



# Wojciech Lipoński

LANDMARKS IN BRITISH HISTORY  
AND CULTURE



WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UAM

**LANDMARKS IN BRITISH HISTORY  
AND CULTURE**

A MONOGRAPH OF SELECTED ISSUES



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**Wojciech Lipoński**

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A MONOGRAPH OF SELECTED ISSUES

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The book presents crucial facts and events, selected from the countless defining moments in British history and culture: the appearance of prehistoric man in the British Isles; the influence of Celtic culture from a wider, not only insular perspective; the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; the historical truth and legendary aspects of the Arthurian myth; sea and imperial expansion; the most important factors and players in the fight for freedom; and finally, the development and cultural meaning of the English concept of sport. Although the author discusses well known historical and cultural events, he does this from a non-British perspective and frequently suggests new hypotheses and analyses for some unsolved problems of British cultural history, such as the lack of English protagonists in Old English literature, the Five Borough question and the etymology of fair play as an ethical term and norm.

KEY WORDS: British history; British culture; Celtic culture; English literature; fight for freedom

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*“The past may be forgotten, but it never dies. The elements which in the most remote times have entered into a nation's composition endure through all its history and help to mould that history, and to stamp the character and genius of the people.”*

Thomas William Hazen Rolleston  
(1857-1920)

The cultural historian who attempts to write anything about British history and civilization is confronted with two serious dilemmas. First of all, even a comparatively short description and analysis of basic historical factors would consume many volumes. To write about the mighty force of the events, processes and cultural achievements which have emanated from Britain to the rest of the world over the ages is an even larger task. Secondly, he encounters the problem of a subject about which little new can be said, at least from the traditional point of view generally accepted by official historiography. British historiography, however, suffers from internal British evaluations, excluding the external views of foreign historians. And here is the chance to reveal and analyse what has been overlooked by native British scholars.

This monograph attempts to examine some selected issues which are crucial for British history. It consists of fragments of my earlier publications together with previously unpublished full lectures, now arranged chronologically in order to form a somewhat new historical, and at the same time, cultural narrative. Most of this monograph's chapters were first delivered at different intervals in the years 1991-2014 as a series of regular lectures under the title „Selected Aspects of British History and Culture.” Then they were repeated during consecutive academic years, each time updated with new elements and thus they matured until they gained their final form. At least in some respects they ventured to introduce new information or new interpretations of earlier knowledge. Some of them were separately developed and became the basis of two of my former books published in Polish: *The Origins of Civilization in the*



*British Isles (Narodziny Cywilizacji Wysp Brytyjskich, 1995)* and *A History of British Culture (Dzieje kultury brytyjskiej, 2003)*. In the present monograph I use some fragments of these books in a new English language version, because they have never been published in English before (except two chapters: on *Archaic Celtic Poetry* and *From 'ga' to Heptarchy*). Thus, some of them closely follow the Polish texts in English, while some appear in loose, paraphrased form. But the main bulk of this monograph contains chapters which are based on original lectures delivered in English and never before published either in English or Polish versions.

All of them, although to different degrees, are enriched by new discoveries, not always my own, but always used to update my narrative. For instance, a number of my earlier works explained the presence of the Celtic people on the British Isles through migration. Now I present a more differentiated view of prehistoric Celtic Britain. Thus, I have included a new thesis which accepts the possibility of the existence in the Isles of pre-Indo-European peoples and moreover, their possible influences on Celtic tribes – both those groups arriving in Britain and those remaining on the European Mainland. Also, recent excavations carried out in Poland by two Polish archaeologists: Małgorzata Talarczyk-Andrałójć and her husband Mirosław Andrałójć, extended the known range of Celtic civilization into the Kujawy Region in Central Poland, further than was previously realised by Western celtologists. Although this does not pertain directly to the British Celts, it has allowed me to present the general character of Celtic culture in a new light.

Careful readers may also observe that among the chapters on Celtic culture, two are almost entirely devoted to Ireland. This may not seem justified in a book with the adjective “British” in its title. In addition, in Ireland, especially among Roman Catholics in the north, whatever is named “British” is often confused with the term “English” and associated with resentment towards the English as the enemy from the neighbouring island. On a popular level it has been largely forgotten, however, that the words *British*, *Britain*, etc. in terms of their etymology are, in fact, of Celtic origin. Secondly, in all atlases known to me, the entire North Atlantic archipelago, which includes Great Britain and Ireland, is still named the British Isles. Furthermore, in the course of the development of civilization in that area of the world, Irish and British cultures have overlapped and intertwined to the degree that the history of one of them cannot be

understood without the other. All of this, in my view, fully justifies and makes it rational to include significant elements of Irish history and culture in the book.

In all the chapters of this monograph I have also tried to enrich my narrative with elements of new interpretations and sometimes create new hypotheses or even, at least in some cases, discover new facts (although this is quite difficult when taking into account the exhaustive coverage of all aspects of British culture found in the numerous works of British and American historiography). Nevertheless, I was bold enough to suggest a new hypothesis concerning the lack of English protagonists in the Old English epic, a problem not solved for decades if not centuries. Also, I attempt to suggest that the medieval Five Boroughs and later Seven Boroughs, were in fact the first European union of trading towns, preceding by a few decades the Hanseatic League. In the history of English sport, it seems to me that I was able to add new information concerning the etymology of the fair play concept. So far it has generally been accepted that the first usage of the term was introduced by William Shakespeare in his two dramas: *The Tempest* and *the Life and Death of King John* and almost simultaneously by James Balmford in his *Short and Plaine Dialogue concerning the unlawfulness of playing at cards* (1594). I found, however, after some research, that the term appeared for the first time much earlier than the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the first time it was used in literature almost 200 years earlier in the late medieval poem *The Siege of Jerusalem*, although in a slightly different form: *faire play*. This poem was well known to English literary historians but nobody had extracted the mentioned term from it just for its specific linguistic use in an ethical context.

The academic character of the lectures and the necessity of providing students with a deeper context for the raised matters inspired me to explain the typical events and processes of British culture against the background of wider phenomena in European cultural history. Thus, such an event as the Sepoy Mutiny and the well known picture of Vasily Vereshchagin, showing the moment of killing the leaders of the rebellion by attaching them to the mouths of guns, comprised wider information about anti-war painting in the European tradition, such as Jacques Callot's prints on *The Miseries of War* (*Les Misères de la guerre*) or Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* (*Los Desastres de la Guerra*). Monographs discussing specific topics do not always concern themselves with extending their content to wider questions of similar and simultaneous cultural develop-

ments and traditions in other cultures and contexts. I have never encountered any work on the history of the East India Company and the Sepoy Mutiny furnished with the anti-war context or anti-imperial art or literature. I have tried to escape in a number of other places such a narrow attitude by providing the reader with a broader context in terms of the depth of the described and analyzed factors and processes. The careful reader, even the one well acquainted with British cultural history, will easily find such fragments of the monograph in which I do not follow precisely the traditional canons of British historiography.

Composing a monograph from a series of academic lectures has a very long tradition and is certainly not my invention. It allows the lecturer to test the views and content of a future book before publication by seeing students' reactions and understanding. This quite frequently allows the possibility to consider and include their suggestions and even improvements! Some of my lectures were attended by students of different faculties and even schools, such as the Institute of History at Adam Mickiewicz University, the Academy of Music, the University of Economics or even the Banking School, all in Poznań. I never will forget the visit of a group of some 15 students of architecture from Leszno State Vocational School, willing to extend their knowledge of British matters. A series of four lectures was delivered on the invitation of the Department of English at the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, and two for the Institute of English Cultures and Literatures at Silesia University. My lecture on British sport and the origins of fair play was honoured by becoming an inaugural speech for the Postgraduate Course in Sports Management of the Faculty of Management and Social Communication at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Such diverse audiences provided me with different types of reaction and sometimes quite energetic discussion of theses within my lectures. The final part of my lecture on the *History and Concept of Freedom in British Civilization* (now a chapter of this book) is one of the most controversial areas, due to recent public fears concerning electronic surveillance and „The News of the World” affair known also as “Murdochgate.” I will never forget my lecture in which one girl substantially corrected my rather outdated views on some aspects of Britain's medieval culture in such a competent way that I was completely surprised by her knowledge and convincing argumentation. We, academic lecturers, sometimes forget that in the audience sit our successors and that sooner or later their knowledge will exceed our own.

It is not my purpose to write and analyse a full chronological record of the most important historical events in this monograph. In the history of British civilization they are too numerous. The present work is not a regular history but pays attention only to some selected issues in the cultural history of Britain (and also partly the British Isles) which seem of special importance. These selected problems are in my opinion highlights of British cultural history, the very moments and factors when cultural, not just political, legal or economic factors, take the centre of the British stage.

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Wojciech Lipoński

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## Chapter One

# THE EARLY INHABITANTS OF BRITAIN

The earliest traces of the hominids which later developed into homo sapiens appeared in the British Isles in the glacial epoch, about 450 000 years ago. It was a time when the British Isles were connected by a large land bridge with the European Continent and by a huge glacial surface with Scandinavia. This epoch, as the first in which human activity can be proved, is called the *Paleolithic Era* from the Greek words: *palaios* – old or past and *lithos* – stone or rock. This is the time when man began to make the first primitive stone tools. Nearly 4 000 sites which indicate the traces of primitive man have been found so far by archaeologists within Britain and Ireland. These mainly comprise tools and caves which indicated human habitation. Evidence of *homo sapiens* dates back at least to about 50 to 40 000 B.C. This is at the end of the middle *Paleolithic Period* which, in turn, is usually dated from 100 000 to 40 000 B.C. At the end of this period humans already had the ability to light fires and also specialised in stone working, especially flint scrapers, knives and spear heads. The epoch of the *Upper Paleolithic Period* was the time when the bow and arrow were introduced. Hunting became popular and ancestral structures also came into being.

Humans at this time adopted caves for dwelling, some of which are still famous in Britain. One of them is Gough's Cave in Cheddar Gorge. And it was here that one of the most sensational archaeological events took place at the turn of the last millennium. Earlier, in 1903, a skeleton of the so-called Cheddar Man was found here. Almost a century later, in 1997, Dr. Brian Sykes from Oxford University examined Cheddar Man using the newest methods in genetic research. His research was fully documented in his fascinating book *Blood of the Isles* (2006).<sup>1</sup> After careful and painstaking research it appeared that the DNA code of Cheddar Man showed quite a close connection to at least one person in the modern

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<sup>1</sup> B. Sykes, *Blood of the Isles*, Bantam Press, London – Ealing 2006. In North America, both the USA and Canada, the book was published under a changed title as *Saxons, Vikings and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland*, Barnes and Noble, New York 2007.

local population! This basically means that after 11 000 years and despite all the historic convulsions and turmoil, despite tragic wars, numerous migrations and ethnic changes, a certain, though tiny, thread of genetic continuation was preserved among the British population up to modern times! It seems unbelievable but the preciseness of the scientific proof leaves this conclusion unquestionable. How could this have happened? The answer seems rather simple: the new conquerors of any area rarely remove or kill all the local population, and at least some prisoners of war, or local traitors, were assimilated with the new masters, who, in turn, frequently raped local women or, when they were more kind, took them as their wives or, at least, as concubines. This is how the DNA characteristics of Cheddar Man could be continued and identified after so many generations.

Cheddar Man lived at the end of the so-called Ice Age. Between 10 000 and 7 000 B.C. the most important changes for the future civilisation of the British Isles were observed. It was during this period of time that the British Islands began to be gradually separated from the European mainland. This was caused by the melting of the glacier and consequently by higher and higher sea levels.

British writer Edward Rutherfurd (a nickname of Francis Edward Wintle, b. 1948 in Salisbury), in his bestselling novel titled *Sarum*, precisely reconstructed and described what actually happened:

“Slowly this melting gathered pace. New land, tundra, emerged from under the ice; new rivers were born; ice floes moved southward into the seas, which began to rise. A new ferment was in progress upon the surface of the earth. Century after century, the face of the continents changed as new lands began to define themselves and new life began, cautiously, to spread across the earth. The last Ice Age was in retreat. It was not enough to be noticed in a decade, ‘hardly in a century, and it did not yet have any effect upon the ice; but it rose nonetheless. Centuries passed. It rose a little more. And then the ice cap began to melt. Still the process was gradual: a stream here, a small river there; blocks of ice a few yards across in one place, half a mile in another, breaking away from the edge of the ice cap, a process hardly noticeable against the thousands of miles of the vast continent of ice that remained.”<sup>2</sup> The title *Sarum*, on the other hand,

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<sup>2</sup> E. Rutherfurd, *Sarum*, Books-Ballantine Books, New York, thirteenth edition 1992 (first published 1987), pp. 3-4.

Rutherford took from the ancient name of an old Celtic stronghold built around the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., long before the Roman conquest (43 A.D. – 410 A.D.). It is located on the Salisbury Plain, not so far from the famous ruins of Stonehenge, about which we will talk a little later.

*Sarum* is a very specific novel. It is composed and written in a style invented some decades ago by James Michener, who wrote his “fictional, lengthy family sagas covering the lives of many generations in particular geographic locales and incorporating solid history”<sup>3</sup>. But as such it deserves a more specific name than a traditional, even substantially extended saga. On the one hand, it does not fit the traditional literary structure of the saga with its “multi-generational length” while on the other hand it requires more precise definition. But such a definition cannot yet be found in traditional literary dictionaries. This is why it seems quite accurate to describe it as a *transhistoric saga novel*. Such a transhistoric novel is much more than, say, a traditional saga novel which contains facts concerning the lives of about 3 or 4 generations of protagonists. The transhistoric saga novel covers an incomparably longer period of time. It frequently presents the history of a whole nation or a local society through many ages. Rutherford’s novel *Sarum*, in fact, covers all the history of Britain, beginning with prehistoric times, through her Celtic heritage, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Viking and Norman invasions and ends with 20<sup>th</sup> century events.

Its subtitle, *The Novel of England* is, however, misleading if not nationalistically used: this territory should not be called “England” at least not when it pertains to the times before invasion of the Anglo-Saxons. Overuse of the name of “England” is rather obvious here but is by no means an exception in modern English usage. Exactly the same mistake can frequently be found in a number of masterpieces of English literature, such as in the famous poem of Gilbert Keith Chesterton titled: *The Rolling English Road*. There we can read:

“Before the Roman came to Rye,  
or, out of Severn strode,  
the rolling English drunkard  
made the rolling English road.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_A.\\_Michener](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_A._Michener)>

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Rolling English Road*, in: R. Ingrams, ed., *England. An Anthology*, Collins, London, 1989, pp. 58-59; <<http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~mward/gkc/books/rolling.html>>



It looks like the English populated Britain and built their roads even before the Romans came in 43 A.D. and much before the English did in 456 A.D.

The first “nation” which, thanks to archeological excavations, is known to us, probably arrived in Britain from the territory of today’s Denmark, and was known as the Maglemose. This “Maglemosian nation” travelled on the big ice cap, then covering the North Sea. This hypothesis is supported by the similarities between Danish excavations from Maglemose and later excavations from contemporary Yorkshire, located at a lake in the Pickering Valley which is no longer existent.

About the same time, the *Tardenoisian Culture* reached Britain. The name originates from Fère-en-Tardenois which is now a commune in the Picardy region of northern France. This is where remnants of this culture were originally found and excavated. The archaeological findings of that territory were then compared with their British equivalents, with the result that both appeared very similar or even identical.

It was most probably the Maglemosian or Tardenoisian culture that inspired Rutherford to describe the prehistoric moment when for the first time we can talk about the cultural beginning of Britain: “At some time around 10 000 B.C., a change began to occur: at the outer edge of the frozen wastes, the temperature began to rise. And it was in this environment that the first man from ‘abroad’ probably arrived in Britain, which until then had been a rather icy peninsula. But from that moment on, it began gradually to become an island. Between 7 000 and 6 000 B.C. the first influx of an ‘alien nation’ is scientifically identified.”<sup>5</sup>

These two influences, Maglemosian and Tardenoisian, soon showed the tendency to merge. And it was probably one representative of Maglemosian culture, typical for the territory of what is now northern England, who became the first fictional hero of Edward Rutherford’s novel. Rutherford writes: “In the still bleak and uninviting season that was summer in those northern lands, a single hunter undertook a journey that was impossible.”<sup>6</sup> For literary reasons, Rutherford gave to this prehistoric hero the name Hwll. Hwll soon meets his wife, Akun, and both travel to the south and east of what is now England in search of better hunting territory. And it is in the South-East of the future island that they

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<sup>5</sup> E. Rutherford, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

observe one of the last moments of the disjoining of the Isles from the Continent. Let us follow for a while Rutheford's literary reconstruction of that very moment when insular Britain was born:

“He (Hwll) woke at dawn, to a clear, chilly day. Akun and the children, wrapped in furs and huddled together beside a clump of bushes, were still sleeping. He stood up, sniffing the air and staring towards the east where a watery sun was rising. At once his instincts told him that something was wrong. But what? At first he thought it was something in the air, which had a curious, clinging quality. Then he thought the trouble was something else and his brow contracted to a frown. Finally he heard it. It was the faintest of sounds: so faint that it would never have been picked up by any man other than a skilled tracker like himself, who would discern a single buffalo three miles away by putting his ear to the ground. What he heard now, and what in his sleep had troubled him all night, was a barely perceptible murmur, a rumbling in the earth, somewhere to the east. He put his ear to the ground and remained still for a while. There was no mistaking it: some of the time it was little more than a hiss: but it was accompanied by other grating and cracking sounds, as though large objects were striking against each other. He frowned again. Whatever it was, this sound was not made by any animal: not even a herd of bison or wild horse could generate such a trembling of the earth. Hwll shook his head in puzzlement. He stood up. ‘The air’, he muttered. There was, undeniably, something strange about the air as well. Then he realised what it was. The faint breeze smelt of salt. But why should the air smell of salt, when he was close to the great forest? And what was the curious noise ahead? He woke Akun. ‘Something is wrong’, he told her. ‘I must go and see. Wait for me here.’ All morning he travelled east at a trot. By late morning he had covered fifteen miles, and the sounds ahead were growing loud. More than once he heard a resounding crack, and the murmur had turned into an ominous rumble. But it was when he came to a patch of rising ground and had reached the top that he froze in horror. Ahead of him, where the forest should have been, was water. It was not a stream, not a river, but water without end: a sea! And the sea was on the move, as ice floes stretching out as far as he could see, drifted past, going south. He could hardly believe his eyes. Along the shoreline, small ice floes buffeted the vegetation, and tiny waves beat on the ground. This was the hissing sound he had heard. Further out, the tops of great trees were still visible here and there, sticking out of the water; and occasionally a small

iceberg would crack and splinter the wood as it rubbed against them. So that had been the strange cracking sound that had puzzled him! Before his very eyes lay the entrance to the great forest he had been seeking; and here was a new sea, moving inexorably southward, gouging out a mighty channel and sweeping earth, rock and tree before it. Hwll had seen the rivers swollen with ice floes in the spring, and he surmised correctly that some new and gigantic thaw must have taken place in the north to produce this flow of waters. Whatever the cause, the implication was terrible. The forest he wanted to cross was now under the sea. For all he knew, so were the distant eastern plains and the warm lands to the south. Who could tell? But one thing was certain: there would be no crossing for him and his family. The ambitious plan for the great trek was destroyed; all the efforts they had made on their long journey had been wasted. The land to the east, if it still existed, was now cut off.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the insularity of the future Britain commenced. And it was the great British historian, Alfred Leslie Rowse (1903-1997), who expressed his well known conviction that “Our (i.e. British) insularity and our mixed stock are the two formative factors in our history.”<sup>8</sup>

The insular character produced by the withdrawing of the glacier was soon responsible for the unique, wide and far-reaching originality of Britain’s cultural and historical shape: “The sea that surrounded the [British] Islands gave the inhabitants of ‘Britain’ some measure of protection from ‘outsiders’. A polity seeking hegemony within the islands could often do so without challenge from an immediate neighbor. A continental polity with comparable hegemonic intentions had no such luxury.”<sup>9</sup>

But let us go back to the very moment just after the separation of Britain from the European mainland. The period between approximately 5 000 and 4 500 years ago was the beginning of the so-called Neolithic Age in the British Isles.

Strange stone structures, built during this and the following ages in the British Isles and also along the coast of Western France, are frequently called “The Atlantic Façade” and their conspicuous cluster in Ireland and Britain – the “Western Neolithic Culture Group.” Today, it is very difficult

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> A. L. Rowse, *The Spirit of English History*, Longmans Green, London-New York-Toronto 1943, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> K. Robbins, *Great Britain. Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, Longman, London-New York 1998, p. 5.

to determine which of the remains of this culture belonged to the Mesolithic Peoples and which are the work of the European immigrants who started to arrive in the British Isles at various times by crossing the sea, and who built similar stone structures along the coast of France, including the aforementioned Atlantic Façade. They were usually several metres wide and about 30-40 metres long, although longer constructions have also been found. They all belong to the so-called *Wind Mill Culture*, the name of which originated from the place where they were found for the first time. The biggest concentration of these structures (about 100 in number), is located in Wiltshire. Human remains, sometimes as many as 50 skeletons, were found in many of them. This creates the impression that these structures were used mainly for burial purposes associated with the religious veneration of ancestors. Such mounds, with a drilled burial chamber inside, constituted the higher stage of development.

Originally, this burial cavity was a palisaded underground passage, covered with a terrestrial roof and propped up by beams. Many of them included a special room surrounded by stones, which probably served some ritual purposes. In the much later tradition of the Celtic languages, such structures were called *cairns, carns or cuirn*. In both Britain and Ireland such graves are located mainly within the Irish Sea Basin. The most famous, and at the same time, the most magnificent as far as the size of the used stones is concerned are: the circular *cairn* found in Brynn-Celli-Ddu on Anglesey Island in Wales, and the series of similar monuments located to the west of Arrow lake in the Boyne River Valley, Sligo county, Ireland.

These and other stone structures, called *cromlechs*, endured their own Neolithic Age, which on the British Isles ended about 2 000 or 1 800 B.C. In the following epochs they changed into more ample and rich forms. Within the limits of the main construction there is usually a burial chamber located behind a gate which probably symbolizes the entrance and passage to the under-world and this is why we call these constructions *passage graves*. Many burned human remains have been found in them. Much later, *passage graves* were transformed into much larger Celtic royal graves with their biggest concentration in Tara, the ancient capital of Ireland.

The *passage graves*, and especially their characteristic stone gates, as well as other megaliths including so-called *cromlechs*, in terms of their general combination of stones, were strikingly similar to those constructions found in the region of the Mediterranean Sea. Especially characteristic

was the junction of vertical and horizontal stones of the Mycenaean Gate in Greece, which was once upon a time considered as primordial to similar structures in Western Europe by supporters of the cultural diffusion theory. Supporters of the diffusionist theory of cultural expansion were convinced that the Mycenaean patterns of architecture influenced the structures of Western Europe, visible on the Atlantic coast of Spain, France and the British Isles, the so called and previously mentioned Atlantic Façade. According to them, the Mycenaean Culture, located originally in the Mediterranean Basin, through a process of diffusion, reached the southern parts of France and the Iberian Peninsula and then started its expansion to the north along the western continental coast, and finally also reached the British Isles, thus forming the *Atlantic Façade* also called in archaeological jargon the *Megalithic Province*, due to the fact that its whole area is covered by structures made of stones. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century such a *theory of cultural diffusion* was formulated and propagated by a leading Australian historian and archaeologist Gordon Vere Childe (1892-1957) who presented his viewpoint in his famous book titled *The Dawn of European Civilisation* (1925). According to Childe, the group of magnificent Neolithic constructions along the Atlantic coast and part of the North Sea initiated the development of both the European continental and British insular civilisations. Some years later Childe concentrated his survey more precisely on Britain and published in 1940 his *Prehistoric communities of the British Isles*.<sup>10</sup>

Childe and other diffusionists' opinions and arguments were contradicted and finally rejected by the later development of the archaeological method and especially by radiocarbon dating that uses the atomic disintegration of radiocarbon 14 (C-14) to estimate the age of such organic materials as wood, bones and leather, up to about 58 000 to 62 000 years Before Present (BP). This method was invented in 1949 by Willard F. Libby of Chicago University. He measured the amount of radioactive carbon C-14 preserved in organic remnants of the past, including human, animal and plants remains, and especially wooden remnants. Then he took advantage of the following phenomenon: after an organism dies the radiocarbon decreases at a rate known to us, which is one half every 5 760 years according to its atomic reaction and tempo. The amount of C-14 found in organic remnants such as bone, skin, fossilised pieces of wood, etc. is

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<sup>10</sup> G. V. Childe, *Prehistoric communities of the British Isles*, W.& R. Chambers, London-Edinburgh 1940.

then compared with the amount of radioactive carbon in similar contemporary organisms because all organisms at their formation stage have the same amount of that ingredient absorbed from the earth's atmosphere. Later comparison of C-14 percentages in both samples, i.e. the one preserved from the past and the contemporary one gives an approximate age of the tested piece due to the scientifically established stage of atomic disintegration of the ancient organic sample.

When the C-14 method was used in order to examine the Atlantic Façade and British stone constructions it became clear that they were older than those from the Mediterranean region! The earliest Atlantic megaliths date back to about 4 000 B.C. while the oldest similar constructions in the Mediterranean region appeared as late as about 2 700 B.C. This leads to the self-evident conclusion that what happened earlier cannot be a result of what happened later. It means that the Atlantic stone structures could not have been erected as a result of influences which arrived after the diffusion of Mediterranean culture. The *Mycenaean Diffusion Hypothesis* was finally and thoroughly discredited by a distinguished British archaeologist, Sir Colin Renfrew (born 1937), who was knighted for his scientific achievements. He did this first in his famous paper titled *Wessex without Mycenae*. Renfrew proved, using the radiocarbon C-14 method, that it is irrational to connect British megaliths with Mediterranean influences. Then the ultimate shock was caused by Renfrew's famous book *Before Civilisation* (1973), in which he definitively proved that the so-called Atlantic Façade developed earlier and independently from any Mediterranean influences.

One year later, Renfrew mobilised a number of his fellow-archaeologists to support a new view of the British past from different angles and edited another book titled *British Prehistory* in which he wrote: "Britain's past has changed in the past few years almost beyond recognition: the new datings, new discoveries and new assessments have come so fast that any survey written more than five or so years ago is inevitably out of date. [...] Radiocarbon dating has fundamentally changed British prehistory, altering not merely dates but also historic reconstructions and interpretations as well. This implies, of course, that some of the earlier interpretations were wrong."<sup>11</sup> Thus, the theory of cultural diffusion of

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<sup>11</sup> C. Renfrew, *British Prehistory: Changing Configurations*, in: C. Renfrew, ed., *British Prehistory. A New Outline*, Duckworth, London 1974, pp. xi and 1 respectively.

Mediterranean Civilisation, initiated by G. V. Childe and developed later by such scholars as Graham Clarke (*Prehistoric England*, 1940) and Jacquetta and Christopher Hawkes (*Prehistoric Britain*, 1944) was finally rejected. As Renfrew wrote “the view until recently widely and authoritatively held, that Stonehenge (the famous stone circle of Britain) was built or designed, or at least influenced by Mycenaeans from the Mediterranean, is now almost universally rejected.”<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of the Neolithic Age, the most mysterious constructions, huge ritualistic stone centres in a circular shape, began to be built in the British Isles. The biggest such stone circle is located in Avebury in Wiltshire, and has a diameter of 412 metres. The most intriguing is the complex of stones of Stonehenge, located on the Salisbury Plain in Southern England. Although Stonehenge is not the biggest stone circle in Britain, it is nevertheless the best preserved. Of course, the etymology of its present name does not go back to prehistoric times. It was formed in the Old English period. Its first part derives undoubtedly from the word *stan*, which is simply the OE equivalent for the Modern English word *stone*. The second part of the name, *-heng*, presumably derives from OE *hencg* or *hen[g]ene*, which were the origins of the Middle English *henge* and Modern English *hinge*. Some British medieval chroniclers tried to derive the name Stonehenge from the proper name of Hengest, the leader of the Saxons, who, according to legend, was supposed to have massacred the Celtic aristocracy in that area. Hence, the term *Stonehengest* can frequently be found in some of the old medieval manuscripts. However, in the light of contemporary linguistic analyses, such an explanation is not to be accepted. The *Oxford English Dictionary* even refers to it as “spurious.”

The very first written medieval sources mentioning Stonehenge, then in the form *Stanenges* was: *Historia Anglorum* (*The History of the English*) written by the medieval chronicler Henry of Huntingdon in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The first longer description of this place is given to us by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his legendary chronicle titled: *De gestis Britonum* or more frequently as *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the British Kings*, written between the years 1130 and 1136. Stonehenge is mentioned there as the burial place of Constantine, the alleged king of Britain who was supposed to have ruled not long after the legendary King Arthur: “He was struck down by the judgment of God and buried [...] in the stone cir-

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

cle known in English as Stonehenge which had been built with great skill not far from Salisbury” or in the original Latin: “sententia Dei percussus [...] infra lapidum structuram sepultus fuit quae haud longe a Salesberia mira arte composita Anglorum lingua Stanheng nuncupatur.”<sup>13</sup>

These passages from Geoffrey’s work are a kind of homage paid to Neolithic man and his monumental buildings, like Stonehenge. In the mentality of the Middle Ages, the period of magnificent cathedrals and castles, writers were usually unwilling to fall into easy enchantment over the architectonic achievements of previous times. Although the homage has fairy-tale poetics, it expresses with clarity the admiration of a medieval chronicler-intellectual in a form typical for his period. He attributed the idea of monument formation to Aurelius Ambrosius, the Brittonic leader who fought against the Anglo-Saxons. He calls his most skilled builders and familiarises them with his plans. Terrified by the scale of the King’s ideas, they refuse. The King bursts out laughing: “how could it be that stones that big were transported here from such a remote country, as if Britain itself didn’t have stones sufficient for such an undertaking?” Merlin answers that the stones from Ireland are not only very big, but that they are also of magical power and were transferred to Ireland by African Giants of the Past. Having learned this fact, the King assigns 15 thousand men to bring the stones to Britain, which turns out to be impossible as the stones are too big for humans to move, and only Merlin’s spell moves them to the Salisbury Plain, where Ambrosius Aurelius is buried when his days come to an end.

The oldest known depiction of Stonehenge, showing a giant helping Merlin to build Stonehenge, is contained in the medieval manuscript *The Roman de Brut* kept in the British Library and written by Wace of Jersey. The spacious scale, as well as the mysterious expression of Stonehenge, fascinated not only the minds of the Middle Ages but also subsequent scholars, writers and artists. The first known modern drawing of Stonehenge was by a Flemish drawer and cartographer Lucas de Heere, who lived in England between the years 1573 and 1575. To the most famous English writers describing this place belong John Evelyn (1620-1706), who also described Stonehenge in his *Memoirs*, and Celia Fiennes (1662-

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<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Clarendon Press, Oxford-London-Toronto 1928 (1912), chapt. XI, paragr. IV, p. 201; Latin text ed. by M. D. Reeve, transl. by Neil Wright, Boydell and Brewer Press, Woodbridge 2007, p. 254 (English text) and p. 255 (Latin original).



1741), who included a description of Stonehenge in her pioneering memorist-ethnographic work *Through England on a Side-Saddle in the time of William and Mary*, written between 1685 and 1703, but published from the manuscript as late as in 1888. In 1900, *A Sentimental and Practical Guide to Amesbury and Stonehenge*, written and compiled by Florence Caroline Mathilde lady Antrobus was the first guidebook to the area, inspiring innumerable similar works in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Stonehenge was painted by such artists as: Moses Griffiths (about 1780), Thomas Jones (1774), James Malton (1800) and John Constable (between 1825 and 1836). A fantasy picture of Stonehenge, showing it populated by prehistoric people can be found depicted in Charles Hamilton Smith's book *Ancient Costumes of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1814. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stonehenge was the inspiration for a series of 15 lithographs titled *Stonehenge* (1975) by the great English artist, Sir Henry Moore (1898-1986), who by the way is better known for his sculpture, but was also a painter and an illustrator.

As early as 1620, Stonehenge was visited by King James the 1st, who was so impressed by what he saw that he ordered his architect, Inigo Jones (1573-1652), to plot a special graph, the first serious architectural analysis of the monument. It was titled *The Most Notable Monument of Great Britain, Vulgarly Called Stone-Heng on Salisbury Plain* (1655). It comprised a collection of Inigo Jones' drawings and engravings with a text by John Webb. The famous antiquarian, William Stukeley (1687-1765), devoted a whole book to this place entitled *Stonehenge: a Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* (1740).

Let us examine the structure of Stonehenge. In 1923 a British geologist, H. H. Thomas, proved that the inner circle stones, covered with a characteristic bluish deposit of copper sulphate, the so-called bluestones, came from the stone layers of the *Prescelly Hills*, located about 280 km from Stonehenge. What is more, Thomas narrowed the occurrence of three types of minerals – doleriths, rhytolites and volcanic rocks, to an especially small area of the Carn Menyn Hills in Wales. This strengthened the assumption once formulated by Stukeley and prompted the creation of the so-called *Bluestone Theory*. In 1954, through the BBC's initiative, a practical experiment was conducted. Its aim was to transport a stone of similar size from Wales to Stonehenge by means of the primitive techniques which hypothetically could have been used by the inhabitants of prehistoric Britain. This experiment turned out to be a success, providing

a strong argument for the Blue-Stone Theory. Geoffrey Kellaway from the British Institute of Geological Sciences (not to be confused with an English football player of the same name) questioned the Blue Stone Theory by suggesting that a glacier that slid down from today's Irish Sea in about 100 000 B.C. and passed through Pembrokeshire and the Prescelly Hills, took a block of stones with it, carrying it up to Somerset located only several dozen kilometres away from Salisbury Plain. From that place it would have been much easier to transport the stones to Stonehenge. Complementary geological research confirmed Kellaway's thesis. Within a radius of 40 km from Stonehenge traces of "erratic stone blocks" were found. They are equivalent to some types of stones present in Stonehenge.

Another question arises about the placing of the big and heavy stones on top of one another. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Stukeley suggested that huge cranes made of wooden trunks were employed. Such a set-up, possible now, was rather beyond the abilities of the British inhabitants of four thousand years ago, although theoretically it was possible. Moreover, a big, over one thousand year old tree could be a better tool for building a lever to hoist large stones on top of one another. Nevertheless, archaeologists have put forward another, far more plausible hypothesis based on examining the ground around the stones. The deformation of natural ground layers suggests that the stones were probably pulled up the hills on wooden rollers or sleighs in a way similar to the Egyptian method of transporting stones in order to build pyramids. A stone lying flat was excavated from one side until the hole was deep enough for the stone to lose its balance and slide into it. Then the excavation was continued until the stone reached an upright position and its top was even with the ground level. A similar procedure was undertaken in the case of other stones, which were to form a set of vertical columns standing upright in deep holes in a circle. Only then were transverse stones pulled over the tops of vertical stones. Then the earth surrounding the columns was removed which flattened the hill. This created the deceptive impression, which Stukeley also had, that the transverse stones were placed on the vertical ones with the use of huge cranes.

Rolling a 4-ton stone some 200 miles from a Welsh quarry to the site that the world now knows as Stonehenge would have been a daunting enough challenge for even the hardest of Neolithic-era laborers. The work of subsequent generations of archaeologists and explorers, first Richard Holt and John Lubbock, then Stuart Piggott and Richard Atkin-

son, resulted in an agreement about the possible chronology of how Stonehenge was created. The history of the building process can be divided into three basic periods. The first one, during the transition stage between the Neolithic and Bronze Age, lasted from about 1900 to 1700 B.C. It was at that time that a kind of round moat or, a deeper trench, 97m in diameter, appeared. Within the circle, excavators located 56 deep holes, which formed, beside the moat and mound, a third, inner circle. In the memory of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Stonehenge explorer, these holes were named Aubrey Holes. Apart from a limestone block of stones found inside the main circle, there are also human remains in some of the holes. They date from about 1800 B.C., according to examination of the carbon C14 degradation cycle. A 4.9 m stone was placed in the middle of the circle, traditionally called the Heel Stone. None of the stone structures built in the second period, 1700-1500 B.C., remained. Their existence can be inferred, however, from the remaining holes, arranged in two further circles of 38 holes each, traditionally called in archaeological terminology, the “Z” and “Y” holes.

In September 2014, in the vicinity of Stonehenge, archaeologists discovered some traces of wooden and stone structures with the assistance of high-tech mapping. The wooden structures, closest to the “old” arrangement of Stonehenge monoliths, look like a series of small centres, or even Neolithic chapels. On the other hand, huge stone pillars are located some 2 miles (around 3 km) from Stonehenge, close to the remains of the Neolithic settlement of Durrington Walls. In the remote past they were apparently pushed over and laid flat, thus remaining hidden under the ground. Now they have been detected by state of the art geophysical imaging technology, which has revealed images of a formation which is much bigger than the central part of Stonehenge, for so long considered as the most important part of the structure. In this light, the old part of the monumental stone ring would appear to be just a section of a much larger Neolithic arrangement. It is too early to determine the real ancient purpose of the whole structure. One thing is for certain, however. Further excavations and scientific analysis will substantially alter our current knowledge of the Stonehenge and Neolithic era.

Quite a number of researchers affirm that the second stage of building Stonehenge is the work of the people who have been called Bell Beaker Folk in the archaeological tradition. This name derives from the characteristic utensils those tribes left behind, which have the shape of a beaker

or a bell turned upside down and possess characteristic curved edges. The shape of the bell is easily recognisable when the utensils are turned upside down.

We do not know who the Bell Beaker Folk were. The only archaeological trace they left were types of cups and utensils after which they gained their name from modern archaeologists. The characteristic product of their pottery, however, is not sufficient enough to make any more precise conclusions about their culture. We do not even know if these utensils, covering so much of European territory, were a product of the same people, or whether the extension of their use was an effect of trade, war, looting or any other form of cultural diffusion. Nonetheless, excavations of bell beakers cover much of the European continent, starting with the Iberian Peninsula, which later became the western and northern part of contemporary France, then Belgium, the Netherlands, the British Isles, a substantial part of central Germany, the southern part of Denmark and a huge offshoot going to the South-East of Europe including the north-western part of the contemporary Czech Republic and even the margins of contemporary Hungary.

Some scholars consider the Bell Beaker Folk as proto-Celts, but there is nothing to support this hypothesis. As long as linguistic evidence does not exist we are unable to prove the ethnic roots of any people. And Bell Beaker Folk, like all prehistoric peoples, did not leave any written records behind them. This is also the basis for the division of the continuity of human existence on earth into two basic periods: *prehistoric* – lasting up to the appearance of the first written documents, and *history proper* – beginning with the moment when particular peoples started to write down their histories.

The third period of Stonehenge's development, lasting from 1500 until 1400 B.C., saw the last and most spectacular stage of the stone structure. It was at that time that the biggest stone circles, which are the main attraction of Stonehenge today, were raised. At the edge of this part of Stonehenge we can find traces of the circles called by archaeological tradition, the Sarsen Circle [a central exterior row of stones] and the Bluestone Circle [a central row second from the exterior]. In the middle of them we can see the most impressive part of the whole structure. Each of these upright stones weighs about 25 tons and measures over 4 metres in height. The architectural description of Stonehenge, however, does not explain the old functions of this mysterious place. The extreme and scientifically rather

unreliable theories suggest that Stonehenge was a landing field for some other planet's envoys. A specific arrangement of the stones, showing some similarities to astronomical configurations, led explorers to the assumption that it could have served as a site for some celestial observations (Erich von Däniken, especially his *The Gods Were Astronauts: Evidence of the True Identities of the Old Gods*, 2001). The most striking thing is the fact that the stones are arranged in such way that the first and last sun rays of the summer solstice have a direct route from the outer Heel Stone to the centre of the inner circle. The accompanying luminous effects must have created the impression in the minds of contemporary people that this was a Sun God or the Sun at some divinity's service, becoming symbiotic with the priests' proceedings, because it was "coming down" from heaven to an indicated place, thus proving the causative power of the shamans' spells. The religious function of the structure could eventually be confirmed by the function of a huge stone, traditionally called the Altar Stone. Its precise original position is uncertain today because it fell over some time ago, suppressed by the weight of two other heavy stones. But most probably this stone was located somewhere in the middle of the structure. The whole structure was so arranged that the sun ray could reach the Altar Stone at sunrise through the space between two central stones. Hypotheses based on astronomical accounts associated with Stonehenge were initiated seriously in 1906 by sir Norman Lockyer, author of the booklet *Stonehenge and Other British Stone Monuments Astronomically Considered*. It was so popular among readers that in 1909 a second issue of the booklet was printed. In 1963, Gerald Hawkins, an American professor of physics and astronomy at Boston University in Massachusetts, calculated, with some help from computers, that the positions of the Stonehenge stones correspond with the solar and lunar cycles and that they might even have been used to estimate the ecliptic deflection of the globe. He did not have archaeologists' support on this issue. In the columns of another magazine, "Antiquity," Hawkins was severely criticised by Richard Atkinson in his article titled *Moonshine on Stonehenge*, where he labelled Hawkin's book as "tendentious, arrogant, slipshod and unconvincing."<sup>14</sup> Atkinson devoted a number of works to Stone-

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<sup>14</sup> J. C. Atkinson, *Moonshine on Stonehenge*, "Antiquity," 1966, vol. 40, nr 159, pp. 212-216; see the text online: <http://antiquity.ac.uk/ant/040/Ant0400212.htm>. Atkinson extended his arguments in: *Hoyle on Stonehenge: Some Comments*, "Antiquity,"

henge, trying to explain some mysteries of the spot in a more rational way.<sup>15</sup>

Undoubtedly, however, the builders of Stonehenge took astronomical phenomena into consideration, although they were probably far from using the sophisticated mathematical combinations suggested by Hawkins. Hawkins simply reckoned upon *post factum* regularities in the arrangements of stones, although their configuration was originally based rather on an intuitive imitation of nature rather than on conscious, abstract calculations. Skilful manipulation of what was happening on the horizon, in order to gain their gods' respect, was known in the oldest religions, such as in Egypt for instance. Egyptian priests were, for instance, able to predict some astronomical phenomena, such as solar eclipses. And they cleverly used this knowledge to manipulate people during different types of social unrest and dissatisfaction, announcing that the sun would disappear if the people were not obedient. When the terrified people seemed sufficiently subdued, the sun usually appeared again after the shadow of the moon had started to disappear. Thus, there is nothing sensational about traces of similar manipulations, which are visible in the Stonehenge stone arrangement. Regardless of what religion was practised in Stonehenge, we can observe the return of pagan religions now in Britain and the rest of the world. Stonehenge seems to be the very centre of such neo-heathen beliefs, with its annual gatherings held in June. Last year (2014) a record crowd of about 36,500 revellers welcomed the dawn of the Summer Solstice at Stonehenge.

The second of the most famous stone circles, the Avebury Cycle, originally four times as big as Stonehenge, is, unfortunately, far more poorly preserved. Its existence was noticed by the general population when Stukeley published his *Abury Described*, i.e. *Description of Avebury*, in 1743 (Stukeley used the local dialect name for Avebury, i.e. "Abury" in the title). The Avebury Cycle comprises in total 11 hectares and 30 acres of land and is located in a village of the same name, about 10km west of London. In the proximity of the main circle, which is 400

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1967, vol. 41, pp. 92-95; see also M. Pitts, *Gerald Hawkins – Astronomer who claimed Stonehenge was a computer*, "The Guardian," July 24, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Earlier, Atkinson devoted to Stonehenge the book *Stonehenge and Avebury and Neighbouring Monuments*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London 1959; among his later work, the most important on a similar issue is his paper. *Megalithic Astronomy: A Prehistorian's Comments*, "Journal of the History of Astronomy," 1975, nr 6.

metres in diameter, there are two smaller ones, as well as the highest mound in the British Isles. This area, considering its size, was once certainly more important than Stonehenge. Today, it is a field of continuous archaeological exploration along with numerous other British stone rings, or cycles. Mysterious stones cover numerous areas of Britain, such as, for instance, the so-called Ring of Brodgar. It is also called the *Temple of the Sun* and is about the size of Avebury, but located between two Scottish lakes: Loch Stennes and Loch Harray on the Mainland Island, the biggest of the Orkney Islands. At the same time, this circle is the northern-most British monument of such a kind. On the same island, there is also a second slightly smaller circle, which may have constituted a ritual complex with the first one. Such a function is implied by its name: *Temple of the Moon*.

The stones found in some stone circles of Britain are decorated with intricate carvings. Numerous, though much smaller circles are located in Cornwall. The most famous ones are: *The Hurlers*, connected with a local legend about heroes flinging rocks around, and *The Merry Maidens* (or *Dans Maen* in Cornish), connected with a legend about sinful dancing women changed into stones. There are also a great number of stones in Britain arranged in vertical columns, with a single, solid-block on top of them, called a portico or roof. The highest stone of this kind is located in Rudstone in Humberside. It weighs 26 tons and measures 8 metres in height. It dates from about 2 000 B.C. Some of such stones are called *Devilish Stones*.

From the technical and chronological point of view, each of these impressive structures is today precisely recorded and described. However, some basic information about them is still lacking: Who were the people who erected them? What did they believe in? What purpose did these edifices serve? Why did they take on such shapes? Professor Richard John Copland Atkinson's remark about the role of an archaeologist and an explorer of prehistoric times seems to be adequate at this point: "When finally we come to matters of faith and religion the archaeologist is usually inclined to take refuge altogether in silence [...]. The plain fact of the matter is that on such points there can be no certainty or even very high degree of probability as long as written evidence is lacking."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> R. J. C. Atkinson, *Stonehenge*, Hamish Hamilton, London 1956 p. 167.

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Stonehenge, as depicted by a British illustrator and antiquary, Charles Hamiton in 1814.



Ancient Celtic cauldron.



Druid depicted by Charles Hamilton Smith (1776-1859).



Modern enactment of the invasion of Mona Island by Svetonius Paulinus in 61 A. D.



A wicker man, a large wooden construction, allegedly used to burn criminals and religious victims in ancient Celtic societies. As depicted in the English translation of Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* translated by William Duncan (1753).

## Chapter Two

# THE CELTIC CHARACTER OF THE BRITISH ISLES

The Celts were the most important people to shape the cultural character of the British Isles before the arrival of the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons. It is not known, however, which of the peoples whose presence on the British Isles is confirmed by archaeological excavations and evidence can be considered as the very first Celtic tribe. Some scholars believe that it was the *Bell Beaker Folk*, mentioned in the first chapter of this book, a race that probably arrived in Britain between 2 000 and 1 600 B.C. However, all that remained and all that we now know about the Bell Beaker Folk is the bell-turned-upside-down shape of their pottery. Nothing remained which could confirm their ethnicity, culture or religion, no single trace of their tongue, and no single picture left either on their pottery or in any other form of painting, such as, for instance, on cave walls.

Numerous scholars strongly deny the Celtic character of these people, assuming that the oldest archaeological remnants which could be considered as Celtic can be identified no earlier than the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Another question is, who were the Celts of the British Isles? Until quite recently there was no dispute over the Celtic migrations to the British Isles from the European mainland. It looked like the Celts arrived in Britain and dominated her culture for almost one thousand years, while earlier cultures disappeared suddenly and quite completely. This seems rather unconvincing, especially as the long lasting and massive Indo-European migrations left some visible traces on the European continent. The Basque people living in the area bordering Spain and France are so far the only confirmed pre-Indo-European people, able to preserve their ancient language and culture. But were the Picts and Caledonians of Britain pre-Indo-European or early Celtic tribes?

Some decades ago, scientists using the latest genetic methods started to compare DNA samples found in the teeth of the most ancient Celtic skeletons found in the British Isles and those found on the European mainland. It was quite surprising that the effect of such research provided us with an unmistakable and explicit answer: ancient continental DNA

has nothing in common with the DNA of the Celtic inhabitants of the British Isles! According to Colin Renfrew, the most distinguished of contemporary British archaeologists, research into DNA has substantially changed the existing hypotheses concerning Celtic migrations into the British Isles. It follows from this research that either the ancient inhabitants of the British Isles have nothing to do with the Celts of the European Mainland, or that one of these peoples were not of Celtic origin! But why do they, even today, speak Celtic and why, historically, did they believe to a large degree in the same pagan gods as the European Celts? Why do they share with them a similar or identical culture? The dispute over these questions has so far not been resolved. In my opinion, the Celtic presence on the British Isles can be explained by the following hypothesis: the Brythonic Celtic tribes have no connection with the continental Celts by blood, but they share many aspects of their language and culture because of cultural diffusion of different kinds – contacts between neighbours of different stock, trading over the English Channel, pillaging in times of war, the taking of prisoners of war etc. Moreover, it is very probable that the original Brythonic culture of non-Celtic origin, after absorbing Celtic language and culture, started to influence the original Celtic continental tribes via ‘cultural feed-back’ and *vice versa*, thus producing a common civilization and similar languages. Whatever the truth, it is proven beyond any question that we can find a lot of ancient Celtic monuments in the British Isles, including the unquestionable remnants of the material and artistic culture of the Celts. Later linguistic evidence, containing a number of literary masterpieces, was also preserved, first in oral tradition and then written down by Christian monks.

Leaving aside the question of to what degree the continental Celts supported the ethnic or merely the cultural development of the British Isles and to what extent the Celts of Britain depended on European influences and courses of events, we can agree that Celtic culture at one time covered a substantial part of Europe.

The name “Celts” was first known in the Greek form *Keltoi* (κηλτοι), and as such it was used for the first time by the geographer Hycataeus about 500 B.C. when he wrote of Nyrax “a Celtic city.” In latinized form, the Celts were named by the Romans as *Celtae*. The Greeks also used another name for the Celts: “Hyperboreans.” These forms were used up to the time of Julius Caesar (100-44 BC). From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. onward, the Latin names “Galatae” (Engl. “Galatians”) and “Galli” (Engl.

“Gauls”) were increasingly used by ancient writers. It is between the 10<sup>th</sup> and around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. that we observe the first climax of Celtic prevalence and their early expansion in Europe. At that time the Celts occupied half of the Iberian Peninsula. Then the Celts conquered, or their culture was spread by diffusion, to almost all of Central and Southern Europe, even reaching the borders of the Apennine and Balkan Peninsulas. Soon after, in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century, their culture, either by migration or cultural diffusion, started to gradually reach the British Isles also. In the North and East their influences probably reached the territory of South-West Scandinavia and to some degree western and west-central parts of what is now Poland. Recent archaeological excavations have confirmed the presence of Celtic coins as far into Poland as the Kujawy area. This was proved by excavations published recently by two Polish archaeologists: Małgorzata Talarczyk-Andrałojć and her husband Mirosław Andrałojć. In their book written and titled in both English and Polish: *Celtic coinage in the Kujawy region – Mennictwo celtyckie na Kujawach* (2012), they proved not only the presence but also the coining of Celtic coins on Polish soil. In this title both the Polish word “mennictwo” as well as its English equivalent “coinage” mean that not only were single coins found there (which could have been a result of trade and not necessarily of the real presence of the Celts), but most importantly that Celtic coins were coined there. They have also assumed, which in a way is justified by their findings, that in the territory of the Polish Kujawy Region, as well as in Lower Silesia “some small but militarily and politically experienced aristocracy from the Gallo-Belgic area (known from written sources) may have been present.”<sup>1</sup> We also have another strong argument for Celtic settlement on Polish soil: some place names of obvious Celtic origin. Among them, the most important is certainly Legnica, stemming from the name of the god Lugh, the Celtic deity spreading light and beauty, and responsible also for craftsmanship and wisdom, the character and function of whom we will discuss later. The influence of his name can be traced today not only in Legnica but also in numerous former Celtic centres across the vast European territory once covered by the Celts and consequently by their religion.

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<sup>1</sup> M. & M. Andrałojć, *Celtic Coinage in the Kujawy Region*, Refugium S. C., Poznań 2012, p. 73. This book is simultaneously published in Polish under the title *Mennictwo celtyckie na Kujawach*.

## PLACE NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CELTIC GOD – LUGH:

*Liège* – town in contemporary Belgium;

*Lyon* – (ancient Lugudunum) in France;

*Ługańsk* – town in contemporary Ukraine;

*Lugau* – town in contemporary Germany;

*Lugg* – town in contemporary Wales;

*Lugnasad* – ancient town in Ireland;

*Legnica* – town in contemporary South-West Poland (Lower Silesia).

There is also a *Lugg River* flowing in Wales in Llangynllo in the Powys area.

Vast Celtic expansion is also testified by the mere existence of the “gal” element in different geographical place-names. The Celts arrived through the territory of today’s Romania and Bulgaria in the present Turkish Galatia, where Celtic cultural traces are still visible. Thus, the “gal” element is visible even today in such names as the just mentioned Turkish *Galatia*, French *Gaul*, Spanish *Galicia* and Polish *Galicja*. It also exists in the names of the Celtic Irish and Scottish *Gaels* and their *Gaelic* languages.

Seemingly, the name of Halicz or the Halicz Principality (Pol. Księstwo Halickie), on the border of contemporary Ukraine and Russia also has its name derived from some phonetic changes from the root “gal” where “g” was substituted by “h,” which is frequent in Slavic languages as in the Polish “gańba” and “hańba” differentiated today, but both still maintaining in their meaning different aspects of what is shameful.

The necessity of establishing communication over such a vast territory enforced the development of transportation. It is also the case that the tempo and pace of the Celtic conquest and cultural expansion was significantly increased after the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., that is, during the time when they started to use wheeled vehicles on a larger scale, which enabled them to move with more belongings and to convey booty or items of trade. It was the beginning of the Golden Age of Celtdom in continental Europe. Over the following centuries, the Celts waged a number of quite successful wars which had a significant effect on the course of ancient European history. Some of these wars were undertaken in alliance with the Greeks, with whom the Celts were temporarily on friendly terms. Some historians maintain that the Celts “played a small part in preserving the Greek type of civilisation from being overwhelmed by the despotism of the East (es-

pecially Persia), and thus keeping alive in Europe the priceless seed of freedom and humane culture.”<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, the appearance and development of Celtic communities in Europe are linked to three main cultures, conventionally called 1) the Urnfield Culture; 2) the Hallstatt culture; and 3) La Tène Culture.

Excavations have shown that the most ancient of the three is the *Urnfield Culture*, named after the quite substantial remnants of this ethnic group found in burial urns which appeared on the continental scene as early as the end of the second millennium B.C. Its relics were found in the upper Rhine River area. Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., the tribes representing this culture moved to the Iberian Peninsula. In the course of time, having mixed with the indigenous Iberian population of African stock, they created a hybrid society referred to today as the Celtiberians living in the area which later became the Roman province Lusitania (approximately contemporary Portugal). It was here that the new race called the Celtiberians appeared (by mixing the Celts with the original Iberians of African stock).

The second in chronology was the *Hallstatt Culture*, remnants of which were first excavated in the Austrian village Hallstatt, which gave its name to this sector of Celtic civilization. The Hallstatt Celts employed a newly discovered iron-using economy, and started to develop it in around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Their culture became widespread by the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC in the upper Danubian region and extended to the Rhine and Eastern France and also, either by migration or diffusion, to Britain and Ireland. The invention of the handy short sword helped the Hallstatt warriors to gain military superiority over less developed tribes and was one of the main incentives that contributed to the great expansion of the Celts in general. The Hallstatt Celts also produced numerous artifacts and utensils, like amber necklaces and early bronze razors. The Hallstatt culture, according to archeological evidence, either by migration or diffusion, reached Britain as early as the end of the 8<sup>th</sup>, or the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It is also very probable that the Hallstatt Celts had had contacts with the later so-called

Urnfield Celts and then with the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula, where other wings of Celtic civilization, mixed with African Iberians,

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<sup>2</sup> T. W. Rolleston, *Celtic Myths and Legend*, Studio Editions, London 1994 (1911), p. 22.



produced the hybrid population known from history as the Celtiberians. In the meantime, the Hallstatt Celts arrived in the Seine River Valley on the territory of contemporary France. From here, their influences, either by direct migration or cultural diffusion, also reached the British Isles.

The last Celtic group in question was *La Tène Culture*. Its name comes from the town of La Tène on the Northern side of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland, where the first substantial traces of that culture were found in 1856. La Tène Culture emerged shortly before the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The same century saw the first significant stage of its development, if not its blooming. Soon afterwards, the greatest ever known expansion of the Celts began.

*La Tène culture* was known for its decorative style of art. It flourished from the 5<sup>th</sup> until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in Northern Italy, then the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor (Galatia in contemporary Turkey), Ukraine, the Carpathians and Western and Southern Poland. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, either representatives of that culture migrated to Ireland and Britain or their indirect but quite massive cultural influences reached the British Isles by diffusion. Eventually covering more than half of the European mainland, the influence of La Tène culture in continental Europe lasted until about the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. It was then decisively destroyed under the force of Julius Caesar and his expeditions to Gallia in the middle of the same century. Its climax period was also the time of a series of Celtic migrations which in most probability also reached the British Isles. If so, they came to Britain, or their influences reached her territory by diffusion, most probably, within the last two centuries BC.

Regardless of the real influence and degree of Celtic arrivals or indirect influences in Britain, one thing seems certain: in those days of early communication, working out one's way to the British Isles across the considerably dangerous waters of the strait which is today called the English Channel required other kinds of ingenuity than those which were necessary when travelling on land across the European Mainland. It seems in this light that the Celts, either as conquerors or traders, crossed the English Channel with the help of boats, descriptions of which luckily survived in ancient sources dating back to as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Even today, similar boats, known in English as *coracles*, can be found in slightly modernised form among the Celtic inhabitants in some areas of Wales and Scotland. In the remotest ancient times, such boats were used in adjacent continental areas to carry the tin from Cornwall and the tiny Ushant Island, off

the coast of today's France, near the present city of Brest. From that port it was transported to the Mediterranean countries and the heart of Continental Europe. These boats were characteristically round and of different sizes, beginning with large barks for the transportation of tin. In some areas of the Mediterranean Basin, large barks of similar kind are still in use. To some degree they are a continuation of the historic *kurukos*, which was also used for tin transportation. The most ancient description of such boats could be found in the Greek *periplus* from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., written originally in Greek. *Periplus* – in ancient Greek means 'literary description of sailing' or circumnavigation, especially along the coast. No original of this anonymous *periplus* was preserved, however. But we know of a substantial fragment of its text translated into Latin and used by the Roman poet Rufus Festus Avienus living in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Avienus translated some of the not much changed fragments of this *periplus* and included these fragments in his own poem titled *Ora Maritima*, i.e. *Sailing along the Coast*. The original periplus and Avienus' poem are concerned with the same topic, i.e. sailing from the Mediterranean Sea along the Western European shore of what is now Spain and France, to Cornwall. The characteristic feature of these boats was their flat bottoms which allowed floating in waters a few inches deep. In Wales they were used up until quite recently to move across swamps. These boats, as the Celtic folklorist Edward Dwelly says, "were usually made of leather or wicker and may seem to moderns a very unsafe vehicle to trust to in tempestuous seas, yet our forefathers fearlessly committed themselves in these slight *pinnaces* to the mercy of the most violent weather."<sup>3</sup>

Having conquered, or covered by the influences of their culture, vast territories of continental Europe and the British Isles, the Celts created an extensive empire, but unfortunately, they were unable to build a more substantial political consistency in this territory.

In fact, it was more like a loose union of tribes without any central government which was about to enter a higher stage of development. They were twice very close to creating such a political structure, firstly in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. At the first peak of their power, shortly before the year 400, the Celts "under a king named by Livy Ambicatus [...] attracted by the rich land of Northern Italy, poured down through the passes of the Alps, and af-

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<sup>3</sup> E. Dwelly, *Curach*, an entry in: *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, Gairm Publications, Glasgow 1973 (1901), p. 301.

ter hard fighting with the Etruscan inhabitants they maintained their ground there.”<sup>4</sup> After a short alliance with the Romans against the Etruscan army, the Celts turned against their allies. Then “they reached the river Allia, a few miles from Rome, where the whole available force of the city was ranged to meet them. The battle took place on July 18, 390, that ill-omened *dies Alliensis* which long perpetuated in the Roman calendar the memory of the deepest shame the republic had ever known. The Celts turned the flank of the Roman army, and annihilated it in one tremendous charge. Three days later they were in Rome, and for nearly a year they remained masters of the city, or of its ruins, till a great fine had been exacted.”<sup>5</sup> It was much later that the power of the Celtic tribes, during their second great attempt to create a powerful state in Gallia, was destroyed by Julius Caesar who definitively put an end to Celtic power and the anti-Roman element in continental Europe. The kingdom of the Celtic ruler, Vercingetorix, was then subjugated and finally wiped out by the Romans, who one century later (43 A.D.) under Emperor Claudius subjugated the best developed Celtic kingdoms in the prevailing parts of Britain.

What linked the Celts was, in fact, their cultural, religious, linguistic and not just ethnic identity, at least not in all cases of their differentiated tribes. A leading Irish Celtologist, Proinsias Mac Cana (1926-2004), comments on this in his book titled *Celtic Mythology*: “The unity of the Celts of antiquity was one of culture rather than of race. Those peoples whom the Greeks and Romans knew as Celts no doubt were sprung from various ethnic origins, but in the view of external observers they had sufficient shared features in language and nomenclatures, social and political institutions, and in general their way of life – to mark them off, as a recognisably distinct nation.”<sup>6</sup>

An important factor in Celtic civilization was their relatively high level of military technique and especially their ability to manufacture excellent short swords. Even the more militarily-developed Romans introduced the famous Celtic short sword as standard equipment for their legions. The Celts had also built and effectively used in battle their famous chariots, mentioned in *De Bello Gallico* written by Julius Cesar. It was also the Celts who developed outstanding handicrafts. Beautiful specimens of jewellery,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, London-Sydney-New York-Toronto, Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1975 (1970), p. 11.

thick necklaces called *torques*, signified dignity and a sense of authority to the Celtic nobles. The unusual shape of the Celtic *torque* even today finds some followers among contemporary creators of jewellery for women, like the designers of the Pandora firm who are obviously inspired by Celtic craftsmanship. The more delicate necklaces were called *lunula* because of their crescent shape modelled after the moon, i.e. the Latin *luna*, and have fortunately survived until today. There were also beautiful brooches or buckles for fastening garments, or gowns, gold lock rings for hair, golden bracelets, etc. Among the most beautiful remnants of Celtic handicraft are the embellished bronze helmets and *cauldrons*, i.e. pots of different sizes, serving different purposes, beginning with feeding and ending with religious functions associated with the god Lugh.

The artistic objects left to us by the Celts are frequently characterized by stylised animals, birds and floral elements. Celtic decorative art also involved geometrical figures, invented and worked out through the ages in compositions of wavy lines, spirals and scrolls. However, one should remember that in the Celtic art which flourished before Romanisation, there is an almost complete lack of human shapes. The only element of the human body frequently seen in archaic Celtic art is the man's head, especially visible in stone sculpture and later on also on cauldrons and Celtic coins. Separate human heads made of stone have been found all over the ancient territory of the Celtic cultural empire. Such sculpture was, among many other usages, employed as an oil-lamp in the shape of the human head. At the top of the skull there was a small shallow basin for oil and a wick to be ignited to give some light.

A special feature of Celtic art was its flexibility in absorbing elements of other cultures, yet it was done in such a way that it did not lose its unique character and Celtic originality. "Celtic art was a fluid, moving and ever changing discipline and its practitioners were never averse to adapting the elements of foreign art they found pleasing. Thus, later classical influences came to be an intrinsic part of Celtic designs, modified in subtle ways but recognizable nonetheless."<sup>7</sup>

Apart from highly developed visual art, the Celts also created extremely beautiful and sensitive literature, especially poetry (of which we will talk soon) and also delicate music, played especially on the harp. After their contact with and in fact occupation of a substantial part of Italy, "they left a

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<sup>7</sup> D. Sandison, *The Art of the Celts*, New York, Barnes & Noble, New York 2006, p. 25.

greater memorial in the chief of Latin poets, whose name, Virgil, appears to bear evidence of his Celtic ancestry.”<sup>8</sup> Most Celtic poetry was accompanied by music, especially played on the harp, now the national symbol of Celtic Ireland. In architecture, the Celts achieved a level of pre-urban type of settlement known as *cranóg*. It was a human settlement with a handful of huts, usually palisaded and located on a lake peninsula or even an island in order to be defended by water surroundings.

Early Celtic coins were, by the way, in a rectangular, not a round shape. And it was much later that round Celtic money entered their economy. This economy was extended as far as a substantial part of Poland, into the Kujawy region which was recently proved, as I mentioned earlier, by two Polish archaeologists, Małgorzata Andrałójć-Talarczyk and her husband Mirosław Andrałójć.

All this legacy, to a substantial degree, was destroyed in continental Gaul. The Romans were responsible for its destruction both directly through military action initiated by Julius Caesar and later by influences imposed on Celtic territory by Roman civilization.

Within the British Isles, Celtic originality was substantially suppressed but happily survived in varying degrees in some particular areas, mostly in Ireland and Northern parts of Britain, which were never conquered by the Romans. Parts of Britain occupied by Roman legions were most heavily affected by Roman suppression but certain Western parts of the island, especially what is today's Wales, preserved many of the earlier Celtic cultural traits.

Northern Britain, as a non-occupied territory, continued its pre-Roman traditions, and not necessarily Celtic, if we consider the *Picts* as the most ancient people of non-Indo-European stock, together with the *Caledonians* and some 17 other tribes mentioned by Tacitus in his *Annalia*. Were they all pre-Indo-European peoples with nothing to do with the Celts apart from territorial contacts, such as wars and eventually trading?

*The Picts* or the *Painted People* were called this by the Romans due to their characteristically painted or tattooed skin. Their name was coined on the basis of the Latin adjective *pictus* – meaning “colourful” or “painted.” Up to this day they remain an obscure puzzle for all scholars trying to decipher their mysterious culture.

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<sup>8</sup> T. W. Rolleston, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Despite all the foreign influences, the Roman, then Anglo-Saxon, Viking and Norman invasions, it was the Celtic languages that were preserved best from the Celtic cultural inheritance. The area where these languages were preserved, is, of course, incomparably smaller than the archaic Celtic cultural empire. It consists, first of all, of the British Isles and a small piece of contemporary France i.e. Brittany, where in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Celtic Britons found refuge in their attempts to escape from Britain and her invasion by the Anglo-Saxons.

Historically, Celtic tongues were a branch of the greater Indo-European language family, which consisted of 439 known languages and dialects. Celtic tongues belong to the western group of the Indo-European language family. The territorial expansion of the Roman Empire, which soon included the Celtic territories, caused, of course, the very fast Romanisation of the Celts. The British Isles thus became the last asylum of Celtic tradition, where Romanisation also took place, but only in limited areas of occupied Britain, and even there Roman influences were never fully successful. The majority of Roman legionaries stationed there were not original inhabitants of Rome but soldiers recruited from other areas earlier subjugated by the Roman Empire. They usually spoke Latin as their second language, in numerous cases incompetently or not at all. Latin was in official use mostly among higher military echelons and administrative clerks. In the course of time, richer Brythonic families and municipal patricians educated their children in Rome. The majority of ordinary people, however, except through possible language contacts with their Roman or Romanised masters, remained faithful to their Celtic mother tongue. A number of Celts taken as prisoners of war were employed in ancient Rome as gladiators and thus quite quickly Romanised, certainly speaking the Latin language in their gladiatorial schools and camps. There is one excellent artistic proof of their presence in Rome: an anonymous sculpture titled *Dying Gaul*. It is now known from an ancient Roman marble copy of a lost Greek sculpture executed in bronze. The copy has also been mistakenly known as *The Dying Gladiator*. But the sculpture shows a dying Gaul entirely naked. The gladiators never fought fully naked. Meanwhile, the Celts frequently went into the battle naked because they wanted to demonstrate to their enemies that they have no fear. In addition, the Greek origins of the sculpture rather exclude the possibility of the Gaul's death being the result of a gladiatorial fight, because in Greece, even under the Roman occupation, such circus spectacles were

largely non-existent. For the Greeks were interested in purely sporting games and never fully accepted the Roman style of circus pastimes. Thus, this sculpture most probably shows a typical Celtic warrior killed during one of the frequent encounters between the Celts and Mediterranean troops, either Greek or Roman. Anyway, it belongs among the best known masterpieces of ancient European art.

All these language contacts produced comparatively weak roots for the Latin tongue in Britain and its complete absence in other areas of the British Isles. It allowed the Britons to play the role of being a repository of the various Celtic languages.

All those languages which owe their preservation to the inhabitants of the British Isles, are called today the “insular Celtic group” to differentiate them from their Gaulish continental counterparts, called the “continental Celtic group” which, unfortunately, ceased to exist under Roman occupation.

## MAIN GROUPS OF CELTIC LANGUAGES

I) CONTINENTAL CELTIC GROUP: Gaulish;

II) INSULAR GROUP :

- 1) Brythonic or ‘P-Group’ (named after the consonant ‘P’ being used in some places, like in the word son, i.e. ‘map’ later also ‘ap’– ‘son’: *Cymraeg* (Welsh); *Brezhonek* (Breton); *Keruwak* (Cornish); *Cumbric* (language of ancient Strathclyde);
- 2) Gaelic or ‘Q-Group’ (named after the consonant “q,” “ch,” “c” or “k” being used in some places where in the ‘P-group’ ‘p’ is used, example: “mac” – “son”; *Gaedhaelg*, later *ghailege* (Irish Gaelic); *Gaidhlig*, *Yrris* or *Erse* (Scottish Gaelic); *Gailck* (Manx from the Isle of Man).

Careful observers of Celtic culture may protest and maintain that not only in the British Isles do communities speak Celtic, but that also in France one can still encounter a living Celtic, i.e. Breton language, called *brezonek*. However, it is not a descendant of continental Gaulish but a continuation of the Brythonic language brought to continental Armorica by British refugees escaping from the progress of the Anglo-Saxon invasion in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the Breton language is in fact “insular Celtic,”

preserved, then later separately developed and diversified on the continental mainland. It is also a well known fact that the name of the territory, now incorporated by the French, called *Bretagne*, in English *Brittany*, stems from the same Celtic root, which in its etymology goes back to the first names of Britain, such as *Pretanike*, as it was for the very first time called in about the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC by the Greek traveller Pytheas. Incidentally, the same word, *Bretagne*, written and spoken in the same way, means in French both: *Brittany* and *Britain*, with the difference that one of them is *Grand Bretagne* and the other just *Bretagne*.

The original proto-Celtic was divided into two main groups. This fact is well known and it happened under the influence of different geographical environments and conditions of living, responsible for instance, for shaping new vocabulary and then also phonetics and language pronunciation. It also happened under the influence of local non-Indo-European communities and their languages. These two Celtic groups are the “Q-group” and “P-group.” Both these names are agreed by linguists and are derived from characteristic, randomly selected phonetic features and then the consequent treatment of consonants of Indo-European origin. Roughly speaking, the Brythonic “P” Group has “p” in the places where the Gaelic “Q” group preserved a sound like “q” itself or similar consonants, for instance “ch,” “k” or “c” pronounced as “k.” This is best explained with the example of two words, the equivalents of “son” and “everyone”:

|                 |   |          |            |
|-----------------|---|----------|------------|
|                 |   | son      | everyone   |
| Irish Gaelic    | – | mac      | cach       |
| Scottish Gaelic | – | mac      | cach, gach |
| Cornish         | – | map      | pup        |
| Welsh           | – | map > ap | paup       |

While explaining the development of the Welsh “map,” as the “P-group” denomination of “son,” it is necessary to mention that in the course of time it was shortened to “ap” and, for instance, the name of the national poet of Medieval Wales was Daffydd ap Gwilym meaning David son of William. Later, even “ap” was frequently shortened to a single consonant “p” and the Welsh name Prichard means originally, although not always today, “son of Richard.”

Linguists frequently identify the “Q-group” with “Goidelic” or the “Gaelic group.” Today the “Gaelic Group” is represented, first of all, by



Irish Gaelic known in original Celtic and historic form as *Gaedhaelg* and more recently as *Ghailge*, and Scottish Gaelic known in Scottish original form as *Gaidhlig*.

Both Gaelics, Irish and Scottish, as traditional linguists maintain, constituted one linguistic entity which became broken when, in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Irish Scotti (as they were named in old Latin chronicles) migrated and settled in Northern Britain. Here they created their kingdom of *Dal Riata* or in slightly different written form *Dalriada*. From that moment on, the initially Irish *gaedhaleg* started to be used in Scotland and to acquire more and more differences. In the course of time, it gradually became Scottish Gaelic i.e. *Gaidhlig*.

However, more recently, some scholars have questioned such a pattern of development for Scottish Gaelic. They base their opinion on the complete lack of archaeological evidence. For instance, the archaeologist Ewan Campbell electrified the Scottish public by maintaining that “There had never been any serious archaeological justification for the supposed Scottish invasion.[...] if there was a mass migration from Ireland to Scotland, there should be some sign of this in the archaeological record, but there is none. If there was only an elite takeover by a warband, who must have adopted local material culture and settlement forms, there should be signs of the language of the native majority in the placenames, but again there is none.[...] I suggest that the people inhabiting Argyll maintained a regional identity from at least the Iron Age through to the medieval period and that throughout this period they were Gaelic speakers. In this maritime province, sea communications dominated, and allowed a shared archaic language to be maintained, isolated from linguistic developments which were taking place in the areas of Britain to the east of the Highland massif in the Late Roman period. Occasional developments in material culture settlement types could pass from one area of the west to another, and of course individuals moved between the areas, but this was not on a sufficient scale to produce an homogenous cultural province. [...] In conclusion, the Irish migration hypothesis seems to be a classic case of long-held historical beliefs influencing not only the interpretation of documentary sources themselves, but the subsequent invasion paradigm being accepted uncritically in the related disciplines of archaeology and linguistics.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> E. Campbell, *Were the Scots Irish?* The author of that paper declares that “The ideas in this paper have been presented in various seminars over the last few years.” It is

Whenever and however Scottish Gaelic developed, either as a result of partition from Irish Gaelic, or originally and separately from the Irish base from prehistoric times, one thing is for certain: for a long time they were mutually understandable due to trade and general cultural diffusion, and at a certain moment in history these mutual similarities ceased to be sufficient for full mutual understanding and communication. Moreover, even if we accept the lack of archaeological evidence of the common ancestry of both Irish and Scottish Gaelics, there is at least linguistic evidence confirming the Irish origins of both, which was memorized in different parts of Scotland where the names of Scottish regional Gaelic dialects are called *Yrris* and *Erse*, which simply means *Irish*.

It is, of course, a problem to discover at which moment the two *Gaelic* languages differentiated to the extent that they ceased to be understood by both nations. Some linguists, who still support the idea of Irish migration to Scotland, are inclined to consider them as separate from the very moment of Scottish settlement in the parts of Northern Britain known as Scotland today. It was here that the Scots had to name their new environment and conditions of living by creating a new vocabulary or by acquiring Pictish names, especially geographical and topographical ones (which is seen in many contemporary Scottish place-names). The language of the Picts, who lived in Northern Britain long before the Scots appeared there, were absorbed gradually by the prevailing and more dynamic culture of the Scots. Nevertheless, hundreds of Pictish words, usually gaelicised, entered Scottish Gaelic and started to discriminate it from its Irish brother. It was certainly one of the very first and real differentiations between the Irish nation, who remained on its Green Island, and its kinsmen who decided to settle in the prospective Scotland, then still called Alban or less precisely Caledonia (since it was the name of only one of several pre-Gaelic tribes).

Other linguists, however, maintain that both Gaelics lost their ability to be understood by both nations as late as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was as late as 1690 A.D. when Irish Gaelic was considered by the clergy in Scotland as incomprehensible to the degree that a new translation of the *Bible* had to be prepared for their Scottish flock.

Today, Scottish Gaelic is getting closer and closer to becoming extinct. The 2011 census of Scotland provides information that only 57 375

people speak fluently in Gaelic which means 1.1 percent of the Scottish population. This means a decline of 1,275 Gaelic speakers from 2001.<sup>10</sup>

Until recently, there also existed a third Gaelic tongue, *Gailck*, spoken by the inhabitants of the Isle of Man and called in their native language *Eilean mhanain*. In English terminology the language is called *Manx*. Its original version is preserved now only on records and tapes while the last few of its speakers have gradually died out during the last four decades. The most distinguished authority on Manx, George Broderick, considers Ned Mandrell, who died in 1974 (born. 1877), to be the last original speaker of that language. He tried to preserve and even unsuccessfully extend Manx by talking to Gaelic speaking sailors on British ships, where he served in his youth. He was brought up in the remote village of Cregneash, where, as he said “unless you had the Manx you were a deaf and dumb man and no good to anybody.” Some linguists however, maintain that it was not Maddrell but Juan y Geill who last spoke Manx and died as late as 1983. It is his name which is alluded to in *Ynsee gaelg*, a special website page devoted to learning conversational Manx.<sup>11</sup>

During the 1990s, however, some scholars, and also some regional devotees and enthusiasts of a different sort, decided to learn Manx on the basis of its preserved original texts. In recent years, it is estimated that at least several hundred people are able to communicate in such artificially revitalised Manx after energetic revival efforts. Thus, despite the small number of speakers, the language has become more visible on the island, with increased signage and radio broadcasts. The revival of Manx has been aided by the fact that the language was well recorded. For example, the Bible was translated into Manx, and a number of audio recordings were made of native speakers.<sup>12</sup>

I should also mention a tendency to consider as separate languages those Gaelic dialects spoken on larger islands surrounding Britain, such as the Orkneys, the Shetlands and the Inner and Outer Hebrides. However, these islands were for centuries occupied by the Vikings of Norway, and the influence of the Norwegian language is to such an extent that we can talk rather about hybrid dialects showing features of both Gaelic and Norse cultures.

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<sup>10</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish\\_Gaelic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Gaelic)>

<sup>11</sup> <[http://www.learnmanx.com/cms/advanced\\_lesson\\_detail\\_894.html](http://www.learnmanx.com/cms/advanced_lesson_detail_894.html)>

<sup>12</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manx\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manx_language)>

The language of the continental Gauls, as the few remaining words prove, belonged to the “P-group.” No more than 60 short inscriptions of that tongue have been preserved. These inscriptions, usually made on stone or on metal, do not allow, however, for a full reconstruction. Otherwise, representatives of the “P-Group,” also called the *Brythonic Group* are Welsh, originally called *cymraeg*, Breton *brezonek* and finally the extinct Cornish *keruwak* or *kerouac*. All these languages are frequently called Brythonic because all of them stem from Britain in one way or another. Brezonek is still fully alive in Brittany, competing with French as far as the number of speakers is concerned. One dictionary of contemporary Breton poets and novelists writing in *brezonek* contains approximately 1,100 writers, although a substantial number of them simultaneously produce their masterpieces in French.

The Welsh language is historically the best developed and preserved of the Celtic languages. Its development falls into three basic periods: Old Welsh (about 700 to about 1100 A.D.); Middle Welsh (respectively, about 1100 to 1500) and Modern Cymraeg from about 1500 onward. It is now divided into four main dialects: Venedotian, Powysian, Demetian and Gwentian.<sup>13</sup>

The Venedotian dialect is spoken in Gwynedd i.e. the northwest area of Wales named after the old Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd. It is here that more than two-thirds of the population reports being able to speak *cymraeg*, although the proportion of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd dropped slightly in the 1990s to slightly below 70 percent.<sup>14</sup>

The Powysian dialect is spoken in North-eastern and middle Powys and is named after the Medieval Kingdom of Powys. Of all the main regions of Wales, Powys has the lowest population density and only a third of its inhabitants have linguistic skills in *cymraeg*. Its district of Faesyfed (Engl. Radnorshire) was almost completely Anglicised during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while “The 2001 census records show 21% of the population of Powys were able to speak Welsh.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See: M. J. Ball, ed. *The Use of Welsh. A Contribution to Sociolinguistics*, Multilingual Matters, Ltd., Bristol 1988, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwynedd> >

<sup>15</sup> < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powys> >

The third Welsh dialect, Gwentian, can be heard in Gwent, named after the ancient Welsh Kingdom of Gwent and Southeast Morgannwg, known better in English as Glamorgan.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the fourth main Welsh dialect, Demetian, is spoken in Dyfed, the contemporary region of Southwest Wales covering approximately the same geographical area as the ancient Welsh principality (or petty kingdom) of Deheubarth.<sup>17</sup> Historically, the name *Dyfed* was coined by the *Déisi*, the Irish settlers in Wales, who undoubtedly influenced to some degree the language of the territory they occupied.

Apart from the four main dialects of Welsh, we have a number of local subdialects, such as the tongue of the people known colloquially as “Cofis” living in Caernarfon in Gwynedd. The same word, “Cofi” denotes the local Welsh subdialect where a number of words are in use that are not in use elsewhere. In turn, part of Dyfed, now known as Pembrokeshire, is divided into two language areas of approximately equal size and thus “is split into its two halves, the Englishry and the Welschery”<sup>18</sup> This division resulted from the Anglo-Norman invasion and occupation of that part of Wales in the Middle Ages, initiated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The boundary between the Welsh and English speaking populations is known here as *Landsker*, and the English part of Pembrokeshire is sometimes referred to as Little England. The Pembrokeshire dialect of Welsh, constituted in fact the fifth dialect of the language and was historically “developed somewhat differently from the mother tongue. [...] Today it is a dialect apart and often far removed from standard or literary Welsh. There is also a considerable English element in its vocabulary. [...] English words have been finding their way into the language for many centuries – probably an inevitable consequence of a long period of intercommunication between the two halves of the county. Many of the English words in the Pembrokeshire Welsh dialect have become almost unrecognizable, for their original spelling and pronunciation have been adapted to Welsh and have evolved along with the rest of the language.”<sup>19</sup> This led people to some-

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<sup>16</sup> See: J. Griffith, *Wenhwyseg: Key to Phonology of the Gwentian Dialect for the Use of Teachers of Welsh in Glamorgan and Monmouth Schools*, Southall, Newport 1902, reprinted by Nabu Press (place of publication unknown), 2012.

<sup>17</sup> W. Meredith Morris, *A Glossary of the Demetian Dialect*, Llanerch Press, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset 1991 (facsimile of 1910 edition).

<sup>18</sup> B. John, *Pembrokeshire*, Pan Books, London 1978, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133 and 135.

times say about the Welsh of Pembrokeshire, after Welsh novelist and interpreter of both languages Menna Patricia Humphreys Gallie (1919-1990), that it possesses “a macabre beauty.”<sup>20</sup>

Welsh was for a long time discriminated against after Wales was incorporated into the United Kingdom. In 1847, a famous or rather infamous Parliamentary Commission on Welsh Affairs published its *Report of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales* and initiated the practice of enforced introduction of English into Welsh schools. It was then that a special punishment was introduced for those children who refused to speak in English during their school day to discourage them from speaking in their native *cymraeg*. This punishment had the form of so-called Welsh Nots, in fact a piece of wood with inscribed letters “WN” or the words “Welsh Nots.” Such a wooden tablet or small panel was hung around the child’s neck and had to be worn on the breast until he or she overheard another child speaking Welsh. Then it could be passed to the new “guilty” child. The last bearer of the Welsh Not on that day was given a lashing. In 2010, one Welsh member of the British Parliament, Susan Jones, claimed that the use of Welsh Nots and the lashings associated with it persisted in some Welsh schools until as late as the 1930s and even 1940.<sup>21</sup>

Now Welsh is officially supported by both the British and Welsh local authorities. Persons seeking naturalization in the United Kingdom are expected and required to have, apart from an understanding of the life and institutions of the country, also a sufficient knowledge of one of the three official languages i.e. Welsh *cymraeg*, English or Scottish Gaelic. Surprisingly, there is no daily newspaper published in *cymraeg*. There is only the weekly “Y Cymro” (“The Welshman”) published in the native tongue of the Welsh. There was an attempt to establish a daily newspaper in Welsh when the publication of “Y Byd” (“The World”) was launched in 2008. It was supported officially by the Welsh local government but shortly after its first issue appeared it was scrapped because of poor sales and low levels of subscription. However, there is an online news service in *cymraeg* called “Golwg” (“The View”) which contains daily on-line news and stories. It was first established as a print magazine as long ago as in 1988.

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<sup>20</sup> I quote this expression after B. John, op. cit. p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh\\_Not](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Not)>

The original Cornish *keruwak*, also known as *kernowek* or *kernevek*, ceased to exist at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although it probably continued to be spoken in homes by some families well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some local patriots have maintained that it was unofficially continued at a family level possibly into the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thus overlapping with the beginning of revival efforts. As Peter Berresford Ellis (b. 1943), Cornish historian, literary biographer and novelist once wrote: “Although the spoken language died, Cornish still persisted in place names and in grammatical forms and words of the tongue of the ordinary people who spoke in the Cornish dialect of English.”<sup>22</sup> One of the last rather amateurish poets writing in *keruwak* was a certain farmer, John Davey or Davy of Boswednack (1812-1891), author of *Cranken Rhyme* published long after his death by John Hobson Mathews in 1892. Regardless of its literary level, which seems rather low, it should be considered the last surviving piece of the original Cornish literary tradition. All later Cornish writers used English, although as one of them wrote:

We speak your language now  
 But we sing it to our own tune  
 An ancient song  
 Liling before you came  
 And the words in our way we say  
 In the old accents  
 Singing to a question  
 And because we say it is so  
 So chanting in our memories  
 It is not your language  
 It is ours.<sup>23</sup>

Keruwak’s heritage contained in Cornish place names was sentimentally expressed by another Cornish poet Katherine Lee Jenner:

The names of our dead speech are music still  
 In our dear living land  
 Which never can be void or desolate  
 While here on every hand  
 Is still the record of our fathers’ lives

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<sup>22</sup> P. B. Ellis, *The Cornish Language and Its Literature*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, London-Boston, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> R. Davies, *We speak your language now*, in: P. B. Ellis, op. cit. p. 1-2.

Though their old hopes and fears  
Have passed away like sunlight on the hills  
Down through the path of years.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, no phonetic records of original *keruwak* were preserved, unlike in the case of *manx*. Despite the lack of original speakers and recordings, a number of local scholars and enthusiastic folklorists have started to restore *keruwak* on the basis of written records and similarities to the existing Celtic languages. It is estimated that up to several thousand Cornish people are able now to communicate in such an artificially restored *keruwak*. Since the time of revival, the efforts many Cornish textbooks and literary works have been published, especially as children's books. Also, an increasing number of the Cornish population studies *keruwak* individually. Recently, the language has been taught in a growing number of Cornish schools, there are a limited number of independent movies where *keruwak* is spoken and lyrics in *keruwak* can be heard among local bands performing pop music. Generally, the number of people speaking *keruwak* is clearly rising. It is seen as a means of demonstrating one's ethnic identity and some Cornish people have been brought up to be bilingual. *Keruwak* now has the status of a minority language of the United Kingdom.<sup>25</sup> As a result "today the Cornish language is not merely confined to snatches of dialect and place names. Today there are more people with a knowledge of the language, who can read, write and speak it, than at any time during the past 250 years. This language revival is continuing today with a fair degree of success."<sup>26</sup>

Once upon a time, the Cumbric language also belonged to the Brythonic group. It was developed from the same Brythonic base and was located between contemporary Wales and Scotland until the Anglo-Saxon conquerors, pushing West and North, reached the Irish Sea and divided the Celtic tribes of Britain into two. The more populated and culturally strong Wales was able to preserve its *cymraeg*, while the Cumbric kingdom of Strathclyde was incomparably weaker politically and lost its ethnic identity between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D., influenced from two sides: English and Scottish Gaelic. In the course of time Cumbric became strongly influenced by Scottish Gaelic. Little is known about Cumbric due to the fact that

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<sup>24</sup> Quot. after P. B. Ellis, op. cit. p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> P. B. Ellis, op. cit.; see also <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornish\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornish_language)>

<sup>26</sup> P. B. Ellis, op. cit., p. 2.



no written records were preserved. It is assumed, however, that it was mixed with Scottish Gaelic after the inclusion of Strathclyde in the kingdom of Malcolm II, ruling Scotland between 1005 and 1034.

It is not known to which Celtic group the Pictish tongue belonged. It was certainly spoken by the inhabitants of Northern Britain before and shortly after the arrival of the Scots from Ireland. All that is known about the Pictish tongue is limited to a handful of inscriptions carved in stone and a number of place names of geographical and topographical nature. There is also only one surviving word not associated with proper and place names. It is *scollofthes* meaning in plural 'spiritual leaders' or 'priests' as explained occasionally by Simeon of Durham (died after 1129) in his medieval chronicle. We do not even know, however, what its singular form looked like. In general, the remnants and preserved evidence of the Pictish language are very confusing due to the fact that original names and all preserved place names were heavily latinised or gaelicised forms, according to who wrote them down: chroniclers in monasteries using Latin or autochthonic writers in Gaelic. Due to this, the eventual features of Celticity or lack of it are much obliterated and confused by the non-Celtic influences of Latin, Gaelic and quite frequently also Scots English. The lack of precise information, not only about the Pictish language, but also culture in general was once responsible for some extreme scholarly opinions that such people did not exist at all, and that "the Picts never existed outside the imagination of Roman panegyrists."<sup>27</sup> Fortunately enough, more and more evidence provided by archaeologists, not to mention better and better analysis of remaining literary sources such as *The Pictish Chronicle*, preserved in Latin as *Chronica Pictorum*, convinces us that all attempts to deny the existence of that colourful people, at least since the publication of the first historically serious work to analyze the topic in 1953 (F. T. Wainwright, *The Problem of the Picts*), are "absurd and can be ignored."<sup>28</sup>

To be acquainted in an easy fashion with the similarities and differences existing between the better preserved Celtic languages the following table gives examples of words meaning the same in particular tongues. First let me consider those words which are quite similar, in fact, almost the same in all Celtic languages:

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<sup>27</sup> F. T. Wainwright, *The Problem of the Picts*, Nelson, Edinburgh-London-Melbourne, 1953, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

*English*

|                     |              |              |               |             |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| <i>equivalents:</i> | <i>river</i> | <i>clean</i> | <i>island</i> | <i>full</i> |
| Irish Gaelic        | abhann       | glan         | inis          | lan         |
| Scot. Gaelic        | abhainn      | glan         | innis         | lan         |
| Manx                | awin         | glan         | ynys          | lane        |
| Welsh               | avon         | glan         | ynys          | llawn       |
| Cornish             | avon         | glan         | enys          | lun         |
| Breton              | avon         | glan         | enez          | leun        |

There are also numerous groups of words so developed that they still can be identified by common roots but require careful attention:

*English*

|                     |                        |             |              |                     |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------------|
| <i>equivalents:</i> | <i>time or weather</i> | <i>year</i> | <i>sweet</i> | <i>anger</i>        |
| Irish Gaelic        | aimsir                 | bliain      | milis        | tarathar            |
| Scot. Gaelic        | aimsir                 | bliadna     | milis        | tarachair           |
| Manx                | emshyr                 | blein       | millish      | tharrar             |
| Welsh               | amser                  | blwyddyn    | melys        | tardar              |
| Cornish             | amser                  | bledhen     | melys        | tardar              |
| Breton              | amzer                  | blizen      | milis        | tarar <sup>29</sup> |

Nonetheless, there is also the third group, probably most numerous, where words were driven apart to the extent that they are now not easily recognised: especially when differences between the “P” and “Q” groups are concerned:

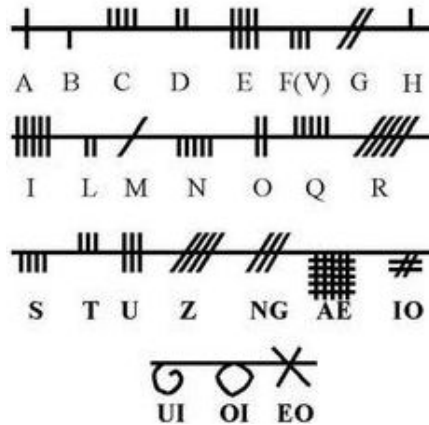
*English*

|                     |              |             |              |                    |              |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| <i>equivalents:</i> | <i>money</i> | <i>cold</i> | <i>mouse</i> | <i>to run</i>      | <i>apple</i> |
| Irish Gaelic        | airgead      | fuair       | luch         | rith               | ùll          |
| Scot. Gaelic        | airgiod      | fuair       | luch         | ruith              | ubhal        |
| Manx                | argid        | feayr       | lug          | roie               | ocyl         |
| Welsh               | arian        | oe          | llwr         | rhed               | afal         |
| Cornish             | arghanaor    | lergh       | resek        | aval               |              |
| Breton              | arc'hant-    | rec'h       | reish        | aval <sup>30</sup> |              |

<sup>29</sup> Prepared on the basis of P. B. Ellis, *The Cornish Language ...*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The most ancient alphabet used for Celtic inscription was *ogham*, which originated long before Christ. However, due to the complicated shape of particular letters, *ogham* could not serve for recording longer texts, in the same way that Roman numerals could not be used for more refined mathematical operations.



