

Richter

HISTORICAL STUDIES

PAPERS READ BEFORE THE IRISH CONFERENCE OF HISTORIANS

VOLUME XI

NATIONALITY AND THE PURSUIT OF
NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

(PAPERS READ BEFORE THE CONFERENCE
HELD AT TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN,
26-31 MAY 1975)

Q103614

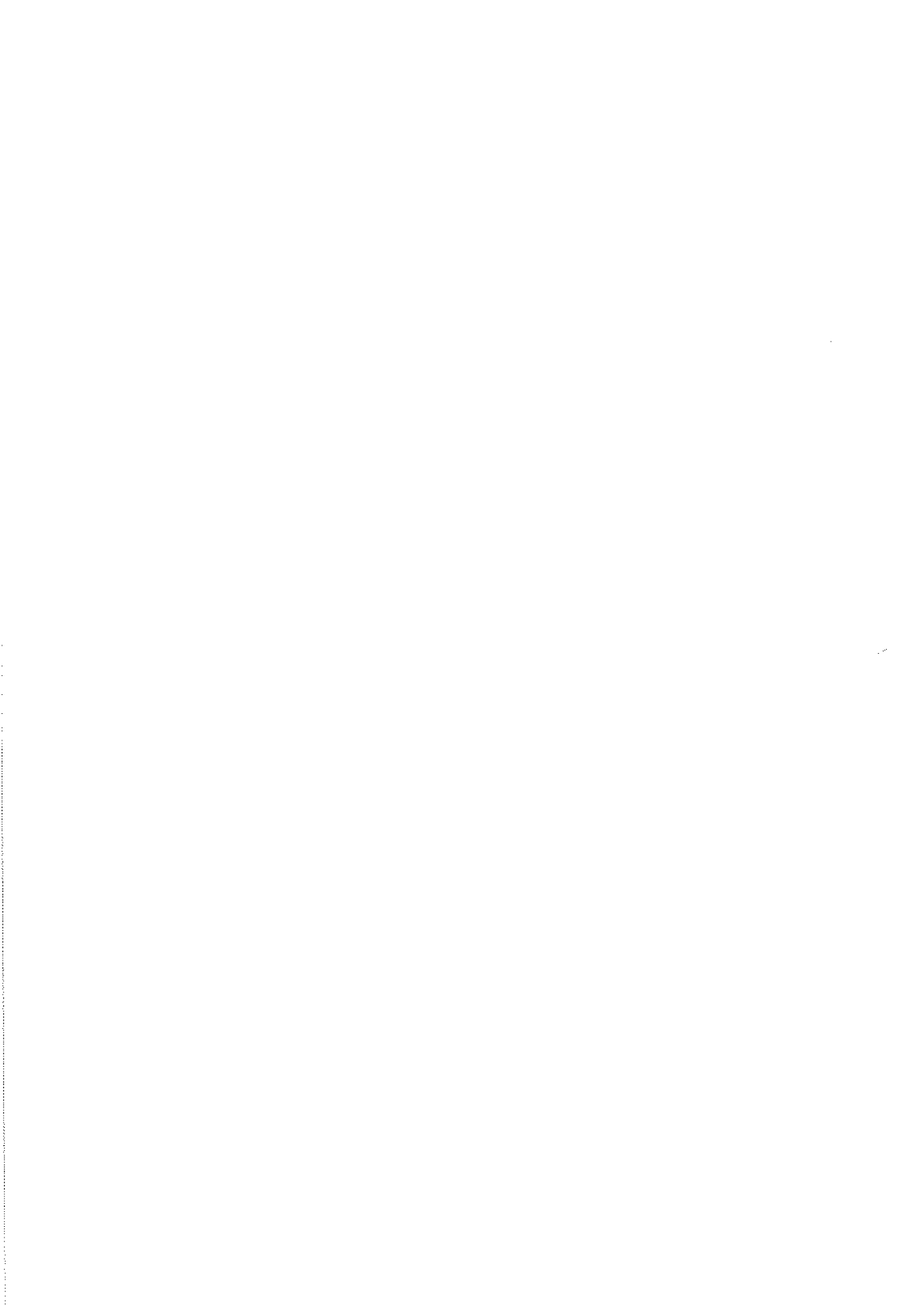
NATIONALITY AND THE PURSUIT OF NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Donnchadh Ó Corráin
Michael Richter
Aidan Clarke
Rosalind Mitchison

Leon Ó Broin
Wolfgang J. Mommsen
David Harkness
John Blake

edited by T. W. Moody

BELFAST
THE APPLETREE PRESS
*For the Irish Committee
of Historical Sciences*
1978



II

The political and institutional background to national consciousness in medieval Wales

Michael Richter

The medievalist who is invited to contribute to a discussion of the pursuit of national independence has a feeling of trepidation as well as satisfaction. He takes satisfaction from the assumption that a medievalist has something to contribute, but what he offers is different in substance from the discussion of the modern historian, hence his trepidation. He works in a time when those structures and mentalities which produce the sentiment of nationalism are just appearing in outline, when they can be divined rather than demonstrated. He will have to be contented with less detail and less precision while covering a wider time-span than his modern counterpart. What he can contribute is to indicate that political structures become wider, going beyond the local community, that participation in the running of these political structures begins to broaden. These processes are essential elements in any nationalism, whether medieval or modern. In addition, the medievalist is aware, probably more so than the modern historian, that the modern nations took shape gradually in the course of the middle ages; therefore his contribution is not only to be tolerated but will be a necessary element in any discussion of the subject.¹

National consciousness requires some kind of framework within which to be expressed, and this can be political, religious, cultural, social, linguistic or a combination of more than one of these elements. It also requires a group of people who express their sense of belonging together. For the study of national consciousness, the historian depends on the survival of written records. In the middle ages, the limits of literacy in every society restricted considerably the circle of those whose awakening national consciousness was recorded and can be studied.

¹ A group of scholars, based at the University of Marburg, West Germany, has started systematically to investigate the origins of the European nations in the middle ages; see *Nations*, 1 ('Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter', in the press) and the author's contribution therein: 'Mittelalterlicher Nationalismus: Wales im 13. Jahrhundert'. An earlier version of that paper was read to the Irish Historical Society in Dublin in March 1973.

created a sense of consternation and defenceless grief in the few people who expressed their sentiments:

Now the labours of earlier days lie despised; the people and the priests are despised by word, heart and work of the Normans. . . One vile Norman intimidates a hundred natives with his command and terrifies them with his look . . . Are you, British people, at enmity with God? O country, you are afflicted and dying, you are quivering with fear, you collapse, alas, miserable with your sad armament; . . . patriotism and the hope of self-government flee; liberty and self-will perish.⁵

The expectation of imminent doom was premature. Wales was too fragmented politically to be taken over by foreign invaders in one fell swoop. Her lack of political unification was her strongest weapon, and the Norman kings did not yet have their hands free to subject Wales. The increasing tendency in Wales to write down the native traditions in history, religion and literature, however, prompted by these strong neighbours, enables the observer for the first time to deal with developments and changes in Welsh society.

If we look at the Welsh scene again a century after Rhigyfarch's Lament, quoted earlier, the country had already changed enormously: by then the low-lying and accessible areas in the south and east of Wales were in the hands of either the English crown or a number of Norman lords who established their own independent rule. To the native rulers was left the upland zone (above 600 ft).⁶ But even here substantial changes had occurred. Of the numerous rulers who had existed before, only two dynasties had survived in a recognisable form, those of Gwynedd and Deheubarth. But the strongest indication of change may be taken from the fact that the native rulers had adopted a new name: they no longer referred to themselves as 'Britons', but instead as 'Welshmen' (*Walenses*). The link with their past history was becoming weaker and lost some of its breadth; they were gradually abandoning their 'retrospective mythology'.⁷ Where there had been fragmentation in native Wales before, the signs were now set on nucleation, and this meant that there would be, in future, fewer dynasties in the country, but that these would be more powerful and would command a wider following than their predecessors.

