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Mann and men in a medieval state: the geographies of power in the Middle Ages

Rhys Jones

The state-making process represented a major institutional change, as societies moved from being organized according to notions of kinship to being ordered around the power exercised by kings over defined territories. The paper focuses on the medieval state-making process, primarily in a Welsh context; building on Michael Mann's notion of power networks, it is suggested that the mapping of the geographies of power within a society may offer a powerful tool for demonstrating the tentative and gradual nature of this process. Such a methodology also stresses the importance of geography in such a major change in human history.

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Introduction

European societies in the Middle Ages witnessed a major institutional change when they moved from being primarily organized around concepts of kinship to being ordered around the power exercised by a king over a defined area of territorial jurisdiction. This shift – from a political landscape in which territory was identified through *society* to one in which society was ordered through *territory* – lies at the heart of the state-making process (Sahlins 1968, 5; Dodgshon 1987, Chapter 5). In this societal change, a ruler's sphere of power was increasingly specified through a process of territorialization, whereby rights and jurisdictions were emplaced within defined areas of operation. In effect, the political landscape became something that was defined by the needs of the state, rather than by the immediate need of its occupiers.¹ It meant that society moved from a world of tribes and chiefdoms – in which rights of property were mainly defined through membership of a kin-group – to a society in which lordship over all land and men was increasingly assumed by state rulers. Clearly, this would have vested the change

with great geographical significance. The territorialization of power occurred throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, and this paper proposes to examine closely spatial aspects of the process, principally within a Welsh context.

Despite the conceptual and spatial revolution that is inherent in the state-making process, it should be noted at the outset that this was seldom a rapid societal change; rather, it was a gradual, tentative and discontinuous process of territorialization, characterized by institutional forms of varying maturity. For example, the medieval state, this paper's main subject of discussion, displayed a large degree of institutional immaturity. The so-called feudal state of the Middle Ages was an institution that represented a limited territorialization of power, wherein a king's ability to govern and rule his kingdom depended to a large extent on the cooperation of his vassals (Elias 1982, 16–17). The paper's main aim is to chart the growing territorialization of power in the medieval state. Building on Michael Mann's (1986) notion of power networks, it is suggested that the mapping of the geographies of power may represent a powerful methodology for evaluating

the maturity of state institutions – in other words, the degree to which power was territorialized within medieval society. It is concluded that such a spatial approach to studying the state-making process may serve to emphasize both the gradual nature of the process and the importance of geography in understanding an institutional change that is overtly territorial in nature. The main empirical evidence for such observations will be drawn from the geographical area represented by modern Wales, but, owing to the fuzzy nature of the state-making process in medieval society, it will make few comments regarding the viability or legitimacy of a distinct Welsh state.

A tentative and gradual state-making process?

Gledhill (1988), amongst others, has argued that societies tend to avoid being constrained by state institutions for as long as they possibly can, and has further suggested that we should perceive,

resistance to state formation as being the itinerant human tendency, and a transition beyond the absolute rank chieftdom to 'the state' based on 'permanent coercive power' as a rare event dependent on unusual tendencies. (Gledhill 1988, 10)

Such statements seem to suggest that human societies will tend to avoid the exploitative and constraining institutions of the state and will resist their adoption within a given region. Furthermore, the state-making process alluded to in the above quotation appears to be one that is extremely tentative, even tortuous, in nature. Indeed, it has been argued that the vast majority of instances of societies adopting state institutions as their main methods of governance and rule have occurred at a very slow pace.² For instance, Claessen and Skalnik (1978, 21) have stressed that:

the fact that many scholars have had considerable difficulty in drawing the dividing-line between the state and the non-state is a result of their failure to understand that the transformation was not an abrupt and mechanical one, but, on the contrary, was an extremely lengthy process.

Claessen and Skalnik further develop their argument by maintaining that it is possible to distinguish three alternative forms of early state, ranging from an extremely immature inchoate early state – a society where the rules of kinship are still important in the political arena, 'where taxa-

tion systems are primitive and where full-time specialists are rare' (Claessen and Skalnik 1978, 23; Khazanov 1974) – to a far more typical early state, where the power and jurisdiction exercised by a king is institutionalized in a territorial manner. In other words, the state-making process portrayed in such theories is anything but a societal revolution, and is rather a slow institutional development fraught with uncertainty.

In this respect, Tilly (1990) believes that such statements are as relevant to instances of European state formation as they are to other early societies:

The history of European state formation runs generally upward toward greater accumulation and concentration, but it runs across jagged peaks and profound valleys. (Tilly 1990, 28)

