The Politics of Arthurian Legend in the Plantagenet Empire: A Study of Literary and Historical Sources from the Time of Henry II to Edward I

Laura J. Radiker

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THE POLITICS OF ARTHURIAN LEGEND IN THE PLANTAGENET EMPIRE:
A STUDY OF LITERARY AND HISTORICAL SOURCES
FROM THE TIME OF HENRY II TO EDWARD I

by

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Laura J. Radiker
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FROM THE TIME OF HENRY II TO EDWARD I

Laura J. Radiker, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1995

This study looks at both medieval chronicles and romances--the primary sources of Arthurian legend--to seek mutual influences between the politics of the Plantagenet Empire and Arthurian legend. The authors of the works used in this study performed within the sphere of the Plantagenet Empire, during the time period with which this study concerns itself. Secondary sources provide background information, such as the historical, literary, and cultural milieu surrounding the primary works, archeological and linguistic evidence, and current scholarly debate.

From the evaluation of the primary sources and their historical framework, several aspects of Arthurian legend emerge which have connections with Plantagenet politics. The Arthurian genre, having its beginning in the Celtic Revival encouraged by Norman encroachment, reached its full flower during the Plantagenet era. The portrayal of Arthur as emperor in these works both fed and reflected the importance of empire to Plantagenet kingship. King Arthur also served as a model of courtly and chivalric kingship by which the Plantagenet kings were often measured. Finally, the questions surrounding Arthur’s death and burial or reputed immortality proved to be a politically charged topic during the Plantagenet era.
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At the commencement of the High Middle Ages, a mysterious personage named Arthur emerged from Celtic myth and fragments of early British history to become a great king whose fame spread all over Europe. The groups who claimed Arthur as their own national hero were at first those descendents of the ancient Britons, of which race Arthur was a member. Those Celtic tribes, the Welsh, Cornish, and Bretons, had retreated to their corners of the Celtic fringe, so history told them, upon the arrival and eventual conquest by barbarian tribes, chief among those, the Anglo-Saxons, by whose name the home-island of the Britons came to be known. Nonetheless, their collective traditions and oral folkways allowed them to share a common heritage and common mythic heroes. However, the island of England was to be conquered yet again, and in time the conquerors found something which they had in common with the descendents of the Britons--an interest in a heroic figure named Arthur. Once the Norman conquerors had established themselves as kings of England as well as Dukes of Normandy, they faced new challenges: they strove to bring the Celts of the island under their political sway, and overcame their first dynastic dispute. With the settlement of this dispute, the great Plantagenet dynasty consolidated and expanded their control to create a thriving but
fractious empire. The Celtic peoples were eventually united under the domination of these Anglo-Norman kings, and thus it is no surprise to find a Celtic hero eventually appearing in the Anglo-Norman court. However, he did not come in homage, but rather in triumph.

The founding generations of Plantagenet kings, from the patriarch Henry to his great-grandson Edward I, discovered that Arthur could serve as ancestor and examplar of Plantagenet kingship and empire or he could be an intrusive rival. Indeed, the Celtic peoples were not inclined to share him, and the aspects of King Arthur which were increasingly elevated by them, proved unfortunate for the Plantagenets. On the other hand, those aspects of Arthurian legend which became associated with the Plantagenets often served to undermine Celtic interests. Nonetheless, Arthurian tradition had gone beyond the Celtic world and become part and parcel of that world represented by the Plantagenet court. The literary and historical documents of this period exhibit the multiplicity of beliefs concerning King Arthur, as well as a multiplicity of reactions to these beliefs. Various understandings and motivations, both personal and social, inform these works, and they allow glimpses of the political necessities which shaped their portrayals of Arthur. This study will take a look at several aspects of Arthurian tradition as they are recorded in history and literature which will help to illustrate the possibility of mutual influences between Plantagenet Britain and Arthurian legend, as well as comparing the portrayals which arose during this period with their early antecedents.
CHAPTER II

ARTURUS REDIVIVUS

The Nature of the Earliest Arthurian Sources

The earliest written sources reveal little about Arthur. Nennius, a priest of the early ninth century, wrote the Historia Britonnum in response to "the stupidity of the British" scholars who "had no skill, and set down no records in books." The various sources he credits include Latin and Church chronicles, "the writings of the Irish and the English," and finally "the tradition of our elders." The latter, apparently oral tradition, is most likely his source for the campaigns of Arthur against the Saxons: "Then Arthur fought against them in those days, together with the kings of the British; but he was their leader in battle." This "dux bellorum" led his people to victory in twelve battles.\(^1\) It has been suggested, however, that since some of the names of these battles form rhymes, they are more likely to be based upon early Welsh poetry than on an historical source.\(^2\) Another side of Arthur appears in Nennius' brief sketch. In his eighth battle:

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appears in Nennius' brief sketch. In his eighth battle:

Arthur carried the image of the holy Mary, the everlasting Virgin, on his shoulders [shield], and the heathen were put to flight on that day, and there was a great slaughter upon them, through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the holy Virgin Mary, his mother. ³

The Annales Cambriae also provide an early mention of Arthur. Existing in various manuscripts, the earliest extant text of these annals (Harleian MS 3859) was written around 1100, but derives from earlier, ninth or tenth-century, texts. ⁴ For the year 516, the annals give notice of Arthur’s leadership in battle, along with a Christian theme similar to that in the Historia Britonnum: "Bellum Badonis, in quo Arthur portavit crucem Domini nostri Jhesu Christi tribus diebus et tribus noctibus in humeros suos et Brittones victores fuerunt." Moreover, the Annales Cambriae contribute another piece of information not present in Nennius’ history; in the year 537 occurred the battle of "Camlann in qua Arthur et Medraut corruerunt." ⁵ References to Arthur in literature which treats early subjects can only tentatively be considered genuine products of the early period. Two Welsh poems, Y Gododdin and Marwnad Cynddylan, refer briefly to Arthur "as a paragon of valour and ferocity." Arthur is not the subject of these poems, but is mentioned as though he would be well known by the audience. However, while these poems elegize early events (Y Gododdin a seventh-century battle), they appear in High Medieval

³ Nennius, 35, 76.

⁴ ibid., 1-3; OCLW, 13.

⁵ Nennius, 85.
manuscripts, and thus it cannot be proved whether or not the Arthurian references were later additions. Similarly, Arthur appears in other Welsh poetic material preserved in later manuscripts, but which show that by the ninth and tenth centuries, he had developed further into a legendary hero. Medieval critics of Arthurian legend made much of the fact that Arthur was not mentioned in the most respected sources for ancient British history, Bede and Gildas; nonetheless, the seeds of the coming revival were already planted.

Arthur's Place in the Celtic Revival

The roots of this study lie in the Celtic Revival of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, based in its turn in the circumstances of both Celtic and Courtly societies, which encouraged the great Arthurian flowering of the thirteenth century. The manifold exploits of Arthur suddenly burst forth after the centuries in which he appeared in only the few written sources, from which little can be drawn to account for the ensuing magnitude of the Arthurian Legend. Charles Moorman notes that "the major documents of Arthurian tradition in its principal forms and aspects—history, legend, romance—were shaped and created from, for the most part, earlier materials from about 1050 to about 1180." What is clear is that these written materials were a reflection of an ongoing oral tradition, and that something occurred

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6 OCLW., 19.

to motivate their collection and elaboration into written forms. Moorman’s hypothesis, that the upheaval and re-orientation of society caused by the Norman Conquest was responsible for this Arthurian literary explosion, seems imminently plausible.

In Celtic society, the latter half of the eleventh century, marked by a humiliating defeat by Harold Godwinson, then the encroachments following the Norman Conquest, precipitated a cultural crisis. Moorman defines the resulting major literary products of Wales at this time as "the literature of defeat." The Four Branches of the Mabinogion, and the Arthurian Culhwch and Olwen, are both attempts to codify the myths of the Welsh past in a way which would make sense in an eleventh century milieu. Thus the author turns to the heroic age:

and sees reflected there, as in Culhwch, a conflict between the values of an age of heroes--simple and forthright bravery, integrity, generosity of spirit, loyalty--, values entirely worthy of emulation and praise, and/or, as in the Four Branches, the moral entanglements and complexities, the personal deceit and expediency that then threaten them.\(^8\)

Arthur, then, for the Welsh may have served as the chief symbol of a Golden Age, and as this idea spun itself out in the oral tradition of the post-Conquest era, it may well have changed from one of Glories Past to one of Glories to Come Again. The Britonic kin of the Welsh, the Cornish and the Bretons, no doubt had similar traditions born of similar experience; however, they left no written evidence for themselves; what written evidence there is comes from non-Celtic observers and

\(^8\) ibid. 24, 29-31.
points to a vigorous oral tradition. In fact, because of the presence in the literature of the Revival of place-names and characters of Celtic, but non-Welsh origins, especially a preponderance of Breton elements, it is obvious that Arthur was enjoying quite a vogue among the Celtic peoples in general.

A question of great interest and little resolution, inspiring a debate of some magnitude among scholars, is how the Celtic hero Arthur came to adorn the literary and historical works of English, Norman, and French authors. One side of this argument includes those who believe that Arthurian legend was spread through the courts of France and entered the courts of England via Breton minstrels, who translated their native legends into French, and who accompanied the Breton knights and barons who joined in the Norman Conquest of England and reaped its benefits in land and titles. Here these minstrels "compared notes with the Cornish and Welsh," updating their own material and spreading it through the royal and baronial courts of western Europe. The other side of this argument is that tales were transmitted directly between the Welsh and Anglo-Normans in the courts on the March. Both sides doubtless contain elements of truth, but both sides tend to

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9 Loomis is the main proponent of this theory which he has stated often in his many books, for a condensed version, however, see the essay "By What Route Did the Romantic Tradition of Arthur Reach the French?" in Studies in Medieval Literature (New York, 1970), 199-212. Others suscribe to his position, notably Geoffrey Ashe; see The Discovery of King Arthur (Garden City, 1985), 165, and The Quest for Arthur's Britain, eds. G. Ashe, et al (New York: 1968), 2.

10 Moorman succinctly states both sides of this argument and identifies proponents of each (and what is at stake for each side) in "Arthurian Revival," 35-36.
deny the feasibility of each others' hypothesis. As Constance Bullock-Davies asserts, "the process of transmission was by no means a simple one," and grand generalities do not do justice to the medieval's capability to adjust himself to the polyglot societies of medieval kingdoms, and his or her interest in the legendary material encountered in new lands. Bullock-Davies stresses the reality and importance of professional interpreters in the employ of kings and barons; these were the people who were in a position to pass on traditional information, and were perhaps the middle-men between native societies and the foreign conteurs who adapted native traditions to the palate of their Norman and French employers.\textsuperscript{11} Thus in a much more intricate and subtle way, Bretons, Welsh, Normans, and French share in the process of transmission. This theory seems more plausible, and has more substantial evidence behind it, than those placing the onus on minstrels alone, who, while talented in music and the rhythms of language, as a group probably cannot shoulder the entire burden of gathering, translating, and adapting traditions. The important theme raised in these arguments is that of the court. It was the court culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that employed troubadours and interpreters, and embraced Arthurian tradition. Arthurian tradition, in fact, seemed tailor-made to the needs of the Plantagenet court. In order to see how this may be, we must return to the concept of a Golden Age of Britain.

To the Celtic peoples, the Golden Age was that in which their ancestors held sway over the whole island of Britain. Between the Roman occupation and the

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Professional Interpreters and the Matter of Britain.} (Cardiff, 1966).
Saxon and Norman conquests, a Briton Britain may seem a rather fleeting historical reality, yet from the periphery of their homeland, the descendants of the Britons wove fond tales of their greatest age of heroes, which fell between the departure of the Roman legions and the rise of the Saxon kingdoms. Arthur came to epitomize the height of this British Britain, and this Golden Age served as a rallying point for Celtic nationalism when faced with the onslaught of Norman domination. Under such pressure, Arthurian tradition proved to possess a certain political expedience. Beginning in the late eleventh-century Welsh hagiographers used Arthur, already a king of some means and more pretentions, as a foil to showcase the God-given power and authority of the saints. These Saints' Lives served as vehicles both to champion Welsh interests in an increasingly Norman Church and to uphold the rights and privileges of dioceses and churches against rival institutions.

The Normans arrived and settled as foreign conquerors, having little in common with the peoples they conquered. However, they were not immune to the pull of the Golden Age of Britain. As early as the reign of Henry I, Orderic Vitalis, an Anglo-Norman monk of St. Evroul in Normandy, had picked up enough Celtic tradition to apply aspects of it to the Norman kingship in his *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. In fact, Orderic already provides an example of a trend in which the Norman kings were legitimate partakers in a long line of "princes both English and British"--a line which included Arthur.\(^{12}\) This trend would gain

momentum as the political advantages to legitimizing, and perhaps sanctifying, the new Norman dynasty became more apparent. The civil war over the throne of England which arose between the Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I and her cousin Stephen did much to necessitate such legitimizing.

Galfridus Arturus and Arturus Rex

Geoffrey of Monmouth, surnamed "Arthurus," presumably after his father, was of Breton parentage, and while probably born at Monmouth, was educated and taught at Oxford, and it was there that he wrote his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, at the request of Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln. Published around 1136, with the inclusion of another work, the *Prophetiae Merlini*, the *Historia* would become one of the most well-known, oft-cited, and oft-alluded to works in the histories and literature of the Middle Ages.¹³ Geoffrey, however, worked hard to get his work noticed by those in position to help him advance in life. He dedicated copies of his work to such politically diverse persons as King Stephen and Robert, earl of Gloucester, half-brother of Stephen's rival Matilda; as well as Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, a supporter of Matilda, and his successor, Robert of Chesney, an adherent of Stephen's. Such a method of dedication, as Antonia Gransden comments, "shows

a general desire to please the powers-that-were";\textsuperscript{14} however, no greater reward was forthcoming than an insignificant bishopric in North Wales, which it seems unlikely that he would have visited due to the recent successful Welsh revolt. Ironically, Geoffrey of Monmouth played a small part in bringing the hostilities between Stephen and Matilda to a close by being one of the episcopal witnesses to the confirmation of the Treaty of Winchester, which ensured the accession of Matilda's son, Henry of Anjou to the throne.\textsuperscript{15}

A contemporary of Geoffrey's and fellow historian, William of Malmesbury, addressed the subject of Arthur in his \textit{Gesta Regum Anglorum}, written around 1125. Upon the death of Vortimer, William records:

\begin{quote}
British strength decayed, and all hope fled from them; and they would soon have perished altogether, had not Ambrosius, the sole survivor of the Romans, who became monarch after Vortigern, quelled the presumptuous barbarians by the powerful aid of the warlike Arthur.
\end{quote}

He also includes Arthur's remarkable victory at Mount Badon and his image of the Virgin Mary in a description of Arthur as a battle chieftain deriving from Nennius. However, William, a careful and conscientious researcher, also addresses, with some dismay and outrage the burgeoning of hyperbolic traditions concerning Arthur:

\begin{quote}
It is of this Arthur that the Britons fondly tell so many fables, even to the present day; a man worthy to be celebrated, not by idle fictions, but by authentic history. He long upheld the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} Gransden, 204.

\textsuperscript{15} Chambers, 51-2; Loomis, \textit{Development}, 34; Parry, 74.
sinking state, and roused the broken spirit of his countrymen in war.\textsuperscript{16}

William must have been sadly disappointed then, in Geoffrey’s \textit{Historia}, which raised such fictions, supplemented by his own imagination, to the level of history, and which was, in fact, deemed authentic by many, historians or otherwise, for several centuries.\textsuperscript{17}

Nonetheless, Geoffrey’s glorious history of the kings of Britain had much to recommend itself to the current denizens of Britain, both Celtic and Norman. Despite his use of Welsh material for some of his work, including his version of Merlin’s prophecies, Geoffrey is none too laudatory of the Welsh as a people in his \textit{Historia}; his picture of the Welsh is of a dissipated people locked in self-destructive, internecine warfare.\textsuperscript{18} Rather, he considered the Bretons to be true heirs of the ancient Britons. When Cadwallo, the last insular, British king flees to Brittany to escape the depredations of the Saxons, the Breton king castigates the "feeble behavior" of his people, saying:

\begin{quote}
for we come from the same stock and we bear the name of Britons just as the men of your kingdom do, and yet we manage to protect our fatherland, which you see around you, when it is attacked by
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{17} For thorough discussions of Geoffrey’s source material, real and imagined see E.K. Chambers’ chapter, "The Sources of Geoffrey" in \textit{Arthur of Brittain}, John Parry and Robert Caldwell’s essay, "Geoffrey of Monmouth" in \textit{ALMA.}, and R.S. Loomis’ \textit{Development of Arthurian Romance}.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{The History of the Kings of Britain}, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York, 1966), (xi.9-xii.11) 264-5, (xii.19) 284.
any of our neighbors.¹⁹

It has been a general consensus that Geoffrey was thus flattering his own ancestry and the powerful Breton elements in England, as well as intending to appeal to the Normans by disparaging both Anglo-Saxons and Welsh, while providing the Anglo-Norman kingship with a glorious precedent. John Parry suggests that Geoffrey wished "to help the English kings in their effort to assert their independence of the kings of France," to which Antonia Gransden adds that "Geoffrey was trying to bring British history in line with continental histories." Many scholars point to the parallels between Geoffrey's Arthur of the Britons, and the august French Charlemagne tradition; both lent a certain mystique to their respective monarchies. Geoffrey himself hints at some such notion by including the Twelve Peers of France in Arthur's court.²⁰ The British kingdom outlined in the Historia, from the Trojan Brutus to Arthur, served indeed as a blueprint, (or as a mirror in actuality), of the Norman holdings on both sides of the Channel, urging both the equality, if not superiority, of the English throne to the French, and the kinship of Anglo-Norman subjects. Parry explains:

This would apply equally well to the subjects of Henry I or Matilda or Stephen, and when Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine came to the throne, its application was far broader than Geoffrey

¹⁹ HKB., (xii.5) 272-3.

could have imagined when he first thought of the idea.\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, during the reign of Henry Plantagenet Geoffrey’s \textit{Historia} and Arthurian legend in general began to attract the attention of royalty.

"Per Ora Multorum"

In Geoffrey’s \textit{Prophecies of Merlin}, the mage prognosticates the fame of Arthur, the "Boar of Cornwall": "The Boar shall be extolled in the mouths of its peoples, and its deeds will be as meat and drink to those who tell tales."\textsuperscript{22} This trend, noticed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, continued with greater vigor after the publication of the \textit{Historia}. Geoffrey was by no means the source of all the Arthurian material which followed, but in many ways the popularity and accessibility of his Arthurian history acted as a catalyst. His work was translated within twenty years into French by the Norman Wace, and subsequently into English by the Saxon priest Layamon at the turn of the century; both authors enhancing the original to even more aptly fit their own society and views. Also by the turn of the century, the first of many translations into Welsh was made; about fifty manuscripts of Welsh \textit{Brutiau} remain extant, "representing at least three independent translations."\textsuperscript{23} Obviously, Geoffrey’s slights made against the Welsh people did nothing to deter

\textsuperscript{21} Gransden, 204-5; Parry, 86.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{HBK.}, (vii.3) 172.

their embracing the illustrious history he had written of their ancestors. Extracts and
translations could be found throughout all of Europe. Moreover, chroniclers, and
some writers of romance, incorporated the Galfridian history of Britain into their
own works. Such a situation is none too surprising since Geoffrey had already
blurred the line between history and romance, and, moreover, demonstrates the
extent to which Arthur’s world became that of contemporary society.

Although Geoffrey was unable to benefit from royal patronage, the popular
message of the Historia opened doors for other authors into the highest eschalons of
medieval society. The aristocracy, like Earl Robert of Gloucester, continued to
patronize Arthurian literature, but the kings and queens of England also began to
actively sponsor Arthurian works as well as to attract elements of Arthurian legend
to themselves. Geoffrey’s translator Wace, as we are told by his translator
Layamon, presented his Roman de Brut, completed in the year of Geoffrey’s death,
1155, "to the noble Eleanor, who was Henry the high king’s queen."24 Henry
himself may well have read and enjoyed Wace’s offering, for Wace was soon
occupied with another poetic history, commissioned by the king, this time concerning
the dukes of Normandy.25 Henry’s queen, Eleanor, also served as one of the
greatest patrons of the Arthurian arts, employing, among others, Chretien de Troyes,
the progenitor of Arthurian romance. When in Sicily during the Fourth Crusade,

24 Introduction by Gwyn Jones in Wace and Layamon: Arthurian Chronicles,

Edward I lent a collection of Arthurian tales to Rusticiano de Pisa, who later produced from this as well as from "pluseurs hystoires" and "pluseurs croniques" the Arthurian work, *Meliadus*. Moreover, according to the epilogue, Edward expressly commanded that it be written. Like her namesake, Edward's first queen, Eleanor of Castile, owned a collection of romances, probably Arthurian, and was presented with the latest French Arthurian romance, *Escanor*, by Girard of Amiens upon her visit to his city in 1279. Finally, many independent historians, that is those not attached to monasteries, were attached instead to the royal court. The likes of Peter of Blois, Gerald of Wales, and Roger de Hoveden all served as officers or courtiers of Henry II. There, with their fingers on the pulse of the monarchy and kingdom, such historians as these wrote histories which would reflect the interests and perspectives of both. Little wonder then that they often included Arthurian tradition in their works.

