Pendragon

JOURNAL OF THE PENDRAGON SOCIETY

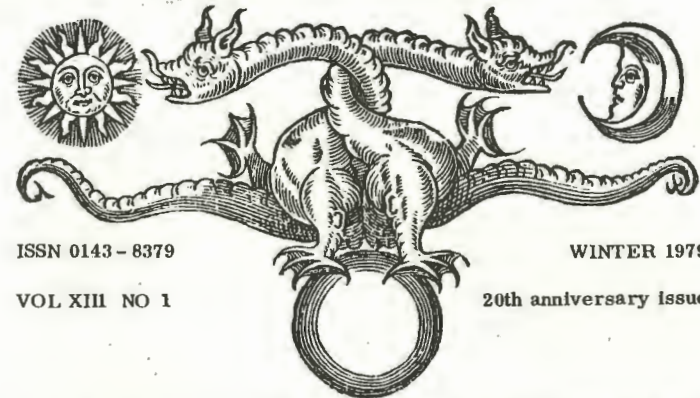The Pendragon Society was originally founded in Winchester in 1959 to study the history and archaeology of the "Matter of Britain" as well as to stimulate interest in King Arthur and his Dark Age contemporaries.

When the Society changed its base to Bristol a new aim was added to allow it to investigate the significance of the Arthurian legends, and more recently to examine other aspects of British mythical and mystical traditions.

IN MEMORY OF JESS FOSTER 1902 - 1979

contents:

This special issue is a collection of essays reflecting some of the diversity of contributors' opinions about the figure of Arthur. The opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Society.

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Richard Hoskins ARTHUR REVISITED

uman nature being what it is, any historical background however small for a folk-hero seems to be heavily obscured by a cloud of legend, myth and downright fairy-tale fantasy. Almost as if there is a kind of literary law which insists that imagination shall expand to fill the gaps. This seems to have been the case with Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, Hereward the Wake and Davy Crockett etc.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the same thing appears to have happened to Arthur and his Knights; not only because so little is known of their true story but because of other factors seeking to use their story, such as the sycophantic Geoffrey of Monmouth, the lineage-conscious Plantagenet Kings, and the fertile imaginations of the troubadours of France and Brittany. The latter built a world of Romance around the story and so disguised it by their own period's tales of chivalry, courtly love and camouflaged images that, in most peoples' minds, truth and fantasy became reversed. Arthur became the hub and his Court the central situation for a mainstream of stories, then his Knights became ancillary tales, each having his own adventures. (All the ingredients were there of what, in our own days, became the hallmarks of numerous TV Westerns. Perhaps Chretien de Troyes should be suitably recognised as the author of the first TV series!)

It is this maelstrom of fact and fantasy which makes it so difficult to unravel the history of Arthur and his merry men. Poor Johnny Seek-for-Truth may grasp a likely looking thread of fact and find eventually that he is climbing along yard after yard of fiction. To differentiate, there seems to be some insistence that we should remember that life was rough and tough in Arthur's day, that there were no knights-in-shining-armour to play by the rules, it was a case of dog-eat-dog and every man for himself. Brett Young

seemed to recognise this difficulty of identification in his poem of Arthur

"Nor pry too deeply, lest you should discover
The bower of Astolat a smoky hut
Of mud and wattle find the knightliest lover
A braggart and his lilymaid a slut
And all that coloured tale a tapestry..."

ARTHUR'S PERIOD

It would be as well to take another look at what little facts we have of the Arthurian legend. These are contained in the writings of Gildas (his De Excidio), Nennius (his Historia Brittonum), two dated facts in the Cambrian Annals (otherwise merely a clerical chronology), some comments by the historian William of Malmesbury (in his Gesta Regum), and early Welsh stories and poems before 1130 (the date of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, and the beginning of the romantic tradition.

Gildas does not mention Arthur, but he refers to Ambrosius Aurelianus of Roman descent who led the initial resistance to the invaders of Britain, with victory coming eventually to the British at the battle of Mount Badon "almost the last but not the least slaughter of these invaders". In a rather obscurely worded Latin sentence Gildas seemed to indicate that it took place in the year of his birth c. AD 500.

The two relevant entries in the Cambrian Annals indicated the battle of Mount Badon as having taken place in 516, and the battle of Camlann in 539 "in which Arthur and Medraut were killed". Since the two passages would have been inserted arbitrarily in their relevant periods and not in the exact year, it is probable that the correct dates would have been just before about 500 and 521 (allowing for the same margin between the two battles).

Nennius, writing about AD 800, gave the most information, commencing with the crucial date of 488 (also confirmed by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). This was the year in which Eric Oisc became King of Kent after the death of Hengist (the chieftain of the band of Saxon mercenaries who spearheaded the main Saxon invasion) and founded the royal line of Oiscingas. Next, without further introduction, and speaking of him as if he were so well known that no-one needed to be told about him, Nennius stated that it was then that Arthur fought against them and implied that he was the British War Leader although he was only a minor noble. He fought twelve battles and was the victor in all of them, ending with the battle at Mount Badon.

Giving the foregoing information, it is possible to put forward certain dates for Arthur. If the date of Mount Badon was 500, and assuming that Arthur was then 35, being at the peak of his career with 12 battles behind him, he was probably born in 465 and 23 years old at the beginning of his career. Then this would logically make him 56 years old at the date of his death at Camlann, when declining physical powers, after a lifetime of war, would have helped to overcome a man who was probably an almost invincible warrior in his prime.

The matter in the early Welsh sources is a jumble of fact and fantasy, some of the knights named obviously being Celtic gods and folk-heroes, which caused William of Malmesbury to exclaim, "It is of this Arthur that the British tell such nonsense even today, a man clearly to be remembered not in fallacious fables but proclaimed in veracious histories, as one who long sustained his tottering country and gave the shattered minds of his fellow-citizens an edge for war". Perhaps it was only fit that the finest epitaph written about Arthur should come from the last unbiased historian to write about him.

The battle of Mount Badon thus represented a highwater mark in Arthur's life and presaged almost a half-century of peace during which history is silent about him. It is into the period then of 500 - 540 that the fictional Romances of the Arthurian theme must be fitted.

ARTHUR'S KNIGHTS

Determining the nature of Arthur's "knights" has always presented a puzzle. That they were not of the heavily armoured type seems almost certain, as it is most unlikely that the stirrup had been brought to Britain by that time. There had always been a history of horsemen of the lightly-armed type since the Roman invasion however and, just before the Roman withdrawal in 410, the greater part of the garrison of Hadrian's Wall had consisted of light cavalry squadrons. It is likely that the knights were of this type.

In early Welsh sources there is a reference to St Illtud returning from the wars to found his monastic establishment at Llantwit. He was referred to as Illtud Farchog (the Knight) and is known to be a cousin of Arthur, their mothers being sisters as both were daughters of Amlott Gulectic. He was much older than Arthur and withdrawing from a soldier's life just as Arthur began his career. It is probable that young men were just as restless in those days, spent all their youth as mercenary soldiers, and became monks or hermits when they became too old for the martial arts and wanted to accumulate credit cards in Heaven. In the immortal words of the Ingoldsby Legends:

"The Devil grew old
And the Devil turned monk
And begged for release from his sins."

It is thus doubtful that Illtud was ever one of Arthur's knights and it is not always possible to decide who was. One of the main clues to such a person would be whether his name could be derived from a recognisable Roman form. The main trio seem always to be mentioned together – Arthur (Artorius), Kei (Caius), and Bedwyr (Bedivarius). Others were Gawain (Walwanus), Edeyrn (Eternus), March Meirchion (Marcus Marcianus), Llacheu (Flaccus), Tegid (Tacitus) etc.

A host of others were introduced by the French troubadours in the Romances in which knights, flinging back long ringlets from their pallid brows, would go madly galloping off into the middle distance until the clashing of their silver carapaces died gradually away into the Forest of Brocéliande as they went off on their adventuring. Of such were Lancelot, Galahad, Percival, Peredur...

