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To what extent can the association between Owain Glyndŵr and the Prophetic Tradition be justified or is it the legacy of Tudor propaganda?

Margaret Murphy

Dissertation for module A329 - 'The making of Welsh History' Open University,
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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late husband, Michael Murphy - a man who courageously fought his own battle and like Glyndŵr eventually lost.

Chapter One

Introduction

Owain Glyndŵr is often depicted as a man who, in the words of T F Tout, “had long brooded over the legendary glories of Cambria. The fabled prophecies of Merlin, the wondrous deeds of the old British Kings”.¹ But how far can this view of Glyndŵr, as a leader with a predilection for the prophetic tradition, be justified? Can evidence be found within contemporary documents that Glyndŵr was influenced by prophecy or has this image been created at a later date, as suggested by Elissa Henken, to reflect “changing socio-political as well as personal needs”² Prophecy was an integral part of medieval life. This dissertation seeks to determine its importance to Glyndŵr and also aims to establish whether Tudor chroniclers and historians, such as Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed, exaggerated Glyndŵr’s use of prophecy for propaganda purposes, to justify both the Act of Union between England and Wales and to confirm the authority of the Tudor claim to the throne. Certainly, Glyndŵr manipulated legends to his own advantage, such as his adoption of the standard of Uther Pendragon but as Helen Fulton in her essay *Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition* points out

¹ T.F. Tout, *Owain Glyndŵr and his times* (London, 2018), p11

² Elissa Henken, ‘Legendry of Owain Glyndŵr’ in *National Library of Wales Journal*, 32 (3), (2002), p288

there are only five known references in contemporary documents that refer to Glyndŵr's use of prophecy³.

The historiography of Owain Glyndŵr's association with the prophetic tradition has largely been established by two lecturers, Elissa R. Henken of the University of Georgia and Helen Fulton from Bristol University. In *Three forms of a Hero, Arthur, Owain Lawloch and Owain Glyndŵr*, (1995) Henken claims that it was as the result of Glyndŵr's reputation becoming linked to prophecy that has enabled him to be viewed with the same mythical connotation as Arthur and has led to him becoming "the preeminent redeemer hero as well as a primary nationalist symbol"⁴ Certainly, in the twentieth century Glyndŵr became the poster boy of Welsh Nationalists with historian and founder member of Cymru Fydd J.E. Lloyd going as far as declaring Glyndŵr as "the father of modern Welsh nationalism"⁵ Whilst in her 2005 article *Owain Glyn Dŵr and the Uses of Prophecy*, Fulton maintains that it was the legacy of anti-Welshness left by the Tudors that "is largely responsible for the view that Owain Glyn Dŵr was nothing more than a dreamer, driven by an irrational conviction that he was the *mab darogan*, the son of prophecy"⁶ This portrayal of Glyndŵr is one that endured and has been passed down from Hall and Hollinshed to the present day, enjoying a revival in Victorian times when cultural commentators, such as Matthew Arnold, saw Glyndŵr and Welsh medieval ideology as being preoccupied with prophecy⁷

³ Helen Fulton, 'Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition', in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.477

⁴ Elissa Henken, 'Three forms of a hero, Arthur, Owain Lawgoch and Owain Glyndŵr' in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquim*, vol 15, (1995) p 28.

⁵ Sir J E Lloyd, *Owen Glendower (Owain Glyndŵr)*, (Oxford university Press, 1966) p.146

⁶ Helen Fulton 'Owain Glyn Dwr and the Uses of Prophecy' in *Studia Celtica*, XXXIX (2005) p12

⁷ Helen Fulton, 'Matthew Arnold and the Canon of Medieval Welsh Literature', in *Review of English Studies* 63 (2011), p 221.

With a view to establishing the importance of the prophetic tradition to Glyndŵr, this dissertation will discuss the five known contemporary documents that specifically link Glyndŵr and prophecy. *De Oweino Glendworedy*⁸, lists the names of fifteen men believed to have been present when Glyndŵr was declared Princeps Wallie. One name on the list was Crach Ffinnant, their prophet. *Burgesses of Caerleon, Owain and the Prophet*, records a conversation between Glyndŵr and Hopcyn ap Thomas, in which Hopcyn use of prophecy prevents Owain from going into Gower⁹. The *Tripartite Indenture*, the alliance between Glyndŵr, Edmund Mortimer and Henry Percy, refers to a Prophet considered by many to mean Merlin¹⁰. The other two sources are letters written by Glyndŵr to Robert III, King of Scotland and to the Lords of Ireland. In both of which he quotes a prophecy that by the sons of Brutus joining together they will defeat the English¹¹.

