



# Legacy Hunting and Welsh Identities

By Dai Morgan Evans\*

## ABSTRACT

*The case for there being continuity from Roman Britain to medieval Wales is often argued. The literary evidence suggests otherwise and some problems with continuity are considered again. Why did Edward I include Imperial Roman influences in his building of Caernarfon Castle? Are we sure that the dynasty of Powys claimed descent from the emperor Magnus Maximus or is he part of a confused origin story which is later incorporated into genealogies? Gildas' five 'tyrants' are usually located in specific areas, which suggests continuity with earlier and later political units. Re-examination of the evidence suggests that this is not so.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the on-going argument about continuity, or not, in the post-Roman/early medieval period in the western parts of Britain, one approach sees strong elements of continuity. It claims that part of the Western Roman Empire carried on into the thirteenth century in north-west Wales and was only finally suppressed by the Plantagenet King Edward I with his conquest of Gwynedd. In support of this thesis, Dark approvingly quotes Campbell: 'when Edward I defeated Llewellyn, prince of Gwynedd in 1282, and subjugated his principality, this marked the loss to a foreign ruler of the last piece of the Roman Empire in the West ...' (Dark 1994, 256). More recently White re-affirmed this stance, saying of the conquest: 'it was also the death knell of the last fragment of the Roman Empire to fall beneath the barbarian kings of medieval Europe'; and 'Britannia Prima was able to imbibe just enough Roman culture into the successor kingdoms for them to retain their own identity in spite of all that the English could throw at them over the centuries' (White 2007, 209, 214). The titles of both Dark's and White's books (cited in the bibliography) succinctly summarise their lines of argument. If this approach is correct it must significantly affect how we consider *Romanitas* in fifth- and sixth-century western Britain.

But against these expressions of 'continuity', there are the problems thrown up by Dumville. His original 1977 study of 'sub-Roman Britain: history and legend' effectively ruled out of consideration as 'history' the stories of Magnus Maximus as a true fount of continuing post-Roman authority, along with other tales such as the migration of Cunedda from Hadrian's Wall to clear the 'Irish' out of Wales (Dumville 1990a, 179–83). So how much of 'Rome' really did survive into ninth- and tenth-century Wales?

I will be testing these ideas through two studies. The first is of the historical figure of the emperor Magnus Maximus. The second is of the five 'tyrants' of Gildas' *De Excidio*: in particular investigating whether we can tie any of them to a specific territory. Before starting this, it is helpful to consider some of the problems of the relevant sources.

## EARLY MEDIEVAL LITERARY SOURCES

Our earliest source is the *De Excidio Britonum* by Gildas (Winterbottom 1978), which was probably composed between A.D. 490 and 540 (Sims-Williams 1983, 5). There is a tendency to treat the text we mainly use, based on a tenth-century manuscript written at St Augustine's, Canterbury, as a contemporary document. But we need to be cautious as it is unclear how much editing took place in the Anglo-Saxon context of Canterbury from the late seventh century

\* University of Chester; tycapelbeulah@hotmail.co.uk

onwards (Dumville 1977, 183–4). For example the name Gwrtheyrn/Vortigern might have occurred in the original text. There is also the question of later interpolations such as detail of the ‘Saxon’ invasion (Winterbottom 1978, 23.3; Sims-Williams 1983, 22; Woolf 2002b).

The *Historia Brittonum* was composed around A.D. 830 as a ‘synchronising history’ in the milieu of the royal court of Gwynedd and probably reflects a political bias because of this. The author in trying to produce a coherent history ‘struggled with inadequate source-material’ which, when considered in detail, does not suggest a scholastic continuity (Dumville 1977, 176–7). But for any use that is made of material in the *Historia Brittonum* it must be emphasised that it is a composition of the early ninth century.

The *Annales Cambriae* survive in a manuscript of c. 1100. They belong to the mid-tenth century, but are based on contemporary St Davids annals kept from the late eighth century onwards. Only these entries are capable of being considered as contemporary records, the chronologically earlier material being derived from a variety of sources and possible dates.

