



The Burial of Arthur | Claddedigaeth Arthur

Text Information

Author | Anonymous

Language | Welsh

Period | 13th Century

Genre | History

Source | Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 4, c.1400, ff. 505r-509r

Collection | Writing History: Chronicles, Legends and Anecdotes

URL | <https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/burial-arthur/>

Transcription, translation and introduction by Georgia Henley.

Introduction to the Text

This text is an adaptation into Middle Welsh prose of Gerald of Wales's report of the discovery and public exhumation of Arthur and Guinevere's graves at Glastonbury in 1190 or 1191 and the subsequent reburial of their bones in a marble tomb. Historians have interpreted this event as a ploy by Henry II of England to crush Welsh belief in Arthur's messianic return, a belief Gerald disparages in his account of the event.

Gerald's full account of the exhumation is in *Speculum Ecclesiae* ii.8–10 with an abridged version in *De principis instructione* i.20. The Welsh text uses both as sources. The text contains the characteristic elements of Welsh "prose translation style" defined by Brynley Roberts, typical of the numerous texts translated from Latin into Middle Welsh. These features include introducing a subordinate clause with the construction *pan yw*, the perfective particle *ry*, and rendering *Notandum est* ("it is observed") as *Bit honneit*. The Welsh translator/adaptor does not however imitate the ornate Latin style that Gerald adopts when describing a monk being led astray by Guinevere's beautiful hair; instead the translator simplifies and abbreviates the passage's periodic style.

The earliest manuscript, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 4, c.1400, which contains saints' lives, fables, and translations of *Visio Pauli* and *St Patrick's Purgatory*, places the text in a milieu of popular adaptations of Latin and French texts into Middle Welsh in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including the Vulgate Grail cycle, the Charlemagne cycle, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum*, and Honorius Augustodunensis's *Imago mundi*. The manuscript shares a scribe with the *Red Book of Hergest*, a large compendium of Middle Welsh prose and poetry created under the patronage of Welsh nobleman Hopcyn ap Tomos, linking it to a literary renaissance in South Wales spurred by the interests of post-conquest Welsh nobility. The translation is therefore secular, non-monastic, professional, and intended for a lay audience.

This text constitutes a rare example of the reception of Gerald of Wales's writing in Wales. Both *De principis instructione* and *Speculum ecclesiae* survive in one manuscript each, leaving behind little information about patterns of wider circulation. One can only speculate about whether they were commonly known in Wales. However, there is circumstantial evidence that the manuscript of *Speculum ecclesiae* came from Llanthony Secunda Priory in Gloucestershire, offering a point of entry into Wales. The Welsh text cites *Drych yr Eglwys* ("Mirror of Princes") as a source, indicating the translator knew the Latin source by name. External accounts of the exhumation of Arthur's bones are also found in chronicles including Higden's *Polychronicon*, the Annals of Margam, and Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*, indicating that the story of Arthur's grave was available to Welsh scribes in several forms.

Though the event may have been staged as a propaganda piece intended to quash Welsh belief in Arthur's return, its translation into Welsh c.1400 suggests continued interest in the exhumation as antiquarian or legendary history. In fact, there was sustained interest into the fifteenth century in Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury, as others have discussed, indicating continued symbolic relevance of Arthur as a figure of political unity and dominance. Edward I had the bones translated from the lady chapel to the high altar in 1278 and Edward III came to Glastonbury to visit the tomb in 1331. James Carley argues that Henry V staged another excavation in the 1420s, indicated by a letter to the abbot inquiring about new archaeological finds. It is tempting to associate interest in Arthur's messianic return with the rebellion of Owain Glyn Dŵr taking place around the time the manuscript was made. Ongoing use of political prophecies to influence opinion about Owain Glyn Dŵr



attests to the continued importance in the early fifteenth century of the idea of a messianic savior, or *mab darogan* "son of prophecy," predicted to deliver the Welsh from English oppression. However, it is not certain whether this text had perceived prophetic or historical value for the manuscript's compilers. Without putting too fine a point on generic differences in Middle Welsh writing, the contents of Llanstephan 4 could suggest that *Claddedigaeth Arthur* was associated with visionary, religious, and moralizing works rather than prophecy or history.

