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Did Welsh noblewomen have the ability to act independently in a medieval Welsh patriarchal society? A thematic study of agency in 13th century Wales

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Did Welsh noblewomen have the ability to act independently in a medieval Welsh patriarchal society? A thematic study of agency in 13th century Wales.

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*Hail Ladies of Cymru with loveliness blest,
Fair Sina the faithful, the beautiful Nest,
Young Morvid of Mona, unfading thy wreath,
And gallant Gwenllian's who battled till death*

(Llewelyn Pritchard 1854)

In his 1854 study, T.J Llewelyn Pritchard celebrated 'The Heroines of Welsh History' which marked the first tentative steps in recognising the importance of Welsh women in history. However, this biographical approach placed women firmly within the context and boundaries of a Victorian male dominated history even though it was an attempt to 'excite the curiosity of many' (Llewelyn Pritchard 1854 p.x). This study will attempt to draw women away from this structure by analysing whether they had the ability to make independent decisions which could counteract the medieval societal structures surrounding them. This study will initially analyse the term agency and evaluate how agency manifests itself in the context of medieval history. This essay will also establish and define the role noble women played within medieval society and the expected behaviours which defined their gender. This dissertation will attempt to challenge the opinion that women had no voice nor the ability to act independently in patriarchal medieval society and that the lack of information surrounding women is due to history being recorded in a manner that silences Welsh noble women. The period under discussion is the thirteenth century, culminating in the Statute of Rhuddlan of 1284 when England gained legislative control over Wales (Jenkins 2007 p.103).

Welsh women were of course not just noble and made up all hierarchies of society, both religious and secular. This study concentrates upon noblewomen through necessity as details of their birth rights, marriage and deaths appear on royal charters, acts of laws, traditional poetry and manuscripts. Noble women are the women that are married to or are widows of, as well as daughters and mothers to noble Welsh men and Marcher lords (Cartwright in Richards 2009 p.8). This dissertation also concentrates upon secular women as unlike in England, religion was not considered to be a viable occupation for women. Their power was thought to be in their ability to marry. It appears that women were not '...purposefully

directed towards withdrawal into monastic seclusion' (Cartwright 2008 p.6). Although noblewomen were exiled into nunneries, this could be the result of a punishment or as a form of retirement for wealthy widows once they would no longer bear children and were therefore powerful yet vulnerable (Cartwright 2008 p.6). Although evidence is limited, it would seem that there were only three religious buildings; two Cistercian houses at Llanllugan and Llanllyr and a Benedictine priory at Usk (Cartwright 2008 p.2). It is also important to note that men would have lived under certain restrictions and dynastical and social hierarchies and pressures would have determined which choices they could freely make.

Although the development of a national identity lies outside of this study, there was an emerging sense of unity during the 11th century, at least in part to the response to outside influences from the invading English. A common language, a wide acceptance of Christianity and the development of their own laws (The laws of Hywel Dda), meant that a strong sense of regional belonging was emerging throughout Cymry (Jenkins 2007 p.61). By the 12th century, there was a deeper divide throughout Wales with the North and the West ruled by the independent Welsh rulers, known as Pura Wallia and the South and East largely under the control of the Norman, Marcher Lords, an area known as Marchia Walliae (Jenkins 2007 p.66). This study will in part also analyse whether the ability for women to exercise agency was different dependent upon the laws to which they were subjected. Although this study is limited by word count, there will be a comparative analysis with one English noblewomen living under English law within Wales; Emma de Audley. Throughout this period of social, political and spiritual change, women are rarely present in extant sources or modern historiography and appear to be almost absent from the scene apart from a few notable exceptions (Cartwright in Richards 2009 p.2). Running alongside this study will be an awareness of feminist theory which will be explored within Chapter one.

