

## King Arthur: Man or Myth?

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## **John Cabot University**

Department of History and Humanities

Bachelor of Arts in History  
Minors in Italian Studies and Creative Writing

King Arthur: Man or Myth?

Nicholas J. Ciniglio

First Reader  
Gene Ogle

Second Reader  
Fabrizio Conti

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## Abstract

King Arthur first appears in the Early Middle Ages in historical chronicles and stories documented by monks of Britain. As these works diffused, the legend of King Arthur continued to gain prominence to such an extent that he appears in High Medieval texts, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, and as a protagonist in medieval romances such as Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. King Arthur has seen a revival in the past 150 years which has prompted both intellectual and cult debates on whether or not the legendary King of the Britons was real, or solely an idyllic figure to embellish medieval writing. This thesis seeks to explore the debate surrounding the historicity of King Arthur through an analysis of prior scholarship to form a structure of the debate. Tangible archaeological evidence will be cross-referenced with medieval texts which mention Arthur or otherwise lend contextual clues about his life, in order to demystify the duality of a real and a legendary King Arthur.

## **Dedication**

Grandma Coffee, thank you for always encouraging me to take risks and be myself.

I'm sorry I couldn't make it back in time to see you.

I miss you.

## **Acknowledgements**

Mom and Dad, thank you for always supporting me, even when I wanted to do crazy things

like cross an ocean to go to university

Victoria, thank you for being my best friend, spontaneous travel buddy, and personal editor.

Professor Ogle, your guidance inspires me to always reflect and grow as a historian.

Snelgrave Yacht Club, thank you for being my historian family and tolerating all of my

horrible puns.

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## Introduction

One of the most famous literary icons of all time is the fabled King Arthur. He is known in legend for beating the pagans of Britain and uniting the land. For many, he exists only as that: a legendary figure. However, from the latter end of the nineteenth century up until modern day, there is a lively and ongoing debate about the historicity of Arthur. The mystery of Arthur's historicity drives this debate to continue, as historians are neither able to confirm nor deny wholly the existence of the legendary Arthur, King of the Britons. In fact, in many academic circles, the subject is taboo because the overarching view of historians is that it is not worth the time, effort, or resources to try and further the discourse to a more definite outcome.<sup>1</sup> Arthur serves as a national figure for Britain, and also as a literary archetype of "The Hero".<sup>2</sup>

The debate about Arthur is comparable to a search for Christ himself; we look for both of them within a range very limited textual evidence and even less attestable physical evidence.<sup>3</sup> In trying to discern a historical Arthur, as I will discuss later on in this introduction, it is very important to be both analytical and open minded due to the ambiguity of sources from the time when Arthur was supposed to have lived (ca. 500 C.E.); the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the decline of Roman presence in the Empire's peripheries such as Britain led to an era in which very few prominent historical materials were produced.<sup>4</sup> Like many Arthurian scholars, I believe that Arthur is not just a legend, and that he has a basis in history. Whether or not my hypothesis is entirely correct, the figure of Arthur is still important to both British national identity and as a pervasive archetypal figure in culture and

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Gidlow, *Revealing King Arthur* (repr., Stroud: History, 2010), 190.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Howard, *The Quest Motif in Literature; Archetypes*, PDF (Hillsborough, FL: Hillsborough Community College), accessed 5 December 2018, <https://www.hccfl.edu/media/724354/archetypesforliteraryanalysis.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur* (repr., Rochester, Vermont: Bear and Company, 2016), 3

<sup>4</sup> Rodney Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend* (repr., London: Routledge, 2003), 8.

literature. Given these thoughts, this question stands to be explored: Was Arthur real or based on a real person, and what effect would his proven or disproven historicity have on the Arthur today we know as a national figure and pop-culture icon?



# Chapter One: Prior Scholarship

## Overview

Arthur, despite his questionable authenticity as a singular and perfectly defined person, was possibly in some degree real, as he is attested by some factual basis. In order to examine previous scholarship and scholarly theories about “King” Arthur, I have selected two articles and two books which contain a range of stances on and methods of exploring the historicity of King Arthur.<sup>5</sup> The articles are “King Arthur in History and Legend” by Mary Williams, published in the 1962 Summer edition of *Folklore*, and “The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur” published online by Caitlin (former *nom de plume* Thomas) Green in 1998 (though updated last 2009) via Oxford University.<sup>6</sup> The two full-book texts I have selected *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* by N. J. Higham<sup>7</sup> and *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend* by Rodney Castleden.<sup>8</sup>

One of the more interestingly comprehensive approaches is taken by Mary Williams. She opens her article by theorising that the name Arthur was more than likely derived from a Roman general who would have led expedition and conquest in Brittany (at the time known as Armorica). As such, she suggests that the name Arthur may have been misconstrued, but his persona is real. Part of the article explores the duality of real Arthur versus legendary

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<sup>5</sup> Some sources, such as Nennius’ *Historiae Britannum* make known that Arthur was more a commander, *dux bellorum*, rather than a King- at least in his famous campaign;

N. J Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (repr., London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Mary Williams, "King Arthur In History and Legend", *Folklore* 73, no. 2 (1962): 73-88, doi:10.1080/0015587x.1962.9717319;

From this point, Ms. Green will either be identified by surname or her real first name, not her pen name; Caitlin Green, "The Historicity & Historicisation Of Arthur", *Arthuriana.co.uk*, 1998, <http://www.arthuriana.co.uk/historicity/arthur.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*.

<sup>8</sup> Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*.

Arthur.<sup>9</sup> Building on the notion of duality, Green's approach is that Arthur could have been taken from legend and written into history (entirely falsified in historical records) or otherwise had his traits imposed on a true historical figure. In her article she agrees with Williams' theory Arthur was not real but was instead written into reality. She uses this concept repeatedly within her analysis of his mythos.

N.J. Higham takes a similar approach to that of Green. He considers that Arthur is a national identity and a political figure, and that enough facts found in literature of c.500 C.E. correlate in such a way that it is possible to conclude that he may be from generalised location. Nonetheless, Higham debates how if an true flesh-and-blood Arthur existed.<sup>10</sup> He ambiguously argues the lack of a real Arthur by establishing everything that *can* be known about the time period and history, and then justifies his scepticism to the reader on based on what *cannot* be concluded about Arthur from it.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to these, Castleden fervently believes that Arthur was real, and he systematically examines evidence, addressing the potential of what it contributes to the likelihood of Arthur's existence in a positive manner rather than a belittling one. He says straightforwardly, "But evidence does exist to show that Arthur was a real person, and the purpose of this book is to explore that evidence and see how the historical Arthur fitted into the realities of the sixth century."<sup>12</sup>

## **Trends in the Scholarship**

Connecting the four publications are a variety of key trends relating to the Arthurian legend over time. The first trend is that all of the sources take Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, Saint (and scholar) Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae*, and the *Annales Cambriae* (Welsh Annals) as primary source literature and concur from them that a historical Arthur would

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, "King Arthur in History and Legend", 73.

<sup>10</sup> Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-170.

<sup>12</sup> Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*, 2.

have lived in the sixth to seventh centuries C.E. When Castleden talks about the chronological location, circa 500 C.E. is a reference point of relation from between history and that perceived of King Arthur.<sup>13</sup>

The second trend is the acceptance of one of the complications of records of the history in medieval times, especially those in the periphery of Western Roman Empire such as Britai. Most records were clerically kept (ex. Gildas of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and Nennius of the 9<sup>th</sup>) or were not entirely reliable due to different biases or simply personal gaps in knowledge. It is likely these authors wrote based on oral tradition or other, non-verifiable sources they had read. Bias could also shape these accounts. A prime example is how Geoffrey of Monmouth (12<sup>th</sup> century) places Arthur's birth at Tintagel in Cornwall- which, *verifiably*, was at the time a seat of Geoffrey's patron's brother suggests he was likely trying to earn favour in doing so.<sup>14</sup> While these clerically written sources are taken as fact with a grain of salt by many historians, Green discounts the actual existence of Nennius, saying, "The *Historia Brittonum* was written anonymously in C.E. 829/30, [with] the ascription to one 'Nennius' now being regarded as false."<sup>15</sup> All the other three sources take Nennius being a real author as fact because he contributes integral and reasonably verifiable accounts regarding to early Celtic life.<sup>16</sup>

The third trend is a common conception of Arthurian scholars which maintains "Arthur" may not be our figure's true name. Caitlin Green states that, "... the second-century

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<sup>13</sup> He uses the battle of Badon (and that of Camlann) to approximate the time frame in which the historically founded contemporaries of Arthur would exist in reference to Arthur's personal timeframe. Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Jacqueline Nowakowski, "Researching Tintagel, Dumnonia And King Arthur In Post-Roman Britain", (Presentation, repr., Centro Studi Americani, Rome, Italy, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Green, "The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur.", 4.

<sup>16</sup> William Hopkin Davies, "NENNIUS (NEMNIUS, NEMNIUUS) (Fl. C. A.D. 800), Monk and Antiquary | Dictionary of Welsh Biography", Biography. Wales, 1959, <https://biography.wales/article/s-NENN-IUS-0800>.

Lucius Artorius Castus is the original Arthur.”<sup>17</sup>, which would corroborate with the Mary Williams’ theory that Arthur is a linguistically deviated form of the Roman *gens* of Artorius.<sup>18</sup> A second proposed derivation is from Ambrosius (Welsh: *Emrys*) Aurelianus, a general who fought at Badon in the sixth century C.E. Ambrosius is touched upon by all four authors, who take the same stance that he is likely conflated to some degree with the “historical Arthur” because of his battle prowess near identically attested to in multiple sources.<sup>19</sup> The agreement of all four scholars’ about a derivative naming concept shows that it is well-based in evidence and important to the understanding of the Arthurian historicity.

## **Scholarly Analysis and Interpretations**

Mary Williams does incorporate a very interesting list into the first two pages of her speech: the six instances of christened Arthurs in the sixth and seventh centuries, which are relatively contemporary to when King Arthur would have lived.<sup>20</sup> This list serves to show that Arthur *could* have been the hero’s true name, since it was recorded in use nearly contemporarily to him. It also establishes a historical precedent for Arthur’s existence in the same way as Castleden’s genealogical exploration in his book; both observe the occurrence and similarity of a name or names associated with King Arthur.

*The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur* was originally published in 1998 by Caitlin Green under the pen name of Thomas. She analyses the methods of Nennius in his composition of the *Historia*. She talks about the way in which he incorporates many figures,

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, “King Arthur in History and Legend”, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, “King Arthur in History and Legend”, 74; Green, “The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur.”, 7; Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 58; Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-4.

values, and non-contemporary events into areas where they, so to speak, have no place.<sup>21</sup> she succinctly asserts why the Arthurian legend cannot be solidly affirmed nor denied. She introduces research concepts that can be applied more broadly to any historical research in which the data is sparse or questionable in nature.<sup>22</sup> Green believes that Arthur is a figure who emerged from a mixture of history and legend– the same duality that most scholars admit exists. She says:

[Arthur] is a composite figure...there is no ‘standard’ Arthurian legend as this legend is the result of Arthur attracting to himself both the deeds and characteristics of other tales and characters. ... we cannot conclude that there was no historical Arthur as there was, to the extent that certain texts, notably the *Historia Brittonum*, the *Annales Cambriae* and Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, have a concept of Arthur that is clearly historical. ... it is surely still a valuable exercise to inquire as to whose deeds were being later attributed to Arthur, as these deeds are an integral part of many later portrayals of Arthur ...<sup>23</sup>

She then moves onwards, addressing Arthur’s origin. This is a very interesting way in which to progress, as it follows her argument that Arthur was created out of other myths and then placed into a shroud of his own mythology. Overall, her publication is very informative and takes a very interesting scholastic approach at insisting upon an almost cyclical creation of man from fact and legend who then becomes seen as fact and remembered in legend.

