Northwestern University

Studies in Medieval Literature
King Arthur: From Myth to Modernity
Arthur of History

School of Professional Studies
Fall, 2018

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Addressing the elephant in the room –

Did King Arthur actually exist?

Most reasonable answer

“Unknown ... perhaps unknowable!”

The academic answer is contained in the following slides!

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Arthur of History
Roman Britain

Roman Diocese of Britain
Late 3rd Century CE
Arthur of History
Major Roman Sources

Late 4th Cent.  Notitia Dignitatum ("The List of Offices")
391. Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae
C. 400 Claudius Claudianus
417. Orosius, Historiae adversum Paganos
C. 498. Zosimus, Historia Nova
Notitia Dignitatum ("The List of High Offices")

- Details the administrative and military organization of the late Roman Empire.
- The section for the Eastern Empire seemingly dates from the late fourth century and that for the Western Empire from the early fifth century.
- Earliest manuscript copy dates from the 15th century
- Notitia specifies the major high offices, dignitates, often with the location:
  1. Court officials and senior dignitaries
  2. Vicars and provincial governors, arranged by prefecture and diocese
  3. Senior Military Commands – Comites Rei Militaris and Duces
**Notitia Dignitatum** ("The List of Offices")

Lists three major military commands in Britain

1. “Companion (Count) of the Saxon Shore for Britain” (*Comes Littoris Saxonici per Britanniam*) – Military command located along the southeast coast of Britain facing Gaul

2. “Companion (Count) of the Britains” (*Comes Britanniarum*) – Commander of the Roman field army in Britain

3. “Leader (Duke) of the Britains” (*Dux Britanniarum*) – Commander of the western and northern borders, Hadrian’s Wall
Notitia Dignitatum ("The List of Offices")

A Brief Comment on the designation, “Saxon Shore,” Litus Saxonicum

✓ Understood traditionally as the area of Britain threatened by Saxon raiding parties
✓ May also indicate that part of Britain defended by Saxon auxiliaries and / or settled by Saxons

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367. “The Great Barbarian Conspiracy”: Picts, Scots and Saxons overrun the provincial borders

383–8. Magnus Maximus (Macsen Wledig), proclaimed Emperor in Britain; occupies Gaul, Spain, and northern Italy; threatens Rome before being defeated and killed by the Western Emperor, Theodosius.

397. The Roman commander, Stilicho, comes to Britain and repels an attack by Picts, Irish and Saxons.

402. Stilicho recalls the 6th Legion *Victrix* from Britain for the defense of Gaul and Italy

407. Constantine III hailed as the new emperor by Roman garrison in Britain. He invades Gaul with the 2nd Legion *Augusta*.

408. Britain attacked by the Picts, Scots and Saxons

409. Britain “expels” Roman officials and declares itself “independent” of Rome

410. The Western Emperor, Honorius, urges the Britons to defend themselves

429. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, arrives in Britain to combat the Pelagian heresy (Nennius)

c. 446. Britons send an appeal to “Agitius, *ter consul*,” for assistance against barbarians; they receive no known reply (Gildas)
“Barbarian Conspiracy”
367 CE
The historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, recounts a year-long state of war and disorder that occurred in Roman Britain which he called *barbarica conspiratio*, the “Barbarian Conspiracy.” Multiple barbarian tribes – *Scotti*, *Attacotti*, *Picti*, *Saxones* and the *Franci* – and rebel garrison troops took advantage of a depleted Roman military force in the province brought about by civil war in the empire.

Romans are able to defeat the tribes and restore order in the province by 368 CE.
“Great Barbarian Conspiracy”
367 CE

- Political and military instability of the western empire
- Rome’s increasing inability to maintain stability in Britain
- The major threat to Britain – Saxons, Picts and Irish
Arthur of History
Roman Britain

Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE
Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

- In 383, Magnus Maximus, Roman commander of Britain, invaded Gaul and declared himself emperor of Britain and Gaul.

- In 387, Maximus invaded Italy.

Removed all or part of two Roman legions and an unknown number of auxiliary troops from the British garrison.
Arthur of History
Roman Britain

Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

- In 383, Magnus Maximus, Roman commander of Britain, invaded Gaul and declared himself emperor of Britain and Gaul.
- In 387, Maximus invaded Italy.
- In 388, Maximus was defeated and killed by the emperor, Theodosius I, at the Battle of the Save.

Survivors of Maximus’ forces were returned to the British garrison.

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Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

✓ Weakens the Roman hold on Britain.

In the *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (c. 540), Gildas claims that Maximus took all Roman and British troops from Britain, never to return.
Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

✓ Weakens the Roman hold on Britain.
✓ Empowered Native Tribes

Maximus seems to have entrusted native levies, especially in the west, with the defense of their own territories.

In the Welsh tale *Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig* (The Dream of Emperor Maximus), Maximus marries a British woman and gives her father sovereignty over Britain.

The early Welsh genealogies give Maximus, referred to as Macsen or Maxen Wledig, the role of founding the dynasties of several medieval Welsh kingdoms, including Powys and Gwent.

© Ray Gleason 2019
Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

✓ Weakens the Roman hold on Britain.
✓ Empowered Native Tribes
✓ Established a British presence in Brittany

“[Maximianus] unwilling to send back his warlike companions to their wives, families, and possessions in Britain, conferred upon them numerous districts from the lake on the summit of Mons Iovis, to the city called Cant Guic, and to the western Tumulus, that is Cruc Occident. These are the Armoric Britons, and they remain there to the present day. In consequence of their absence, Britain being overcome by foreign nations, the lawful heirs were cast out, till God interposed with his assistance” (Nennius, 9 cent. CE).
Arthur of History
Roman Britain

Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

✓ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136).

Maximianus was a Roman senator, a nephew of Coel Hen, and king of the Britons following the death of Eudaf Hen. Maximianus invaded Gaul, leaving Britain in the control of Caradocus. Upon reaching the kingdom of Armorica, he defeated its king and depopulated the land. Before departing to Rome, he appointed Conanus, king of the land, which was renamed Brittany. Following the death of Caradocus, rule of Britain as regent passed to Dionotus. Maximianus sent two legions to stop an invasion of Britain by the Irish. After Maximus died in Rome, Dionotus became king of the Britons.

