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Author(s): J. S. P. Tatlock

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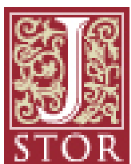

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THE DRAGONS OF WESSEX AND WALES

By J. S. P. TATLOCK

THE dragon during the middle ages seemed quite as much an actuality as the elephant or camel; it was oftener said to be seen, even if never seen. Isidor of Seville in the seventh century says it is the largest of living creatures, and has a crest, an erectile tongue and a powerful tail.[1] The thirteenth century encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais adds that it has wings and a yellowish and black face; some have feet, but this is rare.[2] Reports of dragons are constantly retailed by English chroniclers. They are heard of as battling each other in the sky, as seen passing over on their own errands, as ominous, and rarely as arriving and spreading ravage. As mere specimens from Matthew Paris, they were seen in the sky before the Danish invasions, and in 1233.[3] Most convincing of all, in 1405 we are told a huge dragon appeared near Sudbury (probably Suffolk), killed sheep and shepherds, and was vainly attacked with arrows, which rebounded clattering from its scaly sides; it betook itself to a marsh, and was seen no more. The Laon canons who visited England in 1113 are made to say they saw a dragon with five heads and sulphurous breath burning Christchurch in Hampshire.[4] Dragons were the kind of phenomenon which might be seen last year or next year, were common in the next country and not unknown in the next province. They are not merely ferocious, but in the earliest belief sometimes wise and protective. Hence their interest and symbolism for the mediaevals.

The likeness of a dragon as ensign came from the East, where it was widespread, and was adopted by the Romans about 175 A.D. Used in the fourth century for the ensign of the cohort,[5] as the eagle was that of the legion of ten cohorts, it was a chief military ensign, and a red or purple dragon was used by the emperor in warfare and ceremonial. There are many full accounts of it in late classical and early Christian writers; it was modeled of colored cloth, and set at the top of a staff, to swell and writhe and hiss as blown open by the wind, like the pennons on ships and landing-fields now used to show how the wind blows.[6]

[1] *Etymol.*, XII, 4 (*Patrol. Lat.*, LXXXII, 442).

[2] *Speculum Naturale*, XXI, 29. Ample information as late as in Konrad Gesner, *De Serpentibus* (German version, Heidelberg, 1613), pp. 35r–43r; Ulysses Aldrovandus, *Serp. et Drac. Hist.* (Bologna, 1640), pp. 312–360; Joannes Jonstonus, *Hist. Nat. de Serp.* (Amsterdam, 1657), pp. 32–37; G. C. Kirchmaier, *De Drac. Volantibus* (Wittenberg, 1675); Fr. Tiedemann, *Anatomie . . . d. Drachens* (Nuremberg, 1811), pp. 31 ff. We learn the color of its flesh (*vitreus*), and the length of its intestines (120 ft.); some have and some have not wings and feet. Also S. A. Cook on *Serpent-Worship* in *Encycl. Brit.*, eleventh ed.

[3] *Chron. Maj.* (Rolls Series), I, 361, III, 243; Roger of Hoveden (Rolls Ser.), I, 26; cf. William of Jumièges, *Patrol. Lat.*, CXLIX, 869.

[4] *Annales Henrici Quarti* (in *Trokelowe's Chronica*, Rolls Ser., 1866), p. 402; Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, CLVI, 981.

[5] Vegetius, *De Re Militari*, I, 23, II, 7.

[6] Daremberg and Saglio, *Dict. des Antiq. Gr. et Rom.* (Paris, 1877), IV, 1321; Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encycl.* (Stuttgart, 1905), V, 1633–34; Ducange, *Glossarium, s. v. Draco.* (Sculptures or pictures of such dragon-ensigns may be found on the column of Trajan (cf. the studies of it by G. Cerosa and C. Cichorius) and the arch of Septimius Severus (cf. Daremberg and Saglio, *op. cit.*, and *La Grande Encyclopédie*, as well as descriptive treatments of the Bayeux Tapestry, etc.).

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This was retained in Constantinople as a *φλάμουλα* (*flammula*, banner), the *δρακόντειον*, among others borne before the emperor by great officials on certain occasions;[1] and also as an army-ensign.[2] The Continental Saxons, according to Widukind of the tenth century, had a 'signum . . . sacrum, leonis atque draconis et desuper aquilae volantis insignitum effigie.[3] The western emperor Otho IV, at the battle of Bouvines, 1214, had a golden dragon-standard much like that of the ancient Romans, made of cloth to swell out with the wind, with wings and tail and gaping jaws, and set upon the top of a shaft surmounted by an eagle; it was carried by a car,[4] as standards were in the twelfth century and later in various places from Yorkshire to Italy. A four-wheeled car also carried the 'standardum altissimum Dragonem desuper deferentem' of the Count of Flanders, according to the early thirteenth-century abbot of Andres.[5] It is hardly necessary to mention dragons of apparently other ancestry. In Scandinavia they are familiar, especially as figure-heads of ships, and appear thus in a poem of about the year 1000, and about a century later.[6] As typifying Satan, evil, heresy they abound in literature; their effigies were carried in church processions, and figure in the religious wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most of this is pre-armorial, but they became not uncommon in arms; always up to the present day less common in the fixed, hereditary scutcheon, which dates from the twelfth century, than as armorial crests or supporters, both a century or two later, and more readily adopted and changed.[7]

Among the French there seems to be no historical evidence of the dragon-ensign. In seven early Norman historians there is no indication that it was used by their dukes before (or after) the conquest of England, in spite of the appearance of the dragon in Norse mythology and usage recorded later. At Hastings William had a *vexillum* of St Peter sent by the Pope. Ducange quotes from a very late manuscript a statement as to the feudal duty of carrying the dragon of the Duke of Normandy, but this may well have become attached to Normandy through Richard I or another English king. I find no other suggestion of a ducal dragon in Normandy.[8] Still less in France proper. I find in no historian either mediaeval or modern any suggestion that it was ever used by the French. Their

[1] *De Officiis C'politanis*, (cap. 6), attributed to Codinus Curopalates, of the fifteenth century (*Patrol. Gr.*, CLVII, 65, 71; *Corp. Script. Hist. Byz.*, XIV, 48, 54, 283 f.).

