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THE  
**ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA**  
 ELEVENTH EDITION

FIRST	edition, published in three	volumes,	1768—1771.
SECOND	” ” ten	”	1777—1784.
THIRD	” ” eighteen	”	1788—1797.
FOURTH	” ” twenty	”	1801—1810.
FIFTH	” ” twenty	”	1815—1817.
SIXTH	” ” twenty	”	1823—1824.
SEVENTH	” ” twenty-one	”	1830—1842.
EIGHTH	” ” twenty-two	”	1853—1860.
NINTH	” ” twenty-five	”	1875—1889.
TENTH	” ninth edition and eleven		
	supplementary volumes,		1902—1903.
ELEVENTH	” published in twenty-nine volumes,		1910—1911.

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A  
DICTIONARY  
OF  
ARTS, SCIENCES, LITERATURE AND GENERAL  
INFORMATION

ELEVENTH EDITION

VOLUME XVIII  
MEDAL to MUMPS



Cambridge, England:  
at the University Press  
New York, 35 West 32nd Street  
1911

*Merlin*, 1861) cannot be regarded as much more trustworthy than Geoffrey himself. The story of the tower, and the Boy without a Father, has been critically examined by Dr Gaster, in a paper read before the Folk-lore Society and subsequently published in *Folk-lore* (vol. xvi.). Dr Gaster cites numerous Oriental parallels to the tale, and sees in it the germ of the whole *Merlin* legend. Alfred Nutt (*Revue celtique*, vol. xxvii.) has since shown that Aengus, the magician of the Irish *Tuatha de Danaan*, was also of unknown parentage, and it seems more probable that the Boy without a Father theme was generally associated with the Celtic magicians, and is the property of no one in particular. Some years ago the late Mr Ward of the British Museum drew attention to certain passages in the life of St Kentigern, relating his dealings with a "possessed" being, a dweller in the woods, named Lailoken, and pointed out the practical identity of the adventures of that personage and those assigned by Geoffrey to Merlin in the *Vita*; the text given by Mr Ward states that some people identified Lailoken with Merlin (see *Romania*, vol. xxvii.). Ferd. Lot, in an examination of the sources of the *Vita Merlini* (*Annales de Bretagne*, vol. xv.), has pointed out the more original character of the "Lailoken" fragments, and decides that Geoffrey knew the Scottish tradition and utilized it for his *Vita*. He also comes to the conclusion that the Welsh Merlin poems, with the possible exception of the *Dialogue between Merlin and Taliessin*, are posterior to, and inspired by, Geoffrey's work. So far the researches of scholars appear to point to the result that the legend of Merlin, as we know it, is of complex growth, combined from traditions of independent and widely differing origin. Most probably there is a certain substratum of fact beneath all; there may have been, there very probably was, a bard and soothsayer of that name, and it is by no means improbable that curious stories were told of his origin. It is worth noting that Layamon, whose translation of Wace's *Brut* is of so much interest, on account of the variants he introduces into the text, gives a much more favourable form of the "Birth" story; the father is a glorious and supernatural being, who appears to the mother in her dreams. Layamon lived on the Welsh border, and the possibility of his variants being drawn from genuine British tradition is generally recognized. The poem relating a dialogue between Merlin and his brother bard, Taliessin, may also derive from genuine tradition. Further than this we can hardly venture to go; the probability is that anything more told of the character and career of Merlin rests upon the imaginative powers and faculty of combination of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

See also G. Paris and Ulrich (*Société des anciens textes français*, 1886); *Merlin*, ed. Wheatley (Early English Text Society, 1899); *Arthur and Merlin*, ed. Kölbing. (J. L. W.)

**MERLON**, in architecture, the solid part of an embattled parapet between the embrasures, sometimes pierced by loopholes. The word is French, adapted from Ital. *merlone*, possibly a shortened form of *mergola*, connected with Lat. *mergae*, pitchfork, or from a diminutive *moerulus*, from *murus* (*moerus*), a wall.

