

# Arthur and Kingship as Represented by the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth

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## Abstract

The present study investigates the representation of King Arthur in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth (1343–1400). In doing so, it concentrates on specific historical context – early Anglo-Saxon England – and a specific form of authority – Anglo-Saxon kingship. The intention of the study is to show how Geoffrey of Monmouth used historical chronicles, not only for cataloguing the stories of various rulers of the island, but also for creating and shaping a single leader who can unify the kingdom.

The study claims that the ideal kingship constructed around the figure of King Arthur in the *Historia* involved a re-orientation of some of the more conventional norms of kingship; the heroic qualities of martial prowess, generosity and morality are quite essential in every conception of an ideal king. Geoffrey's conception of this ideal king was largely influenced by his personal aspirations, some of which have been outlined in the introduction of this article. The remaining parts of this study offer a historical as well as a literary analysis of the text, addressing the main qualities of kingship that were articulated in the text.

All translated quotations from *Historia Regum Britanniae* are taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of Kings of Britain*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (London, Penguin Book, 1966). The Latin text consulted was Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regnum Britanniæ*, Vol. 1, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms 568, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge; D.S. Brewer, 1984).

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## 1. Introduction

Since its first appearance, the Arthurian legend has occupied a position unique, important and lived to be characterised as a hope, a history, and a proper legend. Its great theme and flexibility, as Nick Higham suggests, have attracted many talent historians and romancers such as Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Chrétien de Troyes, and Sir Thomas Malory to recreate the legend for their current needs (Higham, 2002, p. 8). Often at the heart of these Arthurian stories is the important figure of King Arthur. At one time, Arthur is praised as a great battle leader, at another as a warrior-king, and sometimes he is condemned as a weak feminine king. The present study argues that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* shows a marked interest in national history and the role of kingship in that history. Geoffrey's *Historia* is the most popular chronicle which introduced much of the Arthurian legend and captured an enormous amount of attention of both readers and authors for centuries. It was translated into Welsh three times in the thirteenth century, and further translations and amalgams “continued up to the eighteenth century to produce no fewer than 60 *brutiau*” (Hunt, 2006, p. 46). The *Historia* was not just a historical record of the kings, it was “marked by ... other characteristics of court writing”, which “marks the *Historia* as different from other historical writing of the period” (Echard, 1998, p. 35).

This examination of the image of Arthur as a warrior-king will both explain why he maintains certain similar characteristics across lengths of time, as well as why certain traits change drastically. This will highlight the signifiers which contribute to the construction of the ideal medieval kingship, such as prowess, generosity, and Christian morality.

To gain a solid understanding of what constitutes an ideal kingship in medieval England, we need first to establish an objective distance, which the historical dimension offers in the first place. To understand the elements of medieval kingship, one needs to consider it in a historical and social perspective. Many sources shaped medieval ideas of ideal kingship, and the institutions that resulted from these ideas influenced the creation of Arthurian legacy in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. The *Gesta Regum*, *Gesta Pontificum*, and the *Historia Novella*, by William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century discuss the expectations of strong kingship, Björn Weiler argues that

William of Malmesbury's concept of kingship consists of a relatively formulaic set of duties: Maintaining the peace; defending the realm; practicing piety, found, endowing or re-establishing monastic houses, ensuring that not a whiff of simony poisoned the English Church; and upholding justice, usually through the swift and decisive punishment of criminals, but also by combating witchcraft and adultery (Weiler, 2005, p. 7).

William of Malmesbury's concept of kingship is important to contextualize Arthur's kingship in the twelfth century. This concern for royalty may be a defining feature of many medieval Arthurian writings. On the surface, the *Historia* is indeed a chronicle detailing the reigns of several important kings in Britain. However, below the surface, Geoffrey presents a king who is "the fulfillment of ideas of kingship which belong to both the political philosophy and even the later political reality of the twelfth century" (Echard, 1998, p. 46). Geoffrey's political environment was characterized by a high level of instability due to the issue of succession in Britain. The notion of a king was never fixed in Geoffrey's lifetime, and the British legal order was at that time troubled with factions leftover from the Norman Conquest.

