

MACSEN WLEDIG

a Geni'r Genedl Gymreig



MAGNUS MAXIMUS

and the Birth of Wales the Nation

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MAGNUS MAXIMUS AND THE BIRTH OF THE WELSH NATION

In 1983 we recall how Wales began to be a national community 1600 years ago, not in the fog of a barbarous dark age but in the dawning light of Christianity before Rome's grandeur had disappeared. Her people had been here a long time. For a thousand years, and perhaps more, their language and culture had been Celtic; but it is towards the end of the fourth century that we glimpse the first lineaments of a national community emerging. Of course the Welsh did not become conscious of their nationhood for centuries or even of their Welshness. But already in the fifth century we discern the outlines of a nation and the embryo of a culture whose transmission via the Welsh language down to our own day, through all the vast changes in the nature of society and its government and in the modes of production, is so astounding. The continuity of her tradition is the wonder of Wales.

The beginnings of Welsh nationhood are permeated by Roman civilisation; a Roman emperor assisted the nation's birth. The heritage of Rome and of the Celts and the Christian religion determined the nature of Welsh civilisation; and when barbarism swept over the continent and over England, destroying its splendid civilisation, the Welsh retained and fostered their life, building a strong foundation for the fair heritage transmitted to us.

A word about terms. Wales will be called Wales from the beginning of its history and those who lived here will be called Welsh, but I will confine the Welsh to Wales and will call the Welsh-speaking people in England and Scotland Britons. The Welsh and Britons were called "Welsh" by the German people because of their association with Roman civilisation. Pennar Davies has recently reminded us that *Welschland* is the old German name for Italy. In fact, right across Europe, along the northern boundaries of the Roman Empire, there is a series of locations which contain the words Welsh or

Wales from Wallonia in Belgium to Wallachia, which is a name for Romania; and also further to the south in Greece where much of the country is divided between Great Walachia and Little Walachia. And the custom increases of calling the Teutonic Germans who came to England between the second and the seventh centuries "English". One reads of "English settlements in Britain", and some go as far as to give the term "English" to those Germanic people who would come to England in the future, even though they still lived in Germany. I will call them Germans before they crossed over and after.

The territory on which the Welsh have always lived is a peninsula, washed on three sides by the sea. To the south, the west and the north its boundaries are unchangeable. Only the eastern border has changed; only there do we have a frontier. In the post-Roman period Powys, which lay against much of that border, was a much bigger country than it later became and perhaps included Gloucester as well as Chester and Wroxeter. The boundary of Gwent, also on the border, changed less than Powys. It was the lowlands of Gwent and Morgannwg on the Severn Sea that enjoyed the greatest economic prosperity, and it was there that Roman civilisation flowered, although it was not absent from most parts of Wales, as Latin memorial stones in the 5th and 6th centuries testify. Gwent and Morgannwg gave Caradog, whom Tacitus describes in such a lively way, his greatest support in his resistance to the Romans. The memory of this lingered long. Caradog Freichfras (Strong Arm), a contemporary of Vortigern, was king of Gwent in the 5th century, and the name Cynfelin (Shakespeare's Cymbeline), father of the original Caradog, is found in the family later on.

The political foundations of the Roman civil order were the *civitates* or cantons, which enjoyed a high degree of self-government. Some of these were founded on old Welsh or Britannic countries. For instance, the *Respublica civitatis Silurum* was founded on Gwent, and Caerfyrddin (Carmarthen) was the capital of the Demetian *civitas*. Each canton had a council which met in the *civitas* capital, such as Caerwent, Caerfyrddin and perhaps Caernarfon. They were responsible for domestic matters but not for military defence. The council was composed of elected justices or former justices. Such a justice was the father of Patrick who was born in 410; he was a Christian as was Patrick's grandfather.

The Romans built a network of forts in Wales which were connected by a thousand miles of Roman roads, which contributed to uniting this mountainous land in a way Scotland and Ireland were not united.

Craftsmen travelled along them, and afterwards poets and evangelists. The forts kept the peace. After the first century we hear of no wars until the coming of the Irish in the fourth century. These settled in and around Brycheiniog (Breconshire) and in the north-west and especially in the south of Dyfed, and they brought their language with them. It was in order to resist the Irish invaders that Caergybi (Holyhead) was built, and that the forts were rebuilt in Caerdydd (Cardiff) and Caernarfon. The latter, which is important in the story I have to tell, was strategically placed to defend northern Wales.

There is a close connection between the defence of Wales against the Irish and the great change which happened at the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th, which gave a completely new direction to the course of the country's history. After three centuries of apparent stagnation there was movement. Within a generation new life coursed through the land. We can perceive a new national community beginning to take shape and the Welsh people beginning to show initiative apart from the rest of Britain. This change is associated with Magnus Maximus, known to the Welsh as Maccsen Wledig, the first person in Welsh history of whose activities we have a fairly full record.

The History of Magnus Maximus

Although Maximus finds no place in Welsh or English dictionaries of biography, a number of contemporary historians relate some of his story, including Orosius, who describes him as "a ready and able man"; but the main source is Ammian, a dependable historian who wrote during the reign of Theodosius, the emperor who killed Maximus. (It was with the emperor's father that Maximus first came to Britain.) We must therefore expect Ammian to be prejudiced in favour of the successful emperor who won the day, and against Maximus who lost.

