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A comparative study of magic in the Mabinogion with Anglo-Saxon Archaeology

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Magical Women: A comparative study of magic in the *Mabinogion* with Anglo-Saxon Archaeology

By Olivia Morris-Soper

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the award of the degree MPhil in the Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities, Bristol University, June 2022.

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Abstract

This dissertation deals with magical women in the Middle Welsh collection of stories, commonly known as The *Mabinogion.* It pays particular attention to the tools these women are associated with, including magical rings, magical stones and herbal ointment. This dissertation compares these Welsh Arthurian magical women with earlier Anglo-Saxon cunning women to provide a broader context on female magic. The Anglo-Saxon cunning women are thought to be established magical professionals who specialised in healing magic. They can be recognised in the archaeological record based on their amuletic toolkits. The association of Anglo-Saxon cunning women with specific tools makes it possible to compare these tools with the magical tools found in Middle Welsh literature. The similarities between the two reveal common trends in medieval magic regarding gendered magic and tool use. This dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of magical women and the broader traditions of magical objects and gendered practice in the early medieval period. In order to place the cunning women and the magical women of the *Mabinogion* in the wider context of magical beliefs and practices in the medieval period, French Arthurian literature and Classical material will also briefly be considered.

This dissertation thus employs a multi-disciplinary approach to shed new light on depictions of female magic. Through archaeological analysis and consideration of cunning women and detailed investigation into Welsh Arthurian magical women, I hope to show similarities in tool use and magical status among Anglo-Saxon practices and medieval Welsh magic. These connections, when evident, represent a broader collection of established magical conventions spanning continental Europe at the time. There are, of course, differences between the archaeological evidence and later literary sources, and consideration of the continuities and discontinuities will provide insight into female magic of the early medieval period. By carefully considering magical women in the *Mabinogion* and archaeological cunning women, this research will enhance understanding of how magical women were perceived in the Middle Ages and how they adhere to the common stock of conventions of magical objects and gendered practice seen across the continent.

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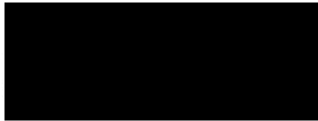
I would firstly like to thank my supervisors, Ronald Hutton and Ad Putter, for their continued support throughout my research, especially amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic. Their expertise in magic has been a blessing, and I am honoured to have studied under their supervision. Secondly, I would like to thank Bristol University for being so accommodating throughout the pandemic. To my mother, thank you for always reading my research and discussing new ideas with me. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Sydney Bull, for his unwavering encouragement throughout my degree. I could not have completed this research without him.

Author’s Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:  DATE: 16.06.22

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Introduction

Magical women of Arthurian romance have long been the focus of critical attention. The names of Morgan le Fay, the Lady of the Lake and Viviene are known by experts and non-experts alike. However, the focus has primarily been on English and French romances and, to a lesser extent, on Geoffrey of Monmouth, in whose *Vita Merlini,* Morgan first appears. This research seeks to contextualise the magical women of the Welsh Arthurian tales of the *Mabinogion* and hopes to shed light on the significance of female magic, thereby adding to the broader context of academic work in this field. Of particular interest to this dissertation is the possible relevance of earlier beliefs and practices surrounding female magic. To explore this earlier tradition, I will read the Arthurian tales of the *Mabinogion* alongside evidence from the early medieval period. To this period belong the established Anglo-Saxon magical practitioners, known as 'cunning women', and examining the archaeological evidence they have left behind allows us to determine whether there was a broader gendered practice in this period. By focusing on magical women and their tools, this research seeks to prove a common stock of conventions for magical objects and gendered practice across these two realms of study and beyond.

The *Mabinogion* is the modern title given to a collection of Welsh prose stories in the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest.[1] Originally translated into English by Lady Charlotte Guest in the nineteenth century, the name 'Mabinogion' has become a convenient name for the collection of medieval tales, each with different authors and dates.[2] My research will take a new approach to magic in the *Mabinogion* and builds on the work of Helen Fulton and Sioned Davies, among other scholars. Rachel Bromwich writes that the Welsh collection of tales that became the *Mabinogion,* and indeed other Welsh texts such as the Triads, 'represent relatively late literary adaptations of what must be regarded as a mere fragment of the cycles of narrative to which they belong'.[3] The Welsh prose narratives were written down in the fourteenth century but at least some of them are likely remnants of oral traditions from centuries earlier than the written texts we consider the earliest forms of the work. Bromwich succinctly and rather poetically describes the stories and text

[1] Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 4-5 c. 1350 (White Book) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College III, c. 1382-1410 (Red Book).

[2] Further discussion on the dates and origins of the tales can be found in Lowri Morgans, 'Peredur son of Efrawg: The Question of Translation and/or Adaptation', in *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature,* eds. Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 403-414.

[3] Rachel Bromwich (ed), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, The Triads of the Island of Britain Fourth Edition,* (Wiltshire: University of Wales Press, 2017), p. lv.

we know; 'its life was the life of the spoken, not the written, word.'[4] Therefore, considering the tales of the *Mabinogion* in a literary context, but also as sources for understanding perceptions of magic and the role of magical women and their tools in early medieval Wales, both in imagination and reality, will help build a more robust overview of magical women during this period. The Anglo-Saxon archaeology of magical women will enhance and further our knowledge of the existence of a toolkit of magical women. The material is of course earlier than the manuscript sources, but given the Anglo-Saxon long history in oral tradition, it is relevant to ask whether the body of evidence we have about the cunning women of the early medieval period yields any comparable data. Focusing on the tools associated with these women, I aim to discuss repeated patterns in both sets of data, thus shedding light on a common magical identity felt across literature and archaeology of the early medieval period.

Magical women in Arthurian literature have more often been compared with enchantresses such as Medea and Circe in Classical literature, and Classical mythology influenced Arthurian magic. Scholars such as Carolyne Larrington, Corinne Saunders, Richard Green, Michelle Sweeney and many other key authors have done significant work in this area. The Classical period also heavily influenced Anglo-Saxon perceptions of magic and medicine, and we can see commonalities across these different cultural spheres. By briefly considering how the Classical world impacted Anglo-Saxon and Welsh magic and medicine, we can further establish how magical female identity was understood in these different spheres of study.

Through medical texts such as Bald's *Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga*, homilies and legal codes of the period, we know that a belief in what we would now call 'magic' was widespread in Anglo-Saxon England.[5] The extensive work of Audrey Meaney on Anglo-Saxon magic and the regular use of amulets discovered within the archaeological record confirms the importance of magic to Anglo-Saxon daily life. Alongside Christine Fell, Tania Dickinson, Andrew Reynolds and Helen Geake, Meaney's work has shed much light on specific magical forms and female practitioners, known as 'cunning women'. These healing, magical women, well attested in archaeological evidence, can be compared with magical women in Arthurian literature and in this dissertation, I do so by focusing on the *Mabinogion*. I thus use a multi-disciplinary approach to consider historical literature, archaeology and even folk practice to contextualise female magic. There are, of course, significant differences between early medieval English and later Welsh cultures. However, there are

[4] Bromwich, p. liv.

[5] For more information on the homilies of the tenth and eleventh centuries by reformers Ælfric and Wulfstan, see Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England Elf Charms in Context* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 74-81.

connections to be made between the magical women in the Anglo-Saxon period and magical women in the *Mabinogion*. To my knowledge, no one has investigated the continuities and discontinuities between these two historical source types, the archaeological and the literary, and I hope to do so with particular attention to magical women and their tools to establish a broader context of magical female tool use.

The tools associated with magical women in archaeological and literary evidence provide the organising principle of this dissertation. We shall look primarily at magical stones, rings, and healing ointment. This structure will help place the magical women of the *Mabinogion* and Anglo-Saxon cunning women within the context of a wider shared magical identity. Furthermore, by briefly considering French Arthurian tales that parallel the stories in the *Mabinogion*, the similarities and differences in magical tool use and the role of magical women may prompt further analysis into a trend of gendered magic in the medieval period.

An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Magic

Firstly, we must consider the term 'magic'. Richard Kieckhefer describes magic as having two forms: natural magic and demonic magic. This distinction separates natural magic into a more 'positive' form, a branch of science that aims to understand the 'hidden aspects of nature' and can be related to healing magic.[6] As the name suggests, demonic magic was associated with demons and the satanic and is, according to Kieckhefer, a 'perversion of religion' that attempts to affect human affairs through demonic correspondence.[7] At first glance, these two forms of magic may appear distinct, but they are not always easy to separate in practice. For example, if healers gather herbs from a forest to cure an ailment, are they practising natural magic, or are they instead summoning demons (with the use of these herbs) to do their bidding? Conversely, are those who practice demonic magic but use herbal or natural resources in their spells not also invoking natural magic? This distinction is challenging today, so it is fair to assume these two magical forms would have been equally difficult to distinguish during the early medieval period. Since Anglo-Saxon magical women were more closely related to healing magic, the term 'magic' generally refers to 'natural magic' within the Anglo-Saxon period, unless otherwise stated.

[6] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) p.1.
[7] Ibid.

Valerie Flint rejects the late-Roman Latin term *magia,* a rejection shared by Imperial Rome and many 'of its most powerful medieval heirs' and acknowledges the difficulties faced when discussing magic due to many terms linked with its processes, some pejorative and others restorative in nature.[8] Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon reformer Ælfric based much of his work on patristic sources, such as the works of St. Augustine, and therefore, the magical 'practices he condemned were continental as much as they were Anglo-Saxon'.[9] Karen Jolly explains how 'the early medieval mind adapted Christian cosmology to Germanic worldviews through Anglo-Saxon language and concepts,' going some way to explaining why there are so many positive and negative terms to describe any practice remotely magical.[10] Ælfric's homilies described magic as a condemnable offence from the Devil, practised by sorcerers and witches. Jolly's analysis confirms that the Anglo-Saxon view of magic was intrinsically linked with continental beliefs and practices and therefore enhances the notion of a tangible connection between Anglo-Saxon magic and a broader continental system of magical tools and practices. There is a middle ground between the medieval opposites of miracle (entirely Christian) and magic (from the Devil), though the distinction between the two ends of the spectrum may seem indistinguishable to a modern audience. Healers often fall into this 'middle practice', combining charms, weather invocations, herbal remedies and magic with Christian miracle and ritual to ward off evil and disease.[11] The transition to 'precious ointment' and magical healing salves found in Arthurian romance, within the *Mabinogion* and beyond, discussed in Chapter 4 of this research, finds logical and historical grounding in the 'middle practice' magic of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Audrey Meaney was one of the foremost scholars in the area of Anglo-Saxon magic in the 1980s. Though recent excavations have uncovered new material, her work remains highly relevant. Meaney's 1981 work *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* collated many examples of apotropaic and amuletic items from across the Anglo-Saxon world.[12] She adopted a multi-disciplinary approach, comparing relevant archaeological examples with period literature and modern folk tales. While Meaney compared Anglo-Saxon material with Norse archaeology, Christian liturgy, legal codes from the period and European archaeological examples, she never compared the material to Arthurian literature, and neither did the researchers who developed her work, such as Andrew Reynolds, Christine Fell, Helen Geake, Tania Dickinson.

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[8] Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.
[9] Karen Louise Jolly *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England Elf Charms in Context* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 86.
[10] Jolly 1996, p. 86, and further discussion on Anglo-Saxon terms on magic can be found in Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present* (London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 158.
[11] Jolly 1996, pp. 90-91.
[12] Audrey Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones,* BAR British Series, 96 (Oxford: B.A.R, 1981).

I seek to explore the possible connections and establish Anglo-Saxon magic as a relevant context to the Arthurian world and the supernatural elements therein. Using Meaney's seminal work as a base, I will focus especially on the tools associated with magical women. It must also be noted that the terms 'magic' and 'magical' will be used when discussing both archaeology and literature. However, we cannot confidently label any archaeological item as magical as we do not know its original context of use. Instead, we can assume a potential magical function behind an amulet, or a tool based on how unique or unusual it is in the archaeological record. Therefore, caution must be applied when considering archaeological and historical 'magical' rings and 'magical' stones.

An Introduction to the *Mabinogion*

The *Mabinogion* is a heterogenous group of stories, and not all of the stories are relevant to this study. I will consider two of the *Mabinogion's* Arthurian Romances, translated by Sioned Davies; *Peredur son of Efrog* and *The Lady of the Well* (often referred to as 'Owain').[13] However, *Geraint, son of Erbin* will not be included as there are no specific references to magical women and their tools. Two further Arthurian texts in the collection, *How Culhwch Won Olwen* and *Rhonabwy's Dream,* will also be included. *How Culhwch Won Olwen* likely predates the romances, and so it is essential to consider. Helen Fulton states that the language in *Culhwch* is comparable with other contemporaneous dateable texts, 'such as court poetry and Welsh laws'. She suggests this story was written down somewhere between 1090 and 1100, likely in a monastic centre of southwest Wales.[14] *Culhwch*, therefore, predates Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittanniae,* which makes it a highly significant Arthurian text. The story is found in the Red Book of Hergest, which also includes a Welsh translation of Geoffrey's history. This association reinforces the connection between English and Welsh Arthurian literature.

Fulton suggests that *Rhonabwy's Dream* was written early in the thirteenth century as a political satire, and it demonstrates an awareness of Geoffrey's history by making deliberate allusions to the earlier text.[15] The text states that no bard knows the tale without the book, and when Gwydion arrives at the court of Pryderi, the passage describes him as a leader of a company of bards, dressed

[13] Sioned Davies (translator), *The Mabinogion,* Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. ix. All further references will be to this edition.
[14] Helen Fulton, 'Magic and the Supernatural in Early Welsh Arthurian Narrative: Culhwch ac Olwen and Breuddwyd Rhonabwy' in *Arthurian Literature XXX* eds. R. Barber, N. Bryant et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), p. 8.
[15] Fulton 2013, p. 8.

as a storyteller ('well-informed' person).[16] Though the bardic tradition has more solid written evidence in Irish cultural history, mentions of bardic lore in Welsh literature are rarer, even though it is likely that bards played a role in the transmission of older stories before they were written down, perhaps evident in tales like *Rhonabwy's Dream.*[17] It must also be noted that the Welsh Arthurian romances listed above have debatable origins. They show similarities with Chrétien de Troyes's French texts of the later twelfth century. *Peredur* directly corresponds with Chrétien's *Perceval, Story of the Grail*, *The Lady of the Well* is consistent with Chrétien's *Yvain, The Knight of the Lion,* and *Geraint* is the Welsh equivalent of *Erec and Enide*.[18] Whether the French or the Welsh were written first is a subject keenly debated among Arthurian scholars. The majority of the Welsh texts are later in date than the French, suggesting the Welsh versions were adaptations of the French. However, the Welsh texts demonstrate an awareness of earlier forms of Welsh literature and oral traditions, indicating that the tales were older than the two manuscripts we recognise. Therefore, other manuscripts must have existed, perhaps with much earlier dates. For example, the first mention of Geraint, son of Erbin, can be found in a much earlier series of *englynion* (short stanzas used in Welsh poetry). Scholars believe the versions of Geraint found in the White Book and the Red Book bear similarities to the earlier poetry that may date between c. 800-1100.[19] The differences between the texts are likely due to repeated oral transmission.[20] Therefore, the French/Welsh 'chicken or egg' debate is still relevant to these texts.

