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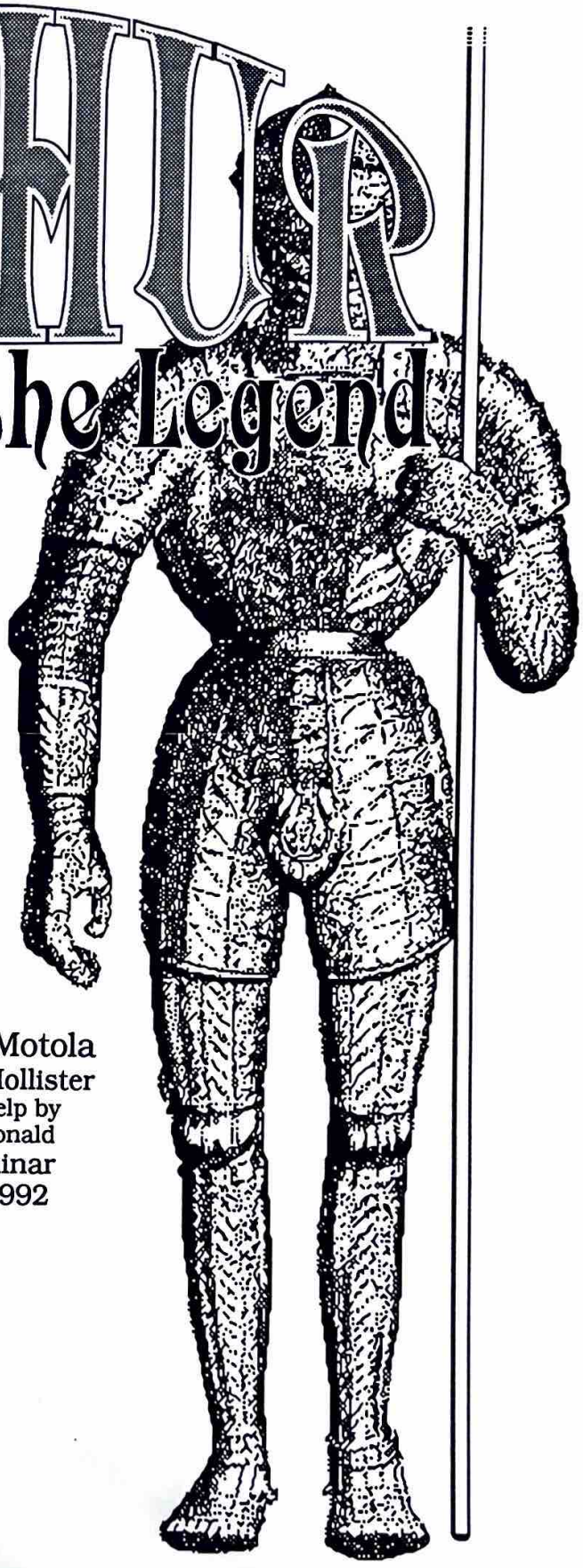
ARTHUR
Origins of the Legend



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To Alex Motola
via Al Lindeman
From Warren Hollister

INTRODUCTION

The story of King Arthur is one of the most enduring legends in Western culture. Such literary luminaries as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Nobel laureate John Steinbeck have retold the legend, attempting to mix their magic with the mystique of Arthur. What remains to be discovered is the reality behind legend, whether it is a single great man, a composite of men, or merely the creation of an unparalleled romantic epic.

The best known literary work written about Arthur is Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur. This masterpiece was written in the mid-fifteenth century while he was in prison for various charges, including his involvement in an unsuccessful revolt against Edward IV. Malory translated various French tales and tried to form them into a single cohesive body. The original French tales were drawn primarily from Geoffrey of Monmouth, so in basic content Malory differs only marginally from Geoffrey. Whereas Geoffrey sought to legitimize the native Briton kings of England with his work, Malory created a romantic epic of the High Middle Ages following the French tradition, complete with knights in shining armor battling Gauls, Romans, and Saracens.

Malory begins his story with the king of Britain, Uther Pendragon, making advances towards Igraine, the beautiful wife of the Duke of Cornwall. Igraine rejected the king's proposals and informed her husband, who promptly took his wife and left court. When he arrived back in Cornwall, he began to fortify his two strongest castles because he knew Uther would gather his army and pursue him. The Duke put Igraine in Tintagel Castle and then marched his army to the other stronghold, where he met with Uther's forces. A battle raged, but neither sided could gain the upper hand. Finally, Uther,

frustrated by his unrequited desire for Igraine, ordered his charlatan, Merlyn, to provide a solution. Merlyn then mystically transformed Uther into a likeness of the Duke. Thus disguised, Uther rode to Tintagel and gained entrance to the castle, where he satisfied his desires with Igraine. That same night the Duke of Cornwall was slain during a battle around his other castle.

After being returned to his former likeness, Uther married the widow Igraine within three months of the battle. Six months later, a son was born to the King and Queen of Britain, a child conceived by the two of them nine months earlier, although only Uther and Merlyn knew the truth of the matter. Merlyn advised Uther to give the child up to a foster parent because everyone would think that the boy was the son of the Duke of Cornwall, and not of Uther's blood. Furthermore, Merlyn explained to the king, the child proved Igraine's fertility and there was no reason she could not bear him other sons. The infant Arthur was given into the care of Sir Ector, a country gentleman. Ector was not told by Merlyn who Arthur's parents were.

Uther Pendragon died around sixteen years later, leaving no rightful heir to his throne. The kingdom was thrown into chaos. Barons and other vassals vied for land and power. By Merlyn's advice, the Archbishop of Canterbury summoned all the nobles of the land to London for Christmas mass. At this gathering, there appeared an anvil sitting atop a marble stone, with a naked sword which had been driven through both, "and letters there were wryten in gold about the swerd that saiden thus: WHOSO PULLETH OUTE THIS SWERD OF THIS STONE AND ANVYLD IS RIGHTWYS KYNGE BORNE OF ALL ENLOND."[1]

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[1]Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, Edited by Eugène Vinaver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 7.

Arthur came to London in the entourage of Sir Ector acting as the squire to Ector's son Sir Kay. Just before the great tournament prior to Christmas began, Sir Kay discovered that he had left his sword at their lodging and asked Arthur to fetch it. The owners of the lodging were at the tournament, so Arthur arrived to find the place locked. He saw a sword in the churchyard, a sword that driven through an anvil and a marble stone. He easily pulled it out without knowing its import, and brought it to Kay. Kay realized what had happened and Arthur was proclaimed King after a lot of heated debated by some of the more powerful nobles who had hoped to gain the throne themselves.