The aim of this dissertation is to provide a balanced interpretation of the available evidence which links Glyndŵr to the prophetic tradition. It seeks, by gathering together disparate evidence from both primary and secondary sources, to provide a unique insight into the actual relationship Glyndŵr had with prophecy and to discover how much of what is believed to be true today actually originates from the political and ideological beliefs of Tudor propagandists. There are three key justifications for this research. Firstly, to discover if Glyndŵr was the “prophet born centuries before his time”¹² who “lived in a world of miracle and mystery”¹³ or has he been “misrepresented as the gullible fantasist, the unsophisticated dabbler in risible prophecy”¹⁴ by the anti-Welsh rhetoric of Tudor propaganda. Secondly, how far did Tudor propaganda fuel the myth of Owain Glyndŵr and lastly how much is our

⁸ Anon. 'De Oweino Glendworedy', trans. by Graham C.G.Thomas, in Michael Livingston and John K. Bollard (eds). *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp 36-43

⁹ Burgesses of Caerleon, 'Owain and the Prophet', trans. by Michael Livingston in Michael Livingston and John K. Bollard (eds). *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.89

¹⁰ Ellis, 'Original Letters, 2.1.27-28', trans. by Michael Livingston in Michael Livingston and John K. Bollard (eds). *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.115

¹¹ Adam of Usk, *Chronicle*, ed. and trans. C. Given-Wilson (1997) in Michael Livingston and John K. Bollard (eds). *Owain Glyndŵr: a casebook* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 61-7.

¹² R.R.Davies, *Owain Glyndŵr Prince of Wales* (Talybont, 2009) p. 150

¹³ Tout, *Owain Glyndŵr and his times*, p. 11

¹⁴ Fulton, 'Owain Glyn Dwr and the Uses of Prophecy' p. 121

current understanding of Glyndŵr still influenced by the political and ideological biases of the 16th Century.

Chapter two will begin by examining the role of prophecy in the 15th Century and in particular the importance to the Welsh of the Mab Darogan. It will then examine the five known contemporary primary sources that link Glyndŵr to prophecy and try to identify how important the prophetic tradition was to him and to isolate which prophecies were known to be associated with Glyndŵr during his lifetime. It will also examine Glyndŵr's manipulation of popular myths and legends for his own benefit.

Chapter three examines the role of chronicles in the 16th Century. It will investigate how Tudor chroniclers associated Glyndŵr with prophecy for propaganda purposes, in particular to justify both the Act of Union between England and Wales and to confirm the authority of the Tudor claim to the throne. It will also examine why he became associated with prophecies previously not connected with him. The dissertation will conclude by summarising the research questions and relating them to the broader historiography of the life, times and legacy of Glyndŵr. It will then examine how the legacy of Tudor chroniclers still influences our opinion of him today.

Chapter Two

Prophecies at the time of Glyndŵr

Prophecy was an integral part of medieval life. It is one of the oldest methods of social commentary and whilst the “point of prophecy may be to present a vision of the future, its goal is also to influence the present”¹⁵ and whether it was secular or political, in an era without recourse to the printed word, it “operated as a mode of propaganda on behalf of hegemonic institutions”¹⁶.

Prophecy was used to legitimise power and “at no period was the rage for these predications at a greater height than in the reigns of Richard the second, Henry the fourth and Edward the fourth”¹⁷ when the prophecies of Merlin were claimed by both the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions to validate their claims to the throne by “associating each king with the ancient Arthurian past and all its connotations of legitimate and exemplary rule”¹⁸

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that Glyndŵr would seek to justify his position as Princeps Wallie by articulating the language of Prophecy. Modern historian R.R. Davies argues that prophecy “was the foundation of his political credo and of his hope that he could remake the world of Wales (and that) Prophetic legend affirmed that he was indeed the Son of Prophecy, the long-

¹⁵ Aled Llyon Jones, *Darogan: Prophecy, Lament and Absent Heroes in Medieval Welsh Literature*, (Cardiff, 2013) p xiii

¹⁶ Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of prophecy* p. 107

¹⁷ Revd John Webb, ‘Translation of a French metrical history of the deposition of King Richard II’ *Archaeologia*, 20 (1824) p. 253.

¹⁸ Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of Prophecy*, p. 108

awaited Deliverer destined to save his people and his country”¹⁹ However, there is no evidence that Glyndŵr ever claimed to be the mab darogan and he was only associated with the pre-existing myth after his death. One of the first references to y mab darogan (The son of destiny) is to be found in the *Armes Prydein* (The Prophecy of Britain) a 10th Century prophetic poem from the Book of Taliesin. The poem prophesies the expulsion of the English from Britain by armies led by Cynan and Cadwaladr, two legendary British heroes²⁰ and is a typical example of early Welsh prophetic tradition, which was based around apocalyptic revelations that foretold of political freedom for the Welsh following a period of uprising and violence. With its anti- English rhetoric, it had particular relevance for Glyndŵr and to the “fourteenth-century assertion of the ancient power of Welsh-language culture in its struggle against anglicization”²¹

