EXPLORING THE EUROPEAN NARRATIVE THROUGH THE ARTHURIAN CORPUS

Head: Geert van Iersel

Participants: Marjolein Hogenbirk, Lydia Zeldenrust

One need hardly point out to attendees of the International Arthurian Society’s Conference that King Arthur is one of the most enduring characters of European narrative. Medieval poets were far from the last creatives to be inspired by the stock of Arthurian materials. One need only browse the online catalogues of services such as Amazon, Comixology, Steam and Youtube to realise how persistent Arthur’s popularity has been. It is this enduring tradition that makes the Arthurian corpus, in all its manifold colours, one of the most promising sources for the exploration of European identities from the High Middle Ages until the present, with their overlaps, divergences and convergences, as well as of the trans-continental cultural ties that have emerged in the modern era.

Our aim in this round table is to lay the foundations for an international network that will (1) set out to explore the nature of the Arthurian corpus as a cross-boundary cultural phenomenon and (2) to valorise the insights gained from this exercise through educational projects developed in close collaboration with teacher training programmes and schools. Ultimately, the project seeks to promote the awareness of Europe as a diverse cultural space which conjoins shared literary traditions with local narratives and modes of expression. Participants should possess or, otherwise be willing to establish and maintain, ties with secondary schools and/or teacher training programmes that would or might be willing to participate in a project of this description.
TRANSCULTURAL MIGRATIONS OF INSCRIBED OBJECTS IN ARTHURIAN LITERATURE

Head: Christine Neufeld

From Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Brackenseil* to the famous epitaph on Arthur’s tomb, HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REQUE FUTURUS, inscribed objects figure prominently in Arthurian literature. This panel will present analyses of extraordinary objects and extraordinary forms of writing in Arthurian literature using data gathered by the Heidelberg CRC Project, ‘Inscriptionality. Reflections of Material Text Culture in the Literature of the 12th to 17th Centuries.’ The focus on comparative examinations of inscriptionality across linguistic and cultural boundaries in the Middle Ages in the second phase of the CRC project (2015-2019) offers a unique opportunity to examine the transmission and migration of Arthurian texts by following the traces left by inscribed objects. Moreover, in addition to examining the ‘translation’ of material culture in the Arthurian corpus, the metatextual implications inherent in inscriptionality invite considerations of how extraordinary forms of writing function as sites where medieval authors not only elaborate their individual poetics, but also theorize the potentials and boundaries of writing itself. The session presents new perspectives on the intersection between textual culture and material culture drawing on the rich history of Arthurian artistic production across medieval Europe.

For more information on the CRC project: http://www.materiale-textkulturen.de/teilprojekt.php?tp=C05&up=

THE INVENTION OF INSCRIPTION. TRANSFERING THE GRAIL FROM CHRÉTIEN TO WOLFRAM

Michael R. Ott

The grail is an iconic and rather essential element of Arthurian literature and it is the German tradition, starting with Wolfram von Eschenbach, that invents the grail as a transcendent medium for written messages. Although there is no model for this aspect of the grail in Chrétien de Troyes’ “Perceval” nor in Robert de Boron’s *Roman du Saint-Graal*, both texts contain elements that contribute to Wolfram’s arrangement, even though he may not have known the *Roman du Saint-Graal*. Robert de Boron’s text gives its protagonist the chance to communicate to god by praying in front of the grail. And Chrétien speaks of an inscription on the sword which is bestowed on Perceval by the Fisher King. This is the only inscription in Chrétien’s *Perceval* and its translation into Wolfram’s text marks the first instance of several inscriptions on things which are related to the grail: stars forming the name of the grail, Anfortas’ lance, the inscription in Frimutel’s sword. The paper will follow these insessional traces, from the French narratives to Wolfram’s *Parzival* and finally to his *Titurel*, in which the motif of the inscribed object is broadened and escalated.
THE FINGER OF GOD: INSCRIPTION, PROPHECY AND AUTHORITY IN MALORY’S Morte Darthur

Christine Neufeld

In Malory’s Morte Darthur and its French sources, Arthurian knights wander through a landscape riddled with inscribed objects, the products of both Merlin and what medieval exegetes might call the digitus Dei. These inscribed objects frequently function as more than the public memorials or landmarks of the mundane world, embracing their metatextual roles explicitly to direct the narrative action through instructions and prophecy. This concept of the material text as a trace of a fuller knowledge located elsewhere in time and space is also central to the medieval tale of Eve commanding Seth to inscribe the history of the Fall into two pillars for future generations. This episode in the Apocryphal Life of Adam and Eve leads directly to the legend of Solomon and the Tree of Life familiar to audiences of Galahad’s Grail quest. I argue that the story of the first inscription is a stowaway (if you will) under Solomon’s bed on the Ship of Faith – itself a moving inscribed object filled with other inscribed objects from distant times that the knights must interpret correctly – which raises questions about the transmission of narrative across time and culture that might preoccupy a medieval author/translator such as Malory.

