MAURICE, SON OF THEODORIC:
WELSH KINGS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD
AD 550-650

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ABSTRACT
Among the many petty rulers of early medieval Wales was a king whose name can be rendered Maurice, son of Theodoric. That seemingly odd combination of Germanic and Mediterranean/Byzantine names demands explanation. Understanding the appearance and spread of such exotic names provides a valuable context for exploring a very dark period of Welsh history.

Introduction

This paper originated with a question about how and why a seventh century Welsh king acquired a rather odd name. From that starting point, the research has involved issues like the sources and evidence for the era in which that king lived; the nature and scope of his power; and the larger question of European influences in what remains a dark and controversial period of Welsh history.

The king in question would in modern Welsh be known as Meurig ap Tewdrig, the form which I shall adopt throughout. Meurig ruled between about 625 and 665 in south-east Wales. He attracted little attention from early historians outside the immediate area, although the local dynasty that he established held power until the 1070s. One of his descendants would be a certain Morgan, from whom the western part of the realm would take the name of Morgannwg, later Glamorgan.

In early Wales, he was remembered as Mouric ap Teudric, but the name would properly be rendered as Maurice son of Theodoric, a curious mixture of Graeco-Roman and Germanic elements. The name has attracted attention before. Leslie Alcock once suggested that

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Works used generally throughout this paper include T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Pauline Stafford, ed., *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Leslie Alcock, *Economy, Society and Warfare among the Early Britons And Saxons* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987); Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (University of Leicester Press, 1982); and P. C. Bartrum, ed., *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966).

the Germanic elements at the important fortified site of Dinas Powys might be associated with some kind of intrusive dynasty, represented by names like "Theodoric."[2]

In the present paper, I wish to focus rather on the name of Meurig or Maurice himself. Today, it is a common Welsh name, often anglicized as Merrick or Meyrick, while Morrises of Welsh ancestry can also look back to a Meurig ancestor. In the sixth or seventh centuries, though, the name was far more novel and distinctive, but it appears to have enjoyed a sudden vogue: Meurig ap Tewdrig was only one of several contemporaries to bear this name.

I suggest that the Welsh princes were consciously taking the name of the current East Roman Emperor, Maurice (582-602). If this is true, then the name evidence has implications for the knowledge of Mediterranean affairs in Britain; and perhaps for enduring pro-imperial sentiment in sub-Roman Wales. The use of such exotic names might have been part of a deliberate practice by local elites, both to assert their power, and to demarcate themselves from their social inferiors

Sources

Half a century ago, it would have been rash for any reputable historian to venture too far into the early kingdoms of south-east Wales, an area which suffered from a gross surfeit of history. There were any number of written sources waiting to trap the unwary, and the consensus was that most of them were outrageous forgeries undertaken at various times between the tenth century and the nineteenth. There were major hagiographical accounts of south-eastern saints like Cadoc and Illtud; there were numerous charters collected in the Book of Llandaff, *Liber Landavensis*, which purported to derive from all centuries from the Roman departure to the Norman conquest; and there were various annalistic accounts "discovered" by the eighteenth century antiquary Iolo Morgannwg.[3] Forgery was so evident and so extensive that antiquaries had even created a fictional archiepiscopal see based in Llandaff, and backdated its creation to post-Roman times.

From this rich concoction, it was certainly possible to derive a detailed account of the kingdom of Morgannwg and its rulers, but it was highly unlikely that the result would have any value whatever. Meurig ap Tewdrig himself enjoyed some celebrity in later antiquarian works as the patriarch of Glamorgan, and as "the first founder of the church of Llandaff." The statement was based on the *Liber Landaviensis*, and it is wholly misleading.

Matters changed in the 1970s with the work of several scholars, who put the history of this area on an entirely different and sounder footing; and who thus made possible a reconstruction of Meurig's dynasty. In particular, Dr. Wendy Davies undertook the enormous task of separating the wheat from the chaff in *Liber Landavensis*; and of proving that wheat was indeed present. Indeed, she showed that the charters contained a core of authentic documents

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[2] Alcock, *Economy*, 51.

