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Essays and Studies 2015

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Translating Europe in Medieval Wales

HELEN FULTON

One of the most significant aspects of Welsh as a vernacular is its long continuity as a prestige language in Wales. While Middle English endured an extended and often painful struggle with Norman French before emerging triumphant as a relatively high-status language towards the end of the fourteenth century, Welsh never ceded its position as the prestige vernacular of the elite. Consequently, medieval literature in Welsh has an antiquity, a variety of registers and functions, and an awareness of its own long literary history that are unusual among the vernacular literatures of Europe.

This is not to say, however, that medieval Welsh literature was parochial or insular. The early conversion of Wales to Christianity in the fifth century nurtured a strong cultural tradition of Latin writing, mainly of a religious nature but also in the form of annals, chronicles, and philosophical works.\(^1\) From the twelfth century, the rapid foundation of a chain of priories and abbeys around Wales, particularly those of the Benedictines and Cistercians, enabled the keeping of substantial libraries which were shared among the various foundations and borrowed by noble families. Like England, Wales was subjected to conquest and colonisation by the Normans after 1066, with the crucial difference that Welsh literature retained its pre-eminence as a literary language alongside French. This was due in part to the politics and topography of Norman settlement in Wales, which divided the land into Marcher lordships held by the Normans (mainly in the east and south of the country) and independent patrimonial territories held by Welsh princes where the Welsh language retained institutional power.

In 1282, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, prince of Gwynedd in north Wales, fell at the hands of the English army of Edward I and his entire territory, along with others ruled by Welsh princes, was annexed to the Crown.

From 1284, Wales was divided into two different kinds of political unit, the Marcher lordships which operated separately from the king, and the Crown lordships, former Welsh prinedoms, which were governed by a combination of English and Welsh administrators. The old Welsh aristocracy was brutally disposed of, by murder, imprisonment, or claustration, and the gentry class immediately below it in the hierarchy, the *uchelwyr* (literally ‘high men’), found itself called upon to serve the English monarchy. Buttressed by imposing castles and new towns garrisoned by English immigrants, political power in Wales now depended on the co-operation of the upper echelons of the Welsh gentry.\(^2\)

These families of landed freemen, many of them well-to-do and well connected with both Welsh and English powerbrokers, assumed the role of patrons of Welsh literature, a role they inherited – willingly or not – from the vanished aristocracy. Welsh poets, cast adrift by the events of 1282, now depended on this new group of patrons and adapted their literary styles accordingly, making their poetry less formal and adulatory, more flexible and contemporary. This stylistic adaptation to new times and new audiences included the widespread popularity of a reinvigorated metre, the *cywydd*, and a relaxation of traditional poetics to allow for a greater influence from another prestige literature, that of French. In both poetry and prose, the combined forces of Latin scholasticism and French courtly literature exerted a pressure on Welsh literature which turned it into a distinctively European cultural form.

We can say, then, that Europe was ‘translated’ into Welsh using two related processes: firstly in the form of literary and linguistic influence, and secondly in the form of translations, or rather adaptations, of European works into Welsh. It is the second of these which is the focus of this article, in particular the boom in literary translations evident in Wales in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which continued a tradition of translating that can be traced back to the mid thirteenth century and is likely to have been older still. While court poets after 1282 continued to practise a centuries-old tradition of Welsh praise-poetry to support their new patrons, leading gentry families also began to commission copies of key texts, translated into Welsh, which delivered the cultural capital

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required by a new class to establish itself in a multicultural environment. As the emergent gentry class expanded to fill the place left at the top of the Welsh hierarchy by the disappearance of the princely class, their participation in a courtly culture shared by their Marcher and English overlords worked to institutionalise their own status position.

