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Lessons from History: Historia Regum Britanniae and Twelfth Century Turmoil

ABSTRACT

History often repeats itself as so popularly said. In the twelfth century, Britain witnessed a chaotic time not unlike it had before in the past. King Stephen of Blois was caught in a battle of succession with his cousin Matilda. Under his reign many problems in Britain's social and political sphere emerged and erupted into a mess of civil war, instability, and poor government. It was in this time that a Welsh-Norman scribe, Geoffrey of Monmouth, wrote his magnum opus, "Historia Regum Britanniae." In his work, Geoffrey detailed the accounts of the British kings of the past, and although modern historiography deems his work to be highly inaccurate and even fictional, its significance remains important. As a chronicle of history widely accepted well until the sixteenth century, Geoffrey's "Historia Regum Britanniae" provided the people of medieval Britain insight and reflection to events surrounding their lives. This paper argues that Geoffrey's writing displays a warning for Britain meant to remind peasant and lord alike that history can indeed repeat itself, and in many cases will not always be pleasant. It is essential that changes be made in order to avoid catastrophic events from occurring again.

The history of Britain involves a tumultuous timeline of invaders, conquerors, kings, empires, and a plethora of different peoples. This chaotic history is evident in the English language, with its grammar, form, and diction resembling that of Latin, Germanic and Celtic languages. A unique element in the history of Britain is its geographic separation from the rest of Europe. This separation, although not a very large one as the English Channel is easily traversable, has led to developments in the British Isles, particularly England, that are vastly different than those developments seen in continental Europe. The history of this island has been recorded and presented by many scholars and chroniclers since the emergence of writing. Indeed, British history remains in the twenty-first century one of the most popular historical topics. Major influential works have been written over its history including Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and the topic of discussion within this essay; Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Geoffrey of Monmouth's work *Historia Regum Britanniae* allows the people of twelfth century Britain to realize their own social and political situations in the context of peace, the monarchy, their pluralistic identity, and Christianity.

Historia discusses the history of many British kings and the first and one of the most important is Cassivelaunus. Cassivelaunus was the Celtic King of

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Britain prior to the Roman arrival. His story was presented in *Historia* as a confrontation with Julius Caesar. "We have become so accustomed to the concept of liberty that we are completely ignorant of what is meant by submitting to slavery...if you start attacking the island of Britain, as you have threatened, you must clearly understand, Caesar, that we shall fight for our liberty and for our kingdom."¹ This passage is fair enough to understand, yet presents itself far more than a simple than a declaration of war. Cassivelaunus was presented as a noble King, with no greedy desires and a self-realized duty of protecting Britain. In contrast, Caesar was portrayed as a bloodythirsty conqueror full of greed and vice.² These portrayals are done on purpose, outside their factual evidence, to enhance the view of a British king that is a more chivalrous and noble monarch than any foreign king. Indeed, after the first battle with Cassivelaunus, Caesar's character was portrayed as a great Roman conqueror that had suffered defeat for the first time in Britain, again to enhance and highlight the superiority of the *British* king Cassivelaunus and his armies.³

The reasons for the portrayal of Cassivelaunus as a chivalrous king can be seen when the character and attitude of the Celtic king is contrasted with the Anglo-Norman king of Britain at Geoffrey's time, King Stephen. King Stephen's reign was seen as a troubled era in early Norman rule over Britain. A major incident involving the turmoil of his reign is when Stephen usurped the throne from the daughter of Henry I, Matilda. Henry I deemed Matilda his daughter heir to the throne, yet after his death Stephen usurped the throne even after pledging loyalty to Matilda. This act of treachery and deceit caused "The Anarchy" a time during Stephen's reign in which England suffered unstable government and civil wars. During "The Anarchy" Stephen and Matilda engaged in several battles over the throne, in addition, King David of Scotland, who supported Matilda, sent troops to Northern England leaving Stephen and his rule in complete disarray involving matters of defense.⁴ Although *Historia* was written circa 1136 A.D., Geoffrey had witnessed the beginning of Stephen's chaotic problems. As a witness to Stephen's reign, this gave Geoffrey the opportunity to make comparisons in his work between kings mentioned in *Historia*, such as Cassivelaunus, and King Stephen.

¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, "The History of the Kings of Britain," translated by Lewis Thorpe, 107-185, (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 108.

² Francis Ingledew, "The Book of Troy and the Geneological Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*," *Speculum* Vol. 69, No. 3 (July 1994): 680.

³ *Ibid.*, 682.

⁴ Edmund King, *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 12.

King Stephen was perceived as a traitor, deceitful usurper, and greedy king during his reign. When Henry I died, Stephen arrived in London and proclaimed himself king, breaking his oath and angering his opponents greatly. Completely contrary to these attributes, Cassivelaunus was seen as a noble, chivalrous king committed to the protection and liberty of Britain.⁵ The portrayal of Cassivelaunus, because he is one of the first British kings mentioned in *Historia*, is meant to incite comparison of a corrupt, greedy king to the ideal king by means of placing the attributes found in Stephen in a parallel king to Cassivelaunus, Julius Caesar.⁶ This comparison presents a foundation of moral analysis of the twelfth century affair of kingship in Britain. It allows Britons of Geoffrey's time to see how a king *should* be as opposed to a king that is represented as an antithesis to ideal kingship.

Cassivelaunus is far from the only king in *Historia* to be linked to a wider meaning. Perhaps as important in history and meaning as Cassivelaunus was King Vortigern. Vortigern was a fifth century warlord in Britain. He was portrayed as a corrupt man who stopped at nothing to achieve his desires. In Geoffrey's work, Vortigern was portrayed as making Constans, son of usurper Constantine, king of Britain. In this context, Geoffrey refers to Constans as a "puppet king".⁷ In Stephen's case, he had sworn an oath implying that Matilda would become queen, yet when the opportunity arose, Stephen usurped the throne. Similarly in *Historia*, Constans is killed by Picts, by the order of Vortigern. At this point Vortigern seizes the throne and becomes king of Britain. The means in which Stephen and Vortigern obtained the throne are presented to be similar in order to strike a comparison. Later on in his reign, Vortigern invites Saxons to England to help fight the Picts. This act leads to his demise and the eventual conquest of England by overwhelming amounts of Saxons. This example not only portrays Vortigern as corrupt, but also the Saxons. Written during the time of Norman rule, it is clear that the portrayal of the Saxons as backstabbing conquerors was done on purpose. Norman perceptions of Anglo-Saxons were that they unlawfully claimed England as theirs, and Normans justified their rule based on this belief.⁸

⁵ J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, (New York: Gordian Press, 1974), 119.

⁶ Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 205.

⁷ Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 147.

⁸ Heidi Estes, "Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by Catherine E. Karkov and Nicholas Howe, (Tempe: ACMRS, 2006), 142.

As a king presented around the fifth century A.D., close to the fall of Rome and the European Migration Period, Vortigern makes for a perfect choice to portray the consequences of corrupt kingship as seen with Stephen. Geoffrey shows that the corrupt kingship of Vortigern may seem selfishly rewarding, however it will bring impending catastrophe, in the case of Vortigern, the conquest of England by Saxons. This example of Vortigern's reign was intended to mirror the reign of King Stephen in Geoffrey's time.⁹ Vortigern lost his kingdom to Saxons because of his corruption, and similarly in the twelfth century Stephen was losing his kingdom for the analogous reasons. A twelfth century reader would easily be able to see this comparison. The reason for why this comparison was made can be attributed to the turmoil surrounding Stephen's reign. Geoffrey demonstrates a situation in which a king manages to lose his kingdom because of his corruption (Vortigern). This was intended to warn twelfth century readers that this event may occur again in British history if the king (not necessarily Stephen, but any English king) is corrupt.¹⁰ Signs of the loss of the kingdom were already seen due to civil wars and incursions from Wales and Scotland. The incursions from Scotland under King David in particular mirrored Pictish invasions found in *Historia*. For the case of the Picts, Geoffrey portrays their invasions as devastating to England's security, foreshadowing that should the incursions of The Anarchy succeed, a similar fate would befall the kingdom.

