



**Andrew Breeze**

University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

## ***Legionum Urbs* and the British Martyrs Aaron and Julius**

Voprosy onomastiki, 2016, Volume 13, Issue 1, pp. 30–42

DOI: 10.15826/vopr\_onom.2016.13.1.002

Language of the article: English

---

**Andrew Breeze**

University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

## ***Legionum Urbs* and the British Martyrs Aaron and Julius**

Вопросы ономастики. 2016. Т. 13. № 1. С. 30–42

DOI: 10.15826/vopr\_onom.2016.13.1.002

Язык статьи: английский

## ***LEGIONUM URBS* AND THE BRITISH MARTYRS AARON AND JULIUS**

The article focuses on the localization of the martyrdom of the British saints Aaron and Julius, known of solely from Gildas, writing in the early 530s. His remarks were taken up by Bede (d. 737), so that the two saints have never been forgotten, their cult surviving to this day. The author provides a detailed survey of discussion of Aaron and Julius over the centuries, and argues that their martyrdom was neither at Caerleon (in south-east Wales) nor Chester (in north-west England), as suggested by numerous scholars, but at Leicester, another major city of Roman Britain. Working from epigraphic sources and taking into account ancient models of naming, the author attempts a reinterpretation of *Legionum urbs* in the original texts by emending it to *Legorum urbs* “city of the *Legores*,” the Celtic people of the Leicester region. The latter, by the time of Gildas, was occupied by the Angles, while the city itself was abandoned, which may explain Gildas’s remarks, otherwise unclear if one identifies *Legionum urbs* with Caerleon or Chester. The author adduces both historical and linguistic arguments for his proposal and shows that it sheds new light on the history of early British Christianity.

**Key words:** Latin language, Aaron, Julius, Christian saints, early British Christianity, Roman Britain, Gildas, Bede, Caerleon, Chester, Leicester, place-names, toponymy, textual criticism.

### **1. Aaron and Julius in Medieval and Modern Writers**

The lack of a proper Latin life notwithstanding, Aaron and Julius gained attention thanks to Gildas and Bede, and then Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gerald of Wales in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; later on they had the advantage of the printing press, with editions

of Gildas's *De Excidio* published in 1525 (probably at Antwerp) and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* in 1565 (at Antwerp). The two were hence familiar to Catholics and Protestants alike. For the first is the unpaginated calendar prefacing a devotional by the Welsh priest John Hughes (1615–1686), who gave 1 July as the feast of “s Iulijs & s Aaron MM” [Hughes, 1670]. For the second is the Protestant cleric and historian Theophilus Evans (1693–1767), referring in an uncritical work to Julius and Aaron, citizens of Caerleon (*Caer-lleon ar Wysc*), formerly with churches dedicated in their memory (*wedi eu cyssegru i Goffadwriaeth y ddau*) [Theophilus Evans, 1740, 201].

Evans depended upon testimony previously transcribed by John Leland (1506–1552), antiquary to Henry VIII. Leland gave Gildas's words on the death of “Aaron & Julianum Legionum urbis cives,” a place now, “lugubri divortio Barbarorum,” inaccessible to the Britons, the phrase being glossed: “Sepulturae martyrum in Britannia incursione Barbarorum multis locis obscuratae.” Leland also copied a passage from Gerald of Wales (1146?–1223) on the burial at Caerleon of Aaron and Julius, *martyrio coronati* [Leland, 1774, II, 63, 90]. Gerald was misled by inventions of Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1155), champion of Caerleon's claims to the saints (and to King Arthur). Leland's gloss on “divortio Barbarorum,” the occupation of British territory from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards by Anglo-Saxon invaders, is crucial. He recognized that, wherever Aaron and Julius were put to death, it was in a part of Britain lost to the Britons by the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, when Gildas was writing. It was hence not at Caerleon (outside England to this day). Yet this is routinely ignored by historians, who state repeatedly that the two died at Caerleon, and on that insecure foundation build theories on their status and trial. This paper aims to demolish Caerleon's claims. It attempts, however, to show that Aaron and Julius really existed. They belong to history, not legend. Hence the significance of their story for our knowledge of Roman Britain.

The last point needs to be stressed. While there has been overconfidence as regards Caerleon, there has also been scepticism on the historicity of the two. Haddan and Stubbs, reproducing the words of Gildas more accurately than did Leland (“Aaron et Julium Legionum urbis cives”), doubted a connection with persecution by Diocletian in 304, noting that while traditions of St Alban's martyrdom (also mentioned by Gildas) can be traced independently to 429, when St Germanus of Auxerre first visited Britain, for Aaron and Julius there is no local evidence predating a 9<sup>th</sup>-century charter in the Book of Llandaff [Haddan & Stubbs, 1869–1878, I, 6]. The charter appears in the diplomatic edition [Evans, 1893, 225–226]. Charles Plummer (1851–1927) shared their doubts: “The story of Aaron and Julius must be considered extremely doubtful” [Plummer, 1896, II, 20]. Nevertheless, few writers have followed him.

