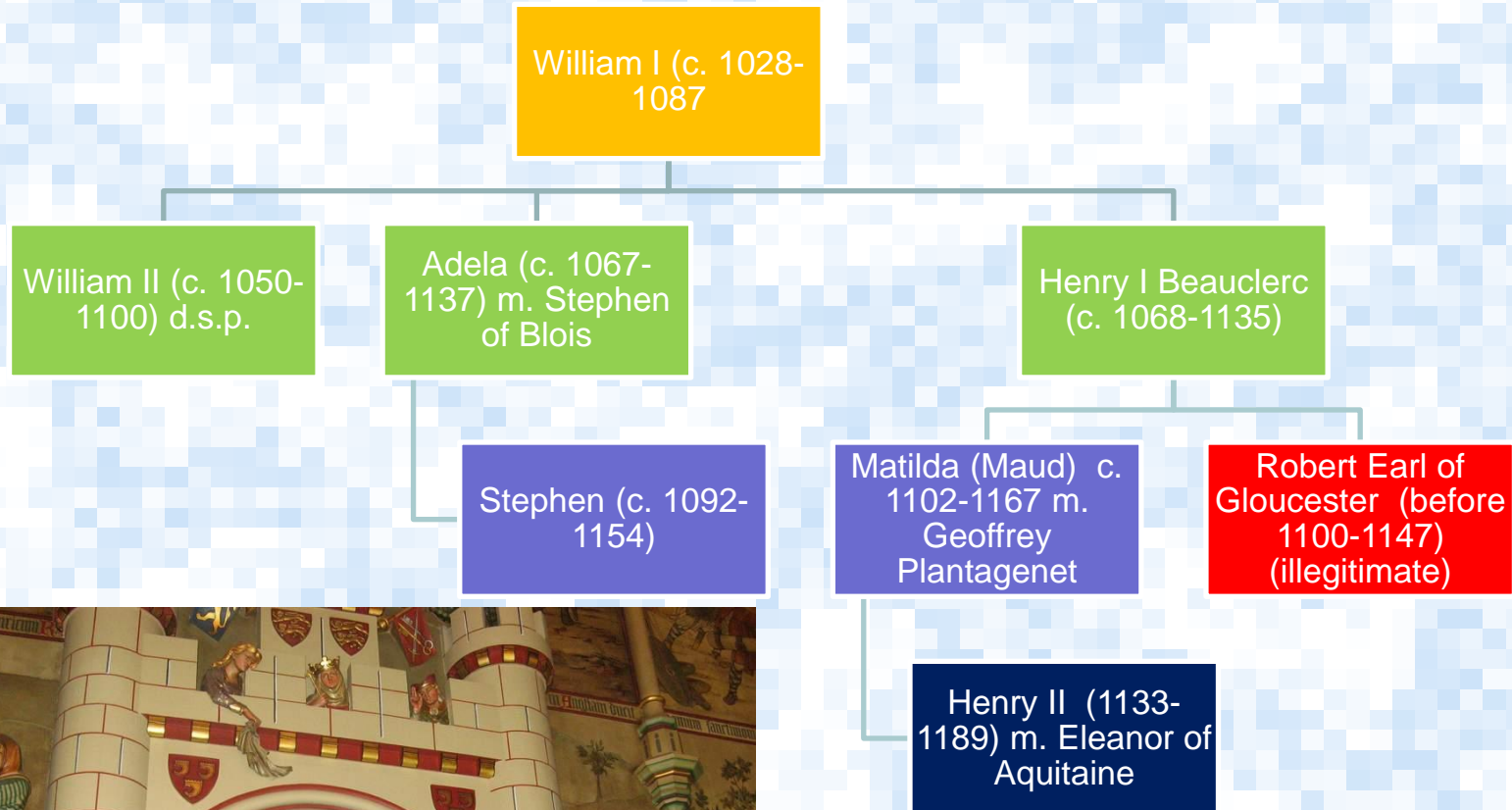


Geoffrey of Monmouth



The Norman & Angevin Rulers of England, extremely simplified

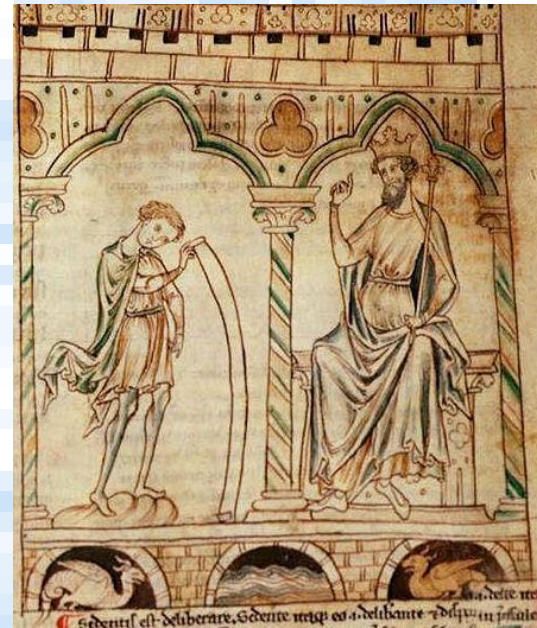


Geoffrey of Monmouth

- Witness to some six documents in Oxford between 1129 and 1151
- Termed *magister* in two of them, suggesting he may have been a teacher
- Name occurs together with that of Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, provost of St George's College; may have been a canon there
- Ordained as priest in 1152 and made Bishop of St. Asaph's (Wales) several days later
- Death recorded in 1155

Known Works

- *Prophetiae Merlini*, before 1135
- *Historia Regum Britanniae*, by 1138
- *Vita Merlini*, 1149-51



Historia Regum Britanniae



- More than 200 manuscripts of the *Historia* have survived; at least 48 are complete and several date back to the 12th century
- Claimed to have based the chapters on Arthur on a "certain very ancient book written in the British language, loaned to me by the Archdeacon Walter"

Framework of the Story

- Gives Arthur a family and a family history—Uther (Ambrosius' brother) and Igraine, sister Anna (Morgana=Anna of the Sea)
- Igraine previously had two daughters by Gorlois—one marries father of Hoel; one marries Lot and is mother of Gawain and Modred
- Adds mysterious force of Merlin

How do we 'read' Geoffrey?

- Not 'historically factual' in any modern way
- Convenient to legitimize the Norman dynasty of English kings
- Robert of Gloucester was feudal overlord of most of Wales
