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COURSE PAPER

on the theme: The Arthurian legends first created by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his Latin book Merlin, based on Celtic folklore.

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Introduction

Main part:

The origin of Arthurian legends and their place in Medieval Literature

1.1. Background of Medieval Literature

1.2. Life and creative activity of Geoffrey Monmouth.

1.3. “History of the Kings of Britain” by Geoffrey Monmouth is one of the most significant and influential developments in the history of Arthurian Literature

1.4. Merlin is a fascinating figure in Arthurian Legends

Conclusion

Bibliography

Introduction

The theme of our course paper is “The Arthurian legends first created by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his Latin book *Merlin*, based on Celtic folklore”. We tried to discover and study the place of Arthurian Legends in English literature, their origin and the process of development. The Arthurian legends were popular subjects in art and literature for many centuries. The Arthurian legends, stories that revolve around the character of King Arthur, form an important part of Britain's national mythology. Arthur may be based on a historical person, possibly a Celtic warlord of the A. D. 400s. The legends, however, have little to do with history. A blend of Celtic mythology and medieval **romance**, they feature such well-known elements as the magic sword Excalibur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the search for the **Holy Grail** and Merlin, who played an important role in Arthur's life, first overseeing his childhood and later serving as his adviser.

Actuality of the theme. The Arthurian legends exist in numerous versions and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They include tales of adventure filled with battles and marvels, a tragic love story, a Christian **allegory**, an examination of kingship, and an exploration of the conflict between love and duty.

The aim of our course paper is to give an explanation about Arthurian Legends and to look through various myths and tales based on them. To increase students' interest to the Medieval Literature and supply them with various versions of the Legend.

The level of issue development is rather high in the World Literature. In the process of working we faced with works of such kind of writers as J. Rhys, R.S.Loomis, Brewer D.S, K. Azizov, O. Kayumov, M.P. Alekseyeva and many others.

Scientific novelty of the work is that we tried to find new approach to Arthurian Legends, making deep analysis of Geoffrey Monmouth's book "History of the Kings of Britain".

Practical significance of the work. This work reflects different versions of the legend and shows its power in English Literature. We hope this work can be useful for those who want to master English Language and its literature.

Ways of scientific investigation used within the work. The main method for compiling our work is the method of literary analysis and the method of statistical research.

Fields of amplification. The present work might find a good way of implying at schools and lyceums of linguistic kind and also it can be successfully used by teachers and philologists as modern material for writing course papers dealing with Arthurian Legends.

The goals of the investigation are:

- to study the biography of Geoffrey Monmouth and his precious works
- to introduce the origin and history of Arthurian Legends in English literature
- to analyze and compare different version of the legend
- to study the character of Merlin
- to make conclusion of the results of investigation

Our course paper consists of introduction, main body, conclusion and bibliography.

In the introduction we defined the actuality, novelty, scientific and practical value of our work.

In the main body we presented information about general background of Medieval Literature, life and creative activity of Geoffrey Monmouth and his masterpiece "History of the Kings of Britain". This chapter gives full information about the marvelous and fascinating character of the legend Merlin.

The origin of Arthurian legends and their place in Medieval Literature

1.1. Background of Medieval Literature

When King Alfred died, the account of the wars with the Danes showed how many suffered in that age, how bitter, insecure and cruel life was. Parties of the Northmen sailed round Scotland and over to Ireland. Others sailed south across the channel to France. They conquered the north of France and settled there. In the next hundred years they came to be called Normans, and their country Normandy.

In the middle of the 11th century the internal feuds among the Anglo-Saxon earls weakened the country. The Normans did not miss their chance and in 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, defeated the English troops at Hastings in a great battle. Within five years William the Conqueror became the complete master of the whole of England.

The lands of most of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy were given to the Norman barons, and they introduced their feudal laws to compel the peasants to work for them. The English became an oppressed nation.

William the Conqueror could not speak a word of English. He and his barons spoke the Norman dialect of the French language; but the Anglo-Saxon dialect was not suppressed. During the following 200 years communication went on in three languages:

- 1) Latin at the monasteries;
- 2) Norman-French at court and in official institutions;
- 3) The common people held firmly to their mother tongue.

