King Arthur

HIC IACET SEPTULUS INCLITIS REX
ARTURIUS IN INSULA AVALONIA

'Here lies the renowned King Arthur in the isle of Avalon' reads the inscription recorded by the monks of Glastonbury in the 1190s, a decade after the completion of five Arthurian romances by Chrétien de Troyes written in the twenty years of 1160-80.

Both real and unreal, the inscription (Phillips and Keatman 1992, p. 17) at once encapsulates the mystery underlying the literary development of the stories associated with the legendary King Arthur and the searches for his historical authenticity: King Arthur, lying in the Isle of Avalon comes to us - and came to the Glastonbury monks - in legend from the Arthurian romances that blossomed throughout Europe following the History written in 1135 by Geoffrey of Monmouth and older stories recorded in Wales (Comfort 1914); and the production of a tangible grave and a tantalising inscription recorded on a lead cross is one of many 'discoveries' made over the centuries that showed the existence of a 'real' Arthur, satisfying the need for a truth about the marvels of Britain and trauma experienced amongst the Britons at the time of the Saxon invasions.

The Arthur Project is presented as an introduction to the Arthurian legends and the historical endevours to penetrate the Dark Age of Britain. A look at the events leading up to the age of Arthur, an overview of the stories and romances produced, the view from Britain and the search for an historical Arthur, and the power of the legend today are each presented to introduce information and to seek response. It is hoped that the articles will provide context to the development of the legends and the search for the reality of Arthur. The Project also intends to assist those searching the wealth of Arthurian information resident on the internet by presenting annotated weblinks to key web resources. Finally, the Project is hoped to provide a forum for discussion and the provision of information, both literary and historical, in which the many ideas both great and small about Arthur and the legend may be presented or suggested, shedding further light onto the often contradictory conclusions that have been reached over the years.

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The Time and Place

Arthur is remembered in legend as a great Celtic leader who fought against the Saxon invaders of Britain in the Dark Ages. But what does this mean? What was Britain like in that time and how did the people think, live and believe? Above all, what were they fighting for - what were they defending?

Britain flourished as a Celtic land for centuries in the first millennium BC, and shared with the other Celtic lands of Europe an extensive trade with the Mediterranean. The rise of Rome and its Empire saw the Celtic world subsumed, and Britain suffered first incursion by Caesar in 55BC, then invasion in AD49 and the foundation of Roman Britain. That transition was traumatic and deadly - the revolt of Boudica stands testament to this time (In Boudica's footsteps 2002) - but once established provided four centuries of development to Britain as an integral province of the Empire. Trade, commerce and urbanised life became the way of life for the British in the empire. Towns and cities grew, and beyond them the villas where grain and cattle were managed.

After centuries of dominance, the threat of invasion on the Empire was felt in Britain as it was elsewhere - particularly from Germanic tribes to the east and Pictish tribes to the north. Strong defences were prepared along the coast in the south and east (Richmond 1963, p.60), and Germanic foederati - hired forces - were employed in the defence of the province (Snyder 1997; Wacher 1975, p.413), but around AD410 Roman rule was withdrawn (Ellis 2003, p. 218; Greene, 2001) and the province was open to attack. Saxons from the north of Germany were ready to take Britain and make it their own, but an attack of deadly consequence also came from disease and in the fifth century the towns and cities of Britain became afflicted by an epidemic introduced from the Mediterranean around AD443-5 (Edens 2003) through trade routes and causing devastation in the towns such that "the majority of the towns had ceased to function by the middle of the fifth century" (Wacher 1975, p. 421). The defendable towns became death-traps and the Saxons invaded the south-east, with a pattern of occupation indicating the avoidance of the towns - and disease - and the destruction of the villas to deny supply: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle refers to the "worthlessness of the Britons and the excellence of their land" (Killings, 1996).

