

CULTURAL REBELLIONS:
WELSH LITERARY OUTPOURING AFTER THE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY EDWARDIAN CONQUEST

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Introduction

The sun on December 11, 1282 dawned bright and crisp over the green Snowdonian morning. Rising just before light first broke over his mountain encampment, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd began donning the leather jerkin, boots, and sword that his young squire had feverishly worked to assemble the night before. Supple from heavy use over the past few years, his meager cover slid effortlessly over his frame as his mind worked through the events of the past week. Only a few short days ago, it seemed, he had made the drastic decision to set out southward from his stronghold in Gwynedd in hopes that he and the small army that formed his retinue would receive succor from some of his supporters in the Powys territory. He had had no choice. The strategizing King of England had once before conducted this campaign against the Welsh Prince, but was hindered solely by a lack of provisions from taking the heartland of his native opponent, a deficiency that Edward would certainly not repeat during this incursion. Faced with his own lack of resources as the English python drew its coils tighter and tighter around northern Wales, Llywelyn chose to venture out of his fortress at great risk to himself from the many pro-Edward factions that called Powys and the Marches home.

Alas, there was a tiny glimmer of hope on the dark horizon. Just two nights ago, he had received an emissary from two of his marcher enemies, Edmund de Mortimer and Hugo Le Strange, expressing their desire to join forces with the Welsh Prince. Coming as something of a surprise, the messenger entreated Llywelyn to travel only a little further into Powys and receive their homage at a small village called Cilmeri. Too desperate to allow his suspicions to get the best of him, the Prince placed his hope in the notion that Edward's own land-greed might have soured this whole affair even for his loyal supporters on the buffer between England and Wales. So, on the morning of December 11, Llywelyn and his army embarked on the small trip to the

rickety bridge over the River Wye, all the while praying that their endeavors would not go unrewarded.

Though short, the march was a fearsome, one even for the stoutest of Welsh warriors. Every creaking branch became an English knight drawing his sword, every rustling leaf an archer fitting his bow. More than once Llywelyn halted his company to check in with the scouts that he had ordered to flank the army a quarter-mile to either side. No one had seen so much as a deer. The entire forest had quieted in anticipation. It came as something of a relief when the army drew within sight of the river crossing and cast its collective gaze on the Marcher lords that would, hopefully, become their saviors. Working to shield a slight smile, Llywelyn advanced to greet the English nobles and to thank them graciously for their support in his struggle. As he reached the apex of the wooden bridge, the soft padding of his boots quickly gave way to the clamor and clash of metal on metal and the ominous twang of a bowstring being loosed. Turning to ascertain the source of this noise, Llywelyn was greeted with a sight that had haunted his imagination: his army was under ambush.

Unbeknownst to the Welsh Prince, the two traitorous Marcher lords, aided by Roger Despenser and Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn, who had already made an attempt on Llywelyn's life, had sent a sizable portion of their forces across the river to encircle the meager Welsh army as it grew closer to the bridge. Having already disposed of the scouts whom they found in their pathway, the English army had nothing to do but wait for the signal. At that moment, they were able to sweep in from their sylvan hiding places and deliver a fatal blow to Llywelyn's forces within a very short time.

Seeing his army besieged, the Welsh Prince turned in a desperate attempt to rejoin them, but the opposing combatants were too well placed between him and his men to allow his return.

Across the bridge, Edmund and Hugo ordered their men forward to cut off Llywelyn's retreat while they themselves remained behind to oversee the battle. As the Welsh Prince felt the grip of the treacherous Marcher lords tighten about his neck, he drew his sword in hopes that he could fend off enough of their soldiers to buy him some time before his capture and ransom. The hours raged on as Llywelyn watched more and more of his loyal men fall upon English swords. These were some of the very men with whom he had grown up, with whom he had shared his vision of a unified Wales under his rule. Now these were the same men fighting for their lives in a last-ditch attempt to do damage to the English hordes. Llywelyn himself was becoming tired and overrun by the opposition, and it did not look like anyone sought to come forward to claim his arrest. As the warring forces bore down upon him, the Prince's own mortality rose to the top of his mind: he could not be killed, he was far too valuable. Putting his last hope into revealing his identity, Llywelyn shouted his own name amidst the tumultuous battle. Unfortunately for him, it proved to be too late. At that moment, a young English squire impaled the Prince upon his lance, already soiled with the lifeblood of so many of his compatriots. Llywelyn died within minutes and the hope for a sovereign Wales expired with the passing of his last breath.

With the death of Llywelyn the Last, the army of King Edward I of England was able to sweep through the Welsh territories and subdue any remaining threats to English overlordship. With that act, the real story of this thesis commences. Edward sought to cement his authority by depriving Wales of many of its greatest cultural icons and by instituting a firm administrative structure to keep the Welsh in line while extracting all the economic resources that the region had to offer. However, this did not mean a total loss of autonomy for the native people. For those willing to cooperate with the new regime, the opportunities arose for substantial monetary gains and the inclusion into a nascent class of Welsh demi-nobles. Realizing that they could no longer

take on their English rulers militarily, these native squires found a new medium for salving their psychological wounds. They became great patrons of literature, providing the financial backing for artists and scribes such as Dafydd ap Gwilym and the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi, respectively, who dedicated their lives to the production of manuscripts celebrating Welsh heritage in contradistinction to their English lords.

Until this point, very little scholarship exists (especially outside Wales) on linking the literary outpourings of the fourteenth century with the great changes wrought in Wales during the Conquest. That is not to say that academics have not turned their attention to Welsh history or its literature, but the two are often investigated independent of one another. Historical analyses of this period, like *Edward I and Wales*, edited by Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones, are generally content merely to describe the events of the Conquest, especially the structure and military function of Edward's Iron Ring castles, with some attention offered to the new administrative features implemented by the Statute of Rhuddlan. On the other hand, in literary analysis, a seemingly greater degree of importance has been allotted to understanding the ways in which some of this very literature, especially the *Mabinogion* tales of the *White Book of Rhydderch* and the *Red Book of Hergest* reflects early medieval Welsh history rather than their fourteenth-century contexts. A good example of this can be found in Jeffrey Gantz's own translation of the *Mabinogion*. These are scholastic deficiencies that I will address in this thesis.

It will become apparent that the literary works of the fourteenth century were not merely byproducts of a disgruntled populace nor were they simply the tools by which the Welsh people could create a new cultural identity for themselves. Instead, if we can gaze from the Welsh perspective, this literature very effectively serves to reinforce and expand the pre-existing concept of Wales as a majestic and sovereign region with a unique set of traditions and a glorious

heritage. Thus, by exploiting the opportunity afforded by Edward's new infrastructure, key members of the Welsh squirely class were able to forge a cultural rebellion that developed out of this long heritage. The result is a strong sense of native culture that has endured the ages even to today; as a tour guide at Caernarfon Castle (and the inspiration of this thesis) told me, the land and its administration are now in the hands of Welshmen, like himself, who speak Welsh and carry on a Welsh way of life. Thus, we may say that these cultural rebellions were, in the long term, successful. Before we turn to the specifics of this rebellion, however, we must spend some time sifting through the events in the history of Wales that led up to the Conquest.

Background to the Conquest

Edward's construction of his Iron Ring castles occurred at, and indeed formed, the apex of a centuries-long process toward the unification of Wales and embodied a step forward in the dominance of England over the British Isles. Stretching back to Roman days, Wales had been occupied by a series of fragmented and often warring tribes who relied upon their remoteness and their distrust of strangers to impede most efforts of foreign invasion and internal fusion. In the late eleventh century, the peoples of England found itself under the helm of the highly competent Norman aristocracy who sought the ultimate assimilation of its Isles; around the same time, Wales began to bear leaders whose visions and ambitions extended far beyond the scope of their minuscule territories. Not to be outdone by their neighbors to the West, the Anglo-Norman monarchy, beginning with William I, was quick to exert control over Wales before it had the chance to form a unified, national identity. When their efforts were resisted in the north by the likes of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (Prince of Wales, often known as Llywelyn the Last), the English King Edward I used his well-known military might to extend an iron fist over the land and consummate the marriage of England and Wales with an Iron Ring of fortifications, to be forever a symbol of English authority and power.

Early Wales

Foreign occupation of Wales is generally thought to have originated in the Roman period. As Gaius Julius Caesar's troops began to arrive in 55 BC and concentrate forces in key locations throughout what is now known as England, the native population, the Celtic Britons, attempted to mount a guerrilla offensive, but proved to be little more than a pest for Caesar's mighty armies. After a period of uneasy relations between the Romans and the Britonic tribes, a force of

about 40,000 troops led by Aulus Plautius in AD 43 attacked Caratacus and his men at Kent, forcing them to move westward into the island's hinterlands, what is today known as Wales.¹ From there, the rugged terrain and lack of proximity to the more populated eastern shores of England sheltered most of Wales from invasion and allowed it to develop largely independent of the surrounding peoples. (One notable exception to this absence of Roman presence in Wales, which we will discuss more in detail later, is the fort of Segontium built ca. AD 77 in present-day Caernarfon.²) In the fifth century, the British Isles were freed from Roman rule when the latter “had neither the will nor the resources to maintain its authority in Britain.”³ As time progressed, the Welsh people found themselves, unfortunately, to be sharing an island with a series of invaders, the Angles and Saxons, then the Vikings and Irish, and finally the Normans. Understandably, the Marches (eastern borders) of Wales were often the site of conflict between these native Welsh and this succession of occupiers of England, but the highland-guarded northern territories of Wales endured more the strain of competing tribal kings than the threat of outward incursion. At any rate, the Welsh would not easily become accustomed to living under foreign rule.

1 Graham Webster, *Rome Against Caratacus : The Roman Campaigns in Britain, Ad 48-58*, (London: Bath Press, 1981), 30-31.

2 “Segontium,” Internet source. *National Museum of Wales*; available from <http://www.segontium.org.uk/2006>; accessed 25 Oct. 2006.

3 P.H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

Harlech and the Snowdonia National Park⁴

Source: Author's Own Photograph



As scholar David Walker states in his work *Medieval Wales*, “The rugged terrain, with impenetrable mountain massifs and inhospitable upland ranges, broken by river valleys, did not make for a unified control or a unified development.”⁵ As a result, local communities arose under the leadership of tribal chieftains, constantly in competition with one another for land supremacy and political clout. Throughout the Middle Ages, Wales was organized into four major kingdoms/principalities: Gwynedd covering the northern Snowdonia mountains, Powys in the center, and Deheubarth and Dyfed in the south.⁶ Each of these regions were further

⁴ The mid-ground flatlands were completely covered by the waters of Cardigan Bay. In the distance, the peaks of the Snowdonian highlands rise sharply above the surrounding territory; it was this terrain that characterizes much of northern Wales.

⁵ David Walker, *Medieval Wales*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.

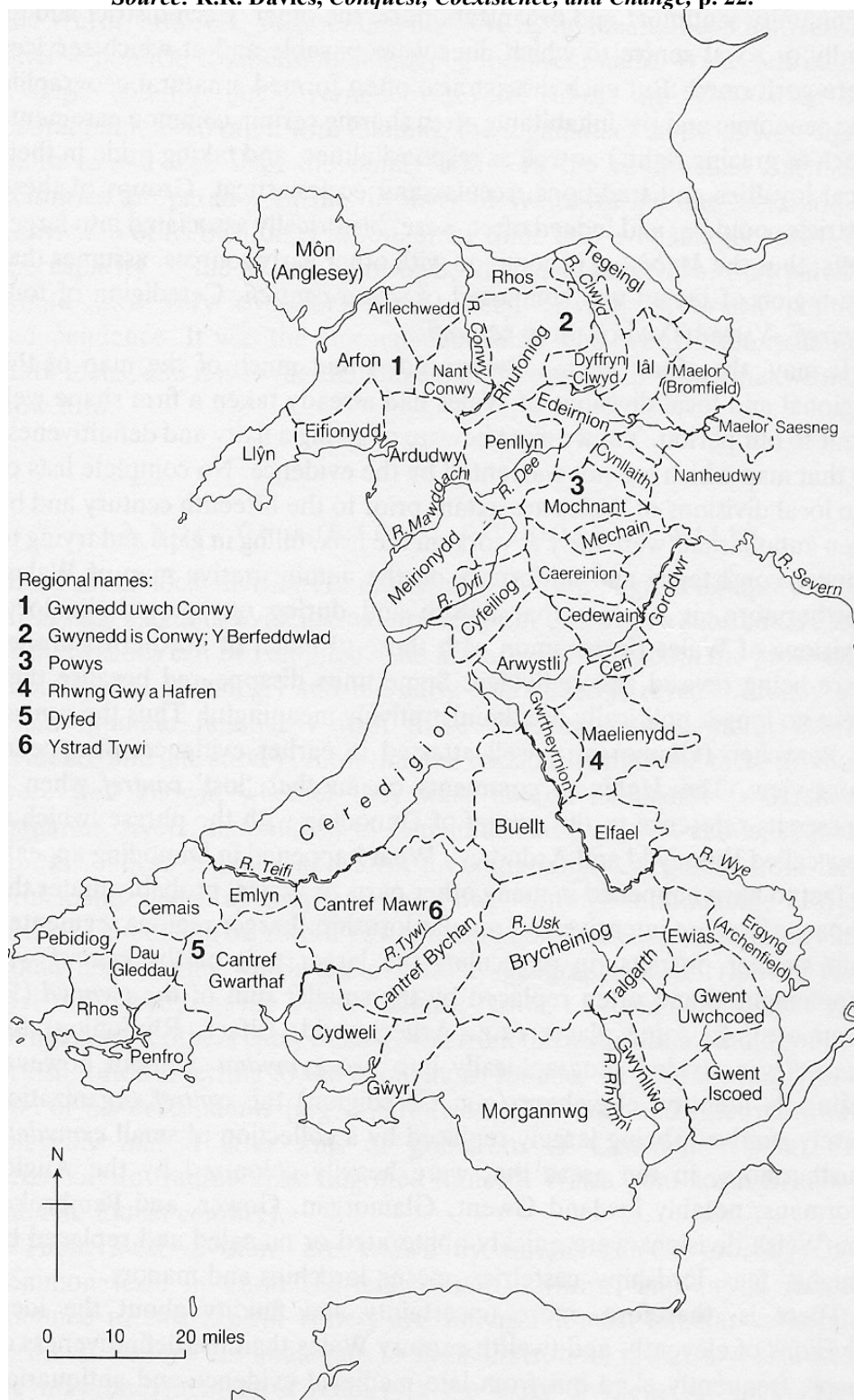
⁶ For our purposes here, we will concentrate mostly on the northern territories of Wales since they form the setting of the last bastion of Welsh independence before Edward's Conquest; however, we must note that the dramatic

subdivided into counties or *cantref*s, each with its own local administration and customs. There did exist some modicum of a ruling elite, who attempted to establish an overlord rule in the major kingdoms. Despite many of the rulers arising from the same lineages in any given territory, their rule was anything but continuous. Sub-rulers and competing kings often managed to destroy and succeed these dynastic families in the bloody style that characterized Welsh political engagement. “Rivals were eliminated: they were to be blinded, so that they could not be effective leaders in peace or commanders in war; they were castrated so that they could not sire rival candidates for power.”⁷ Understandably, some of these warrior-kings were far more effective than others, consolidating their territories into one large holding and creating for themselves such political clout as to cause problems for neighboring England. Such was the case in Wales throughout the Middle Ages, coming to a stop only after Edward I's invasions.

changes instituted in the north after the English campaign did have a ripple effect throughout Wales, touching the lives of essentially all Welshmen.

7 Ibid., 6.

Regional and Local Divisions of Medieval Wales
Source: R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, p. 22.



Wales and the Norman Monarchy

One of the most dramatic changes for England after the Norman invasion in 1066 was the extensive disinheritance of the Anglo-Saxon nobility. As any medieval ruler would be expected to do upon conquering a new territory, William I (r. 1066-1087) was quick to award his loyal subjects on both sides of the Channel with major holdings, including lands on the borders with Wales. In fact, William himself did not take possession of any Marcher (from the Anglo-Saxon *mearc*, meaning “boundary”) territory, but instead enfeoffed them to his supporters⁸ like Hugh d'Avranches, Earl of Chester in the North. These Marcher Lords often acted according to their own whim and were rarely accountable to the king as were their counterparts in England;⁹ even more confusing was the fact that their jurisdictions embodied a legal hodgepodge of Anglo-Norman law and Welsh law (the Hywel Dda). Furthermore, even these powerful families were not able to maintain continuous authority, forcing the local power to change hands every few generations. Thus, with different lords and barons exerting power over the border, Welsh-Norman relations underwent the strain of non-uniformity: the different Anglo-Norman aristocrats dealt with the Welsh in varying ways, sometimes in peaceful accord, but often as conquerors with fluctuating degrees of ambition. Add to this mix the disunity of the Welsh kingdoms and the only occasional invasion by the Anglo-Norman monarchy, and we have the situation when Henry II took the English throne in 1154.

In the Councils of 1175-1177, the Welsh princes gained a short-sighted victory in the guise of a long-term defeat. Their advances against each other and the Marcher lords in 1165 were confirmed in the courts of Henry II (r. 1154-1189), and both sides implicitly recognized English overlordship in their territories.¹⁰ King John (r. 1199-1218), however, would ignore the

⁸ Walker, *Wales*, 21.

⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰ R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change : Wales, 1063-1415*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press,

former in regard to the latter and act as overlord in his dealings with Wales. As Welsh historian R. R. Davies argues, “Royal interest in Wales grew from the early thirteenth century onwards. It did so in part because the faltering momentum of Marcher advance made it clear that the Crown alone could contain and challenge the resurgence of native Welsh power.”¹¹ As far as knowledge of Welsh political weaknesses goes, John was well versed; having been Lord of Glamorgan in northern Wales since 1189, he had already participated in the turbulent politics and experienced the fragmentation of that region by the time of his accession to the English throne. Add to this the fact that, confined to the Isles after losing Normandy in 1204, John sought to save some face and spent a great deal of his time surveying his western borders in an attempt to assize and consolidate his resources to mount an offensive against France.¹² Of course, these incursions into Wales were rarely met amicably. Ironically, John's son-in-law Llywelyn ap Iorwerth of Gwynedd proved to be one of the king's most troublesome enemies; this man, often termed Llywelyn the Great (and often remembered as Llywelyn I in Welsh consciousness), campaigned to become the sole ruler of Gwynedd by 1200, making a treaty with John in recognition of his authority and marrying his illegitimate daughter Joan.¹³ Wishing to curb Llywelyn's annexation ambitions, John mounted in 1211 the first series of royal campaigns in Wales since his father's in 1165, sweeping into the region and “building many castles in Gwynedd' to consolidate his victory.”¹⁴ It was here that John did to the Welsh what he had failed to do to the French and set the tone for what would be Edward I's policy and strategy against Wales more than a half-century later.

As Davies asserts, “The government of Henry III was too busy reasserting its authority in

1987), 291.

11 Ibid., 290.

12 Ibid., 293-295.

13 Ibid., 239. John had hoped that recognition of Llywelyn's authority and his marriage to Joan would endear Llywelyn to the English king and give him pause when considering further annexations against the king's will.

14 Ibid., 295.

Brittany and Poitou, to give much attention to Wales, unless and until it was goaded into doing so.”¹⁵ Such was certainly the case when the deaths of the Marcher earls of Gloucester and Pembroke as well as William Braose occurred within months of one another in 1230-1231, eliminating three firm English powers in the area and inviting conflict among the potential contenders for those prominent Marcher positions; though Llywelyn ap Iorweth was not ready again to do battle against royal forces, he was anxious to exploit this newly developed weakness in English power, and, in order to do so, he quickly played politics.¹⁶ Despite many efforts to establish himself in Henry's good graces, Llywelyn could not help but test the limits of his power, inviting several weak and ineffective royal campaigns in the 1220s and 1230s. It was only after Llywelyn's death in 1240 that Henry's fortune began to turn. Llywelyn's son Dafydd, faced with competition from native Welsh authorities, turned to England for support; on May 15, 1240, Dafydd was knighted and did homage to Henry, allowing himself to be confirmed only as "the son of Llywelyn sometime prince of North Wales.”¹⁷ With such a submissive ruler in the region, Henry needed only a short campaign in 1241 to reestablish English overlordship. Over the next few years, Henry instituted a series of institutional measures in Wales, “building and fortifying castles, raising troops, instituting inquiries into royal rights, and establishing wide-ranging judicial commissions” that, in turn, incited a damaging rebellion led by Dafydd in 1244-1245.¹⁸ Of course, these Welsh gains did not last long. After Dafydd's death a year later, many of the leaders in south and central Wales turned to Henry for support, forcing the grandsons of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and young heirs to the throne of Gwynedd (Dafydd's nephews), Llywelyn and his brother Owain ap Gruffydd, to submit to English rule, effectively giving the king

15 Ibid., 297.

16 Ibid., 297-298.

17 Ibid., 300.

18 Ibid., 302.

uncontested overlordship over most of north and mid-Wales as cemented in the Treaty of Woodstock in 1247.¹⁹

Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, Prince of Wales

By the time of the Treaty of Woodstock, both Dafydd's territory and princely authority in Gwynedd were already curtailed seemingly beyond repair. Having no direct descendant to continue Dafydd's line, the region faced the possibility of civil war among the leader's four surviving nephews. Two of them, Llywelyn and Owain ap Gruffydd, "by the advice of good men," divided the territory into two roughly equal parts, thereby sating the two primary contenders for control,²⁰ but it was to be Llywelyn who roused the native sentiments against the careless and oppressive English rule. "Not for the first time or last time a national unity in Wales was forged out of the experience of foreign domination."²¹ After his succession to power in Gwynedd, Llywelyn quickly continued a strategy of battle and alliance that had he begun before the death of his uncle. In 1247-1248, he had established a pact of mutual aid with Gruffydd ap Madog of north Powys and, with his brother Owain in tow, with Maredudd ap Rhys Gryg and Rhys Fychan of Deheubarth. In this manner, Llywelyn began to forge an alliance of native Welsh powers under his own authority. The next trial that the rising ruler had to face was the jealous contentions of his brothers. Apart from Owain's already vested interest in controlling Gwynedd, Llywelyn also had to deal with his young and ambitious brother, Dafydd. In June of 1255, Llywelyn met his brothers on the field of battle at Bryn Derwin and forced them into submission, becoming the sole leader of Gwynedd.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 302-303.

²⁰ Llanvarvan of Caradog, *Brut Y Tywysogion or the Chronicle of the princes (A. D. 681-1282)* ed. John Williams, (London: Longman, 1860), 400. This source is a continuation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.

²¹ Davies, *Conquest*, 308.

²² Ibid., 309.

Met with immediate success, Llywelyn continued to garner support from his neighbors in reducing English holdings in Wales. In 1258, he held a meeting involving almost all Welsh leaders as well as the Scottish barons represented by Walter Comyn, a meeting in which he was accorded the title *princeps Wallie*.²³ In the early 1260s, Llywelyn was able to make further gains in the Marches thanks in no small part to the factional battling between the Marcher lords and between those lords and Prince Edward. This had begun, as most conflicts do during this period when a particular baron, this time Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, began to assert an authority against the king's will in a similar style to what happened for King John in the *Magna Carta*, thus leading to a civil war generally referred to as a "baronial conflict."²⁴ By 1267, Llywelyn had proved himself to be such a successful strategist that Henry, in his advanced age and with a highly fragmented nobility, felt that he could no longer afford to go up against the Welsh *princeps*. On September 25 of that year, Cardinal Ottobuono stepped in to secure a papally supported peace, the Treaty of Montgomery. "It was... a peace conceded reluctantly by the Crown, but it served the immediate needs of both parties—confirmation and recognition of his gains [and title] for Llywelyn, a respite from conflict, and an opportunity for reconstruction, for the Crown."²⁵ From there, the prince of Wales continued building alliances and seizing lands, ever furthering his power and consolidating his territory in the north, making strategic use of fragmentary English loyalties and Welsh resentment of foreign rule: "'Unity' was his ambition: his documents echo to the refrain of the need for one peace and one war, 'one war, one counsel and one aid.' It was only through such unity that native Wales could hope to survive."²⁶

Of course, we must not take for granted that Llywelyn's confederation was held together

²³ Ibid., 311.

²⁴ Ibid., 312-313.

²⁵ Ibid., 314.

²⁶ Ibid., 320.

loosely by fear of the English monarchy and burgeoning “nationalistic” identity. The prince still faced much opposition from his neighbors to the south who had long become accustomed to Anglo-Norman presence and versed in its policy. In one example, Llywelyn had to face a plot against his life made by Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn of southern Powys in association with the prince's brother, Dafydd. When Llywelyn discovered their treachery, both sought refuge in England rather than doing battle.²⁷ Similarly, the prince had to deal with conflicts arising from the Church in Wales. In 1274, Llywelyn faced a man much like himself in pride and ambition: Anian, Bishop of St. Asaph. What began as a small policy dispute grew into a monstrous argument over ecclesiastical liberties versus the power of the prince; after Anian had gone to the Crown and the Pope for support, Llywelyn was forced to grant him the concessions that he so desired, proving that the prince could make enemies on all fronts.²⁸

Edward I and the Conquest of Wales – The First Campaign

When Edward acceded to the throne in 1272, he was still on Crusade; it would be two years before he returned to England, taking a leisurely route back and enjoying the fine Savoyard architecture of St. Georges d'Esperanche. When he did return, he found most everything in the same peace that characterized the period before his departure. Llywelyn continued to work his authority throughout northern Wales and was slowly absorbing the Welsh fealties normally reserved for the king.²⁹ Leaving nothing to chance, Edward summoned Llywelyn to do homage in early 1273. The prince was already ensconced in a political battle with Roger Mortimer, Lord of the Marcher territory at Chirk, over rights to build castles in Maeleinydd (in Mortimer's case) and in Montgomeryshire (in Llywelyn's case); when answered by the Crown forbidding his

²⁷ Ibid., 324.

²⁸ Ibid., 325-326.

²⁹ Ibid., 309.

castle at Dolforwyn in Montgomeryshire, Llywelyn responded that he had full rights to build castles in his own land “and that although he held his principality from the king, the rights of that principality were quite distinct from the laws of the English realm.”³⁰ Seemingly as an addendum to that viewpoint, Llywelyn did not present himself to do homage that year, asking Edward to receive him at a later date in Shrewsbury. To Llywelyn's credit, it was the king who did not attend that second meeting as a result of a sickness. At yet a third try, Llywelyn asked Edward to come to Chester in late 1275; this time, the king attended, but the prince did not. More disconcertingly, however, was the fact that he proclaimed to his people that a peace had been made with the English king and that he would be raising a new tax in order to pay Edward his dues, a new tax that the most suspect of subjects would see as a tax for levying war.³¹

Given his situation, it is understandable that the Welsh prince would have had some reservations about traveling to England to do homage at this time. He was already in an embittered contest concerning the mandates of the Treaty of Montgomery with a substantial Marcher lord, a man who would stand to profit much by his death. Similarly, he had already witnessed the plot to take his life at the hands of his brother and another Welsh lord, both of whom had been heartily received by the king in their flight from Wales. Also, his marriage to Eleanor de Montfort (daughter of Simon and his key to rekindling the baronial rebellions of the 1260s) had been uncovered; his wife had then been kidnapped by a Cornish knight while on her way to Wales.³² All of this understandably gave Llywelyn cause to feel uneasy for his well-being if caught traveling abroad, but Edward would prove not to be so understanding as to accept this excuse for Llywelyn's conspicuous absence.

30 Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 174.

31 Ibid., 174-175.

32 Ibid., 175. Llywelyn's marriage to Eleanor de Montfort firmly allied himself to the anti-monarchical baronial cause of the Welsh Marches, formerly headed by Eleanor's father, Simon.

On the advice of his magnates, who were of course anxious to acquire new lands in Wales, Edward began preparing his invasion force in 1276, a force created solely for an attack on Llywelyn's strongholds in the north, rather than for a full-scale conquest.³³ Not wishing to go up against the whole of northern Welsh power, Edward used his ties with Dafydd and Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn to raise native support for his political maneuvering; in fact, he gained much approval by promising to restore much of their lands from the hands of Llywelyn rather than promising them to his English magnates.³⁴ By mid 1277, Edward's small force was mustered at Worcester and began the march around the northern coast of Wales. The campaign was fairly uneventful as Llywelyn could hardly muster a force strong enough to face Edward in pitched battle and as Edward was clever enough not to face guerrilla attacks by advancing into Llywelyn's Snowdonian heartland; "the chronicler Bartholomew Cotton described the operations of this first Welsh war as a siege of Snowdonia, and they certainly had something of that character, with the Welsh being steadily encircled and their food supplies cut off."³⁵ Of course, Llywelyn was not the only one with small provisions: "It is likely that the English lacked the resources, particularly food supplies, for a protracted conflict, and that they welcomed the chance to end the war."³⁶ For that reason, Edward sought a brief but decisive campaign, and that is precisely what he achieved.

In his march, Edward had effectively hemmed Llywelyn's presence and authority to the region of Snowdonia in Gwynedd, a move which was made official by a November 9 treaty in Conwy. Llywelyn was forced to surrender Edward's former holdings, the Four Cantrefs, in addition to paying a war indemnity of £50,000 and limiting his reception of homage to just five

33 Michael Prestwich, *The Three Edwards : War and State in England, 1272-1377*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 12.

34 Prestwich, *Edward I*, 177.
Prestwich, *Three Edwards*, 12.

35 Prestwich, *Edward I*, 180.

36 Prestwich, *Three Edwards*, 12-13.

Welsh lords.³⁷ In addition, Edward required Llywelyn to do fealty at Rhuddlan and then to come to London to do homage,³⁸ thus ensuring that his allegiance was pledged the site of the king's headquarters in Wales and England, respectively, and embodying a step that would hopefully secure the Welsh prince under the king's rule. As physical reminders of Edward's power and authority, the king began the construction of four new Welsh castles, at Rhuddlan and Flint in the north, and at Aberystwyth and Builth in the center. The building was overseen by Master James of St. George, a Savoyard architect whose work Edward so admired while on Crusade. As Prestwich propounds, "The most up-to-date techniques of fortification were used to overawe a people whose leaders scarcely had the resources to mount a full-scale siege."³⁹ The awe factor would become Edward's most visible *modus operandi* in Wales.

