Editorial

Once again we have to apologize for the late appearance of the current volume, in principle due out during 1990. In part this has been due to a need to change production methods. The text is now being typeset under the supervision of Miss Clark. We have been fortunate in recruiting as Editorial Assistant Miss Fiona Duncan, who brings good humour as well as expertise to dealing with difficult texts.

We now hope that future volumes will, provided the present system can be maintained, appear more punctually than has been the case over the last four years. Typsetting of Volume XIV (1990–91) is already well under way, and publication will follow as soon as feasible. All being well, we hope to be able to bring Volume XV (1991–92) out during the relevant year, 1992, and thereafter to return to a punctual pattern of publication.

For XV we shall be welcoming as Editor (English Place Names), in place of Dr Rumble, Mr John Freeman, who has for some time been engaged in studying the place-names of Herefordshire and was the author of an article published ante, X, 61–77; and we hope that he will enjoy working as a member of the team. Sadly, we have lost the services as assistant bibliographer of Dr Mark Bateson, owing to changed professional circumstances; our gratitude and good wishes follow him in his new career. In consequence, however, future bibliographies may lack the copiousness our readers may have come to expect, and we ask them to bear with us.

C.C.
O.J.P.
A.R.R.
V.J.S.

On some Controversy surrounding Gewissae / Gewissei, Cerdic and Ceawlin

Richard Coates

THERE has been controversy surrounding the Old English tribal name Gewisse. It has to do with whether the form used in titles by the Alfredian dynasty in Wessex was a learned revival of the tribal name found in Bede’s Ecclesiastical History (c.730) or a continuation of the older tradition. That is not our concern here, but the uncertainty has led to unnecessary linguistic controversy, which is. Here is what is known. Gewiss (or, in the archaic spelling, Giwis, patronymic Gewising, in the A Text) is given in the late-ninth-century recension of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the name of the great-grandfather of Cerdic, the supposed founder of the West-Saxon dynasty.1 This is, however, almost certainly an eponymous invention back-formed from the plural Gewisse, an early alternative name for this dynasty.2 The dynastic name is also found in the form (regio) lewissorum in a tenth-century record of a synod of Edward the Elder’s time.3

The problem is well set out by Geoffrey Ashe.4 What seems to be the same name also appears in early medieval Welsh, including Latin texts embodying or based on the Welsh traditions: e.g., as Giotuits in the Welsh Annals (s.a. 900);5 as Gegovis in Asser’s Life of Alfred;6 in a mention in the twelfth-century Anglo-Latin Textus Roffensis which Stevenson takes to derive from Asser;7 and in an apparently later form Iwys, Iwis in Armes Prydein (c. 930).8 This latter was apparently pronounced Iwys (i.e. [iwis], not [iwis]), presumably on the analogy of other names with the -wy's suffix, to judge from rhymes like egiwy's in a poem of Gwalchmai.9 Similar forms are found 'in one of the older prophetic poems' and in the awd to St David by Gwynfard Brycheiniog (thus Ashe). Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in the early 1140s, refers to the Gewys and makes Vortigern de Gewisseorum.10 A connection between the Welsh and the English contexts is suggested by the possibility that the Eliseg, king of Powys, referred to on the Valle Crucis pillar as claiming descent from a Vortigern,11 was the same person as the Elesa of the Chronicle who was Cerdic’s father.12 Even if this were the case, though, Tatlock’s derivation of Gewiss [sic] from Gwenhwyd ‘man of Gwent’ (itself from Latin *Ventensis) is misconceived and must be rejected.13 It is impossible for the Primitive Welsh *Wentis postulated as underlying Gwenhwyd to appear in Geoffrey’s Latin in this form by the usual phonological processes and scribal
channels of transmission. Whatever may have been in his 'sources', Geoffrey used in his romance a form based upon the Old English Gewisse, with a Latin inflection added to, rather than replacing, the Old English one, thus Gewissæ. He used the name also in the Vita Merlini. However, Ifor Williams pointed out Geoffrey's arbitrary treatment of it (he even made Vortigern into (a) Gewissus in the Vita Merlini, line 986), noting additionally that the name was understood by the creators of the Welsh Brut as denoting the area called Ewys in Gwent and Herefordshire, represented by the village of Ewias Harold in the latter county. Furthermore, the antecedent of Gwennws cannot underlie OE Gewiss-, because it would regularly have yielded something like *Winitis(s)- in English; cf. Lindisf 'Lindsey' from *Lindes. 

