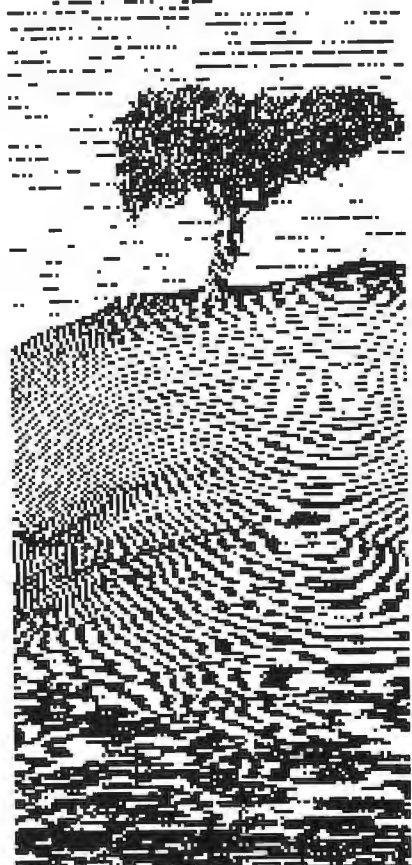




XXXV No 1 • Bloodlines • Holy Grails
• Ogham lineages • Frederick II
plus news, views, previews and reviews



after Ian Brown

editorial

Vol XXXV No 1 Autumn 2007

A quarter of a century ago the self-styled "explosively controversial international bestseller" *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* burst onto the scene and gave conspiracy theories a whole new dimension. This issue is thus entitled *Bloodlines* to – as it were – draw a line under 25 years of mythmaking, but a glance at some of the contributions indicates that Holy Grail theories show no sign of letting up. So, immerse yourself in fictional grails, family trees and libraries of chronicles and see if you can make any sense of it.

Thanks

As usual, this issue comes to you thanks to the generosity of contributors who have offered *gratis* their thoughts and deliberations for our enlightenment. In addition, the backroom team of Simon and Anne Rouse, Fred Stedman-Jones and Steve Sneyd have unstintingly supported the editor in numerous ways. Thanks too, for the various appreciations – in addition to the content Pamela Harvey says she does "like the presentation of *Pendragon*", while Paul Parry "enjoyed the last issue immensely". *ca C Lovegrove*

A note on some of the contributors

R A Gilbert, who read Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Bristol, has been for many years an antiquarian bookseller with a long-standing interest in the western Mystery Tradition. As well as a biography of A E Waite, he has authored *The Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories*, several books on *The Golden Dawn* and, with Walter Birks, *The Treasure of Montségur: a study of the Cathar Heresy and the nature of the Cathar secret* (1987). We first published his review of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* back in 1982.

Mark Valentine, a longtime contributor to *Pendragon*, is Secretary of the Friends of Arthur Machen and co-editor of the Machen journal *Faunus* which focuses on this outstanding Welsh Victorian fantasy writer. In addition Mark edits *Wormwood*, "a journal of discussion for fantasy, supernatural and decadent literature" and is the author of *Arthur Machen* (Seren Books 1995).

F J Stedman-Jones studied at Caerleon (now the University of Wales), and after several years schoolteaching he lectured for twenty years in Drama and Theatre Studies at Liverpool Institute of Higher Education (now Liverpool Hope University). *Pendragon's* longest-serving chairman, Fred looks at a larger-than-life historical figure with a dramatist's eye.

Joseph Biddulph is a publisher of independent magazines such as *Troglodyte* (an article from "the last but one issue of this extraordinary and frustrating journal" re-appears this issue) and other miscellaneous papers on various cultural and linguistic matters, and lives in Pontypridd. See his website: <http://www.cs.vu.nl/~dick/biddulph/info.html>

pendragon

www.pendragonsociety.org

The Journal of The Pendragon Society

Established 1959 ISSN 0143 8379



Contents

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

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Illustrations / picture research I Brown, C Lovegrove, S Rouse, F Stedman-Jones
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Four issues £10.00 UK (£10.50 Paypal), £13.00 Europe, £16.50 (\$26.00) USA / RoW
Sample £2.00 Cheques *The Pendragon Society* website www.pendragonsociety.org
Data protection Members' contact details, where known, are stored in a retrieval system for Society purposes only; if you object we will remove your entry
All letters answered if accompanied by SAE or IRC
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Advertisement rates £20.00 per page and *pro rata*, minimum quarter-page
Special rates for back cover and inserts – enquire for details
These rates are for camera-ready copy at A4 scale for reduction to A5

Printed by Catford Print Centre, PO Box 563, Catford, London SE6 4PY

☎ 020 8695 0101 post@catfordprint.co.uk www.catfordprint.co.uk

Letters

Letters to the Editor are always welcome (at the address on the Contents page, or e-mail ed.pendragon@yahoo.co.uk) but do please indicate if any part of your correspondence is not for publication. *cs*

WHAT DID ARTHUR EAT?

Dave Burnham's piece ["What did Arthur drink?" last issue] put me in mind – obliquely – of a passage that has puzzled me from the 14th century *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, describing Arthur's Christmas feast at Carlisle for the Roman ambassadors.

We have "peacocks and plovers on platters of gold, herons in hedoyne, swans in silver chargers; barnacles and bitterns in battered dishes, braunchers in brede, cranes and curlews craftily roasted..." Now herons are notoriously inedible; it is not surprising that they would have to be served in a rich sauce. Barnacles are geese, of course. Bitterns and cranes are so rare in this country that I suspect they are only there for the alliteration – or to impress. But it is the "braunchers" that really surprise me. These are young hawks, goshawks or sparrowhawks: prized possessions of the nobility, difficult and expensive to rear and train. Why would anyone suggest cooking them? I can't imagine they are any more edible than a heron.

Arthur ironically apologises for the pooriness of the fare he can offer from "these barayne landez" – I can only imagine that this is seen as the ultimate in conspicuous consumption.

A second point: a couple of issues ago I wrote about Geoffrey Gaimar's declared sources for his *English History*. I know that Gaimar does not have a particularly high reputation, but I chanced upon a passing comment¹ that "Gaimar alone has preserved a reference to the first assault on York" (by the Danes in 866). We know that this happened from Norse sources, I think, but the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – often a bit laconic about things happening a long

¹ In Smyth's *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850-880* (OUP, 1977)

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way away from Wessex – is silent. It certainly suggests that Gaimar had more material available to him than even his own account reveals.

Geoff Sawers, Reading

• So, what did Arthur eat? Not just the monarch from the High Middle Ages, but the putative warlord in the early medieval period? Answers, please, on rather more than the proverbial postcard. *cs*



TICKS ALL THE BOXES

I can't help feeling it's rather Charles Evans-Günther who's lost his way, not at all *Pendragon* (comment on cancelling his subscription, reported in Chris Lovegrove's Editorial to XXXIV No 4: 2). As page 3 of the same issue proclaims, just as it has for years, "*Pendragon* pursues Arthurian Studies: history and archaeology; legend, myth & folklore; literature, the arts & popular culture". I can't think of an issue that hasn't ticked all those boxes for me, as well as providing a platform for discussion and debate, to get people thinking about matters Arthurian more fully and in different ways. As I've mentioned repeatedly, the latest issue's arrival is always a matter of great pleasure personally, as it has been since I started subscribing in 1997. It has only improved with time in my view, and I see no sign that that has changed. XXXIV, 4? Another excellent issue!

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

I very much enjoyed the latest *Pendragon* and (as a reader on and off, but mostly on, for over 20 years) cannot agree with Charles [Evans-Günther] that the journal has lost its way: not in the least. It seems to me the same fascinating and stimulating mix it has always been. Editor's work is often taken for granted, so I'd like to thank you for all you do.

Mark Valentine, Keighley, Yorks

• Thanks for the appreciations. The journal is a collective effort, the editor's job being to

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present all contributions as best as is possible, so really it stands or falls on the content rather than the presentation.

Mark's "*The Great Quest*" appears this issue, republished from *Book & Magazine Collector*. *cs*

GOVAN OLD PARISH CHURCH

I attended a meeting of the Friends of Govan Old Church to see what news of the future of the building and stones [Old News XXXIV No 4, 9].

The Church of Scotland has established a Steering Group to discuss the future of the building and the Kirk Session has agreed that it will open to the public as usual between the beginning of June to end September 2008 on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons, so that they can view the building and stones, hogbacks, crosses and sarcophagus.

The more visitors the Church receives the better, so if you're in Scotland do try to take this opportunity to see the stones together at their original site on the River Clyde.

Eileen Buchanan, Houston, Renfrewshire
• Eileen draws attention to a recently produced DVD which features the various pieces of architecture, stained glass and stones, as well as a number of the gravestones in the church graveyard (some carved with Masonic emblems, skull and crossbones etc. The DVD costs £10.00 from Friends of Govan Old, PO Box 7325, Glasgow G51 3WB (or by mail order from WWW.StanleyThomson.com). See also www.govanold.org.uk *cs*

SUMERIAN WRESTLING

Further to Shani Oates' reply (*Pendragon* XXXIV No 3, 4-6) to my comments on the five-armed star of pentagram form being unknown in ancient Sumer in the preceding issue, I must apologise to one and all, as I have subsequently discovered I was incorrect to say this. One of the proto-cuneiform (or pictographic) signs on clay tablets, which recurred on some contemporary clay sealings, found at the Mesopotamian sites of Jemdet Nasr (modern name) and the ancient city of Ur, dating to c 3000 BC, was of just this shape. It has been assigned the modern transliteration "UB", and it appears it may be the ancient name for the city at Jemdet Nasr,

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though its original pronunciation is not known. Several artefacts with the same sign on were recovered from Jemdet Nasr, apart from the clay tablets and seals, including spindle-whorls and painted pots. An amulet was apparently recovered with an UB sign at Tell Agrab too, though nothing in this suggests the sign alone was linked with any kind of regnal power.²

Note that a considerable number of the seal impressions (as opposed to those inscribed by hand with a stylus) actually showed a six-pointed UB form, with a curious, and sometimes very elaborate, internal linear interlace pattern. Matthews' *Plate 1a* shows a nicely incised pictogram of the five-pointed version, as does his sealing in Fig 12.5, but Fig 12.6 has a very complex possible UB variant, and an even more elaborate "possible" with four points and a double ring is in Fig 15.32. Clear representations of the commoner sub-rectangular six-armed UB sign are in Figs 12.7, 13.12, 14.21 and 17.39.

In respect of Shani's directional comments, Petr Charvát mentioned that in later times, UB meant "outer extremities of the earth" in the sense of a distant perimeter.³ This does not seem to mean there were thought to be five cardinal directions however, as Mesopotamian texts that mentioned directions, including the "Four Quarters" of the world, usually did so with reference to the four cardinal points, north, south, east and west, with each quarter of the imaginary world circle thus created centred on the specific direction. These are repeatedly used for example in Akkadian omen texts from the 2nd millennium BC onwards, as correlated to things like the quadrants of the Moon's visible disc,⁴ the months of the year (three non-consecutive months per quarter), the day from four

² See R J Matthews' *Cities, Seals and Writing* (Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1993: 41-42) for discussion and references

³ Petr Charvát's *On People, Signs and States* (The Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 1997: 14)

⁴ U Koch-Westenholz (1995) *Astronomy and Astrology in Mesopotamia* (Museum Tusulanum Press) 38

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possibilities per month a lunar eclipse could happen, and the four winds.⁵ The solstices and equinoxes, and computing when they would occur seem to have had relatively minor importance, the summer solstice arguably the more essential, but in terms of correspondences, three other times of year had to be added to bring the total to seven, the number of planets in the Akkadian texts (not just five) – Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury and Mars, in the order the great "Enuma Anu Enlil" compendium presented them.⁶

There was no single Mesopotamian cosmology, but a variety of sometimes conflicting accounts have been recovered. A proportion of those involved some variant of the loose threefold vertical division I cautiously suggested previously (*Pendragon XXXIV* No 2, 4-5).⁷

The planet Venus was called Mul Dil-bat or Dele-bat, "The Brightest Star", or Eshdar/Ishtar (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 125) in the Akkadian texts. For unknown reasons, on one explanatory tablet to an otherwise meaningless omen text, it was equated with the Goat-star, as Shani mentioned, though the Goat-star was actually the modern constellation of Lyra the Lyre (op. cit., 84).

Lastly, Shani's *Figures 1 and 2* were not Sumerian, but Assyrian and Babylonian respectively, roughly dated to the c 9th century BC.⁸ The Sumerian civilization effectively ended c 2000 BC. Unfortunately, the drawing from Black & Green (1992: 108; Shani's *Fig 1*) is inaccurate in some details compared to rollings of the actual full seal design, which suggest perhaps one of the nineteen plausible stars on it may have been carved with five points, possibly just by accident; others on the design had none, 4, 6, 7 or 9 points. One at least, and

⁵ op cit 106-109

⁶ op cit 134-135, but see the rest of Chapter 5 too

⁷ Jeremy Black and Anthony Green's *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (British Museum Press, 1992: 52-53) gives a selection of those known, for instance

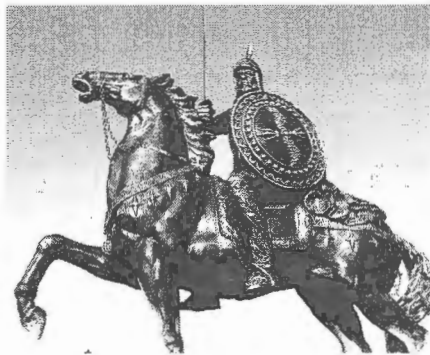
⁸ See D Collon's *First Impressions* (British Museum Press, 1987: Figs 883 and 785)

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probably two, should have had 8 compared to other designs, which may support the "accidental" concept. No two sketches of Shani's *Fig 2* seem to show exactly the same features either, for some reason, though most do agree that one of the three large hanging roundels in front of the skirt has a vaguely floral five-armed design. The figure shown is the deity Marduk. Marduk was never a human ruler, though Mesopotamian human rulers were sometimes partly named after deities, including him. The inscription accompanying the illustration of Marduk and his recumbent dragon indicated the seal once belonged to Marduk-zakir-shumi I, king of Babylon, c 859-819 BC, for example.

Alastair McBeath, *Morpeth, Northumberland*
• The context of this discussion concerns the antecedents of the pentangle device on Gawain's shield (in the 14th-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). Shani Oates proposes that the five-pointed star has a significance that dates back to pre-Christian Middle Eastern civilisations, while Alastair McBeath argues that any such significance is unlikely. ☾

KING ARTHUR NEAR PRESTATYN



David Burnham some time ago asked about a monument to Arthur [Arthur: time for a commemoration?" XXXIV No 2, 20-22] – see the enclosed picture of "King Arthur" on his horse, life size, which is to be found at a leisure facility called Graig Park in Meliden, near Prestatyn.

There are some other Arthurian connections in that area; here at Gronant, some three miles away, there is a Bronze Age burial mound which I am told is

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called Bedd Arthur (Arthur's Grave) and to the east around 3½ miles away there is Craig Arthur Farm where the farmers talk of King Arthur's footprint on a rock on a spring there.

Paul S Parry, Gronant, Prestatyn



SENIOR PENDRAGON

Your email encouraged me to look back to the old Pendragon files and it turns out that I joined the "Junior Pendragons" in July 1961 and was promoted to 'boys' representative' – what a title! My notes also state that Richard Palmer and Pat Gurnett and dear Jess [Foster, founder of the Society] went to speak to the vicar of Otterbourne to obtain permission to tidy the old church and to excavate part of it on April 29th 1961. Within just a couple of months we were up to 30 members, some very young indeed.

I'm still very involved with my interest in the Dark Ages. My job as a tour guide allows me to take clients to the old haunts of Tintagel, Glastonbury and South Cadbury! I took my students to Cadbury (I teach archaeology) about a month ago and the Gods were really against us as the weather was diabolical!!

Don Bryan BA (Hons) MITG via e-mail
www.heritagetours.co.uk

• Don and Carol Bryan are the longest-surviving Pendragons on our books, as you can guess – the Society had only been

Bloodlines

founded in 1959. In contrast, your editor is a relative stripling, only joining as late as 1967. By that time, there were probably no age distinctions. Nowadays, those "very young indeed" junior Pendragons for health & safety reasons would probably not be allowed on site, the rest of us would have to be insured and wear safety helmets, plus a business plan drawn up in quadruplicate, before spade (or rather JCB) went into sod. And as the old Otterbourne church must by now be a scheduled monument, the Society would no doubt be subject to an exclusion zone. Innocent days! ☾

The Birth of Merlín

Deep in the deepest cwm
a low, lowing swell of half-light
has been seen for many a night.
Deep in the deepest cwm
a shirking dwindle of half-night
has been seen for many a day,
worming into and out of moonray.
Told in the creak of crows unhinging the sky,

in the shimmer of lakes,
in the glim of shapes
cast by hinges embered in sunset...

His old white head uncaverns last,
breached into time,
slick with myth,
already slipping away.
Forking into mists.
Salmoning against echoes.
Already younger than oak and mistletoe
and fire.

Phil Emery



And made first Mari Llwyd
hang halter at bed
with dawn horse dreamed will
softly trample there yours to
ride to wonderwhere only
too long unused maybe this
winter's morning yes promise
kept is there skeleton mare

Steve Sneyd

Questing, questing...



Coupe des Ptolémées, Louvre, Paris

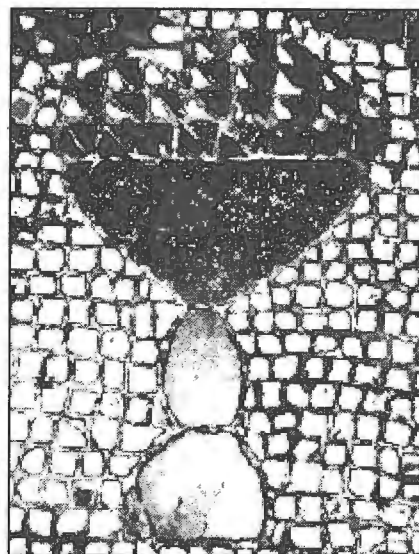
2007 may well have been the Year of the Holy Grail: not one, not two, but at least three (and maybe more) would-be Indiana Joneses have declared that they have either found the elusive object or know where it has been hidden.

