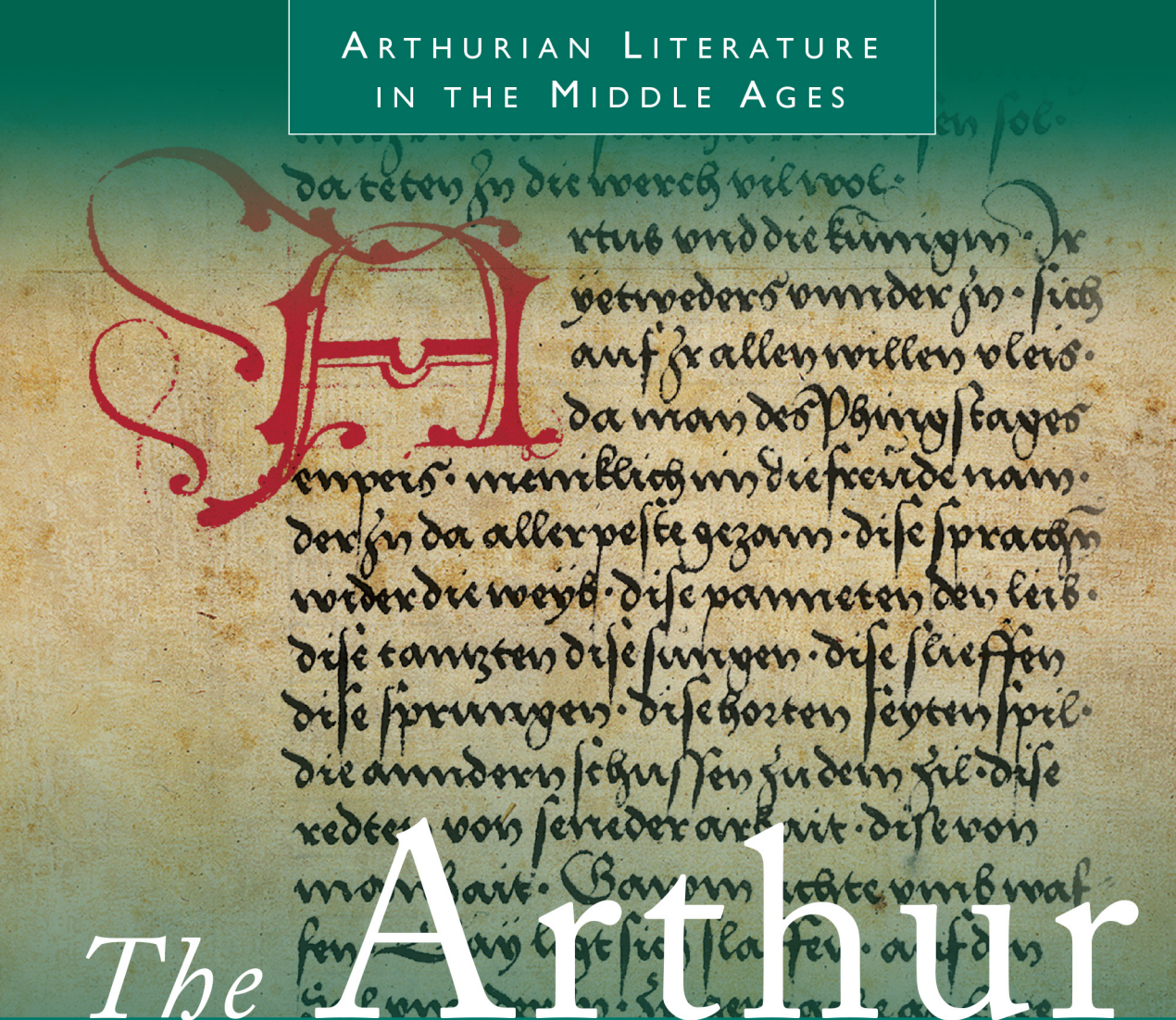
ARTHURIAN LITERATURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES



The Arthur *of the* Germans

The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature

edited by

W.H. Jackson and S.A. Ranawake

THE ARTHUR

OF THE GERMANS

Statue of King Arthur at the monumental tomb of Emperor Maximilian I in the Hofkirche, Innsbruck. Photograph by kind permission of the Tiroler Volkskunstmuseum, Innsbruck.

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III

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Eugène Vinaver

the editor of Malory's Morte Darthur. *The Trust aims to advance study of Arthurian literature in all languages by planning and encouraging research projects in the field, and by aiding publication of the resultant studies.*

ARTHURIAN LITERATURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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PREFACE

When, some years ago, the Vinaver Trust considered revising the standard history of its academic field, *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (ed. R. S. Loomis, Oxford, 1959), the authors of the opening chapters on Celtic texts were the first to be approached. Their feeling was that the passage of time and the advance of scholarship made necessary a more fundamental revision than was possible within the original single-volume format. The book had served several generations of students well, but the Trustees were persuaded that the time had come for a more fundamental approach to Arthurian literary history.

ALMA, as it appeared in the Abbreviations to a hundred volumes, had reflected its editor's professional interest closely and, even within the limitations of a single volume, given a rather narrow picture of Arthurian studies. Changing perspectives, the accumulation of scholarship and the more flexible technology of publishing now make possible a fuller record. The basis of the volumes listed on p. vi is cultural rather than purely linguistic, as more appropriate to a period when modern nationalism, and in many cases modern nation states, had not yet evolved. Each takes into account extraneous influences and includes some texts which the influence of the mother culture carried into the wider world.

Each volume in the series is primarily addressed to students of the individual culture in question, but also to those of other cultures who, for the appreciation of their own Arthurian literature, need to be aware of the various expressions of the legend. With this dual readership in mind, the volumes aim to present the present state of knowledge as individual contributors see it, concisely expressed and structured in a way which, it is hoped, will help readers to appreciate the development of Arthurian themes within the particular culture. The contributors also address the needs of specialist scholars by discussing current academic controversies, and themselves treating open questions of research.

Within this remit, the editors have had complete control over their individual volumes. They themselves would admit that they have not ensnared that rare bird, the Whole Truth of the Arthurian legend, and that in time a new survey will be needed, perhaps on a different basis. But if, for the moment, they have allowed others to catch a glimpse of that universal phoenix, the Arthurian myth, through the thickets of academic speculation, they will feel that they have done what was presently necessary.

