

Essay 1

The Welsh law codes are useful not because they provide an ideal account of life on the ground, but because they indicate what the jurists and lawmakers of the Middle Ages considered required control. The manuscripts that exist are copies and not originals ranging from the tenth to fifteenth centuries and therefore cannot be read as a clear indication of practice. Nevertheless, they can show social assumptions of native Welsh law. Reading between the lines, the law codes imply that medieval Welsh society knew women primarily in the context of the moments when sexuality influenced kinship, the household structure, and property. That is the main aspect of the intersectionalism between virginity, marriage, and divorce. These are not different or independent subjects in the texts. These are interrelated phases within a legal system that determine the status of women, by sexual transition and its effects as well as by the establishment of having a culturally and legally recognized personhood.

The medieval Welsh law codes traditionally attributed to Hywel Dda remain among the most revealing sources for understanding social, legal, and gendered dynamics in Wales. Hywel Dda, ‘Hywel the Good’ was a 10th-century king of Wales who ruled roughly from 910 to 950 CE. He is aptly best known for being credited with establishing and codifying the medieval Welsh laws. These laws governed Welsh society for several centuries and guided regulations surrounding areas such as marriage, inheritance, property, crime, and the rights of women. He became a popular, cherished and respected king. Medieval Welsh writers commonly praised him, remembered him for being just and wise and he became associated with establishing logically sound laws. He seemingly, genuinely sought to create better order and justice within his society. From this lens, it makes the decisions made in these early laws that take female agency into consideration more believable and more of an authentic and honorable undertaking.

These important law codes are collectively known as *Cyfraith Hywel*, and offer a sophisticated framework for regulating kinship, property, and sexuality. This doesn’t necessarily mean they were aptly followed or adhered to.¹ Fairly quickly,

¹Stacey, Robin Chapman, *The Road to Judgment: From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). p 175.

we can assess that the laws were made more or less as guidelines that were adhered to sometimes only when and how it suited the aristocracy. These texts were not merely descriptive but they also articulated normal idealisms, mediating what they interpreted to be the best of their guidelines with an aim of encouraging social peace and recognizing the intersectionalism between justice, family obligations, and social stability. There was an attempt to be more genuine and realistic about their expectations for social order. The appearance of women within these laws highlights a striking feature which is that their legal visibility is primarily determined by sexuality, marital status, and participation in household economics.

A woman's legal identity is consistently mediated through a series of social and biological transitions and reveal a distinct framework in which women's status was not defined primarily by independent political or economic authority but by their relationship to kinship structures and sexual relations. The laws devote considerable attention to regulating women's virginity, the formation of marriage, and the dissolution of marital unions. These categories are again, not separate issues but interrelated components of a larger legal system concerned with the management of sexuality and its consequences that impact social stability. On one hand, many of the aspects of these early laws may seem misogynistic and on the other, they address the realities of life at the time and for women, the harshness of the reality of sexual relations and possible repercussions of them, especially if children came out of the union.

Virginity, marriage, and divorce naturally form very layered legal categories. Scholar Sara Elin Roberts emphasizes the sophistication of the codes, which were produced in a learned and often oral culture seeking to set down succinct standards for common and customary law.² This essay contends that female sexuality was a central axis where the law enforced social order, mediated household and kinship relations, and distributed property. Virginity functioned as a legal and social status with implications for family honor, marriageability, and financial compensation. Marriage, rather than being an indissoluble sacrament, was a regulated institution with possibly more legal purpose than romantic notions and offered protection for both parties intending to be together long term. This translates into being quite a

² Roberts, Sara Elin, 'Welsh Law Codes', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Medieval Women's Writing in the Global Middle Ages*, ed. by Misty M. Sauer, Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).

pragmatic approach to Welsh law for the time it was. Across these three domains, women appear as legally recognised participants, with their rights and visibility intimately tied to sexuality and household labor and contributions with their own kin upholding their value.