Whereas the other sources focus primarily on Arthur and his origins, “King Arthur: Myth-Making and History” by N.J. Higham analyses Arthur’s historical context in the

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<sup>21</sup> Green, “The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur.”, 5-7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

land/time of the Britons.<sup>24</sup> He explores not only the national historic context of circa 6<sup>th</sup> century Britain (the start of the dark ages), but also analyses a multitude of contested aspects of the Arthurian legend including but not limited to if the sources are primary or secondary, their relation to religious ideology, and the significance of the time of production in relation to the “affirmed” time of Arthur’s life.<sup>25</sup> Chapter two concerns an analysis sources such as the works of Gildas, Nennius, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, all of which offer information and/or context to the question of Arthur’s historicity.<sup>26</sup> Following a historical interpretation with historical texts pieces together two integral parts of how we as modern scholars should analyse the case for Arthur’s historicity.<sup>27</sup>

Rodney Castleden’s *The Truth Behind the Legend* argues adamantly that King Arthur *was* real. Interestingly, it uses much of the same data and research as the other sources, but instead of refuting the research or findings, Castleden has taken them as truths and, where possible, affirms these ideas using logic and verifiably recorded facts. One predominant example is Vortigern, a king in Powys, Wales in the early fifth century C.E. He talks about Vortigern’s presence in *The Life of Germanus* as well as the Pillar of Eliseg.<sup>28</sup> I will be elaborating on Vortigern’s importance to the Arthurian mythos later, in conjunction with the phonetic and genealogical lineage of Arthur. Castleden’s research is vital to exhibiting the progression of Arthurian studies, as he worked .

Castleden divides his work up in 7 sections, in a similar fashion to that of Higham: “Who this Arthur was”, “The Documents”, “The Archaeology”, “Arthur’s Britain”,

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<sup>24</sup> Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 97-170.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–36.

<sup>27</sup> As previously noted, verifying the information surrounding many primary sources between the fall of the Roman empire and the High Middle Ages is difficult due to either lack of specificity or the plethora of contradictions amongst them.

<sup>28</sup> Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 8-107.

“Arthur: the Man, the King and the Kingdom”, “Camelot”, and “The Death of Arthur”.<sup>29</sup> In doing so he systematically addresses each facet of the historicity debate. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the primary argument which Castleden makes is that Arthur was real and that his intent is to establish the real Arthur within context. One of the key notions of Castleden is that, “Archaeology is very unlikely ever to be able to prove or disprove his existence, simply because it follows different paths, but it can supply the social, economic, cultural and political setting for the living people of his day. Once we see Arthur as real flesh ... then we shall see the dynamics of dark age society at work.”<sup>30</sup> He acknowledges the biases and inconsistencies of history, yet also points out how even inconclusive evidence can lend a sufficient amount of information and understanding to a slightly varied topic or focus. This is incredibly important in research, especially in a topic which is as “controversial” (one could say unresolvable) as the fact of King Arthur’s existence. A prime example is when he addresses the debate on whether Arthur and Mordred were fictional additions added in later editions of a historical account. Castleden argues that no other figures in this other work are debated, and the events at Badon are even corroborated in Gildas’ work, so therefore it would be likely that Arthur and Mordred *did* fight and fall on the field of Camlann, wherever it was.<sup>31</sup>

Castleden makes particular use of genealogical data of Wales from the time around which Arthur would have existed. He notes that, “The native peoples of the British Isles ... preserved long pedigrees of their royal families.”<sup>32</sup> This particular fact is important— though these lineage records are not assuredly 100 percent reliable. Castleden reminds his reader that

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<sup>29</sup> Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

genealogical data can display diffusion of families, titles, and power across generations; a concept which played a significant role in the Brittonic conquest of the British Isles.<sup>33</sup>

From the start, Castleden presents and accepts the degree of possible fallacy in post-Roman and medieval sources. His “documentation” tends to focus on a recorded history, such as those of Nennius and Gildas and the like, whereas his “archaeology” focuses on actual finds such as historically confirmed buildings and sites which have been dated and returned sufficient contemporary data.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

Moving back towards a comparative review of all four sources, it is best to recapitulate the core ideas and research that have been put forth by the previous scholars of Arthurian studies in the realm of the historicity of King Arthur. Their research is often displayed logically through a discourse which seeks to reach a conclusion- in comparison to a typical history approach of “source A means thing B is true”, the research in Arthurian lore tends to require a much less analytically aggressive and much more open-minded perception. Another notable quality of these sources is the emphasis of separation they put between textual sources and archaeological ones, because of the more verifiable nature of archaeological discoveries, owing to modern dating methods. All the sources, regardless of whether they are for or against Arthur’s historicity, establish the importance of taking medieval primary sources with caution due to their tendency for bias and/or embellishment. Based on the arguments founded and defended in these four works, it may be concluded that there is still a great deal of research to be done before we may put the debate of Arthur’s existence to rest.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 14; This, like Vortigern’s importance, is later discussed in the more critical analysis of historical data later in the paper.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 195; The grave of Arthur and Guenever at Glastonbury has since been debunked by a radiocarbon analysis of the cross, which dates later than Arthur’s lifetime.



## Chapter Two: Arthur in the Text

The Arthurian legend as we know it today is a product of centuries of oral and written sources, with the figure of King Arthur being shaped by religion, social ideals, and personal details added by the writer/orator, among other factors. Over time, the story of Arthur has increased in both scope and detail. Between accounts, certain parts of the stories are introduced, excluded, or expanded upon. Much of the variation is through the means of basing a new telling on prior versions. Despite all this, the overall concept of Arthur as a character who is right, just, and pure of heart has endured. In this chapter, I intend to explicitly go over three of sources which were key to the development of the mythos of Arthur

### Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*

One of the earliest sources to contain a direct, specific mention of a “King” Arthur was in circa 830 C.E. by Nennius entitled *Historia Brittonum*. In this work, he mainly narrates the succession of rulers in medieval England. The portion of the work which talks about Arthur is, in comparison to the rest of the text, fairly short. However, it does historically contextualise the military adventures of Arthur. In the first mention he is described as “the magnanimous Arthur”<sup>35</sup>, an embellished epitaph that describes his nobility in both social rank and in terms of generosity and honour. Despite this, Arthur is not named as a king, but rather as *dux bellorum*- a phrase that translates more aptly to “general” or “leader of wars”. This title derives from Arthur’s main characteristic in the *Historia*

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<sup>35</sup> Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, PDF, c. 700 CE, [http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/nennius\\_giles.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/nennius_giles.pdf). 23; Here the term *magnanimous* derives from the Latin *magna anima*, or “great of spirit/soul”. This may connote that Arthur has a powerful personality, or that he is a person of a very religious nature, or both.

*Brittonum*. When discussing Arthur, Nennius names twelve major battles that took place under his command:

The first battle in which he was engaged was at the mouth of the river Gleni. The second, third, fourth, and fifth were on another river, by the Britons called Duglas, in the region Linuis. The sixth, on the river Bassas. The seventh in the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon. The eighth was near Gurnion Castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders<sup>36</sup>, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter. The ninth was at the City of Legion, Exeter. which [sic] is called Cair Lion. The tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit. The eleventh was on the mountain Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregion. The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon.<sup>37</sup>

Within this long description we see that, according to Nennius, the power of God and Arthur's spirituality drove the unreligious Saxons away. As the Arthurian legend becomes more widespread and more detailed, the focus on Christianity and Christian values will greatly influence the descriptions of characters and create a foil between good (Christian) and evil (pagan).

## **Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae***

The second work that established the basis for the Arthurian narrative was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136). In a very interesting contrast to

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<sup>36</sup> In some translations, "shoulder" is thought to be "shield", as their original Welsh forms are *yscuid* and *yscuit*, respectively. This concept could additionally mean he "carried the faith" in the sense of being pious.

<sup>37</sup> Nennius *Historia Brittonum*, 23.

Nennius' recollection of solely Arthur's adulthood, Geoffrey of Monmouth introduces Arthur at the start of his life, which opens up the narrative for the life of Arthur (as we will see in Malory's version) rather than just his feats. His father King Uther takes duchess Igera to bed, using Merlin's magic to impersonate the Duke of Cornwall, Gorlois, and sleeping with her at Tintagel while his army lays siege to the Duke at Dimilioc.<sup>38</sup> Strategically following the death of Gorlois, Uther lays claim to the Duke's lands and his wife- and Igera gives birth to *two* children- Arthur and Anne.<sup>39</sup> This is a very interesting detail because it develops complex character relations which contextualise Arthur's Britain, though the family lineage does get very confusing. Years pass, and Uther falls ill to what Geoffrey describes as "a lingering distemper" - committing his army and his daughter Anne to the consul Lot of Londonesia.<sup>40</sup> Fighting the rebels Octa and Eosa, Uther was brought to command the battle riding in a horse cart, a dishonourable position in the eyes of Uther's opposition. They pitied him to such an extent for this that they left the gates to their city open, at which point Uther ordered a siege.<sup>41</sup> After the death of Octa and Eosa, the Saxons fled, and Uther proclaimed that "These Ambrons called me the half-dead king, because my sickness obliged me to lie on a horse-litter... Yet victory to me half-dead, is better than to be safe and sound and vanquished." He is then killed by Saxons who poisoned his personal water well.<sup>42</sup> The tragic fall of the king (Uther) in the wake of a victory sets up the rise of Arthur as an avenging hero who will work to lead his kingdom to progress.

At this point in Book IX, Geoffrey explains Arthur's succession to the throne despite the fact that, "[he] was then fifteen years old, but a youth of such unparalleled courage and

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<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Of Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain*, PDF, 141-193, [http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/geoffrey\\_thompson.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/geoffrey_thompson.pdf), 141 - 144.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-144.

<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, this is a point in which reference is made to the specific influence of the Romans or their empire holding place in Britain during the reign of the Pendragons (the surname of Uther and Arthur, as derived from Uther's vision of the gold dragons).

<sup>41</sup> Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain.*, 145-146.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-148.

generosity, joined with that sweetness of temper and innate goodness, as gained him universal love.”<sup>43</sup> This harkens to the point Nennius made when he called Arthur “magnanimous”- this description asserts his purity of character. In Chapter 3, Arthur subdues the Saxons at the battle at river Douglas and makes them into tributaries.<sup>44</sup> In the battle Arthur ran down many Saxons singlehandedly, thanks to his virtue and Christian nature, which is juxtaposed against the “religion-less” and barbaric Saxons. The imagery of the Virgin Mary on Arthur’s shield is first mentioned in this battle sequence. The debate of whether the old Welsh translation said “shield” or “shoulders” for where the Virgin was borne (see footnote 3) is important to notice because it could denote religious iconography, or a type of divine selection and protection, respectively. We begin to see much description and benefits of virtue from this point onward in the story, as Arthur seems to be divinely supported by both the old and new religions (pagan and catholic prophets) in his goodness, fairness, and charity.<sup>45</sup>

In this battle the death of Cheldric, the Saxon leader whose name and geographic location may or may not be a chronologic and geographic skewed positioning of the Merovingian Childeric. He had lived approximately a century before Arthur is noted, which if there is a connection could establish an approximate time frame for this battle.<sup>46</sup> Arthur continues north with his siege, toward the Scots and Picts who hid in the lake Lumond which “contains sixty islands and receives sixty rivers into it, which empty themselves into the sea by no more than one mouth.”<sup>47</sup> The only reason any of the Scots and Picts are spared is

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-151;

It is important to note the correspondence between this and Nennius’ twelve battles, as it shows the contingency between sources.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>46</sup> Childeric was the son of Merovich and was a Merovingian monarch who though a “barbarian” fought alongside Rome to clear Saxons from the Orléans region of what today is France.

<sup>47</sup> Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain*, 155.

because the holy men, their equivalent of clerics, begged forgiveness and pity from the great Prince Arthur.

