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Brychan Brycheiniog

(*fl.* c. 500)

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Brychan Brycheiniog (*fl.* c. 500), king of Brycheiniog, was allegedly son of the Irish king Anlach, son of Coronac, and of Marchell ferch Dewdrig of south Wales. He was the legendary dynastic founder and eponym of the early medieval kingdom of Brycheiniog (Brecknockshire) in south Wales. Nothing historically reliable is known about his life or rule, though later hagiographical and genealogical accounts would suggest that he flourished in the late fifth or early sixth century. According to the dynastic origin-legend, Brychan was son of one Marchell, a daughter of a local petty king called Tewdrig. Marchell was sent to Ireland to marry the king, Anlach son of Coronac (perhaps Cormac), on the understanding that if a son issued from the union he should return to Wales to reclaim his rightful kingdom. Thus, when Brychan was born, the couple returned thither with the child. As a youth he is said to have been sent as 'hostage' to the kingdom of Powys where he violated Banhadlwedd ferch Banadl, the daughter of the king, who subsequently gave birth to Cynog, afterwards St Cynog. Brychan is most famous for his allegedly large progeny by three wives—Eurbrawst, Rhybrawst, and Proestri—numbering twelve sons and twenty-four daughters according to the earliest lists, and both figures increase in later accounts. His daughters are linked to a number of figures of saintly and secular importance, most notably with St David and Cadog and the kings Urien Rheged and Maelgwn Gwynedd. There are also some entirely different accounts of Brychan's saintly descendants located in Cornwall and Ireland. Brychan is said to have been buried at 'Ynys Brychan', near 'Mannia' or 'Manar', but the location has not been identified.

Although much of this account is probably hagiography and origin-legend, and therefore difficult to credit historically, Brychan's alleged connection with Ireland is important. His name probably derives from the Irish personal name Broccán, and the region of Brecknockshire contains a large number of ogham inscriptions suggesting significant Irish settlement in the region, perhaps in the fifth century. Also Brycheiniog houses the only known example of a crannog, or lake settlement, outside Ireland and Scotland, at Ynys Bwlc at Llan-gors, again implying an Irish connection. This was probably the 'Brecenanmere' destroyed by Æthelflæd, 'lady of the Mercians', in 916. However, the settlement probably dates no earlier than the ninth century. This would be too late for Brychan of c.500,

but it is worth noting that his father's name has also been identified as the Irish name Amlaíb (from Olaf), suggesting a ninth- or tenth-century origin. Whether this affects understanding of Brychan himself is not clear.

Sources

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