

INTRODUCTION

One possible model for viewing the history of western Europe during the central middle ages is that of a locus of 'feudal' civilisation in northern France from which waves of influence radiated concentrically to the outer fringes. The characteristics of this 'feudal' culture include castles, a feudal mode of political and military organisation, gothic architecture, scholasticism and universities, and a militaristic and ambitious nobility. It is no accident that military items dominate this list, for military organisation was a vital framework in central mediaeval western European society.

In a recent article Robert Bartlett has used this model to analyse the spread of military technology and political power in western Europe during the period.¹ Bartlett has described three characteristics – heavy cavalry (that is, feudal knights), archers, and castles – of a superior military technology which emanated from the 'centre' of western Europe (northern France and adjacent England and Germany) and spread by virtue of its superiority to other zones of Europe, including Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Scandinavia, and eastern Europe. This technology spread by three means: first, by military conquest of outlying regions; secondly, by local rulers in these regions imitating the technology in direct reaction to attempted conquest; and thirdly, by the local rulers adopting this technology as part of a broad indigenous effort to organise the institutions of a feudal polity to enhance their own power.

Wales features prominently as an example in Bartlett's discussion, and his broad model at least implicitly underlies the approach taken by most scholars who have considered the English conquest of Wales. Thus Le Patourel observed that 'the English colonization of Wales . . . was carried out largely by violence'² and R. R. Davies that 'the Normans were by no means invincible, . . . but the suddenness of their appearance, the *novelty of their equipment*, and the *sophistication of their tactics* more often than not proved as devastatingly successful against isolated and *militarily backward* communities in Wales as they were to do later in Ireland'³ (my italics). Similarly, Lynn Nelson remarked that while the Welsh were expert in raids and ambushes, 'pitched battles and

¹ Bartlett, 'Technique militaire'.

² Le Patourel, *The Norman Empire*, p. 48; see also pp. 63–4, 312–15.

³ Davies, *Conquest*, p. 89.

protracted campaigns, on the other hand, were beyond their capabilities, and the intricacies of siege warfare were foreign to their experience'.⁴ However, if the model is valid, one wonders why more than two centuries elapsed between the introduction of this new military technology into England in 1066 and the Edwardian conquest of Wales late in the thirteenth century. Surely a large, better organised, feudal state like England ought to have been able to overwhelm a politically fragmented Wales characterised by more 'primitive' military institutions, weapons, and techniques.

Bartlett has recognised this objection and has endeavoured to meet it by labelling Wales during this period as 'half-conquered',⁵ partly because native Welsh rulers began to adopt some of the 'heavy cavalry-castle' technology. Yet this is not an entirely satisfactory explanation if, as he has acknowledged, heavy cavalry was not superior in the mountains of Wales or the bogs of Ireland. Nevertheless, after discussing Wales, he maintains the view that the 'heavy cavalry-castle' technology was basically superior. In addition to this difficulty, another problem with the model is that it envisions peripheral cultures like the Welsh borrowing the new technology from the English but makes no provision for imitation or adaptation working in the reverse direction.⁶ The case of Wales therefore raises several questions about the suitability of Bartlett's model for explaining events in western Britain after 1066.

This book will consider the Anglo-Welsh military relationship between 1066 and 1282, most specifically on the Welsh Marches, as a case-study to test Bartlett's model and to determine if it should be rejected entirely or modified. To keep this work within manageable proportions, Shropshire and its segment of the Marches have been selected as the focus for study. As an example, this county provides several advantages: it is large and has a long border with Wales, it provides a variety of military phenomena for study, and the painstaking researches of R. W. Eyton permit detailed consideration of individual tenurial histories where these are relevant to military services.

In 1066 the border between England and Wales was a north-south line nearly coincident with the geographical boundary between the mountainous Welsh uplands and the rolling plain of the English midlands. The modern political boundary between England and Wales shows very little

⁴ Nelson, *The Normans*, p. 12.

⁵ Bartlett, 'Technique militaire', p. 1147.

⁶ Bartlett's observation - that, while the native Irish in later mediaeval Ireland did begin to build stone castles (in consonance with his model), many descendants of the conquering Anglo-Normans abandoned the use of stirrups - would seem to raise the issue of reverse borrowing and cultural assimilation. However, he has merely noted this behaviour as 'strange' (*ibid.*, p. 1154) and has not developed the possibilities inherent in this example.

deviation from this same north-south line – a line which roughly follows the course of Offa's Dyke.⁷ The impetus of Anglo-Saxon expansion into what had been a primarily Celtic Britain was checked at this line by the last decade of the eighth century. This was, perhaps, due partly to stiffening Welsh resistance and partly to Mercian calculations that the agriculturally unattractive Welsh uplands were not worth conquering.⁸

