Kingship in Celtic society

- IE roots, *pead = rules, *reg = stretches
- IE *regs = king; Latin rex, Gaulish rix, Irish, ri, Welsh rhi.
- IE *teuta = tribe; Irish tuath, Welsh tud
- Words formed from these roots
  - Gaulish god’s name Teutates
  - Gaulish personal name Toutierix = tribal king
  - Irish ri tuaithe=tribal king
  - Welsh personal name Tudor
Sovereignty

• Goddess of the land seeks out the king
  – Archaeological evidence
    • Rosmerta and Esus
    • Rosmerta and Mercury
    • Epona and Mars
  – Literary evidence
    • Irish--Lugh and Flaithe (Baile in Scáile/Phantom’s Frenzy)
    • Welsh--Rhiannon and Pwyll (First Branch of the Mabinogi)
Feasting and drinking

- Irish feis = “feast,” from fo-aid = “sleeps with”
- Feast of Tara, discontinued in Christian era
- Gerald of Wales, c. 1185 AD
- Asvamedha (PIE ekwo-meydho), “horse-drunk”
- Gaulish personal name Epomeduos, “horse mead”
- Irish Medb, “drunkenness”
- Branwen and Matholwch (Second branch of *Mabinogi*)
- Rhiannon and Pwyll (First branch of the *Mabinogi*)
- Last kingship ritual in Ireland recorded in 1310, with accession of Felim O Conchobair as King of Connacht
Hill of Tara, Ireland
Kingship ritual illustrated in *Gerald of Wales’ History and Topography of Ireland*
Sovereignty ritual gone awry

- **Lebor Gebála (The Book of Invasions)**
  - Sons of Mil rape and kill the sovereignty goddesses Eriu, Fodla, Banba
- **The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel**
  - Sovereignty goddess appears as a hag and the king rejects her
- **Medb in the Tain**
  - Offers her “friendly thighs” to any warrior who will help her in her war with Ulster
Sacral kingship

• Important rituals/behaviors
  – Bravery
  – Hospitality
  – Generosity
  – Hunting
  – Truthfulness
  – Justice

• *Crith Gablach,* “On Status”, 7th century—gives a weekly schedule for kings
  – Sunday for drinking ale
  – Monday for legal business
  – Tuesday for fidchell/chess
  – Wednesday for watching greyhounds hunt
  – Thursday for marital relations
  – Friday for horse racing
  – Saturday for judging legal cases

• *Audacht Morainn,* “The Testament of Morainn,” 7th century
• *Fir Flathemainn,* “Prince’s Truth,” 7th century
Signs of sacral kingship

• Unusual birth
  – Pryderi ap Pwyll (First branch of Mabinogi)

• Irish geis (s), gessa (pl) = taboos
  – Fergus Mac Róich could not refuse a feast
  – Cuchulain could not eat dog meat, but could not refuse food given him

• Unusual death
  – Lleu Llaw Gyffes (Fourth branch of Mabinogi)
  – Diarmait Mac Cerbaill (The Death of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill)
Queens

• Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, 1st century AD
  – Queen and sovereignty figure?
• Boudicca, queen of the Iceni, d. 61 AD
  – Prasutagos, husband to Boudicca, died c. 60 AD
British/English kingdoms
Map from Peter Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain and Early England, 55 BC-AD 871*.

- The Invaders
  - Angles, Saxons, Irish, Picts
- British kingdoms
  - Dumnonia
  - Dyfed
  - Ceredigion
  - Gwent
  - Powys
  - Gwynedd
  - Gododdin
  - Strathclyde
  - Rheged
  - Elmet
- Wealh>>Wales, Welsh (foreigner/slave)
- Cymru, Cymro
British/Welsh kingship and culture

