Etymology, Antiquarianism, and Unchanging Languages in Johannes Goropius Becanus's *Origines Antwerpianae* and William Camden's *Britannia*

DAVID WEIL BAKER, *Rutgers University–Newark*

This article argues that, despite the protestations to the contrary of William Camden (1551–1623), the antiquarian methods of his "Britannia" are indebted to the "Origines Antwerpianae" of Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–73). Both Goropius and Camden posited the contemporary existence of an unchanged primeval language (Dutch for Goropius and Welsh for Camden) wherein etymologies could be used to trace the origins and migrations of ancient peoples. Even as humanist philology underscored the mutability of language, Goropius and Camden selectively ignored this mutability in order to have a basis other than myth or legend for reconstructing antiquity. Their efforts, however, created new myths about language and its ability to bridge present and distant past.

INTRODUCTION

DECADES BEFORE THE Dutch antiquary Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–73) was mocked in Ben Jonson's (1572–1637) comedy *The Alchemist* (1610), he elicited a more favorable response in a sixteenth-century text of a different kind.[1] In the dedication of his *The principall navigations, voiages and discoveries of the English nation* (1589), Richard Hakluyt (1552–1616) quotes in Latin a part of the "excellent history intituled Origines of Joannes Goropius," where Goropius, who spent time in England, describes being approached with a proposal to travel through Asia at the behest and expense of

This article grew out of a conference paper presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America. I am grateful for the opportunity to have presented there, as well as to the readers at *Renaissance Quarterly* for their insightful criticisms. Finally, I would like to thank the late Marcia Worth-Baker for her many contributions over the years.

[1] Jonson, 5:317 (*The Alchemist* 2.1.83–85). Mammon assures Surly that Adam wrote "in High Dutch," which "proves it was the primitive tongue."

Renaissance Quarterly 72 (2019): 1326–61 © 2020 Renaissance Society of America.
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.379

Henry VIII (1491–1547).[2] The venture faltered—and may never have been more than a vague plan anyway—but Goropius's hopes to undertake it were real enough. Long before writing the work that made him known to English readers such as Hakluyt, Goropius had once envisioned himself exploring distant places for the English nation.

But in the passage from his monumental *Origines Antwerpianae* (The origins of Antwerp, 1569) where Goropius described the proposed expedition and lamented its not being carried out, his main regret was not the missed opportunity to bring back up-to-date geographic knowledge. Rather, this regret had to do with the biblical antiquarianism that underlay Goropius's project of tracing the origins of his home city of Antwerp. In the *Origines*, among other aspects of the Asian Continent, where Goropius believed humanity to have originated with Adam and Eve, this antiquarianism extends to determining the actual species of the Tree of Knowledge. If only the expedition had taken place, he would have been able to see with his own eyes the kind of tree it was.[3] Nevertheless, from his reading of Strabo (63–21 BCE), Theophrastus (371–287 BCE), and Pliny (23–79), along with Genesis, Goropius thought he knew anyway: the Indian fig. This tree had a unique configuration that would have allowed both Adam and Eve to be positioned in its midst while hiding from God.[4] The Indian fig was in fact many trees, spaced apart in rings but in the manner of vine shoots that grow from a single "mother."[5] So long were the branches of the parent tree that they bent down and formed roots in the earth. From these would come forth new trees, whose branches would in turn root themselves in the earth. Eventually, the parent tree was surrounded by concentric circles of its own progeny. Or, as John Milton (1608–74) described the same species in *Paradise Lost*, "The bended twigs take root, and Daughters grow / About the mother tree, a Pillar'd shade."[6]

---

[2] Hakluyt, 3. See also Goropius, 1569, 494; Frederickx and Van Hal, 28–29. The circumstances surrounding Goropius's being given this assignment remain obscure. Sometime in the 1540s, Goropius embarked on a grand tour of Europe, visiting, among others, England, Rome, and Spain. His contacts in England included the physician Hadrianus Junius (1511–75), who was tutor to the children of the poet Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–47), as well as one of the "earliest intellectual links between Holland and England." See Van Dorsten, 26–27.

[3] Goropius, 1569, 494–95. Goropius describes himself as having been denied the chance to see with the "eyes of the body" what he apprehends with his "spirit"—i.e., proof of the historical existence of the Tree of Knowledge. See also Goropius, 1569, 517, for more on oversized Asian plant life that Goropius identified as important to the historical meaning of Genesis. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's own.

[4] Goropius, 1569, 487–88, 491, 494.

[5] Goropius, 1569, 487–88. The Latin word that Goropius uses here, *matrix*, is also the term used for "mother language" in early modern discussions of linguistic origins.

Whether Hakluyt had this identification of the Tree of Knowledge in mind when he characterized the *Origines* as an "excellent history" is an open question. For though the *Origines* did make Goropius known for his opinions about the Garden of Eden, the views that brought him the greatest fame—as well as notoriety—did not concern its "mother tree" but rather the mother language for all of humanity. With considerable erudition and ingenuity, Goropius departed from prevailing ideas about the original Adamic speech, whose roots might still be found in post-Babelic languages. Instead of Hebrew being this "mother of all languages," or Syriac, as some dissident church fathers maintained,[7] Goropius believed it to be Dutch. According to his theory, which the *Origines* supports with a multitude of etymological arguments, contemporary Dutch was the same as ancient Cimmerian, or Cimbrian, and this was the mother language, predating even Hebrew.[8]

Although eccentric, this belief was not entirely sui generis either. Ultimately, it was based on the lineage of Noah from the Bible, which, however, had long been augmented with nonbiblical sources to account for the postdiluvian propagation of humanity.[9] In particular, a race labeled "Scythian" or "Cimmerian"—or both—was supposed to have descended from Noah's grandson Gomer, and, according to some accounts, populated parts of Europe.[10] Such "ethnic theology" enjoyed much influence during the early modern period, and it continued to do so well into the eighteenth century.[11] Still, few of its adherents were quite so imaginative as Goropius, who reconfigured the traditional order of linguistic relationships by absenting the Cimmerians from the confusion of Babel. Because the Cimmerians were elsewhere when the rest of the human race was building the infamous tower, they escaped its aftermath and kept the language of Eden.[12] Eventually, their migrations transmitted this language from Asia to Europe.

---

[6] Milton, 246 (*Paradise Lost* 9.1105). Along with other parts of the *Origines*, this same tree also makes an appearance in Sir Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World* (1614), which mocks Goropius even as it does not reject all of his ideas. See Popper, 194–96.

[7] Droixhe, 1978, 34–37; Olender, 15; Eskhult, 98–118; Eco, 74–80. The identification of Hebrew as the "mother of all languages" ("omnium linguarum matrix") comes from Saint Jerome's *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores*: see Migne, 25:1384.

[8] Goropius, 1569, 36, 367, 452–55. In a 1598 letter to Henricus Schottius, Justus Lipsius accused Goropius of inviting ridicule by making their language the "matrix" out of which to derive all others: see Lipsius, 41. In his posthumously published *Hermathena*, Goropius identifies Dutch as the "matrix" language, and the notion of it being such is operative, if not explicitly expressed, throughout *Origines*. See Goropius, 1580, 36–37, as well as 31, where he even draws a parallel between his own use of Dutch/Cimbrian as the *matrix* language and Jerome's use of Hebrew as such.

[9] During the early modern period the most influential of these was the forged *Antiquitates* (1498) of Annius of Viterbo. On Annius, see Grafton, 1991, 76–104.

[10] Johnson, 254–56; Olender, 10–11. In their efforts to integrate biblical with nonbiblical history, church chronologers provided peoples from the latter with various Noachic genealogies. On the slipperiness of the terminology describing different peoples and their origins, see Kidd, 61.

But only in his native speech did Goropius believe the ancient Cimmerian language to remain pure. For him this speech was both a present-day unity[13] and an ancient mother tree with roots appearing in modern vernaculars, as well as Latin, Greek, and the now-dethroned Hebrew.[14] By contrast, however, even apart from Babel, these other languages "degenerate little by little."[15] What purity they enjoy is not their own but rather comes from "proximity to the roots of the first language."[16] Even so, Goropius's etymologies did not always necessitate the direct use of Dutch/Cimmerian; they could also employ one of the corrupted languages as the source for another. When he turns his attention to English, Goropius is looking for words of Scandinavian origin to show that an offshoot of the Cimmerian language first reached Britain via a migration of Danes.[17] In the *Origines*, claims about linguistic and ethnic relationships are intertwined, and thus for Goropius these Danes were the original Britons.

---

[11] Kidd, 28, 31–35, 62–64.

[12] Goropius, 1569, 532–34.

[13] Frederickx and Van Hal, 133–34, point out that Goropius's conception of his native language as a unified whole was *avant la lettre*; sixteenth-century Nederduits, or Low German, was nothing more than the "fictional sum" of its dialects. In the posthumously published *Hermathena* (1580), Goropius acknowledges this problem but maintains that the dialects are not different enough from one another to constitute separate languages. See Goropius, 1580, 3–4.

[14] Fredrickx and Van Hal, 158. In the *Origines*, however, Hebrew is not entirely displaced as a source of word origins, but it no longer provides them by virtue of being the "prima lingua": see Goropius, 1569, 539.

[15] Goropius, 1569, 736.

[16] Goropius, 1569, 737: "quanto propius ad primae linguae radices accedit."

[17] Goropius, 1569, 738, 759–60. Goropius compares some of the words of the Lord's Prayer in Swedish to contemporary English words that are very similar. The "closeness" that thence he infers among the languages of the ancient Britons, Danes, and Swedes suggests that his understanding of the history of the English language was much different from that of Camden, who did not view ancient British as having survived in modern English but rather Welsh. Nor was Goropius's view of the origins of English a flattering one, since to him the Swedish Lord's Prayer was a linguistic mess, "Cimbrian roots" that are "sprouting in miserable and distorted ways." By extension, English too would represent a distortion of its Cimmerian roots. Quotations from Goropius, 1569, 738.

As the different responses of Jonson and Hakluyt suggest, the reaction to the *Origines* in England (and elsewhere) was mixed, and here I want to examine its reception by a contemporary of theirs who had more in common with Goropius than he cared to admit. This was Jonson's own teacher at Westminster School, William Camden (1551–1623), whose landmark work of antiquarian chorography, the *Britannia*, went through six Latin editions between 1586 and 1607 before being translated into English in 1610. Not only is the *Britannia* full of etymologies of the names of places and peoples belonging to Camden's native land, but it uses such evidence to advance its own controversial thesis about the origins of the people who settled the island long before the Romans or Anglo-Saxons conquered it. In the still-influential account of Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100–56), the original Britons were Trojans who came from Italy and had to defeat a race of giants to make the island their own.[18] By contrast, although he did not outright deny that giants once existed, Camden was dismissive of most stories about them,[19] and, in lieu of Trojan origins, he argued that the Britons were Cimmerians—not, however, from Scandinavia but rather Gaul, whence they also brought their language.[20] In the *Britannia* the pieces of this language that come to light in etymologies are as much evidence of a Cimmerian migration as coins stamped with the profiles of emperors are of Roman occupation. These etymologies depend, in turn, on the belief that the ancient British language was preserved intact in modern Welsh. By no means alone in this belief—it had outspoken Welsh advocates during the early modern period—Camden was nevertheless innovative in making it the primary basis of determining the origins of the Britons.

