

British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. xiv, part i

by Ben Guy

Part i of Vespasian A. xiv (ff. 1–105) is a critical manuscript for the study of medieval Wales and Cornwall. It contains the earliest Welsh ecclesiastical calendar, the most substantial extant Old Cornish text, and the most extensive collection of Latin saints' Lives surviving from medieval Wales. It was written by a group of at least nine scribes using typical Anglo-Norman hands of the last third of the twelfth century (the opinion of Professor Teresa Webber). Judging by the spellings of Welsh proper nouns and Old Welsh boundary clauses, the scribes may not have possessed a very secure grasp of the Welsh language. It is generally agreed that the manuscript was written in the Benedictine priory of Monmouth, which had been founded by Wihenoc, lord of Monmouth, around 1080 (Harris 1953: 5–14; Hughes 1980: ch. 4). Two of the crucial pieces of evidence, discovered by Silas Harris in 1953, may be found in the calendar: a notice of the feast-day of St Dochelinus, a rare saint venerated in Monmouth priory's mother house, Saint-Florent-de-Saumur, and a notice added later concerning the death of one Hathulfus of Aura; this is Awre in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, the church and manor of which were in the possession of Monmouth priory. The manuscript was annotated in the fifteenth century anonymously, and again in the sixteenth century by Sir John Price, who may have acquired it through his role in the Dissolution of the Monasteries. It later entered into the possession of Sir Robert Cotton, in whose library it was bound together with two other manuscripts, one (ff. 106–13: England, s. xii^{med}) containing excerpts from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* alongside other texts, and the other (ff. 114–79: England, s. xiⁱⁿ) containing the letter book of Wulfstan (d. 1023), bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York. The three manuscripts together now form the manuscript known as Vespasian A. xiv, preserved in the Cotton collection in the British Library. It has been fully digitized and is available [online](#).

At least nine scribes have been identified in the manuscript, labelled ABCDEFGHJ. The quiring, scribal stints and contents of the manuscript may be specified as follows (collation by Dr Daniel Huws; scribal identifications by Professor Teresa Webber):

VITAE SANCTORUM CAMBRIAE

Folios	Quires	Scribe	Stint	Texts
1–6	1(6)	A	1 ^r –6 ^v	Calendar
7–12	2(8, wants 7 and 8)	A	7 ^r –12 ^v	Vocabularium Cornicum (7 ^r –10 ^r) De situ Brecheniauc (10 ^v –11 ^v /6) Progenies Keredic (11 ^v /7–14) Capitula (12 ^v)
13–20	3(8)	B	13 ^r –20 ^v	VS Gundlei (Vesp) (13 ^r –17 ^r /27) VS Cadoci (Vesp) (17 ^r /28–20 ^v)
21–28	4(8)	B	21 ^r –23 ^r /2	VS Cadoci (Vesp)
		C	23 ^r /3–28 ^v	VS Cadoci (Vesp)
29–37	5(8) + f. 32 (inserted slip)	C	29 ^r –37 ^v /24 (32 by contemporary corrector)	VS Cadoci (Vesp)
		A	37 ^v /25–35	VS Cadoci (Vesp)
38–41	6(4)	A	38 ^r –41 ^v	VS Cadoci (Vesp)
42	Added leaf	A	42 ^v	VS Cadoci (Vesp)
43–50	7(8)	C	43 ^r –50 ^v	VS Cadoci (Vesp) (43 ^r –43 ^v /15) VS Iltuti (Vesp) (43 ^v /15–50 ^v)
51–58	8(8)	C	51 ^r –53 ^r	VS Iltuti (Vesp) (51 ^r –52 ^r /6) VS Teliaui (Vesp) (52 ^r /7–53 ^r)
		D	53 ^v –58 ^v	VS Teliaui (Vesp) (53 ^v –55 ^v) VS Dubricii (LL/Vesp) (56 ^r –58 ^v)
59–66	9(8)	D	59 ^r –61 ^r /3	VS Dubricii (LL/Vesp)
		E	61 ^r /5[?]-62 ^r /10	VS Daud (Vesp)
		F	62 ^r /11–27	VS Daud (Vesp)