Theodosius the elder and Maximus came to Britain in 368. Both were from Spain and were related to each other. Is it significant that Maximus hailed from Galicia, a Celtic country whose people at that time spoke a Celtic language. Was Maximus' first tongue a language related to Welsh? If it was, that itself would have drawn him closer to the Welsh-speaking Celtic people. He and Theodosius were given their commission because the attacks of the Picts and the Irish had been especially destructive in 367. The enemy was defeated in expeditions which must have taken them to Wales as well as to Scotland. A victory by Maximus in Scotland is particularly noted; and his name is associated with the temporary rebuilding of Hadrian's wall. But Theodosius was not content with military success. The historic nature

of his mission lies in his radical reorganisation of defence policy, a matter of crucial importance to the relationship of Maximus with Wales.

The next step in his career took Maximus to North Africa, once again under the authority of Theodosius. There again the defence was reorganised, and on the British model. Maximus was returned from Africa to Britain by the emperor Gratian, but this time with greater authority. There is reason to think that his military authority now extended from the Firth of Forth to the Severn Sea, and tradition puts his main headquarters at Caernarfon.

This was a troublesome time for the Roman Empire because the continental Teutons were fleeing in desperation before the rampaging Huns who conquered the whole of Germania. For some time control was shared by two, three, even four emperors whose followers fought for the succession. For a long time past a general could be raised to the imperial purple by the army, as in many countries today, and that is what happened in the case of Maximus.

Gratian was a weak character who had been proclaimed augustus by his father when only eight years old. But at eighteen years of age he made Theodosius, son of Maximus' superior, co-emperor to govern the eastern part of the empire with his seat in Constantinople. Theodosius was an orthodox Christian, an important matter at a time when politics were complicated by religion. However, over in Britain the Roman soldiery were dissatisfied by Gratian's ineffectiveness, and Maximus was persuaded, rather against his will according to one historian, to agree to being proclaimed emperor, a tribute to the impression made on his army by this notable man. The date given this in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is 381. Theodosius accepted the situation.

In the year 383 Maximus gathered in one army the greater part of the best of the Roman soldiery in Britain and, most significantly, amongst them the Seguntiones, the men of *Caer Segeint* — the *Caer Seint* of Welsh legend — his personal unit, which bore the name of Caernarfon. Archaeological evidence testifies to his denuding of the Old North, as the Welsh called the North of England and the South of Scotland, of all its soldiers at this time; and the Roman record called *Notitia Dignitatum* has no account of military at Chester after 383. This was when the defence of Hadrian's Wall came to an end; and Mortimer Wheeler says of Caernarfon, "Intensive occupation ceased between 380 and 385." With this army Maximus crossed to France, where the Roman legions welcomed him and abandoned Gratian, who fled south and was killed there.

For five years — much like the period of Owain Glyndŵr's greatest success — Maximus was brilliantly successful. He established his first court at Trèves in France, and afterwards at Trier where Karl Marx was born, a town in Germany near Luxembourg favoured by many emperors. In Maximus' time Trier was a Celtic centre where a Celtic language was still spoken, and it was the main centre of Christianity north of the Alps. It is not known why Maximus went to war against Theodosius after a reign of five years, but the thorough preparations of the latter are known. He sent an army to Italy and a navy to North Africa, while he personally led his main army to meet Maximus in Illyria. It was there, in the northern Adriatic, three miles from Aquileia near Trieste, that Maximus fought his last fight, with his Welsh body-guard around him. He was killed on 28 July, 388.

Magnus Maximus in Welsh Legend

The quite romantic story of Magnus Maximus was transformed by professional Welsh raconteurs, giving Maccsen Wledig, Emperor of Rome, a place in our legend second only to Arthur. In the long short story *Breuddwyd Maccsen Wledig* (The Dream of Magnus Maximus) the young emperor is found resting at mid-day while hunting near Rome, and in a dream he comes to the mouth of a river:

"And he saw a great city at the mouth of the river, and in this city a great castle, and he saw many great towers of various colours on the castle. Inside the castle he saw a fair hall . . . he could see two auburn-haired youths playing at chess . . . The garments of the youths were of pure black brocaded silk, and frontlets of red gold holding their hair in place . . . And he saw a maiden sitting before him in a chair of red gold. No more would it be easy to look on the sun when it is brightest, no easier would it be to look on her by reason of her excelling beauty . . . And the maiden arose to meet him from the chair of gold, and he threw his arms around the maiden's neck, and they both sat down in the chair of gold. And the chair was not straiter for them both than for the maiden alone."

In his dream Maccsen had come to Caernarfon and fallen head over heels in love with Elen of the Legions, the daughter of king Eudaf. After finding Elen in the flesh Maccsen married her and settled down in Caernarfon. But when seven years had passed a usurper seized his throne. However the Empire is won back with the help of Elen's brothers and their small but effective army, much like the Seguntionses; and the story ends with the founding of Brittany.

Classical unhistoric themes run through the legend; but it also contains a kernel of historical fact. It is not wholly an unsubstantial dream inspired by the remains of Roman greatness in Caernarfon. In fact it seems to have been composed in the south. Some of its historic elements are found in *The History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth which gives a lot of space to Maximus. He writes at a later time than the *Breuddwyd* although he seems to have known nothing of its existence, and differs from it in places, but follows the same general line. For instance, he speaks of a marriage between Maximus and a Welsh princess, but in his version it is a political marriage — a credible idea — and he does not name the bride. He too says that it was to Caernarfon that Maximus and his bodyguard went.

