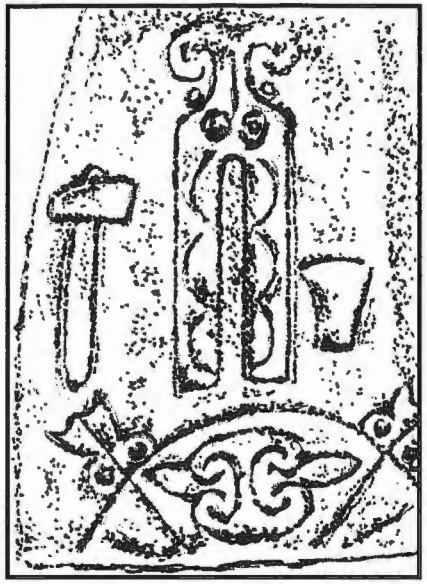
pendragon

XXXIV No 2

The Sword in the Stone • *Medieval narrative* • *Memorials*

editorial

Vol XXXIV No 2 Winter 2006-7



Pictish stone from Abernethy, Tayside: blacksmith's hammer and anvil with 'tuning-fork' (probably a pair of tongs), all above a crescent and so-called V-rod. CL

Themes

Simon Rouse's cover says it all: the image that above all conjures up for many the idea of the Arthurian legends. Among other strands this issue we attempt to explore the roots of this archetypal icon, for example as rite of passage, symbol of authority and badge of the hero. Can it be simply "explained as a mythic reference to the casting of a bronze sword," as Francis Pryor and others have argued?[1] Or are there richer layers of meaning than a literal interpretation can provide?

Next issue's theme is planned as **The Fisher King**; submissions for this, by mid-May, please, would be appreciated.

[1] Francis Pryor (2004) *Britain AD: a quest for Arthur, England and the Anglo-Saxons* (Harper Collins) 18

Round Table

Our biennial get-together takes place this summer and this year we're back at Hay-on-Wye – relatively centrally-placed, full of pleasant distractions and the scene of our very successful Round Table in 2005. Further details on this can be found on the back cover of this issue.

Submissions and subscriptions

Items for publication should be sent to the editor either in hard copy or electronically. The preferred mode for hard copy is typed and single-spaced for ease of scanning, especially for longer submissions. Shorter items may be hand-written. Word-processed articles may in the near future be sent by e-mail (though *not* as an attachment) but for the present please send them in on CD or floppy disk, as text or as a Word document.

It's now also possible to subscribe to *Pendragon* electronically as well as by post: details for using Paypal can be found on page 4.

Thanks

Profound thanks go again to all the contributors for so freely sharing with us their ruminations and conclusions, to exchange magazines for their support and to the magazine team for efficiently expediting another issue.

Thanks too to readers and reviewers for their positive comments. A straw poll of views on the recent changes in the journal's format in general favoured the improvements, in the ratio of 2:1. As for content, Shelley Turner declared that the magazines are "as ever ... an informative, enjoyable read". For Alistair McBeath "as always there [is] plenty to interest, entertain and enjoy, and it remains one of the very few journals or magazines I read right through".

In poetry review *The Supplement* D S Davidson kindly opines that "*Pendragon* remains the best resource for those interested in Arthurian lore, with a fascinating letters page, news, reviews, poetry and fiction, and all sorts of articles". Further, not only is it "probably one of the most interesting magazines out there" but "if you have any interest in Arthur and the Grail then this is a magazine for you!" Do spread the word!

Chris Lovegrove

pendragon

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Pendragon pursues Arthurian Studies: history & archaeology; legend, myth & folklore; literature, the arts & popular culture

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Simon and Anne Rouse

Letters

OF ILLUSIONS & PENTAGRAMS

I'd like to make a quick comment, and a rather longer correction / discussion, to minor parts of Shani Oates' second instalment of her interesting exploration of the Green Knight [*XXXIV* No 1, 24-29]. The comment concerns the Fata Morgana mirage effect, which I gave some brief notes and references on back in *Pendragon XXVIII* (No 2, 5).

The correction is that the five-armed star of pentagram form was unknown in ancient Sumer, contrary to what Shani suggested. From the 3rd millennium BC at least, and in various parts of ancient Mesopotamia, including Sumer, four, six and eight armed stars were widely known and shown in writing and art. The eight-armed form included the Sumerian cuneiform sign MUL, meaning 'star', but the same sign could also mean others things like AN ('heaven') or DINGIR ('god'), depending on its context. This appears in the pre-cuneiform pictographic script too, where it seems to have similar meanings. As time went on, the cuneiform signs became simplified, but the MUL sign retained its form till relatively late, when it was amended to a four-armed cross.

Later, this eight-armed star symbol in art represented the Akkadian goddess Ishtar, plus her associated planet Venus, and its appearance before the mid-3rd millennium may represent the same, or a similar, deity (if so, then probably the Sumerian goddess Inana). Earlier versions tend to look rather more like a flower than a star, however. The four-pointed star, normally inside a disc, and sometimes with four sets of wavy lines interspersed between the four star-arms, represented the Sun-God (Sumerian Utu, Akkadian Shamash). The six-armed star is of uncertain association. In all identifiable cases, the symbols were linked with deities, rather than human rulers, and none of these seem associated with "imperial" power.

Similarly, neither Sumerians nor the later Babylonians had five cardinal directions, but only four – a common ruler phrasing by the late 3rd millennium included a title which translates as "King of the Four Quarters" (*ie* of the world), for example. The Babylonians often divided the Earth and the heavens into various threes, but usually in a vertical sense, not a horizontal one (*eg* Underworld, Earth, Heavens), though certainly both peoples recognised five naked-eye planets, plus the Sun and the Moon.

Oddly, most star symbols used in European, Near Eastern and North African religious Christian iconography and secular star charts prior to the late 15th century AD, tended to have four, six or eight arms too, or were small discs. There are some earlier five-armed examples, but these seem less common, or sometimes as if accidentally so drawn. In general, the five-armed star seems to be used mainly for representing fainter stars in such later artworks, especially closer to our own time. The four and six armed variants persist in our use of crosses (including the "plus" sign) and asterisks, of course.

The place to look for early pentagrammatic stars is ancient Egypt, where exclusively five-armed stars are found abundantly linked with the sky-goddess Nut and other star deities at times from the 19th dynasty (*c* 1300 BC) onwards. There may be earlier examples here, as I claim no especial knowledge of matters Egyptian. It is certainly curious how the five-armed variant has come to dominate people's thought now in terms of what is "properly" star-shaped though.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

Thinking about White's use of time running in reverse ["Fool of Time" last issue] for Merlin's life cycle (albeit he could clearly also operate in the conventional time direction for at least short periods) set me puzzling, without success, over whether that drew on any of the traditional accounts of Merlin, or, if not, where White got the idea. It's certainly not a new one: it turns up in Plato, Blake uses it in "The Mental Traveller", and Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound* (and many writers have done so since).

It also seems to be getting an increasing grip in the more counter-intuitive seeming reaches of modern cosmology: suggestions that anti-matter travels backwards through time, and even recently the suggestion that dark energy isn't just travelling back through time but has been launched back by whatever source from the final stages of the universe when all matter is totally dispersed (the Big Black Cold) to go back to the start and provide the bootstrap energy for the Big Bang, the ultimate in closed cycles. So we could perhaps pull those threads together and speculate on Merlin as a dark energy carrier!

Anyway – "that way madness lies," as with so much quantum and other ultraphysics speculation.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

BILL RUSSELL

Glad to receive my latest *Pendragon* [*XXXIII* No 4] but sad to read the obituary of Bill Russell. He was a man of wide-ranging and distinctively quirky erudition: we need more like him. The prudent proofreaders of *Pendragon* credit him with humane experimental techniques, which is better than at least one other journal in which this appeared as 'human experimental techniques': more Boris Karloff than Bill.

Jeremy Harte, Ewell

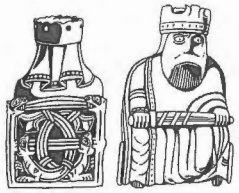
HISTORIANS

I loved "Digging in the Dark" [*Pendragon XXXIII* No 3 (Spring 2006) 18-20], narrating the tale of Pendragons and archaeology over the years. I've been involved in a very odd little dig over the last couple of summers, entirely amateur, startlingly unsuccessful, but great fun. As we've been looking for evidence of a Roman horse-breeding corral on the Roman Road, halfway between Ribchester and Manchester, there's all sorts of talk about the Sarmatians, cavalry *alae* and so on. When I find a bit more inspiration I shall work something up about it.

Dave Burnham, Bolton, Lancs

["Digging in the Dark"] brought back some happy memories and it was interesting to read about Leslie Alcock in *Pendragon* recently. Years ago, before we joined the Society, Eddie and I visited Cadbury but were too late to have a guided tour. Leslie Alcock was sitting at a table busy writing his book but Eddie was keen to ask him about the instrument they were using on the site, and before you knew it they both were in deep conversation. Leslie Alcock put his book to one side and said he was interested in Eddie's views as to improvements in the instrument and would look into it. He then gave me a sling shot as a souvenir and took us on a tour himself which lasted much longer than the previous one. He was most charming. Little did we know then how involved we would get with the Society!

Anne Tooke, Upton-upon-Severn, Worcs



GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

I have never had cause to write as any contribution would pale compared to the rest of *Pendragon*'s highly knowledgeable contributors.

However, there is one thing I am very familiar with and that is board games. I took a delight in reading the recent article on Arthurian gaming by Alastair McBeath ["Upon the board" *XXXIII* No 3, 22-26]. There is one game, which is worthy of note – *Britannia* designed by Lewis Pulsipher.

Britannia is a "sweep of history" game covering the history of Britain from the Roman period to the Norman. Players play factions, which take the roles of various peoples during that millennium. And by conquering territory score points. Apart from having the Romano-British and Welsh to play, the peoples include the Picts, Angles, Saxons, Romans *etc* as time progresses. Specific rules apply to some races, such as the raiding of the Danes. Each player gets to have their own major invasion, some even two, which allows that player to rack up their points for final accumulation at the end of the game. The game plays with 3 to 5 players, but is best with 4 and lasts 3-5 hours.

Further details can be found at the comprehensive, if unfortunately titled, Board Game Geek website. A list of 'Arthurian' games can be found at

http://www.boardgamegeek.com/geeklist/628

Kevin Mantle, Ladywell, London

• *It's a popular misconception that you need to be 'highly knowledgeable' to write for* Pendragon. *Anyone can contribute without being an expert (it certainly doesn't stop the editor expounding on matters he knows little about): all that's required is having something to say regardless of whether it's new, a response or a query.*

Kevin also came across the following, which may be of interest. ***The Popular Culture Association****'s 37th annual meeting is on Arthurian legends. It's on April 4-7 2007 at the Boston Marriott Copley Place, Boston, Massachusetts. Papers and panel proposals on all popular treatments of Arthurian Legend from any period and in any medium were invited, but the deadline – November 2006 – was too late for last issue. Further details from Elizabeth Sklar,* e.sklar_at_wayne.edu *or* DHof635094_at_aol.com *or from Department of English, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202, USA*

The University of Reading's School of Continuing Education is running a day school on June 2, 2007 on ***King Arthur: myth or history?*** *The tutor is Juliette Wood, Secretary of the Folklore Society and a specialist in medieval folklore and Celtic tradition. For further details call 0118 378 8347.*

LINCOLN'S GRAIL

I liked the idea [Old News, *XXXIV* No 1, 40-41] that some cobbled-together – or 'hastily repaired', if you prefer – stained glass had led to the 'discovery' of the Grail's potential resting place at Lincoln Cathedral, and that this had been supported by a 'Da Vinci Codist', given that the evidence is a fine example of late 20th to early 21st century cobbling together of disparate scraps too. If they find a stone underground during the radar scan, will that 'prove' Wolfram was right after all, I wonder?

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth. Northumberland

old news

ROMAN MENHIR

Most ancient standing stones in Britain are assumed to be from the Bronze Age (which ended roughly a millennium BC). Recent radiocarbon dating of charcoal fragments recovered from beneath the **Eathorne Menhir**, near Constantine in Cornwall, was however completely unexpected.

The charcoal was found in the fill of the stone's original socket hole when the menhir was re-erected in 2005, and when calibrated was found to be from the Roman period. "This is not to say that the stone is not Bronze Age: the probability is that it had already fallen over by the Romano-Celtic period and was re-erected then," reports *Meyn Mamvro*, suggesting continued reverence and perhaps use by the local population.

Bronze Age menhirs may have continued to inspire in the post-Roman period. Charles Thomas (1994: 272) noted how the original sitings of 6th-century memorials were "only occasionally at what were, or were to become, primary Christian locations" (*ie* churchyards and cemeteries); half were "first found standing somewhere in the landscape," by an owner's home, or at an estate's border or entrance. The Dark Age inscriptions may have been inspired by examples in Dyfed, but the positioning, we may surmise, may have been influenced by surviving Bronze Age monoliths.[1]

CL

SIR GAWAIN IN WEST WALES

To the south of Haverfordwest, in Pembrokeshire, lay "one of the [principal] Baronies in Wales" a millennium ago. Now a small parish, **Walwyn's Castle** has been reclaimed as the site of Sir Gawain's grave by the Walwyn's Castle Local History Society.

Gawain's link with Pembrokeshire was first recorded by William of Malmesbury in his *De Regum Gestis Anglorum* ("Of the Deeds of the English Kings"). Written around 1125, this was a good ten years before Geoffrey of Monmouth's celebrated Arthurian bestseller. William writes that

"At this time [*ie* the reign of the Conqueror] was found, in the province of Wales called Ros, the tomb of Walwen, who was the not degenerate nephew of Arthur by his sister. He reigned in that part of Britain which is still called *Walweitha* [Galloway]...

The tomb of [Walwen] was found in the time of King William upon the sea shore, fourteen feet in length; and here some say he was wounded by his foes and cast out in a shipwreck, but according to others he was killed by his fellow-citizens at a public banquet."

Walwyn's Castle does indeed lie in the medieval district of Rhos, but it lies about a mile from the nearest shore (Broad Haven or Little Haven, to the west); nowadays all that is left is the remains of a Norman motte and bailey castle. Located south of the church of St James, on the probable site of an Iron Age hillfort, this can scarcely be the place of the seaside tomb recorded by William of Malmesbury, though an article in a local magazine confidently states that the bones of Gawain were "dug up and removed from Walwyn's Castle in Norman times" (perhaps the area rather than the castle itself). Another historian suggests instead that the name Walwyn "may refer to a Fleming who settled the area in the 12th century".

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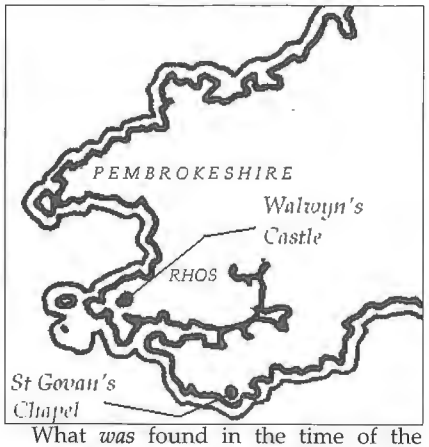
[1] Cheryl Straffon "Eathorne menhir dated – to Roman times!" *Meyn Mamvro 62* (Winter/Spring 2007) 7; Charles Thomas (1994) *And shall these mute stones speak? Post-Roman inscriptions in Western Britain* (University of Wales Press)



What *was* found in the time of the Conqueror on the seashore? No Neolithic chambered tombs are now known here, though one or two standing stones still exist. The general belief is that William was thinking of, as Geoffrey Ashe reports, "a place ... between the islands of Skomer and Skokholm", near Gateholm Island by Marloes Sands.

What is certain is that William was *not* referring to **St Govan's Chapel** on the southernmost tip of Pembrokeshire, which is about 15 miles as the crow (or perhaps chough) flies from these other sites and in a completely different district. Speculation about St Govan being Gawain may be a relatively modern phenomenon: F J Snell in the early 20th century, for example, hadn't come across this correlation; nor did he mention the nearby **Bosherston** lily ponds as the final resting place of Excalibur, a 'legend' which must postdate the creation of the ponds in the 18th century.[2] *CL*

STAFFORDSHIRE SOUVENIR

The so-called **Staffordshire Moorlands Pan**, discovered recently by a metal-detectorist, was purchased by the British Museum, the Stoke Potteries Museum and the Carlisle Tullie House Museum, with funding from the Heritage Lottery. It was displayed until March 11 as part of a special exhibition at Tullie House, along with the **Rudge Cup**.

As we've previously reported, the significance of these bronze pans is that they include the names of selected forts along Hadrian's Wall. These include versions of the name **Camboglanna** which, in the evolved form Camlann, is identical with the name of the battle that claimed the life of both Arthur and Medraut (or Mordred). This is not to say, of course, that this is where "the strife of Camlann" is to be situated, though a vaguely convincing scenario can be built of Arthur dying at Camboglanna and being ferried to **Avalana**, another fort to the west.