The words of Gildas were translated by Hugh Williams (1843–1911) of Bala, North Wales. God's grace “kindled for us bright lamps of holy martyrs. The graves where their bodies lie and the places of their suffering (had they not, very many of them, been taken from us the citizens on account of our numerous crimes, through the disastrous division caused by the barbarians) would at the present time inspire the minds of those

who gazed at them with a far from feeble glow of divine love. I speak of Saint Alban of Verulam, Aaron and Julius, citizens of Caerleon (*Legionum urbis cives*), and the rest of both sexes in different places who stood firm with lofty nobleness of mind in Christ's battle." Williams queried Plummer's remarks. "One finds it difficult to understand why this story must be doubted." He quoted in support of it the Book of Llandaff's "merthir Iun et Aaron" (where *Iun* is an error for *Iulii*). Welsh *merthyr*, as with Merthyr Tudful in Glamorgan, is from Latin *martyrium* 'place of a martyr or martyrs,' the church built in memory of a martyr and generally over his or her grave. The archaic Latin form indicates a story older than Gildas; it "at once carries it beyond the sixth century." Although Williams admitted that *merthyr* is used of legendary Welsh saints, such "shadowy beings cannot disturb the main argument" [Williams, 1899–1901, 26–27]. For him, Julius and Aaron were historical. It did not occur to Williams that the link with Caerleon might not be, even though medieval hagiographical tradition (which was not critical) put historical saints in places with which they had no connection.

Further and unexpected testimony to the cult of Aaron and Julius comes from an Irish manuscript in Switzerland. St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 904 is a famous 9<sup>th</sup>-century copy of Priscian, from the circle of Sedulius Scottus, and contains Old Irish poetry and abundant glosses and marginalia. Amongst numerous invocations to Irish saints is (in the upper margin of page 242) *aarón* and *iulius* [Stokes & Strachan, 1901–1903, II, *xxii*]. When the volume's owners travelled from Ireland to the Continent, they may have stopped in Caerleon, accounting for this rare mention of the two. Together with the 9<sup>th</sup>-century charter in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Book of Llandaff, the St Gallen marginalia are evidence for the cult of Aaron and Julius in early Wales. We shall return to the point, recently discussed by David Dumville and Patrick Sims-Williams.

As for Williams's views on *merthyr*, they were accepted by the Anglican clerics Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924) and John Fisher (1862–1930). Dating the martyrdom to 304 (in Diocletian's reign), they cited the Book of Llandaff for a *martyrium* at Caerleon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century; they also quoted Francis Godwin (1562–1633), Bishop of Llandaff and ecclesiastical historian, for chapels near Caerleon called after Aaron and Julius. They thought that the site of the latter was occupied by S. Julian's, in their time a farmhouse but formerly a mansion of Lord Herbert of Chisbury (1583–1648), founder of English deism. They also referred to *Cae Aron* 'Aaron's field' near Caerleon [Baring-Gould & Fisher, 1907–1913, I, 101–103]. But we shall maintain that neither house nor field can have direct links with Aaron and Julius, whose connection with Caerleon depends upon misidentification of a corrupt place-name in Gildas.

Sir John Lloyd (1861–1947) viewed the problem with characteristic judiciousness. That "Aaron and Julius of Isca" or Caerleon suffered under Diocletian "may be reasonably supposed, though Gildas, who had heard something of their story, is not able to say so with certainty," where Lloyd cited the correct reading *ut conicimus* 'as we conclude' (preceding Gildas's words on the lamps of holy martyrs) for the corrupt *ut cognoscimus* 'as we know' of the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Cambridge, University Library, MS

Ff. I. 27 (from Sawley Abbey, Yorkshire). As for *Legionum urbis cives*, Lloyd emended it to *Legionis urbis* and suggested that Caerleon's traditions counted against taking it as Chester [Lloyd, 1911, 103]. We shall say more on the form *Legionum urbs*.

A minor historian, de Hirsch-Davies, declared that Aaron and Julius died (like Alban) in the Decian or Valerian persecutions of the 250s, making Caerleon "one of the oldest centres of Christianity in this country" [Hirsch-Davies, 1912, 3]. More penetrating are further comments of Hugh Williams, on how Gildas's concessionary *ut conicimus* 'as we gather' indicates that attributing the death of St Alban and others to the time of Diocletian was a surmise. Gildas did not know for certain when they were executed. Williams proposed too that place-names supplied by Gildas indicate not where the martyrs suffered, but where they were from. Citing *Acta* from those of Justin Martyr onwards, he observed that "persons from different parts would appear before the same judge and suffer at the same place." No surprise therefore if Alban's *Passio* seems located at "some spot near the Thames," where he was put to death, and not Verulamium, his home town. Williams also preferred to date all three martyrdoms to the time of Decius or Valerian, not Diocletian. That would be in 251 or 257 [Hugh Williams, 1912, 103, 109, 115]. His point on Verulamium and "Legionum urbs," though not much noticed, is serious. It deserves an answer.