Other traditions confirm the connection of Maximus, and two of his sons as well, with Caernarfon, the Roman fort on the River Seint, and also his marriage with a Welsh princess. And there are quite dependable genealogies which trace royal families back to the union. Rachel Bromwich, following Sir Ifor Williams, has shown that Elen of the Legions, whose legend is connected with Roman roads in Wales, is a wholly mythical figure. But there can be truth in the tradition that Cystennin (Constantine) and Peblig, who were celebrated as saints, were sons of Maximus. He and his wife were Christians.

Other places in Wales are associated with Maccsen and Elen. For example there are Cadair Maccsen and Sarn Elen not far from Caerfyrddin, one of the three forts given to Elen in *Breuddwyd Maccsen*. It was quite recently that Caerfyrddin was shown to be a Roman town, bigger perhaps than Caerwent. In addition, churches throughout Wales are dedicated to members of Maccsen's family. They are especially numerous in the south-west and the north-west; and there is something like a Maccsen Wledig cult in Gwent and western Hereford. The important thing is the strength of the tradition which associates a historical emperor with our beginnings as a nation and that he is celebrated in legend as no other emperor is celebrated.

Two acts of Maccsen which impressed themselves deeply on the Welsh consciousness were his marriage to a Welsh princess and his withdrawal of troops from the country. There is archaeological evidence of the latter in Caernarfon, which was rebuilt in the year Maximus came to Britain, almost certainly in order to meet the Irish threat. The size of the residence built for the governor at that time would have astonished the Welsh. But within a quarter of a century of its erection there would be no Seguntioneses in the district. Maccsen Wledig's battalion had crossed to the continent.

Gildas and Nennius

Gildas, the father of Welsh historiography, is the first Welshman or Briton to write about Magnus Maximus; that was towards the middle of the sixth century. He was educated in Llanilltud Fawr (Llan Twit Major) at the feet of Illtud at the same time as Maelgwn Gwynedd and other prominent Welshmen, and then by Cadog at Llancarfan in the Vale of Glamorgan, three miles from the birthplace of Iolo Morganwg. No more eloquent evidence of the unity of Wales at this time could be found than that the great king of Gwynedd and the sons of other kings were educated at the southern extremity of the country near the shore of the Severn Sea. Gildas was a preacher castigating the public sins of the time in the manner of Jeremiah's Lamentations rather than a historian; and it was on Welsh kings that his lash fell most heavily. But he did not spare the religious leaders either, especially the self-denying people who thought they could get to heaven by their own strength. This was the accusation levelled at the Pelagians, and it seems that Gildas had his contemporary St. David in mind when making it. Gildas espoused Roman orthodoxy against the Pelagian leanings of the Welsh awakening.

He refers to only two events before the fifth century, the rebellions of Buddug (Boadicea) and of Maximus, and it is on Maximus that he dwells longest. In the eyes of Gildas, rebellion against the imperial establishment was a heinous sin. Significantly he believed Macsen was a Welshman or a Briton, which is what the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says too. Already Maximus was being identified with the Welsh.

But in the mind of Gildas the most awful sin of which Maximus was guilty was denuding the country of its soldiery. With typical exaggeration he says that Maximus took all Britain's soldiers with him to the continent, and all its military resources, and the cream of its youth. These young men followed their commander, he says, and never returned. In fact it was probably a generation after Maximus that England was stripped of its Roman military defenders, and that its cantons were compelled to rely on their own resources for their defence. This they did for as much as 150 years with much greater success than any continental country, thanks to Gwrtheyrn (Vortigern), Emrys Wledig (Ambrosius Aurelianus) and Arthur. Gildas asserts that by denuding Britain of its military defence Maximus had thrown it open "to be trodden underfoot by two very cruel and fierce foreign nations", the Scots from the west and the Picts from the north. He does not speak of Saxons at this time.

Our second Welsh literary source for the history of the early centuries is Nennius, a monk from eastern Wales who had been a pupil of

Elfoddw, the chief bishop of Gwynedd. He assembled a number of historical documents at the beginning of the 8th century. It is he who noted a fact which has perplexed historians, namely that Constantine, the son of Constantine the Great as he thought, was buried at Caernarfon, "as the letters on his tomb show". In the opinion of Wade-Evans and other historians the tomb which Nennius had seen was that of Cystennin (Constantine), Magnus Maximus' son, who was so closely associated with Caernarfon that the place was known as Caer Gystennin by 1100; that is the name found in *Historia Gruffudd ap Cynan*. Nennius, who refers to the Welsh as *cives*, is not as antagonistic towards Maximus as was Gildas, who rejoiced because "he lost his accursed head in Aquileia," but he too criticises his military withdrawal from Britain. He has more to say about these troops, who, he affirms, were established in Brittany after Maximus had won control of Europe. According to Nennius these were the first Britannic Bretons.