From chapter 9 to chapter 14, Geoffrey of Monmouth describes Arthur's consolidation of the British Isles, Iceland, and France into his dominion, all leading up to his physical coronation.<sup>48</sup> The presence of so many battles fought concerning Arthur's legitimacy raises the question of if Arthur had some sort of regency (official or otherwise) in place until he was either of age or fully legitimized, which would explain the great allocation of troops and funds to sustain such endeavours. However, the celebration is short-lived, as this is immediately followed by another prospect of war, as is normal in the romantic hero story cycle; the Roman general Lucius Tiberius sends a letter to Arthur reprimanding his "tyranny" and demanding his appearance in Rome to pay tribute to the empire.<sup>49</sup> Arthur holds a meeting with his kings and they unanimously agree on warring with the Romans, with a large force of, "All together ... [one] hundred and eighty-three thousand two hundred, besides foot which did not easily fall under number".<sup>50</sup>

At this point, Book IX ends and Book X begins with the call of the eastern kings<sup>51</sup> by Rome to ally with Lucius against Arthur and his forces- and sets into motion both the events which will culminate after thirteen chapters in Arthur's victory against Rome, and those which lead to his death. It is much easier to summarise Book X rather than approaching it in individual chapters, as it in essence provides a step-by-step record of how the war proceeds. Over the course of the war Arthur's growth as a political figure is highlighted. The first example of this growth is the similarity of Arthur's exhortation to his men (Chapter 7) and Lucius' to his (Chapter 8). Both exhortations call forth the fraternity and fellowship of the

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-164.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>51</sup> "Eastern" here entails, as listed on page 171 of *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Greeks, Africans, Spaniards, Libyans, Parthians, Medes, Phrygians, Itureans, Egyptians, Babylonians, Bithynians, Syrians, Boetians, and Cretans.

soldiers in the respective armies, rallying them to fight for the glory of their homelands. In terms of the characterization of Arthur, chapters 7 and 11 reinforce his leadership by showing not only his prowess as a warrior, but also as an orator through the mastery of the language with which he addresses his men.<sup>52</sup> The second example comes in chapter 12, where Geoffrey puts forth a very belittling view of the Romans (and their eastern allies). The Roman legions in established history are known as being one of the greatest fighting forces due to their skills and coordination in battle. However, Geoffrey states very blatantly that, “The Romans, being now, therefore, dispersed [after the death of Lucius Tiberius], betook themselves through fear... where they could be most safe; but were either killed or taken and plundered by the Britons who pursued: so that the great part of them voluntarily and shamefully held forth their hands, to receive their chains...”<sup>53</sup> This description of the Roman submission further implies the strength of Arthur and his forces. Directly following, in chapter 13, despite the bloodshed and gruesome losses on either side, Arthur, “of his great clemency ... ordered the country people to take care of the burial of the enemy, and to carry the body of Lucius to the senate...”<sup>54</sup> Though this act of reverence for fallen Christians is valiant and just, his political motive for the return of Lucius’ body provides more insult to the Romans- it is a political message to say that the only tribute which Arthur saw fit to pay to Rome was the return of its fallen general.<sup>55</sup> The development of Arthur’s interterritorial relations is used as a device by Geoffrey to characterize Arthur as a powerful warrior and tactician. In some regards it remains plausible as a historical skirmish and as a literary device, provided that the supernatural benefits of Arthur’s virtue are recognized by the audience as the religious propaganda which they were.

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<sup>52</sup> Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain.*, 181-183.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

The last part of *Historia Regum Britanniae* closes Arthur's life. While he was away warring with the Romans, he left his nephew Mordred in charge of the kingdom; Mordred took tyrannical control and even seduced Arthur's wife. For all intents and purposes, he usurped his crown as well. As Book XI begins, it recounts in a very fantastical way how Mordred managed to amass an army of eighty thousand men of mixed Christian and pagan faith. This is interesting because it pits Arthur, the holy and divinely ordained king, against his people of his own Christian faith whereas his prior opponents were usually Saxons, pagans, or other people less religiously devout than he. On top of this, Monmouth emphasizes that Arthur was, "attended only by the kings of the islands, and their armies.", which could imply that Arthur himself was such a strong warrior enough without needing soldiers from his personal army.<sup>56</sup> Another very poignant religious injection in the story is that from the moment that Queen Guanhumara found out that Mordred was pressing further against Arthur, she fled to the City of Legions<sup>57</sup> and became a nun, both to ensure her safety and to atone for her guilt of taking another husband beside Arthur.<sup>58</sup>

Following this, the armies of Mordred and Arthur, totaling six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six men each, did battle at Camlann. Arthur and his men slaughtered thousands of their opponents, and even managed to mortally wound Mordred himself. Geoffrey of Monmouth explicitly states that on the battlefield many commanders fell alongside their forces:

For on Mordred's side fell Cheldric<sup>59</sup>, Elasius, Egbrict, and Bunignus,  
Saxons; Gillapatric, Gillamor, Gistafel, and Gillarius, Irish; also the Scots  
and Picts, with almost all their leaders: on Arthur's side, Olbrict, king of

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> While the City of Legions was defined by Nennius as Exeter, it is defined later by Malory as Almesbury.

<sup>58</sup> Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain*, 191.

<sup>59</sup> It is unclear if this Cheldric is the one mentioned in Arthur's section of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* or if he may be a descendant or simply one with the same name; our only given knowledge is that he is also a Saxon.

Norway, Aschillius, king of Dacia; Cador Limenic Cassibellaun, with many thousands of others, as well Britons as foreigners... And even the renowned King Arthur himself was mortally wounded...<sup>60</sup>

Monmouth goes on further to reveal that Arthur was taken- to be cured- to the isle of Avalon. He then passes down his crown to Constantine, son of Cador, duke of Cornwall, in “the five hundred and forty-second year of our Lord’s incarnation.”<sup>61</sup> Notwithstanding, this Constantine (who may or may not have been linked to the saint of the same name) lost the kingdom to the Saxons and the sons of Mordred. This point concludes Geoffrey of Monmouth’s recollection on King Arthur. Within it, Monmouth uses many details which may theoretically (though in specificity some do directly) correlate to locations and people contemporary to Arthur’s proposed time frame in England. There are many religious allusions in the course of the books VIII to XI which pertain to the life of Arthur that mark him also as a very religious man, at times to such an extent that one (at least, in terms of modern readership) may perceive clearly the embellishment used in writing this in order to maintain religious veneration (propaganda).

### **Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur***

*La Morte d’Arthur* was based on works by the predecessors of Malory, the most important having been those aforementioned of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Nennius, as well as the Arthurian romances written in the 1100s (nearly contemporary to Geoffrey’s works) by Chrétien de Troyes.<sup>62</sup> In fact, Chrétien de Troyes popularized “romantic” medieval literature, and Malory was inspired to use this writing style as well as Chrétien’s characters of Launcelot and Percival.

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<sup>60</sup> Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain.*, 192-193.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>62</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, "Four Arthurian Romances by Active 12Th Century De Troyes Chrétien", *Project Gutenberg*, accessed 6 December 2018, <https://www.gutenberg.org/etext/831>.



Mallory finished writing his *Le Morte d'Arthur* in approximately “the ninth year of Edward IV”<sup>63</sup> which would have been in mid-1469 to mid-1470. However, the official version was not released until William Caxton published it in 1485. Caxton’s published version of Malory’s story, compared to the accounts in the *Historia Brittonum* and *Historia Regum Britanniae*, is a lengthy twenty-one books made of a total five hundred and seven chapters. In this breakdown, specific attention will be given solely to parts which are directly pertinent to Arthur’s personal narrative, therefore not dealing in detail with his knights’ endeavours. In doing so, the arc of Arthur’s life in Malory’s work becomes more clearly compared against those of Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Book I of *Le Morte d'Arthur* begins in much the same fashion as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account; Uther lusts after duchess Igraine (Monmouth: Igera) and uses Merlin’s magic to disguise himself and to lay with her. This is not dissimilar to the Monmouth version, however there is a detail which contrasts: in the Malory version, Duke Gorlois of Cornwall valiantly leaves his stronghold to fight when he knows Uther has ridden off, and then dies in battle.<sup>64</sup> In Monmouth’s version, he is besieged and killed within his fortress. This slight change changes the duke from a coward to a warrior. Regardless, Uther lays with Igraine and when she finds out of his death, she mourns privately and marvels at the man who lays with her in her dead husband’s likeness.<sup>65</sup> They marry and months later she gives birth to Arthur, who, much to her relief, is revealed to be Uther’s son. There are two already existing half-sisters by Igraine and Gorlois’ union, Morgawse and Morgan le Fay (Morgawse was Anne in Monmouth’s version). Merlin takes the baby Arthur as his price for the concealment potions, to be raised with Sir Ector, whom he describes as “a passing true

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, PDF (repr., London: William Caxton, 1485), <https://www.scribd.com/document/66550923/Le-Morte-d-Arthur>.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

man and a faithful.”<sup>66</sup> Sir Ector then raises Arthur until he comes of age to claim his rightful heritage.

Compared to that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the reader learns in a much-abridged version that while on his deathbed Uther rode into battle on a horse-litter and then passed away shortly after his return to London, but not before he had proclaimed Arthur as his true heir. This announcement caused many disputes in England, and prompts Merlin to ask the Archbishop of Canterbury (here we see the presence of earthly religious figures more explicitly in comparison with Monmouth’s version) to call all those who wish to claim the throne to London by Christmas. In order to rival Arthur’s claim, the contenders must prove their right to the throne by pulling a sword out of a stone and anvil in which it is divinely stuck fast.<sup>67</sup> As we will discuss later, this sword is not in fact the same as that given to Arthur by the Lady of the Lake, though in future versions of the myth they are often conflated into one sword. The sword is described as, “...a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:—Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England.”<sup>68</sup> The Archbishop forbade all the lords and knights from touching the sword until mass was done. Once all the contenders had tried- though not Arthur since he was not recognised as nobility- none were successful. The Archbishop declares that there will be jousts and a tourney until the wielder is revealed.<sup>69</sup>

When Sir Kay (son of Sir Ector) forgot his tourney sword, he asked Arthur to retrieve it from their lodging. Instead, Arthur resourcefully attempted and succeeded to draw it from the stone and anvil. When he returns to Sirs Kay and Ector, they recognise the sword and had Arthur re-insert it, and tried to pull it out themselves to no avail, though Arthur did so

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

easily.<sup>70</sup> The doubt about Arthur's legitimate claim persists across the next two chapters as the reader is told of all the troubles faced by Arthur leading up to his first war, which then takes up till roughly the end of the first book. In chapter XX we discover that Arthur also produces a son, yet unnamed, via incest with his half-sister Morgawse. Arthur attempts but fails to kill the child, motivated by a prophecy that the boy will bring the downfall of Camelot. In chapter XX, King Pellinore steals Arthur's horse. When Pellinore returns to Arthur (chapter XXIV), he discloses to the reader the name of Arthur's son: Mordred.<sup>71</sup> The conclusion of Book I comes with the Arthur's receiving Excalibur (Caliburn) from the Lady of the Lake, provided he return it to her when she requests it.<sup>72</sup>

Books II and III focus respectively on Sirs Balin and Balan and the formation of the Round Table (including Arthur and Guenever's marriage). In Book IV Arthur becomes a main figure again. It opens with Merlin being stoned to death: he had doted upon Arthur's half-sister Morgan le Fay, and she had endured his pleasantries long enough to learn his craft. Merlin knows his own death is coming and imparts upon Arthur the advice to keep his sword and scabbard always close, a foreboding warning which will play strongly in the rest of the chapter.<sup>73</sup> The death of Merlin is incredibly significant because it is not only the loss of a magician on Arthur's side of the grand battle that ensues later, but simultaneously the loss of his friend and father figure.

