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## **CUSTOM AND HABIT(US): THE MEANING OF TRADITIONS AND LEGENDS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL WESTERN BRITAIN**

by

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses some well-known legends and hagiographic stories, and explores the context of their production and consumption. From an examination of Welsh foundation legends and Cornish hagiographical accounts, we focus on the methods by which versions of history were used in the Middle Ages to provide a context for fundamental changes in the way in which society was organised. It is found that, far from abandoning traditional versions of history, accounts of the past were promoted that sought to couch newer territorial notions of organisation within existing constructions of identity and mediations with the past. In an examination of the production and reception of these popular stories, we attempt to relate the legends to the generation of communal identity and memory. Consequently, drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus, we argue that pre-existing beliefs and customs were an important part in the development of newer institutional structures. Rather than initiating new practices that had no grounding in any particular past, institutional developments gained social currency by being inherently grounded in existing facets of cultural identity. In essence therefore, changing societal and institutional structures were unintentionally

couched in the language and understandings of existing structures, so that in many ways a concept of continuity was at the very heart of actual change.

## **Introduction**

‘Since all societies are organised...to ensure their own continuity’, collective statements about the past help to conserve existing arrangements, and the diffusion of all manner of history, whether fact or fable, fosters the feeling of belonging to coherent, stable and durable institutions.<sup>1</sup>

This paper aims to re-examine some well-known legends and historiographic sources from medieval western Britain, and to investigate their relationship both with institutional legitimisation and notions of communal identity. A particular focus is made upon the territorialisation of power associated with the processes of state formation and ecclesiastical development. It is proposed that these legends carried messages that both supported institutional development at a critical time and yet appeased existing formations of familiar custom and identity. Through a parallel analysis of secular and ecclesiastical case studies, we hope to uncover new meanings and interpretations of existing material. The process of relating these legends and stories to the maintenance of authority, however, raises questions of how identity is established and developed within a medieval context. In order to provide an answer for this more ambitious problem, we aim to demonstrate how these stories and mediations with the past may have contributed to the construction of a medieval identity. Drawing on Bourdieu’s ideas of habitus, continuity and custom are seen as important themes in the way communal identity is constructed.

In this respect, we will seek to counter the arguments of various scholars who have stressed the way in which versions of the past may be used and modified in order

to establish and maintain the authority of a ruling group. The inherent problem with these accounts is that they are often concerned only with the transmission of versions of the past from the ‘rulers to the ruled’. In much the same vein as Vansina, we would argue against such an instrumentalist interpretation:

Accounts about past happenings are necessarily moulded into forms that are dependent upon existing social relationships and therefore ‘must be’ largely a projection of the present into the past. This is a statement of functionalist faith not proof.<sup>2</sup>

Historical change and developments such as territorialisation, for instance, are often accounted for simply by viewing the ‘popular masses’ as passive recipients of sanctioned history. In this respect, there is little room left for contestation and very little analysis of how such sanctioned histories were actually consumed. We would argue that the extent to which versions of the past could really be modified in the medieval period would have been limited by the very immutability of communal custom and tradition. Therefore, rather than simply reflecting an authoritative elite version of the past, historical discourses and legends need to be seen far more as the result of dialogues between elements of developing authority and existing societal formations. We aim to present a far more nuanced account of how authoritative histories supported contemporary patterns of authority, and the means by which developments were embedded within notions of familiarity and custom. By examining the context both of the production and reception of some well-known medieval legends and stories, we aim to uncover how these versions of the past contributed both to contemporary communal identity and to the legitimisation of authority.

Within a medieval context, however, the possibilities of actually finding out how societies really responded to particular portrayals of their past are minimal. Drawing upon Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, however, we argue that rather than rulers

imposing stories onto a sociocultural ‘clean sheet’, we should interpret medieval legends as the outcome of a mediation between authoritative history and custom that was embedded within existing cultural frameworks. Social groups facing an uncertain future seek solace in a familiar, succouring past. Therefore, any socially accepted projection of the past has to appeal to existing identity systems and views of what the past ‘should be like’.

In the following section we discuss one of the major institutional changes to affect medieval society, namely the territorialisation of power associated with the state-making process. In so doing, we seek to explore the ways in which versions of history made sense of these revolutionary changes in the institutional basis of medieval society that occurred in a secular context.

### **Territorialisation, state development and foundation legends in Wales**

The changes associated with the development of territorial state formation have long been perceived by geographers and anthropologists alike as representing a most fundamental shift in societal organisation.<sup>3</sup> The state-making process occurred in Europe from approximately the tenth century onwards as societal rulers who had previously ruled a social landscape of lineage- or kin-groups (where membership of society was primarily determined through membership of an extended family or kin) became kings, princes or lords who controlled a spatially defined and territorially demarcated landscape of an early state. As a consequence, individual rights of property also changed from being based upon membership of a kin-group to being based upon a notion of territorial citizenship. Put simply, the state-making process in the Middle Ages represented a fundamental territorialisation of power within medieval society.<sup>4</sup>