Maximus and the Founding of Brittany

This theme is developed by Geoffrey of Monmouth whose family came from Brittany. His account is that after mobilising the soldiers of Britain Maximus crossed to Brittany with a great fleet, and, having conquered it, presented it to Cynan Meiriadog. He concludes his history of Maximus by recounting how he was killed in Rome by Gratian's friends and how his troops were killed or scattered. Like Nennius and *Breuddwyd Maccsen* Geoffrey confirms Gildas' assertion that the Welsh soldiers did not return home. According to him, those who succeeded in escaping joined their compatriots in Brittany, which was then called another Britain. The suggestion is made that the Seguntiones went to Brittany from Aquileia, which was on the main military highway from Constantinople to the West. However it is Maccsen Wledig who is associated with the beginnings of two nations, Wales and Brittany.

It was during the two centuries after Maximus that Brittany was heavily settled. Most of the immigrants came from Devon and Cornwall, though Wales contributed her share. Norah Chadwick says that the majority of the saints who are recorded in the migration came from Wales, and the leaders mainly from mid-Wales. In the judgement of this scholar the Welsh cultural influence was the main formative factor in the nation's intellectual life. As a postscript I quote her assessment of the position in the age of Merfyn Frych and Rhodri Mawr: "In the 9th century the Breton state had no equal in the Celtic countries either in unity, in organisation, or in force of expansion."

Maximus in the Royal Genealogies

However great the criticism of Maximus by Gildas and Nennius for taking the Roman forces from Britain, his marriage to a Welsh woman brought nothing but acclamation from Wales, and for centuries royal families rejoiced in their descent from him. His wife may have been named Elen but it is not known who she was. Rachel Bromwich thinks that Geoffrey of Monmouth may be close to the truth, certainly closer than the tradition about the fabulous Elen of the Legions daughter of Eudaf ap Caradog. Geoffrey relates that Maximus married an unnamed royal heiress and thus came into possession of her father's kingdom, that is, that he made a political marriage. The little available evidence suggests that it was Vortigern who married a daughter of Maximus. This surmise is supported by the inscription on the remarkable Eliseg column near Valle Crucis abbey which recorded in the 9th century that Cyngen king of Powys was descended from Sevira daughter of Magnus Maximus. The Powys royal genealogy traces the family back to Sevira's marriage to Vortigern. The connections are interesting. Merfyn Frych, king of Gwynedd, married Nest the daughter of Cyngen. When Merfyn died he was followed by Rhodri Mawr, the grandfather of Hywel Dda, the codifier of Welsh law who was an ancestor of Owain Glyndŵr and of Rhys ap Tewdwr and Lord Rhys, the defender of the kingdom of Deheubarth against the Normans. Maximus thus finds his way into the genealogies of Gwynedd and Deheubarth as well as Powys.

The kings of Powys were not the only line to boast of Maximus as the founder of the dynasty. In the Harleian genealogies the kings of Dyfed are traced to him. And Wade-Evans has noted that according to the oldest draft of the hundreds and commotes of Wales, Maximus is the father of Owain, king of Buellt, who in the *Life of Cadog* is the ancestor of the kings of Glywysing, the kingdom which once extended from the Usk to the Tywi and beyond. In addition to these families in Wales, royal families in Cornwall, the Isle of Man and Strathclyde claim descent from Maximus.

And then there are the connections between two of his sons and Caernarfon. Constantine, who was buried in Caernarfon, was a son of Maximus according to the Jesus College genealogies; and *Bonedd y Saint*, which is respected by historians, makes Peblig another of Maximus' sons, and places him too in Caernarfon or Llanbeblig. Whether all this is historically true or not, it is undeniably significant that six royal families in Celtic countries claim descent from Maximus, and that family connections with Caernarfon are attributed to him in addition to military and legendary associations.

Macsen the Gwledig

The title given Maximus by the Welsh was *Gwledig*. This was afterwards given to Cunedda, Ceredig and Emrys; and Taliesin gives it to Urien Rheged, hero of the Old North; but Macsen is the first to be called "gwledig", which is the only title given him by the Welsh. By giving him this title they seem to indicate that Maximus, who was a Celt but not a Welshman or a Briton, identified with them and they with him.

"Gwledig" was a title given to an overlord who was also a military leader, to one who was both a governor and a soldier. The troops he led were always native, like the Welsh Seguntioneses, never foreign. It is significant that neither Arthur nor Vortigern were called "gwledig". The one is not referred to as a political governor nor the other as a military leader. Later the Germans of eastern England adopted a comparable title. They called the overlord of a number of countries a *bretwalda*, and in the two parts of the word we see its Welsh associations. The title "gwledig" thus suggests that Maximus was seen by the Welsh as a military overlord. Of course it was against the Irish that he defended them, as Cunedda, the next "gwledig" in our history, did after him. The title is another strong link between Maximus and Wales. In at least one instance the Latin term *Protector* is used to convey a similar meaning to "gwledig". It is found on the memorial stone of Voteporix, who in the 6th century ruled the country which corresponds to Pembrokeshire. He was one of the five kings attacked so bitterly by Gildas, and one who claimed descent from Maximus. The term *Protector* is used in relation to Maximus himself in the genealogy of Owain, son of Elen and Hywel Dda, who is descended from "Maxim Gwledig map Protector".