The argument here leads to the question that what are Geoffrey's motives which stand behind his portrait of his Arthur as a great warrior-king in his *Historia*? One possible motive which can be seen in Geoffrey's portrait of king Arthur as a warrior-king is that Geoffrey tries to establish the Britons, his own people, as a dignified ancient civilisation and to put them not only among the civilised Western countries, but in its forefront. In testifying and presenting the Britons noble state in history, Geoffrey provided them with ancient and venerable origins as well as with a heroic king equal to that of Greece, Rome, and Arabia. Geoffrey, the Welsh poet, felt the need for someone to stand in England as Alexander in Rome and Mohammad in Arabia. Since necessity is the mother of invention, Geoffrey chose the figure of Arthur, who was already popular between the Welsh themselves, to create his hero, giving him distinguished Trojan origins and noble heroic qualities. Roger Loomis claims:

The French, the Normans, and the Saxons had theirs [heroic history], but the Welsh and the Britons had only the meagre scrape provided by Nennius and hostile narratives of the Anglo-Saxons and the Romans, before whom there was only a blank. Here was an opportunity with a man with Geoffrey's gift-and lack of historical conscious- could hardly miss (Loomis, 1959, p. 86).

Geoffrey emphasising on the heroic deeds and the noble origins of King Arthur can be seen as a political propaganda of his people to heighten respect for them among Norman superiors. Since the Normans, as king Arthur did, fought the Saxons and drove them out of England, Geoffrey's *Historia* can be seen as a clever attempt to prove that both the Normans and the Britons share the same historical and political background. Here Geoffrey indeed provided both the Normans and the Britons with a hero in whom they could take pride and supremacy.

Another thing is that Geoffrey wanted to represent his people the Britons as a nation of great military force. It was believed at that time that the Britons were softened by the Romans civilisation and so they lost their military skills. This, in its role, disgraced the military reputation of the Britons as brave soldiers all over the Continent and Britain became easy target of many foreign invasions. Geoffrey's wars are clear elaborate show of the Britons courage and bravery to signify not only the past, but also the present and the future.

The Romans were scattered. In their terror some fled to out-of-the-way spots and forest groves, other made their way to cities and towns, and all of them sought refuge in the places, which seems safest to them. The Britons pursued them as fast as they could go, putting them to death miserably... (x. 12, p. 256).

Geoffrey, by adapting a major historical theme of the Middle Ages, succeeded in establishing his Arthur as an ideal English king that his *Historia* was readily accepted by the majority of historians who followed him (Dean, 1987, p. 5). Although it is true that King Arthur's characterization has kept evolving depending on the geographical, political, and social environment of his literary makers, his notable kinship traits in Geoffrey's *Historia*, coupled with his literary origins in Welsh and Latin literature, give him strong ties to the matter of kingship in Britain (McClune, 2012, p. 118). Related to this argument, Laura M "Lojo-Rodríguez claims that the heroic potential of King Arthur, presented in the *Historia*, as "the embodiment of Englishness and national identity" is usually invoked in times of crisis (Lojo-Rodríguez, 2018, p. 126). Geoffrey's *Historia* can be interpreted as being a heroic prose epic, intended to celebrate the great victories of the Britons under the leadership of King Arthur.

### *1.1 Methodology and Modern Trends in Literary Criticism*

The present study draws on three influences: textual criticism, historical criticism, and postmodernism. Although these influences are sometimes seen as twentieth century developments, their origins are older. Because the present study is concerned with the literary and historical representation of kingship in Geoffrey's *Historia*, it offers a historical as well as a literary analysis: it explores this material in its historical context. This textual analysis makes references to Geoffrey's contemporaries and twelfth century English values.

### *1.2 Scope and Research Problem*

The present study explores the theme of ideal kingship found in Monmouth's influential version of the Arthurian legend has continued to influence American literary. The justification of the study is twofold. First, few scholars seem to have specifically addressed kingship as an eminently important theme in the *Historia*, though some authorities have investigated some individual kingly traits. The present study aims to rectify this omission by exploring Geoffrey's representation of kingship through the figure of Arthur, placing special emphasis on his illustration of courage, generosity, and inborn goodness as the three main characters of successful kingship. The study contributes to

current debates about the ways in which medieval people viewed and understood the notion of ideal kingship.

Second, Geoffrey of Monmouth—in the *Historia*—gives a particular prominence to Arthur, who occupies about a quarter of the whole work. In doing so, Geoffrey laid the groundwork for future Arthurian stories by other medieval authors, establishing Arthur's family, major conflicts throughout his life, and his death. Because of this, the *Historia* offers a fertile ground for exploration of the notion of ideal kingship in its historical context; it shows a marked interest in national history and in the role of kingship in that history.