It appears that the history of Wales was an extension of English history and as early as 1559 it was conceived that 'there was nothinge doing in Wales worthy memory, but that is to be redde in the Englishe Chronicle.' (Llwyd in Pryce 2011) The historiography of Wales as a separate nation had a small flurry of activity in the Victorian Period with the 1842 publication of *Carnhuanawc (A History of Wales, and the Nation of the Welsh, from the Early Ages to the Death of Llewelyn Ap Gruffudd)*. A *History of Wales from The Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* by John Edward Lloyd in 1911, a defining point in the historiography of Wales

(Jenkins 2007 p.63). There was a renewed interest in Welsh history during the later part of the twentieth century, with extensive studies in the areas of Identity, Genealogy, Coal mining, Chartism and Calvinism. A paper featured in *History Today* by Geraint Jenkins in 1987, outlines these fields as the ones which most Welsh historians have centred their studies upon and discusses the eminent works: *A History of Modern Wales* by David Williams (1950 2nd ed. 1977 by John Murray), Glanmor Williams: *Religion, Language, Nationality in Wales* (University of Wales Press 1979) and David Williams's study of *The Rebecca Riots of 1955* (University of Wales Press 2011). Within recent times, R.R Davies has completed the most comprehensive studies with *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* in 1987 (Oxford University Press). It has only been in recent times, perhaps with the development of Welsh universities, a resurgence of the Welsh language and the constant debate surrounding Welsh devolution that Welsh history has taken on its own identity.

Missing from Geraint Jenkins historiographical analysis are Welsh women and Welsh women historians. Even '*The Heroines of Welsh History*' fails to receive a mention although an original copy, which is now of such national importance, resides in the Special Collections archive in Cardiff University Library. There appears to be a similar hiatus between Welsh history and Welsh women's history with tentative biographical steps into the life of Princess Nest in the 1950s but did not emerge as a serious historical genre until the late 1980s. Specific studies by Susan Johns such as '*The wives and widows of the earls of Chester. 1100-1252: the charter evidence*' (Haskins Society Journal 1995) and *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester University Press 2003) were amongst the first modern day studies to use extant sources directly relating to women and their position in medieval society. *Our Mother's land* by Angela V John (1991 ed. University of Wales Press 2011) studies women from 1830 and is considered the very first book that exclusively deals with Welsh women's history. Gwyneth Richard's 2009 book '*Welsh noblewomen in the Thirteenth century*' (Edwin Mellen Press 2009) alongside Susan Johns '*Gender, Nation and Conquest in the High Middle Ages*' (Oxford University Press 2013) appear to be the most commonly accessible texts on Welsh medieval noblewomen. Deirdre Beddoes has extensively studied Welsh women since 1986 and achieved the very first conference on Welsh women's history on the 14th July 2011; Sisterhood and After; The Women's Liberation Oral History Project held in Glamorgan, Wales (British Library online 2018). Recent studies by

Professor Jane Cartwright (Professor in Welsh at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David) concentrate on women's spiritual history. Dr Emma Cavell has extensively looked at Medieval Welsh women and the law and is currently working as part of the 'Women and Justice' project which aims to give a voice to historic women through litigation between 1100-1300. (www.womenhistorylaw.org.uk) Since 1986, Welsh women are firmly developing as a subject and there is now a shelf dedicated to Welsh Women studies at Cardiff University library, although much work still needs to be completed before women play an equal part in the vibrant history of Wales.

Although a vital and thoroughly interesting subject area, the study of historical Welsh women does not come without limitations and considerations. Primary sources are subject to translations normally from Latin and rarely in Welsh, which vary over time as more translations occur which allows for a deeper comprehension of the laws, the rules and the relationships. Manuscripts are often fragmented with a certain degree of educated guess work on behalf of this historian. The primary sources used within this essay have been translated and are of current modern scholarship. Secondary sources are never completely unbiased, a reflection of the authors understanding, beliefs and opinion, particularly difficult to find in this context as much scholarship has been undertaken by men for men which has caused a void in analysing where women played prominent roles (Cartwright in Richards 2009 p.14). Using both primary and secondary sources, this dissertation will use feminist theory to analyse medieval society and determine whether medieval Welsh noblewomen did exert agency in a way which counteracted their societal structure and will concentrate upon the case studies of Senana ferch Caradog, Joan; Princess of Wales and Emma de Audley. This study is driven by a desire, as Joan Wallach Scott describes it in *'Toward a Feminist History'* (1999), to make those who are 'hidden, visible' (Scott 1999 p.17).

