

ARABIC ASTRONOMY AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CONTACT: GEOFFREY OF
MONMOUTH'S PROPHETIC DRAGON AND ITS RECEPTION IN MEDIEVAL
ARTHURIAN LITERATURE

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Word Count = 79,994

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March 2025

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the complex relationship between the development of the dragon as a political prophetic symbol in late-medieval English history and romance, and the English reception, and understanding, of Arabic astral materials contemporary with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1138), *Prophetiae Merlini* (c. 1135), and *Vita Merlini* (c. 1150). It argues that Geoffrey's engagements with the dragon of Arabic astronomy and astrology (alongside classical, and his better noted Welsh, influences) marks the beginning of a long history of the English inclusion, and disavowal, of Arabic influences, which this thesis also traces through the subsequent uses of the dragon allusions found in Geoffrey's *Historia* in the earliest English Arthurian prose romance, the *Prose Merlin* (c. 1450), translated from the first component text of the Vulgate Cycle – by which point the prophetic dragon has lost the Arabic astral signifiers visible in its twelfth-century form. The gradual invisibility of the astronomical Galfridian dragon is, I argue, superseded by the growing visibility and development of the dragon as a crusading cipher in medieval Arthurian literature, a concept which also finds a point of origin in Geoffrey.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and sisters, for all their belief and support.

To *Merlin* (BBC 2008 TV Series), which sparked my first interest in the Arthurian legend.

And lastly to myself, for pushing through despite everything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God Almighty, for granting me the opportunity to pursue and complete this degree. There is no Power or Might, no Light or Aid, no Blessing or Relief, except Yours. All praise is due to You, the Most Kind, the Best of Helpers.

Thank you to my parents, Sajjad Mouzam and Shaheen Kosar, for always pushing me to strive for excellence. Finishing this degree could not have been possible without your many sacrifices over these last few years. Thank you for always being there to pick me up and drop me off to university whenever I needed it, for ensuring that I always had enough food to take with me, and for your belief in me throughout the many years it took to complete this. I told you it would take three, but it ended up taking six, so I'd like to apologise for making you wait longer than planned. May God grant you both ease, health, and happiness, in this life and the next. This doctorate is for you.

A huge thank you to both of my sisters, Sanah Mouzam and Hafsa Mouzam, for riding with me through every storm, and for not letting the rough waters sink my ship. You both believed in me and this work during every twist and turn of life, and you never had any doubt that I would one day finish this thesis. I will always remember your unwavering faith in me and your constant support of my dreams. Thank you for watching *Merlin* with me. I couldn't have God asked for two better companions. Keep striving towards greatness. In the words of our favourite Kdrama meme: You got this! Fighting, girl!

To my Bava jee, Karam Hussain, and my Dada jee, Mouzam Khan. May God have mercy on you both, and may He reunite us in the Highest Paradise. Bava jee, your prayers and your presence always brought me great comfort. You were the best storyteller I knew, and I will try my utmost to walk through life with the same strength and humility that you always emulated. I'm so sorry you didn't get to see me finish this. I'll tell you all about it

when we meet again, God-willing. Dada jee, you once told me that seeing me graduate was the happiest moment of your life, because you never thought a day would come when someone would call out your name in a place like the Great Hall. After submitting this degree, I'll get to do it one last time, God-willing. Your words will be with me when I do.

A special thanks to all my family and neighbours, particularly Tamkin Ahmed Jafri. You always talk about how you almost had the chance to pursue a doctorate too. Let this be for you too. Thank you for your enthusiastic support all these many years.

To my dear friends and peers, the ones who were with me for part of this journey, and the ones who have seen it all from beginning to end. To the HGS girls: Hafsa Khatoon, Mariam Khanom, Ayesha Ali, Nushin Rahman, Aqsa Hussain, and Aqsa Arif. You never left, and you never doubted. I am so grateful to call you all my friends. To Aysha Nisa, my literary companion. Thank you for getting me out in the fresh air. To the peers I began this thesis with: Eva Momtaz, Neelam Hussain, Narmin Ismayilova, the Westmere Tribe, the Lemmae Group, and those at MEMOs. Thank you for all your help, encouragement, and support. Finally, to the Westmere 105 group, the peers who helped me get through to the very end: Haley Goren, Chang Guo, Yasmin Pezeshki, Sam Riley, and Imran Hashmi. Thank you for all the laughter. Your companionship during this final year has been a true blessing. I wish every one of you all the success going forward.

Most importantly, this thesis could not have been possible without the guidance, support, mentorship, excitement, and generosity of my brilliant supervisory team. Firstly, and most notably, my deepest thanks to Dr Victoria Flood, who has endured as much as I have in the completion of this degree. Over these many years, you have helped me to achieve a vision that went above and beyond my initial proposal, and I have learned so much from you along the way. You encouraged every idea, allowed me to venture down every rabbit hole, and helped me to craft something that will hopefully make for an interesting contribution to our

joint field of study. Thank you for always supporting me, in both life and academia. You truly are the best supervisor I have ever had, and there are no words for how grateful I am to have met you. Secondly, to Dr Megan Cavell, who taught me the importance of rest, the power of subheadings, and the magic of free writing. My work and my life are both better for it. You helped me to become confident and supported me during one of the best moments of my doctoral research. I will always remember our trip to Oxford fondly. Thank you for allowing me to take your place. After all this is done, I look forward to having another cup of tea together with one of the cool mugs from your awesome collection. Lastly, to Dr Emily Wingfield, who joined our team late but made it complete. Thank you for directing me to Vicky all those years ago when I first approached you about dragons. Your grace is unmatched, and your direction and perspective, particularly for the final chapter of this thesis, has been so helpful. You have been such a wonderful addition to our team.

A warm thanks to the English Department at the University of Birmingham, my home for the past eleven years. Completing all three of my degrees here has been such a wonderful and memorable experience. Thank you to Professor Hugh Adlington, Professor Gillian Wright, Dr Will Sharpe, Dr Rex Ferguson, Professor John Holmes, Dr Kate Rumbold, Dr Fariha Shaikh, and Jason Gibson. Your advice, support, and warm wishes over these many years has been a great comfort. Many thanks to Dr Will Tattersdill too— Glasgow are lucky to have you.

To conclude, I am grateful to both the Birmingham Doctoral Scholarship and The Vinaver Trust Award for their support during the first year of this thesis, and the AHRC Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership for its support from the second year of this project onwards. A final thanks to James Freeman, Andy Corrigan, and Rare Books at Cambridge University Library, for all their help with accessing MS Ff.3.11 during Covid. My final chapter would not have been possible without their timely support.

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INTRODUCTION: ARABIC TRANSMISSION AND CULTURAL IMAGININGS

The Arthurian dragon originated in the political prophecies and pseudo-historical imaginings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and its appearance here and subsequent reappearances in English Arthurian literature were to a large degree shaped by the cross-cultural transmission histories, and cultural anxieties, of the twelfth century. Dragons in Geoffrey's foundational Arthurian text, *Historia regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain, c. 1138) are intrinsically tied to the prophecies and dreams of Uther Pendragon, his son, King Arthur, and the political prophet, Merlin. Previously, both Geoffrey and these prophecies have been predominantly studied in terms of their Welsh literary influences.¹ This study primarily seeks to expand these earlier understandings of the twelfth-century writer and his works, investigating Geoffrey's use and elision of concepts beyond Welsh ideas and materials. By uncovering the astronomical significance of the Arthurian dragon, I highlight new lines of potential influence largely unexplored within the critical field, drawing attention to Geoffrey's incorporation of

¹ See A. O. H. Jarman, *The Legend of Merlin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1960); Helen Fulton, 'Arthur and Merlin in Early Welsh Literature: Fantasy and Magic Naturalism,' in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 84-101; A. O. H. Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy,' in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. by Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 117-145; O. J. Padel, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the development of the Merlin legend,' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 51 (2006), 37-65; Aled Llion Jones, *Darogan: Prophecy, Lament and Absent Heroes in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013); Julia Crick, 'Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition', in *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 67-82.

astronomical and astrological concepts within his *Historia, Prophetiae Merlini* (Prophecies of Merlin, c. 1135), and *Vita Merlini* (Life of Merlin, c. 1150/55), from both Latinate-Arabic and classical sources, both of which were being read, translated, and transmitted in the period of Geoffrey's writing.²

However, the dragon's connection to astronomy and astrology, I argue, is but the first point in a wider history of Christian-Muslim cultural contact with which Geoffrey's *Historia* and its later reception texts are engaged.³ This thesis also investigates the Galfridian dragon's relationship to the English depiction of the 'Saracen' and the reception of this within the later English Arthurian romance, the *Prose Merlin*, the fifteenth-century Middle English translation of the first part of the Vulgate Cycle.⁴ Here, looking at the context of the Crusades, I examine the impact of medieval cultural anxieties between Christians and Muslims which occurred alongside moments of cultural transmission between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Through this parallel exploration of the Arthurian dragon as both a stellar scientific symbol and a specific cultural monster, I chart the dual significance of Geoffrey's creature, from its entry into the Galfridian tradition as an astrological and astronomical

² Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. by Michael D. Reeve, trans. by Neil Wright (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007). Hereafter *HRB*; *Life of Merlin. Geoffrey of Monmouth. Vita Merlini*, ed. by Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973). Hereafter *Vita*.

³ Here, I understand Arabic and Muslim as two different contexts. The two terms are not used as synonyms (although they may have been synonymous for insular authors). Throughout this thesis, while Muslim is used as a religious signifier for a person or place associated with Islam, Arabic refers to the language used in writings in parts of the Islamic world during this medieval period. Scholars who read and translated these works were not necessarily Muslim – there were also many notable Jewish and Christian contributors of Arabic material.

⁴ I place the term 'Saracen' in asterisks throughout this thesis. For a full discussion of this choice, see the Introduction of this thesis, pages 36-42 below.

allusion to its subsequent reimagining as a romance motif (divorced from this earlier intellectual context).

From its twelfth-century origins to its later Middle English form, the Galfridian dragon denotes two kinds of Christian-Muslim contact, a relationship made both visible and invisible throughout the medieval Arthurian tradition. In terms of Geoffrey's work, this course of research reveals a new interconnectedness between all his works, highlighting his interest in patternmaking through the construction of astronomical motifs, a patternmaking which draws explicit attention to Arabic influences. In terms of his reception, in the *Prose Merlin* and its French sources, it suggests that the Arabic debt apparent in the dragon motif as we find it in Geoffrey's works eventually was erased, and the dragon was used in the context of more obviously pejorative imaginings of cross-cultural contact. More widely, by investigating the far-reaching literary and cultural influences which informed the development of the dragon as a cultural symbol between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, this thesis will demonstrate how English literature owes debts to Arabic learning, revising the ways in which we consider 'English' literary symbols within canonical works.

Scholarship on Geoffrey, which notably amounts to less than the critical attention given to those Arthurian texts and writers which succeed him, has mainly focused on: the political nature of his prophecies within the *Prophetiae*, the *Historia*, and the *Vita*, their connections to Welsh legends, and his construction of Merlin.⁵ Recent research has noted

⁵ See Victoria Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place in Medieval England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016); Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power through the Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009); Karen Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2010); Victoria Flood, 'Arthur's Return from Avalon: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Development of the Legend,' *Arthuriana*, 25 (2015), 84-110; Michael A. Faletra, 'The Conquest of the Past in *The History of the Kings of Britain*,' *Literature Compass*, 4 (2006), 121-133.

how Geoffrey's writing is 'hard to contain and classify', falling into multiple scholarly disciplines including 'folklore, history, romance, manuscript studies, Celtic studies, classical reception, and medieval Latin'.⁶ Indeed, all of Geoffrey's prophetic texts appear to blur the boundaries of genre and span multiple linguistic and cultural contexts. The *Historia* itself has been understood as both a history and/ or the beginning of romance, as Geraldine Heng suggests, in which insular imaginings may have been informed by the romancing of events in the Latin East, as an act of 'cultural fantasy' (an image, concept, or symbol which preserves and perpetuates certain cultural imaginings, while choosing which stay visible and which are made invisible; a motif which relays past, present, and future cultural moments; an embodiment of a cultural hope or a cultural fear; a thing both old and new).⁷ Beyond Heng's work, however, there is very little Arthurian scholarship which connects Geoffrey to the Islamic world (a broad term I use to encompass the Muslim Iberian Peninsula and the Muslim East), with even less focus on the relationship between Geoffrey, astronomy and astrology, and the contributions of Arabic knowledge to literary texts in the Middle Ages.⁸ This thesis seeks to fill this critical lacuna in Arthurian studies, seeking to answer several research questions. Firstly, how does classical and Arabic astronomy (which fills in the gaps we find in classical knowledge in the twelfth century) inform Geoffrey's construction of the dragon motif? Secondly, why do we begin to see the disavowal of this twelfth-century influence by

⁶ Joshua Byron Smith, 'Introduction and Biography', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 1-28 (p. 1).

⁷ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 18.

⁸ The main critical piece of research that does establish this connection, which I will discuss more fully in this introduction and expand on throughout the thesis is Elizabeth J. Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated: *Caput Draconis* and the Pendragon Star in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and La3amon', *Arthuriana*, 26 (2016), 141-163. For other discussions of Geoffrey and astronomy/ astrology, see Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales 700-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the time we reach the fifteenth century and the *Prose Merlin*? Thirdly, how do the concepts of *translatio imperii* (transfer of rule/ power) and *translatio studii* (transfer of learning/ knowledge) influence the construction of the dragon motif in the Latin, French, and Middle English traditions? Finally, how does the dragon motif operate as a ‘cultural fantasy’ motif both within Geoffrey and his later reception? This last question stems from my reading of Heng’s *Empire of Magic*, a key critical text informing this thesis. Here, I revisit and nuance Heng’s idea of ‘cultural fantasy’ through the dragon motif, asserting the influence of classical and Arabic scientific materials across the English Arthurian canon. This demonstrates that, while Geoffrey’s *Historia* and *Prophetiae* may indeed be the beginning of romance, as Heng suggests, Geoffrey’s works also show us the incorporation of Arabic astronomical and astrological ideas within romance motifs, a combination previously unexplored in the context of its wider implications for our understanding of English history and romance. These lines of transmission between the medieval Latinate West and the Islamic world are a debt which can no longer be overlooked within each of Geoffrey’s works, with such a reading showing Geoffrey’s works as a point of multiple origins: the beginning of a genre, the start of a legend, and the earliest point of Arabic scientific influence found within Arthurian literature.

Therefore, my thesis’s original contribution to knowledge is threefold. It presents an in-depth investigation into the potential models and analogous uses of Arabic astronomy (approached alongside classical influences) expressed through Geoffrey’s original dragon motif; the identification of the subsequent invisibility or erasure of this within the later English uses of the dragon motif in the *Prose Merlin*; and a new approach to the relationship between scientific culture and cultural fantasy, which describes an intellectual history as much as a cultural one. By demonstrating how history, prophecy, and romance should be read alongside the history of science, this thesis makes visible the impact of cross-cultural encounters that would otherwise remain invisible. It presents how both productive and hostile

Christian-Muslim contact, or ‘antagonistic and affiliative cultural engagement’ (to borrow a term from postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha), have influenced canonical Arthurian writings, in turn reshaping the ways in which we must now read, consider, and interact with recognisable Arthurian motifs.⁹ In this light, the Galfridian dragon becomes a palimpsest of multicultural interchange, one which, after peeling away its well-known trappings, reveals not only a hidden exchange of transmitted knowledge between Christian Europe and the Islamic world, but also a discriminatory perception of non-insular groups, specifically Muslims, from the eyes of the medieval Christian West.

Geoffrey’s Two Dragons

There are two main dragon types which this thesis explores in relation to the Arthurian dragon. Each dragon functions as a medieval romance motif, emerging in the twelfth century with Geoffrey, and continuing to appear until at least the fifteenth century in the *Prose Merlin*. The recurrence of these symbols across Arthurian romance is referred to by Helen Cooper as ‘mimetic replication’ – a process wherein which a ‘meme’ (a concept first coined by zoologist Richard Dawkins as ‘a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation’) is

⁹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 1994), p. 3. For more on postcolonial theory, see *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. by Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ruth Evans, ‘Historicizing Postcolonial Criticism: Cultural Difference and the Vernacular’, in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Vernacular Theory, 1280–1520*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 366–70; *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Bruce W. Holsinger, ‘Medieval Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and the Genealogies of Critique’, *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 1195–1227.

able to ‘replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion [can] adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures’.¹⁰ More recent scholars who build upon Cooper’s earlier application of this idea to romance have understood memes in relation to the wider social transmission and cultural translation of motifs.¹¹ The Arthurian dragon, which aligns with these later concepts, is also a culturally determined motif, rewriting itself within romance and consistently affected by changes in cultural, religio-political, and intellectual contexts and attitudes from across the Middle Ages.

In Arthurian literature, we find the dragon’s point of origin in Geoffrey’s *Historia*, where the creature appears in his reimagining of the ninth-century *Omen of the Dragons* episode.¹² With every main instance of the dragon in Geoffrey’s text (the *Omen* episode, the dragon star/ comet, Uther’s golden dragons, and the bear and dragon dream), the motif is principally associated with insular prophecy, with Geoffrey’s prophetic dragon symbolising British power. This is, however, not the only significance of the motif within the *Historia*. Geoffrey’s dragon is also a signifier of astronomical knowledge and crusading fantasies. These two other significances of the dragon form the basis of the two dragon motifs studied throughout this thesis, which I term respectively as the ‘astronomical Galfridian dragon’ and the ‘crusading Galfridian dragon’. The astronomical Galfridian dragon refers to the construction of the dragon as an astronomical/ astrological motif within Geoffrey’s work

¹⁰ See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 249; Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹¹ See *Cultural Translations in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Victoria Flood and Megan G. Leitch (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2022); *Romance Rewritten: The Evolution of Middle English Romance. A Tribute to Helen Cooper*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald, Megan G. Leitch and Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018).

¹² See Chapter 1 of this thesis, pages 56-62.

(influenced by Latinate-Arabic, Syriac, and Greek sources), while the crusading Galfridian dragon represents imperial imaginings manifested in Geoffrey, particularly Arthur's role as a crusader king embarking upon Christian warfare, a characterisation influenced by the cultural memory of the First Crusade – interesting given Dawkins's original association of meme with 'memory'.¹³

In terms of both my dragon motifs, one is more textually (and culturally) dominant than the other, in that it is more clearly recognised and remembered after Geoffrey. We might think here of Susan Blackmore's differentiation of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' memes, with the former getting 'copied and spread'.¹⁴ This concept of a motif culturally outlasting others is what we find occurring after the *Historia* with Geoffrey's two dragon types – one is ultimately made invisible while the other resurfaces after the twelfth century. As discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, we see the eventual vanishing of the astronomical Galfridian dragon, the Arthurian dragon motif losing its astral significance after the twelfth century. The dragon's connection to astronomy and astrology, which remained largely hidden in the *Historia*, is concealed behind Geoffrey's development of the dragon as a romance motif. This transformation of genre, the displacement of scientific material with romance allusion, plays a key role in the astronomical motif's eventual disappearance. Alternatively, the crusading Galfridian dragon survives, replicating and adapting itself in the French tradition, before emerging again in the fifteenth century, in the *Prose Merlin*. The more enduring of the two dragons, this second motif enters late medieval romance as a Christian proto-crusading symbol, utilised against the *Prose Merlin*'s stock antagonist, the figure of the 'Saracen'. Thus, the crusading Galfridian dragon motif is influenced by a long cultural-historical context which continues centuries after Geoffrey, drawing upon a long-term cultural movement (the

¹³ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 249.

¹⁴ Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 7.

Crusades) which is still relevant to, and understood by, audiences after the twelfth century. A 'successful' or recurring motif then, at least in the case of Geoffrey's Arthurian dragons, is one which is overt, and which represents a lingering cultural interest or fear. To be passed on, motifs must, as Cooper suggests of memes, hold 'new meanings, new justifications, to fill it out and give it continued life.'¹⁵ The Arthurian crusading dragon motif follows this approach, thus it not only outlives the astronomical Galfridian dragon but eventually replaces it within the *Prose Merlin* text, able to renew and reassert its significance, by granting itself new justifications and moments of connection across history, texts, and culture since its conception in Geoffrey. By possessing the ability to remain while being reimagined and rewritten, it is much like the genre of romance itself, which is similarly mutable in nature, and which too draws upon the contemporary cultural contexts which surround it.

Medieval Romance

Beside uncovering the significances of the medieval Arthurian dragon, this thesis is also engaged with the ways in which the dragon motif represents the interrelated concepts of romance, genre, and *translatio*. For this study, the importance of romance lies in the genre's enabling of recurring motifs, its intrinsic relationship to history and culture, and its facilitation of erasure (intellectual, cultural, and historical). *Translatio imperii* (the translation of power) and *translatio studii* (the translation of knowledge) – which each of Geoffrey's two dragon motifs represent – also interact with this concept of erasure, with both the *Historia* and the *Prose Merlin* using romance to reshape and rewrite the movement of intellectual and political authority throughout the Middle Ages.

¹⁵ Cooper, *Romance in Time*, p. 2.

Medieval romance is a medium which is as diverse as it is specific. Cooper describes romance as a ‘family of texts’, a genre which consists of interrelating categories and sub-genres, ranging from the historical, to the alliterative, to the prose, narrating matters on Britain, France, and Rome, and comprising of different traditions, of which Arthurian romance is one significant part.¹⁶ A genre both varied and complex, romance is often difficult to categorise. It has been described as ‘the carnival magician of genres, conjuring variety from the same bag of tricks: stock characters, repeated plots, motifs, memes, and overriding themes, right down to the level of verbal formulas and conventional phrases.’¹⁷ This suggestion of romance as sameness, that its symbols are recognisable, is an aspect of the genre which allows for motifs, like the Arthurian dragon, to appear and reappear. Corrine Saunders, in her examination of romance, notes how ‘motifs form the backbone of romance’, with the genre characterised by patterns occurring across texts, particularly romances emerging in the Middle Ages.¹⁸ Yet, despite romance’s reuse of the familiar, and its

¹⁶ Cooper, *Romance in Time*, p. 8. For more on medieval romance, see *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Heroes and Anti-heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012); James F. Knapp and Peggy A. Knapp, *Medieval Romance: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Lydia Zeldenrust, *The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe: Translation, Circulation, and Material Contexts* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2020); Amy Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); *Medieval Romances Across European Borders*, ed. by Miriam Edlich-Muth (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018); *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002); *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Corey James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009).

¹⁷ Christine Chism, ‘Romance’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500*, ed. by Larry Scanlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 57-69 (p. 57).

¹⁸ Corrine Saunders, ‘Introduction’, in *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. by Corrine Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

celebration and preoccupation with repetition, it is a genre which still allows for adaptation and originality, showcasing romance's flexibility, range, and capacity for renewal. As Megan G. Leitch succinctly notes, it is a genre dependant 'upon reinvigoration as much as innovation, upon transformation as much as tradition.'¹⁹ Its mobility, most evident across England and France (but critically noticed now in other parts of Europe too, such as Wales, Ireland, and Scandinavia), exemplifies how medieval romance 'belongs to a linguistically plural context', showing its interest in multiple languages, histories, cultures, and peoples.²⁰

It is thus both 'socially and culturally determined', oftentimes 'highly culturally specific.'²¹ An example of this is the *Prose Merlin*, which utilises romance in a prose context (earlier than Sir Thomas Malory's late fifteenth-century romance) to address the cultural anxieties of the historical past and present, encoding these attitudes in a later form of Geoffrey's crusading dragon (via the French Vulgate tradition). Chapter 4 of this thesis explores this concept in greater depth, investigating how the Middle English romance reworks its source materials (Geoffrey and the French Vulgate) to accommodate contemporary concerns. In this light then, romance may be perceived as 'socially pertinent, looking backwards and forwards', reflective in its resurfacing of the past, as much as it is impulsive, acting on present anxieties and attitudes.²² Closely shaped by cultural conditions, it is a

¹⁹ Megan G. Leitch, 'Introduction. Middle English Romance: The Motifs and the Critics', in *Romance Rewritten: The Evolution of Middle English Romance*, pp. 1-24 (p. 1).

²⁰ Victoria Flood and Megan G. Leitch, 'Introduction. Insular Romance in Translation: New Approaches', in *Cultural Translations*, ed. by Flood and Leitch, pp. 1-20 (p. 4).

²¹ Flood and Leitch, 'Insular Romance in Translation', p. 4.

²² Saunders, 'Introduction', p. 3.

mode of telling [which] can actually provide ways of coming to grips with difficult cultural problems [...] from safer or more elucidating distances. Its exploration of loss and recuperation can speak intimately to the anxieties of its audiences; its fantasies can express yearnings that are profoundly and traceably historical. The genre serves audiences who need simultaneously to be reassured by the traditional and gripped by the urgent and imminent.²³

Informative as well as comforting, romance narratives actively provide cultural closure or, to borrow Geraldine Heng's framing, the genre helps society navigate collective 'historical trauma' to finally achieve 'cultural recovery'.²⁴ Medieval romance then operates as a healer of sorts, utilised as a coping mechanism to effectively treat cultural tensions.

Yet, while romance holds the power to heal, it can also incite harmful animosities. The genre, in its narration of the past and present, at times deviates from conveying cultural histories truthfully or even impartially. Through its capacity for erasure, romance can spin history, which, while at times alleviating cultural concerns, can also instigate or further certain negative 'cultural and social agendas'.²⁵ As seen in medieval romances like the *Prose Merlin*, these adverse agendas manifest in the text through cultural motifs (like the crusading Arthurian dragon), which can be used to intensify pejorative cultural and racial imaginings. This idea that romance takes cultural sides, that it can possess certain allegiances which influence its motifs, leads us to interrogate the models of representation, like that of the Muslim 'Saracen', found in romance narratives across the Middle Ages. Through exploring the implications of romance motifs, we discover that romance does not achieve 'cultural

²³ Chism, 'Romance', p. 57.

²⁴ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 3.

²⁵ Flood and Leitch, 'Insular Romance in Translation', p. 13.

recovery' for all, but rather only for certain cultural groups, predominantly the Christian West.

This shows how romance is primarily invested in certain individuals and their identities and ideals or, to borrow Christine Chism's phrase, 'the genre is not about *what* but rather *who*.'²⁶ This is evident in medieval Arthurian romance which, according to Heng, begins with Geoffrey's *Historia*, a magical narrative encoded with patterns which blend history and culture.²⁷ Geoffrey's work, while indeed commenting upon nation (a key aspect of chronicles), is also composed of the stories of individual heroes with unique qualities and deadly enemies, like Uther Pendragon, King Arthur, and Merlin – who is the primary focus of Geoffrey's later *Vita*. As a romance text, the *Historia* employs certain motifs – like the dragon – to grapple with crises of chivalry, betrayal, imperial power, and mortality, most poignantly felt within its Arthurian sections. In contrast, the *Vita* incorporates romance motifs which deal with the struggle between inclusion and seclusion, and the clash between knowledge and power, through the concepts of the mad prophet and the wise queen (representing the two siblings, Merlin and Ganiada). Motifs such as these can also interact with other complex and important social concepts, like race, class, and gender, found too within later Arthurian romances, like Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (The Death of Arthur, 1485), Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (c. 1580 – 93), and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590 – 96). These three works have been suggested to offer 'a new kind of English Arthurian romance', playing with the conventions of genre and employing romance for different purposes.²⁸ We see this, however, occurring much earlier in the twelfth century with Geoffrey's astronomical dragon motif (discussed further in Chapter 1), where

²⁶ Chism, 'Romance', p. 59; Saunders, 'Introduction', p. 2.

²⁷ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 2.

²⁸ Saunders, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5.

romance is used to veil the scientific. This playfulness and generic hybridity reveals romance as a less restrictive form of narration, a ‘protean’ medium which enables the manipulation of sources in a way which other genres (like the chronicle), or other forms of writing (like scientific tracts), do not easily permit.²⁹ It grants a writer flexibility, gifting them the choice to act less faithfully towards their sources and influences. This is particularly discernible in romances consulting classical and legendary material (like Arthurian romance), which treat historical accuracy with more ambivalence: ‘some claim historicity, set their events within mappable geographies, and name their source texts or eyewitnesses; while others spurn historicity for fantastic reinvention.’³⁰ Works like the *Historia* and the *Prose Merlin* shift between the two, building upon the (pseudo)historical with subtle and obvious alteration. Such cases importantly show how the generalisability of romance facilitates erasure, a feature exploited both by Geoffrey, through his hidden constructions of an astronomical dragon, and by the *Prose Merlin*, which uses the crusading dragon to culturally erase the ‘Saracen’ and ultimately rewrite Christian military loss (discussed further in Chapter 4). This exemplifies two different but important facets of romance erasure: while the *Historia* shows how romances can erase other genres and forms of knowledge through motifs, the *Prose Merlin* shows how romance motifs can be employed to erase entire cultural histories and their powerful players.

Erasure is not just limited to within individual works but importantly occurs across/down a romance tradition too, especially through the process of translation. We see this, for instance, after Geoffrey’s *Historia*, where acts of translation, transmission, and contemporary cultural circumstances create new additions in later texts as well as significant erasures from source materials (as in the French Vulgate tradition and the *Prose Merlin*). These textual

²⁹ Leitch, ‘Middle English Romance’, p. 3.

³⁰ Chism, ‘Romance’, p. 66.

changes, like the recurring components of romance, can be slight, reproducing what came before, or extensive, creating something new through linguistic and cultural translation. Rita Copeland, in her study of the systems of rhetoric and translation in the Middle Ages, notes a key difference between imitation and translation. Where imitation is the ‘organic recreation from an earlier text, in the sense of formal or substantive adaptation’, translation, the ‘literal (word for word) or loose (sense for sense)’, is instead

figured as a pattern of transference, substitution, and ultimately displacement of the source [...] The aim of translation is to reinvent the source, so that, as in rhetorical theory, attention is focused on the active production of a new text endowed with its own affective powers and suited to the particular historical circumstances of its reception.³¹

This idea of translation as generating a new work, of not merely adapting but reinventing what came before it, is closely tied to medieval romance, a medium which enables both evolution and transformation. When we apply this concept of reinvention to translated texts and medieval romances produced down the same tradition, we acknowledge them as more than just ‘a pale imitation of an original source’, approaching them as their own dynamic work.³² Contemporary cultural contexts play a vital role in shaping these linguistic and textual changes, helping form ‘a new set of cultural codes’ (oftentimes encoded within romance motifs) which are understood by, and which resonate with, immediate audiences.³³ Translation is, as Umberto Eco succinctly notes, ‘always a shift, not between two languages,

³¹ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 9; p. 30.

³² Flood and Leitch, ‘Insular Romance in Translation’, p. 5.

³³ Flood and Leitch, ‘Insular Romance in Translation’, p. 6.

but between two cultures'.³⁴ Thus romance materials and motifs, and their transformation through translation, must be considered in terms of the contemporary religio-political and cultural (including intellectual) crises which surround them.

Translatio

Arthurian romances, beginning with Geoffrey, also engage with concepts of *translatio*, 'the transfer, both geographical and eventually linguistic, of political power and learning from the empires of the classical world to medieval Europe.'³⁵ The two dragon symbols can be approached in relation to two key medieval understandings of *translatio*, to which they both conform and disrupt: *translatio studii*, the movement of knowledge, and *translatio imperii*, the movement of imperial power. The astronomical Galfridian dragon signifies *translatio studii* – transmitted knowledge and cultural exchange between England and Muslim Spain during Geoffrey's writing, whereas the crusading Galfridian dragon, as a symbol of the conflict between the Christian West and the Islamic world, denotes *translatio imperii*, the movement and contestation of imperial power, embodying the growing spread of cultural anxieties and pejorative attitudes regarding race and religion from the late-eleventh to twelfth century. In the Middle Ages, both of these forms of *translatio* were comprehended as moving from East to West: knowledge and power began in Greece, then transferred to Rome, before moving outwards to new empires, like France and England. *Translatio* then, in the eyes of the medieval Christian West, was always a westward movement, with the authority of Latin texts derived from their Greek predecessors, and literary production in the insular world assuming

³⁴ Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 17.

³⁵ Flood and Leitch, 'Insular Romance in Translation', p. 3.

its power from these earlier classical legacies.³⁶ This movement and these structures of power, however, become unsettled when we begin to introduce the transmission of Greek work, not through the Latinate West, but via Arabic sources. In so doing, a new line of *translatio* is realised, which sees power and knowledge from Greece moving to different empires within the Islamic world, like Abbasid Baghdad, Fatimid Cairo, and Muslim Spain. This disruption of the medieval model of *translatio imperii et studii* raises uncomfortable questions for the Christian West. For example, what does it mean when some of the most significant knowledge moving into the West, instead of being drawn from the long tradition of Greek mediated via Latin into Western Europe, is instead being drawn from Greek via Arabic or simply Arabic itself? Furthermore, what are the implications of this for medieval writers? For Geoffrey, and other authors in the twelfth century, this disruption would certainly cause anxieties. The esteem with which medieval writings in England and France can be held is in part derived from their relationship to Latin and originally Greek sources. This is evident in the framework of the *Historia*, which roots British imperium in Rome and, prior to that, in Troy. The introduction of Arabic here, however, uneasily complicates this flow of *translatio*, creating a crisis for models of translation. This is presumably why Geoffrey (as discussed later in Chapter 1) omits any direct mention of his potential Arabic sources. To acknowledge Arabic lines of transmission is to challenge the traditional understandings of the flow of knowledge and power in the Middle Ages. This could highlight new lines of *translatio imperii et studii*, which writers like Geoffrey were not keen in emphasising, since the reality of the transmission of knowledge in the twelfth century in the West was different from the way in which it was presented. These differences between medieval constructions of *translatio* and what histories of transmission are instead revealing

³⁶ See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*.

– and the tension between the two – is something which this thesis draws upon, particularly in Chapter 1, through the transmission of Arabic astronomy.

Astronomy and Astrology in The Middle Ages

The study of science was a subject of growing interest during the early and later medieval period, connecting humanity with the universe and broadening their understanding of their place within it. It contained many branches, such as mathematics, geometry, alchemy, astronomy, and astrology, with knowledge of these subjects inherited from Greek learning, expanded by Arab scholars, and then disseminated into the Christian West. Brian Stock charts a modern historical sense of *translatio imperii et studii*, which we might read in relation to the medieval sense of *translatio*. He summarises how:

Under Rome, the Greek Hellenistic world made important contributions to earlier history, and the Romans themselves adapted and improved inherited practice. [When] the Arabs rose in the seventh century to rival Byzantium as heirs to Roman hegemony, theoretical science received a powerful stimulus [...] [Then] when the Arabic natural philosophy began to lose its vigour in the eleventh century and the accumulated learning of the Greeks and Arabs passed to the West, there was no abrupt replacement or transformation of scientific theory – for the time-honoured ideas of both peoples were precisely what the Latins wished to secure for themselves.³⁷

This chain of transfer – an important example of how *translatio imperii* impacts *translatio studii* – as well as a useful way of understanding how Arabic disrupts the Latinate West's

³⁷ Brian Stock, 'Science, Technology, and Economic Progress in the Early Middle Ages', in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. by David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 1-51 (p. 2).

translatio paradigm – narrates the movement of knowledge between emerging and fading empires, touching on the idea that materials and ideas were inherited. In the European Middle Ages, before the widespread Latinate adoption of Arabic learning, some popular classical works associated with the early movement and influence of astronomy included: Aratus's *Phaenomena* (c. 315/310 BC – c. 240 BC), Virgil's *Georgics* (c. 70 BC – c. 90 BC), and Marcus Manilius's *Astronomica* (fl. 1st century AD) – which drew not just on the scientific rather than mythological aspects of the *Phaenomena*, but also other materials such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 43 BC – c. 17/18 AD), Virgil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, and Ennius's *Annales* (c. 239 BC – c. 169 BC). Other popular Greek knowledge which passed into Latin included: Ptolemy's *Almagest* (c. 100 – c. 170 AD), a highly influential astronomical work throughout the Middle Ages, Plato's *Timaeus* (c. 428/427 or c. 424/423 BC – c. 348/347 BC), and the translations of Boethius (c. 480 – c. 524 AD), which made available many works on 'arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy.'³⁸ The long span of astronomical transmission, from Greek to Arabic to Latin, saw the redevelopment and reuse of astronomical knowledge across the ages. Changes in time, geography, and languages also affected the ways in which astronomical knowledge was received and later remembered, with a text's early roots either enduring over time, eventually forgotten, or becoming lost altogether.

This was the case too in twelfth-century Britain, where transmitted Arabic astronomical concepts were at times acknowledged as foreign ideas, while at other times appear to have become so deeply assimilated into the Christian West that they were no longer recognised as an introduced idea, the old history becoming erased. Alongside this, we see evidence of anxieties (discussed further below) about Arabic learning in the Latinate West,

³⁸ David C. Lindberg, 'The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning to the West', in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Lindberg, pp. 52-90 (p. 53).

which may have facilitated more knowing acts of erasure. However, despite the many invisibilities that occur, both consciously and unconsciously, within the process of transmission, dissemination, and the adoption of new ideas, the impact of Arab learning on the West was nonetheless recognisably profound, ‘refashioning Europe’s intellectual landscape’ until the early modern period.³⁹ Such learning recentred the Western perspective on their place in the cosmos, teaching ‘rational thought’, and even shaping the works of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 – 1543) and Galileo Galilei (1564 – 1642).⁴⁰ Hence, the Middle Ages were a period where the shape of the cosmos, humanity’s place within it, and society’s understanding of it, was being redefined. Simultaneously, global geographies and global power were also being redefined and resituated in this period, with the Christian West focused on becoming the political, geographical, cultural, and intellectual centre of the medieval world. Islamophobia, and the erasure of Arabic inheritances in broader cultural terms then, is a response to this, noticeable through mixed attitudes towards astronomy and astrology, but felt beyond scientific works too.

In terms of medieval understandings of astronomy and astrology, there was some overlap. Both terms were often used interchangeably, in contrast to the modern perception of astronomy and astrology as two distinct and separate fields of study.⁴¹ Richard Lemay describes how, while in ‘the mind of medieval Arab writers there is but one science of the sky with the moving bodies set in it’, the subject of the heavens comprised two individual treatments: ‘a purely mathematical one’ (astronomy) and ‘a humanistic but rather conjectural

³⁹ Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 5.

⁴⁰ Lyons, *The House of Wisdom*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Lyons, *The House of Wisdom*, p. 67; Hilary M. Carey, ‘Astrology in the Middle Ages,’ *History Compass* 8 (2010): 888-902 (p. 889).

one' (astrology), with the latter discipline the more 'dominating interest of medieval Arabic civilisation.'⁴² However, despite the growing medieval interest in reading the stars, there were pre-existing anxieties around astrology's deterministic applications since the fourth century, which were taken seriously in the later Middle Ages. Both Isidore and Augustine argued against those who believed that the stars (not only God's will) controlled human souls, with Augustine using the example of twins to reason that two people begotten in the same moment can possess different fates.⁴³ Although these earlier authorities were enough to later render the discipline of astrology questionable, the 'philosophical and scientific grounding of astrology' by Arabic astrologers such as Abu Ma'shar, made the subject of astrology more respectable in the intellectual culture of the Muslim world and Christian Europe during the Middle Ages.⁴⁴ It was in the twelfth century that a true revival of Greek and Arabic astronomical and astrological knowledge occurred in the Latinate West.

Twelfth-century centres of learning, such as Chartres and the Toledo School of Learning, formed a network of notable Latinate-Arabic translators who produced scholarship

⁴² Richard Lemay, 'Astrology in Islam,' in *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. Helaine Selin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 267-269 (p. 267). Also see Carey, 'Astrology in the Middle Ages,' pp. 888-9.

⁴³ Augustine, *City of God. Volume II. Books 4-7*, trans. by William M. Green (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 134-5; pp. 138-9. Also see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 127; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 99. Also see Hilary M. Carey, *Courting Disaster: Astrology at the English Court and University in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 28.

⁴⁴ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 130. Also see Charles Burnett, 'Adelard, Ergaphalau and the Science of the Stars,' in *Adelard of Bath: An English Scientist and Arabist of the Early Twelfth Century*, ed. by Charles Burnett (London: Warburg Institute, 1987), 133-45 (pp. 137-8).

on the quadrivium subjects (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). Scholars from Chartres who produced substantial astronomical materials included Hermann of Carinthia (c. 1100), whose Latin translations of Greek knowledge and Arabic manuscripts were considered very significant in the development of astronomy in medieval Europe, and William of Conches (c. 1090), who produced not only the first Western text which named Constantine the African (d. 1098/9) as an authority (the *Philosophia*), but later revised and expanded this treatise into his major cosmological work, the *Dragmaticon*.⁴⁵ Written in Normandy between 1144 to 1149, this text implemented and adopted Arabic astronomical and astrological ideas from the *Liber de orbe*, a piece ascribed to the Jewish astronomer, astrologer, and mathematician, Māshā'allāh (c. 740), who led the study of the stars in Abbasid Baghdad.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, active in Toledo was Gerard of Cremona (c. 1114), whose 1175 Latinate-Arabic translation of Ptolemy's major astronomical work, the *Almagest* became 'the principal channel for the recovery of the *Almagest* in the West,' his presence and translation attracting other international scholars, copyists, and translators to Spain.⁴⁷

The interest in astronomy and astrology and the transmission of Latinate-Arabic material also reached England in the twelfth century, influencing late twelfth-century English medieval translators such as Roger of Hereford, a medieval astronomer, astrologer, alchemist,

⁴⁵ Marion Dolan, *Astronomical Transmission Through Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts* (Florida: Springer International Publishing, 2017), p. 197; Jonathan Hill, *Dictionary of Theologians to 1308* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co. Ltd., 2010), p. 560. For more on William of Conches, see Joan Cadden, 'Science and Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The Natural Philosophy of William of Conches', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), 1-24.

⁴⁶ Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 125; Barbara Obrist, 'William of Conches, Māshā'allāh, and Twelfth-Century Cosmology', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 76 (2009), 29-81.

⁴⁷ Ptolemy's *Almagest*, trans. by G. J. Toomer (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 3.

and mathematician active in 1178, and Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168), who used Graeco-Arabic astronomical knowledge to challenge traditional computistical doctrines.⁴⁸ Also widely recognised by critics are thirteenth-century English translators like Roger Bacon (c. 1219/20), a medieval scientist, philosopher, and religious commentator, who wrote lengthily on astronomy and astrology in three key works: ‘the *Opus maius*, the *Communium mathematicarum*, and the *Communium naturalium*.’⁴⁹

Geoffrey’s *Historia* was produced much earlier than these later translations and developments in astronomy and astrology in England, with his writing of the *Prophetiae* beginning in the 1120s, decades before England experienced a greater influx of astronomical material and a growing engagement with Arabic learning. The Latinate-Arabic astronomical ideas within his *Historia* thus stem from an earlier English interest in astronomy which occurred during the first half of the twelfth century, at a time when very few scholars in England were learned in Arabic or interested in transmitted scientific ideas from Muslim Spain. One notable figure from this earlier twelfth-century movement was Adelard of Bath (c. 1080 – c. 1142/52), a natural philosopher whose significant Latinate-Arabic translations included: Euclid’s *Elements*, the *Centiloquium* (an astrological work by Abu Ma’shar and attributed to Ptolemy), Thābit ibn Qurra’s *Liber Praestigiorum* (a treatise on talismanic magic), and the astronomical tables of al-Khwārizmī (c. 750), the father of algebra and an

⁴⁸ Robert Grosseteste, *Compositus*, ed. and trans. by Alfred Lohr and C. Philipp E. Nothaft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Also see Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955).

⁴⁹ Jeremiah Hackett, ‘Roger Bacon on Astronomy-Astrology: The Sources of the *Scientia Experimentalis*’, in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences*, ed. by Jeremiah Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 175-98. Also see Jeremiah Hackett, ‘Adelard of Bath and Roger Bacon: Early English Natural Philosophers and Scientists’, *Endeavour*, 26 (2002), 70-74.

astronomer, geographer, and mathematician from Baghdad's House of Wisdom.⁵⁰ Adelard and his works operate as part of a primary network of translators and translations actively writing on Latinate-Arabic ideas in England between 1100 and 1150, contemporary with the period of Geoffrey's work. Part of this network included translators working in the Severn Valley, the most significant for this thesis being Petrus Alfonsi (d. after 1116) and his student, Walcher of Malvern (d. after 1135). Together, they drew on Arabic astronomical knowledge from Muslim Spain, using an astrolabe to measure the time of solar and lunar eclipses, an instrument popularly developed in the medieval Islamic world.⁵¹ The gradual increase in Latinate-Arabic study within England and Europe demonstrated a kind of intellectual renewal, with the 'desire to recover Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Galen, and Ptolemy the main incentive that provoked the flood of translations from Greek and Arabic into Latin.'⁵² This rekindling is described by Charles Homer Haskins as a type of 'Renaissance':

John of Seville, Gerard of Cremona, Plato of Tivoli, Robert of Chester, Hermann of Dalmatia, and others have contributed to a thorough renewal of the sciences in European centres of learning, a renewal for which Charles Homer Haskins coined the catchy expression 'Renaissance of the twelfth century.' Although all translators were clerics, the cathedral schools, particularly in France, were swamped by aspirants, and famous teachers drew

⁵⁰ *Adelard of Bath, Conversations with His Nephew: On the Same and the Different, Questions on Natural Science, and on Birds*, ed. and trans. by Charles Burnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. xi.

⁵¹ See Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *Medieval Meteorology: Forecasting the Weather from Aristotle to the Almanac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 72-3.

⁵² Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, 'Translations and Translators', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable and Carol D. Lanham (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991), pp. 421-62 (p. 422).

students from all over Europe. The result was a dissemination of these fields of knowledge beyond the clerical domain into circles of court and nobility.⁵³

Haskins's use of this term is by no means straightforward. The term 'Renaissance' itself is usually associated with the fifteenth-to-sixteenth-century movement away from the Middle Ages, describing 'a rebirth of concepts and values from classical times as well as the development of new ideas.'⁵⁴ Haskins's application of the French term to the twelfth century has been questioned by some and rejected by others, with several critics seeking to clarify the meaning of the term:

What is meant by the term renaissance? Can it be said to have had a beginning or an end? In what areas of learning and knowledge was its impact primarily felt? Can it be understood exclusively in terms of a revival of classicism? Did it involve broad changes of view, such as attitudes toward God, the world, and the self? Was it associated with a new view of history? a new sense of change and progress? a willingness to accept innovation? Did these in turn contribute to the emergence of new secular values?⁵⁵

R. W. Southern further interrogates whether there was such a thing as a twelfth-century renaissance, questioning if the phrase itself holds any meaning and whether it can be 'justly

⁵³ Kocku von Stuckrad, 'Interreligious Transfers in the Middle Ages: The Case of Astrology', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 1 (2008), 34-59 (pp. 53-4). Also see Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*.

⁵⁴ Jocelyn Hunt, *The Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Benson and Constable, 'Introduction', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Benson, Constable and Lanham, pp. xvii-xxx (p. xx). Also see R. N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 2.

applicable to this century.’⁵⁶ He notes the scientific interests and contributions of the eleventh and twelfth century, acknowledging Walcher as ‘the first man in England to tap Arabic science at its source’ and Petrus as ‘a very important link in the dissemination of Eastern stories among the Latins’. However, Southern identifies the years ‘between 1200 and 1229 [as representing] a dramatic maturing [of scientific learning] after a century of preparation’, identifying figures like Grosseteste as significant scientific translators and innovators, and describing Robert of Hereford (d. 1095), Walcher, Petrus, and Adelard as a ‘little group of scholars in the west of England and the first steps in the scientific movement’.⁵⁷ This dismissive attitude towards the scientific writers of the early twelfth century minimises the historical significance of the intellectual circles operating before Grosseteste, spaces which not only contributed to the transmission and translation of Arabic scientific writings in Western Europe, but ‘birthed’ its study in twelfth-century England, importantly, for my purposes, roughly contemporary with Geoffrey of Monmouth and his early translator Wace – both of whom, as Elizabeth J. Bryan has suggested, may have drawn on a Latinate-Arabic astronomical allusion found in Walcher’s work, the ‘caput draconis’ (discussed further in Chapter 1).⁵⁸ While this thesis discusses the wider transmission and translation histories which underlie the movement of Arabic astral content into the Latin West, drawing on the research of Jonathan Lyons, Charles Burnett, and Hilary M. Carey to establish medieval understandings of astronomy and astrology and the Arabic debts within Latin scientific learning (see Chapter 1), it also acknowledges how this scientific history deepens our understanding of the cross-border and multilingual influences at work in insular romance.

⁵⁶ R. W. Southern, ‘The place of England in the twelfth-century renaissance’, *History*, 45 (1960), pp. 201-26 (p. 201).

⁵⁷ Southern, ‘The place of England’, p. 205; p. 210.

⁵⁸ See Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’.

Romance itself has long been regarded as a multilingual, cross-border genre, particularly within Arthurian studies, with recent research in collaborative volumes edited by Victoria Flood, Aisling Byrne, and Megan G. Leitch offering exciting explorations of cultural and linguistic connections found in medieval romance across medieval Britain, Ireland, and Iceland.⁵⁹ An exploration of relations with Arabic culture is a natural, and much-needed, next step, providing opportunities to read romance in relation to the significant lines of both productive and hostile Christian-Muslim cross-cultural contact which we find occurring at the same time as Geoffrey and the very beginnings of Arthurian romance. The features that I suggest we find in Galfridian history and romance are engaged with paradigms more commonly read in relation to the history of science, and this mode of reading literature and science together grants a new approach to understanding the ways in which scientific intellectual culture, as much as history, politics, and religion, informed English canonical works.

Moves towards this new area of research have been made firstly by Shazia Jagot's research, which provides the first thorough analysis of Arabic 'sources' found within the texts of the medieval English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343 – 1400). Jagot's investigation into how scientific and philosophical Arabic learning (medicine, natural philosophy, astrology, and alchemy) informs Chaucer's portrayal of *fin' amors* (courtly love) provides a suitable model for the co-study of literature and science.⁶⁰ By examining the influence of Arabic science from the Iberian Peninsula upon an English canonical author, Jagot's work offers a later example of the medieval literary use of Arabic scientific ideas. My own thesis suggests

⁵⁹ See *Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages*, ed. by Aisling Byrne and Victoria Flood (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019); *Cultural Translations*, ed. by Flood and Leitch.

⁶⁰ Shazia Jagot, 'Fin' amors, Arabic Learning, and the Islamic World in the work of Geoffrey Chaucer' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), p. 2.

that two centuries earlier than Chaucer, Geoffrey of Monmouth demonstrates a very similar type of engagement with contemporary Latinate-Arabic ideas circulating in England. My work also builds upon Bryan's study of the *Historia*'s use of Arabic astronomy (as noted above), providing a more in-depth, evolutionary study of Geoffrey's astronomical dragon, one which not only integrates the influences of Petrus and Walcher, but other Arabic, Syriac, and classical allusions to a stellar dragon too.⁶¹ Like these previous studies, my thesis explores how we might approach a more expanded understanding of medieval English literature and its Arabic contexts, questioning and unsettling ideas of canonicity, in this case in relation to the wider Arthurian tradition. Such a shift also necessarily reframes the ways in which we interpret the construction of the Islamic world within medieval texts and English literature more generally, allowing us to interrogate the negative, and often demonic, portrayal of Islam, Muslims, and Arabic science that we find in medieval Latin and English literature, positioned in relation to a wider context of erased cross-cultural debts.

The Dark Legend of Gerbert: The Imagined Dangers of Arabic Knowledge

While the transmission of Arabic knowledge from the Iberian Peninsula to the Latinate West was a visible component of intellectual life in early twelfth-century England (at least in the circles I have outlined above), the transmission and translation of ideas was not accepted by all, and some English writers contemporaneous with Geoffrey disapproved of this influx of Arabic learning, presenting it as something to be feared. The religio-political conflict of the First Crusade, having only ended a few decades earlier in 1099, had left its mark on the early twelfth century, a near-historical memory of Christian-Muslim antipathy, which eventually instigated further crusades. As Richard Kieckhefer notes, 'relations between Christendom and

⁶¹ See Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated'.

Islam had never been cordial, and the Crusades had aggravated the mutual antipathy' and '[w]hile there were many in the twelfth century who absorbed the fruits of Arabic science, there were many who rejected or ignored these developments.'⁶² Geoffrey's *Historia* is interestingly positioned between these wars (written between the end of the First Crusade in 1099 and the beginning of the Second Crusade in 1147), and it is to this same period that William of Malmesbury's (c. 1095 – 1143) account of Gerbert belongs. In his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Chronicle of the Kings of England), William included a striking anecdote articulating acute anxiety over the increased interest in Arabic astronomical and astrological knowledge circulating in England: an account of Pope Sylvester II, originally known as Gerbert of Aurillac (c. 946 – 1003). Although William was acquainted with some of the astronomers working in western England on translations from the Iberian Peninsula, this account suggests an element of mistrust for their transmitted materials.

Born in France in the mid-tenth century, Gerbert was admired as a prolific scholar and teacher. As a student, he journeyed to Spain in 967 to study mathematics and, at the monastery of Santa María de Ripoll in Catalonia, was introduced to the quadrivium sciences (of which astronomy was a part) under Bishop Atto of Vich.⁶³ During this period, the learning in Muslim Spain gradually surpassed the schools of Baghdad, and places like 'Seville, Valencia, Saragossa, and Toledo, followed the example of Córdoba', resulting in al-Andalus eventually becoming the new intellectual centre of the Islamic world, flourishing for several centuries.⁶⁴ During his time in Catalonia, Lindberg suggests that 'there can be no doubt that Gerbert encountered Arabic learning during his three years with Atto.'⁶⁵ Lindberg

⁶² Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 117-9.

⁶³ Lindberg, 'The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning', p. 60.

⁶⁴ Von Stuckrad, 'Interreligious Transfers in the Middle Ages', pp. 45-6; Also see Lyons, *House of Wisdom*.

⁶⁵ Lindberg, 'The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning', p. 60.

even proposes that, in journeying to Spain, ‘one may surmise that it was [Gerbert’s] intent to make at least indirect contact with Arabic learning.’⁶⁶ The brief stay in Spain encouraged Gerbert’s veneration for Arab learning, which he promoted after returning to the Christian West, introducing the ‘abacus, the algorism, and the astrolabe’ to Latinate Europe.⁶⁷ He was also said to have produced the first European astrological book, the *Liber de Planetis et Mundi Climactibus*, depicting his growing interest in astrology and astronomy.⁶⁸ This enthusiasm for subjects associated with Muslim Spain, coupled with his period of study in Catalonia, and his introduction of Arabic instruments and ideas, was approached by Latin writers from the eleventh century onwards through a pejorative and defamatory lens. The first association of Gerbert to demons was invented by the eleventh-century schismatic Cardinal Beno (fl. 1082 – 1098). In his *Gesta Romanae ecclesiae contra Hildebrandum* (Deeds of the Roman Church Against Hildebrand), spurred by his hatred for Pope Gregory VII (originally named Hildebrand, c. 1015 – 1085), he created a fictitious narrative in which Gerbert ‘taught the evil arts to Hildebrand.’⁶⁹ William’s ‘Dark Gerbert’ legend puts a ‘novel spin’ on Beno’s tale around four decades later.⁷⁰ While the twelfth-century version still retains Gerbert’s

⁶⁶ Lindberg, ‘The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning’, p. 60.

⁶⁷ Stock, ‘Science, Technology, and Economic Progress’, p. 37.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 106.

⁶⁹ Peter G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 109. Also see E. R. Truitt, ‘Celestial Divination and Arabic Science in Twelfth-Century England: The History of Gerbert of Aurillac’s Talking Head’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73 (2012), 201-222 (p. 209); Robert Mills, ‘Talking Heads, or, A Tale of Two Clerics’, in *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Catrien Santing, Barbara Baert, and Anita Traninger (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 31-57 (p. 36).

⁷⁰ Mills, ‘Talking Heads’, p. 36.

associations to the demonic, William's legendary account frames a more directly moral concern with Spain and Arabic science specifically. William writes:

Ex Gallia natus, monachus a puero apud Floriacum adoleuit. Mox cum Pitagoricum biuium attigisset, seu tedio monachatus seu gloriae cupiditate captus, nocte profugit Hispaniam, animo precipue intendens ut astrologiam et certeras id genus artes a Saracenis edisceret.

(A native of Gaul, he grew up from boyhood as a monk at Fleury; but after reaching Pythagoras's parting of the ways, he either grew tired of the monastic life or was taken with a thirst for reputation, and made his escape one night for Spain, his chief intention being to learn astrology and other such art forms from the Saracens.)⁷¹

The *Gesta* illustrates the shameful fall of a holy man. The fictional Gerbert is depicted as intentionally taking a sinful path, eagerly bewitched by the ungodly knowledge of an enemy people. As a result, Spain – a significant addition in William's version of the legend – becomes a land of immoral teachings, a site of corrupt influence and a point of no return for the French monk, with astronomy, astrology, and the rest of the quadrivium perceived as mistrustful 'Saracen' subjects, with the Latin word 'Saracenis' here the root of the English 'Saracen', a pejorative term for Muslim.⁷² William's account also mentions Seville as the capital city where 'Saracens' 'devote themselves to divination and witchcraft', before depicting Gerbert as surpassing several well-known astronomical figures in learning,

⁷¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum. The History of the English Kings. Volume 1*, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 280-1. Hereafter *Gesta*.

⁷² For a fuller discussion of 'Saracen' as pejorative, see pages 36-42 of this thesis's Introduction below.

including Ptolemy.⁷³ He then narrates an encounter between Gerbert and a ‘Saracen’ figure, an episode which paints Gerbert’s insatiable desire for foreign knowledge, which William illustrates as forbidden:

Hospitabatur apud quendam sectae illius philosophum, quem multis primo expensis, post etiam promissis demerebatur. Nec deerat Saracenus quin scientiam uenditaret; assider frequenter, nunc de seriis nunc de nugis colloqui, libros ad scribendum prebere. Vnus erat codex totius artis conscius quem nullo modo elicere poterat. Ardebat contra Gerbertus librum quoquo modo ancillary. Semper enim in uetitum nitimur, et quicquid negatur pretiosius putatur. Ad preces ergo conuersus orare per Deum, per amicitiam; multa offerre, plura polliceri. Vbi id parum procedit, nocturnas insidias temptat. Ita hominem, coniuente etiam filia, cum qua assiduitas familiaritatem parauerat, uino inuadens uolumen sub ceruicali positum abripuit et fugit. Ille somno excussus inditio stellarum, qua peritus era tarte, insequitur fugitantem. Profugus quoque respiciens eademque scientia periculum et pontem amplectens ut nec aquam nec terram tangeret. Ita querentis auditas frustrata, domum reuertit. Tum Gerbertus uiam celerans deuenit ad mare. Ibi per incantations diabolo accersito, perpetuum paciscitur hominum si se ab illo qui denuo insequeretur defensatum ultra pelagus eueheret. Et factum est.

(He lodged in the house of a philosopher who was of their religion, whose esteem he earned first by lavish spending and later also by promises. And the Saracen played his part; he sold his knowledge, often sat with him discussing topics sometimes serious, sometimes trivial, and provided him with books to copy. There was, however, one volume to which he had committed all his art and which Gerbert could by no means get out of him. On his side he was

⁷³ William, *Gesta*, pp. 280-1: ‘Et sicut Christiani Toeltum, ita ipsi Hispalim, quam Sibiliam uulgariter uocant, caput regni habent, diuinationibus et incantationibus more gentis familiari students.’

passionately anxious to make the book somehow serve his turn. 'We ever strive towards what is forbidden', and set a higher value on what we are not allowed to have. Turning to entreaties therefore, he begged the man in God's name and in the name of their friendship; he made him handsome offers and still more handsome promises. Making no progress, one night he tried a stratagem. With the connivance of the man's daughter, intimacy with whom he had won by constant attentions, he plied him with wine, seized the book, which was kept under his pillow, and made himself scarce. The Saracen awoke with a start and, guided by the stars – for he was expert in the art – pursued the fugitive. Gerbert, looking behind him as he ran and by the same expert knowledge perceiving his danger, hid himself under a wooden bridge that was close by, and hung there, grasping the structure so that he touched neither water nor earth. Thus all his pursuer's zeal was frustrated, and he returned home. Gerbert speedily resumed his journey, and reached the coast. There he called up the Devil with incantations, and covenanted to pay him perpetual homage if he would protect him from the Saracens, who had resumed the pursuit, and convey him overseas. And so it happened.)⁷⁴

Here, William's Gerbert, in his desperation to obtain forbidden knowledge, becomes a thief, an enticer, a separator of kin, and a willing servant to the devil, leaving behind both the 'Saracen' and his Christian faith. The use of wine – Gerbert's tactic for stealing knowledge, operates as a familiar Islamophobic slur. It references the forbidden consumption of wine and pork in Islam, which medieval writings and crusading accounts often used to demonstrate Muslim's weakness of faith, their lack of discipline towards their own teachings, and their 'disobedience to Muhammad's law.'⁷⁵ The stolen book itself, which likely symbolises Arabic learning, denotes the quadrivium ideas and materials Gerbert transmitted during his lifetime

⁷⁴ William, *Gesta*, pp. 280-3.

⁷⁵ John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 199.

from Spain, but also becomes an object of corrupt desire, its secret pages leading its reader away from Christianity towards servitude to the devil instead. Accordingly, the book might stand too for religious Islamic scripture, potentially representing The Holy Qur'an, which was later translated into Latin in 1143 by Robert of Ketton (fl. 1141 – 1157).⁷⁶

The anecdote rests on the medieval Christian association of 'Saracens' and Islam with the devil, perpetuated by Western figures such as the French theologian, Alain de Lille (c. 1128 – c. 1202/03), and Peter the Venerable (c. 1092 – 1156), who used Robert of Ketton's translation of the Qur'an and writing by al-Kindi (c. 801 – 873) to compose two anti-Islamic tracts.⁷⁷ Such writing exemplifies a very limited, derogatory understanding of Islam, Muslims, and their sacred text in the eyes of the medieval Christian West during the period contemporary to both William and Geoffrey. Any attempt to correct this view 'would be to fall into the devil's trap, to take the first step toward being seduced by their error.'⁷⁸ This association of William's Gerbert with demons may also be viewed as ironic: he is seen as escaping from one devil (the 'Saracen') through the help of another (the devil who he summons in the end to rescue him). The knowledge which he steals then, be it Arabic astronomical and astrological learning or an Islamic theological text, vilifies him, drawing him into association with dark magic.

This demonic association culminates in the narrative in Gerbert's practice of necromancy (which he uses to unearth buried treasure), and his use of astral science to create an oracular head – William's spin on Beno's demon.⁷⁹ William's final allusion in the anecdote

⁷⁶ See *The Latin Qur'an, 1143-1500: Translation, Transition, Interpretation*, ed. by Cándida Ferrero Hernández and John Tolan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

⁷⁷ See Tolan, *Saracens*, p. 166; pp. 155-65.

⁷⁸ Tolan, *Saracens*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ William, *Gesta*, pp. 292-5; Mills, 'Talking Heads', p. 36.

clearly emphasises the morally suspect nature of celestial divination and learning derived from the quadrivium sciences, as their roots stem from un-Christian knowledge found within the Islamic world. As E. R. Truitt observes, this confirms that ‘Gerbert's knowledge of astral science and celestial divination came from the same place as his knowledge of the dark arts of necromancy: outside the borders of Latin Christendom.’⁸⁰ This localisation is all the more significant when considering the religio-political boundaries constructed during the Crusades, presenting Gerbert, from the perspective of William, as someone who has grown too comfortable in an enemy-associated territory, physically, mentally, and spiritually alienated from his Christian roots.

Like the medieval boundaries between the Christian West and the Islamic world, which were constantly shifting from friendly to dangerous, knowledge too, and the attitudes to Arabic knowledge, were also ever-changing, sliding between unacceptable and allowable throughout the Middle Ages. It was along these everchanging lines that Gerbert’s image transformed into something altogether dark and distorted. His Arabic education, turned objectionable in William’s account, warned of how reading the stars led to disastrous consequences, with astral scientific content oftentimes deliberately misunderstood and even mistranslated by the Christian West. By fusing together Gerbert's education, the status of Muslim Spain as a site of astronomical and astrological learning, and Gerbert's reputed as a necromancer from late eleventh-century sources, William conflates spaces of knowledge from the Islamic world with religious conversion/ transformed identities, magic, and the stars.⁸¹ Geoffrey later adopts this very same concept in the *Vita Merlini*, albeit in a less demonic light, narrating how Merlin, like William’s Gerbert, runs away from civilisation to

⁸⁰ E. R. Truitt, *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 88.

⁸¹ Truitt, *Medieval Robots*, p. 78.

observe the stars.⁸² Thus, through this twelfth-century case study of Pope Sylvester II, we perceive how pseudohistorical narratives produced in early twelfth-century England were actively responding to cultural anxieties rooted in perceptions of the role Arabic might play in processes of *translatio studii et imperii*. These were largely centered around the Islamic world and the peoples and ideas within it, all of which were cast in a negative, depreciative light, portrayed in literature as something to be feared, and imperfectly understood.

The ‘Saracen’, Cultural Erasure, and Reimagining Cultural Histories

The pejorative and often demonic medieval depiction of Muslims, and the Islamic world more broadly, has long been perpetuated in medieval literature through the image of the ‘Saracen’ (William of Malmesbury’s ‘Saracenus’), a stereotypical, racist, and often monstrous concept, one commonly associated with medieval imaginings of religious, cultural, and often physical alterity. Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘Saracen’ with single quotation marks, in a conscious effort to emphasise its history as a racist, discriminatory, medieval Christian – not Muslim – cultural construct. The label is, as Heng clearly articulates in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, ‘an ingenious lie’, one which claims that Muslims themselves independently adopted the name to proclaim their descent from the prophet Abraham’s first wife, Sara, rather than his second wife and former slave, Hajar, from whom Islam’s final prophet, Muhammad, actually descends.⁸³ Here, medieval Latin Christendom is seen as constructing its own origin narrative for Muslims, one which is then declared as self-

⁸² See Chapter 3 of this thesis for a full discussion of Merlin, his relationship to the stars, and constructs inspired by the Islamic world in Geoffrey’s *Vita*, beginning on page 175.

⁸³ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 111-2.

crafted by the targeted religious group in an attempt to cover the shame of their lineage and correct their genealogy.⁸⁴ A lie within a lie, the Islamophobic invention of ‘Saracen’ quickly became a fixed and permanent identity, one accepted and exploited by the medieval Christian West to establish the inferiority and baseness of Muslims and Islam through political, religious, and cultural terms. The new name then operates as part of what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen terms ‘an ongoing program of Muslim monsterization’, as seen in medieval literature produced at the time (like Geoffrey’s *Historia* and the *Prose Merlin*, where the Muslim is depicted through the monstrous hybrid form of the giant, discussed further in Chapters 2 and 4).⁸⁵ By creating an imagined name for its ‘international foe’, the Christian West effectively granted itself indisputable power to generate its own pejorative imaginings of the ‘Saracen’, an ideological construction used to control perceptions of Muslim figures and Islam.⁸⁶ This is not unlike Orientalism, of which it might be considered a particular early expression. As Edward Said writes:

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Heng, *Invention of Race*, p. 112.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999), p. 132.

⁸⁶ Heng, *Invention of Race*, p. 111.

⁸⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 3. For more on medieval Orientalism, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern*

The construction of the ‘Saracen’ is a Western mechanism for control. This medieval invention by authors in the Latin West not only moves power away from the Muslim towards the Christian, but also permits reconfiguration of the type of power which the figure of the Muslim does possess – one that is depicted as dangerous, threatening, and thus requiring the control of the Christian West to help destabilise it. Hence, we see the manufacture of the ‘Saracen’ as a stock antagonist in both history and romance, a character repeatedly defined in terms of paganism, barbarism, demonism, and monstrosity throughout the medieval period – all opposite values to Christianity.

The derogatory classification and homogenization of a multiplicity of peoples by their religion is also essentially an act of erasure and rewriting. These two interconnected paradigms (erasure and rewriting) make up the essential components of a pattern which this thesis observes as recurring in Arthurian literature, not simply within the disparate, unrelated, ‘particular *moments* and *instances*’ (Heng’s italics) on which Heng draws in order to demonstrate the pervasive and insidious nature of race-making across medieval genres, but systematically in relation to all instances of the dragon as it appears in Arthurian romance.⁸⁸ We see the erasure of Arabic scientific contributions, rewritten as British concepts, in Geoffrey’s text, while in later Arthurian texts, culminating in the *Prose Merlin*, we see the erasure of historical Muslim victories in the Middle East rewritten as ‘Saracen’ defeats. This focus on erased intellectual and historical contexts nuances Heng’s approach to ‘cultural fantasy’ as well as her work on race-making. The Arthurian dragon appears as a recurring symbol of the adoption and erasure of Arabic science, entangled in the *Prose Merlin* with the

Orientalist Romance; Carol Falvo Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and medieval romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003).

