

From plates and rods to royal drink-stands in *Branwen* and medieval Welsh law

ABSTRACT: This paper takes as its starting point the well-known passage in *Branwen* about the compensation for Matholwch and its relationship to the Iorwerth redaction of medieval Welsh law. It argues, first, that the text of *Branwen* need not be emended by reference to the Iorwerth redaction. It then traces the textual development of the legal passage from a silver rod and gold plate in Iorwerth to an elaborate royal drink-stand in the other redactions. It follows Robin Chapman Stacey in suggesting that the Iorwerth redaction has maintained a simple version of this text to ensure the text is seen as unexceptional from a broader European perspective of kingship. Finally, it returns to a particular aspect of these descriptions, the Welsh and Latin terms used for fingers which present a confused and muddled picture.

KEYWORDS: *Branwen*, compensation, fingers, gold plate, measurement, medieval Welsh law, *sarhaed*, silver rod.

It has long been noticed that the episode of the king's *sarhaed* 'insult, payment for insult' in *Branwen* has close connections with the passages in the medieval Welsh laws on the *sarhaed* of a king (Ellis 1928: 113; Owen 1980: 43, 58–60; Harris 2003: 22–26).¹ It has further been observed that the description in *Branwen* appears to be

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closer in a number of respects to the version presented in the thirteenth-century Iorwerth redaction of the laws than to any other versions (Harris 2003: 23–24).² More recently, Robin Chapman Stacey has discussed this passage in the context of the relationship between law and literature (2005: 75–81; cf. also 2000): rather than assuming that all such parallels between legal texts and literature are examples of ‘law in action’, it is possible that the lawyers and jurists could be drawing on literary images and ideas. Now this section of text is certainly worth exploring in this light but one of the contentions of what follows is that it is both more complex and more interesting than that. After all, what is not interesting about a staff of silver and a gold plate in one redaction of the laws which metamorphoses in others into a startlingly baroque royal drink-stand complete with a lidded cup? Furthermore, the terms for the objects described slip and slide from version to version, and the edited versions of the texts give no real sense of the degree of variation found in them. Moreover, as we shall see, the only way that the text of *Branwen* and that of *Llyfr Iorwerth* can be seen as parallel is if we assume a significant editorial emendation in *Branwen*. What follows, then, considers aspects of the multiple versions of this passage in detail before returning to the issues raised above about the relationship between the legal and literary texts. We move from the simpler to the more complex and probably for most readers from the more familiar to the less well known.

Rods and plates

In a well-known passage in *Branwen*, Bran seeks to offer Matholwch, the Irish king, compensation for the mutilation of his horses by Efnisien. He sends his men off to Matholwch with instructions to tell him that:

their comments and suggestions for improvement. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of quoted texts are my own.

² The Welsh texts of the laws are conventionally divided into three redactions, nowadays conventionally labelled Cyfnerth (Wade-Evans 1909), Blegywryd (Richards 1990), and Iorwerth (Wiliam 1960) (corresponding to Aneurin Owen’s regionally distinguished Gwentian, Demetian, and Venedotian Codes (1841)). The Latin texts fall into five redactions labelled Latin A, B, C, D and E (Emanuel 1967). Although the laws are associated with the name of Hywel Dda, no manuscript of the laws predates the middle decades of the thirteenth century. The standard set of single-letter sigla for the manuscripts of Welsh law can be found in, for example, Charles-Edwards, Owen, & Russell 2000: 576–577; the same list is on the website *Cyfraith Hywel* (Roberts 2013), which also provides a useful collection of information and data on medieval Welsh law.

ef a geif march iach am pob un o'r a lygrwyt; ac y gyt a hynny ef a geif yn
wynepwerth idaw, llathen aryant a uo kyuref [a'e uys bychan] a chyhyt ac ef e
hun, a chlawr eur kyflet a'y wyneb ... (PKM 33; BvL 5.111–114)).³

'he shall have a sound horse for each one which was maimed, and also he shall
have as his honour-price a rod of silver as thick as his little finger and as tall as
himself, and a plate of gold as broad as his face ...' (Davies 2007: 25).⁴

The text presented here is that printed by both Williams 1930 and Thomson 1976
(and accepted by Harris 2003: 23–24 without discussion), but it has been emended in
two crucial ways from the text preserved in both the White Book of Rhydderch and
the Red Book of Hergest which reads as follows:⁵

ef a geif march iach am pob un o'r a lygróyt; ac y gyt a hynny ef a geif yn
gyneþerth idaþ llatheu⁶ aryant a uo kyuref a chyhyt ac ef e hun, a chlaþr eur
kyflet a'y gyneb ...

³ The text printed here is that of Williams 1930: 33 in which conventionally, but misleadingly, the 6 (which is a form of v) of the manuscript is printed as w.

⁴ All translations incorporate Williams' emendation (Jones & Jones 1949: 28; Gantz 1976: 70; Lambert 1993: 64; Davies 2007: 25). Some, however, indicate the issue in their notes (Jones & Jones 1949: 277; Lambert 1993: 359; Davies 2007: 233); the last also comments that 'In the Second Branch text "his little finger", or another comparison, needs to be added to make grammatical sense of the sentence', but it is not clear that the Welsh is ungrammatical without this phrase rather than simply saying something else.

⁵ The text printed here (lightly edited for punctuation) is from the White Book of Rhydderch (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 4, fol. 11va23–28); the only differences in the version in the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111, fol. 180rb40–43) are orthographic.

⁶ The website, *Welsh prose 1300–1415* (Luft, Thomas, & Smith 2013) wrongly has *llathen*. (<http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk/en/ms-page.php?ms=Pen4&page=11v>). For the White Book Gwenogvryn Evans printed *llathen* (WM 22 (col. 43)) but in the Red Book *llatheu* (RM 30), although the White Book in fact also has *llatheu*. Since Ifor Williams thought that the Red Book text was copied from White Book, he may well have put his faith in Evans' reading of the White Book (which was normally very good). That may be why his notes do not discuss the issue.

‘he shall have a sound horse for each one which was maimed, and also he shall have as his honour-price rods of silver as thick and as tall as himself, and a plate of gold as broad as his face ...’

What Bran seems to be offering him are rods of silver as wide and as tall as he is along with the gold plate as wide as his face. The two changes made by Williams, and followed by everyone else, are the emendation of *llatheu* ‘rods’ to the singulative *llathen* ‘rod’ and the insertion of the phrase *a’e uys bychan* ‘and his little finger’ (which, he assumed, had fallen out (PKM 176–177)). Accepting the need for the emendation has the effect of making the text appear to be much closer to the Iorwerth redaction than to any other. The Iorwerth version is discussed below.⁷ But for ease of reference the text is printed here from BL Add. MS 14931 (manuscript E in AL), p. 2 (lightly edited for punctuation):

Sarhaet brenhin aberfrav uel hyn y telyr ... a gwyalen eur cyhyt ac ew ehun. a chyn vrasset a’y vys y bychan, a chlaur eur cywlet a’y vyneb a chyn dewet ac ewyn amaeth a uo amaeth seith (nav *other MSS*) blyned.

‘The *sarhaed* of the king of Aberffraw is paid thus ... and a golden rod as long (tall) as himself and as thick as his little finger, and a golden dish as wide as his face and as thick as the nail of a ploughman who has been a ploughman for seven (nine *other MSS*) years.’