In June 2007 Italian archaeologist **Alfredo Barbagallo** announced that the Grail was hidden in the crypt of a Roman basilica, **San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura** (St Lawrence-Without-the-Walls). After two years studying the basilica's medieval iconography he believed he had identified clues that pointed to the sacred object being hidden below the church dedicated to the martyr.¹

Lawrence, archdeacon of Rome when martyred in 258, had been entrusted by Pope Sixtus II with the treasures of the early Church (though surely not the cup of the Last Supper?), but these then

¹ Nick Pisa "Archaeologist sparks hunt for Holy Grail" *Telegraph* June 21 2007; Mary Sharp (1967) *A Traveller's Guide to the Churches of Rome* (Hugh Evelyn, London) 108-110; "Holy Grail 'is hidden in a tomb'" *Mirror* June 21 2007 <http://www.alfredobarbagallo.com/>

disappeared to history. The saint's tomb traditionally lies somewhere under the high altar. However, on his website Barbagallo includes the depiction of a chalice, part of the basilica's medieval mosaic pavement, which he says points to St Lawrence's original tomb in the catacombs where he was buried by a Roman matron called Cyriaca. Barbagallo has studied a 1938 guidebook to the church's catacombs, written by one Giuseppe Da Bra, which describes a chamber containing a "terracotta funnel whose lower part opens out over the face of a skeleton". This funnel, part of the pagan practice of giving liquid refreshment to the dead (and found all over the Empire, including Britain) is, incredibly, the Italian archaeologist's candidate for the grail, not some cup from the 1st century. "I'm absolutely convinced that this funnel is the Grail," he is reported to have said in the *Mirror*.



Nevertheless, a spokesman for the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology reported that an "initial investigation" had been made into opening up the catacombs but that "as yet no decision has been made". In early 2008 a decision still was awaited.

The next grail-seeker to announce his discovery to the world was **Ferhat**

Kanarya, a computer engineer graduate of Istanbul Technical University who first worked in software development before becoming a project leader of an IT department in an international banking company. This of course puts him in an ideal position to crack ancient codes, and his first book, *The Hidden Location of the Holy Grail*, indicates the object of his search. In his own words, posted on an internet site, "The Holy Grail is in **Saint Sophia Museum** [in Istanbul]. I've cracked Shugborough Code. My website <http://www.gradale.com> pinpoints the location of the Holy Grail." You can download it now for just \$11.97.²

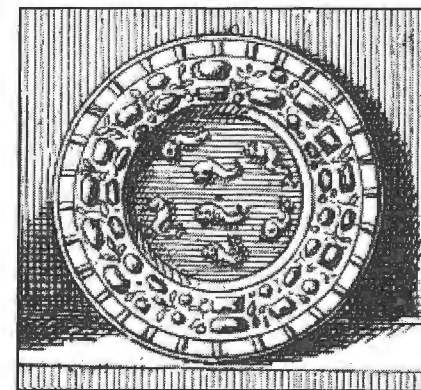
Yes, the clue comes from the notorious **Shugborough Monument**, Staffordshire, which we have explored before in these pages. Using a complex deciphering system, Kanarya produces a statement in French (why French?) from the Shugborough inscription: *Enrico Dandolo a écrit clef montre sur mur sous lune que garde st grael* ("Enrico Dandolo wrote key shown on wall under moon that kept saint grael [Holy Grail]").

Now, Enrico Dandolo is famous (or rather infamous) for the role he took in bankrolling and leading the Fourth Crusade which eventually sacked and despoiled Constantinople in 1204. He died the next year and was buried in the former church of Hagia Sophia where the site of his tomb is still indicated by a 19th-century marker. Kanarya's contention is that Dandolo's tomb shows the way to the grail hidden in the walls of the church in modern-day Istanbul (where, strangely enough, the author lives and works), and all ciphered on a monument in England. No doubt the next stage is to get the authorities to knock down the wall.

Kanarya's other interests clearly show where he gets his inspiration: "The Hidden Message on Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* Painting", the significance of 666, "The Solution of The Kryptos Code in CIA Headquarters", and the mysteries of Rennes-le-Château and of Oak Island. He's going to run out of mysteries at this rate.

² Kanarya site: <http://www.gradale.com>; <http://www.shugborough.org.uk/AcademyShepherdsMon-169>

The third grail was "spotted" by author **Mark Oxbrow**, who "stumbled across" the object "tucked away" in the **Louvre Museum** on a trip to Paris with his wife. This grail doesn't lie under Pei's pyramid (as it does in *The Da Vinci Code*) but in a display of objects from the High Middle Ages.³



The *patène de serpentine* is a saucer made from dark green marble, made in the years around the birth of Christ. Sometime in the Late Empire period eight golden fishes were inlaid on the surface (two are now missing), probably indicating its re-use as a liturgical object – a paten at Mass. Around the late 9th century, at the Merovingian court of Charles the Bald, it gained a gold surround encrusted with precious stones, pearls and coloured glass. Together with an agate cantharus sculpted with Bacchic scenes (the so-called Cup of the Ptolemies) the dish was used at the Abbey of Saint-Denis during the 15th century as part of the coronation of French queens. Thus far the official history of this splendid paten is uncontroversial, if rather spectacular.

However, Oxbrow believes the dish inspired Chrétien de Troyes' celebrated grail romance. When the grail appeared to Perceval it was

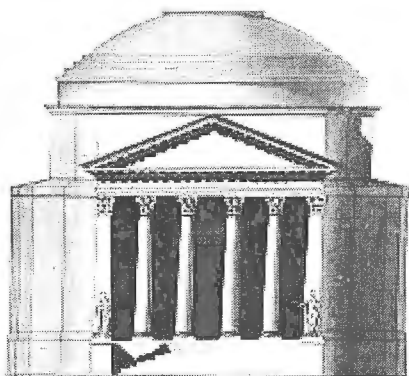
"made of fine, pure gold; and in it were set precious stones of many kinds, the

³ Wendy Miller "I've cracked mystery of the Holy Grail" *Evening Times* December 26 2007; Marie-Cécile Bardoz "Patène de serpentine" www.louvre.fr

richest and most precious in the earth or the sea: those in the grail surpassed all other jewels, without a doubt."

But Oxbrow goes further: he thinks the dish "could have been used at the Last Supper". "It's impossible to prove 100% that the Patène de Serpentine is the real Holy Grail. But the Patène is a sacred medieval treasure that perfectly matches every detail of the earliest descriptions of the Grail," he says in the *Scottish Evening Times*. "It was in the right place at the right time."

In December 2007 Oxbrow, author of *Roslyn and the Grail*, was just about to promote his new book *A-Z of King Arthur and the Holy Grail* (co-authored with Simon Cox) in the States, and his *Evening Times* interview duly winged its way around the world. A comment on the Scottish paper's website about the article ("I've cracked mystery of the Holy Grail") stated "Aye good for you mate! Get a life." Many other media commentators appeared equally bemused.



Just when you thought it was safe to venture out again, a theft in Turin in early 2008 brought stories of the grail hidden in that Italian city re-surfacing. Turin, not satisfied with housing the alleged Shroud of Christ, is apparently also a centre for black magic, allegedly having the highest concentration of Satanists in Italy.⁴ The disappearance of both a church missal and a phial of holy water was blamed on Satanists, with the

⁴ Malcolm Moore "Turin holy water theft blamed on Satanists" *Telegraph* January 23 3008

objects stolen regarded as "symbolic". However, the church in question is not just any church; it is the *Chiesa della Gran Madre di Dio*, or the Church of the Great Mother of God. Occultists suggest that this refers not to the mother of Jesus but the Egyptian goddess Isis, whose temple "is said" to have once existed here on the banks of the Po.

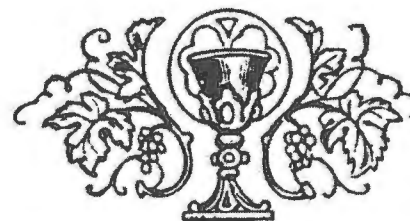
The present church was designed by the architect Ferdinando Bonsignore in honour of King Victor Emanuel I's return to Italy after Napoleon's defeat in 1814. Based on the Pantheon in Rome, it was only completed in 1831. At the base of its entrance steps stand two statues, representing Faith and Religion, and the tradition has grown up that Faith, who holds a chalice in her hand, is either looking at the hidden location of the Holy Grail, or is indicating it is under Gran Madre. Nostradamus, who lived in Turin for a while, supposedly referred to the statues in his *Prophecies*. Nearby Piazza Statuto, the site of an ancient cemetery and which provides access to the sewers, is supposedly the gateway to hell. But that way only madness lies. ☿



The Great Quest

An introduction to books about the Holy Grail

Mark Valentine



The Holy Grail is, as Arthur Machen, the Welsh writer of supernatural and mystical fiction observed, "one of the greatest complexes the world has ever known". Usually thought of as a cup, the vessel used by Christ at the Last Supper, it has also been depicted as a platter, stone, cauldron, bowl or dish, or as an altar. Its origin has variously been identified as Jewish, Islamic, Armenian, Celtic, Provençal, Egyptian, Templar, Byzantine, Persian, Gnostic, Atlantean or Extraterrestrial. More ethereally, it has also been seen as a shining light, the Holy Spirit, and an indescribable object that can change shape. And in recent years, of course, 'secret history' writers have claimed the Grail really represents the "blood-line of Christ", descendants from a secret marriage to Mary Magdalene. In this article, I aim to do no more than quickly survey the vast literature of books on the Grail, with a particular emphasis on the Grail in fiction.

The first definite written record we have of the Grail is in French chronicler Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval, ou Le Conte del Graal* of circa 1181-90. He tells us that he took the story from a book given to him by his patron Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders. That book, if it ever existed, has never been found. About thirty years earlier, there flourished a minstrel called Bleheris, the son of a

Welsh nobleman, who was also fluent in French and a friend of the French nobility. Other chroniclers acknowledge him as a master storyteller who knew all the tales of the Grail. Could he be the source for Chrétien? What else did he know about the Grail? We shall probably never know: nothing whatever by him has survived.

But after Chrétien, many other chroniclers and storytellers in all the lands of Christendom kept the idea of the Grail alive, mingled in with the tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, right up until Caxton published Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which became the definitive account of the whole cycle in the late 15th century. The archetypal story sees Arthur's court given a vision of the Grail when they are gathered together for a feast, and all the knights vowing to go in quest of this mysterious symbol. After many setbacks and adventures on the way, Galahad achieves the quest and two other knights (usually Perceval and Bors) are granted a glimpse of the radiance from the Grail. But the quest leads to the end of the Round Table, since so many of the knights die, are lost, become hermits or remain in far lands. It has been suggested that one reason the Grail legends were so popular is because they presented a different, more daring and mysterious, facet of the Christian faith than the Church – itself then often worldly and corrupt – ever could.

But the modern interest in the theme can probably be traced mostly to Tennyson's Arthurian poems, especially his own *Morte d'Arthur*, *The Idylls of the King* and later *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* (1870). It is difficult today to really imagine the enormous popularity of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, but his narrative poem single-

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handedly revived the legend in the hearts and minds of Victorian readers. It's even been said that most of the Cornish links to King Arthur derive from Tennyson, who chose Tintagel as the dramatic scene for some of his work.

The taste for Welsh, Irish, Breton and Gaelic folk-tales, and poems, songs and plays drawing on these, grew considerably in the late Eighteen Hundreds and this phase has become known as the 'Celtic Twilight'. Echoes of the Grail often found their way into the products of this movement. This found scholarly expression in one of the first studies to attempt to reclaim the origins of the Grail from its Norman chroniclers to the dreamers of the western shores of Britain. Alfred Nutt's *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, with its explanatory sub-title, "With Special Reference to the Hypothesis of Its Celtic Origin", was highly influential when it came out in 1888.

The Grail emerged again in literature when Professor Sebastian Evans had made a well-received translation of the medieval Parsifal stories under the title *The High History of the Holy Grail*. But in his subsequent study *In Quest of the Holy Grail* (1898), he put forward an ingenious theory that the legends were an allegory of political and courtly manoeuvrings between various European kings and barons of the day. While there were indeed some intriguing parallels, most authorities would regard this now as over-stretched, if not entirely far-fetched.

The first years of the new Edwardian era saw two remarkable stories come to light of real healing cups that some people acclaimed as the Grail, although in both cases that was never originally claimed. The first of these was the Nant Eos Cup, a worn wooden beaker kept at a remote country house near Aberystwyth. In the hands of one family for many generations, this Cup is in a time of hiding now, in a bank vault, and is seen by very few. Recently, journalist Byron Rogers made it the title theme of his essay collection, *The Bank Manager & The Holy Grail* (Aurum, 2003).

The second mysterious vessel from this time was the Glastonbury (or Bristol) Cup, a blue and silver glass dish found in the Chalice Well at Glastonbury in 1907 after a series of dreams and visions.

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It had been brought back from Italy some years before and its owner began to believe it had a sacred significance. The find created some newspaper controversy at the time.

Debate in academic and esoteric circles was also caused by a monumental study by a leading occult scholar, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail* by A.E. Waite, which came out in 1909. Waite advanced the tentative theory that the Grail had been secretly revered through the ages in many persecuted groups, such as the Cathars and the Knights Templar and others. This book has had a major and lasting influence on theories of the Grail ever since and may even be said to be the bedrock for the latest popular ideas on the theme. Few books now can resist the idea of a secret tradition, or that the Grail legends conceal something else.

Novel treatments

One of the first 20th century fictional treatments of the Grail theme came from Evelyn Underhill, whose book *Mysticism* (1911) was later a great success. Her novel, *The Column of Dust*, published in 1909, sees an independent young woman, alone with her child – itself a daring theme for the day – encounter the Grail in a remote farmhouse in Westmorland. It's not certain why she placed the Grail there, but several families in this Northern county had legends of "lucks" – precious cups that had to be safeguarded to preserve the fortunes of the house. They were never regarded as the Grail itself, but these tales may have given her the idea to set her story there.

The Column of Dust was dedicated to Arthur Machen and his wife Purefoy. A mentor of Underhill in her work on mysticism, and a great friend of Waite, Machen's imagination had been captured by the legends of the Grail and he studiedly them intensely in the British Museum around the turn of the century. The result was a set of essays, which were collected in his anthology *The Shining Pyramid* (1925), and a novel, *The Secret Glory*. The novel first came out, in part, in a short-lived journal during the First World War – when Machen's legend of The Angels of Mons was at its height – but had to wait until 1922 to see

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book form. Even then it omitted two final chapters, which were not finally issued until 1991.

The Secret Glory has often had a profound effect on people who read it. One notable example of this is John Betjeman, who said he "really owed Arthur Machen more than money can show", since the novel, lent to him by a Cornish priest, had "sent him Anglican when a Public School Evangelical aged 15". In Machen's book, his young hero runs away from his hateful public school to a bohemian life in London. But he also reverences the memory of a pilgrimage his father had taken him on to glimpse the Grail in a humble Welsh farmhouse, and so devotes his days to the quest for the meaning of the sacred cup.

Machen's essays in *The Shining Pyramid* put forward the idea that the legends of the Grail may draw on the lost Mass of the Celtic Church. He presented this too in a fine short novel, *The Great Return* (1915), in which the Grail returns to Wales on a ship of light which comes ashore in Pembrokeshire, and great healing and reconciliation follows.

But in 1920 a fresh new theory about the Grail was put forward in Jessie L Weston's highly influential *From Ritual to Romance*. Machen disliked it a lot and commented that no doubt we'd be told Galahad was really a cabbage next. This was because she proposed that the myths were remembrances of pagan ceremonies linked to the fertility of the land in primitive agricultural communities, and involving a sacrificial king. The book's theory at once gained a great deal of attention, even more so when it was used as the main inspiration for T S Eliot's ground-breaking Modernist poem, *The Waste Land*.

The bohemians who get hold of a sort of Grail in Mary Butts' art-deco, experimental novel, *Armed With Madness* (1928) must also have heard of Miss Weston's theory. They are a group of disillusioned young things gathered in a manor on the coast of Dorset. One of them fishes a jade cup out of a spring with a spear. They jokingly speculate it might be the Grail but one of them is scornful and dishonours the cup by using it as an ashtray. Personal and spiritual crises follow. Mary Butts, an

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associate of Cocteau, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and other leading literary figures, was learned in the legends and her book is a remarkable attempt to bring them up to date.

The next to invoke the Grail was Inking Charles Williams, friend of Narnia's C S Lewis. Williams was a connoisseur and reviewer of detective fiction and was inspired to imitate it. But he brought his own interest in the things of the spirit to the field and the result was seven unusual and pacy supernatural thrillers. The first of these, *War in Heaven* (1930), sees a gentle Archdeacon in the quiet village of Fardles pitted against suave and sardonic villain Sir Giles Tumulty, who wants an old chalice in the clergyman's collection of church plate, as he is convinced it is the true Grail. Tumulty is an agent of evil, but in a satirical thriller written soon after, Sherard Vines' quirky *Return, Belphegor!* (1932), it is a demon in, as it were, person who sets up a Grail Company to stir up unrest and superstition in a moribund Britain. Later, a brisk detective thriller by Francis Gerard, *Secret Sceptre* (1937), placed the Grail back in Machen's remote Wales, guarded in turn by highly respectable senior figures in politics and the Church, who don't stop short of murder to keep their secret.

These titles were entertaining enough in their way. But it took a genius of the magnitude of John Cowper Powys to carefully and copiously explore the way the Grail might affect the lives of a whole community, when he wrote his massive evocation of its emergence in the Somerset town where some of the earliest legends may have grown: *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933). It is no misty romance but captures all of the tensions and uncertainties of its time, the depression-era Nineteen Thirties, while still retaining the real resonances of the Grail myth and opening them up into Powys' own cosmic speculations.

Another notable literary treatment of the theme came in Philip Toynbee's post-War experimental novel *Tea with Mrs Goodman* (1947), told from numerous fragmented perspectives. It was highly regarded in its day but somewhat overlooked now and probably deserves more attention. It looks like a title to pick

up while copies can still be found very reasonably.

In non-fiction studies, American scholar Roger Sherman Loomis distilled a lifetime's fascination to provide one of the clearest, most careful and comprehensive overviews of the legend in his 1963 work *The Grail - from Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, reprinted many times since.