The Second Campaign

For about five years after Edward's campaign, the situation in Wales seemed to be stabilized. Llywelyn kept to his own territories, and most of the Welsh lordships paid homage to the Crown. It was not until 1282 that the grievances resulting from the English incursion exploded onto the scene. On March 22, Prince Dafydd, disgruntled by his failure to receive his family's lands as Edward had promised him, used his Easter invitation to take by surprise the castle at Hawarden, kidnapping Roger Clifford, and slaying his companions; over the next week, Dafydd's similarly disgruntled supporters took the castles at Oswestry, Carreg Cennen, and Llandovery in similar fashion.⁴⁰ Seeing the Welsh successes, Llywelyn himself joined in the fray and led the attacks on Flint and Rhuddlan.

³⁷ Ibid., 13.

³⁸ Prestwich, *Edward I*, 181.

³⁹ Prestwich, *Three Edwards*, 14.

⁴⁰ Prestwich, *Edward I*, 182.

Of course the man who would later become Hammer of the Scots was not willing to stand idly by and watch rebellion destroy his western dominion. Sparing little expense, Edward began to gather up his resources for a full conquest, even calling upon his holdings in Gascony, Ponthieu, and Ireland for aid.⁴¹ The Marcher lords were summoned to infiltrate southern and central Wales, while Edward himself would conduct the march in the north. Once his troops were mustered in August, Edward set out, following the path that had proved so successful in his last campaign. Surmounting many setbacks including the death of Roger Mortimer (lord of Wigmore), the death of Luke de Tany (leader of English forces in Anglesey), and the failure of the Church to provide any assistance, the Crown continued unsuccessfully to make land offers to Llywelyn and Dafydd if they would concede their Welsh holdings to him.⁴² He did receive very beneficial news in December: the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. The prince, with the understanding that he would be starved out if he remained in Snowdonia had risked traveling southward. In one account, he was lured into a trap at Irfon Bridge by Marcher Lords feigning changing sides; “the Welsh prince had vainly shouted out his name in the battle to try to ensure that he would not be killed; an English squire ran him through in ignorance of his victim's identity.”⁴³ The following June, Dafydd was captured by his own men and turned over to Edward, by whom he was tried and executed for treachery.⁴⁴

With Edward's substantial provisioning and the elimination of the primary Welsh opposition leaders, the English forces faced a fairly easy victory in north Wales. Continuing in the same vein as before, Edward built a new series of castles, completing his infamous Iron Ring. The castles at Harlech, Caernarfon, Conwy, and Beaumaris along with the four castles from the

41 Prestwich, *Three Edwards*, 15.

42 Prestwich, *Edward I*, 190-191.

43 Prestwich, *Three Edwards*, 15.

44 Ibid., 15.

first campaign and the dozen or so Welsh castles that he repaired and took over, made for an intense reminder of English power and presence in the region, reminders that had dramatic psychological effects on the native Welsh populace and that manifested themselves in the literature of the period, which we will see in Chapters 3 and 4. Before we begin that, however, we must investigate the ways in which Welsh life was shaped under the reign of Edward I.

Chapter 1: Wales Under Edward I

The introduction of imminent English overlordship embodied in Edward magnified the transformation of north Wales from a conglomeration of independent, native kings into a centrally administered and highly monetized royal principality, thus directly accountable to the king himself. In some ways, the transformation was largely a continuation of Llywelyn's ambitious policies in Gwynedd; in others, it incorporated decidedly English (indeed, Edwardian) innovations, such as the addition of a system of castles for administrative, defensive, and, of course, psychological purposes. Also, despite the fact that Edward spent a great deal of effort outlining the instances in which Welsh law and custom were to be maintained by his new officials, there was, as one would expect, a great degree of subjugation and acculturation of the Welsh as a result of Edward's mass immigration of English into his freshly delineated boroughs. In response to this Anglicization of northern Wales, especially after the failed rebellions of 1294-5, the Welsh quickly adapted to their new way of life and found themselves with the motivation and means for a great literary expansion.

Economy and Oppression

Economic Growth

In its earlier history, Wales was almost entirely a pastoral society; individual families and tribes raised cattle and sheep across the highlands and northern lowlands, relying upon their fur for coats, and their milk and meat for sustenance; “they were, to put it kindly, a wild people living in a wild country....”⁴⁵ The degree of their isolation and exclusivity, stemming from the remoteness of the northern Welsh terrain, cannot be understated; “high relief and high rainfall; cool temperatures; bleak, windswept mountain slopes; and poorly drained, acidic soils make

45 R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063-1415*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 139.

good arable land rare.”⁴⁶ As such, where Europe relied upon wheat production as its prime commercial and dietary staple, Wales could only subsist on oats and other meager plants in its agricultural repertoire, plants that accounted for about one-third of its assessed wealth,⁴⁷ further emphasizing its dependency upon animal husbandry for wealth and nutrition. Moreover, though the populace was nomadic, migration occurred only in restricted ranges of land, and only local markets provided these herders with the opportunity to travel.⁴⁸ Of course, trade at these markets occurred only in like kind, but Edward's demand for cash would soon alter the economic landscape of Wales permanently.

If such fiscal backwardness characterized Wales in her youth, then her later Middle Ages saw a dramatic upswing in economic growth, spurred by immigration and monetization. After the Norman invasion of the British Isles, Wales, undergoing the influence of both a native and alien population boom,⁴⁹ began to feel the effects of an intense land hunger. This problem was exacerbated by native Welsh inheritance laws that governed land transmission on the basis of partibility, rather than primogeniture; a family's holdings would be divided among the male heirs, rather than passed on wholesale. Thus, the previously partitioned land had to be reshaped and further sculpted to make room for new housing settlements,⁵⁰ the largest of which would be on the scale of medium English villages. This, in turn, reduced the amount of land available for pasture and put more strain on the already burdened Welsh economy. The only recourse was to reach out and try to establish some small amount of trading contacts with their Anglo-Norman

46 James Given, "The Economic Consequences of the English Conquest of Gwynedd," *Speculum* 64.1 (1989): 13.

47 Ibid., 14. Here, he gathers data from the Caernarfonshire commote, Caffligion, which should be representative of the northern Welsh agricultural spectrum. If anything, the landscape of this commote was likely to have been more suitable for raising crops than the remainder of the principality given its relatively flat terrain.

48 Davies, *Conquest*, 146.

49 Ibid., 147. Though Norman immigration into Wales occurred largely in the south, powerful leaders of the north territories saw the opportunity for a strong trading network with the southern provinces, the Marcher territories, and with England proper.

50 Ibid., 149-150.

neighbors. This, of course, was restricted substantially by the lack of a native Welsh coin. Any moneys that found their way into Wales was small in volume and of English origin.⁵¹ Beyond that, the Welsh had little to offer the rest of the civilized world. The major component of Welsh trade was wool, as in the case of England. Welsh sheep, however, seem to have been small and undernourished, producing wool of such low quality that no one wanted it; of the sixteen towns established as centers for trading wool in the Isles in 1327, only two were in Wales and zero in north Wales.⁵²

Despite all this, the economy of Wales did begin to grow internally in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, spurred by the changing landscape of Welsh politics. The partibility of land mentioned above ensured that the native wealth remained mobile, spreading throughout different lineages, rather than being concentrated in the pockets of stagnating dynasties.⁵³ When the smaller territories began to coalesce into larger ones, this fluid wealth began to have eminent focal points and strong networks on which to travel. The growth of powerful native leaders began to shift Wales into a period in which they could make profits from peasants, rather than simply commandeering resources as before; in short, “an economy of plunder as being replaced by an economy of profiteering.”⁵⁴ In even more practical terms, Wales began to see a burgeoning of material goods beginning in the early twelfth century; “all goods in Gwynedd multiplied. The inhabitants began to build churches in every part of it. They planted trees. They established orchards and gardens and enclosed with hedges and ditches. They also began to eat the fruits of the earth, after the fashion of the Romans.”⁵⁵ As such, this momentum for economic change began soundly in Wales, but its progression was bolstered substantially by external pressure. If

51 Ibid., 161. Given, “Consequences,” 14.

52 Given, “Consequences,” 38.

53 Davies, *Conquest*, 157-158.

54 Ibid., 157.

55 Ibid. Quoting the anonymous author of *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*.

the Welsh economy were to grow to become a force in the Isles, it would have to develop a native currency that could be traded across Wales and England or simply make use of English currency. Some archaeological findings have included a small sample of Anglo-Saxon coins circulating in Wales from Chester, Shrewsbury, and Hereford, but it was not until the establishment of Anglo-Norman mints in the Marches and southern Wales that money began to penetrate into northern Wales.⁵⁶ By the time of Llywelyn the Last, the upper echelons of Welsh society had begun to use their profiteering to amass fortunes without precedent in Gwynedd. Rather than the customary use of animals as currency when paying tribute to the English kings, the Welsh lords began to use money; notable would be Llywelyn's offer of £20,000 to Henry III between 1267 and 1270.⁵⁷ Thus, even before the Conquest, the northern Welsh people were put under extreme duress to provide money for their lords to placate the English monarchy. The arrival of Edward Plantagenet would only multiply the Welsh woes.

The Statute of Rhuddlan

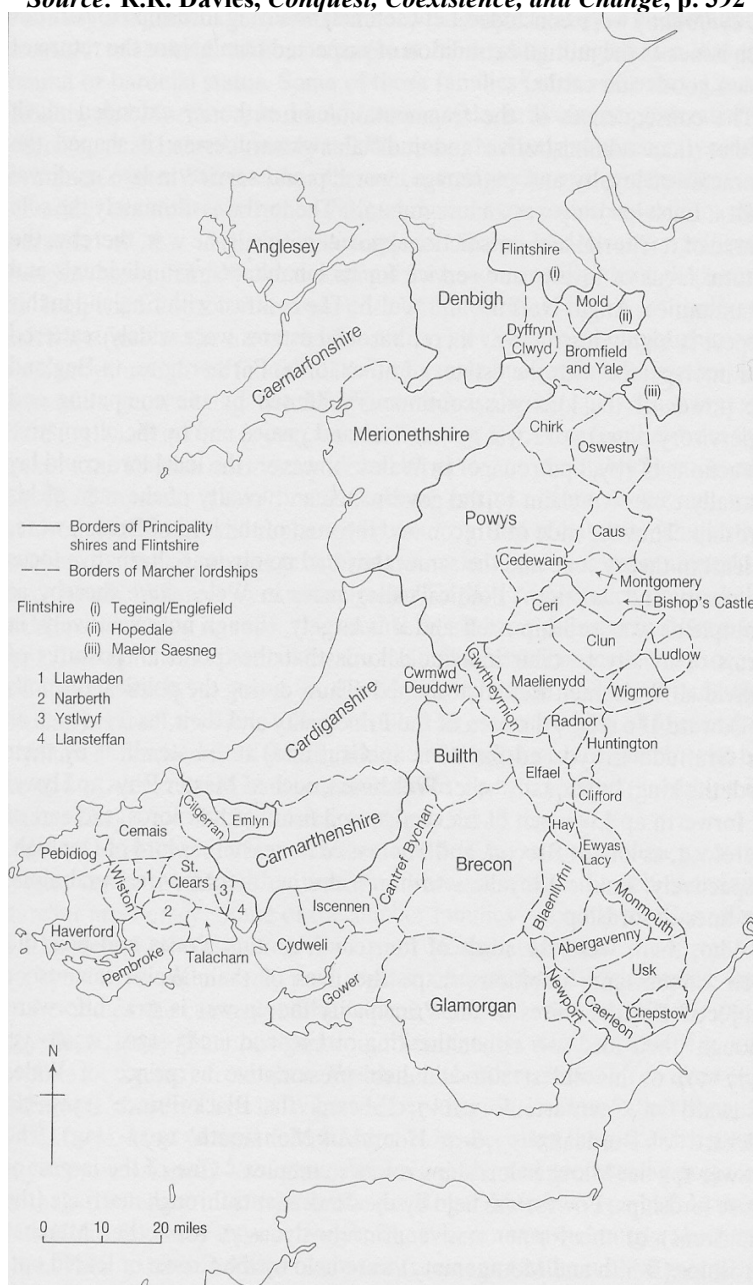
In March of 1284, Edward began to put into writing his ambitious restructuring of northern Wales. The Statute of Rhuddlan (also known as the Statute of Wales), so named for its creation in Edward's castle of the same name, brought about sweeping political and economic changes in the region, especially for the inhabitants of Llywelyn's Gwynedd. To begin his new management, he divided Gwynedd into three distinct counties: Anglesey, Caernarfonshire, and Merionethshire.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

New Welsh Divisions

Source: R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, p. 392



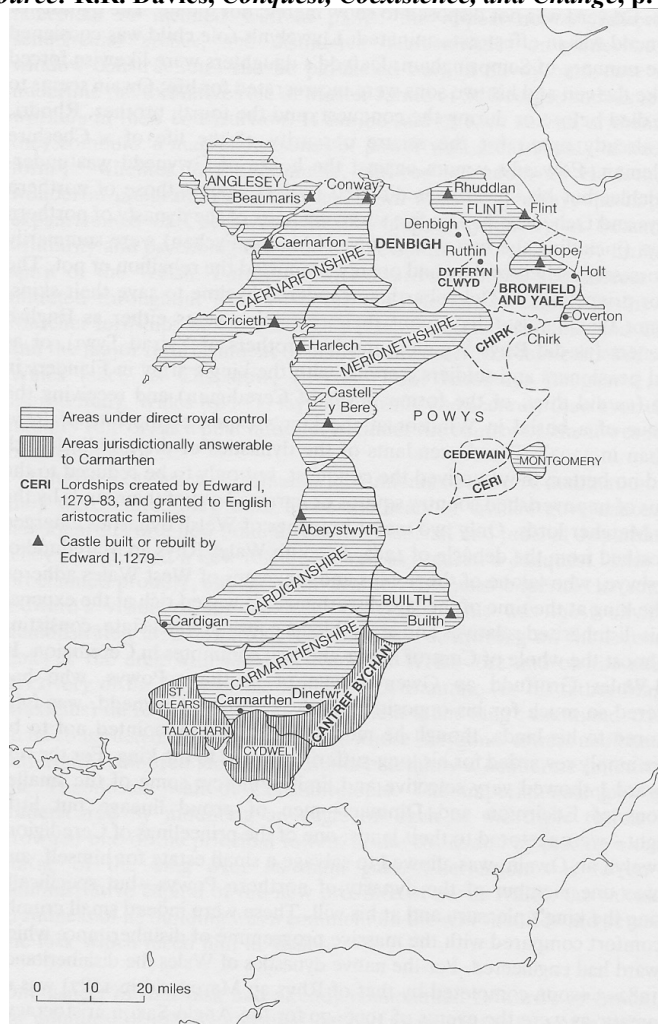
This, in effect, began the transformation of northwestern Wales into a traditional English shire, a transformation that included many new administrative features.⁵⁸ First, Edward claimed all three

⁵⁸ Ibid., 365.

shires in the name of the Crown, meaning that the subjects of that region would be totally accountable to him, rather than to various wayward lords as in the Marches. In each shire, the position of sheriff (shire-reeve) was created largely to oversee the construction of castles and to address any grievances of the local populace before it resorted to violence. Directly under himself, Edward established the position of Justiciar (Justice) of North Wales,⁵⁹ a mirror of a similar position in south Wales that had existed since the twelfth century; this man would soon become a particularly pesky thorn in the side of Wales both in Edward's time and in his son's.

Map of the King's Lands in Wales

Source: R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, p. 363



⁵⁹ Ibid., 365-366.

With the Statute of Rhuddlan, Edward had in mind the complete restructuring of northern Wales under his own hand; apart from the broad changes mentioned above, the Statute also meticulously delineated the king's policies regarding almost every aspect of legality to be implemented in his new domain. It “provided examples of the writs to be used in actions concerning land and in personal actions such as debt, covenant and trespass and described in detail the processes to be followed when such actions were pleaded in court.”⁶⁰ As such, Edward's policies reflected a tension between implementing English law and retaining Welsh custom. To his credit, Edward did try to leave in place many of the laws that existed before the Conquest. For instance, he determined that inheritance would remain partible.⁶¹ However, the concessions made in respect to Welsh custom were small and inconsistently enforced, raising further objections from the local populace.

There are numerous examples of grievances brought to the Crown's attention in response to some English official's transgression of these very traditions. In one lengthy petition sent to Edward II in his last years, the “Liegemen of the King of the Three Counties of Snowdonia” complained that:

The sheriffs in those parts [Snowdonia], without warrant, have changed the statute [of Rhuddlan] on several points, which no minister can do or other than the King himself, as is contained in the statute. Wherefore your people pray that you command your Justice, sheriffs and other ministers of those parts that they be guided peaceably and according to the laws granted at Rotheland [Rhuddlan], without regard to what the sheriffs have done before this time against the form of the Statute.⁶²

Furthermore, the numerous changes that Edward I did make threw many Welsh lives into confusion and stress. Within the new boroughs, created around the striking Iron Ring castles, Edward mandated that only English people would be allowed to reside.⁶³ The so-called

60 Llinos Beverley Smith, “The Governance of Edwardian Wales,” *Edward I and Wales*, eds. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988). 78.

61 Ibid., 79.

62 William Rees and the Public Record Office of Great Britain, *Calendar of Ancient Petitions Relating to Wales : Thirteenth to Sixteenth Century*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975). 107

63 Davies, *Conquest*, 79.

“Englishries” were sharply demarcated from the outlying “Welshries” by the town wall, manifesting in stone the division already in place in the minds of the people (and later in their literature). What made this worse was the fact that Edward's directives for the northern Welsh economy included clauses that forbade the Welsh from attending markets outside these Englishries.⁶⁴ As such, the Welsh were legally forced to travel to these English boroughs in order to sell their wares; even to get in to the market, the Welsh vendors were forced to pay tolls and dues, a stipulation only for the attendance at local fairs in the pre-Conquest period. This, accompanied by the fact that the majority of northern Welsh wealth was transferred into English hands after Edward disinherited the great families,⁶⁵ ensured that the native Welsh economy was firmly bound to the English settlers and to the king himself. (Many other wealthy members of the native Welsh society had supported Edward in his conquest and were thus left in control of their estates, but one would hardly expect these families to be any less demanding of the Welsh peasantry than their English counterparts.)

Economic Oppression

Though Llywelyn, Prince of Wales, did in his later years begin making great economic impositions upon his subjects, as did many of the other Gwynedd nobility in order to face the encroaching English horde, they would pale in comparison to what Edward and his justices would seek in the 1280s to begin funding their wars on the Continent and, in the 1290s, their invasion of Scotland. As Given states, “In the years immediately after the conquest royal extortors surveyed the principality and commuted virtually all renders into kind into cash

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Given, “Consequences,” 28.

⁶⁵ Given, “Consequences,” 15.

payments.”⁶⁶ In other words, where some pockets of Welsh still traded services and goods, the English newcomers would demand cash only. Of course, the only way to obtain that cash was to go to market, as said before, in one of the Englishries; there, one can only glean as much money as the English are willing to pay minus the cost of the market toll. Furthermore, this market toll was not the only fee required of the local populace.

Edward exploited his seigneurial position in the imposition of *banalités* (laws commanding the use of specific granaries, mills, etc., for production) in order to monopolize trade in the former Gwynedd territories.⁶⁷ One of the most fruitful *banalité* involved compulsory grain milling. Prior to the Conquest, the Welsh had a number of options of where to go to grind their grains; bonded men ground at their master's mills; freeman either had their own mills or used others' for a fixed rate or for free.⁶⁸ Edward would have none of this. Much to the distaste of the people, he began requiring them to do suit at one of the king's mills. Later in the same petition mentioned above, the Liegemen of Snowdonia raised a grievance concerning these mills:

Also, Sire your free people of those parts who have a mill, or part of a mill, pray that they may make on their own ground new mills where it may seem profitable to them, as they were accustomed to do in the time of the Princes of Wales before the Conquest... Besides, your free people of the said parts who neither possess a mill or part of a mill, pray that they be not distrained to do a suit at your mills except in the manner they were accustomed to do in the time of the Princes before the conquest.⁶⁹

Thus, we may see that there were even restrictions on the Welsh ability to construct their own mills for fear that they may interfere with the profitability of Edward's.⁷⁰ Not wishing to limit himself to taxing just one facet of society, Edward ran the gamut, even raising dues for a legal system that he himself forced upon the native population. Apart from the necessary tolls demanded for arbitration, the king and his officials had a number of ways to amerce their

⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁹ Rees, *Calendar*, 108.

⁷⁰ Given, “Consequences,” 27. See note 65.

subjects for negligence.⁷¹

The previous instances discussed were merely the incidental methods by which Edward levied fiscal exactions upon his subjects. He was also quick to begin receiving dues from his vassals as a feudal lord was expected to do. These dues were commensurate with the amount of property owned, as they were in the days of Llywelyn the Last. However, the Welsh would find Edward much more ambitious in his increasing dues. Table 1 shows the overall increase in dues around year 1284: Note the increase in dues collected of 160% over the period of a year; thus the land rent more than doubled when Edward swept into town.

⁷¹ Ibid., 29. Given gives a striking example involving coroners of North Wales who could render fines for people unwilling to submit to their investigations of “violent or suspicious deaths.”

Table 1

Source: James Given, Economic Consequences of the English Conquest of Gwynedd, p. 26
The Increase of Money Dues in the Principality of
North Wales after the English Conquest

Commote	Pre-1284 Dues			Post-1284 Increase			Post-1284 Dues		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
<i>Anglesey</i>									
Dindaethwy	14	0	5	15	17	5	29	17	10
Aberffro	37	9	0¼	26	8	7	63	17	7¾
Talybolion	20	4	3½	17	10	10¼	37	15	1¾
Twrcelyn	20	16	8	20	16	3½	41	12	11½
Menai	17	1	11¼	18	18	7	36	0	6¼
Total	109	12	4½	99	11	8¾	209	4	1¼
	(52.4%)			(47.6%)			(100%)		
<i>Caernarvon</i>									
Creuddyn	3	0	0	4	2	0½	7	2	0½
Arllechwedd Isaf	7	5	7½	3	10	10½	10	16	6
Arllechwedd Uchaf	12	19	10	1	18	10	14	18	8
Is Gwyrfai	6	11	8½	15	1	4	21	13	0½
Uwch Gwyrfai	11	16	2½	25	12	2	37	8	4½
Dinllaen	18	0	0½	33	0	7	51	0	7½
Cymydmaen	14	6	4	22	9	11	36	16	3
Cafflogion	13	14	9	17	9	2	31	3	11
Nantconwy	8	7	9	16	0	7½	24	8	4½
Total	96	2	3	139	5	6½	235	7	9½
	(40.8%)			(59.2%)			(100%)		
<i>Merioneth</i>									
Ystumanner	15	8	0	17	5	11¼	32	13	11¾
Tal-y-bont	15	16	0	22	2	5¼	37	18	5¾
Eifionydd	4	14	11	47	7	0	52	1	11
Ardudwy	5	6	8	50	2	6	55	9	2
Penllyn	1	4	0	24	4	4	25	8	4
Total	42	9	7	161	2	3½	203	11	10½
	(20.9%)			(79.1%)			(100%)		
GRAND TOTAL	248	4	2½	399	19	6¾	648	3	9¼
	(38.3%)			(61.7%)			(100%)		

The rents of the demesne villis of the princes of Gwynedd are not included in these figures.
Source: Jones Pierce, "Growth of Commutation," p. 118.

The remainder of the populace, though not required to pay rents, were also subjected to a tax hike of an extreme degree. Beginning in 1291, Edward demanded a lay subsidy (a tax on movable property designed to target the landless populace) of a fifteenth, a tax to be repeated another five times in the early years of the fourteenth century. Though not unfamiliar with taxation as a result of Llywelyn's demand for tribute, the frequency and magnitude of English taxation were novelties to the inhabitants of Snowdonia.⁷² To get a more complete picture of the Crown's exploitation of Welsh resources, we can take a look at Table 2, which gives the annual

⁷² Ibid., 31-32.

royal revenue from north Wales in Edward's time (1284-1307).

Table 2

Source: James Given, Economic Consequences of the English Conquest of Gwynedd, p. 30

Royal Revenue from the Principality of North Wales

Year	Revenue			Index Number
	£	s.	d.	1286-87 = 100
1284-85 ^a	922	7	11 ½	94
1286 ^b	573	9	7	59
1286-87	976	16	9 ½	100
1287-88	869	8	0	89
1288-89	849	13	9	87
1289-90	1231	12	7	126
1290-91	706	14	11	72
1291-92 ^c	1187	11	9 ¾	122
1292-93 ^c	1187	11	9 ¾	122
1293-94	423	15	4	43
1294-95	606	0	15 ½	62
1295-96	1133	5	3 ½	116
1296-97 ^d	1048	7	8 ¼	107
1297-98 ^d	1165	16	5 ½	119
1298-99 ^d	1319	17	9 ¼	135
1299-1300 ^d	1691	1	5 ¾	173
1304-5	1688	3	0	173
1305-6	2400	3	3 ¾	246
1306-7	2673	5	9 ¼	274

^a Covers period from March 1284 through December 1285.

^b Covers period from February through September 1286.

^c Average of the total receipts of the two years 1291-1293.

^d Includes revenues from the lands of the late Queen Eleanor.

Source: John Griffiths, "Early Accounts Relating to North Wales, Temp. Edward I," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 14 (1950-52), 235-41, 302-12; 15 (1952-54), 126-56; 16 (1954-56), 109-33; Lewis, "Account Roll of the Chamberlain."

Thus, we can see an overall increase in revenue of 190% in 23 years. (Note also that this begins in 1284 with Edward's exactions, which were likely to have been much higher than Llywelyn's only two years earlier). Such milking of the Welsh populace was necessary for Edward as he waged his wars both domestic and abroad and as he built his striking castles; Caernarfon alone consumed over £25,000 in its creation,⁷³ a feat indeed given that Edward's income around 1284 totaled only about £27,000.⁷⁴ Understandably, only a small portion of the population would have

73 Daniel Mersey, "Caernarvon Castle - Fit for a Prince," Internet Source. *Castle Wales*; available: <http://www.castlewales.com/caernarf.html>; accessed 15 Oct. 2006.

74 Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 237.

been able to make ends meet under these conditions, likely reduced to cutting costs by curtailing consumption and by relying upon old farming equipment, furthering the diminution of Welsh agricultural production⁷⁵ and economy as well as embittering the developing Welsh nation.

Cultural Oppression

At the same time that Edward was a master of squeezing every pence out of the Welsh population, he also took care to subvert much of the native culture beneath his own authority. One of the least discussed aspects of Edward's personality was his obsession with Arthurian myth. Here we must step aside quickly to note that Arthur is an especially powerful figure in the Welsh literary tradition even (or especially) after the Conquest. This tradition propounds that Arthur, a Romano-Briton king, and his lineage formed the earliest Welsh ruling house after being driven from England by the Roman armies. As such, the legacy of this myth was still a very prominent feature in the cultural memory of Wales and in the remainder of Europe. With the growth of chivalry and the courtly love romance in the twelfth century, Arthurian tradition could not help but take stage, resulting in a vast number of tales written and a plethora of "Round Tables" held throughout Europe⁷⁶ in celebration of the most perfected and idyllic warrior-king, including one held at Nefyn (an important court location for the former princes of Gwynedd) in 1284.⁷⁷ As luck would have it, Edward was in probably the best position possible both to enjoy this cultural trend and to exploit it to his imperialistic advantage; after all, it was prophesied that Arthur would return to unite Britain under his command,⁷⁸ a feat that Edward desperately sought to accomplish.

75 Given, "Consequences," 41.

76 Roger Sherman Loomis, "Edward I, Arthurian Enthusiast," *Speculum* 28 no. 1 (1953): 114. Loomis here has a nice, short list of such Arthurian celebrations held in the mid to late thirteenth century.

77 Davies, *Conquest*, 355.

78 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, Book VIII, Chapter 15.

To show his infatuation with the Arthurian myth, the Easter after his first expedition into Wales in 1277, Edward and his queen traveled to Glastonbury and ordered the tomb of the Britonic king opened.⁷⁹ According to Dimas:

It is to Adam of Domesday that we also owe the brief but vivid description of the visit paid to the tomb by Edward I and Queen Eleanor in 1278. At Duke on the Tuesday before Easter they were shown the tomb with its twin compartments and the painted likenesses of Arthur and his queen, and the marks of the fatal wound on Arthur's skull were pointed out. The next day the bones were wrapped in rich silks and, King Edward carrying those of Arthur while Eleanor bore those of Guinevere, they were temporarily returned to the tomb until a more splendid resting place could be made ready before the High Altar in the recently completed Abbey Church. It appears, however, that the skulls were retained on view outside the tomb as relics [for proper public devotion].^{80,81}

Thus, we can see how Edward, in his earliest years as king, appropriated a Welsh cultural icon as confirmation of his majesty and authority. This type of arrogation is far from isolated in the pattern of behavior that characterized Edward's policy toward Wales. Upon Wales's defeat in 1284, Edward received several Welsh treasures in expression of submission; among these was Llywelyn's coronet, reputed to be the crown of Arthur (others say that the two are separate items, and that Edward absconded with both). The king brought this symbol of Welsh sovereignty back to Westminster Abbey and presented it at the high altar.⁸² As Loomis so succinctly articulates, "It is obvious that Edward regarded the possession of Arthur's crown as symbolizing his sovereignty over Wales, just as in 1296 he removed the coronation Stone of Scone to Westminster and in 1299 seized the crown of John Balliol to signify his overlordship of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 115. Though Glastonbury is not in Wales (a little ways across the Bristol Channel from Cardiff), it was a site for Welsh pilgrimage for this very reason.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16. Adam of Domesday: "Die vero Martis proxima sequente...in crepusculo fecit Dominus Rex aperiri sepulchrum incliti Regis Arturi. Ubi in duabus cistis, imaginibus et armis eorum depictis, ossa dicti regis mirae grossitudinis, et Gwunnarae reginae mirae pulchritudinis, separatim invenit. Ymago quidem reginae plene coronata fuit prostrata, cum obscurione sinistrae auriculae, et vestigiis plagae unde moriebatur. Inventa etiam fuit scriptura super hiis singulis manifesta. In crastino vero, videlicet die Mercurii, Dominus Rex ossa Regis, Regina ossa Reginae, in singulis paliis preciosis involuta, in suis cistis recludentes, et sigilla sua opposcentes, praeceperunt idem sepulchrum ante maius altare celeriter collocari, retentis exterius capitibus et genis utriusque propter populi devotionem."

