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Princely Ambition: Ideology, castle-building and landscape in Gwynedd, 1194–1283

Craig Owen Jones

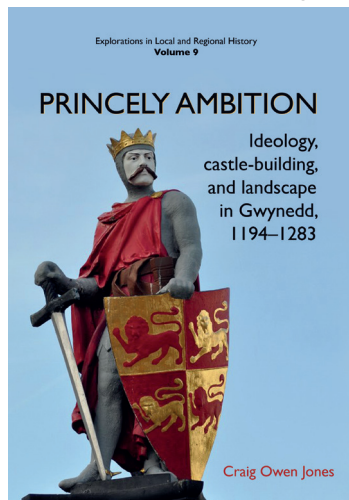
While the Edwardian castles of Conwy, Beaumaris, Harlech and Caernarfon are rightly hailed as outstanding examples of castle architecture, the castles of the native Welsh princes are far more enigmatic. Where some dominate their surroundings as completely as any castle of Edward I, others are concealed in the depths of forests, or tucked away in the corners of valleys, their relationship with the landscape of which they are a part far more difficult to discern than their English counterparts.

This ground-breaking book seeks to analyse the castle-building activities of the native princes of Wales in the thirteenth century. Whereas early castles were built to delimit territory and as an expression of Llywelyn I ab Iorwerth's will to power following his violent assumption of the throne of Gwynedd in the 1190s, by the time of his grandson Llywelyn II ap Gruffudd's later reign in the 1260s and 1270s, the castles' prestige value had been superseded in importance by an understanding of the need to make the polity he created – the Principality of Wales – defensible.

Employing a probing analysis of the topographical settings and defensive dispositions of almost a dozen native Welsh masonry castles, Craig Owen Jones interrogates the long-held theory that the native princes' approach to castle-building in medieval Wales was characterised by ignorance of basic architectural principles, disregard for the castle's relationship to the landscape, and whimsy, in order to arrive at a new understanding of the castles' significance in Welsh society.

Princely Ambition also advances a timeline that synthesises various strands of evidence to arrive at a chronology of native Welsh castle-building. This exciting new account fills a crucial gap in scholarship on Wales' built heritage prior to the Edwardian conquest and establishes a nuanced understanding of important military sites in the context of native Welsh politics.

Craig Owen Jones is an Honorary Research Associate at Bangor University, Wales, and currently works as a lecturer at San Jose State University, California.



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