The Round Table

Ebrauke and the Politics of Arthurian Geography

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Medieval tradition gives us three possible locations for Dolorous Garde, the castle in which Lancelot protected Guinevere from Arthur’s vengeance. The Auchinleck version of the *Short English Metrical Chronicle* tells us that the pair resided in Nottingham, while Thomas Malory suggests that the castle was either Alnwick or Bamburgh. It has been proposed that both of these statements are inspired by contemporary political issues, and indeed an association between Alnwick and Dolorous Garde does seem to be invented to echo current events. Both Nottingham and Bamburgh, however, had long been associated with King Ebrauke’s foundation of a castle called either Mount Dolorous or Dolorous Garde. Rather than inventing the tradition, therefore, both the anonymous chronicler and Malory adapted existing traditions concerning Ebrauke to their own thematic concerns.

The ultimate source for this confusing state of affairs is, of course, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, where Ebrauke is a minor figure. The fourth king after Brutus, Ebrauke is known for his many children and his city-building activities. Most famously, he establishes York, ‘id est ciuitas Ebrauci’ [that is, the city of Ebrauke], but he also founds ‘oppidum montis Agned, quod nunc Castellum Puellarum dicitur, et Montem Dolorosum’ [the fort at Mount Agned, which now is called the Castle of Maidens, and Mount Dolorous]. Several later chroniclers felt that Mount Dolorous was an alternative name for the Castle of Maidens, while others attempted to identify it, just as the Castle of Maidens was identified as Edinburgh. The first author to claim that Ebrauke founded Bamburgh was Geffrei Gaimar in his mid-twelfth-century *Estoire des Engleis*. Gaimar had also translated Geoffrey’s *Historia* as the *Estoire des Bretuns*, but that work is now lost. In the *Estoire des Engleis* Gaimar writes of Ida, the king of Bernicia, who reigned twelve years ‘E Baenburc bien restorad, / Dechaette ert e mult defraite / De si cum Eubrac l’ot ainz faite’ [and well restored Bamburgh, which was in ruins and falling down from when Ebrauke had earlier established it]. The detail about Ebrauke’s foundation of Bamburgh is an addition to Gaimar’s source. Gaimar does not specifically associate the castle with Mount Dolorous, but, given the later traditions discussed below, it seems a fair assumption that he had included a full account of Ebrauke’s foundations in his translation of Geoffrey and that perhaps he had there identified Bamburgh with Mount Dolorous.
The association between Ebrauke and Bamburgh was not universal, however, and Rauf de Boun’s *Le Petit Bruit* (c. 1309) states that King Ebrauke founded ‘le chastel Sidemound Dolorous qe homme appelle ore le chastel de Notyngham’ [the Castle of Sidemound Dolorous, which men now call the castle of Nottingham]. Rauf suggests that the castle was called ‘Dolorous’ because Ebrauke’s wife and children were killed there by Gog and Magog. It is unclear why these authors add Nottingham and Bamburgh to the list of Ebrauke’s foundations. They may merely be supplying information missing in the *Historia* by assigning northern castles to Geoffrey’s cryptic reference to Mount Dolorous. These identifications could be based on local oral tradition or, perhaps, simply the whim of the chronicler.

It is only after Ebrauke had been credited with founding both Bamburgh and Nottingham that the first Arthurian association is made in the Auchinleck version of the *Short English Metrical Chronicle* (c. 1330s). Other versions of this chronicle give a typical précis of Arthur’s reign, but this manuscript presents an unusual picture. It is, in fact, the only English chronicle to deviate from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s narrative and include a romantic relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. After a brief passage of praise for the king, the Arthurian section quickly turns to internal conflict:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Þerafter aros wer strong} \\
\text{Þurch þe quen in þis lond.} \\
\text{Launcelot de Lac held his wiif,} \\
\text{Forþi bitven hem ros gret striif.} \\
\text{Lancelot was a queynt man:} \\
\text{For þe quen sake he made Notingham,} \\
\text{þe castel wiþ mani selcoupe wonder,} \\
\text{Caues mani he made þervnder.} \\
\text{Riæt in þe hard ston} \\
\text{Chambers he made mani on} \\
\text{Pat þe quen mîȝt in wone,} \\
\text{ȝif þe king wald þider come.}
\end{align*}
\]

