Edited by Norris J. Lacy

A HISTORY OF ARTHURIAN SCHOLARSHIP

ARTHURIAN STUDIES LXV

A HISTORY OF ARTHURIAN SCHOLARSHIP

This book offers the first comprehensive and analytical account of the development of Arthurian scholarship from the eighteenth century, or earlier, to the dawn of the twenty-first. Eighteen distinguished scholars present scholarly trends and evaluate major contributions to the study of Arthurian origins, Grail studies, editing and translation of Arthurian texts, medieval and modern literatures, art and film. The result is an indispensable resource for students and a valuable guide for anyone with a serious interest in the Arthurian legend.

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A HISTORY OF ARTHURIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Edited by Norris J. Lacy

D. S. BREWER

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Preface

Arthurian scholarship, no less than the production of original Arthurian novels, films and other creations, has virtually exploded in recent decades. Two recent volumes of the *Arthurian Bibliography*, covering two decades (1978–98), list over 10,000 books, articles and dissertations on Arthurian subjects.[1] It is little exaggeration to contend that owing to the profusion of scholarly studies it is next to impossible to keep abreast of recent and current developments in research on Arthuriana.

In addition, with each passing year, the major contributions of the past appear more remote, and we risk losing sight of previous trends and forgetting the substantial achievements that, however outdated by current standards, permitted or in many cases generated subsequent scholarly efforts.

In no instance is the essential contribution of past efforts more apparent than in text editing, and the ultimate value of critical studies is determined to no small extent by the reliability of the editions from which scholars work.[2] However, the same principle holds for other forms of research: we build on the past accomplishments of others, even if we sometimes do so by rejecting the methods and conclusions of our predecessors. A myopic view of Arthurian scholarship from a twenty-first-century vantage point that looks back only to the late twentieth can easily obscure the crucial debt we owe to earlier generations.

In other words, we all too easily forget what we once learned from Bernard of Chartres – just how much we owe to the giants on whose shoulders we stand. It is essential that we both understand and value our scholarly past even as we ourselves help to shape the future of Arthurian research.

Accordingly, the present volume surveys the work of those who are the acknowledged giants – past and present – of our field and also of a great many other scholars, all of them important and some of them doubtless the future giants, whose work is recognized as instrumental in forming our discipline.[3] To

1 Caroline Palmer, *The Arthurian Bibliography: III. 1978–1992* (Cambridge, 1998); Elaine Barber, *The Arthurian Bibliography: IV. 1993–1998* (Cambridge, 2002). No less striking is the fact that the second volume, covering only five years, contains almost 40 percent of the entries for the entire twenty years.

2 Significantly, even though a chapter in this volume is devoted specifically to text editing, the authors of virtually all the other chapters have also discussed editions and have, most often, included them in their very select lists of indispensable titles (see Select Bibliography). Proper editions are thus the essential foundation on which our entire scholarly edifice rests.

3 We have had previous surveys, most of them quite brief, of Arthurian scholarship. The exception in terms of length is *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York, 1996), but that volume concentrated heavily, and by design, on the most current research and thus is not a true history of the discipline.

accomplish such a survey, we have invited the collaboration of major scholars of Arthurian history, literature, art and film.

Contributors have been free, within the broadest of limits, to make their own selections of names and titles and to offer their own reflections on, and accounts of, the major scholarly trends and accomplishments in their area. When, as editor, I invited their collaboration on this project, I asked them simply to consider which scholars and works ought, in their view, to be known by anyone whose interest in the field was reasonably serious. Most have begun with the eighteenth century; a few with the early- or mid-nineteenth. In any event, the central focus of all the chapters remains on the genuine monuments of Arthurian scholarship: the editions and studies that are recognizable milestones in the progress of our field. However, alongside every discussion of Loomis or Frappier, of Vinaver or Bromwich or Roach, the reader will find accounts of a great many others whose work, though perhaps less celebrated, has influenced – or yet will influence – those who follow them.

Still, it goes without saying that not every important study (or even every seminal one) is included by any means: a full history of Arthurian scholarship, or even of the truly indispensable works, would fill multiple volumes. In addition to omitting a great many significant contributions to the subject in general, we have by necessity given short shrift to certain fields and bodies of scholarship. For example, although our chapter bearing the title 'Welsh Arthurian Literature' does provide some – but only a little – information concerning other Celtic material (Cornish, Breton, Irish), the sheer volume of important scholarship on Welsh alone led to a decision to concentrate largely on that and to title the chapter accordingly.

Furthermore, in offering a chapter devoted to modern literature, we have limited it to the study of texts written in English. Given both the amount of English-language Arthurian literature and, more important for present purposes, the remarkable volume of scholarship devoted to the subject, Arthurian works in English constitute by far the dominant post-medieval Arthurian corpus. Serious work on modern German, French, Spanish and other Arthuriana is proceeding and progressing, but measured against the study of modern English-language texts, films, etc., it is being conducted on a dramatically smaller scale. Nonetheless, it was only reluctantly that we chose not to examine the scholarly study of those literatures. Similarly, as author of the 'Translation' chapter, I only hesitantly – but again necessarily – decided to concentrate solely on the translation into English of works composed originally in other languages.[4]

We have thus sought to be as inclusive as is practicable, but this book is exhaustive neither in the choice of material to treat nor in the focus on particular themes and texts. We have attempted, within reasonable limits, to offer the reader a valuable survey of major trends, with more substantial discussions of

4 Yet another omission is music. There are isolated discussions of a number of Arthurian operas, oratorios, etc., and of course the scholarship on Wagner is voluminous, but to my knowledge the only book devoted entirely to musical treatments of Arthurian themes is the collection *King Arthur in Music*, ed. Richard Barber (Cambridge, 2002).

the genuinely monumental contributions, early or more recent, to the advancement of Arthurian scholarship. Our emphases are multiple and include the origins of the Arthurian legend, Grail sources, editing and all the major Arthurian literatures of the Middle Ages, from the frustratingly enigmatic Welsh texts[5] to the rich Continental tradition and back to the insular. We also treat modern Arthuriana in English, medieval and modern art, film and translation – enterprises that have not always enjoyed among scholars the status of equal 'partners' in the elaboration of the legend of Arthur.[6]

Despite the regrettable omissions, what remains in this volume is a good part of what we believe to be essential. Contributors have traced the sometimes fitful, sometimes explosive progress of Arthurian scholarship, from the earlier efforts to seek sources – both of Arthur himself and of particular motifs and texts – to more recent investigations into the complexities of literary chivalry (and love) and into the romance form itself, gender questions, anthropological concerns, popular culture and a host of other matters both huge and small.

So diverse are the subjects of Arthurian research – both in general and even, in some cases, from one national literature to another – that we could not hope to give in this preface a proper account of them, unless it were through a summary of each chapter. These subjects constitute an astonishingly rich and varied body of material that in turn has generated a no less varied scholarly response. As a result, no brief synthesis or summary is possible, and thus we leave it to the individual chapter authors to offer their own histories of research in each field.

