

St Kenelm, St Melor and Anglo-Breton contact from the tenth to the twelfth centuries

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the similarity between two apparently unrelated hagiographical texts: *Vita et Miracula Kenelmi*, composed between 1045 and the 1080s and attributed to Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, and *Vita Melori*, composed perhaps in the 1060s–1080s but surviving only in a variety of late-medieval versions from England and France. Kenelm was venerated at Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, Melor chiefly at Lanmeur, Finistère. Both saints were reputed to be royal child martyrs, and their *Vitae* contain a sequence of motifs and miracles so similar that a textual relationship or common oral origin seems a reasonable hypothesis. In order to elucidate this, possible contexts for the composition of *Vita Melori* are considered, and evidence for the Breton contacts of Goscelin and, earlier, Winchcombe Abbey is investigated. No priority of one *Vita* over the other can be demonstrated, but their relationship suggests that there was more cultural contact between western Brittany and England from the mid-tenth to the twelfth centuries than emerges overtly in the written record.

Scholars of medieval hagiography seem so far to have overlooked an extraordinary similarity between the Latin Lives of two apparently unrelated saints. One is the Anglo-Saxon saint Kenelm, a Mercian prince who died *c.* 812 and was buried and venerated at Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. The other is Melor, a prince of Cornouaille in Brittany, supposedly of the sixth century, whose main shrine is at Lanmeur, Finistère.¹ There are no direct verbal correspondences between the texts, but their content is highly similar. Both saints, according to their Lives, were royal children whose main claim to sanctity lay in their having been murdered at an early age by relatives for political gain: their brief biographies concentrate almost exclusively on their martyrdom. In the case of Kenelm, the guilty party was allegedly his jealous sister, Cwoenthryth; with Melor it was a wicked uncle, Rivod, who had already killed his own brother, the

¹ Both texts may be consulted in modern editions: *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi* [hereafter *Vita Kenelmi*] in *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives: 'Vita S. Birini', 'Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi' and 'Vita S. Rummoldi'*, ed. and trans. R. C. Love (Oxford, 1996), pp. 49–89; *Vita S. Melori* [hereafter *Vita Melori*] in *Le dossier hagiographique de S. Melor: textes, traduction, commentaires*, ed. and trans. A.-Y. Bourgès (*Britannia Monastica* 5, Lanmeur, 1997), 55–95. For the various forms of the saint's name, of which Bourgès prefers to use the modern Breton form *Melar*, see Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 132–3.

saint's father. Both hagiographers compare the murderer to Cain, the biblical fratricide. Kenelm was killed at the age of seven; Melor was orphaned at seven, but killed seven years later. Both murderers delegated the actual killing to the victim's foster-father or guardian (*nutritor/nutricius*), offering lavish rewards and exploiting the child's trust. In both stories the child's nurse is strongly characterized, issuing warnings to the victim, but in vain. Both martyrs were decapitated and both showed signs of life after death – Kenelm caught his own head in his hands, Melor's head spoke posthumously. Both martyrs instructed their killers to plant a staff in the ground, which miraculously took root and grew leaves – Kenelm before his death, Melor afterwards. Both stories involve the appearance of not just one but two miraculous springs of water, the second of which appears in order to alleviate the thirst of those who are carrying the saint's remains. And both culminate in the divine punishment of the murderer by her or his eyes falling out.

One reason why the resemblance between these two Lives has not been noticed before may be that neither is an obviously derivative text. Each contains a unique core of local and 'folkloric' material which gives it a memorable atmosphere of its own.² In Kenelm's case, the boy has a premonitory vision of a glorious tree being cut down, while he flies away in the shape of a bird: a passage that has been compared to the Grimm Brothers' tale 'The Juniper Tree'.³ While a miraculous dove takes a letter to Rome with the news of the boy's murder, his body lies hidden under a thorn-bush, guarded only by a faithful cow. The dove's message is given in a verse couplet in Old English including a local place-name, underlining the local roots of the tradition.⁴ In the case of *Vita Melori*, elements of the story have been traced to Celtic mythology.⁵ The

² For some caveats against assuming the 'folk' (i.e. collective, non-elite) origins of non-biblical and non-classical fantastical or supernatural narrative tropes in hagiography, see H. Powell, 'Once Upon a Time there was a Saint: Re-evaluating Folklore in Anglo-Latin Hagiography', *Folklore* 121 (2010), 171–89. However, the term 'folkloric' still serves as a useful shorthand to denote this kind of material.

³ J. Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England', *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (Oxford, 2002), pp. 455–94, at 480–2.

⁴ *Vita Kenelmi*, chs 3–4, 9–11 (ed. Love, pp. 56–9, 62–7); C. Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cults of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints', *EME* 9 (2000), 53–83, at 67–72. It should be noted that amid the 'folkloric' elements, some passages in the *Vita* have identifiable literary sources in works by Gregory of Tours and Hincmar of Rheims: P. A. Hayward, 'Translation-Narratives in Post-Conquest Hagiography and English Resistance to the Norman Conquest', *ANS* 21 (1998), 67–93, at 73–5.

⁵ A.-Y. Bourgès, 'Une collecte des motifs hagio-folkloriques d'origine irlandaise dans le Trégor médiéval: la Vie ancienne de saint Mélar ...', *Ollodagos* 30 (2014), 143–68 (consulted online at file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Hagio-folklore_dans_la_Vita_de_saint_Melar-libre.pdf, 02/03/2018)

most striking motif is the silver hand and the bronze foot with which the saint is provided after his uncle – dissuaded by his advisers from killing him outright – has had his right hand and left foot cut off, and which grow like living limbs, a motif which has been plausibly connected with the Irish tale of the divine king Níadu Argatlam (Silver-Hand).⁶ The miraculous plenty during the reign of Melor's righteous father, Meliau, also recalls Irish sources such as the seventh-century 'mirror for princes', *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, and its vernacular analogue, the tract *Audacht Morainn*.⁷ Meanwhile, the political background of the *Vita*, in which Melor, from Cornouaille, flees to the protection of his uncle by marriage, Count Commorus of Domnonia, only to be slain in his house by treachery, has many resonances with early medieval Breton history and tradition which will be explored below.

By contrast, several of the motifs which the two Lives share are hagiographical commonplaces: the martyr who survives decapitation, the miraculous spring, the flowering staff. The reappearance of one or two of them would not suggest direct dependence. The killer's eyes falling out, for instance, goes back to the story of the martyrdom of St Alban as rendered by Bede, and the motif would have been readily accessible to hagiographers both in England and in Brittany.⁸ But such a density of shared motifs, extending throughout both texts, looks more than coincidental. The two texts also share an emphasis on the pathos of the victim's youth and trusting innocence which is more marked than anything found in other examples of child hagiography of the period. Even though there is a recognized genre of hagiography of youthful royal martyrs in Anglo-Saxon England (to be discussed below), the resemblance between *Vita Kenelmi* and *Vita Melori* is closer than that between *Vita Kenelmi* and any one of these texts.⁹ The resemblance raises interesting questions – which are easier to ask than to answer – about contact between English and Breton hagiographers at any time between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries.

⁶ *Vita Melori*, text P, 1c, text M, 1d (ed. Bourguès, 56, 64). For Níadu and possibly related deities in Britain see R. Hutton, 'Medieval Welsh Literature and Pre-Christian Deities', *CMCS* 61 (summer 2011), 57–85, at 63–8. It may or may not be relevant that the main sanctuary of the Romano-British god Nodens, a cognate of Níadu, was at Lydney in Gloucestershire, some thirty-five miles from St Kenelm's shrine at Winchcombe.

⁷ R. Meens, 'Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm', *EME* 7 (1998), 345–57, at 350–1, and references there cited; Pseudo-Cyprianus, *De XII Abusivis Saeculi*, ed. S. Hellmann, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 34 (1909), 1–61.

⁸ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* i. 5, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 32–3.

⁹ The English Lives generally contain more realistic political detail, and they more commonly end in reconciliation (typically the founding of a religious house) than in divine punishment: D. W. Rollason, 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 11 (1982), 1–22.

THE CULTS OF KENELM AND MELOR AND THE
QUESTION OF PRIORITY

On the working assumption that one of these Lives borrows from the other, which is likely to be the prototype? At first glance, the balance of probabilities seems in favour of *Vita Kenelmi*. The composition of *Vita Kenelmi* can be firmly dated by internal evidence to the 1040s–1080s: there are stylistic grounds for attributing it to the prolific hagiographer Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (1040–1114). Its textual history is relatively straightforward and there is independent evidence for the historical existence of the saint and for the growth of his cult from the late tenth century onwards.¹⁰ Moreover, *Vita Kenelmi* emerges from a recognizable, specifically English genre of hagiography of murdered royal saints.¹¹ The series includes the seventh-century Kentish princes Æthelred and Æthelberht, whose story, elaborated in the ‘Kentish Royal Legend’ perhaps as early as the eighth century, was incorporated by Goscelin into his *Vita S. Mildrethae*, the Northumbrian saints Eardwulf, Ælfwald and Eahmund, all of the late eighth or ninth centuries; the Mercian Wigstan, and the East Anglian Æthelberht, killed in 849 and 794 respectively, not to mention the more recent example of King Edward ‘the Martyr’, murdered in 978, whose case rekindled interest in the earlier royal martyrs, and whose *Passio* is also attributable to Goscelin.¹² (The vogue for this story-type in the late tenth century was such that it could even be chosen for the objects of entirely manufactured cults such as that of St Indract at Glastonbury.)¹³ Several historians have proposed reasons why the theme of the martyred king or prince, most often a spotless and innocent youth, should have had such resonance in Anglo-Saxon England, as it also did in the late tenth and eleventh centuries in Norway (St Magnus) and in eastern Europe (St Wenceslas, SS Boris and Gleb of Kiev). The need for a protomartyr to consecrate a newly Christian nation played a part in some of these examples; in the English cases, the young martyrs may have been felt

¹⁰ *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints’ Lives*, ed. Love, pp. xci, xcvi–ci, cxxi–cxxxix, cxliii–cxvii. Love regards 1075 as the *terminus ante quem*. However, Hayward, ‘Translation-Narratives’, p. 25, suggests that the 1080s are the most likely date for the text’s composition.