THE HOLY GRAIL

Many of these stories seem to have become mediums for other underlying enigmatic tales in which obscure references to such matters as the Old Religion, Celtic mythology, and the Virgin Mary cult are to be found. The greatest one however was the recurrent theme of the Quest of the Holy Grail, a goblet or chalice type of object which had been used at the Last Supper and which had been lost since Joseph of Arimathea had brought it to these islands.

The derivation of the word grail does not seem to be fully known, although it probably came from the Old French word greal. The meaning of the latter is "a flat receptacle or dish" rather than a round goblet and there has obviously been some confusion although both objects have overtones of religious rite.

It is a strange coincidence that there is one object which satisfies many of the queries concerning the Holy Grail. During relevant periods of the Arthurian story (i.e. AD 500 – 525 and AD 1204 – 1350) a sacred object called the "Mandylion" vanished from the sight of men and no one knew what had become of it. During the second period, as became known, it proved to be in the hands of the Knights Templar and, when that order was proscribed and destroyed by order of the French King, it eventually reappeared in the care of the Royal Italian House of Savoy, being known since those days as the Turin Shroud. When it is also considered that it could be represented by a flat communion dish symbolically holding the body of Jesus Christ, may it not perhaps be felt that the Quest for the Holy Grail has at last been successful?

ARTHUR: A SENSE OF PLACE

ROGER DAVIE WEBSTER
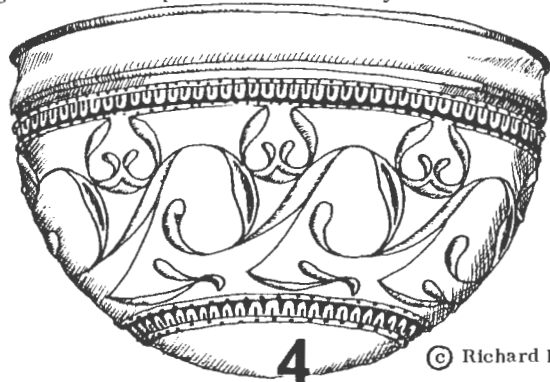
Arthur is an intensely personal demi-god. He is personal because he is wholly and unequivocally British. He was not borne here from a Land to the West, he did not climb out of a spaceship and he did not spring, fully armed, from an earthly magnetic hiccup anywhere near Stonehenge.

He had a mother and a father, a childhood and eventually became the 'Man of the Moment' in the Britons' dark age war with the Saxons. No-one, however laudatory they have been, has ever suggested that he was perfect. Percival was the perfect knight (or fool) but he has never commanded the excitement and interest that has been Arthur's.

Arthur was a human being, he ate, drank, slept, and fornicated. He fought exceptionally well and slew droves of Saxons (940 in a single combat if Nennius is to be believed!). He was a brilliant leader of men and probably invented the kind of cavalry we have seen in Europe, largely unchanged, until the second world war rendered them useless.

But it is not what he was that excites us so much as what he has become. Historically Arthur is but a sketchy character. Centuries separate his life and deeds from the first reliable historical sources that report them. The only recognised contemporary historian ignores him.

Nennius says of him "Then it was that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons and though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander..." Many more noble... This man was not a king, or even particularly high born, yet he has become godlike with the passage of time.

Two reasonably distinct traditions spring from this meagre historical figure. A Celtic tradition, obscure, often of dubious origin, but always secretive and fascinating. And a Romantic tradition which, however it may claim to stem from the former, in fact owes it very little.

ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

The Romantic tradition springs from Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain in which Arthur is born out of Uther Pendragon's adulterous union with Igena, wife of Gorlois the duke of Cornwall. Merlin engineers the adultery by magically making of Uther a likeness to Gorlois. Arthur becomes king upon Uther's death, subdues the Saxons and eventually the whole of Europe. He returns, on the point of taking Rome, when he hears of Mordred's adultery with Guinevere. He fights Mordred and receives a fatal wound at the battle of Camlan.

Between the subjugation of Ireland and the invasion of Europe, Britain under Arthur enjoyed a long period of peace, and it was this part of Geoffrey's story that particularly appealed to the romancers of the mediaeval French court enmeshed, as they were, in the fashions of chivalry and courtly love. This gave rise to the French romances whence came many of the most famous Arthurian legends. The Round Table first appears in a Brut of Maistre Wace where, we are told, it was invented as a means of settling disputes of precedence among Arthur's knights. The Sword in the Stone is to be found in a romance accredited to Robert de Boron at the end of the twelfth century.

The Grail becomes firmly linked with Arthur in the Conte du Graal by Chrétien de Troyes and it is the cup used at the Last Supper in Robert de Boron circa 1190. The Grail is fundamental to Arthur's Christianity despite the fact that he himself does not enter into the quest.

The Grail has its Celtic ancestor in the Cauldron of Plenty and traces of the earlier tradition may be found in the High History of the Holy Grail or Perlesvaus where Gawain is shown the three objects three times and where three drops of blood fall upon the table. There is a clear relationship with the Welsh Triadic tradition and an obvious allusion to Taliesin's three drops of wisdom from the Cauldron of Ceridwen.

The Grail brings us back to Britain and to Glastonbury, probably the site of Britain's first Christian settlement. The story goes that Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail (variously the cup used at the Last Supper or cruets containing the blood of Christ) to Glastonbury not long after the Ascension. He and his companions were granted twelve hides of land by Arviragus, king of the district, upon which they founded the monastic community which later became the Abbey. The Grail is said to have been spirited away from the Abbey shortly before the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 and many believe it to be the cup presently lodged at Nantcos in Wales.

The French Arthurian cycle eventually returned to Britain, most notably in Malory's famous romance. And it is with us still, in the more prosaic and partly digested forms of novels by T H White and Mary Stewart among others.

CELTIC TRADITION

The Celtic Arthurian tradition (mainly Welsh) is fragmentary and disjointed. Oral tradition, such as the Welsh stories of Arthur, are subject to enormous pressures both pecuniary and political. The travelling story-teller may expect to make more of his craft if he can graft his marvels upon the locality in which he finds himself. And if he can press into service some mystery or heroic deed to flatter the local nobility he may expect a greater reward thereby. This might explain why hollow hills containing Arthur and his sleeping warriors are to be found all over the country and why Camelot has been claimed by localities literally the length and breadth of the Kingdom.

Nevertheless these traditions, however diverse geographically, are persistent. Celtic mythology knows little of the Christian Arthur and nothing at all of round tables or swords in stones, but they do tell of Arthur the hero, the focus of Celtic identity in the Dark Ages.

He is said to ride with the Wild Hunt of Gwyn ap Nudd, king of the Celtic underworld. They hunt y Twrch Trwydd, the Wild Boar. The pig was the chief domestic animal of the Celts and as such the pearl of an agrarian culture. Around Pumpsaint, a specially magical area of West Wales, there is, among other marvels, a Waun Cynydd (the Huntsman's Moor) and, over a hill, a Cwm Twrch (the Valley of the Boar).

The Celts will not have it that Arthur is dead. The legends of a Hollow Hill are legion but that of Craig y Dinas is typical: there is a cavern whose entrance lies beneath a hazel tree wherein Arthur sleep with his warriors. In the passage leading to the cavern there is a bell. If it rings the warriors will awake crying "Is it day?", to which the stealthy visitor must reply "No, sleepest thou on". In the midst of the warriors lie a pile of gold and a pile of silver. The visitor must take from only one pile. One day the bell will ring to summon Arthur to lead the warriors of Wales to a great victory.

A Cornish tradition has it that Arthur, like Brân the Blessed, lives on in the form of a raven. On the other side of Cwm Twrch from Waun Cynydd near Pumpsaint lies Cefn Branddu (the ridge of the Black Raven). Ravens still haunt its craggy heights. And at the Tower of London, the White Tower, the raven is yet all but a sacred bird.

ARTHURIAN REALITY

Near Sparkford in Somerset there lies a fortified hill called South Cadbury Castle. If there ever was a Camelot (setting aside the fact that the name is twelfth century and French) then it was here. The excavations (1966-70) directed by Leslie Alcock showed the hill to have been occupied in the Neolithic period and fortified extensively in the Iron Age. The defenses were partially destroyed during the Roman occupation but it was refortified in the Arthurian period. Its size and position in relation to the contemporary Saxon occupation make it the only serious contender for the site of Arthur's Camelot.

