

The Poets of the Princes

Introduction

- Introduce the historical background (12th /13th century)
- What was the role of the poets in relation to their royal patrons and wider society?
- What kind of poetry did they perform, and why?
- How do we know about them?



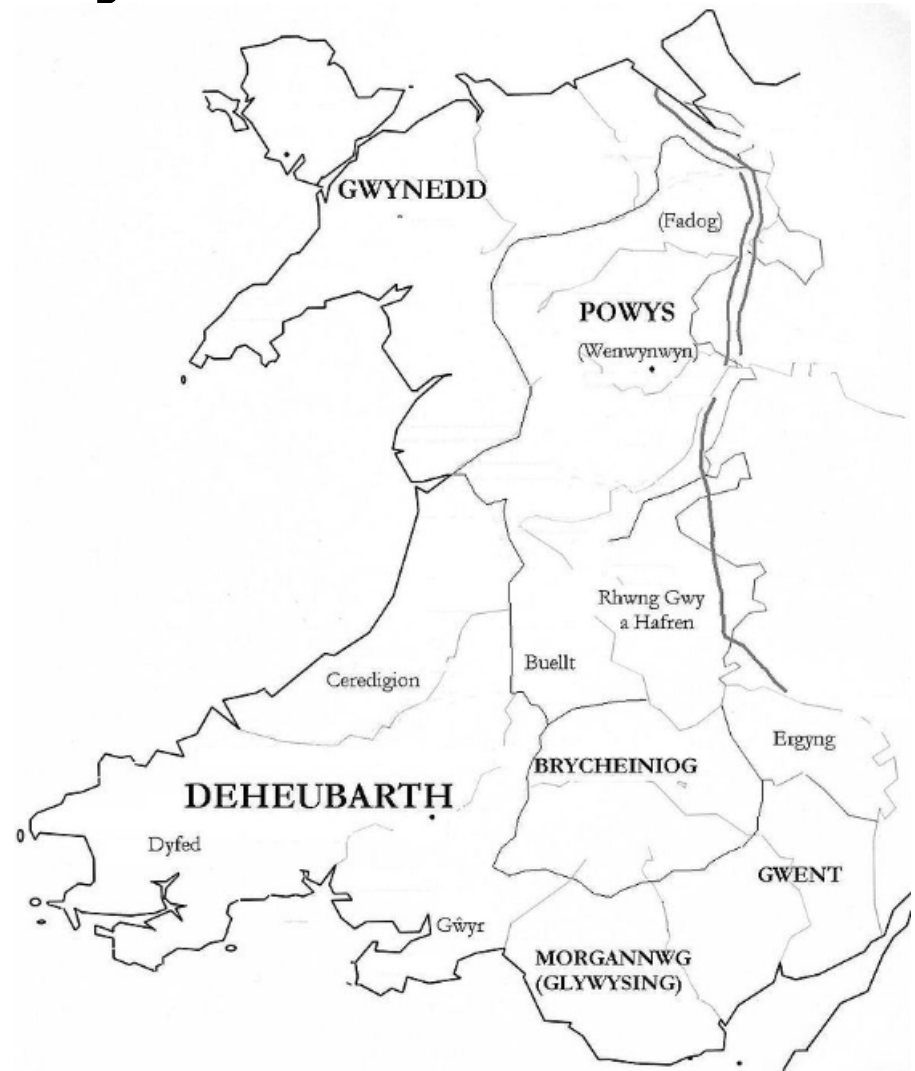
THE KING

