

# *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* and a Tradition of Topographical Wonders in Medieval Britain

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to determine the possible use of the topographical Wonders tradition in later medieval Britain. *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* and various English chronicles appropriate a marvelous landscape from a partially shared, circulating tradition of British Wonders. I will argue that for both the Welsh and English writers, the Wonders of the Island of Britain are a significant aspect of their nationalist agenda and an important component of the 'Matter of Britain'. Additionally, I will note that the manuscript context of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* convincingly suggests that it was thought of less as a translation (from potential Latin sources) or a geographical treatise and more as *cyfarwyddyd* (the traditional narrative material or lore of medieval Wales). By upholding the Wonders as Welsh tradition, the Welsh establish themselves as the rightful custodians of the mythos of *Prydain* (Britain) and its mythological geography that was once theirs.

To date, very little work has been done on *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* ('The Names and Wonders of the Island of Britain') since Ifor Williams's 1929 edition or even on the wider-reaching tradition of the Wonders of the Island of Britain found in many sources from the medieval period (including, but not limited to, the *Historia Brittonum*, Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Alfred of Beverley's *Annales sive Historia de Gestis Regum Britanniae*, Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, and Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*).<sup>1</sup> Scholars are no closer to determining how these collections of Wonders were thought of in the medieval period, which collections or sources should be afforded primacy, whether certain collections share common sources, or even criteria for dating *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*. Additionally, the Wonders tradition departs so significantly from the early Irish *dindshenchas* that it is difficult to argue that *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* reflects a common, 'Celtic' tradition—most of the Wonders are not particularly localized and rarely partake in the 'creative etymologizing'<sup>2</sup> foundational for the

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- 1 For the *Historia Brittonum*, see pp. 40–3, 81–4; for the *Historia Anglorum*, see pp. 3–4; for the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, see pp. 200–3; for the *Annales*, see pp. 6–8; for the *Chronicle*, see pp. 11–13; for the *Polychronicon*, see vol. 1, pp. 412–30 (for the Wonders of Wales) and vol. 2, pp. 22–30 (for the Wonders of the Island of Britain).
  - 2 Rolf Baumgarten's work on 'etymological aetiology' in Irish tradition has transformed notions of etymology as literary creation in medieval Ireland. He identifies three levels of etymology in medieval Irish literature: '(1). incidental or additive etymology...(2).

*dindsenchas* tradition.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the text has much more in common with the Latin descriptions of Wonders first attested in the *Historia Brittonum*, while also seeming to reflect a distinctly separate tradition of Wonders. The *Historia Brittonum* and *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* also both contain unique lists of the chief cities of Britain,<sup>4</sup> but *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is the only text among those cited earlier to come packaged with certain geographical information<sup>5</sup> and the three different *enwau* (names) given to the Island of Britain over time (1. before the Island was seized: Myrddin's Precinct; 2. after it was seized: The Island of Honey; 3. After it was conquered by Prydein son of Aedd the Great: The Island of Prydein).<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this paper is threefold: to categorize and try to understand the wonders in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*, to compare these wonders to those of the *Historia Brittonum* and the Wonder lists of the English chroniclers,

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constituent etymology...[and] (3). creative etymology, the use of the explanation(s) of one or more names in the creation of a tale' (1986/87, 23–24). For Baumgarten, etymology was a technical art and major source of Irish literary creation. See also, Baumgarten 1990.

- 3 The significance of *dindsenchas*, or the onomastic tradition of explaining place-names in medieval Ireland, is a shared characteristic throughout much of early Irish literature. Both in traditional narrative literature like *Táin Bó Cúailnge* or *Acallam na Senórach*, as well as in the *Dindsenchas* corpus (metrical and prose collections completely devoted to place-name lore), the place-names of Ireland are created through story-telling. The *dindsenchas* tradition, described by Marie-Louise Sjoestedt as the 'mythological geography of the country' (1949, 24), demonstrates that, in order to know a place, one first had to learn its history—a creative literary production often with multiple layers of historical substrata. Although a literary project to a great degree, Charles Bowen adds that *dindsenchas* might best be thought of as 'a science of geography based on *senchas* [tradition], in which there is no clear distinction between the general principles of topography or direction-finding and the intimate knowledge of particular places' (1975–76, 115). Unlike *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*, the *dindsenchas* tradition is exceptionally localized and, although the place-names are sometimes created by fabulous means, the places are not often wondrous in the same sense as the Wonders of Britain, which tend to describe the supernatural characteristics of the places within the text.
- 4 A list of twenty-eight chief cities is attested in the *Historia Brittonum* while thirty-three are found in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*. While both lists unavoidably have many of the same cities on them, the *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* list does not seem to be dependent on the *Historia Brittonum* and is certainly not a copy.
- 5 Other than the chief cities, the geographical details include the main islands, the ports, the length and breadth of the island in miles, and where the crown (London) and the three coronets (Penrhyn Rhionydd, Aberffraw, and Cornwall) should be worn.
- 6 Rachel Bromwich (2006, ciii) suggests that these elements represent a pseudo-learned tradition that is long anterior to Geoffrey of Monmouth, especially given the lack of reference to the Trojan origin of the Britons (which Geoffrey adapted from the *Historia Brittonum*). She compares this to the pseudo-learned tradition of 'takings' found in the medieval Irish *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (The Book of the Takings of Ireland). Even if, as Bromwich argues, this section of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is pre-1136 and, possibly, much older than that, this does not mean that we can date the entire text to this same period—the Wonders section could certainly have been composed post-1136.

and to try to determine the purpose or, at least, the use of the Wonders tradition in later medieval Britain. While the Wonders tradition may not reflect the same type of necessity for origin stories to describe how the land has changed over time as found in the Irish *dindshenchas*, I will argue that for both the Welsh redactor and the English chroniclers, the Wonders of the Island of Britain are a significant aspect of their nationalist agenda and an important component of the ‘Matter of Britain’.

