

Gormund and Isembard.

A POSTSCRIPT TO "THE VANDALS IN WESSEX".

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IN my paper "The Vandals in Wessex and the battle of Deorham" (*Y Cymmrodor*, xix, 5), I urged that a wealth of lost history was buried in Book xi, ch. 8 of the despised Geoffrey of Monmouth. It seemed clear to me that the Vandals, who absolutely disappear after the Byzantine order for their exile, had gone to Hiberia (so *corr.* for Hibernia), the country they had come from; that they had helped the Visigoths to complete its conquest; that an army of them had been engaged by the West Saxons for their campaign against the South Midlands; and that this army had left its name on various places within the known or probable dominion of the West Saxons—Wandsworth in Surrey (Wendleswurthe), Windsor in Berks. (Wendlesore), Wændlescumb in Berks, Wendlebury in Oxfordshire (Wendelebur'), Wendlesclif in Worcestershire, Wendlesbiri in Herts, and Wendlesmére in the Fens. Their king, Gormund, we are told, was besieging Cirencester when "Isembard" (Isenbard), grandson of Lodovic, king of the Franks, came to him and engaged his help to conquer Gaul, from which an uncle had expelled him.

I scouted any idea that this story could be the mere irrelevant invention of a South Welshman. I said it must

come from the Breton book¹ which Geoffrey declared he had translated, and I suggested that with the besieged Britons at Cirencester was a Breton contingent, in which the Frankish refugee Isenbard had come. I am now able to *prove* that part, at least, of the story is anterior to Geoffrey, and of Gallic origin—almost certainly, however, not Breton but Norman.

Hariulf of St. Riquier wrote a chronicle of that abbey which he carried down to 1104. He left St. Riquier in 1105, to become abbat of Oudenbourg, where he died in 1143. Now, when his chronicle has anything in common with Geoffrey, that cannot be *borrowed*, but must be prior to Geoffrey's book, because Hariulf left his chronicle behind him² at St. Riquier—some quarter of a century before we have any reason to suppose that Geoffrey began to write. And in ch. 20 of his third book, he has a version of the story of Isembard and Gormond, which is not likely to have been written after 1088, when he finished his *fourth* book.

According to Hariulf, a noble "Francigena", named Esimbardus, had offended Louis III ("Hludogvicus"), and, becoming a traitor, invited "gentium barbariem" to visit the country. Their king, Guaramundus, said to have brought many kingdoms under his rule, wished also to dominate France. The story of the invasion was told not only in histories, but was the subject of daily reminiscence and song among the people ("patriensium memoria quotidie recolitur et cantatur"). On the approach of the "barbari" the treasurer of St. Riquier took a box of valuables and fled to Sens. The enemy, after landing, marched through the provinces of Vimeu and Ponthieu,

¹ In my list of incidents exhibiting the Breton element I ought to have included the procuring of an overking from Brittany (vi, 4).

² See Lot's ed., p. LVII.

overthrew churches, killed Christians, and filled everything with death and blood, finally plundering and burning the church of St. Riquier.

Louis III encountered them in the Vimeu district, and obtained a triumph, the king of the infidels, Guaramund, being killed. Thousands of his people were slain and the rest put to flight. Louis, however, died, it was said from an internal rupture caused by the over-violence of his blows.

Now it is clear that if Hariulf's data are correct Geoffrey's cannot be; but, on examining Hariulf, his account turns out to be a composite one, partly derived from the *Francorum regum historia* (which he quotes *verbatim*), partly from the tradition of the monastery as to the flight of its treasurer and the plunder and destruction of its buildings, and as to other particulars from an unnamed source.

Well, the purely monastic part of the account does not mention Esimbard, Louis, or Guaramund. And the *Francorum regum historia* does not mention Esimbard or Guaramund, nor does it allude to the death of Louis as in any way connected with the battle. Yet the account in that work was written in 886-7, only some five or six years after Louis defeated the invaders. Let me add that Louis did not die till the year after the battle, and that the cause of his death was quite different. It is noticeable too that the *Fr.h.* says the invaders were Normans, and that Hariulf does not.

There is in the Royal Library at Brussels a fragment of a French verse-romance on the subject (MS. II, 181). The MS. is of the 13th century. It was reproduced in 1906 in facsimile, with a transcription by Dr. Alphonse Bayot, and a bibliography. This romance (through which I came to learn the existence of the legend of Hariulf)

calls Gormund or Gormunt an Arabian and an Oriental, but there is no evidence that it was not composed after, and partly based on, Geoffrey's account.

