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## The Power of Perception and Origin Myth: Reconsidering the Origins of the Arthurian Legend

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## 1

## Contemporary Theories and Arthur's Historical Prototypes

*"On the basic issue of Arthur's identity, there need never have been any mystery at all."*

—Geoffrey Ashe

***Riothamus*<sup>1</sup>**

Geoffrey Ashe has made the most recent attempt to find a historical prototype of Arthur.

According to Ashe,

Arthur's history is more than just a medley of yarns, more than just a saga in the "dream time" myth. It puts him within a definite period. It names definite places, and takes him to definite countries....

This is not to say that the official history is true. As it stands, it isn't. But its fullness and firmness, and its power of shaping a consensus, justify a search for the realities behind it. (*Discovery* 3)

For Ashe, there is no need to consider the possibility that Arthur's roots are legendary. Ashe justifies his quest for Arthur's historical prototype by the "fullness and firmness" of Arthur's apparent "official" history, not the historicity of this "fullness and firmness." Unlike most scholars, he believes that Riothamus, who was a Brittonic king, is the prototype of Arthur and that Geoffrey of Monmouth drew on Riothamus' historical tradition when writing his twelfth-century *Historia* (*Discovery* 4). Despite the questionable historicity of Geoffrey's *Historia*, Ashe claims Riothamus as his worthy historical prototype: "[Riothamus was] someone with enough of the qualities Geoffrey needed for this fiction and enough substance to give that fiction

its medieval impact, as an official history which nobody could subvert" (*Discovery* 59). Instead of further supporting Riothamus as Arthur's historical prototype, Ashe's statement implies that Geoffrey of Monmouth appropriated Riothamus' history in order to make his fictional Arthur into a genuine historical figure.

Ashe insists that the link between Riothamus and Arthur lies within the writings of Jordanes, a Gothic historian; Gregory of Tours, a Frankish historian; Sidonius Apollinaris, a Gallo-Roman author; and William, author of the *Legenda Sancti Groeznovii* (Lacy and Ashe 47; Ashe, "Ancient" 310-11; Ashe, *Discovery* 54-57). In the mid sixth century, Jordanes wrote the *Gothic History*, where he explained that the Britons answered the Roman Emperor Anthemius' request for aid when confronted with a Gothic threat in Gaul. However, "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" (qtd. in Ashe, "Ancient" 310). Defeated, Riothamus fled toward Burgundy.

Ashe cites Gregory of Tours' sixth-century *History of the Franks* to add geographical details to this battle: "The Britons were expelled from Bourges by the Goths after the killing of many of them at Bour-de-Dols" (*Discovery* 56). Moreover, according to Ashe, a letter from Apollinaris to a Briton king indicates an earlier contact between the two men, and this "earlier contact with the King suggests a passage of time, putting the letter in late 469, even early 470" (*Discovery* 55). Relying on an account of the fifth-century Britons given in the eleventh-century *Legenda Sancti Groeznovii*, Ashe determines that Arthur campaigned in Britain and Gaul like Riothamus (*Discovery* 103). Since Riothamus led successful campaigns in Gaul during the late fifth century, and since the *Legenda* and other Brittonic chronicles place Arthur in Gaul during the late fifth century, Ashe argues that Riothamus can be no one else but Arthur (*Discovery* 111).

Ashe justifies his conclusion by claiming that the name Riothamus was merely Arthur's title. The Latin "Riothamus" is "Rigotamus" in British. "Rig" means "kingly" or "king" and takes on an "o" in a compound. "Tamus" is a superlative ending like the "est" in "greatest." Thus, as a proper noun, "Rigotamus" means "king-most" or "supreme king," and, as an adjective, it would mean "most kingly." Ashe concludes that "Rigotamus" was used as an honorific title like the names "Vortigern" or "Vortimer," meaning "over-king" or "over-chief," which are commonly given in Arthurian legends (*Discovery* 97). Ashe cites the first Roman Emperor, Octavian, who went by "Augustus," "His Majesty," as a historical example of a great ruler known by his title instead of his name (*Discovery* 97). Similarly, Ashe assumes that Arthur, a king of the Britons, was called Riothamus or Rigotamus ("Ancient" 320). While this may seem plausible, given Ashe's prior claims, a closer examination of Ashe's argument reveals exactly what Rachel Bromwich concludes: "Such suggestions as these can be at best be no more than straws in the wind" (*The Arthur of the Welsh* 6). Ironically, the very tools Ashe uses to defend his claims, etymology and geography, disprove them.

Ashe's claim that Riothamus' military campaigns to Gaul could be a model for the continental campaigns that Geoffrey of Monmouth credits to Arthur is reasonable. The similarities between the campaigns are apparent; however, they do not suggest that Riothamus is a historical prototype of Arthur. Unlike Geoffrey's pan-Brittonic hero, the Arthur in Nennius' ninth-century the *Historia Brittonum* only battles the Saxons: "Then Arthur fought against them [the Saxons] in those days, together with the kings of the British; but he was their leader in battle" (35). Arthur is portrayed as a Brittonic hero; moreover, "In general the early Welsh sources do not show Arthur as a battle-campaigner, but rather a leader against giants, monsters and other supernatural opponents" (Padel, "Recent Works" 109). Rather than a genuine



historical figure, the heroic Arthur appears as a merely-legendary figure. Despite Ashe's claim, "It is much more likely that Geoffrey took the legendary Brittonic Arthur and, as part of the historicizing process, added the Continental campaigns, drawn partly from those of Riotamus, to his achievements" (Padel, "Recent Works" 110). This reasoning accounts for the similarities between their campaigns, but does not establish Riothamus as the historical prototype of Arthur.

Ashe further weakens his main thesis by claiming that Riothamus was a title and not a proper name. In "Gildas and the Names of the British Princes," Kenneth Jackson refutes the idea that titles were used as names in the fifth century by examining the name Vortigern (36-40). O. J. Padel builds on Jackson's argument by concluding that,

Like Vortigern, Riotamus belongs with a variety of other personal names containing the same elements. *Rigo-hene* and *Cuno-tami* are two from about the same period of Riotamus; others of a later date include *Riadaf*, *Cawrdaf*, *Gwyndaf* and others, all containing the Welsh *-daf* from *-tamos*, and *Riguallaun*, *Rigeneu* and others containing the Welsh *Rhi-* and *Rigo-*.  
(*"Recent Work"* 108)

The separate uses and combination of "Rigo-" and "-tamos" are not unique. Moreover, there is no clear evidence that suggests Riothamus was anything more than a personal name. Personal names can have meanings that are similar to honorific titles; thus, "it is special pleading to suggest that Riotamus was also called Arthur," even though the name Riothamus means "supreme king" or "king-most" (Padel, "Recent Works" 108). Since Riothamus was a personal name, it follows that any person bearing the name would be called exactly that. Indeed,

Ashe is grasping at straws. However, two other more likely theories for a historical prototype of Arthur have developed from his name, which is derived from the Latin “Artorius.”

***Lucius Artorius Castus and Artgur—“bear-man”***

Like the historical Riothamus, Lucius Artorius Castus led military campaigns from Britain to the Continent (Padel, “Nature of Arthur” 31). In “Artorius,” Kemp Malone proposes that Lucius Artorius Castus is the historical prototype of Arthur, based on the etymology of the name Arthur and on the Gallic campaigns Geoffrey ascribes to Arthur in the *Historia* (370). The Latin “Artorius” would have developed into “Art(h)ur” in the vernacular. The long “o” in Artorius regularly appears as “u” in Welsh and such endings as “-ius” are dropped. Therefore, Artorius becomes Art(h)ur (Malone 371).