W. R. J. Barron

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABäG	*Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, Amsterdam
AfdA	*Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum*, Wiesbaden
AfK	*Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, Cologne
AL	*Arthurian Literature*, Woodbridge, Suffolk
AStnSpr	*Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, Braunschweig
ATB	Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, Tübingen
BBIAS	*Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*, Madison
BLV	Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins, Stuttgart and Tübingen
CFMA	Classiques français du moyen âge, Paris
ColG	*Colloquia Germanica*, Berne
DVj	*Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, Stuttgart
Euph	*Euphorion*, Heidelberg
FCS	*Fifteenth-Century Studies*, Marygrove College, Detroit
FMLS	*Forum for Modern Language Studies*, St Andrews
GAG	Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, Göppingen
GLL	*German Life and Letters*, Oxford
GR	*Germanic Review*, Columbia University, New York
GRM	*Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift*, Heidelberg
HJb	*Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, Berlin
IASL	*Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, Tübingen
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, University of Illinois, Urbana
KTRM	Klassische Texte des romanischen Mittelalters, Munich
LiLi	*Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, Göttingen
MA	*Le Moyen Age*, Brussels
Med. Aev.	*Medium Aevum*, Oxford
MHRA	Modern Humanities Research Association
MLA	Modern Language Association
MLQ	*Modern Language Quarterly*, University of Wisconsin, Madison
MLR	*Modern Language Review*, London
MTU	Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters
NdW	*Niederdeutsches Wort*, Münster
Neophil	*Neophilologus*, Groningen
NM	*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Helsinki
NTg	*De nieuwe taalgids*, Groningen
OGS	*Oxford German Studies*
PBB	*Pauls und Braunes Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, New York
RhVjbl	*Rheinische Viertelsjahrsblätter*, Bonn
Rom	*Romania*, Paris
RUB	Reclams Universal-Bibliothek, Stuttgart
Spec	*Speculum*, Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge, Mass.
St Med	*Studies in Medievalism*, Oxford, Ohio
TLF	Textes Littéraires Français, Geneva
TNTL	*Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde,* Leiden
VL	*Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd edn, ed. by K. Ruh *et al.*, 1978–, Berlin and New York
WB	*Weimarer Beiträge*, Vienna
WdF	Wege der Forschung
WSt	Wolfram-Studien
ZfdA	*Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, Wiesbaden
ZfdPh	*Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, Berlin
ZfrPh	*Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, Tübingen

INTRODUCTION

W. H. Jackson and Silvia Ranawake

As part of the Vinaver Trust project to survey afresh the spectrum of Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages, the present volume is devoted to the German and Dutch fields. The two terms are in the first instance linguistic descriptors, indicating literature that was produced and transmitted in Dutch and in German as languages. Moreover, 'German' and 'Dutch' do not have the same meanings when applied to the medieval period as they do today, for, whereas the terms now refer to two different (though clearly related) languages, in the Middle Ages Dutch and German were only just beginning to separate out as distinct languages, and both were still part of the Continental West Germanic language continuum that was known as *tiutsch* in Middle High German and *dietsch* in Middle Dutch (Beckers 1995, 147). Whilst the modern terms 'Dutch' and 'German' are used throughout this volume, the term 'German' in the main title of the volume should be understood in the medieval, integrative sense of the word *dietsch* or *tiutsch*.

These linguistic categories point to communities of speakers from areas of northern and central continental Europe that were geographically linked, but differed in size and cultural complexity, and within and between which there were varying degrees of social, political and cultural exchange. Overall, the areas concerned stretch from the South Tirol to the North Sea and Baltic coasts, and from the borders of France in the west to the kingdom of Bohemia in the east. During the period when Arthurian literature spread in the Middle Ages, the speakers of Dutch lived in principalities which owed titular allegiance to the French or German rulers but were in fact more like 'independent "mini-states" ' (Prevenier 1994, 12). The kingdom of Germany itself was a conglomeration of lordships which combined considerable independence with a degree of cohesion that derived from shared social and cultural traditions.

The historical and geographical scope of the volume marks a key stage in the diffusion of the Arthurian legend, when it spread outward from France; and the interplay of common features and variables in the treatment of Arthurian themes throws light on the cultural history of the areas under consideration and on the transmission of Arthurian material in Europe as a whole. In the Dutch and German areas, Arthurian literature was first adopted from French sources, and then indigenous works were also produced. Almost all the sizeable corpus of

medieval Dutch Arthurian works seems to have been produced in the thirteenth century. The corpus of texts and their chronological spread is larger yet in medieval German literature, with major Arthurian works arising as early as the late twelfth century and as late as the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

The kingdom of Bohemia formed part of the Holy Roman Empire. Here German-speakers interacted with speakers of Czech in the upper levels of society, and towards the end of the fourteenth century two Arthurian works were adapted from German into Czech. The Czech romances will also be discussed briefly in this volume. Their reception is important in showing a further eastward spread of Arthurian literature into the Slav world through the medium of German, and they also have features which are characteristic of late medieval adaptations of chivalric romances in other parts of Europe: a certain medial-style realism, and some reduction and simplification of the courtly ideology of the high medieval romance (see the contribution by Alfred Thomas in this volume).

The main focus of the present volume is on Arthurian literature. However, literature had a strong social dimension in the Middle Ages, which is expressed for instance in the relation of author and patron, in didactic narration, in the articulation of group values and in the performance situation of oral delivery. The chapters on literary works contain much information about their wider role, and the volume also considers Arthurian material in other fields of social life so as to build up a broader picture of its cultural impact. The thematic range of the volume expresses the wealth and complexity of the Arthurian contribution from this large and varied part of Europe. At the same time it is useful to plot pathways through the material, and the remainder of the Introduction will draw some of the main strands of the individual chapters together and add further connecting links so as to provide a brief overview of the emergence, spread and range of the Arthurian subjects treated in the volume, highlighting some major trends and acting as a framework for the individual contributions. An introductory survey is particularly appropriate for the German field, which is complex in itself and is spread over many different contributors. Information about research on specific texts or topics is provided in the individual contributions, and the reader is also directed to the useful discussions of recent scholarship on medieval Arthurian literature in the Low Countries by Bart Besamusca (1996) and in Germany by William C. McDonald (1996).