INSCRIBED OBJECTS AND ARTHURIAN LITERATURE. A TRANS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Ludger Lieb

Narrated inscriptions in medieval literatures offer an exceptional and hitherto largely disregarded perspective on the premodern imagination of textuality and preoccupation with textual artifacts. Although the preoccupation with narrated inscriptions in medieval literature has some tradition in 20th-century German scholarship, previous research was mostly limited to collections of examples, to comparisons between real and literary inscriptions and to analyses of few well-known script bearing artifacts, which are to be found quite often in Arthurian literature. The initial paper will present some novel approaches to literary inscriptuality, based on the previous work of the CRC project, and it will argue for a transcultural perspective: The effort to follow the migration of inscribed objects through the medieval network of literature offers a unique opportunity to understand the particular significance of textuality. Since Arthurian literature forms the most important medieval literary network, it should be the touchstone of an examination considering the transcultural migrations of inscribed objects.
RETRACING THE STORY OF BRUTUS IN LATE MEDIEVAL FRENCH CHRONICLES
Laura Endress

Historiographical texts that were composed in 14th- and 15th-century France offer a rich conglomerate of textual materials. These often include components, of varying length and degree of elaboration, relating to the origins and genealogies of the kings of Britain. Since many of the vast compilations at hand remain unedited and their manuscript traditions are yet to be studied in detail, their treatment of the “Matter of Britain” with its patterns and variations is an enticing avenue of investigation. By examining passages from selected chronicles of the late Middle Ages, such as Jean Mansel’s *La Fleur des Histoires*, Jean de Courcy’s *La Bouquechardière* or anonymous compositions that are sometimes referred to as “redactions” of the *Histoire Ancienne jusqu’à César*, this presentation aims to provide a modest insight into the textual tradition and source materials of these works and thereby shed light on the reception history of the story of Brutus and his descendants in medieval France.
REWRITING ARTHURIAN HISTORY: THE SWORD IN THE STONE IN COLLEGE OF ARMS, ARUNDEL 58

Richard Moll

College of Arms, MS Arundel 58 is a mid-fifteenth century copy of Robert of Gloucester’s metrical Chronicle. The text, however, has been substantially augmented by numerous scribal interventions, including large additions of verse and prose material. The Arthurian section of the manuscript in particular has been significantly revised. This paper explores one such revision: the addition of a complete Sword in the Stone scene translated from the French prose Merlin and carefully inserted into the text. The scene is well-known; it is found in other English texts which translate the French Merlin, including Of Arthour and of Merlin (late thirteenth century), Henry Lovelich’s verse Merlin (1420s or 1430s) and the Middle English prose Merlin (mid-fifteenth century). It is also found in another composite text, Thomas Malory’s Le Morte D’Arthur. The insertion of the scene into Robert of Gloucester’s Chronicle, which generally conforms to the Galfridian narrative of Arthur’s reign, reveals the active engagement of the manuscript’s scribe, as he reacts to and in some ways argues with the text that he is copying. The insertion also allows us to contextualize that scribe: his literary choices place him within a tradition of translators of French prose romance; his dialectal features suggest a translator / scribe from Wiltshire who has been significantly affected by the increased standardization of fifteenth-century English; his choice of source text suggests a London literary milieu within which he completed his book production activities. A multifaceted exploration of a single episode thus allows us to refine Matthew Fisher’s concept of “derivative textuality” and to read an variant manuscript like Arundel 58 as the product of a specific cultural time and place.
In the 12th-century, Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffrey of Monmouth both wrote accounts of early insular history that explored Britain’s relationship with Rome. In the first book of his *Historia Anglorum*, Henry lists the Roman Emperors, from Julius Caesar to Theodosius II, who ruled Britain before it was conquered by the Saxons. In the *Historia regum Britanniae*, however, Geoffrey presents Rome as an enemy of Britain, whose imperial authority is directly challenged by several British kings, including Brutus, Brennius and Belinus, and King Arthur.