The influence and adaptation of European literary forms after 1282 seems to have been particularly vigorous in one area of Wales: the southeast of the country in the borderlands of the March. In the Anglo-Norman lordships of Glamorgan and Powys some of the key texts of French romance – the Charlemagne legends, some of the Arthurian prose tales from the Vulgate Cycle, and the romance of Bevis of Hampton – were translated into Welsh for Marcher noblemen. The monastic foundations of Wales, mainly Cistercian in the Marcher regions, provided sites of manuscript production and collections of manuscripts copied or borrowed from continental houses, including texts in Latin and French. Translations from texts in French can be traced to a combination of lay patrons and their scribes, both monastic and lay, who commissioned and collected literary works in Welsh for themselves and their circles of readers in the multilingual spaces of south Wales. The business of translation, which accounts for a considerable proportion of surviving Middle Welsh prose, can be seen as a response by Welsh writers to their position on the border. In contact with other European languages and cultures, Marcher writers and their patrons participated in institutionally powerful ideologies, especially those of classicism and chivalry, which produced a distinctive cultural tradition operating on both sides of the border.

The ‘matter of the March’, taking shape in the thirteenth century and flourishing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is quintessentially European: it comprises works in English, Welsh and French, from Fouke le Fitz Waryn and the Harley Lyrics to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Welsh court poetry. From the Welsh side, the contribution to this Marcher literary culture is distinguished by an antiquarian preservation

3 There is some evidence that the practice of commissioning translations from Latin began before 1282, supported by the native princes and their families. See Stephen J. Williams, ‘Rhai Cyfieithiadau’, in Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol, ed. by Geraint Bowen (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1974), pp. 303–11.

of Welsh literary works from before 1282, a vigorous contemporary court poetry addressed to the new nobility after 1282, a resurgent practice of political prophecy, and a strong growth in translations from popular French texts into Welsh. As a coherent corpus, this material is united not by genre or content but by its location in the March, its assumption of multilingualism, and its production under the auspices of a particular social class, the *uchelwyr*, many of whom lived as social equals among the English and French-speaking elites of the Marcher lordships.

*Welsh translation and classical reception*

Translations from Latin into Welsh began before 1282, with the translation of monastic annals and native laws into the vernacular, though these Latin texts originated in Wales and not in Europe.¹ The majority of Latin texts adapted into Welsh from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century were religious, representing a continental tradition of religious learning and scholasticism that flourished at the monastic foundations in Wales, including ‘Hystoria Lucidar’, based on the *Elucidarium* (a popular dialogue on biblical doctrine, dating from the late eleventh century), ‘Y mod yd aeth Meir y nef’ (‘How Mary went to heaven’), based on the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae*, and ‘Credo Seint Athanasius’, a translation of the Athanasian Creed. Lives of saints, including David, Catherine and Margaret, were translated into Welsh from the fourteenth century, together with various popular biblical and apocryphal narratives such as the gospel of Nicodemus (‘Efengyl Nicodemus’), the story of Adam and Eve (‘Ystorya Adaf ac Eu y Wreic’), and the vision of St Paul (‘Breudwyt

Evidence of the influence of Latin school texts circulating in Wales include thirteenth-century Welsh adaptations of the twelfth-century Latin *Dialogus inter Corpus et Animam* ('Dialogue between Body and Soul') and Welsh examples, dating mainly from the fifteenth century, of the classical Latin genre of the *encomium urbis*, a praise-poem or epideixis to a town or city, which enjoyed a considerable vogue in late-antique and medieval Europe.

A further example of translation from a Latin text is the Welsh prose narrative, *Ystorya Dared*, an account of the Trojan wars based on the sixth-century pseudo-history of Dares Phrygius, *De excidio Troiae historia*. The story of Troy became one of the major origin legends for a number of peoples who emerged as territorial nations after the fall of the Roman empire. Franks, Normans, English, Welsh and Irish all traced their origins to the Trojans and their descendants, with Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae* providing an authoritative account of the foundations of Britain and the British people (direct ancestors of the Welsh) from the early settlement of Brutus, the surviving descendant of the group of exiles, led by Aeneas, who fled from the ruins of Troy. *Ystorya Dared*, written in the early fourteenth century, follows its Latin source fairly closely; what is more remarkable is its inclusion in manuscripts alongside the Welsh chronicles, *Brut y Brenhinedd* ('Chronicle of the Kings'), based on Geoffrey’s *Historia*, and *Brut y Tywysogyon* ('Chronicle of the Princes’), a continuation of the *Historia* up to the crucial date of 1282. By positioning *Ystorya Dared* at the beginning of this sequence, Welsh scribes redefined it...

