Rheged: an Early Historic Kingdom near the Solway

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ABSTRACT

Rheged has been well known to historians for some time, but it is usually considered from the standpoint of the written sources. This paper seeks to begin the process of wider examination, firstly by discussing salient aspects of the archaeological setting, specifically the Iron Age and Roman background. Secondly, attention is drawn to those elements of the archaeological and written record relating to the location of Rheged, as well as to kingship and power. Earlier assumptions as to the location of Rheged are challenged, and it is suggested that its focus was in the Rhinns of Galloway.

By the late sixth century Rheged, led by its great king Urien, was in existence, but it proved to be transient, and within a century or so of the earliest references in the literature, it had become absorbed into the expanding kingdom of Northumbria. Later, the Men of the North provided the heroic ancestry and models appropriate to kings in Wales, and ultimately found a place in one of the most enduring themes in medieval romantic literature.

INTRODUCTION

Rheged (OW *Reget*), a kingdom thought to be located in south-west Scotland and northern England, appears briefly in the written record in the late sixth century, but little is known about it. It is, of course, well known to historians of the period but there has been no overview of the evidence for the kingdom or its personnel although it is frequently mentioned (see for example Morris Jones 1918; Williams 1944; 1951; 1987; Jackson 1953; 1963; 1969; MacQueen 1955; Chadwick 1963a; 1963b; Dillon & Chadwick 1974; McCarthy 1982; Duncan 1992; Brooke 1994). However, compared with Dál Riata, the kingdom of the Picts, Northumbria or some of the kingdoms in Ireland, Rheged has been overlooked. This may be partly because it crosses the national boundary and is, therefore, not wholly 'owned' by scholars in either England or Scotland, but it is also because there is no surviving artistic legacy, no annalistic, legal, or ecclesiastical record, and the written sources for early medieval Galloway and Cumbria are sparse. Much of the relevant documentation that has some bearing on Rheged, namely the poems and genealogies, is early Welsh in origin, and while some written sources have been subject to detailed examination and are available in Welsh, only a few are available in good English translations (Clancy 1998; Koch 2000). It is doubtless such reasons as these that have deterred archaeologists from being 'drawn' to Rheged.

Some of the most renowned characters in Rheged also figure in medieval romantic literature, including such classics as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *The Mabinogion,* but analysis of literary legends in order to shed light on personalities or places is not the purpose of this paper (Caerwyn Williams 1994; Wheatley, forthcoming).

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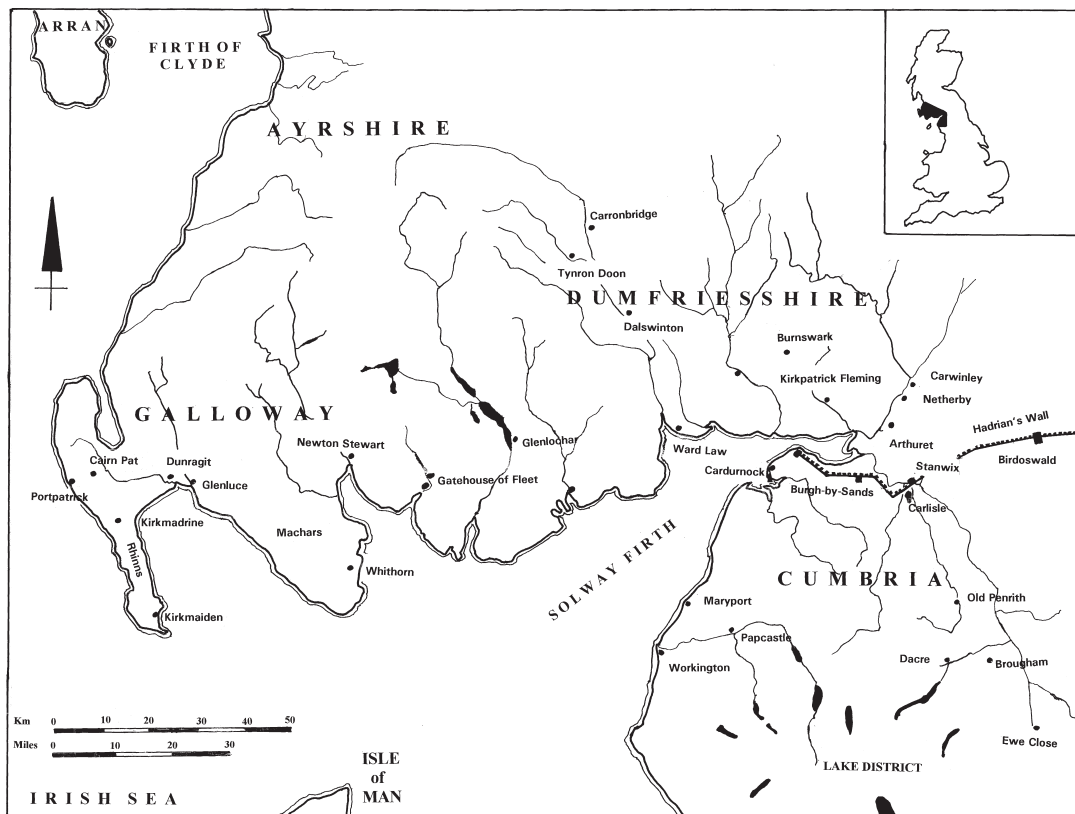
ILLUS 1   Map locating principal places mentioned in the text

THE SETTING

There is a widespread understanding amongst scholars that Rheged was situated on either side of the Solway Firth, an area embracing present day Dumfries & Galloway and Cumbria (illus 1). Some of the personnel in the written sources clearly operated over extensive areas from Wales to the Forth-Clyde area, but very few references to specific, identifiable places occur. This vagueness, compounded by the ambitions of medieval writers to pin events down to certain places (Caerleon is a favourite), and mythologize the exploits of people such as Urien, Peredur, and others, has not helped the historian and shows that more than one interpretation is possible.

After Morris Jones's excoriating analysis of Evans's interpretation of Taliesin (Evans 1915; Morris Jones 1918), the most authoritative discussion with regard to the location of Rheged is by Sir Ifor Williams (1951). Reviewing earlier contributions on the subject extending back to the mid-19th century, he concluded that a key phrase is '*tra merin reget*', which occurs in the Book of Taliesin (BT 78). It means 'beyond the sea of Rheged', and refers, he affirmed, to the Solway Firth, which 'proves that Carlisle was definitely in the land of Rheged and that the northern shore of the Solway may also have been included in it' (Williams 1951, 83–4; 1987, xxxviii–xlii). To the present writer the phrase implies nothing about Carlisle or the Solway Firth, but for the immediate purpose its general location is accepted. It is a point I will return to later on.

Hogg's suggestion that the place-name Llwyfenydd in the Urien poems refers to Lyvennet, near Crosby Ravensworth in Cumbria, has also found general acceptance (Hogg 1946; Williams 1987), although the present-day name is that of a river and its valley and not a specific village, farm or estate. The meaning of the place-name Dunragit, near Stranraer, as 'the fort of Rheged', is similarly accepted (MacQueen 2002, 92; Watson 1926, 156; but see Brooke 1998). However, Williams has cast doubt on the derivation of the name Rochdale (OE *Recedham*), where it was said that Roch = Reced = Rheged, and that the kingdom extended into Lancashire. With the assertion that the Solway was within Rheged, other scholars were then led to the belief that one of the principal places within the kingdom was Carlisle, Chadwick even claiming it as Urien's *caput* (Chadwick 1963c, 329; Koch 1983, 301). It is worth stating, if only for the record, that there are no references to Carlisle (*Caer Ligualid*) in the eight books of Taliesin admitted by Williams to be the core poems in connection with Rheged or Urien and his family. Although this may not be significant, as place-names are infrequent occurrences in the sources, seizing on a place in approximately the right location with a Roman past nevertheless represents the natural desire of historians to 'pin down' some of the earliest recorded annalistic events and personnel relevant to north Britain. What is indisputable with regard to Carlisle is the presence there of St Cuthbert and Queen Iurminburg in AD 685, as we can see in the two eighth-century Lives of St Cuthbert (Colgrave 1940). There is much that is fascinating about these entries, not least the point that they are good evidence for a major Northumbrian landed and ecclesiastical interest west of the Pennines in the late seventh century. They also tell us, by implication, that there was a monastery at Carlisle *before* St Cuthbert's visit (McCarthy 1999, 62–3). Whether or not this extended back into pre-Northumbrian days remains unclear.

The lands of Rheged, using Williams's definition cited above, contained a landscape varying widely in character from the mountains of the Lake District, the Pennine fringes and the Southern Uplands of Annandale and Nithsdale, to the glaciated lowlands of the Cumberland Plain and the coastal fringe of Dumfriesshire and Galloway (illus 2). It is drained by a number of major river systems, including the catchments of the Cree, Nith, Annan, the Dumfriesshire Esk, the Eden, and the Cumbrian Derwent. Apart from the river valleys, much of the landscape is not rich agricultural land; in fact a great deal is relatively poor, and in terms of pre-improvement agricultural technology, it is marginal. Some is distinctly rocky, as in the Lake District, the limestone uplands of the former Westmorland, or the lands between the Nith and the Rhinns where there are outcropping sandstones, shales and granite, and there is much moorland. As a generalization it is fair to say that the undulating lowlands are no more productive, being covered by a mantle of glacial drift with extensive fields of eskers sometimes interspersed with mosses. Within this unpromising landscape there are areas, according to the Soil Survey of England, especially in the Eden Valley and along the south coast of the Solway around Burgh-by-Sands, or further south near Penrith, containing light, well-drained soils of the Newport and Wick Associations, which are good enough for cereal agriculture, especially barley and spelt wheat, but not bread wheat. There is also a particularly favoured area in the Stranraer-Glenluce isthmus where a combination of climate and light, well-drained soils of the Yarrow and Cairnside Associations provide an oasis of pasture and arable (Bown & Heslop 1979).