		E	62 ^r /28–35	VS Daud (Vesp)
		F	62 ^v –64 ^r /4	VS Daud (Vesp)
		E	64 ^r /4(sanctus)– 65 ^r /4	VS Daud (Vesp)
		F	65 ^r /5–66 ^v	VS Daud (Vesp)
67–74	10(8)	F	67 ^r –70 ^v	VS Daud (Vesp)
		G	71 ^r –74 ^v	VS Dubricii (Vesp II)
75–82	11(8)	G	75 ^r –77 ^r	VS Dubricii (Vesp II)
		H	77 ^v –82 ^v	VS Bernachii (Vesp) (77 ^v –80 ^v /6) VS Paterni (Vesp) (80 ^v /7–82 ^v)
83–89	12(8, wants 3)	H	83 ^r –87 ^v	VS Paterni (Vesp) (83 ^r –84 ^v /9) VS Clitaucci (LL/Vesp) (84 ^v /10–86 ^r /15) VS Kebii (Vesp I) (86 ^r /15–87 ^v)
		?	88 ^r	VS Kebii (Vesp I)
		J	88 ^v –89 ^v	VS Tathei (Vesp)
90–97	13(8)	J	90 ^r –92 ^r	VS Tathei (Vesp)
		A	93 ^r –97 ^v /22	VS Carantoci (Vesp) (93 ^r –94 ^v /11) VS Kebii (Vesp II) (94 ^v /12–96 ^v /3) VS Aidui (96 ^v /4–97 ^v /22)
		?(sim. B/C)	97 ^v /23–35	VS Aidui
98–105	14(8)	A	98 ^r –105 ^v	VS Audui (98 ^r –104 ^v) VS Brendani (104 ^v –105 ^v)

The text was also corrected contemporaneously, with reference to the original exemplar(s) (Emanuel 1952: 218). In addition to correction, the corrector also undertook to expand the Life of St Cadog by inserting into it passages extracted from the revised version of the Life of St

Cadog by Caradog of Llancarfan (Emanuel 1952: 223). The longest inserted passages are found on folio 32, a slip of parchment tipped into the manuscript by the corrector.

The work of some scribes is confined to particular Lives, which they wrote in their entirety: scribe G wrote all of VS Dubricii (Vesp II); scribe H wrote all of VS Bernachii (Vesp), VS Paterni (Vesp), VS Clitaucci (LL/Vesp) and VS Kebii (Vesp I) (excepting only the final side of Cybi); and J wrote all of VS Tathei (Vesp). None of these scribes appears elsewhere in the manuscript. Scribes E and F are also confined to a particular Life, VS Daudi (Vesp), which they wrote in alternating stints. The stints of other scribes encompass more than one Life: scribe B wrote VS Gundlei (Vesp) and the first part of VS Cadoci (Vesp); scribe C wrote parts of VS Cadoci (Vesp), all of VS Iltuti (Vesp) and the first part of VS Teliaui (Vesp); and scribe D completed VS Teliaui (Vesp) and wrote all of VS Dubricii (LL/Vesp). Only scribe A certainly appears in more than one place in the manuscript, and it is evident that he was the editor of the collection. He was possibly a senior member of the monastery, for his hand appears somewhat antiquated by comparison with some of the other scribes. Scribe A filled a gap that scribe C had deliberately left blank in the Life of St Cadog (ff. 37v–41v) with material probably taken from another source, most of which comprises a cartulary of documents from Llancarfan (VS Cadoci (Vesp), §§48–68; Emanuel 1952: 223). Scribe A also wrote the beginning of the next chapter on an inserted leaf (f. 42), which was placed before the start of the next quire, where scribe C had resumed copying after the gap. Aside from the material inserted into the Life of St Cadog, the main portions of text copied by A may be found at the beginning and end of the manuscript. A wrote the manuscript's final four Lives (VS Carantoci (Vesp), VS Kebii (Vesp II), and the Lives of SS. Maedóc and Brendan) on quire 13 (which J had begun) and quire 14 (entirely by A), excepting only lines 23–35 of folio 97^v, written by a scribe similar to B and C. Scribe A may have written an additional quire for the end of the manuscript that is now lost, considering that the Life of St Brendan is not brought to completion at the end of quire 14 (cf. Hughes 1980: 65). Probably in the final stages of the production process scribe A wrote the first two quires, which are irregularly constructed and end with a list of *capitula* that derives from the Lives that follow (Harris 1953: 18–19; Hughes 1980: 56–7).