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8 The significance of Troy for Geoffrey’s account of early British history has been discussed by Frances Ingledew, ‘The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*’, *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 665–704.
as the origin legend of the British people, the prequel to Brutus’ arrival in Britain and the confirmation of Welsh rights to sovereignty that had been usurped by the Saxons. The Welsh version of the Troy story indicates very strongly that a manuscript containing Dares’ Latin text must have been available in Wales; the production of Ystorya Dared is associated with the Cistercian abbey of Valle Crucis, near Llangollen, known as a centre of manuscript production and probably the place where Brut y Brenhinedd, the adaptation of Geoffrey’s Historia, was also made. There is a record of a manuscript of Dares Phrygius being held at the Cistercian abbey of Whitland near Carmarthen and Latin manuscripts such as this were regularly lent to other houses for copying or translation.

The fact that the Welsh version of the Troy story is based on Dares rather than on a later text such as Guido delle Colonne’s Historia destructionis Troiae of 1287 suggests that Dares was more readily available to Welsh clerics as part of a culture of classicism in the monasteries. The Trojan legends, known from Dares and perhaps other Latin sources, supplied a roll-call of heroes who could be invoked to confirm the greatness of the lost Welsh princes. In Brut y Tywysogyon, a fourteenth-century Welsh chronicler composed a heartfelt eulogy to the Lord Rhys ap Gruffudd, prince of Deheubarth who died in 1197, comparing him to the great heroes of Greek legend:

Eil Achelarwy o nerth cledyr y dwyuron, Nestor o hynawster, Tideus o lewder, Samson o gedernit, Ector o prudder, Erckwlf o wychder, Paris o prynt, Vlixes o lauar, Celyf o doethineb, Aiax o vedwl, a grwnwal yr holl gampeu.

[A second Achilles for the might of his breast-bone, a Nestor for gentleness, a Tydeus for doughtiness, a Samson for strength, a Hector for prudence, a Hercules for excellence, a Paris for beauty, a Ulysses for


10 The manuscript is Exeter, Exeter Cathedral Library, MS 3514. See Smith, ‘Historical Writing in Medieval Wales’, pp. 84–85.
speech, a Solomon for wisdom, an Ajax for mind, and the foundation of all accomplishments.]\(^1\)

**Translating chivalry and romance**

In the early prose tradition of Wales, we can compare the ‘native’ tales, particularly those known as the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, with other tales found among the larger *Mabinogion* which show quite distinctive influences from French literature.\(^2\) While the Four Branches, whose earliest redaction may be dated to the late eleventh century, evoke a legendary pre-Norman past, their occasional use of French loanwords and customs of *courtoisie* indicate the bilingual and bicultural circumstances in which the tales took literary form.\(^3\)


\(^2\) The term *Mabinogion* is normally used to signify the collection of eleven prose tales in Middle Welsh found together in two fourteenth-century manuscript anthologies (the Red Book of Hergest and the White Book of Rhydderch) and composed at various times between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. They are translated by Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). The Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, four linked tales identified in the manuscripts as a group, have been dated to c. 1050–c. 1120 though the texts as we have them are likely to be based on earlier versions including oral tales. See Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993). Using contextual evidence relating to the second Branch, *Branwen Uerch Lyr*, Patrick Sims-Williams argues that the assumed dates of composition are not stable and that the Four Branches may belong to a later period. See *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 190, 214, 29.

