Department of Humanities, Northumbria University

**Honours Dissertation**

# The Arthurian Reformation:

## The Changing Image of the Arthurian Legend During the English Reformation

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# Introduction: The Reformation of Arthur

The image of the Arthurian legend is a one that has seen constant revision. It has been applied in numerous ways throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period. Although Arthur is now identified as a mythical character, during the Middle Ages he was a very real historical figure. Arthur was the embodiment of chivalry and the model for good kingship. Plantagenet kings such as Henry II, Richard I and Edward I all utilised the legend throughout their reign.[1] Following the defeat of Richard III at Bosworth in 1485, a new dynasty ascended to power and radically altered England and the Arthurian legend forever.

As there is currently no literature which explore the changes to the Arthurian legend during the English Reformation period, primary source material will provide the foundation of this dissertation, but engagement with secondary material is also crucial to the structure. The historiography used is divided across three chapters and contains key debates. The dissertation includes an examination of the contemporary historiographical debate which emerged during the Reformation. It also incorporates interdisciplinary elements which are crucial to the thesis.

Chapter one will examine how Henry VII used Arthurian mythology to produce propaganda which supported his claim to the English throne. T. D. Kendrick claimed Arthurianism was employed to create a 'Tudor cult of British history'.[2] Henry used Arthurian genealogy and pageantry to establish his rule. He used the legend of Camelot and King Arthur's fabled messianic return as he attempted to establish his dynasty. The Arthurian influence was passed to Henry's second son, the future Henry VIII, who was exposed to the legend during his youth. This can be seen in Henry's participation in Arthurian competition such as jousting and during celebrations like the May Day rituals. Henry VIII projected his own image upon that of other illustrious historical figures such as

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[1] Christopher Michael Berard, *Arthurianism in Early Plantagenet England: From Henry II to Edward I* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019)
[2] T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 372.

King Arthur to highlight his political importance. Both Henry VIII and his father used Arthurian pageantry and relics in diplomatic relations, and to project Tudor imperialism. Kendrick's thesis was directly challenged by Sydney Anglo, who argued that the use of the Arthurian legend in early Tudor propaganda was overstated and Henry VIII had even less interest in the legend than his father.[3] But David Starkey challenged this interpretation of events directly by examining Henry's Arthurian influences.[4]

The challenge to early British historiography during the English Reformation significantly affected the image of the Arthurian legend. The best known and most influential work on the Arthurian legend was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, completed in c.1138.[5] Chapter two will examine how the legend was challenged by Polydore Vergil, who questioned Monmouth's methodology and validity. This criticism created a Protestant nationalist backlash by English historians, most prominently Antiquarian John Leland who defended England's national hero. Leland conducted vast research and supported his argument with a range of evidence to disprove Vergil's thesis and openly question his motives. F. J. Levy claimed the change in historical thought during the period was due to the religious changes of the Reformation.[6]

The academic duelling would change the Arthurian image and the legend would move away from the history books and instead help fuel a golden-age of literature. Chapter three will explore how without the restraint of reality, the Arthurian legend delved in to the fantasy genre where it was used to promote the merits of the Reformation and England's imperialism. Christopher Dean argued that the Arthurian legend held little interest to Elizabethan poets or their audiences.[7] However, the Arthurian historical works produced over the previous centuries provided dramatists with a wealth of material to produce popular plays, which showcased political issues of the time.

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[3] Sydney Anglo, *The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda* (Manchester: John Rylands, 1961)
[4] David Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', in James P. Carley, and Felicity Riddy (eds.), *Arthurian Literature XVI* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), pp. 171-196.
[5] F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1967), p. 66.
[6] Ibid, pp. 79-123.
[7] Christopher Dean, *Arthur of England* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 108.

Paul Whitfield White argued that playwrights were fascinated by early British history during the Elizabethan era and the Tudor association with the legend helped project an imperial image.[8] The Arthurian legend was also used to warn against dangerous militaristic imperialism advocated by court factions. Curtis Perry argued that not all Elizabethan Arthurian plays were imperialistic and used *The Misfortunes of Arthur* as an example of Anti-imperialist thinking.[9] The accession of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England created what Michael Drayton described as a, 'crisis of the heroic'. James was deemed too conservative by the poet of the 'heroic', who used King Arthur to attack the Jacobean court. However, James used the Arthurian legend to establish his lineage to Arthur. He also used Arthurian themes in masques to revive chivalry in the Jacobean court and to elevate his son and heir Henry to the height of popularity.

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[8] Paul Whitfield White, 'The Admiral's Men, Shakespeare, and the Lost Arthurian Plays of Elizabethan England', *Arthuriana*, Volume 24, Number 4, Winter 2014, pp. 33-47.
[9] Curtis Perry, 'British Empire on the Eve of the Armada: Revisiting "The Misfortunes of Arthur"', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (2011), pp. 508-537.

# Chapter 1: A New Arthurian Age

William Caxton's printing of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, had rejuvenated popular enthusiasm for the Arthurian legend in the late fifteenth century.[10] Henry VII sought to establish legitimacy through genealogy by claiming Arthurian lineage to claim the throne in his own right. Henry associated his first-born son and heir with the Arthurian legend to help establish his dynasty. By naming him Arthur and ensuring his birth was at the historical site of Camelot, Henry attempted to connect King Arthur's fabled messianic return to his own dynasty. The influence of the legend can be identified through Henry VIII's enjoyment of Arthurian competition like jousting and celebrations such as the May Day rituals. Henry's pursuit of international recognition from his fellow European monarchs would see the monarch projecting his own image upon that of other illustrious historical figures, connecting himself with their past glory. Henry would also use his prestigious ancestry as a means of highlighting England's political importance and projecting Henry's imperial ambitions through Arthurian pageantry.

## King Arthur's Messianic Return

Henry VII was determined to claim the throne in his own right, rather than through marriage or conquest. Henry sought alternative forms of legitimacy and many royal genealogies were produced claiming Henry's decent from King Arthur.[11] Henry traced his ancestry through his grandfather Owen Tudor who descended from an ancient family of Anglesey whose lineage it was claimed led back to the Trojan founders via Llewellin ap Griffith to Cadwaladr and Arthur.[12] Woodville supporters believed that rather than claiming such titles, he should simply find legitimacy through Edward IV's

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[10] Leanda De Lisle, *Tudor: The Family Story* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), p. 81.
[11] N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 235.
[12] Anglo, *Tudor Propaganda*, p. 19

daughter Elizabeth of York.[13] Henry married Elizabeth, but not before establishing himself as king in

his own-right.[14] Henry's anxiety was understandable with the instability of the English crown over

the previous four decades, where his four predecessors, Henry VI, Edward IV, Edward V and Richard

III all had their rule usurped.[15]

It was claimed that following King Arthur's mortal wounding in battle, his tomb was, 'no

where to be seen, whence ancient ballads fable that he is still to come.'[16] This prophesied return of

the mythical king captured the imagination of

Henry who on the impending birth of his first

child in 1486, moved his queen to Winchester.

Winchester was widely recognized as the

historical site of Camelot and the Great Hall

displayed a round table which was said to

have belonged to King Arthur.[17] Significantly

Merlin had described King Arthur as the



Figure 1. Petrus Carmelianus celebrating Prince Arthur's birth and the end of the civil wars illustrated Poem, c.1486.

product of the union of 'a red king and a white queen.'[18] The new prince was the embodiment of the

new dynasty and of Arthurianism. The minstrels sang, 'Joyed may we be, Oure prince to se, and

rosys thre': a red rose for Lancaster, a white rose for York, and the union rose of red and white.[19]

Pietro Carmeliano wrote a poem celebrating the return of civil order to England following Henry's

victory over the 'mors tyranni' Richard III, his marriage to Elizabeth which united the houses of

Lancaster and York, and the production of an heir who would secure peace and the Tudor dynasty;

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[13] Thomas Penn, *Winter King: The Dawn of Tudor England* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p. 21.

[14] Lisle, *Tudor: The Family Story*, p. 81.

[15] Alexander Grant, *Henry VII: The Importance of His Reign in English History* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

[16] William of Malmesbury, *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle* (Cambridge: George Bell and Sons, 1904), p. 315.

[17] Lisle, *Tudor: The Family Story*, pp. 81-82.

[18] Steven Gunn and Linda Monckton, 'Arthur Tudor, the Forgotten Prince', in Steven Gunn and Linda Monckton (eds.), *Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales: Life, Death & Commemoration* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 1.

[19] John Stevens, *Music & Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 364-365.