By examining these legal categories through the lens of modern historical interpretation, it becomes possible to see how the lawbooks were attempting to recognize women. When analyzed and considered as a whole framework, the patchwork records of these legal provisions reveal a highly sophisticated system that sought to integrate women into the social hierarchy although it was still a deeply gendered system of being. The following paragraphs explore each of these interconnected aspects in detail, drawing on both primary manuscripts and independent scholarship.

In the Welsh lawbooks, virginity is understood as more of a legal category rather than a moral virtue per se. Or, more likely, it is simply, both but inputting individual or religious opinion within law texts would have possibly been seen as hypocritical or problematic. The purpose of these law texts was not to establish morality in personal decision making but rather, provide a framework that encouraged morality simply by its existence and giving people a framework to work within that benefited them *by* doing what was morally encouraged outside of the law. The law rarely frames chastity in ethical or religious terms and instead it treats virginity as a social and economic status with tangible consequences.³ A woman's transition from maidenhood into sexual maturity had implications for her kin, potential marriage partners, and her property rights. Recognition of virginity, and the financial and legal structures linked to it, allowed the law to regulate the impact of female sexuality on kinship and household stability.

Historians have drawn different conclusions from this emphasis on sexual status. Earlier scholars sometimes interpreted the financial payments associated with virginity as evidence that Welsh law afforded women a measure of economic recognition. The payment known as *cowyll*, for example, was made by the husband following the consummation of marriage and symbolised the woman's transition

³ Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Gender and the Social Imaginary in Medieval Welsh Law', *Journal of the British Academy*, 8 (2020), pp. 267–293.

from maidenhood into marital life. Because this payment was made directly to the woman, it has occasionally been cited as evidence that Welsh law recognised women as legal participants in economic exchange.

However, more recent scholarship has questioned this interpretation. Scholar Robin Chapman Stacey argues that such payments should not be understood simply as evidence of female empowerment but rather as mechanisms through which female sexuality was incorporated into a broader system of social regulation.⁴ From this perspective, the *cowyll* did not merely compensate the woman but also acknowledged the social transformation that occurred when her sexuality became integrated into a marital household. The payment thereby reinforced the idea that female sexual status had economic and social consequences for multiple parties, including the husband and the kin groups involved in the marriage. In other words, it was possibly an exchange based on perceived value and not personhood.

The related legal provisions of *agweddi* and *argyfrau* further demonstrate this dynamic. The *agweddi* represented the portion of shared property due to a woman if her marriage ended before seven years, while *argyfrau* referred to goods that she brought into the marriage and retained upon separation. At first glance, these rules appear to provide women with significant legal protection and they do in large part. However, some historians have emphasised that it's important to recognize these rights were conditioned by unavoidable social hierarchy and marital context. For example, the amount of compensation a woman received often depended on her birth status, illustrating how legal rights in medieval Wales were structured by broader social inequalities.⁵ These provisions illustrated a framework in which the consequences of sexual activity were carefully managed. This is the crux of what inevitably and understandably has led many historians to question the intent of the laws and if they were in fact as fair as previous historians assumed.

Virginity was also well embedded within collective kinship concerns. Disputes over sexual conduct could be defended or justified by the woman's relatives, emphasising that sexual reputation was understood collectively rather than

⁴ Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Gender and the Social Imaginary in Medieval Welsh Law', *Journal of the British Academy*, 8 (2020) pp. 270–272.

⁵ Webb, Sarah, 'Women in Medieval Wales', *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019), pp. 54–69.

individually.⁶ A woman's body became an aspect for negotiating social capital and family honor. Legal recognition of virginity thus served dual purposes in that it offered some protection to the woman while safeguarding the reputation and social position of her kin. Underneath this protective veil is a woman that is not entirely free. Her decisions regarding her own sexuality are not without consequence. She is forced to really analyze and temper her decision making when it comes to both sex and love.

