

MAELGWN GWYNEDD (died c. 547) king of Gwynedd and monk

Name: Maelgwn Gwynedd
Date of death: c. 547
Child: Rhun ap Maelgwn Gwynedd
Parent: Cadwallon Lawhir ap Einion Yrth
Gender: Male
Occupation: king of Gwynedd and monk
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements; Religion; Royalty and Society
Author: William Hopkin Davies

Son of Cadwallon Lawhir and great-grandson of **Cunedda Wledig**, he ruled over Venedotia (Gwynedd) in the second quarter of the 6th century. His kingdom seems to have comprised most of north-west Wales, including Anglesey, while tradition credits him with a favourite stronghold at Degannwy on the Creuddyn peninsula. As a fifth and last ruler arraigned by **Gildas** for his misdeeds, he is addressed as 'Maglocunus, the island dragon,' a martial prince who has overthrown many other rulers. Tall of stature (cf. his sobriquet 'Maelgwn Hir,' 'Maelgwn the Tall') and excelling most contemporary princes in power, he was an able military leader, impetuous and generous by nature, but given to many failings and deeds of violence. In his early years he overthrew his maternal uncle, whose identity is unknown, but not long afterwards gave up all his royal power and dignity and entered a monastery as a monk. It was now or earlier that, as **Gildas** tells us, he listened to the instruction of 'the accomplished teacher of almost the whole of Britannia,' a teacher generally identified as the celebrated **Illtud**, the site of whose monastery has been assigned either to Llantwit Major in south Glamorgan or to Caldey Island off the coast of Pembrokeshire. Maelgwn, however, soon found the monastic life unbearable, broke his vow, and returned to his former regal position. It is during this subsequent period that **Gildas** and Welsh tradition agree in portraying him as opposed to the 'Saints,' i.e. monachism, and the perpetrator of evil deeds, among them the murder of his wife and of his nephew, whose widow he then married. The same traditions, however, hint at later repentance and the bestowal of many privileges upon various religious centres. In the reference of **Gildas** to Maelgwn's own praises resounding on the lips of 'ranting' minstrels, we may detect a possible allusion to his court bards and his patronage of native song. A strong and able, though wayward ruler, who, according to an old Welsh saying, fell upon his 'long sleep in the court of Rhos.' He died in a widespread plague) c. 547.

Author

Professor William Hopkin Davies

Sources

H. Williams (ed.), *Gildae De excidio Britanniae fragmenta, Liber de paenitentia, accedit et Lorica Gildae / Gildas The ruin of Britain, fragments from lost letters, The penitential, together with the Lorica of Gildas*, 1899, 76-86

J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*(London 1911), 128-31

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Maelgwn Gwynedd](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q886399](#)

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