Chapter 1: The Great Man Approach. How does agency, feminist theory and patriarchy alter our perception of the past?

The recorded history of Britain jumps from one battle to another via one great king to another; from William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings in 1066 to Henry Tudor and the Wars of the Roses and through to Winston Churchill and the Second World War. As, violence and political prowess are characteristics which we mostly consider as male this means that history appears to us as male centric, which political historian Philip Pomper describes as a 'great man approach' (Pomper 1996 p.282). Studying women in history means encountering 'a resistance in the form of 'a disciplined body of knowledge as a professional institution' (Scott 1999 p.18). Feminists argue that this creates a structure which women are viewed as either compliant to or working against, and therefore exist in history in a way where they never quite fit. Using this context of feminism and feminist theory, this study will view Senana, Joan and Emma against a framework of politics, sexual inequality and proprietorship. Agency is vitally important if historians are to understand societal structures (Hemmings et al.2013).

Studying women in the medieval period does not come without limitations. Women are all but absent from extant sources (Cartwright in Richards 2009 p.2). There are a few examples of powerful women but many who are defined as simply a wife or a mother to a powerful man. It is not irrelevant that mothers and wives, 'played a prominent part in binding families together' (Davies in Cartwright 2009 p.3). By looking at medieval society through modern glasses it is easy to miss the things which modern day women take for granted; the ability to choose, the ability to mother their own children and the ability to spend money. Medieval women may not have demonstrated the type of agency that later women did, but this does not necessarily mean that they couldn't act or attempt to. It is also important not to adopt a great woman approach. Joan of Arc, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth I are extreme examples of female agency and it is vital to include all females and discuss agency in a day-to-day context to establish a wider picture of society.

Deciding upon the gender definitions of noble women and the gender specific roles that they would have fulfilled during this period is complex due to the restraints of native language and the still limited studies into Welsh women's history. This isn't helped by the majority of early Welsh history being documented in the middle ages, when women still

lived in a patriarchal society and were not considered to be equal contributors (Cartwright in Richards 2009 p.20). Therefore, the approach of this study is through viewing women in the roles in which we discover them and how they conform or deviate from the associated patriarchal structure where male authority determined the law, the family, customs and religion (Capp in Kumin 2014 p.38). This study is conducted with a consideration that the women studied here do not portray all women. It is also important to study women's interaction with men, as studying them in isolation is unrealistic. Just as today, women and men's lives are interwoven and to study them without consideration of the other, means we lose evidence of how those interactions shaped their lives. Omitting men from historical study can have a similar effect, just as ignoring women has done. Studying women as part of society rather than in isolation, 'enriches conventional history' (Scott 1999 p.21). Michael Roberts in *Women and Gender* argues that there should be a wider historical approach to studying women which considers their roles against those of men and how these roles are shaped by their cultural, regional and national identity (Roberts 2000 p.3

The Oxford Dictionary online defines agency as the '*ability or capacity to act or exert power; active working or operation; action, activity*' (OED online 2018). On a deeper theoretical level, this is more difficult to define with theory's ranging through Marxism to existentialism. This study views agency in its relation to the structures surrounding the lives of the noblewomen within a patriarchal society. In *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in social theory* by Alex Callinicos, 2004, Callinicos introduces Perry Anderson's three types of agency; The pursuit of private goods, the ability of a person to act within a social framework involving public goods and a separate 'unprecedented form of agency' (Anderson in Callinicos 2004 p.2) This essay will define agency as the action whether or not it achieved what it set to do. Political scientist, Iris Marion Young argues that 'women more often than men underestimate the level of achievement they have reached.' (Young 1980 p.8) Which serves as a reminder that consequence is also dependent upon one's interpretation and should not therefore be a measure of agency. Young argues that women in patriarchal societies, are 'physically inhibited, confined, positioned and objectified' which makes the achievements of Senana, Joan and Emma even more important to 'her-story'. (Young 1980 p.16)