In addition to analysis and the extensive citation of sources in each chapter, the volume includes a very selective bibliography, listing a number of the most prominent works, including some of the true monuments, discussed in each chapter. We have excluded from the Select Bibliography many names and titles of the first order, but we believe that this listing nevertheless offers a reliable, if emphatically partial, 'who's who' in Arthurian scholarship across centuries, languages, genres and borders. The titles listed with those names identify the critical and scholarly contributions, or at least a reasonable sampling of them, that in our view should be part of the intellectual baggage of every serious student of Arthuriana.

5 So enigmatic are they, in fact, that Sharon Turner, the first translator of *Preiddeu Annwn*, said of the poem that 'all connection of thought seems to have been studiously avoided'. See *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 5th edn (London, 1828), III, p. 617; quoted by Roger Sherman Loomis, 'The Spoils of Annwn: An Early Arthurian Poem', *Speculum*, 61 (1941), 887.

6 Indeed, as an examination of programs will attest, only comparatively recently have papers devoted to modern Arthurian literature been warmly welcomed at the congresses of the International Arthurian Society.

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Arthurian Origins

CHRISTOPHER SNYDER

'Did King Arthur really exist?' This is the Inquisition for Arthurian scholars. It does not matter whether or not the question interests them – and for many of the greats it did not – it will still be uttered by nearly every student or new acquaintance who discovers that you study Arthur. To make matters worse, there is no easy answer.

The scholarly quest for Arthur's origins[1] goes back at least as far as the twelfth century, when historians like William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon tried to distinguish between historical fact and a legend growing exponentially.[2] The question certainly concerned Geoffrey of Monmouth, though he seldom distinguished fact from legend in his *History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136–38). Gerald of Wales provided detailed commentary following the first Arthurian excavation, when, in 1191, the monks of Glastonbury exhumed the alleged graves of Arthur and Guinevere.[3] Most medieval chroniclers eagerly accepted Geoffrey's account of Arthur's career, though William of Newburgh was an early skeptic.[4] Still it wasn't until the sixteenth century when scholarly critiques appeared, most notably that of the Italian humanist Polydore Virgil in his *Historia* (1534). Some men, commented the English printer William Caxton, 'holde oppynyon that there was no suche Arthur, and that all suche bookes as been maad of hym ben but fayned and fables'.[5] Such skeptical voices, however, were drowned by the Tudor antiquarians and genealogists who provided Henry VIII and Elizabeth I with the most famous of British royal ancestors.

Polydore Virgil and later critics have pointed out that, in discussing Arthurian origins, there is a real problem of sources. The period that most people think

1 This chapter will concern itself primarily with Arthur. For a sampling of the debate concerning the historicity of Merlin, see A.O.H. Jarman, 'Early Stages in the Development of the Myrddin Legend', in R. Bromwich and R. Jones, eds, *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 326–49; A.O.H. Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', in R. Bromwich et al., eds, *The Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 118–91; Nikolai Tolstoy, '*Merlinus Redivivus*', *Studia Celtica*, 18/19 (1983–84), 11–29; and Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Quest for Merlin* (Boston, 1985).

2 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (1125); Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* (1129).

3 Giraldus Cambrensis, *De Principis Instructione* (c. 1193–99) and *Speculum Ecclesiae*.

4 William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (1196–98), Prologue.

5 William Caxton, Preface to Thomas Malory, *Morte d'Arthur* (1485).

of as the Arthurian Age is the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., a period I have termed the Brittonic Age because we are dealing primarily with a Brittonic-speaking population and British writers and prominent figures.[6] Having said that, there are very few written sources for the period after 410, when Britain was effectively separated from the Western Roman Empire. From the Britons we have the letters of St Patrick, a lengthy sermon by Gildas, a couple of early monastic penitentials, and some brief inscriptions on memorial stones; from the Continent only a few scattered mentions of British affairs in chronicles and hagiography. None of these mentions Arthur, who appears first in two Cambro-Latin works – the *Historia Brittonum* ('History of the Britons', c. 829/30, attributed to the Welsh monk Nennius) and the *Annales Cambriae* ('Welsh Annals', 950s) – and in a brief reference in the Welsh elegiac poem *Y Gododdin* (composed as early as c. 600, but extant only in a thirteenth-century manuscript).

As modern techniques of paleography and source criticism developed in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, serious historians mostly abandoned Arthur in favor of better-documented figures like the Anglo-Saxon kings chronicled by Bede and Asser, especially Alfred the Great. Thus most of the great British historians of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wrote Anglo-Saxon histories of the period that relegated Arthur and his Britons to a few scant mentions.[7] In the nineteenth century a few such historians, most notably Sharon Turner and Joseph Ritson, turned to the question of Arthurian origins in their otherwise Anglo-centric works. But it was Scottish and Welsh scholars who seemed most interested in reassessing the insular texts dealing with Arthur. The literary scholar William Skene published a massive collection of translations of these texts in 1868 in which he offered the argument that Arthur *was* a historical figure, a Roman-type military commander operating in northern Britain at the end of the fifth century.[8]

Skene's way of thinking about these Arthurian texts was followed by such scholars as John Rhŷs, John Edward Lloyd, and J.D. Bruce. Rhŷs's *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1891), arising out of the Hibbert Lectures Rhŷs delivered at Oxford in 1886, investigated the origins of several Arthurian figures and motifs, focusing especially on early Welsh literature. Rhŷs believed that, while the essential materials of the Arthurian legend have existed 'from time immemorial', and that the Welsh Triads 'give us the oldest account of Arthur, . . . the Arthurian legend was the work of a comparatively late period' in the Welsh literary tradition.[9] This makes it extremely difficult to untangle all the threads of later tradition to arrive at origins, but Rhŷs believed that in doing so one arrives at the conclusion that there was an historical Arthur *as well as* a Brythonic divinity named Arthur. The latter, the 'greater Arthur', is defined by Rhŷs as a

6 Modern historians and archaeologists have variously termed the period post-Roman, sub-Roman, and Early Christian. Later medieval Britons looked back on the period as their Golden Age.

7 For a good discussion of the historiography, see Nicholas Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London, 2002), pp. 10–14, 239–64.

8 William Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 50–1.

9 John Rhŷs, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1891; New York, 1966), p. 6.

Culture Hero, who, like Conchobar, Zeus, and Woden, gathers champions at his court in order to initiate wars and adventures.

