

The Camelot Papers

Being the Shocking True History of Arthur's Acclaimed Table

As Recounted by Viviana, Royal Historian

To their Majesties Arthur and Guinevere



Adapted by Peter David



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First edition

Foreword by Professors Eugene Bronte, Dean of History,
and Fletcher Hodges, Faculty chair of Anthropology,
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WE CANNOT BEGIN TO CONVEY the excitement in the academic world when Professor R. K. Simpson, possibly the most renowned expert in the realm of mythic historical studies, presented to our board what is thought to be the long-believed-lost journals of the fabled Viviana.

Viviana (also known as “Vivian” and assorted other variations) has been a long-standing “character” in Arthurian mythos, but depicted in a variety of manners. Some describe her as a disciple of Merlin’s, others as a high priestess. Some have considered her interchangeable with the Lady of the Lake. But there remains a small percentage of historians, striving to separate Arthurian fact from fiction, who contend that—unlike such obviously mythical constructs as the aforementioned Lady of the Lake—Viviana was a very real individual. Now Professor Simpson has found the support that those academics have long sought.

As most of you know, the Professor virtually invented the study of what he calls “mythic history”—tales believed by many to be myth, but are actually anchored in fact. We at

G.B.U. believe that his most recent find may well surpass all his previous endeavors in importance simply because of the many iterations of the Arthurian legends. To finally know the real story from a woman who was there is an opportunity over which any true Arthurian enthusiast can only salivate.

Viviana, thanks to her varied incarnations in Arthurian tales, is considered by many in our field to be little more than myth herself. A woman capable of reading and writing, a rare enough commodity at that time in and of itself. But the things that she accomplished, especially when one considers the circumstances from which she came, and the environment in which she fought to survive, simply boggle the mind.

And now, at last, through the good offices of Professor Simpson, we have her actual journals, the authenticity of which we have established to our satisfaction. If we had not done so, we would not be sharing them with the reading public.

The papers present a virtual treasure trove of answers to historians who are obsessed with the apparent contradictions in the extant tales of Arthur and his knights. Picking one example: the status or even existence of Lancelot du Lac has been a subject of lively controversy. There is no mention whatsoever of Lancelot in the earlier recitations of the deeds of Arthur's knights. He does not make an appearance in any text until several centuries later, at which time he takes center stage at Camelot. This delay has prompted a number of scholars to postulate that Lancelot was entirely a fictitious individual. It is easy to understand how such a conclusion could be reached. Lancelot is presented as the best and boldest knight who had

ever lived, a Frenchman so formidable and irresistible that even the queen succumbed to his charms and cuckolded her husband for him. Since the first poets to write of him were themselves French, the theory was that he was nothing more than a wish-fulfillment construct.

Yet now, thanks to Viviana's papers, the truth becomes clearer. Lancelot does not appear in the earliest poems because he was, in fact, a rather brutal and disreputable sort who did not fit in with the idealized world that earlier writers desired to present. Plus, to be candid, there was certainly no love lost between the English and the French. Hence Lancelot's omission from the earlier tales, and the obvious desire of later French writers to rectify that omission by elevating the very flawed Frenchman to idealized status.

And that is merely one example of the various revelations that Viviana provides us.

Professor Simpson, as he did previously with the Atlantis chronicles, has worked closely with fantasist Peter David to cull the narrative into a more manageable size for the general public and David adapted the language to something more palatable for modern audiences. Although scholars will wish to scrutinize every page of the originals (secured in the Golden Bough University Library and available for accredited researchers), the average layman would likely find much of Viviana's writings redundant or even uninteresting, detailing as they do her daily life, particularly when many of those days were mind-numbingly dull. Mr. David and Professor Simpson have therefore presented for this volume a structure—a

story, if you will—that will answer all the questions that the more aggressive Arthurian fans have sent to G.B.U. since the discovery of Viviana’s journals was announced. An unabridged edition will be made available next year, although the projected cover price of \$275 will likely limit its sale to select libraries.

