

King Arthur - Rewriting History

The new film **King Arthur** produced by Jerry Bruckheimer is an ambitious revisionist version of the legendary British warrior king who held back the Saxon invaders.



On the positive side the central character, Arthur is portrayed as a courageous Christian whose faith in God is established early on and he remains steadfast and honourable in spite of the contemptible actions of others. Arthur prays earnestly to God and explains to sceptical Lancelot that it is his faith that protects him. There is also a remarkable battle scene on a frozen river where Arthur and his knights suck a battalion of Saxons into a charge over the increasingly fragile ice.

However, the new King Arthur is full of anti-Christian bias. Most Christians, and in particular the clergy, are depicted in the movie as sadistic torturers, cowardly backstabbers and weak traitors. Even the hero, Arthur, is slanderously depicted as engaging in fornication the night before he goes into battle, then as marrying an unbeliever in a pagan wedding ceremony, after yelling at God because some of his knights died in the battle!

The opening titles of King Arthur claim that this film tells "*the true story*" based on "*recently discovered archaeological evidence*", although what archaeological evidence they are talking about remains undisclosed. King Arthur basically does to "*The History of the Kings of Britain*" what Troy did to Homer. If anything, director Antoine Fuqua has cobbled together more from Gladiator, Braveheart, The Magnificent Seven and Lord of the Rings than from any historical or archaeological evidence. From the Orc-like Saxon invaders to Braveheart battle tactics this film is based more on other films than on history.

First of all, the Roman withdrawal from Britain was completed by 407AD - long before the birth of King Arthur or his famous battle of Mount Badon in 517AD (which in this film is billed as 452AD). Arthur could not have been a Roman officer, as all Roman legions had evacuated Britain before his birth. (When an exceptionally cold winter froze the Rhine River the frontier was lost, and Gaul was invaded by Vandals, Alans and Sueves. The last Roman legions were withdrawn from Britain to meet that barbarian threat in 407AD).

It is also completely anachronistic to portray the Catholic Inquisition in Britain six centuries before it was started in Spain. While human sacrifice and torture were common in Britain before that time, it was only the Druids and pagan priests who were guilty of such atrocities. Yet, in this film, director Fuqua portrays the Christians, who championed the sanctity of life and the rule of law, who opposed slavery and blood sports, as the ones doing what history records the Druids practising. It is also false to portray Catholic Bishops as having political or military control before the collapse of the Roman Empire. In fact there was nothing like what the Roman Catholic Church became in the later Middle Ages in Britain until the 11th Century. The Church in Britain was remarkably independent and resisted papal efforts to bring it under their control for many centuries. For example, it was only by the 11th Century AD that the papacy was able to impose their requirement that priests remain unmarried.

There is also no evidence that Arthur could have been a follower or friend of Pelagius, who in any case had lived and been excommunicated for heresy years before Arthur was even born. Nor was Pelagius executed. (Pelagius lived six centuries before the Inquisition came into existence!)

Not only does King Arthur get its history wrong, but its geography is all wrong as well. There were no Roman villas north of Hadrian's Wall. Around 122AD the emperor Hadrian (who ruled from 117 to 138AD) ordered the construction of a wall in Northern Britain between the Tyne and the Solway Firth to keep out the barbarian Picts and Scots. The wall took five years to build, mostly of stone. At 117km long, with 17 forts and with ditches 12 meters wide, on both sides, it was the Romans' most elaborate frontier. The ramparts were eight to ten feet thick. The wall was protected by a garrison of 14000 men with 5000 troops on patrol.

In 446AD the British high king Vortigern invited some Saxons from the Rhineland to enter Britain as mercenaries to support him in his struggle against the Picts. These Saxons gained a foothold in the South East of England (hence: Essex - East Saxons; Sussex - South Saxons; and Wessex - West Saxons).

Sir Winston Churchill's History of the English Speaking Peoples notes that as these invited Saxons became invaders, building their homes over the graves of the previous inhabitants, they were held off by King Arthur between the years 500 and 539AD. Many of the survivors of the Saxon invaders fled to Wales, Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland, Brittany (in France) and North West Spain. The historian Bede mentions these battles, and Nennius, the compiler of the 9th Century history books, names the British soldier who defeated the heathen invaders: *"King Arthur...a great captain gathered the forces of Roman Britain and fought the Barbarian invaders to the death."* Bede identified the invaders as Angles (whom the English are now named after - Anglesland became England), Saxons and Jutes - all from Northern Germany. Bede also notes that in the 7th Century these Saxons were converted to Christianity by vigorous missionary activity.

Far from Arthur leading pagan mercenaries from the Ukraine as depicted in Fuqua's film, Churchill notes that King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table were models of *"chivalry, honour and the Christian faith."* Churchill describes Arthur as *"a great British warrior who kept the light of civilisation burning against all the storms that beat, and that behind his sword there sheltered a faithful following..."* All four groups of the Celtic tribes united behind Arthur from Cornwall to Cumberland. Churchill notes that the Saxon invaders were infantry, fighting with sword and spear and having little armour, while Arthur's armoured cavalry heading local resistance gained repeated victories. Nennius records: *"Arthur's twelfth battle was on Mount Badon, in which there fell in one day 960 men near the onslaught of Arthur only...and in all his battles he was victor..."* Geoffrey of Monmouth in his History of the Kings of Britain (1136) gives further details.

From all the historical records, the basic story of this film is impossible. The Saxons invaded the South of England not Scotland in the North. As the Saxons came by boat they had no need to breach the formidable Hadrian's Wall. Nor did they attempt to. The Saxons invaded South Eastern England. Arthur's victory at Mount Badon was closer to Wales than to Scotland - and it certainly did not involve the strategy of allowing the invaders past the wall before engaging them.

It was not possible that any of the knights of King Arthur could have been pagans. A part of the code of honour for each knight was to uphold the Christian faith. Nor is it possible that Guinevere was the prototype post feminist painted pagan princess warrior in her battle bikini as depicted in this film. Quite aside from the fact that someone near death with broken fingers could not - within hours - be agile in archery and overcome Saxon warriors in hand to hand combat! As the model of Christian chivalry that all accounts describe King Arthur, it would not have been possible that he would have participated in either a cremation or a pagan wedding, let alone one overseen by a druid at some stonehenge-like monument.

As History of the English Speaking Peoples notes: *"King Arthur and his noble knights guarding the sacred flame of Christianity...sustained by valour, physical strength and good horses and armour, slaughtered innumerable hosts of foul barbarians..."* History records that this 6th Century King of Britain held back the Saxons for a generation. *"British resistance stiffened...the invader's advance was brought to a standstill for nearly 50 years by the great battle won at Mount Badon."* Churchill notes the most likely site of the battle as Bradbury, Dorset in England. Churchill also notes the name of the leader of the Saxons defeated by Arthur as Cerdic.

It is also noted that contemporary with Arthur fighting back the Saxon invaders, Patrick was converting Ireland to the Christian faith.

The legend of King Arthur is a whole lot more inspiring than this revisionist vehicle for distorting history and slandering Christians. One wonders why Hollywood, with all the funding and resources available to them, cannot do a better job of historical research and basic geography in putting together historical epics - which they claim are *"the true story"*! Perhaps anti-Christian prejudice counts for more than historical accuracy in today's Hollywood.

Dr. Peter Hammond
Frontline Fellowship
PO Box 74
Newlands
7725
South Africa
Web: www.frontline.org.za