The oghamic system of lettering was based on symbols which were constructed of complicated geometrical shapes made of growing numbers of linear marks attached to one longer line. In this way the most complicated symbol of the diphthong 'ae' was made of 8 checkered lines. Such an intricate system effectively prevented the recording of longer thoughts and consequently literature of any kind. An assumption may be risked that *ogham* represented a comparatively low level in the art of writing among the Celts, but the fact that any system of writing appeared among any people at all, does, in itself, mark huge progress in civilisation. Julius Caesar reports in his *De Bello Gallico* that it was the Druids who were responsible for hampering the development of the Celtic systems of reading and writing. According to Julius Caesar, they were jealous about their position in Celtic society and prohibited the making of records by their disciples, not to mention ordinary people.

Ancient reports say that in the schools of the Druids, the pupils learned exclusively by heart a great number of verses and learned texts. Some pupils remained for twenty years under such training. The Druids, whose social, political and religious functions will be discussed in the next chapter of this book, did not think it proper to commit these utterances to writing.

Otherwise, the druids in almost all other matters made use of Greek letters but exclusively for themselves, not for other people, which is also mentioned by Caesar but is not confirmed because of the lack of suitable records. But it is certain that due to numerous contacts and even the political cooperation of some Celtic tribes with the Greeks over several centuries, that the idea of such Hellenic borrowings acquired by the druids seems very plausible.

The Ogham and Greek alphabets were not the only systems of lettering used by the Celts. In certain continental areas we can identify short inscriptions preserved in the Etruscan and Iberian alphabets employed by the Celts during their wanderings and conquests across Europe. Local Celtic elites in Britain acquired the ability to read and write in the Latin alphabet. In Ireland, the Latin alphabet entered together with Christianity, producing systems of lettering slightly different in form from pure Latin letters and showing obvious Greek influences. In fact, the Greek language was also not alien to the early Irish monks. Having such powerful rivals, *ogham* soon became a relic of the past in the British Isles, a sort of blind alley of Celtic culture. At best it was a system of lettering which did not have time enough to develop its own rational symbols and was thus unable to convey more refined ways of thinking, literature or legal regulations. This is also why the original and basic vehicle of archaic Celtic literature could historically be found exclusively in oral tradition. In the Middle Ages, numerous masterpieces of that tradition, going back as far as the most ancient Irish tradition, were fortunately enough written down by the monastic scribes. Despite the fact that time and the Christian influence – the attempt at latinization of Celtic originals and the introduction of biblical corrections and comments on pagan facts, deformed the original heathen shape of those ancient texts, they are still an inestimable record reaching deeply into the archaic past of the British Celtic communities. What we can find in these ancient texts preserved by the Christian monks will be discussed in our next chapters devoted to ancient Celtic religion and literature.

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## Chapter Three

# PAGAN CELTIC RELIGION

The main source of our knowledge about the beliefs and mythological history of the British Isles, based mostly on Irish written documents, is recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in *The Book of Invasions of Ireland*, written in Latin. This book is also a representative of one of the four main cycles of Old Celtic literature, mostly Irish, customarily called the *Mythological Cycle*. Apart from elements of mythological history, it is the richest source of information about the Pantheon of ancient Celtic gods.

It is impossible to discuss them all, but at least two main gods among the hundreds of Celtic deities should be considered here: Lugh and Dagda (sometime Dagdha).

Lugh is the most conspicuous Celtic god. Not only is he found in the British Isles but also in the tradition of all known Celtic tribes in continental Europe. Therefore, one can assume that he had a similar position among the Britons and the rest of the Celtic tribes as well.

It was mentioned in the preceding lecture that his name is included in many contemporary European place names, which commemorates at the same time areas which once were heavily influenced by Celtic culture and were also areas of significance for that god. These geographical places, as we mentioned earlier, included the Welsh Lugg, the ancient Celtic and then latinized Roman former name of contemporary Carlisle, which was Luguvallum, then we have the German Lugau, Ukrainian Lugansk, Swiss Lugano, Liège in Belgium, Lyon in France, called in ancient times Lugdunum, the Dutch Leiden (ancient Lugdunum Batavorum), Polish Legnica, Irish Lugnasadh and many others.

The word 'lugh' means in almost all Old Celtic languages 'shining' or 'this who sheds light'. In the *Book of Invasions of Ireland*, Lugh is one of the most vivid and vigorous figures. He is exceptionally strong and dexterous, always young and physically beautiful. He owns a magic spear and knows many arts and crafts. Here, in one of the old Irish legends in which Lugh appears under one of his nick-names, i.e. *Samildanach*, meaning *This Who Has Many Skills*, he arrives at King Nuadh's court in Tara, ancient capital of Ireland:

“The door keeper asked the Samildanach: ‘What art dost thou practice? For no one without an art enters Tara.’ ‘Question me’ he (Samildanach) said, ‘I am a wright’. The doorkeeper answered: ‘We need no wright. We have a wright already’ [...]. He (Samildanach) said, ‘Question me, doorkeeper. I am a smith’. The doorkeeper answered him: ‘We have a smith already’. He said ‘Question me, I am a champion’. The doorkeeper answered: ‘We need thee not. We have a champion already, Ogma son of Ethliu.’”<sup>1</sup>

A long dialogue follows. From this it appears that Lugh is in turn a harpist, a warrior, a poet and a historian, then a sorcerer, a cup-bearer and finally a metal worker. In every case he is told that a specialist in a particular profession is already present at Tara’s court. Finally, Lugh-Samildanach loses patience with all these responses and in the end he asks the doorkeeper.

“Ask the king whether he has one single man who possesses all these arts and if he has I shall not enter Tara.” The doorkeeper went into the palace and declared all to the king. ‘A warrior has come before the garth’, said he, ‘called Samildanach and that one man possesses all the arts practised by thy household so he is the man of each and every art’. ‘Let him into the garth for he is like who has never before come to this fortress’.”<sup>2</sup>

While Lugh resembles in his arts, physical beauty and characteristics, the ancient Greek Apollo, the just mentioned second greatest Celtic deity, Dagda, is usually described as an ugly god. He carries with him a huge club. A blow from one end of the club causes death while a touch of the other brings the victim back to life. According to the Celtic tradition, Dagda’s club was so huge and heavy that it could only be lifted up by eight warriors. On some occasions we can see this God carrying his club by attaching it to the thicker end of a wheel in order to drive it as a kind of a wheel-barrow, thus being also an indication of his astuteness and cleverness.

Dagda always had a big pot with him, a cauldron which was always full of food. Nobody would ever go away from the pot hungry. This symbolised at the same time a punishing or protective power, while the pot provided people with feelings of safety and well-being. One of Dagda’s

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<sup>1</sup> *Cath Maige Tureid (The Battle of Myttira)*, quot. after E. Knott & G. Murphy, *Early Irish Literature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1966, p. 111-112; compare the same text in a slightly different translation from Celtic contained in: Ch. Squire, *Celtic Myth and Legend, Poetry and Romance*, The Gresham Publishing Company, London [1905], pp. 86-88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

powers was his shrewdness, and in this respect he can be compared with Odysseus of Mediterranean antiquity. It is here, during a fight between the Folk of the Goddess Danu (Tuatha de Danan) and mythological creatures called Fomors, that the leader of the firsts, Lugh (already referred to), asks his companions what they are going to do in order to contribute to the victory: “Diancecht, the Physician said: ‘I will completely cure everyone who is wounded, provided his head is not cut-off, or his brain or spinal marrow hurt’. ‘I’ – said Goibhniu the Smith, ‘will replace every broken lance and sword with a new one, even though the war lasts seven years. And I will make the lances so well that they shall never miss their mark, or fail to kill. [...] The fate of the fighting will be decided by my lances’. ‘And I’, said Credne the bronze-worker, ‘will furnish all the rivets for the lances, the hilts for the swords, and the rims and bosses for the shields’; ‘And I’ said Luchtaine the Carpenter, ‘will provide all the shields and lance-shafts’. Ogmha the Champion promised to kill the King of the Fomors, with thrice nine of his followers, and to capture one-third of his army.”<sup>3</sup> Then Lugh asks: “‘And you, o Dagdha, [...] what will you do?’ I will fight’, said the Dagdha, ‘both with force and craft’.”<sup>4</sup>

Dagdha’s wife was Boan. She appears in a legend concerning the origins of the river Boyne in Eastern Ireland. The river is about 70 miles, or about 110 km long and it empties its waters into the Irish Sea near the town of Drogheda in Meath county. In the legend, the Boyne river sprang from a magic well created on the command of Boan. The well was overshadowed by nine magic hazel trees which bore scarlet nuts. Their special property was that anybody who ate them was to acquire knowledge about everything surrounding him. Also, in the goddess Boan’s well swam a salmon. It possessed an ability to pass on wisdom to persons who ate it because earlier this salmon had swallowed the scarlet nuts which had fallen from the just mentioned hazel tree bending its branches over Boan’s well. However, in the course of time, the legend about the salmon, as a fish of wisdom, spread to other areas through myths and traditions. One of the legends about Fionn Mac Cumhaill, who was the main hero of the so-called *Fenian Cycle* of Irish literature (to be discussed later), mentions that he possessed universal wisdom after eating a salmon which lived in Fec Lake, far away from the River Boan. Among the British Celtic gods, Birgit, the daughter of Dagda,

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<sup>3</sup> Ch. Squire, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 87.



was a patroness of literature and poetic inspiration. She was also a patroness of fertility and the hearth. This rather unusual combination of functions probably resulted from the fact that the Celts considered poetry as a non-material and spiritual embodiment of fire. A similar combination of two such distant domains was, for instance, unknown in Mediterranean mythologies. For in Greek and Roman religions, neither Hestia, of ancient Greece, nor Vesta of Rome, as the goddesses of home affairs and the hearth (fireplace), carried out or even partly fulfilled any function associated with poetry which was so obviously ascribed to the Muses, especially Kalioppe to epic poetry and Erato to lyrics.

The equivalent of the Hellenic Hefaistos or the Roman Volcanus was, among the Celts, an Irish God-smith Goibhniu, or his Welsh counterpart Goffanon. Irish Mannanon Mac Lir, i.e. Mannan the Son of the Sea, was a deity in Celtic mythology comparable with the Greek Poseidonios or the Roman Neptune. Mannawydan mab Llŷr was his counterpart in Wales. This god appears in the later versions of *Leabhara Gabhala Eireann*, where, however, Tethra was initially god of the sea.

The complete pantheon of Celtic gods embraces at least several hundred figures and here it is not appropriate to discuss such matters so extensively. Fortunately, there are numerous works dealing with Celtic mythology and religion, many of which are published in almost all European languages. These publications should be consulted in order to glean fuller knowledge of the subject.<sup>5</sup>

Having become acquainted with the major inhabitants of the Celtic Olympus, it is worth taking a closer look at the most special class of people who cared for the worshipping of these deities here on earth, i.e. druids.

A popular myth treats druids as Celtic priests. In reality they were much more than that. They formed a sort of spiritual authority and a political elite that slowly came into existence, ruling over the Celtic communities, even including its aristocracy, who submitted to the druids to a great extent. Apart from acting as priests, the druids were also teachers, keepers of the historic tradition, medicine men, heathen theologians and obsessed fortune tellers. Druidism, as a social institution, transcended tribal divisions, and we know three of its biggest centres – telling us at the

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance: A. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, Constable, London 1967; P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, Hamlyn Publishing Group, London-New York-Sydney-Toronto 1970; R. Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy*, Blackwell, Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA, 1991.

same time about the extent of Celtic civilization: Tara in Ireland, now in Meath county some 35 km north of Dublin, Carnatum or Carnutum in Gallia (present-day Châtres), and finally, the third one known from ancient literature as Drunemeton in Turkish Galatia around 50 km south of the Turkish capital, Ankara. Not too many remnants of the Celtic religious past exist in these places. But in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, which was earlier located on the spot where Druid ceremonies were held around a well, we can still admire that well after it was discovered under the cathedral crypt.

The appellation “druid” probably stems from the root *dr-*, thanks to which, in other languages of Indo-European origin, there emerged appellations and notions connected with trees or oaks. These are for example, Sanskrit *dru*, Old Greek *dryes*, Old English *treo*, Modern English *tree*, Polish *drzewo*, Russian *dierievo*. Also, in the Celtic languages this very root was a base for appellations for a tree: Gaelic *draoi* or *draidh*, Cornish *druw*, Irish Gaelic *druw*, Scotch Gaelic *dru*, or Manx *dru*.

The second part of the appellation *-uid*, or in another spelling *-uidh*, has a lot of meanings, and may, in different Celtic languages, including contemporary ones, mean hope, expectation, concern, will, wish, degree of knowledge, journey, care or good grace, not to mention some other more or less important meanings. The full appellation *druid*, most probably, ambiguously meant somebody who was connected with the worshipping of trees, travelled to holy trees, had a lot of knowledge concerning the subject, etc. It is quite probable that this language ambiguity created uncertainty and, at the same time, a special mystery and magic regarding the functions the druids fulfilled.

Despite such vagueness, it is a fact that the duties the druids fulfilled were certainly connected with rites among trees, usually situated in the deep forests. On the continent, those were most often secluded trees, particularly oaks of exceptional size and shape located in mysterious places, for instance close to foggy swamps. The Greek historian Strabon, living in the first century B.C., described such a place as *drunemeton* – an oak sanctuary. The same Greek-like appellation, *drunemeton*, as we know from preceding comments, is the name of the location of the druidic cult in Galatia in the present Turkish Anatolia. A few Roman authors, like Julius Caesar, describe in turn the centres of druidism as “consecrated spots” or linguistically reconstructed *locus consecratus* or *locum consecratum*, depending on the type of declension, which cannot be finally es-

tablished due to the fact that this term appears in ancient texts exclusively in forms other than the nominative as *loco consecrato*.<sup>6</sup>

It was a little different on the British Isles. The oak was not respected there as much as on the European continent and the Brittonic druids preferred trees, sometimes even bushes, of a totally different kind. “Their sacred wood was not the oak, as in Gaul, but the *yew*, *hawthorn* and especially the *rowan*.”<sup>7</sup>

The druids were a subject of many ancient descriptions. Apart from Julius Caesar and Strabon, they were also mentioned by Poseidonios of Apamea (135-50 B.C.), Diogenes Laertios of Cilicia (II B.C.), Diodoros of Sicilia and Marcus Ammianus Lukan (both 1 A.D.). All of them wrote more or less extensively about that unusual caste of people. There is no doubt, however, that the most complete of those ancient texts comes from Julius Caesar’s work titled *De Bello Gallico – On the Gaulish War*:

Julius Caesar conquered Gallia (approximately the territory of contemporary France) and subdued the most powerful Celtic ruler Vercingetorix. Vercingetorix was at the time the most able Gaulish ruler, trying quite successfully to unite and consolidate separate and constantly quarrelling Celtic tribes. He even coined his own money, thus demonstrating the consistency and advancement of the newly emerging Celtic realm. Vercingetorix came to power in 52 B.C. when he was proclaimed king of the Gauls at Gregovia, one of the Celtic settlements preceding towns. Because the Romans had just started to conquer Gaulish territory, Vercingetorix initiated a strong military alliance with a number of neighbouring Celtic tribes. Then he commanded the Celtic armed forces and led them against the Roman legions. Initially, he won the Battle of Gregovia, in which about seven hundred Roman legionaries were killed, together with forty-six commanders named centurions (a centurion was a commander of a troop with 100 soldiers). In the same battle more than six thousand le-

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<sup>6</sup> See: *C. Iulii Caesaris Bellum Gallicum*, in: *C. Iulii Caesaris Commentari rerum gestarum*, vol. I, ed. O. Seel, Lipsiae MCMLXVIII, p. 185 and Caesar, *The Gallic War*, with an English translation by H. J. Edwards, London & Cambridge Massachusetts, MCMLVIII, p. 336: “Hi certo anni tempore in finibus Carnutum, quae regio totius Galliae media habetur, considunt in loco consecrato” – “... at a certain time of the year, [they] meet within the borders of the Carnutes, whose territory is reckoned as the centre of all Gaul, and sit in conclave in a consecrated spot,” *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>7</sup> E. Dwelly, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, Gairm Publications, Glasgow 1973 (1901), p. 364.

gionaries were injured, whereupon Caesar's army withdrew from the battlefield as losers. Nevertheless, just a few months later, in the Battle of Alesia, the army of Julius Caesar besieged and finally defeated Vercingetorix's troops and captured him. This moment was depicted in the well known nineteenth century painting titled *Vercingetorix Throws Down his Arms at the Feet of Julius Caesar* by Lionel Noel Royer (1899).

Vercingetorix was held by the Romans as a prisoner of war for the next five years. In 46 B.C. Julius Caesar returned to Rome and wanted to demonstrate his power during his so-called triumph, a kind of celebratory parade with prisoners of war. Then Vercingetorix, together with his fellow-Gaulish-warriors, were forced to parade in chains through the streets of Rome, and after that, on the direct will of the Caesar, simply sentenced to death by strangulation.

Going back to druids, Caesar writes in his *De bello Galico*: "Throughout Gaul there are two classes of persons of definite account and dignity [...] one consists of Druids, the other of knights. The former are concerned with divine worship, the due performance of sacrifices, public and private, and the interpretation of ritual questions: a great number of young men gather about them for the sake of instruction and hold them in great honour. In fact, it is they who decide in almost all disputes, public and private; and if any crime has been committed, or murder done, or there is any dispute about the succession or boundaries, they also decide it, determining rewards and penalties; if any person or people does not abide by their decision, they ban such from sacrifice, which is their heaviest penalty. Those that are so banned – Julius Caesar continues – are reckoned as impious and criminal; all men move out of their path and shun their approach and conversation, for fear they may get some harm from their contact, and no justice is done if they seek it, no distinction falls to their share. Of all these Druids one is chief, who has the highest authority among them. At his death, either any other that is pre-eminent in position succeeds, or, if there be several of equal standing, they strive for the primacy by the vote of the Druids, or sometimes even with armed force. "These druids" – Julius Caesar continues – at a certain time of the year meet within the borders of the Carnutes, whose territory is reckoned as the centre of all Gaul, and sit in conclave in a consecrated spot. Thither assemble from every side all that have disputes, and they obey the decisions and judgements of the Druids."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Caesar, *The Gallic War*, with an English transl.H. J. Edwards, op. cit. pp. 335-337.

The relative credibility of Caesar's judgements about the druids stems, among other things, from the fact that one of his personal advisers and friends in the time of war in Gaul was a druid from the Eudu tribe whose name, however, remains unknown. It was not mentioned by Caesar, most probably in order to save him from discovery by his Celtic compatriots and their potential vengeance for his services rendered to the Roman invaders. Nevertheless, Caesar's opinions concerning the druids from the British Isles must be treated with great caution. Although his masterpiece contains two books devoted to his two unsuccessful attempts to conquer Britain in 55 and in 54 B.C., he writes almost exclusively about the Gaulish druids of the European continent, not of the British Isles. Despite this omission, *De Bello Gallic (On the Gaulish War)* nevertheless comprises one of the very first sources of written knowledge on the British Isles.

Caesar's work seems reliable, however, when he writes about Britain as the most important druidic teaching centre in all Europe, not only on the British Islands. There were also other dissimilarities concerning, for example, questions about life after death. As Caesar suggests, the continental druids believed in the existence of the soul and reincarnation: "The cardinal doctrine in which they seek to teach is that souls do not die, but after death pass from one to another" ("In primis hoc volunt persuadere, non interire animas, sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios").<sup>9</sup> Similar opinions can be found in the works of Diodorus, Strabon, Lukan and Ammianus Marcellinus, but all of them refer to the continental Celts. Such beliefs are not at all mentioned in the oldest preserved texts from the Celtic literature of the British Isles. We read there not about a conception of the soul or reincarnation but about a transmigration of the human body to another world. It can best be seen in the example of the Irish People of the Goddess Danu (*Tuatha de Danan*), living in the Celtic Elisium, which was called *Magh Mell*, from where its members could come back to earth at a freely chosen time and in their former carnal personifications. Death, according to this view, is a kind of a temporal visit to another reality, and by no means an act of the body being left by a soul aiming at the beyond. The Scottish Gaelic authority, Edward Dwelly, has spoken "of the belief in transmigration, as being a part of the early mythology both of Britain and Ireland. It is to be understood that Irish pagan beliefs do not exactly

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Latin and English text respectively, p. 338 and 339.

correspond with Caesar's observations regarding the teaching of the druids in Gaul. In the pagan literature of Ireland, we do not find the least trace of a belief in the life after death. The mortals that went into Magh Mell, or the Irish pagan Elysium, did not go there by means of, or after, death; they went as visitors, who could return again to earth at will."<sup>10</sup> This interpretation of human life and death caused a lot of conflicts when Christianity arrived in the British Isles, when pagan beliefs and ritual had not yet been eradicated. St. Patrick's preaching "brought him into constant opposition with the druids, who were evidently, at that time regarded as religious leaders of the nation."<sup>11</sup>

We cannot say much about the druids' rites today, since they were conscientiously kept secret and away from the uninitiated. This was also the reason for the very different and rather imagined suppositions of ancient authors. Those suppositions were often far from the truth, as usual, when a lack of information is supplemented by speculation and imagination. This refers mainly to the sacrificing practices of the druids. They were supposed to have killed people, including children, to have burned their blood over the fire, to have foretold the future from the entrails of ritualistically killed animals and human beings. The frequency in which that kind of information appears in Greek and Latin literature makes one think that those practices might have been really in use though it is difficult to tell to what extent. Edward Dwell, convinced about that role of the druids, writes about it: "there does not seem to be much sign that they were, as they undoubtedly were, even at an earlier age in Britain and Gaul, sacrificing priests."<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the rites of that kind were performed only with the bodies of the dead, and it was only the imagination of those who never took part in such rites to tell the rest. It could also have been a propaganda mechanism, initiated by the Romans and their writers, similar to that concerning the Jews in modern times. The Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were groundlessly accused of the ritual murder of children for their ritualistic dish called *maca*. The purpose was to discredit the Jews in order to justify later Russian pogroms or Nazi murders. Of course, the word propaganda, although Latin, was unknown by the Romans. Whether their actions were of this kind, regardless of how they

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<sup>10</sup> E. Dwelly, op. cit., entry: *Filidh*, p. 434.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

were named, we can consider the reports of them as propagandistic (the word propaganda entered modern languages early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Roman Catholic Church established the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*, in Latin *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*). The druids formed the main centre of spiritual and military resistance to Roman aggression, and Roman propaganda aimed at the enemies of the Roman Empire was a normal and frequent thing. Not accidentally, sharp condemnation of the druids and their alleged cruelty can be found in one of the Emperor Claudius' acts preceding his invasion of Britain. This is why the Romans accused the druids of committing the worst possible crimes, including murdering children for religious sacrifices. The purpose was clear: to show the druids as a cast unworthy of being members of civilised society, a group of people which should be, by all possible means and at any price, annihilated. Some part of the druids' atrocities, if they ever occurred, should be attributed, however, not only to religious practices, but to forms of punishment for disobedience. Posidonios wrote about the crates, probably woven from soft branches, creepers or willow, in the shape of a human body. Disobedient members of Celtic society were put in them. Then such a crate containing a human creature was hanged in order to keep a particular person in the eyes of the rest of the society, as an example and at the same time as a convincing show arranged to discipline rebellious individuals among the Celtic people who could expect to be penalized in the same way.

In the case of a more severe punishment, such a crate was burnt together with its occupant! If there was a necessity to burn more captives or criminals, a much bigger structure was erected called a "wicker man," able to hold dozens of the sentenced victims. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* translated by William Duncan (1753), we can see a supposed illustration of a *big wicker man*, the form of a collective execution that allegedly the druids used for human sacrifice. To what extent such punishment could have been used by the druids, nobody can guess today.

Julius Caesar writes about burning people alive in a slightly different context. He does not say this custom was a punishment but rather a sacrifice to the Gods. He admits that the people sacrificed were criminals deserving severe punishment, but sometimes they were also innocent people, probably slaves or prisoners of war. Sacrifices like those were to be offered by wealthy people in the case of an illness or danger: "The whole nation of the Gauls is greatly devoted to ritual observances, and for that

reason those who are smitten with the more grievous maladies and who are engaged in the perils of battle either sacrifice human victims or vow so to do, employing the Druids as ministers for such sacrifices. They believe, in effect, that, unless for a man's life a man's life be paid (*pro vita hominis vita reddatur*), the majesty of the immortal gods may not be appeased; and in public, as in private life they observe and ordinance of sacrifices of the same kind. Others use figures of immense size (*immani magnitudine simulacra*), whose limbs woven out of twigs, they fill with living men (*vivis hominibus*) and set on fire, and the men perish in a sheet of flame. They believe that the execution of those who have been caught in the act of theft or robbery or some crime is more pleasing to the immortal gods; but when supply of such fails they resort to the execution even of the innocent."<sup>13</sup>

In another place Julius Caesar writes that there were religious dictates to lay down all the loot in consecrated places, and that very few dared to conceal part of the capture. The reason for that was simple: "the most grievous punishment, with torture, is ordained for such an offence." It is not certain, however, if punishment of that sort was ordered by the druids, because in another fragment of Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* one can read that the main repression employed for disobedience to their orders was an exclusion of a particular individual from religious rites, "which is their heaviest penalty" ("haec poena apud eos est gravissima").

Caesar also emphasizes the importance of funeral ceremonies, in which the druids presided. "Their funerals, considering the civilization of Gaul, are magnificent and expressive. They cast into the fire everything, even living creatures, which they believe to have been dear to the departed during life, and but a short time before the present age, only a generation since, slaves and dependents known to have been beloved by their lords used to be burnt with them at the conclusion of the funeral formalities."<sup>14</sup>

The frequency of the occurrence of the human head picture in Celtic art leads celtologists to believe that this particular part of the human body was the subject of great symbolic importance amongst the druids. They probably believed it was a centre enlivening the body and containing wisdom: "The human head was regarded by the Celts as being symbolic of

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<sup>13</sup> Caesar, *The Gallic War*, with an English trans. H. J. Edwards, op. cit. Latin text p. 340, English transl. p. 341.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344 and 345.



divinity and otherworld powers. The motive of the severed head figures throughout the entire of field of Celtic cult practice, temporally and geographically, and it can be traced in both representational and literary contexts from the very beginning of the latter part of the tradition.”<sup>15</sup>

Since humans’ earliest religious awareness, visible in different cultures, including non-European ones, the human head has been an important focus of mysterious interest and superstitious activities and has consequently produced various rites contributing to the fulfilment of a particular religion. Thus, the cult of the head is by no means unusual or unique to the Celts. What can be considered as unique for the Celtic world, are their beliefs associated with it. They are innumerable in their functions and shapes. They can be associated with sacred waters, represent the courage of the warrior, godly control of the world represented by three-faced heads (*tricephaloi*), the horned head typical for the Roman period of Britain’s history, they can even possess phallic significance and finally they can be used as symbols of certain values on Celtic coins. The preserved “literary and folk tradition of Ireland and Wales” reveals especially the full significance of the human head as a venerated object. The vernacular tradition, although compiled some centuries after the advent of Christianity to the British Isles, does contain fragments of genuine pre-Christian cults and rites. [...] Although there is no statement in early Welsh or Irish written tradition to the effect that the Celts worshipped the human head, the frequent references to it, and the nature of these references fully demonstrates that this was indeed the case, and throws some light on the ways in which it was revered as a cult symbol. [...] The best known, and the most convincing description of what we can only describe as a ‘god-head’ comes from the Welsh tradition. It concerns the head of the mythological figure *Bran*, known as *Bendigeidfran*, “Blessed Raven.” In the *Mabinogion* he is described as “being so vast in size that no house could ever contain him, a feature suggestive of his original deity. When he goes to attack Ireland he wades there, followed by his fleet, but he himself carries poets and musicians, a fact suggestive perhaps of his special patronage of the arts.”<sup>16</sup>

It is also certain that the druids accumulated considerable astronomical and mathematical knowledge. The Alexandrian scholars of Egypt spoke about this with the utmost respect. The so-called *Coligny Calendar*,

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<sup>15</sup> A. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

hewn in a bronze slab and found in one of the French vineyards, contains data binding particular days with the stars in a period of 62 months. It is made with extreme mathematical precision, and is not shaken by connections with the divinations: the calendar also points out the lucky and unlucky days. Caesar, too, writes that the druids “have many discussions as to touching the stars and their movement, the size of the universe and of the earth, the order of nature, the strength and the powers of the immortal gods and hand down their lore to the young men.”<sup>17</sup> That knowledge could have been somehow connected with the already discussed stone centres, the so-called *hengés*, like Stonehenge. Their structure made allowances for astronomical observations that were unscrupulously used by priests in many religious systems. Those rings made of huge stones, although not built by the Celts, suited almost perfectly the purpose of demonstrating the religious position of the druids when they eventually entered British soil. Those stone rings, then, could have also been places where the druids could bring their disciples to acquaint them with astronomical and magic knowledge. There is no direct proof that *hengés* were used by the druids, either as their “temples” or “druidic academies.” That is partially the reason for many scholars having been distrustful about this matter for a long time, while a number of them have often explicitly discounted such a possibility. However, still in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, William Stukeley (1687-1765) was totally convinced that Stonehenge was a druidic temple. Later on though, a quite unequivocal conviction was shaped that druidism was of Celtic origin. So, since the first Celtic appearance on the British Isles took place in a period much later than the stone circles were built, they could not have been erected by druids in the early period of their appearance. However, it could be possible that later they continued erecting some, usually smaller, stone circles. Some arguments and quite firm proofs for such a hypothesis are provided by archaeology. In the 1940s, C. E. Stevens described a little stone ring in Frilford, recognising that it was built in the Iron Age. Until that moment it was believed that all of the stone circles originated much earlier, beginning with the Neolithic Age and continued during the so-called Bronze Age, but not the Iron Age. Later on, similar discoveries were made in Navan and Dun Ailinne.

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<sup>17</sup> Caesar, *The Gallic War*, with an English translation by H. J. Edwards, op. cit., p. 338 and 339.

There is also an interesting question about whether stone circles, when considered as druidic temples, were covered by roofs. All such constructions, but especially those later ones, which started their existence in the times of druidic activities in Britain, were suspected in the 1970s by Stuart Piggott of being Celtic shrines provided with wooden roofs on pillars that suffered destruction in the course of time. In Stuart Piggott's opinion, those roofs also had bigger rings dating back to earlier periods. He writes that: "within British late Neolithic Henge monuments of about 2,000 B.C. as at Durrington Walls, Marden or Mount Pleasant in Wessex may lie circular settings of massive posts that may be roofed temples, fossilized in stone in the inner Circles at Avebury."<sup>18</sup> It seems to be much more important here that the architectural experiences of the earlier periods were carried on into the Iron Age, and in this context the roof question, though interesting in itself, seems of secondary importance.

We already know that druidism did not necessarily originate from Celtic culture. Of course, it could have been connected with the religion of the continental Celts and only with their coming to the British Islands did the local pre-Celtic, perhaps even pre-Indo-European religions (connected, among other things, with stone rings), absorb some of the essential ritual features. The situation could have been, however, quite the opposite, if we assume that druidism was a purely Brittonic and even pre-Indo-European phenomenon, adopted afterwards by the Celts at the moment when their culture reached the British Isles, either by migration or diffusion stemming from the continent. Then it could have been propagated back to the Celts of the European Mainland. And Caesar confirms this quite clearly when he writes that "their rule of life was discovered in Britain and transferred thence to Gaul; and to-day those who would study the subject more accurately journey, as a rule, to Britain to learn it."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> S. Piggott, *Nemeton, Temenos Botros. Sanctuaries of the Ancient Celts*, in: *I Celti e la loro kultura Nel epoca pre-Romana e Romana nella Britannia*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome 1978, pp. 50-51.

<sup>19</sup> Caesar, *The Gallic War*, with an English translation by H. J. Edwards, op. cit. p. 337 respectively. Due to the importance of that comment, showing the direction of mutual influences of both continental and insula Celtic cultures, we give this passage in the Latin original: "Disciplina in Britannia reperta atque inde in Galliam translata esse existimatur, et nunc, qui diligentius eam remcognoscere volunt, plerumque illo discendi causa proficiscuntur," *ibid.*, p. 336.

As Stuart Piggott says: “To correlate any religion, especially when very imperfectly understood, with archaeological sites where a bare minimum of tangible evidence survives, is hazardous in the extreme. But Celtic religion can be illustrated not only by literary sources, iconography and epigraphy, but by the archaeological evidence from sites which may be fairly be regarded as shrines, sanctuaries or temples. It is through this evidence that our time-scale can be extended into prehistory, and into substrates of practice and beliefs impossible to infer by other means.”<sup>20</sup>

After the conquering of Britain by the Romans, druidic activities suddenly declined. This is connected with the open persecution of this cast, and also its physical extermination. The most famous example of this was the massacre of druids carried out by Gaius Svetonius Paulinus in 60 A.D. on Mona Island or today’s Anglesey. Gaius Svetonius Paulinus was nominated the governor of Roman Britain in 58 or 59 A.D., replacing Quintus Veranius, who had died from exhaustion when hunting British rebels. In 60 A.D. Svetonius invaded the Western part of what is today Wales. Mona Island (or today’s Anglesey or in Welsh – Ynys Môn) became the main target of his expedition because the druids were gathered there to discuss and prepare resistance towards Roman invasion. Svetonius, following them, occupied a very strategic place, namely the outlet of the River Dee to the Irish Sea. It was here that he started preparations for the invasion of Northern Wales and Mona – Anglesey – Ynys Môn, which took him almost a year. To overcome the narrow sea strait between Mona and Britain, a large fleet of flat-bottomed boats was constructed, probably modelled after the Celtic *corwc* (Engl. *coracles*). Finally, a decisive conquest of the island was initiated. It was dramatically described by Tacitus, a Roman historian in his famous work titled *Annalia (The Annals)*: “Along the sea shore there stood dense rows of armed men, while Celtic women, dressed like Furiae in black dresses were running between the warriors, streaming their hair and holding torches. The druids stood in a circle offering sacrifices to their gods, raising their hands to the heaven and cursing at the conquerors. Frightened with what they saw, the soldiers stood stock-still and exposed their set bodies for the wounds made with swords. Only the urging commands of their leaders and mutual spiritual support to resist this troops of women and fanatics caused that holding their battle symbols

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<sup>20</sup> S. Piggott, *Nemeton, Temenos Botros. Sanctuaries of the Ancient Celts*, op. cit., p. 54.

they finally attacked those druids who stood in front of them wounding them severely.”<sup>21</sup>

Later on, Tacitus continues – “the conquered were taken into custody and during the day they were executed because of savage superstitions practices and because it was believed that it was their privilege to sacrifice the blood of prisoners on the altars and ask the gods for advice with the help of human intestines.”<sup>22</sup>

Over one thousand druids were executed on Mona by the soldiers of Svetonius Paulinus. Earlier, a similar massacre of druids was carried out by the Romans in contemporary Pribemont in France, where they acted in a way similar to their Anglesey performance.

It was, incidentally, during the description of the massacre of the Druids at the Island of Anglesey, that the name “Londinium” appears in Tacitus’s *Annalia*. He concludes his description of the massacre with information that “Svetonius was urged to leave Mona because of a great anti-Roman rebellion (led by Queen Boudicca) during which Londinium was devastated and set on fire.”<sup>23</sup>

Only when the social organization of the Celts was deprived of its druidic backbone, did the Celtic religion begin to enjoy almost complete liberty among the Brittonic folk. This was manifested, for example, in a specific settlement with the Roman religion, with the mixture of the two called Romano-Celtic Beliefs. Nevertheless, the Romans never allowed the restoration of druidism. On the other hand, when Britain stopped being an imperial province of Rome, the progress of Christianisation excluded the broader range of the revitalization of druidism, though their ceremonies in small isolated communities lasted within Britain probably until the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The situation of druidism in Ireland and Northern Britain, where Roman legions were never able to stay, was different, however. On the whole it survived much longer than in central and southern Britain, but the actual extermination of the “training centre” situated in Great Britain slowed down the inflow of new druidic cadres in the British Isles to a substantial degree. After the fall of Gallia, and its druidic cult centre in

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<sup>21</sup> *Cornelii Taciti Opera. Annalium*, XI – XVI, ex recensione I. A. Ernesti, Lipsiae, no year given, pp. 869-870, my own translation.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Carnutum, and because of the long distance to Drunemeton in Galatia, the Irish Tara became practically the mainstay of the druids. Meanwhile, the needs of the Green Island were great in this respect. Hence, not being able to rely on Britain, it suddenly faced the need to train suitable candidates itself, although without the relevant traditions and experience. Probably, two new druidic centres in *Armagh* and *Cruachan* came to life during the period of Roman occupation of Britain, as if trying to make up for the losses on the continent and in Roman Britannia. Yet one has to consider the time span of druidic training. Caesar says it was around 20 years. The sudden cutting off of the hitherto existing centres certainly caused a generation gap, which was very difficult to compensate for quickly. Probably, it was then decided to shorten the preparatory time, which then caused druidic dilettantism to appear. We can observe its echoes in the oldest Irish pagan texts. That is why the druids slowly began to lose their importance and spiritual power. The “specialists” began to appear, who took over some of the previous druidic functions. The Brehon, for instance, had the competence of a ‘guard and interpreter of the law’ at that time. The role of spiritual leadership and the function of a poetic art teacher, with reference to higher society, especially to sovereigns and nobility, was taken by bards of higher rank, i.e. *ollamhs* and *fillids*, who we will discuss somewhat later.

Thus, druidism was definitely doomed in the British Isles. But there are nowadays some attempts to reinvigorate it as a pagan cult, celebrated in June at Stonehenge every year on the June 21st solstice, the longest day of the year, when the Sun reaches the position of its greatest distance from the celestial equator. Whether this renewal of Celtic ritual should be treated seriously or not, we shall leave to our readers for consideration.

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## Chapter Four

# “I AM THE STRENGTH OF ART”: A POET IN ARCHAIC CELTIC SOCIETY

In the ancient *Book of Invasion of Ireland (Leabhar Gabh-ála Eireann)*, Anhairghin, one of the two oldest, and known by name, pre-Christian poets of Erin, sings his exquisite song in which he identifies himself with the surrounding nature. Nature is the source of his poetic strength :

I am an estuary into the sea.  
I am a wave of the ocean.  
I am the sound of the sea.  
I am a powerful ox.  
I am a hawk on a cliff.  
I am a dewdrop in the sun.  
I am a plant of beauty  
I am a boar for valour.  
I am a salmon in a pool.  
I am a lake in a plain.  
I am the strength of art.<sup>1</sup>

Although this fragment was left to us by Anhairghin, it is Coirbre who is considered as the first Celtic poet known by name and is mentioned just a few lines before Anhairghin in the same masterpiece of ancient Irish literature.

The role of poetry in Celtic society was unique, especially when compared with its role in more modern societies. A poet was much more than just a verse maker, a serviceable singer, and much more than an artist, even of the highest rank. He was, above all, an interpreter of nature, which sounds evidently imprecise until it is realised what is hidden behind this plausible obviousness. First of all, nature encircled men in those times more closely and more thoroughly than today. The Irish community did not escape it as early and as premeditatedly as other Europeans, especially the Mediterranean peoples.

There were no towns considered as culture centres. Poetry was neither an aesthetic domain nor a means of sentimental contemplation to which a

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted after P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, Hamlyn Publishing Group, London-New York-Sydney-Toronto 1975, p. 64.



man could devote himself in a time free from life's hardships, or in revolt against them. Poetry was for Celts the expression, and, at the same time, the essence of human life, connected inseparably with nature. This was not, however, a biological, instinctive bond with nature, as perceived by primitive man. The intellectual and emotional development of the Celts preceded the development of their material culture and political organization. A poet was for them a philosopher who significantly outgrew his rather unrefined reality. He was an interpreter of natural laws into the language of humanly understood ideas, a collector of past experience and its public explainer. It was from the past that he drew lessons about the principle of coexistence with the outside world and then transformed them into symbols and truths, making them clear for those who were not sufficiently endowed by the gods or were without poetic ability.

Nobody dared to neglect the one who could have an effective influence upon the community via the strength of his words. First of all, the Celtic chief of a tribe, later the king or *ri*, showed tremendous consideration for poets. In his comprehension, the poet became something of a spiritual complement, and, at the same time, a source of opposition to lay authority, the guardian of ancestral laws, and again, the praiser and panegyrist of the ruler, and (when the latter deserved it), his uncompromising critic and moralist.

"It is not enough to be acclaimed king, leader, and hero" – Stefan Czarnowski wrote about the relationship between a Celtic ruler and a poet – "he should embody magic as an attribute of his predecessors, and even should be just the embodiment of the predecessors themselves. Furthermore, he should fulfil religious functions associated with his position. As his king he is responsible for rain and sunshine, for the harvest and the fertility of flocks. To cope with all this efficiently, he needs to know auguries and incantations which make spiritual powers act properly. Who is aware of the mysterious words if not a poet announcing victory or defeat by a ready tongue? Thus, the Celtic poet of the pagan epoch was a diviner and enchanter. Besides being a druid, a priest who celebrated rites and studied through secret knowledge, he stood as a poet and as a master of effective words which recalled the past and decided fate."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S. Czarnowski, *Literatury celtyckie (Celtic Literatures)*, in Polish *Wielka literatura powszechna (Great Universal Literature)*, ed. S. Lam, Publ. House Trzaska, Evert, Michalski, Warszawa 1932, vol. 3, p. 11.

Can we agree with Czarnowski, who places the Celtic divine poetry maker next to the druid? Yes, and at the same time, no. The spiritual territory of the poets' and druids' vocations overlap, to a great extent, though not entirely. They differed from one another quite considerably with regards to the social location and psychological circle of their actions, and the influences stemming from them. Both druids and poets were concerned with the upbringing of their Celtic youth and the morality of their adults, consolidating and storing ethnic consciousness among the people. Moreover, each used poetry for their own purposes. Druids' concerns, however, were magical and cultish, reaching as far as shamanistic traditions, and also prophetic, while poets (although they often made use of the same spheres of Celtic religious imagery), were not so interested in the ritual aspect. Both druids and poets constituted the link between the human and nature, the human and the past. Nevertheless, druids built their "church" on this basis, while poets acted on behalf of their lay masters who, in turn, did not, of course, stand aside from religion and naturally had a close relationship with it. While the former were teachers equipped with religious sanctions, the latter rectified faults within their society through scathing satire.

Finally, literature was mainly a tool for druids, a mnemonic technique for absorbing knowledge while for poets, literature was the subject in itself. However, it should be remembered that both the concept of the poet and his poetry remained in the Celtic reality "extremely archaic and differed completely from the classical and present perception of a poet as a creator of literature."<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that in many cases there was a blurred line between the two vocations: some druids were poets, and vice versa, many poets were trained for a druidic role, and sometimes each fulfilled both functions at other times, concentrating on only one of them. Such variation makes it difficult to draw a clear boundary or to mark the difference between both spiritual professions.

The functions peculiar to a poet, the gradation of ranks, and the kinds of poets, were not defined precisely. There was not a "poet in general" in Celtic society. Instead of this, there were various types of poets : ollavs, filids and bards; each of these names denoted a different kind, or different rank, in the art of composing and reciting verses within different Celtic communities. Their scope and mutual relations, also the specific poetic grades hidden be-

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<sup>3</sup> D. Ó Corrain, *Ireland before the Normans*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1980, p. 74.

hind them, varied according to the historical period and the region. The role of the poet in Brythonic societies underwent the greatest changes, as almost four centuries of Roman rule ruined the highest categories of court poets. There was no time to revive the Celtic tradition in Britain in a way similar to Ireland because the Anglo-Saxon and Norman invasions caused new political and social situations: a new type of poet defending the threatened ethnicity of the Celts was necessary. In this situation we observe the reconstruction of the poetic profession, responding to new needs and people's expectations. Thus, the rank of the lowest categories of bards who survived Roman occupation was raised to the function of defender of endangered ethnic traditions. This will be discussed in another chapter.

Meanwhile, Ireland, being for a long time free from the turbulent changes which continental Europe and Britain experienced, preserved its community and poetic hierarchy almost untouched until the conquest of Oliver Cromwell in the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

“The Gaelic social order in Ireland lasted for centuries, from before the beginnings of recorded history into the seventeenth century. It was in many ways an archaic society, the origins of whose institutions are to be sought in the remote period of Indo-European unity. In this society, the composing of poetry was not the occupation of the specially gifted, the aesthete, or the dilettante. Poetry, even in Christian times, had the nature of a religious institution and was so closely woven into the fabric of political Gaeldom that without it, society could not continue to exist unless by changing its very essence.”<sup>4</sup>

The greatest preserved block of Old Celtic literature in Ireland undeniably reached as far back as the pagan epoch but was virtually recorded from oral tradition by medieval scribes. Nevertheless, what was saved by them allows for quite an accurate reconstruction of the poetic craft, cultivated there since the remotest of prehistoric times. This reconstruction can embrace, to a certain extent, the Celtic world in general, in the same manner as the ancient Slavic languages can be reconstructed on the basis of the only one preserved form- Old Church Slavonic.

In Irish society, as in other Celtic ones, a poet, in general, was termed a bard. The term has been preserved to the present day, and is written and pronounced almost identically in all the main Celtic languages: *Ir. Gael.* b a r d; *Welsh* b a r d d (b e i r d d), *Scot. Gael.* b a r d. As particular grades of po-

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<sup>4</sup> J. Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet*, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1967, p. 5.

ets developed, however, the term 'bard' began to denote the lowest rank in Ireland, a rather plebeian status.

A poet of higher rank became a 'filid', (also *f i l e*, *f i l i d h* or, *f i l i d d*), from which the Irish Gaelic name of poetry and the art of versification – *f i l i d e c h t* was derived (*Scot. Gael. f i l i d h e a c h d*).

The *o l l a v* (in *Ir. Gael.* also *o l a m*, *Scot. Gael. o l l a m h*) probably became the highest grade of Irish poets just before Christ (or, shortly after that), and this poet was the personal bard of the ruler or magnate. At the same time, the *ollav* performed the function of the head of poets of lower rank. In Ireland his full title was *ollav ri dan* – the head of the royal poets' community. He supervised *filids* whose number depended upon the rank of the court around which they concentrated. It is estimated that the greatest Irish rulers of the first centuries of the Christian era usually had *ollavs* supervising 30 *filids*. Also, a prominent *filid* without the title of *ollav*, but perceived as the successor of his supervisor, could concentrate around himself up to 15 *filids* and bards of lower rank. These numbers were obviously kept at larger courts and less rigorously maintained at smaller ones; nonetheless, the number 30, having some symbolic meaning in archaic Irish culture, appears quite frequently in old sources of different kinds.

The awareness of a hierarchy of Celtic poets is often exceptionally poor, even among eminent scholars. The first prominent Polish expert in Celtic culture – Stefan Czarnowski (1879-1937) – did not recognize it at all. Moreover, he did not know the term "ollav" or "olam" and attributed the characteristics of the poetic rank to some universal status of poet. Unfortunately, this mistake was also made by the Authors of the latest Polish study of Irish literature in the edition of the *History of European Literature*, which cannot be excused and forces one to reflect on the dangers to which literature is exposed when not interpreted by persons competent in literary history.<sup>5</sup>

It is commonly believed that a bard recited his poetry whilst playing the harp. However, this is not confirmed by facts, at least in the case of the higher grades of bardic initiation.

In archaic Irish society, as in the little – changed medieval one, the harpist (*cruitire*) belonged to a separate professional caste, higher than

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<sup>5</sup> A. Majewicz and E. Majewicz in cooperation with A. Lubach, *Literatura irlandzka (Irish Literature)*, in: *Historia literatur europejskich (History of European Literatures)*, ed. W. Floryan, vol. 3, part II, PWN, Warszawa 1991, p. 665.

other musicians, such as trumpeters or bag-pipers, who could be serfs or thralls as well.<sup>6</sup> A harpist was a free man but was not accorded a high position at court, as was a poet. According to the evidence found in old records, during a feast, the harpist took the place most distant from the ruler, while the ollav was sitting next to the ruler. Usually “with the reacaire or bard he joined in the presentation of the official verse which the file (fillid) or official poet composed to record the chief events in the life of his prince or chief.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Cruitire* played the instrument which in its oldest variants had strings made of horsehair or gut, and its construction was called a *cruit*. He made the strings vibrate with specially cultivated, long and crooked fingernails. Later, a harp was given metal strings but it bore another name, namely *c l á i r s e a c h* (*Scot. Gael. c l á r s a c h*). Poetry, naturally, was accompanied by the harpist, but such recitation, while certainly melodious, was frequently, though not always, preceded by an ollav or filid accompanied by a *r e a c a i r e*, a bard or musician of lower rank, who merely performed, and never created poetry (cf. present *Scot. Gael. r á c a i r*). This does not exclude the situation at lower levels, where popular bard singing, not for an aristocratic audience, could be performed and accompanied by the harp.

Although the harpist and his instrument did not hold the highest place in the court hierarchy, paradoxically, the harp became the favourite symbol of Celtic communities, and at a later period it even was recognized as the national emblem of Ireland. Its model became the oldest preserved medieval harp kept in Trinity College in Dublin and known as Brian Bóru after a famous king (c. 941-1014) who attempted to unite the petty Irish kingdoms. And the harp, as a quite popular instrument, is still played there, probably more frequently than in any other country.

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<sup>6</sup> Different players were counted as trumpeteers. These were players who played special instruments made of bone. These players were called *enmphir* while the names of different instruments in most cases were not preserved. One of the few exceptions is the *feadan* played by the *feadanaigh* but we know little about this instrument. The name of the Irish flute, i.e. *fliuit* is a much later medieval borrowing from English. The oldest bag-pipe was called in Ireland *piopai* and in Scotland *phìob-mhór*. In Ireland there was a similar instrument named *cuisleanna ceoil* played by *cuisleannaigh*. For more details consult B. Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (chapter titled *Musical Instruments*), The Mercier Press, Dublin 1983, pp. 65-87.

<sup>7</sup> B. Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*, op. cit., p. 67.

Ollavs and filids formed a kind of pagan order which not only outlasted the introduction of Christianity, but also indirectly strengthened its significance. This was connected with the already-discussed decline of druidism. The Church in Ireland did not dare abolish the institution of druidism, even by one decree, for "the druidic order had been the basis of Irish society, and that society could no more do without the druids than could we today abolish the civil service with a stroke of a pen."<sup>8</sup>

Hence, the Church eliminated only those few manifestations of druidism which were patently in contradiction with the faith, and absorbed those which were useful to it. The ideas which were not consonant with the principles of Christian religion, but did not threaten it, were extended to poets, and thus, the ollav achieved a social status comparable at present with, as James Carney writes, a "lay priest." Those changes, however, caused the Church and "poets' order" to become rivals to some extent, and also created an institution of partly overlapping roles:

"Both organisations recruited their functionaries from the same class of society; it was not uncommon for a man who was a trained and practising poet to enter a monastery, and it also happened that monks sometimes reverted to lay life."<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, there was no sharp division between the functions of poet and priest, which was to a certain extent a parallel to the former relationship between poets and druids. The archaic functions of the ollav and the filid also remained. "Practices of pagan origin lived on and in certain families it was an ollav who presided at an inauguration and who handed the prince the rod or wand which symbolized his mystic union with the land, with growth and fertility."<sup>10</sup>

The poetry of the ollav was an important element in maintaining social order: it authenticated the gods and indicated the evil occurring under the reign of the ruler. The Ancient Celts saw authority as a kind of union of the king, nature and the territory over which he ruled. In this configuration, the ollav fulfilled the function of a link between the king and nature; the way he performed his mission was extremely simple: "when a poet praises a king he is assuring him that the powers of nature find him pleasing and that

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<sup>8</sup> J. Carney, *op. cit.* p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the marriage is going well.” And conversely, “if an ollav satirises a prince he is in effect telling him that the forces of nature, with which he, the ollav, is in communion, are not satisfied: the result of the satire is an injury to the king’s honour ... and possibly a blight on the land. Hence the poem of praise, as well as the satire, is in origin a religious act.”<sup>11</sup>

That act, however, sometimes assumed a drastic form when the ruler made too many serious mistakes and when the satire gained the strength to excommunicate and even deprive him of power.

What was, in practice, the work of a poet, an ollav at royal or magnate court or that of a versifier of lower rank at correspondingly lower levels of Irish social hierarchy like? Fortunately, there remain some descriptions, and, although they refer mostly to a later period, they can be related largely to the earlier period, when the conservatism of Irish culture is taken into consideration. First of all, the number of poets, not only at numerous courts of different ranks, but also in practically every notable clan, is striking. Nobody gathered statistics in those times, but it seems quite likely that on the scale of the whole of Ireland, there were probably several hundred poets of the highest rank, and thousands of the lower level. In Scotland, this custom was even more developed. When the Irish migrants (called Scots today) arrived there, it eventually became the practise that, at important, and sometimes even less important courts, two ollavs, called *ollamhs* functioned there.

They were always looked after by the ruler or magnate. This frequently did not apply to poets of lower rank who were often forced to search the country for supplies, or, at least to earn casual gratifications.

At court, the poet had a deliberately darkened chamber or cell at his disposal. Here he settled down on a special bed, and, closing his eyes, he began thinking of, and then creating, his poems or satires. One of the later ollavs left a verse description, and at the same time, an explanation of the creative work composed in such unusual darkness:

“Misi féin dá ndearnoinn dán,  
maith leam – lughoide ar seachrán –  
bac ar ghriangha um theachta as-teagh,  
leaptha diamhra gar ndídean.  
Eadrom is eatoil ghllana  
muna n-iadhoinn m’aphradha,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

mar dhlaoi díona ar léis an laoi  
díogha dom ghrés do-ghéntaioi

As for myself, should I make a poem,  
I like – a thing which keeps me from error –  
a barrier to keep out the sunlight,  
and dim couches to guard me.

If I did not close my eyelids  
as a protecting veil against the daylight  
between me and the bright rays,  
it would ruin my artistry."<sup>12</sup>

When the poem was ready, the author left the isolated place and handed the completed work over to be recited by the reacaire. Thus, during the court ceremony, or the next feast for which the poem was ordered, or which the ollav wanted to honour for himself, the words, long cherished in darkness, were recited:

“Mac Diarmata dil damsá  
cid ierfacta ní insa  
a molad maissiu maenib  
luaidfider laedib limmsa

Son of Diarmait, dear to me,  
Though it be asked it is not difficult,  
His praise is comelier than treasures,  
It will be sung in lays by me."<sup>13</sup>

There was a composition template which was little changed for ages, and which a poet had to respect. First of all, at the very beginning of a song, he had to express by name the person for which it was written. He should also mention the names of the father and mother of the praised person, and their further genealogy confirming the antiquity and mystique of the noble family as well. In the most refined praising poems, usually of a later period, it became a rule that the first stanza was started with an aphorism or proverb, e.g. “Fulang annróidh adhbhar sóidh” – “Endurance of hard-

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted from E. Knott, G. Murphy, *Early Irish Literature*, Routledge&Kegan Paul, London 1966, pp. 61-62.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.



ship is a source of pleasure,” or “Mairg do-ní deimhin dá dhóigh” – “Woe to him who makes a certainty of his hope.”

Then the main part of the poem followed which was devoted to the achievements and merits of its addressee. The last part of the song usually comprised quite respectable sets of compliments. In the Christian era, an apostrophe added to the patron saint of an extolled person appeared, which constituted the end of the work.

Not only was the ruler extolled. In the Middle Ages there appeared the custom of praise for his wife and family.

It was quite different, however, when matters at court went wrong, such as when the rule of the chief or king aroused discontent or was ravaging a particular country. Then everything suggested that the ollav was not composing panegyrics in his solitude, rather satire. The court froze in expectation of what means the poet would choose and use, as he had a wide variety of choices.

There were three main kinds of satire in Ireland. *A i s n e í s* was the simplest. It was ordinary, not very refined, calling the criticized person to order; the satire was often occasional, yet scathing, sometimes deliberately insolent, without, however, serious consequences. Generally, it did not occur at major courts of high reputation, and was used rather by filids and bards than by ollavs. Such occasional satire could be provoked by any pretext, e.g. an unsatisfactory menu during the visit of a poet to a magnate’s house.

The second kind of satire called *a í l*, which meant “severe reproach,” presented finer subtlety. Finally, the third kind, the most complex and varied, was *a i r c e t a l a í r e*. It was divided into as many as ten subtypes, from the most lenient, where the addressee was reprimanded allusively without pointing out his faults bluntly and mentioning his name, to extremely severe forms which criticised him personally. The name of the criticised person appeared no earlier than at the eighth level of *aircetal a íre* called *l á n a e r* – “full satire.”

The satire of the tenth level – *g l á m d i c e n d* was the most severe and the severest in its consequences – leading to anything up to the excommunication and banishment of the person in question.

Recitation of satires at particular levels was closely related to the rank of a poet. Minor poets were not allowed to use the means from the top of the satire hierarchy, while no ollavs nor prominent filids concerned themselves with trifles. It should also be remembered that apart from the general division into bards, filids, and ollavs, Irish poets also had six degrees of initiation.

Only a poet of the sixth degree could execute condemnatory satire, and it was not at his own discretion. In such a case, when the possibility of severe consequences like excommunication had to be considered, the decision was always taken collectively. The bodies who made such a decision were different in different regions and periods. In later times, nevertheless, at major courts, it was relatively often that a number of thirty warriors, thirty poets, and in Christian times, also thirty bishops, assembled. After taking the decision to reprimand or excommunicate the ruler, they did not, however, have the right to divert the course of events: "... the poet accompanied by six who have respectively the degrees of poetry ... go before sunrise to a mound where seven territories meet, and the chief poet faces the land of the king, he is about to revile and they all have their backs to a thorn which stands on the summit of the hill, and there is a north wind, and each man carries in his hand a stone and a spike from the thorn and speaks into both of them a stanza in the measure called *laídh*. The chief poet says his stanza, and then the other poets chant theirs in unison, and each puts his stone and his spike at the base of the thorn, and if it is they that are in fault the ground of the hill swallows them up; if it is the king, however, that is in fault the ground swallows him and his wife and his child and his horse and his weapons and his clothing and his hound."<sup>14</sup>

Poets of lower ranks quite often abused their rights to satirize. When they were denied agreed payment for their services or given food worse than expected, fillids and bards visiting such inhospitable places tried to take revenge by means of satire which eventually could be incommensurate to the degree of disappointment or displeasure they had met with.

In the last period of the existence of fillids, analogically to Welsh bards or Scottish *aois-dána*, it is noted that there was a true dictatorship of poets:

"Whatever they asked was given them; not always, however, out of respect, but from fear of their satire, which frequently followed a denial of their requests. They lost by degrees, through their own insolence and importunity, all the respect which their order had so long enjoyed, and consequently all their wonted profits and privileges."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from E. Dwelly, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, Gairm Publications, Glasgow, 1973 (1901), entry on *aois-dána*, pp. 39-40.

Contrary to the poets of lower ranks, the function of the ollavs at royal and aristocratic courts maintained its dignity, and excluding exceptions, did not become strained almost until the end. This obviously resulted from higher moral standards and from the poet's political function.

The influential effectiveness of an ollav upon a ruler was institutionally ensured by means of the particular relationship:

“There is a close and mystic bond between the prince and his ollav, and this may have something to do with the fact that the ollav or druid was the prince's only possible approach to the earth goddess whose husband he was.”<sup>16</sup>

This may explain the idea, basic to Irish thinking, that prince and ollav are in a symbolic sense husband and wife.

“This relationship of both men should obviously be not treated according to modern moral criteria but correspondingly to old Celtic customs. The exhibition of closeness and intimacy in the emotional relationship between the ruler and his ollav was a public demonstration of their unanimity and community, and, at the same time, confirmation that the ruler was righteous. If the ollav avoided manifesting the communion in any way, it was the sign of wrongdoing on the side of the ruler.”

It should be admitted, however, that the present day observer might not perceive the proper gravity in demonstrations such as this, especially when “after a night's drinking, the whole company lay down where they could, and it was the poet's right and privilege to lie next to the prince. Such rights, we may assume, were guarded with some jealousy. Ireland became Christian but these ideas never died while the poetic order lasted.”<sup>17</sup>

There is no question that such common “bedding” often turned into a homosexual relationship. This is made clear in poetic texts, in truth, referring to the medieval period. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, after the ollav Sean O'Cluain had hit his ruler O'Connor in an outburst of anger, he begged him later for forgiveness in such words: “O you of the fair hair, let us not be any longer without lying in the same bed, let us not be without drink-

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<sup>16</sup> J. Carney, *op. cit.* pp. 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

ing from the same cup. I am your lover, I am your bed companion, I am he who stands at your bright shoulder."<sup>18</sup>

Some time later, another ollav, Lughaidh O'Dalaigh, lamented the slaying of his master Feilim O'Reilly, and, looking at the grave, uttered the words full of grief: "Let us be in the bed as we were before, o prince of Bóroimhe; we did not think a narrow bed too narrow for us two, o Féilim."<sup>19</sup>

In the former period, the ollav also fulfilled the function of guardian of the law; this lasted until the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century. The time when the oldest written codes – *Senchas Mar* – appeared, is the period of the increasing prestige of their caretaker and interpreter – the *brehon*. In fact, he had appeared before, but this moment was especially conducive to his usefulness. From that moment on, the law did not have to be memorized or preserved in its versed form to make memorizing easier. Now it became possible to focus more on interpreting its written letter. Another favourable factor originated from the changes in the structure of numerous political formations in Ireland, facing more and more new challenges in a developing world. The reaction of Irish society to them was exceptionally conservative, but even the most obstructive conservatism could not shut itself off in passive and unchangeable institutions. The mere introduction of Christianity, although it did not carry out a social revolution in Ireland, led to, apart from purely religious changes, the appearance of the Latin alphabet, monastic sciptorium, and, in consequence, gave rise to written codes of law. Owing to that, the brehon won, the ollav lost. Nevertheless, until the end of his existence, the ollav did not lose the right to be guardian of genealogy. He guarded the rightfulness of succession to the throne not only in the sense of its biological legality, but also because he provided necessary proofs in case of any doubts or obstacles. Ollavs were also known for fabricating false evidence when true evidence was unavailable. So, when the family Dal Cais overthrew the dynasty of Eóganacht in the kingdom of Munster, the ollav was charged with proving that the victorious clan constituted a branch of the Eóganachts. As the charge of finally adjudicating the legality of succession belonged to the brehon, they had to cooperate, though this was not without strife and quarrels.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Genealogy was a part of the more general function of storing historic tradition – *senchas* – which comprised cycles of tribal and family legends strongly embedded in the charmingly original Celtic mythology.

This composition gave birth to magnificent epic literature within archaic Ireland, created, or infinitely re-created by fillids. Analysis of what was produced by so many generations of archaic Celtic poets of the British Isles, however, makes for another equally interesting lecture to follow this one.

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## Chapter Five

# FOUR CYCLES OF CELTIC LITERATURE

The earliest Celtic epic of the British Isles is traditionally divided into four thematic cycles. This division in part results from the stratification of the Celtic community. Three of these cycles came into being within and were written for specific classes in this community, two for its aristocratic classes of two different epochs, one for Celtic folk, and one which can be described as general, so archaic that it cannot be ascribed to any social interest. These cycles are: the *Mythological Cycle* not representing and not belonging to any particular class of society; the *Fenian Cycle* being an expression of the folk imagination, and finally the *Ulster* and *Royal Cycles* which reflect the world of Celtic aristocracy in two different areas and two different periods of time.

The majority of plots in three of these cycles, i.e. *Mythological*, *Ulster* and *Fenian*, come down from the earliest pagan cultural heritage of the Celts while the fourth and youngest one includes plots from the Christian era and is associated to a substantial degree with the early Christian kings of Ireland. Some literary historians also include in this cycle the Brythonic legend of King Arthur. In this book I will devote a separate chapter to early Welsh and Arthurian literature.

When we say “pagan” or “Christian” it does not mean that particular cycles are exclusively “heathen” or “only lay to the Church.” Elements of both these periods occur in all cycles, yet in the first three “the pagan element” was primary, whereas “the Christian element” was added in later times by monastic scribes in order to “correct” a particular pagan text from the viewpoint of the Christian Church. Consequently, they are evidently secondary.

In the *Royal Cycle*, also called the *Historic Cycle*, which originally came into being in the early centuries of Christianisation, the situation is exactly the opposite: earlier pagan ideas and literary tricks are frequently adapted to the plots and stories typical for the Christian era. However, this does not mean that these cycles have a religious character. The terms “pagan” or “Christian” are used by me rather in the chronological sense, which is not to say that religion did not play an evident and sometimes

extremely important role in those cycles. This resulted either from the plots and events described or from artificial attempts by monastic scribes, who wanted to make an old pagan text more adapted and in a sense more “loyal” to the Christian faith.

The analysis of the plots in particular cycles shows the existence of three main historical and cultural layers. The first one consists of the continental tradition of the Celts from before their arrival in the British Isles. The second, evident especially in the *Mythological Cycle*, is composed of pre-Celtic, possibly even non-Indo-European insular plots found by the Celts after their arrival in the British Isles. Or if we assume the theory of insular Celtic originality, it belongs to the tradition of non-continental Celts living on the Isles before their continental kinsmen arrived there. Whatever the results of this mixture of prehistoric pre-Celtic with insular and continental Celtic culture, it produced a unique composition not to be found elsewhere among the Celtic tribes of Europe.

This mixture is, in fact, the third layer of the new tradition which emerged among the Celtic peoples during the time of their golden age and dominance over the British Isles before the arrival of the Romans and later the Anglo-Saxons. This refers primarily to Britain and Ireland but the contribution of the smaller islands of the Irish Sea and also those located close to the North shore of Scotland, like the Inner and Outer Hebrides and Orkneys, cannot be neglected .

It is known, for instance, that plots connected with Mannan Mac Lir, the Celtic god of the sea, originated around the Isle of Man (*Ellan Vannin*, or *Ellan Mannin*) which undoubtedly had to do with the location of this island right in the middle of the Irish Sea, perfectly suitable for the kingdom or capital of this heathen deity. Notwithstanding the origins of particular stories, the plots of the Mythological, Ulster and Fenian Cycles survived mostly in Irish versions which undoubtedly resulted in the predominance of elements connected with the history and traditions of the Green Island. It was in Ireland that the proper oral tradition survived the longest, until the advent of writing i.e. Christian times.

A similar tradition in Britain was thoroughly destroyed by the Roman occupation. The revival of Celticity after Britain left the Roman orbit occurred in completely different circumstances, when the Celtic Britons needed other heroes and other stories as required by the time of Anglo-Saxon invasion and the defense of the threatened Celtic ethnicity. This very situation gave rise to the first songs about protagonists defending

Britain against Germanic invaders, such as King Urien, some other local rulers and first of all King Arthur. All of them defended the Celtic Britons against their Anglian and Saxon oppressors. King Urien, as well as another Celtic ruler, Dutigirn, did not leave many significant literary traces. It is however, the Arthurian literature which marks this epoch significantly. However, if we talk about the *Royal Cycle*, aiming to include the *Arthurian Cycle* in it, we should consider first of all its first Welsh versions, written by such poets as Taliesin, Aneirin (Neirin), Cataguen and others. Their poetry first appeared in about the 6<sup>th</sup> century, long before it became the property of all medieval Europe – and is traditionally reckoned to be a Royal Cycle with King Arthur as the defender of Britain threatened by the Anglo-Saxon Conquest. We should discriminate between this phase of development of Arthurian literature and its later international masterpieces written and developed by such authors as Wace of Jersey, then the French poet Chretien de Trois and German minstrels, such as Hartman von Aue or Wolfgang von Eschenbach. Although they undoubtedly linked their Arthurian stories with the primordial version of the legend, they at the same time can by no means be counted as representatives of the original Celtic cycle. They can be, however, considered as a phenomenon proving the greatness and wide European influence of primordial Celtic Arthurian literature.

Whatever the affiliation of the Arthurian cycle, as part of the general Celtic cycle or as an independent British cycle, it constituted a series of stories so distinct from the Gaelic tradition that both its layers: the Brythonic or Welsh, and then its counterpart – the international and continental – should be discussed in a separate chapter or even in another book treating this vast subject more widely. In this chapter let me discuss only the Irish Gaelic cycles, beginning with the first and oldest cycle of Celtic literature, i.e. the *Mythological Cycle*.

### *The Mythological Cycle*

Its name is exceptionally inaccurate if not delusive: the whole literature of the early Celts has a mythological character full of mythological figures, heroes and events. Yet this cycle is dominated by the oldest mythological elements, thus creating the earliest, and in effect, the most archaic layer of that literature.



The first of the two most important masterpieces of this cycle is: the *Dinnshenchas*, or *History of Places*, a kind of mythological geography of ancient Ireland. The second masterpiece is *Leabhar Gabhala Eireann*, in another transcription, the *Lebor Gabála Eireann* or *The Book of Invasion of Ireland*, which is incomparably more important from a literary perspective. The latter is an excellent compilation of songs of ancient *fillids* (bards of higher degree) with much later medieval additions and comments. Seen through the eyes of a cultural historian, it proves to be an unusual tangle of old pagan myths and legends with biblical plots added later by Christian monks writing down these histories in their monastic scriptoria.

The earliest written version of the *Book of Invasion of Ireland* comes from as late as 1168 A.D. but its most ancient literary layers, also strongly distorted by Christian monks and their additions, presumably go back to the second millennium B.C. It was created over many past centuries before Christ but the decisive period of its compilation were the first centuries of Christianity when the Irish poets for the first time came into contact with *The Bible* and works of the ancient historians (among whom Eusebius, Orosius and Isidoros were held in particularly high esteem in Celtic monasteries). It was then, as we read in one of the textbooks of Irish history, that “the Irishmen began to learn world history as taught by the early mediaeval [Christian] Church.” There they inevitably followed the Orosius, the impulse to fit their own Irish past into this scheme of history, and to pour their myths, traditions, sagas, genealogies, into an orderly historical mould. “Apparently as early as the seventh century, churchmen, such as Monu-Sinu Moccu Mín, and *fillids*, such as Cenn-Faelad, were attempting to elucidate, with the help of the *Old Testament* and Orosius (c. 375 – c. 418), the origins of the Irish people, and, with the help of Eusebius and other chroniclers, to set up a chronological scheme of their later history.”<sup>1</sup>

However, all those efforts, while they were responsible for creating an undoubtedly interesting, if not fascinating literary work, produced an extremely poor result from the point of view of a historian. It is hard to derive any certain date from this masterpiece and the fanciful rather than historical imagination of the compilations can be, for instance, exempli-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland. Ecclesiastical*, an introduction and guide by James F. Kenney, Pádraic Ó Táilliúir, Dublin 1979 (1929), p. 13

fied by the etymology of the name of the people who accomplished the last invasion of Ireland. Their name was the ‘Sons of Mil’ or in Old Irish-Gaelic: ‘Mil espaine’, but it was translated by the medieval chronicler on the basis of false Latin etymology as: ‘miles Hispaniae’ – ‘soldiers of Spain’. Meanwhile, the matter refers to prehistoric times when Ireland certainly could not have known the Latin language, let alone the name ‘Spain’.

Many an investigator of these literary works has been irritated by the mythologically tangled relation to Ireland's past, with borrowings from biblical plots as well as distortions and fantasies added by the Christian compilers or later scribes, so ubiquitous in most Irish texts. No wonder then that one of the editors of ancient Irish texts, including the so called – *Yellow Book of Lecan (Leabhar Buidhe Lecain)*, came to the point where he could endure it no longer and ranted: “No conception of history seems to have taken hold of the Irish mind. The Monks write annals, carefully no doubt, but baldly and there is practically no trace of anything like contemporary history.”<sup>2</sup> But it was not until the 9<sup>th</sup>, and especially the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, that this historical impulse acquired full momentum. Then, many of the fillids seem to have turned their energies almost entirely to the task of transmuting the national folk-lore into a more harmonised history.

Yet although the contents of the *Book of Invasion of Ireland* are so tangled and complicated, following them at least makes it possible to build up an opinion about the origin of a lot of features of that country and its culture in the archaic age which appeared then or which would be of importance for many centuries to come. The *Book of Invasion of Ireland* is the history of six migrations and conquests of Ireland accomplished by different predatory peoples from the earliest, historically vague times up to the invasion of the Goidels, who probably were decisive in creating the Gaelic character of Ireland. According to the latest research, the Goidels came to Ireland about 200 B.C. which roughly marks the chronological range of the *Book*.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Atkinson, *Introduction to: The Yellow Book of Lecan*, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 1896, p. [4].

SIX LEGENDARY MIGRATIONS TO IRELAND DESCRIBED BY  
*LEABHAR GABHALA EIREANN*

- 1) Migration led by Bandbha, legendary founder of the future Irish nation;
- 2) Migration led by Partolan, who initiated wars with semimonsters and demons called Fomors;
- 3) Migration led by Nemedh who cleared twelve plains in Ireland;
- 4) Migration of three tribes: Fíor Bholg; Fíor Dhomhann & Gailioin;
- 5) Arrival of Tuatha de Danan – People of the Goddess Danu;
- 6) Arrival of Miles espaine – Sons of Mil.

According to the pagan but later strongly Christianised text of the *Book of Invasion*, the first conquest of Ireland took place just before the Biblical Deluge. The people who accomplished that invasion were led by a certain Bandbha who was considered to be the ancestor of the Irish nation. In the *Book* he appears as a salmon, then an eagle and finally a falcon. Certainly, he symbolizes the durability of the heritage of the oldest of Ireland's tribes, who did not submit to the pressure of invaders.

The next invasion was led by a certain Partolan who began a drawn-out series of wars with the Fomors (Fomhoire), demons which were presumably the reflection of the beliefs of previous peoples living in Ireland. The third invasion was led by Nemedh, in whose days Ireland already had twelve cleared plains. The chronicler mentions the names of four lakes as well. Those seemingly less important topographical details relating to the number of clearings and lakes are in the opinion of contemporary historians an important stage in the process of providing “to the land of Ireland its geographical definition and identity” because “by creating its physical features and assigning names to them they may be said, in a mythological sense, to have brought it into existence.”<sup>3</sup>

After Nemhed's death, his people were to fall into dependence on the Fomors and had to pay them a compulsory loan in the shape of one third of their crops and milk produce. They were also obliged to offer them a sacrifice of the life of every third child. In despair they revolted against the Fomors but only thirty warriors were to survive the horrible battle which followed.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, Hamlyn Publishing Group, London – New York – Sydney – Toronto 1975, p. 57.

Those warriors were to leave Ireland, going abroad in order to give rise to new and more numerous generations of their nation which later came back to Erin as three groups of peoples named: Fir Bholg, Fir Dhomhann and Gailioin.

The Fir Bholg people introduced the system of authority in which the unit that was holding the authority had distinctly royal prerogatives. Eochaidh Mac Eirc was the first mythological Irish king – *ri*, who eradicated falsehoods and lies from his country and introduced justice.

Unfortunately, he fared much worse in terms of the economy. His rule fell in the time of a drought which impoverished the country, that caused the discontent of his subjects and his own warriors who simply killed him, which was, in turn, the first historically known example of regicide – *fin-gal*. The next invaders of Ireland were the People of the Goddess Danu – Tuatha de Danan, with which the first information about the continental mythology of the Celts appears.

For the Danans brought, amongst other utensils, the God Lugh's spear and Dagda's cauldron. They conquered the people of Fir Bolgh in the so-called first battle of Magh Turedh, but they did not enjoy the supremacy too long because of the repeated appearance of the ominous Fomors.

The chief of the Danans, King Nuadha, lost his arm in the battle and being unable to fight, had to deliver his authority to Bres who was ineffective as a ruler and could not cope either with the Fomors or with his own people. Bres was mocked in the satires of Coirbre, the first legendary Irish bard whose name is known to us. The gods, anxious about the fate of their people, provided Nuadh with a silver arm which allowed him to take the authority back. A bloody war and the second battle at Magh Turedh followed and the Danans, although sustaining heavy losses, were finally able to remove the Fomors from Ireland. According to the *Leabhar Gabhala Eirean*, the last people that came to Ireland in archaic times were the Sons of Mil i.e. the just mentioned Goidels. After conquering the Danans, they began marching deep into the island and after a lot of happenings, events and battles the second bard known by name, Amhairghin, decided to conciliate the opposing sides.

His efforts were at the beginning quite empty and the Sons of Mil defeated Tuatha de Danan near Tailtiu. Then a feast of victory was initiated which was connected with sporting games for the reverence of the god Lugh and which were maintained for centuries to come and even today these games are celebrated in their folkloristic form. Thus, the Celts initi-

ated in their cultural traditions the games, called *Tailtean Games* (*Áenach Tailteann*, or *Aonach Tailtiu*), which were to a degree an equivalent of the Greek Games in Olympia. The oldest evidence of the Tailtean Games pertains to the year 1819 B.C. when they were held in honour of the ancient Irish queen Tailtiu.

According to the *Book of Invasion of Ireland*, Tailtiu was the daughter of the King of Spain and the wife of Eochaid Mac Eirc, the last Fir Bholg High King of Ireland, who named his capital after her name as Tailtiu (now it is Telltown located between Navan and Kells). Queen Tailtiu survived the invasion of the People of the Goddess Danu (Tuatha de Danan). Soon Tailtiu became the foster mother of Lugh, the Celtic god so frequently mentioned during my lectures. Tailtiu allegedly died of exhaustion after clearing the plains of Ireland for arable lands. It was shortly after her death that Lugh established a harvest festival and funeral games, the just mentioned *Áenach Tailteann*, or *Aonach Tailtiu*, in her honour, which continued to be celebrated for centuries to come. These are rather forgotten games in Europe, older and comparable to the Greek Olympic or Pythian Games. A variety of events were staged and some are still continued as traditional games, although usually in more modern forms, in Celtic countries up until today. They included wrestling, ball games (known to the Greeks but not included in their Olympic program) and even horse and chariot racing! The historian of Celtic sport, Sean J. Egan, maintains that “The use of horses was very important in Celtic culture. The chariot race was a popular event during festivals and celebrations. The use of the chariot as a vehicle for games competition occurred as a result of its military importance and a need to develop proficient and skilled drivers. Charioteers lined up side by side and upon hearing a signal raced toward a finish line.”<sup>4</sup>

The Tailtean Games lasted until about 1180 A.D., when they died out after the Norman invasion. Unfortunately, apart from some written and much distorted sources, there is not too much precise information about these unusual sporting events. Nonetheless, in 1924, their tradition was revived by the Gaelic Athletic Association under the same name as the Tailtean Games – *Áenach Tailteann* or *Aonach Tailtiu*, a sporting festival held in Dublin at the famous Croke Park or named in Irish as *Pàirc an*

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<sup>4</sup> See: S. J. Egan, *Celts and Their Games and Pastimes*, series “Celtic Studies,” vol. 3, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter 2002, p. 101.

*Chrócaigh*— a modern symbol of the Old Irish sporting traditions cherished by the Gaelic Athletic Association (Cuman Lúthchleas Gael), when its establishment in 1884 “swept the country like a prairie fire”<sup>5</sup>. These games were considered as an important element of the Irish cultural tradition with an emphasis on such national Irish sports as modern *hurling* and *Gaelic football*.<sup>6</sup> Cuchulain, a semi-historical figure, played these ball games according to the old Celtic legend contained in the Irish national epic *Tain bó Cuailnge* (*The Expedition for the Bull of Cuailnge* composed about the 1st century A.D.).

The Scottish Highland Games and Gatherings are in fact a distant echo of these ancient Celtic games. Among these remnants of the ancient Celtic sporting past, one of the most interesting events is the Scottish shinty, similar to Irish hurling, and also *back-hold*, a type of wrestling in which competitors try to floor their opponents under the condition that they do not break their holds on their backs. The Scottish *tossing the caber* was and still is another event stemming from the ancient Celtic Games and continues to be very popular at the Highland Games and Gatherings. The objective is to carry and toss a several-meter-long pole over a distance, after a short run-up. The main goal is to throw this pole in such a way that it remains upright for a time in a 12 o’clock position. After throwing, it should have a position similar to a clock’s hands at the twelfth hour. Ethical principles are carefully guarded.

In Wales, the ancient *knappan* or *cnapan*, a very brutal ball game and the much milder and younger *chawarae pel*, became, in a way, a continuation of the old Celtic sporting tradition. In Cornwall, original wrestling called *omdowl* and the Breton counterpart *gouren*, along with some other folk games, are continued to this day in Celtic sporting lore.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See: M. de Búrca, *The G.A.A. A History of the Gaelic Athletic Association*, publ. by Cuman Lúthchleas Gael, Dublin 1980, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Contemporary *gaelic football*, is a national game of Ireland next to hurling in popularity; the big ball can be passed either by kicking or fisting to the end line which plays the role of a goal. The number of players in each team is 15. In *hurling* the small ball can be hit or balanced on the end of a stick blade, which is the most difficult and also most spectacular element of the game. Also, like in Gaelic football, 15 players take part. The goal is in an “H” shape. Hitting the ball under the bar counts 3 points, over it but still between the posts only 1 point.

<sup>7</sup> See: S. J. Egan, *Celts and Their Games and Pastimes*, op. cit., chapter *Games of Cornwall*, p. 106-111; *Games of Brittany*, pp. 116-138.

In some islands surrounding the British Isles, the tradition of ancient games is still visible and frequently preserved. For instance, on the Isle of Man, *cammag*, a game similar to Irish hurling and Scottish *shinty*, is comparatively well known although it appears in many variations. Basically, its idea is to hit a small rag-covered ball (sometimes made of a lump of cork or wood, a piece of old tin, etc.) into a goal directed by a crooked stick called a *crig* or *clugagn*.<sup>8</sup>

But let me go back to the invasions of Ireland. Although beaten, yet not conquered decisively, the Danans, thanks to their magic practices, were able to deprive the Sons of Mil of food – their fields stopped yielding corn and their cows did not give milk. Finally, a settlement followed as a result of which the Sons of Mil got the surface of the real world to rule over, whereas the People of the Goddess Danu took possession of the alternative and underground kingdom – *Magh Mell*. *Magh Mell* is the Celtic alternative world, equivalent to the Mediterranean Elisium or Christian paradise, into which people dying on earth were to pass and from which they could come back to earth not as souls but in their full bodily shape. The oldest myths concerning that division excluded the belief in the human soul leaving the body in order to get to another, better world. In ancient Irish beliefs, human beings, after their death, go in their bodies to another world, the just mentioned *Magh Mell*, and once a year they come back.

It was a duty of their posterity to prepare for them a special celebration, food and drinks. Because, naturally, ancestors were rarely hungry, most of what was prepared for them was usually eaten and drunk by people waiting for their forefathers with the accompaniment of music, dancing, singing, games and other recreations.

The ceremony of waiting for people to come back to earth from *Magh Mell*, produced the famous ritualised holiday, named in Old Celtic *Samhuinn*, in modern Irish Gaelic *Samhain* and in English *Halloween* or *Hallowe'en*. Similar holidays were popular across Europe and celebrated on the night of October 31st or November the 1st and known in England as *The Wakes* or in Poland as *Dziady*. It was once a ritual known and practiced across all European countries of Indo-European stock, as a form of awakening for the forefathers on the day preceding their coming back to earth. Halloween activities, apart from eating and heavy beer and whisky

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

drinking, usually include bonfires, costume parties, trick-or-treating, ghost tours, visiting “haunted houses,” carving “Jack-o'-lanterns,” reading legendary and frightening stories and in more modern times also watching horror movies. A number of fictional literary and movie heroes have been created on the basis of dead people coming from Magh Mell back to earth. One of them is Michael Myers, a fictional character from the Halloween series. He appears in the movie titled *Halloween* directed by John Carpenter (1978). It is the story of a young boy who murders his older sister, and then, fifteen years later, returns home to murder more teenagers.

### *The Ulster Cycle*

The second of the Celtic literary cycles, called the Ulster Cycle, contains legends connected in one way or another with the feats of the Ulstermen or in Irish Gaelic *Ulaidh*, ruled by their king Conchobar Mac Nessa. In English-language studies his warriors are known as the Red Branch Champions (Old Irish *Cróeb Ruad* or *Cróeb Derg*) of three royal families of Ireland, who fight for glory on their famous Celtic chariots or as mounted warriors.

The central protagonist of the Ulster cycle is Cu Chulainn, Conchobar's son-in-law who probably lived in the 1st century after Christ. *The Ulster Cycle* is aristocratic in character, unlike the popular Fenian Cycle, which I will discuss next. The main literary masterpiece of the Ulster Cycle, is *Tain Bó Cuailnge*, or in English *The Expedition for the Bull of Cuailnge*. This epic story is now considered as a national literary masterpiece in Ireland. It is frequently named just *Tain*.

*Tain* is a versified epic of a size just a little smaller than the classical Greek *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. It is considered as the most important and, for various reasons, the most interesting of the stories of the Ulstermen's feats. Nevertheless, one should remember that it is not the only piece of literature in that cycle. The illustrations show one of the many editions of *Tain Bó Cuailnge* as well as an Old Celtic sculpture showing an animal similar to the literary Bull of Cuailnge (in English sources often appearing as the Bull of Cooley).<sup>9</sup> Cu Chulainn attempts to regain his cat-

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<sup>9</sup> *Tain* was also translated into Polish by a well known poet, Ernest Bryll, and his wife Małgorzata Goraj Bryll (by the way, my former student, who wrote under my supervision her MA thesis on Polish-Irish cultural relations). Both of them are familiar



tle, stolen by enemies from the neighbouring kingdom. Challenging the best Connaught warriors and inflicting heavy losses on the entire enemy army which he holds in check until his other compatriots arrive to help him, he alone bears the peculiarly understood ‘honour of Ulster’: although at that time the notion of honour did not exist in the sense which was coined much later in medieval chivalry. The “honour of Ulster” was a combination of pride, courage and tenaciousness in battle – *lúan laith* or *lón laith* or *lon gaile*, which can be translated approximately as “being seen in light” or “brightness,” and is also frequently interpreted as “champion’s light” meaning that the champion is visible in the light of glory or valour, especially with the background of a dull mass of ordinary people. The Celtic concept of *luan laith* or *lón lait* or *lon gaile*, depending on different medieval sources and manuscripts, can be translated as “being seen in light,” thus being conspicuous and distinguished by light against the dark or even grey mass of other people. It is an equivalent of the Celtic concept of honour as well as another expression, the Celtic *fir féir* – an ancient predecessor and at the same time equivalent of the British/English fair play.

In *The Tain*, this Celtic equivalent of *fair play*, i.e. *fír fer* appears first when Cu Chulainn defends a narrow glen alone: “*Ni damar fir fer dam na comlond óenfir – ni thic nech dom fortacht na dom forithin*” – “*fair play is not granted to me nor single combat, and no one comes to help or succour me*”.<sup>10</sup>

The same expression is used again by Cu Chulainn some lines later in a similar military situation when he is defending a narrow glen alone against a whole army of his enemies:

“*Ni damar fir fèr dam na comlond óenfir ni thic nech dom fortacht na dom forithin*” – “*fair play is not granted to me nor single combat, and no one comes to help or succour me.*”<sup>11</sup>

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with the ancient Gaelic culture and tongue (*Tain*, Warszawa, Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1983).

<sup>10</sup> *Táin Bo Cualnge*, transl. into English by C. O’Rahilly with a simultaneous Celtic original, based on *The Book of Leinster*, Dolmen Press&Oxford University Press, Dublin 1969 – Oxford 1970, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246. In both fragments containing the concept of *fír féir* this term is omitted in the Polish translation of E. Bryll and M. Goraj-Bryll.

*Tain* was written down from oral traditions by Christian monks. No wonder then that some of them had very mixed feelings when they had to read and record such a pagan epic poem in a Christian monastery. Some of the Irish monks were nevertheless proud of their past tradition, regardless of its pagan character. One of them wrote on the margin of the hand-written text:

“I bless everyone who will remember *Tain* by his heart in this version of the text and will not mix it with other poems.” Meanwhile, almost in the same place, another monk tried to ex-communicate this heathen text: “I, who copied this history down, or rather fantasy, do not believe in all the details. Several things in it are devilish lies. Others are the invention of poets. And others again have been thought up for the entertainment of idiots.”<sup>12</sup>

### *The Fenian Cycle*

While the Ulstermen or the Red Branch Champions were expressions of aristocratic literature and were doing their exploits in order to gain heroic grandeur, exceptional status and in consequence – political power – the heroes of the third cycle of Celtic literature, the Fenian Cycle, were the product of folk imagination. As one Celtologist commented: ‘the legends of the Ulstermen were being told in king’s palaces and at royal *óenaige* – kinds of festivals, while simple folk, seated by their firesides or in their fishing boats, preferred to tell magically-controlled tales about Fionn Mac Cumhall or Fionn mac Cumhail and his Fiana.’ Proinsias Maccana, an Irish historian and Celtologist, remarked that ‘here we enter upon another world to that of the Ulster tales. It is still a world of heroes, but one formed in a different mould and conditioned by a different temper of thought. The stories of Fionn Mac Cumhail and his companions seem always to have enjoyed popular favour and they have remained prominent in the repertoire of Gaelic story-tellers even to our own time’.

The main recipients of the Fenian Cycle were the simple folk: the *dao-scarshluagh*, i.e. in Gaelic: simple folk (for whom Fionn Mac Cumhail fought). They were also known under another name: *criadhaires* – a class of ordinary Celtic-Gaelic peasants.

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<sup>12</sup> See: *Táin Bo Cualnge*, op. cit., p. 253 and 283.

Chronologically, the origins of the Fenian Cycle are not very far from the Ulster Cycle. Its principal hero, Fion Mac Cumhaill, lived in reality and became a legend in his own lifetime. The date of his birth is unknown but his well confirmed death in 283 A.D. intensified the circulation of oral stories about him. Later, new ones were created and embellished with more and more fabulous motifs. The folk character of this literature and the lack of elements of aristocratic prestige was the reason for the comparatively late attempts to write it down by medieval scribes. But finally this cycle broke class barriers. Growing popularity and higher and higher artistic maturity gradually overcame the prejudice of the higher strata of Irish society. In that very moment we can also observe the first attempts to write down particular stories and songs of the Fenian Cycle by monastic scribes and compilers. The oldest written mentions and quotations in monastic manuscripts are from as early as the beginning of the ninth century but the first fuller records appear well into the twelfth century. It is also quite characteristic that stories in prose developed simultaneously to those expressed in verse. The rather sluggish penetration of Fenian themes into 'higher' forms of literature is well proved by official lists of stories which any bard or especially *filid* had to memorize if he wanted to achieve his poetic rank. Such lists were, fortunately enough, well preserved until our times. Each *filid*, in order to earn his poetic status, was obliged to memorize and recite at any solemn occasion at least 250 stories and poems, including his own, but also those which were created earlier by his predecessors. Until about the end of the eleventh century, such lists exclusively embraced non-Fenian stories. During the twelfth century, two Fenian stories appeared for the first time on certain lists. In the course of time, their number constantly grew. Belonging to the ancient Fiana, contrary to the Ulstermen, was not hereditary and not limited by blood. In order to become a warrior of the Fiana and gain the prestigious designation of *feinnidh*, it was not necessary to stem one's genealogy from any noble family or give evidence of one's own mythological genealogy and past. This privilege could be achieved and was accessible quite democratically for anybody who was able to successfully undergo a series of tests in physical endurance, courage and moral sensitivity. Any candidate for the *feinnidh* was given a shield and a hazel stick and was half-buried to his waist while standing up in a hole in the ground. Then nine warriors started to cast their javelins concurrently at his buckle. If he revealed a sign of fear or pain – he was instantaneously eliminated from any further trial. Next, his hair was braided and he had to run across the forest

and marshes pursued at a short interim by all the Fianna. Again, when he was caught or wounded he was not allowed to gain membership of the Fianna. Moreover, even if his hair had been disturbed, if his weapon had shivered or even if a dead branch had noisily cracked under his foot, he also was eliminated. After this he was obliged to pass a series of physical exercises, which included among other things, the necessity to jump over a bough positioned as high as his forehead and then to pass under another bough as low as his knees, and without slackening his pace he had to spot and to draw a thorn from his foot. Failing in this also resulted in disqualification. He had to be able not only to act quickly and calmly, not only to resist severe pain (a thorn in his foot), but he also had to be sensitive towards the pain of others and to effectively discern and remove pain from the courses of human events. The peculiar democratism of belonging to the Fianna, which did not require blood proof and only proper psycho-physical and moral qualifications, was responsible for the well known principle of ancient Irish law: “is ferr fer a chiniud” – “a man is better than his birth” (or: “better than you think” due to the ambiguity of this phrase). This principle was certainly not equally binding for all Irish society. However, it allowed Irish craftsmen to achieve a higher position, like musicians and first of all poets, not to mention the social advancement of any man after his more significant war exploits. The ancient values of the Fianna were used 14 centuries later by the most radical division of the Irish Republican Army, which was called Fianna Fáil, the Irish political movement demanding the unification of Ireland, founded in 1924, and still active. Irish terrorists from the IRA based their ideology on the same principles, although they tried to execute their goals in an incomparably more drastic and brutal ways.

