Real and Imaginary Towns in Medieval Wales

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A number of recent studies have engaged with the issue of urban development in medieval Wales and the March and with the representation of towns and town life in medieval Welsh texts.[2] In particular, medieval Welsh poetry, especially from the fourteenth century onwards, is rich in references to towns and urban life,[3] and as a consequence, it has been the focus of much scholarly inquiry. Helen Fulton and Dafydd Johnston have covered the subject of the representations of urban realities in medieval Welsh poetry, and in particular the presence of the *encomium urbis* genre in Wales.[4] Less attention has hitherto been given to the descriptions of towns in medieval Welsh prose, for the simple reason that it is much less geographically precise than the poetic tradition.[5] The present article will contribute to the

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[2] See, for instance, the essays in Helen Fulton, ed., *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012; Keith D. Lilley, '"*Non urbe, non vico, non castris*": Territorial Control and the Colonization and Urbanization of Wales and Ireland under Anglo-Norman Lordship', *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000), pp. 517-531, at p. 519; C. P. Lewis, 'Framing Medieval Chester: The Landscape of Urban Boundaries', Catherine A. M. Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City. Space, Place and Identity in Chester*, c. *1200*-1600, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp. 42-56. For medieval Welsh urban history, see R. A. Griffiths, ed., *Boroughs of Medieval Wales*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978; Spencer Dimmock, 'Reassessing the Towns of Southern Wales in the Later Middle Ages', *Urban History* 32 (2005), pp. 33-45 (https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926805002683); Christopher Dyer, 'Modern Perspectives on Medieval Welsh Towns', Ralph A. Griffiths, ed., *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to J. Beverley Smith*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp. 163-179.

[3] Ralph A. Griffiths, *King and Country. England and Wales in the Fifteenth Century*, London / Oxford: Bloomsbury, chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches', pp. 686-687; Helen Fulton, 'The *Encomium Urbis* in Medieval Welsh Poetry', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 26/27, 2006/2007, p. 54.

[4] Helen Fulton, 'Y Cywyddwyr a'r *encomium urbis* Cymreig', *Dwned* 12 (2006), pp. 49-72; H. Fulton, 'Trading Places: Representations of Urban Culture in Medieval Welsh Poetry', *Studia Celtica* 31 (1997), pp. 219-30; and Helen Fulton, 'The *Encomium Urbis* in Medieval Welsh Poetry', *op. cit.*, pp. 54-72; however, not all representations of towns in poetry were idealistic, as the poem of Lewys Glyn Cothi on Chester shows; discussed in Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', Helen Fulton, ed., *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales, op. cit.*, pp. 95-115, at p. 104 and Helen Fulton, 'The Outside Within: Medieval Chester and North Wales as a Social Space', Catherine A. M. Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place, and Identity in Chester*, c. *1200-1600*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp. 149-168, at pp. 159-160, where Helen Fulton also gives the full text and translation of the poem. Dafydd Johnston observes that though Helen Fulton has argued that the Welsh poems praising towns belong to the *encomium urbis* genre, 'the fact that most of [the typical] elements feature in the Welsh poems does not in itself prove that their authors were consciously following the conventions of an international literary genre. These poems could also be an expression of a sense of civic pride and aspiration to urban ideals which were common to all the countries of Europe by the later Middle Ages, even though differences in material prosperity and political power led to some stark contrasts in scale' ('Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', p. 97).

[5] In the early texts, such as *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the native prose tale variously dated to the tenth or eleventh centuries, and hailed as the oldest Welsh Arthurian prose narrative, geographical interest appears to be primarily onomastic, and relates to regional geographical features rather than settlements and towns; K. L. Over, *Kingship*, p. 89. For an edition of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, see *Culhwch and Olwen: an Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*, R. Bromwich and D. Simon Evans, ed., Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992. The text is translated in Sioned Davies, tr., *Mabinogion*, Oxford University Press, 2007. For more on the geography

discussion of medieval Welsh representations of town life by addressing the views of towns and town life in medieval Welsh prose. The focus will be on two native prose tales within which important episodes are set in a town environment. One is the Welsh Arthurian 'romance' *Ystoria Gereint uab Erbin* 'Story of Gereint, son of Erbin'.[6] This tale, often described as one of the three Welsh Arthurian 'romances', corresponds broadly with the narrative of *Erec et Enide* of Chrétien de Troyes.[7] Much in the Welsh text, however, is native in origin.[8] The second prose text containing an interesting reference to urbanity is the Third Branch of the Mabinogi, *Manawydan uab Llyr*. This text belongs to what is, perhaps, the most famous medieval Welsh collection of texts, the Four Branches of the Mabinogi.[9] Both tales survive in the two major medieval Welsh literary collections: the White Book of Rhydderch (National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 4 & 5, *ca.* 1350) and the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus College MS 111, *ca.* 1400). Both tales appear to date from a period considerably older than the manuscripts they are preserved in, and thus predate also the poetic references to Welsh towns discussed by Fulton and Johnston. The dates proposed for *Manawydan* (as Third Branch of the Mabinogi) range from the eleventh century, through the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries, with the most probable being the second half of the eleventh century.[10] One of the crucial discussions of the date of *Manawydan* rests, in fact, on its depiction of English customs and English towns.[11] *Gereint* dates probably to a somewhat later period, perhaps the first half of the thirteenth century.[12]

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of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, see J. Hunter, 'Dead Pigs, Place Names, and Sir John Rhys: Reconsidering the Onomastic Elements of *Kulhwch ac Olwen*', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 11 (1991), pp. 27-36; P. Sims-Williams, 'The Irish geography of *Culhwch ac Olwen*', D. Ó Corráin *et al.*, ed., *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of James Carney*, Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989, pp. 412–26.

6 For editions, see Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Manawydan uab Llyr*, Belmont (MA): Ford & Bailie, 2000 or more recently Ian Hughes, *Manawydan uab Llyr. Trydedd Gainc y Mabinogi*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007, and R. L. Thomson, ed., *Ystoria Gereint uab Erbin*, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997; For more on *Manawydan*, see, for instance, A. Welsh, '*Manawydan fab Llŷr*: Wales, England, and the "new man"', ed. C. J. Byrne *et al.*, *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples. Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies*, Halifax, Saint Mary's University, 1992, pp. 369–83, reprinted in C. W. Sullivan, ed., *The Mabinogi: a Book of Essays*, New York: Garland Press, 1996, pp. 121-141.

7 For a discussion of the applicability of the term 'romance' to the Welsh Arthurian narratives, see Ceridwen Lloyd Morgan, 'Medieval Welsh Tales or Romances? Problems of Genre and Terminology', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47 (2004), pp. 41-58 and K. L. Over, *Kingship, Conquest, and Patria: Literary and Cultural Identities in French and Welsh Arthurian Romance*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture, New York and London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 89-90.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89, 142, 146.

9 For the most recent English translations, see Sioned Davies, tr., *op. cit.*, and Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *The Mabinogion*, London: Everyman, 1993; for the most recent French translation, see P.-Y. Lambert, tr. *Les Quatre branches du Mabinogi et autres contes gallois du Moyen Âge*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999.

