

## Re-Thinking Thirteenth-Century Powys

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The first major task in any study of medieval Powys is to answer a seemingly simple question: ‘Where was it?’ A legend current in the twelfth century, but perceptible in much earlier poetry, told how Powys had once been a substantial kingdom extending through central and north-eastern Wales and into the land that was later to become Shropshire, with a chief court at Pengwern, which was identified as Shrewsbury.<sup>1</sup> But when Powys emerges into the historical record it appears as a diminished polity, confined to lands west of Offa’s Dyke. We hear of kings of Powys or the Powysians in the early ninth century in the Welsh chronicles, while the Pillar of Eliseg near Valle Crucis abbey in the Dee valley close to Llangollen records something of their eighth-century achievements in driving back encroaching Anglo-Saxon forces.<sup>2</sup> That first Powysian kingdom appears to have collapsed in the mid-ninth century, and its territory was occupied principally by the rulers of Gwynedd. In the tenth and eleventh centuries rule over Gwynedd implied rule over Powys. But in the early twelfth century descendants of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn recreated a Powysian realm.<sup>3</sup>

That realm was almost certainly the creation of Maredudd ap Bleddyn (d. 1132), but it was under Maredudd’s son Madog that the kingdom of the Powysians attained its greatest extent.<sup>4</sup> His court poet, Gwalchmai ap Meilir, described Madog’s realm as extending from the summit of Pumlumon to the gates of Chester, and from the forested borders of Meirionnydd to the church of Bangor is Coed.<sup>5</sup> Much later, probably at the close of the thirteenth century, the Powysian kingdom in the reign of Madog was described by the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as having extended from Gwanan in the furthest uplands of Arwystli to Porffordd.<sup>6</sup> Gwanan

- 1 Gerald of Wales identified Pengwern as Shrewsbury and located it precisely at the spot where the castle stands: *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI: Itinerarium Cambriae et Descriptio Cambriae*, ed. by James F. Dimock (London: Rolls Series, 1868), pp. 81, 169. A later version of the story also placed Pengwern in Shrewsbury, but on the site occupied by the college of St Chad: see Huw Pryce, ‘A new edition of the *Historia Divae Monacellae*’, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 82 (1994), 23-40 (esp. p. 28). See also Patrick Sims-Williams, ‘Powys and Early Welsh Poetry’ *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 67 (2014), 33-54.
- 2 See *Annales Cambriae*, ed. by John Williams ab Ithel (London: Rolls Series, 1860), pp. 11-13 for the chronicle references. Important recent discussions of the Pillar of Eliseg include Nancy Edwards, ‘Re-thinking the Pillar of Eliseg’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 89 (2009), 1-35; eadem, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, Vol. 3: North Wales and the Britons 350-1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 414-9.
- 3 David Stephenson, ‘The ‘Resurgence’ of Powys in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 30, ed. by C. P. Lewis (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 182-95.
- 4 For Maredudd’s achievement see *ibid.*, pp. 194-95; for Madog see David Stephenson, ‘Madog ap Maredudd, *Rex Powisensium*’, *Welsh History Review*, 24 (2008), 1-28.
- 5 *Gwaith Meilir Brydydd a’i Ddisgynyddion*, ed. by J. E. Caerwyn Williams et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 7.73-6.
- 6 *Breudwyd Ronabwy* ed. by Melville Richards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1948), p. 1

can be located on the border of Montgomeryshire and Ceredigion, a few miles to the south-west of Llangurig, and Porffordd is Pulford, some five miles from Chester.<sup>7</sup> It is in addition fairly clear that Madog exercised overlordship in parts of the land between Wye and Severn where the ruler of Maelienydd, Cadwallon ap Madog, was his son-in-law.<sup>8</sup> Powys under Madog ap Maredudd was one of the three great polities of Wales, along with Gwynedd and Deheubarth. But on Madog's death in 1160, rapidly followed by that of Llywelyn, his son and almost certainly his designated successor, his kingdom fractured.<sup>9</sup> Forces from Gwynedd attempted to annexe large portions, while several surviving sons, a half-brother, and two nephews all scrambled for possession, and settled for fragments of the territory of the dead king.<sup>10</sup> At about the same time the under-kingdom of Arwystli moved away from Powysian control; the burial in 1185 of the king of Arwystli, Hywel ab Ieuf, in the abbey of Strata Florida, re-founded by the Lord Rhys ap Gruffudd of Deheubarth in the mid-1160s, suggests that Hywel had placed himself and his small realm under the protection of the southern ruler.<sup>11</sup> In Maelienydd Cadwallon ap Madog seems to have followed the same course within a few years and moved into the orbit of the Lord Rhys.<sup>12</sup>

Over the next half-century the pattern of thirteenth-century possession of the lands over which Madog ap Maredudd had ruled was established. In the north-west much of the province of Penllyn was occupied by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd in 1202 at the expense of Elise, youngest of Madog ap Maredudd's sons.<sup>13</sup> In Edeirnion and Dinmael another son, Owain Brogyntyn, eventually established a lordship that was to remain in the hands of his descendants for many generations.<sup>14</sup> The north-eastern provinces of Iâl and English and Welsh Maelor, together with Nanheudwy and Cynllaith, were acquired, step by step, by the descendants of

7 For Pulford see *ibid.*, pp. 23-4; for Gwanan (rather than the form Gwauan /Gwavan ) see *ibid.* p. 24 and the comments of the present writer in a review of Huw Pryce, *The Acts of Welsh Rulers 1120-1283*, in *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 92 (2004), 149-51 (p. 150).

8 Stephenson, 'Madog ap Maredudd', pp. 16-17.

9 Geraint R. Gruffydd, 'Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr and the Partition of Powys', *Studia Celtica*, 38 (2004), 97-106; Stephenson, 'Madog ap Maredudd', pp. 22-4.

10 The sons were Gruffudd, Owain Fychan and Owain Brogyntyn; a further son, Elise, was almost certainly too young to take part in the initial scramble, but appears later in Edeirnion and Penllyn; the half-brother was Iorwerth Goch, and the nephews Maredudd ap Hywel (Edeirnion) and Owain Cyfeiliog. The divisions of Powys after 1160 are fully considered by the present writer in a forthcoming book on Powys in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

11 *Brut y Tywysogyon, Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955) [henceforth *BT, RBH*], pp. 168-9.

12 This is suggested by the fact (noted *ibid.*, pp. 164-5 that Cadwallon was one of the rulers taken to Gloucester by Rhys for a meeting with Henry II in 1175. Cadwallon's acceptance of Rhys as an overlord was not immediate in 1160, for when he sized his brother Einion Clud in that year he handed him not to Rhys but to Owain ap Gruffudd: *ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5, where Llywelyn ab Iorwerth's seizure of the castle of Bala is recorded; see also *Brut y Tywysogyon Peniarth 20 Version*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952), p. 82, which identifies the castle left to Elise as Crogen; these references establish that Llywelyn had taken control of most, but not all, of Penllyn.

14 A. D. Carr, 'Edeirnion' in *History of Merioneth, ii: The Middle Ages*, ed. by J. Beverley Smith and Llinos Beverley Smith (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 137ff.