⁸¹ E.M.R. Dimas, "The Cult of Arthurian Relics," *Folklore* 75 no. 1 (1964): 22.

⁸² Loomis, "Enthusiast," 117.

Scotland.”⁸³ Additionally, Edward moved to deprive Wales of most other cultural icons, including the matrices of the seals of Llywelyn, of his wife, and his brother Dafydd, which were “melted down to make a chalice to be donated... to Edward's new monastic foundation of Vale Royal” and the fragment of the True Cross, *Y Groes Naid*, which was “paraded through London in May 1285 in a solemn procession on foot led by the king, the queen, the archbishop of Canterbury and fourteen bishops, and the magnates of the realm.”⁸⁴

Though he did have a highly developed sense of ceremony, Edward I also knew how to subvert Welsh culture in very practical manners, the most visual of which being in his construction of the Iron Ring castles. In two castles of these castles, Harlech and Caernarfon, Edward successfully chose a site out of Welsh myth to refashion into a marker of English power and presence. Harlech has reference in the *Mabinogion*, a collection of Welsh myth and pseudo-history texts that we will investigate in the next few chapters.⁸⁵ In the tale *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, we are told that, one day King Brân “was at a court of his at Harddlech [Harlech] in Ardudwy; he was sitting on the rock of Harddlech overlooking the sea”⁸⁶ when he espies an armada of Irish ships come to seek his sister Branwen for their king. It is this very “rock of Harddlech” upon which Edward chose to build his fortress castle, complete with a walkway down to the very sea that Brân had overlooked hundreds of years before. Later in the same tale, after Brân is mortally wounded, he instructs his men to carry his head to London where it will protect Britain from invasion; before this happens, though, they are to spend seven years feasting at Harlech in preparation for the long voyage.⁸⁷ One wonders how the native fourteenth-century

83 Ibid.

84 Davies, *Conquest*, 355-356.

85 Though the only extant manuscripts date from the mid to late fourteenth century, the tales were thought to have been first written down in the eleventh century, though their oral origins date back to early Welsh history. This will be further discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

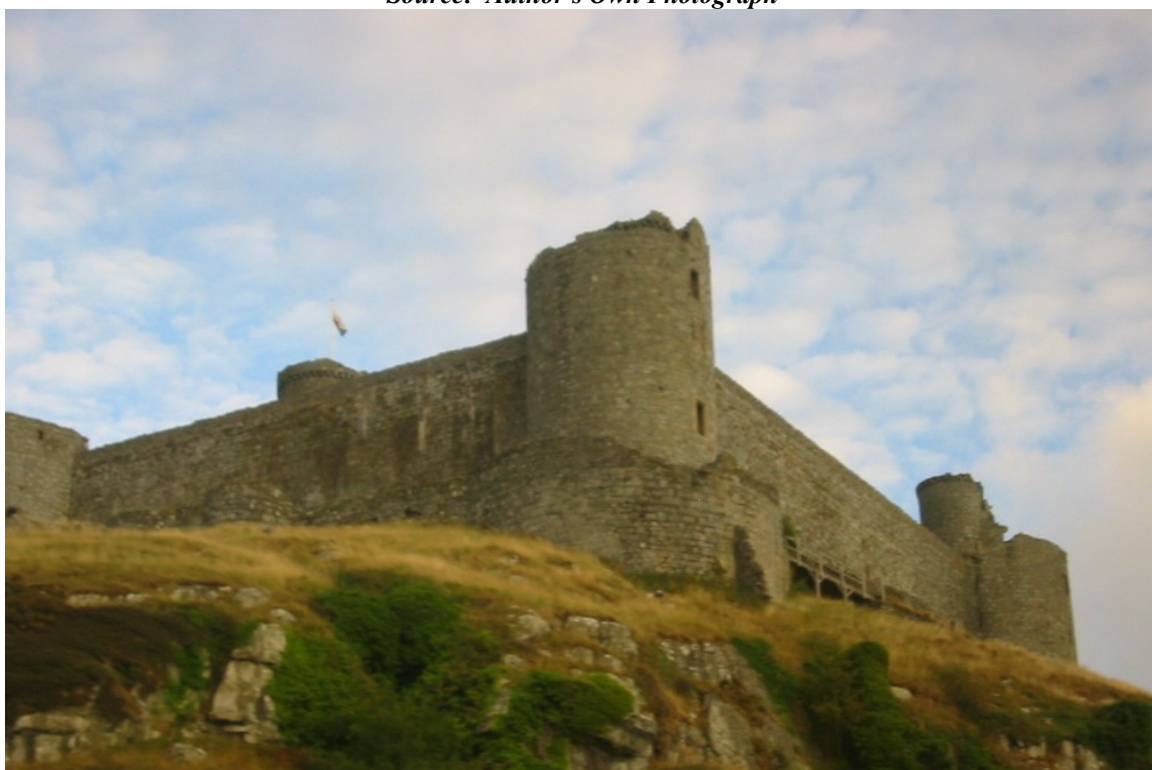
86 Jeffrey Gantz, *The Mabinogion*, (New York: Penguin, 1976), 67.

87 Ibid., 79.

Welsh could accommodate the image of their ancient king's feast-hall against the presence of the immense castle that stood in its place, a castle symbolizing foreign rule. Perhaps recomposing the tale of Branwen in the *White Book*, ensuring that it had a lasting legacy, provided such an outlet.

Harlech Castle atop Castle Rock

Source: Author's Own Photograph



Caernarfon frequently recurs in Welsh tradition as a site of profound history and myth. As we mentioned before, Caernarfon was the site of the Roman fort of Segontium, which reputedly housed a number of great rulers of Britain, including Constantius, son of Constantine the Great.⁸⁸ It is in this association with the majesty of Rome that the natives tried to forge a lineage linking the Welsh princes with the Roman emperors. As such, this spot at Caernarfon⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Roger Sherman Loomis, "From Segontium to Sinadon -- the Legends of a Cité Gaste," *Speculum* 22 no. 4 (1947): 522.

⁸⁹ Here we can see the place-name's etymology, arising from *Caer Seoint yn Arfon* meaning *fort on the* [river] *Seoint in Arfon* [land across from Anglesey], alternatively *Caer Aber Seint*, *fort on the estuary of the* [river] *Seoint*.

would have made an excellent spot for a native Welsh king to hold his court, as we are told that Brân, the very same as above, did when he heard of his sister's plight in Ireland.⁹⁰ Segontium is also mentioned in “The Dream of Maxen,”⁹¹ a *Mabinogion* tale to which we will return in Chapter 4. In that story, the Roman emperor of that name has a dream vision that points him to Aber Seint (Segontium) in order to find his bride and his new seat of rule.⁹² As such, for several centuries prior to the Norman invasion, Caernarfon was viewed as a locality steeped in Welsh tradition.

As such, it comes as no surprise that Caernarfon would be one of the first sites exploited by the new Norman aristocracy. Upon arrival in north Wales, Hugh d'Avranches, earl of Chester, and his cousin, Robert of Rhuddlan quickly began to overrun the coastal regions and, in 1090, established a series of settlements around key motte and bailey⁹³ style forts. “The confidence of the Normans in their prospects in north Wales was evident in... the construction of forward castles at Aberlleiniog (a particularly impressive motte in Anglesey), Caernarfon, Bangor, and in Meirionydd.⁹⁴ This motte at Caernarfon was located approximately two miles away from the ruins of Segontium, on the shores of the Menai Straits. Though the Welsh were able to retake the motte in 1115, Edward's campaign quickly stripped it from their possession and incorporated it into his castle in 1284.⁹⁵ The motte is thought to have been destroyed around 1870, there is still an elevated parcel of land making up one end of Edward's castle that recalls where the structure stood.

⁹⁰ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 74.

⁹¹ This tale is generally included in the *Mabinogion* collection, but is not actually one of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*. More on that in Chapters 2 and 4.

⁹² Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 123-124.

⁹³ This style of defensive architecture involved, in oversimplified terms, digging a trench around a hill and placing a wooden fort atop it. Though stone castles were coming in vogue on the Continent, they would not have a major presence in Britain until the Plantagenet dynasty.

⁹⁴ Davies, *Conquest*, 31.

⁹⁵ Mersey, “Castle.”

Southern Half of Caernarfon Castle Grounds⁹⁶

Source: Author's Own Photograph



Now, Edward would not be much of an imperialist king if he did not attempt to appropriate and restyle this site of Welsh heritage. First of all, he chose Caernarfon to be the home of his most architecturally complex castle ever. Apart from being one of the most advanced castles of its time, featuring heated running water, labyrinthine passageways, and deceptive, multi-angular arrow slits, Caernarfon castle bears a striking resemblance to the Theodosian Wall in Constantinople, a structure that Edward was able to admire while on Crusade. Now why would the English king model his hallmark castle in Wales after a protective wall constructed by a Byzantine emperor? The answer is this: Edward saw in Caernarfon's polygonal towers and

⁹⁶ Note the raised terrain in the southern portion of the castle grounds; it is thought that this was the location of the old Norman motte and bailey structure.

color-banded masonry a reflection of arguably the greatest empire in world history, but this time it would be an English king wearing the laurel. Just as Theodosius II saw himself as Emperor over many disparate lands, Edward wanted his newfound control over Wales in addition to England to earn him an imperial title.⁹⁷ In order to establish his imperial legacy, he ensured that his son Edward (the future Edward II) was born in the half-completed Caernarfon castle in 1284 and that he was invested as the Prince of Wales by the Lincoln Parliament in 1301.⁹⁸ With that act, Edward I had firmly planted his seed in the heart of Welsh culture, a fact that few Welsh would welcome.

Apart from manipulating the native cultural icons to his advantage, Edward also took steps to ensure that the Welsh themselves would have little living legacy that could pose a threat to his rule. As mentioned before, most of the powerful northern Welsh magnates were completely disinherited of their land, forcing many of them to flee to Scotland or Ireland and leave behind a vacuum that Edward sought to fill. He established his own courts at two of Llywelyn's favorite residences, Abergwyngregyn and Caernarfon and appropriated Llywelyn's hall at Aberconwy for his son.⁹⁹ Despite all this, Edward was not quite yet able to wipe out resistance from the Welsh ruling class. In 1294 a branch member of the Gwynedd royal family named Madog ap Llywelyn began leading a revolt in the north that was echoed by Morgan ap Maredudd and others in the south. The individual revolts varied in scope and target, "yet, in despite of these differences, the revolt drew on a common groundswell of deep resentment against alien rule, Marcher and royal alike, in Wales. As such, it was a classic anti-colonial revolt, [venting] its fury in the massacre of English officials..."¹⁰⁰ Madog even went so far as to

97 Roy Martin Haines, *King Edward II : Edward of Caernarfon, His Life, His Reign, and Its Aftermath, 1284-1330*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2003), 3.

98 Ibid., 5-6. This line succession was of high importance since Edward was the king's last surviving son.

99 Davies, *Conquest*, 355.

100 Ibid., 383.

assume the title “Prince of Wales” and sack Caernarfon, destroying much of the in-progress castle. Of course, Edward responded in full force, taking eight months to reestablish his authority over Wales and using the rebellion as an excuse to assume command (at least temporarily) over the Marcher lordships at Glamorgan, Bromfield and Yale, and Mold.¹⁰¹ In response, he constructed the castle at Beaumaris in Anglesey and instituted various punitive measures, including the taking of over 200 hostages from royal lands and the levying of heavy fines in local communities,¹⁰² seeking to ensure that he would never again be the butt of such embarrassment at the hand of Wales.

Such was the condition of life in Wales immediately following Edward I's conquest. Economic oppression made physical life almost unbearable, while the constant reminders of English superiority embodied in the Englishries and in Edward's strategically placed castles ingrained themselves on the psyches of the native Welsh. Though all this did not endear Edward into the Welsh hearts, his conquest did provide something that the Welsh had long needed, peace throughout their domain (and vast economic opportunities available to those Welshmen willing to exploit them). Only when the constant warring between native nobilities had been replaced by Edward's administration were the Welsh able to turn their efforts toward more tranquil methods of expression, in their language and in their art.

The Rise of Peace in North Wales

Though Edward I's campaign and subsequent presence in north Wales embodied an alien rule over Wales at the hand of England, an inevitability long feared by the native Welsh nobility, it did have the positive consequence of stabilizing the region in a manner hitherto unknown,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 384.

¹⁰² Ibid.

while simultaneously allowing the indigenous population to continue to live a very Welsh life. The implementation of an English judicial system provided a systematic means of dealing with disputes in a litigious manner (as opposed to the violent methods previously employed) and the rise of an English-style economy in Wales helped the burgeoning merchant class to develop contacts necessary for any measure of financial success. New nobilities were carved out of those loyal to Edward's cause and from those willing to fight on his behalf in Scotland and France. Thus the growing affluence of north Wales in both economy and politics (as we will see mostly in the reign of Edward II) coupled with the relatively small need for military expenditures finally provided the Welsh with the means for developing and expanding a native Welsh literary culture, duly motivated by the presence and constant reminder of an alien English rule.

Stabilization of Administration

The first major effect of Edward's takeover of northern Wales was his consolidation of property and its administration under his name. Especially in the case of Gwynedd, the majority of the land formerly the site of centuries of conflict came singularly under the king's direct rule. This, added to the king's other lands across Wales, meant that the majority of Welsh territory was now directly under royal control. His Justiciar and sheriffs administered these new lands according to his will, and his judgment could be sought in the case of a grievance, as the petitions have shown us. All this had the effect of eliminating the warring tendencies of Welsh principalities by eliminating the role of the princes themselves. Certainly two or more territories need not combat one another if they all serve the same master. In fact, after Madog ap Llywelyn's rebellion in 1294-95, there would be no other major conflict in north Wales until Owain Glyndŵr's revolt in 1400; in fact, the only other conflict in any part of Wales in this time

period was a short one orchestrated by Llywelyn Bren in 1316.¹⁰³

We can see how the overall sense of peace permeating north Wales in the later years of Edward I and in Edward II's reign were reflected in some of the logistical changes in the military infrastructure. For one thing, as Davies points out, the typical dues paid a lord from a recently deceased tenant's estate (a *heriot*) in the Dyffryn Clywd transformed as early as 1316 from the best armor to the best animal.¹⁰⁴ In other words, livestock was now valued higher than armor. An even more visible transformation occurred with regard to Edward's newly raised castles. The construction of castles ceased entirely, even in the cases of castles not yet completed. The most notable example of this cessation is certainly Caernarfon castle, whose design allowed for an immense reception tower housing the King's Gate as well as a countering tower framing the Queen's Gate at the southern end of the grounds.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 412.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Caernarfon Castle Grounds¹⁰⁵

Source: Author's Own Photograph



Thus Caernarfon proved to be so successfully instrumental in establishing peace in the region that it outlived its usefulness and stopped being a priority for the English masons.¹⁰⁶ Many of those castles that were already completed no longer maintained a garrison, but were slowly restructured to suit a more domestic residency, as exemplified by the construction of a storage barn in the outer ward of Llansteffan Castle.¹⁰⁷ Others needing rebuilding were done so, but with emphasis on comfort and luxury rather than military effectiveness. “Finely decorated chimneys, fireplaces, and glass windows might be installed [as at Chirk]..., or an enterprising residential

¹⁰⁵ Mid-ground stands the main entrance, the King's Gate. The notched stone surround the gate suggests that another tower was planned to stand just inside, forming part of the entrance itself.

¹⁰⁶ Oral testimony of tour guide at Caernarfon Castle. August 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Davies, *Conquest*, 412.

lord...might even desert the gloom of the castle for the spaciousness and elegance of an adjacent stately home [as in Tretower Court in Blaenllyfni].”¹⁰⁸ As a side note, by the time of John Leland's travels throughout Wales in the mid-sixteenth century, “some fifty castles in Wales and in the Marches were in a bad state....”¹⁰⁹ Thus, the castle experience in Wales began to decline almost as soon as it started.

Another set of evidence indicating a shift away from a militaristic approach to life in Wales involves taking a look at the increased expenditures on more domestic infrastructures. The Cathedral of Saint Asaph was finally repaired, as were the monasteries of Saint David and Valle Crucis, all victims of damage incurred during Edward's campaign.¹¹⁰ But, as Davies points out, the greater architectural flourishes indicative of a renaissance were implemented in the buildings of Bishop Henry Gower (1328-47) in the diocese of Saint David's; “the richly decorated style and the distinctive arcaded parapets characteristic of this work bespeak affluence and confidence; they also proclaim a readiness to import the expertise of English craftsmen....”¹¹¹ Apart from the religious houses of the day, the laymen also began to construct distinctive dwelling houses, characterized by a hall, kitchen, two large chambers, and a small chamber (or variants on these designs). Such examples of these exist at Cefn y Fan in Caernarfon and Plas Ucha in Merioneth.¹¹² From these changes, we may see that some of the more prosperous Welsh people were beginning to spend more of their resources on non-defensive structures and on personal comforts within just a few decades after Edward's conquest, suggesting that an overall peace accompanied his troops as they marched into the territory and that a degree of social harmony dripped from the pens of Edward's magistrates. As such, the two populations, the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ David James, John R. Kenyon, and Richard Avent, *Castles in Wales and the Marches : Essays in Honour of D.J. Cathcart King*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987), 207.

¹¹⁰ Davies, *Conquest*, 414.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 414-15.

native Welsh and the transplanted English, began to work to coexist if not necessarily live in perfect harmony.

Assimilation and Acculturation

Law and Administration

Given the relative tensions that must have existed between the native Welsh peoples and these foreign English burgesses imported into the new boroughs, evidence points to a high and somewhat rapid degree of assimilation, as well as some acculturation, of these groups. One of the key elements behind this assimilation was the growing appreciation on the part of the Welsh for the English style of rule. In several of the petitions extant from the period, we see requests from northern Welsh tenants to the king, asking if some portion of Welsh law may be reconfigured to match that practiced by the English. In one such petition from “the King's Free Tenants of North Wales” to Edward II ca. 1321, we hear that:

They are greatly impoverished because they cannot sell their lands or give them according to the laws and customs of England, for if a gentleman of the country has a carucate of land and has five sons or more, the land will be divided up among them after the death of their father and so far from degree to degree so that they become each a beggar living on their parents...; for which grievance they pray that they may have leave to sell their lands.....they would sell according to the law and custom of the Kingdom of England....¹¹³

Similarly, the Welsh began to ignore centuries of tradition by petitioning Edward to allow property to pass to a daughter and her lineage.¹¹⁴ In the petition mentioned before from the Liegemen of the King in Snowdonia, we see a request that the king reinstate many of his policies first implemented by the Statute of Rhuddlan. We must note that this is in response to a violation of those terms by the king's sheriffs, but it still indicates a Welsh appreciation of those regulations. So, we may see that, though Edward's laws represented to the Welsh a major step in

¹¹³ Rees, *Calendar*, 99. See also 282-285.

¹¹⁴ Davies, *Conquest*, 423. See also: Rees, *Calendar*, 65. An example from Cardiganshire ca 1331.

the process of overthrowing Welsh sovereignty, those very laws also provided for much stability and even some prosperity, novelties that the Welsh were not willing to give up easily.

Now, we must understand that the assimilation of law involved much more than just replacing Welsh customs with English ones. In many examples, the two were purposefully combined, such as the adoption of English legal procedure based around traditional Welsh pleas, like the *sardhad* (trespass) and the *amobr* (virginity due).¹¹⁵ On the converse, English settlers in north Wales adopted the formulas of the Welsh *prid* (mortgage), which “effected a perpetual gage of the land in question and it was a device which gave to the purchaser the possession of the land but reserved to the vendor the right to redeem at specified intervals thereafter.”¹¹⁶ For the Welsh, the mortgage was a necessary procedure in an area where partible land inheritance was the norm. Such was the same for the English burgesses who, under Edward's guidance, accepted and approved of the partible inheritance and, in doing so, quickly adopted the *prid* to suit their own ends. Across north Wales, the English employed the practice to purchase land from the Welsh in the countryside and even used it as the primary vehicle for transferring burgages in the English boroughs.¹¹⁷

As a key component to the argument of this thesis, this period has shown that quite a few native Welsh persons were able to incorporate themselves into positions of authority under the new regime, though it is true that most of the higher persons of power were Englishmen handpicked by Edward himself out of his loyal supporters and trusted magnates. After all, what king would want to lose his newly conquered territory by handing it back over to the locals? Edward did, however, prove himself to be a master strategist in implementing foreign rule,

¹¹⁵ Davies, *Conquest*, 423.

¹¹⁶ Llinos Beverley Smith, "The Gage and the Land Market in Late Medieval Wales," *The Economic History Review*, New Series 29 no. 4 (1976): 538.

¹¹⁷ Davies, *Conquest*, 423.

making allowances for much of the local power to fall into the hands of those who knew the areas best, the Welsh themselves. The numerous mentions of the doings of the “great men of North Wales” or “the great ones of the country” in the ancient petitions and correspondences indicates that much power still resided within the native population, just in the framework of the new English administration.¹¹⁸ As Walker writes, “In the most responsible offices the appointment of a Welshman was rare; in the median grades there was a career structure for Welshmen of ability and education; and at grass-roots level everything depending upon local Welsh families to keep the machinery of government working smoothly.”¹¹⁹ In many cases, these prosperous men were among the more lowly supporters of the old Welsh princes, and had transferred their loyalties to Edward and his lords, seeking to reap rich rewards; indeed English officers and burgesses sought after many of these men to exploit their connections with the local populace, and by doing so, guaranteed them a valuable position for negotiation.¹²⁰

Wealth

From this rise of a squirely class of lower Welsh noblemen loyal to the king, we can see how Edward's government promised a degree of financial success to those willing to support his cause. This is evidenced in the accounts of the period by the largesse with which these men conducted their affairs. One native squire boasts of the “sixteen tuns of wine he consumed yearly in his household.”¹²¹ As Davies points out, “such men were the natural leaders of society, acting as its proctors in negotiations with Marcher lords and English officials, taking precedence

¹¹⁸ Ibid., op. cit. 415.

¹¹⁹ Walker, *Wales*, 151-152. He gives some striking statistics for Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire, both of which show a dramatic Welsh presence in the middle and lower levels of government. We can assume that something similar was the case in northern Wales where the English population was much smaller than in the more southern shires.

¹²⁰ Davies, *Conquest*, 415-416.

¹²¹ Ibid., op. cit. 417.

in the swearing of fealty, assessing taxes, and collecting subsidies. They were addressed, in deeds and poetry alike, as 'squires,' 'barons, and 'lords.'"¹²² Thus, they were the natural intermediaries between the English administration and the Welsh people. Their desire for wealth and power endeared them to the English mission, while their heritage and knowledge of native customs ideally suited them for interaction with the local populace. As a result, many of these men grew to be great patrons of the arts, like Rhydderch who conscripted the composition of the *White Book*. Of course, striking the balance between these two was generally easier said than done, and many of these officers were accused as being corrupt English-sympathizers. Unfortunately, however, little could be done against them since they were so firmly entrenched in the English administration.¹²³

Another way of ensuring some success under the new government was merely to accept Edward's offers. As part of his master plan in revamping the Welsh administrative organization, Edward often requested (as much as a conquering king "requests" anyone to do anything) that the communities be relocated to suit his needs. In return, these communities often received very substantial compensations. The Cistercian Abbey of Aberconwy, for example, had to be moved further up the valley to Maenan in order to pave the way for the borough and castle of Conwy. During the process, the monks were consulted about the new site and were offered 580 marks, a substantial amount of money, in compensation. (Perhaps some of these monastic funds aided in the upswing of manuscript composition and copying that we see in the early fourteenth century, thus having a direct impact on the body of literature to which we will turn in subsequent chapters.) In surviving records, the monks speak cordially of the king's concern for their

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. Davies gives a good example of Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd (from south Wales) being constantly "mulcted," but never removed from office, for his oppressive practices.

establishment, and move themselves peacefully to their new location.¹²⁴ From the petitions, we may see how this type of dialogue between the king and his new subjects occurred with some frequency. From the first decade of the fourteenth century, we get a petition from Iorwerth ap Llywelyn to Edward, recounting how “the King, moved by pity, with regards to the [lands] of any who were killed or died by any other death against the King in his wars in Wales, by his grace pardoned..., granting their lands to men of this sort on better conditions than their fathers and ancestors held them before.”¹²⁵ Thus, these Welsh men, willing to accept Edward's offer, received rich rewards in land holdings, though they still had to pay heavy rents for these lands.

In many other cases, the Welsh were offered sizable compensations for supporting the king in his wars in Scotland and France. One can see from two petitions that the Welsh expected a reasonable amount of compensation (and they had yet to receive it, thus warranting the petition). In the first such petition, Lewelyn ab Iorwerth, “the King's Freeman, of County Anglesey” asked in the first years of the fourteenth century that the king grant him the bailiwick (regional jurisdiction of a bailiff) of the Cantred of Aberffraw in return for his service “in Scotland and elsewhere.” In the second, the tax collectors in Anglesey wrote to the king around 1320 to ask that they be granted a reward for dutifully collecting the “fifteenth” tax “in aid of the war in Scotland.”¹²⁶ From these, we may see that the Welsh had reasonable expectation for reward in return for their service to the king, an expectation that would not have existed if Edward had not already proven himself a substantial rewarder of his loyal people.

What's in a Name?

Understandably, it would be unlikely for any substantial amount of assimilation to occur

¹²⁴ Walker, *Wales*, 157.

¹²⁵ Rees, *Calendar*, 396.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 135.

with there being a town wall dividing the English and Welsh populations in north Wales. However, those physical walls did far less dividing than Edward had intended. From some of the demographics of this period, we can see that “by 1330, at least a third of the burgesses of Ruthin and half or more of those of Aberystwyth or Beaumaris—all three of them Edwardian plantation boroughs—were Welshmen”¹²⁷ despite the fact that the Statute of Rhuddlan specifically prohibited the Welsh from owning burgages in any of his boroughs. As a result, the Welsh and English were working side by side to an extent that Edward had not planned. This was both the product of and the cause for a pattern of intermarriage between the locals and the settlers. As Davies asserts, “Recently established settlers—such as Hanmer and Puleeston in Maelor Saesneg, Holland and Thelwall in Denbigh, Le Marreys and Stalworthman in Dyffryn Clwyd—were quite content to choose their brides from among native Welsh dynasties.”¹²⁸ What sprouted from these unions was a class of burgesses whose mixed parentage was reflected by a hybrid nomenclature. Thus, we have examples like Tangwystl, daughter of William of Pulford, or Gruffydd ap David Holland of Denbigh. In some instances different names were used depending upon the company. William son of Walter Haunton of Caernarfon also went by William ap Wat with his Welsh friends; such reflects the anxieties of finding identities appropriate for each community.¹²⁹

From the great degrees of assimilation that we have seen in terms of law, wealth, and family life, it is apparent that the Welsh, to a large extent, were rapidly adjusting to a new life under English rule. This new life offered a prosperity and sociopolitical cohesion unprecedented in Welsh history, and would, in just a few short years, foster a new wave of native literary

127 Davies, *Conquest*, 421-422. It would not be until 1359 that the foundation charter of Neath in south western Wales would grant Welsh burgages.

128 Ibid., 422.

129 Ibid., 424.

expansion, inspired in part by the now institutionalized legal distinctions put in place by an oppressive foreign rule. Before we get to that, however, we must investigate briefly the reign of Edward II and some of the reign of Edward III with regard to Wales in order to see what type of environment supported this renewed interest in Welsh cultural development

Edwards II and III

There has been surprisingly little scholarship on the respective roles of Edwards II and III with regard to Wales (at least until tensions began to rise in 1370, the latter years of Edward III). The likely cause of this academic void is simple: there is little significant English attention given to Wales to recount. Both Edwards seem to have been too preoccupied with other facets of their reigns to be concerned with a minor territory that had already been sufficiently conquered, colonized, and quieted by their predecessor. Edward II first fought an uphill battle against the Scots, whom even his father had failed to bring into submission, then he faced a conspiracy against his rule by his wife, Isabelle, and a few of the Marcher bloodlines. Edward III had to deal with his father's usurper before turning his attention to his tumultuous duel with the French over various continental holdings. This period of transition in Wales, to a large extent, comes to an end mid-century when the Black Death makes her fatal appearance across Britain, wiping out a ghastly amount of the population and ushering in an entirely new era of social disquiet.

One would expect, since Edward II was indeed born in Caernarfon (hence his appellation "Edward of Caernarfon") and named the first English Prince of Wales, that he would have been concerned over the doings in his home territory. To a point, this is true. What little interaction he did have with Wales ensued as a preventive measure against the Mortimer and Despenser dynasties and against the possibility of Wales entering into a Celtic alliance with Ireland and

Scotland.¹³⁰ It is to this situation that we turn briefly now.

As I mentioned above, Edward of Caernarfon inherited an island of tumult when he assumed the throne in 1307. Though Wales had been subjugated, Scotland had been able to resist his father's hammer, which kept alive the fear of a sort of pan-Celtic uprising (especially since the English had yet to establish a dominance in the fragmented Emerald Isle). As a result, Edward II attempted to walk a very, very fine line between bringing the Scots into submission and encouraging another uprising in Wales. Add to this the ongoing grievances of the Welsh against the Justice of North Wales, Roger Mortimer of Chirk (a Marcher territory), and we have the situation that Edward faced at his accession. Mortimer had already raised the king's ire by not handling the petitions of the Welsh in such a way as to guarantee the peace of that realm after receiving a royal order to do just that in 1308.¹³¹ It would seem that Mortimer also selectively employed Welsh and English laws in his justice, much to the chagrin of the rising north Welsh aristocracy, who had only recently begun to see the advantages of English law in their dealings.¹³² As such, though Edward had been formally in charge of the region since named Prince of Wales in 1301, he really had little direct control other than his employment of Justices, which, at the moment, seemed not to be going very well.