As for the 'man Arthur', Rhŷs employed a succinct but subtle argument that characterized him as no less than a British emperor. Because he is called 'emperor' (*amherawdyr* or *amherawdwr*) but never 'prince' (*gwledig*) in the early Welsh sources, Rhŷs believed that, with the departure of Roman imperial authority, the Britons might have bestowed the title 'emperor' on the highest remaining Romano-British officer, the *Comes Britanniae*.[10] If Arthur had held this position, then it would explain why he is depicted (in chap. 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*) as fighting in the company of 'kings' (probably other military officers) 'but he himself was their leader' (*sed ipse dux erat bellorum*). This historical Arthur, wrote Rhŷs, may have been named after the divine Arthur, or the two may have become confused owing to identical sounding names.[11]

If 'Arthur' is a Welsh name but the historical Arthur was Roman, what name did this man bear? The linguist Kemp Malone was the first scholar to point us in the direction of one Lucius Artorius Castus. Malone had argued, following Rhŷs and other Celticists, that 'Arthur was, in origin, a mythical figure, identical with *Uther*, . . . originally nothing more than an alternative form of *Arthur*' but later regarded as his father.[12] Subsequently, Malone conducted a study of the Latin form – *Artorius* – and concluded that there was also a 'pseudo-historical Arthur', based on a Roman general from Dalmatia who is known to have campaigned in both Britain and Armorica (Brittany) in the middle of the second century A.D.[13] The Armorican exploits of this L. Artorius Castus, and the fact that he was forced into retirement from active service (perhaps because of a severe wound), led Malone to suggest that Castus was the ultimate source for Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur, or at least of those activities of Arthur that Geoffrey did not borrow from his Welsh sources.[14] This brief etymological study of *Artorius*, which Malone admitted partly contradicts his previous *Arthur* = *Uther* theory, lay virtually unnoticed by Arthurian scholars for several decades, but would resurface later in the 'Sarmatian Connection' theory espoused by Scott Littleton and others (see below).

One who did notice Lucius Artorius Castus was E.K. Chambers, who believed it 'a rather fantastic notion that an expedition of this Artorius to Armorica was the germ of Arthur's fabulous continental empire'.[15] Sir Edmund Kercherver Chambers was one of the foremost Shakespearean scholars of the early twentieth century. When he turned his learned mind to Arthurian matters, the product was one of the greatest of all works of Arthurian scholarship, *Arthur of Britain* (1927). Here Chambers surveyed all of the pre-Galfridian texts, and even included a lengthy appendix with the most pertinent selections from the

10 Rhŷs, *Studies*, p. 7.
11 Rhŷs, *Studies*, p. 8.
12 Kemp Malone, 'The Historicity of Arthur', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 23 (1924), 472, 483.
13 Kemp Malone, '*Artorius*', *Modern Philology*, 22 (1925), 374.
14 Malone, '*Artorius*', p. 368, demonstrates why *Arthur* 'would be a perfectly normal [linguistic] development from *Artorius*' in early Welsh.
15 E.K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (1927; New York, 1967), p. 170.

Latin texts. He also examined a group of early Irish princes who bore the name Arthur, assessed Geoffrey of Monmouth and his sources, discussed the Arthur of the medieval chronicles and romances, and related the theories of a mythological or folkloric origin of Arthur. Ultimately Chambers rejected a mythological Arthur in favor of an historical figure at the heart of the legends, but was not willing to commit to detailing the career of the historical Arthur, recognizing all of the limitations of the earliest evidence:

> Stripped of [the *mirabilia*, the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*] tell us that Arthur fought against the Saxons, that he won the battle of Badon . . . [and] eleven other battles at named places, that he fell with Medraut at Camlan, that Badon was in 518 and Camlan in 539. . . . Beyond the bare notice of Badon, the reports lack confirmation. The most that history can say is that they are not inconsistent with what we know of the period to which they relate.[16]

The distinguished husband-and-wife team of Hector Munro Chadwick and Nora Kershaw Chadwick touched on Arthurian origins in the first volume of their monumental *The Growth of Literature* (1932). Unfortunately, they could add little to the evidence presented by Chambers and his predecessors. 'For Arthur', they wrote, 'we have not been able to find any contemporary, or indeed any very early direct evidence.'[17] The Chadwicks believed that the name was of Roman origin, 'presumably derived from some Roman official settled in this country', and that the practice of naming Irish and Welsh princes 'Arthur' shows that someone famous bore the name prior to the end of the sixth century.[18] Furthermore, the antiquity of the *Annales Cambriae* 'cannot be proved', while the *Historia Brittonum*'s Arthur is marred by the miraculous and contains a battle-list that cannot, in the whole, be treated as a 'historical record'.[19]

Other literary scholars who were examining the origins of Arthurian romance were persuading some people that Arthur's origins were mythological, even prehistoric. Such works by James Frazer, Jessie L. Weston, and Roger Sherman Loomis are discussed in length elsewhere in this volume. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the Arthurian and Grail myths have elements in them that go back well beyond the fifth century A.D. and the introduction of Christianity to Britain. Recently, John Darrah has followed the advice of Weston and Loomis by looking into the deep pagan past for Arthurian origins. For Darrah, it is the henge monuments and rituals of Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain that reveal the original *rex quondam*.[20]

Such avenues of investigation are outside the purview of historians. A new historical theory, however, was put forward shortly after the Chadwicks' study by R.G. Collingwood. He was commissioned to write the first volume of the

16 Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, pp. 168–9.
17 H.M. and N.K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge, 1932), I, p. 161.
18 Chadwick and Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, p. 162.
19 Chadwick and Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, pp. 161–2. However, the Chadwicks were the first to suggest that the passage describing Arthur's twelve battles may have been based on an early Welsh catalog poem, akin to those recalling the expeditions of Cynan Garwyn, Urien and Owain of Rheged, and Cadwallon.
20 John Darrah, *The Real Camelot: Paganism and the Arthurian Romances* (London, 1981).

Oxford History of England, which appeared as *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (1936) and consisted of four books penned by Collingwood and a final one written by J.N.L. Myres. In the final few pages of his contribution, Collingwood surveyed the written evidence traditionally used to discuss the fifth and sixth centuries.[21] Here Collingwood suggested that an historical *Artorius* would have come from 'a good [Romanized] family . . . of the lowland zone' and would have had a special Late Roman military command, implied by the phrase *dux bellorum* (in the *Historia Brittonum*). That he fought 'with the kings of the Britons' indicated, according to Collingwood, a command throughout the provinces of Britain, akin to that of the *Comes Britanniarum*, bestowed on him by the Britons when no 'Count' was sent to them by Aëtius.[22] The last piece of the puzzle was to give such an historical Arthur a plausible weapon of military superiority: *equites cataphractarii*, the mail-clad, heavy cavalry of the Late Empire.

Collingwood's 'conjectures', as he called them, tied together neatly the disparate evidence and gave plausible explanations to the later heroic traditions based upon fifth-century certainties. The Late Roman heavy cavalry of an Arthur *dux bellorum*, for example, could well have been depicted by later medieval writers as 'knights' of the twelfth century variety. Battles fought as sieges of reconditioned British hillforts could easily be depicted as assaults upon medieval castles. And, naturally, the philosopher and classicist Collingwood could present us with an Arthur who was 'the last of the Romans: the last to understand Roman ideas and use them for the good of the British people. . . . The story of Roman Britain ends with him.'[23]

An historical Roman Arthur appealed to many, but not generally to the Celticists. Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson was one of the most eminent scholars of Celtic languages and literatures in the middle of the twentieth century. His area of specialization was the Brittonic languages spoken in Britain from the Iron Age to the early Middle Ages, which are traced masterfully in his *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953), still the bible for Brittonic linguists. In this work Jackson displayed a belief in Arthur's historicity but also an agnostic attitude, unable to choose between a 'leader of the official Roman kind' and 'another "tyrant" like Vortigern'.[24] However, given the task of writing the introductory chapter on Arthurian origins for R.S. Loomis's *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (1959), Jackson critiqued the prevailing theories about an historical Arthur and offered his own brief sketch of Arthurian 'probabilities'.