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Macsen Wledig, the Emperor of Rome, dreams of a lovely maiden in a wonderful, far-off land. Awakening, he sends his men all over the earth in search of her. They find her in a castle in Wales, the daughter of a chieftain based at Segontium. They lead the Emperor to her. Everything he finds is exactly as in his dream. The maiden, whose name is Elen, accepts and loves him. Macsen gives her father sovereignty over the island of Britain. In Macsen's absence, a new emperor seizes power and warns him not to return. With the help of men from Britain led by Elen's brother Conanus, Macsen marches across Gaul and Italy and recaptures Rome. In gratitude to his British allies, Macsen rewards them with a portion of Gaul that becomes known as Brittany.
Magnus Maximus
383 - 388 CE

- Magnus Maximus may have provided a “source” for the tale of Arthur’s invasion of Gaul and Italy and his defeat of the “Roman Emperor Lucius.”

- Earliest surviving written account found in Geoffrey of Monmouth
Arthur of History

Roman Britain?

Stilicho
402 CE

Stilicho
396-8 CE
Flavius Stilicho  
c. 359 – 408 CE

✓ *Magister Militum*, “Master of Soldiers,” military commander in chief of the Western Roman Empire.

✓ c. 396 - 398, campaigned in Britain against the Picts, Scots and Saxons

✓ c. 401 – 402, withdrew the Roman 6th Legion *Victrix* and an unknown number of auxiliary troops from Hadrian's Wall to face a Germanic invasion of Gaul

✓ 402 is the last date Roman coinage found in large numbers in Britain

© Ray Gleason 2019
Flavius Stilicho

c. 359 – 408 CE

✓ *Magister Militum*, “Master of Soldiers,” military commander in chief of the Western Roman Empire.

**Absence of Roman Coinage – Roman garrison is not being regularly paid**

✓ c. 396 – 398, campaigned in Britain against the Picts, Scots, and Saxons

✓ c. 401 – 402, withdrew the Roman 6th Legion *Victrix* and an unknown number of auxiliary troops from Hadrian’s Wall to face a Germanic invasion

✓ 402 is the last date Roman coinage found in large numbers in Britain

Further Weakening of Rome’s Military Presence in Britain
Who Is Arthur?

Constantine III

402 CE
Flavius Claudius Constantinus  
“Constantine III”  
d. 411 CE

✓ Roman general who declared himself Western Roman Emperor in Britain in 407

✓ Co-emperor of the Western Roman Empire from 409 until 411.

✓ In 407, he invaded Gaul with the 2nd Legion Augusta, the last Roman legion in Britain, and all mobile Roman auxiliary troops

✓ c. 409, Britons “expelled” Roman magistrates and administrators; “[The Britons] rejected Roman law, reverted to their native customs, and armed themselves to ensure their own safety” (Zosimus)
Barbarian Invasions
408 CE

Arthur of History
Sub-Roman Briton

Scots

Saxons

Picts
Arthur of History
Sub-Roman Britain

Sub-Roman Britain Sources

c. 540. Gildas, De excidio et conquestu Britanniae

c. 730. Bede, Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum

c. 830. (Nennius), Historia Brittonum

c. 970. Annales Cambriae

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Timeline of Sub-Roman Britain

408. Renewed Barbarian Raids on Britain

409. Britain declares itself independent of Rome

Picts and Scots Raid Briton

410. Roman emperor, Honorius, tells Britons to defend themselves

429. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, arrives in Britain to combat the Pelagian heresy

446. Britons appeal to Aetius, Roman governor of Gaul, for military assistance

Vortigern and “Adventus Saxonum”

c. 496. Ambrosius and the Battle of Mt. Badon; birth of Gildas

c. 516. Battle of Camlann

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“Annales Cambriae”
The Annals of Wales

- A series of chronological entries reporting events in Britain, England, Scotland and Ireland derived from various sources at various times.
- Manuscript History 12th – 13th Centuries
- Entries in Latin
- Survivals of chronicles compiled and kept in various monasteries
- Original dates of the entries unknown
“Annales Cambriae”
The Annals of Wales

an’ 516  Bellum badonis inquo arthur portauit
         crucem domini nostri ihu xp’i. Tribus
diebus & tribus noctibus inhumeros suos &
brittones victores fuerunt.

“Year 516 - The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the cross of
our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights
and the Britons were victors.”

an’ 537  Gueith camlann inqua arthur et medraut
corruerunt. et mortalitas

“Year 537 The Strife of Camlann in which Arthur and Medraut fell
and there was death in Britain and in Ireland.”

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Calculating the Year in Early Medieval Europe

Imperial Reckoning
- Consular Year
- Imperial Regnal Year
- Foundation of Rome (AUC) – from the traditional year of the foundation of Rome, 753 BCE

Christo-Centric Reckoning
- Creation Dating – from the date of the world’s creation 6 October 3761 BCE
- From the Birth of Christ, Year 0
- From the Incarnation of Christ, 1 BCE
- From the Resurrection of Christ (Easter), 33 CE
Calculating the Year in Early Medieval Europe

“Year 516 - The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights and the Britons were victors.”

$\textit{Ab quo}$ - 483 CE

$\textit{Ad quem}$ - 517 CE

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"Arthur’s" Britain
C. 469 CE
Gildas Sapiens
Sub-Roman Britain

✓ Sixth-Century British Monk
✓ c. 500 – c. 570 - Contemporary to Potential Arthurian Events

Born in the Year of Mt. Badon
Would Have Known “Arthur”

✓ The Destruction and Conquest of Britain (De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae) c. 540
The text is an “extended sermon” denouncing the corruption and sinfulness of the Britons.

“Concerning [Britain’s] obstinacy, subjection and rebellion, about her second subjection and harsh servitude; concerning religion, of persecution, the holy martyrs, many heresies, of tyrants, of two plundering races, concerning the defense and a further devastation, of a second vengeance and a third devastation, concerning hunger, of the letter to Agitius, of victory, of crimes, of enemies suddenly announced, a memorable plague, a council, an enemy more savage than the first, the subversion of cities, concerning those whose survived, and concerning the final victory of our country that has been granted to our time by the will of God.”
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

- Extended sermon denouncing the corruption and sinfulness of the Britons
- Allegory using the convention of *Flagellum Dei* (“The Whip of God”)

  God punishes Christians when they are sinful in order to bring them back to righteousness

  In the Old testament, God allowed the Chosen People to be subjugated and oppressed by gentiles – Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Rome – in order to punish their sins

  God is allowing the Christian Britons to be subjugated by the pagan Saxon as punishment for their sins.

