

*Urth Noe e Tat:*  
**The Question of Fosterage in High Medieval Wales**

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Fosterage has long been considered a key component of medieval childrearing in the Celtic regions. A large body of Irish linguistic, legal and literary evidence has given us a fairly clear picture of the institution of fosterage as it existed in early medieval Ireland. However, for Wales the situation is much less clear. There are only a few scattered references in Welsh literature and, despite a lengthy tract devoted to the upbringing of children, almost no references to fosterage in the medieval Welsh legal texts. Since many works of scholarship, particularly those exploring the Early Middle Ages, have tended to focus on the linguistic, legal and literary commonalities between Ireland and Wales, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars have used Irish evidence to fill in the blanks for Wales in regards to fosterage. Utilizing evidence from both regions has led many scholars to conclude that the practice of fosterage in medieval Wales was quite similar to the practice in Ireland and that the custom persisted in Wales well into the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup>

A lone dissenting voice is heard from Christopher McAll in his study of the female life-cycle in medieval Welsh law. McAll concludes that, in the face of very little legal evidence supporting fosterage, one should assume that Welsh children were not normally fostered.<sup>2</sup> Some of the literary and historical material also supports this conclusion. As an analysis of the Welsh evidence will show,

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<sup>1</sup> The most detailed account of fosterage in Wales is Llinos Beverly Smith, "Fosterage, Adoption and God-Parenthood: Ritual and Fictive Kinship in Medieval Wales," *Welsh History Review* 16 (1992): 1-35. Smith is mainly concerned with adoption and god-parenthood in the 14<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Her discussion of medieval fosterage is limited to a few paragraphs, primarily because, as she states, "the evidence is overwhelmingly Irish." See also Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, (Leicester, 1982), 70-71 and T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 78-82. Both Davies and Charles-Edwards acknowledge that there is considerably more evidence for Ireland than Wales. In her examination of fosterage in England, Scotland and Wales, Annette Parks uses Irish examples almost exclusively. See Annette Parks, "Living Pledges: A Study of Hostageship in the High Middle Ages" (Diss. Emory University, 2000), Chapter 4 "Hostageship and Fosterage."

<sup>2</sup> Christopher McAll, "The Normal Paradigms of a Woman's Life in the Irish and Welsh Law Texts," in *The Welsh Law of Women*, eds. Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1980): 7-22, especially pgs. 8-9. Although the essay's primary focus is women, his comments on fosterage are applied to both girls and boys.

many of the literary and historical examples of fosterage used by scholars to prove its existence in Wales actually took place in Ireland. Nevertheless, not every example of Welsh fosterage can be easily dismissed. The limited nature of the sources makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions, but by examining each example in detail, some observations can be made as to how the custom of fosterage was being practiced in high medieval Wales. The material suggests that while fosterage did exist in high medieval Wales, it was practiced there in a much more limited capacity than it was in Ireland.

A brief review of the Irish material is useful for the sake of comparison.<sup>3</sup> In Old Irish, the terms *aite* and *muimme*, the intimate forms of the words "mother" and "father" that correspond to the English "mom" and "dad," are used to denote fosterparents.<sup>4</sup> Further, early medieval Irish law and legal commentaries go into great detail explaining fosterage and differentiating between the types of fosterage. According to Irish law text, *Cáin Íarraith*, fosterage was open to children of all free ranks.<sup>5</sup> A so-called "fosterage of affection" might take place between relatives and would not require any kind of payment or fee. However, fosterage outside the family required the payment of a fosterage fee, which was assessed according to the child's rank and sex. The parents of a child of high rank paid more than the parents of a child of low rank and a girl's fosterage fee was slightly higher than a boy's. It has been suggested that this was due to the fact that a girl was less able to lend economic support to her foster parents once she reached adulthood. Glosses and commentaries to *Cáin Íarraith* go on to explain the various skills a foster child was supposed to learn in exchange for payment--again these varied according to sex and rank.<sup>6</sup> The texts even outline the minimum quality of food a child was required to receive, detailing the type of porridge to which child of a particular rank was entitled.<sup>7</sup> If a foster son was killed, Irish law dictated that the foster father was entitled to one third of his honor-price and was allowed to avenge his foster son's death.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> More detailed accounts of the Irish material concerning fosterage can be found in Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), 86-90; Kathleen Mulchrone, "The Rights and Duties of Women with Regard to the Education of Their Children," in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, ed. D. A. Binchy (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1936) and Nerys Patterson, *Cattle-Lords and Clansmen: The Social Structure of Ancient Ireland*, (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 1994), 189-91.

