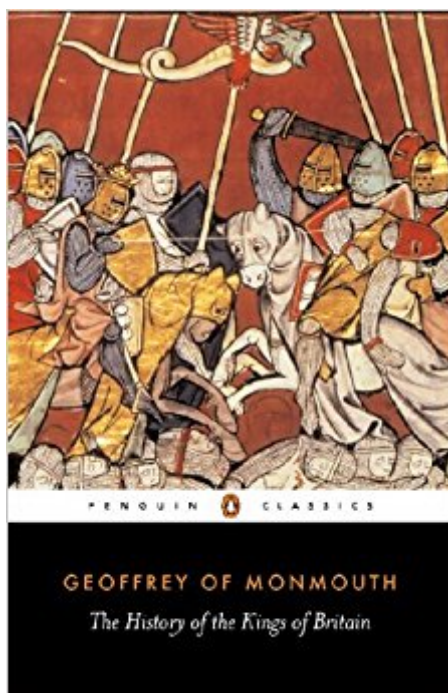


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The History Of The Kings Of Britain (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Completed in 1136, this classic chronicle traces the story of the realm from its supposed foundation by Brutus to the coming of the Saxons some two thousand years later. Vividly portraying legendary and semi-legendary figures such as Lear, Cymbeline, Merlin the magician, and the most famous of all British heroes, King Arthur, it is as much myth as it is history, and its veracity was questioned by other medieval writers. But Geoffrey of Monmouth's powerful evocation of illustrious men and deeds captured the imagination of subsequent generations, and his influence can be traced through the works of Malory, Shakespeare, Dryden, and Tennyson. Lewis Thorpe's translation from the Latin brings us an accurate and enthralling version of Geoffrey's remarkable narrative. His introduction discusses in depth the aims of the author and his possible sources, and describes the impact of this work on British literature.

Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; 1st edition (January 27, 1977)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140441700

ISBN-13: 978-0140441703

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.9 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 45 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #27,924 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales, Legends & Mythology

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Customer Reviews

Very little is known of Geoffrey of Monmouth. He seems to have lived for a time in Oxford and in 1151 he became Bishop Elect of St Asaph, North Wales. He was ordained at Westminster in 1152. According to the Welsh Chronicles he died in 1155. Lewis Thorpe was Professor of French at Nottingham University from 1958 to 1977. He has published many books and articles on Arthur, both on the French and English traditions. He died in 1977.

I finished reading Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* in November 2014, all except the 83-page "index raisonné". It's really a ripping yarn, and there's probably some truth in it. Most importantly, people in the centuries after this book did place some credibility in it. I recently read (in "Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot") that James I of England thought that he was descended from Brutus in accordance with the genealogy in Geoffrey's book. I thought there was not enough commentary at the beginning on just how much of the book had any historical veracity. The very early material about Aeneas and Brutus was obviously totally bogus, although an enormous amount of detail was provided. No doubt the old foundation legends were built upon, century after century, until they ended up in the hands of Geoffrey. I prefer books which give copious footnotes on the veracity or otherwise of ancient attempts at history. For example, the Penguin Pausanias guide books to ancient Greece (Volume 1 and Volume 2) give superb commentary paragraph by paragraph on the authenticity or otherwise of everything in those huge books. It was interesting to see the early origins of the story of King Lear, Cordelia, Regan and Goneril. It was interesting to see some early origins for the Merlin and Arthur stories. Some of the later material about the Angles and Saxons had some credibility. There's a lot of support from Gildas and Nennius and Bede, but they are extremely unreliable also. (Bede is, apparently, very reliable for the couple of hundred years before his time, but not for the earlier history, which he based on other sources.)

For a book written in the 12th century Geoffrey Of Monmouth's *History* is remarkably accessible and entertaining to a modern reader. Part history and part mythology, it reminds one of reading Homer or some other ancient source. Here are the stories of the early settlement of the island by descendants of the ancient Trojans, linkages between Britain and Rome, the Saxon invasion, King Arthur and in a bit of a departure from the narrative the prophesies of Merlin the Magician. The sources for King Lear and Cymbeline are also included in Geoffrey's narrative. I had this book on my shelf for a long time before I got around to it but once I picked it up I was hooked. One of those ancient texts that blends history and myth wonderfully while enlightening and entertaining the modern reader. Well worth checking out.

I am a fairly new student to the early influences of English literature, and this book was highly recommended as a good start. It is a very enjoyable read; many of the stories are similar to what one would read in the Old Testament of the Bible. The translator does a fantastic job of filling in what is left open-ended by Mammoth, ensuring one understands the context and setting of the

stories recorded. One must take note that this is not an accurate history, but a mythological telling of the founding of Britain. If one is looking for factual history, this is probably not the right book. Nonetheless, it is enjoyable and still gives a glimpse into our past.

I confess. I have heard about this book for more than thirty years and I had an itch over all of those years to find out what it actually contains. Geoffrey of Monmouth and this book are, of course, the first known writing about King Arthur. But, there are other tales such as the naming of Briton after Brutus. This is what you would expect of such a paperback. It satisfies an old itch.

Well, it is difficult for me to provide a truly appropriate review. I like the prose style. I am of the strongly held position that the greater part of the history is exactly true so it is very exciting and immediate for me when I read it. It makes wonderful sense when read with an appreciation for the "Big Picture" of the sweep of history. (I guess I should use a capital "H" History.) So, for an old guy like me, it was exciting and inspirational. I deeply enjoyed it - as I have Bede (I love him. I can hardly wait to greet him in heaven.) and others. There are many other historical and legendary writings of other parts of the world demonstrating consistency. I believe that for someone with an imagination, who enjoys history, and can partially suspend belief for a while, this book will be just fine.

clear & concise - really enjoy the book - very informative

An excellent book written in the 8th century by a man who lived shortly after the age of the book. Excellent book to begin research on kings and royalty of England.

Very good book, however I wish the introduction had been more to the point and had a second introduction with a different perspective.

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