The etymology of “Arthur” is the crucial premise in Kemp Malone’s theory. The Artorius derivation seems likely, but this identification requires Arthur to be a figure who was first historical, absorbed into Celtic folklore, and subsequently historicized in a completely different era from that in which he allegedly originated. Also, Malone’s theory does not allow for the possibility of a legendary prototype of Arthur.<sup>2</sup> Hence, his theory for a historical prototype is challenged by an alternative, and quite plausible, theory.

While the Artorius derivation of Arthur is acceptable, so too is a native derivation. Art(h)ur would have developed in the vernacular from Artgur. According to Rachel Bromwich,

The Irish word *art* and Welsh *arth*, ‘bear,’ were frequently used figuratively in both languages to denote a warrior, and *Art* actually survived as a personal name in Irish, and

as the first element in such early Welsh names as *Arthgen*,  
*Arthgal*, *Arthgloys*. (*Arthur* 5-6)

Given the Welsh “Art-” and the Brythonic “-gur” that became “-ur” by the sixth century, the argument for a native derivation is as probable as Malone’s Artorius derivation. Further credence is given to the native derivation when Bromwich includes Jean Markale’s excellent point that “it is significant that Latin writers always refer to Arthur as *Arturus* or *Arturius*, never as *Artorius*” (6). The British “Art(h)ur” would have been Latinized by adding the “-us” ending. Moreover, medieval authors made the connection between Arthur and the bear in marginal additions to manuscripts such as the *Historia Brittonum* (Coe and Young 11).

While there are no linguistic grounds for preferring the Artorius derivation to the Artgur derivation, or vice versa, the native derivation appears more favorable, given the bear-like or warrior nature of the *Historia Brittonum*’s Brittonic Arthur. However, even this claim is as reaching as Ashe’s suggestion that the “fullness and firmness” of Arthur’s “official” history validates his claims that Riothamus is Arthur’s historical prototype.

By relying on etymology, supporters of the Artorius and Artgur derivations associate specific names with genuine historical figures: thus, their arguments revolve only around finding a connection between the right personal name and the proper historical figure and do not consider that Arthur could have been a merely-legendary figure. Ashe’s theory also presupposes that a historical figure existed, because he attempts to link Arthur to Riothamus by geographical sites and the derivation of the name Riothamus. Furthermore, Ashe’s dismissal of a merely-legendary prototype from “a saga in the ‘dream time’ of myth,” allows him to use archaeological investigations to further prove Riothamus is Arthur’s genuine historical prototype (*Discovery* 3).

Often used to bolster claims for historical prototypes, archaeology is not a reliable source, since it further assumes that a historical figure can be found by investigating certain sites, where archaeological methods are directly applied to literary evidence:

In both Biblical and classical studies much exploration has been devoted to the identification on the ground of cities, battle-fields and other places mentioned in texts, whether those texts are dealing with historical, legendary or purely fictitious events. (Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* 160)

In theory, a topographical study of Arthurian Britain is possible and could be beneficial for determining the existence of a historical Arthur. Yet, in practice, “only one of the thirteen battles attributed to Arthur...can be located with confidence; and even then only in a general area—Cat Coit Celidon, the battle of Caledonian Forest, was fought in southern Scotland” (Alcock 160). Excavations have uncovered pottery fragments from the mid-fifth and late sixth century at Tintagel, while evidence at South Cadbury in Somerset shows this Iron-Age hill-fort received a major refortification in the late fifth or sixth century (Padel “South-Western Sites” 230-238).<sup>3</sup> These excavations have revealed much about fifth- and sixth-century activity, but, as expected, no direct associations with a historical Arthur.<sup>4</sup> Thus, regarding Arthur, archaeology is often based on inferences and probabilities, but not facts.

Given this analysis of contemporary theories for a historical prototype, it follows that these theories are based on the assumption that a historical prototype existed. Since these theories presuppose that Arthur existed, they are they are dubious. Thus, while Arthur may have a historical prototype, there is no theory that adequately disproves the likelihood of a legendary prototype. Moreover, Padel notes, “the process of historicising legends was a widespread

feature of Celtic literary activity in the Middle Ages” (“Nature of Arthur” 23). Indeed, Arthur could be a merely-legendary figure historicized in the *Historia Brittonum* just as Hengest and Horsa were merely-legendary figures portrayed as historical in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (Turville-Petre 274). Clearly, it is now time to consider the question, “Was the prototype for a historical and subsequently mythical Arthur derived from legend?”



## 2

## Historiography, the Hengest Founder-King Myth, and Anglo-Saxonism

*“Hengest alone and unduplicated figured independently in heroic legend. The war-god had his shrines and his cults, but he also had adventures.”*

—J.E. Turville-Petre

### ***The Historia Ecclesiastica, the Historia Brittonum, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle***

Before examining the appearance of Hengest and Horsa in the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is important to distinguish between two different genres and sub-genres of historical writing. Since the historicization paradigm includes foundation-legends, or origin myths, distinctions must be made between the types of historiography in which these origin myths occur. In his introduction to *Racial Myth in English History*, Hugh MacDougall states, “Myths of origin enable people to locate themselves in time and space. They offer an explanation of the unknown and hallowed traditions by linking them to heroic events and personages of the distant past” (1). These links to heroic events and ancient ancestors are often established through genealogies and conflicts that occur throughout the people’s history. In the eighth century, the Venerable Bede first recorded the Anglo-Saxons’ arrival in Britain at the request of Vortigern, the king of Britain, in his work the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (1.15). Naming more specific persons and places, Nennius added that Vortigern invited the brothers Hengest and Horsa to Britain when he feared invasion from the Picts and the Irish in the ninth century *Historia Brittonum* (26).<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the history of the Anglo-

Saxons begins with the arrival of Hengest and Horsa in Britain in 449 AD: “In their days Hengest and Horsa, invited by Vortigern, king of the Britons, came to Britain at a place called Ypwinesfleot [Ebbsfleet, Kent] at first to help the Britons, but later they fought against them” (12). The appearance of Hengest and Horsa in these texts as founders of the Anglo-Saxon race in Britain shows that various historical writings often contain types of origin myths.

There are several sub-genres of historical writing, but the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Chronicle* represent two of the main ones—the diachronic and the synchronic. *Diachronic* refers to a form of historical writing that is “an expression of a sense of national unity projected back into a legendary past” (Charles-Edwards 17).<sup>6</sup> *Synchronic*, which can occur in combination with the diachronic, “is concerned to establish a chronological relationship between the histories of different peoples” (Charles-Edwards 20). These two sub-genres of historical writing often occur as elements in two different genres of history: *historia gentis*, the history of a people, and *historia ecclesiastica*, ecclesiastical history.