This research will take a thematic approach when considering magical women and magical objects within the *Mabinogion.*[21] When considering magical women in the *Mabinogion,* we must first consider recognised magical women of the Anglo-Saxon period to better understand their later literary successors.

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[16] Bromwich, p. lxix.

[17] Bromwich, p. lxix. Bromwich references the Triad of Three Skilful Bards at Arthur's Court, namely Myrddin, son of Morfryn, Myrddin Emrys and Taliesin, p. 228.

[18] Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances: Translated with an Introduction and Notes by William W. Kibler (Erec and Enide translated by Carleton W. Carroll)* (London: Penguin, 1991).

[19] Nerys Ann Jones, 'Arthurian References in Early Welsh Poetry' in *Arthur in the Celtic Languages, The Arthurian Legend in Celtic Literatures and Traditions* ed. by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Erich Poppe (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), p. 18.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Though there are other Welsh Arthurian manuscripts, these are not included within this research as they do not mention any magical female characters, or any magical tools used by such women. For more information on other Welsh Arthurian literature, please refer to: Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Erich Poppe (editors), *Arthur in the Celtic Languages, The Arthurian Legend in Celtic Literatures and Traditions* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019).

Chapter 1: Cunning Women

From the Old English *cunnan* meaning 'know', the term 'cunning woman' refers to a female with special knowledge.[22] Cunning women were a particular group who practised magic for clients, predominantly as a side-line rather than a full-time profession. Strongly associated with the use of amulets and curing stones, cunning women can be seen in Anglo-Saxon archaeology, singled out due to their deviant or amuletic burials.[23] W.L. Hildburgh succinctly describes an 'amulet' as 'a material object through whose retention there is sought the averting of some result displeasing… or the obtaining of some outcome pleasing' and that the 'primary retention of the object [is] for the sake of its presumed apotropaic, medicinal or magical virtues'.[24] Andrew Reynolds describes 'distinctly furnished women found in the prone (face-down) position [as] so-called 'cunning women''.[25] Their 'distinctly furnished' grave assemblages often include a bag or pouch containing items usually of a non-functional nature, often including amulets. Meaney describes these magical assemblages in more detail.[26]

Cunning women may have been given deviant burials because 'of their perceived power in life, or even because at their deaths they had passed on the mantle of wisdom to younger women, and such a tradition required a guarantee that the former holder of that wisdom would not return to the world of the living'.[27] Cunning women burials suggest that prone burial during the Anglo-Saxon period was not merely used as punishment, though we do not know the whole nature of the burial rite. Instead, it could be considered a 'positive' technique used for influential individuals, supporting the notion that cunning women were of an esteemed social status. This burial practice appears overtly pagan due to the lack of Christian rites and the presence of many grave goods. However, the range of dates of burials proves that this tradition continued into the Christian Conversion period, and therefore remained prevalent amongst the Christian handling of the dead. Reynolds states that 'the administration of folk magic or religion changed hands presumably from powerful individuals such as the proposed 'cunning women' to churchmen and women'.[28] According to Ronald Hutton, the Anglo-Saxon period was 'a world of fluid religious identities' where people picked 'between

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[22] Peter S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English,* Third Edition (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 301.
[23] Meaney, p.4.
[24] W. L. Hildburgh, 'Psychology Underlying the Employment of Amulets in Europe', *Folklore,* LXI-LXII (1951), p 231.
[25] Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 73.
[26] Meaney, 1981.
[27] Reynolds, p. 90.
[28] Reynolds, p. 90.

religious systems [and developed] their own idiomatic and personal manifestations of each'.[29] This fluidity reinforces the idea of pagan and Christian magical motifs coexisting. However, it is difficult to distinguish magic from religion, and indeed it seems to have been the Christian Church that tried to drive a wedge between the two.[30] Were these women practising their magical arts into the Conversion period without censure from the Church, or were they merely remnants of an older schema, handled with superstition (prone and stoned burials implying a fear of the deceased, as will be described shortly) despite the prevalence of Christianity? Given their presence and deviant form of burial in later Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, does this prove that cunning women prevailed and maintained older pagan customs amidst the new religious reform or that they were shunned? Most importantly, did these cunning women directly influence the representation of Arthurian sorceresses?

Cunning Women Burials

Anglo-Saxon female apotropaic graves sometimes contain crystal balls made of quartz or rock crystal (a form of quartz). These are overtly magical rare items, and their presence can act as a proxy for cunning or high-status women. These crystal ball graves also contained rock-crystal, glass or amber beads, finger-rings, roman coins, perforated spoons, and gold braid.[31] In Kentish burials (Kent having the highest deposition of crystal balls in Britain during this period), all the crystal ball graves that could be sexed or gendered were female. The age ranges of these females were from twenty to twenty-five years old to forty to forty-five years old. On numerous occasions, their burials were deviant, for example, in a double grave with another female, stoned (large stones placed on the body) or prone.[32] The widespread furnishing of Anglo-Saxon graves had primarily ceased by c. 730 AD. A mixture of Christian and pagan traditions merged until the predominant burial tradition was established as what is now recognised as purely Christian.[33] The cunning women burials that I refer to mainly predate 730 AD. However, this does not indicate that cunning women ceased to exist after this period. We simply cannot judge specific burials to be cunning women due to the lack of grave goods in the later Anglo-Saxon period. The Christian period favoured supine inhumations, like the

[29] Ronald Hutton, 'Afterword, Caveats and Cutures' in *Signals of Belief in Early England, Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited* edited by Martin Carver, Alex Seamark and Sarah Semple (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), p. 210.
[30] Karen Jolly et. al, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* (London: Athlone, 2002), p. 16.
[31] Olivia Morris-Soper, 'An exploration into the significance of crystal balls in Anglo-Saxon females graves in Kent' (unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge, Jesus College, 2017), pp 68-69.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England c. 600- c.850* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports 261, 1997), p. 134.

pagan Anglo-Saxons (although the variation during the earlier period is far more significant than after the conversion) and a west-east alignment with the head in the west. Christianity did not favour grave goods. The conversion to Christianity began in England in 597 AD, initiated by Augustine. [34] Although furnished burials ceased in the eighth century, the presence of cunning women in cemeteries before this date were still during the Conversion period, and so were buried alongside Christians and included within 'Christian' cemeteries indicating some form of acceptance within these communities.

'Stoned' burials are deviant burials where the corpse is covered with stones and is a relatively rare practice.[35] There are four known female stoned burials, considered by Reynolds to be cunning women.[36] The young woman buried in Grave 29 on a peripheral location at the Abingdon cemetery was interred with iron objects from a chatelaine (a hook-like clasp worn by women for hanging keys and other small utility objects), an iron bag ring, an ivory distaff-ring and two disc brooches. She was buried prone and stoned with around fifty large stones, and she is the only known example of a prone burial treated in this way.[37] Though the quality of the objects in her grave did not denote great wealth, her prone-stoned burial demonstrates extreme precaution surrounding her burial, which is why she is considered a cunning woman. The prone burial of a sixth-century female at least forty years old in Grave 105 at Broughton Lodge possessed a beaver tooth pendant, among the more standardised Anglo-Saxon female 'kit' of grave goods.[38] Grave 18 at Lechlade cemetery housed a female aged between twenty-five and thirty with another rich array of grave goods. Her grave lay at the edge of the central deposition of graves and was filled with tightly packed large stones over her body. Her grave also contained an amuletic beaver tooth pendant (and a fragment of a second one), a fragment of a Roman altar, several silver finger-rings and three Roman coins.[39] The grave also contained over fifty objects, including an iron chatelaine, ivory and iron bag rings and a silver-coated tube.[40] Though stoning burials may be rationalised as protecting the corpse from wandering, the amuletic nature of the beaver tooth pendant and Roman altar fragment also suggests a high level of fear attributed to the female, possibly due to presumed magical power in life. Lechlade cemetery also includes Grave 71, another amuletic furnished female burial with grave goods, including two

[34] C.J.S. Thompson, *Magic and Healing: the history and folklore of magical healing practices from Herb-lore and incantations to rings and precious stones* (New York: Bell Pub, 1989), p. 50.
[35] Reynolds, p. 81.
[36] Reynolds, p. 83.
[37] Reynolds, pp. 185-186.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Reynolds, p. 194.
[40] Angela Boyle, et al. *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade, Gloucestershire*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, No. 33. (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, for the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 1998), pp. 61-63.

hundred uncut polished garnet gemstones and a cowrie shell.[41] Inhumation 3 at Lechlade was also a furnished female grave with two cowrie shells (and a silver bead). It would be fair to assume these two graves are amuletic based on the symbolism of cowrie shells. Cowrie shells have been found associated with human burial as early as the Upper Palaeolithic, where pairs of cowrie shells were arranged on the body at Laugerie-Basse in Dordogne.[42] There are many examples of cowrie shells in Anglo-Saxon graves, and they are predominantly associated with adult women, though a few have been found with children.[43] Cowrie shells indicate continental trade, and they are commonly found across Europe during the early medieval period. The cowrie has been associated with various symbols throughout history. Their assumed use as fertility amulets (primarily used by women) in Anglo-Saxon England is most pertinent to this discussion.[44]

It is worth considering the repeated appearance of Roman objects, rings and stones throughout these graves. These are relevant when compared with Arthurian magical women, given the frequent literary references to Classical mythology and the magical nature of rings and stones.

When looking at the Anglian cemetery of West Heslerton, we can see two more examples of potential cunning women based on amuletic items. Grave 113 and 132, both prone females, were buried with common grave goods such as brooches, but both also possessed walnut amulets encased in copper-alloy cradles and amber beads.[45] In addition, Grave 113 also possessed a beaver tooth (similar to Lechlade Grave 18) and a bead made from antlers.[46] The walnut amulets bear an uncanny resemblance to crystal balls in metal slings, featured in other cunning woman graves in Kent, and were likely used as part of the cunning women's healing toolkit or to denote their status and role within the community. Given these examples of deviant burials for cunning women, it is fair to state there was a significant amount of superstition associated with their burial, likely due to their perceived power in life. William of Malmesbury's account of the 'Witch of Berkeley' in the *Gesta Regum* in 1125 AD describes a woman 'well-versed in witchcraft, who was not ignorant of ancient auguries' who, when buried, had her corpse sewn into the skin of a stag, laid on its back in a stone coffin. The lid was fastened with lead, iron and stone, with three large iron chains around it.[47]

[41] Reynolds, p. 194.
[42] Meaney p. 123.
[43] Meaney, p. 124.
[44] Meaney, p. 127. For further explanations of the symbolism of cowrie shells, please refer to Meaney.
[45] Reynolds, p. 199.
[46] Reynolds, p. 199.
[47] Anthony Davies, 'Witches in Anglo-Saxon England: Five Case Histories', in Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England, ed. D.G. Scragg, (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1989).

Despite its inherent biases, this account provides evidence of the superstition surrounding magical women, particularly in death.[48]

The most famous cunning woman, buried in Grave HB2 of Bidford-on-Avon, has been described by Tania Dickinson.[49] The young adult female was buried on her back with her head tilted to the right. Her grave assemblage contained glass and amber beads in such a considerable number that they would have created a span of 142mm in length if they had been strung together. In contrast, the second selection of beads would have created another 88mm span, possibly worn as a double layer of necklaces.[50] Several of these beads were of Roman origin, while the amber among her possessions was more indicative of the sixth century.[51] The grave contained twelve small bucket pendants beneath the left shoulder blade, and a potential bag was discovered. It is always difficult to categorically state the presence of a bag, as most would have been made from organic material which decomposes in the soil context of a burial. However, the presence of metalwork akin to that found on a bag is usually a signifier. Bucket pendants are generally considered amuletic and symbolic, as much as they are ornamental and are most commonly associated with females.[52] They have been compared to seventh century amuletic and potentially magical 'thread boxes' containing herbs and scraps of fabric. Evidence shows animal-fibre thread and a dark brown substance in the buckets of grave HB2.[53] There was also an 'antler cone' and unusual knife, different from the standard knives found in graves due to the long bone handle decorated with bull's eyes. The knife resembled a scalpel more than an everyday knife.[54] Dickinson's attribution of cunning woman status to HB2 is based upon the amuletic nature of the bucket pendants, possible amulet-bag, 'badge-like bib' array of beads, the antler cone and unusual knife found with the body, which could all be tools of her craft.[55] HB2 provides material evidence of a young adult female likely practising some healing magic and divination, reinforcing Meaney's theories about Anglo-Saxon amuletic magic.[56]

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[48] We must appreciate William of Malmesbury's Christian biases against witches in the account. Cunning women and witches are not inherently the same, but the source still aids understanding of the beliefs regarding magical women.

[49] Tania Dickinson, 'An Anglo-Saxon 'Cunning Woman' from Bidford-on-Avon', in *In Search of Cult, Archaeological investigations in honour of Philip Rahtz*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993).

[50] Dickinson, p.45.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Dickinson, p. 51, and Meaney, pp. 166-168.

[53] Dickinson, p. 52, and Meaney, pp. 184-189.

[54] Dickinson, p. 52.

[55] Dickinson, p. 53.

[56] Ibid.

It is not possible to detail every furnished amuletic female grave in this research. The examples above are but a few significant deviant burials containing amulets that may have been the graves of cunning women. It is also pertinent to note that mortuary practices were performed by the living, either to commemorate the deceased or to console those left alive. The mortuary ritual, whether cremation, inhumation or deviant, can be seen as a symbol of the 'socio-political identity of the deceased' and the symbolic choices surrounding the funerary rite were selected by the living.[57] Grave goods were thus deposited for many reasons, including 'gifts for the dead to take into the next world, or to comfort them in this one, while they wait to make the journey, or as items too intimately associated with the deceased to be retained by the living without a fear of being troubled by the dead person's spirit'.[58] Though we cannot be sure why grave goods were placed in burials, the close association between these items and the deceased is clear and significant. These cunning women offer an interesting point of comparison for magical women in Arthurian literature. The amuletic items found with these cunning women in the cemetery records can be compared with the magical objects associated with magical females in the literary record. The fact that cunning women are both young and old matches depictions in the *Mabinogion* of youthful magical maidens, for example, those found in *Peredur son of Efrog* and *The Lady of the Well*, and older women or hags, such as the toothless hag in *How Culhwch won Olwen.*

It would be incorrect to consider all female furnished graves containing amulets as cunning women graves. The presence of common amulets amidst an otherwise normal burial 'kit' marks the grave of a superstitious woman instead of a cunning woman. Meaney's work suggests that women were generally partial to amulets. Whether or not amulets were more fashionable among women or whether women were more 'at risk' in society and therefore favoured charms for protection, the number of amulets found in female Anglo-Saxon graves is striking.[59] Therefore, the ownership of an amulet does not indicate a cunning woman. Cunning women's graves have significant numbers of amulets which are particularly unusual or rare and are often deviant burials. These features mark them as more heavily involved with magic than the 'average' superstitious woman.

[57] Howard Williams, 'At the Funeral' in *Signals of Belief in Early England, Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisted,* ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), pp. 67-68.
[58] Hutton, 2010, p. 203.
[59] Meaney, p. 32.