10 See the overview and discussion in T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1971), pp. 263-98.

11 See Saunders Lewis '*Manawydan fab Llyr*', *Y Traethodydd* 532 (1969), pp. 137-42, and the discussion in Charles-Edwards, 'The Date', pp. 280-81. In a recent article, Jon Kenneth Williams examines *Manawydan* as evidence for Welsh acknowledgment of 'English military and political supremacy over Wales during the centuries that followed the Edwardian conquest', suggesting that the elements relating to England in the text, at least, are of a later date; Jon Kenneth Williams, 'Sleeping with an Elephant: Wales and England in the *Mabinogion*', J. J. Cohen, ed., *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 173-190, quotation from p. 173.

12 Helen Fulton, '*Gereint vab Erbin* / Geraint son of Erbin', S. Echard, R. Rouse, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, Wiley Online Library, 2017. https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1002/9781118396957.wbemlb653. For more on *Gereint*, see Roger Middleton, '*Chwedl Geraint ab Erbin*', Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts, ed., *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991, pp. 147–58; and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Migrating

The two words in medieval Welsh that are used in these texts to designate 'town' are *tref* and *dinas*.[13] *Tref* appears to derive from **treb-* 'settlement' (also giving rise to Old Irish *atrebat* 'they inhabit'), whilst *dinas* derives from Old Welsh *din* 'fort', which in turn derives ultimately from Celtic *dūnon 'citadel, town' (Latinised *dūnum*).[14] As Johnston notes, 'the two words have quite different semantic histories, and the poetry in fact contains evidence of a shift during the later Middle Ages towards the Modern Welsh usage of *tref* for town and *dinas* for city'.[15] The main word used in *Manawydan* for the towns, including Hereford, is *tref*.[16] However, *dinas* is also used, and the two appear to be largely interchangeable, as in the following example: '*Ys guell yn*' heb ef, '*kyrchu tref arall e ymossymdeithaw yndi.*' *Ac yna kyrchu dinas arall a wnaethant yll pedwar*.[17]

The reflection of urban life in Welsh literary texts of the eleventh, twelfth or thirteenth centuries is significant in the light of the fact that despite the presence of native words for the concepts, for Wales town and city life has been perceived as a Norman, and thus late (twelfth century onwards) development. Though the practice of various trades in *tref* and *dinas* is crucial to the plot of the probably eleventh- or twelfth-century *Manawydan*, it is to English towns that the Welsh heroes travel in that tale, and no Welsh towns are mentioned. This could be argued reflect the almost complete absence of urban centres in Wales before the twelfth century.[18] There is a trend in medieval texts, both from Wales and from abroad, to represent towns and cities as alien to the Welsh way of life, despite the fact that though towns had been scarce in the eleventh century, by the end of the twelfth century Wales was quite urbanised.[19] The most often quoted passage in this regard is the description of Welsh preference for living in remote areas, by Giraldus Cambrensis also known as Gerald of Wales (*ca.* 1145-1223): *Non urbe, non vico, non castris cohabitant; sed quasi solitarii silvis inhaerent.*[20] To use Helen Fulton's words, '[t]he history of urban development in medieval Wales is associated mainly with the Norman borough towns of south Wales and the English boroughs established during and immediately

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Narratives: *Peredur*, *Owain*, and *Geraint*.', Helen Fulton, ed., *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, pp. 128–41.

[13] Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', *op. cit.*, p. 109. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* s.v. *tref, tre²* and *dinas.*

[14] Ranko Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, s.v. **dūno-* and **trebā-* at pp. 108, 388-89; see also Pierre Flatrès, 'Breton Settlement Names: A Geographical View', *Word* 28 (1977), pp. 63-77, p. 73; Wilhelm Kaspers, 'Zur Bedeutungsentwicklung von *dūnum*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 13 (1921), pp. 164-165; see also *GPC* s.v. *tref, tre²* and s.v. *din.*

[15] Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', *op. cit.*, p. 109 and pp. 109-110 for further discussion.

[16] Patrick K. Ford, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 4; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 37: '"It is better for us," said he, "to go to another town, there to earn a living." And then they four went to another city'. The difficulty in providing a strict definition of medieval Welsh terminology for 'town' mirrors the situation of medieval English; see Abigail Wheatley, *The Idea of the Castle in Medieval England*, Woodbridge: York Medieval Press and Boydell Press, 2004, p. 47 and references in n. 16.

[18] Ralph A. Griffiths, *op. cit*, chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches', p. 286.

[19] Keith D. Lilley, '"*Non urbe, non vico, non castris*": Territorial Control and the Colonization and Urbanization of Wales and Ireland under Anglo-Norman Lordship', *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000), pp. 517-531, at p. 519 (DOI: 10.1006/jhge.2000.0242); Ralph A. Griffiths, *op. cit*, chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches', pp. 681-714 at pp. 681, 683 (DOI: 10.1017/CHOL9780521444613.029).

[20] J. F. Dimock, ed., *Itinerarium Kambriae et Descriptio Kambriae* (Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI), London: Rolls Series, 1868, p. 200; Lewis Thorpe, trans., *Gerald of Wales, Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978, p. 251: 'They do not live in towns, villages or castles, but lead a solitary existence, deep in the woods'. See also Ralph A. Griffiths, *op. cit.*, chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches', pp. 682-83 for discussion. For more on Gerald, see Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages*, Stroud: Tempus, 2006.

after the conquest of north Wales by Edward I in 1282'.[21] It is, perhaps, significant, in one of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, *Manawydan*, dating to perhaps as early as the late eleventh century, the reference is to Welshmen travelling to engage in trades and the production of luxury objects in English towns situated on the Anglo-Welsh border, while the Welsh town of Cardiff is featured in the native Arthurian tale of *Gereint vab Erbin* which is believed to display Norman or Continental literary influence.

Towns and Trades in *Manawydan*

One of the most striking features of the representation of towns in *Manawydan* is the association of the practice of crafts and trades specifically with urban life. The heroes of the tale make their way to England to make a living by the practice of various trades in the wake of the magic disappearance of all signs of human habitation, including ploughed fields or crops, from their own land of Dyfed.[22] The text provides a glimpse into the life and composition of a medieval English town through contemporary Welsh eyes. In this text, the heroes first come to Hereford, where they engage in saddle-making and are subsequently, because of their skill and success, chased out by the local saddlers.[23] They proceed to have similar experiences in two further unnamed towns, where they make shields and shoes.[24] The objects they make, as well as the techniques used, are described in detail that, though insufficient for the reproduction of such an object, is nevertheless considerable. Although identification is difficult, given the presence of Welshmen in the border towns of Tewksbury and Gloucester, which are both close to Hereford, those might be candidates for the second city visited by the heroes.[25] For shoe-making, Bristol might also be a possibility, given its association with the import of real cordovan leather from Spain.[26] The subject of cordovan leather is important in the glimpse it provides into the material world reflected in this literary text, and will be treated in some detail further below.