Step back in time, then, to a medieval era, and prepare to have many of your illusions dashed.

—Eugene Bronte, Fletcher Hodges

G.B.U., April, 2011



Day the First

MY FIRST SIGHT OF THE castle filled me with nothing but a deep and abiding anger. I looked upon it and all I could think was that it was populated by pampered creatures that cared only for themselves and stepped on the backs of people like me on their way to achieving their “great and glorious” destinies. Actually, in truth they did not even consider those like me to be “people.” We were just things. I was a thing, a possession, no different than a table or chair, aside from the fact that they likely cared more about tables and chairs than for someone like me.

The lash fell heavily across my back as it typically did when I allowed myself to pause even for a heartbeat. The assistant slave master screamed in my ear, “Keep moving! Keep moving, you mindless cow!”

As I did as instructed, I allowed for the thought that the castle itself was somewhat beautiful; far more majestic than any I had ever seen. And I had seen quite a few in my years.

I have honestly lost track of how many years that might be. Birth dates are the sorts of things that mean a great deal to a free woman and little to a woman who is a slave like me. When

your life is not your own but instead the property of others, you have only a passing interest in it. I believe I recall sixteen summers clearly, and so fancy I am somewhere less than my twentieth year. But I could well be wrong a few years either way.

At least this slave master did not have chains 'round my ankles. I despise those. The manacles weigh heavily upon me and always rub my skin raw to bleeding. They rob my legs of any feeling and then always leave me making a bad impression on whoever my new master might be, for I cannot move quickly enough to suit his or her fancy. This particular slaver, whose name was Lucius, settled for simple ropes that served more for guidance than imprisonment. Lucius told me, calm as you please, that ropes would suffice if I did not make any sort of attempt to flee. Were I to do so, he warned, then he would turn his dogs upon my trail and hunt me down and then the bonding would be far more severe.

He was doubtless trying to present himself as a man of compassion for some reason that suited his vanity. I am sure the truth of it was that he simply had no desire to diminish my resale value. In any event I agreed not to make any try at escaping and had been true to my word.

The spires of the outer wall of Camelot stretched so high that I thought they were like to touch the sky. Flags fluttered from the highest points, displaying a rendering of a fearsome dragon entwined around a sword. The wind was coming in steadily from the east.

The small procession of slaves, with Lucius in the lead, crossed the drawbridge that lay open over the moat. I glanced

into the moat, curious to see if any strange or exotic animals resided therein. There appeared to be none. I was disappointed. I had heard tales of fearsome monstrous lizards that swam within some moats, capable of devouring anyone foolish enough to cross. Never had I actually seen such creatures. The only monsters I had ever encountered resided within the walls of castles.

Once across the drawbridge, we entered the main square of the keep. Camelot itself was a standard sized gated community, with the primary road stretching from the drawbridge through to the heart of a bustling marketplace. I watched sellers going about their business: farmers hawking their wares; butchers displaying the carcasses of recently deceased chickens. Every so often I would spot someone who was, like me, trapped in servitude. Sometimes our eyes would meet and the reactions were always different. They might nod in silent acknowledgment, keep their gazes locked upon me as if to say, Wait. Just wait. Our time will come.

Or else they might see me and just as quickly lower their eyes, as if considering anything other than their chores and duty to their master would be sufficient to warrant a flogging.

Honestly, I do not know for whom I felt more sorry: the ones who still bristled with hope never to be fulfilled or the ones who dreamt of nothing more than their current state since they had given up all hope.

Beggar children approached the small wagon that Lucius's horse was pulling, with Lucius leading the horse. Lucius snarled out curses at the children and gestured for them to go back

whence they'd come. Seeing that they would obtain nothing from him, they started to approach me. Then they took a close look at me, with the bonds on my hands, the burlap clothes I wore that looked as if they were made of old potato sacks—which they were—and the thick, matted, unwashed black hair that hung lifelessly around my face like so much kelp. The two other slaves who walked behind me did not seem much more appealing. The children turned away.