© Ray Gleason 2019
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

- An extended sermon denouncing the corruption and sinfulness of the Britons
- Convention of *Flagellum Dei* ("The Whip of God")
- Human History and Salvation History

The events of human history are allegories for God’s salvation history, the manner in which God will bring the human race to salvation.

History is a moral allegory to teach righteousness and divine justice to mankind.
Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

1. Purpose
2. Britain as an earthly Paradise (Eden)
3. Britons as Defiant, Stubborn and Sinful
4. Revolt of Maximus Against Rome (Magnus Maximus)
5. Invasion by Pagan Barbarians
6. Britons Appeal to Rome
7. Return of Rome (Stilicho?)
8. Britons Revolt and Rome Abandons Britain (Constantine III and Honorius?)
9. Barbarians Return
10. Britons Appeal to Aetius
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

“The Groans of the Britons”

“To Agitius, thrice consul: the groans of the Britons. [...] The barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea drives us to the barbarians; between these two means of death, we are either killed or drowned.”

(Agitio ter consuli, gemitus britannorum. [...] Repellunt barbari ad mare, repellit mare ad barbaros; inter haec duo genera funerum aut iugulamur aut mergimur) (Gildas, De Excidio 1.20).

✓ Aetius, *Magister Militum*, of the Western Roman Empire
✓ Date *ab quo* 446 – *ad quem* 454
  ✓ 446, Aetius’ Third Consulship
  ✓ 451, Aetius Defeats Attila the Hun at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains
  ✓ 452, Attila Invades Italy
  ✓ 454, Aetius Assassinated in Ravenna

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Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

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9. Barbarians Return
10. Britons Appeal to Aetius
11. Sins of the Britons
12. The “proud tyrant Gurthrigern,” Vortigern,” invites the Saxons to Britain as allies
13. Vortigern’s Saxon allies rebel and devastate Britain
14. Ambrosius Aurelianus whose “parents, who for their merit were adorned with the purple,” leads the Britons
15. Ambrosius defeats the Saxons at the “siege of Bath-Hill,” the Battle of Mt. Badon

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Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

Part II – Corruption of the British Tyrants

1. Constantine – “the tyrannical whelp of the unclean lioness of Damnonia”

✓ Possibly a 6th-Century king Dumnonia
✓ Also the name of Arthur’s cousin and heir
✓ A Custennin is mentioned as part of Arthur’s band in *Culhwch and Olwen*
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

Part II – Corruption of the British Tyrants

1. Constantine – “the tyrannical whelp of the unclean lioness of Damnonia”
2. Aurelius Caninus - “you lion's whelp”

- Thought to be a British king in 6th-Century Briton
- Scholars have argued that he was a descendent of Ambrosius Aurelianus
- *Caninus*, “That which applies to a dog” – “Aurelius the Mutt”? © Ray Gleason 2019
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

Part II – Corruption of the British Tyrants

1. Constantine – “the tyrannical whelp of the unclean lioness of Damnonia”
2. Aurelius Caninus- “you lion's whelp”
3. Vortipore – “the spotted leopard ... tyrant of the Demetians”

✓ A king of Dyfed in the early to mid-6th century
✓ A descendant of Eochaid Allmuir “The Foreigner,” who led a sept of the Irish tribe, Déisi, in their settlement of Dyfed c. 270 (*Expulsion of the Déisi*).
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

Part II – Corruption of the British Tyrants

1. Constantine – “the tyrannical whelp of the unclean lioness of Damnonia”
2. Aurelius Caninus- “you lion's whelp”
3. Vortipore – “the spotted leopard ... tyrant of the Demetians”
4. Cuneglasse – “you bear”

✓ Cynlas Goch, a prince in Gwynedd, during the 5th or early 6th century.
✓ Gildas reference to him in Latin as *urse*, a bear; *arth* in old British also meant “bear”

© Ray Gleason 2019
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

Part II – Corruption of the British Tyrants

1. Constantine – “the tyrannical whelp of the unclean lioness of Damnonia”
2. Aurelius Cananus – “you lion's whelp”
3. Vortipore – “the spotted leopard ... tyrant of the Demetians”
4. Cuneglasse – “you bear”
5. Maglocune – “dragon of the island”

✓ Maelgwn Gwynedd, died c. 547, was king of Gwynedd
✓ “dragon of the island (*insularis draco*)”; association with Arthur of the epithet, “Pen Dragon,” “Head or Boss Dragon.”
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*

Part I – Decline and Recovery of the Britons

Part II – Corruption of the British Tyrants’

Part III – Invective Against the British Clergy

"Britain has priests, but they are fools; numerous ministers, but they are shameless; clerics, but they are wily plunderers."

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Arthur of History
Sub-Roman Britain

Part I – Recovery of the Britons

Rome and its authority, “Ambrosius,” is an allegory for righteousness

British tribalism, “Vortigern,” is an allegory for sinfulness and corruption

1. Roman Britain
2. Purpose
3. Ambrosius Aurelianus and the siege of Mt. Badon

Part II – Corruption of the Britons

1. Constantine
2. Aurelius Conanus
3. Vortipore
4. Cuneglasse
5. Maglocune

© Ray Gleason 2019
Gildas, *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*  

**Part I** – Recovery of the Britons  

Arthur Is Not Named!  

An Individual Named / Called “Arthur” Was Not Known To Gildas  

Gildas does not admire “Arthur”  

“Arthur” Is Not a Name; it’s a sobriquet, a “Battle Name”  

*Arth Uthr* ... “Bear of Terror”  

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, History of the Britons
(9th Century)

✓ Ninth-Century British Monk
✓ Attributed with the authorship of the Historia Brittonum, based on the prologue affixed to that work
✓ Lived in Powys
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
*(9th Century)*

✓ **Date:** c. 829.

“[...] from the Passion of Christ 796 years have passed. But from his Incarnation are 831 years, and in the 24th year of Mervin, king of the Britons” *(Prologue).*

✓ **Meryn Frych ap Gwriad, King of Gwynedd, c. 825 - 844.**
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

- **Date**
- **Nennius, Author or Compiler of Earlier Sources?**

> “Neninus, the lowly minister and servant of the servants of God, by the grace of God, disciple of St. Elbotus, to all the followers of truth sends health” (Prologue).