Camden and Goropius shared a grounding in humanist philology,[21] but to arrive at their theories of origins, they both held in partial abeyance a familiar tenet of this philology—namely, the mutability of languages, or what Goropius himself identified as their tendency to "degenerate little by little."[22] Each made a still-spoken European language the exception to mutability, and Camden's case for Welsh was further complicated by the fact that he was not a native speaker. Thus, in his *Antiquae Linguae Britannicae Rudimenta* (The rudiments of the ancient British language, 1621), the Welsh scholar and lexicographer John Davies (1570–1644) cited the *Britannia* to support his claim that the ancient British language had survived "without any notable change or admixture from another language."[23] But Davies also complained that the use of British words to prove the Gallic origin of the Britons involved "conjectures" so "frigid" and "light" that they did not merit a response.[24] So, too, in his *Celtic Remains* (published 1878), although he acknowledged that Camden was right about the "British tongue" being "pure and unmixed, and extremely ancient," Lewis Morris (1701–65) denigrated Camden's etymologies to the point of comparing them to those of Goropius; both men, Morris suggested, too easily gave way to the "itch of playing with words."[25]

---

[18] By calling this account still influential, I do not mean to suggest that by the late sixteenth century its detractors had made no headway. But see Kendrick, 100–01: he points out that even some members of the Society of Antiquaries, where the "skeptical modernist view prevailed," seem to have accepted the Brutus story.

[19] Camden, 1607, 135, 196, 237, 325. Camden cites Augustine on the theological rationale for the miracle of giants, but I have yet to find a place in the *Britannia* where any instance of such a miracle is treated as credible.

[20] Camden, 1607, 8.

[21] Before embarking on his medical career, Goropius studied languages at Louvain's Trilingual College, and he may have been involved with the production of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible (1569–72). On the possibility of this involvement and on Goropius's studies at Louvain, see Fredericx and Van Hal, 26, 41–44. Not only did Camden devote much of his professional life (1575–97) to Greek and Latin pedagogy at Westminster School, but he was also the author of a much-reprinted Greek grammar (1595). See Herendeen, 108–10.

But even as the "conjectures" of the *Britannia* (and Camden was the first to call them that) have ultimately not won over many more adherents than the linguistic arguments of the *Origines*,[26] etymology remains central to both works. For Camden and Goropius, speculative word derivations (to be sure, Goropius was less inclined to acknowledge their speculative character) were not a curiosity but a necessity, born of the particular difficulty of the object of antiquarian study. Thus, Goropius argues that in the "investigation of antiquities concerning which we have little or nothing memorialized through writing," the only real recourse is "true reasons in names."[27] Although Goropius does cite Plato here—as Camden also does in the *Britannia*[28]—his reliance on such "reasons in names" owes as much to the paucity of other viable options as it does to Cratylism. Without a willingness to investigate names, the antiquary who wished to uncover the remote past would be dependent on a few extant writings, and if their scarcity were not problematic enough, their quality was even more so. They often seemed as misleading to Goropius as to Camden. Along with dubious medieval accounts of this underdocumented era, both rejected the forged *Antiquitates* (1498) of Annius of Viterbo (1432–1502), which purported to fill vast gaps in the knowledge of this same era with the recovery of ancient texts.[29]

---

[22] See Greene, 8, where he observes that humanist philology largely concerned "the process of linguistic change." As Lipsius, 55, noted in his letter to Schottius, "For he errs who in the most unstable thing, that is, language, seeks stability." See also Bodin, 414, on the causes of "changes of languages." Indeed, as early as the fourteenth century, Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* underscored the instability of human language after Babel and castigated those who mistakenly believed their "mother tongue" to be what Adam spoke. See Dante, 8, 15–16.

[23] Davies, preface, b2: "sine ulla aut insigni mutatione, aut alterius linguae admixtione."

[24] Davies, preface, b.

[25] Morris, lxxv, lxviii.

[26] Herendeen, 496: "Camden had the philological training of a humanist, but his etymologies and incursions into linguistic study are often crude by current standards." Critiquing the "false science" of etymology in the *Britannia*, Parry, 36, argues that Camden had "little understanding of the process of linguistic change." In fact, he understood this process well enough but was willing to ignore it selectively.

[27] Goropius, 1569, 7: "in antiquitatum investigatione, earum praecipue, de quibus aut nihil aut parum, veterum scriptis memoriae traditum habemus, in primis rationem habendam verarum in nominibus rationum."

The irony is that, in their efforts to remove one set of implausibilities, Camden and Goropius not only introduced another into the study of antiquity but also did so in such a way as to make philology the basis for the kind of assumption it so often critiqued, the assumption that words could remain static, unaffected by the passage of time. Writing about Goropius, Anthony Grafton has noted the tendency of sixteenth-century philology to be "at once the destroyer and creator of mythical history."[30] The validity of the latter part of this observation is less obvious in the case of Camden, whose overall legacy is one of painstaking scholarship and whose speculative etymologies have thus only begun to receive serious attention, much less be deemed a mythical history.[31] But the story of ancient British remaining a "living language" in contemporary Welsh and of its providing a readily accessible key to the remote past proved compelling, even as particular etymologies in the *Britannia* drew critical scrutiny.[32] In the early eighteenth century, this story would receive new impetus from a foreign source—the "wild theories" of the "Goropising" French abbot Paul Pezron (1639–1706).[33] But the acceptance that Pezron's theories soon won on the other side of the Channel may have been partly due to the ground for them already having been prepared there a century before by an antiquary with a much different reputation.

---

[28] See the unpaginated prefatory letter to the reader in Camden, 1607. For a reading of Renaissance etymologizing that emphasizes Cratylism and, more broadly, the desire to ground words in things, see Anderson, 72–78. See also Crawforth, 5–7.

[29] Goropius, 1569, 341–67; Camden, 1607, 8, 18.

[30] Grafton, 1993, 2:87.

[31] Crawforth, 69–70; Vine 51–79. As far as intellectual influences go, Crawforth underscores Camden's Cratylism and Vine his debt to Bodin.

[32] Thus, for instance, Edmund Gibson's 1695 edition of the *Britannia*, the second English translation, offers both "additions and improvements," some of them corrections of Camden's etymologies. The quotation, however, about ancient British being a "living language" comes from "The Life of Mr. Camden" (unpaginated), in the same work. See Camden, 1695, xxi–xxii.

[33] For the description of his theories as "wild," see Jenkins, 377.

ANCIENT AND MODERN LANGUAGES

"I would not go mad with the insanity of Goropius":[34] this announcement interrupts a part of the *Britannia* that is dense with evidence of its methodological similarity to the *Origines*, and the resemblance is only highlighted by so abrupt a caveat, not to mention the extreme terms in which it is couched. Given his personal connections in the Netherlands, Camden's acquaintance with the *Origines* is not surprising. The writing of the *Britannia* was spurred on by the encouragement of another Antwerpian, the famed cartographer Abraham Ortelius (1527–98), who, along with Camden, was part of an Anglo-Dutch network of antiquaries and poets that was especially active in the years leading up to the Anglo-Dutch alliance of 1585.[35] Among these was no less a figure than the poet, scholar, and diplomat Janus Dousa (1545–1604), in whose *album amicorum* both Camden and Goropius have entries;[36] nevertheless, the connection to Ortelius in particular put Camden at one degree of separation from someone who may have been sympathetic to Goropius's theories. At least according to the Catholic exile Richard Verstegan (1548–1640), Ortelius was not only acquainted with Goropius but also "did much incline" to his "conceit."[37]

A need to dissociate himself from Goropius, however, also put Camden in good company abroad. As Anthony Grafton notes, Goropius may well have been the unwanted "Doppelgänger" of Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), who also leveled the charge of insanity at him even as both applied the "same tools" to chronology.[38] Still, the methods of Scaliger and Goropius did not overlap as much as they could have. One tool of inquiry about the past that the two men did not share was the sort of rampant etymologizing that Scaliger regarded as a "perilous way" of proceeding. Indeed, for Scaliger, Goropius's etymologizing served as a cautionary tale, a demonstration of just how misguided it was to pursue the "etymon" of nations out of a comparison of their languages.[39]

---

[34] Camden, 1607, 15: "Nec Goropii insaniam insanirem." As shall be seen, in order to prove that the Britons came from Gaul, Camden excerpts numerous words of the "old Gauls" out of classical authors and compares them with what he takes to be British/Welsh equivalents. This reference to Goropius as well as some others in the 1607 *Britannia* can also be found in the first edition of 1586. But I have chosen to work with the final Latin edition since it contains Camden's many additions and thus is more inclusive than its predecessors. For references to Goropius in the earlier edition, see Camden, 1586, 5, 17, 396.

[35] Van Dorsten, 19–20, 77–79. See also Weststeijn, 64–66. Ortelius met Camden on a visit to London in 1577. For more on Camden and Ortelius, see Levy, 148–49. Camden acknowledges Ortelius's role in the birth of the *Britannia* at the outset of its prefatory letter to the reader.

[36] Van Dorsten, 81; Frederickx and Van Hal, 58.

[37] Verstegan, 190–92. Indeed, Verstegan seems to have somewhat inclined to Goropius's "conceit" as well. His treatment of the "Teutonic tongue," while ultimately shying away from asserting that it is older than Hebrew, nevertheless does include several Teutonic etymologies of biblical names. Goropius is one of the authorities cited by Ortelius in his *Synonymia Geographica* (1578). See Ortelius, 96.

Camden knew Scaliger's opinion of Goropius,[40] but even so he embarked on the perilous path, albeit with an awareness of its dangers. By his own admission, the etymologies in the *Britannia* are less than certain; he has dared to "hunt" the "origins of names" through "conjectures."[41] Nevertheless, the etymologies that he uncovers in this manner are crucial to his goal of restoring Britain and "antiquity" to one another.[42] In the same preface where he announces this goal, Camden states his intention of inquiring, however cautiously, into both the "etymon" of "Britain" as well as the identity of its earliest inhabitants,[43] and in the opening chapters of the *Britannia* these prove to be two sides of the same inquiry. To be sure, Camden makes no claims about the language spoken in the Garden of Eden. He is also vehement in his rejection of specific etymologies put forward by Goropius, which merit "laughter" or dismissal as "dreams."[44] But even his criticisms show how careful a reader Camden was of parts of the *Origines*, to which he had already been introduced when the *Britannia* was in its earliest stages of development. A 1579 letter to Camden from Ortelius assumes Camden's familiarity with one of Goropius's etymologies.[45]

---

[38] Grafton, 1993, 2:86–89, 595 (quotations on 86). For more on Scaliger's strictures of Goropius, see Frederickx and Van Hal, 194–95. Ironically, these strictures seem to have boosted Goropius's sales.

[39] This quotation is from a 1600 letter to Marcus Velserus. See Scaliger, 1627, 364. This, of course, does not mean that Scaliger was uninterested in the origins of words or the connections between languages. For Scaliger's attempt to find a mean between overly fanciful etymologizing and a rejection of the study altogether, see Grafton, 1993, 2:626–27. See also Van Hal, 2010b, 111–40.