Chapter 2: Senana Ferch Caradog

A tangible example of female agency within the structure of the political framework of Wales is the petitioning of Henry III in 1241 by Senana ferch Caradog ap Thomas ap Rhodri ab Owain Gwynedd (Richards 2009 p.23). Senana descended from Owain Gwynedd and Gruffudd ap Cynan, the twelfth century leaders of Gwynedd. Senana is one of only a handful of female petitioners found in the Acts of The Welsh Rulers 1120-1283 edited by Huw Pryce in 2005, compiled from a collection of translated manuscripts, charters and extant sources. Entry 284 details the agreement between Senana, as the wife of Gruffudd ap Llewelyn and Henry III and the conditions surrounding his release. Senana, although it states on 'Gruffudd's behalf', agrees to pay 600 marks to free Gruffudd and her son Owain who has also been imprisoned by Henry III to weaken the power of Gwynedd (Jenkins 2008 p.90). She also agrees to give the King her sons, Dafydd and Rhodri as hostages on the understanding that should either Gruffudd or Owain die, one son should be returned to her. The petition is sealed with the king's seal and Senana uses her husband's seal and keeps the remaining part presumably as proof that this contract has been agreed. Senana also pledges the allegiance of several prominent families including Ralph Mortimer, Walter Clifford and Gruffudd ap Madog of Bromfield (Pryce 2005 p.452).

Although Gruffudd would benefit hugely from being released, this petition demonstrates her agency and gives us some insight into a life which must have been full of difficult choices. Senana agrees to take personal responsibility for the agreement. The petition states that 'Senana has undertaken to ensure all the terms are implemented' (Pryce 2005 p.452). However, the second part of this sentence is even more interesting. It is stated that 'after his release, Gruffudd and his heirs will confirm them and give their written instrument to the king in the aforesaid terms' (Pryce 2005 p.452). It seems unlikely that Senana would be petitioning for her husband's release without his desire (no-one would choose to stay in prison after all), but why does she not have the prior written agreement from him? This could perhaps suggest several things; Either Senana had not visited her husband in prison, she had decided the terms of his release without either his knowledge or she is petitioning because she needs him to return home – for security, wealth or companionship? We of course can't be entirely sure.

Gwyneth Richards argues that Senana had spent long periods of time running the estate and there appears to be no evidence that this was unsuccessful, although she may miss him, there doesn't seem to be the urgent need for him to return home to help her (Richards 2009 p.34). The fact that she offers money for his release, leads us to assume that she had access to or perhaps the permission to use money. 1241 was a time of great unrest in Gwynedd. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, the great ruler of Gwynedd had died in 1240, leaving two sons; the illegitimate Gruffudd (married to Senana) and the legitimate Dafydd (Jenkins 2007 p.89). Under Welsh law, Gruffudd would inherit in the same way as Dafydd would; 'If it happens that a person makes pregnant a women of bush and brake, it is right for him to maintain the child' (Pryce 2005 p.50). An agreement with either brother would enable peace between Gwynedd and the English crown and disrupt the desires of developing a united Wales which resulted in the arrest of Gruffudd and subsequently Senana agreeing to peace on his release. In terms of agency for Senana, this highlights her position as being a female who was taking centre stage in a political war between Wales and England. Historian Susan Johns argues that this demonstration of political agency shows that 'Senana was a key element in the diplomatic process' (Johns 2013 p.103).