Gougaud, taking Aaron and Julius as from Caerleon, cited Delehaye on them as yet absent from the *Hieronymian Martyrology* [Gougaud, 1932, 21, 426]. Robin Collingwood (1889–1943) also accepted the Caerleon link. The Christianity of Roman Britain is ill-recorded until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when it "emerges into daylight. The Diocletianic persecution in the early years of that century has given us the names of three martyrs: Alban of Verulam, Aaron and Julius of Caerleon. We know nothing in detail about them." Collingwood, accepting Gildas on dating, saw no difficulty on Aaron's Jewish name: "we have the actual stamp of a silversmith called Isaac, who worked in Britain later in the century" [Collingwood & Myres, 1937, 270–271]. Albert Williams, speaking of the British Church as having by the 4<sup>th</sup> century "attained sufficient strength to merit persecution and sufficient organization to be represented in the general assemblies of Christendom," linked Gildas's three martyrs with the persecutions of Decius (250–251), Valerius (257–260), or Diocletian (303–312), leaving open the exact date [Williams, 1941, 86]. Editing a Middle Welsh translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry Lewis (1889–1968) of Swansea was more exact. He cited Hugh Williams for a date in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and not the 4<sup>th</sup>; on the precise whereabouts of "merthyr Iu[l]ii et Aaron" in the Book of Llandaff, he referred to William Rees's 1933 map *South Wales and the Border in the Fourteenth Century* [Lewis, 1942, 227]. Lady Fox made a further claim concerning Roman Wales. "In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we must consider society as predominantly pagan, with a Christian element slightly represented in the south-east," the Caerleon martyrdoms being proof of the latter [Fox, 1946, 106]. There are conflicting viewpoints here. Albert Williams (a writer on Wesleyan Methodism) saw early Welsh Christianity as powerful,

a threat to authority and possessing members who resisted unto blood. Aileen Fox, thinking of the exiguous archaeological evidence, regarded it as absent from Wales except for a slight “element” in the south-east. If Aaron and Julius can be divorced from Caerleon (which they must), Williams’s case collapses. There will be even less evidence for Christianity in Roman Wales than has been thought. The cult of St Alban at Verulamium was analysed by Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947), providing lessons for the study of other martyrs [Levison, 1946, 34].

It will be noticed that by this date the doubts of Plummer (after Haddan and Stubbs) on the existence of Aaron and Julius, and Hugh Williams’s later ones on their execution at Caerleon, passed unnoticed, even by professional scholars. Emrys Bowen (1900–1983) echoed Lady Fox on the “slight evidence of a Christian element [in Wales] in Roman times as witnessed by the tradition of the martyrdom of Saints Aaron and Julius near Caerlleon” [Bowen, 1954, 14]. Nora Chadwick (1891–1972), likewise speaking of “Aaron and Julius of Caerleon,” cited Levison for the apparent use by Gildas of “*passiones* of the British *confessores* Julius and Aaron, who suffered in the persecution, not of Diocletian, but possibly of the middle of the third century” [Chadwick, 1954, 241]. There are exceptions. Professor Lewis Thorpe, citing obsolete scholarship by J. A. Giles (1808–1884) and Joseph Stevenson (1806–1895), took the City of the Legions as Chester, though stating that for Gildas, “Julius and Aaron were citizens of Carlisle” [Thorpe, 1966, 131]. This identification of *Legionum urbs* as Carlisle (*Luguvalium*) is out of the question. The city was British until the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Britons like Gildas might easily visit its shrines.

W. H. Davies mentioned traditions of the execution in the 250s at Caerleon of Julius and Aaron, remarking that, in view of this, the “absence of virtually any Christian material remains in Wales is all the more surprising” [Davies, 1968, 136]. Like Aileen Fox, he noted the disparity between literary evidence (apparently substantial) and archaeological evidence (negligible). If, however, the two martyrs did not die on the banks of the Usk, the difficulties evaporate. Bishop Hanson offered a relevant comment. After describing the martyrdoms as historical, and better placed “in the Decian than in the Diocletian persecutions,” he quoted St Augustine for the practice attested from the 4<sup>th</sup> century “of founding churches, not where the martyr had suffered, but to house a relic of the martyr, or of bringing a relic of a martyr to a church which had not hitherto possessed it” [Hanson, 1968, 30, 147]. This has implications for Gildas’s lament on shrines inaccessible to the Britons. If Welsh *merthyr* were used, not of where a saint had suffered death, but of a church possessing his or her relics, the claims of Caerleon may be taken in the second sense, not the first. It also makes intelligible Gildas’s complaint. Aaron and Julius died in lands now held by the Saxons; the *merthyr* in South Wales might have their relics, but was not where they shed their blood.

