

About “King Arthur”

Bruce Linnell, PhD

Note : this focuses on one of the main theories about King Arthur, regarding his relationship with a man named Ambrosius and a man named Riothamus. There are at least a half-dozen other reasonable theories about who the “original” King Arthur was (and probably another half-dozen not-so-reasonable ones!). This is just my personal favorite...

I have discovered that many of the websites that promote ideas related to these men often include statements which are presented as facts, when in reality they are based on inferences, assumptions, and speculations.

This document is intended to reveal the exact sources of those assumptions. The information presented here is the translated versions of many ancient documents, as is. The notes on those quotes summarizes the information in them with as few of my own assumptions as possible, and **wherever possible explains how the raw information in them has been turned into these so-called “facts” by speculations and assumptions**.

The take-away from this document is that we humans are story-telling creatures, and when presented with individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle (the information in the ancient sources), we are almost compelled to try and fit the pieces together into one contiguous story. In this case, we can only do that by making assumptions and speculations in order to make the pieces appear to fit together. But that’s all the story is : assumptions and speculations. I prefer to leave the pieces as they are, separate, and be satisfied with only that which is known.

Common terms

Britons/Brittons/Brythons/Brittani : natives of Great Britain

Bretons : British emigrants who lived in Armorica

Aarmorica : modern-day Brittany (the western-most tip of France)

Most everyone agrees that the man or men (if any) who were “Arthur” lived around 450-550.

Summary of sources before 1100 :

Ambrosius Aurelianus is described by a contemporary (perhaps around 490?) as having led a resistance to the Saxon invasions (which started around 450-460), and perhaps was in charge of a decisive victory against them at Badon Hill sometime around 500 (± 15 years). He is described by a contemporary source as a Roman of noble birth and good character, and 300 years later as “king among all kings of Britain”.

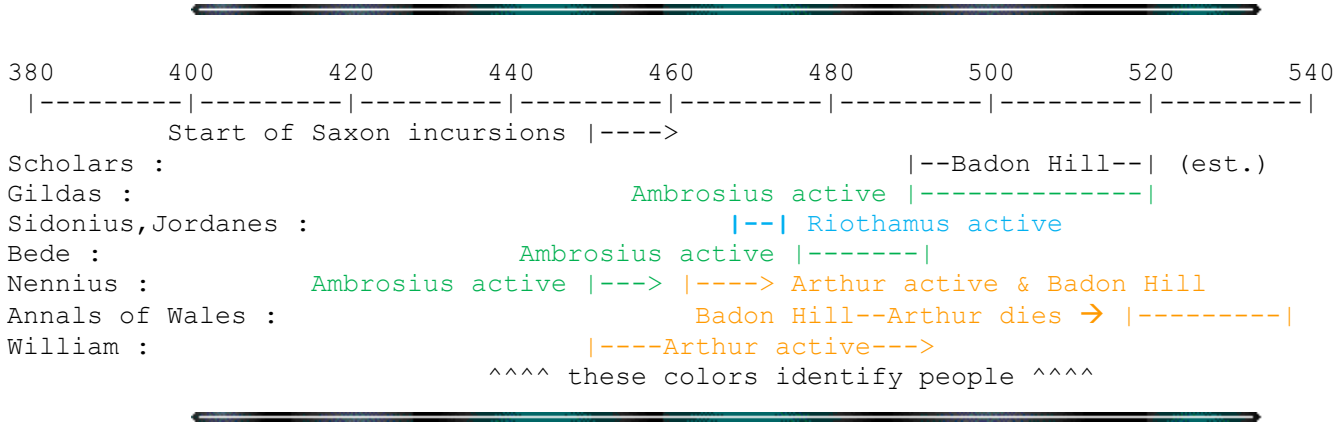
Riothamus is first described in 472 by a contemporary who suggests he has a position of authority and/or power to effect changes in Armorica or Britain and is only 80 years later called “king of the Britons”, and is said to have come to the aid of Rome to repel invading Goths in Gaul around 470. This is virtually all we know about him, but he really did exist – we still have the record of a letter that was written to him!

Arthur is not definitively mentioned by name until around 830, and is first described as a soldier and military commander (“dux bellorum” in the original Latin) who fought alongside the kings of Britain (one of whom was Ambrosius), and who led the defeat of the Saxons at Badon Hill (≈ 500). 200-400 years later, he is described as the “king of the Britons” who stopped the advance of the Saxons in Britain, and campaigned in Gaul as well.

It seems that the titles and deeds attributed to all three names have a lot in common (see table on the next page), and have been blended together over the years. It seems likely that Geoffrey of Monmouth combined all their elements and embellished upon them in his mostly-fictional *History of the Kings of Britain* (written around 1130), which started the modern-day legend of Arthur.