A dominant feature of the area is the coastline, but our understanding of its configuration in late prehistoric and Early Historic times is limited, as much of the work undertaken to date has been focused on the earlier Holocene (Wells 1999). Of particular interest is the location of Hadrian's Wall and its
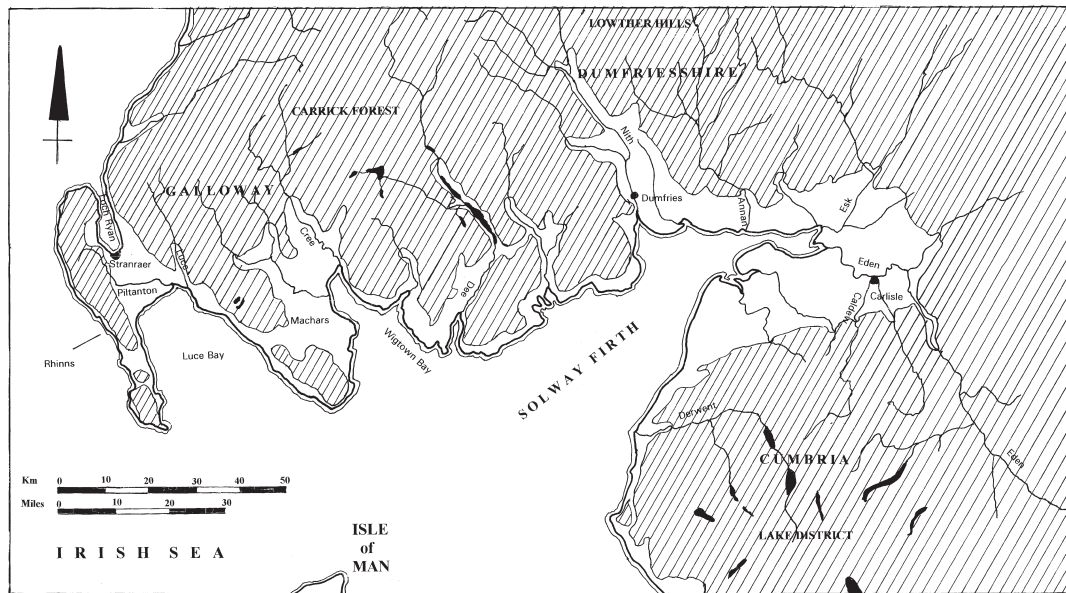
ILLUS 2   Map of the Solway region showing relief and drainage

western extension beyond Bowness-on-Solway. As the late Professor Barri Jones noted (1980), its presence on the raised beach near Cardurnock at least provides an approximate indication of where the coast lay in the second century AD, and the general view at present seems to be that for the outer Solway area it was not much different to that at the present day (Jones 1980). This is certainly not true, however, for the easternmost part of the inner Solway, where the coastline from Rockcliffe near Carlisle, north to Arthuret and the Sark has been substantially affected by aggradation, especially in the post-medieval period (Kilgour 1979). Neither is it likely to be true for the northern shore of the Solway, at least between the Annan and the Nith.

Despite the uncertainties over precisely where the coast lay in the late first millennium BC and early first millennium AD, one general point still holds: the coast east of the Nith estuary to Rockcliffe in Cumbria and including much of the southern shore of the Solway was very easy to access by boat. There are few cliffs and rocks, the waters are relatively sheltered, and beaching small river- or sea-going craft would not have posed much of a problem. West of the Nith, however, the coast is indented to a far greater degree and there are many rocky outcrops and cliffs overlooked by promontory forts, but there are also sheltered bays such as that at Auchencairn, or Brighouse Bay. On a clear day the Machars of Galloway, Maryport in Cumbria, and the Isle of Man are intervisible, and the Irish coast is a mere 32km away from Portpatrick.

Inhabiting this landscape in the period under consideration it is presumed that there were interlocking settlement and social patterns of farms, extended family groups and tribes, estates, small kingdoms, and greater polities, all managing key resources including arable lands, albeit in small areas, woods, moors, rough grazing, waste, estuary, and sea. The last in particular should not be underrated, because however much or little they may have been exploited for subsistence purposes, the Irish Sea and the Solway Firth were key means of communication, and the sea-lanes will have been extensively used if the written records are anything to go by. Bannerman, for example, notes that Adomnán
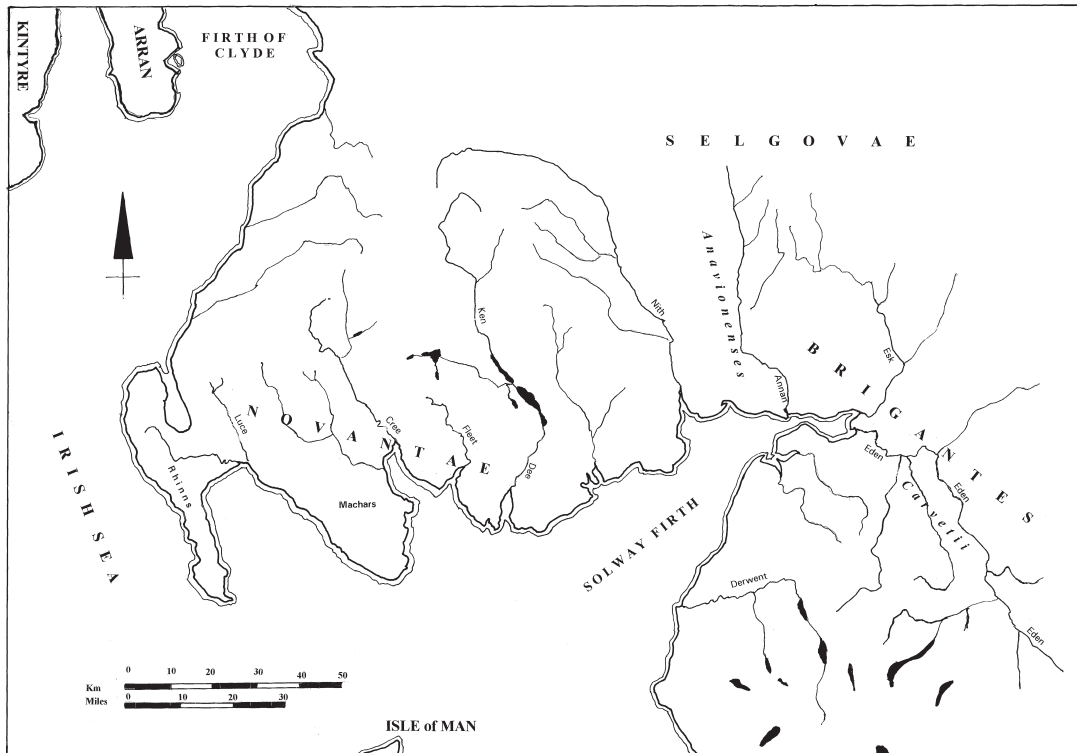
ILLUS 3   Map showing tribal areas (based on Strang 1997, and Ptolemy)

and the Iona Chronicle refer to, or imply, at least 90 separate sea voyages and naval expeditions, almost certainly involving both oar-propelled and sail-driven ships, in the sixth and seventh centuries, the period of Rheged's *floruit* (Bannerman 1974, 148–54). This is likely to be the tip of the iceberg, and we may suppose that the seaways were used for a variety of other purposes and at many levels of society. Major events taking place anywhere around the northern Irish Sea will have been known to, and watched with great interest by, everybody else.

Rheged makes its appearance in early Welsh literature, but its origins are unknown. If William's identification of Rheged as embracing the Solway is correct, it would have been relatively large for sixth- and early seventh-century Britain, a period during which there was a great multiplicity of kingdoms in England and Scotland (Kirby 2000). As was the case with many of the early kingdoms in Wales, the name probably reflects a territory rather than a people or folk, unlike in the late Iron Age and Roman periods where we know of names such as the Epidii or the Carvetii (the 'horse-folk' and the 'deer folk'), or in the seventh-century Tribal Hidage in England (Davies 1990, 16). As a 'territory' incorporating parts or all of the lands of a number of former Iron Age tribes, including the Novantae, Selgovae, Anavionenses, and Carvetii, not to mention the Brigantes, it is not familiar to us (illus 3), and we should resist the temptation to equate pre-Roman tribes with post-Roman entities. The simple fact is that we know too little about pre- and post-Roman politics in the north and the extent to which a new imperial system of administration may or may not have impinged upon it. We can say that Rheged appears as an apparently significant kingdom apparently emerging 'out of the

blue', but whether in the sixth century or slightly earlier is not certain. In Wales, some of the kingdoms of the seventh and eighth centuries had characteristics not wholly dissimilar to those of northern Britain, and these almost certainly originated much earlier, perhaps in the fifth century (Davies 1990, 34).

ARCHAEOLOGY

THE IRON AGE

It is difficult to draw firm distinctions between the archaeology of the late prehistoric and Early Historic periods in the Solway region because of a dearth of fieldwork, and hence cultural assemblages and chronologies. In some parts of the region it must have been a seamless transition, at least insofar as the ordinary farmers and householders were concerned. Elsewhere the impact of the arrival of the Romans, greater in Cumbria than to the north, has to be considered.

