

WENDY DAVIES

States and non-states in the Celtic world

The Celtic world of the early Middle Ages comprises those regions of north-western Europe in which Celtic languages were the dominant vernacular. There were several such regions and several Celtic languages, and there were many differences between them. I am going to focus on the four best-evidenced Celtic areas: Brittany, now a region of the French state; Ireland, where the ‘six counties’ of the north are now part of the United Kingdom, whereas the much greater part of the island constitutes the Republic of Ireland; Scotland and Wales, which are part of the United Kingdom, each now with devolved administrations and with national identities distinct from the English. (I intentionally include Brittany in this Celtic group, although some may see it as Frankish, because of its vernacular language in the early Middle Ages and because of its political ideology over more than a millennium).

KEY MAP



SCOTLAND



WALES

DYFED: Kingdoms with a long existence

BUILTH: Kingdoms not evidenced before the eighth and ninth centuries

Gwent: Kingdoms evidenced in the sixth and seventh centuries only

KEY MAP



IRELAND



BRITTANY

It should be made clear from the outset that there was not one single form of ‘state’ or statehood in the Celtic world in the early Middle Ages, but a range of different political forms and processes; as also that each of the regions considered here included more than one polity at some point in the early Middle Ages. There is, then, no such thing as a ‘Celtic’ political system. However, we should note, firstly, that where they existed, the polities were small in scale – tiny by comparison with the Carolingian Empire, but perhaps not so small when compared with its practical successor polities and power spheres. Secondly, the late Roman experience and tradition had very little significance for these Celtic kingdoms.¹ Thirdly, the creation and fortunes of the Carolingian Empire had very little significance for most of the regions, with the notable exception of Brittany. Fourthly, there was a very low level of political theorizing by contemporary writers in these areas.

In this paper I will describe the political system of each of the four regions, with a quick sketch of the longer-term development, which in all cases has a bearing on the way the early Middle Ages have been viewed. Then I shall consider some characteristics which are potentially significant in

¹ Exceptions are that the Roman cities of Rennes, Nantes and Vannes continued as towns in eastern Brittany; and that some Welsh royal genealogies proposed Roman ancestors for their lines, although this did not have any noticeable practical impact on emerging politics; see *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. Peter C. Bartrum (Cardiff 1966) 10–11, 2 and 16 of the tenth-century Harleian collection.

state development, comparing the regions. I will conclude by commenting on some of the ‘Leitfragen’ our organizers established at the outset.²

POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND LONG-TERM TRENDS

BRITTANY

In modern terms Brittany is the north-western peninsula of France. In the early Middle Ages the dominant vernacular language belonged to the P-Celtic (Brittonic) group – Old, followed by Middle, Breton. It is reasonable to talk in terms of the establishment of a polity in Brittany in the mid-ninth century, specifically in the period of the 840s to 860s; this emerged from a fragmented political situation, in which the region had been in some parts ruled by counts and in the earlier ninth century by rulers termed kings, who led resistance to conquest by Carolingian invaders.³ The mid-ninth century was a major point of change in the fortunes of the peninsula – a change which was a direct consequence of the Carolingian impact: the physical limits of what was to be Brittany for over a millennium were established as a result of conquest by, alliances with and deals with Carolingian rulers.⁴ There was normally a single ruler of the polity, known as *princeps* or *rex* in the ninth century; occasionally rule was shared by two rulers. Nowadays it is conventional to argue that the ninth-century Breton state was integrated within the Frankish model – hence the ‘regality’ of these rulers is seen to be a Frankish derivative – but the historiography of Breton development includes some very different interpretations.⁵

Frankish or not in the mid-ninth century, what happened subsequently was very distinctive. The institutional development of the ninth century seems to have been disrupted; what continued was the shape of the political unit as defined in mid-century by the ruler Erispoë, as also the notion that there was a single responsible ruler for the whole unit and a kind of dynastic succession, although subject to severe competition from the males of the principal comital families from within Brittany and from neighbouring zones. In fact, from the reign of Alain Barbetorte onwards (936–952), the ruler was called *dux*, and the dukes of Brittany were thereafter notionally subjects of the West Frankish king. However, there was negligible contact between duke and king for the next 200 years: the dukes did not do fealty, witness Capetian charters, go to the Frankish court nor join military expeditions; nor did the Frankish king issue acts for Brittany. Further, from the late twelfth century, although there was more interaction between them, the duchy of Brittany operated as if it were an independent state; its officers insisted on ducal “regalities” (“un duc roi en son duché”) and on the duke's sovereign status; the homage done to the French king had a distinctive form, preserving the duke's dignity.⁶ There were also

² See the programme of the conference “Staat und Staatlichkeit im europäischen Frühmittelalter (500–1050) – Grundlagen, Grenzen, Entwicklungen” (Wien, 18.–21. September 2007).

³ Arthur Le Moyne de La Borderie, *Histoire de Bretagne*, 6 vols. (Rennes 1896–1899/Mayenne 1975) 1–2 (Rennes 1896–1898), remains valuable; more recent useful surveys include André Chédeville/Hubert Guillotel, *La Bretagne des saints et des rois V^e–X^e siècle* (Rennes 1984); Noël-Yves Tonnerre, *Naissance de la Bretagne. Géographie historique et structures sociales de la Bretagne méridionale (Nantais et Vannetais) de la fin du VIII^e à la fin du XII^e siècle* (Angers 1994); Wendy Davies, On the distribution of political power in Brittany in the mid-ninth century, in: Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom, ed. Margaret T. Gibson/Janet L. Nelson (Aldershot 2nd 1990) 98–114.

⁴ See also Julia M.H. Smith, *Province and Empire. Brittany and the Carolingians* (Cambridge 1992).

⁵ Guillotel, in: Chédeville/id., *Bretagne 201–321*, 354–389; Jean-Pierre Brunterch, *Le duché du Maine et la marche de Bretagne*, in: *La Neustrie. Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, ed. Hartmut Atsma, 2 vols. (Sigmaringen 1989) 1, 29–127; Tonnerre, *Naissance 77–79*; Pierre-Roland Giot/Philippe Guigon/Bernard Merdrignac, *Les premiers bretons d'Armorique* (Rennes 2003) 122–147. By contrast La Borderie, *Histoire de Bretagne 2*. For the historiography, see Wendy Davies, *Franks and Bretons. The impact of political climate and historiographical tradition on writing their ninth-century history*, in: Frankland. *The Franks and the World of Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Paul Fouracre/David Ganz (Manchester 2008) 304–321.

⁶ Jean Kerhervé, *Aux origines d'un sentiment national. Les chroniqueurs bretons de la fin du Moyen Âge*, in: *Bulletin de la société archéologique du Finistère* 108 (1980) 165–206; Michael Jones, in: Patrick Galliou/Michael Jones, *The Bretons* (Oxford 1991) 230–233; Davies, *Franks and Bretons*; cf. *Chronicon Briocense/Chronique de Saint-Brieuc, fin XIV^e siècle*.

separate Breton États, of clergy, nobles and ‘bourgeois’, who continued to meet until the French Revolution and frequently opposed the French government; there was a Breton ‘parlement’, as a superior court of justice; and a separate body of Breton law was in use. In other words, there emerged a very distinctive polity, with its own institutions and an accompanying coherent ideology of separate sovereign status. Much of that development was subsequent to our period, but the ninth-century phase was fundamental to the emergence of this unit. This was because it was ninth-century developments that established its physical extent and single rulership; and because the perceived history of the ninth century has been central to the later – very developed and sustained – ideology of separation.

