pendragon

Editorial

Vol XXVII No 4 Spring 1999

Themes

First, apologies for the late appearance of the last number, thanks mainly to the vagaries of Parcel Force. The deadline for this number was extended in consequence; items for the next issue should now be in for the beginning of July.

The current theme is **Dark Age Saints**, with Ian Brown's cover showing St Carannog's taming of the Somerset dragon. There are contributions on the lesser known saints Derfel, Meriadoc and Tewdrig, while outside the Arthurian period proper we have the equally obscure saint Galgano and the probably non-existent George. If this is all a little eclectic for some readers, there are also follow-ups to articles on Tristan and Iseult and on Moorcock's treatment of the grail.

The summer number will be a special **40th anniversary** edition, with articles looking backwards as well as forwards. The Society was founded in 1959 in Winchester, and has undergone metamorphosis over those four decades. As we teeter on the threshold of a new millennium (whatever its significance!) it will therefore be fitting to take stock of where we have arrived.

A couple of contributions have already arrived on the theme of **Arthurian humour**, so that may well be the theme of the winter issue. This does not of course preclude any other submissions, so please keep those articles flooding in - excellent studies of, for example, Lancelot, *The Dream of Rhonabwy* and of Dante and Arthur are in the pipeline, not to mention some original fiction and poetry.

Finally, please suggest your own favourite themes, even if they have already been aired recently. I am particularly anxious to have studies of literary works, both ancient and modern, and of other aspects of both popular and "high" culture such as films, comics, art and so on, to counterbalance some of the more historically-based column inches we have had recently.

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Details of our 40th anniversary AGM and weekend are elsewhere in this issue. We do hope this will be a good occasion to chinwag and be entertained, so the more of you the merrier!

Subscriptions

A cross [X] in the box above indicates your subscription is now due.

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PenDragon

DARK AGE SAINTS

♦ *From Helene K Matthews, Hants:*

I am writing with a request for any information concerning the 6th century saints Derfel, Petroc and Illtyd which your other readers may possess, for a study which I have undertaken. Any such information can be forwarded to me via this address: 4 Cargate Avenue, Aldershot, Hants GU11 3EP.

As for the standard of *Pendragon*, I have to say that I and my family are suitably impressed and shall be renewing our subscription eagerly.

♦ *Helene has provided a short study of Derfel for this issue. Do send any suitable hagiographical information directly to her at the address above.*

ARTHUR AS A CAVALRY LEADER

From W M S Russell, Reading, Berks:

I should like to offer a few facts in support of Helen Hollick's characterisation of the historical Arthur as a cavalry leader (1). To begin with, 'Roman cavalry ... consisted entirely of auxiliaries' (from outside Italy), 'the first regiments of whom had been Gauls... At the time of the invasion of Britain, Caesar's inspector-general of cavalry was a Gallic and not a Roman officer. Consequently Gaulish, and after them other Celtic, cavalry formations had a prestige in the Roman service that was never matched by any other sort of auxiliary... There was no Latin word for many technical expressions regarding the cavalry... and drill orders were given in Gallic or Ibero-Celtic throughout the service... By the end of the second century (AD) there were twenty-eight Roman cavalry units of Celtic origin', including units from Britain (2). So there were surely British veterans with cavalry know-how left behind when the Roman armies left Britain.

After the Gothic victory of Adrianople (AD 378), the balance in warfare shifted from infantry to cavalry. The heavy cavalry developed in the Eastern Roman Empire (cataphracts) used horses that were probably not available in Britain (3). But as Hollick has shown, there were perfectly satisfactory horses in the island (4). Anthony Dent and Daphne Machin Goodall have suggested that excellent horses from the Wall forts, including Frisians, were probably sold off to the British when the Romans left, to save the huge cost of sea transport to the Continent, and may have mixed with the rather similar native Fell ponies to produce a numerous progeny by about AD 500. In the poem *The Chair of Teyron*, Arthur 'brought from the great wall creamy horses used to the saddle' (5).

S G Wildman has noted that both the Frisians and the Fell ponies were black, and that Scott reports a legend of Arthur sleeping under the Eildon Hills with his knights mounted on black horses (6). (The meaning of the 'creamy' ones is not clear.) He has suggested that the names of pubs may sometimes reflect very long-lived local traditions. There are in fact many examples of folk memories persisting for millennia without written record (7). Wildman plotted the location of pubs called 'Black Horse', and found that 'the regions where the "Black Horse" is a common name for a public house are those regions where the early settlements of the Anglo-Saxons received a set-back', and where the numerous battles ascribed to Arthur can also plausibly be located (8). He suggests, therefore, rather convincingly, that these pub names can be traced back to communal memories of the victories of Arthur's moble force of cavalry.

References

1. 'Arthur and the Careful Historian' *Pendragon 26* No 4 1997 4-6
2. Anthony and Daphne Machin Goodall (1962) *The Foals of Epona: a History of British Ponies from the Bronze Age to Yesterday.* Galley Press, London 10, 37
3. Dent and Goodall 46-7
4. Hollick 4-5
5. Dent and Goodall 47, 56-7
6. S G Wildman (1971) *The Black Horsemen: English Inns and King Arthur.* John Baker, London 47, 149, 154
7. W M S Russell 'Greek and Roman Monsters' *Social Biology and Human Affairs* Part 1 *58* No 2 (1993) 13-25, especially 14-15, Part 2 *59* No 1 (1994) 1-9, especially 5-6
8. Wildman 32, 153, and *passim*

♦ *I have argued ("At the sign of the Black Horse" in No XXIV/4 1994) that some, at least, of the Black Horse pubs may owe the origin of their names to links with coal fields. A recent issue of a Bristol & Bath listings magazine (**Venue** March 19 - April 2) names the Black Horse Inn at Clapton in Gordano near Bristol as their "top pub". The 14th century building, they note, began life as a farmhouse, then was the village jail before becoming an alehouse two centuries ago. As a "classic, working, traditional country tavern" it has "served generations of the former mining community of this tiny North Somerset hamlet". Though mentioning the Arthur theory **Venue** inclines towards the, admittedly, less attractive explanation.*

*Other explanations were dismissed by Wildman, but Leslie Dunkling and Gordon Wright, in their **Dictionary of Pub Names** (2nd edition Wordsworth 1994) note that although some Black Horse pubs apparently date from at least the 14th century, others may take their name from the 17th century nickname of the 7th Dragoon Guards, and yet others may relate to the London Lombard Street goldsmiths (hence the Lloyds Bank black horse). The whole subject needs some detailed work - anyone prepared to do it?*

ARTHUR, BOUDICCA AND THE ICKNIELD

♦ *From Geoff Simmons, Great Bircham, King's Lynn:*

It's been a busy year for Arthur, what with Badon at Monkton Farleigh (*Guardian* August 11th 1998), his 'last battle at Goring Gap (*Telegraph* September 3rd 1997), and that Tintagel slate (all papers 1998).

Something *strange* was unearthed in these parts a year ago. Forty years ago there was a 'dig' at Sedgeford, near the North Norfolk coast. A large quantity of 'bashed-in' skulls was unearthed - the place is called the Boneyard! Another, current, and on-going dig at the same site found, and I quote, "an unusual burial of a female with a horse ... explicitly pagan" (*Lynn News* June 26th 1998).

Either by accident, or design, there was almost a ritualistic feel about the relative positioning of the two skeletons - a symbolism of horse culture, Epona and Rhiannon in Iceni heartland. Boudicca?! Sure beats Platform Ten of Paddington Station - at least in the romantic stakes, as we are siting her by **Ken Hill** (Snettisham), as in Ickeny (Iceni) hill, and, also, slap-bang on top of the 'battle-road of the Iceni', the Icknield Way.

You have to understand Icknield to understand Arthur, Boudicca, the Saxons and the Danes. I knew, in 1994, that Icknield was *the* combing feature in much of our past; it also combines much of Arthur's as it does Boudicca's. Many of their significant events/places are sited on or just by Icknield.

You get the idea, the feel of the importance from the 9th century Danish Grand Army, which assembled at Thetford (on the Way) to march all the way to Dorset (on the Way). I think it's safe to surmise that it was Icknield they followed; why cut your way through dense, dark forest when there's a perfectly serviceable, and fairly direct major thoroughfare going that way? Then we have 'battle road of the Iceni' and the new Arthur 'stuff'. Goring Gap is on the Way, Monkton Farleigh is just across the valley from it (and, interestingly, itself on the way to the ancient temple complex being excavated at Stanton Drew).

A striking feature of Icknield is the horse - it's White Horse Street at Baldock, it follows the Vale of White Horse, goes past carved White Horses, including Whitehorse Hill and the Epona Horsemaiden carving at Wandlebury, near Cambridge. Sited by it are Exning, legendary site of Boudicca's invention of horse-racing, and important royal bases like Wantage and Chippenham.

But there's so much more besides: Dragon Hill, Silbury, Wayland's Smithy, the Sanctuary, Avebury Circle, the Kennett Barrows, Golden Ball Hill, Barbary, Beranburgh, the Cerne Abbas Giant, Cadbury, Castles Corfe and Maiden, and, in derivatives, Stonehenge, Tintagel, Glastonbury and St Michael's Mount. This was the BC M1 - as much Arthur's route to the east as it was that of Iceni, Saxons and Danes to the west.

So, my point? Defeated by the Romans at Mancetter (on what will become the A5 Watling Street), Boudicca and her Iceni retreat. However, she does not take poison. A ferocious resistance is put up round Ken Hill, just across the water (then) from Icknield. Finally, however, a Roman trap catches the queen and her small band of followers against the river (and just off the Way) at Sedgeford. The Romans takes no prisoners - 'bashed-in' skulls - and the body of the queen, stripped of adornment, is left for the crows. In the still of night, however, local Iceni dare give their queen what *significant* burial they can. And Icknield - well, another legend finds rest and place along it!

Romantic nonsense - who knows? But it's there ...

♦ *From a letter to Fred Stedman-Jones, which picks up the theme from the previous letter.*

GRIM KNIGHT'S GREEN SITE

♦ *From Steve Sneyd, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W Yorks:*

This week I got, after years of good intentions, to the Castle Hewen site in Cumbria - a shortish walk uphill from Armathwaite station on the Settle-Carlisle [line]. I didn't have high expectations of visible remains, since in Guy Phillips *Brigantia*, page 68, he quotes T F Bulmer in 1884 as saying the foundations of the castle Leland has noted "were visible a few years ago" (though, on page 100, Phillips contradictorily says "it is still possible to see the remains of foundations said to be those of Castle Hewen").

Anyway, when I got there (NY 486463, just ESE of hamlet of Aiketgate), is a wonderfully dominating site at a hilltop, vast views over the line where the Roman road was and Eden and Petteril valleys, ideal location for a fortress, but only thing there, aside from a slight scatter of worked-looking stone, was a low mound about 14 yards long with various rusty pumphead *etc* small structures, so clearly covering a farm water tank of some sort, obviously done a fair time ago. Whether, before that took place, there was still any trace of visible foundation, no way of knowing. Could see out over the low-lying pastures which occupy drained site of Tarn Wadling, which also plays a role in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* story, though took a bit of mental effort to imagine water back onto them!

A case of 'worth it for the view', but no castle, let alone giant, or loathly hag sat between oak and green holly!

EXCALIBUR IN SICILY

♦ *From W M S Russell, Reading, Berks:*

I was interested to read recently that in 1190 Richard I (of England) presented Tancred of Lecae, the bastard usurper of Sicily, with 'a sword, which he claimed to be the original Excalibur worn by King Arthur'. (1) I had had no idea that the Angevin exploitation of the legend went to the length of (pardon my pun) *forging* a sword! I wonder if anyone knows anything about the origin and/or subsequent fate of this interesting weapon.

Reference

1. Robert Payne (1998) *The Crusades: a History* Wordsworth Editions, Ware, Herts p226

THE CELTIC WEST

♦ *From Ian Brown, Middlesbrough, Cleveland:*

Well, what a cracking edition of *Pendragon* you have just put together. Every article was at least interesting and at best fascinating.

Thanks for putting the reports of the *Artognou* stone from Tintagel into perspective. It was an intriguing find and deserves sober attention, but the way the press made so much of it probably did Arthurian research more harm than good. Neil Thomas' article on *gwyddbwyll* is interesting. Could there be any connection between Fox and Geese and modern Solitaire? The board and movement of pieces seem similar. I do like Forrester Roberts' style of illustration, in particular his brutish dragon and the lovely, delicate poise of Isolde as she rides side-saddle and chats with Tristan.

And the Jess Foster Memorial Prize! What can I say? "Thankyou" is so inadequate. I finally came down off the ceiling about half an hour or so after seeing my name announced ...

♦ *From Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland:*

Congratulations on another fine, if Post Office belated, *Pendragon*, recently received.

I have seen something on *gwyddbwyll* in a games magazine dated some years ago (perhaps up to twenty), but I cannot now recall more than this. It is not featured in Neil Thomas's interesting article's references, certainly. Perhaps it would be worth investigating the links between the boards he showed and the modern peg-board Solitaire game? I must confess, I am no expert on old board games, however.

Gwilym ap Iorwerth's *Stolen Past* and Chris Lovegrove's *Changing History?* were breaths of fresh air concerning the, in places truly desperate, attempts by tourist boards in southern Britain to claim Arthur as "their own". The evidence, such as it is, supports a northern origin for Arthur at least as strongly, if not more so, than any other area of the country, yet the south-west of England keeps on claiming Arthur for itself, as you know. A little like government propaganda, presumably they feel that the more often it is repeated, the more likely people will be to believe it... The same applies to the recent feeble attempts to drag Beowulf into Kent by the Faversham tourist board, in a country notable for its absence of dragon-slaying legends!

♦ *From Paul Smith, Willington, Derbyshire:*

I hope that you do not mind receiving this brickbat but could it please be possible in the future for all contributions to be scanned - rather than just retyped - into the Journal: I counted several spelling mistakes in my book review which appeared in the previous edition.

I do not know whether this was genuinely accidental or whether it was because my contribution concerned the rather delicate subject-matter of drugs and religion (covered recently on Channel Four's *Sacred Weeds*).

The use of psychedelic drugs by scientists to create micro-chip technology was revealed by Bob Wallace, the founding member of Microsoft, on the BBC2 *Horizon* documentary "Psychedelic Science" (27th February, 1997).

The vast improvement in the production-values of your Journal is due to this very micro-chip technology. So you see, there is much more to psychedelic drugs than their misuse and abuse by hippies, punks and junkies.

♦ *I'm happy to use a scanner if you would like to provide me with one! I went over your review with the old fine-toothed comb and came up with* ***artefacts*** *(an alternative spelling of* ***artifacts****) and* ***Puharish*** *(instead of* ***Puharich****). The rest of the "mistakes" appear to be those silent adjustments editors are expected to make, such as* ***village*** *instead of your* ***villege****, adding spaces after commas, re-paragraphing and so on. If I was unhappy about the subject-matter I would simply have not printed it.*

Cautionary Dragon (Ian Brown)

MORE FROM THE DRAGON'S MOUTH

♦ *From Charles Evans-Günther, Japan:*

There was a very interesting TV programme, "Quiz: World Mysteries" on TBS TV (Channel 6) at 9.00 on Saturday 19th December 1998, about the Holy Grail. Well, not really. The show is hosted by Kusano Hitoshi (note Japanese family names come first!) and, following a report on a particular subject, panellists answer odd questions. Reporter Takeuchi Kanae, an actress with some flair, got my unbounding admiration when she did a piece on the Buddha on the feast of his birthday. She stood in front of the *stupa* that commemorates the Buddha's birthplace and sang (in English) "Happy Birthday Dear Buddha!"

Despite the mystical appearance of a goblet and mist (dry ice!) the programme was primarily about Rennes-le-Château and Abbé Saunière. Sadly, there was nothing new. The questions asked included: "What game is depicted in the church at Rennes?" (Chess), "What famous drink is linked with the Templars?" (Champagne), "What visual image links the painting of Napoleon's coronation with the Merovingians?" (the bee) and "What do Freemasons wear during their rituals?" (an apron). Surprisingly, Montségur appeared in the end credits but wasn't mentioned in the main body of the programme. However, the Grail hardly got a look in and Arthur was mentioned very briefly.

Japan itself has many interesting legends and mysteries and the defeat of the Ainu in Hokkaido is remarkably similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth's "Night of the Long Knives" when Saxons murdered the British leaders. The Japanese invited the Ainu leader to a meeting and poisoned his drink. The Ainu put up a strong defence but they were both outnumbered and lacked modern weaponry (this was in the 17th century rather the Dark Ages).

◆ *Thank you to all correspondents who have written in with comments or contributions. I have however inadvertently reproduced comments which were not for publication, for which deep apologies. If you specifically do not wish letters to the editor, chair or secretary to be published please let us know at the time of writing. Thanks!*

Arthur and the Saints

Chris Lovegrove

The Age of the Saints, which straddles the fifth and sixth centuries in Britain and the rest of the western seaways (Bowen 1972) also coincides with the so-called Age of Arthur. And we find that in later legend Arthur is linked to a number of these saints - in particular Derfel (see Helene Matthews' *The Warrior Monk*), Padarn, Cadoc, Illtud, Gildas, Carantoc (Carannog) and Euflamm (Efflam). What can be said of these Celtic saints and their Arthurian connections?

