

King arthur as a hero

People



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The life of King Arthur consists various features in myths the world over, from his secret parentage to his final encounter in a paradise across the waters. Even though mythical elements, such as giants, wizards, and magic play significant roles in the story, at its core is the simple tale of a man trying to live in accordance to the highest standards in a world where human weaknesses exist.

He was a celebrated epic hero of medieval Britain. King Arthur assumed the lead character in some of the most famous literary works renowned the world over. For nearly 1, 000 years, poets have put into writing the noble deeds of this mighty king as well as the brave exploits of his knights (Castleden 107; Higham 10).

King Arthur was born in a place in time where imagination and history come together. Although it is possible that the original legends have been based on the life of a real person, scholars have not yet identified who that person actually is. Be it a product of the imagination or a real account, his story has been fashioned by the literary creations and earliest myths which evolved around him, and the chivalrous medieval king who appears in the well-known versions has been conceptualized in a more recent time (Higham 150).

Perhaps there was a real King Arthur. However, historic accounts that will serve as verification of his actual existence are insufficient. His tale was passed on by words of mouth from one generation to the other. The stories told about him could have had their basis on a real British leader who

successfully won minor battles against German conquerors from the early 500 A. D. (Castleden 107).

According to legend, Arthur's parents were King Uther Pendragon and Duchess Igraine of Cornwall (Castleden 13). Sir Ector, one of Uther's barons, raised Arthur but did not tell him of his royal ancestry (Castleden 107). Then guided by Merlin, an old Celtic magician, Arthur defeated a force of rebellious princes and married the beautiful Princess Guenevere (Castleden 107). He had a number of residences. However, the castle in Southern England, named Camelot was his favorite (Castleden 148).

Excalibur was his sword. There are two versions of how he obtained this sword. In one version, Excalibur was embedded in a stone slab so that only the worthy successor of the British throne could pull it out (Higham 10). Many men tried, but only Arthur succeeded. He thus proved right to be king of England.

According to the other version of the legend, Arthur received the sword from the mysterious Lady of the Lake (Castleden 178). She lived in a castle in the middle of a magic lake. Just before Arthur died, he commanded Sir Bedevere, one of his knights, to throw Excalibur into the lake. When Bedever did so, a hand rose from the water, caught the sword, and pulled it beneath the surface (Castleden 178). No one ever saw the sword again.

At the start of the fifth century CE, a once-powerful empire of Rome was starting to collapse (Matthews 13). It would last for another few hundred years, but it can never regain its former glory, when it had extended from Africa in the south to Scotland in the north, from Spain in the west to

America in the east (Matthews 13). Rome's boundaries were now shrinking back upon themselves, and the inhabited regions had started to leave from distant provinces, summoned home to defend the Eternal City itself.

As the year 410 CE drew to a close in one of these provinces, the island of Britain, the mists drew back behind the last departing Roman galley, and the ancient land was once again sent back to its former masters, the Celts (Matthews 13). Certainly, this strong and independent people had never been greatly conquered, and many areas of Britain had remained independent of Roman influence, producing a crisscross of conflicting factions across the whole island.

Accounts concerning the events which led to the death of the king come in different versions. It was believed that King Arthur waged war against Emperor Lucius of Rome and took over the most part of Western Europe (Castleden 178). Early writers maintain that King Arthur was summoned home even before he was able to complete his conquest. The king heard that Modred, a knight who was either his son or nephew, captured his wife and seized control of his territory (Higham 10). He killed Modred but he succumbed to death because of the wounds obtained from the battle.