SCOTLAND

Scotland lies in the north of the island of Britain. In the early Middle Ages there were several concurrent vernacular languages in use, Scots Gaelic (= Irish) and Norse becoming dominant, while Pictish and Cumbric (both Brittonic languages) and English declined.⁷ The source material available for Scotland is much more fragmentary than that for the other regions considered here and is in many ways inadequate.⁸ However, it is nevertheless clear that new things happened in the mid-ninth century which were the basis for the establishment of the separate, independent, state of Scotland, which has a very long (indeed, still continuing) history. In this case the changes did not occur as a reaction to the Carolingians.⁹

What happened in the mid-ninth century was the emergence of a ruler – Kenneth McAlpine in Anglicized form (Cinaed mac Ailpín in Gaelic) – with responsibility for two pre-existing polities within central Scotland, the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata in the mid-west and the Pictish kingdom of the centre and mid-east. This was not entirely new, for co-rule had happened before, but from this point onwards (838–856) the two were ruled as one; and Kenneth stands at the head of the dynasty from which the kings of Scotland (at first called Alba) were initially drawn.¹⁰ In other words, Kenneth was seen to be the significant ancestor by the historians and genealogists of the central Middle Ages. The polity was thereafter usually ruled by a single ruler, known as *rex* in Latin and *rí* in the Irish vernacular.¹¹

Within our period the most notable developments were the extension of the territory of Alba to include the Scottish Lowlands (south), Strathclyde (south west) and the north; and increasing evidence of the existence of administrative officers and mechanisms.¹² By the twelfth century, the king of

cle (ed./trans. Gwenaël Le Duc/Claude Sterckx, Paris/Rennes 1972) 82: *Veruntamen utitur omnibus iuribus et libertatibus regalibus in ducatu suo tamquam Rex.*

⁷ See below for the relationship with the Irish language. Norse became important because of heavy Scandinavian settlement in the Northern and Western Isles, and the far north of the mainland, in the ninth and tenth centuries. For the Viking settlement, see Barbara E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester 1987); James Graham-Campbell/Colleen E. Batey, *Vikings in Scotland. An Archaeological Survey* (Edinburgh 1998) esp. 155–205; Colmán Etchingham, *North Wales, Ireland and the Isles. The insular Viking zone*, in: *Peritia* 15 (2001) 145–187.

⁸ See Kathleen Hughes, *Where are the writings of early Scotland?*, in: *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages. Studies in Welsh and Scottish Sources by the late Kathleen Hughes*, ed. David Dumville (*Studies in Celtic History* 2, Woodbridge 1980) 1–21.

⁹ For good surveys see Archibald A.M. Duncan, *Scotland, the Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh 1975); Thomas O. Clancy/Barbara E. Crawford, *The formation of the Scottish kingdom*, in: *The New Penguin History of Scotland. From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Rab A. Houston/William W.J. Knox (London 2001) 28–95; and now Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba, 789–1070* (*The New Edinburgh History of Scotland* 2, Edinburgh 2007). For important primary analysis see Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh 1973); with some rethinking by Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (*Studies in Celtic History* 18, Woodbridge 1999) esp. 133–164.

¹⁰ Dauvit Broun, *The origin of Scottish identity in its European context*, in: *Scotland in Dark Age Europe*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (St. Andrews 1994) 21–31; id., *Irish Identity* esp. 170–174.

¹¹ Most available contemporary sources were external to Scotland. Note that the terminology of the Irish Annals changed in referring to the principal Scottish kingdom: *rex Pictorum* gave way to *rí Alban*, *The Annals of Ulster to A.D. 1131*, a. 858, 862, 876, 878 (ed./trans. Seán Mac Airt/Gearóid Mac Niocaill, Dublin 1983) 316, 318, 330–331, 332–335: *rex*; *Annals of Ulster a. 900, 952, 954*, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 350–351, 396–397, 398–399: *rí*.

¹² Duncan, *Scotland* 108–111, 160–168; Geoffrey W.S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots. Government, Church and Society from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century* (London 1973) 7–82; Geoffrey W.S. Barrow, *Kingship and Unity*.

Scotland was issuing documents and using written instruments that are preserved. In the longer term, further territory was incorporated, especially the Northern and Western Isles, which were won from Norway. Scotland became a powerful late medieval state, with its own distinctive corpus of law, its own parliament, and diplomatic relations with foreign powers such as France. The Scottish royal dynasty continued and provided a monarch for neighbouring England in the early seventeenth century; an Act of Union with England followed a century later, but the distinctive legal system was always retained, and – since 1999 – the Scottish parliament has been restored. Again, the ninth-century phase is fundamental both to the later political development and to the later political ideology, although twelfth- and thirteenth-century phases were also very important.

WALES

Wales lies in the centre of western Britain. In the early Middle Ages the vernacular language was Old, then Middle, Welsh, a P-Celtic language which was closely related to Breton. One could make a case that c. 850 was some kind of change point for Wales, but this was much less obviously so than in Brittany and Scotland. Wales was a land of several kingdoms, whose scale was therefore very small – of a quite different order from the emerging Breton and Scottish polities. There was normally a single ruler per kingdom, though rule was sometimes shared by brothers. Rulers were usually called *rex* in Latin, but an extremely wide range of vernacular terms for ruler was in use in the early Middle Ages (ultimately *brenin* became the normal vernacular term for king); in later tenth-century texts rulers in northern Wales are given no titles.¹³

The long-term political trend was for a reduction in the number of kingdoms, from perhaps twenty in the sixth and seventh centuries to the three main kingdoms of Gwynedd, Dyfed and Morgannwg in the tenth and eleventh centuries, by a process of expansion and absorption.¹⁴ The kingdoms were deeply unstable in the tenth century: unknown aristocrats could appear and proclaim themselves king; decades could pass when no-one was called king, although there were active aristocrats; foreign bodies could establish themselves in control of Welsh territory; there was much fighting; and there was nothing that might pass as government.¹⁵ In the eleventh century, rulers' horizons expanded and kings emerged with pretensions to rule the whole of Wales. They raided all over the region but there is no sign of any institutional development, nor change in the mechanisms of surplus extraction, to support the wider pretensions. This phase ended with the conquest (largely temporary) of much of Wales by the English, in 1063, and the appointment of rulers for the two previous major kingdoms of the north by the English king. Within a generation this was followed by the (lasting) Norman conquest of about half of Wales; conquest of the remaining half by the Anglo-Norman king came two hundred years later. Wales therefore became integrated into the English political system, as it remains today, although a Welsh Assembly was established in 1999, with some devolved powers of government.

IRELAND

Ireland is a separate island, to the west of Britain. In the early Middle Ages its vernacular language was Old Irish, a language from the Q-Celtic group, which (with its successors Middle and Modern Irish) were indistinguishable from Scots Gaelic until the seventeenth century. There is no strong case

Scotland, 1000–1306 (London 1981) 24–32. See below for the time it took Alba to extend to include the whole of present-day Scotland.

¹³ See Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford 1990) esp. 9–31.

¹⁴ Sir John E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 vols. (London 1911), remains an extremely influential survey. For more recent analyses see Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester 1982), and ead., *Patterns of Power*; Kari L. Maund, *Ireland, Wales, and England in the Eleventh Century* (Woodbridge 1991); David E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies. Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford 2003); Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford 2005) 47–50, 326–330, 351–354.

¹⁵ See Davies, *Patterns of Power* esp. 41–79.

for any major change in political fortunes round about 850; the long-term trend began in the early eighth century, and arguably earlier.

