

Macbeth was a real king of the Scots who ruled in the 11th century. Scholars believe Shakespeare learned the story of the historical figure from a chronicle which was popular in England at the time.

There was a difference, however, between the facts presented in the chronicle and the actual history of Macbeth.

First ... the BBC provides a short biography of the real king:

Shakespeare's Macbeth bears little resemblance to the real 11th century Scottish king.

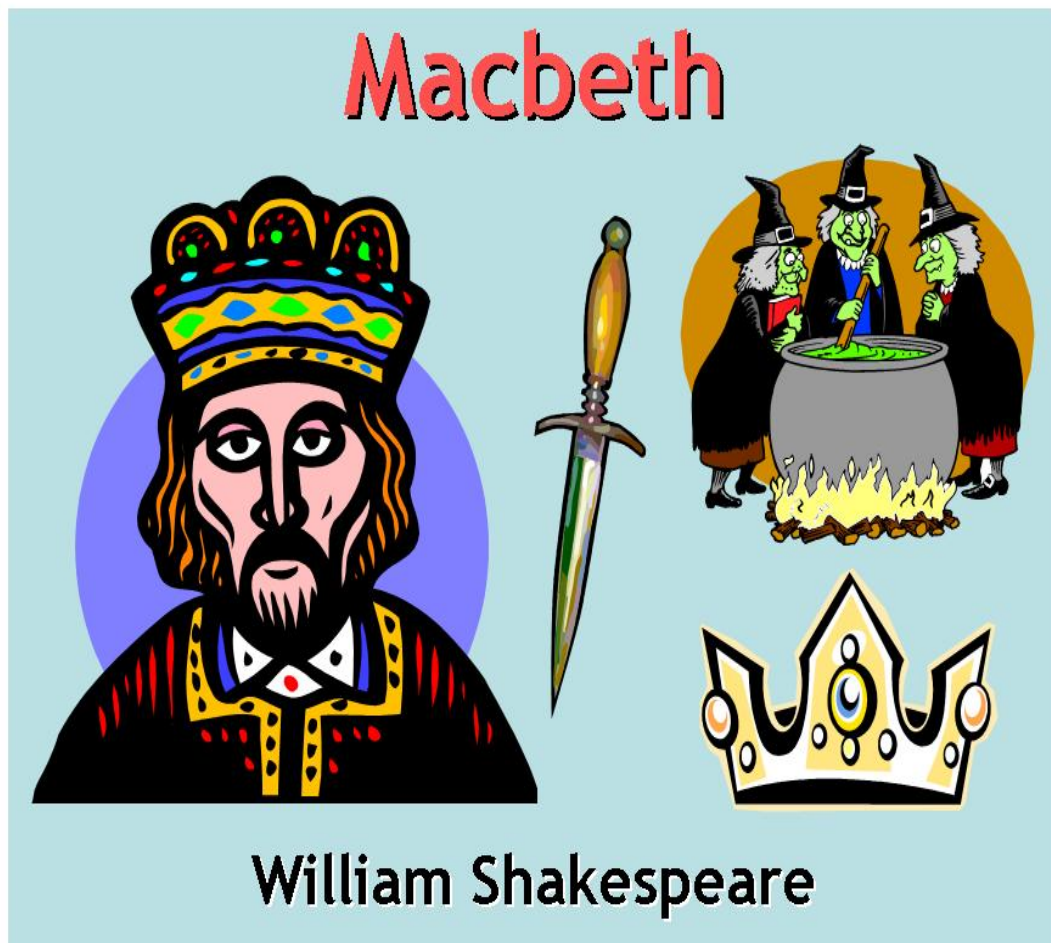
Mac Bethad mac Findláich, known in English as Macbeth, was born in around 1005. His father was Finlay, Mormaer of Moray, and his mother may have been Donada, second daughter of Malcolm II. A 'mormaer' was literally a high steward of one of the ancient Celtic provinces of Scotland, but in Latin documents the word is usually translated as 'comes', which means earl.

In August 1040, he killed the ruling king, Duncan I, in battle near Elgin, Morayshire. Macbeth became king. His marriage to Kenneth III's granddaughter Gruoch strengthened his claim to the throne. In 1045, Macbeth defeated and killed Duncan I's father Crinan at Dunkeld.