There is little point in trying to identify Ambrosius or Riothamus (or anyone else for that matter) as Arthur, due to the unknown accuracy of the sources, as well as the distinct possibility that the later sources copied from the earlier ones (and possibly modified the details). It is also suspicious that Arthur is not mentioned by name until 300 years after he is supposed to have existed, altho it is possible that he was named in earlier, now lost, sources.

<u>Ambrosius</u>	<u>Riothamus</u>	<u>Arthur</u>
Badon Hill (?)		Badon Hill (military commander)
Fought Saxons in Britain		Fought Saxons in Britain
	Fought Goths in Gaul	Fought in Gaul
“King of the Britons”	“King of the Britons”	“King of the Britons”



Light blue text is highly speculative (which I disagree with).

Red text is unconfirmed claims.

Orange text is assumptions I have made.

Italic passages are quotes that are claimed by someone to prove some very speculative theory

There is much debate over the accuracy of the dates explicitly claimed by these sources, when they are given. I am not going to get sucked into that vortex of speculation and justification, I am leaving the dates as the sources claim them.

Sidonius Apollinaris (Gallic Roman), Letter to Riothamus (around 469-472)

O.M. Dalton, 1915

I will write once more in my usual strain, mingling compliment with grievance. Not that I at all desire to follow up the first words of greeting with disagreeable subjects, but things seem to be always happening which a man of my order and in my position can neither mention without unpleasantness, nor pass over without neglect of duty. Yet I do my best to remember the burdensome and delicate sense of honour which makes you so ready to blush for others' faults. **The bearer of this is an obscure and humble person, so harmless, insignificant, and helpless that he seems to invite his own discomfiture; his grievance is that the Bretons [*Britannis*] are secretly enticing his slaves away.** Whether his indictment is a true one, I cannot say; **but if you can only confront the parties and decide the matter on its merits, I think the unfortunate man may be able to make good his charge,** if indeed a stranger from the country unarmed, abject and impecunious to boot, has ever a chance of a fair or kindly hearing against adversaries with all the advantages he lacks, arms, astuteness, turbulences, and the aggressive spirit of men backed by numerous friends. Farewell.

Notes –

- From Sidonius' letter to him, Riothamus seems to be in a position of authority and/or power to effect changes in the Breton's behavior, **but whether he was their "king" is unknown.**
- While the name Riothamus might be more of a title, translated as "king-most" or "supreme king", Jordanes' use of "king Riothamus" (below) would then be redundant. In addition, the formation of the name (noun/adjective + superlative suffix) follows a pattern found in numerous other Brittonic and Gaulish personal names, such as "Riochatus", which means "battle king", who was actually a priest!
- Note that "Britannis" can be translated as "Britons" or "Bretons", and if Sidonius meant "Britons", that means that Riothamus had authority in Britain, not Amorica! But Sidonius lived in Gaul, and the letter was delivered to Riothamus by a man who claimed that the "Britannis" were stealing his slaves. If Sidonius sent the man, he probably came from Gaul, and so it was probably Gallic British (hence "Bretons") that were doing the stealing. **On the other hand, this letter is referenced as the only time "Britannis" is translated as "Bretons", with all other instances being translated as "Britons"!**
No conclusions can be drawn one way or the other as to which region Riothamus ruled (or both).

Gildas (Briton/Breton), *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain* (written around 510-550) :

J. A. Giles, 1848

[25-26] The poor remnants of our nation...took arms under the conduct of **Ambrosius Aurelianus** [*Ambrosio Aureliano*], a modest man [*viro modesto*], **who of all the Roman nation** was then alone in the confusion of this troubled period by chance left alive. **His parents, who for their merit were adorned with the purple**, had been slain in these same broils, and now his progeny in these our days, although shamefully degenerated from the worthiness of their ancestors [*avita*], provoke to battle their cruel conquerors, and by the goodness of our Lord obtain the victory. After this, sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field,...until the year of the siege of **Bath-hill** [*Badonici montis*], when took place also the last almost, **though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes**, which was (as I am sure) forty-four years and one month *after the landing of the Saxons* [italics added by translator], and also the time of my own nativity.

[2] ...the peace which, by the will of God has been granted her in our times.

