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By

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ABSTRACT

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By

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Guinevere has traditionally been regarded as the adulterous queen whose weaknesses destroyed the finest society ever constructed, that of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. It is, however, possible to regard her in another light: as an embodiment of the Celtic tribal goddess.

Celtic scholars have defined five distinct aspects or attributes of the tribal goddess: she was the divine spouse of each successive king of the tribe, and marriage to her made a man king; she was a leader of warriors and the focus of their loyalties; her "marriage" to the king was celebrated in a public ceremony with distinct ritual actions; she had more than one identity; and she could be taken by force, but only with terrible consequences. Each of these characteristics defines Guinevere as well: she is claimed by suitors who state she is their legal spouse; she is the leader of a group of knights separate from the Round Table knights; the ritual aspects of the king-and-goddess

marriage are routinely associated with her; she has twin "sisters" who are other aspects of herself; and she is frequently abducted.

The prototype of Guinevere was originally a Celtic goddess. The behaviors which mark her as "promiscuous" in the Christian and courtly milieu of the romances are the same behaviors displayed by the goddess who tested candidates for kingship and recruited warriors to protect the tribe. Guinevere, in displaying them, reveals her true original identity.

for Elliott

who makes everything make sense

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INTRODUCTION

The question of the existence of an historical Arthur is mired in controversy. Some authorities insist that he did indeed exist, and John Morris goes so far as to suggest renaming the period of his activity the 'Age of Arthur.' Others, such as Patrick Ford, firmly deny him any historical reality, and look to persistent mythology for his origin. Yet something of great importance happened in Britain during that poorly documented and little understood period between the fall of Roman Britain and the establishment of clearly-defined Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Whether we call the leader of the British Ambrosius Aurelianus or give him the name tradition has insisted upon matters very little to our understanding of the period. Whoever the leader was, he entered the literature, mythology, and belief systems of the Britons as Arthur, and as Arthur he remained. Whatever the events of that period may actually have been, they gave rise to a collection of tales that remain curiously compelling to the present day.

If such confusion exists regarding Arthur, what can be said of Guinevere? She is a phantom, a wraith floating at the edge of possibility. Yet she is an integral part of the

Arthurian legend, the one individual besides Arthur himself without whom the tale in all its versions simply does not exist. Her origins are at least as old as those of Arthur, far predating the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and her influence is as pervasive.

Scholars have understood Guinevere almost exclusively in terms of her relationship to her famous husband, Arthur, to her lover, Lancelot, or to her abductors. Gaston Paris's remark that the trait of being run away with is certainly Guinevere's oldest and most persistent one is typical of early critical commentary. The first extensive study of Guinevere, Tom Peete Cross and William Albert Nitze's Lancelot and Guenevere: A Study on the Origins of Courtly Love, focused on Guinevere's intrigue with Lancelot and the courtly love tradition, and Guinevere is discussed only in relation to its conventions. The next full-length study, Kenneth Webster's Guinevere: A Study of her Abductions, is also primarily a discussion of Guinevere's liaisons, though he suggested, with great insight, that they may be due to her origin as a 'fairy,' bound by the rules of mythology rather than humanity (1). More recently, in the wake of a re-examination of the 'fairy' women of Celtic mythology, Glenys Goetinck has speculated "Gwenhwyfar may have been a Welsh version of the personification of sovereignty, as was Queen Medb in Irish literature" (134); and Markale has repeated the possibility (Arthur 123). This is undoubtedly the most provocative suggestion to date. A more

recent book on the queen, Norma Lorre Goodrich's Guinevere, departs from scholarly tradition by concentrating on the possibility of a historic Guinevere, whom she locates in the eastern areas of Scotland, and although the study quotes Goetinck's comment it does not examine the possibility.

Goetinck's suggestion is a most intriguing one, for the Celtic concept of sovereignty is only now being fully examined. To understand Guinevere, it is necessary to understand the belief system of the society from which her stories came, the Celtic tribes of Britain. Before the Romans came to Britain, the Celts included in their pantheon the tribal goddess, the being who somehow embodied the identity of the tribe, who protected and nurtured it in both peace and war, and who was symbolically married to each king in his turn. Medb, the great queen in the Táin and accompanying cycle of tales, is the most clear example of this queen-goddess, though there are many others. The belief continued into the Post-Roman period, and in some areas of Ireland remained vital into the eighteenth century, though in altered forms. It was this belief system that shaped the character who became the Guinevere of medieval romance. The characterization of the goddess is most easily examined in Irish materials, as Ireland remained outside the influence of the Roman Empire, was Christianized later than Britain, and retained its Celtic mythology to a far greater extent than did other areas.

Tomás Ó Máille's 1928 article, "Medb Chruachna," was

the first to suggest the queen might be a personification of sovereignty, and Rudolf Thurneysen extended the concept the following year, concluding Medb was in fact a goddess. This identification was strengthened by D. A. Binchy's 1958 discussion of the feast of Tara and Myles Dillon's analysis of consecration ceremonies of Irish kings in 1973. Dillon and Nora Chadwick, in their 1967 book The Celtic Realms, take this view of Irish kings and goddesses as the consensus of scholarship, and Ann Ross uses it to interpret archaeological findings in Pagan Celtic Britain. In recent years, the theory has been used by such writers as Brendan O Hehir and Catherine McKenna to analyze other texts. Goetinck, however, is the first scholar to suggest the concept might apply to Guinevere.

Recognition of the goddess has progressed slowly, in part because of the diversity of source material. Evidence of her character can be found in archaeological, linguistic, historical, quasi-literary, and literary records, and can be difficult to interpret. However, her nature is now becoming clear.

The goddess had a number of distinctive characteristics, all of which appear in characterizations of Guinevere as well. The goddess was, above all, the divine being who symbolized both the land and the people of the tribe, and who wedded each king; no warrior or champion could be king without her. We see this reflected in Arthur's loss of security any time Guinevere is absent from

court. Because marriage to the goddess made a man king, she was much sought after, both by would-be spouses who tried to claim her legally and by abductors. Guinevere is claimed as a spouse in at least two texts, and she is very frequently abducted. The marriage of the king and goddess was celebrated with a formal public ceremony, and its two essential elements, a kiss and a symbolic libation, are repeatedly connected with Guinevere. The goddess was a leader of warriors, and in a number of texts Guinevere is the leader of a special group of knights who owe loyalty to her alone. The goddess appeared in multiple form and under a variety of names, and we see this reflected in Guinevere's relationship with her sister.

In all these ways, then, Guinevere is representative of the Celtic tribal goddess. She must be understood as such for her actions to appear meaningful to readers of the tales. Once the concept of the goddess was erased by Christianity, Guinevere's actions appeared erratic, unmotivated, and reprehensible. It is this misunderstanding of her identity and resulting behavior that created her reputation for unfaithfulness, and it is this same misunderstanding that underlies scholarly opinion of her today. It is time to restore her true identity, to understand Guinevere and her stories by reading them within the context of the political and religious realities of the period in which she first appeared, the Celtic tribes of sub-Roman Britain.

THE NATURE OF THE GODDESS

It is difficult to determine the precise nature of the tribal goddess in Celtic cultures. The evidence is of various kinds: archaeological, linguistic, historical, quasi-literary, and literary. Each type presents distinct problems of interpretation and often comparison between types is necessary to completely understand any particular item. It is just this comparison of evidence from varied fields of study which leads to a full understanding of the goddess, and of Guinevere.

Archaeological evidence includes the physical remains indicative of goddess worship; these may include the sites of shrines and temples, images, votive objects, altars, dedications, and even curse tablets. Of course, only those objects, mostly made of stone, which have survived through the centuries remain for analysis, and Classical commentators have led us to believe that many more objects were made of perishable materials (Ross 4). Moreover, if the Classical observers are correct, the Celts also venerated natural objects, such as trees, stones, springs, or rivers, and no archaeological record of such practices remains (Henig 21). A further complication arises from the

fact that the Celts were not a literate culture, and a particular object can be reliably linked to a particular tribal goddess only when an inscription is present. Such an inscription, employing Latin letters, already demonstrates some degree of Roman influence, which may itself distort our recognition of the tribal goddess (Henig 22). The Romans tended to interpret all other deities in terms of their own familiar pantheon (Ross 14), and many representations of goddesses in Celtic territories which are inscribed to Roman goddesses may well actually represent the local tribal goddess; equally, the many unidentified single and triple female figures, usually described as "mother-goddesses," may well have been intended to represent a particular tribal goddess (Sjoestedt 27).

Linguistic evidence involves the study of tribal names and place names, many of which can be connected to a particular goddess (Mac Cana, Mythology 23). The names, of course, were recorded by non-Celtic observers, and may be subject to some degree of distortion.

Historical evidence begins with the comments of Greek and Roman observers of the Celtic tribes. These are generally subjective; most interpret social and religious structures according to known Roman practice, while others have specific biases stemming from the purpose of the writers (Ross 2). All, therefore, must be used with some caution. Historical documents also include the annals of Britain and Ireland which, although presenting some problems

of dating and limited by the interests of the compilers, are generally reliable. Genealogies and regnal lists are frequently useful sources though they may be falsified to some degree to enhance the prestige of a particular dynasty. Observations of the Irish Celts made by English observers from the Norman through the Elizabethan periods also shed some light on native Celtic practice.

Quasi-literary evidence includes the huge mass of what can only be described as "learned lore." Law, literature, history, and religion were the province of the learned class of Celtic society, and scholars in each area underwent an intensive training program, often studying for as much as twenty years (Jost). Learning was transmitted orally, and the texts that we have are only a remnant of a much larger corpus. As they were later recorded by scribes who often were uncertain of their original meanings (or even completely mystified!) they are an unreliable but highly suggestive guide to the worship of a tribal goddess. The learned classes were also the custodians of traditional tales, many of which remained largely unchanged for centuries (insofar as we can judge) while others assimilated current events into their traditional framework (Nic Ghiollamhaith 13). The Welsh organized this huge mass of material by triads, short statements including the titles to groups of three tales which were somehow thematically related, while the Irish organized their materials into story groups, that is, tales of elopements, births, deaths,

etc. (Mac Cana, Mythology 48-9).

Literary evidence includes texts in which older materials have clearly been reworked, generally with a particular intention on the part of the writer, and often to provide at least a veneer of Christian doctrine (Ross 3). Heroic literature such as the Táin, which may have been influenced by the medieval transmission of the Iliad and which attempts to disguise the presence of the tribal goddess (C. O'Rahilly x-xiii), is one example from this category, while a biography of a saint, such as The Life of Gildas, in which early material is often distorted by the demands of the genre, is another. The Arthurian materials, of course, can be included in this category, and the majority of the texts dealing with Guinevere appear here.

Within each category of source material, items reflecting a great diversity of time and location are included. The Greek and Roman commentators were most familiar with the Celts of Gaul and Britain, and their texts reflect that fact. Ireland, which was never invaded by Rome and was not Christianized until relatively late, has a far greater number of quasi-literary texts surviving. Archaeological exploration has been more extensive in Britain than in Ireland, with a resulting inequality in the evidence available. However, purely Celtic rituals remained in practice in Ireland far later than they did elsewhere, and their records often reflect mythological materials (C. O'Rahilly xii).

When searching for the tribal goddess, it is necessary to examine a great variety of materials, and to interpret one kind of evidence through comparison to other types. It is through such a method that some concept of the nature of the tribal goddess can be developed, and it is by means of that concept that Guinevere is best understood.

The Celts worshiped a variety of gods, which are known to us only indirectly. Though we must be wary of the interpretatio Romana, "whereby the native gods were made respectable by being likened to supposed Roman equivalents" (Ross 14), and a "single Roman deity represents a multiplicity of local gods whose memory is preserved in the epithet of the imported foreigner" (Sjoestedt 27), it does seem that the classification of the Celtic gods must be a typological one, with the primary emphasis on their functions (Mac Cana, Mythology 27). One variety of goddess was worshiped under the title "Matres" or "Matronae," and her appearance throughout Celtic territories indicates the importance of the maternal function. The Matres were most often represented as a trio of women, sometimes holding infants, fruits, or cornucopias (Mac Cana, Mythology 48), but they can also be represented singly. They were concerned primarily with fertility of the earth (Sjoestedt 30). A second variety is the goddess of war, most often represented in the literature as the Morrighan, a warlike trio sometimes known individually as Badb, Macha, and Nemain, who were accompanied by ravens and could manifest

themselves in that shape (Ross 244). They influenced the outcome of battles by magic and by the terror of their presence, and they could heal as well as kill (Ross 233). The goddess Andraste, who was invoked by Boudica before beginning battle, is another example of the type, as are the deities named in the Benwell inscription Lamiis Tribus "to the three Lamii" (Sjoestedt 45).

Sjoestedt has suggested that divinities of the Celts, known by many distinct names, are "diverse realizations of a single religious idea, groups of deities, probably local -- at least in origin -- who are not identical but equivalent" (39). The various tribal goddesses are just such realizations of a single idea, manifesting as they do characteristics of both the mother goddesses and the war goddesses but being firmly linked with particular locations and tribes.

Linguistic evidence alone suggests some tribes took their names from the goddess they worshipped: the most notable example is the Brigantes who took their name from Brigantia, 'High One' (Ross 358-9); she is also attested to by a considerable collection of archaeological evidence. Others are the Epidii from around Kintyre, Scotland, who are named after Epona (Ross 323) and the Tricorii named after Tricoria (Mac Cana, Mythology 23). Geographic areas might also bear the name of deities: Anu was the goddess of Munster, and a Kerry mountain is named Dá Chích Anann, 'the Paps of Anu' (Mac Cana, Mythology 85), while Áine is

represented by Cnoc Áine in County Limerick, Aoibheall by Craig Liath in Clare and Cliodna by Carraig Cliodna in Cork (Mac Cana, Mythology 86), and Macha's presence is preserved in the place-names Emhain Mhache and Ard Macha (Mac Cana, Mythology 90).

Presumably even those tribes who did not call themselves after the goddess worshiped some form of the matres/war goddess. The actual territory in which the local goddess was worshipped might be quite small. The tuath, "which can mean either the people or the territory ruled by the tribal king" (Binchy, Kingship 8) was the basic political unit of ancient Ireland, and probably of pre-Roman Britain as well; it was "a purely territorial unit, a group of kindreds inhabiting a particular area and bound together by subjection to a common rí," or king (Binchy, Kingship 7). The goddess worshiped by such a tribe is likely to be connected to the location most often used as a central gathering place by the tuath or to some noticeable geographical feature. Ratis, 'Goddess of the Fortress,' is invoked at Birdoswald and Chester, and Latis, 'Goddess of the Pool' is commemorated at Birdoswald and Fallsteads (Ross 215). Sulis was worshipped at the hot springs of Aquae Sulis or Bath, as was Nemetona 'Goddess of the Sacred Grove' (Ross 190); Arnemetia 'she who dwelt against the sacred grove' was worshipped at Aquae Arnemetiae or Buxton (Ross 218). Wells, springs, and rivers were often named after goddesses: the Dee from Déva (Ross 21), the Clyde from

Clóta (Gaulish Clūtioda) (Ross 21), the Severn from Sabrina (Ross 21), the Wharfe from Verbeia (Ross 363), the Boyce from Boand, and the Aeron in Wales from Celtic Agrona 'goddess of slaughter' (Mac Cana, Mythology 86), while Aíne has two wells in Co. Limerick, at Derry and Tyrone (Ross 219). Brigantia, after whom the Brigantes were named, also gave her name to the Braint of Anglesey and the Brent of Middlesex (Ross 21).

Other goddesses are known primarily through archaeological evidence. Coventina's cult center was at Carrawburgh and the Latin inscriptions address her as Nimphae Coventinae and Deae Nimfae Coventine (Henig 47). Her designation of 'nymph' may reflect an identity as the goddess of a local tuath, for Brigantia herself is referred to as a nymph. Setlocenia, 'she of the long life,' is known from a dedication at Maryport, and a relief of a goddess holding a vessel in her right hand is from the same site (Ross 214). Ancasta is invoked in an inscription from Bitterna (Ross 206) and Verbeia, 'winding river,' on an altar at Ilkley in Yorkshire (Henig 17).

The clearest instance of a tribal goddess known through archaeological as well as linguistic evidence is Brigantia, who is clearly named in three Romano-British inscriptions and whose name appears in a shortened form in four others; all but one are on altars. She gave her name to the Brigantes, a powerful group of tribes in Britain, to two rivers, in Middlesex and Anglesey, and to several sites such

as Brentford in Middlesex, South Brent and Brentor in Devonshire and East Brent in Somerset (Jolliffe 36). The datable inscriptions all belong to the third century A.D., when the Brigantes had long been under Roman rule, and are influenced by Roman concepts of divinity. She is addressed five times as a goddess, deae, usually a sign that a native goddess is intended even when other appearances indicate a Roman goddess (Jolliffe 40), and once as "Caelesti Brigantiae" indicating she has been identified with the chief goddess of north Africa who was Romanized as Dea Caelestis (Jolliffe 43). She is addressed once as "Deae Nymphae Brig(antiae)" (Jolliffe 42) indicating some identification with water, and once as "Deae Victoriae Brigant(iae)" indicating an identification with Victory (Jolliffe 38).