There was a considerable expansion of literary activity in the German empire from the twelfth century onwards. Arthurian literature played a major part in this process, and German works are established in the canon of European Arthurian literature. Arthur, his court and the knights of the Round Table first

appear in German literature in the late twelfth century. However, there are important unanswered questions about the beginnings of Arthurian literature in German and in Dutch which arise largely from two pieces of evidence. First, Arthurian names are recorded in the Low Countries already in the early twelfth century, while the earliest Middle Dutch Arthurian texts date from the thirteenth century. Consequently, some knowledge of the Arthurian subject matter is postulated for this north-western area before the extant texts. And second, the earliest Arthurian romances produced in southern Germany, by Hartmann von Aue, Ulrich von Zatzikhoven and Wolfram von Eschenbach, in the years around 1200, were adaptations from French sources, but these works also contain linguistic features of north-western origin. These findings have sparked heated debate about the early history of Arthurian literature in the German and Dutch areas, as the questions pose themselves: what knowledge of Arthurian matters underlies the use of names in the north-west, and by what route did words of north-western origin find their way into Arthurian works produced much further south?

In answer to these questions some scholars have postulated the existence of a lost corpus of Arthurian literature that was produced somewhere along the Lower Rhine before the earliest existing texts, and of which no manuscript traces have been preserved, but which has left its mark on the southern German texts. Pentti Tilvis (1959) went so far as to hypothesize that the earliest German Arthurian romances, by Hartmann von Aue, were not, as is commonly held, adapted directly from the French works of Chrétien de Troyes, but were based on lost Arthurian works from the area of the Lower Rhine which reflected a pre-Chrétien stage of the stories. Tilvis does not produce firm evidence to support his hypothesis in its extreme form, but the matters he addresses cannot be said to be settled yet. It has also been argued that Wolfram von Eschenbach drew on the Middle Dutch Arthurian romance *Moriaen* in composing his *Parzival*, which would involve dating a *Moriaen* text around 1200. However, David Wells (1971/3) has shown that the parallels between *Moriaen* and *Parzival* are too general to indicate direct dependence, and he dates the Dutch text after 1250, thus eliminating it as a piece of evidence in support of a corpus of twelfth-century Arthurian literature. Similarly, Beckers convincingly rejects the view that Wolfram may have taken his *Parzival* from a Middle Franconian *Parcheval* which was itself a version of the Middle Dutch *Perchevael* (1989a, 214).

Beckers brings a balanced and open-minded view of the old question of a lost Rhenish German Arthurian literature. Whilst rejecting some of the more extreme claims, he points out that manuscript fragments of the *Parcheval*, the *Prosa-Lancelot* and a Merlin poem show that there were, in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Arthurian interests in the Rhenish border area linking Dutch- and German-speakers, and this, together with the onomastic

evidence, suggests that the possibility of some literary treatment of Arthurian matter here in the twelfth century should not be dismissed out of hand (Becker 1989a; 1989b, 29–31). There is little reason to doubt that the German authors who introduced Arthurian romance in south Germany in the years around 1200 were indeed working from French sources. However, they may also have had access to Arthurian traditions that were cultivated in the north-west and that provided name forms and other elements of vocabulary. How extensive this lost repertoire might have been, and whether it was transmitted orally or in written stories, or both, escapes our knowledge. But it seems clear that, already in the twelfth century, there was a degree of Arthurian interest that went beyond the extant texts.

If we turn to German (as opposed to Dutch) literature, the main types of narrative in which the Arthurian world figures, Arthurian romances proper, Grail romances and Tristan romances (though the relation of the Tristan theme and the Arthurian world was an uneasy and shifting one), were all established here by the first decade of the thirteenth century and in the hands of leading poets whose work transformed the German literary scene and rapidly acquired canonical status: Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strassburg. A lively production particularly of Arthurian romances continued throughout the thirteenth century; Hans-Jochen Schiewer (1988, 224) calculates that evidence exists of twenty-four post-classical German 'Artus-romane' (and this number does not include treatments of the Tristan theme, or the Titurel and Lohengrin works).

Even the first generation of German Arthurian, Grail and Tristan romances were never straight translations in a modern sense, but adaptations which often showed much independence of style and attitude; and during the thirteenth century works were produced that were no longer based on individual French sources, so that the German Arthurian world, whilst preserving a connection to the French matrix that generated the international themes and concepts of Arthurian chivalry, developed its own distinctive profile.

The thirteenth century also saw the introduction of prose Arthurian literature in Germany, with at least part of the German *Prosa-Lancelot* dating back to around 1250. However, it is a feature of the German cultural scene that prose, with its historiographical associations, remained a minor strand in Arthurian literature. In England, Geoffrey of Monmouth presented Arthur in a historiographical manner, and Geoffrey's portrayal of the Arthurian world was used in historically real constitutional documents (Ullmann 1965). In its reception in France the Arthurian subject matter initially preserved some connection with the Plantagenet dynasty (Schmolke-Hasselmann 1980, 232–44), but it also

acquired greater fictional independence, whilst in Germany Arthurian literature arose quite separately from historiography. Here the Arthurian romances were further removed from specific dynastic interests and had (even) more of a fictional status than was the case in England and France. In Germany, the influential Arthurian genealogy of Wolfram von Eschenbach hindered the link-up of the Arthurian world with Troy and the Roman empire that was familiar in the Anglo-French cultural area, and it seems to have been only with the reception of Latin historiography from the fourteenth century onwards that Arthur gradually found his place as a historical figure in German writings (Kornrumpf 1984, 180f.).

The late twelfth to the end of the thirteenth century is the period of greatest productivity in medieval German Arthurian narratives. Further Arthurian subject matter was introduced into Germany from France in the *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* in the first half of the fourteenth century; and in the late fifteenth century Ulrich Füetrer adapted older German Arthurian romances and linked the Arthurian world with the story of Troy in the massive Arthurian cycle of his *Buch der Abenteuer*. These two works are characteristic of a late medieval tendency to gather material into large summations. Continuing interest in Arthurian subject matter is further evidenced in the manuscript transmission of earlier works during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Finally, a few works made their way into printed editions, so that the history of medieval German Arthurian narratives covers the shifts from oral presentation (which still strongly informs the style of early romances) to written literature, and then from manuscript to printed book.

The rise of Arthurian romance in Germany had as its essential social context the lordly households, the courts, which formed the main centres of cultural activity and large-scale sociability for the aristocracy, and which provided the material resources necessary for a spread of literary activity into the sphere of the vernacular and of secular culture (Bumke 1986, Fleckenstein 1990). Far from being static and homogeneous institutions, these courts were characterized by cultural complexity, even tension, which sprang from the interaction of groups and individuals whose value-systems did not always smoothly harmonize: noble and knightly males who cultivated a dynastic and military ethos; aristocratic women who were objects of poetic veneration, but who had a far more restricted legal condition than their male counterparts; clerically trained men who had the literary skills needed for the production of romances; and individuals who combined characteristics of more than one group, such as the educated knight Hartmann von Aue.