> “I, Nennius, disciple of St. Elbotus, have endeavored to write some extracts which the dullness of the British nation had cast away, because teachers had no knowledge, nor gave any information in their books about this island of Britain” (Apology of Nennius)

> “I have got together all that I could find as well from the annals of the Romans as from the chronicles of the sacred fathers, Hieronymus, Eusebius, Isidorus, Prosper, and from the annals of the Scots and Saxons, and from our ancient traditions” (Apology of Nennius).

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

- Date: 
- Nennius, Author or Compiler 
- Purpose

“ [...] because teachers had no knowledge, nor gave any information in their books about this island of Britain” (Apology).
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

- Date:  
- Nennius, Author or Compiler  
- Purpose  
- Structure

I. Prologue  
II. Apologia  
III. The Six Ages of the World (1-6);  
IV. History of the Britons (7-49);  
V. Life of St, Patrick (50-55);  
VI. Arthuriana (56);  
VII. Genealogies of the Kings (57—66);  
VIII. Cities of Britain (66a);  
IX. Wonders of Britain (67—76).
From Adam to the flood, are two thousand and forty-two years. From the flood to Abraham, nine hundred and forty-two. From Abraham to Moses, six hundred. From Moses to Solomon, and the first building of the temple, four hundred and forty-eight. From Solomon to the rebuilding of the temple, which was under Darius, king of the Persians, six hundred and twelve (5).

The first age of the world is from Adam to Noah; the second from Noah to Abraham; the third from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to Daniel; the fifth to John the Baptist; the sixth from John to the judgment, when our Lord Jesus Christ will come to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire (6).

Humanity is in the “final age” leading to judgement
Nennius, *History of the Britons*

(9th Century)

Origin of the Britons

The island of Britain derives its name from Brutus, a Roman consul (7) [...] Aeneas reigned over the Latins three years; Ascanius thirty-three years; after whom Silvius reigned twelve years, and Posthumus thirty-nine years: the latter, from whom the kings of Alba are called Silvan, was brother to Brutus, who governed Britain at the time Eli the high-priest judged Israel, and when the Ark of the covenant was taken by a foreign people (11).
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

The Allegory of *Translatio Imperii*

“The Transference of Power” is a medieval concept of how God’s favor is handed down from one chosen nation to another

In God’s Plan of Salvation.

Israel => New Israel, Christianity

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

**Biblical Authority of Translatio Imperii**

“This is the dream: we will also tell the interpretation thereof before you, O king. You are a king of kings: and the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, and strength, and power, and glory: and all places wherein the children of men, and the beasts of the field do dwell: he has also given the birds of the air into your hand, and has put all things under your power: you, therefore, art the head of gold. And after you shall rise up another kingdom, inferior to you, of silver: and another third kingdom of brass, which shall rule over all the world. And the fourth kingdom shall be as iron. As iron breaks into pieces, and subdues all things, so shall that break, and destroy all these” (Daniel 2: 36-40).

✓ Didn’t separate "divine" history from the “human” history
✓ Divine and human realities as part of the same continuum
✓ The divinely-intended causality of one reign necessarily led to its successor (Jacques Le Goff)
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(*9th Century*)

*Translatio Imperii*

“This is the dream: we will also tell the interpretation thereof before you, O king. You are a king of kings: and the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, and strength, and power, and glory: and all places wherein the children of men, and the beasts of the field do dwell: he has also given the birds of the air into your hand, and has put all things under your power: you, therefore, art the head of gold. And after you shall rise up another kingdom, inferior to you, of silver: and another third kingdom of brass, which shall rule over all the world. And the fourth kingdom shall be as iron. As iron breaks into pieces, and subdues all things, so shall that break, and destroy all these” (Daniel 2: 36-40).

✓ Medieval historians perceived the *translatio imperii* as a succession leaving supreme power and divine favor in Christendom through God’s provenance, ie
  - Chrétien de Troyes: Athens → Rome → France
  - Richard de Bury: Athens → Rome → France → England

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9\textsuperscript{th} Century)

*Translatio Imperii*

“This is the dream: we will also tell the interpretation thereof before you, O king. You are a king of kings: and the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, and strength, and power, and glory: and all places wherein the children of men, and the beasts of the field do dwell: he has also given the birds of the air into your hand, and has put all things under your power: you, therefore, are the head of gold. And after you shall rise up another kingdom, inferior to you, of silver: and another third kingdom of brass, which shall rule over all the world. And the fourth kingdom shall be as iron. As iron breaks into pieces, and subdues all things, so shall that break, and destroy all these” (Daniel 2: 36-40).

✓ Medieval nations perceived the *translatio imperii* imperii as a succession leaving supreme power and divine favor in Christendom through God’s provenance.

✓ The transference of power typically descends through Rome
  - Roman Papacy in Western Europe
  - Dante, *De Vulgaria Eloquencia* – God favored Rome and allowed – if not facilitated – its conquest of the world in order to enable the universal spread of Christianity

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(*9th Century*)

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✓ Nennius seems to be claiming that the *translatio imperii* runs through Rome to the Britons as God’s chosen nation

Troy → Rome (Aeneas, Ascanius, Silvius, Posthumus) → Brutus (Britain)

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

History of the Britons

- Maximus and the Withdrawal of Roman Forces

“The seventh emperor was Maximus. He withdrew from Britain with all his military force, slew Gratian, the king of the Romans, and obtained the sovereignty of all Europe [...] In consequence of their absence, Britain being overcome by foreign nations, the lawful heirs were cast out, till God interposed with his assistance” (27).

Magnus Maximus

© Ray Gleason 2019
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

History of the Britons

- Maximus and the Withdrawal of Roman Forces
- The Britons Revolt Against Rome Three Times
- Final Roman Withdrawal From Britain *Israel Despoils Egypt in the Exodus*
- "Vortigern Cycle"
  - Vortigern, King of Britain
    "After the above-said war between the Britons and Romans, the assassination of their rulers, and the victory of Maximus, who slew Gratian, and the termination of the Roman power in Britain, they were in alarm forty years. Vortigern then reigned in Britain" (31).