M.G. Jenkins puts forward the alternative idea that the form Gewissæ and its relatives were merely ghosts. He argues that Bede's form Gæwissæ was derived from his informant Daniel, bishop of the West Saxons, but viâ Aldhelm of Malmesbury. During this roundabout transmission, according to Jenkins, a scribal form Gewissæ was substituted by an English-speaker for a spelling *Gæwissæ to which it was phonologically equivalent. This *Gæwissæ was supposedly a misreading of *Gewissæ, which was a reflex in a Welsh cultural context of an inflected form of PrW Găwēs, itself presumably from Latin *Gławensis 'inhabitant of Gloucester'. Whilst there is nothing technically impossible about all this, it is fair to wonder why some, but not all, of Daniel's information should have passed to Bede viâ Aldhelm; why Daniel should have Latinized the (presumably masculine) Welsh *Găwēs as a first-declension noun (forming the plural in -æ); why, if he did, his form should have corresponded so nicely with an OE i-declension nominative-plural form in -æ, rendering æ; why the name of Gloucester, for much of the Anglo-Saxon period in Hwiccean territory, should have given its name specifically to the West Saxons; and why Geoffrey should have been ignorant of such a Latin tradition, preferring to coin his own new nominative form Gewissæ. The form given by Asser, noted above, is further evidence against Jenkins's theory, as it shows no letter at all between the initial g and e.

To me, it is clear that Gewissæ-æi is (rests on) an English name, whatever the resolution of any historical controversy might be. The phonological reasons were set out long ago by Stevenson, who pointed out that the form Iwys in the Welsh Brut y Tywysogion (s.a. 898) can reflect only a form with an OE ge- prefix, not one with a Welsh initial syllable beginning with g-. Welsh g- no doubt always represented [g] in relevant contexts; there is no record of initial g-, whatever the following vowel, being replaced by the vowel symbol i. The g- in the earlier Welsh spellings (e.g. Gïuws, Gëgusís mentioned above) might represent either a sound-substitution for the OE palatal fricative g- [j], or a retention in the Welsh of an Old English spelling in insular g- (i.e. 3). The Welsh I-form represents, of course, a later spelling for the syllable consisting of [j], the regular Old English reflex of Germanic *g- before a front vowel, followed by the vowel-letter representing either [i] or [æ], as found in the revived title of the later, Alfredian, West-Saxon dynasty, presumably having an approximant [j] rather than a fricative [j], as its later history in Middle English would indicate. Indeed, the person of Alfred himself is the connecting link between these Welsh and English forms; the passages in the Welsh Annals and the Brut y Tywysogion refer specifically to (the death of) Alfred (Albrit rex guioys, Alvryn urenhin Iwys). It must be assumed that the Gïuws of the Annals is an OW spelling for *Gïuws. What the name Gewissæ might originally have meant is a trickier matter. Morris asserts that it derives from an Old English word meaning 'confederates', a view inherited (I believe) from Müllenhoff's edition of Beowulf, perhaps viâ an article of 1946 by Johnstone; though it was in any case a common-coinage opinion. Stenton is properly non-committal, describing it merely as 'a piece of antiquarian decoration in the charter-styles of the later Old English kings'.