One other novel fictional treatment that has its own quiet magic is the only novel by Arthurian expert Geoffrey Ashe, *The Finger & the Moon* (1973). It portrays a wonderful revival of the Grail ritual in a hippy-era Glastonbury setting, with hints of mind-altering psychedelic substances, Vietnam protests and alternative living.

Perhaps drawing somewhat on the same Sixties spirit, John Matthews has produced a range of books suggesting we can use the Grail legends to explore our own consciousness and creative imagination. Well-grounded in the Celtic sources, these have proved ideal guides for the Grail seeker of the New Age.

But it was Henry Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh's *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* in 1982, preceded by Henry Lincoln's BBC programme exploring the mystery, that really raised the Grail high again in the public mind. It soon became a major success and generated a whole industry of research, speculation and attempted rebuttal. The book asks how a humble nineteenth-century French priest, in an obscure village, Rennes-le-Château, in the Pyrenees was apparently able to acquire great wealth. But this is no simple treasure hunt. To answer the question, the authors are led to a mysterious painting by landscape artist Poussin, to the geometry of the region where the priest lived, and to a mysterious order known as the Priory of Sion. With secret, coded documents, the Knights Templar, the Cathar heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and a list of Grand Masters that includes many famous names, the book is a heady mix indeed. But the most dramatic revelation was that Jesus may have been married to Mary Magdalene, and that they may have established a dynasty, the bloodline of Christ.

Ten years later, Andrew Sinclair's *The Sword and the Grail* (1993) was one of the first to make the link to Rosslyn Chapel, shrine of the Scottish Knights Templar, where (as a descendant of the St Clair family who guarded the place) he discovered a Grail marking on an old tombstone. Once little-known, the Chapel is now of the most-visited ancient sites in Scotland.

The Grail easily lends itself to variations on almost any form of fiction. So the avid reader can enjoy seeing it in a Lovejoy crime caper (Jonathan Gash's *The Grail Tree*, 1970), a comic fantasy (Tom Holt's *Grailblazers*, 1994), a historical whodunit (Michael Clynnes' *The Grail Murders*, 1993), a supernatural thriller (Phil Rickman's *The Chalice*, 1997) and as part of an eminent literary sequence (Anthony Powell's *The Fisher King*, 1985).

Richard Monaco (the Parsifal saga), Stephen Lawhead (The Pendragon Cycle), Bernard Cornwell (The Grail Quest) and Robert Holdstock (The Merlin Codex) are amongst many fantasy writers who have written book sequences based on the legends, but as they deal with the whole of the Arthurian mythos - a much wider subject - I haven't attempted to include them here.

Where will writers on the Grail go next? Will the present cult survive beyond the influence of Dan Brown's bestselling book? The sacred cup has proved to be a phenomenally enduring symbol which can survive both fame and neglect. We won't have seen the last of the theories about the Grail or the stories that draw on its many rich meanings. ☪

• First published in *Book & Magazine Collector*



The evidence of things not seen... R A Gilbert

Review of Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln
The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (Jonathan Cape 1982)

"Faith," said St Paul, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"¹ and on such a basis the authors of this book are rich in faith indeed, but desperately poor in facts. Not that facts are entirely absent, for there is a most curious church at Rennes-le Château, and Béranger Saunière, its odd parish priest, undoubtedly found something at the tail end of the last century that brought his wealth. And the occasional historical fact has crept into the book elsewhere, but this is not my concern, for the book presents such a dramatic thesis that to show it for the folly it is requires substantial proof that the historical fictions on which the thesis relies really are fictions.

What is the thesis? Why, merely that Mary Magdalene had children, by her husband Jesus Christ, who survived his sojourn on the Cross, and that the descendants of these children are alive to this day. Nor have they always been obscure, for the Jesus dynasty was also the Merovingian dynasty and it has for centuries been delivered from evil by the powerful secret society known as the Prieuré de Sion. Of course, such a secret society requires careful covering of tracks and it would be quite unreasonable for the critic to demand the usual documentary evidence by which historical fact is commonly demonstrated. Instead, the authors establish their thesis by a gradual accumulation of events and people - both historical and legendary and for the most part unrelated - and by the most unlikely interpretations of the New Testament and of infant Christianity. But some documents presumably exist (even though the authors do not see fit either to reproduce or to quote extensively from them) in the form of the parchments which led Saunière to the Priory of Sion after he had discovered



and deciphered them, and in the *Dossiers Secrets d'Henri Lobineau* which purport to show, among other things, the succession of Grand Masters of the Order. This succession is the obvious starting point for critical assessment of the book's thesis, and as it is quoted let us begin.

Grand Masters

From Jean de Gisors in the 12th century to Jean Cocteau in the 20th, there are 26 Grand Masters, and to produce a Catalogue

Raisonné of the errors, inanities and irrelevancies of the authors' accounts of all twenty-six - plus their many associates who are brought into the tale - would be a long and dreary task beyond the requirements of any review. Some assessment, however, must be made and as some Grand Masters are famous while others are obscure, it will be as well to examine one from each category. The 19th Grand Master was Isaac Newton, whose life is so well recorded that traces of his involvement with the Priory of Sion should be easy to recover. As Grand Master, Newton would have been aware that Christ did not die on the Cross and that his descendants still lived; that Newton was more-or-less a Unitarian might seem to support this view - until his own 'Articles of Faith' are read. Here he quite unequivocally accepts the Atonement: "[Jesus] the Lamb of God who was slain, and hath redeemed us with his blood";² and at this point it should be said that the authors appear to have no understanding of the nature of the Atonement (the doctrine of man's reconciliation with god through the sacrificial death of Christ). The encyclical of Pope John XXIII, *Inde a Primis*, which they quote, does not imply that "the death of Jesus on the cross is no longer a

² Sir David Brewster (1860) *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* Vol 2 279

¹ Hebrews Ch 11 verse 1

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requisite tenet of the Roman Catholic faith" (131), but its exact opposite, for it reiterates traditional teaching on the Atonement.

Newton was indeed interested in Hermetic thought but he did not believe in the existence of the Rosicrucians, as is shown by his annotations on his copy of the *Fama Fraternitatis*: "This was the history of ye imposture";³ and he had no connection whatever with Freemasonry. His membership of the Gentlemen's Society (not "club") of Spalding was purely nominal, and that famous literary society was itself neither "semi-masonic" (385) nor "obscure" (116).⁴ The authors, however, are determined to link their Grand Masters with Secret Societies of one kind or another, but their knowledge of such societies (of Freemasonry at least) is minimal: no masonic scholar would agree that "The dissemination of 18th century Freemasonry owes more, ultimately, to Radclyffe. than to any other man" (116) – and one expects – but does not receive – some justification for this elevation of a relatively minor character in masonic history. In point of fact Radclyffe could not have been Grand Master of the French Lodges in 1725 for there was no Grand Lodge in France until 1736.⁵

Further down the list comes Charles Nodier (23rd Grand Master),⁶ as obscure to most people as Newton is famous. Thus few will realise just how many errors are made in the account of his life and work: Nodier died in 1844, not 1845 as on pp 121 and 301; his anti-Napoleonic poem appeared in 1804, not in 1802; he was neither colleague nor

³ Reproduced in facsimile on the cover of Marks & Co Catalogue No 35 (of second-hand books) 1935

⁴ S H Perry "The Gentlemen's Society at Spalding" in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* Vol 53 (1942): 335-339

⁵ J M Roberts (1972) *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, 33

⁶ Roberts *op cit* 268ff. "There can be no doubt that Nodier may not be accepted as a serious guide." Roberts further says, of Nodier's *Histoire*, that "the circumstances of Nodier's life and the uncertainty of his motives ... justify the well-established distrust which this work has inspired among historians"

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mentor of Eliphaz Levi; his *Histoire des Sociétés Secrètes de l'Armée* was published in 1815, not 1816; and he was not "one of the chief architects of that myth (of the Secret Societies)" (123), for that structure had been erected twenty years before by Robinson and the Abbé Barruel. And it is not by the aggregation of such errors that contentious theses are established.

Yet is it not possible that while the Grand Masters were ignorant of their status and the Priory of Sion was itself a chimaera (the charters quoted on page 83 refer in fact to a community of Benedictine monks established on Mount Sion shortly after the First Crusade), that there is truth in the thesis of Jesus as a married Messiah? To establish that one must reject every received notion of New Testament exegesis, and this the authors manfully do. A similar rejection of established patterns of Dark Age and Medieval history is also necessary to show that the Jesus dynasty was not only founded but survived. In addition the authors have rejected the usual methods of historical enquiry, treating legend, Romance and recorded fact as of equal value, save where legend is given greater respect when it can be made to serve their ends (eg the legend of the Magdalene residing in France). No distinction is made between records of the Knights Templar before their suppression and their forced confessions under torture: claims about their blasphemous beliefs, and thus subsequent deductions, must be treated as highly suspect,⁷ but to hurry along the thesis of *Holy Blood* they are taken at face value.

Cathars

Even more important for the authors are the Cathars, perhaps because of their apparent similarity to early Gnostic sects, but on the Cathars the authors are remarkably ill-informed. It is not "virtually impossible to present a coherent and definitive summary of what actually constituted Cathar thought" (page 23), for not only do Inquisition records survive but they are

⁷ E J Castle "Proceedings against the Templars in France and England for Heresy etc AD 1307-11" *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* Vol 20 (1907)

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confirmed by surviving Cathar writings.⁸ The Cathars did not "deny the validity of all clerical hierarchies" (23) for they had their own hierarchy with Bishops and Ministers (Ancients), and they had quite specific doctrines⁹ which makes a nonsense of the claim that there was an "absence of any fixed dogma, doctrine or theology" (24). Most significant of all, the majority of Cathars, being absolute dualists, would never have "regarded him [Christ] as a prophet no different from any other – a mortal being" (25). Indeed, far from repudiating "the significance of both the Crucifixion and the Cross" (25) they held Easter to be their most important festival.¹⁰ In view of this farrago of nonsense about the Cathars it is not surprising to find the authors giving a reference "linking the Cathars and the Holy Grail" (32) but failing to point out that the writer in question categorically rejects the connection.¹¹



On the Grail itself the authors are content to select suitable Romances and to interpret them as allegorical where necessary but as based on objective history when such interpretation furthers their own cause. There are better sources for medieval family history than Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal*, but the authors choose not to use them. Similarly, when they attempt to link the Grail with the Hebrew Kabbalah (which they present in a grossly distorted image) they choose highly contentious

⁸ J Madaule (1967) *The Albigensian Crusade*, 36

⁹ H J Warner (1922) *The Albigensian Heresy*, Ch

¹⁰ Warner *op cit* 81

¹¹ A E Waite (1909) *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail*. In referring to the Cathars Waite says, page 529: "It is worse than idle to suppose that they had any connection with the Grail cycle"

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authorities and ignore those more generally accepted.¹² But these issues are perhaps peripheral and we must return to that which the Grail symbolises – the blood of Jesus Christ.

New Testament

Christianity must stand or fall by the reality of Christ and by the basic truth of the New Testament, which contains for all Christians the basic statements of their faith; but this does not preclude scholarly study, conducted along well-established lines, of the nature, origins and history of the documents that comprise the New Testament as we now have it. Certainly all extant manuscripts are later than the date of composition (which was between c 50 and 100 AD) but the Chester Beatty papyri date from the 3rd century and the Bodmer papyrus of the Gospel of John dates from c 200 AD – which makes quite surprising the claim in *Holy Blood* that "of the 5000 extant early manuscript versions of the New Testament, not one predates the 4th century" (120). The further claim that the Canon of the New Testament was a somewhat "arbitrary" selection, that the excluded books were "cavalierly ignored" and that some of them "have a perfectly valid claim to historical veracity" (279) is a nonsense, for the eminently sound principles by which books were "acknowledged" or "disputed" were established by the 2nd century and the Canon as we have it was effectively defined early in the 3rd – over a century before the list given in Athanasius' *Festal Letter* of 367 AD. All this is not to labour the point but to illustrate the inadequacies of the authors of *Holy Blood* in their analysis of the New Testament.

What, too, is their approach to the Gospels that enables them to "winnow through them, to disengage fact from fable" (283)? A somewhat incompetent one, for they draw most heavily upon the Fourth Gospel without offering reasons for finding it "the most reliable" save that it contains "the most persuasive evidence" (290) for their hypothesis. This

¹² G Scholem (1941) *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, and A E Waite (1929) *The Holy Kabbalah*, would be far more reliable than the sources quoted

evidence, the miracles of the Raising of Lazarus and the Wedding at Cana, together with John's account of the Crucifixion, presumably does not suffer from the "doctoring, editing, expurgation and revision" (290) to which they say the Gospel was subject. Presumably they also have good reasons (if unstated ones) for taking these episodes out of the context of the coherent picture of Jesus' life and mission as presented by all the Gospels. Certainly they carefully omit all reference to the teachings of Jesus as contained in the Parables, the Sermon on the Mount (which scarcely supports the notion of Jesus as a political Messiah) and the healing Miracles. In both the miracles that they do consider they ignore the obvious fact that Jesus' actions are consistent with his mission and are intended to reinforce the Old Testament prophecies that relate to him – a point made by all rational Commentaries on the Gospels.¹³

Those same commentaries also show how inept is the authors' treatment of the crucifixion – as do the Gospels themselves, for they make it clear that many people witnessed the crucifixion close at hand, while the authors' misreading of the text is so grotesque that they claim "most people" were witnesses from 'afar off' (the women, of course, were). This is intended to support the notion of a private, mock crucifixion which further requires the assumption that awkward parts of the narrative (the two thieves crucified with Jesus, the spear thrust in the side) are part of the later doctoring and editing of the text. Perhaps, too, Jesus was not himself party to the plot, which would explain why he refused drugged wine (Mk 15:23) but accepted vinegar-soaked sponge which the authors suggest was itself drugged (315). If plot there was, then the early Church, or some parts of it, must have been aware of it; further, being 'oriented primarily towards a Roman or Romanised audience' the Church must ensure that "the role of Rome in Jesus' death was, of necessity, whitewashed, and guilt was transferred

¹³ A survey of scholarly commentaries on the New Testament, and on specific books, can be found in: M Black *ed* (1962) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*

to the Jews" (322). But the Gospels emphasise that Jesus was executed by the Romans, who derided not only Jesus but the whole Jewish people by the mocking inscription on the cross: a dead criminal was the only king the Jews were likely to have. And death by crucifixion was a purely Roman punishment.

When they stray into early Church history the authors are equally prone to draw unwarranted conclusions from doubtful evidence. The refusal of the first Christians to compromise their faith and their stoic acceptance of savage persecution by Rome does not fit the picture of a people anxiously "pandering to a Roman audience" (324). Even more bizarre is the authors' attempt to use Gnostic Gospels to further their cause. Arguing from the Nag Hammadi papyri that Jesus was married is fanciful to say the least; Gnostic texts are not intended to be read as literal history and their authors looked upon the material world as evil: procreation was abhorrent, and via Jesus unthinkable. Arguing further that these papyri "can claim an authority equal to that of the Gospels" or that some of them "enjoy a claim to a unique veracity of their own" (341) is yet more foolish and flies in the face of the conclusions of every scholar of Gnosticism.¹⁴

What more can be said? Overturning received opinion is the authors' forte, and this course of action will doubtless endear the book to the hearts of many readers who are anxious to endorse any theory, however improbable or unproven, if it supports the notion of some gigantic conspiracy against the truth on the part of Church and State. As history the book fails, as biblical criticism it fails – it most certainly does not "stand up to the most rigorous scholarly scrutiny" claimed for it by my critics Philip Jones and Derek Burton,¹⁵ but the notion of the Priory of Sion defending the bloodline of Jesus is vastly entertaining, for history as it might have been is always more fun than history as it really was.¹⁶ *œ*

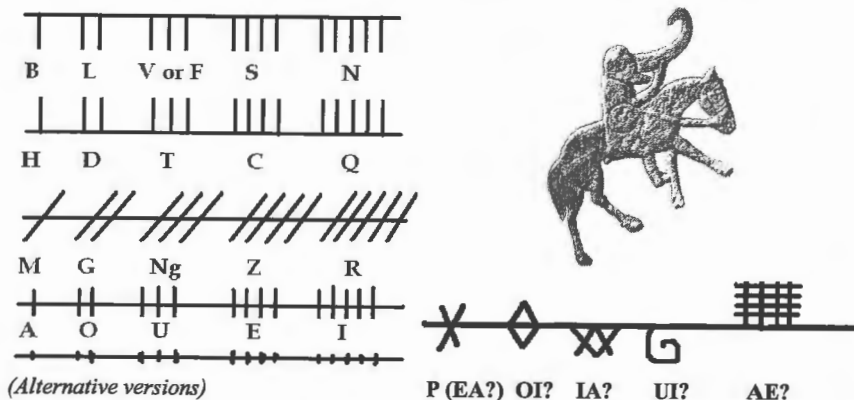
¹⁴ See D M Scholer (1971) *Nag Hammadi Bibliography*

¹⁵ *Pendragon* XIV No 3 (1981) 21

¹⁶ Review first published *Pendragon* XV No 2 (1982) 27-31 *œ* Ed

An Ogamic Reverie

Something Quite Old, Celtic and Precise *Joseph Biddulph*



(Alternative versions)

The ogam script and the Ogamic language seem to be about as far from the concept of "Celtic Twilight" as it is possible to get, despite their great antiquity. The oldest Old Irish *per se*, we are told in Rudolf Thurneysen's monumental *Grammar of Old Irish*¹ consists of Irish names in Latin writings, "in particular those in the notes on the life of St Patrick by Muirchu maccu Machtheni and Tirechan preserved in the *Book of Armagh*, and first written down at the end of the seventh century [page 9].

... But older as a rule than the above archaic material are the sepulchral inscriptions in a special alphabet called OGOM or OGUM in Middle Irish, OGHAM in Modern Irish. There are about 300 altogether, most of which have been found in the southern half of Ireland.

Of particular importance are some 20 inscriptions found in Britain, chiefly in Wales [chiefly Pembrokeshire and Breconshire], for most of these inscriptions are bilingual, with a Latin version accompanying the Ogam."