General outlines of the archaeology of the prehistoric period in Cumbria have recently been published (McCarthy 2000; 2002), but the most authoritative statement for the Scottish side of the Solway is the survey of Eastern Dumfriesshire and work in the Rhinns (RCAHMS 1987; 1997; Cowley 2000; Cowley & Brophy 2001). This shows that enclosed curvilinear and rectilinear settlements were the dominant architectural form in the first millennium BC in Dumfries & Galloway, but as excavations and artefactual assemblages are rare, dating is always a problem. This means that the main tool for analytical work is settlement morphology.

In Dumfries & Galloway one of the key settlement types of the first millennium BC is the hillfort, of which there are many examples (illus 4). Some, such as Castle O'er and The Moyle, near Dalbeattie, are substantial in size, and the former is associated with an extensive series of boundary earthworks, related perhaps to cattle ranching. The most impressive hillfort is undoubtedly the mighty 6ha Burnswark, which dominates Annandale (RCAHMS 1997, 129–30), but there are others (Coles 1893; Feachem 1966, 129) such as the stone-walled, hill-top settlements of Cairn Pat, the Tor of Craigoch, and Knock Fell dominating the Rhinns landscape. In some instances it is clear that the hillforts, as well as smaller defended sites, contained round-houses, some of which were relatively large, but the scale of investigations and quality of the internal earthworks is generally not sufficient to facilitate conclusions about the internal layout, function, or chronology. An exception is Castle O'er, where round-houses appear to be disposed on either side of an axial street, some overlying parts of the defences (RCAHMS 1997, fig 73). In this case domestic activity seems to be present, but without excavation the possibility of other functions, including ritual activities and use as corrals for cattle, cannot be ruled out. Where there is dating evidence there are indications of multi-phase activity, some being relatively early in the first millennium BC, but some certainly extending into the first millennium AD.

Smaller circular or sub-circular enclosed settlements, some merely represented by scoops in the ground, some by upstanding remains, are presumably the homes and farmsteads of people slightly lower down the social scale. In Nithsdale and as far west as the Machars and Rhinns, there are stone-walled enclosures containing one or two round-houses (Cowley 2000, 171–2) and extensive palimpsests of linear features and settlements, but to the east of the Nith the architectural tradition appears to be largely confined to timber, notwithstanding the availability of stone. Living areas were enclosed by ditches, but the defensive potential of the enclosure itself seems less than in the hillfort group just referred to, and some may have functioned as a means of constraining livestock, or as a means of deterring cattle rustling. Of course, there are exceptions. The settlement at Boonies was surrounded by a very large bank 2m in height and 7m wide at the base, but no evidence of a rampart palisade or strongly
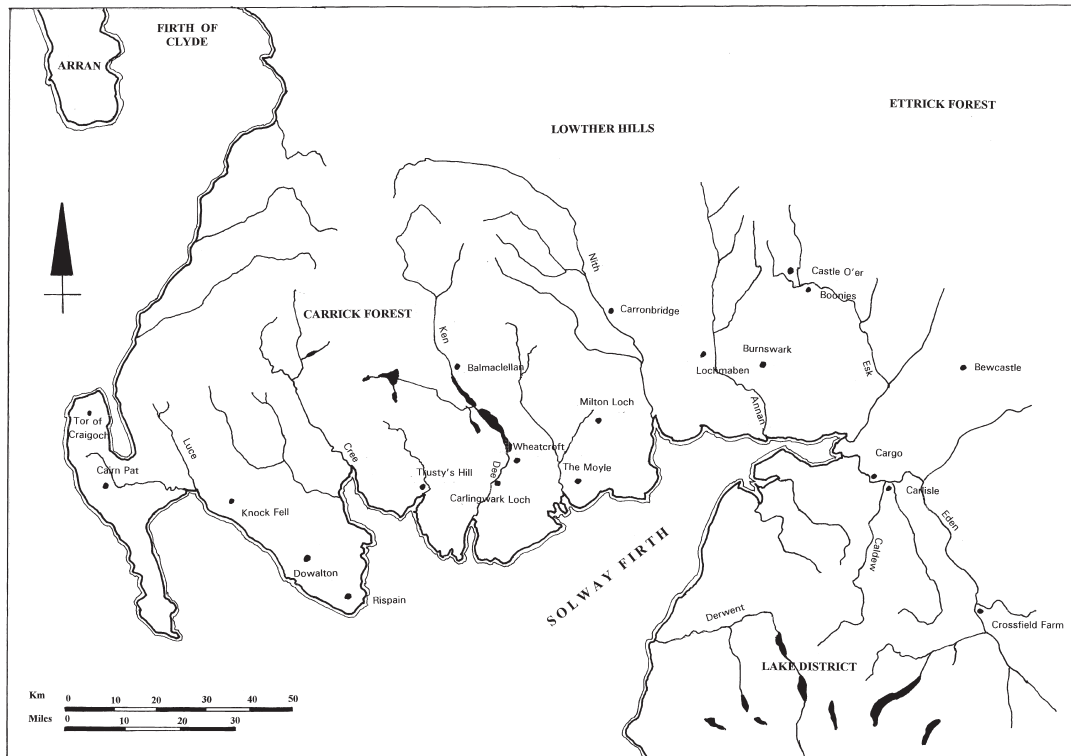
Illus 4   Map locating Iron Age and/or Roman places mentioned in the text

defended entrance was found (Jobey 1974). There is also a large number of rectilinear settlements, a few of which may be medieval in date, but the majority, such as Carronbridge in Nithsdale and Rispain near Whithorn, certainly belong to the late Iron Age or Roman periods.

Crannogs also featured as important centres, not least because their construction, like that of hillforts, would have been labour intensive and possibly only affordable by those with some means. Several are known, especially in the Stewartry and further west, while other important material of the Roman Iron Age thought to have a votive origin has been recovered from lochs, as at Carlingwark (Piggott 1953) and Dowalton (Hunter 1994).

South of the Solway hillforts are rare and crannogs non-existent, despite the fact that there is no lack of topographic potential for both. Two possible examples of forts occur in the lower Eden Valley. Near Cargo is a small multivallate site, overlooking a great bend in the river and a palimpsest of earlier sites, some of which may very well have had a 'ritual' function in the Neolithic. The other is the promontory site occupied by Carlisle Castle, where geophysical survey by the Museum of London Archaeology Service has revealed the presence of two concentric ditches that appear to be earlier than the Roman fort (Mackie et al 1997). There are no coastal promontory forts comparable with those on the northern shore.

On the other hand there are large numbers of circular or sub-circular enclosures on the North Cumberland Plain and in the Pennine uplands (Higham & Jones 1985; McCarthy 2002). Essentially the timber examples on the Plain seem to display many of the characteristics of the settlements on the northern side of the Solway, with internal

round-houses and yards enclosed by ditches and banks. Once again few have been tested by excavation, and the chronology therefore remains unclear, but where invasive work has taken place, as at the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle, or Crossfield Farm, Penrith, they seem to be Roman in date. In the Pennine areas are many examples of well-preserved stone-built enclosures with a cellular arrangement of houses and 'rooms', not entirely dissimilar to others known from the Western and Northern Isles, Wales, and the south-west. Elsewhere in Lakeland are other examples of stone-walled round-houses within stone enclosures, probably exploiting a variety of topographic and ecological niches.

The archaeological evidence for the Iron Age is scarcely adequate on either side of the Solway to permit any conclusions being drawn with regard to the nature or structure of society, but four points may be mentioned. First, as elsewhere in Britain and Europe, the defended sites clearly represented a considerable investment in labour and time, and whatever functions they fulfilled, they are sufficiently elaborate to allow the conclusion that they represent an element of society with coercive power. This means an elite or aristocracy, presumably with a chief, king, or headman. Equally, the apparent dearth of defended sites south of the Solway tells us that the structure of society here could have differed from that to the north. While this may in part be a function of the topography, it may also contain a warning that we should be wary of jumping to conclusions about social dynamics around the Solway based on the interpretation of texts, not all of which are demonstrably reliable.

Secondly, there are small concentrations of high-quality Roman Iron Age and late La Tène decorated metalwork from lands to the west of the River Nith. These include a Bronze Age cauldron, a fine Roman skillet and Early Historic to medieval bowls in Dowalton Loch, near Monrieth in the Machars (Hunter 1994).

Carlingwark Loch produced a major collection of Roman ironwork in a bronze cauldron very similar to the example from Bewcastle (Piggott 1953). Also in the general area immediately west of Dumfries has been found the remarkable Torrs pony cap, the Balmaclellan mirror, a decorated mount from the same place, and a massive terret from Wheatcroft near Castle Douglas. At Innermessan, near Cairnryan, items found include the mouthpiece of a trumpet. This was all expensive material and, as is widely acknowledged elsewhere in the Celtic world, such objects, especially cauldrons and La Tène decorated metalwork, were part of the symbols of rank displayed at chieftainly or aristocratic level. Concentrations such as this have not been found east of the Nith or in Cumbria, although there are many examples of earlier Bronze Age metalwork, including some gold.