Vortigern, a "Tyrannus"
Derives No Power Through "Rome"
Usurper Against God's Plan
Agent of Divine Punishment of the Britons

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Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
*(9th Century)*

**History of the Britons**

- Maximus and the Withdrawal of Roman Forces
- The Britons Revolt Against Rome Three Times
- Final Roman Withdrawal From Britain
- “Vortigern Cycle”
  - Vortigern, King of Britain
  - Coming of the Saxons, Horsa and Hengist

“In the meantime, three vessels, exiled from Germany, arrived in Britain. They were commanded by Horsa and Hengist, brothers [...] Vortigern received them as friends and delivered up to them the island which is in their language called Thanet, and, by the Britons, Ruym [...] The Saxons were received by Vortigern four hundred and forty-seven years (c. 414 CE) after the passion of Christ” (32).
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
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  - Vortigern, King of Britain
  - Coming of the Saxons, Horsa and Hengist  
  (St. Germanus Interlude)
Nennius, *History of the Britons* (9th Century)

St. Germanus Interlude

- Based on a lost *Vita Germani* written by Constantius of Lyon around 480
- Germanus, (c. 378 – c. 448) Bishop of Auxerre, Gaul
- Formerly a High-Ranking Roman Soldier
- Visited Britain c. 429 to combat the Pelagian heresy

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**Pelagianism**

- Named after the British monk Pelagius (354 – c. 440)
- Belief in Christianity that original sin did not taint human nature
- Human will is still capable of choosing good or evil without divine grace
- Human will, as created by God, is sufficient to live a sinless life
- Human beings can earn salvation by their own efforts.
- Associated with the rejection of both original sin and infant baptism

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**Pelagianism**

- Attacked by Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)
  - Baptism was necessary to salvation
  - God’s grace was necessary to resist sin
  - Salvation could not be “earned” by humanity, only “given” by God
- Condemned as heresy by Council of Carthage (418)

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Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

St. Germanus Interlude

- Based on a lost *Vita Germani* written by Constantius of Lyon around 480
- Germanus, (c. 378 – c. 448) Bishop of Auxerre, Gaul
- Formerly a High-Ranking Roman Soldier
- Visited Britain c. 429 to combat Pelagianism
- Performed a number of miracles and conversions
- Led the Britons to a military victory over the Saxons
Nennius, *History of the Britons* 
(9th Century)

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  - Vortigern Seduced By Hengist’s Daughter
  - Vortigern’s Incestuous Child

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Vortigern’s Incest

Vortigern, as if desirous of adding to the evils he had already occasioned, married his own daughter, by whom he had a son. When this was made known to St. Germanus, he came, with all the British clergy, to reprove him [...] St. Germanus, taking the child said, "I will be a father to you, my son" [...] The child obeyed St. Germanus, and going to his father Vortigern, said to him, "Thou are my father; shave and cut the hair of my head." The king blushed, and was silent; and, without replying to the child, arose in great anger, and fled from the presence of St. Germanus (39).
Vortigern’s Incest

Possible Analogues to the Birth of Arthur and the Begetting of Mordred

✓ Uther’s Devious Begetting of Arthur on Igraine
✓ Merlin Fostering the Infant Arthur
✓ Arthur’s Incestuous Begetting of Mordred
✓ Disappearance, “Death,” of Uther After Arthur’s Birth

© Ray Gleason 2019
Arthur of History
Sub-Roman Britain

Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

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  - Vortigern’s Incestuous Child
  - Vortigern’s Fortress and the Intervention of Ambrosius

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Vortigern’s Fortress

The wise men said to the king, "Build here a city; for, in this place, it will ever be secure against the barbarians." Then the king sent for artificers, carpenters, stone-masons, and collected all the materials requisite to building; but the whole of these disappeared in one night, so that nothing remained of what had been provided for the constructing of the citadel [...] [The wise men] replied, "You must find a child born without a father, put him to death, and sprinkle with his blood the ground on which the citadel is to be built, or you will never accomplish your purpose" (40).

The text seems to indicate that “nativism,” represented by Vortigern, is associated with a revival of Celtic paganism, shamanism, and human sacrifice.
Ambrosius’ Intervention

*The Struggle Between the White and Red Serpents*

[The wise men] found the pool [...] said the boy, “[...] there are two vases in the pool;” [...] "What is in the vases?" they were silent: "There is a tent in them," said the boy; “ [...] The boy, going on with his questions, asked the wise men what was in it? But they not knowing what to reply, "There are," said he, "two serpents, one white and the other red; unfold the tent;" they obeyed, and two sleeping serpents were discovered; [...] The serpents began to struggle with each other; and the white one, raising himself up, threw down the other into the middle of the tent and sometimes drove him to the edge of it; and this was repeated thrice. At length the red one, apparently the weaker of the two, recovering his strength, expelled the white one from the tent; and the latter being pursued through the pool by the red one, disappeared (42).
Ambrosius’ Intervention

The Struggle Between the White and Red Serpents

"I will now unfold to you the meaning of this mystery. The pool is the emblem of this world, and the tent that of your kingdom: the two serpents are two dragons; the red serpent is your dragon, but the white serpent is the dragon of the people who occupy several provinces and districts of Britain, even almost from sea to sea: at length, however, our people shall rise and drive away; the Saxon race from beyond the sea, whence they originally came” (42).
"I am called Ambrose, in British Embresgueletic," returned the boy; and in answer to the king's question, "What is your origin?" he replied, "A Roman consul was my father" (42).

The text seems to indicate that "Romanism," represented by Ambrosius, is associated with wisdom and insight into God’s plan once orthodox Christianity is restored to Britain.
Vortigern’s Fortress

Possible Analogues to Merlin

✓ **Child Without a Father**: Traditionally Merlin is the offspring of a human mother and a demon

✓ **Significance of the Serpents**: Prophecy and interpretation of signs attributed to Merlin

✓ **“Translatio Imperii”**: Ambrosius is more “Roman” than British

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  - Vortigern’s Fortress and the Intervention of Ambrosius
- Vortimer Defeats the Saxons Four Times
- Massacre of the British Nobles

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Hengist, under pretense of ratifying the treaty, prepared an entertainment, to which he invited the king, the nobles, and military officers, in number about three hundred; speciously concealing his wicked intention, he ordered three hundred Saxons to conceal each a knife under his feet, and to mix with the Britons [...] After they had eaten and drunk, and were much intoxicated, Hengist suddenly vociferated, "Nimed eure Saxes!" and instantly his adherents drew their knives, and rushing upon the Britons, each slew him that sat next to him, and there was slain three hundred of the nobles of Vortigern. The king being a captive, purchased his redemption, by delivering up the three provinces of East, South, and Middle Sex, besides other districts at the option of his betrayers (46).