Merlyn, in his mysterious way, appeared before the dissenting group and told them that Arthur was the true and lawful son of Uther Pendragon and Igraine of Cornwall. In spite of this reassurance, many of the more powerful knights rode from London to begin their preparations to fight against Arthur. By the advice of Merlyn, Arthur negotiated a treaty with two French kings, Ban of Benwic and Bors of Gaul, and handily defeated his enemies and restored order to Britain. Among the knights who distinguished themselves in the war was Arthur's foster brother, Sir Kay, whom Arthur then elevated to a prominent position in his court.

During the war with the rebellious nobles, Morgause, the Queen of Orkney came to Arthur's court to spy on his activities. Her husband, King Lot, was the leader of the rebellion. Arthur seduced her, slept with her, and got her with child. Lot was killed during the rebellion. Unbeknownst to Arthur, Morgause was the daughter of the Duke of Cornwall and Igraine, which made her his half-sister. The son she eventually bore was named Modred, and he was raised with her other sons, fathered by Lot; Gawaine, Gaheris, Gareth, and Aggravaine.

After securing his kingdom from internal threat, Arthur fell in love with a beautiful noblewoman from Camelarde, a region within his borders. As he did often, the young king asked Merlyn what he should do about his love for the beautiful Guinever. He told Arthur that a man can never accept advice when it comes to affairs of the heart, "[b]ut Merlyon warned the kyng covertly that Gwenyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff. For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne. . ."[2] Arthur married Guinever anyway, apparently disregarding Merlyn's prophecy that she would betray him with his best friend in the world, Sir Lancelot. Guinever's father, a local king, could think of nothing to give in dowry, because Arthur already had all of the horses, men, land, and money that anyone could want. Finally, he gave Arthur the Round Table, something which he had received from Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon. The Round Table was a huge, oaken thing, with seats for one hundred and fifty men. Arthur decided to create the Fellowship of the Round Table, an order of knighthood limited exclusively to the best and bravest men in England. Early in his reign, Arthur received another valuable gift, this time from the Lady of the Lake, a mysterious enchantress who dwells in the inland waters of Britain. The gift was the magical sword Excalibur.

A period of peace began in England after Arthur had extended his borders to include Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Iceland, and Norway. His knights grew restless desiring the opportunity to show their prowess on the battlefield. This was the golden time of Camelot, Arthur's capital. It ended with the coming of a messenger from Rome who told them that the Empire demanded the tribute whose payments had stopped with Uther's death.

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[2]Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, Edited by Eugène Vinaver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 59.

Instead of submitting, Arthur and his men invaded Roman Gaul and took the field against the army of the Emperor Lucius. After many days of fighting, Arthur's knights won the day and defeated the Roman army. The implication is that, like Charlemagne and Napoleon, Arthur was a Roman Emperor by right of conquest.

During the period of peace following Arthur's defeat of the Romans, Sir Lancelot, regarded as the best knight in the world, is magically seduced by Elaine, daughter of King Pelleas of the Wastelands (Pelleas is one of the Fisher Kings, keepers of the Grail). The result of their intercourse is Galahad, a bastard born in sin but nonetheless destined to become the purest and most perfect knight. Galahad is the only knight who succeeds in the quest of the Holy Grail.

The Grail is a mythical vessel which can only be recovered by a pure and true Christian knight. Supposedly it is either the cup from the Last Supper, or the vessel in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the falling drops of blood from Christ's wounds on the cross, or both. The knights of the Round Table seek to find the Grail, which was supposedly brought to Britain by the descendents of Joseph of Arimathea. Four knights come close to achieving their objective, but only Galahad succeeds. Galahad beholds the Grail ands ascends with it when it is pulled into heaven from its sinful earthly abode by divine force. Sir Bors and Lancelot both see the holy vessel, but ultimately fail due to their earthly feelings and desires. Lancelot's passion for Guinever inhibits him from being entirely pure.

Another aspect of the Arthurian legend is the tragic relationship of Lancelot and Guinever. For many years, Lancelot remained chaste, a true flower of knighthood who loved his queen virtuously and championed her on every occasion. Eventually this love was reciprocated by Guinever, and it

blossomed into a passionate affair. Everyone in the court of Arthur realized what was happening, but it was never spoken of. Nevertheless, this treason (at the time it would have been considered treason by Lancelot and the queen to have an affair — it would have been betraying the king's trust and especially his authority) by the king's closest friends ate away at the conception of Camelot as an ideal of society. Finally the affair was revealed by Sir Aggravaine, and then Guinever was sentenced to burn at the stake for treason. In rescuing her, Lancelot slew many knights of the Round Table, including his own friends, whom he could not recognize in the heat of the battle. Among those slain was Sir Gareth, a popular young knight who loved Lancelot more than anyone, including his own brothers Gaheris and Gawaine. As a result of this, Gawaine, also cousin to King Arthur by virtue of his mother Morgause being the sister of Igraine, Arthur's mother, acted on his long standing dislike and jealousy of Lancelot. By using his kinship with Arthur, he forced the king to pursue the treacherous knight (who, at the request of the Pope's emissary, returned Guinever to Arthur in return for a promise that Arthur would not execute her) into his own lands in France.

Arthur then took his army to Gaul to pursue his vengeance on Lancelot. Because Queen Guinever never bore any children, Mordred (Arthur's son by Morgause) was appointed regent in the king's absence. Mordred fabricated letters saying that Arthur and Lancelot were slain during battle and called a parliament, which elected him King of Britain. Following a common medieval practice, he sought to further legitimize his claim to the throne by marrying his stepmother, Guinever. Arthur returned to Britain and fought a dramatic battle with his traitorous son in which Arthur killed Mordred, but in turn received a mortal wound. As he lay near a lake dying, he bid one of his most trusted knights, Sir Bedivere, to take the sword

Excalibur and throw into the lake (thus returning it to the Lady of the Lake). Bedivere could not do it, but he told the king he did. After being reproached, Bedivere finally hurled the sword into the lake and watched in wonder as a slender arm broke the surface of the water, caught the sword by its hilt, brandished it, and disappeared.

The burial site of Arthur is not mentioned in Malory, but "many men sat that there ys wrytten uppon the tumbe thys:

Hic Iacet Arthurus, Rex quondam Rexque futurus."[3]

'Here lies Arthur, the Once and Future King.' Malory tells us that the body of Arthur was taken away in a boat, and Geoffrey of Monmouth claims that "Arthur himself, our reknowned King, was mortally wounded and carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to."[4] The idea that Arthur was not actually interred, but taken away to a mysterious place gave rise to another aspect of the legend known as the "Breton's Hope" — that Arthur will return and save England in it's time of greatest peril.