[2] *τὰ σκεύη τῶν δρακοναρίων*, in *De Cerimon. Aulae Byz.*, I, 1, of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (tenth century; in *Corp. Script. Hist. Byz.*, XVI, 11, XVII, 81).

[3] *Res Gestae Sax.*, I, 11 (*Mon. Germ. Hist.*, *SS.*, III, 422).

[4] G. le Breton, *Philippis*, XI, 20–31 (Soc. Hist. Fr., 1882–85, LXVIII, ii, 318–319).

[5] *Willelmi Chronica Andrensis* (*Mon. Germ. Hist.*, *SS.*, XXIV, 684 ff.).

[6] Vigfusson and Powell, *Corp. Poet. Boreale* (Oxford, 1883), II, 217; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* (Rolls Ser., 1887–89), p. 486; *Heimskringla* (ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen, 1911), p. 46, K. 9. In the last (p. 209, K. 49) St Olaf (died 1030) is said to have had a white banner with a serpent on it (*ormr*, not *dreki*).

[7] Excellent and critical article on *Heraldry* by Barron, *Encycl. Brit.*, 11th ed.

[8] The poem *Normannicus Draco* takes its title from the *Germanicus draco* in the Prophecies of Merlin, and has no relation to the present matter. But if the Normans, or the English about 1169, had had a dragon-standard, it would have been pretty certain to appear in a very long poem so named. Its author loved quips, and would have invented some about it.

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royal standards were the oriflamme, or banner of St Denis, which dates from the eleventh century, and the lilies.[1] Yet in spite of this it is clear, especially through romances from the later twelfth to the later fourteenth century,[2] that French writers were aware of the existence of the dragon-ensign, whether through the Norman-English and other royal usage, or minor use in France. It evidently impressed the French.

We first hear of the 'dragon of Wessex' at the battle of Burford fought between Cuthred of Wessex and Æthelbald of Mercia in 752. The account by the twelfth century Henry of Huntingdon states that the prominent ealdorman Edelhun preceded the West-Saxons, 'regis insigne draconem scilicet aureum gerens,' and stabbed the Mercian standard-bearer.[3] While much of Henry's full detail is of the commonplace kind easy to invent, some ensign at least in the hands of Edelhun is not of this kind, and was probably derived from a lost source. At the battle of Assandun in 1016 (again according to Henry), between Edmund Ironside and Cnut, the former rushed into the fight, 'loco regio relicto, quod erat ex more inter draconem et insigne quod vocatur *Standard*' (p. 184).

We are on quite solid ground with the battle of Hastings. Here none of the many early written authorities mentions the dragon-ensign as such;[4] it appears vaguely as his *vexillum*, or (probably) *gonfanon*. But the Bayeux tapestry suffices, the astonishing accuracy of which is recognized by everybody. Almost at the end of it Harold is seen falling with an arrow in his face, as stated by the written accounts, directly by the dragon-ensign; which is the modeled image of a chunky, twisting snake with two legs and small wings, red and probably gold in color, and streaming horizontally from its head on the top of a shaft.[5]

Here the dragon-ensign disappears for a century and a quarter. While in the next five reigns battles are less important than sieges, still there are seven or so of important engagements which constantly appear in the records. Of the records for these reigns some three dozen are specially listed by Charles Gross;[6] they frequently mention *vexilla* and the like (sometimes with descriptions) as borne in these fights, but never the dragon. Further, it appears nowhere, in the English or any army, in the many long crusade-chronicles in the *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades*.

[1] E. g., G. le Breton, *Gesta Philippi, Philippis* (Soc. Hist. Fr., 1882–85), I, 281, II, 319).

[2] Passages in Ducange's and Godefroy's dictionaries. 'O vos aveiz vostre dragon,' says Hector to Priam in Benoit's *Roman de Troie*, l. 8044 (ed. Constans, Soc. Anc. T. Fr., I, 435).

[3] Rolls Series, 1879, p. 121. The detail is not in extant versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Henry's main source along here), nor in Florence of Worcester, nor William of Malmesbury's two *Gesta*. Matthew Paris (*Chron. Maj.*, R. S., I, 341) gives the detail ('aureus draco depictus'), apparently from Henry; also Roger of Hoveden (R. S. I, 20), indirectly from Henry.

[4] Lists in Freeman, *Dict. Nat. Biogr.* (under *Harold*), J. H. Round, *Feudal England* (London, 1895), pp. 332 ff.

[5] *Reproduction Complète de la Tapisserie* (Tostain, Editeur, Bayeux); Hilaire Belloc, *Book of the Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1914); A. Levé, *La Tapiss. de B.* (Paris, 1919), pl. VIII; F. R. Fowke, pl. LXXVI.

[6] *Sources and Literature of English History* (2nd. ed.), pp. 329–30.