The *paterae* (to give them their technical name – now variously pan, cup or skillet) may have been some kind of souvenir. "Certainly they seem to reveal that Hadrian's Wall quickly acquired an iconic status after it was built," suggests archaeologist Neil Faulkner.[3] *CL*

Magranne's Tale

I have seen how the brash world's whisper
Calls up the forgotten brave,

[2] Val Scurlock "A quest for Sir Gawain" *Pembrokeshire Life* (February 2007); E K Chambers (1927) *Arthur of Britain* (Sidgwick & Jackson) 17, 250; Lise Hull (2005) *The Castle and Bishops Palaces of Pembrokeshire* (Logaston Press) 216; Geoffrey Ashe (1997) *The Traveller's Guide to Arthurian Britain* (Gothick Image) 193-5; F J Snell (1926) *King Arthur's Country* (Dent)

[3] Neil Faulkner "A present from Hadrian's Wall" *Current Archaeology 208* (March/April 2007) 6; Chris Lovegrove "Camlann found?" *Pendragon XXXI* No 3 (2004) 31-33

The Symbol in the Stone

Chris Lovegrove

T H Robinson

A good litmus test for popular conceptions of King Arthur comes with the newspaper cartoon. Along with the Round Table and the hand in the lake grasping the sword, the image of the sword in the stone is pre-eminent in Arthurian reference. CartoonStock.com includes typical examples, though for copyright reasons we can only describe a selection, not show them.

In a cartoon by Dave Carpenter, a medieval official remarks to a peasant clutching a résumé in front of a sword in a stone, "Actually there's no interview necessary. Just pull out the sword and the job's yours." In another US cartoon (by 'Kes') an exhausted office employee, obviously unsuccessful in his attempts to remove the sword, is being addressed by a boss behind a desk: "Well, Foster. It doesn't look like you'll be getting that promotion after all." A third cartoon reveals a knight who has removed the sword, only to retrieve the written message, "Congratulations! You may already be King!"

One cartoon minimises its impact by weak draftsmanship, though to be sure the caption is weak enough. Merlin is examining a giant safety razor in a stone, which we are told represents *The Wilkinson Sword and the Stone*. Another memorable image I've seen is of a boy, watched by his parents, struggling to remove a knife from his birthday cake.

Leaving aside the question of whether Arthurians will find these examples funny, we see that they aim to achieve their effect through sudden incongruity, synchronously juxtaposing two anachronistic but commonplace ideas. The now familiar image of a sword in a stone is so strongly associated with the young Arthur that it may then come as a shock to find that it is not exclusive to this legendary figure, and that in fact its origins may equally lie elsewhere. A look at other possessors of wonderful swords and how they acquired them may help to put the young Arthur's deed into context and explain why the story had (and still has) such resonances.

Retrieving the sword

Let's start with the story of Theseus, as recounted by the 1st-century Greek writer Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives*. Aegeus, the legendary king of Athens, was "either persuaded or enticed" into sleeping with Aethra, the daughter of the king of Troezen, Pittheus.

"Afterwards, when Aegeus discovered that the girl was Pittheus's daughter and suspected that she was pregnant by him, he left a sword and a pair of sandals hidden under a great rock, which contained a hollow just big enough for these objects to fit into.

"He took nobody but Aethra into his confidence and told her that if she bore him a son and he was able, when he reached manhood, to lift the rock and take what had been left underneath, she must then send the boy secretly to him, bringing these tokens and, so far as possible, without knowing of his journey" (Scott-Kilvert 1960: 15).

When Theseus attained manhood, he "put his shoulder to the rock and lifted it with ease". Then on his way to meet his father in Athens he achieves great feats,

Apologies for printing error

Due to a printing error at the bottom of page 8, Pamela Constantine's poem *'Magranne's Tale'* does not appear in full. The poem will appear in full in the next edition of ***Pendragon.***

defeating various uncouth adversaries, "punishing the wicked and meting out to them the same violence that they had inflicted on others". At Athens he is finally acknowledged as Aegeus' son and heir when he produces the sword.

The first thing to say is that, while the sword is under and not *in* the stone, we can still dimly perceive those elements of weapon, sovereignty and inheritance, combined with a stone as chthonic symbol, all of which also characterise the young Arthur's story. Secondly, while Plutarch treats Theseus as though he was a historical figure, we can safely regard him as a euhemerised mythical hero: Theseus is sometimes called son of the god Poseidon "which suggests that Aegeus was originally identical with Poseidon Aegaeus".[1]

If Plutarch saw Theseus' mythical achievements as historical, others recorded historical figures trying to attract mythical associations. Edward Gibbon's story of Attila the Hun in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (chapter XXXIV) was partly based on surviving fragments of writings by the historian Priscus, who had actually met the Hunnish leader. Gibbon first of all discusses the martial interests of the Huns (whom he sometimes labels Scythians).

"It was natural enough," Gibbon writes, "that the Scythians should adore, with peculiar devotion, the god of war; but as they were incapable of forming either an abstract idea or a corporeal representation, they worshipped their tutelar deity under the symbol of an iron cimeter [scimitar]."

Then he relates a singular incident. "One of the shepherds of the Huns perceived that a heifer, who was grazing, had wounded herself in the foot, and curiously followed the track of the blood, till he discovered, among the long grass, the point of an ancient sword, which he dug out of the ground, and presented to Attila. [As] the rightful possessor of the *sword of Mars*, [Attila] asserted his divine and indefeasible claim to the dominion of the earth."

[1] Poseidon Aegeus was worshipped at Aegae, a city on the Greek island of Euboea, hence the name (Warrington 1961).

Here Gibbon notes that the name and attributes of "the Scythian deity" has been translated by Priscus into "the Mars of the Greeks and Romans", the god of war. Then, he observes,

"If the rites of Scythia were practised on this solemn occasion, a lofty altar, or rather pile of faggots, three hundred yards in length and in breadth, was raised in a spacious plain; and the sword of Mars was placed erect on the summit of this rustic altar, which was annually consecrated by the blood of sheep, horses, and of the hundredth captive."

Here the "sword of Mars", which having perhaps fallen from heaven has been discovered fortuitously *in the ground* by a third party, gives Attila the Hun divine authority to rule. Gibbon suggests that the sword may have been placed on a "lofty altar" as he describes, but this is mere speculation.[2] The veneration of the steppe nomads' unnamed god of war as a sword was widespread however, from the pre-Christian Scythians to the Alans who – as the 4th-century writer Ammianus Marcellinus reported – also worshipped a naked sword stuck into the earth.

The finding of a sword in the earth, as with the Hunnish shepherd, is replicated in the early folktales about the Arab hero Antar, who is believed to have died around 600 (Ranelagh 1979: 85ff). The *Sirat 'Antar* (Romance of Antar) located the hero's adventures in Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Syria, and developed from the 8th century onwards, initially probably in Iraq. Among these early stories we learn how Antar discovers his sword.

"Antar ... descended into a deep valley, and lo! there were two horsemen engaged in desperate combat." These are two brothers in contention over a hidden sword, which has a strange history. A stone – "black in appearance, like a hard rock, brilliant and sparkling" – is

[2] Apparently Attila's sword of Mars was said to have survived: Liutpold of Meersburg owned it, carrying it into battle as a talisman against Turkish invaders in 1063. However, a chronicler recorded that he fell from his horse, landing on the sword and mortally wounding himself (Rouse & Rushton 2005: 74). What happened to the sword is not known.

discovered by a camel herdsman who, using it to chastise a straying camel, kills the beast, the favourite of his master. The master, knowing the stone to be a thunderbolt, has it made into a sword two cubits long and two spans wide. It is called *Dhami* "on account of its sharpness". The master's two grandsons are now fighting for possession of the sword, which the younger had hidden to keep from the rapacious elder grandson. Antar kills the aggressor, and the younger leaves to take up his inheritance.

And now Antar dismounts from his horse Abjer, and

"sat himself down to rest himself; and as he was moving the sand with his fingers, he touched a stone; on removing what was about it, behold! the sword the youth had been seeking! He still cleared away, and drew it forth, and seized hold of it, and it was a sword two cubits in length, and two spans wide, of the metal of Almalec, like a thunderbolt. And Antar was convinced of his good fortune, and that everything began and ended in the most high God" (Ranelagh 1979: 98-100).

There are some curious coincidences with the tale of Attila's sword: the herdsman who finds an object, fallen from heaven, *in the ground*; the finding of the sword hidden *in the ground*; its assumption by the hero who did not find it originally. Can the story of Attila (which Priscus tells as a true account) really have influenced folktales in the Middle East three centuries later? Or are these findings of wonder swords, one folktale motif among many, just coincidences, the two stories being totally unconnected?

We next come to the story of Sigmund from the Icelandic *Saga of the Volsungs*, set down in its latest form in the 13th century. At the marriage feast of the daughter of Volsung, king of Hunland, "a man came into the hall... He was dressed in this way: he wore a mottled cape that was hooded; he was barefoot and had linen breeches tied around his legs. As he walked up to Barnstock [the great tree that grew in the middle of the hall] he held a sword in his hand while over his head was a low-hanging hood. He was very tall and gray with age, and he had only one eye. He brandished the sword and thrust it into the trunk so that it sank up to the hilt" (Byock 1999: 38).

The intended audience for this saga would know at once that this stranger was the god Odin, putative progenitor of the Dark Age Volsung dynasty. When the stranger spoke, it was to say

He who draws this sword out of the trunk shall receive it from me as a gift, and he himself shall prove that he has never carried a better sword than this one.

The upshot is as expected: many tried, but none succeeded until Sigmund, son of Volsung, to great resentment "grasped the sword and drew it from the trunk. It was as if the sword lay loose for him."

The drawing of the sword as a sign of recognition for a future heir is also a clear "sign of the right to rule," as Davidson (in her 1960 paper "The Sword at the Wedding") and others have underlined. What is odd here, from an Arthurian perspective, is the emphasis on a tree rather than a stone; Davidson suggests that here we have an example of a 'guardian tree', associated with the 'luck' of a family. Later in the saga there is, however, a distant echo of the sword-in-the-stone incident.

Sinfjotl is, unbeknownst to Sigmund, his son. Together they are captured by their enemy Siggeir (Sigmund's brother-in-law) and buried weaponless in a large mound of stones and turf, separated from each other a large slab of stone. Sigmund's sister smuggles the sword in to Sinfjotl before the mound is closed up. "Now Sinfjotl thrust the sword's point up over the rock and pulled hard. The sword bit into the slab. Sigmund grasped the point and they sawed the rock between them... They were now both loose together in the cairn and they sawed through both rock and iron, thus coming out of the mound" (Byock 1999: 46).

Terrible revenge is then taken on Siggeir, who is burned alive in his hall in Gautland, Sweden. This strange incident, involving a sword, a stone and the unrecognised son of a king, is very reminiscent of elements in the Arthurian tale, but as both tales emerge in writing contemporaneously hundreds of miles apart their exact relationship, if any, is hard to gauge.

When the time eventually comes for Sigmund to die, his sword is broken in

battle by Odin as his 'luck' deserts him. The pieces are inherited by his surviving son Sigurd, and reforged as the mighty sword *Gram* by Sigurd's foster father, Regin the smith. With this sword Gram (seven hand spans long we're told) Sigmund later kills Fafnir the dragon, among other deeds.

The sword in the anvil

The so-called *Suite du Merlin* was a development of a prose version of Robert de Boron's *Merlin*, and all three works – the *Merlin*, the Prose *Merlin* and the *Suite du Merlin* – followed in relatively quick succession in the first half of the 13th century. When Malory came to write his great work two centuries later, he relied heavily on what he called his "French books", and the *Suite* became the primary source for the early part of what he called "the whole book of King Arthur". The opening Book includes this passage (modernised from the Winchester text):

"So in the greatest church of London – whether it were Paul's or not the French book makes no mention – all the estates were the long day in the church to pray." (Vinaver 1954, modernised)

Malory's debt to his French sources can be gauged by comparing his text with a mid-15th English translation (confusingly also called a Prose *Merlin*). At the mass for Christmas Day "one of the holiest men in the land" announced they were all there to worship God, to witness a miracle and to see God's choice of king for the land of Logres. Then some mass-goers saw in the churchyard

"a great stone four feet square. No one knew what kind of stone it was, but some said it was marble. On top, in the middle of the stone, there stood an iron anvil over half a foot high, and through this anvil was a sword fixed into the stone" (Brengle 1964: 222).

After the officiating priest sprinkled holy water on the anvil, the archbishop saw "letters of gold in the steel" of the sword which read

Whoever takes this sword out of this stone shall be king by the election of Jesus Christ.

Malory was later to expand this, omitting any reference to Christ, to

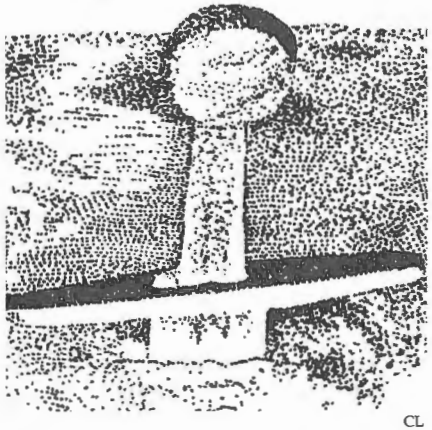
Whoso pulleth oute this swerd of this stone and anvyld is rightwys kynge borne of all Englond".

Malory has already told us that Merlin advised the Archbishop of Canterbury that all "gentlemen of arms" should come to London at Christmas, when Jesus would show by "some miracle who should be rightwise king of this realm", and we need not doubt that Merlin had a hand in the miracle, like a British Odin. When (as at Volsung's court) no-one succeeds in drawing the sword from the anvil and stone, the young Arthur achieves it on New Year's Day. As Sir Ector says, "God will have it so," but then Arthur is shocked to discover that Ector is not his real father (echoing Sinfjotl's position in *The Saga of the Volsungs*[3]). Eventually, after much delay, Arthur is acclaimed by the commons, and the nobles then also accept his right to reign.

The classic image is emphasised by T H White in his *The Sword in the Stone* (1939). As Wart, the young Arthur, says to himself, "I suppose it is some sort of war memorial, but it will have to do." White's own illustration shows the point of the sword buried in the anvil on a low boulder in an echo of many cenotaphs.

However, the original concept, in manuscripts from the 13th to the 15th centuries, was that of a stone or anvil *cleft* by the sword, rather like a cleaver or axe in a chopping block. Malory, in the Winchester manuscript, describes a steel anvil, "and theryn stack a fayre swerd naked by the poynt," which seems unequivocal. A 13th-century manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris shows the young Arthur kneeling before the stone, drawing the sword from the anvil rather like a hot knife from butter. Another 13th-century Paris manuscript shows Galahad similarly withdrawing a sword "naked to the point".

[3] And, of course, that of Jesus in the Gospels.



CL

The swords in the stones

Not all swords were withdrawn from stones (or anvils) however. At least two such medieval swords remain available for the 21st-century public to view.

The first is that of San Galgano – St Gawain in English – who we know renounced a knightly life and who, we are told, plunged his sword into a rock in the middle of an existing round chapel at Montesiepi near Siena in Tuscany. Dated to the late 12th century, the sword (or at least the hilt and part of the blade) is certainly genuine and not a later hoax, for the ruins of a Cistercian abbey named after him still stand (Sneyd 1999: 20-21).

The other sword-in-the-stone is found in the French pilgrimage town of Rocamadour. Above the chapel of the Black Virgin is a medieval sword embedded in a cleft in the cliff-face, sticking out almost horizontally and chained to the rock. "According to legend the dying Roland, ambushed at Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees while commanding Charlemagne's rearguard, hurled the sword with all his dying might lest it fall into the hands of the foe, and it landed in Rocamadour" (Begg 1995: 73); but it is more likely that this is an *ex voto* offering (or modern copy) left by a pilgrim at the shrine of St Amator.

The significance of both San Galgano's sword and the alleged sword of Roland at Rocamadour is that both are simultaneously renunciations of the warrior life *and* votive offerings. In this they are unlike the weapons of Theseus, Attila, Antar, Sigmund and Arthur which were all destined to be retrieved and to be *used*.

Variations on a theme

While there are plenty of analogues for the manner of Arthur's sword retrieval, once Robert de Boron created his precedent there was no going back. If scholars' relative dating is right, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* – from the compilation known as the Vulgate Cycle – followed soon after Robert's poems were rendered into prose, part of a trend to emulate chronicles in the vernacular and so give verisimilitude to the Arthurian tales and other romances. The *Quest* may have been composed around 1225, and its opening includes a variation on the by now familiar trope.

A page comes into the court at Camelot to describe a marvel by the river bank, a great stone actually floating. "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" (Matarasso 1969: 35). The inscription reads

None shall take me hence but he at whose side I am to hang. And he shall be the best knight in the world.

Gawain and Perceval both fail to retrieve the sword, and it eventually falls to Galahad, who has just sat in the Perilous Seat, to take hold of the sword and draw it "as easily as if it had never been fast".

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Galahad goes one better than Arthur in that the marble stone floats, miraculous proof of his divine calling. But as we approach the modern period,

the spirit of scientific enquiry has at times inspired some rather more pragmatic (but still speculative) interpretations seeking to downplay the role of God, destiny and the miraculous.

Beram Saklatvala in 1967 proposed that a phrase in Latin suggesting that Arthur drew a sword out of a stone (*saxum*) had been confused with its withdrawal from a Saxon. At around the same time another theory, the Sarmatian Connection, suggested that the whole Arthurian mythos grew out of the settling in northern Britain of a cohort of cavalrymen originating from the Russian steppes, the evidence cited including the Scythian war-god-as-a-sword noted above, along with dragon windsocks, a selection of alleged correspondences of names and the use of motifs from folktales collected in recent times which, however, may well have already been contaminated by Arthurian tales.

Alternative and increasingly novel approaches proliferate. Alan Wilson and Baram Blackett proposed that a "sword-shaped" stone inscribed with the name *Artorius* that they had unearthed in South Wales was somehow the origin of the tale. Rodney Castleden believed he had identified a rock in Gwynedd which bore a carving of a sword "produced magically when Arthur threw his sword at it"; Laurence Main points out that the real Sword Stone is actually a mile away, but both remain a play on words.