In the 13th century the first universities in Oxford and Cambridge were founded. So, during the Anglo-Norman period feudal culture was at its height.¹ By about 1300 English had again become the chief national language but in altered form called Middle English. Middle English included elements of French, Latin, Old English, and local dialects.

¹ Bakayeva M., Muratova E., Ochilova M., English Literature, Tashkent, 2006.

Tales in verse and lyrical poems appeared praising the bravery and gallantry of noble knights, their heroic deeds and chivalrous attitude towards ladies. At first they were all in Norman-French. Many of the stories came from old French sources, the language of which was a Roman dialect, and for that reason these works were called «romances». They were brought to England by medieval poets called «trouveres» (finders), who came from France with the Norman conquerors. Later in England such poets were called minstrels and their art of composing romances and ballads and singing them was called the art of minstrelsy.

A number of romances were based on Celtic legends, especially those about King Arthur and the knights. The heroes of these romances, unlike the characters of church literature, were human beings who loved, hated and suffered. Their worship of fair ladies motivated the plots of the stories.

In the 15th century **Sir Thomas Malory (1395?-1471)** collected the romances about King Arthur and arranged them in a series of stories in prose, intelligible to any modern reader. The words in Malory's sentences have a beauty of movement, which cannot escape unnoticed. The stories began with the birth of Arthur and how he became the king, then related all the adventures of King Arthur and his noble knights and ended in the death of these knights and of Arthur himself.²

The work was published in 1485 by Caxton, the first English printer, at Westminster (London), under the title of «Sir Thomas Malory's Book of King Arthur and of His Noble Knights of the Round Table». The book was more widely known as «Morte d'Arthur» (old French for «Death of Arthur»).

This epic in twenty-one books reflects the evolution of feudal society, its ideals, beliefs and tragedies. Malory's romance is the most complete English version of stories about King Arthur.

² Bakayeva M., Muratova E., Ochilova M., English Literature, Tashkent, 2006.

In the medieval period the term «romance» meant a long narrative in verse or prose telling of the adventures of a hero. These stories of adventure usually include knights, ladies in distress, kings, and villains. The material for the medieval romance in English was mainly drawn from the stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. This subject matter is sometimes called the «Matter of Britain».

Central to the medieval romance was the code of chivalry, the rules and customs connected with knighthood. Originally chivalry (from the French word «chevalier», which means «knight» or «horseman») referred to the practice of training knights for the purpose of fighting. The qualities of an ideal courtly knight in the Middle Ages were bravery, honor, courtesy, care of the weak, respect for women, generosity, and fairness to enemies. An important element in the code of chivalry was the ideal of courtly love. This concept required a knight to serve a virtuous noblewoman (often married) and perform brave deeds to prove his devotion while she remained chaste and unattainable. The code of chivalry and the ideal of courtly love were still in evidence during the Renaissance as well. Knights and courtiers who wrote on courtly themes included the Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Sir Walter Raleigh. Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney wrote highly formalized portraits of ideal love.

Medieval romance and its attendant codes of chivalry and courtly love faded in the Age of Reason during the XVIII century, but in the nineteenth century, Romanticism brought back the ideals of chivalry.³

Treatment of the romance themes of chivalry and courtly love are still the topics of literature. Historical fiction often attempts to recreate the world of the Middle Ages.

³ Gekker M., Volosova T., English literature, Moscow-1969.

The aristocracy idealized the feudal system, showing the bravery and gallantry of loyal knights. Their exploits were described in great epics. The court had love-stories and lyrical poems praising a chivalrous attitude towards women.

The Norman poet Wace lived at the Court of Henry II. He was born on the Island of Jersey (in the Channel) at the beginning of the 12th century. He spent his childhood at Caen [kein]. When he grew up, he went to the Paris University where he studied theology. A few years later, he was invited to the Court of Henry I (grandfather of Henry II) as a chaplain. A chaplain was a clergyman who conducted services in the private chapel of a great person; if he was a learned man he acted also as secretary or as teacher. Rich families always had a chaplain in their households. The Norman kings and queens were very particular about their possessions, and Henry II ordered Wace to write a history of England. Two rhyming chronicles were his chief works. These romances were called:

- 1) "Brut or the Acts of the Britts" (Deeds of the Britons) and
- 2) "Rollo (or Hrolf) or the Acts of the Normans".