[3] For these controversial texts, see especially J. G. Evans, ed., *The Text of the Book of Llandâv*, facsimile edition (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1979: hereafter cited as LL); and the *Vita Cadoci*, as printed in A. W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1944). Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (University of Leicester Press: 1982), 200-209. Jeremy Knight, "Sources for the Early History of Morgannwg," in H. N. Savory, ed., *Glamorgan County History,* volume two (Cardiff: Glamorgan County History Trust, 1984), 365-410.

dating back perhaps to the early sixth century, recording land-grants made by a number of rulers throughout the south and east of Wales. These grants often followed elaborate late Roman legal practice, and they preserved a picture of a society and of economic arrangements perfectly familiar from observations of barbarian Gaul or Spain. In addition, she showed that related documents could be found in the *Life* of Saint Cadoc, in a cartulary hitherto dismissed as spurious. This remarkable discovery laid the foundation for a thorough re-evaluation of the political history of south-east Wales.[4]

While *Liber Landavensis* was rising in historical esteem, so the genealogical material was coming under heavy attack. Medieval Wales preserved a substantial body of literature purporting to give the pedigrees of princely families, who were often traced back to sub-Roman or even pre-Christian ages. Nobody in recent times had believed that the manuscripts could be entirely accepted at face value, but in the 1970s, scholars like Molly Miller launched an altogether more sweeping attack.[5] Miller believed that the Welsh material was like the Irish genealogies, in that both were frequently adapted to meet changing political realities. A newly successful house would thus tag its supposed predecessors onto the ancestors of an earlier family, and thus gain legitimacy, with little regard for historical truth or even plausibility.

In my view, this critical argument was carried too far. The Welsh records are simply different from the Irish, where frequent fictions are easily recognized on the grounds of their blatant inconsistencies and anachronisms. Where Welsh annals and written records exist - as for the families of Gwynedd or Strathclyde - the genealogies do not appear to have been significantly doctored, and "date-guessing" on the basis of counting generations is often a valuable device. However, Dr. Miller's caveats are especially important in the context of south-east Wales, where the pedigrees frequently do exhibit the kind of warning signs that alert one to the presence of manipulation.

We can in fact reconstruct the era of Meurig ap Tewdrig with a fair degree of confidence.[6]

Theodoric's Dynasty
Our narrative sources for south-east Wales in the fifth and sixth centuries are strictly limited. Unfortunately, none of the kings denounced by Gildas about 540 appears to have held power in this area, or we would have had a full, if highly colored, account of at least one ruler. By

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[4] Wendy Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978); and see now Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064,* 245-72.

[5] For the genealogies, see Molly Miller, "Historicity and the pedigrees of the North-countrymen," *BBCS* 26 (1975), 255-280; *idem*, "Date-guessing and pedigrees," *Studia Celtica*, 10-11 (1975-1976), 96-109; *idem*, "Date-guessing and Dyfed," *Studia Celtica*, 12-13 (1977-1978), 33-61; *idem*, "The Foundation Legend of Gwynedd in the Latin texts," *BBCS* 27 (1978), 515-532; *The Saints of Gwynedd* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979). Compare David Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists" in P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood eds, *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds 1977), 72-104. Francis Jones, "An Approach to Welsh Genealogy," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1948), 303-348.

[6] Jeremy Knight, "Glamorgan AD 400-1100," in Savory, ed., *Glamorgan County History,* volume two, 315-64.

about 550, there were numerous petty rulers in Glamorgan and Gwent. Some were kings, but perhaps others still thought of themselves in Roman terms, as magistrates or "protectors." [7]

According to later tradition, a ruler named Glywys came to control much of the area, and his sons divided the region amongst themselves. By the Norman period at least, this division was seen as the origin of the local cantrefs.[8] The names of some of these units do in fact appear to derive from personal names, though it is open to question whether Glywys existed as an individual, or whether any or all of the eponymous founders were in fact his kinsmen. Quite possibly, the name Glywys derives from the Welsh name for Gloucester, *Caer Glou* or *Glevum*, a key Roman settlement, so that *Gleuenses* would be "men of Gloucester." Perhaps the ruling family stemmed from refugees or adventurers from that area. Did they think of their new home as Greater Gloucesteshire?[9] A little further afield, there were other powerful dynasties in areas like Brycheiniog (Breconshire) and Ergyng (southern Herefordshire).

Shortly after 600, a new dynasty appeared in south-east Wales, and it left substantial evidence in the charters. The key figure was one Theodoric, who might well have been a new man, an adventurer. The tenth century genealogies in Harleian MS 3859 trace the pedigree of the south-eastern kings to him, and no further.[10] Other genealogies attempt to pursue his ancestry to the fifth century rulers of Gwent, but in an exceedingly unconvincing way: the two major accounts can agree on the name of neither his father nor grandfather.