Meanwhile the title of Andy Collins' 1982 publication called *The Sword and the Stone* is misleading, for despite the occasional Arthurian reference the Tudor-looking dagger was not a sword and the green jewel-like stone was not a rock. So too is Andrew Sinclair's 1993 *The Sword and the Grail* misleading, despite the repeated images of swords carved on Scottish Templar gravestones.

Symbol

If we can draw any conclusions from our wide-ranging quest it may be these: many strands are evident in the various precursors of this Arthurian archetypal icon – wonder sword, the earth, heritage, royalty, power, deity, destiny – but no exact template matches all the versions. Like the tale of the subtle knife in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the sword and its adventures may strike many resonances, but the moment we try to grasp it, like Macbeth's dagger we have it not. ☙

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CL

The Guardian Dead

In the deep deserted crypt
the ancient dead sleep unstirring
through centuries of great event
set in train by the lives they led,
lives they'd lived with forceful vigour
relinquished only with regret
and fierce intent to guard the years
rushing with all their hopes toward
futures they will not believe.

John Light

Swords from the Stars

Alastair McBeath

Ian Brown

The earlier tales to mention the 'sword in the stone' episode from Arthur's boyhood clearly described the sword as being physically pulled from a stone, or an anvil-stone combination. This has not prevented more recent commentators from suggesting sometimes that it may have been the casting of a sword blank in a clay or stone mould which was really meant by the action, or that the sword had been forged from meteoritic iron. It is the latter I wish to look at as a possibility here.

Meteorite statistics

There is no question that tools and weapons were made from meteoritic iron at times in the past, though the evidence indicates it was more because such iron occurred in discrete, easily accessible masses on the surface, rather than for any perceived 'heavenly' provenance. Statistics on the point vary by source used and the timescale involved, but somewhere from just 4 to 7% of meteorites seen to fall down the ages were irons. This compares with around 50 to 55% of the meteorites found on the surface, without their arrival having been witnessed, being irons. Such a discrepancy contrasts the real rarity of iron meteorites as free-orbiting objects in space, with the fact their robust nickel-iron natures make them far more resistant to earthly weathering processes than the much commoner stony meteorites, composed of silicate minerals similar to those of earthly rocks. Irons are usually obviously magnetic too, which again gives them a distinct advantage in the 'chance to be discovered' category.

Few iron meteorites are known from the Old World countries, with their historically greater population densities and more intensive agricultural land-use, back into the millennia BC. Many more have been located across the Americas, Australia and South Africa, where population densities were historically / archaeologically less, and where agriculture was practised, if at all, on a much smaller scale. As there is no good reason to think the distribution of such objects was any less in the Old World than elsewhere on the planet, a greater use of such past meteorites can probably be inferred for those places where there were many more people viewing a larger proportion of the surface regularly.

Of those iron meteorites known up to 1972, between 15 to 18% had been reheated or otherwise reworked – sometimes to complete destruction of the original object – by humans since they arrived on Earth, quite a substantial proportion. Though the reheating may not always have achieved what was hoped of it, this gives further evidence to support the fate of the 'missing' Old World iron meteorites.

Meteorite statistics can be gleaned from various sources, but V F Buchwald's monumental three-volume *Handbook of Iron Meteorites* (University of California Press, 1975) is invaluable for presenting large quantities of such information in Volume 1. I have drawn heavily on numbers quoted, or items tabulated, in his Chapter 5 for the above. Other references below giving just a 'Vol' and page numbers are all from this text.

Meteoritic tools and weapons

Leaving aside those unworked iron meteorites, or worked items intended for personal adornment, which have been found in archaeological contexts in different parts of the world, numerous reworked meteoritic iron tools and weapons are known too. More anciently, but persisting till quite recently in parts, this seems to have been done predominantly by cold-working of the metal, none 'colder' than the huge series of iron meteorites, totalling maybe 58 tonnes, called "Cape York" modernly, in north-west Greenland (albeit actually located some 50 km ENE of the Cape itself). The Inuit had been regularly visiting the sites near here for iron for at least several centuries prior to its first non-native 'discoverers' in the early 19th century (the Inuit settled in Greenland *c* 1000 AD). Objects including harpoon-tips, knives and axes are known, which used meteoritic iron flakes or larger pieces as blades, cold hammered to fit into bone or walrus ivory handles. Some European wrought iron blades and tips, presumably from the medieval Scandinavian settlements in south Greenland, have also been found. However, one of the meteorite sites, where there was an object weighing several tonnes, was called "Savisavik" by the Inuit, which roughly translates as "place of the knife material". The original fall of these large Cape York irons probably long predated the Inuit's arrival, and it seems they had no belief the iron had fallen from the skies (Vol 2, 410-425).

Other cold-worked native tools and weapons were made from the Gibeon, Namibia iron (assegais and others; Vol 2, 584-593) and the Hopewell Mounds pallasite, Ohio, USA (knives, adzes, drills, chisels; Vol 2, 656-660), so it seems the practice was widespread. The Hopewell People flourished *c* 500 BC to *c* 500 AD, and were long-distance traders, amongst other things. Their meteoritic iron came from what is now Kiowa County, Kansas, 1500 km away from their homelands, for instance. Pallasites are not 'true' iron meteorites, but are one class of the stony-irons, in which large, often gem-quality, olivine crystals are surrounded by a lattice-work matrix of nickel-iron. This makes separating workable pieces of the metal much easier than from normal, almost entirely solid nickel-iron, irons. Thus it is unsurprising the Hopewell People were keen to trade even so far for it.

As metalworking techniques developed nearer our own time, so there is more evidence for hot-working and forging of meteoritic iron implements, such as the high-quality weapons and tools made from hot-chiselled fragments of the Prambanan meteorite on Java, from before 1797 onwards. A smaller piece had already been used up here by then for production of daggers (Vol 3, 989-991). Other evidence for the reheating and forging of meteoritic tools from the 18th century comes from the Siratik specimens in Mali (Vol 3, 1134-1137) and at Xiquipilco near Toluca, Mexico (Vol 3, 1209-1215).

One notable aspect of forged meteoritic iron is that the nature of the metal tends to produce what can be superb damascene patterns in sword and dagger blades. There are some fine images of such knives from the Wabar, Saudi Arabia and Jalandhar, India meteorites in Buchwald's Vol 3 (1274-1275, *figs* 1867-1869). Perhaps the most interesting and directly 'celestial' weapons are the "Meteor Swords" made from part of the Shirahagi meteorite in Japan, at the end of the 19th century, apparently the earliest weapons to so directly acknowledge their extra-terrestrial origin (Vol 3, 1115).

Ease of manufacture

In some cases, small meteoritic fragments seem to have been quite readily retrieved and worked either hot or cold, and smiths experienced in using meteoritic iron, such as at Xiquipilco by the 18th century AD, appear to have made it look easy. However, this was not always so.

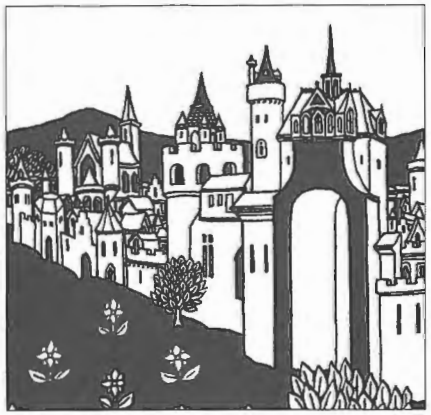
Part of the *Kitab al-Shifa* by Avicenna (Ibn Sina), probably written between 1021-1023 AD, and a form of complimentary text to Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, discussed various stones, the kind of material Aristotle promised to include at the end of his text, but apparently never did. One segment dealt with an iron-rich body, estimated as weighing 150 mana (about 135 kg or 300 lbs), which was seen to fall from the sky

at what is now Khorasan in NE Iran, around the turn of the eleventh century AD. The body proved too heavy to move intact, and attempts to break a piece off it broke the tools used instead! Eventually a piece was removed and sent to the Sultan of Khorasan, who ordered a sword made from it, but this could not be done. This is as detailed on pages 24-25 of the English translation *Avicennae: De Congelatione et Conglutinatione Lapidum* by E J Holmyard and D C Manderville (Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1927). It does show experience of working with off-world iron could be key to successfully 'pulling' a sword from such a meteoritic 'stone'.

Was Arthur's sword meteoritic?

The description of the activity in which Arthur drew the sword from, and replaced it in, the stone, as given in tales, cannot be taken as suggesting he was in some way casting the sword in a mould, or extracting the raw iron to make it from a meteorite. Indeed, as written, it sounds much more like a storyteller's 'cleverness for the audience' trick, where the listeners / readers would appreciate how the trick could be managed before the characters in the story. In this case, where brute force fails by inadequate leadership candidates, it is Arthur's unstated, but innate, ability to 'think outside the box', the mark of a true leader, that allows him to repeatedly draw and replace the sword in the stone. The trick could have been the lewis, the small slot cut into a large stone block, into which three short, dovetailed, metal rods could be slipped, a bar passed through loops at their free ends, and attached to a shackle, which when tension was applied to the shackle, would lock the rods rigidly into the slot, allowing a hoist to easily lift tonne-weight stones. Releasing the tension freed the dovetailed rods when the stone was in place. The method was widely used by medieval masons, having arrived in these islands with the Romans, most likely. The principle is similar to that in the narrow wicker tube "Chinese finger trap", where pulling traps a finger in each end, but pushing releases them.

Before we dismiss it entirely though, swords do have a symbolic link with lightning, as do meteorites – only in the meteoritic case, the link is more real than symbolic, as a brilliant light, typically quite short-lived, and thunder-like rumblings, respectively accompany, and often succeed, the meteoric event the meteorite passes through the upper atmosphere in. So in this sense, a looser meteoritic-sword connection might still be possible. All that was missing from the original was a dramatic flash of light(ning) and rumble of thunder as Arthur extracted the sword the first time. Thankfully, this was the "Hole Kynge of Ingelonde" (Malory), not Hollywood! ©



It is living yet

It is living yet, that place apart
Whose shadows touch and move the heart:
The castle on its windy plot
Among the fields of bergamot:
The sorrow and surviving joy
Which still, which still is Camelot.

And when the wind is in the west
Travelling the hill's bare modern crest,
Again I hear the hooves a-thunder
As knights ride out to stop the plunder,
To ease the pain, renew the wonder.

No worthy knight shall remain interred,
And though I only have the word,
Purpose shall be my steed, and I
Will be ready when my lords ride by;
For the soul of Camelot shall remain
Longer than land or sea or sky.

Pamela Constantine

EXCALIBUR IN SICILY

Some ramifications

Fred Stedman-Jones

Picking up on Bill Russell's interest in the possibility that Richard I presented Arthur's sword Excalibur to Tancred and his attempt to extend the ***reach*** and ***range*** of the historic background of this topic, I shall offer some suggestions of how Bill's third *r* of Arthurian studies – ***ramifications*** – might be followed up by interested readers. My interpretation of this term is: to examine the complexity of the material and to distinguish the significance of its subdivisions and offshoots. The following notes represent some interesting questions and issues raised in my own study of this topic, which are open to further discussion and research. The article is in two parts.

Q.1. *Who says the sword Excalibur was found in Arthur's hypothetical grave at Glastonbury?*

No one. Even if it had been surely it would have been an ancient rusted Celtic sword, valuable as 'proof' for the Angevin/Norman kings to show that Arthur was dead, or as a national trophy of the *Matter of Britain* to which they were now the heirs – to rival the French legends of Charlemagne. Brought up in his mother's artistic, cultured court in Southern France, Richard loved display, pageantry, music and romantic heroic tales. Inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia,* he might have been carrying a symbolic *Excalibur* on the Third Crusade to wave on the Walls of Jerusalem as the triumphant British hero of Christendom, Arthur's successor. (A 13th-century manuscript of Nennius tells of Arthur's visit to Jerusalem, returning home with a copy of the True Cross and an image of the Blessed Virgin which he bore on his shield thereafter.)

Q.2. *Would Richard have given away the icon of his kingdom's legendary past?*

Who first says he presented Excalibur to Tancred of Sicily anyway? The answer is Roger of Hovenden or Howden, there is no other contemporary identification of the gift, though many sources refer to the exchange of gifts between the two kings – Richard of San Germano, Pietro da Eboli, the Annales Morbacenses. Roger had served as a royal clerk under Henry II and was in Richard's entourage on the Third Crusade, he alone mentions Excalibur in his *Chronica* as

"the finest of swords which the British call Excalibur and which was that of Arthur once a noble king of England".

There was a lively cultural communication between the Plantagenet Empire of Britain and western France and the Norman kings of Sicily, perhaps Roger saw the gift of a sword in a metaphorical way, as being a symbolic gift between the two Norman kingdoms – the Arthurian stories had been taken to Italy by the first half of the12th century.

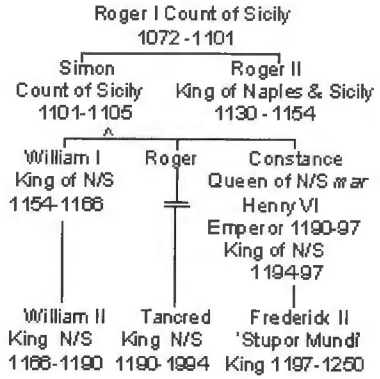
Swords were important to medieval kings and there is another Sicilian example of great significance. In 1398 King Martin the Humane of Aragon wrote to his son in Sicily asking him to send the sword of the Emperor Constantine, kept in the royal palace at Palermo. It is not known whether the sword was actually there or if it was sent but this would indeed have been a weapon of remarkable iconic significance – as the sword of the first Christian Emperor. It may have been a more common custom to present such chivalric relics than is generally known, as in the case of religious relics they may have been of doubtful provenance but accepted diplomatically as the real thing.

Q.3. *Has Excalibur been found subsequently in Sicily?*

I spent two holidays on the island in the 90s and visited museums and collections at the time, there was no mention of the sword anywhere that I could find nor in guidebooks that I have consulted since. Of great significance in this connection is the story that Henry VI, the German

emperor and second son of Frederick Barbarossa, who became King of Sicily after Tancred in 1194 by conquest and by virtue of his marriage to Constance Hauteville the daughter of Roger II, had the treasury of the Sicilian kings at Palermo opened and their jewels, plate and regalia were taken on 150 packhorses over the Alps to Trifels in the German territories The Sicilian coronation robes were used by the German emperors subsequently and are today displayed in Vienna. No mention was made of Excalibur, which would have been a prize for the German emperor, especially since the crown jewels and relics of his own forebears had been taken to England when Henry I of England's daughter Matilda (of Stephen & Matilda fame, Richard's grandmother) returned home childless to be her father's heir after her husband the German emperor Henry V died and her German lands were lost to her. Ironically, Richard the Lionheart was crowned in Westminster Abbey with the Golden Crown of the Holy Roman emperors, so heavy it had to be supported by four bearers on iron rods.

Q.4. *'Why would Richard have presented Excalibur to Tancred, a small player on the world stage, soon to be deposed?'*



Sicily was an important part of the world stage; it was the gate of access to the Mediterranean from the north. The holder of its kingship was a significant figure, especially in view of the ambitions of the German Holy Roman emperors. In spite of the poor relationships between the Normans and the Empire, Barbarossa had persuaded Roger II to marry his daughter to his own son Henry, under whom the German empire would extend through N and S Italy. The Papacy was most alarmed by the threat of being sandwiched in the middle – a true Norman heir had to be found. The Italian Chronicle of Richard of S Germano, 1189-1207, says:

Count Tancred of Lecce was summoned to Palermo, and with the agreement of the Roman Curia was then crowned king by the chancellor. This Tancred was the illegitimate son of Duke Roger and since he had a claim to be descended from the royal kin, Tancred was chosen as king from the other counts of the of the kingdom. After his accession he worked manfully to guard the kingdom's frontiers in peace and to subject rebels and opponents to his rule.

Tancred had served as the Admiral of King William's fleet, he was courageous and intelligent but characterized as being ugly and lacking presence, a claim which came mainly from chroniclers close to the emperor who were likely to have had prejudiced views. Tancred's major problems were with his vassals on the mainland of southern Italy but he led his army skilfully in these internecine battles.

Richard's arrival in 1190 and demands for his sister Joan's rights caused a temporary stand-off between the two kings but their initial problems were sorted out. A treaty was signed when gifts were exchanged and Richard may have given Tancred a sword, a gesture that he would act as defender of Sicily – a promise included in the treaty drawn up between them. Philip of France had tried to draw Tancred into a separate treaty behind Richard's back but Tancred had sized up where his best interests lay – the charismatic, handsome, Lionheart was a better choice as an ally and they were both descendants of the proud Norman conquerors of England and Sicily.

Continued on page 41

Simon Rouse

Arthur: time for a Commemoration?

Dave Burnham

I went to the Portico Library prize award ceremony recently and thoroughly enjoyed it. The Portico is a private library in Manchester with a wonderful glass domed reading room, a grand tradition and modern ambitions. The Portico prize is awarded each year for the best book published whose subject matter includes a North West element. The ceremony is much the same as the Oscars in that a shortlist is announced, each contender's work is explained and praised and then the dramatic announcement is made. Last year's winner, Terry Wyke, looked like many another startled winner and gave a convincing impression of total surprise – 'what me?' But for once I think his surprise was genuine, for amongst the short list of usual suspects (literary fiction and predictably irreverent poetry) his book was an oddity. *Public Sculpture in Greater Manchester* is exactly what it purports to be, a catalogue of the public statues of Manchester.