Thurneysen goes on to assert that some of these inscriptions could be as old as the fourth century. In *The Secret Languages of Ireland*² R A Stewart Macalister makes of Ogamic a secret language (a form of Irish archaic even at that time) probably originally a sign-language used between the cognoscenti ("druids") to disguise their meaning in front of strangers. The signs of five fingers, thumbs, etc were later translated into permanent form by inscribing a series of marks on the edge of a piece of stone, wood, etc. This could be accomplished using the battleaxe that every self-respecting warrior carried with him at all times, in case the men of Connacht or the men of Ulster (accompanied by the wild harpies their womenfolk) should suddenly emerge from the soft mist and carry off your cattle and other valuables as a form of recreational activity (if texts such as the *Tain B6 Cuailge* are to be believed). The *Book of Ballymote* and other late sources confirm the impression that this most strange of alphabets continued to be known and read throughout the Middle Ages. The *Sf Gall Glosses*, where notes in Old Irish are added to a Latin text in a manuscript from the Irish-founded monastery of Sankt Gallen in Switzerland, also have marginal notes in this ogam script. The Welsh word for a zigzag, *igam-ogam*, may have been influenced

¹ Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980, etc

² Cambridge 1937, reprinted 1997 Craobh Rua Books, 12 Woodford Gardens, Armagh

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by the word too, if we see the marks of the script on various monuments in Wales as a series of lines slanting in different directions, supplemented with lines of dots for the vowels.

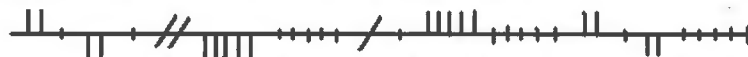
Ogamic materials are scanty indeed. Even where a complete inscription can be pieced out, we have, usually, nothing more than a name. This, as in the Latin, where it accompanies it, is generally in the genitive case, implying "THE STONE OF ... THE MEMORIAL OF ... so-and-so." It may be accompanied by:³

MAQI, MAQI son of
AVI, AVVI grandson of
MUCOI descendant of

The typical inscription, given by Thurneysen, is:

DALAGNI MAQI DALI (The stone of) Dalagnus son of Dalus⁴

that is:



The ending -I, common to Latin and Ogamic, was later taken inside the word, as in Old Irish ACCOBUR, "a wish", genitive singular ACCOBUIR, "of a wish".

It is often the case that when, on those all too rare occasions, we come across an ogamic stone, this precise and odd alphabet becomes a fragmentary gibberish: if someone has provided a translation on a sign or notice nearby we have to rely on their interpretation to make anything of it at all. There are some stones or replicas of stones in the National Museum in Cardiff, and one or two more in the delightful museum in Brecon.

Among the latter we have the replica of a stone from Llywel (Pentre Poeth), Brycheiniog, which has some ogamic marks on the side and back, and a Latin inscription which, we are informed, reads:

(M)ACCVTRENISALIC(I)D(V)M "(The stone of) MACCUTRENUS SALICIDUNUS"

The ogam inscription is reported to be: MAQITRENI SALICIDUNI

Despite my best efforts, by squinting, kneeling, walking to the side of the stone, I noted only the following fragmentary ogam:



Even taking into account the fact that vowels may have been rendered by short lines as well as dots, this proves pretty frustrating and nonsensical.

Another stone in Brecon Museum is from Ty yn y Wlad Farm, Crickhowell, Brycheiniog, and is the original stone this time, not a copy. It is a local red sandstone block, very rough, and it's a wonder anyone thought of carving anything on it at all, but the Latin lettering reads:

TVRPILLI (H)IC IACIT / PVVERI TRILVNI DVNOCATI
"TURPILLIUS LIES HERE, THE SON OF TRILUNUS
DUNOCATUS"

Once again the case-endings are a bit corrupt, implying that Latin survived in some fashion as a spoken medium as well as a book language – otherwise the mason might have had more chance of getting it right!

I could make out even less of the ogam this time, largely because crudely set on the edge of the stone, which in typical red sandstone fashion has been subject to weathering. Lower down on the shoulder of the stone I could piece out:




³ Meic Stephens ed (1986) *Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*

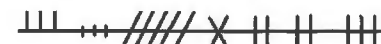
⁴ A Latin nominative masculine ending is restored by me

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Higher up, detached from these, I thought I could see: 

This ogam is supposed to read TURP(I)L(LI. . .)L(U)N(I) that is



The interesting thing here is the symbol X. There was no P in Old Irish, plentiful as it is in Latin, and in the earliest Christian period words from Latin or Brythonic with a P in were rendered in Irish with a C (=K), even the revered name of the Patron Saint himself, which is why such words belong to the so-called COTHRICHE (=PATRICK) loanwords. Pretty soon, of course, with so much Latin and British entering the Old Irish language, the P became a normal part of the sound system. But Ogamic, being even older Irish, had no symbol for it, so the rather odd X (or alternatively, 4 rather than 2 lines in saltire) was pressed into service.

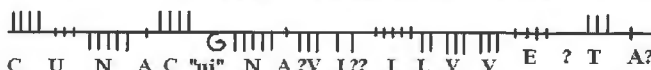
I was not encouraged to try and work out any more ogam inscriptions for myself until I came across the stone in the little church at Trallong near Brecon, and, later on, one at Nevern in Pembrokeshire.

At Trallong (put the stress on the first syllable, roll the r, give ll the full Welsh value of an Land H pronounced together, make the o an "aw" without drawling, and fade the ng sound away in the nose) the stone is inside the church that was very much restored in the 19th century, near the door, and is an oblong tapering towards one end in what appears to be the local reddish sandstone. The Latin reads:

CVNOCENNI FILIV(S) / CVNOGENI HIC IAC IT
"CUNOCENUS SON OF CUNOGENUS LIES HERE"

Professor Kenneth Jackson the Celticist, whose opinion is usually worth knowing, sees in CUNOGENI an early form of the Middle Welsh name CYNGEN. The form HIC IACIT is considered significant: according to the notice provided at Trallong, the phrase originated in the 300s, was found in Gaul in the 400s and then spread further. Is the inscription therefore 5th to 6th century?

It was the first time I could remember being able to examine an ogam inscription in the place it was found with the leisure to feel the incisions with my own finger. The marks straddling the edge of the stone are dots, the others are clearly incised as short lines either to left (interpreted as below the line) or right (interpreted as above the line) or in diagonal marks across the edge. Even so, as I found out, there are difficulties. I read this:



The approved or correct version is reported to read:

CVNACENNIVI ILVVETO "(The stone of) CUNACENNUS ILVVETO"

The ending -IVI is apparently an archaic (Ogamic) Irish genitive ending, for a male name, where the archaic V should perhaps be read as a W, instead of the F that is often read for it (see Thurneysen). The Irish F in any case seems to have been pronounced with the lips in the position for W. ILVVETO looked very suspicious to me, until I opened the monumental tome of Thurneysen's *Grammar*, where (p138) I found the prefix IL- meaning "many" (cognate to Greek πολυς; and Sanskrit purúh), while if we take the mason's deliberately doubled V to convey a very archaic *gh, gwh, etc and Thurneysen's remarks on the development of this sound as dependable, then -VVETO could have become a form of Old Irish GUTH, "a voice". As if to confirm this supposition, Thurneysen gives (p196) the word IL-GOTHA, "many-voiced, eloquent".

At Nevern or Nanhyfer near Newport in the old Lordship of Cemais, Pembrokeshire, I noted the ogam of a stone now built into an interior windowledge

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in the old church. I carefully transcribed it before looking at the version given in the church guide. The Latin beside it reads: **MAGLOCVI FILI CLVTOR** "(The monument of) MAGLOCUNUS (Maelgwn) SON OF CLUTORIUS". The first word is supposed to be a mistake for MAGLOCUNI. For the ogam I made out:

M Q I C L U C ? Z M A G I I C U N S

Let's compare that with the "official" version: MAGLICUNAS MAQI CLUTAR(I)

I missed out a couple of A's – considering that A consists of a single dot, and this is a very old (5th-century?) stone, I think I can pardon myself for that one! (In any case, MAQI is a formula, and would not need to be written in full.) The S was rather uncertain, the fourth stroke of the four being somewhat indistinct, but the scholars seem to agree with me. The last C certainly seemed to me to have four strokes rather than three (which would make T), and the last letter, I thought, mustered four rather than five, making it the obsolete Z that appears in Ogam but never (except in Latin words) in later Irish. Had this inscription been in a Gothic or Nordic language and in runes, this would have been no problem, as R for the masculine ending and Z alternate (shown like a little man with his arms in the air); in Thurneysen's opinion, however, the early Celtic Z became d or ð in early Irish, as in the Continental Celtic Gaulish name *Tasgillus* producing the Old Irish man's name *TADGG*. I suppose the Latin CLUTOR must clinch the argument anyway.

The above remarks must show me to be no Celticist, certainly in no thorough way, but the thrill of putting one's hands on something so incredibly old, a message

from a former age, in two defunct languages, is difficult to explain, and is similar to the thrill of barely-comprehended Middle Welsh textbooks that I collect, or my piecings through Syriac or Classical Ethiopic. In the plain, businesslike world, where money must be earned, and family responsibilities attended to, perhaps ogam and Ogam and the old, precise things seem unimportant, but to the human soul at a deeper level such preoccupations can do us much good and provide us with profound entertainment. Readers of this little rag⁵ will know that we love to try and share this kind of thing with our readers.

So, what relevance can a handful of old stones have outside Breconshire, Pembrokeshire, and the southern half of Ireland? Well, many cultures have their old scripts, their strange alphabets: the Vai and Mende people of Liberia / Sierra Leone, for instance, with a many-character syllabery with several letters the same as that of Djuka, a Creole language of Suriname; the Yemeni artifacts of translucent stone, with a kind of Semitic runes inscribing their ancient Yemeni tongue; the cuneiform letters of Sumeria...

In Denmark, a great rock stuck in the ground, marked with some mysterious runic message:

Jylland mellem toende Have / Som en Runestav er lagt ...

"Jutland between the two oceans, where they laid down a runic stave..."⁶

We rely increasingly on the word of the experts, those who have transliterated before us, but for some of us there is a kind of satisfaction even in following unworthily in their steps, and letting the distant past speak to us directly, the chisel from a dead hand to the eye and fingers of today. ☞

⁵ This article was first published in *Troglydyte: a cultural magazine*, No XIII (2007) 23-29

⁶ H C Andersen, quoted and photographed in *Glæde over Danmark* (Lademann Forlagsaktieskab, København 1972)

Bloodlines

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Bloodlines and Boloney

Chris Lovegrove

In the late Victorian period uncertainty was rarely countenanced, if school 'readers' such as *A Simple History of England*, published in 1900, can be regarded as typical. In chapter 3 we read:

"Not long after the Romans left the country, the Picts and the Scots again invaded South Britain. The Britons, it is said, being unable to resist them, called in the aid of certain sea-faring tribes from the other side of the North Sea. These people gladly came; and they liked the country so well that they were fain to make it their own."

So they wrested from the Britons (or Welsh, as they called them), whom they had come to help, land on which they and their families might settle. These settlers were the founders of the English Nation. By-and-by there came other tribes of the same race ... and thus drove the Welsh into the north and the west of the country."¹

From a 21st-century perspective this is rather a quaint document. The language is epic, almost Biblical, with its archaic touches (a glossary was provided for less well-read youngsters), and there is a sense of antiquity ("after the Romans," for example, and "it is said") appearing to give sanction to a rather regrettable but necessary bit of ethnic cleansing for the founding of the English Nation. Quaint the language may be, but the likely human consequences are more chilling to modern sensibilities.²

In more recent times the ethnic cleansing scenario has been questioned by scholars, while simultaneously being accepted unquestioningly in popular belief and by far right groups. What is the truth of the matter? Can developments in science and technology throw light on the relationships between migrants and natives, or is Gildas the cleric's rant against the backsliding Britons of the 6th century justified as a true picture of the Dark Ages?

¹ Anon (1900) *A Simple History of England in Reading Lessons* (T Nelson and Sons) 14-15

² Dave Burnham "Arthur and the UK" *Pendragon XXXI No 2* (2003-4) 10-13

Bloodlines



THE LANDING OF THE ENGLISH.

History, archaeology and genetics

Historians by definition have to rely on written documentary evidence in order to provide a narrative for any given period. As far as Britain is concerned, there is precious little written history, continental or insular, from the century or so after the departure of the Romans. Other than inscriptions much of it survives in later copies, if it survives at all: we have chronicles not always written contemporaneously with the events they describe; narratives, panegyrics and sermons with an axe to grind; and black holes representing destruction and disappearance of who knows how many unknown documents.³ We have to be critical of all this evidence. Above all there is no such thing as impartial history – we all, whether as writers or readers, have an agenda of our own: think of Gildas and his audience.

Archaeology aims to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of the period, but we must not assume that it can always complement or even confirm documentary evidence. (In other words, we would be very surprised, even suspicious, if we ever unearthed a memorial stone which not only read "On this spot Arthur won the battle of Badon" but was also claimed to be contemporary with the event.) Like historical documents the chance survival of relevant dateable evidence, to be

³ S Ireland (1986) *Roman Britain: a sourcebook* (Routledge, 2nd edition 1996) chapter XIII

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discovered at an opportune moment, is rare in the extreme.

We now come to genetics, a burgeoning science (notably in the field of forensics) and one where developments come thick and fast, often superseding previous theories and techniques, and where the lay person treads at his or her peril. Can genetics provide a foolproof method of determining what actually happened in terms of the make-up of the post-Roman population of Britain?

Blood groups were first identified before the First World War and classified into A, B, AB and O, and since then others – RH (formerly Rh, for Rhesus), M and N, for example – have since been detected. At first the distribution of these various blood-groups seemed to be indicate different 'races': Race A (with blood group A) perhaps originating in north-west Europe and Race B (with group B) originating from somewhere in India. This, and similar theories as to racial differences, are now, a century later, known to be not only simplistic but erroneous.⁴

Much of the detailed work on blood-group distribution in the 20th century was done by Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza (born 1922). From the collection of vast amounts of data he further refined theories regarding genetics and the part they could play in identifying the origins of human populations. Cavalli-Sforza was careful to distinguish these from ideas of 'race': "the classification into [human] races has proved to be a futile exercise for reasons that were already clear to Darwin". He notes that "there is no doubt that there is only one human species" but that doesn't stop scientists from trying to split humans into groups; however, the level at which such classifications stop "is completely arbitrary" because "all populations or population clusters overlap when single genes are considered" (Cavalli-Sforza *et al* 19).

In other words, when we try to

⁴ L Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, Alberto Piazza (1994) *The History and Geography of Human Genes* (Princeton University Press; abridged edition 1996) 4; Bryan Sykes (2001) *The Seven Daughters of Eve* (Bantam Press) Chapter 3

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extrapolate conclusions from the particular (a human individual, for example) to the general (an apparently distinct population, conforming to stereotypes based on skin or hair colour, body types or facial traits) we find many variations which – combined with overlaps between population groups with those superficial stereotypes – together make nonsense of any concepts of distinct races. So, to speak of (say) the Celtic or the Teutonic races is a biological fiction.

Nevertheless, many ordinary people have a nagging feeling that there is an observable difference between the English, the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish, backed up of course by centuries of traditional antipathy, and look to genetics to confirm their beliefs.

Bloodlines

Bryan Sykes, Professor of Human Genetics at Oxford University, appears to have cornered the market – both intellectually and commercially – with his popular books and his company Oxford Ancestors, which offers to trace your genetic roots for a fee. He has done considerable work on analysing the ancestry of relatively stable populations by using mitochondrial DNA (for female ancestors) and Y-chromosomes (for male ancestors), not only world-wide but also in Europe and within the British Isles.

The Seven Daughters of Eve (2001) located the likely areas where what he calls maternal clans developed before going on to populate Europe after the last Ice Age. Using the alphabetic classification devised by Antonio Torroni as initials, Sykes' Oxford team identified seven 'matriarchs'. These he called Ursula (originating from around Greece), Xenia (east of the Black Sea), Helena (the Pyrenees), Velda (the Basque region), Tara (Tuscany) and Katrina (the Adriatic), all of whom lived before the retreat of the glaciers, with Jasmine from Anatolia the most recent (the only matriarch from the Neolithic period). All these women contributed significantly to the modern female population in Britain, with Helena dominating (around 50%), Jasmine, Katrina, Tara and Ursula following (around 10% each) and Velda and Xenia contributing under 5% each.

Sykes' conclusions are that British

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women (and men) can claim their matrilineal ancestors go back several thousand years. The genetic stories he uncovers "make nonsense of any biological basis for racial classifications... We are all a complete mixture; yet at the same time, we are all related" (Sykes 2001: 295).

In *Blood of the Isles* (2006) Sykes went on to show that maternal and paternal origins are different.⁵ While the maternal lines of most Britons can be traced back six millennia within the British Isles, paternal lines are more varied in date, some relatively recent, and demonstrate a very different history. Sykes identifies five dominant paternal 'clans' which he calls Oisin, Wodan, Sigurd, Eshu and Re. Oisin dominates, with around 90% of Irish males descended from this 'patriarch' (83% in Wales, 73% in Scotland and 64% in England). Sigurd descendants number nearly 10% in Scotland, indicating Norse Viking settlement. While Eshu and Re descendants are relatively small, Sykes detected a significant legacy from the Roman occupation in England (almost 4%), though not in the rest of Britain.

In Wales and Pictland evidence of a Wodan line are "echoes of the very first Mesolithic settlers", but in England a different Wodan signature is predominant in the Danelaw, traditionally settled by Danish Vikings. Sykes cannot discriminate easily between Early Saxon, Danish Viking and Norman origins for Wodan descendants in England as a whole, but between 10 and 20% of English males have this signature – "a real presence", he tells us, but "by no means completely overwhelming" (337).

"The roughly twofold excess of Saxon/Danish Y-chromosomes compared to their maternal counterparts hints at a partially male-driven settlement," he concludes, "with some elimination or displacement of the indigenous males." But before we concur with Gildas' fire-and-sword scenario, Sykes assures us that "the slaughter ... was not total": there must have been some measure of co-existence which we can only examine at a local level.

