## *PEREDUR SON OF EFRAWG* AND WINDMILLS

THE MEDIEVAL Welsh tale of Peredur has been much discussed. It even has a book-length study, as well as an edition in its own right.[1] Yet the implications of a passage on Peredur's travels to India, containing evidence for dating the tale, have been overlooked.

> And he came to a river valley, the fairest he had ever seen, and many pavilions of divers colours could he see there. And more wondrous to him than that was to see as many as he saw of water mills and windmills (*melineu gwynt*). There met him a big auburn-haired man, and the look of a craftsman about him. And Peredur asked who he was. 'Head miller am I over all the mills yonder.' 'Shall I have lodging of thee?' asked Peredur. 'Thou shalt,' he replied, 'gladly.' He came to the miller's house, and he saw that the miller's was a pleasant, fair dwelling. And Peredur asked the miller for money on loan, to buy meat and drink for himself and the people of the house; and he would pay it him before he went away thence. He asked the miller what was the reason for that muster. The miller said to Peredur, 'It is one of two things: either thou art a man from afar or thou art a fool. The empress of great Constantinople is there, and she has no desire save for the bravest man, for she has no need of wealth. And food might not be brought to all the thousands that are here, and it is for that reason there are all these mills.' And that night they took their ease.[2]

The allusion to windmills here is remarkable. It is probably the oldest such reference in any European literary text. It certainly offers evidence for *Peredur*'s dating. The figure of the miller, analogue of Chaucer's Miller in *The Canterbury tales*, is also amongst the oldest in European literature. What follows thus discusses early windmills and their implications for dating *Peredur* to about 1200. If these arguments are accepted, they will shed light on *Peredur* and the two other *Mabinogion* romances, as well as on the economics of medieval Wales.

Watermills and windmills have very different histories. Watermills, invented by the Greeks in the first century BC, were used in Roman Britain. By the eighth century they were known to the Anglo-Saxons;

---

[1] See Glenys Goetinck, '*Peredur': a study of Welsh traditions in the Grail legends* (Cardiff 1975), and her *Historia Peredur vab Efrawc* (Caerdydd 1976) .

[2] Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (tr.), *The Mabinogion* (London 1949) 214; cf. Goetinck, *Historia Peredur*, 52–3.

by 1086, when Domesday Book was compiled, there were over 5000 of them in England.[3] They were known too in Ireland, where there was a complex law of milling rights by the eighth century.[4] But we hear little of them in pre-Norman Wales, where the quern (*breuan*) or handmill no doubt long remained in use. What little we know of early Welsh watermills we learn from the laws and Domesday Book, which mentions many in Gwent.[5]

Windmills, in contrast, are a medieval invention. First used in waterless Persia and described by the tenth-century Arab geographer Al-Mas'udi, they appear in Europe in the twelfth century. Although Gibbon, listing such benefits of eastern civilization as sugar and silk, declares too that 'the first importer of windmills was the benefactor of nations', noting that 'windmills, first invented in the dry country of Asia Minor, were used in Normandy as early as the year 1105', nevertheless Bloch accepted no evidence for French windmills earlier than another Norman one of about 1180.[6] It was said that no English windmill was known before the reign of Richard I (1189–99), when there was one at Tandridge in south-east Surrey, and another (in 1191) at Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk (it was pulled down by the abbot, who feared competition with his watermills). Bishop Seffrid II of Chichester (1180–1204) likewise had a windmill in Sussex.[7]

But we now know of a windmill, mentioned in a charter of 5 April 1170, at Swineshead, near Boston in south-east Lincolnshire. There was a windmill as well in 1185 by Weedley (SE 9533), a lost village near Beverley in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Both mills belonged to the Knights Templar.[8]

These references to windmills in twelfth-century England help date *Peredur*. They are of special value given the conflicting views on when the tale was written. Amongst the few points agreed here is that *Peredur* bears a close relationship to the two other *Mabinogion* Arthurian romances *Gereint* and *Owein*, and was probably written about the same time; and that *Gereint*, *Owein* and *Peredur* are related to *Erec* (of 1170), *Ywain* (1177–9 or 1181) and *Perceval* (1181) by Chrétien de Troyes.

A chronological survey brings out differing opinions on the date of the Welsh romances. Loomis declared, 'Everyone, I believe, agrees

[3]H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (London 1962) 356–9.

[4]Donncha Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin 1972) 51.

[5]G. R. J. Jones, 'Post-Roman Wales', in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales AD 43–1042* (Cambridge 1972) 279–382, at 305.

[6]Edward Gibbon, *The decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (New York 1960) 791; Marc Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française*, 2nd ed. (Paris 1960–61) ii, 142.

[7]W. G. Hoskins, 'The English Landscape', in R. L. Poole (ed.), *Medieval England* (Oxford 1958) 1–36, at 26.

