

WALES: KING ARTHUR

by Ross Mulkern

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Was Arthur a true, historical figure or only a hero of legend? This is truly up to each and every one of us to decide for ourselves. Arthur represents a man who was the epitome of good against evil, light against darkness, and that eternal, never-ending struggle between what is right and that which is wrong.

King Arthur is a medieval, mythological figure who was the head of the kingdom Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table. It is not known if there was a real Arthur, though it is believed he may have been a military leader who worked with the Romans to fight off a Saxon invasion during the 5th century. His legend has been popularized by many writers, films and songs ever since.

During the 800s, a man called Nennius of Wales wrote a book called History of the Britons, which became a very important text for people who believe King Arthur was a real man because it listed at least 12 battles in which the king fought. However, historians have since pointed out that it would have been logically impossible for him to have fought in all of these battles because of the dates and distances between fights. Nonetheless, Nennius's book describes Arthur as a brave and noble character. This idea was later added to by a writer called Geoffrey of Monmouth, who introduced the mystical figure of Merlin and joined his life with that of Arthur's, also giving the king/warrior a birth story and an overall narrative that is still repeated today.

In the story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, Arthur, who is son of the king but was raised by another family, takes his rightful place as king when, as a boy, he is able to pull the sword called Excalibur from the stone. Although he rules wisely and is helped by Merlin the magician, Arthur makes enemies of other kings and is often at war.

Due to cultural mixing in Europe, political influences and writers' imagination, the Arthurian story developed into a full-fledged legend and

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complex story, with an emphasis on a noble kingdom called Camelot, the Knights of the Round Table and the queen, Guinevere, who has an affair with the knight Lancelot. Other aspects of the tale include the king's deadly conflict with his nephew or son, Mordred, and the knights' quest for the Holy Grail.

So, what do you think? Was King Arthur a real person, or are the tales of him and his knights just nice stories invented by someone with a great imagination? Or maybe you think he was real but think the legend has become far more impressive than any real historical figure? Whatever the truth, the stories of King Arthur will surely continue to be told for many generations to come.