Language – Culture – Politics, Vol. 1/2022
ISSN 2450-3576
e-ISSN: 2719-3217

DOI: 10.54515/lcp.2022.1.103-111

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Mars Braciaca (RIB 278) at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

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Abstract

Braciaca, on an altar to Mars at Haddon Hall (near Bakewell, in the north Midlands of England), has been related to Welsh *brag* 'malt' and explained as 'he of (divine) intoxication'. Yet this is hard to see, and a new explanation from Welsh *bragad* 'army, host; battle' seems preferable. It fits the God of War better than 'malt' does (a product more apt for Bacchus than Mars). If so, *Braciaca* 'of the hosts' will be one of many terms from Roman Britain that Welsh (and related languages) can explain. To show this, we first consider Celtic attitudes to Mars, and then go on to brag and its cognates.

Key words: *Mars, Celtic Languages, Welsh, Roman Britain, Inscriptions.*

Abstrakt

Braciaca, na ołtarzu poświęconym Marsowi (w pobliżu Bakewell, w północno-środkowej Anglii), połączono z walijskim *brag* 'słód' i wyjaśniono jako 'on od (boskiego) upojenia'. Jednak nie jest to tłumaczenie zadowalające, dlatego pojawiło się nowe od walijskiego *bragad* 'brygada; bitwa' i to wydaje się zadowalające. Bardziej pasuje do Boga Wojny słowo „słód" (produkt bardziej pasujący do Bachusa niż Marsa). Jeśli tak, to *Braciaca* – 'bandy walczących' będzie jednym z wielu zwrotów z czasów rzymskiej Brytanii, które walijski (i pokrewne języki) może wyjaśnić.

By to pokazać, najpierw rozważamy postawy celtyckie wobec Marsa, a następnie przejdźmy do słowa *brag* i jego pokrewnych terminów.

Słowa kluczowe: *Mars, języki celtyckie, walijski, rzymska Brytania, inskrypcje.*

THE CULT OF MARS IN THE CELTIC WORLD

Like most divinities, the war-god Mars had diverse aspects. For some he was sinister. Typical is Horace (in book two of his *Odes*), addressing Postumus with gloomy thoughts upon mortality:

Frustra cruento Marte carebimus,
Fractisque rauci fluctibus Adriae

– for, avoid bloodstained Mars or Adriatic gales as one may, death comes all the same. Also disobliging on Mars was Juvenal, who (in his thirteenth satire) mocked a worshipper at Jupiter's shrine:

Tu miser exclamas, ut Stentora vincere possis,
Vel potius quantum Gradivus Homericus?

Let the suppliant deafen a sergeant-major or Homer's Mars with his pleas, Jove's statue remains as dumb and useless as that of some worthy in a public square.

Others were more hopeful. For them, the cult of Mars was popular and worthwhile. In Britain, 'little rude altars' dedicated to Mars prove the devotion of ordinary soldiers; he was identified with Celtic deities (Belatucadrus, Camulus, Cocidius, Coriotiacus) or styled *Rigisamus* 'most royal'. 'In short, he went native'. (Collingwood and Myres, 1937, p. 262) A like assimilation occurred in Gaul, where Mars is known by 'fifty-nine different epithets'. Hence *Mars Teutates* ('of the people'), *Mars Segomo* ('strong'), *Mars Rudianus* ('the red'), with the first also found in book one of Lucan:

Et quibus inmitis placatur sanguine diro
Teutates horrensque feris altaribus Esus
Et Taranis Scythicae non mitior ara Dianae

– on those by whom 'pitiless Teutates' is appeased with horrid blood; or grisly Esus, with human sacrifice in a wood; or Taranis, no gentler than the altar of Scythian Diana. (Sjoestedt, 1949, 15) Despite the contradictions of scholiasts, Teutates is certainly Mars; Esus is Mercury (patron of merchants and travellers); Taranis is the God of Thunder. The shrine of Mars-Teutates (near Marseille) here described had Insular equivalents at Barkway (in west Hertfordshire) for Mars Alator (RIB 218, on a silver-gilt

plaque), and Caerwent in South Wales for Mars Ocelus Vellaunus (RIB 309). Epithets for the latter correspond to Welsh *uchel* 'lofty' and (it seems) *gwell* 'better, superior'. (Richmond, 1955, p. 143, p. 192)

