

*The Taming of the Dragon. Edward I and the Conquest of Wales.* By Wayne B. Bartlett. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003; pp. xii + 228. £20.00).

Wayne B. Bartlett's book is a remarkable work, written in a compelling and passionate style, for that wider public with a passion for the history and cultural heritage of thirteenth-century Wales. This book is also his tribute to the great Welsh historian J. E. Morris.<sup>1</sup> Bartlett's interest in medieval Wales goes back to his childhood excursions to the Welsh countryside, where he was struck by the majesty of Edward I's castles. As a child he knew little of the great king who built those castles, and even less of the traumatic events that led to their construction - the only surviving testimonials of a time long gone, when Edward I had resolved to conquer and annex once and for all the Celtic principality of Wales. The general lack of interest in Welsh medieval history that Bartlett encountered in his school days and his own great passion for the history of the thirteenth century led him to write this book, in order to provide a wider readership with an accessible account of Edward I's reign, and his struggle with the last prince of Gwynedd, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (d. 1282), who was to style himself as Prince of Wales.

Bartlett is an international financial and management consultant with a keen interest in the history of the thirteenth century. As an amateur historian he can already be credited with three books on the Crusades.<sup>2</sup> *The Taming of the Dragon* comes as a welcome contribution to the debate over the 'anglicization' of Wales, at a time when more and more concerns are being voiced about the numbers of English people investing in secondary residences there. Bartlett's book shows in a clear and well-constructed way how the anglicization of Wales has been a military, political, judicial, and economic concern since the late eleventh century. Bartlett's narrative has the merit of not limiting itself to the chronological framework provided by Edward I's reign (1272-1307), in that it explains how the conquest of the Welsh by the English affected a long period extending from the late eleventh century to the late sixteenth century. One could argue that even today the process continues; certain aspects of Welsh culture have still not been fully assimilated and anglicized. The survival of Welsh culture and identity is a remarkable feat achieved by a proud people, which for centuries struggled for survival. The conflict obviously had its moments of intense drama, and those memorable events are the pivots around which Bartlett constructs a wider narrative, in order to show how the conflict with Wales dramatically affected the feudal basis on which wars were fought. Ultimately this conflict led to the Conquest of Wales, and to that society-changing phenomenon that came to be known as bastard feudalism.<sup>3</sup>

The scholarly and student community should be wary of the extent to which this book can be used. Although the narrative provides a useful introduction to the history of the Conquest of Wales for the uninitiated reader, it is heavily based on the seminal

works of M. C. Prestwich, J. Davies, J. B. Smith and R. R. Davies.<sup>4</sup> The declared purpose of the present book is not, of course, to provide a new contribution to research based on archival work. Bartlett himself states that the book is addressed to the lay reader who thinks that the Edwardian conquest was a sudden event in history (p. x). The problem for the scholars and students of the period is that Bartlett's book does not provide systematic references to primary and secondary sources. Quoted passages are mostly referenced, but sometimes potentially useful references are missing.<sup>5</sup> A further problem for scholars lies in a certain number of inconsistencies and inaccuracies in references to manuscript and printed source material.<sup>6</sup> One might have expected the publisher to have picked up these errors and made the necessary corrections before publishing. One further point concerns some noteworthy absences in the bibliography. Scholars of medieval Welsh history may, for example, be surprised to find reference to only one of R. R. Davies's remarkable and groundbreaking studies of the Conquest of Wales (*The Age of Conquest*). His other books on the subject provide a much fuller account of the history of Wales and England and have challenged many of the pillars of the historiographical establishment, while also remaining accessible to a wider audience, thanks to the clear and pleasant style in which they are written.<sup>7</sup>

On a more positive note, it must be said that *The Taming of the Dragon* does have the merit of reminding the reader that much of what we assume to know about the Conquest of Wales is not based on historical facts: firstly, that there was not one single event that led to the conquest; secondly, many Welshmen actually fought in the English armies led by Edward I against Wales; thirdly, although Edward's early campaigns were still based on the feudal system of levy, the troops were progressively recruited and paid directly by the crown, thus allowing Edward greater direct control over the army; fourthly, the Welsh lords were far from being united in a common cause and were more often trying to defend their personal interests, shifting between alliances with Edward I, the Marcher lords, and individual attempts to gain control over parts of Wales; and lastly, the control Edward I tried to gain over Wales mainly, but not solely, through the construction of massive castles did not always work as planned and, indeed, put immense strain on the royal finances, to the point where, by 1343, Beaumaris Castle, the largest castle-building project on Anglesey, was partly unfinished and partly in ruins.