¹¹ Rollason, ‘The Cults’.

¹² Blair, ‘A Saint for Every Minster?’, p. 478; D. W. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: a Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 16–21, 37–40, 89–104; Goscelin of Canterbury, *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae*, in *The Mildrith Legend*, ed. Rollason, pp. 105–43; Rollason, ‘The Cults’, pp. 3–9; A. Thacker, ‘Saint-Making and Relic Collecting by Oswald and his Communities’, *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp. 244–68; Cubitt, ‘Sites and Sanctity’, p. 67; *Passio Sancti Eadwardi Regis et Martyris*, in *Edward King and Martyr*, ed. C. Fell (Leeds, 1971), p. xx.

¹³ M. Lapidge, ‘The Cult of St Indract at Glastonbury’, *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 179–212.

to be suitable role models for monks and nuns of the tenth-century reform, especially oblates; it has also been pointed out that in the case of many royal martyrs there is good evidence for the early development of a popular lay cult, sparked by outrage at an unjust and unavenged slaying, and preceding any royal or clerical involvement.¹⁴

In the case of St Melor, by comparison, such evidence is lacking: the historical context is obscure and the literary record fragmentary. The earliest indication of a cult of Melor dates from centuries after his supposed lifetime and the initial impulse for it is unknown. In Anglo-Saxon England, thanks to the relative abundance of contemporary source-material, most royal 'saints' can be shown to have had a real and datable historical existence, however much their hagiography distorts it. This is not the case in Brittany, where very few sources antedate the ninth century. Many saints were later believed to have flourished during the sixth century, but almost no contemporary information from this period survives.¹⁵ Melor is one of at least two and probably more reputed saints of the same name whom it is difficult to distinguish from one another in liturgical records and toponymy.¹⁶ One, who was invoked in litanies of Breton saints of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and whose relics were at the important Benedictine abbey of Redon in eastern Brittany in 849, was apparently a bishop and confessor.¹⁷ The earliest indication of the existence of a martyr named Melor is a late-ninth-century calendar in a manuscript of computus, Angers, Bibliothèque municipale, 477, in which the feast days of several Breton saints are noted: *Passio Melori et Budcati* is placed on 25 October (35r).¹⁸ (Even

¹⁴ G. Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 98–113; H. M. Price, 'Boris and Gleb: Princely Martyrs and Martyrology in Kievan Russia', *Stud. in Church Hist.* 30 (1993), 105–16; P. A. Hayward, 'The Idea of Innocent Martyrdom in Late Tenth- and Eleventh-century English Hagiology', *Stud. in Church Hist.* 30 (1993), 81–92; Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity', 78–83.

¹⁵ For a general guide to early medieval Breton hagiography, see J.-C. Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne du haut Moyen Âge: répertoire raisonné* (Ostfildern, 2009); for a review of some of the historical and historiographical problems of the Breton 'age of migration', see C. Brett, 'Soldiers, Saints and States? The Breton Migrations Revisited', *CMCS* 61 (summer 2011), 1–56.

¹⁶ For the identities of St Melor, see Bourguès, *Le dossier*, pp. 132–7; G. H. Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall* (Chatham, 1960) III, 20–52; N. Orme, *The Saints of Cornwall* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 185–7.

¹⁷ *Cartulary of Redon*, nos. 59, 269, 306, in *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Redon en Bretagne*, ed. A. de Courson (Paris, 1863), pp. 47–8, 218, 368. For the Breton litanies, see M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints* (London, 1991), pp. 259–64 (Rheims litany); B. Tanguy, 'De l'origine des anciennes litanies bretonnes des Xe et XIe siècles', *Britannia Monastica* 10 (2006), 43–61, at 44–6, 54.

¹⁸ The date is problematic, since the feast-day that later became established for the martyr Melor is 1 October. The manuscript is of great interest for its text of Bede's *De natura rerum*, *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione* glossed in Old Irish and Old Breton, and has been discussed by P.-Y. Lambert, 'Les commentaires celtiques à Bède le Vénérable', *Études Celtiques* 20 (1983), 119–43 and 21 (1984), 185–206; D. Barbet-Massin, 'The Rite of Church Dedication in Early

less is known of *Budcat*, who may be St Boscat, bishop, eponym of Tréogat west of Quimper.)¹⁹ Melor's name appears in a list of saints whose relics were taken from Brittany to Saint-Magloire, Paris, to escape Viking attacks in the 920s–930s, but he is not identified as a martyr there until a relic-list of 1138.²⁰ That Melor was venerated at an important shrine at Lanmeur is indicated by the place-name *Lanmurmeler* found in a document in the cartulary of Redon – unfortunately a forgery and not certainly datable any earlier than the copying of the batch of charters to which it belongs (early twelfth century); but for what it is worth, the charter claims to be a grant by Count Juhel Berenger of Rennes (c. 958–70) of the island of *Enesmur* (L'Île Grande), given at nearby Lanmeur where he was 'holding court'.²¹ Nothing is known of the early nature of any cult centre or religious community at Lanmeur beyond the name (which means simply 'great [religious] enclosure'), but that it could be envisaged both as Melor's shrine and as a comital court in the mid-tenth century or even by c. 1100 is evidence for the growth of the cult. Possibly Redon had some role in this growth, linked to its own possession of homonymous relics. Lanmeur, however, continues very obscure throughout the Middle Ages. In the twelfth century the abbey of Saint-Jacut in north-eastern Brittany was granted a portion of the tithes of *Lanmur*. Possibly as a result, the parish was an enclave of the bishopric of Dol by 1235, when its possession was contested by the duke of Brittany, Pierre Mauclerc.²² None of these documentary sources mentions the cult of Melor: outside of hagiography and the place-name form in the Redon cartulary, there is no evidence to connect the cult with the locality until the early modern period.

By about 1030, some relics of Melor had reached the convent of Amesbury in Wiltshire. Their presence is recorded in the Old English list of saints' resting

Medieval Ireland and the Dedication Scheme in the Angers Manuscript 477', *Peritia* 27 (2016), 11–30; and *idem*, 'Le manuscrit 477 (461) d'Angers: étude codicologique et textuelle', *Britannia Monastica* 19: *Louis Lemoine* (2017), pp. 15–44. The digitized manuscript may be seen at <http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/mirador/index.php?manifest=http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/iiif/1097/manifest> (accessed 22/02/2018).

¹⁹ B. Tanguy, *Dictionnaire des noms de communes, trèves et paroisses du Finistère* (Le Chasse-Marée, 1990), pp. 227–8; Bourgès, *Le dossier*, 215.

²⁰ H. Guillotel, 'L'exode du clergé breton devant les invasions scandinaves', *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne* 59 (1982), 269–315, at 312; *Chartes et documents de l'abbaye de Saint-Magloire*, ed. A. Terroine and L. Fossier (3 vols, Turnhout, 1976–1998) I, no. 30, pp. 116–8.

²¹ *Cartulary of Redon*, no. 305 (ed. de Courson, pp. 257–8); *Actes des ducs de Bretagne (944–1148)*, no. 1, ed. H. Guillotel (Rennes, 2014), pp. 247–50; P. Guigon, 'La donation d'Enesmur à l'abbaye Saint-Sauveur de Redon', *Le pouvoir et le foi au Moyen Âge en Bretagne et dans l'Europe de l'Ouest. Mélanges en mémoire du professeur Hubert Guillotel*, ed. J. Quaghebeur and S. Sylvaïn (Rennes, 2010), pp. 225–41.

²² For references, see Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 193–4, 196–8.

places from that date, but again it is not clear whether these relics were initially thought to be those of a confessor or of a martyr.²³ One might assume that the relics arrived in England through the well-known collecting activities of King Æthelstan (924–39), but this is not certain.²⁴ A century later, William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (c. 1125) recorded that Amesbury had been founded by Queen Ælfhryth in the late tenth century to atone for her supposed role in the murder of King Edward ‘the Martyr’, and that St Melor’s relics were there at the time of writing, but that nothing was known about the saint.²⁵ However, at some stage before the mid-fourteenth century it was decided that the Melor at Amesbury was the Breton boy-martyr, in keeping with the tradition about its foundation as an act of atonement.²⁶ Also, by the late twelfth century, there were reputed to be relics of the martyr Melor at the abbey of Notre-Dame du Châte at Meaux, near Paris.²⁷

The *Vita* of Melor is anonymous, and has survived only in legends and hagiographic compilations in which it has been variously abbreviated and altered from its putative original form. Its most recent editor, André-Yves Bourgès, has usefully printed the most important fragments separately so that their varying content and interrelationships can be easily seen. He believes that the best witnesses to the probable original state of the Life are the texts he designates ‘P’ and ‘M’: P is found in Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 399 (ancien 248), a fourteenth-century lectionary from Saint-Magloire, Paris; M is in a seventeenth-century collection of hagiographical texts related to Meaux: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 13789. The two are clearly variant versions of the same text, but P is truncated at the end while M is deficient at the beginning.²⁸ Four more versions of Melor’s *Vita* survive from fourteenth-century England, all abbreviated, but supplying the essentials of the same story.

²³ *Die Heiligen Englands: Angelsächsisch und lateinisch*, ed. F. Liebermann (Hanover, 1889), pp. 19–20; D. Rollason, ‘Lists of Saints’ Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England’, *ASE* 7 (1978), 61–93, at 64–6.

²⁴ For Æthelstan as relic-collector, see S. Foot, *Æthelstan: the First King of England* (New Haven, CT, 2011), pp. 188–203.

²⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum anglorum*, II, 87, in *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Pontificum Anglorum / ‘The History of the English Bishops’*, I: *Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom with R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2007), p. 297; R. M. Thomson with M. Winterbottom, *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Pontificum Anglorum / ‘The History of the English Bishops’*, II: *Commentary* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 133–4.

²⁶ For the later medieval history of Amesbury, see Thomson with Winterbottom, *Gesta Pontificum: Commentary*, pp. 133–4; A. H. Diverres, ‘An Anglo-Norman Life of St Melor’, *National Lib. of Wales Jnl* 15 (1967), 167–75, at 168.

