Kilpeck, near Hereford, and Latin pedica `Snare'

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The name of Kilpeck (SO 4430) has been problematic. Early forms include Chipeete in Domesday Book, Cilpedec in the Book of Llandaff, and Kilpedet in 1176.1 The first element is plainly Welsh cil `corner; recess, covert, nook', but the second has been obscure.2 It is true that nant pedecou `valley of pedecou' (a plural) occurs in a ninth-century land-grant from St Maughans (SO 4617), near Monmouth.3 Yet the meaning of Old Welsh *pedec (>Modern Welsh *peddeg) has been unknown.

However, its form provides a clue. Its p may show borrowing from Latin, since no cognate of Welsh *peddeg is apparent in other Celtic languages, and many Welsh words beginning in p- are loans from Latin (padell `pan', pais `petticoat', pall `robe', and so on). If we turn to Latin dictionaries, we find pedica `trap, snare, fetter'. Livy mentions pack-animals trapped in ice as if by a fetter (pedica); Vergil advises when to set snares (pedicas) for cranes. If British did borrow pedica, Old Welsh *pedec is precisely what it should give, with first short e preserved, and penultimate i lowered to e by final _-affection in the fifth century, before loss of final syllables in Brittonic.4

Old Welsh Cilpedec probably thus means `snare nook' and nant

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pedecou `valley of snares'. This makes semantic as well as phonological sense, since it is paralleled at Snargate (TQ 9928) `gate where snares for animals were placed' on Romney Marsh, Kent. If, then, Kilpeck can be taken as `snare nook, snare covert', it provides a simple explanation of a West Midlands place-name, explains Old Welsh pedecou as `snares', and offers a glimpse of Kilpeck before it was settled, when it was a place where the Welsh trapped game.

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