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Monica Oancă
University of Bucharest

LOOKING AT CASTLES: DURABILITY AND CHANGE IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE CASTLE

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***Abstrac**t: This paper analyses a few aspects of the impact castles had on an area. Durability as both strength and permanence seems to have been the image projected by castles on their contemporaries. As would be expected this perception changed with time. Although the durability of most castles is clear, their use has changed continuously, some turning from impregnable fortresses to luxurious residences, others becoming prisons after being royal administrative centres. Most of them are ruins, but they have acquired a new dimension by becoming touristic attractions, proving thus that the essence of castles' durability resides in their ability to change. The best way to explain the transformation is to discuss one castle in particular. I have chosen Kenilworth Castle as an example of a durable castle, which was a powerful royal stronghold and an impressive residence during the Middle Ages and Renaissance and which was deliberately slighted after the civil war in an attempt to undermine the image of lordship and suzerainty.*

The aim of this paper is to analyse the way castles were perceived by their contemporaries and how this perception changed in medieval times. It is obvious when discussing English medieval history that the castle was one of the most durable sights. Together with cathedrals, castles represent the most visible symbols of the medieval era. Although their durability is unquestioned, their aspect has changed continuously. Some turned from impregnable fortresses to luxurious residences; others became prisons after being royal administrative centres. Most of them are ruins, but they acquired a new dimension by becoming tourist attractions, proving thus that the essence of the durability of castles, unlike that of cathedrals, resides in their ability to change.

I am going to present very briefly the general theories regarding the evolution of the castle, but I will point out that there is a continuous development in castle theories and complex approaches to analyse the importance of the castle are available. When discussing a certain castle, like Kenilworth Castle, for instance, I start from the historical context, but then I discuss the evolution of its appearance in connection with the rivalry between noblemen, its association with the king, and the impact on the area and on the rural population.

The Common Interpretation of the Evolution of Castle Appearance in the Middle Ages

The Theories

The design of the castle evolved, the story says, with a stress on defence, until the fourteenth century, choosing circular or polygonal towers instead of the square ones and strengthening the curtain wall (Thompson A. Hamilton 160-162). For a long period of time castles "have been seen as robust, functional buildings, in which design was dictated by defensive rather than visual considerations" (Stalley 84). It has been noted that in time, once warfare techniques evolved and guns were used in a siege, the defensive elements (like arrow slits, battlements or portcullis) lost their initial purpose, but were still preserved as remainders of a violent past, not mainly as decorative items, but rather as symbols of power and domination. It is said that only after the 14th century considerations of comfort and the social status influenced the appearance and the domestic arrangements in the castle. Authors like M. W. Thompson insisted on the "rise" and "decline" of the castle.

The complementary interpretation of castle architecture was to emphasise the majestic appearance of the castle, which was needed in order to impress both the subjugated populace and the neighbouring lords. Such a perspective suggests that, even from the 11th century, the martial aspect was just the result of a "military ethos"

present in the secular culture. The defensive elements of the structures were more due to "social and ideological reasons" than to a real "overriding military imperative" (Liddiard 42). Even in apparently well fortified castles, the defensive architectural details were only superficial and would never stand up to a real siege. Several examples from the 12th century are given: Castle Rising Castle, Hedingham Castle, but the best example given to support this theory is the 14th-century Bodiam Castle (Morris 148). The main argument that sustained this interpretation of castles was that the outcome of a siege (which were considered to be rather rare) depended on the arrival or not of a relieving army, as it was repeatedly shown in the contemporary chronicles (William of Newburgh's *History*, for instance).