Crystal Balls

Throughout history, humans have collected and assigned special meanings to specific objects. Historical objects, such as the Roman intaglios or coins, or even smooth pebbles, are often found in Anglo-Saxon graves, thus demonstrating that Anglo-Saxon people considered these items important. Though briefly mentioned that crystal balls, relatively rare in Anglo-Saxon England, can be used as a signifier for cunning women, it is worth considering crystal balls in greater detail.

Grave 391b at the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Buckland Dover in Kent contained a female skeleton between twenty and twenty-five years old with a rich grave assemblage. Within her 'kit' of burial items, there was a crystal ball in a silver-gilt sling, a Roman intaglio and a chalk bead amongst silver and gold pendants, brooches, nails and studs, chain fragments, knives and one hundred and fifteen amber beads and sixty-three glass beads.[60] The cemetery of Buckland Dover contains upwards of one hundred and seventy graves dating from the late fifth to the mid-eighty century.[61] Though the rest of the assemblage of Grave 391b is characteristic of other female graves at this site and of the period, the rock crystal ball marks it as somewhat unusual. There are only between twenty and thirty crystal balls (both rock crystal and quartz, two very similar minerals) found in England from this period, with the majority found in Kent. Grave 391b was also significant because it was a double burial. However, the second individual, a female aged between thirty and thirty-five years old (Burial 391a), was interred much later than the first, younger female. This double interment marks the grave as deviant and of interest, as deviant burials are often because of atypical characteristics of the deceased, for example, superstition.[62] Furthermore, the later burial appears to be a deliberate placing rather than an accidental intrusion. The term 'deviant burial' was first applied to an early medieval context by Helen Geake, referring to unusual or 'non-normative' graves.[63] The later interment of the second female could have been based on ancestor worship.[64] However, given the grave goods associated with skeleton 391b, I would argue that the later female could have been interred in the same grave because they were both practising cunning women.

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[60] K. Parfitt, *Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, Dover Excavations 1994 (*Canterbury: Canterbury Archaeological Trust, 2012), p. 437.

[61] V. I. Evison, *Dover: The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery,* Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, Archaeological Report 3 (London: Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, 1987).

[62] Reynolds, p. 38.

[63] Helen Geake, 'Burial Practice in Seventh- and Eighth-Century England' in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by M. Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), p. 87.

[64] H. Lüdemann, 'Mehrfachbelegte Gräber im frühen Mittelalter' in *Fundeberichte aus Baden-Württemberg* 19.1, (1994), p. 515.

Though there are no mentions of crystal balls in the *Mabinogion*, Anglo-Saxon female graves containing crystal balls are useful. Crystal balls can be used as a marker for interesting, high status or, most importantly, cunning women burials. Crystal balls are commonly found on the continent dating to a similar period. Whether the English crystal balls were native to Britain or imported from the continent is contentious. Richardson wrote that the crystal balls of Kent demonstrated extremely high-status female wealth and power, and this was expressed through the ownership and display of locally made, intricate crystal balls.[65] However, Huggett considered the English crystal balls as evidence of high-status trade as there could be no local source to manufacture the items, thus implying a continental origin**.**[66] Wherever their source, we can consider the high-status wealth and power of the deceased female correct. Crystal balls found in female grave contexts regularly have an associated perforated spoon, found with the crystal between the knees or somewhere around the waist of a skeleton, as though suspended from a belt. The crystal ball and spoon association is common in both continental and British examples. The spoon was likely used as a sieve while creating herbal remedies or medicines. Both items were probably worn on a belt over clothing. They would have been visible to onlookers and thus potentially worn to signify status as the items were proudly on show rather than merely carried in a bag. Thus, the display and use of crystal balls can be considered part of a toolkit. Whether this kit displays the power and wealth of an individual or something more specifically associated with trade is why this discussion is relevant to my research.

We must remember that grave assemblages are representations of the dead by the living. The grave goods placed within the grave are done so by an individual's family, friends, or mourners. Therefore, we cannot with certainty say that a specific item was owned and used by the deceased. However, it is reasonable to assume, particularly with unusual items such as crystal balls and perforated spoons, that these were placed within the grave because of their close association with the deceased.

The antiquarian Reverend J. Douglas wrote extensively on crystal balls as magical instruments in the eighteenth century, particularly those associated with the 'use of a sieve [perforated spoon] and shears' in divination and scrying.[67] Douglas believed that Anglo-Saxon crystal balls were used in divination since 'the ancients', implying that crystal balls have always been used for such activity. He states that scholars also used crystal balls for divination during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. He draws attention to Dr Dee and Mr Kelly, famed magicians and astrologers of the Elizabethan

[65] Andrew Richardson, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Kent* (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 2005).
[66] J. Huggett, 'Imported grave goods and the early Anglo-Saxon economy' in *Medieval Archaeology,* vol 32. (1988), p. 70.
[67] J. Douglas, *Nenia Britannica. A Sepulchral History of Great Britain from the Earliest Period to its General Conversion to Christianity (*London: John Nichols, 1793), p. 6.

court. The British Museum possesses a 'how-to' guide on a crystal ball owned by Mr Hodges, who used his crystal ball for astronomical research in the unpublished manuscript (British Museum No. 3849). Mr Hodges describes how precisely to use a crystal ball for conjuration in connection with the sun and even how the sphere can help uncover thefts of treasure. The manuscript is written as a scientific document, and Douglas, among other eighteenth-century scholars, likely trusted this analysis of magical spheres. Douglas even writes, 'I trust little doubt will now remain that the crystal ball was a magical instrument, perhaps used similarly to the one described in the [British Museum] manuscript'.[68] Despite his close association with the Christian church, as Douglas was a Reverend, he even owned a crystal ball exhumed from an Anglo-Saxon grave during one of his excavations. However, he wrote that he was too 'afraid of tampering with the devil' to practically use it and instead invited other scholars to visit and experiment should they wish. [69] Douglas was an antiquarian, writing during the eighteenth century, and thus his research must be considered with a pinch of salt, for it is not scientifically accurate. The manuscript from the British Museum which he referred to must be approached with caution also. However, his work supports the idea that the magical use of crystal balls has been well-established for centuries. It is worth asking whether they were possibly magical items as early as the Anglo-Saxon period.

Chapter 2: Magical Stones

Stones with magical powers are common in Arthurian literature, and contemporaneous audiences would have widely recognised the motif. The term 'stone' can refer to crystals, jewels or even rock. Crystals were believed to have magical and powerful properties in the Classical and medieval periods and commonly occur in romances.

Peredur, Son of Efrog: A Stone for the Monster

Peredur includes a description of the bestowal of a magical stone upon our hero by a woman. The magical woman in this encounter is described as the 'fairest woman [Peredur] had ever seen'.[70]

[68] Douglas, p. 18.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Sioned Davies, p. 89. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations and references to the text are taken from Sioned Davies' translation.

Sitting on a mound, apparently waiting for Peredur, the maiden explains that she knows what Peredur is about to do and where he is going (in this instance, it is to kill the monster in a cave that is tormenting the nearby court of the Sons of the King of Suffering). She tells him that he will be unsuccessful in his mission and die because of the serpent's cunning. There is a stone pillar at the mouth of the monster's cave, and the serpent lurks behind it. No one who enters the cave can see the fiend, but it can see all and kills anyone who dares enter with a 'poisonous stone spear,' before they even have a chance to fight. In return for a promise from Peredur to love her above all other women, the maiden offers to give him a "stone, so that you will see the monster when you enter, but it will not see you" (p. 89). Peredur gratefully accepts and explains that he already loved her at first sight, so his promise is an easy one. When asked where she can be found after the monster is dead, she replies that Peredur should "look towards India," and with that, she places the stone in his hand and disappears (p. 89).

The maiden is a classic example of the typical magically gifted female figure who aids (or indeed hampers) a heroic male character, a trope commonly found throughout twelfth-century Western Europe. Her background and origin remain a mystery, akin to this trope. Peredur's encounter provides insight into magical women and how they are perceived. Firstly, the woman is described as a beautiful 'maiden' with whom Peredur falls instantly in love. Her beauty enraptures the hero, and he is instantly devoted to her. Her maidenhood implies her virtue and eligibility to become a wife. She appears to be aware of prophecy or destiny, for she knows of Peredur's arrival before he arrives at the mound where she sits. She also knows of his quest without explanation. Subsequently, she knows its outcome, without Peredur uttering a word or demonstrating any combat skills from which she could assume an outcome. Her foresight could be reasoned away with a logical explanation; that she had seen many men die by the monster's cunning, and she assumed that this was Peredur's task as he was clearly a knight and would likely seek to rid the land of such an evil. This rationalisation is reasonable had it not been for the magical stone she generously gives to Peredur. She sits with the stone pre-emptively, waiting specifically to bestow her gift, implying that her motivation is more than just kindness. Her position near the cave suggests that she had been either waiting specifically for Peredur or for a chance knight to come to the monster's lair. The former implies knowledge and awareness of fate, specifically of Peredur's particular destiny. The latter suggests her desire for the monster's death and hopefulness that a knight will pass her soon. The latter seems less likely as it is unclear why the monster's death would benefit the maiden. Instead, it is fair to assume her incentive is due to an awareness of the future. Her price for helping Peredur is that she gains his unwavering love. This desire is somewhat reminiscent of Classical enchantresses like Circe, who seek romantic reparation for their help, and even more relevant to the enchantresses of high medieval

literature in general. The maiden's bestowal of the magical stone that grants the beholder invisibility from the monster demonstrates a distinctive use of tools that relate to the amuletic stone possession of Anglo-Saxon females, and indeed the use of stones as tools by Anglo-Saxon cunning women. Finally, after the stone is in Peredur's possession, she 'disappears'. No specific detail is given of the manner or nature of her disappearance. It could be a compelling way of describing her walking out of sight, or it could mean a literal and magical disappearance. The latter seems more likely as the action was sudden and immediately after she places the stone in Peredur's hand. Vanishing this way makes the maiden more mysterious and, indeed, more magical.

Whether this is an illusion, a form of magical transportation or sudden invisibility, it is once again evocative of Classical enchantresses that can shape-shift and even fly.[71] Influenced by these enchantresses, Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgen is described as possessing similar talents, and it could be argued that this maiden falls into the same category of magical women as Morgen.[72] Though I am not suggesting that the Welsh author was in any way reworking Monmouth's classic, it is interesting that a similarity of general characterisation is present. It suggests perhaps an older and more folkloric identity that authors recognise, even those from separate spheres. It is also worth mentioning for lucidity that Classical enchantresses are often goddesses, whereas the maiden in Peredur appears to be human. She is not described as a sorceress, enchantress, or even a witch, which is common when discussing twelfth-century magical women. The term 'maiden' implies mortality. However, she wants to be loved 'above all other women'. This phrase is evocative of the language used by the fae in romances.[73] Could the maiden be more fae than mortal when we consider her disappearance, awareness of the future, and magical stone bestowal? Unfortunately, the episode does not go into more detail to help answer some of these questions.

Rhonabwy's Dream: Magic Stones

It is worth considering other instances of magical stones not associated with women in the Mabinogion for comparative purposes.

[71] Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 9.
[72] Geoffrey of Monmouth and Basil Clarke (trans.), *Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press for the Language and Literature Committee of the Board of Celtic Studies, 1973), p. 101.
[73] For further information on fairies in medieval romance, see James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance,* 1st edition (The New Middle Ages) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Rhonabwy's Dream focuses heavily on male characters and their magical items. Arthur's possession of magical items is significant and likely a strategic indication of his power and status. Therefore, it would stand to reason that his squires, chosen in many instances to represent Arthur, should also be richly equipped. During Arthur's *gwyddbwyll* game with Owain, one of Arthur's squires rides to meet with Arthur, and he wears 'a golden helmet with magic sapphires in it' (p. 223). After a few more rounds of their game, another squire rides to speak with Arthur on the subject of Owain's ravens. This squire wears a 'shiny helmet of yellow latten with shining crystals in it, and on top of the helmet an image of a griffin with magic stones in its head' (p. 224). *Rhonabwy's Dream* ends with another mention of magical stones, describing why 'no one knows the dream – neither poet nor storyteller - without a book, because of the number of colours on the horses, and the many unusual colours both on the armour and their trappings, and on the precious mantles and the magic stones' (p. 226). This final statement provides excellent insight into the nature of the tale itself. The catalogue portion of the text is intricately detailed and so complicated that it can only be accurately recalled when reading from a book that lists the elegant colours and designs of armour and horses and, finally, inventories of magical stones. Recording the stones as the final item of the list of essential details suggests crucial importance. Though the magic stones and crystals are described as part of the armour of Arthur's squires, no mention is made of their use. They appear to be merely placed for decorative purposes. The repetitive structure of the tale includes many repeated visits by squires. Each one appears more grandly dressed than the former. Before Arthur's squires arrived, Owain's squires had similarly entered the gaming tent, each more elaborately dressed than the last. The crucial distinction between Owain's men and Arthur's men is that the latter had magic stones whereas the former dressed in expensive garb, without any magical suggestion. Thus, as Emperor, Arthur possessed magical items befitting his status. However, other knights and nobility only possessed these items if they directly represented Arthur elsewhere (or, in other tales, when female characters bestowed them). The suggestion, therefore, is that magical items bestow prestige. The fact that women possess and bestow such items (those befitting an emperor) means that women were considered prestigious characters. If the female character belongs to the ambiguous category of the fae, somewhere between human and superhuman, this prestige still applies.

It must be noted that the magic and supernatural nature of *Rhonabwy's Dream* is found only within the context of the dream. The tale contrasts with the magical realism, for example, found throughout *How Culhwch won Olwen,* which will be discussed later, where supernatural ability and magical power were inherent in the Arthurian world. It is essential to note this distinction when comparing different forms of magic. *Rhonabwy's* supernatural and satirical nature is very different from the story of *Culhwch.*

Precious Stones in Archaeology

Audrey Meaney considered magical stones as ‘mineral amulets’, and they are commonly found within Anglo-Saxon graves. We have limited information on the Arthurian depiction of magical stones, and visual details such as colour or clarity are often left to the audience’s imagination. Therefore, when considering mineral amulets, we must make some assumptions. It is reasonable to assume that medieval authors would have noted if a magical stone had a distinctive and deliberate colour. Therefore, it is reasonable to rule out minerals such as amber, chalk, jet or brightly coloured crystals. Instead, the focus is more likely on quartz, natural agates or stone. If we consider the French tale of *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* compared with the *Mabinogion’s Peredur,* the French magical stone is set within a ring, whereas the Welsh stone is not a part of any jewellery. For this reason, quartz is the most likely mineral to be found both in jewellery and as an individual pebble as it is colourless and can be shaped into jewellery and naturally occurs in pebble form. It is reasonable to assume, that as the ring/stone in both tales serves the same function, the mineral would be the same.

Quartz is one of the most frequently occurring precious stones found in Anglo-Saxon graves. It is found in the form of faceted beads, spheres and pebbles (sometimes pierced for suspension).[74] For example, crystal balls and cowrie shells have only been found in female graves, indicating a gendered use of the amulets. This association aligns with the female proclivity in Arthurian literature of owning magical stones. Meaney describes many Anglo-Saxon graves containing quartz in her chapter on Mineral Amulets and the potential use of quartz beads as spindle-whorls, jewellery, currency and amulets.[75] It is worth noting that Meaney considers rock crystal and quartz to have almost identical properties, as both minerals are of very similar visual and chemical composition, and they are included within the same categorisation within her research. Quartz is commonly found, highly prized, and can be used for jewellery, amulets, status-signifiers (for example, spindle-whorls signifying female power) and can be faceted into beads or stones. Therefore, the stone is a possible contender for the kind found in Arthurian magical rings, though since Arthurian writers did not specify quartz, this must remain a matter for speculation.