'A new age of peace is at hand and the great King Arthur, buried for so many centuries, now returns as prophesied.'[20]

Anglo dismissed the importance of Arthurianism to the Tudors beyond the birth of the prince. He argued that pageants for Arthur and Catherine's wedding focused upon his linage from John of Gaunt rather that the ancient British king.[21] However, Starkey counters this by suggesting there was little purpose in employing Arthurianism in an Anglo-Spanish wedding and rightfully focused on Gaunt who the couple had a shared ancestry.[22] However, the association did continue and at Coventry, in 1498, the twelve-year-old Prince Arthur was greeted by his fabled predecessor, who proclaimed him as chosen, 'to be egall ons to me in myght To sprede our name, Arthur, and actes to auaunce.'[23] In 1501, preparations were made for the arrival of Catherine of Aragon for her marriage to Prince Arthur, and a call went out to:

> All foreign knights and nobles who wish to take part in the forthcoming
> festivities… [for] the two hundred and thirty knights of the Round Table will
> again assemble on this occasion. In olden times King Arthur, on whose soul
> God have mercy, presided over the Round Table.[24]

Catherine entered London where she was greeted by a pageant series; 'Welcome, noble pryncesse, vnto Britayn ! The lond of Arthure, your spouse most bounteVous.'[25] A pageant presented a representation of St Catherine who announced:

>  that out of my lignage came Arthure, the wise, noble, and vayllant kyng,
> That in this Region was first of his name, And for his strength, honour and
> all thyng Mete for his astate… As Arthure your Spouse, than the second
> now Succedeth the first Arthure in dignite.[26]

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[20] Fig. 1.
Anglo, *Tudor Propaganda*, pp. 29-30.
[21] Anglo, *Tudor Propaganda*, p. 27.
[22] Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', p. 193.
[23] Anglo, *Tudor Propaganda*, p. 31.
[24] '294. One of the Secretaries of Henry VII. to his Nephew, a clergyman in Spain', in G. A. Bergenroth (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 1, 1485-1509* (London, 1862), pp. 253-265.
[25] Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (ed.), Chronicles of London (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 244.
[26] Ibid, pp. 234-236.

Such pageantry confirmed the continuing Arthurian interest.

## Are Thou Not Entertained?

The greatest models of the chivalric code were Arthur and his Knights. A learned prince could be a great prince, but a warrior prince, like Richard I, Charlemagne, Henry V and of course Arthur, would be remembered throughout the ages. Henry VIII dreamed of emulating these magnificent princes and their great feats of arms would drive the prince.[27] Arthurian romances were a favourite of the nobility of the period.[28] Records show that Richmond Palace held several French Arthurian romances such as *Estoire, Queste*, *Merlin* and an illuminated manuscript of the prose *Lancelot du Lac.* Such a manuscript alongside *Alliterative Morte Arthure* belonged to a collection known as the 'mirror for princes' genre.[29] Henry also owned at least three Arthurianism items, 'a table with the picture of Arthurus Rex Angliae,' a 'Cope of grene vellat with wheat Eares Crownes and Crosses called king Arthures Cope orphrased with nedell worke,' and 'Fouer peces [of arras] of thistorie of Arthur.'[30] The

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[27] David Starkey, *Crown and Country: The Kings and Queens of England* (London: Harper Press, 2011), p. 282.
[28] James P. Carley, *The Books of King Henry VIII and his Wives* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 36.
[29] Ibid, p. 36.
[30] Inventory no. 15377, in David Starkey, ed., *The Inventory of Henry VIII: The Transcript* (London: Harvey Miller, 1998), p. 384.
Inventory no. 8906, p. 174.
Inventory no. 13334, p. 326.

arras presented both the real and mythical Christian Worthies as the ideals of chivalry, renowned European emperors and most importantly equals.[31]



*Figure 2. Three Worthy Christians: Charlemagne, King Arthur, and Geoffrey of Bouillon,* c.1516.

Tournaments of the age were immersed in Arthurianism and had featured heavily in Arthurian literature.[32] During his father's reign, Henry watched on with great frustration as Knights contested a great May day tourney in 1507. The fifteen-year-old Henry reduced to a spectator despite him being a 'prynce moost comly stature' and 'courage'.[33] The Venetian ambassador Piero Pasqualigo, was impressed by Henry who he described as 'the handsomest potentate I ever set eyes on', well educated, skilled in multiple languages, music and performed great feats with lance and

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[31] Fig. 2.
Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur' p. 173.
[32] Alan Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* (London: George Phillip, 1987), pp. 20-21.
[33] 'The Justes of the Moneths of May and June', in W. Carew Hazlitt, ed., *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England, Vol. 2* (London: John Russell Smith, 1866)

bow, 'in every respect a most accomplished Prince.'[34] The tourneys were a display of military

prowess, but they also presented a powerful image of renaissance magnificence. Henry VII allowed

his son to compete in the 'hastiludia ad anulum' but this was little more than practicing the art and

fell short of the Prince's masculine ambitions.[35] When Henry VIII succeeded to the throne in 1509, he

soon entered his first public tilt.[36] Henry's power, aggression and prowess became known across

Europe as his celebrity grew. The Venetian ambassador's secretary, Nicolo Sagudino, reported that

during the May Day tournament in 1515, Henry 'looked like St. George on horseback… the King

exerted himself to the utmost, that a good report might be made of his prowess.'[37] Whilst the lists

were very much Arthurian, other celebrations also pointed to Arthurianism within Henry's court.



*Figure 3. Catalina de Aragon watching Henry VIII of England joust,* early 16th century *Westminster Tournament Roll.*

In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory placed great importance on May Day celebrations. One notable

account was when Guinevere warned her knights that, 'early upon the morrow she would ride on

maying into the woods and field', and that all must be well horsed and dressed in green.[38] While

there was a tradition of holding May Day jousts under Henry VII, there was no reference to rustic

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[34] 'Letter from Piero Pasqualigo to The Signory of Venice, April 30, 1515', in Giustinian, Sebastian, ed., *Four Years at the Court of Henry VIII: Selection of Despatches, Vol. 1*, Trans. Brown, Rawdon (London: Smith, Elder, and Co, 1854), pp.86-87.

[35] Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, p. 194.

[36] Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', p. 189.

[37] Fig. 3.
'Nic. Sagudino to Al. Foscari, 3 May 1515', in J. S. Brewer, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 2* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1864), p. 120.

[38] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur: Complete Edition* (London: Amazon, 2017), p. 571.

rituals.[39] On the first May Day of his reign, Henry VIII rose early and arranged for an expedition into the woods where all his knights and entourage should dress in white, with bows and arrows to 'fetche May or grene bows.'[40] Again, the following May Day, Henry, accompanied by 'many lusty Batchelers, on greate and well doyng hordes rode, to the wodde to fetch May', where the king and his company 'shyfled them selfes into cotes of grcne Satyn, garded with Crymosyn Veluet', and the other party lead by the Earl of Essex wore the mirror image of red trimmed with green. Upon their return the two parties competed in jousts where 'the king exceded in number of staues all other.'[41] This celebration imitated the rustic ceremonials of Malory's Arthur, such as bringing in the May blossom, the choice of green clothing. The choice of May Day itself suggests an Arthurian influence on the Henrician court.[42]


## Image Projection and Imperial Ambitions

Starkey claimed that King Arthur and Henry V were both figures Henry VIII wished to emulate. [43] *The First English Life*, written in 1513, chronicled the life of Henry V and claimed that upon one of the four horses that conveyed the king to his final resting place was the 'Armes imbrodered that the puisant kinge Arthure by his life vsed to beare, which were three Crownes of golde in a shielde of ashur.'[44] While this is an error and the arms actually represented St Edmund and the lordship over Ireland, the association between Henry V and Arthur was a natural one in Tudor England. Both Henry V and Arthur were presented with great qualities which Henry VIII would attempt to emulate.[45] Henry utilised image projection to associate himself with both Henry V and Arthur. In the case of

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[39] Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', p. 190.
[40] Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (London: J. Johnson et al, 1809), p. 515.
[41] Ibid, p. 520.
[42] Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', pp. 189-190.
[43] Ibid, p. 191.
[44] Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (ed.), *The First English Life of King Henry the Fifth*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), p. 185.
[45] Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', p. 191.

Henry V, this can be seen in *The Black Book of the Garter*, where Henry VIII used his own image as a

model for Henry V. *The Black Book of the*

*Garter* was commissioned by Henry VIII in

1534, as an account of the orders foundation,

ceremonies and details of elected members.

The book was illuminated with the orders

founder Edward III and depicts every

successive English monarch up to and

including Henry VIII.[46] However, the miniature

of Henry V who was described by

contemporaries as 'lean, angular and clean-

shaven', appears to be broad, with a ruddy



Figure 4. *Henry V,* The Black Book of the Garter, 1534.

beard, much like Henry VIII.[47] Henry would also use a similar form of image projection to connect

himself to King Arthur.

[46] Ibid, p. 191.
[47] Fig. 4.

The Winchester Round Table was crafted in c.1275 for Edward I who was a keen Arthurian.[48] It is understood the table was used in numerous Round Table tournaments by Edward. However, in



Figure 5. *The Winchester Round Table,* c.1275, Re-painted c.1516, The Great Hall, Winchester.

c.1516 Henry VIII had the table painted giving it a familiar look. Painted in Tudor livery colours of green and white, in the centre is the Union Rose, replacing the usually depicted Grail, with an image of King Arthur ascending from it. Again, like the Black Book, the image of this revered monarch appears to have Henry's features. Henry symbolically also emerged from the union of the rose much like the image.[49] Both the table and the Black Book contain many other similarities. Both images present Henry holding a sword which in royal ceremonies represent both justice and mercy, but also universal symbols of strength, power, protection and knighthood. He is also holding a Globus Cruciger, the Christian symbol of worldly authority. [50] Henry as Arthur's true successor sought Merlin's prophecy that Arthur's descendants would be 'masters of the whole world'.[51]

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[48] Roger Sherman Loomis, Edward I, Arthurian Enthusiast, *Speculum*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1953), p. 114.
Martin Biddle, 'The Making of the Round Table' In Martin Biddle (ed.), *King Arthur's Round Table* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), p. 341.
[49] Fig. 5. *The Winchester Round Table*, c.1275, Re-painted c.1516.
[50] Leopold G. Wickham Legg, *English Coronation Records* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1901), p. xxv.
[51] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, Trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. 20.