To those observers who measured Wales by European standards, the nucleation had not gone far enough. In the opinion of Giraldus Cambrensis, the Welsh were still too divided to defend their position properly, and it was their weakness that they

⁵ Michael Lapidge, 'The Welsh-Latin poetry of Sulien's family' in *Studia Celtica*, viii-ix (1973-4), pp 91-3.

⁶ See William Rees, *An historical atlas of Wales* (3rd ed., London, 1967), plate 3.

⁷ For the term see Redfield, p. 130: 'it is the contact and conflict of differing traditions that brings about the sudden alterations in society, and, among other consequences, the change from a mythology that is retrospective to one that is prospective'.

identity have been related more than once, and never in more glowing terms than in the impressive study of Sir John Edward Lloyd.¹³ What has not been done in equal depth is to analyse the changes that took place. Their result was political unification and—as a by-product to it, so it appears—a growing sense of national awareness. But what did the new structure owe to native tradition, what to foreign inspiration? An attempt will be made here to discuss the gradual transition from a tribal to a feudal society in medieval Wales that took place under the impact of developments in England.

In a widely acclaimed article published nearly twenty years ago, the great constitutional historian, Sir Goronwy Edwards, solved one of the peculiar features of later medieval Wales, that of the independence *vis-à-vis* the crown of the marcher lords. He showed that their comparatively independent position, which included the right to exercise jurisdiction, civil and criminal, high and low, to make war and to build castles, was that same right which the native Welsh rulers had enjoyed before the arrival of the Normans. The marcher lords perpetuated, in the area under their control, the political fragmentation of native Wales; their lordship was, by Welsh law, royal in character.¹⁴ On the basis of this analysis, which has shed a bright light on indigenous political institutions, it is now possible to look at those areas that were not subject to the marcher lords, to independent Welsh Wales and her rulers.

Norman-Welsh relations are very badly documented in the first century after the Norman arrival in England, and we therefore begin our analysis at a point where these relations assume a definable form. This happened in 1177. In that year, King Henry II met the kings and nobility of Wales at Oxford. Rhys ap Gruffudd, king of South Wales, Dafydd ap Owain Gwynedd, king of North Wales, Cadwallan, king of Delwain (ap Madog of Maelienydd), Owain Cyfeiliog (of Powys), Gruffudd of Bromfield and Madog ab Iorwerth Goch are mentioned by name. The historian who reported this meeting, 'Benedict of Peterborough', *alias* Roger Howden, clearly differentiated between various ranks of the Welsh political leaders. This differentiation becomes even more obvious when we hear of the terms agreed at that meeting. 'Benedict' writes:

There the king of England, son of the empress Mathilda, gave Dafydd, king of North Wales, who had married his sister (Emma), the land of Ellesmere, and (Dafydd) there swore to his lord the king of England fealty for it and liege homage henceforth, and swore to keep the peace with the king of England. Likewise, the king of England

¹³ John Edward Lloyd, *A history of Wales from the earliest times to the Edwardian conquest* (2 vols, London, 1911).

¹⁴ J. G. Edwards, 'The Normans and the Welsh march' in *Proceedings of the British Academy* xlii (1956), pp 155-77, p. 170ff.

procedure. Nevertheless, in these legal instruments 'it was the issuer himself who said the decisive last word about the phrasing and contents of the *intitulatio* formula', for 'we have to ask what a given ruler says of himself; we have to seek what one might label his "self-manifestation" (*Selbstaussage*), if we want to obtain a methodologically reliable answer to the question "what is a ruler?"'.¹⁸ This new approach of the Viennese historian, Herwig Wolfram, to early medieval concepts of rulership helps, so I believe, to illuminate the situation in twelfth-century Wales.

Only few charters are extant from twelfth-century Welsh rulers, but they tell an interesting tale. We must distinguish at this point those charters in which the ruler expresses his self-manifestation by the traditional Welsh names from the others, all later, where the territory under his rule is referred to otherwise. Of the former type, we have a document issued by *Howell rex Argwestli* and one of *Madawc rex Powyssentium*,¹⁹ both from the first half of the twelfth century. All other relevant charters come from the second half of the twelfth century or a later time. Many of these are undated, but the documents issued on behalf of *Owain Gwynedd*, who died in 1170 and who styled himself in his documents *Walliarum rex*, *Walliae rex*, *Wallensium princeps*, *princeps Walliae*, are certainly pre-1177.²⁰ His successor *Dafydd* occurs (probably before 1174) as *David rex filius Owini* and later as *David filius Owini princeps Norwalliae*.²¹ The form *N. princeps Norwalliae* became the standard form used by the Gwynedd rulers until the mid-thirteenth century, when the title *princeps Walliae* was adopted. A similar development can be seen in Deheubarth. From the 1160s onwards, Rhys ap Gruffudd used the following titles: *princeps Wallie*, *Walliarum princeps*, *Sudwall' proprietarius princeps*.²²

When looking at these charters, we notice two important changes which

and letters of the native Welsh rulers. This task is at present undertaken, for Gwynedd, by Mr David Stephenson, to whom the author is greatly indebted for a number of references.

¹⁸ Herwig Wolfram, 'The shaping of the early medieval principality as a type of non-royal rulership' in *Viator* II (1971), pp 34, 33. For a full appreciation of Wolfram's approach, however, reference should be made to the detailed work published in German: Herwig Wolfram, *Intitulatio I. Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Erg. Band 21, 1967), and H. Wolfram (ed.), *Intitulatio II: Lateinische Herrscher- und Fürstentitel im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert* (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Erg. Band 24, 1973).

¹⁹ Robert Williams, 'Wynnstay MSS—charters of Trefeglwys' in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (hereafter cited as *Arch. Camb.*) 3rd series, vi (1860), pp 331, 330.

²⁰ *Materials for the history of Thomas Becket*, ed. J. C. Robertson and others (7 vols, Rolls Series, 1875–85), v 229; M. Bouquet, *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, xvi (1878), nos 357, 358, p. 116ff. See also J. B. Smith, 'Owain Gwynedd' in *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions*, xxxii (1971), pp 8–17.

²¹ *Arch. Camb.*, 1860, p. 332.

²² For *princeps Wallie* (shortly after 1165), see E. M. Pritchard, *Cardigan priory in the olden days* (London, 1904), pp 144–5; for the other two items (of 1184) William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, new edition (6 vols in 8 parts, London, 1846–9), v, 632.

The second change, likewise not precisely datable, went hand in hand with the first: the earlier title *rex* was replaced by the title *princeps*. Never again after the late twelfth century did Welsh rulers refer to themselves as *reges*. According to the native chronicle, *Brut y Tywysogyon*, this change occurred around the year 1157; from that date onwards the *Brut* equally never again applied the title *brenin* (king) to Welsh rulers. On the basis of our previous discussion we have to stress that, in the timing of this change, the *Brut* does not reflect accurately the practice of the rulers themselves.²⁷ Owain Gwynedd, for example, used the royal title repeatedly, at the time of the Becket controversy in England, when he made a spectacular advance in the field of international diplomacy by offering himself as a vassal to the French king Louis VII.²⁸ Of the rulers of Gwynedd it was Owain's son and successor, Dafydd, who eventually abandoned the title *rex*, probably as a result of a marriage alliance with Henry II's half-sister Emma. To connect the final and consistent substitution of *princeps* for *rex* with the events of 1177 is a not unreasonable conjecture; it cannot be more.

