed at weren't more or less contemporary with the composition, and he argues for a dating within Madawc's reign. I believe Slotkin shows quite convincingly that Charles-Edwards' methodological approach, which is based on the premise that the satire is aimed at the 12th century Powys, is problematic. He finds Charles-Edwards' reference to Arthur's comment about Ronabwy and his companion as a rather weak argument for such a reading, especially when considering how much space the author uses in depicting the Arthurian world which forms an object of satire to an even greater extent (*op. cit.* 89-91). Referring to his view of the text as a critique of the literary tradition written by a skilled humanist, Slotkin states that "Such a sensibility transcends specific circumstances and cannot be tied to any specific period without other kinds of evidence" (*op. cit.* 111).

Other kinds of evidence include references in the text which can connect it with the context in which it was written. The most obvious example is the mentioning in the frame tale of Madawc who is known as ruler of Powys in the middle of the 12th century. Most of the scholars who have attempted to date the tale have taken this reference into account, but they disagree on how we should understand the relationship between Madawc and the author. Parry holds that about a hundred years had to pass after a man flourished before his name could be used in such a tale. Foster arrives at a slightly earlier date as he considers it to be vital that the conflict in the frame tale was still remembered by the audience. Richards and Fulton believe the author looks back on the time of Madawc with longing and argue that it was written after the men of Powys had submitted to Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in 1215. One may wonder, on the other hand, if such nostalgia could not have been present during the late 13th and 14th century as well. Arguing on the basis of resemblance in descriptions of armour in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and other texts, Giffin arrives at a dating around 1300. Far from disregarding Giffin's suggestion, I will argue that her method can't offer anything but a rough dating of the tale. Breeze and Rodway base their suggestions on different linguistic evidence and both date the tale to sometime before 1250, but these proposals can only be regarded as crude indications.

Carson's suggestion is the most radical, as she dates the tale to the late 14th century. There seems, however, to be a problem with regard to her identification of Heilyn Goch uab Kadwgawn uab Idon mentioned in the dream with the Heilyn she has found in the genealogies. The latter would bear the name Heilyn uab Kadwgawn uab Trahaern uab Idon, as Idon wasn't his grandfather, but his great-grandfather (Carson 1974: 292). I also question the plausibility of an author depicting a contemporary person and his house in such an extreme way as is done here. Carson doesn't seem to discuss the strange chronological relation which, if her date is accepted, would exist between Heilyn and Madawc and Iorwoerth, who we can date on safe grounds. Richards has pointed out that the name Heilyn was fairly common in Powys in the Middle Ages, (Richards 1949: 29) and this fact puts Carson's suggestion further into doubt.

Lloyd-Morgan's argument against an early 13th century date concerning the tale's absence from *The White Book* is not conclusive, as this is nothing more than an indication unless it could be proven that all early secular prose had been contained within the manuscript. Furthermore we cannot be certain of what the lost pages of this manuscript contained. Her theory that the tale is a reaction to the Arthurian tales, and that it therefore must postdate the three romances, is not wholly convincing either, since it is not clear whether the author refers to the Arthur found in these tales or the one portrayed in *Culhwch ac Olwen* or in *Historia Regnum Britanniae* which both date to at least the 12th century. Considering Carson's dating of the tale to 1385, Lloyd-Morgan points out that the only copy of the tale, which is contained in *The Red Book*, has errors which probably stem from a scribe copying a written text. As *The Red Book* is dated between 1382 and 1410, this would seem to leave very little time between the older manuscript and the composition of the tale in 1385. Likewise, the reference in late 14th century poetry may allow too little time, if any at all, to lapse between the composition of the tale in 1385 and the composition of the poem, since the poet wouldn't refer to it if his audience wasn't well acquainted with the tale, and I find it plausible that that would take some time. On the whole I find Carson's argumentation and dating rather unconvincing as her identification of Heilyn is problematic and since such a late dating would create problems with regard to the textual tradition and the storyline of the frame tale.

3. Cultural memory as a theoretical framework

In my study of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* I will make use of the theory of cultural memory as formulated by Jan Assmann. In the following I will initially account for his ideas and then discuss them with regard to medieval historical writing and text interpretation. Assmann's main thesis is that human memory is socially and culturally anchored,²⁹ and his theories lean upon earlier studies of memory. Among his most important predecessors is Maurice Halbwachs, who held that memory is shaped and acquires meaning through social intercourse, and that it consequently is a collective phenomenon. Halbwachs further claimed that memory is influenced by our emotions and that it becomes a part of us as it governs our perception of the world and ourselves. This is particularly true for the memory which is codified through language, the *narrative memory*, which is organised in accordance with society and may be characterised as communicative (*op. cit.* 1-3).

Bonding, collective and cultural memory

The notion of a social memory may be elaborated through Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of *bonding memory* which stresses the relationship between individual and society, and sheds light on the connective function of memory. He claims that memory was a prerequisite for making contracts and having obligations as this presupposes that all parts remember what they once agreed upon. Memory is thus a necessity in the development of any society. Nietzsche depicts the bonding memory as a device aimed at controlling the individual which becomes inscribed in the body and mind through brutal and painful rituals (*op. cit.* 5, 88). This negative attitude towards memory resembles Sigmund Freud's ideas concerning the relationship between memory and guilt. Freud claims that those memories which are repressed linger in the unconscious, where they remain latent and exercise a powerful influence on the individual by creating a trauma. He regards the cultural forms of memory as superficial and argues that we have to search behind the symbols and into the deeper levels of the human mind to localise memory (*op. cit.* 6, 96-97).

²⁹ Assmann, J., *Religion and Cultural Memory. Ten Studies*, Stanford University Press, translated from German by Livingstone, R., Stanford 2006, 1.

Assmann focuses on the enabling aspects of memory, and argues that it creates possibilities of self-realisation for the individual and gives it security and identity. He contrasts the bonding memory of Nietzsche with a *collective memory*, but I believe both terms should be regarded as different functions of and perspectives on the same phenomenon. The collective memory provides a group of individuals with a past and a set of norms and values which they see themselves in relation to both as a group and as individuals. The collective memory is upheld by the wish of a group of people to remember something they have in common (*op. cit.* 6-7, 87). The importance of identity, which the collective memory provides, becomes apparent when the society changes drastically and the collective becomes threatened by disintegration. In such situations it is essential to codify the memory within the tradition, which Aleida Assmann defines as communication between generations, in order to save it from oblivion. Through the tradition the memory will be available to the members of the community, and by taking part in the tradition the individuals may integrate in the group and get affirmation of their place in the collective (*op. cit.* 8-9, 17).

Assmann leans on Halbwachs' ideas concerning the social aspect of memory, but goes further and claims that memory has a cultural dimension as well. He argues that memory may be communicated and stored in cultural forms, symbols, and that one therefore may speak of a *cultural memory* (*op. cit.* 6-9). As opposed to Freud, Assmann considers symbols as "an authentic medium of the cultural memory" (*op. cit.* 98). It is particularly the instrumentalised parts of memory, the bonding or the collective memory, which is codified in symbolical forms. He argues that the articulation of collective memory involves bringing elements of the past into a context in which they originally did not belong, i.e. the present (*op. cit.* 16, 52-54). Furthermore, Assmann acknowledges, in accordance with Freud, the role of emotions and the unconscious in the development of memory (*op. cit.* 96). The concept of cultural memory may be said to attempt to describe "the interplay between the psyche, consciousness, society and culture" (*op. cit.* 9).

Cultural memory and writing

The bonding/collective memory becomes challenged when writing is introduced, and it is only now that it becomes meaningful to speak of a cultural memory beyond the instrumentalised memory. The cultural memory has a greater spectrum which exceeds the historical and normative tradition the society is based upon. The cultural memory consists, in

addition to this core, of a diverse material which no longer is, or never has been, a part of the bonding or collective memory. The cultural memory can be contrasted to a *communicative memory*, a generational memory that may stay unchanged only for a hundred years at the most. Through the medium of writing, however, the cultural memory may extend itself over thousands of years, and through it man may see himself in relation to people of bygone eras (*op. cit.* 21, 24-25).

Writing takes the place of Nietzsche's cruel rituals when it is employed for the purpose of transferring the instrumentalised memory. One could say memory is excarnated (brought out of the body and into symbolical forms), and this process usually takes place, according to Assmann, within the frame of the state (*op. cit.* 91-92). The characteristics of writing as a storage medium has similarities with the way Freud claims memories stay latent in the unconscious. Books can stay unread for many years and the memories codified in them may be forgotten, but there is always a possibility that they may be rediscovered at a later stage. We can therefore distinguish within the cultural memory between stored and functional memory, the latter corresponding to the instrumentalised memory. The cultural memory as such is therefore not underpinned by the present need of social norms and identity. Tensions arise within the cultural memory between central and marginal parts of it and make changes in the central (collective) memory possible (*op. cit.* 24-25).

The cultural activity connected with the articulation of memory is described by Assmann as "a long mnemotechnical project in which memory creates markers in the struggle against the furies of disappearance and forgetting" (*op. cit.* 81). It may be said to aim at immortalising the past and the present. Writing changes this work dramatically as memory is no longer dependent on the human mind alone, and this makes a cultural memory beyond the instrumentalised and communicative possible. On the other hand, writing accelerates the development of memory, and thereby the process of forgetting since memory becomes vulnerable towards changes when it is made visible. In an oral society, the task of the memory specialists is to transfer the memory to the next generation. In such a society every retrieval appears as a revitalisation of the memory. When the memory is committed to writing, the retrieval of it becomes less demanding. The preservation of memory suddenly appears as plain, and to develop it further becomes the leading principle (*op. cit.* 81-84, 105-107, 113-117).

The codification of memory in writing is in itself not sufficient to preserve the memory, as a reader needs to know the context of the written material to understand it. The

reader is therefore dependent on an expanded context to retrieve the memory from a text. When such a context is not present the text appears as arbitrary signs which may be unintelligible or interpreted in various ways. In such situations the reader is at risk of extracting messages from the text which the writer did not intend to communicate, and thus the tradition may in one respect become broken (*op. cit.* 86, 103).

Cultural memory and text

The term text, *textus*, stands from a philological point of view in opposition to commentary, *commentarius*. A linguistic utterance becomes *textus* when it has become the object of a *commentarius*, which may be defined as all kinds of philological work, for example editing or text criticism. No linguistic utterance is therefore *textus* in the first place. A text may become an object of scrutiny when it has become difficult to understand because of its age, fragmentary condition, archaic language, or when it is approached in a context different to the one in which it originated. Within linguistics text is defined as all linguistic units above the sentence and as the natural form of linguistic utterances, the term is therefore not exclusive to the medium of writing (*op. cit.* 101-103).

Assmann approves Konrad Echlich's definition of text as retrieved communication. Echlich focuses not on the medium or form, but rather on the process of retrieval and the message transferred. A linguistic utterance is, according to Echlich, not a text before it has been transferred and retrieved in a new context, i.e. in a different time and/or place. The retrieval requires that the context is expanded (*op. cit.* 103). When a text is retrieved, a connection between the origin of the text and the context in which it is retrieved is established, and thus the text becomes a common point of reference for people across time and space. This quality is particularly well developed among *cultural texts* which "possess a special normative and formative authority for a society as a whole" (*op. cit.* 104). A normative text contains guidelines for proper behaviour and social conduct, while a formative text creates an identity for the members of a group by relating their common past. The cultural texts shape people's cosmology and reproduce the social identity of the collective (*ibid.*).

In order to function as universal authorities the cultural texts are dependent on being safely stored and accurately retrieved for innumerable occasions. These texts are therefore reliant on an expanded context to be accessible for the collective, and the institutionalising of this context differs in societies which use writing for the purpose of storing cultural texts

and those that do not. In oral societies the expanded context is institutionalised through gatherings where those responsible for storing the cultural texts in their minds may present them to the community so they can take part in them. The memory specialists make up a small elite with high status functioning as keepers of the cultural memory, while the time of retrieval of the texts is governed by the calendar of religious feasts (*op. cit.* 105-106).

In an oral society it is the essential meaning of the cultural texts which is preserved, while their form is characterised by variation as their presentation is based upon improvisation. In such instances it seems evident that the text, i.e. the retrieved communication, is constituted by its meaning, and not by its form. The text may in such a perspective be defined as the sum of all its variations. Paul Zumthor denotes this relationship between form and meaning by the concept of *mouvance*. The opposite of *mouvance* is literal reproduction, and both modes of transference are found in oral and literate societies. One category of texts which is transferred verbatim is *sacred texts* which put the one performing them in contact with the otherworld if they are reproduced correctly. The sacred texts are performative as their power is present only in connection with their rendering, and they are kept secret within a priestly caste. *Mouvance*, on the other hand, is central to the transference of cultural texts as their relevance is dependent on their updating in accordance with the changing context. The contents of the sacred texts do not need to be understood by the performer, as the text as such only plays a minor role in the frame of a ritual. They stand therefore in stark contrast to the cultural texts, as their meaning has to be understood if they shall function as authorities for the members of a collective (*op. cit.* 107-110).

The memory specialists in oral societies use techniques and remedies such as knots and sticks with markings to aid their memory, and these means are the predecessors of writing. Neither these remedies nor writing itself were invented for the purpose of preserving cultural texts, but rather for storing economical and bureaucratic information (*op. cit.* 107). When written cultural texts come into being, it is not as a result of the recording of oral texts. The written texts are, on the contrary, composed in accordance with the nature of the new medium. Assmann entitles these *literary texts* and sees their function as pertaining to education and socialisation. The literary texts had the function of passing on normative and formative knowledge, and played a vital role in the schooling of officials since by studying these texts the apprentices at the offices acquired the ability to read and write. Schooling may here be understood as education in its widest sense as the acquisition of the art of writing gave the apprentices career opportunities at the same time as they were exposed to

didactical texts (*op. cit.* 111-113). The function of cultural texts and literary texts may be seen with regard to socialisation as they convey normative and formative knowledge. Thus, when concerning ourselves exclusively with written texts, these categories appear to be identical.

The share of the population in a literate society which has access to the cultural texts by being able to read is higher than the share of memory specialists in an oral society (*op. cit.* 106). It is the scriptoria, in which the texts are copied and learned by heart, that institutionalise the expanded context in literate societies, and it is here that the written corpus, the stream of tradition, is cultivated and enriched. The cultural texts constitute only a small part of the texts which were cultivated in these scriptoria, the majority of the material being made up by sacred texts and texts preserving knowledge (*op. cit.* 112-114).

The notion of the author didn't exist in early literate cultures, and the scribes' work consisted for the most part of copying and updating the texts which were already present. This work of constant editing and updating was therefore the writers' opportunity to contribute to the tradition. When new texts came into being they were presented as the articulation of the existing tradition and not as compositions of creative writers. Texts' authority and status in such cultures depend upon their ancient roots, and new texts are therefore seldom added to the stream of tradition (*op. cit.* 115-116). The antiquity of texts becomes visible when their language appears as archaic in comparison with the spoken language. When it is realised that a number of texts within the corpus belongs to another era, a selection process is initiated where the texts which are regarded as most important become canonised. This implies that the selected texts are taken out of the stream of tradition and get their definite shape and are transferred verbatim from now on. Simultaneously their status becomes enhanced and they develop into symbols of the greatness of the past (*op. cit.* 117-120).

Cultural memory and history

The reason why I have chosen cultural memory as a theoretical superstructure for my interpretation of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is that I believe the view on the past and the motives and forces which shape man's perception of it that this theory promotes may shed new light upon medieval literature. The traditional discipline of history is based on the notion that it is possible to gain access to the past by scrutinising the sources in accordance with the rules of the craft. Source criticism is the tool with which the historian may uncover what did happen,

why it happened, and what the consequences of an event were.³⁰ My intention is not to discuss whether this is a fruitful method for the study of the past or not, but rather to question whether the modern concept of historicity is adequate for understanding the medieval notion of history.

In order to find out what a culture reckoned as history, one may examine how the term is used within the culture. The English term is related to the Latin word *historia* which was frequently used in the Middle Ages. Titles such as *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, *Historia Brittonum* and *Historia Regum Britanniae* exemplify what the people of the British Isles thought of as history in the medieval period. These texts have, on the other hand, been judged differently by modern historians. Bede's history has served as basis for their depictions of early medieval Britain and has been regarded as a relatively trustworthy source.³¹ *Historia Brittonum* has mainly been characterised as a pseudo-historical text, but sections of it have been used as an account of 6th century history.³² Geoffrey's work has not received much attention by modern historians and has been considered to be a fantastic and unrealistic narrative about the British past.³³

Etymologiae by Isidor of Seville, a 7th century encyclopaedia highly influential in the Middle Ages, offers another insight into the medieval notion of history. Isidor defines *historia* as "a narration of deeds accomplished; through it what occurred in the past is sorted out".³⁴ History is, according to Isidor, concerned with the past and presents it in an orderly manner. Isidor stresses its relation to the "truth" in his distinction between *historia*, *argumentum* (plausible narration) and *fabula*: "Histories are true deeds that have happened, plausible narrations are things that, even if they have not happened, nevertheless could happen, and fables are things that have not happened and cannot happen, because they are contrary to nature" (*op. cit.* 67). On the basis of Isidor's definition and his renown and universal application in the Middle Ages, it seems reasonable to argue that the authors of the three above-mentioned texts regarded their works as being truthful accounts of the past, or at least presented them as that.

³⁰ Kjeldstadli, K, *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var. En innføring i historiefaget*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1992, 53-55, 161.

³¹ Snyder, C. A., *The Britons*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2005, 85.

³² Koch, J. T., "Historia Brittonum", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 925.

³³ Davies, J., *A History of Wales*, Penguin Books, London 1994, 122-123.

³⁴ Seville, I, *The Etymologies of Isidor of Seville*, Barney, S. A., Lewis, W. J., Beach J. A., Berghof, O. (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, 67.

Erich Poppe has argued with regard to the medieval Irish narrative prose that the modern distinction between history and literature is unfortunate and that these texts were considered by their contemporaries as historical.³⁵ He refers to the annals where events and characters from the narrative prose are put into a chronological scheme which accords rather well with the chronology of the tales and may plausibly be derived from them (*op. cit.* 15-18). Poppe demonstrates with reference to legal tracts and *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* that *stoir* (derived from *historia*) was equated with medieval Irish genres as “cattle raids” and “destructions” (*op. cit.* 20-22). Finally he argues that the colophon attached to *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in *Lebor Laignech* shows that such tales were usually perceived as history (*op. cit.* 23-24). Although the Welsh material is less substantial, we see the same tendency of correspondence between the annals and Cambro-Latin and Welsh prose, for example with regard to Arthur (Gantz 1976: 135-176, 193-297).³⁶ Poppe’s argumentation is convincing, and on the whole I believe his conclusions are valid for the Welsh tradition as well.

Both modern scholars and medieval literates claim that their accounts of the past are rooted in the truth, but their depictions differ and modern scholars are reluctant to accept many medieval historical accounts. The difference becomes most evident when we look at *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which is found in numerous manuscripts, both in Latin and translated into Welsh.³⁷ This can be taken as an indication of its great popularity. Geoffrey depicts the Welsh past as heroic and honourable, seemingly regardless of modern scientific soundness. There are, on the other hand, clear indications that the author and his contemporary audience considered it as a valid account of the past, i.e. as giving a trustworthy portrayal of it (Roberts 1971: 55, 62-63).³⁸ One conclusion we may draw from the above is that historicity is a subjective concept. This may further imply that it is not the search for the truth which shapes the historical narratives and, on a deeper level, our perception of the past. In this matter I believe the theory of cultural memory may contribute to our understanding by taking other aspects into consideration.

³⁵ Poppe, E., “Literature as History / History as Literature: A View from Medieval Ireland”, in Fielitz, S. (ed.), *Literature as History / History as Literature*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2007, 13, 19.

³⁶ Williams, J., *Annales Cambriae*, Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, London 1860, 4; Monmouth, G., *History of the Kings of Britain*, Evans, S. (ed.), Everyman’s Library, London 1963, 183-236; Giles, J. A., *The Works of Gildas and Nennius*, James Bohn, London 1841, 28-29.

³⁷ Roberts, B. F., *Brut y Brenhinedd*, University Press of Oxford, Oxford 1971, xxiv;

Monmouth, G., *The Historia Regum Britanniae*, Griscom, A. (ed.), Longmans, Green and Co., London 1929, 19.

³⁸ See discussion above.

