

Old Breton *guiler*, *guilerou*, *guileri* and Old Welsh *gueleri*¹

David Stifter
Maynooth University
david.stifter@mu.ie

Recent research has put a spotlight on the close relationship between several extant early medieval glossed manuscripts of the computistical works of the Venerable Bede, in particular of his *De temporum ratione*. Of particular interest for the present note are some manuscripts with glosses in vernacular medieval Celtic languages, namely Augiensis perg. 167 at the Badische Landesbibliothek in Karlsruhe, hereafter *Crb*, from the first half of the 9th century (Thes. Pal. ii 10–30; CorPH text 22²; Bronner 2013: 19–20; MIRA 60³) and a fragment of *De temporum ratione* in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Lat. 15298, hereafter *Vib*, dating to 780–820 (Thes. Pal. ii 31–37; CorPH text 58⁴; Dillon 1956; Bauer 2017; Bronner 2013: 54; MIRA 4⁵), both with glosses in Old Irish, and Angers, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 476, dated to 926–943, and the late-9th-early-10th-century MS 477 (hereafter *Ang*) with Old Breton glosses (Fleuriot 1964; Lambert 1983; 1984; 2005; Bauer 2008: 9–65; Barbet-Massin 2017; DHBM 8⁶ and 9⁷).

The parallel glosses⁸ among these manuscripts have been commented on in articles by Pierre-Yves Lambert (1983: 120–129) and Bernhard Bauer (2017; 2019a; 2019b). The present note is concerned with a single word, already noted by Lambert (1983: 123; 1984: 204–205) and Bauer (2019a: 44). In *Crb*, *Vib* and *Ang*, the phrase *aperto codice* ‘after having opened the book’ in chapter 19 of *De temporum ratione* is glossed identically, albeit in different languages, by OIr. *félire* and OB *guilerou* respectively. In addition, these words occur several times elsewhere. OB *guiler* and forms thereof are attested four times on folio 57b and once on folio 58a of *Ang*, always in hand A:

Ang 57b l. 13 in *guilerou* gl. *alfabetis* ‘with the letters of the alphabet’;

Ang 57b l. 18 *dan guileri* gl. the Latin gloss *huic libro* ‘to this book’ (Lambert 1984: 191), which itself glosses *praeposuiimus eidem operi* ‘we have put at the beginning to this work’;

Ang 57b l. 26 *guilerou* gl. *aperto codice* ‘after having opened the book’;

Ang 57b l. 32 *guiler* gl. *aperi codicem* ‘open the book’;⁹

Ang 58a l. 16 *guilerou* gl. *hoc autem praecedens quod commemorauimus argumentum* ‘the matter that we have mentioned above’;

In addition, *guiler* occurs in Anger 476 (fol. 6a l. 14) glossing *alphabetis quae in annali uidet libello* ‘alphabetical letters which he sees in the annalistic book’.

¹ This note results from the Old Welsh reading circle that was initiated by Simon Rodway as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In October–November 2020, the reading group studied the Old Welsh *Computus Fragment*. In the course of this, I arrived at the ideas about the origin of OB *guiler*, OW *gueleri* set out in this article. I thank everybody in the Old Welsh reading group for his or her input, as well as Bernhard Bauer, Barry Lewis and a reviewer for their help. All errors are my own.

² URL: https://chronhib.maynoothuniversity.ie/chronhibWebsite/tables?page=0&limit=0&fprop=Text_ID&fval=0022&dtable=sentences&ctable=text&search=false (accessed 5.7.2022).

³ URL: www.mira.ie/060 (accessed 5.7.2022).

⁴ URL: https://chronhib.maynoothuniversity.ie/chronhibWebsite/tables?page=0&limit=0&fprop=Text_ID&fval=0058&dtable=sentences&ctable=text&search=false

⁵ URL: www.mira.ie/004 (accessed 5.7.2022).

⁶ URL: <https://ircabritt.nuigalway.ie/handlist/catalogue/8> (accessed 5.7.2022).