Arthurian literature arose from this cultural mingling, and constructs a fictional world which was closely geared to the upper levels of society. Arthurian romance is an important expression of the cultural self-understanding of the

German aristocracy in the figure of the knight as warrior and lover, a figure that provided the aristocracies of Europe with a supranational cultural identity. The spread of Arthurian interests is closely connected with the rise and spread of other supranational chivalric forms in German society (knighting ceremonies, tournaments); and the recurrent descriptions of noble *realia*, which are a stylistic feature of courtly romance, testify both to the authors' drawing on Latin poetics and to the sociologically normative function of romance in aristocratic life.

German Arthurian literature was cultivated chiefly at non-royal courts, but it does not show a particular anti-royal tendency (though there is criticism of royal tyranny); rather it springs from a large-scale political situation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Germany, when, in spite of frequent conflicts between kings and disaffected princes, as there were conflicts between the magnates themselves, there was also 'an extraordinary degree of interdependence and cooperation between king and princes' (Arnold 1991, 11). In the thirteenth century in particular, when the Capetian kings of France were gaining ground at the expense of the great nobles, the current was if anything running in the opposite direction in Germany, where the magnates who, so far as we can see, were the chief sponsors of romance had less reason to fear the power of the crown. Within the nobility, Arthurian literature met the interests of great lords and lesser nobles, for instance by propagating the image of the knight as defender of justice, which gave ethical legitimacy to the nobles' bearing of arms (and helped to draw a line of social demarcation between the nobility and other groups), and which also matched the state-building efforts of rulers who aimed to stabilize peace and justice. Violence and the control of violence were ever-present problems amongst the sword-bearing aristocracy of medieval Germany, and they are recurrent themes in Arthurian romance.

There is no record of a medieval German narrative involving King Arthur having been written by a woman. However, ample evidence, including comments drawn from Arthurian literature, shows that women formed an influential part of the literary public in the formative period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bumke 1986, 704–6). The recurrent portrayal of violence against women in Arthurian romances is a reminder of the strength of patriarchal forces in society at this time. At the same time important thematic and stylistic features of the romances, not least the elaboration of love scenes and scenes of aristocratic socializing, point to an influence of women's tastes and suggest some mitigation of these forces at least at the ideological level. The ability to read seems to have been more common amongst noblewomen than noblemen in lay society in the central Middle Ages; the education open to such women led generally to the vernacular rather than to Latin, and the spread of vernacular literature is due partly to their encouragement (Green 1994, 290, with further

literature). The well-known vignette of a noble girl reading from a French book to her parents in Chrétien's *Yvain* ('un romanz', v. 5366) and in Hartmann von Aue's adaptation (*Iwein* vv. 6455–70) typically indicates a community of interest between author and female reader of courtly romance. Similarly, the many instances of scenes from the Tristan story on textiles worked by women suggest that the topic of Tristan and Isolde's love was popular amongst noble and burgher women (Becker 1977, 230).

Preachers and educators testify to the influence of Arthurian literature in Germany from the early thirteenth century onwards. Caesarius, monk in the monastery of Heisterbach, tells in his *Dialogus miraculorum* (written 1219–23) how Abbot Gevardus (died 1208) roused the dozing monks in his congregation by suddenly bringing King Arthur into a sermon (IV, 36), and he refers to the deceased King Arthur holding court in the afterlife (XI, 12). Heisterbach was in the archdiocese of Cologne, and Caesarius's anecdote is thus another indication of early Arthurian interests along the Lower Rhine (Beckers 1989a, 219). Thomasin von Zirklaere sees secular literature as inferior in its truth content to religious works, but he nevertheless ascribes an educational function to vernacular romances and advocates Arthurian stories as morally useful reading for young nobles, male and female (*Der wälsche Gast* vv. 1023–62; Düwel 1991), while Hugo von Trimberg, schoolmaster in Bamberg, writing at the close of the thirteenth century, comments that books about Erec, Iwein, Tristan, Parzival and Wigalois are better known than religious works treating God and the saints, and that these books are dangerous to the souls and bodies of youths who risk their lives in trying to emulate the jousting deeds of Round Table knights (*Der Renner* vv. 21637–66). Thomasin and Hugo refer to the figures of romance almost as if they were persons in real life. Indeed, the medieval German reception of Arthurian literature seems to have been highly personalized in that the interest lay as much with the Arthurian characters as with authors, works or themes; and the impact of the romances is seen in terms less of abstract ideas than of persons acting as role models. Moreover, Hugo and Thomasin both speak of young people as recipients of romance, and this focus on youth is an important strand in the thematic and social history of Arthurian literature in the areas considered in this volume, and elsewhere in Europe.

The vitality of Arthurian material and its importance for the self-understanding of the German aristocracy are shown also in the way that Arthurian figures and motifs spread out widely into other types of literature and other aspects of social life in the German empire. King Arthur is praised for the lavishness of his hospitality in Rudolf von Ems's *Der guote Gêrhart* (vv. 5908–16), and as a model of courtesy to whom Ottokar von Steiermark, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, compares the contemporary Duke Albrecht of Austria in his *Österreichische Reimchronik* (vv. 22945–65); and at the end of the thirteenth

century Heinrich von Freiberg, in an encomiastic poem, places the Bohemian noble Johann von Michelsberg in a line with Arthurian heroes and describes him as 'the new Parzival' (*Die Ritterfahrt des Johann von Michelsberg* v. 178). The Arthurian world also forms a point of orientation in fictitious treatments of the German past in historicizing romances of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries: Round Table knights are referred to as exemplars of chivalric prowess in *Reinfried von Braunschweig* (e.g. vv. 20158–73) and in *Friedrich von Schwaben* (vv. 4811ff.), while in Johann von Würzburg's *Wilhelm von Österreich* the hero Wilhelm is a fictional member of the historical Babenberg dynasty and also linked, on his mother's side, with the Arthurian family (Dietl 1993, 174f.).

These instances indicate that during the thirteenth century figures from Arthurian literature gained such a firm place in the minds of authors and public in the German empire that they could be deployed as a framework of reference in works of widely varying genre and in the treatment of contemporary historical figures. The centuries-long cross-fertilization of Arthurian romance and German heroic poetry, and the reception of Arthurian motifs and figures (albeit in an extremely reduced form) in drama and *Meisterlieder* at the end of the Middle Ages will be treated in separate contributions in this volume (chapters 13 and 14) and they testify further to the literary influence of Arthur and his court.