The name Theodoric was rare in medieval Wales, and was obviously Germanic. He may well have had northern British origins. The late sixth and seventh centuries would come to be seen as a heroic age for the surviving British communities of the far north of England and southern Scotland. Among the greatest of the heroes celebrated in poetry and genealogies was Urien of the northwestern kingdom of Rheged, who was active around 580, and later genealogists reported that Theodoric married Urien's sister Enhinti. These then became the parents of Mouric. Whether that is literally true or not, it is striking that southern Welsh dynasties felt it useful to trace their origins so relatively far afield, to the warlords of northwestern Britain.[11]

A northern context would be quite plausible for a "Theodoric," a name very common among Goths and Franks, but one that occurred only infrequently in Anglo-Saxon England. However, it does appear in the royal genealogy of the sixth century kings of Bernicia, which later historians claimed was founded by Ida around 547. One of Ida's sons was Theodoric and held the kingship perhaps in the 570s. Welsh sources also know of this Theodoric, and Nennius claimed that somewhere around 570, Urien and other great British warriors besieged

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[7] Stuart Laycock, *Britannia: The Failed State* (The History Press, 2008); Stuart Laycock, *Warlords* (The History Press, 2009); Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064*, 314-342.

[8] Philip Jenkins, "Cantrefs and Regions in Early Medieval Glamorgan AD 400-1100," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 15(1988), 31-50.

[9] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24

[10] All genealogical evidence here is derived from Bartrum, *Tracts*.

[11] For the figures of this age who entered heroic legend, see for instance Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, second edition (University of Wales Press, 1978).

him on the island of Lindisfarne. These accounts suggest that the families of the British Urien and the Anglian Theodoric might well have come into contact, and intermarriage is quite possible. The archaeology of Anglian royal sites like Yeavering suggests a high degree of cultural and social contact between the ethnic and linguistic groups. We cannot be certain of the Northumbrian heritage of our Meurig, but it deserves consideration.[12]

One other contemporary Theodoric does suggest himself. In the fifth and sixth centuries, British peoples migrated in substantial numbers to Armorica, and particularly the territory that would later be known as Brittany. Because these overseas Britons interacted with the Frankish realms, we know a good deal about them from the work of Gregory of Tours. In the mid-sixth century, the far west of Brittany was ruled by a chieftain with the impeccably Celtic name of Budic, who had a son named Theuderic. This fact in itself points to intermarriage between Celtic and Germanic peoples, and in Gaul those Teutons would presumably be Frankish or Gothic. But this Theuderic also had direct British ties. Conflict with neighboring (Celtic) chieftains drove Theuderic into a long exile, but he returned to power in 577 with the aid of a force he had gathered in *Britannia* – which in this instance almost certainly means the island of Britain, rather than another Breton region. Like his Bernician namesake, that is another aristocratic or royal Theodoric in roughly the right time and place to become the father of our Meurig. [13]

Whatever his origins, later tradition saw Theodoric as a king in Gwent, who retired to a *martyrium* at Tintern, whence he was recalled to resist a Saxon invasion. But although he perished in military sanctity, there is something strange about the memory that he left among his descendants. Over the next five centuries, we have detailed genealogical lists of the family, including the names of numerous younger sons, and it is apparent that certain names were repeatedly favored in the family – they were Morgans, Meurigs and Arthfaels - but Theodoric was not one of the select list. Theodoric in fact appears to have been the solitary and last example of his name. Given the spotted careers of his descendants, it is unlikely that he was deliberately forgotten because he had left a reputation for unusual violence or treachery.

Possibly, this new dynasty was trying not to recall the foreign origins associated with this non-Celtic name. Later generations favored names that were either derived from older local dynasties, or else were impeccably Roman. That Theodoric was seen as something of an embarrassment to the dynasty is confirmed by the later practice of referring to Meurig by a matronymic, as "Meurig, son of Enhinti". The dynasty wanted to recall that he was linked to the family of the legendary Urien, and not some English interloper. In this context, it is not surprising that Theodoric would have given his son and successor a name that was thoroughly Roman and even imperial, in a possible attempt to gain legitimacy for his rule. His son was Maurice/Mouric/Meurig.

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[12] John Morris, ed., *Nennius* (London: Phillimore, 1980; but see Miller, "Historicity and the Pedigrees of the North-Countrymen"); Brian Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering* (London: HMSO, 1977). Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064,* 384-85.

[13] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* (London: Penguin, 1974), 273; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064,* 68-69.

Meurig's Wales

The existence of Meurig is not open to doubt, and neither are his approximate dates. Our Meurig/Maurice emerges as a king in the second quarter of the seventh century, and he apparently died some time after 665. In a charter of c650, Meurig's son Athrwys is already associated with him in the kingship, so it seems unlikely that Meurig can have been born significantly after 600.[14] A lifespan from c.590-665 would be a plausible guess. Roughly, he would have been a contemporary of some of the famous individuals and rulers recorded in Bede's narrative of the seventh century – of kings like Penda and Edwin, Oswald and Cadwallon.