At Birrens, an impressive relief is inscribed "Brigantiae s(acrum)," 'sacred to Brigantia' (Jolliffe 42). The winged goddess figure, 2 ft 3 1/2 inches tall, stands in a gabled shrine, dressed in a long tunic and cloak, holding a spear in her right hand and a globe in her left (Jolliffe 49-50). A shield leans against the wall on her left, and a horned helmet of a non-Roman type is on her head, bordered by a mural crown. The wings and globe are often symbolic of victory (Jolliffe 51-2, Ross 361) while the mural crown indicates territorial associations (Ross 361).

The seated goddess depicted in a relief found at Corstopitum, while not specifically identified, may well

represent Brigantia, who is addressed as "Caelestis" in the inscription from the same location. The unnamed goddess grasps a scepter in her left hand and an unidentifiable object in her right hand, and a large bird stands on an altar at her right (Ross 213). Another unnamed representation from Corstopitum shows the goddess standing beside a vat or tub, holding an unidentifiable object above it -- not at all unsuitable for Brigantia as nymph, and very similar to a relief from Aquae Sulis (Ross 213). She was an important goddess for the Celts, one whose worship extended throughout the Roman period, and whose identity can be traced through several kinds of evidence.

It is impossible to decide how many of the unnamed depictions of the mother goddess, shown singly or as a trio, were actually intended to indicate a tribal goddess, either Brigantia or some more local deity. Equally, it is impossible to determine how many of the representations of Minerva, the classical goddess most used in the "interpretatio Romana" (Ross 213), were actually representations of an unnamed tribal goddess. It is clear, however, that the concept of a local goddess, identified both with the tribe and the territory it inhabited, linked with both healing waters and victory in battle, guarded the fertility and well-being of the tribe. This goddess, known by many names, appears again and again in the vernacular literature of the Celts, and eventually enters the Arthurian cycle as Guinevere.

The Celtic tribal goddesses displayed five distinct and recognizable characteristics, though there is no one queen or goddess who shows the entire cluster (Mac Cana, "Aspects" 84). Guinevere exhibits the same characteristics, although some are displayed more consistently and more clearly than are others, and the entire group is not present in any single text. The characteristics of the goddess[1] can be summarized as follows:

1. Marriage to the goddess made a man king.

The goddess was, essentially, the divine consort of each king in turn; indeed, it was marriage to the goddess that made a man king (Ford, "Women" 425), and the possibility of such a marriage recruited champions for the tribe. Understandably, one of the characteristics of the goddess is that she is married to many men in turn, though the forms of marriage varied greatly, and she actively pursues spouses and lovers.

The goddess was generally represented as possessing an intense sexual appetite. In Celtic tradition, the crown did not pass exclusively from father to son; rather, the possibility of kingship was open to a large group of descendants from an common ancestor, and the fittest candidate would be chosen as king (Binchy, Kingship 25-30). Each new king in his turn was symbolically "married" to the goddess. Though this marriage of king and goddess was expressed in sexual terms, it was based on political

realities.

2. The queen is a leader of warriors, the focus of their loyalties.

The goddess is as warlike as she is sexual, as is appropriate for the divine being who protects her people from danger (Mac Cana, Mythology 86). Medb is probably the greatest example of this aspect of the goddess, but three historical queens, Boudica, Cartimandua, and Grainne, all display this attitude as well. The ability to wield weapons does not seem to be a defining characteristic of the queen, though Medb was herself a warrior, but the ability to recruit and lead groups of warriors is. Both Medb and Guinevere are actively engaged in bringing warriors to their courts, and their reasons are political and military.

This state of affairs exists at least partly because the kingdom and the queen are indivisible (Binchy, Kingship 11). The goddess, then, is both lustful and lusted after, both desiring and the object of desire. However, although she is possessed sexually, her sexuality is not the reason for her many suitors. Men desire her because she is the queen, the personification of sovereignty, representative of the tribe and the kingdom itself. Again and again the names of the goddesses are linked with the names of tribes, as Medb and Connacht are in the Cath Boinde. Clearly, to possess the queen sexually was to possess the kingdom politically, to become the king.

3. The "marriage" of the king and the goddess was celebrated in a public ceremony.

To possess the Queen is to become king, to possess the kingdom. The possession, however, must be public, easily recognized by all, if it is to fulfill its function (Carney 334). Generally, some kind of public ceremony marked the inauguration of the king -- though the ceremony might not take place until some years after he took the throne. In Ireland Diarmait held the Feiss Temro -- the Feast of Tara, the great feast held once during a king's reign to celebrate his ceremonial marriage to the goddess -- in 560, years after he became king (Binchy, Kingship 11). Two concepts are present in inaugural rites: drinking of a special liquid and sexual contact.

4. The goddess has more than one identity.

The goddess has more than one aspect, and can thus appear in more than one guise. O Hehir has shown that Debchalm and Becauma are the same queen-goddess, though her identity is obscured by the treatment in the Eachtra Airt (164). Medb and her daughter Findabair are clearly aspects of the same goddess in the Táin and other materials. Étaine is to be chosen from among the company of her daughters, all of whom are identical to her, and an incorrect choice invalidates the king. The goddess often undergoes a change of form or status when she moves from one identity to the next (Mac Cana, "Aspects" 112).

5. The goddess could be taken by force, but only with terrible consequences.

It is clear that the goddess chooses and replaces her spouses at will, but the Irish texts also indicate she can be possessed by force. Medb was abducted by Conchobar, as was Étain by Midir. In each case, however, the goddess remained with her abductor for a limited period, and returned to the spouse of her choice with her status unchanged.

These characteristics of the goddess are most clearly evident in Irish texts, particularly the Táin Bó Cúailnge and other texts dealing with Medb. Material from early Roman Britain confirms the presence of the tribal goddess among the Celts there, and available historical evidence suggests that human queens may have acted in ways typical of the goddess, perhaps modeling their behavior after hers. The concept of the goddess as sovereignty, and the king as her rightful spouse, survived well into the eighteenth century in Ireland (Carney 336), and echoes of it can be seen in medieval Britain.

Michael Jones has suggested that Britain was never so fully integrated into the Roman empire as has generally been assumed,[2] and the characteristics displayed by the early Welsh kingdoms support this interpretation. Medieval Welsh laws reflect Celtic, not Roman, structures, and early Welsh writings such as the Mabinogi or the Triads display typical

Celtic themes and structures (Mac Cana, Mythology 48-9). There is every reason to believe the concept of the tribal goddess was present in sub-Roman Britain during the period when the Arthurian cycle was being developed.

Recognition of the goddess weakened as newer social systems replaced the old Celtic tribal organization, and any discussion of the goddess must take into account the shifting social realities reflected in the texts. The variety of legal marriages recognized under Celtic systems was unknown to and regarded as bizarre by the Romans, and it was very much opposed to the Christian concept of the marriage contract. Marital arrangements that would have been recognized as appropriate for the goddess, and possibly not unknown for a powerful heiress, were strange and unusual to the Continental writers of romance, and were normally depicted as adulterous unions. Celtic inheritance practices were very different from those practiced in Rome or in the Christian countries which replaced the old Empire, and behavior that marked an individual as an heir to the king in the Celtic system was interpreted quite differently in the romances. The absence of a male heir, a child of Arthur and Guinevere, gives the Continental romances an additional poignancy; however, that atmosphere would have never been present in the Celtic tradition, where the presence of Arthur's many nephews guaranteed a choice of eligible heirs. The Celtic king took his authority from his position as spouse of the goddess, but the Christian king took his

spiritual authority from the Church which anointed him. Many behaviors which appeared normal and natural under the Celtic system could easily be viewed as potentially dangerous and destructive under the Christian system, and typical Celtic social structures were often transformed when incorporated into medieval romances. The identity of Guinevere underwent just such a change.

Guinevere herself displays all six characteristics of the goddess. Like Medb, she is claimed in marriage by more than one man -- by Valerine in the Lanzelet and by Gasozein in Diu Crône. Like Medb, she is explicitly linked with the kingdom -- particularly in the chronicle romances, where she is often left as co-regent, and Mordred's marriage to her is coincident with his usurpation. Like Medb, she is the leader of a group of knights who are loyal primarily to her; the Queen's Knights cause conflict at court in both the Vulgate Prose Merlin and the Livre d'Artus. She is often involved in public occasions that bear remarkable similarities to the Celtic practice of celebrating a "marriage" between the king and the goddess. Like Findabar, whose name is cognate to hers, Guinevere has more than one identity -- there are several episodes involving the False Guinevere in the Vulgate cycle, as well as multiple Guineveres in the Triads. Most noticeably she is, like Medb and Étain, frequently kidnapped, but always returned to her proper spouse.

Guinevere has, in the past, been discussed primarily as

an 'erring wife' or as a participant in a love triangle in the courtly love tradition. Such analysis has been useful for discussion of the texts themselves, for most Guinevere texts are creations of a Christian and romance tradition. However, such an approach -- as the paucity of scholarly work on Guinevere suggests -- has revealed little about the identity or origin of the queen herself. It is time to examine Guinevere in her own terms, as a Celtic tribal goddess.

THE WARRIOR QUEEN

> I had fifteen hundred royal mercenaries of the sons of strangers exiled from their own land and as many of the sons of native freemen within the province. And there were ten men for each mercenary of these, [and nine men for every mercenary], and eight men for every mercenary, and seven for every mercenary, and six for every mercenary, and five for every mercenary, [and four for every mercenary] and three for every mercenary and two for every mercenary and one mercenary for every mercenary. I had these for my standing household. (Táin II 137)

So boasts Medb in the opening passage of the Táin. It is an important statement; she is basing her claim to rule at least partly on her position as leader of this band of fighting men. One of the characteristics of the goddess was just this ability to focus the loyalty of the fighting force of the tribe. Celtic society was ruled by a warrior aristocracy, a group of men knit together by a network of family affiliations, by their willingness to follow the king they helped choose, and, perhaps most importantly, by their loyalty to the deity who somehow embodies their tribe.[1] The goddess was the focal point of their loyalty, the power who aided them in time of war as she guarded them in time of peace. In the Christian period, when the goddess was represented in literary terms, this took the form of the

queen-goddess as the leader of a fighting band. Medb had this role in the Táin, and Guinevere fills it in several texts.

Medb herself is a warrior, involved in every battle, giving and receiving blows. Near the beginning of the Táin, when she explains to Ailill that one of the reasons she took him as her husband is his ability as a warrior, she boasts of her own strength in combat.

> If my husband were timorous, neither would it be fitting for us to be together, for single-handed I am victorious in battles and contests and combats, and it would be a reproach to my husband that his wife should be more courageous than he. (II 138)

When Medb talks about her strength in individual combat, she is making no idle boast, as another episode makes clear. Later in the Táin, the armies have been engaged in battle and Medb has taken part in the conflict. Cethern mac Fintain, a warrior of Ulster, has been seriously wounded, and Cú Chulainn has sent for Fíngan, Conchobar's physician, to heal him. Fíngan is a seer as well as a doctor, and as he examines each wound he describes the person who inflicted it. Cethern amplifies the description, and Cú Chulainn names the warrior.

> 'Examine this wound also for me, master Fíngin', said Cethern. Fíngin examined the wound. 'This is the deed of a proud woman,' said the physician. 'That is true indeed,' said Cethern. 'There came to me there a woman, tall, beautiful, pale and long-faced. She had

> flowing, golden-yellow hair. She wore a crimson, hooded cloak with a golden brooch over her breast. A straight, ridged spear blazing in her hand. She gave me that wound and she too got a slight wound from me.' 'We know that woman.' said Cú Chulainn. 'It was Medb . . . who came in that wise. She would have deemed it victory and triumph and cause for boasting had you fallen at her hands.' (II 237)

Medb would undoubtedly have boasted of her triumph, for she is a typical Celtic warrior in that respect. Fighting prowess was not an unknown attribute for Celtic women; in fact, Cú Chulainn himself was trained in arms by a woman, Scathlach. It is necessary to distinguish between the warlike activity of Celtic women in general, and the inspirational, unifying, identifying function of the goddess. Celtic women engaged in battle, both individually and as tactical leaders, throughout the historical period. It is only when they hold the primary loyalty of the warband that they can be considered goddess figures.

There is substantial evidence to suggest Medb's fighting behavior, her freedom to actually take part in battle physically, was not unusual among Celtic women. The Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus described the Celtic women of Gaul when he discussed the great fighting strength of Celtic warriors.

> A whole band of foreigners will be unable to cope with one of them in a fight, if he calls in his wife, stronger than he by far and with flashing eyes; least of all when she swells her neck and gnashes her teeth, and poising her huge white arms, proceeds to rain punches mingled with kicks, like shots discharged by

> the twisted cords of a catapult (qtd. in Ford, "Women" 420).

Nor is this the only mention of such action; the practice of women fighting seems to have continued well into the historical period. The Cain Lanama, a ninth-century Irish law tract, forbids women to engage in warfare, which suggests that the practice had not been uncommon before that time.

As well as being a warrior herself, a Celtic woman might command warriors by hereditary right or as proxy for a male relative. This command, though it undoubtedly made those women powerful in their own lifetimes, is not indicative of a goddess function. Irish women were sometimes subject to military service for the lands they had inherited in the absence of male heirs (Dillon, "Relationship" 139-40), but this was not an uncommon situation in feudal societies throughout Europe.[2] In twelfth century Wales, Gwenllian, daughter of Gruffydd ap Cynan, wife of Gruffydd ap Rhŷs, and mother of the future Lord Rhŷs, led her own army against the Normans at Cydweli in 1136. The field where she fell, Maes Gwenllion, still bears her name (Morris 185). As late as the Elizabethan period, Fionnghuala MacDonnell, the wife of Hugh O'Donnell of Donegal and the mother of Red Hugh, led several attacks in the complex series of internal feuds which led to her son's securing the throne. The historian Lughaidh Ó

Cléirigh says of her

> She had many troops from Scotland, and some of the Irish at her disposal and under her control, and in her own hire and pay constantly, and especially during the time that her son was in prison and confined by the English (qtd. in Doan 34).

Powerful though these women were, they were not acting independently, but represented the interests of the men of their families. The situation is a familiar one throughout medieval Europe, and is representative more of political realities than of mythic identities. The situation is otherwise when some representation of the goddess is present.

Medb is not only a warrior herself and a leader of warriors, but is also the focus of their primary loyalty. It is in that respect that she clearly functions as a goddess. She has the largest "standing household" in Ireland, as she boasts to Ailill. Yet her function as a focus for battle goes further than that. It is Medb who summons the hosts of Ireland for the Táin, and it is she who is responsible for the conduct of the battle. When the host is assembled, Medb goes to the druids to ask what the outcome will be.

> 'There are many who part here today from comrades and friends,' said Medb, 'from land and territory, from father and mother, and if not all return safe and sound, it is on me their grumbles and their curses will fall. (II 142)

She is well aware of her responsibility to the host, since it is she who called the army together, acting in her role as goddess.

Medb further demonstrates her authority when the host made camp at Cúil Silinne after the first day's march, and "Medb did not permit her chariot to be let down or her horses to be unyoked until she made a circuit of the encampment" (146). During her circuit, she notices that one group, the division of the Gailioin, is quicker and better at preparing their encampment than any others, and concludes "their warriors and champions will surpass those of the men of Ireland on this occasion on the hosting" (146). Ailill -- who is, after all, the king -- thinks it is a good thing, but Medb is worried about the security of the host, and wants the division to be slaughtered before they cause internal strife; Fergus manages to dissuade her from this course with some difficulty (147). It is noticeably Medb, not her husband Ailill, who is in charge of the march, who sees potential difficulties, and who consults with leaders of the host regarding ways to overcome those problems. Medb is the leader of the army. Ailill may persuade her to give other orders, but he cannot countermand her commands.

Acting as the leader of a war-band is a responsibility of the queen, and a reflection of the role of the goddess. A deity concerned with the well-being of the entire tribe must perforce be involved with war as well as with peace, particularly in Celtic society, which dictated that once a

year the tribe should have a hosting (Binchy, Kingship 17). Medb fulfilled this responsibility perfectly: the Cath Boinde tells us "the sons of the kings of Ireland used to be in Cruachan with Meadb at that time to see if they might exchange war with the province of Conchobar" (179).

The ability of a queen to act as a focus for her armed household and for the gathered army of her tribe and its allies was not limited to characters from Irish mythology. Boudica, the famous historical queen of the Iceni, did exactly that in Britain.

Prasutagus, named king of the Icini, was a client-king of Rome. There is no record of the establishment of that relationship, though it is possible he may have provided service of some kind to Rome during the British uprising just before the middle of the century. He may have been one of the eleven client-kings mentioned in the arch dedicated to Claudius by the Roman Senate "because he received the surrender of eleven kings of Britain, defeated without any loss" (Dudley and Webster 41). Rome's practice of establishing client-kingdoms on her newly extended borders was a great economic and military advantage to her: large areas of potentially dangerous populations were pacified without the expenditure of Roman funds or the use of large numbers of Roman troops. The relationship, however, was an individual one between Rome and each client-king, not the kingdom as such, and lasted only for the lifetime of that ruler; upon his death, the territory was either given a new

king, a member of the royal house appointed by Rome, or more normally absorbed into the Empire, thereby losing all individual identity and status (Dudley and Webster, Rebellion 42-3). Rome certainly had this agenda for the Iceni; it is doubtful, however, whether the tribe regarded the arrangement in quite the same way.