Comment on Teutates (not Esus) as Mars is given with Caesar's observation in his campaign memoirs (book six) that Mars and Mercury were the gods most revered by the Gauls. (Owen, 1962, p. 23, p. 41, p. 92) Britons also 'easily assimilated' the Mars of the Roman pantheon, whether as Mars Camulus, god of Camulodunum (or Colchester), Mars Toutates (a cult perhaps from north-east Gaul), Mars Cocidius (revered in north Cumbria), Mars Leucetius ('a Rhineland deity who was worshipped at Bath'), or others, not all 'of exclusively warlike interests'. (Hunter Blair, 1963, p. 151)

Now for *RIB 278*, the subject of this paper. At Haddon Hall (near Bakewell, north-west Derbyshire) is exhibited a gritstone altar with the inscription DEO MARTI BRACIACAE Q(UINTUS) SITTIUS CAECILIAN(US) PRAEF(ECTUS) COH(ORTIS) I AQUITANO(RUM) U(OTUM) S(OLUIT), or 'To the god Mars Braciaca, Quintus Sittius Caecilianus, prefect of the First Cohort of Aquitanians, fulfilled his vow.' It was found in local parkland and is first recorded in Gibson's 1695 edition of Camden. The problem is *Braciaca*. Alfred Holder (d. 1916) offered the sense 'god of malt'; others think it a local toponym, as with *Braciacus*, denoting five places in Gauln. (Collingwood and Wright, 1965, p. 93) We shall argue that neither of them is correct.

British devotion to Mars is yet made clearer by maps of dedications to Belatucadrus and Cocidius, clustered on Hadrian's Wall. (Frere, 1967, p. 326-328) They contrast with Mars Braciaca, who is unique, so that we know 'practically nothing' about him. The altar has 'no accompanying iconography', although it has been related to Welsh *brag* 'malt, barleycorn; malt liquor' (as with the drink 'bragget'), leading to interpretation of the Haddon Hall god as 'he of (malt-induced) intoxication'. He is compared to Medhbh of Connacht in *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*, a proud queen (originally a goddess) whose name means 'drunken woman' or 'she who makes men drunk'. Likewise thought relevant is the seventh-century *Gododdin*, a series of Welsh elegies for heroes who (allegedly) went 'inebriated into battle'. (Ross, 1967, p. 180-181) There are two misconceptions here. A link with archaic Welsh *bragad* 'army, host; battle; offspring' is (as stated) likelier than one with *brag* 'malt'. Nor did British warriors go drunk into battle. The allusion has been misunderstood. We shall return to it.

Information on cults of Hadrian's Wall and Mars Ocelus appear elsewhere. (Liversedge, 1968, p. 425, p. 432) But caution is needed. With sixty-nine god-names applied to Mars, their 'basic attributes' are those of a bewildering

range of 'Celtic divinities'. (Piggott, 1968, p. 16) Mars Vesontius might be Roman Mars as venerated at Besançon (in the French Jura); or 'an unnamed god of extensive cult' there 'equated with Mars'; or a local god subsumed by Mars. Nor, as Teutates, was the Celtic Mars merely a god of war. He had powers of 'healing, fertility, and protection'. He guarded his people against disease or foreign attack and ensured their well-being. (Mac Cana, 1970, p. 24, p. 31) Roman Mars himself had 'agricultural functions' as well as military ones. (Rose, 1970, p. 651)

So the Mars whom the Romans linked with 'fertility and untamed woodlands' was (we hear) naturally seen as Mars Braciaca, 'whose name implies malt and the brewing of beer'. (Alcock, 1980, p. 69-99) The Mars of Caerwent (with a namesake in Trier, Germany) is similarly taken as more than a war-god, probably having 'a much wider Celtic concept of a "high god" '. This vagueness complicates the life of archaeologists, trying to make out some Celtic deity's 'individual characteristics'. (Salway, 1981, p. 668-669) Yet the Teutates of Lucan has a name with the Celtic word for 'tribe' (in Irish, *tuath*), so that he will be 'the god who guided and protected the tribe in war' or Mars. (Kruta, 1991, p. 499-507) Even so, Teutates is known from 'a handful of dedications' only, 'scattered within the Romano-Celtic world'. (Green, 1995, p. 465-488) There is a useful assemblage of British epithets for Mars and other divinities from inscriptions at Lydney Park, Lancaster, Caerwent, Old Penrith, Colchester, West Coker, Martlesham (near Ipswich), Barkway, Housesteads. (Ireland, 1996, p. 189-191) But it excludes the one at Haddon Hall. He does, however, figure in a comprehensive listing. (Jufer and Jugenbühl, 2001, p. 100)