[32] *And thou too, Cuneglasse, why art thou fallen into the filth of thy former naughtiness, yea, since the very first spring of thy tender youth, thou bear, thou rider and ruler of many, and guider of the chariot which is the receptacle of the bear, thou contemner of God, and vilifier of his order, thou tawny[red; bloody?] butcher, as in the Latin tongue thy name signifies. Why dost thou raise so great a war as well against men as also against God himself, against men, yea, thy own countrymen, with thy deadly weapons, and against God with thine infinite offences?*

[33] *Maglocune. Didst not thou, in the very beginning of thy youth, terribly oppress with sword, spear, and fire, the king thine uncle, together with his courageous bands of soldiers, whose countenances in battle were not unlike those of young lions?*

Hugh Williams, 1899

[25-26] A remnant...take up arms and challenge their victors to battle under **Ambrosius Aurelianus** [*Ambrosio Aureliano*]. He was a man of unassuming character [*viro modesto*], who, **alone of the Roman race** chanced to survive in the shock of such a storm (**as his parents, people undoubtedly clad in the purple**, had been killed in it), whose offspring in our days have greatly degenerated from their ancestral [*avita*] nobleness. To these men, by the Lord's favour, there came victory. From that time, the citizens were sometimes victorious, sometimes the enemy....This continued up to the year of the siege of **Badon Hill** [*Badonici montis*], and of **almost the last**

great slaughter inflicted upon the rascally crew. And this commences, a fact I know, as the forty-fourth year, with one month now elapsed; it is also the year of my birth.

[2] ...the final victory won by the mother country, which is the gift granted by the will of God in our own times.

[32] *Cuneglasus. Why dost thou, also, wallow in the old filth of thy wickedness, from the years of thy youth, **thou bear, rider of many, and driver of a chariot belonging to a bear's den**, despiser of God and contemner of His decree, thou Cuneglas (meaning in the Roman tongue, thou tawny[red; bloody?] butcher)? Why dost thou maintain such strife against both men and God? Against men, thine own countrymen, to wit, **by arms special to thyself**; against God, by crimes without number?*

[33] *Maclocunus. In the first years of thy youth, accompanied by soldiers of the bravest, whose countenance in battle appeared not very unlike that of young lions, **didst thou not most bitterly crush thy uncle the king** with sword, and spear, and fire?*

Howard Wiseman, 2000

[25-26] Their leader was **Ambrosius Aurelianus** [*Ambrosio Aureliano*], a gentleman who, perhaps **alone of the Romans**, had survived the shock of this notable storm. Certainly **his parents, who had worn the purple**, were slain in it. His descendants in our day have become greatly inferior to their grandfather's [*avita*] excellence. Under him our people regained their strength, and challenged the victors to battle. The Lord assented, and the battle went their way. From that time on, now the citizens, now the enemy, were victorious ... right up until the year of the siege of **Badon Hill** [*Badonici montis*], almost the last, not the least, slaughter of the villains, and this the forty-fourth year begins (as I know) with one month already elapsed, which is also that of my birth.

Notes –

- Ambrosius is described as a Roman of noble birth; it is only implied that he was the leader at the victory of Badon Hill. He is definitely associated with the victory that began the period of fluctuating conflict.
- Most modern scholars think that the date for the siege of Badon Hill ranges from 490-520; if Ambrosius was involved with it, this would put his birth around 460-500. Note that Gildas explicitly calls it a “siege” (surrounding a fortified place to cut it off from supplies), not a “battle”.
- “*avita*” means “ancestor” or “of a grandfather” – if it is the latter, then Gildas would be writing in the time of Ambrosius’ grandchildren, or about 30-50 years after Ambrosius thrived.
- It is a matter of speculation as to what events the 44 years in reference to the siege of Badon Hill actually refer to; the two most likely are either that Gildas is writing 44 years after the siege (which is slightly bolstered by the “grandfather” possibility of the previous bullet), or that the siege happened 44 years after Ambrosius’ first victory over the Saxons. In either case, Gildas was born during the earlier event of either pair. The idea that it refers to the time between the arrival of the Saxons in Britain and the battle of Badon Hill (as assumed by Bede, below) is discounted by modern scholars.

Williams comments that at the time when Gildas wrote, there were many alive who had been eye-witnesses of the two events, who could not, he remarks, refrain from frequent mentioning of them.

I cannot find this in the source material. Williams seems to be the sole source of this comment.

The following theories are promoted by Phillips and Keatman, and are denounced by many others :

- **Cuneglas is mentioned in [32] because he described as a “bear”, which in ancient Brythonic is “arth”, and “arth-ur” is “the bear” or the “bear-man”. However, Gildas says he is also the charioteer of “the bear”, suggesting that someone else also held that title. It is speculated that Cuneglas’ father, Owain Ddantgwyn/Danwyn (as given in the *Ancestry of the Kings and Princes of Wales*), also went by the battle name “the bear”, which means he could be Arthur who ruled in the last half of the fifth century (according to Nennius, below). However, according to the original Latin, Owain would have been**

Cuneglas' maternal uncle. [Further speculation](#) is that Owain's father, Enniaun/Einion Yrth/Girt (as given in the *Ancestry of the Kings and Princes of Wales*) held the title or battle name "Terrible Head Dragon", which in Welsh is Yrthr-Pen-Dragon, very close to Arthur's father's name as given by Geoffrey.