In the first romance the poet tells his readers how Brutus, the legendary forefather of the Romans, is said to have discovered the Island and called it Brutannia (= Britain). Wace imitated the Latin books of history and added to his composition the songs of the Welsh bards who never ceased singing of the freedom they used to enjoy before the Anglo-Saxons had come to their island. Arthur, a Celtic chief and his warriors are mentioned here for the first time. The Normans, wishing to justify their claims to England pretended to be the descendants of the ancient Britons and made Arthur their hero. Poetry has given the Celtic chief so much lyrical glory that King Arthur is now only a connecting link between real history and legend. This work of 15,000 lines was written in 1155.⁴

⁴ Gekker M., Volosova T., English literature, Moscow-1969.

Wace's second romance "Rollo" tells the story of the first Northmen in France and their chief, the rover Rollo, who was made first Duke of Normandy. In the early 13th century, during the reign of the wicked King John, the interest in Norman-French poetry declined; this was due to some historical events. King John had lost Normandy and other lands in France, and many Norman and French barons came over to England as to their colony. John gave the lands and castles of the first Normans, who had now become quite English, to the new-comers. He put foreign bishops over the English. Thus he made himself hated by everybody in the country. At last the old barons and bishops and also the Saxons, who suffered from the French feudal laws, united and threatened to drive the king off the throne unless he would sign the Magna Charta (the Great Charter). It was a big parchment granting certain rights called "liberties" to the barons. The protest against the French brought back Anglo-Saxon traditions and the feeling of patriotism. Patriotism is felt in the works of Layamon, an English priest. In the year 1205, Layamon created a version of Wace's "Brut". It was called "Brut or Chronicle of Britain". This immense epic (32,000 lines), written in Old English, may be divided into three books.

Book 1 deals with ancient history from Brut to the birth of King Arthur.

Book 2 retells various legends about King Arthur and the "Knights of the Round Table". Arthur is endowed with all the virtues of a hero. He has magical power. Wherever he goes, he is helped by a clever wizard Merlin. Arthur is honest and wise and fair to all his knights. They had their meetings at a round table so that there should not be any first or last, at the top or at the foot of the table.

Book 3 continues the history of the Briton kings from the death of King Arthur to the victory of the Anglo-Saxon king Aethelstane over the Britons.

Layamon borrowed his material from Latin histories, songs of the troubadours, romances, the book of Bede and even "Beowulf", because he wished to show England as a powerful and glorious country. The work is written in rhyming

couplets and in the rhythm of Norman-French poetry, though sometimes the author uses alliteration as in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

"King Horn"

The earliest of all chivalric romances is that of King Horn. It was a very popular poem written about 1225. Its original subject was taken from a Danish story (a saga). It tells us about Prince Horn's adventures and his love for Princess Rymenhilde.

In the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries there appeared a series of Arthurian legends in English: "Arthur and Merlin", "Iwain and Gawain", "Launcelot of the Lake", "Morte d'Arthur" ("Death of Arthur"), "Perseval of Wales", "Sir Tristram" and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight". The heroes in these romances unlike the characters in the literature of the Church were simple human beings who loved and suffered. Their worship of a fair lady becomes the plot of the story. A certain idea of individualism appears in these romances: when a knight retires to a lonely castle or wanders in the woods or mountains, the author depicts him as an individual opposing the general. His conduct is that of a particular person. He becomes a character.⁵

1.2. Life and creative activity of Geoffrey Monmouth.

Geoffrey of Monmouth was born sometime around 1100, perhaps in Monmouth in southeast Wales. His father was named Arthur. Geoffrey was appointed archdeacon of Landsaff in 1140 and was consecrated bishop of St. Asaph in 1152. Geoffrey is one of the most significant authors in the development of the Arthurian legends.

As we mentioned above Geoffrey was probably born some time between 1100 and 1110 in Wales or the Welsh Marches. He must have reached the age of majority by 1129, when he is recorded as witnessing a charter. In his *Historia*,

⁵ Gekker M., Volosova T., English literature, Moscow-1969.