⁵ Bryan Sykes (2006) *Blood of the Isles* (Bantam; Corgi edition 2007) Chapter 18

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Models of change

Does archaeology support this narrative of mixed immigration, assimilation and continuity? Archaeologist David Miles looks at a number of factors – climate change, plague, settlements, artefacts, skeletal material and so on – and concludes that the picture is much more complex than at first might appear.⁶ The various models that he summarises are perhaps best viewed as a continuum. First, the *traditional model* of mass migration by Germanic invaders (maybe around a hundred thousand to a quarter of a million) who gradually swamped the native British and took over their land in the south and east is, as we have seen from the genetic evidence, very much incorrect (173). Next is the *dominant elite model* which suggests that the invaders perhaps numbered as few as ten to twenty-five thousand (176). Thirdly is the *minimalist elite model* where just a few leaders and their bands took control, there was otherwise no significant change in population, and the natives merely adapted new fashions in clothing, jewellery, language and religion; however, Miles points out that wholesale language change is "the strongest argument" against this model. Which model is the more likely?

In the past the evidence for cultural change (new artefacts, burial rites and buildings for example) have been taken as indicators of population change, but not any more, as the scientific evidence mounts up for large-scale population continuity. Skeletal evidence, along with DNA analysis, shows that north-western Europeans are physically and genetically very alike, while tooth analysis demonstrates greater differences between regions than between periods.

The scenario Miles himself paints is of a Britain with a declining population, from around three million in the Roman period to perhaps about half that in the 5th century. Perhaps Gildas was right to point to plague being endemic (though not necessarily because of sinful behaviour), but why else may the indigenous population of lowland Britain fall so drastically? As rising sea levels on the north-western European

⁶ David Miles (2005) *The Tribes of Britain* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; Phoenix 2006)

coast spurred Germanic migration, the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers seem to have occupied the productive agricultural land in what became England (177). The residual *Wealhish* (as the incomers called them) were sometimes enslaved, but at other times seem to have provided leaders recorded in later Saxon writings, if the Cerdic, Ceawlin and Cenwealh were as British as their names imply. Nevertheless, Miles suggests that at least two-thirds of the lowland population may have been of British descent at the end of this migration period – the mid-7th-century English expansion to the north and west represented military conquest by warlords, not wholesale population change.

So, in this crucial period following Roman withdrawal, the native population seems to have decreased, witnessed by the decline of towns, abandoned settlements and less intensive farming (more pastoral than agricultural) and continental incomers seem to have taken advantage of the vacuum created.

Identities

Sykes was at pains to point out that the genetic structure of the British Isles is "stubbornly" Celtic, "if by that we mean descent from people who were here before the Romans and who spoke a Celtic language" (2007: 338). This qualified distinction between genetics and linguistics is not always one that is carefully kept to when the term 'Celtic' is used. A recent article in *Meyn Mamvro* certainly acknowledges that the Channel 4 series and accompanying book *The Face of Britain* points out that "there was probably no such thing as a 'Celtic' nation or culture", and yet goes on to emphasise that the Cornish are descended from the "original" (ie 'Celtic') inhabitants of Britain.⁷ Further, the various invaders and immigrants of the last two millennia are pictured as occupiers failing to integrate with "the native Celtic people", while the "largely discounted" model of "Celtic dispersal"

⁷ Cheryl Straffon "How Celtic is Cornwall?" *Meyn Mamvro* 64 (2007) 23; see also Simon James (1999) *The Atlantic Celts: ancient people or modern invention?* (British Museum Press)

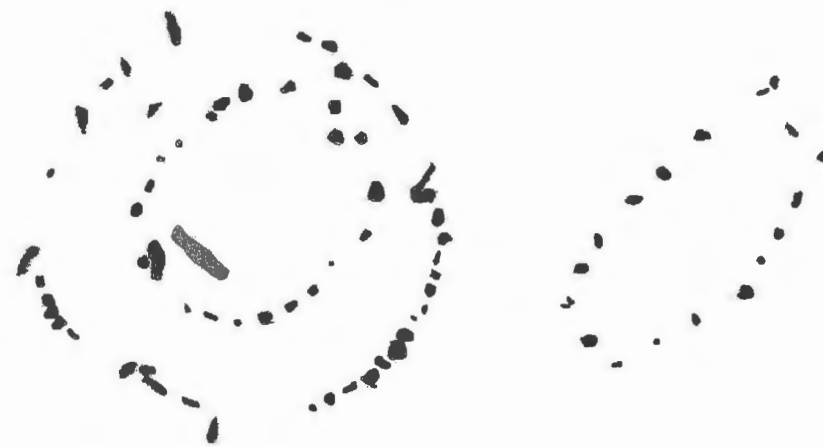
to the fringes has now been put "firmly back into place" by the (still ongoing) DNA research at Oxford University and by the Wellcome Trust. One could take issue with many of these statements, not least in that they might imply that later incomers are in some way illegitimate. However, Cheryl Straffon is certainly right in recognising that ethnic identity is an important and emotive issue involving genetics, language, local history and other aspects of culture (though not just in Cornwall of course).

Identity exists on personal, familial, communal, regional, national and political planes, with some planes overlapping. A sense of belonging is of course essential for the health of social animals such as humans. However, to reinforce that sense of identity stereotypes are often created, largely based on anecdotal evidence or 'common sense', more rarely on scientific data. Identities "inevitably ... lie in ideas about outsiders, strangers or 'others' of some sort or another", in other words defining yourself by what you are not;⁸ and in the absence of an external bogeyman (the English, for example) even an apparently unified nation such as Wales will find a scapegoat within itself to victimise.⁹

When it comes to establishing identity through bloodlines, we can go with a scientific method which is constantly expanding our borders with Uncertainty, testing hypotheses and refining models. Or we can go with more questionable ideas such as those that suggest that humans belong to separate races; and that because humanity is so manifestly divided into 'them' and 'us' (real-life Muggles and pure-bloods, say, or the descendants of Jesus and everybody else) it is therefore alright to demonise outsiders. Or worse. ¹⁰

⁸ Sharon Macdonald ed (1997) *Inside European Identities* (Berg) 22

⁹ Witness 'The Three Wales Model' dividing Wales into Y Fro Gymraeg (Welsh-speaking areas identifying with Cymru); Wenglish-speaking 'Welsh Wales' (Swansea and the Valleys); and 'British Wales' (English-speaking Pembrokeshire, South Glamorgan and the Marches) quoted in Fiona Bowie "Conflicting interpretations of Welsh identity" in Macdonald (1997: 184-88)



0 10m

Stonehenge bluestones (left) and Bedd Arthur (right), after Darvill, 2007. North is at the top.



Compiled by Chris Lovegrove

MERLIN AND ARTHUR'S GRAVE

Continuing research helps to underline the notion that Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of Merlin fetching stones from far to the west to the present site of Stonehenge may not be such a farfetched idea after all.¹ The theory that glaciers moved the 80 or so two-tonne bluestones from the area of present Pembrokeshire to Salisbury Plain is undermined by the fact that there are no known easterly glacial movements to account for it. They therefore must have been transported there by human agency.

Timothy Darvill believes that the positioning on Salisbury Plain of the

bluestones (which are comprised of dolerite, rhyolites, tuffs and ashy slates) corresponded to the volcanic outcrops around Carn Meini in the Preseli hills where his colleagues have located the specific quarry sites. At Stonehenge spotted dolerite stones make up the inner oval, while the outer oval has dolerite, rhyolite and tuff, a relationship that mirrors the outcrops on the Welsh site. "We can see a geological pattern translated from one context to another," says Darvill, arguing for a symbolic act in erecting a surrogate landscape.

The work by the Strumble-Preseli Ancient Communities and Environment Study (SPACES) has revealed a previously unknown landscape on the prehistoric Preselis of dolmens, barrows, circles, menhirs, enclosures, "modified" springs and rock art panels, related to the newly discovered quarries and existing monuments such as the nearby Bedd Arthur. This last ("Arthur's Grave") has a similar size, shape and orientation to the Stonehenge inner oval, so much so that "it is difficult to believe that they are not the work of the same people". We even know that there is every likelihood that some of the so-called Boscombe bowmen, found buried near Stonehenge, came from an area with a high radiogenic background such as West

¹ Christopher Catling "Message in the Stones" *Current Archaeology* 212 (November 2007) 12-19; N P Figgis (2001) *Prehistoric Preseli: a field guide* (Atelier Productions); "Who built Stonehenge?" in *Pendragon XXXII* No 1, 12

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Wales, at almost exactly the same time as the bluestones were set up, around 2600 BC, well over four and a half thousand years ago.

Tim Darvill goes along with the theory that Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th-century *Historia*

"might just reflect some faint folk memory in his assertion that Stonehenge was brought from a land far to the west by Merlin the magician, and that the stones were regarded as having healing powers".

Many Carn Meini springs, artificially "elaborated" in prehistoric times, have had healing lore attached to them locally. This may suggest that the stones brought to Stonehenge were regarded as having curative properties. We know, for example, that two Neolithic burials from near Stonehenge had trepanned skulls, and that the so-called Amesbury Archer had a bone infection because of an injured knee. All this is speculation, of course, but speculation based on the new archaeological evidence being produced by a planned long-term research programme (including excavation of one of the Stonehenge bluestones, to be filmed for an autumn *Timewatch* programme on BBC television).² ☾

MAPPING A ROMAN TOWN

Nearly 80 years ago, in July 1928, aerial photographs (taken in high summer by an RAF aircraft) of the site of the old Roman town at Caistor St Edmund in Norfolk "caused a sensation" when published in *The Times* a year later. Now new technology looks set to do the same for the 21st century: a high-resolution geophysical survey, using a Caesium Vapour magnetometer, has extended our knowledge of the market town of the Iceni, *Venta Icenorum*.³

The survey confirms the known street plan, but also shows the water supply

² "VIPs only at Stonehenge" *Current Archaeology* 217 (2008) 10

³ "Stunning survey unveils new secrets of Caistor Roman town" University of Nottingham Media and Public Relations Office press release December 13 2007; Dalya Alberge "The thriving Roman town that slipped into oblivion" *Times* December 13 2007; www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/venta

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system, the baths, temples, forum and possibly a theatre, "a significant indicator of the town's status" as the most important Roman site in northern East Anglia. But instead of confirming that the town was a densely occupied urban area, many areas within the street grid "seem to have been empty and were perhaps used for grazing or cultivation".

Earlier Iron Age buildings underlay the town, but as usual the ending of the Roman occupation is shrouded in mystery. The survey does show a large ditched enclosure cutting the surface of a Roman street in the north-west corner of the site, with possible internal structures. Two previously known early Saxon cemeteries in the vicinity, and the discovery of Middle Saxon coins, may point to some continued urban life until the 9th century.

However, the foundation in the medieval period of Norwich, to its immediate north, meant the site then lay abandoned until *The Times* published the exciting aerial photos. The subsequent poorly-conducted excavations remained unpublished by the excavator after 1935, so the results of the currently planned investigations (principally by the University of Nottingham) will be eagerly anticipated. The scheduled ancient monument is owned by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and managed by the South Norfolk Council which together with the British Academy and other organisations sponsors the Caistor Roman Town Project. ☾

LONDINIUM'S LAST ROMAN

Excavations to the north of St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square, London, have revealed what's reported as both the latest Roman and the earliest Anglo-Saxon evidence found in the capital so far.⁴

Most Roman evidence has come from the site of *Londinium*, east of the river Fleet and incorporating modern St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London. Most Saxon occupation, on the other hand, has surfaced to the west, stretching from the Strand and Covent Garden to Trafalgar Square, and identified as *Lundenwic* (the *vicus* or civilian

⁴ "London's last Roman?" *Current Archaeology* 213 (December 2007) 35-39

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settlement outside the original fort of Londinium). The new material at St Martin's suggests that Roman settlement spread further than expected, as well as providing evidence for continuity in what used to be called the Lost Centuries.

A sarcophagus made of Lincolnshire limestone contained the remains of a middle-aged man, radiocarbon-dated around 390-430. A Roman of substance, he had joint disease in his back and ribs which had healed after they had been broken. Possibly a nearby tile-making kiln provided materials for a villa, or even a church.

Intriguingly, other finds helped to show that occupation may have been continuous on the site. A hand-thrown pot, in the Continental Anglo-Saxon style, was dated to around 500, the earliest such find in central London. This was followed by grave-goods of some quality from the mid-7th century, including a Kentish-style Anglo-Saxon glass pendant with a twisted-cable border of gold, an undamaged glass "palm cup" and amethyst beads. A copper hanging-bowl with enamelled Celtic designs on the fittings had been buried at the foot of what may have been a woman, along with some hazelnuts, seen as symbolic of rebirth.

Archaeologists are now busy re-examining their models of Roman London and its aftermath, looking at the possibility that first millennium London was full of centres of different activities, whether political, commercial, residential or ecclesiastical, that included old Londinium, *Lundenwic* and, of course, Southwark, south of the river Thames. ☾

THE FALL OF ROMAN BATH

What happened to the baths temple at *Aquae Sulis* when the Romans departed? Research by James Gerrard (reported in *The Antiquaries Journal* 87 for 2007) re-interprets the results of the famous excavations of 1978-1983 undertaken by Peter Davenport and Barry Cunliffe.⁵ Using the relative chronology established by Davenport and Cunliffe

⁵ James Gerrard "The End of Roman Bath" *Current Archaeology* 217 (April 2008) 24-31

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together with the absolute chronology provided by new radiocarbon dating, Gerrard establishes the following sequence of events (all dates approximate):

300 Final sophisticated Roman re-surfacing of Sulis Minerva temple precinct

350 Patching followed by rough re-paving; "great altar" demolished; more rough re-pavings

410-30 Temple partly collapses

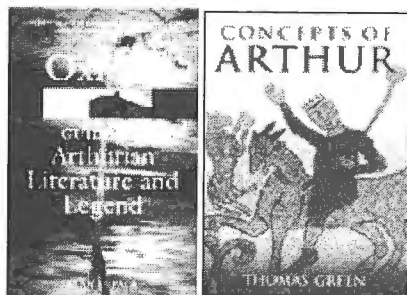
450-500 Temple demolished; 'Celtic' penannular brooch (450-550) deposited in sacred spring

Citing contemporary refurbishment of forts such as South Cadbury as an example, Gerrard believes that in the later 5th century leaders of the local community "mobilised the resources and labour necessary to remove a major set of structures from the ancient Roman townscape". Why such expenditure of effort? Gildas provides a motivation - "Writing in the early 6th century, he rages against British kings for their sins: they were murderers and usurpers. But no once does he call them 'pagans'. This contrasts with the 4th century situation, where pagans and Christians seem to have co-existed peacefully."

So, it may have been Christians who demolished the temple ruins as a symbol of their "successful struggle for political, economic and religious supremacy". The final nail in the coffin of paganism was the founding of the precursor of Bath Abbey in the late 7th century by the Frankish nun Bertana. Perhaps whoever deposited that brooch in the spring was one of the last pagan adherents. ☾



Gorgon's head, pediment of Bath temple CL



Alan Lupack is Director of the Robbins Library and Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Rochester, New York. He declares himself "interested in all aspects of the Arthurian legends, from their medieval origins to their modern manifestations in literature and culture, including the ways in which the legends have been adapted in America, their appearances in and influences on popular culture, and the development of Arthurian traditions". This makes him an ideal author for *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, which was first published in hardback by Oxford University Press in 2005 (and may still be available, around £50.00). Now it comes in a handy paperback edition at a popular price (OUP 510pp 978 0 1992 1509 6 £11.99); look out for a review in these pages soon.

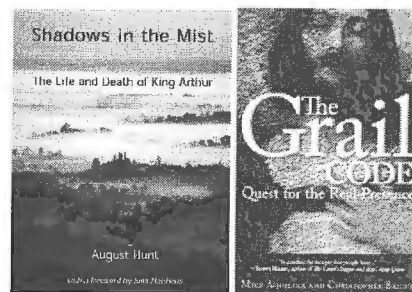
Tom Green has been long admired for his website on Arthurian resources, which has recently transmogrified into arthuriana.co.uk.¹ As Thomas Green he has recently produced *Concepts of Arthur: Early Arthurian Tradition and the Origins of the Legend*, published by Tempus in January 2008 (288pp 978 0 7524 4461 1). This, we are told, is "a detailed study of the ultimate origins of Arthur and the nature and development of the early Arthurian legend, presenting a comprehensive overview of recent scholarship, including the author's own academic research into the primary

¹ Not to be confused with the journal of the North American Branch of the International Arthurian society at arthuriana.com

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sources of the early Arthurian tradition". In other words, this is another authoritative tome for those looking for the "real" Arthur, and will be reviewed here soon.

In addition, another study of the origins of Arthur has appeared recently, also to be reviewed here in due course. This is August Hunt's *Shadows in the Mist: the life and death of King Arthur* (Hayloft paperback 2006 172pp 1 904524 38 9 £17.00), which sets out to find Arthur by locating the twelve battles attributed to him in the *Historia Brittonum*. This is not a new approach to the Arthurian question, but what distinguishes *Shadows in the Mist* is the author's use of recent scholarship (he is a member of the North American Branch of the International Arthurian Society, and graduated in 1985 with a degree in Celtic and Germanic Studies).



Saints in the Landscape, by Graham Jones (Tempus PB 978 0 7524 4108 5 £17.99), shows how the history of communities was bound up with patron saints, with even the most popular cults displaying geographical patterns. Case studies reveal how patrons' choices of church dedications heightened communities' sense of themselves, their environment and their agrarian calendar. Dr Jones was involved in the Pendragon dig at Llanelen in the 1970s and early 80s, which led him from papers in the journal *Landscape History* in 1986 to a thriving career in academia studying the cult of saints.

Taking a different approach is "alternative historian" Graham Russell, who believes that ancient civilisations liked to recreate heaven on earth and so replicated the patterns of the stars within

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the landscape. (Sceptics will however point out that star patterns change significantly over time.) In *Landscape Giants* (Mélrose Books PB 978-1-906050-12-2 £17.99) Russell introduces readers to hill drawings, pyramid mountains and terrestrial zodiacs.