The Red Book of Hergest version of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* describes twenty-seven wonders in Britain and, in beginning to understand these wonders, it is helpful to attempt to categorize them. From a modern perspective, the different wonders can be broadly categorized as natural, unnatural, and supernatural: natural wonders are geographical features that occur naturally, unnatural wonders are those that might not occur as naturally but could potentially occur, while supernatural wonders are those which participate in some sort of distortion of time, space, or otherwise anomalous characteristic. Using these criteria, two wonders are natural,<sup>7</sup> four are unnatural,<sup>8</sup> and the vast majority are supernatural (see Appendix 1). If one were to read these wonders from a medieval perspective, however, it is likely that nearly all of them would have been considered supernatural to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>9</sup> The most common feature among the wonders that a modern reader would deem supernatural is the distortion of space, time, or both: including graves that change their size according to the height of the person lying beside them, a castle that looks full with thirty men but can expand to contain one thousand, a stone whose peculiarity is that if you tread on it you will end up in the same place you started from that morning no matter how far you walked, a stone that always returns to the same place no matter how far you take it, or a cave where one day inside seems like seven days and where you will consume seven days worth of food and candles in that same day. Only a quarter of the wonders contain more geographically locatable information than somewhere ‘in the Island of Britain’—six are given specific locations and one additional wonder is referred to as a mountain ‘in England’ (*yn Lloegyr*), even though many of the

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7 These include: 1. A cave where if you throw your clothes in it, wind comes and raises them in the air; and 2. A bath that gets very hot at all times without any assistance.

8 These are: 1. A tree divided into two branches where leaves, fruit, and bark grow on one side in the summer and the other side in the winter; 2. Two trees that are two miles apart and alternate fruitful and withered years; 3. A mountain with the image of a horse on it and nothing grows on this image [likely the Uffington Horse]; and 4. A stone eight miles from the sea on a mountain with holes in it, when the sea floods, the stone’s holes are filled with water.

9 Datson and Park (1998) write that, for the medieval understanding of wonder, ‘Marvels were either rare phenomena, astounding by their unfamiliarity (for example, the phoenix of the Atlas Mountains, which immolated itself periodically only to rise again), or more common but puzzling, counterintuitive, or unexplained phenomena (for example, the attractive properties of the magnet or ghostly appearances of the dead)’ (23).

wonders with geographical locations are also ‘in England’ (Salisbury Plain, for example). By far the most important aspect nearly all of these wonders share is how interested the redactor is in the human connection to these supernatural places. The wonders rarely just *exist*—they are there for human discovery and interaction. Some explicitly only affect humans,<sup>10</sup> many require humans to act as agents for the wonders to be wonderful,<sup>11</sup> and others focus specifically on the interaction between human and wonder. One of the most intriguing examples of this last kind of wonder is a bird that lives on a great cliff that can respond to a visitor in Welsh or English. When a man tells the bird to come out in order to kill it, the bird promptly comes out moaning, groaning, and weeping to be killed. Generally, the Wonders of the Island of Britain are supernatural, tend to distort space or time, and often are explicitly interested in the interaction of the geographical feature with humankind.

Even though similar themes and the overall essence of the wonders in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* can be found in the list of wonders in the *Historia Brittonum*, certain characteristics emphasize the distinct differences between these separate traditions of wonders. The *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin work of synchronizing history,<sup>12</sup> or ‘synthetic pseudo-history’, written by a Welshman from a wide variety of sources sometime c. 829–830,<sup>13</sup> contains a list of fourteen Wonders of Britain appended to the end of the text (see Appendix 2). Unlike *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*, each wonder is localized: all of the wonders are either given a name or are said to be in or near a certain area. The *Historia Brittonum* wonders can also generally be classified as ‘supernatural’, but all of