In the west lay a solution to the British dilemma - the south east saw the abandonment of the Romano-British culture (Wacher 1975, p.413) and Viroconium, at the western end of Watling Street, was refurbished (Phillips and Keatman 1992, p. 142). Iron Age hill forts were also refortified as strongholds (Snyder 1997; Wilmott 2002), while many nearby towns left in a state of decay or desertion (Wacher 1975, p. 416). The famous 'Cadbury Hill' in Somerset is an exemplar of a re-occupied hill-fort (Ashe 1995, p.4) as highlighted by the excavations (Alcock 1995; Green 1998). These settlements remained defendable and provided a place to regroup and defend. In the west a new Celtic landscape was developed by the people of Britain. From here they readied themselves to retain what was theirs - their lands, their culture and their heritage - and defeat the advancing Saxons. Here, in the real chance of success, rose legendary Arthur.

Arthur Pendragon

King Arthur, son of Uther Pendragon, was famously introduced to the world by the Welsh cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth in the work *Historia Regnum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain; Thorpe 1966) written around 1135. Geoffrey's *Historia* traced the origins and development of Britain from its foundation by Brutus, son of the Trojan hero Aeneas in 1200 BC, to the golden age of Arthur in the late fifth century and at last to the last British king, Cadwaladr, in 688.

The motivation for the work was to provide a history of Britain that was at once in line with the other important powers of Europe of the time as having a classical origin and to supply the Norman dynastic rulers a pedigree and a symbol of power to rival these powers (Blake and Lloyd 2002, pp. 10-11, 33-34), as much for the rulers as for Geoffrey's personal advancement. The work was presented as a genuine history to this purpose, and the fictitious nature of much of the work must be viewed as the kind of embellishment common to that period (Phillips and Keatman 1992, p. 4) for Geoffrey to provide a comprehensive historical record of the British monarchy.

Geoffrey's *Historia* gave the first detailed life of King Arthur to the rulers of medieval England, replete with action and description, giving life to an interest in him that had then recently been awakened through the works of William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntington (Blake and Lloyd 2002, p.10). In these works brief mentions of Arthur's battles had been made, drawing from lists and dates in the ninth century manuscript compilations *Historia Brittonum* edited by Nennius and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Phillips and Keatman 1992, pp. 11, 54), but Geoffrey had taken this information further, drawing upon, he said, an ancient book (Blake and Lloyd 2002, p.34) and he developed a full history that went beyond the motive for the work, and captured the imagination.

The great king Arthur stood as the centrepiece of Geoffrey's *Historia*, and much of the work is devoted to his life and kingship in the fifth century in the wake of the departure of the Roman legions in 410 and the treachery of the Saxon mercenaries lead by Hengist and Horsa. Geoffrey brought the Dark Age alive: Constantinus the king was killed amid the chaos following the withdrawal of Rome but his heirs too young to rule; Vortigern usurps the throne, brings in Saxon mercenaries to fight against the Picts and gives them land to settle in return for their aid, but the Saxons treacherously rebel; the heirs of Constantinus return and take their rightful throne: first Ambrosius, poisoned by a Saxon physician, then Uther, under the title Pendragon 'Dragon's Head', and victories are made against the Saxon. Magic is introduced in the personage of Merlin, adviser to Uther, who shape-changes Uther into the likeness of Gorlois so Uther can sleep with his beautiful wife Ygraine - and Arthur and his sister Anna are born. Merlin's magic is elsewhere encountered when the Giant's Dance, Stonehenge, is brought from Mt Killaraus and in the fight of the Dragons at Dinas Emrys - rich and colourful episodes sparking the

imagination. After the death of Gorlois, Uther admits his love of Ygraine and his adultery atoned. Arthur is made king at age fifteen following Uther's death through Saxon treachery, and wielding a magical sword called Caliburn, forged in the mystical isle of Avalon, he battles the Saxons and the Picts, defeating their forces; Arthur Pendragon establishes a court renowned throughout Christendom, but a messenger arrives from Rome with a demand for Arthur to pay homage to the Pope; Arthur's response is to set out to attack Rome. Having conquered Gaul and crossing the Alps towards Rome, Arthur hears that his nephew Medrod has done the unthinkable and usurped the throne and his beautiful wife Ganhumara. Arthur returned to Britain to meet the armies of Medrod at Camlan and a great battle was fought in which Arthur was mortally wounded, and close to death, Arthur is taken to the Isle of Avalon under the care of the enchantress Morgan and her sisterhood of nine.