Padarn

St Padarn's name is derived from Paternus, a common late Roman cognomen (Birley 1979, 160) which, incidentally, appears on the recently-discovered 6th century Artognou slate from Tintagel (*Changing History?* last issue). The later medieval *Life* tells us that at the Dark Age monastery of Llanbadarn Fawr Arthur covets St Padarn's tunic, and for his pains is miraculously buried up to his chin in the earth.

There seems to be a memory here of the grandfather of Cunedda, the Padarn Pesrut of the genealogies, whose sobriquet means *man of the scarlet robe*; and who reappears in the 15th century Thirteen Treasures of Britain where the ninth treasure is the Coat of Padarn Red-Coat (*pais Badarn Beisrydd*): "if a well-born man put it on, it would be the right size for him; if a churl it would not go upon him" (Coe and Young 1995). If this Paternus actually existed, he would be of 4th century date.

The story's historicity is even more compromised by the saint temporarily blinding Maelgwn Gwynedd; the latter is likely to be a generation or two later than that of Arthur. From a distribution of placenames, Padarn should more plausibly be sought in an immediate post-Roman milieu than in the sixth century (Bowen 1956, 53ff).

Cadoc

Like the *Life of Padarn*, that of St Cadoc was composed sometime in the 12th century, also at the monastery of Llancarfan which was itself founded by Cadoc. According to this, Arthur meets King Gundleius (Gwynllyw) who is abducting Guladus (Gwladys), the future mother of Cadoc, and immediately covets her, but Cei (Kay) and Bedguir (Bedivere) persuade him to do his duty and behave like a just ruler.

Years later, Cadoc outwits Arthur, changing cattle demanded as compensation into ferns. This seems to be a means of declaring the river Usk as the eastern boundary of Cadoc's monastery, of defining Llancarfan's power of sanctuary, and of providing a post hoc explanation of a placename. As a point of interest, Arthur is portrayed as holding power to the west, in present-day England.

Illtud and Gildas

Cadoc seems to be of a generation that included Illtud and Gildas, *ie* the early sixth century, and the *Lives* of the latter two were also written at Llancarfan in the 12th century. The young warrior Illtud sails from Brittany to visit his "cousin", Arthur, at his royal household (Latin *curia*). Here he receives gifts fitting for a warrior (*miles*) before he eventually embarks on a saintly life. Illtud, for no really good reason, is sometimes claimed as the model for the 13th century figure of Galahad (see *From San Galgano to Sir Galahad*).

Gildas is described as a contemporary of Arthur by Caradoc of Llancarfan, but the story of Arthur's slaying of Hueil, brother of Gildas, may be doubted (see Tristan Gray Hulse's *St Meiriadog*). Gildas' reconciliation with Arthur, apparently at Llancarfan, may thus be equally imaginary.

More interesting is the story of Guennuvar's abduction by Melvas, king of the "summer country", and of the intervention of Gildas and the abbot of Glastonbury to restore the status quo. This is the earliest literary connection of Arthur with Glastonbury, and is roughly contemporary with both Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and with the sculptures on Modena cathedral archivolt; the archivolt is itself the first artistic version of the abduction of Winlogee (Guinevere) by a giant Carrado (Carados, *ie* Caradoc). In this scene Carrado, who has handed over Winlogee to Mardoc (Mordred? Melvas?), is defeated by Galvagin (Gawain). Winlogee is presumably handed back to Artus de Bretania. Gildas, however, is nowhere to be seen, and one may question whether he was originally associated with any early version of the tale.

Carantoc and Euflamm

If the claimed Arthurian links with Padarn, Cadoc, Illtud and Gildas are tenuous, how much more so must we doubt the tales of Carantoc and Euflamm with their mention of dragons? Both 12th century stories share narrative patterns.

First, Arthur is seeking out either a particular dragon (*serpens*) in the area of Carrum (Carhampton in Somerset) or monsters in general (on Brittany's north coast). Next, Arthur meets the saint (Carantoc is searching for a portable altar which he floated over from South Wales, while the Irish saint Euflamm and other clerics inhabit rocks on the seashore).

In Somerset, Carantoc blesses Arthur in his enterprise. The Breton clerics show Arthur the monster's cave but, despite a triple-knotted club and a lion-skin shield, Arthur is unable to overcome the invincible monster. The saint, like a latter-day Moses, strikes a rock to produce a fountain of water to quench Arthur's thirst, then, like Carantoc, blesses the fighter.

Back in Somerset, Arthur promises news of Carantoc's altar if the saint "leads out" the serpent. The saint prays and the serpent "came with a great sound like a calf running to its mother ... Carannog placed his stole about its neck and led it like a lamb - it raised neither its wings nor claws". Carantoc eventually banishes it, and in return Arthur returns the altar. In Brittany Euflamm also prays, the monster emerges, coughing up blood, and it too is banished. In neither case does Arthur actually defeat the dragon, and the creature, though vanquished, survives (Coe & Young 1995).

Both stories glorify the saints at the expense of Arthur, who could safely be substituted - by Cadwy at the stronghold of Dindraithou for example. The Somerset story is localised at Carhampton and Williton to confirm land held in these places by the church, while the pink rocks of Brittany's Côte de Granit-Rose still appear red "as if with fresh blood, a testimony of this miracle"; and a worn capital at the church of Saint-Jacques at Perros-Guirec shows, it is claimed, Arthur's battle with the dragon (Duchesne 1981).

What may be of significance is the distribution of these Arthurian associations, in mid-west Wales, Gwent, west Somerset and north Brittany. It is as if the writers of these mostly 12th century saints' lives felt they could bring Arthur into their reconstructed stories with some sense of historical plausibility. Is there a germ of actuality lurking behind this? Or do the incidents involving Padarn, Illtud, Cadoc, Gildas and Carannog merely reflect the creative talents of the writers of Llancarfan (Ashe 1991)?

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(over) Ian Brown: The Victor of Camlann

Saint Derfel
The Warrior Monk
Helene K Matthews

Allegedly one of King Arthur's warriors, the Celtic Saint Derfel (pronounced Dervel) 'distinguished' himself at the Battle of Camlann (1) - that famed final battle between Arthur and his nephew/son Mordred in which one was slain and the other mortally wounded - before entering into the ecclesiastical profession.

Recently fictionalised in Bernard Cornwell's Arthurian trilogy (2), Derfel is - unlike many characters in such novels - a real person who lived during the 6th century AD and who went on to found his own monastery in Merioneth, Gwynedd. Whether or not he actually fought alongside Arthur at Camlann is a subject of much speculation and depends on the individual stance taken concerning the existence of the Celtic warlord who became the legend which is King Arthur.

Also known as *Cadarn*, *Gdarn* or *Gadarn* (apparently all mean 'mighty' and are taken to signify his status upon the battle-field) (3), Derfel entered the monastery of St Cadfan upon Bardsey Island following Camlann, where he became a solitary before founding Llandderfel in Gwynedd (4). During the Middle Ages, his shrine there was the site of many pilgrimages by Christians eager to have their souls delivered from Hell by him. It was believed that if an offering was made to the wooden effigy of Derfel and his horse which stood within Llanderfel's walls, the saint was capable of saving condemned souls from the devil (5). It was this belief which created such popularity of Derfel and, *circa* 1500, led to the rebuilding of Llandderfel as a smaller church upon the original monastery foundations at a time when many of the other churches in Gwynedd were struggling for survival (6).

In 1538, however, the wooden statue of Derfel was removed by Cromwell's men and taken to Smithfield in London where it was burnt alongside a Franciscan Observant, John Forest, who had been a confessor of Queen Catherine of Aragon and who had denied the claim of King Henry VIII's being the Supreme Head of the Church in England. Dr Ellis Price, an agent of Cromwell who played a prominent role in the Reformation of Gwynedd, later wrote that 'the Welsh had a prophecy that this image [that of Derfel's] should set a whole forest afire; which prophecy now took effect, for he set this friar Forest on fire and consumed him to nothing...' (7)

It was Price who recorded, in a letter to Cromwell, the devotion which the people of Llanderfel felt for their patron saint: 'the people have so much trust in him that they come daily on pilgrimage to him with cows or horses or money, to the number of five or six hundred on 5th April [Derfel's feast-day].' When Cromwell insisted that Derfel's wooden image be cut from his horse and removed for burning in London, Price was offered a £40 bribe by the people of Llandderfel to allow their saint to remain where he was. Today, only Derfel's wooden horse and staff can be seen in Llanderfel's parish church and are two of the very few surviving medieval relics left in this country.

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3. Farmer *op cit*
4. *The Book of Saints: a Dictionary of Servants of God Canonized by the Catholic Church* (The Benedictine Monks of St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate, 5th edition)
5. *Folktales, Myths and Legends* (Readers Digest)
6. Entry for Llandderfel parish church from the Gazetteer of Churches in Merionnydd
7. Glanmor Williams (1996) *Wales and the Reformation*

St Meiriadog
and the Historia Meriadoci
Tristan Gray Hulse

A recent review in *Pendragon* of John Matthews' book *The Unknown Arthur*, with its mention of "Meriadoc", prompts me to offer the following note as to the likely identity of this shadowy personage with the dark age Welsh-born saint Meiriadog.

Basically, the sources for the life of St Meiriadog are fourfold:
1. a Latin *Vita* written in Brittany in the high middle ages, almost certainly in or around Pontivy (Doble 1960, 124-6, 135-9);
2. a late-medieval miracle play in Cornish, *Beunans Meriasek*, written for annual performance at Camborne, in Cornwall (Combellack 1988);
3. oral traditions; and
4. - but much more problematically - the high medieval Latin romance *Historia Meriadoci* (Day 1988; accessibly retold in Matthews 1995, 68-89), written probably in Normandy, but certainly based in part on a detailed knowledge of a North Welsh tradition, otherwise lost.

Historia Meriadoci

The *Historia*, as we now have it, is obviously a composite work, fusing together a North Welsh account of the childhood of Meriadoc, which has relatively few characteristics of medieval romance literature, and which appears to exhibit a detailed knowledge of the topography of North Wales, in particular, of the modern parish of Cefnmeiriadog; with a typical romance-amalgam of motifs which serves to incorporate Meriadoc into the Arthurian corpus, and makes of him an Arthurian knight fighting in Europe.

At least in part, this latter section must be based on the fourth-century semi-legendary Cynan Meiriadoc, born in Caernarfon, a brother of Elen of the Hosts, who accompanied Elen's husband Magnus Maximus (Macsen Wledig) to the continent and ultimately settled in Brittany (Bromwich 1978, 316-8: *Cynan, brawd Elen Luydawc*; 341-3: *Elen Luydavc*; 451-4: *Maxen Wledic*).

The Breton Latin source, basing itself here, seemingly, on no more than name-similarity, makes the saint a descendant of Cynan; but as Welsh tradition asserts Cynan Meiriadoc's association with Caernarfon, as the *Historia* associates Meriadoc with the same place, and as the Breton material connects St Meiriadog with Cynan, it is just possible that this represents a knowledge of St Meiriadog's descent from the imperial dynasty of Elen and Macsen. This would perhaps link him with other sixth-century descendants of this dynasty, such as the ruling house of Powys at that period.

However, the *Historia* itself dimly suggests a familial connection with the North British dynasty of Urien Rheged; which is interesting, as this family appears to have had strong ties with the Vale of Clwyd. Thus, the local place-names, Tremeirchion, and Llys Meirchion, in Henllan, both seem to preserve the name of Urien's grandfather, Meirchion Gul. (If this is the case, then Meiriadog would be related to other North Welsh saints, such as Winifred - herself related both to the family of Urien and to the ruling dynasty of Powys.) Other than this tenuous link, there is virtually no connection between the *Historia* and the other three sources.

The Breton *Life*

What should in theory be the primary source, the Breton Latin *Vita* of *c*1300, was written, almost certainly, at the behest of the powerful Rohan family (who claimed Meiriadog as a collateral ancestor, and had a chapel dedicated to him in their Pontivy castle); and certainly in, and for use in, the Pontivy region, which was the centre of the saint's cult in Brittany in the middle ages. Most of the "action" of the *Vita* centres upon the Pontivy region of the northern Morbihan, with detailed references in particular to Noyal-Pontivy and Stival.

The *Vita* knows nothing of Meiriadog's Welsh origins; and has him end his life as bishop of Vannes, the capital of the Morbihan. This is appropriate, if inaccurate, as the Morbihan was settled in the fifth-sixth centuries partly by people from North Wales (for a succinct, conservative assessment of the impact of this immigration, *cf* Davies 1988, 14-16); and serves to explain why in Breton religious art the saint is always depicted as a bishop.

Meiriadog has here been confused with a medieval bishop of Vannes who bore the same name; and the mistake led to there being a chapel dedicated to Meiriadog in Vannes cathedral, where today a stained-glass window depicting the saint still marks the spot.

Beunans Meriasek

The second source, the Cornish *Beunans Meriasek*, was written for performance at Camborne, where the church is dedicated to St Meiriadog, on the saint's feastday. In the main it closely follows the Breton *Vita*; but with the

addition of specifically local themes, obviously derived from medieval oral traditions. These motifs serve, importantly, to link Meiriadog with other saints venerated in the Morbihan, but whose Welsh origins have also been forgotten in Brittany and Cornwall.

The most notable of these saints was the martyr known as Gwinear in Cornwall and as Guignér in Brittany (Doble 1960), where he is culted at Pluvigner - the *plou* (*cf* Welsh, *plwyf*) or parish of St Guignér - near to which are the ancient chapels of St Meiriadog, St Bieuzy, and other Welsh saints.

Also important in this respect are the ruined chapel and holy well of St Ia in Camborne - Ia being the Ivy of Pontivy in Brittany, and the Efa of Moel Maen Efa and Ffynnon Efa in Tremeirchion: Meiriadog's connection with Ivy in North Wales, Cornwall and Brittany being part of the traditionary and onomastic patterns of evidence which underlie and precede the documentary sources.

Oral tradition

The third source of evidence for the life and cultus of St Meiriadog is the oral tradition; and this consists of two, seemingly divergent strands. The most evident of these is the folklore associated with the saint. This is difficult to handle and assess. The Cornish folk tradition, as exemplified primarily in *Beunans Meriasek*, can at least be demonstrated to be as old as the late middle ages (fragments of Cornish tradition relating to the saint collected subsequently are obviously dependent upon this medieval stratum, though substantially decayed), but the Breton oral traditions, which are strongly localised, divergent, and independent of all other sources (other than the toponymic), are seemingly unsupported before the nineteenth century.

The Breton folk legends relate to three specific Meiriadog cult sites in Brittany: St-Jean-du-Doigt, Stival, and Mériadec, in Baden. The St-Jean-du-Doigt legend relates to the arrival of Meiriadog in Brittany, and gives the saint a "brother", St Primael, who is still remembered at sites in northern Brittany, to the west of St-Jean-du-Doigt.

(In this respect, and remembering the proximity of dedications to North West saints, such as Meiriadog and Ivy, Meiriadog and Gwinear/Guignér *etc*, in discrete groups in Cornwall and Brittany, one might recall that Cefnmeiriadog is adjacent to Kinmel; earlier forms of which indicate an original name-form *Cil-mael*, "the hermitage of Mael" - *Mael* being the principal element of the Breton name-form *Primael*.)

The Stival legends relate to the ascetic endeavours of the saint there, and to his powers as a supernatural healer and peace-maker. The Baden legend suggests the martyrdom of St Meiriadog at that place (Ray Spencer, *in litt*, 9th February 1993; *cf* Spencer 1991, 61), and is the only fragment of Breton oral tradition which cannot easily be accommodated within the broad outlines of any plausible reconstruction of the life of the saint. However, Meiriadog's probable association with the martyr Guignér (Pluvigner is only some ten miles from Baden), and more especially the position of Baden as the embarkation point of the martyred and dying St Bieuzy (another saint of the same group - he has a chapel and holy well near to those of St Meiriadog, close to Pluvigner), en route for a final meeting with his spiritual father St Gildas at Rhuys, strongly suggest a conflation and confusion of legends.

Potentially the most revealing aspect of the "oral tradition" ("oral" here in the sense that the names can be presumed to have existed long before the existence of any surviving epigraphic witness) is that enshrined in place-names and church dedications. Most often, these can be factually demonstrated, or at least plausibly suggested, to be older than any of the other available sources. The extreme rarity of the personal name Meiriadog (Welsh; Cornish *Meriasek*; Breton *Mériadec*) in Celtic tradition in itself suggests that, where it is encountered in the toponymy of the three countries, we are dealing with the same historical personage. When we encounter this rare personal name in close toponymic relationship to a small number of other names, the pattern being repeated in clusters of place-names from country to country, we can be virtually certain that this pattern reflects an original historical reality.

The principal witness to the life of St Meiriadog, the medieval Latin *Vita* written in Brittany, both exemplifies this observation, in that it is specifically concerned to compile the traditions relating to the saint in a localised area where his cult was operative; and indicates its methodological limitations as a means of biographical reconstruction, precisely because of its self-imposed restriction to locally-accessible sources. Almost nothing can be guaranteed as certain, given the severely restricted nature of the individual sources; but some sort of, at least plausible, tentative outline of Meiriadog's life may be offered, but a judicious conflation of these various sources, if this is firstly based on the earliest and most indisputable evidential corpus, the witness from toponymy, and only then adding biographical details derived from the epigraphic and oral sources.