When describing Tumulus II at Chatham Lines cemetery in Kent, Douglas refers to a grave with a perforated spoon and ten silver wire rings with glass beads. He noted that ‘the pendant stones were supposed to contain magical virtues’.[76] This analysis directly relates to Pliny’s discussion on

[74] Meaney 1981, p. 77.
[75] Meaney p. 77.
[76] Douglas, p. 7.

'molochites', known as malachite, a green stone often imitated in glass, used as a protection charm to prevent harm, primarily for young children.[77] Thus, we see a connection between the Classical world, Anglo-Saxon magical amuletic rings, and Arthurian literature's magical rings. Furthermore, Douglas describes six rock-crystal beads found in the same tumulus, positioned near the skeleton's radius and ulna, which he states were 'appropriated to some mystical hymeneal purpose'.[78] These beads, likely worn as a bracelet given their positioning, were, according to Douglas, worn to attract a husband or ease marital stress for reasons he does not explain. Though not magical, his analysis suggests an amuletic purpose if the crystal beads are considered to ease stress. The association with 'hymeneal' and the attraction of a husband or marital links prove that Douglas considers this apotropaic grave female. The connection between furnished female burials with amuletic items reinforces the connection between later Arthurian magical women.[79]

Precious stones were thought to possess natural magical powers, such as healing or invisibility. Joan Evans writes how the distinction between magic and religion must also be considered alongside science, which intersects both genres when considering the classification of amulets and magical jewels.[80] Popular in the early Middle Ages, lapidaries described the magical virtues of minerals and stones.[81] Evans writes, 'the magical properties of stones and gems is … of immemorial antiquity'.[82] Many Babylonian, Ancient Greek, Hebrew and Classical texts detail the magical properties of stones and how their power can be used or heightened with carvings.[83] Many of these ancient beliefs were still prevalent in the Middle Ages, and as with medicine, much was adopted from the Classical world. Indeed, many magical properties of minerals are, in fact, equally medicinal. St. Isidore, Bishop of Seville, wrote in the early seventh century, the same period as many cunning women's graves. Isidore states that *memphitis* when powdered and drunk in vinegar, will enable a man to resist torture. G*alactite*, a white stone that smells of milk, increases a woman's milk flow and preserves a child's health if the stone is hung as an amulet around its neck.[84] Jasper provides protection and aid to its wearer when it is held. Agate can allay storms and alter rivers, while coral resists thunderbolts.[85] Bald's Leechbook, a tenth-century collection of medical remedies written in Old

[77] Ibid.
[78] Douglas, p. 9.
[79] Douglas' work as an antiquarian, does not match modern archaeological practice and therefore must be taken within the context of his era, and not considered wholly factual and accurate.
[80] Joan Evans*, Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance particularly in England* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922).
[81] Evans, p. 10.
[82] Evans, p. 13.
[83] For more detail, see Evans chapter on 'Magical Jewels in the Ancient World' (1992) pp. 13-28.
[84] Evans, p. 30.
[85] Evans, p. 31.

English, describes agate, and the stone is said to possess eight magical virtues, including protection of the home and against snake venom, thunder, witchcraft, disease and age when the stone is kept, or placed in water and the water ingested.[86] The Old English lapidaries are based on information derived from Pliny, Isidore and Solinus, drawing a large proportion of information that would later become canonical in the Middle Ages from these Classical sources. However, the magical properties of agate possibly represent an ancient and more traditional English belief as it persists throughout the Middle Ages.[87] As agate can be many different colours, it is a possible contender for inspiration for some of the magical stones found within Arthurian literature. Though uncommon in Anglo-Saxon contexts, its virtues were well-regarded across the continent.

According to the 'Poor-Man's Treasury' written in the thirteenth century, sapphires and emeralds were said to heal malady when placed on the eye (though these costly stones were far less attainable for a 'poor-man' despite the title of the treasury).[88] The powder of 'iris' (likely a form of quartz) was said to heal epilepsy, while cold stones placed and bound to the temples were supposed to cure nose-bleeds.[89] Minerals were prescribed as powdered substances, dissolved in liquid and taken as a potion, or used as a talisman in their original forms. For example, if a loadstone were worn, it would 'remove discord between man and woman', and if coral were kept in the house, it would be protected from evil.[90] In short, stones have had established magical virtues for centuries for healing and other purposes. Thus, the presence of minerals in Anglo-Saxon cunning women's graves and the female ownership of magical stones in Arthurian literature point to the gendered connection between precious stones and women and show that stones were valued for their healing and protective powers in both periods.

Chapter 3: Magical Rings

It is appropriate to follow a discussion of magical stones with magical rings, especially since so many rings were set with stones of power. The possession, use and bestowal of magical rings is a common trend throughout Arthurian literature, predominantly connected to women. Michelle Sweeney

[86] Thomas Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents Illustrating the* History *of Science in This Country Before the Norman Conquest*. Volume 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and further discussion by Evans, p. 53 and Meaney pp. 72-73.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Evans, p. 119.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Evans pp. 119-120.

writes that rings are one of ‘the most common types of magic used by individuals in the romances… which protect the wearer, make one invisible or help one to see spells’. [91] Although stones can feature as magical objects in their own right, as discussed previously, they are more commonly presented as the magical component of a ring. Like the stone in *Peredur,* these rings are closely associated with women. In the *Mabinogion,* we see two instances of magical rings used.

The Lady of the Well: The Ring and Stone of Invisibility

In this tale, the maiden Luned presents the hero Owain with a ring and a stone to make him invisible. The magical ring and stone are intrinsically linked in this tale. Without the stone, the ring would have no power. So Luned says, “take this ring and place it on your finger, and put the stone in your hand, and close your first around the stone, and as long as you hide it, it will hide you too” (p. 123). Interestingly, in the French source *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* (c. 1170), Lunette gives Yvain a ring with a magical stone set within the ring. Lunette ‘gave him the little ring and told him that its effect was like that of bark on wood, which covers it so it cannot be seen. The ring must be worn with the stone clasped within the palm; then whoever is wearing the ring on his finger need have no fear of anything, for no one no matter how wide open his eyes could ever see him, any more than he could see the wood with the bark growing over it’.[92] As a result of the close connection between ring and stone, Luned’s gifts are included under ‘magical rings’, but should be considered closely associated with magical stones, notably the invisibility stone in *Peredur*.

When Owain finds himself trapped between two gates after pursuing a knight to his court, he is met by a helpful maiden, whom we discover is called Luned. Seeing his plight, Luned approaches the gate and announces that he is such a fine young man that any woman would be lucky to call him her friend or lover, and because of these qualities, she will help him. Interestingly, she declares explicitly, “it would only be right for a woman to help you”. [93] Her remark is thought-provoking and draws explicit attention to the social function of women within this literary tradition and perhaps on the role of women in this period more broadly. Does Luned mean that, because Owain is a handsome and perceivably honourable man that a woman must help him and, in some way, serve him? Or does

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[91] Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 48.

[92] Chrétien de Troyes*, Arthurian Romances: Translated with an Introduction and Notes by William W. Kibler (Erec and Enide translated by Carleton W. Carroll)* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 307.

[93] Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion,* Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 123. All further references will be to this edition.

it instead reveal a more influential role held by women; that of a saviour and benevolent assistant, aiding him in his predicament because she has the power to do so and the free-will to control her actions?

Whatever the social implications of her comment, Luned proceeds to do ‘whatever [she] can to rescue [Owain]’ (p. 123). She gives him a ring and tells him to place it on his finger. She also gives him a stone and instructs him to hold it in his hand, closing his fist around it. Combining these two items will make him invisible, and as his hand hides the stone, he will be hidden from view. She states that his newfound invisibility will allow Owain to escape. The enemy will arrive to seize him, and once they find he has gone, they will open the gates and then Owain will be able to leave unseen. Luned proceeds to help him further by stating that once he has freed himself, he should go to the mounting block where she will await him and, as he will be invisible, he should place his hand on her shoulder to let her know he has arrived. She then offers to take him with her on the road she will travel and leaves. Then she leaves Owain to carry out the plan.

The text is unclear as to whether Luned’s ring has a stone set within it, as with the French tale, or whether the two are separate entities. If we briefly consider the latter, the use of a magical stone for invisibility parallels the episode with the maiden, the stone, and the monster in *Peredur*. Again, we see a maiden helping a knight in a problematic situation with a magical stone of invisibility. This interaction is different in two key aspects. Firstly, the addition of a magical ring means the magic is more complicated than the form found in *Peredur*. The ring must be worn while the stone is held for the wearer to become invisible. The stone must also be hidden in the hand, for the bearer will be revealed when the palm is open, and the stone is visible. This magical rule enables a smooth release from the spell, whereas it is unclear in *Peredur* when the effectiveness of the stone will end. It could be that the *Peredur* stone is only useful in the specific cave or for the specific monster. Luned’s stone, combined with the ring, appears to be of more potent magic. The second key difference between these encounters is the price paid for the magical aid. In *Peredur,* the maiden requires Peredur’s unwavering love. In this account, Luned does not ask anything of Owain in return for her help. Her generosity is further proven when Luned brings Owain to her lodgings, and he sees the Lady of the Well and falls instantly in love with her. Luned (handmaiden to the Lady) parleys with her Lady to encourage her to marry Owain. It seems there is no end to Luned’s generosity in this episode as she goes on to feed, clothe and even shave Owain while he stays with her before he is presented to the Lady.

As I have noted, there are some specific differences between the ring in *Yvain* and that in *The Lady of the Well*. In the French romance, Chrétien’s heroine is called Lunette, and she aids Yvain with a

magical ring. She helps Yvain because she had met him many years ago when she visited King Arthur's court with a message from her Lady. While she was there, no knight spoke to her except Yvain. He showed her a level of courtesy and respect that she had not received from any other person at court, and she was grateful to him for it. For this reason, she offers him aid and tells him to "take this little ring of mine and, if you please, return it to me after I have freed you" before continuing to explain how the 'little ring' works.[94]

In the *Mabinogion*, Luned's motivations are different. She helps Owain because she can see he is a noble young man, and she must help him. The Welsh version thus highlights Luned's role and duty to assist the hero, whereas the French Lunette emphasises a reciprocation of aid. Lunette also asks Yvain for the ring to be returned once he has escaped. Luned never asks the same of Owain.

Lunette's request for the ring to be returned implies its magical significance, power and value. The importance of returning gifts is repeated by Chrétien later in the story after Yvain, and the Lady are married ('The Lady of the Well' in *Peredur* is only referred to as 'the Lady' in the French version). The Lady gives Yvain a ring before he leaves her for Arthur's court. She says, "now put this ring of mine upon your finger and let me tell you all about the stone: no true and faithful lover, if he wears it, can be imprisoned or lose any blood, nor can any ill befall him; but whoever wears it and cherishes it will remember his sweetheart and will become stronger than iron. It will be your shield and hauberk; in truth, I have never before lent or entrusted it to any knight, but out of love, I give it to you".[95] She gives him this ring to ensure he returns to her in a year, as per his promise, for no ill-health can impede his journey with the magical ring. However, when Yvain does not return, she sends Lunette to rebuke him and retrieve her ring. Lunette scolds, "Yvain, my Lady no longer cares for you, and through me she orders that you never again approach her and keep her ring no longer. By me, whom you see here before you, she orders you to send it back to her: return it, for return it you must!"[96] Again, the return of the magical object to the female who bestowed it is of crucial importance, suggesting that magical objects are only lent to the French hero rather than gifted.

In the French Romance, Yvain is given a ring of invisibility and remains in the hall while the rest of the court enters to search for him. The Lady joins the search to find her husband's killer. Yvain, meanwhile, remains hidden in plain sight, unseen by his pursuers. It is worth noting that while Yvain is invisible, the Lady cries out, proclaiming that she is the victim of witchcraft, "since I cannot see him [her husband's murderer Yvain], I can affirm that either a phantom or a devil has come among us

[94] Chrétien de Troyes, p. 307.
[95] Chrétien de Troyes, p. 328.
[96] Chrétien de Troyes, p. 330.

here, and I am completely bewitched".[97] Owain's disappearance in the Welsh text, though strange to his pursuers, did not give rise to suggestions of witchcraft. Chrétien's story highlights the French hero's magical disappearance and associates it with witchcraft and, therefore, demonic magic. Sweeney writes that Yvain's ring of invisibility allows him to hide 'like a demon', reflecting his demonic and merciless murder of the castle's lord. Yvain's cruel chase and subsequent murder of the Knight of the Well before his capture was immoral and, therefore, demonic by Sweeney's definition. Sweeney states that the magical item acts as a marker of Yvain's true character, revealing his destructive nature to the audience through the magical ring.[98] Sweeney's theory that magical items serve as moral compass signifiers for characters may apply to this episode, but the theory does not necessarily work for the Welsh analogue. The French magical ring reflects Yvain's values and lack of mercy. However, if we consider Owain's invisibility, it is not associated with demonic magic. The Welsh scene is far less emotional than the French version, and the ring does not reveal Owain's true nature through its use. If we apply Sweeney's same argument to the episode discussed later in this research with Peredur and precious ointment, the theory once again is stretched too far. Peredur arrives at the court of the 'Sons of the King of Suffering' where he sees knights slaughtered each night and then healed with precious ointment. However, the ointment is not used on him, and despite his offers to fight, he is denied as he would not be revived like the knights. Instead of suggesting a lack of morality or flawed values in the hero, the scene instead reveals more information on the women involved in the healing process. Though Sweeney's theory may apply to specific scenarios, it is incorrect to state that all magical items in Arthurian romance expose a character's true nature or hidden motivations. Though the French material is not fundamentally part of this research, a comparison can assist in understanding the *Mabinogion*'s depiction of magical women and the broader trends across Arthurian female magic, chiefly the bestowal and use of magical rings with powerful stones. While the Welsh material seems more focused on responsibility and gift-giving, the French text includes motifs such as chivalry, witchcraft and the loaning and returning of magical items.

Although women may possess magical items, this alone does not necessarily make them inherently magical. The use of magical objects denotes awareness and acceptance of magic, but otherwise, the owner can be wholly mortal without any magical or supernatural powers. For example, Luned in *The Lady of the Well* appears to be a 'normal' handmaiden without any magical powers despite her magical ring and stone. In contrast, the maiden with the stone in *Peredur* vanishes at the end of her

[97] Chrétien de Troyes, p. 309.
[98] Sweeney, p. 19.

conversation, implying some magical ability. If Luned possessed powers of her own, she would perhaps have gained a different rank and position than that of a handmaiden.