As for Bede’s *Legionum urbis cives*, taken directly from Gildas, it was glossed as “Caerleon” in a standard edition, with the comment that nothing more is known of Aaron and Julius [Colgrave & Mynors, 1969, 34, 35]. Charles Thomas echoes

this and includes a map where the cross of martyrdom at Caerleon is almost the only evidence for Christianity in Roman Wales [Thomas, 1970, 72–73]. Another archaeologist, Leslie Alcock, drew attention to the paradox outlined by Aileen Fox and W. H. Davies. As regards archaeology, there is “little in the way of monuments or other remains of Christianity in the last century of Roman Britain. The available material evidence suggests rather a strongly flourishing Celtic paganism. The verbal evidence, on the other hand, favours a contrary conclusion.” What we know of “Julian and Aaron of Caerleon” is proof of “Christian communities in southern Britain before the conversion of Constantine” [Alcock, 1971, 132]. A scrap of information on their cult was given by Canon Doble (1880–1945), Cornish hagiographer, who referred to adjacent parishes of Alban and Aaron in Brittany, between Plédéliac and Pleneuf [Doble, 1971, 205]. They imply influence from Gildas, not from south-east Wales, where Alban was of no interest. On what the “corporum sepulturae” of saints mentioned by Gildas looked like, a clue is given by Professor Thomas, describing examples from Croatia and south-west Ireland [Thomas, 1971, 132–166].

Glanville Jones set out details of Aaron and Julius’s medieval *territorium* at Caerleon [Jones, 1972, 379]. A warning on limitations was given by Professor Mayr-Harting: the evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain, including what Gildas says on its saints, “does not amount to that much” [Mayr-Harting, 1972, 32]. Caerleon nevertheless appears in Bishop Moorman’s oft-reprinted history [Moorman, 1973, 4]. A guide outlines Caerleon’s Roman remains, including an amphitheatre [Houlder, 1974, 140–142]. Caerleon appears too in a Polish dictionary of saints, naming one of them as *Julian* and giving 287 as the probable year of their deaths [Fros & Sowa, 1975, 67]. It appears again with the caution “reputed” and the observation that, if the two were soldiers, “they were quite probably not of British descent” [Victory, 1977, 2, 130]. Their being soldiers was thought implied by Caerleon’s status as a military base. The charter mentioning their *merthyr* is dated by Professor Davies of London to about 864 [Wendy Davies, 1979, 121]. As an aspect of their cult, it compares with the St Gallen Priscian. Another aspect occurs in the remark that “the martyrdom of the Christians Julius and Aaron, recorded at Caerleon (by Geoffrey of Monmouth), and of others at Chester (by Bede) and Carlisle (by Gildas), probably happened in the amphitheatre” [Alcock, 1980, 79]. The author is confused. She converts the original *Legionum urbs* of Gildas into three different places (all wrong). Nor did Bede or Gildas mention any martyrdom at Chester or Carlisle.

Peter Salway quotes W. H. C. Frend on Aaron’s name as indicating “Jewish influence” on the Christian mission to Britain; he himself put the executions at Caerleon and perhaps in the reign of Decius (249–251) or under Valerian between 257 and 259 [Salway, 1981, 718, 721]. Charles Thomas discusses *martyria*, “martyrial shrines in the shape of churches,” the most famous instance being the tomb of St Peter underneath St Peter’s, Rome, where it was discovered after World War II. He adds that Aaron’s name “suggests a Jewish Christian”; although Bede repeated the toponym

supplied by Gildas, he “did not know where this place was.” If the martyrdoms were of the 250s, and not of 303–311, it “would go some way to explain” the loss by Gildas’s day of information on events. If weaker than that of Alban with Verulamium, the connection of Aaron and Julius with Caerleon “is probably real” [Thomas, 1981, 48–49, 133]. An account of the town’s later history does not mention 9<sup>th</sup>-century records of the cult [Soulsby, 1983, 86–88].

At this point we come to a crucial paper by David Dumville. Like Leland in the days of Henry VIII, he confronts the inconvenient statement by Gildas that Britons are, “lugubri divortio barbarorum,” denied access to the shrines of British martyrs. Professor Dumville asks how Anglo-Saxon settlement could “have prevented him and his fellow-citizens” from pilgrimages to these holy tombs, especially at Caerleon. Where might Gildas have lived that he “could not travel by a westerly land-route to Caerleon? This problem urgently demands a solution, for it suggests that much of western England was in Anglo-Saxon hands in Gildas’s day” [Dumville, 1984, 78]. For all that, a detailed paper builds on the shaky foundation of Caerleon, proposing that Aaron and Julius were tried at nearby Caerwent, the cantonal capital, and taking them as soldiers of Caerleon’s Roman garrison [Stephens, 1985].