The scope of the study draws together cultural, historical, and literary materials to offer both depth and breadth in its arguments. It is hoped that this will stimulate new debate about the relationship between medieval heroism, Christianity and ideal kingship.

## **2. Background Literature**

A number of recent studies address, directly or indirectly, kingship as a major theme in relation to Arthur in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. These studies include Helen Fulton's 2009 work, *A companion to Arthurian literature*; Sian Echard's 1998 work, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*; Richard Barber's 2001 work, *Legends of Arthur*; Stephen Knight's 1983 work, *Arthurian Literature and Society*; and Sara Douglass's 1999 work, *The Betrayal of Arthur*.

Contemporary scholars who have addressed Arthurian literature have generally agreed that Geoffrey's *Historia* presents a positive image of Arthur as a king. A good starting point for the study of Arthur and medieval kingship is Helen Fulton's *A companion to Arthurian literature*. This comprises a variety of essays, focusing largely on British histories and romances. It includes treatment of Arthurian legends (e.g., the *Alliterative Mort d'Arthure* and *Sir Launfal*), and some treatment of other notions—leadership, kingship, empire, nation, social identity, religion, and imperialism.

Powerful and useful though *A companion to Arthurian literature* may be, the essays within it arguably focus too much on romances. They lack textual and historical analysis of the work. Neither do they cover—indeed, they scarcely mention—such histories of other twelfth-century writers as William of Malmesbury and Gerald of Wales.

Related to this, Richard Barber shows a great interest in Arthur's prowess in battlefields and presents it as a defining quality of medieval kingship. Barber argues that “Arthur governed the realm of Britain for thirty-nine years in the power of his strength, the wisdom of his mind, the acuteness of his judgement, and through his renown in battle” (Barber, 200, p. 51).

Barber may be underestimating the ‘other’ kingly traits highlighted in the *Historia*, claiming that Arthur’s sovereignty is merely characterised by heroism. The textual analysis in the present study covers and makes references to more kingly traits Arthur acquires which qualify him to be a rightful king.

A more helpful view, related to the idea that kingship is constructed historically in the *Historia* comes from Stephen Knight's review of Arthurian sources. He finds that Arthur's ‘greatness’ is not always and necessarily linked with his heroic deeds, but also with his role as a Christian king. Geoffrey's king, Knight argues, is “an archetype of true heroism”, yet human (Knight, 1983, p. 110). Knight's conclusion is shared by Sara Douglass in her book, *The Betrayal of Arthur*. Douglass focuses on the humane side of King Arthur, pointing out that the English chronicles stress Arthur's kingship and the love and respect shown to him by the people (Douglass, 1999, p. xi).

Yet these studies, helpful as they are, are limited. The various essays in Fulton, as indicated, largely ignore textual analysis. Those in Barber and Knight concentrate on specific kingly traits and ignore the others. This is an understatement. There are also gaps in history in the essays of Douglass and Knight; they have largely ignored Geoffrey's use of history as a literary device which allows for critique of the often conflicting mores of his days.

The first historical appearance of Arthur by name was not in Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* which was written in the twelfth century. Geoffrey used some written sources and, when he did not, he based his characters (including Merlin) around folklore (Reno, 2010, p. 185). Arthur appeared in many Welsh traditional poems such as *Gododdin*, *Culhwch and Olwen*, and *the Spoils of Annwfnas* well as in historical accounts such as the one written by Nennius in the ninth century. Geoffrey's *Historia* was the first ‘historical’ work which introduced King Arthur officially as a British king to his audience (Dean, 1987, p. 4).

After the death of Utherpendragon, the leaders of the British assembled from their various provinces in the town of Silchester and there suggest to Dubricius, the Archbishop of the city of Legions that as their king they should crown Arthur, the son of Uther (ix. 1, p. 212).

However, even before Uther's death, the focus of the *Historia* is Arthur, the king who will actually succeed in destroying the pagans and renewing the borders of Britain. Just as the transition from Roman to Welsh rule was marked by a light in the sky, which resembled a dragon with beams coming out of its mouth. Merlin interprets the dragon as Uther, and the two rays emanating from him symbolize Uther's future offspring, including a son. Arthur's characteristics in this prophecy are his strength and ability to protect his people wisely. These qualities are similar to those of Uther and Aurelius, both of whom successfully defended their countries against attacks.