Jon Whitman argued that the sixteenth century design gave an imperial agenda contemporary form.[52] Both Arthur and Henry V are depicted wearing an imperial crown. Henry had asserted to Thomas More that he received a 'Crown Imperial' from the papacy.[53] The concept of an 'imperial crown' during this period was complex and had little to do with dominion over distant lands. The definition had undergone a change under the new wave of humanist writers who associated



Figure 6. *Round Table and Holy Grail,* c.1475, Évrard d'Espinques, Paris, c. 1475.

*imperium* with independent authority. Henry appropriated the title through his association with Arthur, who it was claimed, descended from Constantine who had united British rule with Roman imperialism. The positioning of the king on the table is also interesting. Arthurian art and literature places the divine 'Siege Perilous' centrally, with the morally flawed Arthur often relegated to the side.[54] However, with the Winchester table there has been a concerted effort to re-centre the monarch to the position of great divinity, power and importance. Henry would use the newly painted table to highlight his imperial ambitions during a visit from Emperor Charles V.

## A Most Welcome Guest

In the 1520s, Henry was placed in an influential position as the rivalry between Francis I and the Emperor Charles V exacerbated. The politics of Europe were turbulent during Henry's reign and he was often courted by European powers.[55] Henry and Francis met in June 1520, for more than two weeks of diplomacy, celebrations and tournaments just outside of Calais, 'where stood the pavilion

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[52] Jon Whitman, 'National Icon: The Winchester Round Table and the Revelation of Authority', Arthuriana, Volume 18, Number 4, Winter 2008, pp. 35-36.
[53] Richard Koebner, 'The Imperial Crown of this Realm', *Historical Research 26,* (1953), pp. 3-33.
[54] Fig. 6. *Round Table and Holy Grail,* Évrard d'Espinques, Paris, c.1475.
[55] Michael A. R. Graves, *Henry VIII: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson, 2003), p. 19.

in which they were to confer, very rich and covered with cloth of gold.' The event which became

known as *The Field of the Cloth of Gold* was seen as an attempt to overcome past enmities and forge

a new and lasting friendship.[56] Henry and Francis 'embraced each other two or three times on

horseback… then dismounting embraced again.'[57] For Henry, it was an opportunity to project an

image of power, wealth, honour and glory, and at the centre of this projection was King Arthur.

Upon entry to the great banqueting hall, dignitaries were received by three statues. The central

figure carried the inscription, 'I am the famous King Arthur, come to behold you, valorous Princes; be

welcome.' Below the statue was a gilt shield with two hands, holding drawn swords, inscribed with

the words, 'Cui adhœreo prœest'- 'Whoever's side I take wins.'[58] This was a powerful symbol of

Britain's past glories and a strongly issued statement to anyone who questioned Henry's current
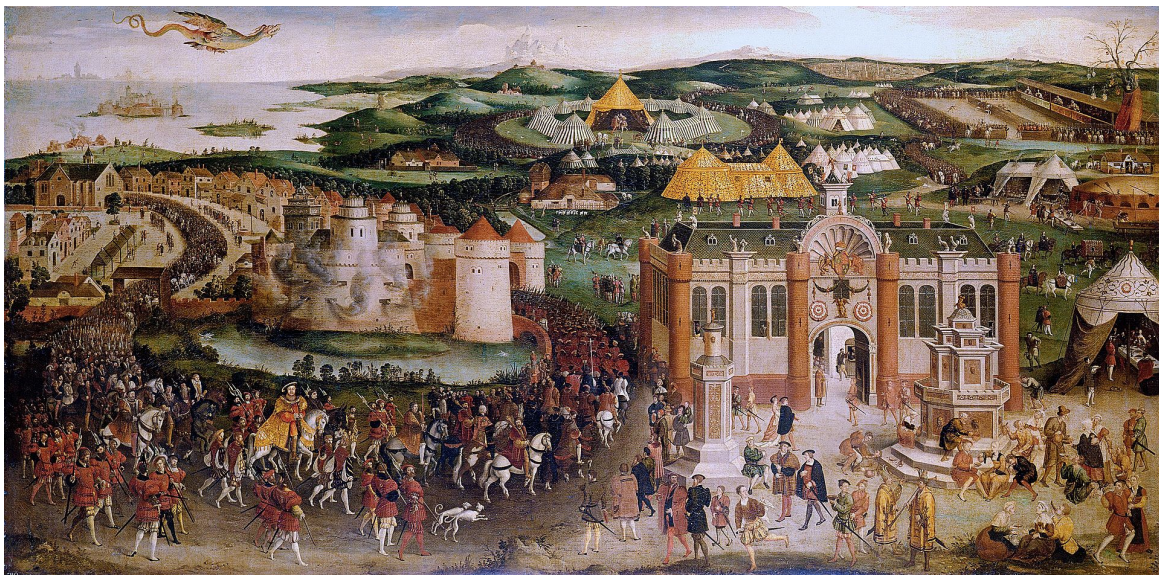
influence in Europe.


*Figure 7. The Field of the Cloth of Gold, c.1545, The Royal Collection at Hampton Court.*

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[56] Fig. 7.
'869. The Field of the Cloth of Gold', J. S. Brewer (ed.), in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 3, 1519-1523* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), pp. 299-319.
[57] Ibid, pp. 299-319.
[58] 'An Account of the Conferences held by King Henry VIII. with the Emperor Charles V. and King Francis I', in Rawdon Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 3* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1869), pp. 14-34.

Rebellion broke out in Charles' Spanish dominions and France seized the opportunity to strike at Italy. The rivalry of Europe's two greatest powers placed Henry in a position of influence, as both courted England for support. Henry revelled in the power and influence the situation granted him and he took it as an opportunity to again push his own merits to the forefront of European politics. Henry believed that he was at the very least the equal of Francis and Charles and had the lineage to prove it.[59] An Anglo-Imperial agreement was signed in July 1520, forbidding either from forming an alliance with France.[60] A subsequent visit by Charles to England provided an opportunity for Henry to present a glorious lasting image. Lavish preparations were made, that were said to be so extravagant that the Emperor wrote anxiously that such expense was not required and may be better used elsewhere.[61]

The two princes entered London in June 1522 and were welcomed by a nine-pageant series devised to flatter Charles, but more importantly to project Henry as an imperial monarch and equal. The pageants were designed to celebrate the two monarchs and their dominions. Charles wrote that he and Henry, 'entered London together, and met with a magnificent reception from a great company of knights and gentlemen, with solemn and costly pageants, to the great joy of all the people.'[62] One pageant presented King Arthur wearing an imperial crown, sat at a round table with ten 'kynges, Dukes and erles all bearyng Targettes of their Tines.'[63] As the two princes approached Arthur, he proclaimed that 'Rome had Cato; Carthage had Hannibal; the Jews had David; the Greeks had Alexander: so, the Britain's had Arthur.'[64] As a Charlemagne pageant celebrated Charles's hereditary claim to the tile of Emperor, the King Arthur pageant presented the same right to Henry.

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[59] 'Charles V', in J. S. Brewer ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 3* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), p. 612.
[60] '1508. Treaty Between Henry VIII. and Charles V', J. S. Brewer (ed.), in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 3, 1519-1523* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), pp. 620-621.
[61] Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 181.
[62] 'Charles V. to the Secrerary', in J. S. Brewer ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 3* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), p. 977.
[63] Hall's Chronicle, p. 639.
[64] Ibid, p. 639.

Charles's visit concluded with a visit to Winchester, where Henry continued his own elevation by showing the Round Table with its new imperial artwork.[65]

Henry had previously employed the Winchester site in diplomacy during his father's reign. Charles's father, Philip I of Castile was driven off course in poor weather and landed off the Dorset coast.[66] While Philip was received as an honoured guest by Henry VII, he was also aware of his status as a captive.[67] He was received at Winchester where he was gifted luxuries and fine wines. The choice of Winchester, which resonated chivalric romanticism was deliberate. Prince Henry drew attention to Arthur's great round table that adorned the wall of the great hall, which spoke of the chivalric traditions of the realm.[68] Philip was invested into the Order of the Garter, which it was claimed, 'that the Garter is the badge and first order of King Arthur.'[69] A Burgundian attendant was overwhelmed by the spectacle, although another thought it was 'excessive' and belonged in the distant past.[70] Yet this was precisely the tone of ancient grandeur Henry would have wanted to convey. A mutual defence treaty was signed and with the successful negotiations agreed, Henry VII, Phillip and the young prince retired to a 'little chamber' in Philip's apartment to dine. Henry hailed the treaty as the latest of England's glorious deeds which stretch back to King Arthur, whose table Henry reminded Philip, resided at Winchester. Henry proclaimed that his achievements and those of the young prince would be recorded alongside those on the table.[71]

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[65] Ibid, p. 641.

[66] Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors* (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, c.1874), p. 6.

[67] Penn, *Winter King*, p. 215.