Others, like Dumville, recognized the problem. In a paper not yet in print, Professor P. J. C. Field gives much information on it (and notes that the modern feast of Aaron and Julius is on 3 July). He proposes not only that *Legionum urbs* was York, but that *urbs Legionis* of the 9<sup>th</sup>-century *Historia Brittonum*, where Arthur *dux bellorum* won one of his twelve battles, is also York [Field, 1998]. Both ideas must be rejected. Despite legions in plenty, York never had a name referring to them; and Arthur’s battlefield is probably the former “Karig Lion,” near Kinneil in West Lothian, Scotland. Others remained confident in Caerleon. In the latest critical edition of Bede’s *Historia*, André Crépin spoke of “ces martyrs de Caerleon-on-Usk” <those martyrs of Caerleon-on-Usk> [Crépin & Lapidge, 2005, 141]. The new Welsh encyclopedia ignores difficulties, in the manner of encyclopedias, describing Julius and Aaron *tout court* as “Christians killed in the ‘City of the Legions’ (Caerleon)” [WAEW, 434]. Preferable is Dr Karen George, who refrains from locating the two [George, 2009, 114]. As a reminder of traditional historiography, Caerleon figures in a new-found text by Philip Perry (1720–1774), Rector of the English College, Valladolid. He praised Aaron and Julius, “whose Acts are not indeed come down to us, but whose memory is celebrated by Gildas and has been ever honoured in the British Church on the 1st of July and perpetuated to posterity by three churches in their native city,” at a cathedral under both their names, a convent of nuns dedicated to St Julius, and a college of canons dedicated to St Aaron [Carrera & Carrera, 2009, 56, 192]. Much of this is from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s fertile imagination, adept in constructing a mythical past [Jankulak, 2010, 70].

Most recently, Professor Sims-Williams writes on the history of the St Gallen Priscian as discussed by David Dumville and others [Sims-Williams, 2011, 31–33]. Professor Charles-Edwards, citing papers by Richard Sharpe, speaks too of how

in the 4<sup>th</sup> century “Britain was also beginning to share in the new enthusiasm for the cult of saints, especially martyrs, as at St Albans and Caerleon,” although paganism remained strong, as proved by the shrine of Nodons at Lydney, twenty miles east-north-east of Caerleon [Charles-Edwards, 2013, 184]. If, of course, there were no martyrs at Caerleon, the contrast will be apparent, not real. Michael García argues that Gildas’s *divortium* means not ‘boundary line between two countries’ but (since it has the further sense ‘divorce, legal dissolution of marriage’) ‘breaking of treaty’, referring to one supposedly made between Britons and Saxons [García, 2013]. This seems improbable. The reason why Britons could not visit the shrines of their martyrs was because they lay in enemy territory. However *divortium* is interpreted, it hardly changes that. In a book as uncritical as that of Theophilus Evans three centuries previous, Professor Halsall mentions the sacrifice of Julius and Aaron, “possibly at York,” where he teaches, but without saying why [Halsall, 2013, 188]. Most recently, Stefan Schustereder cites Higham on Gildas as writing in south-west Britain, for reasons including “political events such as the martyrdom of Saints Alban, Aaron, and Julius” [Schustereder, 2015, 70]. A martyrdom might be thought a religious event, not a political one. In any case, the comment does not reveal exactly where Julius and Aaron met their death.

That concludes our first part. The location of *Legionum urbs* is as obscure as ever. Yet we have clues. The use of *urbs* (long a literary word, not a spoken one) points to a major settlement; by the 6<sup>th</sup> century it lay in regions dominated by Anglo-Saxons; its name was not, however, familiar to all. There is one place and one place only which satisfies these conditions, and that is Leicester in the English Midlands.

## 2. The Martyrdom of Julius and Aaron at *Legorum Urbs* or Leicester

This is no place for a full account of Leicester’s names, past and present. Nevertheless, some philological facts are needed to permit emendation of *Legionum urbs* in Gildas and Bede. In this context we first note the existence of the Celtic root *leg-* ‘drip, dribble; melt, dissolve’ in Old Irish *legaim* ‘I melt, dissolve’ and Welsh *llaith* ‘damp, moist’ [GPC, 2091]. As for Leicester itself, it has changed its name, like Caerleon (known to the Romans as *Isca*, after the River Usk). Leicester was originally called *Ratae*, the earliest evidence for the modern form being *Legorensis civitas* in a charter of 803 (and *Legoracensis civitas* in another of about 840). The Old English equivalent *Ligera ceaster* of 917 shows behind these a sense ‘fort of dwellers on (the region / River) Legra’, originally *Legor*, which is now the Leire (by the village of Leire), a sluggish brook in flat country fifteen kilometres south of the city [Ekwall, 1960, 294].