Arthur, in Geoffrey telling the story, is a warrior-king which keeps him continually concerned with wars and fights.

Arthur was a young man only of fifteen years old; but he was of outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness gave him such a grace that he was beloved by almost all the people (ix, 1, p. 212).

Geoffrey in this passage emphasises three of Arthur's leadership qualities. Rodney Castleden notes that:

Geoffrey tells us of his personal qualities as remembered and probably coloured up across six centuries, of his outstanding courage and generosity, his inborn goodness and grace, his open-handedness and bravery, his keenness to redistribute the wealth of the Saxons to his own supporters (Castleden, 2000, p. 114).

Arthur's outstanding courage, generosity, inborn goodness and morality are the explicitly stated and admirable values which drew much of Geoffrey's attention in his Arthurian portion. Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur is, as Heng states, "summoned from an earlier cultural order to vindicate the humanity, masculinity, and cultural honor of Christian kings and knights" (Heng, 2003, p. 39). Through his Arthur, Geoffrey introduces us to the leadership qualities which qualified him to be a legitimate ruler.

The next three sections examine in consequence the three main kingly characteristics of King Arthur; prowess, generosity, and Christian morals. Because Geoffrey did not write in a vacuum, the present study takes a broadly historicist approach while analysing the text. The textual analysis of the *Historia* in its historical context will help to construct an understanding of medieval ideal kingship.

### **3. "But a Youth of Such Unparalleled Courage": Arthur's Prowess**

The first quality that Geoffrey explicitly emphasises and links to kingship in his Arthurian portion is courage. The heroic values haunt Geoffrey's narrative, so that Arthur's courage is demonstrated by the number of the wars he fought which present a continuation and fulfilment of his youthful kingship. Geoffrey's description of king Arthur as a young king was not meant to show that Arthur as a feeble tearful youth, but to present an active and attractive warrior-king who promises a brilliant victory in the near future. Though young, Arthur is still a 'man' of successful military career. In addition, the idea of King Arthur as a young warrior will be enforced when, later on in narrative, he is to face and fight his enemies, human and non-human enemies. Geoffrey felt the need for a young brave warrior to be the hero in his *Historia*. Arthur would not have the necessary strength and power to face and defeat the giant on Mont St Michel if he was old and weak man.

Arthur gathered his strength and quickly slipped out of the giant's clutches. Moving like lightening, he struck the giant repeatedly with his sword, first in this place and then in that, giving him no respite until he had dealt him a lethal blow by deriving the whole length of the blade in to his head just where his brain was protected by his skull...this evil creature...toppled to the ground...like some old oak torn from its roots by the fury of the winds (x. 3, p. 240).

Geoffrey's statement that Arthur felt no need to lead his army against the giant reinforces the idea that Arthur was a man of 'outstanding' courage and a confident powerful warrior. In testifying Arthur's courage, Geoffrey exposes him to a series of challenges. In addition to his fights with the giants, which highlight Arthur's bravery, Arthur shows his prowess in battlefield against huge hordes of powerful enemies.

While Arthur was killing off the Scots and Picts in this way, Gilmaurius, the king of Ireland, arrived with a fleet and a huge horde of pagans, in an effort to bring help to those who were besieged. Arthur raised the siege and began to turn his armed strength against the Irish. He cut them in to pieces mercilessly and forced them to return home (ix. 6, p. 219).

Another challenge in which Arthur proves his prowess is when he refused to pay tribute to the Emperor of Rome pointing out that he is willing to risk his life to defend the honour of his own people and country. Geoffrey succeeded to keep his audience focused on how Arthur as a king reacts vigorously to any kind of threat to his territory, and how he as a warrior of outstanding courage reacts in the same way to anything which offends his own person. Dennis Donahue argues:

He is a leader of men in peace; in war, he is courageous, generous, listener to good council, and a fierce protector of his land-one who is ready to attack any country that give a hint of being a threat to Britain. In battle, he is seen as a careful strategist and a hard fighter. When we first approach his portion of the HRB [*Historia Regum Britanniæ*], we feel we are reading a manual on how an ideal king should behave. Arthur seems always to be questioning, always thinking, always planning, always concerning about the well being of his land and his people (Donahue, 1998: Vol. 8: P. 143).

