Arthur in the Latin Chronicles
Our questions:

- What do we know about Arthur and when do we know it?
- What is the chronicler’s attitude toward Arthur (or Ambrosius)?
- Can we tell what the chronicler’s motive (or motives) may be for presenting Arthur in this way?
- How does this play into Wheeler’s scheme of “four kinds of Arthur”?
Hadrian’s Wall
Fortifications
Natural defensive fortifications
Gildas (c. 547 C.E.)—p. 1 ff.
From the “Yr Hen Ogledd”—old North of Britain

- *On the Downfall and Conquest of Britain*
- Story of proud British tyrant Vortigern who invites the Saxons into England
- Saxons disperse the British into the Celtic fringes
- British re-form under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus, descendant of Romans
- “a moderate man”
- Under Ambrosius they win the battle of Mount Badon “through the grace of God”
- 44 years figures in but not clearly
Yr Hen Oglegd

*Yr Hen Oglegd (The Old North)*
c. 550 – c. 650
Based on *Yr Hen Oglegd* in *Celtic Culture*, John T. Koch, ed.
The Venerable Bede (c. 731) (p. 2-3)

Associated with monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow

- *The Ecclesiastical History of Britain*
- Vortigern invites the Saxons to Britain in 449 C.E.
- Oppressed natives call on God for help
- Their leader at the time was Ambrosius Aurelianus, “a temperate man”
- Descendant of Romans who lived in a time when people had fallen off from virtue
- With God’s help they fought the Saxons—back and forth
- Battle of Mt. Badon won 44 yrs later—493 C.E.
Nennius (c. 800 C.E.) (p. 3-4)
Probably from Breconshire or Radnorshir on Welsh border

- *The History of the Britons* is the first to name him ARTHUR.
- Octa replaces Hengist as leader of Saxons
- British kings fight Octa with help of Arthur, *dux bellorum* (Duke of battles, leader of battles)
- Names twelve specific battles, including Castle Guinnion, where Arthur bears the image of the Virgin Mary on his shoulders (or on his shield)
- Battles won through the grace of God
- Arthur capable of feats of strength—e.g. slaying 960 men at Mt. Badon
Possible location of some of Nennius’s battles
More of Nennius’ battles
Nennius creates verisimilitude ("Truthiness")

- Cairn Cabal—named for the footprint of Arthur’s hound
- Mound of Anir—burial tumulus of Arthur’s son, whom he killed
Annales Cambriae (The Annals of the Welsh) c. 900 C.E. (p. 4)

Two major entries:

• 518 C.E., the Battle of Badon where Arthur carried the Cross of Christ on his shoulders for 3 days and nights & the Britons were victorious….

• 539 C.E., the Battle of Camlann in which Arthur and Medraut fell
Legend of St. Goeznovius of Brittany (pp. 4-5)

- Written by William the chaplain, perhaps around 1019 C.E.
- Vortigern summoned warlike men from the land of Saxony and made them his allies in the kingdom.
- Since they were pagans and of devilish character, lusting by their nature to shed human blood, they drew many evils upon the Britons.
- Presently their pride was checked for a while through the great Arthur, king of the Britons. They were largely cleared from the island and reduced to subjection.
- But when this same Arthur, after many victories which he won gloriously in Britain and in Gaul, was summoned at last from human activity, the way was open for the Saxons to go again into the island, and there was great oppression of the Britons, destruction of churches and persecution of saints.
- In those days, many holy men left the greater Britain which is now the Saxon's homeland, and sailed across to the lesser Britain (Brittany).
This Arthur about whom the foolish tales of the Britons rave even today; one who is clearly worthy to be told about in truthful histories rather than to be dreamed about in deceitful fables, since for a long time he sustained his ailing nation, and sharpened the unbroken minds of his people to war.

Finally, at the siege of Mount Badon, relying on an image of the Virgin, which he had affixed to his armor, he engaged nine hundred of the enemy, single-handed, and dispersed them with incredible slaughter.
William adds Gawain (Walwin)

- At that time [ca. 1087 A.D.], in the province of Wales, called Ros, was found the sepulcher of Walwin, the noble nephew of Arthur; he reigned, a most renowned knight, in that part of Britain which is still named Walwerth; but was driven from his kingdom by the brother and nephew of Hengist (of whom I have spoken in my first book,) though not without first making them pay dearly for his expulsion. He deservedly shared, with his uncle, the praise of retarding for many years the calamity of his falling country.

- The sepulcher of Arthur is nowhere to be seen, whence ancient ballads fable that he is still to come.
Which leaves us with these questions:

- Most of these sources are compiled by Christian chroniclers. What purpose was served by their expansion of the Arthurian legend?
- Why would they want to promote the legend of a “moderate/temperate man” as the ideal of a ruler?
- All through this period, the Vikings are decimating the eastern and southern parts of Britain. How do the locations of the Arthurian storytellers ‘fit’ with this historical circumstance?
- Why keep this story alive in a time when the Britons are struggling politically and militarily?