How might *Legorensis civitas* in a 9<sup>th</sup>-century charter relate to Gildas’s *Legionum urbs*? An answer is supplied by inscriptions. There are two models. A monument of before the year 220 from Caerwent, near Caerleon, has the phrase CIVIT[ATIS] SILURUM ‘of the canton of the Silures’ (a people of south-east Wales); a stone coffin at York has COL[ONIAE] EBORACENS[IS] ‘of the colony of *Eburacum*’ or York

[Collingwood & Wright, 1965, inscriptions 311, 674]. For Leicester, the second would indicate an original *Legorum*; the first, a tribal form *Legores*. It is not difficult to decide between the two. Old English *Ligera ceaster* ‘fort of those dwelling on (the region / River) *Legra*’, originally *Legor*, points to a tribal name *Legores*, not a settlement-name *Legorum*. Reconstructed British *Legor* would thus designate not Leicester, but the low-lying region and river south of it. The implication is that Leicester is called after a Celtic tribe, the *Legores* ‘people of the *Legor*,’ the marshy area on the River Leire. A city-name derives from that of a people, as with Canterbury (called after the *Cantii* or people of Kent), or Paris (after the *Parisii*) [Rivet & Smith, 1979, 299, 435–436]. The etymology coincides with information supplied by the English Place-Name Society [Watts, 2004, 367–368]. The currency amongst the Welsh of forms in *Lego-* is further indicated by the political poem *Armes Prydein* (The Prophecy of Britain), invoking St David and other British saints, and calling for an attack on the English following their capitulation in 940 at Leicester to Viking invaders. It uses *Lego* for Leicester and *Arlego* for the Leicester region, and not (as supposed) Chester or Caerleon [Isaac, 2007, 165].

If *Legorensis civitas* in our charter of 803 can be taken as ‘Legorensian city, city of the *Legores*, city of dwellers on the district and river of *Legor* or Leire’ (its etymology relating to Welsh *llaith* ‘damp’), we may turn again to *Legionum urbis* in Gildas and Bede. On the analogy of CIVIT[ATIS] SILURUM ‘of the canton of the Silures’ in the Caerwent inscription, we emend to *Legorum urbis* ‘of the town of the *Legores*’ or Leicester. This apparently tallies with archaeological evidence. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, *Ratae* covered an area of 130 acres; it was perhaps the eighth biggest city of Roman Britain [Rivet, 1958, 83]. It possessed “distinguished public buildings,” its baths surviving in part as the most imposing Roman edifice in England [Frere, 1970, 909]. There are also interesting mosaics and painted wall-plaster [Wacher, 1974, 335–357]. With other implications are the words “Verecunda the actress, Lucius the gladiator” on a fragment of pottery discovered there [Ireland, 1996, 245]. An actress implies a theatre; a gladiator, an amphitheatre. Although remains have been found of neither structure, they surely existed at Leicester. As the Roman practice was to execute Christians in public stadiums, Aaron and Julius may have perished in the lost amphitheatre of *Legorum urbs*, Leicester, and not that of *Legionum civitas*, Caerleon.

Yet the proposed emendation to the text of Gildas will not be compelling unless we can demonstrate that, when he wrote in the early 530s, Leicester was in English hands. We can be certain that it was. Jackson’s map of the Anglo-Saxon occupation of England shows settlers coming into the region from the Wash in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and from the River Trent in the earlier 6<sup>th</sup> [Jackson, 1953, 209]. Pevsner adds detail. When the Angles arrived, the Leicester area was “still largely wooded. Evidence for their arrival in the later fifth century increases, and by the middle of the sixth century they were well established. Cremation and inhumation burials occur, the latter with weapons and sometimes costly ornaments” [Pevsner, 1960, 16]. These pagan Germanic

burials are plotted on the map for the period, with a cluster immediately south of Leicester [MBDA]. By then, the city may have been a ghost one, its “distinguished public buildings” abandoned. “No evidence has been found for post-Roman occupation at Leicester” [Dark, 2000, 101].

Swords and brooches from heathen graves around Leicester thus accord with Gildas’s comments on the places of martyrdom and sepulchres of Aaron and Julius which are now, *lugubri divortio barbarorum* “through the disastrous division caused by the barbarians,” inaccessible to the Britons. Emend his *Legionum urbis cives* to *Legorum urbis cives* ‘citizens of the town of the *Legores*, citizens of Leicester’, and we answer David Dumville’s enquiry of 1984 on Gildas, as to how Anglo-Saxon settlement could “have prevented him and his fellow-citizens” from pilgrimages to the tombs of martyrs. Once we alter the text of Gildas and for ‘Caerleon’ understand ‘Leicester’, the difficulties are removed.