The difference we have noticed between the titles used by the author of the *Brut* and in the charters of the rulers is marginal rather than major, because from the late twelfth century onwards these sources share one important feature: the title *princeps* is only applied to or used by the leading dynasties. Whereas there had been a multiplicity of kings in earlier Welsh society, including the early twelfth century, there were henceforth only princes of North and South Wales. None of the other nobles would in future call themselves princes.²⁹ We witness here an increased social and political differentiation, a process during which some dynasties rose while others declined to a status of nobility. There had been changes in the importance of various dynasties in Wales before, but these had been of a temporary nature, not affecting the constitutional position of the dynastic families.

What was the significance of the arrangement of 1177? For the first time, the greatest of the Welsh rulers had entered into a relationship with the

²⁷ This (therefore inconclusive) evidence has been discussed at some length by T. Jones Pierce, 'The age of the princes', in his collected papers *Medieval Welsh society*, ed. J. B. Smith (Cardiff, 1972), pp 28-9. Insufficient attention is normally paid to the fact that the *Brut* was originally written in Latin and that the terms which are of interest are thus the Latin terms *rex*, *princeps*, *dominus* rather than their Welsh equivalents *brenin*, *tywysog*, *arglwyd*.

²⁸ Bouquet, *Recueil*, xvi, no. 357, where Owain styles himself *Owinus rex Walliae*, and no. 358, where he occurs as *Owinus Walliarum princeps, suus homo et amicus* (as above, note 20).

²⁹ A good example of this is a charter by Madog ap Gruffudd of Powys for Valle Crucis, where his *intitulatio* does not include the *princeps* title but where in the narrative part he is referred to as *princeps*, see Morris C. Jones, 'Valle Crucis abbey' in *Arch. Camb.* xii (1866), pp 412-17, esp. p. 415. I know of one example of a Powys ruler using the *princeps* title, c. 1206: see 'Gwenwynwyn, prince of Powys and lord of Arwistli, to the monks of Strata Marcella' etc. (National Library of Wales, Wynnstay Collection, no. 18), quoted from J. C. Davies, 'Strata Marcella documents' in *Montgomeryshire Collections*, li-lii (1949-52), no. 22, p. 178. A little later, Llywelyn became 'lord of Arwistli', see *ibid.*, no. 29, pp. 182-3.

lordship over them at that time was Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. It is tempting to connect with this defiance of the growing power of that prince a letter that Llywelyn wrote to a number of Welsh noblemen. 'I firmly command that, as you respect me and my position' (*firmiter praecipio, quatinus me diligitis et honorem meum*), that they should respect also the property of one of his relatives. The letter closes by singling out one man for this exhortation: 'and I say this especially to you, Madog ap Maelgwn, whom I have fed and exalted, not to repay my good deeds with bad deeds, but to respect my position (*honor*) so that I may henceforth as previously advise and help you'.³³ What this *honor* was which Llywelyn defended so eagerly, he expressed with unprecedented clarity in the *intitulatio* of the same letter: '*Lewelinus filius Gervasii Dei gratia princeps Norwalliae*'.³⁴ It underlines the extent to which the prince of North Wales had risen above the people of his country. Like the European rulers of his time, he interpreted his position to be one 'by the grace of God'.

These sentences were written at the conclusion of a power struggle in Gwynedd that had lasted for three decades and had seen a succession of princes of North Wales, all of whom at some time carried this title: Dafydd ap Owain, Gruffudd ap Cynan, and finally Llywelyn ab Iorwerth.³⁵ The last of these, who was to dominate Welsh politics for the next three decades, emerged after a fierce struggle which lasted ten years.³⁶ In the light of our discussion, Sir John Lloyd seems to be wide of the mark in his comment: 'in the north, the Welsh principalities had now attained such a position that the continuance of Welsh institutions and traditions seemed very well assured'.³⁷ On the contrary, Welsh institutions were readily abandoned, as will be shown later.

We see that, in another area where the Welsh institutions were maintained, the result was quite different. Rhys ap Gruffudd remained as *princeps*

³³ Dugdale, *Mon. Angl.*, vi, 496-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*; for Carolingian parallels see Wolfram (as in note 18 above), p. 49. For an insular parallel of c. 1114 (*David Dei gratia comes*) see *Regesta regum Scottorum*, ed. G. W. S. Barrow, i (Edinburgh, 1960), no. 1, p. 131.

³⁵ For Gruffudd as *Griffinus Kynan filius Northwalliae princeps* see *Register and chronicle of the abbey of Aberconway*, ed. Henry Ellis (Camden series, 1847), pp 7-8; for a more detailed discussion Colin A. Gresham, 'The Aberconwy charter' in *Arch. Camb.* xciv (1939), pp 123-62. For the succession in Gwynedd see Lloyd, ii, 549-50 and 588 ff.

³⁶ The genealogy was brought into line with this political development, see Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, vi, 167 and n.2, where the earlier genealogy of the North Welsh princes reads: 'David filius Oenei, Oeneus filius Griphini' etc., and the later version 'Leulinus filius Iorwerth, Iorwerth filius Oenei, Oeneus filius Griphini'. It is remarkable how Giraldus justified the victory of Llywelyn and thereby became a spokesman of the new order when he stressed that Llywelyn's father Iorwerth Drwyndwn ('Flatnose') was legitimate, while Dafydd ap Owain and Rhodri were illegitimate sons of Owain Gwynedd; see *Opera* vi, 134. For such changes in genealogies according to political changes, well known to anthropologists, see M. T. Clanchy, 'Remembering the past and the Good Old Law' in *History*, lv (1970), pp 165-76.

³⁷ Lloyd, ii 582.

the man who should have inherited the principality of his father. That he failed was an indication of the strength of the old order in the south, an order well attested in earlier Welsh history, that of the division of the patrimony among all the surviving sons, illegitimate as well as legitimate.⁴⁵ When we take note of this tension between tradition and political innovation, we shall have a better understanding of the violence among the rulers about which the Welsh chronicles tell us. Various methods were used to make relatives unfit for succession to their hereditary portions, ranging from imprisonment, blinding, and castration to plain killing.⁴⁶

With the turn of the century, Wales was about to enter a new phase in its political development. The system that had emerged over the past two decades and had won the approval of Henry II in 1177, that of two major native principalities in Wales, did not last. The principality worked out in Gwynedd, but in South Wales the old order prevailed. The events after the death of Rhys ap Gruffudd show clearly that the sense of Welsh identity could as yet be expressed only insufficiently in the political field.

It is all the more important that in those years there emerged another factor which worked more successfully as an integrating element in Welsh native society. I refer to Welsh law. The earliest extant text of the Welsh laws, written in Latin, dates from the closing years of the twelfth century, and in the course of the following century three further versions of the laws were written, both in Latin and in Welsh. It has been customary to distinguish three regional groups in those texts associated with the greater dynasties of the past, with Gwynedd, Gwent, and Deheubarth.⁴⁷ It is significant that the two earliest of these law books, one in Latin (Red. A), the other in Welsh (*Llyfr Iorwerth*), appear to have been written under the auspices of Rhys ap Gruffudd and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth respectively.⁴⁸

thirteenth century historians called him 'magnus' in order to distinguish him from Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. On the succession in Deheubarth see also Lloyd, ii, 568, 577, 585-6.

⁴⁵ From the masses of evidence I select the following: *Vitae sanctorum Britanniae et genealogiae*, ed. A. W. Wade-Evans (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. ix, Cardiff, 1944), pp 24, 148, 172; *Brut* (R.B.H.), pp 47, 108, 119, 162, 195-7, 207; Giraldus, *Opera*, vi, 134, 211, 225. This principle is recalled even in the statute of Wales of 1284, xiii, ed. Ivor Bowen, 1908, pp 25-6: 'wherreas the custom is otherwise in Wales than in England concerning succession to an inheritance, inasmuch as the inheritance is partible among heirs male . . .'. This as against J. B. Smith (as above, note 20) who wrote: 'historians have burdened us with the view that Wales was a land where there were unalterable rules which provided that the royal estate was subject to partible succession' (p. 13). See also above, n. 39.