Gruffudd ap Madog.<sup>15</sup> A further son of Madog, Owain Fychan, known in English sources as Owain de turri or de la tour, possessed as his core territory the cantrefs of Mechain, Mochnant-is-Rhaeadr, and, for a time, Cynllaith, until he was killed in 1187 by the sons of his cousin, Owain Cyfeiliog.<sup>16</sup> Owain Fychan's descendants would periodically hold territories in that region until the later thirteenth century. Owain Cyfeiliog himself emerged from the chaos of the 1160s as the lord of all of the southern parts of Madog ap Maredudd's kingdom. A concerted attack on him in 1167 by Owain Gwynedd, the Lord Rhys, and his cousin Owain Fychan succeeded only briefly; with the support of English forces Owain Cyfeiliog re-established control over his territories, a process mostly accomplished in 1167 and completed by 1170.<sup>17</sup> Owain's lordship was formed around an axis running from the cradle of his line of the dynasty in the western commote of Cyfeiliog, centred by the 1180s on the castle of Tafolwern, to the Cistercian abbey and dynastic mausoleum that he founded in 1170 to celebrate and entrench his power, at Strata Marcella in the east of his realm near the border with English territory.<sup>18</sup>

The realm of Madog ap Maredudd had thus been splintered into at least six lordships, of which two, one held by the descendants of Gruffudd ap Madog ap Maredudd in the north and one by those of Owain Cyfeiliog in the south, were the largest and most important. The northern territory became known as the lordship of Bromfield (Maelor Gymraeg), the most substantial of its constituent parts.<sup>19</sup> It was the southern territory, ruled in turn by Owain Cyfeiliog, his son Gwenwynwyn, his grandson Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, and Gruffudd's son Owain, that would become known as the principality of Powys in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The bounds of that territory remained somewhat uncertain. Gwenwynwyn annexed Arwystli to Powys in 1197, almost certainly with the consent or even the encouragement of some of the leading figures of that

- 15 A good example of the possessions of Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor I is given in his charter of 1202: *The Acts of Welsh Rulers 1120-1283*, ed. by Huw Pryce (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), no. 501.
- 16 *BT, RBH*, pp. 170-71; Gerald of Wales believed that the killing was done by Owain Cyfeiliog himself: see *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, VI, pp. 142-3. It is possible to reconcile these accounts by supposing that Owain instigated the killing and his sons carried it out.
- 17 See David Stephenson, 'The Supremacy in (Southern) Powys of Owain Fychan: a Reconsideration', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 49 (2005), 45-55.
- 18 For discussion of the political dimension to acts of monastic foundation or major benefaction see David Stephenson, 'The Rulers of Gwynedd and Powys' in *Monastic Wales: New Approaches*, ed. by Janet Burton and Karen Stöber (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 89-102 (pp. 96-8). It is fairly clear that the foundation of Strata Marcella was in part an act of celebration of Owain Cyfeiliog's recovery of his lands, and in part an act of defiance of the Lord Rhys, one of the principal aggressors of 1167. It is surely no coincidence that Rhys invaded Owain's territory again in 1171. See for discussion Rhian M. Andrews and David Stephenson, 'Draig Argoed: Iorwerth Goch ap Maredudd c.1110-1171', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 52 (2006), 65-91 (pp. 75-6).
- 19 Madog ap Maredudd's son Gruffudd appears as Gruffudd of Bromfield as early as 1167-8: *Pipe Roll 14 Henry II*, p. 119 records a royal gift of 10 marks to *Griffino de Brunfeld*.
- 20 Gwenwynwyn took the title 'prince of Powys' in *Acts of Welsh Rulers* nos. 548-9, 565, and that of 'prince' in no. 551.

kingdom.<sup>21</sup> Together with the land between the rivers Dyfi and Dulas in northern Cyfeiliog, Arwystli was detached from Powys and effectively incorporated into Gwynedd in 1274, but these lands were regained by Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn in 1277 and he frustrated Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's efforts to add them to his attenuated principality in the following years.<sup>22</sup> Mechain and Mochnant-uwch-Rhaeadr were a bone of contention between the descendants of Owain Fychan and those of Owain Cyfeiliog but were finally secured by Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn: both were part of the patrimony that he left to his descendants.<sup>23</sup> By his marriage to Margaret Corbet at the start of the century Gwenwynwyn had gained part of the Gorddwr, the land that lay across the Severn from Welshpool and included the flank of the Long Mountain.<sup>24</sup> Thereafter the Powysian lords contested the possession of Gorddwr with the Corbets of Caus, a division of that land emerging in the years after 1277.<sup>25</sup> A narrow strip of territory, the thirteen townships between Rhiw and Helygi on the eastern border of Cedewain, had been lost to the lord of the latter territory, Maredudd ap Rhobert, in 1216, regained in 1245, but was lost permanently in 1274.<sup>26</sup> A claim to Deuddwr by Gruffudd ap Madog of Bromfield in the 1240s and renewed by his son Madog in 1277 was beaten off, and that region remained in the hands of descendants of Owain Cyfeiliog.<sup>27</sup>

After the death of Gwenwynwyn in 1216 the later members of his dynasty did not refer to themselves in surviving documents as princes, nor did they style themselves lords of Powys in their *acta*. Instead, on those occasions when they used a territorial designation they styled themselves as lords of Cyfeiliog, emphasizing their ancestral heartland.<sup>28</sup> In the later thirteenth century they employed an alternative designation, that of de la Pole, after their chief stronghold near Welshpool, the present Powis Castle, probably first built by Gruffudd ap

- 21 David Stephenson, 'The most powerful persons in the land: patterns of power in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arwystli', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 93 (2005), 17-36 (pp. 25-6).
- 22 The confrontation between Prince Llywelyn and Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn and his son Owain over Arwystli and the lands between Dyfi and Dulas have been the subject of numerous studies. For recent assessments see David Stephenson, 'The Arwystli Case' *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 94 (2006), 1-13; idem 'The Whole Land between Dyfi and Dulas' *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 95 (2007), 1-8.
- 23 See for example G. T. O. Bridgeman, 'The Princes of Upper Powys', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 1 (1868) pp. 140-41.
- 24 Richard Morgan, 'The territorial divisions of medieval Montgomeryshire', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 69 (1981), 9-44 (p. 39).
- 25 Idem, 'The territorial divisions of medieval Montgomeryshire', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 70 (1982), 11-34 (p. 15).
- 26 Morgan, 'Territorial divisions', (1981) pp. 11-21.
- 27 *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1232-47*, p. 466; *The Welsh Assize Roll 1278-84*, ed. by James Conway Davies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1940), p. 15; *Acts of Welsh Rulers* no. 527.
- 28 *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, nos. 593, 603. Hawise, wife of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, called herself Domina de Cyfeiliog on her seal: see Michael Powel Siddons, *The Development of Welsh Heraldry*, Vol. I (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1991), p. 291.

Gwenwynwyn in the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The lords of the northern parts of the former kingdom of Madog ap Maredudd tended to adopt distinctive styles: lords of Bromfield, of Iâl, of/in Edeirnion, and, further south, lords of Mechain.<sup>30</sup> They remembered that they were Powysian lords: poets addressing the lords of Bromfield/Maelor in the thirteenth century sometimes emphasized their Powysian identity, and as late as 1322 Madog ap Gruffudd, lord of Hendwr, one of the barons of Edeirnion, successfully sought the office of *pentulu*, or military leader of the lordship of Powys.<sup>31</sup> But the polity that was most explicitly that of Powys was the creation of Owain Cyfeiliog and his son Gwenwynwyn, embracing most of the later Montgomeryshire, and that will be the focus of the following examination. Their descendants were identified as lords of Powys in their relatively rare appearances in the Welsh chronicles and in a number of late thirteenth-century records.<sup>32</sup> That is not to say that Gwenwynwyn and his successors were consistently in control of Powys. The land was occupied by the rulers of Gwynedd for long periods, in 1208–10, 1216–40, 1244, 1257–63, 1274–77.<sup>33</sup> On occasions the Gwynedd princes had claimed, perhaps not without careful omissions of fact, that annexation was justified by a Powysian failure to stand by agreements, as in 1216 or 1274.<sup>34</sup> But at other times Powys was quite simply an obstacle to Venedotian expansion.