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But from Richard I's day we hear much of it for over a century and a half. Richard carried a dragon to foreign parts. Besieging Messina in 1190, 'Rex Angliae procedit armatus, vexillum draconis terribile praefertur expansum,' and the next year on the march in Palestine there was uncertainty as to who ought to carry the ensign, 'draconem suum.'[1] Richard's dragon was remembered for many years by Gervase of Tilbury.[2] His brother too used the ensign. In 1216, Louis VIII, invading England, hastened ahead of John, 'quem audierat apud Wintoniam insigne bellicum draconem erexisse. . . . Sed Johannes . . . draconem suum deposuit et aufugit.' . . .[3] Under the son of John we hear much more. In 1244 Henry III gave the following order to Edward son of Odo, his goldsmith, painter, builder, and vestment-maker: 'Fieri eciam faciat unum draconem in modo unius vexilli de quodam rubeo samitto, qui ubique sit auro extencellatus, cujus lingua sit facta tanquam ignis comburens et continue apparenter moveatur, et ejus oculi fiant de saphiris vel de aliis lapidibus eidem convenientibus, et illum ponat in ecclesia Beati Petri Westmonasteriensi contra adventum regis ibidem.'[4] Clearly just like Harold's dragon, this splendid and formidable ensign did not stay in the abbey long. In 1245 the Welsh revolted, and the king went after them to the foot of Snowdon with a large army; so enraged that 'signo draconis elevato suos procedere jussit in mortem eorum.'[5] Thus in the Snowdon region the red dragon was borne by the English against the Welsh. And later Henry once more displayed the dragon against the Welsh. In 1257, in his campaign against Llywelyn ab Gruffydd, the king 'vexillum suum regale explicans, quasi draconem, qui nemini novit parcere, exterminium generale Walliae minabatur.' To our day, says Matthew Paris, the dragon is carried as a *vexillum* before the king in battle.[6] And again at the battle of Lewes in 1264: 'Acies tamen regalis, quae signo regio, quod draconem vocant, digladiale mortis judicium praetendente, exstitit insignita, progreditur.'[7] Once more, at Crécy in 1346, while the French displayed the oriflamme, 'E contra rex Anglie iussit explicari suum vexillum, in quo draco armis suis togatus depingebatur et abinde fuit nuncupatum *Drago*.'[8] Though there were Welsh in the army, this was not a Welsh ensign as has been wrongly stated, but the royal English; and seems to be now not modeled, but a flag.

After the mid-fourteenth century the dragon vanishes from among royal ensigns and the like. In *Political Poems and Songs* from Edward III to Richard

[1] Richard of Devizes. *De Rebus Gestis Ric. Primi* (ed. Stevenson, Engl. Hist. Soc., London, 1838) pp. 23–24; Roger of Hoveden's *Chron.* (Rolls Ser.), III, 129.

[2] P. 235 below.

[3] Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chron.* (Rolls Ser., 1875), p. 182.

[4] *Close Rolls*, Henry III, 1242–47 (London, 1916), p. 201. The Romans, too, kept theirs in temples.

[5] Knighton's *Chronicle* (Rolls Ser.), I, 234.

[6] *Chron. Maj.* (Rolls Ser.), V, 648, I, 228.

[7] *Flores Historiarum* (Rolls Ser.), II, 495; also in Rishanger's *Chronicle* (Rolls Ser.), p. 26; much the same in the Battle Abbey fragment, in Bémont, *Simon de Montfort* (Paris, 1884), p. 376; also Langtoft's *Chronicle* (Rolls Ser., 1866–8), II, 142. Robert Manning, in his translation of the last, misunderstands and gives a dragon-banner falsely to Simon de Montfort.

[8] Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicon*, ed. E. M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889), p. 83.

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III[1] we find the boar, eagle, leopard, and other royal devices, but dragons of no kind. At Agincourt the five banners of Henry V were of the Trinity, Saints Mary, George, and Edward, and the royal arms.[2] These since the end of the twelfth century had been three leopards, latterly quartered with the lilies of France. All through the French wars and those of the Roses the English dragon is nowhere to be found.

At this point we will make some generalizations about the 'dragon of Wessex.' This stock phrase is purely modern and has every appearance of originating with E. A. Freeman and his Saxonism. While it may be accurate, there is no basis for it except possibly in Henry's account of the battle of Burford; and even there no evidence that the dragon was used in the West-Saxon army only. Later it is found in the royal English army, as in several foreign. Repeatedly called the royal ensign,[3] it long antedates heraldry and national ensigns, and is not national or armorial, but official. Its function is double. It marks the king's position in the sight of all; is honorable to carry, calamitous if thrown down, in case of need a rallying-point. At Hastings Harold's *estandart* was a rallying-point and a resort for the wounded.[4] Just so in Geoffrey of Monmouth's highly contemporary picture of Arthur's great victory over the Romans, the king's post is at the rear, with his dragon *vexillum*, to which in case of need the wounded and weary might betake themselves.[5] And further it is clear that this image of a formidable beast which was fully believed in, this flashing or ruddy image with its lifelike movements, was meant to inspire confidence in the English and fear in their opponents. The dragon is protective yet appalling, a good friend and a bad enemy. Who knows what tacit primitivenesses may have been in the Anglo-Saxon mind? The romance *Athis* says of this ensign, 'Ce nous fait moult a redouter.'[6] In half the passages quoted above its terrors are dwelt on.[7] Likewise, until within a century, the feudal Japanese wore grotesque demonic helmets designed to inspire fear. The Chinese in our own day, becoming more sophisticated, have abandoned their fierce dragon-flag. And so the English in the fourteenth century seemingly abandoned the extreme realism, and then even the dragon-flag itself.