⁴⁶ Imprisonment: *Brut* (R.B.H.) s.a. 1102, p. 47; s.a. 1174, 1175, p. 165; s.a. 1197, etc.; blinding: *ibid.*, s.a. 1187, 1193; castration: *ibid.*, s.a. 1131, 1152, 1175, *Annales Cambriae*, s.a. 1128, 1166 (and cf. *The Latin texts of the Welsh laws*, ed. H. D. Emanuel (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. xx, Cardiff, 1967), Red. D, p. 343: 'Exulet a curia illa legis turpitudino, scilicet membri virilis arreptio'); killing: *Brut*, s.a. 1125, 1170 etc.

⁴⁷ See H. D. Emanuel, 'Studies in the Welsh laws' in *Celtic Law Studies in Wales*, ed. Elwyn Davies (Cardiff, 1963) p. 84.

⁴⁸ Emanuel, *Latin texts* (as above, note 46), *passim*.

Cambriae in its proper proportion, it has to be stressed that an unqualified *rex Brittonum* is a title by which only Hywel is honoured. He also attested one charter of king Eadred of Wessex as *rex*.⁵⁶ Clearly, then, Hywel was a man of considerable political power. On the other hand, the epithet 'the Good' (*bonus* or *dda*) does not seem to be contemporary. It occurs for the first time in the prologues to the laws, and is thus itself of twelfth-century date, certainly later than MS A of the *Annales Cambriae*.

By the late twelfth century, Hywel was certainly well known even outside legal circles as Hywel 'the Good', and in this manner he occurs in the genealogies of the South Welsh dynasty in Giraldus's *Descriptio Kambriae*.⁵⁷ In assessing the historical fact of the connection between King Hywel and the Welsh laws, as distinct from their compilation, our verdict must remain a cautious 'not proven, but very likely'.⁵⁸ On the other hand, we can call the historical belief in this connection, from the late twelfth century onwards, a fact and as such a powerful integrating factor for Welsh society.

The first application of this appears in the year 1201 in a treaty concluded between the English crown and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, with which we move again to the level of political discussion. In the king's absence, the treaty was concluded between the justiciar, Geoffrey fitz Peter, and the prince of North Wales. The latter swore, together with his nobles (*majores terre sue*) to be faithful to the king. Thereafter, Llywelyn received from the justiciar all the tenements which he then held and promised to perform homage for these tenements to the king later. Should there be in future any disputes concerning these tenements, Llywelyn would have the choice between the law of England and the law of Wales to have his case decided.⁵⁹

From this treaty we can glimpse precisely the constitutional position of Llywelyn towards the English crown at that time. He and the nobles of his land swore fealty to the king. In addition, he himself would be tied by the act of homage to the king for some tenements and, we should add for the sake of clarity, for these tenements only. Apart from them, the area he ruled over was called *terra sua*, and the same term was applied in the same treaty to the king's land, *terra domini regis*. The situation thus resembles that of

⁵⁶ P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters: an annotated list and bibliography* (Royal Historical Society, Guides and Handbooks, London, 1968), no. 550; and see Carlyon-Britton (as in note 55), pp 11-13; for other titles: *rex genedotae*, *rex demetorum*, *rex guent*, *rex pouis*, *rex celericiaum* see Phillimore (as above, note 50), pp 155-66.

⁵⁷ *Opera* vi, 167: 'Oeneus filius Hoeli da, id est, Hoeli boni, Hoelus filius Cadelh'.

⁵⁸ Cf. Emanuel, *Latin texts*, p. 84: 'there seems . . . every reason to accept the traditional connexion between Hywel Dda and the Welsh laws'. The belief that the *codification* dates from the tenth century is, however, still widely held; see most recently Dafydd Jenkins, as well as, earlier, D. A. Binchy in *Celtic law papers. Introductory to Welsh medieval law and government* (Brussels, 1973), pp 17, 27, 94, 113, 120; against, however, see *ibid.* J. G. Edwards, pp 139, 150.

⁵⁹ *Rotuli litterarum patentium* (Record Commission, 1835), 1, i, 8b; also Rymer, *Foedera*, 1, i (Rec. Commission, 1816), p. 84; cf. also Lloyd, ii, 615.

Llywelyn claimed in 1222 that he had 'no less liberty than the king of Scotland'.⁶⁵

Hand in hand with this process went the question of the succession in Gwynedd. Breaking with two Welsh customs at the same time, Llywelyn intended to pass over his elder illegitimate son, Gruffudd, and give the principality to his younger legitimate son, Dafydd, alone. In 1220, he obtained for this the consent of Henry III's regents, and in 1238 'all the princes of Wales swore allegiance to Dafydd ap Llywelyn ab Iorwerth at Strata Florida'.⁶⁶ His brother Gruffudd had been imprisoned before, and he went to prison again, probably after Llywelyn's death in April 1240.⁶⁷ Under Dafydd, there followed a rapid collapse of the principality. On his first confrontation with Henry III, in May 1240, Dafydd had to perform homage for North Wales (the first time we have undisputed evidence for this), and acknowledge (also for the first time, so it seems) the king as feudal overlord of all Welsh 'barons'.⁶⁸ Fifteen months later, after another defeat, he had to submit to even harsher conditions: while Dafydd had to concede once again the points raised earlier, now, in addition, he was forced to hand over to the king his half-brother, Gruffudd; he also had to return to the king, forever, the lands of Ellesmere.⁶⁹ The arrangement of 1177 was finally extinguished.

King Henry III, however, worked only for his own convenience; early in August 1241, he had concluded an agreement with the wife of the imprisoned Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, in which she claimed, on behalf of her husband, the hereditary portion to which he was entitled under Welsh law.⁷⁰ Henry forced Dafydd to hand over Gruffudd who was not, however, subsequently reinstated in North Wales but again imprisoned, this time by the English king in the Tower of London. There Gruffudd was killed in 1244 in an attempt to escape.

After Dafydd had died in 1246 without heirs, Henry III tried his best to impose Welsh customs on Wales again, to his own advantage. He forced the joint succession in Gwynedd of two (of the four) sons of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, Owain and Llywelyn, and formally forbade a renewal of the internal feudalisation of Wales.⁷¹ The English king, however, could keep

⁶⁵ *Calendar of ancient correspondence concerning Wales*, ed. J. G. Edwards (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. ii, Cardiff, 1935), p. 24.

⁶⁶ *Brut* (R.B.H.), p. 235. For more details see M. Richter, 'David ap Llywelyn, the first Prince of Wales' in *Welsh History Review*, v (1970-71), pp 205-19, esp. 207-8.

⁶⁷ See Gwyn A. Williams, 'The succession to Gwynedd, 1238-1247' in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* xx (1962-4), pp 393-413.

⁶⁸ *Littere Wallie* (hereafter cited as *L.W.*), ed. J. G. Edwards (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. v, Cardiff, 1940), pp 5-6; also *ibid.*, pp xlvi-xlviii.

⁶⁹ *L.W.*, p. 9.

⁷⁰ *L.W.*, no. 78, p. 52.