In chapter VI, Arthur, King Uriens, and Sir Accolon of Gaul (the lover of Morgan le Fay) chase a hart so eagerly they kill their horses and continue on foot.<sup>74</sup> They find an abandoned ship laden with rich cloth, then "there suddenly were about them an hundred torches set upon all the sides of the ship boards and it gave great light; and therewithal came

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-40.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60, 65-66.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>74</sup> A hart is an adult male red deer, as opposed to a buck, which is an adult male roe deer.

out twelve fair damosels and saluted King Arthur on their knees,” and who then proceeded to seduce these noble men.<sup>75</sup> Magically, the following morning, Uriens has been brought away to his wife Morgan le Fay, and Arthur awakes in a prison. Accolon wakes up further away, by a well into which he wishes to be able to make way to Arthur.<sup>76</sup> The issue that ensues is that a damosel, thought by Arthur to be of the castle but actually sent by Morgan herself, brings him a fake Excalibur and scabbard in order for him to fight for his freedom. Accolon, who receives the real Excalibur and scabbard though he knows this not, agrees to fight a tourney in the place of sir Ontzlake who is incapacitated, and unbeknownst to him, his opponent is Arthur.<sup>77</sup>

The reader is also given a plot-twist in which the Damosel of the Lake, Nimue, who has just killed Merlin, comes to rescue Arthur from death at the hands of Morgan le Fey. As to the magic of the weapons Accolon was wielding, he did not shed a single drop of blood, while Arthur was bleeding profusely (though he still fought better than any other man).<sup>78</sup> Arthur’s fake Excalibur is shattered to the pommel, and he exclaims at Accolon, “for though I lack weapon, I shall lack no worship, and if thou slay me weaponless that shall be thy shame.”<sup>79</sup> Despite being practically weaponless, Arthur beats Accolon back and in the instant of Accolon’s returned thrust, the Damosel of the Lake took such pity that “such a man of worship should so be destroyed,” and so proceeded to bring Accolon’s blade to earth by Arthur, who grasped it and the scabbard, and beat Accolon to the ground with one buffet to the head.<sup>80</sup> In this event, Arthur’s religious greatness is again highlighted and serves to save him from harm.

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d’Arthur*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-116.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.; The fact that even without his magical weapons Arthur has personal skill shows he was incredibly gifted- he did not need to rely on the power of weapons or divine intervention.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.

Accalon is forced then to confess Morgan le Fay's plot against Arthur, and his role in it. He also discloses her plans to murder her husband Uriens, and how he, Accalon, would have ascended to the throne in Uriens' place.<sup>81</sup> With this knowledge, Arthur departs with the dying Accalon to an abbey not far off to be healed. During treatment, Accalon dies and his body is sent to Morgan with the instruction, "say that I send her him to a present and tell her I have my sword Excalibur and the scabbard;" which shows both his nobility in returning the body of his fallen rival, and his warlord nature through his implied threat of vengeance.<sup>82</sup>

Chapters XIII, XIV, and XVI show the ferocity and cunning of Morgan le Fey. In XIII, she attempts to kill Uriens, is thwarted by her son, Uwain, and swears to never make an attempt on Uriens' life again.<sup>83</sup> In chapter XIV Morgan rides off to the abbey in which Arthur was recovering. Failing to take Excalibur from sleeping Arthur's grasp, she takes the scabbard and escapes; nobody stops her because she is of high-born blood. Arthur wakes and takes off after her, impossibly speeding up to catch up, though she veers off to a lake and thrusts the bejewelled and gilded scabbard into its depths and transforms herself into a large marble stone in order to hide before Arthur arrives.<sup>84</sup> This action is not only important in the short term for her success in stealing his scabbard, but also because Arthur will now become vulnerable in battle, since the scabbard protected the wearer from all mortal wounds. In Chapter XVI the Damosel of the Lake saves Arthur from bearing on his back a cursed mantle sent in "recompense" by Morgan le Fey. She insists that Arthur make the damosel who brought it to him try it on first, and he does: she is reduced to a pile of smouldering coals. Following this, Arthur banishes Uwain from his court because he believes Uwain has had

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

part in his mother's plans, and Sir Gawaine follows Sir Uwain (his cousin) out of court as well.<sup>85</sup>

Moving forward, Book V follows the arrival of an envoy of generals from Rome who wish to impose taxation on Arthur's Kingdom, which he will not tolerate. After going to war with the Roman general Lucius, Arthur smites him down and then persists to drag the corpses to the Senate in Rome, as "I send to them these dead bodies for the tribute that they have demanded."<sup>86</sup> By the time Arthur reaches Rome, the senators and the city and even the pope himself have surrendered to the great, spiritual, and virtuous King Arthur- and at the following Christmas, the pope himself crowns Arthur Emperor.<sup>87</sup> The remainder of Book V consists of Gawain's return, with his Saracen-turned-Christian prisoners, bookending the fact that Arthur's dominion is far and wide and that he and his knights champion the Christian movement to convert people to their religion.

Following this, Arthur does not have a strong presence for many chapters. He is not present in the adventures related and, if anything, he is only mentioned in conjunction to his knights as their king. Book VI follows the newly announced Sir Launcelot (adopted from the Chrétien de Troyes' *The Knight of the Cart*).<sup>88</sup> Book VII is one of Malory's own crafting, introducing a mysterious knight, dubbed *Baumains* (fair-hands) by Sir Kay. The book follows the story of this knight, later revealed to be Sir Gareth.<sup>89</sup> Books VIII – X follow Sir Tristram and relates the tale of tragic and ill-fated love between Tristram and Isoud, which results in the death of Sir Tristram.<sup>90</sup> Books XI and XII follow Launcelot and the start of his affair with Guenever. In Book XI Lancelot is seduced by a maiden, siring Galahad, the knight who is

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Book VI; Chrétien de Troyes, "Four Arthurian Romances By Active 12<sup>th</sup> Century De Troyes, Chrétien", *Project Gutenberg*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/etext/831>.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Book VII.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, Books VIII – X.

destined to procure the Sangreal. Guenever, upon Launcelot's return to Camelot, initially forgives his infidelity, but upon a second occurrence, she banishes him.<sup>91</sup> Book XII describes Launcelot's madness in exile, until he reaches Corbin where he is healed by the Sangreal. After time passes, he is recalled to Camelot.<sup>92</sup>

Books XIII through XVII encompass the whole quest for the Sangreal, which contrary to modern conception, Arthur had no hand in. He sent 151 knights out to find it, knowing many would not return. Book XIII focuses on Galahad, Book XIV focuses on Sir Percivale's journey and his struggle with purity, and Book XV covers Launcelot who struggles with his faith (both in life and spiritually).<sup>93</sup> Books XVI and XVII cover the meeting of the trio of Sirs Galahad, Percivale, and Bors and their adventures on the way and arrival at the castle in which they meet the Maimed King, and even Christ himself.<sup>94</sup> They are presented with the Sangreal, but after transporting the grail to Sarras and liberating the city, Sir Galahad perishes, and then a few years later Sir Percivale does as well. Sir Bors remains and is the sole Grail-bearer to return to Camelot (with the Sangreal).<sup>95</sup> Launcelot also makes his return to Camelot, but his affair with Guenever is fated to be uncovered. This scandal will trigger his own downfall and prelude the war in which Arthur dies.

Book XIX begins with Guenever's May ride out to the forest accompanied by an order of the knights from the Round Table. They are attacked by Sir Meliagrance who wounds Launcelot du Lake.<sup>96</sup> Sir Meliagrance exposes the affair of Launcelot and Guenever by showing the Queen's bedchamber which has bloodstains from Launcelot's wounds, though Launcelot escapes imprisonment before he is convicted.<sup>97</sup> Book XX is the beginning

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XI.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XII.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XIII, Book XIV, Book XV.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 624 – 627.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XVI – XVII.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 674-675.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 677, 679.

of the end for Arthur and his romantic story. The first four chapters concern Sirs Agravaine and Mordred entrapping Launcelot in the Queen's chamber in order to convict him of his crime, backed up by twelve knights.<sup>98</sup> Launcelot kills Sir Agravaine and the 12 knights, though Mordred flees and makes off to the King.<sup>99</sup>

At this point, Arthur declares that Guenever is to be burned at the stake for her infidelity. Launcelot, in open rebellion, brings in a horde of men to rescue Guenever and slays forty of the knights of the Round Table.<sup>100</sup> Sir Gawaine laid siege to Launcelot's castle of Joyous Gard, avenging the loss of his brothers and fellow knights.<sup>101</sup> However, the pope intervenes by issuing a bull to make peace, by exiling Launcelot to France, far from Arthur and his knights.<sup>102</sup>

Despite Launcelot's expulsion in the name of peace, Gawaine insists that Arthur should wage a war, and he does. For the duration of this battle, Arthur leaves his son Mordred to rule in his place.<sup>103</sup> During the war, however, Gawaine is injured and lays sick for a month. Right as he was ready for battle, Arthur and his men are recalled to England.<sup>104</sup> At this point, Book XXI begins, and the tale of Arthur draws to a close. Mordred has staged a coup and has stolen Arthur's throne as well as Guenever. On his route back, by Dover, Arthur is confronted by his own usurping son- and in the skirmish many men, including Sir Gawaine, are killed.<sup>105</sup> In the following chapter, chapter III, Arthur receives a warning from Gawaine's ghost that begs him to not fight Mordred that day, and Arthur tries his best to postpone the fight.<sup>106</sup> This is an almost angelic interference in order to protect Arthur. The battle ends up, by accident,

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 688-691.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 699 – 702.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 702.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 716.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 723.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 726.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*



taking place nonetheless, and the final war of Mordred against Arthur ensues- with Mordred being killed, and Arthur mortally wounded.<sup>107</sup> In his dying state, Arthur orders Sir Bedivere to give his sword back to the Lady of the Lake, by throwing it into the depths of the nearest body of water.<sup>108</sup> Sir Bedivere is also told to put Arthur, dying, into a barge and float him out to the Damosels of the Lake who have appeared. Arthur tells Bedivere, “Comfort thyself, ... and do as well as thou mayst, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul.”<sup>109</sup>

From this point forth, Sir Bedivere dedicates himself to the hermitage he finds after leaving Arthur to the women.<sup>110</sup> From this point, the end wraps up very quickly, using a combination of interjected opinions by Malory and the normal narration that exists in the rest of the work. Chapter VII revolves around the debate as to whether King Arthur truly died, and where he has been interred- presumably at the chapel at Glastonbury- and that Guenever, after his death, became a nun at Almesbury.<sup>111</sup> Launcelot hears of the death of Arthur, returns to England, and tries and fails to woo Guenever. He then takes the habit himself and after approximately seven years, has a vision which guides him back to Almesbury where Guenever had just passed away.<sup>112</sup> Chapter XI is one in which he interrs her beside Arthur at Glastonbury, and then he himself is buried at his castle. Sir Constantine, son of Sir Cador of Cornwall, becomes the next reigning king of England after Arthur, and all the remaining Arthurian knights of the Round Table are disbanded to their home keeps in their

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 728-729.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 731.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 731-732.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 732.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 733.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 734-741.

home countries. With this, Malory then draws to a close the legend, expressing his humility at being “chosen” to re-record the story and wishing that in peace all find their way.<sup>113</sup>

In conclusion, over the presentation of these three sources, it is very visible which adaptations have been made to the story of King Arthur. Nennius focused only on Arthur as a war-figure, which was key in establishing his physical heroism. Geoffrey of Monmouth romanticized him by giving him a life story and using him as a religious propaganda and a “chosen figure”; he is almost Christ-like in his ways of preaching to his knights and they each have specific exceptional circumstances in which they come to follow him. Malory further romanticizes the story using key characters and styles adapted from the introduction of romantic writing style which had just begun around the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes and allowed the story to be more compelling for the basis of general readership. Strong religious culture and national identity (or identifiers) create a vast and highly dynamic world for King Arthur, thereby immersing both medieval and modern audiences. These definitive aspects— both the variation/extenuation of details and the noted geographic locations— will be further put into analysis in the following chapter. A more concise analytical review will be drawn from and between the information recounted in this summarisation of the primary materials, as well as comparing the mythos to the verifiable world.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 742.