<sup>4</sup> Charles-Edwards, 80-81, 169-170. Kelly, 86-87.

<sup>5</sup> *Cáin Íarraith* is translated in *Ancient Laws of Ireland ii* (Dublin, 1865-1901), 147-93 and summarized by Kelly and Mulchrone. The *ócaire* was the lowest rank of freeman in early Ireland and is the lowest rank mentioned in *Cáin Íarraith*.

<sup>6</sup> Kelly, 87. Lower ranked boys learned how to keep animals, dry corn and comb wool. Noble boys learned horsemanship, swimming, marksmanship and board games. Lower ranked girls learned how to use the quern, sieve and kneading trough, while higher ranked girls mastered skills such as sewing and embroidery.

<sup>7</sup> Patterson, 190.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, 89.

Furthermore, early Irish literature contains many accounts of fosterage, which help to illustrate its importance as a way to create political alliances and to reinforce the bonds of kinship or friendship. In the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the hero Cúchulainn is raised by several sets of foster parents. In addition to Cúchulainn's maternal uncle, King Conchobar, his maternal aunt and her husband are among his foster parents as are several prominent warriors of Ulster, including Fergus mac Roich, and even the warrior-woman, Scáthach. Foster daughters also feature prominently in Irish literature. Eithne, wife of King Cormac in *Esnada Tige Buchet*, and Saint Brigid in her vita have close relationships with their foster fathers and are portrayed as loyal foster daughters.

In contrast to the detailed material available in the Irish law codes, the medieval Welsh law texts have little to say on the subject of fosterage. It is not mentioned at all in the section of *Llyfr Iorwerth* devoted to the upbringing of children. In fact, the law states very clearly that the place of a son is "*urth noe e tat, a'e tat en argluyd arnau*" [at his father's plate with his father as lord over him] from birth until the age of fourteen, when he was to be commended to the local lord.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a daughter was to remain "at her father's plate" until between the ages of twelve and fourteen when, once she began menstruating, she was to be given to a husband.<sup>10</sup> The terms *tadmaeth* [foster father] and *mamaeth* [foster mother] do not appear in the Welsh legal texts. *Llyfr Cyfnerth* explains that all boys are entitled to a guardian even if their father has died, but the guardian is called an *arffedog* [protector], not a foster father.<sup>11</sup> Only blood kin is entitled to a son's *galanas* if he is murdered; there is no mention of foster parents.

The only reference to fosterage in *Llyfr Iorwerth* is a brief sentence in the section devoted to land law. It states that if the son of an *uchelwr* [noble] has been sent to be fostered by the *ailt* [unfree servant] of a lord, and has been reared by that *ailt* for a year and a day, then the *uchelwr's* son was entitled to inherit a portion of land along with the *ailt's* own sons upon the death of the foster father.<sup>12</sup> Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that the only other reference to fosterage in Welsh law comes in a triad in *Llyfr Cyfnerth* where it is said that one of the "*teir pla cenedl*" [three plagues of kindred] is to foster the son of a lord.<sup>13</sup> Although the view of fosterage in the legal texts appears to be less than complimentary, it does tell us something about the status of those who practiced

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<sup>9</sup> *Llyfr Iorwerth*, ed. Aled Rhys Wiliam (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1960), § 98. An English translation can be found in Dafydd Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> *Llyfr Iorwerth*, § 99.

<sup>11</sup> *Welsh Medieval Law*, ed. A. W. Wade-Evans (Oxford: OUP, 1909), 293.

<sup>12</sup> *Llyfr Iorwerth*, § 94.