- 10 These include a mountain between two roads where if two men come there and each goes on one road, they will never see each other again, or two mountains together, one big one small, where if two men run around the mountains, the second time around they are united in the place they began.
- 11 Examples include a stone where if you put a stick in it, it appears three miles away on the seashore, or a small stone that cannot be lifted any higher than a man’s chest.
- 12 David Dumville (1986) has read the *Historia Brittonum* as attempting to provide a smooth account of the historical period by combining all available (and contradictory) witnesses into a ‘coherent’ whole. Dumville argues that the *Historia Brittonum* has little ‘historical value’ for the Dark Ages period (fifth and sixth centuries) which it discusses, but does have something to tell us about ninth-century Britain. Thomas Charles-Edwards (1991) complicates Dumville’s reading of the *Historia Brittonum*, arguing that it is not *all* synthetic history and perhaps its main concern is for the Britons to come to terms with the defeat and loss of their territory. He goes on to discuss the *Historia Brittonum* as a fusion of *historia ecclesiastica* and *historia gentis*, providing a very useful way of reading the text structurally.
- 13 This text had been generally ascribed to ‘Nennius’ until David Dumville’s (1975–76) careful study of the manuscript tradition of the *Historia Brittonum*. Dumville finds only five surviving manuscripts that assign the text to Nennius (of the remaining thirty, most ascribe it to Gildas) and of these five, one manuscript is the exemplar for all the others (this MS is no older than an eleventh-century Welsh recension). Dumville argues that attribution to Nennius was likely a guess by later compilers. Nevertheless, it has been taken for granted that the *Historia Brittonum* was composed by a Welshman.

them are more explicitly geographical: there are no animal wonders, many of them have to do with aspects of the environment (several are about the sea flooding, apples are on an ash tree, there is a cleft that always blows wind), and fewer deal with the distortion of space or time. Human interaction is at less of a premium in the *Historia Brittonum* than in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*—most wonders do not require human contact to be become wonderful but rather are wonders in their general, geographical being. The most significant evidence the *Historia Brittonum* gives concerning the Wonders of Britain is that, at least by the middle of the ninth century, there was already a fully formed tradition of wonders, most likely of Welsh origin, circulating in Britain. *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* both reflects this tradition and widely diverges from it, especially in that while only five of the wonders from the two texts are similar,<sup>14</sup> each one is different enough that they do not seem to have been taken wholesale from the *Historia Brittonum*.

The *Historia Brittonum* and *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* traditions of Wonders of the Island of Britain have a remarkable existence in a variety of texts, generally chronicles and other ‘historical’ texts, outside of Wales. Beginning in the twelfth century, English chronicle writers such as Henry of Huntingdon and Alfred of Beverley supplemented their geographical descriptions of the Island of Britain with a list of topographical wonders. While other writers, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth (fl. 1136) or Gerald of Wales (fl. 1190), seamlessly integrate certain Wonders of the Island of Britain into the narrative of their works, Henry and Alfred use the Wonders tradition to augment their introductory depiction of Britain (which is itself derived from the much earlier examples Gildas and Bede). My discussion here will only concern lists of wonders that directly correspond with those found in the *Historia Brittonum* and *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*, and,

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14 These are 1. The Hot Lake (where the baths of Badon are), surrounded by a brick and stone wall, and where a man can have any bath he wants there, hot or cold (the corresponding wonder in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* only mentions hot baths with no wall). 2. A cleft in Gwent from which the wind always blows even in summer (the corresponding wonder is a cave in a mountain called Pec that throws your clothes in the air). 3. Buih: a heap of stones with the footprint of Arthur’s dog that hunted the Twrch Twyth, if men come and take the stone, it is returned under the pile after a night (the corresponding stone has no reference to Arthur or his dog, but instead says if you take it two miles away, it will come back). 4. Crug Mawr: a mountain with a tomb on the top of it in Ceredigion. Whoever comes to the tomb and lies beside it, the tomb is the same length as the man, also if a weary traveler kneels near it, he will never be weary again (while this is one of the most similar corresponding wonder, *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* does not name the mountain or area in which this grave is located but adds that it grows under hawthorn bushes without anything on top and that rain never comes on it while not mentioning anything about weariness). 5. A lake which hardens wood to stone after a year, found among the Wonders of Ireland (this is the other most similar corresponding wonder, although in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* it is a British river that is in a forest).

specifically, the earliest uses of these wonders. Henry of Huntingdon is the first Englishman to draw on the wonders in his Latin chronicle the *Historia Anglorum* (first version, c. 1129). He writes,

There are four wonders which may be seen in England. The first is the wind which issues with such force from the caves in the mountain which is named ‘The Peak’, that it drives back any pieces of clothing thrown in and tosses them up to a great height. The second is at Stonehenge, where stones of remarkable size are raised up like gates, in such a way that gates seem to be placed on top of gates. And no one can work out how the stones were so skillfully lifted up to such a height or why they were erected there. The third is at Cheddar Gorge, where there is an underground cavern which many people have often entered, but although they have travelled a long way over dry land and over rivers, they have never been able to come out at the other end. The fourth is that in certain places the rain seems to rise up from the mountains and immediately fall on the plains (23).<sup>15</sup>

Henry, who either neglected or did not have access to the Wonders list from the *Historia Brittonum*, instead draws on the same alternative tradition found in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*. While the mode and direction of transmission remains uncertain,<sup>16</sup> the extent of similarity between Henry’s wonders and the corresponding three wonders in *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is remarkable.