[40] Manilius, 244; Camden, 1607, 93. A comparison of Scaliger's edition of Manilius to this passage from the *Britannia* shows Camden's willingness to entertain a notion (i.e., the Persian origins of the Germans) that Scaliger ridiculed as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Goropius's methods. Scaliger notes that if the "feverish" Goropius knew the Persian language, he would have figured out a new origin for his "Cimbrians drawn from I know not where": Manilius, 244. For he would have found the words *fader*, *bruder*, and *muder* in Persian and then explained their transmission to German with a story about a fugitive from the army of Xerxes. But Camden merely cites Scaliger on the affinity between the two languages, leaving out the sarcasm and the reference to Goropius.

[41] See the prefatory letter to the reader in Camden, 1607: "I have frequently dared to hunt and explore the origins of ancient names by conjecture."

[42] Camden interpreted Ortelius's suggestion that he "illuminate" British antiquity as an invitation to restore "antiquity to Britain and Britain to its antiquity." See the prefatory letter to the reader in Camden, 1607.

[43] Camden, 1607 (unpaginated): "I have inquired timidly into the etymon of Britain and into its first inhabitants." The need for timidity is one sign of the audacity of the undertaking. One must, Camden seems to be suggesting, tread warily.

In the *Britannia*, moreover, the "British, or Welsh (as they now call it) language" plays a role similar to that of Dutch in the *Origines*.[46] Since the modern language equals the ancient one by another name, its own usefulness can pick up where legendary accounts of the remote past leave off being believable. In particular, Camden had to rely on the British/Welsh language after discrediting the Galfridian story of Trojan refugees, who, in addition to winning the island from giants, named it after their leader Brutus. Here his argument runs parallel to that of Goropius, who refuted the existence of giants and had no patience for "Trojan trifles" either.[47] In accordance with his rejection of such fabulous material, Goropius offered a broad critique of eponyms as "the worn-out and royal way in hunting down first founders . . . from the ancient name of a city or region, to discover the name of a person who may be said to have found a name for the place."[48] Although here discussing the name "Brabantia," which he did not believe to have come from the eponymous hero Brabo, later in the *Origines* Goropius would extend his disbelief to the "fabulous inventions about Brutus."[49] His counter-etymology of "Britain" as "free Dania" is in accordance with his theory that the island's first settlers were Danes, and it receives short shrift in the *Britannia*.[50] But the elimination of eponymy and substitution for it of an etymology purportedly rooted in geography and history represents a similar approach to Camden's.

---

[44] Camden, 1607, 94 (quotation), 101, 160, 220 (quotation), 556. Camden's targets include Goropius's etymology of the "Angles" as "good anglers" (Camden, 1607, 94) and his derivation of the "Danes" from a Dutch word meaning "rooster" (Camden, 1607, 101). For these, see Goropius, 1569, 616, 702. Interestingly, Camden more than once equates Goropius's etymologies with the kind of mythical history that both men were seeking to overturn. Thus, for instance, Goropius's etymology of the "Danes" is said to be no better than arguing that their name came from a supposed giant named "Danus" (Camden, 1607, 101). For Goropius's own attitude toward legendary history, see Goropius, 1569, 756, where he compares the *Gesta Danorum* of the medieval chronicler Saxo Grammaticus to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.

[45] Camden, 1691, 2–3. The etymology is that of the "Brittenberg" ruin uncovered in the Leiden area. For more on this ruin in the *Britannia*, see Camden, 1607, 29, 852, where, though other Netherland writers are cited on the origins of the name, Goropius is not. See also Goropius, 1569, 309–10, where he offers an etymology of "Brittenberg" as a "citadel keeping its borders free." For more on the general sixteenth-century interest in this ruin, see Porras.

[46] See the prefatory letter to the reader in Camden, 1607: "In etymologies and conjectures I always come back to the British, or Welsh (as they now call it) language, which the primitive and most ancient inhabitants of this region used." See also Camden, 1605, 13, where he refers to the "British tongue (or Welsh as we now call it)."

[47] Goropius, 1569, 756. Goropius mocks the argument that Saxo Grammaticus makes in favor of the existence of giants. See also book 2 of the *Origines*, the so called "Gigantomachia." For the reference to "Trojan trifles," see the unpaginated prefatory letter "ad senatum populumque Antwerpiensem" in Goropius, 1569.

Once he has disposed of Geoffrey, Camden provides an etymon for "Britain" that is no eponym but rather comes from the ancient British practice of body painting. For in the "native and ancient language" of the Britons, "Brith" is the word for whatever is "painted."[51] As the practice that distinguished the Britons from other peoples, it then became their name and the root of the name of the entire island. Camden goes on to use the Welsh/British language to unpack the meanings of many other ancient place-names throughout his native land and, in a few cases, France. To a large degree his chorography of Britain is a journey from one toponym to the next. As the Catholic jurist and historian Richard White (1539–1611) expressed it in his *Historiarum Libri* (Books of history, 1597), Camden "by continually coaxing British words aims to draw forth the names of places."[52]

Although not all of these toponyms turn out to have British roots—some derive from Anglo-Saxon[53]—the British toponyms bear the heaviest burden of proof because of the relative lack of evidence for the pre-Roman period in comparison to later ones. To Camden, this earlier period is the one for which, as Goropius expressed it, "little or nothing" has been "memorialized through writing." Borrowing a scheme from the Roman antiquary Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE), Camden divided antiquity into an "uncertain," "mythical," and at long last recoverable "historical" era.[54] But while Varro dated the start of the historical period at the first Olympiad (in the eighth century BCE), Camden did not believe this demarcation to hold as true for ancient Britain as it did for Roman and Greek antiquity.[55] Rather, Camden suggests that in Britain the effective start of the historical period was much later. For in the *Britannia* Caesar's invasion marks the shift from "fables" to "uncorrupted" historical records, and the lack of such records before this invasion not only renders the Brutus story dubious, but the rest of British antiquity too.[56] A work intended to restore antiquity and Britain to one another would then seem to be in a quandary. If he could not find some plausible evidence for Britain's prehistory, Camden would have nothing other than doubt with which to replace Geoffrey of Monmouth.[57]

---

[48] Goropius, 1569, 138.

[49] Goropius, 1569, 760: "fabulosa de Bruto commenta."

[50] Goropius, 1569, 759; Camden, 1607, 4.

[51] Camden, 1607, 19. In modern Welsh, "Brith" can mean "speckled" and "motley."

[52] White, 38–39: "palpitando semper vocabula Britannica, studet inde nomina locorum producere." My translation reflects my belief that the intransitive verb *palpito*, meaning "quiver" or "palpitate," here is a mistake for *palpo*. White is taking issue with Camden's British etymology of the "Belerion" promontory in Cornwall.

[53] Parry, 37. Camden's interest in the Anglo-Saxons grew between the first and last editions of the *Britannia*, and so too did his familiarity with the Anglo-Saxon language.

[54] Camden, 1607, 4–5, 25.

One source of the evidence Camden sought was "sacred history," the important exception to the fables that he believed made up most of the writings about the mythic period.[58] For all their aversion to eponyms elsewhere, neither he nor Goropius rejected the ones that came from scripture and, in particular, the descendants of Noah. But scripture was only the starting point of sixteenth-century ethnic theology, and in the *Britannia* its ability to illuminate the mythical period is not for the most part supplemented through other texts but rather by means of etymological argument. Language is both the "greatest support" of claims about the origin of the Britons as well as the "most certain argument" of the origin of peoples in general.[59] Not only does evidence of kinship between different languages have the advantage of not depending upon reliable histories of a period for which Camden believed almost none to exist, but in theory this type of evidence allows the pursuit of ethnic origins to dispense with histories altogether. As Camden goes on to assert, if all histories had perished and no one had written down that the

---

[55] Camden, 1607, 5. Camden points out that the events of the Brutus story must have taken place at least three hundred years before the start of Varro's "historic" period. Setting apart the "erudite" peoples of Ancient Greece and Rome from "barbaric" ones such as the Britons, who lacked the "light of letters," he argues that the latter would be far more prone to fables than their sophisticated counterparts. By contrast, Prise, 35–45, argued that pre-Roman Britain was not preliterate. On Welsh attempts to grapple with the absence of written documentation for British history, see Schwyzer, 2004, 81–90. As he points out, the loss of such documentation was lamented as early as the sixth century by the British monk Gildas.

[56] Camden, 1607, 25. After repeating Varro's much earlier date for the beginning of the historical period, Camden goes on to claim that with the Roman invasion he is no longer drawing his material "out of fables" but rather "out of the uncorrupted monuments of primitive antiquity."

[57] See Camden, 1607, 86, 425, where Camden teeters on the verge of historical Pyrrhonism. He identifies himself as a "skeptic" in both places, the first of which concerns the origins of the Scots, while the second is about etymologies in general: "In etymologies I prefer to be a skeptic rather than a critic."

[58] Camden, 1607, 5.

[59] Camden, 1607, 12.

English and the Germans or the Scots and the Irish were kindred peoples, this kinship would be easily discernible from what their languages have in common. This commonality outweighs even the "authority of the gravest historians."[60]

Of course, Camden and Goropius were hardly the only early modern writers to highlight the importance of linguistic evidence about the remote past.[61] Annius himself often relies on names and etymologies in the *Antiquitates*,[62] but there were less controversial sources too. The *Britannia* makes much use of Continental scholarship, and although the French historian and political philosopher Jean Bodin (1530–96) is only cited occasionally,[63] Camden might well have been influenced by the chapter on the "origins of peoples" in Bodin's widely read *Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem* (Method for the easy comprehension of histories, 1566), where the ancient Celtic language is used to demonstrate that the Germans were an offshoot of the Gauls.[64] Bodin, however, makes no claims for the existence of ancient Celtic in his own day. Rather, this language has been "virtually lost" due to the spread of Latin under the Roman Empire, and now it only survives in the form of such "traces" as keep languages from being altogether "abolished" by the forces of change.[65]

Camden also sought the language of the ancient Gauls through scattered remains rather than a coherent whole, and here his argument is not quite as free of written evidence as his credo about relying on linguistic relationships alone would suggest. Since this language was submerged in the "floods of oblivion," its remnants have to be retrieved like "planks out of a shipwreck" in Latin and Greek texts, where they appear along with other references to the ancient Gauls (and Britons).[66] But the necessity of a piecemeal retrieval of words from classical literature was not the case for ancient British. Since he believed this language to be extant in modern Welsh, Camden in theory had there an abundance of words out of which to construct his etymologies.

---

[60] Camden, 1607, 12: "gravissimorum historicorum authoritas."

[61] Borchardt, 424–29. Borchardt emphasizes the shift from the theological emphasis of medieval etymologizing to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century goal of praising a "national, or more properly, local past": Borchardt, 425. This characterization fits both Camden and Goropius.

[62] Ligota, 52–53.

[63] See Camden, 1607, 4–5, where Bodin plays a minor role in Camden's argument. For more on the broader influence of Bodin, see Vine, 63–64.

[64] Bodin, 435. See also Bodin, 416, where Bodin uses linguistic evidence to prove the Greek origins of the Gauls. The "old Celtic language" is far from being a "matrix" language in the *Methodus.*

[65] Bodin, 416, 430. The word that I have translated as "traces" is "vestigia." For other related uses of this term in the *Methodus*, see Bodin, 427, 435.

[66] Camden, 1607, 12: "oblivionis fluctus" and "tabulae e naufragio." Camden, 1607, 229, does suggest that some words of the ancient Gallic language can be found in contemporary French, of which it was one of the "matrix" languages. But for the most part he retrieves these words from classical texts.