⁸⁸ Heng, *Invention of Race*, p. 4.

‘Saracen’, a construction which itself is a type of erasure of Muslim history. Both the dragon and the ‘Saracen’ thus operate as ‘cultural fantasy’ motifs in the fullest sense of the term as Heng uses it (although she is less engaged with moments of vanishing than I am): components which make up cultural fantasy (scientific content included) ‘collide and vanish, each into the other, without explanation or apology.’⁸⁹

This thesis suggests that a key cause of the emergence of cultural fantasy motifs in Arthurian literature and this continuous pattern of erasure and rewriting is the context of the Crusades, wherein which central and peripheral identities were contested. I approach this context as postcolonial and in relation to cultural construction, in that we see a complex negotiation of cultural identities informed by unequal power relations (although the supremacy of the Christian West is here, as noted above, largely imaginary).⁹⁰ As Cohen notes, ‘[c]onquest, domination, and injustice are predictable outcomes of such clashes. Innovation, hybridity, and resistance are, however, never far behind.’⁹¹ Homi Bhabha, in his study of later instances of cultural hybridity, states that in such transitional historical contexts (the example he gives is the *fin de siècle*):

we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.⁹²

⁸⁹ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 2.

⁹⁰ For more on medieval Postcolonialism, see *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Cohen; *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Kabir and Williams; Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

⁹¹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 5.

⁹² Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 2

A similar historical tipping point, which instigates difference and creates marginalisation, occurs after the First Crusade too, informing the construction of literary motifs from the early twelfth century onwards, from the extreme patriotism of Arthur's early trans-continental victories (where his Eastern campaign 'conforms to a crusading paradigm') to the appearance of the pejoratively conceived 'Saracen' – who as Cohen notes, were 'not a group who had ever inhabited Britain'.⁹³ The establishment of the crusader states in the late eleventh century potentially birthed the beginning of the Arthurian legend as we find it in Geoffrey's *Historia*, which envisioned an expanding Christian world. Yet this imaginary was far from static throughout the Middle Ages. Arthur's failure to conquer Rome (followed by the fall of the Arthurian empire), coincidentally foreshadowed the next phase of the Crusades, which saw the loss of crusader states to Muslim forces, starting with Edessa in the middle of the twelfth century.⁹⁴ As a result, the later Middle English Arthurian tradition (based on the French Arthurian tradition before it), grappled with this loss, as part of a communal 'cultural trauma', the term used by Heng to describe the cultural shock over past historical moments of failure, which, when surfaced through romance, finally allow for collective cultural 'recovery'.⁹⁵ In response, late medieval romance exhibited a growing fixation with the 'Saracen', incorporating in an earlier medieval enemy which it could, at least fictionally, destroy.

⁹³ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 75; Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity*, p. 3. Also see Helen Fulton, 'History and Myth: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, pp. 44-57 (pp. 53-4).

⁹⁴ See Jonathan Phillips, *The Second Crusade: Extending the Frontiers of Christendom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁹⁵ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 3.

This perception of threat was long-lived. As Said observes:

Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolise terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the seventeenth century the ‘Ottoman peril’ lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilisation a constant danger, and in time European civilisation incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life.⁹⁶

Said demonstrates how Islam and Muslim empires which grew throughout the Islamic world were longstanding threats to the Christian West, something to be feared and defeated. The ‘lasting trauma’ of the rise of Islam, which endured throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, affected the literature produced during that time, generating stories of the long rivalry between the two religious groups. Arthurian romance was deeply invested in this narrative structure, informed and even generated by Christian-Muslim conflicts from the twelfth century to the fifteenth century. By using the medium of romance, the Arthurian texts examined here revisited and rewrote Christian military disappointments following the First Crusade, creating a new glorified past centred on the attainment of Christian land and the removal of the non-Christian body. The ‘*structure of desire* which powers the narrative’ and the romance of the Arthurian tradition then, is the desire for complete Christian rule, and the need to erase all which threatens it, particularly Islam.⁹⁷

While critics like Heng have certainly taken into consideration the effect of the Crusades on manifesting racial representations and imperial fantasies within romance, this

⁹⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 59-60.

⁹⁷ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 3.

thesis demonstrates further how in later Arthurian texts the marginalised ‘Saracen’ figure is tied to these moments of historical *and* scientific erasure too, eventually being erased itself (that is, eradicated). This thesis therefore reveals how medieval Arthurian literatures misremember and thus erase both cultural histories and scientific (astronomical and astrological) learning. In adding science to Heng’s model, I articulate how historical past traumas (namely Christian political defeats and the rise of Islam), when coupled with scientific Arabic knowledge in contemporary circulation, cause past and present narratives to become altered. The historical trauma is seen as reversed, or even subjected to a different group of people (Muslims instead of Christians), with scientific achievements merging with astronomical fantasy, their origins made invisible and rewritten as British. As a result, we see in the end a British historical victory rather than a historical defeat, as well as a contemporary claiming of new ideas which are no longer accredited to intellectual authorities from Muslim Spain. This historical ‘recovery’ is not achieved through remembrance, as in Heng’s framework, but rather through misremembering.⁹⁸

1100-1450: Cultural Histories of Exchange and Anxiety

My thesis’s timeline of interest closely coincides with the beginning and end points of Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s significant research too:

1100 and 1450, [...] [which] begins at the time of the First Crusade, with the Crusaders’ dramatic assault on the holy city of Jerusalem, and ends with the Ottoman conquest of the

⁹⁸ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 3.

Byzantine capital of Constantinople, when Muslim ‘Turks’ raised their banner over the last remaining stronghold of ancient Roman imperial might.⁹⁹

For Akbari, these dates mark a shift in the language used to describe both Islam and the Orient, her work documenting a series of ‘stereotypes developed over time’ which were used to characterise Muslims and Arabs during the medieval period – labels which became the early ‘roots of modern Orientalism’, founding several stereotypes present today.¹⁰⁰ For this thesis, these beginning and end points are also significant, connected to three distinct but overlapping cases: the narrative of King Arthur in England, the transfer of religio-political power away from the Latin West, and the translation of foreign knowledge into Latin England.

Firstly, the dates relate to the creation of key Arthurian material in medieval England, starting with Geoffrey in the 1130s and concluding with the Arthurian legend’s return to England in Middle English prose form with the *Prose Merlin* in 1450 (just before Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*). These two primary texts are important for understanding how Arthurian prose romance commemorates, erases, and revises the past, producing narrative histories which showcase both English supremacy and the military might of the medieval Christian West.

Secondly, 1100-1450 also encompasses significant historical-political moments of Christian-Muslim opposition, most importantly the Muslim capture of Edessa which sparked the second Crusade (1144), Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub’s (Saladin) conquest of Jerusalem in the Third Crusade (1187), and the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (1453). Each of these medieval historical battles represent, on the one hand, a victory for different Muslim

⁹⁹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, p. 1.

empires, and on the other, a series of losses for the Latinate-Christian world. Arthurian material written and in circulation during these eras innovatively re-envisioned these military events, evading these Christian failures by creating imperial fantasies of Christian glory throughout the literary tradition, to imagine a successful history for Christian Europe.

Thirdly, alongside this continued struggle for political supremacy, the period of 1100-1450 was also witness to the flourishing of Arabic learning entering the Christian West through Iberian Peninsula. These years mark a time when the circulation and translation of non-English, non-insular ideas helped further study in the Latinate world, prompting progression in subjects such as astronomy and astrology in Western spaces like England. This scientific knowledge, I assert, even helped design the Arthurian symbolism in Geoffrey's *Historia*; however, the removal of its Arabic origins and its English refashioning in the twelfth century consequently erase all scientific, non-insular roots, causing them to be forgotten down the Arthurian tradition.

Altogether then, these three parallel lines of interest between the period of 1100 and 1450 (the Arthurian narrative in England, the religio-political warfare between Christianity and Islam, and the steady stream of knowledge entering England from Muslim Spain), are all interconnected. Arthurian literature since Geoffrey interweaves medieval instances of *translatio imperii* with *translatio studii* to establish a Western Europe which operates as both the centre of religio-political power and the greatest intellectual centre of learning in the Middle Ages. *Translatio imperii* and *studii* thus function as a joint framework of erasure in medieval Arthurian literature. Beginning with Geoffrey, both Muslim political victories in the Holy Land (and beyond) and Arabic origins of knowledge stemming from Muslim Spain are being erased and reimagined in medieval Arthurian literature, resulting in an invented, idealised world where all political, cultural, and intellectual power is transferred to Britain. We see this in the *Historia*, where Geoffrey creates an unbroken chain of Christian victories

throughout Arthur's career up until his battle with the Eastern Emperor Lucius, this imperial journey showcasing an interest in ideas of conquest and transfer from the ancient world of Rome to the medieval English and Christian-European world of Arthur. However, this concept of an unbroken transfer of power and knowledge from the East to the West, and the notion of Western Europe as an early twelfth-century imperial and intellectual centre, sits uncomfortably with the historical achievements and political authority established elsewhere in Europe. As Akbari writes:

For most of that period, the dominant power in the world was not the Christian West but rather the Islamic East, and European awareness of that inferiority played a crucial role in the development of Orientalism.¹⁰¹

The relationship between the Christian West (England and Latinate Europe) and medieval Muslim empires (Islamic rule in Jerusalem and Muslim Spain) during this period is thus one which is separately focused on attaining greatness, supremacy, and mass influence, with both sides engaged in a constant battle to surpass and overthrow the other. Christian Europe's recognition of their own 'inferiority' is vital to note here, for it is presumably this very feeling, instigated by their lack of success in military endeavours and intellectual advancement, which becomes the very catalyst which propels the rewriting and a reimagining of history in Arthurian literature. The dominance of the Muslim East (and West) in this period, in terms of *translatio imperii et studii*, was thus recognised, shifted by the Christian West in literature to attain control. As a result, this rewriting of the dynamics of medieval power and learning changed the positions of superiority and inferiority in chronicle histories

¹⁰¹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, p. 9.

and romance texts from Geoffrey up until the *Prose Merlin*, potentially even influencing other works in the tradition beyond the scope of texts examined in this thesis.

Therefore, through investigating the medieval transfer of imperial and intellectual powers and their influence upon English cultural narratives, this study seeks to reassess canonical English, Arthurian works, to read and evaluate them in light of their erased histories. This act of historical erasure is part of a fantasy of *translatio imperii et studii* recurring throughout medieval Arthurian romance, wherein which the Western movement of imperium and centres of knowledge is accompanied by an erasure of contributions from the Islamic world. In thus uncovering hidden histories, I respond to Patricia Claire Ingham's statement on the need for more medieval research on the 'alternative histories' which lie beneath legendary stories, such as the legend of King Arthur:

Analyses of the imaginary syntheses of medieval history have had little to say about the colonising uses of imagination and fantasy; medievalists have not examined as frequently as we might what traumas, losses, imaginary fragments, or contradictions fuel historic medieval legends. We have, as a result, often had less to say about the alternative histories, alternative imaginings also legible in medieval texts; we are often silent about the other dreams and desires sacrificed, often forcibly, to traumatic imperial, or national, unities.¹⁰²

In line with this, this thesis also addresses the traumas which plagued Arthurian authors and fuelled their imperial imaginations, to uncover the 'alternate (erased) histories' and non-English influences which helped shape the Arthurian legend. Unlike Akbari, whose work assesses the 'categories, hierarchies, and symbolic systems that were used to differentiate the

¹⁰² Patricia Claire Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 2.

Western self from its Eastern other', and rather than trying to unearth medieval representations of the East to understand modern depictions of Muslims, this thesis examines the 'symbolic systems' at work in the Arthurian legend, used to separate the Christian European from the Muslim/ Arab European through *translatio imperii et studii*.¹⁰³ In Geoffrey, the concepts of *translatio imperii et studii* operate as a dual framework of erasure, used to create an origin narrative of English power and learning, despite the interpenetration of Arabic scientific learning into England. Later, in the *Prose Merlin*, we see this pattern of erasure occur again in prose format, where memorable military failures of the Christian West are rewritten into idealised narratives of Christian glory and the loss of the 'Saracen', an identity which, like the narratives histories in which it resides, is a combination of the medieval real and the Christian imaginary.

Chapter Overview

This thesis moves across time to explore the Arthurian dragon as both a symbol of adoption and erasure, and a motif denoting Christian-Muslim contact through cultural transmission and cultural conflict, from the legend's origins in the twelfth century to its return to England in the mid-fifteenth century. Chapter 1 studies Geoffrey's *Historia*, exploring his construction of an astronomical dragon motif through the *Omen*, the dragon comet/ star, and the hidden dragon at the end of the *Prophetiae*, arguing how each dragon episode is influenced by contemporary Latinate-Arabic astronomical and astrological concepts of the dragon circulating in twelfth-century England. Here, I expand on Heng's idea of 'cultural fantasy', including science within the interconnected relationship of history, culture, and literature.

¹⁰³ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, p. 1.

Chapter 2 extends my first investigation into Geoffrey's dragons in the *Historia*, by considering how wider, contemporary classical astronomical and astrological ideas potentially influenced the bear and dragon motif in Arthur's imperial dream, the final appearance of a stellar dragon in Geoffrey. This discussion also includes an analysis of imperial imaginings in the *Historia*, which appear to be crusading-centred, as Arthur seeks to extend his empire through journeying to Rome. My reading here outlines a key connection between astronomy and a crusading imaginary within Geoffrey, revising Heng's view that Geoffrey's giant episode contains no direct references to the Crusades.

Chapter 3 turns to Geoffrey's final work, the *Vita Merlini*, investigating how Geoffrey may have been influenced by other astronomical concepts found across the medieval Islamic world, showing how his incorporation of Latinate-Arabic motifs was not limited to just his *Historia*. Here, I demonstrate how Merlin's 'House of Stars' is likely modelled on the Houses of Wisdom found in parts of the Islamic world, while also examining potential cultural analogues for Merlin's sister, Ganieda, the female poet-prophet and astronomer at the end of the *Vita*.

Finally, Chapter 4 moves on to the reception of Geoffrey's dragon motif in the *Prose Merlin*, examining how the scientific, astronomical allusions found earlier in Geoffrey are now made invisible, replaced instead by a crusading imaginary which sees the Arthurian dragon in direct opposition against a new English enemy, the Middle English 'Saracen'. Other Middle English texts could have also been selected as the basis for Chapter 4's discussion of Geoffrey's English reception. For example, Layamon's *Brut* (The Chronicle of Britain, c. 1200/ 20) and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (King Arthur's Death), which dates around the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century, each provide interesting cases for the incorporation and adaptation of the Arthurian dragon motif as we first find it in Geoffrey's *Historia*. However, this thesis, while acknowledging the potential of these other texts and

their great significances within English Arthurian literature, turns instead towards the *Prose Merlin* as its final centre of attention. An understudied work, the *Prose Merlin* offers the chance to expand scholarship on the Middle English Arthurian tradition beyond earlier verse texts and later prose works, like Sir Thomas Malory's widely-known *Le Morte Darthur*. The *Prose Merlin*'s sophisticated crusading framework enables this thesis to analyse the eventual erasure of Geoffrey's astronomical episodes, which become replaced by an intense preoccupation with medieval religious warfare and the 'Saracen' enemy. Situated against key moments of cultural conflict from the medieval past and present, such as the long Crusades and the Spanish *Reconquista*, the *Prose Merlin* represents a less explored aspect of the Middle English Arthurian tradition: the complex relationship between Christian (Pendragon) and Muslim empires, one which we first saw materialise in the twelfth century with Geoffrey.

In this final chapter, I will also return to Heng one last time, expanding her idea of 'cultural recovery' by demonstrating how Arthurian cultural romances do not simply confront history through surfacing haunting memories but essentially rewrite history through a conscious misremembrance of past military failures, all for the purpose of constructing a long-lasting Christian claim to Jerusalem. By reading comparatively and thinking connectively across literary texts, scientific ideas, and cultural histories, this thesis aims to show how Arthurian motifs are patterned and evolutionary, constructed around the ever-changing cultural concepts and contexts which surround them.

CHAPTER 1: THE ASTRONOMICAL GALFRIDIAN DRAGON

There is no single Arthurian dragon within Geoffrey's *Historia*, but rather two dragons which are both constructed from interconnecting spheres of influence from the Islamic world. The first Galfridian dragon (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2) is influenced by Latinate-Arabic, and classical, astronomy circulating in the wake of the First Crusade, while the second Galfridian dragon is influenced by Christian perceptions of Islam during and after the Third Crusade (discussed in Chapter 4). Analysis demonstrates that beyond Geoffrey's (widely noted) use of Welsh sources in his construction of the Arthurian dragon, he was also indebted to the intellectual movement of materials transmitted into England from the Iberian Peninsula in the context of the First Crusade.¹

This chapter discusses Arabic analogues and possible sources for the astrological and astronomical components of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*, exploring the connections between Geoffrey's construction of an astronomical dragon and his potential engagement with works originating beyond medieval Britain. As Elizabeth J. Bryan has noted, Geoffrey integrates one significant contemporary Arabic astronomical idea (the dragon's head as a lunar node) into his *Historia*, mediated by authors working roughly contemporary with him in the Severn Valley, such as Petrus and Walcher.² This single point of affinity is, however, just the

¹ For more on Arabic learning and the Crusades, see Christine Chism, 'Arabic in the Medieval World', *PMLA*, 124 (2009), 624-631; Chris Prince, 'The historical context of Arabic translation, learning, and the libraries of medieval Andalusia', *Library History*, 18 (2002), 73-87; Jonathan Rubin, *Learning in a crusader city: intellectual activity and intercultural exchanges in Acre, 1191-1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) CX; Nicholas Morton, *Encountering Islam on the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

² Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated'. For more on Walcher, see Chapter 1, pages 85-91 below.

beginning of Geoffrey's broader debt to Arabic-Latin translations, centred on his representation of the dragon. This chapter will therefore not only address the transmission of Latinate-Arabic astronomy and astrology, but also examine its importance in relation to the construction of the Arthurian dragon as a romance motif within Geoffrey's *Historia* and *Prophetiae*. By resurfacing knowledge pertaining to the Arabic astronomical dragon, I hope to address that which has remained obscured or (largely) undiscussed by previous scholars concerned with the Arthurian dragon and its multi-lingual or multi-cultural contexts. I also underline how Geoffrey's disavowal of source traditions makes invisible these Arabic connections, allowing for the scientific discourse of the dragon to become integrated into the *Historia*'s genres of history and prophetic romance. As mentioned in this thesis's introduction, Geoffrey utilises romance here (a complex category, hybrid or with the potential to hybridise through its core motifs) to combine and eventually veil the scientific.

A History of Geoffrey's *Historia*

The *Historia* comprises twelve books detailing the 'Matter of Britain', from the Trojan origins of the Britons to the age of King Arthur, ending with the decline of the Britons in the generations after Arthur's death. In the prologue to his work, Geoffrey reveals that after being presented with a book which contained the narrative of Arthur and those who eventually succeeded him, he was persuaded to translate it into Latin:

Talia michi et de talibus multociens cogitanti optulit Walterus Oxenefordensis archidiaconus, uir in oratoria arte atque in exoticis hystoriis eruditus, quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum qui a Bruto primo rege Britonum usque ad Cadualadrum filium Caduallonis actus omnium continue et ex ordine perpulcris orationibus proponebat. Rogatu itaque illius

ductus, tametsi infra alienos ortulos falerata uerba non collegerim, agresti tamen stilo
propriisque calamis contentus codicem illum in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui;

(I frequently thought the matter over in this way until Walter archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the rhetorical arts and in foreign histories, brought me a very old book in the British tongue, which set out in excellent style a continuous narrative of all their deeds from the first king of the Britons, Brutus, down to Cadualadrus, son of Caduallo. Though I have never gathered showy words from the gardens of others, I was persuaded by his request to translate the book into Latin in a rustic style, reliant on my own reed pipe).³

The product is a historiographical narrative written for a twelfth-century Norman audience, with Geoffrey synchronising the chronologies of British rulers with ‘classical, biblical and Christian history’ to create a long pseudohistory of Britain.⁴ Geoffrey’s *Historia* has also been understood as the ‘origin’, ‘beginning’, or ‘re-beginning’ of medieval romance.⁵ This chapter approaches Geoffrey’s work as a chronicle, work of prophecy, and a romance, although (as noted in the introduction) it understands romance as its primary genre designation.

In the *Historia*, Geoffrey revises this British history to establish the Norman rulers of England as Britain’s rightful heirs, and within the *Historia*’s seventh book, the *Prophetiae*, expresses this through political prophecy. Political prophecy, as Victoria Flood observes, ‘refers to a predominately secular literary tradition drawing on authorities from the historical and legendary past, alongside a common stock of heroes and ciphers, to comment on near-

³ *HRB*, pp. 4-5.

⁴ Dennis Green, ‘King Arthur: From History to Fiction’, in *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 66-76 (p. 68).

⁵ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 2.

historical and contemporary political affairs.’⁶ Originally composed as a separate text, which Geoffrey began a decade earlier in the 1120s, the *Prophetiae* exists within the 217 manuscripts of the *Historia*, as well as separately in 76 catalogued manuscripts.⁷ The work is also found in translation, circulating in several languages beyond Latin, such as Anglo-Norman, Continental French, Old Norse-Icelandic, Middle and Early Modern Welsh, and Middle English.⁸ Its cross-cultural transmission shows that the relevance and appeal of Geoffrey’s history extended beyond the direct allusions to English political affairs that he includes in the *Prophetiae*, although these allusions are retained in subsequent translations. We might note, for example, Geoffrey’s prophetic treatment of the sinking of the White Ship, which references the drowning of Henry I’s heirs and the ‘ascendancy of the Empress Matilda’: Catuli leonis in aequoreos pisces transformabuntur, et aquila eius super montem Arauium nidificabit. (The lion’s cubs will become fishes of the sea, and his eagle will nest on mount Aravius.)⁹ There are more obviously legendary references and motifs with fairly

⁶ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, pp. 1-2. Also see Rupert Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), who first coined the term.

⁷ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 19; Julia Crick, ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth, Prophecy and History’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 18 (1992), 357-71 (p. 360); Michael J. Curley, ‘A New Edition of John of Cornwall’s *Prophetia Merlini*, *Speculum*, 57 (1982), 217-249. For more on the early circulation of the *Prophetiae*, see Bernard Meehan, ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Prophecies of Merlin*: New Manuscript Evidence’, *BBCS*, 28 (1978), 37-46.

⁸ For more on the various translations of the *Prophetiae*, see ‘Database: Prophecies of Merlin’ in *Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages* <<https://digitalcultures.ncl.ac.uk/projects/crossingborders/#/db>> [accessed 3 July 2021]. For an interactive map of the *Prophetiae*’s translations, see ‘Visualisation: Prophecies of Merlin’ in *Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages* <<https://digitalcultures.ncl.ac.uk/projects/crossingborders/#/vis>> [accessed 3 July 2021].

⁹ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 26. For more on the interpretation of these allusions, see Jacob Hammer, ‘A Commentary on the *Prophetiae Merlini*’, *Speculum*, 10 (1935), 3-30 (p. 16); Jacob Hammer,

discernible interpretations, particularly those at the beginning of the text, such as the boar of Cornwall, which represents Arthur, while others are more ambiguous, like the text's final, apocalyptic scene (to which I shall return presently).¹⁰

The *Prophetiae*'s predominantly political nature spoke to the interests of the Norman political elite (who Flood suggests are positioned as heir to the Britons), particularly its narration of the unity of the legendary British past, the oppression of the Britons under the Saxons, and the overthrow of the Saxons by the Normans in 1066.¹¹ Geoffrey dedicated the *Historia*, at different times, to patrons on both sides of the English Anarchy, dedicating his work to Waleran of Meulan (1104 – 1166) and even King Stephen (c. 1092/1096 – 1154).¹² In a preface at the beginning of the text, he also dedicates the *Prophetiae* to his patron, Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln (d. 1148), and the whole of the *Historia* to Robert of Gloucester (c. 1090 – 1147), a supporter of Empress Matilda (c. 1102 – 1167) – Stephen I's rival – whom Geoffrey also supported.¹³ This 'inner circle' each displayed an interest in

'Another Commentary on the *Prophetiae Merlini*', *Bulletin of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America*, 1 (1942–43), 589–601 (p. 599).

¹⁰ Crick, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth, Prophecy and History', p. 360. ¹⁰ For more on the ambiguity of the *Prophetiae* see Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. by Michael A. Faletra (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), pp. 24–5; Michael J. Curley, 'Animal symbolism in the *Prophecies of Merlin*', in *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy*, ed. by Willene B. Clark and Meredith T. McMunn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 151–163.

¹¹ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 18.

¹² Also see Paul Dalton, 'The Topical Concerns of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*: History, Prophecy, Peacemaking, and English Identity in the Twelfth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 688–712 (p. 707).

¹³ J. S. P. Tatlock, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Motives for Writing His 'Historia'', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 79 (1938), 695–703 (pp. 698–9).

national histories of England and France, forming an elite audience for Geoffrey's literary historical writing.¹⁴ To establish his British history for this Norman audience, and to narrate the life of King Arthur, Geoffrey incorporated Welsh history and prophecy within the *Historia*.¹⁵ It is unclear whether he drew on his own cultural identity as a Welshman for this, since Geoffrey's biography is a point of debate within Arthurian scholarship. Joshua Byron Smith asks, for instance:

Was Geoffrey Welsh, Breton, Anglo-Norman, or perhaps even a Cornish sympathizer? And did he intend his literary works to support the Welsh cause, to justify Anglo-Norman conquest of Wales, or to play both sides, allowing supporters of whatever faction to find succor in his spirited account of the British past?¹⁶

While the cross-border relationships of the *Historia*, not least in terms of the various possibilities presented by Geoffrey's own elusive identity, have been explored, no sustained work has been done in terms of his possible relationship to Latinate-Arabic translation in the twelfth century. Both Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, in their study of the medieval reception of Geoffrey, note how 'there was no Arabic reception' of Geoffrey's work.¹⁷ While this brief mention of Arabic alongside the *Historia* is a small step forward in the critical field, Henley and Smith are engaging with the wrong end of the *Historia* – considering Arabic in

¹⁴ Tatlock, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Motives', p. 699.

¹⁵ John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity, and Political Values* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000); Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*.

¹⁶ Smith, 'Introduction and Biography', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Henley and Smith, pp. 10-28 (p. 11).

¹⁷ Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, 'Introduction to Part 4. The Medieval Reception of Geoffrey of Monmouth', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Henley and Smith, p. 426 (p. 426).

terms of post-Geoffrey rather than its potential influence upon Geoffrey. While an Arabic translation of the *Historia* is highly unlikely, it is interesting that no scholarship (minus Bryan) has considered approaching Arabic in relation to Geoffrey's source and analogue materials, or the relationship between prophecy (a key mode within the *Historia*) and astronomy and astrology (popular Latinate-Arabic subjects).

The *Omen of the Dragons*: Nennius's 'vermes' and Geoffrey's 'dracones'

The use of Welsh source materials by Geoffrey is particularly evident within his *Prophetiae*. A number of animal ciphers, such as dragons, lions, and boars, appear throughout the *Prophetiae*, and have been understood to bear a debt to the animal epithets of Welsh heroic verse.¹⁸ Most significantly for this thesis, however, are the well-attested Welsh borrowings which appear in Books VI and VII (*Prophetiae*): the episode known as the *Omen of the Dragons*, associated with the prophet Merlin.¹⁹ Geoffrey's Ambrosius Merlin is the narrator

¹⁸ Doris Edel, 'Geoffrey's So-called Animal Symbolism and Insular Celtic Tradition', *Studia Celtica*, 18-19 (1983-84), 96-109; Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 36: The recognised source relationship between Geoffrey's *Historia* and Nennius's *Historia Brittonum* aligns Geoffrey's *Omen* with early medieval Welsh historical and political prophetic writing, a culture which also includes the *Armes Prydein*, a tenth-century Welsh prophetic poem, from the *Book of Taliesin*, which contains the earliest mention of Myrddin.; For more on the source relationship between the *Historia* and the *Historia Brittonum*, see Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 35; Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power*, pp. 23-6; Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 14. For more on the *Omen* and its relationship to Welsh prophecies, see Victoria Flood, 'Arthur's Return from Avalon: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Development of the Legend', *Arthuriana*, 25 (2015), 84-110; Michael A. Faletra, 'The Conquest of the Past in *The History of the Kings of Britain*', *Literature Compass*, 4 (2006), 121-133; Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', pp. 117-145; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Some Functions of Origin Stories

of the *Prophetiae*, a fatherless child whom Geoffrey constructs from two identifiable Welsh sources: Myrddin, the bard and madman from Welsh legend, and Ambrosius, the boy-prophet in the *Historia Brittonum*, attributed to Nennius (c. 829/30), who prophesies the fortunes of the red and white dragons to the British king Vortigern.²⁰ The *Historia Brittonum* presents the earliest version of the legend of the founding of Britain by Brutus, as well as the earliest Latin account of Arthur, and provides the basic framework for Geoffrey's *Historia*.²¹ It is in this context that we first encounter Geoffrey's Arthurian dragon as it was known in subsequent English and European literature. Geoffrey's Merlin is summoned as a blood-sacrifice to stabilise King Vortigern's crumbling tower. However, he prevents his own bloody end by revealing the presence of two hidden dragons beneath the falling fortress – the real cause behind Vortigern's unstable foundations:

‘Praeipere hauriri stagnum per riuulos, et uidebis in fundo duos concauos lapides et in illis duos dracones dormientes’.

[...]

Sedente itaque Vortegirno rege Britonum super ripam exhausti stagni, egressi sunt duo dracone, quorum unus erat albus et alius rebeus. Cumque alter alteri appropinquasset, commiserunt diram pungam et ignem anhelitu procreabant. Praeualebat autem albus draco

in Medieval Wales’, in *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*, ed. by Tore Nyberg and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985), pp. 97-131 (p. 106).

²⁰ See Jarman, *The Legend of Merlin*; Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 23; *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, ed. by A. O. H. Jarman (Cardiff: National University of Wales, 1982); Fulton, ‘Arthur and Merlin in Early Welsh Literature’; Jarman, ‘The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy’; Padel, ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth and the development of the Merlin legend’.

²¹ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 14.

rubemque usque ad extremitatem lacus fugabet. At ille, cum se expulsus doluisset, impetum fecit in album ipsumque retro ire coegit.

(‘Have the pool drained through channels and at the bottom you will see two hollow rocks with two dragons asleep in them’.

[...]

As Vortigern, King of the Britons, sat on the bank of the drained pool, the two dragons emerged, one white, one red. As they neared each other, they fought a terrible battle, breathing fire. The white dragon began to get the upper hand and drove the red to the edge of the pool. But it was irked at being driven back and attacked the white, forcing it back in turn.)²²

The *Omen* episode operates as a political allusion within both the *Historia* and the *Historia Brittonum*: Ambrosius (*Historia Brittonum*) and Merlin (*Historia*) explain how the red dragon symbolises the Britons and the white dragon symbolises the Saxons, both dragons fighting for supremacy over British territory.²³ Here, the two dragons are incorporated into the *Prophetiae* as markers of British national identity, civil unrest, and political turmoil, used as a motif in both the *Historia* and the *Historia Brittonum* to figure two opposing peoples. However, when comparing both *Omen* episodes, there is a crucial difference in terminology which marks a clear shift made by Geoffrey, one which presents another point of contextualisation for the figure beyond Welsh precedents: the insular reception of Arabic astronomy and astrology. This context is established by understanding Geoffrey’s dragons as astral creatures, not just terrestrial. It is a representation that aligns Geoffrey’s dragons with dragons found within Arabic astronomy.

²² *HRB*, pp. 140-5.

²³ *HRB*, p. 144.

In the *Omen* of the *Historia Brittonum*, there are no ‘dracones’ as there are in Geoffrey, but ‘vermes’ (generally translated as worm or serpent).²⁴ Nennius reveals that the two ‘vermes’ symbolise two dragons, which in turn represent the fighting Britons and Saxons, the allusion to dragons here used emblematically in order to display two national battle standards belonging to two different peoples (the Britons and the Saxons).²⁵ Previous critics have explored how Nennius may have chosen ‘vermes’ to allude to the etymologically similar, early-Welsh words, ‘gormes’ (‘oppressor, violator’) and ‘arnes’ (‘prophecy’), both of which connect to the *Omen*’s interest in portent and prophecy.²⁶ The term also has a split resonance in a Latin context, beyond Welsh etymologies. Isidore of Seville associates ‘vermis’ with ‘vermin’:

²⁴ Nennius, *British history and the Welsh annals*, ed. and trans. by John Morris (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), p. 31; p. 71. ‘Vermis’ in Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary, Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary. Revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879) in *Perseus Digital Library*

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=vermis>> [accessed 15 April 2021].

²⁵ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 36. Also see Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, ‘The Dark Dragon of the Normans: A Creation of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Stephen of Rouen, and Merlin Silvester’, *Quondam et Futurus*, 2 (1992), 1-19.

²⁶ Jones, *Darogan*, p. 6. For more on ‘gormes’ see *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, ed. and trans by Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), p. 90, where she points out ‘gormes’ means ‘an oppression by an alien race or conqueror’, which relates here to both the physical body of the ‘vermes’ and the foreign nature of the Saxon and Norman races; See Sims-Williams, ‘Some Functions of Origin Stories in Medieval Wales’, pp. 97-131, where he explores the etymological meaning of ‘gormes’ and its relation to historical and mythical conquests; Joseph Shack, ‘Otherworld and Norman ‘Other’: Annwfn and its colonial implications in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 35 (2015), 172-186 (p. 184).

Vermis non ut serpens apertis passibus vel squarum nisibus repit, quia non est illi spinae rigor, ut colubri, sed in directum corpusculi sui partes gradatim porrigendo contractas, contrahendo porrectas motum explicat, sicque agitatus perlabitur.

(Vermin do not crawl with obvious steps, or with a pushing of scales as snakes do, because vermin do not possess the strong support of a spine, as in serpents. Rather they achieve motion by extending the contracted parts of their little bodies forward by degrees, and contracting them again, and set moving like this they glide along.)²⁷

This conflation signifies something small and creeping. Nennius's *Omen* also appears to be grounded: the 'vermes' emerge from the subterranean foundations of the castle to the surface of the earth. The *Omen* of Geoffrey's *Historia*, however, appears to be, at least in part, aerial: Geoffrey removes Nennius's 'vermes' and replaces it with 'dracone' (dragon).²⁸ Isidore's description of a dragon is a useful comparison to note here, for it exemplifies the dragon as a different creature to 'vermes', specifically through its larger size and its ability to fly:

²⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XII*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1911), pp. iv-v. For the translation, see *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. by Stephen A. Barney and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 258-9.

²⁸ 'draco' in Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary, Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary. Revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879) in Perseus Digital Library

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Ddraco1>>

[accessed 15 April 2021].

Draco maior cunctorum serpentium, sive omnium animantium super terram. Hunc Graeci δράκοντα vocant; unde et derivatum est in Latinum ut draco diceretur. Qui saepe ab speluncis abstractus fertur in aerem, concitaturque propter eum aer.

(The dragon (*draco*) is the largest of all the snakes, or of all the animals on earth. The Greeks call it δράκων (*drákon*), whence the term is borrowed into Latin so that we may say *draco*. It is often drawn out of caves and soars aloft, and disturbs the air.)²⁹

Geoffrey's choice to replace 'vermes' with 'dracones' thus elevates the nature of the *Historia Brittonum*'s two creatures, transforming them to two larger bodies capable of flight. This is a significant reworking. Although, as Flood suggests, Geoffrey may have made this change to literalise Nennius's original allusion (a 'collapsing of metaphor'), so that instead of Ambrosius's suggestion of dragons, we are in its place presented with Merlin's real revelation of them, Geoffrey's revision here does more than clarify Nennius's earlier Welsh material.³⁰ Through 'dracones', we move away from the earthbound creatures in Nennius. Geoffrey constructs a prophetic dragon episode which occurs more in mid-air than on land, and this draws Geoffrey's *Omen* into relation with another contemporary context, in which we find aerial depictions of the dragon. This other representation of the dragon, in circulation in England's Severn Valley during the time of Geoffrey's writing, stems from twelfth-century Latinate-Arabic astronomical materials known in England, potential source traditions for Geoffrey's *Historia*.

²⁹ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum*, p. iii; p. iv. For the translation, see *The Etymologies of Isidore*, trans. by Barney and others, p. 255.

³⁰ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 36.

Latinate-Arabic Influences of the Galfridian Dragon

The period in which Geoffrey wrote his *Historia*, and constructed his aerial Arthurian dragon, saw wider cultural and intellectual movement occurring in Europe concerning the transmission and translation of Arabic materials into Latin.³¹ In early twelfth-century England one site connected to this growing intellectual interest was the Severn Valley.³² Twelfth-century Oxford was another significant place of foreign learning for many scholars working on subjects such as astronomy, astrology, mathematics, geometry, and natural philosophy.³³ By 1129, Geoffrey himself was in Oxford, likely a ‘secular canon of the college of St. George in Oxford’, and he is understood to have conducted all his literary activity at Oxford, including writing his *Historia*.³⁴ His ties to Oxford are strengthened by his relationship to Walter, the archdeacon of Oxford, whom he addresses in the *Historia*’s prologue, and again at the very end of the work:

Reges autem eorum qui ab illo tempore in Gualliis successerunt Karadoco Lancarbanensi contemporaneo meo in materia scribendi permitto, reges uero Saxonum Willelmo Malmesberienensi et Henrico Huntendonensi, quos de regibus Britonum tacere iuebo, cum non habeant librum illum Britannici sermonis quem Walterus Oxenefordensis archidiaconus ex Britannia aduexit, quem de historia eorum ueraciter editum in honore praedictorum principum hoc modo in Latinum sermonem transferre curauit.

³¹ For more on astronomy and astrology in England, see this thesis’s Introduction, pages 18-27.

³² Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 120; Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’, p. 142.

³³ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 126.

³⁴ Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’, p. 146; Neil Wright, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 568* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. x. Also see Valerie I. J. Flint, ‘The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Parody and Its Purpose. A Suggestion’, *Speculum*, 54 (1979), 447-468 (pp. 449-50).

(The Welsh kings who succeeded one another from then on I leave as subject matter to my contemporary, Caradoc of Llancarfan, and the Saxon kings to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon; however, I forbid them to write about the kings of the Britons since they do not possess the book in British which Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, brought from Brittany, and whose truthful account of their history I have here been at pains in honour of those British rulers to translate into Latin.)³⁵

Geoffrey also addresses both William and Walter in the closing passage, the former associated with the Severn Valley, and the latter with Oxford. Additionally mentioned here is Henry of Huntingdon, another contemporary chronicle writer, whose *Historia Anglorum* (History of the English, c. 1129) was a work requested by Alexander of Lincoln, the patron of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*.³⁶ Despite Henry being one of the first readers of Geoffrey's *Historia*, in Normandy in 1139, Geoffrey does not grant him nor William leave to write about the British kings, reserving that right to himself due to his possession of Walter's historical book.³⁷ Walter, regarded as a long-time friend of Geoffrey's, was known to have worked as 'the provost of the college of secular canons in the church of St. George', demonstrating not only Geoffrey's close connections to Oxford, but displaying the site itself as already a 'famed

³⁵ *HRB*, pp. 280-1.

³⁶ See A. G. Dyson, 'The Monastic Patronage of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 26 (1975), 1-24. For more on Henry of Huntingdon, see Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

³⁷ W. Levison, 'A Combined Manuscript of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Henry of Huntingdon', *The English Historical Review*, 58 (1943), 41-51 (p. 44).

seat of clerical instruction.’³⁸ The establishment of a ‘scholastic community in Oxford by the 1130s’, alongside the clerical, intellectual movement occurring in the Severn Valley, displays the growing English interest in Arabic scientific learning within the environments through which Geoffrey moved.³⁹

Beyond Geoffrey of Monmouth’s immediate context, we might note again, as in this thesis’s introduction, the activities of Adelard.⁴⁰ A contemporary of Geoffrey, Adelard was instrumental in introducing Arabic science into England from al-Andalus, a prominent intellectual centre generating leading Arabic ideas of science and technology.⁴¹ In the wake of the First Crusade, Adelard brought Arabic astronomical knowledge and other valuable learning to England, crossing cultural borders and navigating empires engaged in fierce military conflict. He studied in both Tours and Laon and, after leaving France, spent several years travelling and studying in places such as Salerno, Sicily, and Antioch, cities which fell

³⁸ John Edward Lloyd, ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth’, *The English Historical Review*, 57 (1942), 460- 468 (pp. 464-5).

³⁹ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 126.

⁴⁰ See this thesis’s Introduction, pages 23-4. For more on Adelard of Bath, and his interest in/ contributions to medieval astronomy and astrology, see Burnett, ‘The Roads of Córdoba and Seville’, p. 145; Patricia Aakhus, ‘Astral Magic and Adelard of Bath’s *Liber Prestigiorum*; or Why Werewolves Change at the Full Moon’, ed. by Nicholas Campion and Rolf Sinclair, *Culture and Cosmos*, 16 (2012), 151-161 (pp. 151-2); Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, pp. 106-8; Jeremiah Hackett, ‘Adelard of Bath’ in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jorge J. E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 86-7; *Adelard of Bath: an English Scientist*, ed. by Burnett; Lyons, *House of Wisdom*; Hilary M. Carey, ‘Astrology in the Middle Ages’, *History Compass*, 8 (2010), 888-902 (pp. 891-2); Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 118; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York, Columbia University Press, 1923) II, pp. 22-3; pp. 50-6.

⁴¹ For more on Arabic science and the Iberian Peninsula, see Lyons, p. 22; p. 126; p. 144; Burnett, ‘The Roads of Córdoba and Seville’, pp. 143-152.

under the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century.⁴² When Adelard returned to England, he helped introduce Arab learning to the Christian West, determined not to let the severe religious and cultural animosity – perpetuated through the ongoing holy wars, temper his respect for Arab knowledge and wisdom.⁴³ This helped to establish his legacy as the first Western man of science, his work on Arabic science generating interest in the subject even after his death.⁴⁴

The generation after Adelard saw a further transmission of Latinate-Arabic works, by twelfth-century translators such as Gerard of Cremona, Hermann of Carinthia, John of Seville, Michael Scot, Robert of Ketton (also known as Robert of Chester), as well as later thirteenth-century translators, such as Roger Bacon.⁴⁵ This cultural movement in England, which continued into the early modern period, saw the transmission and translation of not just

⁴² Charles Burnett, 'Adelard of Bath', in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, ed. by Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011). For more on the Norman Conquest of Muslim Sicily and Salerno, see Paul Oldfield, 'The Norman world, c. 1000–c. 1100', in *Debating medieval Europe: The early Middle Ages, c. 450–c. 1050*, ed. by Stephen Mossman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

⁴³ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*. For more on Latinate-Arabic translators and translations, and the influence of Arabic learning on the West, see *Adelard of Bath: an English Scientist*, ed. by Burnett; Carey, 'Astrology in the Middle Ages'; Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*; Richard William Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); *The Translation of the Elements of Euclid From the Arabic into Latin by Hermann of Carinthia (?)*, ed. by H. L. Busard (Leiden: Brill, 1968); *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Violet Moller, *The Map of Knowledge: A Thousand-Year History of how Classical Ideas Were Lost and Found* (New York: Anchor Books, 2020); Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*; Hackett, 'Adelard of Bath and Roger Bacon'.

astronomy and astrology, but materials on alchemy, astral magic, natural science, arithmetic, geometry, medicine, and philosophy.⁴⁶ One facet of the so-called ‘twelfth-century Renaissance’ (discussed above in this thesis’s introduction) shows the revival and elaboration of Greek materials through the transmission of Arabic learning, with Spain serving as the chief link in a new search for knowledge.⁴⁷ This is not to say that works by late antique and early medieval Christian writers were no longer being read in England, as many writers during this time, including Geoffrey and William of Malmesbury, still drew on the previous ideas of earlier authors such as Isidore and Augustine of Hippo. However, Arabic learning reworked texts from many geographical and linguistic origins, not particular to one language but sourcing from many (for example, Middle Persian, Sanskrit, Syriac, and Greek), intending to not simply revive lost texts in ancient tongues, but to generate and transfer ‘specialised learning’ to multiple court professionals, such as astrologers, physicians and theologians, over several centuries.⁴⁸ As an intellectual movement, Arabic learning represented a ‘reception of disciplines, techniques, and methods of learning and practice,’ one which, though beginning in the seventh century, only began to develop more fully in England in the early twelfth century.⁴⁹ This surge of English interest in Arabic materials, which reached Britain from the Iberian Peninsula, should therefore not be overlooked in an

⁴⁶ See Lyons, *House of Wisdom*; Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*; Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁴⁷ Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, pp. 4-11.

⁴⁸ Kevin T. van Bladel, ‘The Arabic Reception of Late Antique Literature’, in *A Companion to Late Antique Literature*, ed. by Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), pp. 569-582 (pp. 571-3).

⁴⁹ Van Bladel, ‘The Arabic Reception of Late Antique Literature’, p. 573.

examination of Geoffrey's twelfth-century works, particularly the translation and transmission of Arabic astronomy and astrology.

Both medieval astronomy and astrology were concerned with human events and time, and in the visible and hidden movements of our world. The close association between prophecy and astrology was also growing during the Middle Ages, with both operating as forms of knowledge of the future.⁵⁰ It is therefore no wonder that astronomy, astrology, and prophecy gained attention in medieval English literary production more broadly, spreading also into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* and his *Knight's Tale*), influencing royal courts, and intriguing the minds of the cultural elite throughout the Middle Ages.⁵¹ This branch of knowledge was used to show three main things: firstly, how the heavenly bodies affected someone's character and destiny; secondly, to interrogate the outcome for a particular undertaking, such as a marriage, a battle, or some vital action; and thirdly, to determine the most auspicious moment to undertake these in.⁵² Thus, astronomy, astrology, and prophecy were considered useful by many rulers, and were popular at many courts. Aristotle thus reportedly advised Alexander the Great never to embark on war, and never to even eat, drink, sit or rise without consulting an astrologer, and a chaplain of William the Conqueror was so dedicated to the subject of astrology that it was remarked he would spend his nights gazing at stars rather than sleeping.⁵³ Court astrologers

⁵⁰ Chiara Crisciani, 'Opus and sermo: The Relationship between Alchemy and Prophecy (12th-14th Centuries)', *Early Science and Medicine*, 13 (2008), 4-24 (p. 4).

⁵¹ Carey, 'Astrology in the Middle Ages', p. 891. For more on the influence of astronomy and astrology in Chaucer, see Jagot, '*Fin'amors*'.

⁵² Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 121-2.

⁵³ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 122. Also see J. D. North, *Horoscopes and History* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1986).

were popular throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period, with examples such as Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630) and Tycho Brahe (1546 – 1601) aiding the Holy Roman Empire, Galileo Galilei (1564 – 1642) attending to the Medici family in Italy, and Dr John Dee (1527 – c. 1608/ 1609) serving Elizabeth I of England (1533 – 1603), all of whom were interested in astronomy, astrology, and also optics.⁵⁴ Adelard was also believed to have provided his former student, Henry II of England (1133 – 1189), with horoscopes too, and was considered to have been ‘the only man in early twelfth-century England with the skill to cast and interpret a horoscope.’⁵⁵ He has been presumed to be the author of ‘ten English horoscopes which survive from the period 1135-60, with a cluster around 1150-51’, the likely time of composition of Geoffrey’s *Vita*.⁵⁶ These examples demonstrate the astronomical,

⁵⁴ For more on the use of astrology in royal courts, see Robert Bartlett, *Blood Royal: Dynastic Politics in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Michael A. Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers: Astrology and Authority in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011). For more on Kepler and Brahe, see Johannes Kepler, *The Harmony of the World*, trans. by E. J. Aiton and others (Pennsylvania: American Philosophical Society, 1997); Todd Timmons, *Makers of Western Science: The Works and Words of 24 Visionaries from Copernicus to Watson and Crick* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012). For more on Galileo, see Marco Piccolino and Nicholas J. Wade, *Galileo’s Visions: Piercing the Spheres of the Heavens by Eye and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mary Quinlan-McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Massimo Bucciantini, Michele Camerota, and Franco Giudice, *Galileo’s Telescope: A European Story*, trans. by Catherine Bolton (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015). For more on John Dee, see Nicholas H. Clulee, ‘Astrology, Magic, and Optics: Facets of John Dee’s Early Natural Philosophy’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), 632-680; Nicholas H. Clulee, *John Dee’s Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁵⁵ Carey, ‘Astrology in the Middle Ages’, p. 892; Carey, *Courting Disaster*, p. 30. Also see Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 108.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 106.

astrological and prophetic interests of Norman England's courtly elite, and it is this same audience who read and received Geoffrey's *Historia*.⁵⁷

Manuscripts containing Geoffrey's *Historia* and *Prophetiae*: An Analysis

The *Historia* and *Prophetiae* were certainly read alongside astronomical and astrological works, appearing alongside Latin-Arabic manuscripts produced in England between the twelfth century to the seventeenth century (Table 1). In both British Library, London, Cotton MS Fragments XXIX and British Library, Arundel MS 66, the *Prophetiae* is placed near astrological tables. Geoffrey may have been included alongside these due to the similarity between prophecy and astrology during the Middle Ages, both of which are concerned with future events. Arundel MS 66 also contains many astronomical and astrological texts alongside prophetic texts. This late fifteenth-century manuscript contains astronomical tables for Oxford by John Killingworth (fols 3-32), 'perhaps the most important of fifteenth-century English astronomers', the *Liber Astronomiae* by Guido Bonatti (fols 33-249), a thirteenth-century Italian astronomer and astrologer, plus visions and ten prophetic texts, including the 'Prophecy of the Eagle' (fol. 291v), attributed to Merlin Silvestris (the Merlin of Geoffrey's *Vita*), and Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* (fols 267-268v).⁵⁸ It also includes a dragon constellation

⁵⁷ For more on twelfth-century Norman horoscopes, following the death of Henry I of England, see Sophie Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 11-2.

⁵⁸ For more on John Killingworth, see Päivi Pahta, *Communicating Early English Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 51; J. D. North, *Cosmos: An Illustrated History of Astronomy and Cosmology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 264-5. For more on Guido Bonatti, see Guido Bonatti, *Bonatti on Basic Astrology*, trans. by Benjamin N. Dykes (Minneapolis: Cazimi Press, 2010); *Bonatti on Mundane Astrology*, trans. by Benjamin N. Dykes (Minneapolis: Cazimi Press, 2010); Lawrence-Mathers, *Medieval Meteorology*, pp. 134-93. For more on the Prophecies of Merlin Silvestris, see Anne Sutton and Livia

Table 1. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia/ Prophetiae* found alongside twelfth- to –seventeenth-century astronomical and astrological texts.⁵⁹

Manuscript Name	Manuscript Contents
British Library, Cotton MS Fragments XXIX: (11 th to 16 th century)	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>Prophecies of Merlin</i> ; an astrological table; a chronicle of Anglo-Saxon history; heraldic treatises; letters patent of King Henry VIII of England (1509–47)
British Library, Arundel MS 66: (1490)	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>Prophecies of Merlin</i> ; Astrological and astronomical tables; political prophecies; dragon initials; Ptolemy's <i>Almagest</i> with dragon constellation ('Draco') miniature
Bodleian Library, Digby MS 67: (12 th to 16 th century)	Astrological treatises; Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i> ; Scientific texts; Albertus Magnus, <i>De intellectu et intelligencia</i> ; Roger Bacon, <i>Summa de sophismatibus et distinctionibus</i>
Christ Church College, MS. 99: (17 th century)	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i> ; Aristotle, <i>Secreta secretorum</i> , tr. Philip of Tripoli; Isidore of Seville, <i>Etymologiae</i>
Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.1.1: (14 th century)	Illustration of <i>L'image du monde</i> , including elements, moon, sun and their eclipses and seven planets; illustrations of the <i>Apocalypse</i> , including dragons; <i>Prophecies of Merlin</i> , prose version

Visser-Fuchs, 'Richard III's Books: VIII. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* with *The Prophecy of the Eagle* and Commentary: 2. The Prophecy and Commentary (Continued)', *The Ricardian*, 8 (1990), 351-362; Victoria Flood, 'Prophecy as History: A New Study of the *Prophecies of Merlin Silvester*', *Neophilologus*, 102 (2018), 543-559.

⁵⁹ This table provides examples of key collections containing Geoffrey's work and Latinate-Arabic texts circulating in England. However, this list of manuscripts is not exhaustive and there is room for further research.

from Ptolemy's *Almagest* (fols 33-47), a mathematical and astronomical manual which received its name when it was translated from Greek into Arabic.⁶⁰ Altogether Ptolemy's *Almagest* contains thirteen books detailing astronomical topics, with Book VI on eclipses, and Books VII and VIII on the fixed stars.⁶¹ In the tenth century, Arabic astronomer Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi (c. 903), produced the *Book of Fixed Stars* (c. 964), his own version of the *Almagest*'s star constellations, and two centuries later, Ptolemy's work was 'principally channeled into the West through Gerard of Cremona's translation from the Arabic, completed in Toledo, in c. 1175.'⁶² Belonging to the *Almagest*, and featured in this manuscript, is an image of the constellation 'Draco' (Figure 1), on fol. 33v, which is here presented as the red dragon of the Britons/ the Tudor dragon for Henry VII, suggesting cultivation of an explicit connection to Galfridian frameworks of meaning. Ptolemy's constellations, including the above depiction of Draco, clearly represent the fifteenth-century royal interest in astronomy. The constellation images were 'verified for Alfonso V, king of Aragon and Naples (c. 1396), and in Oxford for Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester (c. 1390),' with Arundel MS 66 itself most

⁶⁰ Ian Ridpath, *Star Tales* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988), p. 8.

⁶¹ Ptolemy's *Almagest*, pp. 5-6. For more on the *Almagest*, see Olaf Pederson, *A Survey of the Almagest* (New York: Springer, 2011). For more on al-Sufi, see Ihsan Hafez, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi and his book of the fixed stars: a journey of re-discovery' (unpublished doctoral thesis, James Cook University, 2010); Laurel Brown, 'The astronomies of al-Sūfī's 'Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars'' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2009); Laura Fernández Fernández, 'Arab stars in the Castilian sky: Al-Sūfī's *Book of fixed stars* amongst the manuscripts of Alfonso X', in *The Stars in the Classical and Medieval Traditions*, ed. by Alena Hadravová, Petr Hadrava, and Kristen Lippincott (Prague: Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2019), pp. 93-114.

⁶² Ptolemy's *Almagest*, p. 3; Ridpath, *Star Tales*, p. 8.

likely ‘written for King Henry VII (c. 1457 – 1509).’⁶³ This exhibits the fifteenth-century political elite’s interest in astronomical images and texts which illustrate and detail the heavens. The manuscript’s contents also show the lasting cultural significance of prophecy and astronomy, with the *Prophetiae* potentially being read and considered in the Tudor period alongside these constellation images, three centuries after Geoffrey’s writing. In both the Oxford manuscripts in Table 1, Geoffrey’s *Historia* is placed alongside notable intellectuals and translators of Arabic texts. In Digby MS 67, the *Historia* appears in Part 5 of the manuscript, preceding Albertus Magnus in Part 7, and Roger Bacon in Part 8, two thirteenth-century philosophers who used Arabic source materials in their writing on astrology, alchemy, and philosophy.⁶⁴ Although Digby MS 67’s works by Albertus Magnus are philosophical, there is one astronomical work of his, beyond Digby MS 67, which provides relevant cultural and intellectual context for the reception of the *Prophetiae* and *Historia*. The popular work was titled *Speculum astronomiae*, which displayed ‘extensive evidence of cross-cultural borrowing of scientific and philosophical ideas in its presentation of astronomy and astrology,’ drawing on Abu Ma’shar, who in turn drew his astrological system from Ptolemy’s

⁶³ London, British Library, Arundel MS 66. Also see David Rundle, *The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain: The English Quattrocento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 283; Pahta, *Communicating Early English Manuscripts*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ For more on Albertus Magnus and Arabic texts, see Dag Nikolaus Hasse, ‘The Early Albertus Magnus and his Arabic Sources on the Theory of the Soul’, in *Transformations of the Soul: Aristotelian Psychology 1250-1650*, ed. by Dominik Perler (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 10-30; J. R. Partington, ‘Albertus Magnus on Alchemy’, *Ambix*, 1 (1937), 3-20; Scott Hendrix, ‘Reading the Future and Freeing the Will: Astrology of the Arabic World and Albertus Magnus’, *Hortulus: The Online Graduate Journal of Medieval Studies*, 2 (2006), 30-49. For more on Roger Bacon, see Hackett, ‘Roger Bacon on Astronomy-Astrology’; Hackett, ‘Adelard of Bath and Roger Bacon’; Amanda Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defence of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Figure 1. Draco constellation from Ptolemy's *Almagest*, c. 1490.⁶⁵



⁶⁵ Arundel MS 66, fol. 33r. 'Amongst the elements that can be tied to Henry VII and his family is the friendly Red Dragon of Cadwaladr, painted against the Tudor livery colours of white and green [...] This stand-out Red Dragon was used in Arundel MS 66 in the place of the more usual image of the constellation *Draco*, in a section containing Ptolemy's 'Catalogue of Stars'.' See Joanna Fronska, 'What Can We Learn from a Scribal Colophon?' (2013) <<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2013/04/what-can-we-learn-from-a-scribal-colophon.html>> [accessed 2 June 2024].

Almagest.⁶⁶ This assertion of the power of the stars is one accepted by Bacon, who, ‘like many of his contemporaries, believed in the influence of heavenly bodies on earthly processes’, a view which he categorised under ‘true astrology’, as opposed to ‘false astrology’, which dealt with the predestination of inevitable events.⁶⁷ Bacon, a part of the cultural movement after Adelard, was known to have ‘had access to an impressive collection of Arabic and Greek texts that had been brought to Oxford in the preceding decades.’⁶⁸ Like Albertus Magnus, he was also interested in Aristotelian theories, mainly the *Secretum secretorum* (The Secret of Secrets), a letter from Aristotle to his pupil, Alexander the Great.⁶⁹

In the second Oxford manuscript, Christ Church College, MS 99, Geoffrey’s *Historia* (fols 1–42) is placed together with Aristotle’s *Secreta secretorum* (fols 116–37), translated by the Italian translator, Philip of Tripoli (fl. 1218 – 1269). Philip first translated the *Secreta* around 1243, and Bacon likely used this translation to later edit his own version of the *Secreta*, adding some additional notes.⁷⁰ The *Secreta* itself is categorised as a ‘Mirror for Princes’, a text which gives political and moral advice to a ruler, on issues such as a king’s generosity, their conduct, the importance of justice, and war tactics.⁷¹ However, the *Secreta* includes more than just political advice on statecraft, also discussing ‘medicine,

⁶⁶ Hendrix, ‘Reading the Future and Freeing the Will’, p. 31; p. 36.

⁶⁷ Alexsey Klemshov, ‘The Conversion and Destruction of the Infidels in the Works of Roger Bacon’, in *Religion and Power in Europe*, ed. by Joaquim Carvalho (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2007), pp. 15-28 (p. 17).

⁶⁸ Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defence of Christendom*, p. 36.

⁶⁹ See Brian Clegg, *Roger Bacon: The First Scientist* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2003).

⁷⁰ See Clegg, *Roger Bacon*.

⁷¹ Benedek Lang, *Unlocked Books: Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p. 58.

physiognomy, astrology, magical gems, the virtues of herbs, amulets, and recipes.⁷² This is comparable to another astro-numerological work, the *Alchandreana* texts, which, in the twelfth-century British Library, Egerton MS 821, is similarly described in its manuscript catalogue as ‘a collection of astrological, brantomantic, onomantic and oneiromantic treatises; astronomic and computistic texts; herbal remedies, charms and magical amulets.’⁷³ Both the *Secreta* and *Alchandreana* are associated with Arabic learning. However, only the *Secreta*’s Arabic versions survive, which were then translated into two Latin versions (both of different lengths, with the shorter version only a partial, twelfth-century translation by John of Seville (fl. 1133 – 1153), and the longer version completed in the thirteenth century by Philip.)⁷⁴ Despite John’s astrological interests, Philip’s version of the *Secreta* contains more scientific material (which the *Historia* accompanies), with John’s version containing none of the practical information on astrology, more focused ‘on how to rule (*de dispositione regiminis*).’⁷⁵

The circulation of Geoffrey’s *Historia* alongside works/ translations by Albertus Magnus, Bacon, and Philip, all of whom had some interaction with Arabic ideas and materials, shows how throughout the Middle Ages, and until even as late as the seventeenth century, Geoffrey was situated alongside writers who were influenced by Arabic learning during their lifetime. Also, the shared interest of these later writers in Aristotle who, in the

⁷² Lang, *Unlocked Books*, p. 59.

⁷³ London, British Library, Egerton MS 821. For more on the *Secreta secretorum* and the corpus as astro-numerological works, see John Scott Lucas, *Astrology and Numerology in Medieval and Early Modern Catalonia: The Tractat de Prenostication de la Vida Natural Dels Hòmens* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 53-6.

⁷⁴ Lang, *Unlocked Books*, p. 59.

⁷⁵ Steven J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: The Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 60.

Secreta, counsels Alexander in matters of war and astrology, is reminiscent of Geoffrey's Merlin to Uther, showing the *Historia*'s and the *Secreta*'s similar motif of a king and his advisor, a relationship which was prevailing in royal courts throughout this period (as mentioned previously in this chapter). This may suggest that later readers read Geoffrey alongside the *Secreta* with a common thematic interest in mind. Likewise, Bacon also strongly believed that astrology could be harnessed in service to the sovereign:

Astrology does not undermine the doctrine of the free will [...] because true astrologers do not presume to foretell future events with certainty. Instead, they foretell future possibilities, which are contingent upon God's will and sufficient causes. Astrology is an essential science for princes because it enables them to prepare for events that are likely to occur. Although these events might be inevitable, foresight might mitigate their impact.⁷⁶

Bacon's thoughts on astrology show how, in the century after Geoffrey, some medieval writers held the subject of astrology in high regard (despite its dubious status among early authorities). Its appeal lay, especially for Bacon, in its potential to warn and inform, especially applicable to those who held royal positions. Such attitudes supported a growing relationship between royal rule and the stars in the Middle Ages, showing astrology as advisory, legitimising, and potentially destabilising.⁷⁷ As we shall see, this connection is also present and recurring within Geoffrey's Arthurian narrative, through Geoffrey's Merlin and his interactions with Uther and Arthur.

⁷⁶ Williams, *The Secret of Secrets*, p. 49. Also see Roger Bacon, *Secretum Secretorum cum glossis et notulis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920); Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers*, p. 69.

⁷⁷ See Carey, *Courting Disaster*.

The subject of astrology was also considered by Bacon to determine the time of Anti-Christ, this view influenced by both Abu Ma'shar and Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century Calabrian prophet (who I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis), who integrated Petrus's work into 'one of the most ambitious and challenging Trinitarian theologies of the late twelfth century.'⁷⁸ This conflation of astrology and apocalyptic narratives highlights astrology's strong links to religion as well as politics. Similarly, in the early fourteenth-century Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.1.1, Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* (fols 120r-121v) is placed alongside small miniatures detailing the Apocalypse (fols 407r-439v). These include astral images such as: 'third trumpet: Falling star' (fol. 418v); 'fourth trumpet: darkening of sun and moon' (fol. 418v), as well as images of the apocalyptic dragon: 'earth swallowing water spewed by Dragon against Woman' (fol. 422r); 'seven-headed Beast rising from sea' (fol. 422v); 'worship of Beast' (fol. 423r); 'sixth vial: frogs coming out of mouths of False Prophet, Beast and Dragon' (fol. 428r); and 'an Angel with vial showing St John, Great Whore seated on seven-headed Beast' (fol. 429r).⁷⁹ Alongside these, the manuscript also contains astronomical images through several illustrations of 'L'image du monde' (fols. 346r-390r): 'diagrams of the world including its antipodes, elements, moon, sun and their eclipses, seven planets and seven days of the week' (fols 358v-362r; fols 374v-378v).⁸⁰ The placing of the *Prophetiae* (here, in a French prose version) alongside these images of Judgement Day evokes the apocalypticism in Geoffrey's Book VII, which ends in a cataclysmic conclusion.

⁷⁸ For more on Joachim of Fiore, see Chapter 4 of this thesis, pages 270-7. Bernard McGinn, 'Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought', in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. by Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013), pp. 11-34 (p. 14).

⁷⁹ Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.1.1.

⁸⁰ MS Gg.1.1.

These fateful, revelatory images, included near Geoffrey's political, prophetic work in Cambridge University Library Gg.1.1, show recognition of the *Prophetiae's* incorporation of astrological motifs.

Two centuries earlier than Cambridge University Library Gg.1.1, two manuscripts containing Latinate-Arabic astronomical materials were circulating in England. The first, British Library, Sloane MS 2030, contains several notable names and works: Bede and Rasis in Part 1 of the manuscript (second half of the thirteenth century, fols 3-30; 95-135v), and in Part 2, Marcianus's *Astronomia*, the *Ysagoga Minor*, translated by Adelard, and Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium* (second half of the twelfth century, fols 32v-94v).⁸¹ The placing together in Sloane 2030 of the English historian, Bede, and the Persian polymath, Rasis (Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi, c. 854-925), is interesting to note. The inclusion, alongside the English writer Bede, of al-Razi, a renowned authority on medicine, philosophy, mathematics, theology, astronomy, and alchemy, who wrote '*Kitāb al-Asrār* (The Book of Secrets) and *Kitāb Sirr al-asrār* (The Book of the Secret of Secrets) potentially demonstrates the thirteenth-century English interest in not only insular learning, but Arabic ideas, particularly those associated with quadrivium learning.⁸² This is strengthened by Part 2 of the manuscript, which brings together three astrological texts (of various origins). Adelard's translation of Abū Ma'shar's *Ysagoga Minor* (Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology) is situated here alongside both the pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium* (One Hundred Sayings), which Adelard was also known to have translated, and Capella's *Astronomia*, the cosmological doctrine in Book VIII of his *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercuri* (On the

⁸¹ London, British Library, Sloane 2030.

⁸² Selma Tibi, *The Medicinal Use of Opium in ninth-century Baghdad* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 105. For more on the quadrivium sciences, see *Quadrivium: The Four Classical Liberal Arts of Number, Geometry, Music, & Cosmology*, ed. by Miranda Lundy and others (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010).

Marriage of Philology and Mercury).⁸³ Collectively, these three works represent astrological ideas on the movement of the heavens and the influence of the stars.

The *Ysagoga Minor* derives from the *Ysagoga Maiore* (Greater Introduction to Astrology) by Abu Ma'shar, in which he proves the existence of astrology and shares arguments with Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (Four Books of the Influence of the Stars) and *Almagest*.⁸⁴ The pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium* are aphorisms belonging to astrology from the Greek Hellenistic period, connected to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* and other sources.⁸⁵ In 1136, the *Centiloquium*, was translated into Latin, likely by Plato of Tivoli or John of Seville, emerging as one of the foundational texts of medieval astrology.⁸⁶ The association here of the two manuscript texts to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* demonstrates a shared interest in 'arguing for the viability of astrology as a physical science of the effects of celestial bodies on the terrestrial environment and on individuals.'⁸⁷ Taken together, we see how during the twelfth century, more attention was being placed on justifying astrological learning and practice, with the transmission of Arabic works, like those of Abu Ma'shar and Ptolemy, in manuscripts such as Sloane 2030, showing the scientific value of astrology to the West. Richard Jones suggests that during this period Latinate-Arabic translations on astronomy and astrology superseded earlier understandings like Macrobius's *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis* (*Commentary on Cicero's Dream of Scipio*) or book eight of Capella's *Philologiae et*

⁸³ Bruce Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens: Roman Astronomy and Cosmology in the Carolingian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 183.

⁸⁴ *The Greater Introduction to Astrology by Abū Ma'shar: The Arabic Original and English Translation*, ed. and trans. by Keiji Yamamoto and Charles Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 8-9; p. 16.

⁸⁵ S. J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1987), p. 154; p. 92.

⁸⁶ Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, p. 93.

⁸⁷ *Ptolemy in Perspective: Use and Criticism of His Work from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Alexander Jones (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), p. xii.