## Chapter Three: Tracking Arthur

As we have discussed, the question of Arthur's historicity is highly debated amongst scholars in various fields, most importantly within that of history. They overlook the fact that many small pieces of viable evidence are just as valid as a few larger pieces; both can amount toward creating a whole conclusion. With this said, amongst all the hypotheses made, some are more concretely backed up than others. The debate of Arthur's historicity can be separated into three main categories for better analysis: the time and lineage of Arthur, Arthur's kingdom (Camelot), and the death and burial of Arthur. Each corresponds to a key sector of the debate about him, thereby allowing a methodical dissection of the facts from the legend. In *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, Graham Phillips explores these, providing one of the most in-depth and convincing analyses of the Arthurian historicity, consistently backed up with explanation and evidence.

### The Real “Arthur”

One of scholars' greatest misconceptions about the Arthurian legend is that he does not fit into any organized lineage. This is both correct and incorrect; *Arthur* does not, but through a very interesting historical and phonetic cross-analysis, there is a Brittonic leader named Owain Ddantgwyn who fits almost exactly. This section will explore the both the monarchical and phonetic lineage of the man today known as “King Arthur”.

The best place to begin exploring Arthur's lineage is his name itself. Family names in Britain were possibly influenced by the Roman conquest and the Roman system of epithets as a form of surname (as seen with Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus).<sup>114</sup> One of the notable

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<sup>114</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 69;

cases of such a name in Britannia (Wales) is Uther Pendragon, who is King Arthur's father in the Monmouth and Malory renditions. Graham Phillips explains, "the kings of Gwynedd in north Wales bore the title the dragon. Well, in Welsh the word *uthr* (pronounced 'oo-ther') means 'terrible,' as in mighty, and the word *pen*, means 'head,' as in leader. So *Uthr Pen Dragon* means 'Terrible Head Dragon.'"<sup>115</sup> The oldest known king in Gwynedd, Enniaun Girt ("the Impetuous"), was corroborated in the Harleian genealogies as a son of Cunedda, who was a mercenary general likely called to Gwynedd by King Vortigern in the mid fifth century to fight off the Irish.<sup>116</sup> Cunedda, likely because he aided Vortigern, established a dynasty of kingdoms via his children, which encompassed the modern Gwynedd and Powys regions of Wales.<sup>117</sup> When Gildas wrote in 545, his contemporary ruler of Gwynedd was Maelgwn (Latin: Maglocunus) Gwynedd or Maelgwn "Dragon of the Island", as he was referred to in chapter 33 of *De Excidio Britanniae*.<sup>118</sup> Maelgwn was, according to the genealogy, the grandson of Enniaun.<sup>119</sup> By comparing the lifetime of Uther/Enniaun (ruling around 480), to Arthur's proposed lifetime of circa 460-520 C.E., we may concur Uther's historical counterpart is Enniaun Girt.<sup>120</sup>

Records about Powys' rulers are slim, but the Pillar of Eliseg in Denbighshire lists the rulers of Powys, and places Vortigern (the aforementioned king who invited Cunedda and his family to the land) as a ruler in the early 400s.<sup>121</sup> Graham Phillips talks about how there is also evidence in the Harleian genealogies and similar trees which trace place families and figures with the "cyn", "cun", or "cin" affix around the lands which were at various points held by Gwynedd all trace back to the epithet of "cun", meaning hound. The evidence of one

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Howard Hayes Scullard and Patrick Hunt, "Scipio Africanus The Elder | Biography, Battles, & Facts", Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Scipio-Africanus-the-Elder>.

<sup>115</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 140.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>118</sup> Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain* (repr., Project Gutenberg, 2012).

<sup>119</sup> *Welsh Annals* via Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 142.

<sup>120</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 143.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

such descendant is found at Powys' capital of Viroconium. There is a tombstone to Cunorix, the son of Maquicoline. Phillips linguistically infers that Cunorix bears a Celtic suffix which derives from the Latin *rex*, meaning "king". The style and decoration of the gravestone helped archaeologists date it to approximately 480 C.E., and determined it was not likely to be that of a ruler of Powys, but rather a high-status person who died in the realm.<sup>122</sup> Based on this analysis, it is likely that a member of the Cunedda dynasty resided or was otherwise significantly attached to Viroconium. The connection of the family to this point leads me to believe that it was within their domain of control and therefore a potential region to be connected to a real King Arthur.

Looking forward a few centuries, there is evidence in the *Elegy of Cynddylan* (600s C.E.), translated by John Morris, that Cynddylan, who ruled in Powys, and his siblings, were descendants of Arthur. Logically, this means that Arthur himself was a ruler in Powys.<sup>123</sup> We know Vortigern ruled in Powys in the 400s, and thanks to Nennius' *History of the Britons* we know that Vortigern had three heirs, with his successor being his son Pascent, who ruled in western Powys after his father.<sup>124</sup> Pascent, as Graham Phillips points out, was followed by Cyndrwyn and then Cynddylan in the seventh century. Both bear the Cunedda affix, which when put together with our "King Cuno" tombstone from 480 leads to the conclusion that Viroconium and western Powys were annexed by the region of Gwynedd and ruled by the Cunedda family throughout- even in the proposed time of Arthur himself.<sup>125</sup> This means that Arthur was likely a part of this lineage, coming somewhere between Pascent in the fifth century and then Cyndrwyn and Cynddylan in the seventh.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-92.

<sup>123</sup> John Morris, *The Age of Arthur* (repr., London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973). Via Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*.

<sup>124</sup> Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*. 22-23.

<sup>125</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 192.

Phillips makes a short and effective proposed identity of one of the potential rulers in Powys between Pascent and Cyndrwyn: Cuneglasus. He is mentioned by Gildas in *De Excidio Britanniae* as a heretical but powerful warmonger, having lived contemporary to Gildas himself.<sup>126</sup> Judging by the -cun affix of his name, it is reasonable to believe that Cuneglasus was a Cunedda descendent ruling in Powys. This is confirmed as well by the fact that in the Harleian genealogies, Cuneglasus and Maglocunus are first cousins, descended from Enniaun Girt.<sup>127</sup> Enniaun's successor was Cadwallon, and Cuneglasus is the son of Cadwallon's brother. Theoretically speaking, the inheritance from Enniaun would have split Powys and Gwynedd to his two sons, with their respective sons taking over from them. Due to this, Gildas' contemporary cousin-rulers would both be found in north-central Wales at the time.<sup>128</sup> This meant that in accordance to their ruling periods, Cadwallon's brother Owain Ddantgwyn would have ruled in Powys at the time of the man we call King Arthur— therefore giving us the true name of our legendary king (refer to figure 2.1 below).

| Approximate Dates | Kings of Gwynedd                 | Kings of Powys                 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 480 - 490         | Enniaun                          | <i>Unknown</i>                 |
| 490 - 520         | Cadwallon<br>(son of Enniaun)    | Owain<br>(son of Enniaun)      |
| 520 - 550         | Maglocunus<br>(son of Cadwallon) | Cuneglasus<br>(son of Owain)   |
| 550 - 600         |                                  | <i>Unknown</i>                 |
| 600 - 630         |                                  | Cyndrwyn                       |
| 630 - 660         |                                  | Cynddylan<br>(son of Cyndrwyn) |

Figure 2. 1: Table of Rulers in Powys and Gwynedd from 480 AD to 660 AD.

Source: Harleian Genealogies, via Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 204.

<sup>126</sup> Gildas lived in the early to mid-fourth century.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

Now, having a name for who we presume to be Arthur, we face the issue that his name, obviously, is not Arthur at all. This proposal also coincides with the views of Mary Williams and Caitlin Green: if Arthur did exist, his true figure would not be as mythical or magical. Graham Phillips concurs with Mary Williams, that, “The name Arthur... does not appear on record anywhere until the late sixth century.”<sup>129</sup> Yet again, phonetics and word play may aid us in discerning a latent truth within the myth.

Returning to the importance of epithets and their potential usage as names instead of titles (such as our aforementioned “Uther”), we may note that while Owain does not bear an animal epithet or affix, Arthur does. *Arth* is the Welsh and Brythonic word for bear, so it is possible that the Welsh epithet for “the bear”, *ur arth*, could have been refashioned into “Arthur”, and Owain could have been distinguished and remembered by this title.<sup>130</sup> This concept appears even in *De Excidio*: Gildas called Cuneglasus (Owain’s son) “you bear” and charges him with possessing an object from another ruler with that title, presumably his father. In conclusion, Arthur’s true name may have been Owain Ddantgwyn, and his father would likely have been Enniaun, who matches up with Arthur’s father Uther in appellation, chronology, and lineage. Through this examination Arthur and Uther may tentatively be traced back to real figures in north-central Wales in the 400s C.E.

## Camelot

In *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*, Castleden describes Camelot as a city that has, “...come to symbolize the new order Arthur created that its name conjures, still, a poignantly nostalgic image of otherworldly idealism, a dream of a perfect city, a perfect society. Camelot is a utopia, a castle in Never-Never Land where justice and the perfect

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 201; Phillips also here gives the examples of Ghenghis Khan or Caligula, as people who are remembered by title, rather than their birth-given name.

social order prevail...”<sup>131</sup> As Castleden describes it, Camelot coincides with the medieval/romantic ideal; provided that if Arthur lived in the post-Roman era, his “castle” would have been much more primitive in its construction. Many of the “castles” of the post-Roman phase in Britannia would have rather been simple wood and stone mount forts or fortifications built upon the remains of roman outposts.<sup>132</sup> This observation narrows greatly the amount of potential locations for Camelot. Three sites are pertinent contenders amongst the views of Arthurian scholars: Tintagel, Cadbury Castle, and Viroconium. Though Owain Ddantgwyn (our prospective Arthur) likely hailed from Viroconium, it does not necessarily mean it was “Camelot”—the legendary kingdom may have been inspired by another city also connected within the mythos.

The first location is Tintagel, which is explicitly mentioned in Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain* and in Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* as the birthplace of Arthur. Tintagel is first mentioned as Arthur’s birthplace by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, nearly 700 years after Arthur would have lived.<sup>133</sup> This discrepancy has overshadowed archaeological research at the site since it began in the 1930s with Courtenay Arthur Raleigh Radford. Today, Jacqueline Nowakowski is an archaeologist on the field team of the Tintagel Castle Archaeological Research Project (TCARP). She and her team are excavating the ruins of Tintagel, which today stands as a castle. This initially discredits the idea of it being the location of Camelot because there is a full-fledged medieval castle at the site, which was not built until roughly the twelfth century. However, a fire in 1983 cleared space which, when surveyed, revealed earthworks. Nowakowski’s team has been excavating these since 2016

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<sup>131</sup> Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*, 149.

<sup>132</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 25;  
Jacqueline Nowakowski, "Researching Tintagel, Dumnonia And King Arthur In Post-Roman Britain".