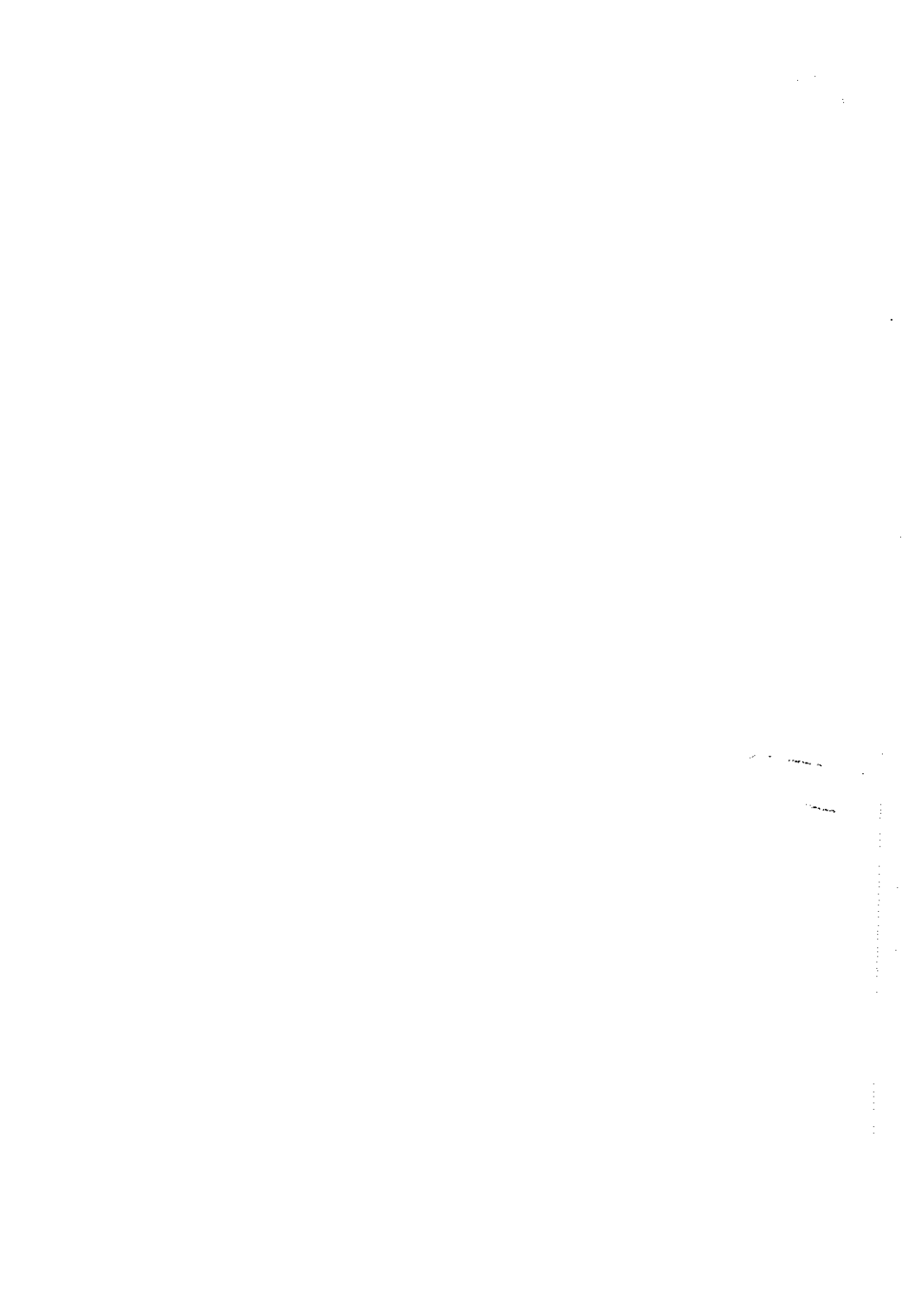
⁷¹ *L.W.*, no. 3, pp 7-8.

lord king have their own laws and customs according to their own language.⁷⁶

More unanimously than ever before, the free Welsh expressed their sense of belonging together in the terms of living under their own native law. Political unity was accepted more reluctantly, but it was accepted in preference to rule from England, by the majority of the nobles. Those who had suffered harm in their personal status in the process of feudalisation of native Wales which we have described were faced with a choice between two evils, and the lesser of these was the rule by a Welsh prince. In this manner, their identification was more legal-cultural than political.

In this paper I have applied some gentle European breeze to the Celtic mists in Wales. The political structure thereby exposed resembles in some ways that of other European societies at that time. Once the last word has been said about the prince of Wales, the non-royal ruler in a feudalised society, attention should be turned to the aristocracy, a social class of royal stock in Wales as in Ireland, and just as essential to the running of the state as the king or prince. An important theme of later medieval Europe is the growing national awareness of the aristocracy, in fragmented Germany just as much as in the more centralised England and France during the hundred years war. In Wales we have stopped with the first glimpses of this social class. It is a theme that requires much detailed work, but it is a worthwhile objective because it will readjust the historian's outlook. The source-material seduces him anyway into being too 'royal' in his approach, as K. B. McFarlane has so powerfully reminded us.

⁷⁶ *The Welsh assize roll, 1277-1284*, ed. J. C. Davies (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. vii, Cardiff, 1940), p. 266. For more detail see Richter (as above, note 1), *passim*.



Wales divided only so long as he could effectively impose his authority. The two brothers did not break with the letter of the arrangement of 1247, but certainly with its spirit when, in 1251, they concluded confederacies (*amicitia*) with other Welsh nobles.⁷² While England fell victim to the barons' revolt, Llywelyn was able to oust his brother and then again receive the homage of Welsh nobles.⁷³ By then he had assumed a new title, *princeps Wallie*. He was recognised as such by the crown in 1267.⁷⁴ The transformation of native Welsh society was complete. Feudal concepts had overcome the political fragmentation that had been one of the typical features of tribal Wales and had resulted in a nucleation of power with Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, prince of Wales, at the centre. He was to be the feudal overlord in native Wales and tenant-in-chief to the English king. The treaty of 1267 also provided that this arrangement should last beyond Llywelyn's lifetime.

International treaties have at all times tended to use grand words which were forgotten as soon as the political constellation changed. The principality of Wales which had emerged in 1267 was no exception. Only ten years later, a military defeat of Llywelyn by Edward I heralded the approaching end of the principality: it was to last only to Llywelyn's death. This provision of a new treaty (of Conway, 1277) was later actually implemented. Yet before this came about, the spirit of Welsh independence asserted itself strongly once again. It was articulated by a great number of people, and can still be perceived in the replies given by the Welsh nobles and freemen to members of a royal inquiry set up at the command of Edward I. It is impressive to hear how the Welsh on that occasion measured themselves against other European nations in demanding that their own national law be guaranteed to them. The sons of Maredudd ap Owain expressed this idea forcefully when they said that

all Christian peoples have their own laws and customs in their own lands; . . . they themselves and their ancestors had in their lands unalterable laws and customs until these were taken away from them by the English after the last war.⁷⁵

Llywelyn himself applied to the king for a guarantee of Welsh law for Wales when he said before the royal tribunal:

Each province under the rule of the lord king should have its own laws and customs. This should also be granted to Wales, just as all other nations under the rule of the

⁷² *L.W.*, no. 284, pp 160-61 *amicitia* is clearly a technical term; see Wolfgang Fritze, 'Die fränkische Schwurfreundschaft in der Merowingerzeit' in *Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung*, lxxi (1954), pp 74-125.

⁷³ *L.W.*, no. 68, p. 45.

⁷⁴ First evidence for his own use of the title: *L.W.*, no. 317, p. 184; official recognition in treaty of Montgomery, *L.W.*, no. 1, pp 1-4.

⁷⁵ *Reg. Peckham* (as above, note 12), p. 454.

1177, with the important difference that for 1201 we have the official text, and in this text Llywelyn is not granted the princely title.

On the other hand, after the death of Dafydd ap Owain, Llywelyn received, perhaps in 1205, the lands of Ellesmere 'which had for so long been held by a scion of the house of Gwynedd'.⁶⁰ It is tempting to compare Ellesmere with the Honour of Huntingdon, held by the Scottish king from the English crown at various times in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as 'subordinate tenures held by a ruler who within his own domains claimed to be sovereign'.⁶¹

It is an indication of the fundamental changes introduced into Wales when we see that the political development of Gwynedd in the thirteenth century centred on two issues: (1) the extent to which the integrity and indivisibility of the principality could be maintained; and (2) the process of internal feudalisation. These two points, though interrelated, show one essential difference when observed from England: the maintenance of the integrity and indivisibility of the principality would be a maintenance of the *status quo*; internal feudalisation, on the other hand, would introduce a new element.