Ireland was a land of many kingdoms (*tuatha*) – perhaps as many as a hundred – and so the scale of these was extremely small. For example, one of the largest, the *tuath* of the Osraige in the south east, was of the order of 60 km from north to south while a more regular *tuath*, that of the Dál nAraide in the north east, was of the order of 40 km across. Ireland was also a land of simultaneous over-kingships, at several levels; in other words, more powerful kings were over-kings of lesser kings, and the most powerful kings were over-kings of over-kings.¹⁶ The system was extremely volatile and most over-kingships were not institutionalized: they might exist in one generation but not in the next; and many kings might have one over-king in one generation and a different one, or none, in the next. Political power was accordingly extremely fragmented. Rule of a kingdom, or over-kingdom, was sometimes shared, but usually there was a single king, known as *rex* in Latin and *rí* in the Irish vernacular (the words are cognate). Although the law tracts have other terms for over-kings, the Annals (which constitute a very full and varied source by the tenth century) overwhelmingly use *rex* or *rí* for all grades of king.¹⁷

The long-term trend involved the institutionalization of the greater over-kingships: already by the late eighth century four regional over-kingships had been established in the north/centre, west, south west and south east. At the same time, there was a tendency for the basic building blocks of small kingdoms to disappear, although that took a very long time – there were still many in the twelfth century and some in the thirteenth and fourteenth.¹⁸ Further, in the second half of the tenth century, a new dynasty became over-kings in the south west. One of those over-kings – Brian Boru – campaigned across Ireland, by 1012 achieving the submission of all other significant over-kings. However, there were rapid revolts and, with his defeat and death, disaster in 1014. His wider over-kingship was not therefore institutionalized, but thereafter, for 150 years, over-kings competed to establish an Ireland-wide over-kingship, which – when it happened – swung from one dynasty to another. In 1166 King Henry II. of England and Anglo-Norman warriors were invited to participate on the side of the exiled over-king (Diarmait mac Murchada) of Leinster in the south east, and that began the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland. Development was thereby interrupted and thereafter a complex relationship with England emerged; part of Ireland was directly ruled from England. Ultimately the Irish Free State, the ancestor of the modern Republic, was established in 1922, for all but the ‘six counties’ of the north, which remained part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

Overall, then, two embryo states emerged in Celtic areas from the political process of 850–1050, Scotland and Brittany, the latter being of a very unusual kind; no embryo states emerged from the other two regions, Wales and Ireland, despite the existence of many kings. One might argue that, but for conquest, Wales and Ireland would have developed into consolidated states, given the Wales-wide and Ireland-wide ambitions of eleventh-century superior rulers. Indeed, they might have. However, the rulers of Scotland were able to resist conquest and the rulers of Brittany were able to manipulate the relationship with France to their own advantage; those facts underline the differences between Scotland/Brittany on the one hand and Ireland/Wales on the other.

¹⁶ The best study remains Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London 1973). Valuable more recent analyses are Anne Connon, *The Banshenchas and the Uí Néill queens of Tara*, in: *Seanchas. Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin 2000) 98–108; many of the papers in: *A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005); Wickham, *Early Middle Ages 50–53*, 354–364, 378–379. Elva Johnston, *Early Irish history: the state of the art*, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 33 (2003) 342–348, is also useful.

¹⁷ *Annals of Ulster* aa. 792, 829, 851, 885, 918, 945, 979, 1006, 1044, 1076, 1104, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 248–492, for example.

¹⁸ The best treatment is Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland*, in: *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, ed. Theodore W. Moody (Belfast 1978) 1–35, although – in my view – he argues for a much more rapid change than is suggested by the texts; *Annals of Ulster* a. 884, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 340 for example, has three rulers termed *rex* and one called *dux*, but the latter is extremely unusual; cf. n. 17 above.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS COMPARED

In a paper concerned with political analysis, there is no room for detailed discussion of the available source material. I have already drawn attention to the paucity of contemporary written sources available for Scotland.¹⁹ For the rest, there is plenty of material but its incidence is extremely uneven and sometimes its quality is poor; moreover, quantities tend to increase in the eleventh century, making it difficult to assess whether features noticed at this time were new or continuing – while it is reasonable to argue that some, if not many, first notices were just that, there is no way of assessing the antiquity of features at the point where they enter the record. Interpretations of words are also fraught with problems: does usage invoke original or contemporary meanings? Can a translation carry the weight of institutional certainty that has been attributed to it, as when *dux* is rendered *toisech* in Ireland, for example? Was usage consistent anyway? Many modern arguments about political development hang on interpretation of the use of this or that word and the proper context for its understanding. Multiple uncertainties are thereby sustained.

For Wales a range of different types of source survives, but quantities are small and localizable material is confined to the south east of the country.²⁰ Breton sources are exceptionally rich for the ninth century, but very thin for all other centuries in our view, until they begin to grow in the eleventh century.²¹ There is a relatively large quantity, and rich diversity, of Irish material, including much in the vernacular; the enormous corpus of surviving early Irish law (essentially of eighth-century date and partly schematic in character) has been disproportionately influential on interpretations.²² There are hardly any charters but annals do allow localization of some activity; however, our inability to penetrate local levels in Ireland is a real problem.

TERRITORY

The territory of the Breton polity was essentially defined in the mid-ninth century, although there were minor changes in the late ninth and tenth centuries.²³ The core of Scots territory was also established in the mid-ninth century, but the core only; it took most of the tenth century to add Lowland Scotland and most of the eleventh century to stretch farther north; the Scottish Isles were not incorporated until the late Middle Ages (Western Isles 1266, Northern Isles 1468–1469). The land of Wales is defined by the sea on three sides and by the earthwork known as Offa's Dyke, which was in existence already by the late ninth century, on much of the fourth. In our period, there were shifts of territory between the three principal kingdoms of Gwynedd in the north, Dyfed and Morgannwg in the south, but these are neither plottable nor consistent; the southern two rapidly lost most of their territory to the Normans in the late eleventh century. For Ireland the land available was defined by the island. On the whole, the territory of the many basic kingdoms (*tuatha*) remained the same during our period, although some disappeared and a few new ones emerged. The territory encompassed by the over-kingships ebbed and flowed, but was essentially composed of the building blocks of *tuath* units.

It is therefore important to note that definition of the territory of the 'state' occurred in our period in the case of Brittany, and began in our period in the case of Scotland; it did not do so in the case of Ireland and Wales.

¹⁹ For what there is, see Alan O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History, A.D. 500 to 1286*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh 1922/Stamford ²1990, revised Paul Watkins).

²⁰ For a survey, see Davies, *Wales* 198–218.

²¹ For surveys, see Chédeville/Guillotet, *Bretagne* 9 and 196–200; André Chédeville/Noël-Yves Tonnerre, *La Bretagne féodale, XI^e–XIII^e siècle* (Rennes 1987) 57–58, 82, 138–139, 175–178. *La Borderie, Histoire de Bretagne* 2, is also invaluable.

²² There is very comprehensive guidance in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín/Francis J. Byrne/Peter Harbison, *Bibliography*, in: *A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. id. (Oxford 2005) 996–1147. There remains much valuable comment in James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide* (New York 1929/New York ²1966, revised L. Bieler); Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland. Introduction to the Sources* (London 1972). For law, see also below.

²³ See above. The county of Nantes (the modern 'département' of Loire Atlantique) was not detached until the twentieth century; it is now part of the French administrative region of Pays de Loire.

TRANSMISSION OF RULERSHIP

Rulership was normally hereditarily transmitted through dynasties in all of these regions, although it was not consistently transmitted through males and there was nothing like primogeniture. In fact, transmission through females occurred in most parts from time to time for, in effect, new males married into existing dynasties. Both Welsh and Irish preserved detailed records of the ancestry of kings, voluminous in the Irish case, and there is a much smaller corpus of genealogical material from Scotland from the central Middle Ages;²⁴ no such records survive from Brittany.²⁵ In Welsh, Scottish and Irish cases there was some element of segmentation within dynasties; in other words, there was competition for rulership between different segments of a dominant dynasty. Segmentation was extreme in the Welsh case in the tenth century and in the Irish case for much of the early Middle Ages. So, for example, the sons of Idwal, in the 950s–970s in Wales, fought each other across the whole territory;²⁶ and branches of the Uí Néill family in northern and central Ireland competed for superior overkingships across centuries.²⁷ This tendency to segmentation pulled against the development of institutions of government; it was to some extent destabilizing, and most destabilizing in Wales and Ireland.