<sup>13</sup> *Welsh Medieval Law*, 138.

it. The law implies that fosterage, when it occurred, was the placing of a son of higher rank into a household of lower rank.<sup>14</sup>

If the Welsh legal material concerning fosterage is contradictory and ambiguous, the literary material can be problematic for other reasons. Fosterage of some sort appears in "*Culhwch ac Olwen*" and in the first, second and fourth branches of the *Mabinogi*. In "*Culhwch ac Olwen*," Culhwch is put out to foster immediately after his birth.<sup>15</sup> Culhwch's mother has become mentally unstable during her pregnancy and, although she comes to her right mind after giving birth, she then falls ill and dies. The word *meithrin* is used to denote both fostering and nursing and it is very likely that wet-nursing is implied here since Culhwch is an infant. However, given that Culhwch is clearly away from home at the time of his father's remarriage some years later, one can assume that Culhwch was fostered as well as nursed. Nevertheless, one could make the case that Culhwch was fostered out of necessity since his mother had died.

In the fourth branch, "*Math vab Mathonwy*," fosterage is not mentioned by name, but it is implied. Gwydion rescues the son that his sister, Aranrod, rejects. Gwydion is never called the boy's foster father, but he is the child's sole caretaker and raises him to adulthood. Aranrod's abandonment of her infant makes fosterage necessary for the child's survival. It has further been suggested that Gwydion is actually the biological father of the child, which might help to explain Aranrod's hostility to both her brother and her son.

The second branch, "*Branwen uerch Lyr*," has a more direct reference to fosterage. After her marriage to Matholwch, king of Ireland, Branwen gives birth to a son, Gwern. It says that Gwern was put out to foster in the best place for men in Ireland.<sup>16</sup> Further, some of Matholwch's companions in the tale are called his foster brothers. However, since Matholwch is Irish and Gwern is being raised in Ireland, the references to fosterage in Branwen do little more than show that the Welsh were aware that the Irish practiced fosterage.

Fosterage features most prominently in the first branch of the *Mabinogi*, "*Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*." After slaying a beast in his barn one night, Teyrnon Twryf Lliant discovers a mysterious infant in his stables. He and his wife raise the child as their own until they realize that he must be the missing son of Pwyll and Rhiannon, presumed dead. Upon the child's return to court, Pwyll announces

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<sup>14</sup> T.P. Ellis first suggested that Welsh fosterage functioned in this manner and Llinos Beverley Smith seems to agree; T.P. Ellis, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: OUP, 1926), Vol. I, 335; L. Smith, 5. Kelly suggests that children from Irish families might occasionally be fostered with fosterparents of lesser rank (90).

<sup>15</sup> *Culhwch and Olwen*, eds. Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1992), 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogi*, ed. Ifor Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964), 37.

that, although Teyrnon and his wife will always be cherished foster parents, the boy from that point on should be reared by Pendaran Dyfed.<sup>17</sup> Teyrnon and his wife, somewhat like Gwydion in Math, fostered the boy out of necessity since he was a foundling. However, with the mention of Pendaran Dyfed, we finally seem to have a purely Welsh reference to fosterage as voluntary custom. Pendaran Dyfed is a mysterious character who isn't mentioned until the end of the tale, but he does seem to be a figure of some importance and may even be kin to Pwyll. One thing Pendaran Dyfed isn't, however, is a ruling prince. He, like Pwyll, is associated with Dyfed, but it is clear in the story that Pwyll himself is the rightful prince of the region. Pendaran Dyfed's rank must be lower than Pwyll's.

Some references to fosterage, while they appear in literary sources, have stronger historical implications. It is well known that Gruffudd ap Cynan, prince of Gwynedd in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, was fostered. The biographical text, *Historia Gruffudd vab Kenan*, states that Gruffudd was reared by his mother's kin. However, the text also states that Gruffudd was born to an Hiberno-Norse mother and grew up in Swords, just outside of Dublin in Ireland.<sup>18</sup> Gruffudd's Welsh father is notably absent. Thus, Gruffudd's fosterage, like that of Gwern in Branwen, seems much more an example of Irish fosterage than it does an example of Welsh fosterage.