The perfidy of pagan Saxons, Hengist.
The impotence of nativist leadership, Vortigern.
Nennius, *History of the Britons*  
(9th Century)

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  - Vortimer Defeats the Saxons Four Times
  - Massacre of the British Nobles
  - St. Germanus and the Halleluiah Victory
  - Death of Vortigern & Departure of St. Germanus

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Arthur of History
Sub-Roman Britain
Nennius, *History of the Britons*
(9th Century)

History of the Britons

✓ Maximus and the Withdrawal of Roman Forces
✓ The Britons Revolt Against Rome Three Times
✓ Final Roman Withdrawal From Britain (Israel Despoils Egypt in the Exodus)
✓ “Vortigern Cycle”
✓ “Arthurian Cycle”
  ✓ Ambrosius a “great king among the Britons”
  ✓ Arthur’s Twelve Victories
Arthur’s Twelve Victories

Then it was, that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror.

| 1\textsuperscript{st} | At the mouth of the river, Gleni |
| 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th} | On the river, Duglas, in the region Linuis |
| 6\textsuperscript{th} | On the river, Bassas |
| 7\textsuperscript{th} | In the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon |
| 8\textsuperscript{th} | Near Gurnion castle |

“[…] where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter.”

| 9\textsuperscript{th} | At the City of Legion, which is called Caerleon |
| 10\textsuperscript{th} | On the banks of the river, Trat Treuroit |
| 11\textsuperscript{th} | On the mountain Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregion |
| 12\textsuperscript{th} | A most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon |

“In this engagement, nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty” (50).
Then it was, that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror.

1st At the mouth of the river, Gleni

2nd On the river, Duglas

3rd On the river, Bassas

4th In the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit

5th Near Gurnion castle

"...where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter."

6th At the City of Legion, which is called Caerleon

7th On the banks of the river, Trat Treuroit

8th On the mountain Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregion

9th A most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon

"In this engagement, nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty" (50).

Allegory of Salvation History

With the death of Vortigern, Nativist British Tyrant, and the elevation of Ambrosius, Romano-British Leader, the link between God and the Chosen People, the Christian British, is restored. The sign of this reconciliation is Arthur and his victories over the pagan Saxons, the *flagellum Dei*.

"In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty"
Riothamus

- Romano-British military leader, c. AD 470 CE
- Invaded Gaul in alliance with Rome.
- Defeated by the Goths and disappears from the Historic record
- Riothamus, Latinized form of a British title, “Great King”?
- Associated with both Ambrosius and Arthur
"Now Euric, king of the Visigoths, perceived the frequent change of Roman Emperors and strove to hold Gaul by his own right. The Emperor Anthemius heard of it and asked the Brittones for aid. Their King Riotimus came with twelve thousand men into the state of the Bituriges by the way of Ocean, and was received as he disembarked from his ships. (238) Euric, king of the Visigoths, came against them with an innumerable army, and after a long fight he routed Riotimus, King of the Britons, before the Romans could join him. So when he had lost a great part of his army, he fled with all the men he could gather together, and came to the Burgundians, a neighboring tribe then allied to the Romans. But Euric, king of the Visigoths, seized the Gallic city of Arvernum; for the Emperor Anthemius was now dead" (Jordanes, Getica, 45.237-238).
The Roman Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, Arvandus, wrote to the Visigothic king, Euric, stating that "the Britons stationed beyond the Loire should be attacked" and that the Visigoths and Burgundians should divide Gaul between them.

- Stated in a letter from Sidonius Apollinaris to Vincentius, circa 468 CE
- Riothamus not specifically identified
- Geoffrey Ashe argues that Arvandus betrayed Riothamus.
Riothamus as King Arthur
(Geoffrey Ashe, Discovery of King Arthur (1985))

- Riothamus' activities in Gaul bear a casual resemblance to King Arthur's Gallic campaign against the Emperor Lucius (Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*).
- Riothamus' betrayal by Arvandus analogous to Arthur’s betrayal by Mordred
- Riothamus' last known position was near the Burgundian town of Avallon (not noted by any ancient source), which is the basis for the Arthurian connection to Avalon.
Riothamus as Ambrosius


✓ Ambrosius precedes Arthur in Nennius’ recounting of history
✓ Ambrosius is identified by Nennius as “supreme ruler of the Britons,” a possible translation of the title, “Riothamus”
✓ Ambrosius was king over both Britain and Brittany
✓ The name "Abros," common in Breton genealogies, is a contraction of "Ambrosius"
✓ Ambrosius led the Britons in the battle against the Goths, but then returned to Britain to continue the war against the Saxons
Riothamus as King Arthur or Riothamus as Ambrosius?

Problem with Either of these Theories

Jordanes is not clear whether Rhiothamus came from Britain or Brittany.

If Rhiothamus did invade from Britain – and is associated with either Arthur or Ambrosius – would the Britons be so confident about their domestic situation, before Badon and with the Saxon, Aelle, threatening their southern flank, that they would send a sizeable invasion force into Gaul to support a Roman emperor?
Riothamus as King Arthur or Riothamus as Ambrosius?

“Pays your money and takes your choice”

These connections *could* have happened
But there is no compelling evidence that they *did*

The arguments are “*interesting*”
but neither “*reasonable*” nor “*compelling*.”
c. 465.  Birth of “Arthur”

c. 470.  Ambrosius Aurelianus “high king” of Britain? (Riothamus invades Gaul)

c. 477.  Saxon chieftain, Aelle, lands on Sussex coast

c. 485-96.  Period of “Arthur’s” “twelve battles” (Nennius)

c. 496.  Britons, under Ambrosius? and his dux bellorum “Arthur,” defeat Saxons at Mount Badon; birth of Gildas

“The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders and the Britons were the victors.”

c. 516.  Death of “Arthur.”

“The battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell: and there was plague in Britain and Ireland.”
Discovery of Arthur’s Grave

In 1191, the grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere's tomb was allegedly discovered in the cemetery of Glastonbury Abbey.