Perhaps the first major point to emerge from this very rapid survey of the origins and development of Powys in the high middle ages is the transitory nature of the extensive Powysian realm of the twelfth century. It lasted for little more than the lifetime of Madog ap Maredudd. In that respect it simply did not have the continuity of existence that marked Gwynedd and Deheubarth. This perhaps explains an almost obsessive Powysian interest in tradition: Rachel Bromwich

- 29 For the construction of Powis castle see David Stephenson, 'Powis Castle: a re-appraisal of its medieval development', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 95 (2007), 9-21; for examples of the designation 'de la Pole' see Bridgeman, Princes of Upper Powys', pp. 138 (Owain ap Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn), 141 (Hawise, widow of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn), 149 (Llywelyn, son of Gruffudd de la Pole).
- 30 Lords/ladies of Bromfield: *Acts of Welsh Rulers* nos. 328, 418, 497-8, 510, 514-6, 520, 523-4, 526-7, 530, 533-4, 536-7; lord of Iâl: *ibid.*, nos. 418, 529-30; lord of Edeirnion: *ibid.*, no. 482; lordship in Edeirnion, *ibid.*, no. 504; lords of Mechain: *ibid.*, nos. 328, 614.
- 31 David Stephenson, 'Crisis and Continuity in a fourteenth-century Welsh Lordship: the Struggle for Powys, 1312-32', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 66 (2013), 57-78 (p., 71).
- 32 See for examples *BT, RBH*, pp. 190-1, 206-7, 236-7; *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 601.
- 33 J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 volumes, single pagination, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London, 1939), pp. 621, 630, 633, 699, 719, 722, 749, 755-8.
- 34 The Venedotian case in 1216 is reflected in the comment of *Cronica de Wallia*, p. 10 sub anno 1215, that Gwenwynwyn had joined the king *postpositis ac despectis iuramentis, fide, cartis scriptis, cyrographis que domino Lewelino et principibus ac magnatibus Wallie dederat, necnon et homagio et obsidibus quos predicto L[jewelino] fecerat et dederat* (having set aside and scorned the oaths, promises, written charters and chirographs that he had given to the lord Llywelyn and to the princes and magnates of Wales, as well as the homage that he had performed and the hostages that he had given to the aforesaid Llywelyn). The reference to the surrender of hostages is particularly revealing of the pressure that Gwenwynwyn had been under to accept Llywelyn's growing supremacy. Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's case against Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn is set out in *Littere Wallie* ed. by J. G. Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1940), pp. 108-10, 136-8. It is critically examined in the forthcoming work referred to in note 10 above.

noted ‘an especially lively interest in the older heroic traditions’ at the court of Madog ap Maredudd.<sup>35</sup> Madog even named one of his sons Elise, surely to make a link with the old dynasty. Madog’s nephew, Owain Cyfeiliog, was himself reputed to be a poet, the author in 1156 of a work, ‘Hirlas Owain’, which closely follows the style and structure of the ancient poem, *Y Gododdin*.<sup>36</sup> The extended realm of Powys was an exceptional achievement, and it created an expectation that haunted later Powysian leaders – as witness the opening lines of the prose tale *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, in which the admiring description of Madog’s realm may be interpreted as a reproach aimed at later-thirteenth century Powysian rulers.<sup>37</sup> But far from representing a decline, the achievement of Owain Cyfeiliog and his line in maintaining and indeed in extending the most significant of the Powysian successor polities, and in ultimately overcoming the attempts of successive rulers of Gwynedd to re-absorb Powys into their dominion, must count as a significant triumph. Long after the extinction of Gwynedd and Deheubarth as polities, the lordship of Powys survived – though as we shall see survival was only one of many achievements.

We may well ask how Owain Cyfeiliog and his successors achieved the remarkable feat of establishing such an enduring polity. Personally they were resilient and determined, and were prepared to fight to hold or reclaim their territories. In this they perhaps resemble the commitment over two centuries of the Mortimers of Wigmore to build an empire centred on Maelienydd. Notoriously, the main key to Powysian success was accommodation with the English. English armies helped to restore Powysian rulers who had been driven from, or kept out of, their lands in 1167 (Owain Cyfeiliog), 1210 (Gwenwynwyn), 1240–41, 1244, and 1277 (Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn).<sup>38</sup> Gwenwynwyn turned once more for help in 1216 to his old friend and ally Ranulf of Chester whose assault on Gwynedd, culminating in the taking of Degannwy in 1210 had probably helped to enable, or had provided the opportunity for, the Powysian prince to regain his territories. England, particularly his estate of Ashford in Derbyshire, provided a place of refuge for Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn during the long exile of 1216–40, as did the Shropshire March in 1257–63, and Shrewsbury and that same March in 1274–77.<sup>39</sup> Links with the English regime and with marcher magnates who often supplied that regime with military commanders and officials were strengthened by repeated

35 *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. by Rachel Bromwich, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp. xcvi–xcvii.

36 For the argument that Cynddelw, rather than Owain Cyfeiliog, was actually the poet see Gruffydd Aled Williams, ‘Owain Cyfeiliog: Bardd-dywysog?’ in *Beirdd a Thywysogion* ed. by B. F. Roberts and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press/National Library of Wales, 1996), 180–201.

37 *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, p. 1.

38 1167: *BT, RBH*, pp. 148–9; 1210: *ibid*, pp. 188–9; 1241: *ibid*, 236–7; 1244: *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence concerning Wales*, ed. by J. G. Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1935), p. 21; 1277: *ibid*, p. 81.

39 For the importance of Gruffudd’s Derbyshire lands see *Acts of Welsh Rulers* nos. 582–90, 597 and 599; for Gruffudd’s activity in the Shropshire March see David Stephenson, ‘The politics of Powys Wenwynwyn in the thirteenth century’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 7 (1984), 39–61.

marriages between the men of Powysian ruling families and marcher women. The children of such marriages moved easily in Welsh, English, and marcher circles. Amongst the descendants of Owain Cyfeiliog, Gwenwynwyn married Margaret Corbet, Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn took as a wife Hawise LeStrange, and his son Owain married Joan Corbet. Owain's brother Llywelyn married Sybil, daughter of Hugh Turberville, lord of Crickhowell, and widow of Grimbald Pauncefote, one of Edward I's trusted officials. Owain's son married Ela, a member of the Audley family. In northern Powys, Gruffudd of Bromfield (d. 1269) was married to Emma, another Audley.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that those contacts, marital and political, with English rulers and marcher magnates have been the cause of much of the disparagement of or the silence about Powysian leaders that characterizes so much of the work of historians of Wales in the past century and more. It is to the historiography that I now turn.

The tone of much of the treatment of the dynasty of Powys was set in 1905, by the curious figure of Owen Rhoscomyl, in his book *Flame-bearers of Welsh History*, which included comments such as: 'Could [Gwenwynwyn's] abilities have been used for his country, under Llywelyn, then the record of that time would have been finer still, and the result might well have been permanent.' The implication, of course, is that Gwenwynwyn's failure to subject himself to Llywelyn is to be identified as the reason for the latter's failure to found an enduring independent principality. It is thus but a short step to the accusation of treason, when we are told that 'from Powys he [Llywelyn ap Gruffudd] drove the traitor Gruffudd, son of Gwenwynwyn of traitor memory'.<sup>41</sup> It is not to be expected that Sir John Lloyd, a far greater historian (indeed perhaps the greatest historian ever to write about medieval Wales), should be so intemperate. Yet at times he came close. Writing of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn he stated calmly that '...when he turned traitor and cast off his allegiance, he was easily driven out of his territories by his overlord [Llywelyn ap Gruffudd]...' There is here no attempt to investigate what may have turned Gruffudd against Llywelyn. But Lloyd's principal point about the Powysian lords of the thirteenth century was that it was futile to expect too much of them: 'Gwenwynwyn had in him the making of a patriot, but fate decreed that he should rule over Powys...' Elsewhere he noted that 'the realm of Powys was not fitted by nature to play a heroic part in the conflict between Welsh and English'.<sup>42</sup> Among the several interesting and dubious notions in these statements is the element of geographic determinism, and the assumption that Welsh politics were to be interpreted simply in terms of the conflict between Welsh and English.