According to David Dumville, the *Historia Brittonum* represents diachronic history because the origins of the Irish presented in chapter 13 are wholly legendary (5-8). Also, the use of Mil Espaine, an ancient ancestor of all the Irish, establishes national unity (Charles-Edwards 17). Yet, in establishing a text as diachronic history, there is a danger that the legends within it indicate that other information in the text is also ahistorical. However, the *Historia Brittonum* is not entirely diachronic. The histories of the Irish, Romans, and Anglo-Saxons are woven throughout the continuous account of the Britons, and, thus, the text also contains synchronic history. Moreover, these sub-genres of historical writing are parts of the *Historia Brittonum*’s larger historical genre; that is, a hybrid of *historia gentis* and *historia ecclesiastica*—or, *sacred-origin* history (Charles-Edwards 21).<sup>7</sup>

As sacred-origin history, the early ninth century *Historia Brittonum* begins with the “Six Ages of the World,” which moves from the beginning of the world to the second-coming of Jesus Christ at Judgement Day (Nennius 18). Thomas Charles-Edwards concludes that this theme is “appropriate to ecclesiastical history, but then turns to the origin of the British people, an *origo gentis* closely related to the *origo* of the Franks given in Fredegar’s *Chronicle* and in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*” (21). Since the *Historia Brittonum* is about the origin and fates of the Britons and Anglo-Saxons and the Saxon settlement in Kent led by Hengest that was “the will of God” (Nennius 32), the *Historia Brittonum* represents a synthesis of diachronic and synchronic history as well as a hybrid of the genres *historia gentis* and *historia ecclesiastica*—sacred-origin history.

Unlike the *Historia Brittonum*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is not a hybrid of ecclesiastical and origin historical writing. Beginning with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, the *Chronicle* combines diachronic and synchronic historical writing to present the origin of the Kingdom of Kent, which begins with Hengest. Anglo-Saxon national unity is established by a single common ancestor, Woden, a Germanic War and Father God (Brooks 58-60), from whom all genealogies of the Kentish dynasty are descended (*Chronicle* 2). Thus, the *Chronicle* combines diachronic and synchronic sub-genres to create a *historia gentis*. However, the Anglo-Saxon origin myth does not begin and end with Woden.

### ***Hengest and the Founder-King Myth***

The previous discussion of historical genres and sub-genres reveals that legends were commonly used in historical writings. Such inclusions can call into question a text’s historicity,

but the crucial danger lies in not recognizing merely-legendary figures in such historical writings. When a merely-legendary aspect of a text is assumed to be historical, the historicization of a legend occurs through subsequent historical writings. The *Historia Brittonum* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* can be classified as examples of *historia gentis*. Moreover, the origin of the Anglo-Saxons described by these texts is diachronic, or extends back to merely-legendary ancestors. The brothers Hengest and Horsa are portrayed as historical in these and later works, and they represent one of many types of merely-legendary figures derived from ancient religious beliefs and practices known as *founder-pairs*.<sup>8</sup>

Acknowledging the role Hengest and Horsa play in the Anglo-Saxon genealogies, J. E. Turville-Petre states, “if the royal house of Kent in the early eighth century seriously believed themselves to be descended from a person called Hengest, they should have taken the pains to make him seem credible” (273). Since Hengest is only an invading Germanic chief in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Turville-Petre speculates that the added tale of Hengest’s four battles in the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Chronicle* might have been composed to give Hengest and his brother an illusory historicity. Yet, even with these battles, Hengest and Horsa still represent a legendary founder-pair like Ibor and Agio of the Lombards or Ambri and Assi of the Vandals and give credence to the claim that “[t]he founder-pair is a well-known motive among origin legends” (Turville-Petre 274).

The concept of the founder-pair originates from ancient religious beliefs in divine twins. In the *Rigveda*, a thirteenth-century BC collection of Indian hymns of praise, divine twins “emerge as representatives of the life-giving light of the sun, as practitioners of healing, helpers in distress, especially for seafarers” (Turville-Petre 274). Their title, *Asvinau*, means “possessors of horses.” In Sparta, the worship of divine twins evolved into the practice of dual



kingship by royal brothers or other close relatives; often, “the social and dynastic tradition bore the impress of this cult” (Turville-Petre 274). Even though the cult of twin deities is not widely reported among the Germanic people, Turville-Petre asserts that archaeological and literary evidence reveals that the belief in divine twins was widespread among the Celtic and Germanic people on the Continent (275n). Initially, Hengest and Horsa are a founder-pair of siblings.

Their divine associations are further revealed by an examination of their names. As stated above, the divine twins in the *Rigveda* were known as *Asvinau*, possessors of horses. Often, the founder-pairs’ names are associated with different types of horses, which were sacred animals among the Germanic people, while the cult of the horse was known among other Indo-European peoples (Turville-Petre 278). As a founder-pair, Hengest and Horsa’s names correspond to words associated with horses. In Old English, Hengest means “gelding” or “pack-horse,” while Horsa is a derivative related to the noun “hors,” “which in Old English denoted the genus *equus* in general” (Turville-Petre 277). In turn, the Latin genus *equus* indicates “horse” (“Equuleus”). Indeed, except for a hero in *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon *historia gentis*, the names Hengest and Horsa never appear as personal names; rather, their names are more often associated with animals (Turville-Petre 277).<sup>9</sup>

Given the selective use of these names and their divine cult associations, their appearance in Anglo-Saxon *historia gentis* is significant, for they are first used to establish a legendary founder-pair and then a hero-founder, or founder-king archetype for the Anglo-Saxons. According to Turville-Petre, “The original purpose of the royal genealogy was to attach the line to a divine ancestor. The genealogy expressed the myth of the god-king...” (283). In the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Chronicle*, “Woden” indicates the divine ancestor from which all Anglo-Saxons descend (*Historia* 26, *Chronicle* 2). As merely-legendary descendants of Woden,



Hengest and Horsa are part of a foundation-legend that often includes a founder-pair and/or a hero-founder who becomes a founder-king archetype based on myth and divine associations (Turville-Petre 289).

Indeed, the four battles added to the *Historia Brittonum* by Nennius and recorded in the *Chronicle* can be seen as attempts to give these merely-legendary figures a genuine history. The *Historia Brittonum* contains Vortigern's request for help, the ensuing invasion of the Anglo-Saxons, and Horsa's eventual fall at the battle of Episford, but does not focus on Hengest as a hero-founder/founder-king (31-32). Only in the *Chronicle* does Hengest continue his campaign against the Britons with Æsc, his son, and establishes the Kingdom of Kent: thereby, he becomes a heroic founder-king (12). After Bede's brief account of Hengest and Horsa, it is clear that these brothers have been recognized as historical in the *Chronicle*, when they are instead merely-legendary. A legendary aspect of a text is often assumed to be historical because of its race's sociopolitical needs. The motives for historicizing Hengest and Horsa, especially in the *Chronicle*, are derived from such needs, and these motives are part of a larger process—*Anglo-Saxonism*.

### ***Historicity and Anglo-Saxonism***

As defined by Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles, in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, the term “Anglo-Saxonism”

is used to denote the process through which the self-conscious national and racial identity first came into being among the early peoples of the region we now call England

and how, over time, through both scholarly and popular promptings, that identity was transformed into an originary myth available to a wide variety of political and social interests. (1)

Before Frantzen and Niles, Hugh MacDougall defined Anglo-Saxonism as the genesis and growth of an originary myth (2). In both cases, the identity of a race is fostered and perpetuated by an origin myth. Anglo-Saxonism also fosters a belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, where the “race” denotes “not so much a biological state as a social identity that is compounded of ethnicity, culture, tradition, and language” (Frantzen and Niles 2). In summarizing MacDougall’s argument, Frantzen and Niles conclude that he “makes it clear that the power of any myth of origins resides not in its objective truth but rather in its being *perceived* as true” (3, my emphasis). This perception of truth is powerful because elements of the origin myth—whether legendary or historical—are often derived from and incorporated into historical writings such as *historia ecclesiastica* and *historia gentis*. Thus, historical writings further add historicity, or credibility, to these legendary or historical elements and the origin myth as a whole.