While here the rod is as thick as his little finger, in the equivalent place in other redactions the thickness of the silver rod is measured against the *aranvys* (Cyfnerth) ‘third finger’, the *hiruys* (Blegywryd) ‘middle finger’, with the Latin redactions varying between *digitus medicus* or *digitus medius*.⁸ There were two stages to Ifor Williams’ reasoning in emending the text: first, he thought that *llathen* implied something as thick as a finger: ‘petasai’r wialen cyn frased a’r brenin ei hun, nid *llathen* “rod” a fuasai ond boncyffl” (1930: 176);⁹ and, secondly, if it were as thick as a finger, Williams’ reason for choosing the little finger as the comparative measure was simply that the context of *Branwen* has to do with the king of Aberffraw and so it made sense to use the text of the northern redaction (1930: 177).

This is cogent enough but, as will emerge, *bys bychan* is very much the minority reading in this passage across the law texts; and in particular, as will be discussed below, it does not occur in the corresponding passage in Latin C (WLMA 7). On the

⁷ See p. **.

⁸ For discussion of these terms for the different fingers, see below, pp. **–**.

⁹ ‘If the rod were as thick as the king himself, it would not be a “rod” but a tree-trunk!’

other hand, the Iorwerth version of this passage is by far the simplest of all the redactions and it is therefore more straightforward to see how it might be aligned with the text of *Branwen*. Two further points are worth making at this point. First, *llathen* is only used in this context in *Branwen* and in *Llyfr prawf* ‘Test Book’ of the Iorwerth redaction;¹⁰ all the other legal texts in Welsh have *gwialen* ‘rod’. Secondly, although, as Williams rightly noted, a misreading of *llathen* as *llatheu* is trivial, the form is plural in both the White and Red Books and so it is arguable that it must have been clear enough in the archetype rather than a chance misreading of the archetype perpetrated twice.¹¹ Even so, given the triviality of the error, little weight can be placed on this fact.

There has been a marked reluctance to countenance the text of *Branwen* as preserved in the manuscripts. Thomson 1976: 26 is adamant: ‘there can be no question of Bendigeidfran offering Matholwch a silver rod as thick and as long as himself’. Williams 1930: 176 was at least prepared to envisage that there might be traces of this but no more: ‘awgrym o hynny, neu olion hynny, sydd yma, ac nid y peth ei hun’.¹² The obvious ‘why not?’ had by this stage already been asked by Gaidoz 1889. While he adduced various Indian parallels which need not detain us, he also provided several examples of body-sized and -weighted (or at least substantial) payments in silver from hagiography and medieval Irish literature which should give us pause for thought.

Probably the oldest of these cases is that found in the *Vita prima* of St. Samson of Dol. Amon, Samson’s father-to-be, is advised to make an offering of a silver rod to counter the sterility of his wife: *tu uero fac uirgam argenteam coequantem uxori tuae et da pro anima illius* ‘fabrique une baguette d’argent aussi grande que ta femme et donne-la pour sa personne’ (VASS 150–151 i.4). In fact Amon is so overcome with

¹⁰ For discussion of the latter, see below, p. **. There is in fact one other instance of *llathen* in the late fifteenth-century law text, NLW Peniarth 36C (printed in AL IX.xxxix.2) in the context of discussing who the *edling* ‘heir-apparent’ should be in the event of the king not having a son or a brother; given that this is in a later manuscript, it is not clear that this is a separate instance or whether it is dependent on one of the earlier versions.

¹¹ Both terms contain the singulative *-en*, the implication presumably being that we should be thinking of them in terms of bundles or the like, although it is not clear that *llath* or *gwial/gwial* are obviously collective; furthermore, both forms also have plurals and in the case of the latter one of its plurals is formed from the singulative — a very rare pattern for Welsh, though more common in Breton. I have grateful to Silva Nurmio for discussion of this.

¹² ‘there is a suggestion of this here, or traces of it, but not the things itself’; cf. also Davies 2007: 233: ‘This practice may reflect the original custom whereby a person’s weight in gold or silver was given as compensation’.

joy that he promises to give three silver rods. The editor makes the obvious comparison with the Welsh laws (Flobert 1997: 33) and clearly assumes that the rod would be ‘as tall as’ his wife, though *coequantem* can be interpreted as meaning ‘as big as’ in all dimensions. A similar example is found in the life of St. Brieuc where an angel instructs St. Brieuc’s mother-to-be: *Facietis itaque tres uirgas, duas quidem ex argenteas, unam pro te, alteram pro uiro tuo. Tertia uero erit aurea pro filio uestro; quas usque ad natiuitatem in thesauro uestro reponitis* ‘You will make three rods, two of them of silver, one for you and one for your husband. But the third will be of gold for your son. Until his birth you should put them in your store’ (VSB 164). Here nothing is said about the size of the rods, and the text goes on to indicate that they were intended to cover the costs of St. Brieuc’s education with Germanus.¹³ In this case, what may have been a narrative closer to that in the life of Samson, where the rods are thought of as an offering to God, seems to have been rationalised as a solution to the cost of higher education. It might be tempting to see these narratives as being particularly Breton, but the payment of similarly substantial amounts of silver (or gold) is also found in medieval Irish. For example, in *Tochmarc Étaíne* Óengus, who is seeking Étaíne’s hand in marriage, performs a series of tasks and then also pays Ailill Étaíne’s weight in silver and gold (TE 150–151 §14).¹⁴ Charles-Edwards describes this as ‘a stipulation that may echo the compensation for an insult against the honour of the highest grade of king’ (2002: 171–172): *Dligid .u. cumalu dergoir sce lig logmoir dia diguin, dia esain, no dia grised gruad* (CIH ii 583.9–10) ‘(sc. The *tríath*) is entitled to five *cumals* of red gold or precious stones for violating his protection, refusing him hospitality, or blistering his cheeks (sc. through satire)’.¹⁵ We seem then to be back where we started in the realm of royal insult.

The evidence above suggests that an interpretation of the *Branwen* passage which stays closer to the original text of the two manuscripts need not be ruled out of hand quite so abruptly as it has been. The explicit reason given by, for example, Williams is that, if we think in terms of rods, we have something closer to a block of silver rather than a rod (and the same point could be made about the use of *uirga* in the Latin texts), but it is possible to think of such a block of silver as made up of rods

¹³ This narrative may well be based on the passage in the Life of St. Samson (Poulin 2006: 79).

¹⁴ Cf. Charles-Edwards 2002; Eska 2011: 184.

¹⁵ This passage is from the Old-Irish text on status, *Míadslechtæ* (Kelly 1988: 267; Breatnach 2005: 264–265). On the problem of the meaning of *cumal* here, see Charles-Edwards 1993: 482–483 and Kelly 1997: 591–593. Elsewhere an ounce of red gold is valued at twelve cows (CIH i 149.1), but the difficulty is that the value of a *cumal* in cows can range from three to ten cows (Kelly 1997: 592–593). Cf. also the passage in *Loinges Conaill Chuiric* where Feradach’s weight in silver (*comthromm do argut*) is bound upon him by Gruibne as a guarantee (ECC 941 & 947).

rather like the rods of hack-silver found in Viking hoards. The implicit reason for rejecting the reading of the manuscripts in *Branwen* is that it does not correspond to what we find in the laws; the assumption is that the example derives from the laws and should be seen as an example of the ‘law in action’. But if we are prepared to accept Robin Chapman Stacey’s proposal that the law may be drawing on literary texts for examples and references, it is possible that what we see in the laws is an assimilated version of the original requirement for the king’s height or weight in silver. This would also be consistent with Stacey’s view that the redactor of Iorwerth was keen to downplay the bizarre and apparently archaic in favour of the up-to-date and conventional (2005: 75–81).

