



Early state formation in native medieval Wales

RHYS JONES*

*Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Wales, Aberystwyth,
Ceredigion, SY23 3DB, UK*

ABSTRACT. This article examines the applicability of general theories concerning the formation of early states to native Wales in the Middle Ages. Theories which attempt to explain the state-making process are reviewed in order to clarify the concepts and possible processes associated with this major institutional change. It is stressed in the article that an understanding of the extent to which a society is organised according to state concepts of rule is an important first step in the formulation of any theory which attempts to explain the main reasons for the formation of the early state in the first place. Consequently, three of the criteria given by Claessen and Skalník as being indicative of the existence of state institutions within a society are utilised in order to elucidate the extent to which Welsh society was organised as an early state in the Middle Ages. It is argued that Welsh society was indeed organised in this way, but that these state institutions were centred on regional kingdoms within Wales and not on a unified Welsh state. This suggests that mature state institutions are viable within kingdoms, political units which were previously considered as being immature forms of early states. The article concludes by postulating that the main reasons for the adoption of state institutions within Wales was the diffusion of ideas of state rule both from neighbouring Wessex and also from one Welsh regional kingdom to another. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved

One of the most important institutional changes which occurred in the Middle Ages was the one where societies changed from being controlled by concepts of kinship to being ordered around the power exercised by kings over defined territories (Sahlins, 1968: 5; Dodgshon, 1987: Chapter 5; Claessen and Skalník, 1978; Gledhill, 1988). As a consequence of this state-making process, rulers in society no longer controlled groups of people but rather became kings and lords over territorially defined areas of jurisdiction. A ruler's domain of authority was set down within demarcated areas of operation and by controlling territory it naturally followed that a societal ruler also controlled its inhabitants. It meant that individuals' rights of property within a particular society were not defined by being a member, real or assumed, of a kin group or tribe, but by being born within a particular territory. Clearly, this would have made it a change of great geographical significance. Territorialisation of power occurred throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, and this article proposes to closely examine the process within a Welsh context.

Early states first appeared in Europe in the form of kingdoms (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978: 20; Khazanov, 1974). These were early states in which political power was centred on a king. Nevertheless, there is a certain degree of conflict amongst historians as to the exact timing of the formation of Welsh kingdoms, and indeed European kingdoms in general. Numerous authors have hypothesised that kingdoms appeared within Wales in the immediate Post-Roman period (Chadwick, 1954: 27; Chadwick, 1959; Lloyd, 1911: 214; Davies, 1990: 80, n. 4). These alleged kingdoms were based upon Roman *civitates* and were part of a common process which occurred throughout the whole of Western Europe from approximately the fifth century onwards (Wolfram, 1970). As Roman *civitates* started to lose their imperial status, local rulers took over the reins of power and converted it into a rule based upon the absolute power of a king. In such a situation, local rulers might indeed be returning to a societal arrangement which was familiar to them from the period before the coming of the Romans (Brun, 1995).

Davies (1988: 20), on the other hand, has emphasised that kingdoms did not appear in Wales until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Even in the twelfth century, he refers to the political arrangements in Wales, and Ireland also, as being 'kingships' rather than 'kingdoms'. That is, the political landscape, even in the twelfth century, was not divided into a set of defined early states. The stability, or rather the instability, of political units at even this late stage was dependent to a large extent on the personal power of individual kings. We find support for such a view in an European context in the work of Reynolds (1981: 204; Reynolds, 1984). She has emphasised that it was not until the twelfth century or even later that societies in Western Europe saw a definition of what territorial law entailed. It was not until this period also that kings began to monopolise the process of law and order. What Reynolds is clearly saying here, of course, is that early states did not start to appear in Western Europe until approximately the twelfth century onwards.

Evidently, we have a major conflict of opinion here. On the one hand, kingdoms or early states are said to have developed in Wales, as in the rest of Europe, in the very early Middle Ages. They filled the organisational vacuum left by the Romans. On the other hand, Rees Davies and Susan Reynolds maintain that early states did not appear in Wales nor in the rest of Europe until the twelfth century, or even later. It is believed that much of this conflict derives from a disagreement as to what constitutes an early state. It will be helpful, therefore, if we turn to examine some of the theories which have been used to explain the origin and nature of early states.

Theories of state formation

Theories concerning the formation of early states are traditionally divided into two opposing schools of thought, those which emphasise themes of conflict and those which emphasise themes of alliance (Dodgshon, 1987: 139). Theories which emphasise the role of conflict in the state-making process either maintain that early states were formed due to a process of conquest or that states were formed in order to reduce friction and conflict between different classes within society (Fried, 1978). There are problems with the former theory, as there is evidence from numerous well-documented examples of state formation that processes of conquest did not play an important role in the creation of early states (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978: 10). The latter theory is very similar to ones which have been used by sociologists to explain the nature of the modern state, whereby the state acts as the means to ease the process of capital accumulation within society (Taylor, 1995: Chapter 4; Miliband, 1969). Fried (1978: 45), one of the main proponents

of this theory, cites the Sumerian civilisation as an example of state institutions developing in order to cope with increased friction between different social classes:

'When Anu and Enlil had called Lipit-Ishtar the wise shepherd whose name had been pronounced by Nunanmir — to the princeship of the land in order to establish justice in the land, to banish complaints, to turn back enmity and rebellion by force of arms, and to bring well-being to the Sumerians and Akkadians . . .'