The reaction of historians to the Arthurian legend as presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth was both positive and negative. Henry of Huntingdon, upon being introduced to Geoffrey's *Historia* in 1139 at the Norman abbey of Bec, expressed surprise and pleasure at its contents, happily incorporating some of its entertaining

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Arthurian elements into his own works. At the other extreme, William of Newburgh vitriolically, and with great conviction, denounced Geoffrey for producing a history full of "wanton and shameless lying." It was, however, among the populace at large that the emergent Arthurian legend had the greatest impact, and the historians of the time remarked upon this trend. Wace describes the birth of Uther and Ygerne’s son, Arthur, "with the rumour of whose praise the whole world has been filled." This is a slight but significant deviation from Geoffrey’s text which states that Arthur "subsequently won renown by his outstanding bravery." Geoffrey places Arthur’s great fame in the future of his story, while for Wace it is in the past and present, not only of his small sphere, but of the world at large. Alfred of Beverley, writing in his abridgement of the Historia begun around 1149, states: "At that time, tales of British history were being produced by many mouths, and whoever did not have knowledge of such tales was deemed a rustic." Finally, Peter of Blois mentions, in his De Confessione from around 1190, tales told by story-tellers about Arthur, Gawain, and Tristan which moved the hearts of their audiences

28 Gransden, 200-1.


30 WLAC, 40.

31 HBK, (viii. 19), 207.

32 Chambers, Record xvii, 260. "Ferebantur tunc temporis per ora multorum narrationes de historia Britonum, notamque rusticitatis incurrebat, qui talium narrationum scientiam non habebat."
to compassion and reduced them to tears.\textsuperscript{33} It was in this society that the Plantagenet kings found that the themes of empire and kingship which had become associated with Arthur could be useful allies in their ambitious endeavors, while his role, increasingly reputed by the Celtic peoples, as redeemer of the Britons, could prove to be a hindrance.

\textsuperscript{33} Chambers, Record xxiv, 145-6, 267.
CHAPTER III

ARTURUS IMPERATOR

Pre-Galfridian Scope of King Arthur’s Rule

The Plantagenet quest for empire may help to explain the allure of Arthurian legend for the Anglo-Norman monarchy and nobility. Henry Plantagenet’s sprawling empire, achieved through a brilliant marriage, political maneuvering, and hard-won battle remained an ideal by which his descendants were measured. From John’s humiliating loss of Normandy to Edward’s battering of Wales and Scotland, the struggle to retain and expand the empire remained on the forefront of political strategy. The *Arturus Imperator* of Geoffrey’s *Historia* rode forth to the aid of empire and kingship. Chronicle and romance reveal the important place this Arthur occupied in the popular conception of king as conqueror in the Plantagenet era, as well as providing brief glimpses into royal response to the potent legend.

It is necessary again, before delving into Geoffrey’s contribution to this matter and that of his followers, to look into the information provided by his predecessors. In the extant documents, the pre-Galfridian scope of King Arthur’s sway is decidedly limited, and his position, as discussed before, more humble than that in the *Historia*. Nonetheless, the early Arthur is not without a certain aura of authority and potency, whether achieved by the brash savoir faire and mystical
connections attributed to him in Welsh poetry and romance or the pugnacious self-interest by which he is known in some of the Saints' Lives.

*Culhwch and Olwen* portrays Arthur as the lord of a large and varied court, the formidable magical talents of which are at his disposal. Arthur's court, as in later romances, is a place where boons are granted and injuries redressed, a site of pilgrimage for those who seek help or justice, although the means to these ends will not be very familiar to the readers of High Medieval romances. In *Culhwch*, Arthur seems to have the run of Britain, for while opposing forces do exist, it is within his to power challenge them and most often have his own way. Examples of Arthur ranging outside of the isle of Prydein are few in early Welsh literature. One instance, *The Spoils of Annwfn*, portrays Arthur and many men sailing to the Celtic underworld in order to relieve its lord of his magical cauldron. Although that expedition seems to have been disastrously unsuccessful, a similar episode with a more positive denoument occurs in *Culhwch*, in which Arthur and his men sail instead to Ireland to seek a magical cauldron. This time, Arthur and his "light force" easily route the "hosts of Ireland," making off with "the cauldron full of the treasures of Ireland." Arthur then gathers allies from France, Brittany, and Normandy to join his British forces in another expedition into Ireland, whose fearful denizens pay him tribute for his protection.34 That seems the extent of Arthur's

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imperialistic tendencies to be found in early Welsh literature. These tales do not imply that Arthur had any agenda for overrunning foreign lands for any other than temporary, material purposes; if, however, the references to France and Normandy were not later additions to the early corpus, they offer some evidence of Arthur’s international stature before Geoffrey of Monmouth sent him marching across Europe.

The Saints’ Lives portray Arthur’s sphere of influence as more humble still, for in most he is but a petty tyrant whom the saints must foil and chastise. Furthermore, Arthur is not the only king the saints must deal with; as in actual medieval Welsh society, the land is dotted with many kingdoms and spheres of influence. Another king, Maelgwn, appears as often as Arthur in the Lives, and also makes trouble for the saints, while in the Life of St. Carannog, Arthur is co-ruler in Somerset with a certain Cado or Cadwy, a personage typically associated with Cador, ruler of Cornwall.35 The various epithets by which Arthur is known, from "the most illustrious king in Britain" to "a certain tyrant," reveal the ambivalence toward Arthur in these Lives, but in the final analysis a composite view of Arthur

emerges. He is most often referred to as someone wielding royal power, which, if not absolute, is a force to be reckoned with, and, as kings are wont, he spends a great deal of time using his power to get what he wants in despite of the Church.

On the other hand, a few of the Saints' Lives give some indication of the tradition of Arthur's court and conquests to be seen to some extent in *Culhwch and Olwen* and to a far greater degree in Geoffrey of Monmouth. The Breton Life of St. Goeznovius speaks of a "magnum Arturum Britonum regem" who won "multas victorias" in both Britain and Gaul. Though found in a fifteenth-century manuscript, the text, due to internal evidence, has tentatively been dated to 1019. Another Life witnessing this tradition is that of St. Iltut, in which the young Iltut, having heard of "the magnificence of his cousin, king Arthur, and being desirous to visit the court of so great a conqueror," leaves his native Brittany for his cousin's court. Some controversy persists concerning the dating of this Life; Baring-Gould argues that it was written before the *Historia*, while others, including Tatlock, make it contemporaneous with or after Geoffrey's work. Until this controversy can be laid to rest satisfactorily, it is perhaps best to loosely date the Life of St. Iltut between the 1120's to the 1150's. The fact, however, remains that Saints' Lives typically used

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36 Text of the Arthurian segment of the *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* from Chambers, 241-42; his discussion of the same, pp. 93-94.

37 The Life of Iltut contained in Rees, Arthurian connection p. 159.

associations and encounters with Arthur to boost the esteem of their saints, and, as a larger Celtic oral tradition of Arthur's impressive court was captured in pre-Galfridian, secular, Welsh writing, there is no reason to assume that a hagiographer should not avail himself of these traditions as well, with or without the influence of the Historia.

Next, it is necessary to turn to the early chronicles to seek out possible evidence on which to base Arthur's later international reputation as an exemplar of heroic kingship. The chronicle of Nennius and the Annales Cambriæ treat his prowess as a Christian military leader, and while his successes may be limited in range, what High Medieval king would not wish his epitaph to read "he was victorious in all his campaigns"? By long-standing tradition court bards of the Welsh princes were praising their patrons with poetry comparing them to an Arthur who was more a fierce and generous war-lord than the courtly sovereign of later romance. A late verse written to Rhys ap Maredudd celebrates the prince: "Rampart of hosts, defender of Wales was he, Shield-shorn like Arthur, the mighty-voiced slayer of men." Such a verse is reminiscent of Nennius' battle of Badon Hill in which "nine hundred and sixty men fell in one day, from a single charge of Arthur's, and no one laid them low save him alone," and is surely but a continuation of a long oral tradition. In both Nennius and the Annales Cambriæ, he carries Christian

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39 Nennius, 35 and 85.

emblems into battle with the pagan Saxons.\textsuperscript{41} Certainly in an age of Crusades, Arthur's early portrayal easily translated into the Christian sovereign-knight fighting against pagan barbarians and proved irresistible to chroniclers, romancers, and their readers. The more genteel Arthur awaited the imaginative touch of Geoffrey and the more sophisticated stylings of the writers of romance, yet the warrior Arthur served the purposes of the Plantagenet kings and their chroniclers as well.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthurian Empire

The Arthurian scholar, Geoffrey Ashe summarizes the Arthur of the \textit{Historia Regum Britanniae} as "a compound of the historical military leader and the enigmatic fairy prince, with amazing embellishments."\textsuperscript{42} In terms of the present argument, it turned out to be quite a potent brew. Under Geoffrey's pen, Arthur became a king with an impressive court, as based on Celtic tradition, but further glorified and adapted to the current fashions of the Anglo-Norman court. Moreover, he transformed Arthur into a prodigious conqueror, who, after defeating the Saxons, carries his sword abroad, making subject Scotland, the Orkneys, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, and Gaul. The king rewards his faithful followers with the fallen lands: Scotland, Moray, and Lothian are given to the brothers Auguselus, Urian, and

\textsuperscript{41} In Nennius, Arthur carries an image of Mary, while in the \textit{Annales Cambriae} he carries an image of the Cross: "portavit crucem Domini nostri Jhesu Christi"; in both cases victory is attributed to the power vested in Arthur through the holy symbols.

Loth; Norway to his brother-in-law, Loth; Normandy and Anjou to his officers, Bedevere and Kay. Thus, at his plenary court at Caerleon homage is offered him by these and other subject kings, including those of Brittany, Ireland, Cornwall, and North and South Wales, and from farther afoot, the duke of Flanders and the earl of Boulogne. The court is rounded out with bishops, archbishops, and the leading men of his principal cities. Arthur's imperial exploits, however, had not gone unnoticed by the great Empire to the east, and the Roman Procurator, Lucius, demands receipt of British tribute and that of the conquered lands. With a great host of his feudal allies, Arthur rushes to avenge this "unjust oppression," routes the army of the Romans along with their allied armies from a multitude of Eastern kingdoms, kills Lucius, and is only prevented from storming the Imperial City itself by news of treachery at home. This and Geoffrey's inclusion of a reworking the Prophecies of Merlin, which among its obscure prognostications foretold the future reunion of England, Scotland, and Wales and hinted at the strengths and weaknesses of English monarchies, became political fodder for the aspirations of kings and the commentary of chroniclers. Moreover, this pan-European Arthurian kingdom became the common-place backdrop for the Arthurian romance.

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43 Thorpe, in *HBK*, p. 359, identifies the *Ruteni* as Flemings, and so it is glossed by Wace and other later writers; the nomenclature is somewhat problematic, but it seems fairly certain, that Geoffrey was referring to Flanders, since he implied that they were a northern, coastal people. See Tatlock's explanation on pp. 94-95 of *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley, 1950). Thorpe, p. 333, further identifies *Hoiland* as Boulogne, a translation that also shows up in Wace and later writers.
Arthur as World-Conqueror in Chronicle and Literature

Arthur's conquests, as recited by Geoffrey, certainly belong to the realm of hyperbole, and one of Geoffrey's harshest critics, William of Newburgh, was only too happy to point this out. In scathing tones, he writes: "But even a person of dim mental vision can observe how much the unadulterated historical truth preempts the falsehood which has been compiled at this point." Arthur's universal achievements arise only from the "free reign" of Geoffrey's fancy, and ultimately insult the historical achievements of great conquerors like Caesar and Alexander; on Arthur's battle against Lucius and the kings of the East William lectures:

He recounts that they were all conquered by Arthur in a single battle, whereas the celebrated Alexander the Great, renowned in every age, sweated for twelve years in overcoming certain princes of these great kingdoms. He certainly makes his Arthur's little finger broader than the back of Alexander the Great.

After exhaustively listing the impossibility of Arthur having subjected Scandinavia, Ireland, and Gaul, he relegates the thirty kingdoms Arthur had supposedly conquered even before the encounter with the Eastern hosts to the historical rubbish bin by noting: "Yet our story-teller will not find that number of kingdoms in the world we live in, over and above the ones listed which Arthur clearly had not yet conquered."

Similarly, William's opinion of the prophesies of Merlin is that they are false and deceitful.44 No doubt much to his chagrin, William of Newburgh could not stem the tide.

44 HEA., Walsh and Kennedy, 28-35. By calling Geoffrey a "fabulator" or storyteller, William strips his works of all pretensions to "the honourable title of history."
The tradition of Arthur as the conqueror of much of the known Western world continued unabated, perpetuated by chroniclers who based their accounts of the history of ancient and Dark Age Britain on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s colorful version of the past. Whether or not the chroniclers truly believed Geoffrey’s work to be historical truth, as no doubt many did, it is probable that their acceptance was not only due to the mere fact that it was the only source for certain portions of Britain’s history, but also because such a magnificent past, which blended so well into the spirit of the present time, was too precious a prize to give up. As previously discussed, the idea of empire was a popular one in Plantagenet England, and the chroniclers apparently thought Arthur’s empire true enough, interesting enough, or inspiring enough to include in their histories of the world.

Among the more sober recitations in chronicles of Arthur’s dominion are those of Roger of Wendover, Robert of Gloucester, and Gervase of Tilbury. Roger of Wendover, a monk of St. Albans and later raised to prior of Belvoir during King John’s reign, wrote *The Flowers of History*, a world chronicle covering the creation to 1235; in it Arthurian legend, based closely on Geoffrey’s model, mingles with world events. In the year 525 he records the conquest of Ireland, Iceland, Gothland, and the Orkneys, followed by news of heresies, emperor Justinian, a miracle in Africa, and finally Arthur’s conquest of Norway. His entry for the year 533 states that Arthur "now aimed at nothing less than the conquest of all Europe." Roger then carefully lists the regions Arthur conquered in Gaul: Normandy, Gascony, Poitou,
Anjou, and Aquitaine. Although he leaves out some of the kings and all of the more exotic names used by Geoffrey as filler, it may well have been important to Roger to include in his Arthurian empire the territories of the Angevin empire at its height. The sunny southern states had been part of the rich dower brought to the Anglo-Norman monarchy by Eleanor of Aquitaine, while within the author’s living memory the young Richard had been the count of Poitou, John had struggled to keep the empire intact, and Henry III had ignominiously lost all but Gascony to the French king.

*The Metrical Chronicle* in English, attributed to Robert, a monk of Gloucester, survives in two recensions which record events up to the end of Henry III’s reign, although the original source most likely ended with the reign of Henry I. It contains a full accounting of Arthurian Britain according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, translating Geoffrey in most places phrase by phrase. Robert provided his readers the standard refrain of countries conquered by Arthur, although, like Roger of Wendover, paring down the list for the sake of space. Nonetheless, the chronicler adds a verse between the defeat of the Romans and the arrival of news from England of Mordred’s treachery that appears nowhere in Geoffrey’s work. In eulogistic tones he says:

Grettore batayle than this was ich wene nas neuere non
Bote it were thulke of troye vor ther nas unnethe non
Prynce in al the world that ne moste be there other sende
Fram the west syde of the world to the est most ende
Tho adde king arthur ywonne fram the west moste se

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45 Vol. 1, v, 38, 40.
Anon to the mouns al that lond & ar he come age.\textsuperscript{46}

The chronicler seems to be rather an enthusiastic fan; this is not the only example of this chronicler allowing small diversions from his source to elaborate on Arthur’s virtues. Assuming that he chose to elaborate on subjects of importance or interest to himself and to his readers, it is significant that he chose the matter of empire.

Finally, in his \textit{Excerpta ex Otiis Imperialibus}, an encyclopedic world chronicle, Gervase of Tilbury includes a version of early British history also taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Arthur’s conquests here are also in the \textit{Historia}, except for the curious addition of what seems to be Russia. Gervase apparently had difficulty in placing Geoffrey’s \textit{Ruteni}. First he glosses \textit{dux Rutenorum} by saying "hoc est Flandrensium," arriving at the same conclusion as Wace and Layamon. However he further complicates the problem by pursuing other etymologies:

\textit{Alii tamen Russiam Ruthoniam nominant. Sed et in provincia Narbonensi civitas Rutenensis Bituricensi est archiepiscopo subjecta.}\textsuperscript{47}

The Ruteni, it seems, was long the name applied to a people of Aquatinian Gaul, a definition Geoffrey either was not certain of or ignored when he applied it to a northern coastal people. Thus Gervase probably applies it more correctly to the Bituriges, two Gallic tribes, one centered around Bourges in Berry, the other around

\textsuperscript{46} Ed. William Aldis Wright. (Rolls Series, 1887; Weisbaden 1965), v, 256-271, 316-17. Of Arthur’s French conquests, the chronicler only lists Gascony (\textit{gascoyne}) and Poitou (\textit{peyto}). The above verse is inserted into what would be Geoffrey’s Book 10, chapter 13, following Arthur’s order to carry Lucius’ body to the Roman Senate and directly before the sentence reading "Arthur spent the following winter in this same locality and found time to subdue the cities of the Allobroges."

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Chronicon Anglicaum etc.} ed. Joseph Stevenson (Rolls Series, 1875; Wiesbaden, 1965), 437.
Bordeaux. The latter city is near the region of Perigord, which is derived from the ancient tribal name. Since Perigord is in the province of Aquitaine and thus a fitting sight for the Ruteni, Gervase inexplicably places his "civitas Rutenensis Bituricensi" near Narbonne. Moreover, the similar spelling of the High Medieval term for Russia, *Ruthenus*, provides yet another element of confusion. Nonetheless, while Gervase may have confused Ruteni with Ruthenus, he does not mistake Flanders for Russia, as he glosses both with the more familiar terms "Flandrensium" and "Russiam."

Beyond this etymological quagmire, it is interesting to consider Gervase’s station in regards to this version of Arthur’s empire. Gervase left his home in England to serve Henry the Lion, Duke of Brunswick, son-in-law of Henry Plantagenet, who gave him the office of Marshall of Arles. During his tenure, he wrote the *Otia Imperialia*, and dedicated it to Otto IV of Germany, the nephew of the English kings Richard I and John, and no friend to France. Perhaps in this more easterly milieu, adding Russia to the list of conquests would not seem so far-

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48 See entries in *Harper’s Latin Dictionary*. (New York, 1907). The Ruteni are described by Pliny, Caesar, and Lucan; the two tribes of Bituriges by Pliny, Caesar, Hirtius, and Lucan.

Layamon is the only chronicler in this study to include a representative of Berry at Arthur’s court; since he also includes Flanders, one wonders whether he interpolated in from Geoffrey’s *Ruteni*, or whether he found it elsewhere.


50 Joseph Stevenson’s preface to Gervase’s work in the Roll Series, pp. xxiii-xxiv.
fetched, but, in any case, it seems Otto could be in the position to enjoy a chronicle which glorified a predecessor of his Plantagenet kin at the expense of France.

Two other chronicles make somewhat greater additions to Geoffrey of Monmouth's framework of Arthurian conquest. Pierre de Langtoft, the biographer of Edward I, adds Austria, Portugal, and Navarre. This may be a free interpolation from a verse in the Historia which states about Arthur's great feast, "there remained no prince of any distinction this side of Spain who did not come when he received his invitation," to which Wace added in the Brut: "yea, to the very Rhine in the land of Germany."\(^{51}\) Langtoft also may have been referring somewhat obscurely to ties he saw, or wished to see, between these countries and the royal house of England. Certainly, Pierre de Langtoft was not above using his chronicle as a forum for comparisons between Arthurian and Edwardian England; in fact, his favorite device is to give Edward advice based on the deeds and virtues of Arthur. A close review of Edward's diplomatic policies reveals failed attempts to marry his offspring to that of the houses of Navarre and Hapsburg, the latter actually negotiated by the papacy. The widowed queen of Navarre married Edward's brother, Edmund of Lancaster, but gave her daughter, the sole heiress, to the son of Philip III of France, rather than to Edward's son. This created quite a tangled web of feudal loyalties and tensions.\(^{52}\)

\(^{51}\) WLAC., 65; Layamon translates this verse into his own chronicle.

\(^{52}\) Michael Prestwich, Edward I. (Berkeley, 1988), 315-17, 330, 380. While Edward did not succeed in binding his line to Navarre, his great-uncle Richard I had been more fortunate, marrying Princess Berengaria of Navarre--although they had no offspring. Certainly marriages between the royal houses of England, Spain and Germany were common.
However, Langtoft’s choice of Portugal is too obscure in both an Arthurian and an Edwardian context to venture suggesting his motivation.

Finally, the *Draco Normannicus*, of which more will be said later, provides a particularly hyperbolic account of Arthur as conqueror. Attributed to Etienne de Rouen, a monk of Bec Herluin who died around 1170, the work contains a series of letters purportedly written between Breton nationalist Roland de Dinan, King Arthur, and Henry II. In an imperious letter to King Henry, Arthur recounts his conquests, based largely on Geoffrey of Monmouth, in an attempt to put a stop to Henry’s oppression of the Bretons. The list of Arthur’s allies against Lucius seems surprisingly modest: Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Gaul, and Saxony, but he has no time to waste on details here. Rather he spares no extravagance when comparing his glory to that of his predecessors in conquest. Etienne’s Arthur claims to outshine Romulus, Alexander, Caesar, Constantine, and Rollo, while his empire is greater than that of Assyria, Chaldea, Macedon, and Rome.\(^{53}\) The general consensus of scholars is that Etienne’s purpose in writing this eccentric exchange is to spoof contemporary Breton beliefs in Arthur as world-conqueror, in which case William of Newburgh’s tirade against the fallacies and fancies perpetrated by Geoffrey’s *Historia* seems well-placed.

In the literature of the Plantagenet period, Arthur’s empire and, in fact, Arthur took a back seat to the adventures of his knights. This is not to imply that

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the writers of romance did not know Arthur as a great conqueror, but rather that they took it for granted. Everyone familiar with Geoffrey and his translators or who had ever heard stories told knew this aspect of Arthur and more. Story-tellers and romance writers simply had other messages to get across to their audiences, and thus dealt with the subject of Arthur’s conquests rarely or very briefly, as they are generally considered to be past events and incidental in the present life of the Round Table. Nonetheless, vestiges of Arthur as a conqueror remain, sometimes along the lines provided by the Historia, and sometimes colored by the intent of the author.