Outside of the political framework, it is worth mentioning the level of agency which is not so dramatic. Senana had made a deliberate decision to petition the king and although we can never be certain of her reasons why, this demonstrates her desire for independent choice. It also shows on a practical level her ability to travel to Shrewsbury, to access funds, to ask for support from local Marcher families; her ability to act outside of her role as a wife. It is also prudent to recognise Senana as a mother to six children. Pregnancy and childbirth were responsible for up to fifty percent of all young female deaths in the middle ages (Högberg in Dickinson et al.2013 p.2). Senana had survived childbirth at least six times and raised all her children through early childhood when the infant mortality rate was as high as one third (Gowland et al. 2007 p.1). Gruffudd had been imprisoned since at least 1228, the petition to release him is dated 1241, which means, there were long periods of time when she was the sole parent of her children (Christie 1887). She manages to do this although her husband and her child are in prison and chooses to expose two of her other children to the same fate, a decision which could not have been easy. One of Senana's children is Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the 'Prince of Wales' (Jenkins 2007 p.90) and although an analysis of Llywelyn

lies outside of this study, his military prowess, determination and belief in a united Wales may just have come from Senana. His father spent considerable years in prison, absent from his upbringing and although it is conjecture, it would be comforting to think that Senana's bravery and impetus had a bearing upon his personality.

Chapter 3: Joan 'Princess of Wales'

Joan was the illegitimate daughter of King John (reigned 1199-1216) and the wife to Llewelyn ap Iorwerth (Columbia encyclopaedia 2017). There is a complicated genealogical relationship between Senana and Joan, as Gruffudd was not the son of Joan but the son of Tangwystl although he was the son of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Johns 2013 p.94). Joan also plays a role in the politics of the Norman conquest due to her position as the mother of Dafydd (brother to Senana's husband Gruffudd) and the role of daughter to King John. The petition to Pope Honorius III 29 April 1226, legitimises Joan's birth (Pryce 2005 p.446). Legitimising Joan's birth would in turn legitimise her son Dafydd's rule which would, as mentioned above, create a divide throughout Gwynedd. Aside from agency viewed against a political structure, it is intriguing to view Joan through the structure of female sexual relationships and female constraints of chastity and modesty.

Detailed in an entry in *Annales Cestrienses Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburg At Chester 1215-34*, William de Braose is hung for having an affair with Joan in 1230 (Christie 2018). He had previously been imprisoned by Llywelyn in 1228 although this chronicle doesn't state why. He was the grandson of the ferocious Marcher Lord William de Briouze which may bear some reflection upon the relationship between the families (Turner 2006). The annals also state that Joan is imprisoned for a 'long time' (Christie 2018). Although this may have always been the intention when the order was issued, Joan is released by Llywelyn in 1231 just one year later. Perhaps one year was considered a long time, or perhaps it seemed that holding was no longer serving any purpose, we can't be sure but it is presumed the marriage continued after her release.

Modesty, chastity and fidelity were expected of women by men; chastity and modesty before, and modesty and fidelity once they were married. Adultery, we assume was met with contempt, more so for women than for men. Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) discusses noblewomen's infidelity in his *Journey through Wales 1146-1223*. He claims that Mahel's mother Anne, who was married to Bernard de Newmarch, 'held an adulterous intercourse with a certain knight' (Cambrensis 1908 p.26). When the son discovered their affair, the knight was severely physically punished and banished. It is worth noting here how Anne is described only as a wife and mother. Gerald regards the affair as a 'heavy loss of modesty' and as a 'disgrace of infamy' (Cambrensis 1908 p.27). The passage continues

with references to Ecclesiastes and the opinion that women have an innate position which renders them angry and resentful with an ability to de-honour themselves. Gerald chooses the phrase 'small is the wickedness of man compared to the wickedness of woman' (Cambrensis YR p.27). In just one account spanning two pages, it is possible to deduce that society honoured female compliance through modesty, the marriage and of course, female fidelity. The Mabinogion, is a collection of eleven traditional tales from fourteenth century manuscripts which would have been transmitted orally. The First branch of The Mabinogion has fidelity as a key theme. The noblemen of the Mabinogion hunt, carouse and drink whereas the women are beautiful, chaste and loyal. 'Maiden' he said, 'for the sake of the man you love most, wait for me' (Davies 2007 p.54). 'Mabinogion' translates roughly as tales for boys, is this a further demonstration of history as a predominantly male institution? (Davies 2007 p.11)