However, there are problems with this quotation and with this school of thought in general. Although it is quite possible that social hierarchies could have existed within society before the formation of early states, this does not necessarily mean that the main reason for the formation of early states was to alleviate the conflict which might have existed between different strata within society. Consequently, it is dubious whether the anarchy portrayed in the above quotation can be used as conclusive evidence to support Fried's theory.

Other authors, such as Service, have argued that the main reason for the formation of early states lies in themes of integration and alliance. According to these authors, early societies perceived that their best interests lay in being organised and controlled using state institutions (Service, 1978). This might be especially applicable in situations where members of a society needed to be organised on a large scale for the benefit of the whole society. For instance, in arid environments, there might be a common belief that a state apparatus was needed in order to allow for the development of irrigation schemes (Wittfogel, 1957). In such a situation, all members of society would benefit from the organisational capabilities of state institutions. A more abstract example of a similar process is the way in which a state, with its class of full-time administrators, is able to cope with increasing flows of information and energy within a society. An improvement in the organisational capacity offered by state institutions would have been especially beneficial if there was an increase in the geographical size and/or the population of a particular society (Carneiro, 1967; Wright, 1978). Nonetheless, there are also weaknesses with this school of thought, mainly because it maintains that early societies perceived themselves to be benefiting from the existence of state institutions. This notion is at odds with the work of authors such as Gledhill (1988: 10), who has stressed that societies tend to avoid being constrained by state institutions for as long as they possibly can.

The conflict between these two schools of thought is of course unnecessary to a large extent. There are strengths and weaknesses to both sets of theories as both themes of alliance and conflict may have had an equally important role to play in the state-making process. As has been maintained by Cohen, 'there are costs and benefits to all members of a polity that evolves from a pre-state to a state system' (Cohen, 1978: 15; Mann, 1988: 76). State formation, according to Cohen, may be seen as being a common outcome to a variety of different pressures which affect pre-state societies. In effect, Cohen argues that it is impossible to denote one process which has been instrumental to the formation of all state systems. The great variety of contexts, both historical and geographical, in which the state-making process has occurred would seem to strengthen such an argument. After all, it is unlikely that the Nile civilisation and the medieval Welsh state would have been formed due to similar processes.

In this context, we need to differentiate between the processes which led to the formation of primary states as opposed to secondary states (Price, 1978). Primary states were states which formed independently of each other and were the first examples of a society being organised around concepts of territorial rule in a particular region. The vast

majority of societies which experienced the state-making process were secondary states, which formed as a result of being in close proximity to other societies organised using state institutions. It was the geographical proximity of 'primitive' societies to the neighbouring state which led to a diffusion of state institutions to the surrounding societies. Wales falls into this category of states and it may well be that many of the state institutions associated with Wales were ones borrowed from surrounding political units. An oft-cited example of this process is the borrowing of the title of the Welsh royal official, the *distain*, from the Anglo-Saxon *discpegn* (Binchy, 1970: 23).

Another hypothesis which bears some relation to theories of secondary state formation is the 'Early State Module' proposed by Renfrew (1984). Renfrew postulates that early states are often formed when one large polity encompasses approximately ten smaller political units. He advances his theory further by arguing that it is possible for each of the smaller political units, which later form the large early state, to develop state institutions themselves. Indeed, it is the close geographical relationship between these smaller political units which leads to state institutions diffusing from one society to another. As *Figure 1* demonstrates, it is this process of diffusion which leads to a growth of state institutions within the smaller political units, as well as the development of more advanced state institutions within the larger political unit. This theory is again pertinent in a Welsh context. There existed a number of independent kingdoms within the bounds of Wales during the early Middle Ages and it is possible that state institutions may have diffused between these units before leading to the development of mature state institutions within a unified Welsh kingdom.

The description of political units within medieval Wales as 'kingdoms' is critical in this respect. As has already been noted, many authors have argued that societies in an European context did not progress directly from being chiefdoms to being early states. A transitional mode of societal organisation exists in many polities, a kingdom or an 'inchoate early state', which represents an institutional half-way house between a chiefdom and an early state. These kingdoms are societies where the rules of kinship are still important in the political arena, 'where taxation systems are primitive and where full-time specialists are rare' (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978: 23). These theories are of great significance in a Welsh context, especially as the main arguments concerning the timing of the appearance of early states in Wales have been centred on the notion of kingdoms. It is possible that a better understanding of the exact definition of a kingdom, as given above, will greatly aid any attempt to furnish a date for the appearance of early states in Wales. The empirical evidence from Wales may also help to resolve a conflict of opinion between Renfrew's 'Early State Module' and Claessen and Skalnik's designation of kingdoms as inchoate early states. Whilst these two authors believe that kingdoms are immature forms of an early state, Renfrew in his 'Early State Module' maintains that it is possible for smaller political units, possibly kingdoms, to also develop mature state institutions. The existence of mature state institutions within medieval Welsh regional kingdoms would seriously undermine the notion that kingdoms are inherently immature institutional and political organisations.