The process of feudalisation within native Wales seems to have come very quickly. The first evidence for it dates from 1208 when Llywelyn showed his strength against Maelgwn ap Rhys of Deheubarth.⁶² Obviously profiting from the difficulties which King John encountered in his own country, Llywelyn was able to assume a position of a more general leadership, and, in 1212, in the words of the *Cronica de Wallia*: 'the Welsh conspired against the king of England, . . . and they chose for themselves one head, namely Llywelyn, prince of North Wales'. Three years later we hear that one of the leading nobles, Gwenwynwyn of Powys, had done homage to Llywelyn in written form. No wonder that the same *Cronica* spoke about Llywelyn as 'then holding the monarchy and leadership of nearly all Wales'.⁶³

It cannot be established in all clarity to what extent this situation was changed after John's death and the accession of Henry III. In 1218, Llywelyn as well as all the magnates of Wales performed homage and fealty to the new king. On this occasion, we read for the first time the title *princeps North Walliae* being conceded to Llywelyn in an English official document.⁶⁴ It was fully in line with this increasing independence of Gwynedd that

⁶⁰ Lloyd, ii, 616-17; also *ibid.*, p. 553 and *passim*.

⁶¹ G. W. S. Barrow, *Feudal Britain* (London, 1956), p. 243.

⁶² *C.W.*, s.a. 1207 = 1208: 'Advenientes vero patriotae universi tam sibi quam filiis Griffini homagium fecerunt'.

⁶³ *C.W.*, s.a. 1215: 'tunc temporis totius Wallie monarchiam fere atque principatum tenente'; on the homage of Gwenwynwyn, *ibid.*, 'cum cyrographis et cartis tenorem confederacionis et homagii sui continentibus'. See also *Brut* (R.B.H.), pp 205-9.

⁶⁴ *Foedera*, I, i, 150.

Variations between the different recensions are of a sufficiently minor nature to allow us to speak of one Welsh law, or, as became customary in Wales, of the law of Hywel Dda ('the Good').

The editor of the Latin texts of the Welsh law books assures us that the oldest extant manuscript, National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 28 (Red. A), is probably not more than two stages removed from the exemplar. We have therefore in the legal sector the same transition from the old to the new order as in other sectors, shown in the writing down of native traditions. The date of the compilation makes it very difficult to distinguish in each individual case between what is old and what is more recent, since even very recent changes were woven into the texts, but the eminent position reserved for the kings of both Aberffraw and Dinefwr seems to reflect the political nucleation around the princes of Gwynedd and Deheubarth in the late twelfth century very adequately.⁴⁹

Considerable attention has been paid by scholars to the dating of these compilations. They are associated with the Welsh king Hywel, who died in 949 (950).⁵⁰ It is clear, however, that at least the prologues to the law books, which give an account of the motives and methods of their compilation, show signs of composition in the twelfth, not the tenth century.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the laws are always associated, even outside the prologue, with king Hywel,⁵² and we must look into this question more closely.

The *Brut y Tywysogyon* commemorates Hywel's obit as follows: 'and King Hywel the Good, son of Cadell, the head and glory of all the Britons, died'.⁵³ This chronicle exists, however, only in a fourteenth-century translation into Welsh from a Latin exemplar now lost; when we turn to one of its sources, the earliest version of the *Annales Cambriae*, the corresponding entry is more modest: *Higuel rex Brittonum obiit*.⁵⁴ Fortunately, we have independent evidence for the *Selbstausage* of Hywel. On a coin which has been found he occurs as *Hopael rex*.⁵⁵ In order to see the entry in the *Annales*

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 110: 'non redditur aurum nisi regi Aberfrau et Dynever', and similarly pp 194, 317, 436. See also the gradual appearance in the laws of the terms *Norwallia* and *Sudwallia* respectively, *ibid.*, index iii.

⁵⁰ *Annales Cambriae*, version A, in Egerton Phillimore (ed.), 'The *Annales Cambriae* and old Welsh genealogies from Harleian MS 3859' in *Y Cymmrodor* ix (1888), a manuscript composed in the last half of the tenth century (*ibid.*, p. 144), extant now in an early twelfth-century copy (*ibid.*, p. 146).

⁵¹ J. G. Edwards, 'The historical study of the Welsh law books' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th series, xii (1962), pp 141-55.

⁵² Emanuel, *Latin texts*, index iii, s.v. Hywel Dda.

⁵³ *Brut* (R.B.H.), p. 13.

⁵⁴ *Annales Cambriae*, loc. cit., as in note 50 above, p. 169. Closely parallel is the entry in the *Annals of Ulster*: 'Oel ri bretan moritur', *A.U.*, ed. William M. Hennessey, i (Dublin, 1887), p. 466. This reference was kindly supplied by Mr Charles Doherty with whom I had the opportunity to discuss many aspects of this paper.

⁵⁵ See W. P. Carlyon-Britton, 'Saxon, Norman and Plantagenet coinage in Wales' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1905-6, pp 3-4.

South Walliae to his death in 1197. None of his numerous sons, all of whom were by then of a mature age, gained the position of their father, because all of them fought for the position of *princeps* which was indivisible. The nucleation of political power in South Wales came to an end with the death of Rhys, and it was replaced by the traditional political fragmentation. There was no *princeps* of South Wales at any time in the thirteenth century. Those historians who regret this development³⁸ do not indicate that thereby, in a manner not unlike that of Giraldus Cambrensis, they implicitly reject one of the essential features of the native Welsh society as well. '“Lordship” in Wales was fully royal, but . . . this “lordship” was [also] easily divisible and readily transferable.'³⁹

The death of the Lord Rhys provoked a long and skilful elegy from the author of the *Brut*:

*Nobile Cambrensis cecidit dyadema decoris
Hoc est Resus obit Cambria tota gemit
.....
Wallia iam viduata dolet ruitura dolori.*⁴⁰

The events after his death can be followed in the account of the local native *Cronica de Wallia*.⁴¹ In 1197 Rhys was succeeded by his son Gruffudd who was, however, dispossessed by his brother Maelgwn soon afterwards.⁴² Similarly, Maelgwn was unable to maintain his sole rule.⁴³ The fight for the hereditary portions continued among the sons, and when Gruffudd ap Rhys died in 1201 he was described by the annalist as *Griffinus magni Resi filius de iure Cambriae princeps et heres*.⁴⁴ The *Cronica* here suggests that Gruffudd was

³⁸ A. J. Roderick, 'The feudal relations between the English crown and the Welsh princes' in *History*, xxxvii (1952), p. 206.

³⁹ Edwards, as above, note 14, pp 169-70; see also *Littere Wallie*, ed. J. G. Edwards (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. v, Cardiff, 1940), pp xxxix-xi.

⁴⁰ This elegy occurs only in the *Brut*, Peniarth MS 20 version, ed. Thomas Jones (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. vi, Cardiff, 1941), pp 140-41. It should be noted that the names used for Wales are the new ones, *Cambria* and *Wallia*, not *Britannia*.

⁴¹ Hereafter cited as C.W. See Kathleen Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and related texts' in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, lix (1973), pp 3-28, esp. pp 17-18.

⁴² From him there exists the transcript of a charter which contains at least an echo of his status in his *intitulatio*: 'Mailgun filius Resi principis South Walliae' (National Library of Wales, MS 12362 (Alcwyn C. Evans 7), unpaginated 19th century transcript).