Once such "planks" of the Gallic language as could be rescued from the "floods of oblivion" were compared with their contemporary Welsh counterparts, the connection between the two peoples would become clear. Camden describes the likeness of their languages as one of both "sound" and "sense," and the etymologies that demonstrate this likeness as not forced but instead achieved "most easily."[67]

At least, such etymologies seem easy so long as Camden's reader accepts the remarkable intactness of Welsh, not only in comparison to the shipwrecked ancient Gallic but also to most other languages as well.[68] (Welsh readers also had to accept that Camden's etymologies represented plausible uses of their language, which not all did.) The degree of certainty that Camden expresses about Welsh's preservation of an ancient language in uncorrupted form is all the more remarkable because in the *Britannia* words are scarcely immutable. Rather, part of the challenge of analyzing toponyms is their instability: "Thus as the years gradually turn, names gradually change."[69] So Camden qua humanist philologist sums up the many variations in the name of a single town in Kent. The passage of years erodes such place-names, or else it gives them new additions, obscuring the originals. This erosion of names, moreover, reflects the broader mutability that is everywhere apparent in the *Britannia*, where the pursuit of antiquities is often the pursuit of the fragmentary remains of a once illustrious whole. As Camden points out at the end of his chapter on Roman Britain, the world offers evidence of alteration "everyday." Just as new foundations of cities are laid, so new names of peoples arise while the old ones become extinct.[70] But amid the turbulence of history and the vicissitudes of nomenclature, how could an entire language be more or less the same as it was in antiquity? How could this language become an ark with which to navigate the "floods of oblivion"?

For all his determination to prove his thesis about the Dutch/Cimbrian language, Goropius was aware that such questions could be asked of the *Origines*,[71] but he addresses them most pointedly in a posthumously published work, the *Hermathena* (1580). There he quoted the familiar Horatian comparison of words to ever-changing leaves on a tree, and he even acknowledged that Dutch wasn't exactly the same as ancient Cimbrian since some of its oldest words had fallen into disuse to the point of being forgotten. But in a surprising twist he then claimed that the mother language would regain its oldest words if they were inferred from the derivatives to which they gave rise in various offspring languages, including English.[72] Elsewhere in the *Hermathena* Goropius admits that no language remains the same for a long time. But he tries to circumvent this problem by arguing that even significant changes do not have to deprive a language of its identity.[73] Thus, for Goropius it is "credible" that the much-evolved Latin of the age of Cicero would be still intelligible to the earliest Romans. If the ancient ruler Numa were to come back to life during this later period, its Latin, however altered, would not present him with the same difficulties as a foreign language.[74]

---

[67] Camden, 1607, 12.

[68] Camden is, however, aware of danger to the continuance of the Welsh/British language outside Wales. See Camden, 1607, 133, where he identifies the inhabitants of Cornwall as Britons who have "not entirely lost their ancestral language."

[69] Camden, 1607, 234: "sic sensim volventibus annis sensim immutantur nomina."

[70] Camden, 1607, 76. See also Camden, 1605, 15, where he notes "how powerful time is in altering tongues and all things else."

[71] The *Origines* does occasionally allude to discrepancies between contemporary and ancestral Dutch: see Goropius, 1569, 12–13, which addresses the loss to the former of the word *Ger*. Also, at Goropius, 1569, 22, Goropius suggests that during the Roman occupation not all parts of Brabantia were as successful as Antwerp at keeping their "ancient speech." Justus Lipsius offers extensive counterevidence to the notion of Dutch staying the same "all the way from Adam." See Lipsius, 42–55; Considine, 152–53; Borst, 3:1216–17. Borst makes Goropius a reformer of the Dutch language, only too aware of its absorption of foreign elements.

If some of this qualifying of the more rigid ideas of the *Origines* still seems to strain rather than strengthen credibility, Camden was even more inconsistent about the imperviousness of the British language to mutability. Camden identified this language as "the least mixed and oldest by far," but he also asserted that its purity was compromised during the centuries of Roman occupation when a substantial "force of Latin words crept into the British language."[75] Even "Britannia," as Camden explains it, is only a half-British word; the other half, "-tania," is a Greek suffix that was added to the British root by Greek sailors whom he believed to have explored the island and perhaps left other linguistic traces of their presence.[76] All this, moreover, is to say nothing of the Saxon onslaught, which forced the majority of Britons to yield to the language of the conquerors as well as to their laws. Only a small number, whom the rough terrain in the western part of the isle guarded from the absolute victory that the Saxons achieved elsewhere on the island, were left to keep their language and identity intact.[77]

---

[72] Goropius, 1580, 3, 31. See also Goropius, 1580, 37, where he makes a similar point about words that have fallen into desuetude being brought back into "the usage of the mother tongue." Goropius makes reference to the *Hermathena* in the *Origines.* On such cross-referencing among Goropius's different works and how they indicate a "macro-plan," see Van Hal, 2010a, 81.

[73] Goropius, 1580, 4.

[74] Goropius, 1580, 4. Goropius argues that, though some words and turns of phrase would be opaque to Numa, he would be able to figure them out through "Latin interpretation"—i.e., without the help of another language—just as "obscure" poets are interpreted by means of the language in which they wrote their poems.

[75] Camden, 1607, 18, 83. Camden has it both ways: the British language is both "minime permista et longe vetustissima" and a "vis Latinarum dictionum in Britannicam linguam irrepserit." The latter point is also made in the *Remains . . . Concerning Britaine*: see Camden, 1605, 13, where he discusses how the British language became "intermingled" with Latin.

[76] Camden, 1607, 20–21.

But somehow the residue of Britons did just this, and Camden's point about the effect of their being isolated by rugged terrain raises the question of what else might set apart a language that had survived so many centuries unchanged. At points both he and Goropius suggest that it must be something exceptional, though this exceptionalism has a more obvious patriotic component when attributed to a native language rather than, as was the case with Camden and Welsh, a foreign one. For Goropius patriotism may even have included a hint of defiance. When he marvels at the ability of "so small an angle of the world" as the Netherlands to retain the "purity of its language" under the Roman Empire,[78] one can only wonder what the then-ruler of the Netherlands and dedicatee of the work, Philip II of Spain, was intended to make of such indomitable "purity," which even the ultra-powerful precursor of the Hapsburg Empire could not compromise.[79] "Who does not love his native language?" Goropius asks as if to suggest that his own attitude toward Dutch reflects a general human tendency.[80] But he does not just assign to his own vernacular the distinction of being the oldest language. Through avoidance of corruption, it is also the "most perfect" one, and, among the languages that fall short of perfection in the *Origines* is Spanish, which, like French and Italian, is identified as a "barbarous" mixture of Latin and German.[81] In contrast to such corruption, a "divine benignity" has preserved the "genuine simplicity" of Dutch and left it to be the only key to a past that would otherwise remain unrecoverable.[82]

Camden never claims perfection for Welsh/British. Nor was he ever an advocate for it as Goropius was for Dutch. But in a similarly rhapsodic vein, Camden does marvel at the longevity of the British language, which he does not attribute solely to the sequestering effects of geography. In a rare religious outburst he even rejoices over the "divine benignity of the highest creator toward our

---

[77] Camden, 1607, 95.

[78] Goropius, 1569, 566.

[79] During this period Philip was sending Spanish troops into the Netherlands to quell rioting and rebellion. See Considine, 144, where he argues that for Goropius "what really mattered about Dutch" was its "total independence from Spanish, the language of Hapsburg oppression." On the perception of Spain's empire as a new *imperium Romanum*, see Pagden, 43.

[80] Goropius, 1569, 453: "patrius sermo" ("native language"). But see Goropius, 1569, 563, where Goropius complains of the Dutch contempt for their own language.

[81] Goropius, 1569, 563–64. On Goropius and the search for a "perfect language," see Eco, 96–97.

[82] Goropius, 1569, 566.

Britons, the posterity of ancient Gomer," who, although overcome by successive invaders (Romans, Saxons, and Normans), have kept both their "ancestral name" and "first language" in "good condition."[83] Here the Welsh, derived, like Goropius's Dutch, from Gomer, provide access to the remote past with an indomitable linguistic purity of their own. Indeed, in Camden's Latin the phrase "sarta tecta" literally refers to the "good condition" of buildings, and as a description of an ancient language, it suggests that this language has escaped the unhappy fate of so many of the castles, military outposts, and even whole towns that make up the landscape of the *Britannia*. Built by one or another group of conquerors, these all too often either fell victim to the next group or else dwindled gradually into ruinous obscurity. But through a "divine benignity" that is nothing short of miraculous, forces whose effects are felt so keenly elsewhere in the *Britannia* are held at bay by the British language, and thus this language is able to provide a more enduring testimonial to ancient origins than stone or brick.

EXPANDING ON SACRED HISTORY WITH ETYMOLOGY

According to John Aubrey (1626–97), Camden "much studied the Welch language, and kept a Welsh servant to improve him that language for better understanding of our Antiquities."[84] In what may have been an outgrowth of such studies, Camden contributed a prefatory poem to John David Rhys's (b. 1534) grammar *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecaeve Linguae Institutiones et Rudimenta* (Principles and rudiments of the Cambro-British or Welsh language, 1592), the prefatory material of which also includes a letter extolling the antiquity of the British language as well as its resistance to corruption from without.[85] Such professions were not uncommon in early modern texts by Welsh writers.[86] (The English antiquary John Leland also used the British language to unpack the meanings of place-names.[87])

---

[83] Camden, 1607, 17: "summi Creatoris benignitatem, in nostros Britannos antiqui Gomeri posteros"; "nomen, & primigeniam linguam sartam tectam hactenus."

[84] Aubrey, 396. In the *Britannia* Camden expresses his gratitude to the Welsh clergyman David Powell, "most expert in the British tongue," for help with this language. See Camden, 1607, 70. Later in the *Britannia* Camden uses the same phrase to describe an unnamed person who helped him with one of his etymologies: Camden, 1607, 180. Perhaps this too was Powell. In a 1603 collection of old writings that he edited, Camden reprinted Powell's edition of Giraldus's *Itinerarium Cambriae* (Journey through Wales).

[85] See in Rhys the unpaginated letter of Humphrey Prichard to the reader. Prichard does acknowledge that the British language has borrowed some words from other languages, but he argues that this language also possesses words that have no source outside of itself. These words are "sowed by nature" or "divinely infused." Camden's poem "In Laudem Ioannis Davidis" emphasizes the role of Rhys in the restoration of the "splendor" of the British language, which, interestingly enough, has been lessened by time.