Despite the existence of numerous theories which attempt to explain the origins of early states, the vast majority of them display one common weakness. Most of the theories only attempt to elucidate the reasons behind the formation of early states and do not offer a precise description of the characteristics of a typical early state. As such, the conclusions that are reached by different authors are very much dependent upon their perception of the extent to which the societies that they are studying are organised as early states (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978: 3). They are attempting to discover the reasons for the

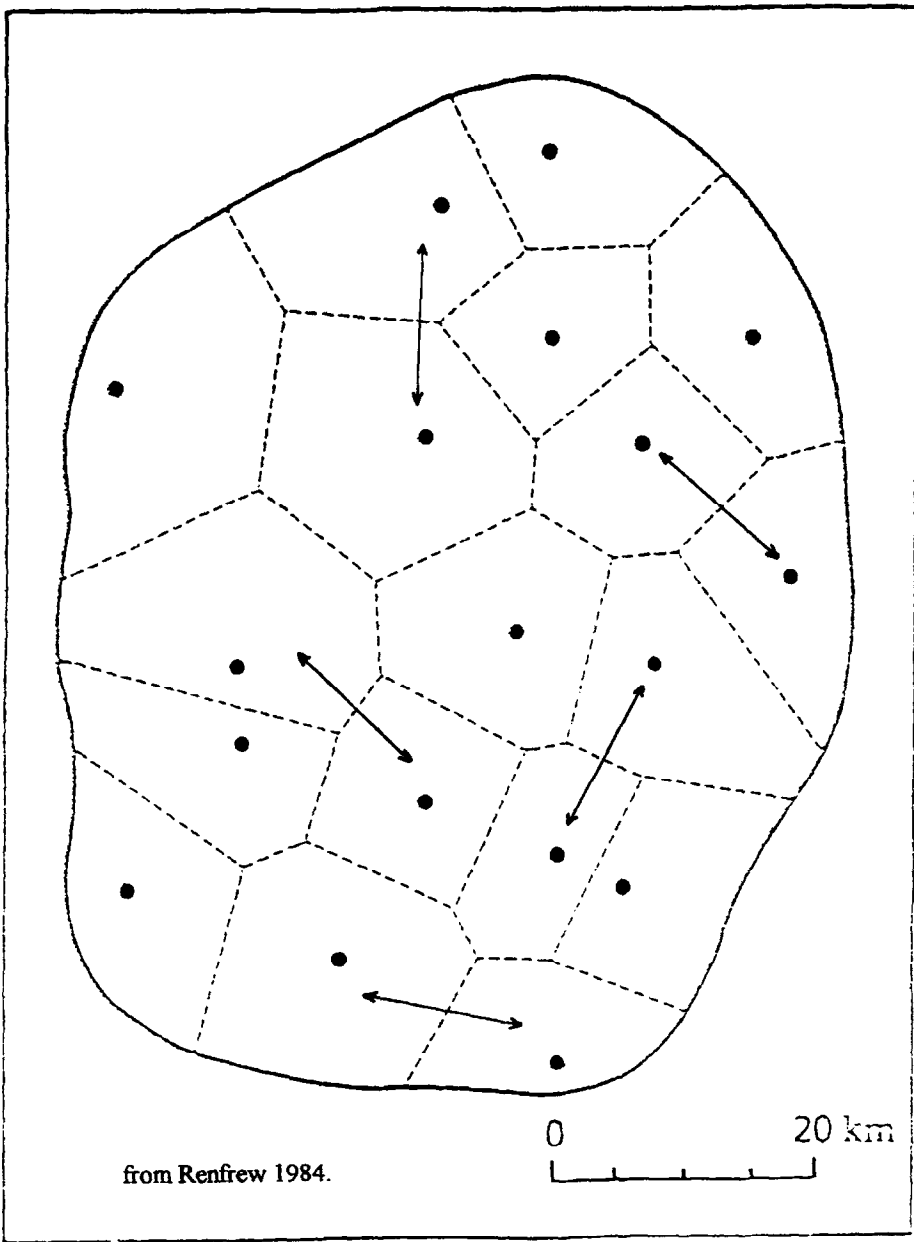


FIGURE 1. Renfrew's 'Early State Module' showing small political units which interact to create a large and more mature early state.

formation of early states without defining exactly what they believe constitutes an early state. It is proposed that we must know to what extent state institutions are present within a particular society before we can make any assumptions concerning the main reasons for their adoption. It is only by combining theories which attempt to elucidate the reasons for the process of state formation, as outlined above, with precise definitions

of the characteristics of early states that we can improve our understanding of the state-making process within particular societies.

Two of the few authors who have attempted to provide a list of characteristics of societies which are constituted as early states are Claessen and Skalnik (1978: 21) and this article will use a set of criteria postulated by them to try to determine the extent and the timing of the process of early state formation in medieval Wales. The use of this objective classification of societal organisation will then provide a firm basis for postulating possible reasons for the state-making process in medieval Wales.

Characteristics of early states

Claessen and Skalnik cite seven characteristics which demonstrate the extent to which a society is organised according to state principles. However, this article will concentrate on three of the more important criteria in a geographical context; first, the fact that citizenship in an early state is decided by being born or living within a particular territory; second, the existence within an early state of a centralised government with the ability to administer law and order, and third, the fact that agricultural productivity is high enough within a particular society to maintain a regular surplus of resources. These three characteristics illustrate the importance of spatial and geographical themes in the organisation of early states. The first characteristic is clearly based on the fact that a state organisation emphasises the existence of state rulers who order society through their control of defined territories. The second criterion expands on the importance of territorialised power by maintaining that kings and princes within an early state also exercise legal jurisdiction within a framework of demarcated boundaries. In other words, the territorialisation of legal power is also a crucial element of the state-making process. The third characteristic to be discussed suggests that state institutions can only be adopted and maintained in regions where the physical environment supports fertile and productive agriculture.