Indeed, Geoffrey's *Historia* uses its chivalric moments to contrast the worthiness of King Arthur with the degradation of his antagonists (Radulescu, 2006, p. 190). Moreover, there is no point in Geoffrey's narrative where King Arthur is portrayed by Geoffrey as cowardly. Even when Arthur was sometimes forced to retreat and withdraw, Arthur never abandoned his plans. For example, Arthur's withdrawal from York where he besieged the treacherous Colgrin and his brother Baldulf was, as Geoffrey tells us, a common policy to save his army "from a most dangerous engagement" ( ix. 1, p. 214).

As soon as Arthur was loaded with brave soldiery, he attacked his enemies and killed 470 men alone in this battle.

Geoffrey's Arthur is wholly concerned with wars, devoting most, if not all, of his time to war, gathering young warriors around him to have wars, participating actively in all fights, and often troubled by wars. Geoffrey tells us that after king Arthur had finished with the Scots,

As soon as the next summer came around, Arthur fitted out fleet and sailed off to the island of Ireland which he determined to subject to his own authority... the whole land was thus conquered. Arthur then steered his fleet to Iceland defeated the people there and sub ducted the island (ix. 10, p.221).

The passage refers to two important points. The first point is that Arthur's wars in Geoffrey's *Historia* constitute the main part of Arthur's life. Since wars and politics, as Tatlock suggests, were Geoffrey's main interests, he hardly mentions Arthur's activities at peace that "as conveying any idea of day-by-day of human life, this never entered his [Geoffrey] head" (Tatlock, 1974, p. 345).

What Geoffrey had in mind was a clear introduction of Arthur as a warrior who spent most of his reign in deadly wars, a warrior from Dark Ages. P. J. C. Field believes that Geoffrey presented his Arthur as a great conqueror and introduced his foreign conquests to be taken as the most admirable qualities of his king; Field writes:

He made Arthur's career one of continuous battles, some taken from Nennius and elaborated, others manufactured out of whole cloth. The subjection of England is followed by that of Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, and finally of the Rome of 'the emperor Lucius'. As far as we know, the overseas conquests are Geoffrey's invention (Field, 1978, p. 24).

The second point is that Arthur's wars were not always to defend his territory, but to increase it. Rosemary Morris finds that Arthur's activities and battles, in Geoffrey's *Historia*, was not mainly concerned with defence pointing out that defence is not King Arthur's original role; she argues:

In the HRB [*Historia Regum Britanniae*] traditions, Arthur does not fight defensive wars in the sense that he waits to be attacked before taking up arms. Such passivity is alien to Geoffrey's concept. The Saxons, Romans and Mordred wars can all be constructed as defensive, if only for the purposes of moral arguments, but the overall impression is of a victorious aggression (Morris, 1982, p. 55).

Arthur's wars in Geoffrey's *Historia* were deliberately designed to show the successful military career that Arthur led pointing to the fact that Arthur "was encouraged...to conceive the idea of conquering the whole Europe" (ix. 11, p. 222). However, this does not mean that Arthur is tyrannical or power-hungry king. His wars, Geoffrey clarifies, were exercised in accordance with the rules of the law of God and controlled by Arthur's kingly generosity and Christian morals. This is clearly evident in the arguments of the next sections.

#### **4. "But a Youth of Such Unparalleled Courage and Generosity": Arthur's Generosity**

As Geoffrey's story runs, Geoffrey introduces the reader to the second quality of King Arthur as a rightful king; his great generosity. Arthur's true source of kingly power is his natural and eternal generosity rather than his external and mortal qualities. Generosity, unlike youth and strength which extinguish by time, is one of Arthur's natural-born leadership qualities which is necessary for him to stand up to lead his country. In Geoffrey's *Historia*, Arthur generosity is clear whether we meet him as a king or as a warrior. He, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, begins "his reign as a champion who restores his people's fortunes within the island, but ends as the master of an international empire drawing allies drawn from diverse geographies" (Cohen, 2008, p. 10). Arthur's generosity as a king first appears in Geoffrey's account of Arthur's coronation.

All these [kings, great leaders, and princes] marched with a train accoutrement, mules and horses such as I find it hard to describe. Once they listed, there remained no prince of any distinction this side of Spain who did not come when he received his invitation. There was nothing remarkable in this: for Arthur's generosity was known throughout the whole world and this made all men love him (ix. 12, p. 228).