For 14 years, Macbeth seems to have ruled equably, imposing law and order and encouraging Christianity. In 1050, he is known to have travelled to Rome for a papal jubilee. He was also a brave leader and made successful forays over the border into Northumbria, England.

In 1054, Macbeth was challenged by Siward, Earl of Northumbria, who was attempting to return Duncan's son Malcolm Canmore, who was his nephew, to the throne. In August 1057, Macbeth was killed at the Battle of Lumphanan in Aberdeenshire by Malcolm Canmore (later Malcolm III).

So ... how was it that Shakespeare wrote a dark tragedy so different from the real history? Did he use his own imagination, to make Macbeth's tale more dramatic - or - did the history reach Shakespeare in an already-altered version?



Scholars believe the story reached Shakespeare by this historical path:

- Fordun's *Chronica* (which contains the story of the real Macbeth in Book IV - bk IV);

- Wynton's *Oryginale* (a history of Scotland);
- Boece's *Historia* (another history of Scotland);
- Bellenden's version of the *Historia*; and

- Raphael Holinshed's version of Bellenden's *Historia*, entitled *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (published in 1587.)

But ... according to Shakespearean scholar Arthur Wilson Verity, in his book *Macbeth* ... the historical king is not fairly presented in these narrative works:

The picture of Macbeth in these successive narratives is consistent, as we should expect. It is an extremely unfavourable picture, untrue to history as recorded by more reliable authorities... (A.W. Verity, *Macbeth*, page xiii.)

The reason these narratives contain fanciful sections, inaccurately depicting historical facts? Macbeth was an "interloper," not descended from the line of Scottish kings:

Of the defamatory legend that supplied the materials of the poet the explanation is at once simple and satisfactory. With the Scottish historians who followed the War of Independence it was a prime concern to produce an unbroken line of Scottish kings stretching to the fathers of the human race. As an interloper in this series Macbeth was a monster, whose origin and whose actions must alike have been contrary to nature. In the hands of Wyntoun, therefore, improved by Hector Boece, Macbeth was transmuted into the diabolic personage whom Holinshed presented to the genius of Shakespeare. (A.W. Verity, *Macbeth*, pages 247-48.)

This 30-minute animated version of *Macbeth* was commissioned by BBC Wales in the early 1990s. It was actually made in Russia for original broadcast in Wales.

Although this animation may seem like a "cartoon," it follows Shakespeare's play and includes its language and tragedy - including murder. Lady Macbeth is as diabolical here as she is in the original.

This clip is neither easy to watch (the witches could be scary for young viewers) nor simple to understand (because the language is Shakespearean). On the other hand ... it provides an indelible summary of the play.

See, also:

[Animated Macbeth, Part 2](#)

[Animated Macbeth, Part 3](#)

Credits:

Clip from [Shakespeare: The Animated Tales](#) (also known as *The Animated Shakespeare*). Originally broadcast in 1992, each episode of the series is a thirty-minute adaptation of a Shakespeare play.

The producer of this BBC-commissioned series was the Dave Edwards studio in Cardiff, the scripts were authored by Leon Garfield, the academic adviser was Professor Stanley Wells and the animations were created by Russian directors and animators at the Christmas Films Studio in Moscow. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the production.

Director:

Nikolai Serebryakov

Macbeth:

Voiced by Brian Cox

Lady MacBeth:

Voiced by Zoë Wanamaker

Narrator:

Alec McCowen

Duncan:

Voiced by Laurence Payne

Banquo:

Voiced by Patrick Brennan

MacDuff:

Voiced by Clive Merrison

Witches:

Voiced by Mary Wimbush, Val Lonsaine and Emma Gregory

Malcolm:

Voiced by David Acton

Donalbain

Voiced by Richard Pearce

Lennox:

Voiced by John Baddeley

Quoted passage from the BBC biography of the historical figure, [King Macbeth](#).

Quoted passages from [Macbeth](#) by A.W. Verity (1901).

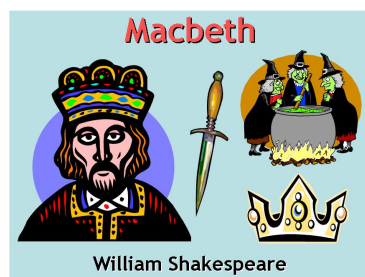
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Macbeth-The-Play-and-the-Story-Behind-It0>

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Macbeth

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