Although Claessen and Skalnik's description of the main characteristics of early states offers an objective measure of the extent of the territorialisation of power within a particular society, a criticism which may be levelled against their criteria is the fact that they do not give any indication of the dynamics of the state-making process. In effect, their characteristics portray a society which has undergone the state-making process but do not elaborate on the processes which led to this societal change. Such a weakness emphasises the importance of examining the process of state formation through the development of a detailed knowledge of both the mechanics of the process itself and the nature of the subsequent state system. It is only by combining these two viewpoints that we will develop a rounded interpretation of both the processes at work within a pre-state polity and the resultant institutional forms.

Before turning to examine the applicability of three of Claessen and Skalnik's characteristics of an early state to Wales in the Middle Ages, it is important to emphasise that any study of medieval Welsh institutional history and geography is much impaired by lack of evidence. Wendy Davies, amongst others, has noted that 'sources for the history of early medieval Wales are few, fragmentary and difficult to use' (Davies, 1982: 198). For instance, even a seemingly rich source of early medieval material, such as the *Book of Llandav*, presents numerous difficulties of interpretation, due to the political propaganda that colours much of the document (Davies, 1978, 1979). In many cases, the intractability or lack of evidence will restrict our ability to theorise concerning the nature of institutions and institutional change. However, despite these difficulties, it is possible to make

reasoned and relatively firm statements concerning the nature of medieval Welsh society and politics. This is especially true of the later stages of the early Middle Ages which are far better illuminated than the earlier Post-Roman period. Additionally, recent studies in the field of archaeology, such as Alcock's (1963, 1987) work on Dinas Powys, have aided in our attempts to reconstruct the nature of early medieval society and institutions. Such work is of exceptional importance in recreating the physical and social contexts of the state-making process. In spite of the apparent difficulties therefore, by combining different sources of evidence with a theoretical knowledge of the nature of typical pre-state and state societies, it is possible to construct reasonably firm hypotheses concerning large-scale institutional change in early medieval Wales.

Citizenship being decided by being born or living within a particular territory

There are very few indications of notions of citizenship in literary sources of the early Middle Ages. However, we can gain some idea of the growth in the importance of this first criterion by noting the increased occurrence of 'territory' as a concept in Welsh literary sources of the early Middle Ages. It is recognised that a growth in the importance of the notion of territory does not necessarily imply that citizenship at the same time was determined by an individual being born within a particular territory. Nevertheless, it would not be feasible to expect a notion of territorial citizenship developing without firstly having a growth in the notion of territory as a concept. In that case, we can use the appearance and growth of the notion of territory as a proxy measure for a growth in the importance of territorial citizenship in the Middle Ages.

There are indications that society in Wales was beginning to be organised around notions of territory from approximately the late tenth century onwards. During this period, *cyuoeth*, the Welsh term for territory, starts to appear in the vernacular Welsh annals. This period also sees the appearance of the term *regnum* in the Latin Welsh annals (Jones, 1955: 14, 16, 18; Phillimore, 1888: 164). For instance, it is recorded in approximately 972 in the Welsh annals that Iago was driven out of his territory by Hywel (Jones, 1955: 14). Such evidence would seem to suggest that the period at the end of the tenth century witnessed a perceptible growth in the importance of the notion of territory and territorial rule in Wales. It can be proposed that Welsh rulers' ideology changed from being one which emphasised the controlling of social groups to being one which stressed the ordering of defined territories. It would seem probable, therefore, that the citizenship of the inhabitants of Wales during this period was a territorial one and was not based upon membership of social groups. It should be emphasised also that the notion of territory in this period was based upon regional political units within Wales and not on a unified Welsh political unit. That is, references to *cyuoeth* were made in the context of the regional political units of Dyfed and Gwynedd rather than in the context of a unified Welsh political unit. Such a pattern could indicate that the state-making process possibly occurred at a regional scale within Wales rather than at a unified Welsh scale; it could also weaken Claessen and Skalnik's theory that small-scale kingdoms are an inherently immature form of early state.

More support for the hypothesis that a notion of territorial rule had appeared in Wales before the tenth century can be adduced from the appearance of territorial administrative units. The first reliable evidence for this relates to the existence of the *cantref*, a large Welsh territorial administrative unit, in Gwynedd from approximately the ninth century onwards (Williams, 1953: 16). The significance of this is that the rulers of Gwynedd now believed that the most efficient way of administering their lands was to subdivide them

into territorial units which were administered by officials nominated by the king. This demonstrates that the rulers of Gwynedd by this time perceived their lands as being a territory rather than an amalgam of social groups.

Further evidence concerning the appearance of territorial administrative units, such as the *cantref*, can be found in the *Mabinogion*. Although these tales, written in the eleventh century, deal with themes of magic and heroism, they are based on a Welsh geographical reality (Charles-Edwards, 1970). There are many references to *cantrefi* throughout Wales in these tales and the ease with which the author of the legends describes the *cantref* suggests that it had already reached a prominent status within Wales by the eleventh century (Ifans and Ifans, 1980: 1, 16, 25, 60, 88; Davies, 1991: 21). The composer of these tales was an individual who was totally familiar with an administrative landscape of *cantrefi*.

Taken together, such evidence suggests that territorial units of administration, notions of territorial rule, and possibly territorial citizenship, had appeared in Wales by approximately the tenth century onwards. It should be emphasised, however, that this notion of territorial rule was based upon regional political units which existed within the geographical area of Wales and not on a unified Welsh political unit.