While it is unquestionable that the 11th- and 12th-century towers were defensible, one can also see ornaments in their architecture, a fact which proves that the aesthetic quality of the building was also important for the owners. Having a certain decoration made could represent a political statement of social superiority and could point to the wish to impress the others (as was suggested by several writers like Robert Liddiard and Matthew Johnson, to name just two), yet it was also a sign of individual interest in beauty and a personal desire to live in a pleasant ambience. It was correctly noted that comfort was an important element to consider even in the first centuries of castle building (Creighton 50 and Morris 63). So it seems that the comfort of the inhabitants of the castle was always at the height of the fashion. The latrines, the private rooms, the beautifully ornate fireplaces bear witness to an interest in the well-being of the dwellers, even in the early stone towers. On the other hand analysing the defensibility of the castles it is enough to look at the 16th century Civil War to see how many castles were besieged and defended in order to start wondering whether the castle as a military device was considered obsolete at that time.[1]

The New Perspectives

The point I want to make is that this debate is already out-dated and obsolete, because castles could have been all these things and more (Johnson 3). In other words, their function could be both to impress in times of peace and to fight in times of war, and also to govern the surrounding area and to provide a comfortable habitation. At the same time, the castle was a place of prayer, because the chapel was always present in the interior design. The castle could also be a woman's domain, since the lady of the castle was the one who assigned jobs to each of the servants (Duby 253), and she had even greater power when the lord was away.

12th-century Stone Castles: Castle Rising Castle and Rochester Castle

It is important to study the keep of stone castles which did not suffer changes, because we can gain some valuable insights into how a certain castle, like Kenilworth for instance, looked in the 13th century, before major works were done to change its appearance. I will also point out that castles actually consisted, besides the keep, of a combination of separate wooden or stone buildings, erected over the years by different owners, forming an agglomeration of structures rather than a single construction.

I will only refer to the stone castles, because there are no material remains of wooden castles, except for the written evidence (or embroidered evidence, for example the Bayeux Tapestry). The problem of such an investigation is that, unlike churches which have been in use for centuries and whose function was never changed, castles have been remodelled by their successive owners, or left to decay. In both cases their original medieval fittings (furniture, doors, external timber hoardings and drawbridges) are gone, which makes it very difficult for us to comprehend how they originally looked. Still, we can guess from little decorative details that

[1] When Raglan Castle was besieged in 1646 it was transformed in a short period of time from a stately home into a fortified military stronghold. The siege lasted more than three months, and the castle dwellers had no aid from another army, because there was none left.

the owners wanted sometimes to advertise their high social standing, as was the case of William d'Albini, who built Castle Rising Castle to make an impact on his peers after his marriage to Queen Alice, widow of Henry I**.** It has been noticed repeatedly (in the official guide of Castle Rising) that several ornaments are copied from the more notable Norwich Castle, whose constable at the time of the construction of Castle Rising (1140) was Hugh Bigot (1095-1177), the first earl of Norfolk and William d'Albini's uncle.

There are some features that differentiate Castle Rising Castle, which was a castle built by a nobleman as his prized residence having all the facilities available at the time, from a royal castle meant to accommodate first and foremost a garrison, like Rochester Castle.[2] For instance, although both of them have a chapel, they are differently ornamented. When we looked at the remains of the chapel in Castle Rising Castle, we can notice that it used to be highly decorated and it has a rather elaborate design, with beautiful columns separating the nave from the chancel. The traces of blue paint on the chapel walls were still visible in the 18th century (according to the official guide of Castle Rising Castle). When comparing the two chapels one can see that the chapel at Castle Rochester is spacious and the chancel has almost the same width as the nave, and the design seems very plain. The decoration, although existent, would not be lavish**,** and there were no columns, just an arcade separating the chancel from the nave.

Admiring the second and main floor at Rochester Castle we can see some fine-looking decorations around the windows, two fireplaces and a mural gallery at the next floor allowing thus for more space and more light into the hall bellow. The arcade which divides the second floor into two parts is also highly elaborate, with arches of unequal size, and decorated with chevron motifs. We can see how the theory that 12th-century castles were just a functional defensive structure cannot stand, not even if we refer to Rochester Castle, which was unquestionably an important fortress, near the River Medway. Yet it was not only majestic, since it underwent two sieges in 1215 (against King John's army, a siege which lasted more than six weeks) and in 1264, during the Baron's War (when Simon de Montfort's army did not have enough time to breach the defences of the keep). Kenilworth Castle was also besieged for a few months at the end of this war[3], which proves that Kenilworth Castle was not just a "beautiful face".

