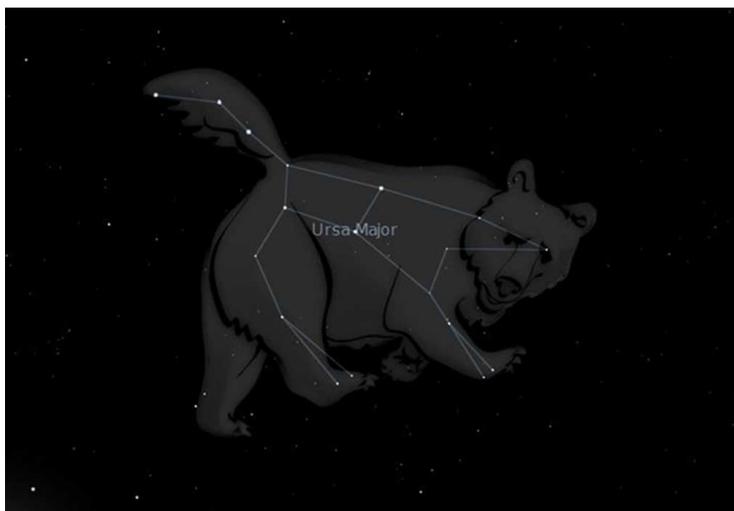


Arth Vawr and the Pendragon: Astronomical Link Between the Great Bear and Draco Constellations and the Arthurian Legend?

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Constellation Ursa Major (The Great Bear). [\(CC BY-SA 3.0\)](#)

From Mystery Hill and the spot dubbed Calendar Hill in New England to the venerable Stonehenge, from Incan Pyramids to the Australian outback, from the windswept northern Islands of Great Britain to sun-washed Egyptian ruins, the findings all are similar. There seems to be plenty of evidence that most, if not all, megalithic monuments had an astrological connection that pointed to something in the heavens. On the morning of a solstice, stand in the center of Stonehenge, visit Newgrange, climb

a watchtower at Mystery Hill or trek back into the Peruvian jungle to one of the great pyramids, and you will certainly understand that there is as much mathematical precision at any of those ancient places as you will find in the most complicated observatory built today. If you factor in degree of difficulty, even more. After all, although contemporary astronomers have sophisticated computers and telescopes at their disposal, if challenged, not many of them could duplicate our ancestors' work if all they were given to work with was stone.

The Link Between Arthurian Saga and Astronomy

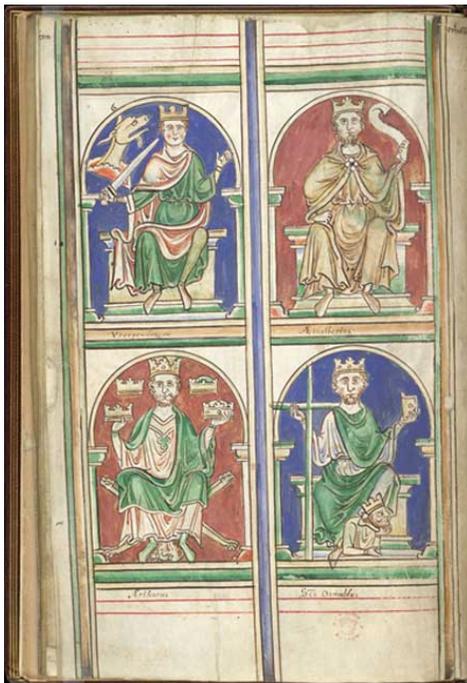
But the astrology of ancient times is hidden away in other disciplines as well. Katherine Maltwood, for instance, wrote a book in 1929 called *A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars*. It caused an immediate stir because she claimed to have discovered, in the very face of the landscape which was, in her time, covered by fields and seemingly natural folds of the ground, a series of huge figures that were literally carved into the earth. She recognized in them the signs of the Zodiac, each figure constructed beneath its parent constellation.

At the time of her discovery, she was diligently at work illustrating *The High History of the Holy Graal*, a work that had been translated from old French by a Dr. Sebastian Evans. On the final page of that book she found written these words: "*The Latin from whence this History was drawn into Romance, was taken in the Isle of Avalon, in a holy house of religion that standeth at the head of the Moors Adventurous, there where King Arthur and Queen Guenievre lie.*"



King Arthur's tomb site at ruins of Glastonbury Abbey (Moriari/Public Domain)

Avalon? That was right there at Glastonbury! Could there be a connection between the Arthurian saga and astrology? In other words, could the saga itself, sometimes called *The Matter of Britain*, which was first spoken and later written down many hundreds of years later, contain an astrological message that duplicated the work of ancient Neolithic workers in stone? If so, it would illustrate a literary version of the now well-known and almost universal megalithic adage: "As above, so below."