Virginity was closely tied to kinship honor. The reputation of a woman's sexual conduct was not regarded as a purely individual matter but as something that reflected upon her family. Loss of virginity affected marriageability, household alliances, and the legitimacy of children. Women's sexual status was therefore a critical legal and social category, demonstrating that medieval Welsh society treated virginity as a measurable and actionable condition rather than a mere symbolic virtue. It was again, likely both, but logistically, used as a measurable act within law code. These provisions highlight the complex interrelatedness between morality, gender, sexuality, and legal recognition in the codes.

This was a very similar structure as old Irish law where women were well held within the kin group and protected within that group until they were married. In disputes involving sexual conduct, relatives could play a role in defending the woman's reputation or negotiating compensation. This collective dimension underscores the fact that sexuality was embedded within wider networks of social obligation. A woman's virginity, therefore, functioned as a form of social capital that could influence the alliances and reputations of entire kin groups. Also, the kin group's word was trusted in regards to the woman they were speaking for and of.

Herein lies a bit of the perceived continued unfairness to women where the lawbooks reveal a significant discrepancy between male and female sexuality. While male sexual activity rarely threatened a man's social standing, female sexuality was subject to much greater scrutiny by her kin group as well as the wider social net. Stacey's analysis of the symbolic language surrounding women in the law codes suggests that female sexuality was perceived as a potential source of

⁶ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986) pp. 96–101.

disorder that required careful regulation. Women who deviated from accepted norms of sexual behaviour could be stigmatised in ways that men rarely were. In some respects, it can be argued that this perception and larger overarching cultural pattern in general, possibly guided by Christianity, possibly not, has continued in the present.

Stacey again, highlights the term *gwraig o'r llwyn a'r berth*, 'woman of bush and brake' as an example of how female transgression was explicitly stigmatized, while male sexual misconduct received less legal or social condemnation.⁷ This was a negative slang phrase used to describe a woman who was behaving outside of the patriarchal norms. This illustrates a broader societal logic that the law protected women financially, but also subjected them to greater scrutiny and symbolic burden, positioning female sexuality as a socially and legally regulated resource. From these broader perspectives, women may have been merely moved about as social and cultural pawns. There isn't a strong impression that women were truly free to pick and choose their sexual partners easily.

Sexual violence, too, was framed through this lens. Scholar Sarah Webb notes that rape was recognised both as bodily harm and as social injury, with compensation sometimes awarded directly to the woman.⁸ This is also highly similar to old Irish law where a woman or her family was compensated a dire fine for the violence committed against her. However, again, the law conceptualised rape mainly as a disruption of social and economic order rather than as the violent act it was and a violation of personal autonomy.⁹ Although the Welsh laws recognised rape as a form of injury, the offence is framed primarily in terms of social and economic damage. Compensation payments might be directed toward both, the woman herself or her family, reflecting the idea that sexual violation disrupted both individual dignity and collective honor. The law thus recognised harm but expressed it through the language of status and restitution rather than through a modern concept of bodily autonomy. From this lens, the law quickly feels more misogynistic where you get the impression that an increase of sexual activity, even

⁷ Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Gender and the Social Imaginary in Medieval Welsh Law', *Journal of the British Academy*, 8 (2020) pp. 278–279.

⁸ Webb, Sarah, 'Women in Medieval Wales', *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019) pp. 57–58.

⁹ Webb, Sarah, 'Women in Medieval Wales', *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019) pp. 61–62.

rape against their will was perceived as possibly lessening a woman's value. As already mentioned, men were not treated with the same scrutiny.

Overall, the treatment of virginity in the Welsh lawbooks reveals a system in which female sexuality served as a key point of legal regulation. Virginity marked the threshold between girlhood and adulthood for women, determining their marriage prospects, their value within kinship negotiations, and the financial obligations that accompanied marriage. Rather than functioning purely as a moral concept, virginity was embedded within a legal structure designed to ultimately manage the social consequences of female sexual relations.