A final note. In the twelfth-century *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* is the tyrant Caswallon, who conquers Britain and at Oxford receives tribute from the island's legitimate rulers, in this resembling Henry I at Woodstock, near Oxford. (Breeze, 2009, 45-6, 72) Caswallon surely preserves traditions amongst the Welsh of Cassivellaunus, king of the Catuvellauni and Caesar's antagonist in 54 BCE. Despite this, the suggestion (made by a former Sovietologist at Birmingham University) that Caswallon also represents Welsh memories of Mars lacks all credibility. (Rees, 2012, p. 80-81)

BRACIACA AND EARLY WELSH *BRAGAD* 'ARMY, HOST'

Having outlined Celtic notions of Mars, we focus on *Braciaca*. Two perennial flaws of reasoning are soon detected. First, a familiar term is preferred to one less known. Second, dubious statements are repeated year after year, a feeble explanation being thought better than none. So with *Braciaca*.

Welsh *brag* 'malt, barleycorn' is, to be sure, a word still current. It is a cognate of Irish *braich* 'malt' and Welsh *braen* 'to rot', as also Greek *amorge* 'lees of olive-oil', borrowed as Latin *amurca* 'waste from an olive-press', all from a root meaning 'to rot, decay'. (Morris-Jones, 1913, p. 147-148) From *amorge* is named the island of Amorgos, driest of the Cyclades, and alluded to by Aristophanes in *Lysistrata* (line 735):

talain ego, talaina tes amorgidos,
en alopon oikoi kataleloiph

– or 'Stupid! Stupid me! Back home is my flax from Amorgos and I forgot to beat it out!' (The excuse of a wife desperate for her husband and trying to escape.) As for *amurca*, it figures in Vergil's third Georgic:

Aut tonsum tristi contingunt corpus amurca,
Et spumas miscent argenti, vivaque sulphura

– on how, to protect flocks after shearing, their keepers rub them with foul dregs of olive oil, prepare applications of silver-scum and rock-sulphur. So Welsh brag has extended links with early texts.

But what matters here is Welsh *bragad* 'host, army; progeny'. Reciting (back to Adam) the ancestors of Gwilym Fychan (d. 1483), deputy-chamberlain of North Wales, a bard praised one of them as (emended) *bragad briwgaer*, 'he whose offspring shattered strongholds'. (Lewis, Roberts, Williams, 1925, p. 297, p. 402) A glossary shows *bragad* as by then an old form, figuring in archaic verse from the Black Book of Carmarthen and Books of Taliesin and Aneirin. (Lloyd-Jones, 1931-63, p. 71)

At this point, a correction on drink and fighting men. Even the Chadwicks here stumbled, commenting on Aneirin's *Gododdin* (as also Beowulf and the *Iliad*'s book twenty) that mead consumed as warrior-feasts led to 'disaster' in battle. Heroes lacked 'complete possession of their senses'. (Chadwick and Chadwick, 1932, p. 72) The error was corrected by Sir Ifor Williams on advice from the Anglo-Saxon scholar Bruce Dickins. To 'pay for one's mead' meant fighting a lord's battles in return for the feasting and luxuries that he provided. If combat brought death, that mead had (of course) a 'bitter' taste. Williams also edited lines on a warrior Cydywal, who *blaen bragat briwei*, 'shattered a host's front line' (Williams, 1938, p. xlix, p. 9, p. 131) The point was made again in a lecture on Aneirin's *Gododdin*, where the bard lamented North British champions wiped out in an attack on the English at Catraeth or Catterick, Yorkshire, perhaps in 603 CE. Before they died, these men yet 'hewed down like rushes' their foes.

Warriors went to Catraeth; ready were they.
Fresh mead their feast; poison it proved.

Williams acknowledged their prowess. They 'had one virtue in common, loyalty to their lord; they deserved their mead'. (Williams, 1944, p. 68-9) Any notion of their valour as being due to drink is foolish.