Significantly, many authors have argued that societies in a medieval European context did not progress directly from tribes or chiefdoms to typical early states; rather, a transitional mode of societal organization (the kingdom or inchoate early state) was a characteristic institutional form within the region. In spite of the fact that medieval rulers often sought to promote a conception of governance and rule that was explicitly territorial in nature, in practice, their control over the furthest reaches of their kingdom was, to a large degree, limited (Bloch 1962, 157). As has been cogently argued by authors such as Elias (1982, 16–17), the feudal state or kingdom was characterized by an inherent social and spatial tension. With only a rudimentary administrative structure available to govern their kingdom, the rulers of medieval states were dependent upon the personal relationships that existed between a king and his vassals in order to exert any jurisdiction over the vast majority of their territories. In effect, such control was largely derived from the social bond between two individuals rather than being based upon an objective and absolute ordering of space and territory. Of course, under certain circumstances, the powers that were devolved to particular vassals at a regional scale could act as the focus for his or her claims for greater autonomy and even political independence. There is no more striking a demonstration of this process than the dramatic collapse of the Frankish kingdom in the early Middle Ages, when the extended kingdom of Charlemagne disintegrated into a 'mosaic of autonomous duchies and principalities' (Llobera 1994, 42; James 1982; Duby 1977, 147; see, however, Reynolds 1986). It

is evident, therefore, that the feudal state was characterized by much institutional and political instability.

Another fundamental aspect of the medieval state's institutional immaturity was the degree to which age-old pre-state institutions were still crucial to its internal organization. An example from medieval Wales will illustrate this point. Much of native Welsh administration in the Middle Ages was based on the territorial units of the *cantref*, the commote and the township. Such units, acting as the territorial focus for the collection of renders and dues and the maintenance of law and order, were plainly designed to serve the needs of the state. Yet, despite the fact that these units demonstrated a desire on the part of Welsh rulers to order their kingdoms into distinct domains of territorial jurisdiction, a closer examination of medieval surveys and extents reveals that the kinship units of the *gwely* and the *gafael* still played an important role in local administration. For instance, in 1334, a proportion of the renders in the commote of Rhos Uwch Dulas in North Wales was paid by the kinship group of Edryd ap Marchudd (Charles-Edwards 1993, 234).³ The coexistence of state administrative units and kinship groups in parts of Wales in the Middle Ages would seem to suggest that such a feudal or quasi-feudal state was inherently immature in nature.

Of course, such institutional immaturity has direct implications for the territorialization of power. In situations where societies are to some extent still dependent upon kin-groups to collect renders and dues and to maintain law and order, it is likely that those societies will be constituted partially through reference to social groups, rather than through reference to demarcated territories. In effect, it is a society where the state's infrastructural power, that is, its ability to affect its members in a routine way, is limited (Mann 1984; Driver 1991) – indeed, it has been argued by Mann that this is the inherent nature of the feudal state. It is a political construct whereby methods of large-scale taxation and coercion are restricted, and individuals tend to exist beyond the effective reach of state institutions. The medieval state was therefore a state of limited territoriality, where social constructions of the political and institutional landscape were still important.

However, it is likely that fundamental changes would have occurred within these feudal states during the Middle Ages. It must be remembered

that these puny states, 'marginal to the social lives of most Europeans', gradually changed into institutions 'of decisive importance in structuring the world we live in today' (Mann 1984, 209). In other words, the inchoate early states or kingdoms of the early Middle Ages, characterized by a limited territorialization of power, were progressively transformed into institutions wholly organized according to territorial criteria. The remainder of this paper will examine the first period of the growing maturity of the medieval state, namely the way in which the feeble states of the early Middle Ages were transformed into the far stronger, more institutionally mature and, more importantly from a geographical viewpoint, more territorial states of the later Middle Ages. In this respect, it is suggested that much may be gained by using notions of the geography of power, in order to elucidate the degree to which a particular region is organized using state institutions. The following section will discuss Mann's concepts of the existence of networks of power, and will suggest a method by which we can use his notions both to examine the maturity of state institutions within given regions and to offer a more informed and precise interpretation of the mechanics of the territorialization of power.

Mann's geographies of power

The first theme in Mann's thesis is that societies are 'constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power' (1986, 1). He advances his argument by stating that the overlapping nature of these networks means that it is conceptually impossible to denote a completely closed and self-contained social system. In a sense, what he proposes is that societies exist within a hierarchy of power networks of different geographical scales and, as a consequence, any attempt to demarcate their spatial extent will depend upon the nature of the power network being analysed. As Mann himself admits, much of the same was suggested by Lattimore (1962, 9), on the basis of his studies of the relationship between China and the Mongol tribes. Lattimore distinguished three distinct spheres of social interaction as being fundamental to the organization of society before the fifteenth century, ranging from a geographically expansive sphere of military power, through an intermediate

sphere of civil power, to a more spatially circumscribed sphere of economic power. In short, what Mann and, to a lesser extent, Lattimore argue is that societies are not bounded, but rather exist as elements within an overlapping and interacting lattice of power.

The second theme in Mann's argument is that there are principally four types of power (the 'four sources of social power'): ideological, economic, military and political power (Mann 1986, 2; see also Giddens 1987, 166–82). Accordingly:

- Ideological power may derive from: an individual's ability to maintain a monopoly of the process whereby ideological meaning is placed upon concepts and categories within a society; an individual's or group's ability to shape the norms concerning the way in which individuals should act towards each other within a society; or an ability to mould the nature of ritual practices within a given society. It is the ability to shape or mould these elements that confers ideological power on a particular group or individual.
- Economic power is based on an individual or a group's ability to order the processes whereby a society's subsistence needs are extracted from the resources of the region that it inhabits. It is by controlling the means of sustenance within a given society that an individual or group of individuals are able to maintain a hold on their source of economic power.
- Military power is a relatively straightforward concept, since it derives directly from an ability to order the means of defence and offence within a particular region. It may also offer the means by which a ruling class coerces its subjects into adhering to norms of ideological, economic and political control within the same society.
- Political power, according to Mann, derives from the ability of individuals, groups or institutions to order aspects of societal organization in a territorial manner within a given society (Mann 1986, 22–8).

