Myths

Most nations have their own founding myth, intended to give them dignity and importance, and sometimes to comfort them in bad times. Christian Europe derived many of its myths from the Bible, and dynasties traced their descent from Noah or Adam. The pagan Anglo-Saxons claimed ancestry from the heathen gods, Odin and Thor. The classical world was also a fertile source, with myths of descent from the Greeks or Trojans. Most myths accumulated detail and embellishment as they developed. When they moved into literature, painting, or music, they acquired fresh vitality. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* or Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' are no less beautiful for being based on shaky historical foundations. At the least, myths tell us how nations would like to see themselves and promote concepts of bravery, chivalry, loyalty, and fortitude.

Brutus. The legend that Britain was founded by Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas, who escaped from the fall of Troy, was started by Nennius in the ninth century. Geoffrey of Monmouth, a prolific myth-maker of the early twelfth century, elaborated by explaining that Brutus landed at Totnes, overcame the giant Gogmagog, and founded London under the name of Trinovantum or New Troy. The story held credence until Tudor times, with John Leland protesting its authenticity as late as 1544.

Scota. Scotland's reply to England's claim of descent from Brutus was Scota, a daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt. According to Nennius's account, written in the ninth century, Scota was married to a Scythian nobleman living in Egypt at the time of the escape of the Hebrews from captivity. His offspring, after many vicissitudes, reached Dál Riata (modern Kintyre and mid-Argyll) via Spain. The myth was popularized by John Fordun in his *Scotichronicon* written in the fourteenth century.

Bladud is said by Geoffrey of Monmouth to have succeeded Hudibras as king of the Britons, to have founded the city of Bath, and to have killed himself while attempting to fly, 'dashed into countless pieces'. Geoffrey claimed that Bladud was the father of King Lear.

Lud is said by Geoffrey of Monmouth to have been the elder brother of Cassivellaunus, to have founded (or re-founded) London, and to be

buried there. There is, at present, no evidence that London existed before the Roman occupation of AD 43. Ludgate was said to have been named after him, but its earliest mention is as Lutgata *c*.1100–35.

Leir (Lear). The earliest accounts of king Leir and his three daughters is in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, written in the twelfth century. Though it probably draws on previous sources, they have not been securely identified. Geoffrey described Leir as the son of Bladud. The basic story of his three named daughters and the love test is outlined, and Leir is credited with founding Leicester. In Geoffrey's version, Leir was buried at Leicester in a tomb under the river Soar. He offered a happy ending, with Leir restored to his kingdom by Cordelia's aid, thus providing some excuse for the ending which Nahum Tate made in 1681 for Shakespeare's play.

Cole. The nursery rhyme which gave fame to Old King Cole and his fiddlers three was extant in the seventeenth century. In the account given by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, Cole founded Colchester and submitted to the Roman, Constantius, who subsequently married Cole's daughter, Helen. Their son was the emperor Constantine. The name Colchester derives in fact from the river Colne on which the town stands.

Arthur. The story of king Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table is one of the most enduring of all legends, popular with poets and dramatists, composers, and film-makers. The usual setting is the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the cult of chivalry was developing. Edward I and his queen visited Glastonbury in 1278 to see what were said to be the bones of Arthur and Guinevere, and his grandson Edward III had a round table made (still at Winchester), held a great tournament there in 1344, and based the Order of the Garter in part on the story.

The first writer to popularize Arthur's deeds was Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose Arthur was an heroic leader of the Welsh (Britons) in their struggles against the Saxons. Having dealt with them, Arthur proceeded to crush the Scots, Picts, and Irish, and occupy Iceland and Gotland, before tackling Rome itself, which he would certainly have overcome had he not been called home by news of Mordred's treachery. Geoffrey placed these events in the immediate post-Roman period (late fifth century), and quoted from Gildas and from Nennius, writing in the

King Arthur's Round Table was first mentioned in Arthurian literature in 1115 by Wace, a Norman poet, who explained that it was designed to avoid disputes among the knights about precedence. The round table now in Winchester castle has been dated to the late 13th cent.

late sixth and the ninth centuries. Gildas has no mention of Arthur, and his hero in the struggle against the Saxons was Ambrosius Aurelianus, a noble Roman, though he did mention a later British victory at Mons Badonis. Nennius retained Ambrosius but added an Arthur, who took over his task. The tenth-century *Annales Cambriae* recorded that Arthur defeated the Saxons in 516 at the battle of Badon and was killed in 537.

The Welsh poem *Gododdin*, written about 600, referred parenthetically to a hero called Arthur.