Another reason for the change may be St George, whose victory over a dragon (believed to be derived from Perseus') appears early. The connection of this Byzantine saint with England became closer after the first crusade. 'Saint George' appears as a war-cry under Richard I (it is said), and at the battle of Poitiers (1356),[8] at Shrewsbury in 1403, at Agincourt in 1415, at Cravant and Verneuil in 1423–4, and by Henry VII in 1485. The banner of St George was used in 1405, at Agincourt in 1415, and at Bosworth in 1485.[9] As people became more critical than in Richard's day, they may well have felt incongruity in carrying a dragon

[1] Rolls Ser., 1859–61, II, 345 f.

[2] J. H. Ramsay, *Lancaster and York* (Oxford, 1892), I, 215, with abundant references.

[3] *Insigne, signum, vexillum;* the Standard is evidently something else.

[4] Wace, *Rou*, 8592 ff.

[5] *Historia*, x, 6, 9.

[6] Passage in Ducange, *s.v.*

[7] And see Gervase of Tilbury (p. 235 below).

[8] Geoffrey le Baker, *Chron.*, p. 149; Froissart (ed. K. de Lettenhove, Brussels, 1868), v, 427.

[9] Thomas of Elmham, Thomas Walsingham, Robert Fabyan, J. H. Ramsay, J. H. Wylie.

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as royal ensign when the patron-saint was portrayed as vanquishing a dragon. But enough of the English for the nonce.

With the Welsh dragon we are on more uncertain ground. We must not only deal, as before, with moderns who make bland statements which are both unsupported and improbable; the early evidence is shaky as to date and interpretation.

One matter must be rejected. As early as the later twelfth century, (and no one knows how much earlier), *dragon*, *dragwn*, *draig* in Welsh meant *leader*, *chieftain*. Those noted below[1] seem the earliest cases. Of even this usage there is not an instance, as some have thought, in the Latin of Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae* of the sixth century, who introduces his dangerous contemporary Maglocunus as *insularis draco*.[2] This means not 'leader of Britain' but 'monster of (probably) Anglesey.'[3] The passage has no bearing on the present matter; nor have the others. Where the word comes from nobody knows; whether from some other source, or purely from *draco*. The wise and protective dragon of European folklore — one cannot but fancy the possibility — may have passed its name through poetry to a great leader. No case can be made for any connection with the Roman ensign of the cohort, and an imperial standard could hardly have been familiar in Britain.

Of dragons or their images the number in the literature of Wales is far from striking, in view of their appeal to the imagination of many mediaeval peoples, and the fantasy of Welsh literature. They are not at all characteristic of Celtic literature in general, and are rare in that of serpentless Ireland. They scarcely appear in Cambro-Latin literature. In the lives of the saints we are in a quite different air of Christian piety and marvel; though in the *Life* of the sixth century St Teilo, copied in the Book of Llandaff about 1136–54,[4] the saint binds a winged fiery dragon with his stole in the city of Dol in Brittany (after which he is asked to remain as bishop). In the thirteenth or fourteenth century mabinogi *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, we hear of Arthur's sword with golden serpents venting flames from their mouths; and of a red-topped pavilion with a black serpent on top with red eyes and tongue, among other pavilions with other strange beasts, which abound in the tale.[5] These evidently are not dragons. In the late mabinogi of *Lludd and Llevelys* two dragons go to sleep in Dinas Emreis; the two dragons having previously fought, and representing two unnamed tribes.[6] Here

[1] J. C. Morrice, *Manual of Welsh Literature* (Bangor, 1909), p. 12; J. G. Evans, *Text of the Book of Aneirin* (Pwllheli, 1908–22), pp. 6, 10, 28, 30, 44, 78, and *Black Bk. of Carmarthen* ib., 1906), p. 11; Skene, *Four Anc. Bks.* I, 499, II, 6; D. S. Evans, *Dict. of the Welsh Lang.* (Carmarthen, 1887–).

[2] Ed. Mommsen, *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, §33, p. 44.

[3] Such is the interpretation of Zimmer (*Nennius Vindicatus*, p. 101); and J. E. Lloyd (*Hist. of Wales*, London, 1912, p. 131), who thinks the passage reminiscent of *Revelation*, xiii, 2. Besides the *draco* of this verse, its parallels *leo*, *pardo*, *ursus* are used by Gildas just before to introduce four other wicked rulers (§§28–32; pp. 41–44).

[4] Ed. by J. G. Evans (Oxford, 1893), p. 111.

[5] *The Mobinogion*, tr. T. P. Ellis and J. Lloyd (Oxford, 1929), II, 14, 16; *sarf*, *seirf*, not *draig*.

[6] *Ibid.*, I, 156–158.

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we are on familiar ground of historical symbolism. This passage is based on the *Historia Britonum* partly by Nennius, about the eighth century, or on Geoffrey of Monmouth; in the former we remember the *duo vermes*, red and white, fighting beneath the fortress of Guorthigirnus on the mount Heriri or Snowdon; they prove to be two dragons, *rufus draco* being that of Guorthigirnus, *albus draco* representing the English.[1]

All this passes with no essential change into Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (1130–36), as an imposing introduction (vi, 17)

Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies.