In this respect, we need to realise that medieval Europe was characterised by a particular type of territorial formation, namely the feudal state. As Elias has

demonstrated, the feudal state represented a relatively immature form of the territorialisation of power.<sup>5</sup> A medieval king's ability to govern and rule his state depended to a large degree on the cooperation of his vassals. In effect, medieval kings often ruled parts of their territories in an indirect manner: their methods of governance depended in part on the devolution of powers to regional and local barons who ruled their lordships in the king's name.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this dependence on vassals, we can argue that the medieval feudal state was constituted, to a certain degree, in social rather than spatial terms. Nevertheless, despite the inherent institutional immaturity of the feudal state, there is evidence to suggest that medieval kings were intent on promoting a more territorial conception of political space. We can see the growing importance of territorially defined administrative units as evidence for such a process. Shires and hundreds, for instance, were promoted in England as means of governing people and land in a territorial manner.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the adoption of syssels and herreds in Denmark (territorial administrative units with the latter often being a subdivision of the former) can be seen as evidence of a territorialisation of power within that particular country.<sup>8</sup> Wales, too, had its emergent territorial administrative hierarchy of cantrefi, commotes, maenolau/maenorau and townships.<sup>9</sup> It has been demonstrated elsewhere that the relevance of such units as the basis for a Welsh king's network of political and economic power first appeared in approximately the tenth century and became increasingly crucial to Welsh methods of governance in subsequent centuries.<sup>10</sup> Such units heralded a major shift in the institutional basis of Welsh society. Rather than having a situation in which food renders and payments of criminal compensation were paid by kin-groups, state institutions began to emphasise the existence of a landscape where renders and subsequently, money rents were paid, and law and order maintained, on the basis of territorial administrative units.

At first glance it could be argued that such a process of institutional change would have had major implications for traditional customs and versions of history. Theoretically, versions of history that sought to account for the genealogical relationship which existed between the leader of a lineage-group and his kinsmen would be replaced by traditions and legends that sought to legitimise the new territorial landscape of the state. As will be discussed, however, rather than fabricating new stories that stressed a supposed progression from an obsolete past, popular fables and historical narratives in the medieval period were keen to emphasise longevity and an enduring tradition that connected to an essential past.

### *The Cunedda legend*

Nora Chadwick has noted that kings and princes in the British Isles in the early Middle Ages promoted a series of legends which sought to justify the existence of the political units they controlled:

In or before the ninth century a number of ruling dynasties of the British Isles gathered about them stories of their origins which have come down to us in written form. In every case the ruling families are either themselves intrusive, or belong to a people who are described elsewhere as newcomers....In most, if not all of these stories the founder of the incoming dynasty, or his sons, are eponyms of later kingdoms. This should put us on our guard against treating the traditions as genuine history.<sup>11</sup>

Such a statement would seem to suggest that the various foundation legends of kingdoms or origin legends of peoples should not be treated as particularly truthful representations of the history of a given community but should rather be viewed as versions of history that were contingent on contemporary political and social

geographies. Perhaps the most famous instance of a foundation legend of a kingdom is the one associated with the Cunedda tale. According to tenth century legends, Cunedda and his entourage had migrated from Manau Gododdin (the kingdom around modern Edinburgh) to north and west Wales some five centuries earlier.<sup>12</sup> They expelled the Irish people who were inhabiting these areas, and Cunedda's sons subsequently became the eponymous founders of kingdoms in those areas of Wales they allegedly conquered (Figure 1). It has been suggested that the version of political history described in the Cunedda legend was fabricated, acting primarily as a means for the second Gwynedd dynasty, founded by one Merfyn Frych at the beginning of the ninth century, to legitimise its control of an extended Gwynedd kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Merfyn Frych himself had appeared in north-west Wales at the beginning of the century and in the course of his lifetime had managed to extend his rule of a small portion of the island of Anglesey into a control of extensive regions of north-west Wales.<sup>14</sup> It has been suggested that the political motivation for the legend is also apparent through the fact that the inhospitable land of Meirionnydd is ascribed an eponymous leader, Meirion, who is a grandson, rather than a son of Cunedda. In effect, the greater familial distance between Meirion and Cunedda is suggestive of a delayed incorporation of Meirionnydd into the larger Gwynedd over-kingdom.

Conventional interpretations of the Cunedda legend would seem to suggest, therefore, that it should be viewed as a fabricated tale, produced in order to legitimise Merfyn Frych's control of the kingdom of Gwynedd. We need to ask, however, how this tale managed to gain such currency in the communal memory of the inhabitants of ninth and tenth-century Gwynedd. Given Vansina's statements regarding the general nature of 'accounts of past happenings',<sup>15</sup> it would appear likely that the version of history ensconced in the Cunedda legend would have been far more likely to have been accepted by the inhabitants of medieval Gwynedd if it in some way reflected or

incorporated generally held beliefs regarding the migration of a group of individuals from somewhere in Scotland to north-west Wales. Indeed, Miller has argued in much the same way, stressing 'it is unlikely that Cunedda's migration from Manau of Gododdin was a simple invention to provide a precedent for Merfyn'.<sup>16</sup> We should appreciate, therefore, that there may well be some factual basis for the version of history that appears in the Cunedda tale.

The Cunedda tale has also been interpreted as a legitimisation of the process of the territorialisation of power. In the tale, Cunedda's sons are portrayed as individuals who control territorial kingdoms rather than a social landscape of lineage-groups, and as such, represent some of the first examples of the territorialisation of political power in medieval Wales.<sup>17</sup> In many respects, the version of history encapsulated in the Cunedda tale signifies a radical shift in the traditions and customs of early medieval Welsh society. Theoretically, traditions and customs associated with a landscape of kinship groups gave way to a version of history which promoted a conceptualisation of land as a spatially defined resource to sustain the leader of a territorial state.