Mercurii.⁸⁸ However, in Sloane 2030, Capella's *Astronomia* (Book VIII) appears alongside the *Ysagoga Minor*, perhaps demonstrating that, at least in the twelfth century, this was not yet the case, with late antique ideas of astronomy and astrology still circulating, despite the influx of new Arabic ideas.

The scientific importance of MS Auct. F. 1. 9.

This co-existence of classical and Arabic science is further evident in MS Auct. F. 1. 9.⁸⁹ Produced in Worcester, after 1126, this manuscript also contains notable, translated works of astronomy, and is associated with several translators working across the early twelfth century period, more closely contemporary with Geoffrey than Sloane 2030. The manuscript includes Robert, Bishop of Hereford's *Excerptio de chronica Mariani* (fol. 2v), Walcher of Malvern's *De lunationibus* (fol. 86), Petrus Alfonsi's *Sententia de dracone*, translated by Walcher, al-Khwarizmi's, *Ezich Elkauresmi*, translated by Adelard (fol. 99v), Capella's *Philologiae et Mercurii*, and Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, with the commentary by Macrobius (fol. 163).⁹⁰ Robert, a keen astronomer and mathematician, drew on the *Chronicon* of Marianus Scottus (c. 1028 – 1082), an Irish monk who wrote on Christian chronology, creating a more understandable treatise which 'served as an indispensable instrument for intellectuals' to acquaint themselves with Marianus's ideas.⁹¹ William of Malmesbury

⁸⁸ Richard Jones, *The Medieval Natural World* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 26-7.

⁸⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Auct. F. 1. 9.

⁹⁰ MS. Auct. F. 1. 9.

⁹¹ Gleb Schmidt, 'A Saint Petersburg Manuscript of the Excerptio Roberti Herefordensis de Chronica Mariani Scotti', in *Writing History in the Anglo-Norman World: Manuscripts, Makers and Readers, c. 1066–c. 1250*, ed. by Laura Cleaver and Andrea Worm (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), pp. 69-92 (p. 69). For more on

described Robert as ‘highly skilled in all liberal arts, and in particular [... in] the abacus, the reckoning of time by the moon, and the course of the stars in the sky’, displaying Robert’s work as well-known in the Severn Valley too (where William resided), a key site of astronomical learning during the twelfth century.⁹²

Adelard’s translation of al-Khwarizmi’s *Ezich Elkauresmi* (astronomical tables) in MS Auct. F. 1. 9 is the first Latinate-Arabic translation of a scientific work, based on the work of Maslama ibn Ahmad al-Majriti (c. 950 – 1007), the Spanish astronomer, alchemist and mathematician.⁹³ This shows the period just before Geoffrey’s writing as greatly influential for the introduction, translation, and circulation of Arabic astronomy. However, MS Auct. F. 1. 9 also shows how, despite the growing interest in Arabic texts at this time, there were still several works, originating outside the Iberian Peninsula, and written earlier than these Arabic materials, that remained of interest and in circulation during the twelfth century. These cosmographical texts continued to prevail, despite the twelfth-century emergence of texts on astronomy and cosmology from Greek and Arabic source materials.⁹⁴

Robert, Bishop of Hereford, and Marianus’s *Chronicon*, see George Garnett, *The Norman Conquest in English History: Volume I: A Broken Chain?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 43-4.

⁹² Schmidt, ‘A Saint Petersburg Manuscript’, p. 70. Also see William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum: The History of the English Bishops*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I, pp. 458–9.

⁹³ Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (Massachusetts: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 26. For more on Maslama ibn Ahmad al-Majriti, see Julio Samsó, ‘Majrītī, Maslamah ibn Ahmad al-’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, ed. by Salim Ayduz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 517-9.

⁹⁴ Barbara Obrist, ‘“Imaginatio” and Visual Representation in Twelfth-Century Cosmology and Astronomy: Ibn al-Haytham, Stephen of Pisa (and Antioch), (Ps.) Māshā’allāh, and (Ps.) Thabit ibn Qurra’, in *Image*,

One such work is Capella's *Philologiae et Mercurii* (which also appears in Sloane 2030). A late antique, encyclopaedic text known for its allegorical form, it details the seven liberal arts, describing the 'heavenly ascent of Philology and her marriage with Mercury', symbolising the joining of 'eloquence and learning', a concept which strongly influenced thirteenth-and-fourteenth-century imaginative literature.⁹⁵ The text circulated in 241 known manuscripts (the earliest of these from the ninth century), and was popular during the Middle Ages, undoubtedly read in both 'monastic and palace schools.'⁹⁶ Capella himself is important within the fields of science and rhetoric, and within cosmography he was a distinct authority among the Chartrian scholars of the twelfth century.⁹⁷ Jacques Le Goff notes how:

Chartres was the great centre of learning in the twelfth century. The arts of the trivium – grammar, rhetoric, and logic – found their place there, as was seen in the teachings of Bernard of Chartres. But beyond the study of *uoces*, Chartrian scholars preferred the study of things, *res*, which belongs to the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. This orientation determined the *Chartrian spirit*, a spirit of curiosity, observation, and investigation which, fed on Greco-Arab knowledge, was to flourish and expand.⁹⁸

Imagination, and Cognition: Medieval and Early Modern Theory and Practice, ed. by Christoph Lüthy and others (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 32-60 (p. 36).

⁹⁵ William H. Stahl, 'To a Better Understanding of Martianus Capella', *Speculum*, 40 (1965), 102-115 (p. 102).

⁹⁶ Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300 -1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 148.

⁹⁷ Stahl, 'To a Better Understanding of Martianus Capella', p. 102.

⁹⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Teresa Lavender Fagan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), pp. 13-4. Also see Édouard Jeuneau, *Rethinking the School of Chartres*, trans. by Claude Paul Desmarais (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2009), p. 23.

Coinciding with the engagement of scientific scholarship at Chartres, and the rise of astronomy in England, the study of *Philologiae et Mercurii* reached its height among the twelfth-century Platonists (philosophers who believed in the existence of that abstract objects).⁹⁹ It directly influenced

the *Philosophia mundi* of William of Conches, the *Heptateuchon* of Thierry of Chartres, the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris, [and] the *De eodem et diverso* of Adelard of Bath.¹⁰⁰

These writers were all interested in similar concepts, both to each other and Capella. William of Conches's *Philosophia mundi* (The Philosophy of the World), later revised and renamed *Dragmaticon*, discussed nature in its entirety, from astronomy to physiology.¹⁰¹

The *Heptateuchon* (Book in Seven Volumes) by Thierry of Chartres (whose older brother, Bernard of Chartres, was master and chancellor at the School of Chartres), incorporated Ptolemy and al-Khwarizmi's astronomical tables, Gerbert of Aurillac's mathematical texts, and learning on the trivium and quadrivium.¹⁰² Bernard Silvestris's allegorical *Cosmographia* (Cosmography) encapsulates medieval and renaissance philosophical thoughts on man and nature, with its scientific material reading as astrological.¹⁰³ Finally, Adelard's *De eodem et*

⁹⁹ Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁰ Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, p. 150.

¹⁰¹ Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, 5 vols (Omaha: Horatius Press, 2003) V, p. 183.

¹⁰² Michael C. Weber, 'Thierry of Chartres', in *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Thomas Glick, Steven J. Livesey, and Faith Wallis (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 476.

¹⁰³ Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), p. 13; Mark Kauntze, *Authority and Imitation: A Study of the Cosmographia of Bernard Silvestris* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 83.

diverso (On the Same and Different), the first of three dialogues with his nephew, describes science and philosophy that Adelard learned when seeking Greek and Arabic knowledge.¹⁰⁴ Together, these other texts demonstrate the scientific and philosophical influence of Capella's work in the twelfth century. The presence of *Philologiae et Mercurii* alongside the other treatises in MS Auct. F. 1. 9 shows how, in England in the twelfth century, this late antique work was still being read alongside Latinate-Arabic ideas of astronomy (another example which argues against Richard Jones's earlier claim of the decline in interest of Macrobius and Capella).

This is the case, too, for Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* which, with Macrobius's *Commentary*, features as the final text in MS Auct. F. 1. 9. The *Somnium Scipionis* (Dream of Scipio) is a part of the *De Republica* (On the Republic), Cicero's political dialogue which 'deals with the soul's ascent through the stars', its astronomy 'modelled on Plato's idea that the human soul is made of fire and hence derived from the stars.'¹⁰⁵ In the *Somnium Scipionis*, Scipio is transported to the heavens while dreaming, where he views Earth and learns of his place in the empire and in the world.¹⁰⁶ The text, which was preserved in a *Commentary* by Macrobius (c. 400 CE), saw continued popularity into the later Middle Ages due to its foregrounding of the relationship between the stars and the soul, which reinforced the contemporary medieval European notion that 'astronomy had significant spiritual implications and political applications.'¹⁰⁷ This idea of astronomy's purpose – of its potential

¹⁰⁴ Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas Campion, 'Cicero, Marcus Tullius', in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, ed. by Thomas Hockey and others (New York: Springer, 2007), pp. 235-6.

¹⁰⁶ Karma Lochrie, *Nowhere in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁷ Campion, 'Cicero, Marcus Tullius', p. 235.

influence upon both the individual and the state – helped establish the *Somnium Scipionis* as an authority. When placed together with the other astronomical works within MS Auct. F. 1. 9, Cicero and Macrobius’s dream adds a spiritual, fictional component to the manuscript’s larger scientific interests, demonstrating how the spiritual nature of astronomy and astrology was also being read and contemplated in the twelfth century.

While each of the texts in MS Auct. F. 1. 9 are contextually relevant to our understanding of how astronomy was being read and practiced in England at the time of Geoffrey’s writing, most pertinent to this chapter’s exploration of Geoffrey’s own direct engagement with astronomical ideas is Petrus’s *Sententia de dracone*, translated by Walcher. The relationship proposed here between the *De Dracone*, attributed to Walcher, and Geoffrey’s *Prophetiae*, stems from the text’s discussion of an astronomical dragon which Geoffrey arguably uses as a source for constructing his own astral Arthurian dragon.

Geoffrey’s dragon star, ‘Caput draconis’, and the Latinate-Arabic Ecliptic Dragon

In the early 1120s, the period immediately prior to Geoffrey’s work on his *Historia*, a new interest in the figure of the dragon appears in English intellectual culture, as a point of astronomical allusion, distinct from the Welsh *Omen*. Unlike Nennius’s ‘vermes’ (and like Geoffrey’s ‘draco’), this dragon is aerial, moving in the ecliptic space between the sun and moon, first appearing in England in the Severn Valley.¹⁰⁸ We find it, as Elizabeth J. Bryan has noted, in an astronomical treatise attributed to Walcher.¹⁰⁹ A monk in a small circle of local clerics with personal and intellectual roots in Lotharingia, Walcher worked on astronomical,

¹⁰⁸ Walcher of Malvern *De Lunationibus and De Dracone: Study, Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, ed. by C. Philipp E. Nothaft (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2017). Hereafter Nothaft, *De Dracone*.

¹⁰⁹ Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’; Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 125.

astrological and mathematical treatises with his master, Petrus.¹¹⁰ Described by John Victor Tolan as an ‘intellectual emissary between two worlds’, Petrus, a converted Jew who studied Arabic science in al-Andalus, was a notable astronomer who has been connected by historians to the English royal court, and has even been understood to have served as a physician to King Henry I.¹¹¹ Both Walcher and Petrus were greatly influenced by the learning of Muslim Spain, as well as by intellectual movements in Lotharingia which, in the tenth and eleventh century, served as a prominent hub for new scientific ideas that trickled into Christian Europe through contact with the Iberian Peninsula.¹¹² Lotharingia (particularly Liège, which, from the tenth century onwards, ‘became one of the most important intellectual centres of Europe’) was an important site for the reading, translation, and dissemination of Arabic scientific texts, the type of work which Walcher eventually also carried out in the Severn Valley.¹¹³ After leaving Lotharingia and arriving in England in the late eleventh century, Walcher was appointed as prior of Great Malvern Priory, Worcester. In this period, we find four primary sites of Arabic learning in England: alongside Worcester, we might note similar activities at Hereford (home to Robert, Bishop of Hereford, author of *Excerptio de chronica Mariani*), Bath (the hometown of Adelard and his patron, Bishop John de Villula), and Oxford (where Geoffrey was incorporating Arabic astronomical concepts into his works).¹¹⁴ We might note a particular clustering of interest in this material in western

¹¹⁰ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 125. For more on Lotharingia, see Mary Catherine Welborn, ‘Lotharingia as a Center of Arabic and Scientific Influence in the Eleventh Century’, *Isis*, 16 (1931), 188-199.

¹¹¹ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 15. See Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, p. 1.

¹¹² Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 15. See Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 36.

¹¹³ Welborn, ‘Lotharingia as a Center,’ p. 190.

¹¹⁴ See Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 126; Carey, *Courting Disaster*, p. 30; Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’, pp. 143-4. For more on John de Villula, see Max Lejbowicz, ‘Adélard de Bath ou les sortilèges de la nouveauté’, in *Die mantischen Künste und die Epistemologie prognostischer Wissenschaften im Mittelalter*, ed. by Alexander

England, from the Severn Valley to the Welsh March, from which Geoffrey of Monmouth takes his name.

Walcher was known for his observational use of the astrolabe, an astronomical device further developed by Muslim astronomers during the Islamic Golden Age (c. 700 – c. 1300), which he used to measure the time of both solar and lunar eclipses.¹¹⁵ Based on his use of the astrolabe, Walcher then wrote a text on eclipse computation. Titled *De Dracone* (On the Dragon), the Latin astronomical treatise was written in around 1120 (copied, as mentioned above, in MS Auct. F. 1. 9) and builds upon Arabic astronomical knowledge from Muslim Spain that Petrus had imparted upon him.¹¹⁶ José María Millás Vallicrosa describes Petrus's contribution in more detail:

Fidora (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), pp. 73-99 (pp. 82-3). For more on Robert, Bishop of Hereford, see Josiah C. Russell, 'Hereford and Arabic Science in England about 1175-1200', *Isis*, 18 (1932), 14-25.

¹¹⁵ Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated', p. 143. For more on science in the Islamic Golden Age, see Jim Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders: The Golden Age of Arabic Science* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); Ahmed Renima, Habib Tiliouine and Richard J. Estes, 'The Islamic Golden Age: A Story of the Triumph of the Islamic Civilization', in *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies: Social, Economic, Political and Ideological Challenges*, ed. by Habib Tiliouine and Richard J. Estes (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), pp. 25-52; Matthew E. Falagas, Effie A. Zarkadoulia and George Samonis, 'Arab science in the Golden Age (750–1258 C.E.) and today', *The FASEB Journal*, 20 (2006), 1581-86. For more on the astrolabe in medieval England and Europe, see Charles Burnett, *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: The Translators and their Intellectual and Social Context* (Surrey: Routledge, 2009), pp. 329-68; H. C. Darby, 'A Note on an Early Treatise on the Astrolabe', *The Geographical Journal*, 85 (1935), 179-81; Arianna Borrelli, *Aspects of the astrolabe: 'architectonica ratio' in tenth- and eleventh-century Europe* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2008); J. D. North, 'The Astrolabe', *Scientific American*, 230 (1974), 96-107.

¹¹⁶ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 3.

Walcher adopts the system of astronomical division in degrees, derived from the Arabs and imparted to him by Pedro Alfonso; he follows his master's methods of calculation; he alludes to his master's astronomical tables, which are related to the tables of the famous Arab astronomer Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, [...]; finally, he tells us about consultations he held with his master regarding problems in astronomy and how the latter had solved them.¹¹⁷

This direct transfer of transmitted knowledge from Petrus to Walcher determines 'that Walcher was the first native student of Arabic learning in England.'¹¹⁸ Philipp E. Nothaft, in his attentive study of Walcher's translations, notes that at the core of *De Dracone*

was the insight that predicting the time of an eclipse crucially depended not only on the respective ecliptical longitude of the Sun and Moon, but also on that of the Moon's orbital nodes, known to Arabic astronomers as the head and tail of the Dragon.¹¹⁹

Walcher describes the aerial dragon:

[1.1] Among the seven planets that go around the zodiac, the Dragon roams as well, but with a contrary motion, because whereas the path of all the planets is carried from Aries to Taurus, from Taurus to Gemini, and so on, only the Dragon is held to go from Aries to Pisces to

¹¹⁷ José María Millás Vallicrosa, 'Pedro Alfonso's Contribution to Astronomy', *Aleph*, 10 (2010), 137-168 (p. 144). Also see Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, trans. by Irven M. Resnick (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), p. 18.

¹¹⁸ Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby*, p. 26.

¹¹⁹ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 3. For the Latin text of the *De Dracone*, see Vallicrosa, "La aportación astronómica de Pedro Alfonso," *Sefarad*, 3 (1943), Appendix I, 89-97.

Aquarius, and so on. It is, moreover, of such size that in whatever sign or degree its head is found, its tail always occupies the sign or degree opposite to it. An understanding of its circuit, however, is so essential to foreknowing an eclipse of the Sun or the Moon that without it there is no way of predicting it. For a solar eclipse never happens unless the Sun and the Moon meet with head or tail of this Dragon in one degree of a given sign, nor is there a lunar eclipse unless the Sun is in its head and the Moon in the tail opposite it-or the Sun in the tail and the Moon in its head.¹²⁰

The association of the ‘head and tail of the Dragon’ to the ecliptical nodes of the sun and moon was thus a scientifically acknowledged, astronomical parameter in twelfth-century England. Its transmission in England during this moment, and its central place within *De Dracone*, suggests that, on account of Walcher and Petrus’s earlier work, the dragon itself was not only an important national, political, and prophetic motif in England in the first half of the twelfth century, but a significant astronomical one too.

Bryan has convincingly argued for a connection between this stellar Arabic dragon in Walcher’s work and Geoffrey’s dragon in the *Historia* based on Geoffrey’s use of the phrase ‘caput draconis’, the astronomical term (meaning ‘head of the dragon’) which Walcher and Petrus also use to describe one of the lunar nodes.¹²¹ She suggests that Geoffrey ‘poeticised (or literalised) this astronomical concept’ in Book VIII of the *Historia* through the episode of the dragon star, a fiery symbol which appears in the sky, which Merlin interprets as signalling both the sudden death of King Aurelius and heralding his brother Uther as his immediate successor, and the next King of Britain.¹²² She also notes how the term ‘caput draconis’ only

¹²⁰ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 195.

¹²¹ Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’, p. 141; Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 3.

¹²² Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’, p. 141. For the dragon star episode, see *HRB*, p. 178.

appears *after* the episode of the dragon star, with ‘Geoffrey delaying his use of the term, in a skilled rhetorical postponement’, until Uther’s coronation, to connect Uther’s new name to the dragon star, ‘when he finally acknowledges the dragon as his own symbol.’¹²³ Geoffrey writes:

At Vther frater eius, conuocato regni clero et populo, cepit diadema insulae annuentibusque cunctis submilatus est in regem. Reminiscens autem expositionis quam Merlinus de supradicto sidere fecerat, iussit fabricari duos dracones ex auro ad similitudinem draconis quem ad radium stellae inspexerat. Qui ut mira arte fabricati fuerunt, optulit, unum in ecclesia primae sedis Guintoniae, alterum uero sibi ad ferendum in proelia retinuit. Ab illo itaque tempore uocatus fuit Vther Pendragon, quod Britannica lingua caput draconis sonamus. Iccirco hanc appellationem receperat quia Merlinus eum per draconem in regem prophetauerat.

(His brother Uther summoned the clergy and people of the kingdom and took the crown, becoming king of the island with the consent of all. Remembering Merlin’s interpretation of the comet, he ordered that two dragons be cast in gold, to resemble the dragon he had seen in the comet’s tail. After these had been fashioned with great skill, he presented one to the cathedral in Winchester, and kept the other to take into battle. From that time he was known as Uther Pendragon, which means ‘dragon’s head’ in British. He had received the name because Merlin had used the dragon to prophesy his succession as king.)¹²⁴

Although Geoffrey presents ‘caput draconis’ as a Latin calque of a Welsh or Breton phrase, he does not identify the phrase’s astronomical significance. However, those who were

¹²³ Bryan, ‘Astronomy Translated’, p. 149.

¹²⁴ *HRB*, pp. 180-1.

familiar with Walcher's *De Dracone*, or similar astronomical and astrological learning, would have recognised Uther and Arthur's dynasty as named for the astrologically fortunate lunar node, the head of the dragon.¹²⁵

One other twelfth-century writer who appears to be familiar with 'caput draconis' as an astronomical component is John of Worcester, a chronicler contemporaneous with Geoffrey, who uses the term 'caput draconis' when describing an astral phenomenon similar to Geoffrey's dragon star. In the 1133 entry in his *Chronicle*, John uses Walcher and Petrus's astronomical terminology, integrating the idea of the dragon and the lunar nodes, to describe an eclipse (albeit incorrectly) occurring in England:

Anno .xxxiii. ex quo rex Anglorum Heinricus regnare cepit, feria .iiii., die etiam ipso secundum anni reuolutionem quo frater et predecessor illius, Willelmus, scilicet Rufus rex, interfectus est et ipse Heinricus primo regni sui suscepit gubernacula, tale constat contigisse spectaculum. Cum igitur rex predictus circa maris litus transfretandi causa moraretur, uento sepius ad transfretandum existente secundo, tandem die prefato circa meridiem cum ad mare transiturus perrexisset, suorum ut mos est regibus constipatus militum turmis, subito in aere nubes apparuit, que tamen unius eiusdem quantitatis per uniuersam Angliam non comparuit. In quibusdam enim locis quasi dies obscurus uidebatur, in quibusdam uero tante obscuritatis erat, ut lumine candeles ad quodlibet agendum ipsa protecti homines indigerent. Vnde rex latusque regum ambientes et alii complures mirantes, et in celum oculos leuantes, solem ad instar noue lune lucere conspexerunt, qui tamen non diu se uno modo habebat. Nam aliquando latior, aliquandiu subtilior, quandoque incuruior, quandoque erectior, nunc solito modo firmus, modo mouens, et ad instar uiui argenti motus et liquidius uidebatur. Asserunt quidam eclipsim solis factam fuisse. Quod si uerum est, tunc *sol erat in capite draconis, et*

¹²⁵ Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated', p. 150.

luna in cauda, uel sol in cauda et luna in capite in .v. signo leonis in .xvii. gradu ipsius signi.
Erat autem tunc luna .xxvii. Eodem etiam die et eadem hora, stelle quamplurime apparuere.

(In the thirty-third year of the reign of Henry, the English king, on Wednesday, on the same day in the year's cycle when his brother and predecessor, King William Rufus, was slain, and Henry himself first began to rule, a dramatic phenomenon occurred. This was when the said king was at the coast putting off the Channel crossing, even though the wind was more often than not favourable for the transference. At length on the aforesaid day at midday the king went down to the sea to cross over, surrounded, as is usual with kings, by bands of knights. Suddenly a cloud appeared in the sky, which was visible throughout England, though of varying size. In some places indeed the day only appeared darkened, but in others it was so dark that men needed the guidance of candlelight to do anything. The king and his followers and many others walked about, marvelling greatly, raised their eyes to heaven, and saw the sun shining as though it were a new moon, though it did not keep the same appearance for long. One moment it was broader, the next it was narrower, now curved, now straight, now steady as usual, now moving, and seemed quivering and liquid like quicksilver. Some claim that an eclipse of the sun had taken place. If this was the case, then the sun was in the head of *Draco* and the moon in the tail or the sun was in the tail and the moon in the head of the fifth sign, Leo, in the seventeenth degree of that sign. The moon was twenty-seven days old. At the same day and hour, many stars appeared.)¹²⁶

¹²⁶ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester. Volume III. The Annals from 1067 to 1140. With The Gloucester Interpolations and the Continuation to 1141*, ed. and trans. by P. McGurk, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 209-11. As Charles Burnett observes, this 1133 entry is drawing on *De Dracone*, albeit incorrectly: 'John in using his source here confused the conditions necessary for a solar eclipse with those for a lunar eclipse.' See John, *Chronicle III*, p. 210, n. 2.

John then was not the only author to apply this concept to a historical account of regnal change. The parallels between this entry and Geoffrey's dragon star episode are perceptible, with both texts dramatizing the wonder of a king (or a soon-to-be chosen king, in Geoffrey's case), looking at the star in the middle of a military campaign, and reading an astronomical event involving Draco or the lunar nodes as an astrological sign of the coming death of a king (Aurelius Ambrosius in Geoffrey; King Henry I in John of Worcester).¹²⁷ The term 'caput draconis' appears in Geoffrey's *Historia*, applied not to an eclipse but to other astral events portending the death of a British king, including a type of comet. (Geoffrey presumably drew on the established relationship between comets and the deaths of rulers, a trope which goes back to the classical world, with direct application in the eleventh- and twelfth-century texts.)¹²⁸ These similarities between Geoffrey and John's use of 'caput draconis' suggest that Geoffrey was not alone in drawing on Walcher's astronomical terminology to describe an astral or stellar event of political significance during this period. However, Geoffrey applies the term 'caput draconis' more covertly than John – he omits any direct mention of the lunar nodes, and so describes a less obviously scientifically framed astronomical event than John's (erroneous) description of the eclipse. It is difficult to ascertain whether Geoffrey fully understood the science behind 'caput draconis' (there was limited interest in this in England during the early twelfth century, outside Petrus and Walcher's work), and like John, Geoffrey

¹²⁷ Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated', p. 151. For more on John of Worcester's interest in Arabic learning, see Anne E. Lawrence-Mathers, 'John of Worcester and the science of history', *Journal of Medieval History*, 39 (2013), 255-274; Philipp E. Nothaft, 'Roman vs. Arabic Computistics in Twelfth-Century England: A Newly Discovered Source (*Collatio Compoti Romani et Arabici*)', *Early Science and Medicine*, 20 (2015), 187-208.

¹²⁸ Isidore, *Etymologies*, p. 105; p. 244. We might similarly think of the comet of 1066, mentioned by several of Geoffrey's contemporaries, including John of Worcester, as well as, of course, the Bayeux Tapestry. See *The Chronicle of John of Worcester. Volume II. The Annals from 450 to 1066*, ed. by R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. by Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 599-601.

may have misunderstood the precise scientific point of reference intended by Walcher – yet this is not his primary concern, for his use is more obviously literary.¹²⁹ Geoffrey's omission may then be a matter of genre. In the *Historia* episode, Geoffrey is thinking between scientific writing, history, and romance. Therefore, he may have made his Latinate-Arabic terminology more invisible than John's, giving a more generic translation of the scientific term, in order to conflate it more easily into the medium of romance. As a result, he is, in essence, 'romancing' erasure, moving a transmitted, technical term from a scientific text to a non-scientific text, and this process of assimilating science within the framework of cultural-historical romance and prophecy may have required, in Geoffrey's mind, a removal of its previous origins. Insular romance then, drawn from British legendary history, elides Arabic contexts, even while it includes – as one of its wonders – translated Arabic scientific vocabulary, unacknowledged.

Geoffrey's generic framing extends further, for while his astronomical dragon gives the impression of a comet, his episode does not explicitly incorporate this term. (This is unlike Wace's later *Roman de Brut* (A History of the British People, 1155), which describes the dragon in the sky as a 'cumete' (although it is unclear whether he does this as a result of understanding or misunderstanding the *Historia*'s astronomical allusion).)¹³⁰ In the *Historia*, Geoffrey writes:

Haec dum Guintoniae gererentur, apparuit stella mirae magnitudinis et claritatis uno radio contenta. Ad radium uero erat globus igneus in similitudinem draconis extensus, et ex ore eius

¹²⁹ Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated,' 141. Bryan understands, similarly, Geoffrey's use of 'caput draconis' as a 'poeticised' astronomical allusion.

¹³⁰ Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated', p. 152. See Judith Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut. A History of the British: Text and Translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 209.

procedebant duo radii, quorum unus longitudinem suam ultra Gallicana climata uidebatur extendere, alter uero, uersus Hibernicum mare uergens, in septem minores radios terminabatur.

Apparente itaque praefato sydere, perculsi sunt omnes metu et ammiratione qui istud inspiciebant. Vther etiam frater regis, hostilem exercitum in partibus Kambriae petens, non minimo timore perculsus quosque sapientes adibat ut quid potenderet stella notificarent. Inter ceteros iussit uocari Merlinum; nam et ipse in exercitu uenerat ut consilio ipsius res proeliorum tractarentur. Qui ut in praesentia ducis astitisset, iussus est significationem syderis enucleare. Mox ille, in fletum erumpens, reuocato spiritu exclamauit et ait:

‘O dampnum inrecuperabile, o orbatum populum Britanniae, o nobilissimi regis migrationem! Defunctus est inclitus rex Britonum Aurelius Ambrosius, cuius obitu obibimus omnes nisi Deus auxilium subuectauerit. Festina ergo, dux nobilissime Vther, festina et conflictum facere cum hostibus ne differas. Victoria tibi in manu erit, et rex eris totius Britanniae. Te etenim sidus istud significat et igneus draco sub sidere. Radius autem qui uersus Gallicanam plagam porrigitur portendit tibi filium futurum et potentissimum, cuius potestas omnia regna quae protegit habebit; alter uero radius significat filiam, cuius filii et nepotes regnum Britanniae succedenter habebunt’.

(While this was happening at Winchester, there appeared a comet of great size and brightness, with a single tail. Attached to the tail was a fiery mass stretching out like a dragon, from whose mouth issued two rays, one of which seemed to extend beyond the skies of France, the other towards the Irish sea and to end in seven smaller rays.

All who saw the comet were filled with fear and awe by its appearance. As he marched towards the enemy army in Wales, the king’s brother Uther was also a little apprehensive and consulted all his wise men to find out what it meant. Among the rest he ordered that Merlin be summoned; he was accompanying the army to advise on matters of

strategy. Brought before the duke, he was commanded to explain the comet's meaning.

Immediately overwhelmed by tears, he summoned his spirit, exclaiming:

‘Oh irreparable loss, oh the bereavement of the British people, oh the passing of a most noble king! Aurelius Ambrosius, the renowned king of the Britons, is dead, and with him, without God's help, we shall all die too. Make haste, noble duke Uther, make haste and attack the enemy without delay. Victory shall be yours and you shall be king of all Britain. It is you that are represented by the comet and the fiery dragon beneath it. The ray that extends over France foretells that you will have a most powerful son, whose might shall possess all the kingdoms beneath it; the other ray indicates a daughter, whose sons and grandsons will rule Britain in turn’.)¹³¹

The *Historia* uses the term ‘stella’ (a star) as well as ‘sydere’ (a group of stars united) to describe the dragon star episode, instead of the Latin ‘cometes’ (a comet).¹³² This aligns with the Bayeux Tapestry's reference to Halley's comet of 1066 as ‘stella’, showing another potential point of influence for Geoffrey.¹³³ However, while this astral event may be referred

¹³¹ *HRB*, pp. 178-9

¹³² ‘stella’ and ‘sīdus’ in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary in Perseus Digital Library*

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dstella>>

[accessed 13 March 2021]; ‘cōmētes’ in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary in Perseus Digital Library*

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dcometes1>>

[accessed 25 March 2021].

¹³³ ‘Isti mirant(ur) stella(m)’ in *Panel 74-5, Scene 22 in Bayeux Tapestry online*

<<http://bayeuxtapestry.online/bayeux/index.html#/facsimile%3DBayeux%26panel%3D1>> [accessed 18 May

2021]. The aligning of the dragon star with the comet of 1066 is a possible point of interest for Geoffrey,

considering Geoffrey's allusion to Harold Godwinson and the Norman victory in 1066 in his *Prophetiae*. See

HRB, pp. 146-7: ‘Vix obtinebit cauernas suas Germanicus draco, quia ultio prodicionis eius superueniet. Vigibet

to as a star in some instances, in other works it is more directly described as a comet. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports some men labelled the sign as ‘the star comet, [while] some men called [it] the ‘haired’ star’.¹³⁴ Here we might think of Bede’s *De natura rerum*, which defines ‘cometae’ as ‘stellae flammis crinitae’ (stars with hair of flame), a sign which indicated regnal change, a description that, as Mark Williams notes, ‘derives from earlier authorities such as Pliny the Elder and Isidore of Seville.’¹³⁵ Halley’s comet is also referred to as a comet in John’s *Chronicle* and William’s *Gesta*, with both twelfth-century chronicles remarking upon its long appearance (both in terms of time and space).¹³⁶ Geoffrey’s dragon

tandem paulisper, sed decimatio Neustriae nocebit. [...] Germen albi draconis ex ortulis nostris abradetur, et reliquiae generationis eius decimabuntur.’ (The German dragon will be hard put to keep possession of its caves since retribution will be visited on its treason. Then it will prosper for a short time, but Normandy’s tithe will injure it. [...] The seed of the white dragon will disappear from our gardens and the remnants of its generation will be decimated.). For more on this allusion to Harold Godwinson’s broken oath and Norman victory, see Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, pp. 37-8.

¹³⁴ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. and trans. by Michael Swanton (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 195; p. 83, n.20.

¹³⁵ See Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, pp. 7–12; n. 29; Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 136.

¹³⁶ John, *Chronicle II*, pp. 600-601: ‘Eodem anno .viii. kalend. Maii, stella cometis non solum in Anglia, sed etiam, ut fertur, per totum mundum uisa, per .vii. dies splendore nimio fulgebat.’ (In that same year, on 24 April, a comet was seen, not only in England but also, so they say, throughout the whole world, blazing for seven days in great splendour.); William, *Gesta*, pp. 570-1: ‘Decimo anno kalendis Octobris apparuit cometes quindecim diebus, maiorem crinem emittens ad orientem, minorem uersus euroastrum. Apparuerunt et aliae stellae, quasi iacula inter se emittentes.’ (In the tenth year, on 1 October, appeared a comet, which lasted a fortnight, shooting out a larger tail towards the east and a smaller one towards the south-east; and other stars also made their appearance, which seemed to be emitting shafts of light at one another.).

star then, if indeed drawing upon Halley's comet (alongside Arabic allusions), is differentiated from the imagery used by contemporary chronicle writers.

But what does Geoffrey's omission of 'cometes' here – the Latin cognate of Wace's later French term, reveal? Although portending a change in king, Geoffrey's dragon star does not use Bede's 'cometae', nor any other 'comet' term, to define the event.¹³⁷ Consistently calling the sign a star, Geoffrey's 'stella' releases 'radii' and 'radios' (a beam or ray of any shining object), which could be describing a star like the sun, or even lightning.¹³⁸ Planets were also understood in the twelfth century to release rays. The ninth-century philosopher, astronomer, and court astrologer to Caliph al-Mamun, al-Kindi (c. 801 – 873), associated rays with astrological forces.¹³⁹ This idea of planetary rays was introduced by ancient Greek astrologers, who presented the doctrine that each planet cast seven visual rays, and this theory of the seven rays was enthusiastically adopted by medieval Islamic astrologers.¹⁴⁰ It is interesting to note here that Geoffrey's dragon star, from its second ray, which symbolises

¹³⁷ For more on Geoffrey and his sources, including Bede, Isidore of Seville and Gildas, see Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 15; Kellie Robertson, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Insular Historiography', *Arthuriana*, 8 (1998), 42–57; Robert Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1966).

¹³⁸ 'rādīus' in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* in *Perseus Digital Library* <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dradius>> [accessed 25 May 2021]. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the aurora borealis's (Northern Lights) colours and movements were commonly described as fiery dragons. See Marilina Cesario, 'Fyrenne Dracan in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker*, ed. by Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederick (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016).

¹³⁹ Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated', pp. 148–9. Also see Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, pp. 99–102.

¹⁴⁰ Josep Casulleras and Jan P. Hogendijk, 'Progressions, Rays and Houses in Medieval Islamic Astrology: A Mathematical Classification', *Suhayl*, 11 (2012), 33–102 (pp. 40–1).

Anna's (Arthur's sister) line, ends in 'seven smaller rays.'¹⁴¹ This small detail, if alluding to the scientific theory of the seven rays explored within ancient Greek and Arabic astronomy, could further a planetary reading of the dragon star. Al-Kindi's work, *De radiis* ('On Rays'), describes rays in some detail, stating that 'all astral and earthly objects emit invisible rays, and that these rays account for the effects of the stars on the sublunary world.'¹⁴² This notion extends the idea of emitted rays to beyond even objects in the sky. He also maintains, in his version of astrology, that 'the stars actually *cause*, rather than merely symbolise or indicate, the events predicted by the astrologer.'¹⁴³ Hence, if we were to read the *Historia*'s episode through al-Kindi's astrological understanding, then the dragon star is not just a mere sign indicating Uther's ascension to the throne, but the direct cause of his change in destiny, affecting him and his entire dynastic line. While al-Kindi's treatise did exist in an anonymous twelfth-century Latin translation, and despite the similarity between his astrological work and Abu Ma'shar's (al-Kindi's close associate, whose *Abbreviation* was translated from Arabic into Latin by both Geoffrey's contemporary, Adelard, in the early twelfth century, and by Hermann of Carinthia, c. 1140), it is unclear whether Geoffrey knew of this astrology, or

¹⁴¹ *HRB*, pp. 178-9.

¹⁴² Michelle Karnes, 'Marvels in the Medieval Imagination', *Speculum*, 90 (2015), 327-365 (p. 350). Also see Champion, *A History of Western Astrology Volume II*, p. xviii.

¹⁴³ Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 203-4. For more on al-Kindi's astrology, see Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, pp. 167-9; Charles Burnett, 'Al-Kindi on Judicial Astrology: 'The Forty Chapters'', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 3 (1993), 77-117; Francis J. Carmody, *Arabic Astronomical and Astrological Sciences in Latin Translation* (California: University of California Press, 1955), pp. 78-84. For more on al-Kindi and optics, see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 35-6.

whether he applied this idea of astral causation to his dragon star.¹⁴⁴ There does not appear to be any direct influence of the stars in Geoffrey's *Historia*, with the astral phenomenon in the dragon episodes only indicating future events rather than causing them, although there may be a suggestion of such influence in the reworking of this episode in the fifteenth-century *Prose Merlin* (discussed in Chapter Four). Overall, the ambiguity of Geoffrey's possible points of reference creates an uncertainty as to the exact type of astronomical or astrological phenomenon witnessed here. But perhaps that is the very point. Geoffrey may have created an unspecific symbol to steer us away from the scientific: it matters less that we see a 'stella' / do not see a 'comete' – rather the importance lies in witnessing the appearance of a 'draconis' in the sky.

Another speculative connection, but one which potentially is the subject of the same kind of genealogical romancing as Geoffrey's engagement with Walcher and Petrus's 'caput draconis', is connected to the *Alchandreana* corpus which we might further consider as part

¹⁴⁴ Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 119; Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 106; Champion, *A History of Western Astrology Volume II*, p. 61. For more on Abu Ma'shar's astrology, see Burnett, 'Adelard, Ergaphalau and the Science of the Stars', pp. 133-45; Richard J. Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century: The Recovery of Aristotle's Natural Philosophy through Arabic Astrology* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1962); Liana Saif, 'Arabic Theories of Astral Influences: Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi', in *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*, pp. 9-26; Benson Bobrick, *The Fated Sky: Astrology in History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pp. 70-1; Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, pp. 169-71; Carmody, *Arabic Astronomical and Astrological Sciences in Latin Translation*, pp. 88-100; *Abu Ma'sar on Historical Astrology: The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, ed. and trans. by Keiji Yamamoto and Burnett, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2000). For more on Abu Ma'shar and his relationship to al-Kindi, see Peter Adamson, 'Abu Ma'shar, Al-Kindi and The Philosophical Defense of Astrology', *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 69 (2002), 245-270; Adamson, *Al-Kindi*, pp. 13-4.

of the matrix of potential influences informing Geoffrey's depiction of the dragon star.¹⁴⁵ The author of these texts is uncertain (with the corpus apocryphally ascribed to 'Alchandreus' or, at times, even to Alexander the Great), and while these texts originally drew on a variety of Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac traditions, the corpus was translated and reworked into Latin in Catalonia.¹⁴⁶ During this period, Catalonia

enjoyed good trade relations with the Western Caliphate, based in the imperial city of Cordoba and [...] cultural trends, ideas, and inventions passed easily enough across this border between Muslim East and Christian West, [such as] the Arabs' advanced science of the stars, the game of chess, the earliest representation of what came to be called Arabic numerals, and the Muslim astrolabe – the most potent analog computer until the modern era – all awaiting 'discovery' in Catalonia. Here, all seven of the liberal arts were available for study.¹⁴⁷

After being reworked in Catalonia, the *Alchandreana* corpus entered the Latinate-West during the second half of the tenth century, and 'can be found in nearly a hundred manuscripts, fifteen dating from before c. 1200', with many manuscripts circulating in France, Lotharingia, Germany and England.¹⁴⁸ Two copies of the *Alchandreana* texts, found in Lotharingia and Germany, potentially trace back to Gerbert through his close friend, Miro

¹⁴⁵ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁶ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁷ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 271; Nancy Marie Brown, *The Abacus and the Cross: The Story of the Pope Who Brought the Light of Science to the Dark Ages* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 194; David Juste, *Les 'Alchandreana' primitifs: Étude sur les plus anciens traités astrologiques latins d'origine arabe (Xe siècle)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 264.

Bonfill, who was thought to have practised astrology.¹⁴⁹ With regards to the *Alchandreana*'s reception in England, David Juste notes how:

three witnesses attest that the *Alchandreana* were there at the beginning of the 12th century at the latest. We have seen that William of Malmesbury, who wrote around 1120, had to have access to *Liber Alchandreus*.¹⁵⁰

William also compares Gerbert to Alchandreus (to whom the *Alchandreana* texts are ascribed) in his *Gesta*:

Ibi uicit scientia Ptholomeum in astrolabio, Alhandreum in astrorum interstitio, Iulium Firmicum in fato.

(There he surpassed Ptolemy in knowledge of the astrolabe, Alchandreus in that of the relative positions of the stars, and Julius Firmicus in judicial astrology.)¹⁵¹

This demonstrates a connection between twelfth-century narrative histories and the *Alchandreana* texts, showing how chroniclers are engaging with these names within the field of astronomy and astrology, if not necessarily with the texts. Astronomy and astrology are, in this respect then, a component of twelfth-century history writing.

The *Alchandreana* corpus itself details a method for locating planetary positions, presenting two different schemes for five planets and, like the *De Dracone* (and the *Liber*

¹⁴⁹ Brown, *The Abacus and the Cross*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁰ Juste, *Les 'Alchandreana' primitifs*, p. 264.

¹⁵¹ William, *Gesta*, pp. 280-1.

Nemroth, discussed further below), these texts mention the zodiacal head and tail of the dragon found in the sun and moon, and link the two nodes to the occurrence of an eclipse.¹⁵² Interestingly though, the *Alchandreana* adds two further details about the astronomical dragon:

In the majority of extant passages, the *Alchandreana* invoke the Dragon for its astrological significance, highlighting, for example, the benign influence of its head and the malign one of its tail.

[...]

[The texts] offer an alternative explanation for eclipses of the Moon, this time claiming that there are in fact two Dragons in the heavens: one male and one female, who are chasing each other's tails.¹⁵³

These two descriptions in the *Alchandreana* possess features in common with Merlin's interpretation of the dragon star. We might remember that the fiery dragon in Geoffrey's episode emits two big rays, the first representing Uther's son, Arthur, the second indicating Uther's daughter, Anna, (the mother of Mordred) whose sons and grandsons will later rule Britain.¹⁵⁴ Here, we perceive one male and one female ray in the sky. Again, Geoffrey might be seen as romancing scientific source material – part of that (as with head of the dragon) is applying genealogical material, showing another discursive shift. By employing the dragon as a cultural fantasy motif – a symbol through which he can make the scientific invisible while foregrounding the historic, Geoffrey is arguably resituating and reimagining his astronomical

¹⁵² Nothaft, *De Dracone*, pp. 41-2.

¹⁵³ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, pp. 41-2.

¹⁵⁴ *HRB*, pp. 178-9.

source traditions through removing/ changing genres. However, this gendering of the dragon is quite different from the other portrayals of astronomical dragons in Geoffrey, though the idea of a pair is repeated: first in the *Omen* (going back to Nennius), then here in the dragon star, and again just after this scene, through Uther's two golden dragons. Juste notes how astrologers, such as the Muslim astrologer and astronomer, al-Qabisi (d. 967), agree that the head of the dragon is male, and the tail is female.¹⁵⁵ This is an interesting parallel to Geoffrey, in which Uther is described as 'Pendragon' (head of the dragon), a newly constructed title later passed onto Arthur, his male heir. The male line then, when read alongside the *Alchandreana*, is associated with the benign influence of the dragon's head, with Geoffrey describing Arthur, through the dragon star, as 'a most powerful son, whose might shall possess all the kingdoms beneath it', hinting at a strong and good leader.¹⁵⁶ Such a reading consequently likens Anna to the malign influence of the tail. In Geoffrey, this notion is conceivable through Anna's son, Mordred (Arthur's nephew in Geoffrey). Anna's dragon ray is associated in Geoffrey with her offspring, and later in the *Historia*, Mordred usurps Arthur's kingdom, which ultimately leads to both Arthur's death and the subsequent downfall of the Arthurian empire.¹⁵⁷ A similar concept of devastation, caused by the influence of the

¹⁵⁵ Juste, *Les 'Alchandreana' primitifs*, p. 132; n. 86; n. 89. For more al-Qabisi (Alcabitius), see Abd al-Aziz Ibn Uthman and others, *Al-Qabisi (Alcabitius): The Introduction to Astrology: editions of the Arabic and Latin texts and an English translation* (London: Warburg Institute, 2004).

¹⁵⁶ *HRB*, pp. 178-9.

¹⁵⁷ For more on Mordred, see Amy Varin, 'Mordred, King Arthur's Son', *Folklore*, 90 (1979), 167-77; Steven P. W. Bruso, 'The Sword and the Scepter: Mordred, Arthur, and the Dual Roles of Kingship in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*', *Arthuriana*, 25 (2015), 44-66; Deborah S. Ellis, 'Balin, Mordred and Malory's idea of treachery', *English Studies*, 68 (1987), 66-74; George Gregory Molchan, 'Mordred: treachery, transference, and border pressure in British Arthurian romance' (unpublished master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2005).

malign tail, is itself reflected in the *Alchandreana*, in its description of the dragon's head and tail:

The beneficial character of the Head and evil of the Tail is a common astrological place. The texts never refrain from recalling it while providing some precisions. Thus, the Head of the Dragon produces an effect similar to that of Jupiter and all the things governed by the sign (or house) in which it penetrates, namely the lands, the cities, the heathen, the villages, the men and the people are promised to prosperity. By cons the Tail of the Dragon, considered on the same foot as Saturn and Mars, devastates everything in its path and with such power that no planet has the means to counteract its effects.¹⁵⁸

There are plain parallels here to Geoffrey, with the beneficial head of the dragon governing all and promising prosperity, like Uther after Ambrosius, and the tail devastating everything around it, like Mordred, who treacherously takes over the kingdom, kills Arthur's men and relatives, and inflicts him with a mortal wound in the *Historia*'s Book XI. In light of this reading then, though the two rays in Geoffrey are not two single dragons, they still present two opposites, not just in their spreading in different directions (in Geoffrey, Arthur's ray extends beyond the skies of France, and Anna's ray towards the Irish sea), but also in their reference to two rival lines of rule, and two alternate futures for the Arthurian kingdom (Arthur sought to grow the Arthurian empire from beyond its borders, while Mordred hastened its collapse from within them).¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, the theory on planetary rays, adopted by medieval Arabic astrologers from their ancient Greek sources, (and discussed

¹⁵⁸ Juste, *Les 'Alchandreana' primitifs*, p. 131.

¹⁵⁹ *HRB*, pp. 178-9. For more on Arthur's fight against Lucius to claim Rome, Mordred's treacherous usurpation, and the fatal fight between Arthur and Mordred for Britain, see *HRB*, pp. 228-52.

above in terms of the theory of seven planetary rays mirroring the seven smaller rays of Geoffrey's dragon star), also defines some rays as more favourable than others, with rays regarded as either 'beneficial', 'less beneficial', or as 'damaging'.¹⁶⁰ This astrological mode of characterising rays, of reading benign and malign destinies within them, is alluded to in Geoffrey too. The dragon star reveals Uther's victory against the Saxon enemy and heralds his destiny as the new king. Its first ray represents the might of his future heir, Arthur, and its second ray represents, through Anna and Mordred, the end of his dynasty and the line of Pendragon. The dragon star then, like the *Omen* dragons (which warned Vortigern), symbolises the transition and decline of dynastic power, forecast in the sky and read aloud to Uther by Merlin, an image not unlike that of kings who sought court astrologers to read the future of their dynasty in their stars.

An Ecliptic Dragon in the *Prophetiae Merlini*

Alongside Geoffrey's telling engagement with 'caput draconis' are the other aerial dragons that appear in his work. With these, we can establish a further connection between Geoffrey and the dragon of *De Dracone* in three other moments in the *Historia*: the astrological chaos at the end of the *Prophetiae*, the appearance of the dragon star to Uther in Book VIII, and the dragons associated with Uther's coronation in the same book. As noted previously, the aerial dragon in *De Dracone* is associated with eclipses. Walcher's treatise describes a solar or lunar eclipse as occurring when the head of the dragon ('caput draconis') is positioned in the sun, and the tail of the dragon is positioned in the moon, or vice versa.¹⁶¹ John of Worcester incorporates this transmitted Latinate-Arabic idea within his 1133 entry, using the dragon as

¹⁶⁰ Casulleras and Hogendijk, 'Progressions, Rays and Houses', p. 40.

¹⁶¹ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 195.

an ecliptic parameter in his chronicle to portend a change in dynastic rule, a more scientific portrayal than Geoffrey's figurative use of the same idea in his dragon star episode. However, if we read Walcher's treatise, the source for Geoffrey, with this combined lens of the scientific and the symbolic, a broader association, as in, a fuller presence at other points in the *Historia* and *Prophetiae*, may be established between the dragon of *De Dracone* and Geoffrey's *Omen* dragons.

An eclipse itself is the shadow cast by one celestial object blocking the view of another, with one object lying entirely behind or in front of another object.¹⁶² Thus, it is a phenomenon which is associated with a pair of bodies, both moving and hidden.¹⁶³ Both Geoffrey's *Omen* dragons and Walcher's ecliptic dragon are hidden and revealed. In the *Historia* they are observed and interpreted by Merlin, who reveals the significance of Geoffrey's dragon star. Williams thus describes Merlin as 'a poet-prophet infused with some of the trappings of the new astrological learning, the same interest which was growing amongst a number of scholars in England in the mid-twelfth century', including Walcher.¹⁶⁴ Merlin's revelation of the hidden *Omen* dragons, and his interpretation of the dragon star episode (which leads to the mention of Walcher's 'caput draconis'), invites comparison between these two *Historia* episodes and the *De Dracone* dragon, through this very act of astronomical observation (which Walcher was already practicing in the Severn Valley during Geoffrey's writing). Reading the *Omen* dragons in relation to Geoffrey's dragon star episode,

¹⁶² John Westfall and William Sheehan, *Celestial Shadows: Eclipses, Transits and Occultations* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2015), p. 8.

¹⁶³ 'eclipse, v.' (2.a. and 3.b.), in the *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/view/Entry/59363?rskey=U4PG04&result=2&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 8 June 2021].

¹⁶⁴ Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 108.

Geoffrey's Merlin is then seen in the *Historia*, and later in the *Vita Merlini*, as embodying the role of astronomer and court astrologer, much like Geoffrey's Pellitus, astrologer to the Saxon King Edwinus or, as discussed in further detail below, more broadly, al-Kindi (c. 801 – 873) to Caliph al-Mamun (r. 813 – 833), and al-Biruni (973 – c. 1050) to Mahmud of Ghazni (971 – 1030).¹⁶⁵ The importance of Merlin in the astral scenes of the *Historia* may also show Geoffrey as not only conflating his astral phenomenon with Latinate-Arabic astronomy, but potentially also merging his poet-prophet with contemporary astronomers, such as Walcher, or, if he had any knowledge of them, even past ones, such as al-Kindi. This may be the case too for his portrayal of Pellitus. However, if Geoffrey was indeed constructing a Merlin that was both poet-prophet and astronomer/ astrologer as early as in the *Historia* (for in the later *Vita*, I argue, that Merlin is both), then his scenes interpreting the dragon are not to be read as simply prophetic, but as astrological interpretations in the presence of a king.

Merlin is also associated with a hidden, prophetic dragon in Geoffrey's work. The *Prophetiae* end with apocalyptic commotion:

Ab eis uultus auertent sydera et solitum cursum confundent. Arebunt segetes his
indignantibus, et humor conuexi negabitur. Radices et rami uices mutabunt, nouitasque rei erit
in miraculum. Splendor solis electro Mercurii languebit, et erit horror insipientibus. Mutabit

¹⁶⁵ Pam Gregory, *How to Co-Create Using the Secret Language of the Universe* (Bristol: Silverwood Books, 2017). For more on Geoffrey's Pellitus, see M. C. Escobar-Vargas, 'Magic, technology and new categories of knowledge in the central Middle Ages', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 41 (2015) 53-66; Carey, *Courting Disaster*, pp. 25-36. For more on al-Biruni, see José Luis Mancha, *Studies in Medieval Astronomy and Optics* (Hampshire: Variorum Collected Studies Series, 2006); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993); Bill Scheppler, *Al-Biruni: Master Astronomer and Muslim Scholar of the Eleventh Century* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2006). For a discussion of Merlin as an astronomer in the *Vita*, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

clipeum Stilbon Archadiae, uocabit Venerem galea Martis. Galea Martis umbram conficiet, transibit terminos furor Mercurii. Nudabit ensem Orion ferreus, uexabit nubes Phoebus aequoreus. Exhibit Iupiter licitas semitas, et Venus deseret statutas lineas. Saturni sideris liuido corruet et falce recurua mortales perimet. Bissenus numerus domorum siderum deflebit hospites ita transcurrere. Obmittent Gemini complexus solitos et Vnam in fontes prouocabunt. Pensa Librae oblique pendebunt donec Aries recurua cornua sua sopponat. Cauda Scorpionis procreabit fulgura, et Cancer cum sole litigabit. Ascendet Virgo dorsum Sagittarii et flores uirgineos obfuscabit. Currus lunae turbabit zodiacum, et in fletum prorumpent Pleiades. Officia Iani nulla redibunt, sed clausa ianua in crepidinibus Adriannae delitebit. In ictu radii exurgent aequora, et puluis ueterum renouabitur. Confligent uenti diro sufflamine et sonitum inter sidera conficient.

(The planets will look away from men and alter their customary paths. Because of their wrath crops will wither and rain not fall from the sky. Roots will change place with branches, and people will marvel at the strange sight. The brightness of the sun will be outshone by Mercury's amber, to the horror of the observers. Arcadian Stilbon will change his shield, and Mars' helmet will summon Venus. Mars' helmet will cast a shadow, and Mercury's rage will know no bounds. Steely Orion will unsheathe his sword, and a watery sun will trouble the clouds. Jupiter will turn from his permitted course, and Venus abandon her established paths. The spite of Saturn's star will rain down and slaughter mortals with a curved scythe. The twelvefold band that is home to the stars will weep to see its travellers run amok in this way. The Twins will forgo their usual embraces and call Aquarius to the spring. The scales of Libra will hang awry until Aries supports them with his curved horns. Lightning bolts will flash from Scorpio's tail and Cancer will quarrel with the sun. Virgo will mount on Sagittarius's back and defile her virginal flowers. The moon's chariot will disrupt the zodiac and the Pleiades burst into tears. Janus will not perform his duties, but will close his door and hide in the precinct of Ariadne. In the flash of its beam, the seas will rise and the dust of the long-

dead will be reborn. The winds will contend with a terrible blast and the stars will hear them howl.)¹⁶⁶

This closing scene of the *Prophetiae* combines apocalyptic chaos and destruction with the planetary and zodiac bodies, all of which appear to be engaged in fierce battle. Though there are some studies which have stated or alluded to Geoffrey's use of astrology in this passage, most references to the topic have been brief.¹⁶⁷ Williams asserts that 'for assigning meaning to celestial events, apocalypticism and astrology are incompatible [...] the rise of medieval astrology is thus also, at least partially, the story of the decline of apocalypticism.'¹⁶⁸

However, in the case of the *Prophetiae*, the two are interwoven. Geoffrey's engagement with astrology is explicitly apocalyptic, and the two modes are clearly not here incompatible.

Scholarship has understood this final part of the *Prophetiae* as beyond meaningful analysis – not just in its lack of historical reference points, but with the motifs themselves generally striking critics as obscure:

The first sequence of the prophecies, the so-called 'Omen of the Dragons,' proves the easiest to gloss: the Red Dragon (the Britons/ Welsh) will rise from near-defeat to triumph over the White Dragon (the Saxons). [...] As one moves through the prophecies, however, even tentative interpretations such as these become more difficult, while the imagery takes a markedly apocalyptic turn. In the end, it is hard to know what to make of the prophecies at all.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *HRB*, pp. 158-9

¹⁶⁷ See Bryan, 'Astronomy Translated'; Carey, *Courting Disaster*; Williams, *Fiery Shapes*.

¹⁶⁸ Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. xxii-xxiii.

¹⁶⁹ *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. by Faletra, pp. 24-5. Also see Curley, 'Animal Symbolism'.

Contrary to this, I suggest that here, amidst this astrological apocalypse, Geoffrey places a (textually) hidden dragon. Although there are no explicit uses of the term ‘dragon’ (*draco*), or ‘serpent’ (*serpens*, used in medieval Latin as a synonym for *draco*), anywhere within the passage, we do encounter the ‘Pleiades’. Commonly, the Pleiades are recognised as a cluster of stars associated with seven sisters from Greek mythology, and although they can be found in the works of many authors, including Isidore, no Western Christian accounts contain an allusion to the Pleiades as a dragon.¹⁷⁰ The term does not appear in Walcher’s discussion of the astronomical dragon in the *De Dracone* either; however, one draconic reference to the ‘Pleiades’ is found in a cosmological, astronomical treatise known as the *Liber Nemroth*, showing a constellation brought into conjunction with *Draco* in Syriac accounts of the astrology and astronomy of eclipses of a type with those found in medieval Arabic sources. This reading may offer a connection which lends a unity to the whole of the *Prophetiae*, typical of Geoffrey and his interests in pattern-making.

The *Liber Nemroth*, also referred to as the *Liber Nimrod*, is a dialogue between Nemroth and his disciple Ioanton.¹⁷¹ The treatise is divided into three units, each discussing, in turn: the universe and the sphere of the fixed stars; the solar system (in particular the planets, the sun, and the moon); and finally computistical and miscellaneous topics.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Steven J. Livesey and Richard H. Rouse, ‘Nimrod the Astronomer’, *Traditio*, 37 (1981), 203-266 (p. 207). For more on the history and mythologies surrounding the Pleiades, see Munya Andrews, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades: Stories from around the world* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2004); Gerardus D. Bouw, ‘The Bible and the Pleiades’, *Biblical Astronomer*, 87 (1999), 4-18; Amanda Laoupi, ‘The Greek Myth of Pleiades in The Archaeology of Natural Disasters: Decoding, Dating and Environmental Interpretation’, *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 6 (2006), 5-22.

¹⁷¹ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 39.

¹⁷² Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 15; Livesey and Rouse, ‘Nimrod the Astronomer’, p. 204.

Nothaft notes how the core content of the *Liber Nemroth* ‘very likely originated from Syria-Palestine in late antiquity, before being refashioned into a Latin treatise, most likely in the early ninth century’, although this has also been dated as early as the eighth and as late as the end of the eleventh century.¹⁷³ The *Liber Nemroth* enjoyed some popularity from the first half of the twelfth century onwards, quoted by the Anglo-Norman poet, Philippe de Thaon (c. 1113), theologian Hugh of St-Victor (c. 1141), and also William of Conches (c. 1159), a French philosopher (whose *Philosophia mundi* was influenced by Capella’s *Philologiae et Mercurii*), who studied Islamic philosophy through the translations of Constantine the African.¹⁷⁴ Isabelle Draelants makes a comparison between the *Liber Nemroth* and Macrobius’s *Commentary* (which was also circulating in the first half of the twelfth century, in MS Auct. F. 1. 9), suggesting how Macrobius’s use of diagrams as a method of explanation, are ‘exactly what the author of the *Liber Nemroth* had in mind when he wrote the didactic dialogue between Nemroth (i.e., Nimrod) and his pupil Ioanton and illustrated it

¹⁷³ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 39; David Juste, ‘On the Date of the ‘Liber Nemroth’’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 67 (2004), 255-258 (p. 255).

¹⁷⁴ Juste, ‘On the Date of the ‘Liber Nemroth’’, p. 255; Livesey and Rouse, ‘Nimrod the Astronomer’, pp. 237-52. For more on Philippe de Thaon, see Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire*, ed. by Ian Short (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2018). For more on Hugh of St-Victor, see Boyd Taylor Coolman, *The Theology of Hugh of St. Victor: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For more on William of Conches, see Cadden, ‘Science and Rhetoric in the Middle Ages’. For more on Constantine the African, see *Constantine the African and ‘Alī Ibn Al-‘Abbās Al-Mağūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts*, ed. by Charles Burnett and Danielle Jacquart (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Luisa María Arvide Cambra, ‘The Intermediary Role of the Arabs During the Middle Ages in the Transmission of Ancient Scientific Knowledge to Europe’, *International Journal of Innovative Science, Engineering & Technology*, 3 (2016), 422-6.

by mixing coloured graphs and pictures.’¹⁷⁵ The point of comparison to Geoffrey though, which allows for the possibility of the *Liber Nemroth* as another source (or at least, indicative of another possible source tradition) for the *Prophetiae*, similar to the *De Dracone*, is, again, the discussion of eclipses. As Nothaft writes in his comparison of the two texts:

Another highly unusual idea put forward in the *Liber Nemroth* is the distinction between two types of lunar eclipses [...] Eclipses on the 14th day always takes place ‘above the Earth’ (‘super terram’) and are brought about not by the Earth’s shadow, but by a celestial constellation or presence referred to in the text as the ‘tail of Pleiades’ (‘cauda Pliadum’), which dampens the Moon’s glow and colours it red. The Moon is here seemingly treated as autoluminescent, but the contrary is assumed in a different passage, in which Nimrod links the Pleiades to a ‘dragon’ found between the Sun and Moon. This dragon is in turn accompanied by two she-bears, the greater of which (‘ursa maior’) is capable of blocking sunlight from reaching the Moon.¹⁷⁶

The description of Nimrod’s ‘Pleiades’, as an ecliptic dragon found between the sun and moon, is an earlier parallel to Walcher’s ‘caput draconis’ dragon, similarly in circulation in early twelfth-century England. In the same astrological passage in which Geoffrey mentions the ‘Pleiades’, he is notably also interested in eclipses: ‘Galea Martis umbram conficiet’ (‘Mars’ helmet will cast a shadow’), would appear to refer to an eclipse, that is a phenomenon ‘caused by a celestial shadow’.¹⁷⁷ The connections made here, between the ‘Pleiades’ and the

¹⁷⁵ Isabelle Draelants, “Depingo ut ostendam, depictum ita est expositio:’ Diagrams as an Indispensable Complement to the Cosmological Teaching of the *Liber Nemroth de astronomia*’, in *Inscribing Knowledge in the Medieval Book*, ed. by Anne D. Hedeman and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 56-92 (p. 56).

¹⁷⁶ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, pp. 40-1.

¹⁷⁷ *HRB*, pp. 158-9; Westfall and Sheehan, *Celestial Shadows: Eclipses, Transits and Occultations*, p. 1.

Liber Nemroth, and through Geoffrey's repeated references to the ecliptic, offer a possible interpretive framework through which we might make sense out of a passage previously understood to be unclear, shedding new light on the structure of the *Prophetiae* as a whole.

Thus, Arabic, and related Syriac astrological and astronomical precedents present a possible interpretive framework through which we might comprehend the final passage of the *Prophetiae*, a sequence which has been previously understood in Arthurian scholarship as especially obscure. This chapter's Latinate-Arabic reading of the Pleiades certainly encourages a more cyclical reading of Book VII, from the *Omen* dragons at the beginning of the *Prophetiae*, to the Pleiades dragon at its conclusion. Overall, this helps establish a connection between all three dragon episodes which, individually, relate to one another through their aerial natures, and their association to the concealed and the ecliptic. When considering these dragons altogether though, they appear to almost narrate Uther Pendragon's origin story: the *Omen* dragons present a warning of opposition to King Vortigern, staging his rise and fall at the hands of a mightier dragon (Aurelius and Uther), the Pleiades dragon appears at the end of Book VII (just before the arrival of Aurelius and Uther the next day, at the beginning of Book VIII), and tearfully hints at a hidden, astronomical dragon, which will make an aerial appearance during a future battle, and finally, Uther's dragon star foretells his brother's death, portends his new role and title, and unveils his future dynasty, resulting in the eventual formation of the astronomical dragon into the Pendragon emblem.¹⁷⁸ The movement of Geoffrey's dragons then, may be read as an origin narrative within the wider plot of the

¹⁷⁸ After Merlin interprets the *Omen* dragons and narrates the *Prophetiae*, he warns Vortigern to 'Ignem filiorum Constantini diffuge, si diffugere ualeris [...] sed te prius infra turrin inclusum comburent.' (Beware the fire of Constantinus' sons, if you can [...] [for] 'they will besiege your tower and burn you in it.) *HRB*, pp. 160-1. It is interesting to note here how both brothers (Aurelius and Uther) are associated with fire, foreshadowing their relationship to the fiery dragon star, the stellar sign which simultaneously reveals both their fates.

Arthurian story, with the *Historia*'s astronomical dragon interwoven into key moments narrating Uther's rise, and later, after him, Arthur's fall (which will be discussed in Chapter 2).

Conclusion

The sequence of hidden dragons in Geoffrey (in the *Omen* and in the apocalyptic end to the *Prophetiae*) are analogous to the ecliptic dragons in Walcher's *De Dracone* and the earlier *Liber Nemroth*, connecting the *Prophetiae* to a wider matrix of conceivable influences originating outside Britain. In the case of the *Liber Nemroth*, if Geoffrey or any other twelfth-century insular writers did access the treatise, it is easy to presume that they may not have realised its prior origins, as it was translated into Latin three centuries before the *Historia*. However, in the case of the contemporary *De Dracone*, Walcher drew explicitly on Petrus's Arabic learning, therefore the non-English origins of his astronomical ideas were more likely to be known, at least in Western England, and perhaps also in other English intellectual centres engaged in similar work.

Geoffrey's incorporation of Walcher's ideas (namely, the astronomical 'caput draconis', as well as an aerial, hidden dragon based on the astronomical, ecliptic model in Walcher), likely remained largely hidden not only because all the *Historia*'s stated sources are historical rather than scientific, but also due to romance's ability to erase these scientific source traditions. To acknowledge these Arabic and Syriac sources, would be to disrupt the medieval flow of *translatio*, which Geoffrey's own (pseudo)historical romance relied upon. Geoffrey's obscurity with regards to his scientific sources, however, does not conclude with the *Prophetiae*, extending instead to one final episode within the *Historia*. Here we see, instead of a range of Latinate-Arabic influences, an incorporation of contemporary classical

astronomical ideas which, like the materials circulating in twelfth-century England, helped construct another aerial dragon, half-astral, half-imperial.

CHAPTER 2: THE GALFRIDIAN BEAR AND DRAGON DREAM

This chapter explores the *Historia*'s construction of the final Arthurian dragon which appears in Arthur's dream at sea, termed in this thesis as the bear and dragon dream. Another example of Geoffrey's incorporation of astronomy and astrology, this dragon draws from a classical rather than Arabic astronomical tradition. This chapter therefore expands upon the previous considered astronomical sources for Geoffrey's motif beyond England and Arabic transmission, evaluating a second set of cultural influences which derive instead from Latinate-Greek sources. While the dragons in Chapter 1 represent Christian-Muslim contact through the assimilation of Latinate-Arabic astronomical sources drawn from translated and transmitted materials, this final dragon functions as a romance cipher for Christian-Muslim relations in terms of empire-building and religio-political warfare. Thus, by investigating the relationship between astronomical and crusading allusions, I examine how Geoffrey, who was writing between the First and Second Crusade, utilises both classical astronomical and historical models in his bear and dragon dream episode to develop a proto-crusading Arthur, while challenging Arthur's dreams of imperial conquest.