Equally plausible are the means by which he built up his power, which derived from marriage and inheritance. Different sources give us two names for his wives. According to the genealogies, he married Dibunn, daughter of Glywys, while the charters name his wife as Onbraust, daughter of king Gwrgan of Ergyng. As Dr. Davies points out, it is quite possible that both sources are correct, and that he successively married the heiresses of two of the largest kingdoms in south-eastern Wales, through Glamorgan, Gwent, and Ergyng.[15]

In the charters, Meurig emerged about 620, donating land at Matharn in southern Gwent; but this document is regarded as very questionable. More confidence can be placed in a series of charters from between c650 and c665. Two grant land in west Gower and the Llandeilo Talybont area. Another gives 24 *modii* of land on the river Thaw in Glamorgan, and a third probably concerns the Howick area. We also have a charter of Meurig's in the Llancarfan records preserved in the *Life* of Cadoc.[16] These charters are of interest not only for their legal and social value, but because they provide many names of the great men and families of the era - lay magnates, as well as clergy like the abbots of Llancarfan and Llantwit Major.

We discern a clear pattern of a dynasty emerging on the lower Wye and spreading its power through Gwent and Glamorgan. Detailed information is provided on some specific conflicts and rivalries, though it is uncertain how far such narratives were added retrospectively to original documents. We hear, for example, that king Meurig murdered a rival named Cynuetu, and this crime was the immediate cause of his donation of lands on the Thaw.[17] Such treachery and murder were a frequent theme in the charters, and grants undoubtedly did originate in this sort of violence.

Meurig's family was very successful. As the seventh century progressed, the older petty kingdoms were absorbed into the new dynastic system, and local rulers were either wiped out, or accepted new positions as *subreguli*. In consequence, donations by Meurig's descendants indicate control of a steadily increasing area of south eastern Wales, Glywysing. By about 720, the family established a monopoly of power, which continued until shortly before the Norman Conquest. The area might be divided between several different princes, but all had to be part

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[14] LL144. Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, 102-4.

[15] Davies, *Microcosm*, 98-101 for the growth of the Meurig dynasty in Wales.

[16] For the dubious early charter, see LL 141. The more credible examples are found at LL140, 143-144, 147. Compare *Vita Cadoci* c. 68.

[17] LL147

of the royal kin. Descent from Meurig was thus an indispensable qualification for rule, for no less than fourteen generations.

Even after the Norman Conquest, branches of the family produced the medieval rulers of Welsh statelets like the lordship of Afan. These in turn became the ancestors of many gentry families throughout the region, some of whom retained their status through Victorian times.

Why Maurice?

There was never any question about the origin of the name Meurig, which was re-Latinized as Mauricius throughout the high Middle Ages. (Giraldus Cambrensis recorded an early thirteenth century Welsh poet and writer as "Mauricius Morganensis.")[18] But why did the name become popular, and whom did it commemorate?

The name Maurice derives from the Greek for "Moorish" or "dark." It became celebrated in Europe from the mid-fifth century, chiefly in Gaul, in consequence of the widespread dissemination of the legend of the Martyrs of Agaunum. These were the soldiers of the Theban Legion wiped out c.287, under their *primicerius*, St. Maurice. There was a fourth century cult based on the story, but the account of a whole legion being massacred is first recorded in the writings of St Eucherius of Lyon, about 445. There had been other martyrs named Maurice - for instance, in Armenia - but the Agaunum one was by far the most celebrated in the West. The site lies between Montreux and Martigny, south-east of Lake Geneva. It is known today as St Maurice-en-Valais.[19]

Around 515-520, the church commemorating the martyrdom was rebuilt as a substantial monastery by the Burgundian king Sigismund, who would later take refuge there from his enemies. This abbey - St. Maurice d'Agaune - was strategically located near the border between Burgundy and Gothic (later imperial) Italy; and it would become one of the greatest Gaulish houses. The story of the martyred legion was elaborated by Gregory of Tours about 590. Gregory also translated some supposed relics of the martyrs found at Tours, further assisting the dissemination of the cult. As a matter of coincidence for our present purposes, we might note that the king Sigismund who patronized the cult of St. Maurice had one ruler named "Theodoric" as a father-in-law, and another as a son-in-law.[20]

It was St Maurice's role as a patron of Christian warriors that led to the great German church of Magdeburg being placed under his protection in the ninth century. Under the Carolingians and Ottonians, this fortress on the Elbe stood on the embattled frontier of Western Christian civilization. Magdeburg became one of the great shrines of Maurice. By the thirteenth century, the saint was famously depicted in this church as a Black African knight.