A life of St Meiriadog

Meiriadog was, most probably, born sometime between 490 and 500 AD, of an aristocratic or dynastic family of North Wales; or at least of such a family at that time resident in North Wales.

He settled as an ascetic in Cefnmeiriadog, most plausibly at the site on the north bank of the Elwy still identified today as *Meiriadog* (in 1698, a "house of note", according to Edward Lhuyd: Morris 1909, 48; for the one-time importance of this site within the local community, see Thomas 1883, *passim*). The *Historia* has him born near Caernarfon, but being raised in secret in a place whose description sounds astonishingly like the Cefn Caves, on the banks of the Elwy. The personal name Meiriadog remained in use in the immediate locality - and nowhere else in Wales - as the 1334 *Survey of Denbigh* shows (Vinogradoff and Morgan 1914, 212).

Llanelwy

Almost of necessity, he must have been connected with the important monastery of Llanelwy (called St Asaph by the English). At that time, as witnessed by parochial boundaries still in force into the high middle ages, Llanelwy included not only the townships of Meiriadog and Wigfair (from which the present parish of Cefnmeiriadog was created last century), but also Kinmel and the township of Maen Efa, in Tremeirchion: (Pri)mael and Ivy both being connected with Meiriadog, according to toponymic and traditionary witness, and thus, most plausibly, monks like him of the Llanelwy monastery.

(The *Historia* gives the child Meriadoc a guardian named Ivor, who must almost certainly be identified with Ivy; the later half of the romance has Ivor as Meriadoc's travelling companion.)

Maelgwn Gwynedd

The origins of the Llanelwy monastery are obscure; but its medieval "charter", however fabricated, at least bears witness to a tradition that its original patron was the sixth-century Welsh overlord Maelgwn Gwynedd (text printed in "Index" 1868, 336-8: the charter specifically notes the donation of "Meiriadog" to Llanelwy). Maelgwn has come down to us, in Welsh hagiographical tradition, as a persecutor of saints - the individual legends revealing that he was especially concerned to harass the Christian communities of specifically non-Welsh origin: Bretons, the Irish, the Scots. This must have been at least as much politically motivated as it was an expression of antipathy towards Christianity or to any one section of the Church.

Some scholars have suggested that it was the appearance of the book *De excidio*, by St Gildas, attacking the complacent rulers of contemporary Wales (and especially Maelgwn himself), which led to this persecution. Gildas was a son of Caw, a Scottish (?Pictish) dynast exiled to North Wales where he and his family were granted asylum by Maelgwn's father, Cadwallon Llawhir. Certain place-names in Llanelwy and Cefn, as elsewhere in the Vale of Clwyd, perhaps suggest the settlement of several of the "sons" (here, not necessarily meaning more than that they belonged to the family) of Caw; and it seems at least possible that Llanelwy, if not a direct foundation of St Gildas himself, may have owed spiritual allegiance to him. If so, the persecution of the Llanelwy monastery, hinted at in the medieval charter, might well have been directly attributable to the publication of Gildas' book, attacking Maelgwn.

The foundations of St Meiriadog in Brittany are usually in proximity not only to the foundations of Ivy and (Pri)mael, but to certain of those of St Gildas, which suggests that when Gildas was forced to flee from the wrath of Maelgwn, he was followed (either voluntarily or as part of some general persecution of Gildasian communities) by those who owed him allegiance as their spiritual father. Maelgwn died in AD 547 (or -9): Gildas' book was written perhaps ten years earlier. It seems likely that St Meiriadog left Wales just before 540.

Cornwall

He went first to Cornwall, where he settled for a time at Camborne, where in later times the dedication of the parish church and a holy well bore witness to his stay. Nearby were churches or chapels and wells to St Ivy (the *Ia* of Troon in Camborne is possibly to be distinguished from the *Ia* of St Ives, further west in Cornwall) and St Gwinear/Guignér. His holy well was long believed to cure madness.

But in Cornwall, and like St Gwinear nearby, he was persecuted by a local "tyrant" called Tewdar (perhaps this was a reflex of Maelgwn's persecution of the Gildas fraternity in Wales?), and Meiriadog again took flight, this time to Brittany.

Brittany

According to the Breton local tradition, he landed at St-Jean-du-Doigt, on the north coast of Brittany, near Morlaix, sailing over the Channel in a stone coffin, accompanied by his "brother" St Primael. Primael settled nearby, at the place now called Primel, and Meiriadog settled where they had landed, at St-Jean, which until the late fifteenth century was called *Traoun Mériadec*, "Meiriadog's Valley" (Le Braz 1907, 131-6). He is remembered there to this day, though the church

no longer bears his name; and part of his skull is preserved in the church in a late-medieval silver reliquary. It is venerated at the annual Pardon, being held over the heads of the pilgrims, and is believed to cure or prevent headaches and other ailments of the head.

Some time afterwards, Meiriadog moved south, presumably following St Gildas, who himself seems to have travelled north to south through Brittany, before settling at St-Gildas-de-Rhuys, on the Gulf of Morbihan. A cluster of church and holy well dedications (for instance, at Bieuzy-Lanvaux, Baden, and Ste-Anne-d'Auray) bear witness to Meiriadog's work as a missionary in the Morbihan, in the region settled by so many people from North Wales. At the present, his cult is strongest at St-Mériadec, near Pluvigner, where he is venerated as the patron saint of domestic animals.

Finally, he settled at Stival, just to the west of Pontivy, where his fellow saint from North Wales, Ivy, had made a foundation (and - according to local tradition - built the first bridge over the river Blavet: hence the name of the settlement). Local legend ties Meiriadog firmly to the area (as does the Breton Latin *Life*), and to this day his stone coffin (though it is stylistically too late to have been really his) is shown at Noyal-Pontivy; and a portion of his relics is still preserved at Stival. He died *c*570.

At Stival too is a bronze Celtic handbell, called the "Bonnet" of St Meiriadog, which at his annual Pardon on Trinity Saturday is placed on the heads of the pilgrims, and then rung in their ears, to cure ear problems and to prevent headaches for the coming twelve months - a custom which is at least five hundred years old, as it is depicted in the wall-painting decorating the sanctuary of Stival church, executed at the end of the medieval period. Consistently, in Brittany, Meiriadog is presented as the patron of persons suffering from problems of the head, either physical or mental; and as a patron of domestic animals.

Basically, then, Meiriadog was a sixth-century North Welsh monk, driven from his Cefn hermitage to seek refuge, first in Cornwall, and then in Brittany. He spent the second half of his life in Brittany, still basically living the life of a monk and hermit; though the pattern of church dedications across Brittany also bears witness to his success as a Christian missionary. His success in this respect is still evident today, in the devotion to St Meiriadog still found in Brittany. Though totally forgotten in Wales, he is still remembered fondly in Brittany; at St-Mériadec near Pluvigner, country people still place his picture in their farm buildings, to protect their cows and horses, and still collect water from his holy well on the day of his Pardon to cure the ailments of themselves and their animals.

Meiriadog and Arthur

How, then, did the author-compiler of the *Historia Meridadoci* come to enroll this dark age saint as one of Arthur's knights? If my suggestions as to the origins of the Llanelwy monastery, and the relationship of the two saints be accepted (and there is considerably more material witnessing to these ideas than can be presented here, though it must be stressed that as yet much of my research in this particular area is highly speculative), then the answer may lie in the association of Meiriadog with Gildas.

St Kentigern

The Llanelwy charter is apparently attested from 1256. It tells of the foundation of Llanelwy, as both a monastery and as the centre of a diocese, by St Kentigern, supported by grants made by Maelgwn Gwynedd. Subsequently Maelgwn was angered by Kentigern's defence of two of his enemies, and was only prevented from destroying Llanelwy by a miracle performed by the saint, which caused Maelgwn and his son Rhun to ratify and augment the orignal grants.

As is now well understood, Kentigern played no part in the foundation of Llanelwy (neither did St Asaph, for that matter), and the diocese was inaugurated only in the Anglo-Norman period. The name of Kentigern possibly entered the charter from chapter 24 of the *Vita Kentigerni* of Jocelin of Furness (one of the most outrageously implausible of all medieval *vitae*), though the stories told are only superficially similar. It seems possible that the charter represents, in however developed a form, a much earlier document into which Kentigern's name has been intruded. This is supported by the great size of the medieval parish of Llanelwy, and by the form of the *llan* itself, which together suggest an important foundation of dark age date. If this be so, then the question may be asked: whose name was removed from the Llanelwy charter to make room for that of St Kentigern?

Arthur and the brother of Gildas

In the tenth- or eleventh-century *Vita prima Gildae*, written at Rhuys, we are told that one of Gildas' brothers was "Cuillus, a very active man in war" (Williams 1901, 325), but no further details are offered.

The early twelfth-century *Vita secunda* by Caradog of Llancarfan, written in Wales, appears to know next to nothing about the historical Gildas, but it does record an interesting legend concerning his brother, whose name Caradog records in the form Hueil. Gildas, we are told,

was a contemporary of Arthur, "whom he loved exceedingly". But his elder brother rebels against Arthur, who is eventually forced to kill him, *in insula Minau*, which commentators identify as the Isle of Man. Gildas, though "grieved", forgives Arthur (Williams 1901, 401, 403).

A later version, written down *c*1530 by Elis Gruffudd, is much more detailed, and firmly locates the events in the Vale of Clwyd. Here, Gildas and Huail are the sons of Caw of Prydain, a chieftain in Edeirnion, in North Wales. Arthur, at this time resident in "his court at Caerwys" quarrels with Huail over a woman, and Arthur is wounded. Later Arthur has Huail executed in Ruthin (Bromwich 1978, 408-10: *Hueil m. Caw*).

Gildas, Huail, and Caw are also associated with Arthur in the *Mabinogion* tale of "Culhwch and Olwen" (Bromwich 1978, 301-3: *Caw*). The version of the Arthur-Huail conflict in the *Vita secunda Gildae* may be taken as witnessing to the antiquity of a Welsh tradition in which Gildas' brother is killed by a North Welsh ruler.

"Dark Age" Warrior (Ian Brown)

Exit Arthur

One point needs to be clearly made. If we accept Arthur as an historical reality, then he was, however roughly, contemporary with Maelgwn Gwynedd (if he wasn't, then he cannot be brought into contact with Gildas and his brother, who were). But, given the nature of the rule of Maelgwn over North Wales (witnessed in a variety of sources from the *De excidio* of Gildas onwards - for Maelgwn, *cf eg* Bromwich 1978, 437-41: *Maelgwn Gwyned*), it is impossible that Arthur could have exercised any influence there, at least during his reign. Thus, if there is any underlying dark-age reality in the legend of Huail, it is improbable that Arthur's name was originally attached to it; not, at least, if it has always been located in North Wales. That it has always been so located is suggested by a tradition of the murder of another brother of Gildas, St Caffo, which is recorded in the twelfth-century *Vita* of St Cybi. Caffo was murdered at Llangaffo, on Anglesey, by the "herdsmen of Rhosyr" (Wade-Evans 1944, 247). The story is placed in the middle of an account of a dispute between Maelgwn and Cybi, and Rhosyr is close to Aberffraw, the dynastic centre of Gwynedd.

Thus it may be suggested that at some time in the medieval period, when "Arthur" was gathering to himself traditions from across Britain earlier associated with other dark age heroes and villains (existing *vitae* permit us to see this happening with regard to Arthur usurping Maelgwn's role as the persecutor of the saints: Henken 1987, 301-6: $49, "Arthur and Maelgwn"), his name was substituted for that of Maelgwn in the tale of Huail. This, with the legend of Caffo, appears to render it at least plausible that the missing original name in the Llanelwy charter was that of their brother Gildas, the most influential Celtic churchman of his age, and the published opponent of Maelgwn Gwynedd.

If Gildas was the founder of Llanelwy, then Meiriadog, a monk from Cefnmeiriadog in the ancient Llanelwy parish, would have been his associate; which is what is otherwise suggested by the Breton evidence. The origins of the *Historia* are problematic, but it seems not unlikely that, as already noted, its first half devolved from material such as that under discussion. Meiriadog almost certainly came from the same aristocratic milieu as St Gildas; and like Gildas himself (before he entered the monastic life and developed his moral strictures on the correct behaviour of Christian monarchs), Meiriadog too might have had connections with the Gwynedd court. Fragmenting memories of this background, joined to the emerging *persona* of Arthur, at the expense of figures like Maelgwn, may well have coalesced into the Meriadoc of the *Historia*.

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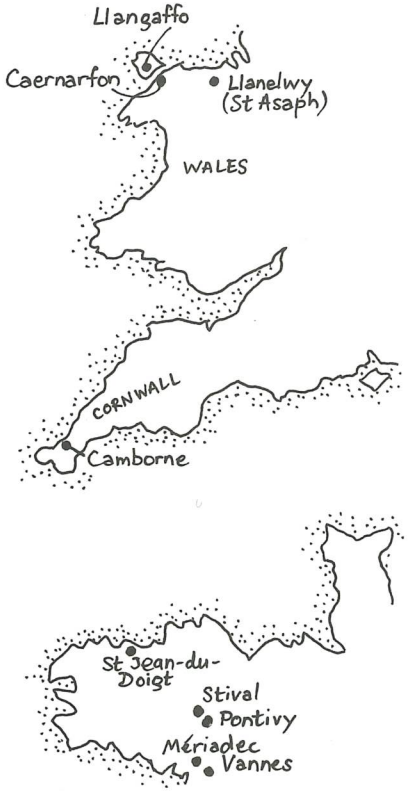
St Samson



Tewdrig

Celtic Saint and Warrior King

Malcolm Morris

Mounted Warrior (Ian Brown)

The Battle of Tintern

The battle flagged for terse respite and for a brief time the two armies drew apart. The warriors panted and snarled at each other across the space of the boggy meadow. The stream, splashing its way through a bouldered bed, was inviting. But the more seasoned fighters amongst both sets of belligerents knew that their rest period would be all too short. The fight had been head-on and bloody and from its start - amidst jeers and chanting - had been a bitter one. Everyone knew just what was at stake here: the future of what was left of the once mighty Ynys Prydein. There had been little room for manoeuvre on this warm spring day: and even less for the employment of stratagem. The field on which this decisive engagement was being played out was encompassed on one side by a rocky hill - the one down which the brook cascaded - and was flanked on both other borders by a wide river.

The invading Wessex Saxons hated rivers and being backed by one was tantamount to being thrown into it. Furthermore, they knew that the defenders, the men of Gwent, could disappear rapidly, if they so chose, and melt into their native hills and woods only to regroup and fight again another day. Their leaders realized that they were now no more than a spear's throw away from their Celtic enemies and they had to seize the initiative soon or perish. They sent runners along the line.

Horns blared and echoed. The defenders watched in dismay as the invading army leapt to its collective feet and made a ferocious, unstoppable charge. As they ran forward they formed themselves into a hard, human wedge which smashed through their line of defence, not even pausing to draw breath as it went. The wedge drove inexorably onwards towards the rear of the Cymric army, to where stood a richly dressed, thick set man well advanced in years - who was obviously the commander of their forces.

This man raised his sword and yelled defiance at his attackers. Within seconds, the attack became a flailing melée as the Saxon charge was met and halted in full cry. Havoc ensued. A battle-axe smote off the man's helmet and a hastily fumbled second blow half scalped him. He dropped to his knees, mortally wounded; but not before he disembowelled his foe with a well-placed sword stab. His men rallied.

In a carefully drilled move, a section of the British army detached itself from its man body and attacked the enemy units from the rear. Stung to fury by the attack on their king, the main body of the British defenders hurled themselves with all their might at the Saxon invaders. The bulk of them smashed into the Saxon shield wall

and broke it irreparably under their counter charge.

The Saxons then made a hopeless last stand at the log bridge which spanned the stream. It waters became momentarily red. As for the estuarine river, the knee-deep placid flow which had been its lot in the morning had, by afternoon, become a chest-high raging torrent which drowned hundreds of fleeing invaders encompassed, as they were, by arms and armour. Fear overtook them as their retreat became a rout. A sorry handful of them gained the woods on the English back. Gwent was destined on that day in the spring of 595 to remain forever a part of Wales.

The British troops had been urged on by their dying king, Tewdrig, and they sent those foemen who were still alive back across the Wye forever. Those whom they had despatched were on their way to Valhalla. Such was the end of the battle of Tintern. On the field of combat, a bemused and grimy youth named Arthwr was told that his grandfather, King Tewdrig, although past mortal help was destined for sainthood and was to be regarded as a holy martyr.

That is probably a highly romanticized account of the battle of Tintern fought, tradition has it, on 1st April 595. April 1st, at least, is the commemoration of the martyrdom of Tewdrig, a saint's day which is remembered locally even if it doesn't enjoy a niche in the calendar of the Church in Wales. But what of Tintern? What of the battle itself? And, above all, who was Tewdrig - and why is a warrior king revered in his locality as a saint, even to this day?

