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Doan on Turvey, 'The Welsh Princes: The Native Rulers of Wales, 1063-1283'

Author: Roger Turvey

Reviewer: James Doan

Roger Turvey. *The Welsh Princes: The Native Rulers of Wales, 1063-1283.* London and New York: Longman, 2002. xxxi + 215 pp. \$26.40 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-30811-4.

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Wales of the Princes

The period considered here begins with the death in 1063 or 1064 of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, a prince of Gwynedd (northwest Wales), who had unified much of the country, but was killed by his own troops during a campaign against Earl Harold (later Harold II of England). This was, of course, almost immediately followed by the Norman Conquest of England, which reached into Gwent and Morgannwg (southeast Wales) by 1072. As Roger Turvey points out, though, "unlike William's invasion of England in 1066, the 'invasion' of Wales was neither planned nor coordinated either by a king preoccupied in consolidating his victory over the Saxon-English or by Norman adventurers selfishly engaged in carving out for themselves pockets of Welsh territory" (p. 42).

The Welsh Princes focuses on the following two centuries, during which first the Anglo-Norman Marcher lords and eventually the English kings themselves turned their attention more and more to the petty Welsh kingdoms, leading to the conquest of the entire country in 1283 under Edward I. Though the author does not break much new ground in his presentation of the facts of the conquest (this was largely accomplished by A. H. Williams in his 1941 study^[1]), Turvey does shed new light on the relationships among the Welsh princes and barons and, moreover, between them and their Anglo-Norman neighbors. For example, we learn that soon after the beginning of the conquest, Welsh princes were already marrying their daughters and other female relatives to Marcher lords, e.g., Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's daughter Nest to Osbern fitzRichard and another Nest, daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr of Deheubarth (southwest Wales), to Gerald of Windsor (p. 60). Interestingly, the same policy was followed by Irish rulers over a century later when, after the descendants of these same Anglo-Norman-(Welsh) adventurers invaded Ireland beginning in 1169, they realized the value of forming alliances with them. In fact, one criticism of this book might be that it does not go far enough in showing parallels between Wales and its rulers in this period and comparable situations in contemporary Ireland, though Turvey does refer to Welsh princes spending time in exile in Ireland and their use of Irish mercenaries.

This study follows a series of books published over the past twenty-five years which illustrate different aspects of Welsh history, society, and literature, such as Wendy Davies's *Wales in the*

Early Middle Ages (1982), Gwyn A. Williams's *When Was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (1985), D. Simon Evans's *Writers of Wales: Medieval Religious Literature* (1986), and J. E. Caerwyn Williams's *The Poets of the Welsh Princes* (1994). In addition, there have been some noteworthy biographies of individual Welsh rulers during this same period, including J. Beverley Smith's *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd: Prince of Wales*,^[2] *Gruffudd ap Cynan: A Collaborative Biography* (ed. K. L. Maund, 1997) and Turvey's own *The Lord Rhys, Prince of Deheubarth* (1997). Intended as a fairly general approach to the subject, the book under review succeeds in making the subjects come alive as real flesh-and-blood figures, showing their military and political activities, as well as their patronage of the arts (especially the court poets) and of the church.

The reader will no doubt frequently consult the genealogies at the beginning of the volume, as well as the maps showing the regional and political divisions of the country from the eleventh through the thirteenth century. I did find Turvey's tendency to list the death dates for each (usually male) individual mentioned in the text rather distracting, particularly when these had already been given. I suppose this was to avoid confusion since, because of the Welsh use of patronymics, there are so many persons with the same or similar names (e.g., Llywelyn ap [son of] Iorwerth, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd as three generations of the same ruling family in Gwynedd). In addition to minor typographical errors throughout the book, I also noted a few more substantive errors: e.g., Gruffudd ap Cynan's grandfather Iago died in 1039, not his father Cynan (p. xiv). In addition, a pronunciation guide might have been helpful, particularly for those not used to Welsh orthography.

Nevertheless, this is a very readable book and I would recommend it for anyone interested in medieval British, Irish and/or European history. The latter dimension is revealed when Turvey comments on attempted alliances between Welsh rulers such as Owain Gwynedd and Louis VII of France against their common enemy, Henry II, or Owain's grandson Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's treaty with Louis's successor Philip Augustus in 1212 (p. 167). Moreover, in 1244 Iorwerth's son Dafydd sought to become a vassal of Pope Innocent IV in order to assert his independence from his uncle, Henry III,^[3] at a cost of 500 marks (about 333 pounds sterling) per annum, which, however, came to naught when the Pope accepted Henry's offer nine months later to repay his outstanding debts (p.180).

Notes

[1]. *An Introduction to the History of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1941; rpt. 1969), particularly Volume II (The Middle Ages, 1063-1284).

[2]. Originally published in Welsh in 1986, it was greatly expanded and revised in the English version published by the University of Wales Press in 2000.

[3]. The link came through King John's illegitimate daughter Joan (Welsh Siwan), Llywelyn's wife and Dafydd's mother.

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