C. E. Stevens, whose scholarship traced the Seguntioneses, Macsen's Welsh unit, to Illyria, has suggested that Maximus was the *consularis* of the large province of Valentia which, he thought, included Wales and Lancashire, and that he lived at Caernarfon. He contends that this helps to explain the scorn poured on Maximus by his enemies as a man cut off from the world and living in the ends of the earth. The Caernarfon connection is of course supported by Stevens' discovery that Macsen's Seguntioneses were with him at Aquileia when he died. It is at one with Gildas' accusation that Maximus had brought Roman rule of the country to an end. Wales was the land that Gildas knew best; it is of Wales, her kings and religious leaders, that he writes. It was Roman rule in Wales that Maximus ended. In England it continued in some form for another generation or more.

One wonders what banner flew at the head of Maximus' army when

it crossed to the continent. Wade-Evans draws attention to the purple dragon which the Roman emperor flew when he went to war; and since Magnus Maximus was the only Roman emperor to march from Wales he thinks it reasonable to infer that we must trace the use of the Red Dragon of Wales back to this occasion. The first reference we have to the Red Dragon banner is its use by Cadwaladr, who displayed the power of Gwynedd in his victorious march with Penda king of Mercia through Northumbria to the Firth of Forth 271 years after the departure of Maximus.

Maximus and the Establishment of the Welsh Order

It was the havoc wrought by the Picts and the Irish in 367 that brought Maximus to Britain in the following year as an officer under the general Theodosius. The invaders came over the sea from Ireland and the north of Scotland in big rudderless coracles, the Picts to ravage the land and return home with its wealth, but the Irish not only to ravage but often to settle the country. They settled in Scotland, in the north-west and the north-east of England, the north-west and south-west of Wales, in Breconshire, on the coastlands of the Severn Sea and in Cornwall. The emigration of large numbers of Cornish people to Brittany was probably the result of the Irish invasions. Later they would settle in such numbers in Scotland that they gave their name — Scots — to the land. It was they who posed the great danger to England and Wales in that age. We will not understand the situation in Wales and the countries of Britain at that time unless we appreciate that the Irish posed quite as great a problem as the Northmen did later. Their danger to the isle of Britain can be compared with the threat posed to the Roman Empire in the same period by the Germanic peoples.

After temporarily defeating the invaders Theodosius and Maximus faced the need for an effective defence policy which would reduce the cost to the Empire in men and money. They decided on a complete and radical reorganisation, no less than to remove all Roman troops and to put the defence in the hands of the native people under the leadership of Roman officers, who probably belonged to local ruling families. These were put in control of provinces of the Old North comparable with Roman cantons following a series of political agreements which legitimised the governments by putting the authority and prestige of Rome behind them. Two years later Theodosius, and Maximus with him, pursued the same policy in North Africa.

The officer appointed to rule the Votadini, the people around Edinburgh and to the north, was Paternus, grandfather of Cunedda, who was thus trained as a young man in the art of government. It is

recorded that Maximus, who had won a notable victory over the Picts, appointed Antonius Donatus in the south-west of Scotland, perhaps after returning from north Africa. The officers so appointed clung to their power and were succeeded by their sons, so establishing royal families. Kingship was an old institution among the Celts; the Welsh word for king — 'brenin' — is pre-Roman, one of the many Welsh political terms that were not Latinised. The dynasties thus founded ruled the Welsh-speaking kingdoms of the Old North — Gododdin and Rheged, Elfed and Ystrad Clud — for centuries. The family of Clemens continued to govern Ystrad Clud (Strathclyde) until the 11th century, when the kingdom was integrated with Scotland by the marriage of its heiress with the Malcolm who is portrayed in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. It was through a royal marriage that Rheged disappeared also before the middle of the 7th century, 250 years after the death of Maximus, to be regained, however, by Ystrad Clud, of which it continued a part until Canute conquered Cumbria for England.

The developments in Wales after the departure of Maximus reflect what we would expect. They suggest that he applied to the defence of Wales against the Irish the policy adopted to defend the Old North. Roman troops were removed and the Welsh were given the responsibility for their own defence. In doing this Maximus remade the map of Wales. All the evidence including the record in *Notitia Dignitatum* indicates that after 383 Wales and its eastern border were without any Roman military presence. Wales was now militarily self-dependent, wholly independent of the Roman imperial order. Devising and applying this policy were the fateful actions that resulted in the creation of the new Welsh order that would continue for 900 years. 383 thus marks the end of Roman Wales and the inauguration of an autonomous Welsh order that was not finally ended until the barbarous execution of Prince David in 1283.

Responsibility for defence meant self-government for the Welsh. It is granting this responsibility, together with his marriage alliance with one of a Welsh royal line, that explains the extraordinary hold of Maccsen Wledig on the affections of the people of Wales.

In two cases government was put in the hands of men who were not themselves Welsh. In both the purpose was to strengthen the defence against the Irish. An Irishman was placed in southern Dyfed, in keeping with the policy which had been followed by the Romans for centuries in eastern England of bringing in Germans as *foederati* to help the defence against German attack. The number of Germans employed was so great that a Romano-German culture can be perceived by the end of the 4th century. With time the Germans became the

majority of the population in a great part of the country. Of course in Pembroke it was an Irish clan who were employed as *foederati* to aid the defence against Irish attack. Voteporix the *Protector* was an Irishman, a member of the family that reigned there until the 7th century. His grandfather bore the name of Triphun, the Latin 'tribune', a commander of a Roman military unit.