With T. P. Ellis, author of the massive but misguided *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, we return to more vitriolic comment. Writing,

40 Stephenson, *ibid*; *idem*, 'Crisis and Continuity', p. 60, and *idem*, 'Potens et Prudens: Gruffudd ap Madog, lord of Bromfield 1236-69', *Welsh History Review*, 22 (2005), 409-32 (419); the whole subject of Welsh-marcher inter-marriage in this period is now receiving proper attention through the work of Emma Cavell. See in particular her 'Welsh Princes, English Wives: the Politics of Powys Wenwynwyn revisited', *Welsh History Review*, 27 (2014), 214-52.

41 Owen Rhoscomyl, *Flame-Bearers of Welsh History*, (Merthyr Tydfil: Welsh Educational Publishing Company, 1905), pp. 150, 184.

42 Lloyd, *History of Wales*, where the comments quoted appear, in order, at pp. 748, 650, 411.

ironically, in the journal of the Powysland Club in 1930, Ellis referred to one of the late-thirteenth century lords of Powys as ‘a degenerate scion of a degenerate stock’, and went on to condemn ‘the rottenness of the Gwenwynwyn branch of Powys, succumbing to the impact of Norman feudal ideas...’<sup>43</sup> A generation later James Conway Davies was to dismiss Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn simply as a ‘time-server’, while as late as 1997 Henry Loyn, former Professor of Medieval History at Cardiff, writing in the *Montgomeryshire Collections*, noted of what he called ‘the Gwenwynwyn family’ that ‘some mutter “quislings” when they reflect on the relationship with Llywelyn the Last’.<sup>44</sup> Francis Jones, meanwhile, had offered a much more balanced view in 1958, when he emphasized that ‘Powys suffered as much, if not more, from the Welsh as from the Anglo-Normans’, and concluded that ‘although historians are apt to condemn the, apparently, unpatriotic conduct of certain Powysian princes, we must always bear in mind the peculiar difficulties with which the dynasty had to contend’.<sup>45</sup>

Representative of a growing modern consensus that the achievement of the Powysian lords was simply to survive, Rees Davies, writing in 1987, noted that their survival was due ‘above all to their capacity to trim their sails to every change of wind in the political situation in Wales.’<sup>46</sup> The notion that the Powysians were particularly characterized by the practice of changing sides is, incidentally, hardly convincing. Nimbleness in making and breaking alliances or acknowledging and rejecting allegiance was a characteristic of many contemporary Welsh leaders. Let us take as an example one of the sons of the Lord Rhys, Rhys Gryg. The *Brut* records that he broke an agreement with his nephews Rhys and Owen, sons of Gruffudd, in 1209, when he took the castle of Llangadog, presumably from them; in 1210 he allied with King John and took the castle of Llandoverly; in 1211 he was first with, then against John, then with him, then against him again. He continued to oppose the royal interest in south Wales and was imprisoned on John’s orders in 1213. Released in 1215 he rapidly turned against John once more, but was amongst the Welsh leaders who made their peace with Henry III’s government in 1218. By 1220 he was acting against royal orders and came into conflict with Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, at this point acting as Henry III’s agent. But by 1223 Rhys was once more closely allied to Llywelyn, remaining one of his subordinates until his death in 1233.<sup>47</sup>

Lest we should conclude that political manoeuvrability was a characteristic of Powys and Deheubarth alone, it should be remembered that Llywelyn Fawr himself

43 T. P. Ellis, ‘The Powys ‘Inquisitiones’ 1293-1311’, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 41(1930), 171-92 (p. 192).

44 Davies, *Welsh Assize Roll*, p. 74; H. R. Loyn, ‘Llanfyllin: the charter and the Laws of Breteuil’, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 85 (1997), 13-21 (p. 17).

45 Francis Jones, ‘The dynasty of Powys’ *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, (1958), 23-32 (p. 25).

46 R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 233.

47 Most of these changes of allegiance or alignment can be found in *BT, RBH*, pp. 188-93, 196-9, 204-7, 216-9. The confrontation with Llywelyn in 1220 is recorded in *Acts of Welsh Rulers* no. 248 and clarified in the notes thereto. Rhys’s activities in support of Llywelyn from 1223 are in *BT, RBH*, pp. 224-7 and 232-3.



was quite capable of making abrupt reversals of policy and of becoming an earnest supplicant for English support when such moves promised to be advantageous. Thus he was an opponent of the English interest in north Wales in the 1190s, as long as the English government gave active support to his uncle, Dafydd ab Owain, who was married to Emma of Anjou, Henry II's half-sister. But the danger of English intervention in favour of Dafydd lessened progressively in the later 1190s and the early 1200s. After Llywelyn captured Dafydd in 1197 he released him into the hands of Hubert Walter and exile in England. It seems clear that Llywelyn was now prepared to move towards an accommodation with the English government. Such an accommodation involved acceptance of his subjection to the English king, implicit in a guarded confirmation to him by John in 1199 of all the lands to which he had a right, and made clear in the treaty of 1201, which set out in detail the fact that Llywelyn had 'sworn to observe fealty to King John for ever in respect of his life, limbs and earthly honour'. Dafydd's death in 1203 paved the way for an opportunistic and successful bid by Llywelyn for the hand of John's illegitimate daughter Joan. To secure this match Llywelyn was ready to renounce a marriage to the daughter of the Manx king that he had previously sought.<sup>48</sup> Throughout much of his career Llywelyn was prepared to accept, to confirm, to rely on, or to depart from his fealty to the English kings as occasion demanded. Of course, it can be argued that some shifts in his allegiance were forced upon Llywelyn; but exactly the same argument may be used to explain and justify Gwenwynwyn's actions. And in the pursuit of his ambitions Llywelyn was not above breaking his promises. To secure an agreement with Henry III's government in 1218 he undertook to return Powys to its rightful heirs, the sons of Gwenwynwyn, when they came of age, and meanwhile to provide for their maintenance out of the revenues of their patrimony.<sup>49</sup> He certainly failed to honour the first of these undertakings, and there is no evidence that he fulfilled the second. Similarly we should not assume that marriage alliances with marcher families necessarily entailed subjection to English interests, nor that these were specific to the dynasty of Powys. Llywelyn Fawr's son Dafydd married Isabella de Braose from the lordship of Brecon; of Llywelyn's daughters, Gwladus married first Reginald de Braose, then Ralph Mortimer; Margaret married a de Braose and then a Clifford; Gwenllian married William de Lacy; Elen married John the Scot, heir to the earldom of Chester.<sup>50</sup>

In recent times explicit disparagement has given way to a more subtle air-brushing of Powys from the pages of history. After 1160, we are sometimes told, Powys ceased to be of moment.<sup>51</sup> Its lords have been relegated to a place of

48 The agreement of 1201 and its background are discussed in Ifor W. Rowlands, 'The 1201 Peace between King John and Llywelyn ap Iorwerth', *Studia Celtica*, 34 (2000), 149-66. See also *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 221. The projected marriage between the daughter of King Rognvald of Man and Llywelyn, and its abandonment by Llywelyn in favour of the marriage to Joan is discussed in R. Andrew McDonald, *Manx Kingship in its Irish Sea Setting, 1187-1229* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 103-4.