⁷ URL: <https://ircabritt.nuigalway.ie/handlist/catalogue/9> (accessed 5.7.2022).

⁸ Parallel glosses are defined as “all instances in which the different manuscripts have glosses on the same lemma at the same position within the underlying Latin text” (Bauer 2019b: 34).

⁹ Note the address to the second singular person in the Latin, which parallels the use of second singular verbal forms in the Old Welsh *Computus Fragment*.

In the Old Irish glosses, the masculine *jo*-stem *félire* occurs three times, twice in the Vienna Bede, once in the Karlsruhe Bede:

Crb 32a1 *félire* gl. *aperto codice* ‘after having opened the book’;

Vib 3a2 (no. 36) *feilere* gl. *conpotus ... annalis* ‘the calculation for the years’;

Vib 4a1 (no. 43) *felire* gl. *aperto codice* ‘after having opened the book’.

In all these instances, the glosses specify that what is variously referred to by *codex*, *alpha-beta* or *computus* is always the book containing the *pagina regularis* ‘the table of regulars’. The *pagina regularis* is a complicated mathematical table that allows the – comparatively easy – calculation of the moon phases for any year.¹⁰ The examples above illustrate that in these sources *guiler/félire* is used as the vernacular equivalent of Latin *pagina regularis* or of the wider concept of ‘calendar’. From there, the word *félire* develops in Irish to a general word for ‘calendar’. Outside the texts collected in *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, this is already evidenced prominently around the year 800 in the title and in the text of the poem *Félire Óengusso* ‘The Martyrology of Óengus’, and it has remained in use in the language as a word for ‘calendar’ until the present day.

But the interrelationship of manuscripts does not end there. Another text that belongs in this cluster of manuscripts is the early-10th-century Old Welsh so-called *Computus Fragment* (Cambridge University Library Add. 4543, edited and translated by Williams 1925–27). Unlike the sources mentioned above, which consist of a main Latin text with vernacular medieval Celtic interlinear glosses, this single leaf contains on one side a continuous Old Welsh explanatory text relating to the very same chapter 19 of *De temporum ratione*, especially concerned with the use of the *pagina regularis*. The *Computus Fragment* is not only identical in content, but it is evident from the use of very similar and occasionally identical expressions that it, too, ultimately derives from the same source or sources on which the ‘parallel glosses’ in the manuscripts discussed above and in other related manuscripts draw. In lines 16–17 of the fragment, the phrase *in irgueleri* ‘in the calendar’ occurs twice.

The words OB *guiler*, *guilerou*, *guileri*, OW *gueleri* and OIr. *félire* are manifestly related, but what is their precise relationship? While the morphology of the Old Irish masculine *jo*-stem *félire* is straightforward, the British examples require some discussion. OB *guiler* is a singular noun, referring to singular ‘book’ in *Ang* 57b l. 32 and in *Angers* 476 6a l. 14. *Guilerou* appears to be its grammatically regular plural, albeit also with reference to singular items, as if it were used as a *plurale tantum*. In *Ang* 57b l. 26 it corresponds to *codicem* and in *Ang* 58a l. 16 to *argumentum*. *Guileri* likewise corresponds to singular *libro*. Formally, the final *-i* could be a plural ending. However, since the plural is already supplied by the common ending *-ou*, it is preferable to interpret it as a singular abstract suffix, used for a concrete object. It is hardly an old formation, since otherwise the operation of secondary *i*-affection might be expected to have taken place in Breton like in *pririti* ‘anxiety’ < **preter + -i*. Likewise, OW *gueleri* could be a plural of unattested **gueler*, but the analysis as a singular abstract noun seems preferable in parallel to the Breton word. An additional argument for this will be produced below.

These words are continued neither in later Welsh nor in later Breton. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* records *gueleri* under the headword *gwyleri* – a form which does not exist as such. The word is found only in a single document, namely the *Computus Fragment*. The same is true for Breton. Bret. *goueler* ‘calendar’, included in dictionaries of the modern language, is an artificial creation, or reanimation of the Old Breton word, dating to the early 20th century. Unlike Irish, neither of the British words therefore has textual support for ever having been a commonly used expression.