OFFICERS

A strong indicator of political development can be the presence of officers responsible to the ruler, especially when they have differentiated functions. Agents of Breton rulers are clearly evident in the ninth century, with judicial functions; there may well have been special tax collectors too, in the *maiores* encountered in the villages; and rulers' representatives certainly dealt with rulers' proprietary interests in the localities.²⁸ The Scottish kingdom also clearly had officers, in many cases responsible to the king: there was an officer called a *mormaer* from at least the early tenth century, often with a regionally defined responsibility, and another called a *toisech* from at least the eleventh; the *mormaer* led the host and the *toisech* (which means leader) seems to have been a kind of lesser *mormaer*.²⁹ Both expected to collect dues, as the twelfth-century marginalia in the Gospel Book known as the Book of Deer make clear.³⁰ We do not know if these dues were fiscal, or proprietary, or if they were an expression of, or commutation of, military obligation; but to some extent these men were financial officers too. Tax-taking, and also judicial functions, are usually assumed for *mormaers* by modern commentators, by analogy with the functions of tenth- and eleventh-century English earls.³¹

In Wales we encounter occasional agents or representatives of a ruler (*ministri*, *praepositi* and *meiri*), with undifferentiated functions, but there is hardly any contemporary indication of royal

²⁴ Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts, ed. Bartrum; Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae 1 (ed. Michael A. O'Brien, Dublin 1962), and Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae (ed. Pádraig Ó Riain, Dublin 1985); John Bannerman, Studies in the History of Dalriada (Edinburgh 1974) 65–66; and Broun, Irish Identity 148–153, 174–193.

²⁵ Although one ninth-century charter does cite a woman's descent through nine generations, cf. Cartulaire de Redon 109 (869) (ed. Aurélien de Courson, Paris 1863); and there are some brief genealogies in hagiographical material. There is some quasi-genealogical material in the fabulous histories of the twelfth and later centuries; see La Borderie, Histoire de Bretagne 2, 456–463.

²⁶ Davies, Patterns of Power 42–46; Kari L. Maund, Dynastic segmentation and Gwynedd c. 950–c. 1000, in: Studia Celtica 32 (1998) 155–167.

²⁷ In addition to the classic Irish surveys, see the recent comments by Bart Jaski, Early Irish Kingship and Succession (Dublin 2000); Immo Warntjes, The alternation of the kingship of Tara 734–944, in: Peritia 17–18 (2003–2004) 394–432.

²⁸ See Wendy Davies, Small Worlds. The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany (London 1988) 201–207.

²⁹ Annals of Ulster a. 918, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocail 366–368; Duncan, Scotland 108–111; Archibald A.M. Duncan, The Kingship of the Scots 842–1292: Succession and Independence (Edinburgh 2002) 33–34; Woolf, From Pictland to Alba 342–349. Also *toiseach cloinne*, chief of kin, in the Deer marginalia; see also n. 30 below.

³⁰ Kenneth H. Jackson, The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer (Cambridge 1972) 30–32, 109–112 and 119–121; 'This splendid little book'. Studies on the Book of Deer, ed. Katherine Forsyth (Dublin 2008).

³¹ This is not entirely fanciful the Norse Orkneyinga Saga uses the word *jarl* (cf. 'earl') for *mormaer*; and there is some *mormaer*/earl equivalence in the twelfth century; Anderson, Sources 1, 484 and Duncan, Scotland 163–164. However, it is quite a leap to suppose similarity of function from this. Barrow, Kingdom 65, also suggests the equivalence of *toisech* and Anglo-Saxon thane.

administration.³² Major landowners in south-east Wales clearly had rent-collectors by 1086, as the English Domesday Survey makes clear for the borders of England and Wales.³³ The situation in Ireland is similar: it was the eleventh century before the Annals started to notice royal administrative officers, as in 1018 with the first reference to a *rechtaire*, a king's rent-collector, although references to the *rechtaire* in earlier texts indicate a lord's agent (ecclesiastical or secular) with less specific function.³⁴ It is much easier to find examples of Irish monastic officers, with specialized functions, in our period, and in general easier to find examples of ecclesiastical administrative systems.

ARMIES

Rulers in all of these areas were military leaders, in person; they led expeditions and many campaigned widely. Most of them led retinues of aristocrats for they all had military clients. Clientship was especially important in the Irish case and was the principal mechanism for providing military support for a ruler; a sub-king was client of an over-king and obliged to join him on expedition.³⁵ In the case of Scotland, as we have seen, there were also, at least from the early tenth century, responsible officers who led the local host; and there are separate indications (ultimately deriving from the seventh century) of obligations to turn out and fight, and to provide ships, which fell on localities and were assessed by land unit.³⁶ I know of no such local obligations in Brittany. In Wales, although there are some hints of local military obligations from the mid-eleventh century, and arguably from the late tenth, there is nothing before then, and even those hints only relate to the south east.³⁷ In Ireland, according to the law tracts, the king of a *tuath* could expect freemen of the *tuath* to turn out for its defence, but this was on a very small scale and it is difficult to find unambiguous evidence of its occurrence.³⁸

In neither of the latter cases is this suggested hosting obligation associated in surviving texts with any system of organization of the host in surviving texts, such as traces of machinery for assessing obligations or of officers responsible for commanding the host. By contrast, indeed, Welsh and Irish rulers in the tenth and eleventh centuries made heavy use of foreign fighters: both used Vikings to fight for them and the Welsh also used English warriors, as Edwin ap Einion did in 992, when he allied with a *dux Anglorum* to ravage the ruler Maredudd's lands in the south west of Wales.³⁹

³² See Davies, Wales 131.

³³ Domesday Book seu liber censualis Willelmi primi regis Angliae (ed. Abraham Farley, London 1783) fol. 162a (Gloucestershire).

³⁴ Annals of Ulster a. 1018, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 454. Cf. Francis J. Byrne, Ireland and her neighbours, c. 1014–c. 1072, in: A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005) 862–898, at 869–879.

³⁵ Fergus Kelly, A Guide to Early Irish Law (Dublin 1988) 26–33; cf. Marilyn Gerriets, Economy and society. Clientship according to the Irish laws, in: Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 6 (1983) 43–61.

³⁶ Cf. the *satrapas* of Atholl who fell in battle in 966, Anderson, Sources 1, 473. John Bannerman, Senchus Fer nAlban, in: id., Studies in the History of Dalriada (Edinburgh 1974) 27–156, provides an edition of the key text on units of assessment and an extensive commentary; Bannerman argues that the present text is of tenth-century date, with obvious accretions to an earlier text, whose context places it firmly in the seventh century.

³⁷ Exemption from military service to the king of Morgannwg is a privilege claimed by the church of Llandaff by the mid-eleventh century, Wendy Davies, Braint Teilo, in: Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies 26 (1974–1976) 123–137, at 135. In 1086 the Domesday customs of Archenfield (south-west Herefordshire) indicate some military obligation to the English king when he led expeditions to Wales: Domesday Book, ed. Farley fol. 179b (Herefordshire).

³⁸ Daniel A. Binchy, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship (Oxford 1970) 21, on the basis of law tract suggestions of a hosting obligation by free families to the king of a *tuath*; see Críth Gablach. Medieval and Modern Irish Series 11 (ed. Daniel A. Binchy, Dublin 1941) §37, 20. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200 (Harlow 1995) 275, argues for a 'military muster', by analogy with Scotland; this argument hangs on occurrence of the words *trícha céit* (literally 'thirty hundreds') and its postulated original significance; the evidence essentially comes from the twelfth century. See Byrne, Irish Kings 270, for a different view.