<sup>133</sup> Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain*, 141-193,  
[http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/geoffrey\\_thompson.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/geoffrey_thompson.pdf), 143-144.



and have discovered ruins dating back to the fifth century, during the post-Roman era.<sup>134</sup> They have focused on excavating the southern terrace which is a large slate-and-stone space, potentially for exterior usage. Specifically, the team discovered middens which had been constructed in order to support the terrace.<sup>135</sup> Thanks to a combination of radiocarbon dating and stratigraphy analysis, the bones and ceramic pieces found in these pits not only demonstrated what the occupants ate; they are the primary evidence for dating the site so far back in time.<sup>136</sup> This same strategy of dating the site is also referenced in by Christopher Gidlow in his book *Revealing King Arthur*, in chapter two. He explains that in the “great ditch” and around the site, there were pieces of pottery originating from across the Mediterranean: south to Spain and Africa, and as far east as Greece.<sup>137</sup>

Another particular piece of archaeological evidence which had been loosely used to support the Arthur case is a slab known as the Artognou Stone (mistakenly called the Arthur Stone)– now held by the Royal Cornwall museum.<sup>138</sup> The stone was inscribed with the phrase “PATERN[–] COLI AVI FICIT ARTOGNOU”. This roughly translates to “Artognou descendant of Patern[us] Colus made (this).” While the tourism industry and pro-Arthurian Tintagel scholars insist this Artognou must be Arthur, many scholars, such as Caitlin Green, highlight the fact that Arthur was not connected to Tintagel in any historical writing until Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1136.<sup>139</sup> No other source of (and I use the term with caution) credible evidence prior to this places Arthur anywhere near Tintagel. As previously noted, Geoffrey’s mention of the place is likely even tied to earning himself favour with his patron rather than reporting a historical fact. His patron’s brother was the Earl of Cornwall, who was

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<sup>134</sup> Nowakowski, "Researching Tintagel, Dumnonia And King Arthur In Post-Roman Britain".

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*; A midden is a ditch dug in order to dispose of food scraps and refuse such as broken pottery.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Gidlow, *Revealing King Arthur*, 38-39.

<sup>138</sup> Nowakowski, "Researching Tintagel, Dumnonia And King Arthur In Post-Roman Britain".

<sup>139</sup> Thomas [Caitlin] Green, *Concepts of Arthur* (repr., Stroud: Tempus, 2007). via Gidlow, *Revealing King Arthur*.

constructing Tintagel castle around the time.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, despite the confirmed chronology of the site and the discovery of the Artognou stone, there is not enough evidence to confirm it as the central city for Arthur. At best it could have been where he was born, though there is not much evidence for this either.<sup>141</sup>

Moving forward, a site relatively near to Tintagel on the border of the region of Dumnonia toward the region of southern England occupied by the Saxons from the fifth to eighth centuries, is Cadbury castle. This site, much like Tintagel, was never a proper medieval castle either. The site instead is a pre-Roman hill fort, which was later briefly modelled into a legionary garrison during the Roman era. Refortification was performed congruent to when Arthur would have lived, but as Graham Phillips points out, so were many across Britain.<sup>142</sup>

Gidlow compares the excavation at Cadbury Castle as, “A British Troy”.<sup>143</sup> This is in reference to Schliemann’s excavation of Troy, which he located by religiously observing and tracing the details of Homer’s *Iliad*.<sup>144</sup> The team of researchers who excavated Cadbury Castle, led by Leslie Alcock, used the same strategy, analysing Arthurian literature. They reasoned that if Arthur was born at Tintagel (as the medieval romantic writers insisted), Cadbury would be an optimal point to rule due to its location in the vicinity and as a strategic trade and defence point. This line of reasoning follows in the footsteps of Arthurian scholars dating back to 1542<sup>145</sup>, who had already done minor excavations and proclaimed the site to be Camelot-worthy.<sup>146</sup> Despite this, as at Tintagel, the only support for the site are conjectures made by prior scholars, and the fact that a settlement existed there in a time linear to Arthur.

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<sup>140</sup> Nowakowski, "Researching Tintagel, Dumnonia And King Arthur In Post-Roman Britain".

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 35-36.

<sup>143</sup> Gidlow also cites Leslie Alcock and Geoffrey Ashe who said, “Cadbury Castle, appropriately for Camelot, was plainly a kind of British Troy.”.

<sup>144</sup> Gidlow, *Revealing King Arthur* 66.

<sup>145</sup> In 1542 the Tudor antiquary John Leland sought out the site on behalf of the crown.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

The third location is located farther from these two— Viroconium lies on the border of Powys, Wales and Shropshire, England. Like the other two locations, it has been dated back to the post-Roman era. Viroconium was a hub for travel and trade, utilising the roman roads and revitalising the Roman city-fort upon which it was built.<sup>147</sup> It contains incredibly well-preserved ruins of both Legionary and post-Roman occupation. Evidence even shows that despite the style of rebuilding being mainly timber and stone rather than brick and mortar, much of the infrastructure was repaired or even upgraded (such as the plumbing and roads). This shift provided a change from a Roman *civitas* to a high-functioning bronze-age trading hub.<sup>148</sup> This means that due to its advanced infrastructure, it could have been an “ideal city”, to the extent that it inspired the Arthur’s capitol of Camelot. Additionally, and most importantly for the scope of this research, it lines up perfectly with our historical Arthur, Owain Ddantgwyn. In this regard, given the temporal and geographical context, alongside the archaeological evidence of occupation and the historical evidence of the genealogy, it is highly likely that we have located both our historical Arthur, and his “Camelot”.

## **The Death of Arthur**

The greater feat in exploring the historicity of Arthur is not in finding the name, nor the city. Both of these are, with enough research, relatively easy to discern and in addition, are attested in multiple types of records. The most difficult part is coming up with a physical body, or at least a burial plot. Contemporary to Geoffrey of Monmouth, the monks of the Glastonbury Cathedral in the latter half of the twelfth century claimed to have located the cross of Arthur. As Rodney Castleden describes:

Many subscribe to the view that Glastonbury was Avalon, and this view is now so rooted in popular tradition that it is hard to conceive of alternatives.

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<sup>147</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 177.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 178

Yet Glastonbury was not mentioned by Geoffrey, writing in 1136, and the view that Glastonbury was Avalon seems to post-date the ‘discovery’ of Arthur’s tomb at the abbey. If Arthur was buried at Glastonbury, then Glastonbury had to be Avalon, and following the discovery the Glastonbury monks were able to claim Glastonbury as Avalon.<sup>149</sup>

Previously, many scholars had settled upon the concept that Arthur and Guinevere were buried at Glastonbury, and not pressed the idea further despite the incredibly high coincidence between its discovery and the abbey’s need for funding. Today, the cross has been condemned a fake because of the circumstances of its finding: it was found seven feet underground and then another sixteen feet below was a tree trunk. The monks who dug were told *exactly* which spot to dig in by an abbot, and the finding occurred right at a time in which the Glastonbury Abbey needed funds for support after a fire had ravaged the grounds.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, there is the problem that the first attesting to Arthur’s burial at Glastonbury came with Monmouth in the same century. Continuing the search after the disproof of Glastonbury, it is important to consider both where Arthur supposedly died and where he was interred in order to properly locate his body or grave.

In the *Annales Cambriae*, Arthur and Mordred both perish on the field of Camlann.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, Phillips references Gildas’ *De Excidio*: it confirms Owain was slain in battle by Maglocunus, which lines up with our consideration of later romantic writers who concurred on the point that Arthur perished at Camlann in battle with Mordred (Welsh: Maelgwn, Latin: Maglocunus) as well.<sup>152</sup> The location of Camlann itself is an important detail; in medieval

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<sup>149</sup> Castleden, *King Arthur: The Truth Behind the Legend*, 195.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-197;

Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 232;

Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 18-19.

<sup>151</sup> *Welsh Annals*, via Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 199.

<sup>152</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 207; Maglocunus is called by Gildas for killing his uncle, the king. The only kingly uncle of Maglocunus was Owain.

battles it was often difficult to clear or transport the dead from a battlefield— hence many cairns and corpses are found outside of what are clearly designated burial areas, therefore meaning Arthur’s body or grave could be located at the battlefield.<sup>153</sup> Unfortunately, no source explicitly places Camlann’s location. The best textually verified clue to Camlann is, again, found in Gildas’ criticism of Maglocunus for breaking British unity. The fact that Maglocunus, who ruled in Gwynedd, killed Owain, who ruled in Powys, logically leads to the conclusion that Maglocunus was attempting to take over Owain’s kingdom. This must have been in vain, since contemporarily Maglocunus ruled in Gwynedd as a middle-aged man, and Cuneglasus (Owain’s son) reigned in Powys.<sup>154</sup>

In locating Camlann, there are possibilities such as either of two Camlan valleys, both of which are in the confines of Gwynedd.<sup>155</sup> According to Monmouth, solely, the battle took place at Salisbury.<sup>156</sup> In his earlier work (c. 1990), Graham Phillips worked with Martin Keatman and actually cited a Dumnonia-based Arthur, and supported the Salisbury theory through a heavy reliance on Monmouth’s writing and a similar name-based theory to the one he would later use to discern the tentative identity of a historical Arthur.<sup>157</sup> In his more updated research Phillips sought out the help of a team of scholars who specialise in medieval battle strategy and used what information we have about the battle in order to discern, within reason, further key details of the battle.<sup>158</sup>

Taking their analysis in conjunction with the information given in Gildas’ *De Excidio*, it seems that Maglocunus was the aggressor. Based on this assumption, one of the more likely places that Arthur would have been wise to fortify himself would be away from Viroconium

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>155</sup> Here Gwynedd refers to its confines in the early to mid-fourth century.

<sup>156</sup> Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman, *King Arthur: The True Story* (repr., London: Arrow, 1993), 145.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-153.

<sup>158</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 215.

(to prevent a siege) at the town of Forden.<sup>159</sup> Phillips made a breakthrough while exploring this route; he passed Rhyd-y-Groes, a location referenced in *The Dream of Rhonabwy*<sup>160</sup> from around 1159: The tale entails the protagonist, Rhonabwy, being transported to Arthur's camp at Camlann, set exactly by name at Rhyd-y-Groes.<sup>161</sup> Seemingly, the reason for which the connection was never made is that the story is highly religiously allegorical in nature, but descriptive nonetheless. The point at which this ford lies, and nearby, is on the river Camlad, upon which lies a stretch called Camlann (meaning "crooked bank").<sup>162</sup>

Having cautiously but securely placed Camlann near to the Camlad river, it is possible to consider the next factor of Arthur's death: his interment. As mentioned previously, it was unlikely that his body would have been taken a very long distance from the battleground. Using mapping software, I have determined that it is approximately twenty-one miles from Forden to Wroxeter (the modern-day location of Viroconium).<sup>163</sup> Theoretically, this is a feasible distance away from the battlefield to inter the body, but the royal family of Powys had their own special interment site away from the capital, as Phillips explains. He notes that in Roman and post-Roman sources, the site of the Powys chieftain (as Arthur would have been) burials were often mentioned as being far from the city, although no bodies have been discovered, so the site's exact location remains a mystery.<sup>164</sup>

Despite a lack of tangible anthropological evidence, we do have a lead in a textual piece. The sister of Cynddylan had become a bard, and in her *The Song of Heledd*<sup>165</sup> she

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>160</sup> This is held in a collection referred to as The Red Book of Hergest.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>163</sup> "How Far Is It Between", Freemapttools.Com, accessed 25 March 2019, <https://www.freemapttools.com/how-far-is-it-between.htm>;

Wroxeter is the modern-day location of the site of Viroconium.

<sup>164</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 223-224.

<sup>165</sup> This can also be found, in original, in the Red Book of Hergest.

disclosed not only a description of the site, but a name. Graham Phillips makes the following linguistic connections:

...she talked about a desecrated compound called Eglwyseu Bassa...described by the Old Welsh *breint*, which in modern Welsh is *fraint*, meaning ‘a person, place, or thing of special status or privilege.’... was where the king [Cynddylan] lay buried. In Old Welsh the poem described Eglwyseu as Cynddylan’s *orffowys*, now the modern Welsh *gorffwys*, meaning ‘resting place’ ... in Old Welsh *eglwyseu* meant ‘churches’-plural- and as Bassa seemed to have been someone’s name, Eglwyseu Bassa must have meant... ‘Churches of Bassa.’<sup>166</sup>

Interestingly, this correlates to a modern English location in Shropshire, known as Baschurch.<sup>167</sup> Central to the site there is the Berth Hill, known simply as “The Berth”, which was originally made from two islands containing church-like structures.<sup>168</sup> One island was built up by manmade ramparts, though both islands would have been surrounded by water in the first millennium, and were in the middle of a wide-open landscape large enough to provide a clear field of view.<sup>169</sup> All of these points line up, but they make even more sense if we consider the description of the death and burial of Arthur in his legend: his sword was cast into the Lake of Avalon to return it to the Lady of the Lake and he was ferried to the Isle of Avalon to be healed (or buried, it is unspecified which).