Geoffrey refers to himself as *Galfridus Monumetensis*, "Geoffrey of Monmouth", which indicates a significant connection to Monmouth, Wales, and which may refer to his birthplace. Geoffrey's works attest to some acquaintance with the place-names of the region. To contemporaries, Geoffrey was known as *Galfridus Artur(us)* or variants thereof. The "Arthur" in these versions of his name may indicate the name of his father, or a nickname based on Geoffrey's scholarly interests.⁶

Earlier scholars assumed that Geoffrey was Welsh or at least spoke Welsh. However, Geoffrey's knowledge of the Welsh language appears to have been slight, and it is now recognised that there is no real evidence that Geoffrey was of either Welsh or Cambro-Norman descent, unlike for instance, Gerald of Wales. He is likely to have sprung from the same French-speaking elite of the Welsh border country as the writers Gerald of Wales and Walter Map, and Robert, Earl of Gloucester, to whom Geoffrey dedicated versions of his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. It has been argued, by Frank Stenton among others, that Geoffrey's parents may have been among the many Bretons who took part in William I's Conquest and settled in the southeast of Wales. Monmouth had been in the hands of Breton lords since 1075 or 1086 and the names Galfridus and Arthur (if interpreted as a patronymic) were more common among the Bretons than the Welsh. He may have served for a while in a Benedictine priory in Monmouth. However, most of his adult life appears to have been spent outside Wales. Between 1129 and 1151 his name appears on six charters in the Oxford area, sometimes styled *magister* ("teacher"). He was probably a secular canon of St. George's college. All the charters signed by Geoffrey are also signed by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, also a canon at that church. Another frequent co-signatory is Ralph of Monmouth, a canon of Lincoln. On 21 February 1152 Archbishop Theobald

⁶ Collins Discovery Encyclopedia, 1st edition © HarperCollins Publishers 2005.

consecrated Geoffrey as bishop of St Asaph, having ordained him a priest 10 days before. "There is no evidence that he ever visited his see," writes Lewis Thorpe, "and indeed the wars of Owain Gwynedd make this most unlikely." He appears to have died between 25 December 1154 and 24 December 1155, in 1155 according to Welsh chronicles, when his apparent successor, Richard, took office.

Speaking about his place in English Literature we must emphasize that it was Geoffrey who, in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (completed in 1138) located Arthur in the line of British kings. Such an action not only asserted the historicity of Arthur but also gave him an authoritative history which included many events familiar from later romance. Geoffrey also introduced the character of Merlin as we know him into the legends. Geoffrey's Merlin, a combination of the young and prophetic Ambrosius in Nennius's history and the prophet Myrddin who figures in several Welsh poems, first appears in a book known as the *Prophetiae Merlini* (*The Prophecies of Merlin*), which was written about 1135 but then incorporated as Book VII of the *Historia*. This book contains the prophecies made by Merlin to Vortigern, which foreshadow not only the downfall of Vortigern but also the rise and fall of Arthur, events subsequent to the end of the *Historia*, and events of the obscure future. The *Historia* proper begins in the legendary past and traces the origin of Britain to its eponymous founder Brut, the great-grandson of Aeneas. (Because of this purported origin, histories of Britain were known as "Bruts.") Subsequent chapters tell of legendary and actual events in British history, including the story of Lear and his daughters, the offer of tribute from Rome to Belinus and Brennius, Julius Caesar's unsuccessful attempt at conquest, and the invitation of the Saxons to Britain.⁷

The Arthurian portion of the story tells of Arthur's conquests on the continent, his slaying of the giant of St. Michael's Mount, a prominent role by

⁷ Collins Discovery Encyclopedia, 1st edition © HarperCollins Publishers 2005

Gawain in the Roman wars, the slaying of the Emperor Lucius, the treachery of Mordred, the entry of the nunnery by Guinevere, and the final battle between Mordred, who is killed, and Arthur, who is borne to the Isle of Avallon for the healing of his wounds.