Archaeological evidence from Anglo-Saxon England confirms that owning magical amulets does not automatically signify a ‘cunning woman’. Cunning women were a particular group of women who may have practised healing and magic as a profession. Their graves contained rare fossils, crystal balls, sieve spoons, and herb pouches, suggesting that the occupant had a magical profession beyond the mere possession of apotropaic or amuletic items. However, we cannot explicitly say that cunning women were thought to possess an inherent magical ability. Since we do not possess any written proof and can only draw tentative conclusions from archaeological remains, we can only suggest a ‘potential’ magical profession. We can instead consider Luned to belong to another category of women: those who possess magical items but are mortal and otherwise ‘ordinary’. It is worth noting that the maiden in *Peredur* is very different. She has apparent inherent magical powers and does not appear to be a professional magician. She does not charge for her services other than a request of love. She is potentially supernatural rather than a magical mortal, reiterating her potential association with the fae of the romance tradition.[99] The critical point here is that Arthurian women who possess magical items, though possessing no magical ability, can still be considered ‘magical women’. Their ownership and bestowal of magical items are essential plot devices that drive the story onward and ultimately help their respective heroes succeed in various quests. Within the selected sources, no men gift magical objects to men. No women gift magical objects to women (unless to aid a man). Only women bestow magical items to men, and this is an essential factor to note when considering these women as magical.

Rhonabwy’s Dream: Arthur’s Magic Ring

The ring in this tale demonstrates an extraordinary power, exceptional in Arthurian literature. Rather than a fictional reality, this tale is set uniquely within the context of a dream. Therefore, the function and use of the ring is very different, and to some extent, incomparable, from other magical rings used in Arthurian ‘reality’. *Rhonabwy’s Dream* is yet again an example of a male magical item, considered for comparative purposes. While Luned’s ring in *Peredur* aids the hero, Arthur’s ring in this tale allows Rhonabwy to remember the dream he witnesses once he wakes. Such a power would

[99] For further references to fae of the romance tradition consider Richard Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

not be relevant or desirable in any other circumstance than this story, and it must be considered differently.

While dreaming, Rhonabwy meets a man called Iddog and Emperor Arthur. After Arthur speaks, Iddog says to Rhonabwy, “do you see the ring with the stone in it on the emperor’s hand?” to which Rhonabwy agrees, and Iddog continues, “one of the virtues of the stone is that you will remember what you have seen here tonight; and had you not seen the stone, you would remember nothing about this” (p. 217). The ring possesses magical properties, properties unlike those of any other object found in the *Mabinogion*. Furthermore, it is significant that Arthur owns and wears the ring, reinforcing its rarity and power.

Other examples of magical items in this tale are worth discussing. In the dream, Rhonabwy sees one of Arthur’s servants pulling out ‘a mantle of damasked, brocaded silk’ which he spreads out in front of Arthur, placing a red-gold apple in each corner and positioning a giant golden chair in the middle (p. 220). ‘Gwen was the name of the mantle’ and ‘one of the attributes of the mantle was that the person wrapped in it could see everyone, yet no one could see him. And no colour would ever last on it except its own colour’ (p. 220). Although ‘Gwen’ might appear as a woman’s name, ‘gwen’ was a common noun and an adjective during the early medieval period. In this instance, ‘gwen’ is more likely used as the latter and would have meant ‘white, greyish-white, pale, light’ or ‘holy, blessed, fair’ rather than a female name.[100]

Arthur’s possession of magical items is not further described. His ownership of such items could be because he is an emperor, and it is expected that he possesses magical items that match his status. As we do not witness their acquisition, further analysis would be pure conjecture. However, if we allow ourselves to indulge in conjecture, women may have gifted him his magical objects. The significant factor to note is that magical items are not only possessed by women. High-status men like Emperor Arthur can own magical items, though men do not give them to others as women do; they merely possess them while women always bestow them.

Historical Magical Rings

When considering magical rings in literature, we must contextualise their use throughout history before this period. According to C. J. Thompson, the earliest magical rings in archaeological existence

[100] Personal communication from Helen Fulton, based on the Geirdiadur Prifysgol Cymru Welsh dictionary, 09/09/2021.

bore 'mystical symbols' and were made of powerful metals.[101] In an early, unspecified Hebrew manuscript, Thompson describes a reference to a ring made of iron and copper that magically turns the wearer invisible. The Ancient Greeks were also believed to favour rings with deity-carved stones to promote health or ward against evil.[102] Aristophanes of Plutus (408 B.C) alludes to magical rings sold at a play in Athens designed for healing and often sold by drug vendors because of the healing properties.[103] An Anglo-Saxon, or possibly Old Norse gold ring, owned by the Earl of Aberdeen in 1827, had a runic inscription that translates as 'whether in fever or leprosy, let the patient be happy and confident in the hope of recovery'.[104] The ring was likely used as an amulet. Finally, Thompson describes an unknown Dano-Saxon ring 'excavated a few years ago'.[105] Thompson was born in 1862 and died in 1943, so the ring's excavation would have taken place during this period, likely the 1930s, given that this was the decade in which he wrote his last book. The inscription on the ring translates as 'raise us from dust we pray thee, from pestilence, oh set us free, although the grave unwilling be'.[106] Thompson seems to have lacked information about the ring's excavation and specific context. However, if we consider his translation and dating of the ring accurate, we see an instance of a ring ascribed with symbolic healing power, used as an amulet or magical token and kept to protect the wearer from illness and protect from fatal pestilence.

Marcellus, a Roman physician active during the second century, 'advised those who were afflicted with a pain in the side to wear a ring of pure gold, engraved with Greek letters, each Thursday and on the wane of the moon' to be worn on the hand of the opposite side to where the pain was situated.[107] Alexander of Tralles, a physician active during the sixth century, suggested an 'octagonal ring of iron', inscribed with eight words that instructed the bile to enter the body of a lark, thus leaving the patient's body and curing their ailment. Alexander endorsed many other amulets and talismans, including a copper lion ring with a crescent moon and star to cure other illnesses. Amuletic remedies were popular amongst the Romans. Whether magical or religious beliefs encouraged the usage of such amulets, we cannot be sure without knowing the precise translations of the inscriptions. However, the belief in the power of healing rings is apparent. During the Christian period, rings engraved with religious symbols, saints and prayers became popular in healing, despite some disapproval from the Christian Church, likely given the close resemblance to

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[101] Thompson. p. 135.
[102] Thompson, p. 135.
[103] William Hamper, 'Observations on a Gold Ring with a Runic Inscription', *Archaeologia*, vol. xxi (London, 1827), pp. 24-30.
[104] George Frederick Kunz, *Rings for the Finger* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1917), p. 339.
[105] Thompson, p. 136.
[106] Thompson, p. 136.
[107] Ibid.

magic or pagan practices. Plato describes the mythical Ancient Greek ring of Gyges, which was said to turn the wearer invisible.[108] The golden ring only worked once the bezel of the stone was turned inward, towards the hand, and once it was twisted, so the stone was outward-facing once more, the wearer was once again visible.[109] The description of this magical mechanism is almost identical to the ring we see in *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* by Chrétien de Troyes and would likely have been a significant influence on the twelfth-century romance. Kunz rightly highlights how Gyges' ring does not explicitly mention a stone set within the ring. However, the term 'bezel' implies using a precious stone, the centre of the ring's power.[110] Naturally, Gyges' ring's properties are similar to the 'Stone of Invisibility' used by Owain in conjunction with the ring Luned gave him to help him escape the two gates he is trapped inside.[111] Kunz describes the *Mabinogion* stone as being 'regarded [as] one of the thirteen rarities of the ancient British regalia, formerly treasured in Caerleon' and in Welsh legend of 'the Triads, it is said to have 'liberated Owen, the son of Urien, from between the portcullis and the wall' and whoever concealed the stone would be concealed by it'.[112] Though this claim is unsubstantiated, Kunz suggests that the stone from *The Lady in the Well* crossed from literature into folklore and was considered a physical treasure, kept as an artefact in Caerleon. Kunz makes no mention of the associated ring, as though the stone itself was the more powerful item, like Gyges' ring and the stone set within as its source of power.

In 1824, an Anglo-Saxon agate runic ring was found and is now associated with the British Museum. However, information on its excavation and original whereabouts was never known. The ring is 'orange-red in colour and marbled with grey', and the inscription around the ring can be associated with a charm for staunching blood, found in Bald's *Leechbook*, and is similar to two other Anglo-Saxon runic rings found at Braham Moor (Yorkshire) and Greymoor Hill (Carlisle).[113] In the words of Meaney, 'I do not think we need doubt that these rings were worn primarily for their magic powers'.[114] The connection between Anglo-Saxon magical rings and the use of agate seems to reinforce the connection between Anglo-Saxon magic and Arthurian literature. However, agate is not commonly found in Anglo-Saxon contexts despite the rings mentioned above. Of the examples of agate found, for example, by Faussett at Kingston, Kent, in the eighteenth century, Meaney

[108] Kunz, 1917, p. 290 referring to Lib. ii, cap 3; Platonis Dialogi, ed. Hermann, vol. iv, Lipsiae, 1883, pp. 37-38.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Kunz, 1917, p. 291.
[111] Further information on this interaction can be found earlier in this dissertation under the 'Magical Rings' chapter.
[112] Kunz, 1917, p. 307.
[113] Meaney, pp. 23-24.
[114] Meaney, p. 24.

suggests a common mislabelling of agate when the mineral is more likely jet.[115] Therefore, despite agate's extensive virtues and many colours, it is unlikely to be a direct inspiration for Arthurian magical ring stones.

Not only are there many examples of important magical rings in their physical form (too many to detail in this research), Kunz describes how dreams of magical rings were also considered of great importance.[116] According to Kunz's translation, Achametis states that if one dreams of receiving a ring with a red stone, the dreamer could expect great joy, while a ring with a yellow stone would bring the dreamer's wife illness and strife.[117] An Anglo-Saxon dream book details the significance of dreaming of a ring. Research into this book revealed that dreaming of a gifted ring suggested freedom from 'care' to the dreamer. Dreaming of owning a gold ring portended great honour, while dreaming that a gem had been lost from a ring was an evil omen, and grave misfortune would afflict the dreamer.[118] We can see the influence of Classical and Anglo-Saxon ring-dreams in *Rhonabwy's Dream*. The ring in this tale magically allows Rhonabwy to remember his dream (which he would have otherwise forgotten had he not seen the ring). This magical power bears no specific resemblance to any historical or mythological ring examples. Nevertheless, the power follows the same pattern of dreaming of a ring and subsequently affecting the dreamer in life.

Classical Association

The connection between Classical magical women and Arthurian magical women within literature is strong. Direct parallels from enchantresses like Circe to the later Morgan le Fay demonstrate this connection and influence.[119] Therefore, I argue that we can also reliably draw parallels between Classical magical rings and Arthurian depictions of magical rings. However, we can also draw parallels with the Anglo-Saxon use of magical rings. Classical rings possibly influenced the later Anglo-Saxons, directly relating to the Arthurian depiction of magical rings. More specifically, the Anglo-Saxon predominantly female use of the amuletic rings (based on grave-kit assemblages) directly relates to Arthurian depictions of magical women. Considering the Classical examples of

[115] Meaney, p. 74.
[116] Kunz, 1917, p. 298. For further examples of ancient magical rings, please refer to his chapter 'Magic and Talismanic Rings' in this book.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Thomas Oswald Cockayne, 'Anglo-Saxon Leechdom' in *A Book of Dreams by the Prophet Daniel,* vol. iii, (London, 1866), pp. 199-205.
[119] Further details on Morgan le Fay's depiction and inspiration can be found in Cooper, 2004, p. 185 and Larrington, 2006.

actual physicians, we can attribute the use and recommendation of healing rings primarily to males. Only in the Anglo-Saxon period can we see women, particularly exemplified by the cunning women classification of female burials, using amuletic items, most likely for healing purposes. Therefore, the attribution of magical rings to Anglo-Saxon female magic has a solid grounding and warrants a comparison between Arthurian depictions of magical women.

The Latin word often used for a 'protective device' is *phylacterium,* while the word *ligatura* refers to 'something tied frequently in knots' and seems to denote amulets.[120] Knotted rings warding against the Evil Eye 'because the ends of the knot were invisible' would be worn to confuse evil spirits. These rings were popular in the Roman period and were still worn after the migration period in Britain.[121] Meaney also suggests that wire rings with flat bezels twisted into a spiral may also be amuletic in a similar manner.[122] Examples of these rings associated with rich female amuletic graves are rings found in Grave 12 at Holywell Row in Suffolk and Grave IV at Sarre in Kent. Both examples were found amongst other amuletic items, dating to around the late sixth century.[123] Douglas excavated a potential amulet ring at Chatham Lines in Tumulus IV alongside a crystal ball and Roman coins. There are many other examples of similar rings across Anglo-Saxon England.[124] The extensive occurrence of silver wire finger rings found in amuletic female graves reinforces the comparison between Arthurian magical rings and magical Anglo-Saxon women. Though we cannot say for sure whether twisted or knotted finger rings were used only as amulets or whether they were merely worn as fashionable items denoting status or wealth, their frequent presence within the burial record is undeniable. Meaney also suggests that though there is a lack of evidence for more transient items, those made of wool, straw or fabric, for example, this does not indicate a lack of their existence.[125] The soil conditions of Anglo-Saxon graves are not conducive to preserving organic items, but we must consider the possibility of their existence. The established amuletic nature of the Classical versions of these ring types is established. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume the amuletic nature given their presence in amuletic graves. Therefore, where rings are mentioned in Arthurian literature without connection to a gemstone, could the inspiration be these wire rings? The association with twists and spirals confusing evil spirits could easily lend itself to confusing those around the wearer and subsequently granting the bearer invisibility, for example. I might be overstretching reasonable boundaries here, but the connection between the magical nature of

[120] Meaney, p.7.
[121] Meaney, p. 170.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Meaney, p. 170.
[124] Further descriptions of Anglo-Saxon amuletic rings in Meaney 1981, pp. 170-178.
[125] Meaney, p.9.

amuletic finger rings primarily found in female Anglo-Saxon graves and Arthurian rings bestowed by women is tantalising.

Chapter 4: Precious Ointment

'Precious Ointment' is a phrase used throughout modern translations of Arthurian literature to describe healing balms or salves that can cure any injury miraculously or even bring people back to life. Sweeney notes that romances rarely display any magic 'attributed to a demonic origin,' instead, the repeated use of precious ointment suggests an awareness of medicinal magic, which will be explored throughout this section.[126]

The Lady of the Well: The Lady and the Precious Ointment

In this episode, we see an example of magical aid provided by a woman using 'precious ointment' in *The Lady of the Well*. When the hero Owain is unwell and physically changed beyond recognition after living in the wilderness, a countess and her handmaidens notice him lying lifeless in a park. They quickly return to their castle for aid. The countess takes 'a jar of precious ointment' and gives 'it to one of her handmaidens' and bids her to take it to Owain with a horse and clothing. She instructs the handmaiden to "rub him with his ointment, over his heart, and if there is life in him, he will get up as a result of this ointment" (p. 131). The handmaiden follows these instructions and applies all the ointment to Owain. Staying to watch him and see if the treatment works, she soon sees him awaken, revived. Owain suddenly appreciates how 'hideous' he has become as he is shaken from the madness that negatively changed his appearance as he regains consciousness. He puts on the clothes left for him and climbs onto the horse the handmaiden brought. At this moment, the maiden emerges from her viewing place and greets the hero, travelling with him to the castle.[127] Upon arrival, he is shown to a chamber with a large fire and is made very comfortable. The maiden subsequently returns the ointment jar to her mistress. Upon seeing the empty vessel, the countess asks where all the salve has gone. When the maiden answers that she used it all on Owain, the

[126] Sweeney, p. 48.
[127] A similar encounter occurs in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain.* For a detailed account of this episode, see: Ad Putter, 'The twelfth-century Arthur' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend,* eds. E. Archibald and A. Putter, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 48.

countess replies, “it is not easy for me to scold you, but it was unfortunate that I spent one hundred and forty pounds worth of precious ointment on a man without knowing who he is. Nevertheless, girl, wait on him so that he has enough of everything” (p. 132). Her annoyance at the ointment loss is tempered by her continued generosity and desire to show Owain hospitality. The countess’s reply also reveals a multitude of nuances about the ointment that warrants more in-depth analysis.