The function of history is, according to the theory of cultural memory, to create an identity for a community and its members based on a collective past. Assmann claims that man's view of his past is influenced primarily by his emotions and his need of being a part of a community, and not by an objective and scrutinising attitude towards it (Assmann 2006: 6-7, 87, 179). There is a tension within the cultural memory between the past and the present which Assmann illustrates with reference to two theoreticians who stress the two extreme points: "...Warburg explores culture as a phenomenon of memory and Halbwachs explores memory as a phenomenon of culture" (*op. cit.* 170). I will claim that it is not the one or the other, but rather that the relationship between the two is more complex and that history, which has the past as its object, is a product of both the past and the present. Assmann's concept of history distinguishes itself from the one promoted by the traditional historical discipline through a rather loose attachment to historicity and a stronger emphasis on the need of the contemporary society. Thus the dichotomy of "true" history and fiction becomes less relevant, as the history and thereby the past is shaped by emotions and needs, and not by the search for the truth.

In the meeting with early Welsh literature I find this notion of the past interesting and fruitful. The writers' accounts of the past may be, from the perspective of the cultural memory, described as the sum of thoughts and feelings about past and present. One may further describe the authors of historical literature as creators of history as their depictions of the past are the only past which the members of the given society can relate to. Following Assmann, these texts shaped and articulated the memory of the Welsh by giving them a past and thereby an identity. It seems like the cultural memory promotes an expansion of the traditional concept of history.

Cultural memory, context and interpretation

Assmann seems to assume the perspective of the people of former societies when he is discussing memory and text, and this, among other things, poses challenges when we as scholars try to employ his theory on texts. Echlich's definition of text as retrieved communication, which Assmann endorses, is problematic from the medievalist's point of view. In effect, we approach texts as (mainly linguistic) complexes of signs and not as unambiguous messages, the meaning of which is being transferred from generation to generation since the days of the author. Furthermore, I believe it is legitimate to question whether an expansion of the "original context", which according to Assmann ensures that

the text is interpreted correctly, is possible even within a relatively short distance in time and space from the writing of the text.

Assmann seems to presuppose that people in early societies had an orthodox attitude towards the meaning of texts, a presumption which is not self-evident as far as I can see. On the other hand, Morgan Thomas Davies has in the case of early medieval Ireland argued that the literates viewed texts as ambiguous and potentially communicating more than one message.³⁹ With reference to the numerous explanations which the Old-Irish glosses give on single passages from, for example, *Amra Coluim Cille* (*op. cit.* 10-11), the alternative accounts and explanations found in *Dindshenchas*, *Cóir Anmann* and *Sanas Cormaic* and the variant tradition within the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*op. cit.* 21), Davies argues convincingly that the literates operated with considerable room for interpretation governed by, among other factors, the changing context (*op. cit.* 6-7).

The context, or more specifically the expanded context, is a somewhat problematic element in Assmann's theory. A complex of signs is, according to Assmann, only possible to interpret correctly, i.e. in accordance with the author's intentions, if its context is known. This requires that the context is extended (Assmann 2006: 86-87, 103). This extension is in the case of written texts institutionalised through the scriptoria (*op. cit.* 112-113), which corresponds to the monasteries in the early Middle Ages and later to learned secular institutions as well. One may wonder how Assmann thinks this extension takes place practically speaking. The expanded context, understood as the knowledge of the original context, must also become a part of an either written or oral tradition to be transferred along with the texts, but there is no reason why these commentarii, as in contrast to textus, should be entirely unambiguous. Assmann refers to Brian Stock's term of textual communities which denotes movements that were based on either authoritative texts which were peculiar to them, or on unorthodox interpretations of texts which were regarded as authoritative by the residual society as well (*op. cit.* 72-73). One may wonder what happens to the text, as defined by Echlich, when it is approached with different interpretative traditions.

Assmann's view on the possibilities of retrieving a context may on the whole seem too simplified. I doubt that the context of a work, even with detailed knowledge of the author and the text, can be brought back to such an extent that we can truly see the world, and the

³⁹ Davies, M. T., "Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature: Note on some Notes to *Orgain Denna Ríg* and *Amra Coluim Cille*", *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 32, Cambrian Medieval Studies, Aberystwyth 1996, 12-13, 17, 19-23.

text, with the eyes of the author. Both the modern scholar and the medieval reader can in many cases only make qualified guesses about the background of a text and only attempt imagining how the original context influenced the thoughts and feelings of the author. An interesting aspect at this point is the influence of the context which the reader/scholar is part of on the interpretation of a text. I believe that in the same way as we are unable to enter a different context, we are also incapable of stepping out of our own, and in this perspective the message communicated by a text may be more a product of the reader's context than of the author's. I will return to this matter in the chapter concerning the context and the portrayal of the past in the dream.

Utilisation of the theory

Assmann's ideas as they appear in *Religion and Cultural Memory* constitute no model for interpretation of texts, but rather make up a theory about the formation and function of memory in societies and its encoding into symbolical forms. In my study of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* I will make use of his text categories, mainly cultural text and textus and commentarius, as a basis for discussing its status and function. In my analysis and interpretation of the text, I will employ Assmann's concept of the past with its focus on function and subjectivity, as I believe it may be well suited for treating medieval narratives on their own terms.

Slotkin's interpretation of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as a satire on the norms and values of the heroic and romantic literature denotes, with Assmann's terms, its normative aspects. His reading seems on the whole fairly plausible, but I will argue that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s potential will be fully realised only if we ascribe a formative function to it as well. On the background of the theory of cultural memory I believe it makes sense to read the tale, and particularly the dream, historically, and I will claim that such an approach will enrich our understanding of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. I will study this dimension of the tale on the basis of the following questions:

How does the context influence the portrayal of the past in the dream?

- How is the past presented in the dream and what function does the cast of characters have in this depiction?
- How is the battle of Badon portrayed in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* compared with depictions found in earlier texts?

- How does the dream function as a depiction of the past in relation to the frame tale as a description of contemporary society?

4. Analysis

4.1 How is the past presented in the dream and what function does the cast of characters have in this depiction?

There is a curious disparity in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* between the amount of narrated action and the amount of descriptions, but also between the narrated action and the number of characters mentioned. There are 61 personal names in the tale as a whole; five of these appear only in the frame tale. Despite the great number of characters in the dream, there are few important roles to fill. Of the 56 names in the dream, 33 are mentioned only in the list of Arthur's counselors, which all in all counts 42 persons. How should we interpret the great quantity of characters involved in the story, what is their role in the tale?

For an audience familiar with the tradition, the mentioning of persons, places or events belonging to it certainly brings forth plenty of associations, concerning for example a person's background and adventures, the happenings which occurred in a place or the significance of an event. Likewise, names occurring in a text function as intertextual references when we already know them from other texts. This process of associating one word or name with traditions already known happens instantly and every time we read a text, and it might therefore be profitable to focus on the names and to explore what kind of connotations they have. I believe that an associative reading of the names is all the more legitimate as the plot is relatively inconspicuous and there is little action with which the numerous characters may be connected. I would thus argue that the understanding of the dream depends upon acquaintance with earlier traditions. We have probably lost the greater part of the medieval Welsh tradition, but by examining the preserved written material, we might be able to say something about what the characters in the dream were associated with. Such an approach may shed additional light on how this tale should be interpreted.

Through the following analysis I will account for how the past is portrayed in the dream, which makes up about 6/7 of the text. I will first present a synopsis of the dream. Secondly I will give an analysis of it in which I will focus on its storyline and structure. For the reasons stated above, I will also account for the characters and some of the traditions

with which they are associated.⁴⁰ After the examination of the storyline and characters, I will discuss the most prominent literary devices employed. The chapter will be concluded by a discussion of how the past is presented in the dream.

Summary of the dream

Ronabwy and his companions find themselves on the plain of Argygroec, and here they are approached by Idawc Cord Prydein who tells them how he got his nickname. Another knight, who is identified by Idawc as Rwawn Bybyr uab Deorthach Wledic, rides towards them and asks for "a share of the little fellows" (Gantz 1976: 181). He rides away when Idawc has promised him their friendship. They move towards Ryt y Groes where they see a camp and the mustering of forces, and upon an island in the Severn they behold Arthur, Betwin escob, Gwarthegyt vab Kaw and a youth dressed in black. Idawc greets the emperor who asks where he found the small men. When Idawc thereafter asks Arthur why he is laughing, he says he rather feels sad since the island which was protected by valiant heroes in former times is now defended by such poor men. Subsequently a company of horsmen approaches and pitches its tents by the ford. They are identified as the companions of Rwawn and are described as Arthur's lifeguard. Another group of riders approaches, and its leader rushes into the river in front of Arthur and splashes water so that the emperor and the men around him are soaked. The anonymous youth dressed in black beside Arthur strikes the knight's horse on its nose, and tells the insulted knight that he struck his horse in order to advise him, and the knight accepts the correction. The knight is identified as Adaon uab Telessin and the young man dressed in black as Elphin uab Gwydno (*op. cit.* 180-183).

Thereafter a man, identified as Karadawc Vreichuras uab Llyr Marini, says he wonders how the great host can be situated in this tiny spot, especially since it has promised to be at the battle of Badon by noon fighting Osla Gyllellwa[w]r. Arthur claims he will follow Karadawc to Badon, and Idawc takes Ronabwy up in the saddle and rides out with the host. As Ronabwy turns around he sees two troops in black and white following them. Idawc identifies them as the men of Norway and the men of Denmark led by respectively March uab Meirchawn and Edern uab Nud. Chaos breaks loose within the host as it reaches *is Kaer Vadon*, and Ronabwy asks if it is fleeing. Idawc tells him that Arthur has never fled

⁴⁰ Due to practicalities I will not account for the characters which are only mentioned in the list of counsellors.

and that the host is behaving this way in order to get a glimpse of Kei who is riding through it. A man entitled Cadwr Iarll Kernyw is then called forth carrying a sword decorated with dreadful serpents that silence the host when the sword is unsheathed. A servant, Eiryn Wych Amheibyn, appears with a mantle which makes the one who wears it invisible. He spreads it on the ground and places a large chair of gold upon it. Arthur sits down on the mantle and invites Owein uab Uryen who stands beside to play *gwyddbwyll* with him. He accepts the invitation and Eiryn brings them the board (*op. cit.* 183-185).

While playing *gwyddbwyll* they are interrupted by a servant who asks Owein if he will allow the emperor's squires to destroy his ravens or if he will ask Arthur to call them off. Owein asks Arthur, but he tells Owein to keep playing. This happens two more times, and when the emperor ignores his request for the third time, Owein instructs the messenger to raise the standard where the fighting is most fierce. We are now told that the ravens start to harass the emperor's squires. Then three messengers approach Arthur in succession to tell him about the violent ravens, and Owein ignores Arthur's request to stop them from harming his men twice. As Arthur asks for the third time he crushes the gaming pieces, and Owein orders his servant to lower the banner and there is peace. Ronabwy then asks who the messengers were. Those who came to Owein are identified as Selyf uab Kynan Garwyn o Powys, Gwgawn Gledyfrud and Gwres uab Reget, while those who addressed Arthur are named Blathaon uab Mwrheth, Rwawn Bybyr and Hyueid Unllenn (*op. cit.* 185-190).

Twenty-four horsemen sent by Osla Gyllellwa[w]r arrive thereafter and ask Arthur for a temporary truce. The emperor walks over to a man that Idawc identifies as Run uab Maelgwn Gwyned and gathers his council. Ronabwy asks why the young Kadyrieith mab Saidi is there and Idawc answers that he is the best councilor on the island. Then Arthur's bards begin performing a song of praise which only Kadyrieith understands. Upon that twenty-four donkeys with tribute from the Greek islands arrive. Kadyrieith suggests that a truce should be granted to Osla, and that the donkeys and the tribute should be given to the bards for their patience and that they furthermore should be rewarded for their art during the truce. They decide upon this and Idawc praises Kadyrieith's wisdom. Kei arises and proclaims that those who wish may follow Arthur to Cornwall that night or face the emperor after the truce, and the following noise wakes Ronabwy (*op. cit.* 190-191).

Episode: Ronabwy meets Idawc and Rwawn

As Idawc pursues the men, they get closer or grow distant from him according to his horse's breath (*op. cit.* 180). This is a humorous exaggeration that subtly indicates the difference in size between Ronabwy and Arthur's men which is to be made explicit later. The version of the battle of Camlan which Idawc gives (according to which Idawc was responsible for the battle by twisting Arthur's fair words to Medrawt while asking for peace (*op. cit.* 180-181)) has no support in and is not easy to reconcile with Geoffrey's account. According to Geoffrey, the battle of Camlan was the last of several clashes between the two after Arthur discovered Medrawt's betrayal (Monmouth 1963: 232-236). Idawc's tale doesn't fit into this scenario as the conflict seems to have been beyond reconciliation when they met at Camlan, but one cannot rule out the possibility that Idawc's version stems from an earlier tradition. Both Arthur and his nephew fell at the battle of Camlan. The battle symbolizes the end of the golden era, and to mention it was to bring up a traumatic event in the cultural memory of the Welsh. The meeting with Rwawn Bybyr seems, on a literary level, to lack both causes and consequences, and one may further observe that Ronabwy is not able to recognize him when he reappears later as a messenger (Gantz 1976: 189).

Ryt y Groes is the location of the first part of the dream. Richards has pointed out that the Powesians gained a glorious victory here against the Mercians in 1039 (Richards 1948: xxxviii). Fulton, on the other hand, emphasizes that it was Gruffudd ap Llywelyn who led the Welsh forces in this battle, and argues that it would remind the audience of a period when the lord of Gwynedd had the authority in Powys. She further regards Ryt y Groes as a likely location of the meeting between King John and Llywelyn ap Iorwerth princes in 1215 where King John unsuccessfully tried to convince the Welsh princes to support him against the English barons. Fulton argues that the meeting with Osla's messengers and the gathering of the council is a parody on these negotiations (Fulton 1999: 51-52). The Powesians of the Middle Ages could plausibly associate Ryt y Groes with both events, but it should with regard to Fulton's suggestion be noted that the meeting with Osla's messengers doesn't take place here, but at *is Kaer Vadon* (Gantz 1976: 183-184, 190).

Apart from his appearance in connection with Medrawt in the triad of the Three Dishonored Men,⁴¹ *Idawc (Cord Prydein) uab Mynyio* is more or less unknown outside this tale. He leads Ronabwy through the tale, identifies persons and answers Ronabwy's

⁴¹ Bromwich, R., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1978, 133, 412.

questions. Neither he nor Ronabwy contributes to the development of the storyline, and their role is solely to function as a watchman device.⁴² *Rwawn Bybyr uab Deorthach Wledic* is mentioned later in the dream as one of the messengers who address Arthur, and appears in the list of counselors as well. He is mentioned in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Gantz: 140-141), and is known in the triads as one of the Three Arrogant Men, one of the Three Fair Princes and one of the Three Golden Corpses. He may possibly be identified with Ruuawn who is alluded to in *y Gododdin* or to Rumaun mentioned in the genealogies, who is supposed to have been a son of Cunedda from whom Rhufoniog has got its name. He seems originally to be one of *Gwyr y Gogledd* who later entered the Arthurian tradition (Bromwich 1978: 7, 41, 166, 500).

Episode: The conversation with Arthur

Arthur's complaint after Idawc's question about why he is laughing seems, on the one hand, reasonable. On the other, Arthur's conclusion that the guests belong to a later era than his own is not a logical deduction from the premises that they were found on the road, which Idawc tells him, and that they are small compared to them. Arthur's comment is not clear with regard to grammatical tempus, but it has been interpreted as if Arthur regards the men of Ronabwy's generation as the keepers of the island at that very moment (Richards 1948: 6, 7).⁴³ This obscures the notion of a time travel which seemed evident after Idawc's tale of Camlan and the appearance of Arthur. One may wonder in what time the scene is set, and the comment opens questions about the relation between the dream and the frame tale which I will deal with in a later chapter. This meeting may be compared with that of Patrick and Caoilte in *Acallam na Senórach* where the huge size of the latter is taken as an indication that he belonged to an older era.⁴⁴

One could argue that the appearance of *Arthur* creates the dream's setting and that the other characters exist as part of, or are transmitted to, the universe created around this hero who through the annals is accurately placed within a chronological frame (Williams 1860: 4). It is important to emphasise that the concept of Arthur had become complex at the time this tale was written as the traditions around him spanned many centuries. The preserved material is diverse, and the character underwent considerable changes through the

⁴² Carney, J., *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin 1955, 307.

⁴³ Davies, S., *The Mabinogion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, 217.

⁴⁴ Dooley, A., Roe, H., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, 5.

Middle Ages. Historians see him as a person who flourished around the year 500, and he is regarded as a warlord of possibly North British origins (Koch 2006b: 117). The perhaps earliest trace of him is a vague allusion found in *y Gododdin* in a part which was written down not later than the 9th century (Bromwich 1978: 275). In *Historia Brittonum* (ca. 830) he is associated with twelve battles of which the battle of Badon mentioned in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is the last (Giles 1841: 28-29). In the so-called *Mirabilia* attached to this work we find references to the boar hunt depicted in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and Arthur's killing and burial of his son Anir.⁴⁵ The most prominent among the poems concerning Arthur is *Pa Gwr yw y Porthawr* (ca. 1100) which is shaped as a dialog between Arthur and a gatekeeper in which Arthur mentions his warriors and their exploits.⁴⁶ The earliest Welsh prose text in which he appears is *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the tale having been dated by some scholars to ca.1000 (Snyder 2005: 264). At this stage Arthur is still a potent warrior who accomplishes some of the most dangerous of Culhwch's tasks himself, but he has also become a king with his own court (Gantz 1976: 135-176). The great number of triads in which he appears reveals his prominent position in the Welsh tradition (Bromwich 1978: 274).

An important development of Arthur's character came in the second quarter of the 12th century with Geoffrey of Monmouth's history, in which Arthur was portrayed as the greatest hero among the Britons. Geoffrey depicts Arthur as an emperor who defeated the Saxons and ruled greater parts of Northwestern Europe (Monmouth 1963: 186-232). Arthur was in the same period introduced to Continental Europe via Brittany, and was promoted here first and foremost by Chrétien de Troyes in the late 12th century (Roberts 2006a: 125).⁴⁷ The authors of the romances made Arthur into a courtly and glamorous ruler, but simultaneously he disappeared from the battlefield (Fulton 1999: 47). His reign functioned as scenery for tales about the deeds of the knights who were connected to his court, and thus they became the center of attention. This development influenced the Welsh tradition as well. In the three romances (12th or 13th century), which may be regarded as variants of three of Chrétien's works containing a local substrate (Mac Cana 1992: 94-96; Snyder 2005: 265), Arthur has left the stage for younger heroes. Arthur must be considered as one of the main

⁴⁵ Jones, T., "The Early Evolution of the Legend of Arthur", translated by Morgan, G., in *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 8, W. Heffer & Sons LTD., Nottingham 1964, 11-12.

⁴⁶ Sims-Williams, P., "The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems", in Bromwich, R., Jarman, A. O. H., Roberts, B. F. (eds.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1991, 39.

⁴⁷ Benozzo, F., "Arthurian Literature [6] texts in non-Celtic medieval languages", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 130.

characters in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, but he leaves a doubtful impression. As the synopsis shows, he is involved in most of the action in the tale, but is at the same time passive. He is dependent upon the people around him and does not encourage any development in the story.

Betwin escob may be said to represent the ecclesiastical authority in the tale, and he is also among Arthur's counselors. His name occurs in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where he is described as the one who blessed meat and drink (Gantz 1976: 147-148), and in *Englynion y Clyweit*,⁴⁸ and he is known in the triads as one of the Three Chief Bishops. The name seems to be of continental origin (Bromwich 1978: 1, 289). *Gwarthegyt vab Kaw* plays together with Betwin a minor role in the dream, but is also mentioned in the list of counselors. He appears in *Culhwch ac Olwen* after the hunters leave Ireland and follow Twrch Trwyth back to Wales, and is depicted as holding the two dogs of Glythfyr Ledewig (Gantz 1976:172). His name may be interpreted as "spoiler of cattle" (Richards 1948: 42). He is one of the numerous sons of Caw who himself plays a central in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and is elsewhere depicted as both a saint and a North British ruler (Bromwich 1978: 301-302).