Mike Aquilina is author of a dozen books on Christian history, doctrine, and Catholic devotion while Christopher Bailey has worked as a writer, editor, translator, and researcher for more than 15 years, spending many years in close study and translation of the Arthurian texts. From their background (and their publisher) you can divine the particular viewpoint they will take on grail matters. Their recent book, they say, is "a literary and theological detective story, a mystery story that ends where the Grail legends began – in the room where Jesus gathered his closest friends for the last time, spoke blessed words, broke bread, and shared a sacred cup." *The Grail Code: Quest for the Real Presence* (Loyola Press PB 241pp 978 0829421590 \$15.95) was published back in 2006, and is also available in French, Portuguese, Italian, German and Croatian as well as in English; more details can be had at <http://www.grailcode.com/about/>

John Shimmin's book, *The Manx Grail Chronicles: Mystery of the Templar Treasure*, incorporates a storyline inspired by a true 1868 murder (or was it suicide?) that occurred on the Isle of Man. Although the storyline is said to be a "marvelous read on its own merits", the real tale is claimed as a "unique interpretation of Arthurian mythology, the Knights Templar, and the Grail quest".

The story leads the main character, Robert Corkish, across the island in a thrilling search for Templar treasure. Not only will all the enchanting locations on the Isle of Man become old friends by the end of the book, but the clues leading to the treasure encompass deciphering evidence that point directly to the Knights of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. In the end, the characters in the story come together to form a unique coalition of heroes and heroines to form a new Order of knights dedicated to protecting the treasure.

Although the book is fiction, John Shimmin tells us he has tried to incorporate the principles and history

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of the Knights Templar and the traditions behind Arthurian legend, Druid ritual and medieval tampering of the literature. You can order the book at amazon.com and if you have any comments or questions (or if you prefer an e-book rather than a hard copy) you can email the author at jshimmin@manxgrail.com (more details are at www.manxgrail.com or see John Shimmin's homepage at www.mystery-of-the-knights-templar-treasure.com).

Boydell Press have now published *Edward III's Round Table at Windsor* (reviewed XXXIV No 4) in paperback (312pp 978 1843833918), no doubt to coincide with the Time Team TV special. At £14.99, less than half the hardback price, this study by Julian Munby, Richard Barber and Richard Brown is very good value and should be on the shelf of every Arthurian.

Also recently published is *Malory's Library: the Sources of the Morte Darthur* by Ralph Norris of Kennesaw State University. Described as the first book-length study of Malory's sources since 1921 and the first comprehensive study since Vinaver's three-volume edition, *Malory's Library* collects together one hundred years of scholarship and provides new discussions of the major sources of the standard eight tales, plus, for the first time, possible minor sources. "It shows that Malory carried an eclectic body of literature in his mind and worked at least partly from memory; and it illuminates his interest in characters of his own social class, the breadth of his enthusiasm for Arthurian literature, and the depth of his commitment to provide his countrymen with 'the hoole booke of kyng Arthur and of his noble knyghtes of the Round Table'." *Malory's Library* (£45.00 HB 200pp 978 18438415 4 8) is published by D S Brewer in their valuable Arthurian Studies series.²

² As a footnote to the review of the Malory radio programme last issue and the discussion of Old King Cole and Colchester, it may not be widely known that Malory spent a brief part of his time in prison at Colchester Castle in October 1454, from which we are told he made a dramatic escape. See Peter Berridge and Tom Hodgson (1997) *Colchester Castle*

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Jonathan Clements' *Marco Polo* (Haus PB 176pp 978 1 905791 05 7 £9.99) does more than ask whether the famous Venetian actually travelled to China in the 13th century (answer: he did) and examines the account supposedly detailing the evidence. *The Travels* (more properly *A Description of the World*) were originally dictated to one Rustichello da Pisa when Polo was languishing in a Genoan prison. Rustichello was best known as the author of the *Roman de Roi Artus*³ which was later included with the *Romance of Palamedes* (a prose account of Arthur's Saracen knight Palamedes), along with a history of the Round Table. Clements – himself a noted expert on Chinese and Japanese culture – makes it clear that, in the words of a reviewer, Rustichello "contributed the special-effects nonsense" and the editing that gave the *Travels* a narrative drive and, one gathers, a more marketable quality.⁴

Valerio Massimo Manfredi is a modern Italian historian, archaeologist (currently Professor of Archaeology in Milan University), journalist and novelist, married to Christine Feddersen Manfredi, who translates his writings from Italian to English. *The Last Legion* was first published as a hardback in English by Macmillan, then in paperback in Pan Books in 2003 (978 0330489751) and subsequently as an audio-cassette and later CD (both Macmillan). Its transference to the big screen in 2007 has resulted in film-related re-issues. "Loosely inspired" (thus *Wikipedia*) by 5th-century events, particularly the fall of the Western Roman Empire under the young Romulus Augustus, the novel also brings in elements of the Arthurian legend to account for details such as dramatic personae and the sword Excalibur. Anachronisms abound, especially in the

Museum (Colchester County Council and Jarrold Publishing) 24

³ The *Roman de Roi Artus* was alternatively titled the *Compilation*, based on a book belonging to Edward I of England, at whose court Rustichello apparently served for many years

⁴ Donald L. Hoffman "Rustichello da Pisa" in Lacy ed (1996) *The New Arthurian Encyclopaedia* (Garland); Vera Rule review *Guardian Saturday Review* September 1 2007

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film, but of course that's the prerogative of fiction writers.

Finally, in Ian Rankin's "Reader Beware" review of Tony Tanner's volume of critical essays *City of Words* (particularly referring to the "Entropy in Fiction" chapter about Thomas Pynchon) Rankin said of his own Rebus whodunits that they are "indebted to the grail myth, something Chandler made clear within the first few pages of *The Big Sleep*."⁵

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd



Reviews

Books

Simon Cox and Mark Oxbrow
A-Z of King Arthur and the Holy Grail
Mainstream 2007 £12.99
978 1 84596 075 9 HB

This A to Z (part of a series) probably represents a further opportunity to cash in on the interest generated by Dan Brown (Simon Cox also wrote *Cracking The Da Vinci Code*). It's a collection of 55 brief and self-contained essays covering all the principal names, places and themes, plus a few extras such as the Nazi Grail Quest and the role of the Sacred Feminine in the legends.

As an historical figure Arthur is barely touched upon. With the odd exception the authors concentrate throughout on the character's literary development. Citing the major romancers in the 12th-century canon of Arthurian literature, they provide a brief but useful list of milestones including Chrétien de Troyes' first introduction of a grail and Robert de Boron's linking it to the Crucifixion story, thereby adding the Christian dimension. There's a brief synopsis of Malory's compilation of the earlier material, *Le Morte D'Arthur* (published in 1485), here described as the "standard narrative".

Inevitably, Brown's *Da Vinci Code* gets

⁵ *Guardian Saturday Review* November 18 2006

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a mention, but this leads to a well-balanced discussion on the pros and cons of the theory of Mary Magdalene as vessel of the sang real. Pythonic humour infiltrates a useful differentiation between the Sword in the Stone, and Excalibur, gift of one of the Ladies of the Lake. Serious light is thrown on this confusing array of "strange women lyin' in ponds", but none is described as a *watery tart*. There are plenty of signposts to further reading within the text, and an endearing tendency to fly off at tangents.

Frustratingly the 'See Also' suggestions at the end of each essay point only to other essays; they are no substitute for an index. Nevertheless this is an enjoyable read, in bite-size portions. Cox and Oxbrow have produced an extremely wide-ranging overview of this complex and multi-layered subject which should whet the appetite of those new to Arthurian literature and refresh the palette of those more accustomed to drier fare.

Maura Whitehead⁶

Tim Malim
Stonea and the Roman Fens
Tempus 2005 £19.99
0 7524 2899 3 PB

This massive, and massively illustrated, publication extends well beyond the time frame of its title, contextualising the period when the East Anglian Fens were an imperial estate, a source of salt and sheep meat, and a route through which grain from East Anglia travelled via the immense Roman engineering feat of the Car Dyke canal to the garrisons of Lincoln and on to York, within earlier and later periods.

The human story of the site on which it centres – the then island, in the now drained waterscape, of Stonea, in north Cambridgeshire – is traced, using the uncharacteristically thorough archaeological record, from its earliest role as Neolithic sacred site, via Bronze Age settlement, through its time as Iron Age frontier fort of Boudicca's people (which also served as burial place within a sacred grove) to becoming a small Roman town. That town in turn had its

⁶ First published in *Northern Earth* 111 (Autumn 2007) 31-2; see also Old News

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centre dominated by a Roman structure unique outside Italy, ie a tower, probably of four storeys, which presumably served as an administrative centre for the imperial Fenland estates as well as perhaps also a temple to the Empire's taming of the local Iceni's ferocious Andraeste, Goddess of War, into Minerva. This structure would have been, the author points out, visible as a symbol for many miles across the flatlands, just as Ely Cathedral is today.

But Malim doesn't end his story of Stonea specifically (or of the Fens generally) with the departure of the legions in 410. He demonstrates how, there, high-status Anglo-Saxon hall structures arose near the site of the former Roman administrative buildings, in effect marking a takeover of control, all the while the Romano-British settlement continued for a time just nearby, fascinating evidence of continuity.

And, to further demonstrate why this book would, I think, be of real interest to many Arthurians, he adduces a whole series of such unbroken locational continuities: examples, for instance, of pagan temples, obsolete after the Empire became officially Christian, then re-used for Anglo-Saxon burials. He shows, too, how other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are found to follow a pattern, clearly too frequent to be coincidental, of location around Roman towns and villas, and at strategic points along such Roman routes as the Fen Causeway, and the Aldreth Way onto the Isle of Ely, as well as the Street Way, implying that these stem from deliberate settling of *federati* to provide units of defence at points of economic or military importance. Perhaps, he suggests, this occurred when Magnus Maximus, about to strip Britain of most of its regular troops to back his bid to control Gaul and the Western Empire more generally, was making the best arrangements he could to defend the province he was leaving to undertake his Continental power-grab. The relevant instances Malim cites are many: to take just two examples, along that gateway river, the Nene, Anglo-Saxon burials of such early date occur within the hitherto abandoned but still defensible fort at Langthorpe, which controlled an important crossing, for example; or,

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perhaps most strikingly, adjacent to the former palace complex at Caistor, which Malim speculates had been, given its focal location, a major command HQ, perhaps even for the Count of the Saxon Shore, as well as being very close to *Durobrivae* (Chesterton), Roman Britain's main industrial centre. That was, among other products, home to a mass production pottery industry, which used the local clay (still exploited today, albeit latterly for brick-making).

Also of Arthurian interest, as bearing on the vexed questions of how swift, how total, and how thoroughly "ethnic cleansing" in its effect was the Anglo-Saxon takeover of lowland Britain, are his noting of Wal- and Corn- prefixes in village names in the Fens, eg around Wisbech, indicative of a surviving presence of Welsh *aka* Cymry, ie Britons, well into Anglo-Saxon times, reinforced by the accounts he quotes from Felix's *Vita* of Welsh-speaking demons tormenting St Guthlac during his hermit life on Crowland isle in Fenland.

Relevant, likewise, to "our" period is Malim's analysis of the origins of the great North-South earthwork barriers like the Devil's Dyke slicing across Fenland long-distance routeways. Noting that the defensive ditches are on the West side of the rampart in each case, ie protecting those to the East of them, he explains their origin as a 5th-century defence for Anglo-Saxon settlers against a powerful, potentially aggressive, even reconquest-minded, British ruler still retaining the Chilterns and areas further North into Fenland. Although he names no candidate for the role, one perhaps springs to mind?

Steve Sneyd

Philip Reeve
Here Lies Arthur

Scholastic 2007 £12.99
978 0 439 95533 1 HB 289pp

My expectations for a fictional Arthur-type character are rather specific. I don't rate at all highly any back-projection of Malory, Tennyson or even Geoffrey of Monmouth into a sub-Roman context, with medieval concepts of round tables, grails and swords in stones appearing anachronistically in Late Antiquity. And so my heart sank when I began reading a scenario involving a Lady in a Lake in

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this children's book.

But, dedicated Arthurian that I am, I persisted, and am very glad to have done so. For the essence of every good storyteller – and Philip Reeve is one of these – includes the gift of using such motifs sensitively. What we have here is a tale within a tale, where Reeve weaves a story of how Myrddin embroiders narratives around the exploits of a minor warlord, so that we almost believe that this was the way the Arthurian legends came about: with pagan mythology and imagination hijacked by a bard to boost the reputation of a barbarian chieftain.

In a note the author reminds us that this isn't a historical novel, nor did he set out to portray "the real King Arthur". His geography is deliberately kept vague, set somewhere in the West Country, with Bath particularly identifiable. Many of the characters, including the cross-dressing narrator, have Brythonic-sounding names though these don't all aim to be accurate transcriptions. Still, the feel of both the times and the circumstances is magically conjured up, making this, for me, one of the better evocations of Arthurian Britain.

My previous experience of Philip Reeve was with his gripping *Mortal Engines* fantasy quartet for young readers; *Here Lies Arthur*, which is now available as a 304-page paperback (978 1407103587) at £6.99, is an unexpected but welcome departure for the author – inspired, he tells us, by John Boorman's *Excalibur* when only 15.

Chris Lovegrove

Garth Nix
Across the Wall: a Tale of the Abhorsen and Other Stories
Harper Collins 2007 £6.99
978-0-00-722146-2 PB 352pp

There can't be many children's fantasy authors who have remained untouched by the Arthurian legend: John Masefield, Alan Garner, Ursula LeGuin (she shows this awareness in her introduction to her recent *Tales from Earthsea*), Diana Wynne Jones and Philip Reeve are all writers who spring to mind as acknowledging the huge influence of the Matter of Britain. The Australian author Garth Nix is another who makes his debt clear.

Nix (and yes, that's his real name) is best known for his sequence of

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outstanding novels entitled *Sabriel*, *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*, all set in the Old Kingdom across the Wall from Ancelestierre. These are deliberately reminiscent of Scotland, Hadrian's Wall and the North of England respectively, but there any resemblance ends, for these are tales of magic – Free Magic, Charter Magic, prophetic sight and the constant war with the Dead. *Across the Wall* does include a novella related to these worlds, but the other twelve stories take different directions. Here I want to just mention two of them.

Nix confesses that he "doesn't like the Arthurian mythos", believing that "there are already too many stories and books that have mined the canon", re-using the same stories "with little or no variation of character, plot, theme or imagery". So when he does give in to requests to write Arthuriana we can and do expect something approaching a tangent.

"Under the Lake" and "Heart's Desire" don't disappoint, taking an obtuse look at the Lady of the Lake and at Merlin's infatuation with Nimue. Nix focuses on character motivation, so that the clichéd tales become reformed, shining with a strange familiarity while retaining a semblance of their traditional shapes. Worth reading for these two tales alone, *Across the Wall* might well encourage you to search out his other electrifying novels if you haven't yet come across them.

Chris Lovegrove

Phil Emery
Sirens
2006 PB 37pp
NAWE conference souvenir edition
Order from the author: 21 Ferndown Drive, Clayton, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 4RP
£1.55 (cheques payable "P Emery")

In an introduction the author tells us that *Sirens* was originally written as a radio drama, then adapted for the stage (though sadly never performed) before being re-adapted as this short story (where "words for the eye are sometimes different from words for the mouth"). This final version retains what one must assume is the same intensity of the previous incarnations, told in the present tense part as dramatic monologue, part as dialogue with linking narration.

Adam, a writer on the paranormal, finds himself parked near a Cornish cliff in summer while in search of ideal

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conditions to work on his new book, *Arthurian Cornwall: an exploration of the King Arthur legend in the south-west*. But in the haunting atmosphere of the place he starts to be haunted by a ghostly figure in a nearby cove. As August blends into September he neglects his work and turns to drink. Rescued from his bingeing by Samantha, a New Yorker who's been dumped by her boyfriend, he eventually finds that he is partly able to come to terms with his feelings of *ennui* by rationalising his ghostly encounter as a kind of siren who drains her victim of emotions, replacing hope with despair. Are Adam and Samantha fated to individually follow the archetype of doomed lovers, to never have their affection requited? Or to be part of a tragic love triangle, much as "Arthur and Guenever and Lancelot, Mark and Tristan and the two Ysoldes ... Gawain and Lord and Lady Bertilak"?

Myth generally – and the Arthurian legend particularly – underpins this tale of unease and obsession whose lasting images, set in a bleak and almost alien landscape, haunt the imagination just as much as the presumed mermaid enthrals Adam. The author, who is Creative Writing Tutor at Keele University, has produced a claustrophobic tale that begs to be returned to its dramatic roots.

Chris Lovegrove

Radio
In Our Time: The Fisher King
BBC Radio 4, January 17 2008

The Fisher King was the subject of Melvyn Bragg's *In Our Time* on Radio 4 recently. As a general point, guest experts Stephen Knight, a Cardiff University professor, Juliet Wood, also of Cardiff University and an officer of the Folklore Society, and Caroline Lavington of Oxford University, seemed a little too ready to allow themselves to be dominated / agenda-ed by his preconceived picture, which left limited scope for the genuine discussion and clash of interpretations that can make *In Our Time* so lively at its best. However, "points to ponder" were made.

The programme began with straightforward summary coverage of the various medieval Grail versions / continuations etc. One of the few interestingly fresh-seeming points made

in this section was the suggestion that the reason the Fisher King was catching fish was to eat them in memory of the Last Supper. It was also suggested that Wolfram's Fisher King Anfortas was wounded in the genitals to punish him for prideful chasing of women; also the point was made that here the lance which wounded him, and hence touch of which, was only thing could relieve his pain – that folkloric trope that only what did the harm can ease it – was *not* the lance of Longinus. They noted that Malory marginalised the Fisher King, without theorising as to why he had done so: there had earlier been a suggestion that the Grail story's initial popularity was as a consoling alternative quest to replace Crusading, discredited when control of the Holy Land was clearly no longer sustainable, but no attempt to explain its loss of role.

There was brief comment on the originality of the way that Christianity was present in the Grail stories, *ie* that in them faith was not inconsistent with "the full physical life", a liberating concept for the knightly class. (None of the panel, however, picked up on how this contradicted the earlier remarks about Anfortas' wound-as-punishment in Wolfram). In particular, that Gournemant's avuncular advice to Perceval to keep silent – leading to his failure to ask the vital question about the Grail – is, by implication, a source of error, could be read as a veiled, even heretical, dig at the Church's demands for self-control (and, though this wasn't said, by extrapolation at monastic rules of silence).