Kathleen Hughes has argued persuasively that Vespasian A. xiv was not assembled for liturgical purposes, contrary to previous assumptions (Hughes 1980: 56; cf. Harris 1953: 20–1). She suggested instead that it was assembled for historical purposes, in order to make a record of whatever Welsh hagiographical traditions could be discovered by the compilers (Hughes 1980:

66). This accounts for the relatively haphazard selection of saints included in the calendar and among the Lives. Particular interest is shown in St Cadog; not only does his Life span five of the extant fourteen quires, but it was expanded by the scribes using at least two external sources (a Llancarfan cartulary and Caradog of Llancarfan's Life of St Cadog). This high level of interest can be explained by Monmouth priory's ownership of the church of St Cadog in Monmouth, as well as the nearby church of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel. The former was used by the monks of Monmouth for worship while the priory was being built in the last two decades of the eleventh century. The other major influence on the contents of the manuscript was St Peter's abbey, Gloucester (Harris 1953: 24–5; Hughes 1980: 58–61). At one time or other St Peter's owned many of the churches whose patron saints feature in the manuscript (Ailwyn and Cynidr in the calendar; Cadog, Gwynllyw, Padarn and Tathan among the Lives). It has been argued that the Lives of Gwynllyw and Tathan were written specifically for the monks of Gloucester, as perhaps was Caradog of Llancarfan's revision of the Life of St Cadog (used by the corrector of the manuscript) (Harris 1953: 29; Davies 2003: 134, 142). The second of the two Lives of St Dyfrig in the manuscript was actually composed by a Gloucester monk called Benedict, as is stated in its prologue (VS Dubricii (Vesp II)). This might suggest that the group of Lives that Vespasian A. xiv shares with the Liber Landavensis (Teilo, Dyfrig I, Clydog), all of which show clear signs of association with Llandaff, were nevertheless transmitted to Monmouth via Gloucester (Harris 1953: 24–5; Hughes 1980: 61–4).

More work has been published on the contents of Vespasian A. xiv than on the codicology and palaeography of the manuscript. A description of the manuscript by Robin Flower was published in 1944 (VS BG x–xiii). Hywel Emanuel provided discussion of the scribes contributing to the Life of St Cadog in his analysis of that Life, though he conflated scribes B and C (Emanuel 1952). Questions concerning the production of the manuscript also feature in Kathleen Hughes's wide-ranging study of the manuscript, published originally in 1958 and reprinted in 1980 (Hughes 1980: ch. 4). Other studies have focussed on particular texts or groups of texts. The essential investigation of the calendar remains that of Silas Harris (1953). The *Vocabularium Cornicum* has been the subject of much recent critical attention (e.g. Padel 2014; Blom 2009, 2013; Mills 2013), and Barry Lewis has suggested that it was transmitted to Monmouth via the priory's contacts with the church of St Kew in Cornwall (Lewis 2017). The Llancarfan cartulary inserted into the manuscript by scribe A has received attention from A.W. Wade-Evans, Thomas Charles-Edwards and Patrick Sims-Williams (Wade-Evans 1932; Charles-Edwards 2013: ch. 7, esp. 272–3; Sims-

Williams 2019). A number of the Lives and genealogical texts in the manuscript were edited and translated by Wade-Evans in 1944 (VS BG), and most of the Lives have been edited and/or discussed in detail by others since then (LWS 88–145 for VS Iltuti (Vesp); Emanuel 1950 for VS Cadoci (Vesp); Knight 1970–1 for VS Tathei (Vesp); Thomas and Howlett 2003 for VS Paterni (Vesp); Jankulak 2007 for VS Carantoci (Vesp); Sharpe and Davies 2007 for VS Daudid (Vesp); Smith 2012 for VS Dubricii (Vesp II); Guy 2018 for VS Dubricii (LL/Vesp); Lewis 2021 for VS Kebii(VespI) and VS Kebii(Vesp II); Guy 2022 for VSTeliaui(Vesp); Smith 2022 for VS Brendani). The contents of Vespasian A. xiv are outlined in VS BG xi and RWM II.iv, 1160–2, and see RepWM, I, 664–5.