Malory's manuscript is the key link between the medieval writers and the modern ones. Most later writers, including Steinbeck, Tennyson, and T. H. White, have relied on Malory as their primary source. But Malory is the culmination of several centuries evolution of the tales, both in Britain and on the continent. Malory's sources were mostly French, the most prominant of whom was Chrétian de Troyes.

Before Malory, Chrétian's works on Arthurian themes were the standard of the literary field. He is thought to be the greatest writer of French

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[3]Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, Edited by Eugène Vinaver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 717.

[4]Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Translated by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 261.

medieval romance.[5] He wrote many romances involving members of Arthur's court, including his most famous tale, *Le Chevalier de la charrete* (the Knight of the Cart), which appears, translated, as Malory's tale *Lancelot and Guinevere.* In addition to creating the romantic context by which we most commonly know Arthur today, Chrétian introduced two more key elements to the epic: The Holy Grail and Camelot. Camelot was supposedly Arthur's capital and it was a symbol of the Golden Age of Britain. One of his translators, William Kibler, commented on Chrétian's place in the evolution of Arthur's legend,

> "Chrétian's influence can still be felt in the cast prose compendium of the mid-thirteenth century known as the *Lancelot-Graal* or the Vulgate Cycle (1225-50), which combined his story of Lancelot's love for the Queen (The Knight of the Cart) with the Grail quest (The Story of the Grail), and was the source of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* , the fountainhead of Arthurian material in modern English literature. . . Today in both England and America there is a renewed and lively interest in the Arthurian legends that Chrétian was the first to exploit as the subject matter for romance."[6]

The legend of Arthur was introduced to French literature by Wace, who was writing in the mid-twelfth century. He essentially translated Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of England,* which was written around 1136. Wace's Arthurian tale was in verse form and ran to 15,000 lines. Wace was the first to introduce two key elements to the Arthurian legend: the Round Table and 'Breton's Hope', the belief that Arthur would return as a messiah and save Britain, although this belief may have had roots in Celtic

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[5]*The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Edited by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986), 104.

[6]Chrétian de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 22.

oral tradition. Wace's *Roman de Brut* was very influential on the writers who followed him.[7]

The popularity of both Wace and Chrétian prompted a huge body of medieval literature relating to Arthur, written mostly in verse form. The three most retold tales were those of Tristan and Isolde, The Holy Grail, and Lancelot and Guinever. Wace, Chrétian de Troyes and other medieval writers provided the groundwork for Malory, who in turn inspired such modern writers as Tennyson, E. A. Robinson, Mark Twain, T. H. White, Mary Stewart, and John Steinbeck. But it was Geoffrey of Monmouth that provided much of the basis for Wace and Chrétian.

The point where literature meets fact is in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. Geoffrey wrote of the legendary founding of New Troy(London) in the land of Albion(Britain) in ancient times. Although significant parts in Geoffrey's history are obviously fiction, it does contain some facts. The kings of Britain supported the book, because it gave them a "predecessor who had conquered all of western Europe except Spain, and whose ancestors, Belinus, Constantine, and Maximian, had seized even Rome itself."[8] Even then, as now, historians debated the validity of some of Geoffrey's claims — "William of Newbury, with extraordinary perspicacity, accused Geoffrey of disguising under the honorable name of history the fables about Arthur which he took from the ancient fictions of the Britons and augmented out of his own head, and of writing to please the Bretons, of whom the majority are said to be so brutishly stupid that they look still for

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[7] *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Edited by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986), 615-616..

[8] Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance*, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963), 38.

Arthur as if he would return, and will not listen to anyone who says that he is dead."[9]

Geoffrey definitely had certain political and self-interested reasons for writing his *History*, but the debate of primary importance regards his sources. Many of the events and people in *The History of the Kings of Britain* were real, but there are also parts which could not have happened under any circumstances. Did Geoffrey invent or embellish his stories wholesale or did he draw from any sources? His dedication makes the claim that he used 'a certain very ancient book written in the British language.'[10] Unfortunately, if this ancient book ever existed at all, it has not survived or been found. It seems that he used factual information as long as it did not interfere with the story he was trying to tell. Nevertheless, Geoffrey provided the groundwork for Continental writers to create a huge body of romantic literature about a figure named Arthur and his companions.

In *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Geoffrey acknowledges some of his sources; Nennius, Gildas, Bede, and William of Malmesbury. Textual evidence supports the theory that he was widely read in history, including Caesar's account of his invasion of England. The central question about Geoffrey's authenticity centers on his 'certain very ancient book written in the British language,' because his account offers many details not available in his known sources. Geoffrey often took an actual event and wrote about it, accurately relating the names of the people involved, but completely inventing the context or changing it so much that his account could not be historically authentic. Since his 'very ancient book' supposedly covered a

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[9]Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance*, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963), 38.

[10]Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Translated by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 51.

period of time from the fall of Troy to 689 A.D., perhaps if it existed, parts of it were more accurate than others, or perhaps it was a collection of different histories.

Almost every theory regarding the historical Arthur has derived most of its evidence from this 'Old Welsh Trail.'[11] The Welsh material (Gildas, Nennius, *The Welsh Annals*) also provides significant sections of Geoffrey of Monmouth's evidence as well, except for this 'certain very ancient book.' An eminent Arthurian scholar, Geoffrey Ashe, goes against the traditional beliefs regarding the Welsh material and Geoffrey of Monmouth and has suggested a plausible theory for finding the historical Arthur. Most Arthurian historians of the past, both professional and amateur, "had no doubt what to think of Geoffrey of Monmouth. He could never be relied on for history. Moreover, he had hoaxed the Middle Ages so thoroughly that nothing after him counted for evidence."[12] Ashe argues that by taking this approach, and also by ignoring all material from outside Britain, these historians are confined to using the limited Welsh material, which may or may not be erroneous. The main difficulty in dealing with Welsh material, he claims, is that no events can be cross-dated with occurrences on the Continent.

Ashe asks, in an exercise he calls lateral thinking, "On what happenings (if any) did Geoffrey base the Gallic warfare; and what real person (if any) was here the original for his King?"[13] At this point, Ashe goes straight to Geoffrey of Monmouth and examines the account of Arthur's supposed foray to Gaul. Malory's account of the defeat of the Emperor Lucius is based on the French stories which were in turn derived from Geoffrey. In

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[11]Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 63.
[12]Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 74.
[13]Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 91.

