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King Arthur in British Literature and History

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Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracoval samostatně, a k vypracování jsem použil pouze uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Olomouci dne 21. 4. 2017

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Podpis

"A knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,

That fro the tyme that he first bigan

To riden out, he loved chivalrie,

Trouthe and honour, freedom and curteisie."

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury tales*

Contents

Abstract

This thesis is focused on the topic of King Arthur in British Literature and History. It is divided into three chapters, the first of which describes the changes in the Arthurian legend throughout history. The second chapter provides a historical context for these changes, emphasising the changes to the legend as compiled in Le Morte d'Arthur. The final chapter details some of the places connected to King Arthur and highlights some of the teories about his identity.

Introduction

Legends and tales of heroes, have a particular way of capturing human interest and imagination, be they grounded in reality and in historical sources so firmly it would be unfair to even call them legends, or be they linked to any sort of real person by a link so thin it is on the verge of snapping and turning the legend into pure fabrication. The latter is the case with King Arthur, but there are people who have devoted significant portions of their lives to proving that the king was real, and that all that we associate with him in today's Britain are not just money making schemes.

I remember that the first book I ever borrowed from a library was a book about Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. I honestly cannot recall any of the specifics of it, not even the name or the author, the only thing that I remember is that I read the entire book in a single sitting, and ever since have had a great interest in all legends, no matter the place of their origin.

The aim of this thesis then, is to translate this interest into a work that will hopefully be of both interest and use to those that may read it. The principal goals of this thesis are to show the development of the Arthurian legend throughout history, with a focus on British literature. Then, to show a historical context for these developments, and the reasons why certain elements became part of the legend in the first place, and why others were changed in the ways that they were. The last goal is to show the historicity of the legend, the various places that are commonly connected to Arthur, and the various theories that were put forward as to just who might Arthur have been.

1. King Arthur in British Literature

Before delving into the depth of sources that is literature about King Arthur, and the various Knights of the Round Table that are associated with him, it is important to establish which works will be highlighted in this thesis and which must be left out.

Firstly, as can be derived from the name of the thesis, this part of this thesis will only be concerned with authors from the British Isles. This means the unfortunate fact that the Vulgate cycle, the beginnings of the Holy Grail, and Tristan and Isolde will not get the focus they so rightfully deserve in a work that aims to show the development of the Arthurian legend. The reason for this decision is mainly to keep the work focused on the main points and avoid devoting an inordinately large part of the text to summarising these developments. They will still be mentioned within appropriate chapters of this thesis.

Secondly, while the early mentions of Arthur are self-explanatory in their inclusion, and or they are explained in their introductions, an ending point must be decided when it comes to modern adaptations of the Arthurian legend. The ending point for this thesis is set at the Idylls of the King. The reason for this decision is that the Idylls represent a turning point in literature where the additions into the legend trickle away, and the works become iterative on the already existing material. This is not to say that these works are undeserving of mention, or praise, for being in many cases excellent additions to the Arthurian legend, and certainly better for the modern reader in terms of ease of reading, this simply means that these works do not reach the impact on the development of the legend, especially if one places emphasis on the historical context of that development.

1.1. Earliest Mentions

The earliest mentions of Arthur come in two forms. They are either parts of the works of chroniclers, though the chroniclers in question might not be considered as conservative, and then by extension as reliable as, for example, the famous chronicler Bede. The other source of these mentions are the works of poets and storytellers. These however, are neither very reliable nor as influential as written mentions, past the point of perhaps influencing their creation.

1.1.1. Historia Brittonum

The first written mention of King Arthur comes in the manuscript Historia Brittonum. Both the authorship and the years of writing are a subject of contention [1], the authorship being mainly ascribed to either the 8th century historian Nennius, supposedly then in possession of now lost written sources that would date back to the 5th century. As opposed to the more careful historian Bede, Nennius is criticised mainly for his inventiveness as demonstrated by one of the statements made about Arthur's combat prowess. Those who disagree with Nennius being the author of Historia Brittonum prefer to describe it as a collection of different anonymous authors.

On the subject of King Arthur, the text provides very sparse, but simultaneously extremely important information. When Arthur is first mentioned, he is referred to as magnanimous, but not as one of the kings of Britain, instead just as a military commander in twelve battles against the Saxons. Of the battles mentioned there are two that are notable, the 8th near the "Gurnion Castle" where he supposedly bore the image of Mary, the Holy Virgin, on his shoulders into battle. The use of the word "shoulder" is also debatable in the translation, as a result of the similarities between the old Welsh world for "shoulder" and Latin word for "shield" [2], a more likely place for heraldic display. The second notable battle is the 12th, near the hill of Badon. The description of this battle is the reason for Nennius being described as an unreliable source, claiming that with only God's help, Arthur himself was able to slay the incredible number of 940 enemies, and the British forces emerged victorious.[3]

In the other pieces of information provided we are given the information that Arthur (referred to as "Arthur the soldier") had a dog named Cabal, and that a stone with the dog's paw print can be found in a region called Buelt. Supposedly once the stone is removed, it magically finds its way back to the top of the pile of stones Arthur had constructed[4]. The last mention of Arthur goes to describe the tomb of Amr, Arthur's son, supposedly killed and buried by Arthur in the region called Ercing. Amr's tomb also has a magical property, as it is told to be

[1] GRANSDEN, Antonia. *Historical writing in England pg.5*

[2] RENO F.D. *Historic king arthur: authenticating the Celtic hero of post-Roman Britain. pg. 324*

[3] GILES, John Alen. *Six Old English Chronicles pg. 408*

[4] EVANS *Andrew J. Nennius' The Wonders of Britain [online]*

either immeasurable, or changing in size, as supposedly tested by the author of the text himself.[5]

It is important to note that while the sites of the battles, Cabal's stone, and Amr's tomb are clearly stated, they do not correspond directly with any sites that we would recognise today, and that the supposed places are only estimates, and while all have a solid base in evidence, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to exactly determine the locations.

1.1.2. The Annales Cambriae

The Annals of Wales is a collection of Welsh sources that detail the history of the British Isles, with special focus being placed on Wales with over two thirds of entries solely concerning it. The entries range widely in terms of both quality of information and length, with the information about the years of death of notable people being given without any further information on who they are. Some entries are also quite banal, the most often pointed out example of this is the entry to year 721 A.D. which simply states "A hot summer".

Where the Annals of Wales are of interest in regards to the Arthurian legend, are the year 516 A.D., and 537 A.D. respectively. The year 516 is stated to be the year of the Battle of Badon hill, pointing specifically to Arthur, him, similarly to the account by Nennius, carrying a religious device and the Britons winning the battle, with their enemy not directly specified. The name of the battle corresponds directly with the information given in Historia Brittonum, and both place focus on the religious aspect of Arthur's appearance in the battle, though this text is much more conservative in the claims made about the victory.