It is convenient to treat Geoffrey here. But I do not regard him mainly as in the Welsh literary stream, and no one knows yet how much Welsh material the *Historia* contains, whether much or comparatively little. He forms here a parenthesis, which contrasts with the Welsh things before and after. As to dragons, he has far more than those from Nennius. In spite of the scarcity of early Welsh dragons, the *Prophecies* of Merlin which directly follow are fairly swarming with them, sometimes probably with a glance at the meaning *leader*. The Red and White repeatedly appear as the Welsh and English peoples. *Duo dracones* are William ii and Robert of Normandy. At the Lion (Henry i) 'insulani dracones tremebunt' (vii, 3). Besides various dragonlike *serpentes*, *colubres*, and *vermes*, the dragon of Worcester shall arise, and others winged and wingless and horned (vii, 4, last part). Among the animal-symbols which among mediaeval apocalyptic writings are the mark chiefly of Merlin's prophecies and their derivatives,[2] dragons and the like are the most prominent. There is every indication that this animal-symbolism is largely inspired by the scriptural *Revelation*, and the abundance of dragons by this and the meaning *leader*. What is much more significant, they also abound elsewhere in the *Historia*. After the appearance of a dragon-like star (viii, 14), interpreted favorably by Merlin, Uther has two golden dragon-ensigns made, one to be given to the church of Winchester, the other to be carried before him in battle (viii, 17); like Henry iii's made by a *faber*, they are made with gold, are military but kept in a church, and are probably like Harold's and Henry's. Hence his name Pendragon, and hence Arthur's *vexillum, aureus draco*, in his Roman campaign (x, 6). Arthur wears a helmet sculptured *simulacro draconis* (ix, 4), and dreams of an aerial combat between a bear and a dragon, the latter representing him (x, 2).[3] On all this the indifferent attitude of a Welshman is noteworthy. The adaptation of the *Historia* called *Brut Tysilio* omits the Prophecies of Merlin, but gives the other cases in a matter-of-fact way without exultation or recognition of a national symbol.[4]

[1] Ed. Mommsen, *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, pp. 184–186, §42.

[2] Rupert Taylor, *The Polit. Proph. in England*, (New York, 1911), pp. 4 ff. But see the tenth-century Liutprand (*Mon. Germ.* Hist., *SS.*, iii, 355–6.)

[3] Just so among thirty-one visions (largely of beasts) as to Gerald de Barri's career (which doubtless brought revenue to his humbler friends), a widow in Brecknock dreamed of a flying dragon which represented Gerald himself (*De Invectionibus*, in Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, Rolls Ser., 1861–91, i, 163). Among the ancients to dream of a dragon presaged exaltation and success (examples in Aldrovandus, *op. cit.*, p. 339).

[4] A. Griscom, *Historia of Geoffrey*, pp. 383 ff., 417 ff., 438, 468 f., 483.

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After finding dragons numerous in Geoffrey, we turn to real Wales, where they are scarce, like all ensigns. Military ensigns in Welsh history seem to be mentioned first in the *History of Gruffyd ap Cynan* (died 1137). At a siege this hero 'raised the ensigns [*arwydyon*],' etc. The work is believed translated from Latin and has an imitative classical manner with much minute detail perhaps invented;[1] the ensigns may be such, since as we shall see they can hardly have been common in early Wales. The next cases are in poetry in Welsh. Almost all the earliest writing in the Welsh language is, as is well known, in four manuscripts — the Black Book of Carmarthen, the Book of Aneirin, the Book of Taliesin, the Red Book of Hergest, all dating from the later twelfth century to the fifteenth.[2] As to the dates of the poetry and prose in them it is impossible to be definite or certain. Some of it is little if at all older than the manuscript containing it. Some of it may be much older; but as to just what passages of just what poems, in just what wording, and how much older, opinions differ. No one, especially not a non-Celticist, can often be certain about the age of any passage. But most people will agree with J. G. Evans in totally rejecting a sixth-century origin for any of it. Here Welsh military standards of any kind seem to appear first in the early fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin, 'the banner of holy Dewi,' in a poem composed, in part at least, after the eleventh century,[3] and very likely after the twelfth or the thirteenth.

The earliest historical record of the dragon as an ensign among the Welsh seems to be as late as Owen Glendower. One of the best authorities on his career, Adam of Usk's *Chronicon*,[4] tells how at the siege of Carnarvon, November 2, 1401, 'in multitudine glomerosa vixillum suum album cum dracone aureo ibidem displicuit.' The dragon also appears in his arms, though not as the chief element, which is a lion or lions. His privy seal in 1404 had as supporters a lion and a dragon with wings and two legs, and on his great seal among other creatures his helmet and his horse's head had the same dragon as crest.[5] Crests and supporters, as we have seen,[6] are later than scutcheons, and oftener adopted and dropped at individual whim. Lions, not dragons, both were and are the Welsh arms.

[1] Ed. by Arthur Jones (Manchester, 1910), pp. 116, 126; the above criticism by him, and by Tou in *Dict. Nat. Biog.*

[2] J. G. Evans, *Bl. Bk. of Carm.*, p. viii, *Bk. of Aneirin*, p. xi (about 1265); J. E. Lloyd, *Hist. of Wales*, pp. 123, 528, 531; J. C. Morrice, *Manual*, pp. 1, 2; W. J. Gruffydd in *Enc. Brit.* (eleventh ed.), v, 640; W. F. Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales* (Edinburgh, 1868), I, 3. Text, translation, and interpretation are often very doubtful.

[3] *Four Anc. Bks.*, I, 440 (for a late case see p. 494); J. G. Evans, *Poems from the Bk. of Taliesin* (Llanbedrog, 1915), pp. 166–167, l. 129 (cf. ll. 1, 139–140, 147). In the *Book of Aneirin* (Evans, p. 28), of about 1265, streamers are displayed by the *Norse*, in a poem Evans thinks composed about 1100 (cf. *Four Anc. Bks.*, I, 378).

[4] Ed. by E. M. Thompson (London, 1904), p. 71.

[5] *Archaeologia*, XXV (1834), facing pp. 616, 619; *Archaeol. Cambr.*, N.S., II, 122; J. H. Wylie, *England under Henry IV* (London, 1884–98), II, 376. Llewelyn 'the Great' is said to have had as his helmet-crest a wolf (A. G. Bradley, *Owen Glyndwr*, p. 61), also used by Owen. It is worth noting that about 1300 Henry earl of Lancaster, grandson of Henry III and great-grandfather of Henry IV, had legged and winged dragons as crest and supporters, whether due to his royal descent or his Welsh lordships (*Dict. Nat. Biogr.*, and the article on Heraldry by Barron, cited p. 110 above). Geoffrey's influence by then was strong in Wales.