Introduction to the Text

This edition is a transcription from Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 4, c.1400, ff. 505r-509r, the earliest witness to Version A of the text. Llanstephan 4 was originally part of a composite owned by Edward Lhuyd called *Didrefn Gasgliad* ("haphazard miscellany") that was split up into the first four Llanstephan manuscripts, now in the National Library of Wales. Llanstephan 4 shares a scribe, X91, with the Red Book of Hergest and several other manuscripts. Preceding the text in the Llanstephan 4 is a fragment of "The Birth of Arthur," an account of Arthur's birth and early life. The title *Claddedigaeth Arthur* ("burial of Arthur") is modern.

The text exists in two versions. Version A is extant in the following manuscripts:

- Aberystwyth, NLW MS Llanstephan 4, c. 1400, scribe: X91
- Aberystwyth, NLW MS Llanstephan 2, s. xv2/2, scribe: X93
- Cardiff, Central Library MS 4.22, c. 1717-18
- Cardiff, Central Library MS 2.40, c. 1714

Llanstephan 2, also part of the composite *Didrefn Gasgliad*, is very close to Llanstephan 4 but not a direct copy. The two Cardiff manuscripts are copies of Llanstephan 4. Version B is extant in the following manuscripts:

- London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius C. ix, s. xvi, scribe: Morris Kyffin for John Dee
- Aberystwyth, NLW MS Llanstephan 150, s. xviii, scribe of Moses Williams

Dates are from Huws (forthcoming). As discussed by Lloyd-Morgan 2016 and Russell 2005, Cotton Vitellius C. ix version is particularly interesting for having been reworked from an earlier version. Extant in a manuscript in the possession of John Dee by the 1580s, the text follows the Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan in the manuscript and exhibits similar revisions by a sixteenth-century scribe. The scribe's reworkings include minor clarifications, stylistic adjustments, and additions, such as a date for Arthur's death (AD 542). It could be that the scribe was working with another account of the event, different from the extant witnesses to Gerald of Wales's *De principis instructione* and *Speculum ecclesiae*.

About this Edition

The text is transcribed from Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan 4, c.1400, ff. 505r-509r. Capitalization, word spacing, and punctuation has been added. In areas where the manuscript is abraded, supplied text is indicated by brackets. Missing text is supplied from version of the text in Llanstephan 201. The text has also been edited by Lewis and Bruce 1912 and Evans 1968.



The Burial of Arthur | Claddedigaeth Arthur

The Burial of Arthur

Llyma hyspysr6yd yn y llyfreu ac eglurach noc [a dyweit y] Brut y 6rth diwed Arthur vrenhin, ac adnavot g6irioned am chwedleu a dychmygyon geua6c. Adnabydet y darllea6dyr vot yma deu gabidul gwedy eu hyspyssu o'n llyfyr ni, yr h6nn a elwir Drych yr Eglwys.

Bit diheu y ba6p pan yw ym mynnwent manachla6c Glas-tynbri, g6edy g6eli angheua6l ar auon Gamlan, y clad6yt Arthur, y r6ng d6y groes o vaen g6neuthuredic o gywreiner6yd saeroniaeth. Ac eu drychafel yn eu seuyll yn uchel, a llythyr yndunt g6ed6 ry ysgruennu y venegi bot yno bed Arthur. Ac weithon y mae y llythyr h6nn6 g6edy ry dreula6 o heneint. Bit honneit, hagen, y ba6p nat maen marmor oed ved Arthur. Na bed ar Arthur nyd oed, namyn y os-sot y my6n derwen g6edy ry geua6, a'e gladu vn droetued ar bymthec o dyfynder yn y daear. D6y rann o hyt y bed, megys am y deu draean uchaf a oed wahanedic y 6rth y trydyd. Ac megys teruyn y rygthunt a'r dryded rann, yn wahanedic y 6rthunt 6ynteu, 6rth gyfleheu esgyrn Arthur a oedynt va6r a phraff. Yn asg6rn y benn yr oed vn weli ar bymthec, a phob un o hynny g6edy ry gaeu a ry gadarnhau, namyn 6n. A'r 6n honno a oed agoret a phraff, megys yd oed diheu pan y6 o honno y buassei agheua6l ef.