In discussions of this episode, previous studies of *Manawydan* have placed the accent rather on the succession of the crafts as a pattern, rather than on the fact that these are practiced in the towns. Andrew Welsh argues that Manawydan represents a new type of hero, associated with crafts, agriculture, and law.[27] His solution to the problem of the devastation of Dyfed – to travel to England and make a living by practicing crafts, and his flight-not-fight response to the tradesmen who plot against him and his companions, fit with this interpretation. The latter situation, conflict with the local craftsmen, also seems to echo the real world, as historical evidence suggests there was a great deal of competition and regulation of the division of labour in relation to the trades practiced by Manawydan.[28]

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[21] Helen Fulton, 'Introduction: The Impact of Urbanization in Medieval Wales', H. Fulton, ed., *op. cit* (2012), pp. 1-8 at p. 2. See also Fulton, *op. cit.*, (1997), pp. 819-30, at p. 220-221. Note, however, that, as Ralph A. Griffiths points out, 'It is worth noting too that a few settlements with town-like functions seem to have existed before the Anglo-Norman and English conquests, in the vicinity of distinguished churches and peopled with residents of more local origin (such as at Bangor and Llandeilo)'. Ralph A. Griffiths, 'Who Were the Townsfolk of Medieval Wales?', in Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), pp. 9-18, at p. 10.

[22] Patrick K. Ford, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit.*, pp. 36-39.

[23] Patrick K. Ford, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[24] Patrick K. Ford, ed., *op. cit.* p. 4-5; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[25] Ralph A. Griffiths, *op. cit.*, chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches', p. 681.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 681. Although slightly later than our period, there are fourteenth-century records of the importation of cordovan leather in Bristol; see E. M. Carus-Wilson, ed., *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages*, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967, p. 171.

[27] Welsh, '*Manawydan*'.

[28] John Cherry, 'Leather', John Blair and Nigel Ramsay, ed., *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, London: Hambledon, 1991, p. 308.

There is a significant amount of information about the trades the heroes practice in the text, suggesting a degree of realism. To take saddle-making as an example, Manawydan colours the pommels of the saddles with blue-azure, in a technique which the text calls *calch llasar*. According to the *GPC* s.v. *calch*, the words 'calch llasar' mean 'blue-azure' or 'blue enamel', and according to Patrick Sims-Williams, the term means 'enamel/chalk or lapis lazuli/azure'.[29] This detail is in essence a 'craft-legend', to use Patrick Sims-Williams' term, linking an imported craft with the name of an Irish character who in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi*, Branwen*, brings a magical cauldron of life from Ireland to Wales.[30] Whether the blue enamel was lapis lazuli or not, the technique was usually used in the medieval period for luxury objects, jewellery, and church objects.[31] Within the context of the tale, the use of such costly decoration for saddles suggests an explanation for the local saddlers' negative reaction: Manawydan and his companions were undermining their trade by providing higher-quality (or luxury) objects at competitive prices. This is precisely the type of situation that guilds or craft associations were usually set up to regulate.

Whilst the text does not specifically refer to guilds, the reference to each town's saddlers, shield-makers and shoe-makers acting together in an organised way to chase out the heroes suggests an element of organisation, possibly intended to remind the audience of a guild. Such associations in England date back to at least as far as the beginning of the twelfth century, and may well be what is being described in *Manawydan*.[32] This supposition is supported by the strong (in later periods made official) association of the guilds with admission of individuals as burgesses, and the inclusion or barring of individuals from practicing their trade in the town.[33] Many, particularly in earlier periods, did not have official recognition but would nevertheless fulfil the same functions, and it may be what we are seeing reflected in this text.[34]

It is significant that at least two of the three trades practiced by Manawydan and his associates in England are specifically leather trades, and shields would have involved leather straps at least, and probably leather covering.[35] Leather trades had a particular prominence in the medieval world.[36] These trades flourished in West England and the March (Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Cheshire) as late as the Tudor and Stuart periods.[37] L. A. Clarkson's

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[29] Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Irish Elements in Late Medieval Welsh Literature: The Problem of Cuhelyn and *Nyf', Martin J. Ball, James Fife, Erich Poppe and Jenny Rowland, ed., *Celtic Linguistics / Ieithyddiaeth* Geltaidd: *Readings in the Brythonic Laguages. Festschrift for T. Arwyn Watkins*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1990, pp. 277-295, p. 281

[30] *Ibid*., p. 281.

[31] Particularly famous is Limoges enamel; examples include book covers such as the thirteenth-century book cover in the United States National Gallery of Art in Washington (item 1961.9.182 [C.528]); see Rudolf Distelberger *et al*., ed., *Western Decorative Arts, Part I. Medieval, Renaissance, and Historicizing Styles including Metalwork, Enamels, and Ceramics*, Washington: National Gallery of Art and Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 33-34. For examples of other objects in enamel, see Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, 'Excavations cultuelles ou culturelles : interprétation archéologique et historique de découvertes mettant au jour des émaux méridionaux (XIe-XIVe siècles)', *Bulletin de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1985), pp. 200-214 https://doi.org/10.3406/bsnaf.1985.9011.

[32] Platt, *The English Medieval Town*, pp. 112-113. On the Continent, artisan guilds go back as far as the eleventh, and possibly the tenth centuries; E. Coornaet, 'Les ghildes médiévales (Ve-XIVe siècles). Définition - évolution', *Revue historique* 199 (1948), pp. 208-243 at p. 209. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40947709.

[33] Colin Platt, *The English Medieval Town*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1976, p. 113, p. 116.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 114.

[35] Ian Pierce, 'Arms, Armour and Warfare in the Eleventh Century', John France, ed., *Medieval Warfare 1000-1300*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 70.

[36] John Cherry, *op. cit*., pp. 295-318, at p. 308.

[37] L. A. Clarkson, 'The Leather Crafts in Tudor and Stuart England', *The Agricultural History Review* 14 (1966), pp. 25-39, p. 27.

explanation for this specialisation in the later period is that the region was pastoral primarily and had access to external trade, particularly with Ireland and with Spain, which enabled leather importation.[38] The evidence of *Manawydan* suggests that this specialisation might have dated back as far as the Middle Ages, and the explanation applies to this period also. In this respect, it may be significant that the term *cordwal* 'cordwain', designating the type of soft leather originally imported from Spain, is one of the words Sir Ifor Williams believed to have been borrowings from French speakers settled in and around Hereford in the 1150s.[39] The nature and origins of this type of leather are introduced in greater detail in the following section, as part of the discussion of references to cordovan leather in medieval Welsh prose texts.

Spanish Leather in Wales

The degree of description provided for Manawydan's shoemaking activities is impressive: using cordovan leather for the shoe and a different type of leather for the soles, the shoes were stitched and gold buckles were used.[40] According to John Cherry, methods of fastening shoes varied, but 'the instep strap fastening with a buckle first appears on the late 12th-century tombs of Henry II and Richard I at Fontevrault', and while cordovan leather was known from the beginning of the twelfth century onwards, it is difficult to identify medieval shoes made of it.[41] The use of cordovan leather was regulated, as demonstrated by the creation of a special group within the Paris shoemakers' guild, for instance, in the fourteenth century, with exclusive rights to the use of cordovan leather in the making of luxury shoes.[42] The association of cordovan leather with luxury footwear is visible in the medieval Welsh textual corpus also, as we shall see below.