At first glance, therefore, it would seem possible to suggest that this radical institutional change experienced in early medieval Wales would have made irrelevant traditional conceptions of history. Versions of history, that sought to outline the relationship, whether real or fictitious, that existed between a leader and his lineage-group would presumably become defunct of meaning in the new institutional landscape of the territorial state.<sup>18</sup> Despite the marked institutional differences between a pre-state and state society, however, there is tentative evidence to suggest that a process of accommodation occurred between the new version of the past and the traditional conceptions of kin-based, pre-state history present in the minds of the medieval population. An important theme in the Cunedda legend is its emphasis on the equal inheritance of land between a number of brothers and one grandson. The fact that

Cunedda's sons are portrayed as being equal co-inheritors of an extended Gwynedd kingdom closely resembles the process of gavelkind inheritance promoted in Welsh land law, where agricultural land was divided equally between the inheritors of an individual's personal estate.<sup>19</sup> As such, the legend reinforces the importance in medieval Welsh society of familiar notions of agnatic kinship.<sup>20</sup> In effect, the version of history portrayed in the Cunedda legend succeeds in both transposing familiar notions of individual inheritance of agricultural holdings to the far larger scale of kingdoms and modifying those notions so that they applied to a control of territorial states rather than to the ordering of the allodial lands of extended families.<sup>21</sup>

This does not mean of necessity that the gavelkind inheritance of kingdoms was a direct corollary of the gavelkind inheritance of agricultural holdings.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it would seem likely that notions of agnatic kinship were used in the political rhetoric of the early Middle Ages, primarily as a means of ensuring some degree of continuity with the past society of kin-groups. It can be argued that the use of this particular version of history acted as a shoehorn to lever the Welsh medieval population from a kin-based mode of societal organisation into the institutional form of an early state. In effect, it was the act of phrasing the political rhetoric associated with the Cunedda legend in terms of age-old notions of agnatic kinship and the gavelkind inheritance of land which allowed customs and traditions to be gradually modified rather than being totally undermined by the territorialisation of power. Despite the fundamental shift in societal organisation which characterised this period, some familiar elements of custom and tradition were preserved so that individuals could comprehend the changes that were afoot within their society.

The main media for popularising such legends and myths were the poets, lawyers and quasi-historians living and working within the kingdom of Gwynedd. Individuals such as the *pencerdd* and the *bardd teulu* (the two types of poets in a king's

court in Wales), patronised by the rulers of the Gwynedd kingdom, performed tales in various public gatherings, such as feasts, legal disputes and councils.<sup>23</sup> Such tales also started to appear in written documents. In a general European context, Reynolds has noted that:

From the tenth century, moreover, and even more from the twelfth, such stories proliferated. They were copied in vernacular poems and stories designed for lay audiences and by the thirteenth century political documents were alluding to them.<sup>24</sup>

The sources of evidence are limited in this respect, but it is likely that the Cunedda legend being promoted by the rulers of Gwynedd in the tenth century would have disseminated to a reasonably large proportion of the population of the kingdom.

It is likely that the popular acceptance of the legitimacy of the Cunedda legend would have changed the ways in which the identities of the inhabitants of Gwynedd were constructed. People, who at one time believed themselves to be members of a society because of the fact that they were related to the leader of their lineage-group, would have possessed a secondary identity based upon a notion of territorial citizenship. In other words, they were also members of the new Gwynedd kingdom precisely because they were born or were living within its borders. Significantly, however, the alternative reading of the Cunedda legend would seem to suggest that such a radical change in the ways in which medieval identities were constituted was achieved through a gradual modification of communal identity and memory. Rather than portraying the process of territorialisation and state development as fundamental breaks with the past, they were presented in a light that was sympathetic to that past. Consequently, it is likely that the traditions and legends of Gwynedd and the communal identity of its inhabitants would have gradually evolved through continued reference to a familiar past.

We have argued in this section that the versions of secular history popularised during the early Middle Ages were used as means of making the institutional changes that were affecting medieval society more acceptable to its inhabitants. In effect, a process of mutual mediation occurred between medieval rulers and their subjects as they sought to make sense of the territorialisation of power. By focusing on the Cunedda tale, we have demonstrated that this entailed a gradual alteration of accounts of the past, alterations which were in many ways sympathetic to the cultural norms of the inhabitants of medieval society. In the following section we outline the territorialisation of ecclesiastical power before exploring the ways in which accounts of the ecclesiastical past also incorporated similar themes of institutional and cultural continuity.

## **Ecclesiastical development, legitimisation and hagiography in Cornwall**

Just as processes of territorialisation and exploitation based upon landscape assessment rather than personal allegiance occurred in conjunction with state development, similar institutional changes were taking place within an ecclesiastical context. The parochial system in Britain crystallised by about 1200, but the development of this territorial framework was a complex and long drawn out process.<sup>25</sup> Blair outlines these processes of ecclesiastical development by arguing that the vaguely territorial parochiae, in which minsters had acted as a sort of religious ‘strong point’ within a socially defined sphere of influence, slowly gave way to the more familiar parishes.<sup>26</sup> The new parochial framework was characterised by well-defined territorial limits, and by the recognition of a single parish church which was supported by exploitative rights over a specified territory. In a transition that is comparable to the one involving processes of state formation, ecclesiastical establishments that had been

in existence for centuries saw their spheres of social allegiance come to be defined more tightly through a process of territorialisation.<sup>27</sup> Rather than a particular church having a specific set of personal ties, each field was now reckoned to be within the territory of a certain establishment.

In the context of these developments, hagiographic accounts would seem to comprise an important source for the support of ecclesiastical authority and bureaucratisation. Saintry legends represent key elements in the legitimisation of Christian belief and its supposedly unquestionable supremacy. In addition, their propagation can be related to wider organisational developments and political machinations in the medieval period.<sup>28</sup> In her work on the formation of the medieval cult of saints, Abou-el-Haj showed how hagiographies were ‘part of the effort to renew and enlarge cults and generate pilgrimage’.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, hagiographies correspond to discourses of power which sought to legitimise the apparent permanence and authority of the Church.