- The reference to Maglocunus (Welsh Maelgwyn) in [33] is included because he is Owain's nephew (as given in the *Ancestry of the Kings and Princes of Wales*), so Owain was betrayed and killed by Maglocune, just as Arthur was betrayed and killed by Merdraut/Mordred (who, according to Geoffrey, was his nephew).

The problems with these many assumptions are too numerous to go into here.

Jordanes (Gothic, Roman), *Origin and Deeds of the Goths* (written around 550)

Charles Mierow, 1915

XLV.237-238 Now Eurich, king of the Visigoths, perceived the frequent change of Roman Emperors and strove to hold Gaul by his own right. The [Roman] Emperor Anthemius heard of it **and asked the Brittones [Brittonum] for aid. Their King Riothamus [rex Riotimus] came with twelve thousand men into the state of the Bituriges [Biturigas] by the way of Ocean**, and was received as he disembarked from his ships. Eurich, king of the Visigoths, came against them with an innumerable army, and after a long fight he routed **Riothamus, king of the Brittones**, before the Romans could join him. So **when he had lost a great part of his army, he fled with all the men he could gather together, and came to the Burgundians**, a neighboring tribe then allied to the Romans.

Notes –

- Anthemius was emperor from 467 to 472, so Riothamus was alive sometime during this time.
 - While the name Riothamus might be more of a title, translated as "king-most" or "supreme king", Jordanes' use of "king Riothamus" would then be redundant. In addition, the formation of the name (noun/adjective + superlative suffix) follows a pattern found in numerous other Brittonic and Gaulish personal names, such as "Riochatus", which means "battle king", who was actually a priest!
 - Riothamus is twice called the king of the Britons. This is assumed to mean England because "*Brittonum*" is universally translated as Britain.
 - Riothamus fought Goths in Gaul at the request of a Roman Emperor.
 - It is unknown whether the betrayal by Arvandus (mentioned by Sidonius above) had anything to do with Riothamus' battle against Eurich. But the date implied by Jordanes and the mention of the Goths agree completely with Sidonius' account.
 - [Many people speculate](#) that Riothamus arrived in Gaul by way of the Loire, but whether "Bituriges" refers to tribes that settled near Bourges or Bordeaux, **neither is on the Loire**.
-

Gregory of Tours (Gallic Roman), *History of the Franks* (written around 570-590)

Brehaut, 1916

2.18-19 : Now Childeric fought at Orleans and Odoacer came with the Saxons to Angers.... **The Brittani were driven from Bourges [Bituricas] by the Goths, and many were slain at the village of Deols Count Paul with the Romans and Franks made war on the Goths and took booty.... After this, war was waged between the Saxons and the Romans but the Saxons fled and left many of their people to be slain, the Romans pursuing. Their islands were captured and ravaged by the Franks, and many were slain.**

Notes –

- Gregory’s mention of many Brittani being driven from Bourges and slain by the Goths in Deols can be dated to about 465-466 from his comments before and after the quote given. **Many people assume that this means these were Riothamus’ troops, but this statement does not explicitly indicate that those Britons were Riothamus’ (467-472).** Likewise, the combat between Romans and Saxons **does not explicitly indicate that Britons (or Riothamus) were involved.**
- **There is a common claim that Riothamus fought Saxons in the Loire valley (or at Angers itself), but this seems to be inferred by Gregory’s mention of Saxons at Angers, which is on the Loire, but far from Bourges. Then the “Romans” who fought the Saxons in Gregory are assumed to include Riothamus and his troops. No ancient author explicitly says that Riothamus fought Saxons anywhere!**

Bede (Anglo-Saxon), *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (written around 730) :

L. C. Jane, 1903

[16] When the victorious army, having destroyed and dispersed the natives, had returned home to their own settlements, the Britons began by degrees to take heart, and gather strength, sallying out of the lurking places where they had concealed themselves, and unanimously imploring the Divine assistance, that they might not utterly be destroyed. They had at that time for their leader, **Ambrosius Aurelius**, a modest man, **who alone, by chance, of the Roman nation had survived the storm, in which his parents, who were of the royal race,** had perished. Under him the Britons revived, and offering battle to the victors, by the help of God, came off victorious. From that day, sometimes the natives, and sometimes their enemies, prevailed, till the year of the siege of **Baddesdownhill**, when **they made no small slaughter of those invaders**, about forty four years after their arrival in England.