³⁹ See Davies, Patterns of Power 77, 85–88; Annals of Ulster aa. 956, 970, 983, 999, 1014, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 398, 408–409, 418–419, 428–429, 446–448, for example. Scottish kings also used Norman fighters in the mid-eleventh century: Clancy/Crawford, Formation, in: The New Penguin History of Scotland. From the Earliest Times to the Present Day, ed. Rab A. Houston/William W.J. Knox (London 2001) 82.

TAX

The nature of the available evidence in many cases makes it difficult to assess whether or not there were regular or irregular fiscal mechanisms in any of these regions. As is so often the case in the early Middle Ages, it can be extremely difficult to differentiate between fiscal and proprietary dues. Contemporaries probably did not so differentiate anyway and income from personal property was probably far more significant for most, if not all, rulers; the fiscal/proprietary distinction is therefore to some extent redundant. Income from the tributes achieved by raiding was also likely to have been far more significant for rulers. However, this reliance on the personal and on the irregular of course in itself makes a clear statement about state development, or lack of it. Until rulers could develop regular tax-taking systems from those with the wealth to pay, the machinery of state was necessarily very limited.

In eastern Brittany some kind of tax obligation fell on peasant proprietors in the ninth century, and the *maiores* who appear in local contexts are best explained as tax-collectors; Carolingian-minted coin appears to have been available to some people.⁴⁰ In Scotland a fiscal mechanism may perhaps be indicated by the dues owed to *mormaer* and *toísech*, but this cannot conclusively be differentiated from the military obligation to them and some possible commutation of that. *Exactatores* of the Pictish kings were, however, noticed much earlier, in the eighth century.⁴¹ In Wales, by the late tenth century, clearly something was being paid to kings, as kings and not just as proprietors, from some (but not all) lands; that is suggested by the volume of tribute that rulers were able to collect in order to pay off Viking raiders. It is extremely difficult to see any trace of this before the late tenth century, except in the possible case of the south east – where a standard charter formula may imply it from the mid-eighth century.⁴² What they received, they received in kind, however, since they did not mint coin and there appears to have been relatively little foreign coin accessible.⁴³ There was clearly very little liquidity and surplus was difficult to convert.

In Ireland the strongest emphasis of the available texts is on the renders received by kings from their clients. If there were renders from others, or for other reasons, they are difficult to identify. The presence of ‘king’s land’ in every *tuath*, as proposed by the law tracts, is credible; if so, it may have provided a more practicable form of public support than any kind of taxation. In the longer term, it was the tributes demanded by major over-kings, from lesser kings, that are seen to have formed the basis of a developing fiscal system, but even here there were plenty of exemptions and there were also obligatory (and better-recorded) counter-gifts from over-kings to lesser kings.⁴⁴

LAW-MAKING

On the whole kings in Celtic regions did not have a privileged position in relation to law-making, for much law was customary: it was not the outcome of a legislative process but a supposed record of the procedures and practices used by communities to regulate their internal relationships, as it were from time immemorial. In Scotland, however, a law-declaring function has been suggested for ninth-century (and earlier) kings, by which kings were assuming some responsibility for the law; by the

⁴⁰ Cartulaire de Redon 136 (842), ed. de Courson: *Censum regis*; cf. Salomon’s donation to Redon *ex nostro publico*, *ibid.* 241 (869), ed. de Courson. See Davies, *Small Worlds* 50–52, 56–60 and 205–206.

⁴¹ See above, *Annals of Ulster* a. 729, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocail 182–183: *Bellum Monith Carno ... exactatores Nectain ceciderunt*. Cf. Barrow, *Kingdom of the Scots* 35–68, for suggestions of further indicators of payment of royal dues.

⁴² See Davies, *Patterns of Power* 76 and 86, for detail of the arguments.

⁴³ Late medieval sources have the south-western ruler Maredudd redeeming captives with small coin (*nummus*) in 989; there is no reason to suppose that this is evidence that coin was in circulation in Wales in the late tenth century; he may have collected silver by weight, or paid for the captives in some other way; see Davies, *Patterns of Power* 57. For coin and hoards see Davies, *Wales* 53–56; *ead.*, *Patterns of Power* 52–55; to which must now be added the important site of Llanbedrgoch on Anglesey – not yet fully published but see Mark Redknap, *Vikings in Wales: an Archaeological Quest* (Cardiff 2000) 69–74; and Mark Redknap, *Viking-age settlement in Wales: some recent advances*, in: *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 12 (2006) 5–35.

⁴⁴ Byrne, *Irish Kings* 43–44 and 196–199; Ó Corráin, *Nationality* 22–24; Kelly, *Guide to Early English Law* 101. See Byrne, *Ireland and her neighbours* 879, for tributes levied on neighbours, at times a significant source of income.

twelfth century the responsibility was clear.⁴⁵ In Ireland ordinary kings could make law (*rechtge*) in the special circumstances of danger to the *tuath* through plague or defeat, but law was largely the preserve of the many, professional lawyers who collected, preserved and interpreted it – hence the extremely large surviving corpus of subsequently annotated eighth-century law.⁴⁶ By the mid-eleventh century, however, prominent overkings could be associated with new proclamations of law, as Donnchad mac Briain was in 1040 in matters including Sunday observance and theft.⁴⁷ There was in addition a particular type of ecclesiastical law in Ireland known as a *cáin*, which was promulgated by clerics and backed by kings. Hence, for example, a *cáin* was promulgated in 697 called *Cáin Adomnáin*, an Iona law providing special protection for women and non-combatants, backed by many northern Irish kings.⁴⁸ Wales also had professional lawyers, who declared, collected, preserved and interpreted Welsh law, although the surviving written corpus is of late medieval date.⁴⁹ It is possible that some kings began to assume responsibility for collecting and declaring the law in Wales during our period: the name of Hywel Dda, the early tenth-century Dyfed king, is associated with law texts in a much later preface, although it is impossible to determine what role he might have played. In Brittany there are no legal collections deriving from this period, for the texts come from much later, in the late Middle Ages, and from a different socio-political situation. Nothing suggests ruler responsibility for either declaring or collecting law in the ninth to eleventh centuries; indeed, disputes – for which there is a good corpus of evidence from the ninth century – were settled without reference to legal collections or legal principles and almost entirely by reference to knowledge of the past.⁵⁰

JUDICIAL MECHANISMS

In most of the regions considered, there was a strong element of the local about judicial mechanisms and enforcement relied heavily on privately agreed suretyship. In eastern Brittany, for example, we have extremely good ninth-century evidence of the settlement of all kinds of property dispute, and occasionally other disputes, in local village courts, with judgment made by panels of local elders, and with expert witnesses and sureties provided from the immediate local, village community.⁵¹ In the Welsh case, for which there is very limited though good evidence, it was a community responsibility

⁴⁵ Patrick Wormald, The emergence of the Regnum Scottorum: a Carolingian hegemony?, in: Scotland in Dark Age Britain, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (St. Andrews 1996) 131–160, at 140–142, 149; cf. Stuart Airlie, The view from Maastricht, in: Scotland in Dark Age Europe, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (St. Andrews 1994) 33–46, at 34–36. This suggestion derives from an entry in a twelfth- or early thirteenth-century collection of Scottish materials in the fourteenth-century ‘Popperton manuscript’, for which see Broun, Irish Identity 144 and 175–176.