But it was the winner's speech that captured my attention. He stumbled joyfully along for a while before he caught his own drift. His speech consisted of a plea for the creation of the statues that Manchester does not have, but damn' well should do. Two of the current omissions he mentioned stuck in my mind. One was Mrs Gaskell, that trenchant witness to Victorian industrial oppressions. I heartily agree that Manchester needs a statue of Mrs Gaskell. Hear, hear. The other missing statue Mr Wyke mentioned was to the Peterloo Martyrs – those 21 working people trampled to death by the dragoons in St Peter's Square during a peaceful protest in 1819. Hear, hear again. I could just see a striking tableau reminiscent of Rodin's *Burghers of Calais*, or a relief such as that which now graces the Embankment in London commemorating the heroes of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, rising up opposite Manchester Town Hall.

And that got me thinking. Where is there a memorial to Arthur? Where across the whole of the country? It may be said that Arthur probably didn't exist (please … don't all shout at once). But then St George, of dim historicity, has his chapel in Windsor, several halls and many roads and pubs named after him. Robin Hood, whose identity is no more certain, has hundreds of pubs and that lifesize (if rather small looking) bronze representation nestling under the walls of what passes these days for Nottingham castle. Hard by Maid Marian Way, just up from the Trip to Jerusalem, Robin is wearing tights and a tunic, hood drawn round his ears (like any modern youth) and stands *en garde*, bow drawn and aimed. The authorities gave up replacing the oft-stolen arrow years ago.

Figures with no more fame than Arthur have grand statues; Alfred with his Saxon vestments and sword of office in Winchester; the Black Prince, somewhat oddly guarding Leeds from any mediaeval French knights who might emerge from the station, Richard Coeur de Lion in chivalric splendour protecting the Lords' entrance to Parliament; Churchill, diagonally across from him on Parliament Square looking belligerent even wrapped up against the cold; Boudicca, driving a chariot in her nightie barely 150 yards away at the junction of Westminster Bridge; Edith Cavell, in one of the most prominent positions in the West End opposite the National Portrait Gallery.

OK, there are memorials of a sort to Arthur – William Dyce's scenes in the Queen's robing room in the Lords and similar paintings at the Oxford Union. But these are hardly public. There is the colourful Round Table, again in Winchester, and of course thousands of books and films. The scores of stones, hills, rocks, and misnamed Neolithic chambered tombs and so on don't count. They are just there. No, there is nothing that's both deliberate, tangible, permanent, public and fitting. Merlin has more. He has a fenced off cave in the hills behind Moffat, a tomb in the forest of Paimpont in Brittany, visited and venerated to this day by fans from across Europe. He also has his tree – or did before the council in Carmarthen dug it up for a road widening scheme. And Lancelot: isn't Bamburgh Castle often spoken of as Joyous Garde? Tellingly Arthur has more grand memorials abroad than in Britain. The statue in the Hoffkirke in Innsbruck, one of the Nine Worthies Emperor Maximilian had made in the sixteenth century, is much more impressive than anything in Britain.

And one cannot say that Arthur does not live on in the affections of our compatriots. He did after all appear in the top one hundred in the recent BBC poll of the greatest ever Britons – a triumph this for a man whose very existence is in doubt. Neither Robin Hood nor St George made that list.

So that's settled then – we need a permanent memorial to Arthur and his achievements and who better to get this project started than members of the Pendragon Society? If we press ahead with this sort of project we have to consider five key issues. Two are fun, two are hard work, the fifth represents the opportunity. Fun first.

Form

What would it be? There are several perfectly acceptable regimental mottoes hacked into slopes of chalk downs all across South East England. But these need regular re-creation and count, in my mind, as landscape features rather than permanent memorials. Bill Clinton has a library, but it cost him (or someone else) several million dollars. Any building would be too expensive. On the other hand public art and architecture is currently in vogue and many local authorities are keen to fund it to promote their area. Think what the Angel of the North has done for Gateshead and the Lowry and the Imperial War Museum for Salford?[1] As a building would be too expensive it has to be a statue. It has to be a representation of a dark age Arthur. (Well, that's what I think.)

Location

I don't know where to begin with this. Blood would be spilled wherever was chosen and no one would be entirely happy – unless the statue were movable. I have often thought that any decent Arthurian can 'prove' that Arthur was born/ruled/operated/died within twenty miles of his or her own doorstep wherever they live in mainland Britain. I certainly can and I live in Bolton! But this very debate, prolonged and tetchy as it might be, may be the vehicle to get a project started.

Now the serious issues.

Money

These things cost a lot of money. The new, albeit very elaborate, Battle of Britain memorial on the Embankment in London came in at £1.65 million! A smaller bronze statue of life size, designed and cast by a decent, but unknown, artist is going to come in at about £200,000. A site might cost considerably more. The negotiations with local authorities would demand considerable amounts of time, planners, lawyers and those skilled in publicity. Serious financial backing would be required. This represents nothing but hard work over a considerable period of time.

Enthusiasm

OK, so that last section is a bit of a dampener. But let's have a think about what's really necessary to get this off the ground. One of my favourite writers is John Steinbeck – a man noted for the chivalrous themes in many of his books. He only attempted one explicit Arthurian work and started writing what became *King Arthur and the Knights*

[1] The Imperial War Museum North is actually in Trafford Borough, but feels like part of the Salford Quays development.

of the Round Table (1976) during the spring of 1958. He and his wife, Elaine, hired a cottage in Somerset, within sight of Glastonbury Tor, so he could breathe Arthurian air in his literary efforts. I've always wondered why he chose that subject just then and found out recently that he had done some speech writing in 1956 for the Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate Estes Kefauver. Also on the team (although mostly working with Adlai Stevenson himself – the presidential candidate) was Alan J Lerner. At that time he was buoyed up by the success of *Gigi* on the Broadway stage and casting around for another project. T H White's *The Once and Future King* tetralogy was published in full in the USA for the first time in 1956. Lerner certainly read it and enquired about buying the rights to *The Sword in the Stone* only to find that Disney had done just that as long before as 1939. I have no evidence that Steinbeck and Lerner discussed matters Arthurian during the summer and autumn of 1956 but I have a conceit that they must have met and discussed and enthused over T H White's book. Certainly within 18 months both Lerner and Steinbeck were deeply involved in Arthurian projects.

But first Steinbeck toyed with writing a modern version of *Don Quixote*. In 1956 and 1957 he was dickering with a novel which had the working title of *Don Keehan*. So he had his mind on things chivalrous. But then he chose to go with the rewriting of Malory. As he got down to work in that idyllic setting in Somerset, Steinbeck sent sections to his publisher. He began to receive cautious replies and then downright dismissals of what he was attempting to do. He became thoroughly downhearted but persevered nevertheless. He persevered against all the odds. But as autumn closed in he lost heart and closed up the Somerset cottage and returned to the US – the manuscript very nearly completed but unwanted by his publisher.

He never quite set Malory aside, discussing it with his publisher for the rest of his life, and he never quite abandoned Cervantes either. For in his sad and jerky journey around America in 1960 (published later as *Travels with Charlie*) his home-customised campervan (there being nothing like it commercially available in 1960) was named after Don Quixote's horse, Rosinante.

Mention of *Don Quixote* is apposite here. There is no greater windmill to tilt at than the thought of raising tens of thousands of pounds for a quixotic (and some would say pointless) project such as a public statue of King Arthur. And Steinbeck's determination, against the dismissive comments of his publishers, to complete a rewrite of Malory for the twentieth century was certainly quixotic. *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* was only published after Steinbeck died, but the legacy of that summer was cherished by both Steinbeck and his wife. Unable to speak, so the story goes, he simply wrote SOMERSET on a piece of paper, to express his love for his wife in his last hours.

Have we in *Pendragon* enough people with that same Quixotry[2] and the skills and enthusiasm to get something like this started? Are there others with an interest in Arthur that we could rally to the cause?

Hook

To start with I think there is a hook. Those of you old enough will remember the fuss made at the 900th anniversary of William the Conqueror's victory at the battle of Hastings in 1966 and also the BBC project in 1987 to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the Doomsday Survey. It irritated me that no one made any effort to commemorate in 1978 the 1100th anniversary of Alfred's victory at Eddington over Guthrum, when defeat at the hands of the Danes would have turned what became England into a completely different place. Anyway, is there a hook for us in the 1500th anniversary of the Battle of Badon? Discussion of any date for Badon has gone on for nearly a thousand years without anyone being any the wiser, so we'd have to pick our own date for it, say 2011 (again please don't shout too loud), which roughly fits the chronology and is far enough away to make preparations.

How about it? Daft or what?

Dave Burnham, December 2006

[2] If Quixotry was a real word how would it be pronounced?

The Myth of the Celts

Mike Howard

The 19th century myth of the 'Celts' as a separate race originating in Central Europe, moving westwards and eventually invading the British Isles, which is still held by many modern neo-pagans, has been effectively demolished by new genetic research. A team of scientists at Oxford University has discovered that the Ancient Britons were descended from people who crossed the Bay of Biscay from Iberia in boats about 6000 years ago. They interbred with the few thousand indigenous hunter-gatherers who had been here since the Ice Age to create a genetic 'fingerprint' that can still be detected today in the modem population of these isles.

Apparently, the majority of the indigenous British population are descended from these Iberian settlers, termed the **Oisins** by the boffins, with some genetic input from five other major racial groups or clans. Chronologically these are the **Eshu** clan, named after the African trickster god, from North and West Africa who arrived here around the same time as the Oisin clan; the **Re** clan, who were early farmers from the Middle East; the later **Romans**, who do not seem to have interbred with the Ancient Britons to any great extent as there is little sign of their genetic mark; the **Sigurds** who settled in northern Scotland, Ireland and West Wales from Scandinavia; and the **Danes** who colonised East Anglia in Anglo-Saxon times. Other research tracking racial migrations into this country by DNA profiling the modem population confirms that two thirds of the Ancient Britons came variously from southern Spain, the Basque region, Germany, Turkey and the Balkans. The other third came from Scandinavia and other parts of northwest Europe many thousands of years ago.

The researchers claim that while the Oisin gene pool is concentrated in the so-called 'Celtic' areas of Wales and Ireland, it is also strongly represented across England. The significance of this is that Celtic nationalism, itself largely a political product of the Celtic cultural and spiritual revival of the 19th century, has no historical or racial justification as we are all genetically linked as one homogenous 'British' people, albeit with different (yet shared) racial origins and regional characteristics. This research also challenges the false concept of 'racial purity' promoted by racists as we are all mongrels.

Obviously this genetic research also has a spiritual dimension. Each wave of migrants would have brought their own religious beliefs with them. Historians and archaeologists now accept that a proto-druidic religion existed in the Bronze Age and contained surviving elements of Neolithic spiritual beliefs. This makes nonsense of claims of a 'pure' Celtic paganism existing in these islands, as different racial groups would have added their own indigenous beliefs to this spiritual melting pot. The new model of Britain's prehistory is therefore one of successive waves of immigration from Northern and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, rather then a series of violent invasions. These migrations then blended into a cultural and religious continuity to create our ancient British racial identity.[1]

References and further reading

B C Sykes (2006) *Blood of the Isles* (Bantam Press £19.99)
Stephen Oppenheimer (2006) *The Origins of the British* (Constable £20.00)

[1] This article first appeared in *The Cauldron 123* (2007) 12

"Le bon liuere de Oxeford"

Geoffrey Gaimar's *L'estoire des Engleis*

(*c* 1140) lines 6435 - 6469

Translated by Geoff Sawers

Very soon after Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia was completed, another Geoffrey, Gaimar, made a translation of it into Anglo-Norman verse. This does not seem to have been particularly popular, as no manuscripts survive, and soon afterwards Wace made an Anglo-Norman version of his own. Certainly, from what I have seen, Wace was a considerably better poet than Gaimar. But Gaimar was also responsible for a complimentary rhymed chronicle of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings, which does survive. *L'estoire des Engleis*, an octosyllabic rhymed poem, was written for Constance, wife of Ralph FitzGilbert, a wealthy landowner near Washingborough, in Lincolnshire.

Here is the passage in which Gaimar mentions his source material. Walter Espec's book is probably Geoffrey of

Monmouth's Historia itself, which was written for Robert, Earl of Gloucester. The 'good book of Oxford' may well have been Geoffrey of Monmouth's famous ancient Welsh book, whose existence is so often doubted. Gaimar seems slightly ashamed of how he got it – did he make a copy without permission? The 'Winchester History' is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The opening 'he' of the passage is Gaimar himself - he refers to himself in the third person throughout.

Geoff Sawers

He obtained many copies,
he studied books in English
and in French and in Latin,
before he could bring the work to a close.
If his lady had not helped him,
he could have achieved nothing.
She sent to Helmeslac
for Walter Espac's book.
Robert the earl of Gloucestre
had this story ['geste'] translated
according to the books that the Welsh
had of the British kings.
Waiter Espec asked for it,
and earl Robert sent it to him.
Then Walter Espec lent it
to Raoulle fiz Gilebert
Lady Custance borrowed it
from her lord whom she much loved.
Geffrai Gaimar wrote out this book,
and added in those things
that the Welsh had left out,
for he had already obtained
whether rightly or wrongly
the good book of Oxford
belonging to Waiter, the archdeacon,
thus he improved his book much,
and from the Winchester history;
he amended also this story ['geste']
from an English book at Wassingburc
where he found written of the kings
and of all the emperors
that were lords of Rome
and that had tribute from England,
and of the kings who held lands from them,
of their lives and of their pleasures ...

References

W Lewis Iones, "Geoffrey of Monmouth", *Transactions of the Society of Cymmrodorion* (1898-99)

Mike Gascoigne: http://www.annomundi.com/history/gaimar

bookworm

FICTION

The third book of Robert Holdstock's Merlin Codex trilogy appeared recently. ***The Broken Kings*** (Gollancz hardback £14.99) follows *Celtika* and *The Iron Grail* which chronicled Merlin's time travels, during which he encountered Jason and the Argonauts, and now interlinks the *Argo*, the Otherworld and Urtha (*sic*) Pendragon's kingdom. Holdstock's standing in fantasy literature is said to be based on his "skill at recreating myth and investing its stock figures with startling reality, emotion and motivation".

Lloyd Jones' ***Mr Cassini*** (Seren £7.99) was described as a "psycho-geographic epic" which is "full of ideas but spirals (purposefully) away from any kind of narrative". Mr Cassini is eventually tried for cruelty by various Welsh heroes, including Merlin and author Arthur Machen on the summit of Pumlumon Arwystli, but there is clearly much more to this kaleidoscopic novel than meets the eye.[1]

FACTUAL

Christina Hardyment has written on authors as diverse as Arthur Ransome and Thomas Malory, and her recent study of the latter, ***Malory: The Life and Times of King Arthur's Chronicler***, is now out in paperback (Harper Perennial £9.99). As one reviewer noted, "Admirers of the *Morte* still refuse to believe that this celebrated chronicler of chivalric romance might have been a rapist. Hardyment suggests that [Mrs Joan Smith] was a childhood sweetheart and Malory was rescuing her ('rape' could also mean abduction) from an abusive marriage.... Hardyment's defence of Malory will not convince everyone" [an American reviewer felt that "blizzards of diversionary details" and "molehills of scholarly burrowing" got in the way of a "plausible" reconstruction of the writer's life] "but she writes with such passion she deserves a fair trial – which is more than Malory got."[2]

Simon Armitage's new translation of ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*** (Faber 2006 £14.99 160pp) was launched at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park at Bretton, the sell-out event marking the start of "a year-long collaboration between the poet and Yorkshire Sculpture Park". As writer Kevin Crossley-Holland observed, "The relationship of poet and translator is always a thorny one, entailing questions of freedom and responsibility," and Crossley-Holland is not always won over by a translation that "seems to be more imposed on the original than evolving from it". Nevertheless he enjoyed it "because, like the *Gawain* poet, Armitage is some storyteller". It's worth contrasting Armitage's version with Bernard O'Donoghue's translation of ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***, the replacement for Brian Stone's now rather elderly rendition for Penguin Classics (2006 £8.99 94pp). Like Armitage, O'Donoghue is a poet and so ideally placed to render the *Gawain* poet's meanings with sensitivity and art. With barely a complaint one critic felt that he "keeps things rattling along; he has done justice to one of the first great works of literature in the language," another that this version is "fluently lucid".

Colin Robertson's posthumous book ***The Druidic Order of the Pendragon*** (Thoth Publications £13.95 236pp) relates to a group based in Derbyshire and Leicestershire that he belonged to in the 1930s and 1940s. The Order, which effectively ceased to function after its last leader ('The Merlin') died in the Blitz, claimed a "mythic history" pre-dating the Romans, but apparently its "documents only date from about 1850" and it may owe most to the druidic revival of the 18th and 19th centuries. Needless to say, the Pendragon Society is unrelated to the Order of the Pendragon.[3]

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[1] Eric Brown "SF & fantasy" review in *Guardian Saturday Review* January 6 2007

[2] Ian Pindar *Malory* review in *Guardian Saturday Review* August 12 2006; Paul Gray "Knight in Tarnished Armor" *The New York Times Book Review* August 20 2006

[3] "Poet's new book" *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* January 30 2007; Kevin

PEOPLE AND PUBLISHERS

The late **John Heath-Stubbs**' 101-page epic *Artorius* (Enitharmon Press 1973, 2nd edition 1974) was later included in his 1988 *Collected Poems* from Carcanet. As well as being reviewed in *Pendragon* in 1973 and recommended by a member in *Pendragon* in Spring 1994, earlier (in *Pendragon XX* No 3, Summer 1990) Geoff Bird did a full page article about it. In "*Artorius* – an Heroic Cycle" he described how the Romanised central figure is treated as historical but also as a mythical and occult figure influenced by the Zodiac pattern, in the process of carrying out Hercules-paralleling tasks encountering not just Myrddin, for a Stonehenge initiation, and other Celtic entities like Cerridwen, but figures of Classical belief, like Anubis and an Isis priestess.