Marriage in the Welsh lawbooks was primarily a legal institution designed to regulate sexual access, domestic labor, and property relations, rather than a purely sacramental or romantic bond. Scholar Sara Roberts is yet another historian to argue that these texts were the product of a particularly juristic sort of culture, reflecting deliberate legal reasoning rather than informal opinion.¹⁰ Again, the laws were guided by morality but not concerned with it explicitly in their language. The laws were built to be impartial and clear for the ease at which decisions could be made in regard to the law, but nonetheless, there was an underhanded intent of encouraging moral behavior. Marriage functioned to organise households, establish legitimacy, and integrate women into structured social and economic networks. Welsh law approached marriage primarily as a social and economic institution. This distinction has attracted considerable attention from historians, who have debated the implications of the lawbooks' relatively flexible approach to marital formation and dissolution. This was a substantial step in the right direction to recognizing the personhood of women, if not entirely realized.

From this perspective, the various forms of marriage recognised in the lawbooks should be understood not as evidence of deliberate attempts by lawmakers to account for the diversity of relationships that existed in practice. Rather than imposing a rigid definition of marriage, the lawbooks attempted to regulate the social consequences of sexual relationships once they became established within a household context. A distinguishing feature of Welsh marriage law was its

¹⁰ Roberts, Sara Elin, 'Welsh Law Codes', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Medieval Women's Writing in the Global Middle Ages*, ed. by Misty M. Sauer, Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).

recognition of unions outside the ideal model of formal kin decisions. Lawmakers only aimed to regulate informal sexual relationships once they had social and economic consequences.¹¹ The “three-night rule” stipulated that a man who spent three consecutive nights with a woman incurred responsibilities akin to marriage obligations.¹² Rather than endorsing or condemning casual union, the rule simply enforced accountability and thereby protected household and economic stability. From this lens, it comes across at least in part as a legal attempt at protecting women’s honor. Men may have hopefully been more intentional with their relationship advances as well as more authentic in their approach to dating women and in their seriousness in their proposals. At least, hopefully, they felt in some respects legally bound to do this.

Historians have also emphasised the unique and positive economic dimension of marriage within Welsh law. The lawbooks recognise that wives contributed significantly to household production through domestic labor and resource management. The detailed lists of household goods found in the lawbooks reveal a clear awareness of the gendered division of labor within medieval households. These provisions suggest that women’s work was understood as an essential component of the household economy, even if it did not grant them equal legal authority. This was another step in the right direction at recognizing the importance of both roles within combined households.

The seven-year rule provides a particularly striking example of this recognition. According to the lawbooks, marriages that lasted for seven years were treated differently from shorter unions when it came to property division. After this period, the property accumulated during the marriage could be divided more equally between the spouses if the union ended. Historians interpret this rule as evidence that Welsh law acknowledged the cumulative contributions of both partners to the household economy.¹³

Kinship approval remained central to the marriage hierarchy. Women formally given by relatives enjoyed stronger property rights than those entering unions

¹¹ Webb, Sarah, ‘*Women in Medieval Wales*’, *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019) pp. 58–59.

¹² Webb, Sarah, ‘*Women in Medieval Wales*’, *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019) pp. 58–59.

¹³ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986) pp. 108–110.

independently, highlighting the importance of social legitimacy.¹⁴ This distinction demonstrates that marriage functioned simultaneously as a private arrangement and a social institution connecting households, lineages, and property networks. Financial instruments like *amobr*, *cowyll*, and *agweddi* marked successive stages in a woman's integration into marital life.¹⁵ They ensured that legal obligations corresponded to social expectations, and that economic consequences were distributed fairly. Nonetheless, women's rights within marriage were conditional. While recognised as contributors to the household economy, scholar Sara Roberts cautions against overstating female autonomy.¹⁶ Legal recognition remained bound by domestic roles, kinship support, and social hierarchy, underscoring the conditional nature of female legal visibility. Marriage, therefore, provided women with structured rights and protections but within clearly defined gendered boundaries. While women could receive compensation and property in certain circumstances, their legal status remained closely tied to their roles as wives and members of kinship networks. Again, as Roberts argues, the lawbooks recognise women primarily within relational contexts rather than as independent legal people.