**MERMAIDS** and **MERMEN**, in the folk-lore of England and Scotland, a class of semi-human beings who have their dwelling in the sea, but are capable of living on land and of entering into social relations with men and women.<sup>1</sup> They are easily identified, at least in some of their most important aspects, with the Old German Meriminni or Meerfrau, the Icelandic Hafgufa, Margygr, and Marmennill (mod. Marbendill), the Danish Hafmand or Maremind, the Irish Merrow or Merruach, the Marie-Morgan of Brittany and the Morforwyn of Wales;<sup>2</sup> and they have various points of resemblance to the vodyany or water-sprite and the rusalka or stream-fairy of Russian mythology. The typical mermaid has the head and body of a woman, usually of exceeding loveliness, but below the waist is fashioned like a fish with scales and fins. Her hair is long and beautiful, and she is often represented, like the Russian rusalka, as combing it with one hand while in the other she holds a looking-glass. For a time at least a mermaid may become to all appearance an ordinary human being; and an Irish legend ("The Overflowing of Lough Neagh and Liban

<sup>1</sup> The name *mermaid* is compounded of *mere*, a lake, and *maid*, a maid; but, though *mere wif* occurs in Beowulf, *mere-maid* does not appear till the Middle English period (Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose*, &c.). In Cornwall the fishermen say *merry-maids* and *merry-men*. The connexion with the sea rather than with inland waters appears to be of later origin. "The Mermaid of Martin Meer" (Roby's *Traditions of Lancashire*, vol. ii.) is an example of the older force of the word; and such "meer-women" are known to the country-folk in various parts of England (e.g. at Newport in Shropshire, where the town is some day to be drowned by the woman's agency).

<sup>2</sup> See Rhys, "Welsh Fairy Tales," in *Y Cymmrodor* (1881, 1882).

the Mermaid," in Joyce's *Old Celtic Romances*) represents the temporary transformation of a human being into a mermaid.

The mermaid legends of all countries may be grouped as follows. (a) *A mermaid or mermaids either voluntarily or under compulsion reveal things that are about to happen.* Thus the two mermaids (merewip) Hadeburc and Sigelint, in the *Nibelungenlied*, disclose his future course to the hero Hagen, who, having got possession of their garments, which they had left on the shore, compels them to pay ransom in this way. According to Resenius, a mermaid appeared to a peasant of the Samsöe, foretold the birth of a prince, and moralized on the evils of intemperance, &c. (*Kong Frederichs den andens Krönike*, Copenhagen, 1680, p. 302). (b) *A mermaid imparts supernatural powers to a human being.* Thus in the beautiful story of "The Old Man of Cury" (in Hunt's *Popular Romances of the West of England*, 1871) the old man, instead of silver and gold, obtains the power of doing good to his neighbours by breaking the spells of witchcraft, chasing away diseases, and discovering thieves. (c) *A mermaid has some one under her protection, and for wrong done to her ward exacts a terrible penalty.* One of the best and most detailed examples of this class is the story of the "Mermaid's Vengeance" in Hunt's book already quoted. (d) *A mermaid falls in love with a human being, lives with him as his lawful wife for a time, and then, some compact being unwittingly or intentionally broken by him, departs to her true home in the sea.* Here, if its mermaid form be accepted, the typical legend is undoubtedly that of *Melusine* (q.v.), which, being made the subject of a romance by Jean d'Arras, became one of the most popular folk-books of Europe, appearing in Spanish, German, Dutch and Bohemian versions. (e) *A mermaid falls in love with a man, and entices him to go to live with her below the sea; or a merman wins the affection or captures the person of an earthborn maiden.* This form of legend is very common, and has naturally been a favourite with poets. Macphail of Colonsay successfully rejects the allurements of the mermaid of Corrievrekin, and comes back after long years of trial to the maid of Colonsay.<sup>3</sup> The Danish ballads are especially full of the theme; as "Agnete and the Merman," an antecedent of Matthew Arnold's "Forsaken Merman"; the "Deceitful Merman, or Marstig's Daughter"; and the finely detailed story of Rosmer Hafmand (No. 49 in Grimm).

In relation to man the mermaid is usually of evil issue if not of evil intent. She has generally to be bribed or compelled to utter her prophecy or bestow her gifts, and whether as wife or paramour she brings disaster in her train. The fish-tail, which in popular fancy forms the characteristic feature of the mermaid, is really of secondary importance; for the true Teutonic mermaid—probably a remnant of the great cult of the Vanir—had no fish-tail;<sup>4</sup> and this symbolic appendage occurs in the mythologies of so many countries as to afford no clue to its place of origin. The Tritons, and, in the later representations, the Sirens of classical antiquity, the Phœnician Dagon, and the Chaldaean Oannes are all well-known examples; the Ottawas and other American Indians have their man-fish and woman-fish (Jones, *Traditions of the North American Indians*, 1830); and the Chinese tell stories not unlike our own about the sea-women of their southern seas (Dennis, *Folklore of China*, 1875).