There are many themes in the *Historia* that allude to tensions and problems in twelfth century Britain, specifically King Stephen's reign because of the time it was written. The relation between themes presented and events of Geoffrey's time are that for every major event or problem under Stephen, Geoffrey makes a subtle comparison in his work. Chivalry, war, peace, conduct of kings, and religion are all themes present, all of which have a relation to twelfth century Britain. Chivalry and the conduct of the monarchy is a prominent theme in which the struggle over the throne during The Anarchy is contrasted with noble kings of the past. War and peace is a theme that allows Geoffrey to compare the wars of Britain's past to the wars of between Stephen and Matilda. These themes can be analyzed to see just how *Historia* was written for the people and certainly the aristocracy and clergymen (due to their role in knighthood, kingship, feudalism, and the Church) of Britain. The themes presented can be seen as a reflection of elements in British society at the time. For example, because of the long years of Anglo-Saxon, and then Norman rule in Britain, the island's older

⁹ Michael A. Faletra, "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales," *The Chaucer Review* Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000): 66.

¹⁰ Leslie Alcock, *Economy, Society and Warfare Among the Britons and Saxons*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987), 196.

inhabitants of Celtic origin were cast in a negative view. It is important to note that Geoffrey of Monmouth was originally from Wales, and part Welsh as well.¹¹ Being part Welsh would confirm that Geoffrey's ancestry was of Celtic origin. Having been born and raised in Wales, it is likely that Geoffrey witnessed the social and political tensions in Wales regarding perceptions of Celts.¹²

It can be seen in *Historia*; with the examples of Cassivelaunus and Vortigern that Geoffrey intended to show readers the attributes of an ideal, chivalrous king, as well as those attributes that are opposite to the ideal king. Yet, why is Geoffrey emphasizing chivalry and honour in a king? One would assume that these traits are well known in twelfth century Britain. The reason why *Historia* boasts a liking for honourable kings is because of the implications that follow in the reign of any such king. A king with the traits portrayed in Cassivelaunus would most likely be able to avoid such catastrophic events like civil war, revolt, instability, and dissent.¹³ These events were seen during King Stephen's reign, a king who Geoffrey indirectly deems corrupt. A chivalrous king is primarily focused on his duty, which is to protect his subjects and keep order in his kingdom. So it seems that a good king can avert many things that inhibit peace in a kingdom. Of course, a good king does not bring the promise of peace; intruders at any point may attack a kingdom. Although as demonstrated with Cassivelaunus in *Historia*, a good king may be able to lead his people to victory against invading forces. Therefore, if the underlying reason for chivalrous kingship was the maintenance of peace, then *Historia* can be interpreted as a historical writing meant to incite peace.

It is a bold statement to assert that a work of writing outlying the history of Britain can be seen as a document of peace. *Historia* is certainly not a charter or law; it is a story of Britain's history intended for twelfth century readers. However, unlike a charter, which blatantly and openly tells readers what they need to know, *Historia* is subtle in its message, and uses historical warfare as a medium for this message. There are a few parts of *Historia* that discuss the history of a war involving Britain. The first of these was the Roman invasion of Britain. Subsequently, Geoffrey discusses the arrival of Picts in what is known as present-day Scotland and their raids in England; these raids are the justification for Geoffrey's interpretation of Hadrian's

¹¹ Julia Crick, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, prophecy and history," *Journal of Medieval History* 18 (1992): 358.

¹² Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 201.

¹³ Paul Dalton, "The Topical Concerns of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*: History, Prophecy, Peacemaking, and English Identity in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of British Studies* 44 (Oct. 2005): 692.

Wall and the Antonine Wall. Another example of warfare in *Historia* is King Maximianus conquering the Gauls in continental Europe, leading the armies of Britain to be stretched too thin to avert catastrophe brought by invading Picts and Huns.¹⁴ Then with Vortigern, the arrival of Saxons and their conquest of England was a final example of warfare in Geoffrey's work. Romans, Picts, Gauls, Huns, and Saxons are all portrayed as combatants in *Historia*, heavily emphasizing the deep history of warfare of Britain. Geoffrey's purpose of including an emphasis on war between many different groups is to highlight the current wars occurring during his time under The Anarchy. For example, King Maximianus' campaigns in Gaul directly reflect Stephen's rule of both England and Normandy. Similarly to Maximianus, Stephen's army was stretched too thin in defending and administering areas of England and Normandy, and likewise to Picts and Huns, King David and Matilda were well aware of Stephen's military tensions.¹⁵