²⁷ F. Plaine, ‘Le martyr breton S. Mélor et son ancien culte à Meaux’, *Revue de Champagne et de Brie* 14 (1889), 322–38, at 327–9; Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 199–203.

²⁸ Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 28–41, 55–74. Version ‘M’ was printed as ‘Vita inedita S. Melori martyris in Britannia minori’, ed. F. Plaine, *AB* 5 (1886), 165–76.

One is found in John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium*, c. 1325–50, another in the *Legendarium* of Exeter by Bishop John de Grandisson, c. 1340–65, and there is a version in Anglo-Norman verse, probably from Amesbury, which its editor would also place in the fourteenth century.²⁹ The fourth text is a very brief epitome, found in a fourteenth-century section of a composite manuscript, London, British Library, Royal 8. C. VII.³⁰ From Brittany itself, the only surviving manuscripts are early modern copies (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 22321 (s.xvii/xviii); Rennes, Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 F 1003 (s.xv/xvi); Rennes, Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, 23 J 54), some of which are derived from lost early printed diocesan breviaries, which fed into Albert Le Grand's baroque re-telling of the story in his *Vies des saints de la Bretagne armorique* of 1636.³¹

Given the close resemblance between *Vita Melori* and *Vita Kenelmi* and the predominantly English text-tradition of the former, it would be easy to conclude that the Life of St Melor was originally composed in England, perhaps at Amesbury in the twelfth century, to compensate for the perceived lack of information about the relics there; because of this same lack of information, it would have been based closely on the readily available and popular *Vita Kenelmi*. Only later would it have been obtained by Melor's other cult centres, in Brittany, Paris and Meaux, and expanded with more 'local colour'. On this view, it might even have been as a result of the influence of *Vita Kenelmi* that Melor's identity as a child martyr became established. The societal and ecclesiastical reasons for the popularity of royal martyrs that can be argued for England and eastern Europe do not seem to apply in Brittany, making it all the more tempting to see *Vita Melori* as a derivative outlier of the tradition.

However, on closer examination such an argument seems untenable. It is

²⁹ John of Tynemouth: London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius E. i, vol. II, 72r–73v; *Nova Legenda Anglie as Collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave, and others, and first printed, with new Lives, by Wynkyn de Worde, a.d. m d xvi*, ed. C. Horstmann (2 vols, Oxford, 1901) II. 183–5. John de Grandisson: Exeter Cathedral Library, 3505, 154r–v, in *Vita Melori*, text 6 (ed. Bourgès, pp. 95–6); verse version, National Library of Wales, Bettisfield 19, in 'The Life of Saint Melor', ed. A. H. Diverres, *Medieval French Textual Studies in Memory of T. B. W. Reid*, ed. I. Short (London, 1984), pp. 41–53.

³⁰ The text is edited and the manuscript dated to the thirteenth century by Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, I. 25. However, Bourgès points out (*Le dossier*, 40) that the author of the epitome also wrote of other saints including Bishop Thomas of Hereford, canonized in 1320. The catalogue description by G. F. Warner and J. P. Gilson, *A Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections in the British Museum*, 4 vols. (London, 1921) I. 236, places this section between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

³¹ Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 32–4, 39–40. It is not within the scope of the present article to elucidate the interrelationships of all the surviving versions of the text, interesting though this would be: it is enough for present purposes to show that a text containing all the recognizable features of the story was in existence by the fourteenth century.

clear that all the English versions of the Life of Melor, as well as the continental versions, draw on a core of information that must have come from a text, or at least a well-established tradition, that placed the saint in an authentically Breton genealogical and geographical setting. The English texts ‘anglicise’ Melor to the extent of transplanting him into Insular Cornwall (and neighbouring Devon) instead of Breton Cornouaille. However, the Exeter version contains the information that he was educated at a monastery of St Corentin, the leading saint of Cornouaille; the verse version states that the council where it was decided to mutilate Melor was held at *Cobloyd*, which must be an attempt to render a Breton place-name (*Colroit?*) that occurs as *Gorbroidus* in version P (the Saint-Magloire lectionary).³² And the Exeter and verse versions give elements of Melor’s genealogy on both sides which agree with the fuller continental versions. Given that the authors of all the surviving texts from England are avowedly abbreviating longer models, and given what we know of the practice of John of Tynemouth (especially) in removing unnecessary names and local colour from the hagiography he edited, it seems certain that the source-text or texts of the surviving English versions contained a level of local detail comparable to what is found in the surviving continental versions – although we cannot be sure that any particular detail found only in the continental versions necessarily goes back to the archetypal version. Furthermore, the basic narrative of *Vita Melori* is rooted in earlier Breton historio-hagiographical tradition, as much as *Vita Kenelmi* is in the English tradition. In the next section, I shall explore some of the possible sources and analogues for both *Vitae*.

BRITTANY AND WESTERN BRITAIN:
THE HAGIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Several of the story-elements and motifs in *Vita Melori* echo earlier history and hagiography relating to Brittany. The character of Miliiau, Melor’s father, killed by his own brother, may be based on the late-sixth-century account of Breton politics by Gregory of Tours, in particular the career of Macliau, a Breton ‘count’ protected by another count, Conomor, after one of his brothers had had the others killed.³³ In keeping with the atmosphere evoked by Gregory, the victimization of political rivals is a theme of Breton hagiography from its inception. The earliest saint’s Life from Brittany, the probably late-seventh-century

³² *Vita Melori*, text 6d (ed. Bourgès, p. 95); verse *Vita Melori*, line 45 (ed. Diverres, p. 44). The place-name may be the one which appears in documents of the 850s and 860s in the Cartulary of Redon as *aula Colroit* and *Liscolroet*: *Cartulary of Redon*, nos. 105 and 78 (ed. De Courson, pp. 79–80, 60–1), or one of the place-names Guelvid or Guilvit in Morbihan or Finistère; discussion in Bourgès, *Le dossier*, p. 165, and Bourgès, ‘Une collecte’, p. 164.

³³ Gregory of Tours, *Historiarum Libri Decem* iv. 4 and v. 16, MGH SS *Res. Merov.* I.1, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison (2nd ed., 1951), 137–8, 214.

Vita Prima Sancti Samsonis, featured an ‘unjust and external judge’ of ‘Domnonia’ in Brittany, Commorus, who had slain the rightful ruler, Jonas, and had his son Judwal imprisoned pending execution by the Frankish king Childebert. St Samson miraculously secured Judwal’s release and enabled him to defeat Commorus.³⁴ (Noticeably, ‘Commorus’ or ‘Conomor’ has the villain’s role in *Vita Samsonis* and the Life of Gildas, but plays a much more positive role in *Vita Melori*, *Vita Machutis*, *Vita Pauli Aureliani* and some other texts from north-western Brittany.³⁵) As *Vita Samsonis* served as a model for all subsequent Breton hagiography, its theme of usurpation was similarly influential.

Elements of a story even closer to that of *Vita Melori* can be found in *Vita S. Machutis* (St Malo) by Bili, a Life which was dedicated to Bishop Ratuuili of Alet and can thus be dated between approximately 865 and 872.³⁶ A character with the same name as Melor’s father (Meliau) appears in Bili’s Life as ‘a prince who ruled at that time in the Alet region’ (*princeps qui tunc regnabat in pago Alet*), who granted a hermit as much land as a cart drawn by two untamed bullocks could drive round in a day.³⁷ (The motif of the cart with the untamed bullocks is a commonplace in hagiography, especially Irish: in Muirchú’s Life of St Patrick, as in *Vita Melori*, the cart carries the saint’s body and decides where it is to be buried.³⁸) In *Vita Machutis*, Miliu is thus a sub-royal figure local to Alet, while another ruler, Judicaël or Judel, is later introduced as reigning over the whole of Brittany.³⁹ In an episode omitted from most of the manuscripts of Bili’s *Vita*, we are told that after ‘Judel’ had died, there arose ‘a certain impious heretic named Rethwalus’ (*quidam impius et haereticus Rethwalus nomine*) who attempted to kill all Judel’s surviving sons except Heloch, whom he himself had fostered. Despite the intervention of St Malo the sons were massacred, but Rethwalus was divinely punished by death three days later. In the previous chapter, contradictorily, a Rethwaldus had been described as himself being the son and successor of King ‘Judicaël’. He destroyed a monastery of St Malo,

³⁴ *Vita I. S. Samsonis* i. 53, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*, ed. and trans. P. Flobert (Paris, 1997), pp. 224–5. For the significance and possible historicity of the ‘Commorus’ episode in *Vita Samsonis*, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 66–8.

³⁵ B. Merdrignac, *D’une Bretagne à l’autre: les migrations bretonnes entre histoire et légendes* (Rennes, 2012), pp. 211–26.

³⁶ Bili, *Vita S. Machutis*, Prologue, ‘Vita Sancti Machutis par Bili’, ed. F. Lot, *Mélanges d’histoire bretonne (VIe–XIe siècle)* (Paris, 1907), pp. 331–430, at 340; Poulin, *L’hagiographie bretonne*, pp. 147–70.

³⁷ Bili, *Vita S. Machutis* i. 34 (ed. Lot, p. 375).

³⁸ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii* ii. 9, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. and trans. L. Bieler (Dublin, 1979), pp. 120–1; Bourguès, ‘Une collecte’, p. 166. There is another example in the twelfth-century (?) *Vita Ronani* from Cornouaille: ‘Vita S. Ronani,’ *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum Latinorum in Bibliotheca Nationali Parisiensi*, 4 vols. (Brussels, 1889–93) I. 438–58.