Such a conception of the exclusively territorial nature of political power is, however, problematic. Despite Mann's insistence that political power should be viewed in terms of an individual or institution's ability to order society in a territorial manner, it should be emphasized that it is equally possible for sources of political power, along with

the other sources of social power, to be constructed on the basis of social relationships. This is the essence of a pre-state method of societal organization. Such societies were comprised of socially constructed political, economic and institutional landscapes: food renders were paid, law and order was maintained, military levies were raised and a common ideology was promoted on the basis of the social groupings of tribes and kin-groups, rather than on the basis of defined and demarcated territories (Charles-Edwards 1993).

Both threads of Mann's work may be drawn together, since it is possible for different sources of social power to occupy different positions in the lattice of power networks. For instance, British subjects can be considered to be part of a *political* network that is based upon the United Kingdom; those same individuals are members of an *economic* European Union; they are members of a *military* network of power, in the form of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which comprises much of the Western hemisphere; and they are also members of an *ideological* network of power, stressing the merits of capitalism and free trade, which is global in scale. This demonstrates that the inhabitants of a particular region are not strictly members of a bounded society or social system, but rather interact with, and are ordered as part of, an overlapping network or hierarchy of power.

If we accept Mann's hypothesis, then it would seem improbable that we can use notions of the geography of power to delineate either the spatial extent of a particular society or the maturity of state institutions within it. For instance, in the Middle Ages, territorial lords, who often held the reins of political power in small, focused units of territorial jurisdiction, also promoted a religious ideology that encompassed the whole of Europe (Bartlett 1993, 243–55; Mundy 1973, 26; Anderson 1996, 140). In effect, the way in which geographies of power may range from the small to the global scale makes it difficult at first glance to envisage a situation where the study of spatial domains of influence may yield useful information about the nature of territorial institutions within a particular society.

However, Mann, in an earlier work, has argued that a state's autonomy derives from the fact that it is a place or an arena (Mann 1984; see also Driver 1991; Paddison 1983). In this context, Mann admits that it is possible for different networks of power to converge and be largely confined to one particular society:

Tendencies toward forming a singular network derive from the emergent need to institutionalize social relations. Questions of economic production, of meaning, of armed defence, and of judicial settlement are not fully independent of one another . . . The more institutionalized these interrelations, the more the various power networks converge toward one unitary society. (Mann 1986, 14–15)

In effect, a state system can be seen as being one that emphasizes the territorial institutionalization of power, by maintaining that spheres of economic, political and, to a lesser extent, ideological and military influence should be demarcated by territorial boundaries (Mann 1986, 26–7). Indeed, this is the main difference between states and the earlier societal organizations of tribes and chiefdoms. It would therefore seem likely that, in spite of the apparent overlapping nature of networks of power, the relative stability and institutionalization provided by state territorial units, especially mature state territorial units, will lead to networks of power in a state system being bounded to a certain extent. Mann's theory in this respect is very similar to the one propounded by Elias (1982) as a result of his study of the changing political, cultural and institutional conditions within Europe in the medieval and early modern period. Elias hypothesized that states underwent a similar institutionalization of power to the one suggested by Mann: as state power increased within medieval society, there was also a tendency for the state to specialize its functions and to develop bureaucratized systems of governance. In a spatial context, it is also likely that such bureaucratization would have led to a closer definition of territorial rights.

Political power, for instance, is often mediated through domains of territorial jurisdiction at a variety of geographical scales. We find examples of this in both the medieval world, where kings and princes exercised legal power over a defined territory (Frame 1991, 169), and in a modern society, where individuals living within or visiting particular countries are subject to its laws. At a smaller scale, the territoriality of legal jurisdiction may also be exemplified in the way in which a sphere of legal or political power is subdivided into territorial administrative units. For instance, in a modern state, individuals come under the jurisdiction of their local courts and constabulary; a similar subdivision of territorial legal jurisdiction occurred in the Middle Ages, when individuals living within particular areas of jurisdiction were required to

frequent their local court (Davies 1991, 264–5). Such evidence would seem to suggest that the spatial extent of political power in both a medieval and a modern state are delineated by boundaries, as territorial units seek to regulate spheres of political influence.

Similarly, it is likely that economic power is also dependent upon territorially bounded spaces for its organization. For instance, in a modern state, every individual pays taxes to the local authority in whose area they live. It is by defining the territorial extent of areas of local government, and by making it obligatory for every individual to pay taxes to the local authority in which they live, that state economic power is ordered and promoted through a territorial medium. Similar patterns existed within the medieval Welsh state: rulers sought to regulate their income and spheres of economic power by supporting a system of economic extraction whereby individuals paid renders and dues to the king's representative in the *cantref*, commote or township in which they lived.⁴ It was a system that emphasized both the territorial control of individuals and the territorialization of a king's economic power.