The countess makes it very clear that the ointment was expensive, and the implication here is that she obtained it from an external source, implying a specialist made it (given its high price). This revelation is significant. It suggests magical items were bought and sold and were expensive to purchase. The procurement of the ointment indicates the existence of magical healers or apothecaries who sell their wares. Her possession of the balm perhaps relates to the theory that there is a tendency for women in particular to own magical items, chiefly in the Anglo-Saxon period. Would it be too much to assume that this also means women are more predisposed to purchase magical items? In the Peredur instance of magical ointment discussed shortly (at the court of the Sons of the King of Suffering), a similar balm is owned predominantly by females. If we consider Anglo-Saxon women as an earlier example of (potentially) magical women, the number of amulets in female graves far outweighs those found in male graves. The gendered suggestion here is that women tend to be more often associated with magic than men. If we compare this archaeological information with the countess’s ownership of the ointment, before she knew that Owain, or any other person for that matter, required aid, this idea holds weight. The countess must have bought the ointment in case such an occasion of use should arise. Her forward-planning implies a necessity and fundamental need for magical healing, and her position as a countess affords her the luxury of having the item in advance of a required instance. Her status enables her to afford the ointment, however, she comments on how she cannot justify spending so large a sum on a stranger, implying that even she can appreciate the item as expensive despite her wealth and rank. The act of purchasing also raises questions surrounding who made and who sold the item.

Did the unknown maker also sell the item? Were they male or female? How did the countess know of the creator? Is it accurate to describe them as a magical herbalist, or were they an apothecary? Were herbalists and producers of magical items widely accepted within this fictional reality? Unfortunately for us, the tale does not answer these questions. Leaving these questions unanswered saved the storyteller from theological and moral hooks. Sweeney states that “if the audience did not know who had created [a] magical token, there was always room for doubt about the safety of [its] use.”[128] Sweeney also discusses that standard forms of magic, including potions, rings, swords and

[128] Sweeney, pp. 18-19.

particular illusions, regularly appear throughout the romance tradition and were employed by a wide breadth of authors across varied periods. The general population would have understood these magical tokens, so the ambiguity over their creation would serve as the only 'mysterious' element to them. Perhaps the deliberate anonymity associated with the sale of the precious ointment was intended to create an element of drama in the tale. However, if we consider Chrétien's description of 'Morgan the Wise' in parallel *The Knight with the Lion,* Sweeney's theory is contradicted. The parallel episode finds Yvain sick with madness, and the lady finds him and instantly proceeds to her castle. She tells her handmaiden, "I recall an ointment given me by Morgan the Wise; she told me that it could drive from the head any madness, however great."[129] Morgan is a recognisable character, as no further description of her power or authority is provided. Her presence could even be related to Sweeney's idea of recognisable magical motifs throughout the romance tradition, as the audience is aware of her magical status, proven by the ointment she created for the lady. Morgan's manufacture of the ointment contradicts Sweeney's theory of anonymous creators, instead suggesting a different tradition within romance, the existence of female magical healers. Though the producer is unknown for this episode, the ointment's purchasing, owning and bestowal are crucial factors attributed to the countess. Though she possesses no magical powers, she appreciates the usefulness of magical items and is happy to own and donate them to those in need.

A modern audience will undoubtedly view the precious ointment as magical as it heals Owain in moments, though he had been near death. It is reasonable to assume a medieval audience would similarly observe the scene. A mere herbal wound-healing salve could not have worked so quickly. Owain regained his sanity almost instantly, leading him to discover the state in which he found himself after falling into madness. Although the boundary between natural and magical healing has been unclear for centuries, it is reasonable to assume that a remedy that instantly heals wounds and restores one's mind from madness must be of supernatural origin.[130] The word 'magic' is not explicitly found within the text, but I have applied the term as the magical nature of the ointment can be implied from the context of the situation. When considering medieval magic, according to Richard Kieckhefer, positive, natural magic was considered a branch of science that aimed to understand the 'hidden aspects of nature' linked with healing magic. By contrast, the negative, demonic form of magic was a 'perversion of religion' and attempted to affect human affairs and behaviour through magic.[131] Sweeney accepts Kieckhefer's approach and adds that though

[129] Chrétien de Troyes, p. 332.
[130] Relevant discussion on medieval attitudes towards madness, including belief in madness as religious punishment or penance can be found in Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children, Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature,* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1974).
[131] Kieckhefer, p.1.

technically 'magic should have a magician, a demon or a witch', medieval romances often do not feature the 'originator of a magical event or the creator of magical tokens', which makes it difficult to restrict the term 'magic' to notable events.[132] The term 'marvellous' applies to the precious ointment, and the terms 'marvellous' and 'magical' were often interchangeable in the medieval period.[133] Therefore, the countess's ownership of the ointment proves that she possessed an awareness and an appreciation of natural healing powers while understanding the magical implications of the salve.

To understand and fully contextualise this episode, we must first place it within its medieval Welsh context. Fulton discusses 'Celtic Magic' in *Magic and the Supernatural* and addresses the problematic way nineteenth-century scholars considered 'Celtic'.[134] Fulton states that the supernatural environment of early medieval Welsh narrative does not adhere to 'natural magic' notions, alternatively drawing upon 'classical mythology…[and] and an ancient pantheon of British and Irish deities' instead of 'a belief in the magic powers of nature'.[135] We must carefully consider this concept, especially when reflecting on Welsh material. The regional differences discussed by Fulton affect the worldview of the contemporaneous society, which directly impacts the understanding and perception of the tales. With this in mind, is it incorrect to apply the term 'magic' to this 'precious' ointment? It is reasonable to assume that the healing properties of the ointment derive from magical sources. Though the broader medieval European view of 'natural magic' may not apply to this instance, the absence of this belief does not mean the Welsh did not use herbs for healing purposes. We must be cautious when applying the term 'magic', but I think it is fair to do so in this episode, even within the contextual boundaries described.

Peredur, Son of Efrog: Women Who Resurrect Knights

When Peredur arrives at the court of the 'Sons of the King of Suffering', he has entered a court in mourning, as the name suggests. When he enters the court, women greet Peredur as there are no men in sight. However, he soon sees a horse approaching with a rider lying over the saddle. Closer inspection reveals that the rider is a corpse, transported back to court on his steed. The women seem unperturbed by this sight and immediately take the corpse from the saddle, bathe it and apply

[132] Sweeney, p. 26.
[133] Sweeney, p. 31.
[134] Fulton refers to the problematic use of the term 'Celtic', representing English colonialist ideologies when referring to Wales, and the use of Arthur in this agenda. Fulton, 2013, pp. 2-3.
[135] Fulton, 2013, p.6.

'precious ointment' to it (p. 88). The miracle balm revives the corpse. The man rises from his deathbed, alive and in good health. He meets Peredur and greets him as a host, and makes the hero welcome. This episode repeats as two more corpses on horseback enter, and they are given the same reception as the previous man. They are also brought back to life by the women and the ointment. On further enquiry, Peredur discovers that the men are killed each day by a monster who lives in a cave nearby. Each night they are resurrected by the women, who are the men's lovers. Peredur asks to be allowed to accompany the men the next day in their battle with the monster, but he is instantly refused: "If you were killed there, no one could bring you back to life again" (p. 88). The implication here is that the women of the court can only resurrect their lovers, and Peredur, therefore, cannot be saved as he has no lover or connection to these women. Another potential reason for Peredur's refusal is that there is some unknown rule that each woman can only resurrect one man, and therefore, there is no one 'spare' to help Peredur. However, this explanation seems unlikely as only three men enter as corpses during this passage, and the court is full of women. Perhaps only a select few of these women are healers and possess the 'precious ointment'. Questions surrounding the origin of this ointment cast doubt on whether these women created the healing balm themselves (therefore are inherently magical) or whether they acquired the ointment elsewhere, as seen in *The Lady of the Well*. Based on the language and the context of the situation, I believe that these women are magical. Instead of saying 'there is not enough ointment to bring you back to life', the specific lexis demonstrates that no 'one' could aid Peredur if he died. The vocabulary suggests that some women at court are magical healers, and for a reason unknown to the audience, Peredur cannot benefit from these skills. This notion contrasts with Geoffrey of Monmouth's depiction of Morgan as a benevolent healer who can aid anyone in need and generous with her skills.[136] However, the fact that Peredur is welcomed to court proves that the women are not unable to offer aid because they are discourteous. Instead, there is an unacknowledged magical rule that forbids them.

Herbal Remedies

Herbal remedies were commonly used during the Middle Ages, and multiple different contemporaneous texts discuss the values of herbs and remedies for ailments. The Old English *Herbarium Apuleii* was heavily inspired by Classical medicine and is 'essentially a Mediterranean

[136] Geoffrey Of Monmouth, Michael D Reeve (ed) and Neil Wright (trans). *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The history of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of De Gestis Britonum,* Arthurian Studies, 69, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).

document which seems to have planted certain notions into Anglo-Saxon England'.[137] Bald's *Leechbook* was an Old English collection of various materials, assembled by Bald in the mid-tenth century, probably during the reign of King Alfred.[138] The term 'leech' does not refer to the process of medicinal bloodletting. Instead, 'leech' is from the Old English *læce,* meaning healer of any kind.[139] Bald's *Leechbook* contained remedies, charms, spells, rituals and other medicinal information, including traditional knowledge and influences from the *Apuleius*.[140] Finally, the *Lacnunga*, another Old English medical text, describes and prescribes a herbal amulet (in addition to a written magical formula), and this amulet also appears in the *Apuleius.*[141] These three texts are the primary medical texts of the Anglo-Saxon period, although other manuscripts exist. Therefore, it is challenging to relate herbs mentioned within these texts to modern equivalents directly. It is easier to draw parallels from the Latin *Apuleius,* but Bald's *Leechbook* is particularly challenging. It is also difficult to understand whether a herb is designed as a herbal cure for an ailment or to be used as an amulet to ward against the condition. For these reasons, it is not possible to draw direct parallels between herbal amulets found in Anglo-Saxon burial contexts of cunning women and the contemporaneous healing texts. However, this does not mean we should not further consider the existence, awareness and use of herbal amulets in Anglo-Saxon cunning magic, even though we cannot determine what exact remedy or spell they represent to the deceased.

Jolly explains that the overarching belief regarding ailments ranging from madness to 'elf-disease' is that they could 'benefit from treatment with herbs blessed by rituals that were predominantly Christian.'[142] The scribes and scholars that helped to produce Old English texts, such as the *Lacnunga* and the *Leechbook*, were Anglo-Saxon, and therefore influenced by their rich cultural history, deeply entrenched in folk magic, but they were also 'undoubtedly members of clerical communities'.[143] In this way, magical healing was combined with Christian ideology, accepted in Jolly's form of 'middle practice'. A combination of Classical, Christian and Germanic beliefs, Anglo-Saxon herbal remedies were often magical in nature and part of a broader continental tradition. In magical literature, the presence of herbal healing associated with women, whether practitioners or simply owners, is thus widespread: herbs and herbal ointment were staple magical tools.

[137] Stephen Pollington, *Leechcraft Early English Charms, Plant Lore and Healing* (Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003), p. 50.
[138] Meaney, p. 42 and Cockayne, 2012.
[139] Pollington, p. 41 and p. 50.
[140] Meaney, p. 42.
[141] Meaney, p. 43.
[142] Jolly, 1996, p. 170.
[143] Ibid.

In her chapter entitled 'Vegetable Amulets', Meaney discusses herbal amulets and their historical context in great detail.[144] What is most important to this research is the presence of herbal amulets within Anglo-Saxon female burial contexts. Though the West Heslerton walnut amulets previously discussed are ‘vegetable’ by Meaney’s classification, their resemblance to crystal balls marks them as distinctive. An ‘oak-apple’ was found in a female grave at Little Wilbraham, Cambridgeshire, which also resembled a wooden crystal ball in a sling. Suspended wooden coils found at Welbeck Hill in female graves also bore a similar visual significance to crystal balls. Thus, these items will not be considered among other herbal amulets more akin to examples found in Arthurian texts.[145] In order to fully contextualise Arthurian female magic, we must consider herbal amulets that resemble the ‘precious ointment’ found on multiple occasions in the *Mabinogion.* For this reason, solid vegetable charms will not be considered in detail here. However, they should be acknowledged as existing within the burial record and reinforcing notions of Anglo-Saxon female magic or superstition surrounding their power in life when buried.[146]

Anglo-Saxon ‘thread boxes, or ‘pyxides’ as archaeological literature often calls them, were (predominantly seventh century) small cylindrical objects hung from women’s girdles. Sibertswold in Kent (Grave 60) and Polhill in Kent (Grave 43) show thread boxes in female graves. Thread boxes, similar to ‘amulet-capsules’ found on the continent, for example at Schretzheim and Steeden in Germany and Lussy in Switzerland, often contained vegetable and herbal substances alongside threads, braid fragments and sometimes beads.[147] Despite their name implying their use as small sewing kits, the thread boxes do not appear to contain needles or other sewing equipment. Instead, their use is amuletic or something akin to reliquaries. Pollington notes that the cloth found in English thread boxes was of high quality and therefore supports a possible ‘connection between English royal saints, which flourished in the early Christian period when these boxes were found’.[148] However, Pollington based much of his consideration of the thread-boxes on Meaney’s work. As Meaney considers these items to be of amuletic female significance rather than saintly items, it is fair to assume that any connection to saints is, as yet, unproven. Therefore, we must consider thread boxes as deliberately amuletic tools or status-signifiers. In the instance of the Polhill thread box, moss was found amongst other fibres, likely flax. As Meaney describes, moss does not have underground roots. It is thus reasonable to assume it was placed in the box before burial, ruling out possible vegetation growth post-burial. A thread box found at Barton-on-Humber was identified to

[144] Meaney, ‘Vegetable Amulets’, pp. 38-65.
[145] Meaney, p. 61.
[146] See Meaney’s Vegetable Amulets chapter for context.
[147] Meaney, p. 62.
[148] Pollington, p. 48.

have three caper spurge seeds inside with thread, textile, an uncut garnet and a piece of calcite.[149] These deliberately placed items, including crystals and herbal samples, were very likely considered magical. Indeed, Meaney mentions garnets as an example of a stone believed to have magical powers against demons and commonly favoured in Anglo-Saxon jewellery.[150]

The association of thread boxes with women, whether signifying a specific role of cunning healing within a community or used as a tool to aid healing, reinforces the Arthurian magic of 'precious ointment', predominantly used and owned by women.

