



Merlinus-Artorius: *Sacerdotium* and *Regnum* in the “White Isle”

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In the medieval courtly cycles of Arthurian romance the sacerdotal and regal functions are respectively embodied in the ancient, mysterious figures of Merlin, the boar of Broceliande, and Arthur, the “bear of Britain”. The ultimately Hyperborean provenance of the Arthurian mythos is demonstrated explicitly by the polar (*qutbiyya*) symbolism of the bear, figured in the seven stars of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor: the constellation of the Great Bear, the Vedic *Sapta-Riksha*, was widely known as “Arthur’s Wain”. The father of the “once and future king”, Uther Pendragon, connects via his name with the constellation of Draco and thus with the axial mysteries of the cosmic Pole, the far north termed “Arthur’s Bower” in British tradition.

Albion, the “White Island”, in common with such locations as Albania and Alba Longa, denotes a secondary centre active after the concealment and withdrawal of the original imperishable “White Island”, “Holy Land” or supreme Centre, which occurred at the close of the Golden Age, the *Satya-yuga* of Vedic chronology. Hence Albion or Logres in former ages imaged the primaeval Tula, the capital of Hyperborea, and in this context we find historiographers such as Nennius relating the lore that Britain was once the *axis mundi*. As such secondary spiritual centres eventually become regarded as “lands of the dead” so we find in the historical annals of Procopius Caeserensis in the 6th century AD an account of how in the island “*beyond Gaul...lies...the abode to which departed spirits are sent after this life.*” The symbolism of priestly and regal functions in the Arthurian romances transmit via the lens of medieval chivalric initiations and their aesthetic and poetic sensibility, the light of the Hyperborean tradition. René Guénon points out in this respect, that the Celtic tradition constituted one of the “links” between the Hyperborean and Atlantean cycles and that the Druids are to reckoned as inheritors and guardians of the Primordial Tradition. The fellowship of the Round Table is such a motif or image of the original Centre, the 12 knights correlating with Vedic lore of the 12 Adityas. The kingdom of Albion or Logres was thus an image of the original “White Land” or “White Isle”, the “primaeval Syria”. As Sir Thomas Malory wrote in *Le Mort Darthur*, Book XIV. Ch.2: “*...Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right...When Merlin had ordained the Round Table he said, by them which should be fellows of the Round Table the truth of the Sangreal should be well known.*” The Round Table is thus the mesocosmic “imago

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mundi” of the kingdom and of the sacred order of the universe. As Seth the third son of Adam, preserved the Primordial Gnosis and established an image of the original supreme Centre, so the founding of the Round Table and institution of the knighthood of Logres comport both a symbolic cosmogeny and a renewal of the original Centre, Thule or Tula. (in regard to Seth and the “Matter of Britain” c.f E.C. Quinn’s “The Quest of Seth, Solomon’s Ship and the Grail” in *Traditio* no.21, 1965.)

The sage Merlin, the prototypal Druid-priest and embodiment of sacerdotal wisdom, corresponds with the Celtic divinity Lugos whose name derives from the Indo-European element **leuk* – “white light”, cognate with Latin *lux*, Greek *leukos* – “bright”, Tocharian *luk* – “to shine”, all of which equate with the colour white, the canonical hue of the priestly function. The spear of Lugus, his symbolic weapon, is co-identical with the lance, golden arrow (associated with the figure of Abaris the Hyperborean) and *vajra* and represents the axial light-ray. Recalling the ancient Celtic epithet of Britain as “Merlin’s Enclosure” (*Clas Myrddin*) we may note that René Guénon finds in the very name of the kingdom of Logres the same element as that of Lugos which he associates with “Light” and the “Word” (*Logos*), the uncreated Light of the Atmanic Self at the vital centre.

In the 13th century *Livre d’Artus* we see Merlin, having assumed the form of a stag with a white fore-foot, appearing at the court of the emperor in Rome and in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* the sage is described riding upon an antlered stag. Louis Charbonneau-Lassay in “The Bestiary of Christ” describes the ancient emblematic lore “*which relates the stag to the idea, or one might say, the cult of light.*” In the ancient Irish “Song of Amergin” the druid-poet declares: “*I am a stag of seven battles*”; the seven tines of the deer’s antlers represent rays of light as in the Hebrew word *qarney* which means both the spreading antlers of the deer and also “rays” which resumes the septenary symbolism of the “seven rays” (the seventh ray being the “solar ray” which centrally transpierces and links all the states of the being in metaphysical terms.) As Ananda K. Coomaraswamy comments: “...the “seventh ray” passes through the Sun, viz. into an undimensioned beyond...” (“The Symbolism of the Dome” in “Selected Papers: Traditional Art and Symbolism” edited by Roger Lipsey, Princeton, 1977) which is the supra-solar pathway of spiritual Deliverance and Liberation from all conditional states of entity through realisation of the Supreme Identity. This equates with the 7th day of creation according to Genesis, called by the 17th century Hermetist Thomas Vaughan “the true Sabbath, the rest of God...” and equates with the heaven of Saturn, known as Shabbathai in Jewish esoterism. The Celtic symbolism of the stag may be compared with that of the antelope or deer which Tantric yoga envisions as the emblematic animal of the heart-centre where shines the Atman, “the Stainless Lord who is radiant like the Sun”.