Geoffrey's *Historia* is alive with treachery and betrayal; with magical feats, a wondrous sword and another world almost within reach just beyond the sea; with love and lust, insult, heartache and revenge. Battles are fought with evocative names from the scale of nations to the sake of a man. The scope of Arthur's conquests and the sense of assuredness in the time of his kingship make his time a golden age; an age that demands attraction with a mystique and an heroic air.

The *Historia* laid the foundation upon which the future Arthurian Legend would grow, for the details that Geoffrey provided allowed for the development of themes and plots and elaborations beyond his history. In 1155, the cleric Wace translated Geoffrey's work into Anglo-Norman verse and the *Roman de Brut* (The Romance of Brutus), the first Arthurian Romance, was dedicated to Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife of Henry II - in this work was introduced the concept of courtly love and the name Guinevere, and also the great Arthurian icon the Round Table: the Arthurian literary juggernaut had taken flight.

The Romances of Arthur

The Legend of Arthur became widely distributed across Europe during the twelfth century and inspired writers across the continent. In 1155, Wace opened the second half of the twelfth century with his poetic version of Geoffrey's Historia, introducing medieval concepts and formalising Arthur's court. The elaboration of the Arthurian history and its literary development into the Arthurian Romance can be traced (Phillips and Keatman 1992, pp.10, 202-203) by the stepwise addition of content, concepts and style through the following century. Already from the works of Geoffrey and Wace had Arthur's magical sword, the mystical Isle of Avalon, Merlin the magician, Arthur's beautiful wife Guinevere and steadfast knight Gawain become integral to the stories; as the romances developed so too did the Arthur's entourage burgeon.

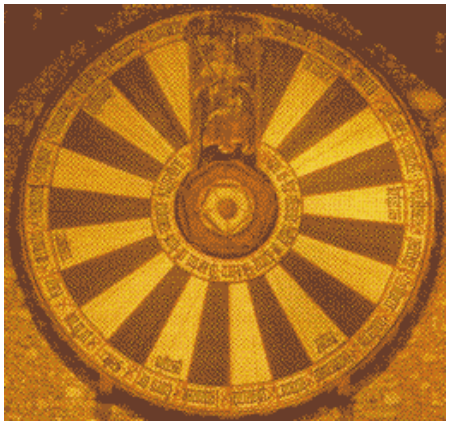
Chrétien de Troyes wrote five Arthurian stories in France between 1160 and 1180 (Comfort 1914). In this period in France the romance genre was replacing the older heroic epic as the favourite form of entertainment among the aristocracy. Classical antiquities such as the Aenead and the Iliad were being transformed to long poetic chivalric adventure tales and in this environment the stories of Arthur and the marvellous Celtic world came to grip the imagination of both audience and author alike (Owen 1975). In these Arthurian Romances were introduced the characters Perceval and Lancelot of the Lake, who appear to be based on folk-heroes from France (Phillips and Keatman 1992, p.33), and Camelot as the name of Arthur's court made its appearance.

Robert de Boron of Burgundy wrote an Arthurian trilogy in the late 1190s that interpolated into the Arthurian romances the powerful theme of the Holy Grail, firing the imagination with the presence of the chalice used by Christ at the Last Supper. Layamon shortly afterwards rendered the Arthurian story into English and transformed Arthur to immortality with the promise of his return from the Isle of Avalon. The Arthur stories entered into German around the same time with two poems by Hartmann von Aue (1200) and Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic, *Parzival* (1205), and by the centenary of Geoffrey's *Historia* in 1235, an Arthurian compilation called the *Vulgate Cycle* had been prepared.

The Arthurian Romances remained popular throughout medieval Europe, with Arthur the feudal king resident in castle Camelot with his Lady Guinevere and his knights in shining armour. In 1470 Sir Thomas Malory completed his *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Vinaver 1971; Cowen 1969). With this work a new style was developed in the telling of the Arthurian stories, for the earlier romances that were written as an ever unfolding and inter-relating poetic 'tapestry' were broken into a series of self-contained readable and intelligible prose stories (Vinaver 1971). The transition of style was accompanied with the technological development of the printing press, and in 1485 *Le Morte Darthur* was published as a

series of twenty-one books by Caxton to celebrate 'King Arthur, which ought moost to be remembred emonge us Englysshemen tofore al other Crysten kynges' (Vinaver 1971, p. vi; Cowen 1969, p. 3).