The soft and gilded leather known by the name of 'cordovan' or 'cordwain', was developed in the eighth century and was particularly associated, as the name indicates, with the city of Cordoba, in Southern Spain.[43] Cordovan leather was famous throughout Medieval Europe and was exported in large quantities.[44] References to it can be found in literature across Europe throughout the period, and Chaucer, for instance, refers to cordovan leather shoes in his description of Sir Topas, the Knight of Flanders's grotesquely exaggerated attire.[45] This type of leather had become so closely associated with quality shoe production by the mid-thirteenth century, that in some places those who produced expensive and luxury shoes were only allowed to use cordovan in exclusion of all other leather types.[46] The production of this type of leather

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[38] *Ibid*., p. 28.

[39] Ifor Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1930, pp. XXXIII-XXXIV; discussed in William Parker, 'Gwynedd, Ceredigion and the Political Geography of the Mabinogi', *The National Library of Wales Journal* 32 (2002), pp. 365-96, pp. 370-371. For a detailed description of cordovan leather, see Mary Ware Dennett, 'Gilded or "Cordovan" Leather', *The craftsman* 4 (1903), pp. 258-66.

[40] Patrick K. Ford, ed., *op. cit*., p. 5; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit*., p. 38.

[41] John Cherry, *op. cit*., p. 309.

[42] See *The Secular Spirit: Life and Art at the End of the Middle Ages. The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Dutton & Co and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975, p. 76.

[43] P. Usher, review of C. Singer, E. J. Holmyard, A. R. Hall, and T. I. Williams, *A History of Technology, Volume II: The Mediterranean Civilization and the Middle Ages, c. 700 B.C. to A.D. 1500*, Oxford, 1956, *The Journal of Economic History* 18 (1958), pp. 67-70, at p. 68; Olivia Remie Constable, *op. cit*., p. 144.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 144, 217; L. A. L. Lafuente, 'Chaucer's Image of Spain', J. L. Chamosa and T. Guzmán ed., *Studies in Middle English Language and Literature: Proceedings of the VIth International Conference of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature*, Leon, 1997, pp. 137–43, at p. 139.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 139.

[46] An example is the town of Douai, discussed by L. Halphen, 'Industry and Commerce', A. A. Tilley ed., *Medieval France: A Companion to French Studies*, Cambridge, 2010 (originally published 1922), pp. 179-211, at pp. 188-9.

spread beyond Cordoba to other areas of the Iberian Peninsula, and it may have been known in France and England as early as the 1100s, although firm evidence for the import of Cordovan leather from Spain into both countries is only available for the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.[47] What evidence we have thus seems to suggest that Cordovan leather is unlikely to have been known in Wales before the twelfth century, and is more likely to have become a familiar item of luxury by the mid-thirteenth.[48] This evidence comes in conflict with the notion that the authors of the medieval Welsh tales, and the Four Branches (and thus *Manawydan*) in particular, had a penchant for archaism.[49] Moreover, it makes it unlikely that references to Cordovan leather would have formed part of the original narrative of *Manawydan*, if this is taken as composed towards the earlier end of the 1050-1120 date-range. It is possible that the reference to Cordovan leather may be a later accretion dictated by contemporary concerns and fashions, rather than an original component of the narrative description. Nevertheless, the fact that the reference is not unique to this text is significant. As Patricia Williams and A. T. E Matonis observe, cordovan leather is almost ubiquitous in medieval Welsh prose narratives, and it may be significant that references to cordovan are present in texts of varying dates.[50] Calling leather 'cordovan' would be an easy way to highlight its quality, but only if the quality and status of Cordovan leather was well known, otherwise the allusion would be lost on the audience. Thus, although the issue of the presence of cordovan leather in medieval Welsh narratives does not seem to have attracted much attention hitherto, it is nevertheless a very important one.

There are two words used in Welsh for cordovan leather: *cordwal* and *cordwan*.[51] The two terms are used to describe a wide variety of foot attire within the surviving corpus, as will be seen from Tables 1 and 2 below.[52] The texts in which these terms occur are all 'native' texts,

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[47] As attested by an ordinance of James I of Aragon for September 1st, 1269; see C. Verlinden, 'Studies in Sources and Bibliography VII. The Rise of the Spanish Trade in the Middle Ages', *The Economic History Review* 10 (1940), pp. 44-59, at p. 54 n. 3; Olivia Remie Constable, *op. cit.,* pp. 144-5, 217-9; John Cherry, *op. cit*., pp. 295-318, at p. 309; E. Crowfoot, F. Pritchard, and K. Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001, at p. 77; W. R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Manchester, 1978, at pp. 12, 104, 136-7. Note, however, that according to Cherry no medieval shoes made of cordovan leather have hitherto been found in England; John Cherry, *op. cit*., p. 309. For a discussion of Welsh footwear in the fourteenth century, see Dylan Foster Evans, 'Rhoi eich troed ynddi: y camau cyntaf ar drywydd ffasiwn yng Nghymru'r oesoedd canol', *Tu Chwith,* 14 (2000), pp. 21-34.

[48] Note, however, that, there appear to be early references to potentially the same leather type in Old Irish literature, specifically in the Ulster Cycle text *Táin Bó Froích* 'The Driving of Froech's Cattle', which refers to a red leather termed *di phartaing* 'Parthian leather'; see Wolfgang Meid, ed., *The Romance of Froech Findabair or The Driving of Froech's Cattle. Táin Bó Froích. Old Irish Text, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Glossary,* English-language version based on the original German-language edition, prepared with the assistance of Albert Bock, Benjamin Bruch, and Aaron Griffith, Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen un Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, 2015, p. 166. I am grateful to Dr. Mícheál Ó Flaithearta for this reference.

[49] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of *Culhwch ac Olwen*', *Bile ós Chrannaibh: a Festschrift for William Gillies*, W. McLeod *et al*., ed., Ceann Drochaid, 2010, pp. 45–56, at p. 39.

[50] Patricia Williams, 'Dress and Dignity in the *Mabinogion*', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 8 (2012), pp. 83-114, at pp. 100-101. Matonis briefly mentions Cordovan leather in a discussion of a poem of Gruffudd Llwyd, which describes Glyndŵr wearing shoes made of it; A. T. E. Matonis, 'Traditions of Panegyric in Welsh Poetry: The Heroic and the Chivalric', *Speculum* 53 (1978), pp. 667-87, at pp. 681-2. The occurrence of the word in *Math* is used as evidence that Cordovan leather was known in Wales by Olivia Remie Constable, *op. cit*., pp. 114, 218.

[51] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* s.v. *cordwal/cordwan*.

