

History, Literature, and King Arthur



The medieval concept of history



The *Roman* as Historical Work



The kinds of *romans*

- *Ne sont que iij matières à nul homme atendant, De France et de Bretaigne, et de Rome la grant.* –Jean Bodel, *Chanson de Saisnes*, 12th C.
- Narrate legendary incidents based on real (or believed-to-be-real) events
- Often moralized in interpretation

Historical antecedents for Arthur: Lucius Artorius Castus?

- Roman general of second century C.E., headquartered at Eboracum [York], *urbe legionem*, perhaps the origin of *Caerleon*, “city of legions.”
- Sent by Emperor Commodus to defend Hadrian’s Wall (c. 181-185 C.E.)
- 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
- Sarmatian folk legends about warrior Batraz and his group of warriors, “Narts,” who rode across the country on quests
- Needless to say, the Russians are the strongest supporters of this connection....

The very fragmentary epigraphic Castus evidence



Dis L . Artorius
Castus . Centur-ioni legionis
Manibus III Gallicae . item
Centurioni legionis VI
Ferratae . item 7 leg . II
Adiutricis . item 7 leg V
Macedonicae . item primo pil
eiusdem praeposito
classis Misensium praefecto
legionis VI Victricis . duci leg
cohortium alarum
Britaniciniarum adversus
Armoricanos . Procuratori
Centenario provinciae
Liburniae iure gladi . Vivus
ipse sibi et suis st

More evidence can be found at
<http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/2/ha2lac.htm>

Translation of the fragment by Linda Malcor

To the spirits of the departed: Lucius Artorius Castus, centurion of the III legion Gallica, also centurion of the VI legion Ferrata, also centurion of the II legion Adiutrix, also centurion of the V legion Macedonica, also *primus pilus* of the same [the V legion Macedonica], *praepositus* of the *classis Misenatium* [the fleet on the Bay of Naples], *praefectus* of the VI legion Victrix, *dux* of the legions of cohorts of cavalry from Britain against the Armoricans, procurator centenarius of the province of Liburnia, with the power to issue death sentences. In his lifetime he himself [possibly: "fecit," "had this made"] for himself and his family . . . ["possibly H. s. est," "lies buried here"].

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 word is a reconstruction
- Question of jurisdiction: would this be a British or Breton king?

From the *Gothic History* of Jordanes (summary of Cassiodorus' *Gothic History*, which no longer survives in complete form)

Now Euric, king of the Visigoths, perceived the frequent change of Roman Emperors and strove to hold Gaul by his own right. The Emperor Anthemius heard of it and asked the Brittones for aid. Their King Riotimus came with twelve thousand men into the state of the Bituriges by the way of Ocean, and was received as he disembarked from his ships. Euric, king of the Visigoths, came against them with an innumerable army, and after a long fight he routed Riotimus, king of the Brittones, before the Romans could join him.

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 *Anekdotia* 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?

	Continental Sources	English/English Latin Sources	British Latin Sources	Breton, Welsh & Cornish Sources
6th c.	Gallic Chronicles do not mention Arthur		Gildas, <i>On the Ruin of Britain</i> , 540, mentions a battle of Mount Badon of Romanized Christian Britons against Saxons, in 500 (?)--does not name Arthur	
7th C.		673. Bede's <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation</i> does not mention Arthur.		<i>Y Goddodin</i> , heroic poem of uncertain date referring to 7th c. events, compares a hero to Arthur (see 13th c.)
8th c.			Nennius also describes the footprint of the soldier Arthur's dog, and Arthur's son's grave, as marvels worth a visit.	
9th c.		890. Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (in Old English) do not mention Arthur.		Elegy of Geraint, heroic poem of uncertain date referring to events ca. 500, mentions emperor/warrior Arthur (see 13th c.)
10th c.			970. <i>Annales Cambriae</i> (Welsh Annals): Arthur carried a cross at Badon in 517 and died with Medraut at Camlann in 540.	
early 12th c.	ca. 1100 A church portal in Modena depicts a captured woman being rescued by knights; the knights are labelled Artus de Britannia, Gawain, Kay, the woman is Winlogee (Guinevere)	1125 William of Malmesbury in his <i>Deeds of the English Kings</i> mentions the stories of Arthur, the warrior victor of Badon, adding that much nonsense has been written about him..	1136 Geoffrey of Monmouth writes the <i>History of the Kings of Britain</i> , outlining King Arthur's reign, companions, etc. in detail.	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.

