

Texts relating to Vortigern

Dr Kari Maund for Punctuation 2

1) Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquesto Britanniae*, On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain, mid 6th century C.E., provenance uncertain.

22. ...a vague rumour suddenly flew to the ears of the people, that their old foes were rapidly approaching to destroy the whole country, and to take settle it from one end to the other, as they had done before. .. So they called a council to decide would be the best and most effective way to repel the violent and regular invasions by those people.

23. Then all the councillors, together with that proud tyrant [Lat: *superbus tyrannus*], the British king, were so blinded, that, to protect their country, they invited the fierce pagan Saxons (like wolves into a sheepfold) in to help fight against the Picts and the Scots, , thus sealing their own doom Nothing was ever so harmful or unlucky for to our country! How blind they were, how foolish and desperate! They invited the people they feared most to love alongside them. A host of cubs flooded out of the den of this barbaric lioness, in three keels, as they call warships in their tongue. They [the Saxons] prophecies and omens from their soothsayer, that they would occupy the country to which they were sailing for 300 years, and would plunder and ravage it for 150 years, half of that time.. They first landed on the eastern side of the island, by the invitation of the unlucky king, and dug their claws in, apparently to fight in favour of the island, but more truly against it. Their mother-land, finding her first brood successful, sent a larger company of her wolfish offspring, who sailed across to join themselves to their treacherous comrades. From that time the germ of iniquity and the root of contention planted their poison amongst us, as we deserved, and shot forth into leaves and branches. The barbarians who had come as soldiers into the island asked for provisions, pretending they were ready to face any danger for their hosts. They were given supplies and for a while this stopped their doggish mouths. But they complained that their monthly supplies weren't sufficient, and exaggerated every argument, saying that unless they receive lavish provisions, they would break the treaty and plunder the whole island. In a short time, they followed up their threats with deeds.

2) *Historia Brittonum*, The History of the Britons, early ninth century, composed somewhere in North West Wales (at that time the kingdom of Gwynedd)

31 Vortigern then reigned in Britain. In his time, he was under pressure, not only from the inroads of the Scots and Picts, but also from the Romans, and their apprehensions of Ambrosius. In the meantime, three vessels, exiled from Germany, arrived in Britain. They were commanded by Horsa and Hengist, brothers, and sons of Wihtgils... Vortigern received them as friends, and granted them the island which is in their language called Thanet, and, by the Britons, Ruym. Gratianus Aequantius at that time reigned in Rome. The Saxons were received by Vortigern, four hundred and forty-seven years after the passion of Christ.

36. After the Saxons had lived on Thanet for some time, Vortigern promised to supply them with clothing and provisions, on condition they would engage to fight against the enemies of his country. But the barbarians grew more numerous, so that the Britons could no longer feed and clothe them, and when the Saxons, according to the promise they had received, claimed a supply of provisions

and clothing, the Britons replied, "Your number is increased; we no longer need your help; you may, therefore, return home, for we can no longer support you."...

37. But Hengist, both smart and cunning, realising that the king was powerless and the people indecisive and weak, replied to Vortigern, "We are, indeed, few in number; but if you allow it, we will send to our country for an more forces, with whom we will fight for you and your subjects."

Vortigern agreed to this proposal, so messengers were despatched overseas, and returned with sixteen vessels of picked warriors. They also brought with them the beautiful daughter of Hengist. And now the Saxon chief prepared an entertainment, to which he invited the king, his officers, and Ceretic, his interpreter, having previously told his daughter to serve them so profusely with wine and ale, that they would soon become drunk. This plan succeeded; and Vortigern, at the instigation of the devil, and enamoured with the beauty of the damsel, demanded her, through the medium of his interpreter, of the father, promising to give for her whatever he should ask....

38. Hengist, after this, said to Vortigern, "I will be both your father and your adviser; listen to my counsels, and you will have no reason to fear being conquered by any man or any nation whatever. My countrymen are strong, warlike, and robust: if you approve, I will send for my son and his cousin, both valiant men, who at my invitation will fight against the Scots, and you can give them the countries in the north, near the wall that is called Guaul." [Probably the Antonine Wall.] The king agreed, and Octha and Ebusa arrived with forty ships. In these they sailed round the country of the Picts, laid waste the Orkneys, and took possession of many regions, as far as the borders of the Picts.

45. After this the barbarians returned in even greater numbers, for Vortigern was their friend, on account of his wife, and no-one dared to drive them out, because it was God's will that they occupied Britain, rather than on account of their strength...

After the death of Vortimer, Vortigern's son, and the return of Hengist and his troops, they [the Saxons] held a council to come up with a wicked plan to trick Vortigern and his army. They sent envoys to his offering peace and a permanent friendship. Vortigern summoned his elders to discuss what to do and in the end, they decided to make peace. So the envoys returned and a meeting was held to confirm the treaty, both sides being without weapons. .