'The name *Arthur* is unquestionably derived from *Artorius*,' wrote Jackson, and our solid information about Lucius Artorius Castus 'proves that his name

21 R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (1936; Oxford, 1949), pp. 320–4.

22 The Britons' request to Aëtius is in Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, chap. 20.

23 Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain*, p. 324. It should be noted that, much later, Myres would distance himself from Collingwood's theory: 'The fact is that there is no contemporary or near-contemporary evidence for Arthur playing any decisive part in these events at all. No figure on the border-line of history and mythology has wasted more of the historian's time' (J.N.L. Myres, *The English Settlements* [Oxford, 1986], pp. 15–16).

24 Kenneth Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Oxford, 1953), p. 116: 'we cannot really know [about Arthur,] and nothing useful can be said about him here'.

was known in Britain'.[25] This does not mean, stated Jackson emphatically, that the historical Arthur held a specific Late or Sub- Roman military title, as both Rhŷs and Collingwood had argued. Early medieval Welsh kings like Cadwallon, who campaigned in Wales, the Midlands, and the North, could just as easily explain the wide-ranging activities of the *Historia Brittonum*'s Arthur. Nor does the evidence prove a northern provenance for Arthur, as some Celticists were then arguing (see below). In fact, believed Jackson, the most certain thing about an historical Arthur was his victory over the English at Badon, in Wessex probably at one of the many Badburys there.

To the question 'Did King Arthur ever really exist?' wrote Jackson, 'the only honest answer is, "We do not know, but he may well have existed." '[26] If he did exist, certain details are 'probable' for Jackson: Arthur was a 'supreme British commander of genius in the late fifth century'; he bore a Roman-derived name; his primary enemies were the English, though he may also have fought the Picts and 'traitorous Britons'; his greatest victory was in Wessex; he campaigned for a decade leading up to the year 500; he may have been killed twenty years later in a civil conflict; he was still vividly remembered in the late sixth century, when various princes were named after him; his deeds were told in 'traditional Welsh oral literature', and also in a panegyric poem 'by an antiquarian who had heard that he won twelve victories'; this poem was summarized in Latin by the author of the *Historia Brittonum*; similar quasi-historical material about Arthur was used to compile the *Annales Cambriae*; and, lastly, folklore was transforming 'the historical general' into the 'miraculous emperor' found in later Arthurian literature.

Celticists in the 1960s and 1970s produced many critical studies and much-needed new translations of early Welsh literature that are crucial to discussion of Arthurian origins. Again, such work by scholars as Thomas Jones, Rachel Bromwich, Brynley Roberts, Ifor Williams, J.E. Caerwyn Williams and others is discussed elsewhere in this book. But of this group, it was Rachel Bromwich who stepped boldly into the fray of the debate on Arthurian origins. 'What *kind* of problem is the problem of Arthur?' she asked in an article in the academic journal *Studia Celtica* (1975/76).[27] Originally a northern British problem, she answered.[28] Bromwich continued Jackson's theory that Arthurian material in both the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* derived from a hypothetical 'Northern Chronicle', written in Latin (but with Welsh words interspersed) in the eighth century. She also saw traces of Old Welsh orthography in the *Gododdin*'s reference to Arthur, and thus believed it to belong to the earliest written ninth-century redaction of the poem, a product of Strathclyde Britons.[29]

25 Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, 'The Arthur of History', in R.S. Loomis, ed., *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 1–11 (2).

26 Jackson, 'The Arthur of History', p. 1.

27 Rachel Bromwich, 'Concepts of Arthur', *Studia Celtica*, 10/11 (1975–76), 163–81.

28 See also Rachel Bromwich, 'Scotland and the Earliest Arthurian Tradition', *Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne*, 15 (1963), 85–95; and the notes to Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff, 1978).

29 A view supported by John T. Koch, *The* Gododdin *of Aneirin: Text and Context from Dark-Age North Britain* (Cardiff, 1997), p. 147, who argues that the reference was likely in the Ur-text

An even earlier (seventh century) reference to Arthur ('whelps of the stout Arthur') could, furthermore, be contained in the Powysian poem *Marwnad Cynddylan*. These works, together with the Arthurian 'name-sakes' in northern Britain (see below), suggested to Bromwich that 'a common "pool" of knowledge about Arthur [existed] among the Britons of Strathclyde between the seventh and ninth centuries', and that these stories migrated to Wales where they provided source material for chronicler and poet alike.[30]

Bromwich's evidence for a northern British Arthur was supported by the medievalist and publisher Richard Barber. Barber began his long and distinguished career of writing on chivalry and Arthuriana with a book called *Arthur of Albion*, which traced the story of Arthur from its historical roots through its many medieval and modern literary manifestations. Shortly after this, however, he focused his attention on Arthurian origins in another work called *The Figure of Arthur* (1972). As the title of the book suggests, Barber was looking not for *the* historical Arthur, but rather a composite 'figure of Arthur' made up of many different historical and literary strands. These begin with an obscure figure from northern Britain named Artuir of Dalriada.[31] This 'Arthur' was a son of Áedán mac Gabráin, king of the Dalriada Scots, and he was killed in battle around the year 590. That is all we know about him, yet it seems to be the beginning of a trend, especially among Irish nobility living in Britain, of naming their sons Arthur. An Artuir maic Retheoir, for example, is named as a prince of Irish descent living in Dyfed c. 600 in an eighth-century Irish story called *The Expulsion of the Déssi* (and also in a later Welsh genealogy of the kings of Dyfed).

Barber was one of the first to trace this important naming trend extensively, a thread taken up much later by Ken Dark (see below). Barber also pointed out the gulf between the British resistance at Badon described by Gildas in the early sixth century and the association of Badon with Arthur made by the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* in the ninth and tenth centuries. Ultimately, Barber argued that the Arthur of Badon is a ninth-century Welsh creation based upon the conflation of Artuir of Dalriada with Artuir of Dyfed (and possibly other Irish Arthurs), which resulted from northern Britons retreating to Wales with their Arthur stories in the eighth century.[32]

Archaeological and place-name evidence, however, has pointed many Arthurian scholars to southwestern Britain. This trend goes back at least as far as the 1930s, when there arose great enthusiasm around the excavations at Tintagel, Cornwall (Arthur's birthplace in Geoffrey of Monmouth) by C.A. Ralegh Radford, one of the pioneering figures of early medieval archaeology.[33] The vast amounts of imported Mediterranean and Gaulish pottery found at Tintagel –

composed in seventh-century Strathclyde. See, however, Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Arthur of History', in Bromwich et al., eds, *The Arthur of the Welsh*, p. 29, n. 2.

30 Bromwich, 'Concepts of Arthur', p. 180.

31 For the career of this Artuir, see now Michelle Ziegler, 'Artúr mac Aedan of Dalriada', *The Heroic Age*, 1 (Spring/Summer 1999), http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/1/haaad.htm.