The early ‘Genealogies’ are found in a manuscript of c. 1100 (Harleian MS 3859) and were brought together in this form in the mid-tenth century (Koch 2006, vol. 3, 800–1). They may in some cases claim to stretch back to the first century A.D. but essentially express the ‘political/dynastic’ claims of Owain ap Hywel Dda (950–988). Other genealogies exist but are contained in later manuscripts with the associated problems of transmission (Bartrum 1966).

### MAGNUS MAXIMUS

The emperor Magnus Maximus is still cited as almost a ‘founding father’ of Wales or the source of continuity (e.g. Koch 2006, vol. 4, 1231). This is despite the clear analysis of Dumville (Dumville 1977) in his consideration of the use of written sources by Alcock and Morris (Alcock 1971; Morris 1973). Dumville states that Magnus Maximus is identified as a ‘founder’ of Welsh dynasties because he is the earliest figure who can be recognised in the accounts of Gildas and the *Historia Brittonum*.

There is no problem with an historical Magnus Maximus. A few points can be picked out, such as the reasonable assumption that it was the usurper Eugenius who removed the troops from western Britain; so Magnus did not deserve Gildas’ abuse on this point (Casey 2010, 64). He may have earned Gildas’ ire because of his execution of Bishop Priscillius (Chadwick 1976, 144). It is also worth noting that Magnus was probably from Galicia, which was a stronghold of Priscillianists and perhaps where he was buried. Galicia was also the site of an early medieval British colony, ‘Britonia’. This colony might have been another source of information for Gildas and others in the sixth century (Young 2003; Koch 2006, vol. 1, 291).

It is well known that the forms and decorations of Edward I’s castle at Caernarfon, alone of the Edwardian castles, copy if not the walls of Constantinople, then other forms of Imperial Roman architecture which can be found in this country (Wheatley 2010). We also have a record of the reburial in 1283 at Edward’s command of ‘Constantius’, ‘*Apud Kaernevan, corpus maximi principis, patris imperatoris nobilis Constantini erat inventum et rege iubante in ecclesia honorifice collocatum*’; ‘Near to Caernarfon the body was discovered of the great and distinguished father of the celebrated emperor Constantine and by the king’s order was laid to rest with honour in the church’ (Luard 1890, 59). If the ‘continuity’ thesis is right, these acts could form part of a living tradition surviving into the thirteenth century. This is usefully summarised by White (White 2007, 209–11).

Edward I must have been aware of this tradition through the *Breudwyd Maxen Wledig* (the ‘Dream of Maccsen Wledig’) or an allied source. This well-known tale has the Emperor of Rome dreaming about a woman whom he falls in love with and finds in the fort at the mouth of the river Arfon (Caernarfon). He then journeys to marry her and the outcome is a reverse invasion of Rome by the Emperor backed by British troops. The ‘Dream’ seems in fact to offer the first occasion of Maccsen/Magnus being directly associated with Caernarfon.

The ‘Dream’ is a great story, but it is not history. While a previously accepted date for the story was the second half of the twelfth century, in the most recent study of the work (Roberts 2005), Brynley Roberts suggested a date of 1215–17 as an appropriate context for the composition of

this version of the tale. This dating is consistent with the attempts by Llywelyn Fawr of Gwynedd to establish a Welsh hegemony/independence and to justify his all-Wales role. Roberts calls the 'Dream' 'an appeal to a fabricated or manipulated past' (Roberts 2005, lxxxvi). Elements of the story can be found in earlier writings, and Edward I must certainly have been aware of a version of the 'Dream' when deciding on the form and decoration of Caernarfon castle.

It is worth noting that Maximus/Macsen does not figure as a major person in medieval Welsh court poetry as an exemplar for praise. In fact there is only one reference, by Cynddelw in the twelfth century when praising his patron, a prince of Powys (Roberts 2005, lviii).