The outward spread of Arthurian motifs from literature into pictorial representations and into various aspects of noble life such as name-giving, military sports and other forms of socializing will be discussed in chapters 16 and 17. Here it is important to note three general points about these developments because of the light they throw on the German reception of Arthurian material. First, in terms of chronology, evidence of the impact of Arthurian and Grail motifs on 'real life' beyond literature starts in the thirteenth century in Germany and is still strong in the fifteenth century; indeed, the second half of the fifteenth century saw a resurgence of Arthurian interest as part of the broader 'chivalric renaissance' of this period. Second, with regard to social levels, Arthurian motifs appear first in the life of the feudal aristocracy and then show some percolation into the urban patriciate. Third, with regard to regional distribution, Arthurian interests are particularly widely documented in southern areas, and this matches the regional spread of other forms of aristocratic culture to indicate a certain two-part division of Germany along an axis running north-west to south-east, but at the same time there was more cultivation of matters chivalric and Arthurian in towns in north-east Germany than has perhaps generally been recognized (Paravicini 1994, 102).

The contributions in the present volume show important shifts of emphasis in research on German Arthurian literature since the appearance of Loomis's

Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages. Socio-historical interpretations have enhanced our understanding of Arthurian romance in an ongoing debate that is discussed by McDonald (1996, 360–70). Advances have also been made in narratological studies, and Arthurian romance (including the Grail and Tristan themes) appears in current work as more self-conscious and complex in its poetics than was the case forty years ago. The reflecting narrator has emerged as a key component in romance and irony as an important feature alongside idealization (Green 1979). The concept of the dialogic has sharpened readers' awareness of the variety of standpoints within romance (Groos 1995). Walter Haug's controversial claim that it was the genre of Arthurian romance that introduced truly fictional narration into medieval vernacular literature (Haug 1985, chapter 5) has provoked a lively and ongoing debate about fictionality and aesthetic autonomy in romance (Mertens and Wolfzettel 1993, Grünkorn 1994). The concept of intertextuality illuminates the way in which romances feed off each other (Draesner 1993). German Arthurian literature is characterized by frequent direct and indirect allusions to other texts and other authors, which give this literature a particularly strong self-referential and intertextual quality. Indeed, the interaction between the self-consciously literary and intertextual quality of romance on the one hand, and on the other hand its social function as a focus of aristocratic values, gives the genre a complexity of texture that can lead to widely different interpretations of individual works.

The past twenty years have, in particular, brought a considerable increase of interest in and a better understanding of 'post-classical' romances (see also McDonald 1996, 355–60). The treatment of German Arthurian literature in Loomis's volume of 1959 was shaped by the view that, from *c.* 1220 onwards, German literature was in a process of decay after the flowering, the *Blütezeit* or classical period, of the decades around 1200. This view, which grew up in the nineteenth century and which often associated the poetic flowering with Hohenstaufen rule, has been widely challenged in recent decades. Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strassburg, the only German authors named in chapter headings in Loomis's volume, are still seen as major figures, and the critical developments sketched in the previous paragraph throw new light on their works. However, recent studies also see far more literary interest and value in later works, especially works of the thirteenth century, than was the case forty years ago.

The dominance of less problematizing, more open-textured romances in the later thirteenth century, by contrast with the double structure of Arthurian romance in the works of Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram and the theme of the hero's personal crisis that is associated with this structure, is seen in recent work not so much as a sign of cultural decline, but rather as the development of a valid – and flexible – alternative type of Arthurian narrative. Later authors' expressed

admiration for and adoption of stylistic features of the 'classical' masters emerge in recent scholarship less as a naive imitation and more as the self-conscious building of a literary canon so that the later authors can project their own works, at times with some critical or playful distancing from the great predecessors. Interpretative studies of individual 'post-classical' works show not a uniform and bland imitative manner, but a variety of styles, attitudes and responses in later romances to the challenge of the masters, considerable intertextual playing with Arthurian motifs and much cross-fertilization between Arthurian romance and other genres. In order to do justice to these new insights, later Arthurian literature (including fragments of romances) is given far more space in the present volume than it received in Loomis.

The decades since Loomis's volume have also seen advances in research into the manuscript transmission of medieval German literature, which throws valuable light on the reception of Arthurian works from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Some information on manuscripts will be found in the individual contributions in this volume. Here it may be useful to point to some general features and patterns of transmission.

The earliest surviving manuscripts of German Arthurian romances date from the first third of the thirteenth century, with two manuscripts of Wirnt's *Wigalois* in the period *c.* 1220–*c.* 1230 (Schneider 1987, 84f.; Bertelsmeier-Kirst 1992, 282). The earliest surviving fragment of Eilhart's *Tristrant* is now thought to date from the early thirteenth rather than the end of the twelfth century, and the earliest *Iwein* manuscript from the second rather than the first quarter of the thirteenth century (Schneider 1987, 52 n. 198, 148). There was then a remarkable continuity of manuscript production of courtly narrative literature for almost three hundred years, with considerable activity in the thirteenth century, some decline in the second half of the fourteenth century (which may be explicable partly by the spread of the plague), and still a lively production in the fifteenth century (Becker 1977, 233). The history of manuscript production thus shows that, whilst few new works were produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the romances of Arthur's knights were still very much alive from the point of view of reception, since patrons were willing to commision expensive manuscripts. Nor was it merely a few canonical works that were still transmitted at this time, for many manuscripts of the post-classical romances stem from the fifteenth century. On this chronological point Schiewer draws attention to an interesting difference between the German and French areas for, whereas fifteenth-century manuscripts exist for all the German Arthurian romances that are known as complete works, there are hardly any fifteenth-century manuscripts of the French post-classical verse romances (1988, 241 n. 82). Recent work on variance (Bumke 1996) and on shortened versions (Strohschneider 1991) provides further evidence of the living reception of courtly romances, since

they were not merely copied out slavishly for antiquarian purposes, but scribes made stylistic alterations and even produced shorter versions to meet the taste of patrons.

With regard to the circumstances of transmission there are very many single-work manuscripts from the early thirteenth century onwards, and single-manuscript transmission seems to dominate especially with the post-classical Arthurian romances (Schiewer 1988, 241). In collected manuscripts (*Sammelhandschriften*) it is a general feature of the German tradition that courtly narratives are gathered together almost exclusively with other German vernacular works, which indicates that these manuscripts were designed for a lay audience that was not versed in Latin (Becker 1977, 171). With regard specifically to German Arthurian romances, Gisela Kornrumpf observes (1984, 180) that, so far as the often fragmentary record of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries allows a view, these romances are transmitted singly, or with their own kind, or with non-historical literature, unlike the position in France, which again suggests that the Arthurian subject matter had more of a free-floating fictional status in Germany than further west.