Chretien de Troyes, employed in the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne at Poitou, wrote some of the earliest and most influential Arthurian romances, mostly dealing with themes of chivalric behavior and courtly love. Arthur’s court is but a colorful backdrop for his young heroes and heroines. However, the romances Erec and Enide and Cliges provide a glimpse of Arthur’s widespread military resources and his international stature. The assembly at Arthur’s court in Erec and Enide is pan-European; gathered at the Angevin city, Nantes, were the "finest and the most noble" of Normandy, Brittany, Scotland, England, Cornwall, Wales, Anjou, Poitou, and Germany. Meanwhile, in Cliges Arthur’s court, both because of its magnificence and the renown of its members, draws the son of the Greek emperor from Constantinople. Refusing to be knighted by anyone but Arthur, a recurring theme in romances which has its roots in

54 See these romances in The Complete Romances of Chretien de Troyes. Trans. David Staines. (Bloomington, 1990), 1-86 and 87-169.
Geoffrey, the young Alexander leaves his inheritance behind. Chretien seems, therefore, to suggest that Arthur's empire, in one way or another, rivals the Eastern Empire. When Alexander's younger brother usurps the throne, Arthur endows him with "so large a force of men from Wales, Scotland, and Cornwall that his brother would not dare stand against him after seeing his assembled array." Thus Arthur is king of all Britain. Finally, when Alexander's son, Cliges, also a knight in Arthur's court, must take back his Eastern throne from a usurping uncle, Arthur "announced that he would sail with a navy before Constantinople, filling a thousand ships with knights and three thousand men-at-arms." Moreover, Chretien continues:

The king embarked on such massive preparations for war that neither Caesar nor Alexander saw their equal. He had all England and all Flanders, Normandy, Brittany, and France, as well as all the men as far as the borders, summoned and assembled.

Although the necessity for this conquest is averted, the Arthur of this romance is on a level with that in the Historia, and Chretien could, through his hyperbolic comparisons, elicit the admonishment of William of Newburgh.

Written between 1190 and 1215, the Didot or Prose Perceval gives a description of an Arthurian feast at Pentecost akin to Geoffrey's but with the addition of the Round Table.\(^5\) People from all over the world attend this feast, but the author does not specify who they are, where they are from, or whether they are invited as guests or to pay homage. The conquest of France in this story is pushed back in time, almost to the end; instead of an early expansion providing the bulk of

Arthur's fame and influence, it has become the remedy for the boredom overwhelming a jaded court. After being gently chided for his idleness by Merlin and reminded of his ancestral rights to France and Rome, Arthur gathers a hundred thousand knights to his side in one month, all eager to conquer France, Normandy, Rome, Lombardy, and even Jerusalem for him and to crown him "lord of the whole world." The addition of Jerusalem probably reflects the crusading spirit of the times. Could the inclusion of Lombardy reflect current Norman interest in Italy? The author does seem rather pro-English, for when Arthur has conquered France and been crowned by cheering Parisians (a detail added by Wace), he notes: "The knights of France and Normandy said that they had never had such a good lord, and there were many nobles of France who loved Arthur more than they ever did [the former king]."

Deviating from Geoffrey's blueprint, the author also has the king give Britanny to Gawain and Vermandois to Bedivere. Why he chose to do so is anyone's guess, but could have meaning in the context of Plantagenet politics. Throughout the period in which this piece was most likely written, the kings of England and France were embroiled in bitter disputes over the overlordship of Britanny; the author may have chosen sides in this debate. Furthermore, Philip Augustus, nemesis of Henry II, Richard, and John, had recently acquired a rich dowry through his marriage to Isabella of Hainault, which included Vermandois,56 a land described by the Prose Perceval's author as "good land and fertile." Arthur's encounter with the Romans

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differs somewhat from Geoffrey as well, for Arthur fights the Emperor himself in one-on-one combat and kills him. However, the king’s entourage greatly resembles the one in the *Historia* and shows him to be overlord of a large empire. In Arthur’s court are the kings of Orkney, Denmark, and Ireland, as well as seven other kings "all of whom were obedient to his command," while his forces against Rome include Britons, Norsemen, Irish, and Scots.

The final romance to be examined here in light of its view of Arthur as conqueror is the French *Mort Artu* written between 1230 and 1235. Arthur is very inactive in the greater part of the story, most of it concerning Lancelot and the other knights. The romance is also very religious and moral in tone. Arthur, at ninety-two years of age, is described as being weak in character and is chastised for his hubris more than he is praised for nobility. A vision Arthur has of Lady Fortune and her wheel sums up the author’s attitude, for in it Fortune blames Arthur for his earthly pride and warns him of his impending fall. When Arthur hears that the Romans have invaded the far reaches of his territory and destroyed Burgundy, his army, surprisingly, only comprises "the men of Logres." Nonetheless, Arthur is to be remembered as a conqueror, for his epitaph reads: "HERE LIES KING ARTHUR WHO THROUGH HIS VALOUR CONQUERED TWELVE KINGDOMS." A king’s body may be mortal, but his reputation as a great conqueror lives on.

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Arthur and the Plantagenet Politics of Empire

While these examples show the general view in the chronicles and romances of Arthur as conqueror, as well as some possible political incentives for specific portrayals, some chroniclers made direct comparisons between Arthurian legend and their sovereigns. These sovereigns could sometimes make it easy for this to be done by deliberately courting comparison or by personally partaking in Arthurian pageantry. Therefore, beyond being the patrons of chronicles or romances or having Arthurian books in their libraries, the Plantagenet monarchs did sometimes become part of the corpus of Arthurian lore when these comparisons or deeds were written about by the chroniclers. Orderic Vitalis, author of *The Ecclesiastical History of England*, compares Henry I to the "lion of justice" in Merlin’s Prophesies: "at whose roar the towers of France and the Island dragons shall tremble; because in wealth and power he transcends all who reigned in England before him." The Plantagenet dynasty, however, provided even more fodder for the prophecy mill, Henry II, his Queen Eleanor, and their feisty sons being favorite subjects. Henry’s imperialism in Brittany attracted dire threats from King Arthur in the *Draco Normannicus*; the boastful letter Etienne crafted in Arthur’s name accomplished a sly parody of the legendary king’s empire-envy, which serves to imply the formidable expanse of the Plantagenet’s own holdings.

Gerald of Wales, the Norman-Welsh Archdeacon of Brecon, served as a guide

58 Vol. 4, 102.
for Henry II and the Archbishop of Canterbury on their political and episcopal journeys through Wales, also acting as a liason between them and the Welsh princes on several occasions. Gerald was a prolific writer and expressed his opinion on topics ranging from the religious reform of Wales to Plantagenet politics. His relationship with Henry and with his son John ranged from sycophantic to acrimonious, although during his time with the court he wrote high praises of King Henry. He speaks of Henry's empire in *The Topography of Ireland*:

> For your victories vie with the world itself, since you, our Alexander of the West, have stretched out your arms from the Pyreenean mountains to the farthest and most western borders of the ocean. In these parts you have spread your triumphs as far as nature has spread her lands. If the bounds of your expeditions be sought, we reach the ends of the earth before we find their limits.\(^{59}\)

Although he chooses another great conqueror of the past to compare with Henry's conquests here, in his *The Conquest of Ireland*, he explains five grounds by which the king of England has "a right to Ireland," the first two of which he derives from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Arthur also, Gerald notes, "had kings of Ireland tributary to him, and that Gillomarus, king of Ireland, with other kings of the isles, came to his court at Caerleon.\(^{60}\)

Richard I, as Christian Crusader and popular hero in his own right, did not

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\(^{60}\) *HWGC.*, 262.
have to work very hard at meeting the standards of a newly emerging, chivalric social ethic based upon pomp, pageantry, exoticism, and idealized warfare. He had spent his youth in his mother's sunny lands in the south of France, surrounded by the likes of Marie, Countess of Champagne, architect of Courtly Love and proponent of an Arthurian-based chivalric code, as well as by Marie de France and Chretien de Troyes.61 While Richard may not have actively involved himself in the romantic goings-on at Poitiers, he certainly attracted his share of romances. Moreover, a chronicler designated John of London sees fit to link the names of Richard and Arthur in his comparison of Edward I with great kings of the past.

At any rate, Richard Plantagenet knew how to use Arthurian legend when it was politically expedient. Many chroniclers record his successful attempt to forge an alliance with Tancred of Sicily. In 1190, on his way to the Holy Land, Richard suggested a marriage between his young nephew, Arthur, Count of Brittany, and Tancred's daughter. In the resulting treaty, the childless Richard included the following generous, and wholly unexpected, pledge:

Moreover, if, in case of our dying without heirs, [Arthur] shall succeed to our throne by hereditary right, then we do assign to [your daughter] from our own kingdom the following dower, that is to say, the ancient and customary dower of the queens of England.62


62 Annals of Roger de Hovedon. Trans. and Ed. Henry Riley. Vol. 2. (New York, 1968),165-6; this contains the text of the treaty between Richard and Tancred, followed by a letter sent to Pope Clement summarizing the treaty and asking him to act as surety that the marriage is fulfilled. In the course of events, however, neither the marriage nor Arthur's promised inheritance actually did come about. The text
according to William of Newburgh, the young duke of Brittany, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet, had been named Arthur by his patriotic Breton mother and her council, both fiercely anti-Plantagenet, in despite of Henry's request that his grandson be named after himself. Newburgh continues: "And thus the Bretons, who are said to have long expected the legendary Arthur, now bring him up in great hope."63 King Arthur was enjoying quite a vogue among Breton nationalists stirred up by Angevin domination, but whether or not the Bretons truly viewed their Duke as his heir-apparent, the more tangible reality of Richard's pledge to return an Arthur to the throne of Britain can only have served to keep their hopes high. It is harder still to discern whether Richard or Tancred would see their treaty in such a light.

However, Richard pulled out another Arthurian trump-card in his dealings with Tancred. In 1191, the two kings met again, and, to cement their friendship, exchanged gifts. Richard refused all but a small ring from Tancred; however, the Peterborough chronicle recounts: "Rex autem Angliae dedit ei gladium optimum


63 Historia Rerum Anglicarum. Ed. Hans Claude Hamilton. (English Historical Society, 1856), 233-34. Patrick Galliou and Michael Jones. The Bretons. (Oxford, 1991), 196. Galliou states that the naming of Duke Arthur is "ambivalent testimony" to the hold of Arthurian legend on Breton consciousness; however, the above contemporary statement in William of Newburgh's chronicle suggests that the idea did exist in certain circles that the Bretons linked the boy's destiny with the "Breton hope" of the renewal of a Celtic empire.
Arcturi, nobilis quondam regis Britonum, quem Britones vocaverunt Caliburnum."
Tancred, stunned by the magnificence of this gift, revealed to Richard libelous
statements made against him by Phillip of France, who desired to break their
alliance. Whether on political or mystical levels, Richard's Sicilian diplomacy
implies an understanding of the power of Arthurian legend.

King Edward I, resembled in many ways his great-grandfather, Henry II. An
immensely active warrior-king, he faced many of the same difficulties, such as the
draining task of expanding his authority in Celtic lands. Furthermore, he recognized
the importance of manipulating Arthurian legend to his own political advantage. The
extent to which Edward identified with King Arthur or even believed in his legendary
drive can only be guessed at; that others chose to depict him in an Arthurian light
is, however, unmistakable. Edward's eulogist, John of London compared the king
favorably to other great kings of the past, including Arthur, who he says, put under
tribute the Orkneys, Norway, Aquitaine, Scotland, and Ireland, but failed to subdue
the Saxons before he was wounded and passed away. However, "Non sic succubuit
Edwardus rex noster," he concludes, making Edward in fact greater than his
predecessor. Edward himself, in his quest for empire, sought historical precedents
for his claims; this strategy was, in its context, a practical one, and when his clerks
combined Galfridian pseudo-history with the stuff of more sober scholarship, it need

64 See above, note 62.

65 "Commendatio Lamentabilis in Transitu Magni Regis Edwardi," in Chronicles
not suggest that Edward did not take the historicity of his claims seriously.

The most well-known example of Edward's use of Arthurian precedents for empire among the chroniclers is the letter written to Pope Boniface in support of Edward's claim to overlordship of Scotland. The evidence in this letter was culled from many historical works, ancient and contemporary, and relied heavily on Geoffrey of Monmouth for its entries concerning early Britain. Thus, Arthur's bestowal of Scotland upon an Augusel and Geoffrey's mention of the kings of "Albany, Cornwall, Demetia and Venedotia" preceding the king in procession carrying "four golden swords" was taken to mean that Scotland still owed homage to the king of England. These clerks apparently freely embellished this passage with a more enticing interpretation, for, as it is preserved in the chronicles, the letter reads:

Et cum postea idem res Arthurus, apud civitatem Legionum, festum faceret celeberrimum, interfuerunt ibidem omnes reges sibi subjecti, inter quos Angusellus rex Scotiae, servitium pro regno Scotiae debitum, gladium regis Arthuri detulit ante ipsum, et successive omnes reges Scotiae omnibus regibus Brictonum fuerunt subjecti. 66

Despite the license employed with this and, doubtless, other sources, "on 7 May 1301 a hundred English barons affixed their seals" to the document, and it was sent on its way to Rome. 67 Michael Prestwich, in his biography of Edward I, states that


since the Arthurian entry is "only one of a massive list of precedents," it would be "wrong to make too much of it."\(^{68}\) Surely it would also be wrong to dismiss the stature of Arthur, and in fact of the other denizens of the Historia, in the minds of the clerks, chroniclers, and Edward himself. While he was certainly capable of bending the truth to accomplish a political coup, it is unlikely that Edward would sanction the sending of what he knew to be fairy tales to the Holy See, especially if he was hoping for the Pontiff’s support.

As briefly discussed before, Edward enjoyed, in Pierre de Langtoft, the adulation of a true connoisseur of the Arthurian idiom. Pierre truly seems to have urged an Arthurian destiny upon his sovereign. In the introduction to his history of Edward’s reign, he makes Edward the scion of a long line of great, conquering kings of Britain, beginning with Geoffrey’s Brutus, and including, of course, Arthur, conqueror of kingdoms. Above all, Pierre was a great proponent of Edward’s right to overlordship of England’s neighboring countries and was especially vocal in the campaign for Scotland. Thus, Edward is made the fulfillment of Merlin’s prophesies and even, in a moment of fervor, a greater conqueror than Arthur:

Now are the two waters united in one,
Which have been separated by great mountains;
And one realm made of two different kingdoms
Which used to be governed by two kings.
Now are the islanders all joined together,
And Albany reunited to the royalties
Of which king Edward is proclaimed lord.
Cornwall and Wales are in his power,
And Ireland the great at his will.

\(^{68}\) Edward I, 121.
There is neither king nor prince of all the countries
Except king Edward, who has thus united them;
Arthur had never the fiefs so fully.  

Meanwhile, a trade alliance with Flanders becomes an excuse for Edward and the Flemings to rise up "against King Philip and against the twelve peers, who wrongfully hold from him the land with the manors which King Arthur to the duke sir Beduer gave in Aquitaine." It will be remembered that the Twelve Peers of France from the Charlemagne cycles were to be found at Arthur's court in Caerleon, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, and so Pierre's double-edged wit makes France beholden to Edward for more than the Angevin Aquitaine.

Another conquest which occupied Edward's time was that of Wales. A mountainous land, filled with warring princes, Wales had proved to be a challenge to all of the Plantagenets and to their predecessors. From the days of William the Conqueror, most of the active warfare had been left to the rugged Lords of the March, who were allowed to carve out of the border lands largely autonomous domains for themselves in exchange for their protection of the belly of England against Welsh raids. In this manner, only the more accessible south of Wales had seen much in the way of Norman domination even up to the reign of Edward. The princes of Gwynnedd or North Wales, in their mountain fastnesses, had been the bain of the Plantagenet kings, and because the balance of power between Welsh rulers was ever fluctuating, anything resembling diplomatic policy between England and the

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70 278-9.
Welsh prince doms could never be reliable. Edward decided that this must be changed, and dedicated much time and money in campaigns against his nemesis, Llewelyn, Prince of Gwynnedd, who had consolidated enough power to call himself Prince of Wales with impunity. Llewelyn, moreover, showed himself capable of wielding Geoffrey's *Historia* as well as Edward's clerks; he justified his claim to Wales by tracing his lineal ancestry to Brutus' son, Kamber, who had inherited the land west of the Severn. However, when Llewelyn was killed in battle in 1282, and his brother in 1283, Welsh independence was finally over; Edward held court in Llewelyn's favorite residences and eventually gave his own son the title Prince of Wales. As a final insult to Llewelyn's ghost and blow to Welsh national esteem, the chroniclers of Waverley and Worcester Abbey record the transference of certain national treasures into Edward's hands. Among these, as recorded in the Waverley Annal's entry for 1283, was included: "Item corona famosi regis Arthuri, qui apud Wallenses a longo tempore in maximo honore habebantur, ... domino regi est oblata;

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71 Welsh genealogies in a manuscript dating from the late thirteenth century, and probably using earlier materials, trace Llewelyn ap Gruffydd's line back to Adam via Geoffrey's Kamber and Brutus; in this same tract Arthur's line is traced back to Welsh mythological figures Bran and Llyr: P.C. Bartrum, ed., *Early Welsh Geneological Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), 38-9. Llewelyn's actual use of this genealogy in lordship disputes with the English Crown has not appeared in the scope of this study, although it is suggested by John J. Parry, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," *ALMA.*, 88. See Geoffrey's text in Thorpe p.75.

et sic Wallensium gloria ad Anglicos, licet invite, est translata."73 The origin and the fate of this "crown of Arthur" are both intriguing mysteries, but, whatever it actually was, the chroniclers give no indication that they do not consider it authentic, nor do they mince words in attributing a political significance to its transfer. Before the victor could don the crown of the legendary conqueror and bask in its glow, he had something else to accomplish, as we shall see.

73 Annales Monastici. Vol. II, 401. The Annals of Worcester, Vol. IV, 489, note piously that it was "per Dei providentiam" that the glory of Wales was transferred to the English.
CHAPTER IV

LY NOBLE REI, SIRE ARTHUR

Arthur as a Model of Kingship in Chronicle and Literature

The concern for an ideal of kingship which arose in the High Middle Ages, fed as it were by streams of literature glorifying the kings of the epic past, provided another reason for the Plantagenets to take an interest in Arthurian lore. If the Plantagenet rulers perhaps encouraged associations between themselves and King Arthur, they also had to live up to the standards already associated with him in Geoffrey's *Historia*, and built upon successively by those who based their works upon his. Moreover, if they did not apply its ideals of chivalric kingship to themselves, others were quite willing to do it for them.

Not only does Geoffrey's vision of King Arthur provide a pattern for conquest and consolidation, but it also offers a template of Christian kingship and its role in perpetuating a courtly society. When Arthur succeeded to the throne at the tender age of fifteen, Geoffrey says, "he was of outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness gave him such grace that he was loved by almost all the people." Geoffrey goes on to discuss Arthur's adherence to the custom of "giving gifts freely" to his retainers: "In Arthur courage was closely linked with generosity, and he made up his mind to harry the Saxons, so that with their wealth he might
reward the retainers who served his own household." Arthur also proved a Christian
king and defender of the church. In a scene reminiscent of St. Bernard’s preaching
of the Crusades, St. Dubricious exhorts Arthur and the Britons to fight the Saxons:

You who have been marked with the cross of the Christian faith,
be mindful of the loyalty you owe to your fatherland and to your
fellow-countrymen! If they are slaughtered as a result of this
treachery behavior by the pagans, they will be an everlasting
reproach to you, unless you do your utmost to defend them. . . .
It follows that if any of you shall suffer death in this war,
that death shall be to him as a penance and an absolution for all
his sins, given always that he goes to meet it unflinchingly."

In this campaign against the Saxons, the king carried on his shield the image of Mary
and "called upon the name of the Blessed Virgin" in battle, a portrayal solidly based
in the early material and repeated by William of Malmesbury. Once the Saxons had
been defeated, moreover, Arthur "rebuilt the churches, which had been razed to the
ground, and he graced them with religious communities of men and women." He
then dispensed justice by restoring lands and offices usurped by the Saxons to their
rightful owners. Such passages would surely not be lost on the crusader-kings,
Richard Lion-Heart and Edward I, nor on their subjects who joined them in the
struggles for the Christian Empire abroad. France’s Song of Roland need not be the
only martial Christian epic sung in the echoing stone halls of Anglo-Norman keeps
or around army camp-fires throughout the Holy Land. Rather, the Historia provided
a number of deeds, battles, rescues, and acts of mercy on an epic proportion, which
served as catalysts for the heroic aventures of Arthurian romance.

74 HKB., [ix.4] 216.
Finally, the glamorous court so familiar to the readers of romance found its beginning in Geoffrey’s Caerleon which, along with the whole of Britain, "had reached such a standard of sophistication that it excelled all other kingdoms in its general affluence, the richness of its decorations, and the courteous behavior of its inhabitants." He goes on to describe the occupations of nice society in the High Middle Ages as though they originated in Arthur’s court: knights wear livery and armorial devices in distinctive colors, often shared by their ladies, who loved only knights proven in battle, great feasts followed by games whose winners were rewarded handsomely by the king, the giving of lands and benefices to worthy officers of the court. Arthur’s court became the model of all courts for chivalric behavior and occupations:

In this way he developed such a code of courtliness in his household that he inspired peoples living far away to imitate him. The result was that even the man of noblest birth, once he was roused to rivalry, thought nothing at all of himself unless he wore his arms and dressed in the same way as Arthur’s knights.