Recollections of Fion MacCumhaill, known in the English version of his name as Finn MacCool, can still be found among modern artists. In a song by the American Boston-based band Dropkick Murphys, featured on their recent album titled *Sing Loud Sing Proud!*, we can find the following stanza:

“Known as a hero to all that he knew,  
 Long live the legend of Finn MacCool!  
 The brave Celtic leader of the chosen few,  
 Long live the legend of Finn MacCool!”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See the text online: <[http://www.lyricsfreak.com/d/dropkick+murphys/the+legend+of+finn+mac\\_20505655.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/d/dropkick+murphys/the+legend+of+finn+mac_20505655.html)>

The first versified ballads about Fionn Mac Cumhaill were allegedly written down by his son Oisín, who later became known in Scotland as Ossian. The oldest known representative of the Fenian cycle is *The Wooing of Ailbe – Tochmarc Ailbe* known from a very late copybook of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though some of its fragments show obvious affiliations with the language of the tenth century. Some ballads concerning Fenian exploits can also be found in the twelfth century *Book of Leinster* and among them the most famous *Agallamh na Seanórach – The Conversation of the Ancient Men*.

The Fenian Cycle contains in its literary content many motifs which are not very essential to the entire cycle but nevertheless, thanks to their originality, have become important for the general literature of later epochs and in the course of time have permeated European literature through the Continental Celts or through the later contribution of English literature. The most typical for that process is the motif representing the unhappy love of a young girl and boy threatened by an old man. An example is the unhappy love of Deirdre, which was the initial basis for the theme of Grainne and Diarmait and finally for the medieval motif of Tristan and Isolde. The Celtic scholar Myles Dillon (1900-1972) once wrote that it is clear that the story of Deirdre, “the tragedy of a young girl betrothed to an old man and of the conflict between passion and duty on the part of her lover” shown in the later story of Grainne and Diarmait employed a general scheme discovered in song on Deirdre’s fate but puts it into another less mythological and more human context. This time a game for a woman is conducted between the folk hero and warrior Fionn and his younger relative Diarmait O’Duibhne. Fionn, who is then very old, is just about to marry Grainne when the young and handsome Diarmait appears on the horizon. Both Diarmait and Grainne run away while Fionn sets off in pursuit and finally causes the death of Diarmait by setting a magic wild-boar upon him. The conflict is between passion and duty on the part of her lover. “In both cases death is the price of love.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that the motif of Grainne and Diarmait stems from the very ancient epoch of Irish culture, it was fully developed during the Medieval period. The oldest copy of the legend was recorded from earlier oral tradition in approximately the fourteenth century and is traditionally titled *The Pursuit of Diarmait and Grainne*. Labby Dolmen, located in the

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<sup>14</sup> Quot. after: E. Knott, G. Murphy, *Early Irish Literature*, Routledge&Kegan Paul, London 1966, p. 153.

Irish county Sligo, and also called Carrickglass Dolmen, is thought to be the location of the beds of Diarmaid and Grainne as lovers, when they traveled across the country while escaping from the angry Fionn Mac Cumhaill. This motif of Deirdre and also of Diarmuid and Grainne was later recovered on a larger scale during the Celtic Renaissance at the turn of the nineteenth century. It was then that this theme was undertaken by a number of modern Irish writers including William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) and his *Diarmuid and Grania* (1916). Some years earlier, the motif of Deirdre also began its twentieth century career thank to such writers as: George William Russell (*Deirdre*, 1902) and John Millington Synge (*Deirdre and the Sorrows*, 1910).

A typical example of how this motif was employed in modern times is the tragedy titled *Deirdre and the Sorrows*, written by John Millington Synge and published and staged in 1910. Another example of the theme used by Irish writers since the Celtic Renaissance is the modern novel *Diarmait and Grainne*, as adapted by Amy Friedman and illustrated by Jillian Gilliland

In one of the medieval Irish texts pertaining to a completely different religious subject, a certain scribe accidentally recorded a fragment of a story about Grainne considered today as the oldest known version, unfortunately, apart from the just mentioned fragment, not preserved in its entirety. In this so happily saved scrap of text, Grainne speaks of her love toward Diarmait:

“There is one  
On whom I should gladly gaze,  
For whom I would give the bright world,  
All of it, all of it,  
Though it be an unequal bargain.”<sup>15</sup>

In another story of similar kind, concerning this time a certain Findabair and her lover Froech, we find the most delicate erotic scene of the archaic Celtic world, so far from brutal contemporary descriptions of sex scenes. After the naked Froech swam across a lake for a twig of a rowan at Findabair’s wish, she was fascinated by his naked body which aroused her erotic feelings. As we read in that ancient text:

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in: *Lebor na hUidre (The Book of the Dun Cow)*, ed. R. I. Best & O. Bergin, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 1929; quot. after: E. Knott, G. Murphy, op. cit. p. 154.

“Findabair used afterwards to say of any beautiful thing she saw that she thought it more beautiful to see Froech coming across a dark pool, the white body, the lovely hair, the shapely face, the grey eye, the gentle youth without fault or blemish [...]his body straight and perfect, the branch with the red berries between his throat and his fair face. Findabair used to say that she had never seen anything half or a third as beautiful as he.”<sup>16</sup>

Gertrude Schoeperle, a specialist in Celtic influences upon European literature, suggested that it was the story of Grainne and Diarmait and indirectly Deirdre, that initiated the development of a motif which resulted in the story of Tristan and Isolde, though it was later transferred to continental European literature not from Ireland but from Cornwall and Brittany. In such a way, some archaic motifs of Celtic literature became a milestone in the development of medieval romance, possessing a scale of lyric sensitivity and human feelings unknown in continental lay literature beforehand.

The motif of Tristan and Isolde has innumerable versions and interpretations in European art and literature. Richard Wagner (1813-1883), the German composer, wrote his opera *Tristan and Isolde*, which is probably the most famous opera based on this Celtic motif. Let us consider: it is an archaic world which surrounds both the authors and the protagonists of these Celtic literary masterpieces. In this brutal world warriors enjoy their bloody deeds, they are proud when they cut off their foe's head in order to attach it to their saddle or chariot. They live in primitive settlements called *crannógs*, located among inaccessible marshes and swamps. And in this barbarian reality, unusually subtle individual feelings appear which can hardly be derived from the Mediterranean tradition of Greek and Latin literatures. If we add to this our earlier observations about the Celtic concept of *fir fer*, on the basis of which the later British idea of fair play was grounded, we can rightly say that Celtic culture contributed much to the development of the general European aesthetic and ethical sensitivity.

The plots of the great Celtic literary cycles, but especially of the Fenian Cycle, reached Northern Britain in that very moment when the Irish Scoti arrived there in the sixth century A.D. It was an obvious impulse initiating the Gaelic tradition of Scottish literature. Then Fionn Mac Cumhaill and later his son Oisín, known later in Scotland as Ossian, and to a lesser extent Fionn's grandson Oscar, became heroes who were even

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<sup>16</sup> Quot. after: E. Knott, G. Murphy, op. cit., p. 131.

more Scottish than Irish. Anyway, it was from Scotland, not Ireland, that all the traditions, folklore and poetry associated with Ossian expanded to continental Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and so-called pre-Romantic period. This happened thanks to the famous mystification of James Macpherson (1736-1796) which initiated the tradition of Ossianic lore and Ossian himself, sometimes called “The Homer of the North.” In any event, one can hardly imagine the European literature of the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century without that element of Celtic tradition. Somewhat later, Ossian also became a hero of painting, as exemplified by the masterpiece of François Pascal Simon Gérard, the French artist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, titled *Ossian thinking about his country’s epic history*.

In Poland, much of the literature of Polish sentimentalism and pre-romanticism is associated with Ossianic lore. To be convinced of that one should read Professor Marian Szykowski’s work titled *Ossian in Poland against the Background of the Romantic Movement*<sup>17</sup> (1912). More easily accessible is a collection of Ossianic songs with an extensive introduction, edited by Jerzy Strzetelski in his work and anthology *Songs of Ossian*, translated by Seweryn Goszczyński for the Polish National Library of Books and published by Ossolineum Publishing House in its famous “series two,” devoted to foreign literature in Polish.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Historic Cycle also called The Royal or King Cycle*

Not much time remains for me to say anything about the last Celtic Cycle of literature, i.e. the Historic, Royal or King Cycle. It is probably the best known Celtic Cycle, thanks to its real Irish rulers and also King Arthur, the semi-legendary King of Britain and his Round Table Knights, if we consider that cycle as belonging to the general set of Celtic cycles.

On the Irish side there are numerous masterpieces in Gaelic concerning numerous heroes of Christian times, such as Rónan, Mongan Mac Fiáchnai or Connacht Gáaire. The basic difference between the earlier cycles and the Historic Cycle is that the last one appeared in the time of

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<sup>17</sup> Marian Szykowski, *Osjan w Polsce na tle genezy romantycznego ruchu (Ossian in Poland against the Background of the Romantic Movement)*, Akademia Umiejętności. Rozprawy z posiedzen Wydziału Filologicznego (Academy of Useful Arts. Paper of the Meetings of Philological Division), ser. III, vol. 7, Kraków 1912.

<sup>18</sup> J. Strzetelski, ed., *Pieśni Osjana (Songs of Ossian)*, transl. S. Goszczyński, Ossolineum, ser. II, nr 202, Wrocław 1980.



Christianity and has the weakest features of pagan Celtic mythology. Irish protagonists of this cycle are real people though they are embellished with legends which usually surpass their true exploits and historic importance. Among them we can find the just mentioned Rónan king of Leinster, who in 624 A.D. murdered his beloved son Máel Fothartaig, who was falsely accused of ravishing her stepmother. This event is told in a story titled *Fingal Rónáin* (*The Slaying by Rónan of one of his kin*). The term *fingal* refers to a killing usually committed among and by relatives, frequently for political reasons such as in support of a claimant to the throne inspired by a king's poor ruling, inability to beat his enemies on the battlefield, etc. Among the other heroes of the cycle whose historicity has been born out are Morgn Mac Fiáchnai, the King of Ulster, who died in 625 A.D. and Connach Gáaire who died in 662 A.D. There also appear protagonists from the Hebrides, like Cano Mac Gartman (died 688 A.D.). It is very typical that sometimes the only historically proved fact about their lives is the date of their death. The idea of death being used by poets as a pretext for singing about their kings is worth discussing further. The lavish funeral ceremonies, during which a poet called to mind the exploits of the deceased ruler, were a constant element of epic literature, not only among the Celtic peoples, but also, for example, in the funeral scenes in ancient Greek and Latin literatures or the Old English *Beowulf*.

Apart from the above mentioned *Fingal Rónáin*, there is another classical Irish epic concerning the death of someone from a ruling royal family: *Mór of Munster and the Death of Cúanu son of Cailchène* (*Mór Muman ocus Aldéd Cúanach maic Cailchéni*).

As well as death there are other kinds of events which are pivotal to the plots: a famous battle, the destruction of a ruler's abode by the enemy or the unrequited love of the king or a member of his family. Among the stories with battles as their subject, attention should be drawn to some of the oldest texts of the Historical Cycle – *Cath Almaine* (*The Battle on Almaine Lake, nowadays Allen*) which describes a real event of the year 718, and *Cath Maige Léna* (*The Battle of Mag Lena*), and many others. The number of epic poem titles which begin with the word “cath” – “battle” is quite numerous and imposing.

The destruction of the royal settlement is the subject, among others, in *Orgain Denna Ríg* (*The Destruction of Dinn Rig*) and *Togall Bruidne Da Derga* (*The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*) The last one of these is one of the main examples of plots borrowed from the *Ulster Cycle*. However,

its general poetics is characteristic of the Historical Cycle; hence the hesitations of many scholars about how it should be classified. Mixing of the elements taken from both cycles is caused by the fact that the plot of any such story concerns times incomparably later than the times when “classic” Ulstermen lived or were conceived by archaic poets. But at the same time these “later Ulstermen” continue the Ulster genealogy to which they feel connected or to which they constantly pertain in one way or another, while at the same time they appear in a new environment and perform new exploits which are far removed from the older layers of the Ulster tradition. Together with them, there also appear characters “brought back to life,” in spite of the fact that they had literally died much earlier, though still maintaining some links with the ancient *Ulster Cycle*. One example of such is Conal Cernell, one of the traditional Ulstermen who suddenly appears accompanied by Conaire the Great, a real king of Tara in Christian times, ruling as late as in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Such obvious “reordering” of historical time is nevertheless in accordance with the rules of “epic time” and “heroic distance,” typical for ancient narratives where the presented world “is projected into the past, the remote the perspective of memory but not the real definite past.”<sup>19</sup> In this “remote perspective of memory” the real chronology of what protagonists are doing is absolutely unimportant. What really matters is collecting together those elements of the narrative which create “ethnic memory,” a backbone and the peculiar “constitution” of an archaic society.

*The Destruction of Da Dega’ Hostel* is the story of an attack upon the settlement of Conaire the Great, shown as a model ruler, who, instigated by the underground *aer side* (inhabitants of tomb hills; this element is a borrowing from the *Mythological Cycle*) breaks the *geasa* i.e. the rules of the gods, and especially solemn vows of religious character, injunctions, conjurations and prohibitions. His step-brothers are instrumental in punishing him but they, in turn, prove unfaithful to the family bonds, swearing an oath to the pirates from Britain to whom they must be loyal and at the same time disloyal to Conaire. Such a “multi-storeyed” breach of faith, for which such treachery is punished, is close to the spirit of the Greek tragedy. The piece is full of cruelty being constantly confronted

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<sup>19</sup> M. Bachtin, *Epos a powieść (Epos and Novel)*, “Pamiętnik Literacki” (“Literary Memoir,” a Polish journal in literary criticism and history), vol. LXI, 1970, nr 3 p. 216; quotation translated from Polish by myself – WL).

with the warrior's honour. This is well expressed in the text concerning Conall Cernach, after he fled from the burnt royal residence where his lord had been slain. He finally finds refuge at the court of Amairgin, his father, and justifies himself when accused of lack of honour and cowardly behaviour:

“He travelled till he reached his father's house, with his shield on his arm, and his sword and the fragments of his two spears in his hand. He found his father before the enclosure surrounding his stronghold in Teltown. ‘Swift are the wolves that hunted thee, lad’, said his father. ‘Our wounds have come from a conflict with fighting men, old warrior,’ said Conall Cernach. ‘Thou hast news of Dá Derga's hostel,’ said Amairgin. ‘Is thy lord alive?’ ‘He is not alive,’ said Conall. ‘I swear by the gods by whom the great tribes of Ulidians swear, it is cowardly for the man who has escaped alive, having left his lord with his foes in death,’ said Conal Cernach's father. ‘My wounds are not white, old warrior,’ said Conall. He showed him his shield arm. One-hundred-and fifty wounds had been inflicted on it, but the shield which protected it had saved it. As for the right arm, it had been twice as badly used; for though the sinews of that arm held to the body without being parted, it had been hacked, cut, wounded, and riddled, since there was no shield guarding it. ‘That arm fought this night, lad,’ said Amairgin. ‘Tis true, old warrior,’ said Conall Cernach: ‘many are they to whom it gave drinks of death this night ...’”<sup>20</sup>

The motif of banishing the ruler is also quite frequent. A typical story is *Longes Chonaill Chuiro* (*The Exile of Conan Corc*). Love threads also appear and when we come closer to the peak of the Middle Ages more and more of them can be met. One of the most ancient motifs of this kind is contained in *Tochmarc Fithirne ocus Dáirine dá Ingen Tuathail* (*The wooing of Fithirne and Dairine, the two daughters of Tuathail*).

The whole cycle, however, is dominated by themes of murder, war and banishment. The Ireland of the first few centuries after Christianity consisted of about 150 “petty kingdoms or “petty states” which were constantly engaged in mutual fighting against each other. They were ruled by monarchs who referred to themselves as kings while remaining in constantly changing and unstable relationships. The Irish law of that age defined three types of such ruler: “ri tuaithe” who ruled over a single tribal “state”; “ruirs” – an overking also called “ri tuath” who exercised power

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<sup>20</sup> *Early Irish Literature*, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

*de iure* (though not always *de facto*) over a few single “states” or “kingdoms.” In turn, he was dependent upon a “ri ruirech” (another name “ri cóicid”), i.e. the third type of monarch ruling over a greater province. Until the time of Brian Bóroime, that is until the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, there was no ruler capable of uniting Ireland, and after Brian’s death it was plunged again into endless civil wars among dozens of feuding “ri.” This is also why it is so difficult to follow Irish history, which was continually muddled by local conflicts. Understanding and deciphering such political convulsions is to some extent possible, yet tedious, and leaves us with the impression of the sustained inability of this people to stop this shambles. This would be nothing peculiar when compared with the equally bloody history of perhaps every European country if there were not the overwhelming feeling that nothing came out of it. A war or regicide which elsewhere – at least in a number of proved historical cases – lead to the unification of the particular nation, in Ireland resulted only in pure revenge, another regicide, another devastating war and another desire to retaliate. Such a state of affairs, preserved through numerous generations, left the country in a state of constant disintegration and feuding, which became her historic curse.

Countless dynastic and family conflicts, lootings and murders played a significant role in the claiming of (often by forgery) genealogical rights. The attitude toward genealogy is one of the major differences between the older cycles of Irish literature and the Historic Cycle. In the oldest Ulster and Fenian tales, an ancestor is usually mentioned and certain geographical space is ascribed to him in which he has the right to live, move and rule. In the Historic Cycle, all these elements were strengthened and widened. The usual recollection of ancestors was substituted by regular genealogical discourse, while the geographical description of territories to which the particular ruler claimed his rights, especially when they remained under the reign of another ruler, contained in the beginning a shy and faint-hearted attitude, but then more and more vigorous specifications and demands of his justified or unjustified hereditary prerogatives toward the claimed region.

Such genealogical character is obviously part and parcel of the oldest and comparatively primitive tales of the *Historic Cycle* which do not have well established Celtic titles but which are usually described by celtologists in English as the *Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories*. Their language exhibits “genealogical moralising” and eulogies, yet with time, es-

pecially when approaching the central phase of the Middle Ages, these written productions assume some features aimed at giving the reader sheer pleasure and trying to meet his more subtle conscious or subconscious aesthetic needs. Genealogy then became the pretext for composing tales about colourful rulers and not with the aim of providing literary arguments in dynastic disputes. This is an obvious sign of relative cultural stability which did not always (fortunately!) reflect the nonsensical political and military violence which had, since time immemorial, been a specific feature of Ireland.

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The multitude of preserved texts and the thematic richness of particular cycles allow the literature of Celtic Ireland in the archaic and early Christian periods to be counted as the richest in Europe. Excluding the more highly developed literatures of ancient Greece and Rome, the heritage of pre-Christian and early Christian Ireland is incomparable in its abundance to similar resources of other countries and languages. The Roman occupation, so destructive for the Celtic “cultural empire,” makes impossible the reconstruction of a similar heritage for Gaul and pre-Christian Britain, but the medieval literatures of Britain, especially Wales and to a lesser degree Cornwall, from the centuries after breaking off ties with Rome, gives us a view of the extremely rich poetic imagination of these peoples, even in spite of the incomparably smaller amount of preserved literature in comparison with the Irish literary heritage. Even if the Brythonic tradition had left only the Arthurian cycle, its literature should be considered as great, regardless of whether we count it as a part of the general Celtic Historic or Royal Cycle or not.

This tremendous Celtic legacy, both Irish and Brythonic, later found its way to different European literatures through the Celts of Brittany (where Brythonic Celts of Britain found shelter while escaping the Anglo-Saxon conquest), who transmitted motifs and heroes of insular tradition to the continent. The Anglo-Norman links with France and then the international circulation of Latin were also helpful. Belonging to different periods of history: the medieval motif of unhappy love, Tristan and Isolde, then the number of offshoots of the Arthurian legend and much later the Ossianic lore flourishing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, are the best examples of the huge Celtic influence upon European culture.

One of the main bridges transmitting Celtic tradition abroad was surprisingly the language of the oppressors of the Celts, the English. Unfortunately, the growing international status of the English tongue soon started to muffle the significance and real character of the original Celtic literature. The number of preserved texts, the ideas contained there and the lyrical motifs found in Middle and Modern English using Celtic heritage (for instance the great dramas of William Shakespeare), and also its influence on painting and music are now easily perceptible. Every cultured European knows Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Macbeth*, or Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. What was probably one of the most inspiring elements for such borrowings from Celtic tradition was not only the novelty of the motifs but also the contribution of the subtle Celtic climate and imaginative, mystical spirit which, according to some scholars and literary critics, is to a substantial degree responsible for certain features of English literature. The Celtic element was undoubtedly absorbed by the English cultural tradition and in the course of time appeared immensely supportive of the great expansion of literature written in English, although not necessarily by the English. One of the greatest English literary critics, Matthew Arnold, quoted by Charles Squire, an expert in Celtic literature and mythology, expressed the following opinion about the links between English and Celtic heritage: "while we owe to the Anglo-Saxon the more practical qualities that have built up the British Empire, we have inherited from the Celtic side that poetic vision which has made English literature the most brilliant since the Greek."<sup>21</sup> Let us leave unanswered the question of English literature being "the most brilliant since the Greek" considering the fact that similar pretensions could be expressed by the literatures of some other languages including German, French or Italian. However, when we consider the importance of the Celtic element, Arnold's opinion seems much more acceptable. Similar views have been expressed by a striking number of literary historians and critics. William Vaughn Moody and Robert Moss Lovett, in their *History of English Literature*, reprinted so many times in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, write openly about the beneficial influence of Celtic culture upon the Anglo-Saxon: "As the Angles and Saxons spread [...] over the Western part of England,

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<sup>21</sup> M. Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Smith, Elder and Co., London 1867; quoted also in: Ch. Squire, *Celtic Myth and Legend, Poetry and Romance*, The Gresham Publishing Company, London [1905], p. 3.

they seem to have absorbed the remaining inhabitants, who communicated to the conquering race its first leaven: they made it later more sensitive and receptive, and gave it a touch of extravagance and gayety, which, after being reinforced by similar elements in the temperament of the Norman-French invaders, was to blossom in the sweet humour of Chaucer, the rich fancy of Spenser, and the broad humanity of Shakespeare.”<sup>22</sup>

Those who were inclined to exaggerate the Celtic influence, and accused the Anglo-Saxons of lacking literary imagination were repulsed by Arthur Compton-Rickett. He, as a matter of fact, accepted the fact that the Anglo-Saxon imagination was of a different kind to the Celtic one: “The Saxon genius of the race voiced itself more readily in social and political life than in literature. It was essentially practical and orderly. Passion and imagination were not alien but subordinate qualities here; for the characteristics most insistent in the Saxon were those precisely that made for sound and efficient national life.”<sup>23</sup> However, Compton-Rickett was far from degrading the Anglo-Saxon type of literary imagination as being inferior to that of the Celts: “To speak of the unimaginative Saxon, as some Celtic enthusiasts do, is absurd. It is not the quantity but the quality of his imagination that differentiates him from the Celt and Norman. His imagination is clear, and intense, with a certain fierce simplicity and bleak directness, whereas the Celtic imagination is iridescent and exuberant, subtle and pervasive rather than simple and strong, allusive and mystical rather than direct and practical.”<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps because of the fear of minimizing the cultural heritage of England, many historians, especially those belonging to the imperial school of thinking, did not fully appreciate the Celtic contribution to British history and culture and sometimes even ridiculed similar views: “Unlike the German and Scandinavian, the English is a mixed race though mainly Nordic – whatever the exact proportion may be. The Celtic and pre-Celtic blood, which probably flows to some extent in the veins of everyone who today claims English parentage, may have influenced the English temper. On the other hand, the difference discernible between modern English and modern

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<sup>22</sup> W. Vaugh Moody, R. Moss Lovett, *History of English Literature*, new and enlarged edition by F. B. Millet, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York-Chicago-Boston-Atlanta-San Francisco-Dallas 1943, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> A. Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London-Edinburgh-Paris-Melbourne-Toronto-New York 1947, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

German or Scandinavian might also be accounted for by the long centuries of residence in the very peculiar climate of Britain and in the social and political security of an island that was well defended against invasion after 1066. But we still like to dream that English poetry owes something to wild Celtic fancy wedded to the deep feeling and good sense of the Nordic races. Shakespeare came from a shire that was close to the old Severn Valley borderland of Welsh and Saxon conflict. All such speculations are fancy, in some indeterminate relation to fact.”<sup>25</sup>

We do not intend to forejudge either the dispute itself or make decisions about the proportions of eventual Celtic influences upon the Anglo-Saxon cultural, especially literary heritage. However, without any fear of mistake, we can say that such influence was certainly huge and of great importance. As a matter of fact, it is hard to even imagine the cultural shape of the British Isles, especially Britain herself, without the Celtic ingredient, undoubtedly one of the most important components of the civilization of the region.

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<sup>25</sup> G. Macaulay-Trevelyan, *History of England*, Longmans & Green, London-New York-Toronto 1947, p. 45.



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## Chapter Six

# FROM GA TO HEPTARCHY: REMARKS ON THE ORIGINS OF ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS

It was from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> to almost the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century when, from among the Anglian and Saxon heathen tribes who were overrunning Britain in their conquering spirit, certain small and primitive political organisms started to appear and develop. We can call them just tribal kingdoms. These unadvanced political structures contained a number of features important for the future Kingdom of England.

Most of historians consider this period superficially proceeding almost without any interruption to the period of Heptarchy, which is the establishment of groups of higher advanced kingdoms so collectively called from the Greek number *hepta* – seven, and *arché* – seniority, or superiority. Underappreciation of the pre-heptarchical period comes usually from conviction that it was characterised by chaos, difficult for historical description and analysis, and resulting from the enormous transfer of Germanic tribes from the continent to Britain. Recent discoveries, however, caused thorough reassessment and revaluation of earlier notions. As Steven Bassett writes “the picture is not so black as some have painted it. Now that historians, archaeologists, and placename scholars do talk to each other, increasingly coordinate their studies and combine the results, the Migration Period in lowland Britain is no longer an impenetrable Dark Age [...] there is no longer any excuse for our saying that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms doubtless emerged out of some sort of primordial barbarian chaos.”<sup>1</sup>

Supporters of the “migrational chaos theory” seem not to remember that the Germanic peoples, even during their continental period, were able to establish comparatively highly organised tribal states, which, in the oldest records of Old English literature are described precisely as “kingdoms” – “cynerica.” In *Widsith*, for instance, one fragment can be found concerning King Offa ruling over the continental Angles. And he should

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<sup>1</sup> S. Bassett, *In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdom*, in: S. Bassett, ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, Leicester 1989, pp. 3-4.

not be confused with his later namesake reigning in Mercia. That earlier, continental Offa:

“... having in boyhood won the broadest of kingdoms;  
no youngster did work worthier of an earl.  
With single sword he struck the boundary  
against the Myrgings where it marches now,  
fixed it at Fifeldor. Thence forward it has stood  
between Angles and Swaefe where Offa set it.”<sup>2</sup>

“[...] geslog ærest monna,  
cnihtwesende, cynerica maest.  
Nænig efeneald him eorlscipe maran  
on orette. Ane sweorde  
merce gemærde wið Mergingum  
bi Fifeldore; heoldon ford sibban  
Engle ond Swæfe, swa hit Offa geslog.”<sup>3</sup>

It would be rather strange, if tribal kinsmen of that continental Offa, setting out for the conquering of Britain completely forgot about their earlier organizational and military experiences and traditions. The Conquest itself proved that they did not forget, though – what seems quite obvious – while acting in new, unknown and difficult conditions they could not momentarily reconstruct or recreate the kingdoms of the continental type which gained comparatively high level of social and political development. An additional difficulty was, as David De Camp wrote, “that the Conquest of Britain was not a transfer of entire continental nations, each with its own culture and language. Rather, it was a slow colonization by numerous bands representing many continental tribes, which did not themselves differ significantly from one another. Whatever tenuous tribal affiliations the invaders had had in the fifth century were soon mostly lost or confused. People migrated not as Angles, Saxons, or Frisians, but as individual adventurer – leaders, with small and heterogeneous followings.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Widsith, in *The Earliest English Poems*, transl. and introd. M. Alexander, Harmondsworth 1987, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Widsith, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. Ph. Krapp & E. van Kirk Dobbie, New York-London 1966 (1936), p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> D. De Camp, *The Genesis of the Old English Dialects: A New Hypothesis*, in *Approaches to English Historical Linguistics*, ed. R. Lass, New York-Chicago-San Francisco-Atlanta-Dallas-Montreal-Toronto-London-Sydney 1969, p. 360.

It is however difficult to agree with De Camp when he maintains that “people migrated not as Angles, Saxons or Frisians, but as individual adventure-leaders, with small and heterogenous followings.”<sup>5</sup> If so, how clear-cut division between the Angles and Saxons was established after their arrival in Britain? It seems that the conquerors were arriving in small groups and part of them could be, of course, heterogenous and made of a mixture containing casual representatives of different tribes. But the majority had to migrate in more homogenous communities, at least to the degree facilitating reconstruction of their main continental divisions especially when concerning the Angles and the Saxons.

This mass of newcomers dripping slowly but persistently was sometimes more of a powerful wave, as in the times of Gildas who described clearly the coordinated military action the result of which was that the intruders almost, at one blow, reached the shore of the Irish Sea. But lack of well stabilised political and military structure was the reason that, after such surprising success, a deep withdrawal and dispersion of temporal allies happened. For the establishing of a wider and more persistent political unity much more time was needed.

The process of building a future English statehood was begun with stabilisation of small territories dominated by particular groups of newcomers. Dimensions of such areas was probably conditioned by many factors, such as resistance of the Celtic natives, current military strength of the Germanic invaders, their lesser or larger inclination to expansion. On the other hand, internal structure of newly established tribal states was the resultant of persisting old continental patterns, individual abilities of particular leaders and, finally, elements found and absorbed within Britain.

Bassett lists several basic mechanisms responsible for creating structures of early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Two of them seem as especially important and worth discussion. The first was developed while utilising the “increasingly hierarchical leadership within the larger extended families.”<sup>6</sup> That type certainly had a number of variants. In many cases leadership was given to the oldest or most experienced member of such “extended family.” In other, especially those more diversified and heterogenous groups where blood ties were weaker it was decided by selection and acceptance by general meeting of a particular community. It was not

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> S. Bassett, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

always done smoothly and there is a lot of evidence that in case of conflict about individual leadership the older Anglo-Saxon communities were choosing a compromise, in the form of collective chieftainship.

The second mechanism tended to utilise existing structures of subdued Brythonic territory including its post-Roman institutions. Most of the older, and some contemporary historians exclude such a possibility drawing a picture of the Anglo-Saxons who arrived upon the ashes of what remained after the romanised Celts. According to such views, in the best case the conquerers were making their new homes on the older Romano-Brythonic settlements where, at the beginning, they did not feel too much inclination to the higher forms of culture. Certainly such cases were quite frequent, but at the same time there is some evidence that at least, in three cases, the framework of Saxon or an Anglian kingdom was built upon earlier Brythonic *civitas*. In such a way small states around Canterbury, Winchester and York were established. It is also quite possible that Essex had a similar genesis.

Regardless of the particular type of all such pre-kingdoms were at the beginning, characterised by rather small areas and only in the course of time did they grow in strength and territory, absorbing adjacent areas either by way of expansion into the Celtic territory, or, by merging with their Germanic neighbours. As long ago as the 19<sup>th</sup> century John Mitchell Kemble suggested calling such small, tribal kingdom as *ga*.<sup>7</sup> In his opinion *ga* was a small tribal state or kingdom, consisting of several *hundreds*, and growing in the course of time to the level of being an immediate predecessor of a higher organized kingdom, which in turn “is only a larger *ga* than ordinary; indeed the *ga* itself was the original kingdom.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England. History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, vol. 1, London 1849, chapter Gá or Scír, pp. 72-87; see also H. M. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, part I, Cambridge 1987, pp. 196-197. Full notation of Old English words, especially names and place names including marks of vowel length are used only at the introduction of particular word, except situations when linguistic analysis requirements need it. Most contemporary scholars, especially historians and literary historians, like H. R. Loyn or R. Reynolds, for example, omit the marking of vowel duration. Only purely linguistic works employ full notation. This article does not pretend to be of a linguistic character; full marks of vowel duration do not add anything important in most of our analyses. In addition there are at least three systems of noting vowel length that introduces confusion in case of quotation from other works where a different system is employed.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

In most cases *ga* reconstructed by Kemble on general Germanic basis survived in English in its derivative form as *ge* in a certain number of local place names such as Lyminge, Hawkinge or Margaretting[e] especially in Kent and Essex. In other shires of Southeast England small numbers of place names survived where *ge* is preserved in an obliterated forms as in the name of Surrey, once *Suther-ge*, or village *Eastry* formerly *Eastorge*. It seems to be undoubted that such names denoted once small political territories preceding heptarchical kingdoms.

Similar names existed in other Germanic languages and together with them certainly also tribal pre-kingdoms. It clearly suggests that the Old English *ge* was transplanted into Britain as a part of a more general continental Germanic lore. In Old Frisian it was *gae* or *ga* identical with Kemble's reconstruction; in Gothic it was *gawi*; in Old High German *gawi* or *gewi* (compare modern German *gau* – region or district, e.g. *der Gau*, *die deutschen Gaue*, *der Gauleiter*, etc.).

In England preserved place names with the *ga/ge* element provide some information about development of territories which were denoted in that way. First of all what is striking it is their localisation in the south-eastern shires. To the West they do not cross natural borders made by the Chiltern Hills and the Hampshire Downs; to the North they do not reach after the Wash. All areas delineated that way experienced the oldest Anglo-Saxon colonisation. It was here that the Germanic tribes initiated reconstruction of their oldest, continental traditions, political and social bonds. Preserved onomastics proves undoubtedly that there was also room for tribal pre-kingdom of the continental Germanic *ga/ge* type.

As the Anglo-Saxons expanded Westward and Northward and started to create new political units on more and more extensive territories their older tribal experience appeared to be insufficient and gradually fading. Pre-kingdom *ga/ge* could only grow to a certain limit but above that its structures were not capacious enough, and as time was passing it became less and less useful. Probably no single *ga/ge* became bigger than an area approximate to a modern shire size, if the largest unit of such kind can be identified as *Sutherge-Surrey*. And that size seems to be the largest in historical development of *ga/ge* kingdom. Above such a boundary there was a role for the kingdom of the heptarchical type. It does not mean that all pre-kingdoms of a similar kind automatically reached such a level. Eastern neighbours of *Sutherge-Surrey* living in *Eastorge* were most probably

less fortunate and less dynamic if they left no territorial place names of significance except small village Eastry.

The *ga/ge* element can also be found in topographical names especially concerning marshes and swamps. Here belong such names as marshes of Denge in Kent or Vange in Essex. It can be explained in quite a simple way: marshes were then frequent and convenient spots for building defensive settlements. Not one early tribal kingdom had such a locality for its “capital.” However, when its historical momentum passed away and when the early mediaeval *burh*, or castle, became incomparably more convenient, local chiefs, or rulers, transferred their abodes to other places. What was left were the names of local marshes...

One of the best known “marsh” place name preserved to our times is Ely. In the oldest documents it appears as Elge, and sometimes as Elige, Elige or Helige. Ely since time immemorial existed in an area which was neither island nor peninsula and in fact it was something between both being among vast marshes remaining in depressions. No-one knows if there existed any *ga/ge* in a political or tribal sense. The ending of the place-name seems to suggest this.

The oldest information about Ely concerns the year 673, a time shortly after the passing away of tribal petty states. In the case of Ely this is additionally supported by its belonging to heptarchical kingdom of East Anglia. Thus, if the tribal *ga/ge* existed it could be absorbed earlier by East Anglia, and before the earlier tribal structure left any written record and then only its former area remained denoted as *ge* no longer having any political context. There is also the possibility that after “epoch of *ga/ge*” was finished, *ga/ge* as a linguistic element was preserved, denoting just certain areas without any additional political context. As such it could be eventually spread and applied to regions which formerly were not tribal kingdoms. In the case of Ely this second hypothesis seems more probable, but the existence of a small petty kingdom here, later absorbed by East Anglia, cannot be definitely excluded.

Ely appears on the historical firmament at the moment when the East Anglian king Æcgfrith endowed his wife Ætheltryth with some land in that area and she, in turn, established there an abbey of which she became an abess pledging virginity and living, as Bede informs us “a holy life.” In the same chronicle information can be found where for the first time the name of that place is associated with eels (OE *el* or *æl*). In the fourth book of Bede’s chronicle we read:

“Ely is in the province of the East Angles, a country of about six hundred families, in the nature of an island, enclosed, as has been said, either with marshes or waters, and therefore it has its name from the great plenty of eels, taken in those marshes.”<sup>9</sup>

“Est autem Elge in provincia Orientalium Anglorum, regio familiarum circiter sexcentarum, in similitudinem insulae vel paludibus, ut diximus, circumdata vel aquis: unde et a copia anguilarum, quae in eisdem paludibus capiuntur, nomen accepit.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus a name of an area rich in eels was created, but this was not the end of its evolution. The ending *-ge* overlapped soon with *ig*, or *eg* meaning in Old English *an isle* which resulted in the suppression of primordial *ge* and which produced *Eleg*. In turn, as final sound was palatalised according to more general changes in Old English and produced “y,” which is found in contemporary *Ely*.

Place names containing *ge*, of course, were not the only linguistic traces of earlier pre-heptarchical kingdoms. Numbers of others can also be found in different tribal and ancestral names such as *Stoppingas*, *Rodingas* or *Hastingas*. Chronology of their origins for long has been a proverbial bone of contention between the onomasts.<sup>11</sup> There is no doubt,

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<sup>9</sup> The Venerable Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, transl. V. D. Scudder, publ. Dent, London and Dutton New York [1910], p. 197.

<sup>10</sup> Baedae, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. A. Holder, publ. Mohr, Freiburg 1882, p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> See short treating of the matter: M. Gelling, *Towards a Chronology for English Place-Names*, in D. Hooke, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, Oxford-New York 1988, pp. 59-76, esp. p. 66. Leaving aside some details the essence of that linguistic argument (stemming from the 1850s) lies in two contradictory hypotheses. The first (F. M. Stenton, E. Ekwall, J.N. L. Myres) says that place names with *-ingas* element are linked to the oldest Anglo-Saxon settlement in Britain and began their existence at the very first moments of that settlement (“*-ingas* names do belong to the earliest settlement period”). The second view represented amongst others by M. Gelling and K. Cameron, associates those names with a later stabilised period of the settlement. As M. Gelling writes “...we are not saying that folk-names like *Hæstingas* and *Readingas* were not in use among the Anglo-Saxons when they first came to this country. What we are saying is that the likely time for these ancient folk-names to be used as settlement-names is several generations after the first arrival, when settlements had expanded to the boundaries which separated the folk-groups from each other” (op. cit. p. 66). Another aspect of the same argument is associated with the mutual relations between names with *-ingas* and *-ing* element. because there is lack of written record pertaining to the period when these elements started



however, that names with *-ingas* do belong to the oldest categories of Anglo-Saxon geographical denominations. These names consist of three easily distinguishable elements. The first is the proper name usually belonging to a mythological ancestor or distinguished leader, usually war leader. The second is the formative *-ing*, which denotes the belonging of someone, or something to particular person. Finally the ending *-as* marks a plural number. Together, for instance, the name Rodingas contains the proper name Rodd or Rod while the remaining elements form the name of a people for which Rodd is superior as leader or as ancestor and in the course of time also becomes the name of territory settled by that people. Shortly speaking Rodingas were the people of Rodd living on Rodd's territory. And in reality such territory known today as Rodingas still exist in the western sector of Essex where at least eleven place names of this kind can be found such as Aythorpe Roding, Margaret Roding, Abbess Roding etc. Of course, only some of those names could be formed in oldest times. It is also quite possible that those most ancient, and original do not exist anymore while those which survived were created in later epochs through analogy typical for that area. Nonetheless, such significant groupings of such names proves vitality and continuous traditions of that tribe. Vitality, however, did not necessarily meant greatness. Nobody among the Rodingas, and the settlements of a similar form of name, played a more significant role in history of Anglo-Saxon England. It can be assumed then that the Rodingas were people tough and numerous but not politically clever, and certainly were unable to create any tribal kingdom which could eventually survive longer. Their potential mythical leader Rodd, meaning in Old English exactly the same as today: "a stick or straight, slender shoot of woody plant," seems not to represent a nickname stemming from any distinguished political or military deed...

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to mean what they are today, and none among the querelling sides is able to prove what is right. In the 1980s this scholarly clash was started anew because of the archaeological excavations at Mucking, a typical old settlement with *-ing* element in its name. This settlement when dug was unequivocally counted as being established immediately after the arrival of the Germanic tribes in Britain. The problem then lies in deciding if the name of Mucking is equally as old as that settlement itself? Meanwhile there is no written record of Mucking before 1066. This allows the possibility that the name of Mucking was given to this settlement later and so this place name cannot be counted as decisive evidence in the argument.

The existence of the Hastingas is well proved in written sources beginning with the year 771 when they are mentioned for the very first time in Latin form “Hestingorum gens” in *Historia regum* written by Simeon of Durham. The name of that people is traditionally derived from their legendary chieftain Hæsten, or Hæst which then meant “acting hastily,” “impetuous” or even “violent.” They probably fought for their tribal survival but as the Rodingas they were unable to create stronger political structure. Anyway their “capital,” Hastings, survives today. A similar story originated in connection with the people led by one Reada or Red (also as today just “red” with his hair or, perhaps, his face). Though his people did not exert a notable influence upon Anglo-Saxon history nor took any leading role, they left after them their establishment called Reading.

After the Stoppingas even such place names were not left. Names with *-ingas* or *-ing* signified heritage, they were tribal symbols of identification, perhaps even a battle-cry. The fact that the Stoppingas lost their home settlement with *-ingas* or *-ing* elements could have resulted from their military failure, or a cataclism, perhaps through gradual and slow desintegration or being absorbed in the course of time by other, stronger community. Still another possibility could be attached to the suggestion that a settlement called Stopping or *Stoppings* (similar to *Hastings*, for instance) was located in a place which, according to new developments found itself out of the main stream of historical events and died slowly and so completely that even the name was not saved. Otherwise other place names associate with the Stoppingas, but without *-ingas* or *-ing* elements became preserved in such contemporary places as Stopham and Stopley, then perhaps less prestigious but having more historical luck to survive.

Such historical luck excluded many other tribes from calling themselves something *-ingas*. From different old sources it is known that there existed such Saxon or Anglian tribes as Faerpingas, Grothingas, Billmigas (or perhaps Billingas), and Witheringas. Such names with *-ingas* element does not exhaust the question: there were many early societies which employed also other types of tribal names. As many as 34 tribal names of different kinds can be found in the document which by tradition of English historiography has been conventionally called *The Tribal Hidage* (‘hidage’ is understood as a kind of tax paid from land measured by hides, i.e. according to different evaluations 60-120 acres per one hide). The oldest copy of that document was written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century but certain indications prove that, beyond doubt, it was much older, probably of the

9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>12</sup> Several of the tribal names contained here have unusual endings with double *ga*: Noxgaga, Ohtgaga, while others because both local dialect changes or inaccuracies of a mediaeval scribler make one suspicious that such double *ga* could originally exist and then primordial *gaga* could be contracted like in the case of Vitherigga, and additionally even devocolized (Hicca or perhaps Hwicca) etc. One could automatically suspect that all this full (-*gaga*) and also contracted and devocalized forms (-*gga*, -*cca*) are associated with just discussed element of the *ga/ge* type which expressed in all known old Germanic languages organized territoriality while in the Old English character of preheptarchical tribal kingdom. There was, of course, no single tribal kingdom in England in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century when *The Tribal Hidage* was most probably written; however, we can be sure that the document reflects a much older tribal division in a time when particular tribes were no longer independent but still kept their uniqueness and integrity despite subjugation to others. *The Tribal Hidage* is in fact a list of sums of money paid by particular communities according to possessed arable lands.

To whom was that hidage paid? Most scholars suspect that it was Mercia. Surprisingly there are on the list certain kingdoms of the heptarchical era. This causes suspicion that the whole document was originated in the time of Mercian leadership, which is before Wessex took its lead because according to the *Tribal Hidage* Wessex paid its hidage with 100,000 hides. This type of an event could not have happen after 802, when Egbert started his ambitious efforts to unite the whole of England and was not ready to pay anything to Mercia. This, in turn, could mean that the date of the writing of the document should be shifted back to at least the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In most cases, however, particular tribes paid their dues from several hundred hides up to several thousand. Except for tribes mentioned previously one can find others, such as Wigesta, Wihtgara, Arosætna, Eastwilla, Westwilla etc.

Steven Bassett compared recently *The Tribal Hidage* to... “Sports Pink newspaper which reports the winners of, say, the fifth round of the F.A. Cup... Most of the little teams have long gone, there are a few potential giant-killers left – the Spalda, Arosætna, the East and West Willa... survi-

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<sup>12</sup> See D. Dumville, *The Tribal Hidage. An Introduction to Its Text and History*, in: S. Bassett, ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, Leicester 1989, pp. 227-230 (with the text of the three oldest copies of the *Tribal Hidage*).

vors only because they have so far avoided being drawn against the major teams. But the next round will see them off; they have had brief moment of glory and no more will be heard of them.”<sup>13</sup> Let us develop a little of that fun but clearly metaphoric.

The “O.E. Cup” was certainly initiated somewhere in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century by an open round accessible for all. Gradually “teams” became stronger and started to eliminate “weaklings” on knock-out basis. They understood that the future does not belong to minor “ball park clubs,” such as *ga/ge* or *-ingas* but to units that are territorially bigger and politically stronger. During the 7<sup>th</sup> century new units appeared grouping to several smaller ones and taking on other names, frequently denoting wider geographical features including one of the four quarters of the globe” (*North gyrwa*, *West wixna*) and among them also those which sound so familiar to all who know the history of England, such as *Suthseaxna* (later Sussex), *Westseaxna* (Wessex), *East Seaxna* (Essex), *East Angle* (East Anglia) and so on. Some among the names of this class formed associations not alien to contemporary fans of football: *Eastvilla* (written then sometimes as *Eastwilla*), now *Astonvilla*, etc.

Only some of the older *ga/ge*’s were able to accustom themselves to new conditions of “cup play,” as is proved by such examples as *Sutherge* – today’s *Surrey*. It was here that, for a certain period of time a community of a petty state was able to combine the tribal structure of *ga/ge* type with geographical expansion to the South – *suther*.

Approximately in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century one sees the “semi-final” of that “football cup” with 12 teams, but four of them go out partly because of weak defense and partly because of a lack of more distinguished “forwards,” despite the fact that some of the eliminated squads, such as *Hwicca* have at their disposal land measured in many hides and being comparable even to the greatest kingdoms of future Heptarchy. Meanwhile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century “play-off” is continued with eight “teams” participating: Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, Mercia, Deira, Bernicia and East Anglia. Let us observe them more carefully.

The name Kent is a transformed designation of Roman *Cantium* which can be found in the oldest Anglo-Saxon sources as *Cent*, *Caent*, or *Centlond*. Three Saxon “clubs,” Essex, Sussex and Wessex had, in Old English, the following forms: *Eastseaxe*, *Eastseaxum*, *Eastseaxan lond*, *East-*

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<sup>13</sup> S. Bassett, op. cit., p. 26.

*seaxan rice*; *Suthseaxa*, *Suthseaxum*, *Suthseaxna-lond*, *Suthseaxna rice*; *Westseaxum*, *Westseaxna lond* and *Westseaxna rice*. Not all numerous variants of those names for space reasons can be mentioned here. All of them, however, appear in for the first time in *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the years 604-607 and their common feature is a combination of quarters of the globe with the general ethnic name stemming from *seaxe* meaning a military instrument (being something intermediary between a large knife and a one-edged sword). Element *lond* is equal to contemporary *land*, while *rice* was an Old English equivalent to a modern *kingdom*.

Mercia, Old English *Myrce*, *Merce*, *Myrcna lond*, or *Myrcna rice* meant originally “border country,” because its localization was on the verge of Anglo-Saxon territory and its neighbourhood with the Celts who desperately tried to defend themselves against their Germanic conquerors. The name stems from the Old English *mearc* or *marc* – frontier, dividing line or mark. It is, however, possible, that the meaning of that name could be strengthened by another word; *mierce* or *gemierce* meaning “marsh” or “swamp,” also “marshy border” having its modern equivalent in “march” meaning in turn “a strip of land along a border” (once marshy) and in the plural well known Marches, i.e. the border areas between England and Wales.

No-one is certain as to the etymology of Deira and Bernicia. It is sometimes suggested that Deira stems from the name of a Celtic chieftain Deifyr who ruled there before the arrivall of Germanic intruders, while Bernicia owes its origins to Bearnoch, a legendary leader of the Anglian tribes.

East Anglia, or in Old English *East Engel rice* – Kingdom of the Eastern Angles – in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was for the first time mentioned under the year 617 together with *Readwalde East Engle cyninge* – “Readwald, king of the East Angles.” It is easy to discern that the contemporary name of East Anglia is composed of two elements taken from two languages: English *East* and Latin *Anglia*. This unusual combination, shaped many centuries ago, resulted probably from need, to discriminate between territory of the East Angles and the name of England (*Engel-lond*, *Engla land*) where not only Anglian but also Saxon tribes lived when that name started to describe the country of all Germanic people in Britain. It was comparatively easy to make such compound of Latin and English elements by monasterial scribblers, knowing both languages. But who, and when joined, those segments is difficult to judge. (Bede, on the other hand uses in his *Historia* full Latin version: *regio* or *provincia Orientalium Anglorum*).

From the “semi-final” of the “OE Cup” Sussex went first, then others followed, including Kent, not safeguarded from “dropping from the table” after having the initial leading position. To defend better against dropping, Bernicia and Deira united their forces and in such a way a new “club,” “giant-killer” to use Bassett’s terminology, Northumbria took the lead.

Northumbria or OE *Northanhymbra-lond*, also *Northanhymbra-rice* and the shorter *Northymbra-lond*, *-rice* combined in its name two geographical elements: North, and the name of the river Humber which means together “country North of the river Humber.”

Meanwhile about the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> and then the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries in the final “play-offs” only three “clubs” remained. Except Northumbria they were: Mercia and Wessex. During the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, after bitter competition the “Cup of Old England” was won by F.C. Wessex ...

Leaving aside sports terminology one might start looking closer at the development of heptarchical kingdoms.

Kent, took the lead at the earliest period of Heptarchy. This region, even during the pre-Roman and then Roman times, characterised itself by substantial economic dynamism. It was predestined to it because of a privileged geographical position: it occupied a promontory facing the European mainland. It was here that new arrivals, invaders, merchants and missionaries first settled. And it was in Cantium that the Romans left the most numerous network of ports: Regulbium, Portis Lemanis, Rutupiae and Dubris (accordingly, today’s Reculver, Lympne, Richborough, Dover). From each such port famous Roman roads run concentrating on Durovernia, the main town of Cantium, known also as Durovernum what was the latinised form of the Celtic name meaning “town among the fens.” From Durovernum only one extremely comfortable road ran towards Durobrivae (today’s Rochester) and then farther toward Londinium from which in turn by streets radiating in all directions it was easy to reach all of the most important centres of the island.

Shortly after arrival of the Saxons, Durovernum was transformed into *Cantwaraburh* – “Borough of the Men of Kent.” It was from that OE compound that the modern name Canterbury was derived and used for the first time in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 1086 with the contemporary spelling *Canterburie*. The significance of that town as trading, cultural and political centre was so large that the ruler of Kent, who was

able to control it, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* assures us, gained the title of “Cantwara cyning” – “King of the People of Kent.”

Kent was “sold” to the Saxons by Guorthigirn (Vortigern) in return for the daughter of Hengest or, according to other sources, Hengist, because the Celtic king was addicted to her with “untamable love.”<sup>14</sup> One thing is certain: for that price, or perhaps for another unknown and less romantic payment, all of Kent or its significant part went in a comparatively peaceful way into the hands of the Germanic arrivals. The take-over of this post-Roman territory saved and did not destroy the economic infrastructure. This became the quick development and initial domination of the Kingdom of Kent in a period of Heptarchy. But, between the arrival of Hengest’s squads and latter Kent’s leadership in early heptarchical period, one has to deal with many facts, difficult to explain. If a so well organised post-Roman inheritance became in Saxon hands a basis for the flourishing of that territory and if it was here that Germanic royal power was stabilised at the earliest, why then was it here that there were the most numerous remnants of small petty states of the *ga/ge* type? Their existence denies the central take-over, in that area, by one Germanic ruler.

The answer can be manifold. Kent nominally passed to the Saxons (or Jutes, as some scholars have maintained) but was not entirely dominated by them. One recalls that arbitrary decision of Guorthigirn (Vortigern), which raised the opposition of a hitherto ruling Brythonic *subregulus* of that territory, thereby competing for power with the post-Roman consuls (elected by the Roman oriented *cives* – local citizens) governing there. It is then possible that the new Germanic rulers maintained real control only over certain, partial areas of Kent whilst gradually conquering remaining territory which rebelled against them. Final conquest could be made by new invaders, not knowing of the earlier agreement between Hengest and

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<sup>14</sup> Some British and American encyclopedias, however, have maintained that Hengest was not a Saxon but a Jutish king invited by Guorthigirn (Vortigern) to defend Kent against the Saxons. See for instance information contained in *The World Book Encyclopedia. British Isles*, 1966, vol. I to Z, entry *Kent*, p. 25: “After the Romans left England, Saxon attacks continued. The people of Kent appealed to the Jutes for assistance. Hengest, a Jutish chieftain, with his brother Horsa, landed in Kent in 449. Under the rule of Hengest’s son Kent became one of the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England.” Traditional view of that event, confirmed by Bede is that Hengest, as Saxon chieftain was invited to Kent in order to defend it against the Picts. Here in Poland I am unable to decide if such information is right, or not.

Guorthgirn and the leaders of those late-comers who began their intrusion, by establishing small, local *ga/ge*'s.

Another possibility is that Kent was entirely taken over by the Saxons at the beginning which could disintegrate into numbers of inferior petty kingdoms of the *ga/ge* type after, say, territorial division of booty by the newcomers. The conquerors certainly represented ethnic multiplicity. Not including the Saxons, according to traditional sources, the Jutes and the Frisians were likely to arrive in that area.<sup>15</sup> Also differentiation among the Saxons themselves is rather undoubtful. And history proved many times before and after that such mixed peoples more easily were achieving unity in the fight against a common enemy rather than unequivocal cooperation after victory.

Otherwise there is no doubt that it was Æthelbert (c.560-616) who, as a monarch, really controlled all of Kent and provided that country with several decades of independent development, economic bloom and political leadership amongst then less mature kingdoms of early heptarchical *Engla lond*. And it was also during his rule that Bishop Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory the Great, arrived at Cantwaraburh and established there a Christian mission which soon became the ecclesiastical capital of all England.

Kent started to lose its privileged position when surrounding territories to the North which was occupied by the Angles and to the West by the Saxons, started rapidly to grow and build kingdoms incomparably larger and, after a period of necessary stabilisation became politically and militarily stronger. It was then that Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex gained their significance and in that succession divided amongst themselves the role of hegemonist for the remaining heptarchical kingdoms.

Northumbria won its supremacy because of Oswy, a distinguished monarch ruling 642-670. Because he had sufficient support it was possible to subdue the Celtic Church in almost all England for the archbishop of Canterbury. This occurred at the famous synod of Whitby in 663/4. In Northumbria also numerous monasteries were established which soon became important centres of culture so important for the early Old English literature. Bede, oldest English chronicler so frequently quoted here, and Caedmon the very first English poet known by name, were active in Northumbrian cloisters. This huge civilisational development so well associated with po-

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<sup>15</sup> There are apparently conflicting statements of Bede, who writes that the tribes conquering Britain were Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; and of Procopius who states that they were Angles, Saxons and Frisians.



litical power of Northumbria, was lost by Ecgrith, successor of Oswy. In 684 Ecgrith sent his fleet under ealdorman Beorth (other sources give that name as Beorhtred) to Ireland where it, as Bede informs us

“miserably wasted that harmles nation, which had always been most friendly to the English; inasmuch that in their hostile rage they spared not even the churches or monasteries.”<sup>16</sup>

“vastavit misere gentem innoxiam et nationi Anglorum semper amicis-simam, ita ut ne ecclesiis quidem aut monasteriis manus parceret hos-tilis.”<sup>17</sup>

One year later Ecgrith with his conquering aspirations decided to subju-gate the country of the Picts. He personally led the expedition to the North of Britain and started plundering and devastating the Pictish King-dom. But he did not foresee that his opponent, Pictish king Bruide (while simulating retreat) prepared an ambush for the Angles. When Ecgrith en-tered sufficiently deep into the mountaineous territory on May 20, 685 amongst the marshy valley not far from Dunnechtan (now Dunnichen), his army was completely annihilated whilst he himself was killed. This gave some satisfaction to the Celtic chroniclers who now recognised vic-tory won by Bruide as “right vengeance made by God” in retaliation for the earlier devastation of Irish cloisters.

In that battle of Dunnichen Northumbria lost its first flush of nobility and warriors, similarly so in 15<sup>th</sup> century Poland under the reign of King Jan Olbracht. Soon a retaliatory war reached the territory of Northumbria. As its result numbers of blooming monasteries were destroyed including two, most famous, in Jarrow and Wearmouth. And it was here that im-measurable numbers of literary and art monuments were pillaged and devastated.

Ecgrith’s failure meant, at the same time an end to Northumbrian po-litical dominance. The country never after was able to recover, though its cultural leadership (but not political) was maintained for some time until about the early decades of the 9<sup>th</sup> century when its most important centres, especially cloisters and towns were ransacked utterly by the Vikings.

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<sup>16</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History*, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>17</sup> Baedae, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, op. cit., pp. 215-216.

The political place of Northumbria about the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century was taken by Mercia. The main creator of its role was Penda who ruled 633-655, but real apogee of Mercian development was achieved under the rule of King Offa (757-796). Full unification of England was still in the future, but it was he who was the first Anglo-Saxon monarch to be called “King of the English” in the letters of Pope Adrian I (Hadrian in other sources) and Charlemagne. Offa, at the beginning had bad relations with Charles the Great, but despite this, made, with him, the very first written trading agreement in the whole history of England.

Discord between Offa and Charlemagne resulted from the fact that the King of Mercia wanted his daughter to marry Charles the Younger, the oldest son of the famous Frankish Emperor. Negotiations failed because Offa hungry for his connections with the leading European dynasty wanted also to marry his son with one of Charlemagne’s daughters. But Charlemagne, for reasons unexplained did not allow his daughters to marry at all. The conflict between the two monarchs lasted until 786 when Charlemagne returned from his victorious war against the Awares upon Danube and sent Offa precious gifts of arms and jewelry.

Offa substantially extended the borders of Mercia. He subjugated Kent, East Anglia, Essex and Sussex but he permitted all former rulers on their thrones to be his *subreguli*. He was, however, too weak to extort the submission of Wessex. In 779 Offa won at Bensington over the King of Wessex Cynewulf (not to be confused with the famous poet) but he was aware that it was not enough to get obedience from his proud opponent. Thus, waiting for a more convenient moment he gave one of his daughters to be married with Beorhtric, Cynewulf’s successor on the Wessexian throne (789) in order to gain at least indirect influence on happenings in that comparably powerful kingdom. In a similar way he gained some sway in Northumbria (792). East Anglia resisted his efforts successfully and Offa, in achieving his goals had no choice but to behead, in 792 or 793, Æthelbert, the East Anglian monarch.

From the very beginning of his rule Offa did not loose from his sight Wales but he undertook a most serious military expedition in 778 when he ravaged South Wales. However, the Welsh appeared worthy opponents of their invader and repaid him with similarly effective raids into England. Because of that Offa decided to build, about 784 a famous line of fortifications from the estuary of the Dee River in the Northern part of Wales to the mouth of the Wye in the South. Earthen walls which remain of that

fortification are partly preserved, even now, and entered history as the famous *Offa's Dyke* or in Welsh *Clawd Offa*. And although in the following centuries the English did not stop at this line (finally absorbing Wales at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century) it is this edge which marked the administrative and cultural border between the two antagonistic countries.

Offa also conducted an active ecclesiastical policy. He had founded churches and monasteries. The most famous cloisters built because of his generosity were: St. Albans, Thorney Island (which, much later, during the rule of Edward the Confessor was rebuilt and changed into Westminster Abbey). In the history of the English Church Offa is remembered as the only king who refused to recognise the archbishopric in Canterbury and established another in Lichfield as a tool in his hands. Canterbury is in Kent where public feelings were then rather anti-Mercian, despite the formal ruling of Offa. The two first Archbishops of Canterbury with whom Offa had to deal, Bregwine and Jænbert were Kentish patriots. No wonder then, that they cooperated with Offa, rather poorly. The King provided excellent relations between him and Pope Adrian (Hadrian). This resulted in the establishment of the Archbishopric in Lichfield where Higbert, docile toward Offa, was made Archbishop and thus Primate of the English Church. Meanwhile the real authority of Canterbury was curtailed, having no more than five dioceses: Rochester, Selsey, Winchester, London and Sherborn.

A decisive factor in the establishment of an Archbishopric in Lichfield was, as it seems, voluntary tribute paid to the Pope in gold coins made especially for that occasion in 365 pieces, called *mancuses* and modelled on Saracenic money. Many historians consider this levy as the beginning of the St. Peter's Penny paid later to the Holy See by all Christian rulers.

Offa's son, Ecgferth ruled for only several months after his father. After Ecgferth died, Coenewulf, his distant cousin stepped on to the throne. In 802 Coenewulf made an agreement with Pope Leo III and the seat of the Archbishopric was returned from Lichfield to Canterbury. Æthelheard of Mercia became a primate. Meanwhile Kent refused further obedience to the Mercian monarch and one, Eadbert Praen was declared King with enthusiastic local support of the Kentish folk. Automatically a sharper conflict sprang up between the new "national" Kentish ruler and "foreign" Mercian Archbishop Æthelheard. The Kentish army drove Æthelheard away. Two years later Coenewulf reinstated his rule over Kent brutally ravaging and burning the whole country and – as Simeon of

Durham wrote – “cutting almost all people off.” He tortured the captivated Eadbert Praen through gouging his eyes and cutting off both hands “in order not to reach for any power.” Æthelheard was, of course, put back to his former title as Archbishop of Canterbury. But it did not end the story associated with that title. When Æthelheard died three years later the Kentish Wulfred gained Archbishopric palium. He initially showed loyalty toward the Mercian king, but soon became his open enemy. Coenewulf infuriated by unexpected resistance and sharp criticism expressed by Wulfred gave him ultimatum: unconditional recognition of royal authority or expulsion from the country combined with complete loss of all personal property. Wulfred was subjugated and he publically declared loyalty to the Mercian king, but his hidden detestation gained a chance to be shown shortly before his own death, when he became instrumental in making a union between Kent and Wessex against Mercia.

The decline of Mercian hegemony was sealed by including that kingdom into Wessex in 829. That decadence was in fact initiated under the rule of Coenewulf who involved his country in a number of exhausting wars, especially with Wales. At the beginning he was able to effectively fight rebellions of the Welsh in the Northern part of their country, which had been earlier subjugated by Offa. It was then that Coenewulf killed Caradoc, ruler of Gwynedd in 798. Several years later, however, smouldering all the time Welsh rebellion and unceasing border clashes transformed into long-lasting full scale war against Mercia, and Coenewulf was unable to win it, dying during one of his military actions. He left his country in sharp conflict with Wales, which now doubled their raids in revenge for earlier atrocities of Offa and Coenewulf taken together. It resulted in a substantial weakening of Mercia. This was effectively used by one of the vassals of that country, Ecgberth of Wessex.

The appearance of Ecgberth meant a decisive turn in the whole history of England. It was before Ecgberth that Offa and Coenewulf titled themselves kings of all England, but in fact they were unable to unify all the kingdoms of Heptarchy. First of all Northumbria refused to recognise the Mercian kings as supreme monarchs while some other countries just waited for the possibility of regaining independence best exemplified by Kent and Eadbert Praen. Thus Offa and Coenewulf should be recognised as an important step in the process of the unification of England, but this was not the end of that process.

This was given to be finished by Egberth who was real protoplast of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty of Wessex.

This chapter is translated into English from my book *Narodziny cywilizacji Wysp Brytyjskich (Origins of Civilization in the British Isles)* published in Polish in 1995 and in an enlarged second edition in 1997 and 2001. I would like to express my gratitude to Profesor John Talbot Powell of Guelph University, Canada, and Professor Gerard Nawrocki formerly of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, for their proof-reading and assistance in preparing this text.

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## Chapter Seven

# THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

In British literature, having as its driving force the ethnic conflict between the Welsh and the English, there is a separate and exceptional place occupied by the Arthurian legend. Its historical circulation can be divided into two uneven parts, both quantitatively and artistically. The first and earlier one comprises various fragments which have been preserved in rather small numbers and, although far from later refinement, they are closest to the original events concerned. They include the history of Arthur as a Welsh national hero who defends Britain from the Anglo-Saxon invasion. They are preserved in both native Celtic texts and in early Latin chronicles. The second part can roughly be called "the story of internationalised Arthur," a literary theme which by different means entered the European continent and was there significantly transformed and enlarged, due to numerous and non-original motifs. From there, when the tide of chivalric literature entered Britain after the Norman invasion, the Arthurian motif came back to Britain but by then it was so changed and neutralised in its ethnic character that it was even accepted in England, the country of Arthur's antagonists. And it was in England that, thanks to historical irony, although unclear in some of its aspects, Arthur was to become one of the most representative protagonists of literature, first Anglo-Norman and then purely Middle-English, making the legend of Arthur and his knights a characteristic symbol, even an icon of the English literary tradition, but at the same time less and less identified with Arthur's real historical context. This transformation reached its climax at the end of the Middle Ages, while its far-reaching results, sometimes assuming a humorous expression, can be observed to this day: for example, a television serial about King Arthur was announced on Polish TV as a "legend about an English king." This phenomenon can only partly be explained by the universal, over-ethnic influence of the medieval imagination. If it were to be interpreted in this way, Saladin, the Saracen ruler, should be glorified in Spanish or French literature while Boleslaus the Brave, a Polish king fighting fiercely against the Germans, should be praised by their chroniclers, including the so strongly anti-Polish Diethmar; all of this is unimaginable. For the Britons, or later the Welsh, Hengest or

Offa were exactly what Wichman or Hodon were for the Poles of Mieczyslaus the 1<sup>st</sup>'s times.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, for the Angles or Saxons, equally odious were their Celtic antagonists, who were sometimes even victorious over them, such as Urbgen or Arthur. In all these examples, a more or less comparable scale of ethnic conflict has to be dealt with as a driving force within Arthurian literature. This is absolutely crucial for the analysis and interpretation of this literature. In its first developmental phase it was a literature of propaganda, in its deepest sense, mobilising its people to fight against the Germanic intruders. "Rarely – the French anglicist and diplomat Jean Jules Jusserand wrote – was literature used for political purposes with more cleverness and with more important results."<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, most of the Anglo-Saxon historians of literature ignored this fact in an inexcusable way. As a matter of fact, their works were usually preceded by a few general statements concerning the background and course of events of the Celtic-English clash and of the role of Arthur in it, but they, in an amazingly easy way, passed over all that, confining their analysis of the most important segments of the story to purely literary and aesthetic aspects. They explained the complexity of the text, placing the plot against the background of the romance literature of the epoch, almost always devoting attention to relations between the Arthurian legend and the historicity of the main hero. But in an overwhelming majority of texts written by English historians, there is an avoidance of open discussion of the Arthurian question, abstaining from casting fuller light upon the ethnic questions inherent in it. One can only suspect what kind of reasons are behind this shallow analysis. Even the most superficial touching upon this matter exposes several extremely delicate aspects, such as the problem of conquest and the suppression of one nation by another, or the ethnic conflict between the Welsh and the English, now muffled, but still quite relevant. Perhaps a subconscious escape from the logical observation that Old English literature was inferior to that of the Celts enters the discussion, since the English were unable to produce or simply preserve a legend of the same historic events, but seen from Anglo-Saxon side, which would be concurrent and attractive to the degree of being comparable to the legend of Arthur.

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<sup>1</sup> Wichman and Hodon were the German border dukes constantly threatening and harrasing the Polish kingdom, christianised in 966 and shortly earlier established with much effort by the first Polish king Mieczyslaus I.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Jusserand, *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*, T. F. Unwin, London 1903, p. 40.

The renowned historian of English literature, George Sampson, departs from, rather than answers such questions in his *Cambridge Concise History of English Literature*. Leaving aside the fact that he did not say a single word about the ethnic conflict between the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons, he deprives the Arthurian legend of its real ethnic and political context. He is also guilty of a kind of literary and historical falsification when he writes: “Arthur was apolitical and could be idealized without offence to any ruling family.”<sup>3</sup> In a very long six-page chapter devoted to Arthurian literature as part of a general history of literature, Sampson did not even mention Celtic Anglo-Saxon confrontation, which should be the main pivot of the story. There is nothing about the Lord of Camelot’s enemies in battle! This historian demonstrates similar evasions towards all of Celtic literature.

Also, such a basic source of information as the Oxford Companion to English Literature does not give any information about whom Arthur fought against. Much energy is expended here, in a very long entry titled *Arthur, King*, in order to list all that is ascribed to him and his legendary deeds, not forgetting his conquests of Ireland and of Scotland, to catalogue all his battles but not to mention with whom the legendary Brythonic leader, or King, had these encounters...<sup>4</sup> An identical entry in the *Cambridge Guide to English Literature* contains laconic information that he was: “a war leader who fought no less than 12 battles, including Mount Badon, against the Saxons”<sup>5</sup>. But apart from this, the author, Michael Stapleton, does not touch upon this question any further and does not explain for whom Arthur was “a war leader” and against whom he led his warriors.

Only a few English scholars pay extensive attention to the essence of Arthurian literature, such as – nomen est omen – Arthur Compton-Rickett, who wrote some decades ago: “We are so accustomed to regarding Arthur as a national hero, that we do not realise readily how largely the literature around him is in a foreign tongue... It is somewhat curious

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<sup>3</sup> G. Sampson, *The Cambridge Concise History of English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970 (1957), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. M. Drabble, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1985, p. 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> M. Stapleton, *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983, p. 31.



that we should have adopted as our national hero the chief of the defeated Britons rather than a Saxon leader. But such is the fact....”<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, French scholars, who are evidently trying to prove the Breton genesis of Arthurian literature (together with numerous other Celtic motifs), tear away its unquestionable British foundations and forcibly press it into the sphere of influence of French culture! It seems as though they have forgotten, whoever Arthur was, that he fought the Anglo-Saxons not in Brittany, but on British territory, and that only there could his legend have been born.

In this way, depending on whether the picture of this literature is drafted by an English or French scholar, the subject takes shape, sometimes slightly and sometimes more substantially deformed, but always in accordance with the cultural inclinations or aspirations of one of these two nations. None of them give King Arthur credit, but both try to give credit to themselves for, if not the genesis of this literature, then at least a decisive contribution to its recording and shape. Even scholars from the outside, including Poles, succumb alternately to these two approaches. The stance of Polish Anglicists hesitates between “neutral-aestheticism,” typical for Anglo-Saxon schools of literary history, and the incontestable assumption that Arthur is the exclusive property of English literature. Amongst Romanists, nothing has changed since Edward Porębowicz groundlessly maintained that the “Arthurian or Bretonic cycle ... emerges from Bretonic laises... .”<sup>7</sup> Polish Celtology, in turn, has so far generally been too weak to record anything convincing on this matter.

Arthurian epic poetry was, for the Celts, a literature for “comforting hearts.” In this vein, pre-Arthurian motifs were preserved in the oldest masterpieces of Welsh literature. Amongst them is a poem, written by Taliesin, praising the deeds of Cynan Garwyn of Powys, whose son fell in battle near Chester. With the general theme of his death present in the background, the poet draws a figure of a hero who amasses within him, not as in other European stories of the heroic era, the best personal traits. Not only is he the bravest in battle, but he is also more just and open-handed during a time of peace. He concentrates in himself the last hope of changing the whole for-

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<sup>6</sup> A. Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London-Edinburgh-Paris-Melbourne-Toronto-New York, 1947, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> E. Porębowicz, *Przemiany etyki rycerskiej (Evolution of Chivalric Ethics)*, in: *Studia literackie (Literary Studies)*, Wydawnictwo M. Kot, Kraków, 1951, p. 106; transl. from Polish for this chapter-WL.

tune of his nation, he is the personification of that hope, beyond which there is nothing, or almost nothing left to the rest of his compatriots. He is like a hero of the victorious *epos au rebours*, or *epos of defeat*, in which a storyteller leaves the doors slightly open to a future change of luck. Such a genre is extremely rare in the history of European literature. In order to create it, there have to be numerous conditions provided which rarely appear together. First of all, a given ethnic group, or nation, in order to produce such literature, has to survive. This is rare in human history. Mention is made of copious but extinct Slavic or Baltic nations such as the Jacvingas, the original (not German) Prussians, the Venedians and many others.<sup>8</sup> If such a nation had survived, it should have been populous and advanced enough to provide its literature with a proper basis and an ethnic circulation in conditions which were often extremely unfavourable. Finally, the time of “heroic defeat” must be long enough, while its emotional structure must be sufficiently firm in order to survive and then create conditions possible for the literary incubation of the epic as an artistic document of the era. This usually required many generations. Quick conquest and thorough assimilation automatically ruled out the potential heroic level. Those who speedily and easily lost faith and were unable to endure and save old traditions and values could not create a model of heroism.

The society of post-Roman Britain and of Wales fulfilled all those conditions in an ideal way. It was the experience of Celtic Britons which provided the groundwork for the great epic literature commemorating “ethnic failure” and, at the same time, the first significant examples of so many kinds of literature in the entire history of European culture. Few similar examples can be listed, even in following, later ages: the legend of Skanderbeg of Albania or even the more historically distant, and so different in literary modelling case of the Polish national hero Tadeusz Kościuszko; despite all the differences, both are at least similar in the means by which a “defeated hero” was created in the common imagination and memory. Otherwise, incommensurably more European ethnic groups, which under different circumstances were entirely exterminated or assimilated into an invading culture, were unable to produce contemporary epic records of their own tragedies. In the British Isles, these include the Picts, the Brigantes and

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<sup>8</sup> See: N. Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms. The History of Half-Forgotten Europe*, Allen Lane, London, 2011; also J. Strzelczyk, *Zapomniane narody Europy* (Forgotten nations of Europe), Ossolineum, Wrocław 2009.

numerous other tribes or peoples of whom only a name remained, frequently not their own but one given by the invaders, because their primordial one was lost together with their particular tribe or nation.

Many ethnic groups, however, more or less consciously, did not undertake a “heroic resistance” and chose an “anti-heroic compromise.” Such an attitude almost automatically eliminated any chance of a heroic epos, but did allow for a common collective existence without dramatic shocks and upheavals. Quite frequently this compensated for the loss of political independence by creating a “quiet victory” of an entirely different kind. Here are included the continental contemporaries of Arthur and his unhappy countrymen, the Gauls, who found themselves in almost identical danger to their kinsmen of Britain, but who accepted rule by the Germanic Franks almost without resistance. The Celts had earlier been subdued by Roman culture and belonged to the Roman empire, and then they were conquered by the Germanic wanderers. But in the case of the Gauls, this meant mutual cultural assimilation and the far-reaching civilisational triumph of the conquered, who gave to their invaders a post-Roman culture and language. In the case of the Britons, however, a similar inter-ethnic collision produced a national drama lasting over fifteen centuries. However, a sense of ethnicity was elevated to unusual heights and ... a marvellous literary record of their defeats was recorded and preserved, with the Arthurian legend as its leading example.

From a purely factual point of view, practically all sources of Arthurian legend have been exploited and brought to light. All the main and less important texts have been thoroughly researched, and so also have the smallest references or farthest allusions. In this field, anything new could hardly be established until fresh information or facts were to be discovered. What then, is known about Arthur?

Nennius, a British Celtic, not English, chronicler of the 9<sup>th</sup> century is the first in all the British records to have mentioned Arthur by name. He described him as a military leader of the Britons who cooperated with the king: “It was then that Arthur fought on those days against those (Saxons) together with the king of the Britons, but it was he (i.e. Arthur) who was a leader for time of war” – “Tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos (Saxones) in illis diebus cum regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum.”<sup>9</sup> It is also

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<sup>9</sup> *Nenni Historia Britonum*, ad fide manuscriptorum recensuit J. Stevenson, in *Nennius et Gildas*, herausg. S. Marte (A. Schulz), Berlin 1844, p. 68.

Nennius who enumerates twelve battles which Arthur was to win, including the famous battle at the foot of, or even at the top of, Mount Badon. This particular and famous battle had been mentioned earlier by Gildas, who, however, credited it to Aurelius Ambrosius: "The first battle was staged at the mouth of the river called Glein, the second, the third, the fourth and the fifth in the upper run of another river called Dubglas and flows through Linnuis country. The sixth battle was on the upper banks of a river named Basses. The seventh battle was in the forest of Celidonis, i.e. Cat Colt Celidon. The eighth battle was at the stronghold of Guinnion, to which Arthur brought on his own shoulders a picture of the Holiest Mary the Eternal Virgin and during the same day the heathens took flight while great butchery was inflicted upon them by the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord and by the grace of his mother Mary the holiest Virgin. The ninth battle occurred in the City of the Legions (*in Urbe Legionis*). The tenth was staged at the bank of the river called Tibruit. The eleventh battle was done on the mountain named Agned. The twelfth battle was at the Mount Badon (*in monte Badonis*) during which, after a single attack of Arthur, nine hundred and sixty men were killed and nobody else did it but he himself, and also it was he who won all battles. Those men (the Saxons) before they were defeated were asking for help from Germania and constantly and many times obtained such help and brought from Germania monarchs who ruled over them in Britannia."<sup>10</sup>

Later texts mention Arthur as the King of Britain. There is too little convincing historical data to judge who he, in fact, was: a military commander of the army designated by one of the Celtic monarchs or was he really the king himself? The possibility is also not excluded that he was merely a higher officer and a commander-in-chief and then, after gaining significance because of his successes, he could have eventually achieved the highest power in the country. Whoever he was, one thing is without doubt: he must have been an individual who was distinguished enough, real or – as some scholars have maintained – created by the collective imagination of many prototypes, that he became the object of unusual literary heroism. In support of this second possibility, a fragment of Nennius indicates that he ascribed to Arthur the victory of Mount Bad, and that this was earlier associated with Ambrosius Aurelius by Gildas. It is difficult to trace the heroic legend from the features and deeds of different

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<sup>10</sup> *Nenni Historia Britonum*, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

models. There is also the hypothesis of John Morris, although not supported by any clear evidence, but nevertheless convincing, which posits that Arthur was simply a successor of Ambrosius Aurelius as commander-in-chief of the Brythonic army when, after the death of Guorthigirn, various quarrelling political factions were temporarily working together.<sup>11</sup>

Morris dates that moment at 470. But what should be remembered and taken into consideration are the doubts associated with the battle at Mount Badon. Whoever commanded the Brythonic army there, whether Ambrosius Aurelius or Arthur himself, is not known. The date of this battle most probably reaches as far as 516 and some extreme estimations go even further, i.e. after 540. It is then a period between 470 and 540 that potentially delineates the time of Arthur's exploits. This is in the same time period as the peak development of post-Roman Britain as a comparatively homogenous political body. It survived until the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and more precisely to 664 when Cadwaladdr died. He was the last Brythonic ruler who called himself King of all Britain. From that moment on, quite symbolically, post-Roman Britain ceased to exist and was substituted by Wales, first divided by and then unified by her distinguished monarchs and then again divided into competing and bitterly quarrelling petty kingdoms or principalities. This 200 year-long period of initial fragmentation, previous to the first more significant attempt at unification by Rhodri the Great in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was characterized by a lack of stability. It was also rich in numerous moments of uncertainty, fears, defeats and mortification and such a situation was extremely favourable to the creation of popular nostalgia and a longing for strong rulers, able to recover belief in survival and the value of Celtic identity. It is not by accident that the oldest Welsh texts pertaining to Arthurian legend stem from that period, despite the fact that they were written down much later and known only from medieval records. Those stories were translated into English by Lady Charlotte Guest as late as 1838-1849 in the *Mabinogion* (Welsh *Mabinogi*), which means tales for young candidates for bardic positions. It consists of stories in the so-called *Red Book of Hergyst*, which originated in around 1375-1425. The name *Mabinogion* was used by Lady Guest, but not entirely correctly. In fact only four of the eleven texts translated by her are original mabinogian tales. These are the famous *Four Branches*

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<sup>11</sup> See J. Morris, *The Age of Arthur. A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650*, Scribner Book Company, New York 1973, p. 103.

of the *Mabinogi*, not of interest to us here because they are not associated with the Arthurian legend. His name and a description of his deeds can be found in the other five old texts of the *Red Book of Hergyst*, which Lady Guest included in her collection, despite the fact that they do not belong to Mabinogian tradition. In three of these texts Arthur appears episodically, but in two (although he is not the main hero), relatively extensive parts of the text are devoted to him. The first is *Culhwch and Olwen*, which is the story of the title hero Culhwch, cousin of Arthur. Culhwch is attempting to gain the hand of and marry Olwen, a daughter of Yspadadden, the leader of the tribe of the Giants. Yspadadden accepts that marriage on the condition that Culhwch finds and captures thirteen magic things, “treasures of Britain.” According to the tale, they consisted of a sword, a basket, a drinking horn, a chariot, a halter, a knife, a cauldron, a whetstone, a garment, a pan, a platter, a board for playing a Celtic game similar to chess, and a mantle. Culhwch leaves for the court of Arthur, who, in turn, helps his cousin to find and bring to Yspadadden all thirteen “treasures of Britain.” Helpful in this task are Arthur's warriors: Gwalchmai, Kai and Bedwyrilater (later famous in Arthurian romance as Gawain, Kay and Bedivere).

The second of the tales was translated by Lady Guest as *The Dream of Rhonabwy* and it tells the story of the hero, who slept for three days upon the skin of a yellow bull and experienced in his dream numerous adventures. He listens to the tale of the battle between Arthur and Medrawt, staged at Camlan, described to the still sleeping Rhinabwy by Iddowg. It is also in this tale that Arthur competes with Uwein (later Owain) in the game called *gwyddbwyll*, resembling chess.

However, neither *Culhwch and Olwen* nor *The Dream of Rhonabwy* refer to Arthur as the defender of Britain against the Saxons. John Rhys (1840-1915), the first professor of Celtology at Oxford University, puts this down to the overwhelming influence of Arthurian romances, which became popular during Norman times: “if one wished to make a comprehensive collection of the sagas about Arthur, one would have to take all the romances into account, since things even of mythological interest have been lost in Welsh, and are now only to be found in the Anglo-Norman versions and those based on them.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> J. Rhys, *Studies in Arthurian Legend*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1891, p. 4.

Rhys also poses a quite crucial question “how [...] did Arthur become famous [...], and how did he come to be the subject of so much story and romance?” This question produced an incentive for the formulation of his well known thesis, describing the Arthurian legend as being derived from two independent figures who were in the course of time combined into one, because of the efforts and imagination of poets and medieval chroniclers.<sup>13</sup> Rhys suggests that “besides a historic Arthur there was a Brythonic divinity named Arthur, after whom the man may have been called, or with whose name his, in case it was of a different origin, may have become identical in sound owing to an accident of speech; for both explanations are possible.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, such a combination of two figures into one “mythologically speaking [...] would probably have to be regarded as a Culture Hero.”<sup>15</sup>

This view was shared and somewhat developed by Charles Squire who admits that one of the Arthurian prototypes was Airt, a Celtic deity, known in some Romano-Celtic writings as Mercurius-Artaius. The second, as Squire suggests, was the real Arthur, “who held among the Britons the post which, under Roman domination, had been called *Commes Britanniae*. This “Count of Britain” was the supreme military authority: he had a roving commission to defend the country against foreign invasion; and under his orders were two slightly subordinate officers, the *Dux Britanniarum* (*Duke of the Britains*), who had charge of the northern wall, and the *Comes Littoris Saxonici* (*Count of the Saxon Shore*), who guarded the south-eastern coasts.

The Britons, long after the departure of the Romans, kept intact the organizational structure their conquerors had built up; and it seems reasonable to believe that this post of leader in war was the same which early Welsh literature describes as that of “emperor,” as a word borrowed from Latin as *yr amherawdyr*, which in later Welsh texts appears as *Yr Amherawdyr Arthur – the Emperor Arthur*, the title given in some Welsh texts to Arthur, unique among British heroes. The fame of Arthur the Emperor, as Squire suggests, blended with that of Arthur the God, so that it became conterminous with the area over which we have traced Brythonic settlement in Great Britain. Hence, the many disputes, ably, if unprofitably

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<sup>13</sup> See J. Rhys, *op. cit.* pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

conducted, over “Arthurian localities,” and the sites of such cities as Camelot, and the places of Arthur’s twelve great battles.”<sup>16</sup>

No matter which elements formed the personage of Arthur, the number of tales concerning him soon spread amongst the Celtic tribes of Britain, and in the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries they reached the European mainland. Their trail led through Brittany, which was inhabited by the descendants of Britons who had arrived there some centuries earlier, but whose language was similar, automatically becoming an effective link in the chain of cultural contacts between the Continent and the British Isles. The Bretons lived as neighbours to the kingdom of the Franks and were even temporarily included in it during the reign of Clovis, the famous founder of the Merovingian dynasty. Later, using the division of the Clovis state between his four sons, the Bretons were able to restore their politically and territorially limited independence and maintain it until the appearance of the Breton national hero, Tominoe. It was he who fought against Charles the Bald and extended the borders of his country as far as Nantes and Rennes, thus delineating the borders of Brittany seen today in the administrative divisions of France, to which this territory was finally incorporated in 1532.

In those days, when the first Arthurian tales began to reach Brittany, probably about the 8<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the cultural situation of that region was very complicated. During the Roman period, Gaul was incomparably more deeply Romanised than Britain. Therefore, when the Britons were fleeing from the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain, they reached its coastal strip and settled mostly on the Armorican Peninsula. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, they found themselves amongst Celtic kindred who had already forgotten their Celto-Gallic language and mainly used a vulgar form of Latin which soon became transformed into what was later named by philologists as Old French. But for the arrivals from Britain, Roman culture and the Latin language were not foreign. One can reasonably suggest that those Romano-Britons who left for Armorica were groups of people who had a strong attachment to Latin civilisation and that it was they who were most afraid of Anglo-Saxon barbarities. They constituted the best developed economic and cultural strata of Brythonic society. Despite this, their Celtic identity was stronger than that of the continental Gauls. One

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<sup>16</sup> Ch. Squire, *Celtic Myth and Legend, Poetry and Romance*, The Gresham Publishing Company, London [1905], pp. 313-314.



might even risk maintaining that the stronger and less Romanised Celtic identity of the Britons became, in their new continental settlement, the main factor in sustaining Celtic culture in times when the rest of Gaul was succumbing to Romanisation almost entirely. Until now it is the only Gaulish territory which, as a result of Brythonic migration, has been able to preserve a Celtic character and language.

From the beginning, the Celtic and Roman cultures in Brittany did not remain isolated from each other. Bi-culturalism became an obvious result of that contact. This especially pertains to the border area of the so-called Breton Marches, for which the Bretons so fiercely fought with the Carolingians. It should also be recalled that the oldest version of the *Song of Roland* was written by an anonymous Breton scribe whose Old French is full of celticisms. Via this bilingual territory, songs about Arthur soon changed into Breton *lais*, entered the poetry of the French *jongleurs* and later reached the Norman castles from where *chevaliers* and poets of Guillaume le Bâtard, known later as William the Conqueror, or in French Guillaume le Conquérant, subdued England.

Up to that moment, the Arthurian theme had not been imagined in English circumstances. One could hardly expect that this hero (being a symbol of anti-Saxon resistance) would be praised in English literature. To make that happen, special conditions had to occur and it was the Norman invasion that created them. It is also quite probable that without the Norman intervention, the Arthurian legend would have had a more difficult passage into English literature and may not have been as significant as, in fact, it became. Moreover, it is highly possible that without that "Norman link," Arthur, as a positive hero, could not have taken root in English literature at all. This happened with so many other continental tales, which either never reached the British Isles or did not take hold, because they were unable to fulfil regional expectations adjusted to other types of imagination.

The opinion that Arthurian literature found its way to England with the Norman Conquest is common to almost every study dealing with it. Nonetheless, it is very difficult to pinpoint the precise moment that it actually happened. Were the immediate winners of the battle at Hastings directly responsible or did "continental Arthur" emerge later, in the course of stabilisation of their, or their descendants', position in the new English dominions?

There is unquestionable evidence that knight-poets were at Hastings. The battle was initiated by a desperate single attack on an established English position by the minstrel Taillefer. He charged with raised sword and the *Song of Roland* in his mouth. It was also he who became the first mortal casualty of the battle. But it can hardly be imagined that, with him, all poetic knights were killed. The war attracted many by promising them personal adventures and sensations, by providing heroic motifs, without which it would be difficult to even imagine medieval chivalric poetry. In addition, every chief or ruler going to war was careful to see that, after a potential victory, there would be someone able to praise it in proper verse. Thus, from the very first moment when Norman soldiers set foot upon the English shore, continental poetry was associated with the victor, and amongst the numerous literary themes there were most probably the first poems commemorating Arthur.

It is also certain that Arthurian motifs were obviously anti-Anglo-Saxon and thus, they potentially were ideally-suited to propaganda initiated by the Duke of Normandy in the period prior to the Conquest. There were at least two advantages of their use. The first was to portray the Anglo-Saxons as the earlier invaders of Celtic Britain. This could be helpful in neutralising moral criticism of the Norman conquest. Sharp criticism was heard from other European courts and was also expressed by a substantial number of Church dignitaries who were anxious about the possibility of war between these two Christian countries.

The second advantage was reminding the British Celts that the English were their ancient enemy, winning them over to the Norman side while considering the Norman Duke as an avenger of old harms suffered by the Welsh as inheritors of Brythonic heritage. And it was not by accident that numerous Breton mercenaries were recruited by Guillaume le Bâtard to help in his aggression. Whether they went into the battle of Hastings with Arthurian songs emanating from their mouths is not known. However, it is certain that Anglo-Norman epic poetry, which used Arthurian plots from the beginning, was only slightly involved in exposing other continental themes from which it borrowed inspiration. This pertains first of all to the Carolingian cycle, most popular in continental Europe with the *Song of Roland* as its main example. Some literary historians explain such an imbalance as resulting from the exhaustion of the Carolingian theme by the time it reached Britain. This seems rather doubtful, considering the fact that on the continent the *Song of Roland* lasted at least several gen-

erations after the battle of Hastings. Why then, would it have shown symptoms of wearing out only in England? We know that its episodic presence persisted as late as at the court of Edward the Confessor. At the battle of Hastings, the minstrel Taillefer recited the *Song of Roland* aloud, which cannot be considered as an indication of its weakening appeal. In France, one hundred years later, trouver Jean Bodel was proclaiming that for any poet the most interesting themes are: “the matter of France, of Britain, and of Rome the Mighty”:

“Ne sont que trois matieres a nul home entendant  
De France, at de Bretagne, et de Rome le grant.”<sup>17</sup>

The matter of France undoubtedly means the Carolingian Cycle, the matter of Britain – stories about Arthur, and finally “the Matter of Rome the Mighty” was a symbol of Mediterranean antiquity, simplified in the contemporary imagination and not pertaining just to Rome. Apart from Eneas and Brutus, this section of literature was dominated by Alexander the Great.