The History of the Kings of Britain, Geoffrey writes,"The province of Gaul was at that time under the jurisdiction of the Tribune Frollo, who ruled it in the name of the Emperor Leo."[14] Only two Emperor Leos ruled during this period, and the one who directly succeeded the other died in infancy. The Emperor Geoffrey is referring to ~~is~~ must therefore be Leo I of Constantinople, who ruled from 457 to 474 A. D. The Emperor Lucius, as he is called in Malory and occasionally in Geoffrey, is also called by his true title — that of 'procurator', a deputy of minor provinces under the control of Senate. Another quote from Geoffrey will illustrate Leo's importance— ". . . for he ['Emperor' Lucius Hiberius] could not make up his mind whether to engage in a full-scale battle with Arthur or to withdraw inside [the fortified city of] Autun and there await reinforcements from the Emperor Leo."[15]

Ashe goes on to use a similar technique, cross-dating Geoffrey with certain Continental sources to arrive at an exact date for Arthur's Gallic activity: 468-470.[16] There was a real medieval British king who campaigned in Gaul, who was betrayed by his deputy at home (Mordred?), and who vanishes after a battle during a retreat in the direction of the French city of Avallon (Isle of Avalon?). Not only that, but he did these things in the late 460s. Ashe proposes that Arthur was a second name of a king known to history as Riothamus, much as Genghis Khan was truly named Temujin. Just as Genghis Khan can be translated as a title meaning 'very mighty ruler', Riothamus can be translated to mean 'supremely royal' or 'most kingly.' Ashe writes that "One medieval historian poked fun at Geoffrey [of

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[14]Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Translated by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 223.
[15]Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Translated by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 246.
[16]Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 95.

Monmouth] because he professed to know all the British kings, yet missed Riothamus. But Geoffrey didn't miss him. Unlike his critic, he had a very good idea who Riothamus was."[17]

Geoffrey Ashe is very prominent among Arthurian scholars; however, he does not have the authority of a doctoral degree or a research position at a university to add weight to his arguments. It should also be considered that this is his latest theory, and that the book in which it appears, *The Discovery of King Arthur*, was written in conjunction with Debrett's Peerage. The supposed 'discovery' of Arthur in the British king Riothamus is a convenient answer to many genealogical problems. Ashe's arguments will need to be examined with these motivations in mind.

Collingwood wrote,"The heritage of Rome lives on in many shapes, but of the men who created that heritage Arthur was the last, and the story of Roman Britain ends with him."[18] Arthur was the last figure of a great era in western history, and once the legend has been stripped away we will see if a true historical entity stands there, or not.

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[17]Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 96, 111.

[18]*Arthur: King of Britain*, Edited by Richard L. Brengle (New York: Appleton-Ashley-Crofts, 1964), 338.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Britain was a Roman territory from the time of Claudius until approximately 410 A.D. During that time, many of the native Britains became 'romanized' citizens of the Empire. If Arthur did in fact exist, he could have lived anytime between the end of Roman Britain in 410 and Gildas's writing of his *History* around 550. The most probably time for Arthur's chief period of activity would be around the very end of the fifth century.

In 383, Magnus Maximus, a Spanish born commander of British Roman troops, made a bid to become the Emperor in Rome. He slew the western emperor, Gratian, and held Gaul, Britain, and Spain. He then attempted to move on Italy, but was defeated and slain by the emperor Theodosius in 388. Following in Maximus' footsteps was another British based military commander, Constantine III, who also tried to become emperor. He was quickly defeated and executed. In 410, the year Rome was sacked by Alaric, the ailing Empire sent a messenger to Britain which informed the residents their that imperial protection was being withdrawn. Britain, whose fighting men had died on the continent for the usurpers Maximus and Constantine III, was now told to fend for itself and not to look to Rome for protection.[1]

The effect of the letter was strong. A large portion of Britain's fighting men had gone to the Continent to fight for Maximus and Constantine III. "Britain was now virtually defenseless," wrote historian Peter Hunter Blair of

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[1]Peter Hunter Blair, Roman Britain and Early England 55 B.C. - A.D. 871 (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 154-155.

the period following the 410 proclamation.[2] No doubt Rome thought to regain possession of Britain once her own difficulties had passed.

The first High King of the Britain, Vortigern, rose to power following the Roman retreat. According to most medieval historians, following the lead of Gildas and Bede, Vortigern invited the Saxons to settle southeastern Britain. He wanted them to fight against the Picts and Scots in return for land. Although Gildas and others blame Vortigern for instigating the plague of the Saxons on Britain, he was just following the standard Roman practice of using one barbarian tribe to defeat another. Nevertheless, the Saxons invited more of their brethren over from the mainland. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells that in 455 A.D. the leaders of the Saxons brought war against Vortigern and conquered Kent within two years.[3]

The British resistance was supposedly led by Vortimer, the son of Vortigern. Vortigern's second marriage to the daughter of the Saxon war chief Hengist alienated his British subjects. Vortimer seized his chance and fought successfully against the Saxons in four battles until he was poisoned by his Saxon stepmother. Saxons continued to arrived every spring on the eastern shores of Britain. A generation after Vortigern, another figure rose to prominence by successfully combatting the Saxon invaders. His name was Ambrosius Aurelianus.

Gildas, in his *History*, tells us "the poor remnants of our nation . . . that they might not be brought to utter destruction, took arms under the conduct of Ambrosius Aurelianus, a modest man, who of all the Roman nation was then alone in the confusion of this troubled period by chance left alive. . . by

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[2]Peter Hunter Blair, Roman Britain and Early England 55 B.C. - A.D. 871 (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 155.

[3]*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Translated by Rev, James Ingram (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1938), 26.

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the goodness of our Lord obtain victory."[4] Ambrosius led the resistance to the invasion for several years, sometimes winning and sometimes losing.

After Ambrosius we do not know much about the period until Gildas begins writing around 540. The *History* of Gildas is a very short manuscript that acts as a prelude to his sermon-like diatribe against the rulers of his day. He avoids using names whenever possible and is not as interested in relating history as we know it as in making moral judgements about past kings. Nonetheless, Gildas is valuable to us because he is nearest thing to a contemporary that we have.

historian / (he was a contemporary).

After 550, the Saxons win several major battles and then overrun the island. The prevailing theory is the the battle of Badon, mentioned by Gildas (but he neglects to tell us who commanded the victorious Britains), was such a significant victory that it took the Saxons over a generation to recover. The Saxons' own history backs up the theory. In their *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* they recorded only six victories from 500 until 550 (they never recorded losses, which could account for the fact that Arthur and Ambrosius's name never appear in their annals). Of these six victories, two were on islands just off the British coast, and two were Saxon landings contested by the British.

Judging from this evidence, there is the possibility that the Saxons suffered an incredible defeat some time between 500 and 550. Most probably this victory would have been the Battle of Badon. If Arthur had commanded the British forces at this victory, it would be more than a solid groundwork for a future legend. Whoever the commander was, he was certainly the last great native British leader against the Saxon threat. He would have been seen as the last Roman in Britain, a defender of civilization before the invading

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[4]Gildas and Nennius, *The Works of Gildas and Nennius*, Translated by J. A. Giles (London: James Bohn, 1841), 22.

barbarian hordes. He would have provided at least one generation of native Britains with a hero, a bright spot against the Saxon domination of their country.

