

JAMES P. CARLEY, *Glastonbury Abbey*. Glastonbury: Gothic Image Productions, 1996. Pp. xxviii, 192. Plates, illustrations, tables, charts. ISBN: 0-906362-23-7. £9.95.

It is a pleasure to welcome this paperback reissue of *Glastonbury Abbey*, first published by Boydell and Brewer in 1988. At the end of the book its new publishers advertise their own guided tours of 'sacred sites of Britain and Ireland': Professor Carley is surely an excellent guide to the sacred site of Glastonbury.

The book, well-illustrated, gives the history of Glastonbury from Celtic times onwards. It also discusses Glastonbury's saints, relics, and manuscripts, as well as the researches of antiquarians and archaeologists. In this reissue the author adds references to work published since 1988, particularly in *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1991), which he co-edited with Lesley Abrams.

However, readers of ARTHURIANA will be most interested in chapter eight, 'Arthur, Avalon and the Bridge Perilous.' This chapter discusses the 'discovery' of Arthur's bones at Glastonbury in 1191, the origin of the names *Avalon* and *Glastonbury*, and associations of local places with Arthur's death.

The author also explores Celtic sources for the legend of Arthur. Professor Carley has done magnificent work on many aspects of Glastonbury studies (particularly as regards manuscripts); but it would be wrong to expect him to be equally at home with earlier material in Welsh. Nevertheless, some points make one uneasy. On pages 159–60 he discusses the Welsh *Four Branches* of the *Mabinogi*, which he confuses with *The Mabinogion* (the collection of eleven Welsh tales of which the *Four Branches* are part). He claims the *Four Branches* concern 'the prototypical British god *Maponos*, that is, the divine youth.' But this may be doubted, particularly as the *Four Branches* never mention the god *Maponos*. Professor Carley also tells us that Pwyll, the hero of the first branch, meets Arawn, prince of the Other World, on a magic mound, where they agree to exchange physical form, kingdoms, and wives for a year. But if we actually refer to the text, we find that Professor Carley's 'magic mound' is really a clearing in a wood; that Arawn is no prince, but a crowned king; and that Pwyll is unmarried.

If Professor Carley nods even in reproducing a text, what must we make of his notions that the tale of Pwyll 'is a Celtic equivalent to the Leda and the Swan tale and distantly prefigures the events surrounding Arthur's own conception,' while Pwyll himself 'in his role as god-king and tribal wiseman, seems to be a prototype of Pelles, the Fisher King of the Grail stories, whose residence is at the fabled Corbenic and who is wounded in his thigh as a punishment for drawing the sword of David'?

The kind of speculation which Professor Carley reproduces is especially unfortunate in the light of recent research on the *Four Branches* of the *Mabinogi*, which is summarized in this reviewer's *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), pp. 68–79. This research allows us to identify Professor Carley's 'magic mound' (where Pwyll meets, not Arawn, but his Other World bride-to-be Rhiannon). It is now known to be Banc-y-Warren, two miles east of Cardigan in West Wales, where it makes a kink in the highway to Aberystwyth. (Will Gothic Image now include it

REVIEWS

on their Sacred Sites tours?) As for the date and authorship of the *Four Branches*, there is good reason to regard them as the work of Gwenllïan (c. 1098–1136), princess of Gwynedd and Dyfed. The fact that we can now give the *Four Branches* a precise dating and social provenance will do much to assist our understanding of early Welsh traditions, not least the Arthurian tradition.

The above criticisms do not detract from the usefulness of *Glastonbury Abbey*. The book will keep its value for many years. When a new edition is needed, Professor Carley should point out that Glastonbury's mysterious Irish priory of 'Ocymild' (p. 19) can be identified from the handbooks of Irish religious houses as Ardaneer, near Loughill in west County Limerick.

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