In fact there seems to be no objection to an obvious solution which I have never seen proposed; namely that it is a nominalization of the adjective gewis, among the meanings of which were 'sure, reliable'. If the first West-Saxon warbands referred to in the Chronicle were indeed led by Britons or by men of part-British descent, as has been suggested (not uncontroversially) by numerous scholars over the last fifty years, it would be small wonder if the English had chosen to distinguish 'good' Britons in this way. It is open to reasonable doubt, of course, whether (part-)Britons really were involved here, but I shall provisionally suppose that they were in order to examine the two personal names sometimes invoked in support of this hypothesis, Cerdic and Ceawlin. It has even been considered highly doubtful whether the names are of the time their bearers purport to inhabit, but see below on the question of dating. It would still be of interest if these names should turn out to be British or Welsh in origin, as this would say something, however obliquely, about the sources behind the Chronicle itself.

The Cerdic (var. Cer dic, Cer dice [dat.]) of the genealogical
preface to the A-Text of the Chronicle is, as has long been known, ultimately derived from a British name, once given as *Coroticos, but now accepted as having been *Caroticos, comparable with the name Ceretic (with i-affection of two syllables) in the Welsh Annals and with Welsh caredig 'beloved'. The name of Cerdic's grandson Ceawlin is problematic and has apparently hardly been discussed before. It is not English. It would be fair to assert that it is not Brittonic either, since it has left no anthroponymic traces in the Brittonic languages. Rather than leave it as totally obscure, we can ask what it could be if it were English. I can find no answer. Derivation as a nickname-form from Old English ceawel 'basket' seems implausible, and *Ceawel - certainly never occurs as a theme in dithematic names (it is scarcely semantically appropriate). The implausibility becomes greater when we consider what are apparently related short-forms, Ceawa, Ceawwa, which do not appear likely hypocoristic forms of a derivative of ceawel. They might suggest Anglicization of a Brittonic *Caw, an idea which provides the impetus for my own bipartite, Brittonic, solution to Ceawlin, to be developed more fully below. There is, however, a prima facie reason to follow a British trail. Searle catalogues two other name-forms which he assumes to represent Ceawlin: Caelin in Bede (HE III, 23; and with $ in Miller's edition of OE Bede), and the Latinized Celinus, the name given by Eddius Stephanus as that of the provost of Ripon in c.700 (also a Celin in the Durham Liber Vitae). The first of these is of special interest: Caelin was brother to men called Ceadda (i.e. St Chad) and Cedd, both of which names are taken by Förster and by Jackson as of Brittonic origin. If we ask what Ceawlin could be if it also were Brittonic, we may find a partial answer. It could be derived from a British *Cawlinos or, better, from a hypothetical PrW *Ceawlin.

The first element of such a name could be the onomastic counterpart of Welsh caw 'skilled', as perhaps also in the continental Celtic tribal name Cavaent. The second element, -lin, is harder to account for; it appears as such in no Brittonic names whose etymology is secure but may be compared with the initial element in Old Breton Linuicet. The lexical status of this form is uncertain, but a corresponding simplex name may be implied by the existence of the continental *Linuicum place-names registered by Holder. It therefore appears that Ceawlin could be Brittonic, but the suggestion is advanced with the most extreme caution.

Whatever its origin, no instance of the name Ceawlin unambiguously shows English i-umlaut. This is consistent with the view that such process was completed before the West-Saxon

Ceawlin's supposed lifetime (fl. 556–584), provisionally taken to represent the time at which the name was borrowed into English. I have argued elsewhere, for independent and quite different reasons, that i-umlaut was completed before c.550. The form Ceawli, if the name is Brittonic in origin, would also be consistent with the view that its bearer became a figure in English history before Welsh internal i-affection of the seventh century, for that would have yielded a form representable in English as *Ceawlin.

Since Welsh internal i-affection is a seventh-century phenomenon, we could assume that Cerdic in the Chronicle would not show it, appearing as it does in an ostensibly English context of the mid-sixth century and presumably remaining immune from further Welsh influence before being written down. On the other hand, the phonologically more straightforward assumption would be that it does indeed show i-affection (as well, of course, as syncope of the pretonic [penultimate] vowel) and that its bearer therefore became a figure in English history after the seventh century. This possibility sets up an interesting tension if both Ceawlin and Cerdic should be of Brittonic origin, for it is possible in the light of what has just been written that Ceawlin became English before i-affection but Cerdic, the supposed grandfather's name, after it.