If so, although it is possible that the version preserved in Iorwerth may be a revised version of what is in *Branwen*, all the redactions of Welsh law contain a version of this passage and should not be passed over. One reason for looking at the other redactions is that, while it is acknowledged that the Iorwerth redaction was probably the latest version to be redacted (by Iorwerth ap Madog in the 1240s), it is preserved in the earliest manuscripts; by contrast, the other redactions, especially Cyfnerth, arguably contain less developed forms of the law but are preserved in later manuscripts. In that context, we might wonder how the most developed redaction has preserved what seems like a simplest version of this passage. In what follows I propose to trace the development of this section of the text through the different redactions. We are concerned with the legal texts corresponding to the rod of silver and plate of gold in *Branwen*; in the laws compensation for *sarhaed* to the king also involves payment of cattle but this will be ignored as it largely remains unchanged and so will be less helpful in the following discussion.

Royal drink-stands

We may begin with the passage from the Iorwerth redaction which has conventionally been compared with *Branwen*. Since the manuscript (BL Cotton Titus D ii) on which the standard edition (William 1960) is based is corrupt at this point (lacking the phrase on the golden plate), the following text comes from BL Additional MS 14931 (manuscript *E* in AL), p. 2 (lightly edited for punctuation):

Sarhaet brenhin aberfrav uel hyn y telyr ... a gwyalen eur cyhyt ac ew ehun. a chyn vrasset a’y vys y bychan, a chlaur eur cywlet a’y vyneb a chyn dewet ac ewyn amaeth a uo amaeth seith¹⁶ blyned.

‘The *sarhaed* of the king of Aberffraw is paid thus ... and a golden rod as long (tall) as himself and as thick as his little finger, and a golden dish as wide as his

¹⁶ *nav* ‘nine’ in other manuscripts.

face and as thick as the nail of a ploughman who has been a ploughman for seven years.'

A level of legalistic precision is added with the comment about the thickness of the plate; presumably the fingernail of an experienced farmer was particularly thick and gnarled. Both the rod and the plate can then be calibrated against easily measurable indicators. Apart from that, it remains clear that in this text at least we are dealing with two distinct items, a rod and a plate.

When we turn to the other redactions, matters soon become much more elaborate. Essentially, the silver rod acquires three prongs at the top and bottom and its height is now calibrated in relation to a seated king. There is also now a *ffiol* or (s)*cyphus* 'cup' and the plate which is as wide as the king's face seems to have become the lid of the cup.¹⁷ The prongs are explained in some versions as allowing the rod to be free-standing and to act as a holder for the lidded cup. Presumably we are to imagine that the scene has changed from a court where compensation is being extracted to the king's hall and a royal feast where feasting paraphernalia, cups and plates, are to be expected.

But even within the versions there are varying degrees of complexity. *Cyfnernth* is probably the simplest of the more developed versions (BL Harley MS 4353 (V) (WML 2.25–3.7 (lightly edited for punctuation); trans. based on Wade-Evans 1909: 147):

... a góyalen aryant a gyrhaetho o'r dayar hyt yn iat y brenhin pan eistedho yn y gadeir kyrrefet a'e aranyys a thri ban erni a thri y deni kyrrefet a'r wyalen; a ffiol eur a anho llaón diaót y brenhin yndi kyn teóhet ac ewin amaeth a amaetho seith mlyned; a chlaór eur erni kyn teóhet a'r ffiol kyflet ac óyneb y brenhin.

'... and a silver rod which shall reach from the ground to the king's pate when he shall sit in his chair, as thick as his ring-finger, with three knobs at the top and three at the bottom as thick as the rod; and a golden cup which shall hold the king's full draught, as thick as the nail of a ploughman who has been ploughing for seven years; and golden cover thereon as thick as the cup, as broad as the king's face.'

The rod is now defined as level with the king's *iat* 'top of his head' when he is sat down (presumably in state upon his throne); it is the cup which has to be as thick as a ploughman's nail, and the lid is then described as being equally thick. The main

¹⁷ The appearance of the cup may have been triggered by the ambiguity of *clawr*, both a 'plate' but also a 'cover, lid'; cf. Loth 1931: 339–340.

difference, however, is the addition of three prongs at the top and bottom of the rod, though no further explanation is added.

Latin B is broadly similar but adds further explanation for the prongs: that the *uirga* can stand on them and hold the cup in the upper part; the prongs should be of the same thickness as the rod; and the cup should be big enough to hold the *potum regis* ‘the king’s allocation of drink’. The main preoccupation is with quality, substance, and legal precision (Russell 2000: 484–485 §1.2/4–6); cf. LTWL 194.1–11):

Redditur uero sic regis iniuria: ... cum argentea uirga eiusdem altitudinis cum rege sedente in cathedra sua, et eiusdem grossitudinis cum digito eius medio, et cum scipho aureo qui ad potum regis sufficiat, et aureum habente coopertorium adeo latum ut facies regis, adeo spissum ut unguis pollicis aratoris qui per septennium aratrum tenuerit. Uirga debet habere in uno capite tria capita in latitudine extensa, in quibus uirga possit stare, et in alto similiter tria capita, in quibus ciphus possit sedere. Capita illa ui debent esse eiusdem grossitudinis cum uirga.¹⁸

‘The *sarhaed* of a king is paid in the following way: ... with a silver rod of the same height as the king sitting on his throne and of the same thickness as his middle finger, and with a gold cup big enough for the king’s drink with a gold lid as wide as the king’s face and as thick as the thumbnail of a ploughman who shall have held a plough for seven years. The rod should have at one end three prongs extending outwards on which the rod may stand, and three prongs likewise on the top on which the cup can rest. Those six prongs should be of the same thickness as the rod.’

Latin A has recently been argued (Russell 2007: 70–74) to be in other respects a tidied-up version of the shorter Latin text lying behind Latin B (LTWL 110.9–30; trans. Fletcher 1986: 3):

Redditur uero sic: ... cum uirga argentea eiusdem altitudinis cum rege sedente in cathedra sua usque ad os eius, et eiusdem grossitudinis cum digito eius medico, et cum cypho aureo qui sufficiat ad unum tractum potationis regis, et qui habeat cooperculum aureum tam latum ut facies regis, et adeo spissum ut unguis aratoris pollicis qui per septennium aratrum tenuerit, uel testa oui auce. Virga debet habere in unoquoque capite tria capita in latitudinem extensa in quibus stet uirga, et in altero capite similiter tria capita in quibus

¹⁸ The Latinity of *cum uirga* is strange (*eiusdem grossitudinis ac uirga* would be expected) and may be an unthinking rendering of a *g6ial* or the like.

cyphus sedeat. Capita illa sex eiusdem grossitudinis debent esse cum uirga, et eiusdem longitudinis cum digito eius medico.

‘And it is paid in the following manner: ... with a rod of silver of the same height as the mouth of the king when he is sitting upon his throne, and of the same thickness as his middle finger, with a gold cup which should be sufficiently large to contain one draught of the king’s drinking and which shall have a gold lid as wide as the king’s face, and as thick as the thumbnail of a ploughman who been at the plough for seven years, or as thick as the shell of a goose egg. The rod should have at one end three capitals of extended thickness, upon which the rod may stand, and at the other end similarly three capitals on which the cup may rest. Those six capitals should be of the same thickness as the rod, and of the same length as the king’s middle finger.’

Two further details are added: the length (as well as the thickness) of the prongs are specified and an alternative comparandum is adduced for the thickness of the cup and its cover, namely it should be as thick as the shell of a goose’s egg (perhaps a ploughman’s nail being less easy to come by at court). One practical adjustment has also been made: the rod is now even shorter, only as tall as the mouth of the king as he sits on his throne which makes sense if it has now become a drink-stand.