The description of the year 537 goes past what can be found in the Historia Brittonum, with the very important addition of the character famously known as Mordred. As stated in the text Mordred (here called "*Medraut*") and Arthur both fell in the battle of Camlann. No real description of the battle or the place is given, and the text continues with the statement that there was a plague that year.[6]

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[5] EVANS *Andrew J. Nennius' The Wonders of Britain [online]*

[6] The Annales Cambriae 447-954 (The Annals of Wales). *Fordham University: Internet Medieval Sourcebook [online]*

1.2. Historia Regum Britanniae

The History of British kings represents a major turning point for the Arthurian legend in several ways. Firstly, the portrayal of Arthur's character makes an appearance, though it is not yet as the noble knight he later becomes. The Arthur described in this text is a bloodthirsty warlord who doesn't shy away the idea of eradicating all Scots and Picts, that is until the clergy comes before him begging for mercy, as he is still a devout Christian. He also uses the vision of plunder from Rome to motivate his men in a fight against the Romans. The description of Arthur's deeds also differs from the simple fight against Saxons that is contained in the works mentioned earlier. Arthur is described as a son to Uther Pendragon, and upon his coronation as king still goes to fight the Saxons, but also to subjugate the entirety of the British Isles, and all the then ruling kings. He then sets his sights on Norway and instates his sister's husband as king there, and finally takes a large part of today's France. He is then asked for tribute to the Roman emperor, which Arthur refuses to pay and instead he goes to war against Rome, and after a hard-won victory begins to march on the capital, only to learn that he was betrayed by his nephew Mordred. Upon learning this Arthur rushes back to his kingdom and defeats Mordred in battle, slaying him, but suffers mortal wounds and is carried to the island of Avallon to be healed, and gives up his crown.

Firstly, before going into the descriptions of individual characters in Arthur's portion of the book, it is important to mention the circumstance of Artur's conception, as they involve a character that has today become engrained with the legend. King Uther falls deep in love with the beautiful Igraine, wife to Gorlois duke of Cornwall. The duke hides his wife away in the castle of Tintagel. Uther then besieges the castle, but due to its perfect strategic position is unable to get inside and thus seeks the help of Merlin. Merlin, by magical means, changes Uther's appearance to that of duke Gorlois, and Uther then safely gets inside the castle and has sex with Igraine.[7]

Merlin in Geoffrey of Monmouth's work is a combination of several existing characters[8], and serves mostly to help along impossible plot points. He never directly interacts with Arthur yet, but he is going to play a major part the in the later iterations of the legend and thus is important and worthy of mention.

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[7] MONMOUTH, Geoffrey a Sebastian EVANS. *Geoffrey of Monmouth pg. 217-220*

[8] PATON, Lucy Allen. *Notes on Merlin in the "Historia regum Britanniae" of Geoffrey of Monmouth. [online]*

Another interesting change from the previous iterations is the number of named characters that appear later iterations of the legend. Mordred, previously mentioned in Annales Cambriae, is now Arthur's nephew, and there is a reason given for their battle, as Mordred attempts to take Arthur's crown for himself, and unlawfully marries Arthur's wife Guinevere (also called Guanhumara).[9] Guinevere herself is not described in detail either, as the only information given about her is that she was the most beautiful in all of Britain, she was from a noble Roman family, and that after Mordred's defeat she ran away from York to become a nun in Caerleon. Also appearing are the men later to be known as Sir Kay (also called Caius the steward) and Sir Bedivere (also called Bedver the buttler), who are granted the provinces of Anjou and Normandy respectively, for their service to their king. Both men later die in a large battle against the Romans.[10] Sir Gawain (also called Walgan), Arthur's nephew and brother to Mordred also appears here. Gawain is recommended by his father to serve the pope, then serves as an ambassador to the Romans, and dies in the first confrontation with Mordred. Last of the mentioned is Sir Howell (also called Hoel), another one of Arthur's nephews. Finally, although not people, Arthur is also in possession of named weapons, that being his shield Priwen, painted with an image of Virgin Mary, his lance Ron, and most notably of all, his sword Excalibur (also called Caliburn) made in the island of Avallon.

Moreover, the text departs further into the realm of fiction than its predecessors. Whereas previously Arthur was simply fighting Saxons here his enemies also include a giant, who is hiding on Mont Saint-Michel. Worth noting is that the giant only described as having ran away with a captive on Michael's Mount, we can assume that this isn't referring to the tidal island in Cornwall as its colonisation was at that time only in its infancy, and is generally connected to another giant of local legend instead.[11]

As a final point, the text contains numerous references to places more easily identifiable but are either of dubious historical accuracy or are inconsistent with the previous names given to Arthur's famous battles, such as Cammlan here being called a battle that took place near the river Cambula.

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[9] MONMOUTH, Geoffrey a Sebastian EVANS. *Geoffrey of Monmouth pg.* 287-292

[10] Ibid. *279*

[11] *The myths and legends of St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall. St. Michael's Mount [online]*

1.3. Roman de Brut

Although not strictly a work of British literature, it is still significant in the development of the Arthurian legend. The text is inspired by the History of British Kings, and Arthur's story at large follows the same steps, there are differences.

Most important of these differences in the mention of the Round Table. This is the first text to mention it[12], though unfortunately it does not go into detail. The only things mentioned are the reason for the Table's creation, that being the intention to make all the present guests equal, and that it had no further significance past its intended reason. There are knights in the text that are referred to as knights who had seats at Arthur's table, but they remain nameless figures that simply serve Arthur.

Arthur himself is also of significantly different character than what is described in the History of British Kings. The first description of his character is that of a brave, generous, merciful, courteous and generally a virtuous knight. For all his fights, he has, or at least claims to have, a good cause and is in general outstanding, even among his peers. And although the author claims to show Arthur's faults too, the only remotely close thing is the occasional show of pride. Lastly, we are informed that Arthur was crowned at the young age of 15 years.[13]

As for the other characters, queen Guinevere still lacks any characterisation, but in the first mention of her it is further specified that she was clever aside from good looking, and behaved in a very queenly manner. Among other changes in the greater importance of sir Howell, and very minor changes to sir Kay and sir Bedivere. Other than that the work is very iterative and keeps the legend in a very similar state to what it was before.