The king’s court was, in short, splendid; people were splendidly attired, splendidly feasted, and splendidly amused. Certainly this was a dainty dish to set before the Plantagenet kings.

These attributes of kingship and kingdom attracted the attention of chroniclers and romance writers who reiterated them or embellished them with detail. Wace,

75 ibid., 229.

76 ibid., [ix.ii], 222.
in his translation for Henry, added or changed elements to bring them even more in line with the courtly society of his day, dwelling upon Arthur's wealth, largesse, and courtesies, and the chivalric nature of his deeds and upon the beauties of his court.

Taking a very strong position, Wace interrupts his translation to insist that the reader take most seriously the example of Arthur as king, that it not be reduced to cliche by the frequency of its telling in circles not concerned with its meaning:

I know not if you have heard tell the marvellous gestes and errant deeds related so often of King Arthur. They have been noised about this mighty realm for so great a space that the truth has turned to fable and an idle song. Such rhymes are neither sheer bare lies, nor gospel truths. They should not be considered either an idiot's tale, or given by inspiration. The minstrel has sung his ballad, the storyteller told over his story so frequently, little by little he has decked and painted, till by reason of his embellishment the truth stands hid in the trappings of a tale. Thus to make a delectable tune to your ear, history goes masking as fable.

Wace completes this sermonette by launching into Arthur's conquest of Europe, achieved by dint of his great valor, the excellence of the barons of his court, and "in the strength of that mighty chivalry he had cherished and made splendid." 77

Obviously Wace took the Historia to be historical fact and, beyond that, believed that its message of good kingship must be proclaimed and followed. Perhaps too, he saw and emphasized similarities between his subject matter and his patron, head of the thriving Angevin empire.

The chroniclers, such as Roger of Wendover, Pierre de Langtoft, and Robert of Gloucester, saw fit to include details of Arthur's kingship in their own world

77 WLAC. 56.
histories, repeating Geoffrey of Monmouth’s descriptions almost word for word. Expanding one of Geoffrey’s original compliments of Arthur’s generosity and bravery, the monk of Gloucester rhapsodizes:

Botte to sigge ssortliche per nas ver ne ner
Of prowesse ne of cortesie in the world is per
Is los sprong so side sone of his largesse
Of strengthe & of is corteisie & off is prowesse
To the verrost ende of the world that such nas nour non .... 78

Pierre de Langtoft follows Wace in providing lush details of the rich silks, gold cloth, furs, and jewels worn by the noble revelers at Caerleon, while the translator of the Historia into Welsh, rapturously surpasses even Wace’s noble effort:

But in short and truly I say never did so many noble men and noble women, fine horses and birds and dogs, and jewels of great price, and gold vessels and splendid clothes of brocaded silk and purple and sendal and ermine come to one feast as came there. ...there was not a man who wanted property who did not come there to receive it joyfully according to his wish and desire--all sorts of gifts, many and abundant, of every kind of goods that every one wanted. 79

Certainly a master of the storyteller’s "delectable tunes," Chretien de Troyes fills his romances with the details of a courtly life, and the glimpses of Arthur and his court conform with those of Geoffrey and Wace. The adventure of The Knight with the Lion begins: "Arthur, the good king of Britain, whose valor teaches us that we too should be courteous and brave, was holding court with all kinglike splendor at Carlisle in Wales." The purpose of this story is to serve as an exemplar:

78 264. Compare with Geoffrey’s original, HBK., [ix.II], 222.
79 Brut y Brenhinedd, 169.
So it is my pleasure to relate a story worth listening to about the king whose fame spreads near and far. And I do agree with the belief of so many Bretons that his renown will last forever. Thanks to him, people will recall his chosen knights, fine men who strove for honor.80

Thus instead of, like Wace, launching into the conquest of Europe, Chretien tells the aventures of one of Arthur's honorable knights, designed to illustrate the making of an ideal knight of the ideal court. In *Erec and Enide*, Chretien describes in exquisite detail the sumptuous court and the generosity of King Arthur:

Wealthy and generous was the king: he presented cloaks made not of serge or rabbit fur or light wool, but of ermine and samite, of whole fur and dappled silk, bordered with heavy gold embroidery. Alexander, who made so many conquests that the entire world stood at his feet, was very rich and very generous, yet compared to Arthur he was poor and niggardly. Caesar, the Emperor of Rome, and all the kings whose names you hear mentioned in stories and *chansons de geste* did not offer at one celebration as many gifts as King Arthur distributed on the day of Erec's coronation. Neither Caesar nor Alexander together would have dared make such large expenditures as were made at the court.

The king further gifted his people with "horses, arms, silver, and many varieties of cloths and brocades," as well as throwing a celebratory feast in which "a thousand knights served the bread, a thousand the wine, and a thousand the food."

Jean Frappier suggests that the "splendor and renown" of Chretien's Arthur "reflect the contemporary magnificence of the Angevin empire under Henry II."81

Certainly, the breadth and variety of Henry's empire and the crusader's ties with the East allowed for a rich assortment of foodstuffs, cloths, and jewels, as well as

80 Staines, 257.

81 "Chretien de Troyes," *ALMA.*, 173.
enough wealth in the royal coffers to afford them. Yet it was his queen, Eleanor, who set the tone for fashion and luxury in her court at Poitiers, which nurtured the courtly stylings of Chretien. The contemporary chronicler, Geoffroi de Vigeois, says of her influence on regional taste:

"Time was when the Bishop of Limoges and the Viscount of Comborn were content to go in sheep and fox skins. But today the humblest would blush to be seen in such poor things. Now they have clothes fashioned of rich and precious stuffs, in colors to suit their humor."  

Gerald of Wales, meanwhile, in one of his more charitable moods, praised King Henry for his "prodigal liberality and profuse kindness ... shown to foreigners and strangers."  

Like Chretien, the author of the *Prose Perceval* begins his tale with Arthur’s feast at Pentecost, giving a glowing description of Arthur’s generosity, valiance, beauty, and renown which finds its source in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*. During the feast Arthur gives out five thousand four hundred robes and blazons to all those in attendance, while himself wearing "a robe of gold." Likewise, after the conquest of France, the French nobles learned to love Arthur more than they had ever loved their vanquished king, "for Arthur knew how to speak beautifully and to draw the people to love him, not by empty words but by giving fine gifts."

King Arthur’s justice is also important to the author of the *Prose Perceval*. Before surrendering France into Arthur’s hands, the French beg Gawain: "Before

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82 Kelly, 165.

83 *HWGC.*, 157.
God, may he treat us justly, and if he does otherwise the sin of it will be his." To this Gawain replies, "Lords, know that he will never do anything to you which will be unjust." Other romances in which Arthur metes out justice, often have him restoring lands and titles to those from whom they have been usurped, as he did in the Historia and in Cliges. Another such example appears in Historia Meriadosi, Regis Cambriae, a Latin romance probably written in the late 1190's. Here Arthur tries the usurper, Griffin, for fratricide, besieges him in his mountain fastness of Snowdon when he refuses to come to trial, then sentences him to death. The king then returns the patrimony to Meriadoc, its rightful heir. One is reminded how often Merlin's "lion of justice" prophecy, which was applied first to Henry I, came to symbolize his Plantagenet successor Henry II, founder of the English Common Law.

Finally, the romances almost without exception discuss the importance of king as religious leader who both advances the Kingdom of God and is respectful of the Church and its representatives. A romance which is almost strident in its insistence on the precedence of the Christian Church is The High Book of the Holy Grail, or Perlesvaus, which begins:

After his father's death King Arthur led the most noble and illustrious life of any king, so that all the princes and barons learned from his example how best to act. For ten years was King Arthur in such a position, with no king on earth so highly esteemed as he, until a weakness suddenly beset his resolve and he began to lose his former passion for great deeds.

With his zeal gone, Arthur ceased to hold court on the great Christian festivals and

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84 Ed. and trans. Mildred Leake Day (New York, 1988)
his knights began to desert him. A local hermit urges him to cease being an "example of baseness," and by repenting restore himself as an "example to all the world of valour and great deeds and honour." In order to do this, Arthur must lead his court in defense of the New Law of Christ and protect Britain from invasion by pagans bent on destroying it. Thus, as the title suggests, this romance is concerned with "higher" conquests and the Christian *aventure* of the Holy Grail. In the age of the Crusades, this was a popular idea. Kings were often measured by the Crusade in which they participated, which is why Richard is so often lauded and held up as an example. Henry II's troubles with the Church, culminating in the Becket tragedy jaundiced many an eye, religious and non-religious. Gerald of Wales criticized Henry sharply for not going on Crusade and for not accepting the kingship of Jerusalem when it was offered to him by the Patriarch. This was shirking a king's most sacred duty. In words surprisingly similar in tenor to those used in *The High Book of the Holy Grail* to describe Arthur's fall from grace, Gerald records the Patriarch's curse (no doubt concocted himself):

> Until now, O King, you have ruled gloriously among the princes of the world, through incomparable grace, and up to now your honour has grown more and more, up to the height of the heavenly kingdom. But without a doubt you have been reserved for this test—which you fail. Because of this, abandoned by the Lord whom you abandon, and completely devoid of grace, your glory will be turned to disaster, your honour to ignominy, until your last gasp.  

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Unfortunately for Henry, he had denied his Grail Quest and, therefore, been denied his chance for redemption.

Ceremonies of the Arthurian Court

One of the responsibilities of a good king which deserves a deeper look because of its Arthurian connections, is that summarized in Geoffrey’s description of the feasting and festival surrounding Arthur’s crowning at Caerleon. The king must be able to provide lavish entertainment for his court. This provides him with an opportunity to show his wealth and magnanimity and the prowess of his knights, not to mention the beauty of the women of the court, and so the greatness of his court may spread far and wide, attracting further political and economic gains. The "games" listed by Geoffrey after the great feast given by Arthur included "imitation battles" between knights on horseback, apparently a reference to early tournaments, as well as archery, hurling of lances, "tossing heavy stones and rocks," dicing, and many other unnamed pastimes, all accomplished "without the slightest show of ill-feeling." This continued for three days with the winners receiving rich prizes from the king himself.

Geoffrey’s games continued in kind and with additions in his translators, and moved into both chronicle and romance. Wace specifies his "imitation battles" as jousts and adds sword fencing, slingshot, and darts; moreover, he inserts what no Plantagenet court, or any court in Europe that had any pretensions to greatness, would be without: entertainers. Tumblers, dancers, singers, musicians, story-tellers,
and mimes gamboled through the Caerleon court. The Saxon Layamon in his *Brut* conjures up more earthy scenes of races, jumping and wrestling contests, and some sort of lawn bowling. To the Galfridian scene of knights armed with lance and sword lining the opposite sides of "feldes and medes to prouy hor bachelerye," the author of *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, adds the more tame pastimes of checkers and other games "pleyn atte table." In the *Prose Perceval*, Arthur's feast at Pentecost, based on Geoffrey's Caerleon festival, was followed by a joust in which King Arthur rode through the ranks to keep the peace between the contestants to see that none became combatants. Carolling and "great festival" between knights and damsels followed the joust. Feasts and tournaments appear again and again in the Arthurian romances in which Arthur's side may do well or badly depending upon the intent of the author. *The High Book of the Holy Grail* includes as integral parts of its story-line, two such events, the Tournament in the Field of Tents, lasting three days, and the Tournament in the Field of Silks. Arthur and his knights compete in both and win prizes. The French author of *Roman de Ham*, composed in 1278, praises the tournament as the antidote to the lack of "Honte, et Larguece et Prouece ensamble et Courtoisie" he sees in his society, and the model for the rest of his verse romance is an Arthurian festival as it appeared in Geoffrey's *Historia*, complete with all characters, trapping, and especially the tourneys.

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87 *WLAC.*

88 278.
Therefore, it comes as no surprise that great royal occasions of Plantagenet England often came to be painted with an Arthurian brush, especially in Edward I’s prosperous reign. The knighting of Edward’s son and heir was the occasion of a festival of Arthurian proportions for which hundreds of minstrels, acrobats, musicians and the like were brought in and two gilded swans served as the centerpiece for a sumptuous banquet. Although no evidence of overt Arthurian elements in this festival exists, Pierre de Langtoft once again sees fit to draw parallels:

No soul wonders there was game and joy enough,
Where a feast was held with such ceremonies.
Never in Britain, since God was born,
Was there such nobleness in towns nor in cities,
Except Caerleon in ancient times,
When Sir Arthur the king was crowned there.

Pierre’s compulsion notwithstanding, such comparison occurs elsewhere. When words failed St. Albans monk William Rishanger, as he faced the task of describing in his Annales Angliae et Scotiae the lavish and festive nuptials of Edward I and Princess Margaret of France, he turned to the pages of the Historia which treat upon Arthur and Guinevere’s crowning at Caerleon. And, as pointed out by Laura Keeler,

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89 Prestwich, 117, 121. For a close study of the festival held at Edward II’s knighting, see: Constance Bullock-Davies, Menestrellorum Multitudo (Cardiff, 1978). Both Bullock-Davies and Prestwich deny the contention of Roger Sherman Loomis that this occasion was intentionally Arthurian (or even unintentionally); see Loomis’ article "Edward I, Arthurian Enthusiast." One must, however, forgive Pierre de Langtoft for giving that impression.

90 Vol. 2, 369.
apparently copied it word for word.\textsuperscript{91}

The basic elements of Arthurian festival as portrayed by Geoffrey of Monmouth did not arise from his fertile imagination but reflected both the gala events at royal courts and the growing trend of martial games. That these elements carried into the translations, chronicles, and romance attests to their popularity both in society and in the social imagination. The history of the tournament is beyond the scope of this study,\textsuperscript{92} but let it suffice that organized tournaments possibly existed as early as Stephen’s reign, as military training and a form of outlet for young knights. Both Henry and Richard, sons of Henry Plantagenet, participated and excelled in tournaments in England and in France. Early in its history, the tournament proved a bane to the Church which decried the bloody excesses that cost the lives of many young and seasoned knights. Furthermore, the tournament was not only the game of royalty; the baroncy delighted in holding these exercises, which sometimes spilled over to the detriment of the monarchy, thus causing kings to forbid them in certain circumstances, especially if they were away from the kingdom. Cries for moderation and regulation led to an alternative form of exercise and entertain-

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\textsuperscript{91} "The Historia Regum Britanniae and Four Mediaeval Chronicles," \textit{Speculum} 21 (1946), 24-37.
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\textsuperscript{92} This brief summation is drawn from: Ruth Huff Cline, "The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages," \textit{Speculum} 20 (1945), 204-11; and Noel Denholm-Young, "The Tournament in the Thirteenth Century," \textit{Studies in Medieval History} eds. Hunt, Pantin, and Southern (Oxford, 1948), 240-68.
\end{flushright}
ment, the Round Table, based on Arthurian tradition. Among feasting and other games at these strictly social occasions, jousts and other militaristic exercises remained, but with blunted weapons. The Round Tables touted the chivalric ideal of competing "without the slightest show of ill-feeling" as Geoffrey had described, an attitude reflected by the Prose Perceval's Arthur, as the voice of courtly reason, patrolling the ranks.

By the thirteenth century, Round Tables were popular throughout Europe, and in some the combatants are said to have taken the part of Arthurian characters. Chronicler William Rishanger recorded Roger Mortimer's Round Table at Kennilworth in 1279; he states that this "ludum militarem" was attended by one hundred knights and ladies, and that the knights of diverse kings participated in exercises of arms. Edward I was involved in a number of these events. As a prince he debuted at a Round Table at Blyth in 1256, as king he was also present at

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93 The "Round Table" both as circular table at which Arthur's knights sat, and, as it later denoted, the chief knights of his court, did not exist in Geoffrey of Monmouth, but Denholm-Young notes, "is alluded to in Wace as if his readers would be familiar with what he meant." Nonetheless, the descriptions of High Medieval Round Tables in the chronicles and romances certainly agree with that of Geoffrey's coronation feast at Caerleon; it seems likely that the two became merged in many minds.

94 Denholm-Young, 253; Prestwich, 121.

95 Cline, pp.207-8, discusses the impersonation of Arthurian characters at two Round Tables: the Artusfahrt of Ulrich von Liechtenstein in 1240, and the tournament by the Sires of Longheval at Ham-sur-Somme, on which the Roman de Ham is based. The latter is also discussed by Roger Sherman Loomis, "Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle," ALMA., 557-8.

96 Text is Record XXXV in Chambers, 281.
the Kenilworth Round Table. Edward personally arranged celebratory Round Tables on three occasions: in 1284 at Nefyn, as the *Annals of Waverley* state, "in signum triumphi contra Wallensium proterviam expediti," one in 1287 following the arrangement of his daughter's marriage to the king of Aragon, and one in 1301 at Falkirk in Scotland. A certain Brabantine priest, Lodewijk van Velthem, wrote, around 1316, a highly romanticized version of Edward's marriage to the Spanish princess, Eleanor, at which a Round Table was held, consisting of a tournament in which Arthurian characters bested their opponents, and a nuptial feast in three intervals in which each course was introduced by actors playing Arthurian roles. These actors lay a new challenge before the king's "Round Table" at each course, which Edward, as King Arthur, and his knights vowed to meet; including challenges to the king's sovereignty from Ireland and Wales. The author continues with a fictionalized account of Edward's conquest of Wales, with surprising Arthurian connections. This account is full of enthusiastic Arthurian romance, but, unfortunately, very short on historical accuracy. Roger Sherman Loomis, while recognizing its historical deficiencies, smooths over some of its more glaring faults and assigns the affair to Edward's later marriage to Margaret of Brabant, as a reasonably accurate portrayal of the festivities based upon Edward's undeniable enthusiasm for the Round Table genre and Arthuriana. On the other hand, Michael Prestwich, joins


98 Loomis, "Arthurian Influence," *ALMA.*, 559; Prestwich, 120.
many others in his inability to take Lodewijk seriously as a chronicler of the actual event, yet allows that his portrayal of Edward’s involvement in an Arthurian extravaganza accurately reflects "the way in which foreigners viewed him."\textsuperscript{99}

In all events, Edward seems to have been a willing participant in and purveyor of the Arthurian-inspired Round Table tradition.

Exemplars of Good and Bad Kingship on the Arthurian Model

Finally, of all Plantagenet kings, thanks to the efforts of Pierre de Langtoft, Edward I is most held up as a model of kingship in the Arthurian vein, both as conqueror and as Christian, chivalric knight. His epitaph for Edward reads:

\begin{verbatim}
Of chivalry, after king Arthur,  
Was king Edward the flower of Christendom.  
He was so handsome and great, so powerful in arms,  
That of him may one speak as long as the world lasts.  
For he had no equal as a knight in armour  
For vigour and valour, neither present nor future.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{verbatim}

However, Pierre also used Arthur’s example to point out Edward’s faults or weakness. "Alas!" he says, "that no man corrects himself by the example of another!" Edward "gave too little" to his lords and thus should not be surprised that they declined to join in his military endeavors. Because Arthur shared his gain


\textsuperscript{100} 381.
generously, Pierre explains, "There was not a king under him who contradicted him, earl, duke or baron who ever failed him in war or in battle but each followed him."

If only Edward had been as generous, as prompt in his expeditions, as temperate, as courteous, and as swift to justice as Arthur had been, Pierre suggests, Scotland may have been won sooner. Arthurian legend could be a hard taskmaster.

However, the Plantagenet who attracted the harshest criticism was John. The excoriating catalogs of John’s sins written by the chroniclers are too numerous to list here, yet as summarized in the *Annals of London* and the *Chronicle of Thomas Wykes* he is guilty of tyranny, extortion, adultery, injustice, and the provocation of wars. Both chroniclers also charged John with disinheriting and murdering his nephew, Arthur of Brittany. The last, though one among many serious charges, produced spectacular waves of feeling against John, among his barons, the Church, the French, and especially the Bretons. Many chronicles include mention or details concerning Arthur’s death while imprisoned by John; of these, several imply that Arthur was the rightful heir to the throne, and a few state that John killed the young man with his own hands. Roger of Wendover records William de Brause’s wife

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101 296-27, 326-29.


Matilda as refusing to deliver her sons to John as hostages "because he basely murdered his nephew, Arthur, whom he ought to have taken care of honourably."

The truth of her accusation can only be pondered, yet it contains the summation of the failure of John as king; if the tone of many chroniclers can be taken to speak as a concensus of popular opinion, then John basely failed England, which, indeed "he ought to have taken care of honourably."

One would not expect to find John compared to King Arthur, yet in the Histoire des Ducs de Normandie et des Rois D'Angleterre, probably dating from Henry III or Edward I's reign, such a comparison is found.\textsuperscript{104} It describes John, on a return to England from France, turning to the desires of his body and "haunting" the forests and rivers of Britain. Then the chronicler states:

So greatly was he feared throughout his land that all the people affirmed that since the time of King Arthur there had not been a king in England who had been so feared in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland as he was.\textsuperscript{105}

This could be taken as a complementary statement, until the meaning of the next lines reveals its intent. The wild beasts, the chronicler continues, would come into the fields and graze like so many sheep, showing no fear of people. When the people attempted to drive them off, in fact, the animals would only "deign" to trot off a short distance and when pursuit ceased went back to what they were doing. As


\textsuperscript{105} "Tant se fist douter par sa tierre ke toutes les gens tiesmoignoient que puis le tans le roi Artu n'avoit eu roi en Engletierre qui tant fust doutes en Engletierre, en Gales, en Eschoce ne en Yrlande, comme il estiot."
readers of romance will recognize, strange occurrences like this one serve as signs and symbols of the larger state of society; moreover, the well-being of the land, including its flora and fauna, is tied to the lord of the land. All is not well, this episode implies, with the kingdom of England, in which nature’s laws are not observed by the wild animals, nor by its king, who, in the words of Thomas Wykes, acted "contra jus scilicet naturale et civile." This lends a grim irony to the preceding comparison, for it could be said that John certainly did not strike the same kind of fear in the people of Britain that Arthur did. One struck reverential awe in the hearts of his people, while the other terrorized them by the lawlessness of his reign. In the end, John had neither empire nor kingdom to call his own.