With this, the hunt was on to identify 'Badon' and 'Camlann', where Arthur was said by the *Annales* to have died. The first is usually identified as Badbury near Swindon or Baydon near Lambourn, either of which would fit a Saxon/British encounter in the late fifth century; the second has been identified with the river Camel in Cornwall. However, Arthur has also been claimed for many other regions, including Cumbria and Scotland.

Romano-British Rulers

Although the occupation of Britain did not take place until after AD 43, contacts with the Roman world had been increasing since the Roman seizure of Gaul in the first century BC, particularly in southern England. Trade developed, and British kings in the later first century BC issued coins based upon Roman models. For a time after the Claudian conquest, Rome ruled through client kings, but the revolt of Boudicca in AD 60 caused the abandonment of that policy. Kingdoms did not reappear until Roman Britain began to break up, after Honorius in 410 had warned it to expect no more help from Rome.

Cassivellaunus is well known through the prominence given to him in Caesar's account of his second expedition in 54 BC. Caesar described his territory as north of the Thames and some eighty miles from the Kentish ports, which places it in Hertfordshire, and commented that 'our arrival moved the Britons to appoint him commander-in-chief for the whole campaign'. His resistance showed him to be a man of skill and some authority, capable of giving orders for a diversionary attack upon the Roman base-camp back in Kent, but after Caesar had overrun his headquarters at Wheathampstead, near St Albans, he was forced to submit and promised not to molest his neighbours to the east, the Trinovantes. Nothing more is heard of Cassivellaunus, and though coins circulated, he did not inscribe his name. It has recently been suggested that he was not necessarily ruler of the Catuvellauni and that Caesar

may have magnified his importance. Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in the twelfth century, devoted much space to his exploits.

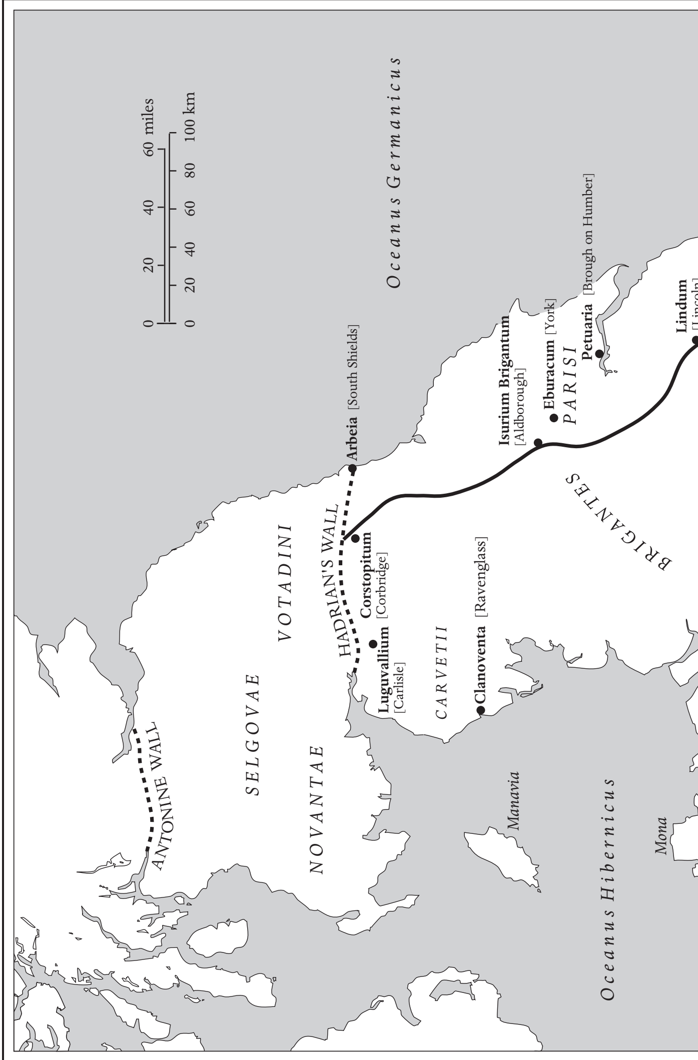
Mandubracius, young son of Imanventius, king of the Trinovantes, fled to Gaul when his father was killed by Cassivellaunus, and sought Caesar's protection. He was reinstated when Caesar invaded Britain in 54 BC. He is identified in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, but it has been suggested that Celtic sources give his name as Avarwy, the Roman version being a nickname meaning 'the black traitor'.