Tintern and its abbey

Everyone knows Tintern. They associate it with the ruins of that magnificent Cistercian abbey built in 1131 and expanded considerably before the end of the 12th century - owing chiefly to the increased popularity, at that time, of monastic vocations. Not many people are aware of the fact that Tintern was only the second Cistercian abbey to built in England and Wales. Unfortunately, the Cistercian ideal of austerity (hence their religious houses always being built in isolated parts of the countryside) was abandoned long before 1400, and by the time of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, early in the 16th century, the order was in dire need of reform.

The abbey has long since been immortalized in verse by William Wordsworth. People have grown used to seeing the ruins of it on Christmas cards, bookmarks, teatowels, ashtrays and countless postcards.

In contrast to all this publicity of the abbey and the rural idyll of the village of Tintern, few folk seem to have heard of the 6th century battle or of the saintly Tewdrig, the quiet, meditative warrior King of Gwent, whose inspired leadership led directly to the defeat of the army of King Ceawlin of Wessex - an encounter which forced the Saxons to stay on the far bank of the River Wye for all time.

The strategic Battle of Tintern

One could claim that this Dark Age combat was of major constitutional importance for the Britain we know today - the present border of Gwent (or Monmouthshire) as part of Wales was established clearly on that day. For the British of 595 - and don't forget that the action took place when the transition from British to Welsh, and Britain to England and Wales, was taking place - it was a vital contest.

In that final charge, Tewdrig lost his helmet and was mortally wounded when an enemy battleaxe removed the top of his skull. Nennius, writing in Bangor-is-y-coed in the 9th century, tells us that Tewdrig was able to kill his attacker with a sword before collapsing owing to the severity of his own wound. He left the battlefield on a cart pulled by two oxen (some sources insist on their being two stags!). The actual identity of the creatures is of small importance. What is interesting is mythological persistence that animals and their strange logic were part of the death of a holy hero.

At the end of the fighting, a young man called Arthwr was brought news that his grandfather, although not dead, was departing this life rapidly and that he, Arthwr, ought to prepare himself to don the mantle of kingship. This he did. Arthwr's father, King Meurig, Latin *Maurice* - who had assumed the title Uther Pendragon - vanishes from the scene of history after the Battle of Tintern. One asks: did he succumb to the Saxon invaders as well as Tewdrig?

Leaving all that aside, though, how is it that a notable warrior king came to be accepted as a saint by the early Celtic Church? Surely the fact that he had killed men in warfare was out of alignment with the code of Christian pacifism which was said to have flourished at this time? Let us look at such information as is available to modern scholars.

Tewdrig

A highly stylized - although widely accepted - biography would run as follows: Tewdrig, Latin *Theodoric*, had ruled the south-east of the increasingly isolated country of Wales for a number of years. A widower, whose sole progeny appears to have been a son, Meurig, he felt, as a devout Christian, that God was calling him to a life of solitude and contemplation. Accordingly, he handed over the reins of authority of his kingship

to his son. The kingdom was thus governed ably, while Tewdrig entered his hermitage on the banks of the River Wye at the place now called Tintern. [The name *Tintern* is, in fact, derived from two old Brythonic words: *din* meaning 'hill' or 'fort' and *teyrn* meaning 'king'. In other words: 'the hill of the king'.]

And so we find Tewdrig embarking on his divinely-inspired second career. He was respected by the ordinary people of the area, many of whom came to him from time to time for advice on secular as well as spiritual matters: his fame as a wise man being well known to them. His lengthy periods of silent contemplation led to his being accepted as a friend by the wild creatures who abounded on the banks of the Wye. Tewdrig enjoyed the reputation of a healer, too. Nennius suggest that he healed quarrels and souls as well as minds and bodies.

With the passing of the years, it became clearer and clearer that the Saxons were determined to push every westward. The Mercians were compelled to stop at the present English border owing to the successful guerrilla tactics of the Welsh, sensing that it was a justifiable line of demarcation and they thus acknowledged Celtic supremacy. But in south-east Wales, the men of Wessex were determined to encroach on British territory. When their threat became a real menace, Tewdrig abandoned his hermitage, to do what he believed God would have him do once again: to lead his people against a pagan foe. He donned the trappings of kingship afresh and, although advanced in years, assumed military command of his people.

The army of the King of Wessex crossed the Severn at a point just south of the present Aust Service Station and marched, in short order, into Gwent. It was halted and defeated resoundingly at Tintern by the war bands of Tewdrig. Although Tewdrig was wounded fatally there, he did not die at Tintern. The ox cart bearing his expiring body moved southwards, where it is said to have halted at a roadside well near Mathern (just off the M4). Whether Tewdrig's wounds were washed there, we shall never know. But St Tewdrig's Well can still be visited. It then moved on to Mathern, where the saint died. A church was built on the spot and still serves the Parish of Mathern to this day.

As one might expect, Tewdrig's remains were buried in the church and exhumations in 1610 and 1861 both proved that the skeleton contained therein had a skull showing signs of a wound exactly like the one said to have been sustained by the King of Gwent at the Battle of Tintern in 595. The battle took place on 1st April which is still observed locally as St Tewdrig's Day - even though the saint is not included in the calendar of the Church in Wales.

It is fitting nonetheless, to think that this wise and humble Christian ruler should be honoured by the community which he died to save.

Tremulous conclusion!

That, at least, is the local story. But was the Arthwr of the tale Arthur? If so, was Tewdrig his grandfather? And, if that is true, is the whole Arthur legend to be dated a century on? These are problems best left to the mists of time ...

◆ *The story of Tewdrig is from* ***The Book of Llandaff****. It has been discussed by Chris Barber and David Pykitt, Forrester Roberts and Messrs Gilbert, Wilson and Blackett and no doubt will re-appear in these pages again! A critical bibliography is surely needed...*

Wessex defeated

Another sword in another stone

Steve Sneyd

Everyone knows the story of how Arthur achieved recognition as king by drawing the sword from the stone after others had failed, even though this is a relatively late addition to the Matter of Britain.

Much less well known is that Italy has a quite independent sword-in-the-stone story, with the striking feature that both can still be seen at a hilltop site in Tuscany, southwest of Siena.

There, eleven hundred feet up on Montesiepe, stands the Hermitage church, open daily from 8 am till dusk.

On the way up the miniature mountain to the Hermitage, you pass at 970 feet the roofless Abbey of San Galgano, abandoned in around 1700.

The sword in the stone

San Galgano - Saint Galganus, saint's day December 5 - is the person held responsible for the sword in the stone being there. The hilt with a small portion of blade showing above the point where it disappears into a large rock, which can today be seen in the centre of the Hermitage church, is believed to be the original 12th century knight's sword concerned.

Galgano Guidotti was a nobleman of Chiusdino, an ancient hilltop village to the west of Montesiepe. He was born in 1148, his parents regarding his arrival as a miracle, since after they had given up hope of having a child he was born "thanks to the intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel". He grew up "beautiful and arrogant", leading the worldly life of a knight.

There are two versions of what happened next. Either: as Galgano, an adventurer known as something of a Don Juan, was riding to see his latest conquest, named as Polisenna of Civitella, he had a vision of the Archangel Michael which led to the sword in the stone episode, and an immediate decision to become a hermit.

Or: having found that his drunken and debauched life did not bring the happiness he sought, he more gradually developed a vocation for the hermit's life, the decision to "live in seclusion with God and Nature" influenced by a series of dreams of the Archangel Michael, in the course of which he was told where he should found his hermit's cell and how it should be built.

The former more dramatic version has the vision of the Archangel, after blinding the knight and his horse with its radiance, demanding that he at once give up his worldly life and become a hermit. The knight Galgano responded by saying he could no more give up the sins of the flesh than plunge his sword into a stone. To reinforce the statement, he dismounted from his horse, thrust his sword at a rock, and to his amazement it entered smoothly, up to the hilt. Whereupon he at once accepted this sign from heaven, and built his hermitage where he could see the sword in the stone and constantly be reminded of his vow. (This is the version recounted by Paolo Raspolli.)

The latter account, that given by the guardians of the Hermitage church today, says that the thrusting of the sword into the stone was either "a deed of refusing the cruelty of war", and that only subsequently did Galgano begin "adoration of the sword as a cross", or that it was due to the impossibility of finding the right wood to make a cross on the bare hilltop, the Archangel then appearing in another dream to tell him to thrust the sword into the stone and use it as a cross to pray. "He did that and so it was."

(Knights in any case would on occasion take oaths on their sword hilt, because of its cross-shape, if no other cross was available, so the idea would presumably be one which would come readily to a knightly mind.)

The broken sword

Galgano's hermitage was violated soon after by an intrusion of three pilgrims on their way to Rome. They attempted to pull the sword from the stone. Enraged at being unable to do so, they broke it, so the story goes, and burnt the hermitage.

Here, the story does contain an element resembling the frustrated attempts to release the sword from the stone in the Arthurian episode, though with a more drastic response to the disappointment - and leading on to an even more drastic resolution.

For, on their return from Rome, when the three pilgrims again reached Montesiepe, they were attacked and killed by the local wolves, which Galgano had befriended, and thus paid for the sacrilege with their lives.

The wolves, it is said, then tore the hands off one of the corpses and brought them to Galgano. ("These are still kept inside the little Chapel, decorated with frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, to the left of the Hermitage.")

The Archangel then appeared to Galgano one more time and told him to put the broken sword back into its place and "it was mended at once - whole again." (Presumably the "scoundrels" had broken the hilt off from the blade, and the two were now miraculously rejoined.)

San Galgano

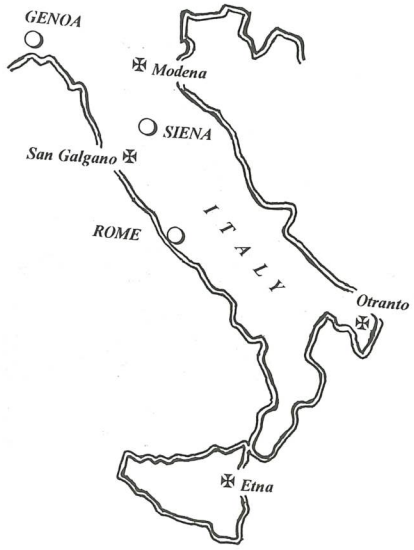
Galgano died in 1181, and three years later the Hermitage church was built to hold his remains and preserve the sword in the stone at its centre. He was canonised in 1185, and the Abbey was begun in 1196, being taken over in 1201 by the Cistercians, who fed and sheltered pilgrims to the site till the end of the 17th century when support dwindled and it was abandoned.

The Montesiepe sword in the stone has never, apparently, been scientifically investigated or dated but it is locally still firmly believed to be the original sword of the knight-turned-saint.

While having no direct link to the Arthurian story, other than the element of sword into stone, the religious and ritual aspects do perhaps illumine possible resonances other than the obvious kingship test involved in the Matter episode.

Acknowledgements

My thanks must go to the Associazione Pro Loco, Comune di Chiusdino, for their very full and helpful reply to my enquiry (phrases in quotation marks are direct quotes from their text), and to Joe Napolitano for initially drawing the story to my attention and supplying a copy of the article by Paolo Raspolli, "The Sword In The Stone", which appeared in *Fear* magazine, March 1995, pp 33-4.



From San Galgano to Sir Galahad

Chris Lovegrove

At the same time that the Normans were consolidating their hold on England, other parts of Europe (and in time the Middle East) were also falling under their influence. In their wake they drew along various other cultural influences, including the Matter of Britain.

And so it is that in the Italian peninsula we see the expansion of Arthurian motifs through the 12th century and beyond. At Modena an Arthurian tale is told in stone on the archivolt of a portal of the cathedral, sometime around 1120-40; at Otranto a mosaic of Arthur riding a goat and combating a fierce cat is depicted in 1165; and Arthur is reported to have been encountered sleeping on Mount Etna in Sicily (variously called Mongibel, Mongibello or Mount Gyber) in at least three separate sources throughout the 13th century (Stokstad 1991; Hoffman 1991; White 1997).

There is perhaps more, then, to the Tuscan sword-in-the-stone story that Steve Sneyd draws our attention to (*Another sword in another stone*, above). During this same period, the 12th and 13th centuries, names derived from Arthurian tales began to be given to Italian children (Kleinhenz 1991), and among these names we find Galvanus, an Italian version of Gawain.

Gawain in Italy

Intermediaries for Galvanus (and other forms like Walganus and Walwanius in Latin) are the French Gauvain and Gauwain. On the Modena archivolt Gawain appears as Galvagin. Other variants are the Dutch Walewein, and Walwen in the pages of William of Malmesbury. It is generally accepted (though this is not universal) that there is a relationship with the medieval Welsh Gwalchmai (perhaps "hawk of May"). Scottish Gaelic ballads yield Sir Bhalbha (Ward 1991), with Gavin as a modern Scots form (Dunkling 1978). There is a medieval Irish form, Balbhuaidh, while the modern Irish name Galvin may derive from the Gaelic *gealbhan*, one meaning of which is "sparrow" (Coghlan 1979).

The point of this linguistic excursion is to demonstrate that Galgano Guidotti (Galganus in medieval Latin) was in all likelihood named after Arthur's kinsman, but it is unclear whether this was because of Norman or Breton family ties or because of the literary fashion of the times. This may have some bearing not only on the act that symbolised Galgano's conversion to the religious

life but also on the subsequent development of the medieval Grail legend.

Life imitates art?

The legends of San Galgano are so chock-full of the commonplace religious motifs - the Pauline conversion, the angelic dream messages, the befriending of wild animals, their grotesque loyalty to the saint and so on - that it is tempting to dismiss the lot out of hand.

The one exception is the sword itself which, as Sneyd points out, still exists today, embedded in a stone in the Capella di Monte Siepi, the successor to Galgano's hermitage, built as Galgano's mausoleum between 1182 and 1185. It is hard to resist what appears obvious, that the inspiration for the act of placing the medieval weapon in the stone, however it came about, derived from the Arthurian legends themselves.

We are, however, so used to the concept of the drawing of the sword from the stone that it may come as a surprise that the young Arthur performs no such deed in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* of 1136. The earliest we can date the story is the early 13th century, when Robert de Boron's poem *Merlin* appeared (only 504 lines remain) with a prose adaptation shortly afterwards (not surprisingly called the Prose *Merlin*). In Robert's version (and he is followed in this by Malory) the sword is set in an anvil which is itself set on a stone (Lacy 1991). Incidentally, illuminated manuscripts depict the sword not as vertical but horizontal.

Where did Robert get this idea from? The Greek tale of Theseus lifting a stone to retrieve his father's sword is one possibility, while others look favourably on Sigmund the Volsung's drawing of a stone from a beam of wood as a source. Other cultures have related tales - the Arabic hero 'Antar finds his sword revealed to him in the sand - but none of these stories is an exact fit. We are left with the curious fact that Saint Galgano died in 1181, when he was 33, a full decade before it is surmised that Robert began his cycle of Grail romances (O'Gorman 1991). Did reports of Galgano's sword influence Robert de Boron?

Art imitates life?

According to some accounts, the building of the Abbazia di San Galgano, which was founded in 1218, was actually begun in 1224 on a wooded site a hundred feet below the site of the saint's hermitage, by the Cistercians. This order of reforming monks, founded over a century before in France, had their only abbey in Tuscany here, and it apparently grew to become the leading monastic power in the region. It was at this crucial time (c1215-30) that the most influential of all the Grail romances was being produced, most credibly by someone who, if not actually a Cistercian, was greatly in sympathy with Cistercian ideals.

The *Queste del Saint Graal* (part of the so-called Vulgate Cycle) begins at Pentecost with the twin wonders of the Perilous Seat and a stone which floated in the water. "Held fast in its red marble was a sword, superb in its beauty, with a pommel carved from a precious stone cunningly inlaid with letters of gold. The barons examined the inscription which read: *None shall take me hence but he at whose side I am to hang. And he shall be the best knight in the world.*"

Lancelot refuses to draw it: "For I know full well that none shall fail in the attempt but he receive some wound." Arthur then insists Gawain try, but he fails, as does Perceval. Only Galahad, presented to Arthur's court by "a man robed in white", manages to sit unharmed in the Perilous Seat and to draw the sword from the marble stone (Matarasso 1969). The "man robed in white" is a scarcely-veiled reference to the Cistercians, whose habit was uniquely white. All this is followed by the first appearance of the Grail in the Queste at Arthur's court.

The broken sword (Ian Brown)

Sir Galahad

This is the first mention of Galahad in literature, and seems to have been an invention of the anonymous French author. The very name of Galahad (or Galaad in the French) is often held to derive from references in Genesis to Mount Gilead. It was here that Laban overtook his nephew (and son-in-law) Jacob after Jacob had escaped his father-in-law and uncle's enforced hospitality (Genesis 31). A standing stone in a cairn of stones was raised as both boundary marker and witness to their covenant or peace treaty, and the new site's placename explained as Galeed, or " heap of witness".

That standing stone in a heap of stones may have recalled the image of the sword in the stone to the mind of the Cistercian author, and a name derived from Gilead or Galeed may then have suggested itself. May that new name Galaad or Galahad not also have been reinforced by the name of Galgano in whose memory a new Cistercian abbey was being planned in Tuscany? Galgano or Gawain was not quite appropriate, but another name beginning *Gal-* might well fit the bill.

So, was San Galgano the inspiration for Sir Galahad, in both name and deed?

