# 2. Setting the Scene

The conquest of Wales in the 12th and 13th centuries saw periods of conflict and consolidation as the Normans fought, negotiated and fought again with the Welsh princes and lords. The final hope for an independent kingdom of Wales was lost by the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282. The courtly poetic tradition that was bound up with the support of the princes and lords of Wales was threatened by the ending of these princely households. The warrior lords representing the major families of Wales were overcome by the military might from the east and division from within (R.R. Davies, 2000, part IV). The poets themselves saw the loss of Llywelyn as the end of hope for Wales and an end for them too:

*O laith Llywelyn cof dyn ni'm daw.*

*Och hyd atat ti Dduw na ddaw - môr dros dir!*

*Na beth y'n geidr i ohiriaw?*

*Pob cantref, pob tref ynt yn treiddiaw;*

*Pob tylwyth, pob llwyth ysy'n llithraw;*

*Pob gwan, pob cadarn cadwed o'i law;*

*Pob mab yn ei grud sy'n udaw.*

*Bychan lles oedd im, am fy nhwyllaw,*

*Gadael pen arnaf heb ben arnaw.*

*Marwnad Llwyelyn ap Gruffudd by Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch 60,71-2,81-86 (c.1282)*

Since Llywelyn is slain, my mortal wit fails me.
Why, O my God, does not the sea cover the land?
Why are we left to linger?
Cantref and township, all are invaded,
Every lineage and clan slips under,
The weak and the strong were kept by his hand,
It is every cradled child that screams.
It did me no good, so to deceive me,
When his head was off, to leave me mine.
Translation by Tony Conran 1986, p.163-64

Following the final invasion by Edward I, the lands of Gwynedd and Deheubarth were annexed and given to others, new castles were built, taxes imposed, new laws and territorial boundaries introduced, new landowners and populations imported (R.R.Davies, 2000, ch 14). As declaimed above by Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch, in some parts of Wales, every cantref[7] and township was invaded. If the poets were to survive, patrons had to be found, different patterns of living and entertaining would be required.

After the appointment of Edward I's son as 'Prince of Wales' in 1301 a different kind of hegemony in Wales began. Normans largely held the castles. Some Welshmen were given senior positions, made knights, appointed as sheriffs to help manage the countryside areas in what became counties. This reformed nobility created a channel of communication between the conquerors and the local community (Ibid, p.386-7).

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, this second tier of Welsh gentry began to emerge with a new kind of prominence. As landowners who had been members of the Welsh princely courts these *uchelwyr* had probably always been patrons (*noddwyr*) of the poetic tradition. With the Norman displacement of the Welsh princes, the *uchelwyr* became a more vital source of support for the poets.

For the Church, the introduction of Norman personnel and traditions began earlier and so by the time of the conquest by Edward I, the European monasticism of Cistercians and Benedictines had largely displaced the ancient Celtic *clas* foundations.[8] In a shift parallel with secular leadership, many of the key Welsh monastic and diocesan positions were taken by Normans or their supporters. In the monasteries and bishoprics where Welsh leadership persisted, patronage of the poets continued as part of their role (Johnston, 2014, p.11).

It is from these patrons that the poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would receive their patronage and sustenance. The poets who entertained and composed for patrons in Ceredigion are the subject of this dissertation.

As Johnston observes ‘Travelling from house to house was usual for poets by the fourteenth century’[9] (2014, p36). While there may have been occasional examples where poets set down roots as a kind of *bardd teulu*, the evidence of the diversity of patronage for most poets of the period points to an itinerant lifestyle being the norm. In Iolo Goch’s description of the poet’s circuit in the conversation between his soul and body, he yearns for an end to the travelling life (see ch 5, 71):

*Nid teg, nac addwyn, nid da*

*Bellach i gleiriach glera.*

*(IG 14.115-116,121-124)*

It is not fair, nor pleasant, nor good
For an old man to lead the life of a travelling minstrel anymore.
(Translation from IG)

Deio ap Ieuan Du (c.1410-1480) wrote a compelling account of his journey meeting patrons and visiting places *‘O Deifi i Ddyf ‘dd af*’ (GDIDaGIH 11.2) from the south to the north of Ceredigion. The poem offers Deio’s own introduction to his local circuit and some of the people and places under study in this dissertation:

*Dechrau o Ddeau ydd wyf,*

*Y Sirwen, gwlad ni sorrwyf;*

*Hil Rhys, melys ganmolaf,*

*Ap Tewdwr, Ddinefwr naf;*

*Galw llwyth Einion ap Gwilym*

*Y sy’ raid yn y sir ym.*

*(GDIDaGIH 11.7-12)*

He starts from the south of the county in the commote of Is Hirwen on the edge of the Teifi estuary, at the home of the great poetic patron Rhys ap Meredudd of Tywyn with descendants going back to Einion ap Gwilym. This is the family that supports several of the poets studied in this work (Dafydd Nanmor ch. 4, Deio ap Ieuan Du ch. 3, Lewys Glyn Cothi ch. 5, and Rhys Nanmor ch.12).

After Tywyn, Deio travels north across a valley to the commote of Is Coed and the generosity of another Rhys (11.15-16). It is not far to Caerwedros and the court at Llwyndafydd, 'a place that every man finds good' (11.22):

> *Agos yw Caerwedros ym,*
>
> *Dros y ddeheuros hoywrym;*
>
> *Dyfod at waith Llwyndafydd,*
>
> *Da yn fawr gan bob dyn fydd.*
>
> *(GDIDaGIH 11.19-22)*

Llwyndafydd was the home of Ieuan ap Siancyn Llwyd for whom Deio composes two poems (*GDIDaGIH 9*, *10*). Ieuan is also the father of Lleucu wife of Dafydd ap Llywelyn,[10] of Castell Hywel praised in poems by Lewys Glyn Cothi (GLGC 73,74,75).

Deio then takes the listener east through the commote of Gwynionydd commending the descendants of Hywel Fychan of Gilfachwen[11] (11.28). The poet continues north into the Aeron valley, a place that is just outside the area of this study, where the family of another great patron of poetry lives, Ieuan Llwyd (31-34).

Even within a distance of a few miles, Deio ap Ieuan Du shows the number of people available to offer poets patronage. He also alludes to the connections that weave together these landed families. This pattern becomes more evident as the relationships between poet and patron are revealed in the works discussed here.

The period between 1300 and 1530 was not only reeling under the impact of Norman invasion and legislation. There were in addition, famine (intermittently through 14th century), plague (c.1347-69), the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr (c.1400-1415) and the divisive Wars of the Roses (c.1455-1487). These waves of massive social change left the population of Wales ravaged and the structures of society undermined.

About a quarter of the population of Wales was killed by the plague, of these the villeins/serfs (*taeogion*) who worked in the fields and harvested the crops were more heavily affected because 'they were less well nourished' (Davies, 2007, p.181). As Johnston (2014, p.13) and Davies (Ibid, 181-7) suggest, one impact of the reduction in population was an acceleration in the aggregation of land that had already begun through the changing of property laws, Norman incomers and local opportunism. The popularity of the cause of Owain Glyndŵr amongst the common people may also have been a consequence of these conditions. Earlier in England (1381) the Peasants Revolt arose from similar circumstances.

The surviving poetry of south Ceredigion reflects the broader body of poetic work of the time, focusing on the landowner patron, with little material reflecting the ravages of the plague, poverty and famine impacting the general population (Johnston, 2014, p.13). There is one significant poem by Iolo Goch castigating the *uchelwyr* for the hard life of ploughmen (71). Poems have survived beyond Ceredigion showing support for the uprising but very little afterwards, perhaps an outcome of the reprisals and pardons that followed (Ibid, p.15).

The period of the Wars of the Roses ushers in a complex web of loyalties for the *uchelwyr* and the poets (Fulton, 2013, p54). The poetry of the time offers a fascinating insight into these tensions. Several of the poems in this dissertation show the poets reflecting their own and their patron's views (See, Dafydd Nanmor ch.2, Lewys Glyn Cothi ch. 5, Rhys Nanmor, ch 12). Some took the opportunity of using these battles to support the primacy of one king or another to use prophetic verse to write obscurely about the potential rise of a Welsh leader in London (see Dafydd Nanmor 41).