46. However, Hengist ordered his men to hide their daggers in their shoes, under the soles of their feet, saying, "When I call out to you, saying "Saxons, draw your knives", take out your daggers from your shoes, and attack them and hold firm. But don't kill the king – keep him alive for the sake of my daughter, whom I wedded to him. It would be better to ransom him." So the meeting gathered and the Saxons, speaking friendly words but hiding wolfish thoughts in their hearts sat down like allies, man next to man. Hengist called out as he had said, and the 300 leading men of King Vortigern were murdered, and the king himself seized and held prisoner. To ransom himself, he granted them Essex and Sussex, also Middlesex and other districts they chose.

47. Then St Germanus preached to Vortigern, seeking to convert him and get him to end an illicit relationship, but Vortigern fled to the territory of Gwerthyrnion and hid with his wives. Germanus and all the British clergy followed him and stayed for 40 days and nights preaching from a rock. Vortigern retreated in disgrace to his fortress in Dyfed, next to the Teifi. Germanus followed him again, and remained fasting with all the clergy for 3 days and nights to achieve his goal. On the 4th night around midnight, the entire fortress was destroyed by sudden fire, sent from heaven, and burned. Vortigern was burned along with all his companions and wives.

N.B. St Germanus was a bishop of Auxerre in the 5th century, and in around 429 C.E. travelled to Britain to combat the Pelagian heresy. By the 9th century he was particularly venerated in the Welsh kingdom of Powys. The *Life of St Germanus*, written around 480, has him defeating the Picts and Saxons somewhere in Britain. Tradition holds this was near Yr Wyddgrug (Mold), which alternated as a possession of Powys and of neighbouring Gwynedd. The *Life* does not mention Vortigern. Germanus is also associated in *Historia Brittonum* with Cadell Ddyrnllug, an early king of Powys.

3) Croes Elisedd, an inscribed monument dating to around 855. It stands on an artificial mound of a much earlier period (perhaps Bronze Age), and near the later abbey of Valle Crucis, near Llangollen.

† Concenn son of Cattell, Cattell son of Brochmail, Brochmail son of Eliseg, Eliseg son of Guoillauc.

† And that Concenn, great-grandson of Eliseg, erected this stone for his great-grandfather Eliseg.

† The same Eliseg, who joined together the inheritance of Powys . . . throughout nine (years?) out of the power of the Angles with his sword and with fire.

† Whosoever shall read this hand-inscribed stone, let him give a blessing on the soul of Eliseg.

† This is that Concenn who captured with his hand eleven hundred acres [4.5 km²] which used to belong to his kingdom of Powys . . . and which the mountain

[the column is broken here. One line, possibly more, lost]

. . . the monarchy . . Maximus. . . of Britain . . . Concenn, Pascent, Maun, Annan.

† Britu son of Vortigern, whom Germanus blessed, and whom Sevira bore to him, daughter of Maximus the king, who killed the king of the Romans.

† Conmarch painted this writing at the request of king Concenn.

† The blessing of the Lord be upon Concenn and upon his entire household, and upon the entire region of Powys until the Day of Judgement.

4) The A-text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (compiled in the later 9th century under Alfred the Great, though using some earlier materials.)

A.D. 455. This year Hengest and Horsa fought with Wurtgern the king on the spot that is called Aylesford. His brother Horsa being there slain, Hengest afterwards took to the kingdom with his son Esc.

5) The A-text of the Annales Cambriae (The Annals of Wales), compiled around 950.

[854] an. Cyngan, king of Powys, died in Rome.

6) Asser's Life of King Alfred, 893 C.E., written in the circle of the court of Alfred

At this time, and for some time before, all the territories in South Wales belonged to King Alfred...Hyfaidd, with all of the kingdom of Dyfed, had submitted to Alfred because of the force of the 6 sons of Rhodri Mawr... Similarly, Elise ap Tewdwr, king of Brycheiniog, driven by the might of the sons of Rhodri also sought the lordship of Alfred.

Achau Brenhinoedd a Thywysogion Cymru (pedigrees of the Welsh Kings and Princes) extant in several late mediaeval manuscripts.

The mother of Merfyn Frych ['Freckled'], father of Rhodri Mawr: Nest daughter of Cadell ap Brochfael ab Elise ap Cyllau ap Beli ab Eiludd ap Selyf Saryffgadau [Battle Serpent] ap Cynan Garwyn [place name] ap Brochfael Ysgithrawg ['Tusked'] ap Cyngen Clodrydd ['Renowned'] ap Cadell Dyrnllwg ['Gleaming Hilt'] ap Pasgen ap Brydw ap Rhuddfedel Frych ap Cyndeyrn ap Gwrtheyrn Gwrtheneu ['the Thin'].