✓ Reported by Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) in *De principis instructione* (Instruction of a Prince, c. 1193) and repeated in *Speculum Ecclesiae* (Reflection of the Church, c. 1216)
In our own lifetime Arthur's body was discovered at Glastonbury, although the legends had always encouraged us to believe that there was something otherworldly about his ending, that he had resisted death and had been spirited away to some far-distant spot. The body was hidden deep in the earth in a hollowed-out oak bole and between two stone pyramids which had been set up long ago in the churchyard there. They carried it into the church with every mark of honor and buried it decently there in a marble tomb. It had been provided with most unusual indications which were, indeed, little short of miraculous, for beneath it, and not on top, as would be the custom nowadays, there was a stone slab, with a leaden cross attached to its underside. I have seen this cross myself and I have traced the lettering which was cut into it on the side turned towards the stone, instead of being on the outer side and immediately visible. The inscription read as follows:

\[ Hic jacet sepultus inclitus rex Arthurus in insula Avalonia \]

(Here lies buried King Arthur in the isle of Avalon).

There are many remarkable deductions to be made from this discovery. Arthur obviously had two wives, and the second one was buried with him. Her bones were found with those of her husband, but they were separate from his. Two thirds of the coffin, the part towards the top end, held the husband's bones, and the other section, at his feet, contained those of his wife. A tress of woman's hair, blond, and still fresh and bright in color, was found in the coffin. One of the monks snatched it up and it immediately disintegrated into dust.

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Discovery of Arthur’s Grave

In 1191, the grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere's tomb was allegedly discovered in the cemetery of Glastonbury Abbey.

- Reported by Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) in *De principis instructione* (Instruction of a Prince, c. 1193) and repeated in *Speculum Ecclesiae* (Reflection of the Church, c. 1216)
- According to Giraldus, the digging for the tomb was ordered by Henry II based on a story obtained from an Welsh) bard
- Arthur and Guinevere's bones were reinterred in the marble sarcophagus in 1278 by Edward with the burial cross affixed to the top.
- The tomb was destroyed and the remains scattered in 1536 during the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII
- The cross remained in the the reverstry of the parish church of St. John Baptist, Glastonbury until the early 18th century, when it disappeared into the private collection of a certain Mr. William Hughes, Chancellor of Wells.

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In 1191, the grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere's tomb was allegedly discovered in the cemetery of Glastonbury Abbey.

“Pays your money and takes your choice”

Glastonbury Abbey and the “Graceland Syndrome”

“Bury someone famous and people will pay money to visit the site.”

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Discovery of Arthur’s Grave

In 1191, the grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere's tomb was alleged discovery in the cemetery of Glastonbury Abbey.

“Pays your money and takes your choice”

Glastonbury Abbey and the “Graceland Syndrome”

✓ Many buildings of Glastonbury Abbey had recently been destroyed by a devastating fire and the abbey desperately needed funds for rebuilding.
✓ The grave of Arthur and Guinevere becomes a destination for pilgrimage
✓ The discovery of the grave identifies Glastonbury with the legendary Isle of Avalon

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In 1191, the grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere's tomb was allegedly discovered in the cemetery of Glastonbury Abbey.

“Pays your money and takes your choice”

Henry II – Subjugation of the Welsh and the *Translatio Imperii*

- According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur designated Bedivere as the Duke of Normandy after conquering it.
- Henry II, as Duke of Normandy, is the political heir of Bedivere, a Briton and one of Arthur’s champions.
- Henry is “restoring” the transfer of divine favor back to the Britons.

Rome → Brutus (Britain) → Ambrosius → Arthur → Bedivere → Henry
Was King Arthur an historically verifiable character?

✓ Gildas in the early sixth century attributes the British victory at Badon to a Romano-British leader called “Ambrosius.”

✓ Nennius in the ninth century attributes the victory at Badon and eleven other British victories to an individual he identifies as “Arthur.”

✓ Nennius’ “Arthur” is not identified as a king but as a war-leader, dux bellorum, who fights with the kings of the British

✓ Annales Cambriae designate “Arthur” as the victor of Badon falling in battle at Camlann
A (not too) Brief Comment on the Title, “King”?  

✓ In Roman culture the title, “king,” rex, was considered barbaric and un-Roman – a tyrant who rules without imperium, the authority of the People and Senate of Rome.  

✓ The Romans reported that the early Britons had “kings,” reges, but this is a “translation” of native terms – brigantinos, tigernos, pennaeth, etc. – in a Latin text whose purpose was to characterize the Britons as barbaric.  

✓ There are no surviving British source documents explaining their traditional laws and social structure before the Roman domination.
A (not too) Brief Comment on the Title, “King”?

Toward a Celtic Model of “Kingship”

An Irish model derived from traditional Brehon law and Old Irish literature indicates there were various degrees of “kingship” designated by the title, rí.

✓ Bó Rí, “Cattle King” – an individual who possessed cattle
✓ Benn Rí, “King of Peaks” or Tuatha Rí, “King of a Tribe” – an individual who rules a single settlement or tribe
✓ Rí Buiden, “King of Bands” – a leader of war bands
✓ Rí Mór Tuatha, “King of a Great Tribe” – a leader of multiple tribes or a confederation of tribes (Dál)
✓ Rí Ruirech, “King Over Kings” or Rí Cóicid, “Province King” – king over the five traditional “fourths” of Ireland – Munster, Leinster, Connacht, Ulster and Mide
✓ Ard Rí, “High King” – Supreme King of Ireland who rules from Tara; usually one of the Rí Cóicid

© Ray Gleason 2019
A (not too) Brief Comment on the Title, “King”?

Toward a Celtic Model of “Kingship”

Irish Kingship was theoretically “elective.”

- The rí was chosen from the *riogh dhamhna*, selected members of the *flaith* class, the most powerful members of the warrior aristocracy.
- While the rí was living, a candidate was elected tanaiste, the “second,” as the heir apparent to the rí.
- The electorate depended on the office:
  - *Ard Rí* – the Rí Cóicid, “Province Kings” and the *flaiths* who participated in the *feis* at Tara.
  - *Rí Cóicid* – the *flaiths* and the *aires*, the “nobles,” of the province.
  - *Tuatha Rí* – the *flaiths*, *aires* and principle families of the tribe, etc.
- Qualifications – a trained, male member of the *riogh dhamhna*, of age, with no deformities or disfigurements, ability to act as a warrior, and worthy to represent the community.
A (not too) Brief Comment on the Title, “King”?