Illuminated manuscript showing Uther Pendragon, Aethelbert, King Arthur, and Oswald of Northumbria, from *Epitome of Chronicles of Matthew Paris* (Public Domain)

Two observations come into play: First, as the earth spins on its axis, it wobbles a little. This wobble is called precession. What it means is this: Slowly, over the course of thousands of years, from the standpoint of any vantage point on earth the constellations appear to change places. Our present north star, Polaris, wasn't always located in the true north. (As a matter of fact, it still isn't, and won't be until the year 2100.) Second, the dragon is an ancient symbol for earth energy, or what is now often called 'Pagan' religion. Its sign in the Zodiac is the constellation Draco.

Western Concept of the 'Evil Dragon'

During much of the long span of millennia that encompassed the construction of the great stone monuments built all over western Europe and the British Isles - a vast amount of time that lasted from at least 4500 to 1500 BC - there were actually two north stars, both located in the constellation Draco, the dragon.

People in western cultures differ from people in eastern cultures when it comes to their understanding of dragon symbolism. In the west, the dragon has come to represent evil. Anyone who reads JRR Tolkien's *Hobbit* stories is familiar with this interpretation. To those of this mindset, a dragon is a terrifying force of nature that consumes all in its path as it gathers gold and treasure. It doesn't use this treasure. It just hoards it. The only way to access the wealth is to slay the guardian. The evil dragon symbol is found in western mythology and monotheistic religious texts. It is there in the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden and is identified as: "that old serpent, the Devil" just before the final battle of Armageddon. In North and Central American mythology, it appears in the guise of a rattle snake. It is a creature meant to be conquered and destroyed, destined to fall before the materialistic and technological power of a humanity that is separate from and superior to the powers of nature.

Eastern Concept of 'Energized Dragon'

In the east, however, the dragon symbolizes something else entirely. There, it represents vitality and strength. It is understood to be the raw energy of nature, the ultimate power of the earth itself. The serpent that sheds its skin is in a continual process of growth and renewal. It is worshipped as the guardian of secret places. It is vividly immortalized in parades celebrating new beginnings. It is found in 'dragon lines' that carry vital earth energies as they 'snake' their way throughout nature. The intersection of these energy lines is often marked by great megalithic structures that some believe were constructed to magnify and amplify this vital earth force. In other words, they were built on holy ground.

In the time of the Arthurian legends, the western concept of the dragon dominated the Christian church. The dragon was a creature of the old, earth-centered, Pagan belief system that derived its strength from the power of Mother Earth. It was the Devil, himself!

In megalithic times, the stars pointing to true north were already, at least from the standpoint of earth-bound astronomers, being pushed out of the way by the constellation later called in Welsh and phonetically in Old Celtic, *Arth Vawr*. It means 'Great Bear'. Most western observers now recognize the principle stars of this grouping as the Big Dipper. In our time, the two stars forming the edge of the 'dipper' point to Polaris, the modern north star.



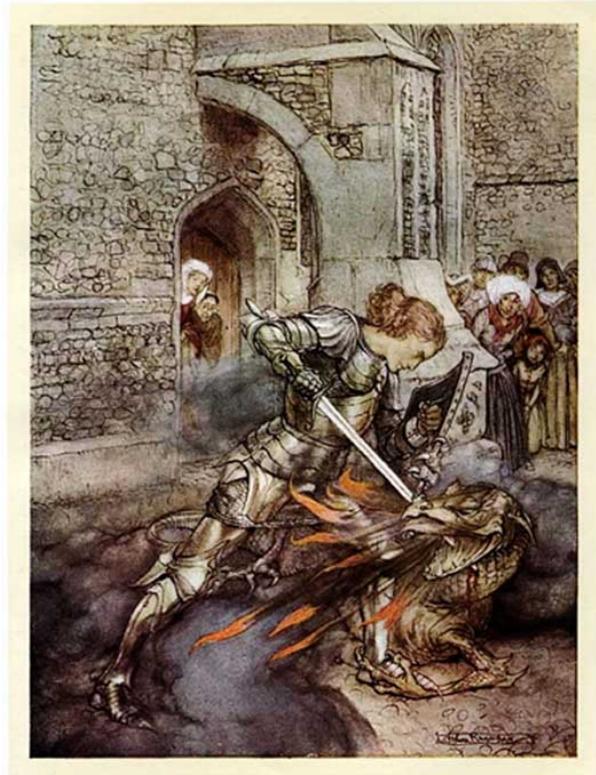
Arth Vawr, transliterated into modern English, is, of course, Arthur. And who was Arthur's father? Who preceded the 'Great Bear' himself? In the sagas, he is called *Uthyr* or *Uther* (which might mean either 'Wonderful' or 'Terrible') Pendragon, or 'Head of the Dragon'.