This political border persisted through the remainder of the Anglo-Saxon period. Although the border remained more or less stable, this did not ensure that life along it was peaceful. A treaty from the tenth century which regulated relations between English and Welsh in the Archenfield district of Herefordshire has provisions prohibiting Welshmen from crossing into England, and English from going into Wales, unless they were residents. Despite this provision, the treaty also had another to deal with situations in which a man of one race killed someone of the other.⁹ In the same vein, John of Salisbury reported that during Edward the Confessor's reign Earl Harold, having penetrated to the fastness of Snowdonia, established a law whereby any Welshman found with a weapon on the English side of Offa's Dyke would have his right hand cut off by royal officials.¹⁰ Clearly, even in the best of times there was some unrest along the border. At times the borderlands suffered outright hostilities, as when the Welsh king Gruffudd ap Llywelyn devastated parts of Herefordshire in 1056.¹¹

This was the situation inherited by the Normans when they conquered Anglo-Saxon England. Within a decade of the Conquest in 1066, King William I established three great border-earldoms in Cheshire, Shropshire, and Herefordshire. From the Norman kings' perspective these earldoms provided a defensive shield for England against the Welsh: the kings entrusted the earls with responsibility for local defence and with extraordinary powers. In Shropshire, for example, the sheriff was an official of the earl rather than of the king¹² and led expeditions against the Welsh.¹³ From the border earls' perspective, their earldoms presented a tempting opportunity for expansion at Welsh expense. Domesday Book reveals that a number of districts in Wales were

⁷ Sylvester, *The Rural Landscape*, pp. 23–39.

⁸ Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, pp. xviii–xxi, 288–93.

⁹ *Die Gesetze*, ed. Liebermann, I.374–9. Stenton thought that this treaty established the River Wye as a border between the English and Welsh: see his foreword *apud* Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, p. xviii; and Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 341.

¹⁰ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VI.6 (ed. & transl. Dickinson, *The Statesman's Book*, p. 195).

¹¹ *ByS*, s.a. 1054 (ed. & transl. Jones, pp. 70–1); and *ByT* (Pen. 20), s.a. 1054 (ed. Jones, p. 18; transl. Jones, p. 14).

¹² Morris, 'The office', p. 148.

¹³ Mason, 'The officers', p. 245. See also Lloyd, *A History*, II.383.

dependent to some degree upon the earl of Shropshire.¹⁴ However, along the northern and central portions of the Welsh Marches – the Cheshire-Shropshire-Herefordshire segment – this potential for expansion was not realised. The last Norman earl of Shropshire forfeited his lands and title in 1102 for rebellion against Henry I¹⁵ and the earldom of Hereford had earlier been forfeit for similar reasons. A great Welsh uprising in 1094/5, in reaction to Norman inroads in south Wales, devastated much of the Marches,¹⁶ obstructed William Rufus, and set the tone for relations along the Marches until Edward I's conquest of Wales in 1282/3.

During the period 1066–1282 the political border between Wales and England continued to be the line established centuries earlier by Offa's Dyke. In a constitutional sense this line became a broad band of territory, for along the border there developed a series of Marcher lordships which were legally separate from the kingdom of England even though they were held by 'English' lords who were subordinate to the king of England. During this period these Marcher lordships endured many Welsh depredations, ranging from minor thieving forays to full-scale expeditions led by Welsh rulers. Interspersed among the raids were occasional peaceful interludes.¹⁷

Welsh society and political organisation were certainly not static during this era. R. R. Davies, declaring that this society was not 'tribal', has noted the evolution of its social classes as 'Wales gradually turned its back on a pillage economy'.¹⁸ The thirteenth century, in particular, was a time of considerable change. David Stephenson has meticulously demonstrated how the rulers of thirteenth-century Gwynedd strove to develop governing institutions, a ministerial cohort, and the financial organisation needed in order to convert their polity, hitherto a traditional Welsh political arena with evanescent power based upon a leader's individual charisma and ability, into a 'nascent state'.¹⁹ And G. R. J. Jones has examined how these same rulers began to erect castles and strove to modify traditional Welsh custom to increase and enhance the

¹⁴ There are now several alternative methods of reference to Domesday Book. In the recent Phillimore edition of separate volumes for each county under the general editorship of John Morris, which uses a system of numbered chapters, sections, and entries, the appropriate references are: *Shropshire Domesday*, edd. Thorn & Thorn: 4,1,13; 4,2,1; and 4,3,42. The equivalent references in the more traditional system of reference are: fos 253va, 254rb, and 255ra.

¹⁵ Nelson, *The Normans*, pp. 119–21.

¹⁶ *ByT* (RB), s.a. 1094 (ed. & transl. Jones, pp. 32–5); John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, s.a. 1094 (ed. Thorpe, II.35; transl. Forester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, p. 198).

¹⁷ See appendix I (pp. 151–61, below).

¹⁸ Davies, *Conquest*, pp. 120, 121, 123.

¹⁹ Stephenson, *The Governance*. See p. 197 for the quotation.