Episode: The two troops and the splashing of Arthur

The appearance of Rwawn Bybyr's men seems just as meaningless as that of Rwawn himself, as they arrive at the ford, pitch their tents and are never mentioned again. The scene may, however, serve as a prefiguration of the next troop that rides in. The splashing sequence seems neither to have a logical explanation nor any consequences. After Elphin and Adaon part, Idawc describes the latter as the wisest and most accomplished young lad in the kingdom (Gantz 1976: 183), a comment which only contributes to the absurdity of the scene. Such a description doesn't suit a man who splashes down the emperor and his bishop, who thereafter gets angry because he is punished for it, but finally accepts the punishment as a correction of his behavior. Elphin, the rebuker, is described by Idawc as perverse and overanxious (*ibid.*). His reaction seems quite understandable, however, and one could even have expected him to challenge Adaon. This scene can be read as mockery against both the secular and the ecclesiastical power.

⁴⁸ Bromwich, R., Evans, S., *Culhwch ac Olwen*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1992, 107.

Adaon uab Telessin is another of Arthur's counselors. The evidence that Adaon was regarded as a wise man is slight, but it is reasonable to believe that such an association could be linked up to his patronymic. Telessin or Taliesin is regarded as a 6th century bard from whom we have preserved poems. He developed into a bard archetype and a legendary figure to whom vast traditions were attached (Bromwich 1978: 509-511). The traditions concerning Adaon are mainly preserved in the triads, where he is depicted as a warrior and not as an intellectual. He is mentioned as one of the Three Bull-Chieftains, one of the Three Battle-Leaders and as the victim of one of the Three Unfortunate Assassinations (*op. cit.* 13, 44, 70). *Elphin uab Gwydno* is mentioned in the genealogies as a descendant of *Gwyr y Gogledd* (*op. cit.* 238), but he is first and foremost known through *Hanes Taliesin*. In that story he is depicted as a youth connected with the court of Maelgwn Gwynedd where he spends his father's money. In a coracle in the river Elphin finds the little boy Taliesin, who later helps his lord out of trouble at the court, ridicules the bards there and utters prophesies.⁴⁹ If Adaon can be taken as a representation of his father, the conflict between him and Elphin can be interpreted as a mirror image of the tale about the young lad who helps his lord through his wisdom, which may have been known when *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* was written.⁵⁰

Episode: The journey to is Kaer Vadon

Karadawc's speech appears seemingly out of the blue, but it is one of the few narrative elements which creates development in the story, and Arthur's willingness to go to Badon creates expectations. To fight the battle of Badon after the battle of Camlan is rather absurd, as Slotkin has pointed out (Slotkin 1989: 96-97), and it may seem from Karadawc's reminding comment and Arthur's reply that Arthur had forgotten about the battle altogether. The journey to the famous battlefield places the story in a well-known context and gives it a long-awaited plot. The mentioning of the coming battle gives meaning to the former gathering of men and explains the following muster of the black and white troops as well. The appearance of allied troops from Norway and Denmark seems to be inspired by *Historia Regum Britanniae* where Arthur is depicted as gathering troops from his great empire (Monmouth 1963: 208-209). Some of these warriors attend Arthur's council (Gantz 1976:

⁴⁹ Ford, P. K., *The Celtic Poets. Songs and Tales from Early Ireland and Wales*, Ford & Bailie, Publishers Belmont, Massachusetts 1999, 15-34.

⁵⁰ Haycock, M., "Taliesin [2] the Taliesin tradition", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 1655-1656.

190). The depiction of the chaos which Kei causes as he goes through the host may, together with the splashing of the bishop and the king, be interpreted as a ridiculing of men of authority. Ronabwy's following question and Idawc's nervous reply may be said to support such an interpretation.

Karadawc Vreichuras uab Llyr Marini distinguishes himself in the way he tries to direct Arthur's attention to a task which is worthy of an emperor, i.e. to fight his enemies. He is known in the triads as one of the Three Battle-Horsemen and his horse is among the Three Bestowed Horses, he is also mentioned as one of the Three Lovers (Bromwich 1978: 31, 97, 189). Idawc describes him as Arthur's first cousin and chief adviser, and he is later mentioned among the counselors (Gantz 1976: 183). Both Karadawc's role and Idawc's description agree curiously with the second triplet in the triad of the Three Tribal Thrones where he is mentioned as Chief Elder, while Arthur and Betwin are entitled as respectively Chief Prince and Chief Bishop in the same entry. Bromwich claims that this triad has monastic origins and can be dated to the period 1120-1150, and one may wonder if the author was familiar with it and used it for his composition. In the genealogies he is known as an ancestor of the rulers of Morgannwg. He is furthermore associated with Brittany, and he made his way into the Continental Arthurian tradition as well. The triads and the traces of him at the continent may indicate that he played a greater role in the Welsh tradition than the preserved tales give evidence of (Bromwich 1978: cxi, 1, 299-300).

In *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy Osla Gyllellwa[w]r* appears as Arthur's enemy at Badon, but this role is in conflict with the one he inhabits in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In that tale he is obviously one of Arthur's men and is mentioned in the court list, where we are told that Arthur's host used his knife as a bridge. During the boar hunt he chases Twrch into the Severn and he is drowned as water fills up his empty sheath and drags him down (Gantz 1976: 144, 174). Both references may be regarded as plays on his epithet *Gyllellwa[w]r* "big knife". As to the origin of Osla, Richard equates him with Offa, an eighth century king of Mercia (Richards 1948: 46) while Foster has identified him with Ohta son of Hengist (Foster 1961: 42). Slotkin, on the other hand, considers him as originally belonging to the Arthurian tradition (Slotkin 1989: 98). His role would be easy to explain if he is to be regarded as a Saxon. There are, on the other hand, indications, in for example the list of counselors, that the author was familiar with *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Bollard 1980-81: 160), and we can therefore not rule out the possibility that Osla's enmity against Arthur was intended as an absurd element.

March uab Meirchawn leads the Norwegian host and is also among Arthur's counselors. He is first and foremost known as the king in the story about Tristan and Essylt which is geographically placed in Cornwall. There is, on the other hand, evidence which indicates that he may have been a ruler in south Wales. The triads reckon him among the Three Seafarers, and he is frequently mentioned in this material in connection with Drystan (Bromwich 1978: 25, 45, 189, 193, 443-446). His grave is described in the *Englynion y Beddau*.⁵¹ The Danish warriors are led by *Edern uab Nud*, who is among the counselors as well. He is mentioned in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and plays an unfavourable role in *Geraint fab Erbin* (Gantz 1976: 140, 267-275). He is a rather anonymous brother of Gwyn, the more prominent of Nudd's two sons, but is well known in the continental tradition (Bromwich, Evans 1992: 70-71).

The knight who creates the chaos within the host is *Kei*. He belongs to the earliest strata of the Arthurian tradition and is depicted as Arthur's fiercest warrior in *Pa Gwr yw y Porthawr*. He is described in positive terms in the court poetry and occupies a prominent role in *Culhwch ac Olwen* as one of the chief helpers (Bromwich 1978: 304-306). A different trait of character is Kei's arrogance which in that tale is displayed in the arguing with Arthur (Gantz 1978: 167-168). It is this aspect of Kei we find in the continental tradition, and it is present in the three romances as well where he often challenges the newcomers at the court (Bromwich 1978: 305).

Episode: The preparations and the meeting with Owein

The bringing forth of Arthur's dreadful sword contributes to the expectations created by Karadawc, and the arming of the emperor by the earl can be seen as an action which indicates that he will fulfill his promise and fight the battle. The other man who is called forth is described rather negatively and the items which he brings are associated with the luxurious life in the court and not with the ruler's role as a protector. Thus his appearance causes a sudden drop in the expectations concerning the further development of the story. The status of Owein uab Uryen, who suddenly appears before Arthur, is not clear. As he traditionally is presented as one of Arthur's knights, we may presume that he has led another British troop to *is Kaer Vadon* to join Arthur's men before the battle. The expected

⁵¹ Jarman, A. O. H., *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd 1982, 41.

development is definitely brought to a halt as Arthur and Owein decide to play *gwyddbwyll* instead of attacking Osla.

Cadwr Iarll Kernyw, whose tasks are to arm the emperor and administrate Cornwall, seems to belong to Arthur's inner circle, and is also mentioned among the counselors (Gantz 1976: 184-190). In *Pedwar Marchog ar Hugain Llys Arthur* he is reckoned as one of the Three Knights of Battle (Bromwich 1978: 252). The occurrence of Cadwr may reveal a familiarity by the author with *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which is the oldest source from which we know of this character, and there is a distinct possibility that Cadwr is Geoffrey's creation (Richards 1948: xv). In Geoffrey's account Cadwr is presented as Arthur's closest companion and ally throughout his career, and it is his son who succeeds Arthur after the battle of Camlan (Bromwich 1978: 297). *Eiryn Wych Amheibyn* is described as big, ugly and red-haired, and nothing about him justifies his nickname *gwydh*, "brilliant". He is not among the counselors and his tasks and characteristics indicate that he is of inferior rank. He doesn't seem to have occupied any prominent place in the Arthurian tradition.

Historians regard *Owein uab Uryen* as a 6th century prince of Rheged who is praised and lamented in poems of Taliesin which are believed to have been composed in the same period (Snyder 2005: 259). He and his father became symbols of the North British resistance against the Angles, a tradition which is alluded to in the saga *englynion*.⁵² Another tradition concerning Owein is reflected in *Bonedd y Saint* where he is depicted as the father of St. Kentigern (Bromwich 1978: 479). He is known in the triads as one of the Three Fair Princes, patron of one of the Three Red-Speared Bards, owner of one of the Three Plundered Horses, and with his sister Morfudd he makes up one of the Three Fair Womb-Burdens. He is also mentioned as one of the Three Knights of Battle in *Pedwar Marchog ar Hugain Llys Arthur* (*op. cit.* 7, 19, 101, 185, 252). He seems to have entered the Arthurian tradition at a relatively late stage and he is absent from *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the early Arthurian poems. In Geoffrey's account he is briefly mentioned as the one who inherits the Scottish throne after Angusel falls in the battle against Medrawt at Richborough (Monmouth 1963: 234). He plays the main role in *Owain* and is also mentioned in *Peredur fab Efrog* (Gantz 1976: 192-257), but is curiously absent from *Geraint fab Erbin*. In the continental tradition he occupies a prominent position among Arthur's knights. (Bromwich 1978: 479-480)

⁵² Rowland, J., *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge 1990, 477-482.

Episode: The *gwyddbwyll* and the battle

This highly visual section has attracted a lot of attention from scholars. The scene takes up a lot of space with its repetitions and descriptions, but one may wonder how it fits into the plot. The readers receive no explanation of why the squires attack the ravens in the first place, and one becomes inclined to consider their fight as a reflection of the *gwyddbwyll* game between the two leaders of the hosts, although no clear link between the two actions can be observed. Fulton interprets the enmity between Owein and Arthur as an analogy to the bad relations between Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and his vassals (Fulton 1999: 49-50, 53-55). On the basis of the heraldry described in the dream, Carson argues that the conflict between Owain and Arthur may represent the discord in the Middle Ages between the Welsh nationalists and those who favored cooperation with England. She further sees the scene in a pattern as one of three conflicts mentioned in the tale in which Britons stand against each other. She contrasts these with the battle against the Saxons at Badon which Arthur cancels (Carson 1974: 298-302). It seems difficult to find the connection between the apparently peaceful board game and the brutal battle, unless it can be found in the *gwyddbwyll* itself. I wonder if the *gwyddbwyll* could be regarded as a symbol of war, a representation which here is materialized in the clash between the squires and the ravens, and furthermore if Arthur's invitation to play could be interpreted as a way of challenging Owein. In this context it should be remembered that it is Arthur who takes the initiative to play and that it is his men who attack first (Gantz 1976: 185-186). The fighting ravens have been explained as a play on the well known trope for warriors as *cynfrain* "foremost ravens" (Bromwich 1978: 481). This war band is alluded to in the end of *Owain* where we are told that Owein went home "with the three hundred swords of Kynverchin and his flight of ravens, and they were victorious wherever they went" (Gantz 1976: 216).

Selyf uab Kynan Garwyn o Powys is mentioned in *Annales Cambriae* in the entry for the year 613 in connection with the battle of Chester (Williams 1860: 6). The battle was a disastrous defeat for the Britons as the Saxons managed to separate Wales from the northern territories (Snyder 2005: 85). Selyf belonged to the ruling dynasty of Powys and seems to have been the leader of the Welsh army at Chester. In the triads he is known as one of the Three Battle-Leaders and as the owner of one of the Three Pack-Horses (Bromwich 1968: 44, 107, 418, 507). *Gwgawn Gledyfrud* is associated with the kingdom of Ceredigion, and this character can possibly be equated with its last king who died in 871. Another and

probably later tradition is reflected in the triads, where he is reckoned as one of the Three Gate-Keepers at the action of Bangor Orchard, an event which has been equated with the battle of Chester. He is also mentioned among the Three Slaughter-Blocks and as the owner of one of the Three Plundered Horses (*op. cit.* 42, 101, 163, 389-390). The character *Gwres uab Reget* seems to be found in this tale only. *Gwres* may be interpreted as “heat”, while the patronymic does not refer to any person, but to the North British kingdom with which Owein is associated. This indicates that Owein still was, and in this context should probably be, connected to *Gwyr y Gogledd*. Blathaon is used as a place name denoting the northernmost point of Scotland often referred to in the early Welsh literature, while *Blathaon uab Mwrheth* may provide the only instance of its use in a personal name. It has been suggested that the name may be derived from *blaid* “wolf”. Blathaon is reckoned in the triads as one of the Three Enemy-Subduers (*op. cit.* 33, 233-234). *Hyueid Unllenn* is mentioned in the list of counselors and in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Gantz 1976: 142).

Episode: The twenty-four horsemen and the gathering of the counsel

Because of the seemingly banal board game and the conflict among allied warriors, the Battle of Badon has been postponed for a long period of time when the twenty-four horsemen from Osla unexpectedly arrives. Carson suggests that the ending of the *gwyddbwyll* and the battle is a necessary precondition for the appearance of the horsemen, and that their enquiry may be regarded as a kind of reward to Arthur (Carson 1974: 302). Although this theory may describe the succession of events, it doesn't offer a logical explanation of how they are connected. However it may be, I will argue that their enquiry and Arthur's subsequent need for making a decision revives the plot and the earlier expectations concerning the famous battle. On the narrative level the counselors give Arthur advice on whether or not to grant Osla a truce, and they may be said to put additional authority behind whatever decision is made. On an associative level the mentioning of the counselors functions as a catalogue of heroes which brings to mind their adventures and deeds. Many of them like *Gwalchmei uab Gwyar* and *Gwryr Gwalstot Ieithoedd* are known as being among the foremost of Arthur's companions, and thus confirm and reinforce the Arthurian setting and atmosphere.

Rachel Bromwich and Simon Evans have argued that the kind of lists that we find in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is a developed feature of the Arthurian literature, and trace its history from the mentioning of Arthur's warriors in *Pa Gwr yw y Porthawr* to its most elaborate

development in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. They consider the court list in the latter tale as a forerunner for the list of counselors in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and for the lists in *Geraint fab Erbin* and *Englynion y Clyweit* (Bromwich, Evans 1992: xxiv, xl). Likewise, Bollard has pointed out that 21 of the 42 names in the list in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* also occur in that of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, most of them in the three first columns of the court list. 27 of the counselors are mentioned in the triads, 15 of which are absent from the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. The remaining names are found in other Welsh texts, especially in *Geraint fab Erbin*, with the exception of Danet mab Oth and Granwen mab Llyr (Bollard 1980-81: 160-162). Compared to the one in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, our list falls short by more than 200 names. Furthermore the list of counselors lacks the clusters of names sharing common features and the bits of narratives which appear in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Bromwich and Evans suggest that the triads may be the ultimate inspiration for such lists in Welsh literature. Lists of characters occur in Arthurian literature written outside Wales as well, for example in Geoffrey of Monmouth's description of the festival of Whitsuntide and in *Erec et Enide*. The feature is also known from the Ulster Cycle, for example in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Fled Bricrenn*. (Bromwich, Evans 1992: xxxvii-xxxviii xlii-xliii, xlv-xlvi; Monmouth 1963: 199-200)

Episode: The decision

The reason why the bards start chanting after the counsel has been gathered, but before any decision is reached, is not clear. One could, on the one hand, possibly connect their song with the *gwyddbwyll* episode, but we are, on the other, told they praise Arthur, and it is doubtful whether his behavior during the board game may be regarded as praiseworthy. The groundless praise which, however, is not understood by the counselors may be interpreted as a mocking feature aimed at the bards and/or the aristocracy. The arrival of the twenty-four donkeys with tribute from the Greek islands is a parallel to that of the horsemen, and both groups come more or less out of the blue. The connection with Greece must be seen against the background of Arthur's great empire as portrayed by Geoffrey's history and the medieval notion of Greece as a land of enchantment (Bromwich, Evans 1992: 59). Kadyrieith doesn't give any argumentation for his advice concerning the truce, nor do we get any explanation of why the bards should be rewarded for any patience, or why he bothers with them at all. The decision to postpone the conflict fall short of the readers' expectations a second time, and the announcement of Arthur's return to Cornwall kills all hope of any

meaningful conclusion of the dream. It is not clear who Kei addresses, possibly Osla's riders or maybe even Owein and his ravens, but his threat has no credibility after the demonstration of the emperor's inability to fight his proper enemies. The agreement upon the truce and Idawc's praise of the decision contributes to the impression of Arthur as a weak and indolent ruler, and that impression comes off on the Arthurian world as a whole.

Run uab Maelgwn Gwyned is described in the dream as a man whose status makes him a respected counselor (Gantz 1976: 191). He is considered as a historical person and is supposed to have followed his famous father as the ruler of Gwynedd in the 6th century, and some traditions reckon him as a forefather of the Breton kings (Bromwich 1978: 501-502). In *Hanes Taliesin* he is sent to seduce Elphin's wife, but is fooled by Taliesin to sleep with a housemaid instead, something which causes great anger in Maelgwn, who subsequently puts Elphin in prison (Ford 1999: 20-21). He is known in the triads as one of the Three Fettered Men and one of the Three Fair Princes (Bromwich 1978: 7, 29). *Kadyrieith mab Saidi* is described as both young and wise and is the only one who understands the bards' song (Gantz 1976: 191). He is possibly referred to in the court list in *Culhwch ac Olwen* through the mentioning of "the son of Seidi" (*op. cit.* 141). Bromwich identifies him with Cadyrieth fab Portawr Gadw, who appears as a squire at Arthur's court in *Geraint fab Erbin*. She believes that he should be regarded as a bard on the basis of his name which she interprets as "fine speech". She argues that this explains why he understands the song and why he takes care that the bards get the tribute as a reward and payment during the truce. In the triads he is mentioned as one of the Three Chieftains of Arthur's court and as one of the Three Men who were most courteous to Guests and Strangers (Bromwich 1978: 16, 195, 291-292).

Literary devices

In some respects *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* appears to be an unconventional prose tale, and it owes at least some of its peculiarity to the author's usage of literary devices. Considering the narrative level, Slotkin has argued that the traditional *fabula* of Arthur has been reversed in this *text* to create a new *story* (Slotkin 1989: 91-97). The level of *fabula* is rather abstract and it is therefore difficult to see what Slotkin refers to, but the *fabula* may seem to roughly agree with Arthur's career as presented by Geoffrey. The inversion of the *fabula*, i.e. the conventional sequence of events being reversed, becomes obvious when Idawc tells Ronabwy about the battle of Camlan before he subsequently beholds Arthur, who according to the *fabula* was killed in that battle. Thereafter Ronabwy listens to Karadawc

who addresses Arthur concerning the coming battle of Badon, which Arthur according to tradition fought at an early stage in his career. This battle is later postponed by Arthur and his counsel, and is thereby pushed further into the future. As a part of a complex argumentation about the author's intention, Slotkin argues that he inverts the *fabula* to draw attention towards the Arthurian tradition (*op. cit.* 108-111). I would like to add that the inversion seems to disturb any development of a plot. By presenting the history of Arthur so differently, I will argue that the author would confuse the readers who were familiar with the traditional presentation of him and provoke questions concerning his "true" nature.

The watchman device is a prominent narrative technique which is constituted in the dream through Ronabwy and Idawc. Ronabwy has traveled in time in his sleep and plays the role of the ignorant watcher. He asks Idawc, the knowledgeable watcher, what is going on and who the different persons are (Carney 1955: 307). The author has exploited this device thoroughly as the whole perspective is governed by it. Although there is a narrator present, we see the action from the same perspective as Ronabwy. He arrives, in the same way as the reader, at a scenario which is strange to him. He shows no personal traits, nor does he interrupt or contribute to the story. Altogether, this gives the readers an impression of being put in a similar position to that of the main character. Thus the dream becomes a looking glass from which we can observe the Arthurian era.