But what evidence is there to support Davies’s contention that prophecy was the foundation of Glyndŵr’s political credo? Or has this belief arisen out of a modern political culture that promotes the idea of romantic nationalism? Certainly, in *De Oweino Glendworedy*, an incomplete copy of a document thought to be derived from the court rolls of October 1400 from the General and First Court of the town of Oswestry, is a list of the names of fifteen men believed to have been present when Glyndŵr was declared Princeps Wallie. One name on the list was “Eragh Fynant, corum propheta”, commonly translated as Crach Ffynant, their prophet.²² However, not all historians agree on this. George Osborne Sayles, who is noted for his study of medieval English law courts, chooses to interpret propheta to mean spokesman,²³ if this is true, it would cast doubt on whether this document can be considered as evidence of a connection between Glyndŵr and prophecy. However, it is widely accepted that Ffynant’s role was that of a prophet. Historian R.R.Davies compares Ffynant’s

¹⁹ Davies, *Owain Glyn Dŵr Prince of Wales*, p.31

²⁰ Anon., *Armes Prydein* trans. by Rachel Bromwich (Dublin, 1972)

²¹ Helen Fulton, ‘Tenth -Century Wales and Ames Prydein’ in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorian*, 7, (2000), p.8

²² Anon. *De Oweino Glendworedy*, p37

²³ Anon., *Select cases in the Court of King’s Bench under Edward I. Volume II*, trans. by George Osborne Sayles (London, 1938) p. 114

relationship to Glyndŵr to “modern politicians have their spin-doctors to interpret the signs of the times, so Welsh leaders of the period had their seers, and Owain had Crach Ffynnant”²⁴

The next surviving documents to connect Glyndŵr and the Prophetic Tradition are two letters written by Glyndŵr on the 29th November 1401. One letter was addressed to Robert III, the Scottish King, and the other to the Lords of Ireland. It is unknown whether these letters actually reached their intended recipients, Adam of Usk believed that the messengers carrying the letters were captured in Ireland and beheaded²⁵ Copies of both letters are included by Adam of Usk in his chronicle. How he obtained these letters is unknown. It has been suggested that his possession of them was proof of his collusion with Glyndŵr but it is also feasible that he acquired copies through his contacts at court.²⁶ In both letters Glyndŵr appeals for help to fight the English. In his letter to Robert he writes that “the prophecy states that, with the help and support of your royal majesty, I shall be delivered from this subjection and bondage”²⁷ and similarly in his letter to the lords of Ireland “It is commonly said in the prophecy, however, that, before we can gain the upper hand in this contest, you and your noble kinsmen in Ireland shall come to our aid in this matter”²⁸

It is believed that the prophecies referred to in these letters, had their origins in Merlinian prophecy “New collections of prophecies, most of them attributed to Merlin, developed from the fourteenth century onwards and circulated in Latin, French, English and Welsh”²⁹ seemingly as a direct result of the popularity of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s works *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Vita Merlini*. Merlin is also believed to be the prophet mentioned in the only other primary source that can be directly attributed to Glyndŵr, the Tripartite Indenture (1405). Contained within the document, which affirms

²⁴ Davies, *Owain Glyn Dŵr Prince of Wales*, p.30

²⁵ Adam of Usk Chronicle, part 2, trans. by Given-Wilson, in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.63

²⁶ Michael Livingston, *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.312

²⁷ Adam of Usk *Chronicle, part 2*, p.65

²⁸ Adam of Usk *Chronicle, part 2*, p.65

²⁹ Helen Fulton, Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of prophecy* p. 109

the alliance between Glyndŵr, Edmund Mortimer the son of Edmund Earl of March and Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland, is the phrase, “should appear to these lords in process of time that they are the same persons of whom the prophet speaks”³⁰. Some historians have questioned the document’s authenticity. Lloyd states that “Doubt has been cast upon the genuineness of the instrument itself since it is only to be found in the pages of one not over- accurate chronicler”³¹. Livingston counters his argument by highlighting both the meticulous attention to geographic detail within the document and the well informed summaries of events occurring in the north of England claiming that “To imagine it an English forgery would be to imagine a complex scheme indeed”³².

Within the Tripartite Indenture is an example of how Glyndŵr used prophecy to legitimise his own cause. The indenture defined that the boundary of new Wales would run along the Severn bank to “the ash trees commonly called Onnenau Meigion ... on the high road from Bridgnorth to Kinver”³³. The significance of this location would have been understood by many Welsh to be linked to the Merlinian prophecy which foretold “that at Bridgnorth Ash Trees in the depth of England a great eagle would muster a host of Welsh warriors who would defeat the English”³⁴.