Alfred of Beverley, a close contemporary of Henry, is perhaps the most interesting of these early chroniclers however. Alfred’s Wonders of Britain (see Appendix 3) in his *Annales sive Historia de Gestis Regum Britanniae* (c. 1140s) are a unique mix of both the *Historia Brittonum* and Henry of Huntingdon (or whatever source Henry used), as well as possibly one other source. Alfred begins first by drawing on Solinus’s description of the Roman baths in Britain before writing, *Cum Britannia*

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15 ‘Quatuor autem sunt que mira uidentur in Anglia. Primum quidem est quod uentus egreditur a cauernis terre in monte qui uocatur Pec, tanto uigore ut uestes iniectas repellat et in altum eleuatas procul eiciat. Secundum est apud Stanenges ubi lapides mire magnitudinis in modum portarum eleuati sunt, ita ut porte portis superposite uideantur. Nec potest aliquis excogitare qua arte tanti lapides adeo in altum eleuati sunt uel quare ibi constructi sunt. Tercium est apud Chederhole, ubi tanta concauitas est sub terra, quod cum multi sepe ingressi sunt et ibi spacia magna terre et flumina pertransierint, numquam tamen ad finem euenire potuerunt. Quartum est quod in quibusdam partibus pluuiia uidetur eleuari de montibus, et sine mora per campos diffundi’ (22).

16 It is noted by Gover, Mawer, and Stenton (1939, 360–1) that this is the ‘first’ description of Stonehenge to survive and is the ‘earliest’ record of the name. While this may be the first description among *Latin* or *English* sources, I highly doubt that these English scholars had access to *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*. Therefore, until further work is done toward dating *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*, it remains unclear whether Henry of Huntingdon (or the afterlives of Henry’s four wonders) are the source of the three exactly similar wonders in the Welsh text, whether the Welsh text or tradition to be later written down influenced Henry, or, finally, whether some kind of common source influenced both compilers.

*plura in se contineat mirabilia, iiii. tamen prae ceteris habet miranda* (6) ‘While Britain contains many wonders, four, however, are more wonderful than the rest’. These four are copied almost verbatim from Henry. Alfred then draws on four lakes or pools from the *Historia Brittonum*, three of which Geoffrey of Monmouth (a noted source for Alfred) discusses.<sup>17</sup> In between these four lakes, however, is a fountain (*fontes*) that gives the whitest and (very) fine (*candidissimum et subtile*) salt all week long but from noon Saturday until Monday, the water is drawn out fresh (7). This wonder is not in the *Historia Brittonum* list or the *Historia Anglorum* and its closest analogue comes from *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*, where the nineteenth wonder is a stream that makes salt as flawless as flour and from Saturday at noon until Monday, one cannot work it. After these lakes and pools, Alfred draws further on the *Historia Brittonum*, mentioning a cave near Gwent out of which is always blowing a strong wind so that you cannot stand before it (the ninth wonder), a pond that turns wood into iron (a wonder of Ireland, cited earlier), and the tomb that becomes the same length as any man who lies beside it (the fourteenth wonder, also cited earlier).<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that Henry and Alfred were drawing on some kind of Wonders tradition in composing their twelfth-century chronicles and, further, that their lists of wonders would circulate in Britain and continue to be influential for several hundred years.<sup>19</sup> Henry’s *Historia Anglorum* was an explicitly *English* chronicle

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17 Geoffrey of Monmouth inserts three wonders about different lakes and pools in Britain into his Arthur narrative in *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136). Arthur takes possession of a lake containing sixty islands, sixty streams (though only one flows out to the sea), sixty crags, and sixty eagles’ nests (this is the first wonder in the *Historia Brittonum*) and then Arthur tells Hoel the lore of two other lakes: 2. a pool twenty feet wide and the same distance long, and its depth is just five feet. It produces four different kinds of fish in its four corners and the fish of any one corner were never found in any of the others (the seventh wonder in the *Historia Brittonum*) and 3. Lin Ligua—a pool which roughly corresponds to the sixth wonder in the *Historia Brittonum* (the pool swallows up all of the incoming tide but spits forth all the water when the tide turns, flooding the banks). This wonder also comes with the legend that if all of the people of the district (rather than ‘an army’ in the *Historia Brittonum*) come to the edge, they would likely not escape if facing the pool, but if they are turned away, no harm would come to them.

18 Interestingly, the two wonders most common in the *Historia Brittonum* and *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* are both in Alfred.

19 Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon* (c. 1342), translated into English by John Trevisa (c. 1387), contains separate, non-contiguous sections on the Wonders of Ireland, Wales, and ‘Britain’. While his Wonders of Wales are nearly all taken wholesale from Gerald of Wales’s *Itinerarium Cambriae* and *Descriptio Cambriae*, his Wonders of Britain are copied (but also cited) from Alfred of Beverley’s entire list and a few from Gerald. Though most late medieval Englishmen learned their geography from the *Polychronicon* (Given-Wilson 2004, 131), this important text lies outside of the scope of this article, especially since Higden only duplicates Alfred’s earlier list. Nevertheless, it has been argued that Higden ‘manipulates global geography to fashion his own myth