In the examination above I have referred to the lack of coherence between the different sections and between the single actions, and that the plot consequently occupies a relatively weak position in the dream. The plot is further weakened by a heavy focus on descriptions which the use of the watchman device may be said to promote. More than 1/3 of the entire text consists, according to Slotkin, of descriptions, which is about the same amount as is used for plain narrative (Slotkin 1989: 99). The most extensive descriptions concern men and horses and are most notable in the *gwyddbwyll* section. One may moreover note that men of rather low rank and importance are described in great detail, for example the six messengers, while important and high ranking persons such as Betwin and Arthur are mentioned without any descriptions at all. This neglect of Arthur accords rather well with the impression of him as a poor emperor of which his behavior gives evidence. Slotkin holds that descriptions in epic prose had the function of creating a heroic atmosphere. In the dream, he argues, this ambience is not fulfilled by any heroic deeds, and the descriptions contribute therefore to an impression of the Arthurian world as meaningless (Slotkin 1989: 101, 108). Mary Giffin sees the depictions of armor, equipment and heraldry as deliberate

references to the rulers of Powys around 1300 (Giffin 1958: 40), and in this perspective one may regard the descriptions of the Arthurian knights as anachronistic. It is, however, unclear how deliberate these anachronisms are. Could the 14th century fashion of the knights simply be a product of the author's context which unconsciously slipped into his account of the past? Although we must make reservation for the possibility that the descriptions could appear differently when the tale was read aloud, I believe they would appear as excessive and meaningless to any audience whether they read or listened.

One last important literary device employed by the author is repetition. Some actions happen twice: Ronabwy meets two knights before they reach Arthur, two troops arrive at the ford after Idawc has greeted Arthur and the storyline is interrupted by two arrivals after the *gwyddbwyll*; first by the coming of the twenty-four horsemen from Osla and then by the advent of the twenty-four donkeys carrying tribute. The most obvious usage of the device is the triplets of messengers which arrive first to Owein and then to Arthur. Slotkin has pointed out that this section is rather static and takes up a lot of space without contributing anything to the plot (Slotkin 1989: 106-107). The constant mustering and arrival of troops and riders could in general be said to make the dream repetitive. Repetition is a narrative device which is usually employed for creating expectation. In *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, however, the expectations are never fulfilled, and the repetitions seem therefore to be out of place. This accords rather well with the employment of descriptions as both devices may be said to promote a negative impression of the Arthurian world.

Concluding remarks

The dream is speckled with allusions to the Welsh tradition, particularly through the occurrence of numerous characters. The survey of traditions connected with the names given above is by no means inclusive, but I believe it demonstrates some of the associations a knowledgeable reader potentially could make while reading *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. The names of persons, places and events together with the traditions concerning them can be seen as parts of the cultural memory of the Welsh. The author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* may be said to recontextualise these memories within the frame of a new narrative which takes its place among the other texts as an expression of the cultural memory. The dream presents us with a rather poor performance by the Welsh heroes, and the memories stand here in the risk of being influenced by it as *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* becomes a text with which readers will associate for example Arthur. By including all the characters, places and events in his tale,

the author covers a great spectrum of the cultural memory, and I will argue that he gives an impression of depicting the Welsh tradition in its entirety. I will discuss some of the memories alluded to in the dream more closely in the following chapters.

The perspective of time is rather untraditional in the dream and Slotkin has argued convincingly that the traditional Arthurian *fabula* is played backwards. I will nonetheless argue that it from Ronabwy's point of view is a dream about the past and more particularly the Arthurian era. Although some of the characters originally seem to belong to later periods, the time is set through the appearance of Arthur and maybe even more by the storyline's relation to the battle of Badon. That the dream is set in the past according to Ronabwy's perspective will become evident when the tradition concerning Badon and the setting of the frame tale are accounted for in the following chapters.

I have demonstrated above that Arthur is presented as a weak ruler: he is incapable of making decisions, tries to avoid facing the enemy and doesn't correct the men who ridicule him. He is by no means awe-inspiring and lacks the traditional virtues of wisdom and bravery. As for his men, they are hardly more impressing than their lord as they splash down the emperor and his bishop and lose all discipline at the sight of Kei. In the *gwyddbwyll* section they are just about to be wiped out in the fight against the ravens when Arthur finally interferes in the battle as he crushes the gaming pieces. The lavish descriptions create a magnificent atmosphere and, together with the repetitions, they build up expectations which repeatedly break down through the lack of development.

I have claimed that the impression Ronabwy and the readers get of the heroic Arthurian era is rather negative and disappointing. I will argue that the plot of the dream is the battle of Badon, and I will account for and discuss this event and its status in the cultural memory in the following chapter. In the dream the battle doesn't reach its expected resolution, if any resolution at all. This causes the dream in itself to appear somewhat meaningless, and it gives on the whole a negative impression of Arthur and his men. The golden past is generally presented as a world without heroes or brave deeds with fights occurring only between those who should stay together.

4.2 How is the battle of Badon portrayed in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* compared with depictions found in earlier texts?

Having argued that the battle of Badon constitutes the plot of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, I will in the following see this event in a greater perspective and examine its position and status within the cultural memory of the Welsh. Writing is, according to Assmann, an authentic medium of cultural memory (Assmann 2006: 98), and this implies that we should be able to trace the development of a memory by examining texts from different periods in which it is articulated. If we take the number of depictions and references in the literature into consideration we will see that the battle of Badon is a central event in the cultural memory. In this chapter I intend to account for the most prominent depictions of the battle which predate *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, examine the contexts in which these were made and finally discuss them with regard to the presentation of the battle in the dream.

De Excidio Britanniae

Our first written source to the event, i.e. the earliest extant encoding of the memory into symbolic form, is the account in *De Excidio Britanniae*, a work ascribed to Gildas (Snyder 2005: 84). This attribution has not been contested. We are dependant on hagiographical traditions from the 11th and 12th century for any biographical information about Gildas. He was, according to these texts, of North British decent, but it was in Wales that he received his education, which has been judged as thorough and extensive on the background of his written works, which reveal considerable knowledge of classical and Christian tradition. Apart from *De Excidio*, two other texts of Gildas have been preserved. These are the so-called *Fragments* of lost letters and *Preface of Penance* which are concerned with apocalypse, ecclesiastical justice, asceticism and monastic discipline. His works seem to suggest that Gildas at some point joined a monastery, and there are indications that he may even have become an abbot (*op. cit.* 121-125).

On the basis of Gildas' local knowledge as revealed in the text, the composition of *De Excidio* has been geographically placed in South-Western Britain. Somerset and Dorset has been suggested as a possible *locus scribendi*, but hagiographical traditions give evidence of a man well travelled within the British domain. The dating proposals suggested for this

text are mainly based on internal evidence and hagiographical traditions, and reach from the late 5th century to the middle of the 6th (*op. cit.* 122-124). In his preface Gildas reveals the intention behind his work: “for it is my present purpose to relate the deeds of an indolent and slothful race rather than the exploits of those who have been valiant in the field” (Giles 1841: 1). The history section, in which Badon is mentioned, is only an introduction to the epistles addressed to the kings and clergy of Britain. In these he complains about their sins and immorality and the neglecting of their proper tasks and everything that is good. Although he became famous as the historian of the Britons, his purpose was not mainly to relate their history (Snyder 2005: 121). His historical account functions as a demonstration of how the Britons were tormented because of their disobedience to God and the immorality of their leaders, while the main part of his work is dedicated to accusations and corrections of the secular aristocracy and the clergy.

The last chapter of his history opens as follows:

“After this [the war waged by Ambrosius against the Saxons], sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field, to the end that our Lord might in this land try after his accustomed manner these his Israelites, whether they loved him or not, until the year of the siege of Bath-hill [lat. Badonici montis], when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes, which was (as I am sure) forty-four years and one month after the landing of the Saxons, and also the time of my own nativity” (Giles 1841: 22).

Ian Wood has interpreted the latter part of the section as “...forty-three years have passed... ..., as I know, for it is the forty-fourth year since my birth: and now a month has passed (since Badon)”.⁵³ He dates the battle to the 520s at the latest, while David Dumville, Thomas Charles-Edwards and Christopher Snyder, who base their estimations upon an interpretation which agree with the former quoted translation, date the battle to approximately 500 (Snyder 2005: 123).⁵⁴ Gildas’ way of dating the event appears to us as problematic and the same can be said of his geographical placing of it. J. A. Giles translates Badonicus as Bath, while Charles Thomas favours Badbury Rings,⁵⁵ an Iron Age hill fort in

⁵³ Wood, I., “The end of Roman Britain: Continental evidence and parallels”, in Lapidge, M., Dumville, D. (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, The Boydell Press, New Hampshire, Dover 1984, 23.

⁵⁴ Charles-Edwards, T. M., *After Rome*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, 29.

⁵⁵ Thomas, C., *Britain and Ireland in Early Christian Times*, Thames and Hudson, London 1971, 42.

Dorset, as the location of the battle. Both suggestions have received support, but conclusive evidence is lacking.

According to Gildas' account, the battle of Badon marks the end of the war against the Saxons as he relates a few lines after the section quoted above that "...our foreign wars [have] ceased, but or civil troubles still [remain]" (Giles 1841: 22). Although Gildas' main concern is not the war with the Saxons, the battle of Badon is presented as a decisive victory, as a turning point in history. Snyder remarks that "...Gildas records no dates and only a handful of names and events..." (Snyder 2005: 122). In the light of this statement, Gildas' reference to the location and date of the battle suggests that the event was significant in the writer's own time.

Roughly dated to the 6th century, *De Excidio* is nearly the sole written source to post-Roman Britain (*op. cit.* 121). The Roman era was mainly regarded as a prosperous and peaceful epoch in the Middle Ages, particularly when compared with the destructions and massacres of the Post-Roman era which ended, according to Gildas, with the victory at Badon. His description of Badon as one of the last battles and the fact that he ends his historical account with it gives the event a certain significance, which is partly due to the period in which Gildas wrote. The battle marks, from a 6th century political perspective, the end of the period of Saxon invasions and the beginning of a new era. We see *De Excidio Britanniae* as the starting point of the memory of Badon and Gildas as its creator, and it is plausible that this opinion was shared by the Welsh in the Middle Ages as well. Whatever interpretation of the lines concerning the relationship between the battle and composition we might choose, the gap is short and the scribal activity in that period moreover low. I find it therefore likely that it could have been Gildas' account, together with oral traditions, that made Badon known in the 6th century itself, and it was certainly he who made it known to posterity.

Historia Brittonum

The first recension of this work is dated on the basis of internal evidence to around 830, and the reference to the fourth year of the reign of Merfyn (Frych) may point to an origin in Gwynedd. One of the recensions includes a prologue where the author identifies himself as Nennius, but Dumville's argumentation that this is a forgery has been widely accepted. One recension is also ascribed to Gildas, but this attribution can be rejected as the work depicts events which postdate the 6th century. *De Excidio* seems, on the other hand, to

have been an important source for the author or rather compiler of this work. A Breton manuscript identifies the author as *filius Urbagen* “son of Urien (Rheged)”, but this is unlikely for similar chronological reasons. At the present time we have to regard the work as anonymous. There are eight extant recensions of the text and these differ widely, and there exists a Middle Irish translation as well. The text is found in numerous manuscripts and seems to have been popular in both Britain and France (Koch 2006d: 925-927). In the forged prologue we are told that this history was compiled “... to deliver down to posterity the few remaining ears of corn about past transactions, that they might not be trodden under foot, seeing that an ample crop has been snatched away already by the hostile reaper of foreign nations”(Giles 1841: 1-2). The author has a more positive attitude towards the British past than Gildas, and the work may even have been written as a reaction against his gloomy description of the history of the Britons.

The passage which mentions Badon is known as the battle list and is usually situated between the life of Saint Patrick and a section consisting of Anglo-Saxon genealogies and accounts concerning the Old North (*op. cit.* 28-32). The relevant section runs as follows:

Then it was [when the Saxons had increased in strength and numbers and Ochta had followed Hengist as their leader] that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was often conqueror. The first battle... [Here follows the mentioning of eleven battles]... The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon. In this engagement, nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful.” (*op. cit.* 28-29)

John Koch argues that the battle list has more in common with the material about the Old North than with the preceding parts, and that these two sections may come from the same source. He further claims that both of them reveal an interest in Welsh poetry. Indeed, the Chadwicks argued that an Old Welsh poem underlies the list, and Thomas Jones has shown that the names of the battlefields constitute some sort of rhythm in which Badon fits in neatly. This theory is based on a possible confusion between similar words in the lines which describe the battle at *castellum Guinnion*.⁵⁶ The error could be explained if the

⁵⁶ The description runs as follows: “The eight was near Guinnion castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his *shoulders*, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter” (My emphasis; Giles 1841: 29).

compiler had a written Welsh poem as his source in which he confused *scuid* “shoulder” and *scuit* “shield” (Koch 2006b: 119-120). If this is the case, it suggests that the connection between Arthur and Badon was not made by the compiler of *Historia Brittonum*, and that the battle list therefore represents a tradition older than 830.

Although the tradition may be older, *Historia Brittonum* might be the earliest text extant that links Arthur to the battle of Badon. We don’t know whether Gildas knew of Arthur, who may have belonged to the generation before him, or if Gildas didn’t find him important enough for his account, or if he knew of Arthur, but didn’t connect him with the event. I find it most likely that he didn’t know the name or didn’t have any reason to connect Arthur with the battle since giving the event a hero would have invigorated his depiction. Although Gildas has a rather negative view on the British history and focuses on the sins and their consequences, he is willing to mention heroes like Ambrosius (Giles 1841: 22). One may indeed wonder if Arthur was anything but a name at the time Gildas wrote. I will argue that the linking of the character and the event in *Historia Brittonum* has the effect of strengthening the two phenomena. They may be regarded as two memories which have their memorability enhanced by being put together, joining a victor to the great victory.

The structure of the entire section promotes the significance of Badon. The event is placed at the end of a list of battles and has a considerable description attached which depicts it as “a most severe contest” (*op. cit.* 29). *De Excidio* is, however negative, a rather realistic and sober account of the British past. *Historia Brittonum* may in contrast be described as a pseudo-historical and heterogeneous compilation in which we find mythic, legendary and historical material mixed together. I have no intention of discussing the historicity of the two sources, but I will point to the fantastic, almost mythic, quality which is ascribed to the battle in *Historia Brittonum*. This feature is visible in the assertion that Arthur alone killed the striking number of 940 foes. This claim puts Arthur even more in the forefront as it makes it look like he literally defeated the Saxons on his own. We are also told that the Lord intervened to help Arthur on the battle field, and even though such formulations are common in descriptions of war, such a claim reinforces its legendary aspect. These additions elevate the battle to the same level as the second battle of Mauthyn and the siege of Troy.

Annales Cambriae

Like *Historia Brittonum*, *Annales Cambriae* is based on varied material from different sources. The A-text, with which I will deal exclusively, consists of entries for the period 447-954 and was finished in the middle of the 10th century.⁵⁷ Many of the events may have been recorded at an earlier stage and closer to their own time, but the Welsh forms found do not predate the 8th century. According to Kathleen Hughes, the earliest entries, to which the one of Badon belongs, were mainly based on Irish annals.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the battle is not mentioned in any of the Irish annals extant, and it is therefore likely that the entry has a relatively late North-British or Welsh origin (Koch 2006b: 121). The chronicle genre forces information about the past into a strict chronological order where the events are organised with regard to the year they occurred. This is radically different from the chronologically loose accounts of pseudo-Nennius and Gildas. The chronological structure of the annals has more in common with modern historians' presentations of the past, but there are no indications that the medieval scholars would regard the annals as more historical than the aforementioned texts. A chronological account of their own history according to the birth of Christ made it easier for the Welsh to see their own past in a greater perspective, for example in connection with important events abroad and biblical history. How the exact date of the battle was known or decided is not clear, but the scholars may have used the two earlier accounts and possibly known Gildas' year of birth from other sources.

This is the entry for the year 516 (possibly referring to 518): "The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders and the Britons were the victors".⁵⁹ Although the first entry in *Annales Cambriae* is for 447, the one quoted here is the first concerned with secular politics, and it could be argued that the event may have been reckoned as the beginning or resumption of the British dominion. This is the most elaborate description of any event in the annals and that may be regarded as an indication of its prominence in the British past. The entry mentions the cross on Arthur's shoulders, a wording which, as shown above, may have originated in a translator's confusion of Old Welsh *scuid* and *scuit*, and the line should possibly be read as "cross... ..on his shield". A plausible explanation of such a reoccurring error would be to assume that the battle list, where a similar phrase occurs, has influenced

⁵⁷ Stephen, M., *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986, 13.

⁵⁸ Koch, J. T., "Annales Cambriae" in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 68.

⁵⁹ <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/annalescambriae.html>.

this entry. Thomas Jones has pointed out that the annals, unlike *Historia Brittonum*, doesn't mention any image, and states that Arthur is depicted as carrying the actual cross on his shoulders. He regards this religious motif as historically untrustworthy and as a possibly late addition. Jones does not rule out the possibility of confusion between *scuit* and *scuid*, but argues at the same time that this entry, when first inserted, may have been very brief, or even non-existent in the annals dating from the middle of 10th century, but that it was expanded or inserted at a later stage. He claims that to take out the relative clause, i.e. reducing the entry to "Bellum Badonis & brittones uictores fuerunt" (Jones 1964: 5), would give a formulation which would suit the annals rather well (*op. cit.* 1964: 5-6).

The mention of the shoulders of Arthur in *Historia Brittonum* occurs in the description of the eighth battle: "... bellum in castello Guinnion, in quo Arthur portavit imaginem sanctae Mariae perpetuae virginis super humeros suos...",⁶⁰ while the motif is employed (the image of Mary being substituted with the cross of Christ) in the description of the battle of Badon in the annals: "Bellum Badonis, in quo Arthur portavit crucem Domini nostri Jesu Christi tribus diebus et tribus noctibus in humeros suos" (Williams 1860: 4). The battle at the castle of Guinnion is not mentioned in the annals, although its compilers most probably had access to *Historia Brittonum*. I am tempted to argue, with regard to the cultural memory, that the potent memory of Badon has ousted most of the other battles in *Historia Brittonum*'s battle list from *Annales Cambriae*. This may be illustrated by the compiler who at some point seems to have employed the formulation concerning *castello Guinnion* in *Historia Brittonum* for his depiction of Badon in the annals. Although it is presented as the foremost of Arthur's triumphs already in *Historia Brittonum*, Badon is the only one of twelve battles which is mentioned in connection with Arthur in the annals, something which reinforces the connection between the event and the hero. There may be several reasons for this concentration of attention. The scribes behind the annals may have regarded the other battles as less important as they weren't named in *De Excidio*, a source which the compiler probably knew, or they could possibly consider themselves unable to put them into a strict chronological order because they didn't know precisely when they occurred. However it may be, it seems likely that Badon was regarded as the most prominent victory at the time

⁶⁰ <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/histbrit.html>.

the entry was inserted, and the possible lack of sources for the other battles indicates that it had been regarded as such for a long time.

Another significant difference between *Historia Brittonum* and the annals is the mentioning of the battle of Camlan in the latter in the entry for year 537 (or 539), while *Historia Brittonum* only mentions Badon as the last victory. Compared to the entry concerning Badon it is rather brief: “Gueith Camlann, in qua Arthur et Medraut corruere...” (Williams 1860: 4). The historians place this battle somewhere near Hadrian’s Wall (Koch 2006b: 121). It is unclear how Camlan was understood and regarded at the time it entered the annals. The references to the battle which predate Geoffrey of Monmouth include, in addition to the annals, some brief allusions to it in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the mentioning of it in five triads (Gantz 1976: 142-143; Bromwich 1978: 160). The later traditions concerning the battle differ somewhat, but the outlines tell of a conflict between Arthur and his nephew Medrawt caused by the latter’s treachery. They met finally at Camlan where they both fell, and the battle marks, at least in Geoffrey’s account, the end of the golden era (Monmouth 1963: 232-236). When seen together the two battles appear as contrasts, where Badon refers to the victory of a united British force under Arthur against the Saxons, while the kin slaying of Camlan symbolises their inability to stand together and the renewal of the reign of the Saxons.

