

# The Lives of Saint David: from monastic leader to patron saint

## Part II: The David of the poets

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# St David: Objectives

- Who was, and is, St David?
  - A humble monastic leader in south-west Wales... or 'head of all the British nation'?
  - Healer and intercessor...or a military figurehead?
- How is he portrayed in different sources? What are the motivations of the authors or adapters? Who are the audiences?
  - What *additional material* is contained in the poems, as compared with the prose Lives?
  - Where did it come from?
- How and when did David become Wales's patron saint?

# Agenda

- 11:30 The David of the poets (75 min)
  - Gwynfardd Brycheiniog, 'Canu i Ddewi', c.1175/6  
<<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/DewiGB/edited-text.eng.html>>
  - Iolo Goch, 'Mawl i Ddewi Sant', c.1380 × 1400  
<<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/DewiG/edited-text.eng.html>>
  - 'Armes Prydein Vawr', 10<sup>th</sup> century
  - (time permitting) Dafydd Llwyd of Mathafan, 'Canu i Ddewi', 1485
- 12:45 Questions, discussion and conclusions (15 min)
  - How does the portrayal of David differ from that in the prose Lives?
  - Additional material? Where from?
  - Different audiences, or different purposes/genres?
  - A 'southern', or a 'national' saint? When did he become Wales's patron saint?

# Gwynfardd Brycheiniog, 'Canu i Ddewi', c.1175/6

- One of the 'Poets of the Princes', Brycheiniog > Breconshire (S. E. Wales)
- Only two surviving poems; the other is in praise of the Lord Rhys (d.1197)
- 'Canu i Ddewi' is one of three twelfth-century poems in praise of saints and their shrines: the others are Cynddelw's 'Canu Tysilio' and Llywelyn Fardd's 'Canu Cadfan'
- Focus on Llanddewibrefi and the Synod.  
Likely to have been performed there in the presence of the Lord Rhys (ap Gruffudd).

<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/DewiGB/edited-text.eng.htm>

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# Iolo Goch, 'Mawl i Ddewi Sant', c.1380 × 1400

- One of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century *cywyddwyr*
- A professional poet from the Vale of Clwyd, N. E. Wales
- 39 poems: mostly praise-poems and eulogies, also religious and love poetry
- 'Mawl i Ddewi Sant' probably sung near the end of his life
- Opens with the poet's desire to go on pilgrimage to St Davids
- Praise of St Davids and of St David himself

<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/DewilG/edited-text.eng.html>

# ‘Armes Prydein Vawr’ (‘The Great Prophecy of Britain’)

- From the ‘Book of Taliesin’ (1<sup>st</sup> half of the fourteenth century) but thought to have been composed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, on linguistic and historical grounds
- ‘expresses, in the form of prophecy, dissatisfaction with the interference of the English king Athelstan (apparently) in Welsh affairs, principally by means of a tax’ (G. R. Isaac, 2007)
- implied condemnation of Welsh rulers, especially Hywel Dda, and desire for an uprising ‘led secularly by the legendary saviour-heroes Cynan and Cadwaladr and spiritually by St David’ (G. R. Isaac, 2007)
  - Cynan Meiriadoc (legendary founder of the the Breton colony)
  - Cadwaladr Fendigaid ap Cadwallon ap Cadfan (king of Gwynedd, 7<sup>th</sup> century)
- This is the earliest surviving reference to David in Welsh literature – but is he the historial David, or the saint, or ...?

# ‘Armes Prydein Vawr’

Dygogan awen dygobryssyn.  
maraned a meued a hed genhyn.  
A phennaeth ehelaeth a ffraeth vnbyn.  
A gwedy dyhed anhed ym pop mehyn.  
Gwyr gwychyr yn trydar kasnar degyn.  
escut yg gofut ryhyt diffyn.  
Gwaethyl gwyr hyt Gaer Weir  
gwasgarawt allmyn.  
gwnahawnt goruoled gwedy gwehyn.  
A chymot **Kymry** a gwyr **Dulyn**.  
**Gwydyl Iwerdon Mon** a **Phrydyn**.  
**Cornyw** a **Chludwys** eu kynnwys genhyn.  
Atporyon uyd **Brython** pan dyorfyn.  
Pell dygoganher **amser dybydyn**.  
Teyrned a bonhed eu gorescyn.  
**Gwyr Gogled** yg kynted yn eu kylchyn.  
ymperued euracwed y discynnyn.