Latin A is also the one manuscript which provides several images of officers carrying rods, the most relevant being the image of the seated king on fol. 1v.¹⁹ However, the image does not correspond to the description in the text, for he is depicted as holding a sceptre (held in his left hand and which ends at his lap) rather than a rod extending to the ground. The top of the sceptre is sufficiently elaborate that it could be interpreted as having prongs, but the top of it is at least level with his mouth. I take it that rather than being a direct illustration of the text the image is what was thought to be appropriate for a king in the mid-thirteenth century in a manuscript perhaps intended for consumption outside Wales.²⁰

It has been argued that the Blegywryd redaction represents a Welsh translation of a Latin text close, but not identical, to Latin D (Emanuel 1960 & 1967: 53–72 & 520–522). With regard to this passage, however, it is striking that, while Latin D is as complex as Latin A, containing references to the shell of a goose’s egg and the

¹⁹ For a digital image, see <<https://www.llgc.org.uk/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/laws-of-hywel-dda/>>, image 13 (consulted 29 April 2016); cf. also Huws 1988. Other images include the *penteulu* on fol. 3r and the *hostiarius* on fol. 5v.

²⁰ See below, p. **.

extended explanation of the prongs, the Blegywryd texts are shorter. The Latin D version is as follows (based on LTWL 317.19–29):

Iniuria regi redditur hoc modo: ... et virga argentea tam longa ut attingat a terra usque ad os regis in cathedra sedentis, et tam grossa ut digitus eius medius; et cibus aureus in quo regis una bibicio possit contineri, cum cooperculo aureo ita lato ut regis vultus; cibus²¹ et cooperculum habebunt spissitudinem unguis²² aratoris qui per septennium aratrum tenuerit, vel teste ovi auce; virga eiusdem ab inferiori capite quasi tres digitos extensos in latitudine habebit,²³ in quibus sicut pedibus stare possit, grossos et longos ut digitus medicus; superiori²⁴ vero totidem aliis similes, in quibus cibus possit stare.

The insult of a king is paid in this way: ... and a silver rod so long that it reaches from the ground to the mouth of the king sitting on his throne and as thick as his middle finger; and a gold cup in which a single draught of the king can be contained, with a gold lid as wide as the king's face; the golden cup and lid will have the thickness of the nail of a ploughman who shall have held a plough for seven years, or be as thick as the shell of the egg of a goose; its rod will have at the lower end three prongs, like fingers, extending outwards like feet on which it may stand, as thick and as long as the middle finger, and on the top similar ones to the others on which the cup can rest.

The representative Blegywryd text is taken from Oxford, Jesus College MS 57 (CHDd 2.32–3.5; trans. based on Richards 1954: 24–25):

Val hyn y telir sarhaet brenhin: ... a gwialen aryant kyhyt ac o'r llawr hyt yng geneu y brenhin pan eistedo yn y gadeir, ac yn gyfveisget a'e hirvys, a their bann arnei a their y danei kyn vreisget a'r wialen ehun; a ffuol eur a angho llawn diawt y'r brenhin yndi, a chlawr eur arnei kyflet ac wyneb y brenhin, ac yn gyn dewet y ffuol a'r clawr ac ewin amaeth a amaethi seith mlyned, neu blisgyn wy gwyd.

'Thus is a king's *sarhaed* paid: ... and a silver rod as long as from the floor to the mouth of the king when seated in his chair, and as thick as his middle

²¹ Followed by *aureus* underdotted to indicated deletion; probably eyeskip from the preceding sentence.

²² Emanuel 1967: 25 adds *pollicis* here.

²³ The manuscript has *habuisse* here; I follow Emanuel's emendation.

²⁴ I follow Emanuel's emendation of *inferiori* here.

finger, with three branches at the top and three at the bottom as thick as the rod; and a golden cup that shall hold the king's full draught, with a gold cover on it as broad as the king's face, and the cup and cover are to be as thick as the nail of a ploughman who shall have ploughed for seven years or the shell of a goose egg.'

What is missing, in comparison with Latin D, is the final section on the function of the prongs. It may have fallen out of the Welsh text, but it is possible that the Latin text lying behind the Welsh texts had a much thinner version of that sentence and that the more elaborate version was worked in to the exemplar of Latin D perhaps from a Latin text similar to Latin A.

Latin E, preserved in much later manuscripts, is in many respects a revised version of Latin B. But in this instance it is more complex in that it mentions the shell of the goose's egg (as seen also in Latin A and D (and Blegywryd)). It has also revised the ordering so that the explanation of the prongs appears when they are first mentioned rather being added on as an afterthought; perhaps by omission we are not told what the lid is made of, though by implication it is probably gold; the one addition is again a legalistic detail: the rod and prongs should be solid, a point which is not specified in other versions (LTWL 436.17–28):

Sarhaet regis redditur sic: ... et uirga argentea tam longa ut attingat a terra usque ad os regis in cathedra sedentis, tam²⁵ grossa ut digitus eius medius; que in inferiori parte debet habere quasi tres digitos extensos tam grossos²⁶ sicut uirga predicta, et in superiori parte totidem, in quibus possit ciphus regis sedere, aliis consimiles; et ciphus aureus tam magnus²⁷ ut possit intrare una pocio regis, cum cooperculo tam lato ut regis uultus. Et ciphus et cooperculum ita erunt spissi ut unguis pollicis aratoris per septennium aratrum tenentis, uel testa auge oui. Uirga autem et digiti non erunt intus concaui.

'The *sarhaed* of a king is paid in the following way: ... and a silver rod so long that it reaches from the ground to the mouth of the king sitting on his throne and as thick as his middle finger; at the lower end it should have three prongs extending as thick as the aforementioned rod, and on the top similar ones to the others on which the cup can rest; and a gold cup big enough to contain a single draught of the king, with a lid as wide as the king's face. Both the cup and the lid will be as thick as the thumbnail of a ploughman who shall have

²⁵ Omitted in the earliest manuscript of the redaction.

²⁶ The manuscript has *grossi*.

²⁷ *tam magnus* omitted in the earliest manuscript of the redaction.

held a plough for seven years, or the shell of the egg of a goose. But the rod and prongs will not be hollow inside.’

One of the most interesting of these versions remains to be discussed and that is the text preserved in Latin C (WLMA 6–7 §1.4/4; LTWL 277.5–12):

Si fuerit *brennin* Aberfrau, insuper aurum habebit, *nid amgen na claur eur*²⁸ ut faciem eius totam, cum uirga aurea, que habet altitudinem eius sedentis in kathedra et grositudinem eius digiti medici, et cifus [erasure]²⁹ argenteus qui sufficiat regi ad potum, habens coopertorium aureum adeo latum ut facies regis tota, spisum ut unguis aratoris per septennium arantis.

‘If he should be *the king* of Aberffraw, he shall have gold in addition, *namely a golden dish*, like his whole face, with a golden rod which is as tall as him sitting on his throne and as thick as his middle finger, and a silver goblet big enough for the king’s drink with a gold cover as wide as the king’s whole face, and as thick as the nail of a ploughman who has been ploughing for seven years.’

It has been recently argued that fragmentary text preserved in Latin C, the manuscript of which can be located in Anglesey, represents a northern version of Welsh law but one that may predate, in developmental terms, the creation of Iorwerth’s Test Book (Russell 2011: xxxvi–xli). As such we might expect it to contain a simpler version of this passage, perhaps similar to that found in Iorwerth; but it turns out to be much more complicated than any of the others in that it is the only text to have a plate (gold), a rod (silver), a goblet (silver), and a lid (gold). However, it has been proposed (Russell 2011: xxxix–xl) that the text may be bipartite. The first part, apart from the ordering of the plate and the rod, is very similar to the Iorwerth text:

Si fuerit *brennin* Aberfrau, insuper aurum habebit, *nid amgen na claur eur* ut faciem eius totam, cum uirga aurea, que habet altitudinem eius sedentis in kathedra et grositudinem eius digiti medici.

But a second part, which mentions the cup and the lid, may have been added:

²⁸ On the pattern of the other redactions, LTWL 277.8 adds *adeo latum* here but the text, as it stands, makes sense and so can be left unemended (WLMA 52).