Thirdly, the relationship between enclosed and unenclosed settlements, or between great hillforts and lesser defended sites is not understood. Wilson's assertion that a 'Late Iron Age dominated by such sites (hillforts) is highly questionable', and his further comment that the variety in the settlement types in Galloway is indicative of a politically fragmented society (2001, 76) are misconstrued. It seems to the present writer that a hierarchical pattern representing different levels of wealth and status in an interlocking network of settlement sites is perfectly plausible. The range of settlement types, brochs and crannogs, hillforts and duns, lowland enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads, cultivation remains, field boundaries and roads, is an indication of the variety of response required to exploit ecological niches in a landscape of generally limited agricultural potential.

Finally, the quality of the soils, and the productive capacity of the land as it might have been before the agricultural improvements, favours an economy generally biased towards livestock. Cereal agriculture was certainly practised, as aerial photographs of field systems, discoveries of ard-marks, and ards

themselves at Milton Loch and Lochmaben testify, as well as querns at Milton and Dowalton Lochs and Trusty's Hill, but the landscape was best suited for stock raising. Livestock was one of the key indicators of wealth in pre-agricultural improvement days, as well as in Ireland, parts of which are topographically very similar to the lands fringing the Solway coast (Lucas 1989, 12–15) although the range in settlement types is more limited.

THE ROMAN PERIOD

The Roman impact in north Britain was dramatic. It changed the settlement pattern by adding a network of roads and forts where none previously existed, and while some forts and camps had very short lives, many forts were occupied for prolonged periods, attracting non-military settlements (*vici*) outside the defences. The Roman impact on local vegetation and land-use strategies, and their use of local supplies, would certainly have been noticeable in the immediate vicinity of forts, notwithstanding the activities of traders (*negotiatores*) and the importation of such items as cereals, especially bread wheat, wine, olives, ceramics, glassware, metal objects, and other supplies from afar, as shown by excavations. But the consequences of the *adventus Romanorum* must have penetrated deep into the political and social fabric as well, especially south of the Solway. The Romans imposed a state system of control in which power along the northern frontier lay unmistakably with the military, a circumstance in which the native elite in each locality must surely have found their authority undermined and eroded by the incomers. The natural place for them to gravitate towards was the *vicus,* where they may have had the opportunity to retain something of their former status through association with the military on a regular basis, as well as having ready access to imported food, drink, and other prestigious items.

Within the Solway region the Roman presence was most noticeable in Cumbria, but in Dumfries & Galloway it seems to have been rather less apparent. Some of the forts or camps, including such places as Glenluce, Dalswinton, and Kirkpatrick Fleming, were probably built for specific campaigns such as those of Agricola or Severus, but others may have played more substantial roles in policing the area. Unlike those in Cumbria, these forts do not seem to have attracted *vici*, there being no convincing evidence for settlement outside the defences, unless, of course, the enclosures defined as annexes have been misinterpreted. Otherwise the Roman presence is difficult to pin down in the settlement record, and it is often only the occasional discovery of diagnostic finds in 'native' farmsteads, objects such as glass bangles or pottery, that allows us to consider occupation in the first millennium AD at all. Hunter has recently asserted, however, that Roman finds from non-Roman sites in Scotland represent only the 'tip of the iceberg', which, if true, means that Roman material goods must have been in much more frequent use than the archaeological record seems to allow (Hunter 2001; Wilson 2001). Within Dumfries & Galloway Roman finds appear to be largely confined to the lands west of the Nith, where there is considerable variety in the form of ceramics, glassware, and metalwork (Wilson 2001). It would be unwise to draw conclusions from this, however, as there has been very little systematic fieldwork and the impact the Roman army made, or did not make, is not yet known.

South of the Solway, the local tribe, the Carvetii, was organized into a *civitas,* probably by the third century AD. The capital was almost certainly at Carlisle which, in its archaeology, provides a fascinating picture of growth and change in a frontier town from the late first to the fourth–fifth centuries AD (McCarthy 2002; forthcoming). By the third century it had acquired stone bath-houses, *mansiones*, temples and other public buildings, cobbled streets, many domestic houses, some with hypocausts, artistic specialisms, and a Council (*ordo*), of which one member, Flavius Martius,

was buried at Old Penrith (RIB 933). With a milliary unit, the *ala Petriana,* in residence from the 160s on at Stanwix on the northern bank of the Eden, the combined military population of Carlisle and Stanwix must have numbered around 1500, without the Carlisle townsfolk and the Stanwix *vicani*. With them the population was probably counted in several thousands, very large indeed by the standards of the day.

Inscriptions leave no doubt as to the presence of foreign-born people in Carlisle and in other forts and *vici*. They came from all over the Empire, and the ethnic mix of people, many doubtless wearing clothing from their places of origin, will have added considerable colour to the local communities, especially in the first hundred years or so of the occupation. The army of the Wall, however, was manned by auxiliary soldiers, who increasingly will have been recruited in the frontier region itself, a situation that will inevitably have led to sons following fathers in the army, and close relationships being formed between regiments and local communities (Breeze & Dobson 2000, 180ff, 210–12). Moreover, some commanding officers may also have been of local extraction. Some of these troops, now under the overall command of the *dux Britanniarum*, may have been withdrawn for service elsewhere, as under Stilicho or with Constantine III's expeditions to Gaul, but it is thought that many remained behind at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries. Indeed, it might have been difficult to prise these troops away for service elsewhere.

THE EMERGENCE OF A KINGDOM

What happened to these forts and their dependent communities at the end of Roman rule? There is no reliable archaeological information from those in south-western Scotland, but in England there is archaeological evidence from Carlisle (McCarthy 2002), and also Birdoswald (Wilmott 1997) that life did indeed continue. Late Roman coins and pottery can also be used to suggest that other forts on the line of the Wall and along the Cumbrian coast may have continued to function in some form or other after the pay chests stopped arriving in the late fourth century.

Of particular relevance is the fort and the town of Carlisle (*Luguvalium*), long thought to have been a focal point in the kingdom of Rheged. Excavations in 2000 and 2001 in the central range of the fort, that is to say a broadly similar zone to that excavated at Birdoswald, have provided evidence for the continued use of the headquarters building (*principia*), as well as buildings adjacent to the south side of the *via principalis,* after the end of the fourth century. Here, there appears to be a sequence of 'stratigraphic events', the earliest being associated with late Roman pottery and coinage, attesting activities taking place long after the 370s, the dates of the latest coins. The southern defences seem to have begun to decay, perhaps in the late fourth century on the evidence of silver coins *(siliquae)* of Valentinian I. Outside the fort excavations have also yielded evidence for occupation in the fourth century and later (McCarthy 1999; 2002; forthcoming).

At Birdoswald, one of the granaries near the west gate was demolished and replaced with a timber hall which went through several phases of use (Wilmott 1997). Given that large timber buildings could have a very long life, as is evident in medieval Britain, we ought not to be too coy about admitting that these buildings at Birdoswald could have remained in use well into the sixth century. Another very strong candidate for continuing occupation, although untested by excavation, is the Roman outpost fort of Netherby. This is very close to both the supposed site of the battle of Armterid (AD 573) which has been identified with the name Arthuret, near Longtown, and Carwinley, a Brittonic place-name (Skene 1886, 157; Chadwick 1963). At Stanwix, limited archaeological evidence clearly implies late activity (Burnham 2000, 392), and further evidence has been obtained from the commanding officers'

houses at South Shields and Vindolanda, and the bath-house at Binchester.

The conclusion one might legitimately draw is that important buildings in important locations (mostly, but not necessarily only, forts) continued to have a function at and beyond the point where the old-style Roman military command structure no longer had any real force. It may be significant that where evidence is being recognized for late activity in forts, it occurs in the central range, the command centre, and one wonders whether this might also allow us to infer that an element of lordship is beginning to appear in the archaeology. If so, we might ask the question, is the archaeology of these buildings at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries AD a witness to lordship? Is it, in fact, lordship in transition from a Roman command structure to one in which sub-Roman leaders emerge as local chiefs or kings, with military titles and authority derived from those of the late Roman army? If so, how did it work? Was the authority of these new lords supported by private armies or warbands, in which titles, insignia and ceremonial, so important in the Roman world, reflected those of the former garrison? Was their authority also derived from the prestige attached to the place, and indeed the very buildings in the centre of the forts, where their predecessors, the commanding officer and his senior colleagues, had exercised control? Did they establish *territoria* from within which they could be supplied and over which they exercised a quasi-leadership role, perhaps an area that had supplied the former fort and *vicus*? Such people were not yet kings or princes, but neither is it necessary to suppose that they continued to be members of a Roman army linked into a wide-ranging command structure.

One writer seeks to reconcile the various finds of sub-Roman and Anglo-Saxon objects from the Hadrian's Wall forts by postulating a co-ordinated re-fortification of the Wall after the withdrawal of the Roman army (Dark 1992, 115–16). This is based upon the numbers of apparently 'high-status' sites showing signs of re-use in the sub-Roman period, and the presence of 'British' objects. That such finds represent the residues of British communities staying put is regarded as 'hardly credible' and an 'inadequate' explanation (ibid, 116). Apart from the fact that the numbers of objects, 'halls' and stratigraphic sequences are pitifully thin on the ground, it seems to the present writer a rather weak argument. It is an interesting idea but it is quite simply not supported by the archaeology. Neither is there a shred of evidence to support the speculation that the refortified Wall divided enemies. By the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries the curtain Wall itself was an irrelevance, and we have absolutely no idea as to the relations that may have existed between groups on either side. The forts, however, were not an irrelevance, at least not initially. With their defensive capabilities they conferred a degree of prestige on those able to occupy them, but in time some also sank into political obscurity, Birdoswald, perhaps, being amongst them. Others, perhaps including Carlisle, occupying sites with greater strategic potential, continued to exercise important functions.