In addition to John Davies, another proponent of his native language's longevity was Sir John Prise (1502–55), whose *Historiae Britannicae Defensio* (Defense of British history, 1573) makes this longevity an element in its vindication of the Galfridian narrative;[88] however, most important as a model for the use of the British language in the *Britannia* was the *Commentarioli Britannicae Descriptionis Fragmentum* (Fragment of a commentary on the description of Britain, 1572) of Humphrey Llwyd (1527–68), which was translated into English in 1573. Llwyd begins his chorography of Britain with a lesson on the grammar and pronunciation of the British language.[89] This then becomes the "foundation" for a "geographic" description of Britain, where, instead of names drawn from Latin and Greek, Llwyd derives them "out of the most ancient language of the Britons."[90] Llwyd even offers an etymology of "Britain" itself, which, although different from Camden's, is rooted in this same venerable language.[91]

But however he may have marveled at the stubborn survival of British/Welsh, Camden did not bring to his study of this language the same kind of patriotic identification as those whom he termed "our Britons."[92] Indeed, his claim that they were descended from Gomer, not Brutus, undercut the traditional patriotic history of the Welsh. By contrast, Prise and Llwyd (as well as the English Leland) were defenders of this history, and thus for all their reliance on the British language, neither of them was using it to search for British origins. Even Llwyd's Welsh etymology of "Britain" was, as Camden noted in the *Britannia*, "without any prejudice towards Brutus"—that is, not to the disadvantage of the history of which Llwyd was a partisan.[93] For though in the *Commentarioli* "Britain" comes from a British word, through a separate etymology the British people take their name from the eponymous Brutus.[94] Like Camden, Llwyd claimed that there was "no more certain argument than language" for tracing the origins of peoples; however, when Llwyd uses this type of argument, it is not to show the origins of the ancient Britons but rather the extent to which they ventured abroad and left their mark in foreign lands.[95] Thus, while Goropius had asserted that Britain, or "free Dania," received its name from the Danes, Llwyd took the opposite position, that Dania must have received the designation "Cymbrica" after marauding Cambrian troops marched through it. The name Cambria itself comes from "our annals," the traditional British history where Camber, as the third son of Brutus, inherits the third part of his kingdom.[96]

---

[86] Jones, 55–64.

[87] Leland's *Cygnea Cantio* (Swan song, 1545), *Genethliacon* (Birthday ode,1543), and *Assertio Arthuris Regis Britanniae* (The assertion of Arthur king of Britain, 1544) all feature toponymic appendixes with some British-based etymologies. But Leland did not believe in the absolute purity of the British language. In words that closely anticipate Camden's own formulation, Leland acknowledged this language's absorption of an "infinita vis" ("infinite force") of Latin words during the Roman occupation. He also detected traces of Hebrew and Greek in it. See Leland, 123.

[88] Prise, 56, where he argues that "through some fate" the British language remained for over a thousand years "almost whole until now."

[89] Llwyd, 1572, 2–4.

[90] Llwyd, 1572, 4: "ex antiquissima Britannorum lingua." For examples of place-names derived from a British root, see Llwyd, 1572, 12, 21, 15. As Llwyd puts it in his *Cronica Walliae* (Chronicle of Wales), "Let them for shame holde ther peace that denye the Welse to be the olde British tonge." See Llwyd, 2002, 66.

[91] Llwyd, 1572, 5–7. Llwyd argues that "Britannia" is a Latinization of the Welsh word "Prydam," signifying "beauty," and he comes to this argument by both adopting and subverting the view of Sir Thomas Elyot, who had derived "Britannia" from the Greek "Prytania."

[92] Camden, 1607, 11: "Britanni nostri." The phrase "our Britons" is even slightly condescending here, since Camden is comparing the proverbial credulity of the ancient Gauls to that of the contemporary Welsh. See Schwyzer, 2004, 19, where he notes that "what bound the Welsh together and defined them as a people in this era was not blood, but rather language."

Llwyd's deployment of a Welsh etymology that Camden would later use in the *Britannia* is equally instructive. This etymology is of "Trimarchisia," which the Greek geographer Pausanias (110–80 CE) had identified with the three-person cavalry teams favored by ancient Celtic invaders of Greece under the leadership of a figure who—depending on one's perspective—was either a Gaul or Briton.[97] In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* this leader, Brennus, sacked Rome, and in one version of this history also made inroads into Greece.[98] Pausanias, however, does not mention any Britons, only "Celts" and "Gauls." Nevertheless, in an effort to show that these "Gauls" were originally British, Llwyd breaks down "trimarchisia" into modern Welsh components, "Tri" meaning "three" and "march" meaning "horse." Thus, either the soldiers of Brennus were "true-born Britons" who had found their way to Gaul or the Gauls spoke British—which "histories" deny.[99] Llwyd's argument here reveals more than his desire to claim an impressive military conqueror for the Britons. Since he assumes the original Britons came from Troy, any word derivations linking them to a neighboring people had to be the result of expeditions outside their native land, not a shared identity.

---

[93] Camden, 1607, 18: "sine praejudicio Bruti."

[94] Llwyd, 1572, 8.

[95] Llwyd, 1572, 45: "lingua ipsa quo nullum certius argumentum."

[96] Llwyd, 1572, 42–43: "nostri annales." Llwyd also uses linguistic evidence to show that the Cimbrians as described in Plutarch's "Life of Marius" and other classical sources were originally Britons. For Llwyd's connection of the name "Cambria" to the Brutus story, see also Llwyd, 2002, 64; Schwyzer, 1998, 7.

[97] Pausanias, 4:476 (10:19). On the controversy over whether Brennus was a Gaul or a Briton, see Schwyzer, 2004, 77–79.

[98] Fletcher, 462. The addition of Greece to Brennus's military glories is found in an abstract of Geoffrey's *Historia* made by Henry of Huntingdon. The historicity of this additional glory was defended by Prise against the strictures of Polydore Vergil.

But the perspective of the *Britannia*, as one early modern reader noted, is more akin to that of Goropius. In his commentary on the eighth song of Michael Drayton's (1563–1631) *Poly-Olbion* (1612), John Selden (1584–1654) made both Camden and Goropius the leading advocates of a narrative of British origins that was in opposition to Llwyd's account as well as to that of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Selden was commenting on the River Severn's boast that the

> native Cambri here
> (So of my Cambria called) those valiant Cymbri were
> (When Britain with her brood so peopled had her seat
> The soil could not suffice, it daily grew so great)
> of Denmark who themselves did antiently possess
> And to that straitened point, that utmost chersoness,
> My country's name bequeath'd; whence Cymbrica it tooke.[100]

Here the notion that the Cambrians, who for Drayton's River Severn are descendants of Brutus's son Camber, conquered and left their mark on the "Cymbrica Chersonessus," or Jutland, is almost the same as Llwyd's explanation of how "Dania" became known as "Cymbrica." Overflowing their native land, the Britons bring their name as well as their excess population elsewhere.

But Selden's commentary on these lines demonstrates his awareness that Goropius and Camden have turned the familiar relationship of Cambrians and Cimbrians on its head: "That Northern promontory now Jutland, part of the Danish kingdom, is called in Geographers Cymbrica Chersonesus, from the name of the people inhabiting it. And those which will the Cymbrians, Cambrians or Cumrians from Camber, may with good reason . . . imagine that the name of this *Chersonese* is thence also, as the Author here, by liberty of his Muse. But if, with *Goropius, Camden* and other their followers, you come nearer truth and derive them from Gomer, son to Japhet, who, with his posterity, had the North-western part of the world; then shall you set, as it were, the accent upon the *Chersonese* giving the more significant note of the country; the name of *Cymbrians*, *Cimmerians*, *Cambrians*,

---

[99] Llwyd, 1572, 44–45.
[100] Drayton, 113.

Cumrians, all as one in substance being very comprehensive in these climats."[101] In Selden's account, once the distracting "liberty" of Drayton's poetic "Muse" has been curbed in favor of coming "nearer truth" with "Goropius, Camden, and other their followers," the Welsh Cambrians are more likely to seem an offshoot of the Cimmerians/Cymbrians rather than their source. Nor is it likely that either people come from Camber, but rather from Gomer, the grandson of Noah. To be sure Selden here says nothing about Goropius's theory that the original Britons were Danes.[102] Nevertheless, he makes both peoples part of a vast migration that left traces of itself in the obviously related ethnic names that are "all as one in substance . . . very comprehensive in these climats."

Camden establishes the link among Gomer, the Cimmerians, and the original settlers of Britain after first providing an overview of the postdiluvian repopulation of the world: "Out of the sacred history of Moses we are taught that after the flood the three sons of Noah, Sem, Cham, and Japhet, augmented with numerous progeny went out in different directions from the mountains of Armenia where the ark had landed, and propagated their peoples throughout the world."[103] Even as Camden expands on this overview from "sacred history" with other biblical as well as nonbiblical citations, the basis of his argument about the Cimmerians is their name—in particular, its likeness to that of Japhet's eldest son. "Why should we not confess that the Britons, or our Cimmerians are the posterity of Gomer and named from him? The name sounds very similar."[104] Indeed, the descendants of Gomer, once called the "Gomari" and identified with the Gauls by Josephus, are not hard to find in the "Cimmerii/Cimbri," whose name has "filled this part of the world."[105] Underscoring the importance of the "Britons' own special name for themselves" to the discovery of their origins, Camden lists several such self-designations: "kumero," "cymro," "kumeri," and "kumeraeg" (the last denoting "the Welsh language"), that support his theory. By contrast, he argues that "Cambri" is a latecomer, coined from one of these self-designations rather than from Camber, the son of Brutus.[106]

For Goropius, too, sacred history represents the beginning of the genealogy of his own people. As he puts it in book 4 of *Origines*, Gomer was the oldest son of Japhet, "from whom the Gomer-ites or our Cimmerian ancestors draw their race." Thus, "out of the history of Moses" it will be worthwhile to transcribe those things that "pertain to the first origin of our people."[107] But as was the case for Camden, Moses, whose succinctness and brevity receive several mentions in *Origines*, can only take Goropius so far.[108] He is soon adducing Josephus as well as other sources that will allow him to elaborate on the Mosaic account.[109] But Goropius's main supplement to Mosaic history is the Dutch language, out of which he is not merely content to spin etymologies of words from various languages, both classical and vernacular. He also fleshes out Mosaic history itself by applying his etymological method to the key names of Genesis. Thus, in the case of the progenitor of the Cimmerians, "Go" and "mer" come together to mean "of good fame,"[110] while the father of humankind is explained as "Haat-dam," an admonition that he is supposed to be a bulwark against satanic envy and hatred in the same way that a dam is against the ocean waves.[111] One might question whether Adam would have been in a better position to heed this admonition if, instead of the landlocked Garden of Eden, he had lived in the flood-prone Netherlands, where such dams were a familiar sight. Nevertheless, fascinating here is the notion that the interpretation of sacred history can come not only from the language but also from the geography of Goropius's native land. Indeed, this particular etymology takes to a patriotic extreme an attentiveness to location that animates parts of *Origines* no less than it does the chorography of the *Britannia*.

---

[101] Drayton, 125.

[102] Nor did Selden mean to suggest that either he or Camden accepted the primacy of Dutch. In his *De Dis Syriis* (On the Syrian gods, 1617), Selden noted that the identity of the language of Adam and Eve as Hebrew was evident to "anyone with more sanity." See Selden, xi.

[103] Camden, 1607, 7.

[104] Camden, 1607, 8.

[105] Camden, 1607, 7.

[106] Camden, 1607, 7.

But if the language and the landscape of the Netherlands can help to explain the Bible, so too the Bible can help to explain the nomenclature of this landscape. Thus, reversing the direction of his etymology of "Adam," Goropius finds an echo of Mosaic history in the Dutch word, "barg" or "berg," which, among other things, can mean "mountain." Why, then, is this word found in ancient toponyms marking places where, as is almost always the case in the "low lands," there are none? Goropius's ingenious answer is that this happened through a metaphor. Because during the Flood the "first parents" preserved themselves on high ground, the word for "mountain" became synonymous with "every kind of preservation." Thus "berg" was also used to denote a low-lying port, where ships were preserved in safety.[112]

---

[107] Goropius, 1569, 373: "e Mosis historia . . . ad primam gentis nostrae originem spectant."