The *Historia Brittonum* and the *Chronicle* contribute to the origins of Anglo-Saxon racial identity before the Norman Conquest in AD 1066. Hengest and Horsa, like the divine twins *Asvinau*, are “helpers in distress” (Turville-Petre 274). Their legendary deeds against the Britons fulfill the Anglo-Saxon need for racial and military superiority and are fundamental components of the Anglo-Saxon origin myth.

MacDougall argues that Anglo-Saxonism is largely derived from the historicization of Hengest and Horsa: “The English are, in the main, of Germanic origin, and their history begins with the landing of Hengist and Horsa at Ebbsfleet, Kent, in 499” (2). Since Hengest and Horsa

represent a founder-pair who create a foundation-legend, and since Hengest is a founder-king archetype, these brothers cannot have an authentic history. Anglo-Saxonism is dependent on the historicization of Hengest and Horsa. Like Turville-Petre, Nicholas Brooks concludes, "Claims of descent from divine progenitors and the identification of the 'Founding Fathers' as gods are of course standard elements in the dynastic praise and 'oral tradition' of early Germanic peoples, as they are of many tribes throughout the world today" (289). Indeed, Hengest and Horsa, as a heroic founder-pair descended from the divine progenitor Woden who aid in vanquishing the Britons, are merely-legendary figures historicized.

The accounts of Hengest and Horsa's four battles that develop the Anglo-Saxon origin myth in the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Chronicle* are examples of how historicizing legendary figures and their actions can come about through sociopolitical influences. In "The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent," Brooks lists the accounts of Hengest and Horsa's four battles in the two texts:<sup>10</sup>

<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>	<i>Historia Brittonum</i>
499 Hengist and Horsa, invited by Vortigern, land at <i>Ypwinesfleot</i> .	c.31 Vortigern invites Hengest and Horsa and gives them Thanet.
455 Hengist and Horsa fight against Vortigern at <i>Ægelesthrep</i> (?Aylesford). Horsa killed; Hengist and Æsc [Oisc] succeed to kingdom.	c.44 Vortemir son of Vortigern fights four battles against Hengist and Horsa: Second battle at ford called <i>Episford</i> (Brit. <i>Rithergabail</i> ). Horsa killed and also Categirn, Vortigern's son.
456 Hengist and Æsc fight Britons at <i>Crecganford</i> (? Crayford) and kill 4000; Britons flee from Kent to London.	First battle on River <i>Derguentid</i> (Darent).
465 Hengist and Æsc fight Britons at <i>Wippedesfleot</i> and slay 12 British elders. Thegn Wipped also slain.	Third battle in field by shore of Gallic sea <i>iuxta lapidem tituli</i> . Barbarians flee to ships.
473 Hengist and Æsc fight Britons, capture spoils. Britons flee.	c.45 After Vortemir's death, bar-
488 Æsc succeeds to the kingdom And reigns 24 years	

barians return through Vortigern's  
friendship.

Treacherous slaying of 300 British  
elders.

Vortigern cedes Essex, Sussex and  
Middlesex.

Each text lists four battles, acknowledges the death of Horsa, and ends with an enemy fleeing.

Whereas the similarities in these accounts give the legendary figures of Hengest and Horsa a seemingly credible history, the differences show that these accounts have been altered for political and social reasons. In the *Historia Brittonum*, the “barbarians,” or Anglo-Saxons, flee after battling the Britons in chapter 44. In obvious disagreement with the *Historia Brittonum*, the Anglo-Saxons force the Britons to flee in the *Chronicle* twice—in AD 456 and 473. As Brooks remarks, “...one version has been slanted for the benefit of an English audience, [and] the other for a British audience” (63). Also, the continual use of “barbarians” and the mention of the slaying of the British elders in chapter 45 demonstrate the anti-Saxon nature of the Hengest and Horsa account in the *Historia Brittonum*. Even though the Anglo-Saxons return via the friendship of Vortigern, the Britons are portrayed as the moral victors.

In sharp contrast, the *Chronicle* depicts Hengest and Horsa as successful warriors who establish Anglo-Saxon dominance over the Britons. Even though Horsa is killed in AD 455, Hengest and Oisc, his son, subdue the Britons twice and establish a kingdom in Kent after the Britons flee. Here, Hengest and Oisc are linked to the Kentish royal genealogy. However, while Hengest appears in the royal genealogy, Brooks notes it is *Oiscingas* and not *Oisc* who is Hengest's successor in the genealogy; also, *Oisc* “appears to be the name of a God” (63). Thus, the account in the *Chronicle* functions as a foundation-legend for the Kentish kingdom and contributes to the founding of an Anglo-Saxon origin myth. As Robert W. Hanning states, in



*The Vision of History in Early Britain*, “To be sure, origin stories figure in folklore and folk traditions, but usually in the reduced form of genealogies which stretch back to a superhuman hero-founder of a tribe or nation” (103). As merely-legendary hero-founders of the Kentish kingdom, the heroic Hengest and Oisc are historicized founder-king archetypes who aid in establishing a “history” of Anglo-Saxon success and dominance over the Britons. Thus, the historicization of Hengest, Horsa, and Oisc begins the process “through which the self-conscious national and racial identity[of the Anglo-Saxons]first came into being” (Frantzen and Niles 1).

As Anglo-Saxon legendary figures historicized through political and social needs, Hengest and Horsa represent a paradigm of historicizing legends that can be used to answer the question, “Was the prototype for a historical and subsequently mythical Arthur derived from legend?” The shadowy history of Arthur and O.J. Padel’s claim that “historicising legends was a widespread feature of Celtic literary activity in the Middle Ages” (“Nature of Arthur” 23) further reveal the need to apply this paradigm to Arthur. As Hengest and Horsa appeared as the champions of the “barbarians,” there is also a figure that arose as the Britons’ moral victor and leader: “Then Arthur fought against them in those days, together with the kings of the British; but he was their leader in battle” (Nennius 35). As the historicizing paradigm of Hengest will show, Arthur’s identity is anything but “a basic issue” without “any mystery at all” (Ashe, *Discovery* vii).



## 3

**The Merely-Legendary Arthur**

*“Did Arthur exist? The only honest answer is, ‘We do not know, but he may well have existed...or He may very well **not** have existed.’”*

—O.J. Padel (my emphasis)

***Arthur as Heroic Re-Founder***

Initially, the Anglo-Saxon Hengest and Horsa are associated with a legendary founder-pair that are derived from ancient religious beliefs and practices. After Horsa falls in battle, Hengest becomes a heroic founder-king and is further historicized in the *Chronicle* and the *Historia Brittonum*. The historicization of Hengest constitutes a historicization paradigm, which contains three criteria that must be met in order to show Arthur’s legendary origins and subsequent historicization: 1) he must be derived from divine or legendary origins, 2) he must represent a beginning or part of a foundation-legend or origin myth by being a hero-founder and/or founder-king, and 3) his presence in various historical writings must be used to give him a contrived history, which satisfies the political or social needs of a race. Given the conflict between the Saxons and Britons, Arthur’s presence in chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* cannot be ignored, for the Brittonic figure is their “leader in battle” (Nennius 35).