⁴³ See *Annales Cambriae*, ed. J. W. ab Ithel (Rolls Series, 1860), p. 62, s.a. 1200: 'Mailgonus filius Resi, ut vidit quod solus terram patris sui tenere non potuit, quin Francis vel Grifino fratri suo partem daret, elegit potius cum hostibus partiri quam cum fratre'.

⁴⁴ *Cronica de Wallia*, ed. Thomas Jones in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* xii (1946), p. 32. 'magnus Resus' in this context clearly does not mean Rhys 'the great' but Rhys 'the elder'; see also C.W., s.a. 1204, 1215. The same usage of the term 'magnus' in Giraldus, *Opera*, vi, 143: 'Oeneus magnus', translated by Lloyd, ii, 488, as 'the great', and v, 229: 'Nesta magni filia Resi filii Griffini consobrina'. For a general assessment see Walther Kienast, 'Magnus = der Ältere' in *Historische Zeitschrift*, ccv (1967), pp 1-14. Perhaps the Welsh historian will have to learn also to speak of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth no longer as Llywelyn Fawr but of Llywelyn the elder, if the

English king that was a two-sided agreement. In exchange for a recognition of their continued independent position in North and South Wales respectively, they promised peace to the English king, and this promise was further strengthened by the gift of small territories which they received from the king on feudal terms. King Henry II did not impose a new order upon Wales.³⁰ Instead he recognised developments that had occurred there and that were not of his making. Yet it must not be forgotten that the nucleation of political power in Wales was apparently acceptable to him. To deal with two partners in Wales rather than a dozen made the political game easier, and it was also better to have two rather powerful rulers there than one very powerful man. We are again on the level of conjecture, but we can assume that the order that took shape in Wales was not without advantages for the English king.

A word must now be said about the significance of the title *princeps*. We have seen already that this title was used by the most powerful dynasties only. It also appears to have been used only as long as the ruler in question was powerful. In addition, it was used only by one member of each dynasty at a given time. In short, the title of *princeps* in the legal documents signifies real political power which was indivisible. In this light, the transition from *rex* to *princeps* by some Welsh rulers expresses an increase in political power, not a decrease. *Princeps* signified a position which was higher than that of the earlier Welsh *rex*. In Wales, it denoted a ruler who was considerably more powerful than other Welsh lords, a title which was indivisible within the dynasty. In other words, *princeps* signified a non-royal but autonomous ruler, an institution known in Europe but hitherto unknown in Wales.³¹

While himself gaining in power, the Welsh *princeps* would, of course, thereby deprive other people of their influence. A reaction to this new constellation appears only once, but then in a clear light. In an undated charter, Madog ap Maelgwn, from a noble family of Maellienydd, gave land to the Cistercian abbey, Cwm Hir. At the end of his charter, we find a statement which has a clearly political ring about it: 'Likewise, my nobles (*optimates*) have sworn before many people that they will never tolerate the lordship of any prince over them'.³² The only prince who could exercise any

³⁰ To this extent, I agree with Paul Barbier, *The age of Owain Gwynedd* (London, 1908) who writes on p. 96: '[Henry II] was . . . a defender of the existing state of things; with this exception, that he aimed at a feudal rather than a tribal tenure'.

³¹ For the non-royal ruler, see Wolfram, as above, note 18; for the latest discussion of *princeps* H. H. Kaminsky, 'Zum Sinngehalt des princeps-Titels Arichis II. von Benevent' in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, viii (1974), pp 81-92, with further references; also D. C. Skemer, 'The myth of petty kingship and a new periodisation of feudalism' in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, li (1973), pp 249-70. Further Robert Feenstra, 'Jean de Blanoet et la formule "rex Franciae in regno suo princeps est"' in *Etudes d'Histoire du Droit Canonique dédiées à Gabriel le Bras*, ii (Paris, 1965), pp 885-95.

³² 'Similiter et optimates coram multis juraverunt se nunquam passuros cuiuslibet super se principis dominium' (Tibbot, as in note 17 above), p. 65.

must have occurred in the second half of the twelfth century. The first is this: the traditional Welsh names were no longer used to describe the territory under the control of a ruler, but instead a name was adopted which had long been used in England to describe the country on the western border: *Wallia* and components thereof take the place of the indigenous terms. This is truly remarkable. 'Welsh' meaning 'foreign'²³ was the word that had been used for a long time by the English to describe their western neighbours. It is used in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,²⁴ but was also retained by the Normans. It appears in Domesday Book where it is used in recording the land of Gwynedd which the Norman Robert of Rhuddlan had acquired from Gruffudd ap Cynan. There we read: 'Robert of Rhuddlan holds from the king North Wales (*Nortwales*) at farm for £40, besides that land which the king had given him to hold in fee'. Similarly, the term 'Southwales' occurs in Anglo-Norman royal documents to describe the area of the diocese of St David's in the reign of King Henry I.²⁵

From an English point of view, the bishopric of St David's appears naturally as 'South Wales', as Gwynedd is most conveniently described as 'North Wales', and the terms on which Robert of Rhuddlan held 'North Wales' are even comparable to those (expressed in non-technical, non-official language), granted to Rhys ap Gruffudd and Dafydd ap Owain in 1177, at least in one point: none of them held the Welsh lands in fee, i.e. by feudal tenure with the ordinary obligations. But the parallel goes further. The occurrence of the Welsh rulers in 1177 as kings of 'North Wales' and 'South Wales' respectively cannot surprise us in the works of an English twelfth-century historian (as *Fremdaussage*). They are quite remarkable, however, in charters of the Welsh rulers themselves. These rulers adopted, in the second half of the twelfth century, the English usage as well as the English terminology and used it consistently to the end of independent Wales. Henceforth, the Welsh rulers referred to themselves as rulers of 'North Wales', 'South Wales', 'Wales', 'the Welsh' or variants thereof, not of *Venedotia* (Gwynedd), *Demetia* (Deheubarth), or 'the Britons'.²⁶ In their charter formularies, they submitted to English usage, they accepted the identity impressed upon them from outside.

²³ See Gaston Paris, 'Romani, Romania, lingua Romana, Romanum' in *Romania*, i (1872), pp. 5-6. For a contemporary assessment see Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, vi, 179.

²⁴ *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1892), p. 104: s.a. 922 (921): 'The kings of the North Welsh (*North Wealum*), Hywel, Clydog and Idwal and all the people of Wales gave (Aethelstæd) their allegiance'; s.a. 926: 'King Aethelstan . . . brought into submission all the kings of this island: first Hywel, king of the West Welsh (*West Wala cyning*) and Constantine, king of the Scots, and Owain, king of Gwent'.

²⁵ For 'North Wales' see *Domesday Book*, i, f. 269a; cf. also J. G. Edwards, p. 159f; Lloyd, ii, 387. For 'South Wales' see *Historia et cartularium monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae* (ed. W. H. Hart, Rolls Series, 1865), ii, 76, and cf. *ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁶ It should be noted that the new terms were not adopted in the *Brut* and only at a late stage in the Welsh laws, for which see below, note 49.

gave to Rhys, the king of South Wales, the land of Merioneth, and (Rhys) swore him fealty and liege homage and promised to keep the peace.¹⁵

From this report it appears that the kings of North and South Wales both received from Henry II land outside their own territory in exchange for homage and fealty. It must be stressed that they apparently did not perform these acts for North Wales and South Wales but for the other lands mentioned, and we can assume that they were therefore recognised as independent rulers of North and South Wales. There is no reason to assume that the fact that previous Welsh rulers had paid tribute to the Norman kings¹⁶ had in any way diminished their constitutional position within their own territory. Moreover, at Oxford, only Dafydd and Rhys were recognised as independent lords. In his account of the Oxford meeting of May 1177, Roger Howden thus reports indirectly a growing nucleation of political power in Welsh Wales.