Yn y dryded rann o'r bed, megys o'r deu parth y waeret, yd oed esgyrn G6enh6yuar y wreic, ual y gellit eu hadnabot yn vanolach ac yn wreigeid. Ac ym plith y rei hynny y kaffat pleth o wallt melyn. Tec oed edrych arna6. Ac ar y bleth honno y dodes manach o'r vanachla6c y ol6c, a ry dathoed y gyt a'r niuer 6rth agori y bed. Ac yd arganuu ym blaen pa6b. A bryssya6 a oruc, ac ysglyfyeit y bleth. Ac val y kymerth yn y la6 a'e dangos, a pha6p yn edrych ac yn ryuedu y thecket, yn deissyfyt yg g6yd pa6p y difflanna6d o'e la6. Ac nyt heb wyrtheu y damchweinya6d hynny, ac y dangosset yn honneit y ba6p, ac yn bennaf y'r creuydwyr a dathoed yno, y rei lleiaf a berthyn udunt nac edrych na theimla6 bruger g6reic, a bot pop peth byda6l yn daruodedic ac yn sathredic, ac yn bennaf oll y petheu teckaf o edrych arnunt, megys y tystir tr6y vra6t ac a6du-rda6t y doeth, yr h6nn a dyweit, "Teg6ch a gosged dyna6l bryt, cribdeiledic y6, a buan a chynt y ffy ac y diffllanna noc anwadal6ch blodeu g6anh6yn."

Claddedigaeth Arthur

Here is the information in the letters, and clearer than what the Brut says about the death of king Arthur, and it distinguishes truth from false stories and riddles. Let the readers know that here are two chapters made known to them from our book, the one which is called Mirror of the Church.

Let it be certain to all that it is in the graveyard of the monastery of Glastonbury, after his mortal wound on the river Camlan, that Arthur was buried, between two crosses of stone made from the ingenuity of craftsmanship. And these were raised standing highly, with letters on them which had been to proclaim that the grave of Arthur was there. And now those letters have been worn away from age. Let it be known, however, to all, that the grave of Arthur was not of marble stone. There was no grave for Arthur, except that he was placed inside an oak after it had been hollowed out, and he was buried sixteen feet deep in the earth. The grave is two parts of length, as if the two highest thirds were separated from the [lower] third. And as if it were a border between them, the third part is separated from them by the arranged bones of Arthur, which were large and sturdy. In the skull there were sixteen wounds, and each one of them had closed and hardened except one, and that one was open and large, as though it were certain that it was from that one that he had become dead [i.e. that had been fatal to him.]

In the third part of the grave, like the two parts of the bottom, were the bones of Gwenhwyfar his wife, as they can be recognized as smaller and more feminine. And among those things a plait of yellow hair was found. It was fair to look upon. And on the plait a monk from the monastery fixed his gaze, he who had come together with the group to the opening of the grave. And he noticed [it] before the rest. He hastened and snatched the plait. And as he took it in his hand and showed it, with all looking and marveling at its beauty, suddenly in front of everyone it disappeared from his hand. And that event did not happen without miracles. And it was shown manifestly to everyone, and chiefly to the religious men who came there, the thing which was least appropriate for them, that they should not look nor feel a woman's hair: that every worldly thing, most especially all the things most beautiful to look upon, is transitory and common, as is witnessed through the judgement and authority of the wise man, who said this: "Fairness and stature of human appearance is transitory and swift, quicker to flee and to vanish than the inconstancy of spring flowers¹."



Dyeithyr hynn, y brenhin Arthur a vu bennaf seila6dyr manachla6c Glastynbri, kanys kynn dyuot Saesson y'r ynys, y rodassei ef tir a daear a da arall y'r vanachla6c honno, a daroed y chyssegru yn enryded y'r wynuydedic Veir wry, yr honn a garei yn v6y noc yssyd o sant a santes, ac nyt heb acha6s. Ac 6rth hynny, y paryssei ynteu dodi y del6 hi yn d6y ysg6yd y daryan ef o'r tu atta6. Ac megys y dyweit, ym pob br6ydyr ac ymlad o'r a vei arna6, o wir uvydda6t a charyat arnei hitheu y cussanei ef y thraet.