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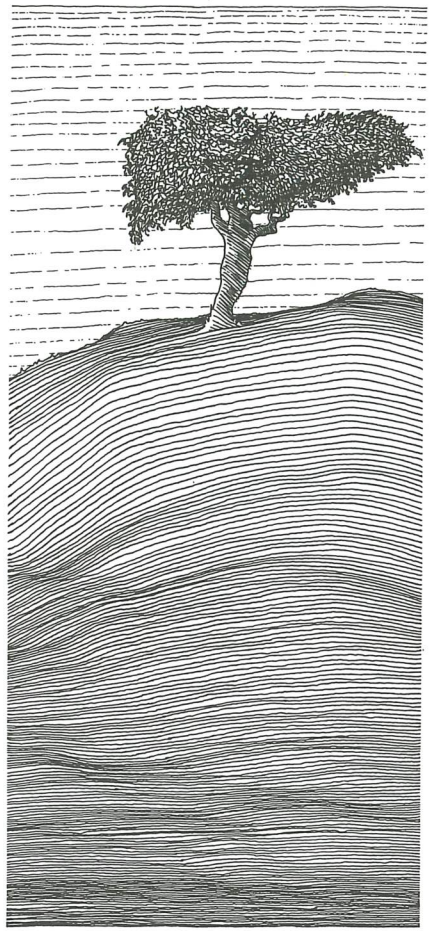
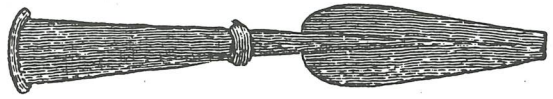


The Glastonbury Thorn (Ian Brown)



The Changing Beast

Ordinary crocodile, grotesque amphibian
Were you as such the beast of Sylene mire
Without ability to rise, yet having fetid breath
That poetic words gave flight and element of fire?
What was the basis of your story
Appeasement, sacrifice or adulation?
Was there more than fear or worship of a god
Young life devoured perhaps for stimulation?
Would another day be worth the Roman coin?
Did they raise the status of human sacrifice
To be thwarted, shaken by a Roman, George
Whose action saved a noble life?
With myth established by artistic brush
Was a European girl essential to illumination
With St George on horse in medieval armour
Set against a versatile and wiry dragon?
Many literary heroes fought against a fabulous beast
Yet mundane persons chose the dragon for a badge
Though were Romans first in using it as fiery apparition
To undermine determined Britons from their stand?
Yet if dragon served as Celtic sovereign emblem
And there was Teuton colonizing in this land
How successful might have been ubiquitous decoration
As a fired effect in gaining upper hand?
When Saxon and Norman scarred Britannia
Was it then the most determined symbol on display
That joined so many sides in human conflict
Lasting twenty centuries on a changing stage?
Now in stone the dragon guards the royal chapel
Emblazoned too on Welsh flag and Wessex cloth
Yet the English patron, George, of uncertain standing
With saintly lance deposes ancient dragon in his wrath.

Reg Baggs

(above) Dürer's St George

(below) Tristan and Isolde

Tristan and Isolde (2)
Tala Bar

Literary Versions

In the *Encyclopaedia of World Mythology*, there is an explanation of the geographical wanderings and transformations of the Arthurian legends, of which Tristan's is a part; the original Arthur is known to have been a Welsh king and a military leader of many conquests and exploits, who lived and died in the 6th century AD:

An English chronicler named William of Malmesbury, writing in 1125, said that the Britons told many fables about Arthur...

implying that it was high time a real history was written about him (*op cit* 189).

A few years later, c 1135, the first full and connected account of the hero appeared in Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain" (*ibid* 189).

In 1155, the year of Geoffrey's death, Robert Wace translated it from the Latin into French, and by 1200, an English cleric named Layamon had turned Wace's version into English with some additions and reformations. Meanwhile, another French writer, Chrétien de Troyes, rewrote the legends with more variations and changes, making it more marvelous and full of fantasy (*ibid* 190).

In the 15th century the Arthurian legend reached its finest expression in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Since then, it had attracted many writers and artists, including Spenser, Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites and Masefield (*ibid* 190). The *Encyclopaedia* does not mention the versions and artistic references which particularly mention the story of Tristan.

All ancient manuscripts telling it which exist today are partial, having been written in the 12th and 13th centuries in the form of poetic romances of the lives and exploits of heroic knights and warriors. As such, they are full of descriptions, flowery language and moral preaching according to the life and ideas of the late middle ages. In addition, the various versions are filled with stories and events which have nothing to do with the main legend, according to the different inclinations of their authors (by names - Béroul, Eilhart von Auberge, Thomas of England, Gottfried von Strassberg, and the Italian and French texts in prose). I venture to bring here some example of the more interesting of those variations, in the order of the main line of the story: the birth and youth of Tristan; the battle with Morold; Tristan's first visit to Ireland; Tristan's second visit to Ireland; the love potion; at King Mark's court; life in the forest; Tristan's exploits outside Cornwall; the lovers' death.

Variations

Although there are some differences in the tale of how Tristan's parents met and married, and the way he was born, a greater controversy exists between Eilhart's story, that Tristan was sent by his father at the age of fourteen on a visit to Cornwall, and the others which say that he was brought up after his father's death by the king's marshal, that he was kidnapped by Norwegian traders, and that he was abandoned on the shore of Cornwall to be found by Mark's men.

Tristan's visit to Ireland after killing its hero was dangerous, whether he went there intentionally, as some maintain, or drifted there in a boat without sail or oar. For that reason, perhaps, some versions claim that he came there under a false name - Tantrist, according to Gottfried, which is Tristan in reverse - to be cured by the queen. While Malory says that Tristan taught Princess Isolde to play music and they fell in love then, Eilhart denies they ever met at that time.

There is a mythic tale about Mark's knowledge of the existence of Isolde: One day he saw a golden hair in the beak of a swallow, and decided he would marry its owner. Both Gottfried and Thomas deny that story.

In his second visit to Ireland, Tristan killed a dangerous dragon and was poisoned by its blood. Having been brought to court to be cured, he was recognized by the queen and her daughter both as the killer of the dragon of Morold, the Queen's brother; this led some interpreters to speculate that these were one and the same. By his action, Tristan wins the Princess's hand; some versions claim, though, that Isolde's parents preferred her to marry the established King Mark. The potion the couple drank on their voyage to Cornwall, according to Malory, only turned the already existing spiritual love between the pair into physical attraction; but other claim it was the first time they recognised themselves as a man and a woman, rather than princess and her vassal.

There are many complex events and variations in the story of Tristan's life at the court of his uncle, King Mark, after he had brought Isolde there; many of them tell in different ways the various forms in which the lovers tried to deceive the husband in order to meet and be together: Isolde's maid Brengwyn, Tristan's tutor Gouvernal, and other servants, according to some versions, took active part in it. Some of the courtiers were jealous of Tristan and tried to alienate him from his uncle; others, for one reason or another, helped the lovers. According

to some versions, they were exiled and went to live in the forest.

According to Eilhart and Béroul, the lovers made the acquaintance of a hermit, who tried to persuade them to avoid carnal relations, to go back to court and get their reward or punishment as their desert. Many times, Mark was involved in their actions, trying to catch them, and to separate them in any way he could. In the end, Isolde returned to court and Tristan resumed his travellings.

Tristan went to many places and did many great deeds; the various versions count the countries of his visits as Britain, the Continent, Africa, Rome and Spain, until he finally reached and settled in Brittany.

As in Ireland, Tristan again demonstrated his greatness in battle in the service of the local Duke, thus winning the hand of his daughter, Isolde of the White Hands; but Tristan did anything he could in order to avoid sleeping with Dark Isolde, so as not to offend his love for the Fair Isolde.

In one way or another, according to the different writers, Tristan managed to meet his beloved one more time; but they were discovered and he was hurt with a poisoned arrow again, and returned to his wife in Brittany. It can be noticed how many of Tristan's adventures in Brittany are a repetition of those he had in Ireland, even not wanting to sleep with the woman at his side. Tristan sent word to Fair Isolde to come and see him before he dies, stipulating that if she was on the ship, the sails should be white - or blue, according to the Icelandic ballad. But when the ship returned, though it carried Queen Isolde on it, his wife told him the sail was black. He died of a broken heart, and when Isolde came and found him, she also died.

Different versions tell of their burial. Eilhart says that Mark himself came to fetch their bodies to Cornwall, burying them separately and planting on Isolde's grave a rose and on Tristan's a vine. Both bushes grew and joined together. The Icelandic ballad says that the graves were situated on both side of a church, and that the trees growing from them joined over the church's roof. According to Thomas, though, the two were buried inside a church, on either side of the choir wooden screen. The next day, a bush growing out of Tristan's coffin crossed over the screen and set roots in Isolde's coffin, blossoming with scented flowers. Three times the farmers cut down the bush, and three times it grew again in the same way. When they told Mark about it, he forbade them to cut it down again, and the bush became the symbol of the eternal love between Noble Tristan and Fair Isolde.

Artistic Versions

The proximity of love and death, heroism and passion and divided loyalties have long been subjects of tales from ancient myths through medieval romances up to modern fiction in writing and in the visual arts. The story of the love and death of Tristan and Isolde is the epitome of such mixture, and as such has served as material for many creators, old and new.

Medieval tellings

Ancient and medieval writers did not know or use the term 'fiction'. Stories were usually told for a purpose - either to teach and instruct, or to divert and entertain; the idea that a teller would invent a completely new story in order to express his own feelings would have sounded bizarre and unnatural in those days. Usually, the material used was old and known in one form or another, the teller's function was to tell it in an interesting way, to embellish it in any way he or she would find it necessary.

Thus, like other ancient tales and legends, Tristan's story does not have a known origin - it has all the marks of having been initially told orally over and over in various versions before it had ever been written down.

Joseph Bédier had found five written independent versions, and these already were literary in form, not just informative of the details of the story, but full of descriptions of the various emotions expressed in it: the admiration of heroism, the fear in face of danger, the pain of being hurt, the passion of love, the sadness of death.

Here are some such expression as they appear in the medieval Icelandic ballad:

Queen Isolde stood before the King her husband:
"Would you let your nephew die of his wounds?"
The king answered her in his anger:
"The man is lost, not to be cured."
Queen Isolde the Fair talked softly,
Circling her arms round his neck...
Tristan turned his face and fought against death,
For three miles the sound of his breaking heart
was heard, released from its jail...
The pain and anger of Dark Isolde strengthened
As she saw the two dead bodies carried from the church.

Gottfried of Strassberg, on the other hand, is more interested in moral instruction, as he says

in the Prologue to his *Tristan* (translated by A T Hatto):

A man does well to praise what he cannot do without. Let it please him so long as it may.

That man is dear and precious to me who can judge of good and bad and know me and all men at our true worth ...

There are so many today who are given to judging the good bad and the bad good. They act not to right but to cross purpose.

In contrast to the curtness of the Ballad, Gottfried's book is very long and full of descriptions, conversations, and additional characters and events, either taken from other sources or invented by the author. Here is a description of the couple leaving Ireland for Cornwall, and later their drinking of the love potion:

Out of love for Isolde, the King and Queen and the whole court followed him down to the harbour. The girl he never dreamt would be his love, his abiding anguish of heart, radiant, exquisite Isolde, was the whole time weeping beside him ...

Now, when the maid and the man, Isolde and Tristan, had drunk the draught, in an instant that arch-disturber of tranquillity was there, Love, waylayer of all hearts, and she had stolen in! ...

When Tristan felt the stirrings of love he at once remembered loyalty and honour, and strove to turn away.

Modern versions

It was the German composer Richard Wagner, renowned for his great operas, who took Gottfried's text for his great opera *Tristan und Isolde*: Paul Bekker says:
Wagner never delved so deep into his own being as in Tristan *... [In it] a new fount of music ... passed onward into an emotional sphere far surpassing that of the forces of nature, into the sphere of human suffering, caused by recognitions of the Love-instinct as the ultimate law of being. In the saga of Tristan and Isolde Wagner found a drama in which to embody this conception* (Bekker 1931 285-6).

Wagner lived in the Victorian era, in which the peak of romanticism in all the arts was reached. The romantics opened themselves to the greatest range of human emotions, from the highest to the lowest, and, indeed, the story of Tristan provides a basis for this range to the full.

In his long poem *Tristram of Lyonesse*, the English poet A C Swinburne, albeit with a heavy five-stepped iambic rhythm, clumsy rhymes and long, convoluted sentences, expresses the basic mythological idea of the closeness of life, love and death:

Yea, heart in heart in molten, hers and his,
Into the world's heart of the soul is
Beyond or sense or vision; and their breath
Stirs the soft springs of deathless life and death,
Death that bears life, and change that brings forth seed
Of life to death and death to life indeed...
(Swinburne 1892 110)

The ancient story has an influence also on the artistic mind of modern times. In the catalogue of an exhibition of paintings and drawings by Oskar Kokoschka from 1912-22, there is an essay by the artist called *Tristan und Isolde*; and the Israeli poet Abraham Balaban has produced a book containing a cycle of love poems called *Tristan and Isolde - a Chronicle of Impossible Love*. Here are some quotes from this book (my translation from the Hebrew):

Tristan and Isolde in the forest -
Enlightenment
Resting on a couch of grass
Tristan and Isolde are like water meeting water.
Water absorbed in the clear air, in the treetops,
In the fluff of clouds.
The fine membrane of the soul
Sliced like the placenta.

An Impossible Love. The End:
Tristan and Isolde rest in their home.
How clear it is now:
They'll never have a son.
They'll never have a home.
The Eternal Home will be their home.*

*

How clear it is now
That it was an impossible love.
They have had a miracle,
Like the miracle of the water breaking out of the rock.
Now the rock is sealed.
They rest between the walls of their home.
(Balaban 1982 17, 75)

[* *ie* the graveyard. T B]

This book of poems is illustrated by paintings from a French manuscript from the 15th century,

called *Roman de Tristan*, and found today in the Austrian National Library.

Conclusion

Love, death, heroism, passion and divided loyalties, which make up the story of Tristan and Isolde, form the essence of all human drama as has been expressed throughout the generations, centuries and millennia of all kinds of human creation. From the classic *Iliad*, Helen and the Trojan wars, to Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, from *Romeo and Juliet* in all its variations to the simplicity of *Love Story*, from the ultra-romantic *Wuthering Heights* to the modern Bashevis Singer's *Enemies - a Love Story*, more than any other myth, that of Tristan and Isolde consists of all these five elements which have inspired writers, painters, musicians and other creators and have affected their recipients and will continue to do so even in the age of space travel and science fiction.

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Cross from Kelloe, Co Durham: St Helen, the mother of the emperor Constantine, dreams of the discovery of the True Cross with, below, the archaeological dig to find it. "In hoc, vince" refers to Constantine's vision of the cross.

Moorcock, the Grail and the Fall of the Nazis

W M S Russell

In a recent issue of this journal (1), Steve Sneyd gave an interesting account of the appearance and significance of the Grail in two novels of Michael Moorcock, *The War Hound and the World's Pain* and *The City in the Autumn Stars*. The heroes of these novels are two successive members of the Saxon family of Von Bek, adventuring in the early 17th and late 18th centuries, respectively. Both have a special relationship with the Grail, which figures on the family's coat of arms.

Moorcock is so inventive and prolific a writer, that we need not be surprised to find the Grail in another of his novels, *The Dragon in the Sword* (2). This is the third volume of a trilogy concerning the Eternal Champion, a hero summoned to battle in countless space-time compartments of the multiverse of parallel or alternate worlds in which Moorcock sets his stories. In his most peaceful avatar, a respite from his everlasting battles, he is a painter, John Daker, in late 20th-century London. In *The Eternal Champion* (3), he is summoned to become Erekosë ('the one who is always there') (4), in a world where human beings are waging a war of extermination against a slightly different race called the Eldren. Daker-Erekosë has nearly won this war when he discovers that the Eldren are civilised and peace-loving, the humans of this world completely insane. He changes sides, exterminates the mad humans, and settled down to a happy life with his Eldren love, Ermizhad. But in *Phoenix in Obsidian* (5) he is snatched away to a half-frozen world orbiting a dying sun, where, as Urlik Skarsol, he has to save the people of this world from a vicious tyrant. From this space-time on (though the words hardly fit in the multiverse) he is endlessly seeking to return to the world of his Ermizhad.

The Grail

In these two novels, the Grail does not appear as such by name. In the first novel, the only trace of it is a gold and jewelled wine-cup that the hero throws into the sea. But in the second novel there is a mysterious chalice. The novel ends with the hero using a demonic sword to kill a beautiful queen. The sword drips blood into the chalice, and when this is full it is raised to pour the blood into the sun, which is revivified.

This episode recalls several motifs of legend and literature. Jean Markale has shown that the Grail has at least one source in prehistoric human sacrifice (6). The clearest expression of this is in the Welsh tale of *Peredur*, where the Grail is a severed human head on a salver. Robert de Boron, writing at the turn of the 12th-13th centuries, made the Grail the chalice of the Last Supper, in which Joseph of Arimathea had collected the blood of the crucified (sacrificed) Christ (7). Finally, Moorcock has combined with these reminiscences the gruesome notion of the Aztecs that the sun has to be fed with human blood (8).