Principal phases in the evolution of Kenilworth Castle

Early phases

At Kenilworth, the first keep was built by Geoffrey de Clinton, who found favour with King Henry I, and was given the task to build a strong castle to counter the growing influence of Roger de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick. Geoffrey de Clinton had been chamberlain and treasurer to King Henry and he used the King's suspicions regarding the Earl of Warwick to secure his advancement. In 1124 when Geoffrey de Clinton started his work on his stone castle, Warwick was just a motte and bailey structure, although it was rather imposing at the time. The growing animosity between the owners of Kenilworth and Warwick was predictably solved by the marriage of Geoffrey's son and heir Geoffrey II de Clinton with Agnes de Beaumont (daughter of Roger de Beaumont, owner of Warwick).

[2] King Henry I granted the custody of the castle to the Archbishop of Canterbury, William of Corbeil, under whose supervision the great stone keep was built.

[3] We can analyse this siege in two opposite ways: on the one hand the castle did fall, so it was not impossible to conquer, yet on the other hand the siege was very long, although the defenders got very little help from outside, if any, since Simon of Montfort had already died and his cause was compromised. The besiegers tried and failed to breach the castle defences, so in a way they were impenetrable to direct assault, yet the castle was taken when those inside ran out of resources. So my opinion is that although Kenilworth Castle was beautiful and impressive, its value was not only psychological, but also militarily practical.

Kenilworth Castle was too important a holding to be left unsupervised directly, so, after the rebellion of his sons (1173-4), King Henry II took control over the castle and it remained royal under the reigns of Henry II, Richard I, John and Henry III, who gave it to Simon de Montfort in 1244.

The rivalry between Kenilworth Castle and Warwick Castle can be proven by the fact that in 1194, when tournaments were allowed in England again[4], Kenilworth was listed in association with Warwick as a licensed site for tournaments. The place was probably selected because it offered polar settlements, Kenilworth Castle and Warwick Castle, as "team bases", with each pole being of "moderate to large size in population". Apparently the choice was not to the Earl of Warwick's liking, and the first mention of a tournament held in the area was fifty years later, in 1245 (Crouch 53-54), when Kenilworth Castle was in Simon de Montfort's custody.

The impact over the area

When one discusses the durability of the castles, and especially the durability of important castles like Kenilworth, one considers the impact it had on the area over the years. I have mentioned that initially it was erected with the distinct purpose to counteract the influence of Warwick Castle in the area. The influence it had on the development of the neighbourhood was far greater. Before the castle was built the village of Kenilworth "consisted of a number of rude huts scattered in the forest clearing" (Drew, *Kenilworth. A Manor of the King* 10). In the following years the village developed quickly and the lives of the inhabitants probably revolved around the castle and the abbey.

As soon as he had been granted the land, Geoffrey de Clinton also founded a monastery. The original charter mentions both the founding of the church "in honour of St. Mary" and the endowing of the congregation with lands and manors (Drew *Kenilworth: A Manor of the King* 12). According to Thomson "the twinning of castles and religious houses was a phenomenon characteristic of the medieval period" (*Associated Monasteries and Castles* 305-21). It was the case of castles like Chepstow Castle, Castle Acre Castle and Lewes Castle.

The presence of such a castle in the vicinity of a settlement, far from imposing unwanted pressure, would have a certain advantage. Usually, the founder of the castle was also generous with the parish church. The castle would provide new jobs and elevated positions as servants in the castle for the peasants around the area, increasing thus their living standards. Working in a castle would increase not only the peasants' income, but also their social status. In the 12th century "the lords had limited powers over the tenants in fee" (Dyer 109) and therefore the construction of a new castle would not add new taxes or threaten their position in any way, since their tenure was safe and the lease had a rather fixed value. They rather looked at a castle as the place which would preserve order in the area. Another advantage, this time economic, was the fact the town was granted "borough rights" allowing it to hold a market, one year after de Clinton was granted the land, in 1125 (Johnson 137).