It tells you something about your status in life when you are not even worth a beggar's time.

The portcullis that guarded the main entrance to the castle was old and rusty but looked sturdy nonetheless. As for the castle itself, it was the largest I had ever seen. As opposed to other castles that were little more than piles of stone, the outsides of Castle Camelot were made of varied colored stones that formed amazing mosaics. They displayed men at arms locked in battle with powerful mythic creatures, dragons and griffins and phoenixes. And the tiled mosaics stretched dozens of feet high, perhaps hundreds. It was so much to absorb that I stopped where I was just so I could take it in.

That was when I felt the lash across my back and the bellow from the assistant slaver to keep moving. It hurt as much as it always did and I sank to my knees, startled, gasping. I did not cry out, not wanting to give the bastard the satisfaction, but it was a near thing.

"Get up!" he practically shouted in my ear, which was ironic since I would not have been down had he not struck me.

He appeared ready to bring the lash across my back yet

again, and this time Lucius interceded, pushing him back and scolding him for his over-enthusiasm. "We want her at her best!" Lucius said. "Not beaten half to death! What sort of price do you think we'll get for her then, eh?"

"Pardons, sir," said his assistant whose name I had never even bothered to learn.

Lucius put out a hand and helped me to my feet. He spoke not a word to me, but there appeared to be the slightest hint of apology in his eyes. It was more than I expected and probably insincere.

We were brought through the main entrance to the castle. The hooves of the horse pulling Lucius' wagon clopped away on the paved entrance. The weather was tepid but a blast of cool air struck me as soon as we crossed the threshold. The more fanciful aspects of my personality made me think that it was an ill omen, a physical representation of a certain chilly reception, or perhaps simply an indicator that the master of the castle had all the warmth of a winter storm.

We passed servants going about their business, and children scampering around, stopped in their activities to point and laugh. One youth who was holding a roll saw us, drew back his arm, and slung it. I do not think he was aiming it at any of us particularly, but it bounded off my head. This sight was greeted with snickers from the children. Seeing the bread at my feet, I cared not for its origins or the disdain with which it was thrown. I tried to grab for it but as I did the rope 'round my wrist was yanked tight and I was pulled forward. The slave behind me snatched it up and crammed the entire piece into

his mouth. He looked at me challengingly as if daring that I demand a share. I said nothing.

“Halt!”

We stopped upon the shouted order. A squat, swaggering man approached us. He was wearing a stained white tunic and seemed thoroughly unpleasant. “Is this the lot?”

“Yes, milord.”

“Do I look like a lord?” said the man contemptuously. He had a point.

He walked past us, looking us up and down. He stopped when he saw the small burlap sack slung over my shoulder. “What is that?” he said.

“It is . . .” I began to respond out of reflex, more fool I. His hand swung and took me in the face. I swayed, staggered but did not fall.

“I wasn’t asking you!” he bellowed in my face.

“It is her possessions,” Lucius said.

“Possessions? A slave with possessions?” He grabbed the sack away from me, which was unnecessary since all he needed to do was ask. He pulled open the sack, looked inside and then frowned in confusion. “Why do you have this?”

Afraid to speak, I simply shrugged.

“Answer me!”

“My father gave it to me.”

“Your father is a fool.”

I said nothing. It seemed the safest course.

Obviously feeling the contents of my sack warranted no further interest on his part, he shoved it back at me. I clutched

it to my bosom, taking care not to say “Thank you” or even make eye contact. Once upon a time it would have been the sort of situation that would have prompted me to start crying. That had not happened in a long, a very long, time. I was bereft of tears, having shed them all when my status in life had been transformed from free woman into slave.