²⁹ The erasure is consistent with *aureus* having been erased (Russell 2011: xl¹⁰⁵). It is possible that the scribe was expecting *aureus* but then erased it when the text had *argenteus*. No other extant text has a silver cup; this may simply be a scribal error, but it might indicate that there was another text with a different wording here.

et cifus argenteus qui suficiat regi ad potum, habens coopertorium aureum
adeo latum ut facies regis tota, spisum ut unguis aratoris per septennium
arantis.

It is arguable, therefore, that the Latin C version originally matched Iorwerth quite closely but that subsequently it acquired an additional sentence from another Latin text and thus appears to be the only text which has both a plate and a lid. It is unlikely that the additional text derives from any extant Latin text since no mention is made of the prongs. One crucial difference, however, is that the thickness of the rod is to be measured against the king's *digitus medicus* 'third finger', not the little finger as in all the other northern versions. If Latin C is a northern text which developmentally preceded the Iorwerth redaction, was Iorwerth's *bys bychan* an innovation of that redaction?

The elements of this passage (and the ordering of these elements) in the texts discussed above are summarised in Table 1 **{Table 1 visible from here}**, and it is possible to argue for an approximate order of development as follows:

- (a) *Branwen*: rods (silver) and simple plate (gold);
- (b) Latin C: simple plate and rod (both gold); subsequently influenced by another Latin text (but one which did not mention prongs, etc.); Iorwerth: simple plate and rod (both gold). In the Iorwerth versions together with Latin C, the rod and the plate are both of gold; in contrast with the other redactions, this is probably an innovation intended to make the text consistent with the general requirement in the Iorwerth redaction that only the king of Aberffraw gets gold (and perhaps to emphasise the status of Aberffraw): *ny thelir eur namyn e urenhyn Aberfrav* (Ior. 2 §3/5) 'gold is not paid except to the king of Aberffraw'.
- (c) Latin B and Cyfnerth: rod (silver) and lidded goblet (all gold); and prongs;
- (d) Latin A: rod (silver) and lidded goblet (all gold); and prongs; and shell of goose egg;
- (e) Latin D (but Blegywryd simpler), and Latin E: rod (solid silver with solid silver prongs) and lidded goblet (all gold); and shell of goose egg.

These provisional conclusions are based on the passages on the *sarhaed* of the king found at the beginning of the laws of court, but we are yet to consider all the available evidence. We have seen how the passage on the king's *sarhaed* located early in the Laws of Court in all redactions has undergone increasing elaboration with regard to two of the items originally involved, the silver rod and the gold plate. But some of the redactions also contain other passages later in the text which refer to the king's *sarhaed* in relation to an insult to his queen. In some cases there is a

cross-reference to the early discussion of the king's *sarhaed* but in others there is not and in those cases especially it is important to understand how the two passages are related.

In the Iorwerth redaction, we have to consider a passage in *Llyfr prawf* 'the Test Book'. The creation of the 'Test Book' is one of the major re-arrangements of the text (apparently by Iorwerth ap Madog) which defines the Iorwerth redaction; essentially he pulled out from the earlier parts of the text that which a judge needed to know (typically the 'Three Columns of law' and 'Wild and tame'³⁰) and gathered it in a tractate of its own. In one version of the Iorwerth redaction at the end of the tractate on *galanas* 'homicide', the first of the 'Three Columns', is a section on the compensation payable to the king of Aberffraw for insult to his wife. The following text is preserved uniquely in BL Cotton Titus D ii, fol. 45r13–16 (Ior. 73 §110/3; trans. Jenkins 1986: 154):

Sef mal e dywegyr ydau am e wreyc, klaur eur ydau kyulet a'e vynep a chyn
tewet ac ewyn amaeth yryffo amaeth nau mlyned, a llathen eur kehyt ac ef
ehun a chyn urasset a'e vys bychan ...

'This is how compensation is made to him for his wife: a gold plate for him, as
broad as his face and as thick as the nail of a ploughman who has been a
ploughman for nine years; and a gold rod as long as himself as thick as his
little finger ...'

It differs from the passage earlier in the text in the following respects: the plate precedes the rod (which is also the order in Latin C); and there is no mention of the cup or lid. It also differs from the parallel passage in the other versions of the redaction, and it looks as if it is an innovation in this version which seems to have revised its version of *Llyfr prawf*. That said, it is possible that it is derived from a simpler version of the passage.

Similarly, in some of the other redactions we find reflexes of the same passage. They too merit consideration as it is possible that they give us a clue as to the development of the more elaborate versions. While Latin D and the Blegywyrdd versions do not contain any further passages of interest, Cyfnerth does. In a passage in the law of women on compensation for rape, in addition to the compensation payable to the woman, the man should also pay *g'ialen aryant y'r brenhin yn y wed y dyly* 'a rod of silver to the king in the way he is entitled' (WML 97.19–20, trans. 242 (BL Cotton Cleopatra A xiv, fol. 81r19–20)). No further details are provided but the implication of the final clause is that it should correspond to the standard

³⁰ On the 'Three Columns of law', see the essays in Charles-Edwards & Russell 2007.

dimensions stated earlier in the text. Three triads also occur in the Cyfnerth redaction which relate to compensation for the king. The simplest version is found in BL Harleian 4353, fol. 46r23–25: *O teir ford y telir góialen aryant y'r brenhin am treis ac am torri naðd fford ar achenaðc diatlam, ac am sarhaet brenhin* ‘three ways in which a silver rod is paid to the king: for violence, for violating protection of way against a homeless poor person, and for insult to the king’ (WML 131.23–25, trans. 275–276 (adapted); cf. LTMW 72–73 & 273–274 (note)). Because the triad is concerned with the silver rod it is no surprise that further elaboration is lacking. Elsewhere, however, there are more elaborate versions: again in Harley 4353 (fol. 42r15–19) we find *Teir dirðy brenhin ynt ... Diuðyn dirðy treis yð góialen aryant, a ffiol eur a chlaðr eur yn y mod y dywespðyt yn diuðyn sarhaet brenhin* ‘the three fines of a king: ... compensation for the fine for violence is a silver rod, and a gold cup and a gold plate in the manner which has been stated in [sc. the section on] the compensation for insult to a king’ (WML 123.15–19, trans. 266 (adapted)). Here the cup and plate are mentioned as well as the rod but the relationship between them is left implicit; but *yn y mod y dywespðyt* directs us to fill in the details from the earlier passage. But the same triad in Cotton Cleopatra A xiv (fol. 101v13) is more explicit with the addition of *erni* ‘on it’ after *a chlaðr eur* (LTMW 2007: 72–73 & 273–274 (note)) thus ‘a silver rod, and a gold cup and a gold plate on it’ which at least allows us to see the *clawr* as a lid on the cup.³¹

A similar example can be found in Latin A. We have already considered the full-blown version of the text above but later in the text, again in the context of rape, we have another version (based on LTWL 144.33–37, trans. based on Fletcher 1986: 61):

Regi uero reddet uirgam argenteam altam usque ad os eius, ita grassam sicut digitum³² medicum eius; et cyphum aureum super uirgam in quo possit sustineri plenus poti regis ita spissum sicut³³ unguis aratoris pollicis qui per septennium aratrum tenuerit.

‘Furthermore he (sc. the offender) shall render to the king a silver rod as high as his [i.e., the king’s] mouth, and as thick as his middle [*recte* third³⁴] (sc. finger); and a gold cup, in addition to the rod, in which it is possible to contain

³¹ It is worth noting that the Cotton Cleopatra A xiv and Harleian 4353 were copied by the same scribe who also among other manuscripts copied the Book of Taliesin (NLW Peniarth 2) (Huws 2000: 59).