The appearance of Kenilworth Castle was dramatically changed when a lake was artificially created by erecting an earth dam. This may have occurred during Henry II's reign, but King John was the one who supervised the construction of the outer bailey walls with towers and the expansion of the lake, which bordered the south and the west sides of the castle. The Mere, as it was called, changed the landscape completely and had a multilayered significance. It was first and foremost a beautiful sight. Studying the entrances into the castle, John Drew notes that "the glory of the castle lay in its expanse of water with the reflection of the castle in it and the play of light on the walls" ("Kenilworth Castle – A Discussion of its Entrances" 150). Secondly it was a good defence and it would prove so when the castle would be besieged. Thirdly it was a source of fresh water and fish,[5] which were supplied by several small streams and on this lake. There was also at least one mill.

[4] During the reign of Henry II there was a ban on tournaments, and they were only allowed in England during the reign of Richard I.

[5] Gifts of fish were made to different important people: the Bishop of Worcester was offered fish from the "king's *vivarium* at Kenilworth Castle" (Pounds 199).

Later Owners of Kenilworth Castle

The owner who initiated the long line of Lancaster owners was Henry III's younger son, Edmund, nick-named Crouchback. The improvements to Kenilworth Castle were made by Thomas, his son, who liked to receive guests lavishly and who considered Kenilworth castle as a more appropriate place to impress and entertain his guests. He built a wide hall and other buildings as accommodation for his guests. He also organized the forest near the castle as a deer park, so that his guests could indulge in the pleasures of hunting. We can see that the buildings that were added to the original Norman tower were constructed in such a way as to enclose a courtyard in the centre. I have noticed a tendency to reorganise the interior of the bailey in order to make it more private, arranging buildings around an inner curtain wall, which led to the final image of a "courtyard castle", preferred at the end of the 14th century (as for instance Bodiam Castle or Bolton Castle). I have tried to analyse the mentality behind this transformation and I have found that the distance between the aristocracy and the lower class increased gradually during the Middle Ages and therefore towards the end of the 14th century the lord and his guests required more privacy.

The courtyard of the 12th-century Norman tower would be busy with common people doing the ordinary jobs that were part of the life of the castle. There were carpenters and wood carvers, smiths, laundresses, fletchers fashioning arrows, etc (Gies 60). All these people moved outside the castle bailey, usually into the adjoining village, which grew into a town. Their products would not be especially made for the castle or for a local economy, but would be sold both to the castle dwellers and to any other buyer. The castle yard would remain the domain of the landlord and his family and guests.

I try to associate a change in economic policies with the 14th-century organisation of the castle area, which tended to encircle an inner courtyard and to make the castle a closed area. The result of the lack of available workforce led to the commuting of the labour services to one manor into cash rents and leasing more of the arable demesne to different tenants. In other words, the end of the 14th century saw "the end of direct management of agriculture by the great estates" (Dyer 332). The land lord would not be so closely linked to his properties, since only money was involved in his dealings with his tenants.

It is to be noted that Thomas Plantagenet, the second earl of Lancaster worked together with Guy de Beauchamp, 10th Earl of Warwick, against a common enemy, like Piers Gaveston, perceived as an upstart nobleman. The Beauchamp Earls of Warwick preserved a good relation with the Earls of Lancaster which lasted even when they became kings. After the death of Henry de Beauchamp the last Earl of Warwick (who had been made Duke of Warwick), Richard de Neville became the 16th Earl of Warwick, in right of his wife, and the good relation with the Crown, who owned castle Kenilworth was compromised. The Wars of the Roses saw the two castles on opposite sides once again, but at the end of the Wars of the Roses, the Tudor kings acquired both castles.

Details of Architecture at Kenilworth Castle

The most impressive remains, besides the Norman tower, are the walls with the huge windows that belonged to John of Gaunt's Great Hall. The large, impressive windows of the hall with their tracery and window seats, the six fireplaces and the rich foliage decoration above the entrance doorway and above the windows declare the owner's wealth and high social rank. When analysing the structure of this third Great Hall one can see that the original Hall had been at the ground level while Gaunt's Hall was raised over a vaulted undercroft. When looking through the windows one understands a possible reason for this change, as the window seats of the hall now had a view over the landscape of the mere and the deerparks, "a view that would have been barred by the outer walls of the castle had the hall floor been at ground level" (Johnson *Behind the Castle Gate* 141).