If this process of reasoning is sound, it has implications. The connection of Aaron and Julius with Caerleon must lapse. As with St Oswald (d. 642) at Oswestry in Shropshire, or St Werburgh (c. 700) at Warburton in Greater Manchester, misinterpretation of a toponym gave rise to a cult [Gelling, 1978, 187]. The same will have happened with the two British martyrs and Caerleon. On the other hand, we can be sure that they really existed. In churches dedicated to them in Wales and beyond, their names may still be honoured and invoked, even if the supposition that (Caerleon being an army base) they were soldiers must be discarded. Aaron was probably a Jewish tradesman or craftsman who had received baptism. Hugh Williams’s observation of 1912, that places mentioned with the names of martyrs indicate not where they died and were buried, but where they were from, perhaps also has less force. Gildas clearly thought of holy tombs at *Legionum urbs*, not at London or elsewhere. In addition, the corruption of proposed *Legorum urbs* to *Legionum urbs*, with *legio* as familiar to scribes as *Legores* was not, indicates miscopying of Gildas’s text at an early date (if the form was not already corrupt by the time it reached Gildas himself in a *passio* of the martyrs), for it was already defective when Bede wrote in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally, what Caerleon loses, the industrial town of Leicester gains. Historians often complain how little is known of the Church in Roman Britain, whether in terms of archaeological discoveries or written texts [Irby-Massie, 1999, 193–201]. For Wales, the present arguments diminish that knowledge to vanishing point. Professor Nancy Edwards maintains that “clear evidence for Christianity in Roman Wales is confined to Caerwent and Caerleon in the south-east” [Edwards, 2013, 15]. Her remarks no longer bear examination. The conflict between the paucity of finds and (apparently) trustworthy literary sources, noted by Aileen Fox, Davies, and Alcock between 1946 and 1971, can be resolved. At the close of antiquity, Celtic paganism still flourished in Wales, as we might gather from worship of Nodons at Lydney (now just inside the English border). At the cantonal capital of *Ratae*, however, it was a different story. If our interpretation of Gildas is correct, we have new testimony for a Christian community in 3<sup>rd</sup>-century

Leicester, its faith sufficiently strong to have produced Aaron and Julius, who, with St Alban, can be recognized as the protomartyrs of British Christianity.

- 
- Alcock, J. (1980). The People. In P. A. Clayton (Ed.), *A Companion to Roman Britain* (pp. 69–99). Oxford: Phaidon.
- Alcock, L. (1971). *Arthur's Britain*. London: Allen Lane.
- Baring-Gould, S., & Fisher, J. (1907–1913). *The Lives of the British Saints*. London: Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion.
- Bowen, E. G. (1954). *The Settlements of the Celtic Saints in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Carrera, A., & Carrera, M. J. (Eds.). (2009). *Philip Perry's Sketch of the Ancient British History*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Chadwick, N. K. (1954). Intellectual Contacts Between Britain and Gaul in the Fifth Century. In N. K. Chadwick (Ed.), *Studies in Early British History* (pp. 189–263). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Charles-Edwards, T. M. (2013). *Wales and the Britons 350–1064*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colgrave, B., & Mynors, R. A. B. (Eds.). (1969). *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Collingwood, R. G., & Myres, J. N. L. (1937). *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Collingwood, R. G., & Wright, R. P. (1965). *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain: Inscriptions on Stone*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Crépin, A., & Lapidige, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais*. Paris: Sources chrétiennes.
- Dark, K. R. (2000). *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*. Stroud: Tempus.
- Davies, W. (1979). *The Llandaff Charters*. Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales.
- Davies, W. H. (1968). The Church in Wales. In M. W. Barley & R. P. C. Hanson (Eds.), *Christianity in Britain 300–700* (pp. 131–150). Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Doble, G. H. (1971). *Lives of the Welsh Saints*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Dumville, D. N. (1984). The Chronology of *De Excidio Britanniae*, Book I. In M. Lapidige & D. Dumville (Eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (pp. 61–84). Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Edwards, N. (2013). *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales: North Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Eilert, E. (1960). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans, J. G. (Ed.). (1893). *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*. Oxford: privately published.
- Evans, T. (1740). *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* [A Mirror of Early Times] (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Y Mwythig [Shrewsbury]: Thomas Durston.
- Field, P. J. C. (1998). *Gildas and the City of the Legions*. Unpublished paper.
- Fox, A. (1946). Early Christian Period: Settlement Sites. In V. E. Nash-Williams (Ed.), *A Hundred Years of Welsh Archaeology* (pp. 105–122). Gloucester: Cambrian Archaeological Association.
- Frere, F. F. (1970). Ratae. In N. G. L. Hammond & H. H. Scullard (Eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (p. 909). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fros, H., & Sowa, F. (Eds.). (1975). *Twoje Imię* [Your Name]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy.
- García, M. (2013). Gildas on the “Grievous Divorce from the Barbarians”. *Early Medieval Europe*, 21(3), 243–253. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/emed.12017>
- Gelling, M. (1978). *Signposts to the Past*. London: Batsford.