The Laws of Hywel Dda also gives us some insight into the behaviour that was expected in marriage and the consequences when this wasn't adhered to. Interestingly, the punishment of Joan and William de Braose doesn't coincide with the law codes. *The Law of Hywel Dda* (Jenkins trans. & ed. 2000) is a collection of translated texts which were collated from material most likely originating from the tenth century through to the thirteenth. The core material dates from the tenth century to which manuscripts were added throughout the next three centuries. Jenkins makes us aware that material was added and discarded so as a body of evidence it is not exact, but it does demonstrate to an extent how the law in Wales developed. They are also a reflection of the beliefs of the person who compiled the texts; prescriptive rather than descriptive which also gives historians an idea of what society demanded of people from others (Jenkins 2000 p.xxiii). The section titled 'The Laws of Women' are primarily focused upon the payment of 'amobr' which is translated as 'a fee payable to a woman's lord, originally on the loss of her virginity' and is calculated dependent upon her status, determining her virginity and her worth in terms of material goods (Jenkins 2000 p.311). The laws also cover pregnancy, rape and ownership of property but all laws are in the context of punishment by compensation which Jenkins suggests was a feature of Welsh law more so than English law (Jenkins 2000 p.xx). The laws cover infidelity on both the male and female side. If a man commits infidelity, she is entitled to compensation of 'six score pence on the first occasion; for the second, a pound; if she finds

him the third time, she can separate from him without losing any of what is hers' (Jenkins 2000 p.53). However, if she fails to leave him after the third time, she is not entitled to 'wynebwerth' (Jenkins 2000 p.392) which appears to be a type of compensation. If she doesn't claim it, she will not ever be entitled to it 'for she is a shameful woman' (Jenkins 2000 p.53). It seems that on the one hand Welsh law is progressive, offering the ability to separate but on the other, archaically legally oppressive.

In relation to female infidelity, the onus appears to be upon whether the woman allows the infidelity to occur. If a woman acts manifestly with another man, he can leave her without compensation and the new partner will need to compensate the husband. The laws claim that it is insulting to the husband if a woman commits a 'gross offence' by 'allowing copulation with her' or fondling (Jenkins 2000 p.48). The term '*allows*' suggests that the female does demonstrate a degree of choice but removes the sense of moral judgement from the man. There are separate and extensive rules regarding rape so this clause seems to deal exclusively with consensual extra-marital sex. In relation to the affair between Joan and William, it could be argued that William was so harshly punished due to his position as the grandson of William de Briouze, who it is claimed fell dramatically from King John's favour however, by this point, the Briouze family had lost significant lands and barely appear in chronicles post 1230 (Turner 2006). Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider why Joan would have what we assume was a consensual sexual affair. It is clear from Joan's own legitimisation by the pope that she would have been aware of the importance of undenied paternity of heirs. It is realistic to expect Joan to be concerned about the paternity of her children upon the public discovery of an affair or for her to be fearful of an unexpected pregnancy. This begs the question of motivation for Joan's relationship; love, companionship, desire? At this point, there is no evidence to suggest how and why they met as the only evidence is the end of their affair however, perhaps the level of punishment suggests several things; Llywelyn is concerned about the affair resuming or a pregnancy and the question of paternity. Perhaps Joan was unwilling to end the relationship. Of course, any suggestion is speculative, but against the societal constraints of modesty, chastity, dynastical and political consequences, Joan had taken a considerable risk to engage in this relationship and to demonstrate her agency.