Nennius' battles

in rubo igneo. secundo modo in monte q^o
draginta dieb; & q^odraginta noctib; ieiuna
uit. tertio modo similes fuer^t cetate centū ut
quāta annis. quarto modo sepulchri illi ne
mo scit. S; moeculo humat^r; nemine sci
ente. quindeci annis in captiuitate. materfi
mo quinto anno ab amathico scō episcopo
subrogat^r. octingentorū & quinq; annorū.
in hibernia p^odicauit. & et aut exagebat
ampli^r loqui de scō patreio. sed tamen p^o
cōpendio sermonis uoluit breuiare.
In illo tempore saxones inuallescēbant in
multitudine & crescebant in britannia.
Morcuo autē hengisto oetha fili^r a^r transi
uit de sinistrali parte britannie ad reg
nū cantorū. & de ipso ortas reges cantoe.
unc archur pugna bat cōtra illos.
illis dieb; cū regib; brieconū. s; ipse dux erat
bellorū. Prīmū bellū fuit in ostiū flumi
nis quod dicit^r glem. scdm & tēu & q^o
tū & quincū. sup aliud flumen quod
dicit^r dubglas. s; in regione linnuis.
Sextū bellum sup flumen quod uocā
t^r bassas. Septimū fuit bellū
in silua celidonis. id; eac corie celidon.
Octauum fuit bellū in castello quinn
on. In quo archur portauit imaginē
scē marie p^opecue uirginis sup hume
ros suos. & pagani uerū s; in fugā in
illo die. & cecidit magna fuit sup illos.
p^ouirucan dū in ihu xpi & p^ouirucū
scē marie uirginis genitricis ei^r. Nonū
bellū gēstū; in urbe legionis. Decimū
gēstū; bellū in litore fluminis quod
uocā^r tribruic. In decimū; factū;
bellū in monte qui dicit^r agned. Duo
decimū; fuit bellū in monte badoni
in quo corruer^t in uno die n^ogenti sex
aginta unū de uno impetu archur.

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Sextū bellum sup flumen quod uocā
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in silua celidonis. id; eac corie celidon.

Arthur's battles

(K. Jackson identifications)

- The river Glen is in Northumberland, though the river Glen in Lincolnshire is a possibility
- The river Dubglas, which could be any of a number of rivers, though the river Douglas in Lancashire and the Douglas Waterway south of Glasgow are excellent possibilities
- The river Bassas is unidentifiable
- Coed Celydon, a wood "within range of Glasgow and Carlisle, perhaps the moorlands round the upper Clyde and Tweed valleys"
- Castle Guinnion is unidentifiable, though other scholars have suggested Fort Vinovia near modern Binchester
- Chester may be "*urbe Legionis*," though recent research makes York a more likely location
- "The Strand of the Pierced or Broken (Place)" for the Tribruit, with no named location suggested
- Fort Bremenium (High Rochester) for Breguoin
- and simply "somewhere in central southern England" for Badon; some archaeologists connect it with Liddington Castle in Wiltshire