From: Leges Hywel Dda

MS Peniarth 28, mid-13th century

12th/13th-century Wales

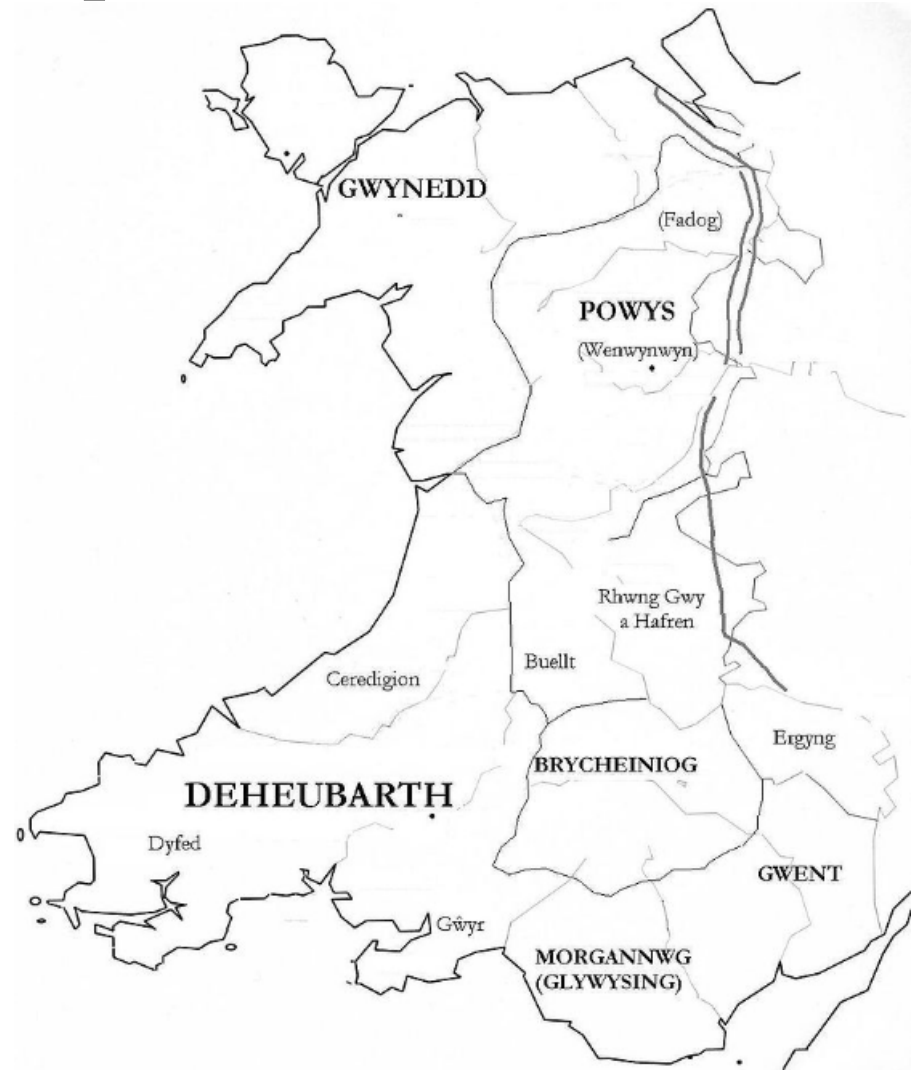
- Three major kingdoms
- Princes or kings?
- Most of the poetry is from the north...
 - why?



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales_in_the_Middle_Ages ; Public Domain

