



Mummy, Mummy, why is everyone so excited about dumb Narnia and is it true that Geoffrey was right after all?

Not now dear. Mummy's busy working out why she has to use GCSE grades to assess Year 7's work. It seems to make all the same mistakes as using Level Descriptions, except that it adds a few more mistakes, all of its own. She tried raising this with the Head of Data, but it didn't go down well at all. Not at all.

For goodness sake stop moaning Mummy. And please tell me, why was Narnia dumb and was Arthur its king?

Ah! I think you must be talking about the Cornwall Archaeological Unit's recent excavation of the remains of what looks like a sixth-century palace at Tintagel that *might* have been the home of the kings of the ancient kingdom of Dumnonia.

But why are the archaeologists so sure it was a palace?

Metre-thick walls, big rooms, numerous shards of Roman amphorae for wines and olive oil, fragments of fine glass and a piece of Phocaean tableware all suggest that it was for someone very high-status. We already knew from glass and pottery fragments from Visigothic Spain, from the Byzantine Empire and from north Africa that that bit of Cornwall prospered as a trading port between 450 and 650 A.D. But this latest excavation of a new site now seems to suggest a large luxury dwelling, fit for kings.

So what have Geoffrey and Arthur got to do with it?

As far as the archaeologists are concerned, nothing. They aren't looking for evidence of King Arthur. But people interested in Arthur are naturally excited because of the legend that he was conceived and born in a castle at Tintagel. Until now, the earliest castle we knew about at Tintagel was built in the 1230s – seven centuries too late for Arthur. Evidence even for Arthur's existence, let alone where he was born, has been shaky, to say the least. Early accounts from the sixth-century monk Gildas seem to have been embellished six centuries later by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey wrote that Arthur was conceived at Tintagel by a British king and the wife of his arch-enemy after the wizard Merlin magically disguised the king as the woman's husband. Sixth-century sources say nothing about Arthur's conception, magical or otherwise, nor his birth, nor even the twelve battles Arthur was supposed to have won against the Anglo-Saxons. The overall picture is so wobbly that some historians conclude that Arthur is just an amalgamation of real and fictional characters from the Dark Ages.

Is Daddy an amalgamation from the Dark Ages?

That's an interesting way of describing Daddy, dear. Those unearthing evidence of Daddy in a few hundred years' time might well agree. To be fair to the Arthurian enthusiasts, however, evidence for Arthur's existence has been on the increase. In 1998 a stone inscribed with 'Artognou' (pronounced Arthnou) was found at Tintagel. Given the stone's dating, some deem it to strengthen the basis for an historical Arthur. Other scholars dispute such claims as too tenuous, but this new discovery of a sixth-century palace or castle will re-fuel debate both in popular and in scholarly Arthurian circles. We're talking well-made flagstone floors, steps, two rooms 11 x 4 metres... something important was going on. Whether or not evidence for the Arthur legend is found, such a big building will be very significant for the study of the period. There now, you've got me going, and it's time for bed. Run along now...

Mummy, what's the difference between functionalism, reductive physicalism and eliminative materialism. My science, history and RE teachers are having one of their rows again.