A. M. Sellar, 1907

[16] When the army of the enemy, having destroyed and dispersed the natives, had returned home to their own settlements, the Britons began by degrees to take heart, and gather strength, sallying out of the lurking places where they had concealed themselves, and with one accord imploring the Divine help, that they might not utterly be destroyed. They had at that time for their leader, **Ambrosius Aurelianus**, a man of worth, who alone, by chance, **of the Roman nation had survived the storm, in which his parents, who were of the royal race,** had perished. Under him the Britons revived, and offering battle to the victors, by the help of God, gained the victory. From that day, sometimes the natives, and sometimes their enemies, prevailed, till the year of the siege of **Badon-hill**, when **they made no small slaughter of those enemies**, about forty-four years after their arrival in England.

Howard Wiseman, 2000

In his *Chronica Majora* of about 725, Bede notes the following –

During the reign of Zeno (474-491) : The Britons, under the leadership of **Ambrosius Aurelianus** (a gentleman who, **alone of the Romans, had survived the disaster of the Saxons in which his parents, who had worn the purple,** had been killed) challenged the victors to battle and defeated them.

Notes –

- Bede apparently used Gildas as his source, and says nothing new about Ambrosius, except in his *Ecclesiastical History* to elevate his parents from merely “wearing the purple” to having a “royal name and insignia” (literally, from the original Latin).
- Bede, like Gildas, also does not state explicitly that Ambrosius won the battle of Badon hill, but merely associates him with the victory that began the period of fluctuating conflict.

- Bede assumed that “44 years” referred to the time between the arrival of the Saxons in Britain and the battle of Badon Hill; this is discounted by modern scholars.
- In *Chronica Majora*, Bede places Ambrosius as being active sometime between 474-491.

Nennius (Welsh), *Historia Brittonum* (written around 800-830) :

Giles, 1848; and Alan Lupack, ~2000 (chapters 56 and 73)

[31] Vortigern then reigned in Britain. In his time, the natives had cause of dread, not only from the inroads of the Scots and Picts, but also from the Romans, and their apprehensions of **Ambrosius**.

[48] ...Pascent, who reigned in the two provinces Builth and Guorthegirnaim, after the death of his father [Vortigern]. These were granted him by **Ambrosius** [*Ambrosio*], **who was the great king among the kings of Britain**.

[56] At that time, the Saxons grew strong by virtue of their large number and increased in power in Britain....**Then Arthur** [*Arthur*] **along with the kings of Britain fought against them in those days, but Arthur himself was the military commander** [*dux bellorum*]. His first battle was at the mouth of the river which is called Glein. His second, third, fourth, and fifth battles were above another river which is called Dubglas and is in the region of Linnuis. The sixth battle was above the river which is called Bassas. The seventh battle was in the forest of Celidon, that is Cat Coit Celidon. The eighth battle was at the fortress of Guinnion, in which Arthur carried the image of holy Mary ever virgin on his shoulders; and the pagans were put to flight on that day. And through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the power of the blessed Virgin Mary his mother there was great slaughter among them. The ninth battle was waged in the City of the Legion. The tenth battle was waged on the banks of a river which is called Tribruit. The eleventh battle was fought on the mountain which is called Agnet. **The twelfth battle was on Mount Badon** [*monte Badonis*] **in which there fell in one day 960 men from one charge by Arthur; and no one struck them down except Arthur himself, and in all the wars he emerged as victor**.

[73] There is another marvel in the region which is called Buel. There is a mound of stones there and one stone placed above the pile with the pawprint of a dog in it. When Cabal, who was the dog of **Arthur** [*Arturi*] **the soldier** [*militis*], was hunting the boar Troynt, he impressed his print in the stone, and afterwards Arthur assembled a stone mound under the stone with the print of his dog, and it is called the Carn Cabal. And men come and remove the stone in their hands for the length of a day and a night; and on the next day it is found on top of its mound.

There is another wonder in the region which is called Ercing. A tomb is located there next to a spring which is called Licat Amr; and the name of the man who is buried in the tomb was called thus: Amr. He was the son of **Arthur** [*Arturi*] **the soldier** [*militis*], and **Arthur himself killed and buried him in that very place**. And men come to measure the grave and find it sometimes six feet in length, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, sometimes fifteen. At whatever length you might measure it at one time, a second time you will not find it to have the same length--and I myself have put this to the test.

Notes –

- Ambrosius in [31] is described as being a contemporary of Vortigen (and the text immediately before [31] indicates that Vortigern came to power around 425); Vortigern in [48] is estimated to have died around 450, so Ambrosius seems to have become king right after that. **If Ambrosius was 25-35 in [31]**, he would have been 50-60 in [48], which is possible, but then he would have been 90-120 by the time of Badon Hill, which is unreasonable. The best hypothesis scholars have is that the Ambrosius in [31] and [48] is a different Ambrosius than described by Gildas, and *possibly* his father.
- This is the earliest document (for which we have a definitive date) that mentions Arthur by name.