A centralised government with the ability to administer law and order

The introductions to the various law texts maintain that Hywel Dda codified and standardised the Welsh laws in the tenth century so that there existed a law which was common to the whole of Wales (Owen, 1841: 1, 338, 620). Jenkins (1970: 3) believes that this was the case, stating that although there were many kingdoms in Wales there was only one law. If there is a connection between Hywel Dda and the Welsh law, then it must be stressed that his only contribution was to standardise the law throughout the whole of Wales. The impression given is that Welsh law was a public law, administered by kings, even before this date. The difference that Hywel Dda possibly made was to convert a public law which was administered on the basis of small kingdoms, a law which possibly varied over small distances, into a common public law for the whole of Wales. It is possible that this institutional development derived from the close links that existed between Hywel Dda and the institutionally-mature Wessex kingdom in the tenth century, a hypothesis which strengthens the argument that many of the state institutions adopted in Wales in the early Middle Ages were acquired due to processes of secondary state formation (Loyn, 1981; Price, 1978).

Nonetheless, the existence of a law which was common to the whole of Wales does not of necessity mean that there existed a state legal system within Wales. Although the introductions to the Welsh law texts may give the impression that there existed a sophisticated legal system within the country, it must be stressed that introductory proclamations of law codes usually reflect an institutional maturity that kings aspire to, rather than a maturity that has been achieved. In this respect, we need to see the law texts codified by Hywel Dda as being an ideal measure of his legal power as opposed to being a reflection of the institutional reality of the tenth century. Nevertheless, the oral nature of early traditional Celtic law would seem to suggest that even the codification of law texts in a written form represented a major institutional advancement for early medieval Welsh society. As Wallace-Hadrill (1962: 179–81) has maintained in a Germanic context, a king, by codifying laws indicated that the legal role of kinship groups was limited and that the administration of law was now primarily a royal function (Wormald, 1977: 106).

As such, even the codification of law texts represents a considerable degree of institutional maturity.

Hywel's main motivation for codifying the Welsh laws, according to the introductions to the law codes, was to reduce the occurrence of criminal offences and the misuse of the various customary laws (Owen, 1841: 1, 338, 620). To some extent, such a rationale for the introduction of a standardised law for the whole of Wales resembles that of the introduction to the Sumerian laws discussed above, and can be interpreted as evidence to support the hypothesis that the main reason for the adoption of state institutions within Wales was to reduce friction and discontent between different social classes. However, the same criticisms apply to the use of the introductions of both the Welsh and Sumerian laws as evidence for the importance of friction between social classes in processes of state formation. Although the introductions may well indicate the existence of conflict between different sections of society, they do not offer conclusive evidence that this friction was the causal reason for the adoption of state institutions.

The existence of a common Welsh law possibly suggests that legal institutions were developing at a unified Welsh scale in the tenth century. However, this, to some extent, is a misleading statement. Even though it is possible that there existed a common Welsh law at one time, it subsequently diversified into the law of Gwynedd, the law of Powys and the law of Deheubarth. This suggests that even if Hywel Dda managed to regulate laws throughout the whole of Wales, it was not long before this common Welsh law had split up into regional variations. For instance, in the document known as 'Braint Teilo', which dates from a period before the end of the eleventh century, it is the law of the king of Morgannwg which is mentioned and not the laws of Wales (Davies, 1974-76: 136). Laws within Wales were primarily administered by a king and his government. However, this was mainly done at a regional scale and not at a unified Welsh scale.

It is difficult to know how centralised this government was. It is plain that developments within Welsh law during the Middle Ages were trying to reduce the role of kinship groups. We can see this most clearly in the context of the growing importance of the state, and the corresponding decreasing importance of kinship groups, in the law of *galanas*, the Welsh law which attempted to ameliorate the effects of the bloodfeud (Pierce, 1972a). Although kinship groups paid the same amount of compensation to the relatives of a murdered individual for most of the Middle Ages, the relatives of the deceased received a progressively smaller proportion of the payment. The state now received a larger slice of the *galanas* payment, demonstrating clearly that murder was now perceived as being a crime committed against the king's peace.

Nonetheless, as has been demonstrated by Davies (1969), kinship groups still held some influence in the laws of *galanas*, even at a late stage of the Middle Ages. One could argue that this suggests that societies within Wales to some extent failed this criterion of an early state. Welsh society could be described as one where the rules of kinship were still relatively important. However, in mitigation, it should be noted that the state-making process is often a slow one which may be drawn out for centuries, and therefore it is not unusual to discover signs of institutions which were prevalent in previous modes of societal organisation coexisting with newer and more sophisticated institutions (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978: 21).

Additionally, as we have already seen, Claessen and Skalnik (1978: 23) have argued that it is possible to discern the existence of an institutionally-immature early state, or what they term an inchoate early state. This is a state where kinship groups still have an active role to play in the political arena. This notion of an inchoate early state does bear some resemblance to Welsh society in the context of *galanas* laws. However, despite the

continuing importance of kinship groups in some limited aspects of Welsh law, it is evident that there existed within Wales both a predominantly public and state-administered law and a relatively centralised government. Such evidence would seem to suggest that Welsh society was by and large organised as a typical early state, one where the influence of kinship groups was minimal.