\(^3\) The linguistic context of medieval Wales, including evidence that many Welsh people used French as a spoken and written language, has been discussed by Llinos Beverley Smith, ‘The Welsh Language before 1536’, in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. by Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 15–44. See also Marie Surridge, ‘Romance Linguistic Influence on Middle Welsh: A Review of Some Problems’, *Studia Celtica*, 1 (1966), 63–92. For examples of the kinds of loanwords that came into Welsh from French (some of them via Middle English), see Surridge, ‘Words of Romance Origin in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi and Native Welsh Tales’, *Études Celtiques*, 21 (1984), 239–55.
The three tales composed before 1282 that present the strongest evidence of French influence and adaptation are the so-called Arthurian ‘romances’ of Owain, neu Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnawn (‘Owain, or the Lady of the Fountain’), Gereint uab Erbin (‘Geraint son of Erbin’), and Peredur uab Efrawg (‘Peredur son of Efrog’). These three prose narratives, probably composed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, have close affinities with three long narrative poems by Chrétien de Troyes, Yvain, Erec et Enide, and Perceval (Conte del Graal), poems which themselves preserved traces of early Arthurian legends from Wales. Few scholars would now argue for direct influence from Chrétien’s works to the Welsh stories; it seems more likely, based on the evidence of style and content, that the Welsh versions took shape in Normanised areas of Wales, probably in the south-east, and drew, if not on Chrétien’s work itself, then on intermediary versions of it brought to Wales, in combination with older Welsh legends which Chrétien had also used to structure his own poems. While the Welsh tales have adapted the French courtly diegesis to suit Welsh


15 Proinsias Mac Cana supports the view that the three Welsh Arthurian tales were composed in the area comprising south-east Wales and the land around Archenfield in Herefordshire. See The Mabinogi (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), p. 15. Arthur’s court is located at Caerleon, in the medieval region of Gwent, and Roger Middleton points out that the author of Gereinet uab Erbin knew the local geography of the south-east, with events taking place in the Forest of Dean and Cardiff, and near the rivers Usk and Severn. See ‘Chwedl Geraint ab Erbin’, in The Arthur of the Welsh, ed. by Rachel Bromwich and others, pp. 147–57 (p. 150). For the view that Peredur may have been composed in north Wales, see P. W. Thomas, ‘Cydberthynas y Pedair Fersiwn Ganoloesol’, in Canhwyll Marchogion: Cyd-destunoli Peredur, ed. by Sioned Davies and P. W. Thomas (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 2000), pp. 10–49. The process by which Welsh material may have reached Chrétien de Troyes is described by Constance Bullock-Davies, Professional Interpreters and the Matter of Britain (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966). See also the review of this book by Rachel Bromwich, Llên Cymru, 9 (1967), 249–51, which comments on the importance of the south-east in the transmission of European material.
audiences – the tales are in prose, rather than poetry like the French texts, and the Welsh Arthur is less like a French king and more like a Welsh chieftain – there are evident traces of French chivalric themes centred on the figure of the knight as the main protagonist, including the knightly quest, single combat, marriage to an heiress, the hero’s love-sickness, the conflict between marriage and martial prowess, exotic locations, and the knight’s ambition for independent lordship. In following the basic plot outline of Chrétien’s three poems, the Welsh adapters inevitably reproduce many of the French themes while translating them into a worldview that their audiences of Welsh nobility would recognise.16

After the watershed conquest and settlement of 1284, the proximity of French-language culture in Wales coupled with a flourishing of the Welsh language in the south-east generated a demand for French chivalric narratives translated into Welsh. These translations were commissioned by wealthy families in the March and supplied by clerics and lay scribes who shared the work of translating and copying. Evidence for the rise in translations during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries comes partly from the production, movement, and ownership of manuscripts, and partly from references in Welsh court poetry that give some indication of the extent to which characters from French romance were known well enough by Welsh audiences to be integrated into the poetry on the assumption that everyone knew who they were. Describing his grief at the death of his friend, Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd, Dafydd ap Gwilym, the pioneering court poet writing in the middle decades of the fourteenth century, refers to ‘Amlyn’ and ‘Emig’, the friends from the twelfth-century Latin Vita Amici et Amelii, a popular medieval tale which was translated into Welsh from the Latin text early in the fourteenth century.17 In other poems he