The final document linking Glyndŵr with Prophecy is a letter from the mayor and burgesses of Caerleon written in July 1403. They write that whilst in Carmarthen, Glyndŵr consulted with Hopcyn ap Thomas. Hopcyn was a well-known patron of Welsh literature and “almost certainly the man who commissioned and designed the Red Book of Hergest”³⁵. Owain was believed to have requested the meeting because “he considered him a master of Brut, ..(who) would help him to understand what

³⁰ Ellis, ‘Original Letters, 2.1.27-28’, trans. by Michael Livingston in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.115

³¹ Lloyd, *Owen Glendower (Owain Glyndŵr)* p. 93

³² Michael Livingston, ‘An Amazing Claim: The Tripartite Indenture’, in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.489

³³ Ellis, *Original Letters, 2.1.27-28*, p.115

³⁴ Ian Skidmore, *Owain Glyndŵr Prince of Wales*, (Swansea,1996) p.138

³⁵ Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition*, p.482

the future would hold for him”³⁶ Lloyd sees this meeting as proof that Glyndŵr was “a patron of divination and not adverse to invoking its aid when face to face with the incalculable future”.³⁷

However, whilst there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this letter, it should be noted that it was written by people loyal to the English crown.

The five known sources that link Glyndŵr to the Prophetic Tradition can by no means be described as being conclusive evidence of a man obsessed with prophecy and who “saw a mystery in every natural law, a portent in every storm, and an omen of forthcoming woe in every comet”³⁸ Indeed, each document raises questions as to its reliability as proof of Glyndŵr’s use of prophecy. However, Glyndŵr was a shrewd and capable leader, who was quick to realise the power that the imagery associated with prophecy, would have for his political ambition. Adam of Usk in his *Chronicle* describes the highly symbolic moment when Glyndŵr first raised the standard of Uther Pendragon, of “a golden dragon on a white field”³⁹ and although the battle it was raised at was inconsequential, historian Michael Livingston also sees significance in its date, 2ND November, 1401, the day after All Saints Day and the first day of the New Year according to the Celtic calendar⁴⁰ The choice of Harlech Castle as the home for Glyndŵr’s court can also be interpreted as having symbolic relevance. Apart from its strategic value, it was believed to be the location of the palace of Bendigeidfran, the pre-Celtic king of all Britain⁴¹ It would appear that Glyndŵr was a skilful manipulator who wasn’t afraid to harness the image of prophecy and utilise it for his own advantage.

Glyndŵr’s rebellion also coincided with a number of natural phenomena that both friends and foe would interpret through the medium of prophecy. The comet that appeared in March 1402 was

³⁶Burgesses of Caerleon, ‘Owain and the Prophet’, trans. by Michael Livingston in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.89

³⁷Lloyd, *Owen Glendower, Owain Glyndŵr*, p.68

³⁸Tout, *Owain Glyndŵr and his times*, p.11

³⁹ Adam of Usk, *Chronicle, part 2*, p.63

⁴⁰ Livingston, *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, p.312

⁴¹ Skidmore, *Owain Glyndŵr Prince of Wales*, p.123

interpreted by the Welsh as “being in the shape of a dragon, the symbol of Welsh nationalism”⁴² They also saw it as being the third great star of history. The first being at Bethlehem and the second the comet that portended the greatness of Uther Pendragon, this they believed signified a deliverance for the men of Gwynedd⁴³ Whilst in September 1402, the invading army of King Henry were to experience unseasonably cold weather that saw torrential rain, hail and snow⁴⁴ which forced the English army to return home within three weeks believing “that magic alone could have conjured up such storms and disasters and that Owain had got from the devil the power of making himself invisible at will”⁴⁵

However, it would be the nature of Glyndŵr’s mysterious death which would prove to be his lasting legacy⁴⁶. The Welsh chronicle *Annales Owen Glyndŵr* states “1415. Owain disappeared on the feast of St. Mathew's Day in the autumn. From then on [the place of] his disappearance was not known. A great many say he died; the seers say he did not”.⁴⁷ It would be the foundation of a prophecy, with the suggestion, that just like Arthur, he is not dead and thus still a potential redeemer and together with Arthur and Owain Lawgoch he shares the Sleeper in the Cave legend, ready to reawaken at the opportune moment and lead Wales to its independence⁴⁸

After examining contemporary evidence, we find little to assume that Glyndŵr based his political ambition on prophecy. Fulton, argues that we need to re-examine our preconceptions regarding Medieval prophecy and see it not as a medium of popular vernacular culture, in which mention of the commonality would be expected, but rather as the language of power in which only Kings, Saints

⁴² Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition*, p.484

⁴³ Lloyd, *Owen Glendower, Owain Glyndŵr*, p.48

⁴⁴ Appendix 1 – John Hardyng’s rhyme about a soldiers’ view of the weather

⁴⁵ Tout, *Owain Glyndŵr and his times*, p.15

⁴⁶ Appendix 2

⁴⁷ Anon, ‘Chronicle of Owain Glyndŵr’, trans. by John K.Bollard in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.175

⁴⁸ Henken, *Three forms of a hero, Arthur, Owain Lawgoch and Owain Glyndŵr*, p.22

or members of the upper nobility were represented and one from which Glyndŵr was deliberately excluded.⁴⁹ By distancing Glyndŵr from prophecy, contemporary chroniclers were effectively marginalising and disempowering him.