When Prasutagus died in A.D. 59, the Iceni, along with the other tribes in Britain, were in a state of heightened tension. Ostorius Scapula had, a decade earlier, "disarmed" all the tribes -- a movement of little military value since swords and spears could be rapidly produced by every local blacksmith, but possibly of great psychological value -- and unwisely included the client-kingdom of the Iceni in his action. Their minor revolt was easily put down, but left a smoldering hatred for Rome growing among the warrior aristocracy (Dudley and Webster 34-6). After Scapula's death Didius Gallus, the elderly man appointed as governor, managed to keep an uneasy peace. Rome followed its usual policy of establishing military colonies to act as centers for Romanization of the new province, and the appropriations of lands and money necessary for their construction made them a focus of tribal hatred. Though unrest was covert, it was growing in strength. On the western border, the Silures were joined by fugitives from Caratacus's army, and Mona, a sacred site and center of Druidic learning, became a rallying point. The political energy of the Druids, and their ability to rally the Celtic tribes against Rome, had

been a problem at least since the rising of Vercingetorix against Caesar in Gaul, and continued to threaten Rome in Britain. The new procurator, Suetonius Paulinus, began moving forces to northwest Wales to deal with the threat (Dudley and Webster, Rebellion 52-3).

At this politically dangerous moment, Prasutagus died; Tacitus says he was "famed for his long prosperity" (337). He left a will, in which he

> made the emperor his heir along with his two daughters, under the impression that this token of submission would put his kingdom and his house out of the reach of wrong. (Annals 337)

No mention is made of any son. The legacy to Nero may have been intended to pay a loan incurred by the tribe to pay the expenses of Romanization (Dudley and Webster 50-51), but if so it failed in its purpose: the procurator, Catus Decianus, treated the entire country as if it had been given to Rome, with the estates of kinsmen of the Royal house appropriated and some of the family sold into slavery. Boudica, who objected to this treatment, was publicly flogged, and the two princesses were raped.

The outrage touched off a rebellion that nearly drove the Romans out of Britain. Camulodunum, Londinium, and Verulamium were overwhelmed in rapid sequence, leaving only a layer of burned ashes to testify to their presence. Swollen with confidence, the army surged on toward the last

battle, where it would be defeated by Suetonius.

The remarkable thing about the rebellion is that it was led by the queen herself. No text gives the slightest indication of any male heir of Prasutagus, nor of any kind of male war leader. Neither is a new spouse of the queen mentioned. Both Tacitus, writing shortly after the battle, and Dio Cassius, writing a century later, show Boudica on the field the morning of the last battle, exhorting her troops -- and however unlikely it is that any Roman heard that speech, the fact that she made one, that it was she who was in charge, is indisputable. It was Boudica herself, like Medb in the Táin, who rallied the tribe and led them forth. "neque enim sexum in imperiis discernunt," says Tacitus: "they make no distinction of sex in their appointment of commanders" (Fraser 55).

It is tempting to speculate on the statement; just what does the noun "imperium" imply? In a military context the word most normally means "commander," or "supreme military power" but its primary meaning is "the supreme administrative power, in Rome exercised at first by the kings" (Oxford Latin Dictionary). It is possible Tacitus intends to include both meanings in his comment, and is referring to the Celts' lack of discrimination on basis of sex in choosing rulers as well as military commanders.

Perhaps the Romans made a treaty with the wrong spouse, when dealing with the Iceni. Certainly they underestimated Boudica's importance in the tribal structure, never

realizing the rage her violation would provoke. Like Medb, she was the focal figure for the loyalties of her people: a position common to Celtic tribal goddesses and to the women acting in their image. The image of the queen-goddess was present and vital in early Roman Britain.

The figure of a strong woman leader who served as the focus of loyalty for a group of fighting men remained a compelling one in the Celtic world well into the historical period. During Elizabeth I's reign, Grace O'Malley led a group of over two hundred man who both traded and pirated through the seas surrounding Ireland. She was proud of their reputations for courage, and claimed she would "rather have a shipful of the Conray and McAnally clans than a shipful of gold" (Chambers 73). County Mayo records include an account of the birth of her son, Tibbot-na-Long or Theobald of the Ships, aboard one of her vessels. The day after his birth, Grace's ship was attacked by Turkish pirates who roamed the area, and the battle was going badly for her men. Her captain thought her presence could rally them, and Grace stormed onto deck, where she emptied a blunderbuss at the Turks shouting "Take this from unconsecrated hands." Her action carried the day, and the Turkish ship was captured (Chambers 78).

Grace was an astute observer of political shifts, and in 1577 she met Sydney, Elizabeth's Lord Deputy of Ireland, at Galway. In a letter written some years later to Walsingham, the Queen's secretary, Sydney referred to the

meeting.

> There came to me also a most famous feminine sea captain called Grany Imallye, and offered her services unto me . . . with three galleys and 200 fighting men . . . she brought with her her husband . . . This was a notorious woman in all the coasts of Ireland. (qtd. in Chambers 85)

The letter makes it quite clear that it was Grace, not her husband, who was the commander of the fighting force. A year later, Drury's dispatch to Elizabeth's Privy Council referred to her as

> Granieny Maille, a woman of the province of Connaught, governing a country of the O'Flaherty's, famous for her stoutness of courage and person, and for sundry exploits done by her by sea. (qtd. in Chambers 95)

Grace was an historical Irish woman of the sixteenth century, but her career is typical of the Celtic tribal goddess and of the women whose lives were shaped by that tradition. The ideal of the goddess must have been a powerful one indeed to have survived so late.

In Britain, too, the idea of the tribal goddess who led warriors to battle survived into the historical period. By the early sixth century the Irish had established permanent colonies in western Wales, and the British were struggling to expel them. The Brecon texts record that Marcella, the mother of Brychan, led a military expedition, and list the names of six places important to the campaign, all sited on

or close to the Roman road through the territory (Morris 126-7). Three of these places -- Porth Mawr, Caer Farchell, and Llan Marchell -- are identifiable today. A hundred men were lost at each of two sites, Porth Mawr and Caer Farcell, the 'fortress of Marcella.'[3] Marcella, like Grace and Boudica, was filling a pattern established by belief in a tribal goddess.

The Celtic tribal goddess was a leader of warriors, the focus of loyalty for a band of fighting men. This was true on the mythological level, where the texts of the Táin display Medb commanding armies, and it influenced the actions of historical women such as Boudica, Grace, and Marcella. The belief continued in Celtic areas well into the historical period, and was an established part of Guinevere's characterization when the Arthurian stories were first formed.

Guinevere is recognized as the leader of a group of warriors in at least three medieval texts, Lestoire de Merlin, Livre d'Artus, and the Book of Merlin. In each text, a group of knights led by Gawain[4] pledge their loyalty to Guinevere, thus forming a special group at court separate from the Round Table knights and the rest of Arthur's entourage, and sometimes hostile to it.

In Lestoire, Gawain approaches the queen

> & requerons que vous nous retenes a uostres cheualiers & de uostre mainie por ce que quant nous serons en estraigne paispor conquerre pris & los & aucune gent

> nous demanderont a qui nous sommes & de quel terre si dirons nous de la terre de logres & des cheualiers la roine gueieure. (321)
>
> [and we request that you retain us as your knights and among your retinue so that, when we are in foreign lands to achieve worship and honor and some people ask us to whom we owe loyalty and from which land we come we may say that we are from the land of Logres and are the knights of Queen Guinevere.] (Finlayson 9)

The queen accepts the offer "gladly and graciously" and from that moment Gawain and his companions are known as "les cheualiers a la roine genieure" (322).

Kay then proposes a tournament, in which the Queen's Knights are opposed to the Knights of the Round Table. Ten Knights of the Round Table are taken prisoner and surrender to Guinevere (324-5). The remaining Knights of the Round Table, seeing that they are being defeated, take their up lances, and when Gawain sends messengers warning them they have violated the rules of the tournament they reply angrily (325). The fighting gets seriously out of hand for the next six pages, and the Round Table knights are clearly defeated. Gawain, however, is in a rage, and cannot be persuaded to stop fighting (331). The three kings finally manage to stop him, and the Knights of the Round Table ask his pardon, but he refuses to be reconciled with them. Only when Guinevere intervenes is he at last persuaded to relent, and Gawain declares she is the "wisest and best lady" (333).

The two orders of knights appear again in the Livre D'Artus. The opening page refers to "du roi Artus & de ses

compaignons & de cels de la Table Roonde & de monsegnor Gauuain & des Compaignons la Roine" (3) and mentions a preexisting quarrel between them. Both texts represent the Queen's Knights as a group of fighting men who are loyal specifically to Guinevere, who are answerable to her for their conduct, and who define their separate identity by means of their connection to her, as the men of Medb's standing household were identified as hers and owed loyalty to her. Also like Medb's household, the Queen's Knights may be in conflict with other groups of warriors. Gawain, the leader of the Queen's Knights, can be persuaded to alter his course of behavior and accept an apology from his enemies only when Guinevere herself intervenes and directs him to do so, again emphasizing his primary loyalty and obedience.

The later English version of the story is very similar. Gawain, together with twenty-four of his companions

> come be-fore the Queene, and seide, "Madame, I and my felowes be come to yow, and praye yow and requere that ye will with-holde vs to be youre knyghts and youre meyne. That whan thei come in eny strange contrey to seche loos and pris, yeg any man hem aske with whom thei be, and of what land. Than thei may seyn of the reame of logres, and be the knyghts of Queene Gonnore. (482)

Guinevere accepts the offer with great joy.

> gramercy to yow and to hem alle; ffor I yow resceyve with gladde chere as lordes and my frendes, and as ye offre yow to me, so I offre me to yow with trewe herte; and I pray god lete me so long lyve that I may yow

> guerdon of the worshippe and the curtesie that ye promyse me for to do. (482)

The language here resembles that of a formal oath of fealty, with Guinevere entering into a lifelong contract with the knights. The group is thereafter known as hers: "and all-wey fro thens-fourth was sir Gawein and his felowes called the queenes knyghts" (483).

Kay arranges a tournament and, as in the French text, the fighting gets out of control. Gawain and his companions drive the Round Table knights from the field, and chase them to the church of St. Stephen, fighting in the streets (495). The battle ends with the Queen's Knights victorious, and "a-bove alle other was the quene ioyfull of her knyghtes that hadde the victorye of the turnement" (499). Like Grace O'Malley and the Celtic queens, Guinevere delights in the valor of her followers.

Gawain is still angry about the improper behavior of the Round Table knights and refuses to accept their apology, even when Arthur reproves him (500). Guinevere alone can quell his ire.

> Than she toke hym be the hande, and seide, "nevew, be not so wroth . . . Now yeve credence to my wordes, and do that I praye yow at this tyme . . . pardon hem for I pray yow. (500-501)

Her words reach him as the king's did not.

> sir Gawein loked on the quene and be-gan to smyle for the wordes that she hadde seide, and seide, "Madame, who that will lerne lete him come to yow . . . well may the kynge hym a-vaunt that yef ye lyve to age ye shull be the wisest lady of the worlde, and so be ye now as I beleve; and wite ye what ye haue wonne, ye may do with my body and myn herte all youre volunte" (501)

Again, the language is reminiscent of fealty oaths; Gawain has offered his body and his heart to be used as Guinevere wills. Even more important, he had agreed to be governed by her will when he had ignored the king's command. He will be ruled by her because his allegiance is to her.

Medb, Boudica, Grace, and Marcella were all women who commanded fighters loyal only to them, and this ability to hold the fierce and exclusive allegiance of their followers is typical of the tribal goddess. Medb is most representative of the mythological development of the concept, while Boudica and Grace both suggest ways the myth could have influenced historical people and events. The Christian and courtly traditions which shaped Arthurian literature give little opportunity for this aspect of the goddess to be visible; women are in general less involved in martial activity and more confined by feudal proprieties. Nevertheless, Guinevere is representative of this aspect of the tribal goddess: like her, she commands the fierce loyalty of her warriors.

Warriors were necessary to defend the queen because, at the most fundamental level, the queen was the land. The equation of the goddess and the tuath was fundamental to the

concept of sovereignty.

> Eochaid Dala took up the yoke of battle across Meath, over the green-streamed Shannon, and brought Meadb and Connacht safe with him through dint of fighting. (Cath Boinde 181)

The land is the woman, the goddess, the queen. Medb is Connacht, and Eochaid Dala's military might brings them both safe across the Shannon. Similarly Guinevere is Britain: when Arthur holds her he holds the land, and when he loses her he loses the kingdom. Her well-being is inextricably entwined with the well-being of the realm.

The Celtic habit of representing the tribe by a goddess who was identified with both geographic features of the territory and with the political entity dates from the prehistoric period. Indeed, the concept of the goddess who was the land may be reflected in the Old Welsh word for king, breenhin (modern brenin). The early Celtic word for king was rhi, used by British and Irish alike; in Irish it developed normally into rí, the king of a tuath or small kingdom or tribe. The Welsh word breenhin developed from *brigantinos, which Binchy suggests meant "spouse or representative of *Brigantī" (Kingship 13); the use of the -no- suffix to form the word supports this interpretation (48). Brigantia was the goddess of a powerful group of tribes in northern Britain, and Cunedda, a prince of the Brigantes, expelled the Irish invaders from Wales and

settled there early in the fifth century, where his 'sons' became the eponymous founders of the larger Welsh kingdoms. Cunedda's title, *Brigantinos, became the word used for a new kind of king, who ruled a kingdom larger than and politically dominant over the old tribal units (Binchy, Kingship 14). The title itself reflects the idealized concept of the king as the spouse of the kingdom and the goddess.

The concept endured far into the historical period. The marriage of the king and the kingdom was symbolically performed in Connacht in 1310, when the Annals record the marriage of Feidlimid: "et ar feis d'Feidlimid mac Aeda meic Eogain re coiced Connchat" they say "and when Feidlimid son of Aeda son of Eogain had married the province of Connacht" (Carney 336-8). An Irish poem of about 1650 recalls the marriages of the castle of Tullymongan, which was wedded to the O'Reilly chieftains (Carney 335).

The importance of the concept of the marriage of king and kingdom could affect historical events. Around 1170 Eleanor of Aquitaine had her son Richard installed as Duke of Aquitaine. She arranged a symbolic marriage between Richard and Saint Valéry, the patroness of the region, in which the saint's ring was placed on his finger "in solemn token of his indissoluble union with the provinces and vassals of Aquitaine" (MacCana, Mabinogion 116). A hard-headed politician, Eleanor used the old idea of the overlord's marriage to the land to secure her son's

political position.

The presence and well-being of the queen, which included her marriage to the king, was essential for the well-being of the kingdom. In the Eachtra Airt Meic Cuind, when Conn was married to the wrong queen

> there was neither corn nor milk in Ireland during that time. And the men of Ireland were in the greatest difficulty about that matter. And the druids of all Ireland were sent with the help of their science and their true wisdom to show what had brought that dreadful evil into Ireland. And it was declared to them: and the druids related to the king of Tara and the nobles of Ireland the cause of the evil. Because of Conn's wife . . . it was sent. (qtd. in O Hehir 155)

The correct relationship between the king and the land, symbolized by his marriage to that other representation of the land, the queen, would ensure fertility. When the relationship is incorrect, problems of all sorts follow inevitably.

An early Irish text, the Testament of Morand, contains a catalog of the blessings which will come to the tuath because of fír flathemon, literally "the prince's truth," the just rule of a righteous king. They include

> prosperity and fertility for man, beast, and crops: the seasons are temperate, the corn grows strong and heavy, mast and fruit are abundant on the trees, cattle give milk in plenty, rivers and estuaries teem with fish; plagues, famines, and natural calamities are warded off; internal peace and victory over external enemies are guaranteed. (qtd. in Binchy Kingship 10)

The opposite of "the prince's truth" is gáu flathemon, "the falsehood of the prince." A law tract about a century later than the "Testament of Morand," and clearly Christian in character, lists "seven candles that reveal the unrighteousness of a king." Besides interfering with the Church in various ways, they include "defeat in battle, famine during his reign, dryness of milch-cows, blighting of mast, scarcity of corn" (Binchy, Kingship 10). This is precisely what happens to Conn's realm when he marries improperly.

