Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Maredudd *ab* Owain

(*d.* 999)

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18040>

Published in print: 23 September 2004

Published online: 23 September 2004

Maredudd *ab* Owain (*d.* 999), king of Gwynedd and of Deheubarth, was the son of Owain ap Hywel Dda of Deheubarth (*d.* 988). Maredudd ruled the kingdom of Gwynedd and other parts of north Wales from 986 and subsequently Deheubarth in the south from 988 until his death in 999. The extent of his power is uncharacteristic of this period, matched only by that of his paternal grandfather, Hywel Dda ap Cadell, and in records of his death he is called 'the most famous king of the Welsh'. His father, Owain, had inherited Deheubarth and other southern Welsh regions from Hywel Dda in 950, whereas the northern Welsh lands were reclaimed by a different branch of the dynasty. Owain did not die until 988, but Maredudd had been active for at least two years before this. It was perhaps because of his father's longevity that initially he sought power beyond his hereditary kingdom in the south. Indeed, his brother Einion had also acted seemingly independently of Owain until he died in 984, and it is possible that Einion's death enabled Maredudd to assume a more active political role.

Maredudd seems to have exploited the political divisions that fractured Gwynedd on the death of Hywel ab Ieuaf in 985. In that year Hywel's brother Cadwallon is said to have slain one Ionafal ap Meurig (a possible kinsman and rival) and thus to have assumed control of Gwynedd, Anglesey, and Meirionydd. The year 986 witnessed the killings of Maig ab Ieuaf (or Meurig ab Idwal Foel), possibly by Maredudd, and of Cadwallon, most definitely at Maredudd's instigation. Maredudd was thus able to bring this northern kingdom under his power and he subdued it under tribute to him. There is no strong evidence that he lost his dominance in the north until his death. Thus, in 987, when Godred Haraldsson (Gofraid mac Arailt), king of Man, raided Anglesey, capturing 2000 people (or slaying 1000, according to an Irish chronicle), it was Maredudd who took the survivors southwards into Ceredigion and Dyfed. Furthermore, two years later he ransomed what were probably some of those captured in 987 by paying the vikings known as the 'Black Host' a penny per head.

Maredudd no doubt harboured interests in his father's southern kingdom. Thus, if the Llywarch ab Owain blinded in 987 was his brother, this act may indicate a fraternal struggle before Owain's demise. When that king did die, in the next year, it seems likely that Maredudd was in a position to add Deheubarth to his territories.

However, he was not free of dynastic rivals: his nephew Edwin ab Einion aspired to this southern part of Maredudd's territories, while Idwal ap Meurig (*d.* 997) and his brothers sought to exercise their hereditary claim to Gwynedd. In 991 Maredudd attacked 'Maeshyfaidd', probably the plain of Radnor, then under Mercian control. This may have antagonized the English, for in 992 Edwin ab Einion, in allegiance with an English leader called Edelisi (possibly Æthelsige), raided Maredudd's southern territories of Ceredigion, Dyfed, Kidwelly, and Gower, taking hostages. One account states that Edwin had taken hostages on at least one previous occasion. Maredudd is also said to have raided the neighbouring kingdom of Morgannwg in 992 with the help of viking mercenaries. His son Cadwallon died in this year. The following year saw trouble in Maredudd's northern territories. On the one hand Anglesey was ravaged by vikings (not necessarily Maredudd's erstwhile allies), and on the other the sons of Meurig ab Idwal Foel raided Gwynedd. Maredudd also fought and was heavily defeated by the sons of Meurig in 994 at Llangwm (in Dinmael), where his nephew Tewdwr ab Einion fell. The political implications of this defeat for Maredudd's position in the north are not apparent. It has been suggested that Idwal had established himself in north Wales before this battle and that it represented an attempt by Maredudd to oust him thence; alternatively, it may have been a further attempt by Idwal and his brothers to regain their rightful kingdom. It is possible that these northern troubles ceased following the death of Idwal ap Meurig in 996 or 997. Maredudd lived for a further two or three years, dying in 999, as far as can be determined of natural causes, despite the aspirations of his dynastic rivals. While none of Maredudd's direct male descendants seems to have succeeded him to the kingship, his daughters Angharad and Lleucu were married into dynasties of later importance.

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