Though our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon medicinal practices is based on the 'scanty relics of Anglo-Saxon literature that [remains]', we can see how 'great faith was placed in charms and incantations in curing disease'.[151] These charms were often connected with herbal remedies, often in the form of powdered substances or ointments. Considering the large number of amulets and charms found in cunning women graves and the comparatively few found in male graves, it is safe to assume that women were likely to possess magical healing remedies in the Anglo-Saxon period and within Arthurian literature.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The Classical World

There is an established close connection between the Classical world and the Anglo-Saxon period in England. Not only can we see literary evidence of medicinal understanding affected heavily by Classical medical theory, but we can also see evidence of Roman items treasured by Anglo-Saxon owners, so much so that they are placed in a burial context. From these different sources, we can see how Classical influence pervaded Anglo-Saxon society. The relevance of Classical magical and amuletic healing items becomes clear when we consider this close connection between the Classical world and Anglo-Saxon magic and healing. For example, the cunning women burials of the Anglo-Saxon period and other high-status female burials across Anglo-Saxon England often contain Roman intaglios and *objet trouvés* that likely have been kept for amuletic purposes. Often these keepsakes

[149] Meaney, p. 62.
[150] Meaney, p. 27.
[151] Thompson, p. 51.

are assigned superstitious meanings and become amuletic, for example, a lucky coin or a stone that keeps you protected from harm. These objects' possession and propensity to attain heirloom status can carry symbolic and even magical meanings, merely from humans' continued possession and inherent need to possess unusual or pretty objects.

Hutton writes that there are no classical witches in Greek literature but that the enchantresses Circe and Medea resemble some Arthurian figures. Medea uses *pharmaka,* herbal magic, for magical ends, including murder, while Circe combines potions and wand magic to turn men into animals.[152] Neither of these women is human, Circe is a goddess, and Medea is a demi-goddess. Neither are wholly evil figures, yet neither bestow nor aid heroes in the same way as the women of the *Mabinogion*. However, both were incredibly influential figures in later Arthurian literature. Hutton describes them as the 'ultimate ancestresses of many [Arthurian] magic-wielding females', even when not categorised fully as witches.[153] These two females directly influenced Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgen in the *Vita Merlini* in the twelfth century.[154] Geoffrey's Morgen has shape-shifting powers, magical healing skills and can divine from the stars, amongst other talents, mirroring abilities from Circe and Medea.[155] Morgen is not a witch nor a goddess, but she is more than mortal, a trait that some maidens in the *Mabinogion* share. Though this research does not seek to compare Geoffrey of Monmouth's work with the *Mabinogion*, or indeed with Anglo-Saxon archaeology, he is a key author to consider, albeit briefly. It is particularly relevant when considering Chrétien's characterisation of 'Morgan the Wise' in *The Knight with the Lion* (parallel to the Welsh *The Lady of the Well).* Chrétien's awareness of Geoffrey of Monmouth's healer Morgen, which was directly influenced by Classical enchantresses, supports this comparison. When the Red Book of Hergest was created, a book that housed many of the *Mabinogion* tales, Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Brittanniae,* was included. This addition proves awareness of Geoffrey's work to Chrétien and to the people compiling tales that would later become the *Mabinogion.* Though there were undoubtedly other manuscripts with Welsh tales (that are now lost to us), the Red and White Welsh books are the earliest documents we can consider in the history of the *Mabinogion* stories. Therefore, if we know Classical sources directly influenced Geoffrey, and his work was prevalent at a similar time to the Welsh tales, it stands to reason that similar Classical sources may have influenced the Welsh Arthurian tales.

[152] Hutton 2017, p.58.
[153] Hutton, 2017, p. 58.
[154] Geoffrey of Monmouth, 1973, lines 917-927.
[155] Larrington, p. 9.

In Roman society, despite controversy over whether magic was a positive or negative force practised by imposters or authentic practitioners, magic was also prominent in medicine and literature.[156] For example, the Roman poet Lucan writes of a lunar eclipse, describing how 'by these witches…the clear moon, beset by dread incantations, grew dim and burned with a dark and earthy light, just as if the earth cut her off…lowered by magic, she suffers all that pain.'[157] Lucan was well aware of the scientific explanation of a lunar eclipse but favoured the magical instead. As Flint explains, Lucan's description found an 'echo in a "popular" magical belief well attested in the early Middle Ages…[where] the darkening of the moon in this way was always the work of an enchantress, who drew it down into a dark cavern' causing the moon pain.[158] Flint explains that, though Lucan's description alone may not have given 'rise to the belief' of witches involved with eclipses in the early Middle Ages, 'it could certainly have helped to keep alive folk memories of it, and to sustain the semi-educated in a twilight between condemned "magical" beliefs and "authoritative" evidence.'[159] In this way, we can clearly see Classical ideas on magic impacting early medieval perceptions of magic, particularly concerning magical women.

Similarities

There are many similarities between the Anglo-Saxon archaeology, predominantly of cunning women, and the Welsh Arthurian magical women of the *Mabinogion.* Firstly, the use of magical rings in both spheres by women is evident. The propensity for maidens to bestow magical rings upon heroes can be seen in both *Peredur* and *The Lady of the Well,* and the rings are ultimately why the hero slays the beast or escapes death. Without the bestowal of these rings, the heroes would not have succeeded in their quests, so the presence of the rings is vital to the story. The many silver-wire knotted amuletic rings found in furnished female burials across Anglo-Saxon England suggest a close association between women and amuletic or apotropaic rings, with a possible magical function. These may be worn for superstitious purposes, but in the case of cunning women's burials, we can conjecture that they could have been worn for something more akin to magical power.

The presence and ownership of presumed magical stones in female Anglo-Saxon furnished graves is also abundantly clear in the archaeological record. In addition, the existence of overtly magical rock

[156] Flint, pp. 14-28.
[157] Lucan, edited and translated by J. D. Duff, *Civil War* (Pharsalia), vi, 499-506, (Loeb Classical Library, 1928), pp. 340-341.
[158] Flint, p.38.
[159] Flint, p. 39.

crystal and clear quartz spheres, precious rough-cut gems and jewellery with presumed amuletic significance, such as garnet, quartz, amber, agate and jet found in graves suggests an awareness of the properties of precious stones. Lapidaries such as Bald's *Leechbook* proves this suggestion and establishes genuine medicinal belief in the magical properties of gems. The same appreciation is felt within *Peredur* and *Rhonabwy's Dream* as magical stones feature heavily in both and are once again integral to driving the story forward.

A discussion of precious ointment or magical healing salve is less straightforward as the evidence for using such unguents is not conclusive in the archaeological record. Unfortunately, organic matter does not survive due to poor soil conditions, so we cannot definitively say whether herbal ointment was used as a miraculous cure-all, as in the Arthurian literature. However, the herbal thread-boxes of cunning women graves suggest some amuletic or magical purpose behind the possession of certain herbs. Given that leechbooks of the period detail the medicinal value of herbs and ointments, it is reasonable to conclude that herbal ointment ('precious' due to its healing abilities) was used in medicine. Furthermore, the possession of thread-boxes by cunning women suggests the professional and possibly magical use of such a salve by Anglo-Saxon magical women. There is a connection here with the purchase of ointment from a professional in *The Lady of the Well* and with the women who own and use or bestow precious ointment, most notably, in *Peredur.*

The very presence of so many amulets in female furnished graves in the Anglo-Saxon period can be linked with the predominance of women in the *Mabinogion* as owners of magical items. There are no instances of male characters bestowing magical rings or magical stones to heroes throughout the Welsh texts. The archaeological record supports this through the lack of male amuletic furnished burials. The propensity for women to own amulets and apotropaic items far outweighs any owned by men, and this trend can be directly related to female magic in the *Mabinogion.*

Towards a Broader Context

Cooper's view that magic is 'above all, a narrative issue' in romance is based mainly on fourteenth and fifteenth century romance. While this research focuses on earlier tales, it is essential to consider her view.[160] Her idea that magic is a narrative expedient, urging the story onwards in a positive way, overcoming possible obstacles, is true of the magic and magical objects found in the *Mabinogion.* However, Cooper's sentiment that magic is 'a problem that gets in the way of telling a story well'

[160] Cooper, p. 137.

does not ring true, unless readers find it unsatisfying that no explanation for magical outcomes needs to be given.[161] For example, readers may feel there are unanswered questions about who the maiden in Peredur is or how the healing ointment cures all ailments. Cooper states that 'the very replicability of magic [and] the ease with which it can be incorporated into a story, threatens to make it… a set of cliches.'[162] This idea does not give any credibility to magic existing as anything other than a literary device. As the Anglo-Saxon evidence suggests, and indeed swathes of historical accounts of the early medieval period, magic was an integral element of daily life.[163] Cooper does not consider magic in romance as a continuation or remnant of magical belief but rather a tool used by authors to varying degrees of success. There are, however, discernible continuities and established trends visible across literary and archaeological spheres, representing a common stock of conventions around magical items and practice. Cooper describes a collection of magic objects in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* that, once assembled, is largely ignored, and a similar lack of attention is paid to the magic rings in *Richard Coeur de Lion.*[164] Perhaps the lack of elaboration on these items is due to the previously established rich and recognised history of the use of magical items, dating back to the Anglo-Saxon and Classical periods.

Discussion of magical women during the medieval period must briefly address the concept of the 'fairy' woman, particularly as we have suggested that the maiden in *Peredur* could be considered similar to the fae of romance. According to Helen Cooper, fairies can be rationalised as 'mortal women whose supernatural powers are acquired by more ordinary means.'[165] An excellent example of this is Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet* (a German text originally translated from an Anglo-Norman source) which is likely the earliest form of the Lancelot tale. The sea-fairy, or *merfeine,* lives in a mystical land solely inhabited by women and an occasional merman. The fairy queen of the isle raises Lanzelet as her own son. Cooper states that during this period, the term 'fairy' was 'used for all women who practised magic, and at that time, there were many more of them in Great Britain than in other lands.'[166] For example, she writes that the fairy women in the British tale of Lancelot 'knew the powers of words and stones and herbs, which allowed them to retain youth and beauty and enjoy whatever wealth they wished.'[167] Relating the term 'fairy' to all magical women in Britain is overly broad, especially since there is no explicit mention of fairy in the *Mabinogion* or within any

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[161] Cooper, p. 137.
[162] Cooper, p. 138.
[163] See Davies, Five Case Histories, 1989, for Anglo-Saxon examples of belief in witchcraft.
[164] Cooper, p. 138.
[165] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 184.
[166] Cooper, p. 184.
[167] Cooper, p. 184.

archaeological context of cunning women (though lack of evidence does not denote any lack of belief). However, consideration of continental fairy women as magical women may help shed further light on the magical women of the Welsh tales.

What makes *Lanzelet* especially interesting in the context of the insular evidence we have focused on is that it may have Anglo-Norman origins, and so arguably gives us an English perspective on the role of magical women and their use of magical objects. If the internal evidence is to be trusted, *Lanzelet* is a translation of 'The French book of Lanzelet' that was originally taken from the hostage Hugh de Morville when he was captured by Kaiser Heinrich in Germany. It is, therefore, fair to consider this an Anglo-Norman text, relevant particularly when we consider the close association with French and British Arthurian romance.[168] Therefore, it is worth briefly considering some of the instances of magical women and their magical tools within this text for comparative purposes in order to create a fuller picture of the broader magical traditions of women during this time.

The tale describes various magical objects, including the sea fairy queen's crystal ball mountain, a magical sword given to Lanzelet that would cut iron and steel when wielded in anger, and a magical mantle. Most relevant are the mentions of prophetic awareness by the sea fairy, the ancient prophetess Sibille from Kunis, and the maiden Iblis, all similar to the maiden we see in *Peredur*. Malduc the Magician's sorceress daughter, is described as 'a beautiful maiden who was courtly and honourable' and 'who couldn't have been wiser for she had read books about all kinds of occult knowledge and from this she knew many mysteries.'[169] Malduc's daughter in many ways is similar to Nimue/Viviene who in later Arthurian tales learns magic from Merlin, and then takes his place in Arthur's court as a magical advisor. Malduc's daughter, 'the crafty wizard's child,' became part of Arthur's 'household because of her honourable deeds, for she was a wise maiden.'[170] The implication here is likely that she practised her magical arts within Arthur's court, a clear instance of a magical Arthurian woman, well-educated from magical books and her sorcerer father's tutelage. There are mentions of magical stones throughout *Lanzelet,* owned and gifted and often placed in magical structures such as a magical pavilion and a magic castle. One such example was called 'galazia', a stone that would never get warm, even when placed into a fire, and was said to come from Arabia. The stone would grant the wearer the inability to become poor and protection from magic.[171] Magic rings also feature in the text, though it is Lanzelet himself who gives a fairy maiden a 'gold ring for

[168] Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, and Kathleen J. Meyer (ed. and trans.). *German Romance IV,* Arthurian Archives XVII, 'Lanzelet' (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer 2011), lines 9324-9349.
[169] Von Zatzikhoven and Meyer, lines 7172-7184.
[170] Von Zatzikhoven and Meyer, lines 7676-7680.
[171] Von Zatzikhoven and Meyer, lines 8524-8539.

luck' that would grant the wearer the ability never to be denied a request. It is likely that he originally got the ring from his fairy Queen mother since she gifted him many magical items before he left her island.[172]

Finally, there are multiple instances of magical healing within the text. For example, a woman cleanses wounds with oil and wine and bandages them. Then, 'the virtuous maiden began to anoint him everywhere in an expert way with a salve so good that his flesh and blood became so heated that the battle-weary man longed for life and rubbed his eyes in confusion and said, "I am in great pain. Where am I? I wonder what has happened."'[173] This instance of healing is reminiscent of the Lady of the Well and her precious ointment that revived a near-death Owain and saved him from his madness. The *Lanzelet* text also includes magical fruit that can cure any sickness, and 'no wound was so large that it was not healed immediately.'[174] The fruit could be considered akin to the herbal healing known by cunning women and those magical women who use precious ointment, though the link is more tenuous. The importance of magical healing, however, is evident in this text.

The German *Lanzelet* reinforces the notion that there are clear literary magical motifs in continental literature, exemplified by the British evidence discussed throughout this research. The most important and most familiar themes include those we have primarily discussed: the use of magical rings, the existence and awareness of magical stones, and magical healing. These motifs can be seen within the *Mabinogion* tales and their French parallels, Anglo-Saxon archaeology, and Classical history, all to varying degrees. Originally an Anglo-Norman text, *Lanzelet* provides distinct and clear parallels between British and French romance material as the same trends can be seen throughout. These motifs can be corroborated by the Anglo-Saxon material evidence and Classical historical accounts, thus proving these trends were widespread across these different cultures.

The similarities between Welsh and Anglo-Saxon magical women are evident. This research does not seek to determine whether cunning women influenced the women of the *Mabinogion*, for the contextual, cultural and time differences are too significant to warrant any direct influence to be established. Instead, the similarities prove that the magical women of these two realms of study are part of a broader spectrum, seen across the continent, influenced by Classical notions of magic, and can be clearly seen within other Arthurian and magical texts of the medieval period. From *Lanzelet* to Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian work, we see evidence of women using magical rings, magical stones of power and herbal remedies, or miracle cures. Other important and common trends include

[172] Von Zatzikhoven and Meyer, lines 4940-4955.
[173] Von Zatzikhoven and Meyer, lines 2195 -2212.
[174] Von Zatzikhoven and Meyer, lines 3950-3960.

awareness and abidance by the laws of prophecy, foretelling the future, and magical weapons, often wielded by men. Nevertheless, the scope of this research is such that we may consider the women of the *Mabinogion*, known through literature, and the cunning women of Anglo-Saxon archaeology as examples of magical women who used a set of common tools in their magical practice.