There was a brief look at how, with a return of interest in the 19th century, a search for Celtic origins / parallels began, and how this trend could be traced partly to seeking "utopian primitive wholeness" (presumably meaning that the pre-wasteland state of the Grail kingdom was seen as representing an unspoiled golden age), partly to a desire for the Matter of Britain to represent a non-classical alternative heritage, the latter aim in turn perhaps influenced by the way then-new Darwinism had undermined "classical certainties" and led to "a quest for validating their own present". They then covered developments from this search – Frazer,

Weston *etc* – and creative use (and non-use, *inter alia* amusingly that "Tennyson didn't like the Grail much ... thought Galahad was too like Cardinal Newman"!)) including Wagner, that T S Eliot in his use of the Wasteland "reflected the shattered landscape of World War I", and that, while the Fisher King was overtly present in T S Eliot's poem, "Perceval was remarkably absent".

After touching on use of the Fisher King by modern novelists – by Anthony Powell as a wounded war hero, and by David Lodge, making identification clear in the character name Professor Arthur Kingfisher in *The Small World* – the final point was that the story's modern appeal to the popular contemporary search for self-healing / personal wholeness lies in it being generally a "feel-good" one, Stephen Knight making the considerable claim that "Wolfram's *Parzival* has the happiest ending in medieval literature".

Steve Sneyd

CS 80



Miracle of tactics

warrior says of
God not man wields cudgel but
for peace will pay king's
fine red and white cattle here
come down just rust-dull bracken
heaps laughter in wind
a sidestep out of losing
face to say see joke

Steve Sneyd

The board

Arthuriana in the arts and popular culture



The death was announced of **Richard Leigh**, co-author of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, on November 21 2007.¹ Born in New Jersey in August 1943, he eventually gained a PhD from Stony Brook University, New York, intending his chief commitment to be to literary fiction. In his early thirties he moved to Britain to pursue his career as a writer: "I never felt particularly American," he said in an interview, "despite being born and bred there. My father was British, my mother Viennese, and I came to London in 1974 simply because I had become disgusted with America – for a variety of reasons."²

In Britain he met **Michael Baigent**, who was researching the Rennes-le-Château myth. The New Zealander had gained a degree in psychology before travelling and dabbling in photography, ancient Bolivian ruins and the Knights Templar. "Of the three authors who co-wrote the pseudo-historical masterpiece *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, Michael Baigent may be considered as being the main one who contributed the most towards the 'Jesus-Bloodline' theory," writes Paul Smith, adding that Baigent's obsession with the Jewish Line of David was evident from his contributions to the satellite documentary *Investigating History: The Holy Grail*.³

Incidentally, Smith suggests that Baigent's involvement in the grail-bloodline theory seems to have begun during the late 1970s as a researcher for the BBC2 Chronicle documentary *In the Shadow of the Templars*.⁴ Producer Roy Davies (writes Smith) "categorically rejected" Baigent's proposed "solution" to the activities of Abbé Bérenger Saunière, as these involved the survival of the Old Testament David's bloodline in the Rennes-le-Château region. Between the late 1970s and 1982 "Baigent took his theory 'on the road' giving Talks and Lectures in various locations". On January 31 1981 he addressed a meeting of the Pendragon Society (of which, Smith points out, he was once a member) at an AGM held in Bristol University. "Even then Baigent's theories were not taken seriously," Smith adds, for "it was suggested by several people who listened to his various claims that because he had a Degree in Psychology he was pursuing some sort of *social experiment*".⁵

With Baigent researching and Leigh writing (and, in the case of two other books, with the pair collaborating with **Henry Lincoln**) a series of "non-fiction" titles were produced, contributing to the genre that is sometimes affectionately known to aficionados as "alternative" or "speculative history" (and to orthodoxy politely as New Age, or less politely as lunatic fringe). Any opposition, or even studied ignoring, could and did fuel conspiracy theories among those looking for mysteries and cover-ups. However, the writing of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* was largely "onerous" to Leigh, with several sections in which "I was simply going through the motions." He confessed that "in many ways, I've spent more than 25 years writing books I never wanted to write."

"Over the years," Baigent said, "I'd say that Richard has become my closest friend, even though we very rarely see each other." They were more in contact during their prolonged court battle over *The Da Vinci Code*, which together with their unsuccessful appeal left them with around £3m in legal fees (Lincoln chose not to be involved).

¹ Marcus Williamson "Richard Leigh: *Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* author" *Independent* November 29 2007

² Richard Leigh & Michael Baigent "How we met" *Independent* December 16 2006

³ History Channel April 26 2004

⁴ First broadcast November 27 1979

⁵ Paul Smith "Michael Baigent Profile and his book *The Jesus Papers* reviewed" <http://priory-of-sion.com/posd/baigent.html>

In the meantime Leigh turned back to literary fiction, in particular poetic myth. *Erceldoune & Other Stories* (2006) includes an essay "Mythic Logic" with the short story "Druidess" and two novellas "Erceldoune" and "Oisín Society" all set against the background of the Northern Ireland Troubles. "Erceldoune" focuses on West Virginian Rafe Erlston's visit to the Belfast countryside and his "kind of black version of Thomas the Rhymer's visit to the land of Faery" (as long-time self-confessed 'groupie' Philip Jones notes in an internet review). His other published work, *Grey Magic* (2007) is semi-autobiographical, focusing on an American leaving for Britain in his early thirties. Marcus Williamson gives a couple of examples of his humour: dedications in his books to a mythical Occitan poet, Jehan l'Ascuiz, and his stated membership of the Vancouver Foundation for Lycanthropic Children, understandable when you see press photos of the hirsute writer during the trial. *cs*



NAME GAMES

When Dr John Sentamu the Archbishop of York made his "historic" visit to Pope Benedict XVI in January 2008 he reportedly delivered "quintessentially Yorkshire gifts" to the Pontiff in the Vatican. These included a cut-glass beer tankard and a bottle of Black Sheep Brewery Holy Grail beer, all chosen, he said, to reflect Benedict's "appreciation of Bavarian beer". This allowed local York paper *The Press* to announce "the moment the world was waiting for – the Holy Grail being hand-delivered to the Pope". According to the brewery itself, the 4.7% strength Holy Grail Bitter was specially commissioned to commemorate the 30th anniversary of *Monty Python & the Holy Grail*: "it has a distinctive taste with plenty of fruity hops, and is full flavoured with a dry and refreshing bitterness." Black Sheep's managing director said however, "We don't imagine that His Holiness will be swapping holy water for Holy Grail just yet."⁶

A Pembrokeshire-based dance group was looking for special black linoleum by March 2008. Baubo Belly Dance is run by Guinevere Clark, and needs the lino to cover the stage at, appropriately, the *Merlin Theatre* in Haverfordwest, for a show featuring visiting international belly dance stars. Guinevere appears to be the same Guinevere Clark who writes poetry, such as her collection *Fresh Fruit*

⁶ Gavin Aitchison "Archbishop delivers 'Holy Grail' to Pope" *The Press* January 29 2008; Richard Catton "Pope discovers Holy Grail" *Ripon Gazette* February 1 2008

& Screams, published by Bluechrome at £7.99, described as "vivid" and "seriously impressive".⁷

Joseph Biddulph draws attention to the arms of Sir Bors ("of the Table Round") found in Herefordshire when describing an example of *bendy* (that is, covered in bends): *bendy of 4 argent and azure*, or alternating bends of silver and blue in a window to Archibald Lucas-Tooth at Holme Lacy. He comments that these arms "are of course as spurious as Bors himself, but the non-existence or legendary nature of someone commemorated in this fashion has scarcely been a barrier for the heraldic imagination!"⁸

It could have been a new battleground, but the fight over which version of the revived Cornish language is the most "authentic" has been resolved. It was reported that an independent arbitrator will create a single official written form out of the three or so versions that currently exist.



The development manager for the Cornish Language Partnership, Ms

Jenefer Lowe (one assumes that her name is a form of Guinevere), said that an official form needed to be used on road signs, in documents and in schools, but that the various forms won't be lost: "People will

⁷ www.baubo.co.uk; bluechrome publishing, PO Box 109, Portishead, Bristol BS20 7ZJ or www.bluechrome.co.uk

⁸ Joseph Biddulph "A Continuation of the item concerning some of the Heraldry of the Old Shire of Hereford, and of certain places contiguous thereunto" *Troglodyte* 13 (2007) 8

be able to speak their preferred dialect." 300-plus fluent Cornish speakers base their modern language on the reconstructed Unified Cornish of the 1920s: the last native speaker died over two centuries ago.

EVENTS

The premier Arthurian association, the International Arthurian Society, is running its 2008 conference at Rennes in Brittany. The 22nd international conference takes place from July 15th to the 20th and includes – along with academic papers – excursions and an exhibition entitled *Le Roi Arthur, une légende en devenir* ("The legend of King Arthur in the making"). To attend you have to be a member of the IAS, which is "open to all persons interested in the study of the Arthurian realm in literature, history, art, and film". Membership details are obtainable from Professor Jane Taylor, Principal, Collingwood College, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LT.⁹

"A major new conference event" is how *Archaeology '08* was described. Taking place at the British Museum in London in February, and jointly sponsored by the museum's Department of Portable Antiquities and Treasure and by *Current Archaeology*, highlights included Rethinking Roman Britain; Treasures of the Celts; and Picts, Vikings and Scots. Speakers included Mick Aston of *Time Team* and Martin Carver, re-excavator of Sutton Hoo and editor of the archaeological journal *Antiquity*.

PETS CORNER

At the end of May 2007, media around the world were broadcasting the news that an 11-year-old called Jamison Stone had killed a massive 75-stone (476kg) boar near Delta in Alabama. Reported as over 9ft long, this was larger than Hogzilla killed in neighbouring Georgia in 2005.¹⁰

⁹ http://www.uhb.fr/alc/ias/version_ang/ang_congresrennes.htm; <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~iasbb/join.htm>

¹⁰ "Hogging limelight: boy kills giant pig" *Guardian* May 28 2007; Mike Stone "Get

As expected, there was more to the story than met the eye. Although doubts were raised about the report (the boar photo was said to be "Photoshopped"), it was soon established as true, but the "wild" boar was not actually feral. According to Jamison's father, the pig came from a hog breeder, sold to the hunting preserve where it met its end. Originally bought as a pet (!) by the breeder, the aggressive boar scared visitors "because of his jaw popping", resulting in his sale to the preserve. Too big to be bred from "because of his massive weight and stature", the uncut boar hog was also unsuitable for slaughter, for the same reasons.

For the record, Hogzilla from Georgia was established as weighing 800 pounds (360 kg) and measuring almost 8 feet (2.4m) long. Hogzilla was a hybrid, part domestic (Hampshire breed) and part wild boar. What size *Twrch Trwyth* was when he was hunted by Arthur and his men over South Wales in *Culhwch and Olwen* we are not told, but we do know that neither Hogzilla nor the Delta boar could talk.



Excavations at *Rotherwas* in Herefordshire on the line of a new road exposed what has been claimed as "Britain's first prehistoric serpent mound". A ribbon of fire-cracked stones zigzags its way in a fashion reminiscent of the Serpent Mound in Ohio in the USA; it's only surprising that the so-called *Rotherwas Ribbon* hasn't been claimed as a dragon.

Keith Ray, the Herefordshire County archaeologist who led the excavations, is quoted as saying, "It's the only structure we have from prehistory from Britain or in Europe, as far as we can tell, that is

The Truth, It Was Not The Family Pet" at http://www.monsterpig.com/get_the_truth.htm

actually a deliberate construction that uses burnt stones. This is ... going to make us rethink whole chunks of what we thought we understood about the period." The discovery of cremated human remains and burnt timbers close by is "a clear indication of the monument's powerful presence in the landscape," suggests Andy Collins, a speculative historian. In addition, "Using domestic waste in funeral material is very significant in terms of linking life and death," Henry Chapman of the University of Birmingham has said, adding, "It's a really neat expression of the psychology of the period."

Plans to seal the ritual structure under the road with a protective covering have come under attack by local activists, who believe the road approved by the local council is unnecessary and a waste of money.¹¹

A Reuters report posted on January 10th 2008 identified Merlin as a crimefighter. A burglar (or burglars) had been interrupted in the course of burgling duties at Pet Palace in Leominster, Massachusetts when Merlin raised his voice, and the intruder(s) took flight with only \$15.00 in change. The store owner, Lori Oltman, explained that Merlin was a seven-year-old blue-and-gold macaw, and when photographed for the press obligingly squawked *Hello, Hola, Whass Up and Want the paper*. He also calls for his former owner, Rhonda, and his repertoire includes meowing.

"He also tends to swear at people if you ignore him," Lori said. Does he swear in Welsh? After all, his former and present owner have Welsh-looking names, Rhond(d)a and Lo(w)ri...¹²

¹¹ Andrew Collins' website featured the serpent theory in July 2007 ("Britain's first prehistoric serpent mound to be buried beneath bypass" at <http://www.andrewcollins.com/page/news/Rotherwas.htm>). Local opposition comes from "Save the Dinedor Serpent" (<http://www.rotherwasribbon.com/>) and further local government news is at http://www.smr.herefordshire.gov.uk/news_events2/RotherwasNews2.htm#Section1 (accessed February 2008).

¹² Scott Malone, Sandra Maler "Shouting macaw scares off burglar at pet store" *Yahoo! News UK* January 10 2008

MOVING IMAGES

A film starring Colin Firth and Ben Kingsley should certainly whet the appetite, but when a film trailer begins with the portentous words *Everybody's heard of the sword in the stone, but nobody knows the truth, you begin to doubt yourself*. *The Last Legion* (102 mins, 12A) has been inauspiciously described as "a throwback to 1960s Italian sword-and-sandal stuff, a bad history lesson", and though rated as "not much good" it was declared "infinitely superior" to British fairy tale *Stardust*. It is 480 AD, and Colin Firth commands a Roman regiment on Hadrian's Wall... Further key "facts" to grasp are that Arthur's father is Pendragon, the last Caesar, Excalibur is a sword made for Julius Caesar and Ambrosinus (Ben Kingsley) changes his name to (you guessed it) Merlin. Cue CGI and mixed accents from either side of the Pond. Mind you, though this is an Italy-UK-France co-production, Italian sword-and-sandal epics were actually huge fun, even if absolute tosh, so there's some hope here.¹³

In the same month as *The Last Legion* came *The Dark is Rising* (99 mins, 12A), a movie based on Susan Cooper's sequence of children's fantasy novels of the same name. The first book in the sequence is the Arthurian-inspired *Over Sea, Under Stone* (1965), but the movie seems to begin with the second title. Philip French described it as "Dennis Wheatley for the wee ones", with the American hero leading the Light against the Dark of the film's title.

BBC1 broadcast a docudrama on the Scourge of God on February 13 2008: *Attila the Hun* starred Rory McCann as the bane of the Roman Empire, with Allen Leech as his henchman Edeco. The *Radio Times* rightly called it an "enjoyable" and "handsomely mounted historical drama" and it's worth catching a repeat of this reconstruction of the 5th-century anti-hero. Just two small niggles: the first concerns the distraction of regional accents (Romans speak Standard English, Attila and Edeco use Scots and Irish accents respectively), and

¹³ Philip French film review *Observer* October 21 2007; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Legion

the second concerns omitting the final years of Attila – did the producers run out of time, or money, or both?

Tony Robinson investigated Edward III's fantastical Windsor Castle building in *The Real Knights of the Round Table: a Time Team Special* (Channel 4, February 25 2008). Coinciding with a paperback re-issue of *Edward III's Round Table at Windsor* (reviewed XXXIV No 4) this programme intelligently reported on the archaeological, literary and historical research that specialists had made on the Round Table building, with reconstructions and visits to structures likely to have been of inspiration, such as York Cathedral chapter house and the Castell de Bellver in Majorca.

In 2006 BBC1 announced that Merlin was to be the subject of a new drama series due to be screened "probably early in 2008", though in March 2008 filming had only just begun. A collaboration between BBC Drama and Shine Limited, the 13-part series "focuses on Merlin as a young wizard on the cusp of adulthood and his ongoing clashes with a young Arthur", according to a press release. Starring Richard Wilson and Anthony Head, *Merlin* is set for transmission in autumn 2008 after filming in Wales, England and France. According to a 2006 interview in the *Western Daily Press* Geoffrey Ashe, who had just had his *Merlin: the Prophet and his History* published by Sutton, hoped the BBC would use his book to develop the series. Ashe, who had advised fantasy author Persia Woolley on her Guinevere trilogy, was paid the compliment of having her place Merlin's retreat at his own home on the slopes of Glastonbury Tor.¹⁴

Eileen Buchanan reports that a DVD is now available on the Corrieveckan whirlpool, taken from a boat when it's in high spate, and with computer simulations of how the vortices are created: "It's the best one I've seen!" she tells us. A current theory is that the Corrieveckan inspired the medieval Welsh poem *The Spoils of Annwn* in which Arthur and his crew go searching for a cauldron from the Otherworld. The DVD is available for £10.00 plus £1.00 p+p from www.whirlpool-scotland.co.uk

¹⁴ Geoff Ward "Under spell of Merlin" *Western Daily Press* December 15 2006

– a 7-page thesis can also be downloaded for free from the site.

Alison Skinner points out that the 1970s classic *Lancelot du Lac* by Robert Bresson is released on DVD on April 28 2008. "I have dim memories of seeing it when it was released but I may have imagined it!" she reports. The Region 2 format is available for around £19.99 from Artificial Eye (the R1 version appeared in 2004).