It is probable that military and ideological networks of power are not as easily constrained by territorial boundaries. Ideology, according to Mann (1986, 23), is very often 'socio-spatially transcendent', extending beyond spheres of political, economic and military influence. In a modern context, we can perceive the ideology of capitalism and free trade as being one that has transcended all political boundaries, and even penetrated into regions of the world that had previously promoted diametrically opposed ideologies. Spheres of ideological control in the Middle Ages displayed similar disregard for socio-spatial institutions. For example, Wales in the Middle Ages, before falling to the military might of Edward I, was under a constant barrage of what Rees Davies (1990, 6–7) has termed 'ideological domination', whereby Welsh princes and lords alike came to believe that they held their lands as vassals of the Norman kings, even though there were no Norman settlements or castles in the majority of the lands of Wales. A similar measure of the Normans' ideological power over their Welsh neighbours is the way in which Welsh lords and princes borrowed institutions from the English and Normans in order better to control and organize their own territories. Such actions would have conveyed a belief on the part of the Welsh nobility

that the most efficient method of ordering their lands was to borrow and copy English or Norman practices of governance and rule, and that traditional Welsh customs were in many ways inferior to the new, 'modern' English or Norman institutions. An oft-cited example in this respect is the borrowing of the title of the Welsh royal official, the *distain*, from the Anglo-Saxon *discpegn* (Binchy 1970, 23). In another historical context, such an inferiority complex on the part of the Welsh lords, allied with a perception of the institutional maturity of the Normans, could well have been the motivation for the commutation of rents in thirteenth-century Gwynedd (Pierce 1972a). Military power has also demonstrated a tendency to extend beyond territorial boundaries. As Lattimore has maintained, military striking range has, throughout most of history, been much greater than the spatial extent of domains of political and economic power. In medieval Britain, Norman military power extended far beyond the boundaries of the lands that they controlled – this is amply demonstrated by the military excursions carried out by the Normans into Welsh lands in 1114, 1121, 1157–8 and 1165 (Davies 1990, 7). In such a society, territorial boundaries held no sanctity for rulers who wished to impose their ideological and military power on their neighbours.

As is suggested by the above discussion, it is possible to argue that territorial boundaries play a critical role in defining the spatial extent of spheres of political and economic power in a medieval state – far more so than spheres of ideological and military power. The use of demarcated boundaries as methods of defining the territorial extent of networks of political and economic power in the Middle Ages, rather than those of military or ideological power, is not surprising. As Skopcol has cogently argued,

Any state first and fundamentally extracts resources from society and deploys these to create and support coercive and administrative organizations. (Skopcol 1979, 29; see also Roth and Wittich 1979, Volume 2 Chapter 9, Volume 3 Chapters 10–13)

Even though it is possible that medieval rulers sought to promote their political power at the expense of all other sources of power, the above statement would seem to suggest that there also exists a close interrelationship between institutions of economic and political power within any territorial state. A state's role as the single legitimate

source of political or coercive power within a given region is underpinned by its ability to exploit the resources and population of that region (Strayer 1970, 18). Without an economic base upon which to support political and administrative units, state power is severely compromised.⁵ It has been argued, in this respect, that medieval administration was principally concerned with two functions: namely the collection of renders and dues and the maintenance of law and order (Griffiths 1972, 59; Carr 1972, 59).⁶ For instance, as has been noted by Maitland, the *sake* and *soke* were two fundamental territorial rights in medieval England, the former referring to the right of jurisdiction and the latter relating to the rights to the profits of jurisdiction (Dodgshon 1987, 170; Maitland 1897, 282). Such evidence would seem to suggest that such rights went hand-in-hand within medieval society. Conceptually, therefore, it is probable that the priorities of medieval lords and kings would have centred on the definition of the extent of their political and economic power, rather than their military and ideological power.

It is submitted, therefore, that mature state societies to some extent exhibit bounded networks of political and economic power as they attempt to institutionalize power relations within the confines of their territory. That is the sum and substance of the territorial boundaries that encompass a state polity. However, in the light of the discussion regarding the tentative nature of the state-making process, it would seem likely that such an institutionalization of political and economic power would occur at a gradual pace. In other words, it would be unreasonable to expect early medieval states, characterized by immature administrative units and limited powers of infrastructural coordination, to promote a territorialization of power that was in any way sharply or precisely defined. It is likely that early forms of territorialization would be have been far more diffuse and ill-defined in nature. As such, it is probable that the state-making process would have witnessed a gradual process of territorialization, as spheres of political and economic power, originally constituted in social terms, slowly evolved into far more territorial delineations of power. Mitteis (1975, 5) has described the process as being one of 'statification', wherein a medieval state, characterized by an association between persons (the essence of the early feudal state) gradually changed into a mature state, incorporating defined territorial institutions.