Why then did thematic plots, which were roughly equal in popularity on the Continent, not become so in England, where, from the very first day of Norman rule, Arthur was supreme, while the Carolingian Cycle, including the *Song of Roland*, like the heroes of Troy, especially Brutus as the legendary protoplast of Britain, was still waiting for its greatest days of literary glory? The “British patriotism” of the Normans should not be taken into consideration, at least not during the first Norman generations in Britain, because the recently conquered country was treated as a colony and not as a territory equal to Normandy, whilst the permanent royal residence was more frequently Rouen, not London or Winchester. The first conclusion is that Arthur was consciously preferred at court, at the expense of Roland and Alexander the Great, because the “defensor Britanniae” was more useful for propaganda needs in the period of stabilising Norman rule in England.

How far this propaganda spread and to what extent it was effective, either before the Conquest or immediately after it, is not known. What is really known is that the intentions of the Norman monarchs failed completely in predicting the support of the Welsh. Shortly before the Norman conquest,

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<sup>17</sup> Compton Ricekett, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Harold Godwinson as the Earl of Edward the Confessor, destroyed the fast-growing kingdom of Gruffydd ap Llewellyn. The Norman prince Guillaume, soon crowned as the English King William, certainly counted on a favourable reception of that fact in Wales. It was he who annihilated Harold, the “temporary” King of England who was responsible for the destruction of Welsh aspirations. But William did not appreciate at least two important facts. First, the Welsh remembered that only three years had passed since the moment when the power of Gruffydd’s kingdom rested on cooperation and alliance with Anglo-Saxon Mercia. Second, the bringing of the English to their knees by the Normans, and thus the creation of a “second category” had brought the English and the Welsh closer to each other while facing the Norman conquerors. And there are precise examples proving such rapprochement. In 1067 in Herefordshire there was a guerrilla war against the Normans in which the Anglo-Saxon magnates, Alfred of Marlborough and Eadric the Wild, participated. They were openly supported by the North-Welsh rulers Bleddyn and Rhiwallon. Soon, more examples of such united resistance were seen and thus, the Normans ceased to look for the support of the Welsh and gradually sought Welsh territory to be subdued. Thus, they transformed themselves into supporters of the old Saxon threat. In the Welsh poetry of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the denomination “Saxon” meant any conqueror of the English territory, despite the fact that, by then, most of them spoke French and were involved in obeying the policy of the Norman, and then the Blois and Anjou dynasties. Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch used the cognomen “Saxon” exactly in that meaning in his *Elegy for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*:

“Mine rage at the Saxon who reaved me,  
Mine the need, before death, to lament.”<sup>18</sup>

So, the propaganda usefulness of the Arthurian motif soon diminished for the Normans. In the next century, Geoffrey of Monmouth (d.1155), known also under a Latin version of his name as Gaufridus Monemutensis, so outstandingly contributed to the further popularisation of the Arthurian legend, as he criticised the chroniclers of Norman England, especially William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, for “being silent

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<sup>18</sup> Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch, *Elegy for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, in: *A Bok of Wales* an anthology selected by M. Stephens, J. M. Dent and Sons, London-Melbourne 1987, p. 89.

as to the Kings of the Britons.”<sup>19</sup> But even into this several decade long gap, the Carolingian theme did not enter. It appeared during Edward II's rule at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but by then it had little in common with the oldest Carolingian layer of the cycle. Instead, it was rather built upon much later chivalric romances. Whatever its type, the Carolingian theme was poorly represented in England because of local cultural and historic circumstances, which were so decisive in such cases. Seemingly, the Normans were well predisposed to transmitting the motifs of the *chanson de geste* into newly conquered England: they spoke French, they were saturated by French culture. It should not be forgotten, however, that they were still descendants of the Vikings, Romanised in comparatively recent times, and who still possessed numerous original ethnic features. On the one hand, those features hampered full assimilation with Roman civilisation, despite the absorption of many of its' essential elements. On the other hand, through a combination of post-Viking mentality and culture, and French civilization, entirely new traits were created which had not existed in either culture. This is why the Carolingian Cycle, which had taken deep roots in France much earlier, but in a sense was soon frozen, if not fossilized, was adapted by the Normans, because its static nature was not vigorous enough. More succinctly, the lack of 'literary energy', visible in the comparatively passive content of the *Song of Roland*, could not meet and fulfil the imagined expectations of those who were still full of barbarian dynamism as the descendants of sea robbers from Scandinavia. For certain periods of time, choked and enchanted by their new reality on the European mainland, where they had so surprisingly become members, they imitated and repeated the stories they heard of Carolingian heroes, like Taillefer at Hastings singing the *Song of Roland*. But the Normans themselves never produced any literary masterpieces in that spirit. When they brought such songs to England, it soon appeared that this world, representing the far away affairs of sunny Southern Europe, did not fit the Northern climes and foggy British Isles, actually or metaphorically. French literature would soon warm its English equivalent with the sunny light of Provence, but the appearance of Roland in Britain was too sudden and radical a transition: an attempt to replant this beautiful literary flower did not take into consideration the different type of insular soil and

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<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the King of Britain*, transl. S. Evans, Everyman's Library, London-Toronto 1920 (1912), p. 223.

weather. No wonder then that such “displanted” literature, however visible in comparatively numerous but always secondary and rather derivative replicas, never took deeper root in Britain.

Introducing Arthurian themes to England was something entirely different. That literature was returning to its natural environment, even though it had been taken over by another ethnic group: the historical and geographical reality, the natural environment and the general factual basis were still the same (the peculiar role of nature in Celtic poetry should not be forgotten). Moreover, that literature was coming back after more than a century of development in Brittany and France. This period significantly neutralised the character and general outlook of the Celtic Anglo-Saxon clash, and added to it universal literary dimensions as well as liberating it from direct political influence (this also contributed to the failure of Norman attempts to employ it as propaganda against the English). There was an additional “shock-absorber” which, in the course of time, allowed the acceptance of Anglo-Saxon content in Arthurian tales: it was the French language. It appeared in French disguise and was initially confined in range to the Anglo-Norman nobility. This allowed for a comparatively conflict-free rooting of Arthurian literature in England, but still not among the English. After Hastings, there was almost no Anglo-Saxon chivalry, and its eventual remnants were of little consequence to the general population. Not enough to refuse the Arthurian topic on the basis of ethnic resentments. Also, the poor knowledge, or lack of knowledge of French among the English natives was a factor to be taken into account, even if they had any contact with such literature at all. In that way, the Arthurian theme entered the British mind, first through the instrumentality of Anglo-Norman literature and also through Latin chronicles. Only in the course of time, when descendents of Norman knights who were neutral to the Celtic-English conflict were gradually more and more saturated in the culture of their new homeland and had absorbed English as their native tongue, could such literature reach a more popular audience through texts written in English and composed from the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This process was undoubtedly accelerated when, under the rule of John Lackland, English barons lost their lands on the continental mainland. From that moment on, they were forced to live in England and automatically accept her culture and the growing necessity to communicate with Anglo-Saxon subjects in their native language.

Thus, English literature simply discovered a theme which, with the help of languages other than the native, became the property of not only Celtic Britain. Two ethnic groups which had quarrelled tragically in the course of history and politics, although these conflicts had still not ended, started to build a common British cultural tradition. *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), written by Geoffrey of Monmouth, is in fact a fusion of original Celtic and continental-French i.e. an ethnically neutralised version of the Arthurian legend. The basic source for that masterpiece was, as Geoffrey himself informs us twice in his preface and epilogue, a mysterious book containing the tales of British rulers. Geoffrey had to obtain that book from Walter, the Archdeacon of Oxford. It was allegedly written in “the British language” and brought to Britain from Brittany. No matter from where he obtained it and no matter in what language it was written, Breton or Welsh, if it existed at all, it was based on Celtic sources. Even if such a book never existed, as maintained by some scholars, Geoffrey had no choice but to use Celtic sources. *Historia regum Britanniae* is exuberantly Celtic in character, it is overloaded with Celticity. Otherwise the “continental-French trace” contained in it can be discerned in its literary lightness and first of all in its neutralisation of the Celtic Anglo-Saxon conflict. That conflict is, in Geoffrey’s work, still obvious and readable, but at the same time so enclosed within legendary motifs that it, to a substantial degree, loses its leading and all-important character. Arthur is shown here as a great monarch surrounded by famous knights whose names are well known from earlier tales. He takes part in historical events but also in occurrences caused by supernatural forces, he lives a life full of unusual and fabulous deeds, ending with an emotionally described death.

William of Newburgh, father of English historical criticism, could not forgive Geoffrey his literary fantasy which so completely filled his work. So, William wrote with untamed irritation and irony: “It is manifest that everything which this person wrote about Arthur and his successors, and his predecessors after Vortigern, was made up, partly by himself, and partly by others, whether from an inordinate love of lying, or for the sake of pleasing the Britons.”<sup>20</sup>

The tremendous fame of *Historia regum Britanniae* also caused the jealousy of Giraldus Cambrensis, known in England as Gerald of Wales.

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<sup>20</sup> Quot. after: Compton Rickett, op. cit. 35.

He clearly felt threatened, because until that moment he was recognized as the authority on the affairs of Celtic Britain. No wonder then that he reacted with ill-nature and maliciousness, describing the story of Melerius, who had a peculiar gift of knowing if someone was telling the truth or not : “He knew when anyone spoke falsely in his presence for he saw the devil, as it were leaping and exulting on the tongue of the liar ... If the devil spirit oppressed him too much, the Gospel of St. John was placed on his bosom, when like birds they immediately vanished; but when that book was removed and the *History of the Britons* by Geoffrey was substituted in its place, they instantly reappeared in greater numbers, and remained a longer time than usual on his body and on the book.”<sup>21</sup>

The readers of Geoffrey’s masterpiece were not frightened either by the learned warnings of William of Newburgh or by the nastiness of Giraldus. The number of preserved copies containing Geoffrey’s *Historia* alone, proves how great was its popularity. In the British Museum there are as many as 35 preserved manuscripts while in the Bodleian Library “only” sixteen... Not many medieval texts were preserved in such numbers. How many facts of those times can be proved exclusively by one single source? Another measure of the wide influence of Geoffrey’s *Historia*, this time on a European scale, was the number of its translations, recasts and borrowings from the original text and finally the number of works which were inspired by the original text, and which went even further, adding new elements to the old plot and motifs far removed from the original Arthurian legend. In that way, the history of King Arthur as defender of Britain started to be surrounded by new “satellite” plots. There appeared new and more refined ingredients bound to chivalrous ethics, such as courtly love, religious mysticism, the miraculous behaviour of particular protagonists, and magic associated with different subjects. From that point of view, the Arthurian legend was gradually aimed higher and higher, faultlessly accommodated to the expectations of the medieval reader and perfectly fulfilling. At the same time it created a world of his imagination, all done on a scale comparable only with a modern TV serial, or rather its best representatives, which have the highest possible degree of effectiveness and influence on the audience.

Geoffrey’s masterpiece also initiated a second historical transfer of Arthurian legend to France and through France into the European interior.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 36.



This time, it was not the text in Celtic requiring the mediation of Brittany in spreading the “matter of Britain” into the continental mainland. This time the text was written in Latin, a medieval “esperanto,” understandable far and wide wherever a Christian monastery or a courtly scriptorium could be found, and thus a further agent in the spreading of the legend into many national languages.

Such a situation, in which a literary text about Arthur travelled back and forth between Britain and the rest of Europe, was repeated and occurred several times whenever a literary genius or any new author from Britain or the continent discovered new inspiring elements in Arthurian lore: a new episode of the plot, a new type of hero or new details of more general symbolic appearance. The first French version in that direction appeared just five years after the death of Geoffrey, as a result of the work of the Anglo-Norman poet, Geoffrey Gaimar and his versed chronicle which consisted of two parts: *Estorie des Bretons* (*History of the Breton People*) and *Estories des Angles* (*History of the English*). The first of these works was a rhymed translation of *Historia regum Britanniae*, but known only from indirect sources because it was not preserved. The second book about the English is not discussed here.

Shortly after Gaimar, the subject of British kings was recorded by Robert Wace, a Norman poet living on Jersey around 1100-1075. He was the author of two works based on *Historia regum Britanniae*. Neither, however, were simple imitations, and because of this his original poetic vision became autonomous despite borrowed elements. These are *Roman de Brut* (*Romance of Brut* or *Tale of Brut*) and *Geste des Bretons* (*History of the Bretons* or *Deeds of the Bretons*), written after 1055. In the first of these, new Arthurian details appear – the Round Table or, at least, Wace’s poem provides the earliest extant allusion to it. Both Gaimar and Wade furnished an important source of inspiration for the greatest trouver of medieval France – Chrétien de Troyes (died c. 1183), who borrowed abundantly from the Arthurian legend and created a long poetic cycle of absolute artistic beauty, without which the chivalric poetry of that time could hardly be imagined.

Chrétien de Troyes was among the first (although not the first), to employ the motif of the search for the Holy Graal. At the beginning it was not associated with Arthurian literature and was an autonomous legend about St. Joseph of Arimathea, who was jailed for testifying the resurrection of Christ. Christ provided the prisoner with food and light by bringing to him

the communion chalice formerly used at the last Supper, and called in Hebrew “graal” i.e. “dish.” This word, used later by writers who were not aware of its etymology, sometimes became understood as the non-existent St. Grail. Such obvious confusion probably resulted from the fact that the word stressing the sacred character of the dish in some European languages, including French, which was most decisive, meant at the same time “holy” and “saint” as in the anonymous prose romance *La quête del Saint Graal* concerning the search for the-Holy Graal by King Arthur’s knights.

The whole legend arrived in England during the reign of Henry II (1133-1189; ruled from 1154). According to its English version, Saint Joseph of Arimathea, who offered his own prepared tomb for the burial of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion, was allegedly the first keeper of the Holy Graal. He allegedly arrived in Britain and converted her inhabitants after he was ordained as bishop, and was personally derived from the apparition of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. Some other versions say that he arrived in Britain even earlier, accompanying Christ, who visited Britain during the unknown years of his life.<sup>22</sup> Yet another version of the legend links the Holy Legend with Arthurian legend. According to this version, the missionaries brought to England by St. Joseph wedded his daughters to the native kings and one dynasty initiated this way was carried down to Arthur. The mystery of transubstantiation and, consequently, the Graal, as the communion chalice, play an important role in this story. The main seeker of the chalice and at the same time the new hero of the whole Arthurian cycle was Galahad, son of Lancelot.

The Holy Graal was introduced to Arthurian legend by Robert de Boron and his story titled *Joseph d’Arimathie*, in which St. Joseph receives the chalice from Christ and brings it to Britain. Some later authors treated the Saint Graal story as truth, to the extent that Queen Elisabeth I considered Joseph of Arimathea as the first bishop to establish the Christian Church in Britain, which predated the Roman Church in England!

The very first poet extolling Arthur in the English language was the priest of Arley Regis, known as Layamon. That is exceptionally and emo-

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<sup>22</sup> This version was used by William Blake in his famous poem *Jerusalem*, where this city appears as an ideal place, a metaphor of paradise thanks to the fact that English soil became sanctified by his feet: “And did those feet in ancient times/ Walk upon England’s mountains green/And was the holy Lamb of God/ On England’s pleasant pastures seen!” England is considered here as a synonym of Britain, despite the obvious historical fact that the English arrived there several centuries later.

tionally important: until then only authors of Celtic, French or Anglo-Norman origins were responsible for the whole series of works and epic pieces based on the Arthurian theme. The Celts stemmed from the same ethnic group as the legendary King, while the French and Anglo-Normans were neutral towards the political conflict reflected in the story of Arthur as *defensor Britanniae*. With the entrance of Layamon comes an unusual event: Arthur is eulogised by representatives of a nation against which he fought so fiercely, and from that moment on Layamon's receivers of literature are the English, who actually were dealing with the inheritors of the legendary King, through the still-burning Marches on the Welsh border.

That moment is noted in every encyclopaedia of English literature, it is not missed by any Arthurian scholars. However, few amongst them have ever stopped to think about how this abnormality happened. Is there a satisfactory explanation? Until now none exists, and it would require highly toilsome research, laborious analysis of many texts in which longevity (Wace's 15,000 couplets, for instance), and numerous inconsistencies of plot are only the initial series of difficulties. Along with the extent of the material, innumerable dangers are hidden resulting from multilingual sources. Their analysis would require knowledge and competence in at least 5 old languages: Old Welsh, Old Breton, Old French, medieval Latin, Old German, not to mention some languages in which Arthurian literature appears to a lesser extent, such as medieval varieties of Dutch, Danish and other Scandinavian languages, Italian, Spanish etc.

Layamon wrote in a language of transitional character between Old and Middle English. He is the "first writer of any magnitude in Middle English and standing at the entrance of that period, he may be said to look before and after. He retains much of Old English tradition in addition he is the first to make use of French material."<sup>23</sup> In his preface, Layamon adduces different Latin and Old English sources, including Bede, but also refers to the epic of Wace, who seems to be most important for him. It is from Wace that Layamon borrows the Round Table and the concept of Arthur as the "fast hope of Britain" and finally Avalon, as a magic country, if not fairy-land, to which the Celtic ruler sets out after his last, and lost, battle together with his two saved companions. It is here that they, like the

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<sup>23</sup> *History of English Literature*, ed. A.W. Ward, A.R. Waller, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Cycles of Romance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1932, pp. 237-238.

Sleeping Knights in the Tatra Mountains after Poland lost her independence, had to survive until better times and at the proper moment return and restore freedom to their country:

“I will go to Avalon, to the most beauteous of all maidens, to the Queen Argante, the splendid elf. And she will heal all my wounds and make me quite well with a healing drink. And afterwards I will come again to my kingdom and dwell among the Britons in great bliss.

While he was saying this a little boat came from the sea borne by the waves, with women therein of marvelous figure. And they at once took Arthur and brought him to the boat, laid him in it and sailed away. Then was fulfilled what Merlin said of yore, that there should be mighty grief at Arthur’s demise. The Britons still believe that he is alive and dwells in Avalon with the most beautiful of all elves, and the Britons still watch for his return. Never was the man born or chosen by woman who could with truth say more of Arthur. But of yore there was a prophet named Merlin. He announced with words – his sayings are true – that an Arthur should yet come to the help of the Britons.”<sup>24</sup>

We can find a similar prophecy in Wace’s poem: “He is yet in Avalon, awaited of the Britons, for as they say and deem he will return from whence he went and live again.”<sup>25</sup>

Layamon lived on the border of England and Wales and, as he writes in his own preface, he “dwelt at Ernly, at a noble church upon Severn’s bank – good it there seemed to him – near Radestone where he books read.”<sup>26</sup> He certainly knew Welsh stories about Arthur, not only from French sources but also from direct, local Welsh legends abundant in that area. We do not know to what extent cultural confusion, so typical for any bordering area, was responsible for mitigating the anti-Anglo-Saxon character of local tales about Arthur, and to what extent it marked a temporal “rapprochement” between Welsh and English folk, caused by Norman dominance (this last factor remains the least researched in the cultural and literary history of both nations). The fact that all such elements played important roles is quite positive. It was through these features that many Celtic motifs and themes became, in the course of time, the property of English literature. Layamon himself introduces in his poetry not only King Arthur but also Kimbelin, or

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<sup>24</sup> Quot. in: A. Compton-Rickett, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> I.e. read the services in his church; quot after A. Compton-Rickett, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Cunobelin, and finally the Shakespearean *Cymbeline*, then *King Lear*. A peculiar gap, which remained in Anglo-Saxon imagery after the disappearance of their own pagan beliefs, was extremely favourable to that process. The new English mythology and lore, being a compromise between Old English beliefs and Christianity, was not yet created. No wonder then, that after the peculiar “ethnic decolourisation” of Celtic tales, they did not have any great difficulties in entering this vacuum. The Celtic heroes of Layamon’s epics have, in fact, certain traits of Anglo-Saxon warriors and heroes. “In the place of fast vanishing native mythology, he (Layamon) endows his countrymen with a new legendary store in which lay concealed the seed of later chivalry.”<sup>27</sup> But in the introduction to Wace’s *Brut*, where Layamon explains his aims concerning Arthurian legend, we read that he was probably conscious that he to some extent was falsifying English history by deliberately creating Arthur as an English hero: “It came to him (he writes about himself this way-WL) in mind, and in his chief thought, that he would tell the noble deeds of the English, what they were named, and when they came, who first possessed the English land after the flood that came from the Lord.”<sup>28</sup> It looks as if Layamon either deliberately confused the ethnic origins of Arthur in order to create an allegedly English hero, or, due to the medieval lack of a modern understanding of nationality, he simply treated the conflict between Arthur’s countrymen and the English as an internal quarrel between different British tribes.

The followers of Layamon, consciously or not, continued the process of escaping from the political character of Arthurian lore. It would be rather difficult to expect that, after gaining such splendid material, so well assimilated in English versions of the legend, that they would extend it in order to use it against the interests of their own nation, simply by reminding their English countrymen what the real reason for Arthur’s struggle was. All the power of their imagination turned to creating more and more fantastic exploits for the main hero and his companions. Whatever the reason, this mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic elements was not muddled in the coming ages, even by the Norman courtliness of Wace or Layamon’s confusion, and despite all its penetrating force. The English could, for their own reasons, muffle it, like Sampson in his history of English lit-

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<sup>27</sup> *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>28</sup> Quot. after A. Compton-Rickett, op. cit., p. 37.

erature. But the Welsh are certain to this day who Arthur was and for what reasons he fought.

On the other hand, the universal formula of chivalric tales also exerted its pressure. All in all, everything worked towards changing the *Defensor Britanniae* into a person who was more and more cosmopolitan, a protagonist in a story where there is no question of such and such nation or ethnic group, but where honesty and virtue dominated the fight between the good and the bad, accompanied by themes such as chivalric aspirations, the dangers of human happiness and love, etc.

That process progressed fast and its next phase can be found in an anonymous poem *Arthur and Merlin* amounting to 9972 lines.<sup>29</sup> Its culmination is, of course, the multi-book cycle of romance, titled in French *Morte D'Arthur* but written in English in around the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas Mallory (1405-1471). This extremely attractive romance plot finally and decisively won over the "ethnic message" and splendidly fulfilled the needs and expectations of wider and wider circles of readers, thirsty for a colourful and attractive story. This army of readers, enchanted by the story of Arthur, now deprived of its real historical context, was soon enlarged after 1485 by the effectiveness of William Caxton's printing press. The Arthurian legend became enormously popular in almost all of Europe. It was used and developed in the great chivalric poetry of Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1135-1185) in France, also in the songs of German Minnesingers (Minnesänger) such as Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170-c. 1220) and Hartmann von Aue (c. 1160-70-c. 1210-20). It reached Polish Silesia where Prince Henryk Probus (c. 1257-1290) composed poems on Arthurian subjects. In Siedléniec, also in Polish Silesia, an unusual monument to the Arthurian legend can be found in the chivalric tower: wall paintings depicting Lancelot and other heroes of the story. In at least two Polish towns, Gdańsk (Danzig) and Toruń (Thorn), so-called Arthurian Houses (Pol. Domy Artusowe) survived from medieval times, when they were built as centers of chivalric social life, though in the course of time they also became accessible to the lower strata of city burghers.

However, all of this English and international circulation of the legend was unable to erase the true genesis of the Arthurian story which was so accurately emphasized by William of Malmesbury, otherwise a non-Celtic chronicler:

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<sup>29</sup> *Arthur and Merlin*, HS, herausg. E. Kolbing, Nach der Achinleck, Leipzig 1890.

“It is of this Arthur that the Britons fondly tell so many fables, even to the present day; a man worthy to be celebrated, not by idle fictions, but by authentic history. He long upheld the sinking state, and roused the broken spirit of his countrymen to war.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This chapter is a translation from Polish into English from my book *Narodziny cywilizacji Wysp Brytyjskich (Origins of Civilization in the British Isles)* published in Polish in 1995 and in an enlarged edition in 1997 and 2001. I would like to express my gratitude to Profesor John Talbot Powell of Guelph University, Canada, for his proof-reading and assistance in preparing this text.

## Chapter Eight

# ANGLO-SAXON POETS AND POETRY

In the archaic Celtic world there were three bardic grades, while in Anglo-Saxon England there existed only two ranks of poets. The poet, whose task was to create poetry or songs, was named a *scop*. His denomination is derived from the Old English *sceapan* or *scapan*, the verb meaning to create or to give shape (compare with Modern English *shape*). It was he who “took the crude material of legend and adventure which lay about him and shaped it into lays.”<sup>1</sup> The lower rank was the *gleeman* (OE *gleo-man*, literally: *a man making joy*). As a principle, he did not create poetry but merely confined himself to its recitation and to the performing of the literary output of others.

Both kinds of Old English poet were frequently of the wandering, or courtly type, depending upon their tribe and social circumstances: the better of them were kept longer at a ruler’s court. The *scope*, especially, “sometimes [...] was permanently attached to the court of the aetheling, or lord, was granted land and treasure, and was raised by virtue of his poetcraft to the same position of honor which the other followers of the aetheling held by virtue of their prowess in battle. Sometimes he wandered from court to court, depending for a hospitable reception upon his host’s appreciation of the tales that he chanted to the harp.”<sup>2</sup> However, when a particular lord was bored with the *scope*, or when a better poet arrived at the court, the old one was usually forced to look for a chance at another court. An interesting record of such changeability of a poet’s fate is revealed in the Old English poem titled by literary convenience *The Complaint of Deor*.

Despite the fact that this poetic piece was written down at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, it contains a number of much more archaic realities associated with the life of an Anglo-Saxon poet. It consists of 35 verses and is also known under some alternative titles such as *Deor’s Lament* or, simply *Deor*.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Vaughn Moody, R. M. Lovett, *A History of English literature*, new and enlarged edition by F. B. Millet, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York-Chicago-Boston-Atlanta-San Francisco-Dallas 1943, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



This multiplicity of titles results from the fact that in Old English literature nobody cared about titles, nor were they preserved in their original form when they were handed down.

*The Complaint of Deor* consists of seven stanzas of unequal length. Each of them recalls someone's unhappy fate. It begins with Wayland the Smith who suffered because he was captured and enslaved by a certain Nithland. Escaping from his thralldom, Wayland kills two sons of his persecutor, inflicting severe pain on their sister, Beadohilde. In further stanzas one sees the fate of Theodoric, who spent 30 years enslaved.

After this, Deor stops and complains about the injuries of those peoples who found themselves under the rule of Eomanric, the king of the Ostrogoths. Every stanza shows a different dimension of human pain and harm, while all of them end with a melancholic reflection:

[In OE]

“Thaes oferoede, thisses swa maeg...”<sup>3</sup>

[In Mod.E]

“That evil ended. So also may this ...”<sup>4</sup>

The penultimate stanza is entirely devoted to philosophical reflection on the expediency of the Lord in distributing virtues, such as happiness and failures in human life. One deals with a mixture of old pagan characteristics, with obvious influences of Christianity. In the last stanza one encounters a stoic and melancholic meditation concerning Deor's life events:

“And so I can sing my own sad plight,  
 Who long stood high as the Heodenings bard;  
 Deor my name, dear to my lord,  
 Mild was my service for many a winter  
 Kindly my king, till Heorrenda came,  
 Skillful in song and usurping the land right,  
 Which once my gracious lord granted to me.  
 That evil ended. So also may this.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This and all further OE quotations of *Deor* in this chapter are taken from: *Deor*, in: *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp, E. van Kirk Dobbie, Columbia University Press, New York-London 1966, pp. 178-179.

<sup>4</sup> This and all modern English quotations of *Deor* are taken from: *Deor's Lament*, in: *Medieval English Literature*, ed. J. P. Trapp, Oxford University Press, New York-Toronto-London 1973, pp. 99-100.

There is another reminder of Old English poetry, much older than *Deor*, illustrating the role of a poet not only in the Anglo-Saxon world but also in the all-Germanic community, once covering Central and also part of Eastern Europe. It is known as *Widsith*, derived from the very first word in the poem and which designates wandering, or far away travel.

This word – *Widsith* – became, in the course of time, a kind of proper name and a synonym for one who returns from world-wide travel, bringing with him knowledge of other countries and peoples, contained in songs:

“Widsith spoke, unlocked his word-ward,  
 he who had travelled most of all men  
 through tribes and nations across the earth.  
 Often he had gained great treasure in hall.  
 He belonged by birth to the Myrging tribe.  
 Along with Ealhild, the kind peace-weaver,  
 for the first time, from the Baltic coast,  
 he sought the home of Eormanric,  
 king of the Ostrogoths, hostile to traitors.”<sup>6</sup>

The stories told by *Widsith* are based on three so-called *thulas*, in fact, lists of names, peoples and countries visited earlier to which he adds some other information. These three *thulas* together have 143 verses. The first *thula* lists rulers whose capitals and courts were visited by *Widsith*:

“He began then to speak at length:  
 ‘I have heard of many men who ruled over nations.  
 Every leader should live uprightly,  
 rule his estates according to custom,  
 if he wants to succeed to a kingly throne’.  
 Hwala for a time was the best of all,  
 and Alexander too, the noblest of men,  
 who prospered most of all of those  
 that I have heard of across the earth.  
 Attila ruled the Huns, Eormanric the Goths...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Deor's Lament*, in: *Medieval English Literature*, ed. J. P. Trapp, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> This and all further quotations of *Widsith* are taken from: *The Exeter Book*, op. cit., pp. 149-153.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Here, a further 28 names of rulers over different countries follow while the second *thula* contains names of different tribes and nations visited by Widsith.

It is interesting for many reasons. First of all, it is a mine of information about the ethnic divisions of those days. Widsith lists over fifty tribes and nations from almost all of Europe, some from Asia, India, the Near East and North Africa, including Assyria, Israel and Egypt.

It is, of course, unthinkable, that one poet, even the cleverest polyglot, could have visited and collected information from such a remote and vast territory and communicated at such an artistic level with particular communities with the help of several dozen languages.

This is also excluded by the chronology of events described by Widsith: if he had been a real witness to all the events described by him, he would have had to have lived for over 200 years! This presupposes that the stories told by Widsith are recorded experiences of several generations of poets active among many peoples and languages. An exciting question appears here: in what way did the knowledge of so many nations, kingdoms and their rulers enter Widsith's poem, despite all the linguistic differences and such a manifold "summarising story"?

No doubt, some archaic *poets errant* knew more than one language, if not at the level of artistic performance, then at least to a degree making ordinary communication possible, for instance, via envoys, merchants or captives arriving or staying at local courts, where particular verse-makers lived either temporarily, or more permanently. Many scop and gleemen accompanied their lords to war, where they had the opportunity to be acquainted with new countries even if this happened amid bloody and dramatic circumstances.

A significant part (if not the majority) of territories and also the number of peoples mentioned by Widsith belong to the Germanic world. This facilitated the spreading of his poetry thanks to the similarities of the Germanic languages and dialects, which were then not too different from each other. The appearance of Scandinavian protagonists, such as Beowulf, in Old English poetry confirms the comparatively easy way by which certain all-Germanic themes and motifs were slipped from one language to another. A notable element of such circulation was also the culture of the Goths, which was an exceptionally important medium of inter-Germanic cultural exchange, and at the same time, a link with a number of external civilizations.

This was all guaranteed by the extraordinary dynamism of the Goths who, at the peak of their territorial expansion, occupied territories from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean Sea and from the Western boundaries of Europe to the shores of the Black Sea and almost to the Crimean Peninsula.

The gap between their Western settlements and East European possessions was filled, however, by their Germanic kinsmen, such as Flemish tribes, Angles and Saxons.

The Goths were also well-reputed for their susceptibility to any foreign culture with which they came into contact. The ruins of an Arian Gothic basilica from late antiquity at the palace of Omurtag in Northeastern Bulgaria are a good illustration of this.

Widsith also travelled to the East European Gothic areas along the Vistula River. Thus, from the Polish point of view, the most interesting fragment of *Widsith* is the one where, for the first time ever in Old English sources, a designation associated with Polish territory appears.

This fragment is contained in the third *thula*, where the names of some famous persons of that epoch whom Widsith had met are listed. And it is here that in association with the outstanding Gothic warriors Wulfhere and Wyrnhere, we can encounter highly controversial passages which, in Old English read:

“Wulfhere sohte ic ond Wyrnhere;  
ful oft alæg thaer ne,  
þonne Hraeda here heardum sweordum  
ymb Wistlawudu wergan sceoldon  
ealdne eþelstol ætlan leodum.”<sup>8</sup>

[in Modern English]:

“I [...] sought Wulfhere and Wyrnhere,  
Often was unceasing war  
Where with hard sword the army of the Hraeds  
About the woods of Vistula must fight  
For home against the folk of Attila.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Widsith*, ed. K. Malone, Methuen, London 1936, pp. 91-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Widsith*, ed. with prefatory notes and indexes by A. S. Cook and Ch. B. Tinker, Ginn & Company Boston 1902, pp. 3-8, see also vs. 118-122 in internet version: <http://elfinpell.com/TranslationsOldEnglish/Widsith.html>

This fragment is concerned with the battle between the Gothic tribe of the Hraeds with the “Aetlan leodum,” i.e. “People of Atilla,” a well known leader of the Huns. What is striking, especially for the Polish reader, is the appearance of the word *wistla* – *Vistula River*, or depending on another interpretation, the adjective *Vistlan* concerning the *Vistlan Wood*, in Old English *wistlawudu*.

This fragment was very controversial and, in fact, troublesome for Polish historians. The presence of the Germanic, Gothic tribe of the Hraeds on territory traditionally considered as unquestionably Polish seemed unacceptable to them. Moreover, these Germanic tribes were defending “their ancestral seats against Atilla’s host.”

Especially in terms of the propaganda conflict between Poland and Germany over the territorial possessions of both countries, which was in full swing in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this fragment appeared unfavourable to Poles.

The problem lies in the fact that recognizing the Gothic Vistulans could eventually suggest that the Vistulans (in Polish known as *Wiślanie*), who appear in Polish history much later, have Germanic ethnic roots. This, in turn, seems very inconvenient for Polish historiography, which claims rights to this area as belonging to the prehistoric Slavic tribes. Thus, an eminent Polish historian, Karol Szajnocha (1818-868), when he decided to publish the very first Polish translation of *Widsith*, ignored in his interpretation of the “Vistlan” fragment any tribal name pointing to the Gothic, i.e. the Germanic affiliation, and introduced instead a certain unnamed tribe, supposedly Slavic, which fought in the Vistlan forest against the warriors of Atilla. In Polish, Szajnocha’s translation of that fragment is as follows:

“Wulfhera nawiedzałem i Wyrmhera bardzo często,  
Nigdy tam walka nie spoczywała,  
Lecz szybkie wojska twardym mieczem  
Koło puszczy wiślańskiej bronić miały  
Starej stolicy ludziom Aetlowym.”<sup>10</sup>

Here is a reverse translation from Szajnocha’s interpretation into Polish, back into English:

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<sup>10</sup> *Podróże śpiewaka* (a *Travelling Singer*), tłum. K. Szajnocha w: *Pomniki dziejowe Polski* (*Historical Monuments of Poland*), ed. and publ. by A. Bielowski, Lwów 1964, p. 9.

“I visited Wulfhere and Wyrmhære very often  
 Fighting there was never ending,  
 For swift troops with their hard swords,  
 Near Vistlan forest had to defend  
 Their old capital against Atilla’s people.”<sup>11</sup>

To be just, it should be mentioned that in 1961 a young Polish anglicist, doctor Jacek Fisiak, correctly translated *Widsith*, without falsifying the said “Vistlan” fragment. His translation into Polish is as follows:

“Wulfhera odwiedziłem i Wyrmhæra,  
 Często tam walka nie ustawała,  
 Kiedy Hredów wojsko twardym mieczem,  
 Obok Gotów Wisłańskich puszczy bronić miało  
 Starej ojczyzny, przed wojskami Atylli”<sup>12</sup>.

Fisiak’s Polish translation, when interpreted back into English, gives a text incomparably closer to the original:

“I visited Wulfhere and Wyrmhære  
 Where fighting did not cease  
 while troops of the Hraeds by hard sword  
 by Vistlan Goths defended the wood  
 old native land, against warriors of Atilla.”<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, almost all Polish historians accepted Szajnocha’s translation, rather than Fisiak’s. They totally disregarded the fragments of *Widsith* which proved the Germanic pre-history of the Vistula river-basin. Among them was professor Jerzy Strzelczyk of Adam Mickiewicz University (born 1941) who, in the 1980s, totally disregarded the possibility of a pro-Gothic interpretation of that Old English poem in his book *The Goths: Legend and Reality (Goci. Rzeczywistość i legenda, 1984)*.

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<sup>11</sup> My own translation – W. L.

<sup>12</sup> *Widsith*, transl. into Polish J. Fisiak, in: *Emendacje polskiego przekładu tekstów staroangielskich w zbiorze A. Bielowskiego ‘Pomniki Dziejowe Polski’* (Correct reading of Polish translation of Old English texts in a collection of A. Bielowski ‘Historical Monuments of Poland’), in: “Rozprawy Komisji Językowej Łódzkiego Towarzystwa Naukowego” (“Papers of Linguistic Commission of the Scientific Society of Łódź”), vol. VIII, Łódź 1961, pp. 82-85.

<sup>13</sup> My own translation – W. L.

Strzelczyk maintained that the appearance of the Vistlan wood as territory inhabited by the Gothic Hraeds is simply a mistake of the Old English scop. The problem is that nearly all the 200 facts, personal names and place names, and also historical events found in *Widsith* are confirmed by competent historical research. If we could believe Strzelczyk, we should assume that only the “Vistlan factor” was falsified and by mistake introduced into the poem. But such a “lonely” and selective error of the Old English poet seems rather improbable.

It is probably to Strzelczyk and a number of other Polish historians representing the same point of view, that British professor Norman Davies some years ago addressed the following opinion:

“Polish researchers of the twentieth century have been as eager to prove that the earliest settlers of the present Polish lands were Poles, as their German predecessors were to show that they were Germanic. To the neutral observer, however, the ethnogenetic hunt for the ‘prasłowianie’ or ‘protoslavs’ makes of chauvinism no less than the earlier hunt for the ‘Fruehosgermanen’ (Early Germans). Given a mass of conflicting evidence, the sceptical enquirer must remain as confused about the origin of the Slavs in general, as of the Poles in particular.”<sup>14</sup>

Archaeology solved the problem at the end of the 1980’s: Professor Andrzej Kokowski from the University of Lublin, after exhaustive excavations of the route of the so-called Yamal gas-pipe as well as some other places where new highways were being built, discovered who really inhabited the Vistula river-basin in the first centuries A.D. On Polish territory he discovered as many as seven (!) Gothic settlements dated from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and earlier.<sup>15</sup> He wrote about this in many papers and even in popular articles such as one printed in the Polish weekly “Polityka,” where he explained the difficulties created by local Polish authorities when he started his archaeological works.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> N. Davies, *God’s Playground. A History of Poland*, vol. I, *The Origins to 1795*, Columbia University Press, New York 1982 p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> A. Kokowski, *Archeologia Gotów. Goci w Kotlinie Hrubieszowskiej*, Ideamedia, Lublin, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> A. Krzemińska, *Gościli tu Goci (The Goths Were here), rozmowa z prof. Andrzejem Kokowskim o Germanach, Słowianach i kłopotach z identyfikacją narodową* (An interview with Prof. Andrzej Kokowski about the Germanic Peoples, the Slavs and problems with national identification), “Polityka,” Polish weekly, 18th May 2011, nr 21, pp. 58-60.

The fact that Gothic, i.e. Germanic culture was flourishing on Polish territory long before the Polish kingdom was established still seems very inconvenient for Polish historiography. Kokowski describes how his excavations in the Hrubieszów region in Poland were received by local authorities and especially Communist party officials:

“When, in the 1970s, I started telling the local people that there were Goths in their area, they could not hide their dissatisfaction. In Masłomęcz (a village in Eastern Poland close to Lublin) a former commander of the underground resistance (fighting against the Germans and Ukrainians during World War II), took me aside for a conversation and said that I could search there for whatever I wanted, except Germanic peoples and Ukrainians. And later I had a lecture delivered by the first secretary (of the Communist party): ‘Listen comrade engineer, it cannot be, that you constantly talk about Goths while it is Slavic soil. This is why I popularised my work, because I wanted people to be familiar with thinking about Goths. I explained to them that it was not the nation with their passport, but a mixture of different peoples unified under one banner. Today, for the inhabitants of the Hrubieszowska Valley, the Goths are equally familiar emotionally as the Slavs.’<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, all earlier propaganda efforts, to some extent justified by Poland’s political plight under German partition, directed against the German interpretation of the Goths’ presence on Polish soil, initiated by Karol Szajnocha and followed by other Polish historians in a way similar to professor Strzelczyk’s interpretation, are today unacceptable. Omissions in Polish translations and historical interpretation were at least not followed by German, not to mention English, researchers. So, what can we do in order to avoid German claims to the Polish soil once upon a time belonging to the Goths? Such claims are still occasionally heard, especially in nationalist circles. The answer is rather simple. We can do what the French did

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58. original Polish text: “Gdy w latach 70. zacząłem opowiadać miejscowym, że na ich terenach byli Goci, to nie kryli niezadowolonia. In Masłomęcz były szef oddziału partyzanckiego wziął mnie nawet na rozmowę i mówił, że mogę sobie tu znajdować co chcę, ale nie Germańców i Ukraińców, a potem miałem wykład od pierwszego sekretarza ‘Słuchajcie towarzyszu inżynierze, tak nie może być, że wy tak ciągle o tych Gotach i Gotach, a to przecież słowiańska ziemia.’ To dlatego wziąłem się za popularyzację, bo chciałem by przyzwyczaili się do myśli o Gotach. Tłumaczyłem, że to nie była nacja z paszportem, tylko mieszanka różnych ludów, zjednoczona pod jednym szyldem. Dziś dla mieszkańców Kotliny Hrubieszowskiej Goci są emocjonalnie równie bliscy jak Słowianie.”



about similar German efforts and even political propaganda. As we well know, even the name of the French and France is, as such, of Germanic origin, because it was the Germanic tribe of the Franks who invaded and finally conquered the post-Roman territory of Galia i.e. contemporary France. The French did not even try to counteract German historical propaganda, which claimed German rights to the origins of France as a state and the kingdom established by the Germanic tribes of the Franks. The French adopted another attitude. They said: “There is no doubt that the Germanic Franks were here. But apart from some ethnic Germanic names, which they left to us, did they impose on us any permanent Germanic culture? Do the invaders, who were quickly assimilated by the original inhabitants of this territory, today speak the German language? Our Romanic culture – say the French – with our language stemming from Roman Latin, which was absorbed by the Germanic invaders, appeared more attractive, and soon the Franks became the French’. I think that Polish historiography and even Polish historical propaganda should take the same stand. In this context also, we, the Poles, should say: “All right. Fifteen hundred years ago there were Gothic settlements and inhabitants of the soil, which became Slavic and then Polish after Slavic tribes arrived there in about the 7<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was Slavic culture which appeared more attractive and stronger than the Germanic one, and soon all inhabitants of that territory started to speak Polish and took on Polish culture.”

The most impressive element of this historical clash between Polish and German historians lies, however, in the fact that a tiny poetic quotation preserved accidentally in Old English literature, in one distant country, as an inheritance of the pan-Germanic cultural treasury, is able to affect the interpretation of history of another country, even after some fifteen centuries.

Another puzzling element of Old English epic poetry is associated with the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain. In all known European conquests of a similar kind, different peoples created a kind of triumphant literature, full of victorious ecstasy: a kind of *Iliad*, *Eneid* or *Edda* of their new homeland. Meanwhile, it seems that nothing of this kind happened in Old England, because not even a fragment of such literature has survived. It seems that Old English scopers were not interested in praising the military successes of their kinsmen, neither on the battlefield nor after the war. It is astonishing to see that the Anglo-Saxon epic of that period does not have Anglo-Saxon heroes! The only complete Old English poem,

*Beowulf*, depicts the story of a protagonist from southern Sweden, who achieved his supermanly deeds on the territory of contemporary Denmark. *Beowulf*, despite the fact that it was preserved in Old English, is not originally an English poem, but the story of a Danish warrior who liberates his people from the atrocities of the evil monster Grendel and his mother, which were “very terrible to look upon,” with a miraculous sword. Although the Danish origins of this poem are unquestionable, it was not preserved in Old Danish, but only in an Old English version, most probably interpreted by Saxon scopes in the occupied zone of England known as the Danelaw. The Danes, in order to be acquainted with the poem, not preserved in Old Danish, have no choice but to translate it back into modern Danish from Old English. The first modern Danish translation was completed by Nicolas Grundtvig, as late as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1971, the motif of Grendel was used by the American author, John Gardner. Gardner retold the Anglo-Saxon epic story from another perspective, not that of the epic’s main hero but of his antagonist Grendel. The novel deals with the power of myth in contemporary civilization and the everlasting conflict between good and evil. As we read in Wikipedia: “John Gardner uses Grendel as a metaphor for the necessity for a dark side to everything; where a hero is only as great as the villain he faces. Using Grendel’s perspective to tell at least part of the story of *Beowulf* in more contemporary language allows the story to be seen in a new light and also brings it into the modern era.”<sup>18</sup>

But let me go back to the question of Old English heroes of the Conquest Era, who for some puzzling reasons did not appear in Old English literature. We cannot find them in Old English poems. We know these poems only from the happily preserved fragments telling us about events from ordinary Germanic lore, not simply associated with the Anglo-Saxon invasion

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<sup>18</sup> *Grendel* (novel) <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grendel\\_%28novel%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grendel_%28novel%29)>. Gardner’s novel has become one of his best known works, illustrated by highly artistic woodcut images. So far, several issues of *Grendel* have been published. In 1981 the novel was adapted into the movie titled *Grendel, Grendel, Grendel* and in another version as *Beowulf and Grendel*, directed by Sturla Gunnarson and starring Gerard Butler as Beowulf and Stellan Skarsgård and Sarah Polley in other roles. For a long time the Old English text of *Beowulf* was not translated into Polish. In 1966 an adaptation of *Beowulf* made by Rosemary Sutcliff was published in translation by Anna Przedpełska-Trzeciakowska. In 2006, a Polish translation of *Beowulf* was published by Wydawnictwo Mandragora, translated by Mirosław Kropidłowski. In 2007, a Polish translation of Gardner’s novel *Grendel* was issued by the Publishing House Replika.

of Britain. Thus, *The Fight at Finnsburgh* is a story about a skirmish between the Danes and the Frisians. *Waldere*, a title hero of another poem, is the son of the King of Aquitaine, not of England. *Widsith*, discussed earlier, tells the story of a wandering scop from the tribe of the Myrgings, not the Anglo-Saxons. He sings his song at the court of Hermanaric, the King of the Goths. As a matter of fact, one reads there about the Angles, but those Angles are still continental tribes which were described before they started to conquer Britain. The first amongst the much later poems containing some brief information on the Conquest is known as *The Battle of Brunanburh*, or simply *Brunanburh*. It describes the battle that took place in 937, when the English King Aethelstan won a victory over the united forces of the Scots and the Norwegian Vikings, who were also supported by the Welsh. It is one of the few examples of Old English poetry in which the conflict between the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons is reflected at all. But I emphasize – this has nothing to do with the Conquest. The second of the Celtic Anglo-Saxon ethnic clashes reflected in early English literature was known as *The Battle of Maldon*, which is about the skirmish between the English and the united army of the Norwegian Vikings and the Scots in 991. It describes the plight of Byrhtnoth, who was an earl of the English King, Aethelred II. The hero is struck by a poisoned spear and dies. One of his officers, Aelfwine, stirs the English to further fighting. Unfortunately, the end of the poem has been lost.

The question of why, in the earliest Old English epics, there are no English heroes, is troublesome for historians of English literature. The majority of them simply evade the problem, contenting themselves with a bald description of facts. Here and there one can find suggestions that poetry of the Conquest may have existed, but was lost. So, was the quality of the poetry of the Conquest so poor that it did not withstand the test of the time, or was this poetry simply non-existent? Regardless of the answer to such a question, we can ask another one: why have none of the epic poems from the first centuries of the Anglo-Saxon invasion survived, while there are a plenty poems full of Scandinavian or continental Germanic protagonists? All these questions are important, and not only for literary reasons. Showing that Old English epics produced at the time of the Conquest were too poor, or non-existent, questions the creative abilities of the Anglo-Saxons. Moreover, the pan-Germanic and Scandinavian themes existing in their poetry would eventually merely prove their imitative skills. This is probably why some older and nationalistically ori-

ented English literary scholars eagerly evade this problem because the conceivably negative answer would damage their objective of presenting Anglo-Saxon culture as, from the beginning, creative, dynamic and having high aspirations.

Amongst the small group of scholars openly dealing with the problem is George K. Anderson. In his book *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons* (1962), he explains this thorny problem in the following way:

“There are two possible reasons for this curious state of affairs. First, all the Old English epic literature of native origin might have been stamped out between the upper millstone of the Danes and the lower millstone of the Church. It is conceivable that the Danes were guilty of this vandalism; they comported themselves for generations as destructive marauders on large stretches of Anglo-Saxon coastal and inland regions. Perhaps [...] the fact of the Danish invasions and the ultimate conquest of England by the Danes may have had something to do with the presence in surviving Old English legendry of Norse heroes like Beowulf and Hraef. The Church, however, was inclined, at least among its individual members, to look with leniency on these old pagan stories. Since all surviving Old English literature was written down in Christian times, one is justified in regarding the Church as a kind of haphazard protector of the Old English epic remains. [...] But a still easier explanation of the absence of any definitely Anglo-Saxon hero is that those factors which go to make up the Heroic Age of the Anglo-Saxon tribes – that childhood period through which all peoples seem to pass, in which hero-worship is the underlying psychological motif – was obtained while the Anglo-Saxons were still on the continent rather than after their migration to the British Isles.”<sup>19</sup>

The thesis about the heroic epoch of the Angles and the Saxons, emphasized by Anderson, the climax of which was eventually reached during their continental stay, and before their migration to the British Isles, is nonsense. The invasion of Britain was the greatest military achievement of these tribes, and at the same time, the perfect epic material. One can hardly imagine a nation which would not want to immortalise such a performance in literature, and then oral songs. Thus, such arguments seem extremely naive. The process of creating a great epic usually lasts a long time, measured by centuries, according to the so called “*lied theorie*”

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<sup>19</sup> G. K. Anderson, *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, Russell & Russell Publishers, New York 1962, pp. 56-57.

(“theory of epic song”) formulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by German theoreticians of literature and culture.

Even if it is assumed that heroism of the archaic type was used up on the continent, one automatically has to answer two questions: first, why is there no literature connected with the tribes which later-on arrived in Britain? And the second, and even more important: why did events of such great importance as the conquest of new territories not become the theme of the standard type of epic which usually followed in archaic literature?

If *Beowulf* was sung until the eleventh century, there must have been the need for this type of hero, especially for a native protagonist of the period of the conquest. Meanwhile, Celtic literature presented the same events from the opposite point of view, i.e. the view of a nation gradually becoming subdued by the Anglo-Saxons. But for the Celts, the archaic period had passed a long time before (most probably before the Roman conquest). Nevertheless, this Celtic literary output is existing evidence that the factor raised by Anderson was not decisive. Even if it had been decisive in reference to other nations (that is the Saxons and the Angles), they should have been particularly proud of their own achievements, ignoring events containing epic intensity, which were able to stir the imagination of any peoples, regardless of their cultural development. All in all, it would have been strange had the Anglo-Saxons, while glorifying their heroes of Brunanburh, or Maldon in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, had not done it earlier with regard to their ancestors who had such a decisive impact on their future development. To say that they kept the heroic deeds connected with the conquest of Britain in their minds seems to be a truism, which is well confirmed in a number of Old English poems which are full of allusions to it. Allusions but not longer epic descriptions. There is the famous passage in the aforementioned *The Battle of Brunanburh*, preserved in the medieval *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

“Never before in this island, as the books  
Of ancient historians tell us, was an army  
put to greater slaughter by the sword  
Since the time when Angles and Saxons landed  
Invading Britain across the wide seas  
From the east, when warriors eager for fame,  
Proud forgers of war, the Welsh (Britons) overcame  
As won for themselves a kingdom.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, transl. G. N. Garmonsway, Dutton, London – New York 1955 (1953), pp. 109-110.

“Ne wearth wael mare  
 this eiglande aefer gieta  
 folces gefylled beforan thissum  
 sweordes ecgum, thaes the us secgath bec,  
 ealde uth witan, siththan eastan hider  
 Engle [and] Seaxe upp becoman,  
 ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan,  
 wlanca wig smithas, Weeales ofer coman,  
 eorlas ar hwate eard begeatan.”<sup>21</sup>

In the following centuries, the motif returned. Layamon, who lived at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, devoted more than five hundred verses of his poem *Brut* to the conquest of Britain. The question is: why, after so many centuries, was the recollection of the conquest so alive while in first two centuries after the Conquest it was non-existent, at least in preserved OE literature? Is it possible that for about two or three centuries, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the English ceased to remember about their greatest ever military victory and suddenly started to recollect it just after a break of two or three centuries? It seems rather impossible, but even if this is so, a question remains about how such memory could be revived after such a temporal break? The only answer is that it was continued as an oral memory, not necessarily written down by the monks in their monasteries. Anderson’s suggestion that the Danes (in traditional English historiography ‘the Danes’ means Scandinavians, while Britain was attacked, in fact, not only by Danish but also Norwegian Vikings) were responsible for the annihilation of that type of literature can only be partly true. Also, it can only, to a degree, explain the presence of Scandinavian heroes in OE literature. To a degree, because such a suggestion does not explain the fact that literary records, having Scandinavian protagonists, are preserved exclusively in the dialect of Wessex where the Vikings met the strongest resistance. This proves beyond any question that oral literary motifs circulated regardless of ethnic differences under the condition, however, that these motifs were not turned directly against a particular nation. But such a hero cannot be found in the preserved masterpieces of Old English literature. Meanwhile, as I mentioned earlier, Celtic literature presented the events of that time from the opposite point of view as a nation gradually

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<sup>21</sup> *Two of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles with parallel supplementary extracts from others*, ed. Ch. Plummer on the basis of an edition by J. Earle, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1929 (1892), pp. 109-110.

becoming subdued. Immediately after the conquest gained momentum, they started to glorify their King Arthur and other heroes such as King Urien defending the nation against the Anglo-Saxons. In this context, it would have been strange if the Anglo-Saxons, glorifying their heroes of Brunanburh, or Maldon in the tenth century, had not done it earlier with regard to their ancestors whose conquest of Britain had a decisive impact on their future development. And still another question remains: how could such “delayed” memories be recollected when scopes, who could eventually pass them to later generations, were “not interested,” while other keepers of Old English traditions and the heroic past were able to do it, such as, for instance, Bede in his *Historia Gentis Anglorum*, written in Latin? Was knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon past known to later poets only on the basis of medieval chronicles? Were they able to read about it at all in this epoch of common illiteracy, when only priests and monks knew the art of reading and writing? Last of all, there are some small, noticeable with some effort, traces of the existence of Anglo-Saxon heroic epics which contradict Anderson’s suggestions. The heroes of such epics were probably the Germanic chieftains Horsa and Hengest, who, according to a number of sources, including Bede and Nennius, were invited by Guorthigirn [Vortigern], the king of the Britons, to help him defend his country against the Picts of the North. Hengest is mentioned occasionally in *Beowulf*, so he could have become the hero of another poem concerning his own exploits. The Danes were not too interested in his achievements, but what about the Anglo-Saxons? Could it be possible that in their songs they ignored their leader when compared with the Danes? In chapter 46 of *Historia Britonum (History of the Britons)*, written by Nennius, there is one controversial passage which some scholars consider as a trace of the lost epic poem about Hengest and perhaps also about his brother Horsa. Nennius quotes Hengest’s statement in which a short fragment in Old English is contained, the only such fragment in the entire chronicle which is generally written in Latin. Moreover, this chronicle is written by a Celtic monk. This is why this quotation is exceptional and it was certainly borrowed from an Old English text which is unknown to us. It is contained in the following context: “And Hengest ordered all his warriors to place daggers in their boots. ‘When I shout and tell you O, Saxons, take to your swords’ (‘Eu Saxones nimith eure saxes’), take your daggers from your shoe tops and with all your force attack and press (against the Britons) but do not kill their king and keep him alive because of my daughter

whom he married and because it will be better for us if we get a ransom for him.”<sup>22</sup>

This fragment pertains to an event known to us from earlier passages of this Chronicle, when Hengest’s body-guard met Brythonic representatives, led by Gurthigirn (Vortigern), for negotiations. The meeting was arranged under some earlier agreed conditions, compulsory for both sides. The main condition stated that all participants will be unarmed during the feast. That explains why Hengest, planning his treacherous attack on the Britons, orders his squad to hide their daggers in the tops of their knee-boots. A preserved fragment of Old English: “nimith eure saxes” which means in modern English “take to your swords,” impels C. E. Wright to conclude that Nennius borrowed it from “an English saga in which the deeds of Hengest and his followers were preserved for later generations.”<sup>23</sup> Another scholar, F. M. Stenton, in his book *Anglo-Saxon England*, goes even further, maintaining that such an epic poem had been handed down in alliterative verse!<sup>24</sup> Alliterative means combining words in such a way that certain repeated sounds have an artistic effect. But where do the suspicions of alliteration come from? The part of Hengest’s speech preserved inside the Latin text of Nennius, but containing an Old English phrase, consists of five words, two in Latin and three in Old English: “Eu Saxones [<Latin] nimith eure saxes” [<Old English]. The Latin ones “Eur Saxones!” mean in modern English “Oh! The Saxons!” whereas the Old English interjection consists of “nimith eure saxes” – which means in modern English – “take to your swords or daggers” (saxes were Old English swords which had just one sharpened edge). If however, one substitutes Germanic equivalents for the Latin, the passage would read, in its reconstructed Old English entity; “O! Saxe! Nimit eure saxes,” and then the alliteration between “Saxe” and “saxes” seems to be possible if not obvious. It seems that Nennius, who quoted Old English words inside a wider Latin context, had a problem with reproducing the

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<sup>22</sup> *Nenni historia Britonum*, Ad fidem manusciporum recensuit J. Stevenson, in: *Nennius e Gildas*, herausg. San Marte (A. Schulz), Verlag von F. A. Röse, Berlin 1844, chapt. 46, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oliver and Boyd, London-Edinburgh 1939, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1943, p. 16. See a similar opinion in: R.M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, Methuen, London 1970, p. 26.



whole citation in Old English and made up the forgotten words with Latin equivalents. Or, he just mechanically repeated the phrase, which could have been a popular saying either in his Celtic or Latin speaking environment, in the same way that here in Poland we mechanically used to say the Russian phrase “posmotrim uwidim,” or the German phrase “langsam, langsam aber sicher” even without knowing those languages. The quoted fragment of Hengest’s order concerning the swords is in plain contradiction to a situation of a seemingly peaceful feasting together with the Celtic elders. The action his warriors are to take: the pulling of their daggers out of their shoe-tops, and consequently the following attack against the Celtic Britons, ought to have been unexpected, so it is quite understandable that the signal to strike should have been expressed unnoticeably for the prospective Celtic victims of the ruse. It is then probable that the indication was taken from an earlier story about the heroic deeds of the Saxons, perhaps from continental Germanic lore containing an earlier battle description, while Hengest could have pre-arranged with his warriors that words which pertained to the beginning of the fight in the poem could, at the same time, be the command to start the assault on the unaware Britons during the mentioned feast. Such a story with hidden signals, could have been, for instance, recited during a feast or a banquet which, in those days, accompanied any negotiations. Our imagination should conjure up the circumstances of the performance of such a song in association with Hengest’s ruse: was it sung in order to impress the Celts with the military power and glory of the Saxons described in such a poetic piece? Or, was it a result of poetic competition between poets representative of both negotiating sides? One thing is for certain, however, Hengest’s word of command hidden in poetic text and preserved in the chronicle of Nennius has all the typical features of a pass-word, or, of a speech preceding a battle, which was quite common for the epic literature of all times and probably all nations, at least in the European tradition:

“Take your sword and force Ireland to her knees” [*Tain*];

“Take your arm, bring your arrows, go to the walls” [*Eneid*];

“Take out Hunn’s hardened arms [...] we set out for a meeting of the swords” [*Edda*].

Unfortunately, there are no preserved records of Old English pre-battle speeches of that time. Neither in *Brunanburh* nor in *Maldon*, of which only a fragment remains without its beginning, can we find such a pre-

battle cry. Hence, Hengest's exhortation or rather its extremely short fragment, is exceptionally precious and must stand for, by necessity, the far richer literature of other nations of that type. In the epics of other nations we can easily find such typical fragments of battle speeches, such as the following excerpt from the Scandinavian *Heimskringla*:

"The King's voice waked the silent host,  
Who slept beside the wild sea-coast,  
And bade the song of spear and sword  
Over the battle plain be heard."<sup>25</sup>

Irrespective of the question of whether such a scrap of OE text like that found in Nennius's chronicle can be considered as sufficient evidence – let it be assumed that the epic of the Saxon conquest existed, but has not been preserved. However, there is still the tantalising question why, among the many poems, only the theme of the invasion was not saved? Why did the Church, which is rightly called by Anderson the main keeper of pagan literature, preserve with the help of its scribes' pens only those pagan literary pieces which were connected in one way or another with Scandinavian or pan-Germanic lore, while hardly paying any attention to local Saxon and eventually Anglian epic output? One can hardly suspect monasterial scriptoria of any sympathy toward the Vikings who played such a bloody role in destroying British churches and abbeys. The numerous lootings and massacres of monks in Lindisfarne and Iona, or Jarrow, not to mention many other places, became symbols of the extreme barbarity of Beowulf's pagan kinsmen. Why on earth then, did the Church demonstrate such a positive attitude towards pagans who were so bloodily aggressive and brutal toward the Church by preserving their Scandinavian literary production, while at the same time neglecting earlier English poetic lore? If so, what was the basis of such strange selection? The answer to such questions should not be looked for in the directions suggested by Anderson but somewhere else. One should not search for them in places where the Church took upon itself the role of scribe and keeper of old literature, but where the Church did not want to do it, or could not do it, for doctrinal reasons. These last points are, in my opinion, crucial to understanding why the Church neglected the autochthonic English epic associated with the invasion of Britain by the

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<sup>25</sup> Snorre Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, transl. into English S. Laing, publ. J.M. Dent, London and E.P. Dutton, New York 1951 (1930), book. IV, p. 99.

Saxons and the Angles. Let us then examine this problem from the beginning. We already know that Old English literature is known exclusively from the masterpieces preserved by monasterial or cathedral scribes (even royal secretaries and copyists were then usually priests or monks). Up to this moment one ought to agree with Anderson that the Church had an obvious and rather exclusive contribution to conserving Old English literary output. This part of Anderson's suggestion can even be strengthened by some examples of extraordinary tolerance by the Church, not only towards pagan literature but even towards heathen religion! One learns from the letter of Pope Gregory the Great to Abbot Melitius, who was starting a missionary journey to England, that the Pope openly recommended employing some selected segments of heathen customs and even religious beliefs, so as to make them helpful in converting new believers and entire communities to Christianity. Gregory recommended, among other things, the use of pagan temples and ritual for the custom of offering oblations: "When [...] Almighty God shall bring you to the most reverend Bishop Augustine, our brother, tell him what I have, upon mature deliberation on the affairs of the English, determined upon, i.e. that the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected, and relics placed [...] For if these temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the True God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. And because they have been used to slaughter many oxen in the sacrifices to devils, some solemnity must be exchanged for them on this account [...] and no more offer beasts to the Devil, but kill cattle to the praise of God."<sup>26</sup> The Church showed the same attitude towards pagan literature: it accepted useful fragments which were eagerly written down and preserved. But scribes also wilfully eliminated those literary pieces which could not be adopted and especially those which directly acted against the Christian religion. When a particular poem or story existing in the oral tradition plainly went against the new faith, or for other reasons made the spreading of it difficult, it was simply not recorded in written form, not pre-

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<sup>26</sup> Letters of Gregory the Great copied in Bede's *Chronicle*. See original Latin text: Beade, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. A. Holder, published by Mohr, Freiburg-Tübingen 1882, passim p. 32-33 and 51-57; English translation: Venerable Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, introd. and transl. V. D. Scudder, publ. Dent, London and Dutton, New York 1910, pp. 52-53.

served in any way, if not simply destroyed. And it is here that one can find the answer to the question concerning the lack of Anglo-Saxon heroes in Old English epic poems. The history of the Anglo-Saxon conquest is, in fact, the history of pagan invaders fighting against the baptised (at least partly) Romano-Britons. The same Romano-Britons whose faith the Church worried so much about, so much that bishop Germanus (an earlier Roman general) was sent twice to Britain in order to fight against the heresy of Pelagianism created by Pelagius. Germanus also gave blessings on behalf of the Church to Romano-Brythonic troops gathering for the fight against the heathen Picts and later the pagan Saxons. He also hurriedly baptised Celtic soldiers who had not yet been converted. In this context it is unthinkable that the Church was, to the smallest extent, interested in preserving and keeping epics which glorified heathen bands conquering a Christian Celtic nation which was considered as belonging to Christendom. The other poems, e.g. composed before the conquest or not dealing with it, had the chance to be preserved because they usually described intertribal wars and were somehow neutral towards Christianity, or at least were not concerned with fighting it. This is the case with *Widsith*. The Danish story of *Beowulf* was preserved on the same principles – there is nothing about lootings and murders committed by Vikings in Christian monasteries. In the course of time these “neutral” poems were not only preserved but even, to a substantial extent, embellished with some Christian elements. Epics about the conquest would have had a similar chance of preservation if the Celts had been pagans. But because they were Christian, defeated by pagans, i.e. Anglo-Saxon tribes, the literature of the heathens, describing their triumphs over Christianity and the Church, was doomed to oblivion, if not deliberate censorial eradication. The Church simply became embarrassed. In spite of its protection, the pagan troops were victorious over the Christian people and in this situation, propagating the faith could be futile when containing description of pagan victories. The Church was obviously not interested in preservation and dissemination of literary documentation of its defeat. It would have been rather strange if things had gone differently. To strengthen this observation, let us examine Bede’s hesitant attitude towards this moment of English history. It seems typical. This purely Anglo-Saxon early medieval chronicler describes the battles between the Romano-Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, but ascribed to God’s help only the temporary victories of the Christianised Celts and not of the Germanic “hiethen here” (heathen enemy). When he writes about the victories of the Saxons and then of the

Angles, he complains about it by naming them as foes in spite of the fact that by ethnic origin he was one of them. He proceeds in such a way until the Anglo-Saxons were Christianised. From that moment on they are no longer enemies – they become his fellow-countrymen. It is also quite characteristic that the two copies of the translations of Bede's chronicle into Old English (probably made during the reign of King Alfred the Great) carefully omit those earlier chapters contained in its original Latin version, where we have extensive descriptions of Pagan Anglo-Saxon victories over the Christianised Brittons. All such fragments concerning pagan victories over the Christian Celts disappear in the preserved manuscripts of the Old English translation of Bede's chronicle.<sup>27</sup> That edition of Bede's *Chronicle* translated into Old English contains only the titles of those chapters where pagan Anglo-Saxon victories are praised, while their content is carefully omitted, i.e. censored. This can be rather easily explained: Bede's chronicle, when translated into Old English, was to be read by many more people than the mere Latin-speaking clergy and a limited number of educated courtiers or aristocracy. It was not very convenient for Christian rulers in Europe, not just in England, who so cleverly were accepting titles of being defenders of the faith, conferred by the Pope, to remind a greater number of Old English readers that their nation had fought against a Christian nation and the Church itself, for almost two hundred years. And this seems to be the real reason why Old English songs concerning the conquest were not preserved, although they were certainly composed and performed in the Old English reality – feasts, courtly occasions, in the evenings in chivalric halls. This is somehow confirmed by the fact that much indirect information has been preserved concerning the songs of this earlier and less developed stage. Information about such poetry unfortunately does not mean that the texts, as such, were saved. The fact that they were not kept is already known. The Church's censorship persisted, while the Church did not allow them to be handed down, although it was unable to prevent their long lasting oral popularity. The liveliness and endurance of such heathen sagas is well proved by the Church's moralists, who complained frequently about their public performances, not only at the courts of the English kings or noblemen but also at ... bishops' residences and even in monasteries!

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<sup>27</sup> See for instance two texts of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* edited by J. Schipper in 1899: *Koenig Alfreds Uebersetzung von Bedas Kirchengeschichte*, G.H. Wigand, Leipzig 1899.

Archbishop Alcuin of York, an authority in matters of science and theology in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, wrote to the Bishop of Lindisfarne: “When priests dine together let the words of God be read. It is fitting on such occasions to listen to a reader, not to a harpist, to the discourses of the fathers, not to the poems of the heathen. What has Ingeld to do with Christ?”<sup>28</sup> One and a half centuries later, an edict of King Edgar officially forbade similar irreligious songs and poetry. King Edgar himself was, however, famous for his unofficial indulgence of such literature at his court. In such a context the effectiveness of his law seems rather doubtful. Such restrictions were extorted to satisfy the more rigorous part of the Church’s hierarchy rather than by the King’s earnestness in imposing severe forbiddances. Even Dunstan, a later saint and then the just Abbot of Glastonbury, soon to be Archbishop of Canterbury, the central figure of the English Church and Edgar’s favourite, was criticised during his pious life for his indulgence in heathen songs. Some decades earlier, Alfred the Great himself was quite famous for his great interest in German, i.e. heathen mythology and the inclination to listen to old Germanic tales, which he even learned by heart. His love for the pre-Christian pagan traditions of the Anglo-Saxons can be identified in an astonishing place: his translation of *De Consolatione philosophiae* by Boetius, one of the most Christian treatise ever written. However, in the very place where Boetius asks in Latin “where are the bones of Fabricius who loves the truth” the King-interpreter paraphrases this question by giving a different, but better understood name among his subjects: “where are now the bones of Wayland the Smith.”<sup>29</sup> It is, of course, not necessary to remind anyone who knows Anglo-Saxon mythology that Wayland the Smith was one of the most important semi-gods in the heathen beliefs of the Germanic world.

Alfred’s son, Edward the Elder, continued his father’s fancy for “barbarian songs.” It was not just English monarchs who were so propitious towards the pagan past of their own nations. It is known that Charles the Great (Charlemagne), one of the greatest defenders of the Christian faith, ordered a collection of ancient pagan songs in which the wars and past deeds of the heathens were glorified.

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<sup>28</sup> Quot. after M. Hunter, *Germanic and Roman Antiquity and the Sense of the Past*, in: “Anglo-Saxon England,” vol. 3, 1974, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> *King Alfred’s Old English Version of Boethius’ De consolatione philosophiae*, ed. W. J. Sedgefield, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1899, p. 165.

So, let me summarize the question of the absence of Old English protagonists in Old English literature: poetry containing such heroes was eradicated by the Church because they symbolized the triumph of paganism over the Christian religion, a religion which obviously aimed to triumph in new European countries.

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## Chapter Nine

# ORIGINS OF BRITISH PROTESTANTISM

Some 19<sup>th</sup> century British historians were convinced that even before the Reformation the Church in England was Protestant. This judgment seems no longer to be commonly shared, at least since A. T. P. Williams' statement, that "The Medieval Englishman had been a faithful, though often grumbling, son of the Papacy."<sup>1</sup> As late as 1525 "the English clergy, as in centuries past, still thought of themselves in temporal matters as subjects of the King but in spiritual matters as subjects of the overlord of Western Christendom, the Pope."<sup>2</sup> However, even if the English clergy considered themselves as spiritual subjects of the Pope, the grumbling of ordinary people was growing. This grumbling, however, gradually rose to a murmuring and finally a denial of some of the Church's services, which were not seen as a characteristic feature of England. In fact, it was in the Netherlands that the first open criticism of the Church was noticed and a rebelling flock, the so called *lollards* appeared. This name stems from the Middle Dutch language where *lollen* meant *to murmur, to babble* or in Polish *szemrać, mamrotać*. Consequently, the name 'lollards' meant "those who murmur or grumble" especially against something or somebody. This name was applied at the end of the Dutch and Flemish Middle Ages to those travelling preachers who in their sermons expressed their discontent with the Catholic Church and its practices. "These 'poor priests' dressed in coarse russet robes and carrying staves, travelled through the length and breadth of the land [...] calling men back to the simple faith of early apostolic times."<sup>3</sup>

Trade and cultural contacts between England and Flanders facilitated the exchange of ideas and the *lollards*, called collectively *lollardrie* or *lol-*

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<sup>1</sup> A. T. P. Williams, *Religion in: The Character of England*, ed. E. Barker, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1947, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> C. Cross, *Churchmen and the Royal Supremacy*, in: F. Heal, R. O'Day, eds., *Church and Society in England. Henry VIII to James I*, Mac Millan Press, London-Basingstoke 1977, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> W. V. Moody, R. M. Lovett, *A History of English Literature*, new and enlarged ed. by F. B. Millett, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York-Chicago-Boston-Atlanta-San Francisco-Dallas 1943 p. 51-52.

*lardie*, soon entered the English religious scene. This name was for the first time used in English in 1382 in one of the documents condemning John Wycliffe as a heretic. Who Wycliffe was, we will explain a little bit later. *Lollardry*, as quite a rebellious religious movement was, of course, strongly resisted by both the Church and civil authorities. It is not surprising then, that *lollardry* soon went underground and was affected by rather heavy persecution. Some of its leaders, like John Bandby were simply burnt at the stake. Apart from ordinary people who grumbled and murmured against the Church and its policy, there was also a group of gentry who called themselves *The Lollard Knights* and who were secretly active, especially during the reign of Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Not always, however, were they able to hide their activities, and at least one example is well known: Sir John Oldcastle was burnt at the stake like his earlier peasant fellow-lollard John Bandby. Despite such persecution, lollardy as a social and religious phenomenon survived to the extent that some historians of religion pose the question: “Was there [...] continuity in certain areas from Lollardry to Protestantism and later to separatism, or in other areas from late medieval orthodoxy to Catholic recusancy?”<sup>4</sup> Another author stresses that “There can be no doubt [...] of the strength of Lollard tradition in parts of the west midlands and borders and elsewhere. In the Forest of Dean a local cult seems to have developed around ‘two martyrs’, Spenser and Griffith, who were burnt as heretics in Lydney in Herefordshire in the late fifteenth century. In Bristol and Coventry the Lollard tradition stretched back to the mid-fifteenth century. The depositions of the group of Lollards in and around Coventry who were brought to trial before Bishop Blythe in 1511-1512 revealed the extent of communication which took place between the Bristol and Coventry groups through the movement of apprentices and journeymen, and showed how Lollard beliefs were kept alive and disseminated throughout the country.”<sup>5</sup>

Protest against the Church gained momentum and rational forms when John Wycliffe (1330-1384) appeared on the religious proscenium in England. Wycliffe himself is an extremely interesting figure in the history of the Christian Church in England and, in fact, also a substantial part of Europe, especially Eastern Poland, which we will see in a moment. He was

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<sup>4</sup> D. M. Palliser, *Popular Reactions to the Reformation during the Years of Uncertainty 1530-70*, in: F. Heal, R. O’Day, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> I. Luxton, *The Reformation and Popular Culture*, in: F. Heal, R. O’Day, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

an Oxford Professor of theology, who never considered himself a lollard, but who was treated by them as their spiritual leader. When he appeared on the historical horizon he demanded “the Church without property.” He studied at Oxford from 1344 and completed his studies after defending his doctorate in theology comparatively late in 1372. Until he was forty he was rather a modest and quiet preacher but then he appeared in public as a severe opponent and critic of the Papacy in Rome. He was, however, not the first who had tried to demonstrate some weak points in the policy of the Church shepherds towards their flock.

This was in fact William Ockham (a. 1300-1349), a friar of the Franciscan Order and also a professor of theology at Oxford University. From a purely philosophical point of view he tried to introduce some empirical premises and proofs for those elements of the faith which do not require unconditional belief and are not in direct opposition to Christian theology. But he was also against the disrespect of the Catholic clergy towards evangelical poverty and their ostentatious and luxurious way of living. Because of these viewpoints he had some problems with the Church authorities, although he was not persecuted too heavily. Ockham only once had to escape the persecution of a certain Italian bishop when he preached critically in his diocese on poverty and the luxurious life of the Church during his trip to Italy. We should not forget that Ockham was a friar of the Franciscan order, which had as its main and conscious principle to remain in poverty and mendicancy.

Wycliffe went much further than Ockham, however. In fact, regardless of whether he himself denied belonging to the Lollards, he developed and strengthened a number of their religious postulates concerning criticism of the irritating wealth of the clergy, the worship of images and the character of pilgrimages. He attacked mendicant monks for selling indulgences and false relics, as well as the vestiges of saints. He was also very critical of the essence of confession to priests and the theologically extremely important and sensitive question of transubstantiation (to which we will return in a while). Moreover, he suggested that the English Church and the English King not pay taxes to Rome, the so-called *St. Peter's Penny*. But most of all, which will be discussed below, he preached against some well established doctrines of the synods of the Church, if they were not confirmed in the text of the Bible. He also wanted preachers to deliver their sermons in the national language, not in Latin, and to base their teachings on *The Holy Bible*. Moreover, he demanded that *The*

*Bible* be translated into English in order to make its lessons available for all and not just for those who know Latin, Greek or Hebrew (only in these tongues was *The Bible* then available). Thus, apart from some fragments of the *New Testament*, *The Bible* was accessible only to those who knew Latin, i.e. for the clergy and well educated nobility, because the only permitted version was accessible in the form of St. Hieronymus's interpretation, the so-called Vulgate. The Church did not favor translating *The Bible* into national languages because it was considered as dangerous for the Faith. This was justified by Pope Innocent III in his letter to the Bishop of Metz: "The secret mysteries of the Faith ought not to be explained to all men in all places, since they cannot be everywhere understood well by all men but only to those who can conceive them with a faithful mind."<sup>6</sup>

No wonder then, that when Wycliffe's *Bible* started to be publicly known, even before printing was invented, and when it was circulated together with some other translations done by the Lollards in hand-made copies, the Church reacted unfavourably. Several years after Wycliffe's death, when his *Bible* was still being used by the Lollards in their popular teachings, the Synod of Oxford in 1408 "directed that no one was to read any translation of the Scriptures which had been made in John Wycliffe's time or which might be made in the future until that translation had received official sanction, thus denying the vast majority of laymen access to the written basis of the Christian faith."<sup>7</sup>

Wycliffe was not a simple man but a highly educated theologian, able to cleverly use his academic knowledge and position at Oxford when he attacked the scandals and corruption in the Church of his time, protesting against much of its teachings and practices.

In fact, the general interest in religious questions awakened by Wycliffe has remained ever since in the English character. He became a forerunner both of the European Reformation and even English Puritanism. When Puritanism collapsed, the Nonconformist Movement regarded him as the very embodiment of the Nonconformist Spirit. As a historian of the movement, Henry W. Clark, maintained "Nearly two hundred years before the birth of anything like organized Nonconformity in the accepted modern sense of the term, the Nonconformist spirit made a sudden, and

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<sup>6</sup> Quot. after M. Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible: And Other Medieval Biblical Versions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1920, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> I. Luxton, op. cit., p. 67.

almost dramatic, appearance upon history's stage – and not in any immature or feeble fashion, but, so to say, fullgrown. It is to John Wiclif (!) (notwithstanding that Wiclif established no separate religious organisation or Church) that the Nonconformist of to-day must in thought carry himself back as to his starting-point when he wishes to trace the line of his spiritual ancestry downward from its beginning. [...]<sup>8</sup>

Wycliffe's religious viewpoints were not only the forerunners of later Protestant denominations of different sorts, but were also astonishingly courageous. At the same time, they were unusually arrogant, which caused additional opposition in the Church's circles. Obviously, he was not a good diplomat. His lectures and sermons were characterized by very logical narrative and enjoyed much popularity due to their unusual, almost warlike and aggressive character. He was supported in his criticism of the Church by his patron, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. He demanded state control over the Church's property and the return of the clergy to evangelical poverty. He was also supported by many mendicant friars and lollards when he started his dispute over all these matters with the bishop of London in 1377. This dispute was ended in a very noisy quarrel and almost a brawl. Meanwhile, information about Wycliffe's outlook on religion reached Rome and Pope Gregory the 11th. Gregory issued no less than five edicts condemning Wycliffe and called him to defend his views at the Papal Court because a number of Wycliffe's opinions were considered as simply heretical. This concerned first of all his most controversial view on transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the belief that the bread and wine taken during the Lord's Supper changes into the body and blood of Christ himself. "Transubstantiation was only one scholastic theory, without full official status during the medieval period, although it did not stop the Church burning as heretics those who denied its truth. It was made an official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1551."<sup>9</sup> We read in a set of viewpoints ascribed to Wycliffe by the Church, that he maintained that "the material substance of bread and of wine remains, after the consecration, in the sacrament of the altar," and moreover, "that Christ is not in the

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<sup>8</sup> H. W. Clark, *History of English Nonconformity. From Wiclif to the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 *From Wiclif to the Restoration*, Chapman and Hall, London 1911, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Transubstantiation*, in: *Companion to British History*, J. Gardiner, N. Wenborn, eds., Collins&Brown, London 1995, p. 758.

sacrament of the altar identically, truly and really in his proper corporal presence.”<sup>10</sup> There were 10 of Wycliffe’s conclusions which were considered as heretical and an additional 14 treated by the Church more politely as erroneous. A number of them reflected Wycliffe’s real inferences and deductions, but some were products of the Church’s propaganda, set down in order to discredit him. For instance, it was accused in an interpretation of his alleged theology, that “God ought to be obedient to the devil”<sup>11</sup> But most of these accusations and condemnations could easily be undersigned by Wycliffe himself, although these viewpoints at the time were considered as heretical or erroneous by the papacy. To those conclusions we can count, for instance, Wycliffe’s conviction that “it is against sacred scripture that men of the Church should have temporal possessions,” further that “if a bishop or priest lives in mortal sin he does not ordain, or consecrate, or baptize,” also that “friars should be required to gain their living by the labor of their hands and not by mendicancy,” etc.<sup>12</sup>

However, what Wycliffe emphasized most was criticism of the morality of the clergy and especially the Pope, who should live according to the *Gospel* and give an example to others. He did this in the strongest words in his reply to his summons from Pope Urban the 6<sup>th</sup> to come to Rome in 1384 and explain his heretical views. But Wycliffe never went to Rome because of the possibility of a severe sentence from the Papal Court and the consequent cruel punishment in the form of being burnt on a stake. Such punishment was quite certain. The examples of John Bandby and John Oldcastle, brutally arrested and burnt on the stake, were sufficiently discouraging. Thus, this is why Wycliffe confined himself to a written answer to Pope Urban the 6th: “I have joyfully to tell what I hold, to all true men that believe and especially to the Pope; for I suppose that if my faith be rightful and given of God, the Pope will gladly confirm it; and if my faith be erroneous, the Pope will wisely amend it. I suppose over this that the *Gospel* of Christ, be heart of the corps of God’s law; for I believe that Jesus Christ, that gave in his own person this Gospel, is very God and very man, and by this heart passes all other laws. I suppose over this that

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<sup>10</sup> *Wicliffite Conclusions: Ten Condemned as Heretical and Fourteen as Erroneous*, in an anthology: E. Weber, ed., *The Western Traditions. From the Ancient World to Louis XIV*, D. C. Heath and Company, Boston-Englewood-Chicago-San Francisco-Dallas-Toronto-London 1967, p. 325.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, passim, pp. 325-326.

the Pope be most obliged to the keeping of the Gospel among all men that live here; for the Pope is highest vicar that Christ has here in earth. For moreness of Christ's vicar is not measured by worldly moreness, but by this, that this vicar follows more Christ by virtuous living; for thus teacheth the Gospel, that this is the sentence of Christ. And of this Gospel I take as believe, that Christ for time that he walked here, was most poor man of all, both in spirit and in having; for Christ says that he had nought (nothing) for to rest his head on [...] more poor might no man be, neither bodily nor in spirit. And thus Christ put from him all manner of worldly lordship. For the Gospel of John telleth that when they would have made Christ king, he said '*my Kingdom is not of this Earth*', and fled and hid him from them, for he would have none of such worldly highness. And over this I take it as believe, that no man should follow the Pope, nor no saint that now is in heaven, but in as much as he follows Christ. [Also] I take as wholesome counsel, that the Pope leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ gave them, and move speedily all his clerks to do so. For thus did Christ, and taught thus his disciples, till the devil had blinded this world. And it seems to some men that clerks that dwell lastingly in this error against God's law, and fail to follow Christ in this, been open heretics and their protectors been partners. And if I err in this sentence, I will meekly be amended, yea, by the death, if it be skilful, for that I hope were good to me. And if I might travel in mine own person, I would with good will go to the Pope. But God has needed me to the contrary, and taught me more obedience to God than to men. And I suppose of our Pope that he will not be Antichrist, and reverse Christ in this working, to the contrary of Christ's will; for if he summons against reason, by him or by any of his, and pursue this unskilful summoning, he is an open Antichrist. For our belief teaches us that our blessed God suffers us not to be tempted more than we may; how should a man ask such service? And therefore pray we to God for our Pope Urban the Sixth, that his old holy intent be not quenched by his enemies."<sup>13</sup>

In this rather sharp exchange of accusations, both Wycliffe and the Pope used much exaggerated and rather impolite arguments. Wycliffe maintained that the Pope could be easily considered as "an open Antichrist" if he did not respect the *Bible*, while the Church in its attempt to

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<sup>13</sup> *Reply of Wycliffe to his summons by the Pope to come to Rome, 1384*, in an anthology: *The Western Traditions. From the Ancient World to Louis XIV*, op. cit. pp. 326-327.



discredit Wycliffe made it public that Wycliffe maintains that allegedly “God ought to be obedient to the devil.” In this atmosphere Wycliffe did not go to Rome for the reasons mentioned above: The famous *Sacrum Officium* or *Inquisitio Hereticae Pravitatis* i.e. the *Saint Office for Heretics Affairs* would have little hesitation in sentencing him to the stake. Somewhat later, when Wycliffe’s ideas and especially the influence of his famous *Bible* and more especially its interpretation, reached Bohemia, one of his disciples, Jan Hus of Bohemia (1369-1415), trusted the Pope’s invitation. His safety was confirmed and guaranteed by the so-called “iron letter.” He should have been safe under the protection of the Pope and of the German Emperor. However, when Hus arrived in Constanca to explain his views, he was simply arrested and burnt on the stake despite the safeguarding of the mentioned “iron letter.” It is true, however, that Wycliffe, thanks to his mighty protector, John of Gaunt Duke of Lancaster, was never excommunicated. Therefore, he could be buried on consecrated Church ground when he died on December 1st, 1384. However, soon the Papacy took revenge on John Wycliffe. In 1428, at the special order of the Pope, his bones were taken from the grave in Lutterworth churchyard by the English bishop. Then Wycliffe’s bones were brutally crushed, burned to ashes, and finally thrown into the river Swift.

The pre-Protestant and reformatory zeal of John Wycliffe was also reflected in an allegorical poem and at the same time an important literary document of the time i.e. *Piers Plowman* ascribed to William Langland (c. 1330-1400). Langland was a monk who was dissatisfied with the authorities and priesthood of the Church, considered by him as betrayers of the Christian religion. In his dark picture of Medieval England, he also expresses his sympathy with the poor and those oppressed by both the upper classes of the kingdom and the leading hierarchy of the Church.

The case of Jan Hus also gives us the impression that the ideas of John Wycliffe had spread all over Europe. Bohemia was one of the strongest centres of *Wycliffism*. Two years after the death of Jan Hus in 1414, an English lollard named Peter Payne (died 1455) arrived in Prague and effectively propagated Wycliffism. Shortly after, a revolt of Hus and Wycliffe’s followers in Bohemia resulted in the so-called Hussite Wars in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

During this period an original religious denomination was established which found its main center of activity in the Bohemian city of Tabor, from which members of this movement were called the Taborites. After

twenty years of the movement's existence, its members were brutally crushed after the famous Battle of Lipany on May 30, 1434 when 13,000 of the strong Czech army were killed by an army of Catholic forces sent by the Emperor Sigismundus of the Habsburg Dynasty. Although the Taborites no longer played an important and direct political or religious role in Bohemia, their independence in the religious way of thinking, obviously initiated by the much earlier theological thought of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, strongly influenced the foundation and development of the *Unity of Brethren*, called in Latin *Unitas Fratrum* and also known in English as the *Moravian Church* or in Polish as *Bracia Czescy*. And again, this movement initiated by the Moravian Church, or the so-called Czech Brethren, was also persecuted and finally crushed after the battle of the White Mountain (1620) during the so-called "Thirty Years' War." Thousands of knights and infantry composed of the Moravian Brethren were killed, which meant the complete annihilation of the Bohemian elites and loss of independence until the end of the 1st World War (1918). The combined army of Catholic forces, after the battle, brutally eradicated the Moravian movement via numerous murders and the forced emigration of Bohemian Protestants. Before the Thirty Years' War there were about 151,000 farmsteads existing in the Bohemian Kingdom, while only 50,000 remained by the year 1648. The size of the Czech population decreased from 3 million at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to about 800,000. The Czech Nation was almost extinct due to its Protestant belief, initiated in the Medieval epoch and modeled on John Wycliffes and Jan Hus's theology. It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that in order to raise the threatened vitality of the Czech population, a group of patriots organized the Falcon (Sokol) organization. Its purpose was to strengthen the ability of biological endurance and in fact ethnic survival, then to develop the general agility, spirit and morality of the Czech nation. This is an example of how far the dramatic effects of a series of historic events can reach.

Wycliffe also had a good reception among some clergy and professors of the Cracow Academy. One of them was Jędrzej Gałka of Dobczyn, professor of Cracow University and Dean of the Liberal Sciences. He wrote a famous song titled *Pieśń o Wicklefie – Song of Wycliffe*. Jędrzej Gałka was born in Dobczyn about 1400 and died in 1451. It is in his *Song of Wycliffe* that we read:

“Lachowie, Niemcowie  
 Wszytci językowie  
 Wątpicie li w owie  
 Wiklef prawdę wam powie.”

“The Poles and the Germans  
 peoples of all languages,  
 if you have any doubts  
 in any written word  
 It’s Wycliffe who’ll tell the truth.”

[Wiklef] “Od boskich rozumow  
 Aż do ludzkich umow –  
 Rzeczy pospolite  
 Wielu mędrcom zakryte  
 Uczynił odkryte.”<sup>14</sup>

“It is [Wycliffe] who from the Lord’s wisdom  
 Went to human arrangements –  
 And the common things  
 Hidden from some reasoners  
 He made open and understandable.”

Jędrzej Gałka of Dobczyn was then accused of heresy and had no choice but to flee to Silesia under the protection of local prince Boleslaus of the Piast Dynasty, who was sympathetic to religious rebels. The *Song of Wycliffe*, written by Jędrzej Gałka of Dobczyn, was publically circulated about 1450 and contains as many as 14 stanzas expressing Gałka’s and consequently Wycliffe’s views of Christianity as a belief based on the *Gospel*, and critical of the papacy and the excessive wealth and hypocrisy of the clergy. It is best expressed in the last two stanzas of the *Song on Wycliffe*:

“Prawdę popi tają  
 iże się jej lękają,  
 Łeż pospolstwu bają.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Quot. after: *Najdawniejsze zabytki języka polskiego (The Oldest Masterpieces of the Polish Language)*, ed. W. Taszycki, Ossolineum, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk, the 5h. issue 1975, pp. 193-194. Translation of the *Song of Wycliffe* from Polish into English my own – WL.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

“The truth is hidden by priests  
Because they are afraid of the truth  
And tell falsehoods to the common man.”

“Kryste przez Twe rany  
Racz nam dać kapłany,  
Iżby prawdę wiedli  
Antykrysta pogrzebli  
Nas k’tobie przywiedli.”<sup>16</sup>

“My Christ through your wounds,  
Give us a reasonable clergy,  
Who are able to speak the truth  
And who will bury the Anti-Christ  
And direct us towards God.”

The Hundred Years’ War (1337 to 1453) and then the so-called War of the Roses (1455 to 1485) lasted until almost the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Both these wars put religious controversies in England to some extent into the shadow. But soon after, Henry VIII (1491-1547) finished what John Wycliffe had initiated. Henry VIII stands out as one of the most conspicuous figures not only of English but also of the European Reformation. His popular fame seems to rest primarily on the fate of his six wives, but cultural and religious historians see him as the central figure and dominating force in England during the whole period of his long reign (1509-1547). From the beginning of his rule he fought hard to establish a secure succession for the Tudor Dynasty that his father, Henry VII, had founded on Bosworth Field, in the famous battle of 1485 which ended the War of the Roses. And it was Henry VIII who initiated the real Reformation and real Protestantism in England through his famous break from Rome and by gathering in his hands powers and loyalties over which the Church and the Crown had quarrelled for such a long time.