The primary role of the poet in Wales has always been to laud his patron. Firstly it was with chieftains, later princes and then in the 14th century, the *uchelwyr*. The metre and style of the poetry developed as the life of the poets and their patrons changed. From the *englyn* to various forms of *awdl* leading to the twenty-four metres associated with Einion Offeiriad c.1320,[12] including the most popular of all, the *cywydd*. This traditional praise of the patron in life and death, in whatever metre, continues to dominate through the period of this study. The ten poets in the following chapters put their own mark on these traditional methods.

In addition, the poets of the fourteenth century began to develop and diversify their work. These developments may have been influenced by the rush of literary and cultural influences coming in from Europe[13] as well as the challenges and changes happening locally in Wales. This movement of change is manifested, for instance, in the move from the classic poem that praises the patron and includes the poet's own requests (p.58),to works that request things and favours from others on the behalf of a patron requester. In this collection there are requests for: A Swan (p.24), a bull (p.105), for the freeing of prisoners (p.87) and for a judge to come and hear the case of a friend (p.78).

Most of the poets here are comfortable using a variety of genre suitable for the occasion and the person being lauded, such as recent marriages (p.49) and new buildings (p.50). Several follow the example of Dafydd ap Gwilym and excel with clever *cywyddau* expressing love (p.96). Others include works directed to God, Mary and the saints (p.59).

In many of the works, a tone of genuine praise and friendship can be confidently laced with humour or gentle irony. These are works of performance and drama where the audience is entertained and so, who better than a familiar outsider to lightly make fun of key members of the household (p. 33)? In some cases, the poet wishes to reflect his dissatisfaction with another so satire (*dychan*) is used, as in the poem to cheese by Deio ap Ieuan Du (p.20).

Perhaps what comes across most powerfully in the poetry of this period is the abundance of food, wine and wealth praised by these poets. If one takes the poetic accounts of the

bards at face value, the lives of the *uchelwyr* seem to be lived in bright contrast to the turbulence, poverty and ill health of the times. Given the vividness of these descriptions and their specificity, the works were most likely a genuine reflection of abundance. Yet, it also has to be remembered that wealth, plenty and generosity stand in place of or go alongside valour, strength, bravery, and achievement in battle, as motifs of success. The poet was usually composing on request, and so is expected to praise and magnify his patron's generosity. It is only in poems of satire that one is likely to see a contrary view, or where the poet is composing for himself. For instance, when Lewys Glyn Cothi requests a cloak for himself he tells the story of his misfortune at the hands of the men of Chester (GLGC, 215 and 227, see notes p.xxvi-xxvii, 624-5 also.).

There is also a sense that chaos and change were the progenitors of creativity and opportunity. Some might argue that the development of new patterns of poetry, the growth of the use of the *cywydd*, the increase in numbers of poets, the wealth and availability of patrons were consequences of the uncertainties and opportunities thrown up by these times (LlU ch 1, Carr 1997, Evans 1915, ch 1 ).

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## Footnotes

[7] Cantref is an area used in medieval times to delineate parts of a county in Wales. Ceredigion was composed of Is-Aeron, Uwch-Aeron and Penweddig. Each cantref is made up of 2 or more commotes (cymwd). For maps of the commotes and cantrefi in Wales see: https://cbhc.gov.uk/mapio-ffiniau-hanesyddol-cymru-cymydau-a-chantrefi/

[8] Religious communities and places of learning that followed different patterns of life to those structured by the religious orders with traditions under the authority of Rome.

[9] Interpreted from the Welsh by this author.

[10] Ancestory noted here in the University of Aberystwyth repository of Bartrum's genealogies. Cydfor ap Dinawal 6.

[11] Cydfor ap Dinawal 3 Hywel is also descended from the line of Dinawal as was Dafydd ap Llywelyn above and Ieuan Llwyd of Glyn Aeron in line 34. See also the poem by Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen to Dafydd ap Tomas of Gilfach-wen.

[12] It is unclear who the author of this early grammar might be; it could be a compilation of several texts and authors. The Welsh Dictionary of Biography offers one theory that he may have been associated with a murder in the area of Mabwynion or Caerwedros in southern Ceredigion. The early grammar was revised by Dafydd ap Edmwnd in c.1450 at the used at the Eisteddfod at the time in Carmarthen. http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s3-EINI-OFF-1353.html accessed Nov 2016.

[13] Helen Fulton (1989) and Edwards (1996) offer a detailed examination of the influences internal and external on the work of Dafydd ap Gwilym, many of the same factors were available to his peers and passed on or developed those that followed.