Guinevere, like Medb and the other goddesses, is a representation of the land, and her well-being is reflected in the safety and prosperity of the realm. This is immediately apparent in the Lanzelet where, when Guinevere is kidnapped by Valerin, Erec and Walwein immediately agree "they would risk life and honor rather than have it happen that their lady the queen and the court at Kardigan should be miserably destroyed" (125). Similar anxiety is shown by the common citizenry when Guinevere is condemned to death in the Vulgate Mort. They follow her through the streets,

> crying from all sides:
> "Ah, lady . . . where will the poor ever again find pity? Ah, King Arthur, who have brought her to her death by your disloyalty, may you yet repent, and may the traitors who have accomplished this die a shameful death!"
> Thus spoke the people of the city and followed after the queen, weeping and crying as if out of their minds. (82)

There are no accounts of the crops failing or the cattle losing their milk when Guinevere is absent from Logros. However, a spiritually similar state prevails during her absences, for on the two occasions when Arthur voluntarily sends her away, the Pope places the country under interdict.

In the False Guinevere episode included in the Vulgate Lancelot, Arthur rejects Guinevere in favor of her double, the False Guinevere. When the Pope hears of this, he places the country under interdict for twenty-one months, commanding Arthur to repudiate the False Guinevere and return to the queen (72-73). The same episode is repeated in the Middle English Merlin, where the country is placed under interdict while the king remains falsely married.

> the reame was therfore nygh thre yere enderdited, and stode a-cursed that neuer manes body ne womans was byried in noon halowed place, but a-cursed be the centense of holy cherche, and all this trouble suffred oure lorde hem for to haue for hir synnes that were right grete. (466)

When the Queen is absent, the realm must suffer. Only the return of the True Guinevere to her spouse can bring health again to the kingdom.

In the Vulgate Mort Arthur again rejects Guinevere. After Agravaine and his followers find Guinevere and Lancelot in bed together, Arthur condemns Guinevere to death, a sentence from which Lancelot rescues her, taking

her away to the security of Joyous Garde. Arthur promptly beseiges the stronghold, and the Pope takes a hand.

> Within that period it befell that the Pope in Rome learned that King Arthur had put aside his wife and that he was threatening to kill her, if he could lay hands on her. . . he sent word to the archbishops and bishops of the country that all land held by King Arthur should be placed under interdict and excommunication unless he took back his wife in peace and honor, as a king should hold a queen. (102)

The king agrees, and a bishop carries a message to the Queen, promising her Arthur "will swear to you before all his barons that he will consider you henceforth as a king should consider a queen" (102), and Guinevere agrees to return, reflecting that the king "will hold me as dear as he ever did before" (103).

A similar account is found in the Stanzaic Morte. England's trouble is known in Rome, and the Pope

> A lettre he selid with hys hande,
> Bot they accorded welle in trowthe
> Enterdite he wolde the lande.
> . . . . . .
> Redde was it byfore all bydene,
> The lettre that the pope gonne make,
> How he moste have aȝeyne the quene
> . . . . . .
> Or Ynglande entyrdyted shulde bene (2250-2268)

Further, the bishop, speaking as the Pope's representative, promises that Guinevere will be "holden in welle more honoure/ Than evyr she was" (2326-7) when she returns.

Malory has the same account. When the Pope heard of the trouble in England, he called a clerk to him and

> gaff [hym bulles] undir leade, and sente hem unto the kynge, chargyng hym uppon payne of entirdytynge of all Inglonde that he take hys quene agayne and accorde with sir Launcelot.
>
> So whan thys Bysshop was com unto Carlyle he shewed the kynge hys bullys (1194)

and Arthur agreed hastily to the Pope's conditions. Guinevere, promised the Bishop, should be "nother in perell nother shamed" upon her return (1195).

Arthur's loss of Guinevere provokes catastrophe, the threat of interdict and excommunication, even when she has been judged a traitor to the king. There can be no greater indication of her central importance to the kingdom.

The essential unity of the queen and the realm is also reflected in the importance the barons place on the queen's marriage. In the Vulgate Mort, when Mordred's false letters have tricked the barons into believing Arthur is dead, they take counsel and go to speak with the queen.

> Because this kingdom, where the power of the lord is spread over all lands, has been left without a governor, it has been necessary for us to consider what man might be worthy to hold an empire as rich as this one to which you were brought as its mistress, for without fail he to whom God gives the honor of this kingdom can only be he who has you for a wife . . . So we have looked among us for some one to have you as a wife, and we will do homage to him. (115)

There can hardly be a clearer statement of the integral link between the kingdom and the queen: the land must have a lord, so the lady must marry. When Guinevere demurs, the barons reply "My lady, your refusal is of no use to you. You must do what you must do" (116). It is the duty of the goddess to marry, because only so can the land be protected.

Guinevere's reluctance here is similar to the behavior of Mór, the tribal goddess of Munster. After the death of her spouse, Fingen, she married Cathal, but continued to mourn the loss of Fingen. Finally Cathal reproached her:

> "Woman over there! do not pour praise upon the dead since he has gone. Love someone who will not do thy displeasure till he himself go to death." . . . She was not seen weeping for him from that time. (271)

Like Mór, Guinevere must remarry, but she does not want to do so.

In the episode in the Cath Boinde quoted at the beginning of the chapter, the queen and the kingdom are joined verbally: "Meadb ocus Connacht," Medb and Connacht, are brought safely through battle. Similarly, Guinevere and the land are often linked with that most simple and basic verbal connector, "and".

In the Historia Regum Britanniae, Arthur is told that Mordred "had tyrannously and traitorously set the crown of the kingdom upon his own head and had linked himself in unhallowed union with Guenevere" (B 99). The two actions,

crowning himself and marrying the queen, are presented equally in a balanced statement linked by a simple conjunction.

The same equation is present in Layamon's Brut. Arthur has had a prophetic dream in which Modred and Guinevere brought down the roof of his great hall; in the morning he sighs "Woe is me I have not here Wenhaver my queen!" (138) The messenger from Britain assures him that even if his dream was true, "If . . . Modred, thy sister's son, have taken thy queen,/ And all thy royal land have set in his own hand" (B 138), still Arthur could recover his kingdom. He then speaks the terrible truth:

> Thus hath Modred now done: thy queen he hath taken
> And thy beautiful land he set in his own hand
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . it is true what I have said,
> The truth without lies, of thy beloved queen,
> And of Modred, thy sister's son, how he hath taken
> Britain from thee! (B 138-9)

Mordred has taken kingdom and Queen in one action, for the two are inseparable. The equation is repeated three times in twenty-five lines.

The Queen and the kingdom are also equated in the Alliterative Morte Arthure. Sir Craddok, the messenger from Britain, tells Arthur about Mordred's treachery.

> He has castels encroched and crownd himselven
> Caught in all the rentes of the round Table;
> . . . . . .

He has wedded Waynor and her his wife holdes. (3525-3550)

Arthur repeats the equation when he retells the list of Mordred's outrages to his barons.

> This is Mordred, the man that I most traisted,
> has my castels encroched and crownd himselven
> With rents and riches of the Round Table;
> . . . . . .
> He has wedded Waynor and her to wife holdes (3569-3575)

The list of Mordred's actions begins and ends with the two important, symbolic gestures: he has crowned himself king and married the queen. Everything else on the list -- dividing land, assigning titles, assembling an army, gathering rents -- is a pragmatic result of these two actions. Mordred can do them because he holds both the queen and the kingdom.

In Malory, too, the equation is of primary importance. After Mordred has sent false letters proclaiming Arthur's death, he

> made a parlement, and called the lordys togydir, and there he made them to chose him kynge. And so was he crowned at Caunturbyry, and hylde a feste there fiftene dayes. And aftirwarde he drew hym unto Wynchester, and there he toke quene Gwenyver, and seyde playnly that he wold wedde her (which was hys unclys wyff and hys fadirs wyff). (1228)

Here, also, the parallelism of the actions is inescapable.

Mordred has made himself king, and to fully possess the kingdom he must marry the queen.

The unity of the kingdom and the queen is an essential element of Arthurian romance. Guinevere's presence is necessary for the stability of the realm; without it the court would be destroyed. Her marriage is essential for the well-being of the kingdom, and to hold her is to possess the kingdom. In this, she is no different from any Celtic tribal goddess. Like Medb, she is the kingdom itself.

THE CEREMONIAL LADY

> He will not be a king over Ireland, unless the ale of Cuala comes to him. (Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin qtd. in Ó Máille, 145)

The sacred marriage between the king and his territory, discussed in Chapter Two, was normally marked by a public ceremony, witnessed by members of the tribe. Elements of that ceremony were incorporated into the Arthurian tradition because of their connection to Guinevere, the great queen.

Each Celtic tribal king was, in his turn, married to the goddess, and it was that marriage that made him king. A public ceremony, the banais rígi or 'wedding-feast of kingship,' celebrated the relationship (O'Rahilly 14), and was, in a sense, the inauguration of the king, though the feast was often held some years after the king took the throne. Binchy considers it "the symbolical mating of the new king with the local Earth-Goddess. . . which was destined to bring fertility to man and beast in his reign" (Kingship 11).

Undoubtedly each tribe had its own particular variant inaugural ritual. However, two elements were essential to the marriage: a sexual action and a symbolic libation;

"when one or both of them were included in the relevant context, they signified the completion and consummation of the ceremony" (Mac Cana, "Aspects" 85).

Both a sexual gesture, often a kiss, and the act of drinking a special liquid or from a special cup are present in accounts of the Irish queens, most notably Medb and Findabair. They are echoed in the early British traditions surrounding Vortigern, and they appear in the Welsh literature when Rhiannon is married. Welsh Arthurian tradition connects both elements to Guinevere in an early poem, and the cup appears in a later text. They are carried into Guinevere's Continental and English tradition in a distorted form, as a test of faithfulness: a "magic" cup[1] appears at court, and drinking from it is a test of faithfulness to one's spouse. The meaning of the cup and the kiss changed dramatically as they were integrated into a Christian and courtly literature, but their connection with the queen, Guinevere, remained unchanged.

Both elements of the banaís rigi are present in the Medb tradition. Her sexual and marital behavior has been discussed in previous chapters, and the reference to the special drink is implicit in her name. Medb means "the intoxicating one" (Ó Máille 144) or "she who intoxicates" (O'Rahilly 15).[2] Medb Lethderg is sometimes called "the daughter of Conan of Cuala," and we are told in the Scéla Cano meic Cartnáin that a warrior "will not be a king over Ireland . . . unless the ale of Cuala comes to him" (Ó

Máille 145). To become king, a warrior must marry Medb, both in the sexual sense and in the sense of drinking her special ale. Indeed the word itself, "flaith," was used in a double sense: "good ale" but also "lordship, dominion, sovreignity" (Ó Máille 145). To drink the goddess's ale was to be filled with sovereignty.

Medb's sacred marriage was the Feast of Tara. Carney comments

> There can, I think, be little doubt as to the nature of Feis Temro: it was the symbolic wedding feast of the king and the sovereignty, and involved the official recognition of the king. (334)

The sexual aspect is clear in the term itself, for feis is the verbal noun of foaid 'sleeps, spends the night.' Feis la mnaí, then, means 'to sleep with (or, to marry) a woman,' while a phrase like Feis Temro la Loegaire means either 'Loegaire holds the wedding feast of Tara,' or perhaps even 'the sleeping of Tara with Loegaire' (Carney 334).

The feast could not, of course, be held without the presence of the queen, any more than the kingship could be retained without the goddess's consent. In the Yellow Book of Leçan version of the Torchmarc Étaíne,

> Eochaid, the year after he became king, commanded the men of Ireland to hold the Festival of Tara. . . . The men of Ireland made the same reply to Eochaid, that they would not convene the Festival of Tara for a king that had no queen. (qtd. in O Hehir 163)

A man could not be publicly married to the goddess unless the queen was present; Eochaid could not hold the Feast until he possessed Étaíne. Then the ritual kiss and drink would proclaim his lordship.

The same pair of significant actions is present in Findabair's behavior. Like Medb, she is a queen, and she recruits warriors for the host with a promise of marriage (see discussion in chapter two). She marries each warrior with the same symbolic actions. During her marriage ceremony to Cú Chulainn's foster-brother, Fer Báeth mac Fir Bend,

> Findabair was placed at his side. She it is who pours goblets for him. She it is who kisses him at every drink. . . . Not for all and sundry does Medb intend the liquor which is served to Fer Báeth. (Táin II 190)

When Láeg returns to Cú Chulainn and tells him that one of his fosterbrothers will come to fight, he is careful to repeat the words in exact sequence, suggesting the actions are significant indeed.

Next Láríne mac Nóis was married to Findabair, and

> it was she who used to serve him goblets and she who used to kiss him at every drink. . . . 'Not to all and sundry does Medb give the liquor that is served to Fer Báeth or to Láiríne,' said Finnabair. (Táin II 192)

The promise of marriage to Findabair recruited champions for the army, and the marriage was celebrated with

all the formal ritual of a banais rígi.

The libation alone is present in the Baile in Scáil, which Chadwick believes is a reflection of the ritual marriage of king and goddess ("Marriage" 84). Conn of the Hundred Battles is the king in question, and he is accorded a vision of his descendants who will also be kings.[3] Conn is standing on the battlements of Tara when he and his companions are enveloped in a thick mist; they meet a horseman, who invites them to his house. A young woman wearing a diadem of gold is there, standing next to a vat filled with special liquor while holding a gold cup and ladle. The man tells Conn

> "What I have come for is, to reveal to thee the life of thine own sovereignty, and of every sovereign who shall be in Temair." And the maiden who was in the house before them was the sovereignty of Erinn for ever . . . "Who shall this bowl with the red ale be distributed to?" said the maiden. "Distribute of it," said the Scál, "to Conn of the hundred battles." . . . "Who shall this bowl with the red ale be distributed to?" said the maid. "Distribute of it", said the Scál, "to Art, the son of Conn. A man of three shouts." (621)

Just so the prophecy continues, giving the name of each king, the length of his reign, and the manner of his death; when the Scál reaches Laeghaire he includes a reference to the coming of Patrick. The text, which is incomplete, breaks off with the death of Fergus in 718; it must have been composed after that date, though it is clearly a work relying more on mythology than history. The maiden is

identified quite clearly, "flaith Érenn," the sovereignty of Ireland. The Bail in Scáil seems to have been a well-known text, for Flann of Monasterboice, who died in 1056, refers to it in his work on the succession of the Kings of Tara. The influence of the old inaugural ritual must have been strong indeed to have survived in such a complete form.

Triad 202 lists as one of the things which hallow a king 'the Feast of Tara' (Binchy, "Tara" 134), and the concept of the "marriage" of the king and the goddess remained a compelling one in Ireland far into the historical period. Each provincial kingdom retained its own version of the ceremony, and the Battle of Moire lists the three famous feasts of Ireland as "Feis Eamna, Feis Temra, Feis Chruachna" (Binchy, "Tara" 135).

The Annals of Ulster record the Feast of Tara, which Binchy considers "the ancient ritual by which the kings of Tara were inaugurated" ("Tara" 134), being celebrated by Loegaire in 454, by his successor Ailill Molt in 467, and by Dairmait mac Cerbaill in 560 (Binchy, "Tara" 132-3). The Clonmacnoise annals describe Dairmait's Feast as the "last Feast of Tara" and the interpolation is correct in that it is the last Feast to be recorded in strictly historical sources (Binchy, "Tara" 137). However, legendary materials continue to refer to it: the older version of the Battle of Moira indicates that Domnall mac Aedo, who died in 642, summoned the men of Ireland to the Feast of Tara at the beginning of his reign (Binchy, "Tara" 133). The ancient

ritual celebrating the public marriage of king and goddess was still considered important, perhaps even necessary, well into the historical period, and was duly celebrated by the kings.

The Annals of Connacht record the traditional ceremony being held in 1310 for Feidlimid son of Aed Ó Conchobair.

> and he, Fedlimid mac Aeda meic Eogain, was proclaimed in a style as royal, as lordly and as public as any of his race from the time of Brian son of Eochu Muigmedón till that day. And when Fedlimid mac Aeda meic Eogain had married the province of Connacht his foster-father waited upon him during the night in the manner remembered by the old men and recorded in the old books; and this was the most splendid kingship-marriage ever celebrated in Connacht down to that day. (qtd. in Carney 336)

The text uses the phrase "et ar feis d'Feidlimid mac Aeda meic Eogain re coiced Connact" indicating that Feidlimid had 'married' or 'slept with' the province (Carney 398) and refers to the ceremony as a "banais ríge," a 'kingship-marriage.'

Giraldus Cambrensis, a cleric who travelled in Ireland in the twelfth century, gives a description of the inauguration ritual for a northern tribe in his Topographia hibernica.

> There is in the northern and farther part of Ulster, namely in Kenelcunill, a certain people which is accustomed to appoint its king with a rite altogether outlandish and abominable. When the whole people of that land has been gathered together in one place, a white mare is brought forward into the middle of the

> assembly. He who is to be inaugurated, not as a chief, but as a beast, not as a king, but as an outlaw, has bestial intercourse with her before all, professing himself to be a beast also. The mare is then killed immediately, cut up in pieces, and boiled in water. A bath is prepared for the man afterwards in the same water. He sits in the bath surrounded by all his people, and all, he and they, eat of the meat of the mare which is brought to them. He quaffs and drinks of the broth in which he is bathed . . . When this unrighteous rite has been carried out, his kingship and dominion have been conferred. (110)

Here, of course, the mare represents the goddess, and the sexual contact and ritual drink are both included in the ceremony. Giraldus's reliability as a witness to this ceremony is suspect: he was certainly in Ireland in 1183 and 1185, but during each visit he spent less than a year in the country, came as a member of an invading force, and travelled mostly in the south-eastern part of the country (Roberts 70). It is highly unlikely that he would have witnessed the ceremonial inauguration of a king from far outside his own geographic area and cultural group, but he may well have heard an account of such an event. The ceremony has striking similarities to the Asvamedha or "horse sacrifice" recorded in Sanskrit from ancient India (Ford, "Women" 426) and may well represent a tribal tradition reflecting Indo-European ritual.