This is explored in relation to the likely Latinate-Greek influences at work within the final stellar episode of the *Historia*'s Arthuriad (Books IX-XI). I expand the list of potential source texts for Geoffrey's construction of astral phenomena, introducing Lambert of Saint-Omer's *Liber Floridus* (Book of Flowers, c. 1121) and its classical astronomical model, the *Aratea* texts (translations of the *Phaenomena* by the Greek poet Aratus, c. 310/15 – 240/39 B.C.), as potential influences for the astral bear and dragon in Arthur's dream sequence. I also consider Lambert's work as a conceptual model for the *Historia*, demonstrating how Geoffrey's seemingly disparate combination of materials (that is, his integration of

astrological content within Arthurian legendary history-writing) might point towards an understanding of the *Historia* as a *florilegium* (a volume of writings, anthology, or encyclopaedia), with Geoffrey potentially acting as a compiler, like Lambert.¹ Non-Arabic texts, namely astronomical material preserved from the classical tradition, were still in circulation during the twelfth century, and were still deeply influential throughout the period of Geoffrey's writing, connected to medieval understandings of *translatio imperii et studii*. The impact of classical literature on Geoffrey's *Historia* has received critical attention but the relationship between classical astronomy and political prophecy, and the ways in which these two engage with crusading rhetoric within the *Historia*, has been less frequently observed.²

The second part of this chapter analyses how classical and Latin astrological traditions were used by Geoffrey to re-imagine the First Crusade. The broader set of cultural relationships which underpin Geoffrey's dream sequence also relate to the two sections which immediately follow the bear and dragon dream: the narrative of the giant of St. Michael's Mount and Arthur's conquest of Rome. These three episodes are connected through a shared engagement with astronomy, prophecy, and warfare. Having established the bear and dragon as an astronomical allusion in the first part of this chapter, the second details its narrative function as stellar sign used by Geoffrey to presage Arthur's double proto- or pseudo-crusading journey, from Britian to Brittany and then to Rome. Building on recent scholarship

¹ For more on *florilegia*, see Raymond J. Cormier, 'The Encyclopedia', in *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by William W. Kibler and others (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995).

² For classical literature and Geoffrey's *Historia*, see Fulton, 'History and Myth', p. 47; Jennifer Farrell, *Prophecy as History Classical and Christian Concepts of the Past in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2012); Daniel Wakelin, 'Early Humanism in England' in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 1: 800-1558*, ed. by Rita Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 487-514 (pp. 490-1).

on the portentous function of celestial phenomena in contemporary accounts of the First Crusade, I argue that the astronomical allusion of the bear and dragon initiates Arthur's proto-crusading journey against the giant of St. Michael's Mount.³ I suggest that Geoffrey's reference in this episode to the murdered Breton princess, Helena, directly recalls the mother of the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine I, who is associated with the discovery of the True Cross, a potent symbol in narratives of crusade. Notice of this parallel, to include both Arthur's astral dream and the character of Helena as part of Geoffrey's crusader imaginary, offers a revision to Heng's claim that 'no explicit memorialising of the Crusade, or direct retrieval of history, occurs in the giant-killing episode.'⁴

Finally, this chapter also outlines a potential source relationship between Arthur's bear and dragon dream and Macrobius's *Commentary* on the *Somnium Scipionis*, exploring how Geoffrey employs another classical astronomical model (alongside the *Aratea*) to offer a stellar warning to Arthur, a final sign of the dangers and consequences of his imperial conquest just before his battle with the Eastern Emperor Lucius for Rome. These two connecting discussions demonstrate how Geoffrey employs classical astronomical models to establish a crusading framework within his Arthurian narrative.⁵ Hence, this chapter investigates how the influence of astronomical signs, empire building, and the imperial legacy of Rome, each frame Arthur's crusading ambitions against the Roman Empire's Eastern forces, with Geoffrey both designing an imperial decline and interested in the frustration of imperial ambitions.

³ Beth C. Spacey, *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), p. 40.

⁴ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 43.

⁵ See *HRB*, pp. 218-9.

The *Historia*'s Bear and Dragon dream

In Book X of the *Historia*, three books after the *Prophetiae*, King Arthur journeys to Rome by ship, where he dreams of a fight between a bear and dragon:

Dispositis itaque quibusque necessariis, incipientibus kalendis Augusti iter uersus Britanniam arripiunt. Comperto igitur aduentu ipsorum, Arturus, Mordredo nepoti suo atque Ganhumaræ reginae Britanniam ad conseruandum permittens, cum exercitu suo Portum Hamonis adiuit, ubi tempestiuo uentorum afflatu mare ingressus est. Dum autem innumeris nauibus circumsaepus prospero cursu et cum gaudio altum secaret, quasi media hora noctis instante grauissimus sompnus eum intercepit. Sopitus etiam per sompnum uidit ursum quendam in aere uolantem, cuius murmure tota littora intremebant; terribilem quoque draconem ab occidenti aduolare, qui splendore oculorum suorum patriam illuminabat; alterum uero alteri occurrentem miram pugnam committere, sed praefatum draconem ursum saepius irruentem ignito anhelitu comburere combustumque in terram prosternere. Expergefactus ergo Arturus astantibus quod sompniauerat indicauit. Qui exponentes dicebant draconem significare eum, ursum uero aliquem gigantem qui cum ipso congredereetur; pugnam autem eorem portendere bellum quod inter ipsos futurum erat; uictoriam uero draconis illam quae ei proueniret. At Arturus aliud coniectabat, existimans ob se et imperatorem talem uisionem contigisse.

(Once all necessary preparations had been made, they set off towards Britain on the first day of August. On learning that they were coming and entrusting the running of the country to his nephew Modred and queen Ganhumara, Arthur went with his army to Southampton, from where he sailed with a following wind. While he was ploughing the waves with his huge fleet, enjoying a safe passage, at about midnight he fell into a deep sleep. In it he dreamed he saw a bear flying through the air and making all the shores tremble with its growls; and also a terrible dragon swooping from the west, whose blazing eyes lit up the land; they met to fight a wondrous duel, in which the bear repeatedly attacked the dragon, but was burned by its fiery

breath and cast to the ground. Arthur awoke and told the dream to his retinue. They interpreted the dragon as meaning the king, and the bear as a giant he would fight; their battle meant the impending combat between the king and the giant; and the dragon's victory foretold that of the king. Arthur understood the dream differently, thinking that it concerned himself and the emperor.)⁶

In Arthur's dream, the bear and dragon are both envisioned as aerial creatures, with the bear 'flying through the air' and the dragon 'swooping from the west'. This aerial episode is a clear reworking of Geoffrey's *Omen*, the first appearance of the dragon motif in the *Historia*. The warring bear and dragon in Arthur's dream appear to reimagine the *Omen*'s opposing red and white dragons, which engage in a similar battle. Geoffrey's repeated portrayal of a winged dragon is, in both instances, also associated with hidden knowledge and revelation: in the *Omen*, Merlin is summoned to uncover the significance of the two dragons for Vortigern; likewise, on the royal ship, Arthur summons his men to interpret the meaning of the bear and dragon. These revelatory dragons are operating as romance conventions within the *Historia*, used in Geoffrey's narrative to convey upcoming battles and conflicts of power. In the case of the bear and dragon, this battle occurs high above Arthur's ship, directing the eye to both their aerial forms and the location of the sky. This focus on the heavens and the action of gazing skyward suggests an understanding of a connection between the sea and stars as found in medieval navigation. The flying bear and dragon can thus be approached as two astronomical allusions: the Ursa Major/ Minor (two bears – conflated in Geoffrey to a singular bear) and Draco (dragon), three constellations in the northern sky. All three are closely intertwined, with Draco 'snaking' between the two Ursa constellations and separating

⁶ *HRB*, pp. 222-5.

them both in the sky.⁷ The bear/s and dragon constellations are well noted in several astronomical, astrological and literary materials written and/ or circulating in England during the early twelfth century, the same time as Geoffrey's writing, in astronomical works in the Aratean tradition, to which I now turn.

The Bear and Dragon in Classical Astronomical Texts

When exploring classical influences on medieval astronomy, we might first think of Ptolemy, whose works operated as astronomical, astrological, and cosmological authorities during the Middle Ages.⁸ Ptolemy's *Almagest*, an astronomical treatise drawing on the lost star catalogue of Hipparchus, contains all three constellations of Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, and Draco.⁹ However, after it was revised in Arabic by al-Sufi as *The Book of Fixed Stars*, the work was translated into Latin in the latter half of the twelfth century in 1175 by Gerard of Cremona, four decades after Geoffrey's *Historia*.¹⁰ Ptolemy's other work, the *Tetrabiblos*, a text on the philosophy and practice of astrology, was however translated into Latin contemporary with Geoffrey's writing, by Plato of Tivoli in 1138.¹¹ While this does contain all three constellations, and though it was written in/ around the same year as Geoffrey's

⁷ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 25

⁸ For more on Ptolemy's astronomy, see *Ptolemy's Science of the Stars in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Charles Burnett and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

⁹ See *Ptolemy's Almagest*.

¹⁰ For more on Ptolemy and al-Sufi, page 71 of this thesis.

¹¹ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos: Quadripartite, Being Four Books of the Influence of the Stars*, trans. by J. M. Ashmand (London: Forgotten Books: 2008). Also see J. M. Ashmand, *Traditional Astrology: Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* (California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

Historia, the Latin translation was made in Barcelona, removed from Geoffrey in Oxford, making Ptolemy an unlikely influence for Geoffrey's astrological allusion.¹²

Instead, we might look to the influence of the Latin Aratean tradition. The *Aratea* texts are based upon Aratus's *Phaenomena*, a celestial poem which offers an introduction to constellations, including the principal northern group containing the Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, and Draco.¹³ Consisting of some 1,150 verses, it also occasionally gave details on 'the locations of specific stars in a constellation and the mythology behind its origins.'¹⁴ Although Aratus himself was inexperienced in Greek astronomy, the *Phaenomena* was and remains a well-regarded piece within the study of astronomical literature. Using the 'scientific writings and heavenly images' of Eudoxus, and Homer and Hesiod as poetic models, the *Phaenomena* summarises 'the entire celestial phenomena as it was understood by Greek astronomers in the third-century B.C.E.'¹⁵ A commentary on Aratus's poem was later produced by Hipparchus, and the *Phaenomena* eventually became so popular a text that it was not only used by Virgil in Book I of his *Georgics* (Farming, c. 29 B.C.E.), but translated over time into Latin by

¹² Luce López-Baralt, *Islam in Spanish Literature: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (Leiden: Brill, 1992), p. 55.

¹³ Aratus, *Phaenomena*, ed. and trans. by Douglas Kidd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Aratus, *Phaenomena*, trans. by Aaron Poochigian (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010). For more on the *Phaenomena*, see Eratosthenes and Hyginus, *Constellation Myths with 'Aratus's 'Phaenomena'*, trans. by Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Emma Gee, *Aratus and the Astronomical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Elly Dekker, *Illustrating the Phaenomena: Celestial Cartography in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Nick Kanas, *Star Maps: History, Artistry, and Cartography* (San Francisco: Springer, 2007), p. 108.

¹⁵ Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, p. 14. For more on Eudoxus Cnidus and the *Phaenomena*, see Kanas, *Star Maps*, p. 54.

Avienus, by Cicero as the *Aratea*, and by Germanicus as the *Leiden Aratea*, respectively.¹⁶ These translations, collectively referred to as the *Aratea*, became popular in imperial Rome, and their artwork and celestial symbolism presented ‘a significant resource in promoting royal propaganda.’¹⁷ Today, there are still in existence at least 60 manuscripts of the *Aratea* in libraries across Europe and America, demonstrating how, over time and particularly during the Middle Ages within the Latinate West, these manuscripts were admired and copied, becoming a key source of stellar astronomy for medieval readers.¹⁸ Such was the case, too, for the *Liber Floridus*.

The *Aratea* tradition reached medieval Europe through several classical sources. The first example is through Virgil’s *Georgics*, a narrative which was not centered around a myth, like Virgil’s *Aeneid*, but which loosely followed the yearly activities of the farmer, using farming, which required hard work, as a metaphor for living life on earth.¹⁹ Virgil’s text was influenced by several didactic poems, including Aratus’s *Phaenomena*, with this genre ‘teaching its hearer to carry out some sort of intellectual or physical activity [...] I teach this, you do this.’²⁰ A similar didactic quality is seen in Book I of Virgil’s *Georgics*, where the passage containing the bear and dragon inspires the reader to not just notice the signs in the sky, but to make use of them for daily activities:

¹⁶ Kanas, *Star Maps*, p. 108; Gary B. Miles, *Virgil’s Georgics: A New Interpretation* (California: University of California Press, 1980), p. 164.

¹⁷ Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Virgil, *Virgil’s Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, 2 vols (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999). Also see Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Kristina Chew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), p. ix.

²⁰ Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Chew, pp. viii-ix. For more on Virgil’s *Georgics* and Aratus’s *Phaenomena*, see Emma Gee, ‘Cicero’s Astronomy’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 51 (2001), 520-536 (p. 520).

Idcirco certis dimensum partibus orbem
per duodena regit mundi sol aureus astra.
quinque tenent caelum zonae; quarum una corusco
semper sole rubens et torrida semper ab igni;
quam circum extremae dextra laevaue trahuntur
caeruleae, glacie concretae atque imbribus atris;
has inter mediamque duae mortalibus aegris
munere concessae divum, et via secta per ambas,
obliquus qua se signorum verteret ordo.
mundus ut ad Scythiam Rhipaeasque arduus arces
consurgit, premitur Libyae devexus in Austros.
hic vertex nobis semper sublimis; at illum
sub pedibus Styx atra videt Manesque profundum.
maximus hic flexu sinuoso elabitur Anguis
circum perque duas in morem fluminis Arctos,
Arctos Oceani metuentis aequore tingui.
illic, ut perhibent, aut intempesta silet nox,
semper et obtenta densentur nocte tenebrae;
aut redit a nobis Aurora diemque reducit,
nosque ubi primus equis Oriens adflavit anhelis,
illic sera rubens accendit lumina Vesper.
hinc tempestates dubio praediscere caelo
possumus, hinc messisque diem tempusque serendi,
et quando infidum remis impellere marmor
conveniat, quando armatas deducere classis,
aut tempestivam silvis evertere pinum.
nec frustra signorum obutus speculamur et ortus,

temporibusque parem diversis quattuor annum.

(To this end the golden Sun rules his circuit,
portioned out in fixed divisions, through the
world's twelve constellations. Five zones
comprise the heavens; whereof one is ever
glowing with the flashing sun, ever scorched by
his flames. Round this, at the world's ends, two
stretch darkling to right and left, set fast in ice
and black storms. Between these and the middle
zone, two by grace of the gods have been
vouchsafed to feeble mortals; and a path is cut
between the two, wherein the slanting array of
the Signs may turn. As our globe rises steep to
Scythia and the Rhiphaean crags, so it slopes
downward to Libya's southland. One pole is ever
high above us, while the other,
beneath our feet, is seen of black Styx and the
shades infernal. Here, with his tortuous coils, the
mighty Snake glides forth, river-like, about and
between the two Bears—the Bears that shrink
from the plunge beneath Ocean's plain. There,
men say, is either the silence of lifeless night, and
gloom ever thickening beneath night's pall; or
else Dawn returns from us and brings them back
the day, and when on us the rising Sun first
breathes with panting steeds, there glowing
Vesper is kindling his evening rays. Hence,

though the sky be fitful, we can foretell the
weather's changes, hence the harvest tide and
sowing time; when it is meet to lash with oars the
sea's faithless calm, when to launch our well-
rigged fleet, or in the woods to fell the pine in
season. Not in vain do we watch the signs, as
they rise and set, and the year, uniform in its four
several seasons.)²¹

Virgil presents the Earth as the centre of the universe, around which the sun revolves, a reference to Ptolemaic cosmic theory and classical astronomical knowledge.²² Like Arthur's omen, which appears above the sea, Virgil too describes the bear and dragon constellations through water imagery, with Draco 'gliding river-like' between the two bears, which 'plunge beneath [the] Ocean's plain', indicating the horizon. In a Ptolemaic context, this water refers to the ocean which surrounds the three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe), as we find it in later T-O maps.²³ Although not an exact mirror of Geoffrey's scene, Virgil's portrayal of the bear and dragon similarly envisions the movement of starry bodies in the sky above a large, reflective body of water. Further, we might note Virgil's mention of oars hitting the sea and

²¹ Virgil, *Virgil's Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid*, pp. 114-7.

²² For more on Virgil's astronomy, see Frederik A. Bakker, 'Vergilius Astronomiae Ignarus? A Vindication of Virgil's Astronomical Knowledge in *Georgics* 1.231-258', *Mnemosyne*, 72 (2019), 621-646. For more on Virgil and the universe, see Philip Hardie, *Virgil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²³ For more on this, see *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, trans. by J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020); Meg Roland, *Mirror of the World: Literature, Maps, and Geographic Writing in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

the launch of a fleet at the end of the passage; Geoffrey's Arthur is also described as 'ploughing the waves with his huge fleet' just before dreaming of the bear and dragon.²⁴ These similarities are strengthened by Virgil's final lesson to 'watch the signs [...] rise and set' – which both Arthur and his retinue also attempt to do after he narrates his dream in the *Historia*. The comparison is suggestive: it is accepted that Virgil was widely read in Europe during the medieval period, and that 'Geoffrey used Virgil extensively,' particularly his *Aeneid*, as a model for constructing the origins of Britain from the Trojans within the *Historia*.²⁵

Another work, known in western medieval Europe, which features the bear and dragon constellations, is Gaius Julius Hyginus's *De Astronomica* (Concerning Astronomy, 1st century B.C.E.), a mythological and astronomical Latin handbook which includes 'definitions of the zodiac and the earth; the folklore of the stars and catasteristic myths; the names and illustrations of 42 constellations; the circles of the sphere; day and night; and the signs of the zodiac and the planets.'²⁶ Marion Dolan notes that Hyginus most likely sourced the astronomical material for his work between the time of Cicero's and Germanicus's *Aratea* translations, with some parts of Hyginus's handbook 'often bound with, integrated with, and

²⁴ *HRB*, pp. 222-3; For the *Historia*'s bear and dragon dream, refer to Chapter 2, pages 120-1.

²⁵ Raymond J. Cormier, 'The Encyclopedia', in *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by William W. Kibler and others (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), p. 1821. For more on Virgil and Geoffrey, see Richard M. Loomis, 'Arthur in Geoffrey of Monmouth', in *The Romance of Arthur: An Anthology of Medieval Texts in Translation*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and James J. Wilhelm, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 58-87 (p. 58). Celia Brayfield and Duncan Sprott, *Writing Historical Fiction: A Writers' and Artists' Companion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 70; K. W. Gransden, *Virgil's Iliad: An Essay on Epic Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 66; Tanya M. Caldwell, *Virgil Made English: The Decline of Classical Authority* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 26.

²⁶ Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, p. 106.

sometimes mistaken for, *Aratea* manuscripts.²⁷ While the *De Astronomica* did possess mainly Greek sources, a Latinate source for the work included Cicero's *Aratea*, demonstrating a shared influence between the well-known astronomical works.²⁸ Patrick J. Murphy notes a similarity in their depictions of the constellation, Draco, too:

In most descriptions of Draco, medieval and modern, the head forms the most prominent feature of the constellation, including its brightest and most readily recognizable stars. [...] Hyginus identifies two stars on the 'temples' of the dragon's head, two for its eyes, and one on its chin. [Cicero's] *Aratea* highlights the head stars of Draco as the most prominent and bright:

'Huic non una modo caput ornans stella relucet, uerum tempora sunt duplici fulgore notata, e trucibusque oculis duo feruida lumina flagrant atque uno mentum radianti sidere lucet.'

(The head does not give light only through a single adorning star, but the temples are marked by a double clarity, and from his menacing eyes two glowing lights blaze forth and the chin is lit with one shining star.)

Arguably, this passage stresses the blazing 'double clarity' of Draco's temples and eyes, somewhat less his 'chin'.²⁹

²⁷ Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, pp. 105-6.

²⁸ Alan Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 38.

²⁹ Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), p. 119. Also see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Les Aratea*, ed. by Victor Buescu (Hildesheim: George Olms, 1966), p. 19-22.

As Murphy notes, in both the *Aratea* and Hyginus, the discussion of Draco follows the discussion of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.³⁰ The grouping of these three constellations, and the emphasis of the dragon's eyes in both Hyginus and Cicero, bear some resemblance to Geoffrey's dream sequence. The brightness of Draco's eyes might be compared to the 'bright eyes' ('splendore oculorum') of the dragon in Arthur's dream – notably, this is the first dragon description in the *Historia* in which Geoffrey comments on the eyes, the creature also there in notable proximity to a bear.³¹

One early Latin manuscript, British Library, Harley MS 647 (a collection of astronomical and astrological texts compiled between the ninth and eleventh centuries, originating in South-East England and Northern France) contains twenty-two illustrated constellation figures from Cicero's *Aratea*, alongside extracts from Hyginus's *De Astronomica* (fols 2v-17v).³² This manuscript, although earlier than Geoffrey's *Historia*, is nonetheless useful to note as it not only contains other popular astronomical works from late antiquity, such as Books 6 and 8 of Capella's *Philologiae et Mercurii*, but also several familiar textual sources connected to Geoffrey's *Historia*: astronomical texts based on Isidore of Seville, excerpts from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, and Macrobius's *Commentary* on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*.³³ The bear/s and dragon also appear in this manuscript on fol.

³⁰ Murphy, 'Transformation and Textual Culture', p. 119.

³¹ See *HRB*, pp. 222-3; Chapter 2, pages 120-1 of this thesis.

³² London, British Library, Harley MS 647.

³³ Harley MS 647. For more on Isidore and Geoffrey, see James Noble, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1100-1155)', in *Key Figures in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard K. Emmerson and Sandra Clayton Emmerson (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 246-7; Thea Summerfield, 'Filling the Gap: Brutus in the *Historia Brittonum*, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Ms F, and Geoffrey of Monmouth', in *The Medieval Chronicle VII*, ed. by Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 85–102. For more on Pliny and Geoffrey, see Nicholas J. Higham, *King Arthur: The Making of the Legend* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

21v, in the centre of a large diagram of the northern and southern hemispheres, originating from South-East England. The centralisation of the bear/s and dragon in this image within the manuscript, as well as the inclusion of Cicero's *Aratea* and Hyginus's *De Astronomica* (alongside other notable astronomical works from the classical, late antique, and early medieval periods), establishes the collection overall as a useful source of astronomical knowledge of the constellations. Harley MS 647 demonstrates an interest in both astral phenomena and key textual authorities, such as Cicero, Isidore, and Macrobius, that continued into the twelfth century – I suggest, in the writings of Lambert of Saint-Omer and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Lambert, the *Liber Floridus*, and the Intellectual Culture of St. Omer in 1100

There is another Aratean text, or rather collection of texts, in circulation closely contemporary with Geoffrey, ordinarily read in relation to Geoffrey's works only for its Arthurian content (its integration of Nennius). However, it operates as an interesting point of comparison to Geoffrey in a number of respects. The *Liber Floridus* was a medieval encyclopaedic compilation by Lambert of Saint-Omer, begun around 1112 and completed in 1121.³⁴ It narrates universal history, contains Biblical narratives, and presents apocalyptic and prophetic materials (on the Antichrist) alongside materials on astronomy, geography, philosophy, natural history, legendary history, and imperial dreams.³⁵ Within this compilation

³⁴ Albert Derolez, *The Autograph Manuscript of the Liber Floridus: A Key to the Encyclopedia of Lambert of Saint-Omer* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), p. 28.

³⁵ For more on the *Liber Floridus*, see *Liber Floridus 1121: The World in a Book*, ed. by Karen de Coene et al. (Tielt: Lannoo, 2011); Derolez, *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus: A Study of the Original Manuscript Ghent, University Library MS 92* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2015); Akbari, *Idols in the East*, pp. 67-112; Hanna Vorholt, *Shaping Knowledge: The Transmission of the Liber Floridus* (London: The

of texts, Lambert also includes a pre-Galfridian Arthur, who appears (unusually) as a leader of the Picts, more soldier than the British king which Geoffrey constructs him as roughly two decades later.³⁶ Lambert's source here is the same as Geoffrey's – the *Historia Brittonum*, which is the principal Latin source for Geoffrey's *Omen* and Arthur's battles. While this is certainly interesting, with the presence of an early Arthurian narrative indeed increasing the likelihood of Geoffrey's interest in the *Liber Floridus* – granting significant precedent for potential influence upon the *Historia*, it is the encyclopaedia's incorporation of astronomical material which is most relevant to this chapter. Its depiction of the stellar bear and dragon shows how it significantly brings together both astronomical and Arthurian materials, like Geoffrey.

In his study of the *Liber Floridus*, Albert Derolez, remarks how the work's 'pictures' play a prominent role in communicating the central ideas of the compilation, so distinctive that at times they 'replace the text as a medium'.³⁷ The bear/s and dragon constellations are one example of the pictures in Lambert's book. They feature as the first constellations depicted and discussed by Lambert under the title, 'De Ordine et Positione Signorv' (On the Order and the Position of the Signs), and are presented as a labelled and annotated illustration on fol. 89r, with the remaining constellation figures spanning fol. 89r to fol. 91v. In another study which observes the making and meaning of Lambert's original Ghent manuscript, Derolez, makes note of the *Liber Floridus*'s constellations and their accompanying captions.

Warburg Institute, 2017); Eva Matthews Sanford, 'The Liber Floridus', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 26 (1941), 469-478.

³⁶ See Christopher A. Snyder, 'Arthur and Kingship in the *Historia Brittonum*', in *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 1-12 (pp. 10-11); Jean Blacker, *Arthur, Origins, Identities and the Legendary History of Britain* (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

³⁷ Derolez, *The Autograph Manuscript*, p. 22.

The captions are ‘a variant version of a treatise falsely ascribed to Bede’, however, the iconography of the constellations is entirely conventional (a rare case in Lambert’s book), belonging entirely to the classical tradition, and

obviously copied from an *Aratea* manuscript (an illustrated copy of a Latin astronomical treatise based on the *Phaenomena* of the Greek poet Aratus, c. 310/15–240/39 B.C.), but obviously not from the *Aratea* codex in Saint-Bertin abbey.³⁸

Here, Derolez confirms a source relationship between the *Liber Floridus*’s constellation images and the *Aratea*. Lambert’s use of an *Aratea* manuscript as the source for his illustrations of the Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, and Draco constellations reveals the prominence of classical astronomical literature during the early twelfth century in northern Europe. This incorporation of materials from the *Aratea* tradition arguably provided twelfth-century writers such as Geoffrey, working in the cross-channel intellectual contexts of post-conquest England, with a significant precedent. If not the *Liber Floridus* itself, Geoffrey may well have used a similar compilation of classical astronomical materials as inspiration for his account of Arthur’s bear and dragon dream.

As discussed in my first chapter, although the prevalence of Latinate-Arabic ideas of astronomy grew in England throughout the twelfth century, classical models of astronomy were still being read and reproduced. With reference to the bear and dragon dream specifically, it is far more likely that Geoffrey used a classical constellation model rather than

³⁸ Derolez, *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus*, p. 103. For more on Bede and his association to astronomy, see C. Philipp E. Nothaft, ‘Bede’s horologium: Observational Astronomy and the Problem of the Equinoxes in Early Medieval Europe (c.700–1100)’, *The English Historical Review*, 130 (2015), 1079–1101; Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, pp. 120–4; Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens*.

an Arabic-sourced model (which provided valuable ecliptic content for his other dragons). This is largely because the earliest Latin translation of an Arabic astronomical treatise which featured the Ursa Major/ Minor and Draco constellations was produced much later, in 1175 (Gerard of Cremona's translation of al-Sufi's *The Book of Fixed Stars*).³⁹

The *Liber Floridus*'s use of classical astronomical sources rather than Arabic is rooted in a significant difference in the intellectual culture of Saint-Omer during the first half of the twelfth century in comparison to the circles in which Geoffrey worked. While I have suggested in Chapter 1 that there was an introduction of Latinate-Arabic astronomical materials in England in the early decades of the twelfth century, with a particular concentration in the Severn Valley, there is less evidence of a sustained interest in this material in twelfth-century Saint-Omer (then still in the County of Flanders). Jan Vandersmissen's study of medieval booklists and library catalogues reveals much about the scientific culture of the Southern Low Countries from the early twelfth century to the end of the fifteenth century. He notes how, aside from a few contributions to the encyclopaedic tradition, like Lambert's *Liber Floridus*, scientific practice in the Low Countries was overall not very innovative, and Latin translations from Arabic scientific works are found only in the medieval works of Constantine the African, which appears in a booklist of the Priory of Saint Andrew, near Bruges.⁴⁰ The focus on the transmission of medical rather than astronomical Latinate-Arabic knowledge suggests that, during this early twelfth century period, the Southern Low Countries' interest in scientific ideas originating from the Iberian Peninsula lay primarily within the field of medicine. Hans Daiber's study into Islamic knowledge and its roots in Europe reveals that this is the case too within twelfth to thirteenth-century

³⁹ See Ptolemy's *Almagest*, p. 3; Ridpath, *Star Tales*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Jan Vandersmissen, 'Medieval booklists and library catalogues as indicators of a scientific culture in the Southern Low Countries (early 12th – end 15th century)', *Scientiarum Historia*, 25 (1999), 3-11 (p. 4).

Montpellier in southern France.⁴¹ Although Montpellier is much further from Saint-Omer than Bruges or Affligem, Daiber's statement still supports the idea of a greater dispersed interest in medical science as opposed to other scientific subjects (such as the quadrivium sciences) throughout medieval France. This shows that Lambert's potential access to Latinate-Arabic astronomical treatises was very limited, unlike Geoffrey's closer access to texts centering on the quadrivium circulating in the twelfth-century Severn Valley. The incorporation then of Aratean source material within the *Liber Floridus* not only suggests classical literature as of interest to both Lambert and the intellectual milieu of Flanders at the time of his writing, but highlights more deeply the lack of Arabic astronomical sources available to him during the early twelfth century, with Latinate-Arabic astronomical works surfacing in this region much later than 1121. Another potential cause for the presence of classical astronomy and the absence of Latinate-Arabic ideas within the *Liber Floridus* may be due to Lambert's own specifications for his work. In his preface, Lambert writes:

. . . Cum igitur, diversis temporibus, diversis in libris, sanctorum patrum curiosa manus operum ejus magnificentiam stilo fidei exaraverit, suisque posteris ad edificationem anime legenda reliquerit, nos videlicet, quorum temporibus mundus, olim sacris florens studiis, penitus exaruit, quoniam ilia omnia velud tediosi et inertes relegere non possumus, saltem quedam de multis proposita fercula avidius ore cordis sumamus. Sepe nimiru contigit, cum, in convivio potentis alicujus, nobis epulantibus diversa fereulorum genera apponerentur, ut hoc propter illud animus fastidiosus refugeret et a neutro tandem recreari valeret. Cujus rei incommoditatem devitans, ego Lambertus filius Onulfi, canonicus sancti Audomari, libellum istum de diversorum auctorum floribus Deo Sanctoque Audomaro, pio patrono nostro,

⁴¹ Hans Daiber, 'Islamic Roots of Knowledge in Europe', in *The Islamic World and the West: Managing Religious and Cultural Identities in the Age of Globalisation*, ed. by Christoph Marcinkowski (Kuala Lumpur: LIT and Asia-Europe Institute (AEI), 2009), pp. 63-84 (p. 72).

contexui, ut tanquam de celesti prato, flore diverso coadunato, fideles apicule ad hunc confluere saporisque celestis inde dulcedinem haurirent: quem, quoniam sic ratio postulat, Floridum intitulavi, quia et variorum librorum ornatibus floret, rerumque mirandarum narratione prepollet.

(. . . At different times, in different books, the careful hand of the holy fathers has noted down with faithful pen the greatness of their works, and bequeathed [these] to be read by their descendants for the edification of their souls, namely us. In our time the world, once flowering with sacred pursuits, has entirely dried up, because, as if lazy and unskillful, we are unable to read all those things, and so, from the many, we accept certain dishes that have been offered eagerly with the mouth of the heart. Without doubt, it often happens that, when dining sumptuously at the feast of some mighty person, diverse kinds of dishes are served to us, and on account of this the squeamish soul flees and in the end is revived nor prevails by none. Avoiding the disadvantage of this thing, I, Lambert son of Onulf, canon of St Omer, for God and St Omer, our holy patron, have woven together that little book from the flowers of diverse authorities, so that, like from a celestial meadow with diverse flowers brought together, faithful little bees may flock to this for the heavenly flavour and then drink the sweetness. Thus, as reason requires, I have called [my book] ‘Floridum’, because it ‘flowers’ with the adornments of various books, and excels in the telling of wonderful things.)⁴²

This preface reveals Lambert’s key intentions for his encyclopaedia. His decision to mostly include texts written by ‘holy fathers’ – in essence those authors whom he deemed as authoritative Christians (such as ‘Augustine, Jerome and Bede, but also Neoplatonists such as

⁴² My translation. For Lambert’s preface, see Sanford, ‘The *Liber Floridus*’, p. 469; Leopold Delisle, ‘Notice sur les MSS du ‘*Liber Floridus*’ composé en 1120 par Lambert, chanoine de Saint-Omer’, *Notices et Extraits des MSS de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 38 (1903), 577-791. For another translation of Lambert’s preface, see Derolez, *The Autograph Manuscript*, p. 38.

Macrobius, Capella and Calcidius') – demonstrates the *Liber Floridus*'s preoccupation with Christian-centric ideas of the world, history and science.⁴³ Thus, if Lambert did indeed have any access to Latinate-Arabic source materials on any subject, he may have chosen to consciously omit it from his compilation, based on the Muslim association of works transmitted from the Iberian Peninsula during this period. Such materials may have been deemed incompatible with Lambert's Christian-centric world view, raising questions of legitimacy and legitimate curiosity. The preface itself opens with a mention of the 'careful hand of the holy fathers,' here alluding to those specific authorities who Lambert believed could and should legitimately answer the curiosities of his readers (if we assume an intentional double meaning to the word 'curiosa'). Both the preface and the encyclopaedia more broadly approve of a Christian and Neo-platonic understanding of the origins of things. Therefore, a conscious exclusion of Latinate-Arabic source materials and perspectives from the Islamic world may have occurred. This is particularly likely when considering Lambert's personal interest in the Crusades, which he imbeds into the *Liber Floridus*.

Finally, the exclusion of Latinate-Arabic texts could have occurred if these texts did not conform to Lambert's assembly of 'traditional' works. Lambert presented himself as 'a guardian of tradition', thus he included the writings of Christian authorities which were no longer being read, whose knowledge he deemed in danger of being lost to history and/ or forgotten from memory.⁴⁴ Lambert's choice then to specifically use a classical Aratean manuscript as his astronomical source demonstrates his probable fear of its impermanence or loss over time. It also demonstrates his high regard for the text, and his recognition of its authority. Dolan notes how the Latin translations of Aratus's *Phaenomena* were immensely popular in the medieval world, passed down from the Golden Age of Greece to Rome, and

⁴³ *Liber Floridus* 1121, p. 60.

⁴⁴ *Liber Floridus* 1121, p. 60.

circulating for more than eight centuries, displaying the Aratean texts as a model vehicle for the assimilation of astronomical information.⁴⁵ Lambert's selection of the classical Aratean manuscript marks it as a source suitable and worthy to be compiled alongside other leading texts in the *Liber Floridus*'s 'authoritative' collection. This may have appealed to Geoffrey, whose interest in 'authoritative' texts as inspirations for his *Historia* (such as the works of Bede, Isidore, Macrobius, Nennius and others – all of whom also appear in the *Liber Floridus*) is well-noted by Arthurian scholars.⁴⁶ Lambert's organisation of this through the medium of an encyclopedia could have also been of interest to Geoffrey who, through his grouping together of concepts from different sources and subjects, may also be perceived as a compiler of sorts (as depicted in Chapter 1 with his conflation of Arabic astronomy, prophecies, romance, history, and pseudohistory). If Geoffrey was indeed doing more than simply drawing on Lambert's work, potentially even modelling the *Liber Floridus*'s structure as a multi-discursive compilation of past and contemporary circulating ideas, then the *Historia* is not just a chronicle but an encyclopedia of sorts too. Could the *Liber Floridus* even be the 'very old book' which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, gave to Geoffrey as the source for the *Historia*, which contained a narrative of Arthur as well as a surplus of legendary histories?⁴⁷ This is both a highly speculative and likely improbable notion, given there is no evidence that connects Walter to Lambert or France in the early twelfth century (alongside the largely accepted critical view that there was no 'old book' at all, and Geoffrey

⁴⁵ Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ See Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey and Monmouth and Bede', in *Arthurian Literature VI*, ed. by Richard Barber (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 27-59.

⁴⁷ *HRB*, pp. 4-5.

fabricated an earlier authority in order to substantiate his work).⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the potentiality of influence between Geoffrey's *Historia* and the *Liber Floridus* remains in other parts. While it is indeed likely that Geoffrey drew on the Aratean material in the encyclopedia for constructing Arthur's bear and dragon, this episode in the *Historia* arguably incorporates narratives of empire also found within Lambert's compilation.

The Bear and Dragon Dream, Geoffrey's Imperial Precedents, and the Classical Foundations of Geoffrey's *Historia*

In the dream, the dragon, which symbolises Arthur, defeats the bear, which the king's retinue argue signifies a giant, but which Arthur alternatively believes represents Lucius Hiberius, the Emperor of Rome. Siân Echard, with regards to Arthur's dream, notes:

The beast imagery, the conflict, and the celestial display all recall the end of the *Prophetiae*, and the dream, like the *Prophetiae*, requires interpretation. The interpretation provided however, is another feature which serves to undermine any real possibility of understanding, for both those who interpret for Arthur, and Arthur himself, are correct as to its significance. Shortly after the dream, Arthur fights with and defeats the giant of Mont St. Michel. Later, after several battles, Lucius too is defeated. However, the dream continues to reverberate through the rest of the narrative. The campaign against the Romans is both the height of the Arthurian period, in which Arthur joins the ranks of Brutus and Belinus, and the beginning of

⁴⁸ See Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey and Monmouth and Bede', p. 27; Blacker, *Arthur, Origins, Identities*, p. 377; Lindy Brady, *The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 191.

the end [...] The return to the animal and celestial imagery of the *Prophetiae* points to the dream's negative implications.⁴⁹

The ambiguity of Arthur's dream is threefold: in the dream's double meaning, Arthur's dream identity, and the dream's interpreters. Firstly, Geoffrey includes two interpretations of the dream within the narrative, resulting in the bear and dragon portent being read in relation to two different subsequent episodes in Book X (the fight between Arthur and the giant from Spain, and Arthur and Lucius in the context of Arthur's Roman campaigns). Secondly, as Echard observes, Arthur might be read as both the dragon and the bear, for after defeating the giant and Lucius, he ultimately loses his kingdom to his nephew, Mordred, thus becoming both 'the victor and the vanquished in his dream.'⁵⁰ This is further supported by the association of his name with both creatures. As Melissa Ridley Elmes notes, he is the dragon through his father's epithet, 'Pendragon', while in the Welsh language 'arth' (Arthur is 'Arthurus') translates as 'bear' or 'fierce or rough person', a synonym used for a brave warrior.⁵¹ Thirdly, as Juliette Wood notes, Merlin's absence shrouds the episode in uncertainty, as Arthur's retinue 'lack Merlin's prophetic sagacity,' possessing less authority and prophetic insight than Merlin, who correctly interpreted both the meaning of the *Omen*

⁴⁹ Siân Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 62.

⁵⁰ Echard, *Arthurian Narrative*, p. 62.

⁵¹ 'arth' in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru (GPC): A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*

<<https://geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>> [accessed 23 November 2021]. Also see Melissa Ridley Elmes, 'He Dreams of Dragons: Alchemical Imagery in the Medieval Dream Visions of King Arthur', *Arthuriana*, 27 (2017), 73-94 (p. 81).

dragons and the dragon star/ comet.⁵² These layers of ambiguity create distance between the dream sequence and the *Historia*'s implied meaning, and Geoffrey constructs a purposefully obscure prophetic episode, hiding Arthur's impending doom behind a prophecy which initially seems to forecast his future victories. While Echard claims that the dream has 'negative implications', due to its use of animal and celestial imagery, Wood remarks how, unlike the two earlier prophetic instances of the *Omen* and the dragon star/ comet, the 'implication of the dragon dream is never fully explained.'⁵³ I offer a supplementary understanding here, arguing that the narrative significance of the bear and dragon dream is directly tied to its use of celestial imagery, which possessed particular significance in a crusading context.

Geoffrey's preoccupation with *imperium* and classical models of conquest has been widely observed. The *Historia* itself opens with the narrative of Aeneas fleeing after the Trojan war, followed by the rise of Brutus, his victory over the Greeks, and his eventual discovery of the island, 'Albion', which he renames 'Britannia', after himself.⁵⁴ The Trojans also bring with them their language, showing a transfer of both knowledge and power – an explicit imagining of the traditional model of *translatio imperii et studii*. Geoffrey's incorporation of *translatio*, through his introduction of Britain's classical origins, is used to explain the relationship between the Britons and the Trojans, authenticating Arthur's realm and authorising his insular rule by declaring Britain's ancient Trojan roots. Ad Putter and Elizabeth Archibald observe how the Arthurian legend, through its 'exploration of heroic and chivalric themes and ideals,' is like classical stories through its central narrative of a powerful

⁵² Juliette Wood, *Fantastic Creatures in Mythology and Folklore: From Medieval Times to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 139.

⁵³ Wood, *Fantastic Creatures*, p. 139.

⁵⁴ *HRB*, pp. 6-28.

and victorious warrior and his band of fighting men, who is eventually brought low by the betrayal of those closest to him.⁵⁵ For example, Putter and Archibald compare this legendary leader to ‘Agamemnon and Priam at the siege of Troy,’ also stating how Arthur’s failure to remove Mordred, ‘the son fated to destroy him’, resembles widely known classical works, like the Oedipus legend and the story of Perseus.⁵⁶ The resemblance between Geoffrey’s Arthur and these Greek heroes of the past recalls the memory of Britain’s foundation by Brutus, grounding Geoffrey’s *Historia*, and its renowned medieval king, in Brutus’s classical origin story – one which is not dissimilar to Arthur’s, with both leaders associated with illicit conception, a prophecy before birth, the legendary rule of Britain, and the foundation, or conquest, of Rome.

Geoffrey, however, is not alone in constructing a history from these classical roots. The Trojan diaspora, which stems from the account of Aeneas, was used by many ‘historians of post-Roman kingdoms [to] situate their origins’, including the Normans.⁵⁷ This presents Rome itself as a shared legacy across multiple peoples, a classical foundation which repeatedly functions as a marker of inherited legitimacy and geographical power for all its descendants. The motif of conquering Rome appears several times throughout the *Historia*: a British king, Belinus, conquered Rome; the Roman Emperor, Claudius Caesar, and Gaius Julius Caesar, both attempted to conquer Britain, with Claudius succeeding; and, near the end of the *Historia*, Arthur attempts to conquer Rome from Lucius, resulting in the eventual

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-18 (p. 8).

⁵⁶ Archibald and Putter, ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 40. Also see Francis Ingledew, ‘The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*’, *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 665-704 (pp. 682-86); Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 39.

collapse of his own empire. Throughout the *Historia* then, ‘over and over, Britain is presented as a platform from which legitimate or less legitimate Roman rulers gained or regained the rule of Rome.’⁵⁸ Thus, despite the ‘evil sway of Rome [which has done] so much harm that no one can enjoy lasting power there without losing their freedom,’ Rome’s prevalence and its enduring appeal as a place for strong rulers to assert their claim remains.⁵⁹ Despite this, I suggest Geoffrey’s Roman-Arthurian episode signifies an interest beyond British ‘romanitas’. Geoffrey resituates Rome as a Jerusalem for Arthur, reframing it from a place which the British king may claim due to his Trojan origins, to an Eastern landscape which he must journey to as a pilgrim, and conquer as a Christian crusader, guided by the astral phenomena and crusading omens of the bear and dragon.

King and Emperor: Arthur’s call to Rome in the *Historia*

The bear and dragon dream occurs in the aftermath of a dispute between Arthur and Lucius. In Book IX, Lucius demands that Arthur pays Britain’s tribute to Rome, as it had been paid to Julius Caesar before him. Arthur, however, refuses, leading to Lucius’s order that the British

⁵⁸ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 18.

⁵⁹ *HRB*, p. 116-7: ‘Super omnia uero mala potestas Romanorum in tantum nocuit ita ut nemo stabilem dignitatem infra illam habere queat quin iugo seruitutis oneratus libertatem amittat.’ (Above all, the evil sway of Rome has done it so much harm that no one can enjoy lasting power there without losing their freedom, oppressed beneath the yoke of slavery.). In the *Historia*, Aldroenus, ruler of Brittany and the fourth successor of Conan (to whom Maxiamianus had presented the crown), states this to Guithelinus, archbishop of London. Guithelinus seeks Aldroenus’s aid against a barbarian invasion in Britain. Aldroenus replies that he has no interest in acquiring Britain as it is in servitude to Rome: ‘under its evil sway’. Instead, Aldroenus sends his brother Constantinus, who after defeating the barbarians, becomes king of Britain and father to Constans, Aurelius, and Uther (later Uther Pendragon). See *HRB*, pp. 114-8.

king must appear in Rome to accept his sentence for disregarding the command of the senate, otherwise he will enter Britain and wage war to take the tribute from him. This threat provokes Arthur to recount the history of two British kings (Beli and Constantine) in whose footsteps he then chooses to follow, with the support of his men:

Nam si quia Iulius Caesar ceterique Romani reges Britanniam olim subiugauerunt uestigal nunc debere sibi ex illa reddi decernit, similiter ego censeo quod Roma michi tributum dare debet, quia antecessores mei eam antiquitus optinuerunt. Beli etenim, serenissimus ille rex Britonum, auxilio fratris sui usus, Brennii uidelicet ducis Allobrogum, suspensis in medio foro uiginti nobilioribus Romanis urbem ceperunt captamque multis temporibus possederunt. Constantinus etiam Helenae filius nec non Maximianus, uterque michi cognatione propinquus, alter post alterum diademate Britanniae insignitus, thronum Romani imperii adeptus est. Censetisne ergo uestigal ex Romanis petendum?

(If Lucius judges that he ought to receive tribute from Britain because Julius Caesar and other Roman emperors once conquered us, I likewise judge that Rome owes tribute to me, because my predecessors once captured her. That most serene British king Beli, aided by his brother Brennius, duke of the Allobroges, once hung twenty of the noblest Romans in the middle of the forum, captured the city and occupied it for a considerable time. Helena's son Constantine and Maximianus, close relatives of mine who were crowned king of Britain one after the other, have both sat upon the throne as emperor of Rome. Should we then demand tribute from the Romans?)⁶⁰

Arthur's decision to become the next British emperor functions not only as a counterargument against Lucius's demands for tribute, but as a reminder of Britain's origins.

⁶⁰ *HRB*, pp. 216-9.

By associating himself with two past British-Roman rulers, he divides the *Historia* into ‘three ages’ through three key moments of war and unification in Geoffrey’s narrative, and this penultimate battle during his reign – in the ‘Age of Arthur’, acts as a means and a hope of rebuilding and reinstating the dual power and overlordship that his ancestors once held.⁶¹ This promise of restoration and renewal is reminiscent of Brutus’s founding of Britain, but it also reads as its reverse, with Arthur venturing in the opposite direction of the Trojan leader, sailing away from Britain to claim Rome and a new title, his march on Rome marking the ultimate realisation of the westwards relocation of power, which began with Aeneas and Brutus. The shift in power here occurs both between the East and West, and between different rulers and their imperial spaces, evoking a sense of *translatio imperii*, ‘a transfer of power or dominion (from empire to empire, dynasty to dynasty).’⁶² We also see this concept of power transfer swiftly apply to Arthur himself: in one episode he has expanded his empire into Rome; in the very next, he and his empire have fallen. Robert W. Hanning succinctly describes this juxtaposition of the rise and fall of Arthur:

Under Arthur, the Britons achieve their greatest imperial success and then immediately experience their greatest domestic crisis, one from which they will never completely recover. As Geoffrey brings British history to its great climax, he emphasises the contrast between the political heights which a united Britain is capable of scaling under a powerful monarch, and

⁶¹ Donald L. Hoffman, ‘The Third British Emperor’, *Interpretations*, 15 (1984), 1-10 (p. 2). Also see Brynley F. Roberts, ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth and Welsh Historical Tradition’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 20 (1976), 29-40.

⁶² Sif Rikhardsdottir, ‘Chronology, Anachronism and *Translatio Imperii*’, in *Handbook of Arthurian Romance. King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature*, ed. by Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 135-50 (p. 141). Also see Zrinka Stahuljak, ‘An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism’, *The Translator*, 10 (2004), 33-57 (pp. 37-8).

the sudden depths into which monarch and nation alike are suddenly thrown. One moment, it seems, Arthur is alive and Britain rules the world; the next, the king is dead and the nation divided.⁶³

This shows a clear link between greatness and devastation, and attainment and loss, particularly in terms of empire-building. Arthur's fall also warns of the dangers of hubris, a trait not quite identical to pride, but rather 'having energy or power and misusing it self-indulgently.'⁶⁴ Perhaps then Geoffrey is suggesting that Arthur's interpretation of his bear and dragon dream (as signifying his fight with Rome as opposed to the giant) was a moment of hubris, of self-indulgence? If so, Geoffrey reveals how imperial desire, and the emotions and actions that it inspires in men, are all closely tied to astral signs. The bear and dragon dream thus symbolises the imperial cycle of success and defeat, with Arthur, in his quest to claim another crown, like those who came before him, expectantly losing both.

For Echard, the celestial imagery within this political prophecy indicates that the dream possesses 'negative implications' – that for Arthur, 'the seeds of destruction are present even at the moment of victory.'⁶⁵ Even as Arthur gains victory against the giant and overpowers Lucius in battle, he ultimately loses Britain and Guinevere to Mordred: the 'seeds of his destruction' are both his nephew and his imperial ambition. If we put aside the inevitable end, however, and simply consider the motivation for Arthur's journey, it is the refusal to accept Lucius's terms of Britain's payment to Rome, as well as the lure of increasing his empire by claiming Rome itself, which eventually drives Arthur away from

⁶³ Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain*, p. 148.

⁶⁴ Julie E. Cooper, *Secular Powers: Humility in Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 168.

⁶⁵ Echard, *Arthurian Narrative*, p. 62.

Britain. Arthur's ambition is endorsed by the Tiburtine prophecy regarding the British emperors of Rome, voiced by Hoelus, King of the Britons:

Quia ergo Romani nobis nostra demere affectat, sua illis procul dubio auferemus si licentia nobis congregandi praestabitur. En congressus cunctis Britonibus desiderandus, en uaticinia Sibillae, quae ueris uersibus testantur ex Britannico genere tercio nasciturum qui Romanum optinebit imperium. De duobus autem adimpleta sunt ipsius oracular, cum manifestum sit praeclaros ut dixisti principes Beli atque Constantinum imperii Romani gessisse insignia. Nunc uero te tercium habemus cui tantum culmen honoris promittitur. Festina ergo recipere quod Deus non differ largiri, festina subiugare, quod ultro uult subiugari, festina nos omnes exaltare; qui ut exalteris, nec uulnera recipere nec uitam amittere diffugiam. Vt autem hoc perficias, decem milibus armatorum praesentiam tuam comitabor.

(Since the Romans are attempting to deprive us of our possessions, we will surely deprive them of theirs, if we get the chance to fight them. That is a battle every Briton ought to long for, nor should we forget the prophecies of the Sibyl, whose truthful verses proclaim that for a third time one born of British blood will rule the Roman state. Her prophecies have come true for two men already, since it is clear, as you said, that the noble princes Beli and Constantine have worn the crown of Rome. You now stand before us as the third to whom that high title has been vouchsafed. Make haste, then, to accept what God freely offers, conquer what begs for conquest, and do honour to us all; for the sake of your honour, I am ready both to endure wounds and to sacrifice my life. So that you can attain your goal, I shall accompany your person with ten thousand armed men.)⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *HRB*, pp. 218-9.

Here, Arthur is encouraged to become the third British Roman emperor through Hoelus's use of the Sibylline prophecy, which prophesised that another British king would inherit Rome in the future. Sibylline prophecies originated from the Sibyls – 'divinely inspired seeresses', whose oracles, prophecies, and predictions were greatly influential throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, circulating in both the East and the West.⁶⁷ Geoffrey connects these to Merlin's prophecies (which are considered the most authoritative prophecies within the *Historia*), when determining the fate of Cadualadrus, the final king of the Britons:

Tunc Alanus, sumptis diuersis libris, et de prophetiis aquilae quae Seftoniae prophetauit et de carminibus Sibillae ac Merlini, coepit scrutari omnia ut uideret an reuelatio Cadualadri inscriptis oraculis concordaret.

(Alanus gathered various books of prophecies, uttered by the eagle which prophesised at Shaftesbury, by the Sibyl and by Merlin, and began to consult them all to see if what had been revealed to Cadualadrus was consistent with the written prophecies.)⁶⁸

This pairing of Sibylline and Merlinian prophecy (which results in their grouping together in several medieval manuscripts), establishes a long-lasting link between both in the medieval

⁶⁷ Milton S. Terry, *The Sibylline Oracles* (Germany: Jazzybee Verlag, 2012), pp. 1-2. For more on the Sibyls, see H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by B. C. McGing (Oxon: Routledge, 2015); Jessica L. Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery in the Renaissance: Shakespeare's Sibyls* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Jorge Guillermo, *Sibyls: Prophecy and Power in the Ancient World* (London: Overlook Duckworth, 2013); Anke Holdenried, *The Sibyl and Her Scribes: Manuscripts and Interpretation of the Latin Sibylla Tiburtina C. 1050-1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁶⁸ *HRB*, pp. 280-1.

cultural imagination.⁶⁹ Just as Merlin's prophecies inform, guide, and influence rulers in Geoffrey's *Historia*, so too do the Sibylline prophecies encourage both Arthur and Cadualadrus to respectively journey to Rome, demonstrating both as possessing power over kings.

In the case of Arthur, Hoelus's Sibylline prophecy describes the coming of an emperor, a narrative which exists in an apocalyptic prophecy attributed to the Tiburtine Sibyl, known as the Last World Emperor. This originated from two texts: the fourth-century *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the late seventh-century Syriac composition, the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius*, produced in response to the Muslim invasions of Byzantine Christianity and translated into Latin, via Greek, c. 700.⁷⁰ It describes a figure called the Last Roman Emperor, who

was said to be coming at a moment of great distress, to liberate Christians from the yoke of Arabs, pacify the world, and establish the *pax Christiana* that would endure until the emperor's abdication at the end of times.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, pp. 74-5; Michael W. Twomey, 'The *Revelationes* of Pseudo-Methodius and Scriptural Study at Salisbury in the Eleventh Century', in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by Charles D. Wright and others (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2007), pp. 370-86 (p. 370). Also see Cinzia Grifoni and Clemens Gantner, 'The Third Latin Recension of the *Revelationes* of Pseudo-Methodius—Introduction and Edition', in *Cultures of Eschatology*, ed. by Veronika Wieser, Vincent Eltschinger, and Johann Heiss, 2 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), I, pp. 194-232.

⁷¹ András Kraft, 'The Last Roman Emperor 'Topos' in the Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition', *Byzantion*, 82 (2012), 213-257 (p. 213). For more on the *Pseudo-Methodius*, see *Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, ed. and trans. by Benjamin Garstad (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012); James T. Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Rooted in Christian liberation, this apocalyptic narrative was ‘a work of lurid and sensationalist anti-Islamic propaganda, attempting to terrify Christians into action’ against the Muslim East.⁷² Anne A. Latowsky notes how the Last World Emperor is concerned with battling ‘enemies of the faith and barbarians’, introduced to attack the ‘Ishmaelites, Arabs, and then Turks’ from the Islamic world.⁷³ She notes how

Prior to his battle, the prophecy predicted, the emperor would awaken from a deep sleep in a state of great anger, and then he would conquer the enemies of the faithful before making his final journey as emperor to Jerusalem to depose his imperial regalia on the Mount of Olives.⁷⁴

The Last World Emperor’s association with wars against Eastern, non-Christian forces, cultural conquest, and final journeys all relate to Arthur. However, Geoffrey, I argue, reimagines the Tiburtine prophecy, conflating the apocalyptic Last World Emperor with the contemporary image of a crusader. Sibylline resonances in the text fashion Arthur into a Christian emperor who, after awakening from a deep sleep (bear and dragon dream), battles with the Muslim world and his enemies (giant of St. Michael’s Mount and Lucius’s Eastern forces) to conquer Jerusalem (Rome). Geoffrey’s merging of a past Christian fighter (crusader) with a future Christian saviour (Last World Emperor) creates an early twelfth-century model of a new type of heroic ruler – a proto-crusading king invested in the

2014); Jay Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The Crusades, Apocalyptic Prophecy, and the End of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁷² Twomey, ‘The *Revelationes* of Pseudo-Methodius’, p. 370.

⁷³ Anne A. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800–1229* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 71.

⁷⁴ Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, p. 71.

contemporary preoccupation of a single, powerful, religio-political space. The *Historia*'s construction of a proto-crusading Arthur, and Geoffrey's introduction of a crusading context prior to Arthur's two battles, becomes more apparent when interpreting the astronomical allusion of the bear and dragon as a celestial phenomenon, used by Geoffrey to presage Arthur's double crusading journey.

Beth Spacey, in her comprehensive study on the miraculous in crusading narratives, investigates the use and interpretation of signs. She refers to the comments of the twelfth-century polymath, John of Salisbury, who notes how, in the Bible, natural phenomena and 'certain astounding things can be signs' ('there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars'), and how these were often 'indicative of events temporally past, present and future, and spatially near and far' (not unlike Halley's comet).⁷⁵ However, Spacey argues that signs were not the only means of knowing or accessing such hidden knowledge. Other methods included 'astronomy, astrology, horoscopy, and prophecy' which, although considered theologically problematic by some Christian writers in the early twelfth-century due to their non-Christian associations/ origins, were becoming more well-known due to the increasing production of Arabic and Greek materials into Latin.⁷⁶ These two forms of gaining knowledge (licit and illicit) are separately understood; however, Geoffrey appears to combine two in the bear and dragon dream, connecting the licit Biblical notion of 'signs in the stars' with the illicit/ uncertain methods of astronomy, astrology, and prophecy. The bear and dragon constellations then simultaneously operate as a sign in the sky and an astronomical, prophetic allusion in Geoffrey. However, their larger function in the *Historia*, I argue, is as a crusading paradigm, although notably Arthur's crusade is an ultimately unsuccessful endeavour. Spacey crucially notes how these licit and illicit 'ways of knowing surface at

⁷⁵ Spacey, *The Miraculous*, p. 111.

⁷⁶ Spacey, *The Miraculous*, p. 112.

intervals in crusade narrative', commenting how 'some of the most spectacular signs of crusade narrative are celestial in nature.'⁷⁷ If we observe the bear and dragon through this reading (as a spectacular, celestial sign which occurs at an early interval in Arthur's crusade – at the very beginning of his journey to Rome, just after Hoelus's Sibylline prophecy), then Geoffrey is preparing Arthur to assume his role as a proto-crusading British king, one which must conquer a sacred space and fight against a religio-political enemy (the giant of St. Michael's Mount).

The First Crusade: Arthur, Helena, and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount

Geoffrey's Arthur as a crusading figure has been given relatively little attention in scholarship. Christopher Tyerman notes how Arthur's wearing of the cross, coupled with the religious undertones in the speech of Archbishop Dubricius ('sign of the cross', 'martyrdom', and 'following Christ's footsteps even to death'), demonstrates an overt crusading ideology.⁷⁸ J. S. P. Tatlock notes how in Book X of the *Historia*, Lucius's army consists of 'fourteen oriental and southern princes' from geographies well-recognised during the time of Geoffrey as associated with the Crusades, with Geoffrey deliberately altering 'sixth-century history [when he knew that the Roman empire was Christian] to give Arthur some of the glamour of a crusader.'⁷⁹ However, the most critical work for this thesis's discussion of Geoffrey's cultural crusading resonances is Heng's *Empire of Magic*, which contains a detailed study of Arthur as a crusader and the *Historia*'s allusions to the First Crusade. Here, I will offer a

⁷⁷ Spacey, *The Miraculous*, pp. 111-2.

⁷⁸ Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 22.

⁷⁹ J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), p. 131; p. 280.

revision to Heng's understanding of the episode of the giant of St. Michael's Mount, by including both Arthur's astral dream (which I have previously noted as a celestial sign denoting Arthur's two crusading campaigns), and the character of the abducted Helena, as key components of Geoffrey's crusader imaginary.

After hearing the retinue's interpretation of his bear and dragon, Arthur encounters his dream's first prophesised foe:

Interea nunciatur Arturo quendam mirae magnitudinis gigantem ex partibus Hispaniarum aduenisse et Helenam neptim ducis Hoeli custodibus eiusdem eripuisse et in cacumine montis qui nunc Michaelis dicitur cum illa diffugisse, milites autem patriae insecutos nichil aduersus eum proficere; nam siue mari siue terra illum inuadebant, aut naues eorum ingentibus saxis obruebat aut diuersorum generum telis interimebat, sed plures capiebat, quos deuorabat semiuiuos.

(Meanwhile news reached Arthur that a huge giant had come from Spain, abducted Helena, duke Hoelus' niece, from her guards and fled with her to the summit of the mount now known as St Michael's, where the pursuing Breton knights were unable to get him. Whether they approached by sea or land, he either sank their boats with great boulders or killed some with various weapons, capturing the majority and eating them alive.)⁸⁰

A focal point of Heng's study of Geoffrey's crusading paradigms is this episode of the giant of St. Michael's Mount. She discusses it in relation to 'cultural trauma' and 'cultural rescue', arguing how the giant of St. Michael's Mount operates in the *Historia* as 'a fantasmatic hallucination of crusader-cannibals', with Geoffrey's creation of the giant an attempt to

⁸⁰ *HRB*, pp. 224-5.

release the cultural memory and eleventh-century horror of the Christian crusader cannibals who feasted on their Muslim enemies.⁸¹ Heng notes how the giant is ‘linked to Muslim-associated geography’, with the reference to the giant’s home, ‘Hispaniarum’, connecting Arthur’s foe to two Muslim-associated territories during the First Crusade: Spain and Syria, which was often designated as ‘Hispania’.⁸² Spain is also identified in the *Historia* as the limit of Arthur’s territory: in his coronation at Caerleon in Book IX (which was notably conducted by the proto-crusading Dubricius and attended by Christian nobility), Geoffrey narrates how Arthur’s present domain ends along the border of Spain, an ostracised space which is excluded from the Arthurian empire.⁸³ As a result, ‘Hispania’ is seemingly another world altogether, a non-Christian periphery hovering at the edge of a great Christian civilisation, with Spain operating not just as an alternate realm but as a distinct red line, one which separates Christian kings like Arthur from unworthy, non-Christian elites. Spain thus functions in both the *Prophetiae* and *Historia*, as Flood observes, ‘as something of a geographical and a cultural limit—to say ‘this side of Spain’ is to say ‘within Christian Europe.’”⁸⁴

The giant, however, appears to have crossed this limit. Its hostile takeover of St. Michael’s Mount (a religious place to which it does not belong) presents an image of occupied religious territory reminiscent of Jerusalem during the Christian-Muslim conquests

⁸¹ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 35.

⁸² Heng, *Empire of Magic*, pp. 36-7.

⁸³ *HRB*, pp. 210-1: ‘Praeter hos non remansit princeps alicuius precii citra Hispaniam quin ad istud edictum ueniret.’ (In addition to them there was no prince worth his salt this side of Spain who did not answer such a call.)

⁸⁴ Victoria Flood, ‘Prophecy and Place in the Arthurian Tradition’, in *The Arthurian World*, ed. by Victoria Coldham-Fussell, Miriam Edlich-Muth, and Renée Ward (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 69-82 (p. 75).

of Crusades. Arthur's entry then into St. Michael's Mount, and his fight against the giant, operates as a microcosmic representation of the Christian fight against the Muslim opposition in the First Crusade. The resonance of this is clear, but in terms of further crusading resonances within the episode, Heng suggests that

No explicit memorialising of the Crusade, or direct retrieval of history, occurs in the giant-killing episode: The defeat of the cannibal monster in the heart of Europe issues not from wars of Christendom but from the urgent necessity of rescuing a single, helpless individual – an aristocratic maiden in peril.⁸⁵

This position, however, might be revised through further consideration of the significance of the helpless maiden in Geoffrey's giant narrative who, when read through a historical lens, may represent Helena of the True Cross.

Heng discusses Geoffrey's Helena in terms of her gender, considering her through the romance framework of an aristocratic maiden in need of chivalric rescue by Arthur.⁸⁶ Only perceived as the female victim spurring the hero to action, Helena is understood as an 'instrument in the narrational machinery of medieval romance', her name and her tomb, Heng argues, 'becoming the resounding cipher that invokes the place and moment in culture where a historical monstrosity triumphantly metamorphoses into celebratory romance.'⁸⁷ Helena's significance, I argue, might be revised in light of the association of her name with Christian history relating to Arthur's Roman campaign, with Geoffrey evoking a cultural-historical imaginary of the Crusades through her role in the episode of the giant. Historically, Helena

⁸⁵ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 43.

⁸⁶ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 44.

⁸⁷ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 44.

Augusta was the mother of Constantine the Great, ‘involved in Constantine’s policy of Christianisation and thus irrevocably connected with the Christianisation of the world.’⁸⁸ She was known as the discoverer of the Cross of Christ, ‘a saint of the universal church, and the ideal Christian empress’, eventually becoming a figure poised between historical memory and narrative legend, much like King Arthur.⁸⁹ Helena’s journey to Eastern provinces, particularly her stay in Palestine, was often understood as a pilgrimage.⁹⁰ Barbara Baert notes how, after helping to structure the perception of the Christian empire in both the East and the West, Helena’s name was directly connected to ‘holy places of the imperial territory’, her status as the model pilgrim in collective memory connecting her to traditions, relics and stories.⁹¹ Reminiscences of Helena frame Arthur’s proto-crusading journey. Three sentences before Hoelus’s Sibylline prophecy, which mentioned Constantine as having ‘worn the crown of Rome’ (‘imperii Romani gessisse insignia’), Helena is mentioned by Arthur himself:

Nam si quia Iulius Caesar ceterique Romani reges Britanniam olim subiugauerunt uestigial
nunc debere sibi ex illa redid decernit, similiter ego censeo quod Roma michi tributum dare
debet, quia antecessores mei eam antiquitus optinuerunt. [...] Constantinus etiam Helenae
filius nec non Maximianus, uterque michi cognatione propinquus, alter post alterum
diademate Britanniae insignitus, thronum Romanii imperii adeptus est. Censetisne ergo
uestigial ex Romanis petendum?

⁸⁸ Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), p. 1.

⁸⁹ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, p. 65.

⁹¹ Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. by Lee Preedy (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 37.

(If Lucius judges that he ought to receive tribute from Britain because Julius Caesar and other Roman emperors once conquered us, I likewise judge that Rome owes tribute to me, because my predecessors once captured her. [...] Helena's son Constantine and Maximianus, close relatives of mine who were crowned king of Britain one after the other, have both sat upon the throne as emperor of Rome. Should we then demand tribute from the Romans?)⁹²

Here, Arthur evokes Helena by name, referring to her as the mother of Constantine, connecting her to his own imperial ambitions and planned journey to Rome. The mention of Maximianus here too (who appears earlier in Book V of the *Historia*) is also interesting. In Geoffrey's legend, Maximianus, a Roman senator with a British genealogical connection (via Constantine), acquires the throne of Britain through marriage, before waging war against Brittany and conquering much of continental Europe (like Arthur) to the gates of Rome, where he is eventually murdered.⁹³ Alternatively in Welsh tradition, he is transformed from the usurping Roman imperial, Magnus Maximus, into the Welsh ancestral hero Maccen Wledig, the most known medieval ruler, alongside Arthur.⁹⁴ (A Spanish commander turned Emperor of the Western Roman empire, he ruled over Gaul, Britain, and Spain, until he was killed after invading Rome, 'not content with his partial *imperium*'.)⁹⁵ Jankulak notes how Magnus connected Britain and Rome in medieval Welsh historical tradition, 'not only by making Britain Roman, but also by making the Roman empire British.'⁹⁶ He was also linked

⁹² *HRB*, pp. 218-9; pp. 216-9.

⁹³ See *HRB*, pp. 98-110.

⁹⁴ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 54. For more on the Roman past, of Wales see Helen Fulton, 'Romantic Wales: Imagining Wales in Medieval Insular Romance', in *Cultural Translations*, ed. by Flood and Leitch, pp. 21-44 (p. 33).

⁹⁵ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 54-5.