There were, however, no knights in shining armour, no plumed helms, no ladies in flowing gowns. The real Camelot was filled with rough hardened soldiers who rode, not mighty chargers, but the infinitely cleverer, more adaptable native ponies we still have today. The ramparts were not stone but earth and rubble and topped, not with turrets and fluttering banners, but a crude wooden pallisade.

Between Cadbury and Glastonbury lie the Somerset levels. These marshlands in the Dark Ages would often have been covered with shallow water. Out of these waters, their outlines blurred by clinging veils of mist, rose the higher ground of Glastonbury and the Tor. It is difficult to imagine that the Celts' sacred Isle of Avalon could have been anywhere else. Close to Arthur's fortress, site of the first Christian settlement, a ley centre of importance, Glastonbury is a heart that beats at the very centre of the Arthurian mystery.

The Somerset Levels in the late ROMAN Period.

Of Arthur's death we know little. The Celtic tradition will not accept that he is dead. In the Stanzas of the Graves (a list of the burials of the great and not-so-great Celtic heroes, in the Black Book of Carmarthen) we find "A mystery to the world the grave of Arthur" or "Not wise the thought, a grave for Arthur". The monks of Glastonbury in the twelfth century claimed to have found a grave in the Abbey precincts containing the bodies of Arthur and Guinevere and a leaden cross inscribed HIC IACET INCLITVS REX ARTVRIVS IN INSVLA AVALLONIA SEPVLTVS (Here lies the famous King Arthur buried in the Isle of Avalon). Unfortunately, although sketches of it remain, the cross has disappeared.

THE MEMORY OF ARTHUR

I believe that the particular importance of Arthur lies in the fact that he fixes Time and Place. His deeds and legends are rooted in places like Glastonbury and Cadbury at a time when Celtic mysticism fused briefly with the strengthening Christianity. The old Celtic religion suggests an intense maternal relationship with the earth, a sense of raw power and an acceptance of death and rebirth, characteristic of the corn rituals, so deep it can barely have been conscious.

So deep must these beliefs have run that the paternal, highly intellectual faith of Christianity could have overlaid them without ever materially disturbing their roots. There is a persistent sense that something remarkable happened in the Dark Ages. Perhaps the blend of Celtic ritual and Christianity allowed, just for a moment, the glimpse of an integrated mystical experience, a flash of comprehension combining earth and spirit that has never been repeated. And perhaps some half buried race memory within us harks back to that place and that time.

Arthur is the focus of that time and he fixes it irrevocably in space. It is here in Britain, and maybe, if we do not try too hard, we could believe that one day he will return and bring with him something we have lost.

Sir Edmund Chambers said in 1927 in the closing line of Arthur of Britain (accountably the best work of reference yet written concerning Arthur) "But the flames which once burnt around the memory of Arthur have long ago sunk into grey ashes. He wakes no national passions now." I am sure he would be delighted to know how wrong he was.

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village
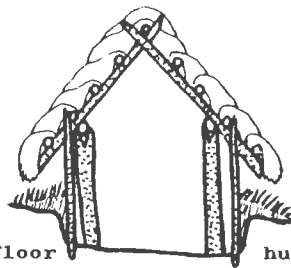## SUFFOLK
SUSAN FOSTER

The site of the village was excavated by Stanley West between 1965 and 1972.

It was first occupied by Mesolithic hunters who dropped flint tools but who built no huts.
In Neolithic times it was used as a burial ground. A round barrow was constructed which covered a crouched burial and forty-nine un-urned cremations.

Sunken-floor   hut

The halls were 35 ft long and 15 ft wide although all that remained were the holes that contained the timber uprights. The huts were 12 ft by 9 ft and were built over pits that acted as cellars. Some, at least, were covered by floorboards, not as originally thought.

Iron Age farmers later dug numerous ditches, some of which encircled their round huts.
They were succeeded by a community of Romano-British potters. Five kilns of this period were excavated.
The Anglo-Saxon settlers arrived from Holland and north Germany before the end of the Roman occupation, probably 380-400 AD.
In the early 7th century the inhabitants moved to near the present church a mile to the east, and this may possibly have been a sacred spot in early Christian times. The site of the pagan village was abandoned; it was then ploughed until the 13th century and then reverted to heath.

The Anglo-Saxon village occupied a sandy knoll on the north bank of the River Lark, ¾ of a mile away from the Icknield Way. It extended over five acres and consisted of thatched timber buildings - seven halls and sixty-eight huts. Three halls were probably in use at any one time with five subsidiary huts. The hall seems to have been the communal eating place of the family group and the sleeping quarters of the unmarried men. Arable and pastoral farming was practised. In addition deer and wildfowl were hunted on the Breckland and fish, including salmon, were caught in the Lark.

6th-7th century tombstone from near Bonn. Note comb, sword and flask!

The cemetary lay ¼ of a mile from the village. It was excavated in the 1840s. The dead were buried with their possessions, the women with jewellery and the men with their weapons. Some relics are shown at the museum in Bury St Edmunds, others at Oxford, Cambridge and the British Museum.

Dixon, pp 54, 55, 57-60.

KING ARTHUR of WIGAN
SID BIRCHBY

After Wigan, the traveller between Mersey and Ribble enters a curious land. For a time, the road to the West continues sedately, perhaps 250 feet above sea level, rising to twice as much on the ridges of Parbold and Upholland. Once past Ormskirk, whose long wide street crammed with market-stalls is an unspoilt gem of the Fylde, the land drops away to both sides, and he sees that he is following an ancient peninsula into a vanished sea. The most dramatic vista is at Sunset, looking into the West. Nine miles away is the present coastline at Formby. To either side is the long dune-shore between Liverpool and Preston Port; a land not much more than 10 feet above the Irish Sea where spring tides drive salt water into farmers' wells. Surely no one would bother to cultivate such land?

Yet the soil, though light and sandy, has a cover of peat in many places, and can be very fertile. They say at Formby that the first English potatoes were grown by a local man who had been one of Raleigh's sailors, and it is fair to say that the Fylde (a name which seems to mean a place cleared for agriculture) is the market-garden of Lancashire. Its potatoes are delicious!

According to a local topographer (Ashton) the Fylde is the balance-point for the Western coastline. To the South, the land has gradually sunk since the last Ice Age, and from Cornwall to the Dee there are legends and sometimes visible proof of drowned lands or forests. To the North, especially beyond the Solway Firth, we find raised beaches, showing that the other end of a geological seesaw has been at work.
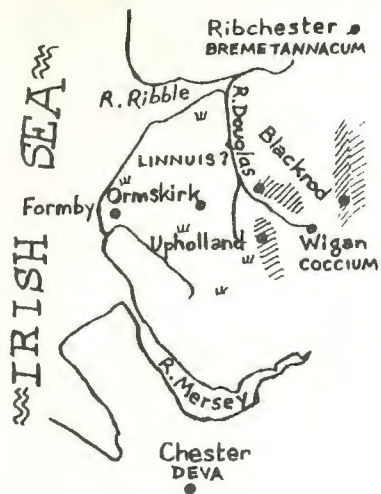

DARK AGE FYLDE

To the Dark Age traveller, the view from Ormskirk was as eerie as Sedgemoor. In a waterlogged maze of peat-hags a few marsh-men, racked with malaria and rheumatism, scratched a living from wildfowl and fish. By night the dancing flame of Jack o' Lantern over the marshes. In a brooding landscape, tales of the Celts who had once owned it from Anglesey to Strathclyde came to mind. To this day we can see the ghosts. Ormskirk is the church of some Northerner called Orm. Wigan is Anglo-Saxon for the Place of Battles. The river Douglas at Wigan is the Black Stream, coloured by peat, or in Celtic, dubglas. Phantoms of old conflicts glimmer like marsh-fire above the lost sea-verges of the Fylde.