He shoved a small sack of coins into Lucius’ hand and said, “This should serve you for the lot of them.” I could see by Lucius’ expression that he felt the sum was inadequate. Instead he said nothing. Lucius was a free man and yet, in his own way, he lived in as much fear as I. He bowed his head in submission and pulled the horse’s reins. Lucius cast one final glance in my direction and, although I may well have imagined it, it seemed tinged with regret. Then he turned the horse around and beast and master—each slaves in their own way—walked out of Castle Camelot.

A wizened woman had appeared at the side of the castle’s slavemaster. He pointed at the slave to my right and said, “This one for the stables,” and then to my left and said, “This one for the laundry.” Finally he looked at me. He took my chin in one rough hand and pulled my head left, then right. Then he examined my teeth as if I was a mare. “The king will vet you personally.”

“Vet me?” I should not have echoed his words, but they slipped out. I braced myself for the inevitable blow that would surely follow. None came.

“The king,” he said, “inspects each comely female slave personally.”

Ah.

Then I understood.

It was not the first time. It would not be the last. I had learned long ago, a lifetime ago it seemed, that a slave's body is not her own. That lesson, hammered home enough times, was the reason my store of tears had dried up.

The other slaves did not cast a glance my way as the slave master led me through the maze of corridors that constituted Castle Camelot. I had heard many things about the castle's fabled ruler. None of them had been especially flattering. Even less flattering were the rumors about his son, reputed by many to be an evil bastard, although a few whispered that he was simply a buffoon.

We passed men whom I took to be knights by their attire. Most apparently gave me no thought, although some seemed to feel I was worth a quick glance before going about their business. The master brought me to a large pair of doors and thrust them wide. They opened onto an impressive room, lined with all manner of weapons mounted upon the wall. There were also several mounted animal heads looking at me in a bewildered fashion.

"Wait here," he said as if I had a choice. Then he noticed that my hands were still tied. He pulled a knife from his belt and sliced through the bonds in one quick movement. "Do not," he warned, "even think of trying to escape."

I did not see how anyone could reasonably control one's thoughts, but I did not point that out as it seemed a futile thing to do.

He nodded once as if approving the sound of his own voice and then turned and left the room, pulling the doors shut loudly behind him.

I waited. I did not have to do so for long.

There was a smaller door at the far end of the room and a great bearded man entered through it. It was as if, in his very presence, he occupied the entire chamber. He was magnificently dressed, but my attention was drawn to his fingertips. They were thickly stained with what I knew to be dried blood, having seeped so thoroughly into his skin that his hands had become permanently discolored. That told me all I needed to know of him.

He took a deep drink from a silver chalice he was holding. He then extended it to me in what I imagine he thought to be a gesture of hospitality. My impulse was to decline, but I was so hungry and thirsty that my hands moved of their own volition. He looked down at me—he was at least a head and a half taller than I—as I gulped down the fiery liquid. I had no idea what it was. I did not care. In the worst case, it would numb me or even kill me, and thus relieve me of what was to come.

“I am Pendragon,” he said.

I did not volunteer my name. He did not ask. I had learned in such circumstances that they typically did not wish to know. Knowing my name would bring me that much closer to being viewed as a human, and he might not be able to treat me like a sack of meat and bones suited only for his pumping pleasure.

“Put down the sack,” he said, expressing no interest in its

contents. I dropped it onto the floor. Then he inspected my face in the exact same manner as the other man had. He brushed my hair back, ran his fingers through it. They snarled on tangles therein and he pulled the fingers through. It hurt like the devil but I bit tightly on my lower lip.

"You will do," he said, which for a man like Pendragon was about as close to words of romance as he was going to get.

I was hoping I would, at the very least, get a preparatory bath out of the bargain, but he had no such interests. Instead he threw me down upon the bed. I lay there for a moment and then said, as respectfully as I could, "Highness . . . I am dirty and disgusting from the road."