This theme of generating a particular account of history in order to legitimise institutional development mirrors the conventional interpretations of the Cunedda legends. Just as this secular fable was implicated in the generation and support for state development, then hagiographies can be seen to assume an almost quasi-legal status in the maintenance of ecclesiastical power and developments in landscape organisation. Davies and Fouracre, for instance, note that some hagiographical texts were devised principally for the purpose of including acts of land donation.<sup>30</sup> Just as with the Cunedda story, however, the production and consumption of hagiographic fables should not be seen simply as tools that were used to articulate a new version of history that had no grounding in communities’ pre-existing mediations with the past. Ecclesiastical authorities were at pains, not only to stress an unbroken continuity back to Jesus and the

Apostles, but also to articulate these stories so that they would be understood by the ordinary laity.

In terms of the practicalities of making these stories accessible to a largely illiterate society, the verbal oration of these legends on feast days and other public gatherings is an obvious channel which sometimes generated a large-scale following.<sup>31</sup> Importantly, unlike many of the daily rituals which were conducted in Latin, the oration of saints' stories needed to be conducted in vernacular languages. We catch a rare glimpse of such an occasion in west Cornwall in 1336, when the Bishop of Exeter visited St Buryan and brought an interpreter so that the story of the 'blessed virgin Saint Beriana' could be communicated in Cornish to the local population.<sup>32</sup> Less obvious forms in which hagiographic stories could be 'related to the masses' include the use of a wide range of architectural devices.<sup>33</sup> However, the degree to which these fables were actually understood and interpreted by the popular masses, and the extent to which such stories formed a real link between a society and its past, is a more difficult question. Some authors seem to indicate widespread piety and an almost unquestioning acceptance of saints' stories.<sup>34</sup> However, Abou-el-Haj and others paint a more complex picture, adding that although the 'living crowds were instrumental' they were also 'unpredictable and sometimes uncontrollable'.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the homogenous and almost exclusively positive image portrayed by contemporary literature on saints' lives conceals a more complex picture of how these stories were received. Bornstein defines two distinct traditions of popular religion, with hagiographic accounts coming to terms with both an educated-elite ideal of spiritual virtue and observance of rules, and a more practical lay version of sanctity that stressed concerns for the cure of affliction, charitable help and miracles.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, hagiographic material can perhaps be seen as being forged and re-forged through dialogue between notions of authority and

ideas of the laity; thereby comprising a tantalising, yet rare, glimpse of non educated-elite views.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Cornish stories***

The earliest surviving saint's life in relation to Cornwall is that of St Samson, a sixth-century bishop of Dol in northern Brittany, who arrived there from Wales via Cornwall (see Figure 1). The legends are placed within an emerging territorial and hierarchical matrix, claiming ancient roots and sacred authority for particular institutions.<sup>38</sup> This hagiographical account survived from its original seventh-century version (now lost), through a system of transcribing and copying via a ninth-century version with interpolations to some twenty versions dating from the tenth century or later.<sup>39</sup> Just as with the Cunedda legends, therefore, we see the crucial importance of political motivations in much later years in the propagation and reproduction of an earlier legend. The process of copying and re-copying reflects the Church's massive investment in the production and reproduction of a particular heritage which supports the unquestioned integrity of its earthly organisation and of its spiritual ministry. Importantly, the twenty versions of this vita that were produced after the tenth century suggests the importance of stressing continuity with a particular past during this period.

An examination of the *Vita Samsonis* reveals how hagiographic traditions supported institutional authority. Aspects of social organisation, hierarchical support, territorial control and even rights over particular pieces of land are incorporated within the stories. For instance, during his journey through Cornwall, Samson was approached by a Dumnonian ruler who invited him 'apostolicum excipere obsequium' 'to accept an apostolic honour'; that is, to become their bishop.<sup>40</sup> Also during his Cornish travels, Samson forces a terrible serpent in a cave near Fowey to eat its own tail before dying 'at the words of our Lord', and later on Samson strikes a fierce and angry lion dead by

invoking the name of Jesus Christ. St Samson also sings a psalm to another cave-dwelling serpent in Brittany and ordered it to remain under ‘a certain stone’. In honour of St Samson, a local king in Cornwall then builds a new monastery and promises to carry on the saint’s work.<sup>41</sup>

Here we see the invocation of the original apostles, used to support the sanctity and authority of the episcopal position. Significantly, this supposed natural authority is associated with a selection of miracles, often in relation to the attainment of superiority over wild aspects of nature. In many respects therefore, the authority of the Church is literally aligned with forces of control and order within an imagined landscape that is anything but ordered. Stories are consciously placed within a specified built environment of monasteries, palaces and even caves that can be found within an emerging recognised territorial framework. Through stories of punishment and coercion, and displays of miraculous healing and reward, a spiritual identity was (re)produced to form important elements of societal memory.

Significantly, however, conceptions of the past that appeared in hagiographies had to appeal to an existing notion of what the past ‘should be like’. This appeal to familiarity and a contemporary perception of ‘natural order’ can be seen throughout both secular legends and ecclesiastical fables, hence the familial nature of the histories of many local saints in Cornwall which echo notions of kinship in a pre-state society. An excellent example of this is represented by the group of saints who were the eponymous ‘founders’ of the parishes around the Hayle Estuary in west Cornwall. They all have Irish-type names and are often represented as being of the same group of companions.<sup>42</sup> The sibling relationship suggested between two of this group of saints, for instance (Saints Ia and Euny), while not necessarily real, mirrors the emerging territorial formation of the Church in this area, with St Ives being a chapelry within the jurisdiction of Uny-Lelant.<sup>43</sup> The novelty that is represented by territorialisation,

therefore, is placed firmly within the context of existing notions of organisation and communal identity. This ‘clan’ were all commemorated in later medieval *vitas* which worked to re-enforce the legitimacy of parochial organisation.