16 Erich Poppe discusses the concept of ‘relative distance’ between Welsh adaptations and their French sources, suggesting that the Welsh Owein is relatively far from the French Yvain compared with other adaptations from French to Welsh since Owein is ‘neither predominantly chivalric in outlook, nor a romance in the narrow sense’. See Poppe, ‘Owein, Ystorya Bowyn, and the Problem of “Relative Distance”: Some Methodological Considerations and Speculations’, in Arthurian Literature XXI: Celtic Arthurian Material, ed. by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 73–94 (pp. 90–91).

17 The Welsh text is called Cydymdeithas Amlyn ac Amig (‘The Friendship of Amlyn and Amig’). Patricia Williams suggests an early fourteenth-century date for its composition, based on language and orthography. See Kedymdeithyas Amlyn ac Amie, ed. by P. Williams (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1982). For the reference in Dafydd ap Gwilym, see Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym, ed. by Dafydd Johnston and others (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 2010), no. 10, ll. 16–17.
draws on the names of heroes from the Trojan legend (CDG 130), the character of Tyrel from the Charlemagne legends (CDG 83), Cyrsus, the sword belonging to Otuel (CDG 71), and ‘Ffwg’, or Fouke le Fitz Waryn, the eponymous hero of the Anglo-Norman romance composed on the March of Wales in the late thirteenth century (CDG 12). These and similar poetic references, attested from the mid fourteenth century onwards, indicate the wide circulation of popular European texts translated into the style and cultural positioning of locally-composed Welsh literature.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, multilingual manuscripts containing texts in various combinations of Welsh, French, English and Latin were beginning to appear as anthologies or commissioned works, such as Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 50 (c. 1445), a mixture of prophecy, religious works and historical pieces, and Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 26 (c. 1456), containing prophecies and annals. Though there are currently no manuscripts in French that can be identified as having been copied in Wales, there is some historical evidence that books containing French texts were circulating in Wales: when Llywelyn Bren, an anti-English rebel, was executed in 1317 an inventory of his books included a copy of *Roman de la Rose* along with three books in Welsh and two other unspecified volumes.

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18 Poem numbers refer to *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*. *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* survives only in Anglo-Norman, though there was a Middle English version now lost. For other references to French and English literary influences in Welsh court poetry, see Rachel Bromwich, ‘Allusions to Tales and Romances’, in *Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986), pp. 132–51; Helen Fulton, *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986); Huw M. Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Edwards argues that what appear to be influences from French in Dafydd ap Gwilym’s poetry are more likely to be analogues from a shared tradition of vernacular popular poetry (see p. 129, for example).


20 *Cardiff Records*, ed. by J. H. Matthews, 6 vols (Cardiff: Records Committee of the City Council, 1898–1911), IV, p. 58. For a useful account of French manuscripts associated with Wales, see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, *Medieval Manuscripts at the*
The man who best epitomises the ‘matter of the March’ in Wales is the manuscript collector from Glamorgan, Hopcyn ap Tomas ab Einion, who commissioned the manuscript known as the Red Book of Hergest (c. 1400). This anthology, an enormous work which contains virtually the entire canon of medieval Welsh literature, including translations from Latin and French (but excluding most of the court poetry in the *cywydd* metre) was very likely designed by Hopcyn as a record of the literary heritage of Wales. We know that Hopcyn had a substantial library which included, according to the poet Dafydd y Coed, a copy of the Grail legends, almost certainly in Welsh but translated from the French Vulgate cycle:

Mynawg Hopgyn, lyn loywgllos,
Mur heilddwbl cetgwbl cagtis,
Mwnai law, mae yn ei lys,
Eurddar, y Lusidarius,
Ar Greal a’r Yniales,
A grym pob cyfraith a’i gras.