- Ambrosius is named as “king among all kings” of Britain, and Arthur is described as fighting alongside the kings of Britain, so Nennius considers them separate people.
- Arthur is named as the military commander of the Britons, and as leading the battle (not siege) of Mount Badon. He is later referred to twice as a “soldier”.
- In [56], the Welsh words for “shield” and “shoulder” are very similar, and so some translations read that Arthur carried the image of Mary on his shield.
- The closest event in the document (which runs in chronological order) that can date Arthur and Badon Hill seems to be the death of St. Patrick in entry [55] (460 CE), so Arthur was active soon after that.
- While the document is considered to have been written during the ninth century, the earliest surviving copy was written in the first half of the 12th century, so how much of the original text survives in this copy is unknown.

There is a common claim on the web that [Ambrosius defeated Vortigern, warred successfully against the Saxons, and had their leader Hengist killed](#). **This is all from Geoffrey**, who is not to be trusted as a reliable source! Note that some sites say that Ambrosius killed Hengist, but in Geoffrey, someone else actually kills him. [Other sites specify a date of 488 for Hengist’s death, which is only implied in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle \(below\), which also only implies he ruled in Cantware \(Kent\)](#).

Welsh and Breton poems

A hero named Arthur appears in many early Welsh and Breton poems. The oldest written compilations of these poems generally date to the 1200’s to 1300’s, and while the poems themselves are generally believed to have originated in the 800’s to 900’s (some say as early as 400’s to 600’s), they cannot be dated with any accuracy. It is also unclear whether “Arthur” refers to a person or a title.

Jarman, 1998

Y Gododdin

This poem refers to a warrior Gwawrddur who

Fed black ravens [killed many men] on the rampart of a fortress

Though he was no **Arthur**.

There are two versions of this poem, only one of which mentions Arthur. It is thought to date from as early as the 600’s, but also might have originated in the 800’s or later.

Rowland(?), 1982

The Death-song of Cynddylan

I used to have brothers. It was better when they were

the young whelps of great **Arthur**, the mighty defender.

This poem could come from the 600’s, but also might have originated in the 800’s or later.

W. F. Skene, 1858

The Spoils of Annwn

...

And when we went with **Arthur**; a splendid labour,
Except seven, none returned from Caer Vedwyd.

...

Beyond Caer Wydyr they saw not the prowess of **Arthur**.

...

Thrice enough to fill Prydwen there went with **Arthur**,

...

And when we went with **Arthur** of anxious memory,
Except seven, none returned from Caer Vandwy.

...

When we went with **Arthur** of anxious contention,
Except seven, none returned from Caer Ochren.

...

Based on linguistic analysis, the *Spoils of Annwn* may have originated around 900.

William F. Skene, 1868

The Welsh poem *Llongborth* describes a battle at a port-settlement :

In Llongborth I saw **Arthur's** brave men who cut [enemies] with steel.

The Emperor, ruler of our labour [in battle].

This was likely written around 900-1000.

W. F. Skene, 1858

The Chair Of The Sovereign

...

The third deep wise one,

To bless **Arthur**,

Arthur the blessed,

In a compact song.

...

This was probably written after 1100.

Matthews, 2002

Journey To Deganwy

...as at **the battle of Badon with Arthur**, chief giver of feasts, with his tall blades red from the battle
which all men remember.

Currently, most historians consider this to have been written well after 1300.

Notes –

- Arthur's name could have replaced the original protagonist's name in any of the poems as Arthur's legend grew in popularity and the poems were copied and re-copied.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (created around 870-900) :

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a collection of annals in Old English chronicling the history of the Anglo-Saxons. Almost all of the material is in the form of annals, by year; the earliest are dated at 60 BC (the annals' date for Caesar's invasions of Britain), and historical material follows up to the year in which the chronicle was written, at which point contemporary records begin (ending at 1154). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is considered by some to be the single most important source for the history of England in Anglo-Saxon times.

- It makes no mention of Ambrosius, Badon Hill, Riothamus, or Arthur! However, from 450-550 it does not record **any** defeats of the Anglo-Saxon armies, which is suspicious.
-

Annals of Wales (Annales Cambriae, Welsh, possibly compiled around 950-970) :

John Morris, 1980

Year 72 (~516 AD) : the Battle of **Badon** [*Badonis*], in which **Arthur** [*Arthur*] carried the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders and the Britons were the victors.

Year 93 (~537 AD) : the battle of Camlann, in which **Arthur** [*Arthur*] and Mordred [*Medraut*] fell and there was : death in Britain and Ireland/plague in Britain.

[underlined text exists in only three of the five sources; some sources say “death...”, others say “plague...”]