The ambassador of Venice, who visited Henry VIII in 1519, left in his memoirs a description of the King as a young and dynamic monarch: “He was very accomplished and a good musician; composed well; was a capital horseman. and a fine joustier [in chivalric tournaments]; he spoke good French, Latin and Spanish; was very religious; heard three masses daily when he hunted, and sometimes five on other days.” And the Venetian

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Ambassador continues: “He was extremely fond of hunting, and never took that diversion without tiring eight or ten horses, which he caused to be stationed beforehand along the line of country he meant to take. [...] He was also fond of tennis, at which game it was the prettiest thing in the world to see him play; his fair skin glowing through a shirt of the finest texture; he gambled with the French hostages to the amount occasionally, it was said, of from 6,000 to 8,000 ducats in a day.”<sup>17</sup>

King Henry VIII was also interested in music. It is well known that he composed a song titled *Pastime with Good Company* (*Passetyme with gude company*) when he was only 18 years of age:

“Passetyme with gude companye.  
I love, and shall until I dye,  
Gruch who wyll, but none deny,  
So God be pleesyd thus lyfe wyll I.

For my pastaunce:  
Hunt, syng and daunce,  
My hert ys sett!  
All gudely sport.  
For my comfort,  
Who shall me lett?  
Youth wyll have nedes dalyaunce,  
Of gude, or yll some pastaunce,  
Companye me thynketh them best,  
All thouts and fansyes to dygest.

For ydleness, ys chef mystres, of vyces all.  
Than who can say  
But merth and play  
Ys best of all?  
Companye with honeste,  
Ys vertu, vyce to flee.  
Companye ys gude or yll,  
But ev’ry man hath hys fre wylle.

The best ensyue,  
The worst eschew,  
My mynd shall be vertue to use.

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<sup>17</sup> R. Brown, ed., *The Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs*, vol. II, *Venice 1509 – 1519*, Longmans Green, Reader and Dyer, London 1874, pp. 559-561.

Vyce to refuse,  
 Youth must have some dalliance,  
 Of good, or ill some pastance.”<sup>18</sup>

Let me repeat one fragment of the Venetian Ambassador’s description: “Henry was very religious; heard three masses daily when he hunted, and sometimes five on other days.” From the Pope, he even obtained the title “defensor fidei” – “defender of the faith,” and consequently “defender of Roman Catholicism.” Shortly before his break with the Church of Rome, Henry VIII wrote a famous book containing the heavy criticism directed against the famous German reformer Martin Luther. It was titled in Latin *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martinum Lutherum, aedita ab invictissimo Angliae et Franciae rege, et o. Hyberniae Henrico ejus nominis octavo* (*Recognition of the Seven Sacraments turned against Martin Luther as edited by invincible Henry VIII, king of England, France and Lord of Ireland*). As we can see, Henry, at the beginning of his reign, was an ardent supporter of the Pope. So what led him to break with Rome? The reason was at first glance not associated with religion. Henry was disgusted with his Spanish wife, Catherine of Aragon, who was unable to bear Henry’s son and to secure the dynastic succession. When Catherine of Aragon was of an age that she would not be able to deliver royal son, Henry asked Pope Clement the 7<sup>th</sup> for a divorce. Clement refused this request for reasons which were important to Papal politics: it could cause a conflict between England and Spain and weaken the Catholic coalition against Protestantism. To avoid this, the Pope caused an even worse weakening of the Catholic coalition, because Henry decided to break with Rome. “The King, indeed, was not in search or in need of a mistress, or even a wife, so much as of a son to succeed him, carry on the Tudor succession, and avert a recrudescence of the Wars of the Roses. That was his engrossing problem throughout

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<sup>18</sup> Modern English translation: Pastime with good company/ I love, and shall until I die/ Grudge who will, but none deny/ So God be pleased/thus live will I/For my pastance/ Hunt, sing, and dance/My heart is set!/All goodly sport, For my comfort/Who shall me let? / Company me thinks them best/ All thoughts and fancies to digest/For idleness is chief mistress of vices all/Then who can say, but mirth and play /is bet of all?/thus shall I use me/Company with honesty/is virtue, vice to flee/Company is good and ill/but every man has his free will/ The best ensue, the worst eschew/my mind shall be/virtue to use, vice to refuse, thus shall I use me. See the text on the cover of record See also: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastime\\_with\\_Good\\_Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastime_with_Good_Company)>

almost the whole of his reign [...] Catherine of Aragon, whom he had not chosen himself, failed him: one miscarriage or still born child succeeded another, and in 1514, after five years of parental misfortune Henry – or Wolsey – petitioned Leo X to annul the marriage with his brother's wife, which another pope had sanctioned doubting the validity of his own dispensation. Then in 1516 came Mary, who was welcomed, not for her own sake, but as an earnest of the son to follow. [...] The expected heir never followed Mary and by 1527 it was certain that Henry VIII would have no legitimate son as long as Catherine remained his wife. He ceased to cohabit, though not to live, with her from that date, and fell a victim to the one grand passion of his life. [...] But for five years he waited; the child must be legitimate, and a divorce from Catherine was confidently expected from Clement VII in 1529. It was refused; if, wrote the Pope's secretary, it is granted, 'The Church cannot escape utter ruin, as it is entirely in the power of the Emperor's servants.' Charles V's armies had almost turned Italy into a province of Spain; Catherine was his aunt, and Mary his cousin whose succession to the English throne he was bent on securing."<sup>19</sup>

If Henry had obtained a divorce, all matters in England could have turned out differently than the events we know now from history. England could have remained Catholic, with all the consequences of this situation in religion, theological thought, daily culture, literature and art. There is also another interesting question: what would have happened to the pioneering Protestants of England, especially that stream of Protestantism which was initiated by John Wycliffe and continued by his followers? Could it have been that Henry, if he had remained faithful to Catholicism, would have been strong enough to crush their opposition? Or, perhaps the Protestants would have triumphed over Henry? Such a situation could have caused a bloody war, so typical for the European continent when the so-called Counter-Reformation was initiated by the Pope and some continental monarchs supporting Rome. Bloody religious wars in Europe between Protestants and Catholics resulted in many tragic ends.

An engraving by Jacques Callot shows the cruelties of these wars during the so-called *Thirty Years' War* at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>19</sup> A. F. Pollard, *Henry VIII*, in: *The Great Tudors*, ed. by C. Garvin, Nicholson & Watson, London 1935, passim pp. 24-30.

Could it be then that if Henry had remained loyal to Rome, England would have become Protestant anyway? Such questions cannot be answered. One fact remains certain, however: under the reign of Henry VIII, England became Protestant by the famous *Act of Supremacy* issued by Henry in 1534. It is fully titled: *An Act Concernynge the Kynges Highnes as to be Supreme Heed of the Churche of Englande and to Have Auctorite to Reforme and Redress All Erours, Heresydes and Abuses yn the Same* (1534). The most crucial fragments of this document read like this: “Albeit the Kynges Majesties justely and rightfully is, and oweth to be, he supreme Heed (Head) of the Church of Englande, and so is recognysed by the clergy of this realme in theyr convocations; yet neverthesse for corroboracion and confirmacion thereof, and for increase of vertue in Cristis religion within this realme of Englande, and to repressse [...] all errors, heresies and other enormyties and abuses heretofore used in the same; be it enacted: by auctorite of this present Parliament that the Kyng our Sovereign Lorde, his Heires and Successors Kynges of this realme shall be takyn, acceptyd, and reputed the onely supreeme heed (head) in erthe of the Churche of England callyd *Anglicana Ecclesia* [Latin name meaning the Anglican Church] [...] And that our said Sovereigne Lorde his heires and succesours Kynges of this Realme shall have full power and auctorite from tyme to tyme to visite, repressse, redresse reforme order correct restraine and amende all such errors, heresies, abuses, offences, contempts and enormytes whatsoever they be whiche by any manner spiritual auctorite or jurisdiction ought or maie lawfull be reformed, repressyd, ordered, correctyd, restrayned or ammendyd, most to the pleasure of Almyghtie God the increase of vertue yn Chrystis religion and for the Conservacy of the peace unyte and tranquylte of this Realme.”<sup>20</sup>

Although Henry used up much energy in sport and hunting he was able to spare enough vigour to send to the scaffold some of his more ardent opponents. However, although he was an irritable and petulant autocrat, he certainly was not an extreme despot. He never tried to impose his will on his subjects too strongly and too pervasively. He knew the limits beyond which extreme rule causes the rebellion of subjects. Thus, in fact, he initiated the principle of a self-limiting autocracy which was also em-

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<sup>20</sup> *The Act of Supremacy*, 1534, in: E. Weber, ed., *The Western Traditions...* op. cit., pp. 367-368.



ployed later by his daughter Elizabeth I. Nevertheless, he was unable to avoid at least two serious religious rebellions.

Before the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), declared the cancellation of the marriage between Henry and Catherine of Aragon in 1533, Henry had tried to exert some pressure on the Pope. In 1532, the *Act of Annates* robbed the Pope of his income from English benefices. One year later (1533), the *Acts of Appeals* made England independent of papal jurisdiction. But “The Papacy was immovable, so was Henry on the question of the succession to his throne.”<sup>21</sup> When Henry became confident that he would not obtain a divorce, events developed very quickly. He married Anne Boleyn and the *Act of Supremacy* was announced internationally in 1534. Then the Pope in Rome excommunicated Henry and the whole Protestant Church of England.

The *Act of Supremacy* was destined to have some effects abroad, while another act, much less known, was passed in England for the effective introduction of the new faith. It was the *Act against Papal Authority* (issued in 1536) in order to “eradicate, abolish and cause full extermination of any authority usurped by the bishop of Rome who is mentioned by some people as the Pope.” In 1535 Henry nominated Thomas Cromwell as Vicar-General of the English National Church. Cromwell ordered his officials to prepare a special list of all properties found in monasteries. The purpose of this order was very clear: it was the dissolution of monasteries and the taking over of all their belongings, assets and lands by the King’s treasury. This document was called in Latin *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (literally *Assets of the Church* or, in Polish: *Oszacowanie majątku kościelnego*) and was the basis for the next *Act of Dissolution* by which a number of monasteries were dissolved, though still not all of them. This did not mean that the English people fully accepted Henry’s administration and instructions. In 1536 there was a rebellion against his ruling, called the *Pilgrimage of Grace*. It lasted for almost a year and was crushed on behalf of Henry with some difficulty by Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. Somewhat later there was another and more serious rebellion in Lincolnshire. Around 50 000 people fought bravely against the royal army, and though the rebellion was crushed, it took the utmost endeavour and bloody action. After that rebellion, the second *Act of Dissolution* was issued in 1539 due to the fact that the still existing monasteries supported the *Lincoln*

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<sup>21</sup> A. F. Pollard, op. cit.

*Rebellion*. Some monasteries voluntarily declared subordination to the Church of England and they were temporarily saved. The last of them, Waltham Abbey, subjugated to the King's will in 1540.

Thanks to the seizure of monastic property, the Royal Treasury was then enlarged by as much as three times! Unfortunately, Henry wasted this wealth on his unsuccessful war with France (1543-4156). Simultaneously, a process of doctrinal and theological changes was initiated in the English Church. All priests obtained royal salaries and thus became dependant on the state's policy. Liturgical changes in Protestant England were initially insignificant but they gained momentum. A number of Catholic ceremonies were simply removed from the English Church in the course of time, mostly on the initiative of Thomas Cranmer.

It was under the rule of Edward, the only son of Henry VIII, that the receiving of communion of both kinds, [i.e. bread and wine] was accepted in 1547. In 1549 the *Act Legalizing the Marriage of Priests* was introduced together with a special *Instruction* issued for the regulation of ceremonies and the Creed. Then Latin was removed from the Churches as the language of the Mass and the English language introduced instead. The Catholic Church decided to do the same, for instance, as late as in 1957 after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Synod. Then the famous *Book of Common Prayer* was prepared and published on the initiative of Thomas Cranmer. These prayers included all the *Ten Commandments*, then the *Confession of the Faith* and finally *Our Father*.

Before all this happened, however, there was an interlude of Catholicism – reintroduced by the eldest daughter of Henry VIII, namely Mary Tudor (1516-1558) who ruled 1553-1558.

Then “England had been reconciled to the papacy at the end of November 1554, after Mary had married Philip of Spain and after the Pope had confirmed English landowners in their occupancy of monastic lands; the queen found herself using powers which she did not consider she possessed to advance the return of Catholicism in England.”<sup>22</sup>

In hoping for reintroduction of Catholicism Mary totally ignored the number of Protestant supporters among the English. In addition she heavily underestimated general appeal of the Reformation. Soon Mary started to oppress her religious opponents and she rightly gained her nickname as

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<sup>22</sup> Felicity Hill, Rosemary O'Day, eds., *Church and Society in England. Henry VIII to James I*, The Macmillan Press, London-Basingstoke 1977, p. 21.

“Bloody Mary.” “The 300 heretic [were] burned between 1555 and 1588, mainly humbler folk” because more eminent representatives of English society, precisely 472, as counted by one historian, “nearly all gentlemen, clergy or merchants fled to the continent”<sup>23</sup>

It was just after her reign that John Fox (1516-1587) wrote his famous *Rerum in ecclesia gestarum [...] commentari* published first in Latin in 1559, and in 1563 issued in an English version and popularly known as the *Book of Martyrs* (1563), in which he described in a very angry way a number of cases where English Protestants had lost their lives due to Catholic persecution, especially under Mary Tudor’s rule. To modern liberal minds, accustomed by the passage of time to a variety of universal freedoms, the penalty of death, especially the terrible burning at the stake, just for differences in a matter of dogma, seems astonishing and offensive. Yet in the middle of the sixteenth century, neither side, apart from a few more refined souls, felt any qualms at the application, in principle, of such a penalty. The reply to the challenge of different religious denominations was the same from either party – torture, the scaffold or the burning of the dissenter. What Catholics and their Church authorities did to Protestants, Protestants did to Catholics. This “exchange of cruelty” was initiated on a larger scale when the father of Mary Tudor, Henry VIII, ordered the execution of Thomas More and Archbishop John Fisher, who were not sufficiently obedient to his Protestant schemes. Then Mary did the same to Protestants.

Quite interesting, although dramatic, are the ups and downs of those who were supportive of English Kings in introducing the new religious system. They could find themselves suddenly under a monarch with different opinions, and their previous efforts could be considered heretical. Among many other individuals, this was the case with such men as the interpreter of the Protestant Bible, William Tyndale, and Thomas Cranmer, the main supporter of Henry VIII in making England Protestant.

William Tyndale, also spelled *Tynsdale*, *Tindall*, *Tindill* and *Tyndall* (c. 1494-1536) even considered the rebellious Wycliffe’s Bible as not faithful enough because it was based on the Latin Catholic version, the so-called *Vulgate*, which meant that it was a translation of a translation. He decided to base his interpretation on the original Hebrew ver-

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<sup>23</sup> Felicity Hill, Rosemary O’Day, op. cit., p. 43.

sion and the Greek *Septuaginta* (called this way because it was allegedly edited by 70 Greek scholars – *septa* meaning in Greek seventy). The Vulgate interpretation was officially approved by the Church while translations of versions closer to original text were still considered as “improper” because they served the schismatic Greek Church. Additionally, Tyndle did not surrender to the Church’s suggestions, known from the times of the Pope Innocent III, who maintained that “The secret mysteries of the Faith ought not to be explained to all men in all places.” Tyndale openly declared that, “If god spare my lyfe, ere many years I wyll cause a boye that dryveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou doest.”<sup>24</sup> During the first period of Henry VIII’s rule, Tyndale, considered as a heretic, fled to continental Europe and in Worms, the very center of early Protestant printing, he published his translation of the *New Testament*, which he had earlier translated secretly in London. It was then smuggled illegally to the then Catholic England. A number of copies were seized and publically burnt. Meanwhile, in 1535 Tyndale went to Antwerp, where he initiated the translation of the *Old Testament*. He was then able to do it freely in England, just after the reintroduction of Protestantism. But for reasons unknown, he decided to stay in the Netherlands where he was treacherously arrested by Catholic agents, then transferred to castle Vilvorde near Catholic Brussels. Finally, he was sentenced to death and burnt at the stake in 1536, the very time when he could, with no obstacles, have worked on the “heretic” *Bible* in Protestant England.

The end of Thomas Cranmer’s life was equally tragic: “Cranmer certainly believed with his whole being in the mission of the godly prince to institute true religion in England. He saw Henry VIII undertaking responsibilities such as had been entrusted by God to the Kings of Israel in Old Testament times or to the Emperor Constantine’s dispensation. His writings display idealised erastianism<sup>25</sup> reached perhaps via no other of his

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<sup>24</sup> W. Russel Bowie, *History of the English Bible*, in: *Encyclopedia Americana International*, Americana Corporation, Danbury Connecticut, vol. III, 1978, p. 716.

<sup>25</sup> According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, erastianism is the “doctrine that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters. It is named after the 16th-century Swiss physician [...] Thomas Erastus who never held such a doctrine.” However, he maintained, that the state “had both the right and the duty to punish all offenses, ecclesiastical as well as civil, wherever all the citizens adhered to a single religion.” <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191050/Erastianism>> [...]. Erastianism was given its

contemporaries; to Cranmer the needs of the Church and of the state become fused and could only be supplied by the prince.”<sup>26</sup>

When Queen Mary started to return England to Catholicism, on 13 November 1553, Cranmer and some other leading English Protestants, like Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer were arrested, brought to trial, found guilty, and condemned to death. Cranmer’s trial was conducted under papal jurisdiction and the final verdict was decided not in London but in Rome. Although the Pope in Rome hesitated over whether he should be sentenced to death because he had renounced his earlier political and religious views, and moreover, had expressed his joy at returning to Catholicism, Queen Mary decided to make an example of him, justifying her decision by declaring that “his iniquity and obstinacy was so great against God and your Grace that your clemency and mercy could have no place with him.” Under her pressure, Cranmer was finally sentenced and burnt at the stake. This decision was strengthened by the fact that just before his execution, Cranmer had unexpectedly turned back to his Protestant views and said ostensibly “as for the pope, I refuse him, as Christ’s enemy, and Antichrist all his false doctrine.”<sup>27</sup>

And it was Elizabeth I who finally established Protestantism in England. But neither the Pope nor English Catholics surrendered easily to the pressure of Protestantism, regardless of who ruled the country. They were, of course, supported from Rome in any possible way. In Douai, France, a centre of English anti-Protestant subversion and sabotage was established at the second largest (then) university in France, and it was very active during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This University then had up to 2 000 registered students and hundreds of professors. These scholars participated widely in the development of humanities of different kinds as well as in approaches to modernity. Thus, from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the university of Douai had a broad influence in all of Europe as an important center of philology, with an emphasis on neo-Latin literature and philosophy. But first of all, its faculty of theology was an important centre for Catholic studies. And it was at this faculty that students were prepared for going to England in order to disseminate and, if

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contemporary meaning by Richard Hooker (1554-1600) who used this term in his defense of secular supremacy over the Church titled *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (first part published in 1594).

<sup>26</sup> C. Cross, *Churchmen and the Royal Supremacy*, in: F. Heal, R. O’Day, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Cranmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Cranmer)>

possible, restore Catholicism. It was also responsible for the printing of the so-called *Douay-Rheims Bible*, which was translated simultaneously from the original Hebrew and St. Hieronimus's versions into modern languages, including English. Both theological studies and the *Douay-Rheims Bible* played an important role in creating religious doctrines and also political controversies in Europe. From its early years, the University of Douai experienced the influence of the English. The printing office of the university contributed significantly to the dissemination of both religious and scientific knowledge which respected Catholic theology. Several of the chief posts were held by Englishmen, mostly Catholics expelled from Oxford.<sup>28</sup>

The beginnings of the University of Douai coincided with the presence of a large number of English Catholics living in Douai after Elizabeth I had reimposed Protestantism in England. However, the reign of Elizabeth was marked not only by the reintroduction of Protestantism into England but also by the unrelenting and severe persecution of the Catholic Church in her realm. Soon after her accession to the English throne, she issued and officially enacted, after acceptance by the Privy Council, the *Oath of Supremacy*, which required Catholics to recognize the Queen and any future monarchs as heads of the English Church. All those Catholics who refused to make such an oath, but especially Catholic priests, were hunted and treated as the country's traitors, then tortured in order to change their convictions. If they still refused to accept the English monarch as head of the Church they were executed, or if the court was merciful, banished from the country.

This situation prompted Cardinal William Allen (1532-1594) to found a special seminary in Douai in 1569, just for English Catholic priests, who were trained there in order for them to return to England and attempt to enlarge the number of English believers in Catholicism. Allen was a controversial figure and it was he who helped to arrange the Spanish Armada's invasion of England. He had planned to become the Archbishop of Canterbury had the Armada succeeded in conquering England and reintroducing Catholicism. *The Douai Bible* was prepared and was completed in 1609 under Cardinal Allen's supervision. Allen's activities were an important part of the European Counter-Reformation, but also significantly worsened

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<sup>28</sup> See: *Les Catholiques Anglais a Douai*, Musée de la Chartreuse & l'Association Williaam Allen, [2011] no name of author is given.

the situation for Roman Catholics in England because he influenced Pope Pius V to ex-communicate and depose Elizabeth I. In return, she started her anti-Catholic actions and persecutions. Simultaneously to Collegium Anglicanum, a *Scottish College* was also established in Douai in 1573 by Bishop John Lesley. The Scottish College at Douai University survived until 1802. The third school in Douai associated with the British Isles was the Irish St. Patrick's College, established in 1603 by Bishop Christopher Cusack, with the support of Spanish King Philip III, who supported the Irish Catholics in their resistance against the colonisation of Ireland by English forces. St. Patrick's College was attached to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Douai in 1610 and survived there until 1905.

Those priests who were sent to England in order to support and keep Catholicism alive could encounter severe persecution, be arrested, jailed and after a short trial simply hanged or decapitated, usually after cruel torture. Harboring and hiding any Catholic priest in any private home was also considered as a crime punishable by the death sentence. Despite this, there were hundreds of Catholic priests who were courageous enough to continue their mission. In exercising their ministry they were forced to move about in the greatest secrecy and do it in different kinds of disguise. Frequently, those who were able to act in such a way did not even hesitate to devote their lives in defense of their beliefs. Many of them, like Edmund Campion or Robert Southwell (both were later elevated as the Blessed by the Pope in Rome), were severely tortured before they were put on the scaffold. Sometimes, those who were able to survive in such difficult conditions rendered their help to those who were jailed, just to help them escape the scaffold. An example of such a case was father John Gerard, a Jesuit monk educated in Douai and the English College in Rome. He entered the Jesuit Order in 1588 and as a very able organizer was immediately sent to England for the anti-Protestant mission. He acted by means of extremely clever disguises and superb initiatives, inventing ingenious hiding places in different private residences belonging to English citizens still faithful to Catholicism. He was active for eight years before he was betrayed by one faithless friend and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. There he was severely tortured for some days by being hung from his wrists while he was beaten, his skin burnt by a hot iron, etc. Despite this, he steadfastly refused to betray his still free fellow Catholic priests or his supporters who had sheltered or aided him. Some

months after he was jailed he contrived to escape by bribing gaolers and bravely continued his covert mission.

In 1606 he was again traced by royal agents and suspected of participation in the so-called Gun-Powder Plot.<sup>29</sup> Then he was ordered by his superiors to flee England. He spent the rest of his life in exile and before he died in Rome in 1637, he was encouraged by the Catholic authorities to write a book in Latin about his life, activities and brave escape.<sup>30</sup>

He even left us a written account of the assistance he rendered to some of his Catholic fellow-priests jailed in the Tower of London, including a certain John Arden, held there for a very long time while waiting for execution. Gerard spread Catholicism in England for eight years before he was caught and jailed in the Tower. Later, he vividly described his own escape. However, one must admit that such occurrences could only have happened under the comparatively liberal English law, which did not prohibit the contacts of prisoners with the outer world after gaining special permission from the Master Lieutenant of the Tower. Also, some contacts between prisoners were allowed. It was still not the Nazi, Soviet or North Korean type of prison: some effects of *Magna Carta Libertatum* were at work and even prisoners who had been sentenced to death had some civil rights granted to them. Some additional liberties in the prison could be achieved with clever negotiations. Moreover, some guardians were still Catholics, hiding their real faith while falsely making the required *Oath of Supremacy*. Thus, they were frequently lenient towards their fellow Catholics and more easily indulged their attempts to have more comfortable conditions of imprisonment. Father Gerard describes in his account how negotiations aimed at providing Catholic prisoners with a Catholic rosary and cross proceeded: "I began treating with my gaoler to convey a cross or a rosary for me to my fellow-

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<sup>29</sup> A conspiracy initiated in 1605 by a few desperate Catholics after heavy persecutions were initiated and some 5000 recusant Catholics were convicted in one way or another. The plot was led by a certain Robert Catesby, who decided to destroy the main persecutors of their community by blowing King James I up while he visited the House of Lords and Commons. The plot was betrayed by some other Catholics who were reluctant about one of their friends and the more severe repercussions which eventually could follow. Then the authorities allowed the conspiracy to go forward in order to round up the conspirators and thus the plot failed.

<sup>30</sup> See: J. Gerard, *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*, transl. from Latin to English by Ph. Caraman, Pellegrini and Cudahy, New York 1952.



prisoner, for the same man had charge of both of us, as we were neighbors. At first he refused, saying that he durst not venture, as he had had no proof of the other prisoner's fidelity in keeping a secret. 'For if,' said he, 'the gentleman's wife were to talk of this, and it should become known I had done such a thing, it would be all over with me' I reassured him, however, and convinced him that such a result was not likely, and, as I added a little bribe, I prevailed upon him as usual to gratify me. He took my letter, and the other received what I sent [...] Next morning, when he made his appearance on the leads, he thanked me by signs, and showed the cross I had sent him."<sup>31</sup>

In a similar way, Father Gerard was in letter contact with his Jesuit superiors on the European mainland, from whom he was even able to receive written instructions on how to act and money for bribing gaolers. His own escape was arranged as usual by bribing a gaoler, who "did not see" a boat arriving in the Tower's moat in order to pick up the escaping prisoner. In some other place, horses and a small carriage were waiting. Gerard also did not forget the helpful Catholic gaoler when he became suspected by the Tower's commander of his illegal assistance to imprisoned Catholics:

"I told him that though I was not wise bound to protect him from consequences, as I had but used my just right, yet as I had found him faithful in the things which I had entrusted him with, I was loathe to leave him in the lurch; if, therefore, he was inclined to provide for his own safety immediately, there was a horse waiting for him with a guide who would bring him to a place of safety, sufficiently distant from London, where I would maintain him for life, allowing him two hundred florins yearly, which would support comfortably. [...] The poor man was, as may well be supposed, in a great fright, and accepted the offer; but he was about to return to Tower to settle matters and get his wife away, a mate of his met him, and said, 'Be off with you, as quick as you can, for your prisoners have escaped, and Master Lieutenant is looking for you` everywhere. Woe to you if he finds you!'"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> J. Gerard, *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*, op. cit.; quotation from extensive fragment of the account republished as *My Escape from the Tower of London*, in: *Prose and Poetry for Enjoyment*, Catholic Edition, ed. H. Ward McGraw, The L. W. Singer Company, Syracuse-Chicago-Dallas 1940, p. 268.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

The frightened jailer was then quickly handed over to Richard Fullwood, who was to be his guide. Gerard confessed in his account that “Fullwood took him to the house of a friend of mine residing at the distance of a hundred miles from London, to whom I had written, asking him, if such a person should come, to take him in and provide for him. [...] Everything was done as I had arranged; my friend received no damage, and gaoler remained there out of danger.”<sup>33</sup>

The most famous place where priests were hidden was Harvington Hall. It was used as a centre for receiving and hiding Catholic priests who were trained on the continent in Douai and then smuggled into England. These priests were hunted by English troops of priest hunters who were called “Pursuivants.” They unexpectedly raided and searched residences owned by some remaining English Catholics. Penalties for these priests were extremely severe and well known: they were either jailed or even decapitated or burnt at the stake. Also, households and their residents sheltering those priests were severely punished. Thus, a great many Catholic houses had special hides or so-called ‘Priest Holes’ designed and built within the house’s structure in order to be used in the case of a search. Some of these “priest hides” can still be seen across England. Such hides were, however, unable to prevent the arrest of the master “hide architect” – their main designer and builder – the Jesuit monk Nicholas Owen, when he started to build hiding-holes in Hindlip House in Worcestershire. Owen, who was caught on the spot by royal soldiers and arrested when performing an open field mass there, was tortured and finally hanged in 1606, thus becoming a Catholic Martyr and Saint. Hindlip House was later demolished and only descriptions of the hides there show a striking similarity to those that were preserved at Harvington. The present Hindlip Hall, erected on the very spot of its earlier and demolished predecessor, has nothing to do with the former residence. Another Catholic Martyr who was caught and sentenced to death was John Wall, who was strictly associated with Harvington Hall, although he was arrested in another place.

The owner of Harvington Hall was Humphrey Pakington. He was in constant trouble for his Catholicism from 1585 onwards. From 1591 to 1607 both Harvington and some of his other estates were sequestered by the royal administration. Nevertheless, he was able to live in

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Harvington thanks to his friend William Sebright who officially owned the residence after he bought it from the Crown. The priest hiding places at Harvington were never discovered by royal agents and now belong to the finest of such places in all England, as well as other Protestant countries where Catholic priests were hunted and persecuted. The most interesting hiding places are sited around the so-called Great Staircase. It is here that in one hand movement you could open the cover of one step and enter a hiding place under it. Secret hiding holes were camouflaged by double walls, while a narrow secret entrance was provided by moving beams from a half-timbered wall. A small hiding room behind the moving beam was usually occupied by two persons, but in the case of unsuspected danger, four or even five persons could enter this secret hiding place at the same time. The false beam, after its closure, looked normal, although it was constructed a little bit wider than other elements of the half-timbered wall and the house's architecture. Some hiding places were arranged between double walls and masked by regular bricking up at the time of a royal inspection. Such hiding places are now deliberately disclosed for tourists.

Other hides were located in the chimney, one or two floors above the fire place. One or two priests were seated on the beam to which a strong rope was attached. Then it was driven up to the higher floor by a special wheel at the top, while fire was ignited downstairs, in order to avoid recognition by royal envoys. In order to distract the prosecutors' attention, the end of the rope was fed through other rooms to the kitchen, from which it was operated. Priests' ceremonial clothing and the accessories necessary for the Holy Mass were hidden under the floor in the room predestined to be a chapel. A moving altar was also used, either in residence or for open field masses. The corridor with personal rooms for priests escaping the royal hunt was named "Nine Worthies Passage". Today, in the rooms of Worthies Passage, wax figures imitate real hidden priests and provide proper visualisations for visitors and tourists.<sup>34</sup>

Every year on September the 4th, on the anniversary of the historic *Pilgrimage of Grace*, originally organized in 1536 against the anti-Catholic edicts of the King Henry VIII, English Catholics arrive in Harvington to celebrate their survival in the Protestant country. The Holy

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<sup>34</sup> On the history of Harvington Hall see: M. Hodgetts, *Harvington Hall*, Archdiocese of Birmingham Historical Commission, [Birmingham] 1998.

Mass is usually celebrated by the Archbishop of Birmingham. In 2011, when I participated in the event, the Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, the most reverend Bernard Longley, celebrated the Holy Mass.

It was not only English Catholics who were hunted and persecuted in Protestant England. Those Protestants who were dissatisfied with the progress of Protestantism were in sharp conflict with the royal authorities. In their eyes, the English Church was not sufficiently Protestant and remained too Catholic in its essence. Especially under the rule of Elizabeth I, and then James I, about eight hundred of the leading extreme Protestants fled to the Continent, where they initiated theological studies and developed contacts with Continental Protestant leaders, especially those who represented the Calvinistic stream of Protestantism. It was they who imbibed such pregnant ideas about the Church's Reformation that when, a few years later, they returned to England, they promptly emerged as the leaders in the Elizabethan Church and later on gradually developed their ideas under the rule of James I. Most of these spiritual leaders played a prominent role in effecting the English Church settlement, lending it a strong Calvinistic tone, and some of them became prominent among the founders of English Puritanism in England, and its equivalent, Scottish Presbyterianism, which became the most influential parallel religious movements in the British history of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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John Wycliffe, 16<sup>th</sup> century wood-cut.



*The Bones & Ashes of the Rev.<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup>. JOHN WICKLIFF (Minister of Lutterworth in Leicestershire) Burnt and thrown into the River, 41 Years after his Death.*

Throwing the ashes of John Wycliffe into the River Swift.



Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, engraving by William Hogarth.



The Old Chapel of Douai College, where Catholic priests were educated and sent to Protestant England. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Harvington Hall, one of the English centres where Catholic priests were received from Douai and sent into the country to spread Catholicism. Phot. W. Lipoński.





A type of priest-hide arranged in a chimney. One or two priests were seated on the beam and driven up to a special hole located on the higher floor while a fire ignited downstairs masked the real purpose of the chimney. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Moving beam in half-timbered wall behind which a small room was used in order to hide a Catholic priest.

Phot. W. Lipoński.



The moving beam, when closed, masked the hiding room behind the wall.

Phot. W. Lipoński.



Entering the hiding room behind the moving beam. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Interior of the hiding room behind the moving beam. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Closed staircase, behind which a room was provided for the priest during a royal guards' search. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Priest hole behind the moving step of the so-called Great Staircase. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Room in Harvington Hall where a Catholic priest was preparing for his mission. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, the most reverend Bernard Longley, arrives at Harvington Hall during the Pilgrimage of Grace in 2011. Phot. W. Lipoński.



Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, the most reverend Bernard Longley, celebrates Holy Mass in a field surrounding Harvington Hall, 2011.  
Phot. W. Lipoński.



Participants in the Holy Mass during the 2011 Pilgrimage of Grace to Harvington. Phot. W. Lipoński.



## Chapter Ten

# PURITANISM AND ITS CONTEMPORARY AFTERMATHS

Not too many religious, cultural or political phenomena have had such a strong impact on the history of Britain as Puritanism. From the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to 1660, English Puritanism, as well as its equivalent – Scottish Presbyterianism, played an extremely important role in Britain. And the role of Puritanism and Presbyterianism in both Britain and America was not limited to the religious sphere. It crossed the religious limits of life and influenced the political situation in Britain decisively during the first six decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This was especially visible in the conflict between Parliament and royal authority during the English Civil War. In this conflict, King Charles 1st was executed by the will of the Puritan Parliament in 1649.

All spheres of British life were strongly affected by the influence of Puritan theology, or rather Puritan ideology: new and severe public and domestic customs were introduced, the way of dressing was completely changed and exclusively black and white colours dominated clothing. In official sermons, all theatrical and musical public entertainments and amusements were discouraged and consequently prohibited along with sporting exercises, as they were considered sinful. On the other hand, the Puritan ethos of work contributed significantly to the development of the British, especially English, economy and sciences. The elimination of such literary forms as drama, which had no output in closed theatres, contributed significantly to the development of other types of literature, not affected by the prohibitive actions of the Puritan Parliament. First and foremost, it was the novel which substituted old types of prose, especially post-chivalric and post-euphuistic romance. It seems quite natural that writers, deprived of the possibility to earn money in closed or demolished theatres, instead of writing new dramas, took to other types of literature. Moreover, efforts to defend as well as attack Puritanism were responsible for the quick development of social criticism, satire and journalism, not to mention the rise in sensitivity towards free expression and free speech.

Puritanism was a radical reforming movement which was born within English Protestantism. As a reform movement within English Protestantism it emerged in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The term “Puritan” was first applied in 1564 to those who resisted the attempts of the bishops in that year to enforce Protestant uniformity in ritual and in the use of vestments. This word and its derivative “Puritanism” denote in everyday language a way of life which is exceptionally strict in terms of conduct and morality and which goes to ethical extremes, if not to absurdity. But Puritanism, when we understand this term as denoting a religious and moral movement, meant something else: its rigidity was not a goal in itself but rather an instrument for reaching spiritual excellence, providing an extremely long list of ethical tools backed by religion and a life cleansed of any sin. This also explains why the Puritans derived their name from the Latin word, *purus* resulting in English forms of *purity* – *cleanliness* and *purify* – to clean or make pure.

As such, Puritanism was opposed to Catholicism on the one hand, and the official, established Church of England on the other. At the same time, Puritanism reproached the Church of England because of its insufficient break with Catholicism and especially for preserving elements of the liturgy which were considered as belonging to Papism, and not to original Christian truths contained in the *Bible*. One of the most criticised Catholic remnants in the Church of England and still existing in the Catholic Church, was, for instance, the *surplice* worn by Anglican Protestant priests. The Puritans did not accept the surplice in their liturgy and started a long-lasting controversy over it. From a contemporary point of view, such a controversy seems rather insignificant, if not trivial. But because the surplice was not even mentioned in the *New Testament* as being worn by Jesus Christ, or his apostles, it gained the dimension of a great symbolic struggle for a clean faith based exclusively on the *Bible* and in such a role it was employed in different ideological and religious areas. The Puritans went so far that they excluded excessive ornamented elements of the church, especially at the altar. They excluded from their churches, paintings, sculpture and even music. All these elements were considered as giving sinful pleasure and were not seen as being in accordance with God’s will. Even after the collapse of Puritanism, a number of English churches remain bare-walled until today, although the organs were usually restored. Another set of accusations resulted from tendencies visible in the Church of England such as, for instance, some obvious inclinations of

the Church hierarchy to be wealthy and to gain political significance and influence. It was, in fact, the same basic set of accusations which earlier Protestant movements, not only in England but also on the European continent, had directed towards the Catholic Church and excessive papal authority. For Puritan theologians, the most important idea was to clean the Christian religion, especially the Church of England and make it free from accretions considered as discordant and incompatible with the assumptions of the Christian Church, especially as far as its religious functions and practice were concerned.

The most essential element of the Puritan faith was unlimited confidence in the *Bible*, considered as the ultimate source of truth. No power, or authority of any kind, should mediate between the Bible and an individual. In order to provide every individual with direct access to the *Bible*, the Puritans decided to teach reading and writing to every person in their society. And literacy was obligatory among them. This is why all children were provided access to *The New England Primer* in the American colonies. It was first published between 1687 and 1690 by printer Benjamin Harris, who had gone to Boston in 1686. To a substantial extent it was based upon *The Protestant Tutor*, which Harris had published earlier in England. Although the *New-England Primer* was the first reading primer designed for the American Colonies, it was not the first primer in the English speaking world. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Latin *Enschedé Abece-darium* was translated into English as the so-called *Salisbury Prymer*, its full title being *The Primer in Englishe and Latine*, and is identified as the earliest example of a printed primer. It contained the Latin alphabet and also some selected prayers. Nevertheless, it was thanks to the Puritans that in New England their *Primer* was deliberately used to teach the whole society to read and write. Thus, the Puritans became the first society in the world's history with 100 percent literacy. Although the first purpose of such full literacy was to provide access to the *Bible*, in the course of time it also facilitated access to other literature.

In considering the *Bible* as the ultimate source of human knowledge, the Puritans were not too different from other Protestant denominations. But they went much further, taking Calvinistic inspiration as a point of departure. John Calvin (1509-1564; the original form of his Swiss name in French: Jean Cauvin or, in German: Johann Kalvin) was a Swiss Protestant, probably second in importance in continental Protestantism only to Martin Luther.



The Puritans made their first contacts with the doctrine of John Calvin when they were expelled from England under the rule of Mary Tudor, who tried to reintroduce Catholicism in England. Some of the Puritan clergy went to Switzerland and the Netherlands where Calvinistic theology became quite strong and popular. Calvinism also emphasised a spiritual confrontation between Man and the Lord.

The original Calvinism based its principles and functioning exclusively on the *Bible* as an ultimate source of faith and morality and predestination, and salvation in heaven. John Calvin himself wrote in his work titled: *The Need of Scripture, as Guide and Teacher, in Coming to God as a Creator* : “Not in vain [...] has He (God) added the light of His Word in order that He might make himself known unto Salvation, and bestowed the privilege on those whom he was pleased to bring into nearer and more familiar relation to himself.”<sup>1</sup> In another paragraph of the same work, *The Testimony of the Spirit Necessary to Give Full Authority to Scripture*, we read: “It is necessary to attend to what I lately said, that our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its Author. Hence the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of Him Whose Word it is.”<sup>2</sup>

Calvin rejected all the things in the Christian faith which were not confirmed by the *Holy Scripture*. This pertained first of all to liturgy, although Calvin did not go as far as his Swiss compatriot Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), who even supported the complete prohibition of such elements of the liturgy as church singing. Most British Puritans, however, accepted Zwingli’s approach to music and singing, which was responsible for killing British music, which up to this time was among the finest in Europe.

Puritanism, in comparison with the Church of England and even Lutheranism, became incomparably more uncompromising in its attempts to eliminate all possible sins from human life, including a number of manifestations of life considered by other Christian denominations as quite normal and by no means sinful. These included all kinds of recreation: theatre, dancing, music, sport, feasting or ale drinking. Painting and sculpture, seen as providing sinful visual pleasure, were first destroyed

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<sup>1</sup> *The Need of Scripture, as Guide and Teacher, in Coming to God as a Creator*, in: Calvin. *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. M. J. Adler, published by *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago 1991, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *The Testimony of the Spirit Necessary to Give Full Authority to Scripture*, *ibid.*, p. 16.

and then relegated from churches to the extent that only bare walls remained. Colourful clothing was forbidden. In the Puritans' hatred of music, they went to the extreme and started to chop church organs to pieces - regarded as dangerous instruments which poured a sense of pleasant and thus sinful sound into the spiritual life of a human being. The only allowed type of music in Puritan churches was psalm singing or rather psalm recitation. Predestination, probably the most important theological assumption of Calvinistic theology, was also emphasised. Predestination declared that the Lord does not provide salvation for all human beings who are able to avoid sin. In Calvinistic theology, only chosen people can count on salvation because God predestined some human beings for such grace and some not. They were convinced that the first man committed such a heavy sin against God, that despite human efforts, achieving good is rather in vain and cannot satisfy the Lord while he justifies his righteous anger. This is why the Puritans treated salvation as God's gift and not as a reward for a sinless and devout life. This assumption of Puritan theology was responsible for some understandable feelings of uncertainty among believers in Puritan doctrine, because nobody knew whether he had been chosen by God or not.<sup>3</sup>

Predestination is a belief that one is chosen (or not) for salvation and that salvation is God's gift and not a reward for a sinless and devout life. The conviction that one is chosen meant that salvation could be achieved via a long-lasting process of total conversion through internal revelation and not just the reform of a sinner. This was the central point of Puritan religious life. When in 1590 some students at Cambridge had begun to question such principle Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift (c. 1530-1604) together with some heads of colleges including William Whitaker, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, drew up a series of 9 articles in order to define Calvinist doctrine concerning predestination. These articles addressed to citizens of Lambeth (thus also known as The Lambeth Articles) were designed to settle a controversy that had arisen among students and professors of Cambridge University regarding whether God predestines people at his own will to eternal life or damnation. They wrote there: "God from eternity predestined certain men to life and condemned others to death. The moving or efficient cause of predestination to life is not foreseeing of faith, or of perseverance, or of good works, or of any other

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<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritans>

thing which is in the person predestined, but the will of the good pleasure of God alone.”<sup>4</sup>

Further to this, every person should strive for such a conversion and gain a new personality as a saint. This last word “saint” should be understood not in the traditional Catholic sense of the word but in its Puritan meaning: a person who achieves a higher state of personal religious involvement and becomes free of sin, but not one who is elevated above others, as in Catholicism. This was, to some extent, an equivalent of the Catholic notion of *saving grace* rather than the Catholic understanding of sanctity.<sup>5</sup> Every Puritan believer distinguished this path to God and also tried to prove every morning that his heart and feelings were really directed towards Jesus Christ and were able to realise the ten commandments during the oncoming day. Among the preserved written sources on Puritanism, we can find one original list prepared by a Puritan minister. This list contains as many as 60 points in a morning examination. It was also quite popular among Puritans to carry a kind of diary by which such a person could control his own daily behaviour, thoughts and even intentions. Puritans and other adherents of Calvinism believed in a clear division of the human world into two sectors: good and evil. Calvinism, on which Puritanism rested, recognized only two sacraments: the sacrament of Baptism and of the Last Supper.

The church as a building had special functions for Puritans. Every person could enter it at any given moment but under the condition that she or he “walked in the ways of Christ.” The Puritan Church, understood as a

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<sup>4</sup> Quot. after: Claire Cross, *Churchmen and the Royal Supremacy*, in: *Church and Society in England. Henry VIII to James I*, Felicity Heal and Rosemary O’Day, eds., Macmillan Press, London-Basingstoke 1977, p. 31. As C. Cross writes: “As soon as she heard of the articles the Queen (Elizabeth I) acted to prevent their promulgation, commanding Robert Cecil (her Secretary of State), to tell Withgift ‘that she mislikes much that any allowance hath been given by your grace and the rest of any points to be disputed of predestination, being a matter tender and dangerous to weak, ignorant minds, and thereupon requireth your grace to suspend them’. Withgift, still believing the articles ‘to be undoubtedly true’, obediently bowed to the Queen’s wishes, and forbade their public discussion in the university” (ibid., pp. 31-32). But such prohibition, of course, did not end the story and several decades later when the Puritans came to power the strict Calvinistic doctrine of God’s total sovereignty over eternal salvation or damnation was officially accepted and to a substantial extent temporarily enforced in England.

<sup>5</sup> Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590 – 1640*, Farnham, Ashgate 2013; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination>

collective society, was divided into smaller congregations. Every congregation had the right to expel those persons who were not in the state of being a saint or at least were not on the path towards such a state. Ministers were selected by common agreement of mature members of the congregation and every adult Puritan believer could vote to decide whether new members could be allowed into a particular congregation. From this perspective, Puritan congregations seem quite democratic, as opposed to, for instance, the system of selecting the Catholic hierarchy, limited exclusively to the clergy. Puritan saints, identified by a higher state of conversion, constituted a kind of internally distinguished collective body and had more authority and powers than the rest of the members.

There was also a special offshoot of Puritanism, whose members were called the Millenarians. They believed that Jesus Christ would again step down upon earth and that he would personally bring about the Last Judgment on Doomsday.

In Scotland, the religious movement which was similar to Puritanism was called *Presbyterianism*. The Presbyterians also extracted their beliefs from the teachings and principles of John Calvin. The Scottish doctrine of Presbyterianism was shaped by John Knox (c. 1514-1572). The word *Presbyterian* was derived from the Greek term *presbuteros* meaning someone older by his age and function. The characteristic feature of this denomination was that its elders, called presbyters, constituted the basic structure of the church. Presbyterian functionaries, called ministers, constituted a body called the *presbytery* which was considered as the highest authority for a particular regional congregation, usually comprising several local communities. Scottish Presbyterianism was even longer lasting and more vigorous than English Puritanism. When, for political reasons, Puritanism disappeared from the English political and religious scene in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Scottish Presbyterianism continued as an important Christian denomination.

During the first decades of the 17th century, Presbyterianism was mixed with Puritanism. This was due to the fact that during the conflict between the Parliament and royal authority, Presbyterian MPs frequently supported the Puritans in their actions against Charles I. Because both denominations were based on similar, and in some points the same theological assumptions, it can easily be understood that confusing them was not considered as a serious mistake, both by contemporaries and also later historians. The main bone of contention between them was, however, the

famous Episcopal *Prayerbook* and its contents, which were by no means accepted by all of them.

Puritanism really flourished under Oliver Cromwell's rule as Lord Protector. Soon after his death in 1658, however, Puritanism collapsed in England while the Presbyterians in Scotland were able to maintain their Church up to this day. In the course of time, the Presbyterian Church, after some changes, became the official Church of Scotland.<sup>6</sup>

Before all this happened, the collapsing Puritanism was divided into different opposing factions. One of them was the Nonconformist movement which rejected the official Protestant principles typical for the Anglican Church. This movement was born in both Wales and England, and saw a further division of its members into Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists. The most famous of the reformers of Puritanism was John Wesley (1703-1791), who established new theological principles for Protestantism, transforming it into an Evangelical movement, now known as Methodism. He took to open-air preaching in the United Kingdom, encouraging people to study Christ personally via a methodological approach, which explains the name of his congregation.

Most of these new denominations gave up some, but not all the extremities of Puritanism. Among the elements which had been banned in Puritanism but were now allowed was, for instance, Church music, especially choirs. Religious singing became especially important among these new sectors of Protestantism. The heritage of the Evangelical movement and its singing is especially beautiful and contains, among many other Church songs, those such as *Rock of Ages* and *Amazing Grace*.

*Rock of Ages* was composed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas Hastings (1784-1872), based on an earlier religious poem by Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778). Toplady was a village preacher in the village of Blagdon. Once upon a time he was travelling along the gorge of Burrington Combe in the Mendip Hills in England. This gorge was commonly known among ordinary people as the Rock of Ages. According to the

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<sup>6</sup> After a short period of repression under William III's rule, some members of the Presbyterian Church separated and created in 1733 the so-called Associate Presbytery or the Secession Church. This, in turn, was reorganised in 1761 as the Relief Presbytery and finally in 1843 they established the Free Church of Scotland. In 1970 Presbyterianism entered *The World Alliance of Reformed Churches*. The name of the 'Reformed Churches' means in this particular case all churches based on the Calvinistic doctrine of Christianity.

story, Toplady was caught up in a heavy and dangerous storm on his way and found shelter from the storm. And it was here that he was frightened by the storm's power, considered by him as an expression of God's anger.<sup>7</sup> Then he associated his feelings with the name of the Gorge, *Rock of Ages*, as a symbol of the eternal power of the Lord and wrote down the initial lyrics on a ... playing card.

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy side of which is flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure;  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
Could my zeal no languor know.  
For the sin could not atone;  
Thou must save and Thou alone:  
In my hand no price I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling.  
While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyes will close in death,  
When I rise to worlds unknown,  
And behold Thee on Thy throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.”<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, this incident gives us some information about the rather confused situation of the Protestant denominations of England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. First, the text written by Toplady is frequently viewed as a criticism of the theology of John Wesley. Wesley rejected the Puritan notion of predestination and maintained that a human being decides to be saved through his/her own attempts to avoid sins and live a moral life, and thus, his life and morality plays a crucial role in salvation. However, although Puritanism, as a separate denomination, did not exist any longer, it persisted in the minds of a substantial number of English Protestants. Toplady, who clearly represented the orthodox post-Puritan view of this issue, was critical of the Wesleyan notion, which is visible in the verse of his poem where we

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock\\_of\\_Ages\\_\(Christian\\_hymn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_of_Ages_(Christian_hymn))

<sup>8</sup> See the text in: *Timeless Truths. Free Online Library*: [http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Rock\\_of\\_Ages/](http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Rock_of_Ages/)

read “Thou must save and Thou alone.” Contrary to his orthodox Puritanism, Toplady, so strict about the extreme principles of Puritanism and its Calvinistic stream, recorded the initial text of the poem by writing it by hand on a .... playing card. Playing cards was strictly forbidden by Calvinistic denominations, including, of course, its Puritan offshoot.

Probably the most famous performance ever of this religious hymn should be attributed to Kathryn Elizabeth Smith, or in the much more popular form, Kate Smith (1907-1986).<sup>9</sup> She was an American singer who had a radio, TV and recording career spanning five decades, reaching its zenith in the 1940s. But she became best known for her rendition of *Rock of Ages* (as well as for her famous version of the Irving Berlin song *God Bless America*).

*Amazing Grace* is representative of a type of religious song which similar in character to *Rock of Ages*, especially in its expression of the smallness and insignificance of the human soul when exposed to the power of the Lord. Its origins are not associated with Puritanism, but similar religious spirituality is clearly expressed. It was written as a poem by an English clergymen, John Newton (1725-1807), in very unusual circumstances, and at least in one respect similar to the origins of *Rock of Ages*: the text was inspired by a heavy storm understood as an expression of God’s anger.

Newton, as a young man, was pressed into the Royal Navy by one of the famous *press gangs*<sup>10</sup> and soon worked as a sailor on a slave ship where he observed many human tragedies. It was during one night of a terrible storm that his ship was so severely battered that it nearly sank. Newton was frightened enough to call out to God for mercy, a moment that marked his belief in God as stronger than ever and produced the inspiration for the hymn. When he was finally released from sea service he became a pastor in Olney, Buckinghamshire. In Olney, supported by the well known poet William Cowper (1731-1800), Newton wrote a number of religious hymns, including, of course, *Amazing Grace*. The hymn was written originally to ac-

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<sup>9</sup> *Rock of Ages*, in *The Americans and Songs of Our Country [...] with Cate Smith*, Pickwick Records, SPC 3372, 1974.

<sup>10</sup> “Press Gangs were a form of conscription used to obtain seamen for the Royal Navy until the early 1800s. The conditions of life in the navy before that time were so bad that it was almost impossible to find volunteers. [...] They seized any able-bodied man they could find and sent him under escort to serve at sea. Hatred of the press gangs, who had the right to separate men from their families, sometimes led to violent demonstrations against them.” [*Press gangs* in: *The World Book Encyclopaedia. The British Isles*, vol. 2, I-Z, Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, London 1966, p. 279.

company his sermon for the New Year of 1773. We do not know if it was then accompanied by any music. *Amazing Grace* was printed in 1779 in a collection of poems written by both Newton and Cowper under their common title *Olney Hymns*. It remained long in obscurity in England but became popular when the post-Puritan denominations in the United States used it during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has been associated with some 20 different melodies.<sup>11</sup> Again though, it was in the USA that, in 1835, it was accompanied by an anonymous tune earlier titled *New Britain*, to which it is usually sung today with the following original text:

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now I’m found,  
I was blind, but now I see.

T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear.  
And Grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
‘Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far  
and Grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me.  
His word my hope secures.  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures.  
Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease;  
I shall profess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing\\_Grace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Grace)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.constitution.org/col/amazing\\_grace.htm](http://www.constitution.org/col/amazing_grace.htm)



The following stanza was added to the original text by an anonymous author, often replacing the sixth stanza, or when publically sung, inserted as the fourth.

“When we’ve been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun.  
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise  
Than when we’ve first begun.”<sup>13</sup>

Hundreds of artists have performed this famous religious tune. And in my opinion, one of the best among them is Connie Smith. She is an American country singer, born in 1941, who had major successes in the 1960s and 1970s. Her strong and deep voice makes *Amazing Grace* especially moving, and makes a tremendous impression even when sung among more trivial American country songs.<sup>14</sup> Even her great rival, Loretta Lynn, representing the concurrent DECCA Records, acknowledged this unusual performance saying: “She puts her heart and soul into everything she sings.”<sup>15</sup>

*Amazing Grace* is frequently performed without words, as a religious tune. For instance, it is frequently played by Scottish bagpipers and their bands. One of the best and most moving performances of this kind ever was by *The Pipes and Drum and Military Band of the Scottish Division*, conducted by captain B. T. Keeling.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, it is also frequently used or rather misused by different entertainers, including Polish organizers of competitive dancing. Quite recently, I personally heard this tune arranged in the form of Boston Dancing, commonly known in Poland as the English Waltz. Completely disregarding its religious character, it was danced to just for recreational and competitive goals. It is hard to imagine a similar scene being performed by British entertainers who have arranged, just for recreation and social dancing, such Polish tunes as *Boże coś Polskę* (*God Save Poland*) or *U drzwi Twoich stoję Panie* (*At Your Doors I Stay, My Lord*).

Under Queen Mary Tudor and later Elizabeth I, much persecution was endured under the *Act of Uniformity*, especially at the hands of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See: Connie Smith’s performance of *Amazing Grace* on RCA Victor Records, titled *Just One Time*, produced by B. Ferguson, Stereo LSP-534 (AAPRS-1344) 1974.

<sup>15</sup> Opinion on the back cover of the same record.

<sup>16</sup> *Amazing Grace*, The Pipes and Drum and Military Band of the Scottish Division, conducted by B. T. Keeling, produced by P. Kerr, RCA – Camden stereo CDS 1116, 1972.

Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645). The desire for the religious freedom to worship drove large numbers of Puritans first to the Netherlands and then in the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century across the Atlantic to New England. The first Puritans, known now as the Pilgrim Fathers, arrived in America on the ship *Mayflower* in 1621. The moment of their arrival appears on the famous painting by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris (1863-1939), titled *The First Sermon Ashore in America*.

In Massachusetts, the most distinguished American Puritan leaders appeared and became very active, like, for instance, John Winthrop (1587 or 1588-1649), John Cotton (1585-1652) and Richard Mather (1596-1669). The writings and sermons of Cotton and Mather soon became responsible for a terrifying religious hysteria, also supported by other ministers. The reason was the popular belief that evil forces were responsible for the recent political and military disasters suffered by the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They then started to look for those who had facilitated the devil to act among the unhappy colonists. Thus, the Puritan settlement in Salem, Massachusetts became famous for the witchcraft delusion. Women considered to be witches were the first to be suspected. Initially, several girls accused certain old women of having bewitched them. Then the delusion affected the city itself and prevailed throughout the summer of 1692. Consequently, nineteen women suspected of devilish witchcraft were hanged as witches during that craze and one man, Giles Corey, considered to be a devilish agent, was pressed to death with weights in the form of stones when he refused to acknowledge his guilt.<sup>17</sup> The terrifying effects of these tragic events were sufficient to get them stopped, with those awaiting trial for witchcraft released and several judges and ministers publicly regretting their part in the prosecution. These included the famous judge of the *Salem Trial*, Samuel Sewall (1652-1730). For his part in condemning 19 persons for witchcraft and sentencing them to the death penalty, Sewall later made a public confession of remorse. A little bit too late, so to speak. Otherwise, he was known rather as a man of humanity and merciful treatment of others. These characteristics were much evident in his pamphlet *The Selling of Joseph*, written in 1700 and usually considered as the first antislavery tract to be published in the British Colonies in

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<sup>17</sup> Gretchen A. Adams, *The Specter of Salem. Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2009.

North America. He also repeated his confession in his famous memoirs, titled simply *Diary* and published posthumously in 1730.

Some centuries later, the events which occurred in Salem became the basis for the famous drama by Arthur Miller (1915-2005) titled *The Crucible*. This moving drama was written and then used as a vehicle to criticize the radical contemporary anti-Communist tactics of the American senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) during the 1950s. McCarthy raised a level of hysteria in the United States which was similar to some extent to what had happened earlier in Salem.

*The Crucible* should certainly be considered as Miller's most important play and be remembered as one of the most moving dramas speaking up for human freedom and at the same time fighting against any kind of ideological and political oppression by literary means.

The trial in Salem was also screened in 1956 in a Franco-German movie directed by Raymond Rouleau. It was titled in French *Les Sorcières de Salem*.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Max Weber (1864-1920), a German economist, social historian and political writer, in his famous work on *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist of Kapitalismus (Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism)* ascribed to the Puritans much of the British success in building a new type of industrial society. However, he did not limit his observation to the Puritans. On the origins of capitalism in Western Europe, his famous theory was as follows: Calvinism, and especially English Puritanism, and also its various successors such as Methodism and Baptism, stressed that man's economic success, achieved through a religiously backed industrious life, proves that a particular person is a chosen Child of God. Taking into account that all Puritans wanted to prove that they themselves were chosen, one can only imagine how it worked: not many wanted to avoid salvation or be suspected that they did not care about it. In effect, the Puritan ethos of work emerged simply because almost all members of Puritan society wanted to prove through their ardent work that they belonged to those who had been selected and predestined by God for salvation. I said almost all, because in all religious or national societies we can find some exceptional individuals or rebels who disagree with the principles and regulations considered as obligatory for all, especially if such regulations are imposed. Robinson Crusoe was one of them, leaving his home to look for colourful adventure. In fact, that novel begins with a moral dispute between Robinson and his father on the

importance of work and modesty in life, understood in an obvious post-Puritan way. Unfortunately, Robinson leaves his home, unable to bear his father's ethical advice, but by leaving his house he contributed much to the development of the English novel.

But this moment of almost theological dispute, as the real beginning of the novel, was omitted from the movie starring Pierce Brosnan. Rod Hardy, director of the 1997 movie, decided that such a dispute would not be attractive enough for general viewers and substituted it with another reason for Robinson's leaving home: a duel during which he kills his friend and is forced to escape trial as a killer.

Weber's thesis about Protestantism was roughly as follows: Capitalism and the rationalisation of economic production did not emerge in the Orient as it did in the West due to differences in religion. Protestantism, but first of all English Puritanism, provided an essential impulse and ideology for a high ethos of work, responsible for the development of a modern economy and technology.

All the mentioned religious denominations existing within English speaking countries, especially Puritanism, Presbyterianism and later Congregationalism, Methodism and Baptism, with their common ground stemming from Calvinism and also Lutheranism, thus provided an impulse to build up capital and to develop a capitalistic mentality, as occurred first in Britain, and somewhat later in other West European countries and then also in the United States as a former British colony where Puritanism was not only well established but also survived its British original.

On the other hand, one of the most distinguished British historians, Charles Harding Firth (1857-1936), in his monumental masterpiece *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (1900) wrote that: "Puritanism was spending its strength in the vain endeavour to make England Puritan by force [...]. A change was coming over the party which supported Cromwell the Lord Protector; it had lost many of the men of conscience; it had attracted many of the time-servers and camp-followers of politics; it was ceasing to be a party held together by religious interest, and becoming a coalition held together by material interests and political necessities."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ch. Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York 1900, p. 486.

There was among them Richard Baxter (1615-1691) one of the ‘saintliest’ Puritans among the ministers of England. He acted as an adviser to Cromwell. In his work titled *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, Baxter wrote: “Respect and save your time, and take care every day not to spend more of your energy and time so as not to lose your gold and silver. Increase your vigilance and alertness against any form of empty recreations, vain clothing and feasting and also unproductive discussions and worthless company.” And he continues: “Do not even sleep too long because your sleep is another way wasting your time.”<sup>19</sup> When Baxter relates this to the journey of the Puritan soul, he says that “If a traveller sleeps or trifles most of the day, he must travel so much faster in the evening, or fall short of the journey’s end.”<sup>20</sup>

Another famous Puritan writer was John Bunyan (1628-1688), author of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The full title of this prose and religious work is *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which is to Come*. It relates the adventures of the said Christian through the *Slough of Despond*, the *Valley of Humiliation*, the *Valley of the Shadow of Death* to the *Vanity Fair*. Later on, as you may know, this last phrase, “Vanity Fair,” was used by William Thackeray in his equally famous novel *The Vanity Fair* (1847-1848).

George Innes (1825-1894), an American artist, painted a number of mystical scenes, including his masterpiece which is based on *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and is titled *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (oil, 1867). It shows a small and insignificant human soul waiting to enter the unknown perspective of life’s end, turned to the Cross visible at the end of a mysterious corridor between the clouds. This masterpiece certainly belongs to the most famous paintings associated with Puritan theology and literature.

Probably the most important writer on Puritanism was the poet John Milton (1608-1674), the famous author of *Paradise Lost*. He is well known for his literary achievements and rather less known for his other activities, such as his dispute with his Puritan fellow-comrades concerning religious liberties and general freedom of speech. Initially, the Puritans fought for freedom of speech very eagerly. In 1641 the Parliament

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<sup>19</sup> Quot. and translated from Polish after: M. Weber, *Szkice z socjologii religii* (*Sketches on the Sociology of Religion*), Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1984, pp. 268-269.

<sup>20</sup> R. Baxter, *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, the text on line, chapter VII on *The Necessity of Diligently Seeking the Saint’s rest*, quot. after [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/baxter/saints\\_rest.iii.VII.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/baxter/saints_rest.iii.VII.html)

abolished the dreaded Star Chamber which had functioned earlier as a severe censorship office. But the Puritans soon became censors for those who disagreed with their doctrine. Then they started to limit freedom for other religious denominations to the extent that they punished all those who had different religious or political viewpoints. This seems quite typical for all revolutionaries of all epochs: they fight for the freedom to express political views, as long it concerns their views. Then they turn against those who represent views not in accordance with theirs. Thus, the Puritans who dominated the English Parliament soon passed an act directed against the freedom of printing and justified this act on the basis that “lately many false and scandalous, rebellious and slanderous prints were published directed against religion and English government.”<sup>21</sup> Both chambers of the Parliament ordered that “no book shall from henceforth be printed or put to sale, unless the same be first approved of and licensed by such person or persons, both or either of the said Houses shall appoint for the licensing of the same.”<sup>22</sup>

Milton, although still an ardent supporter of Puritanism, warned his fellow Puritans about the danger of any attempts to censor any way of thinking. On November 24, 1644, he spoke in Parliament and then published his famous speech titled *A Speech of Mr John Milton for the Liberty of the Unlicenc'd Printing to the Parliament of England*. This speech, which was soon printed, is probably better known under its one-word title *Areopagitica*, probably the most renowned of the great international demands for freedom of speech and consequently freedom of the press. *Areopagitica* in Greek means something done by the *Areopagus* i.e. Council of the Elders. Milton spoke eloquently for the right to free, unlimited discussion of all human matters and declared that all books considered for license “must be permitted untouched by the licenser” because “a wise man, like a good refiner, can gather gold out of the drossiest volume, and that a fool will be a fool with the best book [...]; there is no reason that we should deprive a wise man of any advantage to his wisdom, while we seek to restrain from a fool.” Generally Milton was against, as he writes, all situations in which the “liberty of Printing be reduced into the power of a few.” Finally, he expressed his conviction in a simple question: “Our

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<sup>21</sup> Quot. after: *Analysis of the Order of Parliament* (June 14, 1643), against which *Areopagitica* was directed, in: *Milton. Great Books of the Western World*, ed. M. J. Adler, vol. XXIX, published by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago 1991, p. 381.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

English, the language of men, ever famous and foremost in the achievements of liberty, will not easily find servile letters to spell such a dictatory presumption English.” The content of his famous speech will be more widely discussed in this book in another chapter devoted to the concept of freedom in British history.

Although Puritanism lost its historical power in politics and religion, its continuation could be indirectly found, deep into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in many other areas of human activity. One of the most long-lasting remnants of the Puritan attitude toward all types of recreations were the so-called *Blue Laws*, prohibiting all types of pastimes, including theatre, sport and feasting on the last two days of the week, considering such recreations as “satanic practices.” The first occurrence of the phrase *blue law* can be found not in Britain but in the British colonies in America in 1755. This term was used to describe various laws first enacted by Puritan colonists in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that prohibited various recreational and commercial activities, on Saturday evening through Sunday night. Offenders against the *Blue Law* were punished either by monetary fines or sometimes by putting them in prison or in stocks. *Blue Laws* survived well until the 20 century.

During the 1924 Olympics in Paris, an unusual sporting event happened which was indirectly affected by the *Blue Law*. This incident was later the basis for the script of the famous movie *Chariots of Fire* (1981), directed by Hugh Hudson and awarded with four Oscars. This movie tells the fact-based story of two British athletes in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. One of them is Eric Liddell, predicted as being a successor to his father and becoming missionary of the London Missionary Society (established mostly by the post-Puritan denominations of Congregationalists and Nonconformists). Liddell was also one of the main candidates to win the 100 metre dash. But he refused to take part because its qualifying rounds were planned for Sunday and he had decided to respect the provisions of the *Blue Law* based on the 4<sup>th</sup> of the *Ten Commandments*: “Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.” The film’s title was inspired by the line “Bring me my chariot of fire,” from the famous William Blake poem adapted later into the popular British hymn *Jerusalem*, with the music composed later by Sir Hubert Parry. This hymn is also heard at the end of the movie.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Blake’s *Jerusalem* was inspired by the apocryphal tale that a young Jesus, accompanied by Joseph of Arimathea, travelled to what is now England during the unknown

As late as in August 1965, remnant principles of the *Blue Laws* worked in England against ... the Polish national athletics team, which had arrived in London for a match with its British counterpart. The original match was predicted for the Saturday and Sunday of late July. During those years British sabbatarians did not protest too strongly against sporting events when staged by British or other Western teams and sportsmen. But a team from the then Communist Poland was another issue. Their strong protest caused a change of the match date from Saturday and Sunday to Thursday and Friday.<sup>24</sup>

The American painter, Grant Wood (1891-1942), belonged to those who initially wanted to satirise post-Puritanical remnants in the American *Bible Belt*. One of his best-known paintings is titled *American Gothic*. According to a historian of American art: "it is an image that epitomizes the Puritan ethic and virtue that he believed dignified the Midwestern character."<sup>25</sup> It shows two persons, an Iowa preacher-farmer and his daughter or possibly

years of Christ. There we read the prophesy that Jesus will establish a new Jerusalem in England. We should ignore the naive legend. We should remember, however, that in the Christian tradition, Jerusalem has long been used as a metaphor for Heaven, a place of universal love and peace. Thus, in the most common interpretation of Blake's poem, it is implied that a visit by Jesus would metaphorically create heaven in England, in contrast to the "dark Satanic Mills" of the Industrial Revolution and the general negative sides of modern civilization. One of the most spectacular performances of *Jerusalem* in England is now associated with the yearly *Rugby Football Grand Final*. It was there in 2010 that a Welsh singer and actor, Rhydian Roberts, splendidly performed *Jerusalem* with great emotional expression. And did those feet in ancient time/Walk upon England's mountains green:/And was the Holy Lamb of God,/On England's pleasant pastures seen./And did the Countenance Divine,/Shine forth upon our clouded hills?/And was Jerusalem builded here,/Among those dark Satanic Mills? /Bring me my Bow of Burning Gold;/ Bring me my Arrows of Desire/ Bring me my Spear: O! Clouds unfold! bring me my Chariot of Fire!/ I will not cease from Mental Fight/ Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:/ Till we have built Jerusalem/ For England's green and pleasant Land [*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. D. Eerdmann, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2008, p. 95].

<sup>24</sup> This was quite surprising for some Polish athletes who, hungry for Western recreations and convinced that they would have the two remaining days for rest, went to London by night, including the attractions of Soho on Wednesday evening and arrived at the hotel on Thursday morning. Then they were informed that within a few hours they should go and start competing at the White City Stadium. Some of them, including the author of this book, then representing Poland in the 400 m., did not perform very well.

<sup>25</sup> Art Institute Chicago, *My Collections*: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/node/5187>



wife standing in front of a house with a Gothic window. Although this painting took its title from the window with the Gothic arch visible in the background of the picture, the title's Gothic element seems rather unimportant to the masterpiece and is feebly justified by the artist's idea that "the lines of a Gothic window showing in the background should be roughly repeated in the faces, and again, upside down, in the tines of the pitchfork."<sup>26</sup> Unless we combine the religious rigour of the Middle Ages and Puritanism. According to the famous statement of Italian art critic and devoted anglophile Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764), it was the Gothic style in art and architecture which best expressed the religious rigour of the Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup> Taking into account this feature of Gothicism and its religiously rigorous element, equated now with Puritan moral rigour, we can easily see it radiating from the eyes and faces of the persons painted by Wood, especially from the man handling a pitchfork. Grant intended in his painting to satirise the narrow and rigorous religious attitudes and prejudices of the so-called *Bible Belt*, which included southern Iowa in the USA. Later he denied this, but he painted something better than he was ready to recognize and acknowledge in the early stage of his work. In fact, it appeared much better than his intention to ironically satirise his Puritanical Iowa neighbours. Intentionally or not, when he painted the unusual expression of "puritanical" spiritual power in the eyes and faces of the painted couple,<sup>28</sup> he exposed the ideological, religious and consequently social attitude of a large strata of the American people, with all its negative and positive sides. And regardless of whether they consider themselves as inheritors of Puritanism or not, they continue a certain type of uncompromising Biblical attitude towards life, created long ago by that denomination.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> D. Garwood, *Artist in Iowa. A Life of Grant Wood*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 1944, p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> F. Algarotti expressed this in *An Essay on Architecture* (1753) and *An Essay on Painting* (1766).

<sup>28</sup> In fact, a local dentist Dr. B. H. McKeeby and Wood's sister Nan.

<sup>29</sup> On Wood's painting see also: S. Biel, *American Gothic: A Life of America's Most Famous Painting*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York 2005; Thomas Hoving, *American Gothic: The Biography of Grant Wood's American Masterpiece*, Chamberlain Bros., a member of Penguin Group, New York, 2005. Of the older works, valuable comments on *American Gothic* with an explanation of its history can be found in D. Garwood, *Artist in Iowa...* op. cit., especially chapters: *Birth of a Masterpiece* and *Version for Iowa*, pp. 118-129.

Sara Vowell quotes in her essay an opinion confirming our association of Wood's masterpiece with his view on Puritanism: "Your Middlewest is double-Puritan—prairie Puritan on top of New England Puritan; bluff frontiersman on the surface, but in its heart it still has the ideal of Plymouth Rock in a sleet-storm." And she adds: "Wood's pair lives up to that assessment—they're a tad too churchy but they won't give up."<sup>30</sup>

One thing is for certain, however: even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-Puritanism still appeared sufficiently strong in America to be expressed not only in the Churches but also in literature and art, and even in popular music. This is confirmed, for instance, by singers who perform songs devoted to traditional American values, which are at least to a certain, and sometimes substantial degree formed by the post-Puritan mentality. Among the most popular singers of such type, we can find, for instance, numerous religious lyrics in songs performed by Connie Smith, George Jones or Lynn Anderson. The percentage of their songs which having the *Bible* and the rigorous principles of life in mind is astonishing. No one has counted them, but in the cases of some singers, like George Jones for example, it seems that in at least one quarter of their lyrics we can frequently meet such confessions:

"There's a Family Bible on the table,  
Each page is torn and hard to read,  
But the Family's Bible on the table,  
Will ever be my key to memories."<sup>31</sup>

Of course, in stating sins to be avoided, they sing not only about old, traditional human errs but also turn against those which were introduced and developed in modern times. Among those most condemned are excessive liberalism in sex, aggressive atheism sometimes combined with Darwinism, although rarely mentioned by name and the alienation of great cities contrasted with the love of farming people. In Lynn Anderson's *Country Girl*, the title heroin returns to her small town after a short career as a stewardess on big American airlines, praising the virtues and comforts of her countryside. In the 1960s and 1970s, country singers paid much critical attention to the anti-biblical behaviour of the hippies and modern intellectuals, who had no faith in God and who, in their

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.newliteraryhistory.com/americanogothic.html>

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/g/george\\_jones/family\\_bible.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/g/george_jones/family_bible.html)

view, disturbed if not destroyed traditional American values based on *The Bible*. The most typical song of that type was performed by Merle Haggard in *An Okie from Muskogee* (Muskogee is one small “Biblical” town in Oklahoma; *Okie* means a citizen of Oklahoma). It was sung in the 1970s with great success against all the customs and behaviours of the contemporary youth, who were seen as a threat to traditional American values:

“We don’t smoke marijuana in Muskogee;  
 We don’t take our trips on LSD  
 We don’t burn our draft cards down on Main Street;  
 We like livin’ right, and bein’ free.  
 We don’t make a party out of lovin’;  
 We like holdin’ hands and pitchin’ woo;  
 We don’t let our hair grow long and shaggy,  
 Like the hippies out in San Francisco do.  
 And I’m proud to be an Okie from Muskogee [...]  
 We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse,  
 And white lightnin’ is still the biggest thrill of all.”<sup>32</sup>

The motif of a sinner who tries to return to God and begs to be granted the predestined decision of Jesus appears in Kris Kristofferson’s *Why Me Lord*:

“Why me Lord, what have I ever done  
 To deserve even one of the pleasures I’ve known  
 Tell me Lord what did I ever do  
 That was worth loving you or the kindness you’ve shown  
 Lord help me Jesus I’ve wasted it so  
 Help me Jesus I know who I am  
 Now that I know that I’ve needed you so  
 Help me Jesus my soul’s in your hand.”<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, along with changing times we can also observe protests against the excessive. One of the best known forms of such protest is a collection of *Blue Law Ballads* published in the 1922 in the United States. It contains 50 ballads ridiculing and attacking the Puritan mentality, which takes away the pleasures of life. The titles are aggressively funny, which

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/merlehaggard/okiefrommuskogee.html>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/k/kris\\_kristofferson/why\\_me.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/k/kris_kristofferson/why_me.html)

shows the scale of the anti-Puritan mood: *Madame Theology, or, the Harlot Goddess; My Lady Nicotine; Invocation – The Sinners Seek Rabelais and Finds a Saint; The Hypocrite; Triolets Diaboliques; Puritan and Poison Vine; Sons of the Cup; Suppressed Desires; Sinners and Saints; In Praise of Profanity; The Anti-Saloon League; Kingdom come – written by a Lutheran of Mohammedan Parentage; The Reflection of a Sporty Puritan; The Song of the Last Pagan*, etc. Typical of the anti-Puritan attitude of the anonymous author of the *Blue Law Ballads* is the following fragment:

“Now would ye know what sinners think  
Of cursed customs puritanic,  
Our little book will tell ‘tis quite  
(Within the law of course) satanic. [...]  
The truth to tell, we love thee not,  
Confess too, of a surety,  
Our pagan pleasures we prefer,  
To sober lives or purity.”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the *Epilogue for Puritans* leaves no doubt about the evaluation of Puritan theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for lovers of life’s pleasures:

“You think that on sinners, your laws leave their mark?  
Fools that you are we can work in the dark.  
We’ve taken great joy in our verses one creation,  
And trust we have earned your eternal damnation.  
For our book we not offer a single apology  
To Hell with your Principles!  
Damn your theology!”<sup>35</sup>

Whether it was damned or not, we can summarise the role of Puritanism in Great Britain as well as in the United States according to several points. Firstly, it introduced extreme moral principles which could not stand the test of time and which became the subject of modern criticism. Secondly, from a historical and economic point of view, it introduced a positive and effective work ethic. Thirdly, it introduced common literacy to its society for the first time in the world. Finally, although it generally supported

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<sup>34</sup> Quot. from full text of *Blue Law Ballads – A Purge for Puritans by the Sinners* (1922) on line: [http://www.horntip.com/html/books\\_&\\_MSS/1920s/1922\\_blue\\_law\\_ballads\\_%28HC%29/index.htm](http://www.horntip.com/html/books_&_MSS/1920s/1922_blue_law_ballads_%28HC%29/index.htm)

<sup>35</sup> *Epilogue for Puritans*, *ibid.*, p. 89.

ensorship when in power, John Milton's voice at least provided us for the very first time in world history with a pioneering treatise on a basic human freedom – the freedom of speech.

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## Chapter Eleven

# THE HISTORY AND CONCEPT OF FREEDOM IN BRITISH CIVILIZATION

Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870-1950), a distinguished British Commonwealth politician and general, active during the First and then also Second World War, declared that the British provided the world with “the widest system of organized human freedom which has ever existed in human history.”<sup>1</sup> Some historic events which have taken place in British history should convince us that this statement is correct. It is impossible to list here all the important documents and events which led the British to their fascinating concept of freedom and are responsible for their contribution to its world wide acceptance and understanding. Let me discuss here only some selected issues arising from the most important documents and events of this kind.

It was in a field camp on the Mede Pasture at Runnymede, southern England, on the south bank of the Thames in Surrey, that one of the most important documents in human history was issued by English King John Lackland (1167-1216, ruled 1199-1216). This document was named in Latin *Magna Charta Libertatum* or in English: *The Great Charter of Liberty* and was issued by King John Lackland in 1215 under pressure from his barons, who were dissatisfied with his autocratic rule. Because of the King’s abuse of power, the barons had withdrawn their allegiance and taken up arms against him. The barons demanded reforms, more independence and most important of all – at least from a historical perspective – limitation of royal power. *Magna Charta* was in this context conceived as a guarantee that for the renewal of their homage and fealty, the King would grant to the freemen of England and their heirs, the liberties and privileges enumerated in it.

*Magna Charta* comprises 63 chapters, dealing in a rather confused order with a wide range of subjects, including taxation, law, justice, etc. And it is this point: limitation of the King’s power, that became most im-

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<sup>1</sup> Quot. after: J. Heartfield, *Unpatriotic History of the Second World War*, Zero Books, Alresford 2012, p. 145.

portant for future generations. From that moment on, the King, according to its article 12, could not impose the most burdensome tax called *scutage* – necessary for subsidizing and waging his wars: “No scutage [...] shall be imposed in our Kingdom, unless by the common council of our Kingdom.”<sup>2</sup> Also, the nightmare of all Medieval nations, the rights of the King to imprison whomever he wanted, without any justification, was limited in a substantial if not radical way by article 39: “No free-man shall be seized, or imprisoned, or dispossessed, or outlawed, or in any way destroyed; nor will we (the King) condemn him [...] excepting by the legal judgment of his peers or by the laws of the land.”<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that in some measures *Magna Charta* was a reactionary instrument designed to further the selfish aims of the baronage, who were then in fact the only class of free men for whom it was conceived. But they also secured some rights for other classes, especially the citizens of English towns that had supported them. This is why the King was forced to give new, or restore ancient economic rights to a number of English towns: “The City of London shall have all its ancient liberties, and its free customs, as well by land as by water. Furthermore we will grant that all other Cities, Burghs, and Towns, and Ports, should have all their liberties and free customs.” Moreover, soon after, as a result of different historical events and conditions, this strata of society which was named “free men” was gradually extended to other lower classes. Thus, *Magna Carta*, conceived as a conservative document guaranteeing the rights of the nobility – in the course of time – became incomparably more universal, encompassing the lower strata of English society. In the following years, this document was reissued several times and came to symbolise popular, not just aristocratic liberties. One of its quite numerous versions in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was titled *Magna Carta cum Statutis Angliae* (*Great Charter with English Statutes*) with some additional provisions and laws added. Another issue of a copy of the *Magna Carta*, repeated in 1297 as a still important law of the Kingdom, is now owned by the Australian Government and on display in the Members’ Hall of the Australian House of Parliament.

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<sup>2</sup> English translation, *Magna Charta granted June 15, 1215*, full text in: *The Western Tradition from the Ancient World to Louis XIV*, ed. E. Weber, vol. I, D.C. Heath and Company, Boston-Englewood-Chicago-San Francisco-Dallas-Toronto-London 1966, pp. 217-224; quotation p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

The fact that *Magna Carta* was reissued many times and confirmed by different kings should be particularly emphasised because some historians deny this fact for unclear and unexplained reasons. For instance, Henryk Zins (1922-2002), in his *A History of England* (published in Polish as *Historia Anglii*), wrote that “in the following ages the *Charter* fell into almost complete oblivion.”<sup>4</sup> Despite my personal suggestions, Zins did not improve this in the next issue of the book in 1995, (p. 71), where the same opinion was repeated word for word.

The significance of this document, especially its role in limiting royal power, initiating the development of equality and freedom under law, then, in a wider sense symbolizing the beginning of Western democracy, was emphasized by a number of monuments erected in Great Britain. The first was erected on land donated in 1929 by Cara Rogers Broughton, later Lady Fairhaven, to commemorate her husband Urban Hanlon Broughton, member of the British Parliament, who died in 1929. The famous British architect, Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869-1944), was commissioned to design twin memorials. They consisted of two large piers or posts made of stone blocks at the top of which formalised urns were located. Above the main stone block, but at the bottom of the urns, symbolic laurel wreaths were placed. One of these piers was devoted to Urban Hanlon Broughton, while the second commemorates the *Great Charter of Liberty* with the inscription: “In these Meads on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1215 King John at the instance of Deputies from the whole community of the Realm granted the Great Charter the earliest of constitutional documents where under ancient and cherished customs were confirmed abuses redressed and the administration of justice facilitated new provisions formulated for the preservation of peace and every individual perpetually secured in the free enjoyment of his life and property.”<sup>5</sup>

Chronologically, the next memorial was devoted to 20,456 airmen and airwomen who, during World War II, lost their lives while defending the principles of British freedom initiated in *Magna Carta* and threatened by the German Luftwaffe. The great building of the memorial and its associated piers was designed by the architect Sir Edward Maufe. It was erected in 1953 and in the same year unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II.

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<sup>4</sup> In the Polish original: “w następnych wiekach *Karta* popadła niemal w całkowite zapomnienie” (H. Zins, *Historia Anglii*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1979, p. 96).

<sup>5</sup> *Runnymede*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Runnymede>



There is also a memorial for US President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, consisting of a small garden and commemorative monument made of Portland stone on which a quotation from Kennedy's inaugural speech is written: "Let every Nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty."<sup>6</sup> This monument was unveiled jointly by Queen Elizabeth II and the widow of J.F.K. on May 14<sup>th</sup> 1965, in the presence of the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and some members of Kennedy's family. It stands on an acre of land given as a gift to the Americans by the British nation. It can be reached by going up a long stone path paved with 50 irregular granite steps made from 60,000 hand-cut sets, which forms a staircase leading to the Seats of Contemplation. The whole structure was designed by British landscape architect and garden designer Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-1996). The role of the whole monument is to symbolise and evoke the pilgrimage of man, based on John Bunyan's allegorical poem *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The Kennedy Memorial Trust takes care of maintaining the monument, while the area remains under the sovereignty of the British National Trust.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, there is The Magna Carta Memorial at Runnymede, erected in 1957 by the American Bar Association. It was built in the shape of a classical Greek monopteros i.e. circular colonnade without walls, with pillars supporting a roof. One pillar of granite contains the inscription: "To commemorate Magna Carta, symbol of Freedom Under Law." The structure was designed by Sir Edward Maufe and was unveiled on 18th July 1957 at a ceremony during which representatives of both American and British lawyers participated.<sup>8</sup> There is also an ABA custom to exclaim cyclical renewal pledges to the *Magna Charta Libertatum*, as a symbol of Western-type democracy and understanding of freedom.<sup>9</sup> A great celebration of the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta was held on June 15, 2015. It had additional symbolic meaning at a time of growing threats from anti-democratic forces in the world, such as an aggressive imperial Russia, Islamic State or numerous terrorist organizations.

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<sup>6</sup> Quot. after: *Runnymede*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

In the course of English history, the legal and popular tradition of *Magna Carta* was gradually strengthened by a number of events, especially those associated with Puritan rule (1641-1661). It was during this time and its immediate aftermaths that the question of freedom in its different aspects became the basis for social, religious and political conflicts affecting Britain and consequently resulting in political solutions which were crucial, both in England, Scotland and elsewhere. Charles I of the Scottish Stuart dynasty (1600-1649), who ruled Britain from 1625, planned to establish absolute royal rule based on the French model. However, he disregarded the English tradition of liberty. Charles forgot that absolutism was in sharp opposition to the expectations of his subjects. Their common understanding of freedom was built not only on the basis of *Magna Carta* but was also strengthened by a popular comprehension and recognition of liberty, so clearly and convincingly expressed in the Middle Ages by the itinerant preacher John Ball, who was also a leader of the 1381 'Peasants' Revolt'. John Ball used a revolutionary expression to incite the people against their feudal lords. In the original Middle English it reads:

“whan adam delffid and eve span,  
who was than a gentilman?”<sup>10</sup>

In modern English it can be read:

“When Adam delved and when Eve span  
Who was then a gentleman?”

After a long conflict with the Puritan Parliament led by Oliver Cromwell, Charles I, who did not give up his absolutist principles, was finally arrested, sentenced to death and decapitated. This “legal murder,” although rather radical and barbaric, prepared the ground for future civil rights in Britain.

After the Puritan Commonwealth collapsed in 1660, Charles II was restored to the English throne. But now he was bound to certain new laws. First of all, the King was deprived of all influences on financial and taxation issues. Thus, without access to money, he could not enact anything

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted after Th. Walsingham, *Historia brevis*, Binneman, Londini 1574; see also <<http://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=6266>>

which could hurt his people financially. Then he was obliged to undersign a Parliamentary Act which was very crucial to the development of civil liberties in both England and all the civilised world under her influence. It was the *Habeas Corpus Act of 1679*. Officially, it was entitled an: *Act for the better securing the Liberty of the Subject, and for Prevention of Imprisonment beyond the Seas*. Its title *Habeas Corpus Act* is derived from Latin and means “Having the Human Body in itself ... .” *The Habeas Corpus Act* contained many legal provisions and solutions, but probably the most important was that no person could be kept in prison without real proof of his crime being provided within 72 hours to the Justice of the Peace. Later, the period of 72 hours was changed to 48 hours. As such, this legal rule was soon introduced and accepted by all the civilised world. In England, another *Parliamentary Act* which was very important for developing the idea of personal freedom was the *Bill of Rights*, a historic assertion of freedom in England which enumerated the liberties infringed by the former king, James II. It was accepted by William III of Orange and his wife Mary in 1689. Not accidentally, the future American *Bill of Rights*, in fact the first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution, was given exactly the same title.

All the parliamentary acts mentioned so far provided a general framework for civil rights in the English-speaking world, later so important for the entire Western world. It is, however, necessary to follow the actual events leading to the establishment of the more specific freedoms of speech and press. In 1487, Henry VII established the so called Star Chamber, an English Court which can be considered as a royal censorship office. It was finally abolished in 1641 by the Puritan Parliament. But before it was abolished, the *Star Chamber* effectively controlled all publications in England. For example, under the reign of Elizabeth I, Puritan prints criticizing the Church of England were not only prohibited but their authors and printers were also severely punished. This pertains, first of all, to the so-called *Marprelate Tracts*. These were seven pamphlets published between 1587 and 1589. These tracts were printed by one Welsh Puritan preacher and author John Penry (1563-1593), who satirized the Elizabethan Church and described the English bishops as agents of the Antichrist (considered then as the strongest imaginable indictment in all Christian world) and also favoured a Presbyterian system. These tracts were in fact extremely aggressive: they called the bishops “our vile servile dunghill ministers of damnation, that viperous

generation, those scorpions.”<sup>11</sup> Their printing offices, moved from one place to another in order to escape royal guardians, were finally demolished and thus, further printing was effectively prevented. Penry was soon arrested and executed, his supporter John Udall was jailed and died shortly after he was pardoned, a third, Job Trockmorton, unsuccessfully refuted the accusations and finally was also heavily punished. So, there is no question that before the Puritans gained power in England, they were drastically persecuted and even expelled from England. And the Star Chamber was frequently used to ban their publications. This is why they eagerly demanded the freedom to express their religion and ideas. However, immediately after they gained power in England, they not only abolished the hated Star Chamber but also started to ... deny the freedom of printing to all those who had different views to the official Puritan standpoint. This provoked the strong opposition of their comrade-in-arms, the great English poet – John Milton. He was not only the author of genial poetic masterpieces like *Paradise Lost* (1667), but also wrote some political works and parliamentary speeches, among which, the question of the freedom of man had conspicuous importance. Undoubtedly, the most important among them is *Aeropagitica*, also known officially as the *Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing to the Parliament (!) of England*, printed in 1644. The title of the tract alludes to the ancient name *areopagus* i.e. the high tribunal held on the hill bearing this name in Athens. *Areopagitica* then means approximately “speech in areopagus” considered as an ancient equivalent or metaphor for the modern Parliament. *Areopagitica* also alludes to the *Areopagitikos – Areopatic Discourse* written by the Greek orator Isocrates around 355 BC., in which he urged a change in Athenian policy upon the governing body. Isocrates, in a way similar to Milton, was convinced that the moral goals of any policy should transcend the parochial purposes of any political party and provide men with clear-cut freedoms and ethical standards. Milton used as his motto a quotation from the Greek playwright Euripides and his drama *Hiketides*:

“This is true Liberty when free born men  
Having to advise the public may speak free,  
Which he, who can, and will, deserv's high praise,

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<sup>11</sup> *History of the Puritans under Elizabeth I*; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Puritans\\_under\\_Elizabeth\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Puritans_under_Elizabeth_I)

Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;  
What can be juster in a State then this?"<sup>12</sup>

*Areopagitica* is a tract defending freedom of the press and speech. Its text is undoubtedly one of the main pillars of the modern Western concept of democracy and human rights. It is divided into several chapters: 1) *On the human condition*; 2) *Why freedom is necessary*; 3) *On the value of intellectual diversity and debate, and of its contribution to the overall advancement of learning*; 4) *On the importance of even wrong ideas*; 5) *On the value to be placed upon officially sanctioned thought*; 6) *Truth will win out*; and 7) *A final caution*. Milton was so convinced about his views on freedom of speech, expressed in his famous speech, that he did not even hesitate to break with the Presbyterian faction of the Puritan Revolution at his own political risk.

The following extracts from *Areopagitica* should make it clear why this pamphlet is, to this day, an important part of English thought and political philosophy and at the same time part of the heritage of human civilisation worldwide: "Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism [of today], we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up, in this city."<sup>13</sup> Milton's reflections on the value of debate and intellectual diversity, and also on their contribution to the overall advancement of learning belong to the most important fragments of *Areopagitica*. He was convinced that even wrong ideas are important in establishing what is truth: falsehood existing in any society should be considered as "the dust and cinders of our feet, so long as in that notion they may yet serve to polish and brighten the armoury of Truth, even for that respect they were not utterly to be cast away." He continues: "It was from out the rind of one apple tasted that the knowledge of good and evil, as two

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<sup>12</sup> Quot. after the motto on the title page of the first historic edition of *Aeropagitica*. *A speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Vnlicenc'd Printing to the Parliament of England*, printed in the Yeare, 1644.