49 *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 240.

50 Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 766.

51 David Walker, *Medieval Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 92, judged that southern Powys, to which Owain Cyfeiliog laid claim in the years after 1160 'was to remain as a weak but undivided unit until 1286'.

secondary importance in the great drama of the thirteenth century in Wales. One of the reasons, though not one that is generally acknowledged, for the disparagement and neglect to which thirteenth-century Powys has been subjected is that it is not well covered in terms of some of the most potentially useful of the sources of evidence. In some cases this absence or obscurity of evidence has created a void into which Powys all but disappears; in others it has meant that we see Powys and its people only through the eyes of outsiders and enemies. It is time, therefore, to consider the raw materials available to the historian.

Powys was not a focus of the Welsh chronicles that cover the thirteenth century. Apart from a group relating almost entirely to south-east Wales, these belong to two major families, the Latin annals generally known as *Annales Cambriae*, and the Welsh-language chronicles known as the Brutiau. There are two texts of *Annales Cambriae* that cover this period, known traditionally as the B-text and the C-text. The B-text is particularly complex: at the outset of the century it appears to have been compiled at St Davids, but after 1203 it becomes patchy and in places inaccurate; there is no clear indication that it was being kept up regularly, and no clear sign of where it was written, though Whitland is probable. From 1231 it was based on a Strata Florida text, though again, that may have been copied into the chronicle at Whitland. From 1256 it reflects annalistic activity at Whitland and then at Cwm-hir.<sup>52</sup> The material of Cwm-hir provenance comes to an end in 1263, and thereafter the B-text appears to be more of an Anglo-Welsh composition with entries perhaps made at the abbey of Neath and probably by an annalist who was not a Welshman.<sup>53</sup> In this last section, which ends in 1286, it is not uninterested in Welsh developments, but with one significant exception it ignores Powys.<sup>54</sup> The C-text, which breaks off in 1288, is throughout a St Davids production, and is relatively parochial, focussed on south-west Wales. There is almost no coverage of events in Powys. The fact that for a few years in the mid-century the B-text was a product of Cwm-hir at first sight appears promising. But close analysis reveals that the interest of the compiler was principally on the regions of the March in which Cwm-hir had granges, and that Powys, which contained primarily granges of Strata Marcella, was consequently largely ignored.<sup>55</sup> One further Latin chronicle, known

- 52 David Stephenson, 'Gerald of Wales and *Annales Cambriae*: a reconsideration', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 60 (2010), 23-37; idem, 'The chronicler at Cwmhir abbey, 1257-63: the construction of a Welsh chronicle' in *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages* ed. by R. A. Griffiths and P. R. Schofield, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), 29-45.
- 53 Kathleen Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin Chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and related texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1973), 233-52 (pp. 225-6). This paper was also published as a separate print, and appears in eadem, *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1980), 67-85.
- 54 The exception is found under the year 1274, and concerns the clash between Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn in that year. The B-text records that *eodem anno dominus Griffinus filius Wennunwen Powisiae dominus totam terram suam reliquit, qui Angliam profectus est a rege Edwardo benigne commendatus. Et hoc propter persecutionem Nortwalensium.....* (In that same year Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn lord of Powys left all his land; hastening to England he was well received by King Edward. And this [expulsion] resulted from [his] persecution by the north Welsh.) The significance of the passage is discussed in detail in the forthcoming work to which reference is made in note 10 above.
- 55 Stephenson, 'The chronicler at Cwmhir abbey', pp. 34-5.

as *Cronica de Wallia*, which runs from 1190 to the 1260s, appears to have been a product of Whitland abbey, though it also reveals the influence of Strata Florida.<sup>56</sup> It contains a few significant references to Powysian developments that are not recorded elsewhere, but its south-western provenance means that it does not focus on central and eastern Welsh matters.<sup>57</sup> It appears to be closely related to the Welsh-language chronicles, and it is to them that we now turn.

The Welsh-language chronicles, generally fuller than the Latin annals in *Annales Cambriae*, exist in two main versions, the Peniarth MS 20 and the Red Book of Hergest versions of the Chronicle of the Princes (*Brut y Tywysogion*). A third version, known as *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, comes to an end as an independent text in 1197, after which it follows the Peniarth 20 text, with the admixture of some English annals derived from Winchester.<sup>58</sup> Both versions of the *Brut* texts for the later-twelfth and the thirteenth century are possibly derived from a lost Latin chronicle, or a collection of chronicle materials, assembled at Strata Florida but including material drawn from other Welsh Cistercian houses. For one period, the later 1180s and the 1190s, some material appears to have come from Strata Marcella, and the *Brut* entries are unusually instructive for Powys.<sup>59</sup> But in the main, the thirteenth-century content of the Brutiau reflects a west-Wales origin and the influence of the Gwynedd rulers, who were frequently the dominant force in the politics of that region. The only significant exception is the addition to the Peniarth 20 version of the *Brut*, running from 1282 to 1332, which was compiled at the north Powysian house of Valle Crucis, and even this is patchy and disappointing.<sup>60</sup>

In sum, therefore, the Welsh annals and chronicles deal only infrequently with Powysian matters, and then mainly when Powysian rulers came into unsuccessful collision with the rulers of Gwynedd, whose exploits form a dominant thread in their story. We are dealing, in short, with sources that are ‘partial’ in both senses of that word. Nor is the balance redressed when we turn to chronicles of English origin. In many of these, coverage of Welsh affairs is slight, and the annalists who devote significant attention to Wales usually focus on areas adjacent to their houses or areas in which their houses had a specific interest, such as estates or

56 “‘Cronica de Wallia’” and other documents from Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3514’, ed. by Thomas Jones, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 12 (1946-48), 27-44; also in a separate print. For discussion see J. Beverley Smith, ‘The ‘Cronica de Wallia’ and the dynasty of Dinefwr’, *ibid.*, 20 (1963-4), 261-82.

57 One of the most interesting references relating to Powys is the statement, *sub* 1228, that Henry III’s *Ceri* campaign of that year was intended to restore Gwenwynwyn’s sons to their lands.

58 *Brenhinedd y Saesson or The Kings of the Saxons* ed. and trans. by Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971).

59 Both versions of the *Brut*, and *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, contain very full accounts of the siege of Pool castle (probably to be identified as *Domen Castell*, on the edge of Welshpool town rather than as a structure on the site of Powis castle). A Strata Marcella provenance for some entries in the late twelfth century is indicated by the recording of the deaths of two abbots of that house, Ithel (1187) and Gruffudd (1196), together with the death and burial of Owain Cyfeiliog at the abbey in 1197. See for example *BT, RBH* pp. 170-1, 176-7, 180-1. Strata Marcella receives no other mention in the *Brutiau*.

60 G. and T.M. Charles-Edwards, ‘The continuation of *Brut y Tywysogion* in Peniarth MS 20’, in *Essays and Poems presented to Daniel Huws*, ed. by T. Jones and E. B. Fryde (Aberystwyth, 1994), 293-305.

a daughter-house. Thus the Worcester and Tewkesbury annals deal most fully with developments in the central and southern March, a focus strengthened in the case of Tewkesbury by the fact that that house had a dependent priory at Cardiff; the Chester annals, a most interesting source, nevertheless look most keenly at Gwynedd or at the north-Powysian lordship of Bromfield. The same observation applies to the annals of the Staffordshire house of Dieulacres, originally sited at Poulton on the border of Cheshire and Maelor Gymraeg.<sup>61</sup> The odd and erratic text known as the Wigmore *Historia Fundatorum* deals with territories in the middle March that were of particular interest to the main branch of the Mortimer family, and so look no further than Ceri and Cedewain, both territories that were no part of the Powysian polity.<sup>62</sup> The fact is that just as there are only hints of annalistic activity at the Powysian monastery of Strata Marcella, no border house close to Powys, such as Haughmond or Shrewsbury, has left a chronicle.