[52] The information was collected from the medieval Welsh prose online database: Diana Luft, Peter Wynn Thomas and D. Mark Smith, ed., *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1300-1425*, 2013. http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk.

that is texts composed originally in Wales and in Welsh: *Manawydan* and *Math* (Third and Fourth Branches of the Mabinogi), the Arthurian narratives *Gereint vab Erbin* and *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnawn* 'Tale of the Lady of the Fountain' also known as *Owain* (narrative equivalent of the *Chevalier au lion* of Chrétien de Troyes), *Breudwyt Maxen* 'The Dream of Maxen', a tale about the Roman emperor Maxen (Magnus Maximus), *Breudwyt Rhonabwy* 'Dream of Rhonabwy', an Arthurian narrative, the religious text *Ymborth yr Enaid* 'Food of the Soul'.[53]

Table 1: Instances of *cordwal* in medieval Welsh texts				
Text / Manuscript	Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 16.iii (s. XIII²)	White Book of Rhydderch, Peniarth 4 (*ca.* 1350)	Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 27 (s. XIV/XV)	Red Book of Hergest, Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111 (1382-1400)
Manawydan		f. 17v col. 1 l. 28 f. 18v col. 2 l. 23		f. 183v col. 2 l. 20; f. 184v col. 1 ll. 5-6
Math		f. 24v col. 2 l. 1 f. 24v col. 2 l. 18		f. 188r col. 1 l. 1 f. 188r col. 1 l. 14
Gereint vab Erbin		f. 63r col. 2 l. 16 f. 64r col. 2 l. 9		f. 190v col. 2 l. 29
Owain or *Iarlles y Ffynnawn*		f. 49r col. 1 l. 17 f. 49r col. 1 ll. 33-34		f. 154v col. 2 l. 36 f. 156v col. 2 l. 24 f. 157r col. 2 l. 29 f. 158r col. 1 l. 10
Breudwyt Maxen	f. 42r l. 15	f. 46 r col. 1 l. 12		f. 172v col. 1 l. 15
Breudwyt Rhonabwy				f. 135r col. 2 l. 39 f. 137r col. 1 l. 16 f. 137r col. 1 l. 19 f. 137r col. 2 l. 9 f. 137r col. 2 l. 39 f. 137v col. 1 l. 47
Ymborth yr Enaid			f. 36v l. 9	

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and G. R. Isaac, Simon Rodway, Silva Nurmio, Kit Kapphahn and Patrick Sims-Williams, *Rhyddiaith y 13eg Ganrif*, Aberystwyth University, 2010. (See http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace/handle/2160/5812). For the dates of the manuscripts, I have relied on Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2000, pp. 59-61.

[53] For the texts, see Patrick K. Ford, ed., *op. cit*., Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Math uab Mathonwy*, Belmont: Ford and Bailie, 1999; R. L. Thomson, ed., *Ystoria Gereint, op. cit.*,; R. L. Thomson, *Owein or Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnawn*, Dublin: Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 1968; Brynley F. Roberts, ed., *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic*, Dublin: Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 2005; G. Melville Richards, ed., *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1948; R. Iestyn Daniel, ed., *Ymborth yr Enaid*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995.

Text / Manuscript	Book of the Anchorite, Oxford, Jesus College, MS 119 (s. XIV[med.])	Oxford, Jesus College, MS 20 (s. XIV/XV)	Aberystwyth, NLW, Peniarth 15 (s. XIV/XV)	Aberystwyth, NLW, Peniarth 190 (s. XIV/XV)
Owein		f. 17v l. 14 f. 18r l. 12		
Ymborth yr Enaid	f. 85v l. 25	f. 25v l. 12	p. 48 l. 19	p. 206 l. 4

Table 2: Instances of *cordwan* in medieval Welsh texts.

It is notable that, where the word occurs more than once, the use of the form *cordwal* versus *cordwan* is consistent across several texts within the same manuscript, rather than across a text in several manuscripts. For example, the *Owein* of Oxford, Jesus College, MS 20 has *cordwan*, while in White Book and Red Book the form used throughout this text is *cordwal*. The use of the term appears to vary according to the manuscript rather than text. *Ymborth yr Enaid* displays a similar trend, with the Llanstephan 27 version containing *cordwal*, while Jesus 119, Jesus 20, Peniarth 15 and Peniarth 190 versions have *cordwan*. It may be possible that the division between the uses of the two terms is regional, with *cordwal* potentially being the Northern term, while *cordwan* is Southern.[54]

It is also worth noting that the term does not seem to feature in any texts other than the 'native texts'.[55] That is, it appears in descriptions of clothing only in those texts originally composed in Wales in Welsh, and does not feature in any of the narratives translated into Welsh in the late twelfth or thirteenth centuries, such as *Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* (the Welsh translation of the Anglo-Norman story of Bevis of Hampton), or the various Charlemagne narratives (the Welsh translations of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, the *Chanson de Roland* or *Otinel*).[56] The absence of the term from translated texts implies that rather than being an imported descriptive feature, it was used routinely by Welsh authors in composition.

In all cases, the association is with high status. In both *Mandwydan* and *Math*, cordovan leather is referred to as a material used by the protagonists, who are practicing, or pretending to practice, a trade. The reference to cordovan leather in *Math* is particularly interesting, since it shows imitation cordovan leather being created.[57] This may be a reflection of the fact that as the popularity of cordovan leather increased, non-Iberian imitations of this leather started to make an appearance.[58] If this is the case, Wales seems to have been integrated into the European trade and cultural networks to a much greater degree than the conventional perception of

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[54] The indications for this are the Northern associations of *Manawydan*, *Math*, *Breudwyt Maxen*, and *Breudwyt Ronabwy*. The explanation for the difference between the *Ymborth yr Enaid* versions is that Llanstephan 27 was produced in the same area as Red Book of Hergest, since part of the manuscript is also in the hand of Hywel Fychan. Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh* Manuscript, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2000, p. 60.

[55] Although my survey of the material has included only data from prose texts, it is worth noting that given that medieval Welsh poetry is natively composed (rather than translated) this observation should still hold even if poetic texts were included in the analysis.

[56] For editions, see Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, ed., *Selections from Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009; Analee C. Rejhon, ed. and tr., *Cân Rolant: The Medieval Welsh Version of the Song of Roland*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology 113, Berkeley (CA): University of California, 1983; Stephen Joseph Williams, ed., *Ystorya de Carolo Magno o Llyfr Coch Hergest*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1968; Robert Williams, tr., 'The *History of Charlemagne*: the Translation of "Ystoria de Carolo Magno" With a Historical and Critical Introduction', *Y Cymmrodor* 20 (1907), pp. 1–217.

[57] Patricia Williams suggests that 'shoemaking was regarded as a noble craft' on the basis of this episode of *Math*; see Patricia Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

[58] Olivia Remie Constable, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

medieval Welsh literary texts would suggest.[59] This also raises questions about the native versus foreign nature of towns and trades mentioned above.

Rural Wales and Urban England?