Thus the interests of the Plantagenet kings in the realms of empire and kingship found something both familiar and challenging in Arthurian legend. They were more than willing to claim kinship with the great conqueror and just, Christian king of Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*. As the legend grew in the social consciousness, providing lessons and entertainment in both chronicle and romance, kings found it both convenient and no doubt amusing to attach their names to the Arthurian star. Thus right to conquest and overlordship, the mystical trappings of kingship, as well as social mores and events during the Plantagenet era are often touched with Arthurian detail. So deeply embedded in European culture was Arthurian legend, in fact, that chroniclers applied it to their historical accounts without further thought and many writers of romance used it as a vehicle for their social and spiritual commentary on kings and kingdoms. While the Plantagenet kings
were surely attracted to Arthurian legend for what it could do for their purposes, it seems likely that they also made some attempt to cater to it as a potent ally in the popular perception of their kingship. Yet just as surely the Plantagenets, from Henry II to Edward I also felt its sting. Arthurian legend could be just as uncontrollable as it could be derivative, with the power to challenge them almost as tangibly as an army, a lesson these kings encountered and confronted repeatedly.
CHAPTER V

REX QUONDAM, REXQUE FUTURUS

Pre-Galfridian Evidence of Belief in Arthur's Survival and Return

"The end of the boar will be shrouded in mystery." Thus says Geoffrey's Merlin after outlining the adventures of the "Boar of Cornwall," whose career is so transparently identical to that of Arthur's as to hardly qualify as prophecy. When Geoffrey of Monmouth cast a shadow of doubt over Arthur's death, whatever his motivations, he was probably not without his sources. Given the mythic stature he had provided his hero, it may not seem odd to have given him a mythic ending as well. However, Geoffrey does not seem to have intended that his work be accepted as myth, but rather as a veracious history of early Britain. Thus, it seems probable that, beyond the "ancient British book," hardly identifiable even in his own day, some popular belief in a mysterious end may well have provided such intrigue with a ring of truth. In any case, it is difficult to attribute to Geoffrey alone the intensity of the belief in Arthur's survival and hope for his return ascribed to Celtic peoples by Geoffrey's translators and by the chroniclers. Nonetheless, written evidence of any such tradition is scanty and often consists merely of references to the existence of the matter in oral tradition.

Perhaps the most enigmatic of early sources concerning Arthur's end is to be
found in the Black Book of Carmarthen, a compilation of Welsh materials dating from the second half of the thirteenth century. This manuscript contains a collection of the poems entitled Englynion y Beddau or "The Stanzas of the Graves" which probably belong to the ninth or tenth centuries. Recording in verse form the burial places of Welsh heroes, they are enticingly non-specific when it comes to the grave of Arthur, the final verse reading: "Unknown [or a mystery] is a grave for Arthur."  

Richard Barber notes that the original meaning may not have been that the grave could not be found or was not known, but that such an interpretation could have evolved within the next century. Another tenth-century Welsh poem, the Armes Prydein, Barber submits, contains the idea of a victorious "day of deliverance" from the Saxons led by "heroes from the past" Cynan and Cadwaladr. Once the idea existed, the addition of another hero (or heroes) would not be difficult. While it is not outside the realm of possibility that this reference to Arthur could have been a late addition to the early body of work, the possibility of its authenticity ensures

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107 The Figure of Arthur. (London, 1972), 122-23.

108 Certainly Cynan, Cadwaladr, and Arthur were joined in prophecies of immortality by Owain Glyndwr, last native Prince of Wales and leader of a highly successful revolt against English domination in the fifteenth century.
its place in an intriguing puzzle.

The next piece of evidence comes from twelfth century Cornwall, and the good canons of Laon's visit to the town of Bodmin in 1113:

Indeed a certain man there having a withered hand, was keeping vigilant watch at the shrine in order to recover his health. But, just as the Bretons are in the habit of quarreling with the French about King Arthur,\(^{109}\) likewise this man began to squabble with one of our attendants, named Haganellus, who was of the family of our lord Guido, Archdeacon of Laon, saying that Arthur still lived. From this came no small uprising, when many armed people entered the church, and had not the previously mentioned cleric Algardus hindered them, it might have led to the shedding of blood. We believe that this quarrel in her shrine displeased Our Lady, for this very man with a withered hand, who caused the riot because of Arthur, did not receive his cure.\(^{110}\)

Here, then, is early evidence of a belief in Arthur's survival among the common Cornish-folk, which apparently parallels Breton belief—both factions, it should be noted, being highly vocal in support of their conviction. Moreover, this account shows that the French, probably including if not referring to the Normans, already

\(^{109}\) Both Barber, 124, and R.S. Loomis, "The Arthurian Legend before 1139," Wales and the Arthurian Legend, 181, come to the conclusion that the "Britones" refer to the Bretons, since the quarrels between the Bretons and Normans would be more familiar to the canons of Laon than those between the Welsh or Cornish and Normans.

\(^{110}\) Chambers, Record xi, 249: "Quidam etiam vir ibidem manum aridam habens, coram feretro pro sanitate recipienda vigilabat. Sed, sicut Britones solent iurgari cum Francis pro rege Arturo, idem vir coepit rixari cum uno ex famulis nostris, nomine Haganello, qui erat ex familia domni Guidonis Laudunensis archidiaconi, dicens adhuc Arturum vivere. Unde non parve tumultu exorto, cum armis ecclesiam irruunt plurimi, et nisi praefatus Algardus clericus obstissit, paene usque ad sanguinis effusionem ventum fuisse. Quam rixam coram feretro suo factam credimus Dominae nostrae displicuisse, nam idem vir manum habens aridam, qui pro Arturo tumultum fecerat, sanitatem non recepit."
felt it necessary to shout them down on the matter. Is this purely a function of
disabusing naive peoples, or could there have been a political or nationalistic
principle at stake in 1113, which Herman, furthermore, identified with around 1145
when he included this in his chronicle? He certainly was not alone among
chroniclers in attributing this vigorous certainty of Arthur’s survival to the Bretons.

William of Malmesbury provides the final piece of pre-Galfridian evidence
in the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* of 1125. William describes the discovery in 1087 of
the tomb of Arthur’s nephew Walwen, probably a Continental form of the Gawain
of romance. He then supplies the following information: "The sepulchre of Arthur
is no where to be seen, whence ancient ballads fable that he is still to come." The
anecdote ends with the curious admission that "neither of these men was inferior to
the reputation they have acquired." Walwen’s tomb was found in Wales in a place
still known (or explained) by his name, and among people who told several versions
of his death; he was apparently a local hero. William equates the men both by their
reputations and by the part they played, together, in holding off the Saxons.\[111\] It
does not seem too great a leap in logic to suggest that the Welsh of the region also
connected the two heroes. Moreover, William’s wording seems suspiciously close

315. Loomis ("Arth. Leg. before 1139," 184-5) notes that "Walwen" resembles,
however, a Continental form rather than Welsh, Welsh forms being Gwalchmai or
Gwallt-A(d)wyn; this points to the possibility that William had Gawain stories from
Breton sources as well, which sources Loomis believes to be "Breton conteurs."
Given the history of Breton minstrelsy, one would imagine that these could be at
work both in Brittany and in England and the Marches of Wales. The point I wish
to be made here is that William may provide early proof of both Welsh and Breton
belief in the mystery of Arthur’s tomb.
to that of the Welsh "Stanzas of the Graves"; perhaps this is testimony to current Welsh belief in the mystery of Arthur's tomb.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Isle of Avalon

Geoffrey's account in the *Historia* of the battle of Camlan is only barely suggestive of a dubious quietus for Arthur: "Arthur himself, our renowned King, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to. He handed the crown of Britain over to his cousin Constantine, the son of Cador Duke of Cornwall." Geoffrey passes the kingship along, but does not actually record Arthur's death. Whether or not he intended to, he left the door open for the possibility of the king's wounds, though mortal, being healed on the mysterious Isle of Avalon. While he probably intended to be noncommittal, so as to cater to both Celtic and Norman audiences, the affect of this account was to feed the flames of Celtic belief in Arthur's impending return.

The great popularity of the Prophecies of Merlin which Geoffrey had included in his history, combined with popular interest in the intriguing retreat to the Isle of Avalon, may have motivated him to address the topic again in the *Vita Merlini* produced some fifteen years after the first appearance of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Largely based on Classical and Celtic models, the Isle emerges as an Elysian fairy-world:

The island of apples which men call "The Fortunate Isle" gets its name from the fact [that] it produces all things of itself; the fields there have no need of the ploughs
of farmers and all cultivation is lacking except what nature provides. Of its own accord it produces grain and grapes, and apple trees grow in its woods from the close-clipped grass. The ground of its own accord produces everything instead of merely grass, and people live there a hundred years or more. There nine sisters rule by a pleasing set of laws those who come to them from our country. She who is first of them is more skilled in the healing art, and excels her sisters in the beauty of her person. Morgen is her name, and she has learned what useful properties all the herbs contain, so that she can cure sick bodies.

It is to this healer, and also shape-shifter, Morgen, that the wounded Arthur is brought for healing:

and in her chamber she placed the king on a golden bed and with her own hand she uncovered his honorable wound and gazed at it for a long time. At length she said that health could be restored to him if he stayed with her for a long time and made use of her healing art.112

The response to Britain’s troubles since Arthur’s departure alludes to the Celtic hope:

Then the people must send someone to call on our leader to return in a fast ship. If he has recovered, he can exercise his old vigour to fend off the enemy and re-establish the nation in its old state of peace.113

The provenances of Morgen and Avalon are mysterious, with much scholarly ink spilled on account of both. This study will hope only to touch on the question long enough to provide background for the use of and attempts to expound upon Avalon as Arthur’s retreat by the writers who followed Geoffrey. The description

112 Text from Barber, Figure, 125-6, and Vera Historia, 64; see also John Parry’s translation in Loomis’ Arthurian Literature, 92-93, and discussion 89-92.

of "The Fortunate Isle" in the *Vita Merlini*, bears striking resemblances to the garden of the Hesperides of classical mythology, known throughout the Latin-literate world. In this garden three sisters guarded Hera’s apple trees which bore golden fruit. Loomis notes that the Irish applied a word meaning "rich in apple trees," to the "elysian isle of Manannan the sea-god." Likewise, in Welsh mythology a group of heroes spent eighty years on an otherworldly island, neither ageing nor remembering their troubles, after which time they returned to Wales and went about their business. Indeed, such "blessed isles" are standard in world mythology.

The conjecture surrounding Geoffrey’s choice of appellation for this island typically targets two Welsh words as possible sources. According to scholarly insights on this derivation, Geoffrey may have borrowed the personal name Afallach from Welsh genealogies (which he was wont to ransack), or, the Welsh word for apple, *aval*, akin to the Irish word *ablach* which named the Irish island paradise, may have lent itself to his story, either by his own machinations or through some lost Celtic source. However, these possibilities remain conjectural, and provided medieval writers with much etymological fodder as well.


115 *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, 66.


The tradition of Arthur's survival so narrowly broached by Geoffrey appears to have blossomed, for as translators, chroniclers, and romancers enriched the account in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* with what they gleaned from local, probably oral, sources, it becomes apparent that the "Breton hope" was alive and well, and not restricted to Britanny alone. Henry of Huntingdon in his letter to "Warin the Briton," written between 1139 and 1145, adds gory details of Mordred's death at Arthur's hands, during which the king himself "received so many wounds that he also fell to the ground." These are details Henry either made up for the amusement of his audience, or heard from a source other than Geoffrey of Monmouth. Furthermore, Henry enjoins: "[Arthur's] Briton kinfolk flatly deny that he is dead and still further solemnly await his return." Geoffrey of Gaimar's *L'estoire des Engles*, a verse romance originally made before 1140 and employing some elements of Geoffrey's *Historia*, was continued around 1150 by an author who states that after the Conquest the Welsh boasted that they would take back England from the Normans with help of Arthur:

Par Artur la recoveront,
E cest pais tut ensement
Toldrunt a la romeine gent,
A la terre sun num rendrunt:

118 "Chronicle of Robert of Torigny," *CHSHR*, 74; Howlett translates Britones as "Bretons."
Bretaine la repelerunt.\textsuperscript{119}

This continuator most likely was applying to the period after the Conquest a sentiment that was current among the Welsh of his day. Gerald of Wales records this same Welsh sentiment in his \textit{Description of Wales}:

they boast in their turn, and most confidently and unanimously affirm, [it is astonishing that all of the people keep this hope], that in a short time their countrymen shall return to the island, and, according to the prophecies of Merlin, the nation, and even the name of foreigners, shall be extinguished in the island, and the Britons shall exult again in their ancient name and privileges.\textsuperscript{120}

Meanwhile, Alain de Lille, in his commentary on the prophecies of Merlin, the \textit{Anglicana Merlini Ambrosii Britanni} (1167-1183), illustrates the Breton hope by an anecdote reminiscent of Herman of Laon:

Indeed it is most true, as today the varying opinion of men concerning his death and life proves. If you do not believe me, go into the realm of Armorica, that is, into Lesser Britain and proclaim through the streets and villages Arthur the Briton to be dead according to the rule of others who have died, and then by the facts themselves you will appraise the prophecy of Merlin to be truth which said: Arthur's ending will be doubtful; even if you were able to escape freely after that, no doubt either you would be overwhelmed by the curses of your audience, or surely be buried

\textsuperscript{119} Chambers, 109.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{HWGC}, 514-55; I add in brackets my translation of Gerald's statement: "toto quod mirum est in hac spe populo manente," \textit{Opera}, Vol. vi, 216, which seems to have been left out of Wright's translation.
by their stones. For authors like Gerald of Wales and Alain de Lille, Merlin’s prophecy served to explain, though not to excuse or legitimize, the behavior of these Celtic peoples. However, the cryptic words of Merlin allowed Geoffrey’s translators the leeway to give interpretations with somewhat different colorings.

Following Geoffrey, Wace sends Arthur to Avalon "for the searching of his hurts." However, he adds: "He is yet in Avalon, awaited of the Britons; for as they say and deem he will return from whence he went and live again." Also unlike Geoffrey, Wace states that Arthur gave over his kingdom to Constantine only until he should return to claim it. Evidently Wace had come across tales of Arthur’s survival and return and felt compelled to include them in his Roman de Brut, however incredulously he may have looked upon them. Most likely Wace is referring to Breton tradition here, as he spent most of his life in Caen and only visited England, from what we can tell, on two occasions. Moreover, in his Roman de Rou he records his research into the Arthurian marvels of the Breton forest of Broceliande as noised about by the "Britons"; once he had visited the spot, he reports with some chagrin not finding anything marvellous about it. Nonetheless, Wace

121 Chambers, Record xxii, 265. "Verissime quidem, sicut hodieque probat varia hominum de morte ejus et vita opinio. Quod si mihi non credis, vade in Armoricum regnum, id est, in minorem Britanniam et praedica per plateas et vicos aRthurum Britonem more ceterum mortuorum mortuum esse, et tunc certe re ipsa probabis, veram esse Merlina prophetiam, qua ait: Arturi exitium dubium fore; si tamen immunes evadere inde potueris, quin aut maledictis audientium opprimaris, aut certe lapidibus obruaris."

122 Charles Foulon discusses Wace’s career in ALMA, 95-98.
judiciously softens the impact of his nod to the Breton hope. Constantine, he states, held Arthur's kingdom as he was bidden, but Arthur never returned. When dealing with this dichotomy, Wace relies on Geoffrey of Monmouth's convenient creation of an ancient mystic to further distance himself from the issue of Arthur's survival:

Master Wace, the writer of this book, cannot add more to this matter of his end than was spoken by Merlin the prophet. Merlin said of Arthur--if I read aright--that his end should be hidden in doubtfulness. The prophet spoke truly. Men have ever doubted, and--as I am persuaded--will always doubt whether he liveth or is dead.\textsuperscript{123}

Considering that he hoped for recognition and advancement from Henry Plantagenet, the care with which Wace presented this controversial material.

Wace's adapter, Layamon, writing at the turn of the thirteenth century, clearly did not intend to pander to Norman sensibilities, since his adaptation was most optimistic in terms of Arthur's survival. The \textit{Brut} concedes that "Arthur was wounded woundrously much." Nonetheless, the king manages a speech filled not only with hope but also with undeniable confidence:

I will fare to Avalun, to the fairest of all maidens, to Argante the queen, an elf most fair, and she shall make my wounds all sound; make me all whole with healing draughts. And afterwards I will come again to my kingdom, and dwell with the Britons with mickle joy.

After this speech two richly-dressed women arrive in a boat to carry Arthur across the sea to Avalon. Like Wace, Layamon refers to the prophetic Merlin and British belief in Arthur's survival, but he communicates confidence rather than doubt:

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Arthurian Chronicles}, 113-114.
Then it was accomplished that Merlin whilom said, that mickle care should be of Arthur’s departure. The Britons believe yet that he is alive, and dwelleth in Avalun with the fairest of all elves; and the Britons ever yet expect when Arthur shall return. Was never man born, of ever any lady chosen, that knoweth of the sooth, to say more of Arthur. But whilom was a sage hight Merlin; he said with words--his sayings were sooth--that an Arthur should yet come to help the English.124

Layamon certainly speaks with more certainty and conviction than Wace. The immediacy he gave to the story by causing the king to speak in first person of his departure and return, as well his rewrite of Merlin’s prophecy transform Arthur into a tangible hero for all of Britain. Apparently, Layamon considered the English to be rightful heirs of Britain’s ancient glories as much as any Celts, and probably more than the Normans, as one might wonder whom indeed Arthur was to save the English from during his vaunted return. Layamon was probably not planning to become a revolutionary for the English in a political sense, rather he seems to have felt that the English should not be slighted in the race for a national hero. Since Layamon did not work from a copy of Geoffrey’s Vita Merlini, his mention of the elf-queen Argante confirms the extensive reach of tales about the fairy island Avalon and its magical denizens.

Magic and mayhem abound in the Draco Normannicus account of correspondence between a Breton nationalist, King Arthur, and Henry II. Etienne sets up the conflict by explaining: “Meanwhile, a certain English king takes Brittany by arms and orders conquerors to remain in her and there to kill, crush, subdue, and imprison

124 Arthurian Literature, 264.
his enemies; the Bretons diffuse across the waters and through the woods."\(^{125}\) Henry had indeed made himself overlord of Brittany in 1166 and married his son Geoffrey to the Breton heiress, Constance, leaving the country's duke disinherited and its people bitter. The letter of Roland to Arthur, "threefold king," who is now supposedly residing near the Antipodes begins:

Savage Henry with arms incites you to arms. Therefore, provident of your own, which you alone hold, both king and lord, I appeal for your swift aid, either through coming yourself, or sending legions here.

When Arthur reads Roland's letter, "he gnashes his teeth, he rages, he seethes with anger," and returns a letter to him stating: "Great winds dissolve into breezes and refuse to blow for a long while. Henry's assault is well known to me, nor is it feared."\(^{126}\) A tempest is indeed brewing, and the king, describing himself as "everlasting by the mandate of the fates," sends a scathing letter to "the young Henry," in which he reminds the Plantagenet of his own phenomenal conquests and exploits down to Camlann, then describes his life after passing into Avalon:

Then Arthur seeks the healing plants of his sister, those the holy island of Avalon guards. The deathless nymph Morgan here sustains her brother perpetually, heals,

\(^{125}\) *CRSHR*, 695. "Interea Britonum quosdam rex anglicus armis appetit, et domitos in sua stare jubet. Dumque moratur ibi, terit hostes, opprimit, arcet, diffusiunt Britones per vada perque nemus."

nourishes, restores, and makes him eternal. The juris­
diction of the Antipodes was given over to him. Fairylike, 
unarmed, he takes a martial stance; he does not fear battle 
at all. Thus he rules the lower hemisphere; he is resplen­
dent in arms, the world is half his.\footnote{ibid., 703. "Saudius Arturus petit herbas inde sororis, Avallonis eas insula sacra tenet. Suscipit his fratrem Morganis nympha perennis, curat, alit, refovet, perpetuumque facit. Traditur antipodum sibi jus; fatatus, inermis, belliger assistit, proelia nulla timet. Sic hemispherium regit inferius, nitet armis, altera pars mundi dimidiata sibi."}

As if this were not enough to strike fear into the haughty Henry, Arthur warns that unless he relinquishes Brittany, he will soon be overrun by the Antipodean armies, which are gathering in the forests of Cornwall. Etienne wryly interjects: "The English king reads this, that the British held the forest." Henry, then, "smiling to his companions, not frightened," reads the letter aloud to his nobles, making witty asides; then drafts a letter to Arthur declaring his claim to Brittany as Rollo’s successor, but, out of respect for Arthur, agreeing to be his vassal for Brittany.\footnote{CRSHR, 705.}

Etienne de Rouen may have written this exchange in derision of Breton nationalists who employed Arthurian legend as a rallying point, yet there is no doubt that he based his wild tale of Arthur and his Antipodean minions in traditions extant at that time. Avalon as well may have become connected to this region of the netherworld. In Chretien’s \textit{Erec and Enide}, Arthur summons "kings, dukes, and counts, all those holding land from him" to his court at Pentecost. Among the rulers there present was Guinguemar, "Lord of the Isle of Avalon," and "lover of Morgan le Fay"; also came "the lord of the dwarfs, Bilis, King of the Antipodes," who,
bringing two vassal lords, awed everyone at court with "his lordship and wealth." The trio from the Antipodes, Chretien says, "were treated with great respect." Thus both Avalon and the Antipodes, each with hints of faery, are united under Arthur's overlordship.\textsuperscript{129} A later text to mention this tradition is the \textit{Gesta Regum Britanniae} written for the bishop of Vannes around 1235, possibly by Guillaume de Rennes. Modred was indeed rash, it says, to attack a king "quem totus metuit mundus, quem totus obhorret Antipodum populus."\textsuperscript{130}

Chronicle and romance continued to elaborate on the fantastic side of Arthur's survival. Gervase of Tilbury recounted in his chronicle dedicated to Emperor Otto:

Arthur was wounded, having slain all his enemies. Whence another common British tradition says he was carried off to the Isle of Avalon so that his wounds, which break open afresh each year, might be cured, under the healing ministrations of Morgan the fairy; British fables after that date in time believe he will return to kingship.\textsuperscript{131}

Moreover, in the third book of his chronicle, a book dedicated to various marvels he had come across, he ascribes an underworldly haunt to Arthur:

In Sicily there is Mount Etna. ... The natives say that in the wilds of this mountain the great Arthur appeared in our time. For one day a groom of the Bishop of Catania was cur-

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{CRCT}, 25; see Loomis' discussion in "King Arthur and the Antipodes," \textit{WAL}, 64-65.