1.4. Le Morte d'Arthur

The Death of Arthur, by sir Thomas Malory, is easily the most defining point for the evolution of the Arthurian legend. Whereas the works previously discussed contained the Arthurian legend in a bigger or smaller proportion to their total length, this work is dedicated entirely to it, and enriches it by the addition of the works of French poets. The book was completed in the years 1469-70.[14]

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[12] WILD, Michael *The Origins of the Round Table [online]*

[13] WACE, Robert a Eugene MASON. *The "Arthurian" Portion of the Roman de Brut pg. 45*

[14] MALORY, Thomas a Helen COOPER. *Le morte DArthur: the Winchester manuscript*

1.4.1. The French inspiration

As for the material taken from French, Malory uses two principal sources. First of them is the Vulgate cycle, which is an early 13th century collection of prose written by several anonymous French authors. The works detail the history of the Holy Grail, the birth of Merlin, his involvement with Arthur, the early reign of Arthur, the newly added sir Lancelot, the entire quest for the Holy Grail, and finally provide a conclusion for the legend in "The Death of Arthur".[15]

The other major source is the 13th century Roman de Tristan, a piece which emulates the Lancelot portion of the Vulgate cycle. It details the life of Sir Tristan, who very similarly to Lancelot, loves the wife of another man, and has a role in the quest for the Holy Grail, though same as Lancelot is unsuccessful in his quest.[16]

Though much of the work is iterative, large portions are Malory's own invention. This is the case mostly with the long speeches characters deliver, be it knights or ladies, as well as for example, the descriptions of just how any individual knight fights

1.4.2. Overview of the legend

This iteration of the tale begins with King Uther, and his tricking of Igraine with Merlin's help. Merlin then goes on to take Arthur away from Uther and places him in the care of sir Hector. Later, after Uther's death, when Arthur and his foster brother Kay are to attend a tournament Arthur is sent for a sword. He manages to find one embedded in a stone and takes it. It is immediately recognised as the sword that only the future king of England can pull out of the stone and Arthur's coronation is called for. The would-be king faces opposition of several other kings who wage war against him. With the help of Kings Ban and Bors who he calls from Gaul, and the advice of Merlin, he is able to prevail, though not completely defeat his opposition who are distracted instead by a Saracen invasion. [17]

Arthur then has several adventures and is guided by Merlin to receive from the Lady of the Lake the magical sword Excalibur, and more importantly its scabbard.[18] Then follows the

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[15] NORTON W.W. and Company. *The Prose Vulgate Cycle.*

[16] NORRIS, Ralph. *Malory's library: the sources of the Morte Darthur*

[17] MALORY, Thomas a Helen COOPER. *Le morte DArthur: the Winchester manuscript, pg. 3-20*

[18] Ibid. *pg. 29-30*

major plot detailed History of British Kings, but with key differences. Arthur doesn't conquer France, and has no significant battles or duels there. He is, however, able to overcome Rome, and is crowned Emperor by the Pope.[19]

Interspersed between the story so far are tales of various adventures the Knights of the Round Table have, such as the adventures of sir Balin or sir Gawain. After the Rome portion of the story, the text becomes even more disjointed and what follows is the story of Lancelot, which mainly serves to develop him as a character, and show how he became a knight and that he came to love Guinevere. Next is the Tristan portion, the longest part of the book, though arguably the most autonomous.

After these adventures the reader is introduced to the Holy Grail, and the quest for it the Knights of the Round Table swear to undertake. The individual tales are usually interconnected, with one knight meeting several others in his tale, or working with them. As the knights depart for the quest it is also noted that such a gathering will never be seen again, and the moment marks of beginning of the end of Arthur's era. After the quest follows another portion dedicated to Lancelot, this time with a focus on his love for Guinevere, and the split in the Round Table it causes. Arthur ends up banishing Lancelot, who goes to rule over France. On sir Gawain's urging Arthur follows Lancelot and leaves sir Mordred to keep the kingdom.

No real battle against Lancelot happens, instead he has several duels with sir Gawain, with no clear resolution. This continues until Arthur receives word that Mordred has taken his crown. From then on the story returns to the one known from History of British Kings, as Arthur rushes back to confront Mordred. In a final battle the two kill each other, and almost the entire Round Table knighthood is killed, save for Bedivere and the knights that left alongside Lancelot.[20]

1.4.3. Changes to individual characters

Previously many of the characters involved in the legend lacked individuality or characterisation of any kind. Now mainly the knights who have their own dedicated adventures have a greater degree of description. At large they are all Christians, bound by an oath all of them swear in order to become Knights of the Round Table, and to a bigger or

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[19] MALORY, Thomas a Helen COOPER. *Le morte DArthur: the Winchester manuscript. pg. 82-95*

[20] Ibid. *pg. 507 - 530*

lesser degree try to live according to that. There are however, numerous flaws that they have. Some are very hot-headed, have extramarital affairs, and in some cases, are not afraid to cut down people in cold blood, even in the middle of Arthur's court. This is most apparent in the quest for the Holy Grail, where only the flawless sir Galahad enjoys success.

King Arthur himself, although the work is in name dedicated to him, takes a minor role for most of the book. As for his characteristics, he is, or at least is supposed to be, a model knight, and an inspiration for all of his court. Contrary to his previous depictions, he is flawed and does not behave according to how a good Christian traditionally should. He is for example, lacking in charity as demonstrated with the line "*Wherefore should I give thee a gift, churl*"[21] when Merlin comes to him disguised and offering him a treasure. He also has extramarital sex on several occasions, including one time with his own sister, though at the time he is unaware of their relation. Lastly, with this iteration he loses another one of his legendary weapons, and is now reduced only to the possession of Excalibur and its scabbard.

The character of Merlin suffers perhaps the most drastic change in importance from previous material. His involvement escalates from responsibility for Arthurs parentage to getting him the magical sword Excalibur, and delivering major information to other various characters. He often appears in a magic disguise, though more often than not he has no discernible reason for it, and everyone he interacts with in this way can almost immediately tell that they are talking to Merlin.

Sir Kay remains in the same standing, as a seneschal to Arthur, though now it is explained that he gained this position through him being a foster brother to Arthur. His role is reduced mainly to the beginning of the story and after that he appears extremely rarely.

Queen Guinevere still has very little characterisation in her introduction, where only a short sentence is devoted to her description, whereas the Round Table, which Arthur receives as a gift from Guinevere's father, has much more space is devoted to it immediately after the mention of Arthur's wedding.[22] Afterwards however, the queen becomes a major character, though mainly through Lancelot. She does however occasionally shine as the one who delivers moral judgements on all the knights. Also in a very important change she manages to avoid the marriage to Mordred, though she still becomes a nun after Arthur's death.

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[21] MALORY, Thomas a Helen COOPER. *Le morte DArthur: the Winchester manuscript.Pg. 19*

[22] Ibid. pg. *50-51*

Of the characters established in the History of British Kings, the one who suffers the most changes is sir Bedivere. His role is almost entirely diminished from what it was, and he doesn't appear as a significant character for the vast majority of the work. He is still involved with the giant on Mont St. Michael[23], but serves only as an observer to Arthur's adventure. Instead of his death in the battle with the Roman emperor, his role is pushed back to the very end of the story, where he helps Arthur return Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake, and helps him aboard a boat that would bring him to Avalon. After learning about Arthur's death, he becomes a hermit. [24]

Lastly, the character of Morgan la Fay, Arthur's sister, becomes directly involved, though in a minor way. She attempts to get Arthur killed through exchanging his sword and scabbard for fakes, and then, under the assumption that she succeeded, attempts to kill her husband. Both of her plans fail and she reappears later in Lancelot's story, where it is made known that she loves him and goes as far as to kidnap him. Lancelot quickly escapes and Morgan is then seen only as she is one of the maidens that carry Arthur to Avalon.