"I prefer dirty and disgusting," he said. "My wife, primed and perfumed within an inch of her life . . . it makes me sick to think of it. You are what a real woman should be."

"Filthy?"

"To engage in filthy activities, yes. Absolutely. On your stomach," he said.

I obeyed. I had no other choice. In days past, I had fought. And fought. Sufficient blows to the head and face and body will cure one of such resistance.

He approached me, grabbed my hips roughly. I closed my eyes and prayed that he wound up severely chafed.

That was when the far doors opened.

A servant entered. He had a round, open face and a confused expression. His long brown hair was tied off in the back to keep it out of his face, and his manner was bewildered. "I . . . am sorry, highness. Is this a bad time?"

“Is this a . . . ?” Pendragon clearly could not believe the question.

The servant approached me and smiled vacantly. “Hello. Are you new here? What is your name?”

Unable to believe the circumstances facing me, I still found enough wits to say, “Viviana.”

“Hullo, Viviana,” he said.

“Hello, Viviana!” Pendragon thundered. He yanked himself off me, for which I breathed a sigh of relief. My emotions were long dead within me, but the man was damned heavy and uncomfortable. I should have been thankful that he had not had his way with me; instead I was just happy that he had not destroyed my back. “How many times have I told you to knock? In fact . . . how many times have I told you to leave me alone!?”

The servant’s legs quivered as Pendragon approached him. His feet were rooted to the spot. He tried to put up his hands to avoid the inevitable fist but failed as Pendragon cuffed him soundly. The servant went down, his eyes spinning.

I wanted to do something but obviously could not. Pendragon could easily have broken me in half with one swing of his fist; he was that formidable looking. He was paying me no mind, however. He appeared focused on the servant whose very presence seemed to enrage him. He kicked the poor servant once, twice, thrice, and the servant begged for mercy and pleaded that he would try to do better and endeavor to remember to knock or, even better, never bother him at all.

Tiring of abusing the poor creature, Pendragon stepped back and said with a snarl, “What did you want, anyway?”

"I forget," the servant whimpered.

Pendragon let out a frustrated roar. "Get out of here!" He gestured toward me. "And take this with you! You disrupted my good humor and I will likely not recapture it for hours."

"Yes, highness. At once, highness." Nursing the places where he had been kicked, the servant took a few steps toward me and then winced. Even walking appeared to pain him. He gestured to me. I slid off the bed, pausing only to grab the small sack with my belongings. I ran to his side and he said, "Where shall I take her, highness, if you do not mind my asking?"

If Pendragon had minded his asking, I suspected the response would have been more abuse. But Pendragon sat on the edge of the bed, gestured vaguely, and said, "The kitchen. Bring her to the kitchen."

The servant bobbed his head, took me by the elbow and hustled me out the door. The moment we were in the corridor, he sagged against the wall and let out a low, pained moan.

"Are you all right?" I said.

I knew it was a stupid question the moment it had escaped my lips. Curiously, he did not seem to realize just how stupid it was. "Let me check," he said. He opened his palm and spit into it, then studied the spit. "No blood. That's a good sign. Right? Is that not a good sign?"

I had to think that he had been struck in the head quite a few times in his life to appear that disconnected. He even managed a smile although it seemed more of a lackwit smirk than a true smile. His eyes continued to have that vacant, empty look, as if his brain was functioning but only with sufficient energy to

ensure his ability to talk, see, and walk without falling. "That is a very good sign," I said.

He took heart in that, told me he would walk me to the kitchen, and proceeded to escort me. "What is your name?" he said.

Clearly he was so addled that he could not recall I had told him moments earlier. Little surprise. Pendragon had likely knocked the memory right out of his head. "Viviana," I said again.

"Viviana. Nice name. Welcome to Camelot."

"Yes. What a wonderful welcome," I said humorlessly.

Considering he appeared to have no grasp of subtleties, it was impressive that he managed to discern what I was not saying. "Do not concern yourself about the king."