A nearer-contemporary review, from *Poetry Information 14* (Autumn-Winter 1976) by another poet, John Cotton, also mentions that the Muses make an appearance. This chimes in with Steve Sneyd's memory of reading it, many years ago, as an interlibrary loan, and being irritated by the intrusion of the Muses into the Matter! Cotton emphasises the great variety of poetic forms used, and of mood and tone, with counterpointing of "ancient and modern in fact and language", and that, overall, it is "eminently readable" and "a great organised rag-bag of poetry, erudition and humour", the latter reaching "the point of knockabout farce ... Where Phyllidulus instructs ... tadpoles in the art of poetry" and critiques "the nuptial poem composed by Mordred".

John Cowper Powys was recently championed by the writer Margaret Drabble, who declared this writer's realm "dangerous": a reader "may wander for years in this parallel universe, entrapped and bewitched, and never reach its end ... This country is less visited than Tolkien's, but it is as compelling, and it has more air." Powys' second novel, *A Glastonbury Romance*, centres on the Grail legend ("which haunted Powys all his life") but displays "many of his other obsessions and interests: vivisection, pornography, Welsh mythology and nationalism, magic, the nature of evil, Nietzsche's philosophy and the communist doctrines preached by the labour leaders of the day;" Drabble even compares its central chapter to the "trans-historical" *Life of Brian*. Of his later novels, *Owen Glendower* celebrated the Arthurian-like Welsh-Messiah-who-never-was, while *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* "beggars description".

Colin Thubron, writer of both travel books and fiction (he was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2002), revealed that his preferred schoolboy reading comprised "Greek myths, Arthurian legends and, always, romantic poetry," all of which greatly influenced his adult writing.

In 1993 publisher Alan Sutton was sacked by the new owners of **Sutton Publishing**, a Gloucestershire firm specialising in history. Sutton then set up **Tempus Publishing**, also based in Stroud, as a rival company, and achieved equal success. News now comes of his re-acquisition of Sutton "for a bargain £3m ... to build a global local history and heritage publisher".

An overview of recent **Boydell & Brewer** titles is now scheduled to appear in the next issue of *Pendragon*.[4]

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd

AGE OF ARTHUR

Further to my notes on tabletop figure wargaming in *Pendragon XXXIII* No 4, 8-12, a new set of rules were to be published in early February 2007 from *Warhammer Historical*,[5] a supplement to their established *Warhammer*

Crossley-Holland "Green giant" *Guardian Saturday Review* February 3 2007; Nicholas Lezard "Ho ho ho, green giant" *Guardian Saturday Review* October 5 2006; Neil Powell "Poetry" *Telegraph Seven* August 27 2006; Michael Howard *Druidic Order* review in *The Cauldron 123* (February 2007) 43

[4] See Reviews this issue; Margaret Drabble "The English Eccentric" *Guardian Saturday Review* August 12 2006; Nicholas Wroe "On the road again" *Guardian Saturday Review* September 9 2006; Joel Rickett "The bookseller" *Guardian Review* February 3 2007

[5] www.warhammer-historical.com

Ancient Battles rules, called ***The Age of Arthur: Warfare in the British Dark Ages, 400 AD – 800 AD***. The list price was given as £20 / $38. In the advance publicity, it claimed to be full of period information on the Saxons, Romano-Britons, Welsh, Irish and Picts, with colour illustrations, maps, and ideas on collecting and painting armies of the time. Reviews of other *Warhammer Ancient Battles* supplements I've seen have commented favourably on the depth and breadth of information contained, albeit sometimes selecting only one of a number of possibilities where the evidence was lacking or equivocal, so it should be worth a look at least, perhaps in places, even by those not tempted by the possibilities of Arthurian wargaming.

Unfortunately, the set is only a supplement to the main rules, and you would need a copy of the main rulebook as well, to use it for gaming purposes (costing another £20 / $38). Do shop around though, if you can, as at least one figure manufacturer, Gripping Beast,[6] were promising discounted combination deals in January, including some of their new 28 mm scale British & Welsh Kingdoms figures range with the supplement when it was published. I am not altogether certain what the differences are between their extant Romano-British figures and the new British & Welsh Kingdoms ones, but you should be able to see for yourself online by now, with luck.

Alastair McBeath ©

Reviews

Sojourn in Arthur country

Radio

Steinbeck in Avalon
Afternoon Play, BBC Radio 4, June 26 2006

This hour-long piece by Ray Brown, drawn from John Steinbeck's own letters and the American author's labour-of-love the genesis of which the letters reported, is probably better described as an episodic dramatic monologue, interspersed with short dramatised scenes from the resulting work, than as a play. But it was genuinely gripping as a study of a major author's grappling with the perennial challenge of giving a fresh, and personal, interpretation to an irresistible story, yet at the same time one that lay far away in time and place from the subject matter of his previous novelistic successes.

The piece's recounting begins in 1958, with Steinbeck determined to at long last begin the achievement of a long-time obsession. The world knew him for such near-contemporary America-set novels as that classic Depression epic of Okie migrant workers, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck, however, saw a quite different task as demanding to be the crown of his writing career, namely the creation, using all his novelistic skills, of a re-minting of Malory, one able to communicate directly with a modern readership.

At first he describes himself as sitting still, ostensibly doing no writing, but concentrating his mind in preparation for the commencement of this work – as he puts it, going through the motions of being a husband and father with his mind quite elsewhere, something his third wife, Elaine, could bear cheerfully, whereas it's to this writerly state that he ascribes the failure of his first two marriages – "most women can't live with a zombie."

Another letter extract – as an aside, one puzzle of the play was that we were never told to whom he was writing, or anything about the relationship with the addressee, if indeed all the letters went to the same person – explained why Malory meant so much to him. From his family's tastes, as a child, he had absorbed a sense of the Bible, Shakespeare and *Pilgrim's Progress*, as if by osmosis. But, as a young boy, the idea of actually reading a book for himself had seemed like choosing to seek out a demon of torment. But then his grandmother gave him a copy of Caxton's text, and somehow it got him the love of language that made him a writer. Now he wanted to repay the debt by putting the story into language more accessible to the modern reader, while

[6] www.grippingbeast.com

keeping the wonder and magic.

At the same time he felt the need to convey the antiquity and universality of the story – that it went back even beyond the first Celtic versions, "back to ancient India and beyond."

But he felt blocked from making a start. So wife Elaine suggested getting away from familiar surroundings. But where? Why not "where it all happened", the place where "all the squirming ferment" obsessing his brain began? Somewhere close to Stonehenge, Tintagel, "Arthur's mount". And so a search for somewhere to rent in the West of England began, and before too long it succeeded.

By March 1959 he was writing from Bruton, Somerset, from a house called Discove Cottage, in his letter ascribing to the dwelling a characteristically antiquity-awed American's provenance: "occupied at the time of Edward the Confessor ... mentioned in Domesday Book ... Nothing in sight hasn't been here since the 6th century."

A week later, the 23rd, an often-contradictory letter expresses his excitement: "nothing has changed," yet he "can't sleep" as "the myths flow past"; a sense of what really happened, and the challenge of telling it rightly, leaves him "happy yet perplexed as a cat in a clam basket". And yet the work "is going smoothly".

Soon after, he sets out to explain his approach to the story: that we have to "believe in enchantment as we believe in psychiatry, and in much the same way," and accept that the Arthurian story, "like most folklore, is a mixture of profundity and childish nonsense – but if we throw away the nonsense some essence is lost." He explains his cunning compromise over writing tool. Having always written first drafts by hand – "a typewriter gets between me and the word" – to be right for this book's mood, it must be the "winged quill of a goose". Yet he has found an actual goose quill point too scratchy, so now he mounts modern ball pen fillers in the stem of the quill!

With "Spring lovely here, exciting, lush as a plum", oaks the "red of swollen buds before they go gray then green", work on Malory goes on at a steady pace "like laden camels". Time for a brief, emotional break from writing: "Yesterday I climbed to Camelot, and found myself weeping". As a more extensive diversion from the main task, he plans a little book translating English English into American English, to aid other visitors. Already, however, despite language difficulties, Elaine is "seeding Somerset with a Texas accent" and has "got Mr Windmill of Bruton saying 'You all'".

He enthuses over his discovery of the correct style for his Malory-reworking – "simple stately words" that will "dance beauty on the paper" – having decided, as he works, to criticise, evaluate nothing ... just let the thing come thundering in".

He speaks of finding his near-doppelganger in the story: "I recognise Lancelot, in some ways he is me, corny and fallible". He speaks, too, of a foreshadowing of later difficulties with the project, of "being troubled by the arrant nonsense of so much of it ... the endless fighting, I must excavate some reason for it or cut much out." But still he enthuses about Somerset: a "good time ... perhaps the best we've ever had".

He reaches the point in the story where he must retell the lopsided relationship of a besotted Merlin with the young girl (Steinbeck's version of her name is Nineveh, a curious Biblical echo) who teasingly allures the aged wizard to gain knowledge of his magical secrets: there "must be some reason no one has done it properly" but he thinks he's found an approach that will work, although "if I'm wrong, then it's real whopping wrongness". But then, he adds, a "writer like a knight must seek perfection and even when he fails of perfection must not believe perfection is not possible".

The next letter from Somerset is far less positive: the "work doesn't march, because it doesn't gel ... the room here is like the room in NY, I can bite my nails anywhere".

By September 28 1959 it's time to leave Discove Cottage: "the time here is over ... I feel like an egg about to be thrown at electric fan ... Subject so much bigger than I am ... if I fail, I will be like a painter who breaks his brushes", that is, he is considering giving up writing for good if he finds he cannot resolve the problems encountered in its writing and so cannot complete the Malory project.

Three years later, back in America, writing from the holiday resort of Sag Harbor, Maine, he is still persisting with it: "my whole life has been aimed at this one book", although less positively adding "loneliness is part of a writer's life as celibacy is part of the priesthood", a state made worse by being "terrified always of the next book, more than the first even ... and failure is the end of every writer's life, even though the Nobel was real." Mournfully he summarises that he would prefer to die mid-sentence in mid-book, "leave it as unfinished as all life."

Nine years on from the sojourn in "Arthur country", it is still in his mind. Writing in March 1968 from a New York apartment 38 floors up, watching the strange phenomenon of snow falling upwards due to the updraft caused by the skyscraper, he comments that the min-garden on his windowsill consists of "four cucumbers and an English oak from a Somerset sapling."

By December of that year, on his deathbed, his fingers having "for a long time avoided the pencil", he asked Elaine what she thought had been the best time in their twenty years together, telling her to write down her answer first, then he would give his aloud. She proved to have written the same as he said, "the time in Somerset."

Dying, he quoted to her the words he had written for Arthur to say to the knights of the Round Table: "now let everyone sit quiet and not move, for now begins an age of wonders".

It was to be ten years after the writer's death before, edited into publishable form by friends, Steinbeck's *Acts of Arthur and His Knights* finally appeared in print.

As a footnote to reviewing this fascinating insight into a major 20th-century American novelist's awestruck struggle to re-interpret the Matter of Britain, let me give a summary listing of the acted-out extracts from Steinbeck's version of the timeless story, interspersed throughout the programme to frame the quotes from his letters.

1. The sword in the stone episode;
2. troubled, Arthur asks Merlin about his fate: the latter prophesies both their ends;
3. Pellinore defeats Arthur and breaks his sword;
4. by Merlin's aid, Arthur obtains Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake;
5. Arthur decides to take Guinevere to wife, despite Merlin's warning;
6. Round Table oath-taking;
7. following the final defeat of all rebels, Guinevere counsels Arthur on how to avoid peacetime decline: small individual conflicts (with giants, dragons, robbers, feuding local tyrants) must be made to seem great enough challenges to his knights to replace full-scale war;
8. Lancelot goes forth as such a spearhead of the king's justice;
9. a maiden he saves says she will reward Lancelot with knowledge of who is to be his true love;
10. after what could be called debriefing by Arthur following return from his adventures, Lancelot is kissed by Guinevere for the first, decisive, time;
11. the interaction of Nineveh and Merlin begins: she promises herself to him once he has taught her his most powerful spells, and makes him promise in the meantime not to obtain her body by sorcery;
12. Merlin prepares a wonderful underground chamber in which the long-delayed consummation with Nineveh will at last take place: she tricks him into entering first, and seals him within forever, using the unbreakable spell he has at last taught her as the final instalment of her price.

Steve Sneyd

DVD

The Da Vinci Code (UK cert 12)
Columbia / Sony Pictures 2006
Director Ron Howard 143 mins

When this film first came out in the summer of 2006 it was severely mauled by the critics. Tim Robey in the *Telegraph* was typical: "What's the Latin for balderdash?" he asked rhetorically before accusing the director of making a movie which was "lumpily assembled" and "directed with next to no flow, finesse or underlying craft". A few months down the line, is there anything more positive to be said about this much-hyped piece of hokum?

The first thing to do is to forget the

furore and the hyperbole. Yes, the concept of the grail as the bloodline of Jesus is bogus, and the plot twists are as risible as the misplaced piety of the symbol-crackers. And at the end there is an overwhelming desire to mutter "So what?" But the real core of the film (and the book) is a workman-like thriller in the tradition of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and its ilk, with the hero and his female sidekick just one step ahead of their nemesis in various guises, and on this level it's certainly worth borrowing from your local corner shop (though once was enough for me). It's just a pity that the film takes itself so seriously – or is this a kind of post-modern irony? But then, so does the paying public: *USA Today* showed that at Easter 2006 not only was the novel at the top of America's bestsellers list but that it outsold its nearest competitor in the ratio of 4:1.[7]

Chris Lovegrove

Card game

Camelot Legends:
A Game of Chivalry & Adventure
Designer Andrew Parks 2004
Z-Man Games (www.zmangames.com)

This is a card game for two to four players which sets out to recreate something of the adventures of the later medieval Arthur. The components are nicely produced in full colour, and include three roughly A5-sized location cards for Camelot, Cornwall and the Perilous Forest, where most adventures happen, a smaller ready-reference card for each player, and two packs of illustrated playing-card sized cards, 60 Characters and 40 Events. The latter pack includes three Final Event cards and three Special cards, which latter are kept separate and can only be acquired by fulfilling certain Events.

The idea is for each player to form companies of knights and other characters from the tales, and use them to complete quests and overcome enemy companies. When the Final Event is completed, the player with the most victory points from adventures fulfilled is the winner.

There are short quotes from various Chrétien and later tales on many of the cards, for flavour, and all the characters used are given biographical notes in the rules' booklet, along with a few basic references for translations of the stories. The illustrations on the cards are generally attractive (whether you agree with how the characters look is of course another matter entirely!), though with 26 artists involved, inevitably rather variable. Many have a definite Pre-Raphaelite appearance, which is either a compliment or a complaint, dependent on your view of the Pre-Raphaelites, but range from the pseudo-medieval (*ie* slightly "odd" perspective, and rather flat, such as that for King Bagdemagus) to near-photographic clarity and precision (*eg* Sir Percival, complete with 'five o'clock shadow' round his jaws).

The game mechanics are straightforward, with each character having a numerical score in six abilities, Combat, Diplomacy, Adventure, Cunning, Chivalry and Psyche, ranging from -1 (very bad – only two of these: Sir Kay's Diplomacy, and King Mark's Chivalry) to 6 (Best in the World – five of these, including Sir Lancelot's Combat, and Morgan le Fay's Cunning). Companies must combine their ability scores to complete quests and adventures. However, things become far more complex, as all characters have one or more special abilities, while several Event cards add more such power shifts, once completed. Although many of these have counterpoints, some can be devastatingly powerful, and as the game length is determined by a random selection of no more than two-thirds of the Event cards, it is rare to get through more than half to two-thirds of the Character pack per game, leading to a quite severe imbalance between players commonly.

Regrettably, the random elements tend to overpower skill, as there are just too many different special character abilities. This means most games I have played have tended to be dominated by one or two players who were lucky from

[7] "Best-Selling Books" *USA Today* April 19 2006; also see The Board this issue

early on in their Character card draws, while the other players might as well not have been there. It is quite possible to start with such useless Character cards you cannot compete from the beginning, a position which is typically irrecoverable in what I have experienced.

Heavily luck-based games like this should either be long enough that the random aspects even out, or fast enough to play several in a session, so everyone has a chance to predominate. However, with a four-hander typically lasting 90 minutes plus, comprising between just 6 to 10 (rarely more) rounds, and often bogging down hopelessly, as players try to work through the various "special ability" permutations in play and in their hands, this is caught unhappily between the two. Although parts of the game can be entertaining, and the mix of characters and events give a fine flavour of later medieval Arthuriana, players who have done badly in one game usually have not been too happy to chance another lengthy potential humiliation in what I have found, while even for the victor, it is sometimes with more relief to be finished, than any sense of an overall enjoyable experience. On the whole, nice artwork, shame about the random game.

Alastair McBeath ©

Books

Stuart McHardy
On the Trail of the Holy Grail
Luath Press 2006 £7.99
1-905222-53-X PB 139pp map

The author's latest Arthurian title (his *The Quest for Arthur* was published by Luath Press in 2001) takes him on a quest from the pages of medieval writers to places in the Scottish landscape, and from the early medieval period back into the mists of time. Along the way he encounters folklore and legend, Dark Age warriors and Goddess worship, Pictish symbol stones and natural wonders.