It is proposed that we can use the boundedness of networks of political and economic power – that is, the extent to which spheres of political and economic power are demarcated by definite boundaries – as a measure of the maturity of state institutions within medieval societies. In effect, it is suggested that a study of the degree to which networks of political and economic power are defined by specific boundaries within a medieval state may offer an accurate indication of the extent to which the sources of social power are territorialized. In other words, it can be argued that domains of political and economic jurisdiction will only be precisely defined by territorial boundaries within mature medieval states. Theoretically, it is also possible that the existence of mature state institutions will lead to an increase in the density of power relations within a given society, as medieval rulers seek to exploit their lands more efficiently. Consequently, by closely examining both the geography and density of political and economic power within a given region, it is possible to elucidate the maturity of state institutions. The application of this methodology provides the opportunity for charting changes in the maturity of the territorialization of power in a meaningful way, and for creating a valid portrayal of the state-making process as being gradual and tentative, and also subject to periods of discontinuity and institutional regression.

There will follow a comparison of the geographies of political and economic power within Wales between the eleventh century and the fourteenth century. Empirical evidence will be interrogated in order to elucidate the degree to which power was becoming progressively territorialized during this period. However, in view of the presence of various ethnic and linguistic groups within Wales in the Middle Ages (the Welsh, and the French, English and even Flemish incomers), it would seem disingenuous to portray the institutional changes afoot within medieval Wales during this period as a process whereby a discreet Welsh state was created. Consequently, the remainder of the paper will comprise an investigation into the territorialization of power within a particular region on the western seaboard of the British Isles, rather than a definitive study of the political and institutional success of a specific Welsh state. In this respect, it is hoped that the Welsh empirical evidence will demonstrate the value of adopting a spatial methodology in the

analysis of the growing territorialization of power within a relatively immature medieval society.

Geographies of power in the eleventh century

Before turning to explore the changing geographies of power in the Middle Ages, it is important to emphasize that any study of early medieval Welsh institutional history and geography is much impaired by lack of evidence. Wendy Davies, amongst others, has noted that ‘sources for the history of early medieval Wales are few, fragmentary and difficult to use’ (1982, 198). For instance, even a seemingly rich source of early medieval material, such as the *Book of Llandav*, presents numerous difficulties of interpretation, owing to the political propaganda that colours much of the document. In many cases, the intractability or lack of evidence restricts our ability to theorize about the nature of institutions and the geographies of power. However, despite these difficulties, it is possible to make reasoned and relatively firm statements about the nature of medieval Welsh society and politics; this is especially true of the later stages of the early Middle Ages, which are far better illuminated than the earlier post-Roman period.⁷

In spite of the apparent lack of evidence, it is possible to suggest that eleventh-century Wales was governed using state institutions. References in the Welsh annals to territories, as well as the appearance of territorial administrative units, suggest that territorial criteria were utilized from the tenth century onwards, in order to ascertain whether individuals were members of, and paid renders and dues to, a political community (Jones 1955, 14; Jones 1992; Jones 1998a).⁸ Hywel Dda’s actions in standardizing the laws throughout the whole of Wales in the tenth century also suggests that there existed a publicly administered and essentially territorial law within the bounds of Wales.⁹ At first glance, therefore, it is possible to argue that political and economic power was administered on a territorial basis in Wales from approximately the tenth century onwards.

Despite the existence of native state administrative units in the eleventh century, there are indications that domains of Welsh and Norman power were ill-defined and ambiguous in this period. For instance, the document ‘Braint Teilo’ (Davies 1974),

which outlines the rights that were exacted by both the king of Morgannwg (Glamorgan) and the Bishop of Llandaff in the eleventh century, is in essence a vague document, offering little definition of the renders and dues expected from tenants. It refers to the bishop's right to maintain the same laws in his court as those maintained by the king of Morgannwg in his court, but does not specify the exact nature of those laws. Such lack of definition might suggest that similar uncertainty existed over the territorial and spatial demarcation of rights and obligations. Moreover, there is also evidence to suggest that kinship groups still played an important role in the maintenance of law and order and the collection of renders and dues. It has already been noted that the kinship units of the *gwely* and the *gafael* were crucial to facilitating the economic exploitation of agricultural lands within the geographical area of Wales. In this early period, their role as mediators of law and order through the institution of *galanas* (which attempted to ameliorate the effects of the bloodfeud) was also of the utmost importance. For instance, Pierce has demonstrated that, even though the rulers of the Gwynedd kingdom sought to reduce the role that kinship groups played in the regulation of the bloodfeud, their role was still an important one, especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Stephenson 1984; Pierce 1972b). Similarly, in an economic context, it has been suggested elsewhere that the *maenor*, a Welsh territorial subdivision that appears in the Domesday book, was an inherently immature administrative unit, owing to its emphasis on the delineation of the territorial extent of groups of people. In other words, it had as much in common with the social landscape of kin-groups as it had with the new territorial landscape of the state (Jones 1998b). The important role played by kin-groups in the local governance of medieval Wales in the eleventh century would seem to suggest that the territorial vision of political and economic space was incomplete and immature at this time.