The main sponsors of manuscript production stemmed from the nobility, though there is evidence of interest in urban patrician circles in the fifteenth century (Becker 1977, 218). Regionally, manuscripts of Arthurian literature tend to show more of a southern than a northern spread, but recent work has also shown manuscripts of Hartmann's *Iwein* and Wolfram's *Parzival* being transmitted along a track from the south-east to the north-east (Klein 1988, 122f.; Beckers 1992, 91). This is a further reminder that the interest in courtly and Arthurian matters in the north-eastern parts of Germany should not be overlooked. Wolfram's *Parzival* is regionally the most widely transmitted Arthurian work, often together with the *Jüngerer Titurel* (Becker 1977, 226f.). Gottfried's *Tristan* shows a distinctive geographical distribution based in the south-west (Klein 1988, 124f.), and many of the post-classical romances seem not to have spread beyond their local dialect area (Schiewer 1988, 234f.). These are only some of the geographical findings of recent manuscript research that is shedding more specific light on the diffusion of German Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages.

As to the number of known manuscripts, Wolfram's *Parzival* heads the list, with a total of 82 (16 complete + 66 fragments), followed by Albrecht's *Jüngerer Titurel* (which was transmitted under Wolfram's name in the late Middle Ages) with 56 (11+45), Wirnt's *Wigalois* with 41 (13+28), Hartmann's *Iwein* with 32 (15+17) and Gottfried's *Tristan* with 31 (14 complete – including three that have been lost – and fragments from 17 others). The figures are taken from the relevant sections in the present volume. Estimates of the ratio of the known manuscripts to the total medieval production vary widely, between *c.* 1:150 and

(probably more realistic) *c.* 1:10–1:20 (Schirok 1982, 59f.). Given the vagaries of manuscript survival, the number of extant manuscripts should not be taken on its own as a evidence of the degree of popularity in the Middle Ages, especially where only a small number of manuscripts has survived, but these larger figures agree with other evidence such as references by other medieval authors, name-giving in real life and pictorial representations to suggest what were the most widely known works in the Middle Ages.

A special feature of the German Arthurian scene was indeed the massive influence of Wolfram von Eschenbach. His *Parzival* is the most widely transmitted work of medieval German narrative literature, and far from exercising an enervating influence on later authors by the weight of his achievement, it may be that the energy of Wolfram's narration, especially his sharp profiling of the commenting narrator, had a stimulating effect. Connected with Wolfram's authority is the importance of the Grail as a quasi-religious guarantee of secular order in later literature. Moreover, the German Wolfram tradition developed the special feature that the Grail was located here on earth, in India, as an optimistic utopia which could also include King Arthur and his court (Blank 1993, 134f.). While the manuscript record agrees with twentieth-century critical opinion in giving high rank to Wolfram's *Parzival*, Hartmann's *Iwein* and Gottfried's *Tristan*, the medieval popularity of *Wigalois* probably stems in part from qualities of unproblematical and colourful narration which have, until recently, perhaps been undervalued by modern scholars in comparison with romances of personal crisis, but which form an estimable feature of medieval German Arthurian literature. The popularity of *Wigalois* was such that a printed version was appearing as late as the seventeenth century, and the work was also adapted into Yiddish (see chapter 8).

Dutch Arthurian literature shows similarities and differences in comparison with German. In the Low Countries as in Germany, Arthurian works express and reflect on the concerns and values of aristocratic society and also show a new literary self-consciousness: both areas are part of a common tradition that originated in France and spread out to other parts of Europe, adjusting to the different cultural circumstances.

The county of Flanders was a key area for the transmission of French aristocratic culture into the Germanic world in the Middle Ages. The county was French-speaking in its southern parts and mainly Flemish (as a form of Dutch) in the north, so that the linguistic circumstances were propitious here for the passage of Arthurian subject matter from the Romance into the Germanic world. Chrétien de Troyes himself was closely associated with Philip of Alsace, count of Flanders, when he worked on *Perceval*, and interest in Arthurian

literature seems to have been greater in Flanders than in other parts of the Low Countries.

Dutch Arthurian literature shows a stronger connection with French prose romances and with historiographical traditions of King Arthur than is the case with German. The Lancelot subject matter is also far more prominent in Dutch than in German. No single Dutch author gained the status and influence of Wolfram in the field of Arthurian literature. Indeed, the influential Flemish poet Jacob van Maerlant cultivated what he saw as the historical truth of King Arthur but rejected the many invented stories. Nevertheless, as Bart Besamusca's contribution in this volume shows, fictional Arthurian romances flourished in Dutch literature in the thirteenth century, and like their German counterparts they show a variety of attitudes that testify to the vitality and the diversity of the Arthurian tradition in this period.

The manuscript transmission of Dutch Arthurian literature also has a different profile from that of German since most of the Dutch Arthurian romances are contained in only two manuscripts: ten in the *Lancelot* Compilation (written *c.* 1320), and three in a codex of *c.* 1425 that is written in Low German. The manuscript transmission of Arthurian romances in Dutch peaks in the early fourteenth century and fades out earlier than is the case in German. The absence of fifteenth-century manuscripts of Arthurian romances in Dutch contrasts sharply with the position in German: Middle Dutch literature seems not to have experienced the late burst of Arthurian interest that was a feature of fifteenth-century Germany. The socio-cultural dimensions of this contrast merit further study and may prove to be connected with varying degrees of urbanization. The Low Countries were, together with northern Italy, the most urbanized region in medieval Europe: in the fifteenth century 'more people lived together in cities in the Low Countries than anywhere else in the world: up to 36 per cent in Flanders and 45 per cent in Holland' (Prevenier 1994, 12). Whilst it would be historically inaccurate to see Arthurian interests as incompatible with urban life, it may be that, in the long run, the advanced development of urban structures at the expense of feudal ones in the Low Countries created a climate that was less propitious for the continuing reception of the old Arthurian verse romance than was the case in southern Germany in the fifteenth century.