Realms

In *The Dragon in the Sword*, Daker-Erekosë is summoned to a complex of six worlds, or Realms, normally separate but periodically mutually accessible through special entrances when their dimensions intersect. One of these Realms is the home of the women of the Eldren, of a generation far removed in space and time from Ermizhad's. They can only join their menfolk in yet another world with the help of a mystical dragon. But this creature has been miniaturised and imprisoned in a magical sword. The sword is itself imprisoned in a crystal cliff in a seventh, central realm of the many-realmed complex. This is Alptroomensheem (the people here speak a kind of old German), the Nightmare Marches. It is a kind of hell ruled by a demon Lord of Chaos called Balarizaaf. Fortunately, it is possible to move from the six Realms to this one, but not *vice versa*.

But a foolish and wicked queen, engaged in conquering the Six Realms, is plotting to open a gateway for Balarizaaf, which will enable him to plunge the whole complex into Chaos. The dragon-containing sword is needed to combat the Chaos Lord. Hence whoever wields and then breaks it can both save the complex from Chaos and reunite the Eldren people. The only person who can free the sword from its crystal prison (a kind of sword in the stone) is Daker-Erekosë.

Heroes

The novels of Moorcock are as intricately interconnected as the compartments of his multiverse. Of a very large number of heroes, four are of special interest - Daker-Erekosë, Elric of Melniboné, Hawkmoon, and Prince Corum. Each of these has a set of novels to himself, but the heroes can appear in each other's novels. They are 'different manifestations of the same Hero, drawn from different worlds at different times', but they can be 'coexisting in the same

world at the same time' (9), and therefore in the same novel. As Prince Corum puts it, 'we all share the same identity - but only you, Erekosë, remember them all' (10). In one Elric novel, *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* (11), the four are temporarily fused into one super-hero with awesome powers, to defeat a specially dangerous pair of enemies, only to part again and go their separate ways. The same episode is repeated almost word for word in a Hawkmoon novel, *The Quest for Tanelorn* (9), and it is in this novel that Erekosë and Ermizhad, hitherto immortal, finally die and are turned into statues.

In *The Dragon in the Sword*, Daker-Erekosë dreams of his identity with the other three, and very many other heroes, but none of them actually join him in this adventure. But he *is* joined by an ally from another novel-sequence, namely another member of the Von Bek family, and it is no doubt this essential association that makes it possible to bring in the Grail. This Von Bek lives in the early 20th century of our own world, and devotes his life to freeing his beloved Germany from the Nazi tyranny. He is thus a fictional representative of those incredibly brave real-life people who have earned eternal glory for the German nation by their resistance to Hitler - not only the prominent figures, such as Stauffenberg and Von Moltke, but the countless 'ordinary' German men and women who risked torture and death to save Jews (12). Von Bek has learned from his family archives how to enter other worlds, and after a failed attempt to kill Hitler has escaped to the Six Realms, where he becomes Daker-Erekosë's friend and ally. They are joined also by Alisaard, a warrior-woman of the Eldren, who becomes Von Bek's lover.

Nuremberg

After many adventures in the Six Realms, these three enter the terrifying, continually changing Nightmare Marches of Chaos, in search of the sword. They are guided by Sepiriz, an immortal agent of the Cosmic Balance that seeks to hold an equilibrium between Law and Chaos. He tells them a hare will guide them to a Cup, this to a unicorn, and the unicorn to the sword. In fact the hare leads them to a gateway between worlds, and they are transported to the vaults of a castle in Nuremberg, in what from the context must be early December 1940. (In the novel, the decision to invade Russia has not been made yet: in real life, Hitler issued the directive for Operation Barbarossa on the 18th of December in that year, though of course it was not until the 22nd of June 1941 that the invasion actually started.) (13)

The two heroes and the heroine, who are luckily as insubstantial as ghosts, hide in an underground chapel the Nazi bosses have established for pagan worship.

There have been several articles in this journal about the obsession of the Nazi bosses with the Grail (14). Charles Evans-Günther showed in one of these articles that, although Hitler used Grail rhetoric, probably only Himmler and his associates took this seriously. But with novelist's licence Moorcock has Hitler and Goering as believers, with Goebbels cynically playing up to them. These three enter the chapel, and Goebbels summons the Grail. To the surprise of both the Nazis and the hidden watchers, the Grail appears! But when Hitler tries to seize it, his hands are burned. Goebbels treats it as an oracle, and asks if they should invade Russia. Alisaard shows herself, declares that she and her comrades need the Grail, and orders the Nazis to leave, pointing to the door. The Nazis cannot understand the old German of this Grail maiden, but she happens to be pointing East, and Goering takes this for an oracular answer.

Von Bek takes the Grail, and he and his friends make their way back to the Nightmare Marches. Here the Grail enables them to withstand an approach by Balarizaaf, before it is taken over by Sepiriz. Clearly the presence in the novel of a Von Bek was, in Moorcock's terms, essential for the success of the quest in these realms. There are further complications, but Daker-Erekosë obtains the sword, defeats the wicked queen and the Chaos Lord, enables the Eldren women to rejoin their men (taking Alisaard and Von Bek with them), and is himself returned for a time to late 20th-century London in our world.

The special interest of this novel is its interweaving of the defeat of Chaos in the Six Realms with the fall of the Nazis. It is because he realises that the Nazis will now fail that Von Bek is happy to retire and live with the Eldren: before the scene in the Nuremberg castle, Daker-Erekosë had been careful not to tell him of their defeat, for fear of time-paradox. Moorcock's ingenuity lies in his use of the Grail to deliver a thoroughly Delphic oracle. For the Nazis in the novel have taken Alisaard's gesture (pointing to the East) as inspired advice to embark on that war on two fronts which was to contribute so much to their eventual downfall.

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Ulrich von Bek in the aviary of Count Otto of Gerantz-Holffein

Reviews

Alan Simon
Excalibur - La Légende des Celtes
ISIS label1999 CD PSR4927132

Alan Simon has put a great deal of effort and thought into this project. According to his website, he's a Breton songwriter and composer, and he devised this concept album and managed to get the artists involved before he had any kind of recording deal (which he has now, through Sony). The packaging is exquisite, with the CD itself printed to become the Winchester Round Table, above the Triskell on a J card beneath. All kinds of reputed musicians and one highly respected French actor are involved in the performance of the words and music. I picked up my copy at a supermarket in the little Breton town of Pleyber-Christ, so they've obviously got distribution sorted, too. I was very optimistic about it, until I put it on the CD player. Oh, well.

It opens with a vastly over-produced and clichéd orchestral moment, complete with sonorous male voices. Straight then into *Pour l'Amour de la Reine* by Tri Yann, telling the story of the bedding and wedding of Igraine to Uther. Decidedly unreconstructed electric folk rock, with very few redeeming qualities and some sadly limping French poetry.

On to *The Elements*, performed by Roger Hodgson, late of Supertramp, again sounding rather dated (1970s, I thought, possibly?). I know now from the website that Roger's voice is supposed to stand in for Arthur, but that doesn't shed much light on the rather odd English words ("I shall with wise men learn / and as the seasons turn / I'll raise a tower of light / where in the flame of hope shall burn"). And if Roger *does* represent Arthur we can only conclude he's American, if we follow the logic of the casting whereby the knights seem to be pretty butch English, Morgan is Irish and Perceval is more a Gaulois than a Gallois in the form of Gabriel Yacoub.

We move rapidly from this lyricism into Fairport Convention giving it a harsh bash with the instrumental Castel (*sic*) Rock (Arthur subduing the recalcitrant barons), and then to Nikki Matheson singing *Morning Song* with a melody that sounds uncannily like *Wild Mountain Thyme* in places. "From the earth to the sky / Through the fire / through the rain / Carry me, I'll carry you / By our love be born again." Not quite sure who this is supposed to be, but then we move into the even less directly attributable *Celtic*

Dream with some male voice choir in the background and a Riverdance fiddle and bagpipe duet. There may be a melody in there somewhere, but it's not exactly obvious.

After this comes *Ad Libitum* (male voice choir again, this time singing in Latin ... not sure why, but it has something to do with Guenevere) and then an orchestral moment with Carlos Nunez playing flute, which is all very beautiful. Includes a solo counter tenor. Wish I understood this bit.

OK. Back to more solid ground - here's Bohinta with *Morgane* (*sic*). And we know the point of view this time, too, if the magic is somewhat dubious (maybe I've been using the wrong grimoire?). "Serpent skin and mandrake flower / I'll craft to wield my power / Sorceress I am / Morgane le Fay." Here again it's electrified folk music with a bass buzzing away like billy-o in the background. And a missing syllable in "Camlot", which is intensely irritating.

Now to *The Gest of Gauvain*, with Fairport Convention doing their best with words such as "Where's the champion of the Queen / why nobody can answer me / By the blood, the sword and my Lord / I request the Will of God". Oh, and a mathematical puzzle in the lyrics ... "From Castle Rock to Caerleon / From Dubglas Shore to Celidon / from Badon Hill to Fort Gurnion / These twelve great battles we have won."

It's almost a relief to come across the next set of words in Breton, which I don't speak ... *Davet ar Baradoz*, with the estimable Denez Prigent performing them. By far the best bit of singing so far, but all too short, and a heavy duty church organ just when I was hoping for something simpler. Seems to have some connection with Balan, Gawain and Lancelot, but hey, who's being logical here?

One we go, with Gabriel Yacoub singing *La Complainte de Perceval*. It's not just the English lyrics that leave something to be desired, after all ... "Je m'appelle Perceval / Chevalier du Saint Graal / A pied ou à cheval / La Quête est mon seul idéal." Right. It's the Grail Quest. And the theme is taken on by the Choeurs Orthodoxes Bulgares Philippopolis, so that we know this is something deeply spiritual.

Then back comes Roger Hodgson, with a mysterious little ditty *The Will of God*, which sounds very early Beatles in their *Strawberry Fields* incarnation ... most unsettling, straight after the male voices. And lyrics that are even more gnomic than usual ... "Hear my cry / cry for tainted love / love that has been broken / broken hearts shall writhe."

In comes Bohinta agin, with *Camlann*, in which I became thoroughly confused as Arthur appears to be flying the white dragon, Morgane seems to be fighting him and something seems to be on fire. Oh, and there are moments when it's rather horribly out of tune - if it's intentional it's really not a good artistic concept. This ends with a lot of battle sounds and some pipes managing again to avoid any identifiable melody. Angelo Branduardi joins in here for another over-produced, over-reverbed *L'appel de Galahad*, which is so short you might miss it if you hiccup, Perceval picks up the sword and throws it into the lake (I'm sorry ... *PERCEVAL*??) and then the incomparable Dan Ar Bras playing *Excalibur*, but again, you'll miss it if you're not paying full attention. The album closes with Bruno Le Rouzic playing *Vers l'Ile d'Avalon* on some splendidly atmospheric bagpipes.

As I said at the start of this review, Alan Simon has put a huge amount of time, thought, effort and money into this project. A wish list of Celtic musicians, beautiful art work (except the instrumental credits at the end, which are in such a small font they're illegible without a magnifying glass). There is, apparently, more to come - a second volume (in which Arthur returns, perhaps?), a live album and some festival appearances. What a pity that the music and the lyrics (and the academic side) just can't sustain the result. Now if someone would only give me the equivalent budget and resources ... ah, what a dream that would be!

But if you wish to know more about this project (and you may like it more than I do) you can consult the website at <www.ISISMUSIC.COM>. Don't try to read it in English (the American flag symbol) as you'll end up on a building site in cyberspace, and try to remain patient as the elaborate graphics download ... oh, and don't expect to learn anything new about Arthur, either. I'm sorry. It's a bad case of sour grapes on my part, I'm sure.

Anne Lister

Rosalind Kerven
King Arthur
illustrated by Tudor Humphries
Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness Classics
1998 £9.99
0 7513 7145 9 64pp

I learnt about this book through a cutting from *The Times Education Supplement* sent to me by a friend. I was fascinated! The article, by the author Rosalind Kerven, talked of becoming "immersed in the Dark Ages, removed from the popular image of medieval Camelot" and interpreting "the story from a fresh perspective". My hopes were high but I had misread the article, so when I eventually got a copy, during my brief visit home at Christmas, I was very disappointed.

But on re-reading the *TES* article I saw the author had said she was using the "recognised storyline" of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. I had expected

something new, but it was the same old story. This is, of course, unfair, and the book should be taken on its own merit.

King Arthur is both a well written and excellently illustrated children's book. It is full of atmospheric pictures based on Dark Age images rather than medieval knights in armour. Standard characters appear with Merlin depicted as a druid, Arthur a Celtic warrior, Guinevere a fiery-haired woman and Arthur's knights Dark Age warriors. Camelot is a refurbished Iron Age fort - no spires or mighty stone buildings. However, I still feel that an opportunity has been missed. Ms Kerven was obviously working under certain restraints but I wish some publishers would have the stomach to produce a truly ancient tale of Arthur set in the right period and take a new view of everything!

King Arthur would make an excellent gift to anyone interested in the legend of King Arthur, with pages of information and snippets on more or less every page, and is one of a series which includes *Aladdin*, *Black Beauty*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Dracula*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Robin Hood*.

Charles Evans-Günther

John Forth
A Ladder and Some Glasses
Rockingham Press, 11 Musley Lane, Ware, Herts SG12 7EN £6.95
1 873468 60 1 A5 perfect bound 80pp

Relevance to *Pendragon* readers of this collection lies in the seventeen page sequence entitled *Imposters* within it. Consisting of five poems, plus a page of reference notes, it explores the theme of deception, mistaken identity, and multivalent personality within the Matter of Arthur.

The material is treated elliptically and allusively. Atmosphere, inwards evaluation and self-justification, the emotional "weather" of the episodes, rather than narrative, are the key to the appraoch. *A Guide to Lyonesse* meditates on Merlin's imprisonment. Where "the lichens are wagging free", Merlin, "whose breath had cut this path down to the lakes" yet who, despite his powers, found himself "a mere reflections" in Vivien's world, has undergone an end that, to the poet, modern visitors appear to seek: "to drown inland."

In *Lancelot and Guinevere*, the knight's mind wanders over interpretations of his involvement as uncertainly as he wanders physically the hills in exile. In shorter poems of *Tristan and Ysoud*, *The Forest of The Maiden*, *Dindrane* (which includes the beautifully evocative lines "When you laid me down in the boat / and kicked away the shore / I did feel drained, but it wasn't my idea / to raze your castle to a withered / stump, hurling in burnt fragments / and imploding matter as if tomorrow / was theory") and *The Chatelaine at the Castle Pluere*, who is depicted as young and mischievous, unaware of the significance of her cruelties ("her dancing foot / brushing teeth each time she passed" ... "preening herself" ... "just a bit of fun really"), the mood is again one of the accidental way in which people become involved in what later are to be seen as great events; this inadequacy to a retro-imposed agenda, and the triviality of inner motive, appears again with the other two poems of this group, *Igrayne* ("two lies are better / than one" ... "Anyway, where had he been when she needed him") and the sad misunderstanding of *Nimue*, where jealousy, longing, and child's game are entangled in the enchantress' motivation: "magic... / to make me love like a girl again" ... "hide-and-seek gets us nowhere. / Close your eyes, and I'll follow."

Testing Sir Gawain explores, again from within the mind, the knight's real but unrevealed reactions to the women who tempt him, while the final poem of the group, *Under The Waterfall*, uses the metaphor of the healing lake of Gavanas in Cornwall to look glancingly at the meaning of, and need for, such stories to us today: the sword "when it slithered from its stone, / ... was more than comfort or shield" ... "darker and muddier than a god / and glowing for years with us unaware" ... "unnatural to mind", while "The lovers are isolated too, / sailing close to the bone / until they leave off dreaming." Forth's doubleness of mind about the temptation to draw out supportive meaning mirrors the ambiguity of the Arthurian imposters, human as us or something, Other, greater?

Steve Sneyd

Tales of the Celtic Otherworld
edited by John Matthews
illustrated by Ian Daniels
Blandford (a Cassell imprint) 1998 £18.99
0 7131 2656 3 hbk 176pp

Sixteen stories are gathered here, predominantly Irish, though with a couple from Scots Gaelic, and one Welsh (the well-known story of "Pwyll in Annwn", from the Mabinogion, in Lady Charlotte Guest's translation. The majority of the translations are late 19th / early 20th century, like hers; unlike this story, most are little known, and the reader has the benefit both of their being given at full or almost full length, and of the *chantefable* - prose with verse sections - form of many being preserved, giving a feel of greater closeness to the original listener's experience.

There is a helpful introduction, very useful notes to each story, and an Appendix - an extraordinary list of different names used for the

Otherworld by the Celts, a poem in itself - and Bibliography.

Although none of the stories are directly Arthurian, as the Notes point out many have elements which parallel (and thus illuminate) aspects of stories in the Matter. *The Adventure of Art Son of Conn*, for example, has Grail-like echoes and recalls the story of Emrys at Vortigern's tower; the werewolf material in *The Tuairisgeal* recalls the story of *Arthur and Galagon*; hag/beauty transformations, though far less benevolent than that in *The Marriage of Gawain*, occur in *Gold Apple, Son of the King of Erin*, and in *The Urisk of the Corrie of the Howlings*.