Commius, a Belgic Gaul, served with Caesar and was made king of the Atrebates after their defeat at the battle of the river Sambre. The continental Atrebates had close links with Belgic tribes in southern England, and in 55 BC Commius was sent by Caesar to negotiate a friendly welcome. He was taken captive but released when Caesar landed. The following year he accompanied Caesar on the second expedition and negotiated Cassivellaunus's capitulation, but two years later he joined Vercingetorix's rebellion in Gaul and for some time maintained resistance to the Romans. Surviving a plot to assassinate him, he surrendered, with the proviso that he should never have to look upon a Roman again. He moved to Britain, becoming king of the Atrebates in the Hampshire region, issuing his own coins. His territories were divided between his sons or grandsons Tincommius, Verica, and Eppillus.

Addedomarus is known only through his coins, found over a wide area between Oxfordshire and Essex, suggesting that he ruled the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes, probably *c.*30 BC.

Andoco is another ruler known only by his coinage, and the name is presumably an abbreviation of Andocomius. His coins, which are not plentiful, are found almost exclusively in the Catuvellauni heartland between west Essex and Oxfordshire. His dates are not certain, but 10 BC to AD 10 have been suggested.

Tincommius, one of the three sons or grandsons of Commius, took the kingship of the Regni in Sussex and issued coins. He was forced out of his kingdom and journeyed to Rome *c.*AD 7 with Dubnovellaunus, king of Kent, to ask Augustus to protect them. There is no evidence that help was forthcoming.


0 20 40 60 miles
0 20 40 60 80 100 km
Oceanus Germanicus
ANTONINE WALL
SELGOVAE
NOVANTAE
VOTADINI
HADRIAN'S WALL
Arbeia [South Shields]
Corstopitum [Corbridge]
Luguvallium [Carlisle]
CARVETII
Clanoventa [Ravenglass]
Isurium Brigantum [Aldborough]
Eburacum [York]
PARISI
Petuaria [Brough on Humber]
Lindum [Lincoln]
BRIGANTES
Manavia
Mona
Oceanus Hibernicus

Roman Britain

Eppillus was a son or grandson of Commius and seems to have succeeded Tincommius as ruler of the Atrebates, striking coins at Silchester. He subsequently moved to Kent, where most of his coins have been found. He was overthrown in Kent by Dubnovellaunus, who was in turn overthrown by Cunobelinus. His coins have been dated 10 BC to AD 10.

Verica poses problems. On his coins he claimed to be a son of Commius, king of the Atrebates *c.*50 BC, but these were struck in the early first century AD. Moreover, Dio Cassius reports 'a certain Berikos' seeking help from the emperor Claudius *c.*AD 42, and thus facilitating the Roman invasion. Unless there are two Vericas, it seems more likely that he was a grandson of Commius. He appears to have been pushed out of his Atrebatian territories by Epaticcus, a son of Tasciovanus.

Tasciovanus, king of the Catuvellauni, was father of Cunobelinus and the first of his dynasty to strike coins. They have been found over a wide area from Essex to Oxfordshire and south of the Thames in Surrey. He appears to have taken over the Trinovantes to the east, since some of his coins were minted in Colchester. He could have been a grandson of Cassivellaunus, reigning from *c.*20 BC to about AD 10.

Dubnovellaunus was ruler of Kent, where he struck coins. Another ruler with the same name struck coins in the Essex area *c.*10 BC. It is possible that the first Dubnovellaunus was a son of Mandubracius, reinstated by Caesar in 54 BC. After AD 7 he was overthrown by Cunobelinus and, accompanied by Tincommius, went to Rome to seek the assistance of Augustus. It was not forthcoming.

Dumnocoveros is only recorded in coins of the Coritani, whose territory comprised modern Lincolnshire and Leicestershire, in association with Volisius. They have been dated *c.*AD 20–45.

Epaticcus was a son of Tasciovanus and probably a brother of Cunobelinus. His coins, of good quality, are not plentiful, but have been found in southern England, mainly south of the Thames. He may have ruled the Atrebates for some time, possibly in collaboration with Cunobelinus. If, as has been suggested, he pushed Verica out of Atrebates territory, he would appear to be coining *c.*AD 35–40.

Volisius was king of the Coritani, whose territories were in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, though his coinage has also been found in Yorkshire. He appears to have been ruling in the early days after the Roman occupation of AD 43.

Cunobelinus is probably the most famous British king before the Roman occupation. He was a son of Tasciovanus, and succeeded his father in the early first century, reigning until *c.*AD 40. His first capital was Verulamium (St Albans) but he subsequently moved it to Colchester. Though his power base was the Catuvellauni and the Trinovantes, his influence extended over a wide area, and his coins, of high quality, are found in north-east Kent, north Berkshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire. Most of them carry on the obverse an ear of corn. Geoffrey of Monmouth, not the most reliable of sources, claimed that he was brought up by Augustus Caesar, and Suetonius called him 'rex Brittonorum'. He seems to have been assertive in Britain but took care not to antagonize the Romans. A quarrel with his son Adminius, however, may have given the emperor Claudius the pretext for an expedition, which arrived in AD 43 after Cunobelinus's death. In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* the historical background, borrowed mainly from Holinshed, is sketched in lightly. It has been suggested that the great tumulus at Lexden, near Colchester, might be his burial-place.