A purportedly historical reference to fosterage occurs in the Welsh prose tale "*Breudwyd Rhonabwy*." The tale takes place during the rule of Madog ap Maredudd of Powys who died in 1160. The introduction explains that when Madog's brother, Iorwerth Goch, asked him for a portion of his patrimony, Madog instead offered to make Iorwerth his *penteulu*, the captain of his household troop.<sup>19</sup> According to the story, Iorwerth was not satisfied with this offer and set off on a violent rampage into England in the company of his foster brothers. This is a brief but intriguing reference, as there is some historical evidence to support the story. Iorwerth Goch appears in the chronicles as a prince in a constant struggle to control territory. In 1149, Madog ap Maredudd gave his nephews, sons of his brother Gruffudd, control over the region of Cyfeiliog, but did not give Iorwerth any territory to rule.<sup>20</sup> In 1157, Iorwerth burned the castle at Iâl, on the border between Gwynedd and Powys, but does not appear to have been able to control the land for long. After the death of Madog, Iorwerth gained control of a region of Powys known as Mochnant, but he was driven out by his nephews in 1166.<sup>21</sup> Further, it was not uncommon for a

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<sup>17</sup> *Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogi*, 26-27.

<sup>18</sup> *A Mediaeval Prince of Wales: The Life of Gruffudd Ap Cynan*, ed. D. Simon Evans (Lampeter: Llanerch Press, 1990), 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Breudwyd Ronabwy*, ed. Melville Richards (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1948), 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Brut Y Tywysogyon; or, the Chronicle of the Princes. Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1955), 128-129. Hereafter *Brut: RB*.

<sup>21</sup> *Brut: RB*, 148-149.

prince to offer the position of *penteulu* to a brother; the law dictates that the position should be held by a close relative of the king.<sup>22</sup> Later in the twelfth century, two sons of the Lord Rhys served as *penteulu* for their brothers.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, there is no reference in the chronicles to the particular raid mentioned in "*Breudwyt Rhonabwy*," nor is there reference to Iorwerth Goch acting in the company of his foster brothers.

The reference to foster brothers in "*Breudwyt Rhonabwy*" may tell us very little about whether or not Iorwerth Goch was actually fostered. It is an effective literary convention that, in a brief sentence, manages to convey a considerable amount of information about Iorwerth and his political position within Wales at the time of the story. He is accompanied on his raid not by a *teulu*, but by his foster brothers. This implies that he does not have the resources to support a proper war band. He is not accompanied by cousins, brothers or other kinsmen who often joined in youthful raiding parties together, but by foster brothers. This implies that Iorwerth may have had some local support, but did not have the support of the wider kin group in his quest for patrimony.

Two poems by a twelfth-century poet, Peryf ap Cedifor, are some of the most interesting pieces of evidence we have for the practice of fosterage in twelfth-century Wales. Peryf composed two elegies, "*Marwnad Meibion Cedifor*" and "*Marwnad Hywel ab Owain*."<sup>24</sup> Both elegies were written in honor of Peryf's patron and foster brother, Hywel ab Owain, as well as in honor of his natural brothers who appear to have died at the same time as Hywel. Hywel ab Owain was the son of a non-marital union between Owain Gwynedd and a woman known as Ffynnod Gwyddeles [Fynnod the Irishwoman].<sup>25</sup> Hywel is generally assumed to have been the favorite to succeed his father as ruler of Gwynedd, but shortly after his father's death in 1170, Hywel himself was killed by Dafydd and Rhodri ab Owain, his younger half-brothers.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, nothing certain is known about Hywel's foster father, Cedifor. It has been suggested that this Cedifor may actually be Cedifor Gwyddel [Cedifor the Irishman], who is referred to in a twelfth-century a poem

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<sup>22</sup> *Llyfr Iorwerth*, §6.

<sup>23</sup> "'Chronica de Wallia' and Other Documents from Exeter Cathedral Library Ms. 3514," ed. Thomas Jones, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 12 (1946-48): 27-44, 41. Morgan ap Rhys was the *penteulu* for his brother, Gruffudd. Cynwrig ap Rhys was *penteulu* for his brother, Maelgwn.