The first mention of Arthur occurs in Chapter 56 of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. Like Hengest, Arthur is a heroic warrior. As opposed to Hengest’s four battles, Arthur fought twelve against the Anglo-Saxons, and “he was victorious in all his campaigns” (Nennius 35-36). In the previous section, it was noted that the *Historia Brittonum* portrays the Britons as the moral

victors over the barbarian Anglo-Saxons. Arthur is the Britons' righteous leader, and the number of his battles further reveals his semi-divinity. As Robert W. Hanning concludes,

Arthur performs great feats of valor in defeating the Saxons  
twelve times, and his appearance in the *Historia Brittonum* at  
this point provides an *exemplum* of the combination of social  
heroism and piety which...will save Britain. (120)

Arthur's twelve battles parallel St. Patrick's twelve apostolic works, which are listed in Chapter 54. Arthur's sanctity is further confirmed in his eighth battle, when he carries "the image of the holy Mary, the everlasting Virgin," on his shield (Nennius 35). As the *Chronicle* depicts Hengest's victories, the *Historia Brittonum* also portrays Arthur's successes as the will of God: for "the heathen were put to flight...through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the holy Virgin Mary" (Nennius 35).

Regarding these twelve battles, Leslie Alcock speculates: "It is clear that if we locate them and if there is a sound historical tradition or source underlying the account in *Historia Brittonum*, then we have some basis for writing the politico-military history of the Arthurian period" (*Arthur's Britain* 61). Identifying the twelve battle-sites would provide the necessary evidence to conclude that Arthur's battles and history are genuine. Yet, through a series of place-name studies and etymology, Alcock only produces a long list of probable "ifs," which only lead to vaguely possible "thens." Again, topographical studies have only produced inferences and not objective facts. Alcock even dismisses the sixth, eighth, and tenth battles as being impossible to locate because "their names cannot be identified with those of any places known today" (67). According to James. J. Wilhelm, the twelve battles have "always led many to believe that there must be something historically real behind it, despite the sacramental nature

of the number 'twelve' and the shadowy geography..." (5). Yet, the "name-game," or etymology, only produces fragile connections and no positive historical evidence, which indicates that perhaps it is not the names of the battles that are important but their number.

Arthur's divine characteristics are mainly derived from his associations with St. Patrick's twelve apostolic works. After St. Patrick, Arthur appears in chapter 56 "as a holy man in combat with his nation's enemies" (Hanning 120). Arthur is an invincible figure who will re-establish Brittonic superiority and affirm the Brittonic origin myth. Nora K. Chadwick notes,

It would seem that about the beginning of the ninth century  
a new intellectual impetus was at work throughout the  
Celtic lands, resulting in the 'origin' stories....The effect of  
this new intellectual activity was the record of the native  
traditions and their expansion, by means of inference and  
speculation, with the aim of creating a great national past.

("Early Culture" 36)

Unlike the Anglo-Saxon's heroic founder-king Hengest, Arthur is not the founder of the Brittonic race in the *Historia Brittonum*. Rather, Brutus, Britto, begins the foundation-legend, or origin myth, and genealogy of the Britons: "The first inhabitants of Britain were the British, from Brutus" (Nennius 22). Even though Arthur is not at the beginning of the Britons' origin myth, he still contributes to establishing the Britons' "great national past." Chadwick determines that the hope of driving the Saxons from Britain for good was revived in the ninth century ("Early Culture" 84). Thus, Arthur represents a legendary heroic *re-founder* and archetype for past as well as future Britons in the *Historia Brittonum* because of his semi-divinity and military success. He is part of "an emergent national, secular consciousness,

looking for its inspiration to a refurbished legendary and heroic tradition” (Hanning 95). As a re-founder, Arthur fulfills the Britons’ needs for a “glorious national past and hopes for a glorious national future” (Hanning 95). Even though he does not appear as a founder-king like Hengest, Arthur is the legendary heroic re-founder for the Britons, who gave him a contrived history and seemingly credible historicity by placing him at twelve successful battles.

Ultimately, Arthur represents an irrepressible heroic re-founder of Brittonic national and racial identity. Later historical writings, as well as the *Historia Brittonum*, further perpetuate Arthur’s history while mythologizing him.

### ***The Historia Brittonum’s Mirabilia, the Annales Cambriae, and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae***

James J. Wilhelm notes, “Later in his history, [in the *Wonders of Britain*], Nennius includes the passage [c.73], which shows that the legend of Arthur was already becoming a popular myth” (5). The two wonders associated with Arthur are a pile of stones called Carn Cafal and the tomb of Amr, or Arthur’s son (Nennius 42). Legend has it that no matter how far a stone marked with the footprint of Arthur’s hound is carried, the stone always is found at its original spot the following day. The tomb of Amr, the son Arthur inadvertently killed in battle, is “sometimes six feet long, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, sometimes fifteen. At whatever measure you measure it on one occasion, you never find it again of the same measure, and I [Nennius] have tried it myself” (Nennius 42). These miraculous events occur in southern Wales, specifically in Breconshire and Herefordshire, and situate Arthur in the territory occupied by the Britons in the fifth through eighth centuries.<sup>11</sup> These events add a mythical element to the



supposed historical accounts of Arthur (Wilhelm 6). Arthur is not only viewed as “historical” in Chapter 56 but also in an unmistakable mythical light in Chapter 73. Moreover, the *Historia Brittonum* is unique. A study of this sacred-origin history reveals Arthur to be a merely-legendary heroic re-founder, shows that battles and/or place-names are used in an attempt to validate his historicity, and determines that mythical elements have been added to support his historicity and his subsequent rise to mythical status.

After the *Historia Brittonum*, the tenth-century *Annales Cambriae* assigns dates to Arthur’s last battles—the Battle of Badon and the Battle of Camlann—like the *Chronicle* does to Hengest’s battles (Nennius 45). Even though Alcock considered the *Annales* a contemporary record showing Arthur’s historicity (*Arthur’s Britain* 48), Charles-Edwards’ extension of Dr. Kathleen Hughes’ argument, that “the framework for the annals up to 613 was a version of the *Chronicle of Ireland* compiled in the early tenth century,” reveals that the Badon and Camlann entries are not independent witnesses to Arthur’s historicity—rather, they are related to the *Historia Brittonum*’s account of Arthur’s twelve battles (Charles-Edwards, *Arthur of History* 26-28). As elaborations on the accounts in the *Historia Brittonum*, these battles in the *Annales* do not show a historical Arthur but only the further historicization of a merely-legendary heroic warrior. Echoing Chadwick’s conclusion about the desires of the ninth-century Britons, Charles-Edwards reasons, “One cannot help suspect that the account of Arthur’s battles has in part been moulded by the concerns of the seventh and eighth centuries, in England as well as Wales” (*Arthur of History* 28). Since the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* do not give reliable evidence for Arthur’s historicity, they cannot prove that a historical prototype of Arthur ever existed. Rather, these sources show a merely-legendary heroic re-founder with a contrived history and illusory historicity based on political and social needs.