[108] Goropius, 1569, 492, 374, 510.

[109] Goropius, 1569, 374. Like Camden, Goropius finds the origins of the "Cimmerii" in Josephus's "Gomarii."

[110] Goropius, 1569, 550, where Goropius also provides a Hebrew etymology of "Gomer." Although he denies Hebrew's status as the first language, Goropius does offer a compromise with the traditional patristic view of it as such. In addition to his Dutch etymologies of "Gomer" as well as other names from Genesis, Goropius allows for the validity of Hebrew ones too, on the theory that through the "mysteries of sacred history" these names were significant in both languages: Goropius, 1569, 539. Still, though Hebrew etymologies may retain their validity, they are secondary to those taken from the "first and most perfect speech": Goropius, 1569, 537.

[111] Goropius, 1569, 539.

Without being quite so far-reaching in the *Britannia*, Camden nevertheless does use etymology to bridge the present and remote past, and he thereby recasts the antiquity of the British language and people according to the model of *Origines*—that is, as stemming from the Cimmerians rather than giving rise to them. This does not mean that the linguistic arguments of some Welsh partisans of British history did not provide an important model for Camden, too. Indeed, his analysis of the word for Celtic three-man cavalry teams may well have been taken from Llwyd. As in the *Commentarioli*, so for Camden the Celtic term breaks down into "Tri," signifying "three," and "march," meaning "horse."[113] But Camden does not use this etymology to show that the army of Brennus must have been made up of Britons, as Llwyd does. Rather, this army was one of Gauls, who did in fact speak British. That the word found in Pausanias is "unadulterated British" creates a different narrative of ethnic origins than it does in Llwyd.[114]

This Welsh etymology is only one of many that Camden constructs for such old Gallic words as he was able to discover in Latin and Greek authors. Thus he also argues that the word used by the ancient Gauls for "hired soldiers" (as reported by Polybius) is close to the one by which "Britons now" designate "hired servants." So too the word that to the fourth-century author Vegetius signified a "legion" of soldiers has yet to fall out of use among the Britons.[115] In a more complicated maneuver, Camden extracts "Divona," the ancient word that the Gauls used for "fountain of the Gods," from the fourth-century poet Ausonius, and he analyzes it as a combination of two words used by "our Britons." These are "Dyw" ("god") and "vonan" ("fountain").[116] Likewise, Camden notes that "bard," which is "pure British," meant "singer" to the ancient Gauls, and he goes on to analyze "bardocucullum"—a word found in Martial (40–102 CE)—as an amalgam of "bard" and the still "intact" British word "cucul," meaning "mantle."[117]

---

[112] Goropius, 1569, 23–24.

[113] Camden, 1607, 13. Camden, though, renders "trimarchisia" as "trimarcia."

[114] Camden, 1607, 13: "putum Britannicum."

[115] Camden, 1607, 13.

[116] Camden, 1607, 12. In modern Welsh, "fountain" is *ffynnon* and "god" *duw*.

[117] Camden, 1607, 14. In modern Welsh, *cwcwll* means "cowl."

Only rarely does Camden acknowledge the possibility of an ancient Gallic word no longer existing in some current Welsh form. For instance, in the case of "rheda," which according to Quintilian (35–100) meant "chariot" to the ancient Gauls, "the British language does not now recognize this."[118] Nevertheless, though "rheda" has fallen from usage, it has not fallen far, since Camden is able to use other close British words such as "rhedec" ("to run") to demonstrate that it was once "in use" among the British.[119] These still-extant words are "indubitably" out of the same "vine shoot," and thus they allow Camden to infer the missing root. Camden goes on to derive the name of the Roman town Eporedia from this same root.[120]

As the reference to Eporedia in Northern Italy would indicate, Camden did not limit his etymologies of place-names to Britain itself. In addition to Italy, he also uses the British/Welsh language to provide etymologies of several place-names in France,[121] and with these he might seem poised to expand the range of this language well beyond the borders of his native land, as Goropius did with Dutch. If the Cimmerian descendants of Gomer left linguistic traces of their presence throughout Europe, then these meanings too could be unlocked with contemporary Welsh. But Camden was only willing to grant his own muse so much liberty. "I would not go mad with the insanity of Goropius" is a caveat that he registers soon before he begins reducing place-names in France to their supposed Welsh roots. Along with the limited number of such etymologies in the *Britannia*, this caveat is an important indication that Camden will not be making Welsh the mother language in any general sense. Instead, the *Britannia* identifies the mother language as Syriac,[122] but well before this Camden makes clear that Welsh is no substitute for Hebrew. In contrast to Goropius, Camden only provides one etymology for the name "Gomer," and it is in the "holy language," where "Gomer" means "ending."[123] The name is "not rashly but divinely given" because the descendants of Gomer went on to occupy the "extreme ends of Europe."[124] Nevertheless, in so doing they did not disseminate a language that could illuminate the biblical context out of which they arose.

---

[118] Camden, 1607, 13: "Hoc Britannica lingua nunc non agnoscit."

[119] Camden, 1607, 13. In modern Welsh the word for "run" is *rhedeg*.

[120] Camden, 1607, 13. Camden notes that Pliny connected the name of this town with "breakers of horses."

[121] Camden, 1607, 15–16.

[122] Camden, 1607, 147. At least Camden calls it "probable" that since the world's inhabitants came from the Syrian region, so too did the language that would be "the mother of future ones." The subject of this first language arises when Camden is accounting for the presence of a Syriac word, "caer" ("city"), in Welsh.

[123] Camden, 1607, 8. Camden takes this etymology from Philip Melanchthon.

[124] Camden, 1607, 8.

THE GEOGRAPHIC ROOTS OF NAMES

But if in the *Britannia* the British language cannot interpret biblical names the way Dutch can in the *Origines*, this language does nevertheless provide copious evidence of the aptness of names closer to home. Although this aptness does not depend upon a superior power, Camden's British etymologies do often rely on the same basis as the divinely inspired Hebrew one—namely, geographic descriptiveness, whose importance becomes ever more apparent as biblical material gives way to the chorography that makes up the bulk of the *Britannia*. This chorography is divided into sections according to the descendants of Gomer who inhabited the different areas of the island before the Roman conquest, and the name of each group of descendants is subjected to etymological scrutiny that usually reflects some feature of the area it inhabits.

To be sure, as with old Gallic words, Camden derives the names themselves from classical texts, most often the *Geography* of Ptolemy (100–178 CE). But even as his sources are classical, Camden's etymological method is regional. Breaking down "Damnonii," the name of the people who occupied the region later known as Cornwall and Devon, into what he takes to be its British/Welsh components, Camden argued that this name either came from this region's inexhaustible tin mines or its situation underneath mountains, while the name of the "Durotriges," denizens of the future Dorsetshire, reflects their location by the sea.[125] Likewise, although not entirely ruling out the possibility that the name of the "Trinobantes" is taken from "Troia Nova" ("New Troy"), Geoffrey of Monmouth's designation of their greatest city, Camden is more inclined to derive the name of this people from the British "Tre-nant," which he translates as "town in valley." For the entire region of the Trinobantes lies in the Thames Valley.[126]

So too although he derives "Britain" from the body painting practiced by the ancient British people, Camden most often provides etymologies of lesser toponyms *a situ*, or "from place," as described in their own language by this same people. His sources for the most ancient of these toponyms are Roman texts, in particular the third-century Antonine *Itineraries*, but in his etymologies Camden assumes a minimum of the Latinization that he elsewhere claims to have affected the British language. For instance, he identified the ancient forerunner of the town of Winburne with Vindogladiam, as it was denoted in the *Itineraries*, and he argued that this earlier name came "a situ"—that is, "from its location" between two rivers, as demonstrated by a British word "Windugledy," meaning "between two swords." For through an "idiosyncratic usage," "rivers" are called "swords" by the Britons.[127] Likewise, in Wiltshire the root of "Sorbiodonum," also taken from the *Itineraries* and identified as an ancestor of Sarisbury (Salisbury), turns out not to be an eponym but rather a monosyllable that Britons and Gauls added to the names of places occupying a "higher position."[128] No less guided by spatial considerations, Camden derives "Cantium" or "Kent" "a situ" too; it comes from a word that in old Gallic means "corner." Likewise, the first half of "Cornwall" is owing to its "horn"-like shape instead of "Corineus some ally of Brutus," Cornwall's eponymous founder in Geoffrey's *Historia*.[129] To buttress the latter etymology Camden goes on to list several places outside of Britain that received their names "ab huiusmodi situ" ("from location of this type").[130]

---

[125] Camden, 1607, 133, 153. Camden cites "moina" as Welsh for "tin mines" and "dunmunith" for "low-lying valleys." In modern Welsh *mwyn* means "mineral" and *mwynglawdd* "mine"; "valley" is *dyffryn* or *glyn*. In the case of the "Durotriges," Camden cites "dour" or "dwr" as Welsh for "water," and "trig" for "inhabitant." The modern Welsh for "water" is *dwfr*, while "inhabitant" is *trigiannol*.

[126] Camden, 1607, 298. In modern Welsh *tref* means "town" and *nannt* "brook."

This highlighting of the particulars of place might seem removed from the more wide-ranging tracing of origins practiced by Goropius. But although it is not primarily a chorography, the *Origines* does have elements of one, and this is particularly true of book 1, where Goropius sets out to examine the "antiquities of almost all of Belgium."[131] There he begins by suggesting that the importance of place to the significance of toponyms has yet to be sufficiently appreciated. If only historians had paid more attention to the "geographical method," they would have better illustrated the "antiquities of all regions" and not left behind so many doubts and disputes "over the primitive names of peoples and towns."[132] Accordingly, the *Origines* begins its investigation of the "most ancient founders" of Antwerp "a situ," with the location of the city that Goropius calls the "most famous market in the world."[133]

---

[127] Camden, 1607, 157–58: "fluvios autem a Britannis gladios a peculiari phrasi appellari." To be sure, it is hard not to notice that "Vindogladiam" also contains the Latin word for *sword*, "gladius." On Camden's use of the *Itineraries*, see Levy, 149–51.

[128] Camden, 1607, 180.

[129] Camden, 1607, 229, 133. Camden's direct use of old Gallic to construct his etymology of "Kent" is an exception to his general reliance on the British language to stand in for Gallic. Indeed, Camden takes the word "canton" from contemporary French and argues that since the three "matrices" of modern French are German, Latin, and old Gallic, that "canton" does not come from the first two demonstrates its ancient origin. For another instance where Camden replaces an eponym with a place-based etymology, see Camden, 1607, 136.

[130] Here, as with "Vindogladiam," Camden's British etymology could also show Roman influence. Though "Cornwall" could come from "kern," the British word meaning "horn," "Cornu," the Latin word for it, provides as good of an etymological fit.

[131] See the unpaginated letter addressed "ad senatum populumque Antwerpiensem" ("to the senate and people of Antwerp") in Goropius, 1569: "totius fere Belgicae Antiquitates."