The concept of the ritual marriage of king and goddess was pervasive in Wales, also. Indeed, it was seems to have influenced the account of Vortigern's behavior chronicled in the Historia. The text relates that the Saxons

> came back with sixteen keels, with picked warriors in them. In one of the keels came Hengest's daughter, a beautiful and very handsome girl. When the keels had arrived, Hengest held a banquet for Vortigern . . . and he told the girl to serve their wine and spirits. They all got exceedingly drunk. When they were drinking, Satan entered into Vortigern's heart, and made him love the girl. Through his interpreter he asked her father for her hand, saying 'Ask of me what you will, even to the half of my kingdom.' . . . So the girl was given in marriage to Vortigern, and he slept with her, and loved her deeply. (28)

Vortigern was most probably following the old Roman practice of posting mercenaries along the borders of the province when he first invited Hengist's Saxons into England (Alcock, Britain 94, 105). The policy of settling troops along the frontiers had served the Empire well, but in the changed conditions of post-Roman Britain a further alliance was necessary to confirm the contract. Marriage alliances between the female relatives of emperors and barbarian generals were not unknown in the period: in Rome, the emperor Arcadius' cousin had married the Vandal Stilicho (Morris 74). When such a marriage is recorded by the Celts, however, it is described in a way that reflects their belief in the banais ríge: the girl serves wine, and Vortigern sleeps with her. The old form of Celtic kingship ritual is inserted into the political record, an indication of its importance to the watchers.

Rhiannon is a later representation of the goddess in medieval Welsh literature. The name is descended from *Rīgantonā which means "great queen goddess," (Ford,

Mabinogi 5), certainly an appropriate designation for the character. Her imperious method of seeking out the husband of her choice was discussed in Chapter Two; here her ritual marriage to Pwyll is relevant.

> "All right, Lord," she said. "A year from tonight, in the court of Hyfaidd Hen, I will arrange for a feast to be ready by the time you arrive." . . . They passed the year from then on until the appointed time, when Pwyll arrayed himself with a hundred horsemen, and set out for the court of Hyfaidd Hen. . . The hall was arranged and they went to the tables. This is how they sat: Hyfaidd Hen on one side of Pwyll and Rhiannon on the other; after that each according to his rank. They ate and celebrated and conversed. (45)

The banquet continues appropriately, until the meal is finished. Then a suppliant comes before Pwyll, who rashly promises "Whatever you ask of me, as far as I am able to get it, you shall have it" (46). Rhiannon is angry, but it is too late to rescind his pledge, and the newcomer makes his request.[4]

> "You are sleeping tonight with the woman I love most, and it is to ask for her and the feast and the preparations that are here that I have come."
> Pwyll fell silent, for there was no response he could give.
> "Be silent as long as you like," said Rhiannon. "Never has a man been more feeble-witted than you have been." (46)

Both elements of the traditional ceremony are present here -- Rhiannon intended to 'sleep with' Pwyll, and she had presented him with a feast which must have included

drinking. It is notable that Gwawl requests the "feast and the preparations" as well as Rhiannon, suggesting they have special importance, that the marriage would not be complete without them.

Angry though she is, Rhiannon still wants Pwyll as her spouse, and promptly sets about outwitting Gwawl. Her first concern is to make the present feast invalid, which would postpone her contact with Gwawl. She tells Pwyll he must honor his word, but perhaps they can manage to circumvent the promise.

> He will ask for the feast and the provisions and the preparations, but that is not yours. I will give the feast to the retinue and the hosts," she continued, "and that will be your answer to that. As for me," she said, "I will set a date with him, for a year from tonight, to sleep with me." (46)

A few lines later she addresses Gwawl, presenting him with those terms.

> . . . as for the feast and the provisions here, I have given them to the men of Dyfed, to the retinue and the hosts that are here. I will not allow it to be given to anyone else. A year from tonight, however, a feast shall be made ready in this court for you, friend, to sleep with me." (47)

Rhiannon herself refers to the feast and to having sex as equivalents. Unless both are present, the marriage is not complete and valid, and Gwawl will not possess her. A year later, Pwyll, following her advice and armed with a magic

bag she has given him, tricks Gwawl into renouncing his claim on her. Afterward

> The hall was then prepared for Pwyll and his host, and the host of the court as well. They went to the tables and sat down -- they seated themselves that night just as they had the year before. They ate and revelled, and it came time to go to sleep. Pwyll and Rhiannon went to the chamber and spent the night in pleasure and contentment. (47)

Rhiannon acts as the goddess in choosing her own husband and denying the claims of other suitors. The presence of the formal items and actions of the banais ríge -- the cup and the kiss, or the feast and intercourse -- enable her to do so. The goddess cannot be formally possessed until the actions of the ritual ceremonial marriage are duly performed; in preventing the feast she prevents the marriage.

The text of the Mabinogi can be dated from the latter half of the eleventh to the first quarter of the twelfth century (McKenna 39). The controlling figure of the goddess and her ceremonies, which had survived the Roman occupation of Britain and the confused period following that collapse, was still present in Wales at such a late date, and continued to give a specific shape to tales compiled during that period. It is not surprising, then, to see the concept of the goddess's ceremonial marriage present in equally late Arthurian literature, with Guinevere representing the goddess.

Both the symbolic drink and the implication of sexual contact are present in an early Welsh poem which exists in two late versions. In both versions, three individuals are mentioned: Cai, Melwas, and Gwenhwyfar. Cai and Gwenhwyfar become Sir Kay and Guinevere of the later romances. In another early text Melwas appears as an abductor of Guinevere, and he will be discussed further in Chapter Six. Melwas and Gwenhwyfar are certainly speakers in the poem, which is constructed as a conversation; it is possible that Cai also speaks although the poem only refers to him as a standard for fighting ability. Version A opens with the question "Who is the man who sits in the common part of the feast?" which is answered

> Melwas from the Isle of Glass.
> Thou with the golden, gilded caskets
> I have drunk none of thy wine.
>
> Wait a little
> I do not pour out my wine
> For a man who cannot bide, cannot hold out in the fray.
> . . . . . .
> He would not stand up to Cai in his wine. (Ritual Poem A: 1a - 3c)

The poem opens with a question about an unidentified suitor, who names himself and addresses the questioner, presumably Guinevere, as "Thou of the golden, gilded caskets." The phrase is similar to the description of Sovereignty in the Bail in Scál, which depicts the lady possessing a "silver kieve with hoops of gold by her, and it full of red ale; a

golden can on its edge; a golden cup at its mouth" (621). Melwas says he has drunk none of her wine -- that is, he has not been married to her. The queen's reply clarifies the basis of her choice of spouse: he must be very good in battles, and she compares Melwas unfavourably to Cai, who seems to represent the standard by which other warriors are measured. The first portion of the ritual marriage, the special wine, is present in the opening stanzas of the poem, as is the reference to the martial abilities necessary for the spouse of Sovereignty.

Melwas boasts of his abilities, insisting "I am the man who would stand up to Cai" (4d), and finally concludes "I am Melwas, let us leave it at that" (8c). Guinevere is now interested:

> Since you have begun
> Go on with your conversation
> A lad knows who fondles him.
> Where before have you seen me? (9a-10a)

The sexual element of the ceremony is at least implied by "fondles." It may also be present in the closing line of version A, where the two speakers make an exchange, presumably of actions as no objects are mentioned: "Take that. You take that." It may be that they kiss or embrace, publicly completing the ceremony.

Version B is similar, although the speaker is not identified as Melwas. Interestingly, the fragment opens

with both speakers mounted, and the second speaker, presumably Guinevere, says "Green is my steed of the tint of the leaves" (2c). The word "glas" covers a range of colors more sharply separated in English, from green through blue to grey. The horse has, in any translation, an unusual and distinctive color, rather like the pale ambling mount upon which Rhiannon makes her first appearance. The exchange of taunts and boasts is similar to that of A, with Melwas insisting "I am the man to stand up to Cai" (4c) and "I would stand up against a hundred myself" (6c).

The poem, fragmentary as it is in both versions, reflects the banais ríge, the marriage of king and goddess. The basis of choice for the successful candidate for kingship is clear: he must be a remarkably fine warrior, strong enough to stand up to Cai, who in this text at least sets the standard. It is this ability which interests Gwenhwyfar, who will only pour her wine for strong warriors, and who implies she will "fondle" a successful suitor. Both elements of the banais ríge, the sexual contact and the ritual drink, are present in the text. Guinevere is the goddess, testing her suitors and rewarding them with her favor.

Another reference to Guinevere and the ritual cup of wine is contained in Peredur, a later Welsh text showing considerable Anglo-Norman influence. In that episode, an unnamed knight

> came straight to the hall, to the place where Arthur and his bodyguard were, and Gwenhwyfar and her maids. And a page of the chamber was serving Gwenhwyfar with a golden goblet. And thereupon the knight took the goblet from Gwenhwyfar's hand and threw the drink that was in it on her face and breast, and gave Gwenhwyfar a hard blow on the ear, and said, 'If there be any one so fearless as to strive for this goblet with me, and to avenge the insult to Gwenhwyfar, let him come after me to the meadow, and I will await him there.' (77-8)

The text gives no indication of the knight's identity or motive, although it is worth noticing that even though Arthur is present in court the insult is directed toward Guinevere; it is her injury which is to be avenged, and her cup which is to be recovered. The situation is similar to that of Triad 54, "The Three Unrestrained Ravagings of the Island of Britain," in which

> The first of them (occurred) when Medrawd came to Arthur's Court at Celliwig in Cornwall; he left neither food nor drink in the court that he did not consume. And he dragged Gwenhwyfar from her royal chair, and then he struck a blow upon her. (147)

Here again, although Arthur is involved, the hostile action is directed toward Guinevere. This is a logical result of her identity as goddess: any danger to the tribe would normally be interpreted as hostility toward her, while the action of the king in protecting her would equally protect the entire tribe. Though <u>Peredur</u> is a romance, a product of the Christian and courtly tradition, it retains a much older portrait of the queen.

The use of the cup and kiss take on a different form in Continental medieval literature. The memory of a cup that can be drunk from only by a special and worthy candidate is still coupled with sexual contact. However, the bestowal of the cup no longer indicates the presence of the king. Instead, the cup tests the chastity, and sometimes the general abilities, of the drinker or the drinker's spouse. Moreover, not only the king and the goddess, in her role as queen, are tested: all the knights and ladies of the court try to drink from the cup, and failure is the source of much merriment.

Biket's Lai du Cor, a Breton lai from the second half of the twelfth century, recounts the testing of Arthur's court by Mangon of Moraine, who sent

> a horn banded about four times with gold. Of ivory was that horn, and wrought with inlay wherein amid the gold were set stones of beryl and sardonyx and rich chalcedony; of elephant's ivory was it made, and its like for size and beauty and strength was never seen. Upon it was a ring inlaid with silver, and it had a hundred little bells of pure gold. (103)

The beauty of the horn is matched by its magical qualities. After the messenger has left the hall, Arthur summons his chaplain to read the letters shaped of gold and enameled with silver, which proclaim

> no man, howsoever wise and valiant, shall drink therefrom if he be either jealous or deceived, or if he hath a wife who has ever in folly turned her thoughts

> towards any man save him only; never will the horn suffer such a one to drink from it, rather will it spill out upon him what it may contain; howsoever valiant he be, and howsoever high, yet it will bespatter him and his garments, though they be worth a thousand marks. For whoso would drink from this horn must have a wife who has never thought, whether from disloyalty, or love of power, or desire of fortune, that she would fain have another, better than her lord; if his wife be wholly true, then only may he drink from it. (105-6)

The wording of the inscription is curious. Although it finishes with the conventional method of testing for a wife who is completely loyal in thought as in deed, it begins by declaring a test of the drinker himself -- he must be neither jealous or deceived. The first part of the phrase may be a reminder of one of the characteristics Medb required in her husband: that he be without jealousy. The second part of the phrase is similar to the Celtic idea of the "king's truth," the concept that the king must always give a right judgment and the fertility and prosperity of the land depend on his ability to do so; obviously, if he could be deceived, he would no longer have "truth."

However, it was the horn's ability to test a wife's chastity that interested Biket, and he goes on to recount Arthur's attempt to drink, when "the wine poured out upon him, down even to his feet" (105). Arthur is furious, but the queen defends herself

> No man have I loved, and none will I ever love, save my lord only. This horn is too veracious, it has attacked me for small cause. In years past I gave a ring to a

> damoiseau, a young boy who had slain a giant . . . I granted him my favour, and gave him a ring, for I hoped to retain him to strengthen the court. (106-7)

The statement is reminiscent of the Cath Boinde, which claims "the sons of the kings of Ireland used to be in Cruachan with Meadb at that time to see if they could make war" (179). It is the right and proper function of the goddess to recruit champions for the host, and Guinevere is behaving in that tradition when she gives the ring. The action should not worry Arthur, as she makes clear.

> On all the earth is no man so mighty - no, not though he were king of Rome - that I would love him . . . I have the best one of the three who were ever king under God, why then should I go seeking a fairer or a braver: I promise you, lord, that wrongfully are you angry with me. (106)

Her argument rests not on her own nature, but on Arthur's excellence: she would have no need of or desire for another spouse when she has the best champion in the world as her husband. This is an argument the goddess could be expected to make, for it is her need to retain the strongest warrior as her spouse that leads her to change her husbands, as the Cath Boinde made clear. As long as Arthur remains the best of all, he has nothing to fear.

Her statement reassures Arthur, who causes the cup to be passed to the other kings present at the feast, and laughs when he observes that none of them could drink from

it. The queen "grew bright red" watching the events, and "The king looked on her and found her most fair; he drew her to him and three times he kissed her" (108).

The Lai du Cor, then, contains the essential elements of the banais ríge: the cup and the kiss. Although the text seems to be testing Guinevere's chastity, it is Arthur's fitness to rule that is really evaluated. Since the queen judges him as her rightful spouse, the lai ends as a true inaugural ceremony: Arthur has drunk from the cup and he kisses his queen.

Another version of the test is preserved in Diu Crône, the same early thirteenth century translation of a "welsches buoche" into German that contains the episode of Guinevere's other husband discussed in Chapter Two. In this episode her 'faithfulness' is tested when a strange-looking knight appears at court on Christmas Day. The knight presents an unusual tankard, which has a range of magic qualities, the most important of which is that

> no evil man can make full use of it. He who is mean spirited or deceives his sweetheart has this reward: when he lifts the tankard to his mouth, it at once spills wine all over him. And woman's modesty will not protect a lady, for the same thing will happen to her if she is deceitful. (15)

The assembly begs Arthur to have the cup tested, and he calls the ladies into the hall. The tankard is presented to them while they are still uninformed about its special

quality, and the first woman who drinks from it spills the wine. Then it is brought to Guinevere, and Keii interrupts:

> A hundredweight of tin or lead would scarcely be as heavy as this annoying goblet . . . How could a lady manage it without spilling claret over herself: It would not have occurred if the lady had been stronger; weakness often brings woe, as it did now. But don't be upset. Just hold the vessel firmly . . . look it over carefully and seize it where it can't slip out of your hand . . . Remember this and you have nothing to fear. (16)

Guinevere drinks, and a little wine, "hardly enough to notice," spills onto her lap. Kaii remarks

> so much strength has been hidden in you that I would want to be on your side if the ladies of this company were to compete in spear throwing; you are frightfully strong of arm. (16)

The cup is passed to the other ladies, each of whom fails to drink from it.

Then the tankard is brought to Arthur. The knights, who know about the cup's magic, are uneasy, but Arthur agrees to drink.

> Holding the tankard, the messenger stood before the Round Table . . . and gave it to the king. When the latter drank from the tankard without incident, a throng crowded around. After Arthur had drunk the claret, which so well befitted him that he spilled none of it, and the messenger had taken back the claret, a great silence fell on the hall, for his success seemed a miracle. (22)

Then Keii spoke again.

> "How suitable it would be," he declared, "if the affection of two lovers would tie them together with such a firm bond that no inconstant weakness could loosen them . . . which is why my lady did the best among the women and my lord won the prize without question among us men; it is also the reason he is so lucky and wise. (22-3)

Arthur is tested both for his sexual fidelity to his wife and for his overall worthiness; the cup will not allow anyone to drink who is "mean spirited." The messenger clarifies this when he presents the tankard to the king:

> A king's words should be straightforward, unwavering, and considered by all to be without fault. This is the tradition. Moreover, I have heard it said of you that you have taken care that your promise should be as reliable as that of any king who ever lived. (20)

The messenger's description of a king's words correspond closely to the Celtic belief in the "king's truth." When Arthur can drink from the magic tankard without spilling the claret, he is publicly affirming his fitness for kingship, as the Celtic kings publicly celebrated their status at the <u>banais rígi</u>. The sexual element is also present, for the tankard also tests and publicly affirms Arthur's sexual loyalty to his queen.