\textsuperscript{130} Loomis, "King Arthur and the Antipodes," 64.

rying the palfrey in his charge, by a sudden impulse of wanton
fatness, the horse darted off and fled away to liberty. The
pursuing menial hunted for him in the peaks and precipices but
did not find him, and with growing fear the groom sought him
in the dark places of the mountain. In short, he found a very
narrow but level path; the youth came out on a very wide plain,
gay and full of all delights. There in a palace made with mar­
vellous art he found Arthur lying on a bed of royal splendour.
When the stranger and wanderer had related the reason of his
coming, and made known the cause of his journey, at once Arthur
had the bishop’s palfrey brought in and gave him to the servant
to return to the prelate.

Gervase may well have heard this tradition when he visited the Norman kingdom of
Sicily in 1190. The matter of Arthur’s survival certainly became cosmopolitan.

The northern Chronicon de Lanercost, written between 1201 and 1346, also
combines entertaining tales with straight history. One such anecdote for the year
1216 tells of Peter de Roche, bishop of Winchester, stumbling across a mansion in
the woods while hunting. When invited in to dinner by servants, the bishop
discovers that the lord of this manor is King Arthur. Although the author
couches this encounter in visionary terms, the possibility that one may happen upon
the legendary king in the woods seems not to have been considered remote.

Such notions of Arthur’s survival also found their way into romance. In the
"Mort Artu" section of the Prose Perceval, the author repeats the account made
familiar by Wace and Layamon:

132 Loomis, "King Arthur and the Antipodes," 70; Loomis gives both the Latin
text and the translation used here.

133 Keeler, 32-33; Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur’s Survival," 70.
And also King Arthur was wounded mortally, for he was pierced through the breast with a lance, and then they made great mourning around Arthur. And Arthur told them: 'Cease your mourning for I shall not die. I shall have myself borne to Avalon that my wounds may be tended by Morgain, my sister'. Thus Arthur had himself borne to Avalon and he told his people that they should await him and he would return. And the Britons came back to Carduel and waited for more than forty years before they would take a king, for they believed always that he would return.

However, the author states, hope was not yet lost for many people, and adds: "But this you may know in truth, that some have since then seen him hunting in the forest, and they have heard his dogs with him."¹³⁴ This is one of several written versions of Arthur as leader of the Wild Hunt, which is found in the folklore of both England and France.

Even the chroniclers could not resist the enigmatic allure surrounding Arthur's end and included the traditional ambiguous account along with, in many cases, commentary on Celtic hopes. The Dunstable annalist, writing during John's reign states succinctly for the year 535, Lucius and Modred's deaths, while Arthur "sauciatus in insulam avalonis ad vulnera sananda secessit." He makes no mention at all of Arthur's actual death. Roger of Wendover, for the year 541, reports that Arthur was mortally wounded and taken to Avalon for healing. However, in a twist on Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, Roger reports that in the year 542, "despairing of recovery" Arthur had given the crown of Britain to Constantine. There is no hint here that Roger lends any credence to the possibility of Arthur's survival; nonethe-

¹³⁴ Skeels, 93.
less, he says: "Wherefore, since history makes no mention of the death or burial of Arthur, the Britons fondly assert that he is still living." Pierre de Langtoft and Robert of Gloucester, both devotees of Arthurian legend, nonetheless, do not credit the story of his survival. Pierre declares that Arthur was carried to Avalon for a cure, and while "the Britons say he is still alive," he must admit: "For truth, I cannot tell if he be dead or not." Finally, the author of *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* states more emphatically that although he was taken to "an isle," here nameless, in order to heal his wounds, Arthur "deid as the beste knigt that me wuste euere yfounde." He continues:

& naethes the brutons & the cornwalisse of is kunde
Weneth he be aliue yut & abbeth him in munde
That he be to comene yut to winne agen this lond. 

Thus, the legendary aspects of Arthur’s survival were widespread and

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135 Giles, Vol. 1, 43.

136 Vol. 1, 225.

137 324. The use of *bruton* and *Brutayne* in this chronicle are unclear as to whether they refer to Briton or Breton, or to Britain or Britanny, in fact they seem to be used interchangeably. The crux of this question centers around the nomenclature used to describe Hoel, king of Britanny. Hoel is twice described as king of "the other Britayne," while after that is only called Hoel "king of Britayne"; in another place the author lists "Britayne" among the subject kingdoms, from Norway to Normandy, in such a context that it seems likely to refer to Britanny. However, both *bruton* and *Brutayne* are used when it is perfectly apparent that they mean Briton and Britain. Nonetheless, it seems common sense in the case of the above quote that the author is probably referring to Bretons rather than Britons. It would seem rather odd in the context of the thirteenth century to have singled out "the Cornwallish" from "the Britons." There is always the possibility that he meant to refer to the Welsh, although one would expect a monk of Gloucestershire who includes a blurb on St. David to have used the chronologically accurate cognomen "Welsh."
marvelous in scope; whether sleeping in a cave, ruling the Antipodes, entertaining guests in a silvan manor, leading the Wild Hunt, or still recuperating on the Isle of Avalon, he was very much alive and perhaps spoiling to return to his British throne. There seems little doubt that Arthurian legend had become a rallying point for Celtic nationalism, with written evidence to support the existence of Cornish and Breton and probably Welsh belief in Arthur’s survival and return as a "Celtic Deliverer."

Such beliefs, or at least knowledge of such beliefs, seem also to have become mainstream throughout Europe via the enthusiasm with which Medieval European society received Arthurian legend as an ideal for the age. Within the scope of this study, the legend of Arthur’s immortality in turn became a serious inconvenience to the Plantagenet kings. On one hand Arthurian legend had offered them a inheritance unequaled in its august splendor; on the other hand, this very inheritance would be denied them by those who deemed them unworthy usurpers. While certainly not a politically incapacitating problem, it proved to be irritating enough, in light of constant rebellions and provocations by the Celtic elements of the Plantagenet empire, to lead at least two of them to attempt to settle the ambiguity once and for all. Geoffrey of Monmouth had not specified a geographical location for Avalon; Mount Etna and the Antipodes were too intangible. It remained for further coincidences and permutations of tradition to honor an earthly site definitively with Arthur’s resting place. Nonetheless, these permutations were probably more deliberate than coincidental, for the political advantages to be had by the laying of Arthur’s ghost are too strong to be ignored. Furthermore, the resultant effects on
chronicle and romance establish the importance of the forthcoming discovery in the cycle of Arthurian legend.
CHAPTER VI

MORT D’ARTHUR

Early Evidence for a Tradition of Arthur’s Death

Even as rumors swirled of Arthur’s survival, it seems that not everyone chose to believe them, not even among the Celtic peoples. Certainly, Geoffrey’s account of Camlann entailed Arthur’s mortal wounding, a tradition he found bluntly recorded in the *Annales Cambriae*’s entry for the year 537: "Gueith Camlann in qua Arthur et Medraut corruerunt."\(^{138}\) Nothing in this tenth-century manuscript hints at any mystery. We look again to Wales for evidence of belief in Arthur’s death. T. Gwynn Jones submits: "In one elegy by Cynddelw (1150-1200), it is stated that Arthur, along with other famous warriors, such as Caesar, Bran vab Llyr, Hercules, and Alexander, had died just like other men." Cynddelw, a renowned bard, served in the courts of the Princes of Powys; this elegy may have been made for Madog ap Maredudd who died in 1160, or for Owain Fychan, who died in 1187. Jones further mentions an elegy for Maredudd ap Cynan, who died in 1212, by bard Llywarch ap

\(^{138}\) *Nennius’ British History and the Welsh Annals*, 85.
Llywelyn (1160-1220) which says: "Maredudd is also dead, as is sovereign Arthur." In either case, the elegy, obviously by well-established formulae, both elevates the prince to heroic status, and lowers Arthur to the mortal plane. Arthur, these agree, was a great hero, warrior, and king; however, just as the princes they eulogize, he is most assuredly dead. The Welsh court bards had taken a somewhat surprising stand against Arthur’s "exitium dubium," and were not swayed by the burgeoning survivalist rhetoric that followed Geoffrey’s Historia. If so, what people is William of Newburgh referring to when he rails: "because of fear of the Britons, Geoffrey does not dare pronounce him dead, for the brutish Britons believe that he really will come."? These same Britons, William says, invented the tales of Avalon that Geoffrey used to cast doubt upon Arthur’s death. Jones hypothosizes:

> It is my opinion that popular belief is not at all represented in the poetry of the official bards of the twelfth century, who were a closed corporation and who probably despised the stories of the lower minstrel class, as material for verse.

Thus, Arthur’s survival may have been the hope of the Welsh masses and been passed along to Geoffrey and those after him by more humble channels; certainly the stories relayed by Herman of Laon and Alain de Lille portray Arthur’s survival as

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140 Book I, eds. P.G. Walsh and M.J. Kennedy, 36-37.

141 ibid., 44.
the province of the Cornish and Breton Everyman. Nonetheless, Welsh court bards, by long-standing tradition, considered Arthur’s death a reality, and represent a valid alternative to that of his survival and return which appeared even before the shocking discovery of 1190.

"Inter Lapideas Pyramides Duas"

In Book I of De Principes Instructione, begun by 1191 and probably completed and circulated by 1199 separate of the next two books, Gerald of Wales records, with some glee, the discovery of the earthly resting-place of King Arthur:

Moreover, the body of this man, for whom stories had completely fabricated a fantastic end, as if he had been transferred to a distant place by spirits and not subject to death, in these our days has been found at Glastonbury between two stone pyramids erected formerly in the sanctified cemetery, hidden away in a hollow oak very deep in the ground, revealed by wonderful and almost miraculous signs, and has been moved with honors into the church and fitly commended to a marble tomb.

Gerald goes on to describe how the queen’s bones were found with her husband’s, and how a lock of her golden hair crumbled to dust when snatched up by an eager

142 See Chambers p.112 and Bartlett p.69-70 for discussions of the dating of Book 1.

143 Opera, Vol. 8, 127. "Hujus autem corpus quod quasi phantasticum in fine, et tanquam per spiritus ad longinquam translatum, neque morti obnoxium fabulae coninxerant, his nostris diebus apud Glastoniam inter lapides pyramides duas, in coemiterio sacro quondam erectas, profundius in terra quercu concava reconditum, et signatum miris indiciis et quasi miraculosum, est inventum, et in ecclesiam cum honore translatum marmoreoque decenter tumulo commendatum."
monk. It seems that Gerald himself had ventured to Glastonbury to view the bones shortly after their exhumation, where he had received a first-hand account of the discovery, and had been treated, along with an unspecified group, to a demonstration by the abbot of Arthur's great stature, as shown by the prodigious length of the king's thighbone. This examination of the remains further allowed Gerald to speculate as to the manner of Arthur's death, for in the heroically-proportioned skull were "vulnera decem aut plura" all of which had healed but one, "quod hiatum grandem fecerat, quodque solum letale fuisse videbatur."\(^{144}\)

Just what were the "wonderful and miraculous signs" which led the monks of Glastonbury to perform excavations in that particular spot? Gerald answers this questions with great alacrity, as if he revelled in his ability to silence any nay-sayers by the sheer weight of logic and fact, moreover, he explained away some of the more peculiar aspects of the burial with interpolation worthy of Geoffrey of Monmouth. First, Gerald explains, hints, "alia indicia," of the royal burial were to be found in Glastonbury's own records, and further in inscriptions, though much defaced by time, on the pyramids themselves, as well as "per visiones et revelationes bonis viris et religiosis factas." What may have been communicated to the monks via ecstatic visions notwithstanding, no extant proof of written records pointing to an Arthurian burial at the abbey exists for dates preceding this discovery.

As for the inscriptions on the pyramids, William of Malmesbury's original history of the abbey, *De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie*, fails to attach any Arthurian

\(^{144}\) ibid. 127-29.
implication to them whatsoever. Invited to plumb the depths of Glastonbury's history by the enterprising new abbot, Henry of Blois, William performed exhaustive research between 1125 and 1135 into both the traditions and the features of the venerable abbey. Thus he produced the highly popular and respected *De Antiquitate*, which, in its original form did not mention Arthur at all.145 About the pyramids, he says: "If I could elicit the truth I would gladly explain the significance of those pyramids which are a mystery to almost everyone." Located at the edge of the monk's cemetery, they preserve, he says, "some memorials of antiquity which can be clearly read, even if not fully understood." William also lists some of the names visibly inscribed, which are obviously both British and Saxon, and concludes: "I will not rashly certify what these mean but hesitantly suggest that within those hollow stones are contained the bones of those whose names can be read on the outside."146 Not only do the inscriptions bear no Arthurian import, but William also states that they were clearly legible. Sixty years later, Gerald of Wales implies that they were defaced beyond easy legibility, as perhaps they were, yet it is possible that this merely served to hide the fact that no actual Arthurian inscriptions were to be found.

However, Gerald says, the most clear sign of them all was that given to Henry II by a "cantore Britone antiquo," who told the king that they would find the

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146 Scott, 84-85.
body at least sixteen feet underground and in a hollow oak rather than a stone tomb. Henry then shared this information with the Glastonbury monks.\textsuperscript{147} It is tempting to speculate that this scene unfolded during one of Henry's progresses through Wales on which Gerald accompanied him as interpreter and liaison, witnessing what he would later record as the vital catalyst for the discovery of Arthur's tomb. Gerald does not, however, confirm this theory himself. It is, moreover, intriguing to speculate as to why a "British" bard, here probably referring to a Welshman, although a Breton minstrel is not outside the realm of possibility, should reveal such information to Henry Plantagenet. If the old man were a Welsh court bard, perhaps this is a genuine tradition of Arthur's death and burial place. Although, no other reference to such a Glastonbury site exists in extant Welsh literature which is not based upon the 1190 discovery. However, if the "singer" were a Welsh or Breton popular minstrel, one would expect him to be spreading the gospel of Arthur's survival as his peers were described as doing.

The difficulties with Gerald's story continue with his rewrite of the discovery for his \textit{Speculum Ecclesiae} dating from 1216. Gerald declares that Henry had told the abbot of Glastonbury, here identified as Abbot Henry, later bishop of Worcester, many times that he had learned of the whereabouts of Arthur's tomb from "gestis Britonum et eorum cantoribus historiis." During Henry's reign, the tomb was

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Opera}, Vol. 8, 128. "...maxime tamen et evidentissime rex angliae Henricus secundus, sicut ab historico cantore Britone audierat antiquo, totum monachis indicavit, quod profunde, scilicet in terra per xvi. pedes ad minus, corpus invenirent, et non [in] lapideo tumulo sed in quereu cavata."
"diligently sought" out, with the encouragement of the abbot, who had the fine marble tomb made to house the uncovered remains. The problem which here unfolds is that of dating. Henry II passed away in July, 1189, while Henry de Sully, later Bishop of Worcester, became the abbot of Glastonbury a few months later. What is obvious here is that the tomb was uncovered, the bodies of Arthur and Guinevere exposed and re-intered in the church after Henry's death. Why Gerald would mistake this is unclear, unless he only meant to imply that the excavations began while Henry was alive, then stretched out for a series of months. Between these two versions several points emerge which were obviously important to Gerald to convey. First, he consistently ascribes to Henry the role of an insistent catalyst in this procedure. Second, he indicates that Henry not only heard of the possibility, but he also actively researched it. Finally, the ultimate evidence for the Glastonbury site, as Henry discovered, was to be found in the oral and written tradition of the "British," by which name Gerald refers to the Welsh. Therefore, his statement that the British people still idiotically ("fatue") contend that Arthur is alive becomes rather cruelly ironic, as Gerald takes it upon himself to show that even their own ancient traditions belie their fabrications of Arthur's survival.

Beyond Gerald's story, only circumstantial evidence exists for any involve-


149 Chambers, 114.

150 Opera, Vol. 3, 48. Gerald and William of Newburgh are in agreement in their dismal summation of the caliber of the "British" intellect when it comes to matters Arthurian.
ment Henry might have had in the Glastonbury discovery. Contemporary chroniclers described the king as intellectual and well-read, while Gerald himself notes Henry’s remarkable memory which allowed him a formidable knowledge of history.\textsuperscript{151} Therefore, Gerald’s image of him poring over ancient histories does not seem too far-fetched, though exactly what "gestis Britonum" may have led him to a Glastonbury burial-site for Arthur is unknown. Norman-Celtic political relations may have encouraged Henry to seek to expose Arthur’s tomb. It will be recalled that the Plantagenet was highly unpopular in Brittany, and the butt of nationalistic, Arthurian rhetoric as recorded in the \textit{Draco Normannicus}. Moreover, two years before his death, the king’s Breton grandson had been named for the Celtic hero, rather than for himself. As for relations with the Welsh, they had been mixed at best, with Henry launching three scrappy campaigns against the Welsh princes and their rebellious subjects. At the core of Welsh resistance was the desire for restored British sovereignty, and if Henry had anything to fear from Arthur, it was via the fanatic Celtic belief in the prophecies of Merlin which predicted an end to foreign rule and the restoration of the British throne.\textsuperscript{152} However, in the last decade or so of his reign, Henry and the powerful prince of South Wales, Rhys ap Gruffydd, had not only reached a detente, but enjoyed cordial relations, effectively achieving peace between the two nations which would not be seen again until the Edwardian

\textsuperscript{151} Warren, 208.

\textsuperscript{152} See mention of prophecies to this effect by Geoffrey of Gaimar’s continuator and Gerald of Wales on pp. 56-7 above.
Conquest forcibly imposed it. Moreover, in 1177 Henry had received the homage not only of the prince of South Wales, but also representatives of Powys and Gwynnedd. All in all, it seems unlikely that Henry pored over histories or pressured the Glastonbury monks to excavate because the finding of Arthur’s tomb would alleviate great political extremis. It would probably, however, have been politically expedient and perhaps personally gratifying. Nonetheless, it is perfectly clear that Abbot Henry of Glastonbury could not have been acting under the king’s own orders when he did excavate, and the question arises as to why it took so long to come about, in spite of the royal interest in the matter.

"In Insula Avallonis"

In both of his versions of the Glastonbury excavation, Gerald records that underneath a stone found in the excavation was a lead cross inscribed: "Hic jacet sepultus rex Arthurus cum Wenneuercia uxore sua secunda in insula Auallonis." Thus a grave for Arthur and the site of Avalon had been settled at one location, Glastonbury, yet one might wonder how these came together so neatly. It is Gerald himself who quickly lays to rest any misgivings by carefully explaining how Glastonbury and Avalon are to be connected:

That which is now called Glastonbury was in ancient times called the Isle of Avalon, that is, insula pomifera, apple-bearing island. Indeed, apples, which are in the British tongue called aval, used to be abundant there. Morgan, a

noble lady and ruler and protector of those regions, as well as a blood-relative of King Arthur, after the battle of Camlann conveyed Arthur to the island which is now called Glastonbury for the healing of his wounds. It was also formerly called in British Inis Gutrin, that is insula vitrea, Isle of Glass; out of which word the Saxons, arriving later, named the place Glastingeburi. Indeed, in their tongue vitrum is glas, and castrum or civitas is called buri.154

This is a very creative explanation indeed. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, in an essay on Glastonbury in Welsh vernacular tradition, states that Gerald of Wales is one of the earliest authorities to suggest that Ynys Wydrin "was the old Celtic name for Glastonbury," and further suggests that he may, in fact, have "invented the Welsh form to 'explain' the English name" and to link it to Avalon.155 However, William of Malmesbury’s original De Antiquitate includes a 601 grant from a king of Devon of five "cassates" from the "terram quae appellatur Ineswitrin" to the the


It should be noted that the standard Latin meaning of pomifera is "fruit-bearing," and pomum can designate any kind of fruit; meanwhile the standard Welsh meaning for aval is apple. Since Latin does have a word, malum, specifically designating "apple," it seems somewhat odd that Gerald did not use it, since he so clearly wished to equate the word with aval.

ancient church of Glastonbury. William surmises that the unknown king must have been a Briton: "quod Glastoniam sua lingua Ineswitrin appellavit; sic enim eam Britannice vocari apud eos constat." Lloyd-Morgan, however, notes that while the Welsh Brutiau use Ynys Afallach to translate Geoffrey's insula Avallonis, they only rarely refer to Glastonbury (or Avalon) as Ynis Witrin. Furthermore, Lloyd-Morgan points out the absence of Ynys Wytrin and Ynys Avallach in early native Welsh literature; rather, all examples of them "in surviving vernacular sources derive directly or indirectly from chronicle material." Furthermore, the Welsh, once these names were identified with the abbey and surrounding region, readily adapted Glastonbury to their own language and used it rather than either of the others. It is thereby apparent that the Welsh had no particular loyalty or associations attached to Ynys Widrin or to Ynys Afallach in respect to Glastonbury, or perhaps they were not particularly impressed by the etymological efforts of Gerald and William's continuators. Ynys Afallach, may be as Lloyd-Morgan suggests, the direct result of the need to vernacularize the Avalon tradition as it appeared in Geoffrey's Historia.