PRIMARY SOURCES

We have several works mentioning Arthur that were written in the Middle Ages. Some of these works rely on unknown sources — that is, sources which are not available to us today. Therefore, problems are created in regards to the authenticity of each source. Most of the documents that we have today are later scribal copies of the originals, sometimes many times removed from the first finished copy. Some of the earliest sources are from the oral tradition of Britain and were not written down for several hundred years.

Gildas

There is one source that is almost contemporary with Arthur. A monk, Gildas the Wise, wrote a diatribe against the decay of Britain in the void in the years following the Roman withdrawal. Geoffrey Ashe tells us that Gildas,"probably wrote *De Excidio* in the 540s — certainly not much before or after."[1] An important biography of Gildas was written by Caradoc of Llancarfan in 1140. Gildas was born in Scotland according to Caradoc, and studied in Gaul. What we have of his work today are two manuscripts, *The Epistle* and *The History*. The first is merely Gildas' rebuking the Britons for the current state of affairs. He laments the corruption of the Church and the depravity of several contemporary kings. For the moment, this work has no significant value to our study. *The History*, however, is important. It is the source closest to the

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[1] *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Edited by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986), 233. *De Excidio* is the Latin title of the entire manuscript, which is comprised of both *The History* and *The Epistle*.

time of Arthur, although it makes no reference to him. This might seem highly unusual, but we must examine the document more closely.

In his preface, Gildas writes, "for it is my purpose to relate the deeds of an indolent and slothful race, rather than the exploits of those who have been valiant in the field."[2] His history was written as a backdrop for *The Epistle,* and Gildas was not interested in history for history's sake. He wanted to write about all the moral wrongdoings of contemporary Britons, and how they could never overthrow the Saxons by continuing in their 'slothfullness and indolence'. In the fifteen pages that comprise *The History,* Gildas mentions only ten peoples' names, and thirteen place names.

It is among those place names that we find the most relevant passage to our search. In the twenty-sixth chapter of Gildas, he writes "After this, sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field . . . until the siege of Bath-hill, when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes, which was (as I am sure) forty-four years and one month after the landing of the Saxons, and also the time of my nativity."[3] The reference to 'Bath-hill' is the translator's rendering of 'Mons Badonicus', or Mount Badon. Although two of the hills in the Bath area are possible candidates as the true location of the Battle of Mount Badon, the actual site could be almost anywhere in Britain because there is no strong documentary evidence to prove a particular one.

The authenticity of this battle is almost certain. In addition to other references from other sources, it would be within the living memory of people who would be reading Gildas' work. It would invalidate the rest of his

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[2]Gildas, *The Works of Gildas and Nennius*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: James Bohn, 1841), 1.

[3]Gildas, *The Works of Gildas and Nennius*, 22.

manuscript if he fabricated a battle that took place in the year he was born. What that year was is, naturally enough, uncertain. Due to references found later in *The Epistle*, most scholars date the writing of Gildas' works to before 547 A.D.[4] Since the date of Gildas' birth is very important to Arthurian historians, there are many arguments for the precise date.

If we could accurately date the birth of Gildas, then we would know in what year the Battle of Mount Badon was fought. Sources other than Gildas consider the battle as Arthur's most significant victory — his final of twelve battles against the Saxon invaders. Arthur may not have been mentioned by Gildas for a variety of reasons. As the victor of the battle that stopped the Saxon advance, Arthur would have been well known to anyone reading Gildas fifty or so years later. Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, writing about the debate over *The History* with regards to the Battle of Badon, says, "The fact that Gildas does not mention him [Arthur] has been urged as a serious objection, but the arguement has little force. Gildas was preaching a sermon against his contemporaries, not writing a detailed history of his father's generation, and it is his general practice to avoid mentioning personal names. Besides, what English bishop, castigating the vices of his compatriots about 1860, would be so clumsy as to allude to 'the battle of Waterloo, *which was won by the Duke of Wellington'?*"[5]Gildas rarely mentioned people he thought were good; that was not the purpose of his work. He did not want to write of the warriors but of the decline of the British peoples. If Arthur was not someone Gildas thought was good, it is still highly probable that he would not have mentioned him because Gildas rebuked primarily people

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[4]*The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Edited by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986), 233. Henry Marsh, *Dark Age Britain* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970), 21, 33.
[5]*Arthur:King of Britain* , Edited by Richard Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 327. The italics are ~~those of~~ Jackson's .

who were still living. If the historical Arthur was not a king, then Gildas would not have written of him.

Although many British historians would later use Gildas as a source, Gildas himself used no native sources. He wrote, "but as far as lies in my power, I shall not follow the writings and records of my own country, which (if there ever were any of them) have been consumed in the fires of the enemy, or accompanied my exiled countrymen into distant lands."[6]

Caradoc of Llancarfan wrote his short biography of Gildas in the twelfth century, and it looks as though he had access to an earlier primary account now lost. It presents a look at Arthur provided in no other early material. Caradoc was writing about Gildas and Arthur in a time when the legend was gaining its most lasting qualities, yet he refers to him twice as *rex rebellis* (rebellious king) and once as *Arthurus tyrannus*. (Arthur the Tyrant).[7] The use of these uncomplimentary terms suggests that one of Caradoc's sources for his biography of Gildas was a tract that was written well before the twelfth century by enemies of Arthur.[8]

Nennius and the Welsh Annals

In the British Museum, there exists a collection of documents known as Harley MS 3859, which contains two items of interest to Arthurian scholars. The first is the *Annales Cambriae*, or Welsh Annals. The second is the *History of the British*, written by Nennius, a monk of northern England in the ninth century. The entire collection of documents was compiled by

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[6]Gildas, *The Works of Gildas and Nennius*, 8.
[7]Henry Marsh, *Dark Age Britain* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970), 40.
[8]Henry Marsh, *Dark Age Britain* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970), 40.

There is a serious question about the authorship of the work known as "Nennius."