After the couple has resided in Nottingham for almost four years, Arthur attempts to banish Lancelot, but, in a scene reminiscent of Caradoc’s *Vita Gildae*, the two are reconciled at Glastonbury. The Lancelot story is too brief and vague to be associated with any one source, but it was very well known by the early-fourteenth century (although Guinevere is not typically hidden in caves). Thorlac Turville-Petre argues that the mention of Nottingham has contemporary relevance to the adapter. The additions to the text, he claims, merge ‘a recollection of the French *Mort Artu*, in which Lancelot protects Guinevere in Joyeuse Garde, with a much more recent memory of Roger Mortimer and Queen Isabella in 1330 barricading themselves into Nottingham Castle, from which Mortimer was ignominiously dragged and sent to London to be hanged.’ Although Lancelot’s castle is not named in the Auchinleck manuscript, it seems unlikely that the adapter invented the association between Lancelot and Nottingham. Rather, he has drawn on a Brut tradition (witnessed by
Le Petit Bruit) which identified Mount Dolorous as Nottingham and transferred this detail to Lancelot’s castle, Dolorous Garde. This assumption is supported by the fact that the peculiar details concerning cave excavations are drawn from an earlier episode in British legendary history.

According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Ebrauke’s great-grandfather, Locrine, is married to Gwendolen, even though he loves the German princess Estrildis. Fearing Gwendolen’s father, Locrine builds a series of caves under London to hide his mistress: ‘Sed facto infra urbem Trinouatum subterraneo inclusit eam in ipso familiaribusque suis honorifice tradidit’ [But a cave having been built under New Troy [i.e. London], he hid her in there and consigned her with honor to his servants]. When Gwendolen’s father dies, Locrine abandons his wife and child and takes Estrildis as his queen, a decision which results in civil war. Gwendolen is victorious over Locrine and rules until her son, Maddan, comes of age. We can see, therefore, how the Auchinleck adapter has developed his own Arthurian narrative. By importing the Lancelot story into a Brut he emphasizes the theme of civil discord caused by sexual intrigue. This theme is augmented by the detail of the caves made to hide the adulteress queen: the civil conflict between Locrine and Gwendolen is thus echoed in Lancelot and Arthur’s conflict. By identifying Lancelot’s castle as Nottingham, the adapter also recalls Mortimer and Isabella, but even here the detail is not invented. Rather, it is drawn from a Brut tradition concerning Ebrauke, Locrine’s great-grandson. The entire Arthurian section, therefore, resonates across history, both backwards to Locrine, Gwendolen and Estrildis, and forwards to Edward II, Mortimer and Isabella.

The next attempt to identify Lancelot’s castle is found in John Hardyng’s Metrical Chronicle, where, as in Gaimar, it is associated with Bamburgh. P.J.C. Field has suggested that Hardyng could be the source for Malory’s comments on Dolorous Garde as ‘Hardyng says in his account of pre-Arthurian Britain that King Ebranke built a castle on Mount Dolorous, which, he says, is now called Bamborough.’ Field cites both versions of Hardyng’s text, but he quotes neither and it is worth looking closely at the differences. Indeed, the second version of the text conforms to Field’s comments. After discussing Ebrauke’s foundations at York and Edinburgh, Hardyng continues:

He made also, vpon mounte Dolorous,
A castell strong that this daye Bamburgh hight,
That on a roche is sette full hye and noyous,
Full hard to gette by any mannes might:
The castell is so stronge and so well dight,
If menne therin haue stufe sufficient,
Or it be wonne, many one muste bee shent.