Agricultural productivity high enough so that there is a regular food surplus

In an early state, agricultural productivity needs to be high enough in order to maintain the administrative structure of the state. It is quite obvious from the Welsh law texts that Wales was productive enough to create an agricultural surplus in the form of food renders (Owen, 1841: 188, 196, 198–200, 532–4, 768–70). Some difficulty does arise when attempting to elucidate the actual period when these food renders become common in Wales, but Charles-Edwards (1993: 376–7, 395–400) firmly believes that they derive from a very early period. The Welsh landscape's ability to sustain state institutions would have been even more in evidence from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards, a time of improving climatic conditions (Davies, 1982: 7).

The individuals who cultivated the Welsh agricultural landscape in the early medieval period, and consequently supported kings' efforts to adopt state institutions, were predominantly bondmen living in nucleated hamlets (Jones, 1963). In addition, there existed within Wales a small and exclusive class of freemen, who offered both military and economic support to the emerging state system. Indeed, there is some evidence that both freemen and bondmen were organised into a relatively systematic territorial arrangement in the early Middle Ages, in the form of Jones's (1976) multiple estate. *Maenoraau* and *maenolau*, the Welsh versions of multiple estates, would have been, according to Glanville Jones, the territorial expression of medieval Welsh kings' desire to organise their kingdoms into agriculturally-productive areas. Although there are some conceptual problems associated with the notion of the multiple estate (Jones, forthcoming), it is reasonable to argue that they symbolised both the Welsh landscape's agricultural productivity and kings' need to support state institutions by exploiting land.

Despite an obvious ability on the part of a Welsh landscape to support state institutions, a common theme which has arisen when considering Claessen and Skalkin's first two criteria is the fact that it is probable that the most important institutions in Wales during the early Middle Ages were organised on the basis of the regional kingdoms of Wales rather than on a wider Welsh political unit. We therefore need to consider whether the various regional political units within Wales had a sufficiently large agricultural base in order to maintain a state administration. *Figure 2* demonstrates that each of the four main regional political units of Wales had an agricultural base; Gwynedd possessed Anglesey, the Llyn Peninsula and had an occasional control of the Perfeddwlad; Powys controlled the higher reaches of the Severn Valley and the lowlands of the Borderland; Morgannwg controlled the Vale of Glamorgan and the lower Wye Valley, and Deheubarth possessed South Pembrokeshire (Davies, 1992: 95). Without lapsing into too crude an environmental determinism, it is possible to argue that the agricultural lands of these regional political units would have acted as economic bases to support state institutions as well as providing the food surplus needed to maintain a class of administrators (Pounds and Ball, 1964). As Jones (1981: 105) has stated in an European context, these 'core-areas offered the largest tax bases to sustain offence and defence'.

However, there were regional differences in the patterns of agricultural productivity. Much of the agricultural heartland of Powys was progressively lost throughout the early