⁹⁶ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 54.

to the founding of Brittany and featured in *Breudwyd Macsen Wledic* (The Dream of Macsen Wledig), a Welsh prose text generally dated to the early thirteenth century, in which he is ‘the Roman emperor Maxen [who] had a vision of a maiden in Britain’.⁹⁷ This eventually led to Maxen overthrowing Beli, conquering Britain, and marrying the maiden, ‘Elen Lluyduac’ (Helen).⁹⁸ These narratives show the recurring connection between Britain and Rome, specifically the preoccupation with conquering spaces, in the Welsh traditions Geoffrey reworked in his *Historia*, an imperial imagining which, I suggest, underlies his account of Helena and the giant of St. Michael’s Mount as an explicit point of intersection with imperial fantasies of crusade.

In Geoffrey’s giant episode, Helena is the name of the abducted niece of Duke Hoelus (‘Helenam neptim ducis Hoeli’), the same Hoelus of Armorica (Brittany) who narrated the Sibylline prophecy which encouraged Arthur to journey to Rome.⁹⁹ This familial connection further emphasises Arthur’s connection to Rome, with Helena’s absence here instigating a mini-crusading expedition for Arthur as the first stage in his imperial journey. After learning of the giant, Arthur sends Beduerus to St. Michael’s Mount, where Beduerus discovers that Helena has died:

Miseret me tui, miseret, quia tam detestabile monstrum florem iuuentutis tuae in hac nocte consumet. Aderit namque sceleratissimus ille inuisi nominis gigas qui neptim ducis, quam modo hic intumulaui, et me illius altricem in hunc montem aduexit, qui inaudito mortis genere te absque cunctamine afficiet. Proh tristia fata! Serenissima alumpna, recepto infra tenerrimum pectus timore dum eam nefandus ille amplecteretur, uitam diuturniori luce

⁹⁷ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 57.

⁹⁸ Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 59.

⁹⁹ *HRB*, pp. 224-5.

dignam finiuit. Vt igitur illam, quae erat michi alter spiritus, altera uita, altera dulcedo iocunditatis, foedo coitu suo deturpare nequiuuit, detestanda uenere succensus michi inuitae – Deum et senectutem meam testor – uim et uiolentiam ingessit.

(I pity you, I pity you, because tonight the foul monster will devour you, in the flower of your youth. That wicked giant of accursed name, who brought the duke's niece and myself, her nurse, to this mount, where I have just buried her, will soon come and subject you to an unheard-of death. Oh wretched fate! My sweetest charge felt in her most tender heart such terror at his wicked embraces that she breathed her last, though she deserved a longer life. When he could not inflict his foul desires on her – she was my second soul, my second life, my second dear delight –, maddened by vile lust, he raped me, against my will, by God and my old age.)¹⁰⁰

Here, the giant is depicted as a monstrous antagonist, overpowering the two frail women. Geoffrey constructs him as a rapist, one who physically abused Helena's nurse and who intended to sexually overpower Helena herself. This attempt of sexual violence upon Helena, a representation of the Catholic Church and a piously imagined Christian *imperium*, may be read as a crusading symbol, with the violence of the giant (who represents Muslim 'Hispaniarum') targeting the body of a Christian woman, specifically the double of the mother of Constantine I, and a saint. The entire motif is Islamophobic, Geoffrey creating an immoral Muslim antagonist who captured and endeavoured to physically harm a virtuous woman.¹⁰¹ This romance episode of the cultural monster and the helpless maid appears to be a reconstruction of the First Crusade, with Geoffrey reimagining the Muslim warrior's (giant)

¹⁰⁰ *HRB*, pp. 224-5.

¹⁰¹ For work on the Islamophobic medieval uses of giants, see Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 37; Cohen, *Of Giants*, p. 103; p. 167.

intent to conquer the holy site of Jerusalem (Helena). Thus, Helena in this episode exists as a cipher for an ecclesiastical space, a globally geographic religious space, and a land belonging to Christian empire. Arthur's fight against the giant is then a ciphered crusade – the fight of a Christian crusader against his Muslim enemy, with Helena's female body being used here to signify violence against the Church, the Holy Land, and Christian *imperium*.

Helena, however, dies before the giant can 'inflict his foul desires on her', death acting as a salvation from the giant before the late arrival and intervention of the proto-crusading Arthur. After the eventual defeat of the giant, Hoelus erects a tomb on St. Michael's Mount in memory of Helena:

Victoriam igitur ut praedictum est adepti, in secundae noctis diliculo ad tentoria sua cum capite remeauerunt, ad quod ammirandum cateruatim concurrebant, ei ascribentes laudes, qui patriam a tanta ingluvie liberauerat. At Hoelus, ob casum neptis suae tristis, praecepit aedificari basilicam super corpus ipsius in monte quo iacebat, qui nomen ex tumulo puellae nactus Tumba Helenae usque in hodiernum diem uocatur.

(Having gained this victory, at the dawn of the third day they returned to their tents with the head, which the soldiers rushed in crowds to see, praising the man who had freed the land from such a pest. Hoelus, however, was saddened by the death of his niece, and ordered a church to be constructed over the place where the girl's body was buried on the mount, which to this very day is called Tumba Helenae because of her grave.)¹⁰²

This tomb is the final crusading element in the giant of St Michael's Mount episode. Hoel's construction of the church 'Tumba Helenae' evokes the actual Mausoleum of Helena in

¹⁰² *HRB*, pp. 228-9.

Rome, a structure (now in ruins) which has always been linked with Constantine and thought to have been built for his own use.¹⁰³ Geoffrey's relocation of Helena's tomb from Rome to Brittany emphasises St. Michael's Mount as a prophetic space and a site of pilgrimage, one wherein which Arthur fulfils his role as a crusading king by defeating the non-Christian occupier, before continuing on his imperial journey to claim Rome. The tomb also depicts the movement of a Christian symbol from one geographical space to another, with this spatial transfer potentially occurring in the *Historia* to further distance the Christian relic from the Roman Empire in the East, which, in Geoffrey's time, 'was viewed in the West with suspicion, contempt, and a hostility that amounted to loathing', due to the Byzantine failure to assist in the Christian reconquest of Syria and Palestine.¹⁰⁴ Helena's tomb then, as a Roman remain in a Breton context, becomes an example of *translatio reliquiarum*: 'a geographical transfer of the relics of saints.'¹⁰⁵ This translocation of her burial site across national, political, and geographical borders – from Rome (a space still unclaimed by Arthur) to Brittany (a key prophetic space presaged by an astral omen along his imperial journey) – almost becomes Arthur's first attempt at harvesting Roman power, the relic of Helena's tomb here connecting Arthur to Rome's imperial power. The conceptual movement of Helena's body, story, and bones from Rome to Brittany is closely linked to the geographical movement of *imperium* in Geoffrey from Rome to Britain (*translatio imperii*), as well as the movement of classical learning from Rome to England (via Muslim Spain) during the time of Geoffrey's writing (*translatio studii*). This triple transfer of power, knowledge, and religious artefacts

¹⁰³ Gillian Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function, and Patronage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁵ Rikhardsdottir, 'Chronology, Anachronism and *Translatio Imperii*', p. 141. Also see Stahuljak, 'An Epistemology of Tension', pp. 37-8.

from Rome to Britain in Geoffrey's narrative essentially revises the Anglo-Saxon view of Rome as 'the heart of the Christian West', 'the prime pilgrimage destination', and the 'centre of empire'.¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey replaces Rome with Britain and a British empire, creating Arthur's realm as the most important across space and time. This relationship between Rome and Britain is present up until the very end of the *Historia*, where Geoffrey's interest in the movement of relics is displayed again through the later movement of Cadwallader from Rome to Britain:

Nolebat enim Deus Britones in insulam Britanniae diutius regnare antequam tempus illud uenisset quod Merlinus Arturo prophetauerat. Praecepit etiam illi ut Romam ad Sergium papam iret, ubi peracta paenitentia inter beatos annumeraretur. Dicebat etiam populum Britonum per meritum suae fidei insulam in futuro adepturum postquam fatale tempus superueniret; nec id tamen prius futurum quam Britones, reliquiis eius potiti, illas ex Roma in Britanniam asportarent; tunc demum, reuelatis etiam ceterorum sanctorum reliquiis quae propter paganorum inuasionem absconditae fuerant, amissum regnum recuperarent.

(God did not want the Britons to rule over the island of Britain any longer, until the time came which Merlin had foretold to Arthur. The voice commanded Cadualadrus to go to pope Sergius in Rome, where, after doing penance, he would be numbered among the saints. It is said that through his blessing the British people would one day recover the island, when the prescribed time came, but that this would not happen before the British removed Cadualadrus' body from Rome and brought it to Britain; only then would they recover their lost kingdom,

¹⁰⁶ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 28.

after the discovery of the bodies of the other saints which had been hidden from the invading pagans.)¹⁰⁷

This movement of bones at the end of the *Historia* echoes the transfer of Helena's tomb from Rome to Brittany, with both bodies associated with sainthood and recovery, but also ruin and ruins. As Cadualadrus's bones become a reminder of the ruinous collapse of Britain, Helena's tomb stands as a conflated memory of the giant's ruin of St. Michael's Mount and the actual ruins of Helena's Mausoleum in Rome. Robert Rouse, in his reading of ruins in Geoffrey's *Historia* and Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium Cambriae* (Journey through Wales, c. 1191, a text which draws closely on the *Historia* in its understanding of the British past), describes Roman ruins as

a marker of a not-quite vanished yet unreachable past, of a superseded time that had been replaced by a less-civilized and fallen present [...] a temporal other, a golden age ineluctably irretrievable yet poignantly visible in the current fallen world: the ruin as a cultural *momento mori*.¹⁰⁸

This idea seems to be conveyed by Helena's relic too, which operates in the giant episode as a marker of a Christian saint 'not-quite vanished' yet now wholly unreachable in Geoffrey's *Historia* to both the city of Rome and her family in Brittany. Her tomb, in narrative terms, might be read portentously, as a potential cipher warning Arthur of the future loss of his own kingdom, perhaps even a foreshadowing of his own approaching end. Geoffrey explores this

¹⁰⁷ *HRB*, pp. 278-9.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Rouse, 'Reading Ruins: Arthurian Caerleon and the Untimely Architecture of History', *Arthuriana*, 23 (2012), 101-12 (p. 103).

collapse of Arthur's imperial fantasies by drawing on, I argue, a final classical astronomical model (Macrobius's *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis*), to recall the limits of empire.

Dreaming of Empire: Arthur's Bear and Dragon dream and the *Dream of Scipio*

Narratives of empire are present within both Geoffrey's work and the *Liber Floridus*, closely tied to parallel concepts of rise and fall, and power and conflict, again displaying the precedent of Lambert's work for the *Historia*. Akbari notes how

the *Liber Floridus* is the product of an extraordinary time, a kind of golden age for European Christians punctuated by the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 and the fall of Edessa to the Muslims in 1144, a period when it really seemed as though the end of things was near at hand.¹⁰⁹

Both the *Liber Floridus* and the *Historia* were written after the Norman conquest of 1066 and the Christian conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, wherein which Britain and Jerusalem were released from the hold of Saxons and Muslims alike. Arthur's crusade to conquer Rome from Eastern forces, portended by his crusade against the giant, depicts a similar fight, however the crusading king's victory against the 'Muslim' (giant) is followed by the ultimate defeat of losing 'Jerusalem' (Rome and Britain). All the signs of Arthur's victory are present both in the narrative leading up to the bear and dragon dream and in the episode of the giant itself: Hoel's prophecy, with mention of Helena and Constantine, encourages Arthur to pursue the title of the third emperor, the bear and dragon dream displays Arthur as triumphing over his

¹⁰⁹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, p. 77.

enemies (the giant and Lucius), and Arthur manages to defeat Lucius in battle. Despite these victories however, Arthur fails to reach Rome:

Adueniente uero aestate, dum Romam petere affectaret et montes transcendere incepisset, nunciatur ei Modredem nepotem suum, cuius tutelae permiserat Britanniam, eiusdem diademate per tirannidem et prodicionem insignitum esse reginamque Ganhumaram uiolato iure priorum nupiarum eidem nefanda uenere copulatam fuisse.

(With the coming of summer he decided to march on Rome, but just as he began to cross the Alps, he heard that his nephew Modred, to whose protection Britain had been entrusted, had treacherously usurped the crown, and that Queen Ganhumara had repudiated her former vows and united with him in sinful love.)¹¹⁰

Why did Geoffrey encourage Arthur's journey to Rome, only to ultimately deny him the city and cause his own glorified nation to fall? Is the *Historia*, like the *Dream of Scipio*, pointing to the vanities and limits of empire, showing Arthur's rescue of Helena and defeat of the giant as more commendable, more worthy of victory, than his own imperial desire to conquer Rome? Or is there a moralistic reading here, with Arthur's choice to place imperial conquest above the stability of his own nation and country ultimately leading to his own doom, Arthur's fall perhaps an example of the familiar medieval motif of royal hubris, as seen, for example, in accounts of Alexander the Great?¹¹¹ Alternatively, is Geoffrey playfully offering

¹¹⁰ *HRB*, pp. 248-9.

¹¹¹ For comparisons between Arthur and Alexander the Great, see in Elizabeth van Houts, 'The History of Writing at Le Bec', in *A Companion to the Abbey of Le Bec in the Central Middle Ages* (11th–13th Centuries), ed. by Benjamin Pohl and Laura L. Gathagan (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 125-43 (pp. 138-9); Antonio L. Furtado, 'From Alexander of Macedonia to Arthur of Britain', *Arthuriana*, 5 (1995), 70-82.

the reader prophetic signs, like the bear and dragon dream and the Sibylline prophecy, only to finally deny them, showing how not all prophecies come true, especially those that are not Merlinian? Whatever his intentions, Geoffrey creates a crusading framework through Arthur, Helena, and the giant only to ultimately frustrate it, leaving the final message of the Arthurian narrative that, undeniably, every ruler has his end, and every empire has its limits.

There are two political-astronomical models at work in this section of the *Historia*. Alongside the dream of empire entertained in the allusions to Helena, Constantine, and Sibylline prophecy the frame the bear and dragon dream, in the immediate construction of the dream itself Geoffrey engages with the critique of earthly hubris found in the *Dream of Scipio* and its commentary. The *Dream of Scipio* is a vision ‘of interplanetary travel’ experienced by Scipio Africanus, where ‘Scipio the dreamer is transported to the heavens’, experiencing both ‘wonder and shame’ as he is guided towards a new ‘understanding of his place in the Roman Empire and as a human being on earth.’¹¹² Like Arthur on his way to Rome, Scipio ‘fell into a deep slumber’ and dreamt of ‘the radiant stars.’¹¹³ His grandfather, Africanus, points to Carthage, and reveals (not unlike how Merlin revealed Uther’s fate through the dragon star, or how Arthur’s retinue prophesised that his stellar dream revealed his victory against the giant), that Scipio would conquer the city and triumph.¹¹⁴ Scipio, however, is cautioned against seeking imperial fame and glory, urged by his grandfather to ‘see what narrow confines bound your ambitions’ on earth, directed by his grandfather to instead ‘fix your attention upon the heavens and condemn what is mortal.’¹¹⁵ This political prophetic dream

¹¹² Karma Lochrie, *Nowhere in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 8-9.

¹¹³ Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, *Commentary On the Dream of Scipio*, transl. by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 70.

¹¹⁴ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 70.

¹¹⁵ Macrobius, *Commentary*, pp. 73-74.

vision, circulating throughout the Middle Ages in Macrobius's *Commentary*, describes Rome and all earthly territories as mere mortal holdings, narrow and finite in comparison to the wide, immortal skies:

The whole of the portion that you inhabit is narrow at the top and broad at the sides and is in truth a small island encircled by that sea which you call the Atlantic, the Great Sea, or Ocean. But you can see how small it is despite its name! Has your name or that of any Roman been able to pass beyond the Caucasus, which you see over here, or to cross the Ganges over yonder. And these are civilized lands in the known quarter of the globe. But who will ever hear your name in the remaining portions of the globe? [...] And how long will those who praise us now continue to do so?¹¹⁶

The Macrobian concept of the earth 'represents the earth as spherical and divided into four great continents separated by an equatorial and meridional ocean.'¹¹⁷ Here, the 'small island' is used to emphasise the triviality of seeking long-term fame, its small size a reflection of man's and earth's minor presence in comparison to the universe. By using geography to stress glory as an insignificant pursuit, Scipio's dream points to the limits of empire, human power, and earthly reputation. Earth is primarily observed as an 'office' where man must establish, govern, and protect 'associations and federations of men bound together by principles of justice.'¹¹⁸ It is only by 'look[ing] after that sphere called Earth', that man will be able to secure a lasting place in the heavens after death.¹¹⁹ Hence, Scipio is advised to turn his attention away from earthly empires and earthly vanities, and to instead direct his gaze and

¹¹⁶ Macrobius, *Commentary*, pp. 73-4.

¹¹⁷ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Macrobius, *Commentary*, pp. 71-2.

¹¹⁹ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 72.

devotion to where fame and glory can be infinitely achieved: above earth, in the celestial skies. Looking away from the earth and away from empire-building, Scipio observes:

[...] (a circle of surpassing brilliance gleaming out amidst the blazing stars), ‘which takes its name, the Milky Way, from the Greek word.’

As I looked out from this spot, everything appeared splendid and wonderful. Some stars were visible which we never see from this region, and all were of a magnitude far greater than we had imagined. Of these the smallest was the one farthest from the sky and nearest the earth, which shone forth with borrowed light. And, indeed, the starry spheres easily surpassed the earth in size. From here, the earth appeared so small that I was ashamed of our empire which is, so to speak, but a point on its surface.¹²⁰

Here, the Ciceronian dream uses astronomy to emphasise mortal life, and mortal ambitions, as minute in comparison to the interminable skies and the rewards available to man after death. The beauty and vastness of the astral images (the ‘stars’, the ‘Milky Way’, the ‘starry spheres’) all signify wonder and immortality, juxtaposing the mortal nature of earth and rendering its earthly empires insignificant – minor to the skies in both size and worth. Here, Scipio acknowledges that his empire is but a small ‘point’ on the earth’s surface in comparison to the ‘great magnitude’ of the stars, the Ciceronian dream using astronomy to demonstrate the geographical confines of empire and man’s mortal territory. This relationship between geography, astronomy, and political prophecy functions as a warning to Scipio of the limitations of imperial rule. The Macrobian model demonstrates the earth as a temporary and circumscribed space and the skies as a boundless, revelatory sphere – a didactic reminder to

¹²⁰ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 72.

Scipio of his celestial seat and that ‘those who serve the state well are returned to the heavens after death and there enjoy everlasting blessedness.’¹²¹ Thus, by crafting the political prophetic dream around astral imaginings, Macrobius directs humanity’s attention away from attaining worldly imperial desires and towards searching and securing more heavenly truths, the lustre of empire fading under the splendor and significance of the stars.

Geoffrey’s inclusion of two known stars in Arthur’s dream vision similarly connects earth (and man – Arthur) with the heavens (stars and aerial beings). While Arthur does not have a skilled prophetic interpreter here, unlike Scipio, with Merlin absent in this part of the *Historia*, the episode still conveys a relationship between astronomy and prophecy constructed upon the Macrobian model. Like Scipio, Arthur dreams he observes the stars and his potential future and, like Macrobius, Geoffrey fashions the skies and stars to carry prophetic meanings and hold future knowledge. Geoffrey’s prophetic interests here are combined with his astral interests, as Arthur attempts to uncover the meaning of a stellar image to receive political guidance before his imperial journey. There is also a similar political and geographical interest in Eastern territories, with ‘Greece’, ‘Egypt’, ‘Asia’, and Syria featuring in both Scipio’s dream and Lucius’s army (Scipio is prophesied to go as ‘legate’ to these Eastern placenames, whereas in Geoffrey these nations oppose Arthur, fighting alongside other Eastern forces under Lucius).¹²²

However, while Geoffrey does seem to draw on the Macrobian model as a direct source, he creates an imperfect realisation of the Ciceronian dream. In the *Historia*, Arthur himself does not physically ascend, nor is he told to strive for the hereafter in his dream, with the bear and dragon sequence itself constructed as an ambiguous and misinterpreted astral prophecy. Instead, Geoffrey’s dream is a pessimistic imperial vision, for while it seems to

¹²¹ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 92.

¹²² Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 70; *HRB*, pp. 222-3.

encourage conquest through the warring bear and dragon, in the end following such action only leads to loss of empire, title, kin, and self for Arthur. Where the Macrobian astral dream explicitly warns Scipio against pursuing imperial ideas, the *Historia* only reveals the dangers of chasing empires through Arthur's eventual defeat. Thus, Geoffrey effectively reverses the purpose of the Ciceronian dream, as Arthur is encouraged by his interpretation of the bear and dragon dream to pursue his imperial conquest whilst Scipio is explicitly discouraged in his dream, clearly advised instead to look beyond his imperial desires. Through this reversal however, Geoffrey more catastrophically depicts the futility of following imperial desires, with the dream preceding the destruction of the Arthurian empire and Arthur himself. By constructing the bear and dragon around the Macrobian model but reversing a key message, Geoffrey essentially proves Scipio's grandfather's advice in the Macrobian model true. He shows through Arthur's fall, which occurs in the *Historia* as a consequence of his imperial desire, that eternal earthly fame is not to be sought after, for

Indeed, among those who can possibly hear of the name of Rome, there is not one who is able to gain a reputation that will endure a single year.¹²³

The Galfridian dream then, as well as basing its political, prophetic, and astral structure upon the Macrobian model, also then utilises one of its main philosophical principles (the limits of empire and the futility of imperial desire), applying it practically in order to narrate the decline of the Arthurian kingdom. Geoffrey does this once more in relation to Scipio's dream, with the physical application of the Macrobian model's theme of betrayal.

When discussing Scipio's destiny, the Ciceronian dream narrates that the whole state will take refuge in Scipio and will look to him alone for the safety of the state, if only he

¹²³ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 75.

escapes death at the hands of his wicked kinsman.¹²⁴ This is reminiscent of Arthur's wicked kinsman: his nephew, Mordred, to whom he entrusted both his queen and the running of Britain before leaving for Rome. Arthur chooses Mordred to uphold the responsibility of ruling his kingdom with fatal consequences – the warning of a wicked kinsman's treachery in the *Dream of Scipio* soon becoming Arthur's real fate, as Mordred eventually betrays his monarch and uncle by usurping the kingdom. This parallel between Scipio's and Arthur's destiny, both framed within imperial dream visions, shows the limits and pitfalls of martial success, and reveals the façade of rulers and empires: they possess only a semblance of power – more frail than stable, difficult to raise but swift to topple. Thus, Geoffrey's pessimistic imperial vision functions as a portentous reminder that even as we witness the Arthurian empire reaching its zenith, we must simultaneously be thinking about its inevitable decline. Arthur's dream then may be observed as Geoffrey's attempt to construct a concrete, foreboding version of Scipio's cautionary tale. This use of the Macrobian model by Geoffrey enables the *Historia*'s Arthurian narrative to not simply warn of the dangers and limits of empire like the Ciceronian dream, but to show its terrible futility by portraying the calamitous fall of a great imperial dynasty. The appearance of aerial bodies in the sky, however, has another final significance in Macrobius:

Philosophers whose views are correct do not hesitate to agree that souls originate in the sky; moreover, this is the perfect wisdom of the soul, while it occupies a body, that it recognises from what source it came. [...] 'From the sky has come to us the saying, 'Know thyself.' [...] A man has but one way of knowing himself, as we have just remarked: if he will look back to his first beginning and origin and 'not search for himself elsewhere.' [...] the rulers of commonwealths and other wise men, by keeping in mind their origin, really live in the sky

¹²⁴ Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 71.

though they still cling to mortal bodies, and consequently have no difficulty, after leaving their bodies, in laying claim to the celestial seats which, one might say, they never left.¹²⁵

Considering this passage then, the relationship between Arthur and the bear and dragon could imply a type of stellification – an image of a doomed king in the stars. The sky in Macrobius operates as a place of birth and origin as much as it is understood as an afterlife dwelling for the soul and, within Geoffrey's *Historia* itself, the sky marks the beginning of Pendragon rule, when the dragon comet foretelling Uther's victory validates his claim to monarchical power. By witnessing another final dragon blaze in the sky (in the *Historia*'s bear and dragon dream), and for that sign to be shown to Arthur, Geoffrey mirrors the initial origin of the Pendragon line, creating a linked cycle of prophetic visions. The dragon/ Draco star in the bear and dragon dream then may be Geoffrey's way of signaling to the king to 'Know thyself' – to recognise his own royal sigil and to observe his future celestial seat in the sky. And yet, even if the dream dragon does represent this future seat, it can only be occupied through Arthur's death (through leaving his body behind), Geoffrey's astral dragon thus representing both the beginning and end of the Arthurian empire.

This classical interest in stellification, to aspire to be 'translated to the stars', goes back to antiquity, when belief in 'ancient Greek star worship, notions of stellar soul-substance, and Eastern astrology, linked the soul's immortality with the heavens.'¹²⁶ Alastair Fowler notes how

¹²⁵ Macrobius, *Commentary*, pp. 124-5.

¹²⁶ Alastair Fowler, *Time's Purpled Masquers: Stars and the Afterlife in Renaissance English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 62. Also see Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism: Lectures delivered at Yale University on the Silliman Foundation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922).

Virgil added his authority in one of the most influential passages in ancient literature, *Georgics* 1. 32, where he imagines that Augustus ‘may add himself as a new star or constellation...where, between Virgo and the grasping Claws [of Scorpio], a space is opening’. In the Middle Ages, stellification generally followed this Virgilian plan of aggrandizing national champions with quasi-imperial claims. It was a destiny for the great, like Arthur.¹²⁷

If Geoffrey’s bear and dragon dream is indeed an example of Arthur’s stellification, a future image of the king cast into the stars, then it is a memorial of Arthur to himself, a celestial sign through which he may recognise his own greatness and his own demise (like Scipio). In this dream episode then, Geoffrey may be drawing on both Macrobius and Virgil, placing Arthur in the company of imperial rulers (like Scipio or Augustus), although he is ultimately unsuccessful. Through the use of overlapping classical astronomical models, the *Historia* cultivates transhistorical parallels, in which Arthur’s journey to Rome and its astral contexts speak to more contemporary concerns about the balance of power between Christian and Muslim *imperium*.

Conclusion

When considering Geoffrey’s most plausible classical astronomical models for the stellar portrayal of the bear and dragon in Arthur’s dream, this thesis points to an Aratean source containing the Ursa Major/ Minor and Draco, which Geoffrey could have accessed through a Ciceronian translation of Aratus’s *Phaenomena*, a *florilegium* of a type with the *Liber Floridus*, or even (an outside possibility) through the *Liber Floridus* itself. I recognise

¹²⁷ Fowler, *Time's Purpled Masquers*, p. 66.

Arthur's astral dream as more than just a relatively self-contained prophetic episode. Rather, it is an astronomical episode, the last in the sequence set forth in Chapter 1.

Geoffrey's engagement with astronomy at this point in the text groups the bear and dragon dream with the *Omen*, the *Prophetiae*, and the dragon star/ comet, with the twelfth-century writer constructing these episodes from a pattern of political prophecy and Latinate-Arabic/ Greek astronomy. This pattern, I argue, continues in his final work, the *Vita Merlini*, which I discuss in Chapter 3. Here, Geoffrey may be seen as extending these early interests in prophecy, astronomy, and the adoption of non-English cultural content. By forming both Merlin and his sister Ganieda into medieval astronomers engaged in the observation and interpretation of the stars, Geoffrey creates a new stellar space in England, one which he models on constructs found within the Islamic world.

CHAPTER 3: GANIEDA AND THE GALFRIDIAN HOUSE OF STARS

This chapter explores Geoffrey of Monmouth's later engagements with prophecy and astronomy in the *Vita Merlini*. Discussion of this text is crucial in charting the development of Geoffrey's continued interest in astronomical and astrological knowledge, including his engagements with materials newly in circulation by the middle of the twelfth century, when the *Vita* was composed. Looking beyond the dragon motif, before returning to it in relation to Galfridian reception in Chapter 4, this chapter will expand the list of Geoffrey's literary motifs which were potentially influenced by cultural constructs, ideas, and even people from beyond medieval Britain and Latin Christendom.

The focus of this chapter is split into two parts. I firstly centre my investigation upon Geoffrey's construction of Merlin's 'House of Stars' (my own term, which I use throughout this chapter) at the end of the *Vita*: a house of learning where the prophet takes account of the movement of the stars. I notice that this is a very early European literary imagining of a medieval observatory, an institution not otherwise in existence in medieval Europe. Although Stephen Knight has termed Merlin's building 'a fantasy research centre', we do find precedents for such buildings in the Islamic world – not a fantastical construct, but one thriving and in existence in places like medieval Baghdad, Cairo, and later in Córdoba, institutions which may have influenced Geoffrey's creation of Merlin's astronomical intellectual space.¹ The second part of this chapter focuses on one of the individuals associated with Geoffrey's unique 'House of Stars' – its patron and eventual resident, Merlin's sister, Queen Ganieda. Geoffrey's representation of Ganieda as a female astronomer and poet-prophet may also have been inspired by cultural influences beyond twelfth-century

¹ Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Wisdom*, p. 41.

Britain. This chapter concludes with a small case of this for Geoffrey's Merlin too, who, beyond his well-known use of Welsh imaginings for his characterisation, may have also been inspired by similar cultural influences. Geoffrey, by foregrounding the House of Stars and its two main occupants (Ganieda and Merlin, who each respectively symbolise the romance motifs of the wise queen and the mad prophet) demonstrates how, opposite to his astronomical dragon motif in the *Historia*, the *Vita* uses romance not to veil science, but rather to bring it to the forefront.

Merlin's Observatory

As discussed in Chapter 1, Merlin's connection to the stars begins in Geoffrey's *Historia*, with his prophetic knowledge of the *Omen's* dragon star and his description of a starry apocalypse at the end of the *Prophetiae*. His connection to stellar imagery continues in Geoffrey's final work, the *Vita*, wherein he transforms into a wild man and prophesises about the fate of the kingdom. As with my analysis of the *Omen*, while I acknowledge that Welsh sources are foundational to Geoffrey's construction of Merlin, I also propose that there may be Arabic influences which conditioned Merlin's astral engagements. In this chapter, I engage with, and resituate, the second key component understood to constitute Geoffrey's Merlin (the first being Ambrosius, the child prophet of the *Historia Brittonum* who explains the dragon omen, reimagined in Geoffrey's *Historia*; the second being the wild man of the woods of the Welsh tradition, which influenced Geoffrey's presentation of the prophet in the *Vita*).²

² For discussion of the different personalities of Merlin, see Jarman, 'The Merlin legend and the Welsh tradition of prophecy'; Padel, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the development of the Merlin legend'; Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*.

The *Vita*, Geoffrey's final work, written around a decade after the *Historia*, narrates the life of Merlin years after the passing of Uther Pendragon and King Arthur. The poem describes Merlin's final participation in a bloody battle between Welsh and Scottish forces, the horrors of which lead to his descent into madness, causing him to relocate between residing at Ganieda's royal court and wildly retreating to the woods to hide away from civilisation.³ It is here in this rural setting where Ganieda eventually constructs for him a remote building from which he observes the stars through seventy windows, and where the same number of scribes are at hand to record his prophecies.⁴ This building has been recognised in critical literature as Merlin's 'observatory', a site which then became imbedded in Arthurian folklore.⁵ Towers were constructed for astronomical and astrological purposes during the Middle Ages, their small windows used to view the positions of the heavenly bodies, which were believed to possess knowledge of human fates and the future.⁶ Merlin's building is similarly constructed in the *Vita*, upon his request:

O dilecta soror, quid me retinere laboras?
Non me bruma suis poterit terrere procellis,

³ Nikolai Tolstoy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Merlin Legend', in *Arthurian Literature XXV*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), pp. 1-42 (p. 1).

⁴ *Vita*, pp. 15-6.

⁵ See Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, 'Merlin in the Grail Legend', in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. by Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 273-288 (p. 278); Moniker Otter, 'Merlin's Open Mind: Madness, Prophecy, and Poetry in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*', in *Openness in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Manuele Gagnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 127-44 (p. 136); Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin the Magician* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 52.

⁶ See Jung and von Franz, 'Merlin in the Grail Legend', p. 278.

non gelidus Boreas cum flatu sevit iniquo
balantumque greges subita cum grandine ledit,
non cum turbat aquas diffusis imbribus Auster,
quin nemorum deserta petam saltusque virentes.
Contentus modico potero perferre pruina.
Illic arboreis sub frondibus inter olentes
herbarum flores estate jacere iuvabit.
Na tamen esca michi brumali tempore desit,
in silvis compone domos adhibeque clientes
obsequiumque michi facient escasque parabunt
cum tellus gramen fructumque negaverit arbor.
Ante domos alias unam compone remotam
cui sex dena decem dabis hostia totque fenestras,
per quas ignivomum videam cum Venere Phebum
inspiciamque polo labentia sydera noctu,
que me de populo regni ventura docebunt,
totque notatores que dicam scribere docti
assint et studeant carmen mandare tabellis.
Tu quoque sepe veni, soror o dilecta, meamque
tunc poteris revelare famem potuque ciboque.

(‘Why my dear sister, do you strive so hard to hold me back? Neither winter with its storms, nor the chill north wind when it rages with savage blast and lashes the flocks of bleating sheep with sudden hail-shower, nor the south wind when it stirs the waters with falling rain will be able to deter me from seeking the forest wildernesses and the green glades. I need little: I shall be able to endure the frost, and in summer it will be bliss to lie under leafy trees among the fragrant flowers. Still, food might fail me in winter. So raise me a house, send me retainers to serve me and prepare meals in the time when the earth refuses its grain and the

tree its fruit. Before the other buildings build me a remote one to which you will give seventy doors and as many windows, through which I may see fire-breathing Phoebus with Venus, and watch by night the stars wheeling in the firmament; and they will teach me about the future of the nation.

‘Let there be as many secretaries trained to record what I say, and let them concentrate on committing my prophetic song to paper. Come here often yourself, dear sister, and you will be able to stay my hunger with food and drink.’⁷

A space which operates as both a shelter and an office for the astronomer Merlin, the building is a man-made site which grants Merlin a permanent residence amongst the dangerous wilderness he was reluctant to leave behind. The building itself is constructed on several opposites. It is both an enclosed and exposed place of learning – simultaneously indoors and outdoors, acting as a shield against the wild turn of seasons outside while still allowing Merlin to remain connected to the natural world through its seventy windows, a detail which Jennifer Lopatin and A. Joseph McMullen suggest links to Irish cosmology.⁸ Governed by man and reliant on the stars, the space grants Merlin an escape from courtly life, allowing him to stay in the wild while remaining connected to his old life at court with Ganieda and the king – a building which enables him to simultaneously live as both a wild man and a court astronomer. Merlin is linked to this type of building often in literature; there is an association between the prophet and a glass house (which represents the Otherworld in Welsh

⁷ *Vita*, pp. 80-1.

⁸ Jennifer Lopatin and A. Joseph McMullen, ‘Merlin’s Woodland House: Irish Cosmology in the *Vita Merlini*?’, *Arthurian Literature*, 38 (2023), 302-12.

literature).⁹ In the later Vulgate Cycle (a group of French Arthurian romances which contains, amongst other prose works, the story of Merlin), Merlin's house of glass is understood as a 'place of confinement', a paradoxical 'tower without walls', 'made of magic... in the forest', while in Welsh literature this house of glass is either a storing place for Merlin's treasures or a site where 'Mad Merlin' journeys to 'for the sake of his beloved, where he still is' (with some narratives claiming that he was imprisoned there by his love).¹⁰ There are some subtle parallels between these imaginings and the building in the *Vita*. In Geoffrey's *Vita*, Merlin's new structure is also remote and located in the forest, and he asks Ganieda to construct it for him after he is forced to return to court for killing the new bridegroom of his beloved wife, Guendoloena, showing a space formed after love and loss. However, the building in Geoffrey's work, rather than acting as place of loneliness and confinement for Merlin, represents Merlin's freedom to practice astronomy and the art of prophecy. It is different to these other representations then in that it is a space designed by Merlin for himself, where he is both in control and not alone, with the new building operating as a shared site of astronomical and prophetic knowledge.

In the *Vita*, Merlin's sylvan house is purposely built for observation and documentation, an observatory complex which caters for his pursuit of intellectual astronomical learning. Previously in the text, Merlin's stargazing took place both at court and outside amongst nature:

⁹ Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 125. Also see Sharon Paice MacLeod, *Celtic Cosmology and the Otherworld: Mythic Origins, Sovereignty and Liminality* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), p. 162.

¹⁰ Patrick K. Ford, 'The Death of Merlin in the Chronicle of Elis Gruffyd', in *Viator, Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. by Henrik N. Birnbaum and others, 7 vols (VII) (California: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 379-90 (pp. 383-4, n. 17). For more on the Vulgate Cycle, see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Nox erat et nitide radiabant cornua lune
cunctaque convexi splendebant lumina celi.
Purior aer erat solito, nam frigidus atrox
expulerat nubes Boreas celumque serenum
reddiderat sicco detergens nubila flatu.
Sidereum cursum vates spectabat ab alto
monte, loquens tacite sub divo talia dicens.
‘Quid sibi vult radius Martis, regemne peremptum
portendit noviter rutilans aliumque futurum?’

(It was night, and the horned moon was shining brightly; all the lights of the vault of heaven were glittering. The air had an extra clarity, for a bitterly cold north wind had blown away the clouds, absorbed the mists on its drying breath and left the sky serene again. The prophet was watching the stars in their courses from a high hill. He was out in the open, talking to himself and saying:

‘What means this ray from Mars? Does its new ruddy glow mean a king dead and another king to be?’)¹¹

However, after Merlin’s building is constructed, this new site becomes the primary setting for his astral readings:

Deinde domum peragrans ad sidera respiciebat
talìa dum caneret que tunc ventura sciebat.

¹¹ *Vita*, pp. 74-5.

(then he would wander through the house gazing at the stars, and sing in this manner of the future that he knew would be)¹²

By associating Merlin's astronomical prophecy with a singular location – his new remote building – Geoffrey establishes the *Vita*'s observatory as the future home of Merlinian prophecies and knowledge of the stars. Established by Ganieda while she was still queen, the building is also an example of courtly patronage for astronomical and astrological research, with Merlin operating as its main scholar and astronomer. It is also a symbol of erudition, one which grants Merlin the autonomy to peacefully pursue knowledge of the future and the secrets of the stars. He shares these with a large group of secretaries who work in the building alongside him, and their role of transcribing his words depicts the oral and now also written transmission of Merlinian prophecies.

Geoffrey's formation of a writing community here as part of Merlin's observatory represents the growing interest in astronomy and prophecy during the twelfth century. These secretaries may signify writers, like Geoffrey himself, who are dedicated to recording prophetic material, particularly astronomical prophecies associated with Merlin. Later added to this community are Ganieda, Taliesin (a learned prophet), and even the healed Maeldin (a soldier who had turned mad). All three seek refuge with Merlin at the end of the *Vita*: Ganieda seeks her brother out after the death of the king, Taliesin has just conversed with Merlin about the natural world and wishes to find himself again with Merlin's guidance, and Maeldin is cured by Merlin and then requested to remain in the woods beside him to serve God.¹³ Yet, each of these characters operate as more than simply lone individuals seeking Merlin's company and shelter. On the one hand, they may collectively symbolise the

¹² *Vita*, pp. 82-3.

¹³ *Vita*, pp. 130-1.

prophetic, with Ganiada eventually gaining Merlin's prophetic power, Taliesin a recognised Welsh prophet, and Maeldin's raving potentially associated with divine inspiration – a feature of Geoffrey's presentation of Merlin in the *Vita* too (drawn from the wild man tradition). Individually, however, they each also represent subjects which were growing more popular within England during the time of Geoffrey's writing. These disciplines (often grouped together or studied in relation to one another around the twelfth century), include prophecy (Merlin and Ganiada), astronomy and astrology (Merlin and Ganiada), natural philosophy (Taliesin), and religion (Merlin, Ganiada, and Maeldin). By assembling these characters and their interests/gifts together, Geoffrey, I argue, is attempting to expand the observatory complex into a quadrivium learning hub, potentially modelling this concept on both the monastic communities living in twelfth-century England and the Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom), a place of advanced learning founded in the early medieval Islamic world.

Remote spaces: The Cistercians and Merlin's Observatory

Merlin's building is constructed in the woods away from civilisation, a remoteness not dissimilar to that of Cistercian foundations. Formed in 1098, the Cistercian Order developed more fully after the 1150s.¹⁴ This religious group were strongly connected to their surroundings, building their monasteries in natural and 'lonely wooded places' which acted as 'a window onto the Divine'.¹⁵ G. R. Evans discusses how at the core of a monastic life was 'a small community, composed of the monks who lived together in a particular house, [which] consciously united itself and its members with the greater eternal community of the City of

¹⁴ Janet Burton and Julie Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), p. 7.

¹⁵ Burton and Kerr, *The Cistercians*, p. 56. Also see Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 189.

God.’¹⁶ Cistercian communities, like Merlin’s group, lived a life of seclusion together in the woods. Their buildings drew a connection between man, God, and the outside world, as places of solitude, religious observance, and unification – key aspects of Merlin’s observatory too. This sense of remoteness, forsaking civilisation, is depicted similarly through the words of Maeldin, Taliesin, and Ganiada near the end of the text, who each proclaim to Merlin

‘Non hoc, pater o venerande, recuso.

Letus enim tecum silvas habitabo deumque

tota mente colam tremulos dum rexerit artus

spiritus iste meos quem te doctore piabo.’

‘Sic et ego faciam vobiscum tercius auctus,’

Telgesinus ait, ‘despecto themate mundi.

Jam satis exegi vivendo tempore vane

et nunc tempus adest quo me michi te duce reddam.

[...]

Remanent très et Ganiada

quarta soror vatis, sumpta quoque denique vita.

Ducebat vitam regis post fata pudicam.

Que modo tot populos indicto jure regebat,

nunc cum fratre sibi silvis nil dulcius exstat.’

(‘Venerable father, this is not a thing I refuse. I will gladly stay with you in the woods and serve God with my whole mind as long as my trembling limbs are governed by that vital spirit for which I shall give thanks under your guidance.’

¹⁶ G. R. Evans, ‘The Meaning of Monastic Culture: Anselm and his Contemporaries’ in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 75-85 (p. 79).

‘I too shall stay with you and make the third,’ said Taliesin, ‘turning away from the traffic of the world. I have spent long enough in empty living; now the time has come to recover myself, and you shall lead me. [...] The three remained, and with them a fourth—Ganieda, the prophet’s sister, who had finally taken to their way of life also. She had been leading a retired life since the death of the king. She who till now had been the queen of a large nation under the appointed law, now found nothing pleasanter than living in the woods with her brother.)¹⁷

By the end of the *Vita*, Geoffrey presents the unification of these four Christian individuals, with Merlin even addressed using the religious title, ‘Venerable father’. The group’s adoption of Merlin’s way – a secluded, spiritual, scholastic life within a shared building in the woods, is parallel to the appearance of a monastic community like the Cistercian’s White Monks. Maeldin’s presence strengthens this image of Merlin’s company as a religious group, a community which has forsaken its ties to the outside world, particularly courtly life, to live within a singular natural space. The activity of transcribing in the observatory (recording Merlin’s prophecies) was also conducted by members of the religious order, where Cistercian monks and nuns respectively worked as scribes.¹⁸ One late twelfth-century Cistercian monk, Engelhard of Langheim, even narrates the story of Mechthild, a Cistercian nun whose scribed works ‘signified a connection between heaven and earth.’¹⁹ This is not unlike Ganieda at the end of the *Vita*, whose prophecies, like Merlin’s before her, use astronomical imagery and incorporate heavenly invocations (‘Creator’ and ‘Christ’).²⁰ This mixture of the scientific and

¹⁷ *Vita*, pp. 130-1.

¹⁸ Martha G. Newman, *Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks: The Sacramental Imagination of Engelhard of Langheim* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), p. 145.

¹⁹ Newman, *Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks*, p. 145.

²⁰ *Vita*, p. 123; p. 135.

the spiritual appears throughout the *Vita*, within the astronomical elements of Merlin's prophecies as well as in Taliesin's speeches on natural philosophy, a comment on the order of nature and man's spiritual and physical place within it.

The monastic interest in writing was also contemporaneous with an interest in reading, with both pursuits centred mostly on religious scripture. However, monastic communities from the beginning of the twelfth century onwards did see some shift in reading material, and more scientific and technical writings were finding their way into 'even the remotest monastic cupboard', with some cases showing how 'Greco-Arabian medicine and astronomy replaced the Graeco-Roman tradition of the past.'²¹ However, Cistercian collections were still predominantly focused on theological rather than scientific works, and 'the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St Thierry, Isaac of Stella and other important figures in the early Cistercian movement remain[ed] the building blocks of Cistercian book collections.'²² In contrast, the writings produced in Merlin's observatory (presumably also stored there), were not works or saying by theologians, but rather the words of Merlin himself – his recorded political, astronomical, and astrological prophecies. Ganiada's prophecies were likely added to these too, as the prophetic successor of her brother at the end of the text.

Merlin, Ganiada, and their 'House of Stars' are associated not just with religious observance but with astronomical and astrological study, beyond extra-textual Cistercian examples. The house is not simply a place of knowledge filled with learned Christian people, but more specifically a building which houses astronomers and astrologers who are continuously (and at times sporadically) producing new writings. This formation of an academic network of astronomical and astrological learning, and the creation of new

²¹ Dom David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England. Volume II. The End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 338-9.

²² Emilia Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe: 1090-1500* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 231.

astronomical and astrological prophetic materials within the building, mirrors the communal space established by King Arthur in Caerleon in Geoffrey's *Historia*:

Praeterea gymnasium ducentorum philosophorum habebat, qui astronomia atque ceteris artibus eruditi cursus stellarum diligenter obseruabant et prodigia eo tempore uentura regi Arturo ueris argumentis praedicebant.

(It also possessed a college of two hundred scholars, skilled in astronomy and other sciences, who attentively studied the paths of the stars and accurately predicted to the king the portentous events that were to come.)²³

This institution is a larger version of Merlin's growing community. Studying the science of the stars as well as other scientific disciplines (most likely other quadrivium subjects, such as arithmetic and geometry), Arthur's college at Caerleon is another example of royal courtly patronage for astronomical learning and practice. It is also an additional example, decades earlier than the *Vita*, of Geoffrey's integration of a site of prophetic, astronomical learning within the Arthurian world. The construction of a scholarly institution focused on the stars and other sciences (predominately associated with the advanced learning transmitted from the Iberian Peninsula to the Christian West during this time), demonstrates Geoffrey's interest in subjects beyond the realm of theology, and more specifically presents his preoccupation with observing, reading, and interpreting the stars. By creating two buildings dedicated to the science-art of astronomical prophecy across both his works, I suggest that Geoffrey may be drawing on models beyond the scholarly monastic communities of twelfth-century Christian Europe. Merlin's observatory, with its learned group, large number of scribes, and interest in

²³ *HRB*, pp. 210-1.

astronomy, is most reminiscent of the Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom), another intellectual community, to which I now turn.

Medieval Spaces of Stellar Learning: Baghdad's Bayt al-Hikmah and al-Ma'mun's and Merlin's Observatories

The Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) is most often understood as a library (hence its other name, 'The Grand Library of Baghdad'), and is considered one of the most important places of knowledge in the history of the Islamic world. 'A caliphal institution in Baghdad', it was linked to several Abbasid rulers who were believed to have either founded it or contributed to its development: Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786 – 809), Caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813 – 833), and Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754 – 775).²⁴ Bayt al-Hikmah, which was founded in the eighth century and was likely destroyed during the Siege of Baghdad (c. 1258), was located within the palace of the caliph, furnished with a luxurious interior and initially intended to be a 'reading room'.²⁵ However, it later grew into a 'more sophisticated structure', most commonly comprehended as 'an academy-library' or, as Philip K. Hitti terms it, 'a combination library, academy, and translation bureau which in many respects proved the most educational institution since the foundation of the Alexandrian Museum in the first half of the third century B.C.'²⁶ This image of the Bayt al-Hikmah as more than a library is contested by

²⁴ Thomas F. Glick, 'Bayt al-Hikma' in *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Thomas Glick, Steven J. Livesey, and Faith Wallis (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 80-1 (p. 80)

²⁵ Mohammed Didaoui, 'Translation and Textual Incongruity: The Background for Al-Jāhiz's Rhetorical Work' in *Similarity and Difference in Translation: Proceedings of the International Conference on Similarity and Translation: Bible House, New York City, May 31-June 1, 2001*, ed. by Stefano Arduini and Robert Hodgson Jr. (Rimini: Guaraldi, 2004), pp. 427-48 (p. 436).

²⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, 1996), pp. 117-8.

some historians, who have argued that it did not house ‘scholarly interchange’ and was only connected to technical workers such as ‘librarians, copyists, [and] bookbinders’.²⁷ Although it did contain spaces designated for activities such as ‘reading, binding, translating, authoring, [and] map-making’, the Bayt al-Hikmah, and other libraries which formed as a result of its impact in the Islamic world, were also used as the ‘meeting place for men of literature, science, cultures, and religions’, becoming a multi-purpose, intellectual environment.²⁸ In Baghdad it was also said to contain a library to house its books, a place dedicated for the copying of manuscripts by in-house scribes, a space for translators to work on translations, was presumed to have had a considerable-sized staff running and maintaining it, and potentially provided scholars with a place to sleep, eat, and socialise (on many levels then fundamentally similar to Merlin’s house within the *Vita*).²⁹ Furthermore, institutions that were recognised as ‘Bayt/ Bait’ were not just classified as libraries, but rather also understood as spaces where ‘science and scientific matters were debated’, and were thus places of oral as well as written knowledge.³⁰ The Baghdad site was dedicated to all of the quadrivium subjects, conserving ideas and materials in ‘Arabic, Persian, Greek, Syriac, and Indian’.³¹ During this period, Arabic emerged as the primary language of learning. In the past, it had been associated with ‘poetry’ before becoming a language of ‘revelation and religion’ with

²⁷ For an overview of the historiography here, see Glick, ‘Bayt al-Hikma’, pp. 80-1.

²⁸ Adel Abdul-Aziz Algeriani and Mawloud Mohadi, ‘The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) and its Civilizational Impact on Islamic libraries: A Historical Perspective’, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8 (2017), 179-187 (pp. 179-80).

²⁹ Moller, *The Map of Knowledge*, p. 78.

³⁰ Moneef Rafe’ Zou’bi and Mohd Hazim Shah, ‘Science Institutionalization in Early Islam: ‘Bayt al-Hikma of Baghdad as a Model of an Academy of Sciences’’, *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 44 (2017), 239-247 (p. 243).

³¹ Didaoui, ‘Translation and Textual Incongruity’, p. 436.

the Prophet Muhammad, but by the tenth century, Arabic had ‘metamorphosed in a remarkable and unprecedented way into a pliant medium for expressing scientific thought and conveying philosophical ideas’, its growing contributions to knowledge very different to that of Latin in Christian Europe during that same period.³²

Several renowned medieval scholars of Arabic works were associated with the Bayt al-Hikmah, such as the Persian mathematician and astronomer al-Khwarizmi (c. 780 – c. 850), certainly known in Britain and the Christian West by the twelfth century through Adelard’s Latin translation of his Arabic astronomical star tables. Al-Khwarizmi was appointed a member of the Bayt al-Hikmah by his patron, Caliph al-Ma’mun, to whom he dedicated two of his works.³³ There, he became a leading researcher, eventually attaining excellence in disciplines like astronomy, producing work on the astrolabe, star tables, and the Hindu decimal System, working alongside other leading scholars of Arabic work, such as al-Kindi (c. 801 – 873 AD), who was known for his treatise on optics.³⁴ Al-Khwarizmi, who became recognised as ‘one of the masters of the science of the stars’, was also very likely a member of al-Ma’mun’s astronomical project: the al-Shammasiyya observatory (also known as the Mumtahan observatory) – the first in the Islamic world, which functioned like a ‘scientific institution’.³⁵

The importance of this being the first observatory of its kind in these parts cannot be overstated, nor the fact that Al-Ma’mun ‘was the first ruler in Arabic/ Islamic culture to

³² Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History*, p. 121.

³³ Bridget Lim and Corona Brezina, *Al-Khwarizmi: Father of Algebra and Trigonometry* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2017), pp. 30-2.

³⁴ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, pp. 72-3.

³⁵ Lyons, *House of Wisdom*, p. 72; Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders*, p. 80.

devote state funds to the construction and maintenance of observatories.’³⁶ This shows how valued reading and recording the stars was within the Abbasid court, receiving royal patronage and possessing its own designated space full of notable astronomers linked to the Bayt al-Hikmah. Those linked to the observatory included: Yahya ibn Abi Mansur (d. 830), a Persian astronomer and astrologer (like his father before him) and a senior member of the court of al-Ma’mun, al-Farghani (c. 800 – 870), a Persian astronomer renowned as Alfraganus in the West, who worked on Ptolemy’s *Almagest* and produced a treatise on the astrolabe, and the Banu Musa brothers, three ninth-century Persian scholars and sons of ‘Musa ibn Sakir (a former bandit, astronomer, and boon companion to al-Ma’mun), [who each] grew up at the Abbasid court, where they received a thorough education in astral science, mathematics, and engineering.’³⁷ In 828 – 829, the observatory and its astronomers made ‘the first critical appraisal of Ptolemy and his astronomy’, conducted astronomical observations of both the sun and the moon, and recorded data on ‘twenty-four fixed stars’.³⁸ Al-Ma’mun’s interest in the observatory, however, did not end there: he ordered a second observatory to be constructed near Damascus, on Mount Qasioun, used to conduct more solar and lunar observations.³⁹ Since the founding interest of these observatories was the

³⁶ Gregg de Young, ‘Observatories in the Islamic world’, in *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. by Helaine Selin (Netherlands: Springer, 2013), pp. 792-3 (p. 792).

³⁷ Syed Nomanul Haq, ‘The Indian and Persian background’, in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (Oxon: Routledge, 1996), pp. 52-70 (p. 112); Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders*, p. 81; Truitt, *Medieval Robots*, p. 20.

³⁸ Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders*, p. 82.

³⁹ Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders*, p. 82; Bahattin Karagözoğlu, *Science and Technology from Global and Historical Perspectives* (Springer: Switzerland, 2017), p. 161.

judgement of Ptolemaic astronomy, the instruments used within the buildings would have been Greek equipment like

the meridional armillary, for determining solstice points and the obliquity of the ecliptic; the plinth, used for the same purpose; the equinoctial armillary, used to determine the equinox points; the ‘parallactic instrument’ (or ‘Ptolemy’s Rulers’) to determine elevation on the zenith when heavenly bodies, such as the moon, reached culmination; and the armillary or spherical astrolabe, for finding positions of heavenly bodies relative to a fixed or known celestial object.⁴⁰

This potential collection of astronomical instruments, and the astronomical and astrological materials produced through their use, represents the dedication of the Arabs to the stars during the medieval period. The cultivation of this interest occurred within the Abbasid’s Bayt al-Hikmah, manifested further within the two observatory complexes created by al-Ma’mun, and strengthened still by his group of notable astronomers, whose works eventually reached the West and became read and translated by scholars from Christian Europe. Although there is no direct link between Geoffrey’s own constructs and these distant buildings of stellar learning, their similar focus on astronomy and observation, and their potential housing of astronomers and people of learning, cannot be overlooked.

It is clear that both astronomical buildings within Geoffrey’s *Historia* and the *Vita*, like al-Ma’mun’s Bayt al-Hikmah and his two observatories, are engaged in the observation and recording of the stars, constructed for the purpose of documenting stellar movements and/ or translating their astrological meanings (for Geoffrey, these movements portend the fate of Britain). This is a significant point to pause on – there are no other buildings in Britain

⁴⁰ de Young, ‘Observatories in the Islamic world’, p. 792.

during this period that are solely built for this purpose. It may be argued that the Stonehenge in Salisbury was an ancient observatory used to observe the stars, however in the Middle Ages, and for Geoffrey, the site was intended as a monument used to eternally memorialise ‘the fallen British dead’.⁴¹ In the *Historia*, Aurelius summoned workmen from around the country (with the task then passed onto Merlin) ‘to build a new structure to stand forever as a memorial to such heroes’ murdered by the Saxon invaders under Hengist.⁴² It has no obvious connection to astronomical and astrological activities.

The first established observatory in Europe was the Constantinople observatory of Taqi ad-Din, founded in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), which lasted from 1577 – 1580. After this, several observatories appear across Europe, with one appearing in Britain much later in 1675: the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, commissioned by King Charles II.⁴³ This confirms Geoffrey’s college of astronomers in the *Historia* and Merlin’s observatory complex in the *Vita* as the first observatories in Britain, most likely influenced by buildings of the same type already in existence in the Islamic world (i.e. the Bayt al-Hikmah and al-Ma’mun’s two observatories). Thus, just as al-Ma’mun’s two ninth-century creations were the first observatories in the Islamic world, Geoffrey’s two twelfth-century observatories were the first of their kind within Christian Europe, but in fiction rather than reality.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Time Out of Memory’, in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, ed. by Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 37-62 (p. 51). Also see Alexis McLeod, *Astronomy in the Ancient World: Early and Modern Views on Celestial Events* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), pp. 188-9.

⁴² *HRB*, pp. 170-1: ‘Conuocatis itaque undique artificibus lignorum et lapidum, praecepit ingeniis uti nouamque structuram adinuenire quae in memoriam tantorum uirorum in aeuum constaret.’ (So Aurelius summoned carpenters and stonemasons from all districts and instructed them to employ their skills to build a new structure to stand forever as a memorial to such heroes.).

⁴³ Jonathan Betts, *Marine Chronometers at Greenwich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 6.

These institutions also all possess royal patronage: as al-Ma'mun supported the Bayt al-Hikmah and founded the two observatories, King Arthur created the college of astronomers, while Queen Ganieda built an observatory for Merlin. Each establishment also contains a dedicated group of astronomers, with the sites of learning in Baghdad featuring al-Khwarizmi and the other notable astronomers (mentioned above), the college in the *Historia* containing two-hundred scholars, skilled in astronomy and other sciences, and the *Vita*'s building housing Merlin, a prophet-astronomer, Ganieda, who later inherits Merlin's ability to relay astronomical prophecies, and Taliesin, a natural philosopher who even mentions to Merlin the Arabs and their astronomical beliefs.⁴⁴ Furthermore, all of the spaces are either connected to the patron's palace or situated amongst the wild: Bayt al-Hikmah is an extension of the caliph's palace in Baghdad, the al-Shammasiyya observatory is located in the same city, while the second observatory is on/ near a mountain, presumably in the open. Similarly, Arthur's college is in the same location as his palace (in Caerleon) and finally, Merlin's building is remotely located, built in the wild away from Ganieda's royal court, potentially like al-Ma'mun's second observatory (which was situated in Damascus rather than Baghdad). These parallel connections of royal interest in astronomy, astronomical buildings, and a company of astronomers demonstrate a plausible influence on Geoffrey's works of the astronomical activities ongoing in the medieval, Middle Eastern Islamic world.

It is certainly likely that Adelard, who famously translated al-Khwarizmi, was aware that the writer of the Arabic astronomical tables worked in the Bayt al-Hikmah. If so, it may

⁴⁴ *Vita*, pp. 94-5: 'Altera que friget pretonsas volvit harenas/ quas secum gignit vicino prima vapore/ quando suos radios inmiscet stella Diones./ Hanc perhibent Arabes gemmas generare micantes,/ dum peragrat Pisces dum respicit equora flammis.' (The other sea, which is freezing, rolls along its trimmed beaches, which it first produces from the nearby mist, when the beams of Dione's star mix with it. The Arabs believe that this star creates sparkling jewels when it passes through the sign of the Fishes and flickers down on the sea.).

be possible that Geoffrey knew of the institution through his contemporary, who was also in England in the twelfth century and associated with similar courtly circles. Thus, it may be plausible to suggest that Geoffrey may have drawn inspiration from the Bayt al-Hikmah and al-Ma'mun's observatories for both Arthur's established school of astronomers at Caerleon and Merlin's later observatory, a construct which housed his prophetic materials, group of scribes, and intellectual company. Arthur's college, which is founded in Caerleon and thus presumably lies not too far from the palace (for the astronomers there were commanded by Arthur himself to read the stars for him), is very similar to the Bayt al-Hikmah, which was built in the palace of the caliph for his own interests in scientific learning. This may suggest that Geoffrey potentially modelled his first constructed astronomical space upon this well-renowned building in the Islamic world too. The plausibility of this, aside from Geoffrey's interest in Arabic materials (discussed in Chapter 1) is that there were no other notable spaces of learning in the West during this period of Geoffrey's writing which overall contained an observatory, housed multiple scribes, partook in astronomical and astrological study, encouraged scholarly exchange, and possessed royal patronage. The academic monastic model (such as the monasteries of the White Monks of the Cistercian Order) accessible to him in the twelfth century is a different intellectual community to the one found in Baghdad, less interested in scientific materials and endeavours, and fixated more on Christian religious works. Also, twelfth-century medieval monks were 'not in the world of burgeoning schools', and by the time experts in medicine and science in the twelfth century 'left the cloister for the university, the monastic physician and astrologer was replaced by the lay professional or amateur.'⁴⁵ This shows the temporariness of astronomical and astrological study within the monastic setting, a different environment altogether from that found in Abbasid Baghdad.

⁴⁵ Evans, 'The Meaning of Monastic Culture' p. 83; Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, p. 339.

It may also be possible that Geoffrey, who most likely would not have known what the Bayt al-Hikmah physically looked like, is attempting to construct his own intellectual house in the *Vita*, potentially combining the idea/ concept of the House of Wisdom found in the Islamic world (a space of scientific learning, astronomical observation, and intellectual gathering) with the Cistercian monasteries more familiar to him in the Christian West (residences of learning found in the wild, secluded from society). By merging both constructs, Geoffrey could also be creating the first Christian Houses of Wisdom across his cultural-historical works, utilising the sense of al-Ma'mun's Bayt al-Hikmah as a renowned site of astronomical observation and patronage, and incorporating it into an Arthurian framework in the *Historia*, and within the humble and simple setting of Merlin and his company in the *Vita*. For this latter invention too, there is one more quality which resonates with the Bayt al-Hikmah:

This then, was the famed House of Wisdom. Institutionally more modest than later imaginations would have it, [al-Ma'mun's] 'library and translation circle' nonetheless provided the one thing that was most essential to the scholarly life: time to concentrate and freedom from material want and outside interference.⁴⁶

This is also one of the key aspects of Merlin's request for the observatory to be made: to escape the trappings, commotion, and rules of courtly life and to pursue his passion for observing the stars without any time constraints, meddling, or restrictions from the members of the court. Here, through this building, Merlin can live a quiet scholarly life, free to explore his astronomical, astrological, and prophetic gifts and open his observatory up to a select few

⁴⁶ S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 144.

individuals engaged in similar subject interests to him: astronomy, astrology, prophecy, and the remembrance of God. Merlin's observatory then, like the Bayt al-Hikmah and its ninth-century observatories, acts as an intellectual haven. Each building creates a space for astronomical learning (real or imaginary), realising an ideal that did not yet exist in either the Islamic world or the Christian world prior to these moments of invention: exclusive institutions which allowed its members the freedom to discover and produce new forms of knowledge without disparagement or discouragement. Geoffrey's creation of such a building may have stemmed from a common impulse to that behind the Baghdad house, Merlin's observatory then, along with Arthur's college, forming components of a Western thought experiment making use of precedents from the Islamic world.

A Queen of Stars and Prophecies

Geoffrey's potential modelling of Merlin's House of Stars upon the House of Wisdom in Abbasid Baghdad, may also explain some aspects of the representation of its patron, Merlin's sister, Ganieda. In the characterisation of Ganieda, Geoffrey potentially extends his interests beyond Arabic scientific allusions and intellectual spaces, to include people from the Islamic world (as well as from wider Christian Europe). My final exploration of the *Vita* considers historical analogues for Geoffrey's female patron, which while they present only very speculative direct source traditions, at the very least suggest common impulses between Geoffrey's work and Islamic cultural history indicative of a plausible level of cross-cultural influence. This analysis further expands the pool of cultural influences alongside which we

might read the *Vita*, offering inspirations for Ganieda additional to the Welsh legendary character figure on which she is most directly based, Gwenddydd.⁴⁷

Geoffrey's portrayal of Merlin's sister is ever-changing, with Ganieda transformed from queen to widow, then to female prophet and astronomer, all within a single text. Previous studies on Ganieda have commented upon her deception of her husband, King Rodarch (the Welsh legendary hero, Rhydderch), her complicated relationship with her brother, Merlin, her transition from queen to seer, and the political nature of her prophecies.⁴⁸ However, there has been no extensive critical focus upon the astronomical nature of Ganieda's final prophecy or her role as an astronomer. Geoffrey's engagement with, and his intertwining of political prophecy and astronomy, is, I argue, a continuation of his re-imaginings of Latinate-Arabic astronomy in his *Historia*. Notably, as detailed below, in her prophecy, Ganieda alludes to an eclipse, the treatment of which by Geoffrey's contemporaries appears to have been informed by Latin-Arabic traditions (discussed in Chapter 1). I take this as an invitation to explore this character's wider Islamic context, and this section explores similarities and differences between Ganieda and various Muslim women from centres of learning and knowledge found within different parts of the Islamic world during the early Middle Ages, places such as Córdoba, Aleppo, Baghdad, and Cairo. In undertaking this comparison, I highlight not only the contribution of medieval Muslim women in both the

⁴⁷ See Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', pp. 103-28; Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth; The Romance of Merlin*, ed. by Peter Goodrich (New York: Garland, 1990); *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. by Bromwich, Jarman, and Roberts.

⁴⁸ See Echard, *Arthurian Narrative*; Fiona Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of the Arthurian Legend* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Michelle Karnes, *Medieval Marvels and Fictions in the Latin West and Islamic World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022); Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*; Christine Chism, "'Ain't gonna study war no more": Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* and *Vita Merlini*", *The Chaucer Review*, 48 (2014), 457–479.

fields of astronomy and poetry, but also expand the list of potential analogues for Geoffrey's final portrayal of a female character in his account of the age after Arthur. A small comparison between Ganieda and Hildegard von Bingen is also made, although this is a less full comparison than the female figures from the Islamic world.

Male Scientists and a Female Prophet: Geoffrey's Possible Inspirations

After the death of King Rodarch, Ganieda returns to the House of Stars which she had initially created for her brother, which doubles as the site of her first prophecy. We might think of this building, like Merlin's prophetic gift, as something she later inherits, Geoffrey intriguingly presenting a romance heroine whose story does not conclude with marriage, and whose life does not end with her husband's death and her own departure from court, but rather begins again through newfound gifts and new company.⁴⁹ Here, Geoffrey ascribes astronomical prophecy to a romance queen, showing romance's ability to once more assimilate science into its motifs (as with the dragon motif in the *Historia*). As a result, Ganieda's identity dramatically shifts from female sovereign to the inheritor of Merlin's gifts, assuming his role as the next prophet. It is not, however, simply Merlin's prophetic abilities which Ganieda acquires, but his astronomical prophetic language too.

Ergo die quadam cum fratris staret in aula
inspiceretque domus radiantes sole fenestras,
edidit has dubias dubio de pectore voces.

⁴⁹ See Cooper, *Romance in Time*, p. 219; pp. 222-29. For more on medieval romance heroines, also see Helen Cooper, 'Women and Werewolves: William of Palerne in Three Cultures', in *Cultural Translations in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Victoria Flood and Megan G. Leitch (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2022), pp. 85-100; Jane Bliss, *Naming and Namelessness in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008) VII.

‘Cerno Ridichenam galeatis gentibus urbem
impletam sacrosque viros sacrasque tyaras
nexibus adictos, sic conciliante juventa.
[Pastor in excelsa mirabitur edita turris
et reserare sui cogetur futile dampni.]
Cerno Kaerloytcoyt vallatam milite sevo
inclusosque duos quorum divellitur alter
ut redeat cum gente fera cum principe vallis
et vincat rapto sevam rectore catervam.
Heu, quantum scelus est capiant ut sidera solem
cui sullabuntur nec vi nec marte coacta.
Inspicio binas prope Kaerwen in aere lunas
gestarique duos nimia feritate leones
inque duos homines unus miratur et alter
in totidem pugnamque parant et cominus astant.
Insurgunt alii quartumque ferocibus armis
acriter obpugnant nec prevalet ullus eorem.
Perstat enim clipeumque movet telisque repugnat
et victor ternos confestim proterit hostes
impellitque duos trans frigida regna Boote,
dans alii veniam qui postulat. Ergo per omnes
diffugiunt partes tocius sidera campi.
Armoticanus aper, quercu protectus avita,
abducit lunam gladiis post terga rotatis.
Sidera bina feris video committere pugnam
colle sub Urgenio quo convenere Deyri
Gewissique simul magno regnante Cohelo.
O quanto sudore viri tellusque cruore

manat, in externas dum dantur vulnera gentes!

