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Peulan [St Peulan, Paulinus]

(fl. 6th cent.)

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Peulan [St Peulan, Paulinus] (fl. 6th cent.), holy man, was known in the middle ages as a famous teacher, but remains largely a shadowy figure of probable Carmarthenshire origins. His feast day is celebrated on 22 November. No explicit account of his life and deeds survives, although he is noticed occasionally in the twelfth-century lives of other Welsh saints. However, it has been argued that the first book of the *Vita sancti Pauli Aureliani*, composed by the Breton monk Wrmonoc in 884, which describes the supposed Welsh origins of St Paul of St Pol-de-Léon (sometimes called Paulus Aurelianus or Paulinus), is based in part on traditions about the Carmarthenshire Peulan whom the author sought to identify with his subject—whether correctly or incorrectly is not certain. Although the *Vita* begins by attempting to identify its subject with yet another Welsh saint, Paul of Penychen in Glamorgan, it immediately shifts to locate Paul's origins in Llandingad, near Llandovery, in Carmarthenshire. Following a period of study under St Illtud at Llantwit Major, he is said to have become a hermit at Llanddeusant (also in Carmarthenshire), before moving to Cornwall and eventually migrating to Brittany with his twelve disciples. The second book of the *Vita* describes Paul's arrival on the island of Ushant off the coast of Finistère and his subsequent move inland to found the monastery at St Pol-de-Léon, of which he was ordained bishop. This apparently confuses the seventh-century Frankish saint Philibert, who might ordain, with the Merovingian king Childebert I (r. 511–58), who could not.

How much of Wrmonoc's narrative, especially the exclusively Breton material, can be associated with the Carmarthenshire Peulan is difficult to determine. Some later Welsh saints' lives also preserve traditions relating to Peulan, often contradicting those given by Wrmonoc. For example, Rhigyfarch's *Vita sancti Davidis* (*Rhigyfarch's Life*, chap. 10) claims that St David spent a number of years studying under Paulinus 'the scribe' or 'teacher' on an unidentified island called 'Wincdi-lantquendi'; and it is claimed (*ibid.*, chap. 49) that it was he who would later urge the other bishops to invite David to attend the Synod of Llanddewibrefi. This Paulinus is said to have previously been a disciple of 'Germanus the bishop', that is Germanus of Auxerre, who visited Britain in 429 and c.445. This connection with St Germanus is incredible chronologically, given the approximate dates of St David's life. On the other hand, the *Vita*

sancti Kebii refers to a Peulan as a disciple of St Cybi, whom some have therefore identified with the Carmarthenshire Peulan, though this appears to be a different saint of alleged Manx origins and patron of Llanbeulan on Anglesey. Furthermore, the *Vita sancti Teliaui* in the Book of Llandaff names St Teilo among the disciples of the 'wise man' Poulinus. Whether Peulan was a disciple of Illtud, Germanus, or even Cybi, or of none of them, is impossible to determine with any certainty; and similarly, the traditions that saints David and Teilo were among his own disciples may reveal more about his later reputation as a teacher than historical fact.

Nevertheless, that there had been a St Peulan underlying these various later notices seems probable, given the existence of a handful of dedications to a saint of that name in Carmarthenshire, including the churches of Capel Peulin and Nant-bai and a holy well known as Ffynnon Beulin all in the parish of Llandingad; and in addition, at Llan-gors in neighbouring Brecknockshire lie the churches of Llanbeulan and of Llan y Deuddeg Sant ('Church of the Twelve Saints', perhaps echoing the twelve disciples of Paul Aurelian). In Brittany, there are various dedications to Paul Aurelian, mostly but not wholly in Finistère, an area which also contains a concentration of dedications to the Brecknockshire saints of the family of Brychan. Finally, it has been argued that the Carmarthenshire St Peulan may be identifiable with the Pavlinvs, 'Preserver of the Faith, constant lover of his country, ... the devoted champion of righteousness', whose grave is marked by one of the early Christian memorial stones found at Maes Llanwrthwl in Cynwyl Gaeo, near Llandovery. The location of the inscription would certainly support the identification, though if correct, it would undermine an identification with Paul Aurelian as described in the second book of Wrmonoc's *Vita*, since he is said there to have died and been buried in Brittany.

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