Among other sources of evidence, the large quantity of Welsh-language court poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the work of the Poets of the Princes, was excellently edited in the series *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion* in the 1990s.<sup>63</sup> By far the most important source of that corpus of poetry is the Hendregadredd manuscript, compiled probably at the close of the thirteenth century at Strata Florida. Much of the manuscript was the work of a single scribe, known only as  $\alpha$ .<sup>64</sup> The collection appears to be selective – though whether selection was the work of  $\alpha$  or already existed in the sources on which he drew cannot be determined. But the material presented in the Hendregadredd manuscript cannot be regarded as a representative cross-section of the court poetry of the period. The twelfth-century Powysian rulers are well represented in the surviving work of the court poets. But from the time of Gwenwynwyn ab Owain Cyfeiliog onwards the picture is different. Only three poems to Gwenwynwyn are included; no poem to Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn has survived, while there exists just a single poem to his son and principal successor Owain.<sup>65</sup> For the thirteenth century it is the Gwynedd rulers who are by far the best represented in the Hendregadredd manuscript. It is noteworthy that their Welsh opponents appear to be almost entirely excluded. And even in the twelfth-century material, where poems to Powysians are more fully represented, it is possible that the inclusion in the corpus of poems to Madog ap Maredudd

61 For the Tewkesbury annals see *Annales Monastici* I, ed. by H. R. Luard (London: Rolls Series, 1864); the chronicle of the dependent priory of Cardiff is in ‘Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century, MS Exchequer Domesday’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 3rd Series, 8 (1862), 272-83. The Worcester annals are in *Annales Monastici* IV, ed. by H. R. Luard (London: Rolls Series, 1869). For the Chester annals see *Annales Cestrienses* ed. by R. C. Christie (Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1886). The Dieulacres annals were published in translation by Geoffrey Barraclough in *The Cheshire Sheaf* for 1957.

62 The *Historia Fundatorum* is printed in Dugdale’s *Monasticon Anglicanum*, Vol. 6 (i) pp. 343ff.

63 *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*, 7 volumes, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991-96).

64 An excellent discussion of the work of  $\alpha$  is provided by Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press/National Library of Wales, 2000) especially pp. 196-215.

65 The poems to Gwenwynwyn are in *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr*, I, ed. by Nerys Ann Jones and Ann Parry Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), poems 18-20, and that to Owain ap Gruffudd in *Gwaith Dafydd Benfras ac Eraill o Feirdd Hanner Cyntaf* [sic] *y Drydedd Ganrif ar Ddeg*, ed. N. G. Costigan et al., (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995).

stems from the fact that through his daughter he was the grandfather of Llywelyn Fawr, while the survival of several poems addressed to Madog's son Owain Fychan – even though one was a *bygwth*, a poem of threat – may be the result of his status as an ally of Owain Gwynedd.<sup>66</sup> Significantly, the survival of poetry to the descendants of Gruffudd ap Madog of Bromfield (d. 1190x91) is higher.<sup>67</sup> The lords of Bromfield were far more frequently associated with the rulers of Gwynedd as allies and subordinates. For the thirteenth century lordship of Powys, however, the silence of the texts is almost eerie. And that silence appears to be compounded when we turn to another category of evidence: the Welsh lawbooks.

Thomas Charles-Edwards has pointed out that there is no lawbook of Powysian origin.<sup>68</sup> It is true that one of the Latin redactions of the laws, Latin B, which may have originated in north-east Wales, and which is described by Charles-Edwards as 'a splendid rag-bag of oddities', contains a tractate on the Three Columns of Law (Arson, Theft, Homicide) that is said to be according to the men of Powys.<sup>69</sup> And a Welsh-language lawbook, *Llyfr Cynog*, contains several references to Powysian practice, and notes with some approval changes to the law introduced by Bleddyn ap Cynfyn.<sup>70</sup> Now Bleddyn, who died in 1075, had ruled both Gwynedd and Powys towards the end of a long period when Powys was part of the extended Gwynedd polity. But he was an intrusive ruler in terms of the line that dominated Gwynedd from the later eleventh to the later thirteenth century, whereas he was the founder of the dynasty that came to rule Powys. Maredudd, forebear of both the lords de la Pole and of Bromfield, was Bleddyn's son.<sup>71</sup> So it is in Powysian territories that he is most likely to have been remembered with respect. And in the far west of Powys, in the somewhat semi-detached cantref of Arwystli, we have at least part of a lawbook developed around 1200 by the abbot of Llandinam, Cynyr ap Cadwgan.<sup>72</sup> We thus have significant glimpses of Powysian law and legal thinking in the thirteenth century, but we do not have a lawbook. As in the case of the chronicles and the poetry, the appearances of Powys in the lawbooks are little more than occasional and incidental.

We are left with four further categories of written evidence. First there are the records of late-thirteenth and fourteenth-century inquisitions and surveys of lordships; these embrace inquisitions post mortem, enquiries into the lands of, and rents and services due to, lords who had recently died and who had held their lordships as tenants in chief of the English king. The most potentially interesting, that of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn (d. 1286) is apparently lost, but later ones are

66 P. C. Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies AD 300-1400*, 8 vols. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), I, sub Bleddyn ap Cynfyn 3, for the marriage of Margred, daughter of Madog ap Maredudd to Iorwerth Drwyndwn ab Owain Gwynedd. For Owain Fychan as an ally of Owain Gwynedd see Stephenson, 'Supremacy...of Owain Fychan'.

67 For the problem of the date of Gruffudd's death see *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, p. 686.

68 T. M. Charles-Edwards, *The Welsh Laws* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), p. 44.

69 Ibid. For the text see *The Latin Texts of the Welsh Laws* ed. by H. D. Emanuel (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), pp. 250-51.

70 A. R. Wiliam, *Llyfr Cynog* (Aberystwyth: Pamffledi Cyfraith Hywel, 1990).

71 Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies*, sub Bleddyn ap Cynfyn 1.

72 Gwenno Angharad Elias, *Llyfr Cynyr ap Cadwgan* (Aberystwyth: Pamffledi Cyfraith Hywel, 2006).

still very valuable for investigating the echoes of structures of government in thirteenth-century Powys.<sup>73</sup> But they cannot provide us with a significant narrative of development. In the case of the northern lordships that had once been part of Powys, there are detailed extents, lordship surveys, which exist for Bromfield and Yale (Maelor Gymraeg and Iâl) and date to 1315 and 1391, and of Chirkland (Nanheudwy, Mochnant-is-Rhaeadr, and part of Cynllaith) from 1332 and 1391.<sup>74</sup> These too are surveys of rents and services due to the lord and sometimes they list tenants of specific *gwelyau* and *gafaelion*. There are no such documents for the lordship of Powys.<sup>75</sup>

Secondly, there are references to Powysian matters in the copious English governmental records of the thirteenth century: the Pipe Rolls of the Exchequer and the records of the Chancery – particularly the Close, Patent, Liberate, Charter, and Welsh Rolls. These contain valuable records of the relations of the lords of Powys with English kings, officials and marcher lords. But because of the English provenance and the inevitable focus on English interests of these documents they perhaps produce a distorted picture of the reliance of the Powysians on England and its government. They reveal only incidentally the internal dynamics and factors that motivated the actions of Powysian leaders and magnates.