Arthur’s reign is the narrative climax of Geoffrey’s *Historia* and, as Siân Echard writes, ‘Arthur’s Roman exploits […] are simply the strongest expression of what is in fact a quite systematic shifting of British history away from any kind of subjugation, military or cultural, to Rome’. This paper will argue that Geoffrey’s account of Roman history in his *Historia regum Britanniae*, especially Arthur’s war against Rome, is a direct response to Henry of Huntingdon’s model of ‘British’ history in his *Historia Anglorum*. In particular, this paper will suggest that Emperor Lucius, who questions Arthur’s authority and demands Britain’s tribute, is a figure of ridicule, and that Arthur’s triumph over Rome symbolises Geoffrey’s rejection of *romanitas* in Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*.

By comparing Henry and Geoffrey’s portraits of Arthur, this paper will address the relationship between two 12th-century Arthurian texts, and it will consider how Arthur was adapted and transformed from a ‘British’ warlord into an imperial Emperor.
Malory’s *Morte Darthur* has famously been interrogated in the past by any number of critical approaches – from gender, to postcolonialism, to economic theory, and many, many more. Popular culture and media in the 21st-century have recently become more and more intrigued with the idea of the zombie. Movies like *Zombieland* and *World War Z*, and television shows such as *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead* – not to mention the books and graphic novels on which these productions are based – all explore how humanity attempts to negotiate a post-apocalyptic environment overrun by formerly human monsters. It would be wrong, however, to say that this fascination is a purely modern invention. Many medieval texts contain “anticipatory traces” of the zombie – from the Old Norse tradition to chivalric romances and beyond. Recently, scholars such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen have invoked the zombie in discussions of the literature of the Middle Ages. In this paper, I suggest that interrogating Malory’s *Morte Darthur* through the lens of the zombie and zombie-theory helps us understand how that text negotiates fears about society, identity, and the future. Indeed, King Arthur, forever asleep in Avalon, is arguably himself the quintessential zombie: dead but not, present as a memory and a promise – and for some, as a threat against future enemies or a potential weapon in times of trouble. This paper traces moments of “zombie concern” in the *Morte Darthur* and examines their centrality to the movement of the narrative.
Embodying Arthurian Knighthood: Shame, Identity and Intersectionality in the *Prose Tristan* and Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*

Richard Sévère

Room 6

When considering the range of identities and social positions within the Arthurian community, one can construct a trajectory of the ways in which multi-dimensional systems emerge and converge – in other words, we can see how various identities form social categories. As such, the myriad sources that make up the Arthuriad are robust for discussions of intersectionality – a paradigm once used in tandem with feminist theory, and later expanded to include broader discussions of marginalization, including race, gender, class, age and disability. Of particular interest is the intracategorical complexity of intersectionality, which looks at “people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups” (Dill 5). This paper focuses on the Round Table Knights, specifically Sir Dinadan, whose identity and positionality in the chivalric community shift in Malory’s *Morte* in comparison to earlier representations in the French *Prose Tristan*. A critical comparison of the *Prose Tristan* and Malory’s *Morte*, examined though the lens of intersectionality theory, demonstrates what occurs when several identities intersect with knighthood, specifically love, friendship and violence. Ultimately, one can read Dinadan as a socially vulnerable knight in the Arthurian community because his identity intersects with so many categories that undermine knighthood – an assertion proven in Malory’s text where Dinadan is made to wear female’s clothing and never takes a lover as he does in the earlier Old French version. Whether one reads Dinadan’s drag episode as a joke or punishment, the act is an ideal example of how identity, violence and shame intersect in the Arthurian Community.
Although *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* is frequently referred to as a diptych, the ghost vision and the battle narrative within this late medieval romance have been difficult to reconcile. Those that do not subscribe to the argument that *The Awntyrs* was written by two separate poets have still tended to favor readings that diminish its religious contexts. In this paper, I re-examine this Middle English poem in relation to the purgatorial literature of the period such as *St Patrick’s Purgatory* and *The Gast of Gy*, a vibrant genre long interested in chivalric romance. Rather than a political allegory or the voice of the Church to be resisted by the secular aristocracy, the ghost of Guenevere’s mother offers a spiritual exhortation to reflect upon inevitable failure. *The Awntyrs* dramatizes a theology of penance that is deeply aware of the exigencies of lay life for an ever-widening group of readers in ways that actively complicate notions of the religious and the secular.
Sacred Places – Sacred Spaces