But to return to Late Antiquity. During the sixth century, Maurice's name spread far beyond Gaul to become common in the Eastern empire, where it was seen as especially appropriate for a Roman and Christian warrior. Procopius records one Germanic family who

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[18] *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, "Meurig (fl.c1210)".

[19] The feast day of Maurice and the Theban Legion is September 22.

[20] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 165, 601-602; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 71, 89, 129; Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988). Gibbon summarizes some of the legends of Agaune (Edward Gibbon, *Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), vol. II, chapter 38, p. 395.

served the eastern Empire for several generations in the sixth century. All bore barbarian names, apart from one Mauricius the *strategos*, son of Mundus, who was born about 500. By the seventh century, the name "Maurice" in the West usually indicated some sort of Byzantine context, and it was popular in imperial Italy. Two early doges of Venice were Maurices, as was an imperial official who rebelled in Italy in the 640s.[21]

There would be nothing inherently unlikely about the Maurice cult, and the name, reaching Britain at any point after the mid-fifth century. Even during the darkest years of the fifth century, western parts of the British Isles retained links with Gaul and the Mediterranean. The visit of St. Germanus of Auxerre shows that travel was possible; while around 470, Sidonius Apollinaris had a British visitor, and corresponded with the British king Riothamus.[22] As we will see though, we find no signs of the name "Maurice" in Britain prior to the late sixth century, neither in charters nor genealogies, memorial stones or poetry, and it seems to have been imported afresh about the year 600. The only genealogies that seem to record Meurigs before that date are highly suspect.[23]

After that point, though, "Meurigs" suddenly proliferate, and it was especially favored by certain royal dynasties. Suddenly around 600, we find four Meurigs in Welsh royal houses. Apart from our principal subject, in the early seventh century we find a Meurig ap Dingad in the northern Welsh region of Dunoding; Meurig ab Idno in the northwest British kingdoms; and a little later, Meurig ab Elaed in Dogfeiling. Between the seventh and ninth centuries, the royal genealogies show three Meurigs connected with the Glamorgan-Gwent house, all presumably named after our Mouric.

In short, the name Meurig/Maurice becomes popular - if it does not actually appear for the first time - at roughly the period when an emperor of this name was ruling in distant Constantinople. If we consider the circumstances of the time, it is clear that the Welsh princes could have known the name of the current emperor by a variety of means; and they were likely to look favorably on such a ruler. Perhaps the Welsh chieftains, magistrates or *meliores* who took this name for their sons were even demonstrating some kind of sentiment in favor of the Empire that Maurice ruled.

Maurice and the West

If in fact Maurice was being commemorated in the far West, then his career made that linkage highly appropriate. During his twenty year rule, Maurice proved himself deeply concerned with the affairs of the western provinces, and was the last emperor for several decades who

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[21] Procopius, *History of the Wars*, seven volumes, edited and translated by H. B. Dewing (London: Heinemann, 1962): for the family of Mauricius the *strategos*, son of Mundus, see V.7, VII.1, VIII.26. For the Italian Maurices, see Peter Llewellyn, *Rome In The Dark Ages* (London: Faber, 1971), 148-9.

[22] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064*; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Works*, Loeb's Classical Library, III.9 for a letter to Riothamus; IX.9 is a letter to Faustus, bishop of Riez about the monk, Riochatus.

[23] For the absence of "Maurices" pre-600, see for instance V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments Of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1950), hereafter cited as *ECMW*; Kenneth Jackson ed., *The Gododdin* (Edinburgh University Press, 1969); Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, second edition (University of Wales Press, 1978).

could afford the luxury of such a diversion from the problems of both internal politics and the eastern frontiers. Maurice won some significant victories against the Persians, culminating in 591 with a successful intervention in a dynastic civil war. This allowed him to focus his attention on the Balkans, where the fortress of Sirmium had fallen in 582. Here, the threat came from the Avars and Gepids.[24]

Maurice cared deeply about the imperial territory in Italy, which his predecessor Justinian had reconquered half a century before. In 568, though, Italy faced a new barbarian threat from Lombard invaders. Maurice could not afford to send a major army to defend Italy, but he urged absolute and uncompromising resistance; and he reorganized local defenses under the new exarchate of Ravenna. In 597, his will proposed the creation of a new Western Empire based in Rome, and ruled by one of his sons.