[Noble Hopcyn, wine in his bright court,
Walled with double provisions, complete bounty, battle strike,
Hand full of money, he has in his court,
golden leader, the *Elucidarium*
and the Grail [stories] and the Annals,
and the power of every law and its gift.]  

This list of books owned by Hopcyn indicates the importance of European material in the canon of medieval Welsh writing. The *Elucidarium* has been mentioned already, as a Latin religious text which became a popular Welsh version. The ‘Annals’ could refer to a set of Latin chronicles

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22 Gwaith Dafydd y Coed a Beirdd Eraill o Lyfr Coch Hergest, ed. by R. Iestyn Daniel (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2002), no. 3, ll. 91–96, my translation. Little is known of Dafydd y Coed who was active in the second half of the fourteenth century.
(yniales is an unusual form, borrowed from the Latin annales), but might just as likely signify one or more of the Welsh chronicles, perhaps Brut y Tywysogyon, which are based on earlier Latin annals. The reference to pob cyfraith, ‘every law’, suggests that one or more copies of the Welsh law codes were in Hopcyn’s library. Finally there is Greal, the legends of the Holy Grail, whose transmission in Wales, through the medium of Welsh, is closely connected to Hopcyn and his manuscript collection.

The Welsh text known as Y Seint Greal (though this exact title is not given in the manuscripts) comprises abridged versions of two French romances, La Queste del Saint Graal and Perlesvaus, both of which recount the quest for the Holy Grail. The two French romances were composed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, the Queste as part of the linked series of prose texts known as the Vulgate Cycle and Perlesvaus probably as an independent story in which Perceval, rather than Galahad, is the Grail hero.23 The text of Y Seint Greal is found in five manuscripts held in the National Library of Wales, the earliest dating from the end of the fourteenth century (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 11) and a further two from the fifteenth century (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS 3063E and Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 15), though the versions of the text found in these and the later manuscripts are all based on the one contained in MS Peniarth 11.24

23 There are two manuscripts from France, dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries respectively, in which the French Perlesvaus is juxtaposed to the Queste, as in the Welsh redaction, but it does not seem to have been a common practice and in fact caused considerable problems of cohesion. The manuscript evidence is discussed by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘A Study of Y Seint Greal in Relation to La Queste del Saint Graal and Perlesvaus’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1978), pp. 4–7. Lloyd-Morgan states that the Welsh text is not directly based on any of the extant manuscripts of either the Queste or Perlesvaus (p. 11).

24 The other manuscripts are Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 118 (sixteenth century) and Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 254 (seventeenth century). Only MS Peniarth 11 and MS 3063E contain complete copies, and the latter is copied from the former; the remaining manuscripts contain only fragments. For a more detailed description of the manuscripts, and an edition of the Welsh text of the first section of Y Seint Greal (that is, the Queste), see Ystoryaeu Seint Greal, Rhan I: Y Keis, ed. by Thomas Jones (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1992), pp. xi–xxi. For the possibility that MS Peniarth 15 represents a retelling, from memory, of the Welsh story as it appeared in MS Peniarth 11, indicating a continuing interest in the Arthurian legends in late-medieval Wales, see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘The Peniarth 15 Fragment of Y Seint Greal: Arthurian Tradition in the Late Fifteenth Century’, Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, 28 (1978–80), 73–82.
This particular manuscript, like the Red Book of Hergest, was written by a scribe called Hywel Fychan and was almost certainly owned and commissioned by Hopcyn ap Tomas.\(^{25}\) Hopcyn was clearly committed to making French texts available in Welsh; the reference to a copy of the *greal*, ‘grail’, among Hopcyn’s books, made by the poet Dafydd y Coed and cited above, is the oldest recorded reference to the word – as a text or book – in Welsh, and it is possible that MS Peniarth 11 was the earliest translation of the romance to be made.\(^{26}\) Another poet who composed a praise-song to Hopcyn, Meurig ab Iorwerth (*fl. c. 1380*), compared Hopcyn’s court to that of Arthur in Celliwig (the native Welsh location for Arthur, in contrast to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Caerlleon) and referred to his patron’s interest in French literary culture, perhaps as a translator as well as a reader, calling him ‘koeth awdur messur moesseu ffrenghic’ (‘refined author of the style of French customs’).\(^{27}\) In the fifteenth century, copies of the *Greal*, of which there would have been very few, were eagerly sought after as gifts or loans. Guto’r Glyn, writing to Trahaearn ap Ieuan ap Meurig of Penrhos on the south-eastern March, asks for Trahaearn’s copy of the book to be sent to David, abbot (*c. 1480–1503*) of the Cistercian foundation of Valle Crucis, near Llangollen on the eastern March:

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Am un llyfr y mae’n llefain
A gâr mwy nog aur a main.
Echwynfawr oedd iwch anfon
Y Greal teg i’r wlad hon:
Llyfr y gwaed, llafuriau gur,
A syrthiodd yn llys Arthur;
Llyfr enwog o farchogion,
Llyfr at grefft yr holl Fort Gron.
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\(^{25}\) Daniel Huws groups MS Peniarth 11 together with other manuscripts written by Hopcyn ap Tomas’s scribe, Hywel Fychan (*Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 60).

\(^{26}\) This is suggested by Jones (ed.), *Ystoryaeu Seint Greal*, p. xxi. The Welsh dictionary, *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, gives Dafydd y Coed’s poem as the earliest known reference to the word *greal*.

\(^{27}\) *Poetry from the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog: [Privately printed], 1911), col. 1374 (my translation). Hopcyn ap Tomas was also interested in translations from Latin into Welsh. The two historical chronicles based on Latin sources, *Brut y Brenhinedd* (from Geoffrey’s *Historia* and *Brut y Tywysogion*, are both contained in Hopcyn’s Red Book anthology, along with *Ystorya Dared*. Copies of *Ystorya Dared* and *Brut y Brenhinedd* are found in another manuscript, Philadelphia, Library Company of Philadelphia, MS 8680, also commissioned by Hopcyn and copied by the same scribe who wrote parts of the Red Book, Hywel Fychan. See Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 80.
Llyfr eto yn llaw Frytwn,
Llin Hors ni wyr darllain hwn.

[For one book he is calling out, which he loves more than gold and precious stones. A great loan it would be for you to send the fair Grail to this land: a book about the blood, pain of hard labours, which fell in Arthur’s court; a famous book of knights, a book recounting the skill of the whole Round Table. A book also in the hand of the Briton – the line of Horsa is unable to read this one.]

This request indicates the close relationship between the Welsh nobility as patrons of literature and the monastic houses as sites of scribal copying and manuscript production. The reference to the English, the ‘line of Horsa’, unable to read the story of the Grail, confirms that Trahaearn’s copy was in Welsh rather than English, but it also implies that the Welsh were ahead of the English in having a copy of the Grail legends in their own vernacular (and indeed the earliest surviving version of the Grail story in English, based on the Queste, is that of Thomas Malory in his Morte Darthur of the late fifteenth century).

It was not only the Arthurian legends that interested Hopcyn ap Tomaš but also the other great story cycle from medieval France, the legends of Charlemagne. Welsh texts of Cân Rolant (Chanson de Roland), Cronicl Turpin (the Latin Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle attributed to Archbishop Turpin), Rhamant Otuel (from the Old French Otuel or Otinel), and Pererindod Siarlymaen (Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne) are found together in about ten manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including Hopcyn ap Tomaš’s great anthology, the Red Book of Hergest.