Over 200 manuscripts of the *Historia* survive (for a list of which see: Julia C. Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth III: A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts*). In addition, it influenced numerous vernacular works, including translations into Welsh, Old Norse, and the French and English verse versions by Wace (the *Roman de Brut*) and Layamon (the *Brut*). Geoffrey also wrote a *Vita Merlini* (*Life of Merlin*) in verse in about 1150. Geoffrey wrote several works of interest, all in Latin, the language of learning and literature in Europe during the medieval period. His major work was the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), the work best known to modern readers. It relates the purported history of Britain, from its first settlement by Brutus, a descendant of the Trojan hero Aeneas, to the death of Cadwallader in the 7th century, taking in Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain, two kings, Leir and Cymbeline, later immortalized by William Shakespeare, and one of the earliest developed narratives of King Arthur.

The earliest of Geoffrey's writings to appear was probably the *Prophetiae Merlini* (*Prophecies of Merlin*), which he wrote at some point before 1135, and which appears both independently and incorporated into the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. It consists of a series of obscure prophetic utterances attributed to Merlin, which Geoffrey claimed to have translated from an unspecified language. In this work Geoffrey drew from the established Welsh tradition of prophetic writing attributed to the sage Myrddin, though his knowledge of Myrddin's story at this stage in his career appears to have been slight. Many of its prophecies referring to historical and political events up to Geoffrey's lifetime can be identified – for example, the sinking of the White Ship in 1120, when William Adelin, son of Henry I, died. This work provided some of the subject matter for a poem also

named *Prophetiae Merlini* that was written between 1141 and 1155 by John of Cornwall.

Geoffrey introduced the spelling "Merlin", derived from the Welsh "Myrddin". The Welsh scholar Rachel Bromwich observed that this "change from medial *dd > l* is curious. It was explained by Gaston Paris as caused by the undesirable associations of the French word *merde*". The first work about this legendary prophet in a language other than Welsh, it was widely read — and believed — much as the prophecies of Nostradamus were centuries later; John Jay Parry and Robert Caldwell note that the *Prophetiae Merlini* "were taken most seriously, even by the learned and worldly wise, in many nations", and list examples of this credulity as late as 1445. Furthermore, his structuring and reshaping of the Merlin and Arthur myths engendered the vast popularity of Merlin and Arthur myths in later literature, a popularity that lasts to this day; he is generally viewed by scholars as the major establisher of the Arthurian canon. The *Historia*'s effect on the legend of King Arthur was so vast that Arthurian works have been categorized as "pre-" or "post-Galfridian" depending on whether or not they were influenced by him.⁸

The third work attributed to Geoffrey is another hexameter poem *Vita Merlini* ("Life of Merlin"). The *Vita* is based much more closely on traditional material about Merlin than are the other works; here he is known as Merlin of the Woods (*Merlinus Sylvestris*) or Scottish Merlin (*Merlinus Caledonius*), and is portrayed as an old man living as a crazed and grief-stricken outcast in the forest. The story is set long after the timeframe of *Historia*'s Merlin, but the author tries to synchronize the works with references to the mad prophet's previous dealings with Vortigern and Arthur. The *Vita* did not circulate widely, and the attribution to Geoffrey appears in only one late 13th century manuscript, but contains

⁸. Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature by Robert Thomas Lambdin, Laura Cooner Lambdin.

recognisably Galfridian elements in its construction and content, and most critics are content to recognise it as his.

1.3. “History of the Kings of Britain” by Geoffrey Monmouth is one of the most significant and influential developments in the history of Arthurian Literature

While Welsh literature and saints’ lives offer fascinating views of Arthur, the character and his legends became central to medieval literature and literary tradition when Geoffrey Monmouth told his story. The account of Arthur’s reign told by Geoffrey in his *Historia regum Britanniae* is one of the most significant and influential developments in the history of Arthurian literature.

The first interesting question that arises when talking about the History of Kings of Britain is certainly the following : Who was Geoffrey of Monmouth actually and what was his purpose in writing it? Geoffrey wrote several works of interest, all in Latin, the language of learning and literature in Europe during the medieval period. His major work was the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), the work best known to modern readers. It relates the purported history of Britain, from its first settlement by Brutus, a descendant of the Trojan hero Aeneas, to the death of Cadwallader in the 7th century, taking in Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain, two kings, Leir and Cymbeline, later immortalized by William Shakespeare, and one of the earliest developed narratives of King Arthur.