Nennius in 858 to be preserved for later generations. He makes this perfectly clear in his preface, "I. . . have undertaken to write down some extracts that the stupidity of the British cast out, for the scholars of the island of Britain had no skill, and set down no record in books. I have therefore made a heap of all I have found."[9]

The Welsh Annals were among Nennius' heap. These annals are basically a diary in which significant yearly events were recorded, usually consisting of one terse line. The original purpose of the annals was to help individual churches calculate the exact date on which Easter would fall every year. Someone figured out that the combinations of events that were used to calculate the date, including phases of the moon, repeats every 532 ~~five hundred and thirty-two~~ years. The annals usually included the first year of the next phase, to make the table five hundred and thirty-three years long. The annal we have from Harley MS 3859 covers the period from A.D. 444 to A.D. 977. Other than the annals from Harley MS 3859, two other copies survive. All three documents contain much the same information, varying occasionally in exact date and information. Harley MS 3859 has been determined by whom? to be the most probable master copy of the original Welsh Annals.

One of the problems involving the authenticity of the Welsh Annals is the nature of the entries themselves. While many entries were certainly entered directly following the event, some of the entries were made later, and then backdated. This can be seen most easily with an entry such as '454 St. Brigid is born.'[10] Obviously this was not written in A.D. 454 because at the time no one knew that Brigid would become a saint. Since the table follows a

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[9]Nennius, *Nennius: British History and The Welsh Annals*, edited and trans. John Morris (London: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1980), 9.

[10]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 45.

chronology, translating the original dates into modern dates was not a problem, provided we could pinpoint certain events recorded in the annals. Two events made this possible. The first was an eclipse (occurring in 448) and the second was the mention of debate between the eastern and western churches (Constantinople and Rome, respectively) regarding the precise date for Easter in 455.[11]

In the first hundred years of the Welsh Annals, our period of interest, there are exactly twelve entries. Of these twelve entries, ten have no connection with Arthur whatsoever. The remaining two mention Arthur by name.

> '516 The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders [i. e. shield] and the Britains were the victors.'
> '537 The Battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell: and there was plague in Britain and Ireland.'[12]

The Badon entry is similar to that in Gildas, but it names Arthur as a participant in the battle. To add what we learned from Gildas, we know that the Battle of Badon was fought around A.D. 516, was a siege lasting at least three days, had a soldier named Arthur as a participant, and was won by the British. Badon is one of the significant parts to the mystery surrounding the historical Arthur.

The Camlann entry is a greater puzzle. Gildas did not refer to it, although it was about twenty years closer to the time he wrote his works. The Welsh Annals do not tell us who Arthur fought, or why. Medraut is definitely the figure who becomes 'Modred' in the Arthurian literature, but it

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[11]Henry Marsh, *Dark Age Britain* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970), 48.

[12]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 45. The word 'shoulders' is usually considered to be a scribal error, a miscopying of the word 'shield.' The Welsh for shoulders is 'scuid' and the word for shield is 'scuit', which makes for a more plausible explanation.

unclear whether he fought for or against Arthur. Several sites are possible for the battle. One of the later copies of the Welsh Annals, called Manuscript B (The copy from Harley MS 3859 is Manuscript A) has a longer entry for the year 537, "The Battle of Camlam, in which the famous Arthur, King of the Britons, and Modred his betrayer, died of the wounds they inflicted upon one another."[13]

This is a perfect example of how a simple transcription can get altered. In this case, due to the growing influence of Arthurian literature, some scribe made the history more like the literature. "Arthur himself has become a king and the adjective used to describe him (inclytus - famous) is the same as the epitaph engraved on the coffin said to have found at Glastonbury towards the end of the twelfth century. . . to find the Medraut of the main version changed to Modred and thus nearer to the name of the legend, and to find Arthur not slain outright, but dying of his wounds as in the legends, all these must cast doubt on the antiquity of this additional sentence."[14] A hundred and fifty years after the Battle of Badon, in 665, an entry in the annals was made mentioning "The second battle of Badon."[15] This virtually guarantees that the first battle actually took place.[16]

Nennius' *History of the Britons* , written around 858 A.D., draws heavily on older sources. The introduction is almost copied verbatim from Gildas' earlier *History*. The abrupt transitions between sections support the theory, and Nennius' own words "I have therefore made a heap of all that I

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[13]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 52. This manuscript is dated to the twelth or thirteenth century.
[14]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 52.
[15]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 46.
[16]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 57.

have found,"[17] that his manuscript is pieced together from earlier documents, of which Gildas' *History* is the only one surviving today. Nennius does give us what Gildas fails to do — a direct reference to Arthur.

Henry Marsh describes the pertinent chapter of Nennius, entitled 'The Campaigns of Arthur', as a section which "appears to be based upon a lost document of the sixth or early seventh century."[18] There are two key parts to Nennius' 'Campaigns of Arthur.' The first is the line,"Then Arthur fought against them [the Saxons] in those days, together with the kings of the British; but he was their leader in battle."[19] This passage clearly implies that Arthur was the commander of the British forces, but that he was not a king himself. He was also important enough to be mentioned by name alone, whereas the kings are grouped collectively together. Perhaps his fame is due to the claim that "and he was victorious in all his campaigns."[20]

The second key area of 'The Campaigns of Arthur' is the battle-list. This list is one of the most widely debated aspects of Arthurian historiography. Nennius lists for us twelve battles, giving us their location and scant, if any, details. Historians have accurately placed a few of the battles, but the rest have at least three possible locations. "The twelfth battle was on Badon hill,"[21] is evidence which seems to corroborate the words of Gildas. The Battle of Badon was fought, and it was a huge victory for the native Britons. It can dated between 500 A.D. and 520 A.D. The question remains; did a figure named Arthur command the British forces at this battle? Geoffrey Ashe defends the authenticity of the battle-list by saying,"Early Welsh poems

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[17]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 9.
[18]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 79.
[19]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 35.
[20]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 35.
[21]Nennius, *Nennius:British History and the Welsh Annals*, 35.

have survived which extol men of martial note by reeling off place names with a few words about their triumphs at each. . . However, though the poem theory was not known to Tennyson, . . . he reversed the process and reconstituted the poem, in his fashion, in English. . .In whatever copy Tennyson used, most of the names were spelled differently. They are obscure, and this counts in Nennius's favor."[22]

Therefore, Nennius opens up new riddles regarding Arthur, but provides no convincing answers. He offers the provocative battle list, and confirms Badon, but fails to mention the Camlann incident noted in the Welsh Annals. Nennius' sources, other than the parts of Gildas he used in his introduction, are lost to history. The next step is to look to the people against whom Arthur supposedly fought: the Saxons.