³⁹ Bili, *Vita S. Machutis* i. 37–9, 43 (ed. Lot, pp. 377–9).

was punished by blindness, but repented and regained his sight.⁴⁰ Here we see several motifs that are recognizably shared with the hagiography of St Melor, not least a similar name for the villain. The relationship between the Lives of Malo and of Melor is probably an insoluble puzzle. Bourgès took the incoherence of the narrative in *Vita Machutis* as an indication that Bili had borrowed, but garbled, elements in a hagiographical tradition belonging primarily to Melor that was already well developed in the ninth century.⁴¹ Coherence does not necessarily imply precedence. If the relationship is the opposite one and the Melor hagiographer borrowed from *Vita Machutis*, some interesting inferences follow. The ‘Rethwalus’ section is missing from all the surviving continental manuscripts of Bili’s *Vita Machutis* – and from both the anonymous recensions of *Vita Machutis* too – with the exception of a lost Marmoutier legendary from which it was printed by Morice in the eighteenth century; otherwise it is found only in an Old English translation of the Life which was made at Winchester in the tenth century, and in some Latin derivatives of the English textual tradition.⁴² If, then, the Melor hagiographer borrowed the murder episode from *Vita Machutis*, it would tend to suggest that he worked in England, and also that his research was thorough, since the episode is a short chapter in a very long Life and is in no way highlighted. A likelier scenario may be that this bundle of stories and motifs had a prolonged oral circulation in northern Brittany, reflected and affected by the written texts but not confined to them, and that in *Vita Machutis* and *Vita Melori* we see two of many possible permutations. In any case, the similarity places *Vita Melori* firmly in a Breton tradition.

Thus far, the Breton narratives employ themes which are also met with in Welsh and Irish hagiography: the saint demonstrates his power by deposing wicked rulers and elevating divinely sanctioned ones, and by avenging infractions of his protection.⁴³ The figures of saint and ruler remain firmly separate. From the late ninth century onwards there are signs in Brittany of a readiness, shared with England, to attribute sanctity to royal figures whose main or only claim to it was a tragically violent death. An embryonic cult of Salomon, the Breton ruler who was murdered in 874, seems to have existed: his name occurs (*Salmon*) in the eleventh-century ‘Limoges’ litany of Breton origin in Paris,

⁴⁰ Bili, *Vita S. Machutis* i. 48–9 (ed. Lot, pp. 382–3).

⁴¹ Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 114–15.

⁴² Bili, *Vita S. Machutis* i. 50 (ed. Lot, pp. 383–4); *The Old English Life of Machutus*, ed. D. Yerkes (Toronto, 1984), p. 32; Poulin, *L’hagiographie bretonne*, pp. 149, 151, 154.

⁴³ For structural analysis of the ‘deposition/elevation’ narrative, see W. H. Heist, ‘Hagiography, chiefly Celtic, and Recent Developments in Folklore’, *Hagiographie Cultures et Sociétés IVe–XIIe siècles: Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris (2–5 mai 1979)*, ed. E. Patlagéan and P. Riché (Paris, 1981), pp. 121–41; for the saint’s power to grant sanctuary see W. Davies, ‘Property Rights and Property Claims in Welsh *Vitae* of the Eleventh Century’, *Hagiographie Cultures et Sociétés IVe–XIIe siècles*, ed. Patlagéan and Riché, pp. 515–33, at 524.

Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 1154, and there is some topographic and dedicatory evidence for the cult.⁴⁴ In the eleventh-century Life of St Gildas from Rhuys, a Breton monastery in the Vannes region which had recently been re-founded from Fleury, the royal victim is St Trifina, a princess who is murdered by her husband Conomor. Trifina is miraculously restored to life by Gildas.⁴⁵ Trifina's son Tremorus, mentioned as a monastic pupil in the Life of Gildas, was reputed a martyr in the relic-list of Saint-Magloire, Paris, and received a *Vita* of his own in the later Middle Ages (preserved in the same Saint-Magloire lectionary as that of Melor, Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 399, fols 218–21) in which he was decapitated by Conomor.⁴⁶ St Guigner or Fingar was a saint culted both in Cornwall and in Brittany, whose *Vita*, written around 1300, described him as an Irish king's son who was martyred in Cornwall.⁴⁷ At Saint-Gérand in Morbihan, a fifteenth-century chapel is dedicated to the 'Saints Dredenau', whom local legend in modern times claimed were two brothers killed by an ambitious uncle.⁴⁸ Finally, in the fourteenth century the promotion of the cult of Charles of Blois, duke of Brittany, killed in battle in 1364, consciously harked back to that of Salomon.⁴⁹ It is possible that the vogue for royal martyrs in Brittany was introduced from Anglo-Saxon England (it does not seem to occur in early medieval France or in the Gaelic world); but it was not confined to the legend of Melor, and it can be seen as a natural development within the Breton hagiographical tradition.

Thus, if one may situate *Vita Kenelmi* in an English tradition of martyred royal saints, *Vita Melori* fits into a Breton/Celtic tradition of royal violence; but there is also another grouping to which both may be seen to belong, of hagiography involving victimization of the innocent (not specifically political), in south-western England and the Welsh Marches. Most of this hagiography is

⁴⁴ Tanguy, 'De l'origine des anciennes litanies', p. 58; F. Plaine, 'Saint Salomon, roi de Bretagne et martyr', *Revue des pays de l'Ouest*, 11 (1895), 623–30; B. L. Olson and O. J. Padel, 'A Tenth-Century List of Cornish Parochial Saints', *CMCS* 12 (winter 1986), 33–71, at 42; Tanguy, *Dictionnaire des noms ... du Finistère*, p. 130. It is not clear that the *Salmon* of the litany represents the murdered king, however, since he is listed among confessors not among martyrs.

⁴⁵ *Vita Gildae*, 20–5, in *Two Lives of Gildas by a Monk of Rhuys and Caradoc of Llancarfan*, trans. H. Williams (Cymmrodorion Record Series, 1889; repr. Felinbach, 1990), pp. 44–53.

⁴⁶ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, p. 466.

⁴⁷ K. Jankulak, 'Fingar/Gwinear/Guigner: An "Irish" Saint in Medieval Cornwall and Brittany', *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, ed. J. Carey, M. Herbert and P. Ó Ríain (Dublin, 2001), pp. 120–39.

⁴⁸ S. Baring-Gould and John Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, II (London, 1908), pp. 356–60; P. Healy Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe* (New York, 2008), p. 80.

⁴⁹ A. Vauchez, 'Le duc Charles de Blois et le culte des saints rois bretons du Haut Moyen Âge', *Haut Moyen-Âge: Culture, Éducation, Société, Études offerts à Pierre Riché*, ed. C. Lepellay and M. Sot (Paris, 1990), pp. 605–15.

not recorded until later than the composition of *Vita Kenelmi* (and possibly of *Vita Melori*), but it appears to be rooted in earlier local traditions. First there are the Lives of St Gwenfrewy. Gwenfrewy was a virgin who was decapitated by her rejected suitor Caradog and restored to life by St Beuno, in a story rather similar to that of Trifina in the Breton Life of Gildas. Beuno called down the wrath of God on Caradog, who melted away like wax before a fire: a fate that befalls the villains of a number of Welsh *Vitae* (Cadog, Congar, Illtud and Teilo) and also Rivod in text 'M' (the Meaux text) of *Vita Melori*.⁵⁰ Two twelfth-century Latin Lives of Gwenfrewy exist, one anonymous and centring on her healing shrine at Holywell, Flintshire, and the other, by Robert of Shrewsbury, written shortly after her translation to Shrewsbury in 1137–8: however, her successful cult clearly pre-dated both Lives.⁵¹ In south-west England the cults of St Sidwell of Exeter and St Juthwara of Sherborne have points in common with those of both Gwenfrewy and Kenelm.⁵² Both cults are first attested in the eleventh century, and both legends involve the beheading of a virgin saint at the instigation of a jealous stepmother, after false accusations of sexual misconduct. Miraculous springs, divine lights and the victim's carrying her severed head feature in both cases. It has been suggested that these cults had a Brittonic origin, but this seems unlikely; what is more plausible is that they form part of a culture-province of innocent, murdered and cephalophoric saints that becomes visible in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Also to be noted is the story of St Clydog, as found in the Book of Llandaf, compiled in the 1130s, and in the collection of Lives of Welsh saints in London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. xiv, written *c.* 1200.⁵³ Clydog, son of Clydwyn, was a chaste king of Ergyng of the remote past, who was murdered while at prayer near the river Monnow by a jealous companion. No consequences for the culprit are mentioned, either divine punishment or earthly compensation, but, in tropes similar to those of *Vita Melori* and other Celtic *Vitae*, the body was removed on an ox-cart and grew miraculously heavier, so that the oxen were unable to move further, and a column of light revealed the future site of

⁵⁰ Bourguès, *Le dossier*, p. 67.

⁵¹ Anonymous Life: *Vita S. Wenefrede*, in *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, ed. A. W. Wade-Evans (Cardiff, 1944), pp. 288–309. Robert of Shrewsbury, *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*. ed. C. De Smedt, 'De Sancta Wenefreda', in *Acta Sanctorum Novembris I* (Paris, 1887), 691–759. For further references and discussion, see *Buchedd Beuno: the Middle Welsh Life of St Beuno*, ed. P. Sims-Williams (Dublin, 2018), pp. 19–32; J. R. Davies, 'The Cult of Saints in the Early Welsh March: Aspects of Cultural Transmission in a Time of Political Conflict', *The English Isles. Cultural Transmission and Political Conflict in Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500*, ed. S. Duffy and S. Foran (Dublin, 2013), pp. 37–55.

⁵² Orme, *The Saints of Cornwall*, pp. 234–5; Powell, 'Once Upon a Time', p. 181.

⁵³ *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*, ed. J. G. Evans (Oxford, 1893), pp. 193–5; see J. R. Davies, *The Book of Llandaf and the Norman Church in Wales* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 122–4.

the saint's church. Here the English theme of the murdered royal saint seems to have made itself at home in a Welsh context.

All these comparanda do not invalidate the exceptionally close resemblance between *Vita Kenelmi* and *Vita Melori*, but they do suggest that rather than seeing these two texts as a unique rapprochement of distinct 'English' and 'Breton' traditions, we should see them as especially closely-related works from a broad zone of hagiographical taste in which the English/ 'Celtic' boundary, and even the English Channel, were not firm dividing lines.