It is reasonable to see Cunedda in this context. Cunedda, the other great figure in Wales in Maximus' generation, came with his family and some of his people from Manaw Gododdin near Edinburgh, probably crossing by sea, to lead the defence against the Irish, the kind of work his father and grandfather had been doing in Scotland. He came not to conquer but to co-operate; and one need not think of a great number coming with him. Nearly 800 years later, in the 12th century, a group of Norman-Welsh were enough to win control of a great part of Ireland. Gwynedd was Cunedda's bastion, but his power was felt down to the Severn Sea. His name remains to this day at Allt Cunedda near Cydweli. Before the end of the 5th century he and his descendants had put an end to the Irish attacks. In the Age of Saints that followed him the Irish Sea was like a Celtic lake, across which the saints and others sailed without obstruction between Wales and Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Cornwall and Brittany. And inside Wales the sound of Irish soon faded from the land. It was Cunedda from Scotland who ensured that Wales would be Welsh-speaking. His family governed Gwynedd until the end of the 13th century. The last of the line before Owain Glyndŵr to try to recover the principality was Owain Lawgoch, who sailed for Wales with the French king's fleet and army nearly 1000 years after Maximus had established the Welsh order.

A generation after the Welsh were made responsible for their defence the Britons and Germans of England had to shoulder the burden. In 410 Honorius gave the English cantons to understand that Rome could no longer defend them. Their response to the challenge was splendid. Until the middle of the century Romano-Britannic civilisation continued to flourish, and when the Germans in the country rose in terribly destructive rebellion they were utterly defeated, although the social and economic prosperity of England was never afterwards recovered. It was Emrys Wledig (Ambrosius Aurelianus), a native of the lower Severn, and Arthur who were responsible for quelling the rebellion and for securing the long peace; and it was Arthur who, after his victory at Mount Badon, restricted German control to a region in the south-east of England. When Gildas wrote about 540, peace still reigned. No people in the Western Roman Empire

accomplished anything like this except the Bretons and the Basques.

But within a decade tragedy struck. The appalling yellow plague swept from the continent of Europe across Britain in the middle of the 6th century. It decimated Welsh and Britannic peoples while barely affecting the Germans, who soon afterwards went on the attack in one region of England after another, spreading out towards the north, the midlands and the south-west. By the end of the century the Welsh and Latin heritage of most of England had been destroyed. The Welsh-speaking kingdoms of the Old North continued to fight heroically, but the only nations in Europe which successfully defended their rich heritage throughout the centuries following the fall of Rome and up to the present day are Wales and Greece. Wales and Greece are unique amongst the nations of the Empire in the unbroken continuity of their native language and civilisation.

Although the policy pursued by Maximus in Wales had been applied also in the Old North, its political consequences in the independent kingdoms of Rheged and Gododdin came to an end in two and a half centuries, and no more is heard there of the Welsh language and its heritage. In Wales however the long-lasting order created the conditions of life of a nation which has lived for 1600 years.

Maximus the Christian.

As a Christian Roman Celt Maximus was a bridge between the old order in Wales and the new. He combined in his person Christianity with Roman and Celtic cultures, the three basic elements in the Welsh heritage. Maximus the Christian is the most notable link between the ages of pagan religions and the Age of Saints. When he first came to Wales only half a century had passed since Christianity had begun to spread in Western Europe, and as yet it had scarcely begun to penetrate any rural area. Up to now it was a religion of the towns. But Magnus Maximus and his wife, both closely connected with Wales, were intelligent and enlightened Christians, in touch with the greatest Christian of his day, St. Martin of Tours. Martin was a passionate and self-denying man whose austere mode of life may have influenced St. David. He had been a professional soldier, who was allowed by Julian to leave the army as a conscientious objector. He lived an ascetic life in a cave near Tours, around which a monastic school grew in which some of the great people of the age were educated. His relationship with Maximus was not all honey. In his struggle to establish the authority of the Church in its own field as against the state he had to censure the emperor for daring as a layman to try people for heresy. Maximus also incurred the censure of Damasus, the first bishop of

Rome who can be called pope, who warned him that the crown in the Old Testament was bestowed by priests, not seized by violence. Not that Maximus was any kind of heretic. There is no suggestion, for example, of his sympathising with Pelagius, who left Britain for Rome about the same time as him. Quite the contrary, he was notably orthodox. On one occasion when he was in Trèves he condemned an intelligent company of heretics to exile in the Scilly Isles.

The two centuries of the Age of Saints, which permeated Welsh life with Christian values, are an amazingly creative period in religion and politics, language and thought; an age which saw the development of a national community fundamentally different from the countries to the east in language and culture, religion and values. Wales was Welsh and Christian; England was German and Pagan. In England this period is called the Dark Ages, but the name is inappropriate in Wales; for if most of the history of England during these centuries is characterised, taken all in all, by the darkness and despair engendered by the destruction of a civilisation, in Wales confidence and hope brighten the firmament. The old civilised Latin life of the Britons disappeared completely in a savage break in the history of England, whereas in Wales there was no break, only accelerated development. England's Celtic speech gave way to a Germanic language; the Celtic tongue of Wales became the noble vehicle of its civilisation. Characteristics of the Celtic pre-Roman life of Wales, some of which have survived to our day, were vigorously re-cultivated during these centuries. Nothing is as remarkable in the long history of Wales as its continuity.