⁴⁹Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of prophecy* p. 107

Chapter Three

The Tudor Effect

Thirteenth and fourteenth century histories devoted significant attention to the relationship between Wales and England. However, “the inheritance of the sixteenth century was of an English historiography which paid increasingly little attention to Wales”⁵⁰ but by the end of the century, and due in some part to the Welsh ancestry of the monarchy, this trend had been reversed with Wales featuring heavily in the widely available chronicles. Writers with strong marcher connections such as Richard Grafton, Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed were enjoying a prominent role in historical writing and whilst sixteenth century chronicles appear to be simple narratives, they were in fact sophisticated accounts which relied on a range of narrative devices that sought to reinforce the chronicler’s version of history.⁵¹

One of the earliest writers of the Tudor period to challenge the authority of prophecy was Polydore Vergil. He was known for his involvement in Tudor propaganda and particularly his efforts to justify The Act of Union between England and Wales. He had been encouraged to write *Historia Anglica* by Henry VII⁵². Vergil employed a “relatively new critical approach seeking to compare sources and

⁵⁰ Tim Thornton, ‘Wales in late medieval and early modern English histories: neglect, rediscovery, and their implications’ in *Historical Research*, 90 (250), p. 692

⁵¹ Alicia Marchant, ‘A narrative approach to chronicles’ in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.551

⁵² Polydore Vergil, ‘Historia Anglica’ trans. by Alicia Marchant in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp 230-233

create his own, accurate narrative”⁵³ which he used to dispute Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Vita Merlini* and in the process deny the existence of Arthur. However, from the 1530s onwards the narrative of ‘British history’ “became part of the Reformation claim to Empire and was very widely committed to by English writers”⁵⁴

The first writer who actively sought to discredit Owain Glyndŵr through his use of prophecy would be Edward Hall an English lawyer, member of Parliament and historian. In his work *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*, more commonly known as *Hall’s Chronicle* he sought to justify the Tudor accession by tracing their rule back to Lancastrian Henry IV, the King who in 1399 had deposed Richard II. He would also become the first writer to specifically link Glyndŵr to *The Prophecy of Six Kings to Follow King John*. This prophecy was based on Merlinian prophecy found in the seventh book of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*. The ‘Revised Prose Version’ circa 1327 was included in the Anglo-Norman *Brut*⁵⁵. This version was appropriated after 1399 as an anti-Lancastrian text that describes the evil Moldwarp being destroyed and the land divided into three⁵⁶

Hall deliberately associated the prophecy to the *Tripartite Indenture* depicting the three rebel leaders, namely Glyndŵr, Edmund Mortimer and Henry Percy as the dragon, lion and wolf of the prophecy, claiming that they had been seduced into identifying themselves as such

“Here I passe over to declare howe a certayne writer writeth that this earle of Marche, the lorde Percy and Owen Glendor wer unwisely made beleve by a Welch

⁵³ Cerdic, Polydore Vergil and *Historia Anglia*, 2016. Available at <https://thehistoryofengland.co.uk/resource/polydore-vergil-and-historia-anglia>, Accessed 29th March 2019

⁵⁴ Thornton, ‘Wales in late medieval and early modern English histories: neglect, rediscovery, and their implications’, p. 684

⁵⁵ Livingston, *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, p.257

⁵⁶ Appendix 3

prophecier, that King Henry was the Moldwarpe, cursed of Goddes owne mouth, and that they thre were the Dragon, the Lion and the Wolfe, whiche shoulde devide this realme between them, by the deviacion of that mawmet Merlyn”⁵⁷

By depicting Glyndŵr as a failed and flawed leader with an obsession for divination, Hall is also discrediting the prophecy he had associated him with. The same prophecy that was also used by Yorkist supporters to denounce the legitimacy of Henry IV reign and thus the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty. By “dismissing both Owain’s master plan and the prophecy as the ravings of a madman, Hall authoritatively asserts the legitimacy of Henry IV’s kingship and that of his heirs and pours scorn on what he clearly interpreted as anti-Lancastrian prophecy”⁵⁸ An approach that “elides the Welsh connections of the Tudor kings and demonstrates the futility of Welsh ambitions for self-government”⁵⁹ and which also gave credence to the need for the Act of Union between England and Wales.

Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* first published in 1577 adds considerably to the history of Glyndŵr provided in Hall’s chronicle. Many historians like Fulton believe that Holinshed was simply reiterating the “conventional equations between Owain Glyn Dwr and prophecy, and between prophecy and Welshnesswhich had been circulating in England since the coming of the Saxons”⁶⁰, whilst Tim Thornton argues that Holinshed takes a more sympathetic view towards Glyndŵr use of prophecy by moderating through abbreviation the criticism which is so prominent in Hall’s chronicle.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Edward Hall, ‘The Union of Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke’ ed. By Scott Lucas in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 226

⁵⁸ Fulton, ‘Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition’, p.486

⁵⁹ Fulton, ‘Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of prophecy’ p. 114

⁶⁰ Fulton, ‘Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of prophecy’ p. 106

⁶¹ Thornton, ‘Wales in late medieval and early modern English histories: neglect, rediscovery, and their implications’, p. 696

Of the Tripartite Indenture Holinshed comments

“foolish credit given to a vaine prophesie, as though King Henrie was the moldwarpe, cursed of Gods owne mouth, and they three were the dragon, the lion and the wolfe, which should divide this realme between them. Such is the deviation (saith Hall) and not divination of those blind and fantasticall dreames of the Welsh propheciers”⁶²

Both Hall and Holinshed, in their chronicles moved the date of the Tripartite Indenture from 1405 to 1403 “in order to ensure a dramatic conclusion to the Indenture: Henry (Hotspur) Percy’s dramatic death at the Battle of Shrewsbury”⁶³ and in doing so change the identity of the people involved.

Immediately following his account of the Indenture Hall proceeds

O ye waveryng Welshmen, call you these prophecies? Nay call them unprofitable practises. Name you them diuinacions? Nay name them diabolocall deuises, say you they be prognostications? Nay they be pestiferous publishinges. For be declaring & credite geing to their subtil & obscure meaniungs, princes haue been deceiued, many a noble manne hath suffred, and many an honest man hath been begyled & destroyed.⁶⁴

Alicia Marchant in her work *Owain Glyndŵr in Medieval English Chronicles* suggests that Hall wrote so forcefully as “a lesson to the Welsh; the future that had been foreseen through prophecies and that many ‘Welshmen’ had been seduced into believing, never had any possibility of actually occurring”.⁶⁵

⁶² Raphael Holinshed, ‘Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland’ ed. By Scott Lucas in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 244-245

⁶³ Alicia Marchant, *Owain Glyndŵr in Medieval English Chronicles*, (Suffolk, 2014) p. 88

⁶⁴ Edward Hall, ‘The Union of Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke’ p. 226

⁶⁵ Marchant, *Owain Glyndŵr in Medieval English Chronicles*, p89

However, in his chronicle Holinshed retold the prophecy associated with the birth of Sir Edmund Mortimer which is mentioned in the Polychronicon continuation written by Ranulf Higden between 1432 and 1450. The prophecy recalls that “strange wonders happened (as men reported) at the nativity of this man, for the same night he was borne, all his fathers horses in the stable were found to stand in blood up to the bellies”⁶⁶ Many, including Higden and Holinshed, would link this to the aftermath of the Battle of Bryn Glas when over 400 Englishmen were slain, lying dead in their own blood under the feet of their horses and after which “Owain Glyndŵr increased in power and in might, and the power of the men of England decreased”⁶⁷

Whilst chroniclers played their part, it can be argued that it was the portrayal of Glyndŵr by English playwright William Shakespeare in his play *Henry IV Part 1* that would seal his reputation as a man obsessed with prophecy and who henceforward would be known for his predilection for “skimble-skamble stuff”⁶⁸ Shakespeare’s depiction of Glyndŵr has been interpreted in differing ways by historians. Christopher Highley in his work *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Crisis in Ireland* suggests that Shakespeare’s depiction of Glyndŵr was in fact Tudor propaganda⁶⁹, and was a way of denigrating the ongoing Irish rebellion of Hugh O’Neill, earl of Tyrone being a “screen for Irish politics, (with) the audience of the time going directly to the subtext, since that subtext was of such topical interest”⁷⁰ Whilst R.R. Davies believes that whilst Shakespeare’s Glendower was grounded in Holinshed’s chronicle “his portrait is shot through with insight, sympathy and human warmth

⁶⁶ Holinshed, ‘Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland’, p.244

⁶⁷ Ranulf Higden, ‘Polychronicon Continuation’, trans. by Michael Livingston in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.189

⁶⁸ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 1*, Act III, scene 1, line 152 in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 252

⁶⁹ Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Crisis in Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1997)

⁷⁰ Charles Edelman, ‘Shakespeare, Spenser and the Crisis in Ireland (review)’ *Parergon*, Vol. 17 (1) (1999) pp. 228-229

altogether lacking in the one-dimensional narratives of the historiansIt took the genius of an Englishman to create the first credible, even attractive characterization of the Welsh leader”⁷¹