As a step towards resolving this matter, we must investigate whether Cerdic can show the result of OE i-umlaut rather than of PrW i-affection, whose effects are similar. We must start by assuming, almost uncontroversially, that PrW *ca- yields OE cea- in West-Saxon, via *ca-, just like early borrowings from Latin words in ca- such as ceaster, ceaf. The uumlaut of ea originating from *e of whatever origin, although in West-Saxon usually ie (and later i), could rarely yield e also, just as non-umlauted instances of ea may also yield e in the late dialect. The rarity of all this, though, should lead us to consider that Cerdic shows no i-umlaut; in so doing, we arrive at a way of reconciling the phonology of Cerdic and that of Ceawlin (always assuming them both to be of Brittonic origin). I suggest that neither shows either OE i-umlaut or Welsh internal i-affection, in which case Cerdic must either show later West-Saxon monophthongized e for ea after c (rare before 900) or be taken direct from Bede's reference (c.730) to a British king. If they show neither the Welsh nor the English vowel-affection process, then they must have entered English-language channels of transmission after the operation of the former and before the operation of the latter, i.e. between c.550 and c.650.

West-Saxon outside the Chronicle shows one spelling Cerdic (BCS 224, Sawyer 263 [A.D. 774 (12th c.)]), as well as a further
instance of the dominant Chronicle spelling (BCS 186, Sawyer 1256
[A.D. 759 (15th c.)]). What passes for a mid-eighteenth-century Kentish
document (BCS 181, Sawyer 96 [A.D. 755 x 757 (10th c.)]) shows
the crucial form Cerdic with the clear diphthong (or, at least,
digraph) ea, as do other attestations in the Genealogical Preface of
the A-Text of the Chronicle and BCS 200, Sawyer 262 (A.D. 776
for ?774 [17th c.]), the latter in the Latin genitive form Cerdicis.
These confirm that the form Cerdic could have originated in PRW
*Car'dig and passed through the normal array of West-Saxon
sound-changes.

However, we need also to reckon with the possibility that
Bede's Cerdic (dat.), with e instead of ea, referring specifically to a
British king of Elmet who died c.616, shows either Anglian i-umlaut
or Welsh internal i-affection. Bede's form could either have been
taken from a Welsh source postdating internal i-affection, i.e. after
the mid-seventeenth century,42 which is perfectly plausible; or else show
Northumbrian breaking after a palatal consonant and a spelling of
the result as e, for in names Bedan MSS, largely eschew the
characteristically Old English digraphs (cf. Edwin for Eadwine).43

The name of the West-Saxon king Ceawlin is spelt Caelin (avoiding
-ae, but this may be a pseudo-Latinization on the basis of the
stem of caelum, a frequent Late Latin rendering of coelum), before
going on to gloss this as Ceawlin (HE II, 5). The latter solution
makes no requirement of contact between Bede and the Welsh to
whom he was so hostile, though that is not to deny that such
contact was possible.

We have now explained the Bedan form Cerdice in two
alternative ways, both without recourse to i-umlaut or to i-affection,
just as we argued the Cerdice in the Chronicle to be free from the
effects of these two changes. If we insisted, in defiance of the
argument presented above, that it were indeed an English form and
that it showed i-umlaut, we should have to juggle carefully the
conflicting demands of syncope in the donor language (dated after
c.550 by Jackson; cf. unsyncopated Keredic in The Gododdin of
c.600)44 and of i-umlaut in the receiving language, if correctly dated
before c.550.45 The place-name Gembling in the East Riding of
Yorkshire, probably settled before or around 500, seemingly shows a
'non-primary' name-form with umlaut46, and this suggests that
i-umlaut may have remained active slightly later in the North of
England than previously postulated by me. However, my argument
allows the date of i-umlaut to be later if archaeological and other
evidence requires the date of settlements bearing -ingas-inge- names
to be later, since I postulate only that i-umlaut ceased to operate
before the formation of such names (Gembling now apparently being
the sole exception).47 If such evidence were forthcoming, we could
concede that Bede's Cerdice shows both British syncope and English
i-umlaut. However, I suggest that all this is unnecessary if due
account is taken of Bede's northern background and the scribal
convention of the extant Bedan MSS.