It was the urgency of the Lombard threat that caused Maurice to undertake intense diplomatic efforts in Western Europe, and these made relations with the empire a major topic of concern in Francia. Gregory of Tours, for example, had "excellent sources" for the East, and Maurice emerges from his work as a familiar figure.[25] Gregory knows that Maurice had married the daughter of his predecessor, Tiberius II. He also records that Maurice exchanged envoys with the Frankish king Childeberht, who once attempted to send an embassy to him via Carthage. In addition, Maurice tried to buy Childeberht's aid against the Lombards, for 50,000 gold *solidi*. Maurice claimed that Childeberht had deceived him, but there were no less than five Frankish expeditions to Italy between 584 and 591, presumably with Byzantine support.

Britons could have learned the name of the current emperor in many ways, not least through the trade-links with southern Gaul and the Mediterranean; but there were also ecclesiastical connections. Gregory of Tours describes Maurice's correspondence with Pope Gregory the Great, who had once served in Constantinople as the *apocrysarius* of an earlier pontiff. The papacy naturally saw itself in an imperial context at this time. Indeed, papal correspondence would long be dated according to the regnal year of the current emperor. [26]

The name of the emperor would therefore be familiar to any region of Europe, however remote, if it sent pilgrims to Rome, or if its church corresponded with the Pope. Through the twin connections with the Papacy and the Franks, Maurice's name would have been brought to Anglo-Saxon England by Augustine's Canterbury mission of 597. This Canterbury connection presumably explains why Maurice's accession appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which otherwise has little to record of contemporary Emperors. Through Augustine, the name

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[24] Michael Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome* (New York: Viking, 2009). Not until the 660s would a Byzantine emperor appear in Italy in person, with the arrival of Constans II: Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages*, 157-159.

[25] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 541-552; Averil Cameron, "The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 26 (1975), 421-426.

[26] T.M. Charles-Edwards, "Rome and the Britons, 400-664," in T. M. Charles-Edwards and R J W Evans, eds., *Wales And The Wider World* (Donington, Lincolnshire: Shaun Tyas, 2010)

could also have been mentioned to the British bishops whom he met in synod about 600 – although that would be too late to account for our Meurig ap Tewdrig.[27]

Wales's Mediterranean Connection

Southern and Western Britain at this time strongly valued Roman memories and connections. Around 540, Gildas' kings and churchmen certainly thought they were operating in a Roman environment. Throughout Wales specifically, characteristic late Roman names flourished - Marianus, Donatus, Constantine, and many others. The nobles erected memorial stones in the best Roman manner; they preserved titles such as magistrate and *cives*. About 625, a king of Gwynedd was buried with an inscription praising him as *Catamanus rex sapientissimus opiniatissimus omnium regum,* in a formula reminiscent of the practice of the Byzantine court.[28]

The Welsh kingdoms emerged in a sub-Roman context, most powerfully in the southeast. In Roman times, there had been a *civitas* of the Silures with its capital at their market center, Venta Silurum, later Caerwent. In the Dark Ages, Venta gave its name to the kingdom of Gwent, and an early ruler bore the auspicious name of Honorius of Venta, "Ynyr Gwent". Ergyng itself took its name from the Roman settlement of Ariconium. As noted earlier, charters from Gwent and Glamorgan suggest the survival not only of aspects of Roman law, but also of functioning Romanized estates, perhaps into the eighth century. Possibly, old-establishing villa sites served as the bases for new Christian centers, for influential monasteries and churches, very much on the lines we find in contemporary Western Europe. Three Glamorgan centers emerge as enormously significant, namely Llancarfan, Llantwit Major, and Llandough. Under its founder St. Illtyd, Llantwit c.500 offers the best and perhaps the only British example of a major educational center on familiar Roman lines.[29]

It is difficult to know how these sub-Roman states regarded the existing Empire, but one event deserves note. In 469/470, a British expeditionary force under one Riothamus

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[27] As late as the 660s, Eastern Roman Emperors were still apparently planning diplomatic collaboration with English and British rulers: Philip Jenkins, "The Ancient Inheritance," at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2013/02/2480/.

[28] For Gildas, see Michael Winterbottom ed., *Gildas: The Ruin Of Britain* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1978). For Catamanus, Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, 57. Christopher A. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998); Paul Fouracre, "Britain, Ireland, and Europe, c.500-c.750," in Stafford, ed., *A Companion To The Early Middle Ages.* M. Redknap and J.M. Lewis, eds., *A Corpus Of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones And Stone Sculpture In Wales* (Cardiff : University of Wales Press, 2007), vol. i. Whether continental "Romans" themselves extended that esteemed status to the Britons was of course a different matter: Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064,* 220-244; Alex Woolf, "The Britons: From Romans to Barbarians," in Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl, eds., *Regna and Gentes* (Leiden, Brill, 2003), 345-80.