Another aspect of late Roman communities is the extent to which the church may have contributed to the shaping of the political landscape, or was influenced by it. Professor Charles Thomas has long postulated the existence of a Solway-wide diocese on the Roman model instigated, perhaps, by St Ninian (Thomas 1981). According to Thomas the diocese could have been based at Carlisle, extending as far west as Whithorn and the Rhinns, but for what it is worth, this makes little sense in terms of our limited understanding of the political divisions of the time.

Essentially, there seem to have been two main areas of fourth- and fifth-century Christian activity. One was based around Hadrian's Wall, and includes possible churches as well as epigraphy, amongst which we should include the Papias stone from Carlisle (RIB 955) and the Brigomaglos stone (RIB 1722) and the

'stone with an incised cross' from Vindolanda. The other is represented by the group of memorial stones and church dedications in the Rhinns and Machars of Galloway. In between these areas there is very little evidence of early Christianity, at least in the fourth to fifth centuries, and all the indications point to missionary activity on a smaller scale than many other parts of western Britain, especially Wales. It is possible that there were links between the communities in the two areas. After all Maryport, which has produced a now lost *chi rho* (RIB 856), is visible from the Machars coast; they are two or three hours' boat journey apart. It is equally possible, however, that the church in western Galloway sprang from quite different, possibly Irish, sources from that in the Wall zone, where the evidence is closely related to Roman military sites. Indeed, the churches of the Wall and Galloway may not even be contemporary, so vague is the dating.

Firm evidence of later, but pre-664, Christianity is mostly confined to the reigns of Oswald and Oswiu, as noted by Bede (HE III, 3). Hill's work at Whithorn (Hill 1997) and that of Lowe at Hoddom (1991; pers comm) are pre-eminent here, and in both cases the evidence falls within the floruit of the kingdom of Rheged. Both sites have produced structural activity attributed to the late sixth century, and Whithorn has also yielded an impressive array of artefactual and other material. At Hoddom the Life of St Kentigern tells us that the saint 'built churches in Hoddom and ordained elders and clergy' (Anderson 1922, 134–5). In both cases regal connections with the ecclesiastical institutions may be assumed. The Annals of Ulster and dedications show that there were other places in western Galloway, including the Kirkmaidens and Kirkmadrines, with early associations (Anderson 1922). Close to the church of St Medan, Kirkmaiden in the Machars, is Monrieth, an important site for the medieval lords of Galloway, and which, through an examination of the place name and estates, is another potential candidate for royal or aristocratic activity in the period of Rheged (Brooke 1998; pers comm). Close to Monreith are Longcastle and Dowalton Loch, where the deposition of earlier votive objects hints at an important site very close by.

South of the Solway, evidence for post-fifth-century pre-Northumbrian Christianity is hard to find, although that is also true of secular sites. Carlisle is notable mainly for evidence relating to St Cuthbert and later periods (McCarthy 1999), but one underrated site is that of Papcastle on the northern bank of the Derwent, only 5.5 miles (9km) by Roman road from the coast at Maryport. An important Roman site, close to a probable Anglian minster at Brigham and the medieval town of Cockermouth, Papcastle's name is derived from Pabo, the name of a late sixth-century king in the Harleian genealogies; the name of this king, with his family, has strongly Latinate and ecclesiastical overtones (Miller 1975b, 105–10; McCarthy 2002).

In addition to discoveries in forts, a few other sub- and post-Roman objects have been found in Cumbria. They include a single fragment of Anglo-Saxon pottery from Carlisle, as well as a glass vessel of probable sixth-century date. A fifth-century penannular bronze brooch has been found at Mealsgate, and a seventh-century gilt bronze mount from Crosthwaite is comparable to metalwork moulds at Mote of Mark, as well as a handful of other later Anglo-Saxon objects (O'Sullivan 1993). Excavations at Fremington, near Brougham, and at Shap have also yielded Anglo-Saxon buildings. At the former site a number of *Grubenhäuser* and post-built 'halls' were excavated in association with 'Middle-Saxon' loom-weights, pottery, and other items (Oliver et al 1996, 127–69). At Shap, a post-built hall also associated with 'bun-shaped' loomweights has been excavated. Both sites are attributed to the seventh or eighth centuries. There have also been investigations at the church of St Michael, Workington, at Carlisle Cathedral, and the monastic site at Dacre

(Youngs et al 1983, 171–2; 1985, 167; 1986, 127). Once again no sixth-century activity has been identified, but Anglian material of the late seventh to ninth centuries is known at all three sites.

W G Collingwood conducted excavations at Ewe Close, regarded as a potential royal site in the Lyvennet Valley, but he failed to find anything other than a small collection of Roman and prehistoric material (Collingwood 1908). The basis for him regarding this as a site of Urien is that part of the enclosure wall overlies a Roman road, while the exceptional size of the roundhouse (50 feet; 15.25m) testifies to a royal presence. Suffice it to say that such points can be dismissed, neither being an argument for identifying Ewe Close with Urien or anybody else in the genealogies. Even so, if the equation of Lyvennet with the Llwyfenydd of the poems is accurate, as Williams believed (1987, xlv), there clearly was something of interest on the limestone uplands on the northern fringes of the Lake District in the sixth century.

North of the Solway, at Castle O'er, detailed survey combined with limited excavation has revealed multiple phases of activity, and radiocarbon dates imply an existence continuing perhaps as late as the fifth or sixth centuries, possibly the date of buildings apparently constructed on top of parts of the ramparts (RCAHMS 1997, 79–82, 167). A similar sequence may also be discerned at Bailiehill, a short distance to the south (ibid). The impressive hillfort at Tynron Doon, north-west of Dumfries, with commanding views over the Nith valley, has produced an Anglo-Saxon gold bracteate, as well as ironwork amongst which is a knife that resembles typical angle-backed Anglo-Saxon knives, thistle-headed pins, blue ribbed beads and other less diagnostic objects. Traces of burning (vitrifaction) were also observed, as well as the remains of smithing activities (RCAHMS 1920; Williams 1971). By contrast, the tiny defended hilltop at Mote of Mark, overlooking the estuary of the Urr Water, has produced quantities of Germanic glass, Gaulish pottery, and industrial metalworking detritus, mostly of sixth- and seventh-century date; Alcock has suggested that instead of this being a princely stronghold, it may be the residence of a jeweller (Alcock 1983). Another possible candidate for activity, at least on topographic grounds, is the hillfort of Ward Law, dominating both the Nith estuary at Caerlaverock, and in prehistoric times the Lochar Water. Professor Chadwick long ago drew attention to the name 'Caerlaverock', the castle whose name means 'the lark's nest', which is at the foot of Ward Law (Chadwick 1963a, 99–100), but other scholars have noted that in Old Welsh it translates as 'Llywarch', one of the names of the Coeling dynasty of Urien (Watson 1926, 367–8). At all events its strategic potential is considerable, and he who held Ward Law also controlled access inland by way of the River Nith. The potential of the various promontory forts west of Kirkcudbright, particularly the Isle of Whithorn, a site that resembles other Early Historic citadels and which has a double beaching place, is not yet clear.

WRITTEN SOURCES

URIEN

The written sources for the period include early Welsh poems, Bede, annals and genealogies (Williams 1951; 1987; Jackson 1963; 1969; Bartrum 1966; Miller 1975a; 1975b; Dumville 1977; 1989; Morris 1980; Koch 1997; 2000; Clancy 1998), but few exist in anything like their original form, having been repeatedly recited, copied, and modified to suit a particular patron or circumstance, and there is no body of Rhegedian literature. Practically all the sources survive in medieval and later manuscripts, but there are eight 'historical poems' ascribed to Taliesin in the 13th-century Book of Taliesin dealing with Urien and Owain. It seems likely that in their present form they were written in south Wales in the

late 13th century, possibly copied from considerably older texts (Williams 1944, 49–76; 1987, xivff; xxxvi). How they were transmitted through the bards over many centuries is unclear, and different scholars place the emphases differently (Lewis 1969; Caerwyn Williams 1994). An important point, however, is that the Urien of the poems is not necessarily the same as the sixth-century Urien. The poems are probably a reflection of the desires of post-Taliesinic bards to mould the character of Urien to suit the image they wished to portray of their own royal patrons.

If this casts some doubt on the reliability of the poems as evidence for the sixth century, it is nevertheless still worth stating, briefly, what the picture of Urien is. Many of the texts are praise poems focusing on the exploits and exceptional qualities of great kings, of whom Urien Rheged and his son, Owain, are amongst the most celebrated. Urien was one of the most famed British commanders of his day, and if we believe the panegyrics he was regarded almost as highly as King Arthur, with whose stories he became entwined in medieval literature. But Urien was much more than just a king. He was a king of kings, the *arbennic* (chief or leader) according to Taliesin (Williams 1987, BT 57, 7 and n); 'he restrains chieftains' (Williams 1987, BT 56, 4 and n); and 'kings of every tribe, all to you [Urien] are bound' (Williams 1987, BT 65; Clancy 1998, 89). Finally, according to the Northern History (Morris 1980, ch 63), but not other sources, his end came probably between the 570s and 590s, while blockading the enemy at Lindisfarne (*Metcaud*), where he was assassinated in the middle of a campaign he appears to have been winning against the Bernician Angles. He was murdered 'on the instigation of his cousin Morgan from jealousy', because 'his military skill and generalship surpassed that of all the other kings'. His passing was greatly lamented, and on his death he was described as a 'soaring eagle', 'shield of his country', and 'Rheged's defender' (BT 57). Urien was the 'pillar of Britain', but despite his elevated position he was also generous, a protector, and a 'gay and ribald ruler'. All this is standard bardic panegyric and is language reflecting the qualities expected of the leader of leaders, and used for over half a millennium after the sixth century.

