

TEILO (sometimes called ELIUD), a Celtic saint of the 6th century

Name: Teilo
Gender: Male
Occupation: Celtic saint
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Emrys George Bowen

whose cult was particularly important in South Wales and in Brittany. As is the case with so many other Celtic saints the true story of his career and actions has long since perished. What we possess are the efforts of the medieval authors to create a story out of the surviving traditions and legends; the whole being carefully re-orientated in favour of the particular religious and political views of the writers. The earliest evidence we have of the cult of S. Teilo comes from the Gospel Book of S. Chad. (This manuscript, which was once at Llandaff, is now at Lichfield; the N.L.W. has a facsimile.) While it says nothing about him in person, the entries on the margins of its pages show that in the 9th century, some three hundred years after his death, he was still venerated in South Wales as the founder of a monastery which was almost certainly Llan-deilo-fawr in Carmarthenshire. About three hundred years later we have a long and elaborate life of the saint in the 'Liber Landavensis,' written by one who wished to further the claims of the see of Llandaff as recently reorganised by the Normans. There is another version of the life of the saint in B.M. MS. Vespasian A, xiv, which is identical with that given in the 'Book of Llandaf' except for certain important omissions. Canon G. H. Doble showed in 1942 that the Vespasian A. xiv life is almost certainly the original of which that in the 'Liber Landavensis' is an expanded form. In the latter it is clear that the tradition of Teilo's monastery at Llandeilo-fawr, and most of its property, had been deliberately transferred to the cathedral church of Llandaff. The story told of S. Teilo at this late date was that he was born near Penally in south Pembrokeshire, became a disciple of **Saint Dubricius**, and afterwards studied with **Paulinus** at Llanddeusant in north Carmarthenshire, and there became associated with **S. David**. SS. Teilo and **David**, together with **S. Padarn**, are then made to undertake a visit to Jerusalem. After their return S. Teilo, together with many followers, is forced to flee from Wales because of the yellow plague and passes through Cornwall en route for Brittany where he remained for a period, said to be seven years and seven months. After many exploits he returns to Wales and dies, presumably, in his monastery 'on the banks of the Towy.' The most valuable evidence which we still possess of the story of S. Teilo is to be found in the distribution of the churches, chapels, and holy wells bearing his name. These are particularly numerous in south-west Wales, clearly indicating that he had some real connection with Llandeilo-fawr. It would appear, also, that he must have assisted (possibly in conjunction with **St. David** - there is dedication evidence to this effect) in some great revival of Celtic Christianity emanating from west Wales that carried the work of both saints into Brecknock, Radnorshire, and especially into Monmouthshire and the Hereford borderland - an area that had witnessed the labours of earlier workers such as SS. **Dubricius**, **Cadoc**, and **Illtud**. It is possible also that Teilo, like his master **Paulinus**, may have laboured in Brittany, or that daughter establishments of his Welsh monasteries (possibly with large communities accompanying them) may have carried his cult to Brittany at a later date, and even taken with them the names of the places from which they came and given them to their new homes across the sea. In this way we might explain the present topographical evidences, especially in Cornouaille, of a one time vigorous cult of S. Teilo in those parts.

Author

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Sources

Baring-Gould and John Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints: the saints of Wales and Cornwall and such Irish saints as have dedications in Britain* iv, 226-42

G. H. Doble, *Saint Teilo* (Lampeter 1942) ('Welsh Saints Series,' No. 3) (Lampeter, 1942)

E. G. Bowen, 'The Settlements of the Celtic Saints in South Wales,' in *Antiquity*, 1945, 175-86

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Teilo](#)

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