Year 129 (~573 AD) : the battle of Armterid[Arfderydd](A)/Erderit(B)/Arderit(C) between the sons of Eliffer and Gwenddolau/Guendoleu son of Ceidio/Keidau; in which battle Gwenddolau/Guendoleu fell; Myrddin went mad.

[underlined text exists in only one of the five sources; different names for people are different spellings or in different languages]

Notes –

- Because the *Annales* contain no absolute dates of any kind, using it to verify the date of any person, place, or thing appearing in another text is completely useless.
- *Latin* names in brackets are from the “A” source only.
- The Welsh words for “shield” and “shoulder” are very similar, and so some translations read that Arthur carried the cross of Jesus on his shield.
- Arthur died 21 years after Badon Hill. Note that he is not named as a leader or king of any kind.
- This is the first appearance of Mordred in connection with Arthur, but note that the entry does not specify whether he was fighting with, for, or against Arthur, or if they were even related.
- The reference to Myrddin is from a folk story about a bard driven mad from the horrors of war, but who gained the gift of prophecy as a result. Geoffrey apparently took the name Myrddin, changed it to Merlinus, and combined it with a story about a prophetic child named Ambrosius from Nennius to create the Merlin associated with Arthur today.

William (Breton), Legend of St. Goeznovius (self-proclaimed 1019, now considered around 1200)

Ashe, 1985

In the course of time, the usurping king Vortigern, to buttress the defense of the kingdom of Great Britain which he unrighteously held, summoned warlike men from the land of Saxony and made them his allies in the kingdom. Since they were pagans and of devilish character, lusting by their nature to shed human blood, they drew many evils upon the Britons. Presently **their [Saxon] pride was checked for a while through the great Arthur, king of the Britons.** They were largely cleared from the island and reduced to subjection. But when this same Arthur, after many victories which he won gloriously **in Britain and in Gaul**, was summoned at last from human activity, the way was open for the Saxons to go again into the island, and there was great oppression of the Britons, destruction of churches and persecution of saints.

Richard White, 1998

Thus the Britons of America and of the island, using the same laws and bound by fraternal treaties, were ruled as one people in a single empiric region.

After a passage of time, Vortigern became king by usurpation; and, to preserve himself while ruling most of Britain, which he had subdued unjustly, he summoned warlike men from parts of Saxony and made them companions in his kingdom. Since these men were pagans and of a diabolical nature, they covered themselves with spilt human blood and brought much evil to the Britons. The **pride of these Saxons was later suppressed by the great Arthur, king of the Britons**, and they were driven from the greater part of the island and forced into servitude. However, when that same Arthur, after many splendid victories which he won **in parts of Britain and Gaul**, was recalled at length from worldly actions, the way was again clear for those Saxons who had remained in the island. Great oppression befell the British, and the Holy Church was persecuted.

Notes –

- The self-proclaimed date of 1019 is before Geoffrey, but if the currently accepted date of around 1200 is correct, this material could have been taken from Geoffrey, altho several modern scholars now believe there are indications that neither one influenced the other.
- Vortigern disappears from historical records around 450, and Arthur **is implied to have succeeded him**, so Arthur was apparently active starting right after that.
- White's translation includes a statement that Britain and Armorica were ruled by a single person, at least in a time before Vortigern (before about 425). But this is the **only** reference to this on the entire web!
- Arthur is called the king of the Britons, just like Riothamus in Jordanes and Ambrosius in Nennius above.
- Arthur fights the Saxons in Britain, just like Ambrosius did in Gildas, and Arthur did in Nennius.
- Arthur fought in Gaul, just like Riothamus in Jordanes above, but it does not name who he fought (Riothamus fought Goths in Jordanes, Arthur conquered the indigenous people [Franks, Goths, Gallo-Romans] in Geoffrey).
- This is the **only** (potentially) “early” source that says that Arthur fought in Gaul.
- With the oldest surviving text having been written 500-700 years after the events it describes, the accuracy of the details is unknown.

Unknown, *The Irish version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (1050-1100)

A. G. van Hamel, 1932

14. Now it came to pass after the aforesaid battle, and after the slaughter of the Roman chieftains three times by the Britons, after they had been four hundred and forty-nine years under the Roman tribute, that Gortigern [Vortigern], son of Gudal, took the chief sovereignty of Britain, and he was oppressed by the fear of the Cruithnians [Picts] and Gaels [Scots], and by the power of Ambrose [Amros] King of France [*rig Franc*] and Letavian Britain [*Breatan Leatha* → Armorica].

Notes –

- The text says that someone named Ambrose ruled over Gaul and Armorica during the reign of Vortigern (ca. 425-450).
- If Ambrose is indeed Ambrosius, **assuming he was 30 years old at some point when Vortigern ruled**, this would make him 70 to 125 years old at the battle of Badon, which is unreasonable. See Nennius above for more on this.
- The Irish word “Franc” can be translated as “France” or “Franks”, but “France” is much more common.