Geoffrey discussed the details surrounding the many wars involving Britain and British kings, and what he described was usually dreadful. For example, when Geoffrey describes warfare between Caesar's armies and the British armies, he gives in detail accounts of every form of combat from swordplay to siege. Geoffrey does this to give the reader a graphic depiction of the horror of warfare. "On both sides the wounded fell in heaps, with the weapons of war sticking in their entrails."¹⁶ This depiction was intended to degrade war and make people aware of its terror. In a society that favoured war for centuries (Celts, Romans, Gauls, etc.), Geoffrey subtly presents his opposition and distaste for warfare.

Historia's depiction of war becomes more involved and detailed when the Picts are introduced. The Picts, throughout Roman and Dark Age Britain are seen as plunderers from the north that raid northern England from time to time. Geoffrey partly blames Picts for the slow growth in the arrival of Roman forces in Britain.¹⁷ He suggests this by giving explanations for Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall built by Romans in Northern England to stop Pictish raids. Although, Geoffrey does not mention the Walls by their proper names, he does provide alternate histories and explanations for them. The walls are an example that Geoffrey illustrates which point to the idea that Britain was and is in the twelfth century as well, in dire need of

¹⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, 139.

¹⁵ David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000), 126.

¹⁶ J.S.P. Tatlock, "Geoffrey of Monmouth's Motives for Writing His 'Historia,'" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* Vol. 79, No. 4 (Nov. 1938): 700

¹⁷ Valerie Flint, "The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth – Parody and Its Purpose. A Suggestion," *Speculum* Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 1979): 455.

stable defense especially against Scottish incursions from the north led by King David. The Romans and Picts are just one of many examples in warfare mentioned in *Historia*. However, it is not enough to convince readers that war was dreadful by simply providing accounts of historical wars. Geoffrey intended to compare Britain's historical wars with civil wars under King Stephen by providing examples of Pictish raids and comparing them to the incursions from Scotland. Upon making the comparison, it can be seen that it was indeed possible to extract messages warning of chaos brought by war.

In *Historia*, Geoffrey often explained scenarios in which the government of Britain was in disarray, either through competing kingship or lack of security.¹⁸ In his explanation of its history, he also mentions that under the lack of security arising from the competing kingships, Britain would be left in its weakest state. He explains that after the Romans had abandoned Britain, Picts, Danes, Norwegians, Saxons, etc. had all plundered and raided the island. This is one example of the consequences that arose from a lack of security in Britain. In addition, in cases of competing kings, such as Vortigern and Constans, or Constantine and Maximianus, the lack of a proper king ruling the country left the land susceptible to invasion. In the case of Maximianus, the loss of Britain to Picts and Huns, and in Vortigern's case, the loss of Britain to Saxons. Both kings are portrayed as corrupt and because of which the kingdom was lost. Geoffrey's purpose for these representations are to show twelfth century readers that the same cycle of corruption, failure, and loss can repeat with King Stephen. It is clear to see the comparison because of similar aspects in each king's story. Maximianus, Vortigern, and Stephen, and their respective antagonists, Picts, Saxons, and Matilda's forces combined with King David of Scotland.

Geoffrey's work detailing the events surrounding the corrupt or tumultuous times in Britain subtly allude to issues concerning his own time.¹⁹ The obvious comparison is between King Stephen's reign and the reigns of corrupt kings like Vortigern and Maximianus. However, Geoffrey was able to write effectively enough to allow the reader to foreshadow the consequences of war, and the scale of destruction should the twelfth century civil wars expand. This was where Geoffrey leaped beyond historical narration to the broader message, that in order to maintain peace and stability Britain must break away from its traditional habits of warfare and corruption.²⁰

¹⁸ Dalton, "Topical Concerns," 694.

¹⁹ Robert H. Fletcher, "Two Notes on the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth," *PMLA* Vol. 16, No. 4 (1901): 464.

²⁰ Dalton, "Topical Concerns," 693.