Further evidence to demonstrate the immature nature of the geographies of power in the late eleventh century may be gleaned from the Domesday survey. Figure 1 demonstrates the Norman castles of south-east Wales, as well as the townships assessed in the Domesday book.¹⁰ From this map, it becomes evident that the Normans' power was confined to the lowlands of Gwent, with much of upland Gwent existing

outside their control (and, as a consequence, probably within the control of native Welsh lords). Such a statement is especially true in the context of Norman economic and political power. It is proposed that their economic power extended only as far as those settlements that were assessed in the Domesday book; beyond this sphere of influence, it is probable that Welsh lords still benefited from the economic exploitation of the land. Much the same can be said of the political power of the Normans, as it is unlikely that this extended much beyond the immediate environs of their castles at Monmouth, Strigoil and Caerleon. In effect, the institutional landscape present in the eleventh-century medieval state was characterized by an immature and restricted territorialization of power. It was by no means an institutional landscape that recognized the sanctity of territorial boundaries.

Despite medieval kings' and lords' theoretical claims of jurisdiction over all land, it is possible to suggest in the context of these examples that political and economic powers before the end of the eleventh century were not institutionalized in any real sense. Whilst there was a concerted effort to promote the territorialization of political and economic power, much local administration within Wales was dependent upon the cooperation of tribal groups. Moreover, in the case of the Normans, it is possible to suggest that the sphere of their power was extremely circumscribed, both spatially and, as is shown by the Welsh rebellion in the late eleventh century, temporally (Jones 1955, 35; see also Courtney 1986). Paradoxically, the basis of Norman power was territorial, but it was not founded upon state institutions. It derived from the physical control that they exerted over certain tracts of land located in the immediate surroundings of their castles. However, boundaries did not play any part in delineating the extent of their different powers, since their control of Wales derived principally from military might rather than the ordering of state institutions. In the context of both the Welsh and the Normans, therefore, it would be unreasonable to suggest that networks of political and economic power were wholly based upon the control of specific territories.

In spite of the relative paucity of evidence, what this discussion suggests is that the eleventh century was not characterized by the existence of mature state institutions, since the Welsh and Normans alike were unable to attain control of land that was firmly based on notions of

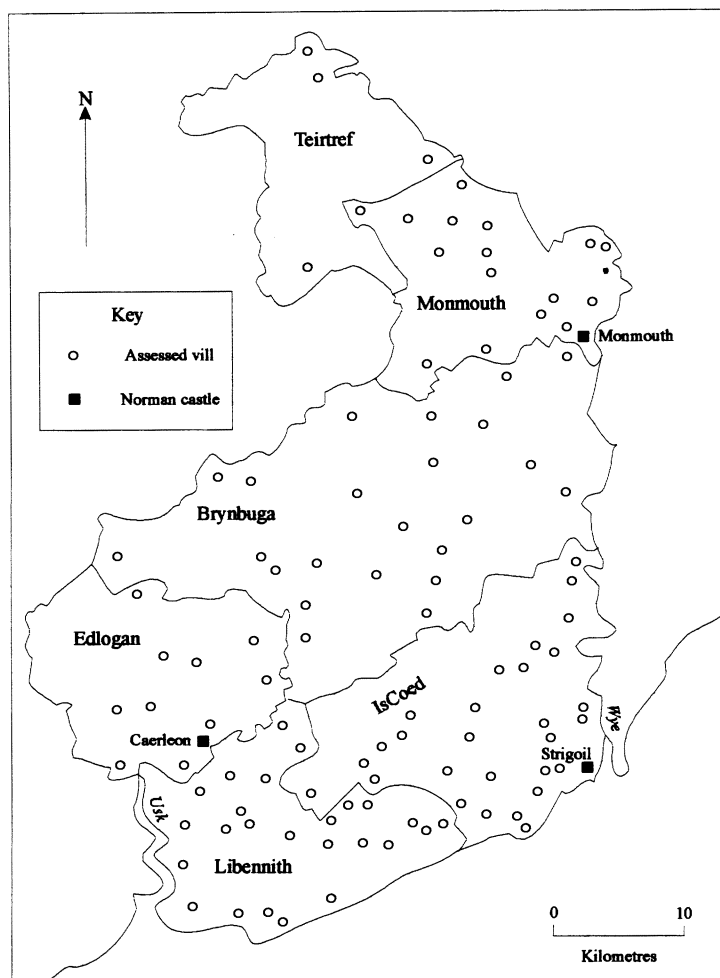


Figure 1 Norman political and economic power in eleventh-century Gwent

territorial power. On the contrary, it was a period of pragmatic rule, in which the geographies of political and economic power bore little or no relation to territorial boundaries.

Geographies of power in the later Middle Ages

The geography of power changed in two respects between the late eleventh and fourteenth centuries as rights, law and fiscal levies became more defined. In the first place, there was an increased definition of the territorial extent of spheres of political and economic power, as boundaries were

used to demarcate the spatial limits of rights and obligations. Specific definitions of domains of jurisdiction occurred at all geographical scales during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, ranging from the grand scale of extended kingdoms to the far smaller scale of knights' fees. For instance, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, ruler of an extended Gwynedd kingdom in the thirteenth century, admonished Edward I in 1278–79 for forcing Llywelyn's clients to attend the king's court in Llanbadarn in Ceredigion (Edwards 1935, 93). Llywelyn claimed that Edward had no right to do so, since Llywelyn's clients, living within the boundaries of Gwynedd, came under his territorial jurisdiction rather than Edward's. The example

clearly demonstrates the way in which networks of political and economic power were increasingly territorialized during this period, as methods of infrastructural coordination progressively matured. It also shows how the whole of the political landscape had been apportioned to kings, princes and lords by the late thirteenth century, and that domains of power and jurisdiction were specifically defined and demarcated by definite boundaries.