[68] Wriothesley, *Chronicle*, pp. 215-216.

[69] '790. News from London, Venice: 1499', in Rawdon Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 1, 1202-1509* (London, 1864), pp. 276-286.

[70] M. Gachard, *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas* (Bruxelles: F. Hayez, 1876), p. 424.

[71] Penn, *Winter King*, pp. 220-221.

## A New Camelot

Henry VII used the Arthurian legend to establish legitimacy for his crown and dynasty. He adopted the myth to establish his hereditary right to the throne. Henry VII embraced the Arthurian legend to associate his son and heir Arthur with the ancient British king's fabled messianic return. He employed pageantry and spectacle to further enhance this image. Anglo's assertion that Henry VIII had little interest in the Arthurian legend has been contested. His exposure to Arthurianism during his youth would influence many of his leisure pursuits. Henry wished to emulate Arthur as seen in the image projection on the Winchester Round Table. Both father and son would turn to their mythical ancestor to promote their imperial agenda and to help establish their dynasty as the equal of any prince of Europe. Which would become crucial as religion began to divide Europe and challenge the Arthurian legend.

# Chapter 2: The Changing Tide

The changes in historiography during the English Reformation significantly affected the image of the Arthurian legend. The English chronicle tradition had moved from the monastic scriptorium to the nobility and the urban burghers. The popularity of such works had soared and helped to sustain the tradition for many more years to come.[72] The radical form of the Reformation acts required suitable precedent, so reformers appealed to England's historical past. This was challenged by a new breed of humanist historians. To examine this, it is important to explore what would come to be known as the 'Battle of the Books'. Vergil's criticism of early British history created a Protestant nationalist backlash. The Italian's logical approach to history challenged the validity of the Arthurian legend. Vergil openly questioned Monmouth's methods and motives. In response English historians, most prominently Leland stepped in to defend the national icon. He viewed the criticism as an attack by a foreigner on the very foundation of English identity. Leland sought to use Arthur to enhance England's national prestige and enhance his king's majesty.

## Revising the Past

In the wake of the Reformation, Italian humanists attempted to remove the layers of mythology accumulated during the Dark Ages.[73] Protestant reformers did not want the Reformed English Church to be a new entity but rather a continuation of the early English church, before the corruption of the papacy. Their preference was for Christianity to have been brought to the isles by Joseph of Arimathea, attacked by Saxons and perverted by the papist Augustine.[74] Archbishop Thomas Cranmer used the Arthurian legend in a collection of manuscripts that were published in

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[72] Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 165.
[73] Ibid, p. 166.
[74] Levy, *Historical Thought*, p. 101.

English in order to gain support for religious change. The *Collectanea Satis Copiosa* was a collection

of historical extracts that embodied Henry's disenchantment with popish authority following the

Blackfriars divorce trial and sought to prove his supremacy in religious matters. Much of the

evidence collected by Cranmer was derived from Monmouth's history and significantly from Arthur.

[75] The opening sentence of the Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533), stated, 'where by divers sundry old

authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England

is an empire.'[76] One of the most fundamental ideas underlying the English Reformation was the

concept of anachronism. This changed historians' approach, and rather than seeking similarities they

instead sought the unique. This also meant an evaluation of the previously recorded history of

England was required. The standards of accuracy and the techniques employed in ordering historical

materials were modernised. The concept was adopted by reformers to allow them to identify the

apostolic church as very much separate from the later 'corruption' of the church.[77] However, the

new standards of accuracy and methodology created new problems for Briton's national hero, who

would once again defend the realm from foreign invaders.


## The Most Shamefullye Romishe lyes?

Vergil arrived in England during 1502, as a papal tax collector with an already impressive historical

body of work. By c.1506 he embarked on a journey to write the history of England with the support

of Henry VII.[78] Vergil's negative portrayal of Richard III and his praise for Henry VII won him favour

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[75] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 54-55.
[76] '1533 Act in Restraint of Appeals (24 Henr. VIII, c. 12)' in J. R. Tanner (ed.), *Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485-1603 with an historical commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 41.
[77] Levy, *Historical Thought*, pp. x, 7-8, 81.
[78] C. S. L. Davies, 'Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge under Henry VII and Early Henry VIII*.' *Historical Research 85*, no. 228 (2012), p. 239.

with Tudor supporters.[79] He wrote his history of England in English and for Englishmen highlighting the antiquity of Christianity on the isles, which was a matter of national pride.[80]

However, Vergil's *Anglica Historia* challenged Arthurianism during a period where the ruling Tudor regime were personally invested in the legend.[81] He was convinced Monmouth's historical accounts of early Britain were nothing more than works of fiction.[82] Vergil argued that Monmouth had, 'recited manie things of this King Arthure, taking unto him bothe the coloure of Latin speeche and the honest pretext of an Historic.'[83] Arthur was reduced to only a short paragraph in his substantial history and accepted only that Arthur ruled after Uther. Vergil attacked the notion of Glastonbury as being the final resting place for Arthur, 'whearas in the dayse of Arthure this abbaye was not builded.'[84] While he never directly denied Monmouth's history, his statements of doubt did make it clear where he stood.[85] Despite Vergil's open criticism of the Arthurian legend, there was no known response from Henry VIII.[86] However, the book did remain unpublished for twenty years and Vergil was imprisoned in the Tower for a number of months.[87]

Many English historians saw Vergil's opposition to Arthurianism as an attack on traditional British lore, which struck at the very foundation of English independence, and its national and racial identity.[88] May McKisack argued that the separation from Rome galvanised national self-awareness and created a desire to demonstrate the foundation of Christianity in England as distinctly different from the Roman 'corruption'.[89] Monmouth's Arthur symbolised national prestige and legitimacy

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[79] David A. Summers, 'Re-fashioning Arthur in the Tudor Era', *Exemplaria 9*, no. 2 (1997), p. 372.
[80] Levy, *Historical Thought*, p. 135.
[81] Summers, 'Re-fashioning Arthur', p. 372.
[82] James P. Carley, 'Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books', *Interpretations* Vol. 15, No. 2, (1984), p. 86.
[83] Henry Ellis (ed.), *Polydore Vergil's English History Vol. I: Comprising the Period Prior to the Norman Conquest* (London: John Boyer Nichols and Son, 1846), p. 29.
[84] Ibid, p. 122.
[85] Levy, *Historical Thought*, p. 172.
[86] Anglo, *Tudor Propaganda*, p. 35.
[87] Koebner, 'The Imperial Crown', p. 36.
[88] Summers, 'Re-fashioning Arthur', p. 372.
[89] May McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. vii.

which was as ancient as Rome itself; therefore England too had its place in the classical world.[90] New

sources of information were sought, and chronicles began to be altered. The amount of evidence

available to historians was much higher and the selection of material became more concise.[91] Vergil

was seen as lacking in reason by attacking the reputation of Monmouth's history, a staple of

historical knowledge of the time.[92]


## The Defender of the Truth?

Leland recognised the importance of early British legends like Arthur to enhance national prestige.[93]

He was insulted by Vergil's attack and in his 1536, the *Codrus sive Laus et Defensio Gallofridi Arturii*

*contra Polydorum Vergilium*, Leland formed a patriotic defence of Arthurianism and proclaimed

Vergil's criticism on Monmouth, as an attack on the foundation of the British icon.[94] Leland crafted a

coherent account of Arthur's reign using evidence he collected. He argued that he could, 'prove that

Arthur existed with as certain, as clear, as true, not to mention as many, arguments as Codrus

(Vergil) can prove Caesar to have existed.'[95] It was important for Leland to produce histories that

stood up to rigorous debate.[96] Leland dedicated much of his life to the study of ancient

manuscripts.[97] He directly challenged Vergil's denial of Monmouth's validity in *Assertio.* Leland

describes Vergil as, 'ignorant of antiquitie, which thinke themselues to haue knowledge.'[98] Rather

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[90] Summers, 'Re-fashioning Arthur', p. 378.
[91] Levy, *Historical Thought*, pp. x-xi.
[92] Ellis, *Polydore Vergil's English History Vol. I*, pp. ix-x.
[93] Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 66.
[94] Higham, *Myth-making and History*, p. 237.
[95] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 87.
[96] Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, p. 66.
[97] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 87.
[98] John Leland, *A learned and true assertion of the original, life, actes, and death of the most noble, valiant, and renoumed Prince Arthure, King of great Brittaine…* (London: R. Wolfe, 1544), p. 1.

than a biography of Arthur, *Assertio* was an argument for his existence and his British identity.[99] It was also, by definition, a challenge to negation, in this case the opponent was Vergil.[100]

The main criticism aimed at the validity of the Arthur was his exclusion by Bede and Gildas in their reference to the Battle of Mt. Badon.[101] Bede's relevance was dependent on the assertion that Augustine brought Christianity to England. However, this would give a papal origin to Christianity and counter the reformers argument of an early English church free from papal 'corruption'.[102] The fact that the nearest surviving contemporary witness to the Arthurian period was Gildas and he never mentioned Arthur by name, caused serious problems for the validity of the legend. Vergil used this ambiguity to challenge the plausibility of Arthur in his 1525 edition of *De excidio Britanniae*.[103] John Rastell's 1529 chronicle, *The Pastyme of People,* argued that contemporaries such as Bede and Gildas did not include Arthur in their chronicles. However, he chose not to exclude the mythical king in his history, but instead chose to refer to Arthurian references with the prefix of 'as Galfridus wrytyth,' suggesting his wish to avoid ownership.[104] Rastell was very much on the fence in his public acceptance of the Arthurian legend and instead concluded that it would be prudent to 'let euery man be at his lyberte to beleue ther in what he lyste.'[105] To counter this, Leland challenged the manuscript tradition of Gildas. He argued the surviving texts were fragmented and reordered abroad so that, 'if he were now againe restored to life, the farther would scarce knowe his chylde.'[106] Other arguments put forward were that many of Gildas' works were lost, therefore he may have mentioned Arthur. There was also that Gildas was born the year after Arthur's alleged death and