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle is unique among the early sources for a number of reasons. For one, it was written by the invaders, not the native Britons. It is also the only early document which was written in Old English instead of Latin. The early entries in the chronicle (much like the format of the Welsh Annals) were backdated, and include many Christian events which would only have been added after the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity. But, according to its introduction, the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* "contains the original and authentic testimony of contemporary writers to the

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[22]Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 69-70.

most important transactions of our forefathers, both by sea and land, from their first arrival in this country [Britain] to the year 1154."[23]

The chronicle does not mention Arthur, but this is not to be thought surprising. The Saxons failed to record any defeat, at any time in the period in question. It is not possible that they could have won every battle, especially in light of what Gildas and Nennius have written. The significant aspect of the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* is what it does not say. From 508 until 552, the Saxons did not write of any victories on the island of Britain. They did win a few battles in outlying territory; Cerdic's-ley, the Isle of Carisbrooke, and the Isle of Wight. What stopped the Saxon advance? The conventional date for the Battle of Badon falls convincingly in this period of inactivity, supporting the possibility that a generation of Saxons died there. Badon is considered to have been the greatest British victory versus the Saxon threat, and a victory of the magnitude that it supposedly was would have ended the invasions for at least one entire generation.[24]

The Venerable Bede

In approximately 731, a Northumbrian monk known as the Venerable Bede wrote the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. Bede drew heavily on Gildas' earlier work for much of his earlier history, including the period of Arthur's alleged existence. As with Gildas, the Venerable Bede does not mention Arthur. He does, however, write of the period following Ambrosius

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[23]*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Rev. James Ingram (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1938), 2.

[24]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 98-99. *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Edited by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986), 8, 38. Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 66.

Aurelianus,"And since that period, at one time our countrymen, at another the enemy, were victorious, up to the year of the besieging of Mount Badon, when they gave these enemies no less slaughter, about forty-four years after their arrival in Britain."[25] The dating of the arrival of the Saxons is not very valuable, because we are unsure exactly which arrival is being referred to. Bede's academic standards in his history were quite high, and it is unlikely that he would have included the Battle of Badon unless he were certain that it had actually taken place.

William of Malmesbury

"Perhaps the greatest of those who wrote in the years immediately after the Norman Conquest was William, a monk of Malmesbury."[26] William's scholarship was exemplary, much like that of his hero, Bede. He carefully mulled over his information and edited material which was unsubstantiated. Modern historians consider his evidence reliable, even when there is no existing source with which it can verified.[27] What makes William significant in the search for a historical Arthur is that he obviously used sources which not only are not available today, but were not used by other medieval historians either.

In then early 1100s, when William wrote of Arthur in Book I of his *Gesta Regum Anglorum,* the excerpt clearly falls out of the chronological sequence of the narrative. Historians have speculated whether this section

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[25]*Arthur:King of Britain* , Edited by Richard Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 4-5.
[26]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 157.
[27]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 159. Marsh writes that William "was a man of real scholarship. Where he records matters that are not to be found in any of his known sources, we may believe what he tells us. . ."

was part of a larger, lost document, possibly even Geoffrey Ashe's 'certain very ancient book.'[28] This theory is supported by the fact that although William was of mixed English and Norman descent, he wrote passages like,"overpowered the presumptuous barbarians with the distinguished service of the warlike Arthur."[29] William's 'presumptuous barbarians' would have been his own ancestors, making it more likely that he copied or paraphrased an earlier chronicle.

Like his historical predecessors, William also mentions Badon. "At last, at the siege of Badon, trusting in the image of our Lord's Mother which he [Arthur] had sewn on his armor, rising alone against nine hundred of the enemy he dashed them to the ground with incredible slaughter."[30] William provides his reader with some new clues about Badon. He is the first person to refer to it as a siege rather than a battle, although the *Annales Cambriae* mention that it lasted three days and three nights.[31] He also refers to Arthur bearing a Christian symbol, as do the *Annales*, but they differ in details; William has the image of Mary sewn onto his armor, whereas the *Annales* has the Cross inscribed on Arthur's shield.

From the primary sources available, the existence of Arthur cannot positively be proved. There appears to be a number of "lost" books used as sources by the historians discussed above which, if found, would almost certainly provided the needed proof. Fortunately, there is other evidence beyond the recorded prose of past historians. Archaeology and other

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[28]See the Introduction, 10.
[29]Brengle, *Arthur:King of Britain*, 8.
[30]Brengle, *Arthur:King of Britain*, 8.
[31]Marsh, *Dark Age Britain*, 163.

disciplines offer new evidence which in turn forces historians to reevaluate these ancient sources. The weight of the evidence has been interpreted this century in many ways by historians. What have modern historians inferred from these sources?

HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Historiography ?
Modern historians ?

Modern historians are generally divided into a number of camps with regard to question of Arthur's existance. Many of their theories come from new evidence which has resulted from improved interpretive techniques and recent "finds" in the field of archaelogy. Distinct lines have been draw between scholars like David Dumville, who heads the "Non-Believer" contingent, and Geoffrey Ashe, who is determined to find Arthur and steadfastly insists on his authenticity.

Norma Lorre Goodrich

Norma Lorre Goodrich has written several books on mythological topics, and she holds degrees from the University of Vermont, the universities of Grenoble, Caen, Paris, and Columbia. Among the major historians writing on the subject of Arthur, she is noticibly the most educated in regards to the language and linguistic evolution of the period.

Goodrich set out to find Arthur, complete with all his knightly trappings, his queen, and all the romance of the High Middle Ages. She claims to have found what she was looking for, but unfortunately provides very little in the way of references or citations to back her arguments. Among the historians of Dark Ages, Goodrich is known primarily as the chief proponent of a northern Arthur — that is, she claims Arthur's principle area of activity was in northern Britain and southern Scotland.

Her technique involves relying heavily on Geoffrey of Monmouth and using his *History* to place figures who appeared the massive body of Arthurian literature. Although the first appearances of the Holy Grail and

Camelot appear in Chrétian de Troyes, Goodrich insists on placing these literary elements into the "history" of her Arthur. As much of her theory rests on the authenticity of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Norma Lorre Goodrich first seeks to validate him.

She writes,"From Geoffrey's account it would seems that Merlin was the original narrator whom Geoffrey was translating into Latin, so that, when we read the English, we are reading at least a translation of a translation (and probably of a translation). Geoffrey speaks through and on behalf of Merlin, and for Arthur also, and thus appoints himself a premier spokesman for the Dark Ages. . . Obviously, Geoffrey was having a terrible time just reading the handwriting of his Merlin text. He may even have needed reading glasses."[1] Goodrich obviously tries to make Geoffrey's 'certain very ancient book' into the historical narrative of Merlin, the "wizard" of Arthur's court. Geoffrey claims that his source was "written in the British language" and that "I have taken the trouble to translate the book into Latin."[2] What British language? Goodrich goes on to answer that question — "To translate Merlin, however, he would have needed to study Brythonic. . . and to have been educated at Gwynedd."[3] Goodrich is the only historian to have Geoffrey educated at Gwynedd. Neither Geoffrey Ashe, Lewis Thorpe nor *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* make any reference to that aspect of his education, although it is commonly known that he lived most of his life at Oxford, acting as a teacher and cleric.