The final work that portrays a historicized legendary and subsequently mythical Arthur is Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae* (HRB). In "The Arthurian Moment: History and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*," Maureen Fries concludes that Geoffrey's *Historia* merges Arthur's merely-legendary and historicized elements to meet "the pointed political needs of his Anglo-Norman patrons with a profoundly meaningful (and as it turned out, universally significant) narrative about the uses and limits of sovereignty" (88). Geoffrey's pseudo-history and imaginative narrative create a *historia gentis*, where Arthur's "scattered and enigmatic" legendary and historicized elements are blended into a "coherent narrative," in which Arthur emerges as a "social signifier" (Shichtman and Finke 4). Because of the conflict between the Britons, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans after the Norman Conquest, Geoffrey constructed Arthur as the heroic leader in a "narrative of cultural identity" (Shichtman and Finke 7). Geoffrey's Arthur is "a proper, godly ancestor for the ungodly Normans" (Fries 97).

Like the *Historia Brittonum*, Geoffrey begins the origin myth of the Britons with Brutus (HRB 53-55). Geoffrey claims his source for the *Historia* is "a very ancient book" from an Archdeacon named Walter (HRB 51). According to Hugh MacDougall,

Since no corroborating evidence for the existence of Walter's 'vetustissimus liber' has ever come to light, one may credit Geoffrey's colorful *History* to a fertile imagination fed by contemporary oral traditions and accounts by earlier scribes like Gildas and Nennius. (7)

Like Fries, Shichtman, and Finke, MacDougall sees the *Historia* as Geoffrey's attempt to provide a "heroic epic on the [British] origins" and "suggest a precedent to the Norman kings in

their imperialistic ambitions” through Arthur (7). In the *Historia*, Arthur is a heroic re-founder who is crowned as a King of the Britons (212-14). Geoffrey foreshadows the Britons’ eventual fall to the Anglo-Saxons through Merlin’s prophecies, whose downfall Geoffrey foreshadows when Merlin interprets Vortigern’s dream of a red and white dragon fighting each other: “The Red Dragon represents the people of Britain, who will be overrun by the White One [Saxons]: for Britain’s mountains and valleys shall be levelled, and the streams in its valleys shall run with blood” (*HRB* 261). Merlin’s prophecies are closely associated with the four-phase cycle of birth, triumph, death, and dissolution that Northrop Frye determines are revealed through “the epiphanic moment, the flash of instantaneous comprehension with no direct reference to time...” in a narrative (15). Moreover, Arthur, after being mortally wounded, is mysteriously carried off to the Isle of Avalon: “Arthur himself, our renowned King, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to” (*HRB* 261). Such an ending leaves open his possible return, and, thus, this possibility is attained through a messianic myth, a once and future mythos.

Geoffrey clearly drew on legendary and historical material from the *Historia Brittonum*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Annales Cambriae*, and even the *Legenda Sancti Groeznovii*. Like the Arthur in the *Legenda Sancti Groeznovii*, Geoffrey’s Arthur campaigns on the Continent in Gaul: he is a pan-Brittonic hero, not just an insular, or Brittonic one. Regarding the Welsh tradition in the *Historia*, A.O.H. Jarman remarks,

Geoffrey of Monmouth transformed the legendary  
Welsh seer Myrddin into the internationally famous  
Merlin, wizard as well as vaticinator, who played a crucial  
role in bringing about the conception of Arthur and was

prominent in later Arthurian story. (117)

The Merlin legends and his prophecies existed before Geoffrey and, along with other extant and lost Welsh sources, “supplied a kernel of narrative for the story Geoffrey wanted to tell, but to make that story universally significant he had to make his King condign with Alexander, Charlemagne, and the heroic ideal they represented” (Fries 96). Even though Geoffrey’s Arthur represents an ideal for the Britons, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans alike, Brynley F. Roberts notes, “By replacing the proper names by genuine Welsh forms, sometimes related to the Latin forms, frequently not, they [Welsh scribes] made the *Historia* even more acceptable to a Welsh audience” (113). The Welsh versions of the *Historia* were “accepted in Wales as the authoritative account of the early history of Britain” (Roberts 113). The *Historia* as a Welsh “‘traditional history’ was to remain a potent element in Welsh national consciousness...such was the pride engendered by Geoffrey in a glorious past and the hope sustained in a restored future” (Roberts 113). Roberts’ concluding remarks on the *Historia* parallel Hanning’s analysis (quoted above) of the *Historia Brittonum*: “These appeals to a glorious national past and hopes for glorious national future...stressed national traditions and aspirations” (95). Arthur, as a heroic re-founder in the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Historia*, clearly contributed to the re-establishment of a Welsh national and racial identity in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Here, it should be restated that the Welsh are the direct descendants of the Britons. Therefore, the restoration of Welsh cultural and racial identity also meant the return of the Britons’ dominance over the Anglo-Saxons. Even though Geoffrey’s *Historia* focuses on the cyclical rise, growth, and fall of the British nation (Hanning 171), the largely ahistorical and mythical elements in the *Historia* contributed to “a narrative genre which, vernacular in language and poetic in form, presented and examined personal destiny...as an index of the

human condition considered as a unique, continuous, ethical phenomenon. This genre is now called romance” (Hanning 174-75). Arthur’s plenary court in Wales at Caerleon, City of the Legions, becomes the archetype for all chivalric romances:

Every knight in the country who was in any way  
famed for his bravery wore livery and arms showing his  
own distinctive colour; and women of fashion often displayed  
the same colours. They scorned to give their love to any man  
who had not proved himself three times in battle. In thus way the  
womenfolk became chaste and more virtuous and for their love the  
knights were ever more daring. (*HRB* 229)

Whereas Arthur is a legendary figured historicized in works before Geoffrey’s, such as the *Historia Brittonum*, he becomes even more so and is ultimately mythologized in the *Historia* and subsequent works such as the Norman Wace’s twelfth-century *Le Roman de Brut*. Arthur’s court in the *Historia* establishes a social setting for the hero of the “romance-adventure” (Hanning 175). His knights are exemplars of prowess, honor and virtue. The more successful they are, the more likely they are to win a lady’s love. In the romances of Chretien de Troyes and in Marie de France’s *lais*, Arthur’s court becomes the beginning and ending point for the romance-adventure.<sup>12</sup> The *Historia* is a source for many of the Arthurian romances and legends; however, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s greatest achievement was to write a coherent “historical” account of Arthur and establish him as a national hero, not primarily for the Anglo-Saxons or Normans, but for the Welsh.

Like Hengest, Arthur is semi-divine. He represents a part of a foundation-legend by being a heroic re-founder and King of the Britons. Also, his presence and actions in various



historical writings are used to give him a contrived history, an illusory historicity, which satisfies the sociopolitical needs of a race—the Britons. The historicized is then mythologized in such works as the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Historia*. As a merely-legendary figure historicized, Arthur not only fulfilled the sociopolitical needs of the Britons from the fifth through the twelfth centuries, but became a part of long tradition of Welsh nationalism and the concept of Welshness that extends into the twenty-first century.