(despite being written in Latin), much in the vein of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Indeed, Henry writes *Hec autem insularum nobilissima cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, postea uero Britannia, nunc autem Anglia* (12) 'This, the most celebrated of islands, formerly called Albion, later Britain, and now England' (13) and that he seeks to narrate *huius regni gesta et nostre gentis origins* (4) 'the history of this kingdom and the origins of our people' (5–7). John Gillingham (1992; 1995; 2000) has discussed the emergence of an imperialist English culture by the mid-twelfth century, noting that the connection to the French after the Norman Conquest did not seem to be a source of ethnic or national tension by that time. He also argues that a developing sense of English identity can be seen in the works of Henry of Huntingdon, especially in the *Historia Anglorum*. This sense of English identity goes together with the kind of nation-building occurring in these chronicles—one which focuses on English kings and the achievements of these kings and their people in 'creating and sustaining a unified English kingdom' (Given-Wilson 2004, 165). Henry discusses the kingdom of the Romans (and Britons) in Britain, the coming, conversion, and kingdoms of the English, the Danish wars, and the coming and kingdoms of the Normans before giving a state of present events. His list of four wonders (perhaps significantly, Henry does say that these four wonders may be seen in *Anglia*, not *Britannia*) comes very early in the *Historia Anglorum* among a description of the cities of Britain, some hexameters in praise of Britain's fertile fields and richness, and further reports of the climate and other topographical features like roads. Chris Given-Wilson (2004) has argued that the geographical description of Britain in the works of chroniclers such as Henry of Huntingdon or Robert of Gloucester provided a 'fitting prelude' to a 'deeply nationalistic work' which demonstrated that England was 'the best land' (128).<sup>20</sup> Alfred of Beverley, on the other hand, is much neglected in contemporary scholarship since he has been seen as too derivative (of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Symeon of Durham, and Henry of Huntingdon). Therefore, it is perhaps even more remarkable that Alfred's list of wonders is so much fuller than Henry's—he adds eight other wonders, only three of which can be derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and seems to be the first English chronicler to gather so many wonders in one place. His *Annales* was also a predominantly English chronicle, drawing on similar sources to give an account of 'British' history from Brutus to the present-day, although Alfred does note that he intends his word to be a *hystorias Romanorum, Britonum, Anglorum* (1) 'history of the Romans, Britons, (and)

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of English identity' (Lavezzo 2006, 92) in similar ways to earlier chroniclers like Henry of Huntingdon (see below).

- 20 Robert of Gloucester's (fl. c. 1260–1300) Middle English Chronicle lists three wonders: warm baths, Stonehenge, and the cave named Pec with the wind that takes your clothes up into the air. Since his list of wonders derives from Henry or Alfred, his *Chronicle* will not be considered in this article. For a general overview, see Shaw 2011.



English'. Nevertheless, Alfred remains an English chronicler for whom many of Gillingham's and Given-Wilson's observations about chronicles writing in England from this period remain accurate.

In both Henry's *Historia Anglorum* and Alfred's *Annales*, the placement of the lists of wonders within the larger framework of geographical and topographical details about Britain is clear, but the question remains: why mention them at all?<sup>21</sup> One possible answer is that, by claiming these wonders for England or a Britain inherited by the English, these writers were seizing an originally Brittonic or Welsh tradition and inserting it into their chronicles—an undertaking which, for Henry of Huntingdon at least, assisted his project of reviving the English *natio*. Regarding the circumstances of the period in which these chronicles were written, R. R. Davies writes,

It was during the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the great socio-cultural divide within the British Isles came into clear focus. The reasons are manifold. It was then for the first time that an aggressive and expansionist English or, if you will, Anglo-Norman society engaged in a regular and sustained fashion with some of the peoples of the outer regions of these islands, not only in military campaigns but also in an extensive process of settlement, initially in Wales and northern England...simultaneously, and particularly during the turmoil of Stephen's reign [1135–54], Welsh and Scottish (especially Galwegian) troops brought parts of English society to the knowledge, profoundly disturbing as it turned out to be, of the behaviour and customs of a different and, as it may have appeared, barbaric world. Finally, and from the point of view of the historian crucially, it was during this period that a towering group of historians—most notably, of course, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon—defined the essence and trajectory of what one may call political and social Englishness (2000, 115–116).

In a period where the English, or Anglo-Normans, were attempting to take over all of Britain while also defining themselves in contrast to the 'barbarous rudeness' (Davies 2000, 113–41) of the Welsh, it would make sense for these chroniclers to take an aspect of the 'Matter of Britain' and insert it into their all-encompassing historical works. Indeed, Gillingham (1995) has noted that, in the twelfth century, English history was beginning to be viewed (by the English) as the history of 'an increasingly civilized people' (88). He attributes this self-identification of the English as a civilized people to a 'negative perception of "Celtic" society' (89). Would this early English imperialism have included places of wonder in the landscape? I think it very likely, especially since there is no great precedent before

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21 Another question that cannot be addressed in the confines of this paper: if Alfred had access to the *Historia Brittonum* wonders list, why did he only chose to include certain wonders instead of all of them? The answer may be that he was copying another, more condensed list, but the same question remains valid for this potential exemplar.

the twelfth century of historical works containing wonder stories integrated into the topographical features of Britain.