1.5. Modern literature

Malory's book enjoyed popularity in no small part thanks to Willian Caxton's printing press. The period after the book's printing however, also marked a beginning of the decline of interest in the Arthurian legend. It was only with the release of the late 19th century Idylls of the King, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, that this interest has seen a resurgence, bringing the legend back into relevance.[25]

1.5.1. Idylls of the King

The Idylls are a collection of 12 poems that derive inspiration from Malory's work. Their significance, aside from responsibility for the resurgence in popularity of Arthur's legend, lies in consolidating the entire story into a much more cohesive and interconnected narrative. The work discards many of the characters previously involved and adds several new stories and characters, more in line with the overall tone. The Idylls also reflect the time in which they were written, and depart further from Arthur's origin as a warrior, instead focusing on the

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[23] MALORY, Thomas a Helen COOPER. *Le morte DArthur: the Winchester manuscript*. pg. *88-91*

[24] Ibid. *pg. 517-522*

[25] FORD, David Nash. *King Arthur in Literature*

portrayal of the Round Table as chivalrous individuals, somewhat reminiscent of an image of a true Victorian gentlemen.

The changes made to several existing characters remain consistent with their character in terms of their adventures and what they represent. If not the perfect example of chivalry, an extremely good example of this principle is sir Gawain. His role is greatly reduced from that in Malory's work, but retains the same tone. In the quest for the Holy Grail, Gawain is originally told that he will not succeed as he is not a pious knight, but he tries in several long adventures and fails regardless. Here sir Gawain simply decides to not even try, and spends the year that would be dedicated to the quest greatly enjoying himself instead.

Replacing Tristan and Isolde, though they are still present but in a more minor role, is the tale of Geraint and Enid, split into two parts, the "Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid". This story is more interconnected with the legend, as it is a direct consequence of the rumours of an affair between Lancelot and Guinevere. The tale is centred around Geraint's suspicions that his wife is unfaithful to him, his fall into seclusion, a diminishing of his reputation as a knight, and the eventual recovery therefrom. [26]

Aside from other minor changes, the character of Vivien appears, and becomes an antagonistic force that remains prevalent throughout most of the stories. She directly causes the death of Balan, imprisonment of Merlin, and Mordred discovering Lancelot's and Guinevere's affair. In a sense Vivien acts as a replacement for Morgan Le Fey, who does not appear in the story (a character under a different name but of the same family does, though has a very different role and goals), and in other modern retellings she becomes, under the name Morgan, the chief enemy of Arthur and his knights. [27]

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[26] TENNYSON, Alfred a Joseph Villiers DENNY. Tennyson's Idylls of the king: The coming of Arthur, Gareth and Lynette, Lancelot and Elaine, The passing of Arthur. Pg. 18-65

[27] TENNYSON, Alfred Tennyson a Stephen J. RUSNAK. *Idylls of the king*.

2. Historical context

As mentioned in relation to the developments of the Arthurian legend in Idylls of the King, the changes made to the legend by the various authors are a reflection of the combination of the time of writing, the themes then important in literature, the conventions of that time's society, and the authors personal opinions. It is therefore important to not only provide a summary of all the changes made, but also to provide a historical context for these changes, and some of the reasons that might have played into the legend being changed in such a way.

2.1. Chivalry

The idea of chivalry was formed in no small part as a result of the position authors and scribes held in the medieval society. Due to the difficulty and length of the arduous task that was transcribing books and adding illustrations, the price was beyond what a regular person would be able to afford. As such the chief audience of books would be the nobility and by extension, knights. In an effort to appeal to this audience the authors depicted the knights in a flattering an idealised way and the knights, in turn, would try to emulate the image that was created.

The begging of the development of chivalry can be traced back to the 11th century "Song of Roland", in which the prideful Roland, the leader of the rear guard of Charlemagne's army, refuses to call for help from the main army and faces the Saracens that ambush him in battle with an inferior force. He repents for his sins and is promised by a present archbishop that he will become a martyr and will be guaranteed place in heaven, should he fall in battle. The motifs present are ones that will become some of the most defining for the concept of chivalry in later years. They are the motifs of a "holy war" and knights standing against infidels that would "destroy the one true faith". The other motif, later more significant, is an unwavering loyalty of a knight to their lord. [28]

The code of chivalry itself can be reduced into ten commandments, not dissimilar from the ones found in the Bible. They order the following: belief in all Church teaching, defending the Church, defending the weak, loving one's country, bravery, war against infidels, loyalty to one's lord, avoiding lies and breaking promises, generosity, and championing good as well as opposing injustice and evil.[29] We can see that from its early stages Arthur's legend integrates

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[28] FLORI, Jean. *Rytíři a rytířství ve středověku. Pg. 198 - 206*

[29] GAUTIER, Léon a Henry FRITH. *Chivalry. London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1891. Pg. 57*

well with these commandments, as it is emphasised in the earliest sources that Arthur was Christian and fought for God and country, in defence against the Saxons.

2.1.1. Courtly love

Another important idea that begun attaching itself to the concept of chivalry in late 11th or early 12th century is the idea of courtly love, though this expression itself has gained widespread use as late as the 19th century[30]. The creation of this concept is often associated with Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie, who both either inspired or commissioned many of the early works that focused on romance in the sense of courtly love. The relationship between a knight and a lady, according to the courtly love concept, would not be dissimilar from that of a knight and his lord. A knight was supposed to serve the lady obediently while the lady is the one in control, though this idea rarely became practice.

The concept also comes from a time in which marriage is often a matter of political or material gain and was often arranged without the real consent of the married. As a result, courtly love was not usually depicted as love between a married couple, but instead it was a love between a married lady and knight that was idealised and unrealistic within the realities of real medieval life. It was also hypothesised that this concept was created with an express purpose, that of providing a purpose for the landless knights that were unmarried and unable to support a family.[31] [32]

A clear image of courtly love appears in the Arthurian legend in the form of Lancelot and queen Guinevere. Lancelot makes it clear that he serves Guinevere, maybe even more so than Arthur, and that he does so out of love, and even though there are references to other characters knowing about his love for Guinevere, there are little repercussions for it, until the king himself learns about it.

2.2. The Holy Grail

Before beginning any sort of discussion on the topic of the Holy Grail, there is one point from the evolution of the Arthurian legend that is important to reiterate. The legend, from the

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[30] *DELAHOYDE, Michael. Courtly Love. In: Washington State University [online]*

[31] *SCHWARTZ, Debora B. Backgrounds to Romance: "Courtly Love" [online]*

[32] *Courtly Love. Middle Ages [online]*

earliest sources mentioned in this work onward, was a Christian one. Though, this does not necessarily mean that Christian morals were an important part of it, and that they deserved much focus, as evidenced by the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. It was only after the introduction of the Holy Grail that being a good Christian became a goal for the knights, in addition to the chivalric principles of defending the faith and the Church.