[6] P. 224 above.

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At this point again we will make some generalizations. As to the style of English and Welsh dragon-ensigns, all the early cases are probably realistically modeled, to swell and struggle in the wind, as those of the Romans, of Harold, of Emperor Otho and of Henry III certainly are; a combination of precious and gory color, of red fabric and embroidery or spangles of gold and jewels, probably with a gold solid head[1] which might support jewels and would hold the flexible body to the shaft. It is probably of this head that writers were thinking who have called the *draco* merely *aureus*. On the other hand, mediaeval writers are not discriminating as to colors, and often (especially in Welsh) call gold red. No difference in color or shape is indicated between the Welsh and the English and others. Just as the earlier ensigns are probably all modeled, the later, including those of Edward III, Glendower and Henry VII (mentioned below), all seem emblazoned flat on a banner. These identities argue against independent origin for the Welsh; and certainly against derivation of either from the Red Dragon for the British and the White for the Saxons in Nennius and Geoffrey. There is scarcely a reminiscence of these anywhere; the mythic precedent is Uther's vision and ensign.

A further matter is that there is a strong *a priori* probability against the use of any battle-ensign at all, unless very sporadically, by the early Welsh, at least to the late twelfth century. Even in peace they were highly mobile, and had few possessions. In war their barefoot troops followed guerilla methods, with rapid unexpected attacks, rapid flight to inaccessible spots, few pitched battles. To carry a tall ensign seems incredible for men on such campaigns, — dashing down rocky trails, dodging among trees, leaping through bogs.[2] Again, while needless details never figure much in the early historical writing of Wales (or of England), yet considering its belligerent and anti-English slant, and the English dragon-ensign, we should expect the Welsh to appear, if it existed, before the fifteenth century. The English too might be expected to comment if they found the Welsh as well as themselves using this ensign. If the early Welsh occasionally used some sort of ensign, there is no reason to suspect the dragon.

Since therefore we have evidence for the English dragon six and a half centuries and positive proof three and a half earlier than for the Welsh, it is probable that the Welsh was a deliberate counterblast to the English. If the latter excited fear in the untutored Welsh, the remedy would be a dragon of their own to writhe against the English. The dragon-ensign common in Europe is traced with certainty to the serpent-infested East and at a known point of time, and the people of England were the chief intermediary between the rest of the world and the isolated Welsh. Its post-Norman origin in Wales was granted by at least two ardent Welsh scholars.[3]

[1] *Draconem cum capite aureo* in Gervase of Tilbury (p. 235 below).

[2] One may depend chiefly on J. E. Lloyd's splendid *History of Wales to the Edwardian Conquest*, pp. 606–610; also on John Rhys, *The Welsh People* (London, 1923), p. 253. Even of the late thirteenth century the same is said by J. E. Morris, *Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford, 1901), p. 105 and earlier.

[3] Not before the Norman Conquest, and due to Norman misunderstanding of Pendragon, *chief leader* (John Williams Ab Ithel, *Archaeol. Cambr.*, 1847, I Ser., I, 325); derived from the English standard at Crécy (O. M. Edwards, *Wales*, London, 1903, p. 255); both reasons probably wrong.

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With Henry vii the dragon returns to England from Wales, probably because associated by tradition and history with Owen Glendower. Henry's grandfather Owen Tudor was cousin to Owen, and it was maintained that all were descended from Cadwalader.[1] In 1485 after the battle of Bosworth, Henry vii offered his three standards at St Paul's, one of St George, one of the dun cow, and 'in the second was a red firye dragon beaten vpon white and grene sarcenet.'[2] In the immense provision for his coronation was nine shillings for 'rede veluete for dragons.'[3] At the coronation of his queen, among the pageants was 'a great red Dragon spowting Flamys of Fyer,' perhaps with allusion to the revived royal device.[4] He instituted the office of Rouge Dragon, one of the four now-existing pursuivants-of-arms.[5] Never in the Tudor arms properly so called, the winged and two-legged dragon appeared on a banner, or as decoration, or as a supporter, on Tudor tombs at Westminster, those of Henry vii, Edward vi, and Elizabeth, and with four legs was recognized in her reign as one of the royal supporters.[6] It is said surprisingly by an eye-witness that the dragon-ensign was carried against the Scots as late as the expedition of 1639.[7] But the dragon pretty much disappears after the time of the Tudors, perhaps because of Stuart antipathy toward them. In recent times it has been revived as an emblem of Wales and the Prince of Wales, and sixteen years ago flew over no. 10 Downing Street.[8]

It remains to indicate the relation of all the above to Geoffrey of Monmouth. The two points discovered where dragons abound are his *Historia* and the English ensigns. Before his time dragons are not prominent in Wales; but then suddenly they multiply in the *Prophecies* of Merlin in his seventh book. There is, it is true, little sound evidence that he composed this work; some features perceptible to the penetrating eye suggest that it is by someone else, a Welshman and very likely an eccentric. But in any case it is due clearly to some individual of the twelfth century, and had its circulation through the *Historia;* whether or not its dragons came chiefly from *Revelation*, they are hardly from Wales. As

[1] Gladys Temperley, *Henry VII* (Boston, 1914), pp. 17–18, etc.; C. B. Millican, *Spenser and the Table Round* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1932), pp. 9, 164, etc., with many references. Among thirty scutcheons (pp. 10–11) in Owen Tudor's ancestry there is no dragon; hence the dragon would seem to have reached the Tudors by way of Glendower.