Hauntings arouse dead passions, and the tradition of fights between Northmen and Celts has lingered for a thousand years. In 1714, the prophecies of Robert Nixon, the Cheshire Seer, referred to invasions by the Black Fleet: that is to say, by Danish invaders whose ships had black sails, whereas the Norse ships had white ones.

John Whittaker's History of Lancashire (1771) is a mixture of fact, hearsay and conjecture which is usually disregarded by historians. However, it contains material which seems to be derived from contemporary folk-belief and which is supportable. We read that King Arthur fought three battles between Wigan and a nearby ridge called Blackrod. A later commentary (Anon, post-1894) says that one battle was at a barrow called Hasty Knoll (destroyed 1770) and that in 1735, when a canal was cut at Wigan, about 6 cwt of horse-shoes was found. Many more were found near Wigan in 1741. Unfortunately, none seem to have survived.

Perhaps it doesn't matter. The earliest reference to horse-shoes is a C9 list of Roman cavalry equipment, well after Arthur's period. The Romans in Britain did not usually shoe their horses because they thought that their roads made it un-necessary. Sometimes they tied a plate to a damaged hoof, but a horseman was expected to lead his mount if the going was tough, or else ride a mule, whose hooves were harder.

But suppose Whittaker was right ? Nennius, writing ca 822, said that Arthur won four battles "on the river Dubglas in the region Linnuis", and at Wigan is the R Douglas. Moreover the name Linnuis may derive from Early Welsh lynn wy, meaning "marshy water". If so, it might well refer to the marshy region already mentioned.

Ribchester
BREMETANNACUM

R. Ribble

IRISH SEA

Formby

LINNUIS?

Ormskirk

Upholland

Wigan
COCCIUM

R. Douglas

Blackrod

R. Mersey

Chester
DEVA

WARGAMES

The Wigan-Ormskirk peninsula in Arthur's day was a natural defensive position and the ideal place to confront invaders. Let us, for a moment, play a war-game: assuming that Arthur's base was at Cadbury, how did he wage his campaigns? Cadbury Hill is not the easiest place to assemble troops and supplies, even for a modern archaeological dig. Wanted: a staging area with good communications. For the purpose of the game, consider Caerleon, former City of the Legions and still in fair condition in 500 AD. Ample food, water and barracks. Linked to Cadbury via the Fosse Way and the North by Stone Street, passing Wroxeter, Mancunium, Ribchester, Coccium and all points to the Roman Wall. Coccium, by the way, is Wigan.

This wargame assumes, then, that most of the old Roman roads were still passable and a major asset for mounting commando raids. Given this and enough changes of mount, a horseman could have reached York in 3 days from Caerleon, Hadrian's Wall in 4, and

Edinburgh in 5. Theoretically a raid from Cadbury to the Forth could be mounted in a week. There is no logistic reason to doubt the traditions that Arthur's campaign went as far North as Edinburgh, which is close to the other Roman wall built by Hadrian's successor, Antonine. If, that is, the key to Arthur's strategy is the Roman road network.

Any wargame played on such assumptions keeps coming up with the same perplexing answers: Manchester and Wigan were key-points. Anything less interesting than Roman Manchester, said Nicolaus Pevsner, is impossible. It consists of a piece of stone wall preserved under a railway arch in a timber-yard. However, times have changed and every season brings new discoveries. The fort of Roman Manchester had a vicus or civil community outside the walls where, amongst other activities, blacksmiths had their hearths and weapons were forged.It seems that Mancunium was a strategic base (it certainly had its own Mithraic temple) between Chester and Ribchester. An obscure street in modern Manchester is called Watling Street. Flanked by Victorian warehouses occupied by Pakistani drapers, it has little appeal, but there was a military road thereabouts and this may be it.

Whittaker tells other legends about the Wigan area. Under Marton Mere, now mostly drained and given over to potatoes, lies Merlin, and from it Lancelot takes his name of du Lac, because that is where the water-sprite kidnapped him. Who knows? Whittaker, when he wrote his book, probably collected all the folklore he could find. He may have accepted it uncritically, but he did record it, and we are in his debt. He was the first to say in print that Arthur fought battles near Wigan, and perhaps we should be cautious of laughing at him.

© S L Birchby, September 1979.

THE DEATH OF ARTHUR

Chris Lovegrove

The best-known work of the Matter of Britain is entitled Le Morte D'Arthur. Malory's book has the inexorable momentum of a Greek tragedy, as befits the subject of this work of fiction, but in fact we can take nothing for granted when we examine the earliest evidence for his death.

"539: the strife of Camlann in which Arthur & Medraut perished..."
So runs an entry in the early Welsh Annals, though scholarship suggests that the date should have been calculated as 511. Traditionally Mordred is the treacherous nephew of Arthur. But this terse entry suggests no such thing; rather the reverse, that Arthur and Medraut fought on the same side.

More doubts come with Camlann itself. Romantics place it in Cornwall (by Slaughterbridge on the River Camel) or near the Somerset river Cam. Historians prefer Camboglanna (the Roman fort Birdoswald on Hadrian's Wall). Philologists postulate Cambolanda or "crooked enclosure" (Alcock 1971 p 67); unfortunately they don't attempt to locate it.

With such will-o'-the-wisp documented facts we could well start to believe the statement from the Welsh Stanzas of the Graves , "A mystery till doomsday, the grave of Arthur".

MEMORIALS

Let's examine a different kind of evidence. In the fifth to seventh centuries a certain type of engraved stone was in common use; in Wales we have evidence for about 140, in North Britain perhaps a dozen and in the South-West about 40. These have inscriptions on them which show they were mostly set up as tombstones or memorials, and mention ordinary and professional people, priests and rulers. If we could find a pillar-stone or slab marked with Arthur's name we might begin to unravel this mystery.
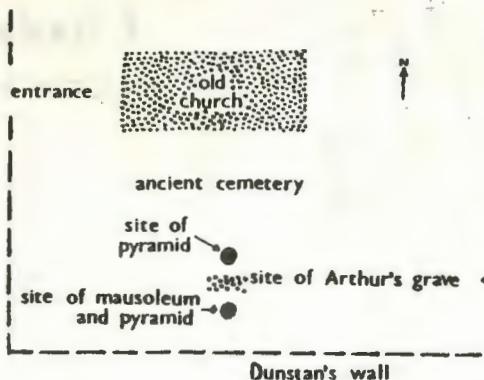
What could we expect to find? ARTVRI "(The stone or memorial) of Arturius" perhaps, maybe with a filiation FILI... "Son of...", or a title such as REX "King". A more common formula

is HIC IACIT "Here lies", less often some phrase like HIC IN TVMVLO IACIT "Here entombed lies". Thus a likely contemporary inscription for Arthur's gravestone (if he ever had one) would be   HIC IACIT ARTVRIVS REX.

If, however, a memorial was raised some years after his death but before the Saxons arrived at Glastonbury in the 7th century an inscription reading something like this would be likely:

HIC SEPVLTVS IACIT ARTVRIVS INCLITVS REX (Here buried lies Arthur the famous king). The use of the word INCLITVS should not surprise us. A 7th century Welsh king, Cadfan, was called OPINATISIMVS OMNIVM REGVM (most renowned of all kings) on a stone inscription mere decades after his death.

entrance | old church

ancient cemetery

site of pyramid

site of Arthur's grave

site of mausoleum and pyramid

Dunstan's wall

28ft   26ft

grave 50ft from church

wall

10th cent

6th 7th

stone

lead cross

oak trunk

Arthurus   Wenneveria

GLASTONBURY

Where should we begin looking for such a stone? The early 12th century Geoffrey of Monmouth placed "Cambula" in Cornwall, where the "famous" (inclytus) Arthur was "wounded to death" and from where he was carried "for the healing of his wounds to the island of Avallon". Nobody knows where this Avallon was. It seems to have been a kind of Celtic limbo, associated with apples (aval), though the etymology is very contentious. But in the 12th century the monks of Glastonbury Abbey knew where to find the body, and because of excavations in the 1960s we know at least where they looked (Ashe 1968 pp 119-138).