This particular passage carries the suggestion that Arthur does seem to have won support, loyalty, and love of people and his men by his kingly generosity. The long list of the guests who attend the coronation which includes local and international kings, archbishops, earls, as Helen Fulton points out, is a clear "a testament to Arthur's generosity and political acumen" (Fulton, 2009: 53). Geoffrey has repeatedly exposed us to Arthur's open-handedness and bravery pointing out that it was because of his generosity Arthur won people's love and loyalty.

...generosity and his inborn goodness gave him such grace that he was beloved by almost all people. Once he had been invested with the royal insignia, he observed the normal custom of giving gifts freely to everyone. Such a great crowd of soldiers flocked to him that he came to an end of what he had to distribute. However, the man to whom open-handedness and bravery both come naturally may indeed finds himself momentarily in need, but poverty will never harass him for long (ix. 1, p. 212).

As a warrior, Arthur's generosity is clearer that, as Geoffrey tells us, "Arthur's generosity was closely linked with courage" (ix. 1, p. 212).

Geoffrey often makes Arthur's generosity the keynote of his treatment of his enemies. It is true that though Geoffrey's description of Arthur's deeds in battlefields portrays Arthur as a merciless killer, it also shows his great generosity. Arthur who besieged the Saxons for three days in Caledon finally was led by his generosity to agree to his enemies' plea to be spared their lives and to be allowed to return to their homeland. Geoffrey provides us with another incident where we can see clearly positive example of King Arthur dealing generously with his enemies which again refers to Arthur's warrior generosity as natural value.

Once he had conquered the Irish, he was at liberty once more to wipe out the Scots and the Picts...he had inflicted sufficient suffering on them, said the bishops, and there was no need for him to wipe out the last man those few who had survived so far. He should allow them to have some small tract of land of their own, seeing that they were in any case going to bear the yoke of servitude. When they had petitioned the king in this way,

their patriotism moved him to tears. Arthur gave in to the prayers presented by these men of religion and granted a pardon to their people (ix. 8, p. 220).

Through practising generosity, Arthur does not grow weak but, on the contrary, finds strength in it. Traditionally, generosity has always been an ancient custom of the wise. The principles of generosity are the same as those of justice and piety which contrast with the principles of cowardice. Though they are not explicitly stated, Arthur's wisdom, noble personality, and ability to control and encourage his soldiers are three extra dimensions of Arthur's military personality which can be easily traced in his wars. Arthur is not acting alone when he declares wars; his good noble men are on his side. Arthur always asks and listens to his noble followers' good counsel and advice. Geoffrey makes it clear that Arthur neither rushes to wars without asking his followers, nor ignoring what they ask him to do.

You who have been my companions in good times and in bad, you of whose fortitude both in giving advice and in waging war I have ample proof in the past, give me now your closet attention, everyone of you, and in your wisdom tell me what you consider me should do on receiving such a letter at this (ix. 16, p. 232).

When Arthur's advisors learned this, they dissuaded him from continuing the siege any longer...Arthur accepted the advice of his retainers and withdraw into the town of London (ix. 2, p. 214).

Arthur's seeking good advice from his noble men reveals Arthur's military maturity rather than his weakness or ignorance of warfare. In defence of Arthur's military maturity Geoffrey created a number of highly significant incidents to emphasise Arthur as a successful military strategist. One incident is that when Arthur noticed that the Saxons used the trees in Caledon Wood to defend themselves against the Britons' weapons, he ordered the tress to be cut down and placed in circle to besiege the Saxons. Arthur's plan was successful. In medieval eyes, as Rosemary Morris points out, "a generous, trusting king was preferable to a cold-hearted, suspicious tyrant" (Morris, 1982, p. 119).

##### **5. "Joined with that Sweetness of Temper and Innate Goodness": Arthur's Christian Morality**

Arthur's goodness and Christian morals drew much of Geoffrey's attention in his Arthurian portion to portray an even stronger affirmation of his ideal kingship. Like the early Welsh verse and prose which emphasised this Arthurian quality, Arthur clearly appears in Geoffrey's *Historia* as a servant of God, a Christian hero who fights the pagans and who carries the image of Saint Mary on his shoulders. Higham argues:

Arthur depiction as the beloved of Christ and the Virgin mother, and as a Christ-helper, encouraged his reign to be envisaged as a peculiarly golden age, characterised to not only by glorious victory and extensive rule but also by high moral standing (Higham, 2002, p. 220).

