

Preface

The history of Wales did not begin with castles, princes, or medieval kingdoms. Long before the age of stone fortresses and crowned rulers, Cymru was a land of competing warlords, regional dynasties, frontier kingdoms, and communities adapting to life after the collapse of Roman authority. The centuries that followed the end of Roman Britain were a time of uncertainty, conflict, opportunity, and transformation. From that turbulent world, the foundations of medieval Wales gradually emerged.

This book explores that forgotten age. It was a period in which old structures disappeared and new ones took their place. Roman governors vanished, military garrisons were abandoned, and the institutions that had connected western Britain to a wider empire gradually faded away. Yet life continued. Communities remained rooted within familiar landscapes. Local rulers expanded their influence. New kingdoms developed from older tribal territories and regional power bases. Across the mountains, valleys, coastlines, and river systems of Wales, a new political landscape began to take shape.

The centuries following Rome remain among the most challenging periods of Welsh history to reconstruct. Written sources are scarce, fragmented, and often influenced by legend, poetry, or later political agendas. Many rulers survive only as names preserved within genealogies. Entire kingdoms appear briefly before disappearing from the historical record. Chronologies are often uncertain, while historians frequently disagree about the details of events and relationships. The evidence rarely provides complete answers.

Despite these difficulties, the period remains one of the most important in the formation of Cymru itself. The kingdoms that later dominated medieval Wales did not emerge suddenly from nowhere. They developed gradually through complex interactions between

older tribal identities, Romano-British traditions, migration, warfare, dynastic ambition, and regional geography. The rulers explored within this book stood at the meeting point between two worlds: the fading legacy of Roman Britain and the emerging kingdoms of early medieval Wales.

A central idea runs throughout *The Cymru Cycles*: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. That principle is particularly evident during the age of the warlords. Geography shaped politics at every level. Mountains provided protection and isolation. River valleys offered routes for movement, communication, and expansion. Coastal regions connected kingdoms to the wider Irish Sea world. Forests, uplands, and borderlands created both barriers and opportunities. The development of kingdoms such as Gwynedd, Powys, Dyfed, Brycheiniog, Morgannwg, and others was influenced as much by the landscapes they occupied as by the ambitions of the rulers who governed them.

This book therefore approaches these kingdoms not simply as lists of rulers and battles, but as living political landscapes shaped by geography, kinship, warfare, religion, migration, and survival. The aim is to understand how power operated within post-Roman Wales and how successive generations of rulers adapted to a changing and often unstable world.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Because the surviving evidence is often incomplete, reconstruction and interpretation are sometimes necessary. Historical sources, genealogical traditions, archaeology, landscape history, and later literary evidence all contribute pieces of the wider picture. Where certainty is impossible, the aim is to present the interpretation that appears most consistent with the available evidence while recognising that alternative interpretations may exist.

The rulers within these pages were not idealised heroes. Many were war leaders who gained and maintained power through conflict, alliances, diplomacy, and dynastic rivalry. Some kingdoms survived only briefly before being absorbed by stronger neighbours. Others endured for centuries and helped shape the future of Wales. Together, however, they created the political world from which medieval Cymru would eventually emerge.

This is the story of the warlords who inherited the western frontier of Roman Britain and transformed it into the kingdoms of Wales. A story of survival after empire, of dynasties forged through conflict and memory, and of the gradual emergence of a land that would one day be recognised as Cymru.

Nathan Williams

The Cymru Cycles