Glyndŵr’s reputation was also being denigrated within Welsh historiography. Elis Gruffydd (1490 – 1552) the Welsh chronicler in his work *Cronicl o Wech Oesoedd (Chronicle of the Six Ages)*, clearly rejects that Glyndŵr was the Mab Darogan of prophecy, he describes a conversation between Glyndŵr and the Abbot of Glynegwestl just prior to Glyndŵr’s disappearance

““Ah Sir Abbot, you rose up too early.” “No” said the abbot, “it is you rose up too early by a hundred years” “Yes” said Owain. And in the opinion of some of the Welsh, it may be he disappeared and vanished away from amongst his people lest he incur shame, since from the speech of the abbot it may be he recognized clearly that he may not have been the Owain he was intending to be, the one the prophecies were promising to take the crown of England.”⁷²

This story is now often repeated as part of the sleeper in the cave legend and is placed not during Glyndŵr’s lifetime but a few hundred years later on a break from his sleep. It has been used in more recent times as an indication that Glyndŵr is ready to return and lead Wales to her independence⁷³

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Glyndŵr’s association with prophecy and that of the Mab Darogan had not always been belittled by the Tudors. The prophetic poem by Ieuan ap Rhydderch circa 1470 hails Jasper Tudor as inheriting the title of the Mab Darogan from Owain Glyndŵr, as leader of the struggle to place a Welshman, Henry Tudor, upon the throne of England.

⁷¹ R.R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyndŵr*, (Oxford, 1997) p.329

⁷² Elis Gruffudd, ‘Chronicle of the Six Ages, trans.by John K Bollard Lucas in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp 229 - 230

⁷³ Henken, *Legendry of Owain Glyn’dŵr*, p.284

“Three names, like pure jewels are attached to the son of prophecy.

You have, surely, in song three names, as I declare them:

Cadwaladr, colour of piercing fire,

Owain, object of great inspiration and Cynan ...

Go and drive out the English,

Do not put the sword of Owain Glyndŵr in its sheath;

Make peace for us in the land of Maxen and make a conquest of ancient Hors and

Hengist”⁷⁴

All the traditional imagery can be found within this poem – the comet; the mab darogan as bear, wolf, stag and dragon. Scotland and Ireland as traditional allies of Wales and the call to expel the English from the land of Brutus⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ieuan ap Rhydderch, *Gwaith*, trans. R. Iestyn Daniel, (Prifysgol Cymru, 2003) pp155-156

⁷⁵ Fulton, *Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition*, p488

Chapter Four

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, there is very little contemporary evidence to substantiate R.R. Davies claim that prophecy was the foundation of Glyndŵr's political credo.⁷⁶ But equally there appears to be little evidence that confirms Fulton's claims that Tudor propagandists portrayed Glyndŵr as a "gullible fantasist, the unsophisticated dabbler in risible prophecy"⁷⁷

Certainly, Tudor chroniclers were responsible for bringing Glyndŵr back from the margins of history. However, their depiction of Glyndŵr tended to be of a subversive and destructive character. John Leland (1503-1552) in his work *Itinerary In Wales* accuses Glyndŵr as being responsible for "the cause of destruction, decay and the diminishment of numerous locations in Wales and the Marches"⁷⁸ Whilst Holinshed's continuer Abraham Fleming⁷⁹, would be the first to record in English print, the "shameful villanie executed upon the carcasses of the deadmen by Welshwomen" following the Battle of Bryn Glas⁸⁰ Tudor chroniclers placed Glyndŵr into the centre of a moral panic⁸¹ about royal authority, about the un-Englishness of Wales and the Welsh and about external threats to English sovereignty. He is depicted "as a symbol of English fears of the outsiders beyond

⁷⁶ Davies, *Owain Glyn Dŵr Prince of Wales*, p.31

⁷⁷ Fulton, 'Owain Glyn Dwr and the Uses of Prophecy' p. 121

⁷⁸ Livingston, *Owain Glyndwr a casebook* (Liverpool University Press, 2013) p. 403

⁷⁹ Scott Lucas, *Owain Glyndwr a casebook* (Liverpool University Press, 2013) p. 420

⁸⁰ Holinshed, 'Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland' p. 244

⁸¹ The term 'moral panic' was first coined by Steve Cohen in his 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panic: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. It describes news coverage of a perceived social threat in a way that creates public concern

their boundaries and beyond the control of their institutionalised monarchy”⁸² However, of all the chroniclers, it was only Hall and Holinshed that directly linked Glyndŵr to prophecy.

But the idea of Glyndŵr having a predilection for prophecy persisted. Welsh historian William Wynne commented in his 1697 work *History of Wales* that the “Prophecies of Merlin made the swelling mind of Glyndŵr overflow its banks”⁸³ and in 1778 Thomas Pennant observes that Glyndŵr sought “to animate his countrymen (by calling) upon the ancient prophecy”⁸⁴ and whilst it can comfortably be asserted that Tudor chroniclers, namely Hall and Holinshed, and the “skimble-skamble stuff” depiction of Glyndŵr by Shakespeare was still influencing historians nearly two hundred years later, are they really responsible for the mythical Arthur type legendry associated with Glyndŵr in modern times?