The reconstructed sequence of events seems to have been this. Before the 7th century the bodies of a gigantic man and of a blonde woman were buried in the ancient cemetary of the Celtic monastery of Ynyswitrin (maybe meaning the island of an unknown St Witrin). They were buried in an area later located as being between two "pyramids" or pillar-stones respectively about forty and fifty-five feet south of the Old Church. They were placed not in the usual slab-lined graves but in a hollowed-out oak trunk. At this stage, perhaps, a memorial stone was laid to mark out the grave, and there the matter seems to have rested until the time of St Dunstan in the middle of the 10th century.

Dunstan revived a dying British monasticism at Glastonbury after a break of about 50 years. He raised the level of the ancient cemetary south of the Old Church, forming a sloping terrace bounded on the south by a wall. Before the tomb between the two pyramids was covered over a lead cross was placed above it; its inscription was turned upwards towards a covering stone (the original memorial?) to which it was fastened.
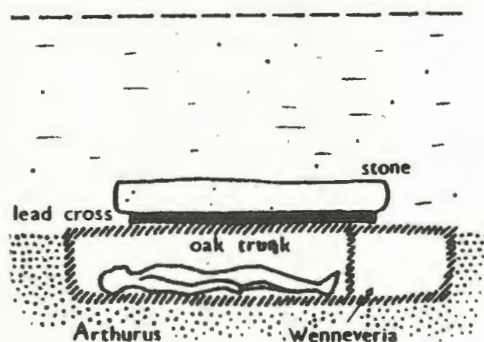
Two centuries later, in 1184, the Benedictine abbey was mostly destroyed by fire, including the Old Church about which so many legends were beginning to accumulate. This was a disastrous age for fires (Westminster Abbey in 1174, Chartres Cathedral in 1194) but for Glastonbury the loss was especially distressing. For a variety of reasons - economics, politics, and curiosity - the monks decided to exhume the body of Arthur.

The site was known from Abbey records, from inscriptions on the pyramids, from religious visions and revelations, and from information given to the late king Henry II by an old British singer. It was left for archaeological excavation to confirm the evidence from documentary, psychic and oral sources that the body lay 16 feet deep (an overestimation surely?) enclosed not in stone but in an oak coffin.

Before the coffin was reached, Dunstan's lead cross proclaimed what he knew of the Arthurian tradition, correcting the Latin and adding details that Geoffrey of Monmouth was to pick up two centuries later: HIC IACET SEPVLTVS (Here lies buried) INCLITVS (the famous) REX ARTVR-IVS (King Arthur) IN INSVLA AVALONIA (in the island of Avalon). One eyewitness account adds CVM WENNEVERIA VXORE SVA SECVNDA (with Guenevere his second wife) but he may have read or misread this from an inscription on the pyramids.

Seventeenth century engraving of a cross, since lost, said to have been found in Arthur's grave. From Camden's Britannia.

RESURRECTION

While Glastonbury may have retained its knowledge of Arthur's burial for over 600 years, different accounts of the end of Arthur began to circulate from other parts of Britain and especially from expatriates in what is now Brittany. Like Frederick Barbarossa of Germany (d 1190), Harold of Saxon England (d 1066) and the Moslem Muhammad al-Mahdi (d 880) the sudden passing of a hero left his followers convinced of his imminent return, as in the days after the Ascension of Christ. Some influence was no doubt exerted by the pattern of annual renewal in agriculture, familiar to us from the survival of mummers plays and the superimposed cycle of the Church's calendar.

When it was evident the second coming was not going to be speedy, the disappearance was commuted to suspended animation. It aroused the nationalist passions of the Welsh, Cornish and Bretons in the 12th century, making it politically necessary for the Plantagenets to exhume Arthur. But the sleeping king continued to sleep, and later generations were motivated instead by greed; in folklore pecuniary success was ensured by knowledge of the correct ritual when plundering Arthur's resting-place. Wherever it was.

Yet, even now, mystery surrounds his grave, as prophesied in the Stanzas. Arthur's reputed bones were scattered at the Dissolution of the Abbeys in the 16th century, the lead cross itself disappeared in the 18th century, and in the late 1970s we are still awaiting the full archaeological report of the excavations carried out in the early 1960s on the site of the grave.

Sceptics are thus able to argue, from this real lack of evidence, that the historical Arthur never existed and that his life, like his death, is merely so much fairy-tale. The tragedy is that, even if we were to find a stone inscribed "Here lies Arthur" in the correct fashion, in the vicinity of Glastonbury, it would have as much credibility as a slogan proclaiming Kilroy's alleged ubiquity.

ARTHUR & ALFRED
by TIM PORTER
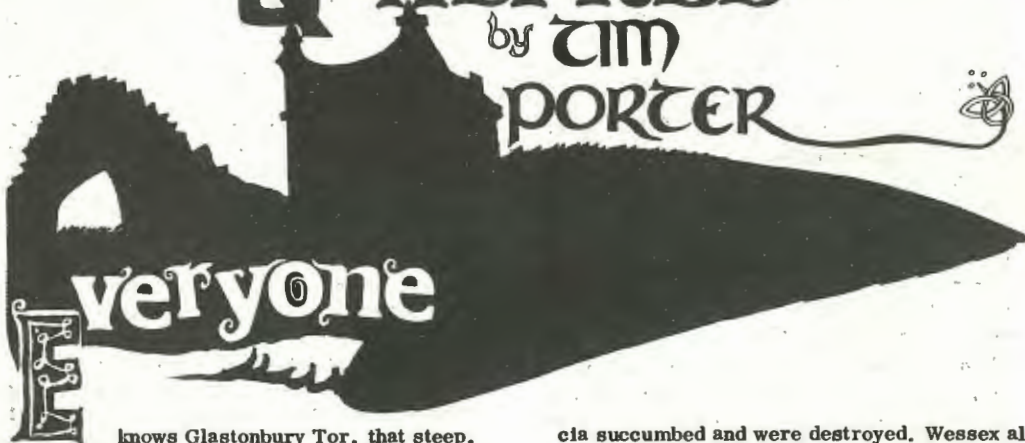
Everyone knows Glastonbury Tor, that steep, solitary hill with its tower to which the eye is irresistibly led. Fewer people know Burrow Mump. It too is a solitary hill; it too has a ruined tower, and dominates the surrounding flat lands, drawing the eye in just the same manner. But the intervening Polden Hills preclude any direct line of sight between it and Glastonbury. If there is a hill which the Tor faces, that hill is Cadbury; Avalon and Camelot are the poles of the Arthurian landscape, clearly associated one with another. This is the much-examined, much-discussed landscape of Avalon, the Abbey, the Holy Thorn, the Zodiac. But beyond the Polden Hills is Alfred's landscape, lesser known and quite separate, and presided over by Burrow Mump, one-time beacon hill to the Isle of Athelney.

It was to this place that King Alfred withdrew at Easter in the year 878, to emerge seven weeks later and fight an astonishing battle which decisively turned the tide of history.

The preceding decades had brought mounting terror. The light of Christian civilisation had been all but extinguished by the "Great Army" or the Host, a vast and locust-like swarm of heathen fighting men which was ravaging western Europe virtually unchecked. England had watched its approach with trepidation. In 865 the Host landed on the east coast. One by one, the Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and Mer-cia succumbed and were destroyed. Wessex alone put up any sort of fight.

The best army any Saxon kingdom could put into the field was an amateur one, composed mainly of farmers and peasants taking time off from their work; the Host was a body of hardened men who did nothing but fight - totally ruthless, totally professional, living entirely off plunder, so totally destructive as well. However, when this fearsome and hitherto undefeated horde descended on Wessex for the first time, the Saxon amateurs handled it roughly. During this hard-fought and inconclusive campaign of 871, King Alfred came to the throne. He had not been trained for the kingship. He had four elder brothers but all had died in turn, three of them as kings. Alfred was not much more than twenty. He was the only adult male left of the direct line of Cerdic. It was a very precarious moment for the kingdom of Wessex.