Hagiographies were essentially produced for large-scale public consumption. They were, by definition, linked to public spectacle and performance and, arguably, represent the popular and heroic epic dramas of their day. The legends display how aspects of institutional development were placed within the realms of an existing communal ethos of what the past was like. These stories and fables both conformed and also contributed to society’s particular and situated sense of the past. Consequently, we can see a two-way process with hagiographic legends both moulding and being moulded by existing notions of identity. In this sense, they represent the meeting point of how particular versions of history negotiate with an existing notion of communal identity. The narrative treatment of saints’ lives attempted to anchor them into a contemporary perception of historical and territorial reality.<sup>44</sup> Hagiographic stories could be moulded so as to suit both local popular beliefs and the orchestrations of ecclesiastical authorities, and also reflected changing notions of social order and identity themselves.<sup>45</sup> Hagiographies are not innocent stories; they represent attempts to legitimise the unquestionable supremacy of the Church. In addition however, they also represent how medieval societies came to terms with the institutional developments that were occurring around them. In this respect, hagiographic legends represent a dialogue between existing notions of space and time and newer formulations.

### **Identity, memory and habitus**

While it is possible to show how legends supported aspects of medieval authority and institutional development, it is much harder to demonstrate how this authority was actually acknowledged and sanctioned by individuals; the questionnaire

results simply do not exist! In other words, although we can surmise from secondary sources how the legends and stories may have been received by the population, a full and contextualised understanding of the actual consumption of the fables is impossible. Instead, we must try to relate the interpretation of these legends to the production of collective memory and the recognition of changing social identity in a wider sense. In order to examine how constructed histories became immutable historical ‘fact’, therefore, we need to examine how identity systems are constructed. We need to uncover the sources for the commonalities of existence in a society, and it is for this purpose that we turn to the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu.

In an attempt to uncover the processes of how people recognise their common identity, Bourdieu has attempted to objectively ground such ideas as tradition and custom in a contextually determined ethical disposition, or *habitus*.<sup>46</sup> Thus, a group ethos is produced and transmitted from one generation to another through the experience of societal formations such as family and education.<sup>47</sup> In essence, Bourdieu steers a course between perceiving identity and tradition as being derived from the potency of certain ‘primordial’ attachments, and seeing them simply as being derived from the cynical manipulation of culture in the service of political and economic interests.<sup>48</sup> Instead, drawing on Bourdieu’s theory, it can be argued that the subjective construction of ethnic identity ‘is grounded in the shared subliminal dispositions of the *habitus* which shape, and are shaped, by commonalities of practice’.<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu’s idea of *habitus* involves the ‘structuring of principles, practices and representations which are objectively regulated without obedience to rules, adapted to goals without conscious aiming and collectively orchestrated without being the product of conscious direction’.<sup>50</sup> In the context of this paper, the processes by which authorities were generated and sustained through the use of particular versions of history are seen to operate within the unexamined assumptions and familiarity of the medieval *habitus*.

The seeming permanence and wide social acceptance of tradition and custom make them the perfect vehicle for the communication of new principles of control,<sup>51</sup> but to be 'successful', they must conform to an existing notion of what 'tradition and custom' should be like. The recounting of legends and historical stories in the medieval period show us how such temporal concepts were socialised and ritualised.<sup>52</sup> Bourdieu's ideas of habitus, therefore, demonstrate how a particular version of the past was articulated through authoritative fable and legend to become a part of 'normal memory'. Accounts of the past that represented the basis of social identity were proffered through familiar secular legend and hagiographical traditions, so that mechanisms of authority legitimisation were grounded within the realms of individual feeling or disposition. Mediation with the past, therefore, conformed to a society's contemporary needs, beliefs and assumptions.<sup>53</sup> In this respect, the sustainability of developing power structures and authority seekers in the medieval world rested upon its acceptability to the medieval habitus.

Bourdieu argues that the habitus represents the 'product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history and objective structures' (such as belief and custom) to succeed in reproducing themselves in institutions and individuals which are 'lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence'.<sup>54</sup> In this respect, popular legends and hagiographical fables were part of a particular version of the past which became widely accepted as natural or 'common knowledge', thereby supporting wider institutional development.

In his explanation of the role of memory in cultural transmission, Rowlands relates the generation and maintenance of a socially integrative memory with different forms of legitimisation and political strategy.<sup>55</sup> He argues that medieval culture was fundamentally memorial and that the value of writing in this period was that it was a

way of remembering rather than a method of producing texts.<sup>56</sup> With this in mind therefore, we can place such articles as medieval hagiographies and written legends within a context of a medieval memorial strategy that formed the basis of an identity and a habitus.