Bartlett's book describes how, from the moment William I landed in England, there had been attempts to conquer at least some Welsh territories, to be distributed among the commanders that had followed the Conqueror from Normandy. These were to become known as the Marches of Wales. Even before becoming King of England in 1272, Edward I had experienced the effects of revolt in Wales. In 1256 Llywelyn ap Gruffudd had risen up in arms against the authority of the English. The situation deteriorated further in the 1270s, when several disputes between Llywelyn and some of the Marcher lords re-ignited the tensions in Wales. These events were ultimately to lead to a major conflict in 1277. This should not, however, be interpreted as a war of conquest: 'it was rather a case of attempting to discipline a recalcitrant baron' (p. 88).

Ultimately Llywelyn was defeated in 1278 and, although he had lost most of his influence and power over Wales, he was allowed to keep his title of Prince of Wales. This victory was followed by the ambitious plans by Edward I to secure his dominion with the construction of castles, such as those at Flint and Rhuddlan.

The second great conflict in Wales, which was to become a true war of conquest, was sparked off in 1282 by Llywelyn's brother Dafydd. One of the main causes was the 'widespread resentment at the imposition of English law, which to many native Welshmen was little more than colonisation by osmosis' (p. 107). In December of that year Llywelyn fell at the battle of the Iron Bridge, leaving no successor to the throne of Gwynedd; Dafydd was executed the following year. As a result of this conflict the Statute of Wales was drawn up at Rhuddlan on 19 March 1284, and this event 'in practical terms, moved a long way towards making Wales merely an extension of England' (p. 155). That same year saw the birth at Caernarfon of the future Edward II, who was in 1302 to become the first English Prince of Wales, 'yet another symbolic assertion of the subjugation of Wales' (p. 160).

Two further revolts, led by Rhys ap Maredudd in 1287, and Madog ap Llywelyn, Maelgwyn ap Rhys and Morgan ap Maredudd in 1294, were to prove how volatile the situation in Wales was during most of Edward I's reign. Bartlett well remarks how all the Welsh revolts against English rule seemed to have come like thunderbolts, violent and unpredictable. But even later, in Edward II's reign, there were still some Welsh lords who were still considering revolt. The English defeat by the Scottish troops at Bannockburn in 1314 lifted 'so many misconceptions that might have existed concerning the invincibility of the English within the British Isles' (p. 199). This event, combined with the terrible famine that hit Wales the following year, led the English, who by this time had learned from the mistakes made by Edward I, to take serious measures. In particular Gruffudd Llywelyn, at this time the most powerful of the Welshmen, who had been negotiating with Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, was arrested. Nevertheless, a revolt broke out in Glamorgan under the leadership of Llywelyn Gwen, who was executed in 1317. This revolt was to prove that the Marcher lords and their relationships with the Welsh were important factors in the stability, or rather the instability, of the region. The insurrection in Glamorgan had been favoured by the Earl of Gloucester's death at Bannockburn, and the consequent absence of control over those territories until 1317, when Gloucester's son-in-law, Hugh Despenser the younger, took control of most of these lands. Bartlett shows convincingly how the Marches were a real political and judicial problem within England, and how it came to be from there that another of the best-known episodes of Anglo-Welsh history was to emerge. The last great Welsh revolt of the Middle Ages was fought under the leadership of Owain Glyn Dŵr between 1405 and 1410. But 'by the sixteenth century, the March effectively disappeared and Wales was an entire principality of the English crown' (p. 201).