⁴⁶ Corpus Iuris Hibernici (ed. Daniel A. Binchy, 6 vols., Dublin 1978); this material is in the Old (and Middle) Irish vernacular and is largely untranslated; the easiest way for English-speaking scholars to access it is through Kelly, Guide to Early English Law, but see also Liam Breatnach, A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici (Dublin 2005); there is also a very important tradition of German scholarship, in which the work of Rudolf Thurneysen is seminal. Note the comments of Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, The Corpus Iuris Hibernici, in: Studia Hibernica 20 (1980) 141–162; Donnchadh Ó Corráin/Liam Breatnach/Aidan Breen, The laws of the Irish, in: Peritia 3 (1984) 382–438.

⁴⁷ See Byrne, Ireland and her neighbours 879.

⁴⁸ Iona – an influential monastery, see Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, The guarantor list of Cáin Adomnáin 697, in: Peritia 1 (1982) 178–215; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Ireland c. 800: aspects of society, in: A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005) 549–608, at 583–584; Byrne, Ireland and her neighbours 879. There is also a significant corpus of early Irish canon law, in Latin; see Die irische Kanonensammlung (ed. F.W. Hermann Wasserschleben, Giessen 1874/Leipzig 1885).

⁴⁹ There are three main groups of texts, conventionally known as Llyfr Iorwerth, Llyfr Cyfnerth and Llyfr Blegywryd; see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, The Welsh Laws (Cardiff 1989), for a short overview. For recent editions of some texts, see Llyfr Iorwerth (ed. Aled R. Wiliam, Cardiff 1960); Cyfreithiau Hywel Dda yn ôl Llyfr Blegywryd (ed. Stephen J. Williams/J. Enoch Powell, Cardiff 1942/Cardiff 1961); The Latin Texts of the Welsh Laws (ed. Hywel D. Emanuel, Cardiff 1967); The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales (ed./trans. Dafydd Jenkins, Llandysul 1986). For a suggested further book, Llyfr Cynog, see Gwenno A. Elias, Llyfr Cynog of Cyfraith Hywel and St Cynog of Brycheiniog, in: Welsh History Review 23 (2006–2007) 27–47.

⁵⁰ Wendy Davies, Disputes, their conduct and their settlement in the village communities of eastern Brittany in the ninth century, in: History and Anthropology 1 (1985) 289–312.

⁵¹ Cartulaire de Redon, ed. de Courson; see Wendy Davies, People and places in dispute in ninth-century Brittany, in: The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe, ed. Wendy Davies/Paul Fouracre (Cambridge 1986) 65–84.

to pursue offenders by the tenth and eleventh centuries and courts could meet which had no kind of royal presence or representative.⁵² Even in Ireland, the law texts allow for witnesses and local knowledge, although the emphasis of much law-tract procedure was on oaths and the correct performance of ritual, while the casting of lots, duels and the ordeal also had a role.⁵³

The exceptions to the predominantly local are that in Brittany rulers' representatives occasionally presided in ninth-century village courts, and could investigate peasant complaints; further, the ninth-century ruler clearly had personal jurisdiction over aristocratic cases, heard in his own court.⁵⁴ In Scotland there were judicial court officers, *iudices*, with regionally defined responsibilities (e.g. Galloway, Strathearn) by 1100; we do not know if this was also the case beforehand.⁵⁵ In Ireland, while kings *could* act as judges, preside in court and declare judgment, these functions were largely the preserve of professional lawyers.⁵⁶ However, since we derive this knowledge from law tracts rather than actual cases, we have no idea how the relative responsibility was in practice apportioned between king and lawyers.⁵⁷

Judicial proceedings present two different, and highly contrasted patterns, although the strength of the contrast may well be conditioned by the different perspectives of the available sources: on the one hand a pattern of dispute settlement largely conducted by respected local elders (as in Breton villages); on the other, a pattern of settlement largely conducted by professional lawyers (as in Ireland). We do not know enough about Scotland, while Wales – on the basis of contemporary early medieval evidence – had elements of both.⁵⁸ More importantly for present purposes, it was well beyond the end of the period here considered before these things became primarily a ruler responsibility.

USE OF CLERICS

Scottish kings came to be inaugurated at the special site at Scone, a place already significant in the tenth century and arguably much earlier.⁵⁹ We can see that a few rulers used ritual and ceremony to reinforce their positions but we lack any evidence of systematic attention to the enhancement of royal charisma in this period. The image of the warrior king comes more strongly from contemporary sources than that of the sacral king.⁶⁰ However, kings did use Christian institutions, and often relied on the assistance of clerics. The ninth-century Breton ruler Salomon was responsible for acquiring relics for

⁵² For detailed discussion, see Davies, Wales 134–140. It was local elders (*degion*, literally ‘good men, worthies’) who settled the ninth-century dispute between Tudfwlch and Elgu, with no hint of any royal participation; see Dafydd Jenkins/Morfydd E. Owen, The Welsh marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels 1, in: Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 5 (1983) 37–66, at 50–52; Dafydd Jenkins/Morfydd E. Owen, The Welsh marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels 2, in: Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 7 (1984) 91–120.

⁵³ Fergus Kelly, An Old-Irish text on court procedure, in: *Peritia* 5 (1986) 74–106; Kelly, Guide to Early Irish Law 190–213; Richard Sharpe, Dispute settlement in medieval Ireland: a preliminary enquiry, in: *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Wendy Davies/Paul Fouracre (Cambridge 1986) 169–189.

⁵⁴ Davies, Disputes 300–301; Cartulaire de Redon 247 (871) and 261 (874–877), ed. de Courson, for example.

⁵⁵ Barrow, Kingdom of the Scots 69–82; *ibid.* 67–68, also discusses the *mair*, a later medieval court official, for whom he suggests a pre-tenth-century origin.

⁵⁶ Kelly, Guide to Early English Law 24, 51–57, 242–244. Byrne, Ireland and her neighbours 873, comments that the *rechtairi* mentioned in the text *Cáin Adomnáin* (for which, see above) were law enforcement officials, enforcing on behalf of the abbot of Iona and Iona's dependencies.

⁵⁷ Marilyn Gerriets, The king as judge in early Ireland, in: *Celtica* 20 (1988) 29–52, argues that the king's role in judgment was significant.

⁵⁸ Hence elders in West Wales in the ninth century; a case which hung on a lawyer's principle in south-east Wales in the mid-tenth century; community pursuit of thieves in south-east Wales in the eleventh century, see above; for the lawyer: The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv (ed. John Gwenogvryn Evans/John Rhys, Oxford 1893) 219.

⁵⁹ Duncan, Scotland 115–116; Duncan, Kingship 10–11, 83; Woolf, From Pictland to Alba 134–138. Royal inauguration places were certainly long used in Ireland: Byrne, Irish kings 15–22. Whether or not inauguration places were also places of regular assembly in the early middle ages is a completely open question.