Before pursuing this line of thought further, it is necessary to compare the use or purpose of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* with the English chroniclers, especially given the similarities in some of the wonders. Without any definite criteria for dating or provenance, it is difficult to determine what use *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* had in its original context. We can, however, at least attempt to establish the use of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* in its most immediate context: the surviving manuscript copies of the text. *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* occurs in three main medieval manuscripts: the White Book of Rhydderch (c. 1350), the Red Book of Hergest (c. 1380–1400), and Peniarth 15 (c. late fourteenth, early fifteenth century). The White Book version of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is much shorter than the Red Book version, containing the early ‘*enwau*’ section and later geographical information but not the wonders found in the Red Book and later versions.<sup>22</sup> The text is sandwiched within a collection of the *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* (‘The Triads of the Island of Britain’), which is positioned directly after *Owain* (the last text in a series of vernacular prose tales including the *Four Branches*, *Peredur*, *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig* [‘The Dream of Maxen Wledig’], and *Lludd ac Llefelys*). *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is placed in the Red Book right after a collection of the *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* and right before the first set of ‘romances’ (*The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, *Owain*, *Peredur*, *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig*, and *Lludd ac Llefelys*). *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain*’s place in Peniarth 15 (a manuscript largely containing religious material) is somewhat anomalous, but seems to complement *Ystoria Gwlat Ieuan Vendigeit* (a translation of the letter of Prester John) at the end of the manuscript.<sup>23</sup> In both the White Book and the Red Book, *Enwau ac*

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22 The arrangement of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is very peculiar in the White Book. While the text does note (like the Red Book version) that there are thirty-four chief wonders in the Island of Britain (the Red Book only describes twenty-seven, however), it does not provide any of these wonders. Perhaps most remarkably, the White Book scribe then inserts the poem *Anrec Urien* (‘Urien’s Gift’) in between *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* and Triads. It is likely that the White Book scribe left a part of the manuscript blank and that this space was later filled with *Anrec Urien* rather than the Wonders of the Island of Britain. I will operate from the premise that the scribes of the White Book intended to insert the Wonders into the space between where *Enwau Ynys Prydain* ends and the Triads begin again.

23 While I do not have space to discuss this manuscript further in the body of the paper, the Peniarth 15 *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is very similar to the Red Book version. Kassandra Conley (2010) has recently discussed that the inclusion of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* in this manuscript and believes that it serves as a counterpart to the letter of Prester John (*Ystoria Gwlat Ieuan Vendigeit*), a treatise on the geographical wonders of the East. She believes the placement of the Wonders into the same manuscript context as Prester John’s letter can be read as a reaction against the idea that there are no marvels to be had in the West, or at least in Wales. We can then,

*Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* is paired with the *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*. This is likely due, in part, to the fact that the three different *enwau* (names) given to the Island of Britain over time might be derived from a triad, but when looking at each manuscript as a whole, other intriguing conclusions can be drawn. The most interesting aspect about the placement of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* in the White and Red Books is that the compilers chose to place this text with the Triads rather than with other geographical treatises (or elsewhere in the manuscript). Both the White Book and Red Book contain *Delw y Byd* (a translation of part of *Imago Mundi*—a twelfth-century geographical and cosmological encyclopedia by Honorius Augustodonensis) and *Sant Awstin am dewder y ddaear* (That which St Austen said concerning the width of the world). Neither text is adjacent to *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* in these manuscripts (though *Sant Awstin am dewder y ddaear* is in the same general vicinity). Instead, as Rachel Bromwich notes (2006, c-civ), *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* was ‘introduced’ into the White Book version of the Triads (and, indeed, Bromwich includes the whole of the ‘*enwau*’ section of the text in her magisterial edition of the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*). Given the recent work by scholars on the conscious and careful placement of texts in the White Book and the Red Book (Huws 2000; McKenna 2009; McKenna 2011; Furchtgott 2011), *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* was likely considered comparable by the compilers, in some degree, to the Triads. Therefore, despite possibly containing a passage translated from Henry of Huntingdon or Alfred of Beverley (if the text was composed after the middle of the twelfth century), *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* seems to have been thought of less as a translation or a geographical treatise and more as *cyfarwyddyd*.<sup>24</sup> The placement of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* so close to the Triad collections then suggests convincingly that the compilers thought of this text as reflecting distinctly *Welsh* tradition in the fourteenth century.

Without establishing *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* in its proper milieu or knowing anything more stable about the transmission of the Wonders tradition in medieval Britain than has been set forth in this paper, it is difficult to know what purpose the text may have had in its original context. Nevertheless, given its place in White and Red Books, I believe that, in the late fourteenth century at least, *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* was thought of as *Welsh* tradition, much like the Triads were a distillation of legendary and historical tradition. As such, for

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arguably, read the Wonders as a defiant response to Prester John’s dismissal of the West as geologically and spiritually impoverished as well as a cultural fantasy in which the world’s Western limit contains as many marvels as its Eastern one.