<sup>13</sup> All quotations of Milton's treaty after: *Analysis of the Order of Parliament* (June 14, 1643), *against which Areopagitica was directed*, in: *Milton. Great Books of the Western World*, ed. M. J. Adler, vol. XXIX, published by Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago 1991, passim p. 383-399.

twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into, of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil [...] now the time in special is, by privilege to write and speak what may help to the further discussing of matters in agitation. The temple of Janus with his two controversial faces might now insignificantly be set open.” Finally, Milton is absolutely sure that in all situations of conflict and debate, truth will win out: “though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter? [...] Her [i.e. Truth] confuting is the best and surest suppressing. He who hears what praying there is for light and clearer knowledge to be sent down among us, would think of other matters to be constituted beyond the discipline of Geneva<sup>14</sup> framed and fabricated already to our hands. [...] For who knows not that Truth is strong next to the Almighty? She needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings to make her victorious.”

Considering the truth as a human issue “next to Almighty” in importance, was, in Milton’s time, unusually strong and provocative. It also shows him as a man of high standing, one of the most important creators of the basic principles ruling modern Western civilization, where the individual freedom of any man is considered as a bulwark of human rights. He, however, could not have predicted modern propaganda techniques, typical for totalitarian systems, where these rights are disregarded while the truth is misused. It was, for instance, Dr Joseph Goebbels in Nazi Germany who invented the clever propaganda method in which suitable and careful selection of exclusively true elements and precise elimination of inconvenient ones could produce a totally falsified picture of any reality.

After Milton, important developments associated with furthering the freedom of the press took place in the British colonies in North America. It was here where the *Bill of Rights* was well understood, while the ideas of John Locke became so influential that in the course of time they provided the grounds for the future American Revolution. Before this happened, some ardent fighters for the freedom of the press started their activities.

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<sup>14</sup> Geneva was the place where John Calvin declared his religious doctrine on which Puritan theology was also founded.

Among the most energetic in this kind of endeavour were two brothers, James and Benjamin Franklin (1697-1735 and 1706-1790 respectively). The elder of them, James, contributed decisively to the “unshackling of the American press from the licenser. All previous publishers had bowed to official pressures to print ‘by authority’ despite the end of actual licensing. Franklin printed his paper, the “New England Courant,” not ‘by authority’ but in spite of it. He thus helped establish the tradition of editorial independence.”<sup>15</sup> At the beginning, it appeared as both a rational failure and ... social success. The year was 1721 when smallpox raged in the British colonies of Massachusetts. Two religious leaders of the colonial hierarchy, Increase and Cotton Mathers, strongly and quite rationally supported a physician in his pioneering effort to apply the new inoculation to the disease. In this medical method, blood was taken from recovered smallpox patients, who thus had proved resistant to the sickness. The blood was then injected into the bodies of healthy persons who could eventually become sick. It preceded a much later vaccination system invented in around 1798 in England by doctor Edward Jenner (1749-1823). Meanwhile, Franklin’s “New England Courant” gave a voice to those who considered inoculation as dangerous for New England’s population. Happily for patients and unfortunately for Franklin’s newspaper, this method appeared quite successful. A substantial proportion of the New England Courant’s readers and even contributors to the polemic were less interested in the merits or demerits of inoculation and more in attacking the Mathers as conservative and very restrictive Puritan leaders, so well remembered for their role in the Salem witchcraft delusion.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the medical results were, the pioneers of colonial journalism discovered in that crusade against inoculation a convenient weapon in their hands for criticizing the authorities, regardless of whether they were civil or religious. That discovery played a role in the activity of the younger Franklin brother, Benjamin. He was initially an apprentice in James’s printing and editorial office. But soon James was arrested and jailed for one month because of his unfettered criticism, and even after he was released from prison, the restrictive colonial authorities inspired the General Court to announce its verdict: “James Franklin be strictly forbidden [...] to print or publish the ‘New England Courant’ or any

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<sup>15</sup> M. Emery, E. Emery, *The Press and America. The Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1992, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter on *Puritanism and Its Modern Aftermaths*.

pamphlet or paper of the like nature, except it be first supervised, by the Secretary of this Province.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the old type of hated censorship was restored in the colonies. However, James evaded the court’s sentence and passed the running of his newspaper to Benjamin. According to the law, restrictions pertained to the person of the editor, not the newspaper as such. Then Benjamin Franklin was clever enough to seize upon the situation and make his mark as an even more courageous journalist. When, after some years, “The New England Courant” collapsed, Benjamin appeared in Philadelphia, where he took over the editing of “The Pennsylvania Gazette” (1729). It was here that “Franklin had little difficulty winning public acceptance [...]. In addition to being a readable paper, his was a bold one. Franklin’s experience in Boston, plus his innate common sense, kept him from getting into serious trouble with the authorities. But he took a stand on issues, just the same. Men have many opinions, he explained to his readers, and printers publish these opinions as part of their business.”<sup>18</sup>

We can easily feel that Franklin was inspired by the spirit of John Milton’s *Areopagitica*. In his view, the readers “are educated in the belief that when men differ in opinion, both sides ought equally to have the advantage of being heard by the public, and that when truth and error have fair play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter. [...] If all printers were determined not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody there would be very little printed.”<sup>19</sup>

If both Franklins had done nothing else but rebel against authority and print public opinions free from control, they would deserve the special appreciation of historians of human liberty. But Benjamin Franklin did something else. He convinced another British rebel, Thomas Paine (1737-1809), to come and stay in the American colonies and write his famous treatise titled *Common Sense*, one of the most outspoken texts on freedom directed against any autocratic rule ever written.<sup>20</sup> This pamphlet, aggressively written and published in 1776, fought in an aggressive way any au-

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<sup>17</sup> Quot. after: M. Emery, E. Emery, *The Press and America...*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Quot. in: C. Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, Viking, New York 1938, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> Since its first publication, *Common Sense* has been published in innumerable issues. See one of the most prestigious, edited and commented on by the famous American novelist John Dos Passos; *Common sense*, full text in: *John Dos Passos presents the living thoughts of Thomas Paine*, Fawcett Publications, New York-Greenwich, Connecticut 1961, pp. 52-80.



thoritarian limitation on human freedom. It instantaneously became the inspiration for the American colonists to fight for their independence and for freedom from British rule. Paine was sadly convinced that “every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe”<sup>21</sup> and this was why it was so important to put human effort into “securing freedom and property to all men, and above all things, the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience.” He was strongly against any royal power, especially the British monarch. He also considered America as a place which “hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still.”<sup>22</sup> But Paine warned his fellow-colonists “we shall be in danger of [...] some fortunate ruffian” who can treat them without respect deserved by any human. In such circumstances, he asks, “where will be our freedom? where our property?”<sup>23</sup>

He pays special attention to freedom of religion, having in mind the discrimination against some denominations in England. As for freedom of the press and looking for the truth, Paine’s view is simple and convincing: no censorship of any kind should be implemented.

*Common Sense* was not Paine’s only work on human rights written and published in America. The first of importance after *Common Sense* was certainly his other treatise, titled *Rights of Man* (1791)<sup>24</sup>. It was written after the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens* was made public in France, to which he not only alludes in many places, but also quotes large tracts of text. Obviously inspired by it he wrote, “Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of government beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Common Sense*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> *Rights of Man* in: *John Dos Passos presents the living thoughts of Thomas Paine* part I: pp. 104-122; part II: pp. 123-139.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Natural rights, a concept which he certainly took from John Locke, takes up a lot of space in *Rights of Man*. "Natural rights are those which appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all intellectual rights, or rights of the mind, and also those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious of the natural rights of others. Civil rights are those which appertain to man in right of his being a member of society."<sup>26</sup>

As the great American writer, John Dos Passos, wrote some years ago, Paine had found in America "what he had been looking for all his life: freedom, a world that gave him a chance to use his great abilities."<sup>27</sup> Paine himself believed in America as a country where human freedom had the best chance to be developed. In the second part of *Rights of Man* he wrote: "As America was the only spot in the political world, where the principles of universal reformation could begin, so also was it the best in the natural world. An assemblage of circumstances conspired, not only to give birth, but to add gigantic maturity to its principles. The scene which that country presents to the eye of a spectator, has something in it which generates and encourages great ideas. Nature appears to him in magnitude. The mighty object he beholds, act upon his mind by enlarging it, and he partakes of the greatness he contemplates. Its first settlers were emigrants from different European nations, and of diversified professions of religion, retiring from the governmental persecutions of the old world., and meeting in the new, not as enemies, but as brothers. [...] In such circumstance man becomes what we ought."<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, his American countrymen did not always consider him as their brother. When he died, "His fellow townsmen at New Rochelle refused to let him vote, claiming that he was not an American citizen."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, paradoxically, Paine, who fought so eagerly for religious freedom, could not count too much on the respect of different denominations and churches. "While he was dying, in a little house on what is now Grove Street in New York, a story is told that a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister, and a pious old lady broke in succession into his bedroom to exhort him to repent. The Quakers refused him bur-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 110

<sup>27</sup> John Dos Passos presents the living thoughts of Thomas Paine, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Rights of Man*, in: John Dos Passos presents the living thoughts of Thomas Paine, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

ial in their burying ground. Even after he was dead and buried on his farm in New Rochelle, his bones were not allowed to rest quiet. William Cobbett, who from a violent antagonist had been turned into a violent partisan of Paine's by reading his essay on Pitt's financial system, dug up his bones and carried them to England where he intended to give them a state funeral, but found the reaction against infidelity and republicanism still too strong. Even the town crier who announced the arrival of Tom Paine's bones was arrested. Years later, the bones were seized with the rest of Cobbett's effects when he went into bankruptcy. The Lord Chancellor refused to regard them as an asset and they were given to an old day laborer who carted them off to no one knows where. Years later the coffin turned up at a secondhand dealer's in London. The trunk containing Paine's manuscripts notes and correspondence and, possibly, an autobiography which was inherited by Mme. De Bonneville [...] was lost in the burning of a warehouse belonging to one of her sons in St. Louis in the middle of the last century. As Joel Barlow said, his writings was his life."<sup>30</sup>

Before Paine appeared on the American horizon, we could observe another important step in the development of the freedom of the press. It was the trial of Peter Zenger, editor and printer of the "New-York Weekly Journal" published in the British Colonies (1733). Zenger's "New-York Weekly Journal" had been founded to give a voice to the party of those citizens, mostly merchants, who had been in an almost constant struggle with the tyrannical royal Governors in the American colonies. One of them, William Cosby, was especially arrogant and completely disregarded what people thought about his behaviour. He had very expensive tastes, spent public money on his private goals and social gaiety, etc. Soon after his arrival in the American colonies, he was plunged into a dispute over his salary, which was allegedly too low. During the public conflict on that issue, which ended in a legal trial, he removed a respected justice of the peace, Lewis Morris, and substituted him with his supporter, just to have the court on his side. Here is where the seemingly insignificant printer Peter Zenger enters the scene. His "New-York Weekly Journal" was rather poorly printed at that point. But it gained extreme popularity after the publication of several articles concerning the Governor, described under the nickname of ... monkey. Let

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

us quote one fragment of Zenger's metaphorical style of reporting: "A Monkey of the larger sort, about 4 foot (!) high, has lately broke his chain and run into the country [...]. Having got a war saddle, pistols and sword, this whimsical creature fancied himself a general and taking a paper in his paw he muttered over it, what the far greatest part of the company understood not."<sup>31</sup> All readers of the journal easily understood who the monkey metaphorically represented. Moreover, a number of similar reports ridiculing the Governor and his administration had to be reprinted in other newspapers just to meet and satisfy demand.

Governor Cosby and his supporters could not stand by and bear the journal's assault with equanimity. The new judge and Cosby's adherent, Chief-Justice James Delancey, after a few abortive attempts to get Zenger indicted for seditious libel by a grand jury, obtained from the governor's council a warrant to arrest Zenger. Zenger remained in jail for a couple of months, although he was allowed to communicate freely with his readers and even to edit his paper, as he later described it, by sending new articles "thro' the hole in the doors." This is the true British legal reality, unimaginable in any authoritarian country: an accused and arrested person was able to continue his work and no one could prevent him from doing so by legal means. Finally, on August 4, 1735, the case came to trial. The whole of New York was excited and the courtroom was overcrowded with Zenger's readers and backers. The judges entered and were seated in their red robes and bushy wigs. A historic trial, so important for the future of the freedom of the press, was initiated.

Zenger's supporters tried first to hire James Alexander (on the screen) to defend the poor journalist. But he was disbarred by the justices presiding over Zenger's trial. Then, Alexander Hamilton, a brilliant Philadelphia lawyer, was hired. He defended Zenger successfully, turning to the Jury with these words: "The question before the Court and you gentlemen of the Jury is not of small nor private concern; it is not the cause of the poor printer [...], No! It may, in its consequence, affect every freeman that lives under a British Government [...] It is the best cause. It is the cause of liberty [...] the liberty both of exposing and opposing arbitrary power by speaking and writing Truth." No one was able to withstand such arguments, especially when launched against an already unpopular and even

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<sup>31</sup> Quot. after: F. L. Mott, *American Journalism. A History of Newspapers in the United States through 260Years: 1690 to 1950*, Macmillan, New York 1956, p. 32.

hated royal administration. In fact, it took only a few minutes to find Zenger “not guilty.”

Zenger’s victory did not automatically guarantee that politicians in power would give up their attempts at censorship and prosecution of courageous journalists and fighters for the public cause. This was exemplified several decades later when John Wilkes (1729-1797), a British MP, started the publication of his newspaper “The North Briton,” established in 1762. In his newspaper, Wilkes published word by word reports from the British Parliament, disclosing and ridiculing its abuses and stupidities. It was both unusual in terms of tradition and also extremely irritating for the men in power, because they were afraid of public control of their behaviour and speeches delivered in Parliament. Wilkes was arrested several times and was forced to leave England, but even in jail he was again elected to Parliament by his faithful electors. He paved the way for Lucas Hansard (1752-1828), who at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century started to publish his “Journal of Parliamentary Debates” later named “Hansard” (still continued) after his name.

And it was John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), the great English social thinker who made an important contribution to a full understanding and respect for the British idea of human freedom with his famous treatise titled *On Liberty* (1851).

Mill sat in Parliament and also worked for women’s suffrage. He was also a leader of the large group of philosophical radicals active in contemporary English life and thought and wrote constantly in newspapers and magazines, providing a model of personality for all fighters for freedom. Mill’s pen always championed advanced liberal ideas and movements. He exerted a strong and stimulating influence on younger British generations. Here is an excerpt from his famous work *On Liberty* (1859), where he provides a definition of freedom:

“[Freedom] is the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral or religious.” “No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected, is free, whatever may be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified. The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not at-

tempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”<sup>32</sup> And here is probably the most important of Mill’s remarks concerning not only freedom as such but also the basic principle of democracy:

“The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”<sup>33</sup> This principle is in fact very similar to the so called *Golden Principle of Behaviour* contained in the Jesus Christ’s *Sermon on the Mount* in the *New Testament*: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and there are also some echoes in Paine, when he writes about “rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious of the natural rights of others.”<sup>34</sup>

Mill was, of course, ridiculed many times for his liberal convictions. He was frequently lampooned by the famous English satirical journal “Punch.” Any fighter for any aspect of freedom must take into consideration strong resistance from numerous opponents representing the less liberal side of the political reality. John Stuart Mill, among his many actions for freedom, was also involved in the women’s movement. He considered men’s behaviour toward Victorian women as the “behaviour of the beast,” interested mostly in sexual satisfaction. He wrote his famous treaty *On the Subjection of Women*, calling for the granting of more civil rights to them, including the right to study at universities (not allowed at this time) and also the right to suffrage, i.e. voting.<sup>35</sup> Under his pressure things started to change, but not very quickly. In 1865 in Manchester the *Women’s Suffrage Committee* was established. In 1869 the British Parliament passed a special act providing women with the right to vote in regional self-governments, but only under the condition that they were taxpayers. There were courageous women fighting for emancipation. First of all, a real pioneer in women’s struggle for rights was Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847-1929). She was concerned with an open struggle for women’s voting rights. We can call her a suffragette or even an early

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<sup>32</sup> J. Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Longman, Robert and Green, London 1859, chapt. I, paragr. 13; text on line: < <http://econlib.org/library/Mill/mILbty1.html>>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See: footnote 22.

<sup>35</sup> The word *suffrage* was derived from *suffragium* which meant in Latin “voting” as in the ancient Roman Senate.

feminist. However, we should remember that as early as the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century we see the first real advocate of women's rights: Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). She was an English writer and social thinker. Apart from some novels, children's books, and a work on the history of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft wrote probably her best known essay on *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), preceded by her first whistle-blowing *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1785). It was in her treatise on the rights of women that she maintained that they were not predestined to be inferior to men by nature, but that they remained in such a position because of their lack of education and courage to protest. Further, she suggested that both men and women should be treated on equal terms as rational creatures, and this equality from the other side was expressed in her somewhat earlier work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). A subtitle of this work says that it was also a strong attack on Burke's famous treatise in which he deprived the French Revolution of moral rights and human dignity. Burke, by the way, praised one special woman there, Marie Antoinette, who was in his opinion unjustly and cruelly beheaded on the guillotine. The mass executions observed during the French Revolution were considered by Burke as contrary to any fight for human freedom and especially to the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens*.

Wollstonecraft's voice was too isolated to have any real effect in improving the situation of women at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the appearance of the wider movement for women's rights, her work was exhumed. A centenary issue of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published in 1892, while the well known suffragist, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, wrote an introduction for it. In 1929, Virginia Woolf described the achievements of Mary Wollstonecraft as immortal. Also, a number of activists in the recent feminist movement consider her, though sometimes critically, as their early predecessor.

To the most distinguished suffragists, who were also active in the intellectual fight for equal rights, belongs Emmeline Davison (1872-1913). She studied English Language and Literature at Oxford and even received a first-class honours in her final exams, but she did not obtain an MA degree or diploma due to the fact that women were not at that time allowed to gain degrees at Oxford. In 1906 she was involved in more militant ac-

tivities for women's rights. She was arrested many times and imprisoned for various offences, including a violent attack on British politicians and policemen. She also boldly went on hunger strike when she was jailed in Strangeways Prison, where she was force-fed. In Holloway Prison, where she was jailed another time, she threw herself in desperation down an iron staircase as an expression of her protest. She died four days after she was struck by King George V's horse, Anmer, at the Epsom Derby in 1913.

Ultimately, British women were to win their right to vote thanks to the effective leadership and efforts of the most famous British suffragette, Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928). The group of women she usually led in street demonstrations quickly became famous when its growing number of members smashed windows and even assaulted police officers. She was sentenced many times to prison, where she and her associates (including her daughter) staged hunger strikes to secure better conditions in the jails. She was, of course, widely criticized for her militant tactics by conservative political circles and the British press. Nonetheless, her activities are recognized as a crucial element in achieving women's suffrage in Britain. Ultimately, Emmeline Pankhurst won. In 1917 the British Parliament passed an act allowing women to vote, though under the condition that they were at least 30 years old. The same act was passed one year later by the House of Lords. In 1928 the age limitation was lowered to 21 years, the same as for men. In 1999 the American weekly "Time" included Emmeline Pankhurst in its list of the 100 most important personalities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In its editorial, "Time" stated that "she shaped an idea of women for our time; she shook society into a new pattern from which there could be no going back."<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought to public light the question of humanity threatened by totalitarian systems. Lord Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) became the most eminent British fighter for human freedom, especially endangered by Nazi and Communist systems. He was at the same time a famous philosopher, mathematician, logician, pacifist and atheist. His authority was so great that during the so-called Cold War after 1945, he was respected and recognized, especially thank to his ethical judgments, even by the Communist authorities in the USSR. He was a prominent fighter for human freedom in all its aspects; he was also an anti-war

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<sup>36</sup> Quot. after *Emmeline Pankhurst*, [http://www.conservativewomen.org.uk/emmeline\\_pankhurst.asp](http://www.conservativewomen.org.uk/emmeline_pankhurst.asp)



activist, criticising with the same strength the Soviet communist totalitarian regimes, as well as the nuclear policies of all other countries possessing “A” and “H” bombs. Finally, he strongly opposed the United States of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Roughly speaking, he was against all possible threats to human freedom. It was in 1950 that Russell was awarded a Nobel Prize, surprisingly in literature, which was certainly based on his numerous philosophical and ethical books. It was awarded, as the statement of the Nobel Committee goes: “in recognition of his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought.”<sup>37</sup>

In 2007, to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BBC World Service, its directors asked several distinguished personalities about the freedom of speech, and freedom of media and information. In fact, there was no better venue for such a global discussion of the freedom of speech than the BBC. The BBC is well known for its high ethical standards and involvement in the fight for independent and free speech. A general approach to its purposes and values is represented by its *coat of arms* which includes the motto “Nation shall speak peace unto Nation.” The motto is attributed to Montague John Rendall, former member of the first BBC Board of Governors. BBC is the acronym of the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, the non-commercial, independent organization operating under the *Royal Charter* and responsible for making and transmitting its own radio and television programmes nationally and internationally. It was preceded by its parent corporation, the *British Broadcasting Company*, which began broadcasting on February 14, 1922. In 1927 it became the *British Broadcasting Corporation* without even changing its initial acronym. The BBC also introduced the first regular public television service in the world, beginning in November 1936. The role of radio and television in spreading the idea of freedom can hardly be overestimated. This is on the condition that the media takes the question seriously, which is not always so evident in their search for income and commercial gain. The BBC, despite all its failures, belongs, however, to those elements of the media which can be considered as the last resort in the fight for human liberty.

First of all, the BBC is almost wholly financed by the licence fees of radio and TV audiences, while only external i.e. international programs

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<sup>37</sup> Bertrand Russell Facts: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1950/russell-facts.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1950/russell-facts.html)

are financed by annual grants from the government treasury. The BBC does not take advertising nor are its programs sponsored, which results in the BBC's independence from any commercial pressure or political interest. Due to this, the BBC is formally independent and thus is freely committed to the public service ethos. According to *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia*, the BBC "is widely respected for its news service, its world external service, its patronage of the arts and its educational broadcasting and has been instrumental in promoting a standardized form of spoken English."<sup>38</sup> Until 1955, the BBC's radio sector had a monopoly in Great Britain. The same situation lasted in TV until 1973. Then commercial stations started their businesses but the BBC did not lose its special position as the principal public service broadcaster and warranter of freedom of speech. All journalists employed at the BBC are obliged to respect its ethos, and especially what we call the journalism of social responsibility.

The functions of the mass media under the social responsibility principle are best expressed by Fred S. Siebert, an American theoretician of the mass media. In the collective work edited by him and titled *Four Theories of the Press*, we read about the most important tasks of journalism of social responsibility: 1) servicing the social and political system by providing information and debate on public affairs; 2) enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government; 3) safeguarding the right of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government; 4) servicing the economic system, primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods (for instance through public discussion on economic issues); 5) providing entertainment; 6) maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests.<sup>39</sup>

In the case of the BBC, this last point is guaranteed, as we mentioned above, by licence fees paid by the owners of radio and TV sets. This does not mean that the BBC is entirely free from unwanted political pressures. In the 1980s we could observe the policies of the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, well known for her antipathy towards the BBC. As early as in January 1980, Margaret Thatcher sent to the BBC an official letter accusing it of left-wing bias. Several times she tried to sub-

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<sup>38</sup> *The Cambridge Encyclopedia*, ed. D. Crystal, published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge 1990, p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana-Chicago-London 1972, s. 74

ordinate the BBC, and expected that they would be more favourable to governmental activities. The conflict between the BBC and Thatcher achieved its peak when the Prime Minister felt outraged over the coverage of the Falklands War in 1982. In the BBC's coverage of the war, reporters refused to refer to British troops as "our boys" and described them as "British soldiers," thus emphasizing in a subtle way the distance from the military ambitions of their country. Then Thatcher accused the BBC of not supporting the war effort sufficiently enough and exerted pressure on Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the House of Lords William Whitelaw to "take over" the BBC. She even wanted to employ governmental emergency powers to take the BBC under the government's control, which was described as an overuse of her prerogatives, since such powers were preserved in order to control the media in the case of a transition to nuclear war, not an insignificant regional war distanced from Britain by thousands of kilometres.<sup>40</sup>

Jean Featon, in his book *Pinkoes and Traitors. The BBC and the Nation 1974-1987*, revealed the fact that, at the BBC's request, its staff were quite regularly vetted by the British intelligence services in order to check whether they could pose a threat to national security. According to Featon's book, as many as 1400 BBC staff-members were checked yearly in this way.<sup>41</sup>

Such pressures have so far not destroyed the high ethical standards of the BBC and its role as a defender of freedom of expression. "In the end" – Nick Fraser commentator of 'The Observer' remarked – "the BBC survived because enough people close to power wanted it to survive, and because people in large numbers wanted to watch its programmes. It is hard to imagine that there won't be more crises, with sackings. But it's also hard to imagine that the BBC will ever again seem to dominate the way the nation sees itself."<sup>42</sup>

As early as in 1953, the Press Council, a British voluntary press organisation, was founded with the aim of maintaining high standards of ethics in journalism. However, in the late 1980s, some newspapers were

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<sup>40</sup> See *Mail on line*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2969624/Margaret-Thatcher-wanted-BBC-furious-treacherous-reporting-Falklands-War-official-history-reveals.html>

<sup>41</sup> J. Seaton, *Pinkoes and Traitors. The BBC and the Nation 1974-1987*, Profile Books, London 2015.

<sup>42</sup> N. Fraser, *Pinkoes and Traitors. The BBC and the Nation 1974-1987* by Jean Seaton review, "The Observer" on line version, Sunday 1 March 2015, books section.

dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the Council, while some others breached these standards. The Press Council was then replaced in 1991 by the Press Complaints Commission.

Unfortunately, there are leaders of the media who do not care about any ethos, apart from profit and popularity as a guarantee of advertising and income. They disregard any suggestion that they provide their audience with true information. To list all of them is impossible, so I would draw attention only to two selected individuals who seem to me to be at the same time important, largely typical and first of all extremely dangerous to the future of the media and its freedom. The first is the big tycoon of the modern media, the Australian Rupert Murdoch. His long career in the Australian, British and, more recently, the American media, deserves some special attention. It is he who successfully destroyed the good reputation of the so-called quality press, introducing elements typical for the tabloids (earlier known as the “yellow press”). Immediately after his arrival in Britain, Murdoch acquired the daily newspaper “*The Sun*” and turned it into a tabloid format, thanks to which by 2006 it was selling three million copies per day. It is no secret that people are always ready to buy attractive and colourful lies rather than the objective truth, which is incomparably less attractive. Truth does not sell very well. Crime, and political, economic and sexual affairs of the Berlusconi “bunga-bunga” type, especially when coloured by a one-sided approach, can count on an incomparably more favourable readership.

In 1981 Murdoch acquired “*The Times*” and its weekly issue “*The Sunday Times*.” It was not changed entirely into a tabloid, like “*The Sun*” but was gradually saturated with tabloid-like information and comment so alien to that newspaper since its establishment at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1986, Murdoch introduced an electronic system of production for his newspapers in Australia, Great Britain and the United States. Murdoch’s empire now includes a number of printed and electronic media outlets, with Sky TV in Britain and Fox TV in the USA as his most visible possessions. In 1996 the Fox News Channel entered the cable news market and systematically eroded all possible ethical standards of journalism, including the principles of objective free speech. In 2011, the famous or rather infamous affair of Murdoch’s tabloid “*The News of the World*” also dubbed as “Murdochgate” became a dramatic controversy. Journalists of the newspaper were accused of engaging in phone hacking, police bribery and exercising unlawful influence in the pursuit of publishing stories. In

July 2011, it was publically revealed that the phones of the relatives of the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler, of deceased British soldiers and victims of the 2005 bombings were also accessed, which resulted in a public outcry against the *News of the World* and its closure on 10 July, which ended its existence after 168 years of publication.

Murdoch was able to survive that storm perhaps due to his many supporters and tendentious mass-media men, such as William (Bill) O'Reilly. The extremely biased programmes of the just mentioned Fox TV, hosted by O'Reilly, are very popular in the USA. Fox TV has commonly been accused by intellectuals of broadcasting extremely biased programmes. As one internet commentator said: "For more than seven consecutive years 'The O'Reilly Factor' on the FOX News Channel has been the highest rated of any cable news show. No program even comes close." It happened from time to time that his guests represented views which were undesired by O'Reilly, and in some cases he even removed such guests from the studio in front of the eyes of TV watchers. Thus, in order to avoid similar conflicts, the O'Reilly Factor is usually prerecorded, though it is occasionally aired live if breaking news or special events are being covered.

Facing such mass-media personalities like Murdoch and O'Reilly, responsible for what is published or transmitted by the biggest media networks in the world, one can be frustrated and ask: what happened to the mass media being involved in the realization of so-called social responsibility in journalism? And what about the freedom of expression threatened by their one sided tendentious journalism? Questions about the future of freedom of speech are also raised by the internet, especially by the website *Wikileaks*, which has recently dominated the media. Wikileaks demands public and free access to the most secret political documents. It made much political noise because of its enigmatic front man and protagonist – Julian Assange. It was in 2009 that Bradley Manning was arrested and accused of leaking secret US military and diplomatic documents, and thus disclosing the abuses of democracy by American politicians and the General Staff. This was all in drastic contrast with the *US Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*. Meanwhile, as one internet commentator wrote: "His imprisonment should trouble every citizen: if the government can detain any one of us indefinitely without bringing charges, it can do the same thing to anyone else." On July 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, Bradley Manning, was convicted of all earlier charges against him, including alleged espionage. A military judge sentenced him to 35 years in prison. On hearing that sentence he said that he

had acted “out of love for freedom and my country.” Immediately after the judge left the court room, military guards flanked Bradley Manning while his supporters called out words of encouragement: “We’ll keep fighting for you, Bradley” and “You are a hero.” One popular poster in the hands of protesters active during Manning’s trial stated “Hey, America, how’s that freedom taste now?”<sup>43</sup> It is a good question, especially after Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

At the end of 2012, Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee and an American computer specialist, deliberately disclosed classified documents on top-secret American and British government mass surveillance programs to the British newspaper “The Guardian.” In June 2013, United States federal prosecutors accused Snowden of the theft of government property and consequently with an act of anti-American espionage. Snowden fled first to Hong Kong and then to Russia. Here he was granted political asylum, paradoxically in a country with no special merits in protecting the freedom of speech and democracy. The American journalist Steven Greffenius wrote some time ago: “In this country the feds call Edward Snowden a spy, and a traitor. Others call him a patriot. Who is correct?” And he adds: “All patriots have one thing in common. Tyrants always brand them as traitors.”<sup>44</sup>

Do Manning, Assange and Snowden represent a new generation of freedom fighters, so called whistle-blowers, bold enough to disclose documents which threaten our freedom of information? Should we pay homage to them? Meanwhile, at the time of writing this chapter, Assange is confined in The Ecuadorian Embassy in London, thus escaping arrest by the British police, while Manning was sentenced to 35 years of prison in an open legal abuse of both the British and American *Bill of Rights* traditions. What a paradox, that in two countries, i.e. the UK and the USA, both with extraordinary merit in the fight for human liberty, something has gone wrong and the three just-mentioned heroes, who risked their own personal freedom for their ideals, are experiencing a kind of political revenge by some spiteful politicians and military elites.

Today, John Wilkes, the British journalist, once upon a time prosecuted for disclosing state parliamentary documents to the public, has a

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<sup>43</sup> R. A. Serrano, *Bradley Manning gets 35-year sentence in WikiLeaks case*, “Los Angeles Times” online, August 21, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> S. Greffenius, *Preserve and Protect Our Constitution Against All Enemies, Foreign and Domestic*, “The Jeffersonian. A Journal of Democracy and Public Affairs,” Monday September 16, 2013.

monument not very far from the place where he was jailed. Will we in the future also erect similar statues for Assange, Manning and Snowden? Meanwhile, they are under attack from political and military officialdom. These circles, in an obvious way, have forgotten about the extremely important and inspiring struggle for freedom staged in their home countries. It was George Orwell, who in his prophetic novel, *1984* wrote: “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” It seems that some military and political authorities really do not want to hear what Manning and Assange decided to tell them. And they should remember a message of the Soviet freedom activist, who wrote in his book translated into English *Progress, Coexistence & Intellectual Freedom* (1968): “Intellectual freedom is essential to human society – freedom to obtain and distribute information, freedom for open-minded and unfearing debate and freedom from pressure by officialdom and prejudices. Such a trinity of freedom of thought is the only guarantee against an infection of people by mass myths, which, in the hands of treacherous hypocrites and demagogues can be transformed into bloody dictatorship. Freedom of thought is the only guarantee of the feasibility of a scientific democratic approach to politics, economy and culture.”<sup>45</sup>

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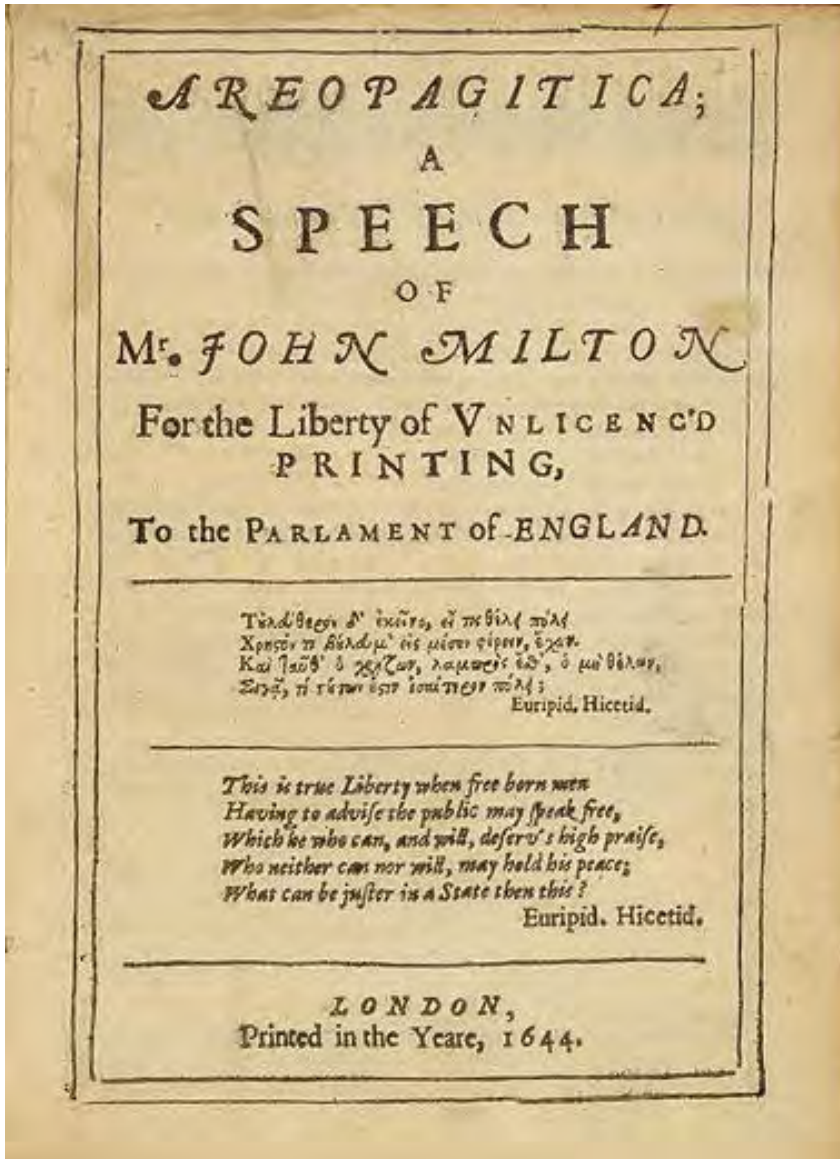
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Front cover of John Milton's *Areopagitica*, one of the greatest pleas for the freedoms of printing and speech in all human history.



John Wilkes, engraving by William Hogarth.



## Chapter Twelve

# BRITISH MARITIME TRADITIONS

The sea has been an influence on the people of Britain from their very beginnings. It has been, indeed, an extremely important factor for all cultures arriving there since the Stone Age. These were, in turn, the Bell Beaker Folk and several migrations of Celts. The sea was later a comparatively easy route for the Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian (Viking) and finally Norman invaders. During this period Britain was, in fact, a kind of pouch or sack, if you wish, into which a great amount of the cultural experience of different ethnic groups, tribes and nations was taken in, making an unusual combination of mutually influential and also conflicting and contradictory elements. After the Norman invasion of 1066, Britain was no longer an object of easy conquest and gradually started to exert its cultural experience abroad. This provides a justification for dividing British history into two basic periods:

### TWO BASIC PERIODS OF BRITISH CULTURAL HISTORY:

- 1) Age of absorbing the cultures of invaders (Maglemosian & Tardenosian Cultures; Bell Beaker Folk; series of Celtic migrations; Roman occupation, arrival of the Anglo-Saxons; series of Danish invasions up to the Norman Conquest in 1066);
- 2) Age of British cultural expansion, initiated unsuccessfully during the Hundred Years War, then successful imperial expansion beginning in the Elizabethan Era.

Not too much has remained in the historical records to illustrate the seafaring nature of the Anglo-Saxons who arrived in the British Isles. As one British historian, J. A. Williamson, maintains, they arrived: “in a little ship, primitive [...] open and shallow like the bowl of a spoon. She had thwarts for rowers to sit upon, a mast and a yard with a square sail, made perhaps of skin, and nothing much in the way of storage for water and

victuals. She probably leaked copiously and needed constant bailing, and if it was rough she took-in, a lot of water over the gunwales.”<sup>1</sup>

We know quite precisely what the old English boats looked like. During archaeological excavations near Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, in 1939, an undisturbed ship burial was discovered. It contained the sand imprint of a great Anglo-Saxon open rowing boat and a wealth of Anglo-Saxon artefacts of outstanding cultural and historical significance, now held in the British Museum in London. It was the grave of an unknown Anglo-Saxon king who was buried with his ship and all his belongings, such as clothing, ornamented belts, sword, shield, helmet, bracelets, rings, coins, and even ... his horse. Not too much remained of all these things, apart from metal artefacts and elements such as the helmet, sword and coins. Elements made of perishable materials, such as wood, cloth or woven fabric, were not preserved, apart from some vestigial remnants. Some of these artefacts left only sand imprints, nevertheless, it allowed the reconstruction of the general shape of such wooden utensils as the harp for playing music. Vestigial remnants of leather belts and shoes completed the findings in Sutton Hoo. But first of all, there was the sand imprint of an entire ship.

During the Viking invasions, when the Vikings (in British historiography described as the Danes) took over almost all England and created their Danelaw, Alfred the Great improved much of his fleet and successfully started to fight the invaders with English-designed “chasing-boats.” But some generations later, the Danes ruled England together with other Scandinavian warriors under Sveyn Forkbeard, who conquered England in 1014, followed by his famous son Canute the Great, and then by two of his sons.

Canute the Great (b. c. 985-died 1035 ruled the Anglo-Danish Empire from 1016 until his death), by the way, was half-Polish because his Polish mother Świętosława, known in Scandinavian and German sources as Gunhild, was a sister of Bolesław Chrobry and was married to Sveyn Forkbeard. Bolesław sent to his brother-in-law, Sveyn Forkbeard, and nephew Canute the Great, the military assistance of three hundred mounted warriors to help them conquer England. Try to imagine Polish mounted squadrons conquering England in 1015!

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Williamson, *England and the Sea*, in: *The Character of England*, ed. E. Barker, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1947, p. 506.

This period was of great importance in the development of British marine traditions. First of all, the Vikings provided the safety of the seas, a factor which had been non-existent for several centuries, due to their piratical and robbing activities on European seas and shores. This safety was provided for their allies – in this case – the English, but not for their foes. Scandinavian settlements and then territorial conquests and pillaging were started within the Baltic Seaboard and contemporary Russian coast. They also reached the Byzantine Empire, were visible through the present day Polish shore, the North Sea and the coast of Normandy, even reaching Italian Sicily where they created their famous Sicilian Kingdom. There is also the theory of Polish historian, Joachim Lelewel (1786-1861), and later also Adolf Piekosiński (1844-1906), who maintained that the Polish Kingdom was also established by the Vikings. The close dynastic contacts between Bolesław Chrobry and Sveyn Forkbeard could support this theory. They were at least kinsmen.

The possessions of the Vikings (the Danes) in Britain soon obtained a name: Danelaw – OE Danelagh, which means in short: territory ruled by Danish Law. Also, under the guard of Danish warriors, both the English and the Danes developed the art of shipbuilding, and they also established new ports and modernised old ones. From the second half of the 10th century, under King Canute the Great, and especially after 1018, the Vikings started to abandon their piratical profession and initiated trading traditions. This was visible in the creation of the loose union of trading towns called *fif burgha* in Old English, which in modern English means simply *Five Boroughs*. It consisted of five towns, i.e. Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford and Leicester. Later on, it was extended to seven boroughs, *Seofum Burgum* in OE, when Torksey and York joined this forgotten league. This unusual union, regardless of how strongly the towns were unified, preceded the better known Hanseatic League by several decades. A characteristic feature of the *Five Boroughs* trading cooperation was the fact that most of these towns were not ports but were located in the British interior, accessible only via inland channels which were built as far back as in Roman times. They also used rivers for their trade and communication.

One of the best known records concerning the boating traditions of Canute the Great's times is the famous poetic passage concerning his sailing by the Isle of Ely. The monks of Ely sang the merry lines: "When Canute the King was rowing nearby. Row my knights nearer the land, just listen to these beautifully singing monks":

“Merrie sungen the muneckes binnen Ely,  
 Tha Knut king rew therby.  
 Roweth, knihtes, ner the land,  
 And her we thes muneckes sang.”<sup>2</sup>

The outbreak of the *Hundred Years War* in the middle of the 14th century temporarily speeded up the development of the British Fleet. The war resulted from dynastic relations between the Anjou and Plantagenet kings and their justified or, more frequently, questioned and unjustified possessions in both England and on the European mainland. Dynastic relations alternately caused the expansion of English possessions, then the loss of them under the rule of King John Lackland, who acquired his nickname from this fact. This was followed by a series of attempts to regain the former territories. The war began, in fact, with a sea battle close to the shore of Sluys, Netherlands, in 1340. It was won by the English fleet.

Thus, up to the mid-fourteenth century there was a considerable English marine. It was still strong enough to prevent the siege of Calais by the Duke of Burgundy *Filips de Goede* (*Philip the Good*) in 1436, but by then signs of its decomposition had just started to become visible. This was sensed by the unknown author of a rhymed treatise or rather pamphlet on the necessity of strengthening awareness and keeping Calais as a fortress defending English continental interests and, at the same time, maintaining control over the English Channel. This pamphlet of 1100 lines composed in rhyming couplets was titled *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* (*The Libel of English Policy*, 1435-1438). It was written after the siege of Calais by the Burgundians in 1436, but before the end of 1438. Another, slightly different, edition of the text appeared shortly before 1441. But as many as 19 copies of these two redactions were preserved in two oncoming centuries, each differing slightly from the others. Initially, the pamphlet was ascribed to Adam de Moleyns, Bishop of Chichester, then to John Lydgate, a monk and poet (c. 1370 – c. 1451). Both authorships were rejected by a number of scholars, and William Lyndwood (c. 1375-1446) was then suggested as the author of the pamphlet. Lyndwood was the English bishop of Welsh St. David's. He was the Keeper of the Privy Seal from 1432 to 1443, exactly in the period when the pamphlet was composed. In addition, he was the son of a wool merchant and well understood the necessity

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<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. II *The End of the Middle Ages*, Press Syndicate of Cambridge University, Cambridge 1980, p. 397.

of developing the fleet as a vehicle of English trade, which was expressed in the most crucial fragment of the *Libelle*: “Cherish merchandise, keep the Admiraltie, that we be masters of the Narrow Sea” – “Cheryshe marchandyse, kepe thamyralte, that wee be maysteres of the narowe see.”<sup>3</sup> The *Libelle* is an expression of the English attitude towards trade and, more generally, English mercantilism as a guarantee of national prosperity and tranquility. It is also strongly jingoistic toward England’s neighbours, considered as rivals and enemies in economic competition.

Although the *Libelle* did not substantially alter English sea policy at the time, it became extremely influential in subsequent centuries after it was printed for the first time and widely spread in the 16th century. It was one of the most important early publications formulating the policy of English mercantilism and contributing much to the development of English marine pride and expansion. Translated into modern English, it is still from time to time quoted as a very important text in English history, particularly her trade and sea policy:

“Cherish merchandise, keep the Admiraltie,  
that we be masters of the Narrow Sea  
For if merchants were cherished to their speed,  
We were not like to fail in any need;  
If they be rich, then in prosperity  
Shall be our land, lordes and commonalty.”<sup>4</sup>

What a difference in the attitude towards the sea, especially when we compare de Moleyn’s statement with the sea policy of the Polish Commonwealth up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The complete lack of such policy and consequent lack of Polish sea power was one of the decisive factors in the partitioning of Poland in the 18th century, after a long period of neglecting the sea. This was best expressed in Sebastian Klonowic’s poem *Flis*, about Polish ploughmen:

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<sup>3</sup> *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, ed. by R. Kayser, in: *Medieval English. An Old English and Middle English Anthology*, ed. and publ. R. Kayser, Berlin Wilmersdorf 1961, p. 541. “Narrow Sea” – The English Channel.

<sup>4</sup> Modern English translation of the fragment quoted from: J. A. Williamson, *England and the Sea*, in: E. Barker, ed., *The Character of England*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1947, p. 509-510.



“A Pole can ignore knowledge of the sea if he ploughs well” –  
 “Polak może nie wiedzieć co to morze, gdy dobrze orze.”<sup>5</sup>

There were, of course, some exceptional moments in history when the Polish kings appreciated direct access to the Baltic sea. When warriors of the Polish ruler, Boleslaus the Mouthwrenched (Bolesław Krzywousty), conquered Kołobrzeg (Kolberg), according to the *Chronicle of Gallus Anonimus* written in Latin, his knights sang:

“For our forefathers fishes salty and stinking  
 were good enough  
 But we are coming for fresh ones, splashing in the sea.  
 Our fathers were satisfied by the seizing of castles  
 But we are not frightened neither by tempests  
 nor the noise of the sea waves.”<sup>6</sup>

Another exceptional moment was observed in 1627, when the Polish fleet defeated the Swedes at the famous Oliwa Battle. But such events were rather incidental and Polish maritime pride was not usually strong and did not continue. In England also, shortly after the appearance of *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, the neglect of sea policies became apparent. The English won all the most important battles of the Hundred Years War at Calais, Crecy and Agincourt, but eventually started to lose everything they had gained.

After the great rising of the French people led by the famous Joan D’Arc, the English started to lose ground. Soon after, the English lost the decisive battle at Castillon in 1453. However, the English were able to maintain the port of Calais until 1558, when under Mary Tudor this sea town was finally lost to the French.

During those times “in all directions English trade suffered from foreign aggression – the connexion with Germany and the Baltic, the Iceland fishery, the Bordeaux wine trade, the cloth export to the Netherlands, all

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<sup>5</sup> English translation – mine.

<sup>6</sup> English translation mine-WL, after Polish edition: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika Polska (Polish Chronicle)*, ed. M. Plezia, Ossolineum, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź 1969, p. 97. Compare the Polish translation from Latin: “Naszym przodkom wystarczały ryby słone i cuchnące/My po świeże przychodzimy w oceanie pluskając/Ojcom naszym wystarczało, jeśli grodów dobywali/Nas burza nie odstrasza ani szum groźny morskiej fali.”

were increasingly diverted from English to foreign control. The ministers of Henry VI ceased to maintain his father's navy. Even the occupancy of the throne was changed by a foreign power when Edward IV, evicted by the Lancastrians, came back in ships supplied by Burgundy and the Hanseatic League."<sup>7</sup>

The so-called *Wars of the Roses*, resulting from the frustrations of the English nobility, who had lost their French possessions, expressed a measure of these disappointments. During these internal English wars, the sea was almost completely neglected by the English. Finally, there came with Henry Tudor, known to us as Henry VII, "not only a king but also a dynasty which satisfied the sea ambitions of the people. Henry indeed arrived like other adventurers of this anarchic century in foreign ships with foreign troops. But having gained the throne with such aid, he held it against other practitioners of the same methods."<sup>8</sup> After the battle of Bosworth, won by Henry VII, his sea policy greatly inspired the English imagination. Henry VII ruled until 1509.

This was the period in which the discovery of America was made by Christopher Columbus. Thus, with Henry VII, maritime policy became an important aspiration of the English. Realising the weaknesses of the English, after the long neglect of the English fleet and almost complete lack of experienced sailors, Henry VII invited the Italian sailor and sea adventurer, Sebastiano Caboto, and later also his son Giovanni Caboto, called in English respectively John and Sebastian Cabots, to arrange the first English expeditions to North America. They were not very successful, however.

The son of Henry VII, Henry VIII, however, limited English interest in the local seas. "He was fully imbued with the doctrine of sea power but he gave it a more combatant emphasis and created a great fighting fleet. He was the founder of the Royal Navy as a service with continuous tradition and an unbroken succession of ships and men, administration and command. He made the Navy the chief fighting force, a position from which it did not afterwards recede. It had its periods of excellence and decline, at times incomparably efficient, at others under some blight of corruption or spiritual decay. But in good times, or bad it has always been an index of the State's prestige, in a way that the military power has not always been."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. A. Williamson, *England and the Sea*, op. cit., p. 509.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

<sup>9</sup> J. A. Williamson, *England and the Sea*, op. cit., p. 511.

Although both Sebastian and John Cabot initiated the unsuccessful English exploration of the North American seacoast, it was under Elisabeth I that English expansion on that continent was more systematically initiated. “More systematically” did not mean “successfully,” however. In 1583, Humphrey Gilbert attempted unsuccessfully to establish the first British colony in North America. This attempt was preceded by the famous book of Richard Hakluyt (c. 1562-1616) titled: *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America*. It is in Richard Hakluyt’s book that we can read very important suggestions concerning future British sea ambitions and colonizing efforts: Richard Hakluyt (lived c. 1552-1616), author of *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America* (1583) and *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589):

“I conceive great hope that the time approaches and now [...] we of England may share and participate (if we will ourselves) both with the Spaniards and the Portuguese, in part of America and other regions, as yet undiscovered. And surely if there were in us that desire to advance the honour of our country which ought to be in every good man, we would not do all this, while have forborne the possessing of those lands, which of equity and right appertain unto us, as by the discourses that follow shall appear most plainly [...]. We read that the bees when they grow to be too many in their own hives at home, are wont to be led out by their captains abroad and to swarm and seek themselves a new dwelling place. [...] Let us learn wisdom of these small, weak and unreasonable creatures.”<sup>10</sup>

Richard Hakluyt, as a marine writer, deserves our special attention. It was this man who ignited the English seafaring imagination, not only through his work on *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America*, but also by writing the most important work to inspire British expansion around the world. It was his famous work titled *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, written and published in 1589, which exerted a tremendous influence on the English consciousness and imagination, similar to, say, a contemporary TV serial. The English were inspired to take up seafaring by this book, by the prom-

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<sup>10</sup> R. Hakluyt, fragment from *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America*, in: *The Western Tradition from the Ancient World to Louis XIV*, ed. E. Weber, D. C. Heath and Company, Boston-Englewood-Chicago-San Francisco-Dallas-Toronto-London 1965, p. 321.

ise of rich foreign lands across the ocean, colourful adventures and finally by the pride of having the strongest fleet in the world. Hakluyt used in his book all accessible sources, the reports of sailors and descriptions of travellers. In the second edition of his *Principal Navigations*, he also included the earlier discussed *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*. His huge work had many reissues and a number of them were published under slightly changed titles. But they all excited the minds of young Englishmen by promising colorful sea adventures. Among them was, for instance, Alexander Selkirk, the prototype of Robinson Crusoe, the literary protagonist of Daniel Defoe's famous novel, which soon became read worldwide, not just in England. A number of other Robinsons of that time decided to leave their homes under the influence of Hakluyt's magnificent work.

Hakluyt's book was published just one year after the Spanish attempt to conquer England with the Spanish Armada in 1588. The competition between Spain and England over control of the oceans was sharpened by religious and dynastic conflicts and wars. Spain was the main exponent of papal policy, which was then trying to restore the Catholic faith in England. As you remember, it was Henry VIII who in 1534 separated the Church of England from the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. But as you well know, the daughter of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, refused to even consider and discuss reintroducing Catholicism into England. Unfortunately, she was childless and heirless, which had some negative consequences during her rule.

First of all, her childlessness produced the possibility of introducing to the English throne her Catholic rival, Mary Stuart of Scotland, connected by dynastic relations with the Tudors. This is why Elizabeth, afraid of such a possibility, arrested Mary and sentenced her to death on the basis of artificially formulated accusations. But the real reason for that was to avoid the possibility of reintroducing Catholicism to England. Pope Sixtus V in Rome felt offended and excommunicated Elizabeth. Moreover, he officially promised his personal absolution for any English subject who decided to kill the English Protestant monarch, either Elizabeth or her future Protestant successors. The Pope also used the earlier resentments of Catholic Spain to inspire the Spanish king Philip II to invade and return England back to Rome. To respond to such a policy, Elizabeth employed a number of buccaneers and privateers, such as Martin Frobisher and John Hawkins, who delightedly harassed the Spanish fleet on the open seas. Among the most famous privateers of Elizabeth I, we should count the

Captain and later Admiral, Francis Drake, who attacked Spanish ships then full of gold and silver grabbed from the Indian states of Central America and the Incas of Peru by Spanish conquistadors like Fernando Cortez and Francisco Pizarro. Moreover, Drake went to the Pacific Ocean from the other side of the Americas and both surprisingly and successfully harassed Spanish colonies there. In 1586, Drake devastated Cadiz, the biggest sea and war port in Spain.

The Spanish felt offended and soon the famous or rather infamous Great Armada was arranged to invade England in a retaliatory expedition. We know how unsuccessful this Spanish excursion was. The Spanish lost due to the following factors: their fleet was organised on feudal principles and their main commander was not an experienced admiral but Juan Alonso Pérez de Guzmán y Suárez de Figueroa, the 7<sup>th</sup> Duke de Medina Sidonia. He had no idea what the sea was and he also experienced continuous sea sickness. This, in turn, caused innumerable strange situations in which officers of the land army gave orders contrary to principles required by situations on the open seas. Meanwhile, English admirals, like Drake, were experienced sailors with their own initiative, not blocked by stupid infantry commanders. In addition, the English fleet was technically better, able to sail against the wind (the technique just invented by the English), they possessed smaller but swifter ships and at the same time had more long ranging and incomparably more effective guns. Somewhat earlier, in 1571, the Spanish had won the Battle of Lepanto over the Turks, who fought on their rather backward ships. It gave to the Spanish an illusionary conviction of their superiority on the high seas. Thus, they were convinced about their ability to defeat not only the Turks but also the English. Soon, however, they appeared rather disappointed. When they attempted to invade England, the Spanish Armada was simply destroyed and returned home in shame. They could not, however, return by the same route as they arrived, because the English Channel was now well guarded by Drake's fleet. The Spanish had no choice but to go back home by rounding the British Isles from the North and West side, and due to heavy storms raging there they also lost a substantial number of ships which were crushed on the Irish rocks. It was during the time of the Great Armada that literature on its subject was initiated, having long lasting effects on the English consciousness. In one of the Elizabethan songs we can read:

“Long the proud Spanyardes  
 Had wanted to conquer us  
 Threatening our Country with ffyer and sorde  
 Often preparing their nauy most sumptuous  
 With as great plenty as Spaine cold afforde:  
 Duba-dub, dub-a-dub! Thus strikes their drums,  
 Tanta-ra, ra-ra! Now the English comes!”<sup>11</sup>

In another ballad of the time we read about a different and less known aspect of English-Spanish sea warfare. It was a ballad about the captivity of a Spanish lady. Cases of seizing Spanish ships together with crew and passengers were quite frequent then. The story of which we read in the ballad is a product of propaganda, showing the Spaniards as orthodox narrow-minded men with no respect for their own women, while at the same time, as the lyrics says, “Englishmen through all the world are counted kind.” The captured Spanish lady even started to love her oppressor, an English officer:

“Leave me not unto a Spaniard,  
 You alone enjoy my heart,  
 I am lovely, young and tender,  
 Love is likewise my desert:  
 Still to serve thee day and night  
 My mind is prest (pressed !)  
 The wife of every Englishman  
 Is counted blessed.”<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile the English captain assures his lady captive:

“Courteous ladye, leave this fancy,  
 Here comes all  
 that breed the strife;  
 I, in England have already  
 A sweet woman to my wife:  
 I will not falsify my vow  
 for gold nor gain,  
 Nor yet for all the fairest dames that live in Spain.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The Winning of Calais*, in: *Relics of Ancient English Poetry*, ed. Th.Percy, published by F. J. Child, Glasgow-Edinburgh-London 1855, p. 146.

<sup>12</sup> *The Spanish Lady's Love*, in: *Relics of Ancient English Poetry*, op. cit. p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



*Sea Battle at Sluys*, a miniature from Jean Froissart's *Chronicles*, 14th century.  
Picture taken from the Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.



Royal ship "Britannia" entering Portsmouth. Fragment of a painting by George Hyde Chambers, 1814, from the Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.





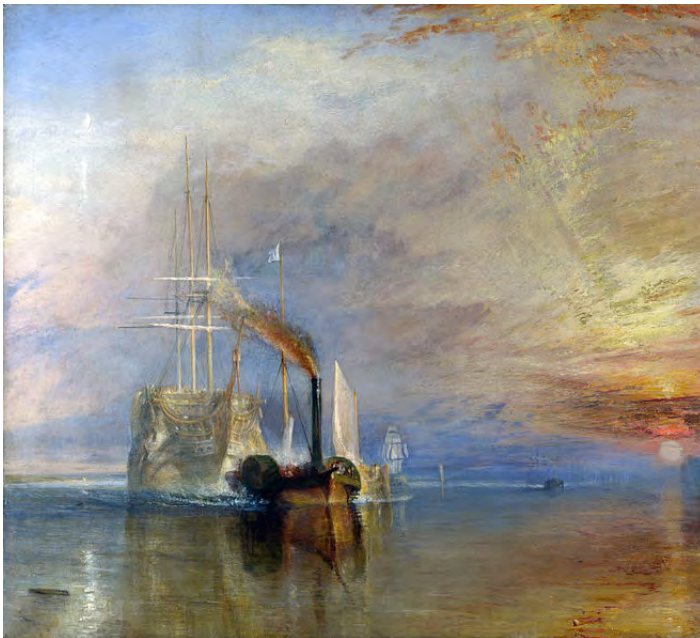
Portrait of Horatio Nelson by Francis Lemuel Abbott, National Portrait Gallery, picture taken from the free media repository, internet.



*Death of Nelson* by Daniel Maclise. Fragment of wall-painting in the Royal Gallery of the Palace of Westminster; picture taken from public domain, internet.



Emma Hamilton in a Straw Hat, by George Romney, version 1782-1784, from Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.



Fragment of Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire* tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838-1839, National Gallery, London; picture taken from public domain, internet.



Johan and George Forters.



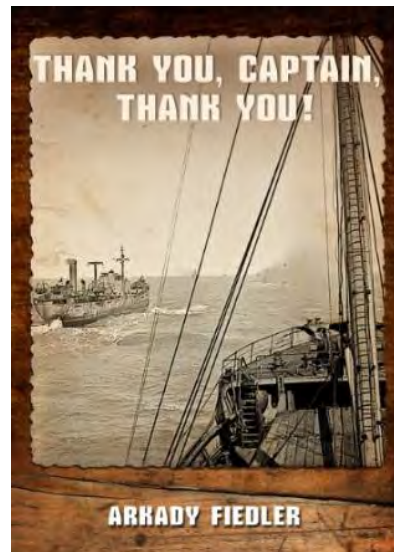
Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski.



John Walker, hero of the Battle of the Atlantic.



Front cover of Nicolas Monsarrat's novel *The Cruel Sea* (1951).



Front cover Arkady Fiedler's maritime report of the Battle of the Atlantic *Thank you, Captain, thank you.*

When the Spanish lady was informed that the English captain was married, she decided that:

“I will spend my days in prayer,  
 Love and all her laws defye,  
 In a nunnery will I shroud mee,  
 Far from any companee;  
 But there my prayers have an end,  
 Be sure of this,  
 To pray for thee and for thy love  
 I will not miss.”<sup>14</sup>

The English were not always as charming as in the case of the just mentioned Spanish lady-captive. We also know of some cases where English privateers offered to some Spanish crews and passengers their beloved amusement called walking the plank. Its essence was to place a simple wooden plank or beam over the side of a ship. Then, the unfortunate victim was forced to walk off the end of that plank or beam. Usually, he was not informed that the plank ends at a particular moment. Finally, the victim unexpectedly (to himself anyway) falls into the water and drowns, sometimes with bound hands or weights attached to his neck or legs. In contemporary English, *walking the plank* is a phrase that describes a form of risky activity, sometimes execution or torture, without giving any chance to the victim.

Going back to this unusual amusement, in one old English ballad of the time we read what walking the plank was all about:

“Four-and-twenty Spaniards, mighty men of rank  
 With their signoras, had to walk the plank.”<sup>15</sup>

The experience of the Great Armada made the English very sensitive to the danger of sea invasion. This has been expressed in innumerable literary works which were responsible for building up English military, seafaring and general marine traditions. The most typical examples of such literature included songs, poems and novels, written in a national if not nationalistic vein and addressed mostly to youngsters. A typical example

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in E. Wingfield Stratford, *The History of British Civilization*, Routledge, London 1932, p. 435.

of such literature can be found in the works of Captain Frederic Marryat. Among his numerous novels, probably the most famous one is titled *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (first published in 1836). It concerns the adventures of its hero during sea wars between England and Spain. Needless to mention, some centuries later we also observed a Polish contribution to the cultural role of the sea in Great Britain. For instance, the literature of Joseph Conrad, which deserves a separate lecture, or rather a long series of lectures. Here, I would like to discuss one piece of poetry, written at the turn of the 19th century. This poem speaks symbolically about Admiral Francis Drake. Although Drake died of dysentery after unsuccessfully attacking San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1595, over the centuries he was symbolically considered as a guardian of the English shore and independence. He has been extolled ever since in numerous literary works as a man of the moment who was always able to guard the English coast and would wake up from his ship's hammock, now located in heaven, in order to defend his country against any invader. See how he is depicted in one poem written by Henry Newbolt. The essential conclusion of this poem consists of the famous fragment:

“Drake he’s in his hammock  
 Till the great Armadas come.  
 Capten, art tha sleepin’ there below?  
 Slung atween the round shot,  
 Listenin’ for the drum,  
 An’ dreamin’ all the time o’ Plymouth Hoe [...].  
 Call him on the deep sea,  
 Call him up the Sound,  
 Call him when ye sail to meet the foe;  
 Where the old trade’s playin’  
 An’ the old flag flyin’,  
 They shall find him ‘ware an’ waking,  
 As they found him long ago.”<sup>16</sup>

The last time he rose from his hammock was when the Nazi Luftwaffe attacked Britain in 1940-1944. This poem is probably one of the most frequently quoted English poems ever written. It has been included in al-

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<sup>16</sup> H. Newbolt, *Drake’s Drum*, in: *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, F. Turner Palgrave, Oxford University Press, London-New York-Toronto 1943, pp. 486-487.

most all anthologies of the best English national poetry ever since. One of these anthologies containing Newbolt's poem is entitled *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, edited by Francis Turner Palgrave.<sup>17</sup> This anthology alone has given great popularity to the poem because nearly 50 issues have been published, the last in 2002. (I have in my private library the 1943, 38th issue)

In another poem stressing the sea strength of Britain, written earlier by Thomas Campbell (1777-1844), under title *Mariners of England*, we read:

“Ye mariners of England  
 That guard our native seas  
 Whose flaggs has braved, a thousand years,  
 The battle and the breeze,  
 Your glorious standard launch again  
 To match another foe:  
 And sweep through the deep,  
 While the stormy wind do blow;  
 While the battle rages loud and long  
 And the stormy winds do blow.  
 The spirits of your fathers  
 Shall start from every wave  
 For the deck it was their field of fame  
 And Ocean was their grave.  
 Where Blake and mighty Nelson fell  
 Your manly hearts shall glow  
 As ye sweep through the deep  
 While the stormy winds do blow [...]
 Britannia needs no bulwarks,  
 No towers along the steep;  
 Her march is o'er the mountain waves  
 Her home is on the deep.”<sup>18</sup>

Since the time of the victory over the Spanish Armada, English and then (after unification with Scotland in 1707), British sea power experienced numerous moments of glory. A number of admirals contributed much to British naval history. Perhaps the most eminent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was

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<sup>17</sup> F. Turner Palgrave, ed., *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Th. Campbell, *Mariners of England*, in: *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

General Robert Blake,<sup>19</sup> who continued the successful hunting by the royal fleet under Prince Rupert, then fighting the Spaniards, and the next candidate for supremacy on the seas, the Dutch. He even successfully fought the Turkish pirate fleets. “Robert Blake” – James A. Williamson, historian of British expansion, wrote – “set about strengthening of the navy and the re-establishment of English prestige throughout the world by its means.”<sup>20</sup>

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the first successful attempts to colonise America also followed. The first effective and long-lasting colony was established in 1607 under James I and this is why it was named Jamestown.

It was at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in 1682, that the battle-ship named “Britannia” was built for the King of England. This tradition was continued over the next centuries when every several decades a new, technically better, ship was built and the name “Britannia” was continued without change. The last one was built in 1904 and sunk by a German u-boat in 1916. From that time on, the tradition was only partly continued. No longer was the battling man o’war a royal ship. The King and later also Queen Elizabeth II had at their disposal only the yacht “Britannia,” which had nothing to do with the military. Some years ago this yacht was taken away from the royal property due to a wave of criticism directed towards the excessive luxury of the Royal Family.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the discoveries and military activities of such men as James Cook (1728-1779) extended the British Empire to all continents of the globe. We should also know that on James Cook’s second expedition, two Polish citizens of Scottish descent were present. They were Johann and Georg Forsters, father and son, two Polish citizens of Scottish origins, who participated in the 2nd voyage of James Cook which started on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1773. They left Gdansk, where they had lived up to that point, for England in 1772, because they had refused to be subjects of Frederick the Great when the Prussians partitioned Poland together with the Russians and Austrians. The Forsters not only participated in Cook’s expedition but also left to us a two-volume description of it together with numerous drawings of exotic local tribes, animals and plants of the newly

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<sup>19</sup> This title was equivalent for admiral in Cromwell’s Commonwealth.

<sup>20</sup> J. A. Williamson, *A Short history of British Expansion. The Old Colonial Empire*, Macmillan, London 1961, p. 242.



discovered lands in the South Pacific. They were subsequently arrested on the orders of the British Admiralty, because in the book describing the second Cook expedition they demythologized James Cook as an English national hero. He was murdered during his expedition, allegedly by the indigenous inhabitants of one Pacific island. But Forsters maintained that he was hated by his sailors and that he was killed when he was hit in his back by one of his own countrymen when he was trying to escape from the island. Forsters' book went into oblivion for almost two hundred years. Some years ago I suggested to the Polish sailor and yachting captain, Dr Krzysztof Vorbrich, to write his second Ph.D on Forsters. In order to write it more precisely, Dr Vorbrich followed the route of Cook's expedition in his own yacht and compared the places described by Forsters with their modern outlook. He did this and soon wrote, defended and published his second Ph.D. His book made some impression among the international sailing fraternity.<sup>21</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that the greatest moments of sea pride arrived with the appearance of Horatio Nelson. His victory and heroic death at Trafalgar (1805) are especially responsible for his great legend. For the most frequently quoted poem on Nelson we can count the poem of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928):

“Dead Nelson and his half-dead crew,  
His foes from near and far,  
Were rolled together on the deep  
That night at Trafalgar.”<sup>22</sup>

Apart from innumerable masterpieces of literature, poetic and prose works devoted to Nelson, we can find a lot of British monuments and art masterpieces devoted to the Battle of Trafalgar, like the statue on Trafalgar Square in London. Innumerable painters also devoted their works to Nelson. For example, we have *The Battle of Trafalgar: End of the Action*, by Nicholas Pocock (1740-1821), oil on canvas, c. 1808; *The Battle of*

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<sup>21</sup> K. Vorbrich, *Memoirs of the Forsters: The Polish-born Participants of Cook's Expedition: The Same Voyage, Worlds Apart*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Contact, Poznań 2009; see also his article *Three Memoirs of the Forsters – the Polish-Born Participants of Cook's Second Voyage*, *Polish Anglo-Saxon Studies*,” vol. 14-15, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM (Adam Mickiewicz University Press), Poznań 2011, pp. 7-47.

<sup>22</sup> T. Hardy, *The Night Of Trafalgar*, <http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/thomas-hardy/the-night-of-trafficar/>

*Trafalgar* as painted in 1836 by William Clarkson Stanfield (1794-1867). This last painting commemorates a very crucial moment of the Battle of Trafalgar. We can see here the French battle-ship *Redoutable* very close to an abordage on Nelson's *Victory*. Fortunately enough, there was another British ship, *Téméraire*, which manoeuvred itself between the two ships and prevented the French from boarding. Thanks to this, the ship gained an additional element in her name: *Fighting Téméraire*.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly before the collision between *Redoutable* and *Téméraire*, Nelson was mortally wounded but still lay alive on the deck. Historians of the Battle of Trafalgar, on the basis of the logbooks of all the ships involved, reconstructed precisely, almost minute by minute, what actually happened.

"*Téméraire* was taller than *Redoutable*, but for close-quarter anti-personnel fighting she was much more heavily armed than *Victory*. The seven 32-pounder carronades and sixteen 18-pounder guns on the starboard side of her upper deck and superstructure commanded *Redoutable*'s decks. As the two ships collided she fitted off a full broadside of grape and canister at what was almost the whole of Lucas's<sup>24</sup> crews as they massed to storm aboard *Victory*. It was a massacre – a shattering moment for Lucas. 'It is impossible to describe the carnage produced by the murderous broadside of this ship', he reported later. More than two hundred of our brave men were killed or wounded by it'. In this one decisive moment *Téméraire* turned *Redoutable* from a ship about to fight for a prize to one now fighting for her life. [...] *Redoutable* should probably surrender immediately, but she kept fighting. *Victory* opened up, with her heavy guns firing downwards through *Redoutable*'s hull. Ostensibly this was done to avoid hitting *Téméraire*, but it was angry fire, perhaps influenced by the injury to Nelson, and calculated to sink the French ship. It also caused hideous casualties in the crowded operating theatre in the orlop deck, killing or further injuring many of those lying wounded there. Lucas ordered his men to fire into *Téméraire* whatever guns had not been dismounted by the collision, but the British ship had much the better of what could only be an uneven artillery duel. [...] At this moment the much-damaged *Fougeux* (the French ship-WL) emerged from the smoke on *Téméraire*'s other side. *Téméraire* fired her starboard broadside at *Fougeux*

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<sup>23</sup> *Téméraire* in Asian mythology was a very warlike flying dragon.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Jacques Lucas – captain of *Redoutable*.

before all four ships drifted into each other. By this time *Fougeux* was totally disabled and powerless to avoid collision. [...] *Téméraire's* seven starboard 32-pounder carronades swivelled round and sprayed murderous grape over *Fougeux's* decks. [...] Victory finally disentangled herself from *Redoutable* and got her ahead to northward. [...] Finally Lucas decided to surrender. [...] Nelson heard the British cheers that greeted this surrender as his lungs slowly filled with blood."<sup>25</sup> Soon after he died, but fully aware of what had happened and that his fleet had finally become victorious.

The role of *Téméraire* at Trafalgar was much praised in English literature and poetry. Henry Newbolt, an English lawyer who turned to the pursuit of poetry, wrote his well known poem titled simply *The Fighting Téméraire*:

“It was noontide ringing,  
And the battle just begun  
When the ship her way was winging  
As they loaded every gun [...]   
There's a far bell ringing  
At the setting of the sun,  
And a phantom voice is singing  
Of the great days done.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1838, ‘Fighting Temeraire’ ended her career which was commemorated in the famous painting of William Turner (1775-1851) titled ‘*The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up*’ (1839). At the front of Turner’s painting we see “Fighting Temeraire” deprived of its sails and glory, while in the background we can observe disappearing sailing boats on a line of horizon, symbolizing a more and more distant past. It is hauled to “his last berth to be broken up” by small, ugly smoking tug-boats. Soon, only ugly smoking steamers would dominate the high seas. In Newbolt’s poem, where we read about “Fighting Temeraire’s” glory, we also read about its symbolic fading, like a comment on Turner’s painting:

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<sup>25</sup> T. Clayton, Ph. Craig, *Trafalgar. The Men, the Battle, the Storm*, Hodder and Stoughton, London-Edinburgh 2004, pp. 209-211.

<sup>26</sup> H. Newbolt, *The Fighting Téméraire*, in: *Prose and Poetry for Enjoyment*, Catholic edition, ed. H. Ward Mc Graw, Catholic edition ed. By J. Maline and W. J. McGucken, The L. W. Singer Company, Syracuse-Chicago-Dallas 1940, p. 332.

“Now the sunset breezes shiver.  
 Téméraire! Téméraire!  
 And she’s fading down the river  
 Téméraire! Téméraire!”<sup>27</sup>

Turner’s painting looks like an anticipation of Joseph Conrad’s philosophy of the sea, found in his *The Mirror of the Sea*, where apart from glorifying ships with sails, he lamented the disappearance of their grandeur under the assault of ugly, smoking steamboats. According to Conrad, the steamer acts against nature and possesses the “pride of its strength, fed on fire and water, breathing black smoke into the air, pulsating, throbbing, shouldering its arrogant way against the great rollers in blind disdain of winds and sea.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, “The efficiency of a steamship consists not so much in her courage as in the power she carries within herself. It beats and throbs like a pulsating heart within her iron ribs, and when it stops, the steamer, whose life is not so much a contest as the disdainful ignoring of the sea, sickens and dies upon the waves. The sailing ship, with her unthrobbing body, seemed to lead mysteriously a sort of unearthly existence, bordering upon the magic of the invisible forces, sustained by the inspiration of life-giving and death-dealing winds.”<sup>29</sup> The dangers of the sea in Conrad’s view are those “wiles you must defeat, whose violence you must resist, and yet with whom you must live in the intimacies of nights and days. Here speaks the man of masts and sails, to whom the sea is not a navigable element, but an intimate companion...”<sup>30</sup> And Conrad continues: “The length of passages, the growing sense of solitude, the close dependence upon the very forces that, friendly to-day, without changing their nature, by the mere putting forth of their might, become dangerous to-morrow, make for that sense of fellowship which modern seamen, good men as they are, cannot hope to know.”<sup>31</sup>

A moment similar to that of Turner’s picture was painted some decades later by an American painter, William James Aylward (1875-1956). It was titled “*Her Last Port*” (1895). In another way it shows the same thing

<sup>27</sup> H. Newbolt, op. cit. p. 332.

<sup>28</sup> J. Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, J. M. Dent and Sons, London-Toronto 1923, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-72.

as we saw in Turner's painting: a big sailing ship to be broken up by the ugly black of a smoking tug-boat.

We have numerous portraits of Nelson, like, for example, this one painted by Lemuel Francis Abbott (c. 1760-1802) or one painted in 1800 by Sir William Beechey (1753-1839). The most famous painting showing Nelson is not a portrait, however, but the scene of his death painted by Benjamin West (1738-1820), an Anglo-American artist born in the British colonies but active in both the United States and the United Kingdom, where he was even President of the Royal Academy of Art (1792-1805 and 1805-1820). He specialized mostly in historical pieces. Probably his most famous historical painting is *The Death of General Wolfe* (the hero of the Seven Years' War), certainly one of the most admired and frequently reproduced art pieces of the period. Nelson was a confirmed admirer of West's paintings. "Nelson had even met the artist at Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire, in 1800, and had asked him why he had never painted anything else like it. 'Because my Lord, there no more subjects' West replied. 'Damn it!' said Nelson. 'I did not think of that'."<sup>32</sup> At the time Nelson could not have predicted that five years later he would become the "next subject" of a similarly famous masterpiece. "Just days after news of Nelson's own death had reached London, West had struck engraver James Heath for a print of the scene. [...] For authenticity West made portrait sketches of around thirty of *Victory's* officers, sailors and marines. But he choose to set the hero's death on *Victory's* quarterback rather than on the crowded, dimly lit orlop deck below."<sup>33</sup> This engraving based on West's sketch, was soon substituted by an oil painting titled *The Death of Nelson*. The painting was then exhibited in West's studio where it was admired within just the first month by more than 30,000 visitors. Later, West painted two more paintings with Nelson as the subject: *The Death of Lord Nelson in the Cockpit of the Ship 'Victory'* and *The Immortality of Nelson*. His paintings concerning Nelson are obviously not very accurate and show the scene of Nelson's death in much idealized form. West had an answer to why he executed them in such a way, saying that they were painted "of what might have been, not of the circumstances as they happened."

Another artist who in the same period, just several days after Nelson's death, created a similar scene was Arthur William Davis, which enraged

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<sup>32</sup> T. Clayton, Ph. Craig, *Trafalgar. The Men, the Battle, the Storm*, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211-212.

West. But despite the fact that Davis's picture was equally inaccurate when compared with West's work, from the contemporary point of view both masterpieces can be rightly evaluated as representing the same high artistic quality. Both were made popular on an extremely large scale in the form of engravings sold in hundreds of copies, which before photography was invented was the common way of making masterpieces known to the wider public.

Nelson, though a national hero of England, provoked some negative reactions amongst English writers and historians, but most of all English moralists. The reason was rather obvious: it was his "immoral" love affair with Lady Hamilton, the wife of an eminent British aristocrat and diplomat. Nelson was married and the demonstration of his love for Lady Hamilton, who was also married, caused a lot of negative comments and a social reaction amongst the religious in English society, to the extent that some English aristocratic houses closed their doors when they tried to visit them.

This immoral love affair was probably the reason why, despite the general conviction, Nelson was never nominated as a full admiral in the British fleet. Until the end of his life he remained vice-admiral or rear-admiral, a rank below full admiral. Many years later, Robert Graves saw the Nelsonian legend in the light of this double moral evaluation. His poem titled *1805* is full of irony and relates to a hidden irritation in the British Admiralty resulting from the "immoral" love affair between Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Graves saturated his poem with colloquial and modern day-to-day language as if he wanted to expose the moral dilemma still in existence in modern times. It is the dilemma of an unquestionable hero, who justly earned his fame and who is a person of the highest merit for his country, but at the same time his involvement in an ethically and religiously prohibited love affair do not allow the use of all his positive characteristics as an ethical model of personality, especially for youngsters and English seamen. To understand this poem and its numerous allusions and metaphors we should keep in mind some facts associated with Nelson's life, like, for instance, his tendency to dress colourfully. Other allusions in Graves' poem are associated with Nelson's victory over the French at the mouth of the river Nile in Egypt (1798), then with the famous blind eye story, an incident which happened during the battle of Copenhagen in 1801. During his numerous sea battles Nelson lost his hand and was blinded in one eye. During the sea battle for Copenhagen, he was subject to Admiral Hyde Parker (1739-1807), then a commander-in-chief of the English Royal Navy. Parker considered this battle as lost and sent his flag signal to Nelson's ships, giving him an

order to withdraw. This order was given via a special configuration of battle signal-flags. Then Nelson lifted his telescope up to his blind eye and said to his officers: “I do not see any flag-signal ordering me to withdraw.” And he subsequently won the battle. From that moment on the English idiom “turning a blind eye” is used to describe the act of ignoring inconvenient facts or unpopular commands. Graves’ poem is written as a fictional dialogue between a general and an admiral, representing two opposing views on Nelson:

“At Viscount Nelson’s lavish funeral  
While the mob milled and yelled about St. Paul’s,  
A General chatted with an Admiral:  
‘One of your Colleagues, Sir, remarked today  
That Nelson’ exit, though to be lamented,  
Falls not importunely, in its way.’  
‘He was a thorn in our flesh,’ came the reply –  
The most bird-witted, unaccountable,  
Odd little runt that ever I did spy.  
One arm, one peeper, vain as Pretty Poll  
A meddler, too, in foreign politics  
And gave his heart in pawn to a plain moll.”<sup>34</sup>

However, the Admiral is still unable to accept Nelson, who

“... would dare lecture us Sea Lords, and then  
Would treat his ratings as though men of honour  
And play at leap-frog with his midshipmen.  
We tried to box him down, but up he popped,  
And when he’d banged Napoleon at the Nile  
Became too much the hero to be dropped.”<sup>35</sup>

The memory of the Battle of Copenhagen seems to cause mixed feelings: on the one hand it was a glorious victory for the British fleet, on the other it was won ... against a clear order of Admiral Hyde Parker (1739-1807), which by military standards showed an obvious lack of subordination, worthy of severe punishment:

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<sup>34</sup> R. Graves, 1805, in: *England. An Anthology*, ed. R. Ingrams, Collins, London 1989, p. 195; see also the text of the poem online: R. Graves, 1805, [http://aboutnelson.yuku.com/topic/779/Poem-1805-by-Robert-Graves#.VQYTw46G\\_eE](http://aboutnelson.yuku.com/topic/779/Poem-1805-by-Robert-Graves#.VQYTw46G_eE)

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

“You’ve heard that Copenhagen “blind-eye” story?  
 We’d tied him to Nurse Parker’s apron-strings –  
 By G-D, he snipped them through and snatched the glory!”<sup>36</sup>

Trafalgar is the last argument of the general to convince the admiral about the unquestionable military merit of Nelson:

“Yet, cried the general, six-and-twenty sail  
 Captured and sunk by him off Trafalgar –  
 That writes a handsome finish to the tale’.  
 ‘Handsome enough.  
 The seas are England’s now.  
 That fellow’s foibles need no longer plague us.  
 He died most creditably, I’ll allow.  
 And, Sir, the secret of his victories?  
 By his unservicelike, familiar ways, Sir,  
 He made the whole Fleet love him’.  
 ‘Damn his eyes’.”<sup>37</sup>

Nelson’s flag-ship *Victory* took his body back to England where he was buried at St. Paul’s Cathedral on 6 January 1806. After that, Nelson’s *Victory* sailed on numerous expeditions, but her active sea career ended on 7 November 1812, when she was moored in Portsmouth Harbour where she remains until today as a museum-ship. Sign-flags flying over *Victory* still show Nelson’s famous order, given to his fleet at the beginning of the Battle of Trafalgar: “England expects that every man will do his duty.”

The glorious traditions of the British fleet were, however, evaluated differently by the sailors themselves. In a memoir of one English sailor and adventurer, Edward Coxer (1633-1694), written in somewhat earlier times, we can find the following confession: “I was always thinking that beggars had a far better life of it, and lived better than I did, for they seldom missed of their bellies full of better victuals than we could get; also at night to lie quiet and out of danger in a good barn full of straw, nobody disturbing them, and might lie as long as they pleased; but it was quite contrary with us, for we seldom in a month got our belly full of victuals, and that of such salt as many beggars would think scorn to eat; and at night when we went to take our rest, we were not to lie still above four

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



hours; and many times when it blew hard were not sure to lie one hour, yea, often we were called up before we had slept half an hour and forced to go up into the maintop, or foretop to take in our topsails, half awake and half-asleep, with one shoe on, and the other off, not having time to put it on; always sleeping in our clothes for readiness; and in stormy weather when the ship rolled and tumbled as though some great millstone was rolling up one hill, and down another, we had much ado to hold ourselves fast by the small ropes from falling by the board; and being gotten up into the tops, there we must haul and pull to make fast the sail, seeing nothing but air above us, and water beneath, and that so raging as though every wave would make a grave for us.”<sup>38</sup>

The constant problem of the British fleet was the lack of ordinary sailors. To provide the British fleet with the necessary crews, individuals were tricked into conscripting and deceitfully detained by the famous ‘Press-Gangs’. The ‘Press Gangs’ were groups of recruiting officers, who usually got an observed individual drunk in a tavern and then forced him to undersign a contract of service for several years. When such a candidate sobered up, he was already on the high seas.

After Trafalgar, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Fleet did not have too many deployments. Some far away wars, like the Crimean War (1853-1856), needed transportation by sea but not sea power itself and did not engage the fleet on a scale comparable to the conflict with Spain or Napoleonic France. But it was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Royal Navy was modernised by Admiral John Fisher and, as such, he played an important role in the great sea encounter with the German fleet.

Britain was then seriously threatened by German submarines. This threat was initiated by the sinking of the British passenger ship *Lusitania* in August 1915. *Lusitania* was a British ocean liner, and briefly the world’s biggest ship after *Titanic* had sunk in 1912. In 1915 *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat, with a heavy loss of over 1,000 lives. Soon, German submarines became a threat to the entire British system of providing by sea the provisions and imported food, goods and raw materials from her colonies which were necessary for conducting war and producing armaments. Walter Page, an ambassador for the USA in the UK, wrote to his President, Woodrow Wilson on 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1917: “The submarines have become a very grave danger. The loss of British and Allied tonnage increases

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted in: Ch. Lloyd, *William Dampier*, Faber and Faber, London 1966, pp. 17-18.

with the longer and brighter days – as I telegraphed you, 237.000 tons last week; and the worst of it is, the British are not destroying them. [...] If merely the present situation continues, the war will pretty soon become a contest of endurance under hunger with an increasing proportion of starvation. [...] It will be possible for Great Britain to suffer to the danger point next winter or earlier unless some decided change be wrought in this situation.”<sup>39</sup> The British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, in his *War Memoirs*, fully confirmed this dramatic situation, being “apprehensive that the War might be lost at sea before he had an opportunity of winning it on land.”<sup>40</sup>

The German threat on the high seas was finally overcome with the greatest difficulty and thanks to American assistance. Convoys from British colonies and the United States were armed and manned with sailors educated in watching submarines. Finally, Water Page could inform his President that “all our-trans-Atlantic ships are armed.”<sup>41</sup>

However, the German submarine threat appeared on a much wider scale during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. There was a very critical period in 1941-1942 when the Germans were sinking more ships than the British dockyards could replace. Sea transportation provided food resources for the entire country, which were only sufficient for 2-3 weeks! This crisis was overcome thanks to different factors, especially the adamant and unbending stance of Winston Churchill, American help in providing simplified and cheap transportation ships, but also thanks to some individual heroes of the so called ‘Battle of the Atlantic’. One of the most famous among them was Frederic John Walker (1896-1944). He became famous for his numerous inventions which helped in fighting German submarines. This included a special system of cooperation with aircraft, providing by radio precise information on the location of a particular submarine, which could be easily seen from the air even when deep under the water’s surface. After receiving this information, Walker’s ships could drop their deep-water bombs precisely into the water. The sinking of numerous German submarines was of vital importance then, because Britain, fighting bravely against Hitler’s forces, depended so much on war supplies from her colonies and the USA. These supplies were transported exclusively by sea in

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<sup>39</sup> W. Page, *Report for the US President*, May 4, 1917; quot. after: Lord Beaverbrook (W. M. Aitken, 1st Baron Beaverbrook), *Men and Power 1917-1918*, London, Collins 1956, p. 157.

<sup>40</sup> Quot. after Lord Beaverbrook, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

special convoys. German u-boats effectively prevented such supplies, and acting in so-called “wolf-herds” between 1940 and 1943, they torpedoed hundreds of British ships. Britain was seriously threatened and in one moment had supplies only sufficient enough for about two or three weeks of the war effort. This is why the work of Walker was so important.

How intensive this warfare was is illustrated by the fact that before the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1944, Walker died of exhaustion and did not witness the final success of his inventions. The outcome of the battle of the Atlantic was finally a hard victory for the British but it was achieved at an incredibly large cost: 3,500 merchant ships and 175 men’o war were sunk. At the same time, the Germans lost 783 of their U-boats.

Fighting German submarines in the Atlantic was not the only war effort of the British on the seas. On the open seas the British were able to sink several important German battleships, such as battle-cruiser *Scharnhorst* and ironclads *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*. Although a number of British battleships, like the battle cruiser *Hood*, were also destroyed and sunk, the British successfully prevented the wider activities of the Germans in the Atlantic ocean.

How difficult this warfare also was for regular surface ships safeguarding convoys is best illustrated by the famous novel of Nicholas Monsarrat (1910-1979) titled *The Cruel Sea* (1951). Monsarrat’s *Cruel Sea* is based on the author’s experiences as captain of a corvette and paints a matter-of-fact picture of ordinary sailors learning how to survive in the most difficult war conditions on the high seas, fighting an exhausting and merciless battle against both the elements and the ruthless Nazi Germans. This novel was the basis for a movie with the same title, directed by Charles Frend with the famous actor Jack Hawkins as captain Ericson, which was, in fact, a fictitious name for the real captain, i.e. Monsarrat himself.

There are a number of other impressive artistic pieces concerning British efforts during the sea battles of World War II. Special attention should be paid to the movie *In Which We Serve*, the fictionalized account of the destroyer HMS Kelly, sunk by German dive bombers on May 23, 1941 during the Battle of Crete. Kelly was commanded by a member of the Royal Family, Earl Louis Mountbatten (1900-1979).<sup>42</sup> The movie on the sinking of HMS Kelly was produced during the war in 1942 and was financially as-

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<sup>42</sup> Earl Louis Mountbatten was from 1943 Supreme Allied Commander of the South Asian British forces and nominated full admiral. In 1979 he was killed by IRA terrorists in a bombing attack led by Thomas Macmahon.

sisted by the British Ministry of Information as a propaganda film. But its artistic and moral values much exceeded its propaganda purposes. The film was directed by a friend of Mountbatten, Noël Coward, who composed the musical score of the movie and played the main role of *H.M.S. Kelly's* captain. The movie also starred famous actors such as Richard Attenborough (later a famous film director himself), Bernard Miles, John Mills and Celia Johnson. The film also included some original recordings of Mountbatten's war speeches. Apart from the thrilling scenes of war on the high seas, there are also scenes showing the character of ordinary people, who through their composed persistence and calm courage created the special atmosphere of the "Finest Hour" of British history, as Winston Churchill once named that time. Jeremy Paxman commented on it in his book *The English*:

"As the survivors of the destroyer [...] lie in their life-raft they recall the ship's history. What they are really calling-up is a picture of the strength of England. The captain and the ratings may be divided by their accents, but they share the same essential beliefs about what their country represents. It is an ordered, hierarchical sort of place in which the war is an inconvenience to be put up with, like rain at a village fête. It is a chaste, self-denying country in which women know their place and children go dutifully and quietly to bed when told. 'Don't make a fuss', say the wives to one another during an air raid, 'we'll have a cup of tea in a minute.' [...] It shows how the English liked to think of themselves. The picture that emerges from this and many similar movies is of a stoical, homely, quiet, disciplined, self-denying, kindly, honourable and dignified people who would infinitely rather be rendering their gardens than defending the world against a fascist tyranny."<sup>43</sup>

The sea has played such an important role in British cultural history that such books and movies should be included in British Studies academic teaching programmes, especially English literature. We, the Poles, also have a similar masterpiece of literature, although it has never been screened. It is Arkady Fiedler's *Thank you Captain (Dziękuję ci kapitanie)*, describing the contribution of Polish ships and crews to the British war effort during the Battle for the Atlantic 1940-1945. Here we find numerous descriptions of heroism and tragic moments experienced on the high seas by commanders and ordinary sailors when floating with convoys. Here is one of such descriptions:

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<sup>43</sup> J. Paxman, *The English*, Michael Joseph, London 1998, pp. 2-3.

“About two hours after sunset, the eyes of the men on watch were suddenly turned in one direction to the left side of the rear of the convoy. A tanker had been sailing there. Now, a column of smoke was shooting up, and a streak of fire was cutting the sky. It rose to some three or four hundred yards, as broad as the tanker. The cargo of petrol had blown up.

The sea was lit up. The black-out had lost its meaning. All the ships of the convoy loomed out of the darkness as if unveiled, and stood out in the brightness-luminous targets outlined against a black background. But this lasted only a moment. The fire disappeared quite suddenly. It left behind it only a plume of smoke, spreading out at the top, until it resembled an enormous black mushroom. The tanker had been cut in two. The bow went down at once; the poop continued to float on the surface and burn with a slow even flame. Black silhouettes could be seen emerging and jumping into the sea. From the distance, they resembled tiny worms. Before a tragedy men very often feel and look like worms.

