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Dublin Core

Title

Nest ferch Rhys – Princess of Deheubarth | Nest ferch Rhys – Tywysoges Deheubarth

Subject

Welsh Medieval History

Irish Medieval History

Nest ferch Rhys

Creator

Linda Asman

Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

Date

2023

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Relation

<https://perma.cc/N9QX-JAX4>

Format

Curatescape story

Language

English

Welsh

Coverage

53.347521973094096, -6.236458448843697

Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

Linda Asman relates the story of Princess Nest, the Medieval ‘Helen of Wales’, famous for her legendary beauty which, like Helen of Troy, ultimately led to her abduction and civil war.

Lede (Welsh)

Mae Linda Asman yn adrodd stori Tywysoges Nest, yr ‘Helen o Gymru’ Ganoloesol, a oedd yn enwog am ei harddwch chwedlonol, ond a arweiniodd yn y pen draw at ei chipio a rhyfel cartref, fel Helen o Droea.

Story

Very few women are written about in the high Medieval period; often a mere mention as someone’s wife or mother. Not so with Nest. Born in *c.*1085, Princess Nest was the daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of Deheubarth, the old Welsh kingdom of southwest Wales. During a battle outside Brecon in 1093, Rhys was killed and south Wales overrun by a Norman force. Whilst her brother Gruffydd ap Rhys was taken to safety in Ireland, Nest, at the tender age of 13, was taken as a hostage to the English court of William Rufus.

This beautiful young hostage attracted the attentions of none other than the King’s brother, Prince Henry Beauclerc (later to become Henry I) and entered into a liaison, which was to result in at least one child – Henry Fitzhenry. It was no brief affair, and Nest openly became Henry’s mistress. This was to change when Henry seized the crown and wed Matilda of Scotland. Nest could no longer remain in court and was given in marriage to Gerald, Castellan of Pembroke. However, the marriage appears to have been a happy one, resulting in three sons and a daughter Angharad (the mother of Gerald of Wales). Nest brought with her Carew as a dowry and there Gerald built their first castle.

The story of Nest’s abduction by Owain ap Cadwgan in 1106 is recounted in *Brut Y Tywysogion*, the Chronicle of the Princes. Gerald had built a second castle at Little Cennarth (Cilgerran). On hearing that Nest was in the castle, Owain accompanied by a small retinue, went to visit her as his kinswoman. Owain was well received by Gerald but left the castle mad with lust for his beautiful cousin. ‘Smitten by the Devil’, Owain returned with a small force of men, broke into the castle and laid siege to the room in which Nest and her husband lay. Nest took charge of the situation, persuading Gerald to escape through a garderobe and convinced the interlopers that he was not there. Owain then seized her together with her children, fired the castle and carried them off into Powys.

There is conjecture as to whether Nest welcomed Owain’s advances. However, the *Brut* informs us that she only promised to stay with Owain on condition that he release the children back to their father. Out of love for her, Owain agreed. Nest’s abduction incensed King Henry and the Norman lords. Owain’s Welsh enemies were bribed to attack him, but he escaped to the safety of Ireland. Accounts vary as to whether or not Nest accompanied him there, but she was eventually returned to Gerald.

In 1112, Nest’s brother, Grufudd, returned from exile to reclaim his father’s kingdom and led a Welsh rebellion against the Normans. However, as Gerald was on friendly terms with

Gruffudd, Pembroke was spared the Welsh raids to which Cardigan, Carmarthen, Gowerland and Cemaes were subjected. It was during these troubles that Gerald was finally able to exact his revenge against Owain who, having become reconciled to Henry I, was now fighting on the side of the King. Gerald, riding with a force of Flemings, happened upon Owain with a small force and killed him. After this incident, we hear no more about Gerald and do not know when and where he eventually died.

Nest was later married to two other men: the Sheriff of Pembroke, William Hait with whom she had a child, William Fitzhait and then Stephen, the Constable of Cardigan by whom she had another son, Robert Fitzstephen, who was one of the first conquerors of Ireland. The date of Nest's death is unknown and it has been suggested that it would have been c.1136. Her legacy really lies in her many children: from her sprang a dynasty - the Fitzgeralds, the Fitzhenrys and the Carews, who led the campaigns against Ireland. She was grandmother of Gerald of Wales and among her eminent descendants was President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Story (Welsh)

Ychydig iawn o fenywod yr ysgrifennir amdanynt yn ystod anterth y cyfnod Canoloesol; yn aml, dim ond cyfeiriad a wneir at rywun sy'n wraig neu'n fam rhywun. Ond nid felly gyda Nest. Ganwyd Tywysoges Nest tua 1085 ac roedd yn ferch Rhys ap Tewdwr, brenin y Deheubarth, hen deyrnas Gymreig de-orllewin Cymru. Yn ystod brwydr y tu allan i Aberhonddu yn 1093, lladdwyd Rhys a goresgynnwyd de Cymru gan lu Normanaidd. Cludwyd ei brawd, Gruffydd ap Rhys i le diogel yn Iwerddon, ond cymrwyd Nest fel gwystl i lys Seisnig William Rufus, a hithau ond yn 13 oed.