The sheer visual power with which the Celtic storytellers imbued the interfacing of man and Other is everpresent - two example which are particularly haunting are the start of *The Adventure of Nora*, in which he carries a hanged man in search of a drink of water, while the corpse guides and warns, and the way in which the monstrous Red Head Orlosh reconstitutes itself from a heap of red-brown bones.

It is also intriguing to note, in some of the later stories, how the storyteller has, in effect, laundered pagan tales into respectability with token Christian elements, a point of interest when also considering some of the more puzzling Arthurian material.

One final point which needs making is the beauty and impact of the illustrations: the cat-headed warriors from *The Voyage of Snedgus and Mac Riagla* (the voyage tales, incidentally, are a particular pleasure in themselves), mournfully guarding a tree of golden fruit beneath the eternally twilit sky, deserve framing for the wall. This book is not cheap, but certainly value for money.

Steve Sneyd

Simon James
The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?
British Museum Press 1999 £6.99
0 7141 2165 7 illus pbk 160pp

It may seem churlish, with the theme "The Celtic West" just behind us, to bite the hand that feeds, but this reviewer applauds the questioning of the entire concept of "Celticness" that has been the norm until now. In accessible and mostly jargon-free prose Simon James outlines the modern growth of an insular pan-Celtic identity, due in part to Edward Lluyd, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, barely three centuries ago. Chapter headings highlight his argument: the assumptions behind, the limitations of and objections to standard Celtic histories; how the Celts were created, and why; and a new ethnic history of the isles which is certain to ruffle quite a few feathers.

As devolution becomes a reality it is even more important than ever that nationalisms that present a historical picture of the ancient past that never existed are analysed and openly discussed. Along with *factoids* and *reification* we may in time soon be as familiar with the concept of *post-Celticism* as Victorians were of woad-painted British savages on the eve of Caesar's invasion. Which may be no bad thing.

Chris Lovegrove

Geza Vermes
The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English
Penguin Books 1997 £25.00
0 713 991313 hbk 648pp
Also available as a Penguin Paperback at a buyer-friendly price

The earliest references to Arthur are intrinsic with Christian symbolism. The later Romances introduce the motif of The Once And Future King, custodian of a vessel called the Grail, possessing magical properties which emanate from the Godhead, sometimes interpreted as the Cup of the Last Supper. Evidently the figure of Arthur was modelled upon that of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ of the New Testament. But what was the protagonist of the New Testament modelled upon? Has the source been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

It took the best part of half a century for the non-Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls to be published in their entirety in the English language. An amazing history: discovered by the Dead Sea between 1947 - 1955, written in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic (with a few fragments in Greek), therefore part of Jewish heritage - yet in the possession of Christian scholars right up to the early 1990s. The fact that an entire translation became available prior to the year 2000 came as somthing of a surprise to those people who did not expect to see such a thing during their lifetimes.

This definitive book on the non-Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls by the renowned Jewish scholar Dr Geza Vermes should serve as the ultimate reference-book on the subject matter. Whilst not being in total agreement with of the author's viewpoints, I do appreciate his knowledge of Judaic history and religion which places the Scrolls into a better context to that offered by fringe scholars like Robert H Eisenman and Barbara Thiering.

Substantial delays in providing translations of the scrolls spawned conspiracy theories and rumours of cover-ups - despite the fact that discussions on various unpublished texts appeared in various academic journals. Those fringe scholars developed bizarre theories on

Christian origins which relied entirely upon public ignorance concerning the unpublished (fragmentary) texts. Now that everything is out in the open, is there really anything of a "controversial" nature amongst the material?

All the major complete non-Biblical scrolls were translated and published during the 1950s (one of which, the *Damascus Document*, was originally discovered in a Cairo synagogue in 1896 and published in 1910). The material consisting of an allegedly "controversial" nature, only just translated and published during the 1990s, mainly comprises the following three fragments:

- "The Resurrection Fragment" (4Q251; A Messianic Apocalypse)
- "The Son of God Fragment" (4Q246; An Aramaic Apocalypse)
- "The Pierced Messiah Fragment" (4Q285; fr5; The Rule of War)

Some of the vocabulary found in the non-Biblical Scrolls does indeed match that of the New Testament, the other similarities being references to:

- The practice of Baptism
- The ritual meal comprising of Bread and Wine
- The story of a leader called the Teacher of Righteousness, whose followers believed his life to have been prophesied in Biblical texts, and who was persecuted by the Wicked Priest who forced him into exile and was even possibly involved in his death. Furthermore, the Teacher of Righteousness was expected to reappear at the "end of days", thus implying a resurrection (this was the interpretation of the Scrolls scholars of the 1950s, since discarded - individual readers need to consult the *Damascus Document* to arrive at their own conclusions). The ritual meal of Bread and Wine was symbolical of the "end of days", when the Messiah was expected to appear and bless the meal.

Scrolls scholars claim that the remains of a settlement by the Dead Sea where the Scrolls were discovered, named Khirbet Qumran, was inhabited by a Jewish sect ousted from the Jerusalem Temple *circa* 152 BC, with it being uninhabited during the reign of Herod the Great (37 - 4 BC). The resettlement of the site was significantly smaller than the first.

The Dead Sea Scrolls most certainly lift the curtain on the developing Judaism during the period of Roman occupation, but do they tell us anything at all about Christian origins? Despite certain similarities the interpretation tends to differ, making it uncertain whether the Scrolls represent nascent Christianity - Christianity could have been a rival religion to the sect (possibly the Essenes) which composed the Scrolls. Alternatively, Christianity could have been a renegade offspring of the Dead Sea sect (my favoured theory). Ultimately, however, no satisfactory answer to this question can be determined from the evidence available, arriving at a point where research stops and guesswork begins...

Perhaps the truth of the matter lies somewhere amongst the following three observations (this being pure speculation):

- The Judaism of the period when the Dead Sea Scrolls were written (between *c*250 BC - *c*68 AD, according to scholars) was eliminated by the Emperor Vespasian (AD 66 - 74), with the final death-blow being dealt by the Emperor Hadrian (132 - 135) when the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt as Aelia Capitolina, a statue of the God Jupiter erected on the site of the Jewish sanctuary, with every Jew banaished from the city under pain of death. The Emperor Hadrian regarded the Christians with great respect.
- The oldest surviving writings are the letters of Paul of Tarsus, laying great stress on Baptism, the ritual meal of Bread and Wine, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are dated to approximately betwwe AD50 - 60. Greek was the language of the New Testament. Christianity was existing in countries surrounding Judaea, although its spiritual centre was undoubtedly Jerusalem. There was no central organisation to secure and enforce uniformity of belief.
- According to the *Damascus Document*, a Jewish sect assumed a monastic existence following their ousting from Jerusalem, calling themselves "The New Covenant in the Land of Damascus". Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish persecutor of the Christians, was converted to Christianity following a supernatural revelation of Jesus Christ whilst on the road to Damascus, to persecute Christians located there.

The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English is an essential part of a library belonging to those interested in the history of religions and is recommended to everyone, complementing *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* and the recently made-available-in-paperback *The* (complete) *Works of Josephus*.

For a criticism of the works of Robert H Eisenman by Dr Geza Vermes see *The Times Literary Supplement* dated 4th December 1992, pp 6 - 7.

Paul Smith

Ian Wilson
The Blood and the Shroud
Orion 1999 £6.99
0 75282 616 6 illus pbk 410pp

Twenty years after his bestseller *The Turin Shroud*, and ten years after radiocarbon tests apparently "proved" Christ's alleged burial cloth dated from the 14th century, Ian Wilson revisits the subject of his first book. In *The Blood and the Shroud* (which first appeared last year published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson) he examines suggestions that the material of the cloth has been covered with a so-called bioplastic coating of naturally occurring fungi and bacteria which has given a false later date to the linen.

Apart, however, from the intrinsic interest this has for the cloth being somehow genuinely imprinted with Christ's crucified figure, there are, surprisingly, dimensions connected with the Matter of Britain. First, a sixth-century Georgian manuscript describes St Joseph of Arimathea as collecting Jesus' blood "in a headband and a large sheet". Joseph's contemporary St Philip, later believed to have converted Gaul to Christianity, was actually linked not with Gaul but with *Galatia* in Turkey. Joseph's connection with Britain may have come on the back of Philip's supposed visit to France. Here might be one source of the idea of Joseph bringing a relic containing Jesus' blood to Britain.

Secondly, Bede later reports Britain's conversion to Christianity due to a king Lucius requesting this from Pope Eleutherus (175-89). Scholars have long suggested that this is a garbled reference to a Syrian king Lucius Aelius Abgar, or Abgar VIII. This Lucius was a contemporary of Pope Eleutherus, ruling from the *Britio Edessenorum*, a citadel by ancient Edessa, modern Urfa in Turkey. It is here that a predecessor, another Abgar, is early reported to have received a "likeness" of Jesus from Christ himself, which Wilson argues refers to the Shroud. This citadel or *britio* appears to be the origin of Bede's story of the evangelisation of Britain.

Thirdly, there are the odd references to the grail appearing in various guises in 12th and 13th century romances, some of which Wilson argues (and has done so for two decades) appear to be related to the display of the Shroud in Constantinople around the same period. If Wilson's historical sleuthing is correct (and his is the most coherent argument for continuity I have seen) then a wealth of interpretation for grail literary origins opens up.

This is a stimulating read not just for Arthurian buffs but for those interested in the wider ramifications if the Shroud proves not to be the medieval fake so often claimed for it.

Chris Lovegrove

Andrew Sinclair
The Discovery of the Grail
Arrow Books1999 £6.99
0 0992 7094 3 illus 374pp

This book, first published in 1998, endeavours to present "the first complete history of the Grail", using the twin principles of Belief and Evidence. While it is certainly wide-ranging, there is much evidence of the author's beliefs but this reviewer has little belief in the use of his evidence. Sinclair is, as expected from a very eclectic author, extremely well-read, but as this is a personal quest he plays fast and loose with scholarly interpretations. By turns entertaining and frustrating, this is a work to be used cautiously but with some profit.

Chris Lovegrove

Fran & Geoff Doel, Terry Lloyd
Worlds of Arthur: King Arthur in History, Legend & Culture
Tempus 1999 £15.99
07524 1414 3 illus hbk 160pp

The justification for yet another book on Arthur must be that it has something new to say. The authors variously lecture on traditional culture and on history, and the texts bear traces of their origins as lecture notes. Terry Lloyd's contribution is on Arthur's place in history, and is a competent though extremely simplistic gallop through the period. Fran and Geoff Doel's section on Arthurian legend equally display a reasonably firm if uneven grasp of the subject's outlines, but there is little space for more than a very superficial analysis.

The minor strengths of the book are a short gazetteer of insular Arthurian sites (though with little or no critical comment) and a range of site photos taken by Geoff Doel. However, I question the point of publishing a title that is in the main a re-hash of what has gone before, and with so many irritating spelling and typological mistakes (chapter 4, for example, begins halfway through a sentence). Heaven forbid that this journal should ever succumb to

Chris Lovegrove

Stephen S Evans
Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain
The Boydell Press 1998 £16.99 / $30.00
0 85115 662 2 pbk 180pp approx

With a four page index, 14 page bibliography and a map of Britain c600, this is one information-packed publication which originally appeared in hardback in 1997. One should not be put off by the price - it is, of course, a specialised subject - but there is a lot of interesting material within!

Though Mr Evans may blanch at the following statement, this is a depiction of the court of Arthur. If you want to find out anything about what a real Arthur may have been, this book will tell you. There is, however, a proviso - Arthur is said to have lived in the late 5th or early 6th century and much of what appears in this publication comes from the latter part of the 6th or after. So the comitatus system may have been developing in the earlier period or it may already have been established early. Unfortunately, the period is still somewhat misty. The image that appears is what early Welsh writers would have imagined of Arthur's court!

Based on the research done for his PhD at Temple University, Philadelphia USA, Evans approaches the Dark Ages from its central military point - the lord and his warband - in Latin, *comitatus* - the *heorðgeneatas* (hearth companions) of the Anglo-Saxons and the *teulu* (family) of the Welsh. He explores the relationships and responsibilities of both lord and warband, the general background of the period and the warband's position in the society of the times.

Don't expect to find any mention any mention of Arthur or King Arthur - Evans completely ignores him - but he does look at later characters mostly from the North of England and Scotland in the second half of the 6th century.

What is important about this book is that it shows that heroic societies developed similar systems. The Germanic tribes and Romano-Celtic nations were almost alike. The biggest difference is language - the main barrier between many peoples. Not understanding another race breeds a certain amount of animosity, though recent events in the Balkan states shows that there is more racial hatred than language. To the Romano-Celts the Saxons were devils - pagan devils at that - and invaders. We know less of the Anglo-Saxon attitude. However, it can be seen from this book that the differences were not in the political or military situation - since they were so alike as to be of the same origins.

Following the collapse of Roman authority over Britain it looks as if the British reverted to an older system, one that was common to many pre-Roman peoples, including the Germanic tribes. This fascinating book looks into a fascinating period when Britain was developing into small nations. Evans explores aspects of the comitatus in a simple straightforward way and supports the material with lots of references. For example, in one chapter he looks into every nook and cranny of the hall - and at one point shows that one particular hall must have used 70 tonnes of building material and caused the cutting down of two hectares of oak forest!

There is one point that is well worth discussing further. Evans suggests that the battle of Catreath, which is only recorded in one of the early poems in the Welsh language, is to be found in the mid 6th century rather than the late 6th or early 7th as is normally accepted. He says that evidence in the poems of Taliesin shows that the warriors from Gododdin must have fought at an earlier period because it would seem Urien Rheged and his son Owain held sway over the area of Catreath and it must have been after the battle. Also there is no mention of the Bernicians in *The Gododdin* itself.

The leader of the warriors of Gododdin has always been a bit of a mystery! There is no evidence that Mynyddog Mwynfawr led the warriors in battle - but it would be unusual for a lord not to do so. Also Mynyddog is a bit of a mystery himself, having no mention in early genealogical material.

I suggest that anyone interested in learning more of both the Romano-Celtic and Germanic society in the Dark Age should read this book. It may open many people's eyes to the complexity of society and to the problem of warfare in the early period of the Dark Ages.

Charles Evans-Günther

Michael E Jones
The End of Roman Britain
Cornell Paperbacks 1998 £13.50
0 8014 8530 4 pbk 323pp

An extremely closely argued book (which first appeared in hardback in 1996), this more than amply demonstrates that there are no easy answers to those questions asked about this period of transition. Rather than there being a monolithic "establishment" view of the Late Roman period and its aftermath, academics are constantly arguing, re-visiting and revising the traditional historical framework according to evolving critiques of documents, archaeology and placenames, not to mention social dynamics, economics and the environment. This is blast of fresh air after the rather rigid and turgid narratives we have seen from recent populist authors.

Chris Lovegrove

Some reviews have been unavoidably held over

BookWorm

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Arthurian legends are retold in ***Tales of King Arthur and his Knights***, illustrated by Rodney Matthews and published by Usborne in hardback [0 7460 3387 7 £9.99 160pp]. Morgan le Fay is apparently the mainspring of the action, from setting up the Green Knight incident to stealing Excalibur. The cover features the Green Knight on his steed, but the horse's head is curiously obliterated by the title. A companion volume on the Trojan War is also available, misleadingly entitled ***Greek Myths***.

Last issue, I omitted to give publication details of Margaret Simpson's ***Top Ten Arthurian legends***, so here they are: Hippo 1998 paperback, 0 590 19800 9, £3.99. I also misspelled the name of the author of ***Arthur High King of Britain*** who is in fact Michael Murpurgo [Pavilion 1998 hardback, 1 86205 230 1 £9.99].

FICTION

Original treatments of Arthurian and related themes come not only in the form of the written word. Member Anne Lister has a new CD due out in June entitled ***Singing on the Wind*** [Hearthfire 005]; based on Irish folk tales (including analogues to the Tristan and Iseult stories) and the Irish landscape, the CD has one dragon song "but nothing overtly Arthurian, sadly," she writes.

Spotted on *amazon.co.uk* are Betty Hoyland's ***Pendragon Tales*** (hbk 1998 £8.95) and Dilys Gater's ***Pendragon*** (pbk 1999 £7.99). More details and/or reviews, anyone? Nothing else specifically in the way of novels has come to my attention; please let me know what I must - surely - have missed!

NON-FICTION

Publications recently offered by **Excalibur Books** include a trio dealing with alternative views of the past. Laurel Phelan's ***Guinevere*** (Pocket pbk £12.99 298pp) is about the authoress' previous incarnation as Arthur's queen, while Michael D Miller's ***Camelot - the True Story*** (Rideout pbk £13.99 379pp) deals with the past-life memories of a hundred and two people, all reincarnations of Arthur, Guinevere, Merlin, Morgana and so on. In J and A Chiappalone's ***The Revenge of Camelot*** (an Australian pbk £12.99 326pp) the divinities Arthur and Guinevere are due to avenge the destruction of Camelot by the forces of evil in the future.

Of interest too are John King's ***Kingdoms of the Celts*** (Blandford hbk £19.99 256pp) which includes Boudica, Vortigern, Arthur, Welsh and Breton royal dynasties, and Mike Baillie's ***Exodus to Arthur*** (Batsford hbk £19.99 272pp) which argues that earth has had several comet catastrophes, preserved in traditions that include Arthur and Merlin. All available from Excalibur Books, Rivenoak, 1 Hillside Gardens, Bangor, Co Down BT19 6SJ, Northern Ireland, or telephone 01247 558579 [011 44 1247 458579 from USA].