Historia Regum Britanniae and *Brut y Brenhinoedd*

Historia Regum Britanniae was written by Geoffrey of Monmouth around 1139 and has been regarded as a pseudo-historical work. Geoffrey’s origins are not entirely clear, but his name indicates that he had some connection with Monmouth; it was possibly his place of birth. He was consecrated bishop of St. Asaph, but he probably never visited his bishopric, and he is mainly associated with Oxford where he most likely wrote his history (Roberts 1971: ix-x). We don’t know the intention behind this work, but he probably aimed at an Anglo-Norman audience, and Brynley Roberts suggests that he sought to provide the new rulers with a history of the island adapted to their taste (*op. cit.* xxiii-xxiv). Scholars have speculated that he may have been of Breton descent as the rendering of Welsh names in his writings reveal an acquaintance with Breton and the content has a positive bias towards the

Bretons.⁶¹ It seems therefore reasonable to assume that Geoffrey also wrote the history in order to confer upon the Bretons a heroic origin.

Although it seems like Geoffrey's connection to Wales and identification with the Welsh are rather weak, there are substantial arguments for regarding his history as important to the cultural memory of the Welsh. The topic of his work is the history of the island before the Saxons gained the upper hand (it ends with the death of Cadwaladr which he dates to 689 (Monmouth 1963-263)), and the past is seen from the perspective of the Welsh. The work is certainly a product of the author's creativity, but he was inspired by and used local texts as *De Excidio, Historia Brittonum*, annals, genealogies and saints' lives as sources (Koch 2006e: 927). Geoffrey's history gained considerable popularity among the Welsh despite the fact that they were not his intended target group. It was translated into Welsh for the first time in the early 13th century. Several translations were made later, and the Welsh versions were entitled *Brut y Brenhinoedd*.⁶² Nine copies of it dated before 1400 are still extant and we have preserved it in about sixty manuscripts altogether (Parry 1955: 85; Roberts 1971: xxiv). The Welsh editions render some of the proper names differently and more in accord with the Welsh language (Koch 2006e: 927), and there are examples of scribes inserting portions of new material (Roberts 2006b: 299), but *Brut y Brenhinoedd* is on the whole quite a close rendering of the Latin text.

Geoffrey himself held that his history was a Latin translation of an ancient British book which had been given to him by the archdeacon of Oxford. For this reason he could claim that his work told the true history of the Britons (Monmouth 1963: 3). With the exception of a few contemporary critics, *Historia Regum Britanniae* was regarded as a trustworthy account of the British past throughout the Middle Ages (Roberts 2006b: 298). Among the critics was Giraldus Cambrensis. In his *Itinerarium Cambriae* he tells of a man who had a particularly strong contact with the world of the spirits. He placed the gospel of St. John upon his bosom when demons troubled him and they all vanished, but if that book was substituted with *Historia Regum Britanniae* they reappeared in even greater numbers because of the falseness of its content.⁶³ Geoffrey's work was not rejected by a majority of scholars before the 16th century, and it was frequently copied in Wales until the 18th (Roberts

⁶¹ Koch, J. T., "Historia Regum Britanniae", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 927.

⁶² Roberts, B., "Brut y Brenhinedd", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 121.

⁶³ Cambrensis, G., *The Journey through Wales/The Description of Wales*, Thorpe, L. (ed.), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1978, 117-118.

1971: 61-62; Roberts 2006b: 299). Modern day historians would not use Geoffrey's work as an account of the past (Snyder 2005: 268), and it differs from the aforementioned texts in that respect, but this is no argument against its central position within the cultural memory during the Middle Ages (Assmann 2006: 176).

The depiction of the battle of Badon is found in Book IX, chapters three and four, and its excessiveness surpasses the former accounts (Monmouth 1963: 186-189). Before the battle we are told of Arthur's increasing power and how he defeats a Saxon army in Scotland. The Saxons convince the Britons to spare their lives and are allowed to sail back to the continent. While travelling at sea they change their minds and go back to Britain where we are told "they devastated the land as far as the Severn sea" (*op. cit.* 187), and they lay siege to *pagus badonis/Kaer Vadon* (Monmouth 1929: 437; Roberts 1971: 23).⁶⁴ The forthcoming battle becomes the object of two speeches, one by Arthur and one by the archbishop Dubric, in which they stress the Saxon treachery and the obligations the warriors owe their countrymen and God, who will give them victory and take the fallen ones up to his kingdom. Thereafter we are told how Arthur equips himself for the battle, and the image of Mary is mentioned here as being on his shield Pridwen. The battle is described as brutal and the Britons make numerous assaults while the Saxons stand their ground. By nightfall the latter pitch camp upon a hill. The day after Arthur orders his men towards the hill. Many are killed before they reach the top, where they fight the enemy for a long time. Geoffrey relates that Arthur at last grows impatient, draws his sword and with the help of God kills everyone he touches with one blow. In this way he slays 470 men. His heroism inspires his men and the hill falls together with thousands of Saxons, including the leaders Colgrin and Baldulf. The Saxons never regained their strength in Britain after the battle of Badon during Arthur's reign. The battle is followed by the subduing of the Scots and the Picts by Arthur and conquests abroad starting with Ireland (Monmouth 1963: 189-194).

It follows from the synopsis that Badon was a watershed in both Arthur's career and in British history, as it marks the end of the Saxon aggression and the beginning of a new phase in which Arthur creates his empire. The 470 victims of Arthur's frenzy recalls the 940 mentioned in *Historia Brittonum*, Geoffrey's number being exactly half of the other. The exaltations of Arthur's role are typical for both accounts. Furthermore, the image of Mary

⁶⁴ Kaer Vadon (mod. Caerfaddon) is the Welsh name of Bath and it seems therefore clear that the scholars who translated the Latin text in the Middle Ages regarded it as the location of the battle.

occurs in both depictions, and it should be mentioned that Geoffrey agrees with today's scholars with regard to *scuit* and *scuid* (he may indeed be the inspiration for this theory). *Historia Regum Britanniae* is the only text that gives a detailed background for the battle, about which we are told that Arthur pursued his enemies until they reached *nemore colidonis* (Monmouth 1929: 436). He may have got this idea from the battle list which locates the seventh battle *in silva Celidonis*.⁶⁵ Geoffrey reintroduces the notion of a siege that Gildas mentions, but which is missing in the other two texts. Gildas refers to an *obsessionis badonici montis*,⁶⁶ but we are not told who the besiegers and the besieged were. Geoffrey, however, tells us that the Saxons besieged the city, but it doesn't seem to be of major importance as Arthur and his army are not the ones who were besieged, but arrived from the north. The notion of a hill is not present at all in *Annales Cambriae*, but Geoffrey exploits this detail to create a dramatic fighting sequence where Arthur and his soldiers are forced to charge upwards. He is successful in the way he creates expectations and excitement through the two stirring monologues, the detailed description of how Arthur puts on his war gear, the depiction of the development of the battle and at last Arthur's battle frenzy. Geoffrey may be said to strengthen the emotional force of this memory through his dramatic account in a way which wasn't possible within the annals genre and which was only slightly exploited by pseudo-Nennius and Gildas.

The status of Badon in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*

In the former chapter I argued that Karadawc's speech in which he claims that Arthur has promised to be at *Gweith Uadon* introduces a plot: the famous battle of Badon (Richards 1948: 8). I hold therefore that the battle in certain respects must be considered as the subject of the dream, although it is overshadowed by the *gwyddbwyll* episode with regard to the amount of space used. I will in the following discuss some of the main differences between *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and the earlier accounts with regard to Badon, and then go into detail regarding the relationship between *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

The unity of the British forces at Badon is a vital aspect of the event. This becomes apparent when comparing the battle with the kin slaying at the battle of Camlan, which is carefully depicted by Geoffrey, mentioned in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and possibly alluded to

⁶⁵ <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/histbrit.html>.

⁶⁶ <http://www.kmatthews.org.uk/history/gildas/gildas6.html>.

in the annals. The British sentiment of unity sustains a serious blow in the dream as Arthur's squires start molesting Owein's ravens, and the fight between the two British hosts puts the battle of Badon on hold.

The former accounts identify the enemy as the Saxons. This is stated directly in all the texts, except in the annals which relate that the Britons gained the day, from which one can plausibly deduce that the defeated army was Saxon. It is only Geoffrey who mentions who the Saxon leaders were, and he identifies them as Colgrin, Baldulf and Cheldric. The Saxon chief is identified as Osla Gyllellwa[w]r in the dream and the problems concerning his identity have already been discussed. He is usually regarded as one of Arthur's knights who at some stage was transposed to become a Saxon, and Osla is depicted as one of their kings in *Brenhinoedd y Saeson* (Bromwich, Evans 1992: 94). One could argue from the chapter in *Historia Brittonum* which includes the battle list that Ohta and Arthur were contemporaries (while according to Geoffrey Ohta had been slain before Arthur gained the throne (Monmouth 1963: 181)) (Giles 1841: 28), and that the similarities between their names may explain why the author depicts Osla as Arthur's opponent at Badon. On the other hand, the author seems to have been familiar with *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and I don't think it is out of the question that the enemy at Badon could be regarded as a disloyal Briton by a contemporary audience.

The main difference between the aforementioned texts and *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is that the battle never takes place in the latter; it is merely announced. Read as history, this would be a dramatic rewriting of the Welsh past, as we are told the battle was postponed for a month and a fortnight. Kei's proclamation that "Whoever wishes to follow Arthur, let him be in Cornwall tonight, and let everyone else come to meet Arthur at the end of the truce" (Gantz 1976-191), must be understood as a threat to those who won't join Arthur to Cornwall (to pledge him allegiance?). This threat seems to lack credibility both to Ronabwy and the readers, who have witnessed the behaviour of Arthur and his men as Arthur appears to do his best to avoid fighting his enemies. I would argue that the battle is not temporarily postponed, but rather effectively cancelled. The tale can therefore be said to shake a pillar in the cultural memory of the Welsh.

Badon and the Welsh tradition

Ignoring *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and *Brut y Brenhinoedd*, which is a translation of a Latin work, there is an almost complete absence of references to the battle of Badon in

medieval Welsh literature. The battle is mentioned a few times in the works of the *Gogynfeirdd*. Badon is alluded to in the praise poem *I Hywel ap Goronwy*, which is found in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* and may be dated to about 1100 (Jones 1955: 149-151; Jarman 1982: 51).⁶⁷ There are three references to it in *The Hendregadredd Manuscript*, all of them in poems by Cynddelw (fl. 1155-1195) addressed to Owain Gwynedd and Hywel ap Owain.⁶⁸ The storylines of *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi*, *Cyffranc Lludd a Llefelys* and *Breuddwyd Macsen* seem to take place before Arthur's reign, and one would consequently not expect any reference to Badon in those tales. Its absence from *Owain*, *Geraint fab Erbin* and *Peredur fab Efrog* might be explained by their connection to their French counterparts which don't show any interest in the British past. It has been remarked that this tendency also applies to the three romances, which lack the strong sense of place and geography which is characteristic for the other *Mabinogion* tales.⁶⁹ The case of *Culhwch ac Olwen* is rather more suspect as this tale is of local origin. The battle of Camlan, on the other hand, is mentioned in the court list in connection with Moruran eil Tegit, Sande Pryt Angel, Chynwyl Sant and Gwynn Hyuar maer Kernyw a Dyfneint, (Bromwich, Evans 1992: 8-9, 11). The battle of Badon is not alluded to in *y Gododdin* or in *The Book of Taliesin* as far as I can see. Most surprising is its complete absence from the triads, which to a considerable degree deal with Arthurian material. The triads seem, however, to have a close relationship to the tales, and Badon's absence from the triads accords rather well with its marginal role in medieval Welsh prose.⁷⁰

The Cambro-Latin sources to the battle are, compared with the Welsh ones, relatively early. They date from the 6th century to the second quarter of the 12th, while few Welsh texts predate 1000. The dating of the older poetry is a highly debated topic and the most archaic is pushed back to the 6th century by some scholars,⁷¹ but the earliest allusion to the battle in the poetry belongs in any case to the *Gogynfeirdd*. The absence of any depictions of Badon postdating the middle of the 12th century can be seen in contrast to the great popularity which *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Brut y Brenhinoedd* enjoyed from this period

⁶⁷ Jones, T., *Brut y Tywysogyon. Red Book of Hergest Version*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1955, 149-151.

⁶⁸ Morris-Jones, J., Parry-Williams, T. H., *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd 1971, 84, 96, 101;

Owen, A. P., "Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 533.

⁶⁹ Jones, T., Jones, G., *The Mabinogion*, Everyman's Library, New York 2000, xxxiii-xxxvi.

⁷⁰ Grooms, C., "triads [2] Trioedd Ynys Prydain", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 1687-1688.

⁷¹ Koch, J. T., "Cynfeirdd", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 536.

onwards. I am tempted to see this phenomenon in connection with Assmann's concept of canonisation. This term has been employed by Roberts for describing *Brut y Brenhinoedd*'s position within the Welsh tradition (Roberts 2006b: 298), but it is unclear what he means by the term "canonisation".

According to Assmann, a text may be said to be canonised when it stops being constantly edited and acquires a definite form and enhanced status (Assmann 2006: 117-119). If we regard the battle of Badon as a text, Geoffrey may be said to have given it its definite shape through *Historia Regum Britanniae*, although the fact of there being numerous versions and translations means that it does not fulfil Assmann's requirement concerning literal transmission. When a definite version of a text, i.e. the definite depiction of an event in this case, has been established, there is no need of different versions; these would be regarded as false. Although the concept of canonisation might not explain the almost complete absence of any references to Badon in medieval Welsh literature, it may explain the lack of any elaborate depictions of it postdating Geoffrey's work. The possibly canonical status of *Historia Regum Britanniae* might throw additional light upon the position of the battle in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and the tale as such.

Is the dream based on the depiction of the battle of Badon in *Historia Regum Britanniae*?

Many scholars have claimed that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* was familiar with *Historia Regum Britanniae*, most often with reference to the occurrence of Kadwr Iarll Kernyw and Howel uab Emyr Llydaw, which has been regarded as Geoffrey's own creations (Richards 1948: xv). Although this seems probable, the argument is not waterproof as Geoffrey could have had local sources mentioning these characters that have been lost after the Middle Ages. Alternatively, the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* could have found the names indirectly through other texts. I will, on the other hand, claim that there may be further connections between the two texts. If a satirical intent is to be ascribed to it, the text must be regarded as referring to something familiar to the reader which it twists. This topic has been discussed by Slotkin (Slotkin 1989: 95), but he is careful not to refer to any particular texts while discussing *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s relations to the Arthurian tradition. The only one of the aforementioned texts which aims at depicting the battle in greater detail is *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Bearing in mind its possible status as a canonical text, I consider Geoffrey's account to be the most plausible candidate for a template for the dream. This matter has already been touched upon by Richards, who merely mentions Geoffrey's

work as one of several sources of inspiration for the author of the dream (Richards 1948: xv). Foster and Fulton also remark on the relationship between the texts, Foster pointing out some parallels between the two Badon scenes (Foster 1961: 41-42), while Fulton suggests that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* may at least in part satirise Geoffrey's portrayal of Arthur (Fulton 1999: 46-47). I believe, however, that new light might be shed on the relationship between the texts by a closer comparison of the two accounts.

Both the battle of Badon and the battle of Camlan play a part in the dream, although the order in which they occur in *Historia Regum Britanniae* has been reversed in it. There are, however, other elements which reoccur in the dream as well. If we adopt a more narrow perspective, concentrating on chapters three and four of Book IX which deal with the battle (Monmouth 1963: 186-189), we can discern other motifs common to the two texts. In *Historia Regum Britanniae* the Britons and the Saxons agree upon a covenant after the battle in Scotland, which claims that the latter should give up their gold and silver, give hostages, go back to the continent and pay Arthur tribute in the future. I find it possible that the truce in the dream may be a kind of reflection of this agreement which the Saxons ignore after a short while. Tribute and gold and silver are also found in the dream, as the donkeys from the islands of Greece reach Arthur with tribute consisting of the aforementioned treasures. In Geoffrey's account Arthur's mercy becomes an opportunity for the Saxons to attack the island once again, and the battle of Badon happens as a consequence of it. The truce in the dream may appear as a peaceful solution to the conflict before the story breaks off. However, the decision to follow Kadyrieith's advice would seem foolish to those who knew Geoffrey's account. The truce is granted in both cases after the Britons have been holding counsel. This is only briefly mentioned by Geoffrey, while the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* gives a detailed record of the participants and how the decision was reached. The list of councillors has been discussed, but although there is a similar list of the guests who attended the Whitsuntide festival later in *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*op. cit.* 198-200), few if any of the names occur in both, and it is more likely that this feature has been borrowed from *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

Another motif common to the two accounts is the arming of the emperor. This constitutes a highly elaborate section in *Historia Regum Britanniae* which amounts to roughly 15% of the depiction of the battle. We are told that he arms himself with a habergeon, a gold helm with an image of a dragon, his shield Pridwen with the image of Mary, his sword Caliburn and his lance Ron. The actual arming takes up less space in the

dream, where we are told that Kadwr comes forth with a sword with a design of serpents looking like they shoot flames, and which terrify the whole host. This may be regarded as an exaggeration of the earlier description. The rest of the equipment which is brought in has little to do with arms and warfare: the invisibility mantle, which is used as a carpet and seemingly doesn't make anyone invisible, the large chair and at last the board game. These pleasing luxury objects stand in stark contrast to the grim weapons Geoffrey's Arthur arms himself with. The detailed description of Arthur in *Historia Regum Britanniae* could be said to have something in common with the great number of detailed descriptions (none of which describes Arthur) in the dream, for example of the messengers, although these focus just as much upon the clothing as the weapons.

Geoffrey's account is dominated by speeches, which make up about a quarter of the section. Arthur and his bishop Dubric are described as addressing their soldiers and inciting them to greater deeds. Arthur focuses on the betrayal of the Saxons and what the soldiers owe their fellow countrymen. Arthur's declaration of truce in the dream stands thus in contrast to the invigoration of his men in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The depiction of Arthur together with his bishop, the union of the secular and ecclesiastical power, is present in both the accounts. Archbishop Dubric of Caerleon gives the longest speech where he ascertains that it is an honourable deed to die for the country and that the fallen ones will obtain salvation. Bishop Betwin of the dream doesn't utter a single word, not even when he becomes a victim of Adaon's splashing, and appears thus as a contrast to the inciting Dubric. The closest parallel to these speeches in the dream is Karadawc's reminder to the emperor remarking that Arthur and his army should be at Badon by noon. This scene looks quite strange compared with the one in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, as a man of rather inferior rank motivates the emperor to go to war. This may be another example of how the author has borrowed from, reversed and twisted the older account.

The greatest difference between the two is found in the depiction of the battle. This section reaches a climax in *Historia Regum Britanniae* with Arthur's heroic intervention. The battle of Badon doesn't take place in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and the dramatic event is exchanged, as it were, with the *gwyddbwyll* and the clash between ravens and squires. It might have been the intention of the author to present this conflict, where British warriors fight against their own kinsmen and the warlords confront each other by playing *gwyddbwyll*, as an unheroic contrast to the battle of Badon. It should furthermore be noticed how the ravens gain an upper hand against Arthur's men as soon as Owein loses his patience

and his standard is raised, and the emperor's troops seem for a moment to be on the verge of defeat. The conflict ends as Arthur intervenes, not as a heroic charging warrior, but through crushing the gaming pieces in anger, an action which makes Owein lower the standard. It is unclear where the author got the idea of the *gwyddbwyll* from. The board game occurs in both *Peredur fab Efrog*, where the hero sees two sets of gaming pieces playing against each other in a forlorn castle (Gantz 1976: 254), and in *Breuddwyd Macsen*, where Macsen in his dream goes into a castle where he sees two lads playing and an old man carving gaming pieces (*op. cit.* 120-121). It is tempting to argue that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* got the idea of both the *gwyddbwyll* and the dream from *Breuddwyd Macsen*, and it might be significant that the gaming pieces in both tales are made of gold. With regard to the use of dream as a literary device, it must be remembered that the dream takes up considerably less space and plays a different role in *Breuddwyd Macsen* than in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. I will discuss the use of dream as a literary device in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* later.