This symbolism corresponds to Belenos-Apollo, Ablun, Apollo-Karneios and hence with Hyperborean Apollo who is in actuality the original regent of the Golden Age (just as the stag is traditionally sacred to Saturn as the primal lord of the Age of Gold, underlining his essential identity with the god of the Hyperboreans – his domain corresponds with the 7th heaven of the *Satya-loka* hence with the infinitude of the Divine Intellect as in his “Enneads” Plotinus interprets the name Kronos as *Koros-Nous* – “*Abundance of Divine Intellect*”). Geoffrey of Monmouth describes Merlin in the woods of Kaledon as being accompanied by a wolf, holy to Apollo, whose Greek name *lukos* alludes to the symbolism of light and furthermore in the *Livre d’Artus* the sage wanders dressed in

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wolfskin and surrounded by a herd of deer in the forest of Broceliande.

The white stag equates also with the Celtic divinity Cernunnos, also associated with the Merlinus-Artorius *dvandva* and with the symbolic colour of sacerdotal authority of the druidic caste through his name Vindos, Finn or Gwynn deriving from the Celtic word signifying “white, fair”. (This can also be seen in the name of the mystical salmon Fintan, the “White Ancient One”, the omniscient being, repository of all knowledge, who survived the Flood, was married to Noah’s grand-daughter Cessair, and transmitted the primordial doctrine to the post-diluvian world, thus being identical with the Matsyavatara, the fish incarnation of Vishnu and with the initiatory meaning of the *Ichthus* hierogram of Christian esoterism.) The stag is famed for its longevity and is shown in medieval woodcuts drawing the chariot of Saturn, confirming the identity with Kronos as sovereign of the Golden Age, Apollo Karneios. Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, emphasizing the significance of the stag as the symbol of light and of the victorious power of the Word cites the opinion of Georges Lanoë-Villene that “...the white stag was a symbol which the early Christians attributed to Jesus Christ.”

Whether as the white stag or the “Great White Wild Boar” hidden in the remote depths of the forest, *Coed Celyddon* or Broceliande, the Druidic function always epitomised contemplative detachment from the world, like the forest-sages of the Upanishads. Ancient Celtic poetry such as the *Yr Afallennau* (The Apple Trees) cryptically associates Merlin with the solar fruit of the “World-Tree” at the sacred centre, the abode of immortality, the Terrestrial Paradise. This Celtic symbolism of the wild apple tree as the “shelter of the white hind” correlates with the doctrine of the Zoharic Kabbalah concerning the Shekinah as the supernal Garden of Eden, the “Holy Apple Orchard”. Furthermore the “Vita Merlini” of Geoffrey of Monmouth Merlin specifically mentions the “nineteen apple trees” in the Forest of Caledon, symbolising the 19 year cycle of Hyperborean Apollo’s appearance, in his chariot drawn by flights of swans, in the polar paradise of light. In the context of the veiling and invisibility of the supreme spiritual Centre one might consider the esoteric import of Merlin’s words in *Yr Afallennau*: “Sweet-apple tree which grows in a glade, its peculiar power hides it from the men of Rhydderch.”

In his turn Arthur as *Rig* or *Rix* corresponds with the Celtic divinity Noudons or Nuada and personifies royal power, consecrated and invested from above with the “mandate of heaven” Arthur embodies the office of the “high king” (Ard Ri) enthroned at the central position. The legitimation of Arthur’s rightful kingship with the supernatural sword Excalibur brings to mind the sword of Nuada of the Silver Hand in Irish mythology and here we touch upon the lore of symbolic weapons in respect of the priestly and regal functions.

The spear/arrow represents the straight axial light-ray – the sword, as in the emblematic language of Hermetism, denotes the undulating tongue of fire: light and fire emblemize the functions of contemplation and action, knowledge and power, which are originally conjoined in their unity in the Principle. (The ritual rod called the *baresman* borne as the mark of office by the *Huristar*, the ancient Indo-Iranian priestly caste, is synonymous with the Avestan *vazra* and is cognate with the spear in this context.)