The sailors in the ships realised only later that a powerful explosion had rent the air. They had not noticed it at first: the sight of the fire was overpowering, taking their attention completely. [...] It was not an attack by any enemy raider – but by submarine. The sounds of explosions which had been heard came from depth-charges, dropped by the escorting ships. The escort also fired flares. They were intended to discover the enemy in the event of his coming to the surface, or to force him to remain submerged. Without warning a new column of fire appeared, this time on the right side of the convoy. A second tanker had been blown up. There was little doubt that more U-boats were operating in the vicinity. Escape was the only means of saving the convoy, the only duty paramount. The minds and the hearts of two and a half thousand sailors had one desire – to get away. Despite this there was no commotion. The convoy continued to sail in good order and to manoeuvre skilfully: the ships still kept their positions. The insufficient escort, bustling furiously about, redoubled its efforts and continued to drop depth charges and to fire flares. [...] ‘Bright as Broadway’ joked one of the crew [...] The night was long and depressing. The enemy was strong in numbers and stubborn. He attacked the convoy almost hourly and sank ships. The devilish torpedoes came stealthily, from nowhere. No one saw their start and no one knew whose turn would be next. How true the comparison of a convoy to a herd of cattle proved to be. That night the convoy was a herd of helpless sheep and this is what humiliated the sailors most: they were almost defenceless. [...] During the

second half of the night everyone realised that the defence was weakening and the escort short of depth charges: their explosions were becoming ever less frequent. The enemy did not relax. Men were praying silently for the ordeal to cease; to be allowed to breathe freely again. The convoy, not losing the herd instinct, continued to keep in formation and as escaping in good order. At about four in the morning yet another ship was torpedoed and as she went down an unusual thing happened: something went wrong with the siren, and it continued to sound as if giving a signal of danger to the rest of the convoy. The siren did not stop, and there was an infectious hysteria in this shrill noise. The men felt it getting on their nerves. They could hardly bear to stand there and watch the plight of the wounded ship. The call of despair jarred their ears and shook them as violently as, earlier in the night, the meek silence of the other sinking ship had done. Then day began to dawn in the east and the quietness came together with the new day. The explosions of torpedoes and all other nightmares ceased.”<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the war was over, “so their battle ended, and so, all over the Atlantic, the fighting died – a strangely tame finish, after five and a half years of bitter struggle. [...] It would live in history, because of its length and its unremitting ferocity: it would live in men’s minds for what it did to themselves and to their friends, and to the ships they often loved. Above all, it would live in naval tradition, and become legend, because of its crucial service to an island at war, its price in sailors’ lives, and its golden prize – the uncut lifeline to the sustaining outer world.”<sup>45</sup>

It really was a time of not only British but also Polish maritime glory, the time of the heroic story of the submarine *Orzeł* (*Eagle*) and the destroyers *Grom* (*Thunder*), *Błyskawica* (*Lightning*) and *Burza* (*Tempest*), during World War II. It was a Polish destroyer *Piorun* which, chased and found *Bismarck* first, long before British battleships, and initiated artillery contacts with the Germans. Fiedler is, by the way, also the author of the book titled *Squadron 303*, about the contribution of Polish pilots to the *Battle of Britain*, fighting bravely in the air against the German Luftwaffe, also during World War II.

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<sup>44</sup> A. Fiedler, *Thank You Captain, Thank You*, transl. from Polish original *Dziękuję ci kapitanie*, by C. Wieniewska, Max Love Publishing, London 1945, passim pp. 10-13. I would like to express my deep thanks to the son of Arkady Fiedler, Marek Fiedler, of the Fiedler’s Museum in Puszczykowo, for providing me with the quoted above official English translation of *Dziękuję ci kapitanie*, published immediately after World War II.

<sup>45</sup> N. Monsarrat, *The Cruel Sea*, Alfred Knopf, New York 1951, pp. 505-506.

Unfortunately, during the Victory Parade in London just after World War II, the British did not allow Polish pilots or other Polish forces, including sailors, to participate. Why? The answer is rather simple. The British government recognized the Polish Communist government in Warsaw immediately after World War II and withdrew recognition for the Polish government-in-exile in London. Meanwhile, Polish forces in Great Britain remained faithful to the Polish government in London, not Warsaw. The British did not want to irritate either Warsaw or Moscow by allowing Polish soldiers to participate officially as a military representation of the London Government. Recently, the Polish group *Elektryczne Gitary* commented on this issue in their song titled *Dywizjon 303 (Squadron 303)*. The song is about the most famous Polish air group, fighting bravely during the Battle of Britain. Their average for shooting down German airplanes was 12 per head during the Battle of Britain, while in the British squadrons the same average was 8. Despite this, they were ignored during the Victory Parade in 1946 in London. Although the song is about pilots, not sailors, it reflects the spirit of all Polish forces fighting on the British side:

“It is June forty six, Pall Mall in London  
 Weather as usual English, the sky covered with grey clouds  
 We’ve been waiting since the morning, flags are in all colours  
 At last the war is finished, the King and the Queen have arrived.  
 The murmur of military cars with the white star is heard  
 Certainly our men will appear soon rounding the corner  
 Now the French soldiers go, they are laughing and puff out their chests  
 But we are waiting for our men, certainly they will be here in a moment.  
 There was much talk about them when London was covered by bombing smoke  
 They shot down the most Jerries – Squadron 303 [...]  
 The Czechs, the Dutch and the Belgians  
 The military band plays aloud,  
 The Sikhs are marching in their turbans, Euphoria is seen around

We are standing at the verge of the street among dust, cries and flags  
 The Queen waves her hand distinctly, but there are none our men.  
 There were no soldiers in white-red, and it is not the fault of anybody  
 The English are gentlemen, they did not want to irritate Stalin.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Original Polish text of the quoted fragment: Jest czerwiec czterdziesty szósty, londyńska aleja Moll/ Pogoda jak zwykle angielska, niebo stalowe od chmur/ Czekamy w tłumie od rana, są flagi we wszystkich kolorach/ Nareszcie koniec tej wojny, przybyli

The most recent and probably the last important event, in the sense of the old maritime tradition, was the British expedition and war for the Falkland Islands known in Spanish as the Guerra de las Malvinas. It was a short-lived war which happened in 1982. On Friday 2, 1982, the Argentinians invaded the Falkland Islands and attempted to establish their sovereignty over that territory, something which they had been demanding for a long time. Just three days later, the British Government decided to send a naval task force, which after just seventy four days reconquered the Falklands. This miniature war reminded the British of the long tradition of their navy, although in comparison with the legendary heritage of Trafalgar and the Battle for the Atlantic during World War II, it does not seem as glorious.

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król i królowa/Słysząc już pomruk wozów z białą gwiazdą w kole/Pewnie niedługo nasi się tam za zza zakrętu wyłonią; Teraz idą Francuzi, śmieją się prężą pierś/Ale my czekamy na naszych, zaraz tu będą też!/Ciagle się o nich mówiło, gdy Londyn spowijał dym/Najwięcej szkopów trafili - Dywizjon 303. [...] /Stoimy na skraju ulicy, wśród kurzu, krzyków i flag/Dostojnie macha królowa, i tylko naszych brak/Czesi, Holendrzy, Belgowie – przygrywa orkiestra wojskowa/W turbanach idą Sikhowie, euforia dookoła. [...] /Nie było biało-czerwonych, to chyba niczyja wina/Anglicy to dżentelmeni, nie chcieli drażnić Stalina. For original sound of the tune see: <<https://www.google.pl/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=celektryczne%20gitary%20dywizjon%20303>>



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## Chapter Thirteen

# THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION, PASTIMES AND LANGUAGE

In 1801 Joseph Strutt (1749-1802), a pioneer of English ethnography and history of sport, wrote in his famous book titled *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*:

“In order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them. War, policy, and other contingent circumstances, may effectually place men, at different times, in different points of view, but when we follow them into their retirements, where no disguise is necessary, we are most likely to see them in their true state, and may best judge their natural dispositions.”<sup>1</sup>

Strutt was, and indirectly still is, responsible for shaping English sporting consciousness to the same degree that Richard Hakluyt was responsible in the 16<sup>th</sup> century for building the English maritime consciousness. Their respective fields of activities are different but both of them created very important segments of English, and consequently of British civilization. Many other factors were added to establish British awareness of sport as an important social and cultural area. One of them was the unusual historical context of sport's development and also of its etymology. It is not unimportant that the name of sport was coined in England. Although it was ancient Greece where the cultural character of European sport was coined, including basic sports terminology (*gymnastics* < *gymnastikes*; *athletics* < *athletikos*, etc.), the appellation “sport” was unknown to the Greeks. It was during the Middle Ages that the English language started to play a role and exert influences similar to those of the ancient Greek language. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries a number of terms, so crucial to modern terms, such as: *sport*, *football* and *fair play* were conceived, to be introduced much later into universal worldwide use.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, White and Co., et al., London 1810 (1801), *Introduction*, p. I (a).

As a matter of fact, before the term *sport* appeared in the Middle English language, its initial, primordial form was coined somewhere else, i.e. in the towns of the declining Roman Empire. The Roman legions were no longer able to provide effective defense of the imperial territory against the cohorts of Vandals, Huns and Visigoths. Until then, Roman towns had not required many strongly fortified installations, outposts or ramparts. Now, threatened by barbarians from all sides, Roman townsfolk started to build strong walls and bastions which in turn limited the internal space for *ludi* – people’s games. This is why the *ludi* were forced out of the town gates, of course to be played only when the towns were not threatened by hostile sieges. This produced a Latin expression which was not preserved in its original form due to the fact that folk games were usually not of interest to the writers of the official chronicles and literary masterpieces of the time. The expression, however, most probably had the shape of “disporto” or “disportae.” It was composed of two elements: “dis” meaning transfer of the game from one point to another, and “porta” meaning gate. So the word meant a game arranged and transferred out of the gate. Soon, most of the Roman provinces affected by the collapse of the Empire lost direct contact with the imperial capital and started to develop local Romance languages which in the course of time became the bases for their national languages. These languages preserved the name of “out of the gate” games, phonetically modified in post-imperial Latin and the resulting Romance languages. Thus, it became in Spanish *deporte*, in Catalan *deport*, in Portuguese *desporto* or *esporte*, in Provençal *despourta*, in Italian *diporto*, and in French – *desporte*. In 1066 Duke Guillaume of Normandy conquered England and as William the Conqueror introduced the French language to the subdued country. The French *disporte*, together with numerous other French loans entered England and substantially influenced the English language. In the course of time *disporte*, due to the so-called process of *aphetisation* lost the initial “de,” leaving the rest of the word as “sporte.” In this form the term appears approximately at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the English translation of Hugh de Rotelande’s poem titled *Ipomedon*. In one episode of *Ipomedon*, a group of courtiers quarreled during a game of bowls or early form of billiards and called upon the King to come and resolve their dispute. In a Middle English manuscript of *Ipomedon* written about 1420, the following stanza can be found:

“Whan they had take hyr *sporte* in halle  
The Kynge to counselle gan hyr calle.”<sup>2</sup>

which translates into modern English as:

“When they had taken their *sporte* in the hall  
The King for counseling them was called.”

Soon, due to the loss of the weakly stressed word ending, the vowel “e,” *sporte* became the contemporary *sport*. As such, it became very popular in English, describing any physical pastime or competitive activity. In this sense, it is used in William Shakespeare’s plays as frequently as 124 times. However, the French *disporte* produced simultaneously the English *disport*, which is still used nowadays to mean a wider type of pastime or pleasure.

From England, sport was then transferred to France. It was used for the first time in 1776 when Duke Luis de Lauragais returned to France from England and reported in his memoirs that he had learned there the “sport of horse racing.” In the German language, *sport* appeared for the first time in the memoirs of Herman Pückler von Muskau, titled *Fürst Pückler Reist nach England* (1824). He uses the word in the context of betting attracting as much as a 10,000 total sum, considered by him as deceitful, and concerning a “famous boxing match” between “a Yankee and John Bull” (although he gives no names for them): “Diese Betrügereien bei allen Arten von Sport sind so gang und gäbe in England”<sup>3</sup> which means approximately in English: “These frauds resulting from sport are so commonly accepted in England.”

In Poland it was first used in 1856 in the comedy *Horse Racing in Warsaw* (*Wyścigi konne w Warszawie*) by Konstanty Gaszyński.

“Mamy wyścigi konne,  
Sport wzmaga się wszędzie.”<sup>4</sup>  
We have horse racing at last, Sport is spread all around.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quot. after: *Sport*, an entry in *New English Dictionary*, vol. 9, W. A. Craigie, H. Bradley eds., Oxford University Press, Oxford 1919, p. 665.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Fürst Pückler Reist nach England*, Hans von Hugo Verlag, Berlin 1824, p. 426.

<sup>4</sup> K. Gaszyński, *Wyścigi konne w Warszawie*, Księgarnia Polska L. K. Bartoszewicza, Lwów 1857, p. 5, my own translation –WL.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The etymology of the medieval noun *football* is even more interesting. The original English appellation consists of two parts: *foot* and *ball*, which can seemingly render its etymological interpretation as rather simple and straightforward: a ball kicked with a foot. However, this is the case with most modern games, like association football and its historical predecessors played in English public schools, e.g. Eton field games, Winchester College Football or Harrow Football. In the names of many other historic English “footballs,” the element *foot* – seems rather illogical, because a number of medieval sources show that traditional ball games, which ultimately gave rise to *football*, consisted mostly of carrying the ball, with only occasional kicking involved if any. Such is the character of traditional English football games, continued in some towns even today with an unlimited number of players. For instance, in the traditional *Shrove Tuesday Football*, the two opposing teams numbering hundreds of players each try to carry and pass the ball from one city gate to another. Kicking the ball among such big crowds in the narrow streets of medieval towns was simply impossible. Moreover, a great number of ball games created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which playing with both hands and feet was allowed, adopted the name football almost automatically, e.g. *Rugby Football*. This also pertains to *American Football*, *Australian Rules Football*, *Gaelic Football*, *Canadian Football* etc. In the famous extreme sports game of *Ski Football*, invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the ball is passed between skiers during a downhill run, kicking the ball is technically impossible because feet are attached to skis and thus only players’ hands are used. The question is then, why do so many names of these games use the element *foot-* instead of, let’s say, *fist-*, *palm-*, *hand-* etc.

This inconsistency can be explained by the use of the old measure of *foot* in England. It seems obvious that in its earliest semantic layer, *foot-ball* could have originally signified not a ball kicked with the feet but a *foot-size ball*! Until the first imports of natural rubber from Central America in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and then the inventing by Charles Good-year of vulcanization in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most playing balls had been made of either wood shavings, packed hay or wool covered with leather with a cartilage or fishbone core or calf’s gristle (copula) to ensure the proper resilience of the ball, i.e. its capacity to rebound. These balls were very hard, resembling the present-day medicine ball. As late as in 1721, a short poem concerning a match in Gaelic Football between Lusk and Swords describes the ball:

“View well this ball, the present of your lords  
To outward view, three folds of bullock’s hide,  
With leather thongs bond fast on every side  
A mass of finest hay conceal from sight.”<sup>6</sup>

“A mass of finest hay” certainly heavily packed and dense, could not have created a ball which was easy to kick.

Many of the early legal documents prohibiting the playing of football, while written in Latin, describe the banned ball as *pila pedalis* (*foot-size ball*) probably to denote the large, foot-size balls used in crowded team games as opposed to some sports with small balls played individually, e.g. *Royal Tennis* also known as *Court Tennis* modelled on the French *jeu de la paume*. Such a supposition is strengthened by the usage of the Latin passive participle *pedalis* explicitly signifying an attribute or an object of *foot shape* or *foot size*. A ball moved and played with a foot would have taken the Latin participle *pedarius*; however, no medieval sources mention such a name.

Bans on ball playing were proclaimed to the public by heralds or priests from the pulpit. Such public proclamations, written in Latin in chancelleries, had to be translated into the vernacular, for instance, and in fact we can easily find in a number of written sources of the Medieval and Renaissance epochs examples such as *fbootebale*, *fotebal*, *foteballe*, *fotebale*, *footte ball*, *foutbaule*, *fut ball*, *fute ball* or *futballe*, *footballe* and many other different variants in Middle English, later giving rise to modern *football*. Such a translated version appears in a royal edict of Henry VI from 1428 written in English: “The king forbiddes bat na man play at be fut ball under the payne off.”<sup>7</sup>

After the English ball games gained popularity in continental Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term *football* entered the majority of European languages. In Germanic languages the adaptation of the new compound was facilitated by similarities in the pronunciation of the stems *foot* and *ball*, resulting in German *Fußball*, Danish *fodbol*, Dutch *voetbal* and Swedish *fotbol*. In Romance languages, the English original was generally modified following the rules of pronunciation stemming from Latin.

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<sup>6</sup> F. Menke, *The Encyclopedia of Sports*, A. A. Barnes & Company – Cranbury N. J. and Thomas Yoseloff-London 1969, p. 449.

<sup>7</sup> *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. F-G, H. Bradley, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford 1901, entry *Football*.

Thus, the name was adopted in French as *football*, in Spanish as *futbol*, and in Romanian as *foţbal*. On the other hand, in Italy, which boasted a strong tradition of local ball games, the former Italian name of *giocco di calcio*, or *calcio* in short, was kept, despite the simultaneous adoption of the English term. In Hungary, the native form *labdarúgas* is still used. In Poland the name *football* appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and denoted the same type of games as in England. In western and southern Poland the term *fusbal* was used, through German *Fussball*, which finally gave rise to modern *futbol*. The Slavic languages have generally adopted the English term, with slight spelling modifications, e.g. *futbol* in Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian or *futbal* in Serbo-Croatian. The term commonly used for football in present-day Polish, however, *piłka nożna* (literally “leg-ball”), appeared first as an inaccurate calque from English between 1900 and 1914.

Another linguistic contribution of English, associated now with sport but earlier with chivalric culture, is *fair play*. This resulted from the old chivalric ideals which first permeated the English nobility, but according to the later pace of democracy also became accepted by the middle classes and finally by the working class. “In these two words are summed up all that English education and ethics hold most dear.”<sup>8</sup> Historically, it was used occasionally in the Middle English poem *The Siege of Jerusalem* as “faire play” describing one episode of the Romano-Jewish War in the 1st century A.D.

“Thei token her leve and went her way  
He thankede hem of here faire play.”<sup>9</sup>

which in modern English means:

“They took their leave and went their way  
He thanked them of their fair play.”

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<sup>8</sup> R. McKibbin, *Deference and Democracy*, “Times –Higher Education Supplement,” February 15, 1982, p. 13; quot. after R. Holt, *Sport and The British*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1989, p. 268.

<sup>9</sup> *The Siege of Jerusalem*, v. 2132. Nine copies *The Siege of Jerusalem* have survived today, but none includes the expression faire play. I used a manuscript from the British Library (MS Additional 36523), also published in: J. A. Herbert, ed. *Titus & Vespasian or The Destruction of Jerusalem in Rhymed Couplets*, London and Oxford MSS, Roxburgh Club, London 1905, v. 2132. The use of the term fair play in this version was identified thanks to Professor Piotr Gąsiorowski from the Faculty of English of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude.

During the next couple of centuries, fair play gradually gained more and more significance and soon became one of the most crucial moral expressions in defining the moral character of sport in both English and other European languages. For a long time, however, it was used rather in a chivalric context, describing moral behaviour, especially in war circumstances. For the first time in a purely sporting context it was probably used by Sir Francis Knollys in his report for the English Queen Elizabeth I (1568). He reported to Elizabeth events at the court of Mary Stuart the Queen of the Scots, where he was delegated. Among many other things, Knollys described the pastimes of Queen Mary's courtiers:

“Twenty of her retinue played at football before her two hours very strongly, nimbly and skilfully [...] Their *fairer play* was owing to the smalness of theyr balle.”<sup>10</sup>

But why “fairer play was owing to the smalness of theyr balle”? The answer is simple. Great balls were used by city crowds for plebeian, rowdy games where respecting fair play was rather difficult. Meanwhile, smaller balls, used among courtiers, were characterised by “fairer play,” especially when played for the Queen or royal delegate.

But it was William Shakespeare who secured for the term fair play great cultural prestige by using it in his two dramas: *The Tempest* and *The Life and Death of King John*. In *The Tempest* fair play appears once in scene I of act 5 verse 194, in the dialogue of Miranda and Ferdinand when they are playing chess:

*Miranda*: “Sweet lord, you play me false.”

*Ferdinand*: “No my dearest love, I would not for the world.”

*Miranda*: “Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle, and I would call it f a i r p l a y.”<sup>11</sup>

In *The Life and Death of King John*, fair play appears twice: once in noun form and once as an adjectival modifier. The first usage is in act V scene 1, when Philip the Bastard evaluates and speaks ironically about the

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<sup>10</sup> Quot. after: S. Inglis, *A Load of Old Balls*, English Heritage Publications, London 2005, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in: *The Yale Shakespeare*, ed. by W. L. Cross & T. Brooke, Barnes and Noble, New York 2005, p. 1427; emphasizing mine – WL.



“happy peace” agreed between King John Lackland and the papal envoy during the English-French war:

“... o inglorious league!  
 Shall we upon the footing of our land,  
 Send f a i r p l a y orders and make compromise,  
 Insinuation, parley and base truce,  
 To arms invasive ? ...”<sup>12</sup>

In scene II of *King John*, the phrase appears again when Philip the Bastard arrives in the military camp of the Dauphin and declares:

“According to the f a i r p l a y of the world  
 Let me have audience.”<sup>13</sup>

Later, the term was made popular by Walter Scott in his novel *Redgaunlet* (1824) from the *Waverley* series. It is here that in a tavern one of the minor heroes, Peter Peeble, when drunk tries to drink one more glass of brandy, but his hand is stopped by his friend, who says: “No, no friend, fair play’s a jewel – time about, if you please.”<sup>14</sup> In different contexts fair play was later used in Benjamin Disraeli’s novel *Coningsby* published in 1844<sup>15</sup> and in *Unknown to History* (1883) by the Victorian novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge.<sup>16</sup>

Most of these literary usages of fair play could be met in highly artistic literature where they reflected its former chivalric or later high culture

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<sup>12</sup> W. Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John*, w: *The Yale Shakespeare*, op. cit., p. 676, emphasizing mine-WL.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 667, emphasizing mine-WL.

<sup>14</sup> W. Scott, *Redgaunlet*, chapter XX: *Narrative of Darcie Latimer, continued*, Macmillan, London 1901, p. 555.

<sup>15</sup> B. Disraeli, *Coningsby*, part. IV, chapter V; quoted after <http://www.globalgrey.co.uk/coningsby> : “Lord Monmouth was one of the most finished gentlemen that ever lived [...] there was rarely a cloud of caprice or ill-temper to prevent his fine manners having their fair-play.”

<sup>16</sup> Ch. M. Yonge, *Unknown to History*, London 1882, chapt. XXXVI, *A Venture*, quot after: *The Project Gutenberg Ebook*: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4596/pg4596.txt>, or another on line text: [https://community.dur.ac.uk/c.e.schultze/works/unknown\\_to\\_history.html](https://community.dur.ac.uk/c.e.schultze/works/unknown_to_history.html): “Lord Burghley considered this hesitation to be the effect of judicial blindness – so utterly had hatred and fear of the future shut his eyes to all sense of justice and fair play.”

meaning. An interesting question is how and when did this term leave its early literary usage and enter day-to-day sporting reality? Thus, it seems essential to find its first plebeian usage. We do not know at what moment it happened. What we know for sure is that it was used in such “lower” meaning in two 19<sup>th</sup>-century folk sporting ballads. One of them concerns a foot race between a certain Richard Hornby, alias Long Dick, and George Eastham, alias the Flying Clogger. It took place in 1845 near Preston in Lancashire and was run over a distance of 200 yards. According to the account of the race from a local newspaper: “A little before four o’clock the assemblage had increased to at least 3,000 persons, a goodly number of whom had perched themselves in the trees by the wayside, while others had mounted wagons and carts at a penny each in order to better observe the race.”<sup>17</sup> As one contemporary witness of the event wrote: “the course was dully cleared and measured and the judge positioned at the winning posts. The runners were heavily backed by their supporters and they were racing one another for a purse of 25 pounds a side. The two men, both extremely fit, got away to a flying start after several false starts. For the majority of the race they remained neck and neck but during the last few yards the Flying Clogger pulled away from Eastham to win by three yards in a time of 21 ½ seconds.”<sup>18</sup> The first fragment of the ballad containing the expression *fair play* concerns betting before the running competition:

“Come all you sporting lively lads wherever you may be,  
Who take delight in foot racing come listen unto me:  
Concerning the two champions who ran at the five-barred gate  
The prize of a fine and twenty pounds a very handsome stake.  
We’ll drink success to Clogger that man of courage bold  
Who won the prize at the five-barred gate  
And bore away the gold [...]  
The flower of Lancashire was there a man of high renown  
To cheer yer spirits up me lads and let the bets go down,  
And up sprang Jerry Jim and unto them did say  
That every penny that you have and let us see f a i r p l a y.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Quot. after the back cover of the vinyl LP record titled *English Sporting Ballads*, Broadside Records, No. Bro 128, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The above text titled *The Great Foot Race* was transcribed from a vinyl record titled *English Sporting Ballads*, performed with 11 other songs by Martin Wyndham-Reed (Broadside Records, No. Bro 128, 1977). In the printed form it includes some alterations to the text and it lacks the first stanza in: *The Rigs of the Fair. Popular Sports and Pas-*

The second usage is more directly associated with the oncoming running:

“The Clogger’s speed was very swift, his courage stout and good  
 And for to run his rival, at the starting place he stood;  
 Then take up and spoke bold Richard, and unto him did say:  
 ‘You needn’t boast, young Eastham, you’re sure to lose the day.  
 But George he only laughed at him, and Jerry Jim did say:  
 ‘Come clear the ground, they’re going to start,  
 So let us have f a i r p l a y.’”<sup>20</sup>

*Fair play* can also be found in another ballad from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, concerning cock-fighting, titled *The Charcoal Black and Bonny Grey*. Its oldest version was contained in a broadside printed by John Harkness of Preston, currently in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The term *fair play* appears there twice:

“The Owdham lads stood shoutin’ around,  
 ‘I’ll lay thee a quid to ‘alf a crown,  
 If our black cock ‘e gets f a i r p l a y,  
 ‘E’ll mek mince-meat out o’ thy Bonny Grey” [...]

“And when the clock struck one, two, three,  
 The Grey struck the Black upon the thigh,  
 They picked him up to see f a i r p l a y,  
 But the Black would not fight with the Bonny Grey.”<sup>21</sup>

In the countries of continental Europe, *fair play* appeared comparatively late. The restorer of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, despite to a substantial degree following the sporting experience of the English in his initiative, suggested for a long time another expression “l’esprit de chevalresque” – “chivalric spirit.” Crucial for international circulation and acceptance of the term was the publication in Germany of the widely commented upon book of Rudolf Kircher titled *Fairplay, Sport, Spiel und Geist in England (Fair Play, Sport, Game and Spirit in England, Frank-*

*times in the Nineteenth Century through Songs, Ballads and Contemporary Accounts*, selected and edited by R. Palmer and J. Raven, The Macmillan Company, Cambridge – London-New York-Melbourne 1976, pp. 48-49; emphasis in quotations mine – WL.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis in quotation mine-WL.

<sup>21</sup> Holbeck Moor Cockfight, in: *Traditional Tunes*, ed. F. Kidson; according to an Internet site *Folk Leads Online. Songs, Stories, Customs, Tunes and Instruments*; emphasis in quotation mine – WL

furt 1927). It contributed much to the absorption of the term by different European languages, including French, Italian, Polish, etc. Kircher's book praising the British ethics of sport even found some positive comments among British authors and sports enthusiasts.<sup>22</sup> From that moment on, *fair play* became an international term, used for instance by different national and international committees of fair play. The most important seems to be the International Fair Play Committee (in French Comité International pour le Fair Play, CIFP) established in 1963 by members of UNESCO, the International Sports Press Association and several sports federations. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering sportsmanship on an international scale. It annually confers different awards and distinctions, among which the most prestigious is the Pierre de Coubertin World Fair Play Trophy.

#### *THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL BEGINNINGS OF BRITISH SPORT*

Long before the English started to develop their concept of pastimes, in the territory of the British Isles which were not conquered by the Romans, there were games staged by the Celtic peoples. These games had a splendor not much lower than the Greek Olympics. The biggest among the Celtic Games were the Tailtean Games, held in honour of Tailtiu (or Tailte), the Celtic Queen and goddess of the Earth. *Encyclopedia Britannica* dates these games to the year 1829 B.C.<sup>23</sup> According to a historian of Celtic sport, Sean Egan, these games "consisted of athletic, gymnastic and equestrian contests of various kinds, and included running, long-jumping, high-jumping, hurling, quoit throwing, spear casting, spear or pole vaulting, sword and shields contests, wrestling, boxing, swimming, horse racing, chariot racing, sling contests and bow and arrow exhibitions. In addition, there were literary, musical, oratorical and story-telling competitions; singing and dancing competitions."<sup>24</sup> But a much more interesting thing is how the Tailteann Games contributed to the development of later modern sport: they provided numerous events, such as hammer throwing, pole vaulting, and later also hurdles and what we call today sports ethics.

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<sup>22</sup> See: P. McBride, *Philosophy of Sport*, Heath Cranton, London 1932, chapter: *British Attitude towards Sport*, pp. 35-49.

<sup>23</sup> H. A. Richardson, *Tailtean Games*, in: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. IX, 1974, p. 773.

<sup>24</sup> S. J. Egan, *Celts and Their Games and Pastimes*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston-Queenstone-Lampeter 2002, pp. 30-31.

Egan explains that: “The function of the games was first to honour the illustrious dead; secondly to promote laws and thirdly to entertain the people. [...] There were prescribed by-laws for the games. [...] All feuds, fights, quarrels and such disturbances were strictly forbidden. It was a fair without sin, fraud, insult, theft, contention or rude hostility. A universal truce was proclaimed in the High King’s name, and ‘woe betide the man who broke it.’”<sup>25</sup> Among the Celtic peoples, the principles of ethical behavior during the games were also maintained quite strictly. It was in Celtic culture that we can observe the development of individual chivalric ethics which later, thanks to the great cycles of Celtic literature, especially Arthurian romances, would enter English and European principles of behavior. Celtic principles like *fir fer* – meaning fair and noble behavior, as expressed first in the national epic of Ireland *Tain bó cuailnge* – certainly had obvious though elusive influence.<sup>26</sup>

When the Anglo-Saxons arrived, they brought with them their pastimes. They were not even interrupted by Church regulations, frequently prohibiting pagan games. In Bede’s *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (*Historia Ecclesiastica Genti Anglorum*), we find some descriptions of games popular among the children and youth. According to Bede, young St. Cuthbert was excellent in physical exercises of different kinds: “he gave his mind to such plays and enjoyments alone as boys delighted in, so that it might be testified of him [...] He took delight [...] in mirth and clamour; and, as was natural at his age, rejoiced to attach himself to the company of other boys, and to share in their sports: and because he was agile by nature, and of quick mind, he often prevailed over them in their boyish contests, and frequently, when the rest was tired, he alone would hold out, and look triumphantly around to see if any remained to contend with him for victory. For in jumping, running, wrestling, or any other bodily exercise, he boasted that he could surpass all those who were of the same age, and even some that were older than himself.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> W. Lipoński, *The Celtic Origins of Fair Play*, “Coaching News,” Dublin 1993, vol. 3, nr 1, pp. 3-5; W. Lipoński, *From Filotimi to Fair Play and Sportsmanship: Some Remarks on the History of Sports Ethics*, in: *Fair Play in Sport and Olimpism (!) – Opportunity or Utopia*, Z. Żukowska, R. Żukowski, eds., Warszawa 2010, pp. 14-31.

<sup>27</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, transl. Vida de Scudder, New York (no year given), pp. 288-289; original Latin version: Baedae, *Historia*

Pagan remnants of Old English pastimes and exercises were best preserved in *wakes*, continued in many places through the Middle Ages up to now. A *Wake* in English tradition was and still is a ceremony associated with human death. The English word “wake” originated from the ancient Indo-European root “wog” or “weg,” meaning “to be active.” This evolved into several meanings, including “watching” or “guarding.” Thus, this last meaning also evolved into the word “watch,” and it is in this sense that people have a “wake” for someone who has died. Thus, initially wakes were religious night watches, or services, when on the eve of a particular selected day all people expected their ancestors to come back to earth. During such night watches, they usually gathered together to remember their forefathers and their deeds. Such a vigil was associated with food and drinks, and also different recreations, including physical competitions, were added in the course of time.

It was in England during Christian times that they were absorbed by the Church. Celebrations associated with wakes lasted up to several days, sometimes even whole weeks. Under the influences of the Christian Church, wakes’ weeks were celebrated also in order to honour the saint to whom the local church was dedicated. Thus, also in English tradition wakes became a kind of secular religious holiday which was associated with eating, drinking, dancing and finally sport. This stems from the great Indo-European tradition of waking for forefathers’ souls arriving back on earth after their death. From the same tradition stems the Celtic *Samhuin* (also *Samhain*), also called *Halloween* in English, as well as the Polish ceremony of *Dziady* (*Waiting for Forefathers*). All these feasts were organized on different days; in Celtic tradition on October 31st. And their primordial purpose was to honour ancestors with gay celebrations of different kinds including heavy drinking of *ale* and *whisky*, dancing, singing and different physical and competitive exercises. They eventually attracted undesirable elements of entertainment and were also used to make money. However, the original *Wakes* date back to the pagan times of European culture. The *Wakes* were held in the churchyard, later on also in other public places, and they gradually degenerated, until, in the words of one 18<sup>th</sup> century writer, pastor Samuel Bourne “the pepul fell to lecherie

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*Eclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. Alfred Holder, Freiburg-Tübingen 1882, pp. 444; see also numerous fragments devoted to Old English games in: J. M. Carter, *Medieval Games. Sports and Recreations in Feudal Society*, Greenwood Press, New York-Westport, Connecticut-London 1992.

(sexual activities), and songs, and daunces, with harping and piping and also to glotony, and sinne, and so tourned holyness to cursydeness.”<sup>28</sup> In England, wakes were usually held in the non-festive part of the year between Trinity Sunday (just after the Pentecost) and Advent. On Wake Sunday and Monday rich householders kept “open houses,” when a special wake brew and wake food was prepared. But the main business was carried on in the market place or church yard and it was a time when the cares of the real world were left behind. In spite of the corruption of the later wakes they became morale boosters, regenerating tired bodies and minds in preparation for a further year of labour. Henry VIII attempted to suppress the more disturbing wake practices in 1536, and in Elizabeth’s reign a High Commission issued a royal order against “pipes and minstrels, playing and masking, frequenting ale houses, bull and bear baiting, and similar practices on Sundays, Common Feasts and Wakes.”<sup>29</sup> After the Reformation, the stern disapproval of the Puritans ruling Britain between the 1640s and the 1660s succeeded in banishing the wakes to the market places but, in spite of these orders, bull-baiting and cock-fighting formed an indispensable part of the wakes until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the best known English wakes were those arranged yearly in Newcastle and also in Eccles, a town, historically separate, but now within the metropolitan borough of Greater Manchester some 3 miles or 4.5 km West of Manchester City Center. Both were praised in well known old sporting ballads:

“To ‘Castle wakes let’s go let’s go,  
 To ‘Castle wakes let’s go  
 For fun and cakes the best of wakes as everyone shall know.  
 To our town field then we’ll repair where our fathers drank wassail,  
 And proclaimed the charter of the wakes the birthright of Newcastle [...]  
 The sports so gay they soon will play  
 For here you will find pleasure.  
 Wives or sweethearts on your knees  
 Clap loudly now me treasure.[...]  
 A chosen band of loyal men  
 That faced the rebel wars

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<sup>28</sup> Quot. after J. Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>29</sup> Quot. after: < <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/ENG-BLACK-COUNTRY/2000-02/0949544294>>

Will stand at ease and tip the cat<sup>30</sup>  
And play at prison bars.<sup>31</sup>  
The Steeple Chase,  
The Barrow Race  
In bags with many a faw,  
Whilst some you'll see on bended knee  
Knuckling down to taw."<sup>32</sup>

Eccles Wakes were held over 3 days, beginning on the first Sunday after 25th August. This is the feast day of St. Mary, to whom the local Parish Church is dedicated. By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Eccles Wakes, similar to other events of this type in England, had become a somewhat less than pious

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<sup>30</sup> *Tip cat* is a game also known as *cat*, in which a stick sharpened at both ends is batted into the field. The game was played between 2 individuals or 2 teams of several players each. The idea of the game and the equipment necessary to play it were described by J. Strutt in *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1810 edition): "Tip-cat, or perhaps more properly, the game of cat, is a rustic pastime well known in many parts of the kingdom. Its denomination is derived from a piece of wood called a cat, with which it is played; the cat is about six inches in length and an inch and a half or two inches in diameter, and diminished from the middle to both the ends in the shape of a double cone; by his curious contrivance the places of the trap and of the ball are at once supplied, for when the cat is laid upon the ground the player with his cudgel strikes it smartly, it matters not at which end, and it will rise with a rotatory (!) motion, high enough for him to beat it away as it falls, in the same manner as he would a ball." *Tip-cat* belongs to the much wider European tradition of similar games, called in Polish *sztekiel* or *klipta*, in Brittany *mouilh*, and in central France *pilouette*. It is also met in Asia, for instance in Pakistan where it appears as the very popular to these days *gullidunda*, or in India and Sri-Lanka as *dunda gulli*.

<sup>31</sup> Prison bars was played between two teams, usually of 10 or 11 players, frequently accompanied by the music of a flute or tin whistle and drum. The game entailed running to and from a special area, called a den, and capturing opponents who would be taken into a "prison" and held there until rescued by one of their team mates. It was also played on a holiday called the Prison Bar Meadow, for example, in Talbot town on a meadow christened Prison Bars Field. Yet another, this time funny, game was and in some places still is played – eating stir-pudding with an awl. It was not an easy task and it took up to one hour before the pudding was eaten. The expression associated with this game is now also used in English slang language meaning 'to have anal sex', or referring to female masturbation, when two fingers are used to enter the vagina and thus 'stir the pudding'. To this repertoire, mentioned in the ballad on Eccles Wakes, we should add *barrow races*. It can be practiced in two forms: a real wheel-barrow or a physical exercise in which one person plays the role of a "wheel-barrow" while the other "operates" it.

<sup>32</sup> *The Rigs of the Fair...*, op. cit., p. 19.



affair. Looking for forefathers became unimportant and races and competitions were growing in importance as well as blood sports. These included bull and bear-baiting and cock fighting. Although many came to Eccles to enjoy the general rowdiness and excess, many locals objected to the gross behaviour and to the cruel sports. In 1877 the Home Secretary, at the request of the Eccles Local Board, banned the Wakes. To no effect, however, because unofficially the wakes were continued.

“In August last being holiday time,  
 And being myself a young man in my prime  
 To see Eccles Wake it was my intent,  
 So I dressed in my best and I went,  
 With Ned and a few men  
 And Robin the Ploughman  
 And Sally and Ally and Moll.  
 Each lad took his lass as we passed along  
 And when we come there it was wonderful throug  
 There were some crying “Eccles” some Banbury cake  
 For the lasses and lads that attended the Wakes. [...]   
 Y’ on fine dressing work-folk from Manchester town  
 They strutted as if the whole Wakes were their own  
 Thou putters-out, warkers, yea, cutters, and all  
 Dressed like masters and dames jeered me and my Moll.”<sup>33</sup>

One of the main attraction of Eccles Wakes, as in many other English towns, was the moment, when

“The bellart<sup>34</sup> ere long tied the bull to the stake,  
 The dogs were set at him some pastime to make,  
 He jostled about gave a terrible roar  
 Tossed the dogs in the air and the folk tumbled o’er.  
 Such squeaking and squalling  
 Such pulling and hauling  
 I ne’er in my life saw before.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *The Humours of Eccles Wakes*, in: *The Rigs of the Fair...*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Or *bullard*, a man taking care about spectacle with bull-baiting.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



Chivalric defensive tower in Siedleniec, where medieval wall-paintings with Arthurian themes were discovered under later surface plaster. The Arthurian legend played an important role in spreading the ideals of chivalric behaviour, known later as fair play.

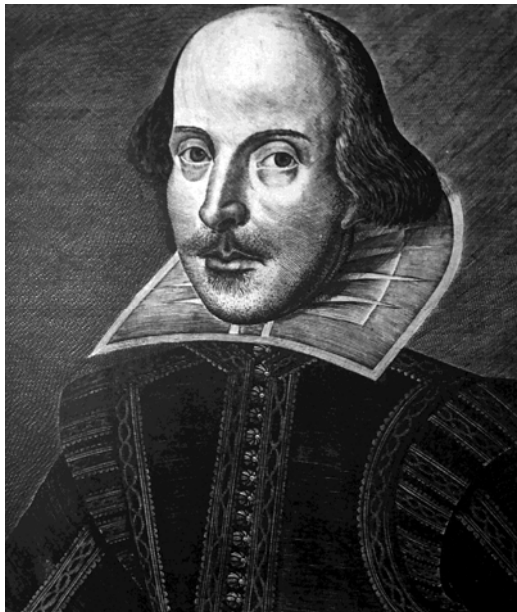


The author of this book in the main room containing Arthurian wall-paintings of the chivalric tower in Siedleniec.

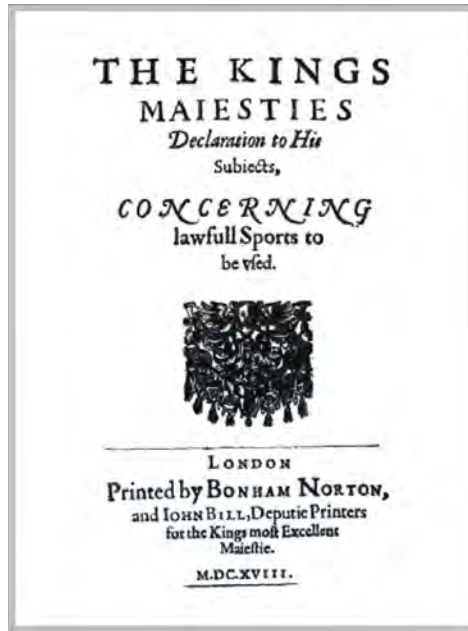


Francis Knollys.

Public domain. <http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/francisknollys.htm>



William Shakespeare.



Front cover of the Declaration of Sports issued by James the 1st in 1618.



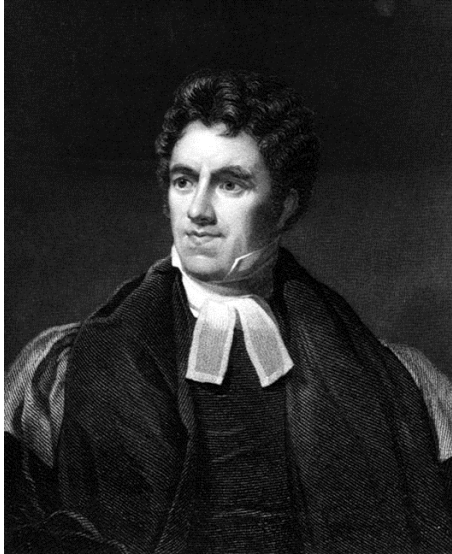
Contemporary opening ceremony of Robert Dover's yearly Olympic Games, phot. from [shakespeareblog.com](http://shakespeareblog.com)



Front cover of the Sportsman's Dictionary, 1735.



The first page of "The Sporting Magazine", October 1792.



Thomas Arnold, engraving for the English magazine "Punch".



William Gilbert Grace, the most famous British sportsman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Rugby College, building with the historic office of Thomas Arnold.



Monument of Thomas Hughes in front of the Library of Rugby College.



Anglomaniacs parading through the streets of Warsaw, drawing by Franciszek Kostrzewski, 1861.



Cartoon showing the English attitude towards sport: "Cancelled? The darts match?" (Punch)



Old prints show without question that the bull frequently released itself from the rope or chain and started to cause terror among the spectators and merchants using wakes as an opportunity to sell their products, especially food:

“But stop me good folks the fun ended not here  
 For a Banbury merchant attending the rear  
 Crying “Buy now or toss” which the bull chanced to spy,  
 Gave his basket a toss for he chose not to buy.  
 I thought to the Wakes  
 They were coming with cakes  
 Confectioners down from the sky.”<sup>36</sup>

One of the most important events was usually horse racing, staged in regional formula:

“Next followed the race for a leatherin prize,  
 Nags entered the field amid bustle and noise;  
 ‘Now Bobbin!’ ‘Now Short!’ ‘Now Ball!’ was the cry,  
 But Bobbin beat Short and Ball passed them by.  
 Disputing who’d won, soon to fighting they run  
 And the winner come off with black eyes.”

When racing and fighting were all at an end, all participants were joined together and “to an alehouse each went with his sweetheart or friend,” where the stunt was completed “with music and cakes for to keep up the wakes, among wenches and fine country beaux.”<sup>37</sup>

In some English towns, to some degree also Scottish ones, an indispensable part of the wakes were certain forms of ball games on the basis of which during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the contemporary principles of football were indirectly established. The oldest forms of football, however, were associated with the end of carnival and preceded Lent. The most popular form of such post-carnival games was so called Shrove Tuesday Football. It was played on Shrove Tuesday. It was also called *Shrovetide Football*. Some other days were also used for such town games, for instance Ash Wednesday. No wonder then, that one of the most impressive *English Sporting Ballads* is associated with football.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

In England and Scotland, either in villages or towns, different forms of football had been very popular since the Middle Ages. In towns and villages a number of local people were divided into opposing teams, representing different parishes or districts. One team sometimes had several hundred players. There were also established rituals and customs associated with ball playing. The oldest information about playing ball, not necessarily football, we can find in the work of William Fitzstephen titled: *Descriptio Nobilissimae Civitatis Londoniae* i.e. *Description of the Noble Citizens of London*, written in Latin as long ago as 1174. And it was here that we read:

“After the midday meal the entire youth of the city of London goes to the fields for the famous game of ball. The students of the several branches of study have their ball; the followers of the several trades of the City have a ball in their hands. The elders, the fathers, and men of wealth come on horseback to view the contests of their juniors in their juvenilities; and there seems to be aroused in these elders a stirring of natural heat by viewing so much activity and by participation in the joys of unrestrained youth.”<sup>38</sup>

Much later, a number of ball games were initiated in different towns of England and Scotland. One type of football was played at the very end of Carnival on Shrove Tuesday. That day was (and still is) also called Pancake Day. In Ashbourne, Shrove Tuesday Football was initiated by a special fete in the local theatre. A huge number of pan-cakes were eaten in the audience while actors recited a special poem glorifying both pan-cakes and football:

“Shrove Tuesday, you know, is always the day,  
When pancake’s the prelude, and football’s the play.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Post prandium, exit in campos mnis iuventus urbis ad lusum pilae celebrem. Singulorum studiorum scholares suam habent pilam; singulorum officiorum urbis exercitores suam singuli pilam in manibus. Maiores natu, patres, et divites urbis, in equis, spectatum veniunt certamina iuniorum, et modo suo iuvenantur cum iuvenibus: et excitari videtur in eis motus caloris naturalis, contemplatione tanti motus et participatione gaudiorum adolescentiae liberioris”; both texts, either in English and Latin quot. after: F. Peabody Magoun, *History of Football from the Beginnings to 1871*, Verlag Heinrich Poppinghaus, Bochum 1938, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

A similar custom could be observed in Chester-le-Street, where the games are still continued on an annual basis. In the Middle Ages, rough and tumultuous games caused a lot of disturbances and damage. One can easily imagine what could happen if two teams, up to 200-300 players each, tried to carry the ball to the gate of the opponent or to the bank of the nearby river. In order to defend citizens' houses against the crowd of rowdy players sturdy planks were and still are placed in front of doors and windows at least up to waist height and in numerous cases also higher. Windows were broken, trading stands overthrown, a number of players usually wounded or even killed. When the team was able to reach bank of the river, the pressure of back rows of players pushed on the players in the front and some of them simply fell in. This is why the authorities of particular towns issued numerous prohibitive edicts, to no effect, however. Because people did not respect the prohibitions, finally matches were moved out of the town to the suburban greens. And it was here that artificial gates were erected in order to substitute the town gates. Thus, the tradition of modern football goals was initiated. And it is *The Alnwick Football Song*, played traditionally at the foot of the Alnwick Hill and nearby castle, that is strictly associated with similar tradition though it represents something more. It is traditionally preceded by the playing of a tune titled Chevy Chase.<sup>40</sup> This tune is generally considered as the oldest English anti-war protest tune, based on a popular ballad which was most probably composed shortly after the battle of Otterborn in 1388. Earl Percy of Northumberland decided then to initiate a big hunt on the Cheviot Hills bordering with Scotland, and during the chase he invaded Scottish territory.

“To drive the deer with hound and horn,  
Earl Percy took his way;  
The child may rue that is unborn,  
The hunting of that day!  
The stout Earl of Northumberland  
A vow to God did make,  
His pleasure in the Scottish woods  
Three summer's days to take.  
The chiefest harts in Chevy Chase  
To kill and bear away.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Chevy means in short “of the Cheviot Hills”+ “chase” meaning hunting.

<sup>41</sup> Quot. after version of the ballad which entered the Stationers' Register in 1624 and is available on the internet: <http://www.contemplator.com/child/chevy.html>

Then the Scottish earl Douglas felt offended and counterattacked, which ended in bloody battle:

“These tidings to Earl Douglas came,  
In Scotland where he lay:  
Who sent Earl Percy present word  
He would prevent his sport.  
The English Earl, not fearing that,  
Did to the woods resort.  
With fifteen hundred bowmen bold,  
All chosen men of might,  
Who knew full well in time of need  
To aim their shafts aright.”<sup>42</sup>

During the bloody battle of Otterburn (August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1388), from among over 3.000 soldiers and knights of both sides of the conflict, only 111 survived! Most ordinary soldiers were from Alnwick town but as the ballad says

“Of fifteen hundred Englishmen  
Went home but fifty-three;  
The rest were slain in Chevy Chase  
Under the greenwood tree.”<sup>43</sup>

Mourning dominated whole town while

“Next day did many widows come  
Their husbands to bewail;  
They washed their wounds in brinish tears,  
But all would not prevail.  
Their bodies bathed in purple gore,  
They bore with them away;  
They kissed their dead a thousand times  
When they were clad in clay.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the town was after this battle almost deprived of men and turned into the small village at the foot of Alnwick Castle. The huge losses in population experienced by the people of Alnwick inspired the next succeed-

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

ing Duke of Cumberland to an original initiative: shortly after the battle, probably around 1390, he suggested playing a football match on every anniversary of the battle of Otterburn instead of a military fight. Beginning at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and carried on until now, all successive Dukes of Cumberland have continued and cherished the tradition of throwing the ball from the castle window among the players, thus giving the signal to initiate the game:

“The noble Duke he gave a ball,  
 Oh, let his name resound by all,  
 Both young and old, both great and small,  
 Sing o’er his praise withal, man.  
 Sing o’er his praise withal.  
 Now from the castle came the ball,  
 Out from the porch it flew, man,  
 Cheered the heart of every soul,  
 Each to his courage drew, man.”<sup>45</sup>

Initially, the match was played within the town while the ball was passed from one town gate to another.

“In Bailiffgate they kicked her fast,  
 And Narrowgate stood the hard blast.”<sup>46</sup>

However, the brutality of the game played in an uncoordinated way by the crowd of several hundred players caused a lot of destruction in the town and hurt a number of participants. As the same ballad says:

“The folk in Pottergate were fast,  
 The crowd like horse did smash, man.  
 The crowd like horse did smash.  
 The ball then to the market flew.  
 The crowd they followed fast, man.  
 The kicks it made her black and blue.  
 Her very ribs were smashed, man.  
 They kicked her then up Bondgate street.  
 Just like a flock of highland sheep.  
 Some skinned their shins, some lamed their feet.

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<sup>45</sup> *Alnwick Football Song*, in: *The Rigs of the Fair*.... op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

They ran so swift and fast, man. [...]
They kicked it then around the town
Just like a butterfly man
For every scalp was like a drum
It really was a spree, man
Each ran at her to get the bat
And others gripped what got him stopped
And down he come like any snot
And tumbled like a block man
And tumbled like a block.
Each trade was active in its part,
The blacksmiths and the nailers,
Both millwrights and the joiner lads.
The cobblers and the tailors.”<sup>47</sup>

Initially, at the end of the Middle Ages, play took place inside the town walls but the current venue outside the castle was decided upon by the Duke of Northumberland to allow the game to continue in the face of opposition from towns folk some centuries ago. This was necessary due to the destructive results of the game and severe cases of players hurting themselves. Thus, nowadays the ball, after being thrown from the castle window, is carried to the common green at the foot of Alnwick Castle during a procession which follows the Duke’s piper and captains of two teams to the venue of the game, a field called the *Pastures* which surrounds the castle. Chevy Chase is played by the Duke’s piper on an old English instrument called the small-pipe (similar to the Scottish bag-pipe, but having a different number of drones, usually one or even five instead of three as in the Scottish instrument).<sup>48</sup> Because originally the game was played between the town’s gates, now the artificial gates covered by foliage were erected at the foot of the castle. These goals are called *hales* and are located at opposing ends of the pitch. The pitch is about 200 yards wide and long with foliage covering two opposite goals. Play usually takes up to about two hours depending on the score, because the game is decided on the best of three hales which usually last half an hour each.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Kathryn Tickell (b. 1967) is a specialist and quite famous performer on that medieval instrument. She has recorded a number of albums, has played at different public occasions and toured widely with her band . Also, she has a special program on the BBC and also appears on TV. In 2013 she won the very prestigious BBC Radio Two *Folk Award* as “Musician of the Year.”

Then the Duke of Cumberland executes the first kick of the match. Because the pasture's area is full of sandy surfaces, holes and swamps full of shallow water, the game sometimes resembles a survival test:

“The mason he came creeping out,  
Just like a half-drowned cat, man,  
The water made him blubber up,  
Just like a water rat, man;  
O Lord's he cried, “I've had bad luck,  
For in the water, like a duck,  
I oft went down but ay came up,  
And now I've got ashore, man.  
And now I've got ashore.”<sup>49</sup>

The events at Otterburn and the yearly football match as its aftermath played at the foot of the Alnwick Castle, belong to the great tradition of sport as a peaceful factor. It was begun in ancient Greece as a period of ten months before the Olympic Games, called *ekecheiria*, when war was prohibited between Hellenic petty-states. Alnwick football reminds humans about the same peaceful purpose of sport – “make sport not war.”

### *SPORT IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE*

British sport, especially of the imperial epoch, was not just recreation or spectacle. In a way similar to ancient Greece, it was considered as one of the most important factors of British civilization. The Empire, in order to realise its political and economic goals, needed citizens with dynamic personalities who were physically fit and resistant to the exotic difficulties of colonial areas and climates.

Historically, the ethos of British sport was created at the end of the Middle Ages, when it provided a kind of class prestige for the declining idea of chivalry. When it lost its military importance due to the invention of powder and guns operated by great masses of ordinary soldiers, not so careful about individual chivalric ethics, the knights, who now became courtly cavaliers, gradually losing their earlier armaments, used their old military abilities and especially tournaments for demonstrating their class superiority. Horse riding and fencing especially, hardly accessible to the lower strata

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<sup>49</sup> *Alnwick Football Song*, in: *The Rigs of the Fair...* op. cit., p. 59.

of society, became class distinctions and were followed by new elite sports such as yachting and royal tennis of the older type. Gradually, however, richer merchants and generally representatives of the middle class, who were becoming richer and more influential due to democratic processes, started to follow the chivalric example. Sport practiced in a gentlemanly spirit of fair play became one of the most important educational tools in English public schools, like Harrow, Eton, Winchester and Rugby. It was here where political elites, army officers and colonial administrators of the British Empire were taught and trained. As the eminent historian of British sport, Richard Holt, writes: "There was a close relationship between the creation of this muscular élite and the extension of formal control over large areas of Asia and Africa by the British government in the latter nineteenth century."<sup>50</sup> Apart from this, sport played an integrating role for societies constituting the British Empire: "British sport served overwhelmingly to express and enhance the solidarity of colonial society, providing amusement for those far from home isolated amidst an alien and sometimes hostile population, sport was not so much a luxury as a necessity, a means of maintaining morale and a sense of shared roots, of Britishness, of lawns and tea and things familiar. For the more humble middle-class emigrant, sports also underlined that transition from a suburban to an essentially landed style, which added to the appeal of the Empire. Where else could a man acquire 'broad acres' and prestige so quickly? For the price of a private education, the settler could become a kind of squire copying or adapting the pastimes of his 'betters' back home."<sup>51</sup>

To the famous English victor over the Napoleonic army, Arthur Wesley Duke Wellington (1769-1852), is frequently ascribed the famous saying that "The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton." In fact, he never said anything of the sort. His biographer, Elizabeth Longford, explained this confusion: "This 'laconic' (as Wellington's epigrams used to be called) did not make its first appearance until three years after his death. In 1855 an eminent French writer and parliamentarian, Count de Montalambert<sup>52</sup>, visited Eton in search of material for his projected book on the political future of England. The writer picked up something which the orator in him turned to good account: 'one understands the Duke of Welling-

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<sup>50</sup> R. Holt, *Sport and the British*, op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Forbes René Count de Montalambert (1810-1870).



ton's *mot* when, revisiting during his declining years the beautiful scenes where he had been educated, remembering the games of his youth, and finding the same precocious vigour in the descendants of his comrades, he said aloud: 'C'est ici qu'a été gagnée la bataille de Waterloo.' Note first, that there is no mention here of 'playing-fields', there is no justification for later attempts, based on this passage, to praise (or deride) Wellington for advocating organized games. Note second, the difficulty of deciding on which of his later visits he made his oracular *mot*. none seems appropriate. [...] Nothing daunted by these difficulties, a successor to Montalambert Sir Edward Creasy, soon carried the 'Waterloo legend' another stage forward. As the aged Duke passed the 'playing-fields,' wrote Creasy in *Eminent Etonians*, he paid a tribute to the 'manly character' which they nurtured: 'They grow the stuffs that won Waterloo.' By the 1889 that excellent club raconteur, Sir William Fraser, had capped both his predecessors. in his *Words on Wellington*,<sup>53</sup> he not only repeated for the first time in English Montalambert's original 'waterloo' epigram, but added for good measure Creasy's tribute to 'playing fields' and 'manliness.' Meanwhile, over one hundred years earlier, in 1784 [...] Arthur Wesley, had left Eton after his three inglorious years, having been neither happy nor successful. he never returned [...] except when he had to."<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Wellington saw in sport a kind of playful preparation for the war efforts of his soldiers: "The Duke no doubt was occasionally angry, and probably with just cause, at the careless conduct of his Regimental Officers; but their behaviour at Waterloo, many of them never having been in action before, roused the enthusiasm even of his philosophical nature. He describes them behaving as if they were playing at cricket."<sup>55</sup> And the truth of the matter is that more than one century after the phrase "playing fields of Eton" entered public consciousness, whoever formulated this famous saying, P. McBride in his *Philosophy of Sport*, expressing

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<sup>53</sup> W. Fraser, *Words on Wellington. The Duke. Waterloo. The Ball*, J.C. Nimmo, London 1889. The original context of Fraser's text concerning the Battle of Waterloo, and the alleged saying of Wellington: "Most of us have read the well known passage in Montalambert, where he describes the Duke as saying 'The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.' The manliness of that great school told upon his Officers." (pp. 138-139).

<sup>54</sup> E. Longford, *Wellington. The Years of Sword*, Weidenfeld&Nicholson, London 1969, pp. 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> W. Fraser, *Words on Wellington*, op. cit., p. 138.

the British attitude toward play and games wrote, “we (the English) have in times of national emergency been able to carry the sporting instincts into things much greater than sport.”<sup>56</sup>

Comparison of playing field and battle field was an imperial policy, not a theory. In 1869 a guide to English outdoor sports and recreations was issued, where we read about certain features of cricket as useful for building up military abilities and courage during battle: “we even think that square-leg to a hard hitter is no bad training for coolness as the cannon’s mouth.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, in Henry Newbolt’s famous poem titled *Vitai Lampada*.<sup>58</sup> there is an allusion to how a young schoolboy, i.e. a future soldier fighting for the Empire, should learn selfless commitment to duty and loyalty to his team during cricket matches in the Close at Clifton College:

“There’s a breathless hush in the Close to-night–  
Ten to make and the match to win–  
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,  
An hour to play and the last man in.  
And it’s not for the sake of a ribboned coat,  
Or the selfish hope of a season’s fame,  
But his captain’s hand on his shoulder smote  
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”<sup>59</sup>

But soon sporting allusions to cricket turn into war metaphors associated with the real engagement mentioned in the second stanza. It is concerned with the Battle of Abu Klea staged in January 1885, during the unsuccessful expedition to rescue the Governor General of Sudan, Charles Gordon (1833-1885) besieged in Khartoum.

“The sand of the desert is sodden red,  
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;  
The Gatling’s jammed and the colonel dead,<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> P. McBride, *Philosophy of Sport*, Heath Cranton, London 1932, p. 49.

<sup>57</sup> Quot. after J. Paxman, *Empire*, Viking-Penguin, London 2011, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> The title was taken by Newbolt from a quotation by Lucretius meaning “The Torch of Life.”

<sup>59</sup> H. Newbolt, *Vitai Lampada* < <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/vita-lampada/>>

<sup>60</sup> The “Dead Colonel” mentioned in the poem is Frederick Gustavus Burnaby (1842-1885). The Gatling gun, so named after its inventor Richard Gatling, was then an early rapid-fire multi-barrel weapon and a forerunner of the modern machine gun. It is the poet’s mistake, because in reality another weapon, the Gardner gun, was used in the

And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.  
 The river of death has brimmed his banks,  
 And England's far, and Honour a name,  
 But the voice of schoolboy rallies the ranks,  
 'Play up! play up! and play the game!'"<sup>61</sup>

The final stanza of the poem reminds young citizens of the Empire of their duty, shaped by sport but not only for sport:

"This is the word that year by year  
 While in her place the School is set  
 Every one of her sons must hear,  
 And none that hears it dare forget.  
 This they all with a joyful mind  
 Bear through life like a torch in flame,  
 And falling fling to the host behind –  
 "Play up! play up! and play the game!"<sup>62</sup>

A similar spirit was created in English schools during World War I. On the fields of Flanders, some regiments stormed German trenches while kicking forward their footballs.<sup>63</sup> In the week before Christmas 1914, British and German soldiers left their trenches in order to exchange holiday greetings, barter cigarettes, sing Christmas carols and also ... play football on no-man's land as an expression of humanity over the war. Another example of linking the playing-field with real battle-fields is provided by the famous British 17<sup>th</sup> Service Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment which later became known as the *Football Battalion*. At the beginning of the war, Arthur Conan Doyle encouraged British sportsmen to join the army and defend the honour of Britain and civilization.

"There was a time for all things in the world. There was a time for games, there was a time for business, and there was a time for domestic life. There was a time for everything, but there is only time for one

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described battle (named so after its constructor William Gardner; it was also an early type of mechanical machine gun provided with two barrels, and fed from a vertical magazine with cartridges while operated not by a trigger but by a crank.

<sup>61</sup> H. Newbolt, *Vitai Lampada*, op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ch. Baker, *The Truce. The Day the War Stopped*, The Hill Stroud, Gloucestershire 2014.

thing now, and that thing is war. If the cricketer had a straight eye let him look along the barrel of a rifle. If a footballer had strength of limb let them serve and march in the field of battle.”<sup>64</sup>

Within a few weeks of December 14, 1914, the 17th Battalion had 600 men of whom 122 were professional footballers. The rest of them were just local recruits who wanted to serve in the same military detachment as their sporting heroes. Nevertheless, in different sectors of the British Army there were over 2,000 soldiers who up to 1914 had played professional football. The Football Battalion experienced heavy casualties during the Battle of the Somme in July 2015. An estimation of how many footballers were killed is difficult, but they number at least several dozen. In addition, on 18th September, German poisoned gas killed 14 members of the battalion.<sup>65</sup>

Playing football while storming the enemy became a legend. During World War II, this legend could not be continued on a bigger scale due to the more totalitarian character of the war. When the Wehrmacht successfully attacked France in June 1940, and especially during the evacuation of Dunkerque and the general retreat of the Allies there was not too much left for the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to attack, either with the ball or without it. But we have evidence that the British soldiers possessed footballs. After they were captured and put into POW Camps, at least in some of them they kept their British produced balls and played with them. We can find information about this, for instance, in the memoirs of Captain Patrick R. Reid who was imprisoned in the POW Camp located in Colditz Castle. As a matter of fact, not only football was played in Colditz. Captain Reid justified the necessity of playing it in the following way: “I realised that this game was a manifestation of our suppressed desire for freedom. While the game was in action we were free. The surrounding walls were no longer a prison, but the confines of the game we played, and there were no constraining rules to curtail our freedom of action. I always felt much better after a game. Followed by a cold bath it put me on top of the world.”<sup>66</sup> But it was football that was of special importance. It could not be played in the castle’s court due to space limitations. But “as time went on, the Jerries allowed us a couple of hours’ exercise three times a week in a barbed wire pen in the wooden ground be-

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<sup>64</sup> <http://spartacus-educational.com/ExamFWWU2.htm>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> P. R.Reid, *Colditz*, Hodder and Stoughton, 9th impression, London 1956, p. 99.

low the Castle, but within the external castle walls. Here we played something resembling soccer – the hazards were trees amongst which the game surged backwards and forwards. Our ball games amused the Jerries.”<sup>67</sup> Another POW Camp for British soldiers captured during the 1940 campaign in France was organized in Rauch Fort in the Polish city of Poznań, then occupied by the Germans. It was here that the British even kept some of their original British produced balls. One of them was symbolically donated to the Polish footballers who won the underground Poznań championships in June 1941. Exercising sport in occupied Poland was then severely forbidden by the Germans and when discovered, punished by being sent to a concentration camp. Despite this, the brave footballers in Poznań, in June 1941, organized an underground city championships. Then, the British soldiers, via unknown contacts with the Poles, decided to honour the winning team representing the Dębiec District of the town. In the memoir of one of the witnesses to the event, Edmund Olachowski, we read that “the team of Dębiec, which was recognized as the champion of Poznań City, received a football donated by the English prisoners of Rauch Fort.”<sup>68</sup> The award of the English ball was concomitant with a symbolic cup showing at its bottom the relief of an athlete, resembling Prometheus, trying to break chains fastening him to the rock, as a symbol of future liberation from German occupation. Thus, again, as in Colditz, soccer became a symbol of freedom, this time not only for the British. All such symbolic roles of football and sport in general resulted from the British “playful attitude,” shown in even the most serious forms of life, as one of the most important features of the British character.

Sport also played an extremely important role in imperial policy: “The most vibrant legacy of empire evident every day is not its now deeply unfashionable poetry, music or paintings but the sports which were either invented or codified to keep its young men fit and occupied and somehow to pass on to the colonized, through cricket, soccer, rugby, tennis or golf, some of the imperial values. These sports were also supposed to inculcate personal courage and collective loyalty in the builders of empire.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; See also: J. Witkowska, *British Sport in POW Camps during World War II*, “Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism,” ed. W. Lipoński, vol. 19, nr 1, Poznań 2012, pp. 10-15.

<sup>68</sup> E. Olachowski, *Wspomnienia z czasów okupacji o sportowcach Poznania (Memoirs from Time of Occupation Concerning Sportsmen of Poznań)*, “Kronika Miasta Poznania” (“Chronicle of Poznań City”), vol. XXVIII, nr 3, Poznań 1960, p. 54.

The supreme imperial game was cricket – as an 1868 guide to outdoor sport put it.”<sup>69</sup> According to Jeremy Paxman, “Cricket mattered. At King’s School in Worcester the memorial to those who died in the First World War took the form of a new pavilion, inscribed with the words: ‘In memory of those who, having learnt in this place to play the game for their school, played it also for their country during the years 1914-1919’.”<sup>70</sup>

Cricket also became an essence of Britishness exported to the colonies. Its role was strengthened from the establishment in 1788 of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in London. That organization started to play not only a very crucial role in the development of the sport as such but contributed much to creating elements of prestige among British society: “Descriptive evidence shows a close association between the MCC and the elite of British society.”<sup>71</sup> And it was in the venues of the MCC where in 1909 the first meeting of the Imperial Cricket Conference took place. In 1965 that organisation rose to the level of the International Cricket Conference and in 1981 the International Cricket Council was established. It contains 37 national federations. Only some of them have higher status and are allowed to participate in series of international matches, called simply *tests*. These events were started in 1877 although initially only England and Australia competed. Today, nine teams participate in *tests*.<sup>72</sup>

If cricket and some other sports were exported from England to the colonies, simultaneously a process of assimilation of indigenous games was seen. This gave to indigenous people a feeling of participation in shaping imperial sport and culture. Thus, *pulu*, known in the territory of India and later Pakistan, improved by the British officers stationed there was transformed into modern *polo*. One of the leading polo players at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a young Winston Churchill. He was a member of the polo team which in 1899 won a great inter-regimental tournament for the championship of the British cavalry stationed in India. In his memoirs titled *My Early Life* he devoted much space to his own attitude towards that sport: “It is the hour of Polo. It is the hour for which we have been living all day long. I was accustomed in those days to play every

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<sup>69</sup> J. Paxman, *Empire*, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>71</sup> T. Mason, *Sport in Britain. A Social History*, Cambridge-New York-Fort Chester-Melbourne-Sydney 1989, p. 116.

<sup>72</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket>

chukka I could get into.”<sup>73</sup> In Churchill’s garrison “the whole system was elaborately organized [...] a smart little peon collected the names of all the officers together with the number of chukkas they wished to play. These were averaged out so as to secure ‘the greatest good of the greatest number.’ I very rarely played less than eight and more often ten or twelve. As the shadow lengthened over the polo ground, we ambled back perspiring and exhausted to hot baths, rest, and at 8.30 dinner, to the strains of the regimental band and the clinking of ice in well filled glasses. Thereafter, those who were not so unlucky as to be caught by the Senior Officers to play a tiresome game then in vogue called ‘Whist’, sat smoking in the moonlight till half-past ten or eleven at the latest signaled the ‘And so to bed.’ Such was ‘the long, long Indian day’ as I knew it for three years.”<sup>74</sup>

These were ordinary day-to-day activities in peace time, not affected by Indian rebellions. Churchill describes in his memoirs a number of tournaments of different ranks showing at the same time the British style of living in India. He also emphasized the great interest of Indian natives, who participated in particular tournaments expecting that their teams would defeat the British, thus expressing Indian superiority in the game. During one tournament in Hyderabad, “the whole ground was packed with enormous masses of Indian spectators of all classes watching the game with keen and instructed attention. The tents and canopied stands were thronged with the British community and the Indian rank and fashion of the Deccan. We were expected to be an easy prey, and when our lithe, darting, straight-hitting opponents scored 3 goals to nothing in the first few minutes, we almost shared the general opinion.”<sup>75</sup> Finally, after some events which “are effaced by the march of time,” most probably the pressure of higher rank British officers who could not accept losing the tournament to the natives, the tournament was won by Churchill’s team nine goals to three “amid roars of excitement from the assembled multitudes.” Driven by waves of ambition “on succeeding days we made short work of all other opponents, and established a record, never since broken.”<sup>76</sup>

A role similar to polo was played by field hockey, today the national game of India and Pakistan and some other Asian countries. The compara-

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<sup>73</sup> W. Churchill, *My Early Life* (London 1934), The Reprint Society, London 1944, p. 117.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

tively common acceptance of the new shape of these games by indigenous peoples was considered as a strengthening factor of relations between the Empire and its colonies. Local nations were influenced by its general culture and were at the same time convinced, at least to a certain degree, that they were sharing in the general development of the Empire.

In almost all English public schools a kind of local football was played. Athletics, especially running and fives, was also quite popular. In Eton there were as many as 40 courts for fives, which gives a picture not only of the popularity of fives, but of English school sport in general, which seems incomparable with any other educational institutions, of say, continental Europe.

In one of the most “sporty” schools in Rugby, the great English pedagogue Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) created exceptional conditions for the imperial educational system. Sport played a special role. Arnold assumed that with the assistance of sport, shaping the personality of the pupil was incomparably easier and more effective than doing so by classical and theoretical teaching: with the help of physical exercise, educators could achieve the desired beauty and agility of the body; strong training creates resistance to difficulties and prepares one for achieving goals; the principle of fair play trains a sense of morality while team sports develop the abilities of cooperation and social discipline, which are also useful outside of sport. Giving the students the possibility to participate in self-governing school sports clubs and organizations became a good way of preparing for adult life and managing future public or political life. Arnold’s concept of “sports pedagogy” was imitated by numerous other public schools. One of his followers, the headmaster of Winchester College, George Ridding, once openly emphasized the unusual role of sport, especially cricket, in bringing up the young generation: “Give me a boy who is a cricketer and I can make something of him.”<sup>77</sup> This saying was repeated many times by English pedagogues both in Britain and the Empire. One alumnus of Queen’s Royal College in Trinidad recalled that “rapidly we learned to obey the umpire’s decision without question, however irrational it was. [...] We learned to play with the team, which meant subordinating your personal inclinations, and even interests, to the good of the whole. We kept a stiff upper lip in that we did not complain about ill for-

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<sup>77</sup> Quot. after J. Gemmel, *The Politics of South African Cricket*, Routledge, London 2004, p. 38.



tune. We did not denounce failures, but ‘Well tried’ or ‘Hard luck’ came easily to our lips. We were generous to opponents and congratulated them on victories, even when we knew they did not deserve it.”<sup>78</sup>

The British pedagogue and historian, Herbert Branston Gray, in his treatise titled *Public Schools and the Empire*, describes a kind of decalogue compulsory in one of the British public schools, where the role of sport is described in three out of ten Commandments: 3. Without big muscles, strong will, and proper collars there is no salvation; 6. I must play games with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength; 8. Enthusiasm, except for games, is in bad taste.”<sup>79</sup>

Paradoxically, it was in Rugby, where the moral side of sport was so strongly emphasized, that quite immoral behavior (at least from the sporting point view) led to a new sport being invented, known by a name identical with the school’s location – rugby. It happened in 1823, when according to the commemorative stone in Rugby, William Webb Ellis “with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time first took the ball in his arms and ran with it thus originating the distinctive feature of the rugby game.”<sup>80</sup> Overall, the role of sport in Rugby was narrated in a school novel *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1856) written by one of the college’s alumni, Thomas Hughes (1822-1896). That novel, despite its literary shortcomings, became unexpectedly quite popular, and as one critic described it, an “educational codex, real Habeas Corpus of the British boy.” Jean Jules Jusserand, French diplomat and anglicist, when searching in the catalogue of the British Museum, observed that Hughes’ novel during the Victorian Epoch took second place after the *Bible* in terms of the number of issues and copies sold, many more than the novels of Charles Dickens and William Thackeray!

Apart from the sports practiced in elite colleges by gentlemen, there was, however, another side of British sports resulting from the quick industrial development of the Empire. The repetitive nature of manufacturing labour among the workers of Sheffield, Manchester or the Glasgow dockyards on the one hand, and the inertness and immobility of clerks and

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<sup>78</sup> J. Paxman, *Empire*, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>79</sup> H. B. Gray, *Public Schools and the Empire*, Williams and Norgate, London 1913, pp. 172-173.

<sup>80</sup> The text was written down from a photograph taken by me during my stay in Rugby in 2008. I am grateful to the school authorities for permission to visit the College, its Library, the Chapel and take numerous pictures used later for my lecture on British history and culture.

other types of white collar workers on the other, separated the wider strata of society from natural forms of physical fitness. Thus, sport became a form of compensation, acting effectively against muscular atrophy. Trade Unions understood this problem very well from their establishment in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under the trade union umbrella, numerous clubs were organized where additionally one could observe processes of integration between former villagers arriving in cities and looking for new conditions of living.

There was a sharp contrast in the 19<sup>th</sup> century between gentlemen exercising elite sports, such as horse riding or fencing, and ordinary players involved in plebeian sports such as football or boxing. It was cricket where they could meet half way. In the course of time football and athletics started to play a similar role in rubbing away class differences. On the playing field, one's social status was not important, rather one's physical prowess and ability to win.

Before the Hellenic traditions of the Olympic Idea were restored by French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin in 1896, it was England where two much earlier and significant attempts to revive the Olympics took place. A certain Robert Dover, a Roman Catholic who left the University of Cambridge for religious reasons without a degree: "When he settled in Saintbury, Gloucestershire in about 1611 he took over and revived, probably as counterblast to the Puritan menace the old Withsuntide Cottswold Games, held on Cottswold Hill later to become known as Dover's. The Civil War interrupted them but they were revived at the Restoration and continued to 1832."<sup>81</sup> Soon the event organized in 1612 became known as the Olympic Games (originally Olimpick Games) in Chipping Campden, containing such sports as running, jumping, acrobatics, javelin throwing, hammer throwing, archery, wrestling and local games known as *shinkicking*. Moreover, Dover hired distinguished poets who praised his games according to the model of the ancient Greek Olympics. In 1636 a special book containing Olympic poems written to honour Dover and his games was published by Matthew Walbancke. It contained as many as 36 poems by such well known poets as Ben Jonson or Michael Drayton, and was also published earlier on separate leaflets. The purpose of the volume was to make the games popular and re-

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<sup>81</sup> B. Juel-Jensen, introductory note to a reissue of *Annalia Dubrensia*, M. Walbancke, ed., Menston, Yorkshire 1973.

mind the English about the glory of the ancient Olympic Games and its usefulness for modern society. Walbancke justified the edition in the following way: “first that their flying papers came so opportunely to my hands, which having considerately perused [...] I thought worthy to bee (!) published. Next since your owne modestie seem somewhat adverse to have those your deserved Encomion imprest, which is the heart of all your Countrey men, and others have tooke such deepe Impression: I held it more expedient to hazard the frowne of one by boldnesse, then the discontents of many by a timerous negligence, lastly since those Quintenalia, or Olimpick Games (celebrated every fifth yeere onely) begun by Hercules, and for many succeeding ages continued, by all the Semones, Heroes, and prime princes of Greece, are now utterly abandoned, and their memorie almost extinguisht. Since you, to whom I may not unproperly give the denomination of an Hero of his our Age, have in this Famous Annalia, or yearly celebrations, not onely revived the memory of the former, but adormed these your Cotswald Hills with such Ovations and triumphs, as may continue their memorie to all posteritie. (First craving your pardon) I commend myselfe to you for the present: And your name (thus decored by your friend) to perpetuitie.”<sup>82</sup>

Particular poems are typical praising pieces, showing slightly affinities to ancient *epinikia* praising the glory of Olympic Winners. But poems devoted to the Cottswold Games were addressed exclusively to their creator, Robert Dover. Typical is the initial poem of Michale Drayton:

“Dover, to doe thee right , who will not striue (!)  
That dost in these dull yron (!) Times revive  
The Golden Ages glories; which poor Wee  
Had not so much as dream’t on but for Thee?  
As those brave Grecians in their happy dayes,  
On Mount Olympus to their Hercules  
Ordain’d their games Olimpick (!), and so nam’d  
Of that great Mountaine; for those pastimes fam’d  
Where then their able Youth, Leapt, Wrestled, Ran,  
Threw the arm’d Dart; and honoured was the Man  
That was the Victor...”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> M. Walbancke, *To My Worthy Friend Mr Robert Dover*, in: *Annalia Dubrensia*, op. cit., p. A2.

<sup>83</sup> M. Drayton, *To My Noble Friend, Mr Dover on His Brave Annual Assemblies upon Cotwold*, in: *Annalia Dubrensia*, p. B.

The Games organised by Dover would come in handy for King James I, who had just entered a severe conflict with the Puritans, who were against all kind of recreations as sinful. Thus, they tried to ban from public life theatre, dancing, and of course sports. Meanwhile, the King wanted to have his subjects happy, playing at sports, and first of all physically able to serve in the army in the case of war. In 1617, James I received a petition from the inhabitants of Lancashire, demanding cancellation of the earlier local prohibition to practice sports. Soon the inhabitants of other shires affected by Puritan pressure and regulations demanded the same. The King reacted by issuing in 1618 his famous *Declaration of Sports* known also under the name *The Book of Sports*. It was later reissued by his son Charles I in 1633. It became probably the first state document in the world guaranteeing for all citizens of the kingdom the possibility to exercise sports on each Sunday after church service. Not all sports enjoyed royal permission. The document did not contain football, which had a bad reputation and constant brawls during matches. James also prohibited bowling, practiced in taverns and usually associated with heavy whisky and ale drinking. Otherwise, he preferred running, jumping, archery and fencing. This royal edict was an order to be read from the pulpits of parish churches throughout the kingdom.

Although the anti-Puritan character of the *Declaration of Sports* is undeniable, there were also other parts of English society which were strongly against sports in England during those times. Thus, the document was also directed against other religious factions, hostile to sports, especially different kinds of sabbatarians, protesting against pastimes on Saturday and Sunday. Cindy Dyer, in her splendid article on the problem, explained it plainly:

“James made specific and repeated reference to Puritans in the preamble of the *Declaration*. He demanded they either conform to the laws of the kingdom and canons of the Church or be forced to leave the country. These statements have led many historians to conclude that James issued the Declaration in reaction to conflict that existed between Puritans and Church officials over the use of recreations on Sundays. While it is convenient for historians to draw clean straight lines of division between political parties and religious factions, such as have been drawn between Puritans and English Church officials, these divisions are artificial and usually led to incorrect conclusions about historical facts and events. A clearer understanding of the doctrinal positions of Puritans

and English Church officials as well as the political theories of both James and Charles, reveals that the slide toward a stricter observance of the Lord's Day was not unique to Puritans."<sup>84</sup>

In 1735, sport was sufficiently popular in England to publish a *Sportsman's Dictionary*, the first such publication ever. In October 1792, the first sporting journal ever, titled "The Sporting Magazine" appeared. In the earlier mentioned book *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, Joseph Strutt described as many as 500 different games and recreations popular in England at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Beginning with the 1730s, boxing was introduced in the British Navy. It could be useful when meeting indigenous rebels in territories just seized by the navy. Pugilism was first regulated by James Figg (1695-1734). As an art of fighting it was very useful in the dark and dangerous streets of London, full of criminals and thieves, especially before gas lamps were introduced in 1801. The great poet of Romanticism, Lord George Gordon Byron, attended lessons in boxing at the famous boxing school of John Jackson (1769-1845). Jackson had earlier won the title of all-England champion in bare-knuckle boxing. In 1865, thanks to a reform initiated under the patronage of Robert, the 9th Marquise de Queensberry, boxing gained its modern and less brutal character: leather gloves were worn, matches became divided into 3-minute rounds, attacking an opponent after knocking him down was prohibited, and counting to 10 to give a chance for a felled boxer to get up was introduced.<sup>85</sup> Simultaneously, a big impression was made by the English formula of horse racing which, apart from some remaining regional forms, until now is arranged by yard and mile distances.

Especially during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of sports obtained English terminology, against which a number of purists tried to defend their national languages. In Poland, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, a famous historical writer but also a journalist and editor of the newspaper "Gazeta Codzienna" ("Daily Gazette") wrote in 1859: "No

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<sup>84</sup> C. Dyer, *The Historical Context of the 1618 Declaration of Sports Issued by the King James I, and Reissued by King Charles I in 1633*, "Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism," ed. W. Lipoński, vol. VI, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> The modern code of boxing is traditionally called *The Marquess of Queensberry rules* because John Robert Douglas, 9th Marquis de Queensberry, officially endorsed it. In fact, these rules were formulated in 1865 and published in 1867 by John Graham Chambers (1843-1883) as "the Queensberry rules for the sport of boxing."

one is able to understand or even read these crazy English words. If all these Anglomaniacs would kindly translate this vocabulary into Polish it would have some sense. Meanwhile, we do not understand why they wear upon their hats inscriptions in English when all that can be easily named in Polish. All these inscriptions, not only on their hats, but also in printed programmes of the race proved beyond any doubt that these people are childishly reckless, that they do not respect their own *traditions* and that they completely disregard any serious work and care for the welfare of their country.”<sup>86</sup>

In 1849, in the small town of Much Wenlock, the physician and social activist William Penny Brookes (1809-1895) established the English Olympian Society which from 1850 was responsible for organizing local Olympic Games. Some decades later, the French baron Pierre de Coubertin was aware that this ancient idea, on the basis of which he wanted to restore the modern Olympic Games, was not enough, because the Hellenic experience did not fit modern times. He was a careful reader of *Tom Brown's School Days*, the famous novel of Thomas Hughes where the pedagogical system of Rugby College was described under literary disguise. This is why he turned to England, considered then as a country with the best organized system of sport in the world. From 1888, he visited England several times in order to spy and follow what he observed. The ageing Brookes was then sick but still alive and he described to Coubertin much of his experience. During his first visit to England, immediately after landing in Dover, he went to Rugby and spent a full night watching at the grave of Thomas Arnold. And it was Arnold's spiritual inspiration, his education system shaped in Rugby, which was later on visible in Coubertin's activities and his pedagogical system of Olympism. Coubertin was also much inspired by the works of John Ruskin in providing the modern Olympic Games with an artistic and aesthetic setting. The influence of Arnold's pedagogy, the experience of Brookes in organizing the Much Wenlock Games and finally the aesthetics of Ruskin are three

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<sup>86</sup> Untitled article by Topór Szaraczkowy (Ax of Grey Hare, a funny pseudonym of J. I. Kraszewski), “Gazeta Codzienna” (“Daily Gazette”), Warsaw 1859, nr 147. On the critics of sporting anglomania in Poland see: W. Lipoński, *Sport, History, Tradition and Nation*, in: *Between Two Cultures. Poland and Britain*, under the patronage of the British Council, Poznań 2004, pp. 217-232; also W. Lipoński, *Still an Unknown European Tradition: Polish Sport in the European Cultural Heritage*, “The International Journal of the History of Sport,” vol. 13, August 1996 number 2, pp. 1-41.

visible and meaningful traces of the English sporting spell which affected Coubertin so immensely. Upon his return to France he wrote a series of articles praising the English for their achievements in sports education and their effectiveness in practical organization. He knew that the French had a rather negative attitude towards England and thus he wrote: “We hate the English, and they hate us. But [...] it is always useful to study one’s neighbor, even if that neighbor is an adversary, for by imitating the good in him, one can correct it and do it even better.”<sup>87</sup> In another article, under the same title *L’Education en Angleterre*, he extolled the English system of education, especially education supported by sport. France was then dominated by the gymnastic movement, in which the youth followed certain patterns under the command of teachers which was modeled on the military system of instruction. Coubertin appreciated the different approach of the English: “To instruct is not to educate” while in France “Instruction is everything, education nothing.”<sup>88</sup> And he concentrated his attention on the situation of the child in English schools: “So there the child is, in a ‘public school’. What is he doing there? Thomas Arnold will tell us. This great man, who died in 1842, the headmaster of Rugby, a school that he headed for fourteen years, can be considered the father of modern education. He was the first to adopt and apply the principles that are its foundation. [...] He said ‘I wish to form Christian Gentleman; my goal is to teach children to govern themselves, which is far better than governing them myself.’ A profound statement, worthy of reflection on the part of those who wish to govern schools as autocrats, with an iron hand. [...] They are wrong regarding the nature of their mission, which is not to form slaves, but masters! Sovereign masters at that, who, far earlier than the law recognizes, are free to use and to abuse what is subject to them. To hope to withdraw this sovereignty from them, and to try to do so, is a dangerous thing [...] man must feel isolated, feel alone with himself, know his strength, and as early as possible, be placed in the presence of the heavy responsibility that is the counterbalance to all power. That is what Arnold thought.”<sup>89</sup>

This reflection is far beyond appreciating English sport as an educational tool. It is an appreciation of the great English experience in civiliza-

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<sup>87</sup> P. de Coubertin, *Education in England*, in: *Olympism*, transl. into English W. H. Skinner, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne 2000, p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> P. de Coubertin, *L’Education en Angleterre*, in: *Olympism*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

tion in which sport played a certain, but nevertheless partial role. Partial, but important. As Coubertin emphasized: "Is there any need to talk about freedom in their games? It is total. Cricket, lawn tennis and football have never been imposed. [...] I cannot go into much detail listing all the types of recreation they have to choose from [...]. But everywhere, in addition to outdoor games, I saw heated swimming pools, gymnasiums, boxing rings and tennis courts, as well as workshops where they can be initiated in the mysteries of wood working and other manual work. None of these activities is regulated with respect to hours."<sup>90</sup>

The Olympic Games held at Much Wenlock were especially appreciated by Coubertin. "Wherever is Much Wenlock? I can imagine your embarrassment as the coupling of a barbarous name with the memories of antiquity. Much Wenlock is a small town in Shropshire, a country on the borders of Wales and if the Olympic Games [...] still survive today, it is due to Dr. W. P. Brooks. It is he who inaugurated them 40 years ago, and it is still he, now 82 years old but still alert and vigorous, who continues to organize and inspire them."<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, the games initiated by Brookes under the National Olympian Association started to be followed on a larger scale and transferred to larger cities of England like Liverpool and London, where they were staged several times from 1866 till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some decades later they inspired British sports officials and politicians to organize the Imperial Games, which started to be organized on Olympic principles once every four years from 1930. They were called "Imperial" until 1970, despite the fact that the Empire as a political structure had ceased to exist in 1932 under the Westminster Act, when the Commonwealth of Nations was created instead. Today, this event, named the Commonwealth Games, is considered as the third in importance after the Olympics and the football World Cup.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>91</sup> P. de Coubertin, *Les Jeux Olympiques à Much Wenlock*, "La Revue Athletique, nr 12, December 1890; English translation after: S. P. Mullins, *Pierre de Coubertin and the Wenlock Olympian Games*," "The International Olympic Academy," 24<sup>th</sup> Session, Ancient Olympia 1984, p. 99.

<sup>92</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth\\_Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_Games)



The importance of English sport, especially in the imperial era, has found much expression in English philosophy, literature and art. As early as in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a group of English intellectuals, Charles Kingsley among them, initiated a kind of practical theology based symmetrically on religion and sport under the name of Muscular Christianity. In 1856, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), an organization using this theology, was established. Shortly after that, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) followed. Soon, both organizations gained a strong foothold in the United States. And it was here, on the order of the headmaster of Springfield College, that James Naismith created the principles of basketball, now one of the most popular international sports. William Morgan of Holyoke College followed his example by creating volleyball.

The role of sport in Britain was strengthened by literature and art, especially painting and engraving. The first significant writer on sport was Robert Surtees, a contemporary of Charles Dickens. How numerous these pieces of sporting literature were is proved by a bibliography of cricket alone: in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as many as 76 novels on cricket were written and published! We should add to this nearly 300 short novels or full chapters in novels. For instance, in *The Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens we can find a full chapter on cricket, not to mention other fragments concerning, for instance, other games played in different circumstances, including a debtor's jail. From the Middle Ages, and the ballad on Alnwick Football, as we mentioned earlier, sporting ballads were popular, gaining their biggest popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition of sporting painting was initiated by George Stubbs, who in the 18<sup>th</sup> century painted horses and jockeys, especially in Royal Studs in Newmarket. A number of his fellows in English painting followed his example, The French painter Theodore Gericault visited England in 1820 just to paint a series of masterpieces on horse racing, which includes his famous *Course de chevaux à Epsom (Horse Racing at Epsom)*. In Poland, Aleksander Orłowski, Juliusz Kossak, his son Wojciech and his grandson Jerzy, painted horses in the English style, full of red jackets and jockeys.<sup>93</sup> The original speciality of English painting

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<sup>93</sup> See W. Lipoński, *British Patterns in the Development of Polish Sport in the 19th Century*, "International Journal of Eastern Sports and Physical Education" vol. 6, nr 1, October 2008, pp. 1-13; the text of the paper was devoted in a substantial degree to the influences of British art and literature and was earlier read at the 2008 conference of the

and engraving were portraits of famous pugilists. The theme of golf was represented in the art of Paul Sandby and Lemuel Francis Abbott. John Lavery devoted much of his painting to lawn tennis. The famous defeat of the Royal Yacht Squadron in the first regatta of the America's Cup was commemorated in a colourful engraving by Oswald Walter Brierly.