[29] Tyler Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England* (Archaeopress, 2005), 105, 120, 13; Jeremy Knight, "From Villa to Monastery," *Medieval Archaeology* 49(2005): 93-107. Philip Jenkins, "A Lost Christian World," at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2013/01/a-lost-christian-world/; and "Illtyd and the End of a World," at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2013/03/illtud/. Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane, eds., *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales AD 400-1100* (Cardiff: University College of Wales, Department of Archaeology, 1988).

attempted to assist Roman forces under the emperor Anthemius against Germanic barbarians. The project was a disaster, though it might conceivably have provided a nucleus for later legends about Arthurian adventures in western Europe.[30] However, this was a remarkable example of pro-Roman sentiment and action by a people who clearly regarded themselves as still within the imperial ambit, even though that power might be temporarily in abeyance.

Contacts between Western Britain and the Mediterranean world continued sporadically, at least into the seventh century. The most concrete evidence in Wales proper is the survival of Mediterranean pottery at sites like Coygan, Dinas Emrys and Degannwy. This material is hard to date precisely, but fifth and sixth century origins seem most likely. The widely connected site of Dinas Emrys was probably part of the realm of Dunoding, and perhaps served as its royal seat. And we have already seen that around the year 600, the royal dynasty apparently began using the name Meurig. Historians of the Byzantine world debate whether such imports indicate any kind of deliberate diplomatic effort to cultivate potential allies in the far West. Anglesey, seat of one of the most powerful Welsh dynasties in this era, has produced a distinctive Byzantine garnet seal ring. [31]

Inscribed memorial stones also indicate direct Mediterranean contacts. In north Wales, a stone purported to have been erected *in tempore Justini consulis*. Scholars differ on who exactly this "consul" might have been. Traditionally, Justinus was identified   with the last consul recognized in the West, around 540, and the usage suggests influence from the area of Lyon. Alternatively, it might refer to the Byzantine Emperor of that name a generation or so later, not long before Maurice's own time.[32]

Other incidental references are difficult to interpret precisely, but they are suggestive. In this category we may place the miracle attributed to the Patriarch of Alexandria, John the Almsgiver, who directed a shipload of grain to the island of Britain, where a famine was then raging. We know that Ireland had many contacts with both Merovingian Gaul and Visigothic Spain, and beyond that to the Mediterranean world and even Egypt itself. Presumably, information and documents from the Mediterranean were no less available across the Irish Sea, in Wales.[33] One possible linkage comes from the abbey of St. Maurice d'Agaune itself. This

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[30] Geoffrey Ashe, *The Rediscovery of King Arthur* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday Anchor, 1985).

[31] Alcock, *Economy*; compare Susan Pearce, *The Kingdom of Dumnonia* (Padstow: Lodenek, 1978). Anthea Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2003), 139-89; Ewan Campbell and Christopher Bowles, "Byzantine Trade To The Edge Of The World," in Marlia Mundell Mango, ed., *Byzantine Trade, 4th-12th Centuries* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 297-314. For the garnet ring, see Simon Denison, "Gemstone Evidence For Late Roman Survival," *British Archaeology* 52 (2000), at http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba52/ba52news.html#gemstone.

[32] Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, 93. The Justinus stone was found at Penmachno, together with a number of other inscriptions recording Roman terms like citizen and magistrate. For Justinus as the emperor concerned, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, "Rome and the Britons, 400-664," in T. M. Charles-Edwards and R. J. W. Evans, eds., *Wales And The Wider World* (Donington, Lincolnshire: Shaun Tyas, 2010), 21-22.

[33] Elizabeth Dawes and Norman Baynes, ed. and translated, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford: Mowbrays, 1977), 216-218. J. N. Hillgarth, "Visigothic Spain and Early Christian Ireland," *P.R.I.A.*, 62(1962); Edward James, "Ireland and Western Gaul in the Merovingian period," in Dorothy Whitelock *et al*.,

house is believed to have pioneered the practice of *laus perennis*, "perpetual praise," the constant singing of the divine office by different choirs. As this practice later became popular in Celtic Britain and Ireland, we may speculate on some connection.[34]

Such linkages also appear in the lands directly subject to the dynasty founded by Theodoric in the south-east. Mediterranean pottery occurs at Dinas Powys, which may well have been a royal hall or villa, a *llys*, in one of the cantrefs under Meurig's rule. Further west, the cantref of Margam had its religious center at the monastery of the same name. Near here was found a seventh century copper coin from Byzantine Alexandria.[35]

There is no mystery about *how* the name of Maurice could have reached Britain. What is interesting is that the local rulers should have cared sufficiently about that name to make it a vogue in their families.