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[99] Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, p. 72.
[100] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 90.
[101] Ibid, p. 88.
[102] Levy, *Historical Thought*, pp. 110-111.
[103] Ellis, *Polydore Vergil's English History Vol. I*, p. 27.
[104] John Rastell, *The Pastime of People* (London: Harding and Wright, 1811), p. 106.
[105] Ibid, p. 107.
[106] Leland, *Assertio,* p. 33.

lived a relatively secluded life. If Arthur was dismissed solely on the grounds of Gildas, by the same

criterion many other British ancestors would also be disregarded.[107]

Leland relied on active scholarship and the analysis of sources. He examined numerous types

of evidence; textual, archaeological and oral, building his case much like a modern historian.[108]

Leland travelled across Britain examining significant Arthurian remains. He visited Wales and

explored Welsh records and places associated with Arthur such as Caerleon. He highlighted the

origin of place names like *Cather* or *Cair-Arthur*. In the South of England, Dover castle provided him

with Arthurian relics and written evidence in their chronicles. Westminster held a wax seal with the

inscription 'PATRICIVS ARTRVS BRITANNIAE GALLIAE GERMANIAE DACIAE IMPERATOR.'[109] Although

Rastell was clear in his objection to the validity of this seal.[110] It was Glastonbury that held the

largest collection of significant Arthurian material.[111] Vergil challenged the foundation date of

Glastonbury Abbey where it was claimed Arthur was laid to rest. Leland responded to these

allegations by presenting two pieces of evidence supporting the Arthurian cause. First from the

Charter of St. Patrick which Leland believed to be authentic, which described the evangelisation of

Avalon by Phaganus and Deruvianus. The second was a collaborating charter by Henry II to

benefactions by King Arthur to the monks at Glastonbury.[112] The two pieces of evidence together

resolved the dispute in Leland's favour.[113] Leland's history of Arthur was 'legitimised' by the English

landscape; the burial site of the giant he defeated could still be seen as the mountain of

Cardiganshire, or the bones and harneys found at Dunmere, the site of his final battle.[114] Leland

identified the hill at South Cadbury as the site of Camelot, dismissing the previous site at

Winchester. Both the ruins, old coins and the local place names such as Queen's Camel, Leland

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[107] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 91.
[108] Ibid, p. 88.
[109] Leland, *Leland, Assertio,* pp. 12-13.
[110] Ibid, p. 107.
[111] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 87.
[112] Leland, *Leland, Assertio,* pp. 11-12.
[113] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 91.
[114] Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543 Parts I to III* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), p. 316.

argued provided clues to the new site. As James Carley argued, 'Vergil is silenced not by abuse but by the weight of greater learning.'[115] The weight of evidence collected convinced many of Vergil's 'foolishness'.[116]


## For the Glory of an Imperial England

Leland admitted in *Syllabus, et interpretatio antiquarum dictionum*, that history is made by those who write it. Leland sought to use his histories to promote a programme of national glorification. But he also identified the role historians had in establishing and conserving the kingdoms fame and identity.[117] He declared, 'the Romans were as famous to future generations as either the eloquence or favourable disposition of writers wanted to make them.'[118] Unlike the Tudors, Leland was not concerned about the dynastic status of Arthur. For him, Arthur was an internationally recognisable figure, 'the chiefest ornament of Brittayne', that enriched England's national culture.[119] England's independence from Rome created the need to break from the recent past and to find a historical foundation to justify the move.[120] James Simpson argued that Leland, 'writes without any characteristically Protestant flavour at all.'[121] However, Leland wrote *Antiphilarcia*, which he used antiquarian knowledge to establish precedence for the English Church.[122] He also rallied against, 'the usurpid autorite of the Bishop of Rome and his complices,' in a 1544 letter to Henry VIII.[123] Leland claimed, 'the Romanes made almost all the whole worlde bond slaues.'[124] Leland's agenda was to

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[115] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 91.
[116] Ibid, p. 87.
[117] Shrank, *Writing the Nation,* pp. 70-71.
[118] John Leland, *Genethliacon illustrissimi Eäduerdi Principis Cambriae* (London: Reynerum Vuolfium, 1543), un.
[119] Leland, *Leland, Assertio,* p. 1.
[120] Shrank, *Writing the Nation,* p. 69.
[121] James Simpson, 'Ageism: Leland, Bale and the Laborious Start of English Literary History, 1350–1550', *New Medieval Literatures*, 1 (1997), pp. 225-226.
[122] Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, p. 66.
[123] John Leland, 'The Laboriouse Journey and Serche of Johan Leylande for Englandes Antiquitees', Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543 Parts I to III* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), p. xxxix.
[124] Leland, *Leland, Assertio,* p. 35.

dignify England domestically and on the continent. He promised Henry VIII that, 'that this yowr reaulme shaul so welle be known… that the renoume ther of shaul gyve place to the glory of no other region.'[125]

Leland sought to show England's worth by recovering 'lost' history and restoring the isles glorious past, as 'renoumed Britaine… [will] reflorish through the world'.[126] Leland's choice to publish in Latin was a result of his academic education but more importantly to attract a continental audience.[127] *Assertio* identified Arthur as a national Christian hero who *'droue out of Brittaine both Saxons and Pictes. He mightely subdued, the Scottes, Irish/men, and Orcades vnto his kingdome*.'[128] John Bale cast Henry VIII in the same role as he had also banished the, 'Idolatrye & fowle sodomye couetousnes. Ambycyō, false doctryne & hypocresye,' and claimed international recognition for his island nation.[129] Leland proclaimed the 'English church began to despise of Roman wages', and Henry VIII, 'the great-spirited king, threw off the insupportable yoke with the public consent of his people,' and 'long-sought-for liberty returned.'[130] The Duke of Norfolk warned the French ambassador that, 'the Popes in former times had tried to usurp authority, and that the people would not suffer it'; referring to Emperor Lucius's demand for tribute. He continued to claim that as Arthur had conquered Rome, the king 'had a right of empire in his kingdom and recognised no superior.'[131] In 1533, the Flemish News reported that they had great pity for Henry's misstep, 'considering his great nobleness and fame, which is greater than that of any prince since king Arthur.'[132]

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[125] Leland, '*Laboriouse Journey*', pp. xlii-xliii.
[126] Ibid, p. xxxviii.
[127] Shrank, *Writing the Nation,* p. 66.
[128] Leland, *Assertio,* p. 19.
[129] John Bale, *A comedy concernynge thre lawes, of nature Moses, & Christ, corrupted by the sodomytes. Pharysees and Papystes*, [Play] (Wesel: Nicolaum Bamburgensem, 1538), NPN.
[130] Shrank, *Writing the Nation,* p. 92.
[131] 'Chapuys to Charles V', In James Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, Vol. V* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1882), pp. 20-21.
[132] 'Flemish News', in James Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, Vol. VI* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1882), p. 515.

Leland was open to the opinion that some of the Arthurian legend was not factual. He lamented, the romances were corrupt, exaggerated and sometimes just false. However, he argued such works should not condemn the legend. Leland acknowledged the influence of previous writers who introduced fables to the story, much like in the telling of Alexander.[133] Leland was well versed in Arthurianism and was willing to pass judgment on conflicting accounts. He was suspicious of the suggestion of a second wife and decided that the myth of Guinevere's burial at Glastonbury should be given less credence than Arthur's tomb.[134]

## Debate and Conquer

The 'Battle of the Books' created a legacy for historians. While in the short-term Vergil's influence was not as apparent as it would become. His logical approach became an invaluable tool in analysing historical sources. Notwithstanding Leland's silencing of Vergil, he was not completely critical of the Italian. He acknowledged Vergil's intelligence and style was at the very least worthy of admiration.[135] The same could not be said of Leland's intellectual successors who were outraged at Vergil's insult to their British past. John Bale accused the Roman Vergil of speaking ill of Britain's past at the behest of malicious clergy.[136] John Foxe accused Vergil of burning manuscripts or shipped them to Italy if they were detrimental to his argument.[137] Vergil also had the advantage of approaching English history as an outsider. He could evaluate source material without the influence of the traditional grandeur of British history, and although some questioned the influence of his heritage and faith, the same could be said of his critics.[138]

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[133] Leland, *Assertio,* pp. iii-iv.
[134] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 90.
[135] Leland, *Assertio*, p. 1.
[136] J. Payne Collier (ed.), *King Johan: A Play in Two Parts by John Bale* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1838), p. 84.
[137] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 92.
[138] Levy, *Historical Thought*, pp. 169, 172.