The legitimisation and acceptance of institutional development is related to the success each had in becoming viewed as natural, permanent and unquestioned. Aspects of territorialisation and bureaucratisation which occurred during this period were legitimised through existing identity and belief structures that were supported through the popular consumption of an imagined past. Notions of tradition, therefore, are explicitly connected to societal development. Consequently, innovations such as the territorialisation of power and control can be specifically related to the development of a medieval habitus that reflected the unconscious generation of unexamined views and beliefs that were based upon a widely accepted and durable sense of the past. In essence, changing societal and institutional structures were couched in the language and understandings of existing structures, so that, in many ways, the habitus could stress themes of continuity and ‘ensure the permanence in change’.<sup>57</sup>

Evidence from both a secular and an ecclesiastical context has been examined in order to ascertain the methods by which versions of history were used to provide a context for fundamental changes in the way in which society was organised. It is concluded that, far from abandoning traditional versions of history, accounts of the past were promoted which attempted to fuse traditional notions of pre-state, kin-based institutions with more territorial notions of state and Church rule. The versions of history that are represented by hagiographic stories and foundation legends allowed members of communities to make sense of the world in which they lived. These histories allowed people to comprehend changing political and institutional arrangements through providing an environment that articulated changing societal

formations in terms that were familiar and acceptable. In this sense, the medieval habitus developed from one generation to the next in a 'silent dialogue' that occurred between existing unquestioned and immutable aspects of identity and newer notions of order.

In a medieval context, we can argue that the habitus of the early Middle Ages, based around notions of kin-based rule, would have been ill-equipped to deal with the radical and fundamental process of the territorialisation of power that medieval societies were experiencing from approximately the eighth and ninth centuries onwards. This institutional revolution needed to be understood in a cultural context that did not allow for such 'complete breaks' with the past. However, the new views of the past that were promoted during this period were couched in terms which were familiar to those individuals whose life-world was being revolutionised. In the case of the foundation legend of Gwynedd, it was a version of history which tailored the age-old concepts of agnatic kinship and gavelkind inheritance into the far grander institutional fabric of territorial kingdoms. Similarly, the Cornish hagiographical tradition both stressed connection to a particular past, and attempted to portray developing territorial and institutional frameworks as natural extensions to pre-existing societal patterns and landscape perceptions.

Institutional power required consent in order to maintain authority, and so these (re)productions of a particular sense of the past should be seen as part of the process of turning power into authority. To be sure, the territorialisation of power led to a fundamental realignment of both secular and ecclesiastical institutions. That they succeeded must be due in part to their ability to present the institutional revolution that was happening during this period as a slow and gradual process of societal evolution.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> LOWENTHAL, D. (1985): *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 213-14; quotation from POCOCK, J.G.A. (1962): 'The origins of the study of the past: a comparative approach', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4: 209-46.
- <sup>2</sup> VANSINA, J. (1985): *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 121-2.
- <sup>3</sup> DODGSHON, R.A. (1987): *The European Past: Social Evolution and Spatial Order*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, Chapter 5; GLEDHILL, J. (1988): 'Introduction: the comparative analysis of social and political transitions', in GLEDHILL, J., BENDER, B. and LARSEN, M.T. (eds): *State and Society: the Emergence and Development of Social Hierarchy and Political Centralisation*. London: Unwin Hyman, pp. 1-29; COHEN, R. (1978): 'Introduction', in COHEN, R. and SERVICE, E.R. (eds): *Origins of The State: the Anthropology of Social Evolution*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 1-20; CLAESSEN, H.J.M. and SKALNIK, P. (1978): *The Early State*. The Hague: Mouton.
- <sup>4</sup> SAHLINS, M. (1968): *Tribesmen*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, p. 5. Mann also examines the rise of what he calls 'territorial citizenship'; MANN, M. (1988): *The Sources of Social Power Vol. 1, The Beginning to AD1760*. London: Cambridge University Press, chapters 1-3.
- <sup>5</sup> ELIAS, N. (1982): *State Formation and Civilisation, Vol. 2. The History of Manners*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>6</sup> DODGSHON, *The European Past*, Chapter 6.
- <sup>7</sup> LOYN, H.R. (1984): *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500-1087*. London: Arnold, pp. 133-40.
- <sup>8</sup> SØRENSEN, J.K. (1978): 'Toponymic evidence for administrative divisions in Denmark in the Viking Age', in ANDERSSON, T. and SANDRED, K.I. (eds): *The Vikings: Proceedings of the Symposium of the Faculty of Arts of Uppsala University, June 6-9th, 1977*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, pp. 133-41.
- <sup>9</sup> OWEN, A. (ed.) (1841): *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales, Vol. 1*. London: Record Commissioners, p.186.
- <sup>10</sup> JONES, G.R.J. (1992): 'The models for organisation in Llyfr Iorwerth and Llyfr Cyfnerth', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 39: 95-118; JONES, R.H.A. (1998): 'Problems with medieval Welsh local administration: the case of the maenor and the maenol', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24: 135-46; IDEM (1998): 'Early state formation in native medieval Wales', *Political Geography*, 17: 667-82.
- <sup>11</sup> CHADWICK, N.K. (1958): 'Early culture and learning in north Wales', in IDEM (ed.): *Studies in the Early British Church*. London: Cambridge University Press, p. 29; see also SIMMS-WILLIAMS, P. (1985): 'Some functions of origin stories in early medieval Wales', in NYBERG, T. et al. (eds): *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*. Odense: Odense University Press, pp. 97-131.
- <sup>12</sup> LOT, F. (1934): *Nennius et l'Historia Brittonum*. Paris: H. Champion; MORRIS, J. (ed. and trans.) (1980): *Nennius*. Chichester: Wiley; CHADWICK, 'Early learning and culture in north Wales'; DUMVILLE, D. (1977): 'Sub-Roman Britain: history and legend', *History*, 52: 173-92; WHITE, R. (1978): 'New light on the origins of the kingdom of Gwynedd', in BROMWICH, R. and JONES, R.B. (eds): *Astudiaethau yn yr Hengerdd*. Cardiff: University of Wales

Press.