[8]J. G. Hurst, 'Rural Building in England and Wales: England', in H. E. Hallam (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales 1042–1350* (Cambridge 1988) 854–930, at 930.

that the Welsh tales are somewhat later in date than Chrétien's poems, probably compositions of the thirteenth century.'[9]  Foster spoke of 'good orthographical and linguistic evidence for an exemplar dated about 1200', but gave no date of actual composition.[10] Glenys Goetinck in 1961 dated composition to about 1100 on what Thomson called the 'uncertain' and 'unconvincing' grounds of patriotic purpose (allegedly appropriate only then) on the author's part.[11]  Simon Evans dated the three Arthurian romances to about 1200.[12] Thomson refers to *Peredur*'s sister-text *Owein* as having 'a written form in Welsh, pretty certainly by the middle, and perhaps by the beginning of the twelfth century.' His argument was based in part on the belief that the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* predate 1120 (for which there is no real evidence whatsoever).  But Thomson noted two details (horse armour, and the rowels of Owein's spurs) hard to reconcile with a dating of pre-1150, and pointing rather to the thirteenth century.[13]

Jackson said no more on *Peredur* than 'twelfth century'.[14] R. M. Jones, considering them the work of one author, dated the three romances to about 1100.[15] Yet, since they describe Caerleon as Arthur's capital, Rachel Bromwich dated all three to after the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* in 1138.  She went further, suggesting that the appearance in *Peredur* of Hywel son of Emyr of Brittany as Arthur's knight shows the influence, not of Geoffrey's Latin original, but of Welsh translations of it.  She thought that would indicate a date of about 1200.[16]  By 1976 Glenys Goetinck had dropped a dating to about 1100, suggesting merely 'sometime during the twelfth century', with the orthography of Aberystwyth, NLW MS Peniarth 4 (part of the White Book of Rhydderch) pointing to a written text by the end of the century.[17] Mac Cana writes of much uncertainty on when the romances were written, adding that 'the most reliable opinions range from 1100 to 1200'; he more recently accepts as possible their adaptation from Chrétien.[18]  That places *Peredur* after 1181.  In a major study, Sioned Davies speaks of the difficulties of dating the three romances, but thinks 'some time in the twelfth or thirteenth century' likely.[19]  Most recently, Roberts has dated the

[9]R. S. Loomis, *Arthurian tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York 1949) 33.

[10]I. Ll. Foster, '*Gereint*, *Owein*, and *Peredur*', in R. S. Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1959) 192–205, at 205.

[11]R. L. Thomson (ed.), *Owein* (Dublin 1968, repr. 1986) xcvii n. 1.

[12]D. Simon Evans, *A grammar of Middle Welsh* (Dublin 1964, repr. 1994) xxx–xxxi.

[13]Thomson, *Owein*, xxi, lxxxiii.

[14]K. H. Jackson, *A Celtic miscellany*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth 1971) 152, 160.

[15]R. M. Jones, 'Rhagymadrodd', in J. Gwenogvryn Jones (ed.), *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (Caerdydd 1973) i–xix, at ii.

[16]Rachel Bromwich, 'Dwy Chwedl a Thair Rhamant', in Geraint Bowen (ed.), *Y traddodiad rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol* (Llandysul 1974) 143–75, at 155 n. 1.

[17]Goetinck, *Historia Peredur*, xxiii.

[18]Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (Cardiff 1977) 101; 2nd ed. (Cardiff 1992) 95–6.

[19]Sioned Davies, *Crefft y cyfarwydd* (Caerdydd 1995) 12.

tales to 'perhaps *c.* 1200', regarding *Peredur* as a work that 'echoes' *Perceval*, of which copies may have been circulating in Wales.[20] Padel also refers to French influence on the Welsh tale, not only in its castles and conception of knighthood, but also its 'design and construction'. He thus thinks it unlikely to predate the thirteenth century, noting that much of it exists in a manuscript of that century.[21] This is Aberystwyth, NLW MS Peniarth 7, which others date rather to 1275 x 1325.[22]

So the latest opinion would tend to locate the romances to about 1200. The reference to windmills accords with this. It certainly rules out a dating before then. If we have no evidence for a windmill in England before 1170, we cannot expect an allusion in a Welsh literary text until a while after that. Hoskins notes that windmills reached England in the later twelfth century and spread rapidly. After 1200, documentary references to them proliferate; by the fourteenth century there were hundreds of them, especially in southern and eastern England, where rivers are few and slow. In the north and west, however, where swift streams are abundant, watermills remained more practicable.[23] Hoskins might have added that watermill and windmill alike require considerable capital, and would thus be built only where farming was prosperous; that they were worth building only in areas of arable (not pastoral) agriculture, producing ample grist; and that windmills in particular, coming from the Continent, would tend to occur first in lowland Britain, more receptive to change, than in the more conservative and distant highland zone. They would hence reach Wales later rather than earlier. We may note in addition that it is harder to operate a windmill than a watermill, a windmill costs more to maintain, and is less easily adapted to other purposes.