28 The text is taken from the online edition of the poetry of Guto’r Glyn <http://www.gutorglyn.net> [accessed 5 August 2014], no. 114, ll. 43–52, with my translation. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan suggests that a complete copy of the Vulgate Cycle was available to Welsh writers at least by the fifteenth century and probably earlier than this: see ‘Crossing the Borders: Literary Borrowing in Medieval Wales and England’, in Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales, ed. by Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 159–73 (p. 164 and n. 22). The transfer of books from one collector to another, whether lay persons or clerics, indicates the scarcity value of many of these texts. For a fuller discussion of the manuscript transmission of the Grail text, see Lloyd-Morgan, ‘A Study’, pp. 47–50.

29 For the list of manuscripts and a full discussion of the manuscript history of the Charlemagne texts, see Annalee Rejhon, Cân Rolant: The Medieval Welsh Version of the Song of Roland (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984). Rejhon suggests that the translation of Cân Rolant was made in the first half of the thirteenth century and was based on a late-twelfth or early-thirteenth-
Another prose translation in the Red Book, *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn*, is a thirteenth-century translation of the Anglo-Norman romance, *Boeve de Haumont*, composed earlier in the same century. The French genre of the *chanson de geste* clearly resonated with a Welsh nobility proud of their military service and seeking to strengthen their ties, already established through marriage, with the French-speaking Marcher lords.

There is one further link to be made between Hopcyn as a patron of literary translations and the appeal of French writing in the March of Wales. The French *Bestiaire d’Amour*, written by a northern French cleric, Richard de Fornival, in the thirteenth century, was translated into Welsh some time in the fourteenth century and a copy is included in a manuscript written partly by one of the three scribes who made the Red Book of Hergest. Two other manuscripts containing the Welsh bestiary, dating from the sixteenth century, are also Marcher texts from Glamorgan and also contain other works translated from Latin and French, confirming the popularity of European material in that border region. The bestiary uses
the conventional format of short sections describing individual animals, whose characteristics are applied, mostly negatively, to the complex negotiations of courtly love: ‘Ag velly idd wyd ti y’lm lladd j ag y’lm dallyv val i dalla’r helwr kywraint yr ap’ (‘And so you kill me and trick me like the skilful hunter tricks the ape’).\textsuperscript{33} Retaining the French epistolary form of a first-person address to the beloved, the Welsh adaptation remedies the courtly and learned traditions of northern France into the stylistic patterns and distinctive lexis of medieval Welsh prose, implicitly including Welsh audiences in the prestige game of courtly love.

The evidence of manuscript transmission, literary influences and the vigorous tradition of translations from French and Latin into Welsh, especially after 1282, all work to construct Wales as a region with close links with Europe, both cultural and political. When the translations are compared with their originals, we find a process of interpretation and adaptation that is just as creative as that used to turn Chrétien’s Arthurian poems into Welsh prose tales: these are not word-for-word literal translations but creative remediations which transform Latin history and French courtly romance into the language and style of Welsh storytelling. These remediations are not simply linguistic; they construct the ideological positioning of the Welsh \textit{uchelwyr} on the March, a relatively new nobility living in close proximity to an older and more powerful aristocracy whose prestige literature drew largely on classicism – the ‘matter of Greece and Rome’ – and chivalry, the ‘matter of France’. Enriched by the multilingual context of south and east Wales, book collectors such as Hopcyn ap Tomas encouraged Welsh translations from this prestige material and in doing so helped to fashion the ‘matter of the March’, a literary culture on the border which looked to European trends as much as to the literary heritage of Wales.

\textit{Bestiary of Love}, pp. xix–xxi. Thomas stresses that all four surviving Welsh versions of the text are copies of a previous Welsh translation now lost, and that the copyists were not working directly from a French text (p. xxx).

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{A Welsh Bestiary of Love}, p. 16, ll. 104–05, my translation.