Leland was happy to apply logic to his counter arguments, but it was in producing documental and archaeological evidence that favoured the Arthurian position. It was this willingness to go beyond logic and produce factual evidence that convinced many of his contemporaries. However, Leland failed to believe that people of the twelfth century would forge evidence and many of his source would now be viewed as suspect.[139] Leland's methodology is very similar to today's historians. While modern conclusions are primarily closer to Vergil, in terms of historical methodology, Leland's approach can claim a flawed victory.[140]

The Reformation took a more conservative turn as Henry VIII neared the end of his life. Contemporary historian John Bale's work was conducted in exile as he fled from Henry VIII's theological conservatism. But once Edward VI ascended the throne under the guidance of his liberal uncle Edward Seymour, Bale returned home, and his work became popularised.[141] Following the accession of Mary I, printing was forbidden without the Queen's express written license and then she prohibited and ordered the burning of any work by protestants, restricting Arthurian works.[142] Vergil's criticism of early British history strengthened the Arthurian legend as it entered the Elizabethan period. It was the ferment defence of Arthurianism which helped shape the future of the Arthurian legend regardless of its true historicity.[143] For it was the generation that followed Leland, which produced a golden-age of English literature.

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[139] Ibid, pp. 67, 131.
[140] Carley, 'Vergil and Leland on King Arthur', p. 91.
[141] Levy, *Historical Thought*, p. 97.
[142] Robert Tittler, *The Reign of Mary I* (London: Longman,1983), p. 41.
[143] Summers, 'Re-fashioning Arthur', pp. 372-373.

# Chapter 3: Reconstructed

Historians became less reliant on Monmouth's history and often only used it to fill gaps within the historiography. Some historians still utilised the legend and refused to dismiss its validity. Popularised works such as William Warner's- *Albion's England* (1586) was published with a Galfridian framework which was notoriously inaccurate.[144] A poem is embedded in the middle of Robert Chester's 1601, *Love's Martyr* called *Birth, Life and Death of honourable Arthur, King of Brittaine*, condemned contemporary writers who were critical of the validity of the legend. While praising, 'our late Historiographers of England, who no doubt haue taken great paines in the searching foorth of the truth of that fist Christian worthie.'[145] Poets and playwrights were happy to borrow from Monmouth. While many plays of the period have been lost to time, the ones that have survived show the dramatists did not take the original chronicles seriously. The fact that most Elizabethan's did not accept plays like Monmouth's *Macbeth* or *King Lear* as real history shows a change in the historical sophistication of the sixteenth century.[146]

Why was Arthur a popular figure with playwrights and poets in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century? Arthur was the only British king to find a place in the illustrious Nine Worthies. He was believed by many to be an ancestor of Elizabeth I and later James I, despite Arthur being depicted as having no heirs. It was also due to the popular consumption of Arthurian romances, chapbooks, songs, and ballads, many of which had derived from Malory's work. Arthur appealed the English Protestants who associated him with an early form of English Christianity free from the tyranny of the papacy. A tyranny that was very much present for Elizabethans in the age of the

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[144] Levy, *Historical Thought*, pp. 219-220.
William Warner, *Albions England* (London: Edm. Bollifant, 1602)
[145] Alexander Balloch Grosart (ed.), *Robert Chester's Loves Martyr, or, Rosalins Complaint, 1601* (London: N. Trübner, 1878), p. 42.
[146] Levy, *Historical Thought*, p. 230.

Spanish Armada. Therefore, the image of Arthur appealed to popular imagination and maintained a political influence during this period.[147]

Edmund Spenser sought to restore the fantasy elements removed from the Arthurian legend during the historiographical debate. This imperialistic text reflected not only Elizabeth's association with her mythical forefather but also the merits of the Reformation. Shakespeare utilised the legend indirectly within some of his most popular plays and other companies would perform Arthurian plays to showcase political issues and warn of foreign intervention in religious affairs. Drayton identified what would be termed, a 'crisis of the heroic' within the Jacobean court. Drayton, a historical poet of the 'heroic' was dismayed at James I's reversal of the war like posturing of Elizabeth. He used a patriotic and heroic Arthur to attack the idle Jacobean court. To counter such accusations, James appropriated the Arthurian legend for his own means. He, like his Tudor forbearers linked his lineage to Arthur and used Arthurianism in masques to revive the 'heroic' image of the court.

## The Magical Isles

Dean argued that the genealogical link between Arthur and the Tudor dynasty required the 'unbelievable elements' of the legend to be removed. The subject matter of which had the most poetic appeal to writers and audiences. He claimed, 'Stripped of his mysterious origins, of his fellowship of knights, and of his fatally attractive queen, Arthur emerged from the heated controversies of the historians lacking much of his poetic appeal and significance.'[148] However, Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1590) sought to connect Elizabeth to the Arthurian revival and reclaim the spectacular.[149] Spenser's fairy world was populated by numerous national icons, including Arthur as the quintessential British hero, the Redcrosse knight (St George), and Britomart, virgin knight of

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[147] White, 'The Admiral's Men', pp. 34-35.
[148] Dean, *Arthur of England*, p. 108.
[149] Higham, *Myth-making and History,* p. 237.

chastity who embodied English virtue like the queen herself. As these heroes crossed fairyland in search for the court of the Faerie Queen, the poem presents a parallel between the mystical land and England.[150] Spenser employed Britain's ancient past to present an allegorical romance in his own era.[151] The journey of Redcrosse reflects Spenser's interpretation of the English Reformation.

England in the guise of Redcrosse, becomes separated from - the 'true' church, personified by Una, and is enticed by the false temptation of Duessa representing the Catholic Church. Arthur then proceeded to guid Redcrosse to reconcile with Una, saving him from fatal anguish and brings him to the house of Holiness.[152] Spenser helped develop



Figure 8. Prince Arthur, the Redcrosse Knight, and Una, William Kent, 1751, Harvard University.

an image of 'Great Britain' in the Faerie Queene long before its eventual establishment in 1707. Arthur proclaimed, 'how much to her [Britain] we owe, that all vs gaue, That gaue vnto vs all, what euer good we haue.'[153] Spenser conceptualised England as a nation whose experience of the Reformation had altered its identity.[154] Patrick Collinson proposed, 'the Protestant Reformation was thought to have made a great difference to national self-esteem, not least by those who were

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[150] Edmund Spenser, 'Book I', in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Faerie Qveene* (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), pp. 29-156.
[151] Higham, *Myth-making and History*, p. 237.
[152] Fig. 8.
Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, p. 1.
Edmund Spenser, 'Book I', pp. 29-156.
[153] Edmund Spenser, 'Book II', in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Faerie Qveene* (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), p. 258.
[154] Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, p. 1.

themselves caught up in it; and that fact, an illusion though it may have been, is important in itself.'[155]

## Wherefore Art Thou Arthur?

William Ingram claimed Arthur infrequently appeared in the plays of the late sixteenth century.[156] James Merriman argued that a king born illegitimate and heirless was a politically dangerous topic to address in the late Elizabethan period.[157] Shakespeare was not known to have produced any works that centre on the Arthurian legend, but he did include several references to the Arthurianism in his plays. *Love's Labour's Lost* included a quip about Guinevere's promiscuity; in *Henry IV*, Hotspur compared Glendower to Merlin and *King Lear* contained a prophecy attributed to Merlin.[158] In *Henry VI*, at the siege of Rouen, Bedford recalls an account of Uther being carried in to battle, 'in his litter fick, Came to the field, and vanquished his foes.'[159]

Shakespeare's rival company the Lord Admiral's Players did perform numerous Arthurian plays. They presented Elizabethan audiences with two Arthurian romances in: *Chinon of England* (1596) and *Trystram of Lyons* (1599), They also produced the historical trilogy of *Vortiger* (1596), *Uther Pendragon* (1597), *The Lyfe and Death of Arthur, King of England* (1598), which explored contemporary political issues and the threat of a foreign Catholic intervention. A play about Vortiger is significant as he is a historical figure connected to the Arthurian chronicle tradition with observable accounts being traced back to Bede and figured more recently in Holinshed's History.

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[155] Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), p. 1.
[156] William Ingram, 'The Real Misfortunes of Arthur; Or, Not Making it on the Elizabethan Stage', in John Pitcher (ed.), *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 16 (2003), p. 33.
[157] James Merriman, *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England between 1485 and 1835* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1973), p. 35.
[158] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost* (London: John Bell, 1783), pp. 46-47.
William Shakespeare, *Henry IV: Part I* (London: John Cawthorn, 1818), p. 64.
William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (Leipzig: Gustavus Graebner, 1861), p. 56.
[159] William Shakespeare, *Henry VI. Part I and II* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), p. 101.