Geoffrey of Monmouth was born sometime between the years 1100-1110 in Wales. His exact location is unknown, yet he refers to himself in the authorship *Historia* as “of Monmouth” strongly suggesting that he was born there. His descent is most often attributed to the Norman aristocracy in Wales, yet this is unconfirmed.²¹ The origins of Geoffrey’s ancestry are important to note when assessing the motives of why he wrote *Historia* due to many references made to Celtic peoples and their interactions with non-Celtic invaders and conquerors.

Historia was written in Latin, and follows the account of British history from the time of Julius Caesar to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. This period roughly covers first century B.C. to seventh century A.D., about eight hundred years. According to historiography, very little written record existed between the fifth and eighth centuries A.D. in Britain.²² This may be enough reason for medieval and early modern English society to accept Geoffrey’s work as factual without opposition. However, it seems that the comparison with Norman Britain is a significant factor in its popularity.

There are a number of reasons why the *Historia* was written. Many of them directly implied by Geoffrey’s writing style, and many of them can be extracted from his work when analyzed. It can be seen as a model for chivalry and knighthood, of how a king should act in perilous and complex situations. Identity is a theme found in *Historia*, and it can be viewed from a wider scope to be a work meant to inspire and provide foundation for a medieval British identity. These themes require analysis and inquiry in order to provide a clearer and deeper picture. Formulating an identity in Norman England was important because of the tensions it would help dissolve. In a kingdom consisting of Celts, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans, tensions existed between these groups. The Celts, more specifically those inhabitants of Wales and Cornwall, held great enmity for the Anglo-Saxons that had conquered their lands. Likewise, the Anglo-Saxons felt the same enmity towards the Normans who had also conquered England. As a result, these three major groups of peoples had tensions that manifested into instability and war.²³ The Anarchy was one of these manifested problems that originated as a contest for the throne, but expanded into a chaotic mess both socially and politically through civil war and incursions from Wales and Scotland. Geoffrey presented Britain’s history with an emphasis on its diverse peoples and the conflicts associated with them so that he could

²¹ Tatlock, *Legendary History of Britain*, 4.

²² Hanning, *Vision of History*, 25.

²³ Edward James, *Britain in the First Millenium*, (London: Hodder Education, 2001), 268

convince readers that it is imperative for Britain to form a unique identity, to avoid internal conflict and instability.

The obvious step for peace in Britain was the unity of all different types of peoples. Britain at Geoffrey's time had a diverse population that included Celts, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans. Geoffrey lived roughly a hundred years after the Norman Conquest; as a result Normans held political and social influence more than any other group of people in Britain. Norman hegemony over Britain was a pivotal reason why unrest could so easily occur during Stephen's reign.²⁴ *Historia* mentioned the several different peoples that inhabited Britain since ancient times. Celts, Romans, Picts, Vikings, and Saxons are all mentioned as people who either lived or invaded Britain. The interaction between these groups in *Historia* is often portrayed as hostile. This was done on purpose by Geoffrey (historical or not) to show the twelfth century reader that often the origins of war are due to differences and enmity between different groups of peoples.²⁵ One can make an assumption that this was one of many reasons why Britons in *Historia* were said to have descended from Aeneas, and therefore be related to Romans (one of the many hostile groups to Britons). The purpose is to outly a common origin of all peoples of Britain so that the differences can be asserted as minor and insignificant.

In twelfth century Britain, there seemed to be efforts in creating and maintaining unique British identities unlike those of before which were usually associated with Roman heritage or Saxon origins.²⁶ *Historia* portrays different national identities from different periods in Britain's past. Some historians have alluded that this was intentional to lead twelfth century readers to understand the diverse past of Britain, and in turn understand the differences between the many peoples of medieval Britain.²⁷ Geoffrey would have witnessed persecution and prejudice to Welsh people by Anglo-Normans. Indeed, he being of Welsh-Norman origin, it would seem likely that he would see differences between the two as insignificant in maintaining order and peace in a kingdom.

Historic perceptions of Celtic peoples by other groups are heavily outlined in the *Historia*. Geoffrey's work acts as a mirror for twelfth century Britain to look upon. Although it is likely that very few if any Britons perceived

²⁴ John T. Appleby, *The Troubled Reign of King Stephen*, (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1969), 13.