The situation moved toward crisis with Edward's disastrous defeat at the hands of Scottish leader Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, a battle that had a threefold effect. First, it inspired the Scottish to reach further beyond their borders for support, beginning with Edward Bruce's (Robert's brother) excursion into Ireland in the summer of 1315; it was this move that really galvanized the fear of a Celtic uprising for the English. Second, it

130 J. Beverley Smith, "Edward II and the Allegiance of Wales," *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976): 139. This is a very interesting article that attempts to capture the complex relationships of individual parties in England, Wales, and the Marches. I will try to recreate his argument in brief here for our purposes, but the details of his article should not be ignored.

131 Ibid., 145.

132 Ibid., 162.

embodied a dramatic waste of English resources. After all, it takes quite a lot in the way of logistics to march and sustain such a sizable army more than 400 miles from London into Scotland. As a result, Edward's ability to move against any particular foe was considerably diminished. Finally, it helped to solidify Edward's baronial opposition, who were already incensed at the king's inappropriate lavishing of gifts on Piers Gaveston, who some thought was pursuing an unnatural relationship with His Majesty. In fact, they were so incensed that they murdered Gaveston in 1312, only four years after Edward recalled him from France and endowed him with the new earldom of Cornwall. It is for these three reasons that Edward II decided that it would be best for him to appease the Welsh in his provinces, especially since it would also benefit him by opposing the actions of some of his baronial adversaries.

What resulted for the Welsh was a direct line to the king's ear. Edward appointed extra guards for the Welsh coasts, further provisions for his castles, and, above all, an inquiry into alleged oppressions committed by the king's officers.¹³³ As J. Beverley Smith points out in his article, the commissioning of Master John Walwayn, Philip ap Hywel, and Master Rhys ap Hywel occurred with the stipulation that they were required "not only to authorize expenditure on the defense of the land but to negotiate with the men of the principality concerning confidential matters (*negociis privatis*) which the king had entrusted to them;" it would be this type of stipulation that characterized much of Edward's business in Wales.¹³⁴ His main contact was a Welshman, Gruffydd Llwyd, Lord of Treggarnedd in Anglesey and of Dinorwig in Caernarfonshire,¹³⁵ who helped the king to raise Welsh troops first in the summer of 1316 for an expedition into Scotland, and then again in 1321 and 1326 to move against the baronial factions led by Roger Mortimer of Chirk (once again Justice of Wales) and his nephew, Roger Mortimer

¹³³ Ibid., 148.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁵ J.G. Edwards, "Sir Gruffydd Llwyd," *The English Historical Review* 30 no. 120 (1915): 589.

of Wigmore, who had become consort to Queen Isabelle.¹³⁶ To make a long story short, on November 16 of 1326, Henry of Lancaster (an earl in support of the Mortimers), assisted by Rhys ap Hywel, captured Edward in Glamorgan and held him in Berkeley Castle. Though a Welsh group did manage to stage an attack on the castle and free him briefly in July of the following year, Edward was recaptured, confined, and ultimately murdered on the order of Roger Mortimer (Wigmore). After his death, the Welsh opposition to the Mortimers rallied behind Rhys ap Gruffydd, a liaison in Edward's court and an ally of Donald, Earl of Mar (also a former court member and a supporter of Robert the Bruce after Edward's death).¹³⁷ Unfortunately for him and the Welsh cause, Robert's intention to garner support in Ireland for an invasion of England never materialized, and the Welsh were stuck with Mortimer's regency over the young Edward III until the latter had him executed for treason in 1330.¹³⁸

As I have stated before, there is very little scholarship having to do with Edward III and his relationship with Wales largely because there is little to relate. From evidence in the petitions, we may see that Edward III's dealings with Wales fairly resembled those of his father and grandfather after the Conquest. In one example, the "Commonality of North Wales" wrote to the king in 1330-31 with eight specific requests; one request is answered with the order that they continue business "as they have done in the time of the King's ancestors" and three others gain the responsive command to consult the Statute of Rhuddlan and act accordingly.¹³⁹ Such was the attitude that seems to have characterized his reign. Of course, when he started the Hundred Years's War in 1338 by claiming himself as the rightful heir to the French throne, his attentions were fixed firmly on the Continent and less on the Isles.¹⁴⁰ When the Black Death struck Britain

¹³⁶ Ibid., 151, 159, 164.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 167-168.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 168-169.

¹³⁹ Rees, *Calendar*, 282-284.

¹⁴⁰ He did spend a fair amount of time reasserting English sovereignty over England, beginning with his renunciation of the Treaty of Northampton in 1333, but the on-again, off-again nature of the war helped to

in 1349, all bets were off; the fundamental socioeconomic and political structures were thrown into confusion and what remained of the populations in both Wales and England had to fight to continue a life with some modicum of similarity to that lived prior to the epidemic.

The Story Continues

What has been written here is only a small work attempting to do big things. I have tried to highlight the rough times experienced by the Welsh in the period of rapid transition from fragmented principalities to a foreign king's provinces in the late thirteenth century, a transition that stripped the region of its sovereignty and placed it under extreme economic stress. I have also suggested that the quick adoption of the English rule by the Welsh allowed for a dramatic spurt in economic and political growth. As a result, while some portions of the native population were under duress, others managed to exploit the new administration and become highly profitable; these were the men who made possible the boom in literary production in the fourteenth century. Thus, Wales possessed simultaneously the motivation and the means by which it could turn its attention to celebrating its Welsh-ness. As we will see in the next three chapters, the Welsh began working fastidiously on expanding and preserving a cultural legacy, which, for our purposes, was manifested in a body of literary works with the “Poetry of the Gentry” and the *Mabinogion* at its core.

subsume it into the larger Anglo-French conflict. Ultimately, Edward simply threw his support one of the two contenders for the Scottish throne, David Bruce, and concluded the conflict by naming him King of Scotland in 1357.

Chapter 2: At the Crossroads of Orality and Literacy

As we noted in the last chapter, Edward I's campaigns in the late thirteenth century provided Wales with the motivation and the opportunity to undergo a cultural expansion. This movement furnished a new Welsh squirely class with the impetus, the resources, and the governmental infrastructure suitable for embracing and celebrating their heritage and a method by which they could draw distinction between themselves and their English occupiers. However, before we can begin discussing the ways in which northern Wales experienced this expansion, we must investigate the nature of Welsh oral and literary¹⁴¹ culture prior to its shift. To that end, our primary attention will focus on the notions of literacy and orality active in this period and how these shaped and sculpted native culture before and after the Conquest through the production of manuscript evidence. With that in mind, we will see in Chapter 4 how the high oral residue present especially in the *Mabinogion* tales demonstrates their textualization at a point early in Wales's transition toward a literate society since, if Wales had already long had a consistent literary tradition by that point, then it would stand to reason that the texts coming out of the fourteenth century would not possess nearly the high degree of orality that they do.

It is important to underscore briefly the position of Wales at the time of the Conquest before we continue on to historical orality and literacy. As we have seen before and will see again, Wales's existence on the periphery of Europe helped to ensure its slow and stunted growth in a number of areas, including administration, economy, and written culture. Since the previous chapter showed how Edward's Conquest sculpted the former two, this one will treat the latter, discussing the primary orality of native Welsh culture and the relative lack of manuscript production (both composition and duplication) in Wales up until the Conquest; this will shed

¹⁴¹ As I go into more detail later, I will be using the terms “oral” and “orality” to refer to cultural elements that are entirely reliant upon sound and speech. On the other hand, I will employ the terms “literary,” “literacy,” “written” and “textual” interchangeably to describe those elements that have their basis in writing.

further light into the ways in which Edward's campaign yielded new tools for Welsh written cultural expansion, namely an infrastructure that could nurture and sustain a textual movement and a stabilized contact with more highly developed literate societies like England.

Literacy and Orality

Research over the past century performed mostly in the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology have yielded insights into the functioning of orality as a concept in modern language and the relationship that orality maintains with writing.¹⁴² These fields, along with Ferdinand de Saussure's brain-child, modern linguistic studies, began to chip away at centuries-long assumptions on the nature of human communication and the interplay between speaking and writing. Ultimately, the work of others such as the Reverend Doctor Walter J. Ong demonstrated that modern modes of thinking, not to mention communication, were not shared by our ancestors even a few hundred years ago. In other words, literacy and the ability to write has transformed the human landscape in such profound ways that it has taken decades of digging to reveal not only undercurrents of orality in our own time but of the primacy and necessity of the written word to modern thought.

Thus, it cannot be understated the extent to which one cannot approach the topics of literacy and orality with any preconceived assumptions, which, as we will see momentarily, arise from our own highly literate context. We especially cannot labor under assumptions concerning the relative superiority of the former prevalent in our own time as we are wont to do with most aspects of life in the past. That being said, what do we mean exactly when we speak of these two facets of human life? First off, it is far more than merely the extent to which a culture relied

¹⁴² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1982), 5. It is from Ong's very influential work that I will draw most of my understanding of this topic.

upon written documentation. Similarly, it is not just the percentage of literate or partially literate people within a given population. In its broadest and most profound sense, in my opinion, literacy and orality are terms used to categorize the ways in which we view, engage, and interact with the world around us: objects, ideas, and people across time.

All languages begin as oral utterances long before they are ever written. There has been some speculation that “of all the conjecturally tens of thousands of languages spoken since the beginning of human life, only some 106 have ever had a literature, and that of the some 3000 or more languages spoken today, only some 78 as yet have a literature.”¹⁴³ To the cultures that do not possess writing of any kind, including the pre-literate phases of historical societies, Ong gives the term “primary orality,”¹⁴⁴ a term to which I shall return often. Next, we will take a look at the implications of language, namely in the categories of sound, memory, and rhythm, in a primarily oral society in contradistinction to our own fully literate one in order to extrapolate meaning for those societies in between the two, semi-literate cultures such as Wales in the late Middle Ages; from there, we will have laid the foundations for investigating in the next chapters the ways in which post-Conquest Welsh literature leverages the power of the spoken and written word to effect a new native cultural expansion born out of indignation toward and utilization of foreign administration.

The Sounded Word

To begin our exploration, I will use an excellent anecdotal exercise taken from Ong's work.¹⁴⁵ Try to imagine the word “nevertheless.” Most likely, your best sense of the word is an image of it spelled out on paper and you probably cannot hold on to the mere *sound* of the word

143 Walter J. Ong, “Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization,” *New Literary Journal* 16, no. 1 (1984): 5.

144 Ong, *Orality*, 6.

145 Ibid., 12.

for more than a minute or so. “That is to say, a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to purely oral people.”¹⁴⁶ A primarily oral society had no image of a word; a word did not exist outside of its utterance; it was totally *sound*.¹⁴⁷ Given that fundamental, it is much easier to understand the “evanescence,” as Ong terms it, of words in an oral culture. Whereas stimuli received by the other four senses can be frozen in time and still perceived, sound cannot. “When I pronounce the word 'permanence', by the time I get to the '-nence', the 'perma-' is gone, and has to be gone... There is no way to stop sound and have sound. I can stop a [video] camera and hold one frame fixed on the screen. If I stop the movement of sound, I have... only silence.”¹⁴⁸ As such, sounded words are entirely bound with both time and the speaker. Without either, there is only silence.

In a world where the word is only sound, a certain amount of power and majesty is given to speech. It is not for nothing that one of the most prized skills in the ancient world was that of *rhetoric* in the Greek world (or *oration* in the Latin sphere). Rhetors and orators were by very definition professional public speakers who spent most of their lives practicing their art entirely without a script.¹⁴⁹ Many of us are familiar with the vestiges of public speaking today, though we are not aware of it. A certain passage of the Old Testament of the Bible states, “Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. It is for this reason that we must not use the term “literature” to include any type of oral tradition, for that would in fact put us in a position of attempting to establish an account of this tradition by way of its successor. The term “literature” itself is a giveaway since its root in the Latin *literatura* points to a collection of *litera*, or alphabetical letters. Similarly, we should probably not even refer to these oral societies as pre-literate since that appellative would place the emphasis squarely on the subsequent literacy rather than the immediate orality.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴⁹ This was not necessarily because there were no writing resources or skills available to them. On the contrary, Greco-Roman culture was quite accomplished in literature, but those peoples considered it bad form for any supposed speaker to work from a written document.

was upright and true.”¹⁵⁰ What has here been translated as “Teacher” is the Hebrew word “Qoheleth,” meaning “public speaker;” it is also translated as “Ecclesiastes” in Greek, thus yielding the English name for the Book itself.¹⁵¹ Public speaking was a necessity in ancient times not only for disseminating ideas, but also for practicing a sacred art. Each rhetor contributed something of himself to impart a force behind his spoken words, imbuing them with a kind of magic that had abilities beyond what we moderns consider words capable of doing. It is for that reason that naming systems in the pre-modern era were considered of vast importance. We are all familiar with various stories throughout history that give primacy to the act of naming. From Adam's naming of the creatures of Earth in Genesis, to the myriad of times that people in the Bible were commanded, by the Divine no less, to name their children something of profound import, to the fairy tale of “Rumpelstiltskin,” right up through the 1984 movie *Neverending Story* where Sebastian must give the Child-like Empress a new name in order to save Fantasia. Naming was one of the few ways that man could exert some power, often mystical, over his world; names then were nothing like the labels and tags that they generally are today.¹⁵² This is precisely the force motivating Culhwch's great invocation of names in the *Mabinogion* tale *Culhwch and Olwen* that we will investigate in Chapter 4.

Hopefully now we have a sense of how words themselves were different to oral cultures than they are to us. Let us turn to look at the ways in which language was employed in tales from oral cultures and the kinds of traits that many of these tales have in common with one another. In doing so, we will set up some of the characteristics that we will seek as we turn to the literature of medieval Wales in the next two chapters.

¹⁵⁰ Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 (NIV)

¹⁵¹ Ong, *Orality*, 16.

¹⁵² Ibid., 33.

Memory and Rhythm

Since there are no written records in a primarily oral society, as we have discussed, the only reference tool available to humankind is one with which we are all born: memory. Without the ability to record events in text (or photographs and video as we can today), the entirety of human experience depended upon reliable recollection of events and tales for communication from one person, or generation, to another. How is that even possible? It is almost unfathomable for us today who rely upon notes and outlines to give us guidance in our speeches, to-do lists to keep our schedules straight, and calculators to do our mathematics for us. People in oral societies had their own methods for assuring that memory be reliable and recollection sharp. In addition to having a better capacity for memory (after all, it was essentially their only means of record), oral people also maintained numerous devices to ensure memory stability, at least when completing complex or prolonged thoughts. These devices generally included patterning, repetition, rhyme, alliteration, stock thematic elements and characters, etc.¹⁵³ In other words, “protracted orally based thought, even when not in formal verse, tends to be highly rhythmic, for rhythm aids recall, even physiologically.”¹⁵⁴

There are many different kinds of rhythms that a verbal nugget might possess that help its recollection. Probably the most obvious to us would be simple rhyme. Who among us has not committed something to memory via some rhyming mechanism? It can be useful for safety on the high seas, “Red in the morning, sailor's warning; red in the night, sailor's delight” or perhaps something more mundane, “*i* before *e*, except after *c* or as in “*eight*” as in *neighbor* and *weigh*.” In addition to the rhyme scheme employed in both of these examples, they also possess parallel structuring. When the two phrases are forged parallel (or balanced) in sound or syllable to one

¹⁵³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

another, they generally become easier to remember.¹⁵⁵ Another type of device used especially in cases of nomenclature is what Ong classifies an “aggregative” epithet. “Oral folk prefer, especially in formal discourse, not the soldier, but the brave soldier; not the princess, but the beautiful princess; not the oak, but the sturdy oak.”¹⁵⁶ Moderns tend to apply adjectives in an analytic style: there is a soldier and he is brave. For oral people, the “brave soldier” is simultaneously descriptive and, more importantly, indicative. An extreme example of this can be found in the collection of kennings that characterize Old English poetry. When the narrator of *Beowulf* speaks of Shield Sheafson's authority transcending the “whale-road” (the sea) he is using a highly descriptive epithet. Fully literate thinkers would dissect “whale-road” to affirm that the sea is indeed a passageway for large marine animals, but for oral cultures, such dissection would not be possible, much less necessary for its understanding.

Another linguistic pattern employed in oral cultures is that which Ong terms an “additive” property. This property is manifested in an author's tendency to use “and” to connect many, many phrases together, rather than calling upon a full stop to separate ideas as we tend to do. Ong gives a wonderful example from the Douay translation of the Bible (1610), which reflects an oral work translated in a still highly oral culture:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said:; Be light made. And light was made. And God saw the light that it was good; and he divided the light from the darkness. And he called the light Day, and the darkness Night; and there was evening and morning one day.¹⁵⁷

What is key to notice here are the nine introductory “ands” that serve to connect each idea and build upon them. In that sense, these five verses could be translated as one long sentence that begins in utter Nothingness and builds up to the completion of Night and Day. To drive the point

¹⁵⁵ What I have here described as “sound or syllable” could also be considered in the family of “meter.” Linguists and literary specialists have done much scholarship on the variety and nature of meter, and I refer to their work for more specific information on the subject.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 37.

further, we may see how the translation differs in a version created in the 1970s, the *New American Bible*:

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the water. Then God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day' and the darkness he called 'night'. Thus evening came, and morning followed – the first day.¹⁵⁸

In this translation, there are only two introductory “ands,” each buried within a compound sentence. According to Ong, Douay renders the Hebrew *wa* or *we* as just “and” while in the *New American Bible*, it takes the form of “and,” “thus,” “while,” “then,” and “when,” thus making it more natural to modern readers through “a flow of narration with the analytic, reasoned, subordination that characterize[s] writing.”¹⁵⁹ This additive property forms another pillar of strength used in Culhwch's invocation of names in the *Mabinogion* tale that we will see in Chapter 4; using an aggregative structure, the invocation successfully creates a 2,000-word sentence calling upon over 200 names!

Another method of aiding memory and keeping the audience involved in the tale was to keep the storyline close to the human world. In an oral world where the abstraction of knowledge for evaluation via writing was impossible, it is understandable that tales must be situated in familiar settings. In other words, “oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less closer reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings.”¹⁶⁰ Ong goes on to give the example of genealogies, which may seem to us at first as lists of people, duly abstracted and cataloged as literacy has enabled us to do. To oral people, on the other hand, they are not simply lists, but instead verbal representations of familial connections.¹⁶¹ The people inside the

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid., 42.

161 Ibid., 43.

genealogy are not scattered about according to height, weight, eye color, etc. They are thematically connected in an obvious way, their biological relatedness to the others of the tree. We can reinforce this point a bit further by emphasizing the non-abstract nature of the names in genealogies. To us, the names are place markers in the trees, labels pointing to real people with real connections. In oral cultures, as we have discussed before, people did not see names as simply tags. The words themselves contained a bit of the person in ways difficult to comprehend today. As such, genealogies were not mere representations of people: in a sense, they *were* people – names, familial connections, and all. We will take a look at another way in which oral tales have no concept of abstraction when we investigate the extremely mundane dreamscape present in the “Dream of Maxen” from the *Mabinogion*.

With Ong's guidance, I have here related some of the key bases underlying strictly oral cultures. This last point describing the situational rather than abstract nature of language in oral societies is probably the most fundamental factor in defining the uniqueness of primarily oral peoples and the distinction between them and literate ones. We will take closer looks at how this plays out in the literature in post-Conquest Wales in Chapter 4. Now that we have gained a glimpse into the nature of primarily oral cultures, we must turn to Wales herself in hopes to understand the degrees of literacy and orality at play up from the High Middle Ages through the fourteenth century.

Literacy in Early Medieval Wales

The Age of Romanticism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries propounded two contrasting notions of early Celtic societies: first, that they were rich in written records and ancient heritage, which were annihilated by time and conquest; second, that they were entirely

oral societies who passed down their lore only from mouth to mouth, generation to generation, leaving nothing for later scholars to investigate.¹⁶² Romantics formulated this latter view from observations of orality that led to the belief that these societies had always been oral, not giving any thought to the possibility that the diminished socioeconomic status of these regions did not allow for an abundance in writing materials, that the lack of infrastructure eliminated any sustainable writing movement, or that there was a potential for a “reoralization” of these societies.¹⁶³ Though we do not know precisely to what extent medieval Celtic societies were literate, we should certainly seek to avoid these two extreme assumptions.

What we do know of these early societies who have left so little documentation comes by way of other contemporaneous writers and writings. Caesar wrote of the druids in Gaul that they preferred to pass on their lore in verse via word of mouth, but also made use of the Greek alphabet in tasks outside their discipline.¹⁶⁴ Sixth-century Church Father, Gildas Sapiens, commented upon the textual accomplishments of Maelgwyn, King of Gwynedd, one of the writer's few positive asides in his *De Excidio Britanniae (On the Ruin of Britain)*, which may have even come from Wales itself.¹⁶⁵ Later, Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) reflectively remarked upon the genealogical traditions of the Welsh bard as well as the manuscripts of Merlin's prophecies that we also see incorporated into twelfth-century clergyman Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.¹⁶⁶ We also know of other Welsh writings from extant foreign (mostly English) sources. The most notable of these include “the *Orationes Moucani*, the *Historia Brittonum*, Asser's *Life of Alfred*, the *Annales Cambriae* and the Harleian Genealogies, and the saints' Lives by Rhygyfarch and Lifris; all these are known only from non-

¹⁶² Patrick Sims-Williams, “The uses of writing in early medieval Wales,” in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

Welsh copies and it is only internal evidence that allows us to assign them to Wales.”¹⁶⁷

While there are no manuscripts left from early Welsh history, there is a kind of documentary evidence available in the form of stone-carvings. We can see from the “Class I” stone-carvings (fifth-seventh centuries) a heavy influence from lost manuscript writing, but those textual traits are often deemed a sub-Roman leftover rather than a native Celtic work. In other words, many scholars have theorized that the root of the carvings' literary elements arose from the Roman occupation of Britain rather than from the Celts' own scribal tradition. This assumption, however, is contradicted by the distribution of stones in the north rather than the Romanized south. Given the Latin formulas and epigraphy of the inscriptions, it must be said that these were created under some sort of Romano-British or Gallo-Roman influences, mixes of Roman and Celtic traditions.¹⁶⁸ As such, the stone-carvings from this period are amalgams of different cultural styles coming together to form a unique product, a process that comes into play well into the fourteenth century.

Further evidence of a kind of cultural amalgamation (Romano-Christian) existing in this period can be found in the number of Latin texts available in Welsh libraries (still in the Latin language). As Sims-Williams recounts, this foreign documentation includes:

various biblical and liturgical extracts; a Psalter and Martyrology; patristic works like Augustine's *Deo Trinitate*; Classical and Christian school texts such as Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Juvenecus; Liberal Arts texts such as Martianus Capella, Boethius' translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and Macrobius; Bede's *De Natura Rerum* and computistical texts such as Bede's *De Temporum Ratione*... On top of all these texts, we have to add the Latin works quoted or alluded to by Welsh authors; for example, Ieuan and Rhygyfarch's library at (?)Llanbadarn seems to have included the works of Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Prudentius, Caelius Sedulius, Aldhelm and others. Listing all this evidence together it would be possible to draw up a quite substantial collection of *Fontes Cambrenses* to parallel the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* sponsored by the British Academy¹⁶⁹

From that, we may see that early medieval Wales, though one of the farthest outposts of Roman

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 23.

rule, possessed a considerable literary connection with the Imperial intellect. Of course, these collections were available primarily in monasteries and do not reflect the reading habits of the medieval Welsh populace (most of whom could not read anyway!). The collections do show, however, that early medieval Wales did possess a small amount of written culture among the ecclesiastical elite, but for all intents and purposes, we can assume that the remainder of the Welsh people relied upon their orality to act as intermediary between themselves and their world. It would not be until Edward's new administration established a firm foothold in northern Wales that literacy would become the primary vehicle for the expression of a purely native Welsh culture.

Absence of Documentary Evidence

There are a number of factors behind why there is such a glaring absence when it comes to extant documentation in the case of Wales, especially in relation to Ireland or England. Though much of the scholarship involves speculative arguments *ex silencio*, there is reason to believe that the inhabitants of medieval Wales just did not compose or copy nearly as much as their geographical neighbors did. We have seen previously the relative isolation in which Wales developed and the fragmented nature of its rule. As such, it is understandable that there existed little if any need for any appreciable documentation in the period. Boundaries and administration (if tribal rule can be termed administration) were constantly in flux, thwarting any attempt to establish long-term relationships across regions and between peoples; thus, no written communication would be needed as a go-between amongst the ruling elite. The managerial units themselves were generally quite small and sparsely populated, dramatically reducing the need for such bureaucratic documentation like censuses, payroll reports, petitions, etc. Contact with the

world outside of Wales was seemingly minimal, diminishing the likelihood for international correspondences to be generated. The relative isolation of the Welsh Church militated against the preservation of letters, since few correspondences were sent to noted recipients, like Lull and Alcuin on the Continent, whose documents were copied and preserved.¹⁷⁰ It is absolutely key here to understand the distinct lack of central organizational infrastructure, be it secular or ecclesiastical, that could support and sustain any substantial written culture. It is precisely this infrastructure (coupled with a native economic boost) that Edward inadvertently provided when he set up his new administration in the late thirteenth-century, thus complementing the motivation with the means for establishing an expansion in literary culture for the native Welsh.

Beyond the lack of need for compositions in Wales, there was also a distinct lack of resources for composing them. Writing in the medieval world was an expensive enterprise. A noble would have had to procure the materials, mostly parchment or vellum (animal hide) and ink of varying colors either through trade or by domestic production; since, as we have before noted, links with possible trade members were minimal, the elite of Wales were often restricted to their own resources or those of Ireland, their primary trading partner. Even more costly to obtain was someone possessing the skill to write. These men were generally clergy and would have been commissioned by an elite for their scribal duties.¹⁷¹ Again, given the relative isolation of the Welsh Church, it is not likely that many clerics in this period would have been educated enough to perform any substantial writing functions. As such, it is easy to see how the socioeconomic conditions of medieval Wales would have militated against the production of any abundance in documentary material.

Not only were few texts created in the first place, but what did appear faced the likely

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷¹ It is interesting to note that modern-day secretaries perform “clerical” work and are sometimes called “clerks,” thus keeping the medieval term alive even today.

prospect of destruction long before modern scholars could ever gain a glimpse of it. Wet weather, fire, and the frequency in which monasteries changed hands (especially without the Benedictine emphasis put on monastic libraries)¹⁷² ensured that few insular Celtic texts prior to AD 1000 survived in their native countries. The ones that did survive were often taken to England or the Continent at an early stage, possibly a result of some connection between the monasteries. Scottish and Welsh migration tended to move in the direction of Ireland, where the likelihood for preserving the writings were only marginally better than in the other two Celtic countries and dramatically reduced from that of England and the Continent.¹⁷³ If the texts did endure the tumult of the Middle Ages, they faced the various destructive movements that swept through Europe thereafter. “The stark scarcity of surviving liturgical books from Wales is testimony to the effectiveness of the destruction of service books ordered after the Reformation, and subsequent losses under Elizabeth and during the Civil War.”¹⁷⁴ The number of texts lost in that century of turmoil is unknown.

It would be profitable here to establish a comparison between the literary legacy of Wales and that of its geographic neighbors. As Sims-Williams notes, only around ten Irish manuscripts dating prior to AD 1000 survived in Ireland, while those of Irish extraction surviving elsewhere number around 50; for England, nearly 1000 manuscripts survived, three-fourths of them inside the country; contrast this with the fact that no pre-AD 1000 book survived in Wales at all, and only about ten or so survived elsewhere.¹⁷⁵ (Even these numbers are highly debatable. The problem in pinpointing a specific number arises partly from the “difficulty of proving the Welsh

172 The rule of St. Benedict of Nursia, arising in the first half of the sixth century, put a large emphasis on “*pax, ora, et labora*,” (i.e. peace, prayer, and work). As a cross-component of prayer and work, Benedictine monasteries by the ninth century often contained libraries with holdings replete with the writings of early Church fathers.

173 Ibid., 20.

174 Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 20.

175 Sims-Williams, “The uses of writing,” 21.

origin of Latin books of later Welsh provenance... let alone the origin... of books being written in medieval Wales in French and English.”)¹⁷⁶ Huws offers another partial explanation for this disparity between British Isle occupants in addition to the ones that we have discussed above. In his investigation of Insular Script, the writing style that became prevalent in the Isles during the early medieval period in contradistinction to that used on the Continent, Huws reasons:

In England, books in Anglo-Saxon in Insular script mostly survived the Middle Ages as sleepers in large ecclesiastical libraries. In Ireland, early books in Irish probably survived because their Insular script belonged recognizably to a continuing tradition. In Wales there was neither continuity of libraries (unless possibly at St David's, where most of the books seem to have been destroyed soon after the Reformation) nor continuity of script.¹⁷⁷

In other words, Wales did not have the monastic tradition of England nor the scribal tradition of Ireland (called *ogam*, developed through contact with the Roman Empire¹⁷⁸) that fostered a conservative literary tradition.

Under those conditions, the degree of textual ubiquity in Wales appears much like that of Pictland, the eastern and northern portions of what is today Scotland; however, the ultimate outcome for the Welsh was significantly different from that of the Picts.¹⁷⁹ According to Forsyth, given the relative complexity and sophistication of the Picts' metalwork and masonry that survived to today, it is not incomprehensible that they must have developed a literary tradition of some degree, especially given the fact that the ecclesiastical centers in the area would have been hard pressed to function without them.¹⁸⁰ However, there are no extant Pictish writings either in Scotland or elsewhere. Apart from the isolation from the Imperial world and the lack of resources as in the case of Wales, Pictish texts also faced their own diminishing importance as the native

¹⁷⁶ Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁷⁸ Katherine Forsyth, “Literacy in Pictland,” in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39.

¹⁷⁹ The western regions of Scotland, the territory known as Dál Riada, was relatively close to Ireland in language and custom, as Forsyth points out on page 39.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 40.

culture declined starting in the late ninth century in favor of the growing Gaelic civilization of Dál Riada.¹⁸¹ Wales, unlike Pictland, managed to avoid the destruction of its unique culture via absorption and assimilation by a burgeoning foreign threat, which came for them first in the form of the Anglo-Saxons, then the Normans, and then the English with Edward's own conquest. In the latter case, the Welsh did precisely what the Picts could not: they threw their support toward functioning within a foreign society and cementing and expanding their written cultural heritage in the late Middle Ages. This lasting legacy not only provided their progeny with glimpses into the past, but it also provided successive Welsh generations with a cultural foundation from which they continue to thrive, ensuring that Welsh as a language (both written and spoken) and culture would not be wiped from the face of the earth.