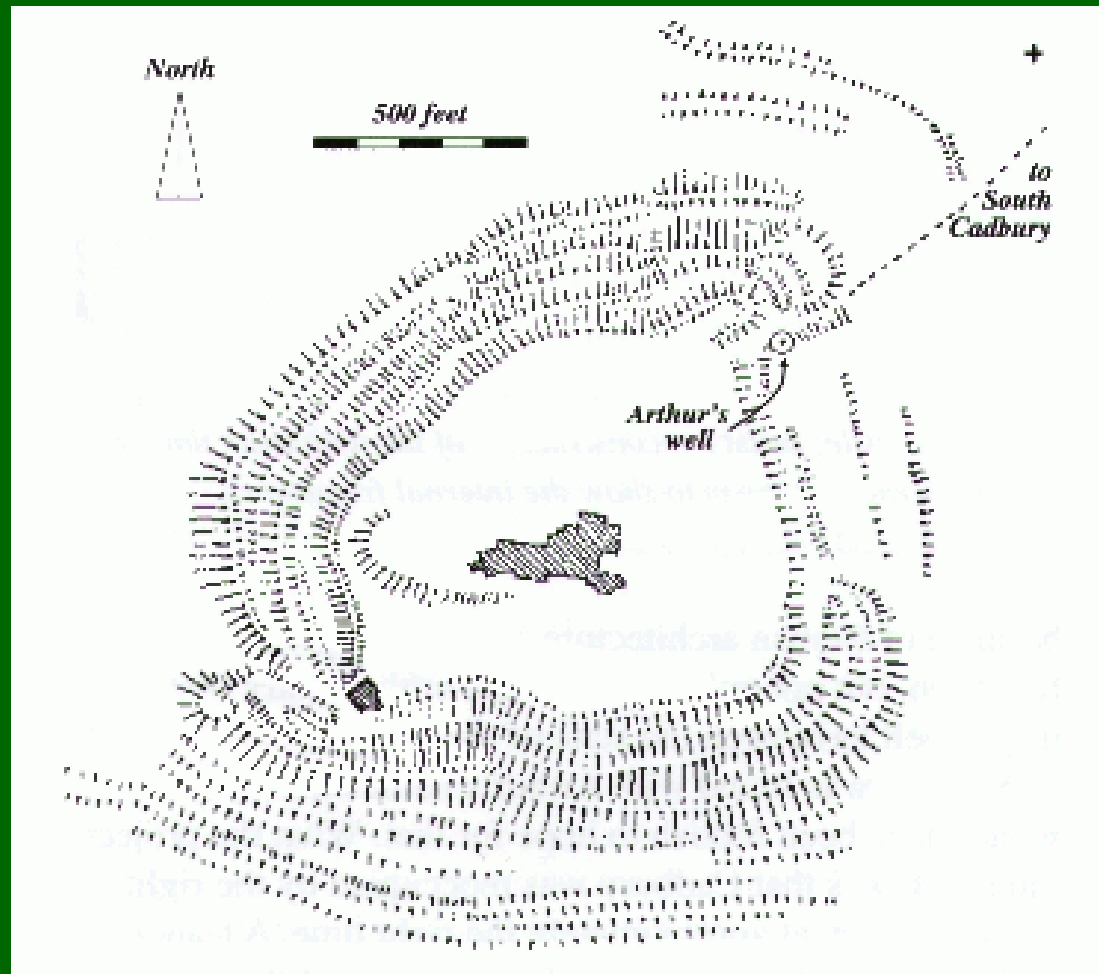
Liddington Castle hill fort— possibly Badon Hill



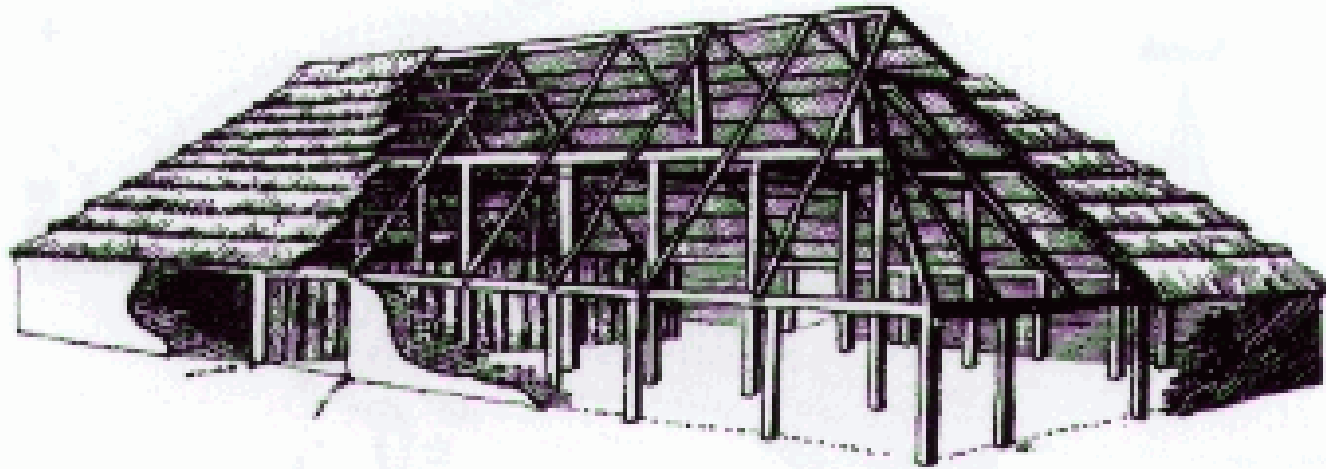
Archaeological Evidence: Cadbury & the Warrior Code