24 *Cyfarwyddyd* refers to the traditional narrative material or lore of medieval Wales and, more specifically, the traditional information that makes up a story—the ‘stuff’ of tales. To some degree, *cyfarwyddyd* can be compared with *senchas*, the traditional lore of medieval Irish culture. See especially Ford 1975–76, Byrne 1974.

both the Welsh redactor and the twelfth-century English chroniclers, the Wonders of the Island of Britain were a significant aspect of their nationalist agenda and an important component of the ‘Matter of Britain’. R. R. Davies writes that:

The idea of Britain exercised a powerful hold over the medieval mind. It had a depth, a resonance, a precision, and an incontestability which did not belong to its imprecise, contestable, and Johnny-come-lately competitors—England, Scotland, Wales. Britain had long constituted a separate, definable world on its own, an *alter orbis* as it was still known in Anselm’s day. It had the further advantage of being a precise, even neutral, geographic term which was apparently immune from the vagaries and inconstancies of political fortune in a way that was not true of, say, Francia and Germania or *Wallia* or *Scotia*. Early medieval writers from Gildas through Bede and ‘Nennius’ to Geoffrey of Monmouth were very much at home with the concept of Britain: it was the natural geographical framework for their histories. A rapid pen portrait of this best and fairest of isles—its length and breadth in miles, its twenty-eight cities, its rivers, its associated islands—became a recognized *topos* with which to introduce their works (2000, 35–6).

Britain was also the natural geographical framework for the chronicles of Henry and Alfred, both of whom make use of this *topos* to introduce the island which the English have inherited. For Henry of Huntingdon, who was not only trying to construct English identity but also build an empire around a migration myth,<sup>25</sup> the Wonders were one more piece used to ground his claim of the English domination of Britain. The Wonders of Britain were, perhaps, one aspect of ‘native’ tradition that English chroniclers could easily ‘hijack’ and attach to their broader project.<sup>26</sup> If the compilers of the White and Red Books thought of *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* as traditional Welsh material in the fourteenth century, it would make sense that, beginning with the first extant iteration in the *Historia Brittonum*, the Wonders of the Island of Britain would have been viewed as ‘British’ (ie. Welsh) tradition. As, indeed, ‘The British past had to be captured and possessed by the English if their claim to the domination of Britain, and with it the revival of Arthur’s empire, was to be historically and mythologically legitimized’ (Davies 2000, 41), Henry of Huntingdon, Alfred of Beverley, and all later English chroniclers, seem to do exactly that: seize the Brittonic Wonders tradition to help erect their own ‘British’ (ie. English) mythology. But, while English chroniclers may have been

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25 For a discussion of the Anglo-Saxon appropriation of the migration myth, see Howe 1989.

26 Davies (2000) notes that if the English were to create a convincing British mythology in the face of the Welsh—the descendents of the Britons and the begetters of the mythology and prophecy of Britain—they had two solutions: ‘One was to hijack much, if not most, of the Matter of Britain and to convert it into a colorful backcloth for the history of England before the coming of the English’ (48–9). The alternative was to ignore that there was a problem.

appropriating the Wonders in nationalistic self-interest, so too were the Welsh. *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain* should not be read solely as ancient, ‘native’, distilled British tradition handed down over centuries: whether the text was composed before or after the publication of Henry’s *Historia Anglorum*, by laying claim to these Wonders of the Island of Britain, the text participates in the same tradition as the prophetic *Armes Prydein Vawr* (‘The Great Prophecy of Britain’) or the poetry of the *Gogynfeirdd* praising heroic princes—that the ‘Britons’ were still the only authentic proprietors of the Island of Britain. By upholding the Wonders as Welsh tradition, the Welsh establish themselves as the rightful custodians of the mythos of *Prydain* and its mythological geography that was once theirs. By continuing to describe and take pride in a landscape envisioned to some degree as a single cultural and geographical entity—despite contemporary political fragmentation—the Welsh could attempt to topographically reclaim their wonderful *Prydain* (at least until Arthur, Cynan, or Cadwaladr returned to do it for them).

*Appendix 1: The Wonders of Britain in Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydain<sup>27</sup>*

1. A tree like a hazel-tree, its leaves are a fathom in length and it is divided into two branches: leaves, fruit, and bark grow on one side in the summer and on the other side in the winter.
2. A church and a graveyard where if someone steals something, he cannot take his hand from what he was trying to steal until blessed by the priest.
3. A bird that lives in great cliffs that can respond to a visitor in Welsh or English. When a man tells the bird to come out in order to kill it, the bird promptly comes out moaning, groaning, and weeping to be killed.
4. A bottomless lake where unless a person who settles on the payment and day of a loan repays the loan, he will never receive more.
5. A stone eight miles from the sea on a mountain top with holes in it, when the sea floods, the stone's holes are filled with water.
6. Caves in a mountain called Pec where if you throw your clothes into the caves the wind comes and raises them into the air.
7. A great stone in the form of little wickets on Salisbury 'Mountain' that no one knows by what art it was lifted (Stonehenge).
8. An endless cave near Colchester with great fields and rivers in it.
9. A mountain near Abbingdon with the image of a horse on it and nothing grows on this image.
10. A stone that if you take it two miles away, in the next morning it will be in the same place.
11. Two French hazel trees in Cornwall that are two miles apart and alternate fruitful and withered years.
12. A mountain in England that is called Sefrael between two roads: if two men come there and each goes on one road, they will never see each other again.
13. A stone on a busy road, if you tread on it, no matter how much you walk that day, you will come to the same place you started from that morning.
14. A great hollow stone like a castle standing on four twenty ft. pillars as big as horses and on top of this stone a fountain of the best water in the world.
15. Two mountains together, one big one small; if two men run around the mountains, the second time around they are united in the place they began.
16. A hollow stone on a mountain: if you put a stick in it, it appears three miles away by the sea.
17. A stream that if you leave iron and food on the shore, the next day it is made into iron links.
18. A cave where, if you go in, it will seem like seven days (you can eat seven days worth of food and use seven days worth of candles) but you will only have been there for a day.
19. A stream that makes salt as flawless as flour and from Saturday at noon until Monday, one cannot work it.
20. A castle that looks full when it contains thirty men, but expands to contain 1000.
21. A forest with a river: if you put any of the wood of the forest in the river, after a year it will be a hard stone.
22. A bath that gets very hot at all times without any assistance.
23. An oven that is said to be owned by Arthur, it is the size of a hall without a cover on it: rain, snow, and hail never fall within it.
24. A grave under hawthorn bushes without anything on top: rain never comes on it and it is the right size for any man who lies beside it.
25. Another grave close to a road under a thorn bush, rain can come on this one; if a small man lies by it than the grave is great, if a large man does, then it is small.
26. A forest with a great field in it: all the wild beasts of the forest are in that field on the first of May as if it were a market.
27. A small stone on a mountain: whoever tries to lift it can lift it to his chest but no higher.