The Host had received a bloody nose, and there were richer pickings elsewhere. So Wessex was left alone for some years, though the Host was always hovering, awaiting its chance. At the end of 877 the moment arrived, at Christmas, when the Saxon levies were dispersed. The surprise attack took Alfred completely unawares. It was at this juncture that he was forced to take refuge in the Somerset lowlands.

This part of England was at that time covered by marsh and dense alder forest. Athelney could be approached only by secret paths. At Easter, Alfred established himself there, and sent word to all parts of Wessex that the levies were to assemble at Egbert's Stone (a little to the east of Mere in Wiltshire) on a certain day in May. In a supreme act of faith he made his way there on the appointed day with his own small contingent. Fortunately the other contingents showed up as well. Two days later, at the Battle of Ethandun (thought to have been fought on the downs between Westbury and Warminster) the heathen Host were utterly defeated.

PATTERNS

It is strange how actual history seems to shape itself into a mythic pattern. It is no surprise to find that Alfred's defeat and disappearance occur at Midwinter; he is in the wilderness during Lent, suffering the shame of humiliation (this latter illustrated by the hackneyed but by no means irrelevant fable of the cakes); his reappearance on Athelney is at Easter, and his full return in glory before all the people at Whitsuntide. So, though all was apparently lost, the anointed king who had seemed to die in the winter returned to life with the summer. It is a story as old as human thought.

Alfred put himself forward as the champion of Britain, not just of Wessex. The princes of Wales voluntarily submitted to him, and when he and his descendants reconquered the rest of England from the Danes there was no question of re-establishing the old separate kingdoms; the House of Wessex had won the right to provide the kings of all England. His court welcomed men from all over the island (two of his chief advisers were a Mercian and a Welshman).

One is tempted to wonder whether Alfred was, up to a point, acting out a part. He must have known of Arthur, that earlier champion of Britain, who had organised the Celtic resistance when the Saxons had been the heathen invaders. The climactic battle of those times, Badon Hill, was as distant to Alfred as the Gunpowder Plot is to us, but the very survival of the tradition shows that the Saxons must have honoured the memory of their valiant opponent (a recognisable English characteristic).

THE END OF THE DARK AGES

The parallels between Arthur and Alfred are remarkable, even if most of them seem at first glance to be co-incidental. Even the sites of two famous victories, Arthur's at Badon and Alfred's at Ashdown, seem to be within a few miles of one another on the Ridgeway. As far as one can tell, there seem to be striking tactical similarities between Badon and Ethandun also. The parallels persist even if we examine the more apocryphal Arthurian traditions. Both kings came to the throne unexpectedly, both fought beneath the dragon standard, both had rebellious nephews who tried to seize the throne (though the revolt of Alfred's nephew Ethelwold was crushed before it could do much damage).

But the most crucial parallel of all concerns the disappearance of the king. After the catastrophe, Arthur was taken to Avalon, there to be healed of his wounds, with the promise that one day he would return and save his people. Alfred also vanished to his own similar, though separate, place. But he became the king in the greenwood. Not surprisingly, this is the part of his career which has inspired folklore. The fable of the cakes, and the tale of how he went into the Host's encampment disguised as a minstrel, both have a definite flavour of Robin Hood. It is also significant that Alfred's disappearance was into that part of Britain which seems to have been a great centre not only of Christianity but also of the old religion. The one known historical event from those months seems to have a bearing on this. A Saxon skirmishing party captured the Host's raven standard and carried it back to the alderwoods - surely the symbol of the Old Faith may be read into this!.

Whatever happened to Alfred in these months, he returned like a man reborn.

Was he perhaps saying in his own way, "When this happened before, Celt stood alone and lost; this time Celt and Saxon stand together and win. Christianity and the Old Faith also stand together and win. Arthur went away but never returned. I have put another ending on that unhappy event 400 years ago, and so brought it out right."

I'm not, of course, suggesting that Alfred set the situation up; it set itself up, as situations do. But I am suggesting that he may have seen what was happening, and perceived what his own role had to be, and that this may have given him strength and shown him what to do. At all events, Ethandun marked the end of the Dark Age as decisively as Camlann marked its beginning.

THE COMPLETE HERO

The tales of Arthur appeal particularly to the Celt in us; the down-to-earth Saxon responds more to Robin Hood. King Alfred suffers by comparison for the simple reason that we know too much about him. From the Chronicles and from Bishop Asser's Life we know that he suffered constant ill-health, that he instituted legal and educational reforms, that he invented a candle clock, that he did not win all his battles. His actual voice speaks to us through the books he translated. Arthur and Robin Hood, though doubtless originally just as real, are shrouded in the romance of Celtic mist and greenwood leaves.

Yet Alfred, when seen as a mythic figure, combines their attributes; he is the Divine King, the man in the woods, the Champion of Britain, the friend of the poor, all in one - a very complete British hero.

KING ARTHUR IN *THE STONE AGE*

RICK PLEWES

Looking at the myths of countries other than Britain it is easy to see how folk tales incorporate original historical facts. Schliemann discovering Troy just where Homer said it would be. Cretan tales of Daedalus, the great bronze technocrat, are to the point, but what is the significance of the British myths in this respect?

The trouble with believing in a Dark Age Arthur is two-fold. None of the contemporary references produce a justifiably gigantic figure (Gildas doesn't mention him at all) and yet by 1300 Arthur is not just a hero, but the central hero around whom all others flutter like moths round a candle, and not just in Britain but all over Continental Europe too. And, at a time when Europe looked culturally toward Rome and Greece, how can it be that a major cult figure, and an anti-Roman at that, could arise in the backward Western Isles where a series of invasions, Romans, Saxons, Danes, Normans, are constantly breaking up the continuity of the culture and language? Had Arthur really been a response to these invasions then he would have been more clearly painted as the killer of invaders.

But examination of the adventures of his knights paints the opposite picture. The tyrants which those heroes went out to destroy are old established tyrants. They live in castles and have been indulging in the evil ways for years and years. They seldom arrive in King Arthur's territory; the knights arrive after much travelling in the tyrants' territory.

THE METAL REVOLUTION

Let's begin by going back to the Ice Age. Then much of the sea was locked up in ice all over the Northern part of Europe and America. The last Ice Age ended about 8 - 10,000 years ago. When it ended all those glaciers melting raised the water level in the sea, which had been fairly static for 2,000,000 years before that. So there was the flood (not necessarily a sudden one). And as a result all those Old Stone Age people that had been living on what is now called the continental shelf had to move upward and populate the newly released territories in Northern Europe.

As they did so they would be moving into a barren and scarred landscape where the vegetation had hardly yet had time to form. All the rocks were exposed. Some of these rocks glittered. Man, already used to fire and using stone, soon found that some of these rocks melted. Starting with metals with the lowest melting point and moving upward as his techniques developed men first made metal objects which were pretty rather than useful. Hardness could only be achieved with the higher melting points. Without the constant feedback of usefulness the metal revolution gathered speed slowly.

At the point where bronze was discovered a great speed-up occurred because here was a metal which gave you better tools and weapons, making the whole of society more efficient and producing the spare time to spend looking for metals, mining them, defending them from other races and so on. It has recently been shown that the Bronze Age did not arise around the Mediterranean but up by the Danube where metal-working (gold first) arose within a thousand years of the melting of the glaciers.

CONTINUITY OF MYTH

We can imagine that, at first, tribal hunting expeditions would explore further and further north each year following the migrating herds, who in turn were following the possibility of a fresh bite of grass. The magical discovery of valleys exposed for the first time since the ice came, ground away by the glaciers till all the strata clearly showed, must have been pschedelic to those stone age warriors.

Of all the events in the history of man, certain stick out as being prime targets for mythmaking. One is the flood which occurred as the glaciers melted and drowned all the lower lands. Can I find a quotation from our myth which actually tells of that time? The Mabinogion, which is taken from the Red Book of Hergest, is one of the main sources of material which is untainted by superstitious Christian additions or other interruptions. It represents the best glimpse we shall get of the oral tradition as it stood when it was first written down. I quote from Branwen Daughter of Llyr (Penguin ed p 75):

"Bran and the host we spoke of set sail for Ireland, and since the sea was not deep he waded through. At that time there were only two rivers – Lli and Archan – but thereafter the sea widened and overflowed the kingdoms."