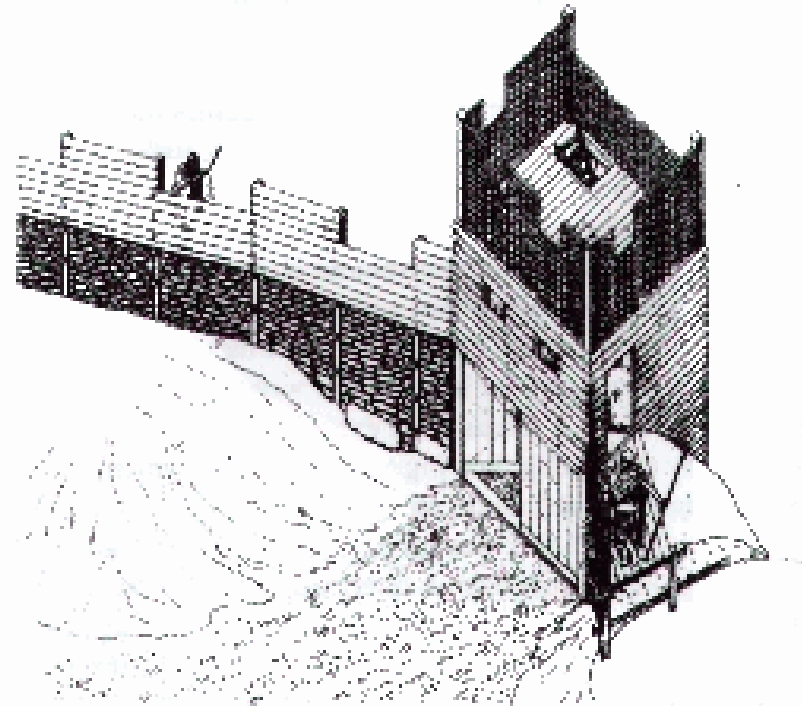
Possible plan of Cadbury Castle hill fort



Reconstruction of Hall and Gate at Cadbury



Think Francis Brett
Young here....