The University of Wales dictionary has an entry for *bragad* 'army, portion of an army, host, war, battle; household, issue, offspring, progeny', with Modern Irish *brachadh* 'malting; fermentation' as its cognate. The Welsh sense presumably refers to the commotion and hurly-burly of combat. (*Geiriadur*, 1950-2002, p. 289, p. 1172, p. 3745-3746) That *bragad* has a corresponding form in Irish indicates an ancient construction, from Common Celtic times. Nevertheless, in discussing Middle Irish *mraich* 'malt', Vendryes considered the Mars Braciaca of Derbyshire 'probablement un dieu de la bière ou du malt'. (Vendryes, 1960, p. 66-77) Lines in the seventh-century *Gododdin* on Cydywal, who 'left shields splintered and broken' and 'crushed the van of the army (bragad)' undermine such opinions; while the motif of 'paying for mead' is again made clear. (Jackson, 1969, p. 36-37, p. 124) It was stressed once more in in an edition of collected papers. (Williams, 1972, p. 64-65)

In an Arthurian poem, far older than the thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen where it appears, is the declaration *oet guaget bragad* when Cei ('Sir Kay') was around. (Jarman, 1982, p. 67) It means 'a host (*bragad*) was futile' compared with Cei in battle. (Bromwich and Evans, 1992, p. xxxvi) That casts unexpected light on *Bracara Augusta* or the city of Braga, Portugal. Its name has been a puzzle. One can supposedly 'can go no further' than regard it as 'Indo-European'. (Luján, 2000, p. 55-72) It may yet relate to *bragat* in Welsh poems of war, including a strange one in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin, on an attack by trees, with 'Bracken the pillager, / Broom in the van of the battalion (*bragat*)'. (Haycock, 2007, p. 180, p. 216) *Bracara* would on this basis be Celtic, like *Langobriga* or *Tongobriga* with their hills, or *Caladunum* with its hillfort, all close to Braga. (Koch, 2007, map 16.2)

For all that, the *Bracara Augusta* of Ptolemy and others hardly relates (as some think) to 'malt' or Celtic words for 'trousers, breeks'. Nor does *Bracari*, the people living in and near Braga. (Falileyev, 2010, p. 79) An answer is obvious. The Bracari were not so called because of a taste for malt or fashions in trousers. Reference in the Book of Taliesin to trees in attack with 'Broom at the head' shows that. (Lewis and Williams, 2019) The argument is thus. Many Celtic tribal names breathe violence. Calidonii of North Britain were 'tough men'; Catuvellauni of the Chilterns were 'battle-champions'; Ordovices of North Wales were 'hammer-fighters'. This is clear from Welsh *caled* 'hard'; *cad* 'battle'; *ordd* 'sledge-hammer'. So *bragad* 'army, host', with

implications not of 'malt' but of the ferment, tumult, turmoil, or commotion of battle. It offers a solution for *Mars Braciaca* in Derbyshire and the *Bracaci* of Portugal (and perhaps *Braciacus* in Gaul). The Celtic god was, it seems, 'he of (heated) battle, being of (fervent) combant'; the Bracaci were 'fervid warriors, men ardent in attack'. The latter seemingly gave themselves out as fierce combatants, like the tough fighters and battle-champions and hammermen north of the Channel.

If so, the epithet *Braciaca* at Bakewell was stern and threatening, well suiting Mars. It was not to do with consumption of liquor. As an instance of how early Welsh and Irish can shed light on Roman Britain, it can be compared with *Leeds*. The name of this great city in the north of England can be shown, like those of nearby Ledsham and Ledston, as an ethnic name, not a hydronym (as usually said). It has a curious explanation in Welsh *llawd* 'heat of sow' and Middle Irish *láth* 'animal's desire to mate' (with a cognate in Ukrainean *lit'*), the latter also meaning 'warrior'. An amorous sow is passionate. So, too, a soldier in the thick of battle, who may not even notice that he is wounded. That allows reconstruction of Latenses 'fierce fighting men, ferocious warriors', after whom Leeds is called, and who had (in part) namesakes in the Latovici 'ardent fighters' of ancient Slovenia. If Leeds is explained from Welsh *llawd* 'sow's desire for the boar', no surprise, then, if an altar to Mars Braciaca 'he of the (tumultuous) warband', should relate via brag 'malt' to Middle Welsh bragad 'army, host; war, battle'.

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