Adminius, or **Amminus**, a son of Cunobelinus, ruled the Cantiaci in Kent, presumably as a sub-king. In AD 40 he lost control or was expelled and fled to Gaul, where he begged the emperor Caligula for help. Caligula treated this as a surrender of the whole country, but his assassination removed any chance of intervention, and it was left to his successor Claudius to set in train the successful expedition of AD 43.

Togodumnus was a son of Cunobelinus and brother, or close relative, of Caratacus. On the death of his father *c.*AD 41, he took control north of the Thames, with Colchester as his capital. When the Roman army invaded in AD 43, he joined forces with his brother and gave battle on the line of the Medway. After heavy fighting, Togodumnus was killed and Caratacus fled westwards to continue the struggle.

Caratacus, son of Cunobelinus, with his brother Togodumnus led British resistance to the Roman invasion of AD 43. After a defeat on the Medway, in which Togodumnus was killed, Caratacus fled to Wales to

seek support from the Silures, and then the Ordovices. When Ostorius Scapula advanced in AD 50 to complete the work of Aulus Plautius, Caratacus gave battle on a fortified hill. Newtown or Caersws are the most likely of many places in Wales which have been suggested. After a bitter struggle, Caratacus's wife, daughter, and brothers were captured, but he escaped and appealed to Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes in Yorkshire. She handed him over to the Romans and he was taken to Rome where he ended his days. His demeanour at Claudius's victory parade is said to have won admiration, and Tacitus provided him with a heroic speech. More moving is the remark attributed to him by Dio Cassius, when he beheld the splendour of Rome: 'when you have all this, why do you begrudge us our poor hovels?'

Prasutagus, king of the Iceni, was the husband of Boudicca. His territories were ruled from his capital at Venta Icenorum, near Norwich. He seems to have been a client king of Rome, possibly installed after some discontent among the Iceni in the late 40s. At his death in AD 60, he made the emperor Nero coheir with his own daughters, but the brutal conduct of the Roman officials led to Boudicca's great revolt.

Hadrian, Roman Emperor AD117–38 and builder of the wall from Carlisle to Newcastle. This fine head was found in the Thames near London Bridge in 1834.

Boudicca, or **Boadicea**, was wife of Prasutagus, king of the Iceni, whose territories were modern Norfolk. At his death, the local Roman officials treated the Iceni with contempt, flogging Boudicca and raping her daughters. Her response was to raise a terrifying insurrection, probably the greatest in British history, which came close to sweeping Roman rule out of Britain. Colchester, the Roman capital, was taken and burned, and its inhabitants put to the sword. Paulinus, the Roman governor, was campaigning in Anglesey but, in a desperate cavalry dash, tried to hold London. He reached it before the rebels but was obliged to withdraw to wait for reinforcements. Both London and Verulamium (St Albans) were sacked. In all three cities, ashes from the devastation survive below the surface, and 70,000 are reported to have been slain. Paulinus succeeded in gathering forces and, advancing to join his infantry from North Wales, gave battle at Atherstone, near Watling Street. Against all odds, he won a decisive victory, and Boudicca took poison to avoid capture.

Dio Cassius, writing more than one hundred years after the event, described Boudicca as 'very tall, in appearance most terrifying . . . the glance of her eye most fierce, her voice harsh . . . a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips'. For centuries, this vivid portrait, real or imaginary, seems to have unnerved male historians and their attitude to Boudicca was cautious. Gildas in the sixth century referred to her as 'a treacherous lioness', and Holinshed in the sixteenth century dwelt mainly on her atrocities. The emergence of Boudicca as a national heroine was largely Victorian. Thomas Thornycroft offered a large statue of her at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and his sculpture, after some vicissitudes, was placed on the Victoria Embankment opposite the Houses of Parliament in 1902.

HINGLEY, R. and UNWIN, C., *Boudica* (2005).

Cogidubnus was placed or confirmed by the Romans as ruler of the Regni soon after the invasion of AD 43. He took the name Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus and claimed to be 'rex magnus Britanniae'. His capital was Noviomagus (Chichester), and the great palace at Fishbourne is believed to have been built for him. As a client king of Rome, he seems to have had a comfortable, dignified and lengthy reign. The main authority is Tacitus (*Agricola*), augmented by a remarkable stone found at Chichester in 1723.

Cartimandua was queen of the Brigantes, a very powerful northern tribe or confederation, which had come to terms with the Romans after