Urien's family is also celebrated. His sons were Owain and Rhun, a cleric, who participated in the baptism of Edwin of Northumbria in York (Morris 1980, ch 63; 46) according to Nennius and the Welsh Annals. Owain took part in the battle against Flamebearer (*Flamdwyn*), a description assumed to represent an Anglo-Saxon king, perhaps the king of the Bernicians, who had mustered four armies in an attempt to see the Britons off (Williams 1987, BT 60). They lost to Urien, and Owain is credited with killing Flamebearer (Williams 1944, 63–4; 1987 BT 60, and n).

Amongst his grandchildren are, allegedly, St Kentigern and Royth. Nennius tells us that a princess, Rienmelth, daughter of Royth, was married to Oswiu, King of Bernicia (643–71), in the late 620s (Morris 1980, ch 57; Stancliffe 1995, 57) and they had a son, Ahlfrith, who ruled Deira as a sub-king until his death in about 664. The consequence of this marriage was of great importance. Firstly, it probably resulted in the unification of the royal houses of Bernicia and Rheged if the latter had not already been conquered (Stancliffe 1995, 57), and later when Oswiu re-married after Rienmelth's death, it helped in the unification of Bernicia with Deira, thereby creating a single dynasty with a legitimate claim to rule lands extending from the Humber to Northumberland and across to Cumbria and Dumfries & Galloway.

RHEGED

Even supposing that the qualities and achievements of Urien and his family were over-inflated in the literature, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Rheged and its leaders were considered to be important. But where was Rheged (illus 5)? It was not in the
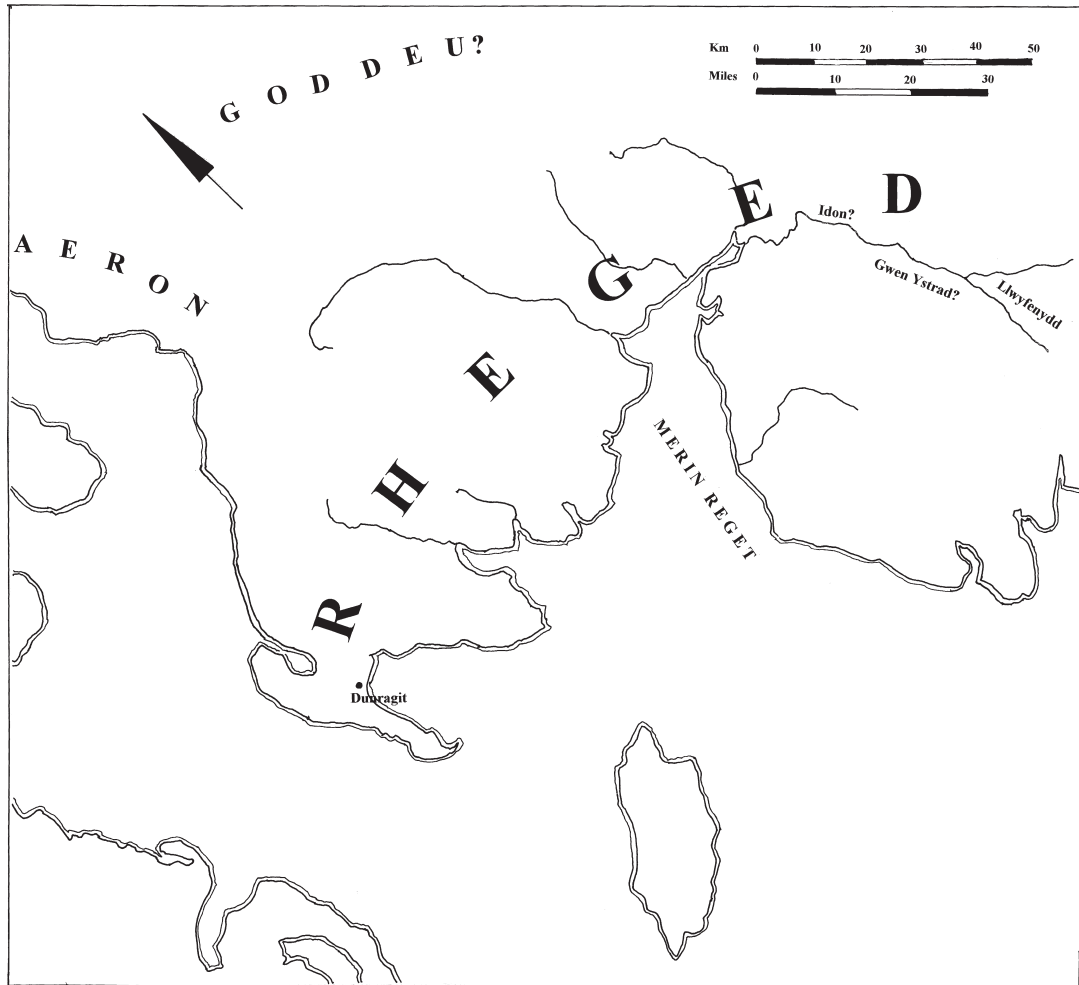
ILLUS 5   Map locating names tentatively identified as being in Rheged by Sir Ifor Williams (1987)

Clyde-Forth isthmus or the lands to the north, for these were the territories of the Damnonii (Strathclyde) and Picts. Neither was it to the west (roughly Argyll), the home of the Dál Riata. The territory of the Votadini (later the Gododdin) probably extended south from Lothian towards the Tyne, and in the west Ayrshire was the land of Aeron. These were all kingdoms and are attested as such in the texts, but apart from Dál Riata which was divided into three lineages (Cenéla), we know little about their structure. That leaves the vast area of Dumfries, Galloway, and the Scottish Borders (formerly the territories of the Selgovae and Novantae). It also leaves the present-day county of Cumbria, an area that 12th-century Welsh tradition regarded as being the land of Rheged (Morris Jones 1918, 55–68; Williams 1987, xxxix). Wisely, Morris Jones would not be drawn on the question of precisely where he thought Rheged lay, saying that 'the exact position of his (Urien's) kingdom has not been ascertained with certainty' (Morris Jones 1918, 64). Koch, however, saw no difficulty in reconciling Rheged with the old territory of the Brigantes (1983, 301), but his argument lacks cogency, being based upon rather general analogies with other tribes/

kingdoms, some of which we know almost nothing about, let alone how they might have been structured.

Rheged probably had access to the sea, implied by the phrase 'tra merin Rheged'. Drawing on the work of earlier scholars, Williams affirmed that this meant the Solway Firth, but the evidence is, at best, inconclusive. 'Merin' means 'sea', and assuming that the word is not a literary device, it tells us little more than that Rheged had a coastline. The question is, which one? There is no internal evidence in the texts to suggest that it has to mean the Solway Firth rather than, say, the Irish Sea, or even a large bay such as More-cambe Bay in Cumbria, Wigtown Bay, or Loch Ryan. Luce Bay is especially large, being over 12 miles (c 19km) wide in places. But even if 'merin' does refer to the Solway, it certainly does not follow, as Williams implied, that both the northern and southern shores lie within the kingdom. That being the case, there is no necessity to view Carlisle as a part of Rheged; indeed it is irrelevant to the argument, notwith-standing Morris Jones's point that the Caer Liwelwydd in Book 69 of Taliesin, an elegy and distinct from the Urien poems, is unques-tionably Carlisle (Morris Jones 1918, 58–9; Williams 1987, xx). Similarly, we should not read too much Cumbrian topographic detail into names that occur in the texts, such as Erechwyd (Gwen Ystrad) (BT56, Williams 1987, 31, n7), although in this case Williams associates it with the name 'Idon', suggesting that it was the Eden Valley (1987, xlix). The search for topographic parallels with rather generalized nouns and adjectives, tempting though it may be, is fruitless simply because most are non-specific, and could apply to many places.

In considering the size and geography of Rheged, it is worth recalling aspects of the topography. In south-west Scotland the land-scape is naturally divided by a series of more or less N/S-oriented river valleys, with uplands in between. Some of these formed political boundaries in the past, as is the case with the River Cree which divided the sheriffdoms of Wigtown and Dumfries in the 13th century (Gaelic *Crích* = Cree = boundary: Watson 1925, 123–4; 1926, 182; Brooke 1994, 100; Oram 2000, 56–7), or even the Skyreburn (*scir burna* = shire boundary: Brooke 1991, 317). Major power bases were located in the valleys from the 12th century on, as was the case in Annandale or the lower Dee. Political or administrative divisions which also have a topographic basis may well have existed in earlier times. Although it is currently impos-sible to verify with any certainty, Oram (2000) has nevertheless noted the possible extent of political fragmentation in Galloway west of the Nith in the period from Norse colonization in the ninth century to the rise of Fergus in the 12th century.