Historian Ian Skidmore argues that the modern-day image of Glyndŵr of a man who “had long brooded over the legendary glories of Cambria. The fabled prophecies of Merlin, the wondrous deeds of the old British Kings”⁸⁵ has not come about by the writings of Tudor chroniclers but is rather the result of the Victorian obsession with romantic tradition.⁸⁶ Certainly, at the beginning of the 19th Century the image of Glyndŵr was still problematic but as the century progressed and the fight for Welsh nationalism became more prominent then the image of Glyndŵr was rehabilitated and in the twentieth century he would become as Henken describes “the preeminent redeemer hero as well as a primary nationalist symbol”⁸⁷

⁸² Fulton, ‘Owain Glyndŵr and the uses of prophecy’ p. 121

⁸³ William Wynne, *History of Wales*, p.317

⁸⁴ Thomas Pennant, *Tour in Wales* (1778) p.322

⁸⁵ Tout, *Owain Glyndŵr and his times* (London, 2018), p11

⁸⁶ Skidmore, *Owain Glyn Dŵr Prince of Wales*, p.17

⁸⁷ Henken, ‘Three forms of a hero, Arthur, Owain Lawgoch and Owain Glyndŵr’ p 28.

In modern days the reputation of Glyndŵr is often romanticised and this includes his use of prophecy. Contemporary documents suggest that in a time when prophecy was a part of everyday life, Glyndŵr's used prophecy "only on formal occasions as a kind of political shorthand to seek support for his claim to power"⁸⁸ Claims that the Tudor propagandists portrayed Glyndŵr as a fantasist consumed by a belief in prophecy have also been exaggerated. Certainly, both Hall and Holinshed promoted this view in their chronicles but for the majority of Tudor writers Glyndŵr was portrayed as being violent and destructive "After he (Glyndŵr) won the castle he took sixty men And had then beheaded on the side of the castle yard"⁸⁹ It would be in Victorian times that the image of Glyndŵr would be rehabilitated and the romantic image of Arthur and prophecy became inextricably linked with the name of Owain Glyndŵr. By 1920, when Sir John Lloyd delivered a series of lectures about Glyndŵr at Oxford, culminating with him declaring Glyndŵr as "the father of modern Welsh nationalism"⁹⁰ Glyndŵr's rehabilitation was complete he had been "transformed into an acclaimed statesman and a prophet born centuries before his time"⁹¹

(6026 words)

⁸⁸ Fulton, 'Owain Glyndŵr and the prophetic tradition' p.476

⁸⁹ John Leland, 'Itinerary in Wales' in *Owain Glyndŵr A casebook*, (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.221

⁹⁰ Lloyd, Owen Glendower (Owain Glyndwr) p.146

⁹¹ Davies *Owain Glyn Dŵr Prince of Wales*, p.150

Appendix 1

The King Henry thrice to Wales went
In the haytime and the harvest, divers years
In every time were mists and tempest sent
Of weather foule that he had never power
Glendower to know, but o'er his carriage clear
Owen had at certain straits and passages.
And to our hosts did full great damage
The King had never but tempest foul and rain
As long as he was aye in Wales' ground
Rocks and mists, winds and storms certain
All men trownd that witches made that stounde
The commons, all of them on England's ground,
Cursed his going to Wales every year
For hay and corn were lost both infere

John Hardyng

The Chronicle of John Hardyng Vol.2, edited by James Simpson and Sarah Peverley (London, 2015)

Appendix 2

'His grave is beside no church, neither under the shadow of any ancient yew. It is in a spot safer and more sacred still. Rain does not fall on it, hail nor sleet chill no sere sod above it. It is forever green with the green of eternal spring. Sunny the light on it; close and warm and dear it lies, sheltered from all storms, from all cold or grey oblivion. Time shall not touch it; decay shall not dishonour it; for that grave is in the heart of every true Cymro. There, for ever, from generation unto generation, grey Owen's heart lies dreaming on, dreaming on, safe for ever and for ever.'

Owen Rhoscomyl

Flame bearers of Welsh History, (Montgomeryshire, 1905)

Appendix 3

And afterward he shall be given three parts of his land to have the fourth part in peace and rest. He will live in sorrow all his lifetime; in his days the hot baths will become cold. After that the Mole will die accidentally and suddenly: alas the sorrow, for he will be drowned in a flood of the sea! Forever more his seed will be completely fatherless in strange lands, and then shall the land be broken into three parts. That is to say, one to the Wolf, one to the Dragon, and one to the Lion. So shall it be forevermore. Then shall this land be called "the land of conquest," and so shall the right heirs of England end.

Prophecy of the Six Kings

trans. by Michael Livingston, from Brut, ed. Brie, 72-76

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