

The Domesday Book castle *LVVRE*

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The Domesday Book records a castle in the manor of Maesbury, the current Oswestry in Shropshire, called *LVVRE*, usually taken to represent *Luvre* (Figure 1). This is interpreted by Gelling (PN Sa 1: 193) as “presumably French *l’oeuvre* ‘the work’”; and she notes (p. 110) that it was called *castellum de Oswaldestre* in c.1180, this being the first mention of the name Oswestry. Lewis (2007: 134) also accepts this interpretation, stating that the castle was “known simply as ‘the Earthwork’ (*Luvre*, that is *l’oeuvre*)”; the same is given by Duckers and Duckers (2006: 122). The purpose of this note is to point out that this is not likely to be correct, and to offer alternative interpretations.¹

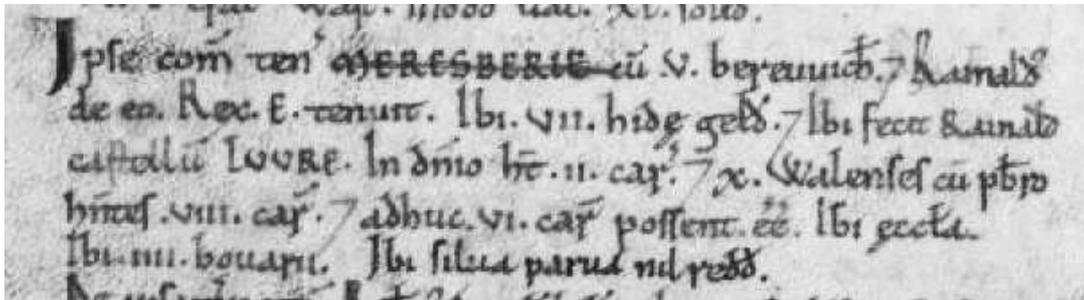


Figure 1: the *Meresberie* entry in folio 253v of the Great Domesday Book, referring to *castellu LVVRE*. Reproduced with the permission of The National Archives.

Some justification needs to be given for the study of a nonce-name. DB names are often corrupt, making conclusions based on them alone very uncertain. However, as a likely French name and thus one of the few recorded in DB, it is of great interest for the study of the progress made by the Norman administration in the 20 years since the Conquest. Additional interest is created by the possible connection to the famous Louvre in Paris.

Gelling (PN Sa 1: 193, 230) claimed that the names *Leorv'*, *Leouv*, *Leorud*, and *Leour'* occur in a 14th century account roll from Oswestry. This was an unfortunate error arising through the misunderstanding of a

slip written by a transcriber who was merely making several attempts to read a difficult name.² Gelling further suggested (p. 193) that this is the same name as our *LVVRE*. In fact, the name occurs only once and I read it as *Castru' Leonu'* (Figure 2). Two hypotheses could explain this:

1. The second word begins *Leon-*, and is a reference to the well evidenced *Castrum Leonis* in Holt (just in Wales at SJ 410537, on the border with Cheshire).³ This castle was *Villa Leonum* n.d., *Castrum Leonis* 1316, *Leouns* 1346 (Palmer and Owen 1910: 237, Charles 1938: 203, Owen and Morgan 2007, s.n. Holt);⁴ or,
2. The second word begins *Leor-*, and is another spelling of our *LVVRE*. I will say more about this later.

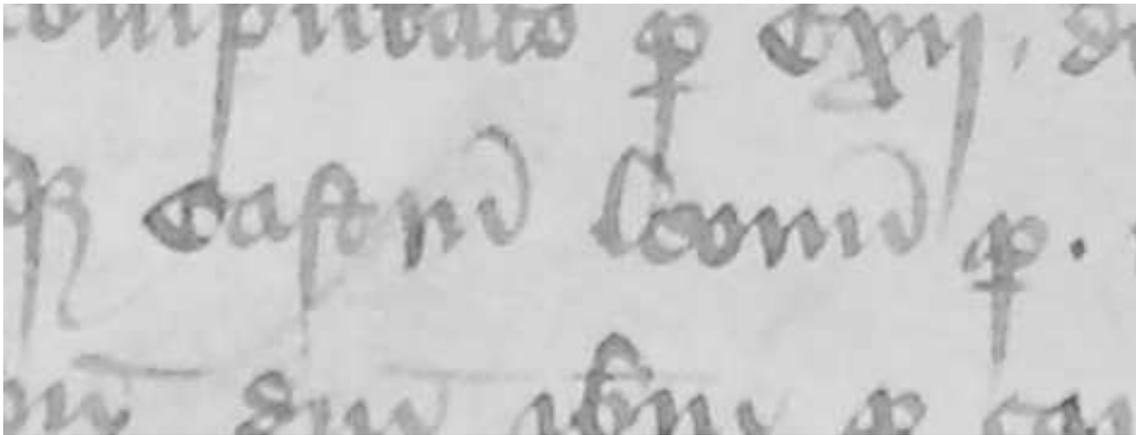


Figure 2: *Castru' Leo?* in Shropshire Archives 6000/9777; reproduced with their permission.