Early medieval child-martyrs were not absolutely confined to the Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and other peripheries of Christian Europe. There is at least one comparable example from the Carolingian world: St Gerulf of Drongen, near Ghent. He is thought to have died in the mid-eighth century, and his *Passio* was written in the 920s by an anonymous author at the instance of a 'father Gerard', perhaps the monastic reformer Gerard of Brogne, on the occasion of the discovery and translation of his relics.⁵⁴ According to the *Passio*, Gerulf, a son of noble parents, was an unusually religious youth who, while riding home from his confirmation ceremony, was murdered by his godfather. The *Passio* survives in four manuscripts, all from Flanders, the earliest of which, Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 70 H 50, from Saint-Omer, is tenth- or eleventh-century. Thus, it pre-dates all the English, Welsh and Breton texts discussed above. However, Flanders was in close contact with both England and Brittany in the early tenth century, a contact expressed especially through developments in the cult of saints.⁵⁵ Conceivably (although one would not want to insist on this), English or Breton influence helped prompt the development of Gerulf's cult: in which case, the *Passio* is a good example of how a saint of this sort might be presented in a milieu where he did not quite fit in. The *Passio* is brief and perfunctory, contains no 'folkloric' miracles, and, unlike any of the Insular or Breton authors discussed, the author seems exercised by the theological problems surrounding a saint whose only real claim to sanctity was his murder. 'It was not merely the malice of his murderous godfather that made him a martyr,' he insists, 'but divine clemency ensured that the virtue of a martyr was conferred on him in the very hour of his origin.'⁵⁶ Gerulf's cult, however, remained popular

⁵⁴ 'De Sancto Gerulpho Martyre', *Acta Sanctorum Septembris VI*, ed. J. Stilling *et al.* (Paris, 1867), pp. 250–64; for the manuscripts, see the Bollandist website, http://bhlms.fltr.ucl.ac.be/Nquersaintrubrique.cfm?code_dossier=Gerulfus&rubrique=Gerulfus%20m%2E%20Truncinii (accessed 09/09/2018); for a brief discussion, see Wasylw, *Martyrdom*, p. 80.

⁵⁵ B. Meijns, 'The Policy on Relic Translations of Baldwin II of Flanders (879–918), Edward of Wessex (899–924) and Æthelflæd of Mercia (d. 924): A Key to Anglo-Flemish Relations?', *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947)*, ed. D. Rollason, C. Leyser and H. Williams (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 473–92, and see below.

⁵⁶ 'Neque sui homicidae patrini malitia fecit modo eum martyrum, sed divina procurante clem-

into modern times, and one feels that perhaps the real difference between the Christian ‘peripheries’ where murdered children were honoured, and the metropolitan regions where they were not, may have been the greater resistance by ecclesiastical authorities in the latter to the development of cults launched by popular sympathy. Perhaps it was popular pressure that made the authorities in this case consider the cult worth promoting – combined with a claim to property allegedly bequeathed to the abbey of Drongen by St Gerulf as he died. St Gerulf may thus be the exception that proves the rule: nevertheless his case shows the danger of attempting to delineate culture-zones, either geographically or chronologically, because their boundaries are blurred at best and can easily dissolve if confronted by new evidence.

THE DATING OF *VITA MELORI*:
INTERNAL EVIDENCE AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS

This analysis does not help to establish the relative priority of *Vita Melori* and *Vita Kenelmi*: each *Vita* is rooted in its own local tradition so far as this can be ascertained, although independent early evidence for the cult of Melor is lacking. However, *Vita Melori* did at some stage become available in England, whereas *Vita Kenelmi*, as far as we know, never had a manuscript tradition on the Continent. This creates a *prima facie* case that the author of *Vita Kenelmi* may have drawn the texts’ shared elements from *Vita Melori*, rather than the other way around.

If this was so, *Vita Melori* must have been composed before about 1090, the later dating limit for the writing of *Vita Kenelmi*. In this case, to explain the fact that William of Malmesbury in *c.* 1125 knew of no traditions relating to St Melor, one would have to argue that the *Vita Kenelmi*-author had access to a text or tradition which did not become available at Melor’s cult-centres in England until later. If, on the other hand, *Vita Melori* borrowed from *Vita Kenelmi*, this would mean that an author who worked in western Brittany, or at least had a local Breton agenda and knowledge of Breton locations and traditions, obtained access to a text which is not known to have circulated outside England. There are difficulties with either scenario, which opens up an interesting third possibility, already implicit in my suggestion of a cross-Channel hagiographic ‘zone’: that the authors of both texts drew on a pool of traditions and motifs that was circulating prior to the composition of either *Vita*, and perhaps worked at about the same time and in the same milieu and may even have had a personal connection.

Is it possible to shed any further light on the relationship by considering internal evidence for the date and motives for the composition of *Vita Melori*?

entia, in ipsa suae originis hora martyrii virtus est ei collata’: *Passio Gerulfi*, Prologue, 3; ‘De Sancto Gerulpho Martyre’, ed. Stilling *et al.*, p. 259.

The text's editor, André-Yves Bourgès, believes that the *Vita* was originally composed at or for the saint's shrine of Lanmeur between 1066 and 1084 – a very similar date-range to that of *Vita Kenelmi* (1045–90). Evidence for its being local to the Lanmeur area is the toponymic detail given in the continental versions P and M, although strangely enough Lanmeur itself is not mentioned. Bourgès connects its composition to the construction of the surviving eleventh-century crypt at Lanmeur, implying local promotion of the cult, and to the rise of Hoël, count of Cornouaille, to become duke of Brittany by right of marriage in 1066.⁵⁷ Hoël and his successors attempted to enforce their authority throughout Brittany, without great success in the north where the power of members of the earlier Rennes-based ducal dynasty was entrenched – especially its cadet branch, the 'Eudonids'. Eudonid power was centred on the dioceses of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier, in the latter of which Lanmeur was situated. However, the immediate region of Lanmeur, an area known by the mid-eleventh century as *Pagus Castelli* (*Po Gastel* in Breton), was debatable territory between the Eudonids and the vicecomital dynasty of Léon, which was loosely attached to Cornouaille.⁵⁸ The passage in *Vita Melori* in which Commorus, the count (*comes*) of Domnonia (northern Brittany), takes St Melor, a scion of the duke (*dux*) of Cornouaille, under his protection and promises to give him the castle where they stand (*Castellum Boxidus*, Beuzit, arguably the stronghold from which *Pagus Castelli* derived its name), is interpreted by Bourgès as an assertion of the hereditary rights of the rulers of Cornouaille in Eudonid territory.⁵⁹ (The duke/count distinction, it might be added, constitutes an assertion of Cornouaille's superiority.)

Bourgès has good reason to focus on the relationship between Cornouaille and Domnonia as the crux in understanding the political context of the *Vita*'s production, because this is perhaps the most innovative aspect of the text. In medieval Breton hagiography in general, Cornouaille (*Cornubia* or *Cornugallia*) and Domnonia are depicted as the two main sub-regions within Brittany, one in the south-west, the other in the north. However, these two regions are not historically comparable. Cornouaille had a somewhat shadowy existence in the early medieval centuries, but it took on a solid political reality with the emergence of a comital dynasty founded by Budic I (d. 1008 × 1019).⁶⁰ Domnonia, on the other hand, only appears retrospectively in the antiquarian pages of saints' Lives: if it ever existed as a polity it was defunct by the ninth century.

⁵⁷ Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 98–110.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 161–2, 222–4; S. Morin, *Trégor – Goëlo – Penthièvre. Le pouvoir des Comtes de Bretagne du XI^e au XIII^e siècle* (Rennes, 2010), pp. 190–4.

⁵⁹ *Vita Melori*, text P, 1f (ed. Bourgès, pp. 58, 62); Bourgès, *Le dossier*, pp. 106–10.

⁶⁰ J. Quaghebeur, *La Cornouaille du IX^e au XII^e siècle: mémoire, pouvoirs, noblesse* (2nd ed., Rennes, 2002), pp. 103–14.

Vita Melori is the only text to attempt to describe a relationship between the two regions. The ruler of Domnonia, Count Commorus, is depicted as being of lesser status than the duke of Cornouaille, but effectively independent. His dynasty has contracted two symmetrical marriage alliances with the dynasty of Cornouaille: Melor's father Meliau has married Aurilla, a princess of Domnonia, and Melor's aunt (unnamed) is the wife of Commorus. Bourguès argues that the *Vita* is Cornouaillais dynastic propaganda – and yet the rulers of Domnonia seem to play a more favoured role in the story. The legitimate line of Cornouaille is apparently extinct by the close, thanks to Rivod's murder of his brother and nephew followed by his own demise, whereas Commorus and his wife first shelter Melor to the best of their ability and then reverently bury the young martyr, annexing his virtues for their own realm. The question is, does 'Domnonia' stand in the author's mind for a contemporary political unit, and if so, which? Quite possibly, it was the region of Léon (the extreme north-west of Brittany) that was being envisaged as the successor to Domnonia. During the reign of Hoël of Cornouaille, the *vicecomites* of Léon recognized his supremacy and acted for the most part as his allies, while continuing to assert their territorial rights in Tréguier, where Melor's shrine was situated. Bourguès even suggests that the author of the *Vita* was Omnes, bishop of Léon between approximately 1047 and 1084, who came from Cornouaille and may have been concerned to reconcile the Léonnais to a Cornouaille duke by assuring them that they owned the relics of an important Cornouaillais saint.⁶¹ (Another example of the identification of Léon with Domnonia occurs in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 12942, a twelfth-century manuscript containing the fullest surviving version of the ninth-century Life of St Paul Aurelian, the founding bishop of Léon: the text closes with the words 'Here ends the Life of St Paul Aurelian the Domnonian' ('explicit vita S. Pauli Aureliani Domnonensis').⁶² *Vita Melori*, then, can be made to work as a *roman à clef* for the political situation in Cornouaille and Léon in the years after 1066.