What then of the reburial of 'Constantius'? There is a reference to a tomb in the *Historia Brittonum* section 25, although this is identified with the son of Constantine the Great rather than the father '...Constantine, son of Constantine the Great ... His tomb is to be seen by the city called Caer Seint as the letters on its stonework show' (Morris 1980). This was probably a genuine late Roman or fifth/sixth-century inscription. Whether it was formally connected with a grave or cemetery is not clear, but the reburial of 'Constantius' by Edward I is very similar to his reburial in 1278 of 'King Arthur' in Glastonbury Abbey (Parsons 2001).

So the basis for Edward I regarding himself as the 'heir' of Magnus Maximus or of a Roman Imperial tradition is almost non-existent.

### MAXIMUS IN THE NINTH CENTURY

As has been indicated, there are problems with the transmission of the name Magnus Maximus into Welsh. The name Macsen in Welsh is not immediately derived from Magnus or Maximus but from Maxentius. Maxentius was the co-emperor of Constantine the Great, who was defeated by Constantine at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in October 312. While the Latin 'Maximus' appears on the Pillar of Eliseg, the earliest Welsh forms seem to use Maxim, which was later wrongly Latinised as Maximianus. From the twelfth century onwards Maxen, from Maxentius, regularly occurs (Roberts 2005, l). This confusion does not give confidence in the 'continuity' thesis.

What of the evidence from the ninth century? There are two significant sources: the *Historia Brittonum* (hereafter the *Historia*), and the inscription on the Pillar of Eliseg, situated near Llangollen (Edwards 2013, D3, 322–36). These two sources are thought to date to the first half of the ninth century, with the composition of the *Historia* around A.D. 830 and the Pillar of Eliseg's inscription before A.D. 854. In simple terms, the *Historia* is a product of the royal court of Gwynedd, and the Pillar of Eliseg that of Powys. The two courts were not on good terms, so their respective messages need not agree.

Interestingly, the *Historia* does not derive the origins of the 'British' from the Romans. There are two relevant origin stories. First, the *Historia* looks to Britto, by descent a Trojan, born in Italy, who caused the death of his father and mother and was driven from home. After founding Tours in Gaul he came to this island, which was named Britannia after him (Morris 1980, section 10). The other origin story takes Brutus as the founder and traces his ancestry back to Japheth, son of Noah, with the British being named after Brutus himself (Morris 1980, section 17). The author of the *Historia* clearly saw the 'Romans' as different from the 'British', and there is no longing for 'Roman' or 'imperial' past glories. Indeed the last words on the Romans were '*spoliata brittannia auro argentoque cum aere et omni pretiosa veste et melle cum magno triumpho revertabantur*'; the Romans 'deprived Britain of her gold and silver and bronze, and all her precious raiment and honey' (Morris 1980, section 30). The *Historia* also shows the confusion over the names of Magnus Maximus referred to above. The author says that the sixth emperor to reign in Britain was 'Maximus' and the seventh emperor was Maximim(ian)us (Morris 1980, sections 26, 27, 29). The detail given about them shows clearly that the reference is intended to be to the historical Magnus Maximus. So the message from the royal court of Gwynedd is that they are not Romans, do not remember them kindly, and are confused about Magnus Maximus.

It has sometimes been claimed also that the *Historia's* description of Arthur as not a king but *dux bellorum* (Morris 1980, section 56) has echoes of a Roman rank. It is best to regard the description as a contemporary ninth-century one so that 'Arthur' was seen as having a rank perhaps equivalent to a Mercian *ealdorman* (Campbell 2009, 56).

Arguably the earliest source we have is the inscription on the Pillar of Eliseg (Appendix). While it only survives today as a transcription, it surely deserves to be approached as a ‘document’ in its own right. The problems of the transcription have been addressed by Nancy Edwards (Edwards 2009), and what follows depends upon her assessment of the legitimacy of the status of the inscription, which I totally support. If she is right, we have an original document which dates from around the mid-ninth century and has not been altered during later transmission, unlike some of the documents we have been considering.