³² Omitted in the manuscript (NLW Peniarth 28), restored by Emanuel 1967: 144.34.

³³ *sit ut* MS.

³⁴ For discussion of these terms for fingers, see below, pp. **_**.

a full draught for the king, as thick as the thumb nail of a ploughman which has been at the plough for seven years’.

This is a thinner version than the one we find at the beginning of the text and there are no cross-references to other versions; there are no prongs, no comparison with the shell of a goose’s egg, and most importantly there is no mention of a plate or a lid. We might wonder whether here we are seeing an earlier, unelaborated form of the passage.

One question remains about this elaborate construction. We seem to have begun with a rod and a plate to which a cup was added, perhaps not unreasonably if the context was seen to be one of feasting rather than judgement. But how did the drink-stand arise? One possible clue might lie in the passage from Latin A just quoted. While almost all the versions of this passage list a rod and a cup and a plate/lid in various orders, it is striking that the Latin A passage above mentions the rod and then the *cyphum aureum super uirgam in quo possit sustineri plenus potus regi*. Now while *super uirgam* is to be read as ‘in addition to the rod’ (thus understood in Fletcher’s translation (1986: 3)) it could also be read as ‘on top of the rod’; further ambiguity could have arisen if a scribe misread the following *in quo* as *in qua*. Was it then a passage like this, capable of being (mis)read, that stimulated the idea that a rod could hold a cup on top of it? If so, it might help us to understand another stage in the development of this passage.

In none of these secondary versions of the text do we find the complicated and elaborate version set out at the beginning of the laws involving free-standing rods and detailed measurements. Some of that is left implied in phrases like *yn y wed y dylyir*, *yn y mod y dywespóyt*, etc., but it is possible that the versions embedded in these triads and elsewhere reflect an earlier version of the text before it underwent quite so much elaboration. In other words, it is important to consider all these other versions of the text for clues as to how they might have developed.

Some conclusions

A detailed study of the passages on the king’s compensation for *sarhaed* and related passages elsewhere reveals a complex set of developments from a simple scenario whereby the royal compensation involved cattle, a silver rod, and a gold plate. The focus of this discussion has been on the last two of this group which have evolved textually into something best described as a royal drink-stand. It is argued, however, that various stages can be detected in this evolution especially when references to the king’s compensation from elsewhere in the laws are taken into account. A striking feature is that some stages in the evolution are best explained as textual re-interpretation in Latin texts rather than in Welsh ones: the variation

between the fingers (*medicus/medius*), and perhaps how the cup came to be thought of as positioned on the rod (*super uirgam*).

However, certain aspects should give us further pause for thought. One paradoxical aspect of the development outlined above arises from the fact that, as noted above, the oldest redaction, Cyfnerth, is preserved in later manuscripts while Iorwerth, the latest redaction, is found in the earliest surviving manuscripts.³⁵ Now it is in the Iorwerth redaction that we find the simplest account of the king's compensation (with the arguably oldest order of items present in the first part of Latin C and perhaps in the Iorwerth Test Book), while the most elaborate and baroque constructions are found in Cyfnerth and Latin D/Blegywryd. What is surprising in this is that we might have expected to find a more complex version in Iorwerth, developmentally the latest redaction of the law.

A further issue involves the relationship between Iorwerth and the passage in *Branwen*. It has been argued above that, if we accept the reading of the manuscripts, and see this compensation as amounting to Matholwch's height in silver rods together with a golden plate as wide as his face, there are sufficient parallels to make us think, with Gaidoz, that the text of *Branwen* need not be emended. While it is not clear that the silver rods were intended to amount to Matholwch's weight, they would by their bulk have had a symbolic significance. If so, it is difficult to see how the author or redactor of *Branwen* took this over from the laws. But, if we follow Robin Chapman Stacey in arguing that the Iorwerth redactor at least was keen to make his law look normal and to downplay the mythological in order 'to highlight those elements most in accordance with contemporary European standards of rule' (2000: 45), then we might see our way through to what is going on. One way of thinking about the elaborate changes made to this passage on royal compensation (and especially the creation of a royal drink-stand) is that they are all relatively recent; one indication that this is so is the simple fact that we can detect the layers and see some, if not all, of the joins. Furthermore, all the different elaborate versions can be accounted for by starting with something like the text in the Iorwerth redaction (or that in the Test Book) and in Latin C.

On the other hand, it is difficult to deny that the passage in *Branwen* may be completely unrelated. One possibility, therefore, is the following. Passages like that in *Branwen* may have been drawn upon as a way of investing in native tradition and giving the legal tradition of medieval Wales a chronological depth which itself conferred validity upon the law (Stacey 2000: 60–62). If so, a lawyer in the eleventh or twelfth century could have thought that the *Branwen* narrative was rather excessive and so moderated the amount of silver to a single symbolic staff as tall as

³⁵ Such a scenario is not unique to the laws; cf. *Gramadegau penceirddiaid* where the later redaction, attributed to Dafydd Ddu o Hiraddug, is preserved in the oldest manuscript containing grammatical material (NLW Peniarth 20).

the king (subsequently shortened when the king was generally conceived of as sitting on a throne).³⁶ This would seem to be the starting point for some of the inspired re-imaginings within the law texts themselves. However, given that the conception of a silver staff and golden plate seems to lie behind all the redactions of Welsh law, it is difficult to lay the adjustment of a *Branwen*-type narrative at the door of Iorwerth ap Madog, one of the latest of the Welsh legal redactors; it seems rather to lie much further back in the textual tradition and earlier in date.

If so, it is probable that other redactors might have been keen to normalise the law and to downplay the mythological, just as Stacey has noted with regard to the Iorwerth redactor. That is not say that the redactor of Iorwerth was putting his feet up with this passage; he clearly resisted the trend towards complex elaboration current elsewhere in Wales, and he also, as we have seen, made some small adjustments of his own which may downplay the symbolism even further: the rod is made narrower by virtue of calibrating it against the little finger instead of the middle or third finger, and turned into gold so as to be consistent with what is said elsewhere about the king of Aberffraw's entitlement to gold. We might, however, wonder about the process of elaborating the rod and plate into a drink-stand; would not this go against an argument for normalisation and de-mythologisation? I suspect this may be matter of taste; the top of the royal sceptre in the image of the king in NLW, Peniarth 28, fol. 1v, discussed above (p. **), may not contain a lidded cup nor does the bottom reach the ground, but it does have a series of prongs (admittedly four rather than three).³⁷ In the eyes of the illustrator, however, this was presumably a normal way of depicting a king upon his throne; the fact that this manuscript ended up in Canterbury by the latter part of the thirteenth century, and may arguably have been illustrated for an English audience (perhaps with the intention of making Welsh law appear normal and unproblematic despite what the text might have been saying), suggests that not all lawyers and redactors thought that simplicity was best.³⁸

³⁶ Interestingly, by this stage body-weight seems to be less to the fore; the height and thickness of the rod are clearly the issue. A cubic centimetre of silver weighs 10.5 grams; a cubic inch 6.08 oz. By any calculation a body-sized amount of silver would be equivalent to the weight of about 20 people. On the other hand, the weight of a head-height finger-thick solid silver rod is in the region of 2.2 kg or about 5 pounds.

³⁷ For a digital image, see (<https://www.llgc.org.uk/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/laws-of-hywel-dda/>), image 13 (consulted 29 April 2016); cf. also Huws 1988.

³⁸ For discussion, see Huws 2000: 169–176; Barker-Benfield 2008: 1722–1723; on images in English law books, see the work of Anthony Musson 2011, 2012a, 2012b, & 2012c.