⁶⁰ There are arguably two cases of the ordination of Irish kings and it is common to talk of Irish ‘sacral’ kingship; Byrne, Irish kings 159, for ordinations (Annals of Ulster a. 793, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 248–249); note also his comments at 152–153 on the paucity of insignia. Perceptions of Irish sacral kingship come more from theorizing than from contemporary accounts of behaviour (see further below).

his favoured monastic site of Plélan and he and other Breton rulers interfered in the organization of the church, appointing and deposing bishops and creating new episcopal sees. Dol thereby became an “unofficial” archbishopric for Brittany (that is, unrecognized by most of western Europe), as it remained until 1199.⁶¹ Something similar seems to have been intended to happen in Scotland, for Kenneth McAlpine later seen to have translated some of the relics of St Columba to Dunkeld with the apparent intention of establishing a chief church there: a *primepscop*, literally chief bishop, is certainly associated with Dunkeld in 865.⁶² Kenneth's connection with the translation may have had an element of image-building. Whatever the intentions, this did not last long for, in the tenth century, what primacy Dunkeld had had was overtaken by that of the church of St Andrews, perhaps at the instigation of King Constantine (son of Aed), who retired there in the early tenth century.⁶³

Comparable ruler actions are not evidenced in either Wales or Ireland, although twelfth-century ecclesiastical commentators argued for an early-established archiepiscopal status for St David's (in west Wales), and a kind of primacy had been sought for Armagh (in northern Ireland) from at least the eighth century (largely on clerical initiative) and by the eleventh century it was known as the burial place of kings.⁶⁴ In Wales, far from managing the church, rulers were liable to be called to account by bishops by the late tenth century and the church was heavily privileged in subsequent Welsh law; when relics were translated, the initiatives were clerical rather than royal.⁶⁵ In Ireland, by contrast, there was often strong ruler influence in ecclesiastical affairs, through the mechanism of hereditary interests; and in Munster (the south west) there are a number of cases of rulers holding ecclesiastical office as well as kingship, like that of the famous Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, abbot of Cork and king of Cashel, overking of Munster, 820-847.⁶⁶ This impression of ruler influence over the church in Ireland has to be modified, however, by the fact that powerful clerics, such as the abbots of the major monasteries, had a spread of property interests and ecclesiastical dependencies far greater than those of any ordinary king of a *tuath* and even greater than those of many over-kings, and had administrative systems designed to manage income from those properties. Ecclesiastical and secular interests were in fact very strongly intertwined.⁶⁷

THEORIZING

Kingship, rulership and statehood were in most cases very under-theorized, though clearly some individuals were thinking about it and had ideas. In Brittany and Wales new and changing titles indicate some conceptual development: [*princeps/rex totius Britanniae*] *Salomone dominante Britanniam usque Medanum flumen* in the ninth century, of the Breton ruler in Brittany; and of a Welsh king in mid-

⁶¹ Acknowledged, however, for a period in the eleventh century. Hubert Guillotel, *Les origines du ressort de l'évêché de Dol*, in: *Mémoires de la société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne* 54 (1977) 31–68; Julia M.H. Smith, *The 'archbishopric' of Dol and the ecclesiastical politics of ninth-century Brittany*, in: *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982) 59–70; see also *La Borderie, Histoire de Bretagne* 2, 270–272. For relics: *Cartulaire de Redon* 241 (869), ed. de Courson; cf. *ibid.* 90 (871/872), ed. de Courson; see also Guillotel, in: *Chédeville/Guillotel, Bretagne* 340–341; and Guigon, in: *Giot/Guigon/Merdignac, Premiers Bretons* 148.

⁶² Clancy/Crawford, *Formation* 65; Alan MacQuarrie, *Early Christian religious houses in Scotland: foundation and function*, in: *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair/Richard Sharpe (Leicester 1992) 110–133, at 121; *Annals of Ulster* a. 865, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 320–321.

⁶³ MacQuarrie, *Early Christian religious houses* 118–121.

⁶⁴ *Annals of Ulster* a. 1064, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 500; cf. *ibid.* a. 935, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 384–385.

⁶⁵ Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford 1993) esp. 133–203. See also Wendy Davies, *Adding insult to injury: property, power and immunities in early medieval Wales*, in: *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Wendy Davies/Paul Fouracre (Cambridge 1995) 137–164.

⁶⁶ Kathleen Hughes, *The Irish church, 800–c. 1050*, in: *A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005) 635–655, at 642.

⁶⁷ Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London 1966), remains the classic analysis; see also Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth 1999). There are important analyses in Ó Corráin, *Ireland 584–590*; Hughes, *The Irish church*; and Francis J. Byrne, *Church and politics, c. 750–c. 1100*, in: *A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005) 656–679.

eleventh-century Wales, *rex Britanniae et totius Gualiae*.⁶⁸ The latter was excessively elaborated in successive later vernacular versions, but there was no sustained writing on the theme at that time. In Brittany it was the eleventh or twelfth century before the notion of Nominoë's coronation (in the 840s) was aired⁶⁹ and it was the late Middle Ages that saw full development of the theory of Breton sovereignty.⁷⁰

There is an interestingly different situation in Ireland, however. There was plenty of explicit theorizing about rulership, from at least the seventh century. It took several forms. Firstly, there are early (that is, seventh- and eighth-century) texts, like the vernacular *Audacht Morainn* and *Timna Cathaír Máir* and the Latin *De duodecim Abusivis* (often known as *Pseudo-Cyprian*), that elaborate the virtues and qualities of the good king, and indicate the failings of the bad.⁷¹ This was about kingship at its most basic level; it was very close to the soil, and small in scale. Good kingship guarantees prosperity and fertility, security, peace, freedom from disease, comfort, fine weather; the perfection of the king's person symbolizes the health of the community: "Let him be merciful, just, impartial, conscientious, firm, generous, hospitable, honourable, stable, beneficent, capable, honest, well-spoken, steady, true-judging."⁷² It is this writing, together with the description of a king's week in the law tract *Críth Gablach*, in which the king had much leisure and little responsibility, that has given rise to modern scholars' comments on the sacrality of early Irish kingship, famously characterized by Patrick Wormald as a view of the king as "priestly vegetable".⁷³ (Wormald's point was that, by contrast, early Irish kings were neither priestly nor vegetables but pre-eminently active). Whatever our modern view, this early Irish way of writing about kings had widespread European influence through the genre of the *speculum principis*; Irish expressions of it, rather incongruously given the difference in scale, became elaborated in the Carolingian context, explicitly through the writing of Irish people present at the Carolingian court.⁷⁴

Secondly, despite the multiple nature and tiny scale of Irish kingship, a sense of kingship of the whole island of Ireland was expressed intermittently from the seventh century onwards – *rex Hiberniae* initially, later *rí Erenn (uile)* – as occurs nine times in the *Annals of Ulster* before the twelfth century.⁷⁵ This does not in practice seem to mean much more than prominence, from the point of view of the observer, for kings described in this way do not seem to have had institutionalized powers and

⁶⁸ *Cartulaire de Redon 72 (857–869)*, ed. de Courson; cf. *ibid.* 225 (868) and 241 (869), ed. de Courson; and *Book of Llan Dâw*, ed. Evans/Rhys 269. Cf. an Irish perspective of eleventh-century Scotland: *Kl. Mael Colaim mac Cinaetha, rí Alpan, ordan iarthair Eorpa uile d'ég* ([1034] Malcolm son of Cinaed, king of Scotland, glory of the whole west of Europe, died); *The Annals of Tigernach. The Fourth Fragment, A.D. 973–A.D. 1088* (ed. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 17, 1896) 337–420, at 374.

⁶⁹ Initially elaborated in *La Chronique de Nantes, 570 environ–1049* (ed. René Merlet, Paris 1896) esp. 32–39. See *La Borderie, Histoire de Bretagne* 2, 52–59; Hubert Guillotel, *Genèse de l'Indiculus de episcoporum depositione*, in: *Mondes de l'Ouest et villes du monde*, ed. Catherine Laurent/Bernard Merdrignac/Daniel Pichot (Rennes 1998) 129–138; also Davies, *Franks and Bretons*.

⁷⁰ Jean Kerhervé, *L'État breton aux 14^e et 15^e siècles: Les ducs, l'argent et les hommes*, 2 vols. (Paris 1987); many of the papers in *Chroniqueurs et historiens de la Bretagne du moyen âge au milieu du XXe siècle*, ed. Noël-Yves Tonnerre (Rennes 2001); and references cited above, n. 6.

⁷¹ *Audacht Morainn* (ed. Fergus Kelly, Dublin 1976); *Lebor na Cert: the Book of Rights* (ed. Myles Dillon, *Irish Texts Society* 46, Dublin 1962) 148–178; *Pseudo-Cyprianus, De xii abusivis saeculi* (ed. Siegmund Hellmann, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 34, Leipzig 1909). See Hans H. Anton, *Pseudo-Cyprian. De duodecim abusivis saeculi und sein Einfluss auf den Kontinent*, in: *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Löwe, 2 vols. (Stuttgart 1982) 2, 568–617; and the excellent discussion by Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland* 77–78.