Laurence Gardner's ***Genesis of the Grail Kings: the Pendragon legacy of Adam and Eve*** sounds mind-boggling, if you're prepared to part with £16.99 (Bantam Press hbk 0 593 04430 4). For the same price you can be further boggled by Tim Wallace-Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins' ***Rosslyn: Guardian of the Secrets of the Holy Grail*** (Element hbk, 1 86204 493 7). For my money I think I'd rather read Charles Thomas who reveals hidden messages on Dark Age tombstones in ***The Christian Celts: Messages and Images*** (Tempus 1998 hbk 0 7524 1411 9, 224pp £19.99), challenging our perceptions of post-Roman Britain and its cultural achievements.

Also from Tempus is Roger White and Philip Barker's ***Wroxeter: Life and Death of a Roman City***, charting the site from Roman times through the Dark Ages and beyond (Tempus pbk 0 7524 1409 7, £14.99, 176pp).

York's archaeology includes remains from the Roman, Anglian and Viking period, and a twenty volume series, *The Archaeology of York*, has many bargains, among which is Tweddle's 1992 study, ***The Anglian Helmet from Coppergate*** (£18.00, down from £40.00). Further info from York Archaeological Trust [01904 663000, email *postmaster@Yorkarch.demon.co.uk*, or fax 01904 640029; or write to C Kyriacou at Cromwell House, 13 Ogleforth, York YO1 7FG].

Won the lottery? Try Warwick Rodwell's ***The Archaeology of Wells Cathedral: excavations and structural studies, 1978-93*** (English Heritage 1 85074 7415). For around only £100.00 you will learn how an anonymous late Roman burial in a mausoleum may have encouraged the development of a middle Saxon cemetery and chapel, leading to the foundation of Wells cathedral in 909.

For TV tie-ins try Tim Taylor's Time Team tome titled (naturally enough) ***Behind the scenes at Time Team*** (Channel 4 Books hbk, 0 7522 1327 X, £18.99), or Julian Richards' ***Meet the Ancestors: unearthing the evidence that brings us face to face with the past*** (BBC Worldwide £17.99), both of which will of course be well known to readers by now.

Walks in Mysterious Somerset, by Laurence Main and with a preface by Mary Caine, provides twenty-seven walks in the county, through the giant figures of the Glastonbury Zodiac, around

Arthurian sites and down Wookey Hole; published by Sigma Leisure (ISBN 1 85058 607 1 £6.95) who also produce Paula Brackston's ***The Dragon's Trail - Wales on Horseback*** (1 85058 692 6 £5.95) - this is exactly what it says it is on the cover - a description of a long-distance trek across Wales, from the Brecons to the Preseli Hills, along the Pembrokeshire coast and on to Snowdonia. Mixed in with myth and Arthurian legend are personal anecdotes of the trail that she blazed.

◆ If you have enjoyed the original illustrations in this and past *Pendragons* then you may like to know that two of the artists are willing to accept commissions. **Ian Brown**, who has contributed a number of line drawings to this editions, may be reached at 39 Sycamore Road, Ormesby, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS7 9DW. **Simon Rouse** has also been a regular *Pendragon* contributor and illustrates commercially; he may be contacted at **The Light of Celtica**, 43 Water Lane, Oakington, Cambridge. Do include a stamped self-addressed envelope or IRC for replies.

The Board

SMALL SCREEN

Though not part of a film season as such, several Arthurian flicks featured on British terrestrial channels over the Christmas break. First off was the dire ***A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*** (27 December, Channel 5: US TV movie from 1989, directed by Mel Damski). Next up (the following day on BBC1) was Spielberg's rollercoaster ***Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade***, also from 1989 but in a rather different league. Two days later, Sean Connery reappeared in ***Sword of the Valiant***, this time as the Green Knight (he eventually got to play the King in ***First Knight***). Finally, on New Year's Day, the classic Hollywood ***Knights of the Round Table*** (directed by Richard Thorpe in 1953) was shown by BBC2, with Ava Gardner as Guinevere and Robert Taylor as Lancelot.

An animated version of **Beowulf** (directed by Yuri Kulakov) was also aired on December 23rd on BBC2, voiced by Derek Jacobi, Joseph Fiennes, Timothy West and Anna Calder-Marshall (among others).

Easter saw a glut of Arthurian items on Channel 4. First **Biography: King Arthur** (Sunday 28th March 1999) which featured interviews with Stephen Knight, Robert Dunning and Juliet Wood. A rather pedestrian romp through the stories which scarcely traced the myths back to their "probable" roots as claimed. However, **The Real Merlin** (Saturday 3rd April 1999, directed and produced by Andy Robbins and narrated by Joe McFadden) was a rather superior documentary. Firstly, it included a list as long as your arm of notable interviewees, including Geoffrey Ashe, Nikolai Tolstoy, John Matthews and Ean Begg, as well as Myrddin Jones and family (of Merlin's Grove Farm by the Iron Age hillfort of Bryn Myrddin), the storyteller Eric Maddern (at Dinas Emrys), Paul Broadhurst (at Tintagel), Geoff Boltwood (Merlin's reincarnation) and assorted other orthodox and unorthodox experts. (Your editor was unable to contribute due to car clutch problems, but he's not much of an expert anyway.) Secondly, there were many sympathetic shots of key sites around Britain. Thirdly, we didn't have the banality of anachronistic fight scenes - just interviewees talking to camera, often on site. Fourthly, the main elements of the developing Merlin story were not presented as dry as dust history but as part of an ongoing evolving and essentially living tradition. Worth catching if it is ever repeated.

The Real Merlin was broadcast as a taster to the mini-series of **Merlin** at Easter. This needs a

fuller treatment than there is space for here - reviews, please? I'm sure most of you watched it, and have views on it! As it is available on video you can also view it at your leisure.

Finally, news comes that, though the TV sci-fi series **Babylon 5** is ending production, a spin-off, entitled *Crusade* and "starring Gary Cole as commander of the Earth force starship *Excalibur*" is due to have been aired on US TV in January [according to Jim Lee's Screen Scene in *The Zone 7*, January 1999, noted by Steve Sneyd].

TALKS

Adrian Gilbert, co-author of ***The Holy Kingdom***, has been giving slide talks and signing copies of his book [reviewed last issue, Arrow £6.99]. Paul Smith caught him at Dillons, New Street, Birmingham on St George's Day, and reveals that the talk consisted mostly about genealogies. A letter was produced from a professional archaeologist authenticating their *ARTORIVS* stone, though the inscription apparently looked rather too fresh. "According to Gilbert there was opposition to the book from the establishment in the form of vandalism made to a cave within the 'Forest of Mystery', and important historical sites were not being excavated because the results would overturn accepted educational dogma, etc... The St George figure is named after a Welsh personality, and its flag is derived from a historical battle fought by this figure... " It's history, Jim, but not as we know it.

The **University of Bristol's** Public Programmes Office has been running a number of relevant day schools and courses, many by Dr Lee Prosser. I myself attended a packed series of three linked dayschools on *The Archaeology of the 'Dark Ages': Anglo-Saxon England 300-800AD* between January and March, and there is a follow-up on *The Celtic Fringe - North and Western Britain* running between May and July. Related dayschools were *Art of the Anglo-Saxons* in March and *Daily Life in 'Dark Age' England* on 29 May; contact 0117 954 6069 for further details of future programmes.

Finally, Stanley Men's Thursday Club "welcomed new members to its last meeting where members discussed whether King Arthur was a northerner" [*Northern Echo* 29th September 1998, from Steve Sneyd].

FEATURED JOURNALS

Matthew Kilburn, in *Pendragon XXVII/2*, detailed the activities of the Oxford Arthurian Society. The Society's magazine is ***Ceridwen's Cauldron***, edited by Andrew H W Smith. The first oddity is that contributors include Messires Fergus of Galloway, Meriadoc, Gawain and Lohengrin, not to mention Dame Brisen, Thomas the Rhymer, Aneirin and The Fair Unknown! The second oddity is that Pendragons are not alone in enthusiastically embracing the whole gamut of Arthuriana - items on archaeology, history and literature are all here, naturally, but also modern interpretations in comics, cartoons and Doctor Who!

The eminently readable Michaelmas 1998 edition (another has appeared since then) included articles on the Tintagel slate, Gawain's biography and Chris Gidlow's continuing scholarly study on the possible reality of Arthur. There are also regular features such as poetry, reviews and other crits (*eg* the 1998 "The Quest for Camelot" exhibition at the Museum of the Moving Image in London), plus the *Camelot Chronicle*; this latter (*Old News* and *The Board* rolled into one) includes the latest on the site of St George's in Oxford. This is where Geoffrey of Monmouth may have conceived, gestated or even given birth to his Arthurian hybrid - sometime Oxford Prison, soon perhaps to be 'heritaged'!

So, a tasty feast awaits. For a sample copy send a cheque for £1.50, payable to "The Oxford Arthurian Society", to Andrew H W Smith at 41 Essex Street, Oxford OX4 3AW. And visit the website at

http://users.ox.ac.uk/~arthsoc

Wargames Illustrated has been running a series of monthly articles (March 1999 onwards) by Guy Halsall, entitled *The Age of Arthur: Post-Roman Britain (400-600) for the Historical Wargamer*. Alastair McBeath writes that the series "is turning into a very fine, readable, potted work on the sources for Arthurian 'history' from this country and the Continent. Depressing to see the wholesale demolition of the only written sources from the period, however." Well-researched and critical, the articles make the point that "you can only claim a wargame to be historically plausible if it's based upon reliable evidence", so it will be interesting to see what the author makes of the archaeological evidence.

Worth investigating for the occasional Arthurian item is ***History Today***. For example, the December 1998 issue, Volume 48 (12), included *Glastonbury's Christmas Tree* and *Beowulf: New Light on the Dark Ages*, as well as an article on gold, poverty and the early church, and an *apologia* by Ronald Hutton. Volume 49 (3) for March 1999 featured a miniature from the *Roman du Saint Graal* on its front cover and a lead article on *King Arthur and the Making of an English Britain* by Alan MacColl: "the ideological uses to which the legendary hero has been put are important for students of medieval and early modern Britain, and form part of the historical background to the current debate about the constitution of the United Kingdom." The periodical is available from newsstands, price

£3.25, or by subscription from 20 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PE, tel 0171 534 8003/4, while their website is

www.historytoday.com

MERLIN'S MART

In an article, ***Rebranding Britain***, in *The Guardian* for January 30th, 1999, Martin Wainwright reported that a think-tank, **Catalyst**, argues that the word British is outmoded and "has gone back to the Arthurian age to come up with an alternative". Chaired by Roy Hattersley, the group proposes ***Pretanic*** as a neutral name for all inhabitants of the British Isles, at a time when Welsh and Scottish devolution could trigger a supposedly "English" backlash "dividing Europe's most ethnically mixed country on outdated historical lines."

According to the article (clipped by Steve Sneyd), "the mixed tradition, as opposed to the racial exclusiveness later claimed by Celt and Anglo-Saxon nationalists, was personified by Arthur." Catalyst's report, *The British Union State: Imperial Hangover or Flexible Citizen's Home*, is part of a debate on the nature of being British and the relationship of the component parts of the Isles. 5 million living in mainland Britain qualify for Irish citizenship, 20% of people in Wales, and 8% in Scotland, are English-born, while Scots and Welsh resident in England equal 16% and 25% of the populations of those countries respectively. The issues are further complicated by the 3 million of Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin.

So will Pretanic (the term derives from pre-Christian Greek texts) catch on? It is curious that my spellcheck program suggested *pretence* instead of *Pretanic*...

Spotted in my son's bike magazine was a spread for **Merlin Cycles**, who for five years have been specialising in customised mountain bike frames by mail order. Reach them at Merlin House, Orchard Street, Leyland, Preston, Lancs PR5 2WH [01772 421717].

RELICS

Last issue, Tristan Gray Hulse drew detailed attention to the cult of the head of **John the Baptist**, a possible analogue to the grail as it features in *Peredur*. In November 1997 the Andipa Gallery in London exhibited an alleged fragment of the Baptist's skull; it was encased in a statue of the saint among 300 other saintly relics, some perhaps owned by Napoleon. Relics however cannot officially be sold, only their containers. Was there a sale? [Information culled from *The Guardian*, November 18th 1997, by Steve Sneyd.]

More recently, a rare **Roman stone sarcophagus** containing a decorated lead coffin was discovered on 12th March by Museum of London archaeologists excavating at the Spitalfields Market area. Dating to the 4th century, its grave goods included a long glass phial and a jet box. Julian "Meet the Ancestors" Richards was present at the opening of the woman's sarcophagus. Information on site finds is available on HYPERLINK

http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/sdg.htm

Meanwhile, Mike Fulford and Amanda Clarke have been revisiting the Roman town of Silchester and asking pointed questions about its demise [*Current Archaeology 161* 176ff]. A new reading of the **ogham stone** found down a well there gives TEBICATO(S) / (MAQ)I MUCO (...) *ie* "(the memorial) of Tebicatos, son of the tribe of ..." This is the easternmost find of an ogham inscription.

ARTHUR'S SWORD FOUND

An Associated Press item [sent in by Charles Evans-Günther] features **President Lee Teng-hui**, "the man who brought democracy to Taiwan" in 1988, on the campaign trail in recent elections. A photo-caption reads

President Lee Teng-hui holds a sword as he campaigns with other Nationalist Party members dressed as the knights of the Round Table during a campaign rally at Taipei County's stadium.

Curious medieval swords mix with his sweatshirt, Prussian helmet, sporran and slacks as the 75-year-old Lee draws his weapon from what looks like either a tortoise, a clam or a giant burger.

Closer to home, healer **Geoff Boltwood** claims that he is the reincarnation of Merlin, or Myrddin Wyllt. More than that, he and his Tareth group discovered Arthur's half-sword near West Pennard in Somerset in March 1993 at a spot where it had lain since the 4th century.

The lower half of the "broadsword" is kept in a bank vault "because it could be a target for thieves, possibly descendants of the Knights Templar". Boltwood says the sword has existed as a spiritual object for millennia, part of the "original Christian energy and taken to France by Christ". In fact the sword is "encoded with information which can change the way people think ... The return of the sword can stop the planet being destroyed." [*Daily Express* Life on Wednesday feature by Sarah Stacey, March 1999, passed on by Steve Sneyd.]

On a purely fictional level, you understand, ***Arthur and the Sword*** was staged at the Parkside Community Centre, Seaham, on January 19th, and in Washington, Tyne and Wear on 13th February by the **Flabagast Arts Theatre Company**, no doubt to local critical acclaim [S Sneyd]. **Lip Service**, meanwhile, who

are Maggie Fox and Sue Ryding, continued their royal progress with ***King Arthur and the Knights of the Occasional Table*** through Darlington Arts Centre and York Theatre Royal in December and Bristol's Theatre Royal in February, asking (among other questions) how long the Lady of the Lake had to hold her breath under water.

GOOD KNIGHT

From Cornwall's *Western Morning News* [4th December 1998] comes some Arthurian folklore retailed by Ray Thomas. ***Chough knighted by a grateful king*** headlines a tale of treachery and loyalty (as Beryl Mercer says, "a new one on me!"): *Listen well, you who travel south of Newquay at night. For when the wind howls, they say thereabouts, King Arthur's spectral hunting horn can be heard echoing over Goss Moor as he rides in pursuit of ghostly deer... Tradition relates that his soul occupied the body of a chough, a type of crow sporting striking red legs and beak.*

Why a chough? *In the days of the great king, it's said, choughs were black all over. Merlin the magician kept one as a pet - but special it was, able through its master's magic to understand speech... He gave [Guinevere] the chough as a wedding present... One night soon after, a treacherous knight named Murdoch crept, knife in hand, towards the sleeping Guinevere's bedchamber...* The loyal chough ferociously attacked the intruder. *Woken by screams, Arthur came running to find Murdoch dead and the chough beside him, its beak and legs stained red by the traitor's blood.* The bird was knighted "there and then" and all choughs now display the same red legs and beaks.

CORRECTIONS

Tree-rat should have read as *hedge-pig* in Michael Pendragon's poem last issue, while *Llanbadarn Fawr* suffered a nasty case of metathesis as *Llandabarn* on page 17 in Neil Thomas' *gwyddbwyll* piece.

From *The Guardian*'s Corrections and Clarifications section for August 12th 1998, sent in by Steve Sneyd:

The inscribed stone found at Tintagel castle, Cornwall, generally assumed to have been the birthplace of the legendary King Arthur, was discovered on the edge of a cliff overlooking a ***cavern*** *traditionally known as Merlin's Cave. A mis-hearing by a copytaker led to this appearing in the paper as "a tavern traditionally known as Merlin's Cave" (page 1, August 7).*

That inscribed stone, described in last issue's *Old News*, is the subject of a succinct article by our own Steve Sneyd in the US journal *Celtic Chronicles 36* (January/February 199[9]). ***6th Century 'Arthur' Stone Found At Tintagel*** summarises the background to the find with great clarity; unfortunately gremlins have resulted (with possibly unconscious republican sympathies) in Prince Charles becoming the Duke of Cromwell!

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