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Dyfrig [St Dyfrig, Dubricius]

(*supp. fl. c. 475–c. 525*)

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Dyfrig [St Dyfrig, Dubricius] (*supp. fl. c. 475–c. 525*), holy man and supposed bishop, was founder of the churches of Hentland and Moccas in what is now south-west Herefordshire and in the early middle ages was revered in south-east Wales for his learning and wisdom. By the twelfth century, however, he had been appropriated by the expanding see of Llandaff, and erroneously turned into its first bishop. He is the subject of the *Vita sancti Dubricii* in the Book of Llandaff, which was compiled under Bishop Urban in the early twelfth century and intended to provide the episcopal church with a demonstrable early history. Although this should urge caution, analysis of the content of this life suggests that it is not as much an overtly Llandaff composition as those of Dyfrig's alleged successors Teilo and Oudoceus, and may preserve some traditions relating to the Herefordshire saint. Dyfrig is also noticed in the earlier *Vita sancti Samsonis* (now thought to have been composed *c.* 750) and Rhigyfarch's *Vita sancti Davidis* (composed *c.* 1090), as well as in a number of twelfth-century lives of other Welsh saints. Some of this later material was employed by Benedict of Gloucester (*fl.* 1150) in his life of Dyfrig, otherwise based on the Llandaff text and preserved in BL, Cotton MS Vespasian A.xiv. The reference in the *Annales Cambriae* for the year 612 to 'Conthigerni obitus et Dibric episcopi' ('the death of Kentigern and of bishop Dyfrig') does not accord with the hagiographical accounts (below) which, if reliable, would suggest he flourished in the late fifth or early sixth century; and consequently the phrase 'et Dibric episcopi' has been regarded by some scholars as a later gloss to Kentigern's obit.

According to his life, Dyfrig was born at Madley and was the son, possibly illegitimate, of Efrddyl, daughter of Peibio, king of Ergyng. This early Welsh kingdom was equivalent to the region of Archenfield in south-west Herefordshire and was probably centred on the old Roman *vicus* of Ariconium. Dyfrig is said to have founded the monastic school at Hentland, 4 miles north-west of Ross-on-Wye, which attracted many disciples to him. Subsequently he relocated to Moccas, near Madley, and eventually retired to Bardsey Island (off the Llŷn peninsula) where he is said to have died. As this basic outline shows, the life has little to do with Llandaff and may reflect at least some aspects of the original Herefordshire saint. A slightly different picture is presented in the first part of the seventh-century life of Samson: here 'papa Dubricius' is frequently mentioned, for

example, visiting St Illtud's Monastery at Llantwit Major, Glamorgan, where he ordains Samson, or spending his Lenten retreat on Caldy Island (off the south Pembrokeshire coast), where he is said to have had his own house. (The fragmentary inscription on Caldy once thought to refer to Dubr[icius] is generally no longer identified with the saint.) The Dyfrig of the life of Samson has little in common with the figure in the Book of Llandaff and probably reflects a local veneration at Llantwit of the Herefordshire saint. The notice of Dibric in the *Annales Cambriae*, whether a gloss or not, shows that by the mid-tenth century he was regarded as a saint of some importance in south Wales; and subsequently the idea that he was a 'visiting bishop' became common: he appears in the *Vita sancti Gundleii* in this capacity, and is also said to have consecrated St Leonorius (Lunaire), again at Llantwit. Furthermore, according to Rhigyfarch's *Vita sancti Davidis*, it was Dubricius along with St Deiniol who finally persuaded St David to attend the Synod of Llanddewibrefi (545), possibly indicating the growing importance of these two saints in the north-west and south-east respectively.

Other than the *Vita sancti Dubricii*, the material relating to Dyfrig in the Book of Llandaff is almost entirely the product of the ecclesiastical propaganda underlying that manuscript and has nothing to do with the Herefordshire saint. For example, it is claimed that Dyfrig was ordained archbishop of the whole of 'southern Britain' by saints Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes who established his episcopal see at Llandaff. The text proceeds to define the extent of the diocese, which of course equates to that claimed by Bishop Urban in the early twelfth century. Furthermore, the text claims that on 7 May 1120 the relics of Dyfrig were removed from Bardsey Island and translated to Llandaff, where they were ceremonially received on the 23rd of that month—thus physically completing the appropriation of the saint to the interests of Urban and his church. The topographic evidence for the cult of Dyfrig further demonstrates the late date of this appropriation since it is focused on south-west Herefordshire and not Llandaff. The dedications are clustered in Archenfield, including Hentland: for example, he is the eponym of St Devereux in Archenfield, near Kilpeck, and of the former church of Devereux in the parish of Woolhope. There is little trace of his cult in what is now Wales, except for one dedication in Brecknockshire and the holy well Ffynnon Dyfrig, near Llancarfan, Glamorgan. Dyfrig was also the patron of Porlock, on the north Somerset coast. His feast day is 14 November.

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