A digital appendix

All versions of the texts discussed above describe the thickness of the rod in terms of the thickness of a finger, but there is considerable variation as to which finger they refer to. While the Iorwerth redactions assert that the rod is as thick as the king's little finger (*bys bychan*) and this is what is restored in *Branwen* by Williams, the other versions refer to other digits: Cyfnerth uses the *aranuys*, Blegywryd the *hirfys*; the Latin texts vary between *digitus medicus* (Latin ACD) and *digitus medius* (Latin BE); in Latin D the term corresponding to Blegywryd's *hirvys* is *digitus eius medius* but in a sentence later in the passage (which is not translated in Blegywryd) it uses *digitus medicus*.³⁹ In the foregoing discussion, the details of the terms for fingers have largely been side-stepped so as not to clog the arteries of the argument. While they do not substantively affect the argument presented above, they are an important element in it, and the confusion over the designations for the different fingers is interesting in itself.

The Latin terms for the different fingers have a long history; the *locus classicus* is Isidore XI.i.70–1 (Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney, Lewis, Beach, & Berghof 2006: 235):

Digiti nuncupati, vel quia decem sunt, vel quia decenter iuncti existunt. Nam habent in se et numerum perfectum et ordinem decentissimum. Primus pollex vocatus, eo quod inter ceteros polleat virtute et potestate. Secundus index et salutaris seu demonstratorius, quia eo fere salutamus vel ostendimus. Tertius impudicus, quod plerumque per eum probri insectatio exprimitur. Quartus anularis, eo quod in ipso anulus geritur. Idem et medicinalis, quod eo trita collyria a medicis colliguntur. Quintus auricularis, pro eo quod eo aurem scalpimus.

‘The fingers (*digitus*) are so called, either because there are ten (*decem*) of them, or because they are connected handsomely (*decenter*), for they combine in themselves both the perfect number and the most appropriate order. The first finger is called thumb (*pollex*) because among the rest it prevails (*pollere*) in strength and power.⁴⁰ The second is the index finger (*index*), which is also called the “greeter” (*salutaris*) or “pointer” (*demonstratorius*), because we greet someone (*salutare*) or point something out (*ostendere*) usually with it. The third finger is called the “immodest” (*impudicus*), because often an accusation of a shameful action is expressed by it. The fourth is the ring (*anularis*) finger, because it is the one on which the ring (*anulus*) is worn. It is also called the

³⁹ For a brief discussion of some of these terms, see Russell 2011: 52–53.

⁴⁰ Note that Isidore calls the thumb the first finger and consequently the numbering of the fingers is out by one in comparison with modern usage.

medical (*medicinalis*), because physicians (*medicus*) use it to scoop up ground eye-salves.⁴¹ The fifth is called *auricularis*, because we use it to scrape out the ear (*auris*)’.

But other terms were also in use in the ancient world: the index finger was also called the finger *pollici proximus* ‘closest to the thumb’; the middle finger was described physically as *longissimus* or *summus*, but also with increasing degrees of obscenity, *infamis*, *famosus*, or *uerpus*; the ring finger was also called *honestus*; the little finger *minimus*.⁴²

There are scattered reflexes of only a few of these in Welsh. We have noted the variation between *digitus medicus* ‘third finger’ and *digitus medius* ‘middle finger’ in the Latin redactions of the laws; the variation looks in some cases to be the outcome of textual confusion and, if so, it is likely that in view of the Isidorian example *medicus* was the original reading which was misread as the more obvious *medius*.⁴³ It also suggests that terms like *digitus medicus* were unfamiliar to the scribes and so easily adjusted; the consequence, however, is that the rod is slightly thicker if measured against a *digitus medius* than a *digitus medicus*. The Welsh calque *meddygfys* is also attested in some contexts; notably it figures in an image of a pair of hands in NLW Llanstephan 117 (s. xvi) in the context of palmistry, where the terms listed are as follows: *bawd* ‘thumb’, *y mynegy vys* ‘the index finger’, *yr hirvys* ‘the middle finger’, *y meddygvys* ‘the third finger’, and *y bys bychan* ‘the little finger’ (Lewis 1914: plate III (between pp. xx and xxi)).

It was also the case that there was some familiarity with finger measurements, and in particular finger-width measurements, at an earlier period in Wales. The *Liber commonei* (preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auctarium F. 4. 32, fol. 22v–23v) contains a heavily glossed copy of Victorius of Aquitaine’s *Calculus Victorii* on weights and measures; the glosses are in Latin and in Old Welsh. The section on the lower half of fol. 23r is entitled *De geometrica ratione*, the text and gloss of which reads as follows (fol. 23r24–29) (Lambert 2003: 110; Old Welsh is printed in **bold**) :

Digitus [glossed by .i. xuiiii scripuli] ∩ semiuncia ζ sicilicus [glossed in right margin by .i. tertia pars unciae pollicis **teir petguared part** unciae mensura

⁴¹ It is worth noting that to this day it is recommended practice that modern cosmetic eye-creams be applied with the third finger so as to apply minimum pressure and drag; cf. <<http://blog.reneerouleau.com/which-finger-is-best-for-applying-eye-cream/>>. I am grateful for Charlene Eska for pointing this out to me.

⁴² For discussion of, and references to, these terms, see Echtermeyer 1835 and *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* 1900–: s.v. *digitus*.

⁴³ The suggest made in Russell 2011: 52–53 that *medicus* was understood as meaning ‘middle’ seems to me to be less likely than simple confusion.

pollicis ir bis bichan .i. amcibret ir maut biheit hetham ir eguin hittoi ir hunc
isit petguared pard guor frit nimer ho hinnoid guotan amcibfret ir bis hiri
(hinn MS) erguid si unciae pollicis xx et demedium unciae].

‘Finger [gloss i.e. 19 (*recte* 18) scruples] is a *semiuncia* and a *sicilicus* [gloss i.e., a third of an *uncia* of a thumb. **Three quarters** of an *uncia* is the measure of a thumb. **The little finger, i.e., the total width of the thumb up to the extreme point of the nail, that is what the *uncia* is, which is a quarter above the the number of this one** (sc. the normal thumb), *but under the total width of the long finger, according to this, the unciae of a thumb, twenty and a half unciae*’]
(translation based on Lambert 2003: 123–124).

Not all is clear here and Lambert has observed that ‘different systems and different commentaries have been conflated in these glosses’ (2003: 123). Confusion arises here in part because *uncia* means both ‘ounce’ (weight) and ‘inch’ (distance); here it has to do with distance and with how many widths of a thumb and various fingers correspond to an *uncia* ‘inch’; it appears that an *uncia* is smaller than the width of the *bis hir* ‘middle finger’ but a multiple of the width of the *bis bichan* ‘little finger’. The details are uncertain but what is important for our purposes is that already in ninth-century Wales there is evidence for finger-widths being used as units of measurement.