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy and the depiction of the battle in *Historia Regum Britanniae* have some important elements in common, some of which may be regarded as intentionally twisted and reproduced as contrasts in the dream, but there are also elements and motifs in the dream which don't seem to have any clear connection with Geoffrey's account of the battle. Some of these, like the splashing on the emperor and the bishop, may be seen as having a satirising function to which one wouldn't expect to have any parallel in the other account. Furthermore there are differences with regard to where Arthur arrives from and where he goes after the battle. According to Geoffrey, Arthur is in Scotland when he hears of the siege and he travels southwards via Dumbarton to Somerset. After the victory, he hastens quickly back to Dumbarton to aid his friend Hoel against the Picts and the Scots. The situation is less clear in the dream, but Rhonabwy meets the army (possibly on their way from Scotland) in Powys at Ryt y Groes on the Severn from where they travel to Kaer Vadon. After the truce they go to Cornwall, which seems to be the location of Arthur's court. I believe that the mention of Ryt y Groes is due to the author being of Powysian origin and writing for a Powysian audience, a presumption which is supported by the frame tale. The trip back to his court in Cornwall after the truce stands in stark contrast to Arthur's journey to Dumbarton in *Historia Regum Britanniae* where he hastens to drive back his enemies, but it agrees with the general depiction of Arthur in the dream as a poor ruler.

The author may seem to have a tendency of not simply copying features of the other text, but of sometimes inverting the order of events and twisting motifs, minimising some

elements while inflating others. This complicates comparison. There are, as we have seen, a number of motifs which reoccur in the two accounts, but that doesn't prove that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* based his tale upon the former account. Furthermore, the comical and sometimes absurd elements together with the dream's Powesian setting give a rather different story. I have tried to demonstrate that there might be a close relationship between the two texts by pointing at certain common features, however transformed, in the two tales, but I must leave it at that. I can only conclude that there is a possibility that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* used *Historia Regum Britanniae* as a basis for his tale, but that conclusive evidence is lacking.

Concluding remarks

I would characterise the depictions of the memory of Badon from Gildas to Geoffrey as remarkably consistent. The event is promoted as an important turning point in the history of the Welsh in all the accounts. There is a tendency of it being developed into the most prominent memory of the early days of the war against the Saxons, and the battle symbolises the ability of the Britons to stand together against the enemy. The battle as a memory is reinforced by its early connection with Arthur, and the descriptions of his deeds give the battle an almost mythic and certainly legendary status. The strength of the memory is further enhanced through Geoffrey's dramatic depiction of it in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. I have argued that this work achieved a canonical status during the Middle Ages on the basis of its frequent copying and its position as a renowned account of the Welsh past. Furthermore, the work may be said to have given the battle of Badon its definite form as there seems to be, with the exception of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, no later accounts of the battle in the Middle Ages. The Badon of the dream breaks clearly with the earlier accounts, particularly through its unheroic storyline and the fact that the battle doesn't take place in it. There is a possibility that the author has used the account of the battle in *Historia Regum Britanniae* as a template for the dream, but his way of inverting and twisting the tale makes it difficult to offer any decisive arguments for such a relationship.

4.3 How does the dream function as a depiction of the past in relation to the frame tale as a description of contemporary society?

In the two former chapters I have analysed the dream and discussed its relation to the medieval Welsh historical writing. I will in the following chapter analyse the frame in much the same way as the dream, and then discuss how the two parts relate to each other.

Synopsis of the frame tale

The introductory section of the frame tale may be said to consist of two parts. The first is concerned with the reign of Madawc uab Maredudd and the troublesome relationship he has with his brother Iorwoerth. We are told that Iorwoerth is sad because he doesn't possess anything like the power and honour of his ruling brother. Together with his companions he decides to ask Madawc for *gossymdeith* "maintenance", and he is offered horses, arms, honour, the leadership of his brother's war band and equal rank with the prince himself. Iorwoerth turns his brother's offer down and goes to England to plunder. Here he kills, burns down houses and takes prisoners. Madawc and his men hold counsel as well and agree to place a hundred men in every three provinces to search for Iorwoerth. The arable land, *rychtir*, between Aber Ceirawc and Ryt Wilure is one of the areas where men are stationed, and this district was regarded as the most prosperous in the kingdom. We are not told anything else about the dynastic conflict, and the focus is moved to some of Madawc's warriors who are seeking lodging in the aforementioned area. Thus ends the first part (Gantz 1976: 178).

The second part begins with Ronabwy approaching the house of Heilyn Goch uab Kadwgawn uab Idon together with Cynnwric Vrychgoch and Cadwgawn Vras. The black flat-fronted house is described in detail as having a bumpy floor covered with holly stems, cow dung and urine, and as being filled with smoke. They find an old uncivilised woman inside it sitting by the fire. Thereafter a man and a woman enter, seemingly the landlord and his wife, both being in a bad state. They give their guests a tepid greeting and offer them a poor meal. The weather turns stormy and the warriors go to their sleeping accommodations, which consist of half-eaten straws and dirty worn out bedclothes which are full of fleas. Ronabwy doesn't manage to sleep, and he goes to a yellow ox hide lying on a platform

which he presumes is more comfortable than his first bed. He falls asleep on the skin and is given a *drych* “sight” (*op. cit.* 178-179; Richards 1948: 3).

The end of the frame tale is far less substantial, but may also be regarded as consisting of two sections. The first is made up by the short ending of the actual frame tale “And when he woke up he was on the yellow ox hide after having slept three nights and three days” (Richards 1948: 21 (my translation)). The text ends with an epilogue stating that neither bard nor storyteller knows the dream without a book because of all the colours that were on men, horses and arms (Gantz 1976: 191).

Episode: The conflict of Madawc and Iorwoerth

Iorwoerth is sad because of his lack of power and honour and envies his brother, and together with his friends he decides to ask Madawc for *gossymdeith*. His craving doesn't seem to agree entirely with his enquiry unless we give *gossymdeith* a considerably wide meaning. Madawc, however, offers him arms, position as officer, equal rank to himself and honour, which must be regarded as rather generous, and from this it seems like the term should be understood as sustenance or maintenance. Iorwoerth may, from a modern point of view, appear as foolish and greedy when he rejects his brother's offer. Carson has, on the other hand, drawn attention to the opening sentence where Madawc is said to be ruling Powys in its entirety, and points out that the principality, according to Welsh custom, was split between the sons of the former ruler (Carson 1974: 291-292). What is meant by *gossymdeith* and equal standing is not entirely clear, but Carson may be right in claiming that Madawc doesn't offer that which his brother possibly wants the most, i.e. land. Madawc may turn out to be the one responsible for the conflict if we take this perspective. The narrator doesn't show any clear bias or attitude in his description of the conflict, his style having been compared with that of a *Brut* (Slotkin 1989: 95), and it is therefore difficult at this point to discern the author's intention in including it.

Madawc's need to react upon his brother's raids eastwards may be seen in connection with the political situation of 12th century Wales. The primary menace to Powys in this period was Gwynedd. Madawc became, as a part of the struggle to stay independent, an ally of Henry 2. of England, and his brother's raids could be seen as a threat to this pact (Richards 1948: xxv-xxvii). It should be noted, however, that neither the alliance with England nor the hostilities between Powys and Gwynedd are referred to by the author. Fulton's reading of the section as a demonstration of the faults of the political system based

upon local princes and Powys' weak position in the rivalry with England and Gwynedd is therefore dependent on the readers' knowledge concerning the political situation (Fulton 1999: 42-43).

Madawc uab Maredud ruled Powys from 1132 to 1160 and is, as opposed to the majority of the characters in the dream, first and foremost regarded as a historical figure with a fictional career limited to this tale (Richards 1948: xxv-xxvii). He is the subject of several poems by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr and is eulogised by Gwalchmai ap Meilyr as well (Parry-Williams, Morris-Jones 1971: 111-116, 152-153). He inherited the entire Powys from his father Maredudd ap Bleddyn. Madawc's reign was characterised by the hostile relationship to Gwynedd, a kingdom which had been restored through a rebellion lead by Gruffudd ap Cynan in 1094. Madawc was a contemporary of Gruffudd's son and successor Owain Gwynedd, who tried to regain for Gwynedd the position as the leading kingdom in the north. It was in this struggle that Madawc took the side of Henry 2. (Richards 1948: xxv-xxvii; Snyder 2003: 230). Madawc died in 1160 and is remembered in *Brut y Tywysogion* as a great prince (Jones 1955: 140-141). He was the last of the local dynasty to rule Powys in its entirety. The kingdom was shared between his brother, nephew and sons after his death, and a period of dynastic feuding followed. Powys was later split into two parts; the northern one being in the possession of Madawc's descendants, while the southern half was ruled by Gwenwynwyn, a son of Madawc's nephew. The southern part was the foremost of the two. Powys became the weaker kingdom in a struggle involving Gwynedd and England, and after a period of unstable alliances Gwenwynwyn was forced to flee his kingdom. After his death the rest of the Powesian noblemen swore allegiance to other lords, and Powys lost its independence (Richards 1976: xxv-xxx, 24).

Iorwoerth is also considered as a historical figure and is mentioned as Iorwerth Goch in *Brut y Tywysogion* (one may indeed wonder if Iorwerth's nickname has, intentionally or not, been given to Heilyn Goch in the frame tale, who is described as redheaded) (Jones 1955: 144-145). He fought together with his brother and Henry 2. against Owain Gwynedd in 1157, and was, just as his brother, eulogised by Cynddelw. He received some land after his brother's death, but was expelled from this land by his nephews after having given *castell y Waun* to Henry 2. (Richards 1948: 24-25). The historical sources do not confirm that Iorwoerth rebelled against his brother as we are told in the frame tale, but they don't necessarily contradict it either. Richards has argued on the background of how Madawc favoured his nephews by giving them Cyfeiliog that the relationship between the brothers

was strained (*op. cit.* 25). One could further claim that the author hardly could have made up the story of the rebellion if his contemporaries knew that it never happened. Such an argument would, however, only be sound if it could be stated that the tale was written within a relatively short period after the rebellion had occurred, and that is rather uncertain.

Episode: The lodging in the house of Heilyn Goch

The house is described as dirty and filthy with excrements and urine, there are only stems left of the holly branches that lie on the uneven floor, and the room is full of smoke from the fire which is tended by an uncivilised hag. The landlord and his wife are depicted as withered and unfriendly and offer but poor food and bedding. Even the weather is terrible. A close parallel to the hideous house is found in the Irish 11th century tale *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*. The main character of the story decides to abandon his life as a scholar and become a poet. He resolves to seek out the king of Munster, and on his way southwards he stays a night at a monastery's guesthouse. The house is described as being almost inaccessible because of water and snow, it is filled with pieces of thatching and ash, and the bed is full of lice and fleas. After waiting for a long time he is offered a poor meal of oats, and we are later told how the abbot tries to kill him. *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* has, like *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, been interpreted as a satirical tale, but here the satire seems to be aimed at the church (Ford 1999: 112-118). The houses have certain elements in common, for example the flea-ridden beds and the poor food, but these parallels are far from being sufficient to prove that the author of the Welsh tale was inspired by the Irish.

While Ronabwy's dream is characterised by a tension between the grandeur of the descriptions and the meaningless and unheroic storyline, the atmosphere in this section is rather uniform. Nevertheless, there seems to be an inconsistency between the actual depiction of *rychtir Powys* (taking the house and its inhabitants as representing the region) and the description of it given above "as the equal of the best three commots in Powys" (Gantz 1976: 178). This may be understood as an instance of humour and as a premonition of the discrepancies in the dream between how things may appear and how they turn out to be.

The portrayal in this section is beyond doubt negative, yet it is not clear how it should be understood. On the one hand, the house is nasty and the people unfriendly, but they are, on the other hand, depicted as poor and close to starvation. They furthermore seem to offer their guests whatever they have. If the region described was the most prosperous in

Powys, one certainly gets the impression that the kingdom was in a bad state during Madawc's reign. Fulton points out that Dillystwn, where the house is located, lies close to the border, which makes it a likely hiding place for Iorwoerth. Dillystwn was the scene of several border clashes which, according to Fulton, may explain why a war band would thrive in the region and why the people are poor and unwelcoming (Fulton 1999: 45). If we follow Carson's thoughts concerning Madawc not giving his brother his proper share of the kingdom (Carson 1974: 290-292), one could see a link between an unjust ruler and the land's poor condition. This motif, an aspect of the hierogamos which played a central role in many pre-Christian religions, occurs frequently in Irish tradition, but is not particularly prominent in the Welsh (Rowland 1990: 145-146). On the basis of the description of the land and the political unrest, I believe, however, that it could be reasonable to interpret the scene in this perspective.

The only object which stands apart from the rest in the filthy house is the yellow ox-hide, "A blaenbren oed gan vn onadunt a gaffei vynet ar y croen hwnnw" (Richards 1948: 2). *Blaenbren*, understood as good luck, is rather ambiguous in this context. Ronabwy decides to lie down upon it in order to get away from the fleas and get some sleep, and in this respect good luck may be understood as escaping the flea-ridden bedding. Good luck may also be seen in relation to the vision he has while sleeping. With regard to such an interpretation, the strange dream must be perceived as profitable. Receiving a vision after having been in contact with an ox is a motif we find in other texts as well and already in the classical literature (Breeze 1997: 86). In the Irish tale *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* we are told of how a man, after having drunk the broth of an ox and falling asleep, sees the next king in his dreams, the ritual being called *tarbhfeis*.⁷² The two dreams have that in common that those who dream see a king, but while the dreamer in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* gets a prophecy of the future ruler, the motif appears inverted in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as Ronabwy dreams about one from the past. A variant of the motif is found in the tradition concerning the Irish manuscript *Lebor na h-Uidre* which relates that those who died on the skin of which the manuscript was made were granted eternal life.⁷³ An interesting parallel with regard to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is that of Brutus who, according to *Historia Regum*

⁷² Koch, J. T., Carey, J., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, Celtic Studies Publications, Aberystwyth 2003, 168-169.

⁷³ Hellmuth, P. S., "Lebor na hUidre", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 1128.

Britanniae, sleeps on the hide of a hind before the altar of Diana, a goddess who then visits him in a dream and tells him to settle in Britain (Monmouth 1963: 17-19).

The name *Ronabwy* seems to be unique and the character appears, with the exception of later references in poetry, only in this tale. The name may be interpreted as a composite of *rhon* “lance” and *abwy* “carcass”. He appears as rather anonymous both in the frame and in the dream. We don’t get to know anything about him in the text except that he is searching for Iorwoerth, and one may wonder if he has been created for this tale. Ronabwy does not seem to follow any particular intentions, nor does he contribute to the storyline or take any initiatives apart from lying down on the ox hide. His unusual name, the lack of a patronymic, and the fact that he is mentioned, in contrast to his companions, without place of origin reinforce the impression of anonymity. *Cynnwric Vrychgoch* and *Cadwgawn Vras* are described as being from respectively Mawdwy and Moelure, both being locations within the kingdom of Powys (Richards 1948: map). They do not seem to be known outside this story either. They are mentioned with nicknames, but without patronymics and that makes them difficult to place in any particular setting. Ronabwy dreams that they are with him at Ryt y Groes, but they are not mentioned after Idawc’s conversation with Arthur.

The landlord *Heilyn Goch uab Kadwgawn uab Idon* is referred to with both his patronymic and his grandfather’s name, and his home is precisely localized in Dillystwn Trefan. He is described in negative terms as being withered, unfriendly and poor, and his house’s lousy condition may be said to reflect back on him as well. He is, not surprisingly, absent from *Brut y Tywysogion*, but Carson has argued that he is a historical person and claims to have identified and placed him in his proper context (Carson 1974: 292-293). In an earlier chapter I have demonstrated that her argumentation is not convincing and that her dating of the flourish of this character to 1385 at the earliest is rather implausible. However, I find it possible that Heilyn Goch was a historical figure, but in that case I believe it is more likely that he would belong to the period of Madawc and Iorwoerth.

The end of the frame tale and the epilogue

The closing sentence does not tell us much, but one may wonder how Ronabwy could have been sleeping for such a long period considering the events of his dream. The notion of sleeping three days and three nights may well be a standard phrase for ending a dream tale. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that the same time span also occurs in the entry concerning the battle of Badon in *Annales Cambriae* (Williams 1860: 4). The notion of time

is present neither in *De Excidio Britanniae* nor in *Historia Brittonum*, and the account in *Historia Regum Britanniae* is rather unclear in this respect. In the latter the battle itself seems to last for two days (Monmouth 1963: 187-189), but if we with regard to the dream add one day for the travel from Ryt y Groes, the comment in the frame tale could make sense. However, we should probably be careful not to put too much into this.

Scholars have given considerable attention to the lack of a proper end to the frame tale (Slotkin 1989:103; Richards 1948: xlv-xlv). The tale of Ronabwy's search for Iorwoerth is ended just as abruptly as the dream, and the author may be said to disappoint his audience one last time by not telling how the conflict between the brothers ended. Slotkin has concluded that, since the frame tale neither offers a proper conclusion to the conflict between the brothers nor an explanation concerning the strange dream, the meaning of the tale must be searched for in the dream itself (Slotkin 1989: 105). I concur with Slotkin's argumentation, but I will add that the author's use of a frame tale and the placing of his tale about Arthur within a dream serve a function, and that a meaning may be found in the interplay between the frame and the dream. Putting myself in the danger of forcing modern literary techniques upon medieval literature, I wonder if the author intended to make the reader reflect upon Ronabwy's experience in the same way as Ronabwy himself must have done after waking up. However this may be, it appears as a likely response to the tale as the readers, through the author's employment of a dream within a frame tale and the usage of perspective, take part in Ronabwy's journey back in time.

The greater part of the end piece is constituted by the epilogue, which claims that the tale couldn't be known without a book because of the many colours mentioned in the descriptions. Parry holds that it functioned as an explanation of why it was read from a book and not recited from memory. He claims that the real reason for the need of a book is embedded in the nature of the story itself as *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is an entirely written composition and was therefore never a part of the oral tradition, and that the details of the story aren't any more complex than those of *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Parry 1955: 82). Parry's analysis has been accepted to a great degree by later scholars and developed further (Roberts 1976: 232; Mac Cana 1991: 88-89).

Bollard has demonstrated that the descriptions in the tale follow a well developed pattern and therefore did not pose any problem for the disciplined minds of the storytellers. The author, according to Bollard, employs the epilogue in an ironical way just as he exaggerates the use of descriptions and digressions in order to give attention to and poke fun

at the act of storytelling (Bollard 1985: 156-159). Slotkin has pointed out that the epilogue undermines whatever performance value the descriptions may have had, and he agrees with Bollard that it directs the focus of the readers at storytelling and the storytellers (Slotkin 1989: 100-101, 109).

How does the frame tale relate to the dream?

The relationship between the frame tale and the dream lies at the bottom of the very question concerning the meaning of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and scholars have had considerably different views upon the matter. Proinsias Mac Cana has stated that the text is a parody right through, and that we therefore shouldn't search for any deeper meaning within it whatsoever (Mac Cana 1992: 89). I don't think any scholar would deny that the tale has a considerable humorous aspect, but to claim in consequence that it doesn't carry a message is not a logical deduction. I find it more likely that the author has employed the satire to communicate his message more effectively. Dafydd Glyn Jones doesn't seem to consider the tale as meaningless, but sees a possibility of there not being a connection between the frame and the dream at all, and that the author may have regarded this as a part of his satire on the vision tales (Jones 1974: 177, 179-180).

Among those who argue for a connection between the two parts, the interpretations differ with regard to whether the frame and the dream are seen as contrasts or parallels. Charles-Edwards and Richards have focused on the poorness and smallness of Ronabwy's age compared with the splendour of Arthur's time. Following Slotkin, I have argued that this dichotomy is ill founded, as the greatness in the dream lies in the usage of literary devices, mainly descriptions, while there is nothing heroic about the storyline. Carson points out that the conflict between Madawc and Iorwoerth in the frame tale is echoed in the dream through the mentioning of the battle of Camlan and the depiction of the strife between Arthur and Owein. She contrasts these three conflicts between Welshmen with the battle of Badon against Osla Gyllellwa[w]r which Arthur decides to postpone in the dream (Carson 1974: 298, 303). Fulton interprets the interplay between the frame and the dream as a demonstration of two political systems which differ from each other, but which are both unfortunate with regard to Powys (Fulton 1999: 42).