A final point about Joan which isn't entirely succinct with this study but does demonstrate how difficult it is for historians to accurately access and interpret sources is Joan's alleged burial at Llanfaes and her effigy which is now situated at Beaumaris. It is assumed that the effigy is of Joan commissioned by Llywelyn after her death and is listed as so on the Coflein website '*The online catalogue of archaeology, buildings, industrial and maritime heritage in Wales*'. (www.coflein.gov.uk n.d) However comparative scholarship suggests that the effigy is too late for it to be Joan as the dress depicted isn't visible in any other evidence before the 1270's and the Brut y Tywysogyon chronicles Joan's death as 1237 (Williams 1860 p.241). Dr Madeline Gray further suggests that the effigy could be Eleanor de Montfort or interestingly Senana (Gray 2018). More relevant information to this study appears in Andy Abrams chapter in *Monastic Wales (University Wales Press 2013)* It appears that the noblewomen of Gwynedd were buried at Llanfaes; Joan, Senana, Eleanor de Montfort and Gwenhwyfar which leads some to suggest that Llywelyn ap Iorwerth wanted to celebrate his female family but Abrams argues that this could be the deliberate choice of a group of important and powerful females (Abrams in Burton et al. 2013 p.110). Agency strikes again!

Chapter 4: Emma de Audley

The final study is of Emma de Audley who will be discussed in the context of land ownership. The 1697 translation of the History of Wales by Caradoc of Llancarvon (Llancarvon 1697) states that Emma is the daughter of James de Audley. The Audley estates by 1227, ran from the eastern to the western boundaries of Staffordshire. As well as extensive land owners they were also property magnates, holding castles at Heighley, Staffordshire, Redcastle at Shropshire and a hall at Newhall near Nantwich (Morgan 2008). The Norman conquest of Wales took at least 200 years and therefore marriage was a convenient and less violent way to legitimise English colonisation and control (Richards 2009 p.125). Emma married Gruffudd ap Madog, Prince of Northern Powys on the 9th March 1258 (Pryce 2005 719). As Powys bordered the Audley lands in Staffordshire, it can be assumed that this marriage served the purpose of ensuring a more peaceful relationship between Powys and the Marcher lord. Gruffudd had granted the dower of the Manor of Overton in Maelor Saesneh and a manor ay Eyton (Richards 2009 p.148). After Gruffudd ap Madog's death in 1269, the land is passed to her son Llywelyn which was subsequently used as dower in his own marriage (Richards 2009 p.149). In a petition to Edward I dated the 11th December 1282, Emma produces a written contract between herself and Llywelyn to prove that she had been promised Llanarmon in Cynllaith and rent from lands in Tregor, Nanheudwy. It had been agreed between Emma and Llywelyn that he would pay her £7 a year during her lifetime in rent for the land. If he were to die, the lands would be returned to her. Llywelyn died alongside Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282 and the lands seized by Roger Mortimer (Pryce 2005 p.723). It is prudent to mention that this petition must be later than 1282 considering Llywelyn's death. Emma had previously petitioned the king concerning her lands, particularly the manor at Eyton which had been handed in dower to her daughter-in-law Margaret of Bromfield. Examining the retrospective language used, it appears that Emma and Margaret had amicably settled an agreement and although Edward I may have heard the petition, agreement had been made beforehand (Pryce 2005 p.721). Gwyneth Richards argues that Margaret is the sister of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the medieval Prince of Wales and therefore sister of Senana (Richards n.d).

Emma and indeed Margaret, demonstrate several examples of agency here. Margaret is mentioned twenty-three times in court rolls and Emma is mentioned in a series of claims

regarding her land (Richards n.d). Emma has a degree of financial agency and security for and her children. Although the earlier petitions secure the estate for Gruffudd's heirs, these are also Emma's. There is no evidence to question the paternity of their four children. The later petitions indicate that Emma is aware that the relationship between the English and the Welsh would end in violence and the likelihood of her son dying was high which would leave her without support. The rent from the lands would secure some personal financial security. Emma is presumably educated, able to read and write and like Senana, petitions the king personally. T.J Llewelyn Pritchard in his 1854 book 'The Heroines of Welsh History' claims that Emma was forced to hand her two grandsons to John, Earl Warren and Roger Mortimer. The children were allegedly drowned when Edward I became the Prince of Wales (Llywelyn – Pritchard 1854 p.243). Pritchard rather cruelly suggests that Emma would have felt that her greatest ever error was having a high opinion of her sovereign and death was a welcome reprieve for her. It isn't even conclusive that these were Emma's grandchildren and of course there is absolutely no evidence to suggest Emma felt this.