We turn next to the letters, charters, and other documents issued by the Powysian rulers. Here the Powysian records at first appear more promising. In the case of Gwenwynwyn, a remarkable number of charters or references to charters that he issued to the abbey of Strata Marcella survive.<sup>76</sup> They constitute by far the largest number of monastic grants recorded by any Welsh ruler of the thirteenth century, and they establish Gwenwynwyn as an outstanding monastic patron. But if we except the grants relating to Strata Marcella, it is surprising just how few *acta* of the lords of Powys survive. This is particularly marked for Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn. Several grants and letters survive relating to his estate at Ashford in Derbyshire, originally granted to his father and subsequently held by his mother.<sup>77</sup> Clearly Gruffudd was a frequent resident at Ashford during periods of exile. And it is clear that he maintained his Derbyshire lands in mid-century when he was resident primarily in Powys<sup>78</sup> But the records relating to Ashford tell us nothing

73 Bridgeman, 'Princes of Upper Powys', pp. 142-8 (Owain ap Gruffudd d. 1293); 152-66 (Gruffudd ab Owain, d. 1309).

74 *The First Extent of Bromfield and Yale, AD 1315*, ed. by T. P. Ellis (London: Cymmrodorion Record Series 11, 1924). *The Extent of Chirkland 1391-93*, ed. by G. P. Jones (London, 1933). G. Rex Smith, 'The Extent of the Lordship of Chirk, 1332', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 63 (2012), 91-100.

75 That is not to say, of course, that such extents were never made for Powys. The work of Michael Gibbon will be of great help in enabling us to glimpse what such extents may have contained.

76 *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, nos. 542-75, 578. It should be noted that in addition to the grants made by Gwenwynwyn a significant number of charters was issued to Strata Marcella by freemen of Powys, often with Gwenwynwyn's consent. See *The Charters of the Abbey of Ystrad Marchell*, ed. by G. C. G. Thomas (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1997).

77 See note 39 above; for Gwenwynwyn's possession of Ashford see *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, p. 42, and for that of Margaret, his widow, *ibid.*, no. 579 and note thereto.

78 See for example *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 597. Gruffudd lost his hold on Ashford when he went over to Llywelyn's side in 1263.

positive about his life in Wales: he seems to have kept his Powys and Derbyshire entourages quite distinct.<sup>79</sup> From Powys during the periods of his active lordship there come very few *acta*: four or five documents, including the foundation charter of the borough of Welshpool, from the period 1241–57; four from the years 1263–74, two of which are records of his trial before Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in April 1274 and which undoubtedly originated from Llywelyn’s clerks.<sup>80</sup> For the years after 1277 until his death in 1286 only some half-dozen letters and grants in Gruffudd’s name have survived, though the record of legal proceedings relating to Llywelyn’s claim to Arwystli and the lands between Dyfi and Dulas contain pleadings and representations on Gruffudd’s behalf.<sup>81</sup> The *acta* of the Powys rulers are therefore unbalanced in their distribution and their type: with the exception of the large number of charters issued in favour of Strata Marcella by Gwenwynwyn, which may well have had in part a political purpose beyond piety, documents issued by Powysian leaders that give us an insight into their political calculations are rare.

A final category of evidence consists of references in what we may describe, broadly, as miscellaneous prose writings. Some of these can give us valuable insights into Powysian politics and political attitudes. Early in the century Gerald of Wales includes in his voluminous writings accounts of meetings with Gwenwynwyn and of a speech given in praise of Gerald by the same ruler in his court.<sup>82</sup> It is likely, of course, that the speech is more indicative of Gerald’s self-regard than a reflection of Gwenwynwyn’s actual words. Amongst works that do not purport to be factual, the prose tale *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is generally seen as in significant measure a coded satire. It is set principally in the eastern margins of Powys, and it may constitute a commentary on the situation in the region in the late thirteenth century, the period to which I should date it in the form in which we now have it.<sup>83</sup> It may be that, as was suggested by Sir Rees Davies, the tale’s story of the ‘Emperor’ Arthur’s sadness at ‘the little wretches who guard the land’ is a wry reference to the multiplicity of lords, including half a dozen sons and a grandson (a minor) of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn who shared the governance of Powys in the last decade of the century.<sup>84</sup> Again, the respectful notice accorded to members of the dynasty of southern Powys in the Anglo-Norman tale *Fouke le fitz Waryn*, the (lost) original verse composition of which I should place in the mid-1260s, would seem to suggest the closeness of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn and his people to the

79 No officers of the lordship of Powys appear as witnesses to Gruffudd’s documents issued in Derbyshire, and no men from Ashford witness his surviving *acta* issued in Wales.

80 1241-45: *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, nos. 591-4, 596; 1263-74: *ibid.*, nos. 601-4, the last two of which are dated in Cedewain; 1277-82: *ibid.*, nos. 605-8.

81 *Welsh Assize Roll*, *passim*.

82 These passages are most accessible in *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*, ed. and trans. by H. E. Butler, new edition, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 234, 249-50.

83 The date of composition is discussed in some detail in the forthcoming work noticed in note 10 above.

84 Davies, *Conquest, Co-existence and Change*, p. 231.

lords of the March whose doings, real and imaginary, are described by the author.<sup>85</sup>

There are thus many categories of evidence available to the student of thirteenth-century Powys, though few can be described as plentiful. Nevertheless, when all categories of evidence are combined, a picture does begin to emerge, and it is rather different, and can be interpreted far more sympathetically, compared to the one to which we became accustomed for much of the twentieth century. I shall deal elsewhere, and at some length, with the details of that picture, and can give here just a few glimpses of what it will look like. It will, for example, be necessary to revise the view that the events of 1160 extinguished the importance of Powys within Wales. We shall have to take full account of the leadership in Welsh affairs exercised by Gwenwynwyn in the last years of the twelfth and the first years of the thirteenth century. It appears to have been a primacy built on a concept of confederation, and extended into southern Gwynedd, Penllyn, Bromfield, Deheubarth, and the central March. Gwenwynwyn's eminence was such that he should find a historiographical position alongside figures such as the Lord Rhys or Llywelyn Fawr. Later in the century, the importance of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn as a castle-builder has not yet won due recognition.<sup>86</sup> Nor has the central importance of figures such as Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn and Gruffudd ap Madog of Bromfield in the attempts of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd to construct a principality of Wales in the 1260s.

We shall have to look again, and look very hard, at the general acceptance by historians that the actions of Gwenwynwyn in 1216 and of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn in 1274 involved treason to the Llywelyns. It is clear that the accusations are based almost entirely on sources that betray strong Venedotian influence. It seems likely that Gwenwynwyn left the Welsh coalition when it became clear that the confederacy that had marked the years 1212–15 was being replaced in 1216 by subjection to Llywelyn.<sup>87</sup> And Gruffudd's actions in 1273–4 when he was accused of plotting against Llywelyn must be seen in the light of distinct signs of aggressive intent on Llywelyn's part towards the lord of Powys.<sup>88</sup>

85 Max Lieberman, 'The English and the Welsh in *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*', *Thirteenth Century England XII*, ed. by Janet Burton, Phillipp Schofield and Björn Weiler, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), 1-11. For the date of composition of the verse original see David Stephenson, 'Fouke le Fitz Waryn and Llywelyn ap Gruffydd's claim to Whittington', *Shropshire History and Archaeology*, 77 (2005 for 2002), 26-31.