32 Richard Barber, *The Figure of Arthur* (Totowa, NJ, 1972), p. 136. See also the review by Brynley Roberts, in *Studia Celtica*, 8/9 (1973–74), 336–9.

33 See discussion in Charles Thomas, *Tintagel: Arthur and Archaeology* (London, 1993).

proof of high-status activity there in the late fifth and sixth centuries – was subsequently found during excavations at other sites with Arthurian associations, including Glastonbury, Dinas Emrys, and Castle Dore.[34] Furthermore, excavations by Radford at Glastonbury Abbey in 1962–63 confirmed the Glastonbury monks' story that, in a search for Arthur's remains in 1190, they had dug exactly where they said and they had indeed uncovered an early burial.

But the excavation that garnered the most public and media attention was that of 'Cadbury Castle', a massive hillfort at South Cadbury in Somerset. Believing there was archaeological evidence to support John Leland's 1532 identification of South Cadbury as Camelot, Radford formed the Camelot Research Committee with Leslie Alcock of the University of Wales as director of excavations. Alcock, whose meticulous excavation of Dinas Powys in the 1950s made it the classic site of post-Roman Celtic archaeology, carried out work on the plateau and ramparts of South Cadbury from 1966 to 1970.[35] Alcock showed among much else that the hill was reoccupied in the latter part of the fifth century, and refortified on a massive scale, with a new encircling rampart of stone and timber, and a complex gatehouse. Enormous amounts of imported pottery, second only to Tintagel, confirm high-status British occupation in the fifth and sixth centuries, and no British hillfort has been discovered since with fortifications on this scale.

Whoever was responsible for the refortification of South Cadbury was clearly a leader with impressive human and material resources. This led Alcock to postulate an 'Arthur-type figure' as the lord of Cadbury–Camelot, as the media were now calling the hillfort. In *Arthur's Britain* (1971), written just as the excavations were concluding at South Cadbury, Alcock attempted to provide a description of the possible career and context of this figure.[36] To do so he delved into a critique of the British and Anglo-Saxon written sources for the period, arguing that the *Historia Brittonum* and especially the *Annales Cambriae* preserved credible earlier traditions about Arthur. Alcock's Arthur was a major warlord, a *magister militum* who defeated the Saxons at Badon Hill around 490 but fell in civil dispute at Camlann around 510. His culture was that of the British elites, depicted so vividly in Welsh heroic poetry, who resided in places like South Cadbury and Congresbury in Somerset, Dinas Powys and Degannwy in Wales, and Dumbarton and the Mote of Mark in northern Britain.

This was the most Alcock was willing to say about Arthur, returning his attention instead to excavation in Scotland now as Professor of Archaeology at the University of Glasgow. But just two years later, with the general public still abuzz about South Cadbury and its possible royal resident, another major book appeared by a respected academic who was happy to venture quite a bit more about Arthur. John Morris was an authority on Late Roman prosopography and founder of the scholarly journal *Past and Present*. It must have surprised many of

34 See C.A. Ralegh Radford and Michael J. Swanton, *Arthurian Sites in the West* (Exeter, 2002).

35 These excavations have now been fully published, the relevant material in Leslie Alcock et al., *Cadbury Castle, Somerset: The Early Medieval Archaeology* (Cardiff, 1995).

36 Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology, AD 367–634* (London, 1971). See also Alcock, *Economy, Society, and Warfare Among the Britons and Saxons* (Cardiff, 1987).

his admirers when, in 1973, he published *The Age of Arthur*, a massive work offering a detailed narrative of the career of Arthur and British political history from A.D. 350 to 650.[37] Even more amazing was the fact that this weighty tome was just one part of a publishing project that would include nine volumes with new editions and translations of 'Arthurian Period Sources' such as the writings of Gildas and St Patrick.[38]

For Morris, Arthur was no obscure Roman soldier nor was he a native petty chieftain. He was 'the last Roman emperor in the west', the central figure of this entire period of British history. Morris arrived at this vision of Arthur through a mélange of written traditions, including Welsh genealogies and hagiography written several centuries after his 'Arthurian period'. To make matters worse, a haphazard and idiosyncratic system of citations has left many a student baffled in trying to track down these written sources. Neither before nor since has there been such an ambitious and magisterial historical monograph on Arthur, but some brilliant ideas of Morris's were here swamped by much literary extravagance.

Criticism of Alcock's and Morris's books grew steadily in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[39] But no critique had more profound an impact on scholarship in the field than a 1977 essay by David Dumville aptly titled 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend'.[40] Dumville argued that the Arthurian theories of Alcock and Morris belong in the 'Legend' category because they rely so heavily on late 'Celtic' material that neither author was equipped to analyze. Citing the work of other Cambro-Latin paleographers like Kathleen Hughes, Dumville dismissed the majority of texts used to support an historical Arthur and concluded that only primary sources such as the writings of Patrick and Gildas should be used to write histories of the fifth and sixth centuries. As for Arthur himself: 'The fact of the matter is that there is no historical evidence about Arthur; we must reject him from our histories and, above all, from the titles of our books.'[41]

This essay established the minimalist or skeptical extreme in the Arthur debate, effectively scaring away academic historians from the subject of Arthur for nearly two decades. During this time Dumville himself has continued to work on new editions of the various recensions of the *Historia Brittonum*. In doing this work he has already made another significant contribution to the debate: he has denied that Nennius is the true author of the *Historia*, which he sees as a 'synthetic history' (i.e., one that expresses a sense of national unity projected into the legendary past).[42] But he has not been the only skeptical voice

37 John Morris, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650* (London, 1973).

38 Before he died in 1977, Morris completed his own translation of the *Historia Brittonum* for the project: see John Morris, ed. and trans., *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London, 1980).

39 See, for example, Charles Thomas, 'Are These the Walls of Camelot?', *Antiquity*, 43 (1969), 27–30; James Campbell, review of Morris, *Age of Arthur*, *SH*, 15 (1975), 177–85; and D.P. Kirby and J.E.C. Williams, review of Morris, *Age of Arthur*, *Studia Celtica*, 10/11 (1975–76), 454–86.

40 David N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History*, 62 (1977), 173–92.

41 Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain', p. 188.

42 See Dumville, 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature*, 6 (1986), 1–26. For a counter to this argument, see P.J.C. Field, 'Nennius and his *History*', *Studia Celtica*, 30 (1996), 159–65.

on the subject of Arthur. Charles Thomas, an archaeologist and expert on epigraphy, had this to say in his important survey *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500*:

> Any sane person would agree [with Dumville]. These enticing Will-of-the-wisps have too long dominated, and deflected, useful advances in our study. . . . It is possible – it may be preferable, and in the particular case of 'Arthur' it is *desirable* – to construct models of fifth-century Britain devoid of individual names altogether.[43]

Many archaeologists agreed with Thomas, constructing such models not only devoid of names, but entirely avoiding all written evidence (including Patrick and Gildas) because of biases and textual uncertainties. The pendulum had been swung hard by Dumville, and now minimalism was *de rigueur* in academe. As one American medieval historian put it, 'Among scholars who give serious consideration to methodological questions, the historicity of a Britano-Roman military commander named *Artorius* is at risk.'[44]

Oliver Padel suggested a new path of enquiry in an important 1994 article.[45] Through an examination of the pre-Galfridian material, Padel came to the conclusion that the omnipresence of the 'fabulous' in these depictions of Arthur suggests an original folkloric figure who later became 'historicized', that is, mistaken for an historical person. Furthermore, these Arthurian *mirabilia* are almost always associated with remarkable features in the landscape, features located in southern Scotland, in Wales and along the Welsh border, and in southwestern Britain – all areas where Britons lived in the early Middle Ages. This historicization also occurred with the Irish folk hero Fionn, who, as others have long pointed out, shares many similarities with the pre-Galfridian Arthur (e.g. giant-like strength, magical animals and weapons, a famous warband, a 'sleeping not dead' tradition).