The ‘author’ of the inscription was King Cyngen/Concenn of Powys. We assume that the inscription was placed on the Pillar at some stage around the second quarter of the ninth century because we have the record that Cyngen died in Rome in A.D. 854 (Dumville 2002, 12–13). This is not the place for a full consideration of the role of Cyngen, but the fact that he was the first Welsh king to journey to Rome, probably with the intention of retiring and dying there, must say something about his attitude to Christianity and also to the legitimacy of Rome. Given the problems of travel to Rome it is also surely no coincidence that at the same time as Cyngen was there, King Aethewulf of Wessex sent his young son Alfred to be blessed by the Pope (Abels 1998, 57). It was also a time when Wessex and Mercia were drawing closer together. So we could look to Cyngen not only as a firm Roman Catholic Christian, but also as someone with intellectual and cultural contacts with the courts of central and southern England. In this context, it is interesting that while Cyngen refers to his own territory as ‘Powys’, he does not name Wessex or Mercia but *Anglo[rum]*, the ‘English’. On the evidence we have, if any Welsh king was to be keen on *Romanitas* then surely it would have been Cyngen?

I would like to concentrate on two sections of the inscription on the Pillar. The first, lines 1–6, is a straightforward genealogy of Cyngen. It contains five names, Concenn, Catell, Brochmail, Eliseg and Guoillauc, all linked by ‘*filius*’ (son) so we can be sure that it is meant to be a genealogy rather than a king list. This link is made clear in lines 4 and 6, where Concenn is described as the ‘*pronepos*’ or great-grandson of Eliseg, and Eliseg as the ‘*proavo*’, or great-grandfather, of Concenn. It is interesting that the genealogy is so short, and perhaps only takes us back a hundred years or so, perhaps to the second quarter of the eighth century. Leaving aside the time since the Roman ‘departure’ of at least three hundred years, there are also no names with a Latin or Roman tinge; and in this clear genealogical section there is no claim on Rome. Assuming that the composers of later genealogies were aware of this inscription, from where did they get the name of Magnus Maximus? The answer is most reasonably to be found in the section of the inscription which includes lines 20–6:

....*ail Maximus Britanniae*  
 ... *nn Pascen[t] ... mau[n] Annan*  
 ... *bitu a[u]t[e]m filius Guarthi*  
*[girn] que[m] bened[ixit] Germanus que(m)*  
 ... *peperit ei Se[v]ira filia Maximi*  
*[re]gis qui occidit regem Romano*  
*rum*

which Nancy Edwards translates as ‘... Maximus of Britain (although it is *Britanniae* in the plural) ... Pascent ... Maun Annan ... Britu moreover [was] the son of Guarthigirn whom Germanus blessed [and whom] Sevira bore to him, the daughter of Maximus the king, who killed the king of the Romans’ (Edwards 2009, 165).

This section of the inscription is not well-preserved and the appearance of names such as (Magnus) Maximus, Guarthigirn (Vortigern) and a presumably priestly Germanus all serve to tease rather than give firm answers. But these names apply to people from different periods, so there is no way that Magnus Maximus could have been the real grandfather of Britu. So it seems to be rather an ‘origin story’ section than the more recent history connected with Eliseg, such as occurs earlier on in the inscription. It certainly does not appear as a clear genealogical list, and there is no clear link to Concenn’s dynasty. Given the chronological confusion in this section, the name ‘Britu’ (Brutus) can perhaps be looked at again. We have already come across ‘Britto’ in the *Historia* and he also occurs elsewhere as an eponym (Bartrum 1993, 59). Is the occurrence

of Britu/‘Brutus’ on the Pillar simply part of a confused origin story? In the later genealogies of Powys, Guarthigirn (Vortigern) is associated with the dynasty of Powys. However Magnus Maximus does not have such a link and his earliest appearance in Welsh royal genealogies is with the lines of Dyfed and the Isle of Man (Bartrum, 1966, 10). I think that we have to emphasise that there is no clear link with the lineage of Cyngen who explicitly only traced his ancestry back to Guoillauc and did not clearly state himself to be descended from Magnus Maximus or Vortigern.