At a meso-scale, the precise definition of the rights and obligations associated with a tract of land made it possible for grants of territory to be made to faithful servants of the crown. For instance, grants of land were given to Norman lords after the final conquest of Wales in 1284 'with all their metes and bounds' (PRO 1912, 283). By granting land to a certain individual, (s)he gained the right to the economic and political power associated with that area of land. A whole host of individuals benefited from the munificence of the king, especially after the conquest of 1282–83, when precisely defined territories were granted to the faithful servants of the crown. For instance, the donation of the commotes of Perfedd and Hirfryn to 'Katherine de Aldithelegh' in 1299 was followed, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, by a grant of the commote of Emlyn to Richard Wroth (PRO 1911–49, Volume 1, 421, Volume 2, 85). These are not isolated examples, but rather were part of a common process in post-conquest Wales, when rights of economic exploitation and political jurisdiction were granted in discrete and well-defined parcels.

Indeed, it increasingly became the norm for individuals to lobby the king and entreat him for donations of specific territories (or, alternatively, the rights of economic and political exploitation associated with such territories). For instance, Roger Lestrangle, in 1283, pleaded with the king, asking whether he could:

obtain for him Penlyn or Edeyrnyon, or one of them; or he would prefer Maillor Saysnek: he would very much prefer to come to Maillor Saysnek . . . (Edwards 1935, 124)

What enabled this carve-up of the Welsh landscape was an exact definition of the economic and political rights and dues associated with precisely defined territories. In other words, by gaining jurisdiction over a lordship, an individual would secure his economic and political authority throughout the whole of a firmly demarcated

territory. One cannot imagine such an institutionalization of political and economic power occurring earlier in the Middle Ages.

Territories, and the powers associated with them, were so defined by the thirteenth century that it was possible for them to be subdivided into smaller units. This process of the territorialization of power at a micro-scale occurred throughout Wales: for instance, Llywelyn ab Owain, the last representative of the South Wales royal dynasty, controlled a 'moiety' of a commote in Ceredigion at the beginning of the fourteenth century (Rees 1975, 465; PRO 1911–49, Volume 2, 42). Similarly, knights' fees, some of the smallest quasi-administrative units of the later Middle Ages, were subdivided into halves, thirds and even quarters in the various regions of Wales (PRO 1904–, Volume 3, 420, Volume 4, 298). If it was possible to control the powers associated with a whole administrative unit, it was also possible, through precise definition, to control the powers associated with half, a third or even a quarter of an administrative unit. We have here a very different situation to the one found in the eleventh century; by now, the geographies of power and territory alike had become precisely defined, interlinked and interdependent. By controlling a territory, an individual controlled the spheres of power associated with that particular territory (Mann 1986).

The second pattern to appear towards the end of the thirteenth century was the increased density or concentration of power networks. By this time, Norman rulers, as well as, for a period, their Welsh counterparts, were exploiting their territories much more efficiently than they had at the end of the eleventh century. Political power increased in its density in the context of legal jurisdiction. For instance, Owain ap Gruffudd, in emphasizing the sanctity of age-old customs and traditions, complained in 1287–88 that the Normans were forcing him to frequent the shire court as well as the commotal court, something that neither he nor his ancestors had had to do in the past (Edwards 1935, 103, 179–80). This process of forcing Welsh tenants to frequent two courts instead of one occurred throughout Wales from approximately the thirteenth century onwards, and indicates the way in which the political power that Normans exercised over a certain territory was becoming more efficient and defined.

Extra obligations and rents were also becoming onerous for Welsh tenants. For instance, the Welsh

tenants of Brecon complained at the turn of the fourteenth century that the bailiffs of the Earl of Hereford were distraining them because they did not carry timber to the castle at Brecon. The main reason for their complaint was the fact that neither they nor their ancestors had been accustomed to carrying timber to that particular castle (Edwards 1935, 103). Once again, it becomes evident that maturing state institutions within Wales were leading to an increased density of networks of economic power, as Norman lords attempted, albeit in the face of stern opposition, to improve the exploitation of their lands.