We have already mentioned the controversy about a possible lost corpus of Arthurian narratives along the Lower Rhine. So far as the extant texts are concerned, Dutch and German Arthurian literature seem to have developed largely independently of each other. However, it is now generally accepted that the early part of the German *Prosa-Lancelot* rests on a Middle Dutch version (see chapter 9), and the fragments of manuscripts of *Parcheval* and a Merlin poem, to which reference has already been made, suggest that there may have been more cultural contact involving Arthurian literature in the border regions

linking the Low Countries and Germany than has yet been documented. There are also generic similarities between Middle Dutch Arthurian works and German post-classical romances that merit further comparative study (Besamusca 1996, 226).

Like the rise and spread of Arthurian subject matter, its fading and its subsequent modern revival are supranational processes which receive particular form in the German-speaking areas. The lively, continuing manuscript transmission of Arthurian romances in the fifteenth century is a striking characteristic of the German scene. Equally striking is the sudden ending of this three-hundred-year tradition in the years around *c.* 1480–*c.* 1490, for the few manuscripts produced after that time, even though they include the magnificent 'Ambraser Heldenbuch' commissioned by Emperor Maximilian I, were isolated cases (Becker 1977, 239f.). Nor was it a case of the printing press taking up where scribes left off, for only four German Arthurian works made it into print: *Parzival* and the *Jüngerer Titurel* (1477), and prose redactions of Eilhart's *Tristrant* (1484) and Wirnt's *Wigalois* (1493). Of these four it was only the abbreviated, prose versions treating adulterous love (*Tristrant*) and the unproblematical biography of the knight who enjoyed good fortune and God's favour (*Wigoleis*) that went into further editions during the sixteenth century and beyond (see chapter 18). These were narratives that were not bound into a medieval aristocratic ideology and could make the transition into adventure stories for a wider public.

This development in literary history matches other evidence to indicate a fading of Arthurian interest in German society after the end of the fifteenth century. To some extent this retreat was due to the sheer availability of new forms of cultural expression in Renaissance Europe, but here again the history of Arthurian matter also reflects broader trends in the history of the German aristocracy. Recent research has questioned the view that the German nobility experienced a general decline, or even crisis, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (see the contribution by Bernd Bastert in this volume). However, the decades around 1500 did bring a sharpening in the concentration of power in the hands of territorial rulers and a decline in the independence of the lesser nobility, who were tending increasingly to withdraw from military activity and to become more dependent on the patronage of rulers and on the economic strength of towns. Becker rightly suggests a connection between growing central authority, the nobility's loss of the right of feud and the fading of manuscript transmission of medieval epics and romances at the end of the fifteenth century (1977, 240), and to this list could be added the ending of the series of supraregional aristocratic tournaments of the Four Lands in 1487 (Ranft 1994, 176–9): all

mark an important stage in the long process whereby the military aristocracy of the Middle Ages, on whose existence the rise and spread of Arthurian literature was predicated, gave way to changed forms of nobility in the early modern state.

Only vestigial traces of Arthurian subject matter remained in seventeenth-century Germany; for instance *Tristrant* and *Wigoleis* continued to appear until just after the middle of the century. But in Germany as elsewhere in Europe there was an increase of antiquarian interest in medieval literature from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards which also brought Arthurian themes back into view (see chapter 19). The interest gathered strength in the Romantic movement and, with shifts of focus and intensity, has remained to the present day, though the Arthurian legends have not gained such widespread popularity in the German- as in the English-speaking world.

The social framework for the revival of Arthurian themes in the nineteenth century was no longer an aristocratic society, but more a matter of the educated middle class, the *Bildungsbürgertum*; and the Arthurian world was no longer intimately connected with the ethos of a military aristocracy but was free to express quite different imaginative and philosophical concerns. In Germany it was chiefly the epic *Nibelungenlied*, based on early German legend, that captured the nationalist imagination in the medieval revival. In the field of Arthurian legends Richard Wagner's music dramas have been the most dominant cultural force, with a consequent privileging of the (reinterpreted) figures of Parzival, Tristan and Isolde and the themes of the Grail quest and love that leads to nirvana in death. The socially cohesive image of King Arthur and the Round Table has impinged less on the modern German public consciousness than these Wagnerian themes. However, in recent decades new works produced in the German-speaking world (not least Tankred Dorst's *Merlin*) have gone hand in hand with Arthurian films and translations of American and British Arthurian novels to broaden the spectrum of Arthurian themes and their treatment in the contemporary German cultural scene. It seems that postmodernism, with its problematizing approach to history and to the concept of individual authorial creation, its suspicion of grand ideologies and its interest in pastiche (Connor 1989), provides fertile soil for yet another revival of the protean matter of Arthur.

A brief account of the selection and arrangement of material in this volume is called for. An opening chapter will sketch the origins and early development of Arthurian material in Britain and France so as to place the following contributions in a historical perspective. These contributions will then discuss the medieval German, Dutch, and Czech works that come into the category of Arthurian literature. Like the other volumes in the present series, we follow

Loomis's collaborative volume in treating the Tristan theme together with Arthurian literature. This inclusion needs little justification, since Arthur and his knights figure already in the earliest German Tristan romance in the late twelfth century (that of Eilhart von Oberg) and, although Arthur's court plays no part in the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg, it was more often the case that Tristan was in the medieval German view closely associated with the Round Table. We have adopted a broader rather than a narrower approach by including discussions not only of Arthurian romances in a strict sense, but also works in which Arthur and his court play only a minor role (for example *Lohengrin* and *Lorengel*). We do not wish, by including these works, to define them as 'Arthurian' romances, but they are texts in which Arthur and his court enter into interesting relations with other types of literature. We include Wolfram's *Titurel* fragment on the grounds that, although Arthur does not figure in the work, its characters are drawn from Wolfram's own Arthurian and Grail romance *Parzival* and are related by family to the Grail and Arthurian dynasties, and later Albrecht, in expanding and 'completing' *Titurel*, did give Arthur's court a prominent role. We include chapters on Arthurian themes and motifs in heroic poetry, in drama and *Meisterlieder*, in pictorial representations and in German social life in the Middle Ages, so as to show the wider impact of Arthurian culture in literature and in life. Finally, chapters on early printed editions of Arthurian romances and on the modern reception of the Arthurian legend trace the fading and revival of interest in Arthurian subjects in the German-speaking world.

The contributions to the volume are arranged partly according to chronology, and partly according to theme or genre, and most contributions treat a group of texts or a subject that stretches over considerable time. We hope by this arrangement to convey some idea of the complex lines of influence and reception that run in various directions through the Arthurian corpus.