The occurrence of Maximus and Vortigern in the ‘post Pillar of Eliseg genealogies’ can surely be seen as similar to the appearance in the genealogy of the Sutton Hoo dynasty of Anglian ‘Wuffingas’ of ‘Caser’ (Caesar) as an ancestor, along with ‘Woden’ (Bruce-Mitford 1975, 695; Morris 1980, section 59).

The conclusion has to be that the dynasty of Powys could describe a distant and confused ‘Roman’ past as an origin story. Whether they derived their current legacy and legitimacy from this ‘past’ is nowhere made explicit in the inscription, nor is there a clear genealogical link, especially with Magnus Maximus. The fuller inscription implies that legitimacy was derived from Eliseg’s use of armed force.

### TYRANTS

‘*Reges habet Britannia sed tyrannos*’; ‘Britain has kings, but they are tyrants’ (Winterbottom 27.1).

We can now go back earlier in time to consider another set of candidates for continuity who can be located in a sub-Roman context. These are the kings/tyrants mentioned and denounced by Gildas. There were five of them, and in order of appearance they were Constantine, Aurelius Caninus, Vortipor, Cuneglasus and Maglocunus. There has been a tendency to assume that Gildas is treating these in a geographical and territorial sequence starting with Constantine in south-west England, perhaps Aurelius in southern Powys to Vortipor in south-west Wales, Cuneglasus in north-east Wales and Maglocunus in north-west Wales and Anglesey. This can then lead to these rulers being identified with later political units such as Dumnonia for Constantine, Dyfed for Vortipor, possibly Powys for Cuneglasus, and Gwynedd for Maglocunus. Aurelius Caninus can be fitted in somewhere around the lower Severn and this whole sequence has been illustrated in map form (e.g. Snyder 1998, fig. 6), and has also been used to argue continuity of political units from the Roman to the early medieval period and later. The presumed location of these tyrants has also been used to argue a cultural zoning for Britain, for example seeking a correspondence between their distribution and Class 1 Early Medieval monuments (Woolf 2002a, 9).

But can we really be so certain about the location and identification of these ‘tyrants’? First, there is no evidence that Gildas had any particular order of reference in mind for his account, except that the last tyrant, Maglocunus, receives the most attention. So the listing of them in an orderly geographical sequence is a later interpretation. A geographical sequence begins with Constantine who because of the text is assumed to be in ‘Dumnonia’; and this identification of Constantine as the tyrant of Dumnonia has tended to set the tone for the approach to the others. But Gildas does not explicitly state this. Gildas says that he is ‘*immundae leaenae Damnoniae tyrannicus catulus Constantinus*’ (Winterbottom 1978, 28.1), or ‘tyrant whelp of the filthy lioness of Dumnonia’. It is assumed that Gildas is making a play with the spelling of ‘Dumnonia’ to make it ‘damned’. But Gildas does not say that Constantine is the tyrant of Dumnonia. The ‘filthy lioness’ must be understood to be his mother, and it is his mother who is the Dumnonian. Constantine’s father is not mentioned and there is no evidence of where he was born and possibly ruled, but it need not have been in the same area as his wife, Constantine’s mother. No other evidence for the location of Constantine is given. We cannot be sure that Constantine was inheriting his ‘tyranny’ from his father. But if he were, and considered objectively, Constantine’s father could have been located anywhere in a broad zone of Britain, depending on how one considers the situation at the time. But there is no reason for him to have been located in the south-west of ‘England’. We cannot firmly locate Constantine in Dumnonia. If this is accepted we have no starting point for a Gildasian perambulation.

