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Early state formation in native medieval Wales

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Abstract

This article examines the applicability of general theories concerning the formation of early states to native Wales in the Middle Ages. Theories which attempt to explain the state-making process are reviewed in order to clarify the concepts and possible processes associated with this major institutional change. It is stressed in the article that an understanding of the extent to which a society is organised according to state concepts of rule is an important first step in the formulation of any theory which attempts to explain the main reasons for the formation of the early state in the first place. Consequently, three of the criteria given by Claessen and Skalnik as being indicative of the existence of state institutions within a society are utilised in order to elucidate the extent to which Welsh society was organised as an early state in the Middle Ages. It is argued that Welsh society was indeed organised in this way, but that these state institutions were centred on regional kingdoms within Wales and not on a unified Welsh state. This suggests that mature state institutions are viable within kingdoms, political units which were previously considered as being immature forms of early states.

political units which were previously considered as being miniature forms of early states. The article concludes by postulating that the main reasons for the adoption of state institutions within Wales was the diffusion of ideas of state rule both from neighbouring Wessex and also from one Welsh regional kingdom to another.



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