- <sup>13</sup> DUMVILLE, 'Sub-Roman Britain: history and legend'; WHITE, 'New light on the origins of the kingdom of Gwynedd'.
- <sup>14</sup> LLOYD, J.E. (1911): *A History of Wales From the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, Vol. 1. London: Longman, p. 324.
- <sup>15</sup> VANSINA, *Oral Tradition as History*, pp. 121-2.
- <sup>16</sup> MILLER, M. (1978): 'The foundation legends of Gwynedd in the Latin texts', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 27: 517.
- <sup>17</sup> JONES, 'Early state formation in native medieval Wales'. See, however, NASH-WILLIAMS, V.E. (1950): *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, for a reference to Venedotia in the late fifth/sixth centuries.
- <sup>18</sup> There is a lack of empirical evidence of 'tribal' versions of history. The emphasis placed on kin- and lineage-groups in sources such as the Mabinogi, however, may give some indication of the general nature of such accounts of the past; see WILLIAMS, I. (ed.) (1974): *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi Allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- <sup>19</sup> WADE-EVANS, A.W. (1909): *Welsh Medieval Law: Being a Text of the Laws of Howel the Good Namely the British Museum of Harleian MS 4353 of the Thirteenth Century with Translation, Appendix, Glossary, Index, and a Map*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; CHARLES-EDWARDS, T.M. (1993): *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 211-15.
- <sup>20</sup> CHARLES-EDWARDS: *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*; PIERCE, T.J. (1972) 'The laws of Wales, the kindred and the bloodfeud', in SMITH, J.B. (ed.): *Medieval Welsh Society: Selected Essays by T. Jones Pierce*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press; ELLIS, T.P. (1926): *Welsh Tribal Laws and Custom in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press; SEEBOHM, F. (1904): *The Tribal System in Wales, Being Part of an Inquiry into the Structure and Methods of Tribal Society*. London: Longman.
- <sup>21</sup> A similar transposition of a law relating to agricultural landholdings to territorial kingdoms can be seen in the way in which Gruffudd ap Cynan, king of Gwynedd in the twelfth century, claimed his right of *priodolder* - his proprietary right - to the kingdom; EVANS, D.S. (ed.) (1977): *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, *passim*; CHARLES-EDWARDS, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp. 294-6.
- <sup>22</sup> Such a view - which has often stressed the immaturity of patterns of inheritance in medieval Wales - has been dispelled in recent years; see SMITH, J.B. (1988): 'The succession to Welsh princely inheritance: the evidence reconsidered', in DAVIES, R.R. (ed.): *The British Isles 1100-1500, Comparisons, Contrast and Connections*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; IDEM (1986): 'Dynastic succession in medieval Wales', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 33: 199-232. Despite Smith's arguments, it has been suggested by Charles-Edwards and

Stephenson that there existed a relatively close relationship between kindred groups and princes in medieval Gwynedd, a relationship which could have been the source for the kindred associations of the Cunedda legend; STEPHENSON, D. (1984): *The Governance of Gwynedd*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, p. 192, n. 28; CHARLES-EDWARDS, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 211.

<sup>23</sup> LLOYD, N. and OWEN, M.E. (eds) (1986): *Drych yr Oesoedd Canol*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 203-7; VANSINA, *Oral Tradition as History*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> REYNOLDS, S. (1984): *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 258; IDEM (1983): 'Medieval origins gentium and the community of the realm', *History*, 68: 375-90.

<sup>25</sup> BLAIR, J. (1988): 'Introduction; from minster to parish church', in IDEM (ed): *Minsters and Parish Churches, the Local Parish Church in Transition (950-1200)*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, pp. 1-19.

<sup>26</sup> IBID., p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> HARVEY, D.C. (1997): 'The evolution of territoriality and societal transitions in west Cornwall', *Landscape History*, 19: 13-23.

<sup>28</sup> Kirby, for instance, sees the production of the vita of St Cuthbert as a tool in the political power struggle in an emerging Northumbrian kingdom, while Barrow relates the propagation of 'officially sanctioned myths' in Worcester to a more local struggle for Diocesan control; KIRBY, D.P. (1995): 'The genesis of a cult: Cuthbert of Farne and ecclesiastical politics in Northumbria in the late seventh and early eighth centuries', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 46: 383-97; BARROW, J. (1992): 'How the twelfth century monks of Worcester perceived their past', in MAGDALINO, P. (ed.): *The Perception of the Past*. London: Hambledon Press, pp 53-74.

<sup>29</sup> ABOU-EL-HAJ, B. (1997): *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> DAVIES, W. and FOURACRE, P. (1986): 'The role of writing in the resolution and recording of disputes', in IDEM (eds): *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 207-14, ( p. 213).

<sup>31</sup> Brown, for instance, quotes from the text of St Gregory of Tours when it relates how the reading of *passiones* (apparently) 'brought the past into the present', so that 'when the *passio* was read, the saint was "really" there: a sweet scent filled the basilica'; BROWN, P. (1981): *The Cult of the Saints; its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: SCM Press, pp. 81-2. From the text of Gregory of Tours; *Liber in gloria confessorum*.

<sup>32</sup> See HENDERSON, C. (1935): *Essays in Cornish History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 93-107 for this episode.

<sup>33</sup> ABOU-EL-HAJ, for instance, notes how hagiographies could be found in public art on shrines, altars and even bronze church doors (*Medieval Cult of Saints*, p. 27). The depiction of hagiographic stories on stained glass is a particularly striking and accessible format. See, for instance, BROWN, S. (1992): *Stained Glass; An Illustrated History*. London: Braken Books, p. 56.