- George, K. (2009). *Gildas's "De Excidio Britonum" and the Early British Church*. Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Gougaud, L. (1932). *Christianity in Celtic Lands*. London: Sidgwick.
- GPC — *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*. (1950–2002). Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru.
- Haddan, A. W., & Stubbs, W. (Eds.). (1869–1878). *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (Vols. 1–3). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hallsall, G. (2013). *Worlds of Arthur: Facts and Fictions of the Dark Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hanson, R. P. C. (1968). *Saint Patrick*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hirsch-Davies, J. E. de (1912). *A Popular History of the Church in Wales*. London: Pitman.
- Houlder, C. (1974). *Wales: An Archaeological Guide*. London: Faber.
- Hughes, J. (1670). *Allwedd neu Agoriad Paradwys i'r Cymry* [A Key or Opening to Paradise for the Welsh]. Luyck [Liège].
- Irby-Massie, G. (1999). *Military Religion in Roman Britain*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ireland, S. (1996). *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.
- Isaac, G. R. (2007). *Armes Prydain Fawr and St David*. In J. W. Evans & J. M. Wooding (Eds.), *St David of Wales* (pp. 161–181). Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Jackson, K. H. (1953). *Language and History in Early Britain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jankulak, K. (2010). *Writers of Wales: Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Jones, G. R. J. (1972). Post-Roman Wales. In H. P. R. Finberg (Ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: AD 43–1042* (pp. 279–382). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leland, J. (1774). *De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Londini: Benjamin White.
- Levison, W. (1946). *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lewis, H. (Ed.). (1942). *Brut Dingestow*. Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru.
- Lloyd, J. E. (1911). *A History of Wales*. London: Longmans.
- Mayr-Harting, H. (1972). *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*. London: Batsford.
- MBDA — *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (1966). Southampton: Ordnance Survey.
- Moorman, J. R. H. (1973). *A History of the Church in England* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London: Adam and Charles Black.
- Pevsner, N. (1960). *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Plummer, C. (Ed.). (1896). *Venerabilis Bedae Historia Ecclesiastica*. Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano.
- Rivet, A. L. F. (1958). *Town and Country in Roman Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
- Rivet, A. L. F., & Smith, C. (1979). *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Salway, P. (1981). *Roman Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schustereder, S. J. (2015). *Strategies of Identity Construction*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Sims-Williams, P. (2011). *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soulsby, I. (1983). *The Towns of Medieval Wales*. Chichester: Phillimore.
- Stephens, G. R. (1985). Caerleon and the Martyrdom of SS Aaron and Julius. *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 32, 326–335.
- Stokes, W., & Strachan, J. (Eds.). (1901–1903). *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, C. (1970). *Britain and Ireland in Early Christian Times*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Thomas, C. (1971). *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, C. (1981). *Christianity in Roman Britain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Thorpe, L. (Tr.). (1966). *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Victory, S. (1977). *The Celtic Church in Wales*. London: SPCK.
- Wacher, J. (1974). *The Towns of Roman Britain*. London: Batsford.
- WAEW — Davies, J., et al. (Eds.). (2008). *The Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Watts, V. (Ed.). (2004). *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Williams, A. H. (1941). *An Introduction to the History of Wales: Prehistoric Times to 1063*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Williams, H. (Ed.). (1899–1901). *Gildae de Excidio Britanniae*. London: David Nutt.
- Williams, H. (1912). *Christianity in Early Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Received 5 February 2016

\* \* \*

**Breeze, Andrew**

PhD, Professor, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, University of Navarra  
31009 Pamplona, Navarra, Spain  
E-mail: abreeze@unav.es

**Бриз, Эндрю**

PhD, профессор, факультет философии и литературы, Университет Наварры  
Campus Universitario, 31009 Pamplona, Navarra, España  
E-mail: abreeze@unav.es

**Эндрю Бриз**  
Университет Наварры  
Памплона, Испания

**LEGIONUM URBS И БРИТАНСКИЕ МУЧЕНИКИ ААРОН И ЮЛИЙ**

Статья посвящена установлению места, где приняли смерть британские святые Аарон и Юлий, известные исключительно благодаря Гильде Премудрому, писавшему в 530-е гг. Сообщение Гильды воспроизвел Беда Достопочтенный (ум. 737 г.), благодаря чему эти двое святых не были забыты, а их культ существует и поныне. Автор дает детальный обзор литературы об Аароне и Юлии за последние два столетия и высказывает мнение, что местом гибели мучеников был не Керлеон (на юго-востоке Уэльса) и не Честер (на северо-западе Англии), как полагают многие исследователи, а Лестер, другой крупный город римской Британии. Основываясь на эпиграфических данных, а также учитывая древние модели именования, автор предлагает интерпретировать *Legionum urbs* как ошибочное *Legorum urbs* ‘город *легоров*’, кельтского племени, населявшего район Лестера. Ко времени Гильды эта область уже была занята англами, а сам город — заброшен, что, по мнению автора, может объяснить некоторые замечания Гильды, остающиеся неясными, если идентифицировать *Legionum urbs* с Керлеоном или Честером. Автор приводит как исторические, так и лингвистические аргументы в поддержку своей гипотезы и показывает, что эта гипотеза позволяет пролить новый свет на раннюю историю христианства в Британии.

**К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а:** латинский язык, Аарон, Юлий, христианские святые, ранняя история христианства в Британии, римская Британия, Гильда Премудрый, Беда Достопочтенный, Керлеон, Лестер, топонимия, текстология.

Рукопись поступила в редакцию 05.02.2016