THE BOARDS

North Wales-based Anvil Productions were performing their *King Arthur* throughout Wales during summer 2007, along with *The Taming of the Shrew*. Many of their outdoor performances took place at castles (such as Chirk, Caernarfon, Harlech, Conwy, Beaumaris, Kidwelly, Oystermouth, Carew, Caerphilly, Raglan and Castell Coch) as well as at Tintern Abbey, St David's Bishops Palace and, of course, Caerleon Roman amphitheatre. Did Arthur himself get to see so many fortified sites?¹⁵

A one-hour version of Jamie Crawford's new show for adult audiences, also entitled *King Arthur: a new telling*, was premiered at the Friend's Meeting House in Brighton on October 7, with a further performance at Baron's Court Theatre, Comeragh Road, London W14 on the following day. "If we were to stumble upon a cave, and find a king asleep with all his knights, talking in his sleep, remembering, what possible significance could there be for us now in listening to that ancient dream?" Jamie Crawford attempted to "find a living connection between the Arthurian story and 21st century Britain" by claiming to "cut through the clichés" and "bringing to life the passions and flaws that beset the Fellowship of the Round Table from its inspired rise to its violent fall". A professional storyteller, Crawford's *King Arthur* was composed in collaboration with John Wright, June Peters and the celebrated Hugh Lupton.¹⁶

¹⁵ Anne Jones, Bryn Awel, Graig, Glan Conwy, N Wales LL28 5TW; info@anvilproductions.co.uk and www.anvilproductions.co.uk

¹⁶ Jamie Crawford, 92 Denton Road, Denton, East Sussex BN9 0QE;

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During autumn 2007 Glyndebourne Opera has been screening films of three of its "top shows" at Odeon cinemas around the UK, at places such as Huddersfield in West Yorkshire. Along with *Così fan tutte* and *Giulio Cesare* audiences got to see, in October and November, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The new initiative was designed to broaden access by making an expensive art form not only affordable but also accessible for those who couldn't travel to Sussex in season, using DVD films of their performances.¹⁷

Welsh-language theatre group Cwmni Mega has been presenting *Macsen*, Huw Garmon's pantomime based on the Mabinogion story *The Dream of Macsen*. The medieval tale narrates the tale of how the usurper emperor Maximus had a dream of a beautiful maiden in a far corner of Empire, and travelled to north-west Wales to find her. The notion that an early medieval dynasty was thereby founded helped to raise Welsh self-esteem in the later Middle Ages. The touring production began in Carmarthen mid-November 2007 and ended February 1st 2008 in Treorci.

CORRECTION & CLARIFICATION

The *Doctor Who* reviews last issue were by the Anonymous Prosopographer (not Prosographer) to circumvent possible embarrassment. The word *prosopography* is "drawn from the figure *prosopoeia* in classical rhetoric, in which an absent or imagined person is figured forth – the "face created" as the Greek suggests – in words, as if present," *Wikipedia* helpfully tells us. Commonly, a prosopography is referred to as a *Who's Who*, hence the editor's choice of pseudonym.

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd

Next issue

The theme is Gawain, and we continue the Hero motif with items on movie music, Harry Potter and more on narrative literature in the Middle Ages.

stories@jamiacrawford.co.uk and
www.jamiacrawford.co.uk

¹⁷ Katie Campling "Glyndebourne at the cinema: chance to see opera at the Odeon" *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* September 13 2007

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FREDERICK II

King of Sicily, King of Germany,
King of Cyprus and Jerusalem,
and Holy Roman Emperor
"Lord of the World"

But bright above all others shone the star, the
Greatest Frederick, true people's ardent longing.

STEFAN GEORGE

F J Stedman-Jones

Frederick II Hohenstaufen was one of the most enlightened and respected monarchs of the Middle Ages: a statesman, legislator, scientist, writer, poet and architect, he spoke seven languages and his impact on the history, culture and laws of Europe was immense. His court was one of the most brilliant in all Europe, a centre of culture, poetry, natural sciences, and mathematics. His life story reads like a tale of legends, myths, fables and miracles and his contemporaries knew him as *stupor mundi* (the wonder of the world) and *imutator mirabilis* (the amazing bringer of changes).

Richard Cavendish has written, a person is described as a legend in his own lifetime because he has become the focus of special, almost religious admiration and awe. Frederick demonstrates the continuing need for larger-than-life figures in a country's past, to help build up a national identity, shared tradition and pride. The lesson which the supreme heroes of legend and history have to teach us is that existence can be vivid, exciting and intense, that the limits of human reach and achievement are not as narrow and restricted as they often seem to be.

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In this article I shall attempt to highlight the historical aspects of Frederick's career that made him such a legend in his own lifetime. My second article will follow a more romantic path: to view the stories and fables told about Frederick Hohenstaufen, the legendary and mythic motifs that have been attached to his name – ie a view through the microscope again this time, through the kaleidoscope next. A similar process might have happened over time to an historical King Arthur – a transition from man to legend.

Born in Jesi, near Ancona on 26th November 1194, Frederick was the son of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI the son of Frederick Barbarossa, and of Constance Altavilla, daughter of Roger II and heiress of Sicily. The chronicles tell that his forty-year-old mother gave birth to him in a pavilion tent in the public square before the matrons of the town, in order to allay any doubt about his royal origin. Frederick was baptised in Assisi.



He was elected German king at the age of two but when his father died the following year in 1197 the German princes refused to accept him. He was

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four when his mother died in November 1198, just months after having him crowned King of Sicily on May 17th. At that time the Kingdom of Sicily included most of southern Italy. Italy was always his homeland, he identified deeply with the country of his mother's Norman ancestors as she had always intended him to. It was her wish that he should grow up as one of the "happy kings, who could call the most wonderful kingdom of the earth their own" (Dante).

In her will Constantia asked Pope Innocent III to be his guardian and look after his education and his political interests, hence the pope officially governed Sicily until 1208 when Frederick reached the age of fourteen. In reality the Kingdom of Sicily was largely abandoned to the greediness of the German / Sicilian barons and the Roman clergy who ruled on personal whim.

Frederick grew up as an uncared-for ward of the Pope, roaming the streets of Palermo at a time when the port was the largest city in Europe, a palatial, multi-cultured, thriving centre of the Mediterranean world. The boy king, fit, handsome with auburn hair and blue eyes, was largely left to his own devices to roam the streets of the exciting city. Its people shaped the mind of the enthusiastic, intelligent and curious boy. When he was twelve years old he was defined "coarse", "rude" and "vulgar" but that was probably the way the courtly culture perceived the boy. Innocent III said of him that he stood solidly on his legs!

One of his tutors was probably the *cadi* or judge of the Muslim community and all his life he was particularly fascinated by the lifestyle and culture of the Arabs. He was said to speak nine languages and be literate in seven (Latin, Greek, Italian, French, Jewish, German and Arabic) at a time when many monarchs and nobles were not literate at all.

In December 1208, aged 14, he took control of the reins of government himself and the pope arranged his first marriage to Constance of Aragon, widow of the King of Hungary, ten years his senior. She arrived in Sicily in August 1209 with 500 Spanish knights to help him bring his kingdom under control after the chaos of the regency; unfortunately they died almost

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immediately, probably of dysentery.

Nevertheless, in 1209 he toured the island to punish the rebels and to demonstrate his control; it also enabled him to confiscate the property of the traitors. Punishment was merciless, Frederick, was a true medieval ruler, remorselessly cruel in dealing with traitors and heretics:

The sons of the rebellion, those who hated peace, have been dealt with and they are now on their knees under my yoke.

Some had their eyes pierced with hot knives.

In 1210 the German Emperor Otto von Bruanschweig claimed the title of Holy Roman Emperor and marched on Sicily, for which the pope excommunicated him. The German barons decided they preferred the apparently weaker Frederick to strong-arm Otto and elected him as Emperor. Otto raced back to Germany but too late. In 1212 Frederick crossed the Alps, escorted only by a small party of knights, to be welcomed as King of Germany and Roman Emperor elect by the German princes, cities and clerics. Supported by his guardian, Pope Innocent III, his position was consolidated. He was crowned Emperor of The Romans at Aachen by Pope Honorius III in 1220. Thereafter, Frederick's interpretation of his role as Emperor clashed fundamentally with that of the dominant popes of his time and there was conflict between him and the papacy and its allies for the rest of his life.

The papacy wanted to rule Italy itself and needed to prevent the emperor from doing so. The northern Italian Lombard cities feared that the emperor would subjugate them and they provided money and mercenaries to their papal ally. The German princes wished to reduce the Empire into an administrative and judicial nullity and if possible strip the crown itself from the Staufens dynasty – so Frederick had to fight wars on three fronts for three decades.

The popes considered the Roman Empire as the 'Holy' Roman Empire, the pope being the sole representative of God on earth, claiming authority over temporal as well as spiritual matters, an authority transmitted to them by St. Peter. Kings and Emperors were considered to be the servants of the Pope

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in administering this power.

The title of 'Emperor of the Romans' was invented by Charlemagne who saw himself as the heir of the past Roman Empire, over much of whose territory he then ruled. By Frederick's time it had become a formal title, a symbolic honour to hold but with no dominions. Often the post was unfilled for years and sometimes challenged by new claimants.

Ever pragmatic, Frederick saw the necessity of being anointed by the Pope as a ceremony to gain credibility and authority for himself but he was not prepared to play a subservient role thereafter. Frederick understood himself as a Christian monarch in the sense of a Byzantine emperor, as God's *Viceroy* on earth. He believed that the Empire had been bestowed upon him by God and his vision was to restore the concept of the Roman Empire as a Universal Global Institution. He represented himself as the successor of the founder of the Empire himself, Augustus. He minted a gold coinage, the *augustales*, on which he is depicted in all the attributes of a Caesar. The concept of the Pax Augusta became the *leitmotif* of his life: his obligation to guarantee the people under his rule personal safety and the right to *an existence worthy of a human being*.

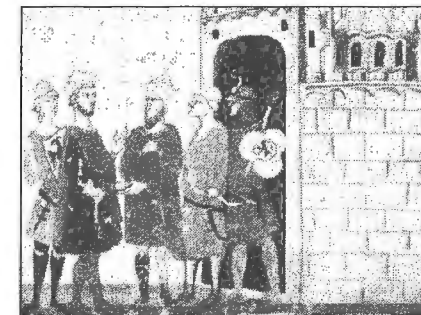
Because of his lifelong interest in Islam, many saw in him 'the Hammer of Christianity' or at the very least a dissenter from Christendom. Rather than exterminate the Saracens of Sicily he allowed them to settle on the mainland and to build mosques, he enlisted them in his army and even into his personal bodyguard. As Muslim soldiers, they had the advantage of immunity from papal excommunication.

At the time he was crowned Emperor Frederick promised to go on crusade but problems of stability within the empire delayed his departure and it was not until 1225 when Frederick married his second wife and third cousin Yolanda – with papal dispensation – heirless to the crown of Jerusalem, that his departure was assured. He was excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX in 1227 for delaying to set out but eventually he led the Sixth Crusade, the strangest of all the crusades in the Holy Land.

With a small army he negotiated a ten year truce with the Sultan which

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included Bethlehem and some places between the Holy City and the coast. On 18th February 1229 access to Jerusalem was restored to the Christians without a drop of blood being spilt. He set the crown on his own head as King of Jerusalem on March 12, 1229 in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and declared himself to be an instrument of God, following in the footsteps of the biblical King David.



Crusade negotiations

For the first time a Crusade had been organized by a secular ruler against the wishes of the Pope. Gregory was enraged and denounced him in ferocious language; Frederick had challenged the very essence of his authority. The irony of an excommunicated Emperor gaining what all the bloodshed and cruelty of the papally-inspired crusades had failed to do was too galling for the residents of Outremer. The orders of chivalry ostracised him, except for the Germanic Teutonic Knights. The Templars and Hospitallers agreed with the Patriarch and the Pope that the purpose of a Crusade was to shed 'infidel' blood, not to do deals with them – peace was not a price worth paying for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. Frederick had exposed the true nature of the Crusade movement: it was about the shedding of blood and the power of the Pope; Jerusalem itself had become a side issue. Despite his new capacity as King of Jerusalem, while he was in the Holy Land papal and allied forces invaded Frederick's Italian possessions of the Two Sicilies.

Returning to Italy he quickly repulsed this treacherous attack and continued with his Italian plans. In 1245 Pope

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Innocent IV declared Frederick to be deposed as emperor, characterising him as a 'friend of Babylon's sultan', 'of Saracen customs'; like the schismatic emperor of Byzantium – a "heretic". He excommunicated Frederick, called a crusade against him and set in motion a plot to kill him and his son, all to little effect.

Frederick became ill in late 1250 and died peacefully after an attack of dysentery on December 13, 1250 in Castel Fiorentino, his favourite palace near Lucera in Puglia, wearing the habit of a Cistercian monk. He was buried in the cathedral in Palermo; his sarcophagus of red porphyry stands beside those of his parents and his grandfather, Roger II of Sicily. When he died Italy and the Empire were in chaos, the intense struggle between Frederick and the papacy led to the ruin of the house of Hohenstaufen and severely damaged papal prestige. Many of his supporters assumed that Frederick's legacy would live on with his heirs but within twenty years his Empire had disintegrated and his family line was all but extinct.

I shall now summarise some of Frederick's achievements, the ways in which he sought to realise his ambition to create a civilised 'Augustan Empire'. Arab, Greek and Muslim worlds met in Sicily and the sophistication of Frederick's court reflected this variety of cultures. He integrated the Saracens of his kingdom by building the city of Lucera for them on the mainland and by promoting them to participate in his army and the administration of the Regno. An expert trader himself, he encouraged commerce and soon expanded it to Spain, Morocco and Egypt. Agriculture and industry were likewise supported.

He encouraged the medical school at Salerno to organise matters of public health in Sicily and seriously ill people with no means were treated free. His *Edict of Salerno* legally separated the occupations of physician and apothecary. Physicians were forbidden to double as pharmacists and the prices of various medical remedies were fixed. This became a model for regulations of the practice of pharmacy throughout Europe. It was a blow to the

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charlatanism under which physicians diagnosed dubious maladies in order to sell useless, even dangerous cures.

In 1231 Frederick issued the *Constitutions of Melfi*, also known as *Liber Augustalis*, a code of laws for his realm that was remarkable for its time. Its basic principle was *Imperator est pater et filius iustitiae*; the Emperor established the law but was subject to it himself. It recognised equality for all before the law; it set a precedent for the primacy of written law and led to the establishment of an effective civil service. He especially defended women against violence and abuse by including relevant articles in the *Constitutions* and widows and orphans could seek legal advice from the court without charge.

He simply did not believe that things could not be explained by reason. He forbade trials by ordeal in the firm conviction that in a duel the stronger would always win, irrespective of guilt.

A gifted artist and scientist himself, at his court in Palermo he patronized science, philosophy and the arts and interested himself in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and astrology. He was an avid collector of ancient artefacts and in his town of Augusta in Sicily he charged an agent to excavate where the maximum number of finds are to be expected. He invited to his Court philosophers and thinkers of all races and religions, asking questions which encouraged scientific speculations.



Castel del Monte

He wrote a long letter to Michael Scot posing a wealth of questions relating to the natural sciences and maintained

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close contact with Leonardo Fibonacci, the most eminent European mathematician of his time. Fibonacci introduced Arabic mathematics to the Western world and determined the harmonic values of the Greek Golden Section. Frederick was a tireless builder, in Sicily he built over 200 fortresses, citadels and palaces. His work reached its zenith in Castel del Monte begun in the 1240s. A regular polygon with eight towers, beautiful and simple, it is set on a hill looking down on a plain: the 'Crown of Apulia'. Its mathematics are a wonder.

Frederick was said to have carried out a language deprivation experiment by having young infants raised without human interaction, in an attempt to determine if there was a natural language that might manifest as their voices developed: presumably the original language imparted to Adam and Eve by God. Frederick was patron of the Sicilian School of poetry. A poet himself, he provided refuge for some of the Provençal troubadours fleeing the devastation of the Albigensian Crusade. He also welcomed German troubadours and minnesingers, possibly the minnesinger known as 'der Tannhäuser' and also Wolfram von Eschenbach, author of *Parzival*. The school had a significant influence on the literary form of what was eventually to become the Italian language.

Frederick inherited a love of falconry from his Norman ancestors. He maintained as many as fifty hawkers at his court and wrote letters requesting Arctic gyrfalcons from Greenland. He wrote a meticulously researched, written and illustrated book, a treatise on falconry, *De arte venandi cum aribus* (*The Art of Hunting with Birds or The Art of Falconry*). The illustrations are clearly the product of close observation of birds in flight.



Bloodlines

In 1224 he founded the University of Naples, now called Università Federico II. His highly qualified, administrative civil servants were graduates of its four faculties. Unlike all other universities of the period, clerical influences were precluded.

For medieval man the supernatural world was ordered and meaningful, while human existence was disorderly and could be predicted only in terms of Gods intentions. When Arab texts describing a direct relationship between the movements of the stars and events on earth came to the West in the 12th century astrologers became permanent residents in royal courts. In 1228 Michael Scot completed his great encyclopedia of astrology at Frederick's court; he was also physician to the Emperor.

Frederick never travelled anywhere without his zoo, which included hounds, elephants, giraffes, cheetahs, lynxes, leopards and exotic birds. As his whole court was constantly moving around his dominions in a huge self-contained retinue, including his courtiers and bureaucrats, his Saracen guard, harem, hawks and zoo, most of his subjects must have had the opportunity at some time to marvel at the colourful spectacle of the *King of the World*. It is small wonder that Frederick II was viewed as 'a legend in his own lifetime'. In my second article I shall examine how that legend developed during and after his lifetime.

CS

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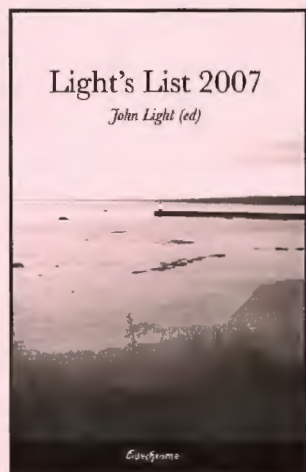
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To be concluded

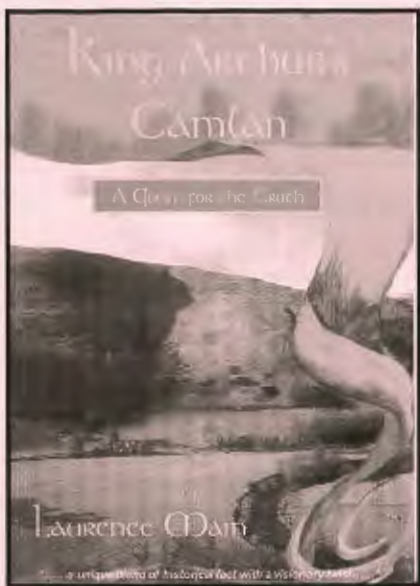


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