These plays were commercially successful making it interesting that Shakespeare's company- the

Lord Chamberlain's Men chose not to perform a play on the legend. Admittedly though only a

limited amount of non-Shakespearean plays have survived in the records, so it is not possible to

exclude the possibility of Arthurian plays being included in their repository.[160]

The production of these plays point to the popularity and political interest in Arthurianism

during the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century.[161] In addition to the Admiral's men, William

Rowley produced *The Birth of Merlin* (c.1620) in which Merlin prophesies Arthur's accession to the

imperial throne and Uther kills the usurper Vortiger to reclaim his rightful throne.[162] *The Lyfe of*

*Arthur king of England* (1598) was co-written by Richard Hathway who had a history of writing

patriotic historical pieces with an overtly Protestant viewpoint.[163] Both the Chamberlain's and

Admiral's Men were fascinated by early British history as expressed by their many plays on the

period.[164] Monmouth's *Historia* had a huge influence on the dramatists of the age. Gordon

McMullen has demonstrated that at least forty plays from the period, many of them in the early

seventeenth century, were based on early British legend.[165]#


## A Very Different Arthur

Many of the later Elizabethan literary works codified and transmitted an imperialistic nationalism

which was both insularity and militaristic derived from Galfridian history. Thomas Hughes's, *The*

*Misfortunes of Arthur*, was performed in February 1588 during the political uncertain period

[160] White, 'The Admiral's Men', pp. 33-37, 40-41.
[161] Ibid, p. 33.
[162] William Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin* (London: Tudor facsimile texts, 1910), p. 41.
[163] White, 'The Admiral's Men', p. 40.
[164] Ibid, p. 35.
[165] Gordon McMullan, 'The Colonisation of Early Britain on the Jacobean Stage', in Gordon McMullan, and David Matthews (eds.), *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 138-139.

between the execution of Mary Stuart and the attack of the Spanish Armada.[166] The play was

performed for Elizabeth by the Gray's Inn Players at Greenwich, a year after the execution of Mary

Queen of Scots.[167] It is an unusual piece as it is a rare literary example of Elizabethan anti-imperial

thinking. A cultural counter point to the pro-imperial works such as *the Faerie Queene*. Such a

tragedy written by members of the Gray's Inn and performed for the Queen would have been

expected to contain political advice. The Gray's Inn players were patronised by William Cecil, lord

Burghley, who advocated peace with Spain, and many of the members were at the very least on the

peripheral of Elisabeth's political class. Yelverton, Bacon, Trotte and Penruddocke all served in

parliament. [168]

In the play, Arthur was reluctant to fight against his son, but his advisors urged him to

defend his rule.[169] Arthur is eventually forced to do battle anyway which parallels Elizabeth's

reluctance to sign Mary Stuart's death warrant even after the Ridolfi and Babington plots.[170] It

served to justify the execution in a period impaired by Catholic paranoia.[171] This is notable different

to the Monmouth version of events, where Arthur voiced his desire for vengeance and offers no

mercy.[172] The introduction highlighted the parallel between the plot of the play and contemporary

political issues. The line 'In tragike note the plagues of vice recounts,' is a reference to Mordred's

attempt to seize the throne, which in turn reflects Mary Stuart's attempted coup, a plot that

Elizabeth had thwarted; 'since your sacred Majestie in gratious hands the regall Scepter held, All

tragedies are fled from State, to stadge.'[173] The traditional imperialistic image of the period became

complicated with the pending Armada invasion. Many drew lessons from the popular history and

literature of classical Rome in which expansion and imperialism eventually destabilised and

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[166] Perry, 'Eve of the Armada', p. 509.
[167] Gertrude Reese, 'Political Import of The Misfortunes of Arthur', *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 82 (1945), p. 81.
[168] Perry, 'British Empire on the Eve of the Armada: Revisiting "The Misfortunes of Arthur"', pp. 509-514.
[169] Thomas Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (London: Septimus Prowett, 1828), pp. 51-52.
[170] Reese, 'Political Import', pp. 85-86.
[171] Perry, 'Eve of the Armada', p. 512.
[172] Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 248-250.
[173] Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur,* p. 8.

jeopardised liberty at home.[174] The play features Arthur's realm left vulnerable to internal friction

and rebellion following a successful campaign on the continent.[175] The play is framed by a ghost who

warns that hell is crowded by popish, 'Rebelles, Traytors and conspirators, The semenarye of lewde

Cateline, The Bastard Coovie of Italian birdes.'[176]

This developing negative attitude towards early British history was a product of Elizabethan

England precarious position in 1588. Elizabeth's military intervention in the Netherlands had gained

little. Philip II of Spain was preparing to launch an attack on England despite the queen's continued

attempts for peace. In Ireland, the reform program heralded by the Lord Deputy John Perrot was in

disarray. Relations between Elizabeth and James VI of Scotland were also fragile after the execution

of Mary Stuart. The cost of imperialist ventures created an ideological division between Burghley

and Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. Perry claimed that *the Misfortunes of Arthur* is a document of

the conflict.[177] It was a clear refutation of the type of imperial intervention and militaristic

aggressiveness that Dudley was associated with.[178] The play presented fictional ideals of nationalistic

imperialism displayed as unsustainable in the real world and attempts to discredit Dudley's brand of

militant Protestantism.[179] This message would have been clear to the Elizabethan courtiers who

knew of Dudley's appropriation of the Arthurian legend during his arrival in the Netherland's where,

'over the entrance of the Court gate was placed aloft upon a scaffold, as if it had bene in a cloud,

Arthur of Britaine, whom they compared to the earle.'[180] The play not only took an unusually

negative view of Arthur, but it also illuminated the problems associated with expansive militarism

and empire.[181] As Nvncius laments in the play, 'Arthur hath woonne: but we haue lost the field. The

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[174] Perry, 'Eve of the Armada',pp. 509-510.
[175] Ibid, pp. 521-522.
[176] Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur,* p. 82.
[177] Perry, 'Eve of the Armada', p. 514 and 520.
[178] Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur,* p. 60.
[179] Perry, 'Eve of the Armada', pp.520-521.
[180] John Stow, *Annals of England to 1603* (s.l.: s.n., 1603), pp. 1192.
[181] Perry, 'Eve of the Armada', p. 509.

field? Nay all the Realme, and Brytaines bounds.'[182] But he did conquer vast territory and despite the

loss of it all, such heroics in the mind of historical poet Drayton were worthy of honouring.


## A Crisis of the Heroic

The poet Drayton imaginatively shaped early British history in the *Poly-Olbion*. After Drayton's initial

efforts to secure patronage from James I failed, he developed an estranged and hostile relationship

with the court. He was known to have satirised the Jacobean court and particularly the new

monarch on numerous occasions.[183] In an elegy to William Browne, Drayton proclaimed James's

reign as an 'evil time… this Isle is a meere Bedlam.'[184] James, like Arthur was seen a beacon of British

unity, internal prosperity and a law maker. However, his reign contrasted with Drayton's ideals of

the heroic. James ceased English privateering and paid little interest in English overseas expeditions.

He opted to pursue peace with Spain following two decades of conflict that had drained the

treasury. James' determination and resilience to maintain the peace was in stark contrasted to his

Tudor predecessor. Elizabeth established herself as a prominent defender of the Protestant faith and

was celebrated as the personification of England's religious values, maritime power, and dynastic

ambitions. Drayton's frustration with the Jacobean court grew from what was labelled the 'crisis of

the heroic'.[185] Drayton believed that poets were the guardians of heroic values and champion of

virtue. In 1612, nine years into James's reign, Drayton published *Poly-Olbion*, in which heroic virtue

took centre stage.[186] The *Poly-Olbion* was a calculated response to the inaction of the Jacobean

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[182] Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur,* p. 60.
[183] John M. Adrian, *Local Negotiations of English Nationhood, 1570–1680* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 84.
[184] Michael Drayton, 'To my noble friend Master William Browne, of the euill time' in Michael Drayton, *Minor Poems of Michael Drayton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 94.
[185] Adrian, *Local Negotiations,* pp. 84-85.
[186] Ibid, pp. 86-88.

Court. While in this period, historians have started to

critically approach their sources, historical fiction writer

like Drayton did not face such pressures.



*Figure 9. Titelcover des Werkes Poly-Olbion, Drayton, 1622.*

The *Poly-Olbion* was an unusual poem as it is

topographical combined with English history. Drayton

used heroic historical figures like Arthur to project a

nationalistic and patriotic image that celebrated England.

In his defence of the historical criticism against Arthur,

Drayton recognises it as an attack on the heroic because,

'the envious world doth slander for a dream.'[187] Where it

was important for Spenser to identify Arthur as the victor,

for Drayton the winner was irrelevant, and he never

declared one. What truly mattered to Drayton was that the land itself contained a heroic spirit that

sang about the great deeds of men. Historical participants were venerated by Drayton, not by moral

standards but by their heroic actions. Historical participant such as Richard III or the Irish who were

often on the wrong side of history were commended for their fortitude and bravery.[188]

As a poet, Drayton often embellished and reconstructed his source material to serve his

poetic aspirations. Richard Hardin describes Drayton's historical poetry as a monumental history that

seeks, 'to derive a pattern of greatness from contemplation of the past,' to remind his audience that

the greatness of the past is achievable again.[189] Drayton's primary building block was the 'heroic';

the charismatic figures and the exciting events of the past. Drayton believed that the patrons of the

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[187] Fig. 9.
Michael Drayton, *The Complete Works of Michael Drayton, Volume I: Pollyolbion* (London: John Russell Smith, 1876), p. 11.
[188] Adrian, *Local Negotiations*, pp. 89, 93.
[189] Ibid, p. 75.