The opinion held concerning the seriousness of the tale seems to some degree to be dependent on the view of dream as a literary device and its usage here. It has been argued that Ronabwy's vision is a parody upon the incubation known from the classical literature

and the *tarbhfeis* in Irish tradition. This argumentation is based on the circumstances in which Ronabwy has his dream (he lies down on the skin in order to escape the fleas and get some sleep) which is seen in contrast to tales in which the vision is obtained through a ritual where the seer lies down intending to receive a prophecy. That Ronabwy's dream is about the past and not the future has also been cited in support of such an interpretation (Mac Cana 1991: 90). Carson, on the other hand, argues that Ronabwy obtains access to otherworldly wisdom relevant to the conflict between the brothers through the dream (Carson 1974: 294-295). Satire as literary device and dream as phenomenon are both often ambiguous, as it is frequently difficult to discern between the serious and the satirical in a text, and what is true and false in a dream. These circumstances make it problematic to reach a safe conclusion, but there may be arguments, however inverted the motif may be, for interpreting the dream as communicating a message.

The ambiguity of *blaenbren* has been discussed, and the expression may be said to favour a view of the vision as being profitable in one way or another. I would also like to draw attention to Idawc's speeches after Arthur's sigh concerning the falling valour of the keepers of the island. "'Rhonabwy, do you see the ring with the stone on the emperor's hand?'... 'It is a property of that stone that you will remember all that you have seen here tonight; had you not seen the stone you would have remembered nothing'" (Gantz 1976: 182). We may wonder why Ronabwy should forget his strange experience. An answer may be found in the fact that this is a dream, a characteristic of which is that it seldom stays for long time in the memory of the dreamer, and its content tends to drift away after a short while. One implication of this theory may be that Idawc knows that Ronabwy is dreaming and that he will make sure that what he sees in the world of Arthur stays with him. The Arthurian past may therefore be said to function as a parallel dimension to the world of Madawc and Ronabwy. However this may be, I find it plausible that Idawc thinks it worthwhile that Ronabwy takes to heart what he sees and that he remembers the dream when he wakes up.

What does the dream convey?

A conclusion one may draw from the discussion above is that the dream in spite of everything has consequences, at least for Ronabwy, as it has given him some kind of insight. I will further argue that the short abrupt ending of the tale as Ronabwy wakes up should be interpreted in the light of the dream having been significant, as the end of the dream may

serve as a conclusion of the tale. If we follow the argumentation claiming that the reader is put in a position similar to Ronabwy's through his anonymity and the usage of perspective, we can claim that the readers have been given the insight as well. If we accept Carson's theory, Ronabwy's recently acquired knowledge may be said to contribute to his understanding of his own situation as depicted in the frame. She argues that the message communicated both to Ronabwy within the frame tale and to the medieval audience outside it is that a fight between brothers/countrymen is futile (Carson 1974: 303). Slotkin interprets the dream as a critique aimed at the literary classes for promoting values that are ultimately destructive for the society (Slotkin 1989: 110-111). According to Fulton, the dream appears as a twisted version of the prophecies concerning the forthcoming national ruler and represents the society of the author. Thus it demonstrates that national leadership as promoted by the bards wasn't anything to yearn for (Fulton 1999: 47-49, 52, 54, 55). These interpretations don't contradict or exclude each other and show that the tale can be read and regarded as meaningful on different levels.

Carson's, Slotkin's and Fulton's analyses of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* are illuminating. I will, however, support a slightly different interpretation. In my analysis, I grant more emphasis to the position of the battle of Badon in the dream and its status in the cultural memory. On such a background I will argue against Slotkin's statement that "the satire is [not] directed so much at the past as at the stories of the past, be they Arthurian narratives or brut-like narratives" (Slotkin 1989: 110). I disagree with Slotkin with regard to the way of understanding the relation between the past and the narratives depicting it. Slotkin seems to argue that this relation consists of two layers: the past as it was and the past as depicted in the texts.

I agree with Slotkin's distinction, but I will, however, oppose the idea that we, when looking back at our own past, are able to discern between these two layers. Every time the past is depicted it is reconstructed: since the past as it was is no longer available to us, there is no "true" version of the past with which to compare the reconstructions. In this perspective the distinction between the past itself and stories about the past becomes vague. I would like to suggest that the dream, however satiric, could be read as a historical narrative based on the premise that the storyline of the dream is set in the past. The implication of such a reading is to take the dream at face value: Ronabwy is not simply offered an analogous example from which something can be learned, he experiences a vital part of his own past.

The dream as a historical narrative and its relation to the frame as an account of the present

In the previous chapter I showed that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* tells about an important event in the Welsh past which had already been depicted in several texts. The battle of Badon is portrayed as a defining moment in accounts from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth, where we are told of how the heroic Britons stood up against the Saxons. The story of Badon, which may be said to acquire a definite form with Geoffrey's depiction, is dramatically changed and twisted in the dream. I believe it is plausible to argue that the author, dismissing the earlier accounts as false for reasons I will discuss later, rewrites the Welsh past in the dream. I will claim that the author intended to portray the heroic past as rather unheroic, or at least question the ordinary accounts of it, by giving an unfavourable portrayal of Arthur and his men and call the victory at Badon into doubt.

Both Arthur and Badon are potent symbols of the Welsh past and as I will argue later of the Welsh identity. They do not represent merely one person and one event, but rather a whole heroic era which makes up an important part of the Welsh past. The numerous historical references, particularly through personal names and place names, contribute to the impression that the golden past of the Welsh in its entirety is represented in the dream. There are, apart from Badon, obvious allusions to at least one victory, one defeat and one futile battle between Britons. A broad spectrum of references is brought forth by all the characters. Some of these characters appear to have originated in the Arthurian tradition itself while others seem originally to belong to the North British tradition, and yet others can be traced to a somewhat later Welsh past. Some of the characters are said to belong to the literary world of tales and romances. Based on Poppe's theories concerning the contemporary apprehension of the medieval Irish prose tales and the above statements regarding the relationship between the past and the tales about it, I will argue that it is unfortunate to distinguish between literature and history when studying medieval Welsh prose.

I believe it is reasonable to ask the following question: if the medieval Welsh prose tales should not be regarded as historical, how then should they be understood? One could possibly view the tales as exemplum literature in which historical figures are employed as actors in a sort of theatre which aims at illustrating moral issues. Such a reading has been suggested in the case of *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* (Davies 2008: xxv-xxvi). I am, on the one hand, not convinced that such an interpretation would make sense in all cases, but, on the other, I see no reason why this interpretation would be incompatible with reading them as

stories about the past. In this context we may ask whether reading a text as exemplum literature would detach well known characters and events mentioned in it from their historical setting. I don't find that likely. Furthermore, I will argue that it is difficult to distinguish clearly between the two interpretations as I believe readers/listeners always tend to search for and contemplate moral issues and dilemmas in texts, and particularly so in texts concerning their past. An understanding of texts as being ambiguous agrees with the attitude which Davies found in his study of the reading and interpretation habits among the early Irish literati (Davies 1996: 8-19).

By presenting an unheroic but pompous account of the past as a dream within a frame tale picturing the present/recent past, I will argue that the author makes his readers focus on their attitude towards the past in contrast to the world they are living in. It seems like he wants to break down the usual dichotomy between the golden past and the present as a period of decline. This is neatly done through, for example, the contrast between the splendour of the descriptions and the lack of heroism in the dream. He neutralises the difference between the eras, not by elevating his own to the glory of former times, but by depicting the greatness of the past as rather shallow and the Arthurian age as just as unheroic as his own epoch. I will therefore strongly disagree with Charles-Edwards who emphasises the contrast between the glory of Arthur's time and the smallness of Madawc's, as both worlds are presented in a negative light. I will develop these thoughts in the next chapter where I will apply the theory of cultural memory to illustrate them further and place my interpretation of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in a greater context.

Conclusion

The frame tale is precisely situated in the middle of the 12th century, where we are told of the struggle between Madawc and his brother Iorwoerth. This conflict may be seen on the background of Madawc having inherited the entire kingdom from his father and Powys' political relations to England and Gwynedd. The second part of the introduction is concerned with the bad state of Heilyn Goch and his house, in which Ronabwy and his companions are lodging, which I interpret as symbols of the poverty of Ronabwy's time. The marginal role of Ronabwy and the total lack of information concerning him make him appear as rather anonymous. I have argued on the basis of Ronabwy's anonymity and the usage of perspective in the dream that the reader is put in a position similar to that of the main character. The end of the frame tale consists primarily of the epilogue which has been

read as an indication of the written nature of the tale, and it has been convincingly argued that it directs our attention towards the role of the storyteller.

I have argued that there is a message to be found in the interplay between the frame and the dream as Ronabwy gains insight through the dream which is relevant for his situation and for the readers'. The fact that the tale ends as Ronabwy wakes up may support such an interpretation. I will claim that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* depicts the times of yore as no better than the present and thereby questions the past as it had been portrayed in earlier accounts. The dream may thus be regarded as a rewriting of the Welsh past and a reaction to the earlier reconstructions of it.

5. How does the context influence the portrayal of the past in the dream?

In the following chapter I will employ the theory of cultural memory as an explanatory model to illuminate the relationship between the text and the context of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, and to answer the question of how the context influences the portrayal of the past in the dream. I will first discuss the relationship between text and context in general, and attempt to situate *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in a context in which it can be classified and characterised with regard to cultural memory. Thereafter I will discuss the text with reference to Assmann's text categories in order to shed light on its function and status. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of the unusual treatment of the past in the dream in relation to the changing context and the tension between the marginal and the central within cultural memory.

The context of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*

I believe the context constitutes the background against which we interpret texts, and this may point to a flaw in Assmann's theory. He does not seem to question the impact changes of context have on interpretation. I will, however, argue that interpretations of texts vary with the changes of context. Assmann seems to claim that interpretation belongs to the realm of canonised texts, and that other texts were constantly edited and updated according to the changing context and therefore had no need for being interpreted (Assmann 2006: 118-121). However, the acquiring of a definite form, and by that a need of interpretation, is not necessarily the same as canonisation, at least not if we understand canonisation as enhancement of status. I believe, in contrast to Assmann, that it could be plausibly argued that the written word as such calls for interpretation.

Since medieval texts have only been preserved as ambiguous complexes of signs and not as clear messages, I find it implausible that the meaning of these texts can be regarded as permanent as they require interpretation as such. Echlich's definition of text as retrieved communication is therefore unsuitable in this case (*op. cit.* 103). I will claim that the meaning of a text is constantly recreated in the meeting between the text and the reader, and it is thus legitimate to claim that there is no definite interpretation or message of a text.

We may move towards the problem of interpretation from a different angle and attempt to recreate the context in which *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* was understood in the Middle Ages. I doubt, however, that a primarily contextual (historical) approach would make us any more capable of interpreting the text the way the medieval readers did. We will probably never know who wrote *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, but internal references suggest that the author had strong connections to Powys. The dating of the tale is, as we have seen, a hotly debated issue with suggestions ranging between 1150 and 1385, and although no conclusive evidence has come up I tend to find a date somewhere in the second half of the 13th century or the first quarter of the 14th as most plausible. This opinion is based on the mention of Madawc's reign and the unity of Powys in the two first sentences as something belonging to the past and therefore necessary to mention to the audience. Such a date would furthermore leave some time for it to obtain the renown required in order to be referred to in court poetry in the second half of the 14th century and be included in *The Red Book of Hergest*. This suggestion is, with regard to the frame tale, in keeping with the notion of the communicative memory's range of about a hundred years, which makes events within that scope unnecessary to record (Assmann 2006: 24).

The purpose of drawing up tentative and rough lines of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s context is to demonstrate the problems of what may be termed a historical interpretative approach. What we want to explore is not so much the author's intention, which in one respect is less interesting as his relationship to the text is in many ways unique, but rather how it was understood in the Middle Ages. The "original" context consists of more than *persona*, *locus* and *tempus scribendi*, but I will argue that the readers' possibilities for recovering it in its entirety, regardless of their proximity in time and space to the author, are limited.

Considering that people are unable to leave their own context for another, I will argue that the medieval readers, just as modern scholars, interpreted the tale in their own contexts and not in the one of the author. Powys in the period from, say, 1250 and throughout the Middle Ages opens for innumerable different contexts, shaped by different political, social and cultural conditions which we may see *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* against. Furthermore, I will argue that these conditions influenced communities and individuals differently even within the same time and place, and that the context in effect is specific to the reader. I believe this demonstrates that Assmann's notion of expanding the original context is problematic, as knowledge about the writer's situation is not sufficient for even a

contemporary reader to ensure that he interprets the text in accord with the author's intention.

From the scholar's point of view, there are difficulties attached to this matter which concern the very relationship between text and context. Obviously, we can not go back in time and observe *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s meaning, role and status in the Middle Ages. The past is only available to us through text (and artefacts etc.) and the apprehension, impact and position of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* would therefore only be visible through other texts. One implication of this is that the text stands in a peculiar relationship to its context, something which is neatly expressed by Helge Jordheim who states that "Teksten er alltid samtidig kontekst, konteksten alltid samtidig tekst".⁷⁴ When attempting to interpret *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in accordance with the medieval context we are therefore in danger of putting forward a circular argumentation as our perception of the past is entirely dependent on other texts, which again are objects of our interpretation.

Based on *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s structure, appearance and our knowledge about its textual history, I believe we may presume that the text has existed only in the shape in which we find it in *The Red Book of Hergest*. Since a period of constant editing and adaptation seems improbable, the understanding and status of the text have varied all through the period as it has been interpreted in different contexts, and not been updated in accordance with them (Assmann 2006: 117-121).⁷⁵ The only medieval context in which we can place *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* with full certainty is the manuscript context of *The Red Book of Hergest*. I will argue that it is reasonable to interpret the text in its manuscript context on the basis of the organisation of the manuscript's content and the expenses and craftsmanship involved in making the vast anthology. I believe this clearly indicates that the contents of the manuscript were intentionally compiled and regarded as meaningful and important by the contemporaries.

One may argue that we are still not on safe ground as this context also consists entirely of text. Hence this point of departure won't help us overcome inherent problems in interpreting medieval texts. This is of course true, but I will still claim that this approach is among the more fruitful ones. The manuscript introduces a number of texts which we may attempt to see *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in relation to. The advantage of looking at *The Red*

⁷⁴ Jordheim, H., *Lesningens Vitenskap: utkast til en ny filologi*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 2001, 117;

The text is always at the same time context, the context always at the same time text. (My translation).

⁷⁵ In this regard, I question Assmann who seems to claim that such updating makes interpretation superfluous.

Book is that we arguably have a relatively more enhanced knowledge of both the manuscript and some of the other texts it contains, than we have of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, which may give us leads in the study of this text.

The Red Book of Hergest as a context for Breuddwyd Rhonabwy

I cannot go into details on the content of *The Red Book* here, but with regard to the position and status of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* I find the five initial texts of the manuscript particularly interesting.⁷⁶ The first is *Dares Phrygius* which is concerned with the destruction of Troy.⁷⁷ It is followed by *Brut y Brenhinoedd* in which we are told of how Brutus travelled from Italy and settled in Britain, and it relates the history of the Britons up to the death of Cadwaladr, which it dates to 689. The third text is *Brut y Tywysogion* which is, as opposed to the other *brut*, structured as a chronicle, but its entries are considerably more detailed than, for example, those of the A-text of *Annales Cambriae*. *The Red Book* version of *Brut y Tywysogion* tells the fortunes and misfortunes of the Welsh princes from the death of Cadwaladr until 1282, where it breaks off before the fall of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in December that year (Jones 1955: 269-271). The text is followed by excerpts from Gildas' history translated into Welsh and a text in which the cantrefs and commots of Wales are listed.

These five texts are succeeded by four others which deal with the tradition around Charlemagne, which again are followed by a group of miscellaneous texts. Many of these are Welsh translations and adaptations of foreign works. *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is located in this section between *Chwedlau Saith Ddoethion Rhufain* and *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth*. The former text is a rather free adaptation of *Les Sept Sages de Rome* (Breeze 1997: 31). The tale is made up of a series of short fables fitted into a frame tale about how the emperor's wife endeavours to persuade the emperor of Rome to kill his son. Seven wise men stand in opposition to her, and try to convince the emperor of the deceitfulness of his wife and that his son should be spared.⁷⁸ *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth* is a prophetic and apocalyptic text

⁷⁶ All information about the order of contents of the *Red Book* are taken from the following website:

<http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk/en/ms-home.php?ms=Jesus111>.

⁷⁷ Diane-Myric, L., *From the De Excidio Troiae Historia to the Togail Troí*, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg 1993, 8.

⁷⁸ Iestyn Daniel, R., "Chwedleu Seith Doethon Rufein", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 436.

based upon the Latin *Oracles of the Tiburtine Sibyl*,⁷⁹ and concerns itself with the life and death of Christ.⁸⁰ The use of a frame tale and fables in *Chwedlau Saith Ddoethion Rhufain* makes an interesting parallel to the structure of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. Likewise, the genre to which *Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth* belongs has obvious similarities with the vision literature. All three texts may be said to convey knowledge in one way or another. The other so-called Mabinogion tales are placed together further back in the manuscript.

The reason for including *Dares Phrygius* must be sought in the Welsh' wish to trace their ancestors back to the Trojan heroes and provide themselves with an ancient and heroic origin. *Brut y Brenhinoedd* follows this thread and adds a bit of the glory of the Roman empire to the British tradition as we are told how Brutus, ultimately of Trojan decent, set out from Italy and settled in Britain. *Brut y Tywysogion* takes up the thread where the preceding text left off, and brings the history up to approximately a hundred years before the date of the manuscript. This way of opening a library, which *The Red Book* may be regarded as, doesn't seem accidental. The Irish manuscript *Lebor Laighech* (ca. 1160) begins with *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* which relates the ancient Irish past and connects it with Biblical history.⁸¹ The structure of these two manuscripts slightly resembles that of the Old Testament, which begins with the historical writings followed by the poetical and prophetic texts.

Is *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* a cultural text?

The text category which is most central to Assmann's theory is cultural texts. Aleida Assmann defines these as: "texts that possess a special normative and formative authority for a society as a whole" (Assmann 2006: 104). The question, then, is whether *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* ever functioned as a normative and formative authority in the Welsh society. Assmann seems to make a rough distinction within the category of cultural text between normative texts, which codify the norms of the society, and formative texts, which "formulate the self image of the group and the knowledge that secures their identity" (*ibid.*). The latter are to a considerable extent concerned with the past.

It may indeed seem difficult to separate cultural texts from other texts when dealing with medieval Welsh prose, as the majority of these texts, including *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*,

⁷⁹ Mittendorf, I., "Llyma Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Doeth", in Koch, J. T. (ed.), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 1179.

⁸⁰ Wallis Evans, R., "Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Ddoeth", in *Llên Cymru* 14, Caerdydd 1983-1984, 216.

⁸¹ Best, R. I., Bergin, O., O'Brien, M. A., *The Book of Leinster* vol i, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin 1954, xvii, xx, 1-56.

may be interpreted as discussing social norms and/or deal with the past on one level or another. Hence the distinctive characteristic of cultural texts is that their formative and normative content is supposed to be authoritative for a society as a whole. Indeed, they may be said to constitute its ideological fundament. Cultural texts seem therefore to be connected with the central and instrumentalised part of cultural memory, which from an individual's perspective is labelled bonding memory and from a group's point of view collective memory. Bonding memory is a descriptive term considering the way memory ties the individuals together as a group. It is particularly the formative knowledge that keeps a group together as it answers the question of whom they are and why they belong together.

It is tempting and even reasonable to argue that *Dares Phrygius* together with the *Bruts*, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* and the historical books in the Old Testament contain the collective past of the Britons, the Irish and the Jews, respectively. If this is the case, one could consequently claim that they are texts possessing a formative function for the society as a whole, and that they therefore may be regarded as cultural texts. The three initial texts of *The Red Book* offer glorified versions of the Welsh past in which the gradual loss of the British dominion of the island is regarded as a tragedy. *Brut y Tywysogion* and especially *Brut y Brenhinoedd* are preserved in several versions and in a great number of manuscripts, and continued to be copied after the Middle Ages. Without going into a closer study of these texts and the manuscript, I will argue on the basis of the above that there are reasons to believe that these texts were regarded as important cultural texts in the time of Hopcyn ap Thomas ap Einion, who *The Red Book* was made for.

Seeing the function of cultural texts as being supportive beams of society, I will argue that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* doesn't fit into this category of texts, and I will in the following give some arguments based on my former analyses to support this claim. Assmann argues that a collective past, i.e. the history which a group of people have in common, is the most important linking device in a society, and a central part of the collective memory (Assmann 2006:87), without which the group will be threatened by disintegration. I will argue below that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, instead of supporting the collective memory, attacks it by critically questioning and rewriting the collective past of the Welsh.