The testing cup motif remains a part of English Arthurian tradition throughout the medieval period, though it later loses its special significance and becomes a test

of sexual behavior only. Malory has only a short account of the drinking horn. In the episode, a knight was sent

> unto kynge Arthure. And this knyght had a fayre horne harneyste with golde, and the horne had suche a vertu that there myght no lady nothir jantyllwoman drynke of that horne but yf she were trew to her husbande; and if she were false she sholde spylle all the drynke, and if she were trew to her lorde she myght drynke thereof pesiblé. And because of the quene Gwenyvere and in the dispyte of sir Launcelot this horne was sente unto kynge Arthure. (429-30)

However, Sir Lamerok forces the knight to take the horn to King Mark's court instead, where it caused a predictable amount of trouble. The episode ocurs in Book Eight of Malory's Morte D'Arthur, and is twice referred to in later books, where Lamerok is reproached with being the cause of so much strife and ill feeling.

Here the cup has largely lost its original significance. The drink is no longer a symbolic acknowledgement of a warrior's fitness for kingship or a ceremony uniting him with the goddess. Indeed, it does not measure the warrior's ability in any way, directly (by allowing him to drink) or indirectly (by having his lover's faithfulness explicitly depend on his worthiness). It simply tests the sexual fidelity of the women involved -- and it was directed to Guinevere because her liaison with Lancelot would cause her to fail.

The drinking vessel functions in a similar way in the ballads, where it simply indicates Guinevere's chastity or

lack of it. In "The Boy and the Mantle" the chastity of the women at Arthur's court is tested by a mantle which will shrink if worn by a woman who ever did wrong, a wooden knife which kills a wild boar leaving it enchanted so that no cuckold's knife can cut into it, and a magic horn which will spill its contents if any cuckold attempts to drink from it; Hales and Furnivall noted the three objects "are claimed by the Welsh as a part of the insignia of Ancient Britain" (302).

In another late ballad, "The Cokwolds Daunce," Arthur himself owns the testing horn, and routinely requires the knights of his court to drink from it. A visiting earl, however, refuses to do so until Arthur has drunk first.

> Kyne Arthour then he tuke the horn,
> And dyde as he was wont beforn,
> Bot this was zit gon a gyle,
> Bot he wend to haue dronke of the best,
> Bot sone he spylld on hys brest,
> With in a lytell whyle. (217)

The cuckolds at court are glad that the king is now one of them, and Arthur himself seems equally pleased with the turn of events, saying

> Be Jhu cryst that is aboffe,
> That man aught me gode loffe,
> That ley by my quene;
> I was worthy him to honour
> Both in castell, and in towre,
> With rede skerlet and grene.
>
> Ffor him me helpyd when i was forth,

To cher my wyfe, and make her myrth,
Ffor women louys wele pley (219-20).

The text is late, and may be nothing more than a ballad-maker's crude humor. However, Arthur's cheerful gratitude toward his wife's lover is very similar to Ailill's cheerful willingness to welcome Medb's husbands and lovers into his host. The presence of Guinevere's lover(s) is a help to Arthur, not a source of shame or annoyance. Although the "inaugural" aspect of the cup has been lost in this late text, Arthur's attitude in it is appropriate for a Celtic king, a spouse of the goddess.

In medieval romance, Guinevere has been portrayed as the unfaithful wife, and the cup that tests her chastity is one means of establishing that characterization. However, the cup is also a remnant of her earlier identity, that of tribal goddess. A special drink and a sexual contact were essential elements of the public ceremony that united king and goddess, and they remained essential elements of the public indication of Guinevere's character.

ABDUCTORS, DEFENDERS, AND THE FIRST OF MAY

> Conchobar stayed after the others in the fair, watching Meadb, and, as Meadb happened to go to the Boyne to bathe, Conchobar met her there, overcame her, and violated her. (Cath Boinde 179-181)

Discussion so far has centered on the goddess's marriage, emphasizing her free choice of spouse and defender. However, the kingship is a desirable prize, and possession of the goddess ensures that position. On a mythological level, the goddess could be kidnapped or tricked into marrying the wrong man -- though the results for the land were often calamitous. Historically, the pattern is repeated in the abductions of a number of women. It is also the pattern displayed in Guinevere's tales, for she is frequently kidnapped, and by a varied group of abductors. Like the goddess, she is the target of ambitious men.

Conchobar took Medb by force, but she did not remain with him. The "kings of Ireland rose forth from Tara . . . The banners of the king of Ireland are raised to attack the king of Ulster" (181), and Medb returned triumphantly to Tara. However, Medb retained an implacable enmity toward

Conchobar. Years later, after she had borne seven sons to Ailill, she renamed them.

> Why are they called the Maines? Not difficult. Of a day that Meadb was at the gathering of Cluitheamnach . . . she said to her Druid, "By whom of my children shall Conchobar fall?" quoth she. "Thou hast not borne them yet, unless they be rechristened," quoth the Druid. "Anyhow, it is by Maine he shall fall." And it is for that reason she called each of her sons Maine, in the hope that Conchobar might fall by him. (Cath Boinde 185)

Though Medb could be kidnapped, she did not submit to the indignity, and her retaliation was deadly.

Other goddess figures, too, were abducted. Eithne,[1] foster-daughter of Buchet, was courted by Cormac.

> Thereafter then a message was sent by Cormac to Buchet to ask her (in marriage). He gave her not . . . So then they say that on the following evening she was brought by force to Cormac, and she staid with him only that night, and then escaped from him. But on that night there entered her womb the son of Cormac, Carbre Lifechair. (Esnada Tige Buchet 31)

Later Eithne married Cormac, but "she did not accept him without bestowing her brideprice on Buchet" (31). The period of prosperity that followed throughout the land demonstrated the validity of the marriage of king and goddess.

Cormac possessed Eithne twice, once by force and once by right. He also lost and regained her twice. The Eachtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri describes a contract between Cormac and a stranger, in which Cormac receives a magic

branch and promises the stranger three as-yet undisclosed wishes. The stranger returns three times, asking for and receiving Cormac's daughter, his son, and finally his wife, Eithne. After Eithne leaves the court, Cormac follows her, and eventually recovers his family (Dagger 89). Cormac's other loss of Eithne is described in "Cormac's Dream," a section of Nia son of Lugna Fer Trí. Cormac dreams that he saw his wife Eithne Thóebfoda sleeping with Eochu Gunnat and coming back to him after that. His druid interprets the dream, explaining that Cormac's kingship will be with Eochu for a year, but after that the Connaught men will place Cormac again in the kingship (Dagger 88). The one-year period is probably a reflection of Celtic marital customs,[2] which allowed short-term marriages between consenting parties. The one-year delay is also a significant period of time in the Guinevere tradition.

Étaín, wife of Eochaid Airem, was stolen from her husband three times.[3] The first time, her husband's brother, Ailill, is dying, and Étaín is left to care for him. He confesses it is love for her that is killing him, and she agrees to meet him "on the hill above the court" where

> Ailill watched throughout the night. But at the hour of his tryst he fell asleep, and did not wake until the third hour on the morrow. Étaín went to meet him, and saw a man awaiting her like unto Ailill in appearance . . . The speech that Ailill would have wished that is what he spoke. (Torchmarc Étaíne 169)

Three times Étaín meets the stranger who appears to be, but is not, Ailill. On their last meeting, she asks his identity, but refuses to go away with him unless her husband Eochaid bids her to do so (173).

Eochaid lost Étaín a second time when he played chess with a magnificent stranger who appeared at his court. The stranger lost the first two games, and paid large stakes. On the third day the stranger, who had not yet stated the stake he would claim from Eochaid, is the winner.

> 'What wouldst thou from me?' said Eochaid. 'My arms around Étaín and a kiss from her," said Midir. Eochaid was silent. 'Come a month from to-day and that shall be given thee' . . . 'Étaín herself promised me that she would come away from thee,' said Midir. . . . 'I have told thee,' said she, 'that I will not go to thee until Eochaid sell me. As for me, thou mayst take me if Eochaid sell me.' 'I will not sell thee indeed,' said Eochaid, 'but let him put his arms round thee in the middle of the house as thou art.' 'It shall be done,' said Midir. He takes his weapons in his left hand, and the woman he took under his right arm, and bore her away through the sky light of the house. (Torchmarc Étaíne 181, 185)

Eochaid loses his wife because of a foolish wager, made without examining possible consequences. A cautious man would have named the stakes, and made sure they were tolerable, before beginning to play, but Eochaid failed to do so. The element of the unwary wager is also present in several of Guinevere's abductions, as is the rash promise like the one that caused Cormac to lose Eithne. Trickery can be as important as force where abductions of the goddess

are concerned.

The abduction of the goddess had its parallel in the abductions of historical queens.[4] The concept of the marriage of the king to the territorial goddess was "an integral element of the historical and political consciousness of the early Irish" (Mac Cana, "Aspects" 61) and influenced historical events as well as literary expressions. According to the Annals, around 838, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Caiseal, obtained the submission of Niall Mac Aeda, and became king of Ireland (MacCana, "Aspects" 62). Two years later, he harried Leth Cuinn and came as far as Tara, where he kidnapped Gormlaith, wife of Niall. MacCana has speculated

> Was his action intended partly to suggest that just as he had taken possession of Niall's spouse of flesh and blood, so also was he in virtual possession of that other spouse claimed by Niall, namely the kingdom of Ireland? ("Aspects" 62-3)

The physical action, taking place in historical time, would certainly parallel the symbolic action in mythical time. A similar account is given of Maelgwn of Wales.[5] According to Gildas, he left the throne to become a monk, but returned from retirement and repossessed his crown. At that time he remarried

> not with some widow, but with the beloved wife of a living man, no stranger either, but your brother's son. So that hard neck of yours, already laden with many

> burdens of sin, is bent from the lowest depths to still lower; for to crown your sacrilege, you ventured on two murders, the killing of this man and of your wife, after you had enjoyed her for some little time. Next you married the woman . . . The wedding was public, and as the lying tongues of your parasites cry (but from their lips only, not from the depths of their hearts), legitimate: for she was a widow. (34)

Maelgwn, then, secured this throne by killing his nephew and marrying his nephew's wife; presumably the nephew had held the kingship during his absence. Clearly the marriage was an essential part of holding the kingship: Maelgwn killed his first wife in order to marry the second. His first marriage may have had an equally political motive, for Maelgwn did not directly succeed his father, Cadwallon; Gildas charges him "Did you not, in the first years of your youth, use sword and spear and flame in the cruel despatch of the king your uncle" (33). If he married immediately following that murder, the most probable wife would have been his uncle's spouse, another symbol of the sovereignty of Gwynedd.

The abduction of the queen, holder of sovereignty, was a mythological and political reality in the period in which the Arthurian legends were being formed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the fullest account of Guinevere's abduction pre-dating Geoffrey of Monmouth is found in a text from that period. It is embedded in the Vita Gildae, a life of Gildas written by Caradoc of Llancarvan. Gildas is staying with the abbot of Glastonia,

and writing his history of the British people, during the "same time when king Melwas was reigning in the summer country" when the place

> was besieged by the tyrant Arthur with a countless multitude on account of his wife Gwenhwyfar, whom the aforesaid wicked king had violated and carried off, and brought there for protection, owing to the asylum afforded by the invulnerable position . . . war was prepared between the enemies. (qtd. in Korrel 85)

Arthur had been searching for his wife for a year, and had roused "armies of the whole of Cornubia and Dibneria" when he found her. The abbot of Glastonia and Gildas

> stepped between the contending armies, and in a peaceable manner advised his king, Melwas, to restore the ravished lady. Accordingly, she who was to be restored, was restored in peace and good will. (qtd. in Korrel 85)

and both kings bestowed gifts upon the abbot. Caradoc's reason for including the episode is quite clear: acting as an peacemaker for two warring kings increases Gildas's stature. Gildas, and even the abbot of Glastonia, may not have appeared in the original account of Guinevere's abduction; Webster has suggested the 'peacemaker' role was originally assigned to a magician, as it is in the Lanzalet (122). Melwas is linked to Guinevere in other early Welsh texts. In the poem discussed in Chapter Four, he is demanding recognition from the queen.[6] Dafydd ap Gwilym

uses their relationship in a poem in which the speaker wishes for "A window like unto this . . . through which at Caerllion formerly Melwas (came) by great love, without fear . . . near the house of the Giant (G)ogfran's daughter" (Bromwich, TYP 382). Another poet, Dafydd ab Edmwnd, must have known a similar tradition, for he writes "Alas that a youth's sigh avails me not to invoke the art of Melwas, the thief that by magic and enchantment took a girl to the end of the world" (Bromwich, TYP 383). The identity of Melwas as a contender for the goddess's favor is an old one.

The account of Guinevere's abduction and her return a year later to her husband is similar to the many Irish tales of the abduction of the goddess and her return. Eithne stayed with Eochu Gunnat for a year before returning to her husband Cormac; Eochaid searched the fairy mounds of Ireland for Étaín for a year before finding her with her look-alike retinue; Pwyll's marriage to Rhiannon was delayed for a year because of Gwawl's claim. The period of time is probably a reflection of the Celtic marital custom discussed in Chapter Two, which allowed marriages to be contracted on a yearly basis, the alliance to be renewed or dissolved at the end of each year, usually on May 1, the feast of Beltaine. Medb offered several such limited contracts to her protectors in the Táin. The same period of time turns up frequently in the accounts of Guinevere's abductions. In Vita Gildae Arthur searches for his queen for a year before finding her at Melwas's stronghold. In the various versions of the

Charrette Guinevere's return to Arthur's court is delayed for a year, when it will be decided by individual combat. In the Lanzalet Guinevere is at Meleagant's court for a year before Arthur and his knights rescue her. These delays, too, are probably a reflection of the one-year marriage. Each ravisher in turn is attempting to establish a legitimate marriage to the goddess, and his claim must be honored for the duration of a one-year marital contract.

The Trioedd Ynys Prydein may contain a reference to Guinevere's kidnapping. Triad 54 lists the "Three Unrestrained Ravagings of the Island of Britain."

> The first of them (occurred) when Medrawd came to Arthur's Court at Celliwig in Cornwall; he left neither food nor drink in the court he did not consume. And he dragged Gwenhwyfar from her royal chair, and then he struck a blow upon her (147).

The action of similar to the insult to Guinevere in Peredur discussed in Chapter Four. Though the text does not say Medrawd went on to abduct the queen, his assault was certainly directed toward her, and threatened the security of the court as an attempt on the goddess would. Arthur retaliated: "The second unrestrained Ravaging (occurred) when Arthur came to Medrawd's court. He left neither food nor drink in the court" (147). If Medrawd had abducted the queen, Arthur's "ravaging" would have brought her home again. The pattern of interaction in the Triad is very similar to the account in the Vita Gildae, and probably

represents another abduction attempt.

The earliest artistic representation of Arthur and his knights is found on an archivolt over the north doorway of Modena Cathedral, and seems to represent a version of Guinevere's abductions. Wingolee -- a version of Guinevere's name representing a transitional form between Breton Winlowen and French Guinloie (Loomis, Arthurian Lit 61) -- is inside a fortress defended by Mardoc, Burmaltus, and Carado. It is being attacked by six horsemen, among whom are Artus, Isdernus, Galvaginus, and Che. The sculpture can be dated on artistic grounds between 1099 and 1120; cathedral documents suggest 1106 as the most probable date (Loomis, Arthurian Lit 60).

The account of Guinevere's abduction in Lanzelet is similar to the Vita Gildae episode, for there, too, Arthur cannot recover his queen without the intervention of magical helper. When Lanzelet, Walwein, and their companions were returning to court, they were met by a weeping page, who informed them "my lady the queen has been snatched away from my lord King Arthur. That the monster, King Valerin, has done" (117). The king had begun the hunt for the white stag, which Bromwich considers a Breton reflex of the sovereignty theme ("Dynastic Themes" 443), and Guinevere had been kidnapped during the hunt. Alarmed, the heroes hurry to the Tangled Wood, where they find Arthur and his army besieging Valerin's castle with little success (117). Arthur is persuaded to enlist the help of Malduc, the wizard

of the Misty Lake (120), who "proceeded to look up his arts in the black books, and he . . . enchanted everything alive both in the castle and under it -- there was no resistance" (125). The queen is found in an enchanted sleep, and Malduc wakes her; "and thus was the gracious king of Kardigan freed from his sorrow" (126).

Guinevere's absence would destroy the court; Arthur cannot continue to rule without her. The threat to the realm is very great: Erec and Walwein agree "they would risk life and honor rather than have it happen that their lady the queen and the court at Kardigan should be miserably destroyed" (125). The point is emphasized by the urgency Arthur displays in attempting to recover her: he is even willing to give two of his knights to Malduc to enlist the wizard's aid (124). This is identical to the Irish tradition, where the king cannot continue to rule unless he possessed the queen, sovereignty. Arthur had successfully defended his claim on Guinevere when Valerin attempted to claim her as his wife,[7] and he is equally successful in meeting this threat to his rule.