86 Part of the problem here revolves around the fragmentation of care for important heritage sites. While most historic monuments in Wales are in the care of Cadw, Powis Castle is curated by the National Trust. The problem is compounded by the tendency of the National Trust to present Powis Castle almost entirely as a stately home of the sixteenth and subsequent centuries: thus in the present edition of the detailed guide-book to Powis, the whole of the medieval period – from the thirteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, is restricted to some half-page of text. For the medieval building phases of Powis Castle see David Stephenson, 'Powis Castle: A Reappraisal of its Medieval Development', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 95 (2007), 9-21, and references there cited.

87 In the years 1212-15 the *Brutiau* treat the Welsh opposition to John as an alliance of rulers, usually involving Llywelyn, Gwenwynwyn, and Maelgwn ap Rhys, albeit an alliance in which Llywelyn's name is recorded first: *BT, RBH*, pp. 194-5, 204-07. But in 1216 Llywelyn apportioned Deheubarth amongst the family of the Lord Rhys (*ibid*, pp. 206-7): clearly he had emerged as a suzerain. It is immediately after this that the chronicle records Gwenwynwyn's abandonment of the alliance (*ibid*).

88 See note 54 above.



We need also to note the dynamism of the Powysian lords during their several exiles: they did not simply wait passively for re-instatement but were active in opposing the Gwynedd rulers who had occupied their patrimony.<sup>89</sup> Their repeated restoration to lordship in Powys was the outcome in no small measure of their own efforts. The picture of Powysian lords as men who trimmed their sails to every change in the political wind overlooks their constant struggle to hold or regain their inheritance and their practical independence. That the Powysian polity survived was largely the result of that consistent resolve and its intelligent application. A reconsideration of what is usually pictured as the maverick role of Powysian leaders in the thirteenth century is indeed more important than simply re-establishing the continuing importance of the lordship of Powys and carrying out revisions of particular episodes. As in the twelfth, so in the thirteenth century, those leaders struggled against the absorption of Powys into an extended Gwynedd of the type that had characterized the quarter of a millennium from the mid-ninth to the early twelfth century. In the end, they contributed significantly to the fall of the house of Gwynedd: Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn's repeated forays into his lost lordship after 1274 ensured that Llywelyn was not able to profit from his seizure of southern Powys.<sup>90</sup> Subsequently in 1277 Gruffudd himself, and later his son Llywelyn, had been, symbolically, custodians of Dolforwyn castle, after it had fallen to the forces of Edward I.<sup>91</sup> Dolforwyn was the greatest of the castles built by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, and one which had been, it seems, specifically sited to threaten the lordship of Powys and the castle of Pool (Powis). In December 1282 Gruffudd and two of his sons were prominent in the army that killed Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.<sup>92</sup> In the following year Llywelyn ap Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn was appointed constable of Castell y Bere in Meirionnydd after it was surrendered by the garrison of Dafydd ap Gruffudd in April, and in the following month Powysian troops led the hunt for Dafydd in the uplands of Pumlumon and Meirionnydd.<sup>93</sup> This was not treason. The motives were those with which the medieval Powysian mind was very familiar: revenge, and, crucially, insurance against any further menace from Gwynedd.

The most important point is that Powys was representative of many regions of Wales outside, and even within, Gwynedd in one vital respect. In a survey of Wales in the medieval centuries published in 1990, David Walker wrote, with reference to ninth- and tenth-century rulers such as Rhodri Mawr and Hywel Dda, 'It is

89 In 1210 the *Brut* is clear that Gwenwynwyn regained his lordship with the help of King John. This is rather different from simple re-instatement. There is no record of English forces operating in Powys. The help may have taken the form of the English attack on Gwynedd that involved the building of a castle at Holywell and the re-building of that at Degannwy, destroyed by Llywelyn for fear of the king: *BT, RBH*, pp. 188-89; for Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn's activity in 1233 see *Close Rolls, 1223-34*, p. 272, and in 1241 *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1232-47*, p. 257; for Gruffudd's raids on Llywelyn in 1275-6 see the following note, and for 1277 see *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence*, p. 81.

90 *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, nos. 385-6, 391-94.

91 *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1272-1307*, p. 81.

92 *Chronicon Petrobургense*, ed. by T. Stapleton (London: Camden Society, 1849), p. 57.

93 J. Beverley Smith, 'The Age of the Princes' in *History of Meirionnydd, II, The Middle Ages*, pp. 54-5.

unavoidable that [...] interest should centre on those rulers who extended their power over much of Wales. They foreshadowed the attempts by the princes of Gwynedd in the thirteenth century to create a unified Welsh “state”.<sup>94</sup> But it should be stressed that there are, and there must be, other perspectives. In sometimes obsessive attempts to prove that in medieval Wales there existed what Thomas Jones Pierce once called ‘all the preconditions of normal political growth’ we have at times become dangerously focussed on the English model.<sup>95</sup> That model involves a precociously developed central government and the progressive elimination in the medieval centuries of forces that stood in the way of the capacity of a single dynasty to exercise government throughout the English realm. But in a Welsh context we need not only to celebrate the vision of the princes of Gwynedd – and I do not deny that theirs was a substantial achievement – but to recognize its limits and its negative aspects. This involves studying and appreciating the resentment felt by many at the attempted imposition of control throughout Wales by those princes. At times they may have recognized that resentment themselves, and their *acta* speak of confederacy as well as subordination.<sup>96</sup> That willingness to think in terms of confederacy, whether sincere or not, was, it seems, largely abolished by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, as his successes, his confidence, and his ambition all mounted. The opposition and resentment of the Powysian elite was matched by many in Wales, by descendants of the Lord Rhys in Ystrad Tywi, by some in the lordships of Bromfield and Edeirnion, and by magnates in Brycheiniog and the central March like Hywel ap Meurig, Einion Sais and Meurig ap Gruffudd, men who in 1277 led a substantial army of Welsh troops against Llywelyn and helped to ensure that he was finally driven from that region.<sup>97</sup>

To charge those who resisted subjection to Gwynedd with acting as traitors is to accept without demur the Venedotian claim to dominance and at the same time to misunderstand one of the most powerful dynamics of medieval Wales. We can learn much about that alternative dynamic by studying the history of Powys in the thirteenth century. It is far from exaggeration to say that in reconfiguring thirteenth-century Powys we are also re-configuring thirteenth-century Wales.

94 Walker, *Medieval Wales*, p. 7.

95 T. Jones Pierce, ‘The Age of the two Llywelyns’, in *Wales through the Ages*, Vol. I, ed. by A. J. Roderick, (Llandybie, 1959), 113-20 (p.118).

96 For the importance of concepts of confederacy see David Stephenson, ‘Llywelyn ap Gruffydd and the struggle for the Principality of Wales, 1258-1282’ *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1983), 36-47, and David Carpenter, ‘Confederation not domination: Welsh political culture in the age of Gwynedd imperialism’, in *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages*, 20-28.

97 For the situation in Deheubarth see J. Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 107-8, 121-2, 293, 419-21, 457-8. The experience of Morgan ap Maredudd of Cwmwd Hirfryn at the hands of Llywelyn is set out in *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, II, no. 289 (p. 164). For the situation in the central March see David Stephenson, ‘Conquerors, Courtiers and Careerists: the struggle for supremacy in Brycheiniog 1093-1282’, *Brycheiniog*, 44 (2013), 27-51 (pp. 41-4). More work needs to be done on the Welsh opposition to Llywelyn and indeed to other rulers who sought a Welsh supremacy. The theme is pursued in David Stephenson, ‘Empires in Wales: From Gruffudd ap Llywelyn to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd’, *Welsh History Review* (forthcoming).