Jacobean court sought poets who composed witty and clever entertainments. He expressed such in his preface in the *Poly-Olbion* where he laments the timing of its release;

> In publishing this Essay of my Poem, there is this great disadvantage against me; that it cometh out at this time, when Verses are wholly deduced to chambers, and nothing esteemed in this lunatic Age.[190]

Joan Grundy likened Drayton to Homer and claimed he worshiped, 'heroic excellence, the great spirit manifesting itself in great deeds.'[191]

Drayton's association between the heroic and the land created and channelled a valiant history that is distributed across the country and bypassed the Jacobean court. In Dayton's view, James not only failed to meet the standards of heroism of his predecessors, but his pacifism made contemporary heroics improbable.[192] Drayton's hopes of overcoming the 'crisis of the heroic' laid in James's eldest son Henry. Prince Henry was more militaristic and anti-Spanish than his father and it was to him that Drayton dedicated the *Poly-Olbion;* in which he included an engraving of the young prince in full armour.[193] The final words in Drayton's



Figure 10. *Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales The Poly-olbion,* c.1612

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[190] Drayton, Vol. 1, *Pollyolbion*, p. xxxiii.
[191] Joan Grundy, *The Spenserian Poets* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1969), p. 109.
[192] Adrian, *Local Negotiations,* pp. 84, 95.
[193] Fig. 10.
Ibid, p. 84.

poem, *the Ballard of Agincourt,* yearns for such a king as Harry, whose deeds could 'fill a pen.'[194]

## The Redeemer of Chivalry

White claimed that following the accession of James I, Arthurianism ceased to appeal to Jacobean society beyond royal masques.[195] However, James also developed genealogical link to Arthur.[196] Supporters of James hailed his accession as the fulfilment of Merlin's prophecy that the two nations would be united as they had once been under Arthur's kingship as reflected in this contemporary anagram, 'Charles Lames Stuart - Claims Arthurs seat.'[197] The use of Arthurian masques in the Jacobean court were aimed to reinforce the link between James and Arthur. In 1588, James composed a masque to honour the Marquis of Huntley's marriage, where, 'Sume does your Court, to Arthures court compaire.'[198] Other masques that James commissioned had Arthurian themes. In 1609, the first notable appearance of James's heir, Henry was in a masque entitled *Prince Henry's Barriers*, combination of martial exercise and theatrical spectacle, where King Arthur was included to honour and glorify the King's achievement of reuniting Britain. [199] Arthur proclaimed: 'the times are now devolved That Merlin's mystic prophecies are absolved In Britain's name, the union of this isle, and claim of both my sceptre and my style.'[200] The first scene is set at a ruined palace in which the opening verse describes as representing the 'decay of chivalry'.[201] The tomb of Merlin was also present, representing lost magic and learning. Merlin emerged resurrected and summoned forth a

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[194] Michael Drayton, *The Ballad of Agincourt (*1606), available at https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/the-ballad-of-agincourt/, accessed 16 March 2019.
[195] White, 'The Admiral's Men', p. 43.
[196] Higham, *Myth-making and History*, p. 238.
[197] Allan F. Westcott (ed.), *New poems by James I of England* (New York: The Columbia university press, 1911), p. 109
[198] James Stuart, 'An Epithalamion Upon the Marques of Huntlie's Marriage' in Allan F. Westcott (ed.), *New poems by James I of England* (New York: The Columbia university press, 1911), p. 50.
[199] Frances A. Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1975), p. 22.
[200] Ben Johnson, 'Prince Henry's Barriers', Stephen Orgel (ed.), *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques* (London: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 145.
[201] Ibid, p. 143.

hero who would restore chivalry to the realm; Meliadus, Lord of the Isles, played by Prince Henry.[202]

The maiden Chivalry was awakened from her sleep by the presence of the young prince and his

knights and cried out, 'Break you rusty doors that have so long been shut, and from the shores Of all

the world come knighthood like a flood upon these lists…'[203] The speeches recited the ancient days

of Arthur and his rule over a united Britain. The Lady of the Lake tells of the greatness of the

Arthurian court and Arthur appears to proclaim the coming of a prince greater than himself. The role

was intended to refer to James as a descendent of Arthur, but it was Henry who took centre stage.[204]

Henry began his career on the stage and was anointed the heir to ancient British history and the

chivalry's redeemer.[205] This is reflected in the c.1613 parodic romance, *Tom o' Lincoln*, which

presented an emasculated Arthur being upstaged by his socially climbing son.[206] Prince Henry was

again the centre of Arthurian chivalry when in 1611 he was presented as 'Oberon, Fairy Prince' in

what was a clear nod to Spenser's work.[207]


## The Golden Age

The Arthurian legend continued to be utilised in the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, and its

malleability was evident. Despite Leland's victory, Arthurianism began to be incompatible with

historical academia and it became obvious it would serve the poets better. Instead the Arthurian

historiography had produced a body of work that helped fuel the flowering of English literature.

Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* connected Elizabeth with the Arthurian golden age, who was

happy to be likened to the Faerie Queene who guided the Arthurian heroes in this work of imperial

nationalism, and glorious militarism derived from Galfridian history. For English Protestant patriots,

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[202] Ibid', p. 147.
[203] Ibid', p. 157.
[204] Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, p. 23.
[205] Ibid, p. 24.
[206] White, 'The Admiral's Men', p. 42.
[207] Ben Jonson, 'Oberon, the Faery Prince', in Robert M. Adams (ed.), *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques* (Toronto: George J. McLeod Ltd, 1979), p. 341.

Arthur conjured up the golden age of medieval English Christianity free of papal tyranny, a tyranny that remained a real threat during the age of the Spanish Armada. Despite claims that Arthur infrequently appeared in the plays of the late sixteenth century, and that Shakespeare did not knowingly write any Arthurian plays, it has been established that many other players did. Arthur was used by dramatists to promote England's imperial ambitions, but in the anti-imperialist - *Misfortunes of Arthur* showed the adaptability of the legend. The Stuart dynasty came to power being criticised by Dayton in what he saw as a 'crisis of the heroic'. His poetic histories were based on the depictions of greatness, the basic building block of his monumental vision of history was the heroic. Drayton believed James was falling short of the standards set by previous English rulers. To bypass the Jacobean court, Drayton used heroic historical figures like Arthur to project a nationalistic, patriotic image that celebrated England. But the Arthurian legend was also used to counter these accusations and present the dynasty as the redeemers of chivalry. James commissioned Arthurian masques that glorified both himself and his heir Henry. In one such spectacle James is announced as the next Arthur - the unifier of Britain. But it was Henry who took centre stage at these events as the redeemer of lost chivalry.

# Conclusion: Transformation

The image of the Arthurian legend had changed throughout the English Reformation period. In the period before the English Reformation, Arthurianism was utilised in propaganda by Henry VII to legitimise his claim to the crown. King Arthur's fabled messianic return was employed by Henry to promote his son and heir Arthur. The use of Winchester and the iconic name, conjured Merlin's prophecy of King Arthur's return to establish and popularise the fledgling dynasty. Following Prince Arthur's death in 1502, Henry VIII assumed the mantle of King Arthur reincarnate from his late brother Arthur. Henry VII's earlier amalgamation of the white rose of York and the Red rose of Lancaster in the creation of the Union Rose was now made flesh with the elevation of Henry VIII to the throne and the establishment of a stable Tudor dynasty. Henry thrived in Arthurian competition such as jousting and revelled in Arthurian May Day rituals. In an attempt to associate himself with his chivalric heroes of the past, Henry projected his own image upon illustrious historical figures Henry V and King Arthur. Both Henry VIII and his father utilised the Arthurian legend in diplomatic relations. Henry VIII attempted to use Arthurianism to project an imperial image set a precedent for contemporary historians to establish the foundations of the English Reformation.

The challenge to early British history during the Reformation transformed the view of Arthurianism. Vergil used a logical approach to challenge the validity of the legend. This in turn created a Protestant nationalist backlash from English historians who viewed it as an attack by a foreigner on the heart of English identity, as they sought to establish the foundations of the English Church. Leland defended the legend with in-depth research and provided a range evidence to construct a solid but flawed case. The 'Battle of the Books' produced a legacy that would influence future historians. While Vergil's thesis was eventually proved correct, Leland succeed in winning over contemporary popular opinion. The academic duelling produced a more critical approach to history. This more analytical approach would challenge future historian to include comprehensive evidence to prove Arthur's historicity shifting the legend in to more fictional accounts.

Arthurianism moved away from the history books, but its importance continued during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. The legend, without the restraint of reality, thrived in a golden-age of literature. Spenser produced the pro-imperialism *Faerie Queen* to promote the merits of the Reformation. Dramatists produced popular plays with the wealth of Arthurian material produced in the previous centuries. They used the legend to showcase religious and political issues dominating the time. The mailability of the legend was evident in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, which promoted an anti-imperial message during a period of political unrest. It also challenged the 'glorious' image of Arthur as a king who was responsible for the destruction of his realm. Historian of the heroic, Drayton, utilised Arthurianism to challenge a 'crisis of the heroic', following the Stuart accession. In response, James I used Arthurian themed masques to counter the accusation. He attempted to revive chivalry within the Jacobean court and to elevate the popularity of his heir Henry.

Although Arthur moved from the history books to embellished fictional accounts, the legend continued to influence English society. The power of the legend did not diminish and Arthur, as Caxton proclaimed, 'ought most to be remembered among us English men tofore all other Christian kings.'[208]

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[208] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur: Vol. 1* (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1906), p. i.

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