An emphasis on the courtly virtues of the chivalric protagonists plays a significant role in Arthurian Romances. Often less present, but no less important, is a religious ethos that the stories in question occasionally throw into focus. Often playing the role of the saviour, or, more precisely, thus of a miles Christi, knights of King Arthur’s court have to deal with social and religious crisis. It has long been acknowledged that the narrative approach that emphasizes the spatial structure of narrative spaces, and that is linked to such conflicts, provides a solid foundation for the analysis of narrative strategies. The focus of interest has, however, primarily been on the study of courtly locations and on the semantics of space linked to these (the court of King Arthur; the world of adventure; parcours of the protagonist etc.). In order to explore this issue further, the proposed contributions seek to offer more detailed insight into the spatial structures of medieval texts with respect to their cultural context. Our focus lies on the examination and the interpretation of the Christian and sacred semantics that emphasize the role of the protagonist as saviour. Largely similar criteria also come to light on a theoretical level: spatial order follows mythical principles or possesses topical or heterotopical qualities. The semantics as well as the structural spaces connected to these can, on the other hand, vary considerably: spaces of penance and hermitage lead the protagonists temporarily outside of the world; they are always connected to the opposing world of adventure, but at the same time separate themselves from it, rendering visible their participation in the exclusivity of the other spaces of the courtly narrative world.


Susanne Friede

All the early Grail romances can be characterized by two types of spatial narratives: on the one hand there are spaces that protagonists have to take action in or travel through in order to reach the Holy Grail. Rather than in terms of the function of the plot, the narrative space is progressively disclosed to the reader/listener through the temporal unfolding of the (textual) parcours. It can be described and organized in terms of thematically relevant subspaces. On the other hand there are places that can be identified and defined solely through the presence and the powerful impact of the Holy Grail. The Grail is characterized by semiotic parameters that also determine the topology of the sacred place itself. Different narratives are inscribed on this spatial object whilst also influencing the perception of its potential performative function. With this in mind, my aim is to study the significance of the complex relationship between these two types of spatial narratives, their impact on the perception of the Grail scenes and their ‘Sitz im Leben’ in the Conte Du Graal, in the short
version of the *Première Continuation*, and in the *Roman de l’Estoire dou saint Graal* de Robert de Boron, as well as in its Prose adaption.

**SPACES OF MADNESS – SPACES OF Penance? PENITENTIAL PARALLELS IN HARTMANN’S *IWEIN***

Sarah Bowden

The spatial location of Iwein’s madness has long been recognized as key to any reading of this scene. This space – a wilderness, outside the court – is conventionally read symbolically with respect to Iwein’s (almost) total loss of self and social markers, and provides a background to complete stripping of civilization necessary to his subsequent reintegration into society. In this paper I want to consider the ways in which the causes and processes of Iwein’s madness, as well as the spaces in which these occur, can also be read as analogous to contemporary penitential practices. Drawing on a background of penitential theology and offering comparisons to other versions of the story as well as other works by Hartmann, I trace the ways in which Iwein’s realization of his guilt, his departure from society and his loss of self, as well as his reintegration, can be mapped onto contemporary penitential practices and theological discourses. I suggest not a complete revision of scholarship, but rather that the ways in which this scene resonates with practices and problems of penance may be illuminating for our readings of the text.

**SPATIAL NARRATIVIZATION OF SALVATION AND DAMNATION IN *WIGALOIS* AND PROSE LANCELOT***

Andreas Hammer

The role of the protagonist in the *Wigalois* of Wirnt von Gravenberg is manifold: not only does he reestablish the social order of the land of Korntin but also appears from the very beginning as a Christian saviour and redeemer. Given this context, the land that the protagonist frees turns out to be Purgatory, his antagonist being the *Sozius Diaboli*. Such religious semantic is, however, of superficial nature. As such, an interlinking between spatial structures and courtly descriptive patterns can be identified in several respects, including, for instance, the presentation of Purgatory as the space of adventure in the Otherworld. In comparison to *Wigalois*, the protagonists in *Prose Lancelot* do not only act within explicitly sacred sites but also within places of penance, and the latter also play an important role in determining their actions. On the basis of these findings, this paper has two aims: first, to identify the impact of these spaces on characters and their actions; second, to describe the spatial structure of these spaces in more detail. The latter aim is based on the consideration that sacred spaces such as churches and graveyards cannot, for the most part, be clearly identified. The following questions thus arise: how can we establish a more comprehensible identification of these places? What kind of descriptive patterns can be assigned to individual spaces? It is therefore importance to question the differentiation between spaces of salvation and sacred spaces, as well as the way in which they intertwine. In order to achieve this, spaces of ‘de-salvation’ should also be considered;
for instance, the structure of the devilish castle of Glois in *Wigalois* or such places in the *Prose Lancelot*, in which the protagonists must repeatedly encounter demonic powers; here, too, it should be considered whether the spatial order of such powers unfolds in parallel or otherwise to spaces of salvation.
LA VOIX ET LA LETTRE DANS LES ROMANS ARTHURIENS EN VERS DE LA SECONDE MOITIÉ DU XIIᵉ SIÈCLE

Danièle James-Raoul

Kardinal-Döpfner-Saal