For events of such importance, the historian cannot be satisfied with mere narrative accounts, even when they come from respectable and normally reliable contemporaries. Further evidence is not available from England; we have to turn to Wales itself. There, I shall attempt a different approach and analyse the way in which the Welsh rulers in the twelfth century interpreted their own position. This appears in its clearest light when we consult legal documents that these rulers issued, and when we look at the way in which they referred to themselves. The charters of the Welsh rulers which contain such references are legal documents; most of them record gifts of land that these rulers handed over to Welsh monasteries. In some of the charters it is explicitly stated that they were written, not by a chancery clerk of the ruler, but in the monasteries that received these gifts,¹⁷ and even when this is not recorded we can assume that this was the

¹⁵ Benedict of Peterborough, *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series, 1867), i, p. 162. In his *Chronica*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series, 1869), ii, p. 134, Howden reports, more briefly, the same event but adds: 'et omnes devenerunt homines regis Angliae patris, et fidelitatem ei contra omnes homines et pacem sibi et regno suo servandam juraverunt'. See also Lloyd, ii, 552-3, who fails to see the significance of this arrangement. My interpretation also differs from that of W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (London, 1973), p. 168. The Welsh *Brut y Tywysogion* ('Chronicle of the Princes') does not mention the Oxford meeting. Unless otherwise stated, the *Brut* will be quoted hereafter in the Red Book of Hergest version (hereafter cited as R.B.H.), ed. Thomas Jones (Board of Celtic Studies, History and Law Series, no. xvi, Cardiff, 1955). On this see also Thomas Jones, 'Historical writing in medieval Welsh' in *Scottish Studies*, xii (1968), pp. 15-27.

¹⁶ J. G. Edwards, as above (note 14), p. 161.

¹⁷ See, for example, a charter of Madog ap Maelgwn for the abbey of Cwm Hir: 'Datum litterarum per manum domini Riredi abbatis, mense Maio' (Gildas Tibbot, 'An Abbey-Cwmhir relic abroad' in *Transactions of the Radnorshire Historical Society* v (1936), p. 65); a charter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, c. 1208, to Strata Marcella: 'In manu G. prioris de Stratmarchel'; a charter of Dafydd ap Owain, 1215, to Strata Marcella: 'in manu Dauid abbatis', for both of which see E. D. Jones, N. G. Davies, R. F. Roberts, 'Five Strata Marcella charters' in *National Library of Wales Journal* v (1947), pp. 52, 53. No attempt is made here to assemble all the charters

National consciousness in medieval Wales

obstinately refused to be ruled by one king, and be subject to one lord . . . For if they would only be inseparable, they would also be insuperable: for three things work in their favour: a country which is inaccessible; a population that is accustomed to hard life; and a people entirely trained in arms.⁸

The lack of unity, still so noticeable in 1194, showed signs of being overcome in the thirteenth century. At the time when England was weakened by the severe strife between crown and nobility, independent Wales emerged more powerful than ever before under the leadership of a ruler of Gwynedd who styled himself *princeps Wallie* and was recognised as such by the English king in 1267.⁹ Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd introduced new forms of government at the expense of ancient Welsh customs and traditions. Like his grandfather, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, before him, he married a foreign noble lady, linking himself to the aristocracy and the royal family of England.¹⁰ Under the younger Llywelyn's rule, the principality of Wales became a feudal state like many others in western Europe, a state, furthermore, in feudal dependence on the English king. When the prince of Wales died in rebellion against his overlord in 1282, the principality escheated to the crown. It is true that Edward I had yet to conquer the country in military campaigns which imposed a great strain on the English finances,¹¹ but the process of political nucleation in Wales had created the necessary conditions for a complete takeover. As a result of the political changes in thirteenth-century Wales, the fortune of the country was tied to the destiny of one man.

The changes in native Wales thus briefly outlined greatly increased the political awareness of a considerable section of the population. Those who have left records of their feelings show that a strong sense of identity had emerged among the Welsh people. When, shortly before the defeat of 1282, it was suggested by a mediator that Llywelyn should renounce his principality and accept compensation in England, the nobles of Snowdon replied that 'even if the prince would hand over their seisin to the king, they were not willing to pay homage to a foreigner whose language, laws and customs were altogether unknown to them'.¹² It is difficult to penetrate below this class, but here we have a powerful expression of national identity in the terms of common ancestry, language, laws and customs.

The political developments leading up to this growing sense of national

⁸ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, ed. J. S. Brewer and others (Rolls Series, 21, 8 vols, 1861-91), vi, 225-6.

⁹ See Richter, as above, note 1, passim, and cf. Rees, *Atlas*, plate 41.

¹⁰ See A. J. Roderick, 'Marriage and politics in Wales, 1066-1282' in *Welsh History Review*, iv (1968-9), pp 1-20.

¹¹ Michael Prestwich, *War, politics and finance under Edward I* (London, 1972).

¹² *Registrum epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham*, ed. C. T. Martin (Rolls Series, 1884), ii, 470-71; cf. also Richter, as above note 1.

In medieval Wales, literacy was perhaps even rarer than in England, and a great proportion of the written records which were produced in Wales have been lost. What has been preserved, however, does indicate that by the early twelfth century a new era was dawning, heralded by a considerable increase in these records. Older native tradition was written down, and often still shows clearly that it originated in a society based predominantly on oral tradition and transmission of information. The writing down of old traditions, some anthropologists suggest, is a sure sign of growing self-awareness, which in turn is a necessary step towards national consciousness.²

The vigorous literary activities that occurred do not indicate the end of a period of isolation, but an important re-orientation of Wales. Prior to the twelfth century, this country was tied to Irish society by links which were probably stronger than those with England; in the wake of the Norman conquest of England, Wales was firmly drawn into the orbit of her neighbour to the east. The country was exposed to military aggression from England as never before, and, after two centuries, it was finally conquered by Edward I and subjected to the English crown. Seven more centuries of English rule have not managed, however, to suppress the spirit of Welsh national consciousness, which has survived, sometimes stronger, at other times in a more muted fashion, the loss of political independence and the strong pressures of linguistic acculturation.³ In what follows, I propose to comment only on the very first stage of this remarkable phenomenon by analysing some institutional and political changes in medieval Wales, for it was within the process of political unification that Welsh national consciousness found the earliest expressions which can still be traced. The two centuries before the Edwardian conquest were a time when the Welsh people experienced an enlargement of their view of the world, when gradually they came to know each other as fellow-countrymen by being fellow-sufferers.⁴

In the late eleventh century, Wales was still what it had been for some centuries before: a country politically fragmented, where loyalties were intensely local and a sense of identity was found by looking to the past. The people referred to themselves as *Britones*, 'Britons', harking back to the time when their ancestors had ruled over the whole island. The years that brought the first serious advances into Wales from Anglo-Norman England

² Robert Redfield, *The primitive world and its transformation* (Harmondsworth, 1968), esp. ch. 3.

³ See, e.g., Glanmor Williams, 'Prophecy, poetry and politics in medieval and Tudor Wales' in *British government and administration: studies presented to S. B. Chrimes*, ed. H. Hearder and H. R. Loyn (Cardiff, 1974), pp 104-16; idem, 'Language, literacy and nationality in Wales' in *History* lvi (1971), pp 1-16.

⁴ Redfield, as above, note 2, p. 89.

HISTORICAL ST

This volume contains
read at the twelfth
conference of History
at Trinity College,
May 1975. It is the
volume in the series
Studies, published
Irish Committee of
Sciences. It differs
predecessors in that
component papers
single theme, nation
the pursuit of nation
dependence, as
viewed by eight
Irish, English, Scot
erman, in relation
story of Ireland
Scotland, Europe
British dominions
periods during th
centuries. In an in
itor of the volume
display and draw
main threads in t
papers.