Gildas’ description of the second tyrant, Aurelius Caninus, contains no hints of a geographical

location. There are attempts to connect him with the dynasty of Powys by analysis of his name, but these are very conjectural. Next comes Vortipor.

'*Demetarum tyranne Vortipori*' (Winterbottom 1978, 31.1) is the one who can be most clearly identified and located. Vortipor is described as the 'tyrant of the Demetae'. This should place him in south-west Wales. At one time Gildas' Vortipor was identified with the 'Voteporix' of the memorial stone from Llanfallteg, now in Carmarthen museum (Edwards 2007, 202–6). This was ideal because it had the advantage of giving a material context to Gildas, some idea of a date for the memorial, and above all, for our purposes, a firm geographical location. However, the identification between Gildas' Vortipor and the Voteporix of the stone is no longer acceptable, as there are significant differences between the two names (summarised by Edwards 2007, 206). We can postulate no firm link between the two individuals and there are probably differences of date between the two.

One of the more important claimed signs of the survival of Roman influence is contained in the supposed military title *protector*, which is attached to the name of Voteporix on the stone. The inscriptions are (Edwards 2007, 205): on the top left side of the stone, an ogam inscription which reads VOTECORIGAS, which is the genitive form; and a Latin inscription which reads MEMORIA VOTEPORIGIS PROTECTORIS. This can be translated as the 'memorial of Voteporix the Protector'. Interestingly, Eric Hamp has suggested that the word Votecorigas/Voteporix has an approximate meaning of 'refuge-king'; in other words it has the same meaning as *protector* (Hamp 1996, 293). If this were the case, we might be dealing with a tri-lingual inscription with the name repeated three times, so '*protector*' would not be a military title.

If '*protector*' were to be taken as a military title, then strictly it could only be awarded to soldiers in attendance on the emperor. This presumably could have been a usurper or an unknown 'British' emperor. It has been suggested that the title had become hereditary to the family of Voteporix or represents a hazy memory of past status. The process whereby military titles could become hereditary can be seen in the exchanges documented by Avitus of Vienne (c. A.D. 470–523), where the Burgundian Sigismund is pestering the emperor Anastasius for titles (Shanzer and Wood 2002, 146, 149). So the hereditary process would seem to be possible. But the presence of '*protector*' on this stone hardly shows a full-blooded Roman inheritance and may be something else altogether.

Leaving aside the stone monument, we are still left with Gildas' Vortipor being the tyrant of the 'Demetae'. This does suggest a location in the broad area of south-west Wales where the tribe of Demetae was located and where the tribal capital bore the name Moridunum Demetarum (modern Caermarthen). It seems reasonable to continue to locate Vortipor in this area, although we cannot be sure what or who was meant by 'Demetarum' in the early sixth century. There are indications that the tribal name had turned into a patronymic. For instance, on the bilingual early medieval monument from St Dogwells in Pembrokeshire the commemorated person is described as 'Demeti', the son of Dimetus or Demetius (Edwards 2007, 471–4). The problems with our understanding of the continued use of Roman tribal names are summed up by the stone at Penbryn (Cardiganshire) where a person with an Irish name was described as an '*Ordovs*' or '*Ordovician*', a tribe which was notionally located some distance to the north in Wales, and last referred to a considerable time earlier. So there is no surety about using former tribal names to give locations as opposed to indicating 'ethnic' groups. Vortipor is the tyrant of a people rather than a place, although in this case we can have some idea of the location of that people. So of all the tyrants Vortipor is the one where perhaps a location can be reasonably postulated.

The next tyrant, Cuneglasus, has been identified with a hillfort near Deganwy (Conwy) and with the place name 'Dineirth' ('bear's fortress'). This was on the basis of the description of Cuneglasus as 'you bear, rider of many and driver of the chariot of the Bear's Stronghold'. The Latin for 'Bear's Stronghold' is *receptaculari ursi*, and Jackson suggested that *receptaculum* as a 'lurking place or refuge/den' could be translated into Welsh as *din*, or fortress/stronghold with the second element being *arth* or bear (Jackson 1982, 33). 'Bear's cave' seems equally possible rather than a fort, but there is also the problem that there is more than one 'Dineirth' recorded in Wales (Dumville 1984, 58). So no firm identification with a specific place can be made. Further, Gildas does not describe him directly as 'Cuneglasus of the Bear's Stronghold' but as the 'driver of the

chariot' of that place, making the link between person and place more tenuous. So Cuneglasus cannot be securely located in the landscape.