## 4

**The Welsh, Welshness and Arthur**

*"We may not be perfect, but at least we're Welsh!"*

—"All Things Welsh" listserv<sup>13</sup>

***Welshmen and Their Influence—Geoffrey of Monmouth and Nennius***

In his introduction to the *Historia*, Lewis Thorpe determines that, "Geoffrey's essential inspiration was a patriotic one" (10). Even though the Saxons rule the Britons at the end of the *Historia*, Thorpe notes,

Let these Welshmen remember their glorious past,  
cries Geoffrey towards the end of his story, their descent  
from the Kings of Troy and the various moments in their  
history when they dominated Europe...above all let them  
remember the prophecies of Merlin. (10)

Geoffrey's portrayal of the glorious Welsh past gives them the faint promise of the future restoration of that glory. Geoffrey's sensitivity to the tumultuous Welsh condition is not surprising.

In the *Historia*, Geoffrey refers to himself twice (52, 257). In both cases, he attaches "Monmouth," given as *Monemutensis*, *Monemutensis*, or *Monumotensis*, in Latin to his first name. As Thorpe notes, "To have called himself *Galfridus Monemutensis*, he must have had some vital connection with Monmouth [in Wales], probably that of birth" (13). Even Geoffrey's vague biography suggests he was a Welshman. According to Michael J. Curley, there is "reliable information, too, on Geoffrey's ordination and appointment as bishop of Saint Asaph's

(Flintshire, North Wales)” (1). As a Welshman, Geoffrey used Arthur to inspire and keep alive the Welsh hopes for a cultural and racial identity.

Arthur, of course, does not die at the Battle of Camlann, but is taken away to the Isle of Avalon, “so that his wounds might be attended to” (*HRB* 261). Despite the seriousness of these wounds, there is hope: “That ambiguous ending leaves open the possibility of Arthur’s return” (Richard M. Loomis 61). Here, Arthur resembles a once and future messiah, primarily for the Welsh, and the potential for a future as glorious as the past.

The *Historia Brittonum* is an earlier work that attempts to achieve the same message as the *Historia*, even though Arthur is not portrayed as messianic. As noted above, Chadwick argues that the hope of driving the Saxons from Britain was revived in the ninth century, and “a new intellectual impetus was at work throughout the Celtic lands...” (“Early Culture” 36). The expansion of Celtic, or Welsh, native traditions was directed at creating a great national past and a glorious future. Like Geoffrey, Nennius, who wrote the *Historia Brittonum*, was also believed to be a Welshman (Wilhelm 5).<sup>14</sup> Though there is little information on Nennius’ personal history, many scholars feel that his reliance upon native Welsh sources reveals his Celtic heritage (Wilhelm 5; Loomis, *Development* 17). Given Chadwick’s conclusions on the divided state of Britain during the ninth and tenth centuries, the appearance of the *Historia Brittonum* is quite auspicious. Moreover, in *A Brief History of Wales*, Peter N. Williams explains that the cultural separation of the British Isles was strongest,

when a long ditch was constructed, flanking a high eastern  
rampart that divided the Celts of the West from the Saxons  
to the East and which, even today marks the boundary  
between those who consider themselves Welsh from those

who consider themselves English. (c.1)<sup>15</sup>

This boundary was named “Offa’s Dyke” for the king of Mercia—one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon kings—who ordered it built in an attempt to define the western border of his territory (Williams c.1). Given the Anglo-Saxon domination of the Welsh and the cultural separation represented by Offa’s Dyke, there was an apparent need for heroic figures.

The roles the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Historia* played in giving Arthur a credible history and the Welsh a splendid past is quite clear. Just as Hengest holds a pivotal place in Anglo-Saxonism, the historicized Arthur is central to the Welsh equivalent of Anglo-Saxonism—Welshness. As a victorious re-founder and king, Arthur and the mythical events surrounding him are part of the genesis and perpetual growth of the Welsh national and racial identity.

### ***Welshness***

Like Anglo-Saxonism, Welshness fosters a collective racial distinctiveness. As with Anglo-Saxonism, “race” or “racial” indicates a “social identity that is compounded of ethnicity, culture, tradition, and language” (Frantzen and Niles 2). In *Welshness Performed: Welsh Concepts of Person and Society*, Carol Trosset defines Welshness “in terms of a number of essential qualities which any individual may or may not possess...the dominant view sees the Welsh language as the most important criterion defining a Welsh identity” (54). Though Trosset only studies modern Welshness, her definition is useful, because she situates the Welsh language and traditional cultural practices near the “core” of Welshness. Individuals of *exemplary* Welshness are “unusually knowledgeable about Welsh history and traditions,”



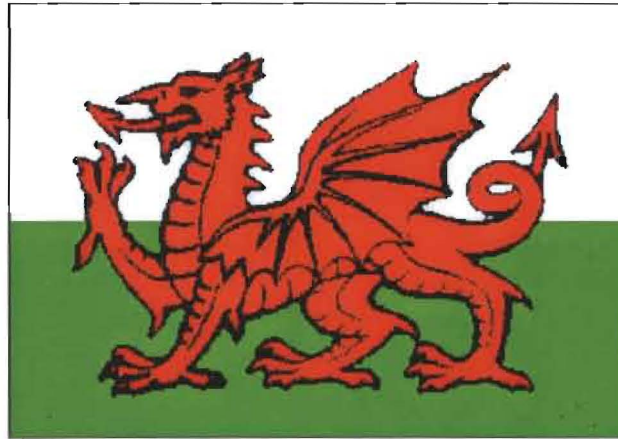
“ethnically conscious,” and “politically nationalist” (55). Geoffrey’s *Historia* is part of the Welsh historical and cultural traditions that are essential aspects of Welshness.

Williams concludes that the *Historia* was “of crucial importance to future Welsh aspirations...which had done much to keep alive the great pride of the Welsh in their ancient traditions, not the least of which was that they were *special* people, descended from Brutus” (c.3, my emphasis). Like Thorpe, Hanning, and Chadwick, Williams recognizes Arthur’s historical power and Geoffrey’s ability to renew the Welsh hopes: Geoffrey’s account was “central to the consciousness of the Welsh for many centuries” (Davies 1).

The *Historia* is also the source of the symbolic red dragon (171). In 1400, the Welshman Owain Glyn Dwr led a peasant revolt against Henry IV and used the red dragon as a metonym: “His banner was that of the Red Dragon, the old symbol of victory of the Briton over the Saxon” (Williams c.3). Even though Glyn Dwr’s rebellion was unsuccessful, he “electrified and galvanized the people of Wales, strengthening their armies and inspiring their confidence” (Williams c.3). Even as a defeated people, the Welsh hope survived.

The emotive power of the red dragon has transcended time and Anglo-Saxon oppression. Like Arthur, the red dragon simultaneously symbolizes the Welsh cultural heritage and its once glorious reign as portrayed in the *Historia*. Known as *Y Ddraig Goch* (fig. 1), the Welsh flag, using the red dragon in its main design, was officially recognized as the national symbol of Wales in 1950:

The white-over-green field is in the livery colours of the Tudors, the Welsh dynasty that once sat on the English throne....Supposedly used by King Arthur, certainly used by the Wessex lords in the 700s, the emblem has been used by Britons right up to the present time. (Wales “Cymru” 1)



*Y Ddraig Goch* (Fig. 1; Wales, "Cymru" 1)

Thus, the reign of the Welsh over the Saxons is represented in their national flag by the red dragon and the colors of the Tudor dynasty. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1953,

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had approved that  
 'the existing red dragon badge, which was appointed  
 as a Royal Badge for Wales over one-hundred-and-fifty  
 years ago, should be honourably augmented by enclosing it  
 in a scroll carrying the words *Y DRAIG GOCH DDYRY*  
*CYCHWYN*...The motto (taken from a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Welsh poem),  
 when freely translated, means *the Red Dragon inspires action*.'  
 (Wales, "Cymru" 3-4)



*Modified Y Ddraig Goch* (Fig. 2; Wales, "Cymru" 3)

Given the Welsh and Anglo-Saxon history, it is not hard to determine whom the Welsh should take action against. Welsh national, cultural and racial identity, or Welshness, is clearly symbolized by the red dragon.