Archaeological Evidence: Tintagel



Postern gate and “Merlin’s Cave” at Tintagel



The “Arthur Stone” from Tintagel



Possible reconstruction



Archaeological Evidence: Glastonbury Tor



Historical Literary Evidence: *Y Goddodin*



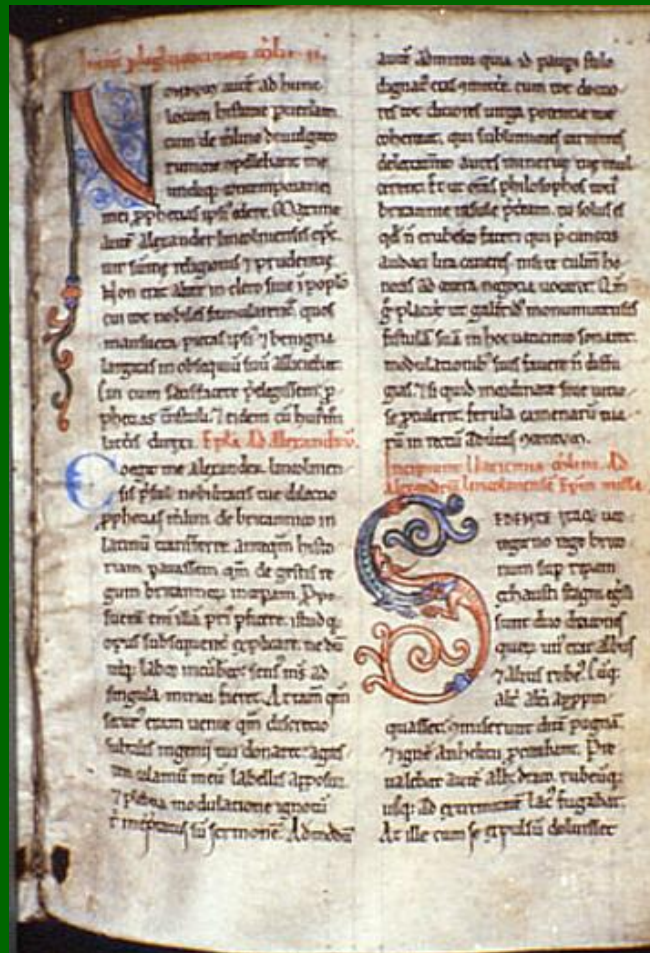
Early Arthurian Mss.: *Annales Cambriae*

et sunt usq; ad decem & ualentiū. ann		an
supre sexaginta noue.		an
an. .xxx.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an. Pasca eo		an
indulgetur sup di ap		an
em dicitur eam	an. xl.	an
papa leone epus		an
rome.		an
an. & brigant		an
su nascitur.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an. Scti patrici		an
ad dnm migrat		an
an.		an
an.	an. l.	an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an.		an
an. .xx.		an
an.	an. Episcopus pau	an
an.	lit in xpo an	an
an.	no. ocl. emat	an
an.	sup.	an
an. quet beruam		an
epus.		an
an.	an. .lx.	an
an.		an
an.		an
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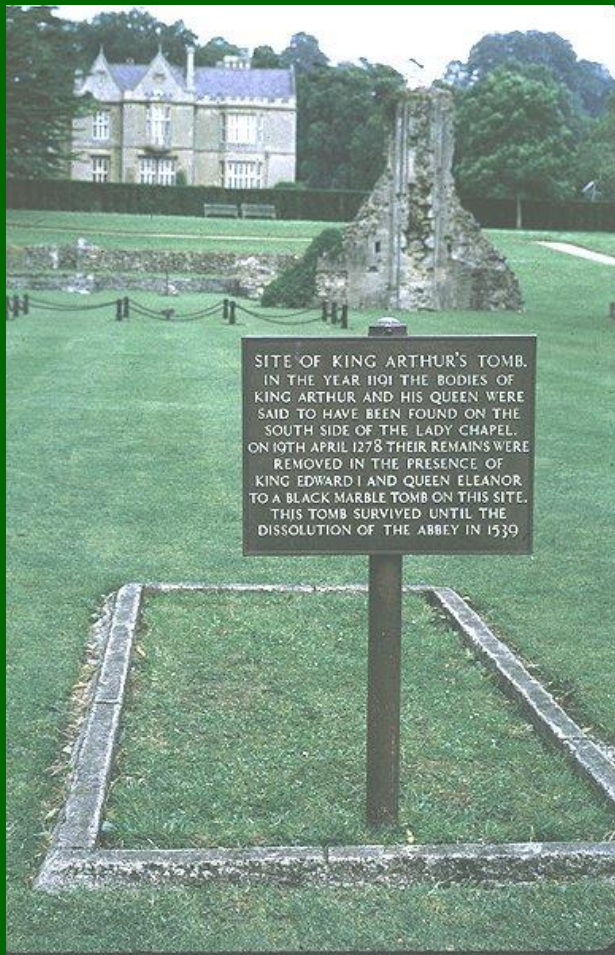
an Bellu badonis inq
 archur portauit crucē
 dñi nri ihu xpi. trib;
 dieb; & trib; noctib;
 inumeros suos &
 brittones uictores fuit.