In the legend, the resting place of Arthur is called Avalon, and is presided over by priestesses who are meant either to heal or bury Arthur. The Berth fits into this scene just in

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 226-227.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 229; The name Baschurch is attested back at least 1000 years in written records.

<sup>168</sup> The two islands are The Berth and The Enclosure

<sup>169</sup> "Shropshire's History Advanced Search | Shropshire's History Advanced Search", search.shropshirehistory.org.uk, 1979, [http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCS\\_MSA173/](http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCS_MSA173/).

the same way as the genealogies and geographic locations overlaid the legend. The churches of Bassa were dedicated to ‘Saint’ Bassa, who likely had her origin in a pagan water deity.<sup>170</sup> At the Berth, excavation and archaeological research is incredibly restricted due to the fact that the site is preserved as an English Heritage monument.<sup>171</sup> The Enclosure (the smaller of the two islands) was geo-surveyed via National Geographic funding in 1995 and turned up results that seem to show a foundation stone of one of the (presumed) two churches of Bassa.<sup>172</sup> The water that still remains around the two land masses is turned up many positive readings for metal during magnetic surveying, but the density of the silt and vegetation underwater made it too difficult to investigate.<sup>173</sup> Given the popularity of votive offerings of weapons, tools, and pots being thrown into bodies of water to make or honour vows to the offeror’s desired deity, it is possible to assume that that is exactly what these readings of metal were. It is even more likely given that a votive cauldron was found in the water by the Berth in the early 1900s.<sup>174</sup> This concept of votive offerings lines up with another instance which is crucial to Arthurian legend: the return of Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake upon Arthur’s death, prior to his being ferried to the Isle of Avalon. Theoretically, there are correlations between Bassa as a goddess of the water and healing at the Berth and the Lady of the Lake, the Berth as Avalon, and Excalibur as a votive in order to honour Arthur’s covenant with the goddess for her blessing him with such a powerful sword in his life.<sup>175</sup> Lastly, and possibly most importantly, there was even an early-sixth century style grave

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<sup>170</sup> Phillips, *The Lost Tomb of King Arthur*, 228-229; The quotations on saint are added according to the assumption that, if based on a pagan deity, in order to have churches in her name she must have become Christianised and therefore maintain some level of sainthood.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 65, 242.



discovered in the geophysical survey of the Enclosure, though funds to excavate the anomaly were withheld to save money, on the chance the spot was not a grave.<sup>176</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By following specific and corollary references within Arthurian and other post-Roman and medieval sources, we are able to better infer a tentative record of the historicity of Arthur. Using these diverse sources in comparison to one another forms a richly detailed composite view of the context—and therefore a clearer history— which would be otherwise impossible with solitary source-by-source analysis.

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

## Chapter Four: The Modern Arthur

The figure of Arthur, through literary worth and moral and religious symbolism, has become and remains a major cultural and literary figure from his origin up to the modern era, seen in the vast reproductions and iterations of Thomas Malory's Arthur narrative.<sup>177</sup> Arthur is a significant figure in contemporary society, representing virtue and leadership, and his myth as a whole has influenced our lexicon as well.<sup>178</sup>

As explained in chapter one, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* provides the genesis of the Arthurian legend as it is recognized and retold today.<sup>179</sup> The story is so persevering and has diffused into so many pieces of literature either as a theme, a reference, or a retelling, that it is impossible to count all of them. In cinema, as well, we can observe retellings of the Arthurian myth in abundance. I have selected three Arthur-centred cinematic pieces well known in our contemporary time: Disney's 1963 *The Sword in the Stone*, the 1975 *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and the 2008-2012 BBC television show *Merlin*.<sup>180</sup> The most prominent question to address is how the legend remains set in its core ideas and ideals, yet is still adaptable as a vessel for modern representations and contemporary ideas as well. The perseverance of Arthur is predominantly caused by the strong and skilful use of motifs and archetypes; the affirmation or disapproval of Arthur's existence, however, could

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<sup>177</sup> For example, T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*, or BBC's *Merlin*.

<sup>178</sup> Terms such as "round-table discussion" referencing Arthur's legendary council table at which everyone had an equal voice.

<sup>179</sup> Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*.

<sup>180</sup> In this case, I regard the analysis of cinematographic sources rather than textual ones because in terms of modern culture, it is more likely the average person would have seen or heard of (at least one of) these sources, rather than having read the multitudes of literature that has been even mildly Arthurian in nature.

affect in modern society because of how engrained the concept of Arthur is within our cultural representations and how controversial his existence is in historical research.<sup>181</sup>

## The Revival of Arthur

Even beginning in the nineteenth century, there was a revival in Arthurian literature which brought back ideals of the “righteous person” while also teaching history, as the best memorialization is through latent means such as storytelling. Historic fantasy stimulates the imagination using certain figures and concepts while also encouraging a growth of knowledge without active learning. Jean Knox talks discusses that,

The similarity between image schemas and the concept of archetypes has also been noticed by Kotsch, who regards archetypes not as concrete images but as unconscious structures which antedate conscious experience and as irrepresentable [sic] sources of images and ideas; archetypes ‘order experience without appearing in it’<sup>182</sup>

This observation tells us that archetypes form an unconscious conveyance of memory via imagery, either physical or through descriptive language. *The Imperial Quest and Modern Memory from Conrad to Greene* by Julia Rawa asserts that the memory and ideals imposed by the motif of a Quest for conquest and fulfilment of a goal are trans-national as well as transcendent of time.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> By “cultural representations” I refer to things such as the Hero archetype, and the “controversial existence in historical research” refers to the fact that if he were proven to have existed, it could alter the attention and fidelity given to early sources about historical figures.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 629.

<sup>183</sup> Julia Rawa, *The Imperial Quest and Modern Memory from Conrad To Greene*, ebook (repr., London, England: Routledge, 2005), Conclusion, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.jcu.idm.oclc.org/lib/johncabot/detail.action?docID=1542732>.

## How has “King Arthur” survived?

The seeds of a lasting impression made by the Arthurian legend are sown within Malory’s edition of the story. The development of romances in the medieval and renaissance Europe was instrumental in ingraining the Arthurian legend; their literary style aided was crucial to the endurance of the legend. The base idea of romance literature is an appeal to humanity, portraying human nature in the worldly plane and then juxtaposing it to supernatural realm of creatures and figures who are super-human. The Quest is one of the most prevalent motifs in literature, and a defining factor of medieval romances.<sup>184</sup> Medieval Romantic literature often revolves around the fulfilment of wishes, destiny, or a goal (preordained or chosen). Usually this means that a larger goal is fulfilled by one powerful being (the Hero).<sup>185</sup> This particularly is the heart of the Arthurian legend, where the Hero’s goal is to expel the invaders and unify the peoples of the British Isles. Within the overall quest motif, the Quest contains the progression and growth of the Hero and other characters.<sup>186</sup> In the case of the Arthurian Quest, the motif is typically represented by the quest for the Holy Grail *and* the preordained quest of Arthur which destines him to undergo the specific struggles and battles he does in order to unify the land.<sup>187</sup> A story in which the character’s desires are achieved is an attainment of success, giving a timeless core to the story that allows it to remain relevant over time; humans are fundamentally goal-oriented.<sup>188</sup>

By utilising a series of character archetypes, formally explored by Carl Jung, the Quest motif is a vessel for the Arthurian legend which allows it to safely traverse temporal

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<sup>184</sup> The uppercase Q being intentional, as I am using it as a proper noun for the overarching motif (in this case it is divinely ordained and thereby must be differentiated from a more mundane quest).

<sup>185</sup> Howard, *The Quest Motif in Literature*;  
Eugène Vinaver and Frederick Whitehead, "Romance | Literature and Performance", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/romance-literature-and-performance>.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> This refers to the sword which Arthur pulls from the stone, meaning he was the true king to unify England.

<sup>188</sup> Anna Dziedzic. "Stanisław Brzozowski on the Ideal of the Modern Man." *Studies in East European Thought* 63, no. 4 (2011): 345-54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41477743>.

and geographical constraints.<sup>189</sup> Arthur in this case is the protagonist, and the epitome of a *romantic hero*, who is (as per usual) divinely and prophetically ordained to assume the quest.<sup>190</sup> This sense of purpose is shown by the “call” which is his drawing of the sword from the stone at London. There are many archetypal characters which support the main hero in any instance of the quest motif– Malory’s Arthurian saga is no exception. First, there is commonly a “good mother” who administers passive maternal guidance; for Malory this is the Lady of the Lake who gives Arthur the sword Caliburn and its magic sheath.<sup>191</sup> Of course, Arthur’s quest would not be complete without the second support, the “wise and knowledgeable elder,” who counters the Mother figure by giving active guidance and advice in endeavours; the “Mother” enables but the old man (“Father”) actually guides.<sup>192</sup> At the start of his life, for Arthur this “Father” is Sir Ector, but once he comes into his role as the heir to England, it is Merlin. The culmination of all of these components makes the frame of the Arthur legend consistently relevant over time, because the archetypes and their symbolism and relevance to the human values and ideals never weakens.<sup>193</sup>

According to Anna Dziedzic, humans psychologically seek out a scenario into which they can project and idealize themselves.<sup>194</sup> Society makes use of this desire as a way to guide and shape citizens to an “ideal” standard- and we see Arthur in both the “perfect politician” and “ideal citizen” as we will discuss later. Regarding the use of archetypes in the Arthurian mythos, Ian Scott-Kilvert has noted that the forms of romantic characters used in order to construct the realm of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, "consist almost entirely of fighting men, their wives or mistresses, with an occasional clerk or an enchanter, a fairy or a fiend, a giant or a dwarf," and also how "time does not work on the heroes of

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<sup>189</sup> David Lindenfeld, "Jungian Archetypes and The Discourse of History", *Rethinking History* 13, no. 2 (2009): 217-234, doi:10.1080/13642520902833833.

<sup>190</sup> Howard, *The Quest Motif in Literature*.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> David Lindenfeld, *Jungian Archetypes and The Discourse of History*

<sup>194</sup> Dziedzic. "Stanisław Brzozowski on the Ideal of the Modern Man."

Malory."<sup>195</sup> The spread of characters there described by Kilvert represent character archetypes and emulated concepts crucial to the popularity of the work both contemporary to its publishing and today. Despite the fact that they are timeless, the story is subject to change for content and its portrayal of certain ideals.

## **Motif and Archetypes in Three Arthurian Cinematographic Pieces**

### The Quest Motif

The Quest underlies all these retellings of the Arthur myths: it is either (or in the case of *Merlin*, both) obtaining the throne, or obtaining the Grail. The Grail itself, an inherent symbol of religion, is intended to a character of true purity/faith.<sup>196</sup> In *The Sword in the Stone*, Arthur is successful his quest by learning to lead via the help of Merlin and ability to claim the sword from the Stone.<sup>197</sup> Arthur's sole goal is fulfilling his prophecy to become ruler— there is no grail quest and religious message. *Monty Python*, on the other hand, focuses mainly on the grail quest as it seeks to satirize the divine.<sup>198</sup> By making a comic figure of virtue and religion, it is a grotesque interpretation of how venerated religion “should” be. The legend of King Arthur worked well to satirize the governmental system. They accomplished this by presenting the King as magically-ordained and absolute in the film, who was juxtaposed in reality by the “divinely-ordained” monarch— a national figurehead who no longer had absolute authority but still possessed a great degree of socio-political influence. Therefore, a satirical production of British national myth aimed to relieve tension and in so doing calm some of the unrest.<sup>199</sup> When reaching the concept of the Quest in *Merlin*, we see

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<sup>195</sup> Scott-Kilvert, Ian. *British Writers*. Charles Scribners's Sons, New York 1979.