Literacy and Orality in Late Medieval Wales

The late Middle Ages saw an upswing both in the use of the vernacular Welsh writings, and in the fervor with which they were copied and distributed, replacing Latin, which had been the primary language of all inscriptions, both on parchment and in stone, prior to about AD 800. (The use of Latin likely resulted from the desire to impress the illiterate audience and to emphasize Romano-British and Christian legacy; for that same reason, writers were reluctant to use Welsh symbols or formulas in their inscriptions.¹⁸²) In the century prior to the Conquest, however, Wales began a slow shift emphasizing more the use of Welsh as a written language and, in that same era, the art of writing was appropriated to a number of different socio-cultural contexts where before it had been available only to ecclesiastic and administrative purposes. This occurred especially in the northern regions where the conglomeration of territories under

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Sims-Williams, "The uses of writing," 28-29.

native rule coupled with the distinct lack of non-Welsh residents and limited contact with the outside world somewhat diminished the necessity for the use of Latin as an intermediary, universal language.

Of course, we must not assume that Wales made an inexorable transition from orality to literacy in this period. Quite the contrary is true. There is evidence that a sort of balance was struck between the two depending on the genre, time period, and geography involved.¹⁸³ Sims-Williams makes an interesting point about relative oralities in a comparison of Wales with Ireland. Evidence can be found in pre-twelfth-century law texts that made a profound distinction between the learned poets, the *fili*, and the practitioners of performance, the *bard*: “It stands to reason that the early Irish poetry which actually survives is more likely to be the work of the learned poets than the orally orientated (if not actually illiterate) *baird*, and the same could be true of extant early Welsh poetry.”¹⁸⁴ The same might also be true of the later medieval texts. “If it is legitimate to judge by the surviving textual evidence, the transmission of the poems of Cynddelw from the twelfth century onwards may have been less oral than those of the Cywyddwyr in the fourteenth century.”¹⁸⁵

From the mid-thirteenth century, we see the arrival of the first extant Welsh poetry codex, the *Black Book of Carmarthen*. Given the orthographic and paleographic evidence, it would seem that this particular codex was not the first ever to have been circulated, merely the first to survive the manuscript destruction that we have before encountered.¹⁸⁶ This book marks the transition into the period of our interest now, those eighty or so years following the Conquest,

¹⁸³ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. Of course, this argument hinges on an assumption of probability: the chance of any particular style of poetry, in this case that which was composed by the learned *fili*, for survival is increased manifold if it is the dominant (and abundant) style of the period. There is also the possibility that, for whatever reason, the bardic poetry might have suffered more loss than the learned poetry, thus shifting the balance of their period of composition back toward the oral side.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 31.

when Welsh cultural expansion hit a high point that was only dampened by the sweep of the Black Death. As Llinos Beverley Smith so eloquently writes:

By the time of the Edwardian conquest of 1282-83 Wales had already been exposed to the written word and its culture—in both Latin and vernacular forms—for several centuries, and the period lacks the interest and forensic challenge of an earlier age when language was first committed to writing. Nor can the preoccupations of those who study the burgeoning of literate modes in later centuries be matched in the evidence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and issues such as the acquisition and diffusion of skills of reading and writing or the consequences, if any, for the development of cognitive processes and abstract thought, for the drawing of boundaries between the inner self and the wider community, for social and cultural differentiation or for individual emancipation are elusive.¹⁸⁷

It is a little into these elusive qualities that I will seek to penetrate in the next chapters where we will discuss more in depth the role of the *Mabinogion* texts and the “Poetry of the Gentry” in giving the Welsh a firm foundation and direction in which to expand culturally. For now, we will speak more generally.

As we noted briefly, the late thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries in Wales saw “a marked intensification of the process of creating a literate mentality.”¹⁸⁸ The growth of scribal skill coincided with the blossoming of a period marked by greater abundance in written works and in wider distribution. The clerical library of Anian, bishop of St. Asaph (1268-1293), according to the bishop's will, held collections in canon law and theology, but by the end of the fifteenth century, Welsh priests would not uncommonly bequeath works of grammar and the humanities as well.¹⁸⁹ Of course, the clergy were not the only ones to benefit from increased literacy. The *White Book of Rhydderch* (the core content of Chapter 4) was composed for Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llywd in Ceredigion (just south of Gwynedd) and was likely to have been circulated throughout Wales, including to the home of Elise ap Gruffydd ab Einion at Plas-yn-Iâl

¹⁸⁷ Llinos Beverley Smith, “Inkhorn and spectacles: the impact of literacy in late medieval Wales,” in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 203.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

in Denbighshire on the northern coast.¹⁹⁰ In various court proceedings, there is further evidence indicating the growth of a book-owning laity. In a town called Ruthin in Denbighshire, a fellow named Bleddyn ap Hochkin brought a suit in 1346 against Adam le Taillour, arguing that a book valuing 10s that he had purchased from Alice Tasket of Denbigh had been withheld from him;¹⁹¹ thus, “by the end of the fourteenth century, we may safely assume that primers and missals, sometimes of considerable monetary value, were in lay ownership.”¹⁹² Similarly, in the commote court of Llanerch in Dyffryn Clwyd (one of the Four Territories in the north), a suit arose in 1331 between two men contending over the loan of “a book of Welsh history,”¹⁹³ not only pointing to rising literacy, but also a new written attention given to Welsh heritage. Thus, as Smith points out, “the ‘explosion in Welsh book production and in the writing down of literature’, [between 1250 and 1400], clearly had ramifications not only for the copying and conserving of texts but for their dissemination across a broad swathe of late medieval society.”¹⁹⁴ Now that we have seen some of the nature of Welsh textuality in the Middle Ages, let us look more closely at the production and form of manuscripts to set our scene further.

Medieval Manuscripts

Here, we will shift our focus from the general literacy of the British Isles in this period to a look into the style and form of some particular manuscripts and the ways in which composition as a formal process took hold in Wales. As was the case with most of Europe, the faltering Roman Empire, as it withdrew to protect its core, left behind vestiges of its socio-cultural makeup for the native Welsh to appropriate and upon which to expand in later generations.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 206.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Part of the Roman inheritance of the Britons, later the Welsh, together with Christianity and the use of letters, was the form of an artefact which had been adopted by the Christianized Romans for the preservation of literature: the codex. The codex, loosely speaking *liber*, a word still recognizable both in Romance (*livre*, *libro*) and Celtic languages (*llyfr*, *leabhar*), had been adopted by Christians for biblical texts before becoming the vehicle for literature in general.¹⁹⁵

This transmission of style also included form. The roll, the traditional format of Roman classical literature, reappeared prominently in medieval Britain in the long period before what we know today as books ever first came on the scene.¹⁹⁶ From those Roman roots, the entity likely to have need of the largest literary collection would have been the Church. Apart from relics themselves, the most precious of a monastery or cathedral's holdings were the Gospels and the *vitae*. These latter contained the stories of the lives and feats of patron saints and were particularly powerful for helping to create a regional identity. The Gospels were generally the most ornately decorated of any work, often encrusted with jewels or plated with gold depending upon the availability of such things in the surrounding area. The oldest Gospel, indeed the oldest book, of Welsh origin is the gospel-book of Saint Chad, which has resided at Lichfield for over a millennium, and prior to that, at Llandeilo Fawr in Carmarthenshire.¹⁹⁷ Another Gospel of notable mention is that of St. Asaph, whose beauty was used to raise funds for rebuilding the cathedral in the 1280s.¹⁹⁸

195 Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, 1.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid., 5. The date of this gospel is largely unknown, though some scholarship has suggested that it has been in Lichfield (England) since the late tenth century.

198 Ibid. The date of this gospel is unknown.

Lichfield Gospels: Carpet and First Pages

Source: *Lichfield Cathedral Library*¹⁹⁹



It was in the early Middle Ages that we see the development of what scholars have termed an “Insular script.” This minuscule script became one of the most widely used styles of writing for ordinary purposes in the British Isles, unlike Insular half-uncial, which was a rounded, near-majuscule script used in the Lichfield Gospels.²⁰⁰ Though Insular script became common throughout the Isles, in Wales it was uniquely modified depending upon the period and location in ways unknown in England or Ireland. Welsh Insular minuscule as early as the ninth century took on a variety of forms across the centuries: a sharpened one that seems to have been abandoned around 900; a rounded script used in the later ninth and tenth centuries that came to

199 “Lichfield Gospels,” Online Photograph. *Lichfield Cathedral Library*; available from <http://www.lichfield-cathedral.org/lcview10.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 Mar. 2007.

200 Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, 7.

be called Welsh Reformed minuscule; and a “flat-topped” version that died out around 1100.²⁰¹ This refers back to the lack of a single scribal tradition, which, as we have mentioned before, reduced the likelihood that any particular Welsh work would have been preserved.²⁰² The peculiarity of the Welsh Insular script could only have developed in a society that lacked infrastructure either to regulate scribal standards or to facilitate an exchange between scribal traditions, which would have ensured that everyone was on the same page (no pun intended) when it came to writing styles in vogue. The Insular tradition, including this script, was a trademark of the Celtic nations of Western Europe: in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland especially, then, via Irish influence, to England and small loci on the Continent.²⁰³ These places showed a marked difference in most aspects of book-production (beyond merely the script as we have mentioned). Some of the key variations include the type of parchment used, the number of bifolia in quires (“pages” in manuscript segments, generally four sheets folded to make eight “pages”), shade of ink, punctuation and syntax marks, abbreviations, and decorative style.²⁰⁴

201 Ibid.

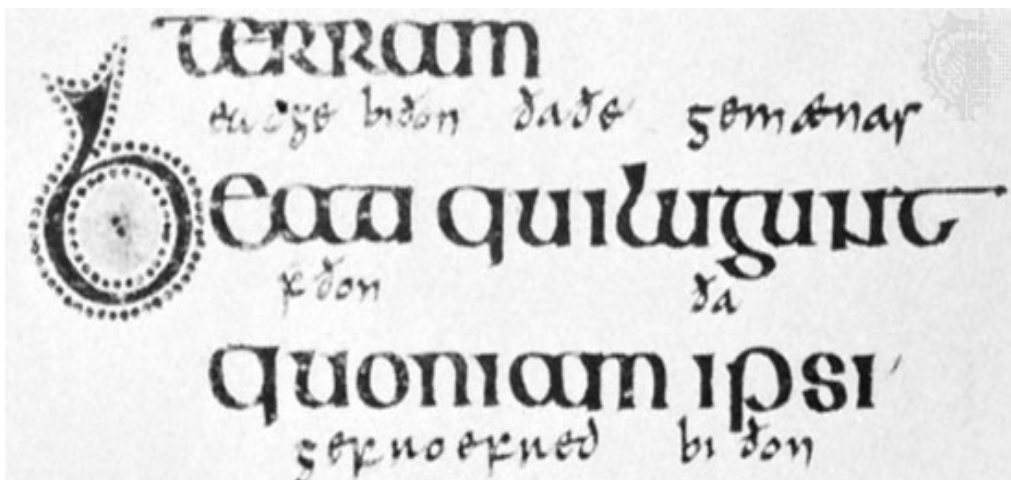
202 The lack of a single scribal tradition is compounded by the relative lack of writers in the period. Recall that only ten native Welsh manuscripts written before 1000 survived to today and, of these, none survived inside Wales.

203 Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, 7.

204 Ibid., 9.

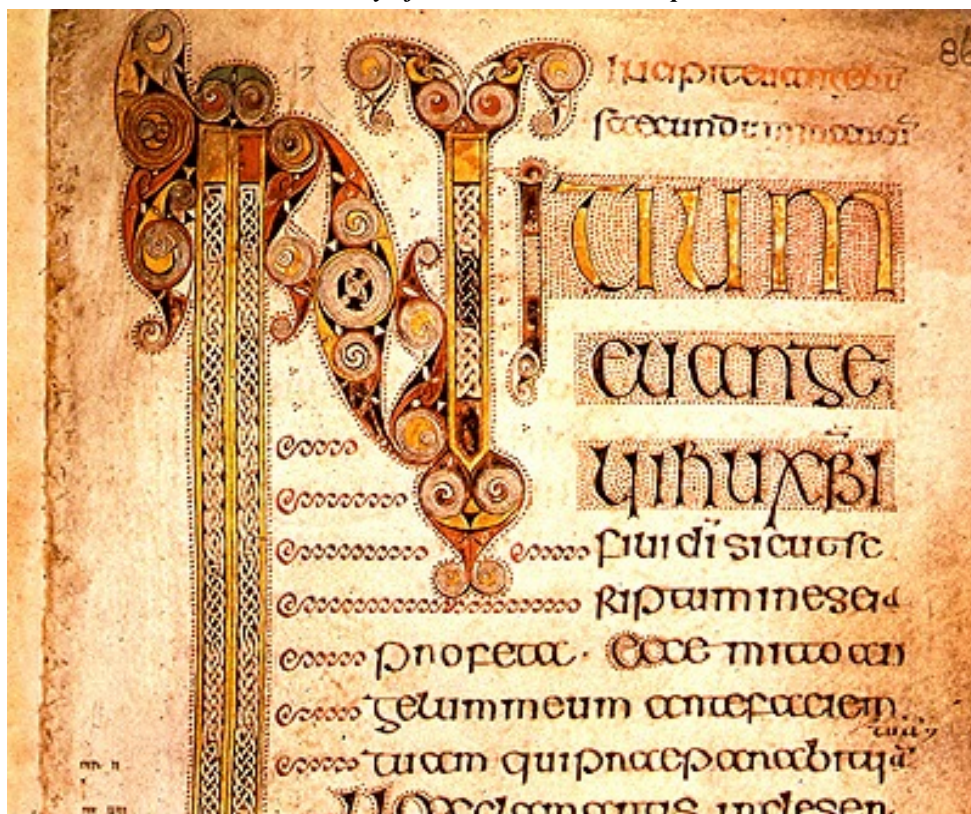
An Example of Insular Half-Uncial Script in the Lindisfarne Gospels

Source: Lindisfarne Gospels, Hiberno-Saxon, c. 700 (British Library, Cotton Nero D. IV)²⁰⁵



An Example of Insular Script in the Book of Durrow

Source: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill²⁰⁶



205 "Insular script," Online Photograph. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Library Edition*; available from <http://library.eb.com/eb/art-6075>; Internet; accessed 8 Feb. 2007.

206 "Dublin, Trinity College MS A," Online Photograph. *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*; available from <http://www.unc.edu/celtic/catalogue/manuscripts/durrow.html>; Internet; accessed 20 Mar. 2007.

The earliest surviving Welsh books date from the middle of the thirteenth century in the form of the *Laws of the Hywel Dda*, the *Brut y Brenhinedd* (Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*), and the *Black Book of Carmarthen*; however, the Welsh contained therein is so free from any regional dialects that it suggests a late stage in the development of a literary medium.²⁰⁷ In other words, Welsh as a written language had already been somewhat standardized to the point that these three texts, having arisen (or having been copied) in different Welsh locales, did not bear linguistic distinctions to one another.²⁰⁸ It is this period on which we must focus our interest in this study, for it is in this period that a written Welsh culture broke onto the world stage in such a way as to ensure its lasting endurance throughout the ages. In addition to the texts mentioned above, within the next century, between AD 1250 and 1350, Wales produced copies of other notable works including the *Brut y Tywysogyon* (the *Chronicle of the Princes*, a continuation of Monmouth's work), the *Can Rolant* (the Welsh version of the *Chanson de Roland*), and the *White Book of Rhydderch* (*Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*), forming the apex of Welsh literary production in the years immediately following Edward's Conquest and the bulk of our discussion in Chapter 4.

The century between 1250 and 1350 is also an interesting one for the burgeoning Welsh literary culture in that it demonstrates a rapid movement from the isolated, regional style of writing toward a conformation to European standards. Ruling, decoration, and arrangement all complied with the customary book-making practices of the day as did the use of the *textura*

²⁰⁷ Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, 13.

²⁰⁸ This provides an interesting dilemma for us. How can such works represent a fairly late stage in literary development while still possessing such a strong oral residue? The answer perhaps lies in the existence of a language standard, like a grammar treatise, that has not survived to today. After all, it is somewhat likely that, of the relatively few scribes active in Wales, most would have had contact with any widespread grammar treatise. We will investigate more into this when we look at Einion's *Grammar* in the next chapter. At any rate, though the style of these works might no longer possess evidence of their oral heritages, their contents certainly do; thus, it is entirely possible that the texts had advanced beyond the point of containing distinct regional residues, but still retained the more fundamental aspects of orality. More on that in Chapter 4.

script, the “angular child of Caroline minuscule.”²⁰⁹ There is some evidence that Welsh scribes attempted the practice of alternating red and blue initials as had become the custom in England and on the Continent, but their efforts were largely thwarted by the difficulty in obtaining blue ink,²¹⁰ at least until the Conquest established better trading prospects. Until then, the Welsh often used a green or blue-green, the latter arising as, possibly, a uniquely Welsh practice.²¹¹ Despite those deficiencies, the century between 1250 and 1350 marked a high point in Welsh literary culture and book-making, likely a result of the new opportunities afforded by the nascent administration. Foreign conquest and rule inspired an unprecedented interest in native culture and solidarity while simultaneously providing the economic and administrative infrastructure to initiate and sustain any suitable writing project.

In the next two chapters, we will investigate the ways in which some of the literature produced in the early to mid-fourteenth century demonstrates an expansion in native Welsh culture as I define it: as a process that both explicitly celebrates local heritage and draws distinction to the English and their rule. We will investigate primarily the content (characters, plots, etc.) of various poems and tales in order to see how, thanks to Edward's Conquest, the literature of the early fourteenth century stood at a crossroads for Wales. There it will become apparent, especially in the case of the tales of Chapter 4, how the burgeoning native textual movement worked to embrace its traditional orality and its newfound literacy in order to affirm its Welsh-ness in the face of so much English-ness.

209 Ibid.

210 Ibid., 14.

211 Ibid.

Chapter 3: Einion's Grammar and the "Poetry of the Gentry"

As the fourteenth century dawned in the Welsh territory, it heralded in a new era of literary practice, shaped at least in part by the nascent socio-political landscape of Edward I's administration. With the rise of a baronial class of native Welshmen operating nominally in the service of the king, Welsh literary culture managed to overcome a "severe crises of both patronage and confidence immediately in the wake of the Edwardian Conquest"²¹² and undergo a massive renaissance. These men, such as Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd ab Ieuan, whom we will see in the next chapter, are at the very foundation of any argument propounding the exploitation of English rule for Welsh advancement. Some of them are themselves notable artists, like Dafydd ap Gwilym or Iolo Goch whose great works withstood the destruction of time to testify to Welsh pride and ingenuity. Before we turn to the works of the great fourteenth-century poets, we must take a look at another opus in the realm of literature that has also made its mark (perhaps somewhat indirectly) on the culture of Wales: the grammar of Einion Offeireid.

Einion's Grammar

One of the unique features of the Welsh cultural legacy is its bardic poetry, a tradition so old that it defies most attempts to study its roots and influence. As Lewis states:

Medieval Welsh bardic poetry, regarded by some Celtic scholars as Wales's most distinctive contribution to the European literary heritage, was pre-eminently social in function, formal and convention in both theme and treatment, archaic and polished in diction, impressively dignified in style, and generally conservative in metrical patterns.²¹³

Having such a particular mode and a strictly managed ritual driving the practice of the bardic art, it is no wonder that several works have surfaced across the ages that seek to establish very firm rules guiding the structure and style of their sacred skill. Though there are a number of tracts

²¹² R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063-1415*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 418.

Note that the rise of this class is discussed in Chapter 1.

²¹³ Ceri W. Lewis, "Einion Offeiriad and the Bardic Grammar," *A Guide to Welsh Literature* 2 (1997): 58.

ostensibly associated with various artistic patrons across the early and High Middle Ages in Wales, most of them make it decidedly difficult to pinpoint their origins, both temporal and geographic; such is the case with a statute associated with Gruffydd ap Cynan (king of Gwynedd, ca. 1055-1137) on governing bards and musicians, which may actually date from the fourteenth or fifteenth century.²¹⁴ “There is, nevertheless, one incontrovertibly authentic medieval tract that has long been regarded as a source of great importance of the understanding of both the content and the background of Welsh bardic poetry.”²¹⁵ This is the grammar of Einion Offeiriad and Dafydd Ddu.

Before we turn to the manuscript, we must ask: Who are Einion Offeiriad and Dafydd Ddu? Very little is known of either of these two men (especially the latter). It was not until Sir Thomas Wiliems (ca. 1545-1622) of Trefriw, a renowned collector and transcriber of ancient manuscripts enclosed two copies of this grammar treatise in a body of texts (referred to now as Mostyn MS 110) that he compiled in 1609, attributing the authorship of one to “Dafydd Ddu Athro o Degiengl” and the other to “Einion Offeiriad o Wynedd.”²¹⁶ Wiliems's suggestion that Dafydd hailed from Englefield (Degiengl) points to an area near Rhuddlan in Denbighshire; this locale is corroborated in the writings of Dr. John Davies (d. 1644) in Peniarth MS 49, which claims that Dafydd had been an “archdeacon” of Dyserth, also in Denbighshire.²¹⁷ Interestingly enough, both of these works attaches the title *Athro* to the man's name, which means “teacher” and denotes a specific kind of cleric with particular (if unclear) ties to bardic grammar.²¹⁸ For the dates of his life, we can only resort to tradition, which holds his *floruit* to be in the second half of

214 Ibid., 62.

215 Ibid., 64.

216 Ibid., 65-66.

217 Ibid., 66. It is unclear if Davies was operating from Wiliems's work or came about this assumption on his own. The assertion that Einion hailed from a different town, though in Denbighshire, does suggest that Davies had his own sources.

218 Ibid.

the fourteenth century.²¹⁹

The life of Einion is somewhat more documented, albeit slightly and more confusingly. From the moniker *Offeiriad*, we know that this man was also a cleric. According to Lewis, somewhere between 1314 and 1322, Einion

sang an *awdl* [one of the most sophisticated forms of Welsh poetry] to Rhys ap Gruffydd ap Hywel ap Gruffydd ab Ednyfed Fychan (d. 1356), a figure of considerable wealth and influence among the Welsh gentry of the fourteenth century, whose career, it has been claimed, 'crystallized the attitude and aspirations of those members of whose class who lent support to the Angevin cause in Wales during the first century of the English settlement.'²²⁰

In administrative documentation, the name Einion Offeiriad occurs in a number of entries between 1344 and 1355. Of course, the significance of these occurrences must be tempered since *Offeiriad* was a standard title meaning “cleric” and “Einion” was not an uncommon name. One record from a judiciary session in 1344 charged an “Eynon Effeyrad” with aiding and abetting the murder of Gruffydd ap Morgan ap Einion in the Is-aeron cantref of Ceredigion.²²¹ In another instance, the Ministers' Accounts for the year 1352-53 show that one “Eygnon Yfferat” owned an acre of land in the same cantref that was escheated to the Crown; thus it is likely that those are the years in which Einion died, leaving no heir to safeguard his lands from the king.²²² The accounts of the chamberlain of south Wales for the year 1354-55 show that an “Eynon Effeyrat” held lands in Cantref Mawr (Carmarthenshire) and had died by January 1354.²²³ Finally, the records of an inquest into the Black Death held in Caernarfon in 1349 establish an Einion Offeiriad as the now-deceased parson of a church in Llanrug in Gwynedd.²²⁴ Given the proximity of all these locations and the relatively short time between these men's supposed deaths, it is not inconceivable that several, if not all, of them were one in the same person; this

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 67.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 67-68.

²²⁴ Ibid., 68.

possibility is reinforced by the fact that Einion's patron, Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd, held lands in both Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire and was a bailiff in Snowdonia.²²⁵ Of course, we must acknowledge the possibility that none of these men were the Einion Offeiriad associated with this grammar treatise; we may never know for sure. The only certainty is that Einion Offeiriad was a cleric who lived sometime in the first half of the fourteenth century, likely in one of the northern territories.

Much like the men of its namesake, the grammar manuscript itself exists in some measure of ambiguity. Many renowned scholars have felt that the oldest extant copy of the text comes to us in the *Red Book of Hergest* in the early fifteenth century, with a slightly later copy included in Llanstephan MS 3.²²⁶ Two other copies exist as well, the incomplete Bangor MS 1 and Peniarth MS 20, the latter of which becomes difficult to read toward the end and itself differs substantially from the other copies.²²⁷ On the other hand, it is been convincingly argued based on orthographic evidence that the earliest version is indeed the Peniarth manuscript, which cannot be dated much later than mid-fourteenth century.²²⁸ Sir Thomas Wiliems wrote that Einion compiled the grammar in praise of Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd, which meshes nicely with what we already know about Einion's great *awdl* to his noble patron. Also of note, as Sir Ifor Williams has pointed out, the text includes a segment of a *toddaid* (a particular measure) taken from an ode written by Gwilym Ddu of Caernarfonshire in praise of Sir Gruffydd Llwyd of Tregarnedd (whom we saw briefly in Chapter 1), a possible participant in the Welsh revolt against the Crown, during the latter's imprisonment in 1322.²²⁹ Thus, it seems probable that the grammar was indeed compiled during Einion's lifetime and revised by Dafydd a short while later.

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid., 65.

227 Ibid.

228 Ibid.

229 Ibid., 69.

The grammar text itself has two primary parts: a treatise on the mechanics of grammar comes first, followed by a discussion of particular aspects of the Welsh bardic art.²³⁰ Though it would be superfluous to go into great depth here about the fine details of Welsh grammar, there are a few key features present that yield insight into the mindset behind and function of this work. For one thing, scholars tend to agree that the first section “is largely an abridged translation of some version of the Latin grammar associated with the names of Donatus and Priscian.”²³¹ Though this was not the first time that the works of these two grammarians were employed in Welsh society (at least monastic society), it seemingly does pinpoint the first time that such was employed on more than a cursory basis and one of the first times that such was juxtaposed with the peculiarities of Welsh prosody (in the second section). To qualify that, we must understand that this first grammatical section did not function as we understand grammar books to do today; instead, it is rather “a study of grammar as a science unconnected with the distinctive features of a particular language.”²³² In other words, the use of Donatus and Priscian functioned primarily to instruct students in the art of grammar itself, which should invariably lead to the further sophistication and refinement of these students' own ability to wield Welsh prose.

The inclusion of a Latin grammar text marks something of a dramatic shift in the way that the bardic art was instructed in Wales. As Lewis points out, “No evidence exists to prove that prior to the fourteenth century the Welsh professional bards, in general, had more than a very superficial knowledge of Latin and its literature, acquired mainly from the Church services and from some familiarity with the life of the monasteries.”²³³ As such, they were extremely limited

²³⁰ Ibid., 73.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 74.

in their ability to connect with the great works of the ancient world, that is, until Einion provided an abridged translation of the text. Afterward, Wales possessed the key to formal instruction in the art of language and poetry. Discussions on different kinds of syllables, on parts of speech, on the letters of the alphabet are included and do devote some time to applying these lessons to the Welsh language in the second section.²³⁴ In one example of a compromise placed between Welsh and Latin grammar, some care was given to the changing face of Welsh sounds, but the text was sure to maintain a strict 24-letter alphabet in spite of the fact that it did not represent all the sounds of that language.²³⁵ The number 24 has a strong resonance for Einion's grammar since it represented the number of letters in the Latin alphabet (including the ampersand) as well as the basis of the Welsh language's metrical system and the number of the best knights in Arthur's court, among other such valences.²³⁶

So what are we to make of this striking manuscript from post-Conquest Wales? Well, we have seen the kinds of forces behind Einion's motivations in the people that the cleric has chosen to praise. In his famed *awdl* to Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd, Einion proved himself to be dedicated to the advancement of the Welsh. He saw in Sir Rhys the ability to exploit the new, wealthy administration to the benefit of the native populace.²³⁷ The inclusion of snippets from the ode to Sir Gruffydd Llwyd of Tregarnedd by Gwilym Ddu of Caernarfonshire also points to one of two eventualities, depending upon what interpretation of Sir Gruffydd's life is used. Out of the two scenarios,²³⁸ one possibility that was proffered in older accounts, suggests that Sir Gruffydd acted in league with the Scot Edward Bruce in a conspiracy to free both Celtic countries from English

234 Ibid., 76. We must note that this does not constitute a comprehensive treatise on all aspects of Welsh bardic practice. Instead, it is actually a strange mix in which some fundamentals of the art are ignored while other extraneous topics are treated heavily.

235 Ibid., 83.

236 Ibid.

237 Of course, his dedication to Sir Rhys was not hampered by the latter's patronage of the scholar-cleric.

238 J.G. Edwards, "Sir Gruffydd Llwyd," *The English Historical Review* 30, no. 120 (Oct. 1915): 590-591.

rule, thus giving Edward II good reason to imprison the man. The other propounds that Sir Gruffydd had always behaved in concert with the Crown, at times acting as sheriff of Caernarfon, Merioneth, and Angelsey, among other positions. If we take the first position, then perhaps Einion sought to include subtle hints of praise for a native rebel in his treatise. If we take the second, then we have again a situation where Einion shows his admiration for a Welshman's ability to rise in the ranks of the newfound English administration and devote "English money" to the patronage of Welsh artists. With regard to the actual content of his work, it seems likely that Einion wanted fervently to augment one of his homeland's proudest and most long-lasting traditions. Putting in place firm supports in the form of Latin grammar behind his native language, the cleric worked to buttress one of the last bastions of Welsh-ness, a feat that likely succeeded beyond Einion's imagination.