Throughout the Arthurian Romances endured the theme of love and its consequences; of the values placed on honour and loyalty and the devastation wrought upon the kingdom by its betrayal, 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' (Lawlor 1969). The Arthurian Romances concern the human condition, and of the need for vigilance in our actions, and for this the Romances endure. Caxton made this clear in his preface to Malory (Cowen 1969, p. 4), 'Do after good and leave the evil ... beware that we fall not to vice ne sin, but to exercise and follow virtue'. That these themes were true to the individual as they were to the survival of nations was exemplified by the fate of the vaguely known yet 'excellent king, King Arthur, sometime king of this noble realm, then called Britain'. The great but doomed kingdom, lost in the dark past, once held and will always hold the lessons we must never forget.



Historical Arthur

The perplexing aspect surrounding the figure of Arthur is the paucity of historical documentation about him, the battles he fought and his fate. Such an absence of evidence is what gives the Dark Ages their title, and for this period historians are more than aware that this in no way represents an evidence of absence. Uncovering or at least gleaning a tangible understanding of the people and the events of fifth and sixth century Britain has proven an exciting and tantalising endeavour, and unravelling the mystery has produced a literature of its own, with a contemporary audience as captivated as the readers of the Romances were in medieval Europe.

Current investigations make strong use of the power of deduction to shed light on the unrecorded, revealing information otherwise unobtainable nor understandable, if taken within context. Medieval proofs of Arthur were rather less rigorous - the Round Table fake in Winchester Cathedral, or the fake grave of Arthur at Glastonbury (Phillips and Keatman 1992, pp. 14-17) are prime examples. The ability to differentiate between the literary add-ons and original material in the Arthurian legends has allowed modern investigators to focus on searching for what can be found, and from what material is available draw testable conclusions.

A good place to start is with King Arthur's name. The name 'Arthur' has been the subject of linguistic analysis, which when taken in the context of its use, is revealed to be in fact an epithet or nickname rather than a given name. Griffen (1994) provides an excellent analysis of the epithet Arthur, showing that it derives from both Celtic and Latin words for Bear. As such, 'Arthur' was a name able to be used with ease by the two main cultural factions in Britain, the 'Celtic' nationalistic and the Roman reunification factions, who stood united by their leader against invading Germanic forces. The Latin form Arturus is a pointed reference to the bright star Arcturus, leader of the Great Bear constellation; The Celtic form Art + ur means Bear-man, or leader of the Bear. As the dux bellorum, Arthur was the leader of the British forces: For both factions united against the Saxons, to say 'Arthur' was to pronounce the same sound and mean the same nick-name. As a symbol for all the British people, the Bear was singularly appropriate, for it is a very northern constellation, and the tenacity of the bear in defending its territory or its young renowned.

One of the earliest references to Arthur is written in British and found in the battle poem Goddodin. This poem was composed around 610, committed to writing around 850 and survives in the 'Book of Anierin' compiled in 1265 (Phillips and Keatman 1992, pp. 200-203) - As an aside, the poem is an excellent example to illustrate the lengthy periods in which Dark Age material was transmitted before the surviving manuscripts were produced. The reference to Arthur in this poem is given in a comparative context - it appears in a line praising one of the warriors of the kingdom of Goddodin who fought

valiantly against the Anglo-Saxons at the battle of Catraeth (c.600; Griffen 1994, p.1), noting that despite his prowess, 'he was no Arthur': ceni bei ef Arthur.

Nennius wrote the *Historia Brittonum* around 830 (Phillips and Keatman, 1992, p. 201), and in this earliest Latin text mentioning Arthur, given in the battle list, his name is given as Arturus; this form was also used by Geoffrey of Monmouth (Griffen, 1994, p. 2).