Divorce in medieval Welsh law illustrates the system's pragmatism and focus on social order. Unlike canon law, which increasingly emphasised indissolubility, the Welsh lawbooks provide detailed regulations for terminating unions.¹⁷ Divorce was not an anomaly but an integral part of native legal cultural patterns and opinions, reflecting a society that acknowledged the functional realities of domestic life. The law enumerated and made clear very specific grounds for separation, including impotency, leprosy, and physical incapacity, and outlined precise procedures for dividing property.¹⁸ This systematic approach transformed divorce into a regulated process for managing the dissolution of social and economic partnerships, rather than a purely moral or religious severing of ties.

¹⁴ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986) pp. 104–106.

¹⁵ Owen, Aneurin (ed.), *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales* (London: Record Commission, 1841) pp. 63–66.

¹⁶ Roberts, Sara Elin, 'Welsh Law Codes', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Medieval Women's Writing in the Global Middle Ages*, ed. by Misty M. Sauer, Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).

¹⁷ Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Gender and the Social Imaginary in Medieval Welsh Law', *Journal of the British Academy*, 8 (2020) pp. 272–273.

¹⁸ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), pp. 116–118.

Earlier scholars sometimes interpreted the existence of divorce provisions in any capacity as evidence that Welsh law was unusually progressive in its treatment of women. The fact that women could leave marriages under certain conditions and receive compensation appeared to contrast favourably with other contemporary legal systems. There is a fantastic argument to be made here. However, more recent historians have taken a more cautious view of these provisions. Stacey argues that divorce in Welsh law should be understood less as a sign of gender equality and more as an expression of legal pragmatism. The lawbooks recognise that marriages can fail and attempt to regulate the consequences of such failures in a way that preserves social order. By providing clear rules for property division and compensation, the law ensured that the dissolution of a marriage would not destabilise the broader network of kinship and economic relationships. In essence, women were not necessarily treated with greater consideration, but more or less, they benefited from the reasoning they were afforded an easier divorce no less that may have had more to do with preserving social order rather than the recognition of women as an equal partner in marriage.

Adultery further demonstrates the law's gendered logic. Scholar Sarah Webb mentions that a wife who tolerated recurring adultery could still make claims associated with honor, implying shared social responsibility for the union's reputation.¹⁹ Women's legal safeguards were conditional and failure to assert claims could result in social judgement or loss of respect. Divorce, therefore, not only corrected social or domestic failures but also tested a woman's ability to manage her honor within legal structures.

Property division was hierarchical and central to this entire process. Early separation settlements, such as the *agweddi*, depended on the woman's birth status rather than equality of treatment.²⁰ Seven-year unions, however, again, permitted more equitable division, recognising the joint production of household labor over time.²¹ Even in these provisions, symbolic continuity, especially regarding lineage and seed corn remained male-dominated, which highlights persistent gender

¹⁹ Webb, Sarah, 'Women in Medieval Wales', *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019) pp. 63–64.

²⁰ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986) 120–122.

²¹ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986) pp. 124–126.

hierarchies. The lawbooks provide detailed instructions regarding the distribution of household goods following divorce, reflecting the importance of material resources within medieval domestic life. Historians have noted that these lists also reveal symbolic assumptions about gender roles. Women often received items associated with domestic labor, such as prepared food or household tools, while men retained resources linked to future production.

This symbolic dimension is particularly evident in the rules concerning seed grain. Women were typically permitted to take processed goods with them after divorce but not the seed grain required for future agricultural production. This distinction reflects a deeper cultural association between men and the concept of generative continuity. By controlling access to the resources necessary for reproduction and inheritance, the law reinforced male authority within the broader social structure. Manuscript evidence underscores these practices. Inventories of divided goods reveal that women received processed commodities, household implements, and labor outputs, but again, items of generative power remained with men.²² These arrangements demonstrate that while women were recognised in divorce, their autonomy over reproduction, lineage, and social continuity was still limited. Divorce law, therefore, balanced and elicited a sense of practical protection combined with the reinforcement of existing gender hierarchies.