[2] Edw. Hall, *Chronicle* (London, 1809), p. 423; as to green and white in early Wales, *Archaeol. Cambr.*, i ser., i, 320.

[3] *Mater. for Reign of Henry VII* (Rolls Ser., 1873–77), ii, 17.

[4] J. Leland, *Collectanea* (London, 1770), iv, 218; Millican, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[5] *Notes and Queries*, 1st Ser., xii, 32. But 'Dragance pursevant' were sent to England by the king of Scotland in 1434 (*ibid.*), whatever this means. The 'Rouge' is evidently due to Henry's Welsh origin and to Geoffrey's *Historia*, vii, 3.

[6] E. W. Brayley, *Hist. and Antiq. of Westminster Abbey* (London, 1818), i, 65 bis; H. M. Pratt, *Westm. Abbey* (New York, 1914), ii, 483–84, 490, 502; Hearne, *Curious Discourses* (London, 1775), i, 114; Millican, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–63; *Notes and Queries*, 1st Ser., xii, 33, 12th Ser., xii, 287. Two legs, sometimes found earlier, became necessary for posing as a crest, and four natural for prancing as a supporter.

[7] *Notes and Queries*, 1st ser., xii, 32.

[8] *Notes and Queries*, ix ser., v, 291; xii, iii, 274; xii, xii, 286, 337 (arms are four lions, the dragon merely a badge).

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to Geoffrey's many other dragons and dragon-ensigns, there is not an iota of evidence for deriving them from Welsh tradition, but abundant grounds for referring them to English practise and historiography. There in England they had been for one century, if not for four, and Geoffrey even shows Uther as depositing his ensign in a church, as the English did later — in Winchester, the old English capital, where it may even be he had himself seen a dragon-ensign hanging. This is as likely as the supposition that he was trying to annex the English capital to the Welsh sphere of influence. What is more, there is some positive evidence that the dragon-ensigns in the *Historia* were attracted into it from English practise by the very epithet of Uther *Pendragon*. Whether or not this epithet originated with Geoffrey (probably not), or whether Uther's paternity to Arthur did (as is likely), matters little here. *Pendragon* would probably mean *chief dragon*, just as (Yspaddaden) *Penkawr* means *chief giant*,[1] — a case of *dragwn* meaning *leader*. But the epithet grammatically might just as well mean *head-of-dragon*, and it is from this, *caput draconis*, that Geoffrey derives Uther's *Pendragon* name (VIII, 17), although there is no question of a head in Geoffrey's account, He, like others, may have thought of the solid golden head which would hold the flexible dragon to its shaft.[2] Mediaeval writers were apt to find names highly significant and to devise far-fetched explanations of them; with Geoffrey, to think instantly of devising a unifying explanation is so common as to be a mannerism, and this explanation fits well enough. Though he knew at least some Welsh, he may not have known the other meaning of *dragwn*.[3] This possibility (it is nothing more) would further favor a pure English origin for his dragon-emblems. Since both probability and evidence make one doubtful as to any military ensigns among the Welsh till long after his day, all the evidence thus derives Geoffrey's ensign from the English. And so much for his sources.

As to Geoffrey's influence, his immense vogue everywhere and the immense encouragement drawn from him by the desperate Welsh incline one to derive any late Welsh dragon-symbol not only from English practise (aided by *dragwn* meaning *leader*) but chiefly from the supposed early history given by him. In particular, it is difficult not to believe that Owen Glendower, the earliest known Welsh dragon-bearer, in wearing a dragon on his helmet and using the dragon-ensign, was deliberately imitating in Geoffrey King Arthur's 'galeam simulacro draconis insculptam' and 'aureum draconem pro vexillo.'[4] From history or *Henry IV*, everyone is familiar with his mysticism and superstition, and with the support given to his revival of Briton nationality against the rule of Henry IV by prophecies attributed to Merlin and the like. As with Geoffrey's Arthur, prodigies were believed to have attended his birth, he consulted seers, and assumed the manner of a British king.[5] And to Owen may well be due the pretense that the Welsh dragon is 'the dragon of Cadwalader.' This prince of the seventh century, the

[1] Mabinogi of *Kulhwch and Olwen;* so translated by Ellis and Lloyd, and by Loth.

[2] P. 231 above.

[3] It seems to occur in the Prophecies (p. 229 above).

[4] *Historia*, IX, 4, X, 6.

[5] *Dict. Nat. Biogr.;* J. H. Wylie, *Henry IV*, *passim;* Adam of Usk, p. 72.

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last to resist the Saxon invasion, according to Geoffrey and to history, not only left such a repute for sanctity that he became Cadwalader the Blessed, and received the dedication of many churches; his repute as a great sovereign becomes marked after the publication of Geoffrey's book, in the twelfth century and later, with the efforts of the Welsh to keep their independence; and from him Glendower had the credit of descent, and himself claimed it in a pompous letter written in 1401 to the king of Scots.[1] What was it to such a mystic that Geoffrey gives such ensigns not to Cadwalader, but to Uther and Arthur, from whom he could not very well claim descent? The phrase 'dragon of Cadwalader' used with such facility by moderns not only is completely unhistorical but never appears till the fifteenth century or still later.