The first mention of the Holy Grail comes from Chrétin de Troye's poem „Le Conte du Graal". Originally, the Grail did not take the form it is known for today, that of a chalice, either ornate or plain, used to contain the blood of Christ but instead a somewhat opposite form, that of a dish or a plate, containing a piece of Sacramental Bread. The image of a chalice appeared first in the work of the poet Robert de Boron. Though both of these share the commonality of Sir Galahad not being the knight who attains the Holy Grail, but instead give this role to Sir Percival. It is only in the Vulgate cycle and later that Sir Galahad is the one who succeeds in his quest, thanks to his purity and virtue.[33]

It is theorised that, perhaps curiously, the Grail has its roots not in strictly Christian lore, but instead in traditional pagan Celtic folklore, either Irish or Welsh[34]. This theory has its basis in the fact that cauldrons that provide their owner with either plenty or supernatural strength, sometimes even with the ability to raise the dead, are common in this folklore, and from the assumption that a cauldron is not far away from a chalice, if they have the same magical properties. The Church never took an official stance, though for example the Valencian cathedral claimed to have the actual Grail.

The Grail does not display its value as a symbol itself in the story from Malory's interpretation on. Instead, it serves to show that the era of Arthur is not perfect, and that the knights need to be men of faith as well. This is illustrated well in the adventures of Sir Gawain, who is good as a knight but bad as a Christian, and refuses to make penance, thus failing in the quest, or Sir Lancelot who fails, at least in part, because of his love for Guinevere. The perfect example of a knight is Sir Galahad, who is pure of both heart and body, and strong of faith as well.

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[33] Grail Legends. *Timeless Myths* [online].

[34] LOOMIS, Roger Sherman. *The Grail: from Celtic myth to Christian symbol*.

3. Historicity of the Arthurian legend

Any mention of the historicity of the Arthurian legend, as well as the various theories about the real identity of Arthur often cause controversy among both historians, and the public that is educated or interested in the topic. This is caused by the attitude a large number of writers have when it comes to presenting their findings in the field. It is not uncommon for an author to believe themselves to be the one who discovered the real Arthur, have some evidence to support this claim, and then to set about diminishing all other claims. The controversy is in no way helped by the fact that most of the sites and items that are so often connected to Arthur have very little basis in actual evidence and in history. The aim of this chapter then, is to explain some of these associations and theories, and show why they might cause controversy in the scientific community and the general public alike.

3.1. Glastonbury Abbey

According to legend, the foundation of the abbey is the work of Joseph of Arimathea, the keeper of the Holy Grail, who supposedly travelled from the Holy Land to Britain, where, with the help of his followers, he established the first monastery and built the first church there. In a version of the legend it is also stated that Jesus Christ himself helped Joseph in this endeavour. As for the abbey's documented history, in the 7th century during the reign of King Ine, the first stone church was built there. Several extensions and improvements were added, mainly during the Norman era following the year 1066. Much of the abbey was destroyed in 1184 but it was rebuilt and remained an important site until king Henry the VIII's Dissolution of Monasteries. The ruins were purchased in 1908 by the Church of England, and they underwent a series of archaeological excavations from the year 1904 to 1979.[35]

The other major legend connected to the abbey is that it is Avalon, and the burial place of king Arthur himself. This claim comes from the year 1191 when, after receiving divine inspiration in the form of a vision, the monks started excavating on the abbey grounds and supposedly found the remains of king Arthur and queen Guinevere. As proof of their identity, the monks stated a lock of golden hair, that upon being touched by one of the monks

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[35] *Chronology. Glastonbury Abbey [online]*

crumbled into dust, and a lead cross inscribed with the words "*Here lies entombed King Arthur, with Guenevere his second wife, on the Isle of Avalon.*"[36]

The latest research confirmed the latter legend as completely untrue, and rather than it being a continuation of local legend it was explained as a money-making scheme. The monks who needed money for the abbey's rebuilding after the 1184 fire supposedly crafted the story in order to attract more pilgrims and thus gain the necessary funds. The very layout of the abbey and the style in which the abbey church are built support this theory, as their style is a clear emulation of earlier styles and layouts, deliberately used to support the claim that it is the oldest church in England. The material from the cemetery pit that was supposed to be king Arthur's grave, previously claimed only to be "Dark Age", was discovered as dating from 11th to 15th century. [37]

Lastly, the cross found in the supposed grave of Arthur directly contradicts the earliest sources about him. The inscription on the cross very clearly uses the word "king" but it was not until the History of British Kings that Arthur would be called a king directly.[38]

3.2. Tintagel Castle

Ever since the publishing of the History of British Kings, Tintagel Castle was deeply engrained into the very begging of the Arthurian legend. Originally only the site of Arthur's conception, it has grown into being considered the birthplace of Arthur and remains a popular tourist destination. The status this site enjoys does not come mainly directly from Geoffrey of Monmouth however, but from Earl Richard of Cornwall. The ruins that remain at the site of Tintagel today are from the early 13th century, when Richard commissioned the castle as a political move, building up a connection to the legendary king who stood against the Saxons and prevailed, just like the Norman nobility.

The inference that Richard did this based on the influence that Malory's tales had in the society of the day comes mainly from the fact that, although in a place that is both impressive and very defensible, Tintagel offered no military advantage and had no significance in this

[36] OF WALES, Gerald a John William SUTTON. *The Tomb of King Arthur*

37 New research rewrites history of Glastonbury Abbey. University of Reading [online].

38 CARROLL, David. *Arturius - A Quest For Camelot [online]*

regard whatsoever. The very construction of the castle was not practical to any sort of military effort, as the walls were too thin for what could reasonably be a defensible stronghold.[39]

Tintagel has seen a wealth of archaeological research during the 20th century, and the interest in this site has yet to falter. From the first excavations in the 1930s a large amount of Mediterranean pottery and glasswork has been discovered. This leads to the assumption that Tintagel was both an important centre of trade, with wealth sufficient for the import of wine and olive oil, and a centre of regional power that was worthy of consumption of these goods.[40] A discovery that was made in the year 1998 was considered to be a breakthrough in the efforts to prove that King Arthur was a real historical character. A stone tablet, inscribed with the name "Artognou", as well as several other ineligible inscriptions, was found, this leading to the discovery being named the Artognou stone, and it was assumed that this was a variant of the name Arthur, and that this indeed proved that someone called Arthur has lived in Tintagel. However, the opinion that is held widely by the archaeological community is that this refers to a different person and the similarity in name is simply a coincidence.[41]