A chanys gnottaei dywedut llawer o betheu petrus am diwed Arthur, ac yn enwedic ch6edyldyon y Brytanyeit a ymryssont ac a gadarnhaant etto y vot ef yn vy6, yny v6ynt wrthladedic a diffodedic a difflanedic y ch6edleu geu hynny, a cherdet y wirioned racdi am hynny yn aml6c, o hynn allan y paryssam ni dodi yma petheu prouedic o'r wirioned diamheu.

G6edy y vr6ydyr ar avon Gamlan yg Kerny6, a llad Medra6t enwiraf vrad6r, g6edy kyuodi ohona6 yn erbyn Arthur y ewythy, vra6t y vam, o geidwadaeth y deyrnas, a brathu Arthur yn agheua6l, y duc hen wreicda a Margan oed y hen6, y gorff hyt yn ynys Avallach, y lle a elwir yr a6r honn Glastynbri. A thrannoeth, g6edy y var6, y peris y wreicda honno y gladu yn y vynwent gyssegredic, val y dy wetp6yt uchot. Sef y gnotaei beird ynys Prydein a'e ch6edyldyon dechymygu pan y6 Margan, dwywes o Annwfyn, a'e ry gudyassei ef yn ynys Auallach, yr iachau o'e welioed. A phan veynt iach, yd ymchoelei drachefyn att y Brytanyeit o'e hamdiffyn, megys y gnotaei. Ac am hynny etto y maent mal yn y adol6yn ef, ac yn aros y dyuodyat rac lla6, megys yr ldewon am Grist, onyt bot yn v6y yd ydys yn t6ylla6 yr ldewon o ynyvdr6yd ac anfydlonder ac andedwydyt.

Bit honneit y ba6p ac aml6c pan y6 Glastynbri y gelwir kanys frydyeu ac auonyd o eigya6n Mor Hafren yssyd yn y gylch, kyt bei priodolach y gal6 "keffinyd auonyd," o acha6s y bot yg kymherued auonyd, ac yn ia6nach gal6 "ynyssed" tir ym perued y weilgi. Pa acha6s y gelwir ynteu Avallach? Namyn o'e vot yn lle amyl aualgryn, neu ynteu o vot yn argl6yd ar y lle h6nn6 g6r gynt a elwit a elwit Auallach. Ef a notteit heuyt gal6 y lle h6nn6 Ynys Wydrin, o acha6s auon a oed yn y damgylchynu, a lli6 glas g6ydra6l ar y d6fyr. Ac 6rth hynny y gelwis y Saesson hi, g6edy y goresgyn, Glastynbri, kanys glas yn Saesnech y6 g6ydyr yg Kymraec.

Besides that, it was king Arthur who was the chief founder of the monastery of Glastonbury, for before the English came to the island, he had given land and earth and other goods to that monastery, which he consecrated in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom he loved more than that all the other saints, and not without cause. And because of that, he caused her image to be put on the two shoulders of his shield on the side next to him. And as it is said, in every battle and fight which he was in, he would kiss her feet in true humility and love for her.

And since it was customary to say many doubtful things about the end of Arthur, and, particularly, the storytellers of the Britons contend and declare that he is still living, until those false stories are rejected and extinguished and faded, and the truth about it obviously succeeds, from this time forth we will cause things to be put here that are proven by unquestionable truth.

After the battle on the river Camlan in Cornwall, when Medrawt, most wicked traitor, was killed after he had risen up against Arthur his uncle, his mother's brother, for custody of the kingdom, and Arthur was fatally wounded, the old woman, Margan was her name, took his body to the Island of Apples, the place which is now called Glastonbury. And the day after he died, the noblewoman had him buried in the consecrated cemetery, as it was said above. Thus the bards of the Island of Britain and their storytellers used to imagine that it was Margan, goddess of the Otherworld, who had hidden him in the Island of Apples to heal him of his wounds. And when they became healthy, he would return to the Britons and defend them, as was his custom. And on account of this, they are still calling upon him and waiting for his future return, like the Jews for Christ, except that the Jews are being deceived more through foolishness and faithlessness and misfortune.

