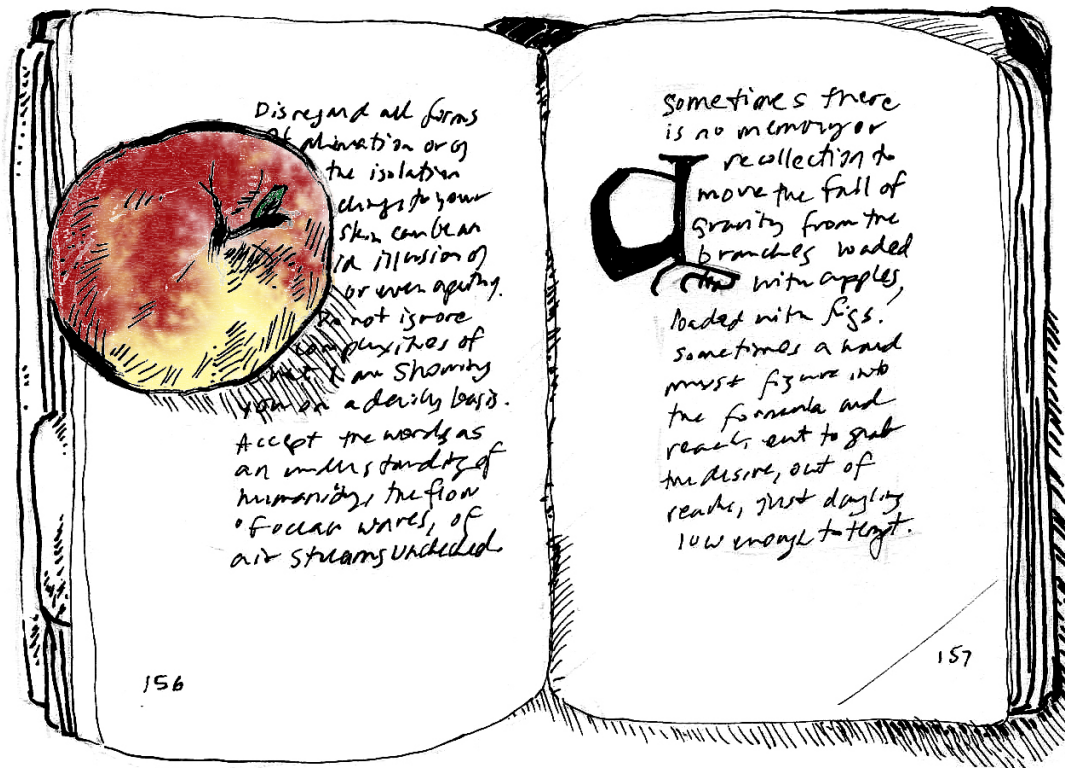


# Tales of King Arthur— part 2

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# *Geoffrey of Monmouth*

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**Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100 – c. 1155) was a cleric after the beginnings of the Norman conquest.**

- Refers to himself in Latin as Galfridus Monumetensis.
- Although he lived in Wales, recent studies state more than likely his parents were of other European origins.
- Modern historians refer to him as a Norman-Welsh prose writer.

# Geoffrey of Monmouth

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## **Geoffrey of Monmouth established a history for King Arthur.**

Primarily, he based his work on the oral Welsh folk stories plus using *some* historical facts

- documents which influenced his prose writing include Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and the cleric Gildas, another historian, who wrote *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* in the Sixth Century
- (keep in mind Bede never mentions Arthur in his historical records)
- overall, the prose works of Geoffrey are not considered historically accurate; these are elaborate blurring of cultural fictions with records of the past

# Geoffrey of Monmouth

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**Geoffrey did transform the image of Arthur from the original Welsh stories.**

In other words, his version is not a direct copy of the folk character.

- Within the Welsh folk stories Arthur is more similar to the Anglo-Saxon rulers, rather than as a representative of a traditional High King of Britain.
- In a recent edition of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* the editor John Matthews comments that in *The Mabinogion stories*, Arthur is displayed more as “a warrior, a leader of a band of wild heroes possessed of supernatural abilities, such as being able to hear over vast distances, ran faster than animals or climb with superhuman skill” (xv).
- Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (“History of the Kings of Britain”) does present Arthur as an established king, as a ruler with a traditional court and elaborate customs. It is here the literary narrative becomes formalized and obtains a common structure for further development by future generations.

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Matthews, John. Ed. “Introduction.” *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Sir Thomas Malory. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc. 2004. Print.

# *Geoffrey of Monmouth*

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***Historia Regum Britanniae* did prove to be a successful publication.**

Numerous, hand-produced copies were distributed through Europe.

- As a result, due to its popularity, other tales about King Arthur soon developed in print from other anonymous sources.

**It is important to keep an historical perspective with this document.**

Despite its inaccuracies and speculations, the work does present a strong view of the royal customs of the period.

- A strong perspective of Norman-influenced England is shown. This was produced almost a hundred years after the Battle of Hastings in 1066.
- As a result, the cultural ideas of Wales became a major part of the mainstream British mentality.

# Geoffrey of Monmouth

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**Through *Historia Regum Britanniae* Geoffrey relates a royal lineage.**

He begins with Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas from the semi-mythical city of Troy.

- From this beginning bloodline, the history develops, ultimately promoting the character of Arthur as a refined monarch, seeking a unified Britain.
- The young King Arthur becomes a role model for others; in the *Longman* it is shown how the king: “developed a code of courtliness in his household that he inspired people living far away to imitate him. The result was that even the man of noblest birth, once he was roused to rivalry, thought nothing at all of himself unless he wore his arms and dressed in the same way as Arthur’s knights” (194).