Geoffrey's vogue was even greater in England. The question arises whether this actually did not promote a revival of the dragon-ensign by Richard I and his successors, through that desire for a glorious continuity with the venerable history of King Arthur for which there is abundant evidence. It is true the Norman kings were at some pains to emphasize their continuity with the Saxon line; but also that the royal Saxon dragon disappears for a century and a quarter after the Conquest. This argument, partly *ex silentio*, is not conclusive, but let us see how it stands out. There is ample evidence for the royal Saxon dragon for one century or three; it completely disappears for a century and a quarter; then reappears many times for a century and a half. Further, Richard I was just the man to revive it. His nearest relatives were particularly interested in the Geoffrey tradition. To say nothing of his father Henry II's interest in King Arthur (for one reason or another),[2] his mother, to whom he was especially close, often showed her interest in various romantic history, and had received from Wace a copy if not the dedication of his *Roman de Brut*, translated from Geoffrey's *Historia* — 'he hoe ȝef þare æðelan Ælienor,' says Lawman. This was almost certainly the French poem on the history of England which Richard's brother John sent for in 1205: 'Mittas eciam nobis . . . Romancium de historia Anglie.' These words were written directly after the loss of Normandy and his other north-French possessions, and at the moment[3] when he was summoning military assemblies and making frantic efforts to recover them; it is difficult not to fancy the unstable John trying to nerve himself by contemplating the triumphs of Arthur and his other great predecessors. No wonder John accepted his brother's revival of Uther's dragon-ensign. It would be just like his laziness to prefer the French Wace to the Latin Geoffrey. Needless to recall that Richard's half-sister Marie de Champagne was the patroness of the greatest of Arthurian romancers, Chrétien de Troyes; and that his brother Geoffrey's son, Arthur of Brittany, was named after the national hero of the British race. What is more, Richard himself, a 'splendid savage,' and certainly all that we mean by a romanticist, was just the man to be appealed to by the fierce and showy dragon-ensign and its romantic history. Shortly afterwards the English dragon-ensign was com-

[1] Skene, *Four Anc. Bks., passim; Y Cymmrodor*, IV, 232; Adam of Usk, p. 72.

[2] See e.g., R. H. Fletcher, *Arth. Mat. in Chron.* (Boston, 1906), p. 190.

[3] *Rot. Litt. Claus*, 6 John (ed. T. D. Hardy, 1833), p. 29. In the same entry he orders provision for an assembly of barons and knights at Northampton.

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monly explained as due not to the Saxon but to Uther's, the only known account of which is that by Geoffrey. About 1212 Gervase of Tilbury in his *Otia Imperialia* summarized Geoffrey's account of Uther and his two golden dragons; hence, he tells his patron Otho IV (who had one himself), 'illud apud Anglos vexillum, draconem habens cum capite aureo, quod vicinis expertum et paganis sub avunculo tuo, illustri rege Ricardo, in ultramarinis partibus terribile fuit.'[1] That part of Matthew Paris' longer chronicle which he took over from an earlier writer states that from Utherpendragon, 'Uhtherd drakehefed,' comes the dragon-ensign carried before English kings in war.[2] And finally the Tudor dragon was repeatedly explained by Geoffrey's book,[3] an intensified interest in which was so marked a feature of patriotic and imperialist feeling in the sixteenth century. It is ironical that Uther's dragon, from which the English boasted the derivation of their dragon, should seem really to be its derivative.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SOME ASPECTS OF *WITHERNAM* OR THE ENGLISH MEDIAEVAL SYSTEM OF VICARIOUS LIABILITY

BY ERWIN F. MEYER

THE subject of liability during the craft gild economic system of mediaeval England is a phase of legal and economic history that has not received the attention its importance demands. It is possible that a fuller understanding of the problem then could throw much light on the multifarious problems involved in the law of partnership, the liability of unincorporated associations, and also liability in international relations resulting from reprisals and boycotts.[4]

The mediaeval craft system had as an ideal a standard of workmanship that was to be honest. One reads a London entry of 1349 to the effect that 'if any work of the mystery be found within the city or elsewhere that is deemed to be bad or unprofitable for the community, at the discretion of the mayor and aldermen and the masters of the mystery, that such work be taken and carried to the mayor and aldermen and be by them declared to be good or bad according as they find it.'[5] Inferior goods were sold, but it was forbidden to sell them as goods of the first grade or to misrepresent them.[6]

[1] Extracts after Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chron.* (Rolls Ser., 1875), p. 435.

[2] *Chron. Maj.* (Rolls Ser., 1872), I, 228; taken over by the *Flores Historiarum* (R.S., 1890), I, 252.

[3] Millican, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 39.

[4] E. F. Meyer, 'English Craft Gilds and Borough Governments of the Later Middle Ages II,' *University of Colorado Studies*, II, 411–415 (Feb., 1930). E. F. Meyer, 'Anent the Statute of Westminster I,' *St Louis Law Review*, XVII, 22–26 (Dec., 1931).

[5] R. R. Sharpe, editor, *Calendar of Letter Books*, F, 198. Cf. *Ibid.*, E, 110–114; *Ibid.*, D, 8; *Ibid.*, H, 6, 34, 37. Cf. C. A. Markham and J. C. Cox, editors, *The Records of the Borough of Northampton*, I, 278–283, 290–293. M. Sellers, ed., *York Memorandum Book*, I, 15. A. F. Leach, ed., *Beverly Town Documents*, 41. M. Bateson, ed., *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, II, 195–196. M. D. Harris, ed., *Coventry Leet Book*, I, 170, E. F. Meyer, *University of Colorado Studies*, XVI, 370–374. A. H. Thomas, ed., *Col. of Plea and Mem. Rolls, 1381–1412*, 2 footnote 3, 21, 82.

[6] A. H. Thomas, ed., *Cal. of Plea and Mem. Rolls of the City of London, 1323–1364*, 108, 194. Sharpe, *C.L.B.*, E. 126; *Ibid.*, F, 205; *Ibid.*, H, 158.

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