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[1]Norma Lorre Goodrich, *King Arthur* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986), 41-42. Merlin is generally considered to be a fictional character, even by Geoffrey Ashe, who also strongly supports much of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

[2]Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Translated by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 51.

[3]Norma Lorre Goodrich, *King Arthur* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986), 44.

Therefore, it would have been difficult for Geoffrey to read the alleged work of Merlin that he was using as his source. But what about Merlin? John J. Parry and Robert A. Caldwell wrote that "Nennius's Ambrosius, whom Geoffrey adopted by the simple expediant of saying that Merlin was also called Ambrosius. The rest of the Merlin story seems to have been the child of his own fertile brain."[4] Nennius's Ambrosius was a youth when Vortigern was king of Britain in 429, which means that Merlin would have to have been actively writing past the age of a hundred to chronicle the events of Arthur, much less what happened after his demise.

Besides Goodrich's insistence on a "northern Arthur," she makes two other startling claims on major points. The first is that "when Arthur was fifteen years old, he attended a convocation of the chiefs of the Britons, who elected him as their commander in chief."[5] After this 'election,' he goes on to win the first six of the twelve battles on the Nennian battle-list. It seems highly unlikely, even if Goodrich's claim of Arthur being of noble birth from both sides of his family, that a fifteen year old boy would be entrusted with the highest military command in the land. There is ample evidence to suggest that if Arthur had lived, he would have in fact been the leader of the British armies and not a king. But the liklihood of a fifteen year old boy being placed in charge of the armies of the British kings to face their greatest threat seems slim indeed.

Goodrich's other startling claim is both interesting and far-fetched. She proposes that Arthur was also a great maritime commander, the peer of other great English seamen like Drake and Nelson. Her basis for this argument is

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[4]*Arthur:King of Britain* , Edited by Richard Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 339.
[5]Norma Lorre Goodrich, *King Arthur* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986), 58.

that the key to the sucessful defense of Britain has always been control of the sea. She writes in a chapter conclusion,

> "Geoffrey functioned like a modern military historian, emphasizing location, terrain, type of action, and strategy. He has shown his readers pitched battles, sieges, an ambush, a tactical retreat, forced marches, encirclement, blockade, and the use of cavalry and a fleet of ships. The ships are maneuvered inside Loch Lomond as well as in the Clyde estuary and probably also in the Irish Sea."[6]

It seems as though Goodrich has confused the Saxons with the British. The Saxons are the only warriors in Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of Britain* with boats, and they are the only people who ambush and go on forced marches. It is likely from the evidence that Arthur fought *some* of his battles in northern Britain, but his opponents would have been Picts and not Saxons.

Good paper. Abrupt ending. Without discussion of other modern writers, the final section doesn't work. Your outline suggests more material and a coherent final section. I look forward to it.

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[6]Norma Lorre Goodrich, *King Arthur* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986), 80.

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Arthur

I. Introduction

a brief explanation of the task at hand, as well as treatment of legend and the evolution of the literature. A short discussion of some of the sources and some of Ashe's latest historiography.

Include a separate section describing the historical background.

II. The Primary Sources

A. discuss the nature of early manuscripts, the possibility of scribal errors, the various possible errors in the dating conversions. For each of the documents the validity, historicity, and motives of each writer will be examined later, in the Historian section.

B. Gildas

Closest thing to a real 'witness' of the period in question. Discuss the dating of Gildas, as well as his sources, and additionally, the *Life of Gildas*, written by Caradoc of Llancarfan in the twelfth century.

C. The Welsh Annals

Again, the dating is very important with this document as well. The motives of the Welsh in claiming Arthur must be examined. Contains key references to the battle of Badon and variously names Arthur as the victor. Also discuss the thirteenth battles in which Arthur dies. How is this used by other historians?

D. Nennius

A close examination of Nennius is necessary. Heavy coverage of the Saxon invasion must be examined and used to create the backdrop for Arthur. Nennius' specific references to Arthur and his battles, plus an introduction to the archaeology of Arthur's Britain. Occurrence of the Battle List - where was it drawn from?

E. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

No direct reference to Arthur, but very important none the less. An accurate account of Saxon activity in England, both in terms of date and facts. Why was Arthur not mentioned? How is the lack of references to Arthur significant?

F. Bede

Again, no mention of Arthur. How is this significant? Examine authenticity as well as references to battles in which Arthur was supposed to have won. Who were Bede's sources? Gildas.

G. William of Malmesbury

The latest of the 'historians' of the Middle Ages who has anything valid to say on Arthur. Discuss why Geoffrey of Monmouth and some others lack merit as valid historians. Cover his version of the events surrounding Arthur, and especially his omissions - most notably, any connection between Glastonbury Abbey and Arthur. The missing Welsh source.

III. The Historians and Their Theories

discuss the evolution of the historical approach to Arthur, and dismantle the arguments of the leading "nonbelievers" - those who say Arthur exists only as a literary figure.

A. Goodrich

proponent of the "Northern Arthur". Important to examine as a kind of radical approach to Arthur's authenticity.

B. Ashe, Geoffrey

Probably the leader of the pro-Arthur contingent. Discuss his lack of literary credentials, as well as his motivations for writing on Arthur. His changing views, and how they affected others. Dismantle his arguments.

C. Alcock, Leslie

Two views by Alcock. First his pro-Arthur view, then his 'agnosticism' after a savage literary attack by Dumville and Co. Alcock is the leading archaeologist in the Arthurian field. Examine his evidence and how it does or does not support Arthur, and how it is used by the other historians.

D. Dumville, D.N.

leader of the Non-Believer faction. Discuss his views, along with those of M. Miller and Kathleen Hughes. Some of the most valid points should be raised here, especially on how the source material should be interpreted.

IV. A New Theory

after attempting to discredit other arguments, I will propose an alternative solution to Arthur - a new configuration of the 'puzzle pieces'.

A. The Questions? When? Where? What did he do, and to and with who? What was his background? Where did he die? Why did he give rise to the legend?

B. The Sarmatian angle

A radical suggestion, first proposed by C. Scott Littleton and Ann C. Thomas. Discuss,

1. using the context of other historians and the pertinent archaeological evidence.

2. names, evolution & possible theories behind them, as pertains to the Sarmatian connection.

C. The Geography

How did Arthur cover his terrain? What where the areas of his activity? Why is it important?

D. The Man

What did he do? Was a war-leader, a king, or both?

E. Making the Chronology fit

F. Fit in somewhere the continental sources, such as the Roman roll-call upon their withdrawal from Britain, and the writings of Dio.

G. Other Ideas worth exploring