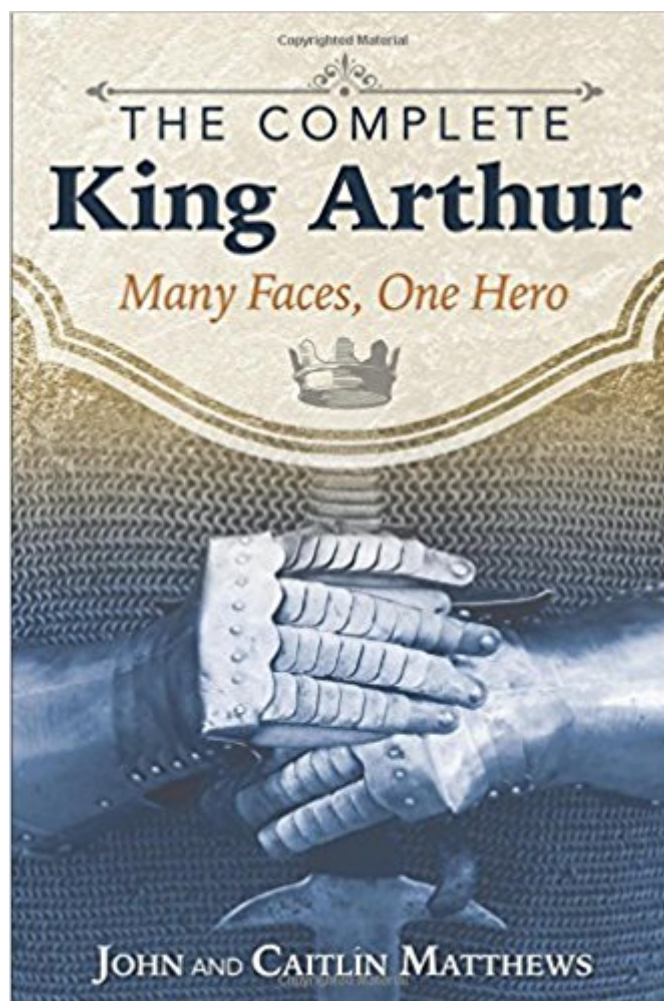


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# The Complete King Arthur: Many Faces, One Hero



## Synopsis

A comprehensive examination of the historical and mythological evidence for every major theory about King Arthur • Explores the history of every Arthur candidate and the geographical arguments that have placed him in different locations • Examines 1,800 years of evidence for Arthur's life and the famous series of 12 battles fought against the Saxons in the 6th century • Reconstructs the history of the 6th century in Britain, when the first references to Arthur and the core events of his reign appear

Few legends have had the enduring influence of those surrounding King Arthur. Many believe the stories are based on historical truth. For others Arthur represents the archetype of the brilliant monarch reigning over a fairy-tale kingdom, offering his knights the opportunity to prove their mettle in battle and find gnostic illumination through initiation into sacred mysteries like that of the Grail. Presenting the culmination of more than 40 years' research, John and Caitlín Matthews examine the historical and mythological evidence for every major theory about the existence of King Arthur. Drawing on modern techniques in archaeology and scholarship, they reconstruct the history of the 6th century in Britain, the period when the first unambiguous references to Arthur appear. They explore the history of every Arthur candidate, the geographical arguments that have placed him in different locations, and the evidence for his life and famous battles fought against the Saxons. Was the greatest British hero of all time not a king but a 2nd-century Roman officer active around Hadrian's Wall in Cumbria? A 5th-century soldier who operated in areas as far apart as Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, or Brittany? Or an entirely mythical fiction that provided a figure of light during a dark period of British history? Examining other literary figures from the 5th century such as Vortigern and Ambrosius, the authors also break down the plots of all the major Arthurian romances, including those by Chretien de Troyes, Sir Thomas Malory, and Robert de Boron, to reveal the historical events they are based on. Piecing together the many fragments that constitute the image of Arthur, both the man and the myth, the authors show how each face of Arthur has something to offer and how his modern popularity proves the enduring power of the hero-myth, truly earning Arthur the title he first received in the 15th century: The Once and Future King.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Certain figures of myth and history have an ability to touch us deeply and take up residence in our imaginations, becoming a touchstone for inspiration and inner power. King Arthur is one of these. Whatever his historical veracity may be, he is a cultural icon that has lived through the centuries and continues to influence us in many ways today. In this book, John and Caitlin Matthews bring the importance of this figure to vibrant life. Far more than simply retelling familiar tales, they go deep into the spiritual, historical, literary, artistic, and mythic heart of Arthur to demonstrate most eloquently the wide reach of his cultural influence and why he continues to be the once and future king of our hopes and our imaginations." (David Spengler, educator and author of *Apprenticed to Spirit*)

• The Matthews have done it again! Here is a compact assembly of Arthurian sources from ancient Rome through the classics, including many obscure bits. A wonderful and entertaining read.

• (Greg Stafford, designer of the King Arthur Pendragon game)

• Beautifully written and extensively researched, *The Complete King Arthur* provides a thorough overview of past and present examples of the tradition and the possible sources from which they sprang. Accessible to scholars and general readers alike, this study is a necessary addition to the library of anyone who loves King Arthur.

• (Linda A. Malcor, coauthor of *From Scythia to Camelot*)

• What a treasure this book is, a gift of great magnitude from the Matthews to all the rest of us. I so wish I had had it when I was immersing myself in Arthur in college many decades ago. The Matthews are the rarest of writers: scholars who are poets, poets who are scholars, singers of myth and history. They understand that facts are the basis of story, but equally, story is the basis of facts. Over the years of their phenomenal body of work, they have never set aside one for the other but have fed them together, in great measure.