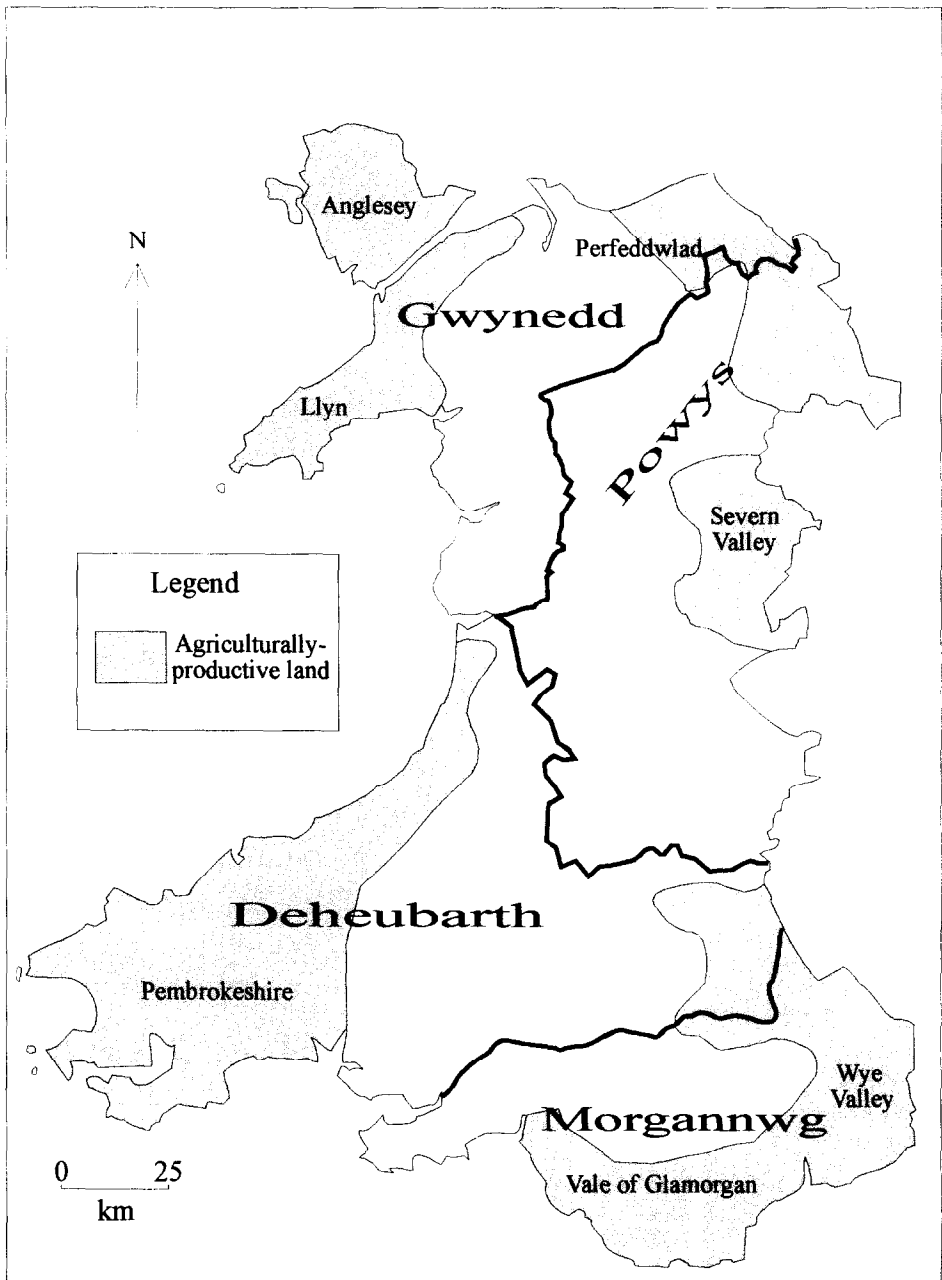


FIGURE 2. Agricultural core areas of the four main Welsh kingdoms.

Middle Ages, firstly to the Saxons and subsequently to the Normans. This would have meant that the ability of societal rulers to sustain state institutions in this region would have been severely curtailed. Similar problems would have struck Morgannwg and Deheubarth from the late eleventh century onwards as William fitz Osbern in the former, and Roger of Montgomery in the latter, first began Norman occupation of parts of the heartlands of Gwent and South Pembrokeshire (Jones, 1941: 26; Davies, 1991: 28-9). This

process continued apace throughout the Middle Ages as ever more extensive areas in the political units of Powys, Morgannwg and Deheubarth came under Norman rule.

The only major exception to this trend was Gwynedd, a political unit which managed to sustain a high degree of internal political coherence and external independence until the late thirteenth century. The main reason for this was that its political and agricultural heartland was protected by the buffer of the inhospitable mountain range of Snowdonia. It is no surprise therefore that Gwynedd was the major bastion of Welsh independence, as well as being the location of major native institutional developments, during the later Middle Ages (Pierce, 1972b).

Conclusion

A consideration of the above three criteria in the context of Wales has demonstrated that societies within Wales were, by and large, starting to adopt state institutions from approximately the tenth centuries onwards. The notion of territorial rule became a norm from approximately this period onwards. Power of jurisdiction was certainly centred on the king and his retinue, although some degree of jurisdictional authority still lay with kin groups. Agricultural productivity levels were high in medieval Wales at both a regional and a unified Welsh scale, forming a sufficiently large resource base to maintain state institutions.

The tenth century is a date that falls somewhat in between the ones offered by authors in favour of an immediate Post-Roman formation of kingdoms on the one hand and those in favour of a late date for the formation of kingdoms on the other. Nevertheless, it is believed that the date offered in this paper is reasonable, mainly because the findings have been based upon relatively objective measures of state formation. The submission of this date as a crucial period for the territorialisation of power in Wales is further strengthened by the fact that it bears some resemblance to dates which have been offered for the timing of the process of state formation in societies such as Ireland, Anglo-Saxon England and Denmark (Dodgshon, 1987: 153, 160, 163).

The main reason for the adoption of state institutions within Wales are twofold. Firstly, the role of processes of secondary state formation, such as those suggested by Price, needs to be stressed. The tenth century was a critical period in the adoption of state institutions within Wales. It is significant that this period also witnessed great advances in the methods by which society was administered in Wessex, an Anglo-Saxon kingdom bordering Wales. It is suggested that many of the Welsh institutional developments of this century were either borrowed from the Wessex court, or were adopted as a means to better organise Welsh society in the face of the Wessex military threat. Indeed, it is probable that the adoption of state institutions during this century was a consequence of both these influences as rulers within Wales perceived that the only way of withstanding Wessex military power was to adopt similar institutions to the ones used by Wessex rulers to organise their territories. In effect, it is possible to argue that the threat of military conquest acted as both an impetus for Welsh societal rulers to adopt state institutions and as an example of the way in which kingdoms could be better administered using mature territorial units.

A second contributory factor in the adoption of state institutions within Wales is the diffusion process associated with Renfrew's 'Early State Module'. It has been emphasised throughout this article that although Welsh society was adopting state institutions from the tenth century onwards, the foci for the adoption of these institutions were the regional political units within Wales. This is an important point. We have already seen the

possible difference of opinion between the work of Claessen and Skalnik and the work of Renfrew. On the one hand, the first two believe that kingdoms, political units similar to those of Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth and Morgannwg, are inchoate early states. They are states where the role of kinship is still pronounced (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978: 23; Khazanov, 1974). On the other hand, Renfrew (1984: 94–101), in his 'Early State Module', believes that smaller political units, which later aggregate together to form an early state, can also be organised using state institutions. Indeed, it is the diffusion of ideas between these smaller political units which leads to more sophisticated and mature state institutions being adopted. In short, what Renfrew proposes is that mature state institutions can appear at the scale of the inchoate early state or kingdom as well as at the scale of large early states.

This is indeed what has been found in the context of Wales. Regional political units within Wales display the main features associated with typical early states. Although kinship still played a role in the political arena, it was a limited one, and one which was decreasing in importance throughout the Middle Ages. Power was slowly being centralised in the institution of the king, a king who ruled a defined territory rather than an amalgam of social groups.