The next passage is slightly garbled and tells I believe of people seeing forests under the sea (a sight which is geologically justifiable). There is the evidence as plain as language can make it, that our own British myth actually has a continuity of at least ten thousand years. Here I wish only to show that it is not unlikely or unreasonable that we should have a myth somewhere about the discovery of bronze. This myth would be common to most of Europe since it is unlikely that within the space of this continent bronze need have been discovered more than once.

Dorset Bronze Dagger Blade
1500 B.C.
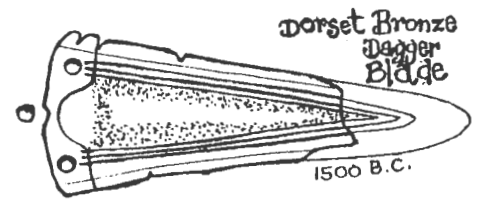
THE SWORD IN THE STONE

Well there is only one man credited with drawing a sword out of a stone. How is it that such a silly act, magical though it may be, can be so instantly recognised by all around as the definitive proof of kingship? One would think that Merlin's magical powers would enable him to do at least as much and yet he is no contester for the throne. The act can only be symbolic, an image which we are blind to because of our different speech habits. To draw a sword from a stone is to smelt. Arthur is the technocrat who started the Bronze Age ball rolling.

Actually the amount of confusion which exists in the sources does not make it clear who was the inventor. In Branwen there is a passage which

occurs before the last one quoted, which is quite distinctly refers to the smelting of iron. Now I think that in fact the later tellers of the tale have substituted iron for bronze because, like the later Christians who made Arthur into a Christian, they interpreted the material before them in terms they understood. The geological strata of myths which have been piled one on top of the other, compressed and petrified, also have other intrusions and seams of later material which have to be identified for what they are. An original statement about how the iron lives in a house and could only be forced out by making it white hot with charcoal and bellows has then been mistaken for a reference to a pair of unpleasant ogre-like characters. Iron has also crept in to replace the metals required for bronze. Now bronze does require two metals, hence the reference to two characters in the house. The confusion arises from the later tellers who were used to iron, being perhaps unaware that the metal referred to was an alloy of tin and copper. However, the myth returns to total clarity at the end as the King of Ireland and the King of Britain compare notes about their visits from these two strangers, and agree that after the visit their men were armed better than ever before.

Meanwhile there is reference in the story to the confusion and unpleasantness caused by their initial arrival. It is not hard to imagine that the introduction of a new technology would have such an effect. Shades of Luddism. Unemployment and the abandonment of old skills while the younger generation learns the new ones and disregards the advice of outdated elders.

Given the possibility that Arthur existed right at the beginning of the Bronze Age (and remember that technology would have spread far slower then than now) he would have been a stone age man, by no means the last, living in what the Archaeologists would term Neolithic times. Gold or copper objects would not begin to be lost and buried for archaeologists to find until long after their initial use. For one thing I do not believe that people bury their dead with valuable things until the value has come down to replaceability level. For a second I think that new technology provokes superstition (touch wood) and therefore the last thing anyone would do would be to send a man off to the happy hunting ground with an object that might be offensive to the Lords thereof. Therefore if the archaeologists say that bronze was in common use by a certain age, we can be sure that the invention of bronze was anything up to a millenium before that.
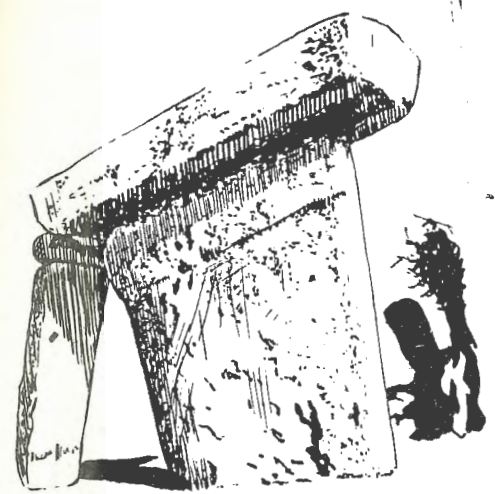
Cadfan Stone 7th.C.

THE ROUND TABLE

Geoffrey of Monmouth, labelled by an idiotic priest as the Father of Lies, in fact is a very fine historian, in the sense that he recorded what was available to him which is more than some respected scholars did. If he added a bit here and there it doesn't matter because with the knowledge available now we can quickly establish the truth. The fact is that the good Geoffrey recorded that Merlin built Stonehenge for King Arthur. And he said that at a time before geology had been invented. And he stated that the stones had to be brought from Ireland. Well, geology has now established that this was correct. There are only two places in Britain that the bluestones can come from; one is Prescelly (Pres coeli = Brass heaven) and the other is the corresponding bit of Ireland. Like shreds of mummified body little bits of truth stick together. If Geoffrey was right about the origin of the stones why doubt that his source of information didn't also know who built them and for whom?

In later legends of course the Giants Dance became known as the Round Table. Single megalithic 'T' structures in Minorca are still called tables, Taula, as indeed that is what they look like. Next door and older than Stonehenge is Avebury. Is it in fact hard to see Arthur's name written into Avebury?

THE ANCIENT TRADITION

The leads go out in every direction and it is difficult to limit the present exploration to the confines of an article. At the same time I must guard against losing sympathy. Remember that the Celts only hit Europe forcibly about 500 BC. They were not the megalith builders. I will quote you from the respectably old parts of the Book of Taliessin (VIII)

"Of sages in the primitive world
When I had a being
When the host of the world was in dignity
The Bard was accustomed to benefits...
It is long since I have been a herdsman
I travelled in the Earth
Before I was proficient in learning
I travelled, I made a circuit
I slept in a hundred islands
A hundred caers have I dwelt in
Ye intelligent Druids
Declare to Arthur
What is there more early
Than I that they sing of."

There was an oral tradition which existed before the Celts ever got here and its champions had a very high degree of contempt for the druids. This tradition referred to a fairly golden age when men could actually meet as strangers without taking up defensive positions automatically. A time when men could wander about the Earth without regard for boundaries. They certainly had religious beliefs but each new conquest by foreigners intent on establishing their own supremacy, the tradition became more corrupt. The fineness of this ancient culture still shines through the ages to us so that Arthur and his knights represent the finest ideal a man may aspire to; and ideal that even the Christians had to adopt because they couldn't destroy it however hard they tried; an ideal which included the concept of meditation and recommended to all youth that it seek communion with God personally, without the interference of priests. This tradition comes to us, I believe, from the Old Stone Age. And it is reasonable that it should do so. For most stone age cultures that still exist have a far more beautiful way of life than we do. They seldom have crime; some cultures don't even have crime words in their vocabulary.

Meanwhile the poetry of those people enabled them to express their cultural beliefs in such a way that we still listen to fragments of their fireside tales to learn how Gwenhwyvar, the White Queen, was stolen from the jealous Winter King in May but had to be returned in Autumn for King Arthur's Christmas feast.

# of RAVENS, GODS & MEN ~

nik wright

In his time Arthur is reputed to have undertaken a number of acts that have distinct ritualistic overtones. Pulling swords out of anvils set in stone is not an everyday activity; and though many of his deeds belong to mediaevil romanticism, there is one story that has very old roots.

The reverence and even obsession that the Celts had for the 'severed head' is well known. It is to be seen in the story of the oracular head of Brân which upon severance from his body proceeded to prophesy and sing, and commanded its own inhumation on the White Mount (now Tower Hill in London). Here it would protect Britain against all invasion from overseas so long as it remained concealed. (Branwen Daughter of Llyr in the Mabinogion.)

Enter King Arthur, protector of the Britons, pronouncing, in effect, "I am here now. Dig up that head - it is of no use now." Well, he dug up the head and presumably for good reasons. On the surface it was a good public relations job, getting popular confidence by banishing old superstition; underneath it may have been an act of ritually supplanting Brân by Arthur as the living embodiment of the oracular head; or perhaps the story arose because Arthur was viewed as the embodiment of Brân himself.