156 Chambers, Scott, and Charles Wood, in "Fraud and its Consequences," AHGA, all agree that the Ynys Witrin charter was investigated by William, and approved as authentic, included in his own work. Scott says that this and other charters may well have been faulty; Wood goes farther toward calling them forgeries.

157 Gesta Regum Anglorum, ed. Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1 (London, 1840), 40; Scott, 89.

158 ibid., 302, 312-13; I have found no scholars to state any real proof that it appeared as such in Celtic records or literature before the date in question; thus, I believe Lloyd-Morgan's point to stand. Everyone seems in agreement, however, that the Avalon designation is an "afterthought."
Since Geoffrey had in mind a Hesperidean isle of otherworldly bliss and made no attempt to connect Avalon with any temporal place, least of all with Glastonbury, and since early Welsh material makes no mention of Avalon or draws any connections, Gerald's claims, or claims relayed to him on his visit to Glastonbury, linking Avalon to Glastonbury and Ynys Witrin appear to be revisionist.

Therefore, a look into the part of Glastonbury in this matter seems in order. In 1184, a fire destroyed many of the abbey buildings, its church, and the treasures therein, a crisis that stirred its monks to a grand fund-raising venture. Henry II turned out to be a very generous patron, financing the rebuilding of the Lady Chapel as a first step to the full restoration of the church. Meanwhile the monks began the well-used route to donations—relics. Disinterments and discoveries of the bones of famous saints ensued, including those of Patrick, Gildas, and Dunstan. However, Henry's death in 1189 brought the larger part of reconstruction to a grinding halt. Thus it has been variously suggested that Abbot Henry, partly to attract the patronage of the new king and partly to boost lucrative pilgrimage traffic, set about the excavation which would produce the crowd and Crown-pleasing bones of Arthur.159

Arthur had, in fact, been connected to Glastonbury before 1190. During their ongoing campaign to enrich the abbey's reputation by linking it with venerable saints, the monks had hired Welsh hagiographer, Caradoc of Llancarfan, a contemporary of Geoffrey of Monmouth, to write a life of St. Gildas. Caradoc used

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sundry, non-historical sources, including other Saints’ Lives and traditional tales, to accomplish this venture, which upon completion no doubt pleased the monks immensely.\textsuperscript{160} Such methods, however, were not unusual, and certainly not restricted to Glastonbury, for English religious institutions were all caught up in the same need for economic and political advancement. Thus despite the utter lack of historical or literary evidence for Gildas having been a major presence at Glastonbury, Caradoc’s Life states that Gildas moved to Glastonbury, built a church, and died there.\textsuperscript{161} Caradoc delved into his store of Arthurian tradition to further enhance both the saint and Glastonbury. Two episodes connect Gildas and Arthur, the second bringing them together at Glastonbury.\textsuperscript{162} King Melwas of Somerset, Caradoc states, carried off Queen Guenevere and hid her successfully for a year in the neighborhood of Glastonbury. Because the reedy bogs of the region prevented Arthur and his army from taking her back, the king laid seige to Glastonbury, inconveniencing its monks to such an extent that the abbot and Gildas intervened. Under Gildas’ mediation Arthur agreed to forgive all if Melwas returned the queen, and the two kings amicably visit Glastonbury church together. This has the ring of genuine local tradition.

In introduction to the tomb discovery in \textit{De Principis}, Gerald of Wales

\textsuperscript{160} Baring-Gould and Fischer, Vol. 3, 82; Christopher Brooke, \textit{The Church and the Welsh Border in the Central Middle Ages} (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1986), 82; Rider 6.

\textsuperscript{161} Tatlock, "Dates," 141.

\textsuperscript{162} See Baring-Gould, Vol. 3, chapter on Gildas.
describes Arthur as a well-known patron and benefactor of Glastonbury Abbey:

> Also the memory of Arthur, the renowned king of Britain was not kept secret; many stories extol him who was the principal patron of the distinguished monastery of Glastonbury in his own days and both liberal benefactor and great helper. Indeed, he esteemed more highly during his reign Glastonbury, church of the Blessed Mary Mother of God, and promoted it with greater devotion above all others.¹⁶³

He goes on to substantiate Arthur's affinity for Glastonbury's church of Our Lady by bringing up the well-established tradition, introduced by Nennius and elaborated by Geoffrey of Monmouth, that Arthur's shield bore Mary's image and that he would pause in battle to kiss her feet. This sounds suspiciously like a faulty circle of logic, as well as an attempt to locate Arthur in a surprisingly twelfth-century milieu. Gerald reports that the king and queen were transferred into marble tombs in "the church," adding in Speculum that this was the wish of Henry II. However, the only part of the church standing at the time was the newly completed Lady Chapel, built thanks to the munificence of the late Plantagenet. It seems here that the actions attributed to Arthur mirror those of Henry Plantagenet, who was their greatest benefactor until his death brought the surcease of his bounty. Combined with Arthur's traditional reverence for Mary it made for a believable story. Perhaps this story, circulated no doubt by the monks, was a thinly veiled invitation for Richard

¹⁶³ loc. cit. 126. "Arthuri quoque Britonum regis inclyti memoria est non supprimenda, quern monasterii Glastoniensis egregii, cujus et ipse patronus suis diebus fuerat praecipuus et largitor ac sublevator magnificus, historiae multum extollunt. Prae cunctis enim ecclesiis regni sui sanctae Dei genitricis Matiae Glastroniensem ecclesiam plus dilexit et prae caeteris longe majori devotione promovit."
follow the example of his predecessors. In any case, as John Scott suggests, "inviting Gerald of Wales along as a spectator and reporter"—Gerald himself says that Abbot Henry showed him the tomb and relics—would help "to ensure that the story would become widely known."\textsuperscript{164}

Before moving on to the effect of this discovery in other chronicles and in romance, a brief look at its part in the revision of William of Malmesbury's \textit{De Antiquitate} is called for. To the original text of the \textit{De Antiquitate}, which can be discerned in William's own rewrite of his \textit{De Gestis Regum}, was slowly but surely appended the newly improved history of Glastonbury abbey, which included its recently achieved Arthurian ambience. The manuscript of \textit{De Antiquitate} extant today shows where this process stood around 1250. The first appearance of Arthur is a nonchalant reference to his obviously well-known tomb between the pyramids, the details of which the author says he will "omit ... from fear of being tedious." Nonetheless, the author assures his audience that this and other famous ancient burials is "proof of how venerated the church of Glastonbury was even by the nobles of our country."\textsuperscript{165} It must be reiterated here that William of Malmesbury stated in his \textit{De Gestis Regum} that Arthur's tomb was unknown, nor had he felt compelled to change this in his own redactions. Next, the revisers include a charming tale of

\textsuperscript{164} loc. cit. 29; Treharne discusses the implications of Gerald's visit to Glastonbury, and surmises that, since Abbot Henry went on to Worcester in the fall of 1193 and since the tomb had been newly completed and the relics transferred, the visit must have been "much before the end of 1192"; p. 97.

\textsuperscript{165} Scott, 83.
Arthur allowing a newly-knighted youth to join in on a battle against three wicked giants. The eager youth foolishly went ahead of the group to prove himself, and in killing the giants, died himself. Arthur, the story goes, felt responsible for his death and was so distraught that "when he returned to Glastonbury he established 80 monks there for his soul, generously granting them lands and territories for their sustenance, as well as gold, silver, chalices and other ecclesiastical ornaments."

The revised version of *De Antiquitate* also contains an awkward explanation for the identification of Avalon with Glastonbury, reflecting either Gerald's traditional source for his Isle of Apples etymological argument, or perhaps drawn from his explanation itself. It also mentions the alternative, also subscribed to in the *Speculum Ecclesia*, that it may have been "named after a certain Avalloc who is said to have lived there with his daughters." Wherever the revisers found these traditions, they are mere reflections of the need to connect Avalon with Glastonbury in order to ease the acceptance of their "discovery." The tradition of Ynys Witrin as the early British name for the region increases from one to five appearances, but as with the Arthur story, it is used as means to add property and to Glastonbury's holdings and prestige to the institution. The history of traditional names for this relatively small area and the variety of interpretations and etymologies they required probably boggled the medieval as well as the modern mind, indeed E.K. Chambers declares: "Most of this twelfth-century etymologizing we may of course dis-

\[166\] *ibid.*, 53.
However, "Avalon" Glastonbury did become. Certainly, surrounded by marshes and crowned by the towering tor, it did have the look of an island, and with a celebrated history, criss-crossed with ancient legend, that stretched back into the mists of time, it may have required only a kingly body to convince the many that Glastonbury was indeed the Isle of Avalon. And whatever the validity of the monks' stories, the exhumation, and the vaunted royal persuasion, it was enough to convince many chroniclers and to influence the writers of romance.

Arthur's Death and Burial in Chronicle and Romance

In his *Chronicon Angelicarum*, Ralph of Coggeshall entered for the year 1191, inexplicably late, but perhaps because of his abbey's great distance from the scene of the action, a version of the discovery of Arthur's bones with some similarities to Gerald's but also with some differences.

Moreover, this year the bones of the most famous Arthur, once king of Britain, were found near Glastonbury in a certain most ancient, hidden sarcophagus, near which two ancient pyramids stood erect on which letters were written, but because they were exceedingly barbaric and disfigured they could not be read. They were found, moreover, accidentally. Indeed, while they were excavating the earth there in order to bury a certain monk, who had chosen while he was alive with vehement longing to be buried in that place, they recovered a certain sarcophagus, on which a lead cross had been placed, written in this manner: 'Here lies the reknowned King Arthur, buried on the Island of Avalon'. Indeed that place formerly, because of its boggy environs, was called the Isle of Avalon, that is, the Isle of Apples.
This account is alike enough to warrant a guess that Ralph had come across the same source material as Gerald had, that is the story spread by the Glastonbury monks, although perhaps he heard (or read) it second or third-hand. The pyramids are intact as is the Avalon-Glastonbury explanation, which is put much more succinctly. The most glaring differences are the absence of Guenevere in both the sarcophagus and the cross inscription, as well as the account of the circumstances leading up to the excavation. Easily enough, the former could be attributed to the natural truncation process of both information transfer and chronicle writing; the latter, however, is a significant break with the account given by Gerald.

W.A. Nitze hypothesizes that Ralph "may have been inspired by a wish to belittle the role of the Angevins in the exhumation," basing this idea on the fact that the annalist at the fellow Cistercian abbey at Margam in Wales follows Ralph's version rather than Gerald's, and that a Welsh chronicler would not wish to exalt the king.\footnote{168} This suggestion is problematic for several reasons. First, and most obviously, not every monk in a Welsh abbey need necessarily be Welsh, and one would expect an abbey founded by the Norman Earl of Gloucester, to be under a Norman abbacy. The \textit{Annals of Margan} themselves give every indication of viewing the Welsh as a menace to the abbey and to society, and Henry's campaign to pacify the region as a relief.\footnote{169} Second, it is as easy to say that Gerald wished to exalt

\footnote{168} "Exhumation," 359.

the role of the Angevins in the discovery, as to say that Ralph or the Margam annalist wished to belittle it. All that seems clear is that both Gerald and the Glastonbury abbot were not unaware of the necessity to attract Plantagenet attention and give the discovery the royal stamp of authenticity. It is also clear that Ralph was apprized of a different tradition. As to the likelihood of monk’s desire to be buried between the pyramids, it seems just as believable, considering their description in De Antiquitate, that a Glastonbury monk would desire to rest among former bishops and ancient kings, as it is that Henry should stumble across a such a candid British bard. Treharne points out the difficulty of reconciling a simple burial with the sixteen-foot trench which, after much hardship, revealed Arthur’s oaken sarcophagus.\footnote{170} Nonetheless, Gerald does mention in Speculum that the leaden cross announcing Arthur’s presence was found at seven feet. Furthermore, could not this monk be one of those who, according to Gerald, had dreams and visions of the greatness hidden between the pyramids? Whatever the truth or provenence behind either version, several other chroniclers not only follow Ralph, but add details not to be found in either his nor Gerald’s rendition.

In his entry for 1191, the Margam annalist mimics Ralph of Coggeshall’s version until he begins to describe the actual recovery of the sarcophagus, at which point it veers sharply and inexplicably away:

...they recovered a certain sarcophagus, in which they discerned what seemed to be the bones of a woman with nearly uncorrupted hair, which set aside, they recovered

\footnote{170}{104-5.}
another laid beneath the first, in which the bones of a
man were contained, that likewise moving aside, they dis­
covered also a third placed beneath the first two on which
a lead cross was placed...  

Here the annalist continues with Ralph’s rendition of the cross inscription identifying
Arthur and the etymology and description of Avalon, before returning to the strange
tripartite burial:

Then opening the aforementioned sarcophagus, they found
the bones of the aforementioned lord exceedingly hard and
long, which, with proper honor and great pomp, the monks
laid out in a marble tomb in their church. The first tomb
was said to be that of Guinevere the queen, Arthur’s wife;
the second of Modred, his nephew; the third of the afore­
mentioned lord.

Obviously, the Margam annalist’s account reflects several versions, but whether they
were relayed separately or arrived already merged cannot be known. The account
is similar enough to suggest that he had access to the tradition Ralph utilized, while

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{loc. cit.} 21. "... repererunt quoddam sarcophagum, in quo quasi ossa
muliebria cum capillitura adhuc incorrupta cernebantur, quo amoto repererunt et
aliud priori substratum, in quo osse virilia continebantur, quod etiam amoventes
invenerunt et tertium duobus primis suppositum, cui crux plumbea superposita erat ...
"

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{ibid.}, 22. "Deinde praedictum sarcophagum aperientes, invenerunt praedicti
principis ossa robusta nimirum et longa, quae cum decenti honore et magno apparatu
in marmoreo mausoleo intra ecclesiam suam monachi collocaverunt. Primum
tumulum dicunt fuisset Guenhavare reginae, uxoris ejusdem Arthuri: secundum
Modredi nepotis ejusdem: tertium praedicti principis."

Once again, the "church" here would be Glastonbury’s Lady Chapel; I am
assuming that the author used \textit{suam} for \textit{eas}, a not uncommon grammatical error in
medieval Latin, thus rendering \textit{ecclesiam suam} as "their (the monks’) church";
however, it could literally be translated that the monks laid Arthur’s bones in "his
own church," perhaps a nod to the idea that the chapel was built specifically to house
the tomb of Arthur, which Gerald implied, or merely expressing the thought that the
tomb was the focal point of that chapel.
details such as Guenevere's hair, the marble tomb, and the reinterment ceremony suggest that he also had access to tradition stemming from Gerald of Wales. Moreover, this annalist, or his source, seems to have accepted some and rejected other details from these variant traditions, for reasons unknown, to arrive at this version. The tripartite burial is to be found nowhere else, although I would hazard a couple of hypotheses. Separating the bones of Arthur and Guinevere into two separate sarcophagi could be the innocent enough result of material received by hearsay; certainly a double burial in a hollowed oak, being an unfamiliar practice by this time, would probably be re-interpreted along the lines of communication in order to make better sense to the bearers and hearers of the news. As for the presence of Modred, this could suggest the annalist's (or his source's) familiarity with Arthurian legend and specifically with the outcome of the Battle of Camlann as it appeared in chronicle and romance.

Like Ralph of Coggeshall, Roger of Wendover in his *Flowers of History*, dates the discovery in 1191, ascribes the find to a monk's wish to be buried between the pyramids, and absents Guinevere from the cross and the grave.\(^{173}\) As a whole, the account is abridged, which, especially in the severely compressed etymology and description of Avalon, sacrifices comprehension to space, and bespeaks more repetition than creativity on the part of the author.

As the years went by since the discovery, chroniclers began to incorporate it into their accounts of Arthur's career. Gervase of Canterbury, responsible for the

\(^{173}\) *loc. cit.* Vol. 2, 110.
material in the *Gesta Regum* attributed to him definitely up to the death of Richard (1199) and probably up to 1207, gives the early history of Britain and ends his summary of Arthur's glorious career by stating: "proditorem suum occidit Mordredum, sed et ipse vulneratus occubuit, et in Avalun sepultus est, hoc est apud Glastoniam." As Nitze intimates, the Canturbury chronicler must have been loath to admit such a coup by its rival Glastonbury, yet faced "with two evils," Nitze also suggests, "Gervase naturally chose the lesser: an Arthur safely entombed at Glastonbury was a decided asset--even at Canterbury." Be that as it may, notice in the chronicle of the Archbishopric implies that Arthur's death and burial at Glastonbury had become the official line. Robert of Gloucester, writing during the reign of Henry III, wrote with great nostalgia of the glorious Arthur and his reign, as well as remarking on lingering belief in his survival by certain Celtic peoples, with which he begs to differ:

& natheles at glastinbury his bones suthe me fond  
& there at uore the heye weued amydde the quer ywis  
As is bones liggeth is toumbe wel vair is.

Thus, it sounds as if Robert himself may have made a pilgrimage to Glastonbury Abbey to view the great king's bones in the fair, marble tomb. Having viewed them, Robert brooks no argument of survival on a fairy island, ending his account of Arthur's life with the poetic "In the vif hundred yer of grace & vourty & two, In

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174 *loc. cit.* 19.

175 "Exhumation," 359-60.
this manere in corwaille to dethe he was ydo."\textsuperscript{176}

Adam of Domerham, cellarar then sacristan at Glastonbury Abbey wrote his \textit{De Rebus Gestis Glastoniensibus} between 1278 and 1291 "as a continuation of William of Malmesbury’s \textit{De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae}, to encourage readers to protect and augment the abbey’s prosperity and privileges."\textsuperscript{177} An onrunning quarrel with the bishops of Bath had threatened Glastonbury’s new-found wealth and sovereignty, the abbey’s rather ambitious argument was that Glastonbury answered only to the Crown and not to Bath.\textsuperscript{178} This afforded a perfect opportunity to expound again upon the discovery of King Arthur’s tomb. Therefore, some one hundred years later, but certainly with access to the abbey’s archives and traditions, Adam produced the following account:

King Richard placed in authority of the abbey Henry de Sully, prior of Bermondsey, a man of royal lineage.... Here, having frequently been admonished to place the renowned King Arthur in a more fitting location (indeed, he had reposed near the ancient church, between two stone pyramids, in former times excellently engraved, from the year 648) he ordered a dig on a certain day with curtains surrounding the place.... Therefore the abbot and those gathered, raising up their spoils, translated them with great rejoicing into the church in two divisions, depositing them in a nobly carved mausoleum. Here was inscribed an epitaph upon the tomb: Here lies Arthur, the flower of kings, glory of kingship, for whom morals and uprightness recommend everlasting praise; here lies in a second tomb

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{loc. cit.} 324.

\textsuperscript{177} Gransden, 520-21.

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{ibid.}, see also Charles Woods’ essay "Fraud and its Consequences."
Arthur’s wife for whom abundant virtue merits heaven.\textsuperscript{179}

Two elements of this account seem especially significant. First, the 648 years of Arthur’s rest between the pyramids added to the date of his death popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth, 542, points to 1190 as a probable date of the exhumation, which circumstances tend to favor over the 1191 date. Second, the true nature of the excavation may be revealed by the screening curtains.\textsuperscript{180} Meanwhile, Adam places the excavation in the correct reign, but fails to explain who suggested that Arthur’s body be moved, nor how long, or by what means, his burial sight had been known by the monks.

The role of Richard in these affairs is an intriguing mystery; perhaps Adam implies that he or his father encouraged the transfer. Upon his father’s death, Richard was indeed in need of means to put down various Celtic elements; Henry’s carefully crafted peace with Wales dissolved immediately upon his death, and

\textsuperscript{179} Chambers, Record xxxiv, 280. "Rex [Ricardus]...praefecit in abbatem Henricum de Soliaco, priorem de Bermundsie, virum de regia stirpe progenitum.... Hic, de incloito rege Arturo decentius locando frequenter admonitus (requieverat enim, iuxta vetustam ecclesiam, inter duas piramides lapideas, quondam nobiliter insculptas, sexcentis quadraginta et octo annis) quadam die locum cortinis circumdans, fodere praecepit.... Abbas igitur et conventus, suscipientes eorum exuvias, cum gaudio in maiorem transtulerunt ecclesiam, in mausoleo, nobiliter insculpto, intrinsecus bipertito, collocantes. Regium videlicet corpus per se ad caput tumvae, reginam ad pedes, s[eu] in orientali parte; ubi usque in hodiernum diem magnifice requiescunt. Hoc autem epitaphium tumvae inscribitur: 

\begin{quote}
    His iacet Arturus, flos regum, gloria regni,  
    Quem mores, probitas, commendant laude perhenni.  
    Arturi iacet hic coniux tumulata secunda,  
    Quae meruit coelos virtutem prole fecunda.  
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{180} Chambers, 115.
Richard had to be restrained by his counselors from post-poning his coronation in order to put down a Welsh revolt.\textsuperscript{181} Perhaps he would suggest that Arthur’s body be speedily produced in hopes of quelling Celtic fervor, thus allowing him to go about his business of the Holy Wars. This can only be conjectural. What seems obvious is that for the monks of Glastonbury, it was both politically and economically expedient to use this discovery to attract royal generosity.\textsuperscript{182} There is the fact that Richard presented Excalibur to Tancred of Sicily in 1190, to suggest that he may have profited from the exhumation; however, although several scholars state that the sword was exhumed with Arthur’s remains at Glastonbury, this detail does not appear in the chronicle accounts of the royal exchange of gifts, nor is a sword mentioned in accounts of the exhumation. The monks may or may not have presented Richard with Arthur’s sword, but if they expected a financial windfall, they were sadly disappointed. Glastonbury, like all other English foundations, was squeezed dry during the Lionheart’s reign, first to fund his Crusade and then to pay

\textsuperscript{181} Davies, 223; Loomis, 573-75. It is interesting to note that Richard sent Gerald of Wales to make an attempt "to calm the storm" before the king returned to England for his coronation, both on a personal and diplomatic level, Gerald’s trip into Wales was not very successful (Loomis, 574).