The contrast between the perception of Wales as rural and England as urban is reinforced in *Manawydan* through the magical context of the journeys: the heroes are forced to go to England because their own land had become desolate through a magic spell. An important nuance that needs to be emphasised, however, is that here desolation means lack of signs of human activity: dwellings, people and crops had disappeared, but forests, wild animals and fruit remain.[60] Thence the heroes travel to English towns, with their crafts and their people (both those making and objects and, crucially, those buying them). Andrew Welsh argues that Manawydan is a hero of a new sort, not of the old 'heroic' model (who would solve his problems by fighting).[61] His suggestion is that Manawydan is associated with a culture of farming. Whilst I do not propose to disprove this, I would like to add to that argument that Manawydan appears the kind of hero, and *Manawydan* appears to be the kind of text, born of a new urban-aware (if not itself urbanised) Wales.

An additional element of interest is the sense of the text's heroes being external to the towns. They are, indeed, foreigners in more sense than one. The average burgess of a typical medieval English town had would have practiced a trade, and, as Colin Platt observes, 'was neither the child of a serf nor of a nobleman, typically moving from a small trading situation to a larger one'.[62] In the case of *Manawydan*, the heroes, being of noble extraction, as well as foreign (Welsh rather than English), are alien to the towns they came to live and work in.[63] Not all who could come to a town could settle there and not all who could settle there could enjoy the full rights of a burgess.[64] It seems reasonable to assume that Manawydan and his companions did not become burgesses but remained aliens in all the towns they had practiced a trade in. There is no record in the text of the characters following the necessary procedures to set up trade (it was usually necessary to either pay for the right to trade or undergo an apprenticeship).[65]

One of the reasons for the ambiguity in Welsh attitudes towards urban life appears to have been the ambiguity of the status of the Welsh in English towns, even those founded within Wales.[66] The inhabitants of towns not only on the border with England but even within Wales would often be non-Welsh and thus towns are often seen as 'agents in the conquest of Wales by the Anglo-Norman aristocracy and the English crown', to use Spencer Dimmock's words.[67] Most of the towns founded in the period from *ca.* 1070 to *ca.* 1300 were founded by Norman

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[59] For a similar suggestion, see Patricia Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

[60] Crucial distinction underlined by Welsh, '*Manawydan*', p. 135.

[61] Welsh, '*Manawydan*', pp. 135-136.

[62] Colin Platt, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[63] For the idea that the crafts are unsuitable occupations for the characters of *Manawydan* in the light of their birth, see Catherine McKenna, 'Learning Lordship: The Education of Manawydan', John Carey, John T. Koch, and Pierre-Yves Lambert, ed., *Ildánach Ildírech. A Festschrift for Proinsias Mac Cana*, Andover and Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 1999 pp. 101-120, at p. 113.

[64] Matthew Frank Stevens, 'Anglo-Welsh Towns of the Early Fourteenth Century: A Survey of Urban Origins, Property-Holding and Ethnicity', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), pp. 137-162, at pp. 137-138.

[65] Colin, Platt, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[66] Helen Fulton, *op. cit.* (1997), pp. 222, 224-225, 227.

[67] Spencer Dimmock, 'Social Conflicts in Welsh Towns, *c.* 1280-1530', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), pp. 117-135.

or English lords, and a few by the Welsh.[68] In some cases, particularly after the Conquest of Wales in 1282, Welshmen were specifically barred from becoming burgesses.[69] Whilst this phenomenon is too late for *Manawydan*, if the conventional pre-twelfth-century date for the text is valid, we should nevertheless take it into account when considering the impact of the tale on later audiences (those contemporary with our manuscripts, for instance). It also does not mean that Welshmen were summarily excluded from becoming burgesses. Matthew Frank Stevens observes an interesting trend in the ethnic make-up of Welsh towns whereby it appears that those towns with economic origins would have higher Welsh populations.[70] This suggests that Welsh engagement with urban culture was primarily economic in basis, a feature we do find reflected in *Manawydan*.

It should be mentioned in the context of this discussion of Welsh participation in urban life within Wales that there are a few examples among Welsh towns, in the early period, of predominantly Welsh urban societies, of which one example is Newborough (in Anglesey), built on the orders of Edward I on the site of a Welsh village called Rhosyr (Rhosyn/Rhosfair) but intended to inhabitants of Llanfaes, displaced in the building of Edward's new castle at Beaumarais.[71] This town is praised in a poem attributed to the famous fourteenth-century Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, who, whilst commonly praised as the poet of love and of nature, provides a surprisingly rich array of lively illustrations of Welsh town life.[72] Dafydd's praise of Newbourgh belongs to the *encomium urbis* genre following the conventions of praise-poetry, focusing on bounty, but it also provides some glimpses of the town. [73] Dafydd's use of both the Welsh name of the town and a 'cambrianized' form of the English name, *Niwburch* in this poem is, according to Helen Fulton, 'a reminder to the town that, despite its royal patronage, its proximity to the English commercial economy, and its English name, it has a long Welsh history that needs to be asserted'.[74] It appears that even towns with predominantly Welsh populations also identified with Anglo-Norman and subsequently English commercial and urban culture.[75] It is a Welsh town that appears within an Arthurian context in the tale *Gereint vab Erbin*, a context that includes a castle and a tournament.

Castles and Towns in the Arthurian World: *Gereint vab Erbin*

Gereint vab Erbin provides us with the description of a real medieval Welsh town in one of its earlier episodes. Gereint, the eponymous hero of the tale and the equivalent of the French Erec of *Erec et Enide*, having overslept the hunt for the white stag at the beginning of the narrative, accompanies Gwenhwyfar, Arthur's queen, who had also overslept, into the woods, and there, in an episode closely mirroring the one we find in Chrétien, is witness to the

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[68] Matthew Frank Stevens, *op. cit*., p. 139.
[69] Helen Fulton, 'Introduction', *op. cit*, (2012), p. 3.
[70] Matthew Frank Stevens, *op. cit*., p. 140.
[71] Gwyn Thomas, tr., *Dafydd ap Gwilym: His Poems*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001, pp. 262-263. For more on Newborough, see Ralph A. Griffiths, *op. cit*, chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches', pp. 694-95 and Ian Soulsby, *The Towns of Medieval Wales. A Study of Their History, Archaeology and Early Topography*, Chichester: Phillimore & Co., 1983, pp. 194-196.
[72] For more on Dafydd ap Gwilym, see, for instance, Rachel Bromwich, *Dafydd ap Gwilym*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974 and for the digital edition of the poems see www.dafyddapgwilym.net (Welsh Department, Swansea University).
[73] For previous discussions, see Helen Fulton, *op. cit*. (2006), pp. 49-72; Helen Fulton, *op. cit*. (1997), pp. 219-30; and Helen Fulton, *op. cit*. (2006/2007), pp. 54-72. Dafydd Johnston suggests that this genre can be regarded as a sub-category of 'praise of place' poetry, Dafydd Johnston, *op. cit.,* p. 96.
[74] Helen Fulton, *op. cit*. (2006), pp. 54-55. See also Dafydd Johnston, *op. cit*., pp. 97-98.
[75] Helen Fulton, *op. cit*. (2006), p. 54.

insulting behaviour of an unknown knight towards the queen. Being unarmed (his outfit, including cordwain boots, is described at some length) and unable to exact immediate revenge, he follows the knight across the river Usk and to a town where a contest is to be held.[76] The town is described as a *dinastref* 'walled town', with *caer a chastell* 'a stronghold and castle' at the town's end (*ym penn y dref*).'[77] This town is later identified as *Caerdryf* (=Cardiff).[78] The fact that the town is defined only through its geographic location and only named much later on in the narrative, suggests that the narrator of the tale thus seems to rely not only on local knowledge, but also to assume knowledge on the part of the audience.[79] It seems that he expected his audience to recognise Cardiff from the reference to a large town with a castle. Cardiff in the middle ages was the largest town in Wales, with around 2,000 inhabitants, of whom 400 were burgesses.[80] This made it a well-known urban centre. The fact that the action in *Gereint* is thus anchored in real-world geography reminds us that although, as K. L. Over, observes, just as Chrétien's romances, their Welsh equivalents 'are geographically vague', this episode in *Gereint* forms an exception to that trend.[81] There is no magic involved, and the audience can recognise the locations as pertaining to their own world.