Concidit in latebras collisum sydere sidus

absconditque suum renovato lumine lumen.

(So, one day when she stood in her brother's hall and gazed at the house and at its windows glittering in the sun, she uttered these dark sayings out of a dark heart:

‘I see the city of Oxford filled with helmeted men, and holy men and holy bishops bound on the decision of the Council. [The shepherd will look at the high battlements of his castle and he will be forced to unlock it without advantage and to his own hurt.] I see Lincoln walled in by a fierce army and two men shut within. One of them escapes, to return to the siege with a wild people and their chief to defeat the fierce host after capturing their commander.

‘O what a terrible thing it is for stars to capture the sun, under which they sink down without the compulsion of military force. I see two moons in the air near Winchester, and two lions acting with excessive ferocity; a man looking at two men, and another man at as many again, and standing face to face in readiness for battle. The others arise and make furious and bitter attacks on the fourth man; but none of them prevails. For he stands firm, holds out his shield while fighting back with his weapons, and suddenly emerges as the victor over his triple foes. He drives two of them across the frozen wastes of the north, while granting the other one the pardon he begs. So the stars flee throughout the field.

‘The Boar of Brittany, under the protection of an antique oak, takes away the moon, swords brandished behind their backs. I see two stars battling with wild beasts under the hill of Urien, where the men of Deira and the men of Gwent came together in the reign of the great Coel. How the men drip with sweat and the ground flows with blood, as wounds are inflicted on foreigners. A star collides with another and falls into the shadow, hiding her own light when light is renewed.’⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Vita*, pp. 132-3.

In this final part of the *Vita*, Ganieda gains a new type of agency: power through knowledge. When considering Ganieda's position as a romance heroine in the text, this scene of newfound knowledge, gifted to her in Merlin's home, is reminiscent of the later episode we find in Book 3 of Edmund Spenser's (c. 1552/1553 – 1599) *The Faerie Queene* (1590 – 96). Here, the lady knight, Britomart, meets Merlin in his cave (a later romance motif, perhaps drawing upon the concept of Merlin's secluded house found in the *Vita*), and realises her destiny in the matter of Britain, with both moments focusing on the political future of the kingdom.⁵¹ Yet, while Merlin conveys the future to Britomart in Spenser's work, in the *Vita* Ganieda voices it herself. Her vision here is unique, not just the only one within Geoffrey's poem that is not spoken by Merlin, but also the only one which focuses entirely on the recent political past of twelfth-century Britain – an interesting juxtaposition here of Ganieda looking ahead to what is to come and Geoffrey referencing what has just passed.⁵² Ganieda's words directly allude to a series of events which occurred during the turbulent period of the English Anarchy, when King Stephen's and Empress Matilda's fight over the English crown escalated into warfare, suggesting an astrological relationship between history and prophecy here, and presenting scope to read this connection as causal rather than simply symbolic. The references include: the Council of Oxford in June 1139, where Bishops Roger of Salisbury and Alexander of Lincoln (Geoffrey's patron for the *Prophetiae Merlini*) are seized, the Battle of Lincoln, where King Stephen fought off Empress Matilda's forces but was eventually captured, and the Rout of Winchester, where Stephen's wife, Matilda of Boulogne, faces the army of the Empress Matilda, resulting in the exchange of King Stephen for Robert,

⁵¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 311-21.

⁵² *Vita*, p. 153 .

Earl of Gloucester.⁵³ This is certainly interesting, with Geoffrey's incorporation of recent historical events subtly emphasising the connection between Merlinian and Merlinian-inherited prophecy as truth. Also, like in his *Prophetiae*, Geoffrey incorporates his signature bestial imagery, which 'underlines the bestial nature of internal warfare, and emphasises how far such behaviour is from the ideal which might be hoped for from humanity.'⁵⁴ However, it is the use of astronomical imagery within Ganieda's prophecy, which once also featured in Merlin's prophetic language across the *Historia*, *Prophetiae*, and the *Vita*, which is the most exciting reoccurrence here.

Geoffrey first introduced astronomical imagery in the *Historia*, which he adopted from transmitted astronomical and astrological material entering early twelfth-century England from Muslim Spain through Latinate-Arabic translators. These previous instances allowed him to combine astronomy and astrology, political prophecy, and apocalypticism, in the end creating new English cultural signifiers, like 'Pendragon'.⁵⁵ In Ganieda's prophecy, the imagery is centred around the stars, the sun, and the moon, each used to describe the events of the Anarchy. The personification of the stars through their movements (they 'capture', 'flee', 'collide', 'hide') gives the prophecy a dynamism which mirrors the civil unrest to take place in the work's extra-textual future (and the reader's past) below. Like the stars, the sun and the moon signify key persons involved in the events of 1141, a turning point in the civil war. In a thinly ciphered reading commonly accepted by previous scholars, the 'captured sun' is King Stephen at Lincoln in 1141 while the 'two moons' are the two Matildas (Queen Matilda and the Empress Matilda) during the Rout of Winchester in 1141, where the Empress Matilda is the 'taken moon', almost seized by the opposition before being

⁵³ *Vita*, p. 153.

⁵⁴ Echard, *Arthurian Narrative*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

rescued by her followers.⁵⁶ The final lines in this passage, however, have received nearly no critical attention. They read: ‘Concidit in latebras collisum sydere sidus / absconditque suum renovato lumine lumen’ (A star collides with another and falls into the shadow, / hiding her own light when light is renewed.)⁵⁷ This may, I propose, be a reference to the end of Empress Matilda’s short rule as ‘Lady of the English’, her departure from England and return to Normandy in 1147, with her absence causing her to ‘fall into the shadow’ (in the terms of the prophecy).⁵⁸ The ‘renewed light’ may then potentially hint at the eventual passing of the crown from King Stephen (after his death) to her son, Henry II, which became actualised through the Treaty of Winchester in 1153, after Geoffrey’s *Vita*.⁵⁹ Geoffrey’s language here also reads as a description of an eclipse – where one astronomical body overshadows another. As I have argued elsewhere, Geoffrey drew innovatively on contemporary astronomical material on eclipses in his *Historia*, incorporating new ideas found in the work of Walcher and Petrus, and transforming them into unique literary symbols.⁶⁰ His return to such imagery again in his final work highlights his continued interest in the astronomical, which did not abate or recede in the two decades between his work on the *Historia* and the *Prophetiae*, and his later writing of the *Vita*. By assimilating astronomy into the language of prophecy, Geoffrey shapes Ganieda into a scientist by the end of the poem, creating a female astronomer whose sudden knowledge of the future is overlayed with knowledge of the movement of the stars.

⁵⁶ *Vita*, p. 154.

⁵⁷ *Vita*, pp. 132-3.

⁵⁸ Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins*, pp. 48-9.

⁵⁹ Edmund King, ‘The Accession of Henry II’, in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 24-46 (p. 36).

⁶⁰ See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Walcher's astronomical treatise, *De Dracone*, was not only invoked in fictional re-imaginings of astronomical events as we find in Galfridian romance, but in chronicles too. John of Worcester, as mentioned in Chapter 1, integrated the astronomical terminology of Walcher into his chronicle, a clear demonstration of the steady development of scientific and literary interest in eclipses in England during the first half of the twelfth century.⁶¹ Eclipses appeared not just in the scientific writings of Walcher and Petrus, but also in Book VI of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, as well as in several other medieval monastic chronicles, including Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People), showing the astral phenomenon as a longstanding, although topical, contemporary, religious, and scientific issue.⁶² Much of the scientific astronomical knowledge in this period derived from Muslim Spain, becoming translated and transmitted from Arabic into Latin by translators like Walcher, Petrus, and Adelard, who then spread these new ideas throughout Christian Europe, reaching writers like Geoffrey. The influence of these transmitted ideas of astronomy and astrology is visible throughout the *Historia* and the *Vita* through both Merlin and Ganiada – two prophetic astronomers who each embody this new learning and express it through their prophetic speech. Was Geoffrey then creating his own literary replicas of these clerical translators and scholars of new learning through the two siblings, imitating the voices of those with scientific knowledge from the male monastic community around him in twelfth-century Britain? This is certainly plausible. Yet while the male astronomers in England, potentially known to Geoffrey contemporaneous with his writing of the *Historia* and *Vita*, could certainly have been analogues or models for his characterisation of Merlin and

⁶¹ See John, *Chronicle III*, pp. 209-11, and n. 2, which states that this 1133 entry is drawing on *De Dracone*, albeit incorrectly, as noticed by Charles Burnett.

⁶² See Ptolemy's *Almagest*, pp. 5-6; Saint Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation. A New Translation*, trans. by Reverend Lewis Gidley (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1870), p. 490.

Ganieda, Geoffrey's female character, I argue, may have also been inspired by, or at least can be illuminatingly compared to, female figures engaged with prophecy and astronomical observation or allusion.

The first such possible point of inspiration is Hildegard von Bingen (1098 – 1179). The twelfth-century Benedictine abbess is a convincing parallel, one which has not previously been considered as a possible analogue or point of comparison for Ganieda.⁶³ A 'visionary, mystic, healer, linguist, poet, artist, musician, playwright, biographer, theologian, preacher, and spiritual counsellor', Hildegard also experienced prophetic visions – in the context of a religious, female community (rather than an all-male community like Ganieda in Geoffrey) – which she describes in stellar terms:

When I was forty-two years and seven months old, a burning light of tremendous brightness coming from heaven poured into my entire mind. Like a flame that does not burn but enkindles, it enflamed my whole heart and breast, just like the sun that warms an object with its rays.⁶⁴

Like the final prophecy at the end of the *Vita*, Hildegard's passage is an example of astronomical imagery applied by a female prophetic voice. Another account of hers, which bears some resemblance to Ganieda's prophecy, shows Hildegard fearfully overtaken by something otherworldly before giving voice to an astronomical prophecy:

⁶³ She has, however, been compared to Merlin. See Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin*, pp. 181-2.

⁶⁴ *Hildegard von Bingen's Physica. The Complete English Translation of Her Classical Work on Health and Healing*, trans. by Priscilla Throop (Rochester: Healing Arts Press, 1998), p. 1.

And when I saw by these things, I was seized with extreme trembling; my strength failed me, and I fell to the ground, unable to speak. And behold! A great splendor touched me like a hand, and I recovered my strength and voice. And from that splendor again I heard a voice, saying;

“These are great mysteries. For consider the sun and the moon and the stars. I formed the sun to give light by day, and the moon and stars to give light by night [...]”.⁶⁵

This is not too dissimilar to Ganieda, who:

Ergo die quadam cum fratris staret in aula
Inspiceretque domus radiantes sole fenestras,
edidit has dubias dubio de pectore vocês.

(one day, when she stood in her brother’s hall and gazed at the house and at its windows glittering in the sun, she uttered these dark sayings out of a dark heart.)⁶⁶

There is a mutual sense of suspense at the beginning of both prophetic moments just before the revelations occur, with both women expressing seriousness and a sense of external inspiration or influence. Geoffrey’s reference to ‘a dark heart’ above bears a likeness to Hildegard’s vision of God, a Pauline allusion which shows God sitting on a throne, holding ‘to His breast what looked like black and filthy mire, as big as a human heart, surrounded

⁶⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. by Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 202.

⁶⁶ *Vita*, pp. 132-3.

with precious stones and pearls.’⁶⁷ Like Ganieda, in her writings Hildegard frequently refers to the sun, the moon, and the stars, using them as allegorical devices to discuss Christian themes like creation, the human body, the hereafter, and salvation.⁶⁸ Her prophecies and work have long been recognised for wholly embracing revelatory concepts within Christianity, and critics have previously commented upon her use of pastoral imagery to convey the purpose of humans in fulfilling the divine plan of God.⁶⁹ Geoffrey similarly creates an idyllic vision in the *Vita*: both Merlin and Ganieda choose a life in the woods over a courtly life, Geoffrey constructing a domestic, family-centred Edenic image by the end of the poem, featuring an all-male company except Ganieda.⁷⁰

However, Ganieda articulates primarily political rather than religious revelation. While her prophetic voice is more largely centred on the astronomical and the recent historical past, with Geoffrey combining a reading of the Biblical alongside a resituated engagement with the astral, it seems clear that Hildegard’s voice predominantly echoes

⁶⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, p. 309: ‘I saw a single block of stone, immeasurably broad and high and the color of iron, with a white cloud above it; and above the cloud a royal throne, round in shape, on which One was sitting, living and shining and marvellous in His glory, and so bright that I could not behold Him clearly. He held to His breast what looked like black and filthy mire, as big as a human heart, surrounded with precious stones and pearls.’ (Book III, Vision 1).

⁶⁸ *Hildegard von Bingen’s Physica*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology*, ed. by Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, trans. by Robert Carver (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 23.

⁷⁰ An interesting comparison here, or a mirror parallel, is Hildegard’s male secretary, Guibert of Gembloux (d. 1213-14), who eventually joined the nunnery at Rupertsberg (Hildegard’s all-female monastery) just before her death, leaving behind his fellow monks and becoming the only male member of Hildegard’s female religious community. See Fiona Griffiths, ‘Monks and Nuns at Rupertsberg: Guibert of Gembloux and Hildegard of Bingen’, in *Partners in Spirit: Men, Women, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500*, ed. Fiona Griffiths and Julie Hotchin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 145-169.

Biblical sources, like the Gospel of John.⁷¹ These spiritual visions led to her contemporaries often referring to her as ‘the Sibyl of the Rhine’, a status which demonstrated her high religious authority at the time.⁷² Sibyls, as discussed in Chapter 2, were female seers/prophets connected to the divine.⁷³ Ganieda too could be classified as a Sibyl, having also experienced a divinely-inspired vision of the future by the end of the *Vita*. Sibyls commonly resided in caves but, like Ganieda, Hildegard founded and resided in a building of contemplation, living amongst other religious women. In 1150 and 1165, she became patron of two nunneries, establishing a convent at Rupertsberg, which could house 50 nuns, and another later at Eibingen, which provided space for thirty, visiting both during her lifetime.⁷⁴ This earlier date is contemporaneous with Geoffrey’s *Vita*, outlining a small connection between Hildegard as a visionary patron, one who relocates to be with a learned group in 1150, and Geoffrey’s formation of Ganieda and her similar journey around the same time. In 1177, after accepting the role of secretary to Hildegard and shortly before her death, the Benedictine monk, Guibert of Gembloux, visits Rupertsburg, describing the buildings and house as ‘suitable for a religious community’ and containing several ‘administrators of the house’, emphasising its founding by a woman.⁷⁵ Similarities to the *Vita* are indeed noticeable here, with the presence of a contemporary female prophet founder, dedicated person/s responsible for writing down their prophetic word, and a space housing a religious group, forming a series of convincing parallels between Hildegard and Ganieda. Interestingly,

⁷¹ *Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology*, p. 27.

⁷² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, p. 10.

⁷³ For more on Sibylline prophecy in Geoffrey, see Chapter 2, pages 147-66 of this thesis.

⁷⁴ Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of her Age* (London: Headline, 2001), p. 221; *Hildegard von Bingen’s Physica*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 101.

however, Ganieda never did join a nunnery after becoming a widow in the *Vita*. Instead, Geoffrey places her within an all-male intellectual group, resulting in her characterisation as aligned more with the masculine than the feminine by the end of the poem. Thus, her categorisation associates more with a male, astronomical, political prophet rather than a female Sibyl, although she does share commonalities with both. Geoffrey's destabilising of absolute gendered associations then (in terms of types of knowledge and gender construction) shows how there can be ambiguities here – Ganieda being one, highlighting an interesting and correlative relationship between people, prophecy, and place.

It is unclear whether Hildegard was, like Geoffrey, influenced by Arabic astronomy for her celestial imaginings, which Geoffrey was very likely drawing upon in England. The intellectual culture of German female monastic houses during the Middle Ages, when Hildegard was writing and experiencing her visions, comprised mainly of patristic and early medieval Christian works, by writers such as Augustine and Bede, as well as texts by classical and secular writers, for example Virgil and Boethius.⁷⁶ There appears to be no record of Latinate-Arabic material, particularly of the astronomical kind, found amongst these readings or within female religious spaces in Germany more generally during the twelfth century. While there was indeed an intellectual and scientific movement which introduced Arabic ideas in tenth and eleventh-century Lotharingia, of which Walcher was also originally a part before moving to England, it was much earlier than Hildegard. Thus, we can only contemplate, given her location in Germany, whether she may have known of the circulation of Arabic astronomical works or encountered any materials herself during her

⁷⁶ Lori Kruckenberg, 'Literacy and Learning in the Lives of Women Religious of Medieval Germany', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. by Jennifer Bain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 52-84 (pp. 73-4).

lifetime.⁷⁷ What is more apparent to us, however, is how Hildegard's work concentrates greatly upon 'cosmology, theology, artworks, and music', which, although slightly different to Geoffrey, still speaks to the relationship 'between the terrestrial and the celestial', a key part of all of Geoffrey's prophetic writings.⁷⁸ A woman recognised and consulted by kings, emperors, and churchmen for her prophecies, Hildegard certainly possesses many points of parallel to Ganieda, making her an interesting point of comparison and analogue.⁷⁹ However, although her prophecies, like Ganieda's, do contain astronomical imagery, her identity as a scientist differs to Merlin's sister. A woman of medicine and natural science rather than the science of the stars, Hildegard's image and imagery is ultimately different than Ganieda's. Ganieda may instead, therefore, resemble women beyond Christian Europe, within the faces and voices of women from the medieval Islamic world.

The women I explore in this next section are, I propose, interesting points of comparison to Ganieda from beyond Christian Europe. While there is little evidence to prove that Geoffrey was influenced by any of these women in his portrayal of Ganieda, the construction of Merlin's sister as an astronomer, patron, and poetic prophet – roles which were mainly attributed to men in the Latin West – suggests a productive point of comparison with analogues from parts of the Islamic world where both men and women were engaged in these same activities in earlier centuries (between the eighth and eleventh centuries).

I begin in the Muslim West, my example situated the nearest to Geoffrey geographically, exploring Muslim Spain (Córdoba) and women engaged in astronomy,

⁷⁷ Nothaft, *De Dracone*, p. 15. For more on Lotharingia, see Welborn, 'Lotharingia as a Center'.

⁷⁸ Margot E. Fassler, *Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts in the Twelfth Century: Hildegard's Illuminated Scivias* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), p. 35; Barbara Obrist, 'Wind Diagrams and Medieval Cosmology', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 33-84 (p. 76).

⁷⁹ Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin the Magician*, p. 181.

patronage, and poetry between the tenth and eleventh centuries, at a time when al-Andalus thrived as a centre of scientific knowledge, translation, and literature. I then return to the House of Wisdom, initially explored in the first part of this chapter, narrowing my attention to three women within three different Houses of Wisdom. My analysis moves from West to East, from Córdoba to Baghdad, the earlier cultural centre of the Muslim world, and then to Cairo, where I suggest we find a historical sibling relationship closely analogous to that of Merlin and Ganieda. Through discussion of these various analogues, I highlight the rich and advanced knowledge present in the medieval Islamic world, showing how people and intellectual spaces within the Islamic world, earlier and contemporaneous with Geoffrey's writings, were engaged with astronomy and poetry. If known to him, the individuals and places explored in this section would have provided clear models for Ganieda and her House of Stars, suggesting that, as in his development of the dragon motif, Geoffrey may have continued to draw on ideas from the Islamic world to inform his Arthurian imaginings.

Women and Medieval Astronomy in the Islamic World

During the Middle Ages, Córdoba was a city in which learning flourished. Unlike medieval England, which only witnessed the arrival of Arabic learning in the twelfth century, Muslim Spain was a centre of Arabic science and poetry many centuries earlier. The city has been described in superlative terms, as a place which was:

the highest of the high, the furthest of the far, the place of the standard, the mother of towns;
the abode of the good and godly, the homeland of wisdom, its beginning and its end; the heart
of the land, the fount of science, the dome of Islam, the seat of the *imam*; the home of right
reasoning, the garden of the fruits of ideas, of the earth and the banners of the age, the
cavaliers of poetry and prose. Out of it have come pure compositions and exquisite

compilations. And the reason for this, and for the distinction of its people before and since, as compared with others, is that the horizon encompasses none but the seekers and the searchers after all the various kinds of knowledge and refinement.⁸⁰

Written in the Middle Ages by the anonymous author of the *Al-dhākhira 'l-saniyya*, this passage both exemplifies the splendour of Córdoba, the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, and categorises it as an intellectual space at its very core, a land filled with, and belonging to, scientists, poets, and writers. It is here where we find our next analogue for Ganieda, beginning with a semi-mythic historical figure. Fátima of Madrid is a figure whose existence is often questioned, with the very little research that has been conducted on her ranging between two arguments for her non-existence and attempts to unearth her role as a female astronomer and mathematician in Córdoba. It has always been a challenge to ascertain the lives, roles, and impact of many women in general during the Middle Ages, with many parts of the world, including Muslim Spain, operating as a largely patriarchal society, which resulted in a greater focus being placed upon the recording and preservation of male achievements. Nonetheless, the name Fátima of Madrid has been passed down to us in the present day, along with her reputation as a great female scientist of her time. The inclusion of her in my discussion, despite the uncertainty around her, is to highlight the possible roles carried out by medieval women within a male-controlled world, much like Ganieda in the *Vita*.

Believed to have lived in tenth-century Córdoba, Fátima is considered to be the daughter of Maslama al-Majriti (c. 950 – 1007), the ‘Euclid of Spain’, a well-known astronomer, mathematician, and scholar originally from Madrid, who translated Ptolemy,

⁸⁰ Robert Hillenbrand, “‘The Ornament of the World’: Medieval Córdoba as a Cultural Centre”, in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. by Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 112-135 (p. 112).

perfected the astrolabe, and improved the astronomical tables of the Persian polymath, al-Khwārizmī – a mathematician, geographer, and astronomer, and head of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad.⁸¹ Al-Majriti, who conducted his work in Córdoba, is also known to have created a ‘major scientific school’ of astronomy and mathematics there, which later led to the development of two further astronomical schools in Toledo and Zaragoza by his disciples in the eleventh century (c. 1035 – 1085).⁸² His scientific contributions to Córdoba and to al-Andalus during his lifetime are well attested, and his work even reached the West through the Latin translations of Hermann of Carinthia and two near-contemporaries of Geoffrey, Adelard, and Petrus.⁸³

It is understood that al-Majriti’s daughter also worked on similar materials to him. Like her father, Fátima took an interest in astronomy and mathematics, working alongside him in Córdoba, and was believed to have produced at least two astronomical works: ‘A Treatise on the Astrolabe’, a guide on how to use the device, and ‘Corrections of Fátima’, which renewed and revised existing knowledge at the time, including measurements for stars on the horizon.⁸⁴ She also corrected Ptolemy’s *Almagest* and the calculation of eclipses, displaying an interest in astral learning and phenomena.⁸⁵ Her collaborations with her father included editing al-Khwārizmī’s astronomical tables and working on Arabic tables known as

⁸¹ Juan Núñez Valdés, ‘Did Fátima de Madrid Really Exist?’, *Review of Social Sciences*, 1 (2016), 19-26 (p. 22); Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 123; Brian A. Catlos, *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018), p. 161.

⁸² Julio Samsó, ‘Is a Social History of Andalusī Exact Sciences Possible?’, *Early Science and Medicine*, 7 (2002), 296-299 (p. 297).

⁸³ Julio Samsó, ‘Maslama ibn Ahmad Al-Majrītī’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, ed. by Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 517-9 (p. 518).

⁸⁴ Valdés, ‘Did Fátima de Madrid Really Exist?’, p. 24.

⁸⁵ Valdés, ‘Did Fátima de Madrid Really Exist?’, p. 24.

zijas, which included ‘calendars, ephemerides of the planets, the Sun, the Moon, with their eclipses and information on the visibility of the Moon’.⁸⁶

Fátima’s relationship with her father and her interests in astronomical knowledge are very similar too to another woman in another part of the Islamic world: Mariam al-Ijliya (known at times as Mariam al-Astrulabi), a tenth-century female astronomer and astrolabe maker based in Aleppo.⁸⁷ Like the Spanish Fátima, knowledge of Mariam is scarce, with the only source reference to her a brief mention by Ibn al-Nadim (d. 995/8), the Baghdad courtier, bibliographer, and biographer, whose *Kitab al-Fihrist* is part of the valuable genre of ‘biographical dictionaries’ which scholars have used to identify women in the Islamic Golden Age.⁸⁸ Usefully, Jagot writes a short but insightful piece on Mariam and the *Fihrist*. Described as an ‘encyclopaedia of medieval Islamic culture’, al-Nadim’s work is composed of ten books on a variety of subjects, including ‘history and kingship’, ‘poets’, ‘philosophy and science’, ‘storytellers’, and even ‘alchemy’.⁸⁹ Mariam is mentioned in Book Seven, which is a catalogue of ‘natural philosophers, logicians, mathematicians, musicians,

⁸⁶ Gabriella Bernardi, *The Unforgotten Sisters: Female Astronomers and Scientists before Caroline Herschel* (Chichester: Springer Praxis Publishing, 2016), p. 47.

⁸⁷ Peter L. M. Kerkhof, ‘Gender Role and Contributions of Women to Astronomy and Medicine in Ancient Egypt’, in *Female Pioneers from Ancient Egypt and the Middle East*, ed. by Ahmed A. Karim, Radwa Khalil, and Ahmed Moustafa (Singapore: Springer, 2021), pp. 1-20 (p. 15); Abdel-Moniem El-Shorbagy, ‘Women in Islamic architecture: towards acknowledging their role in the development of Islamic civilization’, *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 7 (2020), 1-16 (p. 3).

⁸⁸ Shazia Jagot, ‘Mariam al-Ijli al-Astrulabi (c. tenth century CE): An extract from *Fihrist* al-Nadim (c. 998 CE)’, in *Women in the History of Science: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Hannah Wills and others (London: UCL Press, 2023), pp. 61-5 (p. 62).

⁸⁹ Jagot, ‘Mariam al-Ijli al-Astrulabi’, p. 61.

astronomers, physicians, and “makers of instruments””.⁹⁰ She is identified as the astrolabe artisan’s daughter – thus a part of a skilled family, and working in an astrolabe workshop as a pupil of al-Nastulus, a craftsman whose name is ascribed to a device from ca. 972/8 (one of the earliest surviving astrolabes).⁹¹ He in turn was under the patronage of the Hamdanid ruler Sayf al-Dawla (r. 944 – 967), the founder of the Emirate of Aleppo, who had cultivated his city into a site of ‘learning, culture, poetry, and the sciences’, with Mariam, according to al-Nadim, an astronomer in his intellectual court.⁹²

Ganieda, while having not created any astronomical instruments, is similar to both Fátima and Mariam, despite their geographical and religious differences. Ganieda, Fátima, and Mariam each represent a female astronomer, one who creates her own legacy after being inspired by the male relatives before her. Together, these two analogues offer several crucial insights for my study of Ganieda. Firstly, they show how women did work in the field of astronomy in different parts of the medieval Islamic world before the twelfth century, unlike in the Christian West. Secondly, they show how women scientists in the Muslim West and East mainly operated within a predominantly male-centric intellectual sphere, with Fátima’s father founding an astronomical school, and Mariam and her father’s employment in the Emir’s court. Finally, and quite importantly in relation to the end of Geoffrey’s *Vita*, they show how ‘the passing down of astronomical and technical knowledge within families was

⁹⁰ Jagot, ‘Mariam al-Ijli al-Astrulabi’, p. 61.

⁹¹ Jagot, ‘Mariam al-Ijli al-Astrulabi’, p. 64.

⁹² Jagot, ‘Mariam al-Ijli al-Astrulabi’, p. 64; Glaire D. Anderson, *A Bridge to the Sky: Science and Arts in the Age of 'Abbas Ibn Firnas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), p. 68. Also see Dale DeBakcsy, *A History of Women in Astronomy and Space Exploration: Exploring the Trailblazers of STEM* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2023).

not limited to fathers and sons.⁹³ Geoffrey's representation of Ganieda, and her immediate intellectual context, shares these features. As a female astronomer, a member of an all-male learning group within a private, intellectual court, and the inheritor of her brother's astronomical knowledge and power, Ganieda is not dissimilar to these two women from Islamic history.

There are, however, no substantial links between Geoffrey, Fátima, and Mariam, as both women existed two centuries earlier than his writing, and, to the best of my knowledge, no accounts of them survive from the Latin West from during this period. Nonetheless, their histories, when read in relation to Ganieda, do offer a tantalising insight into the ways in which engagements with Arabic learning and the Islamic world in the twelfth century may have, in subtle and as yet undefined ways, have influenced representations of both astronomical prophecy and the astronomer, allowing us to think beyond the masculine paradigms of insular science.

We do know, as noted above, both Geoffrey's contemporaries, Adelard and Petrus, were likely aware of Fátima's father, al-Majriti, through his contributions to medieval science, on the basis of works that both were individually translating during the first half of the twelfth century. Further to this, there is one suggestive point of intersection between Adelard, Petrus, al-Majriti (and Fátima), and Geoffrey. In the tenth century, al-Majriti translated the *Zij al-Sindhind* (Astronomical tables of *Siddhānta*) from al-Khwārizmī, whose original version (written in Arabic a century earlier) is now lost.⁹⁴ The version which exists today is the revised text by al-Majriti (and supposedly Fátima), which survives through the Latin translation produced by Adelard in the first half of the twelfth century (1126). Four manuscripts of Adelard's Latin translation survive, one of which is Oxford, Bodleian Library,

⁹³ Anderson, *A Bridge to the Sky*, p. 68.

⁹⁴ Lim and Brezina, *Al-Khwarizmi*, p. 73.

MS Auct. F. 1. 9 (discussed in Chapter 1). This manuscript, compiled in Worcester after 1126, incorporates Walcher's *De dracone* (the astronomical text which details the Arabic ecliptic concept of the head and tail of the dragon), a work which, I have argued, may have inspired Geoffrey's incorporation of astronomical imagery within the *Historia*.⁹⁵ Geoffrey's construction of 'Pendragon' stems from Petrus and Walcher's discussion of 'caput draconis', in turn highlighting his interest in eclipses, an astral phenomenon to which he also arguably alludes to in Ganieda's prophecy in the *Vita*. Adelard's translation of al-Khwārizmī's (and al-Majriti's and Fátima's) *Zij* (or *Ezich* as it is named in the manuscript), immediately follows Petrus and Walcher's text in the compilation, intriguingly also containing an introductory reference to a dragon in relation to astronomy: 'Liber iste septem planetarum atque Draconis statum continet' (This book contains the position of the seven planets and the Dragon).⁹⁶ This double mention of astronomical dragons within MS. Auct. F. 1. 9., in two separate and yet connected Latinate-Arabic texts, translated by two of Geoffrey's known contemporaries, presents a strong case for Geoffrey's potential engagement with a collection of this type.

However, questions remain. Did Geoffrey (if interacting with MS. Auct. F. 1. 9) know that Adelard's translation of al-Khwārizmī's work was actually a revised piece by al-Majriti and supposedly his daughter too? If so, was knowledge of the astronomical pair transmitted along with the manuscript, passed down orally by Adelard or other translators and scholars like him who interacted with the piece? We cannot answer either of these questions with certainty, as no record of Fátima is found in England during this period of Geoffrey's writing. Despite the ambiguity surrounding both the manuscript and the persona of Fátima herself, it

⁹⁵ For more on MS Auct. F. 1. 9, see Introduction, pages 80-5, and Chapter 1, page 87.

⁹⁶ MS. Auct. F. 1. 9. Also see A. G. Watson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c. 435–1600 in Oxford Libraries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Otto Pächt and J. J. G. Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

is still interesting to consider the multiple layers (visible and invisible) present in the chain of the medieval translation and English reception of Latinate-Arabic works, passing through many peoples, languages, and spaces – like the *Zij*, which was originally produced in Baghdad, later revised in Córdoba, then transmitted into England. If despite Geoffrey's potential engagement with MS Auct. F. 1. 9. he remained unaware of the roles of al-Majriti and Fátima within one of its key texts, then this shows the importance of the invisibilities which lie both in manuscripts and the wider culture of textual translation and transmission. This is particularly ironic with regards to this specific manuscript in that it features an ecliptic dragon – an invisible parameter – much like al-Majriti and his daughter, whose astronomical contributions may have become eclipsed in the text's transfer from the Muslim East (Baghdad) to the Christian West (Worcester).

We also know that while Mariam was a part of al-Dawla and his court in Aleppo, so too were other notable astronomers. Al-Qabisi (d. 967), who worked and resided within the Emir's palace, was a Muslim astrologer, astronomer, mathematician, and poet, known in the Latin West as Alcabitius. His manual, *The Introduction to Astrology*, which was copied into Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin, eventually entered the Western scholastic tradition through a Latin translation, which was made in the early twelfth century by John of Seville (fl. 1133-53), 'the most prolific of the translators of works of astrology and astronomy in the Middle Ages.'⁹⁷ Known to have worked within the Toledo School of Translators (a group of dedicated translators who translated multiple Islamic philosophical and scientific works from

⁹⁷ Charles Burnett, 'Al-Qabīṣī's Introduction to Astrology: From Courtly Entertainment to University Textbook', in *Studies in the History of Culture and Science. A Tribute to Gad Freudenthal*, ed. by Resianne Fontaine and others (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 43-70 (p. 47). Also see Jean-Patrice Boudet, 'Astrology', in *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Thomas Glick, Steven J. Livesey, and Faith Wallis (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 61-4.

Arabic into Latin), John's translation of al-Qabisi's work in Spain interestingly coincides with Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* in England, showing a parallel interest in astronomy and astrology between the Latin translator working in the Muslim West and the Latin author working in the Christian West, both in the period c. 1130 – 1155.⁹⁸ While Geoffrey's contemporaries, Adelard and Petrus, indeed translated materials elsewhere in Spain, knowledge of Alcabitus and his patron al-Dawla (the dedicatee of his astronomical pieces) may have potentially spread to these two translators through John and the network of scholars existing and working in Spain during this time. This could have then reached twelfth-century England and Geoffrey during his writing, with knowledge of the astronomer Mariam potentially also making its way alongside her and Alcabitus's patron – although this remains an open question, as there is no record or knowledge of either the astronomical Mariam or her Aleppo patron al-Dawla in medieval England during this period.

While both these points of connective are highly speculative, dependent upon whether knowledge of Muslim thinkers and female astronomers was passed alongside the translation of their texts, it is still nonetheless interesting to note the parallels between the Christian and Islamic worlds both earlier and during the period of Geoffrey's writing. The mapping of these speculative avenues itself offers an insight into the great impact which Latinate-Arabic translators of astronomy and astrology at once had, may have had, and could have had in terms of the transmission of new knowledge and the appearance of unexpected literary formulations in twelfth-century England, such as Ganieda's prophecy. Thus, alongside presenting potential hidden lines of transmission, these analogues importantly reveal the ways in which women were involved in astronomy, even when records of that involvement were rare.

⁹⁸ Burnett, 'Al-Qabīsī's Introduction to Astrology', p. 43; see Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas, *Magic and Medieval Society* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2014), p. x.

Poetry and Female Patronage in the Islamic World

Astronomy was only one of many scientific interests in the Islamic world and its many courts, including al-Dawla's for example. Alongside astronomers and astrologers, the Emir's intellectual sphere also encompassed biographers, poets, and philosophers like al-Farabi (d. 961), men with an interest in words and the world, not unlike Merlin's own group in Geoffrey's final work.⁹⁹ This affinity for words, specifically poetry, was, however, not an activity reserved for only men within the Islamic world. Women, too, were keenly involved in the spoken and written word, some even inheriting and possessing poetic spaces under their own patronage, like Wallada bint al-Mustakfi (c. 994/1001 – 1091), daughter of the Umayyad Caliph, Muhammad III (c. 1024 – 25), a renowned al-Andalusian poet who gained status and recognition within a male-dominated society, not unlike Geoffrey's Ganieda.

Wallada lived a very different life to that which was typical of an Umayyad princess in Córdoba. She witnessed three different rules: the Umayyad Caliphate to its fall, then the rise of small independent kingdoms in Spain (known as the Taifa), and finally the emergence of the Almoravids, a Berber Muslim dynasty which began in the middle of the eleventh century, leading to the first political unification of al-Andalus and the Maghreb.¹⁰⁰ During her lifetime, rather than fulfilling the societal expectations of dedicating her adulthood to a political marriage (as was expected of a woman, especially one of her social standing), Wallada instead immersed herself in the literary arts, producing poetry and creating an

⁹⁹ Burnett, 'Al-Qabīsī's Introduction to Astrology', p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Kamila Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves: Women in al-Andalus', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 52 (2016), 177-88 (p. 183).

inclusive poetic space. Abu Al-Hasan Ibn Bassam, an Andalusian writer, describes her more than a century after her death:

She was the first of the women of her time. Her free manners and disdain of her veil indicated an ardent nature. This was, however, the best manner to show her remarkable inward qualities, the sweetness of her face and her character. Her house at Córdoba was the area in which poets and prose writers were vying with each other. The literary men were attracted toward the light of this brilliant new moon, as if it were a lighthouse in a dark night. The greatest poets and prose writers were anxious to obtain the sweetness of her intimacy, which it was not difficult to attain.¹⁰¹

A confident, rebellious, and charismatic woman then, Wallada drew attention from both men and women alike, her power not only stemming from her high political status but intricately tied too to her poetic skills. Her works, few of which now survive, centre on her secret relationship with renowned Andalusian poet and politician, Ibn Zaydun, expressing the varying emotions associated with their love.¹⁰² Some, like this one below, contain astral imagery, which Ibn Bassam also used above to describe the female poet (referring to her as a ‘brilliant new moon’). In her own work, however, Wallada draws on the astronomical to convey the power and depth of her forbidden relationship to Ibn Zaydun:

Wait for me whenever darkness falls,

¹⁰¹ Shamsie, ‘Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves’, p. 184. Also see Ibtissam Bouachrine, *Women and Islam: Myths, Apologies, and the Limits of Feminist Critique* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014).

¹⁰² Tijani and Nsiri, ‘Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain’, p. 60. Ishaq Tijani and Imed Nsiri, ‘Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain: Mapping the Sexual-Textual Politics of Al-Andalus’, *AWEJ for translation & Literary Studies Volume*, 4 (2017), 52-67 (p. 60).

For night I see contains a secret best.
If the heavens felt this love I feel for you.
The sun would not shine, nor the moon rise,
Nor would the stars launch out upon their journey.¹⁰³

As in Geoffrey, we see here a female poet drawing on the sun, the moon, and the stars to reveal a secret within herself. Wallada's love in this poem is depicted in great astronomical terms, with her secret relationship, if openly felt and declared, able to impact the natural order of the world. Astronomical imagery then is used to portray the magnitude of forbidden love. Córdoba, and al-Andalus in general, was becoming recognised for its interest in astronomy during this period, so it is no surprise that Wallada is drawing on the heavens to convey her longing, merging literature with science. Her passion for poetry was, however, not unique to her in al-Andalus, with many women – some research even suggesting a number as high as 60,000 – engaged in the development of Andalusian literature through poetry throughout the medieval period.¹⁰⁴ While there are those who may argue that this number is an exaggeration, the records which do remain, despite the great loss of many works of Andalusian female poetry, nonetheless indicate that more women were involved in expressing themselves through literature and culture in al-Andalus than in any other part of the Islamic world during this period.¹⁰⁵ Importantly, this shows how Muslim Spain and its many rulers, particularly those within Córdoba, prominently fostered a communal

¹⁰³ See *Andalusian Poems*, ed. by Christopher Middleton and Leticia Garza-Falcón (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1993), p. 16. These poems are translated by Middleton and Garza-Falcón from Spanish versions of the original Arabic.

¹⁰⁴ Tijani and Nsiri, 'Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain', pp. 54-5.

¹⁰⁵ Tijani and Nsiri, 'Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain', p. 55.

engagement in scholarship and literature, one which paid no heed to the gender of the writer. This is in contrast to the Latinate West, where men, particularly those from a scholarly, monastic, or political background, dominated in reading, writing, and the creative arts over women, with very few early medieval examples of female writers in the Christian world existing before or during the twelfth-century period of Geoffrey's writing.

The 'most striking words' of Ibn Bassam's description of Wallada, as Kamila Shamsie points out, is the reference to 'her house at Córdoba', revealing a level of independence uncommon for medieval women during this period, at a time when power resided firmly within the hands of men within a patriarchal society.¹⁰⁶ It is believed that Wallada inherited the house, when, after her father's exile and eventual death, she remained in Córdoba, his sole heir.¹⁰⁷ Islamic law, by permitting women to 'inherit and independently own property' granted them a certain degree of power 'within the very limited parameters permitted by their society' – women were able to possess property, but largely only through gift or inheritance.¹⁰⁸ This image of the medieval Muslim woman, as able to be both socially and economically independent, greatly contrasts the Western stereotypical imaginary of them as passive and resourceless, a timeworn depiction of which Wallada was certainly not a part.

¹⁰⁶ Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 184.

¹⁰⁷ Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', pp. 184-6.

¹⁰⁸ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), pp. 111-2; Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 185. Also see work on Fatima al-Fihri, the educated daughter of a wealthy merchant who, through her inheritance, founded what is the world's first university in 859 (University of al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco), predating the earliest institutions in the West. See El-Shorbagy, 'Women in Islamic architecture', pp. 5-6; Amy S. Kaufman and Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2020), p. 17; Justin Marozzi, *Islamic Empires: Fifteen Cities that Define a Civilization* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

Her unique position as a princess and a propertied woman, with no close male living relations holding authority over her, ‘marks her out as possibly the most free of all al-Andalusi women’, even more so than many women in Christian Europe until the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ The house she inherited, which she transformed into a private poetic space, is an example of a literary salon ‘hundreds of years before such salons became popular in sixteenth-century Europe’.¹¹⁰ Wallada was famous too for visiting poetry competitions and ‘hosting mixed-gender literary salons’, spaces which satisfied men and women on a creative level and provided them with an inclusive space to deal with permanent human fears, such as loss and death.¹¹¹ Such an establishment allowed people to create ‘communities of love’, forming a voluntarily learning and gathering space, where women, like Wallada, ruled and possessed agency amongst (and even over) men, and where words, both oral and written, granted a rhetorical power within a society which prized intellectual minds and intellectual spaces.

Wallada offers several points of parallel to Geoffrey’s Ganieda, on both a character level as well as in regard to her social role: like the Córdoba princess, Ganieda also possesses a high royal status, suffers the death of the male ruler under whose care she lived, engages in a forbidden relationship, is a patron of an intellectual ‘house’ – one which engages in the spoken word and provides a literary, communal space for a mixed gender group, is a poet – with the *Vita* being a poetic work, incorporates astronomical imagery into her oral rhetoric, is bold and unafraid to use her wit against men (Ganieda and Merlin’s moment of sparring is reminiscent of the poetic sparring commonplace within these literary salons), and inherits a gift (Ganieda gains her prophetic powers from Merlin; Wallada receives the house

¹⁰⁹ Shamsie, ‘Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves’, p. 186.

¹¹⁰ Tijani and Nsiri, ‘Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain’, p. 54.

¹¹¹ Samer M. Ali, ‘Women as Litterateurs in the PreModern Period’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women*, ed. by Asma Afsaruddin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 289-303 (pp. 298-9).

of her last male relative, passed down to her as his sole heir). Although, again, there is no evidence that Geoffrey (who lived over a century later) would have known of Wallada, it is still exciting to consider the ways in which Geoffrey's construction of a female patron and poet resembles women of power and influence found outside Latin Christendom.

Twelfth-century Córdoba, a node in the translation movement which saw a network of scholars connecting England and Muslim Spain, created a small window of opportunity through which oral knowledge of the poet Wallada may have been transmitted into twelfth-century England, given the Umayyad princess's status and influence. While the type of material passed around these intellectual spheres and transmitted across countries was more scientific than literary, it has been suggested that courtly love poetry may have reached its pinnacle in Muslim Spain with the aid of the lyrics by the star-crossed poets and lovers-turned-enemies, Wallada and Ibn Zaydun, their poetic compositions suggested by some critics to have possibly influenced the development of courtly love poetry which later emerges in Christian Europe.¹¹² If this is indeed the case, then it is possible to consider Wallada as a highly influential cross-cultural analogue to medieval romance constructions even beyond Geoffrey's time, with poetry from the Islamic world potentially shaping ideas and literary motifs within the Christian West.

¹¹² See *The SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies*, ed. by Akbar S. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn (California: SAGE Publications, 2010); 'Abdulwahid Lu'lu'a, *Arabic-Andalusian Poetry and the Rise of the European Love-Lyric* (Houston: Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Agency, 2013).

Córdoba, Baghdad, and Cairo: Women of Science, Poetry, and Politics in the three Houses of Wisdom

The final section of this chapter returns to the concept of the House of Wisdom discussed at its beginning (the renowned building of knowledge used by scholars, scribes, and those of royal stature interested in new learning within the Islamic world). In the *Vita*, Ganieda creates and eventually resides in Geoffrey's own House of Stars, and one of the poem's final images depicts her intellectual agency within a male-centric space, individually observing the stars before producing her own oral and written prophecies. If Geoffrey was indeed drawing upon Islamic precedent, as I propose earlier in this chapter, then could he too be drawing upon the women within it for his characterisation of Ganieda? I attempt to navigate this question below, drawing upon three female figures associated with three different Houses of Wisdom throughout the medieval Islamic world. As with all the previous cross-cultural analogues already discussed in terms of Ganieda, Geoffrey may have sought inspiration here, and this particular connection is potentially made more plausible than the above through the marked similarities between Geoffrey's House of Stars and the Houses of Wisdom which appeared in medieval Muslim cities renowned for new learning (discussed in the first part of this chapter).

I explore three key houses and their female patrons or poets thematically rather than chronologically, beginning in tenth-century Córdoba with a focus on the astronomy and poetry of the female scientist, Lubna of Córdoba, before travelling further back in time to the original Bayt al-Hikmah in Baghdad to discuss its connections to the female royal poet, Ulayya bint al-Mahdi, and then concluding in Cairo with a political female figure, Sitt al-Mulk, the half-sister of al-Hakim, the mad scientific Caliph whom, I argue, Merlin strikingly resembles.

There were many spaces of learning in the medieval Islamic world but three notable Houses of Wisdom appeared throughout the Middle Ages, all in existence before Geoffrey's

writing in the twelfth century, each of them named slightly differently but used for the same purpose: to house and record written knowledge mainly in the form of books, which gained great popularity during this period, to facilitate the exchange of new ideas, particularly those in the fields of astronomy and astrology, and to provide an intellectual space of learning for scholars engaged in translation, transmission, but also innovation.¹¹³ It was a place which combined knowledge from the past, present, and future, building on the works of previous scholars (ancient Greek learning) and producing relevant contemporary materials advanced for its time, recognised by later scholars and then disseminated around the world. At its very core then, it was a place for books, a place to record and safekeep old and new learning. Such was the case for the Andalusian House of Wisdom in Córdoba, owned by the Umayyad Caliph, al-Hakam II (r. 961 – 976), which was, in essence, a large library. A combination of ‘three principal royal libraries – the palace library, his brother Muhammad’s collection and his own’ – al-Hakam’s space of learning ‘allegedly employed 500 people’ and held around 400,000 books, most of which he himself was said to have read and annotated.¹¹⁴ This figure is an astounding comparison to the number of books found within the Christian West at this time: on average, most European libraries held around two hundred books, Christian monasteries held a few thousand at a time, and twelfth-century Paris contained two thousand books, all of which still fell widely short of al-Hakam’s collection.¹¹⁵ The Caliph’s books

¹¹³ See Claude Gilliot, ‘Three Great Libraries’, in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia: L-Z, Index*, ed. by Josef W. Meri, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 2006), II (2006), pp. 450-53.

¹¹⁴ Moller, *The Map of Knowledge*, pp. 129-30.

¹¹⁵ John Gill, *Andalusia: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 99; Tomasz Stefaniuk, ‘Scholars of Muslim Andalusia (711-1492): The Trans-Borderness of Science and Culture in a Historical Context’, in *Atomization or Integration? Transborder Aspects of Multipedagogy*, ed. by Alicja Szerlag, Justyna Pilarska, and Arkadiusz Urbanek (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 159-175 (p. 164).

ranged across multiple subjects too, including ‘philosophy, religion, medicine, astronomy, engineering, botany, geography, history, and literature – no subject was omitted.’¹¹⁶ A skilled bibliophile and notable scholar himself, al-Hakam was heavily invested in the book trade, sending agents across the Islamic world to ‘buy, copy, borrow or steal books – ancient and modern – for his library, back in Córdoba, no matter what the cost.’¹¹⁷ He possessed a keen interest in the sciences, and befriended many scholars working on scientific subjects before and during his reign, scouring Eastern cities for knowledge and bringing back the ‘best of their scientific works and their most valuable publications, whether new or old.’¹¹⁸ It was not only books he added to his realm, however, but also minds capable of understanding them, like the female poet and scientist, Lubna of Córdoba.

There is much critical speculation around Lubna’s origins as well as the specificities of her role within al-Hakam’s Andalusian House of Wisdom. She is considered to have been: invited by the Caliph himself from beyond Córdoba ‘to add to the intellectual climate of the court’, becoming his scribe; the Caliph’s private secretary, ‘a position she obtained due to her great knowledge of general literature’; a Fatimid, appointed by Córdoba’s head librarian to take on the role of ‘the Library’s specialised acquisition expert in the bookstalls and merchants of Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad’; ‘a poet employed as a “copyist” in al-Hakam’s library’; a slave, either succeeding her father, ‘a poet and magnificent calligrapher’, or a part of ‘the famous team of scribes employed by al-Hakam in his ‘book factory’ [...] [potentially] a ‘literary freed slave’; ‘an intelligent writer, grammarian, poetess, knowledgeable in arithmetic, comprehensive in her learning; none in the palace was as noble as she’, as

¹¹⁶ Catlos, *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain*, p. 159.

¹¹⁷ Moller, *The Map of Knowledge*, p. 129.

¹¹⁸ Moller, *The Map of Knowledge*, p. 129.

described in the twelfth-century biographical dictionary by Ibn Bashkuwal.¹¹⁹ These varying accounts of Lubna makes it somewhat difficult to accurately ascertain her exact role and entry into al-Hakam's space of learning. If she were indeed a copyist, as much research claims, she would have been an expert in reading, writing, and also annotating, presumably given a place of high importance for her transcription skills as 'books were prized, and even fetishized' in Córdoba during this period.¹²⁰ Arguments made for her status as a slave (or freed slave) do not mitigate her learning, given that even the enslaved women of al-Andalus 'were evaluated for their mastery of Arabic, their handwriting, their expertise in playing instruments, and the reporter of poems and songs they had memorised.'¹²¹ However, regardless of the varying suppositions surrounding her, one thing is certainly clear: Lubna 'was connected to both the palace and the world of books during the reign of al-Hakam II, and was significant enough to be remembered for her intellect and learning.'¹²² Most often connected to the royal palace library – the House of Wisdom and one of the most important libraries of its time – it is commonly claimed that she was 'entrusted with the care' of all its many volumes, acting not just as the Caliph's secretary and scribe, but as the House of Wisdom's presiding librarian and the caretaker of the collection stored at the lavish Madinat al-Zahra, the Umayyad palace-city and royal library close to the Córdoba capital.¹²³ One of her other roles may have also been within the book-trade, where she was believed to have travelled to the book markets of Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus to find more works for the

¹¹⁹ Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 181.

¹²⁰ Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 182.

¹²¹ Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 182; Bouachrine, *Women and Islam*, p. 6.

¹²² Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 182.

¹²³ See Stefaniuk, 'Scholars of Muslim Andalusia', p. 164; Robert Irwin, *The Alhambra* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 19.

library's ever-expanding collection, potentially acting as one of al-Hakam's key agents.¹²⁴ These books, in consideration of al-Hakam's tastes, may have centred upon literature and science, and with Lubna's abilities as a polymath – one who excelled in subjects such as mathematics, philosophy, and poetry. This female scholar would have likely been a great asset in not only the management of the Andalusian House of Wisdom, but in the understanding, translation, and formation of its many materials too.¹²⁵

Lubna's immersive role in al-Hakam's Córdoba space of learning is not an exact mirror of Ganieda's in the *Vita*, and there are some notable differences such as Ganieda's royal status and her patronage of Merlin's House (a contrast to Lubna's potential background as a slave), as well as her role of prophet/ speaker rather than translator or scribe. Interestingly, however, the number of scribes which Ganieda does provide for Merlin's House of Stars is an exact copy of the number of scribes found within medieval Córdoba who were engaged in transcribing the Qur'an – the religious book in Islam:

At the core of the boom, of course, was the almost insatiable market for copies of the Quran. At one point, Córdoba was said to have seventy copyists working on reproducing copies of the Quran alone. The boom was also in transcriptions and translations of philosophy, poetry, science, and theology, although it soon expanded into copies of earlier Greek and Latin texts.¹²⁶

We might compare this context to the *Vita*, where Merlin explicitly requests Ganieda to

¹²⁴ Shamsie, 'Librarians, rebels, property owners, slaves', p. 182.

¹²⁵ Waqas Ahmed, *The Polymath: Unlocking the Power of Human Versatility* (Chichester: Wiley, 2019), p. 37; Margaret Gaida, 'Muslim Women and Science: The Search for the 'Missing Actors'', *Early Modern Women*, 11 (2016), 197-206 (p. 197).

¹²⁶ Gill, *Andalucia: A Cultural History*, p. 100.

build me a remote one to which you will give seventy doors and as many windows, through which I may see fire-breathing Phoebus with Venus, and watch by night the stars wheeling in the firmament; and they will teach me about the future of the nation.

‘Let there be as many secretaries trained to record what I say, and let them concentrate on committing my prophetic song to paper.’¹²⁷

While the seventy ‘secretaries’ in the House of Stars here may be a mere coincidence, with Geoffrey perhaps randomly selecting the number or choosing it for an alternate reason, the mirroring is nonetheless intriguing. Did Geoffrey possess any knowledge of the translation of religious texts in early medieval Córdoba, before the Latin translation of the Qur’an in the late twelfth century? Most likely no. Could this comparison between the two scribal communities suggest that Merlin’s voice, when transformed from oral into written form, translates as a great religious text when transcribed? Possibly. The key thing, however, regardless of influence, is the depiction of a large scribal community within the House of Stars, one which mirrored the many hands found within great intellectual spaces like medieval Córdoba. While Ganieda may not have been a scribe, her presence among them is analogous to Lubna’s place within the Andalusian House of Wisdom. Like the female Spanish scholar, who was recognised for her learning, Ganieda too possesses unfathomable knowledge, unlike any other female within Geoffrey’s textual world, or indeed within the House of Stars by the end of the *Vita*, as Geoffrey eventually transfers Merlin’s gift to his sister. Other similarities between the two women include them both living and working within a male-centric, intellectual space, operating as women of knowledge and authority within a House essentially governed by a knowledgeable man, and their significant status

¹²⁷ *Vita*, pp. 80-1. See pages 178-9 of this thesis for the full quote.

within this scholarly space, with both Ganiada and Lubna holding an important place within the community, distinct from others around them. Their similar skills in science and poetry also presents a likeness, which Ganiada combines to produce astronomical prophecy. Both women also shift in identity, with Lubna transforming from possible slave to head librarian, and Ganiada transforming from widowed queen to astronomical prophet. Their final resemblance is their dual closeness to the written word (Lubna was surrounded by many books in her potential role as a copyist), with both women in charge of a large group of scribes housed within an intellectual community, with those in Geoffrey's House of Stars presumably recording Ganiada's prophetic speech as they did for Merlin before her. Thus, while there is no concrete evidence for Geoffrey's potential use of Lubna as a source for his construction of Ganiada, the presence of a female poet and scientist within an intellectual House still offers a unique comparison to the final astronomical prophet of the *Vita*.

Lubna was, however, not the only female poet to be found within a House of Wisdom. In the East, associated with the first known House of Wisdom, was Ulayya bin al-Mahdi (c. 776 – 825), poet-princess and half-sister of the building's patron, much like Ganiada and Merlin. The eighth-century Bayt al-Hikmah (the House of Wisdom in Abbasid Baghdad) is the model upon which the Andalusian House of Wisdom was based. Like the Umayyad House in Córdoba, it too contained a library, a place for scribes to copy manuscripts, a space for translation work, probably room for staff, and likely too a place for scholars to sleep, eat, and socialise – very similar then to Geoffrey's House of Stars.¹²⁸ It was, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, linked to several Abbasid Caliphs: al-Mansur, who 'founded Baghdad and became an inspirational patron of scholarship', his grandson, Harun al-Rashid, a 'fearsome warrior and a global leader, but also a passionate supporter of scholarship', and al-Ma'mun,

¹²⁸ Moller, *The Map of Knowledge*, p. 78.

‘under whose aegis Baghdad attracted the greatest minds of the day, and who, through a combination of wealth, enlightenment, curiosity and ambition, propelled human knowledge forwards.’¹²⁹ While the House of Wisdom certainly prospered during the time of al-Mamun, it is the period of al-Rashid’s reign that I wish to explore here. The son of al-Mahdi (r. 775 – 786), the third Abbasid Caliph, al-Rashid was a great patron for learning and even an inspiration for legends – he is mentioned in the Middle Eastern, Arabic folktales, *One Thousand and One Nights*, where the text creates a ‘hybrid mythological portrait of the caliph and his age.’¹³⁰ Both historicised and romanticized, al-Rashid’s persona skirts the line of truth and myth, not unlike King Arthur in Geoffrey’s pseudohistorical work and its later reception. The Caliph was said to possess an extreme generosity towards the writers of poetry, which mirrors what is known of Abbasid culture: the dynasty patronised poetry, particularly histories, fables, and mythic lore, as well as scientific, medicinal, and philosophical works.¹³¹ The Caliph’s half-sister, the poet-princess Ulayya, with whom he possessed a close relationship, was thus well-placed within the court.

¹²⁹ Thomas F. Glick, ‘Bayt al-Hikma’ in *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Thomas Glick, Steven J. Livesey, and Faith Wallis (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 80-1 (p. 80); Moller, *The Map of Knowledge*, p. 61. Also see Gilliot, ‘Three Great Libraries’, pp. 450-51. Also see page 188 of this thesis above.

¹³⁰ Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun Al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 17. For more on *One Thousand and One Nights*, see *The Thousand and One Nights: Sources and Transformations in Literature, Art, and Science*, ed. by Ibrahim Akel and William Granara (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

¹³¹ El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, p. 18. Also see Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, *The Abbasid House of Wisdom: Between Myth and Reality* (Oxon: Routledge, 2023).

Like Ganiada, Ulayya ‘made a name for herself navigating the challenges and opportunities of the imperial court.’¹³² Her poetry, which ‘toyed with propriety and taboos’ is, however, noticeably different to Ganiada’s prophetic voice, which is more political and apocalyptic.¹³³ Ulayya’s voice, instead, is more reminiscent of Ganiada’s speech at court during the reign of her husband, before her inheritance of Merlin’s prophetic gift, when her speech was used to entertain her people through spectacles and wit, skirting the line of propriety when cleverly covering up her secret affair from King Rodarch. The Abbasid princess does something similar with al-Rashid, using her poetry to hide the name of her enslaved lover, after her brother forbade her to speak of the illicit relationship.¹³⁴ She ‘often locked horns with her brothers’, including the Caliph, yet her poetry was influential enough to allow her ‘to walk into and out of trouble almost at will, while exposing the breach between monotheism and patriarchy with wit and serenity.’¹³⁵ Thus, Ganiada’s word, like Ulayya’s, held power and sway. Their parallel connections, through their shared nobility, poetic skill, trickster presence among the intellectual court, and close and at times strained relationship to their half-brothers – both of whom owned a house of learning, presents a subtle mirroring of a fictional woman in the West and a historical one in the East.¹³⁶ While

¹³² Ali, ‘Women as Litterateurs in the PreModern Period’, p. 295.

¹³³ Ali, ‘Women as Litterateurs in the PreModern Period’, p. 295.

¹³⁴ See *Classical Poems by Arab Women: A Bilingual Anthology*, ed. by Abdullah al-Udhari (London: Saqi Books, 2017); Jocelyn Sharlet, ‘Educated Slave Women and Gift Exchange in Abbasid Culture’, in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, ed. by Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 278-96.

¹³⁵ Ali, ‘Women as Litterateurs in the PreModern Period’, p. 295.

¹³⁶ She is even connected to Wallada: ‘It is said: [Wallada] was to the west what ‘Ulayya bint al-Mahdi the Abbasid was to the east’. See Eric Calderwood, *On Earth or in Poems: The Many Lives of al-Andalus* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2023), p. 117.

there is, again, no evidence that Geoffrey knew of either the learned al-Rashid or his poet-sister – with depictions of the caliph and his court in *One Thousand and One Nights* only reaching Europe much later, at the beginning of the eighteenth century – the comparison nonetheless grants us a deep insight into the great culture of male and female learning present in the East. It reveals how women navigated both the royal court and private spaces of knowledge centuries before a similar scene appeared historically or fictionally in twelfth-century England, with even the legendary *One Thousand and One Nights* (stories told through a clever female narrator) showing the authority of the female voice and its influence over men and their destinies long before the writing of Geoffrey.

The final case study associated with the House of Wisdom takes us to Cairo between the tenth and eleventh centuries, to two half-siblings reminiscent of Ganieda and Merlin. Here, the Fatimid House of Wisdom, also known as the Dar al-‘Ilm (House/ Abode of Knowledge), contained another great library, like its rival before it in Abbasid Baghdad – a potential model for the Fatimids or, at the very least, ‘an idea to imitate.’¹³⁷ It was constructed around 1005, ‘an institute for the advancement, preservation, and propagation of knowledge’, a place available to all those who possessed intellectual passions.¹³⁸ The building contained around 100,000 volumes at one time, with a catalogue in 1045 listing ‘at least six and a half thousand volumes on astronomy, architecture, and philosophy’, housed alongside paid scholars hired for teaching purposes, as well as support staff, and even interior furnishings.¹³⁹ It was all owned, created, and supplied by Caliph al-Hakim (c. 996 – 1021), whose half-sister was the princess, Sitt al-Mulk (c. 970 – 1023). A leader whose very name

¹³⁷ Gilliot, ‘Three Great Libraries’, p. 451; Paul E. Walker, *Caliph of Cairo: Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996-1021* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2009), p. 152.

¹³⁸ Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, pp. 151-2.

¹³⁹ Gilliot, ‘Three Great Libraries’, p. 451; Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, p. 152.

meant ‘Lady of Power’, she ‘challenged the established female roles of their society’ and, like Wallada in Umayyad Córdoba, never married, her power stemming not from her marital relations to someone in authority, but rather ‘by virtue of her birth.’¹⁴⁰ She was both visible and invisible in the court, her political power hidden behind her nephew, al-Hakim’s eventual successor, through whom she exercised rule over Cairo for four years.¹⁴¹ During al-Hakim’s lifetime, the relationship between the siblings was fraught with tension and distrust (with rumours of Sitt al-Mulk orchestrating her half-brother’s death), their royal court in Cairo thus somewhat mirroring Ganieda’s court while Merlin resided there – a place full of shifting allegiances, thrown accusations of affairs, and arising jealousies, with al-Hakim obsessing over Sitt al-Mulk’s supposed lovers.¹⁴² The place where both siblings grew up, however, was more peaceful:

Sitt al-Mulk spent her happy childhood years in the extraordinary Qasr al-Bahr, the river palace designed by the royal astrologers to be in alignment with the stars, which had no equal in the East or the West.¹⁴³

The existence of such a building during this time shows how the Islamic world surpassed the medieval Christian West in terms of its study of the stars, creating unparalleled institutional structures for scientific observation and knowledge not yet imagined in other parts of the world, including twelfth-century England. It also depicts how, from a young age, both Sitt al-

¹⁴⁰ Delia Cortese and Simonetta Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 52.

¹⁴¹ Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. by Mary Jo Lakeland (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), p. 159.

¹⁴² Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, pp. 163-67.

¹⁴³ Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, p. 160.

Mulk and al-Hakim were surrounded by astronomy and astrology, an interesting parallel to the older Ganieda and Merlin, who eventually reside together in an astronomically centred building by the end of Geoffrey's *Vita*. However, this is where the comparisons between Sitt al-Mulk and Ganieda mostly end. While the Cairo princess remained in politics, Ganieda eventually withdraws from the royal court after the death of King Rodarch, moving away from civilisation to the woods, exactly like Merlin at the beginning of the poem. This suggests how studying the stars requires complete withdrawal from others, an activity which al-Hakim, the Fatimid founder of the Dar al-'Ilm, actively engaged in.

An Arabic Analogue for Merlin

The abandoning of court to observe the stars is thus not unique to Geoffrey's characters. The Caliph, too, perhaps even until the final moments of his mysterious death, turned away from his people towards the stars, an image not too dissimilar from Merlin's retreat to the Caledonian Forest. Like Merlin's own establishment of a house of learning, the Caliph created a scholarly group of scientists in Cairo, 'among them two giants of medieval Arabic science: Abu 'Ali al-Hasan b. al-Haytham, a mathematician and physicist, and 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Yunus, an astronomer.'¹⁴⁴ He also possessed a great propensity for violence, his irrational behaviour directed at ethnic and religious minorities, animals, and even buildings. Al-Hakim placed prohibitions on nightly activities: he ordered the merciless

¹⁴⁴ Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, p. 154. For more on al-Haytham, see Roshdi Rashed, *Ibn Al-Haytham, New Astronomy and Spherical Geometry: A History of Arabic Sciences and Mathematics Volume 4* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Bradley Steffens, *Ibn Al-Haytham: First Scientist* (North Carolina: Morgan Reynolds Publishing, 2007); *Ibn al-Haytham's On the Configuration of the World*, ed. by Y. Tzvi Langermann (London: Routledge, 1990); Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, pp. 60-85. For more on ibn Yunus, see J. L. Berggren, *Episodes in the Mathematics of Medieval Islam* (New York: Springer, 2003), pp. 148-51.

persecution of Christians and Jews, he hunted and killed dogs in Cairo, and ordered the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, an event documented in several medieval, Latinate crusading accounts by chroniclers such as Rodulfus Glaber (c. 985 – 1047), Adémar de Chabannes (c. 988/9 – 1034), and William of Tyre (c. 1130 – 86), all of whom allude to al-Hakim's evil and madness.¹⁴⁵ His legend was certainly known in the Christian West, showing the ways in which history was textually constructed in its own period. The Caliph's violent tendencies, particularly his brutality against humans and animals, is reminiscent of a key episode within Geoffrey's poem, where Merlin, despite accepting his wife's second wedding, spontaneously attacks her new bridegroom:

Ast ubi vidit eum vates animoque quis esset
 calluit, extemplo divulsit cornua cervo
 quo gestabatur vibrataque jecit in illum,
 et caput illius penitus contrivit eumque
 reddidit exanimem vitamque fugavit in auras.

¹⁴⁵ Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, pp. 168-73. See David M. Freidenreich, *Jewish Muslims: How Christians Imagined Islam as the Enemy* (California: University of California Press, 2023), pp. 169-70. For the chronicle accounts, see William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. by Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 66; Rodulfus Glaber, *Rodulfi Glabri Historiarum libri quinque* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 133; Alan Balfour, *Solomon's Temple: Myth, Conflict, and Faith* (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), p. 153; Heng, *Empire of Magic*, pp. 81-2; Richard Allen Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes, 989-1034* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 44-5.

(When the prophet saw him and realised who he was, he promptly wrenched off the horns of the stag he rode. He whirled the horns round and threw them at the bridegroom. He crushed the bridegroom's head right in, knocking him lifeless, and drove his spirits to the wind.)¹⁴⁶

Merlin's lack of control and abuse of power, spurred on by jealousy, vengeance, and madness, is analogous to al-Hakim's temperamental nature which, coupled with his nightly wanderings, transformed him into a 'phantom' his people feared.¹⁴⁷ Al-Hakim was also an astronomer, and this relationship between madness and the ability to read the stars mirrors Merlin in the *Vita*. While widely recognised for his efforts regarding creating his House of Wisdom, al-Hakim was also rumoured to have constructed an observatory:

Al-Hakim, a dedicated astrologer, had an observatory built on the desert hills of al-Moqattam, now part of eastern Cairo, where he would retire to record the position of stars with a giant copper astrolabe.¹⁴⁸

This observatory is often associated with ibn Yunus too, who was noted to have often observed the stars on the Muqattam Mount, as well as other celestial phenomena, like eclipses, producing astronomical tables for his patron, al-Hakim.¹⁴⁹ However, in his history of the development of the observatory in the Islamic world, Aydin Sayili rejects such rumours,

¹⁴⁶ *Vita*, pp. 76-7.

