Arthurian Legend

The Arthurian Legend is a story based on the life of King Arthur. Arthur was the son of Uther Pendragon, king of Britain, and Igraine, the wife of Gorlois of Cornwall. When Arthur’s father died, this left Arthur the chance to become king of Britain and was awarded as king after successfully withdrawing a sword from a stone. The details of Arthur’s story are mainly mythical and literary invention, which has left his historical existence being debated and disputed by many historians. There is not much historical background behind the details of King Arthur’s existence, and this sparseness has left many people skeptical about King Arthur.

The one version of King Arthur that has been accepted to set the table for all other texts is the version depicted by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey’s version of events sees Arthur as the king of Britain who defeated the Saxons and established an empire of Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Norway and Gaul. Many of the main elements and incidents that are now a big part in the way that the Arthurian legend is told nowadays appear in Geoffrey’s Historia, such as Arthur’s father Uther Pendragon, the wizard Merlin, Arthur’s wife Guinevere, the sword Excalibur, and final rest in Avalon. Many other writers have contributed lots of significant elements and incidents to the Arthurian legend. With many of these stories being made, lots of the narrative often shifts from King Arthur himself to other characters, such as various Knights of the Round Table. Arthurian literature lives on today and his stories are not only told through books and texts, but are also told through movies, plays, and comics. The Arthurian Literature was not always so popular throughout the world as the Arthurian literature experienced a fade in the centuries that followed the Middle Ages, after the Arthurian Literature was thriving during the Middle Ages. The Arthurian Legend has now resurged, but is still not accepted so widely as a true story because of the lack in evidence.

With the lack in evidence, it has been difficult for many historians to create a story that flows through the Arthurian Legend, since there are so many different understandings of King Arthur. Arthur has been accepted as being a genuine historical figure, being a Romano­British leader who fought against the invading Anglo­Saxons sometime in the late 5th to early 6th century. Another text that supports Arthur’s historical existence is the 10t century Annales Cambriae. This text links Arthur with the Battle of

Mount Badon, as it dates this battle to 516 – 518. The text also mentions the battle of

Camlann, which is where it is believed that Arthur was killed while battling with Mordred, who was also killed, and this dates back to 537 – 539. Some of these texts do sound fairly convincing that the Arthurian Legend was in fact true, however, the fluctuation in the way that the stories are told, as well as the lack in evidence of the stories, forces many historians to feel very skeptical about the existence of King Arthur. One of the main plot elements of Arthurian Legend includes the story of the Round Table. The Round Table is King Arthur’s famed table where he and his Knights congregate. As the table is described as being “round”, this means that it has no head and everyone who is sitting at the table has equal status. The Round Table first appears in Wace’s Roman de Brut, a Norman language adaptation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s

Historia, and this was finished in 1155. Wace describes that the reason Arthur created the

Round Table was to prevent quarrels among his barons, none of whom would accept a lower place than the others.

Another important event in Arthurian legend is when Arthur was given the sword Excalibur. Arthur first needed to prove to Merlin, the court magician, that he was a noble king and a mighty warrior. Once he gained this trust, he became the possessor of the miraculous sword Excalibur, given to him by the mysterious Lady of the Lake. At Arthur’s death, Excalibur was returned to the Lady of the Lake as Sir Bedivere threw the sword back into the lake. The Excalibur is commonly mistaken for the sword in the stone, where Arthur was required to draw the sword from a stone to prove his royalty.

The Arthurian Legend is a unique story that has been studied by many historians to understand the events that created the myth. With the lack in evidence, however, it has made it very difficult for historians to actually study King Arthur, and has also made it difficult for people to accept the existence of King Arthur.

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