The Awen foretells, they will hasten:  
we shall have wealth and property and peace,  
and wide dominion, and ready leaders;  
(and) after commotion, settlement in every place.  
Brave men in battle-tumult, mighty warriors,  
swift in attack, very stubborn in defence.  
The warriors will scatter the foreigners as far as Caer Weir [Durham?]  
they will rejoice after the devastation,  
and there will be reconciliation between the **Cymry** and the  
men of **Dublin**,  
the **Irish** of **Ireland**, **Anglesey** and **Scotland**, the men of  
**Cornwall** and of **Strathclyde** will be made welcome among us.  
The **Britons** will rise again when they prevail,  
for long was prophesied the time **when they** [Cynan and Cadwaladr]  
**will come**,  
as rulers whose possession is by right of descent.  
The **Men of the North** will be in the place of honour about  
them,  
they will advance in the centre of their van of battle.

(Summary – after G. R. Issac)

II Establishes illegitimacy of English sovereignty

III Images of English flight before vengeful Britons...

Lines 51-2: 'They [=the Welsh] commend themselves to God and David, that He may pay the foreigners back, that he may reject their treachery.'

IV Details about the tax, and how its imposition will be resisted, mention of Cadwaladr

V The forces of Cynan and Cadwaladr will drive the English back to Winchester ...

Lines 105-6: 'Through the prayer of David and the saints of Britain, the foreigners will be put to flight as far as the channel of Legio [=?Caerleon]

VI Graphic battle imagery

VII Interwoven themes of illegitimacy of English rule and support from the saints David and Garmon, and from Ireland

Lines 127-140:

‘The Welsh [ever] triumphed by giving battle,  
and they will muster the peoples of many countries,  
and they will raise **the holy banner of David**,  
to lead the Irish by its linen.

And the heathens of Dublin [i.e. Vikings] will stand with us.

When they come to battle, they will not shirk.

They will demand of the English what they were looking for,  
what the strength of their claim on the land they hold is [...] or the privilege of our saints, why did they disregard it,  
or **the rights of David**, why did they offend against them.’

- VIII More details of allies from Ireland, 'Legio', Dumbarton (in the 'Old North') and Brittany; the English will be confounded; praise of Cynan and Cadwaladr.
- IX Celebration of re-establishment of Welsh sovereignty over the entire Island of Britain and the flight of the English back where they came from...

Lines 189-99 (the end):

'The foreigners will be on their way into exile,  
one after the other, on their way back to their comrades.  
The English will lie at anchor every day on the sea,  
The venerable Welsh will be victorious forever.  
They should not seek out the librarian or the avaricious poet,  
there is no prophecy of this island except this one.  
We pray to the Lord who created heaven and earth,  
**may David be a leader for the warriors,**  
for the sake of those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven with my God.  
He does not die, he does not flee, he does not tire,  
he does not perish, he does not fail, he does not bend, he does not wither.

# Dafydd Llwyd of Mathafan, 'Canu i Ddewi', 1485

- From Mathafarn in the parish of Llanwrin (near Machynlleth), western Powys
- Most of his poems are 'prophetic', i.e. political propaganda
- There is a tradition that Henry Tudor spent a night with Dafydd Llwyd at Mathafarn on his journey to Bosworth (where he defeated Richard III in 1485)
- This poem combines political propaganda with praise for the saint. May date from the period leading up to the battle of Bosworth.
- I thank Eurig Salisbury for sharing his new translation with us prior to publication on the saints website

1 Dewi, before you were born, a place was ordained  
2 in St Davids to pray to you,  
3 and Patrick left St Davids  
4 to dwell beyond the port yonder.  
{2}  
5 When Non came to the church, a pure girl pregnant  
6 with a well-spoken prince,  
7 the prelate left his chair  
8 unable to preach a single word.  
{3}  
9 God blessed you on the day you were born,  
10 when you were named David;  
11 you gave the blind man, some sense of light,  
12 his sight with no disfigurement.  
{4}  
13 You ate a piece of white bread at dinner,  
14 it was an occasion without poisoning,  
15 and your dog, before rolling over once,  
16 and your raven went to their deaths at that time.  
{5}  
17 Bleiddy, ruler of wealth, founded  
18 Bath without efficacy;  
19 to rid the nations of illness,  
20 you blessed, so that it prospered,  
21 the great clean waters of Bath from the soil  
22 for the health of earth's inhabitants.