"'Tis easy for you to say. He is not interested in having his way with you." Then I paused and added curiously, "Is he?"

He blinked. "Not to my knowledge. God, I hope not. Anyway, he will forget all about you in short order."

I was not sure how to respond to that. The concept should have filled me with relief but I was unclear as to what the servant was saying. "Am I that unmemorable?"

"What? Oh . . . no. It is just that the king tends to . . . forget things. It has worsened lately. If matters proceed as they often have, then by supper tonight he will no longer recall there was a new serving wench in Camelot. You will be just another one of the servants beneath his notice."

It might have sounded insulting in other circumstances, but I knew he spoke aright. Lords and ladies, highborn of

all manner, tend to look right through slaves and servants. If Pendragon had no recollection of me as an individual, he would certainly not discern me once I was one of the throng. Besides, better beneath his notice than beneath his body.

I allowed myself to feel some relief. As detached as I might be from the abuse to which others subjected my body, it did not mean I was desirous of such activities. I was glad that the brutish king would not, apparently, be requiring my "services" in that regard.

"Viviana." The servant frowned thoughtfully. "That is a French name, is it not?"

"In my case, Italian. Named for my mother."

"Italian. That is not the same as French?"

I did everything I could not to react to his stupidity. As much as Pendragon had abused him, I was starting to think uncharitable thoughts, such as that it was amazing Pendragon had not simply slain him out of annoyance long before this. "No. Two languages, spoken in two different countries."

"Ah." He took that information in stride but did not seem inclined to ask after it further. Instead, as if the subject of other countries bored him, he said, "I hope you will not judge the king too harshly by what you saw."

"How else am I to judge other than by what I see?"

"A bad impression, is what I am saying. It could be misinterpreted."

"He wanted to ravage me."

"Well, yes, but what king would not?"

Bizarre as it sounded, I believed the servant actually intended

that as a compliment. I could not bring myself, however, to thank him for it. Instead I said, "Many a king, I should hope. His actions were . . ." I searched for the least inflammatory word I could devise. " . . . uncharitable."

"One hopes you will be here long enough to change your mind. Here is the kitchen."

Through a creaking wooden door I heard the sounds of utensils being sharpened and meat being chopped. Simple-minded he may have been, but at least he did not get lost in his own castle. I glanced right and left, wanting to make certain no one overheard, for slaves cannot be too careful, and I said, "Truthfully, I do not know why you defend him. We both know he is a brute. I understand you feel a duty as his servant, but still . . ."

"Servant?" He seemed most amused by that. "I am not a servant."

"Then who are you?"

"I am his son. Arthur."

I stared at him, terrified. "You . . . are the son of Uther Pendragon?"

"Aye."

Instantly I dropped to my knees, clutching at his breeches. "Forgive me, sire. I should not have spoken so out of turn, I . . . please do not have me executed . . ."

"Executed?" He stared at me in wonderment. "If I had everyone who said nasty things about my father or me executed, the castle would be nigh unto empty . . . as would the countryside, I daresay. No, no, do not you worry your little head

about a thing. Just go about your business.”

He walked away from me then, his hands draped behind his back, swaying slightly as he did so. “Everything is fine. Everything is perfectly fine.”

Arthur Pendragon. Arthur, son of Uther. Future lord of Camelot.

This was no evil, conniving threat. This man, the one his father treated no better than a slave, was a simple-minded buffoon. An idiot, despised by his father, perhaps because he was clearly unfit to assume the throne upon Uther’s passing.

Fortunately enough, it was none of my concern. I did not expect to be a permanent resident of Camelot; slaves have a way of being passed around. Instead it brought me a degree of grim pleasure, knowing that at some point in the future, those who had smirked at me or tormented me upon my arrival would find their fates in the hands of an incompetent boob. They would be depending upon him to defend them from their enemies and, frankly, it boded well for the enemies.