In Diu Crône also, Guinevere is kidnapped by a knight who had earlier claimed to be her rightful husband. When she is gone, the condition of the court is lamentable:

> It was plain that all their joy was at an end. There was weeping, wailing, and sobbing everywhere because of the calamity. This was seen and nothing else, as if only tragic events occurred there. Nothing could compare with this distressing scene with its cries of

misery and grief. (129)

The security of the realm is destroyed by her absence.

The Diu Crône abduction displays a curious sequence. Her brother heard that Gasozein tried to claim her as his spouse, and that she had hesitated before stating her preference for Arthur. Enraged, he dragged her into the forest, where he intended to kill her (125). Gasozein, who had just left the court, came upon the two, and promptly overcame the murderous brother. Then, while "the lady lay there pale and faint, for her suffering had robbed her of strength and reason" (127) Gasozein took her further into the forest "without her knowing what was happening" (127). When she returned to her senses she asked him to take her back to court, but he declared he would take her to his own country instead. In a sheltered spot he attempted to rape the queen, who "defended herself vigorously with hands and teeth" (130). Her screams drew the attention of Gawein, who had been returning to court, and he intervened (132). The two men fought until they fell together from exhaustion. They all returned to Karidol, where the men were nursed for a year before they recovered (139). When Guinevere was seen approaching the court and word was taken "to where King Arthur was sitting and mourning" (138), the king was so overjoyed that his "heart floated in happiness that cannot be fully told, and his love brooked no delay as he hurried to the gate" (138).

The sequence is similar to Medb's relationship with Conchobar. According to the Cath Boinde, he claimed her as his spouse; later, when she had left him, he kidnapped and raped her. However, she was rescued by her current husband and returned safely to Cruchrain.

It is a commonplace among Arthurian critics to maintain that Guinevere is treated well during her kidnappings.[8] That is certainly the case in the Lanzelet, where

> Valerin, firm of purpose, promised the queen -- and he kept his word truly and exactly -- that he would not molest her against her will, except that he would beg with propriety for her love. (118)

A similar situation prevails in Chrétien's Lancelot, where Meleagant's father assures Lancelot "the Queen is so confined that no mortal man has access to her -- not even my son, who brought her here" (313) and Kay confirms his statement.

> You do not know how courteous he has been to my lady: no frontier tower since the time that Noah built the ark was ever so carefully guarded, for he has guarded her so vigilantly that, though his son chafed under the restraint, he would not let him see her except in the presence of the king himself. Up to the present time the king in his mercy has shown her all the marks of consideration which she herself proposed. She alone had the disposition of her affairs. (321)

This considerate treatment of the captive queen is a marked contrast to the Irish tradition: both Medb and Eithne were

undoubtedly raped by their captors. Diu Crône is much more like the Celtic tales in its treatment of the theme; there is no doubt that Gasozein has not only abducted but is determined to rape the queen.

> he rose lustfully to his knees and turned his hands loose on both her bare hips. Once he had felt her body, there could be no truce . . . if she is now to become his mistress, she will nevertheless be blameless . . . she struggled desperately . . . As the one line of attack had failed, the knight swung himself under Ginover's leg and tried to conquer her thus. (131)

This is very similar to the Celtic tradition. To possess sovereignty is to possess the queen sexually, and neither the Celts nor the author of Diu Crône avoided that fact. The French texts lay less emphasis on the sexual aspect of the abduction, through Guinevere is the target of a large number of ravishers.

Four versions exist of the 'Knight of the Cart' episode, in which Meleagant is Guinevere's abductor: Chrétien's famous Lancelot, or the Knight of the Cart and the lesser-known section of the Vulgate Lancelot, Malory's version, and the brief account incorporated in Hartman von Aue's Iwein. In Chrétien's text, Arthur loses Guinevere through a version of the "rash promise," the same method by which Eochaid lost Étaín, and one which is often associated with Celtic sovereignty goddesses. Arthur's court is gathered at Camelot on Ascension Day, when a knight suddenly appears before the king. He says that he holds many of

Arthur's people in captivity, and offers

> if in thy court there is a single knight in whom thou hast such confidence that thou wouldst dare to entrust to him the Queen that he might escort her after me out into the woods whither I am going, I will promise to await him there, and will surrender to thee all the prisoners whom I hold in exile in my country if he is able to defend the Queen and if he succeeds in bringing her back again. (271)

The knight departs, and the court is in an uproar. Kay tells Arthur that he is leaving his service immediately, and Arthur begs Guinevere to persuade him to stay. Guinevere tries to do so, and finally

> Kay promises her to remain, provided the King and she will grant in advance a favor he is about to ask. "Kay," she says, "both I and he will grant it, whatever it may be . . . The King sighed with satisfaction, and said that he would perform whatever request he might make. (272)

Kay wants to lead the Queen from court, and defend her against Meleagant's challenge. Arthur is grieved, but cannot break his promise, and Guinevere is led away while

> as great a lament was made by all the men and women present as if she already lay dead upon a bier. They do not believe that she will ever in her life come back. (273)

The account in the Vulgate is similar: "Melyagans lis fiex au roy Baudemagu" (iv 157) makes the same challenge, and Kay

gets Arthur to allow him to take it. Kay, of course, is unequal to the combat, and Guinevere is captured, to be eventually rescued by Lancelot.

The abbreviated version of this abduction embedded in Hartmann von Aue's Iwein has a different version of the rash promise. In this account, a knight appears at Arthur's court and asks for an unnamed boon, a request which Arthur grants "as long as your request is a reasonable one" (4547). In a fury, the knight leaves, complaining that the world had been deceived about Arthur's reputation. The knights rebuke the king (4570), saying the stranger "appears to be a man/ Who knows how to make reasonable requests" (4573-4) and urging Arthur to grant his favor. Arthur summons the knight and gives him "his solemn word/ To grant him anything he wished" (4581-82). The knight "made bold enough to ask/ That he be allowed to take away with him/ His wife, the queen" (4585-7), if he can defend her against anyone who follows him.

The consequences of Guinevere's departure are severe: it "nearly made/ The king lose his senses" (4588-9), and he accuses his knights of betraying him. This is a serious accusation indeed, and can only reflect the importance of Guinevere's presence for the court's stability. The knights rush in pursuit, but each in turn is defeated; the kidnapper Meljaganz "encountered no one/ Who freed the lady" (4714-5).

The 'rash promise' motif is involved in a king's loss of sovereignty in other texts. In Pwyll, during the

wedding-feast of Rhiannon and Pwyll, a stranger appears, announcing

> "I have come to make a request of you."
> "Whatever you ask of me, as far as I am able to get it, you shall have it."
> "You are sleeping tonight with the woman I love most, and it is to ask for her . . . that I have come." (46)

Pwyll is dismayed but, like Arthur, he cannot break his word; luckily, Rhiannon devises a way out of their predicament (see discussion chapter four).

Arthur is on some occasions aware of the possible dangers of such a situation. In Culhwch and Olwen, when Culhwch comes to court and demands a gift, he answers warily

> you shall have what your head and tongue may claim, as long as the wind dries, the rain wets, the sun moves, as far as land and sea reach -- except my ship and my mantle, Caledfwlch my sword, Rhongomiant my spear, Wynebgwrthucher my shield, Carnwennan my knife, and Gwenhwyfar my wife. (126)

Ford has established the Otherworld connections of many of the names on this list ("Names" 268), but it is noticeable that they are all items necessary for a king to maintain his status -- and Guinevere is the culmination of the list. Without her, Arthur could not keep his throne.

Malory takes the name of his abductor, Mellyagaunce, from Chrétien, but little else; there is no trace at all of the 'rash promise.' In his version, Guinevere and ten

knights are going maying, all dressed in green. Unfortunately, the knights are not heavily armed.

> thys knyght sir Mellyagaunce loved passyngly well quene Gwenyver, and so had he done longe and many yerys . . . he had lay[n] in awayte for to stele away the quene, but evermore he forbare for bycause of sir Launcelot . . . But thys knyght sir Mellygaunce had aspyed the quene well and her purpose, and how sir Launcelot was nat wyth her, and how she had no men of armys with her . . . he thought that tyme was beste seson to take the quene. (1121)

Mellygaunce and his knights to manage to abduct Guinevere, but she is rescued rather quickly by Lancelot.

As in Malory's version, Guinevere's other abductions are quite straightforward, rather like Conchobar's kidnapping of Medb. In the Vulgate Merlin, Lot resolves to kidnap Guinevere when the royal couple go to Logres (300); unusually, the author attempts to give the action a motive by claiming Lot intends to exchange her for his own wife. He and his knights ambush Arthur (315), and are overcoming the king's forces when Gawain appears on the scene (316). He overcomes Lot (317) and forces him to make peace with Arthur (317); nothing more is said of Lot's lost wife. The Middle English Merlin gives much the same account: when Arthur left Carmelide

> the kynge loot hadde knowinge by his asspies, and he and his knyghts rode a-gein hym, and hem enbusshed in the foreste of sapernye, and seide that ther sholde he a-bide the kynge Arthur, and take from hym his wif, yef he myght. (472)

In this account, too, his attempt is unsuccessful. The Livre d'Artus also has an account of Lot's attempted abduction, though it handles the matter rather differently. In this text, Guinevere is also abducted by Urien (qtd. in Webster 14) while Karidol burns. In Durmart she is abducted by Brun de Morois while escorted by an unarmed knight (qtd. in Webster 80); the text declares he had yearned for her for more than seven years. In the Vulgate Lancelot, Bors vows to wrest the Queen away from four knights (295) and, when she is out following the hunt, attempts to do so (301) but is prevented by Lancelot, who successfully defends the Queen (303).[9]

The most interesting aspect of these abductions is their superficial lack of motive. Except for Lot and Brun, none of the ravishers is provided with reason for abducting (or trying to abduct) the Queen, and even those motives seem to be a manufactured ones. The action is often explained in sexual terms, with the abductor wooing (or raping or threatening to rape) the queen, and it is possible to infer that her overwhelming beauty and sexual desirability is the reason behind the kidnapping, but that explanation too leaves much to be desired. Another would-be abductor, the mother of Oriol, is clearer about her motivation: she wishes to capture Guinevere so that she can give the realm to her son (Webster 14). This is the motivation underlying all Guinevere's abductions, for to possess the queen is to possess the realm, as it was for other representations of

sovereignty such as Medb or Eithne.

The same intention directs Mordred's actions. No discussion of Guinevere's abductions is complete without an analysis of her most persistent kidnapper, Mordred. Both he and his brother, Gawain, have peculiar relationships with Arthur's queen. Those relationships are nearly mirror-images of each other, and reflect two different possibilities for the connection between sovereignty and the heir-apparent.

Both Mordred and Gawain are Arthur's nephews; in some texts Mordred is also Arthur's illegitimate and incestuously conceived son, but other texts show no indication of that relationship. As Arthur's nephews, both Mordred and Gawain, as well as many of their male kin, are "rígdamnae, the 'material' or 'makings' of a king" (Binchy, "Terms" 225). Binchy supports the formulation,[10] first developed by MacNeill, that

> succession to the kingship was in theory open to any member of the royal line who belonged to the derbfine of a previous ruler; in other words any agnatic descendant of a former king within the four-generations group was eligible ("Terms" 225).

Presumably the most able candidate would be chosen to hold the throne, and in fact the king-lists show that sons seldom directly succeed fathers, while brothers and cousins often succeed.

Arthur had no brothers to follow him. He had sons ---

but under Celtic custom his son or sons would not be especially likely to succeed to the throne; certainly no more likely than his nephews. The Arthurian tradition makes two of those nephews, Mordred and Gawain, especially prominent, and apparently both were considered potential heirs.

At the beginning of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae, Mordred is both the man Arthur entrusts with his kingdom and the man who steals it from him. To do so, he must also steal the Queen. In the Historia, Arthur, learning that Lucius Hiberius and his troops intend to conquer Britain, gathers his army and sets sail for Europe. Before debarking, "he made over the charge of defending Britain unto his nephew Mordred and his Queen Guenevere" (81). He does the same in all the Chronicle romances that follow the Historia. In Wace's Brut, Arthur "committed the care of his realm, and of Dame Guenevere, his wife, to his nephew, Mordred" (121), and in the Stanzaic Morte he consults his barons before doing the same.

> The kynge gan hys conselle take,
> And bad hem ordeyne hem bytwene
> Who beste steward were for to make,
> . . . . . .
> The knyghtis answeryd withoute lese,
> And said for sothe that so them thought
> That Syr Mordred the sekereste was,
> Thoughe men the reme throwoute sought,
> To save the reme in trews and pees (2510-2515).

Malory, too, follows this tradition: "kynge Arthur made sir

Mordred chyeff ruler of all Ingelonde, and also he put the quene undir hys governaunce" (1211). In the Vulgate Mort Artu Mordred offers to stay home and look after the Queen; Artus gives Mordred the keys to his treasure chamber and pledges all his subjects to obey Mordred as himself (317).

Leaving Mordred in charge of the Queen and the realm is tantamount to naming him heir to the throne, whether the action is by Arthur alone or upon the advice of the barons. In each case, Mordred betrays that trust. He usurps the throne, and marries or tries to marry the Queen.

In the Historia a

> message was brought him [Arthur] that his nephew Modred, unto whom he had committed the charge of Britain, had tyrannously and traitorously set the crown of the kingdom upon his own head, and had linked him in unhallowed union with Guenevere the Queen in despite of her former marriage. (99)

In Wace's Brut, Mordred

> would have seized the land to his use. He took homage and fealty from Arthur's men, demanding of every castle a hostage. Not content with this great sin he wrought yet fouler villainy. Against the Christian law he took to himself the wife of the king. His uncle's queen, the dame of his lord, he took as his wife, and made of her his spouse. (124)

The emphasis on the Christian law of marriage here underscores Mordred's villainy. It may also be an effort to obliterate any idea that his marriage to the queen was

necessary to hold the throne, but only serves to emphasize that concept.

In Layamon's Brut, Arthur is told "Thus hath Modred now done: thy queen he hath taken/ And thy beautiful land he hath set in his own hand . . . he hath taken Britain from thee!" (139). In the Alliterative Morte, Mordred "crownd himselven . . . He has wedded Waynor and her his wife holdes" (3525-3550). In the Vulgate account Mordred has a forged letter, presumably from Arthur, read to the barons, announcing Arthur is mortally wounded, and directing the barons to make Mordred king and give him the queen as his wife (321-2). This is similar to the account in the Stanzaic Morte, where

> False lettres he made be wroght,
> And causyd messangers hem to brynge,
> That Arthur was to grownde broght,
> And chese they muste another kynge
> . . . . . .
> They made Mordred kynge with crowne (2969-2981).

Malory's text is very similar.

> he lete make lettirs as thoughe that they had com frome beyonde the see, and the lettirs specifyed that kynge Arthur was slayne . . . Wherefore sir Mordred made a parlemente, and called the lordys togydir, and there he made them to chose hym kynge. And so he was crowned. (1227)

Arthur left a trusted nephew, a rígdamnae under the old system, to hold his queen and his kingdom during his

absence. His choice of heir-apparent was a poor one, for his confidence was greatly misplaced. Mordred seized the throne, and to make secure his claim, he had to marry the queen: the actions are inseparable. The crown can only be worn by the man who espouses the goddess.

Guinevere's involvement varies. Often, her reaction is unknown, and the fact of her new marriage is announced to Arthur without any hint of her attitude. In some texts, however, she rejects Mordred sharply, barricading herself in a secure fortress. The Vulgate gives the most extensive account. When the forged letters commanding her remarriage are read aloud, Guinevere tells the barons she doesn't want to marry again (323). They insist that she must marry the new king, and she asks for a delay, which they grant. She summons her cousin to fortify the tower she is occupying (325) and, when he has gathered two hundred knights to protect her, she calls from the battlements, reiterating her refusal to marry and calling Mordred a traitor (326). She sends a messenger to determine if Arthur is really dead and to summon him if he is not, and continues to defend the tower against Mordred's siege until he arrives (351).

This fierce refusal is found in other texts. In the Stanzaic Morte

> Sche prayd hym of leve a fourtenyght,
> The lady was full hard bestad,
> So to London sche hyr dyght
> That she and hyr maydens myght be cledd.

> The quene whyte as lyly floure,
> With knyghtis fele of her kynne,
> She went to London to the towre,
> And speryd the gates and dwellyd therin
> . . . . . .
> But the wallys myght he nevir wynne. (2990-3001)

Malory has the same account.

> she desyred of sir Mordred to go to London to byghe all maner thynges that longed to the brydale. . . so whan she came to London she toke the Towre of London, and suddenly in all haste possyble she stuffed hit with all maner of vytayle, and well garnysshed hit with men, and so kepte hit. (1227)

Guinevere's refusal to marry in these texts may be partly accounted for by the fact that she is not only married to Arthur but is firmly involved with Lancelot, and would undoubtedly prefer remarriage to him rather than to Mordred; the possibility is at least hinted at in the Vulgate text. More important is the distrust she feels for Mordred. It is the goddess's responsibility to choose the new defender of the realm, and Guinevere does not prefer Mordred. In the Vulgate, she declares she would rather die by fire than marry him, and in Malory "she had levir sle herselff than to be maryed with hym" (1228).