My sole concern in this essay has been to debate what kind of
linguistic objects the crucial names are, not to infer from them
either the course of history or whether they are used to refer to
real peoples or persons. I regard much of this latter information as
irrecoverable.48 The most that can be deduced from this discussion is
a little about what was known by the early English and Welsh of
each other's linguistic forms; when they knew them; and what
happened to them once they knew them.

Summary. The tribal name Gewisse could be the nominalization of
an English adjective, and no recourse to Welsh is required to
explain it. The name of the West-Saxon Cerdice is Britonick, as has
been long known, and as a name deployed in the West-Saxon royal
house was genuinely borrowed between c.550-650, showing therefore
neither pre-Old English i-umlaut or Primitive Welsh i-affection. The
northern form Cerdice probably also shows neither effect. Ceawlin
is also arguably of Welsh origin, though the precise ancestral form
of the name, and its import, are less certain in this case. It is
unlikely to be English.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND NOTES**

My thanks are due to Oliver Padel for comment on Ceawlin; to Patrick
Sims-Williams for suggestions for further reading and for general remarks; and to
David N. Dunville, Veronica Smart and Peter Kitson for kindly providing material
otherwise unavailable to me. They do not necessarily agree with my
interpretations.

1 J.M. Bately, ed., The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS A (Woodbridge, 1986),
genealogical preface and s.a. 552, 597, 855 [hereafter cited as Chronicle]. There
is further relevant discussion of the extant Old English materials in two articles by D.N. Dunville, 'The West-Saxon Genealogical Regnal List and the chronology
of early Wessex', Peritia IV (1985), and 'The West-Saxon Genealogical Regnal List:
manuscripts and texts', Anglia CIV (1986), 1-32. A doubtful instance on an
eleventh-century coin is mentioned by V. Smart, 'Scandinavians, Celts, and Germans
Nomina XIII


See BCS 614 [not in Sawyer], from a single-sheet document ostensibly of A.D. 905. This form is also in B.L. Add. MS. 15,350, fo.112, a twelfth-century copy. Cotton MS. Cleopatra E.1, fo.34b, has Gewissuorum and the later reworking of the same material, BCS 615, has Gewisorum.


J. Morris, ed., Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals (Chichester, 1980), r.a. 616, ch.63 [hereafter Nennius].


IIbid., xxx.


Ibid., pp.xxv-xvii (English edition).


Chronicle, as n.1. There appears to be good support for an English Eless in the place-name Eisenham (cf. PN Essex, 527-8). But it is not unknown for a British-derived personal name to be compounded with an English generic in a place-name; cf. Chetsey and Branscombe (PN Surrey, 105-7 and PN Devon, 250, respectively; assuming cumb to have been naturalized by the relevant date even if of Brittonic origin). Nash-Williams, in ECMW, loc. cit., dates the Elieg commemorated on the Valle Crucis pillar to the mid-ninth century, which would effectively destroy any possibility of the equation Elisiu = Eless, unless the relevant portions of the Chronicle were ninth-century inventions based on unknown Welsh sources. For more on the name Elisee, see LHEB, 709, and compare annals 814 and 943 of the Welsh Annals (Nennius, r.a.).


See, e.g., LHEB, §§362, 28.3, 49, 108, et passim. There would be no parallels for the loss of the first [n], for instance, nor, so far as I know, for the Latinization of Welsh gw as g.