- Rhi/Ri = in personal names (Rigotamos/Riothamus, Rhiwallon)
- Brenhin = king
  - Tywysog = prince, Arglwydd = lord
- Teulu = war band
- Maelgwn Gwynedd, fl. 6th century
- Owain ab Urien, king of Rheged, fl. 7th century
- Rhodri Mawr, king of Gwynedd, d. 878
- Hywel Dda, d. 950
  - Ruled Gwynedd, Dyfed, and Powys
  - Cyfreith Hywel Dda (earliest text 12th c.)
- Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, d. 1063
  - Ruled Gwynedd, Powys, Dyfed, and Gwent
Early Medieval Ireland
Map from Nora Chadwick, *The Celts.*

- **The fifths**
  - Connaught, Cruachan Ai
  - Ulster, Emain Macha
  - Leinster, Dun Ailinne
  - Munster, Cashel
  - Meath, Tara

- **Levels of kingship**
  - Ard rí (high king)
  - Rí cóicid (provincial king)
  - Rúiri (over-king, king of many tribes)
  - Rí túaithe (king of one tribe)
The High Kingship

- Niall Noigiallach (Neill of the Nine Hostages)
  - Ui Néill (grandsons of Niall), modern O’Neill
- Loégaire mac Néill, 5th to 6th century CE
- Brian Boruma
  - Ui Brian (grandsons of Brian)
  - King of Munster, 965-1002
  - High King, 1002-1014
  - Battle of Clontarf, 1014
Christianization of Irish kingship

- Firflaith (just king)
- *Lebor Gebála (Book of Invasions, 7th-8th century)*
  - Sru (Irish for noble, wealthy; a Scythian said to be descended from Noah)
  - Scotta (said to be a daughter of Pharaoh and mother of Sru)
  - Nel (Cloud, reminiscent of pillar of clouds that led Israelites through the desert)
  - Goedel (Gael, Irish, was present at the Tower of Babel)
- *The Phantom Chariot of Cuchulainn*
  - “Great as was my heroism/Hard as was my sword,/The Devil crushed me with one finger/Into the red charcoal!”
The early Scottish kings

- Dal Riada (NE Ulster and NW Britain)
  - Battle of Mag Roth, 637
- Cairpre Riata in Argyll
- Fergus mac Erc in Kintyre, d. 501
- Gabran mac Domangart mac Fergus, d. 558
- Aedan mac Gabran, d. circa 610
  - Battle of Degasastan, 603
- By 650, 7 kings and 7 kin groups, one high king
  - High kings descended from Fergus
- Ferchar ‘the Tall’, r. 680-696
  - Reunites Scots
Dal Riada kingship stone at Dunadd, Scotland
Early Pictish kings

- Bridei mac Maelcon, d. 584
  - Royal center at Craig Phadraig
  - Possibly a son of Maelgwn Gwynedd
- By 668, English Northumbrians rule southern Picts and take tribute from the Scots
- Bridei mac Bili, d. 693
  - Battle of Nechtansmere, 685 (commemorated on Aberlemno Stone)
- Nechton mac Derelei, r. 706-724
  - Sought religious advisers from Northumbria
- Oengus mac Fergus, r. 729-761
  - Dominated Dal Riada
Viking raids and settlement

Viking settlement in England
Map from Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*
The union of Scots and Picts

The Stone of Scone, kingship stone of the kings of Scotland.

• Kenneth mac Alpin, r. 843-858
  – Moved Dal Riada court from Dunadd to Scone
  – Brought relics of St. Columba to Dunkeld

• Duncan I, r. 1034-1040

• Macbeth MacFindlay, r. 1040-1057

• Malcolm III (Malcolm Canmore), r. 1058-1093
Those ranking beneath the kings

• Professional learned classes
  – Druids
  – Poets (Irish fili, Welsh beirdd)
  – Jurists/lawyers (Irish brithemain/brehon, Welsh cyngaws and canllaw)

• Society and law
  – Face price (Irish log n’enech, Welsh wynebwerth)
  – Insult/injury price (Irish díre, Welsh sarhaed)
  – Compensation for homicide (Irish éraic, Welsh galanas)