This second version, completed about 1464, thus focuses on the military aspects of the foundation. As with Le Petit Bruit, any associations between Ebrauke’s foundation and Lancelot are based purely on the similar names of the ancient castles. The first
version of the text (c. 1457), however, remains unedited, and here Hardyng makes the Arthurian association explicit:

A cyte than he made that hight Ebrauke,
After his name, whiche now that Yorke so highte:
A castell stronge sette on the north se banke,
Whiche he dyd calle Mounte Dolorouse, so wighte,
That now Bamburgh ys, castell of grete myght,
In whiche ther ys a toure hate Dolorouse Garde,
Bot by what cause I can nought wele awarde.

Bot thus I haue in olde bokes red and sene,
That Ebrauke, whan he was put to the flight,
For his socoure than thydyr came, I mene.
By other bokes I haue eke sene be sight
For Launcelot loue a lady dyed fulle bright,
Whiche in a bote, enchaunted for the nones,
Drofe vp thar: so named he tho wones.12

Hardyng’s précis of the story in which the Maid of Escalot dies for her love of Lancelot is drawn from the Vulgate *La Mort le Roi Artu*. In the French source, however, the event is not associated with Dolorous Garde, and the lady actually floats to Camelot.13 The Vulgate does describe how Lancelot wins a castle and frees it from enchantment, but in this case he changes its name from Dolorous Garde to Joyous Garde.14 Hardyng’s *Chronicle* thus confirms what Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* only hinted at: a tradition of associating Bamburgh with Mount Dolorous. The first version of the text, however, goes further and makes an explicit connection between Ebrauke’s Mount Dolorous and Lancelot’s Dolorous Garde.

The most famous associations between Lancelot and real places are made by Thomas Malory in *Le Morte D’Arthur* (c. 1469). After Arthur lays siege to Joyous Garde, Malory includes the off-hand comment that ‘Somme men say it was Anwyk, and somme men say it was Bamborow,’15 and it is after these doleful events that Lancelot renames the castle Dolorous Garde. In the notes to the revised edition of Vinaver’s Malory, Field gives a detailed account of Edward IV’s siege of Alnwick and Bamburgh in late 1462 (in which Malory himself may have participated), and suggests that the place-names allude to these recent events.16 As noted above, Field also points to Hardyng as a possible source in an earlier article. As we have seen, however, Hardyng only makes the Ebrauke-Mount Dolorous-Bamburgh-Dolorous Garde-Lancelot relationship explicit in the first version of his text, which was completed before the siege and which survives only in the original presentation copy. The first direct statement which associates Lancelot’s Dolorous Garde with Bamburgh thus has no obvious political relevance, and is unlikely to have been seen by Malory. Malory, therefore, may be making a political allusion, but, like the Auchinleck adapter before him, he is drawing on an existing tradition which includes both Gaimar and Hardyng, and which furthers his own thematic aims. The introduction of Alnwick
does seem to be invented by Malory to strengthen the resonance between Arthurian discord and contemporary events, but he has been led to this moment of creation by an existing historical tradition.17

In several instances, both the Nottingham and Bamburgh traditions are combined. One recension of the prose Brut survives in two manuscripts. Although this text is generally abbreviated, it adds several details to its account of Ebrauke:

Eboracus reigned after Mempricius his father lx. yere. He conquered all Fraunce, and with the treasure of that land he made York and called it Eborac after his name. He made the town and castle of Notingham. He had many wives in his time and got xx. sons and xiiiij daughters, the fairest creatures in the world, and for them he made Edinburgh and there they were all nourished and kept. And therefore it is yet called in old stories Maidens Castle. He made also Bamburgh afterward called the castle of Mount Dolours. He is buried at York.18

The Cleveland copy of this text was produced c. 1470 and the Trinity manuscript is twice dated 1474.19 The text itself was probably written shortly before the two surviving witnesses, thus making it nearly contemporary with Malory’s composition of the Morte, or Hardyng’s composition of the revised version of his Chronicle. We see a similar pattern employed in an early sixteenth-century genealogy which claims that Ebrauke ‘made also Notyngham Castell and Bamborogh Castell that afterward was callid the Castell of Mountdolours.’20 In these late texts both traditions are brought together, but only Bamburgh is associated with Mount Dolorous and Lancelot does not appear at all. They indicate that the tradition circulated independently of Malory, and long after any political association with the places had faded.

