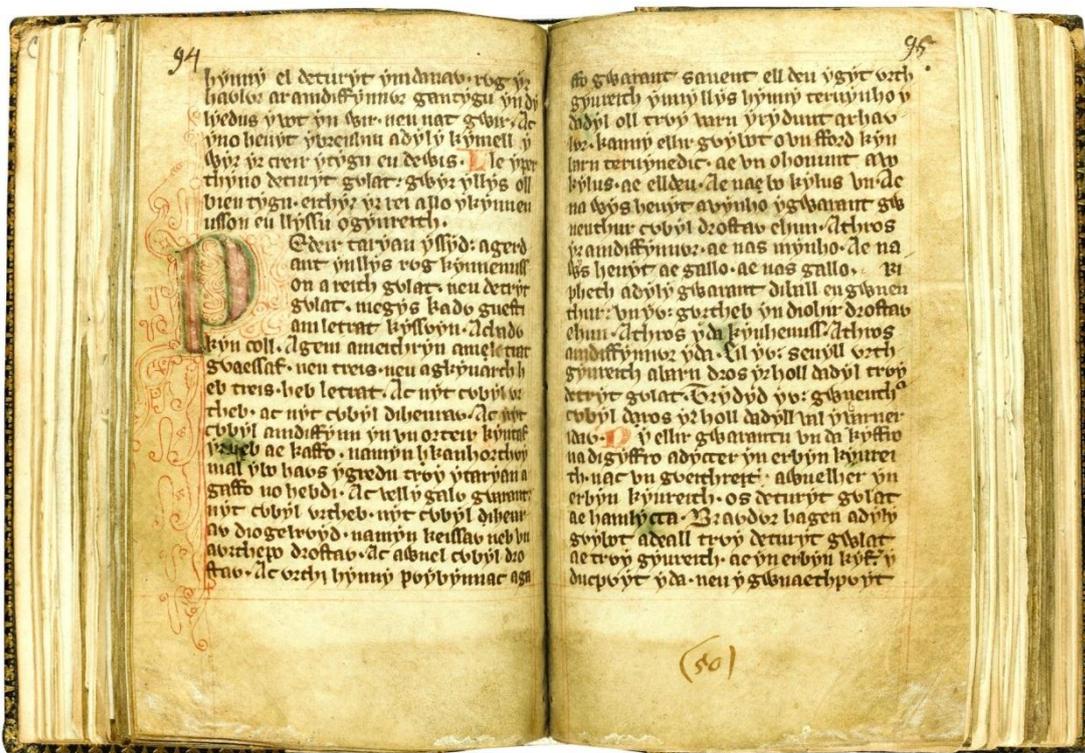


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Sotheby's London to Offer The First Medieval Manuscript in the Welsh Language To Appear on the Market in Almost a Century

— Kept in America, the Manuscript Returns to Britain
For the First Time in Over 150 Years —

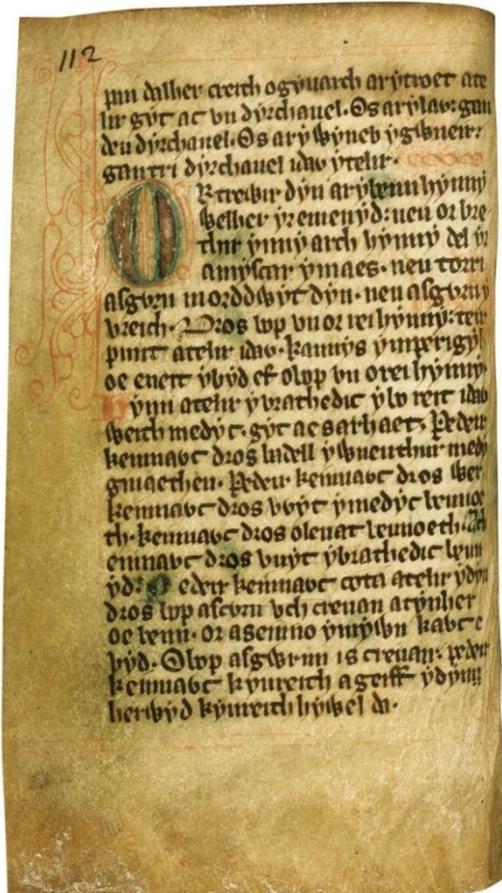


On Tuesday, 10th July 2012, Sotheby's London will offer an extraordinary mid-14th century manuscript written in Medieval Welsh — a language of near-legendary rarity — within its sale of Western Manuscripts and Miniatures. Almost certainly brought to America by Welsh settlers in the 1700s, it ranks among the earliest medieval manuscripts in that country. The sale in London marks its return to Britain for the first time in at least a century and a half. It is the earliest manuscript of its kind ever offered in a public sale and the first medieval manuscript in Welsh to come to the market since 1923. The manuscript is estimated at £500,000-700,000.*

The Laws of Hywel Dda are attributed to Howel the Good, king of Wales (c.880-950). Partly derived from ancient Celtic and Irish justice systems, his laws are exceptionally liberal for their time: they focus on just restitution for crimes rather than violent punishments, and take progressive standpoints in their treatment of women, especially in respect to divorce and division of property. A woman could just as easily divorce her husband as he could her; and a woman who found her husband committing

adultery was entitled to a payment of six-score pence (ten shillings) for the first occasion, a pound for the second, and could divorce him on the third.

The Laws of Hywel Dda came to be a crucial symbol of Welsh national identity, perhaps above any other Welsh text. It was the standard for Welsh law until Llywelyn ap Gruffyd's rebellion against English overlordship in 1282; Llywelyn's entreaty to King Edward I to maintain Welsh law was rebuffed by the archbishop of Canterbury, who believed that the laws had been inspired by the devil.



Remarkably, this manuscript survived in America, where large Welsh-speaking colonies were established in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The manuscript was the property of William Philipps (1663-1721), a barrister from Brecon, whose signature appears at the end of the volume, and most probably was carried to America by his immediate heirs. It was presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, where it has since been kept.

This manuscript is one of only two medieval manuscripts in Welsh outside the UK, and is the earlier of the two. In fact, there are only 80 surviving medieval codices or fragments in Welsh, of which some two-thirds are now in the National Library of Wales, one-sixth in the British Library, and almost all others in institutional ownership in the British Isles. Thus, this is most probably the last appearance of a medieval manuscript in Welsh on the market.

- Dr. Tim Bolton, Sotheby's Specialist in Western Manuscripts, is available for comment.
 - Images available by e-mail request.

**Estimates do not include the Buyer's Premium.*

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