Tynnwyd sylw brawd y Brenin, Tywysog Henry Beauclerc (a fyddai'n Henry I yn ddiweddarach) at y gwystl ifanc brydferth, a chafodd berthynas â hi, a arweiniodd at o leiaf un plentyn – Henry Fitzhenry. Nid perthynas fer fu hon, a daeth Nest yn feistres agored Henry. Byddai hyn yn newid pan ddaeth Henry yn frenin a phriodi Matilda o'r Alban. Nid oedd modd i Nest aros yn y llys mwyach ac fe'i rhoddwyd yn wraig i Gastellydd o Benfro. Fodd bynnag, mae'n ymddangos y bu hon yn briodas hapus, gan arwain at dri mab a merch, sef Angharad (mam Gerallt Gymro). Caeriu oedd gwaddol Nest ac adeiladodd Gerald eu castell cyntaf yno.

Adroddir y stori ynghylch Owain ap Cadwgan yn cipio Nest yn 1106 ym *Mrut Y Tywysogion*. Roedd Gerald wedi adeiladu ail gastell yng Nghenarth Fychan (Cilgerran). Ar ôl clywed bod Nest yn y castell, aeth Owain i ymweld â hi fel ei berthynas, yng nghwmni gosgordd fechan. Croesawyd Owain gan Gerald ond gadawodd y castell yn wyllt yn ei ddyhead am ei gyfnither. Yn glaf gan serch, dychwelodd Owain gyda llu bach o ddynion, gan dorri i mewn i'r castell a rhoi'r ystafell lle'r oedd Nest a'i gŵr yn gorwedd dan warchae. Penderfynodd Nest gymryd yr awenau, gan berswadio Gerald i ddianc trwy wardrob a darbwyllo'r ymwithwyr nad oedd yno. Yna, fe'i cipiwyd gan Owain, a'i phump o blant, llosgodd y castell a'u cludo i Bowys.

Mae pobl yn dyfalu a oedd Nest wedi croesawu sylw Owain neu beidio. Fodd bynnag, mae'r Brut yn ein hysbysu ei bod hi wedi addo aros gydag Owain ar yr amod y byddai'n rhyddhau'r plant yn ôl at eu tad. Gan ei bod yn ei charu, cytunodd Owain. Roedd cipio Nest wedi digio Brenin Henry a'r arglwyddi Normanaidd. Rhoddwyd cil-dwrn i elynion Cymreig Owain i ymosod arno, ond llwyddodd i ddianc i ddiogelwch Iwerddon. Ceir gwahanol fersiynau o'r stori ynghylch a oedd Nest wedi teithio yno gydag ef neu beidio, ond fe'i dychwelwyd at Gerald yn y pen draw.

Yn 1112, dychwelodd brawd Nest, sef Gruffydd, gan hawlio teyrnas ei dad a chan arwain gwrthryfel Cymreig yn erbyn y Normaniaid. Fodd bynnag, gan bod Gerald ar delerau da

gyda Gruffydd, arbedwyd Penfro rhag dioddef y cyrchoedd Cymreig y bu'n rhaid i Aberteifi, Caerfyrddin, Bro Gŵyr a Chemaes eu dioddef. Yn ystod y cyfnod cythryblus hwn, bu modd i Gerald ddial ar Owain o'r diwedd, a oedd erbyn hyn, ar ôl cymodi â Henry I, yn ymladd ar ochr y Brenin. Gan deithio gyda llu o Fflandrysiad, digwyddodd Gerald ddod ar draws Owain a llu bychan, ac fe'i lladdodd. Ar ôl y digwyddiad hwn, ni fyddwn yn clywed mwy am Gerald ac nid ydym yn gwybod pryd y bu farw.

Yn ddiweddarach, bu Nest yn briod â dau ddyn arall: Siryf Penfro, William Hait, a chafodd blentyn gydag ef, sef William Fitzhait ac yna, Stephen, Cwnstabl Aberteifi, a chafodd fab arall gydag ef, sef Robert Fitzstephen, a fu'n un o goncwerwyr cyntaf Iwerddon. Nid yw dyddiad marwolaeth Nest yn hysbys, ac awgrymwyd y byddai wedi bod tua 1136. Ei gwaddol yw ei phlant niferus mewn gwirionedd: oddi hi, gwelwyd teyrnachau yn tarddu – teuluoedd Fitzgerald, Fitzhenry a Caeriw, a arweiniodd yr ymgyrchoedd yn erbyn Iwerddon. Roedd yn fam-gu Gerallt Gymro ac roedd Arlywydd John Fitzgerald Kennedy ymhlith ei disgynyddion enwog.

Factoid

Related Resources

Johnson, Ben. "Princess Nest". Historic UK, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofWales/Princess-Nest/>.

Lawless, E. "Nest ferch Rhys", Hidden Historical Heroines, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://erinlawless.wordpress.com/2012/08/20/ten-hidden-historical-heroines-02-nest-ferch-rhys/>.

Linda Asman, "Isabel de Clare - Countess of Pembroke and Striguil," Ports, Past and Present, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://portspastpresent.eu/admin/items/show/1268>.

Linda Asman, "Aoife MacMurrough – Princess of Leinster, Countess of Pembroke and Striguil," Ports, Past and Present, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://portspastpresent.eu/admin/items/show/1267>.

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