\textsuperscript{182} Nitze states that the monks waited until a visit from Richard to the abbey in 1191 to perform the exhumation ceremony (356); this seems largely unsubstantiated and problematic. First, why had not Gerald of Wales, or any other chronicler, been told of this royal presence at the exhumation? Second, Richard hardly had time to stand around Glastonbury’s cemetery watching the monks sweat over their spades: in 1190 Richard, on his way to the Holy Wars, was presenting Tancred of Sicily with Excalibur, after which he moved on to Cyprus to be married, and was fighting for Acre in 1191, not to leave until late in 1192, and on the ill-fated journey home was taken prisoner.
his ransom.

The details of Arthur's death and burial at Glastonbury were soon incorporated into Arthurian romance. Robert de Boron, in *Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal*, located the "Vaus d'Avaron" in the west of England.\(^{183}\) Meanwhile, the *Perlesvaus*, written in the early thirteenth century, betrays intimate knowledge of the Glastonbury tradition. In the story, Lancelot, having heard of Guinevere's death, wends his sorrowful way back to England, while wandering the land he reaches a wide valley, to the right of which, he sees a mountain on which is "a newly built chapel, which was handsome indeed and very rich; it was roofed in lead, and on top were two crosses which seemed to be made of gold." Having lead his horse up the steep incline, he finds three hermitages adjoining the chapel, "a most beautiful cemetery," and orchards. Entering the chapel he finds, among its splendid appointments, two tombs in a place of prominence. The tombs are explained thusly:

'Sire,' said Lancelot to one of the hermits, 'for whom were these tombs made?'
'Sire, for King Arthur and Queen Guinevere.'
'But the king is not yet dead,' said Lancelot.
'No, sire, if it please God, but the queen's body lies in that tomb beside you, and in the other the head of her son will lie until the king's time comes--may God grant him a long life! But the queen willed at her death that his body be laid beside hers. We have her letters and her seal to that. And before she died she bade that this chapel and site be thus restored.\(^{184}\)

The disparities, Nitze suggests, can be attributed to "a romancer bent on

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\(^{184}\) *loc. cit.* trans. Nigel Bryant, 204.
embellishing his *matiere.*" For example, he places the chapel on a steep mountain, no doubt a reference to the prominent Glastonbury Tor, whereas the Lady Chapel of the abbey church was located to the west side, certainly much easier to approach. Neither is there any chronicle evidence to the existence of two tombs in the Lady Chapel, nor did a queen have anything to do with its restoration, although the name might have recommended a feminine touch to the author. The purposes of his story served to place the queen in her grave before the king, yet the author undoubtedly incorporates genuine details as well.

The chapel had indeed been newly restored and richly appointed by all accounts when Arthur and Guinevere's bones were laid to rest in the marble tomb. Glastonbury Abbey is surrounded by low land, from which the Tor rises sharply, while the orchards of the story may be a nod to the Isle of Apples tradition. Even the lead roof, as Nitze points out, was an actual, and apparently famous, feature of the Lady Chapel. A colophon ending both extant manuscripts of the *Perlesvaus* states:

> The Latin text from which this story was set down in the vernacular was taken from the Isle of Avalon, from a holy religious house which stands at the edge of the Lands of Adventure; there lie King Arthur and the queen, by the testimony of the worthy religious men who dwell there, and who have the whole story, true from the beginning to the end.

185 "Exhumation," 357.

186 *ibid.* 358.

187 Trans. Bryant, 265.
Most scholars debunk the existence of the Latin book, suggesting that the author adapted his story from various material.\(^{188}\) However, it is apparent that, thanks to the industrious "testimony" of its monks, Glastonbury had become Avalon in many minds; the veracity of the tombs was widely accepted, and that the Glastonbury monks were enjoying their prestige and continuing to foster their authoritative connection with Arthur.

An intriguing alternative to the Glastonbury tradition appears in the *Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri*, which survives in two fourteenth-century English manuscripts, but has obvious northern Welsh origins. In his edition of the work, Michael Lapidge suggests a *terminus ante quem* of the late thirteenth century, although a mention of St. David as the archbishop of Menevia also leads him to suspect early thirteenth century origins, "when an earlier controversy about the metropolitan status of St. David's was revived by the redoubtable Gerald of Wales.\(^{189}\) Richard Barber detects references within the work to Bishop Urien of Llandaff (1107-1133), who was also in charge of Bangor.\(^{190}\) The *Vera Historia* seemingly contains a Welsh tradition of Arthur's death, or at least a counter-claim against Glastonbury as the owner of Arthur's sacred bones. In this account,\(^{191}\) the

\(^{188}\) Bryant, 1; Nitze, 357.


\(^{190}\) *ibid.* "The *Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri* and Its Place in ARthurian Tradition," 73.

\(^{191}\) Quotes from Michael Lapidge's translation, *ibid.*, 84-93.
wound Arthur sustained in the battle of Camlann, while serious, was not the cause of his death. The king, exhausted and in pain, sat down "for the sake of recuperation," and ordered his people to help take off his armor. At this point, the story takes unusual turns:

When the king had been disarmed, suddenly a certain youth—handsome in appearance, tall in stature, evoking by the shape of his limbs a strength of immense power—took to the road, sitting on horse-back, with his right hand armed by a shaft of elm. This shaft was stiff, not twisted or knotted but straight, and sharpened to a point in the manner of a lance..., and it had been daubed with adder's venom....This audacious youth, proceeding straight at the king but instead staying his course immediately in front of him, hurls the aforementioned missile into the king and so added a more serious wound to his already serious wounds.

Even with his dying strength King Arthur kills the fleeing youth with his spear, and gathering his people about him:

gives orders to be taken to Gwynedd, since he had decided to sojourn in the delightful Isle of Avallon because of the beauty of the place (and for the sake of peace as well as for the easing of the pain of his wounds). When he had arrived there, physicians concerned themselves with the king's wounds with all the diligence of their art; but the king experienced no restorative remedy from their efforts.

After setting his affairs in order and receiving the sacrament, the king "bid his last farewell to this wicked world." The author dwells for several lines on the grief and distress of Britain upon Arthur's death, for, he says, "when glorious Arthur was taken from her midst, Britain was deprived of its unique claim to victory--insofar as she who held dominion is now totally enslaved." Next he broaches Arthur's funeral in which the king's body is carried to a hermit's "small chapel dedicated to the
honour of the Holy Mother of God, the perpetual Virgin Mary—just as the king himself had appointed." However, the chapel’s entrance is too small to accommodate the king’s body and so it is set up on a bier outside, while the bishops perform the service within the chapel. When the last rites are uttered, storms, lightening, thunder, earthquakes, and winds suddenly arise, and a dense mist, blocking the light, rolls in, lasting "from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon." When the air has finally cleared a great mystery is revealed:

...they find no trace of the royal corpse; for the king had been transported to an abode especially prepared for him; and they look on a bier deprived of that which had been committed to it. They are seized by annoyance as a result of the king’s removal, to such an extent that great doubt concerning the truth arises among them: ‘Whence will this mighty power have come? Through whose violence was he carried off?’—and even up to the present time shadows of ignorance are discerned, as to where King Arthur was destined to find his place of rest. Wherefore certain people say that he is still alive, both sound and well, since he was carried off without their knowledge. Others contradict their audacious conjecture, affirming without the slightest scruple of doubt that he paid the debt of death, relying on the argument of this sort, that, when the aforementioned mist had been dispersed and visibility had returned, the sealed tomb appeared to the gaze of those present to be both solidly closed and of one piece, such that it rather seemed to be one single stone, whole and solid, as if fashioned with the mortar and craft of a builder, one after the other. They think that the king is enclosed in its recesses, since they had discovered it already sealed and closed. And since this discovery has been made, there is no small disagreement among them.

This is a fascinating mix of Geoffrey of Monmouth with Welsh folklore, and probably some degree of personal interpretation and sentiment. I will not elaborate upon the Welsh folkloric elements of this account, as Richard Barber discusses them at some length in his essay "The Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri and Its Place in
Arthurian Tradition." However, I would note that the youth also has his parallel in the Irish Sidh, such as the preternaturally beautiful warrior found in "The Wooing of Etain," who often bring mischief of some sort to the halls of men. The Welsh cleric who wrote this account may well be repeating a long-standing Welsh tradition of Arthur’s death, yet the controversy which the subject still evoked in his own society is perfectly apparent. While the king may be dead and safely ensconced in a tomb, mystery and magic still shrouded the occasion. It is difficult to know whether or not the content of this account was influenced in any way by the Glastonbury tradition--Arthur is to be buried in a chapel dedicated to Mary, yet, the author seems to use this also as an occasion to thumb his nose at the audacity of Glastonbury to claim Arthur and Avalon as its own. The British may be enslaved, but they need not give up their hero to the conquerors without a fight.

The last romance of the French Vulgate cycle, *La Mort Le Roi Artu*, written between 1215 and 1230, combines the two variants of Arthur’s end: that of his journey to Avalon to be healed, and that of his burial at Glastonbury. In the Battle of Camlann, the author explains:192

[Mordred] struck King Arthur so violently on the helmet that nothing could save him from feeling the sword in his skull. In fact he lost a piece of his skull, and King Arthur was so dazed by the blow that he fell from his horse to the ground.

This detail must be an effort to comply with the condition of the skull exhumed at Glastonbury with its fatal gash. The condition of his head notwithstanding, Arthur

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manages to ride with Lucan the Butler and Girflet, sole survivors of the battle, to the Noire Chapelle, where he spent the night in prayer. Here the Avalon tradition appears, for, having left the king at his command, Girflet looks back to see a ship of women:

When the ship had come to the shore opposite where Arthur was, they came to the side, and their lady, who was holding King Arthur’s sister Morgan by the hand, called to Arthur to come aboard. As soon as Arthur saw his sister Morgan, he arose from the ground where he was sitting and went aboard the ship, taking his horse and his arms with him.

Yet, three days after Arthur disappears across the sea, Girflet journeys to the Noire Chapelle where they had left Lucan, crushed by the king’s embrace, to be buried. There, to his surprise, "before the altar he found two rich and beautiful tombs." The lesser one contained the body of Lucan, while, "on the very splendid and rich tomb there was written: ‘HERE LIES KING ARTHUR WHO THROUGH HIS VALOUR CONQUERED TWELVE KINGDOMS’. Girflet swooned and, not wanting to believe, questioned the hermit of the chapel:

‘My Lord, is it true that King Arthur lies here?’
‘Yes, my friend, he truly lies there; he was brought here by some ladies whom I do not know.’
Girflet immediately thought that they were the ladies who had taken him aboard ship.

Thus, in the end King Arthur is dead and buried, his tomb displayed in a chapel for all to see. Details such as the presence of both Arthur’s sojourn to Avalon and his burial, the appearance of the tomb after a time of doubt, and the hermit’s chapel have led some to believe that the *Vera Historia* may have influenced the *Mort Artu*;
the Latin text seems to have enjoyed a "modest circulation." Furthermore, Roger S. Loomis suggests that the variant forms for the chapel, "Noire or Veire Chapelle were not pure inventions, but represent a curious corruption of Ile de Voire, 'Isle of Glass', which was taken to mean Glastonbury."

Edward I and King Arthur's Tomb

Despite the growing acceptance of the Glastonbury burial as evidenced by the examples above, it is also apparent that old legends died hard. The lure of Arthur's survival, whether couched in historical or mythical terms, remained fodder for both chroniclers and writers of romance, so to apparently for Celtic peoples. It is around 1196, that William of Newburgh found it necessary to spew his venom against Geoffrey of Monmouth's for catering to "the brutish Britons" who believe that Arthur "really will still come." Certainly, William would have need to complain only if there were still elements of society who were still not heard the news from Glastonbury, or who were not impressed in the least by what they did hear. It is also of note that Gerald of Wales took the time to publish two accounts of the exhumation; the De Principis and the Speculum Ecclesiae were begun in the 1190's and circulated piecemeal, yet not published in their final forms until around 1217 and


194 The Development of Arthurian Romance (New York, 1964), 111.

195 loc. cit. 37.
1219 respectively. All in all, Gerald seemed eager to disillusion those who thought that the king had been spirited away into immortality. Nonetheless, Layamon, Gervase of Tilbury, the Dunstable annalist, and the author of the *Prose Perceval*, all writing within the first two decades of the thirteenth century, record the tradition of Arthur's survival and Celtic belief in his return, while never mentioning any details of his death or burial. The chroniclers Roger of Wendover, Robert of Gloucester, and Pierre de Langtoft, writing later, from the reigns of Henry III and Edward I, continue to mention the Celtic hope, although Roger and Robert temper it with their accounts of the Glastonbury discovery and Arthur's supposed tomb. It has been argued that the nod to Celtic belief in Arthur's survival and return in chronicle and literature after 1190 is only conventional. This may be in part true, yet Gervase of Tilbury and the *Prose Perceval* record authentic, contemporary folk-beliefs, while Robert of Gloucester's singling out of the Cornish is a step beyond the conventional attribution of the belief to the generic "Britons."

It is with this in mind that we turn to an event recorded by Adam of Domerham and the annalist at Worcester. For April 1278, Adam of Domerham records:

The Lord Edward, illustrious king of England, with the Lady Eleanor, his wife, came to Glastonbury in order to celebrate Holy Easter.... The following Tuesday in the evening the Lord King caused to be opened the sepulchre of the renowned King Arthur. Where in two wooden boxes with images and arms depicted upon them, he discovered separately, the bones of the said king, [which were]
wondrous of thickness, and of Queen Guinevere, [which were] of wondrous beauty. The image of the queen was fully crowned, with the crown of the king’s image was thrown down [or destroyed], with the left ear was cut away, and with vestiges of the wounds by which he died. Also found was something written [or scripture] clearly over each of these. The next day, that is Wednesday, the Lord King ordered that the bones of the king, and the Queen those of the queen, each wrapped in precious cloths, in their own opened chests, and their own seals placed upon them, be placed quickly in that same sepulchre before the high altar, having retained the skulls of both for the devotion of the people.\textsuperscript{197}

For the same year the Worcester annalist notes that Edward and the queen were in the company of the abbot of Glastonbury, John of Taunton, at the time that the king

\textsuperscript{197} Chambers, Record xxxiv, 280-81. "Dominus Edwardus rex Angliae illustris, cum domina Alienora consortae suae, venit Glastoniam...sanctum Pascha celebraturus.... Die vero Martis proxima sequente...in crepusculo fecit Dominus Rex aperiri sepulcrum incliti Regis Arturi. Ubi in duabus cistis, imaginibus et armis eorum depictis, ossa dicti regis mirae grossitudinis, et Gwunnarae reginae mirae pulcritudinis, separatim invenit. Ymago quidem reginae plene coronata; ymaginis regis corona fuit prostrata, cum abscicione sinistrae auriculae, et vestigiis plagae unde moriebatur. Inventa eciam fuit scriptura super hiis singulis manifesta. In crastino vero, videlicet die Mercurii, Dominus Rex ossa Regis, Regina ossa Reginae, in singulis palis preciosis involuta, in suis cristis recludentes, et sigilla sua opponentes, praecipue in idem sepulcrum ante maius altare celeriter collocari, retentis exterius capitis et genis utriusque propter populi devotionem.

Some scholars have taken the description of the ymages of Arthur and Guinevere given here as referring to the actual condition of the corpses, (ie. the head found in the tomb, though one would imagine it to be a skull by this time, actually had an ear cut off, and bore the marks of its death wound); see Geoffrey Ashe, \textit{King Arthur's Avalon} (New York, 1992), 242; and Chambers, 125. Without drawing any conclusions as to the state of the remains as Edward found them, I would suggest that perhaps a better translation of this particular passage is that among the "images and arms" painted upon the wooden caskets, were the representations of the king and queen, painted to match Gerald of Wales’ description. Prestwich refers to the coffins as having "the images of the legendary king and queen on them," although he does not comment upon the remains, p.120. At any rate, the standard definition of \textit{imago} in both Classical and Medieval Latin contains the idea of a representation, imitation, or likeness, rather than actual appearance.
ordered the tomb opened. "Hence," the chronicler says, "because it was unknown to many, he both gathered up the discovered bones of this very king, and caused them to be lain with propriety in the sacristy of that very monastery, until such time as he could place them more honorably."  

Perhaps the Lady Chapel had become too out-of-the-way when the main church had been built; perhaps, sitting quietly in the corner of the chapel, Arthur’s tomb had lost its novel freshness and was fading from the public’s consciousness. In any case, Edward had the marble tomb relocated to the place of highest prominence (and highest visibility) in the church, and, lest the people forget, set up the skull of the mortal king like a relic.

This act has been interpreted variously as proof that Arthur had become an "English hero" with interest for an English king, as Edward’s assertion of "his authority as Arthur’s true heir," and as a deliberate step in his campaign against Welsh independence.  

Michael Prestwich, however, cautions that Edward’s purpose in this act must remain unclear, saying: "There was no overt connexion made between the exhumation of the famous British king, and the recent campaign in Wales, nor was the ceremony accompanied by a tournament or other chivalric activity." Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding the royal visit to Glaston-

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200 120.
bury and the second exhumation of Arthur’s bones combine Arthurian and political events: November 1277, the end of Edward’s first Welsh campaign, in which he brought Llewelyn ap Gruffydd to his terms; April 1278, the Glastonbury visit, re-exhumation and display of Arthur’s bones; 1283, the second Welsh campaign ends in victory for Edward and death for the rebel Welsh princes, Llewelyn and David; 1283, Arthur’s crown, a Welsh treasure, given to Edward as a symbol of the transferrence of power and glory; 1284, a Round Table held at Nefyn in celebration, the chronicler says, of his triumph over Wales. Whether this pattern occurs coincidentally or deliberately we can never know for certain, yet it seems a defensible hypothesis that the Arthurian events of Edward’s reign could have been the king’s deliberate attempt to use the Celtic cultural icon to enhance his throne, while at the same time, and necessarily, tearing down that of the Welsh. As with his predecessors, King Arthur, as rex quondam, could leave Edward a rich, colorful, and honorable inheritance, while Arthur as rex futurus could only mean trouble. Edward could have validated Glastonbury’s claims and endorsed an official Arthurian tradition no better than he did by his visit to Glastonbury in 1278.

201 Davies, 333.
CHAPTER VII

EXPLICIT

During the course of the Celtic Revival, Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the Arthurian romance tradition sprang from a growing oral tradition and interest in a Golden Age of Britain. Arthurian lore became a part of life in medieval, European society, and was familiar to the highest and to the lowest on the social scale. However, Arthur's story was a story of kings, and as such it held special meaning for his successors to the throne of Britain. Geoffrey had the interests and realities of the Anglo-Norman monarchy in mind when he framed the themes of the *Historia*, of which kingship and empire are prominent. Arthur's reputation as Christian king and crusader, as a generous lord made wealthy and powerful by extensive, yet just, conquest was repeated and ever expanded by the explosion of Arthurian history and literature which followed the success of Geoffrey's work. As the exemplar of these traits, Arthur recommended himself to the founding generations of Plantagenet kings, as well as to those who attempted to capture the essence of their monarchies in literature and history.

However, this alliance between the legendary Arthur and the Plantagenets, could not, by its very nature, remain mutually beneficial, for it also contained the seeds for rebellion against the Plantagenet kings and their quest for empire. As a
Celtic hero, Arthur remained in the minds and hearts of the Celtic peoples who felt themselves oppressed by the Anglo-Norman monarchy. The tradition of King Arthur’s survival, immortality, and impending return gained momentous popularity in these times among the Welsh, Cornish, and Bretons. The strength of Celtic belief and the allure this notion held for the collective imagination was recorded by the writers and historians of the day. Arthur as the returning avenger of his people’s wrongs did not fit into the Plantagenet design as well as Arthur, the chivalric knight and conqueror did. Fortunately, a tradition of Arthur’s death also existed, and although it was widely ignored by the common people in favor of the more exotic alternative, it became a tool for the ambitious abbey of Glastonbury in its bid for recognition and royal patronage. The resulting tradition of Arthur’s burial at Glastonbury may or may not have been encouraged by Henry II or by Richard, but it did with all certainty become attached to them. Despite the marble tomb at Glastonbury, the belief in Arthur’s survival carried on in history and literature, reflecting the clash of swords and ideals between cultural factions of the Plantagenet empire. Almost a century after the monks of Glastonbury laid Arthur’s purported bones in the Lady Chapel, Edward I saw fit to repeat the process. His carefully calculated actions and the writings of his time portrayed him as a new Arthur, heir to the radiant legacy of the ancient British king whose mortal remains lay safely entombed before Glastonbury Abbey’s high altar. The history and literature following the 1190 discovery and the second exhumation indicate that the tradition of Arthur’s death and burial at Glastonbury had gained an audience, although not
without its dissenters.

While the early Plantagenet kings certainly reaped the benefits of the ideals of Arthurian kingship and empire, these same ideals could also challenge their ability to live up to them. These kings often faced criticism which negatively contrasted their persona or actions with those of the legendary Arthur. Moreover, a legend is difficult to kill, especially one as pervasive as Arthurian legend became. Thus, despite the efforts made by the early Plantagenets to put aside the most inconvenient aspect of the Arthurian mythos, that tradition continued which the fourteenth-century author of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and the fifteenth-century Malory recorded side by side with accounts of Arthur’s death and burial: HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS.
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