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<sup>27</sup> This summary is based on my own translation. A translation of the text has never been published.

*Appendix 2: The Wonders of Britain in the Historia Brittonum (c. 829–830)*

1. Loch Leven: sixty islands in it, surrounded by sixty rocks, eagle's nest on each rock, sixty rivers flow in but only one flows from it to the sea.
2. Estuary of river Trahannon: reaches the shore in a single wave.
3. The Hot Lake (where the baths of Badon are), surrounded by a brick and stone wall, a man can have any bath he wants there, hot or cold.
4. Salt springs found there (not near the sea but rise from the ground).
5. The Two Kings of the Severn: when the sea floods into the Severn estuary two heaped-up wave crests are built separately and fight each other.
6. The mouth of Llyn Lliwan: when the Severn is flooded the sea floods up its estuary like a whirlpool that spews up everything that is devoured from the sea (it would drag down a whole army if the army fronted the wave, but not if the army turns its back on the wave).
7. The Fount of Gorheli: no stream flows into or out of it but one can fish in it, and the fish are different in different corners of it (it is also only twenty ft. in length and breadth and is knee-deep).
8. Apples on an ash-tree by the river Wye.
9. A cleft in Gwent from which the wind always blows even in summer.
10. An altar suspended by the will of God in Gower (has to do with St. Illtud—a holy man was brought to him with this altar suspended above his face). One king tries to test it with a stick and dies within a month, another peeped under the altar, goes blind and eventually dies.
11. A spring by the well of Pydew Meurig in Gwent in which is a plank that men can stand/sit on while they wash. Sometimes the high tide brings it out to the sea but by the fourth day it always returns. Once someone buried it, but it returned to the spring and the man died within a month.
12. Builth: a heap of stones with the footprint of Arthur's dog that hunted the Twrch Trwyth, if men come and take the stone, it is returned under the pile after a night.
13. Arthur's son Amr's tomb in Ergyng: whatever you measure it, when you come back it's a different measure.
14. Crug Mawr: a mountain with a tomb on the top of it in Ceredigion. Whoever comes to the tomb and lies beside it, the tomb is the same length as the man.

The Wonders of Mona: A shore without a sea; a hill that turns three times a year; a ford: when the sea floods, it is flooded, when the sea ebbs, it dwindles; a stone that walks by night (once thrown away into Menai sea, returned the next day).

The Wonders of Ireland: Loch Lein: four circles, one is surrounded by tin, second by lead, third by iron, fourth by copper, many pearls in the lake. Another lake which hardens wood to stone.

Appendix 3: Alfred of Beverley's Wonders of Britain in *Annales sive Historia de Gestis Regum Britanniae* (c. 1143) with Table of Comparison

Description in Alfred	Source or Analogue
Pec: caverns full of mighty winds that can blow clothes	Henry of Huntingdon 1; EAYP 6
Stonehenge: marvelous stones of unknown origin and significance, they are arranged like gates on gates	Henry 2; EAYP 7
Cheddar: endless underground cave, can walk in and see rivers and streams but you cannot find the end	Henry 3; EAYP 8
The rain that rises up from hills and then rains down in the fields	Henry 4
A lake with sixty inhabited islands, surrounded by sixty rocks (on each rock is an eagle's nest), and sixty rivers (but only one runs into the sea)	HB 1; Geoffrey of Monmouth 1
A lake that becomes hot or cold as the bather desires	HB 3
There are salt wells that give salt all week long but from noon Saturday until noon Monday, the water is fresh	Only similar to EAYP 19
A pond with wonderful water that if you are facing it, it draws you violently toward it and wets your clothes but if you turn away, nothing happens	HB 6; Geoffrey 3
A well from which no river flows and yet fish are taken from it: the well is twenty ft. long and wide, knee deep.	HB 7; Geoffrey 2
A cave near Winchester out of which is always blowing a strong wind so that you can't stand before it	HB 9
A pond that turns wood to iron	HB Wonder of Ireland, similar to EAYP 21
A hill with a grave: any man that comes to it will find it the right size for him, and if a pilgrim kneels near it, he will be fresh and no longer tired	HB 14; similar to EAYP 24



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