Goropius's etymology of "Antwerp" reflects its geographic situation, and though, like his analysis of the name "Adam," this etymology pertains to water management, it does so with an emphasis on commerce rather than morality. Originally a citadel surrounded—and made inaccessible—by a swamp, the future city of Antwerp acquired both its name and identity when the inhabitants began to fill in the swamp and thereby open themselves to trade. The root of "Antwerp" is, then, "werp," which Goropius equates with the Latin "molis," or the "pier" whereby the swamp was overbuilt.[134] The only difference is that "werp" better expresses the "nature of the thing" than the more general designation of "molis," since the former denotes the actual process of "throwing" material into the swamp to convert it to dry land.[135]

This explanation is a far cry from the traditional story of the city taking its name from "Handwerp," or "hand-throw," an etymology based on the story of the hand of a giant being thrown into the river Scaldis by the eponymous hero Brabo.[136] Goropius makes short work of this story in the *Origines*. Nor is Antwerp the only place-name that he derives from the place itself. In lieu of a derivation from the Latin verb "laudare" ("to praise"), Louvain is said to be composed of Dutch monosyllables denoting the "situs urbis" ("location of the city"), and in particular its inclusion of both high terrain ("lo") as well as swampland ("ven"), like the similarly named Venlo on the banks of the Meuse river.[137] Elaborating on his own etymology, Goropius argues that nothing is more pleasing than such variety of terrain, and he goes so far as to compare that of Louvain to Rome, with the victory being awarded to the former. This rivalry between the two cities in effect reenacts the triumph of a vernacular etymology of "Louvain" over a Latin one.

Shifting his attention to Asia in book 5 of *Origines*, Goropius demonstrates still greater faith in his native language by using it to unpack the meaning of toponyms far removed from the Netherlands. As part of a complex argument about the location of Mount Ararat, the landing place of Noah's ark, Goropius derives the name of the "Araxes" river not from Hebrew or Chaldean but rather from the Scythian/Cimmerian language that he identifies with his own vernacular.[138] The argument whereby Goropius makes the three syllables of the "Araxes" combine to denote a river that moves at different speeds and then turns into a lake is not easy to accept. But venturing closer to home to build his case, Goropius also notes that the "Arar" (now Saône) river in France is so named because its "slowness makes it hard to discern the direction in which it is flowing."[139] The description is quoted loosely from Caesar, who, however, does not use it to offer an etymology of the river's name.[140] Nevertheless, both the same description and etymology reappear almost verbatim in the *Britannia* when Camden analyzes French place-names that are rooted in the language of the Cimmerians. To the Britons, "Ara" denotes "slowness," and the Arar moves with such slowness that "the eye is not able to judge in which direction it flows"[141]

---

[132] Goropius, 1569, 2.

[133] Goropius, 1569, 1.

[134] Goropius, 1569, 27–29.

[135] Goropius, 1569, 27. Goropius points out that "molis" depends on the idea of difficulty or labor rather than throwing. It is thus less specific to the project of extending a landmass into a body of water than "werp."

[136] Goropius, 1569, 137–38.

[137] Goropius, 1569, 43–44. See also Goropius, 1569, 41, 42, for other site-based place-names in the Netherlands.

Camden's use of a different language to arrive at the same etymology of a word as Goropius becomes less surprising when one recognizes that, though he did not accept the specifics of Goropius's theory of British origins, Camden did accept that the Britons were a Cimmerian people. If, as seems likely, Camden encountered Goropius's Dutch etymology of the name "Arar" in the *Origines* and converted it into a British one, he could also not have failed to notice Goropius's accompanying expression of a more general faith in such derivations of place-names. Noting the aptness with which Scythian/Cimmerian words are imposed on the things they signify, Goropius argued that his own etymology of the "Araxes" comes closer to "an image drawn on a map by Castaldo" than does a wordy description of the same river by the Roman geographer Pomponius Mela.[142] A map of Turkey and Persia by the Italian cartographer Giacomo Gastaldi (1500–65), whom Goropius dubs "the most diligent delineator of all Asia,"[143] was published in Antwerp in 1555.[144] Given his hope of exploring this region for the English government, Goropius's interest in this map is not hard to fathom, but most striking here is his sense of etymology as cartographic in its ability to uncover the "nature" of places through their names. Thus, the "interpretation of the name" through his native language can "square with" the elegant depiction of the Araxes on Castaldo's map.[145]

---

[138] Goropius, 1569, 527–28.

[139] Goropius, 1569, 529: "cuius tarditas facit, ut vix cernatur in utram partem fluat."

[140] Caesar, 18 (1:12).

[141] Camden, 1607, 15: "oculis in utram partem fluat, iudicari non posit." There Camden also connects the Rhodanus river, known for its swiftness, to the Welsh "rhedec," with its "meaning of 'swiftly running.'" Along with his etymology of "Arar," Goropius also derived the name of the Rhodanus river from its swiftness. See Goropius, 1569, 527.

[142] Goropius, 1569, 528.

[143] Goropius, 1569, 529.

[144] Karrow, 229.

Camden's treatment of place-names suggests a similar convergence between etymology and contemporary cartography. Although his etymologies offer greater credibility than eponymous ones, as fantastic figures from Geoffrey's *Historia* give way to the observable details of a particular location, nevertheless one of their effects is to tell at points a suspiciously modernizing story about those who gave the names. In effect, Camden has assimilated the prehistoric (in the Varronian sense) Britons and their language to his and Goropius's own age of "map consciousness," characterized by "the ability to absorb and transmit spatial information encoded in representational patterns of cartographic projection."[146] Indeed, the supposed verbal mapping of their surroundings by the Britons complements the actual county maps that were introduced in the 1607 *Britannia.*

To look at one of these maps is to view a multitude of place-names displayed amid representations of the very topographic features, mountains, rivers, and forests, from which the Britons were supposed to have drawn these names. It is also to see shapes that once might not have been so apparent to the British name-givers as some of Camden's etymologies would suggest. Thus, casting doubt on the derivation of "Cornwall" from an ancient British word denoting its "horn-like" configuration, the notes to the second English translation (1695) of the *Britannia* ask whether the "form depending intirely upon the increase or decrease of the sea-coast" would not have been more discernible to sailors at a distance than to the inhabitants "by land, or by the assistance of their little boats, with which they ply'd only upon the very shores." At least the "nature of the thing" would suggest as much.[147] Camden's etymology of "Cornwall" reduces an ancient giant and his slayer to scale (Corineus was supposed to have thrown a giant off a cliff), but it may have magnified the ancient Britons' "little boats" and limited discernment of a coastline beyond what was likely at that time.

Even more than such technical abilities, however, language looms to near-gigantic proportions in both the *Origines* and the *Britannia*. For Goropius this language is the first and "best speech," whose words expressing the "characteristics of things" are able to mimic the effects of a modern map even as they emanate from a prelapsarian source—namely, Adam in Eden.[148] The names of this "best speech" seem not so much "made" as "born with the things themselves,"[149] and this remains the case even though many of the things named in the *Origines*, unlike the scriptural examples of birds and beasts, were not yet familiar to Adam. For since the original Edenic language was not lost with him, rivers and regions that Adam did not know of could still be designated according to their nature. The correspondence between words and things carries over to subsequent users of this language, who construct toponyms out of the Dutch monosyllables that Goropius believed to be the most basic elements of the Edenic language. The naming of places in turn becomes an extension of Adam's power to name creation, which in Genesis is a sign of his dominion over it.

---

[145] Goropius, 1569, 528–29.

[146] Klein, 81.

[147] Camden, 1695, 18.

That this power of naming is exercised in Dutch is of course the point, and here the implications of Goropius's argument extend beyond the Edenic age of innocence to the age of discovery in which he had briefly dreamed of playing a part. Indeed, for all its antiquarianism, part of the interest of the *Origines* to Hakluyt may have been due to its also fulfilling one of the key functions of a narrative of discovery. Such narratives were typically intended to accord priority to one nation over another,[150] and whenever the *Origines* finds Dutch roots in the name of a place, it does in effect demonstrate that speakers of Goropius's native language were there first. During a period when mapmakers such as Castaldo and Ortelius were charting the world with ever greater sophistication and accessibility to readers, Goropius was identifying places on their maps as having already been delineated linguistically in his native tongue.

Given his own awareness of the importance of cartography to global empire, one can only again wonder what Goropius's dedicatee, Philip II, was supposed to have made of all this.[151] In his posthumously published *Hispanica* (1580), even as he argued a position flattering to the Spanish—that the New World had originally been discovered by Atlas, identified as an Iberian descendant of Noah—Goropius also maintained that the name given by Atlas to the New World was a Dutch one. This was "Opher," by virtue of the newly discovered land being "over" or across the ocean.[152] Goropius was arguing against "Ophir" being the correct designation of the source of the gold delivered to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:28, but here the contemporary resonances of his biblical antiquarianism are intriguing too. In 1614 the name "Nieu Nederlandt" would first appear on a map of the New World, and later Dutch place-names on such maps would be used to argue the case for the Dutch right to this region.[153] Goropius's etymology, however, represents an earlier attempt to use language to insinuate the presence of the Netherlands in the New World—and, even more remarkably, to do so via a representative of the people to whom the Netherlands were then subject. As Goropius argues, the interpretation of names in the Atlanticus Orbis (Atlantic World) should emerge from the language of whoever first discovered it,[154] and so his argument about the Dutch root of a biblical name also serves to identify this prehistoric discoverer as linguistically, if not ethnically, Dutch.

---

[148] Goropius, 1569, 538: "The best speech is composed of words best expressing the properties of things."

[149] Goropius, 1569, 538: "non facta nomina, sed cum rebus ipsis nata."

[150] Delmas, 309–11, 313–14. On the issue of "prior discovery," see Pagden, 80–82.

[151] On Philip II and mapmaking, see Karrow, 151; Padron, 32. In 1573, Ortelius became Geographer to His Majesty under Philip II.

[152] Goropius, 1580, 112–13. Goropius also provides a Dutch etymology for "Peru."

As has been made clear, Camden never argues for anything like a global dissemination of the roots of the British/Welsh language. Nevertheless, etymology does reflect the influx of global commerce when the *Britannia* turns to England's own rival to the commercial hub of Antwerp. This is of course London, into which the Thames, "most placid merchant of the things of the world," pours the wealth of East and West.[155] After rejecting London's identity as "New Troy" and further dismissing the notion of its name being due to an eponymous founder, Ludd, Camden proposes two alternative etymologies and then fuses them together into an image of the city's contemporary grandeur. The first is drawn from the ancient British custom (as recorded in Caesar and Strabo) of calling woods or groves "cities." After identifying the British word for "grove" as "llhwn," Camden goes on to argue that "London" could mean "city par excellence or sylvan city." But Camden also links London to the British word for "ship," "lhong," and he alternatively suggests that "London" means "city of ships."[156]

Camden then brings together these two disparate etymologies by likening the sight of all the ships docked in the London of his day to "a forest," where masts break up the light in the manner of trees.[157] Here the shift into metaphor suggests an underlying congruence between remote British antiquity and the present. The ancient British meanings of "London" combine to form an image that expresses the ever-growing international importance of the early modern city in terms of its past. London was always the "city par excellence," but now it is becoming that in a global rather than merely sylvan sense. This vision of London is in turn owing to a language that, like the city itself, is both ancient and current, as well as, in more ways than one, still living. Not only does this language continue to be spoken by the Welsh, but it also continues to speak the nature of what it describes, even when this is a city that as much as any other demonstrated the transformative power of change.