The words ultimately reflect Middle Latin **uigliarium* ‘festival calendar’, syncopated from **uigiliarium*, formed via the addition of the collective suffix *-arium* to Middle Latin *uigilia* ‘vigil, eve of a festival’. The regular treatment of *uigilia* > **uiglia* is seen in W *gwyl*, Corn. *goil*, *gôl*, OB *guil*, pl. *guilou*, NB *gouel*, and in OIr. *féil*, all ‘feastday of a saint’. However, the regular outcome of Lat. *-ārius*, *-ārium* is Brit. **-ār* > OW *-aur*, OB *-or*, not *-er*. OB *guiler* and

¹⁰ For more on the *pagina regularis*, see Armstrong 1982.

OW *gueleri* can therefore not continue **uigliarium* in a phonologically direct manner. On the other hand, the Latin suffix *-ārius*, *-ārium* results directly in OIr. *-(a)ire*, and *-iārius*, *-iārium* in *-ire/-ere*. OIr. *félire*, *félere* is therefore the only one of the medieval Celtic words for ‘calendar’ that can be derived directly from **uigliarium*.

I therefore contend that, instead of being borrowings from Latin, the British words are learned, erudite adaptations into Breton and Welsh respectively of Old Irish *félire*. In the case of OB *guiler*, the lexical morpheme *fél-* was replaced by the corresponding Old Breton word *guil*, whereas the suffix *-ire/-ere* was only roughly adapted to the phonology of the language. The ending of *guileri* looks as if an attempt had been made to match the Irish abstract suffix by a British morpheme that was outwardly and functionally similar. Phonologically, *guiler* represents /gui'ler/. In contrast, OW *gueleri* may be a purely phonological adaptation of the Irish word to Welsh. Schrijver (2011: 28) tentatively suggests that *gueleri* is a spelling for /guileri/, i.e. that the letters <ue> represent the Old Welsh diphthong /ui/. However, as far as I can see, this would be a unique instance of such a spelling in Old Welsh.¹¹ I therefore propose instead that in *gueleri* every sound of OIr. *félire/félere* was mechanically substituted by a British equivalent, i.e. /gwele'ri/. It is conceivable the author of the *Computus Fragment* only had a manuscript in front of him. In the multilingual Celtic scriptoria of the 9th and 10th centuries, it was well-known that W *gw-* was functionally and etymologically equivalent to OIr. initial *f-*. All other sounds in the word have straightforward phonological substitutes. Since Welsh vowels have no phonemic opposition of length, OIr. *é* is equated with W *e*, the sound closest to it. Only in the case of the final *-i* I believe that, like in the corresponding Breton word, a functionally equivalent abstract morpheme replaced the Irish ending.¹²

The influence of Irish manuscripts of Bede on the Breton tradition has been noted in the past. Lambert (1983: 139), Ó Cróinín (1983) and Bauer (2019b: 52) observed that Breton-speaking scholars must have copied from Irish exemplars or even suggested Irish involvement in the production of the Breton manuscripts. It seems that this dependence on Irish exemplars can also be extended to the Welsh *Computus Fragment*. Ultimately all these sources belong to one scholarly tradition extending over one or two centuries and need to be studied together.

Bibliography

- Armstrong III, John 1982. ‘The Old Welsh *Computus Fragment* and Bede’s *Pagina Regularis*’. *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 2, 187–272.
- Barbet-Massin, Dominique 2017. ‘Le manuscrit 477 (461) d’Angers: étude codicologique et textuelle’, *Britannia Monastica* 19, 15–44.
- Bauer, Bernhard 2008. *Studien zu den Altbretonischen Glossen*. Unpublished MA-thesis. University of Vienna.
- Bauer, Bernhard 2017. ‘New and corrected MS readings of the Old Irish glosses in the Vienna Bede’. *Ériu* 67, 29–48.
- Bauer, Bernhard 2019a. ‘The interconnections of St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, ms 251 with the Celtic Bede manuscripts’, *Keltische Forschungen* 8, 31–48.
- Bauer, Bernhard 2019b. ‘The Celtic Parallel Glosses on Bede’s *De natura rerum*’. *Peritia* 30, 31–52.
- Bronner, Dagmar 2013. *Verzeichnis altirischer Quellen. Vorläufige Version*. Marburg: Philipps Universität Marburg. URL: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01638388/document>.
- CorPH = David Stifter, Bernhard Bauer, Elliott Lash, Fangzhe Qiu, Nora White, Siobhán Barrett, Aaron Griffith, Romanas Bulatovas, Francesco Felici, Ellen Ganly, Truc Ha Nguyen,