Regarding Welsh property law, the law of Hywel Dda states that 'if by death they separate, she is entitled to have everything' although as a woman it still remained the property of her lord which could be her husband, son or father leaving her no other way to support her family and in a precarious position (Jenkins 2000 p.46). Recognition of a widow's dower was legalised by early English law and *Bracton On the laws and Customs of England* (Thorne et al. 1968) states that 'dower is that which a free man gives his spouse at the church door' (Thorne 1968 p.265). 'Dower, once assigned ought to be free' and was not to be used to pay her husband's debts, it was a provision to enable care for her house and her children (Thorne 1968 p.281). Under English law, daughters would also inherit land, although they were known as 'remote heirs', whereby the 'near heirs' or their sons, would inherit first (Thorne 1968 p.189). Historian Emma Cavell argues English law would be adopted by the Welsh court in regard to dower when necessary (Cavell 2007 p.67). Cavell also suggests that the sons of mixed marriages, were not keen to hand their properties back to their English mothers (Cavell 2007 p.66). Successfully petitioning the king against your own son, is arguably a courageous if an uncomfortable display of agency and it is especially telling that Emma and Margaret make an agreement which wouldn't require the interference of the king nor their male advisors.

As previously discussed, analysing the law alongside other sources provides historians with an idea of how society may have functioned. It also suggests that the question of female agency was becoming more apparent. The Statute of Rhuddlan in 1282, implemented English law across the remaining Welsh principalities and assigned Edward I to rule over Wales (Bowen 1903 p.35). The statute refers directly to dower and recognises dower when '(a) there was an assignment of the third part of the whole land belonging to the husband which was during her coverture, and (b) when a son with his father's assent endowed his wife' (Bowen 1903 p.39). Different to Welsh law, The Statute disinherited illegitimate sons and gave lawful heirs the power to disinherit their illegitimate siblings and recognised daughters as heirs in the absence of sons (Bowen 1903 p.39). Initially this appears to improve the position for Welsh women. However, as 'Englishmen married to Welsh women shall not bear office in Wales' this is a direct response to deal with any level of agency from Welsh women as well as avoiding further inter marriage which of course tightens the social bonds and increases Welsh political strength (Bowen 1903 p.165). It seems likely that the English sought to remove any degree of Welsh political power including that of the Welsh noblewomen which of course suggests that their level of political influence was if not considerable, certainly worth attempting to legislate against.

Conclusion

The agency demonstrated by Welsh noblewomen during the thirteenth century has been measured in relation to medieval law, politics, sexual morality and property ownership. Applying feminist theory has helped this study to identify the gaps in existing historiography. Whilst the Mabinogion demonstrates the qualities that were preferred and revered in women, it is limited as all poems are because it isn't a factual and unbiased account of society but a reflection of the authors and those who recorded them. Nevertheless, it provides a feeling of the culture surrounding society. Senana demonstrates her public agency by petitioning Henry III but provides a personal level of agency in her role as a single parent for the majority of her married life and as the wife of an exiled husband. Princess Joan demonstrates agency by partaking in a sexual relationship outside of marriage when the repercussions of a pregnancy and questionable parenting would be destructive for a noblewoman. Emma de Audley on the other hand, exhibits her agency on a more visible level through ongoing petitions to Edward I whilst on a private level, her agreement with Margaret away from the court suggests that women had the desire and the ability to shape their own futures without legislation.

The Statute of Rhuddlan outwardly appears to improve the situation for Noblewomen, to honour their dowry and inheritance and to recognise the claims of daughters. However, further research would help to determine if this was the case. Senana, Joan and Emma disappear from history after the thirteenth century, and without the discovery and translation of more manuscripts, we will probably never know what happened to these three women which would certainly make for interesting future study. Although women have been traditionally pushed into the side lines of history, with a little careful exploration it is clear that women used their power in a variety of ways. Women and in particular Senana, Joan and Emma undoubtedly demonstrate agency in a patriarchal society even if the records are determined not to tell 'her-story'.

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