

Did King Arthur Exist?

Arthur is said to have lived and fought around the year 500. Examine these sources to see if you think he existed. The first is from a poem about a man named Gwawrddur (pronounced like Gwad-arthur) and it mentions that he was not as amazing as Arthur. That's the only mention of Arthur.

The second source is the next earliest source, written 300 years after Arthur is said to have existed.

Y Gododdin

"Though he was no Arthur
Among the powerful ones in battle
In the front rank, Gwawrddur was a palisade"

-Poet Aneirin, around the year 600

History Of the Britons

"Then it was, that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror.

The first battle in which he was engaged, was at the mouth of the river Gleni. The second, third, fourth, and fifth, were on another river, by the Britons called Duglas, in the region Linuis. The sixth, on the river Bassas. The seventh in the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon. The eighth was near Gurnion castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter. The ninth was at the City of Legion, which is called Cair Lion. The tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit. The eleventh was on the mountain Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregion.

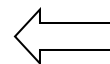
The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon. In this engagement, nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty."

- Monk Nennius, writing around AD 830



Color this historical recreation of what Arthur might have looked like in the 500s!

Note: This is everything Nennius wrote about Arthur. Writing materials were expensive, and all books were written by hand!



Our next mention comes from 950 (four hundred years after Arthur is said to have existed). Like the other two sources, it was written by Welsh/Brittonic authors. Arthur was Brittonic and fought against the Angels and Saxons (also known "English"). The last source is written by an English man 600 years after Arthur.

The Annales Cambriae

"516 The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders and the Britons were the victors.

521 St. Columba is born. The death of St. Brigid.

537 The battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell: and there was plague in Britain and Ireland."

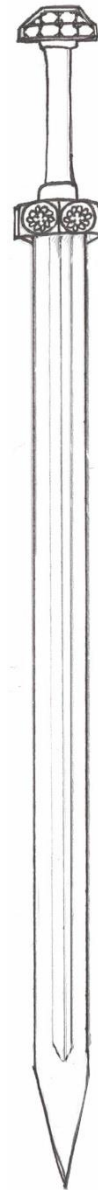
- Written anonymously around 950-1000

Chronicle of the Kings of England

"When Vortimer died, the British strength decayed, and all hope fled from them; and they would soon have perished altogether, had not Ambrosius, the sole survivor of the Romans, who became monarch after Vortigern, quelled the presumptuous barbarians by the powerful aid of warlike Arthur.

It is of this Arthur that the Britons fondly tell so many fables, even to the present day; a man worthy to be celebrated, not by idle fictions, but by authentic history. He long upheld the sinking state, and roused the broken spirit of his countrymen to war. Finally, at the siege of Mount Badon, relying on an image of the Virgin, which he had affixed to his armour, he engaged nine hundred of the enemy, single-handed, and dispersed them with incredible slaughter. "

- William of Malmesbury in 1125



This is a drawing of a real sword from the 500s. It was inlaid with amethysts. Other swords were inlaid with garnets. Would you want yours inlaid with gems? If so, what gems? Color the sword to be how you'd like it!

Questions:

Do you think King Arthur existed? _____

Do you think he was a king? _____ Why or why not? _____

Books can burn, rot away, or be stolen, and writing materials were rare and not everyone could write. Why do you think we know so little about Arthur? _____