The British and Latin forms of 'Arthur' in the early references demonstrate the use of the epithet as described by Griffen (1994). The term 'Bear' is found as a direct reference to a British king at a date even earlier than the Goddodin, in the text prepared in 540-5 by Gildas, *De Excido Conquestu Brittanniae* (Phillips and Keatman 1992, p. 200). The reference is found in Gildas 32, and has become a focus for deductive reasoning about Arthur, for it derives from the time only twenty years after the battle of Camlann. It occurs in an address to Cunoglasus of Rhos, in the north of Wales immediately to the east of Gwynedd: Gildas asks, 'Ut quid in nequitiae tuae volveris vetusta faece et tu ab adolescentiae annis, urse, multorum sessor aurigaque currus receptaculi ursi, dei contemptor sortisque eius depressor, Cuneglase, Romana lingua lanio fulve?: Why have you been rolling in the filth of your past wickedness, bear, rider of many and driver of the chariot of the Bear's Stronghold, despiser of God and oppressor of his lot, Cuneglasus, in Latin 'red butcher'?' This is a wicked and calculated insult to Cunoglasus, for his name in fact transliterates to Blue Dog, and figuratively to Shining Warrior (Stewart n.d.); but the importance of the passage relates to the fact that Cuneglasus was the inheritor of the Bear's kingdom.

Cunoglasus was cousin to Maglocunus, Maelgwyn of Gwynedd, in the period immediately after Camlann. Gildas identifies Cunoglasus as the inheritor of the Bear's Stronghold: The father of Cunoglasus, the previous king, who would by deduction be the Bear, was Owain Ddantgwyn (Phillips and Keatman 1992, p. 160; Baker 2003). Owain was killed by his nephew Maglocunus who then took control of Gwynedd. In Geoffrey's Historia, Arthur was killed by his nephew Merdraut (Mordred) at Camlan - just as Maglocunus killed his uncle, Owain. The father of Owain Ddantgwyn was the son of Cunedda, who famously led the campaign to expel the Irish in Northern Wales after 460. The name of Owain's father was Enniaun Girt, or Enniaun Yrth, king of Gwynedd. The kings of Gwynedd were known as the Dragons, and consequently Enniaun would have been also been known as Yrthyr-pen-Dragon, recognizably the Uther Pendragon of Geoffrey's Historia (Baker 2003).

Here it is pertinent to finally refer to the literature of Wales, for in the words of the very people for whom Arthur was defender are found allegorical and historical depictions of the king that take us to the brink of knowing the man. In 850 the poems *Canu Llywarch Hen* and *Canu Heledd* were composed; in 955 the *Annales Cambria*, the *Annals of Wales*, were compiled; in 990 the epic *Culhwch and Olwen* was composed; in 1160 the *Dream of Rhonabwy* was composed; and in 1250 the *Black Book of Carmarthen* compiled - followed by the compilations the *Book of Aneirin* (1265), the *White Book of Rhydderch* (1325) and the *Red Book of Hergest* (1400). These texts were composed and finally compiled over the same period as the Latin texts - within both sets exist independent and

inter-dependent claims, lineages and tales of Arthur. Blake and Lloyd (2002) have comprehensively followed the Welsh texts and provide genealogies according to the references and inferences there, again locating Arthur to the north of Wales. Camlan is discovered in the south of Gwynedd, where the name is still used today, as pointed out in 1872 in the *Archaeologica Cambrensis*: all in close proximity are the river, Afon Gamlan, the mountain pass Camlan, a stretch of the river Dyfi called Camlan and a farm called Meas-y-Camlan, the Field of Camlan (Blake and Lloyd 2002, p. 190). Phillips and Keatman (1992, p. 151-153 and 163-164) show that consistent with the legend of the death of Arthur at the battle of Camlan as we know it in Geoffrey's *Historia* is a fusing of a great campaign against an alliance of Cunomorus (Mark of Cornwall) and Cerdic of Wessex and the battle for kingship of Gwynedd where Maglocunus killed Owain: Mordred of the legends appears to be a fusion of Cunomorus and Maglocunus; Likewise, the legendary battle of Camlan appears to be a fusion of the battle for control of Gwynedd and the battle against Wessex - resulting in both a battle for Britain as well as a battle between two men. Phillips and Keatman (2002, pp. 184-189) draw attention to Arthur as he is portrayed in the *Dream of Rhonabwy* - an extensive section sees Arthur playing a game of *gwyddbwyll* (a chess-like game with the object of defeating the king) with Owain ap Urien. Arthur is able to read Owain's thoughts, and the passage focuses on how Arthur and Owain's forces reconcile and together defeat the Saxons. Owain ap Urien dates to a century after Arthur, and it may well be that Owain was originally Owain Ddantgwyn and thus Arthur himself - Arthur (epithet) versus Owain (the king) - in which case the 'Bear' of Gildas, Owain Ddantgwyn, is allegorically identified as Arthur.