The probable reason for the adoption of mature state institutions at a regional scale in Wales was a combination of processes of secondary state formation and processes associated with Renfrew's 'Early State Module'. It was the political and social interaction between the regional kingdoms, added to the diffusion of institutional practices and the possible threat of conflict from Wessex, which led to ever-more sophisticated institutions being nurtured and promoted within the regional kingdoms of Wales (*Figure 3*).

The main reason why this institutional development was centred on regional political units within Wales was because of the fact that every regional political unit had its own agricultural heartland (Davies, 1992: 95). It was not due to the existence of a mountainous terrain which retarded political integration, as suggested by Bowen (1976: 13). Wales was, and to some extent still is, a land of numerous fertile valleys separated by mountains, forests and marshes. These fertile lands offered the opportunity for developing state institutions on a small-scale. However, the large number of these agriculturally-productive lands, as well as the political and military competition which they promoted, meant that state institutions were not centred on one unified political unit.

Perversely enough, the Norman occupation of a proportion of the best agricultural land in Wales from the eleventh century onwards, although leading to a severe check to the state aspirations of Deheubarth, Powys and Morgannwg, probably offered the best opportunity for the creation of a unified native Welsh state. Institutional development and political independence was now mainly centred on Gwynedd. The gradual disappearance of native competing power-bases which began in the eleventh century meant that Gwynedd soon began to be perceived as being the focus for native state development throughout the whole of Wales. To some extent, the following centuries represented somewhat of a paradox; they were the centuries which offered the opportunity to create a unified Welsh state based around a Gwynedd core and they were also the centuries when these political and institutional hopes were finally dashed by Norman military power.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor R. A. Dodgshon for his comments.

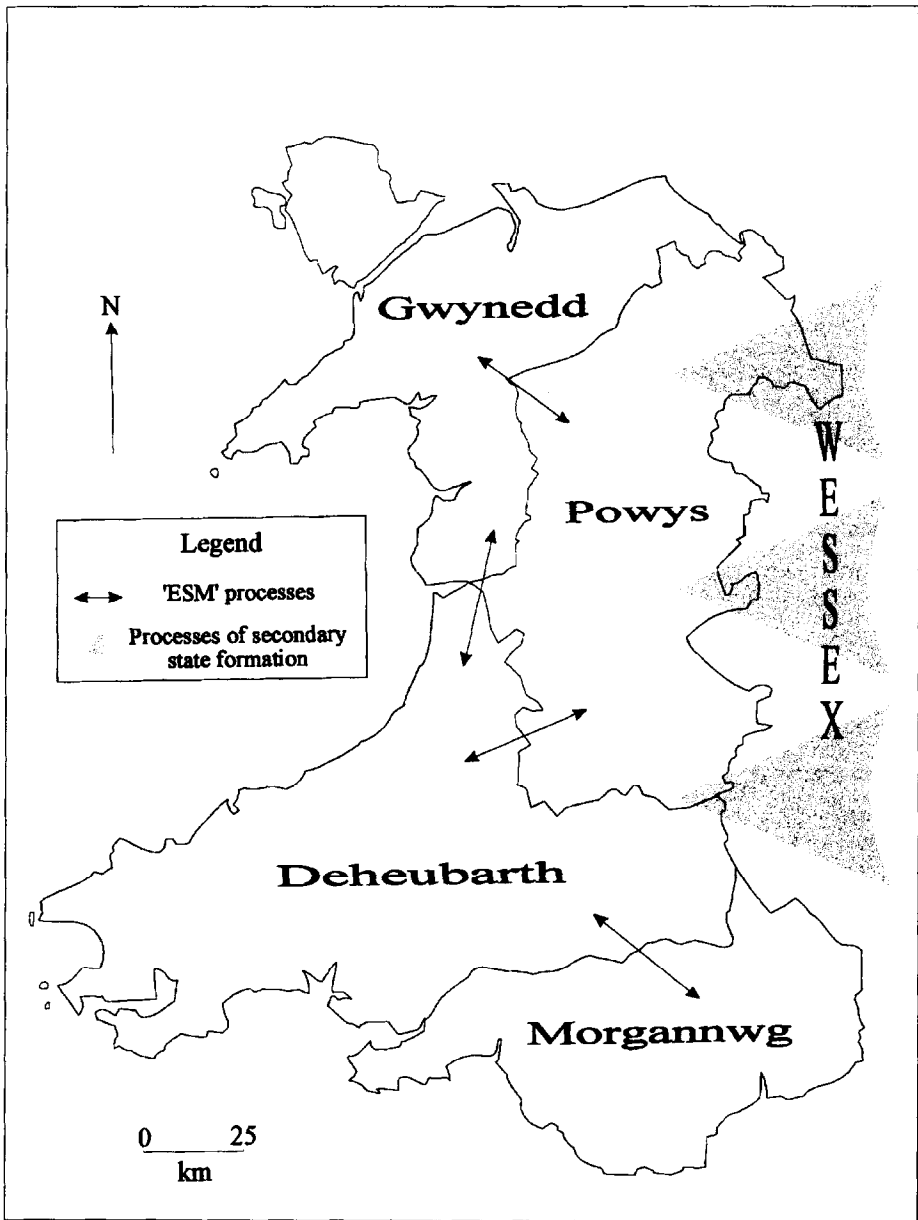


FIGURE 3. Processes leading to state formation in medieval Wales.

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