His solution to the interpretation of the Grail is that its origins lie in the Corryvreckan, the whirlpool that lies off the island of Jura just off the West of Scotland: this is a hypothesis that was first advanced by Hugh McArthur, and explored here in *Pendragon* and elsewhere by Eileen Buchanan.[8] This is an attractive theory, with much to commend it, but, as McHardy himself admits, the idea of the Grail "first appeared in the closing years of the 12th century," and there is a rather large chronological gap between Chrétien's first description of the object and McHardy's speculative celebration of a natural wonder in the prehistoric period.

So whether the Corryvreckan is "a good candidate for the deepest ideas behind the concept of the Holy Grail as it has developed over the centuries [...] and millennia" really depends how far back you can push the putative links between an early medieval Welsh poem, a French romance, miscellaneous folklore of unknown antiquity and modern reconstructions of ancient pagan beliefs.

Chris Lovegrove

Carolynne Larrington
King Arthur's Enchantresses:
Morgan and her sisters in the Arthurian tradition
I B Tauris Ltd 2006 £18.99 264pp

The author of this book on the female characters in the Arthurian mythos is a tutor in Medieval English at St John' Collage, Oxford. She claims that the role of women is central to the myth of the once and future king and the quest for the Grail. They include the enchantress Morgan Le Fay, the faery Lady of the Lake who raised Sir Lancelot and gave Arthur his symbol of kingship, Merlin's young nemesis Vivien, who seduced the elderly wizard to gain his magical secrets, and Morgause, the powerful queen of Orkney.

Larrington describes how these female figures feature in the Arthurian legend and how they have been depicted in poetry, art, literature, theatre, television, film and on the internet. She concludes that they have an archetypal role that survived the destruction of Camelot and in modern times have become symbols of female empowerment free from male domination. Recommended.

Mike Howard[9]

[8] Eileen Buchanan "The Corrievreckan" *Pendragon XXXI* No 2 (2003-4) 31-33
[9] This review first appeared in *The Cauldron* 123 (February 2007) 43

Mike Dixon-Kennedy
A Companion to Arthurian and Celtic Myths & Legends
Sutton 2006 £14.99
0 7509 3311 9 PB

Indefatigable data collector Dixon-Kennedy has compiled another reference work of interest and usefulness to students of the older lores of the British Isles. This volume comprises an update on his two earlier Blandford volumes dealing separately with these two interlinked topic area; though necessarily from a similar source, ethnically or otherwise, and the reader should be careful of assuming that everything Arthurian is Celtic, there is no denying the roots of much Arthurian material in a so-called Celtic milieu. Hence, the collation is useful.

John Billingsley[10]

Richard Barber and Anne Riches
A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts
The Boydell Press 1971 (1975 reissue)
08511506 16 HB 187pp illus

I chanced upon this intriguing and rather whimsical volume in a second-hand book shop in Middlesbrough. I'm not sure if it was written with a predominantly adults' or children's market in mind, but it should make comfortable reading for most age groups.

The bestiary is a mixed bag, including creatures and otherworldly beings from various world mythologies, folk traditions, literature (such as *Alice in Wonderland*) and legend. Although some of the entries are a little brief and might have benefited from more information, others (such as dragons) are rich in detail, making this a helpful quick guide, perhaps before further reading.

The range of entries is certainly eclectic, and, as a Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts, it's quite comprehensive, and, well, it does exactly what it says on the cover. All in all, it was rather a gem of a find on that crowded bookshelf.

Ian Brown

[10] This review first appeared in *Northern Earth 108* (Winter 2006/7) 31

Paul Broadhurst
The Green Man and the Dragon
Mythos 2006 £12.95
0 9513236 6 0 PB 218pp illus

Paul Broadhurst is the author of several books, such as *Sacred Shrines* and *Tintagel and the Arthurian Mythos*, and this recent work, claiming to reveal the mystery behind the myth of St George and "the dragon power of nature", is the latest to argue that the symbol of the dragon represents the forces that exist in nature. Like other Mythos titles it is beautifully illustrated and presented, and looks a quality product.

The premise of the book is as much faith-based as any monotheistic belief. Do we now all believe that there was once a universal religion in these isles whose faith in the old gods and goddesses survived despite persecution by the church? Moreover, can we believe it remained hidden from the authorities (despite its visibility, for example, in church carvings such as dragons and the foliate heads) only to be recognised as such by initiates over the centuries and by modern-day spiritual detectives?

There is much of value in this book, certainly in the wealth of pictorial clues and the range of lateral thinking, but for me there are two main weaknesses. First, there are rather too many inaccuracies, particularly in word-derivations which smack of old-fashioned folk-etymology, and too many unwarranted statements. For example, I profoundly disagree with all of Broadhurst's discussion of Og, Gog, Magog, George and orgy in his chapter 'The Name of the Giant'; and Jerusalem, which he asserts is "often spelt Gerusalem in old manuscripts" is in no way derived from Greek *ge*, "an ancient word for Earth" when their roots lie in completely different language groups. Where too is the hard evidence that the first Grand Master of the Templars, Hugh "of the Pagans", was "of Moorish origins"? Or that Sarras was ever identified with Jerusalem in, say, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, where it first appears?

Secondly, the literary references seem to include no primary sources (bar a couple of very out-of-date summaries of Celtic myths and legends), and they even credit *Pendragon* (rather than Penguin Books) with publishing Brian Stone's

translation of the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In addition Broadhurst cites no modern scholarship which may be critical of his general approach (such as Ronald Sutton's *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*), but he freely includes the now largely discredited theories of past scholars such as James Frazer, Margaret Murray and Lewis Spence.

Still, there is much of eclectic interest in this work, and much to admire in Broadhurst's indefatigable exploration of themes and places: here is an author who has great empathy for a land and its legends, and would like us all to share his vision of how it was and could still be again.

Chris Lovegrove

Richard Freeman
Explore Dragons
Heart of Albion Press 2006 £12.95
1 872883 93 1 PB 187pp illus

The author's CV includes graduating in zoology, a spell as Head of Reptiles in a British zoo and, as a crypto-zoologist, zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology (cryptozoology is the study of unknown creatures, while Fortean studies is dedicated to the research of unexplained phenomena). He describes some of the research he has engaged in, particularly in the Far East, and in this book gives a detailed account of dragon-lore and dragon theories from around the world.

This, however, is a very frustrating study which, while it paints a fascinating picture of eye-witness encounters, folk beliefs and modern hypotheses, fails to deliver any real measured judgements. For instance, his British bestiary lists worm, wyvern, basilisk, gwiber, serpent and so on as examples of dragons, but no zoological classification could include so many variations in wings, limbs, tails and other physical attributes. His chapter on clues and relics cites no instances of survival of bones or skin that could be scientifically investigated. His overview of dragons around the world, compiled essentially from travellers' accounts and local lore as well as his own expeditions, emphasises that there is a large disparity between various sightings of apparently anomalous beasts and Freeman's identification of them as dragons.

His final 'conclusions' are not conclusive at all but rather a short wish-list. Apart from our own Ian Brown's handsome illustrations and a useful bibliography of works cited, there is little to wholeheartedly recommend; yes, this *is* an 'exploration' of dragons, but it's hard to believe that a zoologist (let alone a crypto-zoologist) could come up with such an unappetising mishmash.

Chris Lovegrove

Next issue

The new translations of *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*, journalist Robin McKie's *Face of Britain* (Simon & Schuster) based on Channel 4's TV series of the same name, plus reviews of some past titles you may have missed. ☙

John Heath-Stubbs
Artorius
Enitharmon Press, London 1973 £3.50
Published with the assistance of the Arts Council of Great Britain
Limited to 315 numbered copies

Geoffrey Ashe considered this book to be so important for our quest that he was kind enough to present the Society with a copy, for which we are most grateful. It has been going round the Bristol circle; if members outside Bristol wish to read it, please send in names to be place on a waiting list and we will try to enlarge the circle of readers. [11]

The blurb tells us that this Heroic Poem is the result of thirty years of research and deliberation. The author has "endeavoured to strip away the Romantic and Medieval accretions, and to present a historically plausible Arthur in the setting of the 6th century .... Artorius is at the same time presented as a hero of universal myth, whose exploits are related to the twelve labours of Hercules, and to the Sun's seasonal course through the zodiacal signs."

This is almost an understatement. The opening stanzas are reminiscent of the opening stanzas of the great elegy to Lycidas, and instantly the reader's memory is stirred to life. This happens again and again as the poem continues, small trailers of mention pulling in whole areas of recollected matter: it is like a huge picture with gigantic figures dominating a landscape that is both fearsome and yet familiar.

The book is an amalgam of Classical, Welsh and Nordic mythology. It is Malory and Alcock interwoven. It is very much like Whites' *The Once and Future King* inasmuch as it is laced with prose passages of hilarious and anachronistic content.

For instance, at one point the bishop relates to Illtud how it came about that Arthur summoned a synod of the Church soon after the victory at Badon. "And were, in fact, many of the leaders of the heretical sects in Britain persuaded to attend?" asks Illtud.

Bedwini: "Very many. On the one side sat various sorts of Gnostics, twiddling their flowers and tinkling their Cow-bells. It was said that demons in flying saucers descended from the celestial spheres to whisper instructions to them. But I cannot find that this was actually observed to occur. On the other side sat the bull-necked Pelagians, believing in the indomitable human spirit and in the march of progress – and with scourges ready for the backs of anyone who failed to live up to these ideals. And in the centre, between these two opposing parties, the Millenarians. They believed in the imminent return of the Saviour, with a large cargo of barrels of salt beef and bottles of cheap wine, and pension-books for all his followers. And hell fire for everybody else. They were provided with massive documentation – measurements of the Great Pyramid, apocryphal apocalypses, and sibylline and hermetic palimpsests and pseudepigrapha."

At the end, when Modred takes advantage of Arthur's absence in Armorica and arranges a night of Bacchanalia on Cadbury, the Queen of Heaven comes to take back the gift she gave at the beginning:

"This field is Camlann, the sedgy moor
In the western marshes: 0 Absalom, Absalom,
In the vale of Hebron, by Avalon's isle!
But now it is Modred who challenges Artorius;
He heads the band of the yelling Picts,
And the silent Saxons. And I have come
To take back my Luck, the luck of Artorius,
This gleaming grail. And do not ask me
Why, feminine, my mind is changed,
Nor to whom I shall deliver it ..."

Geoffrey Ashe is mentioned, and Apollo; and Calliope and Ceridwen; and Merlin and the Minotaur; and Taliesin and the Twelve Days of Christmas; and Anubis and Annwyn; Ostrogoths and Owain. This book is total recall, and the total is Arthur.

[11] This review first appeared in *Pendragon Vol 7* No 4 (March 1974). The review is not attributed, but was undoubtedly by Jess Foster

Books

The narrative literature of medieval Europe (1)

W M S Russell

The narrative literature of medieval Europe is certainly one of the great literatures of the world. It includes many works of high quality and two of the greatest writers in world history, Dante and Chaucer (the third great medieval writer, Villon, was of course a lyric and not a narrative poet). It differs from the history and fiction of both ancient and modern Europe in being largely, and before the 14th century almost entirely, in verse. But it is quite as rich and diversified, and there is a surprisingly large amount of it. Goodness knows there is plenty of Arthurian literature, as is obvious from a glance at the classical book on the subject,[1] but this is only a fraction of the vast corpus of medieval narrative literature.

To get some impression of this, just consider the production of works in French, beginning with the *long* narratives. Consider first the epic *chansons de geste*, mostly written down in the early 12th century. These were all about fighting, and were typical specimens of heroic poetry. This has appeared in many periods and regions,[2] [3] and has been especially well studied in Serbia.[4] Most of us know of the *Chanson de Roland*, and perhaps of the *Chanson de Guillaume* (d'Orange). But there are *one hundred* surviving *chansons de geste*![5] [6] They fall into three groups, those about Charlemagne and his paladins, those about the large family of Guillaume d'Orange, and those about barons revolting against their liege lord.[7] The *chansons* were sung at royal or noble courts by professionals, the *jongleurs*, working with the written texts.[8] The Conqueror's favourite *jongleur*, Taillefer, sang part of the *Chanson de Roland* before Hastings.[9] He then asked to be the first man to strike a blow, and was said to be the first man killed in the battle.[10]

In the later 12th century, the *chansons de geste* were increasingly superseded by the romances. Until the 14th century these were generally in verse, but in content they were often quite like the ancient Greek prose romances, with their brave lovers and damsels in distress,[11] for instance, *Leucippe and Clitiphon*.[12] Romances are of special interest to Arthurians, who generally know the five surviving romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the Continuators of his *Perceval*, the two romances of Robert de Boron, the five making up the vast prose *Vulgate Lancelot*, the Tristan romances, and probably the non-Arthurian *Roman d'Alexandre* and the *Roman de Troie* of Benoit de Sainte-Maure. But in a book on medieval French literature I counted over sixty romances![13]

Besides the *chansons de geste* and the

[1] Loomis, R S *ed* (1959) *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) *passim*
[2] Bowra, C M (1964) *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan) *passim*
[3] Oinas, F J *ed* (1978) *Heroic Epic and Saga* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press) *passim*
[4] Koljevic, S (1980) *The Epic in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) *passim*
[5] Brault, G J (1978) "The French Chansons de Geste" in Oinas (ref 3) 193-215
[6] Gentil, P de (1968) *La Littérature Française du Moyen Age* (Paris: Armand Colin) 41
[7] *Ibid* 41-51
[8] Bowra (ref 2) 42, 368
[9] *Ibid* 252, 331, 414
[10] Muir, F (1978) *The Frank Muir Book* (London: Transworld) 19
[11] Reardon, B P *ed* (1989) *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press) *passim*
[12] Gaselee, S *ed transl* (1969) *Achilles Tatius* (London: Heinemann) *passim*
[13] Gentil (ref 6) 78-99, 138

romances, long narratives include monastic annals, chronicles (the earlier ones generally in verse), histories, biographies and memoirs, and three works difficult to classify. These are the dreamy *Roman de la Rose*, an allegory of winning the love of a woman, begun by the idealist Guillaume de Lorris and concluded by the cynic Jean de Meun,[14] the splendid satiric adventures of the trickster hero, the fox, in the *Roman de Renart*,[15] and the racy stories of saints and martyrs and legends related to scripture making up the *Golden Legend* compiled by Jacopo da Varagine, written in Latin but several times translated into French.[16]

A large class of *short* narratives are religious. These include *exempla*, little edifying anecdotes for use in sermons, lives of saints, miracles of the Virgin Mary, and cautionary tales with morals. Then there are the short verse romances called *lais*, virtually invented by Marie de France, at the court of Henry II or possibly his eldest son Henry.[17] Animal fables make up another category, and here again the main author is Marie de France, who produced a collection of supposedly Aesopian fables.[18]

The short comic tales in verse called *fabliaux* were mostly written in the 13th century, though probably derived mainly from tales in Latin written in the 12th century, by clerics knowing Plautus and therefore Roman humour, but also from *exempla* and Marie's fables.[19] There have been several counts, but the best estimate is 160 *fabliaux*! – further evidence of the vast volume of medieval narrative literature.[20] [21] Most of the *fabliaux* are of unknown author, but about thirty signed authors are known.[22] Many of these little tales are very funny.

After 1414, when Boccaccio's *Decameron* was translated,[23] the verse *fabliaux* were superseded by prose *nouvelles*. (The medieval *nouvelle* and *novella* correspond, not to our *novel* or *novella*, but to our *short story*.) In 1461 Philip the Good of Burgundy commissioned the *Cent* (100!) *Nouvelles Nouvelles*, in which he and thirty-five of his courtiers were represented as telling the tales.[24] The actual author is unknown. Study of legal documents of the time has shown that many of these tales are quite realistic.[25] Many *nouvelle* collections were produced in the 16th century, and after Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* they were not all comic.[26] But that is no longer our period.

The huge production of narratives in French was, of course, itself only a fraction of the European output. Equivalent vernacular narrative literatures were being produced in the British Isles, the Iberian peninsula, the Empire and Scandinavia, and besides all this there was the very large narrative literature in *Latin*.

The most surprising thing about this vast *surviving* narrative literature (no doubt itself only a fraction of the total produced, since much must have been lost and much not even written down) is the fact that its survival depended entirely on copies of manuscripts – even the *100 Nouvelles Nouvelles*, at the very end of the period, were only printed in 1486, 25 years after they were written.[27]

Arthurians are naturally primarily interested in the Arthurian literature. But they may well be interested in the narrative literature of which this formed part. Two books have recently been published in this field, and in this paper I will review them in turn.