Let it be known and obvious to all that it is called Glastonbury, on account of the flowing [water] and rivers from the deep Bristol Channel around it, though it may be more appropriate to call it "boundary of rivers," on account of it being in the middle of rivers, and it is more correct to call land in the middle of the ocean "islands." For what reason is it called Avallach? Because of its being a place abundant in apple trees, or because the lord of that place in time past was called Avallach. It was custom also to call that place Ynys Wydrin ['Island of Glass'], on account of the river surrounding it, and the glassy blue color of the water. And because of that, after the conquest the English called it Glastonbury, since glas ['blue'] in English is gwydyr ['glass'] in Welsh.



Honneit y6 weithon paham y gelwir y lle h6nn6 Ynys Wydrin, paham Auallach, a phaham Glastynbri. A honneit y6 heuyt pa dylyet a oed ch6edylydyon gal6 y wreic honno, Margan, yn d6ywes o Ann6fyn. A bit honneit hynn heuyt kyt kaffo y dywededic abat uchot gyuar6ydyt y 6rth gorf Arthur o hen lyfreu ac ystoryaeu, a pheth heuyt o'r llythyr a oed g6edy eu hysgriennu yn y cr6ys, a g6edy eu ry dileu haeach o heney[nt], [f. 508r] m6yaf eissyoes o gyuar6ydyt a hyspysr6yd a gafas ef y gan Henri vrenhin. Kanys ef a dywedassei y brenhin 6rtha6 lawer g6eith, megys y clywssei ynteu gan hen dynyon a beird a chyuar6ydeit y datcanu o weithredoed y Brytanyeit, pan y6 y r6ng y d6y groes a oed yn y vynwent yg Glastynb[ri] yn eu gor6ed, ac odyne y drychaf6yt yn eu sefyll. Y cladyssit Arthur yn d6fyn rac ofyn y Saesson, a 6rthladysssei ef yn vnych ac a deholassei o'r ynys, ac a dugassei Vedra6t y nei ynteu, y g6as direitaf, yn y erbyn y geissa6 amdiffyn y ennwired, y rei a oresgynasant eilweith yr ynys o g6byl g6edy y agheu ynteu.

Ac rac yr vn ofyn h6nn6, yn datkladu y bed, megys am seith troetued yn y daear o dyfynder y kaffat anysgogedic uae praff a chroes bl6m g6edy ry ansodi ynda6 o'r tu ass6 ida6, a'r llythyr h6nn yman yn y groes bl6m: "Yman y mae yr ardercha6c vrenhin Arthur yn gorwed g6edy y gladu yn y bed h6nn, ac y gyt ac ef yr eil, nyt amgen, G6enh6gyar y wreic." Ac yn is no hynny eilweith na6 troetued y kaffat bed Arthur.

Y groes honno g6edy y thynnu o'r maen a weles llawer, a'r abat yn y dangos y Henri vrenhin, ac a darlleasant y llythyr. Ac megys yd oed y groes wedi y ry ansodi a'e chudya6 y dan y maen, velly yd oed y groes eilch6yl wedi ry ymchoelut tu y llythyr idi 6rth y maen, o anryued ystry6 a chywreir6yd a doethineb y dynyon a oed yna yn medru ac yn mynnu cudya6 a dirgelu g6r kymeint y anryded a h6nn6, ac eu hargl6yd 6ynteu, a seilya6dyr pennaduraf y lle h6nn6, ac yn bennaf oll, o acha6s kynn6ryf y ryuel a oed arnunt. Eissyoes g6edy hedychei ar y lle h6nn6 eilweith, ual y keffit manac ar ved Arthur, y gossodassant 6y y groes a'r llythyr yndi val hynny.

Ac yn g6byl, megys y dy6edassei y brenhin, y caffat corf Arthur, nyt y my6n marmor megys y g6edei y vrenhin kymeint y anryded a h6nn6, nyt y my6n ysgrin o vaen nad na maen glas, namyn y my6n dryll dar g6edy ry geua6, a hynny o vn [f. 509r] droetued ar bymthec, neu a vei v6y, o dyfynder yn y daear, o acha6s eu brys 6y yn v6y noc o acha6s anryded cladu g6r kyfurd a h6nn6. Ac nyt oed ryued hynny, yn y kymhellei gynn6ryf ryuel 6ynt a goui.