• (Rachel Pollack, author of *Unquenchable Fire*)

"Because the Matthews have been studying Celtic traditions, including the Arthurian legends, for forty years, *The Complete King Arthur* really is complete." (Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D., *Witches & Pagans Magazine*)

John and Caitlín Matthews have been studying the Arthurian legends and their background for more than 40 years. Recognized authorities on myths and legends of the Celtic tradition, they are the authors of more than 100 books, both separately and together, including *Taliesin: The Last Celtic Shaman*, *Walkers Between the Worlds*, *King Arthur and the Goddess of the Land*, and the award-winning *Arthur of Albion*, as well as several tarot decks and oracles. The Matthews live in Oxford, England.

John and Caitlin Matthews have written a terrific and comprehensive study of King Arthur. The scope of this book is huge - it is admirable how well the authors examine so many facets of Arthur. The first section focuses on the historical Arthur. The Matthews begin with the Roman Lucius Artorius Castus, who lived in the 2nd century AD, and work their way forward through the heart of the dark ages showing several viable candidates for the historical king. "Arthur's transformation into a heroic medieval king was through a process of myth making that began within a few years of his passing." The largest part of the book analyzes the legendary Arthur. The depth of scholarship in this section is fantastic! I loved how easily the chapters flowed from Celtic myth to medieval poetry and beyond. The final section of the book looks at modern interpretations of Arthur; all the heavy hitting artists, authors, and filmmakers are mentioned. The notes and bibliography are a dream come true! Reading all the source material would be like a self-directed graduate degree in Arthuriana. I highly recommend *The Complete King Arthur: Many Faces, One Hero*

My impression of the larger-than-life character comes from popular media and fiction. As a result, I am happy to have my misconceptions busted by this book. Referencing sources from literature and history, we look not only at King Arthur, but also the people and the battles which defined him. As this book relies heavily on facts, the reader may get disorientated by the different versions of names that appeared, or get bored that this man may just be someone trivial. I was surprised by the bloody side of King Arthur, but I supposed I should not be; there were many battles fought! I recommend this book to the serious, analytical reader. \*I got a free copy in exchange for an honest review from NetGalley

What did I think of the book? *The Complete King Arthur: Many Faces, One Hero*, is a comprehensive look at the many different personae of King Arthur. I have read many books from notable scholars on the subject of Arthur, so I was looking forward to seeing what John Matthews and Caitlín Matthews had to say for themselves. I was hoping for something fresh and easy to read, I

got that. The authors do not claim to have found Arthur, this isn't that type of book, although I got the impression the authors were leaning towards the Roman Centurion, Artorius Castus, as a probable candidate! This book covers a vast period, from Roman occupation of Britain, to now, which is a long period of history to cover, but I have to commend John Matthews and Caitlín Matthews, for they did it remarkably well. This book looks at how Arthur has changed through the ages and how he has been used, to some extent, for political purposes. It also shows us how Arthur 'the man' was turned into Arthur 'the legend' and how the ancient texts were possibly misinterpreted. So as with anything to do with Arthur you expect to look at the works of Gildas, Nennius, Bede, etc... which this book does, and John Matthews and Caitlín Matthews have come up with some really interesting thesis as they interpret what they think this writing is, and isn't, telling us. The authors arguments are very compelling, and I have to admit I had this book in one hand, and the rest of my vast Arthurian collection spread out before me while I cross-referenced. And for the most part, I found myself agreeing with what John Matthews and Caitlín Matthews have so elegantly put forward as an argument. Their interpretation makes sense. This book spends a long time looking at Nennius's 12 famous battles and how these "battles" have been interpreted / miss-interpreted over time, and, more importantly, what they say about the political landscape that they are set in. I thought the authors were right to dedicate this amount of time to these battles and for those new to Arthurian Legend this would be enlightening. The book takes us on a journey and show us how Arthur changed over time from a soldier to a king, and it pays particular attention to the great poets, who of course, were responsible for this change. There is a fascinating chapter on Geoffrey of Monmouth, who is the founding father of the somewhat fictitious Arthur that we would recognise today. The authors look in great detail at Monmouth's life and where he got his facts from - that missing ancient manuscript raises its head again - and more importantly, they look at why Monmouth wrote it in the first place. The authors show the two sides of Arthur "the Christian King, and the spoilt, arrogant, almost evil Arthur that he was sometimes portrayed as. The book looks at principle players in Arthurian Legend as well - Kay, Mordred, Bedivere, Gawain, and Lancelot, as well as Arthur's Queen, all get a mention and as with Arthur, the authors demonstrate where the 'historical' characters came from, and which ones have a rather fictitious beginning! I thought this book was very well thought out, there are lots of amazing images, a very useful timeline, maps, and everything is chronicled in order, so you really do need to start at the beginning as there is a lot of references to earlier chapters. This is a book that is suitable for those who are just starting out on their Arthurian journey, as well as those that are well on their way into their research. This is a book that I am going to come

back to again. It is a welcomed addition to my shelf. I Highly Recommend. \*I received an ARC of this book via Netgalley, for review consideration\*

Riddled with factual errors and bizarre, fringe theories about the origins of Arthur. Do not waste your money on pseudo-scientific garbage such as this! John Matthews is not an academic, nor even an independent scholar, but a New Age fantasist posing as the former.

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