In the light of this realism of the world depicted, it is interesting that the castle and stronghold at the end of the town are picked out in the description as its most important feature. The association of forts and towns appears to be reflected throughout Welsh poetic references to urban life, as well as in this prose text. This may well be a realistic feature, reflecting the real presence of fortification within towns (or indeed the emergence of urban growth around pre-existing fortifications). Castles were a crucial element of particularly those towns in Wales which were Norman foundations, and in many cases, 'town and castle were planned and built together' (as in Rhuddlan, Flint, Conwy, and Caernarfon).[82] Cardiff Castle (see Figure 1 below) was preceded on the location by a Roman fort, parts of which are still visible and had always had a settlement attached to it, as it were, on the south side (rather than all around it).[83] The medieval town appears to date to the eleventh century and to be contemporaneous to the construction of a Norman castle (built by William the Conqueror), originally built as a wooden structure, and succeeded by a stone structure in the twelfth century, probably built by Robert of Gloucester.[84] The town itself appears to have stretched down from the South Gate of the castle, and thus, if Gereint were approaching from the south, he would have seen the castle on the far end.[85] The fact that the literary text seems to be in agreement with the historical evidence lends additional credence to both.[86]

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[76] Robert Thomson, ed., *Ystorya Gereint*, Medieval and Modern Welsh Series 10, Dublin: DIAS, 1997, pp. 3-7; Gwynn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit*., p. 191-93.

[77] Robert Thomson, ed., *op. cit*., p. 6; Gwynn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit*., p. 193. See also *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* s.v. *dinastref*.

[78] Robert Thomson, ed., *op. cit*., p. 16; Gwynn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit*., p. 200.

[79] Helen A. Roberts, 'Court and *Cyuoeth*: Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* and the Middle Welsh *Gereint*', in Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ed., *Arthurian Literature* XXI: *Celtic Arthurian Material* (2004), pp. 53-72, at p. 60.

[80] Helen Fulton, 'Introduction', *op. cit.,* (2012), p. 4; Ian Soulsby, *op. cit*., p. 97. The total population of Wales ca. 1300 would have been around 300,000; Ralph A. Griffiths, *op. cit*., chapter 4 'Wales and the Marches' p. 681.

[81] K. L. Over, *op. cit*., p. 89.

[82] Abigail Wheatley, *The Idea of the Castle in Medieval England*, Woodbridge: York Medieval Press and Boydell Press, 2004, p. 50.

[83] John R. Kenyon, *The Medieval Castles of Wales*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010, p. 110; Ian Soulsby, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[84] *Ibid*., p. 95; Kenyon, *The Medieval Castles*, p. 110. For more on medieval Cardiff, see also Ralph A. Griffiths, *Conquerors and Conquered in Medieval Wales*, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994, p. 339.

[85] For the medieval layout of Cardiff, see Figure 22 on p. 96 of Soulsby, *Towns*.

[86] Ian Soulsby, *op. cit.* p. 97.

Figure 1. The Norman Keep at Cardiff Castle ©2016 N.I. Petrovskaia

However, since Gereint was travelling from Caer Llion (modern Caerleon), he would not have approached Cardiff from the south, but rather from the north-west if he had been travelling directly (see Figure 2 below). This would have corresponded to the modern Queen Street, and one can imagine the travellers arriving along the route of the Newport Road (the A4161 and B4487).[87] The corresponding street was part of medieval Cardiff, but whether the audience would have needed to imagine Gereint arriving by that route or whether the description of Cardiff Castle seen from the south of the town would have been accepted as the most well-known and striking image, is a moot point. One need only think of liberties taken with landscape and historical costume in contemporary films, the latter so sharply described by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*.[88]

A major point to be noted in respect to logistical realism is that travelling from Caerleon to Cardiff does not entail crossing the Usk, mentioned in our text, unless that river is crossed twice.[89] There is, however, some possibility that this is the case, as the text refers to both Arthur and, in turn, Gwenhwyfar, going across the River Usk on their way to the Forest of Dean, where the magical stag had been sighted (on the map below the Forest of Dean is not pictured, it would be to the north, beyond the border of the map above Chepstow).[90] Gereint, who is with Gwenhwyfar at the time, then follows the insulting knight directly, without returning to the court, and below Caerleon (*is llaw y llys yg Kaerllion*) they once more cross the Usk, and then head directly towards Cardiff.[91] *Is llaw* means 'below' or 'further down than', which suggests that they crossed the river closer to its mouth, indicating to the reader that they were heading not to Caerleon but further south (for the relative positions, see Figure 2).[92]

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[87] See, however, Robert Thomson, ed., *op. cit*., note on pp. 71-72, who argues that the characters did not follow major Roman roads. The Newport Road partly corresponds to the old Roman route; see Andy Sherman and Edith Evans, *Roman Roads in Southeast Wales. Desk-based assessment with recommendations for fieldwork*, The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust, Report No. 2004/073 (September 2004), pp. 21-22, available from the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Cadw Report Archive www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/cadw.html.

[88] Originally published in *Les Lettres nouvelles* 11 (Jan. 1954) as 'Jules César au cinéma' and reprinted in Mythologies, Paris : Seuil, 1957 as 'Les Romains au cinéma'.

[89] This is accepted by Robert Thomson.

[90] Robert Thomson, ed., *op. cit*., pp. 2-3 and note on pp. 64-65; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit*., p. 190, p. 193.

[91] Robert Thomson, ed., *op. cit*., p. 6; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, tr., *op. cit*., p. 191.

[92] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru,* s.v. *islaw*. See, however Robert Thomson's edition of *Ystorya Gereint*, note on pp. 71-72. Thomson argues that Gereint crossed the Usk again at Caerleon.