---

[153] Schmidt, 550–51, 557.

[154] Goropius, 1580, 112–13.

[155] Camden, 1607, 303: "placidissimus rerum in orbe nascentium mercator."

[156] Camden, 1607, 303. In modern Welsh *llwyn* means "grove" and *llong* "ship."

[157] Camden, 1607, 304.

CONCLUSION

Seven years after the publication of the 1607 *Britannia*, Edward Brerewood's (1565–1613) *Enquiries touching the diversity of languages and religions through the cheife parts of the world* would make the case for "the British tongue which yet remains in Wales" being one of fourteen *matrix* languages.[158] Brerewood's argument is a modification and popularization of the polygenetic theory of linguistic origins in Scaliger's *Diatriba de Europaeorum Linguis* (Diatribe on the languages of Europe, 1610), which, claiming the contemporaneous existence of eleven unrelated "matrix" languages in Europe, represents a riposte to the facile use of linguistic correspondences to trace ethnic kinship.[159] Nevertheless, the depiction of the British language as a still-extant *matrix* and the emphasis of Brerewood, in particular, on its immunity to the influence of Latin during the Roman occupation hardly overturn the assertions made about this language in the *Britannia*.[160] At least John Davies recognized as much. In the preface to his *Rudimenta* Davies brings together Camden, Brerewood, and Scaliger to support his claims for the antiquity of Welsh.[161] Although Davies concedes that his native language may be contaminated with some Latin words, overall his preface argues the opposite.[162] Among its other attributes, the Welsh/British languages emerge as the great exception to mutability. All other languages suffer this.[163] Only the Britons retain the same idiom as they used long ago.[164]

As Camden knew from his struggles with the Galfridian account of ancient Britain, mythical history is slow to die, and this was no less true of his own foray into it. In 1706 Paul Pezron's influential *Antiquite de la nation et de la Langue des Celtes* (1703) would reach an English-speaking readership in the form of David Jones's translation, *The Antiquities of Nations.* The focus of this text was on the Ancient Gauls, not the Britons; the partiality to his own nation that led to Pezron being accused of Goropianism by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716) was of the Gallic variety.[165] Nevertheless, one of Pezron's claims, that the language of "the posterity of Gomer" was still spoken by the "Ancien Britains in Wales," represented a revival of Camden's view, and readers of the English translation in particular were likely to have recognized it as such.[166] If the notion of a language unscathed by mutability seems, to quote a recent editor of this translation, "absurd from a modern perspective, in which linguistic change is assumed to be continual and ubiquitous,"[167] it does not make complete sense from an earlier one either. Indeed, Pezron and Camden appear together as targets of satire in Jonathan Swift's hilarious *Discourse to Prove the Antiquity of the English Tongue* (1765), which uses facetious etymological arguments to demonstrate that this tongue has "varied very little" for over two thousand years.[168]

---

[158] Brerewood, 18 (quotation), 21.

[159] Scaliger, 1610, 119.

[160] Scaliger does not mention the Romans. His treatment of the British language is sparser than Brerewood's.

[161] Davies, b and b2.

[162] Davies, b2.

[163] Davies, b3.

[164] Davies, b4.

Citing Goropius's and Camden's theories of a Cimmerian migration, Selden distinguished between coming "nearer truth" with language and history and holding onto the "liberty" of a poetic "Muse."[169] It is not, however, just the coexistence of his commentary and Drayton's poetry in the same text that suggest how much the one did not necessarily exclude the other in early modern antiquarianism. The very theories to which Selden refers demonstrate this as well. Even as history made inroads into Varro's mythical age, it also produced new myths to replace the old. In particular, the attempt to find a replacement for legend in accounts of the origins of peoples and languages was stymied by the lack of documentary evidence. The most notorious way around this problem was that of Annius, to forge missing documents, but language itself provided another. In their etymologies both Goropius and Camden pressed the philology that was early modern historicism's most sophisticated tool into the service of a sometimes fanciful Muse.

---

[165] Leibniz coined the verb "to Goropise" and applied it to Pezron. See Leibniz, 57. Leibniz, however, had his own, pro-Germanic motives for his reaction to Pezron. On these, see Droixhe, 1996, 24.

[166] Pezron, xii. See also the unpaginated "epistle dedicatory," which emphasizes the sameness of the language spoken by the "ancient Britains" and their "descendants." Jenkins, 375, notes the reprise of Camden's view.

[167] See Davis's introduction in Pezron, xiv.

[168] Swift, 2:419.

[169] Drayton, 125.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Judith. *Words That Matter: Linguistic Perception in Renaissance English*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Aubrey, John. *Brief Lives*. Ed. Kate Bennett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Bodin, Jean. *Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem*. Paris, 1566.

Borchardt, Frank. "Etymology in Tradition and in the Northern Renaissance." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29.3 (1968): 415–29.

Borst, Arno. *Der Turmbau von Babel*. 6 vols. Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1957–63.

Brerewood, Edward. *Enquiries touching the diversity of languages and religions through the cheife parts of the world*. London, 1614.

Caesar, Julius. *The Gallic War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917.

Camden, William. *Britannia*. London, 1586.

Camden, William. *Remains . . . Concerning Britaine*. London, 1605.

Camden, William. *Britannia*. London, 1607.

Camden, William. *Epistolae*. Ed. Thomas Smith. London, 1691.

Camden, William. *Britannia*. Ed. and trans. Edmund Gibson. London, 1695.

Considine, John. *Dictionaries in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Crawforth, Hannah. *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Dante, Alighieri. *De vulgari eloquentia*. Paris, 1577.

Davies, John. *Antiquae Linguae Britannicae Rudimenta*. London, 1621.

Delmas, Adrien. "Writing History in the Age of Discovery, According to La Popeliniere, 16th–17th Centuries." In *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, ed. Siegfried Huigen, 297–318. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Drayton, Michael. *Poly-Olbion*. London, 1612.

Droixhe, Daniel. *La Linguistique et l'appel de l'histoire (1600–1800)*. Geneva: Droz, 1978.

Droixhe, Daniel. "Ossian, Hermann and the Jew's Harp: Images of the Celtic Languages from 1600–1800." In *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown, 21–30. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996.

Eco, Umberto. *The Search for the Perfect Language*. Trans. James Fentress. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Eskhult, Joseph. "Augustine and the Primeval Language in Early Modern Exegesis and Language." *Language and History* 56.2 (2013): 98–118.

Fletcher, R.H. "Two Notes on the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth." *PMLA* 16.4 (1901): 461–74.

Frederickx, Eddy, and Toon Van Hal. *Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–1573): Brabant Arts en Taalfanaat*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2015.

Goropius Becanus, Johannes. *Origines Antwerpianae*. Antwerp, 1569.

Goropius Becanus, Johannes. *Opera Hactenus in Lucem non Edita*. Antwerp, 1580.

Grafton, Anthony. *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Grafton, Anthony. *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Greene, Thomas. *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986.

Hakluyt, Richard. *The principall navigations, voiages and discoveries of the English nation*. London, 1589.

Herendeen, Wyman. *William Camden: A Life in Context*. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2007.

Jenkins, Geraint. "The Cultural Uses of the Welsh Language, 1660–1800." In *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Geraint Jenkins, 369–406. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997.

Johnson, James. "The Scythian: His Rise and Fall." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20.2 (1959): 250–57.

Jones, R. Brinley. *The Old British Tongue: The Vernacular in Wales, 1540–1640*. Cardiff: Avalon Books, 1970.

Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson*. Ed. C. H. Hereford and Percy Simpson. 11 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937.

Karrow, Robert. *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century and Their Maps*. Chicago: Newberry Library, 1993.

Kendrick, T. D. *British Antiquity*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1950.

Kidd, Colin. *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Klein, Bernard. *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Collectanea Etymologica*. Hannover, 1717.

Leland, John. *Cygnea Cantio*. London, 1545.

Levy, F. J. *Tudor Historical Thought*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967.

Ligota, C. R. "Annius of Viterbo and Historical Method." *Journal of the Warburg and Cortauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 44–56.

Lipsius, Justus. *Epistularum Selectarum Centuria Tertia ad Belgas*. Antwerp, 1602.

Llwyd, Humphrey. *Commentarioli Britannicae Descriptionis Fragmentum*. Cologne, 1572.

Llwyd, Humphrey. *Cronica Walliae*. Ed. Ievan Williams. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002.

Manilius, M. *Astronomicon*. Ed. Joseph Scaliger. Paris, 1579.

Migne, Jacques Paul, ed. *Patrologia Latina*. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–55.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. London, 1674.

Morris, Lewis. *Celtic Remains*. London, 1878.

Olender, Maurice. "Europe, or How to Escape Babel." In *Proof and Persuasion in History*, ed. Suzanne Marchand and Anthony Grafton, 5–25. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

Ortelius, Abraham. *Synonymia Geographica*. Antwerp, 1578.

Padron, Ricardo. "Mapping Plus Ultra: Cartography, Space, and Hispanic Modernity." *Representations* 79.1 (2002): 28–60.

Pagden, Anthony. *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

Parry, Graham. *Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Pausanias. *Description of Greece with an English Translation*. Trans. W. H. Jones. 4 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935.

Pezron, Paul. *The Antiquities of Nations*. Ed. Daniel Davis. London: Routledge, 2002.

Popper, Nicholas. *Walter Raleigh's History of the World and the Historical Culture of the Late Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Porras, Stephanie. "Producing the Vernacular: Antwerp, Cultural Archaeology, and the Bruegelian Peasant." *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 3.1 (2011). doi: https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2011.3.1.3.

Prise, John. *Historiae Britannicae Defensio*. Ed. and trans. Ceri Davies. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015.

Rhys, John David. *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecaeve Linguae Institutiones et Rudimenta*. London, 1592.

Scaliger, Joseph Justus. *Opuscula*. Paris, 1610.

Scaliger, Joseph Justus. *Epistolae*. Paris, 1627.

Schmidt, Benjamin. "Mapping an Empire: Cartographic and Colonial Rivalry in Seventeenth-Century Dutch and English North America." *William and Mary Quarterly* 54.3 (1997): 549–78.

Schwyzer, Philip. "A Map of Greater Cambria." *Early Modern Literary Studies* 4.2 (1998): 1–13.

Schwyzer, Philip. *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Selden, John. *De Diis Syriis*. London, 1617.

Swift, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Swift*. 2 vols. London, 1843.

Van Dorsten, J. A. *Poets, Patrons, and Professors: Sir Philip Sidney, Daniel Rogers, and the Leyden Humanists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Van Hal, Toon. *"Moedertalen en Taalmoeders": Het Vroegmoderne Taal-Vergelijkende Onderzoek in de Lage Landen*. Brussels: Paleis der Academiens, 2010a.

Van Hal, Toon. "'Quam enim Periculosa sit ea via . . .': Joseph Justus Scaliger's Views on Linguistic Kinship." *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* 20.1 (2010b): 111–40.

Verstegan, Richard. *A restitution of decayed intelligence*. London, 1634.

Vine, Angus. *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Weststeijn, Thijs. *Art and Antiquity in the Netherlands and Britain: The Vernacular Arcadia of Franciscus Junius (1591–1677)*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

White, Richard. *Historiarum Libri*. Arras, 1597.