



0. BRITONS FIGHT BACK - Story Preface

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After Rome abandoned its province of Britannia, Britons were left to fend for themselves against raiders and invaders (such as the Saxons). A Celtic monk named Gildas tells us about the continuing onslaughts against the Brits. He also tells us about a victory they achieved under the leadership of a Roman, Ambrosius Aurelianus, who remained in Britain after his parents had died. Stories about such events were sometimes illustrated with folklore images where a Red Dragon depicted Britons and a White Dragon depicted Saxons. This illustration—in which the Red Dragon defeats the White Dragon—is from a manuscript maintained at Lambeth Palace which references Geoffrey Monmouth's "History of the Kings of Britain."

Before life became temporarily better for native Britons, however, it became much worse. Gildas writes of the devastating onslaught:

All the major towns were laid low by the repeated battering of enemy rams; laid low, too, all the inhabitants--church leaders, priests and people alike, as the swords glinted all around and the flames crackled. It was a sad sight.

In the middle of the squares the foundation-stones of high walls and towers that had been torn from their lofty base, holy altars, fragments of corpses, covered (as it were) with a purple crust of congealed blood, looked as though they had been mixed up in some dreadful wine-press. (See Gildas, at Chapter 24.)

Some of the surviving natives left their country (beginning, it is believed, around 460 A.D.) for Armorica on the northwestern French coast (still called Gaul at that time). They settled in what became known as Brittany (Bretagne).

Gildas observed that historical records "such as they were, are not now available, having been burnt by enemies or removed by our countrymen when they went into exile."

Eventually, however, the Britons rallied and fought back - at least for a time. Gildas sets the scene:

After a time, when the cruel plunderers had gone home, God gave strength to the survivors. Wretched people fled to them from all directions, as eagerly as bees to a beehive when a storm threatens, and begged whole-heartedly...that they should not be altogether destroyed. (Gildas, at Chapter 25.)

Survivors need a leader to champion their cause. Who, at this moment in Britain's history, was the champion? According to Gildas, a Roman whose noble parents were killed in Britannia's chaotic conflict:

Their leader was Ambrosius Aurelianus, 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...Under him our people regained their strength, and challenged the victors to battle. The Lord assented, and the battle went their way.

From then on victory went now to our countrymen, now to their enemies...This lasted right up till the year of the siege of Badon Hill, pretty well the last defeat of the villains, and certainly not the least. That was the year of my birth... (Gildas, end of Chapter 25 and beginning of Chapter 26.)

If the battle of Badon Hill (also referred to as Mons Badonicus) was fought (as Gildas notes) in the year he was born, the date must have been around 496 A.D. A reprieve from constant fighting took place after Badon Hill.

Although this relative "peace" lasted nearly fifty years, devastating effects of prior battles were still felt in towns and cities. Gildas notes:

But the cities of our land are not populated even now as they once were; right to the present they are deserted, in ruins and unkempt. (Gildas, Chapter 26.)

Peace did not last.

We learn from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that Saxons defeated Britons at Old Sarum, a hill fort on the Salisbury Plain (where Stonehenge is located), in 52 A.D. In far less time than they could have foreseen, Britons were being decimated, or assimilated, into the Anglo-Saxon culture of invitees-turned-invaders:

- Who could have anticipated such foreigners would begin to establish the political and legal foundations of a future empire?
- Who could have imagined their kings would rule England?
- Who could have imagined their coins would become currency of the realm?
- And ... who could have predicted that an invader from the south - William the Conqueror and his Norman (French) troops - would forever end Anglo-Saxon rule in the 1066 Battle of Hastings?

Before that happened, however, another legend was born. A lasting legend, that is, and likely based on a real man whose name was Arthur.

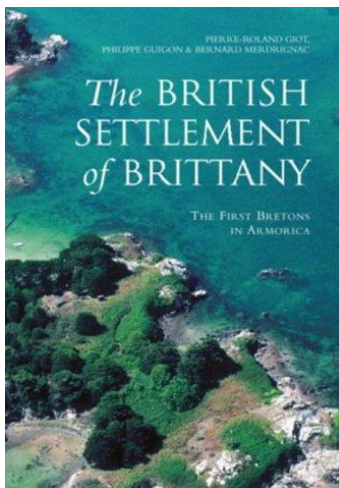
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The British Settlement of Brittany

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France - Brittany (Bretagne) Administrative Division

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Old Sarum

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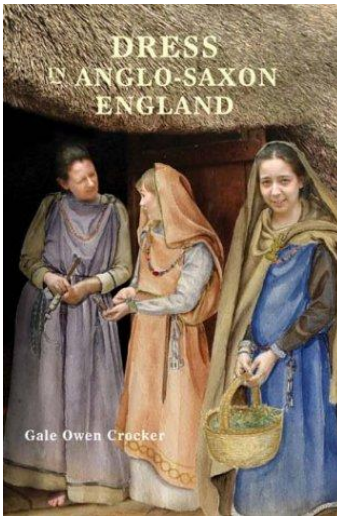


Salisbury Plain

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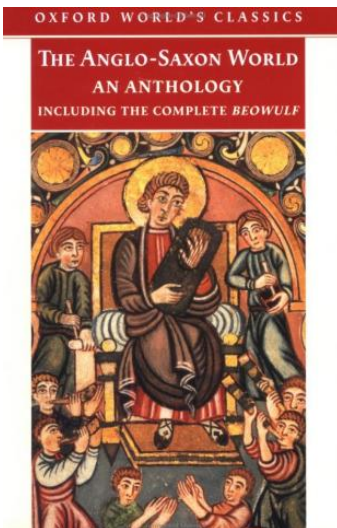


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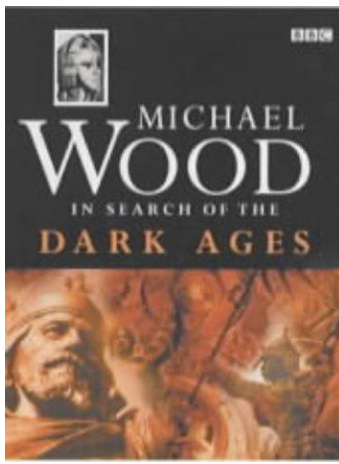


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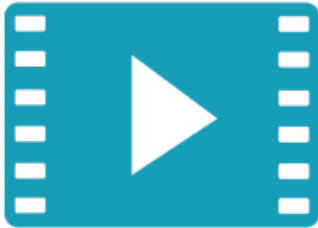


William the Conqueror

Image online, courtesy Royal Monarchy.

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Stonehenge - A Mysterious Place

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