Figure 2. Caerleon, the River Usk, and Cardiff Map data ©2018 Google maps.google.com

Returning to the issue of the *caer a chastell* 'a stronghold and castle' of Cardiff, it is worth dwelling on the issue of town fortifications versus castles. In a poem on the town of Oswestry, the late-fifteenth-century poet Tudur Aled also refes to *caer a chastell*.[93]

Other references to fortifications in the description of a town are not so formulaic or as in this poem by Dafydd ap Gwilym:

In my way in the early [morning], meaning well,
I'm singing – since it is an easy time –
To the fair town by Rhiw Rheon
Just by the rock and the round fort.[94]

In this case, the round fort is a castle-type set of fortifications. Dafydd ap Gwilym's poem dedicated to Newborough, already discussed, also makes reference to the town's *fair [and] lovely temple, its green towers* [l. 3] and refers to the town as *castell*.[95] Given that there was no castle at Newborough, Johnston suggests that the reference is to the town's fortified walls.[96] It is possible to read the reference to the towers also in this context.

Whilst now mostly associated with castles or churches, in medieval Europe, towers were also a feature of town life. One thinks in particular of the urban landscape of medieval Italy (see Figure 3). Indeed, whether castle tower, church tower, or civic tower, the image was also used as a short-hand reference to towns, as attested by the depiction of the city of Chester as a tower on a coin of Edward the Elder (899-924).[97] Towers, except castle and church towers, would not

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[93] 'A wall over gates, seen from afar, magnificent fort and castle, splendid wall, the houses are in a circle, as if round'; 'Tref Groesowallt', Thomas Parry, ed., *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962, pp. 178-182, at p. 179; quoted and translated in Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), pp. 95-115, at p. 100.

[94] 'The Clock', ll. 1-4; Gwyn Thomas, tr., *Dafydd ap Gwilym: His Poems*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001, p. 136. The location of Rhiw Rheon is uncertain, but may be near Brecon (mid-Wales), *ibid.*, p. 137 n. 3.

[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

[96] Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), p. 99.

[97] C. P. Lewis, 'Framing Medieval Chester: The Landscape of Urban Boundaries', Catherine A. M. Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City. Space, Place and Identity in Chester*, c. *1200-1600*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp. 42-56, at p. 43, in the context of the discussion of city walls.

have been a feature of the Welsh medieval town.[98] The castle towers, however, and references to castles and fortresses, appear to form a key element in the description of towns, as we have seen in *Gereint*.

Figure 3. The medieval towers of Pavia, Italy ©2018 N.I. Petrovskaia

Conclusion

Helen Fulton reads the use of the genre of *encomium urbis* for small towns such as Oswestry and Newburgh as ironic, citing that such praise-poetry was usually addressed 'in Latin to the great cities of Europe – Rome, Milan, Verona, York, London'.[99] However, as Dafydd Johnston points out, the appreciation of irony would have required the audience to know the rhetorical models of the poem in question, and he suggests reading this poetry as straightforward praise.[100] In one of the medieval Welsh poems praising the town of Oswestry, the town is compared to Boulogne and Jerusalem.[101] Guto'r Glyn, in his poem to the same town, describes it as *A'r dref orau hyd Rufain* 'and the town, the best as far as Rome'.[102] In this poem he also refers to London and to Canterbury, contextualising Oswestry and placing it, to use Helen Fulton's terms, 'as part of the larger Christian empire of ancient and illustrious cities'.[103] The placement of Welsh towns in a broader European and global context may be a reflection of the idea of urbanity as an import. We have seen in the descriptions of towns in both *Manawydan* and *Gereint* elements which are non-Welsh. In *Manawydan*, the towns described were English, and while dwelling in them the heroes remained outsiders, ultimately chased out by local craftsmen. Importantly, whilst in towns, the heroes engaged in leather trades, and in one case at least, the leather in question was specified as cordovan leather, an import by definition.

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[98] Richard Suggett, 'The Townscape, 1400-1600', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), pp. 51-94, at p. 51

[99] Helen Fulton, *op. cit.* (2006), p. 56.

[100] Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), p. 97.

[101] *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, p. 179; Discussed in Dafydd Johnston, 'Towns in Medieval Welsh Poetry', Helen Fulton, ed., *op. cit.* (2012), pp. 99-100. Indeed, it is likely that many more poems praising Welsh towns had at one point existed and have been lost because no patron had been interested in their preservation. Dafydd Johnston gives the example of a reference by Gutor's Glyn to a poem in praise of Oswestry by Owain Waed Da that had earned him the status of burgess in that town (p. 97).

[102] John Llywelyn Williams and Ifor Williams, ed., *Gwaith Gutor's Glyn*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1939, pp. 15-30, at p. 15, I. 4; for the translation of the relevant section of the poem see Helen Fulton, *op. cit.*, (2006), p. 64.

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

In the case of *Gereint,* while the town described, Cardiff, was Welsh, the chief feature of the town singled out in the account of the hero's first glimpse of it was the castle, built by the Norman king and possibly, by the date of the composition of the text (and certainly by the time of our manuscripts) expanded by the most powerful Anglo-Norman marcher lord of the twelfth century, Henry I's illegitimate son Robert of Gloucester. This representation of Norman power inside an Arthurian tale may invite a postcolonial reading of the 'romances', but this is beyond the scope of the present article.[104]

As Hyde points out, the medieval descriptions of cities are sporadic examples that 'reflect successive stages in the fortunes of medieval cities', with the growth of description representing the growth of material to be described.[105] The emergence of references to Welsh towns in fourteenth-century poetry in Wales can also be interpreted as a testament to the emergence of Welsh towns themselves as important centres.[106] The purpose of the present discussion of medieval Welsh prose references to cities was to examine the extent to which urban life had extended its influence on Welsh culture and to find indications as to which aspects of towns and town life were brought out as most familiar and most characteristic. In our examination of the earlier text, *Manawydan*, we have found that towns, to which Manawydan repairs to easily and fits in so successfully, represent part of the 'new' ('modern') environment within which the old-fashioned hero fits less well than Manawydan, identified by Andrew Welsh as a new type of hero. Towns and trade, closer contacts with England, and imported techniques and materials, are his world. His world is thus larger and more cosmopolitan. In *Gereint*, the later Arthurian text influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth and possibly Chrétien de Troyes, the main feature of the town is its castle. Whether to be seen as a sign of Norman power or as a reflection of the Norman cultural influences on the text, close to a conventional romance, with its knights and tournaments and needing the castles that fit into the same cultural sphere, this aspect of the town remains an external import. Thus the prose texts, much like the poetry examined by Fulton and Johnston, suggest that in medieval Wales towns were a feature of everyday reality, and carried multiple layers of associations, which could be used to great effect and advantage by authors and and audiences.

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[104] For such readings, see K. L. Over, *op. cit.*; Aronstein, 'Becoming Welsh: Counter-Colonialism and the Negotiation of Native Identity in *Peredur vab Efrawc*', *Exemplaria* 17 (2005), pp. 135-68.

[105] J. K. Hyde, 'Medieval descriptions of cities', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1966), pp. 308-340, at p. 310.

[106] Helen Fulton, *op. cit.* (2006), p. 61. Indeed, Helen Fulton suggests that it is worth reconsidering Dafydd's authorship of the poem to Newborough (discussed below) and proposes that it fits better in the fifteenth-century context (p. 72).