[14] *Ibid* 127-34
[15] Kaeuper, R W "The King and the Fox: Reaction to the Role of Kingship in Tales of Reynard the Fox" in Musson, A *ed* (2001) *Expectations of the Law in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press) 9-21
[16] Gentil (*ref* 6) 103
[17] Ewert, A *ed* (1978) *Marie de France: Lais* (Oxford: Blackwell) viii-ix
[18] Scott, N *ed* (1977) *Fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe Siècles* (Paris: UGE) 10
[19] Rouger, G *ed transl* (1978) *Fabliaux* (Paris: Gallimard) 7, 12
[20] *Ibid* 9
[21] Joubert, J *ed* Aubailly, J-C *transl* (1987) *Fabliaux et Contes Moraux du Moyen Age* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française) 199
[22] Jourda, P *ed* (1956) *Conteurs Français du XVIe Siècle* (Paris: Gallimard) xiii
[23] *Ibid* xviii
[24] *Ibid* xix-xx
[25] *Ibid* xxi
[26] *Ibid passim*
[27] *Ibid* xx

Tony Davenport
Medieval Narrative: an Introduction
Oxford University Press 2004 £14.99
0 19 925839 2 PB viii + 305pp

To introduce us to this vast subject is indeed a formidable task, but Davenport carries it out to perfection. To read this wonderful book is to enter the world of the literary Middle Ages. After a discussion of classification and analysis, he takes us through all the many genres, with copious examples, providing brilliant analytic comments and descriptions that bring out all the qualities of the narratives, including the often surprising sophistication of Chaucer. A specially valuable service is his provision of outlines of the less familiar works, so that they become much more than names. It is quite amazing what a multitude of facts and often complex ideas he has packed into 284 pages of text. But he writes so lucidly and attractively that it is all perfectly clear and fascinatingly interesting. However, the density and complexity make this a difficult book to summarise, and I am afraid my account of it will be patchy, and will not do justice to its riches. Still, I will do my best.

Davenport begins by considering just how remote from us are the medieval writers. Now I must admit to feeling I have far more in common with Plautus, Cicero, Seneca and Petronius, including our sense of humour, than with anyone in the Middle Ages, even Chaucer. But of course, being an Arthurian, I can find plenty to appreciate and sympathise with in the Arthurian romances, besides of course enjoying them for the qualities they share with all fine literature. What Davenport amply shows is that this can be true of many other medieval narratives. As evidence of a modern interest in the period, he mentions several minor modern novels with medieval or pseudo-medieval settings. But to my mind his own book brings us infinitely closer to the medieval atmosphere than any medievally set work of modern fiction except the one great one, Hugo's masterpiece, *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

Classification and Analysis

Davenport considers ancient, medieval and modern approaches to classifying and analysing narratives. He begins with Cicero's *De inventione*, which, he shows, was known to the medievals and used as the basis for their own thoughts on the subject. As we should expect from the man 'who created the vocabulary of Western civilisation',[28] Cicero's analysis is beautifully simple and sensible. He considers three types of narrative: 'an account of actual past occurrences (*historia*),... a fictitious, hypothesized but plausible set of events (*argumentum*),... an account of fantastic, unlifelike incidents (*fabula*)' (*p*10 – when I actually quote from Davenport, I give the page number in his book). The difference between *argumentum* and *fabula* is strongly reminiscent of John Campbell's definition of science fiction as the logical treatment of the possible and fantasy as the logical treatment of the impossible. Cicero's three types were taken up by John of Garland in his book *Parisiana Poetria* (*c* 1220); this intelligent writer appears several times in the book.

After considering various other medieval typologies, Davenport turns to medieval education, which, using textbooks by several people (including John of Garland), taught grammar, versification, ornament and amplification – how to turn a brief account in a source into a much longer narrative. Geoffrey de Vinsauf declared that a poet (like many modern writers) should have a plan of a work in his head before starting to write it. He used the simile of an architect planning a house before building starts. Davenport shows that in *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer deliberately took over the simile for Pandarus, so that as Chaucer plans the poem Pandarus plans the love affair.

Davenport next introduces Auerbach's interesting idea of parataxis. Auerbach noted that whereas classical writers tended to link clauses with conjunctions of time or causality (*when, after, because*) – hypotaxis – medieval writers tended simply to put clauses side by side, with at most the conjunction *and* – parataxis.

[28] Russell, C and Russell, W M S (1999) *Population Crises and Population Cycles* (London: Galton Institute) 27

He illustrates this in Augustine in late antiquity and in a letter of St Francis in the high Middle Ages, and shows that parataxis can sometimes be the more dramatically effective technique, and may even become 'a weapon of eloquence'.[29] Davenport notices parataxis in the *Chanson de Roland*.

After noting Aristotle's masterly emphasis on plot, Davenport considers Vladimir Propp's formulae of sequences of plot motifs, which the Russian folklorist applied very widely. These formulae are certainly not universal, even in folklore, let alone in literary narrative. But Davenport points out that similar formulae can sensibly be applied to homogeneous *groups* of narratives, especially if by the same author. For instance, it has been noted that two of Chrétien's romances (*Erec* and *Yvain*) have a perfectly identical structure, based on four successive series of events.[30] Such formulae can also be applied to plays. 'As I showed in an essay written as a sixteen-year-old schoolboy in 1941, Sophocles uses a regular plot structure in his tragedies, which he exactly reverses in his dramas with happy endings. In the tragedies things get steadily worse, and then suddenly seem to cheer up' – this is marked by a special kind of chorus called a hyporcheme; '... this apparent relief immediately precedes the catastrophe... Conversely, in the dramas things begin to get better, and then suddenly seem to go terribly wrong: ... this apparent distress immediately precedes the happy dénouement'.[31] These structures can be visualised like this:

Sophocles' tragic plots

[29] Auerbach, E (1953) *Mimesis* (*transl* Trask, W R, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 70-71, 165-7

[30] Reid, T B W *ed* (1967) *Chrestien de Troyes: Yvain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) xi-xiii

[31] Russell, W M S (2000) "*The Food of the Gods* and *The Fatal Eggs*: Two Views of the Scientist" *Foundation 29* No 60, 51-62, especially 59

Sophocles' dramatic plots

Davenport shows that a structural formula can be applied to quests in Arthurian narratives.

Davenport then considers the differences between *story* and *plot*. The *story* is defined as the actual chronological sequences of events, whereas the *plot* is the sequence of events as told in the narrative. For instances, as Davenport notes, certain events which happened earlier (and so were elements in the *story*) may only be revealed at the end of the narrative in a detective novel with the usual kind of *plot*. He then proceeds to analyse in detail, in terms of *story* and *plot*, the incidents of that great romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Genres, Prologues and Narrators

Davenport discusses the many genres of medieval narrative, and shows that the medievals themselves recognised many genres. But there were often ambiguities, the same work being called by different genre names, and the nature of particular genres changing in time. He makes the nice point that 'the works that most clearly display the identifying features of a genre tend to be parodies' (*p*27). He illustrates this with Chaucer's parody of a romance, 'The Tale of Sir Thopas' (in *The Canterbury Tales*). He notes that Chaucer is unusual in regularly specifying the genres of his tales. In 'The Monk's Tale', which the teller specifically calls a tragedy, he actually defines this medieval genre, in a passage quoted by Davenport. Whereas in both ancient and modern times the word *tragedy* was and is applied to plays, in the Middle Ages it was applied to *narratives*. Davenport notes that the medieval concept stemmed from Boethius. Similarly, Dante called his great work a comedy. In his letter to Can Grande della Scala, the despot of Verona (which Davenport quotes on his *p*191), the poet defines tragedy and comedy without any reference to the stage. 'He says that comedy is a kind of poetic narrative which begins harshly and ends happily', whereas tragedy 'begins quietly and ends in horror'.[32] Of the medievals, only Petrarch used the words in the ancient and modern sense, because he was so deeply involved in antiquity.[33]

Chaucer defines 'The Franklin's Tale' as a Breton lay (*lai*). Marie de France claimed to get the idea of her lais from such sung works, but Davenport points out there is little evidence for such songs, and every indication that Marie invented the genre. Whereas modern writers glory in being original, medieval writers always preferred to be thought followers of a tradition.

Davenport shows that *The Canterbury Tales* is 'a virtuoso display of the narrative kinds' (*p*33), in which Chaucer draws, for instance, on *exempla*, saints' lives, miracles, animal fables and romances. He sometimes contrasts two very different genres, for instance 'the stately "Knight's Tale" and the slap-stick "Miller's Tale"' (*p*34). He distinguishes as three broad categories '"cherles tales/harlotrie"; tales that are "storical" and concern "gentillesse"; and tales that express "moralitee" and/or "hoolynesse"' (*p*35).

Next, Davenport considers various types of prologue, a regular feature of medieval narratives. 'Cicero defined the basic outline and division of the text as an introduction, the statement of the facts, the pros and cons of argument and the conclusion' (*p*36). Isidore of Seville took over these divisions. John of Garlad distinguished between an *exordium*, designed to attract the reader or listener and a *proemium*, giving an outline of the contents of the work. Conrad of Hirsau (*c* 1070-1150) distinguished a prologue *ante rem*, outlining the contents, from a prologue *praeter rem*, setting the work in its context. Davenport illustrates these types with examples of prologues by Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes (who, he notes, wrote different kinds of prologues in his different romances), Gottfried von Strassburg, Eilhart von Oberge, and the author of the Middle English romance *Yvain and Gawain*, 'the only surviving Middle English translation of a romance by Chrétien'.[34]

Davenport considers the varying role of the narrator. 'Chrétien speaks as the teller of the tale but detaches himself from it by partly referring to himself in the third person' as Chrétien (*p*43). A model for medieval first-person narratives was Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a dialogue between the author and Philosophy personified, which, as Davenport shows, is echoed in a number of medieval narratives with narrators and teachers, such as *Piers Plowman*, *Pearl*, and indeed the *Divina Commedia*. After discussion of the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Book of the Duchess*, Davenport shows Chaucer's skill and subtlety in handling the prologues and narrators (including himself) in *The Canterbury Tales*, a theme to which he returns later, notably the poet's device of effacing himself to make way for another narrator.

In the rest of the book, Davenport considers all the narrative themes in turn.

Exempla and Fables

As I mentioned in my introduction, *exempla* were short tales with a moral, used to enliven sermons. Chaucer's Pardoner (seller of indulgences), as Davenport notes, candidly admits that putting little tales into his sermons helps to extract money from the marks. The tales may be very short, as Davenport illustrates in a passage from the *Ancrene Wisse*, a treatise warning women against the seven deadly sins. The moral may be pretty ferocious, as in a tale from Robert Mannyng's *Handling Synne* (1303) of a minstrel killed by a falling stone for the crime of interrupting a bishop saying grace. The tales may be quite fantastic and elaborately allegorical, as in one Davenport tells from the very heterogeneous collection known as the *Gesta Romanorum*. The moral may be very complicated, as in another tale from Mannyng.

Gower and Chaucer use *exempla* but dissociate themselves from the teacher and can be critical or ironic about them. In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Genius

[32] Highet, G (1967) *The Classical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press) 70-71, 97, 591 *n*49

[33] *Ibid* 84, 97

[34] Shepherd, S H A (1995) *Middle English Romances* (New York and London: W W Norton) 332

tells Amans an *exemplum* about pride (with a lesson taught in the story!), but Amans retorts that it does not apply to the case. Chaucer's Pardoner tells an *exemplum* about greed, the tale of three villains who murder each other for sole possession of a treasure. This tale gave rise to the novel by the mysterious B Traven and the film based on it written and directed by John Huston, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.[35] As Davenport notes, this is a beautiful instance of Chaucer's irony – he gives the *exemplum* on greed to the Pardoner, who shows himself, unashamedly, the greediest of crooks.

Fables, usually but not always about animals, are the next subject. Fables, like *exempla*, normally have morals, as noted in a discussion of them by Conrad of Hirsau. Aesop's fables, as Davenport tells us, early got mixed up with many tales from other sources. They descended to the Middle Ages along two routes, one starting with Phaedrus (1st century AD), the other with Avainus (4th century AD). The first vernacular collection was Marie de France's, written for a 'Count William', who may have been William Long-sword, bastard son of Henry II and Fair Rosamund, or the famous William Marshal.[36] By description and quotation Davenport shows Marie's intelligent and sophisticated treatment of the fables. To illustrate her non-animal fables, he tells a good story of a girl taking her father's blood to a doctor for diagnosis, spilling it, and substituting her own: the father turns out to be pregnant. Davenport passes on to the greatest set of animal fables, the *Roman de Renart*. This began with the Latin poem *Ysengrimus* (1149), and once the hero and the main cast of characters were established, more and more episodes were added in vernacular version. 'Nearly thirty branches of *Le Roman de Renart* seem to have been composed between 1174 and 1250' (*p*75). The *Roman* is still great fun to read (in modern French or English translation for me!). Caxton translated the whole cycle from Dutch, but long before that the *Roman* was one of the sources for the 13th-century English fabulist (writing in Latin), Odo of Cheriton. He produced over 100 fables. Davenport gives example of these too. The *Roman* was so well-known in England that there are scores of visual representation of Renart and his adventures in church carvings, stained glass, murals and miniatures.[37]

Probably the best-known animal fable in Britain (at least before Beatrix Potter) is Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* about Chauntecleer the cock and my namesake Daun Russel the fox. Chaucer expanded Marie's 38 lines into 626. Davenport uses quotations to show how Chaucer turns it into an elaborate satire, with the characters sometimes animals and sometimes (in effect) humans, as in African and Amerindian folktales about spider or coyote tricksters. Davenport ends this section with accounts of later English fabulists, Lydgate (dull) and Henryson (sophisticated).

Chronicles, Epics and Romances

Davenport puts these three kinds of narratives into one chapter, since they all purport to give historical accounts. In fact, of course, romances are pure fiction, epics are based on history but often distort it, and chronicles, though supposed to be factual, may be partly or even almost wholly fictitious.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin chronicle, the one known to all Arthurians, is of course almost entirely fiction. Davenport quotes an excellent passage of William of Newburgh (late 12th century) about Geoffrey, which begins as follows:

"He has taken up the stories about Arthur from old fictitious accounts of the Britons, has added to them himself, and by embellishing them in the Latin tongue he has cloaked them with the honourable title of history..."!

Next to be considered is the prose *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 'begun probably in Alfred's time', whereas 'it is only the thirteenth century that vernacular prose chronicles develop in France' (*pp*96-7). Narratives in the *Chronicle* vary from a single sentence – 'Here they killed King Selred' (AD 746) – to the lengthy account of the murder of King Cynewulf (AD 755).

Davenport contrasts Geoffrey's fictions with the serious attempts at history made by William of Malmesbury (*c* 1090-1143) and Henry of Huntingdon (*c* 1088-1160). William criticises the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for its defects. He does include the quite fantastic legends about Pope Sylvester, but he does have the grace to say he is 'simply presenting the evidence of tales told by others' (*p*98). Henry of Huntingdon composed speeches for historical figures, exactly like Thucydides or Tacitus. He included the story of Canute giving his flattering courtiers the lesson that a king cannot hold back the sea. Davenport notes the quantity of short stories to be found in these historians and in the Latin works of Gerald the Welshman[38] and the gossipy civil servant Walter Map. 'The twelfth century is a period when there was a vast increase in the amount of story material that was achieving written form' (*p*99).

Davenport then turns to the three fictional (two of them verse) 'chronicles' that laid the foundations of medieval Arthurian literature – Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (Latin), Wace's *Roman de Brut* (Anglo-Norman French), and Layamon's *Brut* (Middle english). Though Wace is honest enough to use the word 'Roman', these are usually considered chronicles, being written as if they were such.[39] The legend of descent from a mythical Trojan Brutus was already old.[40] Geoffrey brought in Merlin and the invented kings of early Britain and the whole outline of the medieval Arthur story. Wace introduced the Round Table. The whole history of this piece of literary furniture is told in a recent book about the real table in the surviving Great Hall of Winchester Castle.[41] Layamon developed the Round Table further, but Davenport deals with his poem later, considering it really an epic. He feels, as well he might given the enormous content of his book, that he has no room for such later historians as Matthew Paris, Higden and Froissart.

The epics and romances will have to wait for the second part of this giant feature review. ☙

To be continued

Excalibur in Sicily continued from page 19

In the event Tancred stood no chance against the might of the German empire but he strove bravely for his kingdom and has been much misrepresented. When Richard sailed away to the Holy Land in April 1191 in a majestic fleet of ships, it was not to be the end of their relationship – Tancred's spies did their best to prevent Richard from falling into the emperor Henry's clutches on his journey back from the Third Crusade, if they had succeeded Richard might have returned to help save Tancred's kingdom. ☙

To be concluded

[35] Halliwell, L (1982) *Halliwell's Film Guide* (London: Granada) 1105
[36] Ewert (*ref* 17) ix
[37] Varty, K (1967) *Reynard the Fox* (Leicester: Leicester University Press) *passim*
[38] Russell, W M S (2006) "Gerald the Welshman, Arthur and Merlin" *Pendragon XXXIII* No 3 6-9 and No 4, 25-29
[39] Jones, G *ed* Mason, E *transl* (1962) *Wace and Layamon: Arthurian Chronicles* (London: Dent) *passim*
[40] Russell, W M S and Russell, C (1991) "English Turf Mazes, Troy and the Labyrinth" *Folklore 102*, 77-88, especially 80-81
[41] Biddle, M *ed* (2000) *King Arthur's Round Table* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press) *passim*

the board

News, views and previews of Arthuriana in popular culture

COURT CIRCULAR

While **Arthur** is remaining in Cornwall, **Guinevere** and **Merlin** are to be pensioned off... This is the news that the largest earth station in the world, at Goonhilly in the Lizard peninsula, is to have its satellite operations closed down, with the loss of nearly a hundred jobs as well as its landmark satellite dishes named after Arthurian characters.

The remote geography that a century ago persuaded Marconi to broadcast the first transatlantic radio message from nearby also encouraged the establishment of Goonhilly 1 ("Arthur") – which received the first ever Telstar pictures in 1962 – and other dishes like Guinevere ("she looks like she is wearing an elegant dress") and Merlin. Locals are naturally angry at BT's closure of the site – no longer "commercially viable" is the reason given – and though Arthur, who is listed for his architectural significance, will remain, the other dishes will be dismantled and their functions transferred to Madley in Herefordshire.

