Northumbria Research Link

Identity and Myth; the Breton King Arthur

The myth of King Arthur is pre-eminently a British phenomenon, though now international in scope and familiarity. This paper will explore the relation between national identity and the myth by exploring recent French, especially Breton manifestations of the myth. The aim of the paper is to show how myth creates ideas about community that both integrates and separates peoples. The Breton use of Arthur is linked to the origins of the Breton people in Ancient British migrants from Cornwall, one of the homes of Arthurian Myth. The figure of Merlin is closely linked to Breton national and regional identity, and had become central to local identity by the 19th century. In the early 21st century the Breton King Arthur has become an international phenomenon with the success of Alan Simon's rock operas Excalibur, which draw on international popular musical conventions and use the English, French and Breton languages to explore neo-Celtic identity.