¹¹ Barry Lewis (pers. comm.) reminds me that Sims-Williams (2021: 4) discusses the rare, but genuine spelling of /i/ with <e> in Old Welsh. However, Sims-Williams provides no examples of <e> as the second element of diphthongs, but notes that <y> is used in this position in the *Computus Fragment*. Later examples of <ue> for the diphthong /ui/ are extremely rare (Sims-Williams 2021: 21 n. 64), and are possibly confined to the 3pl. affixed pronoun.

¹² I do not regard the *-i* of *gueleri* as a way of representing an Irish schwa. In the Old Irish period, final unstressed vowels still retained their full quality and only became /ə/ in Middle Irish. For other examples of how Irish final *-e* and *-i* are represented in Welsh loans, see Haycock (2015: 471).

Lars Nooij 2021, *Corpus PalaeoHibernicum (CorPH) v1.0, 2021*. Maynooth University. URL: <http://chronhib.maynoothuniversity.ie>.

DHBM = Jacopo Bisagni and Sarah Corrigan 2020–22. *A Descriptive Handlist of Breton Manuscripts, c. AD 780–1100 (DHBM)*. URL: <https://ircabritt.nuigalway.ie/handlist>.

Dillon, Myles 1956. ‘The Vienna Glosses on Bede’. *Celtica* 3, 340–344.

Fleuriot, Léon 1964. *Dictionnaire des gloses en vieux-breton*. Paris: Klincksieck.

Haycock, Marged 2015. *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*. Second, fully revised edition. Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications.

Lambert, Pierre-Yves 1983. ‘Les commentaires celtiques à Bède le Vénérable’. *Études Celtiques* 20, 119–143.

Lambert, Pierre-Yves 1984. ‘Les commentaires celtiques à Bède le Vénérable (suite)’. *Études Celtiques* 21, 185–206.

Lambert, Pierre-Yves 2005. ‘Les gloses en vieux-breton aux écrits scientifiques de Bède, dans le manuscrit Angers 477’, in: Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin et Olivier Szerwiniack (eds.), *Bède le Vénérable entre tradition et postérité* [= Histoire de l’Europe du Nord-Ouest 34]. Lille: Université Charles-de-Gaulle, 309–319.

Lambert, Pierre-Yves, and Jacopo Bisagni 2018. ‘Notes sur quelques mots vieux-bretons du manuscrit Angers 477, f^o 36r^o’. *Études Celtiques* 44, 155–162.

MIRA = Pádraic Moran 2021. *MIRA: Manuscripts with Irish Associations*. Draft version. URL: www.mira.ie/.

Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí 1983. ‘Early Irish annals from Easter tables: a case restated’. *Peritia* 2, 74–86.

Schrijver, Peter 2011. ‘Old British’, in: Elmar Ternes (ed.), *Brythonic Celtic – Britannisches Keltisch. From Medieval British to Modern Breton* [= Münchner Forschungen zur historischen Sprachwissenschaft 11]. Bremen: Hempfen, 1–84.

Sims-Williams, Patrick 2021. ‘“Dark” and “clear” y in medieval Welsh orthography: Caligula versus Teilo’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 119/1, 1–39.

Thes. Pal. = Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (eds.) 1901–3. *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus. A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses Scholia Prose and Verse*. 2 vols. Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Ifor 1925–7. ‘The Computus Fragment’. *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 3, 245–272.