Some, but not all, of the following arguments rely on the presumption that the self-image of the Welsh was founded upon a view of themselves as originally being of a heroic and honourable nature and their past as a golden era. It is not self-evident to depict one's own past in positive terms. This is demonstrated by Assmann, who portrays the Jews as a

people united by their past as it is codified in the Old Testament (*op. cit.* 46-62). Here we are told of how the Jews repeatedly forgot God and his commandments and consequently were punished. A similar element, probably even inspired by Jewish history, is present in the cultural memory of the Welsh as well, particularly in Gildas' account where the misfortunes of the Britons seem to be connected with their neglect of God and Christian virtues (Giles 1841:8, 17-21). With regard to the cultural memory of the Welsh, however, I will argue that the belief in a golden past, centred around the figure of Arthur, stood in the foreground.

One aspect of the dream equally connected to both the normative and the formative element of the cultural memory is the lack of heroic values. Neither Arthur nor anyone else distinguishes themselves by showing bravery or proving their skills in combat against the enemy. The only violence in the dream takes place between Britons. Arthur seems by no means eager to fight Osla Gyllellwa[w]r as he doesn't move towards the famous battlefield before Karadawc Vreichuras has reminded him that he has promised to be there. When Arthur arrives *is Kaer Vadon* he postpones the battle by playing *gwyddbwyll*, and when Osla's messengers arrive both he and his council seem more than willing to grant Osla the truce. As Arthur and his men functioned as a symbol of British valour, their miserable performance in this text may be read as an assertion that the Britons never were a brave and honourable people.

Carson has pointed out one of the blows against the collective memory through her highlighting of the three conflicts between Britons. The battle of Camlan, with which the golden era of Arthur ends through kin slaying, seems to be a major traumatic event within the cultural memory of the Welsh. While Camlan is merely alluded to by Idawc, the dissension among the Britons is elaborately articulated through the *gwyddbwyll* between Arthur and Owain and the battle between the ravens and the squires, two events which may be said to reflect each other mutually. The *gwyddbwyll* and the corresponding clash between squires and ravens may be regarded as meaningless and absurd. The battle of Camlan, on the other hand, can only be described as tragic. These events shed light back on the conflict between Madawc and Iorwoerth in the frame tale which may be regarded as equally futile. The three conflicts indicate that dissension is a characteristic of the Britons current both in the past and the present.

The clear references to the battle of Chester through the mentioning of Selyf uab Kynan Garwyn and Gwgawn Gledyfrud may also be read as critical innuendoes with regard to the self-image of the Welsh. Anglo-Saxon and Welsh sources tell of a disastrous defeat

for the Welsh near Chester which separated the Welsh and the North British kingdoms. Bede offers the earliest and most substantial account of the battle. He gives an elaborate description of how the monks who arrived to pray for the Welsh army were deserted by their protectors led by Brocmail and were consequently slaughtered in great numbers by the Saxons.⁸² I find plausible Bromwich's theory that Geoffrey depicts the same battle in his history, but places it at Bangor-is-coed (Bromwich 1978: 163-165). Geoffrey's depiction of Brocmail is more favourable than Bede's, and Geoffrey turns the defeat into victory as he relates how the British princes gathered their armies and drove the enemy back eastwards, causing the Saxon's great losses (Monmouth 1963: 243-244). I believe Bromwich is right in considering Geoffrey's rewriting of the battle of Chester as an attempt to cover a bleeding wound in the Welsh past. Furthermore, I find it likely that the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, by mentioning Selyf and Gwgawn, aims at bringing to mind the trauma concerning the Britons' disloyalty towards their own countrymen.

The postponing or even cancellation of the battle of Badon is yet another blow against the glorious depictions of the Welsh past. I believe I have demonstrated both the immediate political and the later symbolical significance of this event, and the consequences of its sudden disappearance from the Welsh history should be obvious. The circumstances in which the battle is cancelled cannot be regarded as particularly honourable for the Britons, who demand nothing in return for the truce and are praised by the bards without having performed any heroic deeds.

Badon's role as an important victory is one aspect of the event, but calling it into doubt involves more than questioning the greatness of the past, as a common point of reference disappears. Although a triumph may be regarded as particularly suitable for constituting a formative basis, a heroic defeat like the battle of Catraeth could probably carry out this function as well. The point, however, is that a collective needs one or more historical references that can answer the question of who they are and why they belong together, and in this respect the text strikes at the very heart of the collective memory as it puts the battle of Badon into a state of uncertainty. I will claim that the way in which the author draws the event into doubt, as no clear decision is reached whether to call it off completely or resume the hostilities later, highlights his intention of questioning the Welsh past. I have argued that

⁸² Bede, *Anglernes Kirkes Historie*, Schjøth, E. (ed.), H. Aschehoug & Co., Oslo 1979, 64.

Badon and Arthur together with the numerous historical references in the text may symbolise the entire past of the Welsh. The tale may, from such a perspective, be interpreted as questioning whether the Welsh have any historical experiences in common at all which can unite them.

In the perspective of cultural memory, the past may be regarded as a resource in the work of preserving the collective identity from forgetting and changes which are promoted by the ever-changing context. In the former chapter I argued that the author depicts the heroism of the past as rather shallow in the dream, and that he tries to communicate that the days of yore weren't very different from the present which is described in negative terms in the frame tale. The past has nothing to offer the present if the two are identical. If the past is equal to a present which is described in negative terms, the former ceases to be a resource which the collective may exploit in order to shape its identity and strengthen its unity. I believe the arguments stated above are sufficient to claim that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* shouldn't be classified as a cultural text, as the tale evidently does not support the collective memory which the cultural texts are supposed to uphold.

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy: Textus and commentarius

Besides the concept of cultural text, Assmann puts forward the complementary concepts of textus and commentarius as a second set of terms for classification of texts. Textus is a text which is the object of philological work, a commentarius. A text may become textus when it has become difficult to understand because of its archaic language or fragmented condition, or because it was created in a context alien to the reader. A commentarius may therefore be an edition of a textus, a translation, an interpretation or a commentary on a text (Assmann 2006: 101-103). I would argue that it is reasonable to see a connection between textus and cultural text, both denoting authoritative texts which are objects of scrutiny. I believe one could argue that the cultural texts articulate the world view of the collective, and that other texts therefore often function as commentarii on them as they are read within a frame defined by the cultural texts.

In the case of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, I have argued that the dream may be a calque on the battle of Badon as portrayed in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Conclusive evidence is lacking and the dream is probably inspired by other texts as well, but I believe it is legitimate to claim that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* may be related to *Historia Regum Britanniae* (textus) as a commentarius. According to Assmann, great collections of interpretative

literature, commentarii, grew up around the relatively small number of (canonical) cultural texts in the ancient libraries (*op. cit.* 29). He further notes with reference to Brian Stock that writing made dissidence possible (*op. cit.* 72-73), or at least visible, and with a culture of written commentarii the wide spectrum of cultural memory becomes apparent. I believe *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* could serve as an example of this diversity, as it may be defined as a commentarius which raises an oppositional voice against the collective memory of the Welsh as articulated by the cultural texts in general and *Historia Regum Britanniae* in particular.

The terms *textus* and *commentarius* have literary and philological connotations attached to them which may be unfortunate as they may lead to a conclusion that the subject of the texts only exists on a written level. In this context I would therefore like to draw attention to Poppe's claim that the medieval Irish prose tales was regarded as historical by their contemporaries (Poppe 2007: 26), and I believe that his conclusions are valid for the Welsh prose as well. Additionally, I will argue that from the perspective of an individual located in a certain setting the past is, despite any source criticism, identical to the narratives about it. Assmann states that writing is "an authentic medium of cultural memory" (Assmann 2006: 98). His claim seems to indicate that he believes texts may contain people's view of their own past, an assertion which, from what is stated above, seems reasonable. Based upon this I will argue that the past and the narratives about the past are identical from the individual's point of view, and I believe that this must be taken into consideration when we characterise *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as a commentarius.

So far I have concluded that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, which I have classified as a commentarius, may be interpreted as questioning and rewriting the heroic past of the Welsh. While considering the theory of cultural memory which, at least by Assmann, is often employed in connection with the instrumentalised memory and canonical texts, I would like to emphasise the great diversity within the cultural memory. The cultural memory covers a vast spectrum which includes the orthodox, canonical and central, but also the apocryphal, heretical and marginal. This tension within the cultural memory creates a cultural dynamism which, according to Aleida Assmann, is "the precondition of the possibility of change and renewal" (*op. cit.* 25).

The classification of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as a critical commentarius seems, on the one hand, to place the text somewhere in the periphery of the cultural memory. On the other, I find it legitimate to question the chances for a truly heretical text to survive through the

centuries, and if such a text ever would be placed in a codex like *The Red Book of Hergest*? Keeping in mind that the text was allowed to coexist in the manuscript with great historical narratives which I have categorised as cultural texts, I would characterise it as slightly marginal with regard to the cultural memory. One could plausibly argue that the satirical form of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* could make its rather harsh message less apparent. The ambiguous status of the dream as a phenomenon, its humour, the use of descriptions and other literary devices and its position in the manuscript together with translations and adaptations of foreign texts, are all factors which may explain its preservation.

Why does the author give an unheroic portrayal of the past?

I will argue that the answer to why the author depicts the past in a negative manner may be found in the nature of the collective memory. This memory consists of normative and formative knowledge and its function is to transmit a collective identity. The collective memory provides, first and foremost through historical narratives, assurances of the group's identity, as in the case of the Britons where they may relate that "We are the people who stood together at Badon and defeated the Saxons". History is, according to Assmann, the ultimate source of the collective identity (*op. cit.* 87). It may be seen as a paradox that the individuals have to turn to the past to explain and reassure themselves of who they are. This explains however why texts as *De Excidio Britanniae*, *Historia Brittonum* and *Historia Regum Britanniae* were important to the Welsh, as the collective memory which is codified in these texts had to be kept alive among them. The present situation does not offer any explanation of why the members of a group belong together, and this may be an indication that the communities themselves are products of the past, and therefore may appear as somewhat artificial with regard to the present.

The collective memory is under constant pressure since the present doesn't support, but rather argues against it (*op. cit.* 16-18, 52-54). This is because the society in which the texts transferring the cultural memory are interpreted is changing constantly, and orthodox readings of cultural texts may be undermined by political, social and cultural changes. In this perspective collective memory may be characterised as counterfactual as it aims at preserving a reality which is no longer present. I believe that it is possible to see the treatment of cultural memory in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in this perspective.

Using *Historia Regum Britanniae* as a point of departure, I would argue that this historical account was regarded as authoritative in the Middle Ages and that it gives a heroic

and honourable portrayal of the British past. The last chapters where Geoffrey relates that "...the Welsh, degenerating from the nobility of the Britons, never afterwards recovered the sovereignty of the island..." may indeed be read as an explanation of the difference between the past and the present, but also as an adjustment of the British past according to his own intentions (Monmouth 1963: 264). *Historia Regum Britanniae*'s plot is concentrated on how the Britons after the arrival of Brutus fought against foreign people for the supremacy of the island. The peak of the narrative is reached when the Britons united under Arthur defeat the Saxons and conquers greater parts of Western Europe, a phase which may be said to be initiated with the battle of Badon.

Modern historians put no faith in Geoffrey's account of how the Britons banished the Saxons from the island during the 6th century and conquered foreign countries. They seem to agree that, although the Britons and later the Welsh at times fought the English successfully, for example during the reigns of Cadwallon, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn and Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Snyder 2005: 176-177, 183, 242), the long term tendency is, nevertheless, that the Britons drifted further and further away from the ideal scenario depicted in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Their versions of the past also depend on interpretation and can therefore not be regarded as "absolutely truthful". I believe, however, that this may demonstrate how the present may put the collective past under pressure, as it must have been more and more difficult for the Welsh during the Middle Ages to identify themselves with Geoffrey's brave heroes. His depiction of the golden age during Arthur's reign must have appeared increasingly implausible in the face of negative political, social and cultural developments to such a degree that it may even have appeared as false.

The unlikeliness of the golden past may be balanced against the wish for it to be true. Although the illusion may have survived among the majority, I find it likely that it could have been shattered for some. This demonstrates the diversity within the cultural memory. I find it plausible that a creative writer conscious of the political climate may have written *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as a reaction and as an alternative to the heroic account found in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. I will contend that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* could be interpreted as questioning the Britons' apprehension of their past. The author does this by presenting the heroism of the past as shallow and thereby indicating that their past was not as glorious as depicted in earlier texts. In his version of the past, the times of yore end up as a reflection of the contemporary society pictured in the frame, a world which his audience would recognise as their own.

One might ask what made the bubble burst, what caused the writing of this oppositional historical account? Although we can only speculate on this matter, it is tempting to look for situations and events which were particularly difficult or tragic for the Welsh. Richards suggests the period after Gwenwynwyn's death as a likely background as the hopes of reunification of Powys died with him (Richards 1948: xxxix). Similarly, Fulton argues that Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's dominion in Powys constituted the context of the composition. She identifies the tyrannical Arthur with Llywelyn and interprets the tale as a demonstration of the defects of a national leadership (Fulton 1999: 51-55). I find the 1220s rather early, and I have argued, in contrast to Fulton, that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is concerned with the Welsh cause and not especially with that of Powys. The final defeat of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282 may, from such a perspective, appear as a more likely context for the writing of the tale, but there may well be other events which could have triggered the author.

Conclusion

I have argued that the context in which *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* was written is impossible to reconstruct to such a degree that we can be sure of interpreting it in accord with the intentions of the author. I have, on the other hand, claimed that the interpretation of the tale depends on the context in which it is read. Accordingly I have asserted that the meaning of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* may have varied throughout the Middle Ages. I have furthermore argued that seeing *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* against the background of *The Red Book of Hergest*, the only medieval manuscript in which it has been preserved, may be the most fruitful approach for understanding how medieval Welsh readers regarded it. From the perspective of *The Red Book*, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* does not appear as a cultural text, but as a critical commentarius on particularly *Historia Regum Britanniae/Brut y Brenhinoedd*. The text does not promote the collective memory, but rather questions it, and it may therefore be said to be peripherally placed within the spectrum of the cultural memory.

The negative portrayal of the past and the oppositional voice found in the text may be considered as a reaction against the collective memory as codified in Geoffrey's work, which was under increasing pressure from the changing context, i.e. the political, cultural and social development. On the basis of the discussion above I will claim that the apprehension of the past always depends on the context. This becomes apparent with regard to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as the portrayal of the past in the dream is clearly influenced by a

context which does not harmonise with the depiction of the Britons and their history in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. This impression becomes strengthened through the negative portrayal of the present in the frame.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued for a historical reading of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. I have made use of the theory of cultural memory as a theoretical framework for my analysis. Although I have suggested that Assmann's theory is flawed with regard to explaining the relationship between text, context and interpretation, I have found his ideas inspiring and illuminating in the meeting with medieval literature. With basis in his text categories and the notion of a cultural memory which in literate societies becomes vast and diverse, I have employed the theory as an explanatory model with the help of which I have discussed the results of my analysis of the text. I will in the following summarise the findings of my subordinate questions, before I will finally account for the main problem of the discussion.

I have argued for a historical reading of the dream and I have demonstrated that it gives a negative portrayal of the heroic past centred around Arthur. This impression is conveyed by the untraditional storyline which on the narrative level is dominated by conflicts among the Britons themselves. Little is achieved within the dream. The battle of Badon, which I have argued constitutes the plot of the dream, is cancelled and Arthur and his men appear as being devoid of the traditional heroic virtues. The negative impression is further promoted by a lavish use of descriptions, which the storyline doesn't justify as there are no heroic actions, and incoherencies, which make the past appear somewhat meaningless.

In the analysis of the dream I have focused on the occurrence of the numerous characters, many of which are apparently insignificant for the storyline. Since there is so little action with which the characters can be identified, I have argued for an associative reading of them, and through the analysis I have demonstrated how they may work as references to the cultural memory. I have argued that some of the traditions alluded to should be brought into consideration in the interpretation of the tale. Additionally, I have claimed that all the references to the cultural memory which the dream brings forth create an impression that the entire Welsh past in some way is represented here, and consequently is influenced by the poor impression left by Arthur and his men.

Having argued that the battle of Badon constitutes the plot of the dream, I have further analysed the position and status of this event in the cultural memory of the Welsh.

On the basis of Assmann's claim that the cultural memory is accessible through writing, I have analysed four texts in which Badon is depicted in order to see how these reconstructions of the memory relate to that of the dream.

On the basis of this analysis, I have argued that the battle of Badon occupied a prominent position within the cultural memory of the Welsh after the 6th century. The battle's significance is promoted by its role and location within the narratives as a turning point in history, and there is a growing tendency to describe it in mythical and legendary terms. The dream appears as a contrast to these heroic accounts as the Britons here fight each other while they declare truce with the Saxons and cancel the battle of Badon. Thus the dream relates, in contrast to the earlier accounts of Badon, that the Britons were a divided people and that the battle, depicted as politically and symbolically significant within the other accounts, did not take place. The significance attached to the event reinforces the impression that the Welsh past in its entirety is the object of the dream, as the famous battle and Arthur as the greatest among the Welsh heroes may be taken as symbols of the days of yore. I have pointed to elements which the dream and the depiction of the battle of Badon in *Historia Regum Britanniae* have in common, and I have argued that the dream may be read as a calque on Geoffrey's account of the battle. Without any explicit admissions of the author, however, it is almost impossible to prove that the author in fact intended a parody on this work.

With reference to the quarrel between Madawc and Iorwoerth, the indications of political instability and the description of the filthy house and its inhabitants, I have argued that the frame tale leaves a negative impression. The frame tale appears therefore as a parallel to the dream. However, while there is discordance in the latter between the excessive descriptions and the unheroic storyline, the negative impression in the frame tale is rather homogenous.

I have interpreted the relationship between the frame and the dream as that between contemporary society and the distant past which, is usually depicted as a golden era. The author draws attention to the reader's apprehension of the past and present by depicting the greatness of the past as shallow and no better than the present. The latter is described thoroughly negatively in accord with the tendency of viewing the present as a period of decline. This impression of comparison of the past and the present is reinforced through the usage of a frame tale and a dream in which the main character may observe his past.

Through his anonymity and the usage of perspective the reader is placed in a similar position.

The context may be said to influence the portrayal of the past in the dream on several levels. I have argued that the meaning of the text, and therefore the dream, is decided by the reader and the background against which it is read. Hence I will claim that the meaning of a text is not constant, but changes according to the reader. Theoretically, one may speak of an original context, i.e. that of the author, but I have argued that we are not able to reconstruct it to such a degree that we are ensured of obtaining the message the author intended to communicate. I have further argued that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* appeared just as ambiguous in the Middle Ages as today, and that this period also provided numberless contexts in which it could be interpreted. I have therefore argued that Assmann's notion of an "expanded context" which makes the reader able to interpret the text in accordance with the author's intention seems implausible, and that the definition of text as "retrieved communication" is equally unsuited with regard to the study of medieval Welsh literature.

For my study of the relation between dream and context I have seen *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in relation to its manuscript context in *The Red Book of Hergest*. Although such an approach does not solve the problems concerning interpretation, text and context, I have argued that this is the only context in which we with any certainty can place the tale, and that we may attempt to see it in relation with the other texts of the manuscript. I have contrasted *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* with the texts opening the manuscript, which I have argued present the Welsh past as honourable, and I have classified these as cultural texts. I have given a substantial argumentation against classifying *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as such, and I have claimed that it rather questions the Welsh past as depicted in the initial texts by reconstructing it in a fundamentally different way. I have illustrated this textual relationship further by defining *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as a critical commentarius on the cultural texts (textus) in general and *Historia Regum Britanniae* in particular.

With basis in the theory of cultural memory I have claimed that history is made in the meeting between the past and the present. I have furthermore argued that the negative portrayal of the past in the dream may be regarded as a reaction against the texts promoting the collective memory, a memory which may be regarded as counterfactual. I have claimed that the past as related by Geoffrey of Monmouth found no support in the readers' context from the 12th century and onwards. Considering the increasingly difficult situation in which the Welsh saw themselves I have argued that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s author depicted the

past in the dream on the background of his own context. Having argued that medieval Welsh prose was read as history by its contemporaries, I will claim that the dream can be read as a historical account influenced by the negative political, cultural and social development in Wales in the Middle Ages.

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