In its presentation of genealogy, too, *Vita Melori* can be related to scholarly developments in eleventh-century Brittany. From the late tenth century onwards, we see the first surviving attempts to name the secular leaders of the migration from Britain that had created Brittany, and to construct a dynastic history for them. The earliest was a genealogy which was attached to the Life of St Judoc by Isembard of Fleury, composed in about 1012.⁶³ In it, the saintly

⁶¹ Bourguès, *Le dossier*, pp.108–9, 222–4.

⁶² Wrmonoc, *Vita S. Pauli Aureliani*, ch. 71, in 'Vita sancti Pauli episcopi Leonensis in Britannia minori auctore Wormonoco', ed. F. Plaine, *AB* 1 (1882), 208–58, at 257.

⁶³ Isembard's Life of Judoc is still unpublished. See B. de Gaiffier, 'Isembard de Fleury-sur-Loire auteur de la *Vita S. Iudoci* (BHL 4505–4510)', *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 77 (1979), 9–12; J. M. Howe, 'The date of the Vita Judoci by Abbot Florentius

brothers Judoc and Judicaël were presented as sixth-generation descendants of a certain Riwal, who ‘coming from Britain beyond the sea with a multitude of ships, took possession of the whole of lesser Britain in the time of Chlothar, king of the Franks [511–61], who was the son of King Clovis’.⁶⁴ The genealogy included some persons with a good claim to be considered as historic rulers, but excluded Commorus. Rather later, an attempt was made at the abbey of Landévennec to create a comparable list of rulers of Cornouaille. The list is extant in the Cartulary of Landévennec (1047 × 1055), in a hand slightly later than that of the main body of the manuscript.⁶⁵ The last name on it is that of ‘Houel’ (Hoël), duke of Brittany, who died in 1084 – confirming that Hoël’s reign was a time for the assertion of dynastic traditions. The list begins with figures who are legendary or even invented. The founder of Cornouaille is named as ‘Riuelen Mor Marthou’ (‘the great rider’ or ‘of the great marvels’), possibly intended to be identified with the Riwal of the ‘Judoc’ genealogy. There follow a second Riuelen Mor, Concar, Gradlon Mur, Daniel Drem Rud (‘of the ruddy face’), Budic and Maxenri ‘two brothers’, Iahan Reith, and then a second Daniel, Gradlon, Concar and Budic in sequence, before the list approaches historicity with a probably ninth-century character, Gradlon Ploneour.⁶⁶

It is clear that the various versions of the Life of Melor draw on a similar confected tradition about rulers of Cornouaille, but with significant differences. In the P-text (from the lectionary of Saint-Magloire, Paris), supposedly best representing the earliest state of the Life of Melor, the sequence of rulers is Iohannes – Daniel – Fortunatus – Meliau (murdered by his brother Rivod) – Melor. It is Iohannes whom ‘the Lord prompted to migrate, guided by angels, from regions across the sea to Cornubia’; while Rivod, if he represents the

(BHL 4511), *AB* 101 (1983), 25–31, at 25–6; H. Le Bourdellès, ‘Vie de St Josse avec commentaire historique et spirituel’, *Studi Medievali* 34 (1993), 861–958, at 863; B. Merdrignac, ‘La perception de l’Irlande dans les *Vitae* des saints bretons du haut Moyen Age (VIIe–XIIIe siècles)’, *Irlande et Bretagne: vingt siècles d’histoire*, ed. C. Laurent and H. Davis (Rennes, 1994), pp. 65–75; Poulin, *L’hagiographie bretonne*, pp. 114–18.

⁶⁴ ‘Hic autem Riwalus a transmarinis Britanniiis veniens cum multitudine navium, possedit totam minorem Britanniam tempore Chlotharii regis Francorum, qui Chlodovei regis filius exstitit’. *Vita S. Winnoci*, Preface, *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Sancti Benedicti Saeculum III.1*, ed. J. Mabillon (Paris, 1672), pp. 304–14, at 304.

⁶⁵ *Cartulary of Landévennec*, no. 54, fol. 164v, in *Cartulaire de Landévennec*, ed. R.-F.-L. Le Men and E. Ernault, *Mélanges historiques: choix de documents V* (Paris, 1886), pp. 533–600, at 576–7. For discussion of the list, see A. Chédeville and H. Guillotel, *La Bretagne des saints et des rois* (Rennes, 1984), pp. 77–82; Quaghebeur, *La Cornouaille*, pp. 40–1; P. Marquand, ‘Le milieu politique et littéraire de la rédaction de la *Vita Teliavi*: entre rivalités ecclésiastiques et mémoire bretonne’, *Britannia Monastica* 16 (2012), 41–64.

⁶⁶ For discussion of the possible identity of Gradlon Ploneour, see Quaghebeur, *La Cornouaille*, pp. 39–48.

same character as Riwal, has been demoted from founder to traitor.⁶⁷ Iohannes might be equated with the Iahan Reith of the Landévennec list (who is stated in a gloss to have returned to Brittany from exile), and Fortunatus at a pinch with Budic (whose name means ‘victorious’), but it is clear we are dealing with a different treatment of the tradition, at the least. In other versions of the *Vita Melori* (two late Breton manuscripts and the verse Life), Budic is substituted for Fortunatus, bringing the genealogy slightly more into line with the Landévennec tradition.⁶⁸ Bourguès argues that the version that is most unlike the Landévennec list is likely to be the earliest, and to pre-date the Landévennec list: hence his *terminus ante quem* of 1084 for the original composition of *Vita Melori*.⁶⁹ This seems far from certain: the *Vita Melori* and Landévennec versions are undoubtedly related, and may represent only two of many possible presentations of a varying tradition, none of which was authoritative enough to oust the others. (Yet another theory about the origins of Breton rulership is found in the ‘Chronicle of Dol’, probably written between 1076 and 1143, in which the concern was to present Brittany as a unified kingdom from its origin, and the series of rulers chosen was Maximus, Riwal, Gradlon, Daniel Drem Rud and Judicaël.)⁷⁰ The version of Breton history that *did* become authoritative, once it was available, was the altogether different one presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1137/8); its composition provides a tentative *terminus ante quem* for the dynastic history in *Vita Melori*, but even then, it would presumably have been possible for a Breton author to disregard Geoffrey’s history in favour of local alternatives.⁷¹

It seems reasonable to suppose that *Vita Melori*, in the form ancestral to the extant versions, was written after 1066 – when the title of *dux* of Cornouaille first became a reality, and when dynastic speculation about Breton origins was well advanced. But the posterior dating limit is much more speculative, and a case might be made for its being a twelfth- or thirteenth-century text, to be associated perhaps with the literary activities of William the Breton (c. 1166–1226) or the composition of the Lives of the Cornouaille saints Ronan and Corentin.⁷² In this case the fate of St Melor might have been intended to

⁶⁷ *Vita Melori*, text P, 1b (ed. Bourguès, pp. 55, 60).

⁶⁸ The manuscripts are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 22321, s.xvii (Bourguès’s text D) and Rennes, Archives départementales d’Ille-et-Vilaine, 23 J 54, fonds Lailé (Bourguès’s B).

⁶⁹ Bourguès, *Le dossier*, pp. 138–9.

⁷⁰ *Chronique de Dol*, i–ii, in F. Duine, *La Métropole de Bretagne. Chronique de Dol, composée au XIe siècle; et, Catalogues des dignitaires jusqu’à la révolution* (Paris, 1916), pp. 38–9.

⁷¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. M. D. Reeve and N. Wright (Woodbridge, 2007). For Geoffrey’s treatment of Breton history, see K. Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cardiff, 2010), pp. 54–66.

⁷² A.-Y. Bourguès, ‘Guillaume le Breton et l’hagiographie bretonne aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles’, *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest* 102 (1995), 35–45; Merdrignac, ‘La perception de l’Irlande’.

remind readers of the suspected killing of the young duke Arthur of Brittany by his uncle King John of England in 1203.⁷³ Alternatively, Bourguès has pointed to the reign of King Stephen (1135–54), and particularly the period in 1140–1 when Hervé of Léon, Stephen's son-in-law, held the earldom of Wiltshire (in which Amesbury is situated), as a likely time for the indeterminate St Melor whose relics were held at Amesbury to be identified as St Melor the martyr of Léon.⁷⁴ One might go further and suggest this as a possible moment for the composition of *Vita Melori*. Hervé was at that time a vassal of Alan of Richmond, of the Eudonid family, and the English civil war of Stephen's reign pitted him against the son of the duke of Cornouaille, Brien FitzCount, who was the leading supporter of Stephen's rival, Empress Matilda. Brien's close friend and ally was Earl Robert of Gloucester, whose son (Roger Fitzrobert, d. 1179) became bishop of Worcester; St Kenelm's cult in the dioceses of Gloucester and Worcester would have been well known to him. Moreover, by this time *Vita Kenelmi* had been widely popularized in England through being excerpted in the historical works of William of Malmesbury. (It was disseminated in even more chronicles and legendary-collections in the thirteenth century and after. However, to find all the hagiographical motifs that are shared with *Vita Melori* it would still have been necessary to read *Vita Kenelmi* itself, not just its derivatives.)⁷⁵ The potential devotees of Kenelm and Melor were on opposite sides of the civil war, but this need not necessarily have prevented a Life of Melor from being inspired by the Life of Kenelm: the theme of dynastic violence would have had added point.⁷⁶

In the end, however, arguments seeking to place *Vita Melori* in a particular political context are inconclusive. The *Vita's* political background may be nothing more than neutral, pseudo-learned embroidery for what began and ended as the popular cult of a murdered innocent. In Brittany, there is no evidence that the cult was ever taken up at a high political level, or promoted by a wealthy religious community. The *Vita* is unusual among Breton saints' Lives in having no clear monastic or diocesan filiation. The cathedral of Quimper claimed to possess a relic of St Melor, but not until the seventeenth century.⁷⁷ It was at the parish level that the cult was popular in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period, as shown by the many topographical legends relating to Melor the martyr,

⁷³ On this historical *cause célèbre*, see J. C. Holt, 'King John and Arthur of Brittany', *Nottingham Med. Stud.* 44 (2000), 82–103.