Quasi-historical instances of the appearance or capture of mermaids are common enough,<sup>5</sup> and serve, with the frequent use of the figure on signboards and coats of arms, to show how thoroughly the myth had taken hold of the popular imagination.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Leyden's "The Mermaid," in Sir Walter Scott's *Border Minstrelsy*.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Blind, "New Finds in Shetlandic and Welsh Folk-Lore," in *Gentleman's Magazine* (1882).

<sup>5</sup> Compare the strange account of the quasi-human creatures found in the Nile given by Theophylactus, *Historiae*, viii. 16, pp. 299-302, of Bekker's edition.

<sup>6</sup> See the paper in *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, xxxviii., 1882, by H. S. Cuming, who points out that mermaids or mermen occur in the arms of Earls Caledon, Howth and Sandwich, Viscounts Boyne and Hood, Lord Lyttelton and Scott of Abbotsford, as well as in those of the Ellis, Byron, Phené, Skeffington and other families. The English heralds represent the creatures with a single tail, the French and German heralds frequently with a double one.

A mermaid captured at Bangor, on the shore of Belfast Lough, in the 6th century, was not only baptized, but admitted into some of the old calendars as a saint under the name of Murgen (*Notes and Queries*, Oct. 21, 1882); and Stowe (*Annales*, under date 1187) relates how a man-fish was kept for six months and more in the castle of Orford in Suffolk. As showing how legendary material may gather round a simple fact, the oft-told story of the sea-woman of Edam is particularly interesting. The oldest authority, Joh. Gerbrandus a Leydis, a Carmelite monk (d. 1504), tells (*Annales*, &c., Frankfurt, 1620) how in 1403 a wild woman came through a breach in the dike into Purmerlake, and, being found by some Edam milkmaids, was ultimately taken to Haarlem and lived there many years. Nobody could understand her, but she learned to spin, and was wont to adore the cross. Ocka Scharlensis (*Chronijk van Friesland*, Leeuw., 1597) reasons that she was not a fish because she could spin, and she was not a woman because she could live in the sea; and thus in due course she got fairly established as a genuine mermaid. Vosmaer, who has carefully investigated the matter, enumerates forty writers who have repeated the story, and shows that the older ones speak only of a woman (see "Besch. van de zoogen. Meermin der stad Haarlem," in *Verh. van de Holl. Maatsch. van K. en Wet.*, part 23, No. 1786).

The best account of the mermaid-myth is in Baring-Gould's *Myths of the Middle Ages*. See also, besides works already mentioned, Pontoppidan, who in his logically credulous way collects much matter to prove the existence of mermaids; Maillat, *Telliamed* (Hague, 1755); Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, i. 404, and *Alldän. Heldenlieder* (1811); Waldron's *Description* and Train's *Hist. and Stat. Acc. of the Isle of Man*; Folk-lore Society's *Record*, vol. ii.; Napier, *Hist. and Trad. Tales connected with the South of Scotland*; Sébillot, *Traditions de la haute Bretagne* (1882), and *Contes des marins* (1882).

**MEROBAUDES, FLAVIUS** (5th century A.D.), Latin rhetorician and poet, probably a native of Baetica in Spain. He was the official laureate of Valentinian III. and Aëtius. Till the beginning of the 19th century he was known only from the notice of him in the *Chronicle* (year 443) of his contemporary Idacius, where he is praised as a poet and orator, and mention is made of statues set up in his honour. In 1813 the base of a statue was discovered at Rome, with a long inscription belonging to the year 435 (*C.I.L.* vi. 1724) upon Flavius Merobaudes, celebrating his merits as warrior and poet. Ten years later, Niebuhr discovered some Latin verses on a palimpsest in the monastery of St Gall, the authorship of which was traced to Merobaudes, owing to the great similarity of the language in the prose preface to that of the inscription. Formerly the only piece known under the name of Merobaudes was a short poem (30 hexameters) *De Christo*, attributed to him by one MS., to Claudian by another; but Ebert is inclined to dispute the claim of Merobaudes to be considered either the author of the *De Christo* or a Christian.

The "Panegyric" and minor poems have been edited by B. G. Niebuhr (1824); by I. Bekker in the Bonn *Corpus scriptorum hist. Byz.* (1836); the "De Christo" in T. Birt's *Claudian* (1892), where the authorship of Merobaudes is upheld; see also A. Ebert, *Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters im Abendlande* (1889).