The research in Tintagel continued in 2016, with researchers attempting to confirm the assumption that the pottery and glasswork found at the site is from the 5th to 7th centuries. In addition to finding more pottery and glasswork shards, the researchers have also unearthed more building foundations, and have managed to confirm that they come from the same time as Arthur is said to, according to the early sources.[42]

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[39] CAWTHORNE, Ellie. *History explorer: Tintagel Castle and the legend of King Arthur. [online]*

[40] AD 500 – Tintagel. *Current Archeology [online].*

[41] Tintagel And The Arthurian Controversy. *Storyline Features UK: Features on British life and society [online].*

[42] *METCALFE, Tom. King Arthur's Home? Archaeologists Investigate Legendary Birthplace.*

3.3. The Winchester Round Table

The Round Table is one of today's best preserved and simultaneously most popular attractions. Despite earlier mentions of it, it was only connected with Winchester in the works of Malory, while the earliest records of the table itself come from the year 1463, more than twenty years before the first printing of Malory's Morte d'Arthur. This already made any assumptions of its historicity doubtful, and with the studies done in 1976 it was firmly proven that the table does not come from Arthur's time, but instead it was made in the 1270s.

The history of the table is still an interesting one however. As mentioned above it comes from the 13th century, an era previously mentioned in relation to Tintagel as one where Arthur was a character of considerable interest. In fact, the table was likely in use at tournaments held by King Edward, earning them the nickname "round tables". The current look of the table was still several centuries away, however. In the years after Edward's reign the tables faded into three centuries of not being used. Its revival came in the year 1522 when King Henry VIII repainted the table in a bid to impress the Holy Roman Emperor. In the centre of the table was now a Tudor rose, and above it the panting of King Arthur had a visage not unlike that of Henry himself.

Another point of interest came in the year 1645. Until then, the table remained safely in the Winchester Castle under the control of the Royalists. It was then used for pistol target practice. The last major restoration came in the year 1789 when the table was repainted and the holes were filled in. Today the table can be seen in the main hall of the Winchester Castle on one of the walls. It still retains the look it gained in the era of Henry VIII, with a Tudor rose in the middle, an image of King Arthur above it, and names of various knights of the round table all around its radius.[43] [44]

3.4. Cadbury Castle

What is today nothing more than a green hillock with terraced sides situated south of the village of South Cadbury is one of the sites that is most often assumed to be the site of King Arthur's court. The first instance of Cadbury being associated with Camelot comes from the year 1542 when the historian John Leland reported that it was once a notable castle or town,

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[43] Winchester: Malory's Camelot? *Early British Kingdoms* [online]

[44] Knights of the Round Table. *Medieval Chronicles [online]*

and that the local people have found large qualities of antiquities and Roman coins during ploughing. He also points out that the location has been called either Camallate or Camalat by the locals.

The year 1965 has seen the establishing of the Camelot Research Committee, which was tasked with excavating the site and conducting archaeological research. The earliest signs of settlement found were dated back to as early as the year 3000 B. C. and the site was used up until the end of the Saxon era, in the 11th century A.D. The area was not inhabited continuously, but instead Cadbury has seen long periods of being deserted. It is also important to note that there never was an actual castle as one would typically imagine, a stone structure with stone walls all around it, as is often associated with Arthur. Instead, in the 4th century B. C., the fortifications constructed most likely by the Dumnonii tribe took the form of walls made of earth and of ditches. This hill fort was later attacked by the Romans, and outside of the Roman coins found, there was also evidence of military activity and of stonework, though the latter came in the form of Roman stonework being used to reinforce the existing defensive structures. After the Roman era, in late 5th century, came the construction of a large feasting hall. The most important piece of evidence pointing to the significance of the hill fort is the pottery previously containing wine or olive oil imported from the Mediterranean.

The research of Cadbury has faced criticism for beginning with the idea that the site actually was connected to Arthur. This was idea was helped along with the enthusiastic media coverage and the local tourist industry. There are also claims that the site itself is of natural origin, or its current look comes from medieval agriculture.[45] [46] [47]

3.5. Arthur's identity

The subject of the historicity of King Arthur's existence and real role in British History is a contested one. While this thesis has so far assumed the existence of someone called Arthur and examined the various claims about him and places associated with him, there are also theories about Arthur being an alternative name for another historical character. The following are the most famous and notable of these theories.

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[45] Cadbury Castle (Camelot?). *The History Files* [online]

[46] Cadbury Castle. *Early British Kingdoms* [online].

[47] Cadbury Castle, was this Camelot? *King Arthur, and the legend of the Knights of the Round Table* [online].

3.5.1. Lucius Artorius Castus

The first connection of Arthur with the Roman general by the name of Lucian Artorius Castus was made by the medievalist Kemp Malone. He makes the argument that the very name Arthur is a localised Cymric version of the Roman name Artorius and supports it with an examination of Cymric phonetic features. He then goes on to state that Artorius was not a common name and as such it needs to be strongly connected to an actual person that was proven to have lived in Britain. Thus, he makes the connection to Castus. and uses the evidence available to him to place Castus. in the 2nd century. Other than the similarity in name, the supporting evidence here are the similarities in that both Arthur and Castus. were involved in defence of Britain against barbarian invaders, and that both also campaigned in Gaul.[48]

Further expanding on this concept is the scholar Linda Malcor. In addition to providing a large amount of detail the biography of Castus she further elaborates on the connection between Arthur and Castus. A large part of the connection is based on the assertion that the list of Arthur's battles as given by Nennius isn't given in chronological order, but is instead ordered so that the names would rhyme and the list itself is taken from a rhyming poem. With this assumption in mind, it would be easy to connect Castus with the Caledonian invasion south and place him and the first several battles west of York, eventually progressing north into Caledonia.

Malcor also points out additional parallels between Arthur and Castus. Firstly, it is the similarity of the auxiliary troops under the command of Castus to the traditional image of a knight as a warrior on horseback, wearing heavy armour and armed with a sword and a lance. The Sarmatian auxiliaries wore scale mail, an early form of heavy armour, and wielded swords, lances, and shields, thus the similarity.