⁷⁴ Bourguès, *Le dossier*, p. 219. For Hervé's English career, see K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, 'The Bretons and Normans of England 1066–1154: the Family, the Fief and the Feudal Monarchy', *Nottingham Med. Stud.* 36 (1992), 42–78, at 63.

⁷⁵ *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. Love, pp. cxxxvi–cxxxix.

⁷⁶ Keats-Rohan, 'The Bretons and Normans', pp. 20–1.

⁷⁷ Bourguès, *Le dossier*, pp. 220–1.

and the spread of dedications to him at the expense of the other saints of the same name.⁷⁸ The Fontevraultian nunnery of Amesbury was the only important institution to adopt Melor as its principal saint, and this may account for the fact that the surviving textual tradition of the *Vita* is earlier and more abundant in England than on the Continent. Almost the only certainty about the dating and authorship, however, is that the text post-dates 1066 and was written by someone thoroughly conversant with both Breton and English hagiography.

ANGLO-BRETON CONTACTS AND SAINTS' CULTS
IN THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

With such a wide range of possible dates, is it worth seeking for evidence of an authorial connection between *Vita Melori* and *Vita Kenelmi*? Given what we know of the surprising travels of hagiographical information in the Middle Ages, it would have been perfectly possible for a cleric from western Brittany to obtain material from England, or vice versa, without any trace of a connection appearing in the historical record. Particularly in the decades after the 'non-Norman conquest', when many Bretons, of whom members of the Eudonid family were the most notable, were given estates in England, information could have been passed in either direction without it being necessary for a written text to change hands. To visit a church on a particular saint's feast day and to hear his Life read aloud as part of the liturgy, or even to hold a conversation with one of his devotees, would be enough. If the hagiography of Melor was quickly transmitted to his other continental cult centres at Paris and (perhaps) Meaux, and that of Kenelm to some of the many churches in England where he was honoured in the ecclesiastical calendar, the possibilities for exchange would be multiplied further.⁷⁹

However, there is some evidence for particular contacts through which traditions about Melor may have reached England, or those of Kenelm, Brittany: these belong to the tenth and eleventh centuries, reaffirming the possibility that the dependence may have been in either direction, or both. One such point of contact is the career of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin – if it was he who wrote *Vita Kenelmi*, as seems likely. Before Goscelin arrived in England (at some time between 1058 and 1065), he was based at Saint-Bertin in northern Francia, and also seems to have written hagiography for the church of St Peter's, Ghent.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ For local traditions relating to St Melor, see R. Largillière, 'Saint Melar', *apud* Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, III, 38–52; on toponymy and dedications, Bourguès, *Le dossier*, pp. 198–9, 209–19.

⁷⁹ For the liturgical cult of Kenelm in England, see *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. Love, pp. cxiii–cxvii.

⁸⁰ R. Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: the Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford, 2004), p. lxxvii. On Goscelin's career in general, see Love, *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, pp. xxxix–xliv, and works there cited.

It should be noted that this would have placed Goscelin in a good position to know the hagiography of the child-martyr Gerulf, given that Saint-Omer, Saint-Bertin's 'twin' community, possessed an early manuscript of it and that Gerulf was venerated at Ghent. However, both these centres also had access to Breton relics and Breton hagiography – both directly and, it seems, through the intermediary of Fleury. Of the group of three seventh-century founding saints of Saint-Bertin commemorated in a triptych of Lives dating from the ninth century, one, St Winnoc, was reputed to have been a Breton.⁸¹ In around 1064, also, a Life of Winnoc was composed at Bergues in Flanders (where Winnoc's relics had rested since 899) by a monk from St Peter's, Ghent, in which the saint's royal Breton genealogy was given for the first time.⁸² It is the same genealogy as was given for another Breton saint, St Judoc of Montreuil, in the Life of him composed by Isembard of Fleury in about 1012, as mentioned above. Its transmission is evidence for a network of links between Fleury, Montreuil and Flanders and the ability of this network to access information from Brittany – not surprisingly, as the monks of the important Breton monastery of Landévennec had taken refuge at Montreuil from the Vikings during the early tenth century, and had founded a small community there, equipped with relics and the Life of their founding saint, which continued in existence throughout the Middle Ages.⁸³

A version of this Life, of St Winwaloe, is found in a thirteenth-century manuscript from St Peter's, Ghent, adjacent to that of another Breton saint whom Ghent had newly acquired as a patron during the Viking age: St Gudwal, whose relics were 'saved' from export to England and installed at St Peter's in the 940s or 950s.⁸⁴ Gudwal's Life was composed at Ghent, probably in the twelfth century. It evidently draws on Breton traditions and may be based

⁸¹ *Vitae Aodomari, Bertini, Winnoci*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. V (Hanover, 1890), 613–41.

⁸² *Vita S. Winnoci*, Preface (ed. Mabillon, p. 304); S. Vanderputten, 'Crises of Cenobitism: Abbatial Leadership and Monastic Competition in Late Eleventh-Century Flanders', *EHR* 127 (2012), 259–84, at 275–6; D. J. Defries, 'Constructing the Past in Eleventh-Century Flanders: Hagiography at Saint-Winnoc' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Ohio State Univ., 2004), p. 372. Vanderputten is cautious about whether the genealogy is an integral part of the *Vita II* of St Winnoc composed around 1064, but there seems little reason to doubt it.

⁸³ S. Lebecq, 'Les moines de Landévennec à Montreuil-sur-Mer. Retour aux sources', *Landévennec, les Vikings et la Bretagne. En hommage à Jean-Christophe Cassard*, ed. M. Coumert and Y. Tranvouez (Brest, 2015), pp. 157–70; H. Le Bourdellès, 'Les Bretons à Montreuil-sur-Mer vers 920. Leur création culturelle', *Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* (1995), 44–52.

⁸⁴ The manuscript is Bruges, Statsbiblioteket, 00404. The acquisition of Gudwal's relics is described in *Vita Bertulfi Rentincensis*, 24, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS XV.2, 631–41, at p. 635. See N. N. Huyghebaert, *Une translation de reliques à Gand en 944: le Sermo de adventu sanctorum Wandregisili, Ansberti et Vulframni in Blandinium* (Brussels, 1978), p. lxxiii.

on an earlier text. Its localization of Gudwal is vague, but at one point it introduces a noble layman named 'Mevorus', who has been forced to leave his land and move to 'Cornuvia' to escape his enemies.⁸⁵ Could this represent an alternative tradition about St Melor of Cornouaille? The Life contains many episodes that are reminiscent of other Breton *Vitae*; particularly noticeable is the repeated miracle of St Gudwal reclaiming land from the sea, which greatly resembles two miracles of the same kind in Wrmonoc's *Vita Pauli Aureliani*, composed in 884.⁸⁶

The evidence for knowledge of *Vita Pauli* outside Brittany is especially telling because this was a saint's life from Léon, from the same region of Brittany as St Melor's cult centre. In fact, the earliest manuscript of *Vita Pauli* (s. ix) has a Fleury provenance, and when the history of Fleury by Aimo tells us that Bishop Mabbo of Saint-Pol-de-Léon retired there in 950 × 961, bringing manuscripts and the relics of his patron saint with him, it is probably referring to this very manuscript, among others.⁸⁷ The cult of St Paul Aurelian became firmly established at Fleury: a *Translatio* was composed, and celebrated in the monastic calendar, and healing miracles were ascribed to the saint.⁸⁸ As far as we know, this level of veneration at Fleury was not extended to any other Breton saint except St Samson. However, where one saint from western Brittany was present, clergy and pilgrims bearing traditions about others might gain an entrée. Whether at Saint-Bertin, Ghent or Fleury, it is apparent that Goscelin had either textual or oral access to Breton hagiography, and this raises the possibility that he could have seen or heard an early, perhaps 'pre-production' version of *Vita Melori* and used it as a partial model for his *Vita Kenelmi* and, indeed, his other *Vitae* of royal saints after his move to England. It should also be noted that one of the saint's Lives that Goscelin produced when in England, the Life of St Eadgyth, written at Wilton between 1060 and 1078, mentions a saint later reputed to be Breton: St Iwi, whose relics were brought to Wilton by some visiting clergy during Eadgyth's abbacy (before 984) and could not be moved further. A *Vita* in the fourteenth-century collection by John of Tynemouth states that Iwi was a Northumbrian monk and disciple of St Cuthbert who migrated to Brittany and died there. His connection with

⁸⁵ *Vita S. Gudwali* iii.19–26, in *Acta Sanctorum Iunii I*, ed. G. Henschen, (Paris, 1867), pp. 718–37, at 723–4. For discussion, see Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, I, 61–78.

⁸⁶ *Vita S. Gudwali* i. 6–8, ii.10 (ed. Henschen, pp. 720–1); Wrmonoc, *Vita S. Pauli Aureliani*, ed. Plaine, p. 257.

⁸⁷ Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, 261; Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, pp. 268–9, 290–4.

⁸⁸ Aimo of Fleury, *Miracula Sancti Benedicti* ii.11–12, in *Les Miracles de saint Benoît écrits par Adrevald, Aimoin, André, Raoul Tortaire et Hugues de Sainte Marie, moines de Fleury*, ed. E. de Certain (Paris, 1858), pp. 154–8; A. Davril, *The Monastic Ritual of Fleury* (Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, 123 [101] (Henry Bradshaw Soc., London, 1990), pp. 61–82.