{6}  
23 Ever since you were raised lovingly, in adulthood as an ecclesiastic  
24 as strong as a warrior,  
25 the tall and slender man didn't desire food,  
26 there was no need except for bread and water.  
{7}  
27 One day praising you in your sermon there were  
28 one hundred and sixty thousand, David;  
29 stags came from the shade of the trees  
30 to listen yonder on the same day.  
{8}  
31 What is remembered in truth after this is the raising of the earth  
32 under the slope of Brefi valley  
33 into a sturdy piece of land under your feet  
34 in Llanddewibrefi.  
{9}  
35 Dewi, may the whole nation go where you are,  
36 some great affliction is on its way,  
37 the era of a miserable and unjust foreigner.  
{10}  
38 Against wretched disgrace, it's a necessity for Welsh people  
39 to praise you yonder, grievous anxiety,  
40 and to weep in torrents and to cry for Non.

- {11}
- 41 A great number of prayers against great anger,
- 42 and they were miserable with no place of refuge;
- 43 we were placed in a grim state – make us free!
- {12}
- 44 He who is, was and shall be,
- 45 every wise man, we were made free every day;
- 46 may everyone seek the pope of the faith and his staff!
- {13}
- 47 This is the time when conflict will come,
- 48 and the brave enraged with steel in his hand;
- 49 a great many will be named in this age.
- {14}
- 50 Through fifteen [prophets] will it be declared
- 51 the mole who will kill and who will be killed;
- 52 great troubles will be seen.
- {15}
- 53 Restless men, woe to Britain!
- 54 After the charge, blood on warhorses
- 55 and wild terror between fellow-countrymen.
- {16}
- 56 And sweat on shirts and blows on flesh,
- 57 and water in tunics and Englishmen in pain,
- 58 and joy and ecstasy to the just ones.
- {17}
- 59 And eliminating the tribute will cause the battle,
- 60 to muster men in defiance of the people
- 61 to the land of wine, white flowers.
- {18}
- 62 Behold fighting and warriors from the sea,
- 63 and the colouring of river Thames, cold season,
- 64 and the overthrowing of a leader, truthful utterance.
- {19}
- 65 In the east, shining brightness,
- 66 with long swords, the setting of the sun,
- 67 the one whose expenditure on spears is the greatest in the world.
- {20}
- 68 We will behold two of our avengers
- 69 [free] from the two shackles and calling for men,
- 70 sons of prophecy in armour of white steel.
- {21}
- 71 Men will cause the closing of the estuaries
- 72 to stock provisions for the battles
- 73 from the edge of the seas to the land of Meirion.
- {22}
- 74 Causing the harrowing of all the main ports
- 75 as they exact their vengeance, gateways of the South,
- 76 from Milford Haven to Caledon.
- {23}
- 77 Destroying England's city below
- 78 and driving away the world and cooling [the waters of] Bath,
- 79 and putting the mole to flight, excellent gifts.
- {24}
- 80 Many a knight in tremendous pain,
- 81 many a generous duke, anguish will come completely,
- 82 many a spear of steel and shattered breastplate.

{25}

83 Many a banner to ground every day,  
84 many a great shout will be in England;  
85 where wood is abundant, behold the shoots of spears.

{26}

86 Dewi, for the sake of your blessings,  
87 soldiers' life, we use a rosary,  
88 on Fridays and are sinless.

{27}

89 To pray to you, Dewi,  
90 [may there be] freedom once, nation of rebirth,  
91 for your fellow-countrymen, righteous teacher.

{28}

92 And this year, the expectation of the people of Gwynedd  
93 is that we'll get to see, a hundred retributions,  
94 our enemies as corpses.

{29}

95 Enemies will remain this year on every field  
96 before the end of September;  
97 every great land, everyone in our nation,  
98 every region, let them all follow Dewi!

# Bibliography / further reading

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