

# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

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## PART I

### A LEGEND AND ITS ROOTS

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#### THE KINGMAKER

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*As a British monarch with a supposedly authentic career, Arthur is the creation of one man, Geoffrey of Monmouth. Writing in the twelfth century, Geoffrey portrays him as a great warrior and ruler, reigning in the period after Britain's severance from the Roman Empire. How was Geoffrey's narrative meant to be taken? Did Geoffrey's readers, and the romancers who followed him, regard it as truth or fiction? And what is special about King Arthur? Does his legend look like a medieval invention, or does it seem to belong in the age when he is said to have lived?*

#### 2

#### THE UNEXTINGUISHED LIGHT

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*The later Roman Empire, plagued by barbarian incursions and civil strife, cherished a dream of a World-Restorer—a Restitutor Orbis. He was pictured as an Emperor who would turn back the destructive forces and renovate Roman civilization, with some sort of divine aid. The hope could persist because it had been fulfilled, to a certain extent, by a series of able emperors. Even amid disasters after their impact waned, the Roman idéal stayed powerful, and a Restitutor was still a thinkable figure. One result of the disasters was that Britain, alone among Roman lands, attained independence. Arthur's legend is fundamentally the legend of a Restitutor in Britain.*

## 3

## ARTHUR'S CONTEXT

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*The fifth-century "history" which Geoffrey presents is founded on fact. Saxons were allowed to settle in Britain as auxiliary troops, and got out of hand. After a phase of ruin the violence ebbed and the Britons partially recovered, even having a share in the politics of the Continent.*

## PART II

## ARTHUR

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## THE OLD WELSH TRAIL

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*Geoffrey of Monmouth makes statements about his sources which are partly helpful, partly baffling. He can be shown to have used an older Welsh "history" which gives a list of Arthur's battles. There are also other early Welsh references. Using these, and the results of archaeology, scholars have tried to reconstruct a "historical Arthur."*

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## NEW DISCOVERIES

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*By challenging an assumption which scholars have made, the original Arthur can be identified. Several different kinds of evidence converge upon the same conclusion.*

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## THE WELLSPRINGS OF ROMANCE

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*Arthur, as identified, fits in with the Welsh matter and with archaeological findings. The battles and the legend-making can now be better understood.*

## PART III

## THE UNFOLDING MYTH

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## SAINTS, BARDS, HEROES

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*The "Arthur" phase in Britain led to a long survival of small kingdoms where the Britons' Welsh and Cornish descendants carried on. Among these an Arthurian saga took shape over the centuries, drawing on the traditions of bards and churchmen, and a medley of Celtic mythology.*

## 8

## MAJESTY

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*In the Middle Ages the rise of a powerful monarchy under the kings of England encouraged the growth of Arthurian romance. Furnished with a "historical" framework by Geoffrey, this gave new life to traditions from the Celtic past, and combined them with medieval themes. Arthur supplied a mystique for English royalty; a mystique which sometimes carried political weight, and was still significant in the revival of his legend by Tennyson.*

## 9

## THE MODERN QUEST

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*In the twentieth century the work of archaeologists and historians has given the theme fresh vitality and helped to create a new Arthurian literature. Profound questions arise about the reasons for the perennial spell.*

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