Brittany seems tenuous, but place-names and dedications in Côtes-d'Armor show that a saint Iwi was genuinely venerated there.⁸⁹

Goscelin, then, is one candidate for having brought traditions of Melor and Kenelm together. However, it is possible to push the potential connections between the two Lives further back in time. It is well known that as a result of the Viking crisis in Brittany in the two decades after 919, large numbers of Breton clergy, manuscripts and relics came to Anglo-Saxon England, although no contact between Brittany and England can be demonstrated before the late ninth century.⁹⁰ Oral information about Melor may thus have reached England as early as the 920s or 930s, as may relics, although there is no explicit indication of this until *c.* 1030. Hints of contact emerge around the time of the re-founding of Winchcombe Abbey and the beginnings of the promotion of St Kenelm's cult. Winchcombe, originally founded by King Coenwulf of Mercia (796–821) in 798, was re-founded soon after 969 by Bishop Oswald of Worcester, one of the leaders of the Benedictine reform movement. Oswald had also founded Ramsey Abbey in East Anglia, and for some years the two houses were to all intents and purposes a single community, headed by Oswald's protégé, Germanus, a Fleury-educated monk – until Germanus was ousted from Winchcombe in the 'anti-monastic reaction' of 975, and returned to Fleury. It was probably Germanus who launched the cult of St Kenelm.⁹¹ Two of the principal early sources for the cult, the early eleventh-century liturgical texts in the 'Cambridge Psalter' (Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 1. 23) and the late-tenth-century *Metrical Calendar of Ramsey* in Oxford, St John's College 17, also give evidence for the veneration at Ramsey of three Breton saints, Malo, Samson and Budoc.⁹² It is unlikely to be a coincidence that, on the one hand, the Life of Kenelm shows marked similarity with an approximately

⁸⁹ Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Vita S. Edithae* ii. 6, 'La légende de Sainte Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin', ed. A. Wilmart, *AB* 56 (1938), 5–101, 265–307, at 273–4; trans. S. Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius* (Turnhout, 2004), p. 74; B. Tanguy, *Dictionnaire des noms de communes, trèves et paroisses des Côtes d'Armor* (Le Chasse-Marée, 1992), pp. 132–4, 156, 205; Orme, *The Saints of Cornwall*, pp. 148–9; J. Blair, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints', *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (Oxford, 2002), pp. 495–565, at 541.

⁹⁰ For general accounts of Anglo-Breton relations at this time, see Foot, *Æthelstan: First King of England*, pp. 52–3, 103–6, 167–9; D. N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 154–8; C. Brett, 'A Breton Pilgrim in England in the Reign of King Æthelstan', *France and England in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Essays by Members of Girton College, Cambridge, in Memory of Ruth Morgan*, ed. G. Jondorf and D. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 43–70.

⁹¹ M. Lapidge, 'Abbot Germanus, Winchcombe, Ramsey and the Cambridge Psalter', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature 900–1066* (London, 1993), pp. 387–417.

⁹² Lapidge, 'Abbot Germanus', pp. 388–91, 397–8; M. Lapidge, 'A Tenth-Century Metrical Calendar from Ramsey', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature 900–1066*, pp. 343–86, at 385–6.

contemporary Breton Life, and that, on the other, the veneration of Kenelm is linked with that of a group of Breton saints, in one of very few appearances of Breton cults in England between the reign of King Æthelstan and the Norman Conquest.⁹³ The appearance of Budoc is particularly significant since he is otherwise unknown in English calendars, while Malo was culted at Winchester from the tenth century onwards and Samson was promoted at Æthelstan's foundation of Milton Abbas. Budoc is best known in Breton hagiography as the teacher of St Winwaloe on the Île Lavret and as a bishop of Dol, but a Budoc, whether the same or another, also has an extensive cult in Cornouaille.⁹⁴ It may also be worth noting that in Cornwall, the parishes of Mylor (dedicated to Melor) and Budock (dedicated to Budoc) are adjacent. The saint commemorated at Mylor is thought to have been a bishop of that name rather than the martyr, and the adjacency of the two saints makes sense in terms of their both being identifiable as bishops of Dol (if Mylor = Maglorius); but they could conceivably have had an alternate identity as the pair of martyrs, *Melor* and *Budcat*.⁹⁵

On his return to Fleury, Abbot Germanus is very likely to have brought word of Kenelm, the saint he had been promoting in western England. Contacts were reinforced by the visit of the famous scholar Abbo of Fleury to Ramsey in 985–7, as a result of which he wrote the Life of another English royal martyr, King Edmund of East Anglia.⁹⁶ (When emphasizing the English character of the cults of royal martyrs, it must not be forgotten how high a proportion of their hagiography was given its lasting form by continental authors.) Basic written information about Kenelm soon became available at Fleury, in the shape of the 'Winchcombe Sacramentary', a tenth-century manuscript probably from Winchcombe or Ramsey containing a Mass of St Kenelm, which arrived at Fleury some time in the first half of the eleventh century by way of Mont Saint-Michel. A list of monks of Mont Saint-Michel, living and dead, was

⁹³ On Breton cults in England in general, see L. Gougaud, 'Mentions anglaises de saints bretons et de leurs reliques', *Annales de Bretagne* 34 (1920), 273–7, and *idem*, 'Notes sur le culte des saints bretons en Angleterre', *Annales de Bretagne* 35 (1921), 601–9.

⁹⁴ Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, III, 8–12. It is tempting to identify this Budoc with the 'Budcat' who shared a feast day with Melor according to the late-ninth-century calendar in Angers, Bibliothèque Municipale, 477, but a likelier candidate to be 'Budcat' is the 'Budecac' whose relics were claimed by Glastonbury, together with those of Budoc and other Breton saints, in the fourteenth century according to a list in Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 5. 33: J. Carley and M. Howley, 'Relics at Glastonbury in the Fourteenth Century: an Annotated Edition of British Library, Cotton Titus D. vii, fols. 2r–13v', *Arthurian Lit.* 16 (1998), 83–130, at 85, 89.

⁹⁵ Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, III, 5–6, 34.

⁹⁶ *Abbonis Floriacensis Passio S. Eadmundi*, in *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Toronto, 1972), pp. 65–92; M. Mostert, *The Political Theology of Abbo of Fleury: a Study of the Ideas about Society and Law of the Tenth-Century Monastic Reform Movement* (Hilversum, 1987), pp. 40–5.

copied into it there during the abbacy of Mainard II (deposed 1009) – who was simultaneously abbot of Redon in Brittany, exemplifying the close Breton connections that Mont Saint-Michel had at the time.⁹⁷ All this took place even before the extant Life of Kenelm was composed.

The continental and particularly Breton dimension may illuminate two enigmatic passages in the Preface of *Vita Kenelmi*. The author claims that Kenelm's 'holy passion is said to be preserved in writing in Paris'. As far as we know, *Vita Kenelmi* never reached Paris, but *Vita Melori* was known there. A little later, when the author is enumerating the authorities for his work, he mentions 'a certain monk of Worcester, a disciple of St Oswald ... named Wulfwine, [who] left to us material of most certain trustworthiness'; in one manuscript, the thirteenth-century Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 285, Wulfwine is given the Breton cognomen Winnoc.⁹⁸ If this name is part of the original text, it may imply that the monk Wulfwine was either a Breton who had become known by an English name (like the individuals with Cornish and English names documented in the Bodmin manumissions), or a devotee of St Winnoc of Bergues, or both.⁹⁹ (There were several manuscripts of Breton origin at Worcester during the Middle Ages.)¹⁰⁰ Wulfwine's continental connections, like those of Abbot Germanus, may have played a part in the bringing together of traditions about St Melor and St Kenelm.

CONCLUSION

To sum up: the Lives of St Kenelm and St Melor both contain distinctive local elements, but also share a sequence of motifs and miracle stories so similar that either a textual relationship or close communication between the promoters of their cults must be suspected. The cults of both seem to have begun during the later tenth century, and their *Vitae* can be dated to around the third quarter of the eleventh century – definitely in the case of *Vita Kenelmi*, tentatively in the case of *Vita Melori*. If the author of *Vita Kenelmi* based his work on *Vita Melori*, there is only a narrow dating window for this to have taken place, since *Vita Melori* is unlikely to have been composed in its surviving form before 1066,

⁹⁷ Lapidge, 'Abbot Germanus', pp. 392, 406–9; A. Davril, *The Winchcombe Sacramentary (Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, 127 [105])* (Henry Bradshaw Soc., London, 1995), p. 8.

⁹⁸ 'Quidam Vuigornensis monachus beati Osualdi ... discipulus nomine Vulfuuinus nobis fide certissima reliquit memoranda'. *Vita S. Kenelmi*, Preface (ed. Love, pp. 50–1); *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. Love, p. xciv.

⁹⁹ O. Padel, *Slavery in Saxon Cornwall: the Bodmin Manumissions*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lecture 7 (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 10–11.

¹⁰⁰ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 279; London, British Library, Royal 5. E. xiii; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hattton 42. H. Gneuss and M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto, 2014), nos. 81 (pp. 96–7), 459 (pp. 378–9), 629 (pp. 479–80).

whereas *Vita Kenelmi* was written by about 1090, and in Rosalind Love's view before 1075. We also have to reckon with William of Malmesbury's professed ignorance about St Melor in *c.* 1125. However, the availability of the full text of *Vita Kenelmi* to a later Breton author also seems somewhat improbable. Circumstances can be identified in which information about either cult might have become available orally or informally to the promoters of the other: this circumstantial evidence is strongest in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, before either *Vita* was composed, but it also exists for the post-Norman Conquest period. It seems impossible to be definite about the direction in which information flowed and perhaps the likeliest scenario is that it 'pooled' and was drawn on by the promoters of both saints at a centre frequented by both over a period of time – most likely Fleury.

Whichever date one regards as the most plausible for the composition of *Vita Melori*, the close resemblance between it and *Vita Kenelmi* signals a level of mutual cultural influence between an English locality and western Brittany which is rarely noticed in the historical sources of the tenth to twelfth centuries. The arrival of Breton clergy and relics in England during Æthelstan's reign, and of Breton settlers after the Norman conquest, are well-known episodes, but in neither case is the arrival of Bretons thought to have had any striking or long-term cultural effects in England, nor have specifically English (as opposed to Welsh or French) personnel and ideas been traced in Brittany. The study of these two *Vitae* opens up the possibility that there was a little-seen but considerable interchange between the two regions during the central Middle Ages at the level of local and semi-popular religious cult and practice. The similarity of *Vita Melori* and *Vita Kenelmi* stands out in relief because both are atypical texts amid the predominantly monastic and episcopal hagiography of the early Middle Ages, but similar parallels may await discovery. Anglo-Norman hagiography has not been much considered as a comparandum for medieval Breton hagiography: further comparison may have more to tell us about the integration of Brittany into high-medieval western Europe.¹⁰¹

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