Toward a Celtic Model of “Kingship”
What might this mean to Nennius’ “Arthur”

✓ Among the Britons, “Arthur” may have possessed one of the degrees of Celtic “kingship”
✓ Instead of characterizing him as rex, “king,” which may still have had a negative connotation among the Romano-British, Nennius’ source characterized him as dux, “leader,” which according to the Notitia Dignitatum was a high military rank current in the army of the late Roman Empire

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“Arthur”: Deriving Human History Through The Lens of Christian Allegory

According to Christopher Snyder, An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons A.D. 400-600, after the Britons “emancipated” themselves from Rome circa CE 409,

- Governance decentralized from the Roman diocesan capital in London to the various cities, local economic centers, and traditional tribal centers
- Defense and military activities also decentralized into fortified towns, parts of towns, villas, and traditional hill forts
- Soldiery comprised of the traditional Celtic warrior class, tribal and town levies, and remaining Roman auxiliary units who served whomever would pay them in coin or kind
- Each “governmental” entity protected and defended its own interests against barbarian raids and attacks from other Britons
- Certain sections of Briton would revert to traditional Celtic cultural and religious practices
- Local civic and military leaders in the “Celtic” areas do not derive their power through “Rome,” and are thereby considered “tyranni,” usurpers.
- There could have been a “schism” among the British leaders between those who saw themselves as the Christian descendants of “Rome” and those who reverted back to Celtic law, religion, and tradition

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“Arthur”: Deriving Human History Through The Lens of Christian Allegory

Surviving accounts of sub-Roman Britain are almost wholly transmitted through Christian sources which had a “monopoly” on writing and the preservation of written sources.

✓ These sources would tend to interpret human history in terms of “Salvation History” asking,

“Why would God permit the withdrawal of the Christian Roman empire and the subsequent invasions of pagan barbarians to kill, enslave, and subjugate Christians?”

✓ The orthodox answer would be,

“To punish, test and teach sinful Christians.”

✓ Therefore, Christian sources would construe human history in such a way to demonstrate how historical events will eventually lead to human salvation.

✓ Separation from “Rome,” as God’s intended entity, is interpreted as a sinful separation from (orthodox) Christianity and God’s plan for human salvation.

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Gildas clearly constructs two opposing allegorical elements in the British resistance to pagan incursions.

1. The “Celtic,” represented by the *tyrannus superbus*, the “proud tyrant,” Vortigern
2. The “Roman,” represented by Ambrosius Aurelianus, “descended from the purple.”

This division is clearly preserved in Nennius’ sources as late as the ninth century.
“Arthur”: Deriving Human History Through The Lens of Christian Allegory

The Celtic Tyrant – Vortigern, the “proud tyrant”

- British name / title – “Over Lord”
- “Superbus” – Pride as the seminal sin
- Tyrannus – Separated from “Roman” continuity
- Heresy, Pelagianism, thrives during his reign
- Rebuked by St. Germanus for incest with his daughter
- Complicit with the pagans
  - Invites Hengist and Horsa into Britain
  - Marries Hengist’s daughter
  - Complicit in the slaughter of the British nobles
  - Practices shamanism and human sacrifice

As long as Vortigern leads the Britons, Christianity is suppressed by pagans.

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“Arthur”: Deriving Human History Through The Lens of Christian Allegory

The Roman Hero – Ambrosius Aurelianus, descended from the Purple

- Roman name
- Never designated a “king”
- Descended from and through “Roman” continuity
- Leads the Christian resistance against the pagans
- Achieves the decisive victory over the pagans at Badon

As long as Ambrosius leads the Britons, Christianity is victorious over the pagans.

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“Arthur”: Deriving Human History Through The Lens of Christian Allegory

Gildas construes the events of his time in terms of a Christian allegory of Salvation history:

- Flagellum Dei — Pagan Barbarians
- Translatio Imperii — Continuity with “Rome”

Vortigern — “Celtic” — Fall from Grace!

Ambrosius Aurelianus — “Roman” — Redemption!

This allegorical construct is clearly preserved in Nennius sources and is still present in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s history and its descendants.

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“Arthur”: Deriving Human History Through The Lens of Christian Allegory

The construct of “Arthur” in the allegorical construct.

✓ First mentioned by Nennius from a pre-ninth century source
   (Date and Pedigree of the *Annales Cambriae* citations are not reliable)

✓ Clearly associated with the post-Vortigern British recovery under the “Roman,” Ambrosius

✓ Credited with victory in twelve battles culminating with the decisive victory over the Saxons, Badon

✓ The identity of “Arthur” seems to meld with that of Ambrosius, especially in the attribution for the victory at Badon

✓ Not characterized as a “King,” an un-Roman designation, but as a “dux,” a title authorized in the *Notitia*
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The construct of “Arthur” in the allegorical construct.

✓ Nennius’ “Arthur” is consistent with Gildas’ “Celtic and Roman” allegory
✓ In Nennius, “Arthur” is an allegorical extension of “Ambrosius” and the restoral of God’s plan for human salvation
✓ “Arthur” may represent
  ✓ A title under which Ambrosius was known
  ✓ The title/name of a Romano-British war lord allied with Ambrosius
  ✓ Ambrosius’ lieutenant
  ✓ Ambrosius’ successor

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Arthur of History

Conclusions

“Arthur”

✓ A Romanized British war leader
✓ Vague, unclear presence and role
  • Appears after the fall of Vortigern during the time of Ambrosius
  • *Dux Bellorum*, “war leader”
  • Not clearly a “king”
✓ Participates in the allegorical “Roman” / Ambrosius Complex
✓ Champions Britain Against the pagan Irish, Picts and Saxons
✓ Victor at a decisive battle over the Saxons called “Badon”
✓ Participates in the allegory of *translatio imperii* by restoring Britain to God’s favor
✓ May not have been an individual *named* Arthur, but an individual *called* “Arthur”
✓ Falls in a battle called “Camlann”

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Was King Arthur an historically verifiable character?

The texts offer no smoking gun!

Pays your money; takes your choice!