The Welsh terms which figure in the laws are largely explicable. One which is not is *aranuys*, which has been thought to refer to the third finger (or ring finger) (Jenkins 1964–1966; Williams 1930: 176–177). Its interpretation has not been helped by the attestation of *garanuys* in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* in a context not dissimilar to those discussed above: in a long description of one of the squires, he is depicted as wearing *gwaell eur yn y llen ar yr ysgwyd deheu idaw kyn vrasset a garanvys milwr* ‘a golden pin in the mantle on his right shoulder, as thick as a warrior’s middle finger [sic]’ (BRh 14.2; trans. Davies 2007: 222);⁴⁴ for us the point is that the attestation of *garanvys* has encouraged the idea that *aranvys* is a lenited form of it, and that the first element is *garan-* (Williams 1930: 176–177). However, this is the only example of *garanvys* in a clear context and it is possible that it is a scribal artefact by

⁴⁴ The phrasing seems to echo both the thickness of the king’s finger in the laws and the description of the plate being as thick as a ploughman’s finger nail; presumably a soldier’s finger would be thought of as particularly thick and strong. As will emerge from the following discussion, it is not clear to me that *garanvys* vel sim. does refer to the middle finger.

misreading ... *kyn vrasset ac aranvys milwr* with the *c* wrongly segmented and modernised to *g*.⁴⁵

Jenkins 1964–1966 also noted that *arianfys* was also attested twice in the laws, but the section of text quoted by him from NLW Peniarth 30 and Peniarth 40 is singularly impenetrable without some discussion; the context has to do with the *gwirod cyfreithiol*, the drink to which the officers of the court were legally entitled, and what depth of dregs they could expect to find in it. The following text is from Peniarth 40, fol. 85v17–18: *o deruyd y dyn dybedut nat yuo lladcaðd, sef yô meint o kyfreith, kyhyt a ebin i arianuys* ‘if it happens that a man says that he does not drink dregs, this is the amount according to the law, [sc. the dregs in the bottom of his cup should come up] as high as the nail of his *arianfys*’. The Peniarth 30, fol. 91v20–21 is slightly different: *o deruyd y dyn dewedut na dyly med lletcaut ac amresson ueynt e llatcaut, kyhyt a guyn euyn er euydues* ‘if it happens that a man says that he is not entitled to ... dregs (?) and an argument arises about the amount of the dregs, [sc. the dregs in the bottom of his cup should come up] as high as the ... nail of the *efyddfys*’.⁴⁶ Neither is very clear and one might suspect scribal confusion or omission in one or both of them. Another version, however, preserved in NLW Llanstephan 116, helps to clarify matters: *O dervyd bod dyn yn dbedyd na dylyei yfed llackaut a bod amrysson am loneid y llackaut. Sef, yô meint y llac[k]aðd kyhyd a chôgyn yr ewin ar yr yôdvys* (LHDd 90.23–26) ‘if it happens that a man says that he should not drink dregs and an argument arises about the amount of the dregs. This is the amount of the dregs, as high as the knuckle of the nail on the *efyddfys*’. It is clear the *med* in Peniarth 30 is a misreading of some spelling of *yfed* ‘drinking’ (perhaps *iued*), and that Peniarth 40 omitted the clause about an argument breaking out. What emerges from this disentangling of corrupt texts is that the proper amount of dregs in one’s drink should be no deeper than the top joint of one’s *arian*–/*efyddfys*. The use of *efydd* ‘bronze’ in this context implies that the other word was thought of as a variant of *arian*– ‘silver’ and that both are terms probably referring to the ring-bearing finger whichever that may be. Even so, it is worth pointing out that the broadly equivalent passages in the Cyfnerth and Blegywryd redactions use *hirfys* and *bys perfedd* respectively (WML 14.9–12; CHDd 8.31–33); moreover, the Latin texts, where

⁴⁵ We lack a White Book version of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* which might help us to solve this puzzle, if there ever was one. Other examples of the form *garanuys* are either errors or something else entirely: in *either un tudet y garanuys* (NLW Peniarth 37, fol. 12v10) *garanuys* is an error for *garawys* ‘Lent’; the name *Gerein Garanuys* in the *Brutiau* corresponds to Geoffrey’s *Gerinus Carnotensis* ‘Gereint of Chartres’.

⁴⁶ The text may be corrupt here in the same way as a *garanvys* above in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*: while it might be possible to read a *guyn euyn* as referring to the white of the nail (even though to my knowledge the term is not found in Welsh), it is probably a misreading and partial correction of *ac euyn*.

the finger is specified, refer to the *digitus medius*, thus corresponding to Cyfnerth and Blegywryd.⁴⁷ The texts identified by Jenkins which contain *arian-/efydd-fys* are northern and it may be that this type of terminology displayed regional variation or that, partly perhaps because of the relative rarity of the terms, it is simply muddled (as with the confusion between *medius* and *medicus*).

But what are we to make of *aran-*? Even if we accept that *garan-* might be an error, does *aran-* have anything to do with *arian-*? At this point the discussion moves into the orbit of another crux, namely, whether the first element of *Aranrhod* is *aran-* or *arian-* (Williams 1930: 176–177; Bromwich 1987: 277–278; Hughes 2013: lxvii–lxxiii). If the original form was *aran-*, then it is clear that in both cases it was subsequently re-analysed as *arian-* ‘silver’. Alternatively, *aran-* occurred in southern texts where *-i-* was treated as pre-suffixal and dropped (Hughes 2013: lxvii). Or it is possible that *aran-* was the reduced form of *arian-* when neither syllable originally carried the stress. It is noteworthy that very few compounds containing *arian-* are very old, and most are semantically perspicuous and so would remain formally clear as well. What *Aranrhod* and *aranfys* have in common is that they are both early and semantically opaque. For our purposes with regard to *aranfys* we need not press the argument; whether it is in origin *arian-* or not, by the thirteenth-century it was perceived as such, and sufficiently well understood to generate the parallel form *efydd-fys*.

What emerges from this discussion of terms for fingers is that there seems to have been only the haziest sense of the distinctions. The main problem throughout centres on the distinction between the middle and third finger; the index-finger is not used as a term of measurement and the little finger (*bys bychan*) only in Old Welsh and then in Iorwerth. Part of the problem may be a matter of physiology; whether thinking in terms of width or length there is not much difference between the two fingers. Another element in the equation may be textual and Latinate: *hirfys* seems to have been the standard term for the middle finger, but we also find *bys perfedd* which looks like a calque on *digitus medius*. However, the latter is relatively uncommon and in the context of Welsh law looks like a textual variant of (*digitus*) *medicus*. The other Latin term for the third finger, *digitus anularis* ‘ring-finger’, may be the starting point for terms such as *arianfys* (and by analogy *efyddfys*). I suspect that *aranfys* (like *Aranrhod*) may be an accentually reduced variant of *arianfys*, and that *garanfys* is a ghost-word, but the evidence is sparse and difficult to evaluate. More generally these terms are not well attested in Welsh and so it is hardly surprising that some confusion might have arisen.

⁴⁷ Latin A (LTWL 114.23); Latin C (LTWL 282.17; WLMA 2011: 22–23 §1/15/17); Latin E (LTWL 442.4–5).

Abbreviations

AL	=	A. Owen 1841
BRh	=	Richards 1948
BvL	=	Thomson 1976
CHDd	=	Richards 1990
CIH	=	Binchy 1978
ECC	=	Hull 1941
Ior	=	William 1960
LHDd	=	Lewis 1912
LTMW	=	Roberts 2007
LTWL	=	Emanuel 1967
PKM	=	Williams 1930
RM	=	Rhys & Evans 1887
TE	=	Bergin & Best 1934–1938
VASS	=	Flobert 1997
VSB	=	Pleine 1883
WLMA	=	Russell 2011
WM	=	Evans 1907
WML	=	Wade-Evans 1909

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	Lat A	Lat B	Lat C	Lat D (and Blegywryd)	Lat E	Cyfnherth	Iorwerth	Iorwerth (Test Book)	<i>Branwen</i>
Plate (1)	—	—	gold	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rod	silver	silver	gold	silver	solid silver	silver	gold	gold	silver
Prongs (1)	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—
Plate (2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	gold	gold	gold
Cup	gold	gold	silver	gold	gold	gold	gold	—	—
Lid	gold	gold	gold	gold	[gold]	gold	gold	—	—
Prongs (2)	✓	✓	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—
+ egg-shell	✓	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—

Table 1: Summary of the descriptive elements and their ordering. The numbers in brackets in the first column refer to the order of the elements; e.g., in Latin E and Latin D (and Blegywryd) the description of the prongs comes after the rod, not at the end as elsewhere; while in Iorwerth, Latin C, and *Branwen* no prongs are mentioned.