⁷² *Audacht Morainn* 55, ed. Kelly.

⁷³ Patrick Wormald, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship: some further thoughts*, in: *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach/Virginia D. Oggins (Kalamazoo 1986) 151–183; this paper was a reflection on Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*. See also Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship* 57–88.

⁷⁴ See section IV of *Iren und Europa*, ed. Löwe 2, 735–937; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Hiberno-Latin literature to 1169*, in: *A New History of Ireland 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005) 371–404, at 394–403 especially.

⁷⁵ *Annals of Ulster* aa. 642, 703, 862, 919, 956, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocaill 122–123, 162–163, 318–319, 368, 398, for example; Byrne, *Irish kings* 254–257.

– importantly – usually had no contact of any kind with large parts of the island. It does nevertheless express a kind of ideal.

Thirdly, in the eleventh century, there was a sustained and elaborate back-projection of an ideal of superior kingship – the high-kingship of Ireland – applied retrospectively by medieval scholars to kings from the fifth century onwards. This was associated with kingship of Tara, which brought superiority over other kings and over-kings.⁷⁶ Earlier lists of Tara kings were utilized and the title of high-king added to much earlier entries in the annals by later annalists. This again expresses an ideal of a kingship far more extensive than that of the basic *rí* and *tuath*, the building blocks of practical politics, but it is a concept which belongs with the realities of later politics.⁷⁷

CONCLUSIONS

One might argue that none of the polities which I have discussed were states, nor had any element of statehood, although the regions were certainly not classic ‘stateless societies’ – for the obvious reason that there was plenty of rulership and plenty of kingship. Indeed, it is interesting that the terminology of kingship is consistent throughout, the only significant exception being the ducal title that finally became the norm in Brittany. There is much less of statehood than of rulership, and there are many things we do not know. But there clearly were differences between Celtic regions in respect of movement towards statehood; Wales and Ireland were politically undeveloped by western European standards by 1050, but Brittany and Scotland were both at least clearly on a road to state development.⁷⁸ In fact, scholars of the last generation have been at pains to stress the similarities between Celtic political developments – all regions but especially Irish – and those of the continent. These are of course very useful perspectives, and teach us not to regard the Celtic as utterly ‘other’ – which is certainly welcome; they also help us to understand some otherwise incomprehensible actions. However, the mechanics of political development in most of these regions at this time, and consciousness of the nature of political power, are frankly of a completely different order from those apparent in England and in many parts of the continent.

The limits to state power are in one sense obvious, and many, given that rulers were limited by the low levels of effective machinery of government. But, in another sense, they were also limited by the fact that armed rebellion could happen virtually anywhere. (I am conscious of the contrast with tenth-century Spanish León, in which there was plenty of rebellion but also plenty of consequent confiscation of property by rulers; that cannot be seen in the Celtic world.) Hence, the means by which the central organization of these embryo states could make itself felt were also limited. Most obviously, where there was central organization that stretched out beyond the royal presence, there were officers responsible to the ruler (although we might note that, in insular regions at least, raiding was also a standard mechanism for making the presence of the ruler felt).

I chose to compare selected characteristics of these different regions, not all aspects, because contrasts within the Celtic world make some powerful points. Some characteristics which have generated much discussion in continental contexts do not make such strong points. If we take the obvious case of aristocracies, often kin-aligned, they had a habit of rebellion in all of these regions and kings had a very limited element of control.⁷⁹ This is most strongly demonstrated in tenth-century Wales, where aristocratic rebellion could make kingship totally ineffective, but there are plenty of comparable cases in Ireland, especially generated by the minor segments of ruling families – witness both the “deceitful” killing of Murchad and the “treacherous” killing of Fogartach in 972.⁸⁰ One can make a comparable case for Scotland, especially in the mid-eleventh century, although the evidence is much

⁷⁶ Francis J. Byrne’s lecture, *The rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland* (Dublin 1969) remains the critical analysis, extended in Byrne, *Irish kings* esp. 48–69 and 254–274. See also *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin 2005), especially papers by Doherty and Bhreathnach.

⁷⁷ For discussion of pertinent eleventh-century scholars, see Byrne, *Ireland and her neighbours 864–870*.

⁷⁸ For a contrary view on Scotland, see Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba 349–350*.

⁷⁹ For kinship see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford 1993).

⁸⁰ *Annals of Ulster* a. 972, ed. Mac Airt/Mac Niocail 410–411.

more fragmentary.⁸¹ To some extent Brittany is a contrast, for mid-ninth-century rulers visibly exercised jurisdiction over rebellious aristocrats, but even here the ruler Salomon met his end by murder and later ninth- and tenth-century political history was dominated by the conflicts of rival factions. “Kings went on claiming hegemonic rights ... but local aristocracies were less clearly co-opted into that project”, as Chris Wickham puts it, writing of Wales but the words can equally apply to other Celtic areas.⁸² Lordship was of course a significant relationship too, and a channel for a variety of personal relationships, but it was not much used to reinforce, and particularly to differentiate, royal power.

More usefully, one cannot ignore the fact that there are major differences in territorial scale in the cases considered: the more ‘successful’ polities of Brittany and Scotland were larger than those of Wales and Ireland, in which the scale of the polities was too small to generate sufficient resource to support effective and continuing administration.⁸³ Although even Brittany and Scotland were relatively small, they were not so different in scale from England, León, and the ruled core of West Francia. To the extent that there were mechanisms for organizing these relatively large territories, then the key is the presence of officers with regional responsibility, who were answerable to the ruler. There is also an important negative point: where over-kingship was a major organizing principle, it did not lead to state development;⁸⁴ and where significant royal resources came through the returns of clientship, the same was true. Apart from the presence of officers, we can also see that there was more of a fiscal mechanism in Brittany; more of a military mechanism in Scotland; and more of a ‘law and order’ responsibility – through rulers’ courts – in Brittany (and perhaps Scotland). Their rulers were also more prone to use the structures of the Christian church for explicitly political purposes. They are elements that were missing, or very undeveloped, in Ireland and Wales.

Let me end with a paradox. Paradoxically, by far the most developed ideology of rulership comes from Ireland – an ideology of ruler responsibility that is associated with a notion of political community, the *tuath* (literally ‘people’) of the *rí*.⁸⁵ This ideology is rooted in the basic level of very small-scale kingship, in which the king could easily be known by all members of the *tuath* and in which his protective function had a practical significance for them. This is precisely the level that does not survive in the long-term and does not lead towards state development, for all its influence in Carolingian Europe.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Cf. Clancy/Crawford, *Formation* 78–83; Alex Woolf, The “Moray question” and the kingship of Alba in the tenth and eleventh centuries, in: *The Scottish Historical Review* 79 (2000) 145–164.

⁸² Wickham, *Early Middle Ages* 353.

⁸³ See Wendy Davies, *Celtic kingships in the early middle ages*, in: *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (London 1993) 101–124.

⁸⁴ Cf. David N. Dumville, *Anglo-Saxon and Celtic overkingships: a discussion of some shared historical problems*, in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies, Kansai University* 31 (1998) 81–100.

⁸⁵ Cf. Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *A contract between king and people in early medieval Ireland? Críth Gablach on kingship*, in: *Peritia* 8 (1994) 107–119.

⁸⁶ Very grateful thanks are due to Stuart Airlie and Chris Wickham for their comments on a draft of this paper; to the participants in the Vienna conference for fruitful comparative perspectives and helpful reactions to my own; and to decades of students, who endured my development of this comparative approach.