<sup>24</sup> These poems have been edited and appear in *Gwaith Llywelyn Fardd I Ac Eraill O Feirdd Y Ddeuddegfed Ganrif*, ed. Kathleen Anne Bramley and Morfydd E. Owen., Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion II (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Peter C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1966), 97; For some reason Fynnod has been called "Pyfog" in several modern sources including R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales, 1063-1415* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Brut: RB*, 150-151; For Hywel's position as heir-apparent see J. Beverley Smith, "Dynastic Succession in Medieval Wales," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 33 (1986): 199-232, especially 214.

by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr.<sup>27</sup> If this identification is correct, then perhaps Cedifor was related to Fynnod, Hywel's mother. Like his grandfather, Gruffudd ap Cynan, Hywel ab Owain's strong Irish connections may have contributed to his being fostered and it is possible that he was fostered in Ireland. However, it is more likely that both his mother and foster father were of Irish descent, but resided in Wales. Hywel ab Owain and Peryf ap Cedifor seem to have had strong ties to Anglesey, a region of Irish and Norse influence. Hywel's story is further complicated by the fact that he himself was a poet. A considerable body of Hywel ab Owain's own poetry survives and he clearly had extensive poetic or bardic training. The fact that both he and his foster brother, Peryf, were poets may imply that at least part of Hywel's fosterage was devoted to bardic education.

There is only one reference to fosterage in the Welsh chronicles. In the *Brut y Tywysogion* entry for 1106, it is stated that Hywel ap Goronwy, prince of Rhwng Gwy a Hafren, was betrayed by Gwgan ap Meuring.<sup>28</sup> The chronicle explains that Gwgan ap Meurig had fostered a son of Hywel's and that, of all his men, Hywel trusted Gwgan the most. Gwgan invited Hywel to his home and while Hywel was asleep, Gwgan revealed his location to the Normans. The Normans attacked and when Hywel reached for his weapons, he found that Gwgan had removed them. Unable to defend himself, Hywel was forced to flee. Gwgan caught up with Hywel and strangled him, delivering his body to the Normans. Fostering a child clearly demanded a high level of trust and loyalty and it is significant that the chronicles chose to illustrate the heinousness of Gwgan's betrayal of his lord by mentioning the fact that he had fostered one of Hywel's sons.

The most compelling evidence for the persistence of fosterage into the late twelfth century, and certainly that most often mentioned by historians, is the statement made by Gerald of Wales in his *Descriptio Kambriae*:

*Accesit et aliud incommodum grave, quod principes filios suos generosis  
de terra sua viris diversis diversos alendos tradunt: quorum quilibet*

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<sup>27</sup> For the details of this scholarly debate see Morfydd E. Owen's introduction to the poems by Peryf ap Cedifor. *Gwaith Llywellyn Fardd I ac eraill* . . . , 335; J. E. Caerwyn Williams felt confident enough in the identification to call Peryf ap Cedifor's brothers "sons of Cedifor Gwyddel." J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *The Court Poet in Medieval Wales* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 209; Cedifor Gwyddel's son is the subject of Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr's "Marwnad Ithael ap Cedifor Gwyddel," which appears in *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, eds. Nerys Ann Jones and Ann Parry Owen, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion IV* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 152-160.

<sup>28</sup> *Brut: RB*, 48-51.

*alumni suum post patris obitum extollere, aliisque praeferre, toto conamine nititur et machinatur.*<sup>29</sup>

[Another serious cause of dissension is the habit of the Welsh princes of entrusting the education of each of their sons to a different nobleman living in their territory. If the prince happens to die, each nobleman plots and plans to enforce the succession of his own foster-child and to make sure that he is preferred to the other brothers.]<sup>30</sup>

Gerald of Wales goes on to explain that fratricides and maiming occur frequently as a result of the practice of fosterage and partible inheritance. He concludes that foster brothers are much closer than natural brothers.