The identification of Mount Dolorous with either Nottingham or Bamburgh, therefore, seems to be more closely associated with Ebrauke than with Lancelot. The anonymous redactor of The Short English Metrical Chronicle and Malory may have been making contemporary political allusions within their Arthurian narratives, but by identifying Dolorous Garde with specific places, both were also drawing on existing traditions concerning pre-Arthurian Britain. John Hardyng is the only chronicler who explicitly connected the dots between Ebrauke, Mount Dolorous, Dolorous Garde and Lancelot, but the tradition which he records seems to have been widespread. Certainly the witnesses we have discussed do not allow for a coherent stemma of transmission to be drawn. Rather, they point to a tradition which circulated in a variety of formats. Hardyng seems to be searching for written texts when he complains that he is not sure ‘by what cause’ the castle is called Dolorous Garde, while Malory is more willing to cite contradictory oral traditions when he claims that ‘Somme men say it was Anwyk, and somme men say it was Bamborow.’ What seems like a thoroughly conventional tag may in fact register the common folk tendency to identify known places as illustrious (though ambiguous) legendary locales.

Robert Hanning has shown that Geoffrey of Monmouth ‘repeatedly inserted variants of several basic situations—feuds among brothers, British expeditions to Rome, illicit loves of kings, etc.—which have far-reaching national consequences.’21
The effect of these rhetorical patterns is to emphasize one of Geoffrey’s main themes: ‘that history continually repeats itself.’ By using a variety of Brut traditions to modify their Arthurian narratives we see that both the Auchinleck adapter and Thomas Malory continued to develop Geoffrey’s rhetorical device. By mentioning secret caves at Nottingham, the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere and the civil discord it causes can be made to resonate with both Locrine and Mortimer. By mentioning Alnwick and Bamburgh, Arthurian discord can be retuned to resonate with Edward IV and the Wars of the Roses. The instruments which produce these harmonies, however, are rarely invented, but are drawn from historiographical traditions which allow authors to extend the implications of Arthur’s reign beyond the Brut and into contemporary politics.


NOTES

8 Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia, chap. 25.
9 In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Locrine’s cave digging and Ebrauke’s city building come in chapters 25 and 27 respectively. It should be added that the adapter adds one further detail to emphasize his theme of adultery and civil discord. After Lancelot and Arthur are reconciled, the court is visited by Cradoc, who

10 P.J.C. Field, ‘Malory’s Minor Sources,’ Notes & Queries 224 (1979): 108. This essay was reprinted with some revisions as chapter 3 of Field’s Malory: Texts and Sources (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1998), pp. 27–31. I cite the original version of the paper since the revisions, unfortunately, have introduced some confusion in the notes.


12 London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 204, 20v–21r.


16 Malory, Works, p. 1660.

17 I say ‘does seem to be invented’ because I suspect that evidence of an earlier tradition concerning Alnwick may eventually be discovered.

18 Cleveland, Cleveland Public Library, MS W q091.92 C468, fo. 17. Cf. Dublin, Trinity College MS 489, p. 46. The Trinity copy refers to ‘Mount Dolorous,’ but otherwise varies only in word order.

19 For a description of these manuscripts, their dates, and their relationship to other Brut texts see Lister M. Matheson, The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 180 (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), pp. 259–62. The marginal dates in the Trinity manuscript are at Dublin, Trinity College MS 489, pp. 75 & 216.


22 Hanning, Vision, p. 141.