



Life of Merlin

Basil Clarke, Geoffrey of Monmouth

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Vita Merlini, or The Life of Merlin, is a work by the Norman-Welsh author Geoffrey of Monmouth, composed in Latin around AD 1150. It retells incidents from the life of the Brythonic seer Merlin, and is based on traditional material about him. Merlin is described as a prophet in the text. There are a number of episodes in which he loses his mind and lives in the wilderness like a wild animal, like Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel. It is also the first work to describe the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay, as Morgen. Geoffrey had written of Merlin in his two previous works, the *Prophetiae Merlini*, purported to be a series of prophecies from the sage, and the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which is the first work presenting a link between Merlin and King Arthur. The *Vita Merlini* presents an account of Merlin much more faithful to the Welsh traditions about Myrddin Wyllt, the archetype behind Geoffrey's composite figure of Merlin. Whereas the *Historia* had Merlin associating with Arthur, his father Uther Pendragon, and his uncle Ambrosius in the 5th century, the *Vita's* timeframe is during the late 6th century, and includes references to various figures from that period, including Gwenddoleu and Taliesin. Geoffrey attempts to synchronize the *Vita* with his earlier work by having Merlin mention he had been with Arthur long before.

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