Lastly comes the tyrant who has had the most ink spilt about him but unfortunately not much information to help locate him. Maglocunus is described as '*insularis draconis*', 'dragon of the island' (Morris 1980, 33.1). The question is, which island? The two candidates are Anglesey, if he is located in north Wales, or the island of 'Britain'. Maglocunus has traditionally been associated with Maelgwn of Gwynedd, who appeared in the *Historia* as '*Mailcunus magnus rex apud Brittones regnabat, id est in regione Guenedotae*', 'King Maelgwn the Great was reigning among the British, in Gwynedd'. The section then goes on to link him with Cunedda as an ancestor and the story of the expulsion of the Irish, none of which is serious history (Morris 1980, section 62). We have no firm date for Maelgwn of Gwynedd from the *Historia*. There is a date for his death in the *Annales Cambriae* of A.D. 547, but this has been looked at by Dumville who considered the problems of using him to date Gildas' *De Excidio* and firmly rejected any reliance on this date (Dumville 1984, 52–4). While later medieval Welsh authors made a connection between Maelgwn of Gwynedd and Maglocunus, can we still continue to accept this on so little evidence?

It is not as if Maglocunus was a unique name, as it occurs on a bilingual inscription from Nevern in Pembrokeshire (Edwards 2007, 390–2). The position of Maelgwn is on a par with the references to Arthur in the *Historia* or Maximus on the Pillar of Eliseg: an interesting reflection of ninth- and tenth-century views. Kenneth Jackson, in his article on the names of the 'British Princes' (*sic*) stated that the 'island' of Maglocunus had to be Anglesey because it would be 'absurd' to think otherwise in the context of the other 'princes' and their locations (Jackson 1982, 35). But if we remove the firm base of the context in which Jackson located the other figures, perhaps the idea of Maglocunus' island as 'Britain' becomes more reasonable. So Gildas' Maglocunus needs to be uncoupled from the Maelgwn and Gwynedd of Middle Welsh tradition. In proposing this, I am aware that Woolf has said of Maglocunus/Maelgwn that 'not even the sceptical Professor Dumville seems inclined to challenge this identification' (Woolf 2002a, 9).

I would therefore argue that with the possible exception of Vortipor, there is no evidence allowing us to locate the four other tyrants in any part of the country. The use of locations of the tyrants as evidence for continuity from Roman times is not allowable, nor can any conclusions be reached about the genesis of later medieval Welsh kingdoms.

This leads us to a consideration of how we regard these tyrants. The tendency has been to see them as territorially based. Even if the arguments set out above are accepted, we could continue to see the tyrants controlling territory somewhere. But if we separate them from territories and make them 'foot-loose', what effect does this have? Are Vortipor's Demetae a territorial unit or a people? Are these tyrants more in the tradition of the Frankish and Gothic kings who began as the leaders of peoples rather than rulers of territories? We have the example on the Continent of the Briton Riothamus who seems to have been the leader of a large warband/army rather than a territorial governor (Anderson 1965, II, 9; Sidonius 3.9). Was the role of Gildas' tyrants something similar? In other words, are they far more akin to invading barbarian kings than to some form of continuity with late Roman governors?