Further examination of French and other Continental archaeology of the early medieval period may shed further light on the question of whether this trend can be felt in literary and archaeological spheres. If so, we should not just think of magical tools as literary motifs but as implements that were respected and acknowledged in daily life. Indeed, continental crystal balls that closely resemble those found in Anglo-Saxon graves are found in far greater numbers in Europe than in England.[175] Like the English examples, the continental examples are also slung in metal slings and found in female graves, deposited in a manner that suggests they were worn hanging from a belt at the waist. Around thirty balls have been found in Germany, eleven in France, and a few in Hungary, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands, with one in Austria.[176] Continental crystal balls are often associated with perforated sieve spoons, like those found in cunning women's graves, all dating to somewhere between the mid-sixth century to the early seventh century, matching the dates of English examples.[177] Twisted wire rings have been found in female graves in Merovingian cemeteries alongside other amuletic items such as quartz and amber beads, fossils and girdle-hangers.[178] The scope of this research does not allow an in-depth analysis of continental archaeology. However, there is an established trend, similar to that found in England, of magical female graves, across Europe containing similar magical items and tools. When we compare the archaeology and literature of Europe to that found in medieval England and Wales, it is fair to conclude that a broader, overarching magical awareness and practice is felt across all spheres and all regions. Even within Britain itself, the seventh to eighth-century Ruthwell Cross, Christian in design, is inscribed with a runic inscription with lines from the Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Dream of the Rood,* alongside representations of 'birds and beasts [that] are transformed from portents into adoring subjects'.[179] As Bromwich states, the combination of Anglo-Saxon literature with a Christian sacred object reinforces 'many features of the ancient and contemporary magical world and its shrines'.[180] Though the 'magic' of the Ruthwell Cross sits somewhere between magic and miracle, as is often the case with this period, the fact that 'magical' literature crossed into Christian simulacra serves to bolster

[175] Meaney, p.85.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Meaney, p.176.
[179] Flint, p. 259.
[180] Ibid.

the argument that a wider magical understanding was felt across the country, in literary, religious and folk-magical spheres.

Differences

Though this research aimed primarily to note the similarities between Anglo-Saxon magical women and Welsh Arthurian magical women to create a broader overview of medieval female magic, some differences must be noted. Firstly, there is the obvious fact that the cunning women burials discussed were found in England, while the *Mabinogion* is a collection of Middle Welsh literature. It would be foolish to overlook this significant spatial difference. Medieval England and Wales were more distinctive in their culture and governance than the two regions are in modern-day Britain. That said, the cross-cultural comparisons contribute to our understanding of the broader context of Arthurian magical women. Nevertheless, differences must still be considered.

Magical Men

It would be remiss to discuss female magic in the *Mabinogion* without considering the magical men in the collection. The distinction between supernatural ability and magical talent is of great importance here. Helen Fulton explains the motif 'Six Go Through The World', the literary tradition that requires six helpers to aid the hero with his impossible tasks.[181] We can see this theme throughout Arthurian literature, exemplified in the *Mabinogion* in *How Culhwch won Olwen.* The men listed in the tale of Culhwch are all in possession of supernatural abilities. These range from the ability to hold one's breath underwater for nine days and nights, extreme height, the gift of speaking all languages, including conversing with animals, and the ability to find one's way in any region, even if they had never been there before. The character of Menw, however, possesses established magical ability and can cast spells. Fulton describes magic as agentive and the supernatural as agentless.[182] This distinction is relevant when considering our magical Arthurian women who seem to be somewhere between these boundaries. For example, consider the maiden in Peredur who gives the hero a stone of invisibility before vanishing. She could possess the supernatural ability to disappear as well as possessing and bestowing magical items. Meanwhile, if we consider the Lady

[181] Fulton 2013, p. 9.
[182] Fulton 2013, p.12.

who offers the precious ointment to our hero in *The Lady of the Well,* she purchased the ointment from a magical apothecary figure, rather than possessing any supernatural or magical ability herself.

Elsewhere in the *Mabinogion*, Menw casts a spell on a dog to stop its attack on his comrades and helps Arthur's retinue become invisible to enemies by casting a spell.[183] He also shape-shifts into a bird. Fulton describes shapeshifting as a frequent ability found throughout medieval Welsh literature.[184] We can see the same trend reflected in British Arthurian material and earlier Classical depictions of magical enchantresses. The capacity to shape-shift is inherent and supernatural, rather than a learned incantation, therefore proving that supernatural and magical ability, though different, can be shared by one individual.[185]

Two other key male magical figures found in the Third and Fourth Branches of the *Mabinogion* are Gwydion and Math.[186] Gwydion is skilled in enchantments and glamour and often employs these talents for dishonest and self-serving reasons such as power or wealth. His lack of benevolence directly contrasts with the generosity of magical women (excluding hags and witches) in the *Mabinogion,* who charitably bestow magical items to the heroes in their stories. Instead, Gwydion uses his magic to fool and misguide opponents, for example, tricking Pryderi into releasing his highly prized swine in exchange for twelve luxurious stallions and hounds temporarily conjured by Gwydion. Later, when the fraudulent crime has been discovered, Pryderi and Gwydion fight in single combat after a great battle, and Gwydion uses 'strength and valour, magic and enchantment' to win and kill Pryderi (p. 51).[187] Again, we see no evidence of this kind of trickery employed by magical women.

The magician Math relies heavily on his magical wand, punishing Gwydion and his comrade Gilfaethwy by transforming them into different animals each year for their misdemeanours. Unlike Gwydion's magic, Math's magic fundamentally transforms matter rather than casting mere illusion. Math also uses his wand when proving female virginity when he searches for a new maiden in whose lap he could lay his feet. When placed on the floor and stepped over by a maiden, the wand is a marker for virginity. When a maiden lies, a baby appears as a result. From these two incidents, Math's power stems directly from the wand. However, if the wand was the source of Math's magical power, the author described it as such. Instead, it is merely referenced as a tool used by Math.

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[183] Menw, son of Teirgwaedd, is listed under the triad of the 'Three Enchanters of the Island of Britain', from *Pen.* 16, fo. 51*r*-51*v,* marking him as an established enchanter, in Bromwich, p. 59.
[184] 'It may be noted that [Menw] is distinguished as a shape-shifter', Bromwich p. 61.
[185] More detailed analysis of the supernatural talents of Arthur's men can be found in Fulton's 2013 article.
[186] Math, son of Mathonwy, is described under the Triad of the Three Great Enchantments of the Island of Britain 'which he taught to Gw(y)dion, son of Dôn, in Bromwich, p.61.
[187] All references to the *Mabinogion*, unless otherwise specified, are from the Davies 2008 edition.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the wand channels Math's inherent magical ability. Throughout the *Mabinogion,* women possess and bestow objects on heroic male figures without keeping the talismans to use themselves. Each object associated with a magical woman has unique and limited power. We do not see examples of female magicians with as much power as Math or Gwydion, nor do we see any magical tools to enhance their power.

We can see further proof that Math's magic wand is not the source of his power when Gwydion and Math combine their magic to create a new life without any tools. To combat Aranrhod's 'curse' on Lleu (that he would never marry a human woman), Gwydion and Math combine their powers and 'through [their] magic and enchantment' they are able 'to charm a wife for him [Lleu] out of flowers', and they named her Blodeuedd (p. 58). Math's magic wand does not feature in this enchantment, proving his powers are innate, and the wand is not a source of power but a magical tool to aid with some enchantments.

Magicians' use of magical tools is reinforced when Gwydion discovers Lleu in the form of a sickly eagle. During this encounter, Gwydion uses a magic wand to transform Lleu into his proper form again, though he is near death (p. 63). If we consider the use of the magic wand; to transform a person from an animal into a human, it mirrors Math's first use of his wand. Perhaps then we should consider the magic wand as an essential tool in a magician's kit as a tool that permanently alters someone's form. The rest of Gwydion's magic is ephemeral, while the joint creation of Blodeuedd from flowers was the creation of non-human life rather than altering a human form. This theory would be plausible had Math not used his wand as a marker for Aranrhod's virginity. Though these theories cannot be proven, they are pertinent to consider when reflecting on tools and their uses, particularly with regards to gender. It seems that male magicians hold more innate power than females but are less generous with their magic and their magical objects as they do not help women as women help men. Despite bestowing many forms of magical objects, no female possesses a wand throughout the Welsh tales. Awareness of male magicians enables further comparison and characterisation of magical women and their tools. It highlights the difference in the way female magic and male magic are portrayed in the *Mabinogion.*

We see far fewer instances of male graves furnished with amuletic items than we do with women. Indeed, Meaney states that there is no doubt that 'Anglo-Saxon men did not have the kinds of amulets their womenfolk demonstrably had'.[188] The handful of examples of male amulets are most commonly connected to hunting or battle, shown in the form of boar tusks, amber and glass sword beads, whetstones or balls of pyrite (possibly representing light beyond the grave and therefore

[188] Meaney, p. 240.

religious rather than magical).[189] Instead of possessing amulets, men likely engraved runes or boar designs on armour or swords to invoke protection.[190] Therefore, the predominantly female magical and amuletic grave records directly contrast with the distribution of magical power in the *Mabinogion.* The depiction of magical men in Welsh literature seemingly highlights men as having more innate power than women. However, within the archaeological record, this is not the case.

Late Anglo-Saxon medical charms collated by men 'provide a rare glimpse into the intermingling of a Christian worldview and Germanic folklore.'[191] An example of Jolly's 'middle practice', medical charms found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, such as Bald's *Leechbook*, contain details from Roman Christian and Germanic traditions, demonstrating that a coherent early medieval magical identity was widespread across the continent with variations but similar underlying concepts. Jolly rejects the differentiation in categorising charms by 'magic' or 'superstition', favouring analysis that rationalises the charms within their own cultural context. [192] She explains how charms were considered medicinal and 'part of a Germanicized classical scientific system' that incorporated beliefs on nature, the universe and religion.[193] Since these practices relate specifically to healing 'magic', Anglo-Saxon charms, influenced heavily by Classical and continental beliefs, support the idea of a common stock of magical tools, for charms could be counted as a tool found throughout archaeology and indeed medieval literature. Gender is the crucial difference between the magic this research focuses on and the charms Jolly details. While herbal ointments of literature and archaeological herbal thread boxes suggest a predominantly female usage, the Anglo-Saxon medicinal charms were described and detailed by men, both in the Anglo-Saxon period and the Classical period, from which they draw much inspiration.

The difference between the role of magical men and that of their female counterparts, particularly regarding tool use, lends itself to further discussion on a broader spectrum of magical practice across the continent during the medieval period. The distinction between the prominent role of magical women and their reliance on tools, compared with the innate and often less generous magic of magical men, proves that there is a continuity between female magic, even across archaeological and literary spheres. The comparison between archaeological data suggests that male magical practice was uncommon, while the literary analysis suggests a more heightened gendered power favouring male magicians. This disparity is interesting, and further work into the reasons for this

[189] Meaney, p. 240.
[190] Meaney, p. 241.
[191] Jolly 1996, p. 96.
[192] Jolly 1996, p. 97.
[193] Ibid.

should be explored, with regard taken when considering who wrote the texts and why they were written. Overall, however, the presence and purpose of magical men differing from the fundamental role of magical women in the *Mabinogion* corroborates the idea of a generalised and accepted set of tools and roles held by women with perceived magical power in this period. Though literary depictions of magical men do not correspond with the lack of male amuletic graves, this only makes the similarities between 'magical' female archaeology and literature of even greater significance.

Further Work

The formation of an understanding of a conventional stock of magical tools used by magical women has the potential for a deeper and broader analysis of the perceptions and depictions of magical women across the continent. In order to understand magical Arthurian women fully, British Arthurian texts such as Layamon's *Brut*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini, Sir Perceval of Galles, The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* among others of the period, must be considered. Analysing these texts alongside the *Mabinogion,* and the Welsh Triads, would provide a more robust picture of female magic in Arthurian British texts and allow more reflective cross-comparisons between material. Literary analysis of Anglo-Saxon poetry, for example, the renowned *Beowulf,* would also be beneficial to contextualise literary perceptions of female magic fully. The comparison between British literature and archaeology would thus be broader, and the long-term impact of Anglo-Saxon belief would be easily charted. Welsh archaeology must therefore also be analysed, similar in the way that this research has considered Anglo-Saxon material. In-depth linguistic analysis on all forms of witchcraft and magic, mentioned in legal codes and medicinal documents, begun by Audrey Meaney, would be fruitful to consider in more depth.

Comparisons between Irish and Welsh texts provide evidence for magical objects, for example the closest Irish parallel tale to the Welsh *Trii Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Pyrdain* ('The Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain') tells of the legendary High-King Crimthann Nía Nar bringing back magical objects from a visit to the Otherworld.[194] Bromwich suggests that the parallels indicate 'that the original nucleus of the Welsh Treasures may also have consisted in stories concerning magic objects which had been won from the Otherworld or bestowed on mortals by its inhabitants'.[195] Further analysis into Irish material will inevitably provide a host of tangible connections in magical tool use and

[194] Bromwich, p. cix.
[195] Bromwich, p. cx.

practice, reinforcing the idea of an established magical identity across the Celtic traditions and beyond.

The scope beyond Britain is broad, encompassing all French Arthurian literature and other continental examples, and again *Lanzelet* can be considered as both an insular and a continental poem (as it was translated into German from an earlier Anglo-Norman source).[196] Continental archaeology will provide further insight into the archaeology of magical women, and burial records from the early medieval period across Europe should be considered when amuletic items are present. The same must be said for male amuletic graves, for these are essential for contextual comparison.[197] Old Norse examples of magical women, prominent in the Eddas and within Viking archaeology, could also provide another layer of contextualisation. The Völva (Viking magical seers who bore magical staffs) are a significant comparison to consider alongside British cunning women as both were deemed professional magical practitioners.[198]

Final Thoughts

The overarching conclusions of this research are that there are some tantalising similarities between the magical women of the tales known commonly as the *Mabinogion* and with cunning women of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Moreover, these similarities suggest a shared understanding of general magical gendered motifs, demonstrated through tool use, establishing a broader tradition beyond simply the British magical material of the medieval period. Evidence for this commonality is seen in French Arthurian literature and continental archaeology. Steeped in oral tradition and folkloric trends, further work into the broader implications of these similarities will shine a brighter light on the role and shared identity of magical women during the medieval period across Europe.

[196] Ad Putter, 2009, and Jolly et al, 2002.

[197] As there are fewer male amuletic graves in England, comparing this data with continental examples is all the more pertinent to establish magical trends.

[198] Sue Brunning, 'A 'Divination Staff' from Viking-Age Norway: At the British Museum', *Acta Archaeologica* 87, no. 1, (2016), 193-200. doi:10.1111/j.1600-0390.2016.12171.x., Neil S. Price, *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Second Edition, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019) and Ronald Hutton, 2001.

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