In addition to Geoffrey's great efforts to establish Arthur's great deeds at the head of his army which continuously building upon the image of him as a noble warrior-king, he repeatedly exposes Arthur's Christ-like qualities and his inborn goodness. His *Historia*, Fulton states, introduced Arthur as

...the true product of prophecy; as a secular messiah, his coming is predicted by Merlin as the 'boar of Cornwall' who will repel the foreigners (the Saxons), command the forests of Gaul, and strike fear into the House of Romulus (Rome) (Fulton, 2009, p. 56).

One vision which reveals clearly Arthur's goodness is that when he 'rebuilt' the churches of York which had been destroyed by the Saxons. He also supplied these churches with religious men and women to celebrate God's holy office. As well as referring of human values, Geoffrey asserts Arthur's goodness and his duty as a Christian king towards God and his own people; Geoffrey Ashe states:

The representation of King Arthur reflects a more Christianized idealization by breaking away from ancient Pagan Celtic traditions. King Arthur becomes the savior of Britons by delivering them from the pagans and gathering all of them under Camelot's reign. Even the near death and removal of Arthur's body from the borders of Camelot to Avalon is an expectation of Arthur to come back once again to save England when she is in danger (Ashe, 2013, p. 63).

The figure of King Arthur here was based on the Christ himself, and his coming was linked to the coming of the Christian churches. Arthur, like the Christ, comes to York, a world full of dark and destruction, to help people there cleansing their souls by rebuilding the churches. This Christ-like image appears again and again in Geoffrey's *Historia*.

...I myself will keep faith in God. This very day I will do my utmost to take vengeance on them for the blood of my fellow-countrymen. Arm yourselves, men, and attack these traitors with all your strength! With Christ's help we shall conquer them, without any possible doubt (ix. 3, p. 216).

The passage again sheds more interesting light on Arthur's goodness and religious stature, and it shows that Arthur was not regarded as a noble warrior-king only due to his achievement in his wars against the Saxons and Irish, but also to the fact that from his first appearance he claimed to be a servant of God, acting in his command, and very sure to get divine aid and victory. Arthur's words carry the suggestion that Arthur does not rely mainly upon his prowess and strength in his wars, but also on his goodness and belief in God. It seems that Geoffrey has never missed opportunity to reinforce Arthur's goodness. In this respect, Arthur's goodness does not only appear in his words, but also in his action. At Arthur's command, the rest of the leaders and princes were borne to abbeys in the vicinity. He took pity

on his enemies and told the local inhabitants to bury them (x. 13, p. 257).

Arthur burying his dead in proper way again emphasises his inborn goodness as a Christian noble warrior and points, by contrast, at the same time to the wickedness of his enemies who left their dead unburied on the battlefield.

Arthur's speeches were carefully programmed to be morally and psychologically effective to inspire his men to achieve victory. His speeches attractively remind his men of the rewards that they are going to gain if they are victors that they will clean their souls and win God's love because they fight for the sake of their Christian country; Fulton points out that:

He fights in the name of God, always reassuring himself that he is waging a "just war," sanctioned by God because he is in the right, and supported by the Archbishop Dubricius, who confirms the justice of Arthur's mission (Fulton, 2009, p. 52).

In his fight with Lucius Hiberius, Arthur's speech was the primary element which fired the soldierly courage his men and led them to fight so bravely that after the speech "they were ready to die rather than leave the battle-field" (x. 8, p. 249). Moreover, in Geoffrey's *Historia*, there is a clear and deliberate contrast between Arthur and the bad illegitimate king Vortigern. Arthur, breaking away from the pagan traditions, drives the Saxons out of Britain, builds the churches and brings the land under the rule of the law of God. In contrast, Vortigern invites the pagans to Britain, betraying his English and Christian values, and eventually fails in his duty to act as a rightful king. Arthur's success and Vortigern's failure, in the matter of leadership, signifies Christianity's triumph over paganism.