Kings and princes

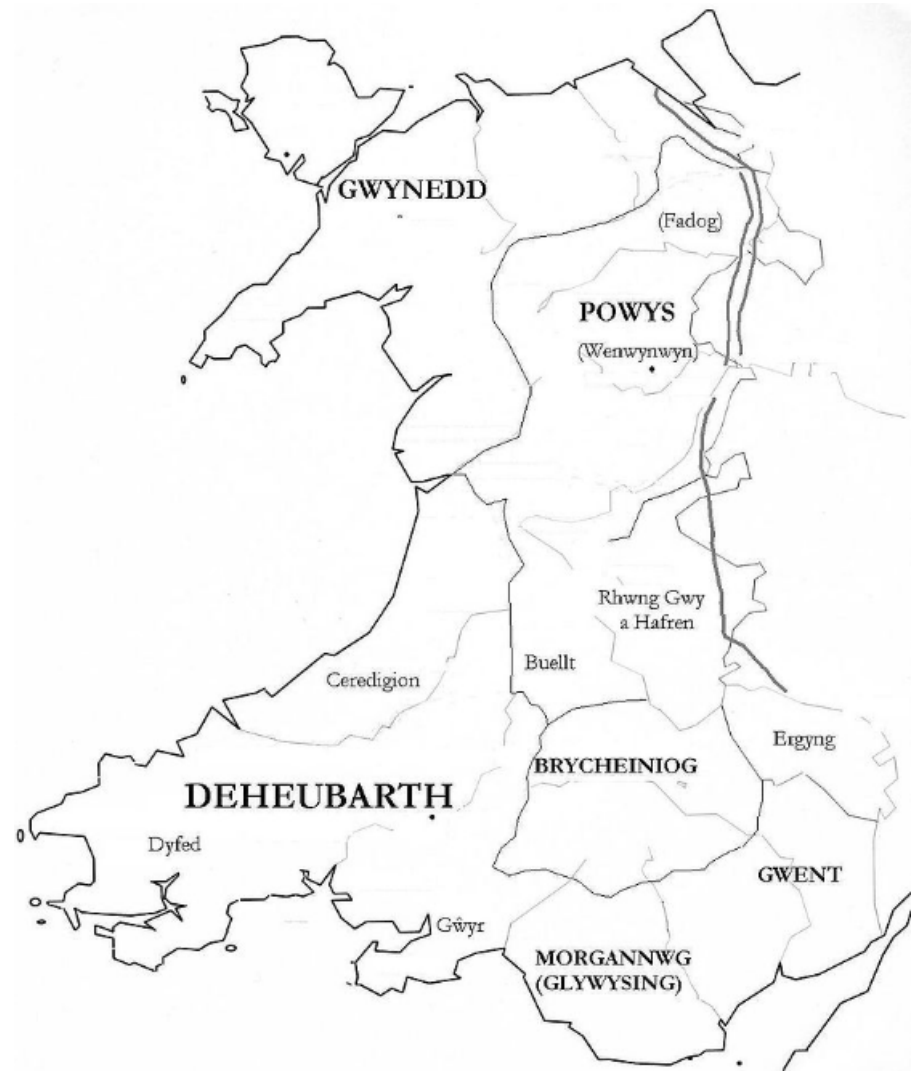
- Gwynedd
 - Gruffudd ap Cynan
 - Owain Gwynedd (son)
 - Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (grandson)
 - Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (grandson)
- Powys
 - Madog ap Maredudd
 - Owain Cyfeiliog (nephew)
- Deheubarth
 - The Lord Rhys (Rhys ap Gruffudd)
 - Rhys Gryg (son)



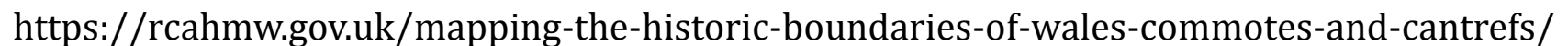
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Poets

- Gwynedd
 - Meilyr Brydydd, his son
Gwalchmai, *his* son Einion
 - Elidir Sais (another son?)
 - Hywel ab Owain (son of Owain Gwynedd)
 - Prydydd y Moch
 - Dafydd Benfras (died in battle)
 - Bleddyn Fardd
 - Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch
- Powys
 - **Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr**
 - Llygad Gŵr
- Deheubarth
 - Phylip Brydydd
 - Y Prydydd Bychan (son?)



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Rhosyr / 'Llys Llywelyn'

AMGUEDDFA
CYMRU



<https://museum.wales/stfagans/buildings/llys-llywellyn/>

Rhosyr / 'Llys Llywelyn'

AMGUEDDFA
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<https://museum.wales/stfagans/buildings/llys-llywellyn/>

Virtual tour: <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=YuDBAPutXF3>

Who were the poets?

- *bardd teulu* 'household bard'
 - an officer of the king's court
 - travels with the war-band
- *pencerdd* 'chief of song'
 - head of the bardic order in a particular region
 - looser affiliation with the courts
- + lower-status itinerant poets, minstrels, etc



THE KING

From: *Leges Hywel Dda*

MS Peniarth 28, mid-13th century

To read more about Welsh Law, see:

<https://www.cyfraith-hywel.org.uk/>



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Eighth [of the King's Officers] is the **bard of the household**. He is entitled to his land free and his horse in attendance, and his woollen clothing from the King and his linen clothing from the Queen.

He is entitled to sit next to the captain of the household at the three special feasts, so as to have the harp put into his hand.

[...]