The allusion to windmills in *Peredur* thus indicates a text scarcely predating 1200, and hence surely postdating Chrétien's *Perceval* of 1181. Apart from its value in dating *Peredur*, the reference to windmills provides evidence for its provenance. *Peredur* is usually taken as the work of a writer from Glamorgan or Gwent, zealous to exalt Caerleon as Arthur's court. Foster therefore notes that *Owein*'s manuscript history links it with Glamorgan and south-east Wales, and that *Gereint* and *Peredur* may well be from the same region.[24] R. M. Jones, attributing the romances to one author, thinks he perhaps lived in Archenfield, a region (near Monmouth) once strongly Welsh,

[20]B. F. Roberts, *Studies on Middle Welsh literature* (Lewiston 1992) 60, and see his 'Writing in Wales', in David Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of medieval English literature* (Cambridge 1999) 182–207, at 190, and cf. 860.

[21]O. J. Padel, *Arthur in medieval Welsh literature* (Cardiff 2000) 78.

[22]Ceri Lloyd-Morgan, 'Narrative Structure in *Peredur*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 38 (1981) 187–231, at 193; Daniel Huws, *Llyfrau Cymraeg 1250–1400* (Aberystwyth 1993) 19; Davies, *Crefft y cyfarwydd*, 13.

[23]Hoskins, 'English Landscape', 26.

[24]Foster, '*Gereint*, *Owein*, and *Peredur*', 205.

though later added to Herefordshire.[25]  Rachel Bromwich, observing
that the only identifiable localities of these tales are Caerleon, the Wye,
Cardiff, Gloucester, Cornwall, the Severn and the Forest of Dean in
Gloucestershire, relates all three tales to south-east Wales (including
Glamorgan, which had an old tradition of prose) and its borders.[26]
Glenys Goetinck suggests the Archenfield-Monmouth region, where
Welsh, French and even Bretons were settled together.[27]  Mac Cana
follows Bobi Jones in provenancing them to a bilingual environment
in Wales, 'most likely in the south-east, in Glamorgan and the border
areas'.[28]  As an exercise in reasoning, one may contrast this with the
*Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, which praise both Gwynedd and Dyfed
(but not other parts of Wales), whose topography the author knew well.
They also describe Dyfed's eastwards expansion, but deal tenderly with
a Dyfed army's defeat by the men of Gwynedd.  These details point
to a Gwynedd author, who was yet curiously ardent for the territorial
ambitions of the royal house of Dyfed.[29]

Does an allusion to windmills accord with a provenance in south-
east Wales for *Peredur*?  It seems it does.  In most of Wales water is
abundant.  Most Welsh mills were thus watermills.  But Rees notes the
existence of windmills along the south coast of Glamorgan and Pem-
brokeshire, where water power is less easily had and wind from the sea
is more constant.  Canvas cloth was used to catch the wind; a Glamor-
gan mill of 1316 needed thirteen ells of it.[30]  Fourteenth-century surveys
refer occasionally to Welsh windmills, which would be post-mills on a
cross-tree base.  A document of 1406 gives the field-name 'cae post' for
a mill in north Powys.  These mills were set on earthen mounds, as at
Runston, near Chepstow in Monmouthshire.  We know as well of a mill
constructed in 1303–4 at Newborough, Anglesey, with timber shipped
from the Lleyn Peninsula.[31]  But the reference in *Peredur* is of interest
in showing a Welsh writer aware of windmills perhaps a century before
any other evidence from Wales.  It suggests windmills may have ex-
isted in Wales earlier than supposed, possibly even in the 1190s. In this
respect Wales was open to the new technology of the day.

[25] R. M. Jones, 'Rhagymadrodd', ii.

[26] Bromwich, 'Dwy Chwedl a Thair Rhamant', 156, 159–60, 174.

[27] Goetinck, *Historia*, xx–xxi.

[28] Mac Cana, *Mabinogi* (1977) 100.

[29] A. C. Breeze, *Medieval Welsh literature* (Dublin 1997) 74–9; 'Did a Woman Write
the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*?', *Studi Medievali* 38 (1997) 679–705; 'Politics and
the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *Memoria y Civilización* 2 (1999) 243–60; 'Hywel ab
Owain Gwynedd (d. 1170) and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', in Dónall Ó Baoill and
Donncha Ó hAodha (ed.), *Féilscríbhinn Ghearóid Mhic Eoin* (Dublin 2003), forthcoming.
For contrary views, see Bernhard Maier and Stefan Zimmer (ed.), *150 Jahre 'Mabinogion'*
(Tübingen 2001).