Referring to the slightly positive conclusions of Kenneth Jackson and Thomas Charles-Edwards, Padel answered the question 'Did Arthur exist?' with 'He may very well *not* have existed . . . and, indeed, the cumulative evidence is such as to make that a probability.'[46] This conclusion had a profound impact on Thomas Green, who has since carried Padel's banner in several Internet publications and list discussions.[47] In addition to an acceptance of the historicization theory, Green offered his support to native derivation of the name Arthur (from *Art-gur*, 'bear-man') and discussed the possibility that the original folkloric Arthur was a raven or Cornish crow! 'Just as an almost infinite number of *historical* prototypes for Arthur can be identified with enough enthusiasm', cautioned Green, 'it seems very likely that a similar number of *mythical* prototypes can also be identified, and, as such, the methodological comments made

43 Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (Los Angeles, 1981), p. 245.
44 Bernard S. Bachrach, 'The Question of King Arthur's Existence and of Romano-British Naval Operations', *Haskins Society Journal*, 2 (1991), 13–28.
45 O.J. Padel, 'The Nature of Arthur', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 27 (1994), 1–31.
46 Padel, 'Nature of Arthur', p. 1.
47 See, for example, Thomas Green, 'The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur' (1998, revised 2002) http://www.arthuriana.co.uk/historicity/arthur.htm.

with regard to the identification of "historical Arthurs" must be applied to this problem also.'

The work of Padel and Green provided inspiration for a bold and ambitious work of revisionist history, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (2002), by Nicholas Higham.[48] Higham, an archaeologist, has published several studies on the written sources and archaeological evidence for early medieval Britain, specializing in northern Britain. In a controversial study of Gildas, he wrote:

> There was . . . no heroic age fit for the deeds of a King Arthur. . . . In reality, King Arthur was no more than the requisite British hero whose appearance . . . was necessitated by the fundamental misunderstanding of Gildas's text by less erudite Welsh scholars, centuries later. . . . As an historical figure, he should be laid to rest once more as an unwarranted and retrospective, if readily intelligible, intrusion on the fifth century by a perplexed but anonymous ninth-century cleric. . . . Not only did Arthur himself not exist but the age which led to his invention was no less fictional.[49]

In *King Arthur*, Higham turned his criticism to the *Annales Cambriae* and the *Historia Brittonum*, the works of those 'less erudite' and 'perplexed' Welsh authors that, in Higham's view, are responsible for belief in an historical Arthur. After producing his own historiography of the Arthur debate, Higham placed himself squarely in the skeptic camp and then embarked on a lengthy exegesis of the Welsh texts that treats them as works of political propaganda. Arthur is created – or rather 'historicized', from either a dim remembrance of someone like Castus or else a folkloric hero – and portrayed in a manner that would flatter the royal patrons of these two works, namely Merfyn Frych and Owain ap Hywel respectively.

Higham as literary critic applied postcolonial theory to Arthurian texts: Welsh writers invented the battle-hero Arthur to counter the conquered Britons' proverbial reputation for cowardice and political obscurity, casting this hero in the guise of Joshua or even Christ. There is much more to this rich study, including discussion of the etymology of *Arthur* and Higham's theory about Arthur's ties to a local bear cult and a mythical huntsman. But in the end the book, marred by historical inaccuracies, builds an unconvincing case for Arthurian fabrication, at least in this reader's opinion. Its legacy among Arthurian scholarship, however, has yet to be determined.

While Dumville's skeptical attitude toward Arthur still carries enormous influence among specialists in the field, there have been a few moderate voices among academics. In an essay on Arthurian origins for the volume *The Arthur of the Welsh* (1991) – bearing the same title and many similarities to Kenneth Jackson's essay – the Oxford historian of early medieval law Thomas Charles-Edwards wrote that 'more than one question may be asked by an historian about a person such as Arthur'.[50] That is, historians are not just interested in the

48 Nicholas J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London, 2002). Three reviews of this important book appeared in *Arthuriana*, 12.1 (2002).

49 N.J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester, 1994), p. 211.

50 Charles-Edwards, 'The Arthur of History', p. 15.

question 'Did Arthur really exist?' but also in questions like 'What is the author of a given text's perception of Arthur?' After dismissing the Arthurian references in the poems *Y Goddodin* and *Gereint Filius Erbin* as too late, Charles-Edwards focused on what he saw as the earliest Arthurian historical evidence, the list of Arthur's battles in the *Historia Brittonum*. Here he parted company with Dumville's skepticism, arguing that we cannot simply dismiss the *Historia* as an unhistorical 'heap' of stories. Rather, he argued, the *Historia*, like those of Bede and Gregory of Tours, is a combination of *historia gentis* ('history of a people') and *historia ecclesiastica* ('church history'). Thus, the Britons Arthur and Patrick provide parallel links between the Roman and the English sections of the *Historia*. As *dux bellorum* of the British kings, Arthur also provides the author of the *Historia* with a British precedent for the later English *Bretwaldas* ('Britain rulers') in Kent and Northumbria, whom Bede depicts as lording over other kings on and off the battlefield.

Charles-Edwards has shown that historians can follow scholarly method without dismissing the worth of texts like the *Historia Brittonum*.[51] In the end, however, he did not push back the dates for the Arthurian material in the *Historia* and the *Annales*. 'At this stage of the inquiry', he concluded (echoing the sentiments of Jackson), 'one can only say that there may well have been an historical Arthur; that the historian can as yet say nothing of value about him, but that later conceptions of Arthur are likely to interest historians almost as much as they do students of medieval literature.'[52]

While academic historians have tended to agree with this statement, saying 'nothing of value' about Arthur himself, several historians and archaeologists have shown that there is much that is valuable to be said about Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries. C.J. Arnold, Simon Esmonde Cleary, Nicholas Higham, Ken Dark, Michael Jones and the present author are just a few such scholars who have published major monographs on this period over the last twenty years; many more specialists have presented important studies in journal articles and essays.[53] While most of these works have totally avoided Arthur, they have nevertheless constructed sound theories about the socio-political, religious, and military structures of the Britons during this period in which either Arthur lived or else his legend arose.

Ken Dark is typical of this group in that he has deftly combined the written and archaeological evidence to construct his picture of the Brittonic Age in two important monographs.[54] Recently, however, he turned boldly to the question of

51 For examples of academic historians who have subsequently re-evaluated the worth of the *Historia Brittonum*, see Kenneth R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom* (London, 1994) and Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, NY, 1996).