If Williams's equation Rheged = Cumbria + Dumfriesshire and Galloway is a 'red herring', it is worth recalling another well-known part of his argument. The place-name Dunragit, west of the Cree, means 'the fort of Rheged', as Watson said (1926, 156; MacQueen 2002, 92). However, Williams and other scholars have concluded that if this attribution is correct, the rest of Galloway and Dumfriesshire were also necessarily in Rheged. This is certainly an unwarranted assumption, but the name Dunragit remains of interest. Today it is a small village located about 5km west of Glenluce, separated from the Luce Sands and Torrs Warren by the Piltanton Burn. With the impressive Neolithic–Bronze Age ritual complex on the southern side of the village (Cowley & Brophy 2001), it is an area of intensive prehistoric settlement attested by numerous ring ditches, enclosures, linear crop-marks including trackways, and other sites, many of which are probably pre-Roman- or Roman-Iron Age in date (RCAHMS 1987). North of the village, in the grounds of Dunra-git House, is a natural knoll known as Round Dounan, surrounded by slight traces of an outer rampart. It was firmly identified by Radford and Reid as the dun of the place-name, and they compared it with Trusty's Hill
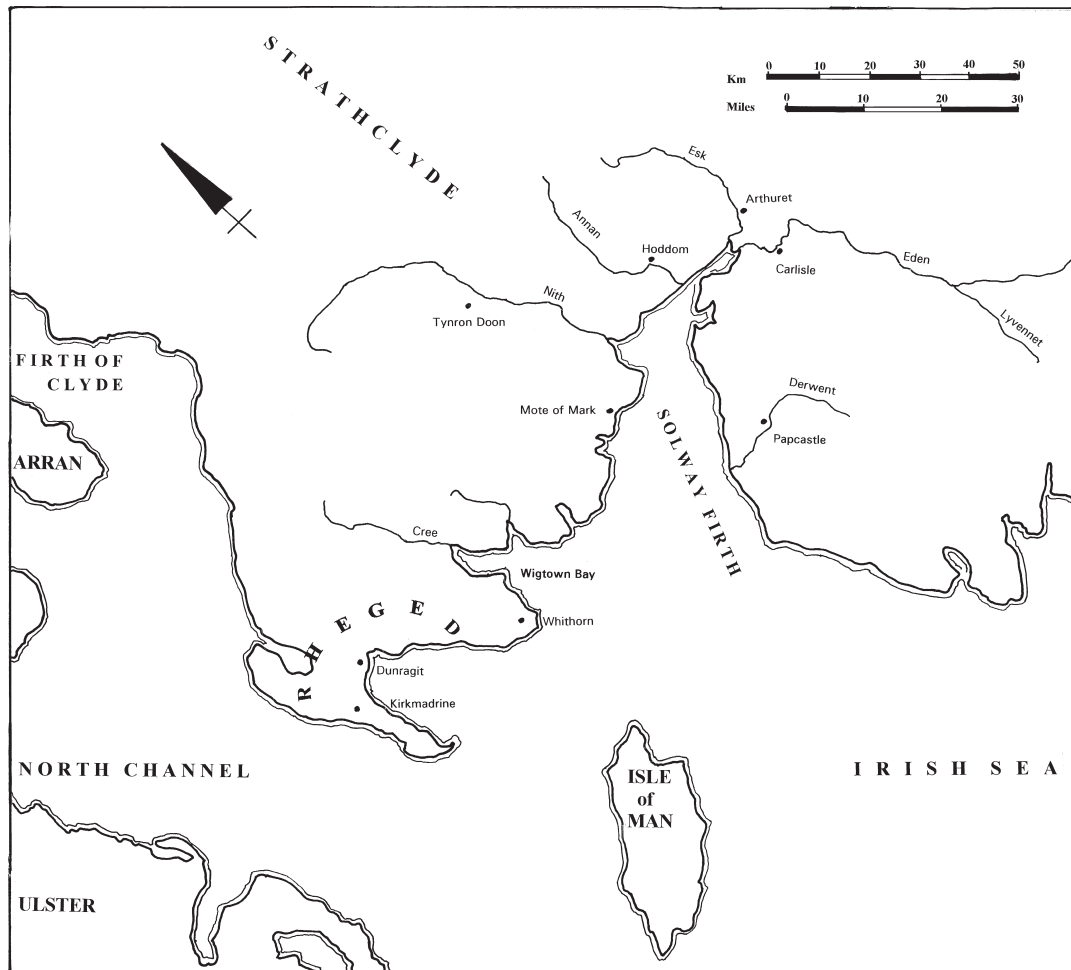
ILLUS 6   Map locating places mentioned in the text in the late sixth and early seventh centuries including a suggested re-
location of the core kingdom of Rheged

(Reid 1951, 151). The village is also bisected by the Roman road, the course of which is fossilized in the present A75 trunk road. Some 500–600m to the west is Drumflower, where linear and pit-like crop-marks seem to have a relationship with the road, perhaps as a road-side settlement. The terminal point of the Roman road has not yet been identified.

Dunragit is situated at precisely the point where control of communications to Newton Stewart and lands to the east, and to Loch Ryan in the west, can be effected most economically. It also overlooks the small estuary of

the Piltanton Burn, a river lined with settlements along its length as far as its source west of Stranraer. Its strategic potential in this corner of Scotland is, therefore, considerable, but any thoughts of it as a power base in the 12th century are difficult to sustain in the light of recent work on the supposed motte by Professor Julian Thomas (pers comm).

If the name Dunragit is taken at face value and Williams's definition of 'merin' disregarded, it now becomes possible to suggest that far from encompassing Dumfries, Galloway, and much of modern Cumbria,

Rheged could have been much smaller, perhaps confined to the Rhinns, and possibly the Machars as well (illus 6). Its eastern extent is uncertain, but clearly the River Cree, overlooked at Gatehouse of Fleet by the important Iron Age and post-Roman hillfort at Trusty's Hill with its remarkable Class I Pictish symbol stone, would be a candidate. There is nothing to prevent us supposing that Rheged may not have expanded through warfare and conquest, but in the first instance a relatively small kingdom based around the Rhinns and the Stranraer isthmus is suggested. In this scenario, Rheged could have been just one, albeit the best known, of a number of kingdoms in south-west Scotland and Cumbria.

Whatever the truth may be with regard to the status of Dunragit, another site, *Rerigonium*, must also be mentioned. *Rerigonium* is a name that occurs in Ptolemy's Geography and, although it has never been satisfactorily located, in the past there has been a consensus that it lay close to Loch Ryan, perhaps in the vicinity of Innermessan (McCarthy, forthcoming). Post-Roman sources refer to *Penrionyd* which is generally agreed to be the same place as *Rerigonium*, and to have been one of the three national thrones of Britain (Watson 1926). *Rerigonium,* the name of which means 'very royal place', appears to have been a major focus of interest in the first century AD, and was also of great interest in the sixth and later centuries. Moreover, another potentially royal site may have existed at or near Portpatrick, as its original name was Portree, derived from *port rìgh*, meaning 'king's port'.

KINGSHIP

A number of scholars have drawn attention to the nature of the impact the Romans had in the formation of early northern kingdoms, and the possibility of continuing traditions (Dumville 1989; Foster 1998). The most economical hypothesis with regard to the origins of Rheged is that it too lies rooted in earlier societies. In the archaeological record, the emergence of strong local identities can be discerned in Iron Age defended hilltops and high-quality metalwork. Although communities or tribes were doubtless led by powerful chiefs or kings, the arrival of the Romans dislocated political and social linkages and land-use patterns south of the Solway where the energies of local elites were probably channelled through the *vici* which provided opportunities for daily contact with the military and access to exotic goods. Over time the regiments of the Roman army were recruited locally, thereby consolidating links with the native community. When the army was withdrawn, although the Wall as a frontier no longer had a useful role to perform, a number of forts seem to have remained in use, as has been described above, and central-range buildings continued to be occupied, perhaps by senior soldiers or their descendants establishing authority over restricted areas.

This process, much of which is inevitably speculative, led to the creation of a patchwork of minor polities doubtless engaged in raiding and feuding, as was commonplace in Ireland. Whether or not any residual elements of the political divisions that existed under Roman rule, or in the pre-Roman period, survived is uncertain, but in the absence of evidence for migrations and convincing linguistic indicators, we could conclude that the people of the late first millennium BC and early first millennium AD were essentially the same. Their main economic base was probably mixed farming in which the emphasis, dictated by topography and soil quality, was on livestock rather than arable, but with the latter perhaps predominating, in the Stranraer isthmus.

One of the characteristics of tribal societies or chiefdoms is that they can and do coalesce or fragment into smaller factions within short timescales, depending upon prevailing circumstances. In the early stages the politics will certainly have been fluid, perhaps dominated by a great many small chiefdoms, otherwise definable as groups, tribes or kinship groups (Earle 1997, 14). By the late sixth century, the

genealogies present us with the lineages of a number of contemporary royal houses ruled by kings in what is now northern England and southern Scotland. Although it would be unsafe to think that all the names in the genealogies were of equal status, and in any case the models that we have from Ireland should warn us against that, it is, however, difficult to rank the names in order of seniority with any confidence. Amongst them are kings of Strathclyde, presumably the former Damnonii, and of the Gododdin and Rheged. The genealogies of the protagonists at Arthuret, people such as Pabo, Gwenddolau, and Ellifer of the Great Warband, may indicate a palimpsest of entities governed by kings, perhaps of different rank, in present-day Cumbria. If Arthuret is indeed the Armterid of the Annals, it is conceivable that the ill-fated Gwenddolau's stronghold was centred on Liddell Strength and/or the Roman fort at Netherby. Within this collection of names there may be at least two tiers of kingship. At one level were the kings of warbands or tribes, amongst whom, it may be surmised, could have been Pabo or Gwenddolau, while at a more elevated level were senior kings or overkings, perhaps including Urien or Rhiderch, able to call on the support of a number of lesser kings and their warbands.

