



0. ARTHUR AND HIS WORLD - Story Preface

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One of the many legends about King Arthur involves his sword, Excalibur, and how young Arthur was able to claim it as his own weapon.

So many legends surround King Arthur that sorting them out becomes nigh-unto-impossible.

Scholars believe he may have been a real person and, if so, he likely lived in the 6th century. But whether he was a king, or a warlord, is as unclear as the "where and when" of his battles.

If he really is historical, he would have lived in "The Dark Ages" when contemporary written records did not always include names and dates. We are thus left with much conjecture, and scholarly guess-work, instead of dependable facts and figures.

Archeology is helping to fill-in the gaps, but more is unknown than known about him. And more romantic literature has been written about Arthur, his loves, and his escapades, than nearly any other personage from the ancient world.

What do ancient sources actually say about Arthur? Do they name him, by name, or identify his parents? Was Guinevere (Gwenhwyfar, in Welsh, meaning "white shadow") really his wife? Was Lancelot his trusted companion or the product of a writer's imagination? Was there really a group of Knights of the Round Table?

Let's take a look at the earliest sources and compare them to the works of later writers.

The first mention of Arthur (as far as anyone knows today) goes back to approximately 600 A.D. The Welsh bard Aneirin, in his poem Y Gododdin from the Book of Aneirin, describes the courage of a warrior who died in battle (with the Angles) by comparing (near the end of his poem) the fallen Briton to Arthur:

*He fed black ravens on the rampart
Of a fortress, though he was no Arthur*

Gildas, although mentioning others by name, does not mention Arthur at all. Scholars think there may have been political reasons for such an omission.

Nennius, the likely 8th century writer of Historia Brittonum ("History of the Britons") lists twelve Arthurian battle victories. He is a major source of King Arthur stories and calls Arthur a "leader of battles" (*dux bellorum*, or warlord) instead of a king.

Scholars who believe Arthur lived also believe he may have been mortally wounded (by Mordred who also died) in the battle of Camlann. The Annales Cambriae, which were based on earlier chronicles and compiled around 955, state that Camlann took place around 537 A.D. If Arthur died (as a result of a head injury) in that battle, it would have been very close to the time Gildas began to write "The Ruin of Britain."

Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh Norman, is the major source for all later Arthurian legends and traditions. Writing in the 1100s, nearly 600 years after the historical Arthur may have lived, Geoffrey's Historia Regum Britanniae ("History of the Kings of Britain") creates an Arthur significantly out of proportion to any evidence of the historical person.

In the Middle Ages, Arthur was immortalized as a true legend in Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur (1485). Although we cannot be sure of Arthur's life, and whether he was a king or a warlord, scholars are reasonably certain stories about Guinevere and Lancelot are the products of those later literary legends.

Even so, archeological digs reveal amazing details about life in the "Dark Ages." But that - including a trip to some of the sites most closely associated with Arthur - is another story for another day.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ARTHUR-AND-HIS-WORLD-King-Arthur>

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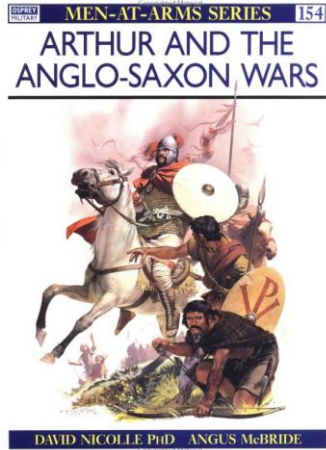
Media Stream



King Arthur and Excalibur

Image of King Arthur's legendary sword, known as "Excalibur," online via Wikimedia Commons.

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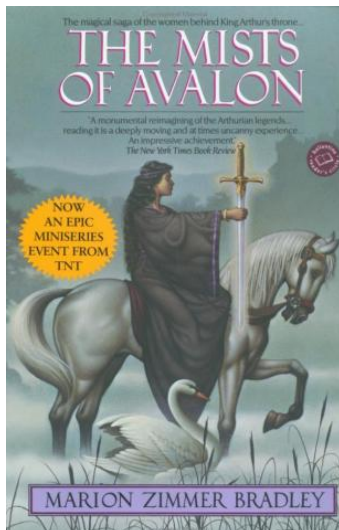


Arthur and the Anglo-Saxon Wars - by David Nicolle, PhD

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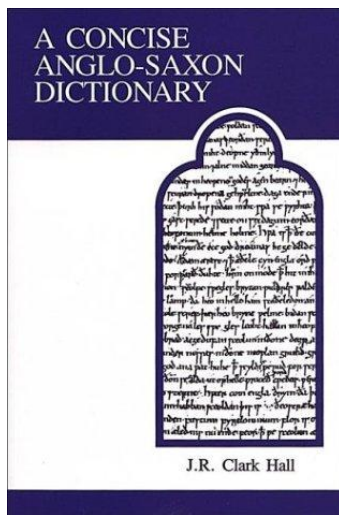


Knights of the Round Table

Image, described above, online courtesy BnF [website](http://www.bnf.fr).

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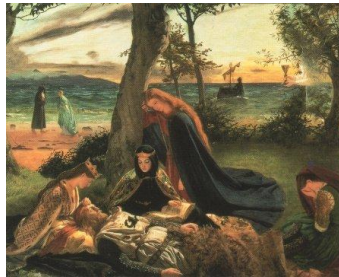


A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary - by J.R. Clark Hall

Book-cover image online, courtesy Amazon.

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King Arthur - Mortally Wounded

Image, described above, online courtesy [CGFA Online Art Museum](#).

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The Death of King Arthur

Image, described above, was created circa 1875. It is online, courtesy "[The Camelot Project](#)" at the University of Rochester.

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Death of Mordred

Arthur Rackham created the image, described above, circa 1917. The Macmillan Company published "Romance of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table" in New York, during 1917.

The image is online, courtesy "The Camelot Project" at the University of Rochester.

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The Combat of Mordred and King Arthur

Image, described above, included in "The Boy's King Arthur," published by Charles Scribner's Sons, in New York, during 1880.

The image is online, courtesy "The Camelot Project" at the University of Rochester.

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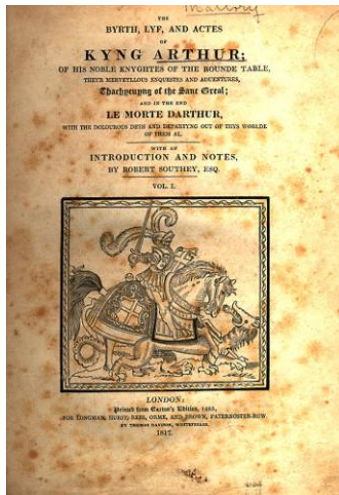
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Combat-of-Mordred-and-King-Arthur>



Camlann - Battle

[Image online](#), via the BnF.

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Morte d'Arthur

Image described above - of the book published in London by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, in 1817 - online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Legendary Site of King Arthur's Tomb

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