52 Charles-Edwards, 'The Arthur of History', p. 29.

53 In addition to those studies discussed below, see especially C.J. Arnold, *Roman Britain to Saxon England* (Bloomington, IN, 1984); A.S. Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1987); Nicholas J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992); Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*; Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*; and Christopher A. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons, AD 400–600* (University Park, PA, 1998).

54 Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*; and Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (London, 2000). The label Brittonic Age is not one used by Dark, who has stressed in his work the continuity of Roman ways in early medieval British lands.

Arthurian origins in a serious, but not skeptical, study of the Arthurian naming tradition.[55] Here Dark accepted Dumville's rigorous methodology and his conclusions that both the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* are too late for use in writing fifth/sixth-century history, both bearing signs that Arthur had already become a figure of legend. But he parted ways with his Cambridge mentor over the easy dismissal of an historical Arthur, for his reading of the early sources leads Dark to identify at least a 'prototypical' Arthur behind six historically attested Irish Arthurs of the sixth and seventh centuries, all probably royal and half with known British connections.[56] This 'prototypical' Arthur may have been the earliest of the namesakes – Artuir maic Retheoir, a Demetian king of Irish descent – or else another figure held in high esteem by the royal dynasties of Dyfed and Dalriada in the late sixth century.

Dark's foray into Arthurian scholarship may serve as a signal to other academics that Dumville might have gone too far in his dismissal, that it is time to return cautiously to the 'Arthur question'. My own contributions to the scholarship on Arthurian origins have been attempts to establish a middle ground between academic skepticism and unbridled lay enthusiasm. As an academic historian of the early Middle Ages trained in detailed analysis of primary sources (with secondary training in the analysis of archaeological and numismatic evidence), I mostly side-stepped the 'Arthur question' in early publications.[57] My primary goal has always been to bring to light the many dimensions of the Brittonic Age – military, religion, politics, material culture – not to prove or disprove Arthur's existence.[58] While I have always had a love for the Arthurian legend, I agree with Dumville that academic historians should rely on the primary sources for the period they wish to describe and not build cases for historical actors or events based upon late or unreliable evidence.

But I have also come to believe that the 'Arthur question' *should* be of interest to historians, not just the question of Arthur's historical existence, but also the ways people have viewed him and used his myth throughout history. In *The World of King Arthur* (2000), I traced the historical and archaeological threads – Prehistoric, Iron Age, Roman – that have contributed to the Arthurian myth, examined the material and written evidence for the Brittonic Age, and surveyed the major historical Arthur theories.[59] Above all, I proposed that the 'reality' of Arthur is not dependent upon an historical figure – possible, but not provable with the evidence we now possess – but rather exists in the fact that he has been taken as real by chroniclers, writers, kings, and proud fellow-countrymen. This

55 Ken Dark, 'A Famous Arthur in the Sixth-Century? Reconsidering the Origins of the Arthurian Legend', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 26 (2000), 77–96.

56 Dark, 'A Famous Arthur', p. 81. These six namesakes are Artuir son of Pedr or 'Retheoir', a Demetian prince (late sixth century); Artuir, son of Áedán mac Gabráin of Dalriada (late sixth century); an Arthur who is a grandson of Áedán mac Gabráin (early seventh century); Arthur son of Bicoir (fl. 620s); Artuir, grandfather of the Irish cleric Ferdach (early seventh century); and an *Artuir* commemorated on a Co. Tipperary tombstone (seventh or eighth century).

57 See, for example, Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain (AD 400–600): A Gazetteer of Sites* (Oxford, 1996); and Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants*.

58 See my comments on Arthur in Appendix A of *An Age of Tyrants*.

59 Christopher Snyder, *The World of King Arthur* (New York, 2000); published in the UK as *Exploring the World of King Arthur* (London, 2000).

approach, using Arthur as a vehicle for *l'histoire des mentalités*, led me to investigate the ways in which medieval princes and poets used Arthur and Merlin for political, and often nationalistic, purposes.[60]

Most academics realize that their specialist squabbling has little influence outside the ivory tower, and perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the historical Arthur debate. Despite the recent academic skepticism, the 'Arthur question' has blossomed into something of a publishing phenomenon in the trade press. The general public's enthusiasm for the topic has been fed by an increasing number of books, CDs, and television programs devoted to the quest for Arthur. The quality of these works has varied greatly.

No one has been more persistent and conscientious in the pursuit of an historical Arthur than Geoffrey Ashe. A prolific writer and lecturer, Ashe began in the late 1950s to bring together the historical Arthur theories with emerging archaeological evidence in well-written and accessible trade books.[61] Ashe became particularly interested in the Arthurian and Grail traditions associated with Glastonbury, where he has lived for many years.[62] In 1966, Ashe was appointed Secretary of the newly formed Camelot Research Committee, and his association with the project resulted in his editing and contributing to a collection of essays, *The Quest for Arthur's Britain* (1968).[63] At this point Ashe and Alcock were fairly close in agreement that the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* provided some legitimate evidence for an historical Arthur whose career straddled the year 500 and who operated primarily in the area around Somerset.

By the late 1970s, however, Ashe had become aware of the heavy academic criticism aimed at Alcock's and Morris's books, criticism that had pushed his friend Alcock into an agnostic position on Arthur. Unexpectedly, the academic skepticism led Ashe to change the direction of his pursuit. In 1981 he published an article in *Speculum* in which he claimed to have found the source for Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'very ancient book in the British tongue'.[64] In a restrained preface to the twelfth-century Breton *Legend of St Goeznovius*, arguably written nearly twenty years before Geoffrey's *History*, Arthur is described as a great king active just after the time of Vortigern and is said to have won victories in Britain *and* in Gaul. Ashe argued that this account of Arthur's Gallic warfare was independent of Geoffrey (who makes it a much more elaborate affair) and dependent upon an account of the career of Riothamus, a British king who corresponded with Sidonius Apollinaris and who, according to Jordanes and Gregory of Tours, seems to have brought an army from Britain to fight both

60 See, for example, Christopher A. Snyder, *The Britons* (Oxford, 2003), chaps. 5, 11 and 12.

61 Examples of these early works include Geoffrey Ashe, *From Caesar to Arthur* (London, 1960); Ashe, *Camelot and the Vision of Albion* (London, 1971); Ashe, *A Guidebook to Arthurian Britain* (London, 1980); and Ashe, *Kings and Queens of Early Britain* (London, 1982).

62 See, for example, Geoffrey Ashe, *King Arthur's Avalon* (New York, 1957); and Ashe, *Avalonian Quest* (London, 1982).

63 Geoffrey Ashe, ed., *The Quest for Arthur's Britain* (London, 1968). In addition to Ashe's introductory and concluding essays, this work features chapters written by such archaeologists as Ralegh Radford (on Tintagel and Glastonbury Abbey), Philip Rahtz (on Glastonbury Tor), and Leslie Alcock (on Dinas Powys and South Cadbury).