Nevertheless, the existence of divorce law at all and provisions women were provided did provide certain important legal protections. The ability to leave a dysfunctional marriage and receive compensation or property represented a significant degree of legal recognition within the constraints of medieval patriarchy. These provisions can arguably demonstrate that Welsh law was concerned with maintaining fairness within household relationships, even while reinforcing hierarchical gender roles at the same time.

In summary, the regulation of female sexuality extended across virginity, marriage, and divorce, reflecting a purposeful strategy of social control. Female sexual behaviour was a mechanism through which family honor, kinship obligations, and property rights were maintained. Virginity established marriageability, influenced

²² Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Gender and the Social Imaginary in Medieval Welsh Law', *Journal of the British Academy*, 8 (2020) pp. 283–285.

compensation, and reinforced kin reputations. Marriage regulated domestic labor and property distribution, while divorce ensured continuity of social order in case unions failed.²³

Sexual transgression was treated asymmetrically. Women bore greater symbolic burden, while male sexual transgressions attracted less scrutiny.²⁴ Sexual violence was acknowledged but framed in terms of economic and social disruption rather than personal autonomy.²⁵ The law thus simultaneously recognised and constrained women, producing a legal system in which female sexuality was a facet of ultimately, both agency and regulation. From one lens the laws were protective and from another, limiting, at least based on today's standards.

Kin networks played an important central role to all of these intersectional idealisms. Female sexual status was embedded in collective reputation, and disputes were resolved with reference to family standing.²⁶ Compensation, property claims, and marital obligations reflected this interdependence. Legal protections for women existed, but they were inseparable from broader social expectations and hierarchical norms. At the end of the day, women were held to a higher standard as well as held under greater scrutiny and control.

The surviving manuscripts, including Peniarth 28, Jesus College 111, and Llanstephan 1, preserve these laws with minor variations.²⁷ Differences among codices illuminate regional practices and textual evolution. Historians such as Jenkins and Owen have provided translations and critical editions, while Roberts, Stacey, and Webb offer modern interpretive frameworks.²⁸ Healthy scholarly debate continues over the extent to which the laws were aspirational or reflective of actual practice. Again, there is an impression they weren't adhered to strictly or 100% of the time. Collectively, these perspectives reveal the complexity of

²³ López Sabatel, José Antonio, 'Perception of Female Virginity in the Medieval West and Its Conceptualisation in the Medieval Welsh Law Codes', *MUSAS: Revista de Investigación en Mujer, Salud y Sociedad*, 5.2 (2020), pp. 93–109 (pp. 100–102).

²⁴ Stacey, Robin Chapman, 'Gender and the Social Imaginary in Medieval Welsh Law', *Journal of the British Academy*, 8 (2020), pp. 267–293 (pp. 286–288).

²⁵ Webb, Sarah, 'Women in Medieval Wales', *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society*, 3 (2019), pp. 54–69 (pp. 64–66).

²⁶ Jenkins, Dafydd (ed. and trans.), *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), pp. 124–128.

²⁷ Roberts, Sara Elin, 'Welsh Law Codes', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Medieval Women's Writing in the Global Middle Ages*, ed. by Misty M. Sauer, Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).

²⁸ López Sabatel, José Antonio, 'Perception of Female Virginity in the Medieval West and Its Conceptualisation in the Medieval Welsh Law Codes', *MUSAS: Revista de Investigación en Mujer, Salud y Sociedad*, 5.2 (2020), pp. 93–109 (pp. 101–104).

medieval Welsh law, situating women at the intersection of sexuality, property, and social regulation.

Female sexuality served as both a focus of regulation and a measure of legal visibility, demonstrating that medieval Welsh law balanced its most noble ideals of recognition, protection, and control. Women were neither seen as completely autonomous nor invisible. They were simply players within a legal framework that linked sexuality, property, and kinship to social order. Their sexual status determined not only their marriageability and the legitimacy of their children but also their access to property, inheritance, and household authority. In this way, female sexuality became a central lens through which social hierarchies and family alliances were structured, embedding women's roles firmly within both legal and social networks while simultaneously lessening their independent agency.

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