## **6. Conclusion**

Surviving in at least 215 Latin Manuscripts, it is clear that Geoffrey's *Historia* circulated widely in England and on the Continent. What Geoffrey presents in his *Historia* is the basis for the medieval story of the rise and the fall of Arthur as a great warrior-king that "All Geoffrey's imitators see Arthur as a warrior-king first and foremost" (Morris, 1982, p. 51). His *Historia* is a notable contribution to the Arthurian story and has the unique distinction of being one of the most fascinating representations of kingship in the English tongue.

Through close textual analysis and by viewing the text through the lens of historical attitudes to kingship and warfare, the present study establishes that Geoffrey, emphasizing Arthur's courage, generosity, and inner goodness, presents the figure of King Arthur in his *Historia* in accordance with the best contemporary characterization of ideal medieval king; the Christian hero who had led his people against their numerous enemies. The 'original' role of King Arthur in the Pre-Geoffrey traditional Welsh Arthurian stories and the historical account of Nennius had always been a brave warrior, a leader in battlefield. In connection to kingship depicted in the *Historia*, the ideas of prowess, generosity, and Christian morality are of great importance. Arthur became a recurring figure representative of the institution of kingship, a "fulfilment of ideas of kingship which belong to both the political philosophy and even the later political reality of the twelfth century" (Echard, 1998, p. 46).

Geoffrey, the present study shows, expanded and emphasised the kingly side of Arthur's character by creating many incidents which mainly refers to Arthur the brave, generous, and Christian rather than Arthur the tyrant. In his Arthurian portion, Geoffrey illustrated his Arthur as the 'just' king, highlighting his kingly qualities such as courage, generosity, and inner goodness which, generally speaking, are the qualities of most of the great classical heroic kings (Castleden, 2000, p. 114). It is true that Geoffrey's *Historia* is not mainly about "Arthur or the characters associated with him; it is about the 'cultural beliefs and ideologies' which 'realized themselves through Arthurian characters'" (Fulton, 2009, p. 1).

The third section of the present study demonstrates that Geoffrey's Arthur is presented positively in war and battlespaces. Arthur usually draws the sword in the *Historia* to serve God, to keep peace, and to defend his right to rule against rebels who contest his rightful kingship. In his wars, Arthur proves to be concerned with the care of his polity and governance of his kingdom; his central duty was "to maintain justice in the realm" (Radulescu, 2003, p. 98). Arthur perfectly controls his men and leads them from one victory to another. Arthur's heroic actions are not meant to be interpreted as an elaborate show of his power and prowess, but to set an example of bravery and soldierly courage to his men to encourage them to fight. They are evidently necessary to heat the battle and to create more military violence in order to sustain Geoffrey's rhetorical purposes; that Arthur's actions illuminate, rather than diminish, his ideal kingship.

To help him to fulfil his carefully constructed portrait of Arthur as an ideal king, Geoffrey provides his Arthur with generosity and Christian morality. The fourth section of the study introduces the reader to the second quality of Arthur as a successful king; his great generosity. Arthur's generosity first appears in Geoffrey's account of Arthur's first assembly in London. Not only had his people recognised his generosity, but also his enemies; in battlefield, Arthur's generosity is illustrated as a keynote of his treatment of his enemies. Thus, generosity, which ordinarily signifies the virtue of true nobility, elevates the image of King Arthur in the *Historia* and separates him from the ordinary.

The fifth section of the study reveals that from the moment he appears on the scene, Arthur is concerned with what is right; a quality which indicates that he "will be less likely to fall prey to the treachery which tends to overtake the good kings, as well as to the vice which tends to overtake the bad" (Echard, 1998, p. 46). The Round Table, the twelfth knights, and Arthur's promised resurrection are Christian imageries which signify an identification of Arthur with Christ. The pagan Arthur (Aurelinous) had undergone a dramatic change in the *Historia* becoming a Christian king; the one who defeats the heathen and establishes the laws of God in Britain.

The study concludes that what Geoffrey presents in his *Historia* through the figure of King Arthur is an ideal image of English kingship. Emphasising Arthur's courage, generosity and inner goodness, Geoffrey presents his Arthur in accordance with the best contemporary

characterisation of great kings that his Arthurian portrait keeps its primacy throughout the centuries. His poem is a notable contribution to the Arthurian story and has the unique distinction of being one of the most fascinating representations of kingship in the English tongue. Geoffrey's kingly traits, presented in the *Historia* through the figure of King Arthur, continue to define Arthur's kingship in Arthurian literature.

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