The Birth of Arthur

The literature of Wales is a rich resource of information about the genealogy of Arthur and the identity of his relatives and the location of his family. In this literature we find that Arthur is a descendent of Cunedda on his mother's side, for Eigr is the daughter of Gwen the daughter of Cunedda; which gives pause to the contention that Arthur can be identified as Owain, the father of Cunoglasus the great-grandson of Cunedda on his father's side. The magic of Merlin's shape-shifting seems to be working its spell again, and once more we encounter the mists of confusion that pervade the legend of Arthur!

In Geoffrey's *Historia*, a magical episode relates the birth of Arthur, for Uther Pendragon, his father, is shape-shifted into the likeness of Gorlois, the husband of Ygerna; and having spent himself with her and conceiving the future King, Uther later confesses his love for her at the death of Gorlois and they are married.

This shape-shifting stands in remarkable opposition to the episode in the First Branch of the Mabinogi where Pwyll Prince of Dyfed is shape-shifted by Arawn a king of Annwn and spends a celibate year in the Otherworld with Arawn's beautiful wife (Jones and Jones, 1949). Another series of shape shiftings are met in the Fourth Branch, Math ap Mathonwy when Gwydion the magician sets as punishment for his brothers' rape of the king's footmaiden their transformation into animals for three consecutive years and they produce three sets of offspring; Gwydion also shape-shifts his nephew Lleu and himself into shoe-makers to gain entrance to Caer Arianrhod in a separate episode in the same Mabinogi (Jones and Jones, 1949).

Thus the shape-shifting of Uther Pendragon by Merlin into the likeness of Gorlois found in Geoffrey's *Historia* is consistent with magical shape-shifting incidents in Welsh literature.

What hidden meaning is contained in this confusion of identity? Is it to explain the confusion about who is the biological father compared to a foster family relationship? Fosterage was a standard Celtic practice and is met with in literary terms throughout the Mabinogi, and was reported by Julius Caesar in his social commentary of the Celts on the Continent in Gaul.

The son of Pwyll and Rhiannon, known originally as Gwri Golden Hair, was fostered into the house of Teyrnon and his wife. Once the lad was grown, he was presented to his parents and gained the new name, Pryderi. The child of Arianrhod was sent to fosterage, and when grown acknowledged as Lleu Llaw Gyffes. Arthur's cousin, Culhwch, was fostered after a manner, being brought up by his step-mother.

Could the child Arthur have been fostered by Eigr? Could it be that the son of Uther Pendragon was sent to the house of Gorlois for his early years? Both Uther and Eigr were the grandchildren of Cunedda (Phillips and Keatman, 1992; Blake and Lloyd, 2002), so the strong family tie would have ensured the young Owain's safety, were this so. When grown, he would be presented at court and may have then gained the title 'Bear', that is, Arthur. This scenario harmonises the otherwise conflicting results of the research efforts conducted by Phillips and Keatman (1992) and Blake and Lloyd (2002).

This is what Caesar recorded about fosterage in Gaullish society at the time of the Conquest, which culturally would apply equally to Celtic Britain at the same time, and in Sub-Roman Britain as it was rapidly re-Celticising: The quote is from 'Customs and institutions of the Gauls', VI.16.18 (Handford, 1982): "Their children are not allowed to go up to their fathers in public until they are old enough for military service; they regard it as unbecoming of a son who is still a boy to stand in his father's sight in a public place."

Given the reflection of this observation by Caesar in the childhood-to-manhood episodes of Pryderi and Lleu Llaw, it ought seriously be considered for Arthur.

Themes Today

The twentieth century and its aftermath have provoked new needs and wants in society. Worldwide wars and clashes of political, social and religious philosophies and the ethics of leadership have greatly impacted on people living today. In this environment, a belief in the capacity of mankind to govern itself with dignity at all levels - from the individual up to nations and beyond - is a powerful motive to reach out to the honourable Arthur and his court, but with the added requirement for hard evidence to back it up.