Secondly, though not very expanded upon, it is the point is the standard that the Sarmatian auxiliaries carried into combat. As they were not a part of the standard legions they had a standard different from the legion's. In the case of the Sarmatian cavalry, it was a bronze dragonhead. This is to explain the name "Pendragon" that is associated with Arthur and his father Uther.[49]

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[48] LACY, Norris J. *A history of Arthurian scholarship, pg. 3*

[49] MALCOR, Linda Ann. *Lucius Artorius Castus Part 2: The Battles in Britain.*

At large the entire theory is based on the idea that most of the body of the Arthurian legend comes not from Britain, but from as far as Scythia, or more specifically the people inhabiting today's Northern Iran. It provides explanation not only for Arthur himself, but also most of the other major characters that appear in Malory's work and further, and for many of the concepts such as the Sword in the Stone, or the imagery of serpents and dragons.[50]

The criticism of this theory is not based on the lack of evidence at large, but at the many assumptions the theory relies on in order to work. For example, it is criticised that, the fact that Castus is supposedly connected to Arthur, but according to the early sources they lived more than 300 years apart is never explicitly addressed.[51] Other criticism includes the theory resting entirely on the assumption that the name Arthur is an adaptation of the name Arthurius, and that "*... it requires us to see Arthur as a figure who was first of all historical, then became totally absorbed into Celtic folklore and then, at a later point, was historicised into a entirely different era from that in which he had his origins.*"[52]

3.5.2. Riothamus

Another historical character theorised to have possibly been, or at least in this case heavily inspired, Arthur is Riothamus, King of the Britons, a 5th century military leader. The main proponent of this theory is the cultural historian Geoffrey Ashe. The basis of this connection is the fact that the major military actions associated with Riothamus are extremely similar to those associated with Arthur. Namely, they are an invasion into France, betrayal by an associate left in a leadership position, and a disappearance form history after a final battle. Ashe argues that there are several fundamental possibilities considering the relation of Arthur to Riothamus. First of them is that they were the same person, which runs into the problem of this one man simply living too long to do everything that is generally attributed to both Arthur and Riothamus. Two possible solutions are presented: either after the man became a known hero he was given other achievements by various storytellers, some of the dates associated with him were arrived to simply through several, non-implausible, errors in transcription. Another of the major possibilities is that there were simply two Arthurs, who eventually were

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[50] LITTLETON C. S. a Linda Ann MALCOR *From Scythia to Camelot: a radical reassessment of the legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail.*

[51] MELIA, Daniel Frederick. *Western Folklore [online].*

[52] GREEN, Thomas. *The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur.*

confused together into a single person, though not much time is spent on describing this in detail.

Both major possibilities rely heavily on the explanation that the discrepancy between the names Arthur and Riothamus is easily explainable by Riothamus not actually being a name, but instead a title meaning "high king".[53]

3.5.3. Scottish Arthur

Last of the theories mentioned here is the theory that Arthur did not in fact, live in the south of England, but was a Scottish prince instead. Among others, this theory was put forward by the historian David Carroll. The theory that he puts forward is largely based on citing the "Vita Columba", written by the monk Adomnan in the 7th century, as the primary and the oldest source on Arthur, or as he is called in the text Arturius. It establishes Arthur as a son of the king Aidan, who fought on the side of Britons against the Picts and Saxons even though he was not a Briton himself. Carroll argues that this document was never before considered because the researchers were simply too focused on Arthur's potential existence as a Briton who lived in Cornwall or Wales and, intentionally or not, neglected any other possibilities.

As a means of connecting this Arturius to the actual legend of king Arthur, the many similarities between the two are explored. Aside from the similarity in name, both have a sister by the name of Morgan, both lived in the same century, though there is a 50 year gap in the dates given by the English and Scottish accounts, and both died in battle against the Picts. The Pict connection is made through the would-be father to Mordred, king Lot, who is described as a northern ruler.

There are several, easily spotted, inconsistencies within this theory. The most glaring example would be the use of the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth as both an example of an absolutely untrue fabrication, which Carroll sets out to prove is entirely disconnected from the actual Arthur, and as a uniting element between Arthur and Arturius via the character of Morgan le Fay. Though not in History of British Kings, it was Geoffrey of Monmouth who makes first mention of her character and connects her to Merlin and the Arthurian legend.[54]

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[53] *ASHE, Geoffrey. The discovery of King Arthur.*

[54] CARROLL, David. *Arturius - A Quest For Camelot*

Conclusion

The legend of King Arthur has undergone many changes throughout the course of its adapting. The king himself went from being a blank slate of a military leader with a son, a dog, and an ability to massacre hundreds with the help of God, to a king worthy of respect and admiration, chosen to rule England. All of his court changed from nameless warriors to knights of virtue, who serve to protect the weak, and to go on amazing adventures full of the supernatural.

All of these changes were dictated by the circumstances of the authors, which applies mainly to the History of British Kings and Le Morte D'Arthur, which respectively contain their own versions of chivalry, ranging from knights essentially being a Christian warband fiercely loyal to their king, to them being on spiritual journeys to discover just how far they have come from being the perfect Christians.

The sites connected with Arthur, and the Round Table itself, do not share in the magic that the rest of the legend maintains through literature. Some of them are proven to be fabrications, either in a bid to raise money using Arthur's name, or to increase one's influence and impress those that would see them as the legendary monarch himself. The others, they remain in a state where proving whether they are connected to a King Arthur or not would be impossible without anything short of a miracle, that would put a definite stop to any debate.

It is my hope that this work is as clear as possible in explaining how all the above came to be and that it helps those who would be interested in studying the legendary king and his court.
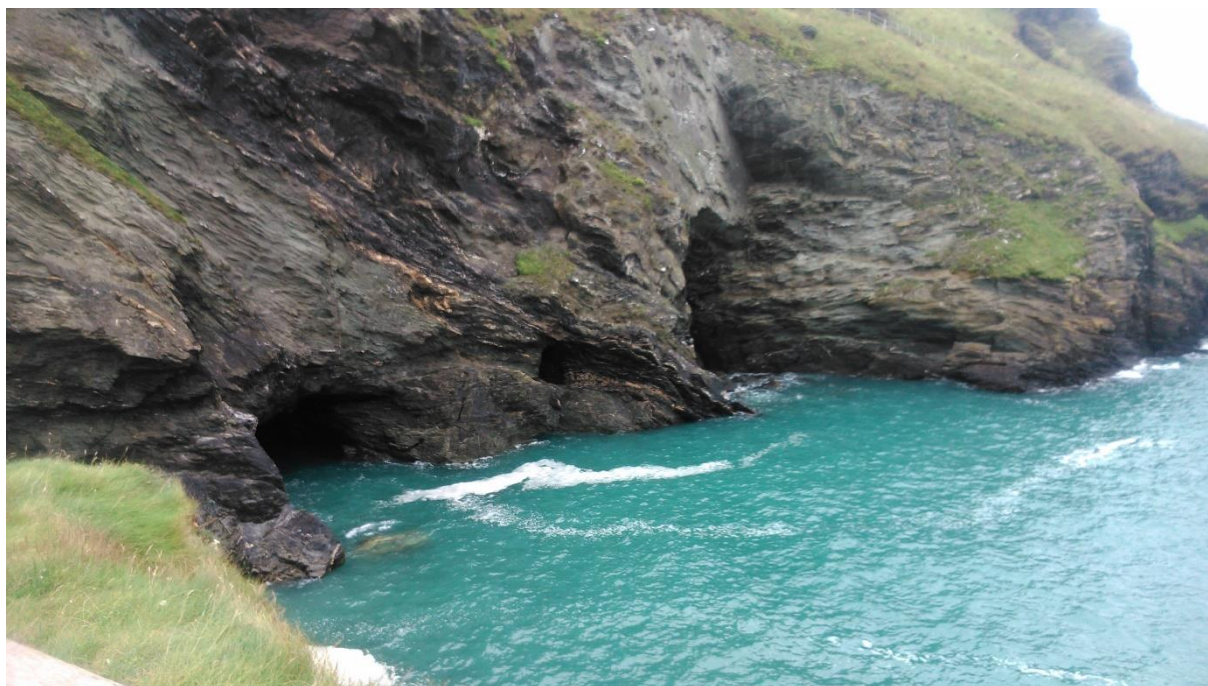
Appendix 1: Tintagel Castle

