The Evolution of Arthur
Who was Arthur?
How did the Middle Ages see him?
Latin precursor: 

Lucius Artorius Castus?

- Roman general of second century C.E., headquartered at Eboracum [York], urbe legionem, perhaps the origin of Caerleon, “city of legions.”
- Standard was a red dragon
- Held the rank of dux (duke)
- Commanded Sarmatian (Balkan) heavy cavalry (early knights?)
- Sarmatian custom to be buried with sword sticking out of grave
- Many Sarmatian soldiers retired in Britain
- Needless to say, the Russians are the strongest supporters of this connection....
Other Candidates: Riothamus

• Attested in the writings of Sidonius Appolinaris of Lyon (c. 431-c.489 C.E.), Bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, c. 470 C.E.

• 6th century *Gothic History or Getica* (c. 551 C.E.) of Jordanes says that Riothamus, king of the Brittones, came at the head of a 12,000 man force at the behest of Anthemius, the Roman Emperor, to aid in combating the Visigoths.

• *Rigotamos* may be early British for “High King” but no linguistic evidence survives to support this.

• Question of jurisdiction: would this be a British or Breton king?
What about the Anglo-Saxon invaders?

• The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is silent about the Battle of Badon Hill but documents a gap of almost 70 years between major Anglo-Saxon leaders in the fifth and sixth centuries.

• Procopius (died c. 560 C.E.) in his *Anekdota* records that a member of a diplomatic delegation from the Franks, told him that some Anglo-Saxons and British found their island so crowded that they migrated into northern Gaul to find lands to live on.
## Is there evidence? And if so, what kind?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Continental Sources</th>
<th>English/English Latin Sources</th>
<th>British Latin Sources</th>
<th>Breton, Welsh &amp; Cornish Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th C.</td>
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<td>673. Bede's <em>Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation</em> does not mention Arthur.</td>
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<td>Y <em>Goddodin</em>, heroic poem of uncertain date referring to 7th c. events, compares a hero to Arthur (see 13th c.)</td>
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<td>8th c.</td>
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<td>Nennius also describes the footprint of the soldier Arthur's dog, and Arthur's son's grave, as marvels worth a visit.</td>
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<td>9th c.</td>
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<td>890. Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (in Old English) do not mention Arthur.</td>
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<td>Elegy of Geraint, heroic poem of uncertain date referring to events ca. 500, mentions emperor/warrior Arthur (see 13th c.)</td>
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<td>early 12th c.</td>
<td>ca. 1100 A church portal in Modena depicts a captured woman being rescued by knights; the knights are labelled Artus de Bretannie, Gawain, Kay, the woman is Winlogee (Guinevere)</td>
<td>1125 William of Malmesbury in his <em>Deeds of the English Kings</em> mentions the stories of Arthur, the warrior victor of Badon, adding that much nonsense has been written about him.</td>
<td>1136 Geoffrey of Monmouth writes the <em>History of the Kings of Britain</em>, outlining King Arthur's reign, companions, etc. in detail.</td>
<td>1113. Canons of Laon visiting Cornwall find that the Cornish believe King Arthur will come to liberate them, and note that the Bretons have the same legend.</td>
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</table>
Nennius’ battles
Archaeological Evidence: Cadbury
Archaeological Evidence: Tintagel
Postern gate and “Merlin’s Cave” at Tintagel
The “Arthur Stone” from Tintagel
Possible reconstruction
Early Arthurian Manuscripts: *Y Goddodin*
Early Arthurian Mss.: *Annales Cambriae*
The French Connection

Petronilla m. Thierry of Flanders
1125-1193

Louis VII of France
1120-1180

Eleanor of Aquitaine
1122-1204

Henry II of England
1133-1189

Matilda of Normandy
1102-1167

Geoffrey of Anjou
1113-1151

Marie Abbess of Shaftesbury

Philip of Flanders
1143-91

Alix
1151-55

Marie de Champagne
1145-98

William
1153-56

Henry
1155-83

Richard I "Lionheart"
1157-99

Geoffrey
1158-86

John I "Lackland"
1166-1216
The Spin Doctor: Geoffrey of Monmouth
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"
Geoffrey of Monmouth

- Witness to 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 several days later
- Death recorded in 1155
Offshoots of the Legend

• Thomas of Britain’s *Tristan*, c. 1155-1160

• Marie de France—before late 1170s (Denis Piramus reference in 1180)

• Andreas Capellanus, *De arte honeste amandi*, c. 1181-84
The Grail & its baggage

• Robert de Boron, c. 1191
• Grail knight originally Gawain, then Percival, and finally Galahad
• Common elements:
  – Fisher King, wound, infirmity; Celtic + Christian
  – Grail knight’s silence and questions
  – “Hallows”—sacred, symbolic items
  – Connection of King’s wound with wasted land
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Chrétien de Troyes and continuations</th>
<th>Robert de Boron</th>
<th>Lancelot-Grail (Vulgate cycle)</th>
<th>German romances</th>
<th>Other French romances</th>
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<td>Perceval 1180-90 (Le Conte du Graal)</td>
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<td>First Continuation 1190-1200</td>
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<td>Second Continuation</td>
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<td>Romance of the History of the Grail (L’Estoire du Graal) <em>(verse)</em> ..... <em>before...</em></td>
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<td>Elucidation Prologue</td>
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<td>Bliocadran Prologue</td>
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<td>All 1200-1210</td>
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<td>Third Continuation (Manessier)</td>
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<td>Lancelot (Grail episodes) 1210-1220</td>
<td>Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival, 1210-1220</td>
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<td>possibly 1210-1220</td>
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<td>Fourth Continuation (Gerbert de Montreuil) 1226-1230</td>
<td>Quest of the Holy Grail (Questa del Saint Graal) 1220-1230</td>
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<td>Romance of the Grail (Post-Vulgate Cycle) 1240-1250</td>
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Building the Myth: Glastonbury Abbey
Key English Literary Stages

- William of Malmesbury, *Gesta* (1125)
- Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* (1137-38)
- Wace, *Roman de Brut* (1155)
- Chrétien de Troyes (1160s—1180s)
- Robert de Boron (1191-1202)
- *Of Arthur & Merlin* (c. 1250)
- The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* (c. 1350)
- *Sir Gawain & The Green Knight* (c. 1350-1400)
- The *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (c. 1400)
- Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* (1471; printed 1485)
The “Winchester Round Table” in the Great Hall, dendrochronological dating has placed it at 1275. Made of oak, it is 18 feet across and nearly 3 inches thick. It weighs nearly 1.25 tons. The design displayed on the Winchester Round Table dates from Henry VIII’s time and was made to impress the visiting Emperor Charles V.
Building the myth: Edward IV’s Genealogy