¹⁴⁷ Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, p. 173.

¹⁴⁸ John Man, *Atlas of the Year 1000* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 75.

¹⁴⁹ Syed Akheel Ahmed, *Islam and Scientific Enterprise* (New Delhi: I. K. International Publishing House, 2008), p. 62.

concluding that there is no source proof that an observatory existed.¹⁵⁰ Despite differing critical views as to whether there was an observatory located at the site during the caliphate of al-Hakim, al-Maqrizi (c. 1364 – 1442), a much later medieval Egyptian historian writing on the Fatimids, led others to believe ‘that the Caliph possessed a house on this mountain to which he liked to retire in order to observe the sky.’¹⁵¹ Though this is not suggestive of a large scale scientific institution, one focused on astronomical research like al-Hakim’s House of Wisdom, this potential other house on the mountain is a similar imagining to Merlin’s own sylvan house – the House of Stars to which he retires, leaving behind courtly life and the rest of civilisation to observe the heavens as an astronomer, much like the Caliph. If not a true ‘observatory’, al-Hakim’s supposed house is still a site of astral observation and quiet withdrawal. It is a building which encapsulates and represents his fascination with the stars, showing how astronomical spaces were at the very heart of both his life and his caliphate.

The possibility of Geoffrey drawing upon the figure of al-Hakim for his characterisation of Merlin in the *Vita* is not as unlikely as it may seem, considering Geoffrey’s construction of Shi’ite rulers in his *Historia*, among the names which appear as part of Lucius Hiberius’s army in Book X of the *Historia*, which offers a connection between Geoffrey and the Fatimids. J. S. P. Tatlock, in his critical study into the potential histories and references of the Eastern forces of Lucius, notes that Geoffrey’s inclusion of Al-Mustansir may be a reference to the eighth Fatimid Caliph of Egypt (c. 1036 – 94), an idea strengthened

¹⁵⁰ See Aydin Sayili, *The Observatory in Islam and its Place in the General History of the Observatory* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 1960). Also see David A. King, ‘Ibn Yūnus’ Very Useful Tables for Reckoning Time by the Sun’, *Archive for History of Exact Sciences*, 10 (1973), 342-394 (p. 344).

¹⁵¹ Françoise Micheau, ‘The scientific institutions in the medieval Near East’, in *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science: Volume 3 Technology, Alchemy and Life Sciences*, ed. by Roshdi Rashed, 3 vols (London: Routledge, 1996), III, pp. 985-1007 (p. 994).

by his following mention of King Aliphatima, both names (Ali and Fatima – which refer to the son-in-law and daughter of the Prophet Muhammad) associated with the Shi'ite sect of Islam.¹⁵² Thus, it is plausible that Geoffrey had knowledge of the Fatimid dynasty, of which al-Hakim was the sixth caliph, ruling a century prior to Geoffrey writing his *Historia* and *Vita*. If this was the case, then al-Hakim could be considered as a potential model or at least a cross-cultural analogue for Geoffrey's characterisation of the later Merlin who, like the Fatimid Caliph, had a propensity for violence, a curious relationship with his half-sister, and a desperate fascination with the heavens.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Geoffrey's scientific constructions in the *Vita*: the House of Stars/observatory, Ganiada, the female astronomical poet-prophet, and Merlin, the most prominent astronomer of Geoffrey's texts, to consider wider cross-cultural models and analogues for Galfridian concepts and subsequent romance motifs beyond the dragon, which I suggest emerge similarly from engagements with astronomy and astrology. Like Geoffrey's dragon motif, connections to these other motifs, although speculative, present interesting connections to peoples and places found outside of twelfth-century England, within parts of the medieval Islamic world. By highlighting these comparisons in relation to the *Vita*, this chapter conveys

¹⁵² A compound of Ali and Fatima, two key figures in Islamic history, the name refers to both Ali, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad (the final messenger in Islam), who later became his son-in-law, and Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, who Ali eventually marries. Tatlock concludes that Geoffrey's familiarity with the name must stem from the Shī'a Muslim dynasty ruling in the tenth to the twelfth centuries in Egypt – the Fatimid Caliphate, which claimed its descent from Fatima, and believed Ali to be the true successor after Muhammad. See J. S. P. Tatlock, 'Certain Contemporaneous Matters in Geoffrey of Monmouth', *Speculum*, 6 (1931), 206-224.

how Geoffrey's interest in the astral is not limited to just his *Historia*, and his adoption and innovation of non-Christian, non-Latinate ideas may have occurred beyond his integration of the stellar Arabic dragon. However, while science is hidden behind romance in the *Historia*'s dragon motif, in the *Vita* we see the romance motifs of the wise queen (Ganieda) and the mad prophet (Merlin) bring Geoffrey's potential scientific allusions to the forefront. Such a reading demonstrates how previously-considered 'English' romance motifs may potentially possess non-English origins, expanding scholarship on Geoffrey's influences and sources. Thus, this study of Merlin and Ganieda's House of Stars reveals how the Galfridian concept of an exclusive space dedicated to astronomical learning, while certainly unique to twelfth-century England and the medieval Christian West, is not quite as original as critics once perceived, especially when considering the dedication to the stars in various parts of the medieval Islamic world. This relationship between Arthurian literature and the Islamic world is further explored in the final chapter of this thesis, which observes how the dragon motif, as it appears in post-Galfridian romance, loses its earlier scientific resonance while retaining its double function as a crusading cipher. It emerges as a repurposed romance motif singularly focused on antagonistic Christian-Muslim contact.

CHAPTER 4: THE POST-GALFRIDIAN CRUSADING DRAGON

The Arthurian legend, which this thesis charted from the twelfth century with the *Historia*, continued long after Geoffrey, emerging throughout the medieval period through new texts, languages, traditions, and motifs (lasting until the present day, where it operates as its own sub-genre).¹⁵³ However, as the narrative of Arthur travelled beyond England, this expansion of the Arthurian narrative, while developing new characters and motifs, also resulted in the loss or alteration of certain Galfridian concepts. These changes occur from the addition,

¹⁵³ See *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts; *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020); *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020); *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. by Marianne E. Kalinke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011); *The Arthur of the Germans: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature*, ed. by W. H. Jackson and S. A. Ranawake (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011); *The Arthur of the Low Countries: The Arthurian Legend in Dutch and Flemish Literature*, ed. by Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021); *Arthur in the Celtic Languages: The Arthurian Legend in Celtic Literatures and Traditions*, ed. by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Erich Poppe (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019); *The Arthur of the Italians: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Italian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Gloria Allaire and F. Regina Psaki (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014); Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); William Farina, *Chretien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010); *The Romance of Arthur: An Anthology of Medieval Texts in Translation*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and James J. Wilhelm (London: Routledge, 2013); Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature Since 1900* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983); *Arthurian Legend in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*, ed. by Susan L. Austin (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2020); *The Arthurian World*, ed. by Coldham-Fussell, Edlich-Muth, and Ward.

modification, or removal of words and ideas. If we consider how ‘worlds are made from words’, then we may begin to investigate where and how the connected processes of translation, transmission, revision, adaptation, and reception together impacted the development of the post-Galfridian Arthurian world and the cultural constructs which began in Geoffrey.¹⁵⁴

I will explore this by returning to the dragon motif, examining its construction and role in the fifteenth-century Arthurian world. While Chapter 1 concluded how Geoffrey’s *Historia* dragons reflected new Latinate-Arabic learning transmitted into twelfth-century England, Chapter 2 conveyed how Geoffrey also drew on older Latinate-Greek concepts still circulating in Europe, with the Galfridian romance dragon signifying the complex intermingling of astronomical concepts and imperial and crusading imaginaries. In this chapter, I investigate how the construction of the astronomical/ astrological dragon which we find in the *Historia* becomes hidden, invisible, and erased within Arthurian texts produced after Geoffrey. It is, I propose, replaced entirely by the intensification of the dragon as a sign encouraging religio-political warfare and the expansion of the Christian empire. By the time we reach the Arthurian dragon in Middle English, it has become a motif which wholly represents the cultural antipathies between Christians and Muslims, signifying the lingering crusading fantasies of the Christian West for the Holy Land, as well as contemporary cultural anxieties surrounding the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and the Christian-Muslim antagonism in the final decades of the Spanish *Reconquista*.

There is a necessary chronological gap between the previous three chapters and this final one. While Chapters 1 and 2 investigate Geoffrey’s astronomical and crusading dragon

¹⁵⁴ Carol Fleisher Feldman, ‘Early forms of thought about thoughts: Some simple linguistic expressions of mental state’, in *Developing Theories of Mind*, ed. by David R. Olson and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 126-38 (p. 127).

in the *Historia*, with Chapter 3 studying his creation of further astronomical motifs in the *Vita Merlini*, Chapter 4 explores the later English reception of Geoffrey's Arthurian dragon in the mid-fifteenth century *Prose Merlin*. Alternatively, other Middle English works aside from the *Prose Merlin* could have been included as the focus for this final chapter, providing further examples of how the astronomical dragon has developed since its conception in Geoffrey's *Historia*. For example, Layamon's *Brut*, which incorporates Uther's dragon star, departs from Geoffrey's original episode by specifying the astronomical phenomenon as a comet, while the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which features Arthur's bear and dragon dream, constructs a grander vision of the dragon, its appearance reminiscent of a king in embellished armour.¹⁵⁵ Differently to these both, however, the *Prose Merlin* moves away from the stellar components found in Geoffrey, focusing instead upon the crusading Galfridian dragon in relation to global religious conflicts. Thus, the chronological gap and the selected primary source for Chapter 4 are both rationalised through this thesis's specific focus upon the *English prose* innovation of the Arthurian legend, which I recentre in terms of Arabic and classical astronomical influences, their visibility, and, importantly, their eventual erasure.

After the *Historia*, the Arthurian narrative moves from England into France (beginning with Wace's Anglo-Norman *Brut*), which then leads to a body of French Arthurian materials produced from the late twelfth century onwards.¹⁵⁶ This thesis is not so much

¹⁵⁵ See Layamon's *Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon's Brut* (*Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies*), ed. and trans. by W. R. J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005); *King Arthur's Death. The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994).

¹⁵⁶ For more on Geoffrey's reception, see Julia C. Crick, *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth: IV. Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 208-17; *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 95-121; Richard Trachsler, 'A Question of Time: Romance as History', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed.

concerned with the reception of Geoffrey in France, but rather the reappropriation of this French Arthurian content back into England in an English language (Middle English) context. Arthurian romances were certainly read in French in England during this period: we might note, for example, the influence of the early thirteenth-century *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle on Middle English literature including the *Prose Merlin* (some manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle were produced in England in the early fourteenth century).¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, (as discussed in my second chapter in relation to Lambert of St-Omer and the *Liber Floridus* – which featured material on Arthur), England, France, and the Low Countries were closely connected across this long period, and Arthurian narratives moved between regions, countries, and languages. However, exploration of the Middle English *Prose Merlin* enables this thesis to study the subject of cultural adaptation and translation in Arthurian literature from an ‘English’ context (which it de-centres), to consider how ‘translation might operate as a labile concept’.¹⁵⁸ It also explores the ways in which romance represents a mode which consciously attempts to facilitate the overlapping of religion and culture with Western

by Carol Dover (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 23–32. For more on King Arthur and the Arthurian world in the French tradition, see *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt; Jane H. M. Taylor, *Rewriting Arthurian Romance in Renaissance France: From Manuscript to Printed Book* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Archibald and Putter; E. H. Ruck, *An Index of Themes and Motifs in Twelfth-century French Arthurian Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991); *The Arthur of the Low Countries*, ed. by Besamusca and Brandsma.

¹⁵⁷ For more on *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle, see *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation. The Quest for the Holy Grail*, ed. by Lacy, trans. by E. Jane Burns, 10 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992-6), VI (2010); Alison Stones, ‘The Lancelot-Grail Project: Chronological and Geographical Distribution of Lancelot-Grail Manuscripts’ in *The Lancelot-Graal Project* <<https://www.lancelot-project.pitt.edu/LG-web/Arthur-LG-ChronGeog.html>> [accessed 22 March 2022].

¹⁵⁸ Flood and Leitch, ‘Insular Romance in Translation’, p. 20.

European history and politics. Therefore, this chapter, by showing how questions of translation are very closely related to changes in terminology, seeks to connect these concepts more specifically to erasure and invisibility within the *Prose Merlin*, investigating how translation not only builds new meanings, but also erases old ones.

This chapter analyses how the dragon motif, as we find it in the *Historia*, is reimagined in the *Prose Merlin*. I examine how Geoffrey's astronomical dragon star/ comet episode and his bear and dragon dream are reconstructed in the later text, noticing how the English translation (mediated via the French) responds to wider shifts in cultural context, associating new meanings with the Arthurian dragon. This is explicitly in relation to a more pronounced interest in the *Prose Merlin*'s engagement with crusading, which occurs alongside the erasure of the Arabic astronomical associations discernible in Geoffrey. I approach this in relation to Laura Chuhan Campbell's contention (writing on the French and Italian translations of Merlin's prophecies) that translation 'sets in place definitive cultural and linguistic boundaries which ensure that the knowledge transferred can only be taken over in a fragmentary form.'¹⁵⁹ The 'fragmentary' nature of the *Prose Merlin* lies not just in this displacement of Geoffrey's use of the astral, but also in the textual differences between the Middle English text, its French sources, and Geoffrey's Latin work, particularly in its use of the term 'Saracen', a cultural identity marker of an enemy signally absent in the *Historia* itself. Thus, this chapter will also analyse and deconstruct the resonance of the term 'Saracen', drawing on Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh and Geraldine Heng's work on medieval western constructions of Islam and its relationship to historical race-making, to investigate the medieval religio-political implications of the association cultivated between the 'Saracen'

¹⁵⁹ Laura Chuhan Campbell, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition in France and Italy: Prophecy, Paradox and Translatio* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), p. 6.

and the dragon in the *Prose Merlin*.¹⁶⁰ My examination of the *Prose Merlin* presents an opportunity to dissect the ways in which racial stereotypes are manifested and perpetuated within Arthurian literature, evaluate how cultural and linguistic boundaries are rewritten and redrawn, and interrogate the demonisation and erasure of the Muslim identity during the late Middle Ages.

The French Arthurian Tradition and the Story of Merlin

The *Prose Merlin*, a Middle English prose work which details the history of the figure of Merlin, survives in complete form in a single witness: Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.3.11.¹⁶¹ The text is regarded as ‘the earliest piece of Arthurian literature written in English prose’, pre-dating Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*.¹⁶² In the centuries between Geoffrey’s twelfth-century *Historia* and this later fifteenth-century text lie new histories and new cultures which together form a different Arthurian legend, and a different Arthurian dragon. The displacement of Geoffrey’s astral dragons occurs as we move from the Latin historical

¹⁶⁰ Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, ‘The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim erasure’, *Literature Compass*, 16 (2019), 1-8; Heng, *The Invention of Race*, pp. 110-180. Also see Aisling Byrne, ‘West is East: The Irish Saracens in *Of Arthur and of Merlin*’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 55 (2011), 217-230.

¹⁶¹ *Prose Merlin*, ed. by John Conlee (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), p. 1. Hereafter, *Prose Merlin*. Although Henry B. Wheatley alternatively offers a complete version of the Cambridge manuscript, Karen Stern notes ‘severe limitations’ with his edition. For this reason, this chapter refers to Conlee’s edition of the text, despite its significant omissions. See *Merlin or the Early History of King Arthur*, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley and William Edward Mead, 4 vols (London: The Early English Text Society, 1865, 1866, 1869, 1899); Karen Stern, ‘The Middle English Prose Merlin,’ in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, ed. by Alison Adams and others (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), 112-22 (p. 112).

¹⁶² *Prose Merlin*, p. 1.

Arthurian tradition (which began with Geoffrey in the twelfth century) into the vernacular French tradition. Assimilated into the continental tradition of Arthurian romance, we see the elision of the scientific interests which I suggest informed Geoffrey's twelfth-century text. There is a noticeable absence of astrology and astronomy in these later medieval works, with greater emphasis placed instead on themes of chivalry in keeping with the generic interests of medieval romance.¹⁶³ Moving away from Geoffrey's original, a hybridisation of early romance with history, prophecy, and (I argue) astronomy, subsequent traditions of Arthurian romance are generally positioned in relation to the Arthurian verse romances of Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1160 – 1191), whose framework focused upon 'young aristocratic heroes of unproven historicity', such as Lancelot, Yvain, and Perceval.¹⁶⁴ Karen Pratt notes how the strength of French Arthurian literature lay in its ability 'to generate new and exciting stories through the techniques of continuation, compilation, adaptation, [and] interpolation.'¹⁶⁵ This concept of a multi-layered entity, of a narrative simultaneously capable of permanence and mutability – of retaining yet reimagining and expanding itself – is a key characteristic of the Arthurian story. Rooted in intertextuality, the legend can be approached as a 'literary memory' made up of 'repetition and variation', a long palimpsest containing a 'conscious interplay between the adapted text and its adaptation' which dates back to Geoffrey's re-use of Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*.¹⁶⁶ Just as the *Historia* 'superimposed a twelfth-century

¹⁶³ However, Heng suggests that the romance genre begins with Geoffrey. See Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴ Karen Pratt, 'Introduction', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

¹⁶⁵ Pratt, 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Raeleen Chai-Elsholz, 'Introduction: Palimpsests and 'Palimpsestuous' Reinscriptions', in *Palimpsests and the Literary Imagination of Medieval England: Collected Essays*, ed. by Leo Carruthers, Raeleen Chai-Elsholz, and Tatjana Silee (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-17 (p. 3); Larisa Kocic-Zámbó, 'Resounding Words: Fan Fiction and the Pleasure of Adaptation' in *Travelling around Cultures: Collected Essays on Literature and Art*, ed. by Zsolt Györi and Gabriella Moise (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars

cultural overlay' onto Nennius, incorporating concepts from contemporary English, Welsh, Arabic, and classical sources, the French tradition does much the same, overlapping its own cultural and political history onto the legend.¹⁶⁷ An example of this is Chrétien's conceptualisation of Arthur, which he constructs around Charlemagne, the French 'national hero', rather than Geoffrey's British Arthur.¹⁶⁸ The French tradition's development of Geoffrey's original narrative is most innovative in its addition of new motifs:

The French inventions created or utilised by Chrétien include the knights of the Roundtable (along with the pivotal figures of Lancelot and Perceval), emphasis on the unwritten code of chivalry and precepts of *amour courtois*, and the important symbolic designations of Camelot and the Holy Grail.¹⁶⁹

These now-familiar Arthurian concepts evoke themes of unity, bravery, and adventure, creating new spaces within the Arthurian world where the search for courtly romance ('love') and the call to spiritual quests ('knighthood') both operate as chivalric pursuits.¹⁷⁰ Within this French tradition, the figure of Merlin is associated with both types of quest, 'an enigmatic

Publishing, 2016), pp. 53-69 (p. 56). Also see Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 8; Donald Maddox, 'Generic Intertextuality in Arthurian Literature: The Specular Encounter', in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 3-24 (p. 5).

¹⁶⁷ Neil Thomas, *Diu Crône and the Medieval Arthurian Cycle* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), p. 58.

¹⁶⁸ Pratt, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Farina, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ See Douglas Kelly, 'Narrative Poetics: Rhetoric, Orality and Performance' in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 52-63 (p. 60).

character with a compelling origin story and a doomed romance.’¹⁷¹ Merlin’s story begins in Geoffrey. As a fatherless boy-prophet summoned to consult King Vortigern about his crumbling tower (which leads to the *Omen* prophecy in the *Prophetiae*), he eventually goes on to aid both Uther Pendragon and King Arthur during their respective reigns. Around 1150, he appears as the central character in Geoffrey’s final work, the *Vita* (an account of Merlin’s life after the *Historia*), wherein which he is a prophet, an astronomer, and a wild man.¹⁷² However, it is in the French tradition, in the work of late twelfth-century writer, Robert de Boron, where we first find an extended account of the prophet’s origins. Robert opens his poem, *Merlin* (dated around the late twelfth to early thirteenth century), in Hell, where the Devil and his council of demonic agents scheme together and create the child, Merlin – a boy who ‘is brought into existence as a servant of the devils, their riposte to the work of Christ, and their attempt to reverse it’.¹⁷³ The demons hope he will operate as their ‘spokesperson in the world of human beings, a counterpart to Christian prophets whom they blame (along with Christ himself) for their defeat.’¹⁷⁴ Merlin, however, is granted the power to ‘answer the claims both of Our Lord and of the devils; for a demon had made his body, but Our Lord had given him the spirit to hear and understand.’¹⁷⁵ The poem then goes on to describe the beginning of Merlin’s life, with Robert’s character a clear combination of Geoffrey’s two Merlins: ‘simultaneously the *Historia*’s omniscient prophet and the *Vita*’s troublesome

¹⁷¹ Campbell, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition*, p. 1.

¹⁷² See Chapter 3 of this thesis for a full discussion of Merlin in the *Vita*.

¹⁷³ Gareth Griffith, ‘Merlin’, in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 99-114 (p. 103).

¹⁷⁴ Griffith, ‘Merlin’, p. 103.

¹⁷⁵ Robert de Boron, ‘Merlin’, in *Merlin and the Grail. Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Perceval: The Trilogy of Arthurian Prose Romances attributed to Robert de Boron*, trans. by Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), pp. 45-114 (p. 55).

trickster, helping to establish the Arthurian kingdom while playing practical jokes on its rulers.¹⁷⁶ Robert's early history of Merlin, which became incorporated into the French Merlinian Vulgate tradition as five prose episodes, narrates: Merlin's demonic origins; the young Merlin's meeting with Vortiger (Vortigern) and his revelation of the red and white dragons (*Omen* episode); Merlin's counsel to the two brothers Pendragon and Uther, the raising of Stonehenge, and Merlin's advice to Uther on the construction of the Round Table; Uther, Ygerne, and Merlin's role in the conception of Arthur; and Arthur and the Sword in the Stone.¹⁷⁷ It is these prose episodes, combined with the later continuation to Robert's poem in the Vulgate Cycle, (also composed of several episodes), which is altogether translated into the Middle English *Prose Merlin*.¹⁷⁸

The Vulgate Cycle's continuation of the Merlin story places a greater focus on medieval warfare than Robert's earlier part, perhaps to illustrate the seriousness of Arthur's journey to create his empire. This latter part details five key episodes of military conflict: the civil revolt of Arthur's barons, to whom Merlin reveals that Arthur is Uther Pendragon's son; the war between Britain and the Saxons; King Rion's war against King Leodegan; the war between King Ban and King Bors and the French Claudas; and King Arthur's campaign against Rome.¹⁷⁹ Through these episodes we perceive the heroic deeds of Arthur, his knights, and Merlin, all of whom are engaged in conflicts at home as well as beyond the nation's borders. These battles also set out Arthur's many enemies, each of whom highlight his power and faith. Thus, the story of Merlin altogether depicts an interest in imperial fantasy. Merlin's association to the Grail quest (a French addition to the Arthurian legend, first mentioned by

¹⁷⁶ Campbell, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁷ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 3-5.

¹⁷⁸ Campbell, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁹ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 5-6.

Chrétien in his final, unfinished romance, *Perceval, The Story of the Grail* (before 1191)), was later developed by Robert de Boron.¹⁸⁰ However, Robert used early Biblical history to make this narrative ‘clearly, unambiguously Christian’.¹⁸¹ The Christianising of a new Arthurian motif by Robert is particularly pertinent to this chapter, which considers the ‘strong element of Christian morality’ and supremacy within the *Prose Merlin* text.¹⁸² This religious framework, while indeed visible in the later Middle English Arthurian dragon (which magnifies the crusading and apocalyptic imaginings found earlier in Geoffrey’s dragon motif), is first realised through the late twelfth-century/ early thirteenth-century creation of the ‘Saracen’ Flualis, an episode which marks the first point in the French tradition of an Islamophobic interest.

Prophecy, ‘Saracens’, and Conversion: King Flualis and the 2 two-headed dragons

In the *Prose Merlin*, at the beginning of the *Merlin and Nimiane; and Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael’s Mount* section, Merlin goes to Jerusalem and meets King Flualis, the ‘powerful Saracen ruler,’ for whom he interprets a dream.¹⁸³ This narrative in the Middle English work derives from the French Vulgate tradition (which the *Prose Merlin* faithfully replicates, with no noticeable changes). In the French, this episode is a significant addition from Geoffrey’s Merlin narrative, unmistakably drawing upon the recent twelfth-century Muslim conquest of the Holy Land. While the other cultural enemies of Uther and Arthur’s in the French are

¹⁸⁰ Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval, Or, The Story of the Grail*, trans. by Ruth Harwood Cline (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. ix.

¹⁸¹ de Boron, ‘Merlin’, p. 4.

¹⁸² *Prose Merlin*, p. 7.

¹⁸³ *Prose Merlin*, p. 305. I here give the section titles as these appear in Conlee.

referred to as Saxons (mainly through the singular form, ‘sesne’), we encounter a departure from this in the description of Flualis.¹⁸⁴ The French version states:

es parties de iherusalem ou il auoit roy moult poissant qui flualis estoit apeles & fu preudons
& de grant renomée de sa loy car sarasins estoit.

(to the region of Jerusalem, where there was a most powerful king whose name was Flualis.

He was a worthy man of great renown in Islam, for he was a Saracen.)¹⁸⁵

This marks the first instance where the term ‘Sarasins’ (‘Saracens’) is used in the French narrative (with ‘Sarrasin’ later used once in relation to Arthur’s fight against Rome, where the Roman and ‘Saracen’ enemies are driven away).¹⁸⁶ This explicit focus upon Christian-Muslim relations in the French tradition shows how contemporary cultural anxieties regarding the figure of the ‘Saracen’ are being reimagined in Arthurian literature after Geoffrey’s *Historia*.

The *Prose Merlin* expands upon this crusading imaginary, retaining the tale of Flualis (and the romance motif of the converted non-Christian king). This narrative is omitted from John Conlee’s TEAMS Middle English Text Series edition, simply summarised as ‘a dream

¹⁸⁴ See ‘Sesson’ in *Anglo-Norman Dictionary (AND² Online Edition)*. Aberystwyth University. <<https://anglo-norman.net/entry/Saisne>> [accessed 24 July 2024]. Interestingly, this term was once used ‘in error’ for ‘Saracen’ in the French Guy of Warwick (see above link).

¹⁸⁵ Heinrich Oskar Sommer, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances* (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908-16), p. 420; *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation. The Story of Merlin*, ed. by Lacy, trans. by Burns, 10 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992-6), VI (2010), p. 448.

¹⁸⁶ Sommer, *The Vulgate Version*, p. 441; Fulton, ‘History and Myth’, pp. 53-4.

[which] signifies the coming of the Christians and the defeat of the Saracens.’¹⁸⁷ The absence of the dream in Conlee’s edition could be because he believed the passage to be incidental, with even Stephen Knight remarking how the episode is ‘digressive’ and ‘less interesting’, its major point simply to ‘predict the Christian reconquest of the holy city’.¹⁸⁸ However, Flualis’s dream is in fact critical in the context of the *Prose Merlin*’s crusading imaginary. By connecting to other dream and crusading episodes within the text, it influences the portrayal of the crusading dragon motif, operating as both a reimagining of Joachim of Fiore’s prophecy of the dragon of Revelation, and a cipher for Salah ad-Din, the Muslim leader who secured Jerusalem during the Crusades.

In the fifteenth century, we read of King Flualis’s enigmatic dream:

In this partie seith the storye as soone as Merlin was departed from the Kynge Arthur asye haue herde he departed from the cite of Logres so faste that in all the worlde was noon so swifte a horse that myght hym haue sewed so that alle that euer hym saugh wende he hadde ben onto of his witte . and a noon he drof in to the foreste that was grete and depe and come to the see and passed over that no tyme wolde a bide be see no be londe till he come to the parties of Jherusalen where ther was a kynge of grete puyssaunce that was named Flualis . he was a goode man of grete renoun as of his lawe . ffor he was a sarazin and he hadde assembled all the wisemen of his londe and of other londes as many as he myght gete . and whan thei were come alle to the assemble be fore hym in his paleys . he seide to hem so high that thei myght hym wele here and undirstonde . lordinges quod he I haue sente for yow and ye ben come at my comaundement and ther fore I thanke yow but ye knowe not the cause why . but yef I do yow to undirstonde . hit be fill that I slepte this other day in my paleys and hilde the quene that is here in myn armes as me semed . and as I was in this a vision com to

¹⁸⁷ *Prose Merlin*, p. 305.

¹⁸⁸ Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power*, p. 63.

me two serpentes whereof eche of hem hadde two heedes foule and hidouse and of eche of
 hem com a grete flawme of fire whereof all my contrey was light . and that oon of the
 serpentes caught me be twene his feet by the flankes and that other toke the quene be twene
 myn armes and bar us bothe an high upon the roof of my paleys that is so high and whan thei
 hadde brought us thider . thei rente of oure armes and legges from oure bodyes and caste hem
 down oon here another there . and whan thei hadde thus us dismembred ther com viij/8 smale
 serpentes a noon and eche of hm toke a membre and wente up in to the heir a bove the temple
 of Diana/e and ther thei rente asondre oure membres in to smale pecis and the two serpentes
 that hadde rente oure membres from oure bodyes. . lifte us an high above the paleys and sette
 fire on the paleis with ynne and brent up oure bodyes in to aisshes . and the wynde a roos and
 gadered the powder and bar it over all the londe a this half the see . ne there ne was no goode
 town but ther ynne leste moche or litill . Soche was the a vision that I saugh in my slepe that
 me semed was right perilouse and grevous . and therfore I have yow hider somowned and
 assembled and therfore I pray yow and requyre in all sernses and guerdons yef ther be eny of
 yow that can telle the significacoun of these thinges lete me witte . and here be fore yow alle I
 graunte trewly to hym that telleth me ther of the verite that he shall haue my doughter to his
 wif and all my relms after my deth . or yef he be mared he shall be lorde of me and all my
 londe alle the days of my lif . **Whan** the wise men herde the promise and the wordes of the
 kyng and thei hadde herde the a vision . thei hadde merveile what it myght be tokene . and
 oon seide othings and some seide a nother eche after that hym semed beste . and Merlin was
 in soche semblaunce that noon cowde hym knowe ne sen . spake whan alle other hadden
 seide so high that alle that were ther with ynne myght it here clerly and seide . undirstonde to
 me and I shall telle this thy dreame and whan he hadde seide this . thei loked aboute hem to se
 hym that hadde this spoken . and so died alle thei that weren in the paleis . but nothings thei
 saugh . and yet hem semed it was a myd monge hem that seide undirstonde to me king
 Flualis . and here the be tokenynge of thyn a vision . The two serpentes that thow saughest be
 fore the in thi slepe that hadde iiij hedes and of alle foure heedes casten onte fier and flame .
 thei ben foure cristin kynges that to the marchen and shull sette all thi contre in fier and

flame . and that the serpentes bar the and the quene in to the highest part of thi paleis signifieth that thei shull haue all thi londe in bailly even to the yates of thi chife fortresse . of that the serpentes raced away the membres of the and thei wif be tokeneth that thou shall forsake the euell lawe that is roted in thyn herte and shall caste it oute from the to come to the beleve of Ihesu crist of that the viij smalle serpentes toke the membres of thi body and of the quene and bar it above the temple of Diana . whider as thi men shull fle for socour of that thei rente thi membres and the membres of the quene thi wyf signifieth that thi cheldren that shull be thy membres and thi flesh shull be slain with ynne the temple of Diana . of that the serpentes lefte the on high on thi paleis and the quene also with the sooll be youre self signifieth that thourgh the and hir shall cristin feith be encreced and strengthed of that the serpentes brente the paleis undir the signifieth that the shall not be lefte the valew of a peny of thniges thatt thou hast of this euell lawe . of that thowe and the quene were brent in to aisshes signifieth that thou shall be purged clene of all thy synne by the water of baptyme . of that the powder of the fly ouer all the londe a this side the see signifieth that thou shalt have children in the goode creaunce that shull be bolde knyghtes and hardy and shull be wrshppd thourgh all the londes of the worlde . Now hast thou herde thyn a vision that thou haste sein in thi slepinge and shall be falle the like as I haue thee tolde.¹⁸⁹

King Flualis's dream appears in the Middle English text (as it does in the French) just before Arthur's prophetic bear and dragon dream, prophesising a fearful future for the 'Saracen' king and queen of Jerusalem. Like the French original, the episode describes the frightening vision of Flualis, a 'Saracen' ruler who dreams of two, two-headed winged 'serpentes' setting fire to his kingdom, before snatching, dismembering, and burning both him and his queen.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ My transcription of Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.3.11. fols 224-25r.

¹⁹⁰ For the French translation, see *Lancelot-Grail: The Story of Merlin*, pp. 448-50. For the original French, see Sommer, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, pp. 420-2.

The vision is interpreted by Merlin who, after swiftly travelling alone to Jerusalem before Arthur's journey to Rome, encounters a helpless Flualis and his wise men, each of whom fail to offer the correct interpretation of the king's prophetic vision. Merlin finally interprets the dream himself, warning the 'Saracen' king of the fall of his kingdom before notifying him of his eventual conversion to Christianity. This episode then is not so much a discontinuity or 'digression' away from the other material in the *Prose Merlin*, as previous scholarship suggests, but rather a similar conflation of insular paganisms and narrow imaginings of Islam which occur elsewhere in the text.

The episode is also a reworking of Geoffrey's *Omen*: Merlin mirrors his role as the young prophet in the *Historia* who corrected Vortigern's wise men and prophesised that the two dragons beneath his tower portended the fall of his kingdom. The Flualis dream sequence retains the main elements of this episode from the *Historia*, incorporating a non-Christian, pagan king (with this characterisation of Vortigern going back to Nennius), two violent dragons, a failing council of 'wisemen', and Merlin as the ultimate prophetic authority. Notably, Vortigern was once a Christian, slowly transforming into a pagan for 'the sake of his wife'.¹⁹¹ Flualis is then his reverse, the 'Saracen' king and his wife turning from non-Christian to Christian. Interestingly too, Vortigern's council was made up of 'magi' (magicians), a description which may refer to pseudo-Islamic magic and/ or astronomers and astrologers from the medieval Islamic world, places like the Muslim East, where Flualis and his wise men reside. At the time of Geoffrey, these non-English masters of the quadrivium subjects were not wholly accepted by some Christian writers (consider William of Malmesbury's depiction of Gerbert as a necromancer influenced by Muslim Spain), which is

¹⁹¹ *HRB*, pp. 130-1.

perhaps why the wisdom of Flualis's 'wisemen' is fruitless.¹⁹² Another difference between Geoffrey's *Omen* and this episode in the *Prose Merlin* is Merlin's body. Merlin does not physically appear before Flualis and the wise men, but rather conveys the dream's meaning as an unseen voice. By becoming an invisible, omniscient persona, Merlin supersedes the king's own wisemen, adopting the role of the king's spiritual guide within the scene. Here, the image of a concealed Merlin is like his assistance of Uther and his 'role in the deception of Igerne and the birth of Arthur', with the *Prose Merlin* subtly incorporating the *Historia*'s trope of Merlin as a master of disguise, a prophetic counsel, and an arranger of royal fertility (with Flualis eventually producing a Christian line).¹⁹³

In terms of the dream's dragon imagery, Merlin narrates to Flualis the significance of the two-headed serpents, with their aerial nature and flaming mouths indicating them to be two, fiery dragons (we may also recall here that serpents and dragons were recognised as interchangeable during the medieval period). Merlin reveals how the four heads of the two dragons symbolise four Christian kings, each of whom will succeed in overthrowing Flualis and his 'Saracen' kingdom. The subsequent Christian-Muslim battle evokes the *Prose Merlin*'s crusading imaginary, altogether portraying an apocalyptic image of the disintegration and dissemination of Muslim bodies, a political Christian victory, and an end to 'Saracen' rule in Jerusalem. This combination of 'Saracens', prophecies, and the triumph of Christianity coincides with a broader French and English tradition found in this period, where Muslim rulers are given prophetic dreams of Christian conquest. A key example of this is found in *Mandeville's Travels* (c. 1357 – 71), a work drawing on earlier Latin sources on

¹⁹² *HRB*, pp. 138-41. Also see Flint, *The Rise of Magic*. For more on the medieval imagining of Gerbert, see the Introduction to this thesis, pages 28-36.

¹⁹³ Sarah Roche-Mahdi, 'A Reappraisal of the Role of Merlin in the "Roman de Silence"', *Arthuriana*, 12 (2002), 6-21 (p. 9).

Jerusalem and the east, with versions in both insular and continental French, which I cite below using the fifteenth-century Middle English translation, *The Book of John Mandeville* (a translation history in this respect similar to the *Prose Merlin*).¹⁹⁴ The chapter, titled ‘Truthe Of Sarasyns. Capitulum Duodecimum’, depicts the narrator’s tale of meeting a soudan who, after discussing the three Abrahamic faiths, reveals how

[...] And for her owen
synnes,” he seyde, “hath Cristen men lost al the lond the which that we holdeth,
and for youre synnes hath your God gyve these londes to us, and noght thorgh
oure streyngthe. For we wyte well,” he seyde, “when ye serveth well your God, that
He wole helpe yow, so that no man shal do ageyn yow. And ye wyte well by youre prophecies
that Cristen men shal wyne agen thes londes, when they serveth wel
her God. But while they lyven so yvel as they doon, we have no drede of hem, for
her God wole noght help hem.”¹⁹⁵

The mention of Christian men regaining a land long held by Muslims in another late-medieval French text, similarly translated in English, shows how the episode of Flualis fits into a larger narrative tradition of Muslim prophecies concerning the fall of ‘Saracens’ in Jerusalem and the Christian reconquest of the Holy Land. This knowledge that Christians will eventually regain Jerusalem also affects Flualis’s future in the *Prose Merlin*. Both the king and queen, who are presented as helpless against the Christian serpents/ dragons in the

¹⁹⁴ See *The Book of John Mandeville with Related Texts*, ed. and trans. by Ian MacLeod Higgins (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2011).

¹⁹⁵ See lines 1311-1318 in: ‘The Book of John Mandeville’, ed. by Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson, in *TEAMS Middle English Texts* <<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/kohanski-and-benson-the-book-of-john-mandeville>> [accessed 10 August 2022].

dream, ineffective against their brute force, realise that Jerusalem will ultimately become a Christian stronghold. The two are eventually ‘purged’ of their Muslim faith, with the dream prophesising that the Muslim king ‘shall forsake the evell law that is roted in thyn herte and shall caste it oute from the to come to the beleve of Hym Crist.’ This conversion scene foreshadows the future baptism of Flualis and his wife, demonstrating the washing away of their non-Christian belief, with both the violence from the flaming serpents/ dragons and the imagery of their burnt, dismembered bodies portraying the ethnic cleansing of Muslims from Jerusalem.

This dual image of mutilation and purification may also have a potential sexual emphasis. Before seeing his vision, Flualis describes how he ‘slepte’ in the palace and ‘hilde the quene that is here in myn armes’, depicting a sexualised image of the Orient. In his dream, however, there is a physical intrusion into this private space, with Flualis describing how one of the two-headed dragons ‘toke the quene be twene myn armes’, the snatching of the queen’s body from the king here (by two Christian kings) symbolising the Christian conquest of Jerusalem. After their capture, the two dragons ‘toke a membre and wente up in to the heir [...] and ther thei rente asondre oure membres in to smale pecis and the two serpentes that hadde rente oure membres from oure bodyes.’ The term ‘membre’ is repeated thrice here, and even though it refers specifically to the tearing of their limbs, it may also insinuate the removal of the king and queen’s sexual organs, conveying an underlying threat to their reproductive potential.¹⁹⁶ This disjoining of the sexual ‘membres’ of both royal heads eliminates the possibility for a future ‘Saracen’ royal line, with Merlin stating that Flualis’s previous ‘Saracen’ ‘cheldren that shull be thy membres and thi flesh shull be slain.’ Here, the king’s private body is prevented from reproducing, its ‘membres’ and his future ‘Saracen’

¹⁹⁶ ‘membre’ in *Middle English Compendium* <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED27274/track?counter=1&search_id=15353854> [accessed 13 June 2022].

heirs destroyed. The dismemberment of Flualis's private body in the dream then anticipates the disintegration of his public body outside of it, denoting the end of Muslim rule in Jerusalem.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the dream implies that all future generations of 'Saracens' will be destroyed while the future Christian children of Jerusalem will flourish, with the dragon motif as four Christian kings preventing the continuation of Muslim dynasties in the Holy Land. The repeated use of the word 'membre' in this episode then, even if subconscious, reworks Geoffrey's *Omen* with an obscene logic in mind, bringing out a sexual element within the *Prose Merlin* that foregrounds the eventual erasure of Flualis's 'Saracen' line. As Alison Basil has noted of fifteenth-century English political imaginaries, 'the integrity of the will and judgement of the public body of the king was reliant on the maintenance of the physical, mental, even moral health of the private Body of the king.'¹⁹⁸ In the *Prose Merlin* episode, the 'Saracen' king is physically separated and reduced to ashes, as well as mentally shaken from the dream and the future it prophesises, all of which leads him to finally forsake his faith. This shows how he is wholly conquered, with the serpent/ dragon motif foreshadowing the king's loss of control over both himself and his kingdom. This image of a degraded Flualis is in stark contrast to his previously 'grete puyssaunce' (power) noted on his introduction to the text. The *Prose Merlin* weakens Jerusalem's imaginary leader by

¹⁹⁷ Also see discussion of the king's 'natural body' and 'symbolic body' in Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). Interestingly, Conrad Leyser notes how 'Jerusalem, was the originary point for the 'mystic fiction' of the ruler's body', showing a Christian fixation with royal bodies and/ in the East. See Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. xxii.

¹⁹⁸ Alison Basil, 'Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou: Madness, Gender Dysfunction and Perceptions of Dis-ease in the Royal Body', in *The Image and Perception of Monarchy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Sean McGlynn and Elena Woodacre (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 168-182 (p. 169).

diminishing his 'influence/ authority', his 'social standing', his 'armed might', and his non-Christian faith.¹⁹⁹ He is only redeemed through his conversion to Christianity and through fathering a future line of crusaders, demonstrating how, even though he was recognised as 'a goode man of grete renoun as of his lawe', initially respected for his law-keeping despite being a 'Saracen', Flualis must still undergo a forceful deposition and two physical baptisms, first by fire in his dream, and then by holy water during his conversion, to purify his private and public self, and thus the whole body of Jerusalem. Therefore, the *Prose Merlin's* reference to the king's public body being disintegrated is conveyed through the image of violence against his private body, suggesting how the individual Muslim body (Flualis) and the geographical Muslim body (Jerusalem and the East) must be dismembered, so that Arthur's empire can further expand to become one Christian body.

Basil also notes 'a third factor essential to the health and stability of the Body of the king – that of the presence of the Queen.'²⁰⁰ She observes how the medieval queen 'enhanced' the king's kingship, suggesting that a king's strength, power and integrity were closely tied to his partner.²⁰¹ The *Prose Merlin's* destruction of the 'Saracen' queen's private body then further causes the collapse of the king's public body, showing how the dignity of the male ruler of the land was connected to the female form beside him. A focus on the female body continues even after the dream, when Flualis offers the one who interprets the dream correctly to 'haue my doughter to his wif', showing how the female body operates as a reward for any man who can appease the king's request. This declaration by Flualis on behalf of his daughter mirrors the long conceived 'model of the Oriental woman' discussed by Said:

¹⁹⁹ 'puissance' in *Middle English Compendium* <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED35153/track?counter=1&search_id=17035550> [accessed 13 June 2022].

²⁰⁰ Basil, 'Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou', p. 169.

²⁰¹ Basil, 'Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou', p. 169.

‘she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her.’²⁰² Such is the case for Flualis’s daughter, who exists as a nameless, voiceless female body within the episode (an interesting mirror here to Merlin as an invisible bodiless prophetic voice within the episode, who could have, as the correct interpreter to Flualis’s dream, claimed the ‘Saracen’s’ daughter as his wife). Therefore, both mother and daughter, within Flualis’s dream and outside of it, determine the ‘sexual, reproductive and political’ future of Jerusalem, showing how female bodies, especially those in the East, remain under the control of the men around them.²⁰³

The transportation of Flualis and the queen’s mutilated bodies from their bedchamber to the ‘temple of Diana’ also demonstrates the sexualised representation of Muslim figures, potentially alluding to ‘Saracen’ hypocrisy, with Flualis’s ‘membres’ scattered at the temple of a Roman figure of chastity. The inclusion of Diana here acts as a pagan allusion within the narrative, with the misperception of the ancient Roman temple as a Muslim holy site conveying the confusion between Islam and idolatry. This was a common and often deliberate misperception in medieval Europe, with many European writers portraying the ‘Saracens as idolators, praying and sacrificing to the statues of a colourful pantheon’ to ‘create a portrait of the religious error of the ‘pagan’ Saracens’, particularly during the time of the Crusades.²⁰⁴ This exemplifies the conflation of insular paganism and Islam, used in the text to demonise the Muslim figure. Diana, in Wace’s *Brut* (derived from Geoffrey’s *Historia*), is even characterised as a ‘devil’ who ‘deceived the people through sorcery’ and false prophecies, showing how the *Prose Merlin* aligns the fallen ‘Saracen’ leader with another figure of

²⁰² Said, *Orientalism*, p. 6.

²⁰³ Basil, ‘Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou’, p. 174.

²⁰⁴ Tolan, *Saracens*, p. xx.

diminished authority.²⁰⁵ The inclusion of the Roman Diana in Flualis's dream also connects back to Geoffrey's Trojan narrative, where Brutus, with an augur and twelve elders, visits the temple of Diana, prays for shelter, and hears a response from Diana through a dream vision:

‘Brute, sub occasu solis trans Gallica regna
insula in oceano est undique clausa mari;
insula in oceano est habitata gigantibus olim,
nunc deserta quidem, gentibus apta tuis.
Hanc pete; namque tibi sedes erit illa perhennis.
Hic fiet natis altera Troia tuis.
Hic de prole tua reges nascentur, et ipsis
tocius terrae subditus orbis erit’.

[Brutus, to the west, beyond the kingdoms of Gaul,
lies an island of the ocean, surrounded by the sea;
an island of the ocean, where giants once lived,
but now it is deserted and waiting for your people.
Sail to it; it will be your home for ever.
It will furnish your children with a new Troy.
From your descendants will arise kings, who
will be the masters of the whole world’.]²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ ‘Guaste unt trovee une cite/ E un temple d’antiquité./ L’imagē ert d’une deuesse,/ Diane, une divineresse:/
Diabls esteit, ki la gent/ Deceveit par enchantment; Semblance de feme perneit/ Par quei le pople deceveit.’
Weiss, *Wace’s Roman de Brut*, pp. 16-7. Also see Fiona Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of
Female Kingship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 165.

²⁰⁶ *HRB*, pp. 20-1.

Both Flualis and Brutus can be viewed as two non-Christians from Asia, who receive prophecies of territorial conquest and/ or loss – figures implicitly implicated in complex imaginings of *translatio imperii*. Like Diana’s promise to Brutus that his descendants become ‘kings’ and ‘masters of the whole world’, Merlin’s interpretation of Flualis’s dream concludes with this image of the king and queen’s future children, who ‘shull be bolde knyghtes and hardy and shull be worshppd thourgh all the londes of the worlde.’ As Catherine Batt notes, ‘Flualis operates as a surrogate for Arthur and his Christian expansionism’, but more than this – his conversion recalls the moment of British foundation itself.²⁰⁷

Flualis’s dream sequence appears shortly before Arthur’s imperial quest to conquer Rome from Lucius, a feat which he hopes will enable him to raise his British, Christian empire. Merlin’s swift visit to Jerusalem just before this upcoming expedition thus exhibits the Muslim loss of the kingdom and Flualis’s religious conversion as an early Christian victory ahead of Arthur’s developing imperial plans. Indeed, as Batt observes, the episode represents an image of ‘the Christianizing of the East’, a tone inherited from the French tradition which we find echoed in the *Prose Merlin*, in other episodes featuring the ‘Saracen’ (discussed later in this chapter).²⁰⁸ While Anne Lawrence-Mathers suggests that the episode makes ‘virtually no attempt to weave into the dominant narratives of Arthur’s wars, of knightly adventures, and of preparation of the Round Table knights for the Grail quest’, the Christian conquest of Jerusalem, the presence of future Christian knights, the positioning of the dream before Arthur’s own imperial quest, and the charged religious undertones of the dream imply otherwise.²⁰⁹ The dream also foreshadows the birth of more Christian knights, men who will be united in their holy quest of maintaining the Christian faith in and beyond

²⁰⁷ Catherine Batt, *Malory’s Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 42.

²⁰⁸ Batt, *Malory’s Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition*, p. 42.

²⁰⁹ Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin*, p. 207.

Jerusalem. Although Flualis's dream does imply that 'King Arthur, Julius Caesar and the Islamic Empire appear to exist at the same time, in a way which would have horrified any historian', the *Prose Merlin*'s grouping together of these distinctly separate historical moments is an attempt to stage and record a successful history of Christian conquest against strong and recognisable pagan enemies from world history.²¹⁰

This temporal blurring may be deliberate, with the anachronistic coupling of King Arthur, Julius Caesar and the Islamic Empire evoking the Nine Worthies tradition. Formed in the early fourteenth century, the Nine Worthies were 'a roster of nine chivalric heroes formed around three trinities of warriors from the three ages of history.'²¹¹ While Julius Caesar is in the first group, made up of 'three 'pagan' heroes', Arthur is in the final group, 'in a trinity of Christian heroes from history: King Arthur, Charlemagne, and, finally, Godfrey of Bouillon.'²¹² By pairing Geoffrey's king with both Charlemagne, 'the *invictissimus imperator* (most unconquered emperor), the ideal ruler figure, of decisive action, power, and assertiveness' and Godfrey of Bouillon, 'the hero of the First Crusade' and 'ruler of the incipient Latin polity centred upon the Holy City' (a configuration which would suggest possessing a Muslim opponent), Arthur endured through the Middle Ages as a hero connected

²¹⁰ Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin*, p. 207. For more on the depiction of 'Saracens' in medieval England in late medieval Arthurian literature, see Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005).

²¹¹ Simon John, 'Godfrey of Bouillon and the Swan Knight', in *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages: Realities and Representations. Essays in Honour of John France*, ed. by Simon John and Nicholas Morton (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 129-143 (p. 141).

²¹² John, 'Godfrey of Bouillon and the Swan Knight', p. 141.

both to Christian empire and the fight for universal Christendom.²¹³ By incorporating the Islamic empire within the Arthurian narrative (from Pendragon and Uther until Arthur, as discussed later in this chapter), the *Prose Merlin* effectively creates an image of a crusading Arthurian line undefined by time or space. It also constructs the Muslim ‘Saracen’ as a long-established, permanent Christian enemy, one which was conquered before Arthur’s rule, during Arthur’s rule, and one which must be re-conquered even after it, founding a longstanding, anachronistic and entirely constructed, Christian claim to Jerusalem.

The Joachite dragon and the Christian dragons in Jerusalem

This antagonism towards the ‘Saracen’, which stems from the Flualis episode, frames the *Prose Merlin*’s dragon motif, a symbol which gestures towards the central Muslim enemy of the Christians within the text, figuratively representing the ‘Saracen’ who it recurs alongside in several connected episodes across the whole narrative. The text manifests a negative attitude towards the cultural group in the dream of Flualis, where the Muslim king, who is initially recognised as good, is eventually overthrown because of his non-Christian faith. In this instance, and those which precede and follow it (in episodes which I will later discuss), the dragon appears specifically to signal and contribute to the ‘Saracen’ defeat, auguring their downfall, which occurs in the text through their death or through their conversion. These two states of being deny any further living or lasting memory of the ‘Saracen’ figure, with the text attempting to cleanse the Arthurian land and the Arthurian narrative of the identity group, through both the physical and spiritual conquering of Flualis in Jerusalem. But why does this

²¹³ Johannes Fried, *Charlemagne*, trans. by Peter Lewis (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 4; Simon John, *Godfrey of Bouillon: Duke of Lower Lotharingia, Ruler of Latin Jerusalem, c. 1060-1100* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), p. 1.

treatment occur, and what is the *Prose Merlin* (and the French tradition upon which it relies) ultimately conveying by constructing the fate of the ‘Saracen’ in this way?

It is, I assert, to do with reimagining the outcome of a haunting military defeat. Heng declares that ‘cultural fantasy does not evade but confronts history’, arguing that romance motifs which denote a contemporary attitude or cultural idea do not avoid but rather directly respond to a past moment in time.²¹⁴ This chapter, however, will enhance Heng’s statement, arguing that ‘cultural fantasy’ does not just confront history but essentially rewrites it in the case of the *Prose Merlin* by resurfacing past cultural attitudes to reimagine the outcome of a traumatic historical event. For the *Prose Merlin* dragon, this historical past is the memory of the Third Crusade, with the dragon not simply recalling but actively rewriting the Christian loss of Jerusalem and the rise of Muslim power, to finally achieve ‘cultural recovery’.

During this historical moment, popular medieval, prophetic traditions were being generated as a reaction to the rise in Islamic military power.²¹⁵ Writing in the mid-twelfth to early-thirteenth century, roughly contemporary with Robert de Boron, is Joachim of Fiore, an Italian theologian and apocalyptic thinker whose prophecies were circulating in France during this period. Frances Andrews notes how the ‘majority of known manuscripts of Joachim and pseudo-Joachim came from Italy and France [...] indicating the original foci of his impact’.²¹⁶ Many of the French and Italian texts from this period were influenced by ‘famous historical prophets – such as Joachim of Fiore, the Sybil, and Merlin’, with authors writing ‘polemically-charged prophecies about contemporary events’ and attributing them to

²¹⁴ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 14.

²¹⁵ Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, p. 51.

²¹⁶ Frances Andrews, ‘The Influence of Joachim in the 13th century’, in *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore*, ed. by Matthias Riedl (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 190-266 (p. 206).

powerful authorities.²¹⁷ Joachim was one such sought-after prophet interested in one of Europe's major political preoccupations – the menace of the 'Saracen' and the crusade of the faithful against the infidel.²¹⁸ His prophetic writings combined the apocalyptic image of the red dragon with contemporary Christian crusading ambitions and cultural anxieties. The abbot's crusading imaginary also appears to be compatible with, and on occasion read alongside, Galfridian prophecy, with the post-Galfridian framework merging contemporary politics with prophetic writings. One example of this is the association of King Arthur with the Last World Emperor, with his Roman campaign in the *Historia* exhibiting him as a leader of 'a Western European army against the 'kings of the Orient' who fight for Rome.'²¹⁹ This construction of the heroic crusader is rooted in the opposition between the Eastern world and the Western world and fixated on the two dominant religions during this time: Christianity and Islam. One specific Joachite prophecy circulating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards was influenced by the role of Islam in the political events of the time, following the contemporary campaigns of Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (referred to in the West as Saladin, c. 1137 – 1193) against the Crusaders, which culminated in 1187 with Salah ad-Din's victory at the Battle of Hattin, resulting in Muslim control of Jerusalem.²²⁰ Joachim narrated a vision which drew on the apocalyptic seven-headed dragon from the Book of Revelation, prophesising Salah ad-Din as the 'sixth head' of the dragon, and thereafter establishing him and all 'Saracens' as threats to the Christian world empire. Joachim's

²¹⁷ Campbell, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition*, p. 33.

²¹⁸ Marjorie Reeves, *The influence of prophecy in the later Middle Ages: a study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 10.

²¹⁹ Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place*, p. 75. For the Last World Emperor, see pages 149-50 of this thesis.

²²⁰ Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, p. 53. I will refer to this figure as Salah ad-Din as opposed to Saladin, using his original name rather than its English form, in order to retain and not erase his identity.

diagram (see Figure 2) of the seven-headed dragon featured in his *Liber Figurarum* (Book of Figures) ‘fuses the most dreaded representatives of Islam with the most dreadful of the apocalyptic beasts.’²²¹ The illustrated dragon is ‘a conventional medieval sign of evil and the Devil’, representing ‘all of the reprobate’ through its red body, ‘a traditional colour of infamy’.²²² Each of the seven dragon heads in the diagram signify ‘the worst persecutors of the Christian Church from its origins to Joachim’s day’, corresponding to ‘the seven persecutions of the Church and seven Antichrists.’²²³ According to Joachim, the first six

²²¹ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 226.

²²² Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, p. 226.

²²³ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, p. 226; Andrews, ‘The Influence of Joachim in the 13th century’, p. 245.

Figure 2. Joachim of Fiore's Seven-headed Dragon from the *Liber Figurarum*.²²⁴



heads were: 'Herod (representing the Jews), Nero (pagans), Constantine the Arian (heretics), Muhammed (Muslims), Mesemotus (sons of Babylon), and finally Salah ad-Din, another

²²⁴ Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 255A, fol. 7r.

Muslim, who had taken Jerusalem in 1187.²²⁵ The final seventh head and tail ‘for Joachim corresponded to Gog, the final Antichrist.’²²⁶

Joachim’s incorporation of two key Muslim figures in history as two of his seven dragon heads reveals Europe’s apprehension of Muslim leaders of the past and medieval present in the late twelfth to early thirteenth century. The great anxiety over Salah ad-Din is apparent from the lone crown placed on his dragon head in the image, singling him out as a major contemporary threat. Debra Higgs Strickland notes how the abbot’s seven-headed dragon was an

exceptional diagrammatic image because it was conceived by Joachim during the Third Crusade and executed soon after, giving it an immediacy and urgency lacking in imagery produced long after the fact. In accordance with crusading sentiment, it expresses a view of Islam and of Saladin in particular that classifies both with the very worst of demonic, anti-Christian forces.²²⁷

²²⁵ Andrews, ‘The Influence of Joachim’, p. 245. See Reeves, *The influence of prophecy*; Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future: A Study in Medieval Millennialism* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1999); Marjorie Reeves and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

²²⁶ Andrews, ‘The Influence of Joachim’, p. 245. It is interesting to note here how Joachim’s dragon model (an apocalyptic, prophetic concept used to denote the long and evil persecution of Christians), while indeed different to Walcher’s ecliptic dragon model in England (which drew on Arabic astronomy), is another twelfth-century example of the ‘head(s) and tail of a dragon’, showing the prominence and adaptability of the dragon and its meaning during this medieval period.

²²⁷ Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, p. 226.

These negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims sparked ‘a continuing discussion about the central problems of history: the seven tyrannies of the Dragon, the scourge of the Saracens, the advent of Antichrist.’²²⁸ Becoming widespread, these cultural anxieties appeared in English, French, and Italian prophetic texts across the period, such as the French *Prophecies de Merlin* (c. 1212 – 1250), which were written by ‘Maistre Richart d’Irlande at the request of the Emperor Frederick II’.²²⁹ Echoing Joachite writings, one prophecy within this work models Frederick as ‘the dragon from the Dragon of Babylon prophecy’, transforming him into the ‘Antichrist that had been defined and condemned by papal protagonists.’²³⁰ By drawing on Joachim’s seven heads and applying it antipathetically to a Christian ruler, the prophecy establishes Frederick as an apocalyptic threat. Here, the French *Prophecies*, like Joachim’s depiction of Salah ad-Din, demonstrates how medieval prophetic materials created during this period actively responded to contemporary political threats, shaping opposition leaders into dragons to represent them as evil, and to establish their place in history as opponents of Christianity.²³¹ The *Prose Merlin*, although written much later, is responsive to this earlier French tradition (of which Robert’s *Merlin*, its source text, was also a part), and to the Joachite material circulating throughout this time. However, it makes these themes of apocalypticism and religious animosity more explicit, by combining the red dragon of Joachim (which symbolises Christian adversaries) with the red, aerial, Galfridian dragon

²²⁸ Reeves, *The influence of prophecy*, p. 8.

²²⁹ Lucy Allen Paton, *Les Prophecies de Merlin*, 2 vols (New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1927), II, p. 4.

²³⁰ Paton, *Les Prophecies de Merlin*, p. 212; Donald L. Hoffman, ‘Was Merlin a Ghibelline? Arthurian Propaganda at the Court of Frederick II’, in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honor of Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. by Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 113-128 (p. 123).

²³¹ Hoffman, ‘Was Merlin a Ghibelline?’, p. 121.

found in the *Historia* (which, aside from its astral significance, symbolises the rise and fall of royal power). This new Joachite Arthurian dragon is integrated within Flualis's dream vision (as well as other crusading episodes), conflating the biblical apocalyptic narrative found in Joachim with past and present feelings of antagonism towards the rise of Muslim power. However, in both episodes in the *Prose Merlin*, this newly formed creature performs a different purpose than Joachim's red dragon and the red dragon from Revelation. Rather than symbolising its enemies, the *Prose Merlin*'s Joachite Arthurian dragon signifies its Christian victors, narrating (to borrow Lee Manion's words) a compelling 'story of vengeance and rightful possession, of personal failure and possible expiation, and of loss and recovery.'²³² Lucy Allen Paton notes how prophecies 'represent the hopes or fears, the pride or shame of the community from which they emanated.'²³³ The *Prose Merlin* dragon, in each appearance in prophecy or dream, conveys the hope of Christian victory against the 'Saracens', not just confronting history, as Heng states of cultural fantasy motifs, but effectively rewriting and replacing the historical shame of the Christian loss of Jerusalem with the shame and defeat of the 'Saracens'.

On the eve of the Third Crusade (c. 1189-92), Joachim prophesised that the conquest of Jerusalem would occur through the deeds of the English king Richard I (1157 – 1199):

On the eve of the Third Crusade, Joachim believed in a Christian military victory. When Richard I of England, then on his way to the Levant, consulted him at Messina in December 1190, Joachim unequivocally identified Saladin with the sixth head of the Dragon, and

²³² Lee Manion, *Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 2.

²³³ Paton, *Les Prophecies de Merlin*, p. 3.

prophesised that if Richard should persevere, he would gain a decisive victory over Saladin.²³⁴

This prophecy is realised in the *Prose Merlin* in the episode of Flualis's dream (a narrative which, I argue, is a continuation of the earlier crusading imaginings found in the *Prose Merlin*, discussed later in this chapter). Here, the narrative presents two serpent/ dragons with two heads each, this multi-headed image of a dragon in the *Prose Merlin* also evoking Joachim's seven-headed dragon. Merlin interprets these four heads as representing 'four cristin kynges that to the marchen and shull sette all thi contre in fier and flam'.²³⁵ This inversion of Joachim's original image, which saw the heads of the beast represent past and present enemies of Christianity, shifts to now represent a set of royal Christians in battle, a vision which Joachim wished to inspire across Europe and which Richard himself embodied.

If Flualis's dream indeed represents the outcome Joachim desired – the fall of a Muslim stronghold in Jerusalem, then it is possible that the dream itself, especially in the French tradition (which was written at the end of the twelfth century/ beginning of the thirteenth century), is a Christian prophetic reimagining of the Third Crusade, with the crusaders finally taking the Holy Land from 'Saracen' rule. Thus, it is also plausible to consider the four prophesised kings in the dream as representing the three kings who led the Third Crusade: Richard I of England, Philip II of France, and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa with the final king potentially Arthur himself, who, by this point in the narrative, has considerably expanded his empire.²³⁶ Merlin is then an embodiment of Joachim

²³⁴ Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches Toward the Muslims* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 113.

²³⁵ For Flualis's dream, refer to pages 256-8 of this thesis.

²³⁶ H. Eugene Lehman, *Lives of England's Reigning and Consort Queens* (Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2011), p. 94.

himself. Like the Calabrian abbot, he voices a prophecy which foretells the future Christian conquest of the Holy Land, his quick journey to Jerusalem in this episode initiating Arthur's imperial quest through attaining the most coveted, religious space in history (this is just prior to Arthur's own journey to the Western world's capital to secure the next great claim, Rome – which may potentially be a cipher for Jerusalem, a place which contains 'Saracenised' armies).

It is interesting to note here exactly how Merlin achieves the feat of bringing Jerusalem within the Christian empire in this episode – although the dream depicts extreme violence against the 'Saracen' king, the aftermath of Flualis's dream results not in bloodshed, but baptism. Thus, the *Prose Merlin* narrative demonstrates two ways in which the crusaders dealt with their 'Saracen' enemy: firstly, through causing their death, and secondly through conversion. This dual treatment of the 'Saracens' within the narrative suggests that violent retribution or spiritual reform were the only two alternatives to manage and control this cultural group, with both outcomes effectively erasing their religious identity. The making and remaking of Flualis reflects this, who is both killed (in his dream) and then converted (in the future) due to his identity as a 'Saracen' in this episode. This ambivalent treatment of Flualis, who is slaughtered and then spared, coupled with the overlap between the main participants of the Third Crusade and the Arthurian characters in the dream sequence, suggests that Flualis is a cipher too, operating in the episode as a fifteenth-century reimagining of Jerusalem's leader during 'The Crusade of Kings': Sultan Salah ad-Din.

Flualis is introduced as 'a kynge of grete puyssaunce [...] he was a goode man of grete renoun as of his lawe . ffor he was a sarazin.'²³⁷ At first reading, this list of positive attributes appears odd, especially considering the violent treatment of 'Saracens' throughout

²³⁷ For Flualis's dream, refer to pages 256-8 of this thesis.

the text. However, this approval likely occurs due to Flualis's high status. The king of Jerusalem fits into the 'motif of the noble Saracen', who were often depicted in Middle English *chanson de gestes* as possessing 'chivalric values' and moral conduct despite their cultural and religious identity as non-Christians.²³⁸ And yet, the detail of his character, as someone of 'grete puyssaunce', manifests an image of a man who possesses a rare and exceptional degree of 'power', 'strength', 'influence', and 'authority', with the text's recognition and respect of the 'grete renoun of his lawe' (i.e. both his religious and secular law), alluding to his overall integrity despite his Muslim identity.²³⁹ Mae Velloso-Lyons writes how 'the idea of Saladin as an idealised 'noble pagan' was already widespread in the Western imaginary (echoed in the *Ordene de chevalerie* [The Order of Chivalry, a French narrative poem, c. 1220] with its description of him as a "very honourable Saracen").'²⁴⁰ Similarly, Shirin A. Khanmohamadi notes that

Perhaps no figure better exemplifies the international code of chivalry than that of Salahuddin [...] about whose generosity, wisdom, and romantic prowess Europeans were telling stories in their vernaculars even as he threatened their Levantine coastline.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Philippa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, 'Crusading, Chivalry and the Saracen World in Insular Romance', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalind Field, Hardman and Michelle Sweeney (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 45-68 (p. 60).

²³⁹ 'puissaunce' in *Middle English Compendium* <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED35153/track?counter=1&search_id=18581060> [accessed 5 August 2022].

²⁴⁰ Mae Velloso-Lyons, 'How to Make a Knight: Reading Objects in the *Ordene de chevalerie*', in *Things and Thingness in European Literature and Visual Art, 700–1600*, ed. by Jutta Eming and Kathryn Starkey (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2022), pp. 91-110 (p. 94).

²⁴¹ Shirin A Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 32.

This presents a stark contrast to the prophecy of Joachim, showing how medieval literature began to recognise Salah ad-Din ‘not as the ambitious and treacherous murderer depicted by Latin historians, but as a chivalric hero’.²⁴² This romancing of Salah ad-Din, and the inclusion of him in crusading romances like *Richard Coer de Lyon*, written around the beginning of fourteenth century, shows a growing familiarity with the Muslim conqueror (still within the framework of imperial imaginings), displaying a wider set of European cultural reactions beyond that which we find in Joachim. The Italian writer, Dante Alighieri (c. 1265 – 1321), in *The Divine Comedy* (c. 1308 – 20) even locates the Muslim ruler not in Hell but in Limbo, despite his non-Christian faith, recognising him as a just and chivalrous ruler by placing him ‘among the heroes’.²⁴³ Richard was familiar with Salah ad-Din’s generosity and the accreditation of him as a ‘magnanimous and wise caliph’ – the Muslim leader not only sent the Christian crusader ‘fruit, sherbert, and his personal doctor’ when he fell ill, but even gifted him one of his own horses in the Battle of Jaffa when Richard’s horse fell, stating that ‘a king shouldn’t have to fight on foot.’²⁴⁴

This chivalric image of Salah ad-Din is a notion most often associated with Christian warriors in medieval literature, possesses an affinity to the fictional Flualis. If the imaginary king is indeed modelled on Salah ad-Din in the original French version (which the *Prose*

²⁴² R. W. Southern, ‘Dante and Islam’, in *Relations between East and West in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Derek Baker (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2010), pp. 133-146 (p. 135).