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Part One

Reception and Appropriation: The German Verse Romances, Twelfth Century to 1300

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1

THE WESTERN BACKGROUND

Ingrid Kasten

Stories about the legendary King Arthur circulated not only in the British Isles but also in many parts of continental Europe in the Middle Ages. In Germany, as in other areas, these stories enjoyed great popularity, for they provided high-class entertainment and also acted as a framework for the presentation and discussion of new patterns of chivalric and courtly behaviour. The Arthurian material acquired its own history in Germany, but it also has a prehistory that is important both in its own right and for an understanding of the German developments. The stories of Arthur and his knights were transmitted northwards and eastwards through French or Anglo-Norman mediation. The great German Arthurian romances of Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach arose as free adaptations of the works of the French poet Chrétien de Troyes, who himself had drawn on various written and oral sources. The aim of this opening chapter is to sketch the early history of the Arthurian legend, which preceded its reception in German literature.

Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Earliest References to Arthur

Although the figure of King Arthur was not, strictly speaking, invented by the British cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth, Geoffrey is none the less generally credited with having created the Arthurian myth and raised Arthur to the status of national hero among the Britons in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a legendary history of the kings of Britain probably completed at the end of 1138.

Earlier historians knew of only one Arthur, a military leader said to have distinguished himself in the fighting between the Britons and Saxons in the early sixth century: as *dux bellorum*, he first figures in Nennius' early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. Nennius claims that this Arthur carried on his shoulders the image of the Virgin Mary in one of the twelve battles that he fought against the Saxons and that in his last battle alone, on the Mons Badonicus, he killed no fewer than 960 men in a single day. By contrast, Arthur is not mentioned either by Gildas, a contemporary chronicler of the Saxon wars, whose *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* (*c.* 545) contains an account of the same battle, or by Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*c.* 730). One piece of evidence that

does, however, appear to confirm Arthur's early legendary fame is the Welsh elegy *Gododdin* ascribed to a bard by the name of Aneirin and believed to date from the late sixth century. (It survives only in a later linguistic form.) Here a hero's valour is praised, 'though he was not Arthur'.

It is clear from Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* and the *Mirabilia* appended to that work that by the early ninth century a nexus of legends had already grown up around the figure of Arthur. Evidence of the increasing number of legends on the subject, which taken together paint an ambivalent picture of the king, is afforded not only by the anonymous *Annales Cambriae* of the second half of the tenth century but also by various saints' lives dating from the years between 1070 and 1120. Following on from Nennius, the *Annales Cambriae* report that in the Battle of Badon in 516 Arthur carried Christ's Cross on his shoulders for three days and three nights and that the Britons were finally victorious. Whereas Arthur appears here as a hero fired by religious zeal, he figures in the lives of the saints (texts in Faral 1929, I, 237–44 and Chambers 1927, 241–7; 262–4) as an overweening tyrant. In the *Vita Cadoci* (*c.* 1090) by Lifris of Llancarfan he is tempted to assault a young woman, and in the *Vita Sancti Gildae* (*c.* 1120/30) by Caradoc of Llancarfan, he is described as *rex rebellis et tyrannus*, a negative counterpart to the saintly Gildas. It is the *Vita Sancti Gildae*, finally, that first proposes a link between the Arthurian tradition and an older abduction myth, a link that was to have considerable repercussions for the later history of the legend: here St Gildas helps Arthur to win back his wife Guennuvar following her abduction by a foreign king (Chambers 1927, 263).

Even before embarking on his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey had already completed a *Vita Merlini*, telling of the life of the legendary magician Merlin (1135), and it is clear that in his later work he drew not only on the few written sources that were available to him but also on oral Celtic narrative tradition, a tradition which, precisely because of its oral nature, is virtually impossible to reconstruct with any degree of certainty. In its basic outline, his *Historia* is clearly influenced by traditional models of medieval soteriological historiography, and the suggestion that Geoffrey was not only influenced by Virgil's *Aeneid* but that, in creating the figure of King Arthur, he sought to give the Britons a ruler who, like Charlemagne, would help to create a sense of national identity is entirely plausible, given the newly awakened interest in classical subjects in the twelfth century and the literary significance of the Continental legends surrounding the figure of Charlemagne.

Geoffrey took up the idea of the *translatio imperii* and combined it with the legend of Trojan ancestry, retelling the story of the Britons from the mythical foundation of their kingdom by Aeneas' great-grandson, Brutus, to its downfall as the result of moral decline and, finally, to the rise of the Saxons. It is against this background that Arthur's role must be seen. The victorious king is bold

enough to challenge even the hegemony of the Roman empire, and he would have succeeded in achieving his aim of world dominion if he had not been prevented by treachery from within his own ranks in the person of his nephew, Mordred. His failure notwithstanding, Arthur appears not only as the representative of a glorious British past but as the embodiment of hope for the present.

It is the political aspect of the story which, in keeping with the work's historiographic structure, is emphasized in the form of a series of power struggles, endless battles and intrigues among rival clans and tribes. There are, however, a number of fantastical episodes that depart from this pattern. One such episode is the account of Arthur's conception, which results from an act of adultery arranged by the magician Merlin (the Amphitryon motif). Another is Arthur's battle with a rapist giant on the Mont-Saint-Michel. Finally, there is the scene in which the king is spirited away to the faery isle of Avalon following his fatal wounding at the hands of the adulterous usurper Mordred. Thematically speaking, the work comes full circle, with Arthur's birth and death both taking place against a background of adultery. In this way, two ideas that were to be of major importance in the later Arthurian tradition are already prefigured in Geoffrey's *Historia*, namely, the image of Arthur as a courtly figure and the disintegration of his kingdom as the result of treachery and adultery.

It is clear from his various dedications to highly placed political figures at the English court that, in writing his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey was anxious to ingratiate himself with the Anglo-Norman rulers and, at the same time, to predispose them in favour of the Britons by depicting the latter as heirs to a glorious historical tradition reaching back to classical antiquity. Although contemporary scholars such as Giraldus Cambrensis were disinclined to regard Geoffrey's historical distortions as serious historiography, it is evident from the *Historia*'s huge success (more than 200 manuscripts have survived) that it satisfied a sudden upsurge of interest in the mythical and aesthetic elaboration of history on the part of cultivated audiences.

Arthur in Vernacular Poetry: Wace and the Breton *Lais*

In the course of the twelfth century, the English court for which Geoffrey wrote his *Historia* developed into an important centre of political power and at the same time became a focus of the new courtly literature (Bezzola 1944–63, part III). It was here that the *matière de Bretagne* first found written expression. Geoffrey had already mediated between oral and written poetic traditions, but his *Historia*, written in Latin prose, inevitably reached only the *litterati*.