- <sup>34</sup> For instance, see MARSHAL, C.T. (1995): 'Popular religion', in DOWLEY, T. (ed.), *Introduction to the History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 300-1, or the implications suggested in BALDWIN, M.W. (1970): *Christianity Through the Thirteenth Century*. London: Macmillan, esp. pp. 400-1, or in particular in WILSON, D.M. (1985): *The Bayeaux Tapestry*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- <sup>35</sup> ABOU-EL-HAJ, *The Medieval Cult of Saints*, p.14; BROWN, *The Cult of Saints*; and particularly CAZELLES, B. (1991): 'Introduction', in BLUMENFELD-KOZINSKI, R. and SZELL, T. (eds): *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 1-17.
- <sup>36</sup> BORNSTEIN, D. (1997): 'Dominican friar, lay saint: the case of Marcolino of Forli', *Church History*, 66: 252-67 (esp. pp. 266-7).
- <sup>37</sup> IBID.
- <sup>38</sup> TAYLOR, T. (1925): *The Life of St. Samson of Dol*. London: SPCK,; Llanerch Publishers, Dyfed, facsimile reprint, 1991, pp. 47-9.
- <sup>39</sup> THOMAS, C. (1994): *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?* Dalrymple Archaeological Monographs, Cardiff, published in association with Glasgow Archaeological Society and the University of Glasgow, University of Wales Press, p. 224.
- <sup>40</sup> IBID., p. 230.
- <sup>41</sup> TAYLOR, *The Life of St. Samson*, pp. 51-2, 55-8.
- <sup>42</sup> THOMAS, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?*, pp. 186-7. This group of saints that are associated with parishes around the Hayle estuary includes St Gwinear or Fingar (Gwinear parish), St Uny or Euny (Uny-Lalant and Uny-Redruth parishes), St Hya or Ia (St Ives parish), St Herygh (St Erth parish), St Breaca (Breage parish), St Sinnedus (Sithney parish), St Germochus (Germoe parish) and St Crewenna (Crowan parish).
- <sup>43</sup> Euny and Ia were brother and sister. See FARMER, D.H. (ed.) (1987): *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; also HARVEY, D.C. (1996): *Territoriality and the Territorialisation of West Cornwall*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, p. 182.
- <sup>44</sup> See, for instance, JANKOVSKY, K.P. (1991): 'National characteristics in the portrayal of English saints in the South English legendry', in BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI and SZELL (eds), *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 81-93.
- <sup>45</sup> For instance, Cazelles points out that the subjects of hagiographies changed from being almost exclusively aristocratic or episcopal to there being many more lay- and urban-based subjects; a transition that corresponds to changes in Feudal society after the twelfth century; CAZELLES, 'Introduction', pp. 2-3.
- <sup>46</sup> BOURDIEU, P. (1977): *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- <sup>47</sup> See ROBBINS, D. (1991): *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 172-3, and GAGNIER, R. (1991): *Subjectivities; a History of Self Representation in Britain 1832-1920*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 15-6.

- <sup>48</sup> BENTLEY, G.C. (1987): 'Ethnicity and practice', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29: 24-55 (25).
- <sup>49</sup> JONES, S. (1996): 'Discourses of identity in the interpretation of the past', in GRAVES-BROWN, P. et al. (eds): *Cultural Identity and Archaeology*. London: Routledge, p. 68.
- <sup>50</sup> BOURDIEU, *Outline*, p. 72. The concept of habitus offers us what Robbins calls a 'soft determinism'; it enables us to 'escape from Marxist determinism and to suggest that humans inter-generationally create the conditions within which they are conditioned', ROBBINS: *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 170-1; see also PRED, A. (1984): 'Place as historically contingent process: structuration and the time-geography of becoming places', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 74: 279-97.
- <sup>51</sup> For instance, in the later medieval period, English 'nationhood' and the legitimacy of the monarchy was related by Bengtson to the potency of a cult of St George: 'The monarchy made St. George a divine national hero and through his cult, established an intimacy with the people which it could not have otherwise easily have achieved'. Within an ecclesiastical context, papal legitimacy was supported by a 'divine mandate' of 'natural' succession from St Peter, but, as Boholm indicates, memories of an earlier pagan era were preserved through the 'correct' interpretation of legend and myth. See BENGSTON, J. (1997): 'Saint George and the foundation of English nationalism', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 27: 317-40; and BOHOLM, A. (1997): 'Reinvented histories: medieval Rome as memorial landscape', *Ecumene*, 4: 247-72 (257).
- <sup>52</sup> Gingrich relates the habitus to what he calls the 'social production of a nameless emotional process' that is indispensable for the preparation of rituals 'that socialise temporal concepts'; GINGRICH, A. (1994): 'Time, ritual and social experience', in HASTRUP, K. and HERVIK, P. (eds): *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge*. London: Routledge, p. 166.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. SCHWARTZ, B. (1990): 'The reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln', in MIDDLETON, D. and EDWARDS, D. (eds): *Collective Remembering*. London: Sage, pp. 82-3.
- <sup>54</sup> BOURDIEU, *Outline*, p. 85.
- <sup>55</sup> ROWLANDS, M. (1993): 'The role of memory in the transmission of culture', *World Archaeology*, 25: 141-51. Rowlands looked specifically at the role of memory within the 'western tradition'. On the general theme of social memory see FENTRESS, J. and WICKHAM, C. (1992): *Social Memory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- <sup>56</sup> ROWLANDS, 'The role of memory', p. 143.
- <sup>57</sup> BOURDIEU, P. (1992): *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 56.

**Caption for figure:**

Figure 1. Location map showing the migration of Cunedda and journey of St Samson

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