Poetries of the Princes and Gentry

While Wales had long had a bardic/poetic tradition, it had been characterized often by its praise of a princely patron and the glory of battle. This was especially the case in the age of the *Gogynfeirdd*, the "Poets of the Princes," during the last two centuries of independence.²³⁹ "Tradition regards as the earliest of them Meilyr (*fl.* 1100-37), court poet of Gruffudd ap Cynan, king of Gwynedd. The dense, mannered style of this poetry could be majestic at its best, as in the work of Cynddelw, and... impenetrable at its worst, and derided even in its own time."²⁴⁰ However, with the advent of the English, Wales had little inspiration in such genres, since they simultaneously failed to conquer gloriously their foe and lost their noble line of princes. With Edward's Conquest came new opportunity for a growing mercantile/squirely caste of Welshmen

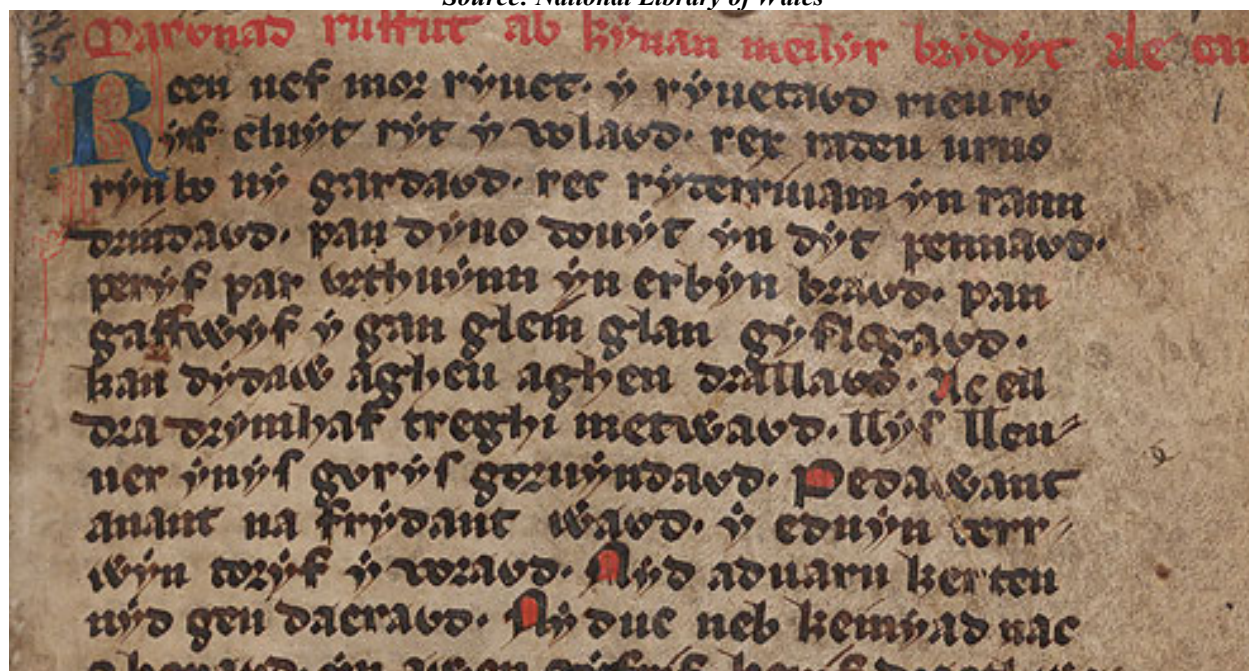
239 Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 85.

240 Ibid.

to afford to patronize a hitherto unexplored category of native literature, what has been termed the *Cywyddwyr*, the “Poets of the Gentry” (or of the “Nobility” as some scholars term it). From an orality and literacy standpoint, this movement is notable for its conscious drive to continue such a longstanding native bardic tradition, but with specific attention to standardized grammar (Einion's) and to the textualization of the poetry itself. Where the vast majority of Welsh poems prior to the fourteenth century were transmitted orally, the “Poetry of the Gentry” made great use of its newfound ability to commit its writings to paper (vellum, etc.), thus helping to secure them for later generations.

Hendregadredd Manuscript – Poetry of the *Gogynfeirdd*²⁴¹

Source: National Library of Wales



The first poem that I want to explore is one that still technically falls within the sphere of the *Gogynfeirdd*, but, in my opinion, helps us to see the transition in the style of active poetry

241 "Hendregadredd Manuscript NLW MS 6680B – folio 1 recto," Online Photograph. *National Library of Wales Digital Mirror Collection*; available from <http://digidol.llgc.org.uk/METS/LLH00001/frames?div=0&subdiv=0&locale=en&mode=thumbnail>; Internet; accessed 26 Mar. 2007.

from the era of the Princes to that of the Gentry. This is the “Lament for Llywelyn ap Gruffydd” (also called “Gruffydd son of the Red Judge”) by Gruffydd ab Yr Ynad Coch²⁴² dating from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, but whose manuscript comes to us inside the pages of the *Red Book of Hergest*. Though this is one of many such lamentations for the last of the native Welsh princes, it is one of the most awe-inspiring across time. As Breeze writes pertinently:

The classic view [of this poem] is that of Sir John Lloyd, who described the poem at the end of his great history of Wales as a 'lament' that read the tragedy of the hour in the beating of wind and rain on 'that miserable and more than wintry December day' [December 11, 1282, the date of Llywelyn's death]. Yet Lloyd considered, unlike Gruff[y]dd, that Llywelyn had not lived in vain. By his life's work he had helped to create a lasting sense of Welsh nationality.²⁴³

Such sentiment is completely understandable when we read the poem, for its words transmit to us the nearly despondent reaction of the author to his prince's death, but, in the end, offers a glimmer of hope for the beleaguered Welsh.

Gruffydd begins his elegy by recalling his prince and describing his own personal grief, but does so without actually naming Llywelyn (in fact, it will not be until the last fourteen lines that the author actually calls the prince by name):

Heart cold in the breast with dread, grief-stricken,
 For a king, oak door, of Aberffraw.
 Bright gold was bestowed by his hand;
 He deserved his golden diadem.
 Golden king's gold cups! No more merriment,
 Llywelyn; no blithe garb may I wear.
 I grieve for a prince, hawk beyond reproach;
 I grieve for the ill that befell him;
 I grieve for his loss; I grieve for his lot;
 I grieve to hear how he was wounded.

He then moves to praise Llywelyn with a number of different titles and honorifics, making reference to the fact that the prince's downfall came at the hands of some traitorous Marcher

242 Joseph P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 171-174. I will use Clancy's translations for all poems in this chapter, but will note the page numbers of each in its own footnote.

243 Andrew Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1997), 61. Breeze notes several scholars and historians across the years who have remarked similarly upon this work.

lords, rather than a noble fighting “Saxon” of Edward's army:

A lord truly constant, listen to me,
 How loudly I mourn: ah, the mourning.
 A blest lord till the eighteen were slain;
 A gracious lord, low he is laid;
 A lord bold as a lion guiding the land;
 A lord eager to create havoc;
 A flourishing lord, till he left Emrais
 No Saxon would venture to strike him;
 A lord, stone his roof, Welsh people's ruler,
 Of the right line to hold Aberffraw...
 Perfect the lad slain by enemies' hands;
 Perfect his forebears' honour in him;
 Candle of kings, strong lion of Gwynedd,
 Throne of honour, he was much needed.

To drive home the loss of such a leader, the next several lines seek to capture the collective mourning of the Welsh and the desolation of Wales at hearing of Llywelyn's death, even going so far as to analogize the moment with that of King Arthur's death at Camlan.²⁴⁴

Many a tear gliding fast down a cheek,
 Many a side made red with gashes,
 Many a foot soaked in puddles of blood,
 Many a widow wailing about him,
 Many a burdened mind wandering,
 Many a son left without father,
 Many a homestead black in the firebrand's track,
 And many a ground ruin lays waste,
 Many a sorry cry, as at Camlan,
 Many a tear trickling down a cheek.
 From a prop cut down, gold-handed prince,
 From Llywelyn's death, lost my sound mind;
 Heart frozen in the bosom from fear,
 Lust for life like dry brushwood shrivels.

Suddenly, with an apocalyptic flair, Gruffydd expounds that Llywelyn's death stands as a sign of the end of times and of the Second Coming of Christ:²⁴⁵

See you not the rush of the wind and rain?
 See you not the oaks thrashing each other?

244 Ibid., 59.

245 Ibid.

See you not that the sea is lashing the shore?
 See you not the judgment portending?
 See you not that the sun is hurtling the sky?
 See you not that the stars have fallen?
 Do you not believe in God, foolish people?
 See you not that the world is in peril?
 Ah, God, that the sea would cover the land!
 What is left us that we should linger?
 No place of escape from terror's prison,
 No place to live; wretched is living!

Closing in a much softer tone, Gruffydd treats Llywelyn's head with the honor and majesty that he feels it deserves, using the image of his prince in heaven as a source of hope for his subjects left behind:

Head of fair Llywelyn, harsh fear for the world,
 An iron spike through it.
 Head of my prince, harsh fall's pain for me,
 Head of my spirit left speechless,
 Head that owned honour in nine-hundred lordships,
 With nine-hundred feasts for him.
 Head of a king, his hand sowed iron,
 Head of a king's hawks, forcing a breach,
 Head of a kingly wolf out-thrusting,
 Head of heaven's kings, be his haven
 Blessed king, rule over him, Lord of hosts,
 Whose hopes reach to Llydaw:
 Aberffraw's truly rightful king,
 Let heaven's blest land be his home.

With those final words, Gruffydd closes his famous lament and opens our investigation into such a wonderfully situated and executed work.

This “Lament for Llywelyn” by its very nature praises what is Welsh and scorns what is English. As such, it has three keystone images that are invoked to such an effect: the death of Arthur, the cowardly Saxon, and the end of times versus the eternal heaven. We have already discussed much in Chapter 1 about the relationship between Wales and the Arthurian tradition, including Edward's appropriation of Llywelyn's coronet during his conquest. This poem, like

that coronet, reinforces the tie between Wales (specifically her prince) and, Arthur, the most idyllic, authoritative ruler that the British Isles have ever known, one whose heroism and great exploits have become the subject of hundreds of tales told across Europe. Likewise, the poem and the coronet can act as symbols of English greed and transgression. Without the war with England, Llywelyn would not have been betrayed and murdered. Without Edward's desire to be a modern-day (so to speak) Arthur, it is unlikely that he would have expended so much trouble in absconding with the coronet and the bones of Arthur and Guenevere. Without that English greed and transgression, Wales might have been left well enough alone to form her own fully sovereign kingdom.

Here Gruffydd does not even characterize his foe as a valiant warrior deserving respect; instead, the only mention of the English threat comes in the line, “No Saxon would venture to strike him...” This is a very interesting line for several reasons. First, it subtly depicts the opposing army as filled with cowards. Now, we must pause here to emphasize that, in medieval warfare, it was generally the custom that only members of the same class have the right to destroy one another in battle and that members of the nobility/royalty would be spared; after all, they are far more valuable as objects of ransom, in most cases, than they are dead. In the case of Llywelyn, even shouting his own name during an ambush did not prevent an English squire from impaling him out of ignorance.²⁴⁶ In other words, not only did the treacherous Marcher nobles (feigning to change sides) not kill him, but they allowed a simple squire to transgress custom and class to do the job for them. According to the poem, these nobles were too pusillanimous to engage Llywelyn in a fight, even after resorting to trickery rather than facing him in honorable battle.

The second striking facet of this line is the use of the word “Saxon.” Gruffydd, capable

246 Michael Prestwich, *The Three Edwards*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 15.

of composing poetry and understanding history, surely would have known that Edward's lineage is Norman and that the Normans conquered the Saxons in their invasion of the Isle in 1066. So, his use of "Saxon" here has a very deliberate purpose: he likens Edward and his army to the race of brutal, blood-thirsty, and savage men that overtook the island some eight centuries before. This has a multifold effect designed to polarize the Welsh from the English. Being termed a Saxon is certainly a blow to those cultures who pride themselves on maintaining courtly, chivalric, and civilized lifestyles, as of course the English do, especially in recalling their Norman ancestry, which sought to conquer the Saxons only two and a half centuries before. Using "Saxon" to define their English adversary also ties in with the reference to Arthur and one of his most famous clashes, the Battle of Badon Hill. Here, as the myths tell us, Arthur, calling upon the name of the Virgin, almost singlehandedly routed an onslaught of invading Saxons, killing 470 of them by himself!²⁴⁷ Now we see that the use of the term "Saxon" not only serves as an insult toward the English, but also deliberately links them with a group of people whom the Welsh had already conquered many years ago. In that sense, perhaps the poem offers hope for the future of Wales, in addition to salving her wounds of frustration after the Conquest.

The final key image that Gruffydd uses in his elegy is that of the eternal Heaven and the Lord of hosts. It is important to note that the poem's reference to the end of time echoes strongly that of Luke 21:20-26,²⁴⁸ which speaks of Jerusalem surrounded by hostile Gentile armies, forcing those without its gates to flee into the mountains, and all to witness astrological and geological upheaval, "for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be

²⁴⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, Book IX, Chapter 4.

²⁴⁸ Breeze, *Literature*, 60.

taken as prisoners to all the nations.”²⁴⁹ The image of the desolation of Wales contrasts sharply with the condition of Llywelyn, who is protected and maintained by the “Head of heaven's kings.” Here Gruffydd moves beyond the simple comparisons of Llywelyn to Arthur and Edward to the Saxon enemy. In alluding to the Bible and specifically to this passage in Luke, Gruffydd moves his analogy into the cosmic realm, likening the English to the waves of heathen gentiles taking over the Holy City while simultaneously ensuring that Llywelyn has a place among the heavenly hosts. The gravity and accessibility of such a reference (summed up in venturing to compare Edward to the anti-Christ and Llywelyn to Christ himself) speaks well enough for itself, especially given that this allusion is one of which everyone in Wales should have at least a passing knowledge. In that manner, Gruffydd tried to make certain that all those around him could easily grasp the extreme dichotomy between the honorable Welsh prince and his accursed slayers.

The next poem that I want to investigate is “The Ploughman” by the famed writer Iolo Goch²⁵⁰ (ca. 1320-1400). Son of a landowner in Denbighshire, Iolo Goch “spent his life celebrating the established order of the Welsh upper class,”²⁵¹ writing poems praising such personage as Ithel ap Robert (archdeacon of St. Asaph), Owain Glyndŵr (Welsh national, later leader of the last great native revolt), and Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd ab Ieuan (for whom the *White Book* was named). Perhaps a minor cleric, perhaps a soldier, Iolo showed himself to be a patron of history and of current events, willing to write an ode to the Blessed Virgin one minute and then a satire on his own beard the next.²⁵² Amidst this seeming hodgepodge of styles and tendencies, Iolo's poetry demonstrates a profound insight into the socio-cultural tensions of his

249 Luke 21: 22-24a (NIV)

250 Clancy, *Poems*, 231-233

251 Breeze, *Literature*, 135.

252 Ibid.

time, and none do this better than “The Ploughman.”

Setting the scene at Judgment Day, Iolo establishes the plowman as one most worthy of God's praise:

When, a free time, the world's people,
Christendom's vigorous throng,
Before the Lord God, great desire,
Fine bold words, disclose their doings,
Atop Mount, where there'll be judgment,
Mighty Olivet, all of them,
Joyful will be, concise story,
The ploughman, plodder of field.
If he gave, the good God is gracious,
Offering and tithes to God,
Then a good upright spirit
He'll render God, he'll merit grace.

From there, he moves on into the meek and kind qualities of the plowman's simple life, enough to earn him a spot among the most blessed of heaven:

Easy for the fair dale's ploughman,
Trust hereafter in the Lord God:
Alms, through keeping faith strictly,
Lodging, he'll deny to none;
He'll pronounce only on ploughbeams,
Wants no quarrels on his patch;
He'll not wage war, bring lawsuits,
Oppress a man for his goods;
He'll not treat us too harshly,
Not press claims, longsuffering.
There's no worth, by the passion,
No life, no world, without him.

Here, he makes an interesting move in praising the plowman's characteristics in contradistinction to that of Arthur and reminds us that, without the plowman, there would be no bread for the sacred Host:

He finds it far more pleasant,
I know, old unflurried way,
To follow, I can't much fault him.
The curving plough with the goad,
Than be, when taking a tower,

An Arthur, a plunderer.
 We'd lack, save for his labour,
 Christ's sacrifice to nourish faith,
 Or the life of, why complain,
 Pope or emperor without him,
 Or king, fine wine-serving ruler,
 Sound his sense, or living man.

After waxing lyrical about the plow's abilities and the plowman's daily life, Iolo uses the famed Emperor Hugh of Constantinople as a testimony to the honor of the craft:

Hugh the Strong, fine nation's master,
 King rewarding praise with wine,
 Emperor of land and seas,
 Constantinople's gold keeper,
 He put his hand, after ruin,
 To a splendid strong-beamed plough.

For a fitting ending, he asks a blessing from God and Mary to be bestowed upon the happy plowman:

A single craft, no false word,
 Stands highest with the dear Father,
 A sign that this will triumph.
 Ploughing, it is wisdom's way.

The Lord God's hand, best of men,
 Mary's hand be on every ploughman.

Such ends this wonderful tribute to the plowman, one that has aroused a raging debate between academics of many generations.

Over the past century, scholars of the British Isles, especially of Wales, have dissected and analyzed this poem, each reckoning Iolo's inspirations on different parts of a socio-political spectrum. Henry Lewis in 1925 saw it as a reflection on the increased importance of the farming class in the period following the Black Death in 1349, which caused a dramatic shortage in labor.²⁵³ D.R. Johnston “refers to 'numerous parallels' to Iolo's portrait of the ploughman,

²⁵³ Ibid., 140.

particularly in sermons of the time, and assures us that the 'purpose of this remarkable poem was to enjoin labourers to accept their duties and position in society without protest' in the period of the Peasants' Revolt."²⁵⁴ In direct contrast to this viewpoint, W.J. Gruffydd wrote in 1909 that it "showed that Iolo was 'in touch with the most advance contemporary ideas – the ideas that lay under the Peasants' Revolt and *Piers Plowman*.'"²⁵⁵ What is remarkable, as Andrew Breeze points out, is that Iolo's plowman resembles point for point Langland's *Piers Plowman*: in his payment of the tithe, love of his neighbor, dedication to peace, service to his fellow man, production of the bread of the Host, and dedication to the Virgin Mary to name a few.²⁵⁶ In fact, the readership of the B- and C- texts of *Piers Plowman* (the ones with which "The Ploughman" has the most similarities) comprised mostly devout literate laymen and secular clergy, a demographic comparable to Iolo's own, given what we know of his background.²⁵⁷

So, as a lyrical treatise on the merits of the working class, Iolo's "Ploughman" provides an unique insight into one sentimentality of post-Conquest Wales. Like *Piers Plowman*, this poem celebrates the necessity and simple beauty of an oft-overlooked and much denigrated position in society. However, for Wales, it has a particular resonance augmented by the realities of everyday life. Despite the acculturation and assimilation of English with Welsh, the vast majority of such plowmen would have been native in contrast to those in the highest echelons of power, primarily English. As such, one could almost say that this poem stands as much in praise of Welsh-ness over English-ness as it does the life of meager plowman over the decadent tendencies of the nobility.²⁵⁸ Given that frame of reference, this poem also invokes two of the

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 140-141.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 141. This strongly suggests that Iolo Goch was familiar with these two texts of *Piers Plowman*, which likely predated his own "The Ploughman."

²⁵⁸ This statement would have to be qualified by discussions on Iolo's view toward native administrators, especially given that he operated under the patronage of such men. Also, nowhere in the poem does Iolo show active disdain for the upper classes, even remarking favorably on the Emperor of Constantinople. As such, the

same key images as did the “Lament for Llywelyn ap Gruffydd,” which are treated both dramatically and subtly differently much to the same end. The images of Arthur and the eternal heaven serve as two unchanging markers for the Welsh, past and future, that offer a sense of cultural continuity and hope for the fate of Wales.

In the middle of “The Ploughman,” Iolo describes the nature of the plowman as a peaceful one, unlike that of Arthur, razer of towers. At first glance, it might seem that Iolo is dismissing the exploits of the famed king, explicitly choosing to characterize him as a plunderer. If we were to accept this point of view, we could still draw some negative comparisons with Edward I and his army who swept through Wales, razing Llywelyn's towers and building many of their own. However, there is another mode for interpretation of this passage that would better situate it into the larger context of the poem. Summed up by the famous phrase “to everything there is a season,” the lines surrounding the mention of Arthur seem to suggest that now is a time of peace rather than battle. Undoubtedly well-versed in Conquest history, the Wars in Scotland, and the ravages of the Black Death, Iolo was aware of the suffering that war had brought upon his people and was perhaps using this opportunity to entreat them for peace. This would be a very pertinent appeal in the face of the Hundred Years War, where the English sought to wage an unending battle against their French opponents.

Possibly for Iolo, the time for such activity passed with the age of Arthur and a new era ushered in a need for cooperation and the rebuilding of society; this possibility is reinforced by the subsequent referral to the Host and the plowman's hand in its production. Immediately after referencing Arthur, the poem reminds us that “We'd lack, save for his labour, / Christ's sacrifice to nourish faith...” Here we are told that the plowman makes the very observance of Christ's

distinctions are mostly implied by the choice of subject and the highly commendatory attitude toward the plowman.

sacrifice possible with a sacrifice of his own. After all, if the plowman were spending all his time carousing or in battle, he would be unable to produce the bread of the Mass. Instead, he forgoes such extravagances of life, especially the destructive ones, in order to provide bread for kings and the Host for the people. One can almost hear Iolo place this depiction in contrast to the nobility, at least the English nobility, who cannot seem to cease waging wars wherever they set foot and who consume the fruits of others constantly (unlike the plowman who produces for others' consumption).

The second image that “The Ploughman” shares with the “Lament for Llywelyn ap Gruffydd” is the eternal heaven and the end of time. Where the lament is set in the tumultuous and volatile End of Days heralded by the death of the last great Welsh prince, the ode to the plowman takes place before and after the time of tribulation. At the beginning of the poem, we are told that the scene is “a free time” (post-Apocalypse) when “Christendom's vigorous throng” has gathered in the heavenly “Olivet” (the Mount of Olives) with “fine bold words [to] disclose their doings.” There in the sublime afterlife, the plowman recounts his life of servitude and equanimity, “render[ing]” his “good upright spirit” to God and “merit[ing] grace.”

Thus, we have moved from having the great warrior-princes like Llywelyn taking up residence in eternity to having the lowly agricultural workers earning such a reward. Interestingly enough, this follows one line of characterization of the Welsh versus the English across the century following the Conquest. In the late thirteenth century, one of the highest praises offered to a Welshman must certainly have been that he was a courageous warrior defending his homeland from the impending English. When such conflict was quelled and the Welsh military might destroyed, there was little opportunity for fame in battle prowess left to the conquered natives. As this poem by Iolo Goch demonstrates, one way to maintain pride in the

Welsh way of life was to switch the mode of praise in order to suit the particularly Welsh spheres, including agriculture. In other words, where before it was in vogue to celebrate the martial abilities of the Welsh as they fought the English, it became fashionable to praise the natives' peace-loving and simple way of life against that of the English, whose nobility enjoyed excesses at Wales's expense and whose wars had cost Wales the lives of many of her sons.²⁵⁹ In that sense, the poem implies that the lowest of the meager Welshmen who lived devoutly and plainly are more deserving of heaven than the most valiant of English warriors – a harsh criticism indeed.

Snowdonian Ranges²⁶⁰
Source: Author's Own Photograph



²⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that this shift accompanies the greater transition from a militaristic lifestyle to a more tranquil one that we discussed in Chapter 1. See page 46.

²⁶⁰ This photograph of the Snowdonian mountains taken from Castle Rock in Harlech captures the Welsh landscape favored in the three poems of my choosing: Herein lies the gateway to Llywelyn's stronghold in Gwynedd as Gruffydd tells us; this may be the same terrain tilled by the humble plowman in Iolo's work; it also could depict the setting wherein the narrator reposed "between field and mountain" in Dafydd's poem, which we will investigate next.

The final poem that I want to explore is one entitled “The Rattle Bag” by the famed poet Dafydd ap Gwilym²⁶¹ (*fl.* second quarter of the fourteenth century in Cardiganshire²⁶²). Known by many scholars of the British Isles as the greatest Welsh poet, Dafydd's “genius... rests not only or even mainly in his confident mastery of the forms of his art but rather in his boundless gusto, his unrestrained delight in nature and woman, his fascination with the paradoxes of life, his unfailing good humour, and the engaging warmth and informality of his work.”²⁶³ If the high quality of his work were not enough testament to his greatness, sheer numbers will suffice; though he only lived to his mid-thirties, he produced hundreds of poems, of which 150 have survived to today. As Breeze comments, reflecting on the importance of Dafydd to Welsh culture, “Wales must have lost as much by [his death] as England lost by the deaths of Chatterton or Keats.”²⁶⁴

A wonderful example of Dafydd's sentimentality and appreciation of life's pleasures, “The Rattle Bag” begins in an idyllic setting with the narrator reposing outside, lying in wait for his female companion to arrive:

As I was, readiest praise,
Upon a day in summer,
Under trees between field and mountain,
Awaiting my soft-spoken girl,
She came, there's no denying,
Where she premised, undoubted moon.

As she arrives, the two begin conversing, their activities becoming intimate until at last they are interrupted by a cacophonous sound:

And so as we, she was shy,
Were learning love for each other,

²⁶¹ Clancy, *Poems*, 189-190.

²⁶² Breeze, *Literature*, 109. There is an ongoing debate concerning the dates of Dafydd's life, the latest being that he was born about 1315 and died of the Black Death in 1349.

²⁶³ Davies, *Conquest*, 419.

²⁶⁴ Breeze, *Literature*, 109.

Hiding wrong, obtaining mead,
 A short time lying together,
 Suddenly, cold comfort, came,
 Blaring, a bloody nuisance,
 A sack's bottom's foul seething shape,
 Who had, public enemy,
 A harsh-horned sag-cheeked rattle.

With their amorous revery impeded by a noisome obstruction, the girl finds herself no longer "in the mood" and swiftly flees before their act of love is complete:

He played, yellow-bellied intruder,
 The bag, curse the shabby shank,
 And there, before satisfaction,
 The sweet girl panicked, woe's me.
 When she heard, festering breast,
 The stones whirl, she'd not tarry.

Understandably upset, the narrator spends the last words of the poem cursing the source of the noise that came between him and his beloved:

By Christ, no Christian country,
 Hundred curses, has heard the like.
 Noisy pouch perched on a pole,
 Bell of pebbles and gravel,
 Saxon box of rocks making a racket
 Shaking in a bullock's skin,
 Creel of three thousand beetles,
 Commotion's cauldron, black husk,
 Field-keeper as old as straw,
 Black-skinned, pregnant with splinters,
 Its tone's an old buck's loathing,
 Devil's bell, stake in its crotch.
 Scar-crusted rock-bearing belly,
 May it be sliced into thongs.
 May the filthy churl be struck frigid,
 Amen, who scared off my girl.

With that ends the short tale of the "Rattle Bag" and the havoc that it played upon the speaker's love life.

On the surface, this poem is a simple tale of young love gone awry, set in the unobtrusive landscape "between field and mountain" and told in a largely unadorned voice. Even if going no

further than that, the poem can certainly be appreciated for its beautiful simplicity. However, if we look but a little more closely, it becomes apparent that, without too much stretching, this work can be read as an allegory for the Edwardian Conquest itself, told from the eyes of Llywelyn as he works toward the full sovereignty and unity of Wales, but is foiled by Edward's disruptions. Thus, the poem can yield insights into one man's (Dafydd's) reflections on the events that changed his homeland only a generation or two before.

To begin seeing the similarities, we need to look no further than the first few lines. "As I was, readiest praise, / Upon a day in summer, / Under trees between field and mountain / Awaiting my soft-spoken girl," speaks the first four lines, establishing the condition of Wales prior to Edward's campaigns. Being between field and mountain easily characterizes the vast majority of Wales, given that the southern and eastern portions are primarily plains while the northern and western parts are dominated by extensive mountain ranges. On a smaller scale, the author might be placing himself where mountains and fields have the most proximity: Gwynedd and the Snowdonian ranges. If we take the latter to be the case, then we can forge a new connection, one that links the narrator with Llywelyn the Last, King of Snowdonia and the last Prince of Gwynedd. Ostensibly, setting the poem on a summer's day is a customary way of creating the idyllic atmosphere that Dafydd wants, but perhaps it refers to something more. It is possible that the author is referring to the days of Edward's incursions, in 1277 and in 1282, both of which began in the late spring and summer.²⁶⁵

If we have Llywelyn reposing allegorically in Gwynedd at the onset of Edward's campaigns, then how does the maiden fit into the story? It seems to me that the girl plays the part of Llywelyn's long-sought native Welsh sovereignty. As the prince worked toward unifying Gwynedd and several other territories under his rule, his ambition for a single Wales grew closer

²⁶⁵ Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 181, 189.

and closer to fruition, until, that is, Edward's incursion destroyed any possibility for Wales to remain a region independent of England. In the poem, this ideal of self-rule is anthropomorphized into a shy, young maiden with whom the narrator has a relationship characterized by inexperience. Their rapport begins in the poem with “debating” and “trading,” easily read as discussions on the relative merits of expansionism and self-rule. From there, the couple moves to “learning love for each other” and “lying together,” strong indicators of the growing appreciation of Llywelyn for notions of solidarity; just as the author seeks to unite himself with the shy maiden, Llywelyn sought to unite large portions of Wales under his jurisdiction.

Trouble is introduced into the scene with the arrival of a “blaring, a bloody nuisance.” We are told that the source of the noise is a “Saxon box of rocks making a racket.” Though we have already discussed the import of the word “Saxon” in Welsh poetry, here it takes on a more specific meaning. This is the only actual proper noun (other than those that deal with Christ) in this poem; thus, it is the only segment that addresses a very particular entity, in this case, Edward and his army. It is interesting to note that Dafydd describes the arrival of Edward's host in the words “Suddenly, cold comfort, came.” In just four words, the narrator manages to encapsulate the fall of the Prince of Wales. Here we must recall that Llywelyn was killed in December by a troupe of Marcher lords pretending to join his side, a “cold comfort” indeed. Just as in Gruffydd's lament, where “No Saxon would venture to strike Llywelyn,” the “yellow-bellied intruder” is not the one to destroy (directly) the prince's ambitions; instead it is the rattle bag that performs this function.²⁶⁶

The rattle bag itself can be a stand-in for any number of Edward's negative assets.

²⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, a similar situation occurred with Dafydd ap Gruffydd, Llywelyn's brother. In June of 1283, Dafydd's own men turned him over to Edward where he was tried and executed as a traitor.

Perhaps it is reminiscent of the king's greedy tendencies, root of his imperialist attitude toward the territories around him: Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and France. Such could certainly be characterized as “commotion's cauldron.” Even more likely, the rattle bag could be the seemingly endless (from a Welsh perspective) numbers of English troops that Edward is capable of using to invade Wales. The manner in which Dafydd depicts the harsh sound of the rattle bag bears a wonderful likeness to the clamor of battle generated by hundreds of troops. This “creel of three thousand beetles” is a force more than sufficiently strong to destroy the narrator's hopes for peace and unity. “And there, before satisfaction, / The sweet girl panicked, woe's me. / When she heard, festering breast, / The stones whirl, she'd not tarry.” Just as the maiden fled when she heard the ruckus of the rattle bag, the drive toward Welsh sovereignty ended with the sounds of battle emanating from Edward's war machine.

So what is to become of rattle bag and its obnoxious player? The narrator hopes that it will be “sliced into thongs,” thus disbanding the contents and destroying their ability to wreak havoc. Perhaps in terms of an army, the narrator hopes for its destruction. This is an understandable wish given wars by the on-again, off-again wars in Scotland and France of which Dafydd must have been aware. Even more cleverly, the speaker asks that “the filthy churl be struck frigid.” Beyond calling the malefactor a “churl,” that is, a person of low or ignoble birth, Dafydd cunningly throws in the word “frigid.” Perhaps this is in response to the “cold comfort” that greeted the narrator, pointing to the desire that Edward himself (whichever Edward was king at the time of this poem's composition) would one day be betrayed and killed. Another possibility would allow us to substitute the word “barren” for “frigid,” thus demonstrating the hope that Edward would be left childless and unable to pass the throne on to his progeny. This shows a particularly powerful valence when taken with the real fear of Edward II's unsuitability

to rule given his inappropriate relationship with Piers Gaveston. As such, Edward I could be deemed frigid for producing an unsuitable heir, while Edward II could be thought frigid given his possible homosexuality.

Again, another layer is added when we take Edward III into consideration. By the time of Dafydd's writing, he would have been informed of the regicide of Edward II by Roger Mortimer and the Queen Isabella, who established regency over the 15-year-old king Edward III. Thus, we can add further frigidity to Edward's line if we consider that the English throne fell into the possession of one who murdered the English king. Though nothing, in Welsh opinion, could make up for Edward's appropriation of Wales, the trouble inflicted upon the Plantagenet lineage proves that Dafydd's curse (and by effect Llywelyn's curse) was well-played on the English throne and in the minds of the Welshmen's compatriots.

Chapter 4: The Mabinogion

Up until now, we have investigated the ways in which the nascent poetry of the early fourteenth century reflects a native literary expansion. The so-called “Poetry of the Gentry” does much to celebrate Welsh culture by way of embracing its old oral (bardic) tradition and fusing it with written longevity in order to draw distinction between it and the overbearing presence of its foreign occupiers. In that manner, the Welsh were able to utilize effectively the sophisticated infrastructure of the English and establish a documentary legacy for their precious heritage. Now we will turn to the unique body of texts coming out of Wales in the first half of the fourteenth century, the *White Book of Rhydderch*, and more specifically, the *Mabinogion*. It is by exploring this astounding work that we will be able to reinforce and add to many of the insights gained in the previous chapters about this remarkable period in Welsh history.

The White Book of Rhydderch

The *White Book of Rhydderch*, or *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* in the native tongue, is so named for Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd ab Ieuan, “who was descended from the Lord Rhys, the last dominant Welsh ruler of Deheubarth and the effective founder of Strata Florida abbey, where generations of his descendants were buried.”²⁶⁷ Rhydderch himself, born ca. 1325, was surrounded by a pronounced literary culture since his birth. His parents' home at Llangeitho had strong ties with the first Poets of the Gentry, including Dafydd ap Gwilym, and with the bardic grammar compendium of Einion Offeiriad, which we discussed in the last chapter.²⁶⁸ Throughout his life, even long after the composition of the *White Book*, Rhydderch's popularity as a patron of the arts continued to rise dramatically. A mock-elegy by Dafydd ap Gwilym

²⁶⁷ Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 249.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

written in the 1340s praises the young man for his education and personality, referring to him as an “interpreter” (*ieithydd*) and a “knight” (*marchog*).²⁶⁹ In the tribute to him and his friend Llywelyn Fychan by Llwelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen, there is a suggestion that Rhydderch served in the king's (Edward III's) army, likely as an interpreter. Later in his life, he was recognized as an expert in Welsh law and made deputy justiciar of Cardiganshire under a number of Justiciars of South Wales.²⁷⁰ As such, Rhydderch proved to be a wonderful exemplar of the main tenets upholding this thesis. He is a native Welshman under the service of the King of England, combining the financial opportunities afforded by his position with his inherent love for Welsh culture in order to sponsor one of the first great collections of native Welsh myth and history.

Though Rhydderch himself resided in Ceredigion, his *White Book* did spend most of its life circulating throughout Wales, eventually being concentrated in those parts of northern Wales newly under the jurisdiction of Edward's progeny. As the text continued to be passed down through subsequent generations, it landed, as we mentioned in Chapter 2, at the home of Elise ap Gruffydd ab Einion, great-great-grandson of Rhydderch, at Plas-yn-Iâl in Denbighshire in the late fifteenth century.²⁷¹ From there, it is likely to have passed to Elisau ap William Llwyd (great-grandson of Elise ap Gruffydd) of Rhiwedog in Merionethshire, who died “at a good age in 1583.”²⁷² At the end of the sixteenth century, the *White Book* came under the jurisdiction of native antiquaries in northern Wales. Notable among these are Richard Langford and Roger Morris of Denbighshire and Robert Vaughan of Merionethshire.²⁷³ Through the latter in the early eighteenth century, the work came to rest in the Peniarth Library until it came to the attention of W.W.E. Wynne in the 1860s and J. Gwynogvryn Evans a short time after that.

269 Ibid., 250.

270 Ibid., 252.

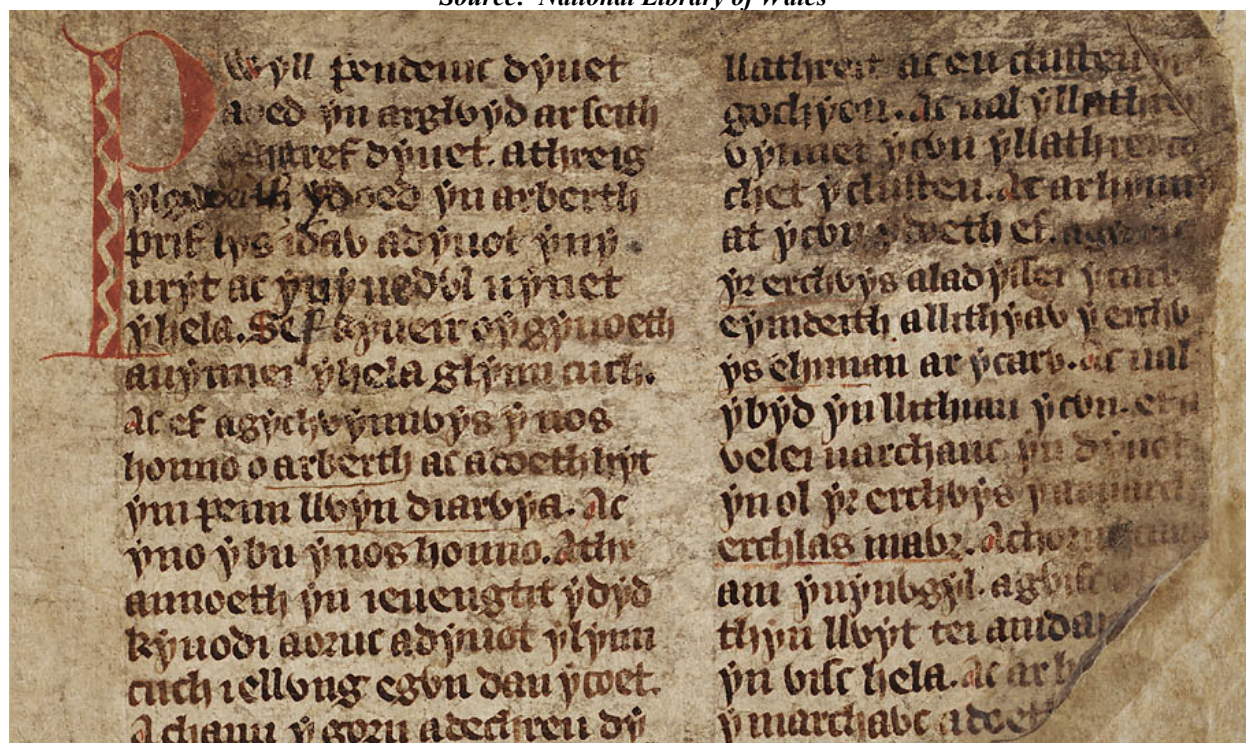
271 Ibid., 257.

272 Ibid.

273 Ibid., 258-261.

The White Book of Rhydderch²⁷⁴

Source: National Library of Wales



The *White Book* grew to fame in the modern world in 1899 as part of J. Gwynogvryn Evans's massive *Report on the Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* and again in 1907 when that same author put forth his *The White Book Mabinogion* as a testament to the *White Book*'s valuable pieces.²⁷⁵ Until that time, the texts had long resided in the Hengwrt and Peniarth libraries, and it is for that reason that the surviving parts of the *White Book* are sometimes termed Peniarth 4 and 5 (the fourth and fifth manuscripts of the Peniarth library, which includes dozens of texts). Unfortunately, the ages have not been kind to the remnant manuscript, which has undergone several generations of destruction, dilapidation, and inept restoration, leaving behind a legacy of over-cropped pages and missing quires.²⁷⁶ Despite this, there has been much good

274 "White Book of Rhydderch (Peniarth MS 4) – folio 1 recto," Online Photograph. *National Library of Wales Digital Mirror Collection*; available from <http://digidol.llgc.org.uk/METS/RHY00001/physical?locale=en>; Internet; accessed 26 Mar. 2007.

275 Huws, *Manuscripts*, 227.

276 Ibid., 227-228.

scholarship over the past century that will allow us to base our analysis on a solid understanding on the text's origin and the nature of its content.

As is the case with many substantial works in the pre-modern era, the *White Book's* composition comes not from one hand, but from several. In fact, its content is attributed to the work of five different scribes, all operating at about the same time. Since there is little evidence in the text that names or points to particular scribes, most scholars have simply termed them “A” through “E” out of convenience. As a consequence of J. Gwynogvryn Evans's vague dating system that places the creation of parts of the *White Book* anywhere from the end of the thirteenth century to the second quarter of the fourteenth century and the distinct lack of much datable internal evidence, the origin of the piece has become a bit obfuscated; however, the currently accepted date of composition is sometime in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.²⁷⁷ It is for that reason that this body of texts speaks to our own work here: coming in a timespan of just seventy years after Edward's Conquest, the *White Book of Rhydderch* marks a culminating point in the push for a native literary expansion and embodies the earliest post-Conquest attempt to compile and catalogue tales from Wales's ancient heritage.

To make matters more complicated, what once was one volume has now been divided into two, Peniarth 4 and 5. Peniarth 4 (folios numbered 171-292) contains what is now termed *The Mabinogion*, the body of stories that will be the primary focus of this chapter. Given the amount of mutilation that the text has undergone, scholars often turn to the *Red Book of Hergest* (ca. 1400) to fill in the gaps in the tales left mangled in the *White Book*. As a result, it is unclear the relationship between the two texts, whether the *Red Book* was a duplicate of the *White Book* or if they simply had a common origin. Though there are some differences such as the fact that “much of *Owein*, the end of *Culhwch*, and perhaps the whole of *The Dream of Rhonabwy* have

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 228.

been lost” from the *White Book*,²⁷⁸ “the differences between the two manuscripts, while of interest to the linguist, are of no literary importance.”²⁷⁹ Below is a table taken and modified from one included in Huws's work; it shows the relationships between manuscript, quire, content, and scribe in both volumes:

The White Book's Contents				
<i>Modified from Source: Daniel Huws, Medieval Welsh Manuscripts, p. 231</i>				
Peniarth	Quire	Folio	Contents	Scribe
5	1	1—12	Imago Mundi, Prophecy of Sibyl	A
5	2	13—26	Prophecy of Sibyl, Apocrypha	A
5	3	27—42	Apocrypha, Pedigree of the Virgin	A
5	4	43—57	Pedigree of the Virgin, Gospel of John	A
5	5	58—65	Purgatory of Saint Patrick	B
5	6	66—77	Chronicle of Pseudo-Turpin	B
5	7	78—89	Chronicle of Pseudo-Turpin, Tale of the Knight Otuel	B
5	8	91—102	Pilgrimage, Song of Roland	B
5	9	103—117	Song of Roland	B
5	10	118—124	Story of Bown of Hampton	C
5	11	125—132	Story of Bown of Hampton	C
5	12	133—138	Story of Bown of Hampton	C
5	13	139—146	Story of Bown of Hampton	C
5	14	147—150	Story of Bown of Hampton	C
4	15	1—8	Four Branches of the Mabinogi	D
4	16	9—16	Four Branches of the Mabinogi	D
4	17	17—24	Four Branches of the Mabinogi	D
4	18	25—32	Four Branches of the Mabinogi, Peredur Son of Evrawg	D
4	19	33—40	Peredur Son of Evrawg	D
4	20	41—48	Peredur Son of Evrawg, Dream of Maxen, Lludd and Llevellys	D
4	21	49—54	Owein	D
4	22	55—62	Triads of Britain, Descent of the Saints, Old Singers	D
4	23	63—70	Gereint and Enid	E
4	24	71—78	Gereint and Enid	E
4	25	79—86	Gereint and Enid, Culhwch and Olwen	E
4	26	87—88	Culhwch and Olwen	E, D

Now that we have overviewed the contents of the *White Book*, we must turn now to investigate its style and form in order to see how it fit into the burgeoning landscape of literary production in the early to mid-fourteenth century. The research performed on dissecting the

278 Andrew Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1997), 63.

279 Jeffrey Gantz tr., *The Mabinogion* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 29.

White Book's configuration delves much deeper than is needed for our purposes here; as such, I want to highlight merely those aspects of textual production mentioned in Chapter 2,²⁸⁰ beginning with scribal tradition and practice.

While the scribes tend to differ in many aspects of their craft, it is apparent that all five did use the same type of parchment customary in Wales, “neither fine nor white,”²⁸¹ which pushes the likelihood that the work was indeed produced in Wales. Other than that, it seems plausible that parts of the *White Book* were written for different purposes. Scribe **A**, the copyist for the first third of Peniarth 5 (quires 1-4, folios 1-57), elected to write in a single column down each page covering significantly more area than the other scribes (ranging from 180-200mm x 125-130mm rather than the others' typical range 175-185mm x 115-125mm).²⁸² **A** also chose to aggregate more leaves into each quire, generally a dozen or more. Content-wise, **A** differs dramatically from the others in his inclusion of tales that are entirely devotional or didactic. Given these remarkable differences and the similarity of his script with that of Scribe **B**, it is reasonable to assert that **A** wrote his liturgical folios in a monastic setting for clerical use, rather for inclusion into the *White Book*.²⁸³ How it was appropriated into the tome is unknown.

For all intents and purposes, the work of Scribes **C**, **D**, and **E** are extremely similar. All four chose to write in two columns in the dimensions shown above. They foliated their quires in series of eights (unlike the twelves of **A** or **B**). In terms of script, all three maintain a more rounded lettering, yielding a high degree of clarity and legibility. In that respect, it is very tempting to say that these three learned to write from the same “school” or teacher, and while all evidence points to such, it remains conjecture at least for the time being.²⁸⁴ However, it must be

²⁸⁰ For that detailed analysis, I would recommend Daniel Huws's *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, from which I will be drawing much of my information here.

²⁸¹ Huws, *Manuscripts*, 231-232.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid., 244-245, 253-254.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 241.

said that enough differences too minute to recount here exist to demonstrate that the trio of scribes are indeed different people merely working in proximity to one another.

The presence of Scribe **B** reveals probably the most intriguing information about the *White Book* out of all five writers. This is because “his is the only *White Book* hand which can clearly be recognized in other manuscripts.”²⁸⁵ The hand of **B** strongly suggests that he is the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi, author of the “Jesus 119” manuscript for Gruffudd ap Llwelynn ap Phylip in 1346, as well as the *Brut y Tywysogyon* and the *Brut y Brenhinedd* (the *Chronicle of the Princes* and the *Chronicle of the Kings*, respectively). The appearance of his work points to an origin for the work in Cardiganshire, just south of Gwynedd. Between this and the likelihood for a strong affiliation of Scribe **A** with an ecclesiastical center, the most probable candidate for the site of the *White Book*'s origin is the abbey at Strata Florida, only a few miles from Rhydderch's home.

Not only does the work of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi point to a location for the text's production, it also gives us a time frame in the early to middle fourteenth century, an assumption that is corroborated by the style of script employed. Huws writes of a number of evolutions in lettering that occur in Wales in this period, all that find themselves consistently within the *White Book*'s pages. Three such examples are as follows:

a: at first open, with a single compartment; then closed, as the upper arm bends down enclosing a second compartment; then, by rationalization of this form, the two-compartment letter comes to be formed by two parallel vertical strokes.

r: at first the round form of *r*... occurs only after the letter *o*. It then came to be used after other letters which showed a convex curve to the following letter: firstly *b*, *d* and *p*, and later *h*, *v*, *6*, and *y*, an even *a* and *e*. Examples of all these appear by 1350, though consistent practice by any single hand is rare.

t: a *t* in which the shaft does not rise above the cross-stroke (so that *c* and *t* may be hard to distinguish); then a tendency for the shaft to rise above the cross-stroke; then a regular crossing of the two strokes.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 239.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 233.

As Huws points out, characteristic styles of some letters used in the *White Book's* composition (*a*, *r*, and *t* as in the example above along with *s*, *u/v/6*, and *w*) prove to be very useful in dating the work to the second quarter of the fourteenth century. It is also crucial that we note that these exact same evolutions in letter format made their debuts in English and French hands only a generation or so before they occurred in Wales,²⁸⁷ fairly remarkable given the Welsh existence on the periphery of Europe, a testament to the new infrastructure's ability to transmit ideas rapidly. Thus we may see that, slowly but surely, the Welsh scribal tradition was catching on to the fashionable styles in vogue at the time.

The *Mabinogion* (Peniarth 4) is the text that will occupy our primary attention here. While the *White Book* lay largely dormant until the early twentieth-century, the *Mabinogion* grew to prominence in the mid to late nineteenth century when Lady Charlotte Guest's English translation appeared on the scene.²⁸⁸ Here, Lady Guest (married to Sir John Guest) supplied the title *Mabinogion* to the entire work, a misnomer that requires some explanation. The first four tales each end with the phrase “So ends this Branch of the Mabinogi.” Incorrectly assuming that *mabinogi* translates to “a story for children” (since *mab* means “boy”), Lady Charlotte applied what she felt was the plural *mabinogion* to the body of texts. Beyond the fact that the word *mabinogion* does not exist in Welsh, the term *mabinogi* is also very enigmatic. Many scholars (led by Sir Ifor Williams of the University of Wales, Bangor) believe that a *mabinogi* is a story of someone's youth and that the “Four Branches” comprises a series of tales revolving around the life of the character Pryderi.²⁸⁹ Unfortunately, that explanation provides a number of problems. If the tales are supposed to be about Pryderi, then why is his role drastically diminished in at least three of the four tales? There is the possibility that the stories have changed so much since

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 234.

²⁸⁸ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 31.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

their original inception that they know longer possess that common characteristic. It is also possible that they were never intended to revolve around Pryderi, but that that character was added in to some of the tales in an attempt to unify them. Such still stands in debate.

The *Mabinogion* as we know it today is a composite of tales from the *White Book* and a later iteration, the *Red Book of Hergest*, which debuted at the turn of the fifteenth century. To avoid any potential complications, I have selected three complete tales from the *White Book's Mabinogion* to use in this chapter, taken from the Jeffrey Gantz translation (Penguin edition) of the *Mabinogion* and will use his nomenclature and etymology throughout the discussion. Each section will begin with a short background on the origin of each tale followed by a brief summary of its plot. Then, we will turn our attention to the ways in which the tales, despite them being textualized, maintain a high degree of oral residue, a testament to the fact that Wales had only begun its transformation toward a fully literate state, expedited by Edward's new administration; for, if Wales had long had a solid (rather than spotty) literary tradition that for whatever reason did not survive to today, it would stand to reason that the texts coming out of the fourteenth century would not be so infused with orality as they are. Finally, we will see, in part, how each tale contributes to an expansion of Welsh culture as I have defined it, a celebration of Welsh legacy in contradistinction to contemporaneous English rule.

“The Dream of Maxen”

The *Breuddwyd Macsen* (“Dream of Maxen”) is the first tale that we will be investigating in this chapter, and for good reason. It is this story, in my opinion, that best encapsulates the need on the part of Welsh psychology to believe in the majesty of Wales and its history. Written in Gwynedd in the late twelfth century,²⁹⁰ its central character, Maxen, is a composite of a few

290 Breeze, *Literature*, 82.

different historical persons. The first, and Maxen's namesake, is Maxentius, Roman Emperor from AD 306 to 312.²⁹¹ The second, more substantial benefactor to Maxen's character is the Spaniard Magnus Maximus, who commanded an army in Britain from AD 368 to 383. When his troops became so disgruntled as to defy their homeland and proclaim him emperor, Maximus crossed back to the Continent and defeated Gratian, laying claim to all of Gaul, Spain, and northern Italy.²⁹² Ultimately, he met his end by being beheaded at the request of Theodosius in 388.²⁹³

Adding to this mix, we have Geoffrey of Monmouth's account, which identifies erroneously Maximus with the Roman senator Maximianus, who, according to the author, is “invited to Britain to marry the daughter of Octavius (Eudav in 'Maxen') and to rule the island. This daughter is not named, but only a few pages earlier in the *Historia* Coel's daughter Helena (Elen in 'Maxen') is married to the wise and courageous Roman senator Constantius,”²⁹⁴ thus confusing the person Helena with Elen in the story. How much of “Maxen” is taken from Geoffrey is unclear, but we can be safe in emphasizing that this tale is a striking mix of history and pseudo-history that sets Wales upon the throne of the world.

To begin, we must have a recap of the storyline. With one of the simplest plots of any tale in the *Mabinogion*, the “Dream of Maxen” begins with just that, a dream. While on a hunt with 32 of his men, Maxen, Emperor of Rome, grows sleepy and decides to nap. As he does so, a dream comes to him, showing him divers landscapes and passageways to his destiny. Passing beyond all these, he comes to a single island (which we are to take as that of Britain) where he finds a great hall of even greater decor: “Its roof seemed all of gold, its sides of luminous stones

291 Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 118.

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

all equally precious, its doors all of gold... [There were lads] dressed in pure black brocade, with headbands of red gold restraining their hair, and precious luminous stones therein, rubies and gems and imperial stones in alternation....”²⁹⁵ In the midst of all this grandeur sat a girl, “the loveliest sight man had ever seen.”²⁹⁶ As she runs forward to embrace him, Maxen rouses from his slumber, disappointed to find himself without the beautiful lady.

When his daydreams of the girl become an impetus to his rule, he summons the wise men of his realm to counsel him in this matter. Being advised to follow his dream and seek his future queen, he sets out with some of his most loyal kings, journeying across those very landscapes until he reaches that very hall. Greeting the girl inside, he immediately makes her his bride and Empress of Rome, deciding to make his imperial seat at Arvon (Caernarfon). After he had spent seven years in the Isles, a letter from the new emperor in Rome reminded him of the Roman custom barring any former emperor to return to the great city after being gone for seven years. Taking it upon himself to regain his throne, he and the brothers of his queen Elen, march back through the Continent, conquering Burgundy and France and, ultimately, Rome itself. Henceforth, Maxen is the undisputed Emperor of Rome.

One of the most remarkable oral residues in the “Dream of Maxen” is the relationship between the Roman emperor's dreamscape and the real world: they are exactly the same. Despite Maxen's reception of a divine/prophetic/miraculous interjection into his psyche, the visions contained therein are, at least in theory, accurate mirrors of the actual landscape. This is what Ong terms, a “situational rather than abstract... human lifeworld.”²⁹⁷ Maxen's dream is striking because, for a dream, it is completely lucid and comprehensible, so much so that Maxen can

²⁹⁵ Ibid.120.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ This is actually a combination of two of Ong's sections by the same titles: “situational rather than abstract” and “human lifeworld.”

follow it image by image and trust that it will lead him to his bride. When moderns imagine a dream, there is essentially no limit as to its contents, for we have been so conditioned by popular fiction and the creative imagination, that we can perceive (though possibly not understand) some of the greatest of abstractions that can only occur in the mind.²⁹⁸

In the dream of Maxen, there is no abstraction, only physical, visible, perceivable, imaginable markers that Maxen can follow to find his love. As Ong writes, “Oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld.”²⁹⁹ For a dreamscape, Maxen's vision is about as situational and non-abstract as possible. In one part, he sees that “Great broad rivers flowed from the mountain to the sea, and he made along these rivers to their outlets, and though his journey was long he finally reached the mouth of the greatest river anyone had seen.”³⁰⁰ Though his physical journey glosses over most of the details of the landscape, we are meant to understand that he follows the directions of his dream precisely. The only possible abstraction occurs when we are told that, in the dream, Maxen, sees “himself traveling to the end of the valley... and having crossed this mountain he saw himself journeying....”³⁰¹ The implication in Maxen seeing himself is that he is having an out-of-body experience, which would be something of an abstraction from his normal life. We should not make much of this, however, as Maxen would certainly have known what he looked like, thus he would not have to imagine very hard to see himself as a separate entity in his own dream.

The story in the “Dream of Maxen” works very hard to evoke the notion of Welsh majesty and supremacy, and it does so in many ways, two of which I will elucidate here. The

298 After all, who among us has not had some extremely bizarre dreams that defy all attempts to understand and interpret them?

299 Ong, *Orality*, 49.

300 Gants, *Mabinogion*, 119.

301 Ibid.

first and less grandiose one is that this story places Wales at the heart of the language of Brittany, now a French province. At the end of the tale, we are told that, of Elen's two brothers:

Avaeon and many of his men decided to go home, but Kyunan and another group stayed, and they determined to cut out the tongues of the women, lest their own British language be contaminated. Because the women were silent and the men could speak, the men of Brittany were called Bryttaneyeid, and there have often come and still do come men of that language from Brittany.³⁰²

As a result, we have the origin of the native language in Brittany, one akin to the Celtic languages of the Isles. Gantz here also has an interesting note: “The Welsh name for Brittany, Llydaw, is here interpreted as Lled-taw, 'half silent'. ”³⁰³ Thus, as the “Dream of Maxen” would have us believe, the uncorrupted language of Brittany is the direct result of Welsh intervention on an imperialist level.

The other way that this tale celebrates the idea of Welsh majesty is much more encompassing and grandiose. When Maxen makes it to Wales to claim his bride, one of the requests the he grants her is that their “chief fortress be built in Arvon, and [that] soil from Rome [be] brought so that it would be healthier for the emperor to sit and sleep and move about.”³⁰⁴ Afterward, “the emperor spent seven years in this island....”³⁰⁵ Thus, though we are not told explicitly, we are meant to believe that the Roman emperor has chosen a place near present-day Caernarfon³⁰⁶ to establish the seat of his power. There can be no higher testament to Wales and her majesty than for the Emperor of the known world to be so enchanted by the beauty of her terrain, her edifices, and her women (specifically one woman) that he would willingly uproot himself from Rome and re-establish his throne there. After all, he might just as easily have taken his queen back to Rome and continued his normal rule, thereby avoiding the subsequent power struggle. Instead, he chooses to stay, spending seven years there, and traveling back to the

³⁰² Ibid., 126-127.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 124.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ See Chapter 1 for the etymology of “Caernarfon.”

Continent only because he received news of a rival emperor's usurpation of his seat in Rome. This is notable for two reasons. First, he may very well have lived out the rest of his life contently in Wales had the warning not come, a further testament to the region's grandeur. Second, it shows that Maxen, even by relocating to Caernarfon, is not willing to yield his title of Emperor to anyone; he is still the Roman Emperor, happening to have his seat on the periphery of Europe. We simply do not know whether he returns to Wales after defeating his foe, or if he chooses to remain in Rome. In either case, we do know that his Welsh Queen remains at his side.

It is very simple to see how such a tale could soothe the frustrations and reinvigorate pride in a native culture recently overtaken by alien rule as was certainly the case of Wales and the three Edwards. Therefore, it is no surprise that such a plot that celebrates the absolute might of Welsh majesty above all of Europe would finally achieve a lasting written legacy just after Edward's Conquest in the late thirteenth century. If Wales could not be sovereign over her own lands in the present, then her people could recall/imagine a time when she was sovereign over the entire western world.