an Gueth ca lan inq
 archur & me drauc
 corruet... phortalicis

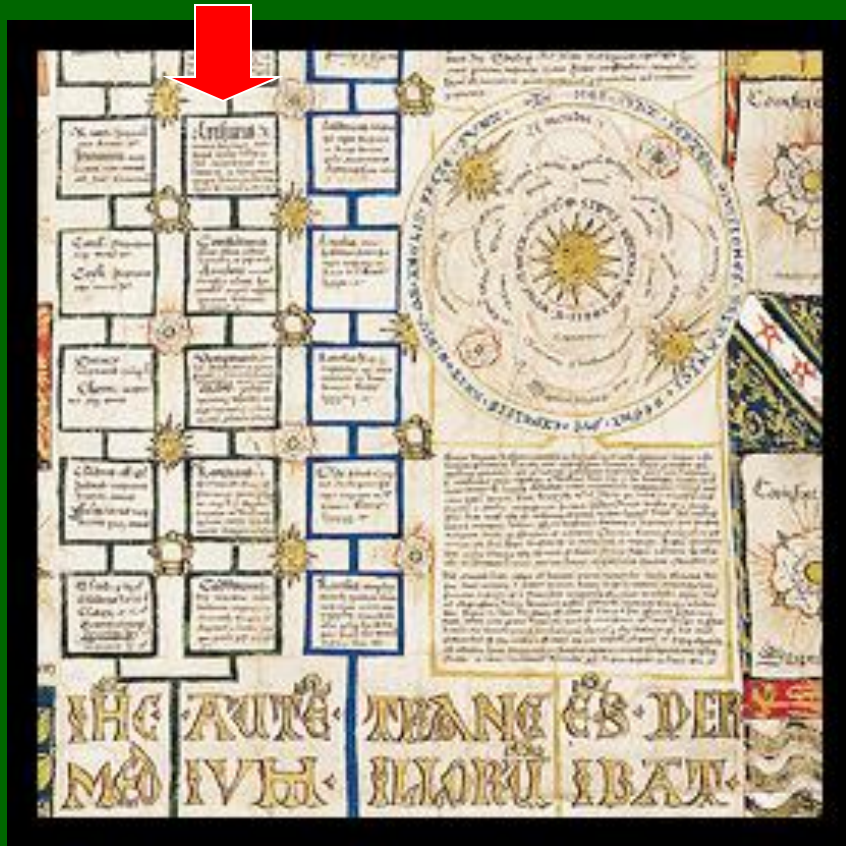
The Great Adaptor: Geoffrey of Monmouth



Building the Myth: Glastonbury Abbey



Building the myth: Tudor Genealogy



Literary Developments

- Corresponds to period of development of historical *romance* (not just *roman*) in southern France—courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of England (1122-1204), and her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne (1145-1198).
- Corresponds to development of concept of *fin' amor* (sometimes called 'courtly love')

And this is very important...



- The introduction of the stirrup into Western horse furniture in the 8th to 10th centuries allowed *chevals* to be ridden by *chevaliers*, who came to be governed by a second code: *chivalry*.

Chrétien de Troyes

- Wrote romances for Marie's court
- Probably invented the character of Lancelot
- Took existing Celtic grail myth & pulled it into Arthurian sphere
- Made *fin' amors* the dominant code of the Arthurian court



Arthur's court becomes the proving ground for chivalric virtue



- Lancelot
- Perceval
- Yvain
- Tristram
- Diminished role for warrior knights like Gawain and Cei
- Diminished role for king (who's already great)

Concomitant changes to Arthur's character



- Leader caught between military and chivalric codes
- Still able to inspire but not necessarily able to control all his knights
- Metaphor or symbol for use of power: “mirror for magistrates”

Building the Myth: The Round Table



“How did he get to be king anyway?”



Answer:

<http://bau2.uibk.ac.at/sg/python/Sounds/HolyGrailPeasants.wav/thatswhy.wav>