The Countries of Wales

The pattern discovered in the self-governing order established by Maximus is of a big number of small countries. Although evidence of their community consciousness is present very early, they continued throughout their existence to be conscious also of their separateness. During the first generation or so there were about eighteen countries altogether. Before mocking this let us recall that in successful Switzerland today there are 26 canton governments all enjoying far greater powers than any British party has ever dreamed of giving a Welsh parliament. In the course of years the number of Welsh 'cantons' fell to seven or eight, nearly all of which proved long-lived, continuing for 600 years or more. Of the original eighteen, Cunedda's family ruled nine between the Dee and the Teifi, including Edeyrnion, Meirion and Ceredigion. Descendants of Madsen Wledig, or alleged descendants, governed seven, leaving Gwent and stubborn Brycheiniog under kings who did not belong to the two big families; there is a suggestion that

the royal family of Gwent traced their lineage back to Caradog. What wonder that a historian has suggested that the order created by Maximus was a confederal one? It proved to be tough. This was the order which faced the Normans seven centuries later. Its character is already clear in the time of Cunedda and Gwrtheyrn (Vortigern).

Nennius relates that Cunedda and his people crossed from the Gododdin to Wales 146 years before the reign of Maelgwn Gwynedd. Since Maelgwn was killed by the yellow plague in 547 according to *Brut y Tywysogion* (The Chronicle of the Welsh Princes), this would put the migration before the time of Maximus, contrary to all the other evidence. 146 years before the end of Maelgwn's reign would be nearer the probable date. This would place the Cunedda movement about the turn of the 4th century, when Stilicho was completing the reorganisation of the defence. There were other movements from the Old North to the south-west about the same time; and even a hundred years later we find a settlement in Somerset under the leadership of a great-grandson of Cunedda, Glast, who gave his name to Glastonbury.

Powys, with its royal seat in Pengwern, was the most important country in the 5th century, a far bigger kingdom at that time than in the later middle ages. It encompassed the valleys of the lower Dee and Severn, perhaps as far as Gloucester, and the upper Wye valley, known as Buellt and Gwerthrynion, which correspond roughly to Radnorshire. Gwerthrynion was probably named after Gwrtheyrn, the king of Powys, who came to his throne about 425, the major figure in Britain in the 5th century. For a generation he was the overlord of a great part of England. Indeed, Nennius asserts that the whole of Roman Britain was under his authority. He was a native of upper Powys, although it is possible that his family, generations before, originated in Gloucester and the lower Severn. Gwrtheyrn is a Welsh name, but three generations of Roman names in his genealogy suggest that his was a Romanised Welsh family and that the Welsh language had acquired a new status by his day. He is one of the four Welsh kings scourged by Gildas; the fifth was the king of Devon and Cornwall. But if Gildas condemns him, the inscription on the Eliseg monument shows that the kings of Powys magnified him.

Gwrtheyrn is not a personal name but rather a title, similar to Bretwalda, given to an overlord. He does not appear to have been a warrior. Though his army withstood the attacks of the Picts and the Irish there is no reference to him as its leader; one of his sons was his chief general. Gwrtheyrn was a civil governor. He was a Christian who played an important part in relation to the Church. Perhaps another son of his was the Faustus who became head of the French monastery

of Lerins, the biggest in Europe. But the story of his conflict with St. Garmon, who twice came to England and Wales during his reign, is apocryphal.

It was Gildas, writing nearly a century after his time, who is responsible for blackening Vortigern's image by alleging, in a story taken up by Bede, that it was he who let the Germans in. The fable about Hengist and Horsa became an accepted part of the conventional history of the period, and it is still repeated in popular English histories. But of course the Germans had been coming to England for centuries. What Vortigern most surely did was to follow the Roman custom of employing them as *foederati* to assist in defence; and doubtless Hengist would have brought more of his fellow-countrymen over for this purpose, and greater numbers probably came after the plague over a century later. The story of the *adventus Saxonum*, the alleged great English invasion which conquered England in a short time and drove the Welsh to the mountains of the West, this is Gildas' invention. The Welsh have always lived in Wales. They have never lost their country. Wales is the only land the Welsh have ever lived in. The Welsh nation has developed largely through the inter-action of the Welsh language with the land; it has known no territory but Wales.

During the centuries it took to destroy the Romano-Britannic society and culture of England there is no record of anyone fleeing to Wales. But the fable that the Welsh lost their land in a huge English invasion which overwhelmed them left a deep wound in the Welsh psyche. That is why the truth is so important. Although the Germans did overwhelm England completely with time, they did not conquer Wales or the Welsh people.

The thousand years of the Welsh defence have a splendour that should not be tarnished. When the Northmen, the Vikings and then the Danes, conquered and colonised great parts of England and Scotland and Ireland as well as areas of the continent, they got no foothold in Wales. The Danes conquered England three times. It was they who united it, under king Canute, as part of the Danish Empire. They seized no part of Wales. It took the Normans more than 200 years to overcome Wales after conquering England in months. For long periods heroism and patriotism characterised the Welsh. We have no reason to be ashamed of our people's struggle for their land the day before yesterday whatever we think of yesterday and today.

The momentous Christian surge in the immediate post-Roman period has an elemental place in the development of the kind of community we call a nation. The human spirit and the people's will and their values have always been more decisive in the growth and

survival of the Welsh nation than have modes of production. To interpret our past otherwise is to be driven to despair of the future.