Two trends appear in contemporary times. One is the development of fantastic and magical themes based firmly or loosely on the Arthurian legend. Here we find T. H. White's 'Once and Future King' published in 1958, the Arthurian literary work of the twentieth century. Marion Zimmer Bradley's 'Mists of Avalon' series (1983-91) explores the conflict between Christianity and neo-paganism. Here also we find the thematic basis of epic quest fantasies such as Tolkein's 'Lord of the Rings' (1954-5), Moorcock's concept of the 'Eternal Champion' such as 'Elric' (1961-5), Eddings' guided prophesy in the 'Belgariad/Malloreon' cycle (1982-91) and Stan Lee's noble leadership in the 'X-men' comics (1963+). The other trend is the development of credible historical enquiries into the Dark Ages including the identity of King Arthur. Investigations at Cadbury hillfort and Tintagel sparked both credibility and a demand for rationality in Dark Age archaeology (Beihl 1991); critical analyses of medieval documents have been prepared, such as described in 'Historical Arthur'. At once these paired developments reflect the twentieth century desire for 'scientific truth' conjoined with a requirement for a 'mystical dimension' to provide meaning to the mundane.

The Arthurian literature has burgeoned. As a simple illustration, a list of approximately 150 novels based on Arthurian characters and themes is provided by the University of Great Falls for its Arthurian Legends subject (Bobbitt 2005). The advent of the internet has given rise to a profusion of websites, discussion groups and on-line journals devoted to Arthurian material - the annotated weblinks provided on this site provide an insight to this phenomenon.

A useful milepost for the opening of modern Arthurian literature is the publication of 'The Idylls of the King' by Lord Alfred Tennyson, appointed poet laureate in 1850. His heroic poems were a reworking of Malory, in which each of the characters or events were written as Idylls that helped the nineteenth century reader grasp the epic's great moral themes (Alfred Tennyson by Andrew Lang 1844-1912). In the twentieth century, following the advent of the Cold War, T.H. White produced 'The Once and Future King' (1958). Written at a time when the leadership of nations and the motives for war had been sorely tested over a sustained period, White "uses the Arthurian legend to illustrate a historical pride of England (and) uses this view to expose faults in contemporary society

(and) sees that the Arthurian legend is not so much the glorification of one man, but the basis and backbone of an entire country" (Latil 1997). This work serves as the twentieth century's contribution to Arthurian legend, a timely reflection of the timeless theme of leadership and national identity.

Films and television productions relating the Arthurian legend were greatly affected by White, and the visual media have yielded The Sword in the Stone (1963), Camelot (1967), Merlin (1976), Excalibur (1981), The Fisher King (1991), First Knight (1995), The Mists of Avalon (2001) and King Arthur (2004). At the time King Arthur (2004) was in post-production, a review of that movie (Houston n.d) examined the impetus behind the prolific Arthurian story-telling, the "wonderful mixing of magic, God, and kingly power".

White's Arthurian cycle comprises five books (Nevitt 1996), the first four bound as 'The Once and Future King'. 'The Sword in the Stone'is about Arthur's childhood, his tutelage by Merlyn, the coming of his kingship and rivalry with Lot; 'The Queen of Air and Darkness', concerns the rival house of King Lot, his wife Morgause, and sons who love their mother despite her evil; 'The Ill-Made Knight' concerns Lancelot and his love dilemma involving Guenever, Arthur's young wife; 'The Candle in the Wind' follows Arthur's bastard son, Mordred, who comes to Camelot with the purpose of bring about Arthur's downfall, manipulating the unresolved love triangle between Arthur, Lancelot and Guenever. The plotting brings about a war that no one wants except Mordred, and the book ends on the battle's eve. 'The Once and Future King' finishes here. Then as now, the reader is confronted with the inevitability of war as the consequence of a lack of vigilance, thoughtless selfish actions and the manipulation of circumstances by ill-doers. The last book, 'The Book of Merlyn', is a separate volume in which Arthur is revisited by Merlyn together with a host of magical animals from his now distant childhood; it is book about hindsight.

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