Geoffrey claims in his dedication that the book is a translation of an "ancient book in the British language that told in orderly fashion the deeds of all the kings of Britain", given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. Modern historians have dismissed this claim. It is, however, likely that the Archdeacon furnished Geoffrey with some materials in the Welsh language that helped inspire his work, as Geoffrey's position and acquaintance with the Archdeacon would not have afforded him the luxury of fabricating such a claim outright. Much of it is based on the *Historia Britonum*, the 9th century Welsh-Latin historical compilation, Bede's

Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum and Gildas's sixth-century polemic *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* expanded with material from Bardic oral tradition, genealogical tracts, and embellished by Geoffrey's own imagination. In an exchange of manuscript material for their own histories, Robert of Torigny gave Henry of Huntington a copy of *Historia regum Britanniae*, which both Robert and Henry used uncritically as authentic history and subsequently used in their own works, by which means some of Geoffrey's fictions became embedded in popular history. *Historia Regum Britanniae* is now acknowledged as a literary work of national myth containing little reliable history. This has since led many modern scholars to agree with William of Newburgh, who wrote around 1190 that "it is quite clear that everything this man wrote about Arthur and his successors, or indeed about his predecessors from Vortigern onwards, was made up, partly by himself and partly by others". Other contemporaries were similarly unconvinced by Geoffrey's "History". For example, Giraldus Cambrensis recounts the experience of a man possessed by demons: "If the evil spirits oppressed him too much, the Gospel of St John was placed on his bosom, when, like birds, they immediately vanished; but when the book was removed, and the History of the Britons by 'Geoffrey Arthur' (as Geoffrey named himself) was substituted in its place, they instantly reappeared in greater numbers, and remained a longer time than usual on his body and on the book." However, his major work was widely disseminated across the whole of Medieval Western Europe: Acton Griscom listed 186 extant manuscripts in 1929, and others have been identified since. It enjoyed a significant afterlife in a variety of forms, including translations/adaptations such as the Anglo-Norman *Roman de Brut* of Wace, the Middle English *Brut* of Layamon, and several anonymous Middle Welsh versions known as *Brut y Brenhinedd* ("Brut of the kings"). Where it was generally accepted as a true account. Geoffrey claims in his dedication that the book is a translation of an "ancient book in the British language that told in orderly fashion the deeds of all the kings of Britain", given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. Modern historians have dismissed this

claim. It is, however, likely that the Archdeacon furnished Geoffrey with some materials in the Welsh language that helped inspire his work, as Geoffrey's position and acquaintance with the Archdeacon would not have afforded him the luxury of fabricating such a claim outright. Much of it is based on the *Historia Britonum*, a 9th century Welsh-Latin historical compilation, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and Gildas's sixth-century polemic *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* expanded with material from Bardic oral tradition, genealogical tracts, and embellished by Geoffrey's own imagination. In an exchange of manuscript material for their own histories, Robert of Torigny gave Henry of Huntington a copy of *Historia regum Britanniae*, which both Robert and Henry used uncritically as authentic history and subsequently used in their own works, by which means some of Geoffrey's fictions became embedded in popular history.⁹

1.4. Merlin is a fascinating figure in Arthurian Legends

Merlin is one of the most fascinating figures in the Welsh literature and the Arthurian legend. Merlin is a man of mystery and magic; contradiction and controversy surrounded his life. Merlin wore many hats: he was a wizard or sorcerer, a prophet, a bard, an adviser and a tutor. He appeared as a young boy with no father. He appeared as an old, wise man, freely giving his wisdom to four successive British kings. He was dotting old fool, who couldn't control his lust over beautiful women, who hold him in fear and contempt. He had even appeared as a madman after bloody battle, and had fled into the forest and learned how to talk to the animals, where he became known as the Wild Man of the Woods.

⁹ Tatlock, J.S.P. *The legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950.