In the Mabinogion Brân is pictured as a giant able to wade across the Irish Sea and who, in the absence of a bridge, laid himself across the River Shannon so that his own army might cross. His death comes only through a poisoned spear in the foot (like Achilles) in a battle with his sister's husband that was caused by a treacherous cousin. Not a unique theme!

Although there is the apparent connection with grain, in the Welsh bran means crow, specifically the Raven. The Raven was the sacred bird of Brân and the presence of these birds at Tower Hill may be a vestige of the oracular head. The

Raven was sacred also to other important deities and mythological figures. Apollo's bird is the raven, Hercules was said to have had one, the Greek Titans were associated with the bird and Odin had a Raven on each of his mighty shoulders. According to Robert Graves the Raven is Cronos, the oldest god who eats his own young.
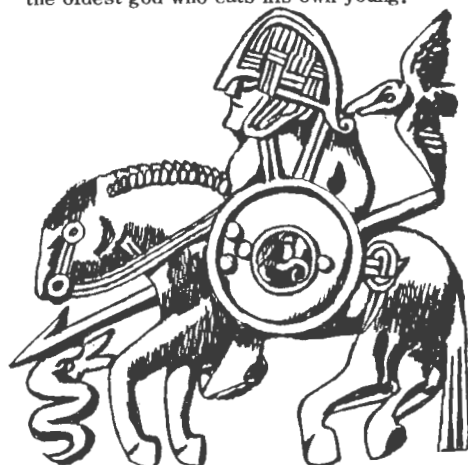
Brân was then a dual god: on the one hand he was a Celtic Apollo (Ogma or Sul); on the other he is the carrion-eating crow. This mixture of divine inspiration and old knowledge forms a symbol of life-in-death so beloved by the Celts.

The question of symbolic supplanting arises between Hercules and the Titan Atlas, where as one of his labours Hercules must carry the world for Atlas (who was bound to this task). In this

light we should view the words of William Blake: "The giant Albion was Patriarch of the Atlantic; he is the Atlas of the Greeks, one of those the Greeks call Titans. The stories of Arthur are the acts of Albion, applied to a Prince of the fifth century." So we are full circle, and each personality is connected by the Raven.

Apart from the exhumation of the oracular head, Arthur is close to the Raven by another means, the most important figure in the life of Arthur: Merlin. That shadowy figure is harbinger, teacher, adviser and undertaker to Arthur. His name in the Welsh stories is Myrddin ab Morvran, Merddyn son of the Raven. (Morvran is literally a sea-crow, a cormorant or shag, but could be a confusion with the more widely-known raven, which is also a cliff-dweller.)

That Arthur is associated so strongly with the Raven suggests two possibilities. Firstly that the memory of a Celtic hero/god was somewhat wishfully confused with a Dark Age soldier and folk-hero (certainly the Gaelic word for a god or deity, arth, has led to the mixing of legend and myth). Secondly the Dark Age hero may have assumed a position: he may have been a Son of the Raven. As Pendragon was a military rank, so it may have been a spiritual rank of an initiate in a life-in-death cult.

There are particular grounds for entertaining this second possibility. While the Roman legions were still in Britain, the cult of Mithraism became immensely strong within the military. It probably had attractions for any Britons maintaining Druidical thought, for one

reported ritual of the Druids involved the slaying of white bulls; while Mithras' heroic deed was to slay a white bull. And the first degree of Mithraic initiation was - the order of the Raven.

Given that Arthur and other members of a Dark Age military élite were of Romano-British descent, the Mithraic concept of a military superior as spiritual leader would not be foregn to them. The early Christian element in the Arthurian stories is no incongruous with any Mithraic cult as at that time there would be little difficulty in accepting Christ as the solar hero, the life-in-death of the Crucifixion, and the attendant divine inspiration from a cup, cauldron or grail.

But as for round tables and chivalry, thus spake the Raven: Nevermore!

Arthur & the *bear* of *arcady*

chris turner

Many readers will be familiar with the myth of Apollo's annual return to his homeland of Hyperborea. This blessed island, far to the north, was inhabited by a race who dwelt in peace and happiness and worshipped Phoebus Apollo, personification of the Sun's light, in their magnificent circular temple, renowned even in ancient Greece. Apollo's journey, undertaken in Autumn, was by means of a celestial chariot drawn by flying dragons. A pretty tale full of intriguing allusions, but of little immediate relevance to our own Bear of Britain. Or is it?

Let us turn our attention to Apollo's twin sister Artemis. Unlike most sister-goddesses, Artemis is not just her brother in drag, a simple echo, but rather a complementary figure rounding out the cosmic concept of Apollo from a purely female standpoint. Like her brother, Artemis bears the epithet "Phoebus", celestial light, but of the moon not the sun. She was also revered by the women of Hyperborea. Artemis did not journey to them, however, but received Hyperborean pilgrims at her birthplace shrine at Delos. Following Prof G Hawkin's demonstration of the intimate solar/lunar interrelation at Stonehenge it may be suggested that the Hyperboreans worshipped Artemis as well as Apollo in their circular temple.

At this point we start to collect polyphones, groups of sound patterns. The first and most obvious is ART and others that crop up with unusual frequency are ARC (Greek root for bear) and BER or BRE (Germanic root for bear). The relevance of these polyphones is open to dispute but the interconnections are, at least, interesting. The reader must make of them what he will.

One of the retinue of Artemis was the nymph Callisto. A virgin, as were all Artemis' companions; strict chastity being a sine qua non of membership. Zeus managed to seduce Callisto by a rather underhand strategem and, although arguably the injured party, she was savagely punished by Artemis who changed the unfortunate pregnant nymph into a she-bear (aha!) and loosed her hunting dogs on her. In the nick of time, Zeus intervened, snatched Callisto from the dogs and set her in the sky as a brilliant constellation which still bears the name of the Great Bear. The other name for the constellation is, of course, the Plough (Ploughman in Welsh is arddwr, plough is arddwyr). The dogs are also set in the sky next to Ursa Major under the name of Canes Venatici and are fated to chase Callisto around the pole until doomsday. Callisto's infant son did not perish. He was named Arcas and achieved such fame that he left his name to Arcadia which became the chief centre of devotion to Artemis.

Artemis was primarily portrayed as a bow-wielding huntress of severe chastity. No allowance was made for any lapse no matter how accidental or innocently intended. In Crete she was known as the Sweet Virgin or Britomartis. Although as a huntress she was a bringer of death, she was usually merciful, provided her sexual sensitivities had not been offended, and killed animals and humans alike with her merciful arrows and was greatly revered for so doing: a quick, clean, painless death being a rare and much sought-after blessing in the ancient world. She was, however, worshipped as the astonishing multi-breasted goddess of fecundity at Ephesus which completes the fundamental triad of the female principle: virgin, mother and death-hag known variously as the Fates, Norns or Weird (Wyrd) Sisters.

Whether or not as a result of the episode with Callisto, the attribute of Artemis was a she-bear. In a striking parallel, a Celtic she-bear goddess was worshipped in what is now Switzerland under the name of Artio. Her chief site of worship is now known as Berne and bears are still kept in the town's bear-pit as civic mascots. The bear appears on the city arms and flag and may be seen on the number plate of any Swiss car (CH plate on back) with a BE registration (five I-Spy points). The Bear also figures prominently in the heraldry of Berlin and Madrid where it is shown on hind legs clawing the trunk of a tree. This representation is, of course, also the badge of our own Earls of Warwick and innumerable Bear and Ragged Staff taverns.

In northern Europe the bear has long been associated with the concepts of resurrection and rebirth being the only large animal to apparently "die" through the winter and become "reborn" in the spring. Strangely enough, recent research shows that the bear does not hibernate as such. Its body temperature and metabolism do not drop to anything like hibernation level. When external conditions become untenable the bear simply goes to sleep until the environment is right for its re-emergence. Which is more or less what we have been saying about the Bear of Britain all along.

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