In 1983, the British Museum organized a great exhibition of British sporting prints titled *Sporting Life*. In its catalogue we read that these kinds of works "deserve more than a casual glance and repay serious attention because they reveal with some eloquence an important aspect of social life in Britain over three centuries. [...] Sport plays and has played, a central rather than a peripheral role in British life. [...] The mention of sport in literature is no mere whim, for it strengthens the argument that sport and life in Britain are inextricably interwoven."<sup>94</sup>

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British Society of Sports History in Eastbourne. Its content was commented upon and evaluated in the official *Bulletin of the British Society of Sports History*: "Wojciech Lipoński analysed British patterns in the development of Polish sport since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, concluding that research has provided a large amount of information about the importance of British sports influences abroad (Poland being an example), influences which British sports historians generally ignore and of which they appear to know either very little or nothing at all. Lipoński has challenged all British members of BSSH to internationalise their study; it is a challenge worthy of some response" (*British Society of Sports History Bulletin*, issue 27, Spring/Summer 2009, p. 5).

<sup>94</sup> P. Goldman, *Sporting Life. An Anthology of British Sporting Prints*, British Museum, London 1983, p. 7 and 13.

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## Chapter Fourteen

# EXPANSION OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

In 2003, Niall Ferguson (born 1963), a Scottish historian who specialises in the history of colonialism, published his book titled *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World*.<sup>1</sup> Ferguson is now a Professor of Harvard University and is well known for his views on rehabilitating British imperialism. “The Times” called Ferguson “the most brilliant British historian of his generation.” Ferguson’s *Empire* was an instant bestseller on an international scale, not just within the English speaking area, “The Evening Standard” described his work as “a brilliant book [...] full of energy, imagination and curiosity.” Almost all critics and reviewers complimented Ferguson enthusiastically, for example, Andrew Roberts, a British historian of the same generation (born 1964), who specialises in biographies (including a biography of Winston Churchill). He appears regularly on British television and radio and also writes for “The Sunday Telegraph” as well as “The Spectator,” “The Literary Review,” “The Mail on Sunday” and “The Daily Telegraph.” Andrew Roberts expressed the following opinion about Ferguson’s *Empire*:

“Ferguson examines the roles of pirates, planters, missionaries, mandarins, bankers and bankrupts in the creation of history’s largest empire [...] he writes with splendid panache [...] and a seemingly effortless debonair wit. Niall Ferguson’s acclaimed *Empire* brilliantly unfolds the imperial story in all its splendours and its miseries, showing how a gang of buccaneers and gold diggers planted the seed to the biggest empire in all history – and set the world on the road to modernity.’ And the same commentator asked the question: ‘how did such a small, rainy island in the North Atlantic achieve all this? And why did the empire on which the sun literally never set finally decline and fall?’<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the first answer which comes to mind is that it was a result of the political and military power of England. Especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>1</sup> N. Ferguson, *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World*, Allen Lane, London 2003; further quotation taken from the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue: Penguin Group, London 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Quot. after back cover of N. Ferguson’s *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World*, op. cit.

British troops, in their famous red jackets, were seen in many places of the globe. The famous tune titled *The British Grenadiers*, the text and music of which was probably written during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713), could be heard in almost all parts of the world:

*THE BRITISH GRENADIERS*

“Some talk of Alexander  
 And some of Hercules  
 Of Hector and Lysander  
 And such great names like these;  
 But of all the world’s brave heroes  
 There’s none that can compare  
 With a tow, row, row,  
 row, row, row  
 To the British grenadier.  
 Whene’er we are commanded  
 To storm the palisades,  
 Our leaders march with fuses;  
 And we with hand grenades.  
 We throw them from the glacis  
 About the enemies’ ears  
 With a tow, row, row, row, row, row  
 To the British grenadiers.  
 Then let us fill a bumper,  
 And drink a health of those  
 Who carry caps and pouches,  
 and wear thy louped clothes ...”<sup>3</sup>

Grenadier troops were first formed in the British Army as long ago as in 1678. They were finally abolished in 1855. Grenadier troops had their origins in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century and the very special military demands of its contemporary warfare. These soldiers made their first appearance in France in the French army of Louis XIV. Somewhat later they were also formed in the British Army. Their original role was to act as leading assault-troops in attacking hostile ramparts. They would throw their grenades overhead and then attack the enemy embrasures. They were equipped with hand grenades. The etymology of this particular type of armament stems from Spain’s Granada, an area rich in fruits known as pomegranates. Grenades

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<sup>3</sup> *The British Grenadiers*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_British\\_Grenadiers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_British_Grenadiers)

had a very similar structure, but of course they consisted of small iron shells filled with black powder instead of small pulp-balls. The first grenades were hollow iron balls filled with black gunpowder and ignited by a slow burning wick. They first came into use in around the 15<sup>th</sup> century though their first inventor is unknown. They were suspended on a soldier's right hip from a wide buff-leather cross-belt, worn over the left shoulder and buckled at the front. Above the buckle was a brass match-case, with a chain to hold the slow match needed to light the fuse in the grenade. Grenadiers also carried the standard infantry equipment of musket, bayonet, and ammunition. Grenadiers were selected for size and strength – because larger and taller men could throw grenades further.

Usually, as in the campaign of the Duke Wellington in Portugal, “these hard-used men were filled with a burning love of their country and a resolve which no odds or injustice could daunt. They went into battle with shouts ‘Hurrah for old England’ and drums playing ‘The British Grenadier’ [...] wild for a dash at the French.”<sup>4</sup>

But the military power personified by British grenadier companies, the equally famous British hussars and light cavalry, and perhaps first of all by the strong British fleet (of which we talk in a separate chapter), does not explain the whole story. Explaining the secret of the British empire's power and conquests is a very crucial task, employing numerous British historians, writers and even journalists. In 1996 Jeremy Paxman tried to answer the question in his excellent book titled just *Empire*. Paxman (born 1950) is an English journalist, broadcaster and author. Since 1977 he has worked for the BBC and is well known for his tough and incisive interviewing style, particularly when interrogating politicians. Paxman was interested in analysing the following question in his book: what did the empire do for Britain? If we assume that for hundreds of years, Britain shaped the history of the world, then it seems shocking to see how little the British appreciate the long-lasting effect of the colonial spirit on their own society. But he went even further when he wrote: “For the most part, we look on our imperial history simply as the actions of men and women we cannot identify with, the product of motives we do not really understand. It is emotionally easier and politically more convenient to inquire no further. But it is not particularly helpful.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A. Bryant, *The Grand Duke*, Collins, London 1971, p. 298.

<sup>5</sup> J. Paxman, *Empire*, Viking, London 2011, p. 3

It is also not particularly helpful to overlook the influence of the British Empire on countries other than those in the Commonwealth, for instance in Eastern Europe, including Poland, and vice versa. How did such territories reciprocate this influence, say, through the literature of Joseph Conrad? But it is a question for another chapter in another book.

Why have these two books written by Paxman and Ferguson made such an impression on contemporary readers and, in fact, also on the historical evaluation and analysis of the British Empire? Should we really change our traditional vision of British history and rehabilitate British imperialism and colonialism? Before a conclusion is made, let us examine the term *imperialism* and then also *colonialism*, in order to understand what we are talking about. Traditionally, imperialism meant the enlarging of the domain of a state beyond its national and ethnic boundaries, and in consequence the political, economic and cultural subjugation of weaker alien nations or countries. The most important driving force in contemporary imperialism has undoubtedly been the desire of strong industrial states to gain exclusive markets for their manufactured products and control of the sources of raw materials for their industries. This is why, over the last several hundred years, America, Africa, India, Australia and Oceania and finally also China have consequently been arenas of such imperialistic aggression. At the same time, we should not overlook the desire of certain idealistic, especially religious Christian groups, to advance culture, and the welfare and morality of mankind, which has undoubtedly played an important role in modern imperialism. This includes a number of missionary efforts but also a number of economic and political campaigns initiated to improve the poor state of civilization among underdeveloped nations and tribes. According to Robin K. Winks, expressed in the *Encyclopedia Americana International*, the term imperialism “often is applied to the outward thrust of European society – the carrying of political, economic, and moral practices into non-European areas – which began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Most commonly it refers to European expansionism in the period following the American revolution, when Britain, France and Spain shifted their interest from the New World and from colonies of white settlement to Asia, and later, to Africa, to areas already populated by yellow, brown or black men.”<sup>6</sup> According to the same ency-

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<sup>6</sup> R. W. Winks, *Imperialism*, in: *Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, vol. 14, Americana Corporation, Danbury 1979, p. 821.

yclopedia, imperialism is difficult to define or explain. This is the case because “the word may be used in both: praise and denunciation of the practice, or policy for which it is the merest short-hand label. Further imperialism is often taken as a synonym for colonialism with which it has a close relationship, but from which it nonetheless should be distinguished.”<sup>7</sup> As far as colonialism is concerned, David K. Fieldhouse maintains that “colonialism defies simple definition, for its usage has tended to reflect changing moral judgments. In the late 1800s the term was applied only to colonies of white settlers and was used in one of two ways, both morally neutral: 1) a trait characteristic of such colonies, and 2) the political status of a dependency as distinct from the metropolis (parent state), or another sovereign state. Actually, the term colonialism was rarely used in the sense of a colonial system. Its later usage resulted from its adoption as a part of the verbal ammunition of the age of decolonization.”<sup>8</sup> Ideology was frequently responsible for understanding both these terms. For instance “imperialism” [...] after 1900 was adopted by critics of European expansion to serve ideological purposes and used imprecisely to suggest both: the annexation of territories and their subsequent state of subordination – in each case to serve the economic interests of the capitalist powers of Europe and North America. By the mid 1900s, colonialism also began to be used in this derogatory sense.”<sup>9</sup> Due to this, the two terms, “colonialism and imperialism were gradually refined and distinguished. Whereas imperialism came to indicate the dynamics of European empire building and for Marxists, the special character of the capitalist societies that acquired empires, colonialism described the resultant complex of political and economic controls imposed on dependencies.”<sup>10</sup> Some modern supporters of imperialism contend that, whatever its immediate motives, imperialism does, in fact, contribute to the quick development of civilization through the exploitation and exploration of the backward places of the earth. Without the intervention of imperialism and colonialism, such backward places could remain at an underdeveloped stage for an unpredictable period of time. Such was the leading motif of Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem *The White Man’s Burden*.

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<sup>7</sup> R. W. Winks, *Imperialism*, op. cit., p. 821.

<sup>8</sup> D. K. Fieldhouse, *Colonialism*, in: *Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, vol. 7, Americana Corporation, Danbury Connecticut, 1979, p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



*The White Man's Burden* was originally published in the popular American magazine "McClure's" in 1899. Although this poem mixed the praising of the British Empire, and, in fact, any empire, with objective and sober warnings about the costs involved and to be paid, some devoted supporters of the imperialistic idea took the phrase "*white man's burden*" as a general justification of the policy of any white imperialism and colonialism as a noble and very human undertaking.

"Take up the White Man's burden –  
Send forth the best ye breed –  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild,  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child."<sup>11</sup>

Here we see the main goal of idealistically understood imperialism, as a means to elevate "wild" people, "half-devil and "half-child," to a higher strata of civilization. Such words could not now be used, say, in the United Nations, or UNESCO, where they would be instantaneously considered as abusive and condemned due to the principles of political correctness. Kipling lived in a time when political correctness was unknown, which allowed him to express his thoughts without any inhibitions. And he was far from optimistic when predicting the result of the white man's burden:

"And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen folly  
Bring all your hopes to nought."<sup>12</sup>

There is probably a large measure of truth, however, in the assumption that imperialism and colonialism have worked for the benefit of universal welfare (of course, after the underdeveloped become politically mature enough). Many cannibalistic tribes found in Africa and South America

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<sup>11</sup> R. Kipling, *White Man's Burden*, in: *The Western Tradition*, vol . II, *From the Ancient Enlightenment to the Atomic Age*, ed. E. Weber, D.C. Heath and Company, Boston-Englewood-Chicago-San Francisco-Dallas-Toronto-London\ 1966, p. 758.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

were at least turned to more humane behavior and learned how to use agriculture instead of eating their enemies. Even today, acts of cannibalism are not entirely extinct. We should ask the question, however, whether all the evils and atrocities of colonialism and imperialism were any better than such barbarian cruelties? Idi Amin, dictator of Uganda, was not so long ago seriously suspected of eating his foes. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, acts of cannibalism also became a subject of European art, depicted, for instance, by the German engraver and soldier, Hans Staden, after visiting South Africa in 1557. Sculptures showing cannibalism also appear in the works of German sculptor, Leonhard Kern, 1650.

Archibald Paton Thornton (1921-2004), a Canadian historian of Scottish origins, summarized British imperialism, especially the imperialism of the Victorian era in such a way: “In the last generation of the Victorian era, many men thought they had found just such an idea. It became their faith, that it was the role of the British Empire to lead the world in the arts of civilization, to bring light to the dark places, to teach the true political method, to nourish and to protect the liberal tradition. It was to act as a trustee for the weak, and bring arrogance low. It was to represent in itself the highest aims of human society. It was to command, and deserve, a status and prestige shared by no other. It was to captivate the imagination and hold fast the allegiance of the million by the propagation of peculiar myths – one among which was the figure of queen Victoria herself who became depersonalized, as an idea. [...] While encouraging and making profit from the spirit of adventure, it was nevertheless to promote the interests of peace and commerce. While it was to gain its greatest trophies in war, it was to find, its main task in serving the ends of justice, law and order. It was an idea that moved, and idea that expanded, an idea that had to continue to move and to expand in order to retain its vitality and its virtue.”<sup>13</sup>

Thornton defended British imperialism, and in fact imperialism as such, with the following arguments: “what nonsense it was for the left to talk of the imperialist view of international politics as unsound, out-of-date, old fashioned. Power never went out of fashion. The day that England permitted her power to go out, that day her great history would end. Holding this conviction, the imperialist was assured that it was he alone who, in an age of shifting opinion and sentimentality, saw the world

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<sup>13</sup> A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies. A Study in British Power*, St. Martin's Press, New York; Macmillan, London 1959, p. ix-x.

straight. Men must eat before they moralise, and it is hard for a Briton to eat all regularly if he is not prepared to keep guard on the sealines through which the food comes to his table. This was the centre board of the imperialist's platform, and on it he remained unshaken."<sup>14</sup>

In his other book, *Doctrines of Imperialism* (1965), Thornton expressed his deep conviction "in the Anglo-Saxon and anti-Leninist tradition" and that "we are beginning to know ourselves and our habits better than we did: and if the principle that politics is still fundamentally 'the art of the possible' can find enough imperialists to respect it, even to make a doctrine of it, we will do well enough." And he concludes, with no hesitation about empire building, seen as "a natural habit of mankind."<sup>15</sup> George Shepperson, in his review of that last work of Thornton, emphasized that he represents "the constructive realism, the guarded optimism of one who has pondered deeply on his subject and the world in which he functions. As such it deserves the respect of all who are troubled about man's empire-making faculty, not simply as a problem of academic analysis but as potential disintegrator of the 'great globe itself' in an age of nuclear fission and space exploration."<sup>16</sup>

It must be remembered, however, that the unregulated imperialism of recent decades, if not centuries, has also been responsible for numerous ethnic conflicts, for intense colonial rivalries and heavy levels of regional armaments, as well as ruthless human exploitation. This resulted from the fact that the borders of colonial territories acquired by one colonial power were usually not based on the ethnic borders of particular tribes. This is why, especially in Africa, we have groups of people belonging to the same ethnic stock but speaking different languages imposed by colonialists, their administrators, soldiers, preachers and teachers. Modern military technology, in the hands of different native tribes without proper education, have produced innumerable evils and bloody disasters. All this raises another question: is it the white man's burden and duty to provide these people with modern military equipment? The crucial question to be considered and asked by us is: why did all this happen? What were the motives for imperial expansion, with all its evils and positive sides? According to Ferguson, most important of all was perhaps the economic motive,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>15</sup> A. P. Thornton, *Doctrines of Imperialism*, Wiley, New York 1965, p. 246.

<sup>16</sup> G. Shepperson, review of A. P. Thornton's *Doctrines of Imperialism*, "Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire" 1969, vol. 47, p. 161.

appearing in the form of simple greed, the intention to grab gold from ancient Indian states in the newly discovered Americas, then the desire to find new sources of raw materials, later to find places for capital investment and new markets for the selling of the products of parent states.

Niall Ferguson also explains the beginning of British colonialism and imperial expansion in the following way: “In December 1663 a Welshman Henry Morgan sailed five hundred miles across the Caribbean to mount a spectacular raid on a Spanish outpost called Gran Granada [...]. The aim of the expedition was simple: to find and steal Spanish gold – or any other movable property [...]. It was the beginning of one of the seventeenth century’s most extraordinary smash-and-grab sprees. It should never be forgotten that this was how the British Empire began: in a maelstrom of seaborne violence and theft. It was not conceived by self-conscious imperialists, aiming to establish English rule over foreign lands, or colonists hoping to build a new life overseas. Morgan and his fellows ‘buccaneers’ were thieves, trying to steal the proceeds of someone else’s Empire.”<sup>17</sup> The next factor which appeared on the horizon was consumerism. In fact, Great Britain, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, became the world’s first producer and at the same time biggest consumer society. The famous English writer, Daniel Defoe, observed in his non-fictional work titled *The Complete English Trader* (1725) that “As the manufactures of England, particularly those of wool (cotton wool included), and of silk, are the greatest, and amount to the greatest value of any single manufacture in Europe.”<sup>18</sup> In the *Introduction* to his work, Defoe also remarked that “England consumes within itself more goods of foreign growth, imported from the several countries where they are produced or wrought, than any other nation in the world. [...] Because for the doing this England employs more shipping and more seamen than any other nation, and, some think, than all the other nations, of Europe.”<sup>19</sup>

In Chapter XXIII of *The Complete English Trader*, Defoe lists the most important products used for consumption by his compatriots: “This importation consists chiefly of sugars and tobacco, of which the consumption in Great Britain is scarcely to be conceived of, besides the consumption of cotton, indigo, rice, ginger, pimento or Jamaica pepper, cocoa or

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<sup>17</sup> N. Ferguson, *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World*, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> D. Defoe, *The Complete English Trader*, Chapter XXIII, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14444/14444-h/14444-h.htm#>

<sup>19</sup> D. Defoe, in *Introduction to: The Complete English Trader*, op. cit.

chocolate, rum and molasses, train-oil, salt-fish, whale-fin, all sorts of furs, abundance of valuable drugs, pitch, tar, turpentine, deals, masts, and timber, and many other things of smaller value.”<sup>20</sup>

The best known of Defoe’s literary heroes, Robinson Crusoe, willingly or not, became an *imperial scout* and agent responsible for extending its boundaries and subjugating Caribbean people, symbolized by his black servant named Friday. The distinguished British literary critic, Arnold Kettle, wrote about Robinson Crusoe as “a story in praise of the bourgeois and imperial virtues of individualism and private enterprise.” But in another, and more important sense, it celebrates the necessity of social living and the struggle of mankind through work to master nature, a struggle in which bourgeois virtues are as sands upon the Red Sea shore.”<sup>21</sup>

After North America, the Caribbean Islands became the next exploited area of the British colonies. Ferguson writes that “annual imports of sugar [from the Caribbean area] doubled in Defoe’s lifetime, and this was only the biggest part of an enormous consumer boom. As time went on, articles that had once been the preserve of the wealthy elite became staples of daily life. Sugar remained Britain’s largest single import from the 1750s [...] until the 1820s when it was surpassed by raw cotton. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, per capita sugar consumption was ten times what it was in France, i.e. 20 pounds per head per year compared with just 2 in France.”<sup>22</sup>

The next huge step of the British Empire was the conquest of India, supported by the famous East India Company, established in 1600. But its first trading station was located at Suret in 1612, with others at Madras (1639), Bombay (1688) and Calcutta (1790). The growth of the company, which had the status of a semi-governmental trading agency, was generally synonymous with the expansion of the British Empire. However, due to strong French and Dutch competition, the British East India Company was limited in its trading activities until Robert Clive (1725-1774) entered the scene.

Clive was a typical British adventurer. In 1743 he entered the service of the East India Company as a writer, resigning after three years to join the army. This was shortly after the Nabob of Bengal had captured Calcutta, and had smothered to death many English soldiers – in what was afterwards called the “Black Hole.” Clive at once took steps to avenge this

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<sup>20</sup> D. Defoe, op. cit. Chapter XXIII.

<sup>21</sup> A. Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, vol. I, Hutchinson University Library, London 1972, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> N. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 13.

outrage. Soon he compelled the Nabob to surrender in 1757. The Battle at Plassey gave to the British almost absolute rule in India for the next one and a half centuries. The British were marching on ...

After Plassey, Clive was appointed Governor of Bengal and on his return to England was made Baron Clive of Plassey. He again went to India, this time as a general ruler, but because of ill health he returned to England in 1767, where he was accused by his personal enemies of using his authority for his own enrichment. As the result of suffering and worry, he committed suicide in London.

The next step in consolidating British rule in India, and introducing the principles of heavy colonial exploitation of that country, was made by Warren Hastings (1732-1818). Hastings was a soldier and administrator, who in 1773 became the first governor general of the entire British India. Hastings retired as governor general in 1785 and returned to England. He hoped that the government in London would reward his services. Instead, the House of Commons impeached him on charges of cruelty and dishonesty toward the inhabitants of India. A committee of nineteen men was appointed, with philosopher Edmund Burke (1730-1797) as its head. Hastings' trial was opened on February 13, 1788. Reading of the charges and defendant's replies took two days. Then two eminent intellectuals, the just mentioned Edmund Burke, and also the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), were given the role of main prosecutors. It seems significant that such a role was designated to distinguished and subtle intellectuals, not ordinary politicians. It was obvious that the House of Commons expected not only accusations but also a moral evaluation of Hastings' behaviour in India, as a pretext for delineating certain ethical limits to political power.

Burke opened the prosecution with a very profound speech lasting four hours. He described Hastings as "a captain-general of iniquity, thief, tyrant, robber, cheat, swindler and sharper." And he concluded, "I impeach him in the name of the English nation, whose ancient honour he has sullied. I impeach him in the name of the people of India whose rights he has trodden under foot, and whose country he has turned into a desert. Lastly, in the name of human nature itself, in the name of both sexes, in the name of every age, in the name of every rank, I impeach him as the common enemy and oppressor of all."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Trial of Warren Hastings Esq. Complete from February 1788 to June 1794 with a Preface Containing the History of the Origins of the Impeachment*, printed for J. Owen,

Sheridan accompanied him in a similar vein, lasting much longer: two days. His speech concerned political hypocrisy and double-dealing: “In his (Hastings’) mind all is shuffling, ambiguous, dark, insidious, and little; all affected plainness, and actual dissimulation – a heterogeneous mass of contradictory qualities, with nothing great but his crimes, and even those contrasted by the littleness of his motives, which at once denote both his baseness and his meanness, and mark him for a traitor and a trickster.”<sup>24</sup>

The trial of Warren Hastings lasted seven years. Finally, after numerous emotional and ethical accusations and defending speeches, the court acquitted Hastings on most charges as not guilty. Only on three minor questions was he found guilty, but even in these cases he was cleared by majority vote at gatherings of the House of Commons and House of Lords. He lost all his property and had debts of more than 70 000 pounds, spent on the cost of the trial and lawyers defending him. Then the East India Company, in order to assist him, gave him a loan at zero percent interest and awarded him a pension of 4000 pounds a year. Although Hastings was not sentenced and jailed, this trial had very important moral consequences. Political wickednesses and economic swindles still continued, as happens in any nation of the world. But now the British Government defined a certain ethical line, after the crossing of which any politician or public officer could expect to be branded as a criminal. This provided the world with a significant contribution to the development of international political and economic ethics. The young Polish aristocrat, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, who was then studying English law and Economy in London, participated in Warren Hastings’ trial. It made a tremendous impression on his sense of ethics, which he employed later in his political activities.

Meanwhile, in India, after several decades of relative peace, a series of events happened which provided the world with a rather shameful example of British behaviour. For years the British had been aware of discontent in the native Indian army, but failed to realise the potential political allies they might find among the dispossessed native princes. This resulted in the famous, or rather infamous, Sepoy Mutiny.

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London 1794, vol. I, passim. See also the full text of Burke’s speech online: Edmund Burke, III. *At the Trial of Warren Hastings*, <http://www.bartleby.com/268/6/3.html>; some of the most emotional quotations from Burke’s speech can be found in: L. J. Trotter, *Warren Hastings. A Biography*, J.M. Dent and Sons, London-Toronto 1925; pp. 235-238.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See also the full text of Sheridan’s speech online: [uod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004780205.0001.000/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext](http://uod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004780205.0001.000/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext)

It was all initiated by trouble over the introduction of greased cartridge for guns. This grease was produced for economic reasons from cows, considered by the Indian natives as sacred. British officers did not pay attention to this, until this aggravated the ill temper of the Indian troops of Sepoys in service for the Empire. The attempt to force the cartridge issue in the Meerut barracks on May 10th, 1857, led to a minor mutiny. Soon this minor mutiny was crushed and the British Army, supported by means of the East India Company and its financial subsidies, triumphed. Then the real rebellion was started. The Sepoy Mutiny, in fact, covered quite a substantial, if not the prevailing part, of India's territory, although its build-up and strain was different in various regions.<sup>25</sup>

This revolt was crushed with unusual cruelty: twelve leaders of the Sepoy Mutiny were tied to the muzzles of cannons, which were then fired when the British officer gave the order to fire... This brutal and unusually barbarian method of execution made it impossible for the sepoys' families to arrange and perform the traditional Hindu or Muslim funeral rites, because the bodies of the executed rebels could hardly be put back together. The Russian artist, Vasily Vereshchagin (*Russ.* Василий Верещагин, 1842-1904), painted somewhat later a famous picture showing this cruel execution. It was titled *Suppression of the Indian Revolt by the English* (1884). Vereshchagin's critics reprimanded him, arguing that his painting depicted the events of 1857 with soldiers wearing English uniforms of the 1880s, implying that the practice was normal, though it happened only once. In "The Magazine of Art" in December 1887, Vereshchagin defended himself rather ironically, by saying that that if there were another rebellion in India then the British would again consider his painting more contemporary. The masterpieces of Vereshchagin belong, by the way, to the great tradition of European anti-war paintings, initiated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the French engraver Jacques Callot and his two series of prints on *The Miseries of War* (*Les Misères de la guerre*), printed in 1633. They show, among other cruelties, the moment of the hanging of Protestants by Catholic soldiers on a big tree in the Lorraine region, which had been invaded by the French during the Thirty Years' War. Callot's artwork later influenced Francisco Goya and his series *The Disasters of War* (Spanish: *Los Desastres de la Guerra*), producing the most powerful artistic statements about the inhumanity of any war. Another well known oil painting

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<sup>25</sup> On the Sepoy Mutiny see: C. Anderson, *Indian Uprising of 1857-8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*, Anthem Press, New York 2007.



by Francisco Goya is titled *French Army was here* and shows the execution of Spanish freedom fighters by a French execution squad.

Meanwhile, news of the Sepoy Mutiny reached London at the time when Queen Victoria was bestowing the first series of crosses named after her, i.e. the *Victoria Cross*, on valorous soldiers of the Crimean War (1853-1856). The dramatic news from India raised mixed and often divergent feelings. Her husband, the Prince Consort Albert, had just arrived in Balmoral to take some rest during these dramatic days, and he wrote: “the season is becoming more beautiful every day [...] I have been out stalking only twice. [...] We succeeded in bringing a little more military spirit into the Ministry which was overtired by endless speeches regarding India. [...] It is impossible to speak of the horrors that happened there. The heroism of the English and their full confidence in God is admirable. [...] The Indians are not a people capable of conquering independence for themselves, to say nothing of maintaining it.”<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, there were no special signs of understanding, let alone compassion, towards the Indians. There was simply cold calculation about what to do in order to crush the rebellion decisively when it was still raging. Hector Bolitho (1897-1974), a biographer of Albert, the Prince Consort to Queen Victoria, described the event one century later with a one-sided emphasis on Indian cruelties and threats towards the cohesiveness of the Empire, stressing the heroism of the British soldiers, not the rebels. The issue of British cruelties was not even mentioned. Obviously, all the energy of Victoria’s retinue and herself was directed towards the problem of how to crush the mutiny to return to the normal ways of colonial life and security for the whites. Bolitho’s biography of Prince Albert does not even mention the execution of the Sepoy leaders. It also makes no comment at all about the factual background of the mutiny and the true reasons for its outbreak:

“English officers, women and children were being massacred in India and the rebels had retreated to Delhi to gather more supporters. [...] On 11 July, Lord Palmerston had sent for Sir Colin Campbell and offered him the command-in-chief. [...] He arrived in India in August to find that the tide of fortune had already turned, Delhi and Cawnpore had been rescued and, with troops that had been intended for China, Campbell advanced to

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<sup>26</sup> Quot. after: H. Bolitho, *Albert Prince Consort*, Max Parrish, London 1964, pp. 174-175.

Lucknow, which, after reverses and slaughter, was finally compelled to surrender in March of the following (1858) year.”<sup>27</sup>

Different opinions on the mutiny were voiced in the British Parliament, at least. In particular, the execution of the Sepoy leaders was considered to be extremely inhumane. As a result, the government of India was transferred from the East India Company to the Crown in 1858 by the *Government of India Act*. The Company formally continued its existence in a much limited and vestigial form as a governmental agency until 1873 when another parliamentary act officially dissolved it.

Under Queen Victoria (1819-1901, ruled from 1837), India was considered as the Pearl of the British Empire. Interestingly enough, Victoria was somewhat unusually nominated the Empress of India. This happened when one of her daughters was married to the German Emperor. The British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, was convinced that it would be very improper and even unseemly if the English Queen were a monarch of lower status than her daughter. Giving to Victoria the full title of “the British Empress” was not even considered, because traditionally the British were afraid of the authoritarian rule which usually results from such a title and political position. Then, on Disraeli’s advice, in 1876 the British Parliament passed a special law under which Victoria was titled the Empress of India. Thus, the British state remained as an Empire without a ruling Emperor.

India waited for her independence until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the great spiritual leader, Mahathma Gandhi, appeared on the political horizon. He lived between 1869 and 1948 and became the leader of The Indian National Congress and advocated a policy of non-violence and non-cooperation with the British. It was Gandhi’s great moral prestige, accepted worldwide, that helped India to regain independence in 1948. Gandhi is now rightly considered in India as *Bapu* – the Father of the Nation. His birthday, 2nd October, is celebrated in India as Gandhi Jayanti, which means “national holiday.” It is also recognised world-wide as the International Day of Non-violence. Gandhi was unfortunately assassinated on 30 January, 1948. His assassin, Nathuram Godse, fired three bullets from a pistol into his chest. Godse was a Hindu nationalist who considered Gandhi guilty of favouring Pakistan. He also strongly opposed the doctrine of non-violence and supported guerilla tactics against the British. Godse was arrested and after a trial was sentenced to death on 8 November 1949. India’s prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

two of Gandhi's sons made pleas for commutation with the justification that a death penalty would be in opposition to Gandhi's legacy and ideas about all forms of violence. Despite this, Godse was hanged a week later.

One of the most profitable factors in the development of all European empires was slavery. Britain was not an exception and had substantial shares in slave-trading and slave-holding from its modern beginnings. Captains of the British merchant fleet were very famous for catching Negro-slaves in Africa. They were equally famous for their "economic" transportation to America. Due to poor feeding, lack of fresh air and minimal hygienic conditions (the slaves were lying in the excrement discharged from their bodies for several weeks during transportation), it was quite common for up to one quarter of the human cargo to die. All of this was precisely described in a poem titled *The Slave Ship* by an American Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892):

"'All ready?' cried the captain;  
 'Ay, ay!' the seamen said;  
 'Heave up the worthless lubbers,  
 The dying and the dead'.  
  
 Up from the slave-ship's prison  
 Fierce, bearded heads were thrust:  
 'Now let the sharks look to it,  
 Toss up the dead ones first!'

Corpse after corpse came up,  
 Death had been busy there;  
 Where every blow is mercy,  
 Why should the spoiler spare?  
 Corpse after corpse they cast  
 Sullenly from the ship,  
 Yet bloody with the traces  
 Of fetter-link and whip.  
 Gloomily stood the captain,  
 With his arms upon his breast,  
 With his cold brow sternly knotted  
 And his iron lip compressed.  
 'Are all the dead dogs over?'  
 Growled through that matted lip;  
 The blind ones are no better,  
 Let's lighten the good ship"<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> J. Greenleaf Whittier, *The Slave Ship*, see full text online: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAE0044.0001.001/1:4.3?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

It happened from time to time that the slaves rebelled on board. But such rebellions were in most cases quickly and effectively crushed by the seamen. In 1807, slave-trading was prohibited thanks to the initiative of William Wilberforce, a politician, philanthropist and leader of the anti-slavery movement. In 1833, the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, also inspired earlier by Wilberforce, but unfortunately passed just a few months after his death. However, Wilberforce was not the first to suggest abolishing slavery in England. In 1706, Sir John Holt, Lord Chief Justice of England, ruled that, 'as soon as any African comes into England, he becomes free. One may be a villein in England, but not a slave.' But this ruling was hardly respected during the next century. It was Wilberforce who forced the general anti-slavery law to be respected on a national scale. Nevertheless, England was not the first country where slave-trading and also slave-holding was prohibited. During the French Revolution, the first elected Assembly of the First Republic (1792-1804), abolished slavery in France and its colonies on February 4th, 1794. It was done on the initiative of Maximilian de Robespierre, preceded by the 1788 activities of the Society of the Friends of the Blacks (*Société des Amis des Noirs*), established in 1788 by Jacques Pierre Brissot. However, the French slave-owners threatened to transfer the French Caribbean colonies to English political control, as Great Britain then still allowed slavery. In order to avoid secession from the French Caribbean islands on 20 May 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte decided to re-establish slavery after becoming First Consul. There was, however, a great rebellion of black men on Dominica Island and Haiti, unfortunately fought against by Polish troops in the service of Napoleon's army. In 1804, Haiti was able to win independence. Slavery in France was permanently abolished in 1848.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Empire still was expanding and able to acquire new territories. Imperial ambitions were well guarded by the strong British merchant marine and the powerful Royal Navy. However, at the turn of the century, the first scratches appeared on the Empire's surface. The first significant reduction of the Empire's strength and cohesiveness was visible after the series of Boer Wars (1899-1902). The Boers were originally Dutch Settlers in South Africa. The history of the conflict between the Dutch and the British started with the arrival of the first European settlers in South Africa. This moment was commemorated by the Scottish artist, Charles Davidson Bell (1813-1882), in a picture showing Jan van Riebeeck from the Netherlands who, in 1652, established a refreshment station

at the Cape of Good Hope (now Cape Town). The British Empire was not ready to consider the Boers as an autonomous and free people. Gradually, sharp frictions increased. The reason for the British interest in African soil was not arable ground or jungles full of animals. It was the gold and diamond mines located there. These mines could make any nation very rich. The most serious conflict was started in 1866 when, in Kimberley, the present capital of Northern Cape province in South Africa, on a farm near Hopetown, a young shepherd named Erasmus Jacobs found a small white pebble which turned out to be a 21.25 carat diamond. This diamond was later named the "Eureka Stone," due to the famous exclamation attributed to the ancient Greek scholar Archimedes. Soon after the discovery of gold and diamond mines, two full-scale wars followed over independence between the Boers or Dutch farmers from the united Transvaal and Orange Free States on the one side, and the British Empire on the other. The first Boer War lasted from 1880 until March 1881. The Second Boer War ravaged South African territory between 1899 and 1902. Also, between these two stages of the conflict, hostilities between the British and the Boers were quite intense. In 1895, a group of 600 Englishmen made a military raid into the Boer Republic. They were forced to surrender and somewhat later, the President of the Boers, Stephanus Paul Kruger (1825-1904), demanded that Britain remove all border troops. The ultimatum remained unanswered but the Boers opened military hostilities. Then the Empire answered and sent 22 000 soldiers to solve the problem by military force. The Boers were, however, highly proficient at guerrilla warfare, and they were excellent marksmen. In addition, they were fighting for their own rights to their own independent country (although also taken by force from the native Africans). The British troops, over the course of the war, were less efficient and when the Commander-in-Chief of the British, Frederick Sleigh Roberts, returned to England asking for reinforcements, he left General Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1871-1916) in command in Africa. Kitchener appeared not only militarily able but also a cruel war leader. A photograph shows what remained after one of Kitchener's troops' raids on a Boer camp. The death and suffering of the civilians, according to many scholars, is what broke the Boers' will. A number of documentary photographs also show dramatic moments during the Boer War, like the setting of houses on fire, the dead bodies of the Boers on the battle field, etc. Another of Kitchener's inventions was the British policy of rounding up and isolating the Boer civilian population in concentration camps, the very first form of this shameful in-

stitution in history. The wives and children of Boer guerrillas were sent to these camps with poor hygiene and little food, although this was remedied to some extent as time went on. Pictures showing Boer women and children in British concentration camps, even today, are extremely moving. British prisoner, Lizzie van Zyl, died in the Bloemfontein concentration camp of sickness and hunger, while her picture, in which she resembled a skeleton rather than a fully-fleshed body, appeared in newspapers, causing outrage among the reading public. Despite all these events and Kitchener's solutions, hostilities continued until May 31, 1902 when a peace treaty was finally signed. Britain obtained all of South Africa. Nonetheless, the British casualties numbered 24 000 men killed, wounded or missing; at the same time 'only' 4 000 Boers were killed, while as many as 40 000 were made prisoners of concentration camps. This victory over the Boers was for the British Empire a typical 'pyrrhic victory', named after an ancient Greek king who defeated his foes but at such an expense that the victory itself became debatable.<sup>29</sup>

After World War I, it was apparent that Britain could not control such an extensive colonial territory as before. In addition, the Empire was weakened by the Easter Uprising in Ireland (1916). Ireland, in the course of time, was divided into two parts. Northern Ireland gained its status within the United Kingdom in 1920, while in 1922 the so-called Irish Free State was established and led by Irish freedom-fighter and statesman, Eamon de Valera (1882-1975). The results of that unfortunate division of Ireland are still felt today, though it was from the late 1960s to the 1990s that the Fianna fighters of the Irish Republican Army troubled the United Kingdom with their terrible terrorist attacks. In 1937, the status of south-central Ireland was changed to become part of the autonomous Eire, while its full independence was achieved in 1949.

The growing demand for freedom was, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, heard not only in Ireland but also in India. Soon after, a number of African nations loudly demanded freedom. This new situation and the political and economic factors behind them forced the British Parliament to declare a new political structure for the Empire. The former Empire was now called the British Commonwealth of Nations, formerly constituting an old imperial organization. Thus, a number (although not all) of the

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<sup>29</sup> On the Boer Wars the basic reference seems to be the comparatively recent: D. Judd & K. Surrridge, *The Boer War*, John Murray, London 2002.

former British dominions and colonies gained autonomy or full independence in the *Westminster Act of 1931*, by which the Commonwealth of Nations was established. Most of the members of that structure recognise, however, the actual King or Queen of the United Kingdom as the head of their state.

In 1936, George Orwell in his famous essay *Shooting an Elephant* wrote his famous remark: “I did not even know that the British Empire was dying.”<sup>30</sup> This essay was published in the literary journal “New Writing” just five years after the Act of Westminster (1931), by which the British Empire officially ceased to exist, substituted by the looser political structure of the Commonwealth of Nations. But it seems that most of the British and also foreign observers of international politics overlooked this substantial change in the structure of the former empire. As late as World War II, Winston Churchill, in a number of his war speeches, alluded to the British Empire as a still vigorous political structure able to resist the German invasion and finally win the war. Thus, Orwell’s observation was virtually ignored. The pretext for such remarks seems trivial: the essay described the experience of a colonial police officer, most probably Orwell himself, who as his duty is obliged to kill a dangerous and aggressive elephant against his own judgment, but according to colonial law, thus depriving the Indian owner of this animal as a means of work and subsistence. The content of the essay in a metaphorical way shows collapsing British imperialism as too oppressive for subdued nations and is concluded by the next sharp remark: “Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.”<sup>31</sup> When World War II really proved that the British Empire, still living in people’s minds, had lost its former glory and power, it was the BBC Home Service that on October 12, 1948, broadcast Orwell’s essay as a kind of political comment. Within the essay was the quite timely and rather sad intellectual discovery and at the same time helpful lesson for the British in understanding what

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<sup>30</sup> G. Orwell, *Shooting an Elephant*, in: *The Random House Reader*, Frederick Crews, ed., Random House, New York 1984, p. 253.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

had happened to their extensive empire, on which once upon a time the sun never set. Nevertheless, the sporting Imperial Games maintained their name up to 1970, which was one more proof of how slow the British were in accepting the new state of affairs.

In 1934, as if someone had unconsciously decided to compensate for the diminishing power of the former Empire through the growing importance of British culture, the British Council was established. Its aim was to secure the spreading and strengthening of the international influences of British culture, first of all the English language, then literature, art, theatre and music throughout the world.

As a matter of fact, long before the British decided to establish such an institution, it was the Polish Prince, Adam George Czartoryski, who, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, planned to use Great Britain in the process of elevating Poland from her deplorable political situation as a country partitioned by three European super-powers: Austria, Prussia and Russia. He was convinced that the British model of civilization would be a good pattern for Poland in gaining her international prestige and slow political emancipation. Thus, shortly before the Vienna Congress in 1815, he prepared a *Memorial to the British Government* written in French in which he declared openly, that “All the Poles want is for the English government to establish its influences in Poland (‘d’occupe à établir son influence en Pologne’) and initiate its political activities here. Even if they were without significance they could at least support the progress of civilisation and the proper organisation of some institutions in our country (progrés de la civilization et de bonnes institutions dans le pays). All of these works would work well for Poland without any risks for England. Great Britain maintains large numbers of representatives all over the world. Why could she not afford to keep a secret agency in Poland? Such an agency could supply Britain with updated information about this country about which too little was known til then, and also initiate new relations with it. In brief , such an agency could introduce some English influences which would be advantageous for Poland (‘d’établir unde influence dans le pays, qui serait infiniment salu – taire ávcelui-ci’) if done cleverly and by friendly means. In this the confidence of Polish society could be won, and soon the entire country would sympathise with English ideas and feelings and unite with the wishes and intentions of Great Britain, and perhaps in the future, even with her endeavours and general political outlooks. Such an agency could also be a centre of activity not only



for Poland, but also for other offshoots of the great Slavic family. English merchants and travellers establishing their factories and trading houses here, or merely entering local economic and industrial associations, with the exception of material gains resulting from the exchanges between the two countries, would also facilitate certain political goals.”<sup>32</sup>

This voice of Prince Czartoryski was not heard in Britain for a long time. It was as late as on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1935, that the inaugural meeting of the British Council took place at St. James’s Palace, attended by His Royal Highness Edward the Prince of Wales as Patron and Lord Tyrell of Avon as the first Chairman ((1934-1936). The British Council was, however, much delayed in comparison with other similar attempts seen in France, Germany and Italy, where national propaganda was the main factor in spreading knowledge of a particular country. In a commemorative book on the history of the British Council written by Frances Donaldson we can read about this: “More than one writer has attempted to explain why the British took so long to accept the necessity for some institutions to undertake cultural propaganda, even if it were to be regarded only as an essential presence on a scene otherwise totally occupied by others. Thus, Harold Nicolson attributes our failure in the nineteenth century to an arrogant reticence based on the training to regard all forms of self-display as obnoxious. ‘If foreigners failed to appreciate, or even to notice, our gifts of invention or our splendid adaptability, then there was nothing that we could do to mitigate their obtuseness. The genius of England, unlike that of lesser countries, spoke for itself.’”<sup>33</sup> One of the British Council’s founders, diplomat and civil servant Sir Reginald A. Leeper, justified the delay in establishing an institution for spreading British culture all over the world as resulting from typical English moderation and self-restraint based on a feeling of national pride which does not need propaganda: “We ourselves read with interest the books that

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<sup>32</sup> *La Politique de la Grande Bretagne. Mémoire présentée au cabinet anglais en faveur de la Pologne*, in: E. Wawrzukowicz, *Anglia a sprawa Polska 1813-1815 (England and Poland’s Question 1813-1815)*, Instytut Popierania Nauki Polskiej (Institute of Supporting Polish Sciences), Kraków-Warszawa 1919, full text pp. 307-324; transl. by WL; see also: W. Lipoński, *The Influence of Britain on Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski’s Education and Political Activity*, part 3, *Unrealized Democratic Reforms*, “Polish-AngloSaxon Studies,” vol. 2, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, Poznań 1991, pp. 36-27.

<sup>33</sup> F. Donaldson, *The British Council. The First Fifty Years*, Jonathan Cape, London 1984, p. 11; internal quotation used by F. Donaldson: H. Nicholson, *The British Council 1934-1955. Twenty-first Anniversary Report*, The British Council, London 1955, p. 4.

others write about us, and note with equal condescension their errors of fact or judgment or the shrewdness of their criticism; only rarely are we annoyed by either. We are perhaps dimly aware that our habits of thought and action are often extremely irritating to foreigners, but our equanimity is hardly ruffled when they show their irritation, and for that very reason we make little effort to correct its cause. For example the criticisms of our foreign policy which appear in the newspapers of other countries are seldom answered in our own, no matter how malicious or misinformed we may consider them. As for taking positive steps to explain our aims and achievements, that we regard as undignified and unnecessary. Good wine, we optimistically feel, needs no bush.”<sup>34</sup>

“Good wine needs no bush” ... A lot of truth is contained in this statement. British civilization in general, despite all its failures, possesses enough elements which are so crucial to all human civilization and at the same time have such a universal appeal that its influence spreads regardless of whether the British Council was established or not. But the fact is that the activity of this institution became not only very effective but was also a model for international cultural relations, deprived of an excessive propaganda element and concentrating on the real cultural values of literature, art and science, with the emphasis on the latter prevailing in more recent years. Regardless of its establishment, the British empire was responsible for the huge cultural impact exerted on international society during the last three centuries. It influenced not only British colonies or the area of English speaking countries. It was not just the countries of the Empire that had the chance to employ the English concept of freedom initiated by the omnipresent traditions of the *Great Charter of Liberty*, the 800th anniversary of which we celebrate this year (1215-2015). The word “charter” became a synonym for all kind of laws guaranteeing human rights. It was first recalled in the *People’s Charter* in Britain in 1838. However, later this word was used on innumerable occasions in the titles of such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nation’s Charter or even the Olympic Charter with paragraphs excluding any form of discrimination in sport. There is also *Charter ‘76* issued by Czech dissidents fighting for freedom under Communist rule or the *Charter Center (Ośrodek Karta)* established in 1982 under Marshall Law declared in Poland.

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<sup>34</sup> R. A. Leeper, *British Culture Abroad*, ‘Contemporary Review,’ vol. 148, August 1935, p. 201; quot after F. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 11-12.

The English *Habeas Corpus Act* (1679) and the *Bill of Rights* (1688) influenced legal systems in all of the civilized world, and the British Parliamentary system was followed, though not always precisely, by numerous countries of West and East, from Canada to Japan. The seemingly outdated and unique character of the British monarchy did not become a model for states looking for republican systems in modern times. It plays rather a symbolic role, with the colourful attractiveness of royal ceremonies able to unite the nation's feelings and support its identity, which is either the subject of admiration and jealousy for outside societies which lack similar traditions or simply destroyed them in the course of their own histories. The British system of kingship among other institutions of the country seems so important "not just because the monarchy is the oldest of them all, the central totem of a continuous tribal system which is Britain's most obvious distinction, or because the Queen is the formal head of many institutions which follow, including parliament, the civil service, the Commonwealth, and the Guards. But also because the monarchy is not a bureaucracy or a hierarchy but a family whose values and attitudes are more personal and comprehensible than those of most other institutions."<sup>35</sup>

The crisis of the monarchy visible at the turn of the last millennium and the 1990s, the divorce of the Prince of Wales and Princess Diana, then her tragic death, temporarily undermined and put in question the ability of the British Royal Family to survive as a symbol of continuity of national heritage. But soon the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton and their new-born babies attracted the admiration of both British and foreign societies. After all, when people want it, nothing else can be decisive. "It is a [Royal] Family that has become more expert than any other institution in one critical art – the art of survival. In spite of the magic and sentimentality that surrounds it, the Family has to be more realistic and less fooled by its mystique than its admirers; the view from the palace is like looking at Britain from backstage, where sets, floodlights and props are seen as part of the illusion. While most other monarchies have been toppled or cut down, the British royal family have developed skills which have enabled them so far to survive each new republican threat. And the more Britain worries about her own survival and future, and the more her

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<sup>35</sup> A. Sampson, *The Changing Anatomy of Britain*, Longman, London-Sydney-Auckland-Toronto 1981, p. 3.

other institutions become discredited, the more interesting and reassuring is the continuity of the institution that pre-dates them all.”<sup>36</sup>

One undisputable heritage of the British Empire is sport (discussed separately in another chapter of this book). Its wide international impact was initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British Empire flourished and was at the peak of its development. This impact was first visible in the English form of horse racing and later best symbolized by the dazzling growth of football. It was associated with the less conspicuous but still impressive progress of tennis, golf, a number of events of track and field athletics, then Scottish curling. The most English sport, cricket, became very popular in the countries of the Commonwealth, but not in countries outside it.

The thoughts of Adam Smith influenced the world economy. All of us have continuously benefitted from British discoveries and inventions, beginning with the world’s first vaccine against smallpox up to the invention of steam locomotion and consequently the railroad network initiated by Robert Stephenson (1803-1859). The steam propulsion of locomotives was changed to electric, yet this was also the invention of an Englishman in the field of electricity – Michael Faraday (1791-1867). We should add to this the innumerable discoveries and scientific theories of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), as well as Britain’s fascinating philosophy and literature, written in the most widespread language in the world. Thanks to the British, we saw the development of alpinism. In 1854, Alfred Wills (1828-1912) climbed Wetterhorn, the first significant achievement in modern mountaineering, while three years later the first Alpine Club was established not by the Swiss but by the British. A substantial part of the youth in numerous countries realise their life goals in scouting, which was initiated in 1907 by General Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941). This movement was initially designed to serve British goals in educating good citizens of the Empire, but soon it was effectively spread internationally and used for incomparably more universal aims. Now scouting, including Polish “harcerstwo,” is accepted in more than 100 countries. Today, around 14 million boys and girls participate in scouting worldwide.

It seems that at least some of this unusual heritage of British civilization has gained real momentum, and is stronger than ever, although it is not now limited to the former countries, colonies and dominions of the British Empire. Different streams of this heritage existed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are expanding widely, independent of the political backing of the former imperial structure. British film, despite its reduced artistic impact in recent years, at least gave us such individuals as Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock, not to mention the innumerable novels of Conan Doyle, adapted in equally innumerable movies. There are the courageous deeds of James Bond, based on the famous series of Ian Fleming novels, preceded by the equally famous, although different in nature, stories of Agatha Christie. More ambitious English literature, translated into dozens of national languages, has had uninterrupted success, with several centuries of international readership, beginning with Elizabethan times and the dramas of William Shakespeare up to the prophetic novels of Orwell. For many decades have we observed the invasion of British TV serials, which are not a direct influence of the imperial inheritance (British television initiated its broadcasting in 1936 just five years after official dissolution of the Empire in 1931), but indirectly their international success stems from the historic stock used by serials based on the literature of Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope or John Galsworthy. In a similar way, the pioneering TV programs of Richard Attenborough devoted to nature have a close connection with the early and more recent achievements of British biologists and the natural sciences. The achievements of modern archaeology and classical philology can hardly be imagined without the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge. English humour, with its famous understatement, uninterruptedly triumphs on the international arena thanks to the English tradition of comedy which has existed at least since Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humours* and was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued by numerous personalities such as Peter Sellers or the less refined, or those who were sometimes even primitive but always widely popular and accepted by international audiences such as Benny Hill and Rowan Atkinson, better known as Mr. Bean. The famous Muppet Show series does not need special emphasis as it is so well known already.

Needless to mention the wide international circulation of British popular music, especially that directed towards young generations. It is also an indirect result of the long British tradition stemming from different factors, such as the heritage of London street ballads, adapted as long ago as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and such great theatrical performances as the *Beggar's Opera* by John Gay and Christopher Pepusch, when folk music became ennobled and raised to the level of popular art much earlier than in continental Europe. From the first performances of the *Beggar's Opera*, British compos-

ers felt the real expectations of the general public. The general level of British popular music was strengthened by the tradition of school and church choirs, perhaps more numerous in comparison with other countries, including Germany. They provided countless performers for popular music, of which the best examples are popular singers on early gramophones and radio, such as Al Bowlly, Gracie Fields or Vera Lynn and after 1945 Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard and Tom Jones. Most of them had at the beginning of their singing careers participated in school or church choirs. Their popularity was extended outside Britain, not only thanks to records but also to radio stations like Radio Luxemburg. The activities of this last station played an important role in transmitting British (as well as American) music to the Soviet zone, where records were hardly available until the political changes of 1989. Radio Luxemburg was established in 1924 thanks to the international initiative of the Anen brothers, François and Marcel. But after 1946, gradually its English broadcast was aimed at the young generation, fantastically detecting their expectations and feelings. Young English disc-jockeys, in a way similar to earlier British discoverers, were seeking new types of adventures in broadcasting. Programs broadcast from Luxemburg certainly preceded and prepared the large scale revolution of young generations outside Britain in which rock music played an extremely important role. It was here that lyrics sung to the rhythm of rock and roll expressed the feelings of the youth, full of impatience, anxieties and eagerness. The youth of all Europe could be acquainted with the lyrics sung by Cliff Richard in his song *Young Ones*:

“Darling we’re the young ones,  
 And young ones shouldn’t be afraid.  
 To live, love, while the flame is strong,  
 ‘Cause we won’t be very young ones very long.  
 Tomorrow, why wait until tomorrow,  
 ‘Cause tomorrow, sometimes never comes.  
 So, love, me, there’s a song to be sung  
 And the best time is to sing it while we’re young.”<sup>37</sup>

Such lyrics paved the way for the future expansion of the *Beatles* and the *Rolling Stones*, whose popularity and worldwide expansion is visible with no further comment.

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/c/cliff+richard/the+young+ones\\_20032259.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/c/cliff+richard/the+young+ones_20032259.html)

The significance of twentieth century British music is not limited to pop. After several centuries of rather low level symphony music, at the end of the existence of the Empire, there appeared such great composers of international standing as Edward Elgar and later Benjamin Britten, famous conductors like Adrian Boult, John Barbirolli or Neville Martinson, and many others. Richard Addinsell composed one of the most famous film scores, *The Warsaw Concerto* for the movie *Dangerous Moonlight*, now played as a separate piano concerto in halls around the world. Today, British music has gained a new and previously unknown tool for its expansion, which is extensively used: satellite transmission. Premier performances of the Royal Opera House, including the famous Royal Ballet, are now transmitted regularly to over 1 600 theatres in the world, including to Poland, with a pioneering role played by the Cultural Centre and its theatre in Kielce. The public, gathered in front of giant screens, can participate live in a London spectacle and can even ask questions via twitter to directors and scenographers or theatre journalists during the intervals of the spectacle. The great theatrical and balletic traditions of Britain, combined with pioneering electronic technology give astonishing results: elite cultural events created in the British metropolis are watched live worldwide.

But why did it happen on the British Isles, and not in countries with similar geographical locations, like Japan for instance, that such an internationally attractive model of culture was shaped? Why did the French and Spanish empires, which were established earlier and at one time were even bigger and more dynamic in their expansion than that of the British, not produce comparable cultural and linguistic results? British expansionism seems to contradict the well known statement of Joseph Arnold Toynbee that geography rules history and civilization. Geography provided other nations and civilizations with much better conditions throughout ages but they never achieved such a big territorial status. This is why some historians have maintained that in the case of British civilization, colonial expansion was responsible for its unusual political and cultural status. This is not a satisfactory answer because it does not deal with the further questions: why was British expansion more effective than the expansion of other empires? What lay behind this imperialistic efficiency? There were moments in the development of European colonialism that France and Spain possessed more territories ruled by more extensive political principles and laws. And here is the first answer: they ruled mercilessly by converting other peoples to

Christianity with the frequent help of militant priests or monks supported by military detachments responsible in turn for grabbing local properties, especially gold and silver, as in the case of Cortez and Pizarro in Central and South Americas. The British were not free from similar accusations, but they were more liberal and after conquering particular territories they, in most cases, provided indigenous peoples with some rights, and at least they did not try to dominate them by a combination of cross and sword, as the Spanish notoriously did. As George Trevelyan Macaulay once said, in the English colonies, the economy was more widely exploited while at the same time the inquisitorial zeal of Spanish Jesuit types was excluded. But it still does not explain the bigger attractiveness of English culture. Why, for instance, did the English language outstrip Spanish, French and Portuguese, not to mention Italian and German? Today, as many as 58 countries speak English as the main official or one of the main official tongues. Meanwhile, there are “only” 17 countries speaking French and 18 speaking Spanish. Italian, German and Portuguese are spoken in just several countries each.

Not only political, economic or even cultural imperialism were responsible. There seem to exist some innate features of British civilization, but especially English language and, say, literature that caused its wide, international acceptance. It was not only classic cultural imperialism. Its definition was coined by cultural anthropologists as “the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture.”<sup>38</sup> But the fact is that British culture, once imposed on other nations, regardless of how, is now accepted without any imposition, rather as a free choice. No one is forced to watch the Muppet Show on TV or a transmission of ballet from the Royal Opera House. No one even tried to enforce the popularity of English soccer in Germany, Brazil or Argentina, where this sport is celebrated with a similar level of emotions, although in a culturally different way.

It seems the attractiveness of British culture stems from an unusually complicated entanglement of historic events and processes of encounters between different, often contradictory cultures, which were forced to co-exist. This did not happen with such intensity in any other civilized areas

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<sup>38</sup> A. Bullock, O. Stallybrass, eds., *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Fontana Books, London 1977, p. 303; repeated in J. Tomlison, *Cultural Imperialism*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1991, p. 3.



of Europe or even the world. These highly diversified cultures, encountering, penetrating and permeating each other, not always by free will, more often in open conflict, by combining so many different elements, nevertheless created a new and quite universal model of civilization. The area of the British Isles was subject to a record number of migrations and invasions in all the history of Europe. These were conquests as well as influences of more peaceful diffusions of prehistoric cultures, a series of Celtic migrations, almost four centuries of Roman occupation, the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons who stayed for the longest period of all newcomers, completed by the forced entrance of the Vikings, the establishment of the Danelaw and soon after the Anglo-Danish Empire ruled by Cnut the Great and his two sons, and finally the Norman conquest of 1066. This last conquest enriched England with offshoots of Romanesque culture, art and architecture. It was the last example of where Britain could be described as a cultural “pouch” or “bag” in which different influences of different cultures were dropping in and being accumulated and where all of them were mixed, worn in and matured. Each of these invasions brought different political and social organization, different cultures and customs, different material achievements, art, literature and architecture and finally different languages. Coming into contact with their predecessors, new arrivals not only carried with them their own civilization but also, consciously or unconsciously, absorbed the heritage of their predecessors and willingly accommodated and shaped their new social order according to new circumstances in which dependencies on earlier culture had to be considered in one way or another, even by prohibitive actions.

The English language carries in it traces of all these processes. In my opinion, the explanation of the present power and overwhelming expansion of the English language in modern times lies in the history of Britain, from which ultimately the language expansion of that country originated. Let us see how it happened.

Under the influence of consecutive invasions and changes, with the necessity of communication between different and frequently hostile ethnic groups, an elasticity and simplicity of expression was generated, and a number of language borrowings resulted from neighbours passing language from one generation to another and even from one epoch to consecutive ages. One of thousands of examples is the history of the name Britain. Its oldest record, *Pretanike*, can be found in a report of Pitheas of Massalia titled *Peri okeanu* (*On the Ocean*) written approximately at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century

BC.<sup>39</sup> Soon the Greeks substituted *Pretanike* with *Pretaneia*, and after vocalization of “p” into “b” a new form *Bretaneia* appeared. Then, in order to point out the greatest island of the archipelago, they added the adjective *Megala* – *Great*. *Britannia Magna* was the Latin calque of this expression, created by the Romans and with similar forms in later European languages – German *Grosse Britanien*, French *Grand Bretagne*, Polish *Wielka Brytania*, Russian *Wielikaja Britania*, etc. This is only one example of the timeless wandering of words subject to historical and cultural influences. Later language borrowings were more and more numerous when Latin entered the island during Roman occupation and continued as the official language of Christendom. The Latin influence was visible among the Anglo-Saxons even before their conquest of Britain. The German tribes served as *foederati* of the Roman Empire, and they even defended Britain against other invaders along the so-called *Saxon Shore* (*Litus Saxonicus*). These contacts are visible in English names of week days, where 4 gods plus name of the Sun and the Moon are calques of Latin names (Lat. *dies solis* – OE *sunandaeg*>modern English – *Sunday*; Lat. *dies solis* – OE *monadaeg*>Monday). However, Saturday (OE *saterdaeg*) was named after Saturnus, a Roman God unknown earlier to the Germanic peoples. Regardless of Saturday being a direct borrowing from the Latin god’s day, Saturnus, with the rest of the weekday names, all Roman gods have their equivalents in figures or ritualistic images similar, or even identical, in respect to their religious functions and meaning, but represented by the Germanic names. In this way we have: Modern *Wednesday* < OE *wedsnesdaeg* or *wodensdaeg*, day of the main Germanic god *Woden* or *Wotan*; based on Lat. *Dies Mercurii*, i.e. day of Mercurius, god of trade; Modern *Thursday* <OE *thursdaeg*, the day of Thor, Germanic god of thunder, a calque from *Dies Iovis* – day of Iupiter the Thunderer (in Latin the irregular genitive for *Iupiter* is *Iovis*]; Modern *Friday* < OE *frigedaeg*, the day of Frigg, goddess of marriage scheme of Lat. *Dies Veneris*, day of Venus, goddess of womanhood and marriage.

Thus, Latin entered early English in such areas as military art (an example is *campus*, originally a military camp, now just English *camp* or university *campus*). There are, furthermore, terms of measurement and weight as well as money such as Lat. *mille* – now English *mile* (a distance

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<sup>39</sup> The most ancient name of Britain before Pytheas, however, was *Nessoï Kassiterides* – *The Tin Islands* due to the export of this metal from contemporary Cornwall to the Mediterranean countries. The name *Nessoï Kassiterides* was coined by Herodotus, considered generally as the father of historiography.

of one thousand steps); then *pondus*, now English *pound*. Then there are household goods, clothing, work, everyday life, food and drinks, for instance Lat. *balteus* or *balteum* – OE and Mod. Engl. *belt*; Lat. *vinum* now English *wine*; or Lat. *butyrum* – OE and Modern Engl. *butter*; Lat. *caseus* – Engl. *cheese* after OE *cese*, etc.

Latin influences were later much strengthened by Christianity, as a combined result of liturgy and literature, especially medieval chronicles written in monastic scriptoria. The results of this process started to be visible together with the quickly expanding missionary efforts and establishment of bishoprics in Europe, far removed from Roman influences. It was, however, a much more general process, reflected not only in language but also if not first of all encompassing incomparably wider areas of English life. We can read about it in *Encyclopedia Britannica*: “The establishment of Christianity [...] meant that Europe, including the British Isles, was exposed to, and tutored in the systematic approach to life, literature, and religion developed by the early Church Fathers. [...] The fusion of Christian and classical philosophy formed the basis of the mediaeval habit of interpreting life symbolically. Through St. Augustine Platonic and Christian thought were reconciled; the permanent and uniform order of the Greek universe was given Christian form; nature became sacramental, a symbolic revelation of spiritual truth. Classical literature was invested with this same symbolism, exegetical, or interpretative, methods first applied to the Scripture were extended as a general principle to classical and secular writings. The allegorical or symbolic approach that was found in Virgil, a pre-Christian prophet and in the *Aeneid* a narrative of the soul’s journey through life to paradise (Rome), belonged to the same tradition as Dante’s allegorical conception of himself and his journey in *The Divine Comedy*.”<sup>40</sup>

Medieval universalisation, in which the Latin language played a conspicuous role, was common for all European nations which acquired Christianity. England and her English language were subsumed by the same processes as any other country on the Old Continent. But it was England which experienced additional universalising impulses from subsequent invasions of different cultures when the Vikings started to con-

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<sup>40</sup> *Western Literature*, in: *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Macropedia – Knowledge in Depth, Chicago-London-Toronto 1975, vol. 10, p. 1099. A similar stream to the *Divine Comedy* is represented later by *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan).

quer and occupy England. The Old English epic poem *Beowulf* is a mixture of English and Danish elements, including some language examples of mutual dependencies. It describes the adventures of its main protagonist, *Beowulf*, the Danish prince, not in Danish but in the Old English language. It is the best example of the cultural, literary and linguistic interdependence of both nations. The number of such mutual dependencies and influences flourished for the first time in the Danelaw, i.e. the part of England occupied by the Vikings and ruled by Danish law in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Soon, the Anglo-Danish Empire was created in 1016 under Canute the Great's rule, producing the phenomenon of further amalgamation of two ethnic groups. As Albert C. Baugh maintains "the amalgamation of the two races was greatly facilitated by the close kinship that existed between them. The problem of the English was not the assimilation of an alien race representing an alien culture and speaking a wholly foreign tongue. The policy of the English kings in the period when they were re-establishing their control over the Danelaw was to accept as an established fact the mixed population of the district and to devise a *modus vivendi* for its component elements. In this effort they were aided by the natural adaptability of the Scandinavian. Generations of contacts with foreign communities, into which their many enterprises had brought them, had made the Scandinavians a cosmopolitan people."<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the cosmopolitanism of the Vikings was an additional factor in making English more universal, when the brotherly Germanic language entered the scene. We should, however, remember that apart from numerous similarities, the two cultures and languages also had visible differences. And it was the process of their blurring that was still another factor in changing and making English mundane. The most visible difference between English and Scandinavian languages was the system of inflectional word endings. During the existence of the Danelaw and especially in the Anglo-Danish Empire, common institutions, service in the army and mixed marriages caused a tendency to make uniform and standardise words, meaning basically the same and different only in their endings. Thus, the root of the words was usually preserved while endings were eliminated, which was strengthened by the earlier, gradual fading out of inflection: "Contact between the languages occurred at the oral level, in those areas where ordinary English

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<sup>41</sup> A. C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London-Henley 1951, p. 111.

people encountered, in face-to-face interaction, their Danish counterparts. In situations such as this, where the communication of basic information is at a premium, we are likely to find a process similar to *pidginisation*. Language is reduced to bare essentials, as it is when we send a telegram; and the clearest means of achieving this is to delete, or simplify, some of the patterns in our grammar. It is probable that grammatical restructuring [...] took place wherever contacts were made, and the new forms gradually spread, at the spoken level, beyond the area of Scandinavian influence.”<sup>42</sup> Dick Leith continues: “We can conclude, then, that certain varieties in Anglo-Saxon, since the beginning of literacy, were already placing less reliance on the system of inflexion than others. What we have seen since Anglo-Saxon times is the gradual erosion, in all dialects, of those inflexions. The term which is used to denote this process – *simplification* – does not imply that generations of lazy speakers have merely taken innumerable short cuts in the grammar. The loss of case-endings, for instance, meant that other means had to be found for signalling relations among words in the sentence, since such endings had a syntactic function. Prepositions, like *for*, *of*, *by*, etc. began to serve those functions; and word-order became less flexible. In this, therefore, we see the *quid pro quo* of much linguistic change: while something in the language may be abandoned by its speakers, something else will emerge as a counter-balance.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the English language became incomparably simpler grammatically than before, which contributed to its universal plainness. Shortened words became more concise and terse, and meanwhile, unable to define relations between words by inflexion, became positional, where dependence between, say, subject, predicate and object became defined by position in the sentence and assisted by such prepositions as *of*, *for*, *by* etc. But as Dick Leith puts it: “More obvious evidence of linguistic contact is the massive borrowing in English of loan-words. Not only have numerous words like *angry*, *awkward*, *get*, and *take* been borrowed into the core of our everyday usage, but indispensable pronoun forms such as *they* and *she* derive either directly or indirectly from Scandinavian. These words are now part of the standard variety; but in much of northern Britain, local dialect is still heavily ‘Scandinavianised’. Forms such as *kirk* (*church*) *steg* (*gander*), *laik*

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<sup>42</sup> D. Leith, *A Social History of English*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London-Boston-Melbourne-Henley 1983, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> D. Leith, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

(*play*), as well as pronunciations and grammatical forms [...] are still part of traditional usage, or were until very recently.”<sup>44</sup> We can add do this entire groups of different terms. These were, for instance, some words associated with the human body, such as *leg* (Scand. *leggr*); *skin* (Scand. *skinn*); *skull* (Swed. *skulle*; Norw. *skol* or *skul*). Dependence on Danish law and administration resulted in such terms and concepts as Danegeld – a kind of tax; *score* – (Norw. *skor*, *skora*). In architecture, *window* stems from *vindauga* or *vindrauga* – literally *eye of the wind*, i.e. a hole in the wall of the hut through which the wind could enter the interior.

Undoubtedly, all these new features of English meant that it was easier to learn. But it was not the end of the story. When, in 1066, England was conquered by the Normans, they provided English with thousands of French words in almost all domains of life, but especially in the areas of administration, law, the army, and even food and clothing. This process was so extensive that some snide and nasty French linguists call it today ... a dialect of the French tongue.

“French had become firmly established in England as the high language of law, government, administration, and also, to some extent, courtly literature and religion. It was not until the fourteenth century that English was re-developed within these domains. We need to distinguish, therefore, two phases of contact with French. The first involves the Scandinavian French of the Norman elite. This language would not have been more developed or more prestigious than that of the English; neither was Norman culture more international or more literate in character: probably the only technical advantage the Normans enjoyed over the English was their superior ability to build castles and cathedrals in stone.”<sup>45</sup>

The second phase is usually called the “French of Paris.” It entered England in a way different from the Conquest of 1066: “In 1204 the Dukedom of Normandy was won by the King of France. While the kings of England still retained possessions in more southerly parts of France, the descendants of the Norman conquerors lost the sense of their ancestry. The ruling class of England became increasingly Anglicised, but it maintained its contacts with the French of the kings of France, a monarchy which by the end of the thirteenth century had become the strongest and most centralised in Europe. From a sociolinguistic point of view, this second phase of

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<sup>44</sup> D. Leith, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> D. Leith, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

contact with French is probably more interesting than the first. We see language come to be regarded as a social symbol, as it is identified with social groups of declared interest. The Old Norman-French is seen as provincial and unfashionable, while the language of the French court is seen as the emblem of the most sophisticated and prestigious culture in the contemporary world. [...] It became a marker of ethnicity, of national identity.”<sup>46</sup>

But the fact is, regardless of when French entered England, both languages possessed innumerable words, written in almost the same way and differing only in pronunciation, for instance such words as *colonel*, *sentence*, *justice*, etc. Two hundred years of Norman rule left its most visible traces in military vocabulary and legal areas. Among numerous examples are *battle* [< Old French *bataylle* modern *bataille*]; *jail* [<OF *jaiole*]. Political terms include *crown* [<OF – *coroune*]; *realm* [<OF – *reialme*], *state* [<OF – *estaitte*] etc. The isolation of the ordinary people from the French court elite was visible in proper terminology. The Normans brought to England new titles in administration and in the feudal and military hierarchy, a different culture of eating, also a number of different types of clothing, elements of architecture, etc. Among hundreds examples we can thus find *baron* [OF – *barun*]; *count* [<OF – *conte*]; *apparel* [<OF *appareille*]; *dress* [<OF *dresse*]; *beauty* [OF *biaute*]; *boil* [OF *boilir*], etc. The Anglo-Saxon peasant raised swines, but these same swines when on the French table were called in OF *porc* [now modern English *pork*]. The same happened to sheep, which on the Norman table was called *muton*, now English *mutton*.

Thus, during the medieval times after the Norman Conquest in 1066, three types of languages: Scandinavian (not only Danish, but also Swedish and two Norwegian dialects) and French supported by Medieval Latin between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, provided English with an enormous number of foreign elements, which was responsible for saturating the language with highly diversified elements of different cultures. Apart from English, “Norman-French was imposed by a ruling caste; but since Latin continued in its spoken form in the church, and as the written language of scholarship, the linguistic situation after 1066 may be described as *triglosic*.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> D. Leith, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> D. Leith, op. cit., p. 27.

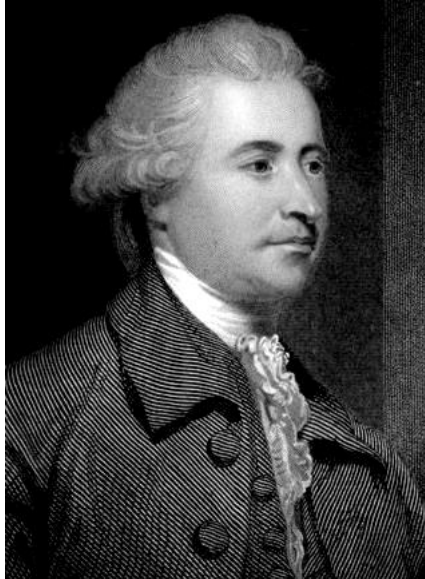


John Bull's luncheon, satirical cartoon from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

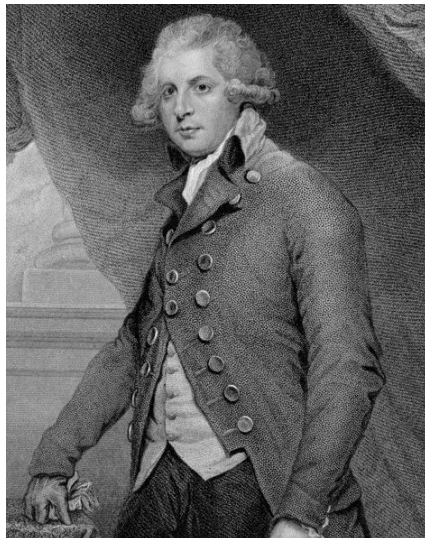


Warren Hastings, engraving from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.





Edmund Burke, Irish philosopher who was accusing Warren Hastings from a deep ethical standpoint.



Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the great English playwright who was accusing Warren Hastings during his famous trial.



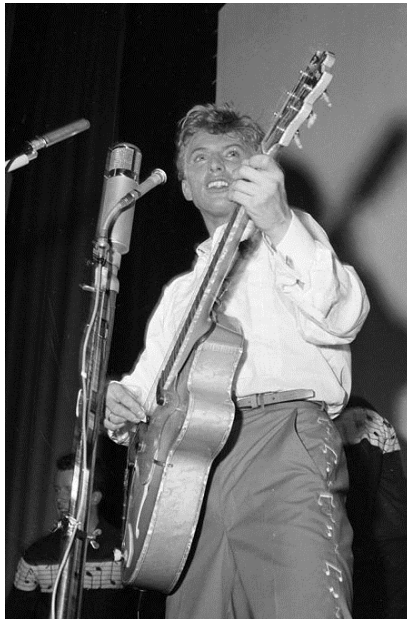
William Wilberforce, politician, philanthropist and leader of the anti-slavery movement.



Vasily Vereshchagin's painting showing Sepoy leaders shot by artillery guns.



George Orwell speaking on BBC Radio,  
1941



Tommy Steele,  
British pioneer of rock and roll in the 1950s.



Jeremy Paxman, British journalist and TV broadcaster;  
original source picture J\_Paxman\_02 on Flickr (public permission:  
Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository).



The Muppet Show, a TV programme (US-British production) which conquered the whole world, even some totalitarian countries.

Roughly speaking, saturation by foreign elements in English was incomparably stronger than in any other European language. And it was the English nation which made proper use of it in the times to come. At the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, the English language obtained its basic modern shape and became ready for international expansion, though this did not begin right-away. French and Latin still maintained their importance, while during the Tudor period English absorbed a heavy load of Italian influences. Colonial expansion plus processes of democracy produced a situation in which English gradually became the tongue of the middle class, first in England and then also in Europe. The English language was ready to become a universal means of communication.

Initially, English expanded more slowly than English economy and culture, especially with regards to literature. Meanwhile Latin, which dominated European culture in all of the Middle Ages, was gradually falling into decadence and ceased to be the universal language of Europe. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a short period of the Italian language being in vogue. After that, the French language dominated the cultural society of Europe, and it was almost obligatory, even for the English elite, to know it, not to mention the Scots who according to the “auld alliance” for centuries considered France as their ally against England. The English language, for a long time, according to Napoleon’s famously ironic and offensive statement, was considered as the tongue spoken by a “nation of shopkeepers” (“nation de boutiquiers”), unworthy of conversation in elegant salons.<sup>48</sup> But the “shopkeepers” had just started to dominate and rule the international economy and trade and together with their language were gaining more and more importance, breaking all earlier class barriers. The 19<sup>th</sup> century appeared decisive in this process for those European nations where English entered and gained an initial foothold together with trade and sport, especially horse racing. Writers and journalists of almost all European countries attempted to fight the invasion of English, visible and heard publically at equestrian races. In Poland, English “horse language” was ridiculed by

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<sup>48</sup> This phrase, however, was initially used in an offensive way by a member of the French National Convention, Bertrand Barèze de Vieuzac in 1794, in his address to the assembly in the following context: “Let Pitt then boast of his victory to his nation of shopkeepers.” Napoleon Bonaparte only repeated it in a slightly different context, but through his political position made it incomparably more widely circulated. The original phrase of Napoleon is: “*L’Angleterre est une nation de boutiquiers.*”

such eminent writers as Konstanty Gaszyński in his comedy *Horse Racing in Warsaw* (1856), Aleksander Fredro and his comedy *The Foreign Folly* (*Cudzoziemczyzna*), or Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, who sharply attacked English customs visible at racecourses in his daily newspaper “*Gazeta Codzienna*” (“Daily Gazette”). In the final scene of Bolesław Prus’s novel *Lalka* (*The Doll*), its female protagonist, Izabella Łęska, talks English in the presence of the merchant Wokulski, attempting to marry her, despite her class prejudices. She considers the English language as a higher form of conversation unknown to the lower classes, including merchants, whom she disdains, and decides to marry Wokulski only under the pressure of the financial crisis of her family and herself. Thus, she plans to betray her future husband after marriage and talk about it in his presence with her light-hearted lover, Starski, assuming that the merchant Wokulski will not understand what she is talking about. But it was at a time when English was quickly becoming the language of merchants and Wokulski was thus informed about Izabella’s treacherous plans give him up.

Today, beside the standard English spoken by the English, it appears in numerous national and regional variants. These are Scottish, American, Canadian, Australian, Indian, Nigerian English, etc. A number of dictionaries translating these varieties of Englishes have been produced over the last several decades. No other language in human history has gained such a wide range and outreach. It is estimated that English is spoken as the first or one of the main official languages in as many as 58 countries and spoken by an estimated 700 000 000 – 1 000 000 000 people, depending on the estimation (how many Indian people speak it, alongside regional Indian tribal dialects nobody knows, but there are about one billion at least potential English speakers). This number results from my own calculation based on research in selected encyclopedias. It was done by looking entry by entry at particular countries which were examined with special respect to their official language. Then it appeared clearly that in all countries of the world, i.e. 203 in number, according to the same research, there were some 18 Arab speaking countries, 18 Spanish speaking and 17 French speaking countries. Only the Chinese language probably has more speakers. But Chinese, as the official language of any country, is spoken only in certain, not very numerous places of the globe, primarily in Mainland China and Taiwan. Additionally, it is considered as one of the official languages in some countries such as Singapore. Although so-called China towns now exist in the world, mostly in the United States, the Chinese

language is not recognized there as the official tongue. We should add English as an international language spoken as a second language in numerous international institutions, organizations and sports federations. It is widely used in tourism as well as scientific areas, with many conferences and publications using English as the basic means of communication. The expansion of English is intensified by international electronic media, radio, television (outlets such as the BBC and CNN), film productions and more recently the internet. The global expansion of English makes linguistic purists anxious to the extent that in some countries special committees have been created to defend national tongues against the unwanted influence of English, with the leading example of France and its governmental *Commissions de la Terminologie*, active in all governmental units, checking whether the French language is not damaged too much by English or any other tongue in official documents. But all of this seems like Don Quixote's proverbial fight against windmills. The attractiveness and simplicity of English have so far overcome all obstacles. Thus, the English language throughout its long and complicated history has become without doubt an actual universal language.

We should, however, remember that at least in certain areas of international communication the English language is still considered as inferior to other international languages, especially French. In the Olympic Movement and the International Olympic Committee, due to the fact that neo-olympism was started by Pierre de Coubertin of France, we have two official languages, namely French and English. But it is French that is listed first in the *Olympic Charter* and it is French which is considered as the primary source in case of any confusion in the editing of all official documents of the IOC or any of its branches. Also, the international postal organization, named officially as the Union Postale Universelle, which coordinates postal policies among member nations of the United Nations, with its headquarters located in Bern, Switzerland, has French as its official language. English was added as a second working language as late as in 1994. At one time French was also the first language of diplomacy, art and some sports, which is still visible in the French terminology of fencing for instance. But neither French nor Spanish can compare in terms of popularity when the usage of a second language is considered. English is now the undisputed language of international communication in modern diplomacy, also as a congress language, as the language of technology, scientific exchange and publications, and finally as a tool of communication in international tourism.

But any language can serve positive and negative goals. Just be reminded about propaganda purposes, for instance. And English, with its widespread popularity and international circulation, has a special responsibility, because whatever is said or written in that language is automatically spread to dozens of nations through the printed media, film, TV and more recently, also the internet. The role of any language, not just English, in propaganda i.e. political lying, should be sharply criticised and if possible distrusted. This function of language, although known since times immemorial, became gradually more conspicuous and the term Propaganda was for the first time coined when the Pope Gregory the 15<sup>th</sup>. Established in 1622 the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide – the Congregation for Defending the Faith. From that moment on this term started its international career, visible not only in the Catholic Church, but first of all in different abusive political activities, especially in authoritarian and totalitarian countries. And it was Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), the great Anglo-Irish writer and author of *Gulliver's Travels*, who wrote his famous satirical pamphlet on *The Art of Political Lying* (I ignore here the literary debate on whether he was the real author of this pamphlet, or whether he only improved the text originally written by John Arbuthnot, a Scottish physician, writer and satirist who together with Swift belonged to the famous Scriblerus Club). Regardless of who wrote it, we can read there some keen observations on problems associated with the pamphlet's title. Especially interesting is the fifth chapter, where "Political Lyes" are divided into several types, which gives us ironic precepts about the inventing, spreading, and propagating of several types of lies and falsehoods. In very vivid language, Swift (or Arbuthnot, if we assume his authorship), writes that "a political lie is most frequently born out of a discarded statesman's head, and thence delivered to be nursed and dandled by the rabble. [...] Sometimes it is produced a monster, and licked into shape; at other times it comes into the world completely formed, and is spoiled in the licking. It is often born an infant in the regular way, and requires time to mature it; and often it sees the light in its full growth, but dwindles away by degrees. Sometimes it is of noble birth, and sometimes the spawn of a stockjobber."<sup>49</sup> "Here" – Swift continues – "it screams aloud at the opening of the womb, and there it is delivered with a whisper.

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<sup>49</sup> J. Swift, *The Art of Political Lying*, <<http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/47797/>>



I know a lie that now disturbs half the Kingdom with its noise, which, although too proud and great at present to own its parents, I can remember its whisperhood. To conclude the nativity of this monster, when it comes into the world without a sting, it is still-born, and whenever it loses its sting it dies. [...] No wonder if an infant miraculous in its birth should be destined for great adventures; and accordingly we see it has been the guardian spirit of a prevailing ruling political party.”<sup>50</sup> Concluding, Swift expresses his hope “that truth (however sometimes late), will at last prevail.”<sup>51</sup> Not all writers and political philosophers were as certain as Swift and the earlier John Milton in his *Areopagitica*, where a similar conviction was expressed. Milton was absolutely sure that in all situations of conflict and debate the truth will win out: “though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field [...] Let her [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?”<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, this conviction seems to me to be rather naive. We can provide a number of examples of where truth has lost in its encounter with falsehood in the political arena. In the following centuries up to the twentieth century, it happened innumerable times. It was Geroge Orwell (1903-1950, born Eric Blair) who was much concerned with political lies observed in the propaganda of both totalitarian and democratic countries. Throughout his career as a journalist, novelist and essayist he saw the misuse of language as a tool of propaganda and political oppression. In his famous essay *Politics and the English Language* (1946) he saw the reasons for such a state of affairs in the decline of a language resulting from the reciprocal relationship between biased thought, producing awkward political writing and speaking: “Now it is clear – Orwell writes – that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. [...] It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are fool-

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> J. Milton, *Areopagitica*, in: *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. M. J. Adler, vol. XXIX, published by *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago 1991, p. 384.

ish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”<sup>53</sup> And Orwell continues: “The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which are spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly; it is a necessary first step toward political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.”<sup>54</sup> Orwell sees the deterioration of English in the use of what he calls dying metaphors, operators or verbal false limbs, pretentious diction, meaningless words, but he pays special attention to the distortion of the language resulting from its employments for political goals: “A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved, as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. [...] If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness [...] is at any rate favourable to political conformity.”<sup>55</sup> Orwell is extremely sharp in his conclusion:

“In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of the political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of

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<sup>53</sup> G. Orwell, *Politics and the English language*, full text in: M. Schorer, Ph. Durham, E. L. Jones, M. Johnson, eds., *Harbrace College Reader*, Harcourt Brace Jovanowich, San Diego-New York-Chicago-Washington, etc., 1984, p. 345.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 352.

scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements. Such phraseology –Orwell continues – is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, ‘I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so’. Probably, therefore, he will say something like this: ‘While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition.’” In our age there is no such thing, as ‘keeping out of politics’. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find – this is a guess which I have not sufficient knowledge to verify – that the German, Russian and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years, as a result of dictatorship. But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation even among people who should and do know better. The debased language that I have been discussing is in some ways very convenient.”<sup>56</sup>

Orwell concludes that “the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions. So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. [...] The defense of the English language implies more than this [...]. What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way around. In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is surrender to them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualising you probably hunt about until you find the exact words that seem to fit it. 1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print. 2. Never use a long word where a short one will do; 3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out; 4. Never use the passive where you can use the active; 5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent; 6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous. These rules

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 352-353.

sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable.”<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, Orwell is deeply convinced that “the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language [...]. Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”<sup>58</sup> Nothing could be more accurate or truthful about today's world...

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Despite the critical remarks about the English language, it is expanding in a way unprecedented in world history. To be convinced of that it is sufficient to turn on a TV set, or simply go out to any street of any town, not necessarily in Britain or the USA, in order to see avenues full of shop signs and dazzling electronic commercials filled with English words and phrases, regardless of in which country we are.

In 1899 in the Imperial Institute (currently the Commonwealth Institute), Sir Charles Waldstein (1856-1927) delivered his lecture on the *English Speaking Brotherhood*, later included in his work *On the Expansion of Western Ideals and the World's Peace*, the idea of which was repeated in still another work titled *The English Speaking Brotherhood and the League of Nations* (1919) in which he suggested his political project of creating an *English Speaking Brotherhood*, composed of all nations using this language as their own. He was convinced that “language [...] reflects more than mere words and thoughts and feelings. It shows the common customs of living as well as of thinking and feeling. People, who, besides, speaking the same tongue, eat and drink in the same manner, find their pleasures in games and sports and the exertion of vitality, and in contemplating the same plays and pageants, to whom the ‘morning tub’ is an essential instrument of daily life, such people not only live together in peace, but they ought to live together.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>59</sup> Ch. Waldstein Walston, *The English Speaking Brotherhood and the League of Nations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1919, p. 127.

Also, Waldstein predicted on the basis of the opinions of a British sociologist, Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916), that in the future only two political systems with areas delineated by spoken languages will dominate the Western world: English and ... Russian. He wrote: "as the result of existing developments, the world outside of Europe tends in the future to be controlled in the main by only two sets of forces, those which proceed from the peoples who speak English, and those which proceed from the peoples who speak Russian."<sup>60</sup> The idea of a Union of English Speaking Nations was later undertaken by Winston Churchill, and strengthened by historical factors in his monumental work *A History of the English Speaking People*.<sup>61</sup>

Surprisingly, Churchill, to the same degree as Kidd and Waldstein, was afraid of the dominance of the Russians and their language in the world. His anxieties were justified at least to some extent by the beginning of the Cold War. Thus he wrote: "The English Speaking Peoples [...] are now to become Allies in terrible but victorious wars. And that is not the end. Another phase looms before us, in which alliance will once more be tested and in which its formidable virtues may be to preserve Peace and Freedom. The future is unknowable, but the past should give us hope. Nor should we seek to define precisely the exact terms of ultimate union."<sup>62</sup>

The formal, not to mention, political chances of establishing an international *English Speaking Brotherhood* are not very convincing and more and more nations of the former British Empire try to be more independent, questioning for instance the role of the English monarch as the head of state. This debate is periodically initiated in Canada and Australia, for example. But former hostilities between the USA and the United Kingdom, so sharp immediately after the American Revolution, disappeared completely during World War II when both nations cooperated with brotherly principles as the main forces of the anti-Nazi alliance. Today, former British colonies and now the USA support the former mother country in the process of linguistic expansion, strongly reinforcing the influence and growing cultural importance of an informal English Speaking Brotherhood, which taken together is responsible for 40 percent of the gross product of the world. The USA has exerted its world domination in

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<sup>60</sup> Ch. Waldstein, *Expansion of Western Ideals and the World's Peace*, Cambridge University Press, New York-London 1899, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> W. Churchill, *A History of the English Speaking People*, Cassell and Company, vol. 1-4, London 1958.

<sup>62</sup> W. Churchill, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 304.

economic, political and military areas and finally also in the cultural area, especially popular culture, which is nowadays so visible in the huge influence of American movies and TV productions of different kinds, some of them much exceeding the original British creativity.

Today, however, the British seem to be unaware of what they really did for the world. Jeremy Paxman, in his *Empire*, summarized it sardonically: „The empire was Britain’s main international preoccupation for a very long time. But instead of trying to grapple with the implications of the story of empire, the British seem to have decided just to ignore it. It is perhaps possible that this collective amnesia has nothing whatever to do with the country’s lamentable failure to find a comfortable role for itself in the world. But it seems unlikely. The most corrosive part of this amnesia is a sense that because the nation is not what it was, it can never be anything again. If only the British would bring a measure of clarity to what was done in their country’s name, they might find it easier to play a more useful and effective role in the world”.<sup>63</sup> The recent decision of the British over Brexit proves that they are quite far from understanding their own influence on civilization abroad and consequently, according to Paxman’s words, far from finding „a more useful and effective role in the world”. Meanwhile, the great influence of British civilization works much better and more effectively abroad than the British themselves could imagine.

The British Empire finally collapsed in the political sense. But it left to us the tremendous traditions of its culture: its achievements in science, literature, art and sport; its fair play concept, media ethics, especially the standards of the BBC, and first of all the English language. In this respect, the *Cultural British Empire* has just started its international expansion. Whether this will also be a kind of positive or negative cultural imperialism, the future will decide.

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<sup>63</sup> Jeremy Paxman, *Empire*, Viking, London 2001, s. 286.

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Professor Wojciech Lipoński (b. 1942) specialises in two fields of research: British studies and the history of sport. He is the author of 16 books in which these two fields are frequently linked. His best works include *The Origins of Civilization in the British Isles* (1995) and *A History of British Culture* (2003), which were reprinted in several editions and published in Polish. They both obtained prestigious awards from the Polish Ministry of Science and Academic Education and his *History of British Culture* was also named the Best Academic Book in Poland of 2004. In 1987, Professor Lipoński established a biannual academic journal *Polish-Anglo-Saxon Studies*, of which he is still editor in-chief. His books on sport include *World Sports Encyclopedia* published in Polish, English and French under UNESCO auspices (2001- 2006), and *A History of Sport* (2012). Both were awarded with Olympic Laurels by the Polish Olympic Committee. He is a member of the British Society of Sports History and his papers have been translated into as many as 12 languages in international journals and conference proceedings. *Landmarks in British History and Culture* examines selected issues crucial in the development of British civilization. It consists of fragments of Professor Lipoński's earlier publications together with the full texts of previously unpublished lectures, which are now arranged chronologically in order to form a new historical and cultural narrative. It contains views which are typical for standardised British historiography, but with the advantage of the outsider's perspective, it also tries to add new interpretations and hypotheses, explaining, for example, the lack of English protagonists in Old English epics or suggesting that it was England where the oldest European trading union of towns was created before the Hanseatic League. This is supplemented by some newly discovered facts, such as unknown usages of the term fair play.

*“Landmarks in British History and Culture* is a fascinating book, packed with curiosities which bring the narrative to life. It is a mine of information about Britain, its culture and history, painting a comprehensive picture of this compelling area.”  
[From the review of Professor Wojciech Jasiakiewicz, University of Casimir the Great, Bydgoszcz],



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