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The spear and the sword are both in actuality forms or aspects of the Vajra, the adamantine “lightning-bolt”: like the sacred weapon of Indra-Agni the sword Excalibur is called in Welsh *Calad-Vwlch* “Lightning-Sword” and the sword of the world-emperor Iskhandar Dhul-Qarnayn was also named “Lightning”. Along with the Spear of Lug, the Middle Irish text *Lebor Gabála* states that the Sword of Nuada were, along with the cauldron of Dagda and the stone of Fal, treasures brought by the gods, the Tuatha Dea, from four cities where they were guarded by four sages in the divine realm of the “northern islands of the world” in a clear reference to the polar “Land Beyond the North Wind”, indicating the Hyperborean origin of the Celtic tradition. The “Book of Invasions” describes how with the coming of the sons of Mil, the gods or *Devas* called the Tuatha Dea/Tuatha de Danaan, withdrew into the mounds and lived on within their subterranean domain – again we see the esoteric concept of interiorisation and concealment within the heart of the world-mountain at the close of the Golden Age.

Reflected in the hierarchy of the sacral and human order the two *varnas* or functions are embodied in the priestly and knightly castes, the Brahmins and Kshatriyas; in the Celtic tradition they are the *Druïdes* at the summit and below them and depending upon them, the warriors (*Flaith*) correlating with the principle of *Kshatram* in Vedic lore. René Guénon has noted that the word *Dru-vid* (Welsh *Der-wydd*) contains the elements *Dru* – strength symbolised by the steadfast oak and *Vid* – “wisdom” symbolised by the mistletoe. Artorius and Merlinus in the Celtic tradition therefore are to be identified with the Vedic dvandva-pairing of Mitra-Varuna. In the Arthurian cycles it is the druid Merlin typifying spiritual authority, who consecrates, advises and guides Arthur, royal personification and holder of temporal power.

The Kshatriya revolt in Celtic tradition is recounted in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi in the tale of Arthur’s hunting of and combat with the supernatural boar called the *Twrch Trwyth* (known in Middle Irish as the *Torc-Triath* and by Nennius as *Troynt*) which Guénon has identified with the Varahavatara, the white boar – incarnation of Vishnu. The boar featured prominently in ancient Celtic iconology, featuring upon coinage such as that of the Iceni. The driving of the great boar from the island of Britain by Arthur and his warriors, represents the revolt of the Kshatriya, the knightly caste, against the priesthood and the appropriation of the three treasures situated between the ears of the boar accordingly symbolises the usurpation of the function of sacerdotal spiritual authority by temporal and regal power. This event, auguring the disequilibrium which ensues from subversion of the sacred order, is one of a series related in the Arthurian romances which herald the eventual decline and ruination of Logres.

René Guénon has written that “the warrior caste, wielder of temporal power...normally plays a passive or feminine role with respect to the sacerdotal caste, from which it in fact receives not only the teaching of the traditional doctrine, but also the legitimation of its own power, whence its “divine right”. Further, when this same warrior caste, overthrowing the normal relationship of subordination, claims supremacy, its predominance is generally accompanied by the predominance of feminine elements in the symbolism of the traditional form as modified by it...” (“Symbols of Sacred Science”, ch. 24) and he points out that in the light of this subversion of the spiritual hierarchy that Merlin ends by being “put to sleep by a feminine power”, obscured by *maya-shakti*. Sir Thomas Malory describes how “Merlin was assotted and doted on one of the ladies of the

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lake”, specifically by the Lady Nimue, the “Damosel of the Lake” who by her “subtle working” entrapped Merlin under a great stone. According to the other medieval Romances Merlin was enchanted and held within a hawthorn tree and in one account he passes, bearing the Thirteen Treasures of Britain, into a “glass castle” or “glass island” – all these motifs implying withdrawal, occultation, suspension, following the deterioration of the sacred order (*Rta*) of the Primordial Tradition under the entropic conditions of cyclical decadence, a process transpiring in tandem with the concealment of the supreme Centre.

