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Rhys ap Tewdwr

(d. 1093)

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Rhys ap Tewdwr (d. 1093), ruler in Wales, was the son of Tewdwr ap Cadell ab Einion ab Owain ap Hywel Dda. Some genealogies omit Cadell, and by making Rhys a son of the Tewdwr ab Einion who died in 994, would have it understood that he performed the active deeds of his short reign between the ages of ninety and a hundred. He became king of Deheubarth in 1079, a year after the death of Rhys ab Owain, his second cousin. According to the unreliable *Brut Aberpergwm*, he came from Brittany, but *Brut Ieuan Brechfa*, another late authority, says it was from Ireland, while the medieval chronicles give no hint that he was an exile at all.

For two or three years after his accession Rhys was harassed by the attacks of Caradog ap Gruffudd ap Rhydderch (d. 1081), who had now made himself master of the greater part of Gwent and Morgannwg. According to the twelfth-century *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, when Gruffudd ap Cynan (d. 1137) landed at Porth Glais, near St David's in 1081, he found Rhys a refugee in the cathedral precincts, willing to promise homage and the half of his realm to Gruffudd in return for assistance. While this part of the story may have been coloured by the biographer's provincial zeal, it is certain the two princes marched together against Caradog ap Gruffudd, Trahaearn ap Caradog, and Meilyr ap Rhiwallon, who met them at 'Mynydd Carn', a place not yet identified, but probably in south Cardiganshire. There a decisive battle was fought, in which Caradog, Trahaearn, and Meilyr fell, and the kingships of Gwynedd and Deheubarth were permanently secured to the descendants of Gruffudd and Rhys respectively. Gruffudd's biographer alleges that he was distrusted by Rhys, who withdrew from him after the battle, and that in revenge he ravaged Rhys's lands.

Rhys was again involved in civil strife in 1088, when Madog, Cadwgan, and Rhirid, sons of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn (d. 1075), drove him into exile in Ireland. Before the end of the year, however, he returned with Irish assistance, and defeated the three in the battle of 'Llech-y-Crau' in which Madog and Rhirid fell. Another movement, due to the conduct of the relatives of Cydifor ap Gollwyn of Dyfed, who set up Gruffudd ap Maredudd against Rhys, was crushed in 1091 at the battle of Llandudoch (St Dogmaels). The Normans were now beginning that vigorous attack on south Wales which marked the reign of William Rufus, and in the Easter week of 1093 (17-23

April) Rhys met the new settlers of Brycheiniog in battle, and was slain. Both John of Worcester and the Welsh Bruts use language which implies that the blow was believed in that age to have put an end to kingship among the Welsh; Dyfed and Ceredigion were at once invaded by the Normans, and many years went by before the descendants of Rhys were able to restore the principality of south Wales. Rhys married Gwladus, daughter of Rhiwallon ap Cynfyn, and left three children: Gruffudd (d. 1137), who after many years succeeded him; Hywel, who was imprisoned by Arnulf de Montgomery, but escaped with some bodily injury; and Nest, who married Gerald of Windsor.

The circumstantial account given in the *Brut Aberpergwm* and in David Powell's *Historie of Cambria* of the relations between Rhys and Iestyn ap Gwrgan of Glamorgan is without historical authority. So, too, is the statement found in the Iolo manuscripts, that Rhys brought over from Brittany the 'system of the round table', with rules for the bards as they were observed in Arthur's time.

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