I conclude that in western Britain there is no continuity of political/administrative units from late Roman times, and that most elements of *Romanitas* are re-imported. In considering when this happened, an important observation of Dumville has tended to be overlooked. In his 1977 article Dumville stated: 'it is possible that the mid-sixth century could also be the historical horizon of the vernacular evidence in the Brittonic areas' (Dumville 1990a, 189). In a 1986 paper Dumville spelt this out directly: 'the middle of the sixth century forms a major watershed in our post-Roman history' (Dumville 1990b, 10), and: 'the mid-sixth century, or even a little later, is the horizon in the Welsh historical record'. He is so insistent upon this that he said: 'I have hammered the point long enough' (Dumville 1990b, 11). The explanation for this 'historical horizon' needs further exploration. But if Dumville is correct, this makes for a major problem for any doctrine of continuity, and how we view the processes of the fifth as well as sixth centuries in western Britain. Is the real 'end' of Roman Britain and a new beginning of 'Wales' and the British kingdoms to be found not in A.D. 410 but rather around A.D. 550?

## APPENDIX: THE INSCRIPTION ON THE PILLAR OF ELISEG

(After Edwards 2009, 171–3)

The text as transmitted:

- a 1 + CONCENN FILIUS CATTELL CATELL  
2 FILIUS BROHCMAIL BROHCMAL FILIUS  
3 ELISEG ELISEG FILIUS GUOILLAUC
- b 4 + CONCENN ITAQUE PRONEPOS ELISEG  
5 EDIFICAUIT HUNC LAPIDEM PROAUO
- c 6 SUO ELISEG + IPSE EST ELISEG QUI NECR  
7 XIT HEREDITATEM POUOS -IPC—MORT  
8 CA<sup>V</sup>TEM PER UIM - E POTESTATE ANGLO  
9 -----IN GLADIO SUO PARTA IN IGNE
- d 10 ----- .MQUE RECITUERIT MANESCR-P  
11 ----- .M DET BENEDICTIONEM SUPE
- e 12 ----- . ELISEG + IPSE EST CONCENN  
13 ----- -TU.-.C—EMEIUNGC-MANU  
14 -----EAD REGNUM SUUM POUOS  
15 ----- .E ... IUBAUI-S- ÊT QUOD  
16 ----- ...S.AIS-UCAUES.E  
17 ----- ..R-EIN—MONTEM
- f/g 18 -----  
19 ----- ...-.-. MONARCHIAM  
20 ----- AIL MAXIMUS BRITTANNIAE  
21 ----- NN PASCEN - MAU.ANNAN  
22 ----- BRITUA - T - M FILIUS GUARTHI  
23 ----- -QUE BENED - GERMANUS QŪE  
24 ----- PEPERIT EISE-IRA FILIA MAXIMI  
25 ----- GIS QUI OCCIDIT REGEM ROMANO
- h 26 REM + CONMARCH PINXIT HOC  
27 CHIROGRAFŪ REGE SUO POSCENTE
- i 28 CONCENN + BENEDICTIO DÑI IN CON  
29 CENN ÊT S.I TOTA FAMILIA EIUS  
30 ET IN TOTA RAGIONĒ POUOIS  
31 USQUE IN -----

## Translation

- a + Concenn son of Cattell, Cattell son of Brohcmal, Brohcmal son of Eliseg, Eliseg son of Guoillauc.
- b + Concenn, therefore, great-grandson of Eliseg, erected this stone for his great-grandfather Eliseg.
- c + It was Eliseg who united the inheritance of Powys ... however through force ... from the power of the English ... land with his sword by fire (?).
- d [+ ] Whosoever shall read out this hand-inscribed ... let him give a blessing [on the soul of] Eliseg.
- e + It is Concenn ... with his hand ... his own kingdom of Powys ... and which ... the mountain.
- f/g ... monarchy ... Maximus of Britain ... Pascent ... Maun Annan ... Britu moreover [was] the son of Guarthigirn whom Germanus blessed [and whom] Sevira bore to him, the daughter of Maximus the king, who killed the king of the Romans.
- h + Conmarch represented pictorially this writing at the demand of his king, Concenn.
- i + The blessing of the Lord upon Concenn and likewise (?) on all his household and upon all the province of Powys until ... .

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