Merlin was the last of the druid, the Celtic shaman, priest of nature, and keeper of knowledge, particularly of the arcane secrets. According to the Welsh historian, Nennius, Merlin appeared as a young boy, but under the name of Emrys or as Ambrosius in Latin, with the British king, Vortigern. In a similar account with Vortigern, it was Geoffrey of Monmouth, who had named this boy – Merlinus Ambrosius (Merlin Emrys in Welsh). In the work, titled *Historia regum Britanniae* ("History of the Kings of Britain", c. 1137), Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote that he was a son of a nun and grandson of the King of Demetia in southern Wales. As to his father, he was either a devil or an incubus. Merlin is a paradox, he was the son of the devil, yet he was the servant of God.¹⁰

Geoffrey of Monmouth composed a similar tale of Merlin's madness, written in Latin, known as *Vita Merlin* or the "Life of Merlin", in 1150. In this version, he was known as Merlin Calidonus. Here, he has a sister and a wife, but there's no mention of his parents. It is the only text that mentioned Merlin having a wife. Many scholars were puzzled over his birth, his magical power, his prophetic gifts and his mysterious yet often conflicting fate. There are various legends about Merlin and his appearance. Some of them say that Merlin was the illegitimate son of a monastic Royal Princess of Dyfed. The lady's father, however, King Meurig ap Maredydd ap Rhain, is not found in the traditional pedigrees of this kingdom and was probably a sub-King of the region bordering on Ceredigion. Merlin's father, it is said, was an angel who had visited the Royal nun and left her with child. Merlin's enemies claimed his father was really an incubus, an evil spirit that has intercourse with sleeping women. The evil child was supposed to provide a counterweight to the good influence of Jesus Christ on earth. Merlin, fortunately, was baptized early on in his life, an event which is said to have negated the evil in his nature, but left his powers intact. The original story was presumably invented to save his mother from the scandal which would have occurred had her liaison

¹⁰ . Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature by Robert Thomas Lambdin, Laura Cooner Lambdin.

with one Morfyn Frych (the Freckled), a minor Prince of the House of Coel, been made public knowledge. Legend then tells us that after the Roman withdrawal from Britain and the usurpation of the throne from the rightful heirs, Vortigern was in flight from the Saxon breakout and went to Snowdonia, in Wales, in hopes of constructing a mountain fortress at Dinas Emrys where he might be safe. Unfortunately, the building kept collapsing and Vortigern's house wizards told him that a human sacrifice of a fatherless child would solve the problem. One small difficulty was that such children are rather hard to find. Fortunately for Vortigern's fortress, Merlin was known to have no human father and happened to be available. Before the sacrifice could take place, Merlin used his great visionary powers and attributed the structural problem to a subterranean pool in which lived a red and a white dragon. The meaning of this, according to Merlin, was that the red dragon represented the Britons, and the white dragon, the Saxons. The dragons fought, with the white dragon having the best of it, at first, but then the red dragon drove the white one back. The meaning was clear. Merlin prophesied that Vortigern would be slain and followed on the throne by Ambrosius Aurelianus, then Uther, then a greater leader, Arthur. It would fall to him to push the Saxons back.

True to the prophecy, Vortigern was slain and Ambrosius took the throne. Later, Merlin appears to have inherited his grandfather's little kingdom, but abandoned his lands in favour of the more mysterious life for which he has become so well known. After 460 British nobles were massacred at a peace conference, as a result of Saxon trickery, Ambrosius consulted Merlin about erecting a suitable memorial to them. Merlin, along with Uther, led an expedition to Ireland to procure the stones of the *Chorea Gigantum*, the Giant's Ring. Merlin, by the use of his extraordinary powers, brought the stones back to a site, just west of Amesbury, and re-erected them around the mass grave of the British nobles. We now call this place Stonehenge.¹¹

¹¹ . Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature by Robert Thomas Lambdin, Laura Cooner Lambdin.

After his death, Ambrosius was succeeded by his brother, Uther, who, during his pursuit of **Gorlois** and his irresistible wife, **Ygernna** (Igraine or Eigr in some texts), back to their lands in Cornwall, was aided by Merlin. As a result of a deception made possible by Merlin's powers, Uther was transformed into the image of Gorlois. He entered their castle, managed to fool Ygraine into thinking he was her husband, had his way with her and in the course of things, conceived a child, Arthur. Poor Gorlois, not knowing what was going on, went out to meet Uther in combat, but instead, was slain by Uther's troops.