²⁵ Dalton, "Topical Concerns," 693.

²⁶ Alan MacColl, "The Meaning of 'Britain' in Medieval and Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (April 2006): 249.

²⁷ Tatlock, "Motives," 697.

Geoffrey's work as such. *Historia* would have been limited to those of Anglo-Norman aristocracy and clergymen; mainly those with the ability to read Latin. Indeed, Geoffrey's ability to read and write in Latin strongly suggests a connection with the Church. Geoffrey's Norman ancestry also coincides with the Norman takeover of Christianity in England. This and Geoffrey's literacy deemed him capable of a career with the Church. Geoffrey was a cleric working with the Archdeacon of Oxford, Walter. This is evident with the fact that Walter also signed all pieces of writing signed by Geoffrey.²⁸

It seems fair to suggest that Geoffrey's connections with the Church and the moral and social implications magnified in *Historia* are connected. It is evident that the Church wielded an influence on many medieval writings including *Historia*. Directly or indirectly, Geoffrey's work was highly Christianized in the sense that many passages and themes allude to Christian themes found in the medieval era. For example, in the latter part of *Historia*, Geoffrey writes *Prophecies* in which Merlin, upon being discovered by King Vortigern recites a long list of prophecies that apply to Britain and its people. Christianity, particularly medieval Christianity had a very strong focus on the apocalypse and the second coming of Jesus Christ. This mentality of waiting for the "end times" is seen heavily in *Historia*.²⁹ The presence of Christian themes in Geoffrey's work implies that it was to be taken as a source of inspiration British Christians.

Historia mentions King Lucius, a king said to have lived during the Roman era, also the first Christian king of Britain. Although actual historical records argue over the period in which Britain became Christian, Lucius was nevertheless mentioned as being the first Christian king. This is significant as it portrays Britain as one of the founders of European Christianity, at a time when the Romans were persecuting Christians. This idea, although not as strong as Geoffrey's other themes, presents Britain with a sense of spiritual superiority, that in a time when Europe was pagan and rejecting Christianity, Britain had accepted it. Most often, values held by an author or the society in which he lives permeate through his work regardless of it being historical or not. Many values of Geoffrey's era, including chivalry, and the high degree of religiosity towards Christianity are present in *Historia*.

Merlin is perhaps one of the most popular figures in *Historia*. Yet, what were particularly significant in meaning were the prophecies attributed to him.

²⁸ Nick Webber, "England and the Norman Myth," in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, edited by Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 222.

²⁹ Jacob Hammer, "A Commentary on the Prophetia Merlini (Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Book VII)," *Speculum* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan. 1935): 5.

Prophecies is a section at the end of *Historia* in which Merlin foretelling future events to Vortigern. These events mirror those found in apocalyptic messages in the Bible and other common legends and myths.³⁰ Merlin's prophecies are perhaps the best example of circumstantial foreshadowing. To expand, the circumstances found in twelfth century Britain that Geoffrey has overwhelmingly alluded to culminate in *Prophecies*. The foretold events are meant to strike a final blow to the reader's conscience, especially because of their similarity to biblical end times. The turmoil and chaos surrounding Stephen's reign and the social upheaval that it brings are mirrored in *Prophecies*, where similar attitudes and unrest are said to be the cause of apocalyptic destruction for Britain.³¹

Geoffrey presents several themes in *Historia* that are meant for the twelfth century reader. This is evident by the subtle and obvious comparisons made between his own era and the periods he discusses in Britain's history. King Stephen, "The Anarchy", civil unrest, and warfare are all topics covered by Geoffrey's themes. It seems on the surface, *Historia* was meant to be a narration of Britain's long and arduous history, focusing primarily on the reign of kings. However, when analyzed and studied it can be deduced that *Historia* had little to do with factual history and more to do with avoiding events (events perceived by medieval Britons) that had led to dark times in Britain's past. Chivalry, peace, identity, and religion are tied together in an epic narration of Britain's history, fact or fiction.

³⁰ Dalton, "Topical Concerns," 709.

³¹ Hammer, "A Commentary," 15.

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