References

- Blom, A. (2009), ‘The Welsh glosses in the Vocabularium Cornicum’, *CMCS* 57, 23–40.
- Blom, A. (2013), ‘Multilingualism and the Vocabularium Cornicum’, in A. Putter and J. Jefferson (eds), *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066–1520): Sources and Analysis* (Turnhout), pp. 59–71.
- Charles-Edwards, T.M. (2013), *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford).
- Davies, J.R. (2003), *The Book of Llandaf and the Norman Church in Wales* (Woodbridge).
- Emanuel, H.D. (1952), ‘An analysis of the composition of the “Vita Cadoci”’, *NLWJ* 7, 217–27.
- Guy, B. (2018), ‘The Life of St Dyfrig and the lost charters of Moccas (Mochros), Herefordshire’, *CMCS* 75, 1–37.
- Guy, B. (2022), ‘The Vespasian Life of St Teilo and the evolution of the *Vitae Sanctorum Wallensium*’, in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses*, ed. D.N. Parsons and P. Russell (Aberystwyth), pp. 1–30.
- Harris, S.M. (1953), ‘The kalendar of the *Vitae Sanctorum Wallensium*’, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* 3, 3–53.
- Hughes, K. (1980), *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D.N. Dumville (Woodbridge).

- Jankulak, K. (2007), 'Carantoc alias Cairnech? British saints, Irish saints, and the Irish in Wales', in *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages*, ed. K. Jankulak and J.M. Wooding (Dublin), pp. 116–48.
- Knight, J.K. (1970–1), 'St Tatheus of Caerwent: an analysis of the Vespasian Life', *Monmouthshire Antiquary* 3, 29–36.
- Lewis, B.J. (2017), 'A possible provenance for the Old Cornish Vocabulary', *CMCS* 73, 1–14.
- Lewis, B.J. (2021), 'The strange Irish career of St Cybi of Holyhead', *Peritia* 32 (2021), 163–80.
- LWS = G.H. Doble, *Lives of the Welsh Saints*, ed. D.S. Evans (Cardiff, 1971).
- Mills, J. (2013), 'The *Vocabularium Cornicum*: a Cornish vocabulary?', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 60, 141–9.
- Padel, O.J. (2014), 'The nature and date of the Old Cornish Vocabulary', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 61, 173–99.
- RepWM = D. Huws, *A Repertory of Welsh Manuscripts and Scribes, c.800–c.1800*, 3 vols (Aberystwyth, 2022).
- RWM = J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, 2 vols (London, 1898–1910).
- Sharpe, R. and J.R. Davies (2007), 'Rhygyfarch's *Life* of St David', in *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. J. Wyn Evans and J.M. Wooding (Woodbridge), pp. 107–55.
- Sims-Williams, P. (2019), *The Book of Llandaf as a Historical Source* (Woodbridge).
- Smith, J.B. (2012), 'Benedict of Gloucester's *Vita Sancti Dubricii*: an edition and translation', *Arthurian Literature*, 29: 53–100.
- Smith, J.B. (2022), 'The legend of Saint Brendan in Cotton Vespasian A. xiv', in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses*, ed. D.N. Parsons and P. Russell (Aberystwyth), pp. 31–42.
- Thomas, C. and D. Howlett (2003), '*Vita Sancti Paterni*: The Life of St Padarn and the original *Miniau*', *Trivium* 33, 1–129.
- VSb = A.W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (1944); new edn, ed. S. Lloyd (Cardiff, 2013).
- Wade-Evans, A.W. (1932), 'The Llancarfan charters', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 87, 151–65.