The Welsh chronicles bear witness to the frequent conflicts between brothers that occurred in princely families, but there are hints that Gerald may have been alluding to a particular incident when writing this passage. Gerald knew of the murder of Hywel ab Owain at the hands of his brothers. This murder took place during his lifetime and he refers to the incident specifically in his *Itinerarium Kambriae*.<sup>31</sup> Since he is known for his tendency to generalize about the traits of the native Irish and Welsh, it is possible that Gerald had this specific incident in mind when he wrote his passage on fosterage, fratricide and the bonds between foster brothers.

What observations can be made regarding fosterage in high medieval Wales from this relatively small, fragmentary and sometimes ambiguous body of evidence? First, in none of the Welsh material, legal, literary or historical is a daughter ever mentioned as being fostered. I think we can safely agree with Christopher McAll on this aspect, that daughters were not fostered. Whether girls were not fostered out of concern to preserve their virginity, as McAll suggests, or simply because it was assumed they could learn everything they needed to at home is unclear. What is clear is that there was no perceived need to remove daughters from the household. A daughter's place was, as the law states, at her father's platter. This in itself marks a major departure from the Irish tradition of fosterage.

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<sup>29</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, "*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*" Vol. Vi, *Itinerarium Kambriae Et Descriptio Kambriae*, ed. James F. Dimock, Rolls Series. (London, 1868), 211.

<sup>30</sup> *The Journey Through Wales/ The Description of Wales*. Trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 261.

<sup>31</sup> *Itinerarium Kambriae*, 134. Gerald presents a scathing assessment of Dafydd and Rhodri ab Owain, criticizing them not only for the murder of their brother, but also for what Gerald perceives as their incestuous heritage. Their mother, Cristin verch Gronw, was first cousin to her husband, Owain Gwynedd.

Given the legal texts and literary examples, it also appears that for most of medieval Welsh society, there was little reason to remove sons from the household either, and the law states that a son's place was with his father. Although the two brief legal references to fosterage mention the ranks of *uchelwr* and *arglwydd* which would often indicate ranks below that of princes, the literary and historical references are all to princely sons. What the legal evidence, as well as the literary examples in Pwyll and the historical examples of Hywel ab Owain and Hywel ap Goronwy seem to be telling us is that fosterage was practiced primarily among princely families, and involved the placing of a princely son into the household of one his local nobles. As the law concerning the three plagues of kindred implies, fosterage may not have always been a convenient or desirable task. Rather, it was a way to enforce the ties of fealty, it was a way for nobles to prove their loyalty to their lord. When we look again at the quotation by Gerald of Wales, this is very much the picture he gives us. He states that it is the custom of the Welsh *principes*, not *populus*, to have their sons fostered by local noblemen living in their territory.

However, if all princely sons were fostered, then there should be more references to foster parents and foster brothers in the Welsh sources, particularly in the chronicles. This suggests that not every princely son was fostered. We cannot be sure that any son of Owain Gwynedd, other than Hywel, was fostered. Hywel ap Goronwy had more than one son, but only one is mentioned as being fostered by Gwgan ap Meurig. Similarly, although Iorwerth Goch ap Maredudd may have been fostered as *Breudwyf Rhonabwy* suggests, there is nothing to say that his half-brothers were ever fostered. Growing up at court would have had its advantages. Military training could be provided by the *teulu* and its captain. The court also employed two priests who may have been responsible for educating princely children.<sup>32</sup> The childhood experiences of a Welsh prince could vary greatly and it would be unwise to assume that all children were reared in the same way.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible to speculate on some of the factors that might contribute to whether or not a son was put out in fosterage. There were great numbers of children born to the Welsh princes from non-marital unions. According to the law, these sons were eligible for inheritance along with their legitimate brothers. It was paternal

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<sup>32</sup> The household priest and the queen's priest are both mentioned in *Llyfr Iorwerth* §7, §22. Unfortunately, most of their duties are not described.