²⁴³ Southern, ‘Dante and Islam’, pp. 135-6.

²⁴⁴ Dan Demetriou, ‘Fighting Together: Civil Discourse and Agonistic Honor’, in *Honor in the Modern World: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Laurie M. Johnson and Demetriou (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 21-42 (p. 29). Also see Jonathan Gifford, *History Lessons: What Business and Management Can Learn from the Great Leaders of History* (London: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), p. 213.

Merlin preserves), the narrative demonstrates how, despite its incorporation of Joachim's red dragon and its antagonism towards 'Saracens', it does not completely align itself with the abbot's condemnation of the Muslim leader in this episode, instead paralleling the more favourable depiction of Salah ad-Din in literary thought.

Another part of the dream episode which supports Flualis as Salah ad-Din in the *Prose Merlin* is the king's eventual conversion. In literature, it was common that 'Christian convention demanded that good, heroic Muslims should convert to Christianity in order to achieve salvation.'²⁴⁵ Flualis's conversion to Christianity is hinted at in Merlin's interpretation of the dream, showing how the 'Saracen' ruler will eventually witness the prophesised Muslim loss of Jerusalem and the victory of the Christian kings. The burning of the king and queen to ashes in the dream reveals how they 'shall be purged clene of all thy synne by the water of baptyme' and how the dispersing of their ashes over Jerusalem 'signifieth that thou shalt have children in the goode creaunce that shall be bolde knyghtes and hardy and shall be wrshppd thourgh all the londes of the worlde.'²⁴⁶ This baptism of Flualis operates as a physical and spiritual cleansing away of his 'Saracen' identity, with the rise of his new Christian children as 'bold knyghtes' showing how the image of 'Saracens' as chivalric heroes and figures of knighthood can only be achieved through the loss of their religion. The French narrative of *Merlin* returns to the story of Flualis after a brief interval, revealing how, after Merlin's interpretation of the dream, the 'Saracen' king was left 'distraught' when his lands, title, and children were all taken away from him, exactly as Merlin prophesised.²⁴⁷ As a result, the French work discloses how both Flualis and his wife were taken prisoner, not killed but instead shown 'the tenets of the Christian religion, and so

²⁴⁵ Helen J. Nicholson, *Love, War, and the Grail* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 217.

²⁴⁶ For Flualis's dream, refer to pages 256-8 of this thesis.

²⁴⁷ *Lancelot-Grail: The Story of Merlin*, p. 478.

much did they give them to understand day by day that they received the unction of holy baptism and were washed and cleansed from the filth of misbelief.²⁴⁸ What follows is a complete erasure of ‘Saracen’ identity and rule, and the insertion of Christianity in the Holy Land and many other parts of the world:

[Flualis and his Christian descendants] said that Our Lord had given them to them to exalt Christendom; they also said that they would not die before they had put all of pagandom under Christianity and the law of God.

Then they summoned and gathered all the men under their sway, and they overran pagandom from every side and took towns and castles, and they killed many a pagan. They won lands and foreign countries, and they went over into Spain to Galicia and Compostela, and nothing could withstand them. At last King Flualis passed from this world in Spain, and the four princes and all his grandsons were filled with sorrow. He was buried in a city they called Nadres at the time.

Then they went back to the region about Jerusalem and took those lands into their hands; then they all scattered throughout various lands and conquered them and took all the honors. Some of them held Constantinople, others Greece, where there were four kingdoms, other Barbary and others Cyprus.²⁴⁹

This extended narrative of Flualis and his descendants in the French tradition portrays how the conversion of the Muslim ruler began the more widespread erasure of ‘Saracens’, another example of how the cultural group was either converted or killed. The final conquest of Jerusalem by Flualis’s Christian descendants presents the desired outcome for the Third Crusade, with the subsequent capture of other key regions, such as Constantinople, showing

²⁴⁸ *Lancelot-Grail: The Story of Merlin*, p. 478.

²⁴⁹ *Lancelot-Grail: The Story of Merlin*, p. 479.

the steady spread of the Christian empire and its gradual unification. Flualis's death in Spain is interesting to note here too, for despite dying a Christian, he is buried outside of his old kingdom, in a country which was often associated with 'Saracens' during the Middle Ages, through both the cultural memory of the Islamic Golden Age and the long Muslim rule in Spain, which lasted almost until the end of the fifteenth century. However, the dead ruler may have been laid to rest here to show that Muslim Spain, like the old Muslim Jerusalem, is now another claimed space in the world of the text (more fully conquered through the appearance of the Spanish giant later in the *Prose Merlin*), showing the spread of Christian power from East to West – the desired outcome of the historical Crusades. Thus, Flualis's conversion in the French tradition (and his prophesised conversion in the *Prose Merlin*) not only depicts the personal alteration of one man's religion from Islam to Christianity, but also acts as a catalyst for the complete dissolution of Muslim world dominance, the reassertion of Christian control, and the expansion of a Christian empire. If Flualis was indeed modelled on Salah ad-Din, the historical figure's conversion would have granted the West a keen advantage over the East.

Tales of Salah ad-Din's conversion were in fact recorded and discussed throughout this period, connected to him being an example of exceptional chivalry, an identity which, in medieval thought, could only belong to Christian knights.²⁵⁰ While the poem, the *Ordene*, narrates 'the story of the historical Hugh of Tiberias' who apparently 'explained knighthood to Saladin', 'there was an older story that Saladin was knighted by Humfrey II of Toron, which appears in the original version of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*,' a Latin prose narrative of the Third Crusade, contemporarily written around 1191 – 92.²⁵¹ This account implies that Salah ad-Din adopted a Christian identity just before his death in 1193, supposedly shedding his Muslim faith in favour of being a knight during the Third Crusade,

²⁵⁰ Nicholson, *Love, War, and the Grail*, pp. 217-8.

²⁵¹ Nicholson, *Love, War, and the Grail*, p. 217.

while he still ruled over Jerusalem. Even earlier than this, there is a record of Salah ad-Din's offer to convert in the anonymous medieval Latin chronicle, the *Chronica regia Coloniensis* (Cologne Royal Chronicle), which documents a rumoured marriage alliance in 1173 between the Muslim ruler's son and a daughter of Frederick Barbarossa, one of the Christian kings from the Third Crusade.²⁵² The chronicle notes how, as part of this political negotiation, 'Saladin and his realm were prepared to convert to Christianity.'²⁵³ This negotiation is not dissimilar to the proposal of marriage which appears in the *Prose Merlin's* Flualis episode where, just before his prophesised conversion, Flualis offers his 'Saracen' child in marriage: 'I graunte trewly to hym that telleth me ther of the verite that he shall haue my doughter to his wif and all my relms after my deth.'²⁵⁴ The comparability here between the historical Salah ad-Din who offers his son and the fictional Flualis who offers his daughter is an image which portrays both 'Saracen' rulers as fathers, a final indication of their potential conflation.

Thus, altogether, these literary and historical accounts show the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century interest in the conversion of Salah ad-Din from Islam to Christianity, coinciding with the French Merlin tradition and the appearance of Flualis in Arthurian literature. If the fictional king of Jerusalem was indeed modelled on the historical military

²⁵² John Gillingham, *Richard I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 188. Interestingly, this theme of conversion and a proposed marriage also evokes the propositioned union between Salah ad-Din's brother, al-Adil, and Richard's sister, Joan, during the Third Crusade, which was eventually rejected after both parties refused to convert. See Timothy Venning, *A Chronology of the Crusades* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), p. 210; Richard Huscroft, *Tales from the Long Twelfth Century: The Rise and Fall of the Angevin Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 134-6.

²⁵³ John B. Freed, *Frederick Barbarossa: The Prince and the Myth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 355.

²⁵⁴ For Flualis's dream, refer to pages 256-8 of this thesis.

leader and revered Sultan of the sacred city, then it is possible that these accounts of the Christianizing of Salah ad-Din may have been combined with an imagined Christian victory in the Third Crusade to create the episode of Flualis's dream in the French tradition, which later appears in the *Prose Merlin*. This imprinting of a past crusading history and its key players onto a newly constructed narrative history with fictional players, causes this episode to read like a literary palimpsest. The conflation of Joachim and Merlin, of kings Richard, Philip, and Frederick with the invading Christian kings, and of Flualis with Salah ad-Din, are key examples of how the Arthurian crusading imaginary draws on history and cultural memory, before rewriting both. It also writes out the figure of the 'Saracen', using death and conversion as a means of making the Muslim invisible and the Christian visible throughout medieval history, until the former vanishes like a dream or disperses like ashes from the page.

The narrative of King Flualis, however, is not only passed down to the *Prose Merlin*. It also appears in another French romance contemporary to the Vulgate Cycle, *Le Roman de Silence*, written sometime during the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁵⁵ The inclusion of Flualis in another French text outside of Robert and the Vulgate Cycle not only shows the popularity of the motif of the converted 'Saracen', but also displays a deep cultural interest in the conceived dream of a future Christian Jerusalem and the image of a violent, anti-Muslim dragon. This demonstrates the long impact of the Third Crusade on medieval literature from the end of the twelfth century onwards, which, through episodes like the dream of Flualis, saw the development of an Islamophobic attitude and a more aggressive literary approach to dealing with individuals outside the fold of Christianity.

Altogether then, the Flualis episode, in its many narrative appearances, depicts a sense of Christian supremacy that can only be fully realised through the erasure of all 'Saracens', a

²⁵⁵ Roche-Mahdi, 'A Reappraisal of the Role of Merlin', p. 9.

cultural group regarded as an apocalyptic threat throughout the *Prose Merlin*. The long-lived anxiety over the Christian loss of Jerusalem is a haunting memory which resurfaces in the fifteenth-century text, pervading the culturally anxious narrative as a reimagined history, and informing its Arthurian dragon. As a romance motif, this Joachite dragon utilises romance's generic nature, amalgamating political prophecy, apocalyptic imagery, imperial narratives, and a cultural-historical enemy. Geoffrey's Arabic astronomical connection is lost or removed, replaced instead with a contemporary Christian, chivalric responsibility: to instigate the erasure of all 'Saracens'. The dragon motif then, red like Joachim's seven-headed Revelation dragon, is the same symbol as its precursor but with a slightly altered application, no longer symbolising the enemies of Christianity but representing instead the Christian crusaders prophesised to ensure their downfall. This presents a closely formed connection between the dragon, medieval crusading narratives, and Islamophobia during this time, showing the *Prose Merlin* as responsive to the earlier medieval French tradition, which in turn was alert to contemporary, anti-Muslim Joachite materials which warned of the 'Saracen' enemy and inspired dreams of a Christian world empire.

Christian-Muslim antagonisms present in this episode inspire further crusading imaginaries within the *Prose Merlin*, causing original episodes sourced from Geoffrey's *Historia* (like the dragon star/ comet episode and the bear and dragon episode) to be rewritten. Here, we see a removal of the astronomical and the introduction of the 'Saracen', these episodes functioning instead as part of the ongoing romance framework initiated by the incorporation of the Flualis material in the fifteenth century text. The crusading mentality made explicit in the Flualis narrative operates as a significant 'cultural code' within the Middle English text, one which becomes encoded within the romance motif of the crusading

dragon.²⁵⁶ This Joachite dragon (which moves over from the French tradition), when inherited by the *Prose Merlin*, affects its other dragon appearances. By responding to Islamophobic cues found within the Flualis episode and its earlier sources, these other instances of the dragon each continue the proto-crusading legacy of their predecessors: finishing their objective of asserting Christian supremacy and marginalising Islam. When considered collectively within the wider chronology of the *Prose Merlin*, these episodes of the dragon act as a long-term crusading movement spanning generations, a sequence and a legacy which may culminate in the text with Arthur, but which began with Pendragon and Uther.

Refashioning Merlin's sign in the sky: The Scientific and Cultural Shift in the *Prose Merlin's* dragon 'in the ayre'

In *Vortiger's Demise: The Battle of Salisbury; and The Death of Pendragon*, the *Prose Merlin* reimagines the episode of the dragon star/ comet in Geoffrey:

Than seide Pendragon to Merlin that tydinges were come: the Sarazins weren arived. And Merlin seide it was trewe. Than the kynge axed what was his counseile to do. And Merlin seide, "Ye shall tomorowe send thedir that oon half of youre peple; and when they be come from the arivage, than go between hem and the aryvage. And youre peple shulde holde hem so shorte that ther ne shall be noon of hem but thei wolde fayn be theras thei come fro. And thus shull ye do two days. And the thirde day, whan ye se a dragon all reade fleyng up in the ayre, than boldly fight with hem, for ye shall have the vycторыe."

[...]

²⁵⁶ Flood and Leitch, 'Insular Romance in Translation', p. 6.

Than shewde the sign in the ayre that merlin hadde seide, and than the Danes hadden grete drede. And the kynge seide to his peple, “Now upon hym in all that we may.” And whan Uter saugh the kynges bataile, and the Danes assembled, he sette upon hem as vigorously or more. In that bataile was grete mortalité on both parties, but the hethen peple hadde moche the werse.

And ther Pendragon did merveloise knyghthode among his enmyes, and so dide Uter, but I may not telle alle their well dedis. But Pendragon was ther deed, and many another gode baron, whereof was grete pité and losse to the Cristen partye. And as the boke witnessith, Uter venquysshed the bataile, and ther ne ascaped noon of the sarazins but that thei weren deed or taken.

And thus ended the bataile of Salisbury wheras Pendragon was deed. And so all the londe [was] lefte hoill to Uter his brother.²⁵⁷

There are two significant differences between this Middle English episode and its French and Latin sources. Firstly, distinct from Geoffrey’s *Historia*, the *Prose Merlin* (like its French source) contains less material of astronomical significance, resulting in the loss of astronomical allusions which we find in Geoffrey.²⁵⁸ Secondly, in contrast to the French, the Middle English episode alters the identity of Pendragon and Uther’s enemy, reimagining them as ‘Saracens’, which further develops Merlin’s crusading role within the text. In the pages that follow, I explore the multiple acts of linguistic and cultural translation at work in

²⁵⁷ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 49-50.

²⁵⁸ It is also important to note here that this may have been made more likely due to the *Prophetiae* (Geoffrey’s text which features astronomical and astrological imagery/ allusions) not being integrated into the *Lancelot-Grail*, as they are omitted from Wace’s Norman narrative.

these episodes, investigating the sites of erasure from the Latin and French source texts, as well as the new additions, that shape the Galfridian dragon of Middle English romance.

As in the *Historia*, in the *Prose Merlin* the appearance of the dragon in the sky inspires Uther to battle against the Saxons, and achieves a victory that establishes him (and his son Arthur after him) as the king/s of Britain. However, in the *Prose Merlin* episode (as in Robert de Boron and the Vulgate cycle), although the ‘dragon all reade fleyng up in the ayre’ and retains its aerial aspect from Geoffrey, there is no reference to the ‘stella’ which we find in Geoffrey’s original episode, or the ‘cumete’ which we find in Wace’s translation, and this absence marks the dragon as less obviously astronomical.²⁵⁹ In both Robert de Boron’s *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin*, Uther’s brother is named Pendragon rather than, as in the *Historia*, Aurelius, and so there is no occasion to discuss this astronomical etymology in relation to the comet or star. Whereas in the *Historia*, it is only after Aurelius’s death that the dragon star appears, with Merlin then directly associating the name ‘Pendragon’ with Uther through the dragon star, an episode which also marks the appearance of the astronomical term, ‘caput draconis’. Notably, in the French and Middle English versions, Uther’s brother is already called Pendragon, his name narratively preceding the star/ comet episode. In Robert de Boron’s text, Merlin notifies Pendragon (not Uther) before his death in battle of the red dragon sign, stating: ‘When you see this symbol of your name, you may join battle in the certain knowledge that your army will be victorious.’²⁶⁰ This still preserves a connection, perhaps not entirely on an astronomical level but at least on a visual level, between Robert’s dragon in the sky and the name ‘Pendragon’, confirmed a fortnight after Uther’s coronation:

²⁵⁹ For discussion of ‘stella’ and ‘cumete’, see pages 94-7 of this thesis.

²⁶⁰ de Boron, ‘Merlin’, p. 90.

Lors dist merlins & conta la senefiance del dragon & dist que li dragons estoit venus senefier la mort pandragon & le saluement vter & que il fu mesauenu al roy por la mort de lui & por la senifiance de la bataille . Et por le moustre del dragon fu puis a tous iors mais apeles vterpandragons .

(Merlin told Uther the significance of the dragon that had flown through the air, saying: ‘The dragon came as a sign of King Pendragon’s death and the accession of Uther.’

It was because of this that he was ever after named Utherpendragon.)²⁶¹

However, by the time we reach the *Prose Merlin*, this scene has again shifted. Before the battle, Merlin does not tell Pendragon that the dragon is a ‘symbol of [his] name’, declaring instead after Uther’s coronation that: ‘I will that thow have surnonn of thi brother name.’²⁶² This transferal from one brother to another shows that the name and title of ‘Pendragon’ becomes inherited by Uther through his bloodline and not created anew through the dragon phenomenon in the sky, configuring the *Prose Merlin*’s genealogy differently to that of the legend’s earlier versions. This results in a different context for the name/ epithet and an altered astral metaphor, the dragon motif in the *Prose Merlin* removing the astronomical significance of Uther’s full title by this point in the Arthurian tradition. Recognised now as Pendragon through his brother who bore the name before him, and not after the aerial (stellar) red dragon of victory in the sky, the Uther of the *Prose Merlin* becomes ever distant from his original personification in Geoffrey’s astral prophecy.

This loss of etymology and change in meaning occurred during the legend’s first shift in context and genre, associated with, but not limited to, linguistic translation, from insular

²⁶¹ Sommer, *The Vulgate Version*, p. 52; de Boron, ‘Merlin’, pp. 90-1.

²⁶² *Prose Merlin*, p. 50

Latin to French. Then a shift occurred again in the episode's translation from the French to Middle English prose. As a result, Geoffrey's Latin reimagining of a Welsh etymology becomes lost in a new French context, before vanishing completely in the act of translating the French Arthurian narrative into its Middle English prose version. It is also interesting to note here how this erasure of the Welsh context simultaneously removes the hidden Arabic context present in Geoffrey too. Thus, with no clear allusion to 'caput draconis', the *Prose Merlin's* episode of the dragon no longer reads as a narrative which features an astronomical dragon in the sky, rather one which points to a mere aerial one. This is supported in the text by Uther, who

for love of the dragon that appered in the ayre [made] a dragon of goolde of the same semblaunce. [...] Than he sette it on a shafte instede of a baner, and lete it be born before hym in every bataile at alle tymes when he sholde fight. And thus was ever after he cleped Uterpendragon.²⁶³

The construction of a golden dragon for Uther, although omitted by Robert, exists as two dragons in Geoffrey's original, formed 'ad similitudinem draconis quem ad radium stellae inspexerat' (to resemble the dragon he had seen in the comet's tail.)²⁶⁴ However, although the absence of the golden dragons in Robert's episode (as well as the removal of one dragon from Geoffrey in the later Middle English text), signals another change, it is the specific mention of a banner here which is most curious. By referencing this banner just after discussing Merlin's dragon in the sky, Uther may be revealing how the earlier red dragon in battle appeared in the air – Merlin potentially raised the dragon as a flag in the sky. Aerial but no

²⁶³ *Prose Merlin*, p. 50.

²⁶⁴ *HRB*, pp. 180-1.

longer stellar, this red dragon makes invisible the intellectual debt to both Latinate-Arabic astronomy and Welsh etymology, resulting in a changed creature altogether. Therefore, Geoffrey's astronomical allusions, while understood by Wace, become lost through genre in Robert, and are thus notably absent from the later *Prose Merlin* too. The Arthurian legend's movement from Geoffrey to Robert thus leads to a disavowal of the *Historia*'s English, Welsh, and Arabic origins of the dragon, with the erasure in *Merlin* and then in the *Prose Merlin* occurring from a shift in genre, language, and the loss in understanding of the original source context, as the legend moved from England to France.

These acts of cultural and linguistic translation, which erased the dragon's scientific origins, also caused a shift in the geography of the *Prose Merlin*'s dragon episode. In Geoffrey, after the sighting of the dragon in the sky and Merlin's explanation of its meaning, Uther journeys to the Welsh site, St. David's, to fight Gillomanius (the ruler of Ireland), Pascentius (Vortigern's son), and the Saxons:

At Vther, in dubio tamen extans an uerum protulisset Merlinus, in hostes ut coeperat progreditur; aduenerat namque prope Meneuiam, ita ut iter medietatis diei restaret.

[Uther, uncertain whether what Merlin had said was true, continued his advance on the enemy; and by midday he was nearing St David's.]²⁶⁵

In the *Prose Merlin*, however, St. David's is removed as the geographical location where the dragon is first sighted by Uther, replaced instead with the English city of Salisbury:

²⁶⁵ *HRB*, pp. 178-81.

And the kyng hem praide to make hem garnysshed of theire armes and of horse; and also the laste weke of Juyn to be redy, in the entré of the playnes of Salisbury, upon the river of Tamyse, to difende the reame.²⁶⁶

This shift in location (an expected change given the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle's confusion around insular geographies – where Britain is seen less as a directly referential setting and more as a landscape of adventures and marvels), first occurs in Robert and is passed down to the Middle English text, taking place due to a change in the narrative timeline concerning the Stonehenge structure, the appearance of the red dragon, and the fate of Aurelius/Pendragon.²⁶⁷ In Geoffrey's *Historia*, Uther and Merlin move the stones (Stonehenge) to England *before* the dragon star prophecy, with Aurelius honouring the new cemetery with his coronation.²⁶⁸ Then, after his victory against the Saxons, Uther learns of Aurelius's death, journeying to Winchester for his brother's funeral and his own coronation, with Aurelius 'buried in the cemetery he himself had built'.²⁶⁹ However, in the *Prose Merlin*, Uther and Merlin move the stones *after* the red dragon sighting at the Battle of Salisbury where

²⁶⁶ *Prose Merlin*, p. 49.

²⁶⁷ For more on the medieval French imagining of Britain, see Ad Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Ad Putter, 'Finding Time for Romance: Mediaeval Arthurian Literary History', *Medium Ævum*, 63 (1994), 1-16.

²⁶⁸ *HRB*, pp. 174-5.

²⁶⁹ *HRB*, pp. 180-1: 'praeuenerant namque nuntii qui casum regis indicauerant ipsumque iam ab episcopis patriae sepultum fore prope coenobium Ambrii infra choream gigantum, quam uiuens fieri praeceperat [...] Et quia uiuens adhuc praeceperat ut in cimiterio quod ipse parauerat sepeliretur, tulerunt corpus eius ibidem atque cum regiis exequiis humauerunt.' (messages had arrived that the king was dead and had already been buried by his bishops near the monastery of Ambrius in the Giants' Ring [...] Before his death Aurelius had instructed that he be buried in the cemetery he himself had built, so they took his body there and gave it a royal burial.).

Pendragon (Aurelius) dies, with the structure in ‘the playn of Salisbury’ moved to England to mark ‘the beryinge place of Pendragon, and ben yet cleped the Stonehenges.’²⁷⁰

This change in the narrative sequence affects the dragon, relocating it from Wales (where it is sighted in Geoffrey) to England (where it appears in the *Prose Merlin*). Here, the French tradition’s replacing of St. David’s with Salisbury (a choice which the Middle English text retains), was perhaps carried out to frame the dragon and its new location in relation to Muslim-Christian encounters. By fashioning Salisbury and Stonehenge – the Christian site of miracle and marvel (much like the tomb of Helena in Geoffrey) – into a space dedicated to Christian warriors, the *Prose Merlin* reimagines English land as a sacred religious territory and a site of Christian warfare. The placement of Merlin’s dragon above this space establishes it as an English, religious symbol, one which signifies Christian victory, Christian martyrdom, and English miracles and marvels. The new English connections forged in this Middle English episode (and the earlier French) thus supplant the earlier Welsh connections found in Geoffrey by centring the English dragon on English soil.

Finally, the actual stones themselves are interesting too, forging a connection between the real Stonehenge and the *Prose Merlin*’s Battle of Salisbury episode. They are recognisably constructed from ‘Sarsens stones’ – a ‘corruption of the word ‘Saracen’’, used to refer to ‘all stone circles and megalithic monuments’ in the Middle Ages, as they were considered ‘the work of heathens’, with ‘Saracen standing for all that was antagonistic to Christianity.’²⁷¹ This connection between the Stonehenge’s genuine stones and the fictional opponents of Pendragon and Uther during the Battle of Salisbury is interesting. The ‘Saracens’ may be introduced in this episode to represent the purification of the pagan

²⁷⁰ *Prose Merlin*, p. 51.

²⁷¹ Frank Stevens, *Stonehenge: Today and Yesterday* (Hamburg: Tredition Classics, 2006), p. 18. I will discuss the term ‘Saracen’ and its connections to ‘pagan’ antagonists further below.

association of the legendary structure, as they are eventually vanquished by Pendragon and Uther by the end of the battle. However, the inclusion of ‘Sarazin’ forces might also be connected to Merlin’s dragon in battle, to target not all non-Christians which the term ‘Saracen’ sometimes broadly encompassed during the Middle Ages, but one specific group which rivalled the Christian West from the eleventh century onwards: Muslims.

In the Battle of Salisbury episode, the *Prose Merlin* significantly changes the invading enemy which threatens Pendragon and Uther, an alteration (from the Latin and the French) which allows the Arthurian dragon to play a key symbolic role in the warfare between two opposing religious and cultural groups. Removed from its twelfth-century astronomical allusions in the Latin *Historia*, and geographically relocated in Robert (and later in the *Prose Merlin*), the motif becomes immersed with French Arthurian tropes of chivalry and the fulfilment of a divinely ordained quest over Arthur’s conquest of Europe, which began in Geoffrey’s Arthurian tradition. While retaining this interest in Christian expeditions, the *Prose Merlin* replaces the quest for the Holy Grail with the pursuit of holy war, modelling its religious mission and combat on the Crusades. The *Prose Merlin* dragon then becomes reshaped within this new narrative framework, no longer representing transmitted astronomical knowledge as it did in Geoffrey, but signalling instead a Christian quest to overthrow a specific enemy. By later moving through the Middle English text as a symbol intrinsically connected to the religio-political history and culture of the medieval West, the dragon in the *Prose Merlin* operates as a motif which confronts and rewrites a past crusading trauma to manifest a Christian victory, utilising a crusading discourse centred on superiority and inferiority, and ‘loss and recovery.’²⁷²

²⁷² Manion, *Narrating the Crusades*, p. 8; For more on ‘cultural trauma’ and ‘cultural rescue’, see Heng, *Empire of Magic*, p. 18.

This begins with the replacement of the Latin ‘Saxon’ with the term ‘Sarazin’ in the *Prose Merlin*’s Battle of Salisbury episode (with the former term found in Geoffrey, which Robert’s French alludes to with ‘sesne’ – translated as ‘Saxon’ in the Anglo-Norman dictionary and the modern English translations of *Merlin*).²⁷³ This introduces a narrative framework centred on erasure, marginality, and Christian-Muslim cultural antipathies. ‘Sarazin’ is mentioned thrice in the battle: the first time to denote their arrival, the second to highlight their fear, and the third to announce their defeat:

Than seide Pendragon to Merlin that tydinges were come: the Sarazins weren arived.

[...]

Whan the sarazins saugh the two hostes, thei were gretly dismayed, and sye wele that thei myght not repaire to their shippes without grete bataile.

[...]

And as the boke witnessith, Uter venquysshed the bataile, and ther ne ascaped noon of the sarazins but that thei weren deed or taken.²⁷⁴

The change in cultural group here to ‘Sarazins’ (‘Saracens’) depicts a significant erasure occurring between Geoffrey’s *Historia*, Robert’s *Merlin*, and the *Prose Merlin*, showing how the Middle English work shifts further away from its two earlier source texts. This modification of the cultural identity of the enemy group not only erases the twelfth-century

²⁷³ See de Boron, ‘Merlin’, p. 90; Sommer, *The Vulgate Version*, p. 51; For ‘sesne’, see page 254 of this thesis.

²⁷⁴ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 49-50.

cultural and historical significances of the Saxon opponents found in Geoffrey, but centralises a different marginalised group and establishes them as an English enemy. It also highlights how certain terminologies, particularly those associated with identity, such as ‘Saracen’, carried negative connotations in the medieval imaginary, used to denote cowardly enemies of the Christian West. On the one hand, the adjustment does not specifically recall a Muslim enemy; the *Prose Merlin* mentions ‘sarazins’ alongside ‘Danes’ in this episode, potentially conflating the two.²⁷⁵ Indeed, Aisling Byrne, in her work on the Irish ‘Saracen’, notes how the term ‘Saracen’ was used to label several cultural groups (like the Stonehenge ‘sarsens stones’, which denoted all non-Christians):

There are numerous examples in medieval romance of peoples from beyond the Islamic world being depicted as pagan ‘Saracens’. The Vikings, for instance, are not infrequently depicted as gigantic pagans, and the word *Saracen* is used of them in several romances, most notably in *King Horn*. The *Middle English Dictionary*’s (hereafter *MED*) entry for ‘Sarasīn’ gives ‘one of the pagan invaders of England, esp. a Dane or Saxon’ as one of the possible meanings for the term.²⁷⁶

Yet although ‘Saracen’ was used to indicate many different peoples, mainly to signify and differentiate those individuals who were non-Christian, in the context of the *Prose Merlin* (particularly when considering its integration of Flualis), and especially from the late eleventh century onwards, the term was most often used to denote a Muslim dwelling in the East. Lynn Tarte Ramey notes how the ‘term Saracen is probably derived from the Greek, *sarakenos*, the word used to describe the Arab invaders following the precepts of

²⁷⁵ *Prose Merlin*, p. 50.

²⁷⁶ Byrne, ‘West is East: The Irish Saracens’, p. 221.

Muhammad.’²⁷⁷ Contrastingly, Heng, in her work on race in the Middle Ages, highlights how ‘Saracen’ was the preeminent, invented name by which the Muslim enemy was known to Europeans during the Middle Ages, a ‘corruption that made it look as if Ishmaelites were descended from Sara.’²⁷⁸ Even if the term was transferred to other cultural groups throughout the medieval period, such as the Vikings, Danes, and Saxons, the name still contained and conveyed an underlying reference to Islam. Tolan notes how

Before the rise of Islam, Christians had established categories for the religious other: Jew, pagan, and heretic. When Christians encountered Muslims, they tried to fit them into one of those categories, ‘ignoring or distorting’ those ‘uncomfortable facts’ that did not fit the preestablished schema so as not to disturb these assumptions.²⁷⁹

The fashioning of a new religious and racial marker for all individuals who identified as Muslim ‘streamlined a panorama of diverse peoples and populations into a single demographic entity defined by their adherence to the Islamic religion.’²⁸⁰ Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, in her work on the depoliticized ‘Saracen’ and Muslim erasure, interrogates the use of the derogatory label, arguing how it ‘operated as part of a racial, political, and social project to represent Muslims as inferior to Christians and to motivate their expulsion from and extinction in the Holy Land.’²⁸¹ The cultural antipathies between Christians and Muslims during the Crusades, stemming from their individual claims over Jerusalem (a religious site

²⁷⁷ Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature: Imagination and Cultural Interaction in the French Middle Ages* (Oxon: Routledge, 2001), p. 8.

²⁷⁸ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, pp. 110-2.

²⁷⁹ Tolan, *Saracens*, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, p. 111.

²⁸¹ Rajabzadeh, ‘The depoliticized Saracen’, p. 2.

for people of both faiths), resulted in centuries-long warfare between the East and the West. Rajabzadeh notes how, in this context, in Middle English literature, ‘Saracen is often used deliberately — most often to label a large group of Muslims who are about to fight Christians, [...] deliberately employed to further dehumanize the Christian enemies and legitimize their slaughter.’ This is the case, too, within the context of the *Prose Merlin*, where the term ‘Saracen’ is included to represent the group of fighters gathered against Pendragon and Uther. Both brothers are also explicitly described in the episode as Christians, specifically in the moments leading up to the Battle of Salisbury, before Merlin’s dragon appears:

And thei swore as Merlin dide devise. And when they were sworn, Merlin seide unto hem,
 “Ye have sworne that in this bataile ye shull be gode men and true, agein God and youreself.
 Ne noon may be trewe to hymself but he first be trewe to God. And loke ye be trewly
 confessed for that ye shull fight ageyn yowre enmyies. And after, have no doute to overcome
 theym, for thei have no bilevel in the Trinite. And wite ye wele that seth Cristendom come
 first into this ile, was never so grete bataile, ne never shall in youre tyme. And also, knoweth
 wele that ther oon of yow two moste nede passe in this bataile. Therfore eche man ordeyne
 for his moste worship that he can, ageins that he cometh before his Lorde. And [knoweth] that
 oon of yow muste go to Hym And therefore goth in soche wise that ye may have His love
 when ye come to His presence.”²⁸²

Merlin’s speech here mimics the tenor of Pope Urban II’s speech before the First Crusade, evoking themes of Christian valour, religious warfare, and martyrdom.²⁸³ Heng notes how

²⁸² *Prose Merlin*, pp. 48-9.

²⁸³ For more on Geoffrey and Arthur’s association to Christian martyrdom, see Tyerman, *England and the Crusades*, p. 22.

before, during, and after the First Crusade, ‘forms of theological militancy, such as impassioned preaching, were used to combat the enemy’, highlighting how it was ‘not a crowned head of Europe, who summoned Western pilgrims to the Near East, to conquer and occupy, in the headlong momentum we now call the First Crusade.’ Like Urban then, Merlin plays the role of a religious authority figure, sending King Pendragon and Uther as proto-crusaders to fight in a crusade as ‘the militia of God’, to carry out God’s will and attain ‘martyrdom’.²⁸⁴ Pendragon is eventually martyred, his death not coming as a result of poisoning, as it does in Geoffrey’s dragon episode, but rather on the battlefield, as a victim of ‘Saracen’ forces and an honoured Christian sacrifice. The reference to the enemy, those that ‘have no bilevel in the Trinité’, differentiates the opposition in terms of religion, with Merlin’s language here used to legitimatise Pendragon and Uther’s actions against their religious enemy in battle. This phrase is potentially important for thinking about medieval Islamophobia, for while it refers to a lack of Christian faith more broadly, it also reminds the reader that in this period Islam is falsely understood to be a type of Christian heresy.²⁸⁵ The term ‘Trinité’ then, is a potential reminder that while Jesus is accepted as a prophet in Islam, he is not understood as the son of God as he is in Christianity, emphasising Islam’s rejection of the trinitarian doctrine. By differentiating Pendragon and Uther from their enemy through their religious beliefs, the *Prose Merlin* accentuates the supposed religious deviation of the ‘Saracen’ invaders, vindicating their deaths at the hands of the king and his brother.

In his crusading resonances, Merlin’s words, and their function, echo not only Urban’s speech on the eve of the First Crusade, but Joachim of Fiore’s prophecy to Richard I at the beginning of the Third Crusade (discussed above). Merlin’s claim in the text that ‘And wite

²⁸⁴ Heng, *Invention of Race*, p. 114.

²⁸⁵ See John V. Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

ye wele that seth Cristendom come first into this ile, was never so grete bataile, ne never shall in youre tyme' emphasises the momentousness of the conflict about to take place, marking it as incomparable to all battles before it and after it during each of the brothers' reigns.²⁸⁶ We might remember that during the Battle of Salisbury Merlin reveals to Pendragon and Uther that 'whan ye se a dragon all reade fleyng in the ayre, than boldly fight with hem, for ye shall have the vycorye.'²⁸⁷ Here, the victory is a crusading one, as both brothers are urged by Merlin to fight for the sake of 'God' and 'Cristendom', a theme prevalent in late medieval crusading romances, where 'Christendom is depicted as under threat from powerful Saracens everywhere.'²⁸⁸ The 'sarazin' enemies in the *Prose Merlin* are all eventually 'deed or taken', showing an overall Christian victory despite Pendragon's martyrdom.²⁸⁹ Merlin's advice to Pendragon and Uther before their momentous Christian battle, coupled with the Christian overthrow of the 'Saracens', rewrites the historical failure of the Third Crusade. Pendragon's identity as a Christian martyr of the 'Saracen' enemy essentially reconfigures Geoffrey's original character into both a king and a crusader, potentially invoking a similar act of historical memorialisation to that which we find in the Flualis episode.

The fifteenth-century depiction of Merlin then, I argue, is likely modelled on Joachim. In the text, he not only guides Pendragon and Uther before their fight against their Muslim enemy, but uses apocalyptic prophecies and the sign of the dragon to address and direct two crusading kings. However, while Joachim 'prophesised that Richard would defeat Saladin' in the Third Crusade (which the crusader king ultimately failed to achieve), both of Merlin's

²⁸⁶ *Prose Merlin*, p. 48.

²⁸⁷ *Prose Merlin*, p. 49.

²⁸⁸ *Prose Merlin*, p. 48; Manion, p. 144.

²⁸⁹ *Prose Merlin*, p. 50.

prophesised outcomes come to pass.²⁹⁰ The *Prose Merlin*'s prophet predicts that Pendragon and Uther 'shall have the vycторыe' and that 'oon of yow two moste need passe in this bataile.'²⁹¹ The fulfilment of both prophecies demonstrates Merlin's unrivalled prophetic powers very early on in the narrative. It also, more importantly, depicts the *Prose Merlin*'s rewriting of the original historical loss suffered by Richard and the crusaders at the hands of Salah ad-Din and his men in Jerusalem. By fashioning a 'Saracen' opposition for the Christian king, by recording the defeat and death of the enemy, and by purging all 'Saracens' from the plain of Salisbury (which arguably becomes a sacred space like Jerusalem, containing a revered monument and holding a crusading battle – another example of the conflation of insular locations with Jerusalem in the *Prose Merlin*, an extension of an association found in the Helena episode in Geoffrey), the *Prose Merlin* creates a new historical moment between Christians and Muslims, one wherein which both the land and military power belong to the crusaders. Thus, Joachim's seven-headed dragon prophecy is altered, with the dragon no longer symbolising Christian enemies but Christian heroes, a sign of hope rather than despair, and good rather than evil.

The high stakes in Pendragon and Uther's battle also draw on the imagery of the final, apocalyptic battle used in the *Pseudo-Methodius* (the late seventh-century proto-Christian, anti-Islamic text), like the death of the Ishmaelites.²⁹² While the apocalyptic work projected

²⁹⁰ Eleanor Tejjirian and Reeva Spector Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2012), p. 35; Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land: From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 55.

²⁹¹ *Prose Merlin*, p. 49; p. 48.

²⁹² See *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, ed. by Garstad. Also see Chapter 2 for my discussion of the *Pseudo-Methodius* and the Last World Emperor.

‘optimism about the future glory of the Christian empire’, it gave Islam ‘the role of the apocalyptic enemy *par excellence*.’²⁹³ Thus, the pagan forces in the text, particularly from the perspective of the thirteenth century onwards, became the ‘sons of Ishmael’ (i.e. the Muslim Arabs), with Gog and Magog and the Antichrist later realised respectively as the ‘Scythian’ Turks, and Muhammad (the final prophet in Muslim creed), Islam, and the Ottoman Empire in medieval Western thought.²⁹⁴

By associating Muslims with these medieval demonic imaginings, the Christian world justified their antagonism towards Islam, accepting the Crusades as necessary quests to prevent the dangerous rise of a people which threatened the world’s Christian religious order. The *Prose Merlin* implements this view, using Pendragon, Uther, Merlin and even the red dragon in the Battle of Salisbury episode to glorify and justify the killing of the ‘Saracen’ figure. When placed alongside the episode of Flualis, the text then presents a dual solution of dealing with ‘Saracens’: they can either be killed by Christians or converted to Christianity. There is no possibility of co-existence. We see this too on the level of textual omissions, through the removal of Arabic astronomical allusions from Geoffrey, the translation history that contextualises the *Prose Merlin* suggesting that the erasure of people (imagined) is related to the erasure of knowledge and sources (actual). By making invisible the Arabic intellectual debts of the dragon and substituting these astronomical associations with English cultural anxieties about Islam, the *Prose Merlin*’s dragon episode recalls the historical memory of the Christian loss of Jerusalem and rewrites it as a Christian victory. The dragon in the air then is recognisable as both a warning sign to the ‘Saracen’ enemy and a military

²⁹³ Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the end: apocalyptic traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 34.

²⁹⁴ Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies: Islam and The Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 52.

emblem heralding a crusading success, erasing the Muslim victories and Christian defeats that largely defined the crusades. This crusading episode shows how the anxieties and antagonisms found in the Flualis episode were not a singular occurrence in the *Prose Merlin*, nor an isolated case. Rather, these two episodes operate as part of a prophetic series in the Middle English work, one which misremembers, rewrites, and re-memorialises Christian crusading histories, while also addressing contemporary cultural conflicts where Christian-Muslim antagonisms remained prevalent.

The Battle of Salisbury episode is the beginning of this vision in the *Prose Merlin*, initiating a crusading response against the ‘Saracens’ through Merlin’s Joachite dragon, which later materialises into a manmade object in the text, ‘born before [Uther] in every bataile at alle tymes when he sholde fight.’²⁹⁵ This is first followed by Arthur in the war against the ‘Saracens’ in the *Prose Merlin*’s section, *Arthur at Tamelide*, where the aerial form of the dragon recurs again. In this episode, Merlin defeats the dual forces of the ‘geauntes and sarazins’ (a grouping which reads suggestively in relation to the later bear and dragon dream, discussed next), while bearing a dragon banner resembling (or perhaps the very same as) the sign in the sky over the Battle of Salisbury:

Arthur [was] well armed and alle his companye [...] And Merlin bar that day the baner [...] that was not right grete and the taile was a fadome and an half of lengthe tortue, and he hadde a wide throte that the tongue semed braulinge ever, and it semed sparkles of fier that sprongen up into the heire of his throte.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ *Prose Merlin*, p. 50.

²⁹⁶ *Prose Merlin*, p. 141.

The resemblance between Arthur, Merlin, and the ‘sarazins’ in this scene and Pendragon, Uther, Merlin, and the ‘sarazins’ during the Battle of Salisbury stands witness to the *Prose Merlin*’s early establishing of a British, dynastic, crusading line. In both these scenes, the presence of a dragon and its association with Christian victory transforms the creature into a religiously charged motif, one which ‘gretely dismayes’ the ‘Saracen’ enemy, prophesising their deaths and warning the non-Christian race of its own doom.²⁹⁷ At Tamelide then, the symbol of the dragon acts as a memento of past legacies and a reminder of a continuous purpose: to expand Christendom and erase all other cultural powers. Merlin’s following role in Flualis’s dream episode brings Arthur one step closer to fulfilling this task, with the recurrence of two red Joachite dragons helping to eradicate Muslim power in the East. This Joachite dragon occurs one last time in the *Prose Merlin* to prompt Arthur’s completion of his Christian world empire, appearing in a dream, not unlike Flualis’s, to spur the crusader king to vanquish one, ultimate ‘Saracen’ threat.

The *Prose Merlin*’s Bear and Dragon dream and the ‘Saracen’ Giant of St Michael’s Mount

The *Prose Merlin*’s bear and dragon dream is concerned with a ‘Saracen’ threat in the West, which Arthur must vanquish before completing his imperial quest at Rome. Like the episodes discussed previously in this chapter, the fifteenth-century episode again contains some notable differences to Geoffrey’s *Historia*:

and as the kynge Arthur slepte hym com a vision . that a grete bere was on a grete mountayne
and and as hym semed ther com agein hym a grete dragon from the Clowdes of the orient and
caste fire and flame thourgh his throte so merveilouse that all the contrey ther aboute thereof

²⁹⁷ *Prose Merlin*, p. 50.

was light and this dragon assailed the bere full fiercely and the bere hym diffended full wele [fol. 228v] but the dragon embraced the bere as hym semed and cast hym to the erthe and hym slough . Whan the kynge awoke he merveiled sore of his dreame and made Merlyn come before hym and praied hym dierly to telle hym the signification of his dreame . and than he tolde hym all worde for worde to Merlin as he hadde seyn in slepinge and than seide Merlin . Sir I shall sey you the tokeinge the bere the bere that ye saugh signifieth a grete monstre a grete Geaunt that is here nygh in a mountaigne that is come oute of the contrey of Spayne in to this londe . and here he abideth and doth the contrey shame from day to day ne noman dar hym abide for the grete force that is in hym . the dragon that ye saugh in youre a vision that caste thourgh his throte fire and flame so grete that all the londe therof was light signifieth youreself by the fire of youre hardinesse that is clier and feire shyng by grace . and the dragon embrased hym and caste to the erthe signifieth that the Geaunte shall embrace yow . but in the ende ye shull hym sle of that be ye nothinge in doute .²⁹⁸

Firstly, the dream does not appear to take place in the sky. The bear, rather than ‘flying through the air and making all the shores tremble’, as in Geoffrey, is instead re-situated on a mountain, the text already hinting that the creature represents the giant to come.²⁹⁹ This change is significant: by presenting the bear as stationary rather than mobile – grounded rather than airborne, the bear becomes more terrestrial than astronomical, the *Prose Merlin* removing Geoffrey’s original characterisation and erasing the astral significance previously placed at the forefront in the *Historia*’s episode. By eliminating the flight of the bear, the *Prose Merlin* effaces all scientific, astronomical allusions found in Geoffrey’s scene, showing how, once again, the Middle English text has rendered Geoffrey’s astronomical motifs invisible, thus detaching the episode from any potential scientific transmission history found

²⁹⁸ My transcription of Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.3.11., fols 228-288v.

²⁹⁹ *HRB*, pp. 222-3.

within the *Historia*'s original bear and dragon scene. The astronomical is, again, replaced by a crusading element, one which becomes immediately noticeable through the dragon's entrance. In this scene, rather than 'a terrible dragon swooping from the west', we have instead a dragon arriving 'from the Clowdes of the orient', an alteration which first occurs in the French Vulgate, where the dragon is 'coming out of the eastern skies'.³⁰⁰ Geoffrey's reference to the West shows Arthur's identity as a British king from a Christian nation, travelling along his designated imperial journey to Rome. So why then is Arthur, who the dragon represents in both the twelfth-century episode, the French cycle, and the Middle English text (and who is consistently British across these works), depicted as a dragon from the 'orient'?

Both the French and Middle English bear and dragon dreams appear not long after the dream of Flualis, in which the Saracen ruler loses his kingdom to Christian crusading kings, all of whom are characterised as dragons. Through a chronological reading of the *Prose Merlin* then, the dragon in the dream appears to be returning from this very same setting – the reference to the 'orient' in the episode likely an allusion to the recently fallen Jerusalem, no longer a Muslim space in the narrative, but rather a Christian one, now presumably a part of Arthur's ever-expanding empire. Both *Prose Merlin* dreams also describe the effect of the creature's fire in the same way: 'a grete flawme of fire whereof all my contrey was light' (Flualis)/ 'caste fire and flame thourgh his throte so merveilouse that all the contrey ther aboute thereof was light' (Arthur), with the shared ability of the serpent/ dragon in Flualis and Arthur's dragon to illuminate an entire kingdom conflating the two creatures across the dream sequences or, at the very least, creating a mirror between the two events to hint at their resemblance.³⁰¹ Merlin's presence during both dreams also furthers the text's aim of imperial

³⁰⁰ *HRB*, pp. 222-3; *Lancelot-Grail: The Story of Merlin*, p. 457.

³⁰¹ See pages 256-8 (Flualis) and pages 305 (bear and dragon) to compare both dreams.

expansion for Arthur. Appearing as an interpreter for both kings, Merlin first reveals to the Muslim Flualis that his kingdom will fall, after which it is conquered by Christian forces. Merlin's swift arrival to inform Flualis, and then his re-joining Arthur after the fall of Jerusalem, characterises him almost as an imperial delegate for Arthur, tasked with ensuring the fall of the 'orient' to strengthen Arthur's legitimacy for Rome. After Arthur's own dream, Merlin acts as interpreter again, a detail which differs to Geoffrey's dream where Merlin is absent, with Arthur revealing the vision to his retinue of advisors instead. In Geoffrey's twelfth-century version, the non-appearance of Merlin results in less clarity and more ambiguity, creating a false prophecy (as all true prophecies in the *Historia* are associated with Merlin). Geoffrey even makes the identity of Arthur's true enemy more obscure. Arthur's wise advisors argue that the dream symbolises his battle against the giant, whereas Arthur himself believes it signifies his fight with Lucius. However, in the *Prose Merlin*, there is no doubt, with Merlin assuring Arthur that the dream indicates his defeat of the giant – the textual replacement of Flualis as the next Muslim 'Saracen' to vanquish. The clarity of the fifteenth-century text further suggests that the bear and dragon dream is part of a sequence of episodes focused on the erasure of the 'Saracen', with Merlin once more acting as a Middle English Pope Urban II (a role he adopted in the Battle of Salisbury with Arthur's father) or as Joachim (as in the Battle of Tamlud, where giants and 'Saracens' are paired). By positioning Merlin as a prophetic figure with great religious authority throughout, the *Prose Merlin* is directing Arthur towards his crusading destiny, towards the objective of erasing of all parts of the Islamic world.

The giant enters the text as a Spanish enemy – its cultural identity relayed to Arthur in Merlin's interpretation, after which the creature is identified as the next non-Christian cultural opponent. As such, it becomes the next critical phase of Arthur's imperial mission, moving through the text as a bestial embodiment of the remaining portion of the historic Islamic

world not yet wholly conquered by Christian forces. The reference to Spain appears in all three versions of the giant episode (Latin, French, and Middle English), although the French and Middle English version mention the ethnicity of the giant during Arthur's bear and dragon dream, whereas Geoffrey reveals the giant's cultural identity only after Arthur arrives at the occupied land. These three references to Spain also reveal slightly different yet interconnected historical-contextual meanings, given the various early twelfth, late twelfth-early-thirteenth, and mid-fifteenth-century backgrounds of each work. In Geoffrey's original episode, Arthur and the Spanish giant's battle may be read as quite a narrow and contradictory depiction of the Muslim figure in the twelfth century, given Geoffrey's adoption of Latinate-Arabic astronomical concepts transmitted from Muslim Spain, which inform his motifs within the *Historia* and arguably his later *Vita* too. This dehumanisation of the Muslim is sustained in the French narrative, but Arthur's fight against the Spanish giant here may be read (beyond the concept of the Second (1147 – 1150) and Third Crusade (1189–1192) – which altogether saw the recent fall of Edessa and eventual fall of Jerusalem to Muslim forces, including Salah ad-Din) as also a response to the Christian takeover of Spain (the *Reconquista*) which, by the mid-thirteenth century, just after the date of the Vulgate cycle, was almost under full Christian power. The last remaining portion still under Islamic rule, the Muslim kingdom of Granada, fell more than a century later.³⁰²

Arthur's vision of defeating a Spanish enemy in the *Prose Merlin* thus becomes a mirror of medieval Muslim Spain during this contemporary fifteenth-century period – a fighting ground between Christians and Muslims, much like medieval Jerusalem, with the final Muslim stronghold in Spain eventually conquered in the Siege of Granada in 1492, a

³⁰² See Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2013).

few decades after the completion of the *Prose Merlin*.³⁰³ As a result, Arthur's bear and dragon dream, and his fight against the giant, is a lingering pejorative encounter between medieval Western Christian imperialism and the nearing-extinct Spanish Muslim. An episode which blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, it shows the deep and intricate relationship between Arthurian narratives, medieval histories, and the production of counter histories, which together misremember the past in order to reimagine it, using 'cultural fantasy' motifs (like the dragon and giant), to write new histories which speak to past and present Christian-Muslim antipathies. Thus, the bear and dragon dreams, particularly in their French and Middle English versions, each address contemporary, medieval, religio-political warfare, foreshadowing the imminent Christianisation of Spain and the end of Muslim rule. This episode of Arthur then, as the dragon of the 'orient' who eventually vanquishes the Spanish giant, is not just a depiction of the Christianising and Westernising of the East and the Holy Land, but of all remaining parts of the West too, the text's final attempt to create a wholly Christian world before Arthur's final journey to Rome.

Joseph F. O'Callaghan, in his work on the Christian conquest of Islamic Spain, states how '[e]ver since the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century, the Christians fought to expel them', showing a long history of Christian-Muslim warfare connected to Spain, which the giant featured in Geoffrey's episode, the Vulgate narrative, and the *Prose Merlin* text arguably embodies. O'Callaghan notes how the Spanish *Reconquista* was eventually '[a]ccorded crusading status by the papacy, the struggle continued long after serious attempts to recover the Holy Land had been abandoned, and so can rightly be called the last crusade in the West.'³⁰⁴ This framing of the war in Spain as the last crusade, due to an

³⁰³ See Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *The Last Crusade in the West: Castile and the Conquest of Granada* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2014).

³⁰⁴ O'Callaghan, *The Last Crusade in the West*, p. 1.

increasingly unrecoverable Holy Land is the additional historical context which shapes the *Prose Merlin*'s entire series of crusading episodes. The *Prose Merlin* speaks to both these two Christian conflicts in sequence, starting with rewriting the Christian loss of Jerusalem through the early Battle of Salisbury, where the Pendragon dynasty is introduced as an elite crusading force and shaped into 'Saracen' killers. This vision is then finalised through the dream of Flualis, which depicts the full Christian takeover of the East through the complete erasure of the Muslim 'Saracen' identity in the Holy Land. The text then returns to the West through the final bear and dragon dream. Here, Arthur's legendary fight with the giant, when perceived through a fifteenth-century Christian context, reads as an attempt to envisage a favourable outcome for the next crusade occurring throughout the Middle Ages, the *Reconquista*, which historically concludes with a victory after the release of the *Prose Merlin*. The text even conflates 'Saracens' and giants in Arthur's Battle at Tamelide, depicting the two as connected adversaries within the Arthurian crusading narrative. Placed together, they each demonise and dehumanise medieval Muslims, communicating a historical and contemporary desire for the complete erasure of Islamic rule and culture(s). The bear and dragon dream then, after losing its astronomical significance since Geoffrey, becomes even more of a racially and politically charged episode. It operates in both the French and Middle English tradition as an anticipation of Christian territorial expansion and the elimination of the Spanish Muslim, both visions eventually actualised by the end of the fifteenth century.

Conclusion

The conquest at Salisbury, the conversion of Flualis, and the defeat of the giant in the bear and dragon dream, each campaign for the erasure of the 'Saracen'/ Muslim identity. Together, the connected episodes both maintain and spread the Christian fantasy of the removal of the Islamic world from East to West, a crusading dream which started in Geoffrey's insular Latin

work, was translated and subsumed within the French Arthurian romance tradition, and finally finds a new life in the Middle English *Prose Merlin*. These episodes are, I argue, the *Prose Merlin*'s attempts to overwrite the fifteenth-century Christian anxiety over past and present religio-political defeats, an apprehension which may have also been amplified by the contemporary fall of Constantinople in 1453, marking the end of the Byzantine empire and the significant expansion of Islamic Ottoman rule in Europe. The loss or occupation of the East and West by Muslim rule throughout the Middle Ages is encoded in these episodes of Christian-‘Saracen’ conflict, with the *Prose Merlin* responding to political defeats through historical erasure (removing moments of Christian downfall and Muslim victories) and anti-Muslim rewriting (by continuing the pejorative depiction of the ‘Saracen’ identity).

Conlee’s editorial choice to remove both Flualis’s dream sequence and Arthur’s bear and dragon dream prevents a comparative and chronologically connective reading of the entire narrative, thus removing the *Prose Merlin*’s significant emphasis on the power and influence of crusading dreams. The omission of both dreams not only removes the final two phases of Arthur’s own imperial journey, making invisible his conquest of the East (Jerusalem) through Merlin, but also eliminates the overarching crusading journey of the Arthurian dynasty, which begins with Uther and Pendragon and concludes with Arthur. The text’s emphasis on a proto-crusading line also bleeds into the Arthurian dragon motif, which shapeshifts from largely astronomical in Geoffrey to wholly crusading in the *Prose Merlin*. No longer stellar, not quite Joachite, and not solely apocalyptic, the dragon roams through the text as the recognisable emblem of a crusading family and a marker of their geographical conquests. In its Middle English form, it takes on a new duty: to spread Christianity by force, in an attempt to alleviate the cultural, religio-political, and even geographical fear of the increase of the Islamic world, a dread which has plagued the Christian European conscience for centuries throughout the Middle Ages.

CONCLUSION: OLD DRAGONS, NEW CONTEXTS

The Arthurian dragon, since its conception with Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, has been deeply invested in English cultural imaginings (and reimaginings). As this thesis has shown, the dragon has prophesied English rule and encouraged imperial dreams, appearing above and across England as both an astronomical motif and a crusading cipher between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Alongside its ability to reoccur has been its capacity for change, most significant in its manoeuvring between different forms of genre (romance, prophetic narratives, scientific tracts), language (Latin, Arabic, French, Middle English), and medieval understandings of translation (*translatio imperii et studii*). This concept of the dragon as a ‘protean’ creature (a term used by Megan Leitch to represent romance’s generic nature) foregrounds how the cultural translation of romance motifs can cause (both consciously and unconsciously) invisibilities to occur between medieval texts and their symbols.³⁰⁵ For the Arthurian tradition and its dragon motif, this has led to the complete erasure of Arabic cultural debts and the severe misperception and marginalisation of specific cultural groups, like the Muslim ‘Saracen’ figure. Affiliated with two Christian crusading kings (Uther and Arthur) by the mid-fifteenth century in the *Prose Merlin*, the dragon’s symbolic value during this period becomes refined to its representation of a strong English Christian ruler, one who defends England against its cultural and political enemies. This loss of the dragon’s astral component, and the greater focus placed by later medieval texts upon its development into a crusading cipher, has directly impacted the dragon’s later understandings and usages too.

³⁰⁵ Leitch, ‘Middle English Romance’, p. 3.

We see this condensed meaning of the dragon become more emphasised around three decades after the *Prose Merlin*, in King Henry VII of England's (1457 – 1509) adoption of the red dragon of Cadwaladr as his royal emblem. He uses the dragon as a military banner in the War of the Roses (1455 – 1487) during the Battle of Bosworth (1485) against King Richard III (1452 – 1485), evoking the image of Merlin raising the dragon banner in two of the *Prose Merlin*'s crusading episodes (the Battle of Salisbury and Arthur's fight at Tamelide).³⁰⁶ This mirroring, and the movement of the dragon from text to reality here, displays the wide social recognition and impact of the motif, used once again (as in the above *Prose Merlin* episodes) in a setting of war between two different groups.

Henry's revival of the dragon motif's military legacy in England had a significant impact upon both literature and science at the end of the fifteenth century. For instance, we find this moment contemporarily echoed in 1485 in *Le Morte Darthur*'s boar and dragon dream, where the victorious dragon represents Henry, and the defeated boar (a conscious alteration from Geoffrey's and the *Prose Merlin*'s 'bear', presumably by the fifteenth-century English printer, William Caxton) symbolises Richard and his royal emblem, the white boar.³⁰⁷ Caxton's political reimagining of the dream in Sir Thomas Malory's work not only reshapes Richard's historical white boar into 'all blak', foreshadowing the king's fall, but also develops the dream dragon beyond its earlier source depictions, shaping it more lavishly.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ John-Wilhelm Flattun, 'In Chase of Dragons: Warburg, Collective Memory and the Myth of Heroes', in *Arthur in Northern Translations: Material Culture, Characters, and Courtly Influence*, ed. by Virgile Reiter and Raphaëlle Jamet (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2020), pp. 37-56 (p. 37).

³⁰⁷ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur or The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 120-1. For more on Malory's boar and dragon dream, see Thomas Crofts, *Malory's Contemporary Audience: The Social Reading of Romance in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 97-9.

³⁰⁸ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 120.

In this prose romance, the dragon's head is 'enamyled with asure, and his shuldyrs shone as the golde', this imagery evoking battle armour worthy of a king.³⁰⁹ As in the earlier *Prose Merlin*'s crusading episodes (which saw Flualis embodying Salah ad-Din, and the Pendragon line – in their fight against the 'Saracens' – evoking the memory of the English crusading king, Richard I), we once again here see the Arthurian tradition's overlay of history with romance and prophecy. As a result, Henry, the chivalric king who enters battle, is transformed into the new 'head of the dragon', thereby continuing the (pseudo)historical legacy which began with Geoffrey's Uther. The romancing of Henry here blurs the line between fact and fantasy, a line we see growing thinner as the Arthurian episode moves further away from the twelfth century. Caxton's editorial change in *Le Morte Darthur* also removes the overt Christian-Muslim history incorporated into the slightly earlier *Prose Merlin* episode. It is instead replaced by the recent memory of English civil war, a new cultural context which now roots the episode in an alternate fifteenth-century political landscape. This importantly shows how culturally translated motifs, while able to retain some characteristic of their previous self, are constantly engaged in an act of rewriting, with new cultural contexts always replacing, and thus erasing, old ones.

Five years after Malory, Henry's dragon returns, not within a romance text but rather a scientific one. It appears (as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis), in Arundel MS 66, featured in place of the 'Draco' constellation in Ptolemy's *Almagest*, with the new red constellation dragon set against Tudor white and green stripes.³¹⁰ This conflation of Henry's dragon with 'Draco' is a similar type of hybridisation to what we find in the *Historia*'s 'caput draconis' moment, where Geoffrey merges the ecliptic dragon with a romance dragon,

³⁰⁹ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 120.

³¹⁰ London, British Library, Arundel MS 66, fol. 33r. Also see page 73, n. 65 of this thesis; Flattun, 'In Chase of Dragons', pp. 47-8.

creating the dragon star which heralds Uther's dynasty. The reappearance of an overtly stellar royal dragon around three centuries later raises an important question regarding the long influence of Geoffrey's ideas. Does this return of a 'dragon star' to England signify the re-emergence of the astronomical Galfridian dragon motif, which became lost and made invisible as the Arthurian tradition moved from England to France in the late twelfth century? It is certainly possible, considering the inclusion of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* alongside this refashioned Ptolemaic material.

This romancing of an astral dragon then 'is a late manifestation of the same impulse' that we find in the *Historia*, in Geoffrey's reframing of Walcher's ecliptic dragon.³¹¹ The late fifteenth-century manuscript's application of this earlier Galfridian framework, presumably to commemorate Henry's Tudor dynasty, marks the reappearance of the initial twelfth-century medieval interest in merging English political history with astronomical concepts. Further research, however, would be required to ascertain whether this return of an astronomical dragon model, here placed in close connection to the Arthurian legend, is a singular occurrence or in fact the re-beginning of what we originally found in the *Historia*. While this is beyond the scope of this study, a consideration of the Arthurian dragon motif's post-medieval development, and the influence of other cultural contexts (English and non-English), would be most valuable. Such work would continue the contribution of this study, which focused specifically on charting the astronomical and crusading patterns originating in Geoffrey until the Middle English *Prose Merlin*, with close consideration paid to Christian-Muslim relations and the intellectual and cultural debts from the medieval Islamic world from the twelfth to the mid-fifteenth century.

³¹¹ Victoria Flood, *Fantastic histories: Medieval fairy narratives and the limits of wonder* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024), p. 250.

Indeed, while the long historical crusading movement (the continuous span of Christian-Muslim antagonisms over the Holy Land as well as Spain throughout the Middle Ages), eventually concludes near the end of the sixteenth century, other forms of cultural conflict relating to these two groups were still in existence. The spread of the Ottoman empire, which lasted until the twentieth century, would, for example, provide an interesting contextual backdrop for the future study of the dragon and/ or the figure of the 'Saracen' in Arthurian literature. This thesis's exploration of medieval imperial dreams certainly offers a useful framework for considering the dream of empire associated with Osman I (c. 1254/5 – c. 1323/4), the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. Osman's vision, applied to him more than a century after his death at the end of the fifteenth century, helped authorise the Ottoman right to rule:

One night, the first sultan, Osman, was sleeping in the house of a holy man called Edebali when:

He saw that a moon arose from the holy man's breast and came to sink in his own breast. A tree then sprouted from his navel and its shade compassed the whole world. Beneath this shade there were mountains, and streams flowed forth from the foot of each mountain. Some people drank from these running waters, others watered gardens, while yet others caused fountains to flow. When Osman awoke he told the story to the holy man, who said 'Osman, my son, congratulations, for God has given the imperial office to you and your descendants and my daughter Malhun shall be your wife'.³¹²

³¹² Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 2.

The incorporation here of moving lunar imagery, and its established connection to the founding head of a new imperial state, is reminiscent of the twelfth-century ecliptic dragon (a lunar symbol) and its representation of Geoffrey's Uther. Like the *Historia's* red dragon star/comet, whose two rays represented the far reaches of the Pendragon empire, the tree sprouting from Osman also operates as a geographical and genealogical imperial margin, showing the spread of Osman's line and their wide global influence. However, rather than warning of the desires of empire – a caution we find in both the dreams of Arthur and Macrobius's Scipio – the dream of Osman instead inspires and celebrates the pursuit of empire, portraying it as a gift from God. The late surfacing of this dream, which appears after both Osman's rule and the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (1453) – 'at a time when the empire was firmly established as a major political and military player in the Mediterranean' – is also important to note.³¹³ It indicates how origin narratives (which Geoffrey's *Historia* is importantly too), were still considered instrumental and influential within the political landscape of Europe just before the sixteenth century. Likewise, it also reveals how medieval writers (such as Geoffrey and the anonymous author of the *Prose Merlin*) understood the effectiveness of romance symbols and motifs in establishing prestige and instigating change.

Altogether then, the texts that I have explored in this thesis depict the ways in which the English Arthurian dragon, a recurring romance motif in the Arthurian tradition, operates as a channel for the integration or erasure of medieval intellectual and cultural contexts. Romance's ability to erase source traditions reveals both the dominative and facilitatory aspects of the genre. It is, as we have seen with Geoffrey's astronomical dragon, capable of inclusion as well as expulsion, with science (specifically twelfth-century Arabic astronomical concepts) particularly susceptible to being removed. When we think of romance then, and

³¹³ Alan Mikhail, *Under Osman's Tree: The Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Environmental History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. xi.

generic romance frameworks, particularly those structuring medieval Arthurian literature, we must also be consciously thinking of what is lost, and why.

The same is to be considered of medieval understandings of the models of translation. *Translatio imperii et studii*, when incorporated into romance, both function as frameworks for erasure too. Through the dragon motif, we begin to discern how medieval writers grappled with challenging the conventional understandings of *translatio*, concerned with disrupting its traditional flow (which would result in the de-centring of the Christian West). Geoffrey, to maintain cultural prestige, avoids this crisis by removing medieval Arabic lines of knowledge and power. Despite Geoffrey's attempts to manufacture invisibilities through romance, his construction of characters and motifs across both his *Historia* and *Vita* (the dragon, the 'House of Stars'/ observatory, Merlin, and Ganieda) point to the use of wider astronomical models and analogues, sourced from beyond English and Welsh cultural imaginings. By constructing these symbols in each of his works, Geoffrey appears to be testing the limits of romance motifs, engaged with the ways in which motifs can veil as well as reveal the scientific.

As we move down the Arthurian tradition, Geoffrey's Arabic (and classical) astronomical models turn from invisible to completely erased, through acts of linguistic and cultural translation. While we lose the dragon's intellectual contexts over time, its engagements with pejorative and racial cultural conceptions become magnified. Romance motifs, like the dragon and the 'Saracen', thus form a key part of medieval strategies of marginalisation and constructions of Islamophobia. Through their generalisability, they become embedded with a 'set of cultural codes' fostering Christian-Muslim hostilities, with the Crusades operating as a significant cultural context from which these codes are

sourced.³¹⁴ Their long transhistorical impact upon the dragon motif and the depiction of the ‘Saracen’ reveals the cultural mentalities of medieval writers and their audiences, with romance motifs used to reimagine and rewrite the past and present, negotiating Western fears, hopes, and dreams.

Thus, like the Arthurian dragon itself, we must look to various past histories and alternative cultural contexts in order to discover the visible and invisible meanings of romance motifs. Rather than reiteratively exploring a long series of reoccurrences of the Arthurian dragon across multiple medieval texts, this thesis, through its narrower focus and greater consideration of the wider cultural contexts at play in the medieval world, sought to challenge the ways in which we read and perceive an inherently recognised ‘English’ motif. In doing so, I suggest how we might reconsider motifs in light of their broader cultural resonances, looking beyond traditional romance languages, to include Arabic. By acknowledging cultural prejudices and moving past the familiar scope of cultural influences previously studied in this critical field, this medieval study strives towards a more considerate and contextualised understanding of the twelfth-century origins and fifteenth-century reception of the Arthurian legend and its prophetic dragon.

³¹⁴ Flood and Leitch, ‘Insular Romance in Translation’, p. 6.

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