Back in 2005 ex-model Juliet Richardson's album *Random Order* (Virgin) included "hypnotic club hit" ***Avalon***, described as "brilliant" and reminiscent of a Madonna track. More recently Viggo Mortensen, who played Aragorn in the films of *The Lord of the Rings*, is reported as owning a **Perceval Press** imprint which includes books of poetry, photographs and CDs of his music. **Merlin**, set up as an international non-profit agency to protect independent record labels' copyright, is negotiating payment for internet downloads by making "unprotected MP3 songs available for sale" via various "social network" websites like MySpace.[1]

[1] Steven Morris "Blow to Cornwall as Arthur, Merlin and Guinevere face redundancy" *Guardian* December 27 2006; *Guardian Friday Review* July 29 2005; "Viggo Mortensen"

BROADCAST

Huw Edwards presented a programme on Wagner's ***Tristan and Isolde*** on December 9 2006 in "The Real History of Opera" series. *Inter alia* it noted that he used the Gottfried von Strassburg version as his source, though most time was given to how the opera chimed with Wagner's own personal and political circumstances at the time, problems due to involvement in the 1848 revolution, relations with patrons and women, and so on.

Simon Armitage's new translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* featured on BBC Radio 4 over the Christmas season. As producer Susan Roberts noted, "It's the perfect story for the Christmas season: it's set around Christmas and New Year, and it has all those elements of magic and sorcery and the English countryside that seem to fit the time of year." Narrated by Ian ("from Gandalf to Gawain") McKellen, the Afternoon Play – entitled, naturally, ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*** – also featured Sam West as Gawain, David Fleeshman as the Knight, with Deborah McAndrew as Bertilak's wife and Conrad Nelson as Arthur. An interview with McKellen in *Radio Times* revealed that though he read English at Cambridge the Middle English poem "passed him by"; now, however, "having spent so long in Tolkien's world [in *The Lord of the Rings* films] it's interesting to go back to the sources that he loved so much, which his imagination fed off and which he pinched from, basically."[2]

Time Team started a new series on Channel 4 on January 14 with an intriguing dig on an Isle of Man golf course. Beneath an 11th-century chapel was a sequence of ritual structures going back a couple of millennia. Prehistoric burials by a low eminence, bounded by a Bronze Age ditch, were followed by Dark Age graves including that of a woman with – incredibly – traces of a plait over her right shoulder. This inhumation was dated to the late 6th

Guardian Guide January 14 2007; "Wizard deal" *Technology Guardian* January 25 2007;
[2] Rupert Smith "From Middle-Earth to Middle English" *Radio Times* December 16-22 2006; for more on Simon Armitage, see this issue's *Book*Worm

century, the earliest Dark Age grave on the Isle of Man, and this was eventually succeeded by Viking Age warrior burials. A box for relics, lined by quartz pebbles and stones and topped by a cross marker, was associated with a scratched ogham inscription of the 11th century in Gaelic.

THE BOARDS

Fresh from switching on the lights at Huddersfield's Festival of Light (as reported last issue), Merlin and the rest of the cast of ***Merlin and the Enchanted Mirror*** strutted their stuff at the town's Lawrence Batley Theatre over the Christmas period. Co-written and directed by local actor Ryan Simons, with original songs by Dom Sales and Phil Gregory, the pantomime-in-all-but-name starred Scott Worsfold as Merlin and Rebekah Hughes as a Wicked Witch.

Halifax's Victoria Theatre produced their traditional Christmas panto ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***, but not all was quite as traditional as expected. Sponsored by the West Yorkshire Casualty Reduction Partnership, the production ("good in parts") featured – of course – a faulty speed camera, while **Merlin** (David Karl, "who's got the best singing voice of all on stage") appears, confusingly, as the narrator.

Bill Viola's "hallucinogenic" video installation for the 2005 Paris Bastille production of Wagner's opera ***Tristan und Isolde*** featured in an exhibition of his works at the Haunch of Venison, London W1 between June 21 and September 2 2006. "No one does video like Bill Viola, the master of the medium," we are told, and his *Tristan* piece recounting "the lovers' journey through death and liberation [offered] a spine-chilling allegory of these turbulent modern times".[3]

PEOPLE

Exchange magazine *Widowinde* found that King Arthur is alive and well and living in Zimbabwe. In what it describes as "a rather difficult piece" in the *Zimbabwe Daily* for April 25, **King Arthur** is reported as being the son of 100-year-old Chief Mutambara. The centenarian chief supports Morgan Tsvangirai, president of the Movement for Democratic Change Party, while his son apparently does not. A MDC rally was told by Chief Mutambara that King Arthur had been invited to enter politics by someone called Welshman Ncube, but the chief advised his son against supporting a rival for the leadership of the party. *Widowinde* comments that the association of King Arthur and Welshman Ncube in Zimbabwean politics "is fascinating to say the least".[4]

John Heath-Stubbs, OBE, poet and author of a major Arthurian epic, died on Boxing Day 2006 at the age of 88. Sharing the affliction of Homer and Milton, though by degrees (he only became totally blind in 1978), Heath-Stubbs remained an unfashionable though significant voice, using tapes and readers to transcribe his many pieces and translations. ***Artorius***, his hundred-page poetic epic (an anonymous notice in the *Telegraph* consistently and incorrectly referred to it as *Arctorius*), appeared in the 1970s when he was tutor at Merton College, Oxford; it included quotes – from medieval as well as modern authors such as Geoffrey Ashe – as linking commentaries for his verses.

Obituaries described him as disconcerting, terrifyingly didactic and not a good listener, but also as skilled, versatile, learned and allusive as a poet and gifted with great intellect and a "prodigious memory for the literature of many cultures". Those of us who were present at the Cardiff Arthurian Day, the Welsh Academy's Festival of Literature in 1994, will remember him for his contribution to the plenary Round Table. As Fred Stedman-Jones, who chaired the discussion, later reported, Heath-Stubbs was the "distinguished blind man in the audience who spoke out with authority and eloquence but who could not be signalled to" – and who therefore discoursed at quite some length![5]

[3] Andrew Hirst "A magical Merlin" *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* December 15 2006; Andrew Hirst "Panto caught out by a speed camera" *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* December 22 2006; "Bill Viola" *Guardian Guide* June 17-23 2006

[4] Karl Wittwer "Mine Gefræge" *Widowinde 140* (Autumn 2006) 53
[5] "John Heath-Stubbs" *Telegraph* December 27 2006; Michael Meyer and Jonathan Fryer

Lewis Perdue claimed that Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) had too many similarities to his own novel *Daughter of God* (2000), but his plagiarism suit was thrown out by a US court in November 2006. A couple of months later **Michael Baigent** and **Richard Leigh** launched their appeal against Dan Brown's successful defence against plagiarising their "non-fiction" book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Press reports suggested that the only real winners were lawyers and publishers.[6]

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

On the contents page of the "Knight's Move" issue (*XXXIII* No 4) we may have inadvertently given the impression that "The Giants of Wales" was *by* Geoff Sawers, as though he were trying to claim authorship of the 16th-century piece by Sion Dafydd Rhys, rather than his updating of Hugh Owen's early 20th-century translation. Sorry about that; please note that the Geoffrey Gaimar piece this issue is indeed Geoff's own translation from the Anglo-Norman.

Cheques for *King Arthur's Camlan* should be made payable to Laurence Main (with a ***u***) and not as spelt in the accompanying text to last issue's advert. Apologies are due to Laurence for any inconvenience caused.

PERIODICALS

The Society of Leyhunters acts as a forum "for all who are interested in alignments and patterns within the landscape". While many aspects of the study of alignments and patterns in the British landscape remain contentious – two past editors of the now defunct journal *The Ley Hunter* eventually decided so-called leys did not exist – that does not stop a dedicated band of enthusiasts researching what may still be called earth mysteries. The newsletter of the Society of Leyhunters contains the usual mix of news, reviews, articles and notices of meetings, not all of it peripheral to Arthuriana.

Former exchange magazine ***Celtic Connections*** seems not to have appeared for some time, and its website is no longer on the internet. Next issue will re-visit some of our other exchange journals (hopefully still publishing!).

JOURNALS AND SOCIETIES

Sample price / annual subs (overseas subs)
"Cheques payable to" – *e-mail or website*

Arthurian Association of Australia 19 Carcoola Road, Cromer, NSW 2099, Australia *www.arthurian.asn.au*

Caerdroia *Annual journal of mazes and labyrinths* UK £7.00 (Europe €10.00 USA $15.00) "Labyrinthos", Jeff and Kimberly Lowelle Saward, 53 Thundersley Grove, Thundersley, Essex SS7 3EB *www.labyrinthos.net*

The Cauldron *Paganism, folklore, witchcraft* £3.50 / £12.00 "M A Howard", BM Cauldron, London WC1N 3XX *www.the-cauldron.fsnet.co.uk*

Hallowquest *Caitlin & John Matthews' publishing and teaching programmes* £8.00 (£16.00) "Caitlin Matthews", BCM Hallowquest, London WC1N 3XX *www.hallowquest.org.uk*

Meyn Mamvro *Cornish ancient stones and sacred sites* £2.50 / £7.50 "Meyn Mamvro", Cheryl Straffon, 51 Carn Bosavern, St Just, Penzance, Cornwall TR19 7QX *www.meynmamvro.co.uk*

Northern Earth *Journal of the Northern Earth Mysteries Group* £1.95 / £7.50 (£10.75 EU, £14.00 RoW) "Northern Earth Mysteries Group", John Billingsley, 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W Yorks HX7 5NP *www.northernearth.co.uk*

The Round Table *Occasional Arthurian poetry and fiction* Alan & Barbara Tepa Lupack, The Round Table, Box 18673, Rochester NY 14618, USA (enclose IRC)

Society of Ley Hunters *Patterns within the landscape* £10.00 (£18.00 non-EU) A Hyde, 7 Mildmay Road, Romford, Havering, Essex RM7 7DA *leyhunter@ntlworld.com*

Wiþowinde *Periodical of the English Companions: Anglo-Saxon literature, history and culture* £3.50 "Ða Engliscan Gesiðas (The English Companions)", BM Box 4336, London WC1 3XX *www.tha-engliscan-gesithas.org.uk*

"John Heath-Stubbs" *Guardian* December 29 2006; Fred Stedman-Jones "Cardiff Arthurian Day" *Pendragon XXIV* No 4 (1994) 19; see also this issue's *Book*Worm and Reviews

[6] Michelle Pauli "US Supreme Court throws out *Da Vinci* suit" *Guardian Unlimited* November 14 2006; Nigel Andrew "See you in court" *Observer* Jan 14 2007

Beardsley

"Arthur, I love you still,
Despite song and story.
Light divine still shines in you;
I can sense the glory.
If I too love Lancelot,
Love cannot always be tamed.
Venus breathed upon me, then;
Must love always be ashamed?"

"Tristan, I cannot help
All I feel for you now.
We may not be wedded, true.
But our bond is our vow.
When the Gods first came to us
They brought heavenly desire,
Not mere human jealousy –
That may quench their sacred fire,
In which mortals yet might blend
If they hurt none, or offend."

Aphrodite's children,
Do not break each other's hearts,
But we all have lovedreams
That need not tear us apart.

Pamela Harvey

Morgan le Fay

Who am I? The enemy?
So might well the question be –
Does mortal conspiracy,
Daughter of Avalon, touch thee?

Who was of Logresland a Star,
Why enter into lesser state
Merely to encourage hate?
Better to remain afar.

So, set the scene of Arthur's play;
A Mystery, that men may learn
How treachery brings sour return,
Showing the worth of loyalty.

Still, Arthur, the Eternal Sun,
His lustre to his knights may lend,
As in past days he did descend
To this fair land of Albion.

Through Avalon's magnetic veil
He passed, and Death did not assail,
That he might once more tread again
The green hills where his dreams still reign.

And so, in Moonlight's ambience
We see your elfin smile, that knows
Immortal realms forever close,
Though hidden from our fragile sense.

And, Queen of Faerie, through despair,
You see, although on Earth we grieve,
In One Real World all beings live,
Which, mirrored in our world, can give
A touching-place that we can share.

Pamela Harvey

Sir Bedivere

Good fortune for Sir Bedivere to bear
And for poor Arthur to be borne.
Worn and wasted, wet with blood,
Dying, to his bier of chastened gold
And whitened wattled wood.
Good that it was dear Bedivere,
As gentle and bold a knight as stood
And carried out the right and good.
And, down the winding path, he bore
King Arthur to the weedy shore.
Three ladies came when he was born;
Three queens now lifted up his bier
And placed it on the barge
Beneath the dark three-sided sails
Between the deep-carved stern
and prow.
Proud Bedivere stood sternly in the
purpling air
And sadly watched the dark barge sail
Over the turquoised waves
lifting their wind-tossed rims,
While the three fair queens stood there
Staring over the darkening lake
and bier,
Sir Bedivere left bereft, bereaved,
Pondering all that passed with him,
With undone Arthur,
who had begun auspiciously
By drawing a sword out of a tree.

Who then could say,
who could have seen
The dark-browed boat
or straightened knight
Standing on the shadowy sand,
watching under the burning stars
The burdened barge set sail
for the western sea?

Bill West

Galahad's hereafter

I have travelled through the tempest
Till my rainbow hues prevail,
Ascending from nether darkness
To the Kingdom of the Grail:
Pale is the steed of conquest,
Invisible to man,
Yet his spirit each may master
By the knowledge that he can,
And, rising through the cloudy vales,
May claim all that is his,
To dwell in the castle of radiance
With no dark memories.

Pamela Constantine

Illustration left
13th-century sword (inscription omitted) recovered from the River Witham near Lincoln where it and other objects have been deposited since the Bronze Age. CL

Near Avalon

A ship with shields before the sun,
Six maidens round the mast,
A red-gold crown on every one,
A green gown on the last.

The fluttering green banners there
Are wrought with ladies' heads
most fair,
And a portraiture of Guenevere
The middle of each sail doth bear.

A ship with sails before the wind,
And round the helm six knights,
Their beaumes are on, whereby, half
blind,
They pass by many sights.

The tatter'd scarlet banners there
Right soon will leave the spear- heads
bare,
Those six knights sorrowfully bear
In all their beaumes some yellow hair.

William Morris

On Merlin's traces

wizard's twin staves black how
midwinter dead buddleia heads still
point menace past life he
they once before roots took
him down girl's trick time's

Steve Sneyd

Neither use nor ornament

no good, it'd been tried, as mounting
block, the hole too narrow, painful
trap for hurrying foot when
seconds matter getting to your
horse, till even stubbornest
triers'd long since given up

nothing to look at either, now;
on dull rock inscription once challenged,
said so much, is now weathered past what
few literates still hang round
this court these days
can get near disentangling, of meaning
from disputed elders' memories of text

gap in it doesn't even go right
through, so couldn't even win
superstitious faith as men an tol
even were it big enough to pass
love or oath-pledging arm through or
desperately fading baby for
just-in-time cure

has got moved further and further
from hall and dwellings, now lies
near nettle and bramble buried in
most distant outpost corner of fort
and would've long since in bored
sentries' contest of strength've
been hurled or hauled over last rampart
to roll off down slope into burying marsh

except time and again king now of an age
where remembering long ago is clearer
dawn against hazed dusk than present is
asks after it must be convincingly
reassured is still here somewhere
kept safe and still remembered too
its meaning by more than just
one aging man that stone once held the sword
outpulled gave crown too heavy now in wearing

Steve Sneyd

Arthur: "Thou shalt receive the boon whatsoever they tongue may name,
as far as the wind dries, and the rain moistens,
and the sun revolves, and the sea encircles, and the earth extends;
save only my ship; and my mantle; and *Caledvwlch*, my sword;
and *Rhongomyant*, my lance; and *Wynebgwrthucher*, my shield;
and *Carnwennan*, my dagger; and Gwenhwyvar, my wife."

Upon his shoulders did Arthur bear the shield that was named *Pridwen*...
Girt was he also with *Caliburn*, best of swords, forged within the Isle of Avallon.
And the lance that did grace his right hand was called by the name *Ron*,
a tall lance and a stout, full meet to do slaughter withal.[1]

[1] From *Culhwch ac Olwen* (*transl* Guest) and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (*transl* Evans)

Pendragon Round Table 2007

We shall be riding down to the **Baskerville Hall Hotel** at Clyro near Hay-on-Wye on **Saturday 30th June** for our 2007 Round Table, and it would be good to see you there. Members, family and friends of the Society are cordially invited to join in our weekend events at this romantic and welcoming hotel which is only a short walk from Hay-on-Wye, the second-hand book browser's paradise.

We'll hold our AGM before settling down to enjoy a range of activities with the emphasis on fun and friendship. The event will start at lunchtime and last until the early evening. Those staying over until Sunday can book into the hotel which has accommodation ranging from dormitory to Executive Doubles and is an expansive 19th-century gentry house, once home of the Baskerville family, with atmosphere, food, bars, swimming pool and extensive grounds where the sun always shines – it certainly did in 2005!

If you wish to join us we are asking you to contact the hotel directly to book accommodation on the Saturday night or the Friday as well. Those coming just for the day can obviously make their own arrangements at leisure. Information about the programme will be sent to you later but please write and tell us soon if you decide you are coming – we hope you will.

Baskerville Hall Hotel Clyro Court, Hay-on-Wye, Powys HR3 5LE
Tel: +44 (0)1497-820033 enquiry@baskervillhall.co.uk

If you are definitely coming please let Dave Burnham know either by e-mailing (Burnhamdrury@aol.com) or by phoning 01204 529292 or 07887 830873. This is important as the numbers attending dictate certain aspects of the programme.