Despite the shortcomings in the footnotes, Bartlett's *The Taming of the Dragon* is an interesting and passionate account of Edward I's reign and the ways in which he was able to conquer Wales. It also explains why the many magnificent castles that had intrigued Bartlett in his youth were built and what their primary function was. Overall, it is a book that deserves to be read and to figure on the bookshelves of all those interested in medieval Welsh and English history.

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<sup>1</sup> J. E. Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901; repr. Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Bartlett, *God Wills It! An Illustrated History of The Crusades* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999); idem, *An Ungodly War. The Sack of Constantinople and The Fourth Crusade* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000); idem, *The Assassins. The Story of Medieval Islam's Secret Sect* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The theme of bastard feudalism is not developed in the present book. For those interested in this topic I recommend the following seminal studies: K. B. McFarlane, 'Bastard Feudalism', in *England in the Fifteenth Century. Collected Essays* (London: Hambledon, 1981), pp. 23-43; P. R. Coss, 'Bastard Feudalism Revised', *Past and Present*, 125 (1989), pp. 27-64; J. M. W. Bean, *The Decline of English Feudalism, 1215-1540* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press & Barnes & Noble, 1968); idem, *From Lord to Patron. Lordship in Late Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> M. C. Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance under Edward I* (London: Faber, 1972); idem, *The Three Edwards. War and State in England 1272-1377* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980); idem, *Edward I* (London: Methuen, 1988); idem, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages. The English Experience* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996); J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1993); J. B. Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992); R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest, 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> References could be useful for the following paragraphs: p. 16 § 3, p. 20 § 2, p. 21 § 1, p. 23 § 4, p. 56 § 2, p. 68 § 3, p. 74 § 1, p. 93 § 1, p. 101 § 1, p. 132 § 1, p. 134 § 1, p. 138 § 2, p. 140 § 1, p. 141 § 2, p. 150 § 3, p. 153 § 3, p. 162 § 2, p. 171 § 4, p. 205 § 3.

<sup>6</sup> Among the problems in the footnotes it should be remarked that it is a standard convention among historians that the *Calendar of Close Rolls (CCR)* and the *Calendar of Patent Rolls (CPR)* are referred to by the year covered by the volume followed by a page number, and not with reference to membrane numbers, years and/or places, as in *The Taming of the Dragon*. Here follows a list of footnotes to be amended: Chapter IV, n. 5: *CCR 1272-1279*, p.2; n. 7: *CPR 1272-1281*, p. 72; n. 8: *CPR, 1272-1281*, p. 104-5; n. 11: *CPR 1272-1281*, p. 42-3; n. 23: here, the author should correct the reference; n. 27: *CPR 1272-1281*, p. 186; n. 28: *CPR 1272-1281*, p. 225. Chapter V, n. 3: PRO E 101/3/11 (the letter E already indicates that the document is in the Exchequer Accounts, and PRO stands for Public Record Office, the location of the document); n. 5: *CPR 1272-1281*, p. 225; n. 14: *CPR 1272-1281*, pp. 228-30; n.18: *CPR 1272-1281*, pp. 232-4. Chapter VI, n. 9: Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 186 (instead of

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Prestwich; Edward I, 186). Chapter VII, n. 12: This reference relates either to the *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, or the *Assize of Welsh Rolls*, or a reference to a manuscript preserved in the PRO, the author should specify the source of this document; n. 13: *CPR 1281-1292*, p. 15; n. 16: *CPR 1281-1292*, p. 11. Chapter IX, n. 3. *CPR 1281-1292*, pp. 48-9 (documents were issued from Rhuddlan on 20 August and 18 October, not on 8 August); n. 10: L. B. Smith in *Welsh History Review*, xi (1982), pp. 200-13; n. 12: L. B. Smith in *Welsh History Review*, xi (1982), pp. 200-13 (note that in the bibliography the page reference is incorrectly given as pp. 200-14). Chapter X, n. 5 : *CPR 1281-1292*, p. 69. Chapter XI, n. 1: should state the reference to the manuscript or printed source.

<sup>7</sup> R. R. Davies, *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales, 1282-1400* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); idem, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); idem, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).