- Serves purposes of Church AND state: rise of medieval dynasty supported by Church, promise of return

Creates an Early History for Arthur

- Return of a descendent of Brutus to rule Britain (foretells Normans)
- Merlin (Welsh *Myrddin*)
- Uther, Igraine, Gorlois, birth at Tintagel
- Campaign against Roman emperor Lucius
- Sword Caliburn, shield Pridwen (with image of Virgin), spear Ron
- Final battle against Modred (nephew) at Camlann
- Final rest in Avalon.

Arthur as King

- Arthur fights in England, Scotland, Ireland and in Brittany
- Marries Guinevere, fosterling of Cador of Cornwall
- Court draws finest knights to serve him, incl. Gawain, Kay, Bedivere
- Very early suggestions of the system known as *fin amor* (p. 72)



Overreaching? (Wheel of Fortune)

- Long years of battle against emperor of Rome
- Modred (nephew)'s coup—Guinevere forsakes marriage vows and joins with Modred (p. 86)
- Modred fights Arthur at Richborough; Gawain slain
- Modred regroups at Winchester; Guinevere flees from York to convent in Caerleon
- Arthur fights and kills Modred at Camblan
- Arthur grievously wounded, retreats to Isle of Avalon (Glastonbury)
- Leaves kingdom to Cadwallader's son Constantine, 542 C.E.

Features of Geoffrey's Writing

- Verisimilitude
- Amplification
- Assimilation
- Invention



**William of
Newburgh
c. 1190**



“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, either from an inordinate love of lying, or for the sake of pleasing the Britons.”

Giraldus Cambrensis c. 1194



"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 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."