But more than the new buildings, the old Norman tower spoke of ancient lineage and of genuine aristocracy. It was this old tower, probably white-washed, which testified to the greatness of the past and therefore to the indisputable nobility of the family holding the residence. It has been convincingly argued that "old fabric was used and deployed to emphasise the ancient nature of the lineage in many instances" when old castles were altered (Johnson, *Behind the Castle Gate* 28-9). It was what new castles like Bodiam Castle or Old Wardour Castle most obviously did not have; it was this lack that materially pointed out the huge difference in status between the old renowned aristocracy and the *parvenus* who had made money in the French wars and built beautiful castles to flaunt their newly acquired wealth.

The Renaissance Castle

When the castle was given to Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester, he undertook important works to improve the appearance of the castle as a residence that would reflect his elevated social status and would impress Queen Elisabeth, who granted it to him. The keep itself was reshaped, the forebuilding was completely altered and turned into a loggia leading to the garden and the windows at the upper floor of the keep were modified and enlarged so that Elizabethan windows could be inserted. Over the loggia he probably preserved "an upper room or a gallery dating, in all probability, from John of Gaunt's transformation of the castle" (Johnson, "A Fragment of Architecture" 175). The windows at the lower storey are left roughly unchanged in order to relate with the entrance arch to the loggia. Leicester intended a "juxtaposition of styles" as "an implicit identification with John of Gaunt" in order to impress the others with "his familiarity with the latest architectural styles at the same moment as his conscious re-use of earlier work" (Johnson, "A Fragment of Architecture" 175).

There is evidence that between 1566 and 1568 he also commissioned a plan for a new impressive east entrance range to the inner court, with a central entrance flanked by two corner pavilions that would have provided extensive lodgings (Morris R. 23-35). The plan would have brought symmetry and would have completely remodelled the appearance of Kenilworth. Although Leicester did not reshape the entrance of Kenilworth Castle, he built a new edifice in order to provide accommodation for Queen Elisabeth and her retinue.

During the Civil War, although Kenilworth was a royal castle it was not very active on the Royalist side and it was occupied without a fight by the Parliamentary troops. Yet after the 1648 uprising, its destruction was ordered and the north side of the old Norman tower (the *donjon*), "the one which was most readily visible to the ordinary people", was slighted (Johnson, *Behind the Castle Gate* 174). The defences were not touched, but the impressive lake was drained. It was clearly an attempt to undermine symbolically the image of lordship.

Conclusion

Kenilworth Castle could be analysed according to the traditional theories, as an efficient defensive structure and later on a luxurious residence. It can be equally noticed that the second approach can also apply to Kenilworth Castle, since its original purpose was to oppose the neighbouring Warwick Castle, bringing the area under royal control, more than to actually resist a siege. So both these theories could be applied to Kenilworth Castle, but, as I showed, there are other aspects - the economic relationships for instance - which should be analysed and which can bring new insights for the understanding of what Kenilworth Castle (or any other castle) really signified.

Another change in the lordly habits would be the fact that they travelled less frequently and they preferred to have fewer, but better equipped residences. The peripatetic life of the 12th and 13th-century lords would come to an end. The aristocrats followed the example of the king and became more settled and more

predictable in their movements towards the end of the 14th century. The courtyard castles would provide the required accommodation for the lord and his entourage or for a party of guests.

I want to stress again that to discuss castles in utilitarian terms, to mention their efficacy to resist a siege or the lack of it, to mention a few decorative details or simply to describe the life of those living inside, fails to sufficiently describe the significance of the castle. It is the mentality of an epoch and the social and economic ties together with other cultural aspects that can be used to enrich our understanding of what the phenomenon of the castle really was.

The life of the castle in general and of Kenilworth Castle in particular would be closely connected with the lives of the people that lived close to it and whose balanced existence would be shaken first by the dissolution of the nearby monastery (16th century) and than by the slighting of the castle (17th century), actions which would substantially reduce their horizon of expectation.

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