When a song is required to be sung, the **chaired bard** starts, first of God, with the second of the King to whom the court belongs, and if he has nothing to sing of him, let him sing of another king. After the chaired bard, the **bard of the household** is to sing three songs of some other kind.

[...]

He is entitled to a cow or ox from the booty which the bodyguard takes in a strange country, after the King has had his third; and it is right for him, when they share out the booty, to sing The Sovereignty of Britain to them.

[...]

His lodging is with the captain of the household.

Cyfnerth version: **This is a *pencerdd*, the bard when he wins a chair.**

No bard can solicit for anything within his *pencerdd* area, without his permission

Iorwerth version:

Tenth [of the Additional Officers] is the *pencerdd*. He is entitled to his land free.

His place is at one side of the court justice.

It is right for him to start the song, first of God, and secondly of the Lord to whom the court belongs, or of another.

No one is entitled to solicit except a *pencerdd*, and from what he and his companions gain together he is entitled to have two shares.

When a bard solicits a monarch, let him sing one song; when he solicits a *breyr*, let him sing three songs; when he solicits a villein, let him sing until he is tired.

He is entitled to twenty-four pence from every *cerddor* after he leaves his instruction.

[...]

He is entitled to the *amobr** of the daughters of the *cerddorion*.

(*payment to the lord when a woman has a sexual relationship)

His lodging is with the *edling* [= heir apparent]

Dafydd Jenkins (trans.), *Hywel Dda: The Law* (Llandysul, 2000), p. 20

The purpose of the poetry

- Praise, to promote and reinforce the king's right to rule
 - military prowess
 - generosity
 - lineage
 - good governance
- Promoting a sense of unity and common purpose (bear in mind who the audience were...)
- Praising God or saints / devotional
- Preserving knowledge from the past
- Commemorating the dead
- Marking an occasion
- Expressing a view or a complaint, or making a petition
- Entertainment!
- Self expression?

Genres (note they often overlap!)

- Praise poetry of kings and *uchelwyr*
- Elegies (of male and female patrons, or poets' loved ones)
- Religious poems, e.g. in praise of God or a saint, or devotional poems inviting prayer and contemplation
- Praise poetry of women
- Love poetry
- Gorhoffeddau ('boasting' poems)
- Reconciliation ('dadolwch')
- Petitions - e.g. poems by Hywel Foel requesting the release from imprisonment of Owain ap Gruffudd, brother of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd
- Occasional poems – e.g. Hywel ab Owain's poems 'to mark the victories of Gwynedd'
- Meditative poems – e.g. the 'death bed' poems
- Nature poetry (especially as an element in other poems), e.g. elegy for Nest
- Poems of thanks for gifts – e.g. Cynddelw's sword
- Prophecies – often in the voice of a legendary poet like Merlin or Taliesin – see *myrddin.Cymru*, especially poem 5 (from the time of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth)

Metres and *cynghanedd*

- Two general types, the *awdl* and *englyn*, in the time of the court poets.
- *Englynion* are short and often presented in a series – for example, poem 4 ‘Marwnad Meibion Cedifor’
- An *awdl* can be a single long piece of verse with the same end-rhyme – for example, poem 1 ‘Arwyrain Madog ap Maredudd’.
- ... an *awdl* can also be a collection of such pieces (called *caniadau* ‘singings’), each sustaining a different end-rhyme.
- *Cynghanedd* (internal rhyme and/or correspondence of consonants) was used within each line but rules were less strict in 12th/13th century than in the later Middle Ages.

Key sources for poets and patrons

- Copies of the poems in manuscripts such as Llawysgrif Hendregadredd
- The Welsh Laws / Law of Hywel Dda
- Documentary sources such as charters and taxation records
- Chronicles
- The Welsh and Latin Lives of Gruffudd ap Cynan
- Writings of commentators like Gerald of Wales
- Other Welsh literature such as the Four Branches of the Mabinogi

'The Bard', Thomas Jones (1742–1803)



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<https://artuk.org/> : 'Jones's major 'historical' work, 'The Bard' is based upon Thomas Gray's legendary tale of Edward I's massacre of the Welsh bards. The last surviving bard is cursing the English invaders before hurling himself to his death from a high rock above the river Conway. In the background appear the bodies of the bards and a circle of druidic stones based upon Stonehenge.'