Along with an improved standard, Wales finally acquired a capital city in 1955, Cardiff: “[W]ith the acquisition of a capital city, Wales could think of itself as a real nation, on par with other small nations throughout Europe” (Williams c.17).<sup>16</sup> With a national flag recognized by the English monarch and a capital city, Wales and the Welsh established a greater national, cultural and racial identity, but one crucial aspect was still missing—the Welsh political voice in Britain’s Parliament.

The desire for a Welsh National Assembly began in the early 1960s, but was not fulfilled until the late 1990s. At the beginning of last decade of the millennium, Williams noted, “Welsh independence is on the verge of becoming a reality, rather than an impossible dream. The 1990’s may yet prove to be the most momentous in its long, tortured history” (c.20). In 1997, this dream became a reality, when the National Referendum Act allowed the establishment of The National Assembly for Wales. As Alun Michael, First Secretary, and Edwina Hart, Finance Secretary, assert, “The creation of the Assembly offers Wales the historic and important opportunity to take the action needed to tackle head on a range of significant economic and social challenges and to act on these policies” (*The National Assembly for Wales*, “Preface” 1). The Assembly reaffirms the Welsh national and racial identity and fulfills their sociopolitical needs. Williams concludes *A Brief History of Wales* by stating, “The common sense of its people, combined with a love of their traditions and unique culture, should ensure a sound future for Wales proud to hold its head up as a nation in full partnership with its European counterparts” (c.21.3). Through the historicized Arthur, the enduring emblem of the red dragon,

and the desires and hopes for an individual Welsh nationhood, the people of Wales have built, maintained, and expand their Welshness and distinctiveness from the Anglo-Saxons.

Yet, even without the successes of the twentieth century, and despite Anglo-Saxon rule, there is a sense that the Welsh have been a people united for quite some time. For, as Williams describes it, a nation really is “a general consensus among [its] members that they share a common identity, be it language, culture, or claim to a geographical area or simply as the desire of a certain group of people to form a state by sharing common goals, then Wales has been a nation for a long time” (Williams c.20). While Welshness has since grown to encompass language, culture, tradition and land, there has always been for the Welsh, the Britons, the unifying figure of Arthur, ever since his first appearance in the *Historia Brittonum*. As a merely-legendary figure historicized and subsequently mythologized through historical writings and the native traditions of the Welsh, Arthur has always represented Welshness and the once and future glories of Wales. Wherever there is Arthur, there is Welshness; thus, wherever there is Welshness there is Arthur. As MacDougall states, “The power of myths and their related ideologies lies not in their objective truth but in their being *perceived* as true” (3, my emphasis). For Arthur and the Welsh, this power of perception enabled Arthur’s contrived history and illusory historicity, as well as the genesis and growth of Welshness that has transcended centuries of Anglo-Saxon rule. Indeed, we might say that, finally, the Red Dragon’s continuous calls for action have been answered.



<sup>1</sup> The following names are all spellings for the name *Riothamus*: *Riotamus*, *Rigotamos*, and *Riotimus*. For clarity, I will use the form *Riothamus*.

<sup>2</sup> For an alternative argument in favor of Lucius Artorius Castus, see C. Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail*, (New York and London, 1994). While accepting Malone's *Artorius* derivation, Littleton and Malcor argue that Arthur's legends are Scythian in origin. The parallels between Arthurian legend and Scythian legend are provocative, but they cannot be used to support the theory that Lucius Artorius Castus is the historical prototype of Arthur. Littleton and Malcor base their theory entirely on Malone's etymological argument, which can be challenged by a native derivation.

<sup>3</sup> For a link between Arthur in the *Historia Brittonum* and South Cadbury, see Leslie Alcock, *The Excavation of Cadbury Castle 1966-70*, (London, 1972) 193-4. For the Cadbury excavation in general, see Leslie Alcock, "Cadbury-Camelot: a Fifteen-year Perspective," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 355-88.

<sup>4</sup> The only significant link between Arthur and a site has been at Glastonbury where a cross over a grave bears the name King Arthur. However, this cross is now regarded as a twelfth-century fraud. See Geoffrey Ashe, *The Quest for Arthur's Britain*, (London, 1968) 119-38.

<sup>5</sup> See David Dumville, "'Nennius' and the *Historia Brittonum*," *Studia Celtica* 10.11 (1975-6): 78-95, for a critique of various interpretations regarding the original author of *Historia Brittonum*.

<sup>6</sup> I find Charles-Edwards term *synthetic* complicates this discussion on historical writings. I will substitute the term *diachronic* for *synthetic*, using *diachronic* to indicate the linear movement or projection from origin to present or present to origin where the origin is legendary.

<sup>7</sup> Since Charles-Edwards did not give this hybrid a proper name, or term, I created my own term—*sacred-origin*—based on the ecclesiastical and origin relations in the *Historia Brittonum*. *Sacred* is used to indicate the religious accounts included in the work and also the divine associations found throughout the people's secular history. *Origin* refers to the diachronic and synchronic sub-genres the historical writing contains. Thus, the term *sacred-origin* history accurately indicates the role divine associations play in the development and preservation of the origin and history of a people and thereby describes the hybrid *Historia Brittonum*.

<sup>8</sup> *Founder-pairs* is borrowed from J. E. Turville-Petre's article, "Hengest and Horsa" in *Saga Book of the Viking Society* 14 (1953-57): 274.

<sup>9</sup> See J.R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest*, ed. Alan Bliss (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982) 168-80, for a discussion on the nationality of Hengest in *Beowulf*. The mention of a Hengest in *Beowulf* does not effect my argument.

<sup>10</sup> The following table is adapted from Nicholas Brooks, "The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Steven Bassett (London and New York: Leicester UP, 1989) 62. I have included Brooks' skeptical place names, noted in parentheses, for the battles because they show the difficulty in using etymology to find the actual place names and sites given in historical works. The only addition I have made is indicated in brackets. The name *Oisc* indicates Hengest's son in the *Chronicle*, and a variation of this name occurs the Kentish royal genealogy, but only adds to the legendary and divine nature of this part of the royal genealogy. The use of "c." indicates "chapter."

<sup>11</sup> See above pg. 5.

<sup>12</sup> See Chretien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, (London: Dent, 1955) or *Perceval*, Trans. N. Briant, (Boydell and Brewer: Cambridge, 1982). See Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, Trans. and Intro. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, (Michigan: Baker Books, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> The "All Things Welsh" listserv can be reached at AllThingsWelsh@egroups.com

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 5 for the controversy surrounding Nennius' authorship of the *Historia Brittonum*.

<sup>15</sup> Since *A Brief History* is an unpaginated online publication, only chapter references are available.

<sup>16</sup> Williams also notes that in the 1970's Cardiff's rugby team was one of the world's best and brought immense pride to Wales; "in particular, it was good to be Welsh when your national team was beating the pants off England" (c.17).

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