[30] William Rees, *South Wales and the March 1284–1415* (London 1924) 138.

[31] L. A. S. Butler, 'Rural Building in England and Wales: Wales', in Hallam, *Agrarian
history*, 931–65, at 964.

The above, then, indicates that *Peredur* could hardly have been written much before 1200. It further implies that windmills (post-mills raised on mounds) perhaps existed by then in the windier and more waterless parts of Glamorgan and other lordships west of the Wye. If they had not been known in Welsh-speaking Wales, we should not have the term *melin gwynt*. However, Peredur's wonder at seeing them may suggest they were still a novelty when the story was written.

This does not exhaust the passage's implications. Its figure of the miller is unusual. The foul-mouthed unscrupulous Miller of Chaucer's *General Prologue* is familiar enough; so is the hard, swaggering, grasping, treacherous, violent Simkin of his *Reeve's Tale*. Langland also alludes to a dishonest 'Munde the mullere', with a taste for low music, in *Piers Plowman*. Yet the literary antecedents of these English millers are disconcertingly few. Jill Mann was hard put to it to find precursors for the miller of the *General Prologue*. But she concludes from Chaucer and Langland that millers had a popular reputation for dishonesty and popular entertainment (Chaucer's millers both play bagpipes).[32]

This may be so. Yet the contrast with the miller of *Peredur* is striking. He is hospitable, a generous host in an attractive house. He is a cheerful lender. His blunt words show scant respect for Peredur, but he is an honest man. When Peredur wishes to borrow more money, the miller (despite his wife's indignation) lets him have it. When Peredur falls in love and moons around, at length 'he felt a mighty blow between shoulder and neck, from an axe-haft. And when he looked behind him upon the miller, the miller said to him, "Do one of two things," said the miller, "either turn away thy head or go to the tournament." And Peredur smiled at the miller and went to the tournament.' He defeats all comers, sending their horses and armour to the miller's wife as pledges for her money. (He later sends back golden goblets.) When messengers reach Peredur from the empress, he has them tied up like a roebuck and thrown into the mill-dyke (*clawd y velin*); when the empress eventually persuades him to come, he takes the miller with him to her pavilion.[33] So Peredur's miller is generous and honest as Chaucer's millers are not, though he shares their abruptness in word and deed. To lend money, this new technocrat of his age must have been prosperous. He thus presents an interesting and unusual contrast to the literary stereotypes of Chaucer.

*Peredur* hence offers new evidence for perceptions of millers in medieval literature. Bloch commented on millers as a new class of person produced by twelfth-century technology, remarking further on its dynamic consequences for social mobility, 'un progrès comparable à ceux du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, entraînant un bouleversement prodigieux.' The ancient world, with abundant slaves, was no place for technological

---

[32]Jill Mann, *Chaucer and medieval estates satire* (Cambridge 1973) 160–162.

[33]Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion*, 215–17; Goetinck, *Historia*, 54.

progress: in the medieval world, technological advance brought slavery to an end.[34] As regards the status of millers, in England mills would usually be let out, the miller often becoming a substantial and prosperous freeholder.[35] So a sociological reading of *Peredur* is possible here, its bluff and masterful miller representing a new class of person, created, empowered, and enriched by the new machines. It thus provides a comment on the spread of all kinds of mill in twelfth-century Wales, the consequence of political change and access to new financial capital. It is significant that *Peredur* provides the oldest known attestation of the Welsh word *melinydd* 'miller'.

Three final points. If *Peredur* dates from about 1200, Welsh *melin gwynt* long predates the first attestation of *windmill* (of 1235) in the great University of Michigan *Middle English Dictionary*. It no doubt predates as well Middle High German *wintmül*, Dutch *windmolen*, French *moulin à vent* and so on. So this is a first for the Welsh language. Similarly, *Peredur* must be the oldest actual literary text in Europe to refer to windmills (Chaucer's mills run on water).[36] This is a first for Welsh literature. *Peredur* also predates the earliest English visual representations, in manuscripts of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. These show post-mills, the tower mill being little older than the fourteenth century (earliest illustrations of the early fifteenth).[37] In short, this passage in *Peredur* has much of interest for historians of medieval literature, society, economics and technology.

<div align="right">A<span style="font-variant:small-caps">NDREW</span> B<span style="font-variant:small-caps">REEZE</span></div>

*University of Navarre, Pamplona*

---

[34]Bloch, *Caractères originaux* ii, 141–2.
[35]Hurst, 'Rural Building', 929.
[36]J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Oxford 1971) 120–123.
[37]Hurst, 'Rural Building', 930.