Figure 1: Merlin's Cave, foto Kryštof Pleský

Figure 2: Tintagel Castle ruins, foto Kryštof Pleský

Figure 3: Early Tintagel building foundations, foto Kryštof Pleský

Appendix 2: Glastonbury Abbey

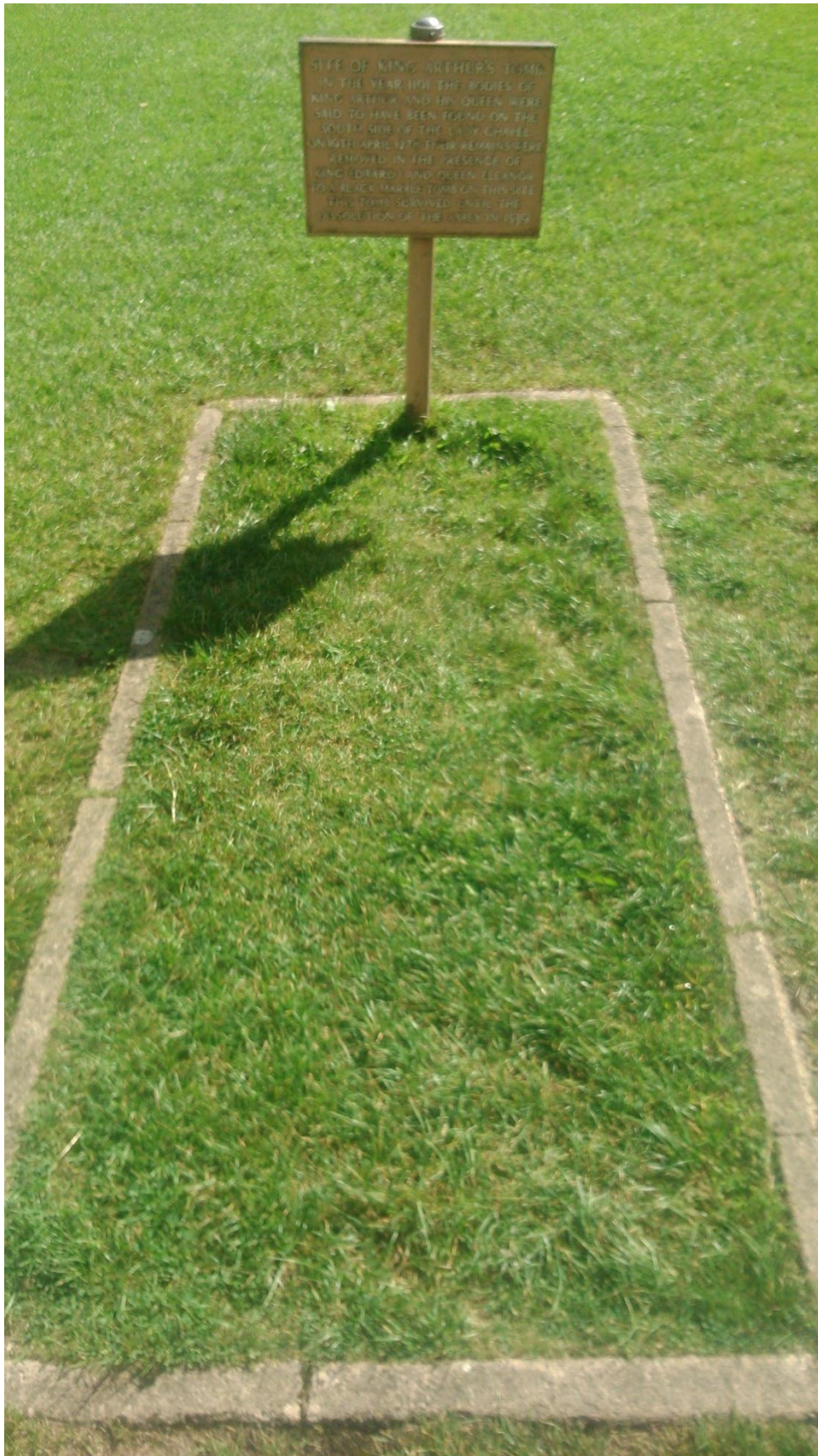*Figure 4: Glastonbury Abbey ruins, foto Kryštof Pleský*

Figure 5: King Arthur's Grave, foto Kryštof Pleský

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Resumé

Bakalářská práce se zabývá vývojem legendy o králi Artušovi v britské literatuře, a historickým podkladem této legendy. Jde o teoretickou práci, která shrnuje vývoj této legendy, a to především v několika primárních zdrojích které pro tento vývoj byly v britské literatuře nejdůležitější. Dále se zabývá historickým kontextem těchto změn, a to se zaměřením na rytířství a křesťanské motivy. Poté ukazuje místa, a předměty, spojované s touto legendou a jejich historický podklad, a zabývá se možnostmi Artušovy identity.

Anotace

Jméno a příjmení:	Kryštof Pleský
Katedra:	Ústav cizích jazyků
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Rok obhajoby:	2017

Název práce:	Král Artuš v britské historii a literatuře
Název v angličtině:	King Arthur in British history and literature
Anotace práce:	Předmětem této práce je popis vývoje legendy o králi Artušovi, jejího historického kontextu a jejího spojení s historií. První kapitola se zabývá vývojem legendy od prvních zdrojů po moderní literaturu. Druhá kapitola dodává historický kontext vývoje legendy. Třetí kapitola popisuje místa spojená s králem Artušem a teorie o jeho identitě.
Klíčová slova:	Král Artuš, Velká Británie, britská historie, britská literatura, legendy, rytířství, Tintagel, Glastonbury
Anotace v angličtině:	The aim of this thesis is describing the development of the legend of King Arthur, its historical context, and its historicity. The first chapter is devoted to the development of the legend from its first sources to modern literature. The second chapter provides historical context for this development. The third chapter describes places connected with Arthur and the theories about his identity.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	King Arthur, Great Britain, British history, British literature legends, chivalry, Tintagel, Glastonbury
Přílohy vázané v práci:	Fotografie hradu Tintagel a opatství Glastonbury
Rozsah práce:	40 s.
Jazyk práce:	Angličtina