Christian Knights Slaying Pagan Dragons

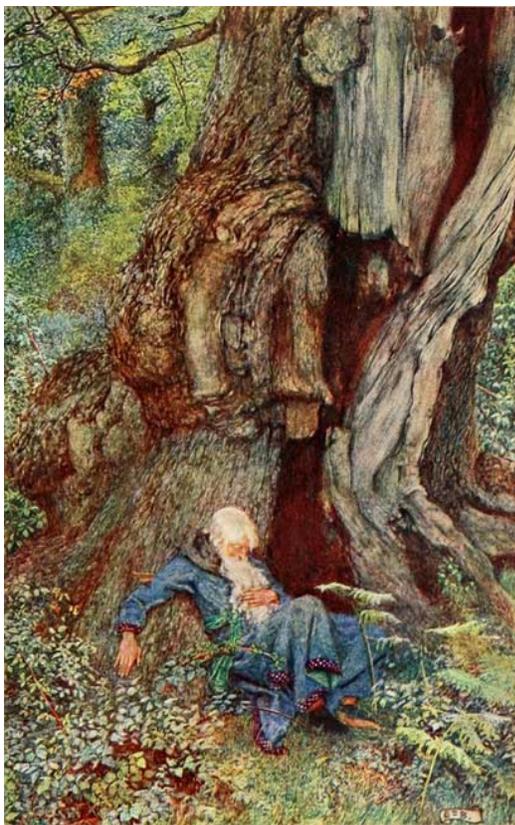
Consider the metaphorical relationship: in the popular telling of the story, what was a prime activity for Arthur (the Bear) and his knights, who succeeded Uther (the Dragon)? Slaying dragons, of course! This way of reading the story follows the old insight popularized by Sigmund Freud, that the son often goes about the business of usurping, or going beyond, his father. The Greeks played with this theme over and over again in their mythology. It is a common motif found in every culture on earth.

Thus, it is that at precisely the same time in history that the megalithic stone structures across the western European countryside were being built, the North Stars, which had been in the constellation called 'Draco the Dragon', were being superseded by a single new star, pointed to by the constellation named for the 'Great Bear'.

Much later, when it became time to tell the Arthurian stories, Arthur, the Great Bear himself, who was born a pagan but raised by Christians, was pushing out the Dragon - the old, pagan religion, while pointing to the new, victorious, pole star that now stood alone in the heavens. In this reading of the saga, the Church Triumphant, championed by both Arthur and his famous, pure-of-heart and dedicated Christian Knights of the Round Table, who went about the countryside searching for Holy Grails and other religious artifacts, while Merlin, the part-Druid, part-Pagan and generally mysterious magician of the old ways, who was secretly the power behind both Uther and Arthur, sadly slipped into his cave, just like Puff the Magic Dragon. He was the hinge upon which swung the historical gate marked 'Pagan' on one side and 'Christian' on the other.



Lancelot slays the dragon. Illustration from Tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table by Nelly Montijn-The Four Illustrated by Arthur Rackham. ([Public Domain](#))



Merlin: And in the hollow oak he lay as dead. Idylls of the King (1913) with illustrations by Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale. (Public Domain)

*O Merlin in your crystal cave
 Deep in the diamond of the day,
 Will there ever be a singer
 Whose music will smooth away
 The furrow drawn by Adam's finger
 Across the meadow and the wave?
 Or a runner who'll outrun
 Man's long shadow driving on,
 Burst through the gates of history, and hang the
 apple on the tree?
 Will your sorcery ever show
 The sleeping bride shut in her bower,
 The day wreathed in its mound of snow,
 And time locked in his tower?*

(Merlin, by Edwin Muir)

When you understand the story in these terms, it makes perfect sense. History, after all, is written by the victors. In this case it was written by the Christian Church, which had a vested interest in putting to rest the old Dragon religions that pointed to the stars rather than Heaven and derived its strength from Mother Earth instead of the Sun or, more appropriately, the Son, Jesus, the Christ. The time of the Dragon was dead. Long live the new age!

Over the course of time, the saga played itself out all around the earth, not just in the West. In China, for instance, the supreme God of this time was *T'ien*. His totem was the Great Bear. In Japan, where the Ainu people believed they were descended from the original inhabitants of the land, the bear was worshipped before all gods. In India, the mythical mountain *Meru* is the place where the gods reside. It is located, according to their stories, at the North Pole. New England native tribes used to celebrate certain auspicious days of the year by serving a captive bear a portion of his own flesh, symbolically of course. They would feast on the meat of the bear and place a leg bone in the mouth of the bear's skull, after which it would be buried with honor and dignity.

The Arthurian Sagas offer only one example of how mythology points to Ancient Astronomers. Sometimes the teaching was built into huge megalithic stone structures. Sometimes it was built into their stories. But no matter what the medium, it is still there for future generations to ponder. The ancients understood something we have forgotten. Theirs is a lost culture. We don't really understand the depths of their philosophical and religious thought. But if we ask the right questions and apply some thought to the problem, we may yet come to understand hidden truths that might affect us today.

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