Rome's Continuing Aura

Owen, Merrick, Tudor - all are common names with impeccably Welsh credentials, but all originated far afield. Respectively, they derive from Eugenius, Maurice and Theodore; and they indicate the predilection among the sub-Roman dynasts of Britain for the names characteristic of the Eastern Roman Empire.

But these names were not archaic survivals from the days of Roman power. Rather they were new importations, brought in centuries after the Empire had formally washed its hands of any responsibility for British affairs. We have seen that "Maurice" came into vogue towards the year 600. Eugenius - "Owein" - appears in the sixth and early seventh centuries in the genealogy of "Cynlas" (Gildas's Cuneglassus), as well as the northern houses of Rheged and Strathclyde. "Tewdwr" occurs in the Ergyng dynasty towards 590; and it appears by the later eighth century in the pedigrees of Dyfed and Brycheiniog. And there were others, such as "Tewdos", Theodosius; or "Awst" (Augustus) of Brycheiniog. In Dumnonia, or south-west Britain, Gildas about 540 denounced a king called Constantine, whose successors bore such names as Justinus, Gerontius, and Theodore, besides later Constantines. When the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded a notable victory in the south west in 577, one of the defeated British kings was Candidianus.[36]

Now, the fact that Wales and western Britain imported some Roman names does not mean that they were indiscriminate in their choices. They never for instance adopted such

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eds., *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge University Press 1982), 362-386. Philip Jenkins, "The First Global Christianity," at
http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2013/02/the-first-global-christanity/ ; and "Out of Egypt," at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2013/02/out-of-egypt/.

[34] Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, 58; Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, 217.

[35] Jenkins, "Cantrefs". The little known find of the Alexandrian coin is recorded in A. Leslie Evans, *The History Of Taibach And District*, second edition (Port Talbot: Alun Books, 1982), 18. Wales has produced other isolated finds of Byzantine coins, as at Caerwent. It is open to debate how many of these might have arrived in the hands of later collectors: Anthea Harris, "Britain and China at Opposite Ends of the World?" in Anthea Harris ed., *Incipient Globalization* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 91-95.

[36] Pearce, *Dumnonia*; Keith Branigan and P. J. Fowler, *The Roman West Country* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1976), p.201, for an early medieval Cornish king "Teudar."

prestigious imperial names as Tiberius, Justinian, Heraclius or Constans, so there was no consistent policy. But the taste for Eastern names does indicate that British nobles had means by which to learn the popular names of the continuing Roman empire, and more especially, that they still felt sufficiently Roman to adopt these names into their families. Still, as late as 600, they were still close enough in time to Justinian to contemplate a future in which direct Roman authority might once more extend over Britain.

Conclusion: The Better People
While naming practice had political overtones, we can also point to other consequences. Above all, the use of foreign and imperial names served to differentiate between aristocrats and kings on the one hand, and the common people on the other. It was the lords and *meliores* who bore the elegant Graeco-Roman names, and the newer and more exotic, the better.

This is neatly illustrated by the charters in *Liber Landavensis*, and especially by the index of the hundreds of donors and witnesses. This shows a total of seven men named Meurig in all the documents, from the sixth century to the 1070s. Of these seven, five were members of the ruling dynasty, including Meurig ap Tewdrig himself. Only in the very last two charters in the collection, from the 1070s, do we finally find the name employed by witnesses who cannot immediately be associated with the ruling house. In contrast, the non-royal witnesses in the early charters bear Celtic names that apparently looked as odd to later medieval scribes as they do to modern eyes - Conuetu, Gindoc, Guallonir, Rihoithil, Guengarth, and so on. Only gradually did royal names like Meurig filter down to lower social levels.

Naming practices have often served as badges of class distinction, the modern British "double-barrelled" surname being an obvious example. There is a consistent pattern whereby the names that characterize the elite in one generation slowly come to be used by social inferiors. In seventeenth century Wales, for instance, the squire had adopted a surname while his poorer neighbors betrayed their common origins by their use of a patronymic. Thus, an (elite) Mr. Williams confronted a (peasant) David ap John. By Victorian times, the tenant farmer might have come to adopt a surname like Williams, Jenkins or Jones - but now his gentleman landlord bore a still more exalted surname, being a Mansell-Talbot or a Williams-Wynn.

When we look at the Welsh elites of the Dark Ages, the Maurices and Justins and Theodores, we see that this taste for class separation and distinctiveness dates back at least to the sixth and seventh centuries.