In others texts, however, she seems to regard Mordred as the new king, and marries him openly. In Wace's Brut

> Mordred was a man of high birth, and of many noble virtues, but he was not true. He had set his heart on Guenevere, his kinswoman, but such a love brought

> little honour to the queen. Mordred had kept this love close, for easy enough it was to hide, since who would be so bold as to deem that he loved his uncle's dame? The lady on her side had given her love to a lord of whom much good was spoken; but Mordred was of her husband's kin! This made the shame more shameworthy. Ah, God, the deep wrong done in this season by Mordred and the queen. (121)

Generally, in those texts in which she accepts Mordred, she is treated with great disdain, and a large portion of the blame for the final destruction of the court is laid at her door, while in the versions in which she rejects him she is treated with respect if not sympathy. In one sense, this is appropriate; in Celtic tradition, an individual was judged by results, not intentions, and a bad queen would be one who married the wrong king and brought disaster to the realm no matter what her intentions had been. Just so was Becuma judged in the Eachtra Airt: she was the wrong queen for Eochaid, she ought not to have married him, disaster ensued, and she is declared 'evil' (O Hehir 171). In the same way, Guinevere's misjudgment in legitimating Mordred's claim to the throne by marrying him results in disaster, and so she must be called 'evil'. In Wace's version, after the last battle,

> That queen, who was Arthur's wife . . . was lodged at York, in doubt and sadness. She called to mind her sin, and remembered that for Mordred her name was a hissing. Her lord she had shamed, and set her love on her husband's sister's son. Moreover, she had wedded Mordred in defiance of right, since she was wife already, and so must suffer reproach in earth and hell. (126)

Since she had chosen wrongly, she was greatly to blame. In those texts where she rejected Mordred, she continues to be treated with dignity and a certain sympathy.

Mordred, then, was not Arthur's proper heir, nor Guinevere's proper spouse. However, Arthur's other nephew, Gawain, may well have played that role.

Gawain has a peculiar relationship with Guinevere in all the Arthurian texts. He is her protector, the knight who, along with Lancelot, defends her from all manner of ills. This has led scholars to suspect he may have been her lover before Lancelot appeared in the texts, but it is even more probable that he is her lover only potentially, the man who will be her next spouse, the heir to the king.

As Arthur's nephew,[11] Gawain is of course a candidate for kingship. In the Vulgate, Arthur gives him his special sword, Excalibur, the sword the confirmed his own kingship, which certainly suggests Arthur regarded Gawain as heir-apparent. Later, during the False Guinevere episode, when Arthur is missing from court, the barons elect Gawain king, and urge him to hold the throne. In two Middle English texts, Gawain substitutes for Arthur in marrying a sovereignty figure.[12] In Layamon's Brut, Arthur assures his followers he will return to Rome after conquering Mordred, and he will "entrust my beloved land to Walwain my kinsman" (28198; B 139) at that time. Like Mordred, Gawain is a possible heir to the throne. Unlike him, Gawain is no kidnapper.

Guinevere, like other goddess figures such as Medb and Eithne, is often the target of ambitious men. If they can hold her, they hold the realm. Her most frequent kidnapper is Mordred, her husband's nephew and a possible heir to the throne. Other kidnappers have political motives or have tried to possess her legally before attempting illegal means. When she is abducted the security of the entire court is threatened, and Arthur and his knights make all possible haste to recover her. Only her presence, the presence of the goddess, can make the realm secure.

CONCLUSION

The tribal goddess was an integral part of Celtic culture. She is found in the archaeological remains, both those from Roman Britain that bear inscriptions naming her and those uninscribed representations found throughout the Celtic areas. She gave her name to numerous Celtic tribes and to many locations. Historical women modeled their behavior after hers, and may have drawn their authority from her. The learned lore of the Celts is full of references to her, and the literary texts of both Wales and Ireland recount her adventures.

Guinevere shows all the major characteristics of the goddess. Like Medb, she is claimed by several husbands -- successfully by Arthur throughout the Matter of Britain, and unsuccessfully by Valerin in Lanzelet and by Gasozein de Dragoz in Diu Crône. Medb maintains Fergus as a secondary husband, and Guinevere has the same relationship with Lancelot.

Medb is the focus of loyalty for the warriors of the tribe, the individual who rallies the host and leads it to war. Celtic queens like Boudica and Grace did the same. Guinevere is the leader of "les cheualiers a la roine

genieure" in Lestoire de Merlin, Livre d'Artus, and the Book of Merlin. In each of these, her knights form a group separate from the Round Table knights, and owe loyalty only to her.

The goddess was, in some way, identical to the land itself. Medb and Connacht are equated in the Cath Boinde, and the concept of the land or castle as spouse of the king remained in Irish poetry into the nineteenth century. The presence and well-being of the goddess was essential for the well-being of the kingdom. This concept is present in Guinevere's texts. In the Lanzalet the knights equate loss of the queen with destruction of the court, and in the Vulgate Mort the people of the city weep and cry when the queen departs. In the Vulgate Lancelot, the Middle English Merlin, the Vulgate Mort, the Stanzaic Morte, and Malory's text, the Pope puts the realm under interdict when Guinevere is absent, and repeals the decree only when she is again at court, restored to her full status.

The marriage between the king and the goddess was celebrated by a public ceremony, witnessed by the tribe, and included two essential elements: the kiss (or other sexual contact) and drinking a special libation or from a special cup. Both elements are connected with Medb, Findabair, and Rhiannon, and a twelfth-century observer described a similar ritual taking place in northern Ireland. The elements of the ceremony are repeatedly linked to Guinevere. In an early Welsh poem, she has a discussion with Cai and Melwas,

referring to drinking a special wine, and in the Welsh Peredur she is insulted by having wine thrown on her face; the Welsh Triads contain a similar reference. In later texts, the cup becomes a testing device, and the sexual nature of the test is emphasized. Guinevere is connected with the test in the Lai du Cor, the Diu Crône, in Malory, and in the late ballads "The Boy and the Mantle" and "The Cokwolds Daunce."

The goddess could appear under various names or in various forms. Medb is equated with her sisters and daughter; Eithne reappears as Bécuma and Delbchaem. Guinevere's "sister" is named in the Welsh Triads and appears at some length in Lestoire de Merlin, the Vulgate Lancelot, the Middle English Of Arthour and of Merlin, and the fifteenth-century Merlin. The goddess also changed her shape. Mór Muman changed her appearance and status when she wedded her proper spouse, as did the hag who was in reality the 'Sovreignty of Ireland' in the tale of Niall. Guinevere is connected with this shape-changing lady in Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale, where she sends a knight to learn that women desire sovereignty, and in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Her spouse, Arthur, and her protector, Gawain, are involved with the shape-changing woman in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnall.

Because marriage to the goddess made a man king, she was always desired and sometimes abducted. However, the goddess must remain free to choose her spouse, and she is

always returned to court. Even Medb was abducted by Conchobar, while Eithne was abducted by Cormac and Étaín by Midir. Historical parallels can be found in the actions of Feidlimid of Ireland and Maelgwn of Wales. Guinevere is abducted in the Vita Gildae, the Welsh Triads, on the Modena archivolt, in the Lanzelet and the Diu Crône, in Chrétien's Lancelot, the Vulgate Lancelot, Hartman von Aue's Iwein, the Vulgate Merlin and the Middle English Merlin, the Livre d'Artus, and Durmart. She is kidnapped by Arthur's nephew, the traitorous Mordred, in many texts, beginning with the Historia Regum Britanniae and including Wace's Brut, the Stanzaic Morte, the Alliterative Morte, and the Vulgate Mort. In these texts, Mordred's marriage to the queen is a part of his usurpation of the throne.

Guinevere is, then, the goddess herself. She acts as such in all the texts where she appears. Loss of awareness of the goddess, her nature, and her proper behavior during the Christian period led to Guinevere's reputation as an adulterous and traitorous queen, a reputation which has followed her into this century and has colored critical approaches to her. Now, however, it is possible to see Guinevere as she is: an embodiment of the goddess, acting in ways appropriate to her identity.

ENDNOTES

ONE: THE NATURE OF THE GODDESS

[1] Mac Cana includes being the ancestress of a line of kings in his list of goddess characteristics. However, that attribute cannot be ascribed to Medb, despite the fact she had seven sons and a daughter, and it is not appropriate to Guinevere, so I have not included it in this discussion.

[2] Discussion of integration of Roman Britain into the Empire has rested largely upon analysis of physical remains which suggest that Roman technology and so on were widely accepted throughout Britain. However, Jones's analysis of the written sources suggests that British-born citizens were never fully accepted in the rest of the Empire in civilian, military, or religious circles, and that the British were generally treated with some contempt. His discussion of Patrick's writings indicates that although Patrick's family used Roman forms of their names and titles, their Romanization was quite superficial, and he concludes that Patrick himself thought of Rome only in terms of the Church and never in political or military terms. This analysis is quite congruent with Morris's suggestion of Britain divided into lowland areas, which were quite extensively Romanized,

and highland areas which were only nominally Roman.

TWO: THE MUCH-MARRIED LADY

[1] Máire Bhreathnach has discussed the connection between death and sovereignty on the mythological level. In a more pragmatic vein, it is notable that the king-lists of the British kingdoms indicate relatively short reigns, and presumably equally short lives, for most rulers. Irish laws compel the king to call a hosting against neighboring tribes every year, and condemn any king who is wounded from behind (unless, the text hurries to note, he has been so far in advance of his own men that he has been surrounded by his enemies!). Under such conditions, a king could probably expect to rule for a short time.

[2] That does not, of course, exclude the possibility of a more individual jealousy. The Aided Fergus relates that Ailill caused Fergus to be slain after watching him play in the water with Medb.

THREE: THE WARRIOR QUEEN

[1] Cú Chulainn often swears by an unnamed god who is important to the Ulster clan: "I swear by that god by whom my people swear."

[2] For example, Eleanor of Aquitaine owed military service to her first husband, King Louis of France, because of her hereditary position as ruler of Aquitaine, and she used that duty to force him to allow her to come on Crusade.

Several generations later, Blanche was the sole heiress of her father, Henry of Lancaster, and her husband, John of Gaunt, though he was a younger son of Edward III, became the most powerful man in the kingdom by controlling her military resources.

[3] Morris insists that the commander's name must have been Marcellus, since "armies are commanded by men." An examination of texts showing armies undoubtedly commanded by Celtic women reveals his error.

[4] Gawain's relationship to Guinevere will be further discussed in chapter six.

FIVE: THE CEREMONIAL LADY

[1] The testing object was not always a cup; it frequently took the shape of a drinking horn. On other occasions it was a mantle, which would not cover the wearer unless the particular conditions of the test had been met. The Vulgate Merlin recounts an incident involving a magic chessboard, which would not let a player checkmate unless his lover was faithful; Lancelot breaks the spell and sends the board to Guinevere.

[2] Thurneysen interpreted the word in a passive sense: "drunken woman." More recently, O Hehir has suggested that 'medb' may be as much a title as a name, the name the goddess uses in her role as pourer of ale, not the name she would use in other roles or her individual name.

[3] Another prophecy, the Bailé Chuinn, was delivered by

Conn himself, and gives an account of his descendants who will be kings, as well as referring to the coming of Patrick; O'Curry has a discussion of the text. Another form of the prophecy is connected to Mongán; in it he and his queen and their companions are transported to a marvellous house, which contains seven vats of wine. Mongán becomes intoxicated and, filled with prophetic fervor, sings his adventures to his wife, as she has previously requested. The wife's name is Fintigernd, "Fair Lady," a name suspiciously similar to Findabair and Guenhwyvar; Mongán may be recounting the deeds that made him worthy of kingship to the goddess. The text is edited in the appendix to Kuno Meyer's edition of The Voyage of Bran.

[4] Arthur's rash action in granting a boon before he knows the details of the request endangered his marriage on many occasions.

FIVE: THE MULTIPLE QUEEN

[1] Celtic inheritance practices will be examined further in Chapter Six, in the context of Arthur's relationship with his nephews.

[2] Bromwich divides the name Gwen + hwyfar, with the second element cognate to the Irish síabáir "phantom, spirit, fairy" which appears as the second element in Findabair's name (380). Richards and Ford agree with this reading, Richards pointing out that the alternate possibility gwenhwy + fawr, 'great,' paralleled by her

sister's name gwenhwy + vach, 'little,' is probably folk etymology (257). Geoffrey of Monmouth's variant forms of the name, G(u)anhumara, Guenhuuera, Gwenwara, etc. can be explained as a derivation of an early written Welsh Guenhuiuar, for Guenhuibar 'white phantom,' with the -iu- misread as -m- (Bromwich 381).

[3] A drawing of the cross was published in 1607, which seems to be accurate enough to date the cross on epigraphic grounds. The letter forms are consistent neither with Arthur's probable dates nor with the date of the exhumation, and most closely resemble those on Late Saxon coins. A tenth or eleventh century date seems likely.

Alcock (77-80) has suggested two possible explanations of the lettering. If the cross is a conscious forgery, the late twelfth century monks may have realized that such an early inscription should have different letter forms, and copied a tenth century model. Alternatively, the cross may date from the late tenth century. When St. Dunstan was abbot of Glastonbury in the years after 945, he enclosed the ancient cemetery with a masonry wall and raised the area itself. Archaeological excavations in 1962 found the remains of an ancient cemetery of slab-lined graves and a mausoleum, which may well have been demolished at the time of Dunstan's improvements. If local tradition attributed it to Arthur, the monks may well have inscribed the cross and enclosed it in the grave at that time.

[4] Ó Cathasaigh discusses Eithne's sovereignty function

in relation to Cormac quite extensively in The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt.

[5] Loomis notes a number of ways in which descriptions of Morgan are identical to descriptions of Celtic goddesses found in Classical texts.

[6] Another version of the story is told in The Marriage of Sir Gawaine. That manuscript exists only as a fragment, but the outlines of the story appear identical.

[7] Gawain maintains a special relationship with Arthur's sovereignty figures, including Guinevere. His position will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six.

[8] Dennis Moore's article provides a good summary of the discussion, and a description of arguments suggesting Morgan and Bertilak's lady are really the same character.

SIX: ABDUCTORS, DEFENDERS, AND THE FIRST OF MAY

[1] Eithne as a sovereignity figure is more fully discussed in Chapter Five.

[2] Celtic marriage customs are discussed in Chapter Two.

[3] Étaíne is discussed as a sovereignty figure in Chapter Five. Her kidnapper was always Midir, who had been her husband a thousand years earlier in her incarnation as Étaín Echraide.

[4] Scholars frequently refer to the wife-stealing raids of Celtic traditions, such as the one which begins Culhwch and Olwen. It is uncertain how far wife-stealing tales

reflect actual practice and how far the practice is a literary or mythological concept.

[5] Gildas names other kings whose marital record certainly suggests that the possession of sovereignty as the motive for their actions. Vortipor of Demetia was said to have 'violated' his daughter, and Cuneglassus sought to marry his wife's sister. Morris discusses this in terms of marriage to heiresses (202-3).

[6] Speakers are not identified in the original poem. Korrel has suggested the first part of the poem may represent Melwas's appearance at Arthur's court, where he has come to kidnap Guinevere (88). Bromwich thinks the same dialogue may represent Arthur coming to Melwas's court to bring Guinevere home.

[7] See Chapter Two for a full discussion of Valerin's claim.

[8] See note #204 to Lanzelet for a summary. More recently, Korrel has made the same statement.

[9] Even Galehot offers to kidnap the Queen, although the circumstances are different. When Guinevere is accused by the False Guinevere, Galehot tells Lancelot he will give his kingdom of Sorelais to the Queen, carrying her off if necessary (iv 19), so that she and Lancelot can live there safely. Lancelot, however, thinks Guinevere would prefer not to be kidnapped, and forbids the scheme.

[10] Such a formulation may have been more ideal than actual; Binchy adds "doubtless there were variations in

local custom, and in some of the more powerful kingdoms the choice was drastically restricted by the traditional practice of alternation between two or more branches of the royal line" ("Terms" 226). Ó Corráin's appraisal of the historical evidence suggests "succession is determined not by reference to the derbfine as such but by reference to the balance of power amongst the segments of the dynasty" (9), with powerful kings successfully passing the throne to their near relatives. Dalton has discussed the regular alternation of the kingship between the two dynasties of the Uí Néill between 734 and 1022 AD.

[11] His position as Arthur's "sister-son" may make him particularly appropriate as a protector of both Arthur and the realm, personified as Guinevere. Ó Corráin has discussed the particular importance of the sister-son in Irish kinship and kingship systems with particular attention to the relationship of Conchobar and CuChulainn, concluding that the sister-son was often the chosen champion of both the king and the people.

[12] See discussion of Gawain and the shape-changing sovereignty figure in Chapter Five.

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