Léon Fleuriot says that Ambrosius (who he claims was known in Gaul as Riothamus) is the only British leader of the time who is identified (much later) as ruling both Brythons [Britons] and Franks, which could only be the case if he ruled territory in Brittany [Armorica].

This *seems* to be the source for his claim (however I am not positive since nowhere can I find the reference he bases his claim on). The Irish word “**Franc**” can be translated as “**France**” or “**Franks**”, but “**France**” is **much more common**, and only a very small part of France at that time was occupied by Franks. It would be amazing if one person could rule over British and all the Frankish tribes at the same time (but not so unlikely that he could rule over Armorican and Gallic [“French”] people, since both had Celtic backgrounds). Finally, the source **clearly refers to Breton (Armorica), not Brython (Britain)**.

Summary of “facts”, by author

These colors identify people.

Sidonius Apollinaris (470)

- Whether Sidonius is referring to **Riothamus** as a Breton (Gallic British) or Briton (Britain) is **unknown**.
- **Riothamus** is **active** around 470, and seems to be in a position of authority and/or power to effect changes in the Briton’s/Breton’s behavior, **but whether he was their “king” is unknown**.

Gildas (530)

- **Ambrosius** is described as a Roman of noble birth; while he apparently fought Saxons in Britain, it is only implied that he was the leader at the victory of Badon Hill. If he was, then he was **active** sometime between 490-520.

Jordanes (550)

- **Riothamus** is called the “King of the Brittones”, presumably England, and was **active** around 470.
- **Riothamus** fought Goths in Gaul at the request of a Roman Emperor.

Bede

- In *Chronica Majora*, Bede places **Ambrosius** as being **active** sometime between 474-491.

Nennius (730)

- **Ambrosius** was **active** sometime soon after 450.
- This is the earliest document (for which we have a definitive date) that mentions **Arthur** by name.
- **Ambrosius** is named as “king among all kings” of Britain, and **Arthur** is described as fighting alongside the kings of Britain, so Nennius considers them separate people.
- **Arthur** is named as the military commander of the Britons, and as leading the battle (not siege) of Mount Badon against Saxons in Britain. He is later referred to twice as a “soldier”.
- The closest event in the document (which runs in chronological order) that can date **Arthur** and Badon Hill seems to be the death of St. Patrick in entry [55] (460 CE), so Arthur was **active** soon after that.

Annals of Wales (980)

- **Arthur** died 21 years after Badon Hill, and so was **active** around 516-537. Note that he is not named as a leader or king of any kind.

Irish version of Nennius (1100)

- Someone named **Ambrose** ruled over Gaul and Armorica during the reign of Vortigern (ca. 425-450).

William (1200)

- **Arthur** is called the king of the Britons, like Riothamus in Jordanes and Ambrosius in Nennius.
- **Arthur** fights the Saxons in Britain, like Ambrosius did in Gildas, and Arthur did in Nennius.
- This is the only “early” source that says that **Arthur** fought in Gaul, like Riothamus did in Gregory.

- Vortigern disappears from historical records around 450, and Arthur is implied to have succeeded him, so Arthur was apparently **active** starting right after that.

By historical figure (each in chronological order of writing)

- Whether **Riothamus** is a Breton (Gallic British) or Briton (Britain) **is unknown**.
- **Riothamus** is **active** around 470, and seems to be in a position of authority and/or power to effect changes in the Briton's/Breton's behavior, **but whether he was their "king" is unknown**.
- **Riothamus** is called the "King of the Brittones", presumably England, and was **active** around 470.
- **Riothamus** fought Goths in Gaul at the request of a Roman Emperor.

- **Ambrosius** apparently fought Saxons in Britain, it is only implied that he was the leader at the victory of Badon Hill. **If** he was, then he was **active** sometime between 490-520.
- Bede places **Ambrosius** as being **active** sometime between 474-491.
- **Ambrosius** was **active** sometime soon after 450.
- **Ambrosius** is named as "king among all kings" of Britain, and **Arthur** is described as fighting alongside the kings of Britain, so Nennius considers them separate people.

- **Arthur** is named as the military commander of the Britons, and as leading the battle (not siege) of Mount Badon against Saxons in Britain. He is later referred to twice as a "soldier".
- Arthur was **active** soon after 460 CE.
- **Arthur** is called the king of the Britons, like Riothamus in Jordanes and Ambrosius in Nennius.
- **Arthur** fights the Saxons in Britain, like Ambrosius did in Gildas.
- There is only **one** "early" source that says that **Arthur** fought in Gaul.