The increasing density of networks of political and economic power is also evidenced in the way in which administrative units were subdivided. By subdividing the administrative landscape into progressively smaller units of jurisdiction, it became possible for Welsh and Norman lords alike to allocate economic obligations to particular communities in a far more detailed and prescribed manner. Although an administrative hierarchy had been nominally present in Wales from approximately the late tenth century onwards (therefore representing some attempts at an increased economic exploitation of land), it only is in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries that we perceive the major trend towards exploiting the landscape in a far more systematic manner (Owen 1841, 186; Jones 1992, 103). It is in this period, for instance, that we see knights' fees being sub-divided into halves, thirds and even quarters in the various regions of Wales (PRO 1904–, Volume 3, 420, Volume 4, 298). Significantly, the late thirteenth century also witnessed an increased commutation of renders and dues into money rents, as both Welsh lords and their Norman counterparts scrambled for the economic resources needed to sustain 'modern' warfare (Pierce 1972a). Such a commutation of rents, of course, represented a far more efficient method of exploiting territory than had been possible when using food renders paid in kind. In this respect, the Normans' success in exploiting their new territories has been demonstrated by Given (1989; 1990), who has argued that they managed to increase economic exploitation by 300 per cent in Gwynedd in the relatively short period between 1284 and 1306. They achieved such startling economic success partly through a commutation of rents and partly through their definition of the obligations expected from all communities within Gwynedd in a precise territorial manner.

These changes in the geography of power between the tail-end of the eleventh century and the thirteenth century are important, for they demonstrate the increasing maturity of state institutions within the region of Wales. The earlier period was characterized by circumscribed spheres of power. Boundaries played no role in delineating the extent of these spheres of power, since the Normans and the Welsh depended on their military might to secure limited economic and political gains. This was a society where the law of the sword was the only law that mattered, where territorial boundaries were of little importance in demarcating domains of political and economic power, and where kin-groups still played a crucial role in patterns of local government – in short, it was a landscape of an immature early state. Such a situation is totally at odds with the one we see at the end of the thirteenth century, where spheres of economic and political power were defined by stable boundaries, and exploitation of land was effective and efficient. This was, therefore, a society governed by mature state institutions, which stressed the sanctity of territorial power.

Conclusions

Charting the geographies of power within a particular society or region can act as a powerful tool in elucidating the maturity of its territorial institutions. In effect, it enables us to chart the evolution from Claessen and Skalník's (1978, 23) inchoate early state of the early Middle Ages to the more typical early state of the later Middle Ages. In immature early states, geographies of power are ill-defined and ambiguous, being dependent on the might of the sword and the cooperation of kin-groups. However, as state institutions become increasingly mature, the geographies of power change in two ways. Firstly, the spatial extent of the geographies of power begin to be determined by territorial boundaries, a process that only comes into being in Wales from approximately the thirteenth century onwards. Secondly, state formation also leads to an increase in the density of geographies of power, as territories become more capable of being exploited, both politically and economically.

The Welsh empirical evidence demonstrates that a meaningful portrayal of the state-making process can be constructed using Mann's notion of the

networks of power. Although the process of state formation represented a major institutional change, with tribal leaders who had previously controlled kin-groups becoming kings who controlled territories, it was often a gradual, uncoordinated and even discontinuous one. This is patently a true reflection of the way in which the process occurred in both Wales and other pre-modern societies.¹¹ Such statements, however, do not imply that a specific Welsh territorial state had formed by the late thirteenth century; medieval Wales was a hotch-potch of Welsh, French, English and Flemish interest groups vying for political and economic power (Smith 1997). As a result, the process whereby power was territorialized in the region of Wales in the Middle Ages happened in an extremely disjointed and uncoordinated manner.

Despite this qualification, it is believed that the Welsh evidence demonstrates that there is much to be gained from a process of mapping the geographies of political and economic power within a given society or region. Firstly, this technique allows us to develop an understanding of the gradual and uncoordinated nature of the mechanics of the state-making process. This was very often a slow process, drawn out for centuries, rather than being instigated and promoted in a few short years. Secondly, the application of the methodology promoted in this paper emphasizes the centrality of geography and territory to the process of state formation. Since the process involved an explicit territorialization of power, it would seem propitious to employ a methodology that is based on mapping the degree to which power was dependent upon territorial institutions within an early state. Of necessity, such a methodology stresses the importance of geography in what was a major institutional change in human history.

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Notes

- 1 It has been argued that the notion of territory lies at the heart of the autonomous power of states (Mann 1984; see also Driver 1991).
- 2 See, however, the theoretical alternative offered by Renfrew (1979).

- 3 The use of commotes (and other native administrative units) in Wales in the period following the Norman conquest demonstrates the institutional continuity between the period of Welsh and Norman rule.
- 4 For instance, for the institutional arrangements for the collection of rents in fourteenth century Gwynedd, see Charles-Edwards (1993, 241–5).
- 5 Many authors have stressed the crucial role played by agricultural and industrial resources in supporting state institutions within a given region (see, for example, Jones 1981, 105; Pounds and Ball 1964).
- 6 For a more limited definition of the medieval state, however, see Brown (1973).
- 7 It is possible that the increase in written sources may be seen as evidence of the changing nature of institutions between the early and later Middle Ages, since the production of surveys and records was integral to the growing territorialization of power (Larsen 1988).
- 8 For a consideration of the changing nature of citizenship in Wales, see Charles-Edwards (1971).
- 9 The nature of native state institutions in Wales are discussed in greater detail in Jones (1998a).
- 10 The map is based upon the Domesday survey of Gloucestershire (Morris 1975; see also Darby 1986).
- 11 For instance, see the Greek, Roman and Irish examples of state societies in Dodgshon (1987, 145–55).

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