The best evidence for the period is Irish, but the sources also have a particular relevance to the Scottish Dál Riata and may be considered in the wider context of the northern Irish Sea zone, given the ease of sea communications. Amongst these are law tracts, notably the eighth-century *Crith Gablach* which records the proceedings of a convention at *Druim Cett* in 575, and the *Senchus fer nAlban* from which a number of useful points emerge appropriate to a comment on Rheged and kingship.

First, kings, including Urien, could operate only with the support of warbands and members of their tribes in general. As non-producing members of society, kings and their retainers had to be supported, and in an appropriate manner. This was probably achieved by progressing from centre to centre, consuming the tribute paid by the surrounding populace as they went (Nieke & Duncan 1988, 11–12). The Rhinns, with its fertile soils, good grazing, and long growing season, would certainly offer a richer base for supporting an ambitious royal family than many other parts of south-west Scotland.

The organization of society and the roles of kings were complex, and were bound up with contracts and understandings between different levels of society, of which there were many (in Ireland: Byrne 1973, 42ff). While the bureaucracy of the kingdoms was primitive, at least by comparison with the Roman state system, procedures were not totally lacking. For example, as kings of whatever status will always have been concerned about their ability to put men in the field for military and naval service (Bannerman 1974), there may well have been the means for calculating the number of levies, based, as in Ireland, on the numbers of households per tribal group. There may also have been courts or meetings of the tribes or *tuatha,* for the settling of disputes.

The size of warbands or armies could be variable. The late seventh-century Laws of Ine of Wessex describe any gathering between seven and 35 in number as a 'band', and over 35 an army (Whitelock 1955, 366). In Ireland and the north the numbers could be greater. In Ireland where cattle-raiding was endemic, indeed it was a duty of kings, the size of raiding parties could number in the hundreds (Lucas 1989, 25ff), and calculations based on the *Senchus fer nAlban* suggest that 'hostings' may have numbered around 700 for each *tuath* (Bannerman 1974, 146–8). The army of Mynyddog that attacked Catraeth is described in The Gododdin as numbering 300 (or 363) (Jackson 1969, 4, 13–18), but Jackson argued that the number could refer to hand-picked, properly equipped warriors rather than the total complement including the supporting retinues (ibid).

Second, loyalties of the kin to a particular king could be volatile, and more particularly the loyalties of 'over-kings' were changeable. It is quite clear that at the level of kings, prominent members of *tuatha* (tribal groups or kindred) and leading ecclesiastics such as Columba, life could be highly political. Indeed, the current political situation will have been common knowledge amongst the main north British and Irish personalities. The very fact that a convention of kings could be called at *Druim Cett* in 575, albeit the only one of its kind known, is ample testimony to the politics of the time, as is the case of a son of one of the Irish high kings fighting alongside Áedán against the Bernician Aethelfrith at Degsastan in 603 (Byrne 1973, 111). The probability that many of the personnel at Catraeth were drawn from royal houses as far away as Gwynedd, north Wales, is further testimony to the complex politics and webs of relationships of the period. Loyalty to a particular king or chief also implies some sort of group identity, and this may be manifest in some parts of the country during the pre- and post-Roman Iron Ages by the hillforts and lesser defended sites.

Third, in Irish sources great emphasis is placed on kin groups for the administration of justice and a range of matters as diverse as farming and the provision of successors to the abbacy of monastic houses (Etchingham 1999). The organization of land-use, such as the division between common land and individually-held land, and details of how land resources might be exploited during the agricultural cycle, was relatively sophisticated, containing elements that persisted for long periods of time. We should not be surprised if, like the Irish (Byrne 1973), the people of Rheged also owed much to their prehistoric past, given the conservative nature of farming and natural constraints of the landscape.

Fourth, the canon laws show that by the later sixth century the church in Ireland was very well organized, and although the process of conversion and the transformation from a diocesan to a monastic organization still had a long way to go, by the late seventh century many of the new arrangements were in place (Etchingham 1999). This was not due solely to the efforts of ecclesiastics, and it was often the case that the active cooperation of the kings was an essential prerequisite for success. In Rheged the promulgation of the gospel was probably due in no small measure to members of the Coeling dynasty, including the family of Urien, which produced at least five saints (Miller 1975b)!

Lavish ornamentation and dress were characteristic of high society at the time (Campbell 2000, 88). As in earlier Celtic societies kings were fond of conspicuous display, wearing metalwork such as brooches in a manner similar to the insignia used by modern servicemen. Indeed, several verses in the Gododdin speak of 'wearing a brooch in the front rank' as the enemy was charged. Metalwork was used as an indicator of rank, and faced with an individual wearing gold and elaborate jewellery, nobody could have failed to appreciate that they were in the presence of a powerful individual. The Gododdin poem also provides a glimpse into the lifestyle of the elite. Their ferocity in war is described by reference to wolves, lions, wild boars, and ravens, and their weapons were stained swords and bristling spears. They wore golden torcs and brooches, drank from golden vessels and lived in halls and palaces. At war they 'made carrion for birds', boasted of being utterly fearless, preferring to 'be flesh for wolves [rather] than go to a wedding', or to be 'prey for a raven [rather] than go to the altar'.

It is unfortunate that the region has seen so little excavation, because the chronology and the cultural background of the monuments attested through aerial photography, as well as those still upstanding, cannot be determined. The exceptions are Hill's work at Whithorn and Lowe's at Hoddom, but these sites may be atypical within a Rhegedian context. However, excavations at a number of elite sites, including Dunadd in Argyll and the Mote of Mark near Dalbeattie, have confirmed

that the possession of objects in gold and silver, as well as the importation of wine and use of foreign 'table wares', is a feature of the aristocracy in the seventh and eighth centuries. At the Mote of Mark near the estuary of the Urr in Kirkcudbrightshire, discoveries of metalworking moulds, glassware, imported pottery and other items points to the site as a jeweller's citadel, giving emphasis to the great prestige accorded to craftsmen (Alcock 1983).

These features are amongst the characteristics of what social anthropologists call a 'prestige goods economy', or a chieftain-based society where control of economic resources resides with the king. In such societies it is often the case that everything is channelled through the king and his warrior elite. It is they who might control trade and who control alliances and allegiances through their ability to dispense gifts. Taliesin, in a lament on the death of Owain, son of Urien, describes him thus: 'though he gathered wealth like a miser, he gave it away for his soul's sake' (Williams 1987, BT 67). Such gifts might arrive as a result of battle or through rather primitive 'ports of entry', a phrase meaning the place at which goods arrived. While this phrase could refer to places on the coast, it should be really interpreted to mean wherever the king happened to be.

CONCLUSION

Wherever Rheged was located, its place in history is brief. It appears in the later sixth century, but within a hundred years or so it had lost its political power to the Northumbrians. Its legacy lies partly in the fame of the Men of the North, whose lineages and exploits provided models for kings in Wales, and who eventually came to have such a profound influence in medieval romantic literature. In archaeological terms the legacy is represented by earthworks and cropmarks, but so far very little else, and it has virtually no significant profile except in terms of the leisure business such as that close to Junction 40 on the M6 motorway.

Where was Rheged? The conventional view is that it embraced the lands of the Solway. This is possible, but to the present writer the evidence is unconvincing. There has been an over-reliance on the meaning of 'merin Reget' and a desperate search for topographic equivalences to vague Taliesinic nouns and adjectives. Moreover, other sources are silent as far as Rheged is concerned, including Gildas, Bede and the Life of St Kentigern. This last, for example, makes no reference to Urien but explicitly states that lands over which he was allegedly king were ruled by Rhiderch. Indeed, it was Rhiderch who conquered all the neighbouring 'barbarous races', and moreover 'he excelled all the kings that had reigned before him' (Anderson 1922, 134–5).

An alternative suggestion is that Rheged originated in the far west, including the Rhinns and possibly, but not necessarily, the Machars (illus 6). Today, the Rhinns is one of the sunniest places in Britain, with an extended growing season, and fertile, light free-draining soils, especially in the Stranraer isthmus (Smith 1813; Bown & Heslop 1979). If this was also the case in the Roman and post-Roman periods, we can suggest that this attractive region may well have been the base from which kings of Rheged extended their territory to the Nith, or even further to include lands to the south of the Solway, in a manner consistent with that of other kings in the sixth and seventh centuries. This could explain why there may be a Rhegedian royal seat at Dunragit, or perhaps *Rerigonium/Penrionyd*. It is as good a candidate as any, and more convincing than Carlisle. This scenario is untidy in that it creates a gap, at least for a time, in Cumbria and Carlisle. In order to fill the gap we must suppose that in the sixth century there were petty kingdoms or polities which are wholly unknown to history, but which could have been rooted in the transition from Roman military rule to in the late fourth and early fifth

centuries. The lack of any tribal or dynastic names is not in itself a problem, especially if we recall that entities such as the Carvetii or the Anavionenses are only known through the chance discovery of inscriptions.

If this assessment is anywhere near accurate, we can easily believe that Urien was indeed an 'over-king' possessing the ability and, with the Bernicians knocking on his door, the incentive to wage war far and wide. He ultimately lost, as did Rheged, which faded from view, but their defeat was less to do with Bernician supremacy than a product of British internecine feuding. By the time of St Cuthbert and the commissioning of the great crosses of Ruthwell and Bewcastle, Rheged was a memory, the anonymous descendants of its aristocracy perhaps destined to become absorbed into the Northumbrian nobility.

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