Of the books and articles mentioned in the bibliography, the most important is an article by M. Ferdinand Lot in *Romania*, xxvii, pp. 1-54 (1898); but he attributes the composition of the verse-romance to 1060-70, which would make it impossible for it to have borrowed from Geoffrey, in spite of its mention of "Cirencestre". On the other hand, M. Gaston Paris in *Romania*, xxxi, pp. 445-8 (1902), reviewing a Swedish authoress who places the poem in the late 12th or 13th century, shows that, on account of an allusion to the king as feudatory of St. Denis, it cannot have been written *before* 1082¹; and, while denying that it is so late as the end of the 12th century, says one can continue to place it towards the end of the first third of that century. Now Geoffrey's book was at Bec in Normandy in January 1139, and how much earlier we cannot tell: M. Paris gives no reason why the poem should not be at least as late as that.

In my paper I preferred the reading "Godmund" to "Gormund", and connected with the invader Godmundcestre and Godmundesleah. That must be given up, in face of Hariulf's Guaramundus.

The reader will probably have begun to wonder whether there is *any* truth in Geoffrey's story so far as it relates to the 6th century, and, if so, whether there were any Vandals concerned at all. That question I am not going to shirk, but we shall be in a better position to discuss it

¹ He thinks Louis VI was the first to recognise formally this feudal bond: in 1124 that king made open declaration of it, and "raised" the banner of St. Denis for the first time.

when we have cleared out of the way those elements which are certainly later.

Geoffrey has mixed up two foreign encampments at Cirencester. The first was that of the West Saxons in 577. The second was that of the Dane Guthrum or Guthorm, who, after making peace with Ælfred, lay with his host at Cirencester in 879, retiring in 880 to his kingdom of East Anglia, and dying in 890.

In 879 another Danish host came to England, but in 880 left for Ghent, where it lay for a year, and in 881 had a battle with the Franks. That may be the victory gained at Saucourt by Louis III, or it may be the one in the Vimeu district. There is no record that Guthorm came from East Anglia to join the invaders, but there is no proof that he did not. And it is maintained that his name might be shortened to Gorm and Latinized to Gormo, which would become in French Gormon. I cannot see that any evidence has been produced of Gorm as an abbreviation of Guthorm. I will, however, add on my own account that the *th* would eventually disappear in French, so that we might have Guorm-on, and *apparently* that might happen as early as the time when Hariulf wrote.

But there is another name out of which it is quite truly said that Gurmond may have arisen. The *Annales Bertiniani* show that in 882 there was among the Normans on the continent a prince named Vurm-o (dat. *Vurmoni*). The *Annales Fuldenses* call him Vurm, and of course his name was the Scandinavian Wurm (also Worm?) *i.e.* Snake (our "worm"). Now in those parts of France where Kymric was the original vernacular Teutonic *W*- became *Gu*-¹ and *G*-—so that Wurm-o-n would produce

¹ Under the influence of the same sound-change in Kymric, which took place not before the 8th century, perhaps even in the early

Gurmon. And it is suggested that the Gurmond of the French romance is a compound of this Wurm and of Guthorm.

M. Lot says that Geoffrey must have been in Normandy in and before 1128¹ as chaplain to Guillaume Cliton, *i.e.* William, son of duke Robert of Normandy. If so, he would naturally visit St. Riquier and hear the Guaramund story there. When he got back to England and came to write his "History", he obviously confused the capture of Cirencester by the West Saxons in 577 and the encampment of the Danes in 879.

And here the question arises, "How comes Geoffrey to be so interested in Cirencester, or to know anything about the siege of 577"? He shows no sign of having consulted an Anglo-Saxon chronicle: if he had, he would have known that Bath and Gloucester were captured in the same year, and would hardly have omitted to name them. Moreover, in his poem on Merlin he makes the latter prophesy:—

Hunc lupus aequoreus debellans vincet et ultra
 Sabrinam victum per barbara regna fugabit.
 Idem Kaer Keri² circumdabit obsidione
 Passeribusque domos et moenia trudet ad imum.
 Classe petet Gallos, sed telo regis obibit.

Here we have three new facts (1) that the invader captured the town by means of sparrows (which, later

9th. In those French dialects in which W- remains, the Keltic vernacular was doubtless Goidelic—see the map in my *Keltic Researches*, at p. 113. Hariulf himself used G- forms, as in Gualaricus for Valery, and even in the middle of a word, as Iludogvicius (-*gui*-).

¹ The *Diet. of Nat. Biog.* is silent about this chaplaincy, and M. Lot gives no authority.

² *i.e.* Cirencester. Either we should read Ceri=Cerin (Corinium), or at any rate that must have been an earlier form. Note that *here* he seems to make the invader capture the city *after* driving the British king across the Severn.

writers explain, was by making them carry fire), (2) that he did accept Isembard's invitation, (3) that he was killed by the French king. The last two he would naturally get from France, but whence his sparrows except from local tradition?