“Branwen Daughter of Llŷr”

The second tale that we will be exploring is called *Branwen uerch Llŷr* (“Branwen Daughter of Llŷr,” sometimes referred to as “Branwen” for short). It is the only true branch of the *Mabinogi* that we will see in this chapter, coming second in the series of four. It is thought that the “Four Branches” were composed by Gwenllïan (ca. 1098-1136), daughter of Gruffydd ap Cynan, King of Gwynedd and great-aunt to Gerald of Wales.³⁰⁷ This supposition is certainly reinforced by the in-depth knowledge of Gwynedd geography, court practices, and its relationship with Ireland. Plus, Gwenllïan's family line was known for quite some time as

³⁰⁷ Breeze, *Literature*, 75.

patrons of the arts or artists themselves; beyond having Gerald of Wales in the family, one of Gwennllian's nephews was the poet Hywel (d. 1170), and her own great-great-great-great-great grandson was Rhydderch ab Ieuan himself!³⁰⁸ Given its close connection to Gwynedd, the recomposition of “Four Branches” into the *White Book's Mabinogion* provides an ideal link between the Welsh majesty of the early Middle Ages and the political reality of the fourteenth century. “Branwen” also possesses a number of peculiarities that make it a wonderful subject for our study; more specifically, the tale makes comments internally on the balance between orality and textuality in the High Middle Ages and attempts to situate Wales politically with regard to her nearest cousin, Ireland and her neighbor, “England.”³⁰⁹

We begin, as always, with a summary of the tale. Brân (sometimes Bendigeidfran), son of Llŷr, is the king of all Britain (the island that today contains England, Wales, and Scotland). While at court in Harlech, a small armada of ships approach him bearing Mallolwch (sometimes Matholwch), King of Ireland, who informs Brân that he wishes to marry Branwen, the king's sister. After holding a council, the king agrees and a feast is called to celebrate the union. Unbeknownst to the Welshmen, the king's half-brother Evnissyen takes it upon himself to cause mischief, seemingly annoyed that “they have given away so excellent a girl as [his] sister without [his] consent....”³¹⁰ Trying to drive away Mallolwch, Evnissyen maims his horses beyond the point of usefulness, forcing Brân to make multiple conciliatory gestures to prevent the Irish king from returning to his own land angered. One of the concessions is an iron cauldron that has the power to restore life to those thrown into its depths. It turns out that Mallolwch has had a substantial experience already with that cauldron since it was the Irish king who had harbored

308 Ibid., 77-78. Breeze writes of eleven different reasons as to why he feels that Gwennllian is the author of the “Four Branches,” and I refer to his work for more detail on this matter.

309 I say “England” because this tale is set in a time when there were no English. Hereafter, I will just use the name without any marks.

310 Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 69.

and subsequently tried to kill the pot's crafter, Llassar Llaes Gyngwyd, who fled to Wales as a result. With relations repaired, Mallolwch sets sail for his homeland with his new bride, who very soon provides the king with a son, Gwern.

Though he has put the past behind him, his foster brothers and kinsman have not, and before two years pass, they begin to grow angry in remembrance of the insults to which Evnissyen subjected their chieftain. Consequently, "Branwen was driven from her husband's chamber and made to cook of the court, and the butcher came very day, after he had finished cutting up the meat, to box her ear, and that was her punishment."³¹¹ She responds by sending word to her brother, who mounts an offensive with a sizable host against Ireland. Closing in on Mallolwch after a miraculous crossing of the River Liffey, the Irish army invites Brân to a peace council inside a great hall. However, the treacherous Irish fill the hall with traps, including bags of armed warriors scattered about the scaffolding (all of whom are destroyed at the hands of the trickster Evnissyen). Sitting down to their council, they agree that Gwern would be invested with the kingship of Ireland. Annoyed that his nephew and now King of Ireland would not willingly come to him, Evnissyen throws the boy into the flames, inadvertently giving the Irish enough time to begin rejuvenating their warriors in the magic cauldron. Regretful of his actions, Evnissyen allows himself to be cast into the cauldron, where he stretches out to break it, simultaneously causing his own death.

The battle was a victory for the Welshmen, of whom only seven survived, excluding a fatally poisoned Brân, who commands his warriors to remove his head and to bury it in the White Hill of London, facing France as a protective measure against the island's foes. After feasting at Harlech for seven years, his men set out for London, tempting their fate by spending another 80 years feasting at Penvro (Pembroke). Once one of their number opens an enchanted

³¹¹ Ibid., 74.

door that looks out upon the Bristol Channel and Cornwall, Brân's head begins to decay, and the group must rush to London where they successfully inter their chief's head.

Statue of the Two Kings³¹²
Source: Author's Own Photograph



Careful not to diminish the myriads of intriguing peculiarities in this tale, one of its most remarkable features is its (somewhat hidden) commentary on the state of orality and literacy in the medieval period. After Branwen has undergone her tremendous punishment for three years, we are told that:

She brought a letter telling of the punishment and disgrace she was suffering; she

³¹² This statue sculpted by Ivor Robert-Jones in 1984 depicts Bran carrying the body of his nephew Gwern. It is located just outside Harlech Castle.

fastened this to the base of the starling's wing and sent the bird to Wales. When it arrived at this island it found Brân at an assembly of his at *Caer Seint yn Arvon* [Caernarfon]... The letter was taken and looked at, and when it was read Brân was saddened to hear of Branwen's disgrace, and immediately he began to muster the island.³¹³

Here we have two sides of the same coin happening immediately in succession. On one side of the Irish Sea, we have Branwen writing a letter of distress. On the other side, we have Brân having the letter read aloud to him. The first piques interest not only because Branwen is writing, but that she is also a *woman* writing – a rare incident, indeed. On the other hand, the use of the impersonal form of the verb “to read” suggests that Brân himself does not read the text,³¹⁴ but has it read to him in the classic style of medieval communication. As Sioned Davis urges us in relation to this: “compare the role of the priest at the king's court, who must, according to the evidence of the law-books, be 'ready and unintoxicated at the king's need, to write letters and to read them.'”³¹⁵ Thus, as we can see here, even as early as the twelfth century (when the text was composed) and earlier (when the story was transmitted totally orally) there was a shifting balance between at least the ideologies of orality and literacy. As Lloyd-Morgan is quick to remind us, however, “It must be stressed also that these are fictional... characters, and so cannot be taken to reflect any contemporary reality, at the time of the copying of the *White Book* or earlier; but it would still be unexpected... to find that an aristocratic male was unable to read whilst his sister could write.”³¹⁶ Of course, this could also represent an aberration arising from multiple versions of the tale; that would explain why Branwen one minute tries to teach the bird to speak, but ties a note to him the next.³¹⁷

The other notability in this chapter is the Otherworld, here taken to be Ireland. In the

313 Ibid., 74.

314 Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, “Welsh women and the written world,” in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 136.

315 Sioned Davis, “Written text as performance,” in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 136. Here Davies translates a quotation from the laws of *Hywel Dda*.

316 Lloyd-Morgan, “Welsh women,” 159.

317 Ibid.

classical and medieval world, water often formed the boundary between this world and the Otherworld, a place of magic and mystery (that incidentally often lies to the west). In Norse mythology, we see this premise in play when Hermod travels to Hel in order to reclaim Baldr after the latter's tragic death at the hands of Loki:

Now when the gods had come to themselves, Frigg spake, and asked who there might be among the Æsir who would fain have for his own all her love and favor: let him ride the road to Hel, and seek if he may find Baldr, and offer Hel a ransom if she will let Baldr come home to Ásgard. And he is named Hermódr the Bold, Odin's son, who undertook that embassy....Now this is to be told concerning Hermódr, that he rode nine nights through dark dales and deep, so that he saw not before he was come to the river Gjöll and rode onto the Gjöll-Bridge; which bridge is thatched with glittering gold.³¹⁸

In “Branwen” we have a very, very similar construct. Brân must cross the Irish Sea in order to reclaim his sister whose beatings arise from the doings of the trickster Evnissyen. Just as Hel (and Hades as in Homer's *Odyssey* Book X) is a place of magic (mostly necromantic), Ireland also turns out to be a magic land filled with death. Here we can recall that the magic cauldron first comes to Brân's hand by way of an Irishman. Though that cauldron is employed to restore life to those Irishman slain by Brân's men, the battle leaves Ireland almost totally devoid of people: “In Ireland, meanwhile, there was not a man left alive, only five pregnant women in a case in the wilderness, and these women all bore sons at the same moment.”³¹⁹ (Fortunately for that country, these five boys grow to be men and repopulate the island with each others' mothers.) Thus we can see some elements in “Branwen” strongly aligned with the prevailing mythologies of the oral world, the reality of an Otherworld filled with magic and death, a place that one might reach if one were to sail far enough west.

As alluded to briefly above, one of the overall strengths of this tale is its attention to geography and the juxtaposition between domestic and abroad. The first line of the story is, “Brân the Blessed son of Llŷr was the crowned king of this island, having been raised to the

³¹⁸ Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 72-73.

³¹⁹ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 82.

throne of London.”³²⁰ The next line begins, “One afternoon he was at a court of his at Harddlech [Harlech] overlooking the sea...”³²¹ Thus far, within the first two lines, we begin with a single king over the entire Isle, one who calls Wales his home. When Branwen sends her distress signal via a starling, it reaches Brân at another court of his in *Caer Seint yn Arvon*, present-day Caernarfon. As is evident, “Branwen,” like the other branches of the *Mabinogi*, has a strong appreciation for the Welsh landscape, especially that of Gwynedd. On the other hand, we have Ireland, a place of mystery and a place of death. Though the initial mischief of the story did come at the hands of a Welshman (though not an heir of the king Llŷr, since we are told that Evnissyen is brother to Brân on his mother's side), it is the Irish population that allows the insult to come to bloodshed long after the fact.

In a sense, we have two juxtaposing places, a Welsh-controlled Britain and an Irish-controlled Ireland. Of course, since this tale is concerned with praises the deeds of a fictitious Welsh king, it ensures that, despite heavy losses, the Welshmen do overcome the Irish victoriously. To a large extent, the story is a testament to the superiority of Wales over a region to which it is often compared and with which it has often struggled: Ireland. Deeper in, we can see a commentary on Wales in relation to England, a pivotal point given the *White Book's* composition just after Edward's Conquest. First off, there is no England, there is only the island ruled by Brân. It cannot be said that this tale was first constructed (orally) with the intention of denigrating the English presence by way of omitting it from the story. However, it is certainly far more appealing for the fourteenth-century Welsh to throw back to a time when there existed no English as they have come to know them and to a time when the native Britons did essentially control the island.

320 Ibid., 67. Here Gantz notes that Brân's name is Welsh for “raven” and his father's means “sea.”

321 Ibid.

Thus, there is a second, smaller juxtaposition present in the tale, between Wales and the non-Wales part of the island, which we will just call England for the sake of convenience. On the one hand, we have Wales in all its grandeur with Brân's primary thrones located at Harlech and Caernarfon, both in Gwynedd and both sites of Edward's new imperialist castles. Wales is the locale of feasting and celebration, of council and deliberation. It is a place where the sovereign Brân's head does not decay. On the other hand, we have England, whose vulnerability is shown in the need for Brân's head to be buried in London despite him never (as far as we know) holding court there. It is also no coincidence that Brân's head immediately begins to decay when his party crosses the boundary between Wales and England. In that respect, England is little better than Ireland in its association with death. It is no wonder why such a story would have great appeal for a society recently forced under the yoke of a foreign English rule.

“Culhwch and Olwen”

To wrap up our investigation into the *White Book's Mabinogion*, we turn now to one of the body's most famous tales, *Culhwch ac Olwen* (“Culhwch and Olwen,” sometimes written “How Culhwch Won Olwen”). This story, as Breeze states, “is the oldest, most primitive, most archaic, most exuberant, and (we might add) most barbaric of the tales of the *Mabinogion*.”³²² Possibly for that reason, it is one of the tales most likely to give us a sense of where Welsh literature stands at the moment of the *White Book's* composition. Though dating the *Mabinogion* has been an arduous and uncertain task, “Culhwch and Olwen” is accepted to have first been put to paper around 1100.³²³ References to the tale in Norman literature show that it is unlikely to have been written before AD 1000, and certain elements of the story are suggestive of events

³²² Breeze, *Literature*, 79.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 80.

occurring in the latter half of the eleventh century; one such example is the account of the landing at Twrch Trwth at Porth Glais, recalling the landing of native hero Gruffudd ap Cynan there in 1081 before joining forces and assisting the dispossessed king of Deheubarth against his usurpers.³²⁴ If the text were first composed in the early twelfth century, then it would be about 250 years before it attained a lasting place in Welsh literature in the *White Book*.

First, a recap of the storyline. Culhwch is the sole son of King Kilydd and his wife Goleuddydd (bright day). As his mother lay dying of some illness, she forces the king to promise not to disinherit her son though he may marry another woman. When he does remarry, Culhwch's new stepmother places him under a quasi-curse, promising him that he shall never lie with a woman until he wins Olwen, daughter of Chief Giant Ysbaddaden. With that in mind, Culhwch seeks the aid of his cousin, King Arthur, who equips the young man with a knightly entourage to aid him in his quest. When he manages to force his way into Ysbaddaden's fortress and overcome attacks from the giant himself, the giant, gives him a seemingly endless list of tasks to perform before he can obtain Olwen. Here the chieftain also admits that he cannot himself be destroyed until his daughter has married, an additional impetus for him to hinder Culhwch's task at all costs. The remainder of the story revolves around Culhwch, aided by characters familiar to Arthurian enthusiasts such as Kei (Kay), Gwalchmei (Gawain), and Bedwyr (Bedivere), accomplishing these numerous tasks and claiming Olwen for his own.

To begin, as we have done before, we will look at a few key literary elements in this story to gain a glimpse of the oral residues still remarkably present in this period in Welsh literature. One of the first components of this story that jump out at the reader will certainly be the lists. This story is composed of two primary lists, which each go on for several pages. The first and most ostentatious of these lists is the invocation of names, a speech-act by Culhwch in Arthur's

³²⁴ Ibid, 81.

court:

Culhwch invoked Olwen in the name of Kei, Bedwyr, Greidyawl Enemy Subduer, Gwythyr son of Greidyawl, Greid son of Eri, Kynddilig the guide, Tathal Honest Deceitful, Maelwys son of Baeddan, Cnychwr son of Nes, Cubert son of Daere, Fercos son of Poch... Kilydd Hundred Holds, Canhastyr Hundred Hands, Cors Hundred Claws... Gormant son of Rica (Arthur's brother on his mother's side; his father was chief elder of Cornwall)... Morvran son of Tegid (no man struck him at Camlann – because of his ugliness everyone thought he was a devil helping, for there was hair on his face like the hair of a stag)... Teithi the Old son of Gwynnan (whose kingdom the sea overran, and who came to Arthur after barely escaping; no hilt would remain attached to the blade of his knife, and for that reason he grew sick and feeble while he lived, and then he died)... Kynyr Elegant Beard (who was said to be Kei's father; he said to his wife, 'Woman, if there is anything of me in your son, his heart will always be cold, nor will there be any warmth in his hands; if he is my son, he will be stubborn; whenever he carries a burden, whether great or small, it will be visible neither from the front nor the rear; no one will brave fire and water as well as he, nor will there be any official or servant like him)... Cacamwri, Arthur's servant (show him a barn, and though there be a track for thirty plough within, he would strike the barn with an iron flail until the plants and cross-beams were no better off than the small oats at the bottom... Gwevyl son of Gwastad (when he was sad he would let one lip droop to his navel and raise the other until it was a hood over his head)....³²⁵

This astounding moment must make up one of the longest sentences in literature, comprising around 2,000 English words and naming over 200 people, animals, objects, by which Culhwch swears himself bound to fulfill the duty of obtaining Olwen! Only a few pages later, we find the second major list, this one detailing the tasks that Ysbaddaden forces Culhwch to perform before the latter can marry the giant's offspring:

'Do you see that great thicket out there?' 'I do,' said Culhwch. 'I want it uprooted and burned on the ground, down to cinders and ashes for manure; I want it ploughed and sown so that by the time the dew has dried in the morning it is ready for harvest, so that it can be made into food and drink for the wedding guests of my daughter and yourself. And I want all this done in one day.' 'It will be easy for me to get that, though you may think otherwise.'

'Though you get that, there are things you will not get. I want a ploughman to till the land; no one by Amathaeon son of Dôn will do, and he will not come of his own free will, nor can you compel him.' 'It will be easy for me to get that, though you think otherwise.'

'Though you get that, there are things you will not get. Govannon son of Dôn is to come to the headland to deliver the irons; he will not do the work of his own will except

325 Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 140-146.

for a rightful king, nor can you compel him.' 'It will be easy for me to get that, though you think otherwise'...

'Though you get that, there are things you will not get. I must untangle my beard before I can shave it, and it will never straightene out until you get the blood of the Black Hag, daughter of the White Hag, from the headland of the Valley of Distress in the highlands of Hell.' 'It will be easy for me to get that, though you think otherwise'....³²⁶

Here, the vastness of the repetition is remarkable to our modern sensibilities. The lists of duties that Culhwch must perform goes on for more than seven pages in the Penguin edition, naming around 40 different tasks and numerous people, most if not all of whom were present in the first list!

These examples recall our discussion of aggregation and addition in orality in Chapter 2.³²⁷ In both of these excerpts, the flow of the narrative relies on the addition of separate elements to the sequence, totally without subordinating one item to another. In a sense, each line reinforces the last until the chain is completed, and every line is as important as each of the others. Though modern readers may see Culhwch's invocation of names as unnecessarily extreme, for the character and his task, naming each and every one of these people and things is of vital importance to the success of his mission. Similarly, we are told explicitly that, if Culhwch fails to complete *all* of the tasks set before him, he will not obtain his goal. Ysbaddaden finishes his lengthy list by saying to Culhwch, "Seek these things, and when you find them you shall have my daughter."³²⁸ There is no quibbling on the part of our hero, no questions as to his prize if he obtains 10 or 20 or 39 of these items; he understands that each individual item adds inextricably to the whole, just as each small task brings him closer to fulfilling his large one.

³²⁶ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 154-157

³²⁷ It is also a wonderful example of the extreme redundancy common in oral societies, about which Ong discusses in *Orality and Literacy*, pages 39-41. The short of it is that, since hearers are unlikely to catch every word spoken, the speaker would find it advantageous to repeat himself frequently. In that manner, the whole of the story can be transmitted and the losses minimized.

³²⁸ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 161.

The power of addition in the instance of Culhwch's invocation extends into a new dimension characterized by the act of naming. As we discussed in Chapter 2, naming allows man to exert some power over his environment, for naming is itself a speech-act that tries to capture and define the essence of a thing or being in a sounded word. In other words, "names do give human beings power over what they name: without learning a vast store of names, one is simply powerless to understand..."³²⁹ In the case of Culhwch, the invocation of 200 names has a twofold effect. First, it demonstrates Culhwch's personal knowledge of all these various beings, including something of their histories and traits. Second, and more importantly, it simultaneously allows Culhwch to exert his own power over them and to appropriate some of their power unto himself. By invoking some 200 of the most fantastic creatures imaginable, Culhwch holds those very creatures accountable to himself and his goal of winning Olwen. His speaking their names forms a kind of contract by which they are bound to assist him in whatever manner necessary, as we do see later in the story when Culhwch is forced to encounter many of these beings while fulfilling Ysbaddaden's requirements. The reluctance on the part of some of them to render assistance (recall the giant's warning of impossibility of entreating or compelling their aid) just goes to reinforce the idea of the invocation. Though they are obstinately unwilling to help Culhwch, he nevertheless succeeds in getting what he needs from them. In that sense, an authority much greater than their own ensures that they and only they will aid the young hero despite their firm refusal.

In his invocation, Culhwch is also able to appropriate much power unto himself in order to obtain his goal. This is most obvious when he names the people whom he will subsequently take on his journey to aid him. The first two that he invokes are Kei and Bedwyr. We are told later that Kei "had this talent: nine days and nine night his breath would last under water, and

³²⁹ Ong, *Orality*, 33.

nine days and nine nights he could go without sleep. No doctor could cure the wound from Kei's sword."³³⁰ On the other hand, "No one in the island was as handsome as Bedwyr... and though he was one-handed no three warriors on the same field could draw blood faster than he; moreover he would make one thrust with his spear and nine counter-thrusts."³³¹ Bedwyr shows his talents early on when he saves the adventuring party from Ysbaddaden's spear. Kei becomes useful later on when he sneakily kills the giant Wrnach in order to obtain his sword. From these two examples, it is clear the manner in which Culhwch appropriates the power of these men. By invoking them, he actually manages to conscript them into his troupe, thus making use of their talents directly. For those who do not join his party, Culhwch's invocation subsumes their abilities under his own authority and exploits them for use in obtaining his prize. These beings possessing phenomenal characteristics are asked or forced to relinquish their treasures for the sake of the young hero's quest. By invoking them early on, Culhwch has condemned them to this fate.

Implicit throughout the story is the seemingly boundless authority and power of Arthur. Though he does not play a very active part in advancing the plot line, he is central to Culhwch's success. It is easy to see the appeal for Welshmen in making Arthur, a Welsh quasi-historical figure, into an insurmountable king. Arthur says to Culhwch following the latter's introduction, "You are my first cousin – therefore state your desire and you shall have it, whatever mouth and tongue may name."³³² There is no question as to the impossibility of Culhwch's request nor in the ability of Arthur to make provisions in order to ensure its success. Ending the tale, we are told that "[Culhwch and his entourage] seized the fortress and the land and that night Culhwch slept with Olwen, and as long as he lived she was his only wife. Then Arthur's men dispersed to

³³⁰ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 149.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 140.

their own lands. / This is how Culhwch won Olwen, the daughter of the Chief Giant Ysbaddaden.”³³³

Though Culhwch is the uncontested hero of the story, having vanquished his nemesis and gotten the girl, Arthur is not left without an honorable mention. After all, it was his men (and sometimes the king himself) who performed many of the tasks required of Culhwch, not to mention protected the young hero all along the way. Only through the omnipotent Welsh king was such a momentous success achieved. It does not take much imagination to see the psychological benefits that such a story provides the native Welsh populace newly under the jurisdiction of a foreign and imperial king. This story is a celebration of Welsh power in the face of outwardly unconquerable challenges. For those Welshmen, overcoming Edward I militarily was no longer an option, but they could reinforce their collective identity by recalling a tradition that commemorates Welsh majesty. That is precisely the end to which this tale follows. Filled with patterns remnant from an oral style of communication, “Culhwch and Olwen” bridges the gap between a gloriously sovereign past rooted in orality and a present where writing is the most potent weapon that the Welsh possess in their defense against non-native rule.

³³³ Gantz, *Mabinogion*, 176.

Conclusion

In short, we have spent a fair amount of time investigating the ramifications of Edward's Conquest on the Welsh people in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. We have seen the imperialistic attitude with which Edward conducted his campaigns, working diligently to appropriate sites and artifacts of native import and to subsume their grandeur under his own authority. Most importantly, we have also seen how the implementation of an English-style administration coupled with a degree of deference for Welsh law allowed for the creation of a native squirely class that possessed the resources to finance a great Welsh literary movement. This movement characterized a dramatic shift in native textualization toward prolificity and sophistication. What resulted was an outpouring of literature with the conscious purpose of preserving the precious Welsh heritage threatened by the constant presence of English occupation.

Researching this outpouring has yielded tremendous insights into the history and culture of a people with whom I had had little prior contact, but who are not so different from ourselves. The Hollywood blockbuster *Braveheart* sought to depict the very same King Edward I as a horrendous tyrant yearning for possession of the lands of Scotland in the 1290s and beyond. Investigating his similar activity with regards toward Wales and parts of France, I was prepared to frame this thesis entirely in terms of a reaction against the tyranny of English aggression. I certainly did discover many instances of Edward's rule making life very difficult for the native residents of northern Wales, apart from the embarrassment of having been conquered by a relatively new player in the field of British Isle politics. However, I also uncovered much information about the ways in which the English administration wrought new and long-lasting opportunities for the Welsh including a stabilization of their homeland and an onslaught of new

trade contacts. Here, I realized that the story was much more complicated than I had previously considered. I did still choose to emphasize the cultural and financial hardship that Edward placed upon Wales and her people, for I still believe that such aggression did help spur the native populace's psyche toward creating a medium suitable for sustaining its longstanding heritage and mythological tradition. However, were it not for the circumstances afforded by the new administrative infrastructure, such a movement would have been dramatically hindered and delayed if not altogether halted.

As a result of this relative peace and economic possibility, a new squirely class of nobles arose with a specific goal in patronizing the development of a native textual body. To explore this further, I decided on a two-pronged approach. The first would treat an entirely new genre of poetry, that “of the Gentry,” whose nomenclature itself testifies to the presence of a new noble class of patrons (a contrast emphasized by previous generation's title, “Poetry of the Princes”). The choice of poems to include in this section proved to be the hardest part since a great many of the ones available to me in English³³⁴ would have served my purpose very well. Three honorable mentions that I decided not to use include Iorwerth Fychan's “A Love Poem for Gweirfyl” (a harbinger of a new trend of love poetry), Iolo Goch's “Lament for Dafydd ap Gwilym” (praise for the language's greatest poet), and Iorwerth Beli's “Complaint Against The Bishop of Bangor” (a poetic rant against the Bishop's preference for English itinerant poets over professional Welsh bards).

As for the ones I did include, I knew that I would have to use both Dafydd ap Gwilym and Iolo Goch. These two men are some of the most famous poets in all of Welsh history, not just the fourteenth century. Their masterful use of the native language coupled with their

³³⁴ A more capable scholar than myself would have been able to examine these texts and their contexts in the native Welsh language. It is my hope that such an endeavor will not be long in the coming.

prolificity made certain that many of their works would garner enough respect to have been preserved for our appreciation today. These men are also very useful for this particular thesis because they were both recipients of noble patronage. Rhydderch ab Ieuan and Ithel ap Robert, their respective patrons, worked diligently within the English administration to make certain that their families would not be disenfranchised like so many Welsh nobles after the Conquest. As such, they possessed the means to sponsor artists in ways unprecedented even in the time of the princes. I thought that the inclusion of the elegy to Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, though technically part of the previous generation of poetry, was appropriate to the topic because it embodies the transition into a post-Conquest way of life, a bleak one for the author. This yielded an insight into the mindset of one native Welshman as he considered the state of his homeland after the fall of his prince, and the bitterness and desperation in his writing furthered the notion that Edward's incursion provoked an anti-English attitude that would manifest itself in the literature of the fourteenth century (and late thirteenth century).

The second prong of my analysis focused on the *Mabinogion* tales of the *White Book of Rhydderch*. Here again I was faced with what content to provide. I might have chosen to investigate the religious content of the *White Book* and how the inclusion of specific stories reflected some sentiment about the state of Wales now deprived of her sovereignty. Indeed, therein lies a thesis in itself. Instead, I chose to use the *Mabinogion* tales for a number of reasons. First, there is a much larger body of scholarship devoted to the interpretation of these tales: in their forms in the *White Book* versus the *Red Book*, in their evolution from much earlier oral tales, and in their compositional style, content, and form. Second, they have all been translated into English,³³⁵ an asset of extreme importance. Third, the tales are just more fun to read. These tales are mixes of history and pseudo-history, of mythology and wishful thinking,

335 See Note 333.

that provide as much passive pleasure in reading as any modern fantasy fiction (with the added bonus that the plotlines are based to one degree or another on real events). In addition, unlike the very copious Irish mythology, the *Mabinogion* comprises the sole corpus of early Welsh mythology, thus making it all the more precious.

The problem, as was the case with the poetry, was what tales to include. Out of the eleven total tales (including the “Four Branches of the Mabinogi”), any number of them would have been highly satisfactory for use in Chapter 4. One possibility would have been to base my entire chapter on the three Arthurian romances: “Owain, or the Lady of the Fountain,” “Peredur, son of Efwarg,” and “Geraint and Enid.” I might have tapped into the scholarly debate on how these tales compare with those of Chrétien de Troyes (both of which are likely to have derived from a common Celtic source), with a specific framing on how the continuation of the Arthurian tradition would have psychologically benefited the fourteenth-century Welsh people. I might also have concentrated solely on the “Four Branches,” each of which make profound commentary on the majesty of Wales and/or its relation to England or the rest of Europe. For instance, in “Manawyddan, son of Llŷr,” a curse is placed upon Wales, forcing the rulers of Dyfed and Gwynedd to move to England where they make saddles, shields, and shoes of such great caliber that the locals keep running them out of their towns; eventually they are able to return to Wales and break the spell.

For the tales that I did ultimately choose, I selected them for their mythological and historical content as well as their explicit treatment of the Welsh relationship with its neighboring peoples. “The Dream of Maxen” spun the tale of Wales's position on the throne of the Western World when the title character chooses Gwynedd to be his home and the seat of his Roman imperial dominion. “Branwen” situates Wales as a place of life and love, of counsel and

wisdom, while it characterizes both Ireland and England as places of death and destruction. “Culhwch” works on a smaller scale, set within Wales and the Otherworld, to establish the might and grandeur of King Arthur, an unambiguously Welsh figure. Together these three tales helped to demonstrate the oral nature of literature during this period, which in turn indicated that the tales were newly textualized in the late Middle Ages from pre-literate sources long before that time period.

As I wrote the thesis, it gradually occurred to me that I was adopting something of a New Historicist stance when it came to investigating these various pieces of literature. Indeed, a large portion of my research was dedicated to elucidate the ways in which writings from fourteenth-century Wales, reflect, critique, and comment upon the historical happenings of the day. This sort of integrative approach was similar to the one with which I originally began the project: seeing what roles Edward's castles played in the social landscape of the newly conquered Welsh territories. Incidentally, this approach also formed the basis of the House Course that I planned and executed entitled “History and Hollywood: (Re-)Imagining the Past Through American Cinema.” The focus of that class was to evaluate certain aspects of the American mindset through the lens of popular historical films created over the past fifteen years. Both that course and this thesis, I hope, demonstrate the idea that any given intellectual entity or artefact is a product of its context and, conversely, that any given time period can be explored by way of its cultural outcroppings. It is with the position of New Historicists that I hope future historians will execute their craft and yield more comprehensive insights into the nature of our past.

On more specific terms, I would like to revisit the statement made by my tour guide at Caernarfon castle about cultural rebellion as an alternative to military coup. In a sense, the fourteenth-century history of Wales can be analogized by the cliché “the pen is mightier than the

sword.” Though the Welsh were certainly beaten beyond hope of reprisal, they were not totally stripped of their identity as a cultural entity distinct from the English. In fact, the proximity of their alien occupiers seems to have had the effect of bolstering that very identity and making it all the more precious to the natives. As a result, Wales today has one of the strongest native cultural identities of all the predominantly Celtic countries. Contrast this with Scotland who, though remaining totally independent of England until the 1603 Union of the Crowns and the 1707 Acts of Union combined the two governments, is today working to restore the prominence that Scots Gaelic once had as a language in its territory. As such, the Welsh experience of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, like the American experience of the 1960s and 70s, has taught us that war is not the only option we possess to change the world; we need only to enact a cultural rebellion.

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