Later poets wrote that the king had completed his conquest against the Romans. Following his return to Britain, he had his court to start the search for the dish or cup that was used by Christ during the last supper, the Holy Grail (Castleden 107). According to some legends, the Grail was a dish or a stone. The Holy Grail inspired writers during the Middle Ages to put into writing the allure of this cup or dish. These poets may have adapted the legend from a tale told much earlier by pagan Celtic people. The Celtic story

described a magic cup or dish that provided food and drink for anyone who used it. Different versions of the Grail story written during the Middle Ages differ from one another on important points as well as in small details. However, each version of the story describes a search of the Holy Grail by King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

Following the end of the battle, a love affair grew between the king's wife, Guenevere and one of his knights, Sir Lancelot (Castleden 107). While waging a war of vengeance against his unfaithful knight, the king learned about the betrayal of Mordred. Afterwards, a battle followed which resulted in the deaths of both Mordred and the king. Most people believed that the wound of the king would be cured and that one day he would come back to his country when they desperately need him.

Le Morte Darthur, a famous romantic prose is a compilation made by Sir Thomas Mallory at around 1469 from much earlier English and French romances telling the story of the legendary Arthur (Higham 150). Several poets made Mallory's work a basis of their literary accounts of the king.

People of the Western world have been caught up in the intriguing romances of King Arthur for well over a thousand years. Throughout Great Britain, continental Europe, and North America, the adventures of Arthur and his noble knights know no cultural or nationalistic boundaries. A multitude of translations have nearly removed language barriers, rendering Arthur as a universal epic hero in every sense of the world.

Associated with his name are qualities that are good, worthy, and honest. His spirit embodies principles disciplined by ethics, truth, victorious through

justice, power submitting to right, compassion blending with sensitivity, chivalry governed by courtesy, and love tempered by forgiveness.

At the mere mention of this king among kings, people of different ages, races, and cultures can call to mind at least one story of the well-known adventures surrounding him. They can identify the names his wizard, his sword, his queen, and at least several of his knights. The name King Arthur produces a charming appeal, a mixture of awe of fantasy and the spice of reality. The one who are tantalized by him are stuck in the knightly exploits of the romantic Middle Ages – the thrill of the court, the intrigue of courtly love, knights who seek for daring missions, banter and the display of manhood. Still, even with these enthusiasts, there is an inciting interest in Arthur's reality. The magic of Arthur spills over into history and the Dark Ages where captivating mysteries are locked in the mists of time (Reno 5).

Even though this area of history, archaeology, and speculation is not as famous to the enthusiasts of the romanticized Arthur, the concern on his historicity is as strong as the interest in his knightly achievements recorded in literary tradition. Legendary heroes serve as examples to promote cultural values as they pass from one generation to the other.

King Arthur was one of the greatest cultural heroes of all times, an embodiment of all desirable values. He was filled with powers that bordered on wizardry, brought back to life not once but twice, and rescued his country from total destruction for over a half century. Records of his exploits developed into medieval romances, entering modern times laden with exaggeration, fabrications, clever inventions, and sometimes intentional deception.

Every time the name King Arthur is mentioned, the majority of enthusiasts think only of the romances. It is the appeal of these stories which arouses the imagination: King Arthur's noble knights, the code of chivalry, the formidable Merlin, banter, courtly love, damsels in distress, battle, honor, and the search for adventures. There has been never such an outpouring of stories about such an impressive figure upon such insufficient historical basis.

King Arthur is the greatest of British literary heroes, celebrated by poets and writers for over a thousand years. From the twelfth century to the twentieth, his heroic acts have been celebrated in prose and verse, and have inspired painters and poets alike.

Heroes come into being for different reasons. At times, it is to set what is right and wrong, or at times, it is to establish a profound change in society, or at other times still, it is to recover lost treasure, both of this world and the other. The hero known as Arthur came into being in response to a cry for help from a people in need.

The life of the celebrated leader of Britain became the basis for a compilation of narratives otherwise known as the Arthurian legends (Higham 10). Being a central feature of British mythology, King Arthur was a symbol of the epic tradition of the Britain. The Arthurian legends, together with its elements of fate, chivalry, betrayal, adventure, war, love, magic, and mystery, has tapped into the common imagination and formed part of the humanity's collective mythology.

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