**MEROE**, the general name (as Island of Meroe) for the region bounded on three sides by the Nile (from Atbara to Khartum), the Atbara, and the Blue Nile; and the special name of an ancient city on the east bank of the Nile, 877 m. from Wadi Halfa by river, and 554 by the route across the desert, near the site of which is a group of villages called Bakarawiya. The site of the city is marked by over two hundred pyramids in three groups, of which many are in ruinous condition. After these ruins had been described by several travellers, among whom F. Cailliaud (*Voyage à Méroé*, Paris, 1826-1828) deserves special mention, some excavations were executed on a small scale in 1834 by G. Ferlini (*Cenno sugli scavi operati nella Nubia e catalogo degli oggetti ritrovati*, Bologna, 1837), who discovered (or professed to discover) various antiquities, chiefly in the form of jewelry, now in the museums of Berlin and Munich. The ruins were examined in 1844 by C. R. Lepsius, who brought

many plans, sketches and copies, besides actual antiquities, to Berlin. Further excavations were carried on by E. W. Budge in the years 1902 and 1905, the results of which are recorded in his work, *The Egyptian Sūdān: its History and Monuments* (London, 1907). Troops were furnished by Sir Reginald Wingate, governor of the Sudan, who made paths to and between the pyramids, and sank shafts, &c. It was found that the pyramids were regularly built over sepulchral chambers, containing the remains of bodies either burned or buried without being mummified. The most interesting objects found were the reliefs on the chapel walls, already described by Lepsius, and containing the names with representations of queens and some kings, with some chapters of the *Book of the Dead*; some steles with inscriptions in the Meroitic language, and some vessels of metal and earthenware. The best of the reliefs were taken down stone by stone in 1905, and set up partly in the British Museum and partly in the museum at Khartum. In 1910, in consequence of a report by Professor Sayce, excavations were commenced in the mounds of the town and the necropolis by J. Garstang on behalf of the university of Liverpool, and the ruins of a palace and several temples were discovered, built by the Meroite kings. (See further ETHIOPIA.)

Meroe was probably also an alternative name for the city of Napata, the ancient capital of Ethiopia, built at the foot of Jebel Barkal. The site of Napata is indicated by the villages of Sanam Abu Dom on the left bank of the Nile and Old Merawi on the right bank of the river. New Merawi, 1 m. east of Sanam Abu Dom and on the same side of the river, was founded by the Sudan government in 1905 and made the capital of the mudiria of Dongola. (D. S. M.\*)

**MEROPE**, the name of several figures in Greek mythology. The most important of them are the following: (1) The daughter of Cypselus, king of Arcadia, and wife of Cresphontes, ruler of Messenia. During an insurrection Cresphontes and two of his sons were murdered and the throne seized by Polyphontes, who forced Merope to marry him. A third son, Aepytus, contrived to escape, and, subsequently returning to Messenia, put Polyphontes to death and recovered his father's kingdom (Apollodorus ii. 8, 5; Pausanias iv. 3, 6). The fortunes of Merope have furnished the subject of tragedies by Euripides (*Cresphontes*, not extant), Voltaire, Maffei and Matthew Arnold. (2) The daughter of Atlas and wife of Sisyphus. She was one of the seven Pleiades, but remained invisible, hiding her light for shame at having become the wife of a mortal (Apollodorus i. 9, 3; iii. 10, 1; Ovid, *Fasti*, iv. 175).

**MEROVINGIANS**, the name given to the first dynasty which reigned over the kingdom of the Franks. The name is taken from Merovech, one of the first kings of the Salian Franks, who succeeded to Clodio in the middle of the 5th century, and soon became the centre of many legends. The chronicler known as Fredegarius Scholasticus relates that a queen was once sitting by the seashore, when a monster came out of the sea, and by this monster she subsequently became the mother of Merovech, but this myth is due to an attempt to explain the hero's name, which means "the sea-born." At the great battle of Mauriac (the Catalaunian fields) in which Aetius checked the invasion of the Huns (451), there were present in the Roman army a number of Frankish *foederati*, and a later document, the *Vita lupi*, states that Merovech (Merovaeus) was their leader. Merovech was the father of Childeric I. (457-481), and grandfather of Clovis (481-511), under whom the Salian Franks conquered the whole of Gaul, except the kingdom of Burgundy, Provence and Septimania. The sons of Clovis divided the dominions of their father between them, made themselves masters of Burgundy (532), and in addition received Provence from the Ostrogoths (535); Septimania was not taken from the Arabs till the time of Pippin, the founder of the Carolingian dynasty. From the death of Clovis to that of Dagobert (639), the Merovingian kings displayed considerable energy, both in their foreign wars and in the numerous wars against one another in which they found an outlet for their barbarian instincts. After 639, however, the race began to decline, one after another the kings succeeded to the throne,