When his lord, William of Normandy, nephew of Henry I, died in 1128, he came to England, and in or about 1129 signs the foundation-charter of Oseney Abbey, just outside Oxford. Whether he was one of the canons who served it is unknown, but some residence in the neighbourhood seems to have originated his statement that Oxford was a prae-Saxon town bearing the name *Ridichen*, *i.e.* Ford of Oxen. Just then, the Abbey of Cirencester was founded by Henry I and served by canons, and I suggest that Geoffrey was one of them. There was a special reason why he should desire to go West: it would bring him nearer to his dead patron's father, duke Robert, who was in the custody of Robert of Gloucester, and nearer to Robert himself, who was the king's son and a man of great political importance, and who had the "History" dedicated to him later on.

And now why should not what I call the Vandal part of the story be simply an element in the confusion? Why should Geoffrey's "Africans" and "Hibernia" conceal any reference to the Vandals and Hiberia? Why should they not be borrowed from the French romance, which calls the invader an Arab, and speaks of his having troops from Ireland? Surely this is the simple and only natural explanation?

Well, the French romance speaks of "Cirencestre" as being in the invader's countries, and the probability is enormous that *it* was borrowing from Geoffrey, and not *vice versa*. There is not a trace of Cirencester, Africans, or Ireland in Hariulf, and nothing would induce me to

admit that these features in the romance are *not* borrowed from Geoffrey except the proof (which has not been, and I believe cannot be, given) that the romance was anterior to him.

Putting that theory aside, I should still be willing to admit that the Africans and "Hibernia" *might* be blunders or even inventions of Geoffrey's, but there is Careticus: where does *he* come from? Well, I am prepared, if need be, to jettison him too! But the story that the Saxons in their attack on Cirencester were aided by foreign mercenaries, and the idea that those mercenaries were Vandals, is too complete an explanation of hitherto unexplained facts for me in the present state of my knowledge to abandon *that*. *Why are there these 7 Wendel names on the map of England? Why are they apparently confined within the limits of ancient Wessex? Why are there no such names in parts of Wessex known to have been conquered before 568, or in the later Wessex conquests of Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall? Why, in fact, are they limited to regions conquered in the last third of the 6th century?*

The prefix Wendel- is given to a cliff, a combe, a "mère", an *or* (boundary), a-*worth* (dwelling), and two *bury's* (forts). There is no Anglo-Saxon common substantive, adjective, or verb to explain it. Also in six of the seven instances it is in the genitive singular—a virtual proof that it is a proper name. Yet there is no Anglo-Saxon person-name Wendel—except in the compounds Uendilbercht, Wendelbeorht, Wendelgar (Vendelgerh), and Wendelburh, each of them found once only.

So that there seems to me a quite distinct balance of probability that the West Saxons did import Vandals. Whether they came from Hiberia ["Hibernia"] we do *not* know. Nor their leader's name. And the legend that Gormund, after taking Cirencester, conquered other parts

of the isle probably refers to Guthorm and not to the Vandal leader with whom Geoffrey confounded him: for Guthorm went from Cirencester to East Anglia, and regularly occupied that.

“Careticus”, who fled into Wales, remains in doubt. Was that really the name of the chief British king, or is it as absolute an invention as the names of most of Geoffrey’s prae-Roman kings? The Harleian Genealogies do not mention him; but, unless any family descended from him survived until the 10th century, or near it, they would not be likely to do so. They mention neither the great Arthur (who of course left no sons) nor Ambrosius Aurelianus (who certainly had *some* descendants living in 548). There is in another Welsh genealogy¹ a “Ceredic”, belonging to one of the chief royal lines of Wales, who would suit perfectly as to date. He was son of Ceneu (weakened from Lat. *Caniō*), son of Corun (=Lat. *Corōnius*), son of Ceretic, or Karedig, earliest of the kings of Cardigan, and son of Cunedag. Ceretic and Careticus are weakened *umlaut* forms of an earlier Caratic(us), derived from the *carato* stem, but not to be confounded with Caratācus, Caratauc, with which their phonetics are quite irreconcilable.

“Careticus” came to his overkingship, according to Geoffrey, on the death of Maelgwn. Maelgwn died in or about 548, and, as Ceredic was a generation further off from their common ancestor Cunedag, that exactly squares with probability. He may conceivably be the Ceretic whose death is recorded at [616] by the *Annales Cambriae*, and who is just too early to be “Cercic” of Elmet. In

¹ See *Y Cymmrodor*, viii, 90 (no. xlix). corrected by vii, 133. I get this through Mr. A. Auscombe’s index in *Archiv. f. kelt. Levic.*, iii, 71-2.

that case he must have died at a very great age, and must have been unusually young when chosen overking: I merely throw out the suggestion as a bare possibility. It seems equally likely that the man whose death is recorded in [616] was not this Ceredic but his great-grandson "Caredic".
