

« Arthur, War and the Sea » : Call for papers

An international conference will be held Thursday 22 to Saturday 24 May 2014 in Boulogne-sur-Mer, Northern France, at the Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale (ULCO), on « Arthur, War and the Sea ». This conference will federate the works of archaeologists, historians, philologists, art historians, students of French and English literature, both medieval and modern, as well as specialists of film studies and comics. This call for papers is widely open to all people who may be interested in this project. Do not hesitate to show it to your contacts, in France and abroad. The conference will be held in two languages, French and English. The following three themes will serve as guidelines in the course of the conference.

War and the Sea during the 'Age of Arthur' (300-700)

In the first part of the conference, historians and archaeologists will be asked to talk about war at sea, the organization of coastal defences, and land/sea strategy in Late Antiquity and the earliest Middle Ages, both in Britain and the surrounding regions. What kind of navy and coastal defences would a British Dark Age king have used in the centuries between the reign of the usurper Carausius and the end of the Anglo-Saxon migration?

It is indeed during this period that Arthur may have lived. Even if the oldest texts (*Historia Brittonum*, *Annales Cambriae*) never mention any maritime activity for their hero, their authors situate his wars within the framework of a conflict between insular populations – the Britons – and invaders from overseas – the Saxons. The case of Riothamus, a British king, mentioned both by Sidonius Apollinaris and Jordanes, who fought on the European Continent, and whom Geoffrey Ashe identified (probably wrongly) as a archetype of Arthur, could be re-examined. Other characters later incorporated into Latin and Welsh legend, like Magnus Maximus and Constantine III, may be studied during the Conference.

Among possible subjects, we will consider the organization of the *Litus Saxonicum*, the question of harbours in that region (among which Boulogne) before the emergence of Quentovic in the 7th century, the ravages of Frankish and Saxon pirates on the coasts of Gaul and Britain, both before and after the retreat of Roman legions from the provinces of Britain, the hiring of Saxon federates and mercenaries, and generally all subjects linked to warlike migration around the island of Great Britain.

War and the Sea in Medieval Arthurian Literature (1000-1500)

In the earliest texts in a Brythonic language (roughly from the year 1000), Arthur is only moderately associated with the sea; but he crosses it in to enter the Other World and is linked with the Island of Avalon. Specialists of Celtic literature are especially welcome to explore these episodes.

From the time of Geoffroy of Monmouth (1136) onwards, a major episode of the Arthurian storyline has been his campaign against the Roman King Lucius: a campaign which means that Arthur and his troops must cross the Channel several times, especially after the rebellion of his nephew Mordred. The campaign against Lucius and Mordred's betrayal make up a significant part of the story, from Geoffrey to Malory through the *Vulgate Cycle*. For example, in *La Mort le roi Artu*, Gawain dies in Dover upon his return from this continental campaign. How are these 'amphibious' campaigns, marked by a combination of land and

naval forces, organized? Does Arthur have a navy? How does he use it? Is the maritime dimension of these campaigns actually put forward by the texts? Do people fight at sea, are coastal cities besieged?

Islands and overseas territories loom large in the Arthurian legend. How do knights cross the sea? Do they do it armed and ready to wage war? And how are these crossings represented in medieval illuminated manuscripts?

More historical questions arise when we consider the relationships between the Arthurian legend and military/naval strategy. At the time of the Crusades and other military sea-crossings, how is the Matter of Britain used by rulers? Richard the Lionheart purportedly offered the sword Excalibur to King Tancred of Sicily in exchange for ships to continue with his crusade: this episode and others of the same vein are also to be considered.

Finally, we will investigate how maritime campaigns are described in the Arthurian corpus. Later works in French and in other languages, from the 14th to the 16th century, are often concerned with war at sea, and may even contain descriptions of battles, for example in *Isaïe le Triste* and *Perceforest*. Are war at sea and war overseas more frequently described in these later works, written at the time of the great warlike crossings of Edward III and Henry V?

War and the sea in modern Arthurian production (19th to 21st century)

Historical novels in English in the late 20th century appropriated the work of English-speaking historians and archaeologists (Leslie Alcock, John Morris) in order to re-create the figure of Arthur as a 'Dark Ages warrior': these novelists wanted to stick to 'historical reality' as it had been understood by those scholars between the 1950s and the 1980s. Within this literary production, war at sea is sometimes an important topic, and will be considered in the conference; but is it still the case in more recent works?

We also wish to explore the importance of the sea as a place for war in contemporary literature with a direct or indirect Arthurian influence (*Heroic Fantasy*, children's literature), as well as in films, opera, and many other artistic media, particularly in popular culture (comic books, illustration), which found inspiration in the Arthurian *Matière*. The modern phenomenon of re-enactment will also be considered.

Conference organizers

- Alban GAUTIER (Medieval History, ULCO)
- Marc ROLLAND (English Language Literature, ULCO)
- Michelle SZKILNIK (French Literature, Paris III)

If you want to answer this call

You may e-mail propositions **until January 31st, 2013**, to Alban Gautier (alban.gautier@univ-littoral.fr). Please mention your name, your institutional affiliation, the proposed title, and a short summary (half a page is enough).