<sup>33</sup> We know, for instance, that while it was uncommon for Welsh princely children to be sent to monasteries, some princely children were sent as hostages to the English king. Hostageship was essentially a military arrangement and could have dire consequences for children. In 1165, a son of the Lord Rhys, Maredudd, and two sons of Owain Gwynedd, Cynwrig and Cadwallon, were mutilated by Henry II. Cynwrig ab Owain died of his wounds. *Brut: RB*, 146-147 and Bartrum, 97; However, for others like Maredudd's brother, Hywel ap Rhys, known as Hywel Sais [Hywel the English], the period of hostageship could be educational and foster close ties with the king. After being released by Henry II in 1171, Hywel returned to serve the king in France in 1173 and the chronicles state that Hywel remained close to the English throne. *Brut: RB*, 162-163; "'Chronica de Wallia' and other Documents . . .," 41.

recognition that determined whether a son inherited, not the marital status of the parents. In addition to the five sons he had by his two wives, if we are to believe the genealogies, Owain Gwynedd also had at least twelve sons born from non-marital unions. Some of these sons were conceived premaritally, others extramaritally.

At least three of Owain Gwynedd's sons, including Hywel ab Owain, were born before his first marriage and before the death of his father, Gruffudd ap Cynan, in 1137.<sup>34</sup> Owain's position in the 1130s was somewhat unstable as he struggled with his brothers over patrimony and dynastic succession, and any son born during this tumultuous time would likely have been in real danger. Even after his father had come into his patrimony, a child might not have been safe at court. Familial violence was common, particularly between paternal uncles and nephews, as Owain Gwynedd himself proved when he had one of his nephews blinded and castrated.<sup>35</sup> Iorwerth Goch seems to have been born during a time of extreme violence within the Powys dynasty. Between the years 1110 and 1130, no fewer than six members of the dynasty of Powys were killed or maimed by close kinsmen. During times of dynastic instability, having a child reared away from court by a trusted nobleman may have been a safer option.

In the case of illegitimate princely children conceived extramaritally, fosterage effectively removed from court certain sons who might be viewed as a threat to patrimony and succession by their legitimate brothers. It also protected them from their father's wife who might be resentful of their presence. Although concubinage was common practice and something the wives of Welsh princes may have come to expect, human nature dictates that at least some wives would have had feelings of jealousy and resentment towards their husbands' lovers and their offspring. The animosity of a stepmother can be seen in "*Culhwch ac Olwen*." When Culhwch's stepmother learns of his existence, she responds by cursing him.<sup>36</sup> Iorwerth Goch may have been conceived extramaritally, since his mother was not the same woman who gave birth to Maredudd ap Bleddyn's elder sons and it is not clear if she was ever Maredudd's wife.<sup>37</sup>

In conclusion, there is certainly enough evidence to conclude that fosterage was being practiced in high medieval Wales. Although it may have developed from an early medieval tradition that was very close to the Irish model of fosterage, by the twelfth century the material for Wales suggests that a

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<sup>34</sup> I base this assumption on the fact that Rhun, Cynan and Hywel ab Owain all appear in the chronicles in the mid-1140s. They would have had to have been at least fourteen by that time, the normal age for a boy to be armed and join the *teulu*.

<sup>35</sup> In 1152, Owain maimed his nephew, Cunedda. *Brut: RB*, 130-131.

<sup>36</sup> *Culhwch and Olwen*, 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Bartrum, 103-104. According to the genealogies, Iorwerth Goch's mother was Cristin verch Bledrus. The mother of Madog, Gruffudd and Hywel ap Maredudd was Hunydd verch Eunydd.

distinctive and much more limited kind of fosterage was being practiced. Rather than trying to place Welsh fosterage within a sphere of Celtic custom by supplementing scanty Welsh examples with more ample, and often much earlier, Irish material, it is clearly more fruitful to examine the Welsh material as it stands and to place it within the context of the native Welsh princely family. It will require further study to determine whether certain sons were more likely to be fostered than others, and the limited nature of the sources may make firm conclusions impossible. However, approaching fosterage as one of many options for childrearing in high medieval Wales may give us insight into the parent-child relationship, fraternal status and sibling relations within the native Welsh princely family.