After Arthur's birth, Merlin became the young boy's tutor, while he grew up with his foster-father, Sir Ector (*alias* Cynyr Ceinfarfog (the Fair Bearded)). In the defining moment of Arthur's career, Merlin arranged for the sword-in-the-stone contest by which the lad became king. Later, the magician met the mystic **Lady of the Lake** at the Fountain of Barenton (in Brittany) and persuaded her to present the King with the magical sword, Excalibur. In the romances, Merlin is the creator of the Round Table, and is closely involved in aiding and directing the events of the king and kingdom of Camelot. He is pictured by Geoffrey of Monmouth, at the end of Arthur's life, accompanying the wounded Arthur to the Isle of Avalon for the healing of his wounds. Others tell how having fallen deeply in love with the Lady of the Lake, he agreed to teach her all his mystical powers. She became so powerful that her magical skills outshone even Merlin's. Determined not to be enslaved by him, she imprisoned the old man in a glass tower, a cave or similarly suitable prison. Thus his absence from the Battle of Camlann was ultimately responsible for Arthur's demise.

According to Geoffrey's "Vita Merlini" (c. 1151), Merlin/Myrddin was a sixth century prophet living in the north of Britain where his career extended beyond Arthur. Merlin travelled north, after Camlann, to the court of King Gwendoleu of Caer-Guenoleu (north of the Salway) where the locals called him Lailoken (or Llallogan). Shortly afterward, a war broke out between Merlin's Royal master and the three allies, King Riderch Hael (the Generous) of Strathclyde and Kings

Peredyr & Gwrgi of Ebrauc (York). Gwendoleu was killed in the ensuing Battle of Ardderyd (Arthuret) and Merlin, sent mad with grief at the death of his nephew and four brothers, fled into the Caledonian Forest. He lived there in a mad frenzy for over a year, becoming known as Myrddin Wylt (the Wild), before Riderch, who was his brother-in-law, found him and brought him to safety in the Strathclyde Court.¹²

Conclusion

English Medieval literature had, so far as we know, as we came to the conclusion there was no existence until Christian times of the Dark Ages when Latin was the language of English literature. English Medieval literature was not written. It was passed by word of mouth from one generation to another by English, Welsh and Irish bards. The origins of the stories about King Arthur and the Arthurian Legends were found in many Welsh legends and Celtic Myths which were told by the Bards who therefore contributed to Medieval literature.

Working on the suggested theme we came to the following results:

Arthurian Legend is a complex weaving of ancient Celtic mythology with later traditions around a core of possible historical authenticity. Arthur was not at

¹² <http://www.britannia.com/history/biography/merlin.html>.

all a historical figure, but a folkloric one, who was historicized by authors such as the author of the *Historia Brittonum* and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Geoffrey of Monmouth completed the first true Arthurian narrative c. 1138 CE. Though Geoffrey's writings were not the lone source of Arthurian romance, they lent the tale an air of authenticity, named the major players and placed their adventures within a recognizable framework. The *Historia* was, for the most part, accepted as fact by medieval chroniclers but eventually doubt superceded belief. The centralized figure in Arthurian legend is Merlin. Merlin is best known as the mighty wizard featured in Arthurian legend. The standard depiction of the character first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and is based on an amalgamation of previous historical and legendary figures.

Romantic versions of the Arthurian legends began manifesting in the 12th and 13th centuries, particularly in France. Much of this literature centers less on Arthur and more on other characters, including Lancelot and Guinevere, Perceval, Galahad, Gawain, and Tristan and Isolde. Romantic literature culminated in Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. This author presented us great treasure, collecting the romances about King Arthur and arranged them in a series of stories in prose, intelligible to any modern reader. The words in Malory's sentences have a beauty of movement, which cannot escape unnoticed. The stories began with the birth of Arthur and how he became the King, then related all the adventures of King Arthur and his noble knights and ended in the death of these knights and of Arthur himself.

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