<sup>196</sup> Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Book XIII.

<sup>197</sup> Reithernn, *The Sword in the Stone*.

<sup>198</sup> Animated “God” and things such as the “Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch” and also the caravan of monks following Arthur's band.

<sup>199</sup> Dennis Kavanagh, “BBC - History - British History in Depth: Thatcherism and the End of The Post-War Consensus”, Bbc.Co.Uk, 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/thatcherism\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/thatcherism_01.shtml).

that Arthur's lineage is pre-established in the sense that he is a noble from the start, the sword in the stone is a tool which emerges only when Arthur most doubts himself: a reflection of the focus on the self and self-growth in the twenty-first century as opposed to the exaltation and being virtuous and committed to the society.<sup>200</sup> The grail quest in *Merlin* involves a faith of character and purity of heart, as opposed to the religious virtue and purity which is put forth in Malory. This is incredibly prominent because in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, religion is (compared to prior centuries) significantly less important and our society idolizes independence and morality as opposed to religious pureness (chastity, devout observance).

### The Hero Archetype

The Hero is central character to any Quest, and in the case of Arthurian legend, as aforementioned, Arthur is the romantic Hero. This type of hero needs to be an ideal (perfect) figure, to an extent which may or may not be attainable.<sup>201</sup> The specificities of this figure are subject to adaptation depending on who the audience is. Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*'s Arthur is made to be a twelve year old boy; in a children's film he is more relatable for the target audience as such.<sup>202</sup> Jungian theory talks about how children idealize what they observe and internally create a perception of what they should look for in life.<sup>203</sup> In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, which targets adults, we are given an Arthur who is already grown up and established in his authority position as King of the Britons. However, this film is written as a work of adult satire, and uses the archetypes, such as the Hero, to satirize the ideal-ness of the leader figure, whose authority is not harshly opposed but still questioned

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<sup>200</sup> *Merlin*, season 4 episode 12, "The Sword in the Stone".

<sup>201</sup> *Archetypes*, PDF (Hillsborough, FL: Hillsborough Community College), accessed 5 December 2018, <https://www.hccfl.edu/media/724354/archetypesforliteraryanalysis.pdf>.

<sup>202</sup> Wolfgang Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone*, DVD (repr., Burbank, CA.: Walt Disney Studios, 1963).

<sup>203</sup> Jean M. Knox, "Memories, Fantasies, Archetypes: An Exploration of Some Connections Between Cognitive Science and Analytical Psychology", *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 46, no. 4 (2001): 613-635, doi:10.1111/1465-5922.00270. 627.

(especially notable in the scene concerning the French and field workers).<sup>204</sup> In the show *Merlin*, Arthur is in the latter part of his teenage years, and the story is reworked so that the events of Malory's legend are selectively used to emulate a coming-of-age narrative. This version is made to be suitable to both younger and older audiences. It provides the viewers with a more action-adventure storyline and the characters are given more personality and ability for development.<sup>205</sup> The discrepancy in the Arthur's age can be also attributed to his characteristic chivalry and how he learns to lead. In the Disney film, the goal was spinning a children's tale, not indoctrinating virtue; in *Monty Python*, they make fun of a self-righteous ruler; *Merlin* stands to show the true growth of a character as he learns how to lead and behave. *Merlin*'s Arthur is also portrayed as the most "human" because he is given many flaws and changes over time.

### Mother and Father Archetypes

In terms of the Father and Mother figures, we can note very specific differences in the three film/television-based retellings. Arthur's relationship in *The Sword in the Stone* with both his mentor (Ector) and "brother" (Kay) are strained until he proves his birth right, whereas in the original myth they are very supportive throughout- this shows children that parents may not be supportive but that it does not reflect on the child himself.<sup>206</sup> On the other hand, Merlin is very supportive of him and encourages his personal growth.<sup>207</sup> This action shows the medieval scholasticism importance of teachers and formal education for those who must lead (essentially, the upper class) as opposed to the more ancient and even medieval peasantry focus on physical strength over intellect. In short, it shows that those who can educate themselves will become fit to lead, those who do not are fit only to serve. The

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<sup>204</sup> Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones, *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*, film (repr., United Kingdom: BBC, 1975).

<sup>205</sup> "Merlin", TV programme (repr., BBC One: BBC, 2008).

<sup>206</sup> Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone*.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*



*Monty Python* portrayal, Merlin (the Father) is not even present, and the Mother figure of the Lady of the Lake is only referenced by name as giving Arthur Excalibur. We do not see Arthur grow during the film (physically or characteristically) and therefore he does not need guidance other than the quest itself; he is independent, much like the post-WWII generation who came of age in the 70s. Once again, *Merlin* walks the middle line on this where the “family” status of the show allows for viewers to observe the humanized Arthur who is dynamic and grows up alongside Merlin, and his Mother figure (the Lady of the Lake) interacts with him via Merlin. The case of archetypes in the Quest here are very important as formative figures since they enable and/or guide Arthur to reach his goals, either by his own power or by divine intervention, depending on the iteration of the legend.<sup>208</sup>

### **Arthur: The Politician and Ideal Citizen**

Given the undeniable intertwinement between the Arthurian legend and the prevalent and continued use of the quest motif in our modern age, an irrefutable conclusion about Arthur’s existence could have consequences. He has become ingrained in the generic tales of chivalry and the medieval court.<sup>209</sup> Unquestionably, the British monarchy is the governmental body that lies at the epicentre of the Arthurian diffusion. The concept of Arthurian power and divine right has served the formation and evolution of the British monarchy.

One example is King James I of England (James VI of Scotland) was a staunch believer in divine right, and united England and Wales with the Union of the Crowns, as well

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<sup>208</sup> Jung believed in the importance of Mother/Father figures and the individual’s attraction to them– they were integral to the development of a person; a person’s attachment could drastically change their outcome later in life; Jean M. Knox, *Memories, Fantasies, Archetypes: An Exploration of Some Connections Between Cognitive Science and Analytical Psychology*, 625.

<sup>209</sup> As established previously, Arthur is known to have lived earlier than the era what we recognise as medieval court.

as having already brought in Scotland as his own home territory upon his succession.<sup>210</sup> In her article “King Arthur: The Romance of the Past”, Jennifer Doerkson explores how James I may be paralleled to Arthur, and its subsequent effect on his political reputation. James I’s ambition and unification was very much Arthurian and was one point of entrance for Arthur as a national myth of the British; it fulfilled Merlin’s prophecy which had foretold the unification of the British Isles under a returned Arthur. Both James I and King Arthur came from outside England (he was Scottish; Arthur was likely Welsh) and united different demographic territories (James I merged Wales, England, and Scotland into a preliminary United Kingdom, and Arthur attempted to conquer Picts of Scotland and the Saxons in England). Due to these parallels, the national myth and personage of Arthur was overlaid on James I.<sup>211</sup> A second example of how the chivalrous nature of Arthur and his knights influenced the English nation is represented by The Order of the Garter founded by King Edward III of England in 1348 (when the popularity Arthurian romances were on the rise).<sup>212</sup> The order celebrates renowned public servants and still exists to this day, and is headed by the Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II. It includes both military and civilians who have exceptionally served or defended the State.<sup>213</sup>

For ordinary people, the Arthurian story is more applicable to ideals of chivalry and justice. Even in the academic sphere, the term *round-table* for debates or interviews stems from the idea of King Arthur having a table at which all men seated would be equal. Much of the public exposure to the Arthur myth comes via books and media (movies or television programmes), or commonplace perceptions of a glorious King Arthur which are upheld by

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<sup>210</sup> Lockyer, Roger. Tudor and Stuart Britain : 1485-1714. London: Routledge, 2004. Accessed April 14, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central. 281;

"Union of The Crowns", UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/legislativescrutiny/act-of-union-1707/overview/union-of-the-crowns/>.

<sup>211</sup> Jennifer Doerkson, "King Arthur and the Romance of the Past," *ADORANS*, Spring 2015, [http://adorans.org/?article=king-arthur-the-romance-of-the-past#\\_ftnref42](http://adorans.org/?article=king-arthur-the-romance-of-the-past#_ftnref42).

<sup>212</sup> "The Order of The Garter", The Royal Family, <https://www.royal.uk/order-garter>.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*.

the transmutation of Arthur into a medieval character rather than a post-Roman one.<sup>214</sup>

Arthur is a character that has managed to transcend his own time in a way which has been done by religious figures, such as Jesus and his disciples, or other biblical figures.

## Conclusion

A cumulative analysis of the history and discernible fact within the Arthurian legend entails consideration of multiple facets of the story. The historical presence of Arthur is first and foremost. Then, there comes the question of, as a king or whichever form of ruler he was, where he ruled from. Thirdly, there is the question of his death and burial.<sup>215</sup> Over the course of this examination and a stable and thorough analysis aided through the rigorous research and cross-verification of Graham Phillips, all three points have been resolved in the most succinct yet detailed way possible. The real Arthur, as corresponding to the Welsh Annals and their genealogies, is the fifth century Welsh King of Powys, Owain Ddantgwyn. The battle of Camlann likely took place on the river Camlad, a tributary of the Severn river which now lies near to the border of Wales and Shropshire county, England. Lastly, as close to assurance can be had without the ability for a proper excavation: Arthur's grave at Avalon is at the Berth in Baschurch, Shropshire, seventeen miles from Forden (near to the Camlad). With the real-world evidence almost entirely overlaying the legend, it is possible to conclude Arthur is based in history, and by proxy, was real.

Lastly, we conclude on the fate of King Arthur if or when confronted with a definitive conclusion about his existence. In a sense, his historical foundation is inconsequential to the pertinence of his character today as an archetype; as explored in

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<sup>214</sup> Refer to footnote 178 on page 44.

<sup>215</sup> Predetermined conclusions on this notwithstanding, the discovery of a burial plot serves more to seal the analysis than to be crucial, since many "historical" figures are taken as fact even without an exhumed corpse.

chapter two, a King Arthur would have ruled justly and have fought off invaders to try and reconcile the lands, just as our perception of him does. On the contrary, if Arthur is proven to be a true and real figure, it could affect how society today views the history of the British Isles. While his existence would in no way automatically affirm the plethora of stories written about him, it would challenge the way he is seen as the king from the medieval romances, because he would have predated them by more than half a millennium. In addition, discovering any type of corpse would undermine the concept of “legitimacy” instilled to the British monarchy by Edward I, who presided over the reopening of Arthur’s Glastonbury tomb to prove Arthur purely dead and establish himself as the successor.<sup>216</sup> It would likely not have an effect on the ceremonial Order of the Garter nor on the current British monarchy as a government, however, since they are no longer using the Arthurian principle of divine right that James IV/I had.<sup>217</sup> In regards to practicality in the non-governmental sphere, the discovery of a real Arthur, I believe, would most definitely create repercussions and encourage scholars to reconsider the existence and importance of other archetypal figures—especially those who take part in a national myth.

The fact that the collective iterations of the Arthurian myth are based around the characters, with little concrete description of setting or chronology, lends more prominence to those figures within it. These figures, the archetypes which they embody, and the importance of their separate personalities come together in order to create a uniquely individual narrative. At the same time, being archetypes, they are enduring symbols which have synonymized themselves with the names of Arthurian figures, thereby ensuring that even in the presence of minor modification to behaviours of these archetypal characters they are transcendent. Due to the lack of consistency in the Arthurian mythos of antiquity in addition to the lack of fully-fledged characterization of any overwhelming canonical nature

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<sup>216</sup> Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 233

<sup>217</sup> This absolutist way of ruling began to fall out of favour following the Glorious Revolution of Charles I.

(as Malory's version is), the Arthur myth remains memorable, relatable, and relevant to all groups of people regardless of time. The characters are capable of morphing to any desired image as long as they remain with their archetypal position in the story, having served and continuing to serve as national and international symbols, regardless of Arthur's historicity.

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