64 Geoffrey Ashe, 'A Certain Very Ancient Book', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 301–23.

Saxons and Goths in the Loire Valley c. 470. Both Geoffrey and the author of the *Legend* may have drawn on the same, now lost, source, which equated Riothamus with Arthur.[65]

Ashe expanded this theory in the book *The Discovery of King Arthur*.[66] Here he pointed out other parallels between Riothamus and Arthur (e.g., Riothamus is betrayed by a treasonous deputy, his end is also uncertain) and explained that Riothamus was probably not a name, but a title, meaning something like 'supreme king' (*Rigo-tamos*).[67] Few academic historians have followed Ashe's equation of Arthur and Riothamus, partly because many see Riothamus as a Breton ruler with no connection to Britain, let alone Badon and the other supposedly Arthurian battles.[68] Jeremy Adams, however, has pointed out that if Ashe's theory is true, then the letters of Sidonius to Riothamus give us a rare glimpse into the ethical character and level of education of this great Briton.[69]

Like the other historical Arthur theories, the Arthur–Riothamus equation rests upon late evidence, though it does give us a real and fascinating fifth-century candidate who has by and large been ignored by historians of fifth-century Britain. While Ashe continues to exhibit faith in his Riothamus theory (with not a few disciples), he has also come to look at the issue from other perspectives. 'A more fruitful approach', he wrote in 1995 in a piece for the journal *Arthuriana*, 'is to ask, not "Did Arthur exist?" but "How did the Arthurian legend originate; what facts is it rooted in?" To do so is to acknowledge that this is a literary problem rather than an historical one.'[70]

As Oliver Padel pointed out, this could also be a problem of folklore rather than one of history. Since the origins of a folk tale or folk figure are almost always non-literate and therefore undatable, a folkloric Arthur may be beyond the capacity of a historian to explain. This is the problem one encounters with the so-called 'Sarmatian Connection'. In 1975 Helmut Nickel wrote an essay in which he briefly explored the possibility that Lucius Artorius Castus was the historical prototype of Arthur and that a unit of Sarmatian cavalry serving under him in Britain formed the basis for what would later be known as the Knights of the Round Table.[71] The westernmost Sarmatians, who were related to the ancient Scythians of the Caucasus region as well as the Alans originally from

65 The first historian known to have made this equation was Sharon Turner, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 3 vols (London, 1799–1805).

66 Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (London, 1985).

67 Ashe, *Discovery*, p. 97. This is contradicted by Kenneth Jackson, '*Varia*: II. Gildas and the Names of the British Princes', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 3 (1982), 30–40.

68 Jordanes says Riothamus came 'by way of Ocean' to the state of the Bituriges (Bourges, in central Gaul), a statement that is ambiguous on the matter of Riothamus's origin. Ashe argues that Badon and the other battles ascribes to Arthur in the *Historia Brittonum* may have been fought by 'Arthur's men', a warband who fought under Arthur's name after the king's death.

69 Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, 'Sidonius and Riothamus', *Arthurian Literature*, 12 (1993), 157–64.

70 Geoffrey Ashe, 'The Origins of the Arthurian Legend', *Arthuriana*, 5.3 (Fall 1995), 3. See also Ashe's discussion of Arthurian origins in Norris J. Lacy, Geoffrey Ashe, and Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Handbook* (2nd edn, New York, 1997), pp. 1–55.

71 Helmut Nickel, 'The Dawn of Chivalry', *Metropolitan Museum Art Bulletin*, 32 (1975), 150–2. This essay served as an accessible *précis* for ideas also published in Nickel, 'Wer waren König Artus Ritter? Über die geschichtliche Grundlage der Artussagen', *Zietschrift der historischen Waffe- und Kostümkunde*, 1 (1975), 1–18.

the Russian Steppes, were defeated by the emperor Marcus Aurelius in Hungary in A.D. 175, and 5,500 of their heavy cavalry (*cataphractarii*) were sent by Rome to help fight barbarians in northern Britain. They were assigned to Castus, wrote Nickel, and fought under a windsock banner of the red dragon; their descendants, still on record in northern Britain in the early fifth century, kept the name Artorius alive as a sort of title and it became linked with epic tales brought from the Caucasus about swords in stones and magic cauldrons.

These were grand and sweeping claims, obviously in need of more lengthy and detailed scholarly examination. C. Scott Littleton had also made the Sarmatian Connection independently of Nickel. From conversations with the linguist/archaeologist J.P. Mallory, Littleton went on to publish his theories first in a collaborative essay with Anne C. Thomas (1978) and then in the book *From Scythia to Camelot* (1994), co-authored with Linda A. Malcor.[72] In this more elaborate form of the theory, Lancelot becomes *Alanus-à-Lot* ('the Alan of Lot'), Arthur is more closely linked with Batraz and his Narts (heroes in the Ossetian epics of the Caucasus), and the Holy Grail is seen as a relic stolen from St Peter's Basilica by the Alans in 410 and carried to southern Gaul. The result is a mixture of sound scholarship on the early Steppe nomads with inaccuracies and flights of historical and etymological fancy.[73]

But the most serious problem with the Sarmatian Connection is that it depends upon links between second- to fifth-century historical actors (Castus, Sarmatian veterans in Britain, Alans in Gaul and Britain), twelfth- to fifteenth-century chivalric romances, and undatable Ossetian epics recorded first in the nineteenth century. Even if these tales do go back to Late Roman Britain, they admittedly (by Littleton and Malcor) had to pass through a filter of Britons in the ninth and tenth centuries.[74] 'To build a bridge of tradition from second-century Roman Britain to ninth-century Wales', writes Richard Barber, 'with no other support is a daring feat of imagination, but not admissible evidence.'[75] Nevertheless, the Sarmatian Connection continues to be a compelling theory, drawing the attention of many scholars[76] and even Hollywood producers.[77]

The documentary filmmaker Michael Wood turned his sleuthing eye toward

72 C. Scott Littleton and Anne C. Thomas, 'The Sarmatian Connection: New Light on the Origin of the Arthurian and Holy Grail Legends', *Journal of American Folklore*, 91 (1978), 512–27; and C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. 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, 1994).

73 For example, Alanic monks are imagined accompanying both Augustine to Canterbury and Patrick to Ireland (p. 27 and n. 85); it is stated wrongly that Magnus Maximus 'captured Rome in 388' (p. 63); and both Jean Markale (p. 27) and Norma Goodrich (p. 25) are cited as historical authorities.

74 The problems in this proposed transmission are pointed out in Richard Wadge, 'King Arthur: A British or Sarmatian Tradition?' *Folklore*, 98.2 (1987), 204–15.

75 Barber, *The Figure of Arthur*, p. 38.

76 Both Padel (1994) and Higham (2003) have given some credence to the theory, and Linda Malcor has recently published some important historical background for Castus: see Malcor, 'Lucius Artorius Castus, Part 1: An Officer and an Equestrian', *The Heroic Age*, 1 (1999), http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/1/halac.htm; and Malcor, 'Lucius Artorius Castus, Part 2: The Battles in Britain', *The Heroic Age*, 2 (1999), http://www. mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/2/ha2lac.htm.

77 The theory provides the basis for the Disney live-action film *King Arthur* (2004), produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and directed by Antoine Fuqua.