B. Clarke, ed., Life of Merlin (Cardiff, 1973), line 1500, and cf. p.189; emendation to Cambri Gewissas..., following Parry, Brut. Clarke, uncritically, takes the form Gewissas in HE to reflect British usage.


Red Book Brut, 260.


Or for [g]—if, the theory of Karl Lücke, Historische englische Grammatik, I (Vienna, 1921), 633, were to be accepted. For a form foreshadowing the later ME approximant [j], see the reference by Stevenson in his edition of Asser (as in n.6) to a form Lewisorum in an ostensibly tenth-century English charter form (in a twelfth-century copy), also n.3 above. See also Williams, Armies Prydein, p.xv.

See A. Campbell, Old English Grammar (Oxford, 1959) [hereafter OEG], §§426, 430.


Cf. Williams, ibid., p.xvi, n.3.


As in Wace's translation of Gregory's Dialogues (H. Hecht, ed., Bischofs Wace's von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialogues Gregors des Grossen, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa V [Hamburg, 1900]), 147, line 25; in The Seafarer (in G.P. Krapp and E. van K. Dobbie, eds, The Exeter Book, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III [New York/London, 1936]), line 110; and in O. Cockayne, ed., Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcates of Early England (London, 1864; repr. New York, 1965), III, 186, lines 19 and 27. For further citations, see T. Toller, Supplement to J. Bosworth's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary (Oxford, 1921), s.v. If one were to deny the rôle of Britons in the establishment of Wessex altogether, one could have recourse to the view of Peter Kitson, who suggests in forthcoming work that gewis in this name means 'eclit', and distinguishes the Saxons who came from the 'old south-eastern dialect area' from the 'upstart' Thames-Valley Saxons. On both Kitson's view and mine, of course, the name is entirely English, which is the main point at issue.
27 It is established, of course, that the names—as opposed to the persons bearing them—are British, see LHEB, 614, and especially P.P. Sims-Williams, ‘The settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle’, Anglo-Saxon England XII (1983), 1-41, esp. 26-31 on the back-formation of eponyms from place-names in sources purporting to be early.
29 Cf. Sims-Williams, ibid.
29 See E. Ekwall, English River-Names (Oxford, 1928), s.n. Charford; cf. Nennius, 90. (The perversion Cedric is due to Sir Walter Scott in Ivanhoe and was, surprisingly, popularized by being the name of the hero of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s Little Lord Fauntleroy.)
30 Except by Johnstone, ‘Cerdic’, where he derives Cæladun from the ancestor of Welsh coel ‘o-men’, believing the Ceal- to represent **Cœo- in the same way as Middle Welsh Gloc and OE Gloc- represent RB Glew-(un) ‘Gloucester’. None of that stands up. The true relation among OE gleaw (as a lexical word or a place-name element), MW gloew, gloew, and RB Gleum has not yet been fathomed out (but see: N.M. Holmer, ‘Postvocalic s in Insular Celtic’, Language XXIII (1947), 125-36, esp. 135; LHEB, 324-30, esp. 327-8; PN Glou., II, 123, which misrepresents the phonological arguments of LHEB; and PNRB, s.n. Gleum). Johnstone does not explain where the w in his **Cœo- could have originated.
31 These appear in BCS 476, 833, Sawyer 311, 529 (A.D. 854 and 947, dates being throughout as presented in Sawyer). These forms are not in M. Redin, Studies in Uncompounded Personal Names in Old English (Uppsala, 1919), though this has Cæa from the Durham Liber Vitae (for which see n.32 below, and esp. Gerchow, Gedächtnisfeierung, 311, item 296), which on the face of it could be a Northumbrian version of Cæala, or a spelling of OE Cæfa, or a rendering of the Welsh name about to be discussed (there are several clearly British/Welsh names in this Liber Vitae).
34 CIJC, no.417. Cf. also the Gaulish tribal name Andecavi, apparently the