It is known now why that place is called Ynys Wydrin, why Aval-lach, and why Glastonbury. And it is also known why the storytellers were obliged to call that lady, Margan, the goddess of the Otherworld. And let this be known also that although the abovementioned abbot had gotten a story concerning the body of Arthur from old books and stories, and something also from the letters which had been written on the cross, after they had been very nearly erased by age, he got most of the story and information from king Henry. For the king had told him many times, as he had heard himself from the old men and the poets and the storytellers relating the deeds of the Britons, that they were lying between two crosses which were in the graveyard of Glastonbury, and then they were set on their end. Arthur was buried deep due to the fear of the English, whom he had had frequently driven away and banished from the island, and whom his nephew Medrawt, the most wicked lad, had brought against him, to try to defend his wickedness, the ones who conquered the whole island once more after his death.

And because of that same fear, when exhuming the grave, approximately seven feet deep in the earth a heavy immovable stone was found, with a lead cross which had been placed on the left side of it, and these letters were in this manner on the lead cross: "Here lies the famous king Arthur after his death in this grave, and together with him a second, namely Gwenhwyfar his wife." And nine feet beneath that again the grave of Arthur was found.

Many saw that cross, after it was taken from the stone, and [they saw] the abbot showing it to king Henry, and they had read the letters. And just as the cross had been set into and concealed within the stone, so it was once more, after the inscribed side had been turned over to face the stone. [This was done] according to the marvelous artifice and skill and wisdom of the men who had then been able to and wished to conceal and hide a man of such great fame as that, and their lord besides, and the principal founder of that place, and most of all because of the tumult of the war that was upon them. Even so, after peace was restored in that place once more, in order to have a sign² of Arthur's grave, they set up the cross and the letters on it in that way.

And entirely as the king had said, the body of Arthur was found, not within marble as would befit a king of such great fame as that, not within a coffin of stone, not blue stone, but within part of an oak tree after it had been hollowed out, and that sixteen feet deep, or more, in the earth. [This was] because of their urgency, more than because of their [lack of] esteem for a burial of a man such as that. And that was not unusual, when they were being driven on by the tumult of war.



Ac odynd y dywededic abat h6nn6, o arch a dysc Hen-ri vrenhin, a beris g6neuthur ysgrin ardercha6c o vaen marmor y esgyrn Arthur, megys y g6edei ac y dylit y sei-lya6dyr pennaduraf y lle h6nn6. Ac ynteu yr egl6ys honno yn v6y noc egl6ysseu yr holl deyrnas, ac ef a'e g6nathoed yn gyuoetha6c o dir a daear yn amyl ac yn ehalaeth. Ac nyt heb y obryn ohona6 ynteu, namyn o gyfya6n vra6t Du6, y g6r a dal p6yth pob da yn ehalaeth heb petruster, nyt yn y nef e hun namyn ar y daear heuyt ac yn vy6 ac yn var6, a g6edy bo mar6, yn y vuched dragy6yd.

Ac yn y diwed, yn y vanachla6c hynaf ac a6durdodaf o'r holl deyrnas y clad6yt Arthur yn anrydedus, megys y g6edei kyflehau g6r kymeint y glot a'e anryded a h6nn6. Ac velly y teruyna cladedigaeth Arthur vrenhin.

And then that aforementioned abbot, by the command and instruction of king Henry, had a magnificent marble coffin made for the bones of Arthur, as befitted and was owed to the principal founder of that place. And then that church was greater than the churches in the whole kingdom, and he made it wealthy from land and earth quickly and generously. And he did this not for his own gain, but for the righteous judgment of God, the one who generously offers rewards for every good thing without hesitation, not in heaven alone but also on earth too, and in life and in death, and after one has died, in the life eternal.

And in the end, Arthur was honorably buried in the oldest and most powerful monastery in the whole kingdom, as was befitting to place a man of such great fame and honor as that. And thus concludes the burial of king Arthur.

Critical Notes

- 1 This is a quotation from Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, 3p8.9, via Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum ecclesiae*, ii.8.
- 2 Literally: so that a sign/evidence was had.