The order that was defended with such spirit in Wales during the centuries following Maximus gave the saints their chance of testifying, teaching and evangelising in peace. When the German rebellion was at its height in England in the middle of the 5th century, ravaging its economy and savaging its Christianity, Illtud and Dyfrig were embarking on their life's work under the patronage of Welsh kings: and in the middle of the 6th century, when the final Germanic onslaught shattered the peace won by Gwrtheyrn and Emrys and Arthur and wiped Christianity off the face of England, Dewi and Cadog and Teilo were at the height of their influence in peaceful Wales. The saints carried the good news of the Gospel out of Wales to Ireland and Cornwall and Brittany over a sea which was quiet now. And while they took the good news out, breezes blew into Wales from without, freshening her life. The traffic went both ways.

Gildas unconsciously testifies to the sea-change that had transformed Welsh life during the post-Maximus century when he scornfully indicts the poets and harpists in Maelgwn Gwynedd's court. They sang in Welsh. By now Welsh was the language of the most important courts in the Isle of Britain, raised to the status of honour that Latin used to enjoy. But that old imperial tongue still cast its civilised shade over Welsh society not only in the Church, which was its main medium, but to some extent in the world outside as well. A *civis* and a *magistratus* are commemorated on Latin memorial stones in mountainous Penmachno, and a *medicus* in Llangŷan. Near the shores of Llŷn in Aberdaron, Patrinus the *presbyter* is remembered. These served their society in the age of Maelgwn Gwynedd. For fourteen centuries they have been silent witnesses of the Latin and the Roman order that still remained even then in those distant parts of Gwynedd.

Wales was no longer an uncivilised enclave untouched by the currents of the world. From Gwent to Gwynedd her Celtic patrimony was utterly transformed by the values of Christian and Roman civilisation. In Cynwyl Caio in the heart of the Cantref Mawr, the commote which alone remained of the kingdom of Deheubarth to the father of the Lord Rhys, prince of Deheubarth, there is a memorial stone to commemorate some Paulinus in the 6th century — St. David's teacher according to Noble — and on it an inscription in Latin which, translated, reads like this:

Here lies Paulinus, upholder of the faith
and lover of his country always.
He pursued justice with great diligence.

The country which Paulinus loved is still here, and so is the faith he upheld.

When St. Beuno heard a man on the banks of the upper Severn urging on his dogs in an incomprehensible tongue he knew that the barbarians had reached the border of Powys. Something of the heartbreak of the losses sustained there in defending this frontier of Welsh civilisation is conveyed in the anguish of the poems of the Llywarch Hen cycle. The thousand-year defence of the Welsh heritage is one of the great stories of history.

It was Magnus Maximus who made the Welsh responsible for their defence. When he left in 383 his work for Wales had been done, unknown to him of course. In that year he went on his long journey as an emperor through France and Italy to his death in Aquileia; and Wales started on her long march as a nation through 1600 years of history. Madsen Wledig sought to raise ramparts to guard an empire in this corner of the earth without thinking that he was laying the foundations of a nation's life. The empire crumbled and decayed a millennium and a half ago; the nation still endures, one of the greatest in her possibilities in the world.

Dymuna'r cyhoeddwyr gydnabod cymorth Adran Olygyddol a Chyhoeddusrwydd y Cyngor Llyfrau Cymraeg a noddir gan Gyngor Celfyddydau Cymru.

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COFIWN

Y mae'r cerflun ar y clawr yn seiliedig ar y ddelw bres o MACSEN WLEDIG yn y Palais des Beaux Arts yn Lyons, Ffrainc. Yn ei law dde wele fedal aur gydag argraffiad o Segontium (Caernarfon) ei brif gaer yng *Ngwynedd*. Sylwer fel y mae ei wraig, y Gymraes Elen, yn tynnu'n sylw at y monogram o Grist yn y ffurfafen, gan fod yr Ymerodraeth Rufeinig — a'n gwlad Cymru yn rhan ohoni — yn swyddogol Gristnogol byth ers dyddiau Cystennin Fawr, 313 O.C., ymhell cyn dyfodiad y Saeson i Brydain.

Sylwer ar y dyddiad 'CCCLXXXIII', sef 383 O.C.

Parthed y llythreniad Lladin:

IMP(eratori) M(agnus) MAXIM(us) P(ater) PAT(riae) NOST(rae) . . .
ystyr y geiriau yw:

'Er clod i'r Ymerawdwr Macsen Wledig tad Gwlad ein Tadau'.

The plaque drawn on the cover was evidently inspired by the bronze bust of MAGNUS MAXIMUS in the Palais des Beaux Arts, Lyons, France. In his hand he holds a gold medallion inscribed with the image of Segontium (Caernarfon) his home base in *Gwynedd*. Helena his Welsh wife draws our attention to the monogram of Christ in the firmament above. The Roman Empire — which included Wales — had been officially Christian since the reign of Constantine the Great (A.D. 313), long before the pagan Saxon invasions of Britain.

Note the date 'CCCLXXXIII' on the plaque, i.e. A.D. 383.

The Latin inscription reads:

IMP(eratori) M(agnus) MAXIM(us) P(ater) PAT(riae) NOST(rae) . . .
which may be translated:

'For the Emperor Magnus Maximus, father of the Land of our Fathers'.