In the light of the profound kardial symbolism of the cave as the interior “heart-space” or *hridaya-akasha* we might note the Arthurian legend or folk-lore connected with certain locations in topography of Britain (denoting former seats of spiritual power pertaining to the science of sacred geography) concerning King Arthur who is conceived of as being asleep deep within a subterranean cavern surrounded by his armoured knights and horses awaiting the hour of his return at the end of time. Likewise Plutarch in his “*Moralia*” tells of Kronos, original lord of the Golden Age/Satya Yuga, who sleeps in a cavern under an island in the region of Ogygia: “*Cronus himself sleeps within a deep cave resting on a rock which looks like gold. Birds fly in at the topmost part of the rock and bear him ambrosia, and the whole island is pervaded by the fragrance shed from the rock.*” The cavern of Cronus, king of the Golden Age, refers to the progressive interiorisation of the supreme Centre at the close of the Krita-yuga – the “rock which looks like gold” is the shining summit of the cosmic mountain which by degrees with the passing of the cycles becomes interiorized and concealed – the “ambrosia” is the *soma* or *haoma*, the “draught of immortality” borne and transmitted by “birds”, winged messengers of light who represent higher states of being. The mention of “ambrosia” in Plutarch parallels the apples, the solar fruit of immortality growing in the “Fortunate Isle”, *Ynys Afallon*, whence the wounded king is transported to be healed and restored.

The immortality-bestowing elixir is distilled by the god Manannan – whose sacred bird is the crane (*cran* or *garan*) equating with the white heron which is the ideogram of Tula in Toltec inscriptions and with the ibis of Egyptian symbolism as emblemizing Wisdom and the Word – from the paradisiacal fruit of the orchards of Emhain Abhlach, the felicitous land whose inhabitants know neither grief or sickness. There is a clear co-equivalence with the sacramental mysteries of the “white haoma” which grows upon the cosmic mountain. As it is written in the ancient Irish tale of Bran: “*Here is a branch from the apple-tree of Emhain, like those that are familiar: twigs of white silver on it and crystal fringes with flowers.*” The Fortunate Isle or Island of Apples described by Geoffrey of Monmouth reveals a classical description of the blissful Edenic realm of the “Terrestrial Paradise”, imaging the “Primaeval Syria” or the “Land of the Sun” where Hyperborean Apollo reigns in the company of the Muses, the 9-fold druidic sisterhood of the “Great Queen”, Morgen (Mor-Rigantona):

The island of apples which men call “The Fortunate Isle” gets its name from the fact that it produces all things of itself; the fields there have no need of the ploughs of the farmers and all cultivation is lacking except what nature provides. Of its own accord it produces grain and grapes, and apple trees grow in its woods from the close-clipped grass. The ground of its own accord produces everything instead of merely grass, and people live there a hundred years or more. There nine sisters rule by a pleasing set of laws those who

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come to them from our country. She who is first of them is more skilled in the healing art, and excels her sisters in the beauty of her person. Morgen is her name...Thither after the battle of Camlan we took the wounded Arthur, guided by Barinthus to whom the waters and the stars of heaven were well known.

The “Isle of Apples” is the “White Isle”, image of the supreme Centre, the “Terrestrial Paradise” or “Abode of Immortality”: in the Middle Ages the doctor Albertus Magnus relayed the tradition of St Thomas the Apostle that the mountain of the Terrestrial Paradise rises up the circle of the moon: Sufi teachings say that Adam is the *qutb* or “Pole” of the heaven of the Moon and thus epitomises the primordial or “Adamic” state of the “True Man” (which is realised via the Lesser Mysteries, equating with *leukosis*, silver and the moon in alchemical symbolism.) Medieval topographical authorities contended that the Terrestrial Paradise, on account of its great elevation, was the only place on earth which escaped the Flood – that is to say that because it participates in the immutable state of numinous, imperishable being which characterises the sacred Centre, it transcends the cyclical cataclysms of the sub-lunary realm of time, becoming and mortality. Hence its blissful inhabitants lead a life untouched by the sorrows attendant upon the temporal fallen condition – there dwell the “men of the invisible hierarchy” (*rijal al-ghayb*), sustained and sanctified by the waters of the fountain of immortality in the Garden – to drink from the well of Khezr-Elias in the station of the “pole-star of the Gnostics” is to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life which is the Tree of Unicity. Ultimately these symbolic visions of the axial mysteries of the supreme Centre, the revolving “glass castle” of the Celtic poets and the cosmic “World-Mountain” of the Terrestrial Paradise coalesce into the “Mount of Salvation”, the Grail citadel of Montsalvat.

Concealed in his cycle of Occultation (*Ghaybat*) the “Once and Future King” will awaken and emerge at the end of the ages, coming forth (as the Mahdi will come forth from his celestial cave according to Islamic esoterism to defeat the satanic powers of Al-Dajjal) to lead forth his company of knights in the “furious host”, the *chasse d’Arthur* (as “Rex Artorius” is depicted in the mosaic pavement of Otranto Cathedral) to the last apocalyptic battle against the massed demonic hosts of asuric forces at the twilight of the Manvantara, to the final transfiguring victory of the Light which ushers in the rectification of all things, the *Apocatastasis*.

“Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross.” (Le Mort Darthur)