OE *geweorc* occurs in a few English place-names with the sense 'fortification': Newark (Nt; *Newarcha* 1060–6, PN Nt: 199); Southwark (Sr; *Sudwerca* DB); Aldwark (Db; *Ald(e)werk(e)* c.1140, PN Db: 339, and cf. the street-name Aldwark in York); Wark-on-Tweed (Nb; *Werch* 1157); Wark-on-Tyne (Nb; *Werke* 1279, NbDu: 207); and a unique case of a compound with a personal name: Basingwerk (Flintshire; *Besingwerc'* c.1155, Charles 1938: 225). Germanic cognates occur in Foremark (Db; *Fornewerche* DB, from ON *forn-verk* 'old fort'; PN Db: 634), and Warcq in Meuse and Ardennes, a name occurring twice in France (DENLF, s.n.).

The question therefore arises as to whether French *œuvre* (OFr *ovre*, *uevre*, *euvre*, *oeuvre* fem.) was used in this specific sense. In classical Latin

the equivalent *opus* (or *opera*) was so used, but the sense ‘fortification’ is not given for *œuvre* in DALF or DHLF, and, more importantly, I have not been able to find a single instance of its use as a place-name element.⁵ Also telling against *œuvre* is the fact that its meaning would have been transparent to the Domesday scribe, making it likely that he would Latinize the name. Furthermore, we would have expected either some attempt to represent the complex vowel (such as in more normal spellings like *euvre*), or the writing of *LOVRE* to distinguish vowel from consonant. The actual spelling *LVVRE* allows the possibility that there is no fricative at all in the name. We may compare here the DB spellings for Loversall (PN YW 1: 34; *Geureshale* 307v; *Loureshale* ×2 373v; *Luureshale* 379r).

If the name is French, but not *l’œuvre*, what might it be? We can first reject the very common French place-name type represented by Louviers and Louvières. These are regularly descended from *lupārium* and *lupāria* respectively and refer to places inhabited by wolves. In these the *-i-* is never lost, and this rules out any connection with *Luvre*. Furthermore, they are always stressed on the final syllable, and this separates these names from Louvre(s) as will be considered later.

A better possibility is the place now called L’Eure in Le Havre. This was an ancient settlement at the mouth of the Seine, now swallowed up by docks. The modern spelling (as if containing an article) is a cacography; the name is well recorded in forms such as *Lure* c.1060, *Lura* 1172–3, *Luere* 1177, and *Leura* 1180 (DT Seine-Maritime, s.n. Leure). The Latin form (*de*) *Lodoro* 1177 may indicate an origin in a Gaulish *Lugdorum*. In any case it proves that the name had no fricative /v/, but rather a hiatus between two vowels resulting from the loss of intervocalic *-d-*, a regular process in French. The place must have been known to any Norman who sailed the Seine, as it would have been the last place for provisioning before a channel crossing. A transfer to England is possible, and the DB form *LVVRE* could stand for *Luure*, with *-uu-* being an attempt to represent a long vowel or the two vowels of a form like *Luere*. The theory that this is the source of the name would be further supported if we could be sure that the uncertain spelling in the Oswestry roll was *Leor*.⁶

The names Louvres (Val d’Oise) and Louvre (Paris, originally a fort, now a palace) are further possibilities, though their not being in Normandy makes a transfer less likely. Louvres is an ancient staging post on the route between Paris and Senlis (Roblin 1978). Typical forms (DENLF, CGP, TGF, TF) are *Luvra* 7th, (*ad*) *Luperam* 860, (*apud*) *Luvram* 1119, and *Luvre* 1210. If the DB name were *LUVRE*, this would be phonetically ideal, but no motivation for a transfer to Shropshire is apparent. There was no castle at Louvres.

The name of the Paris Louvre is not recorded before the 12th century. The names Louvres and Louvre are very likely identical, but the

origin has been much disputed (Berty 1885: 113ff.; Wolf 1969). An obsolete theory of Sauval (1724), proposing a Germanic origin, has been repeated even in recent books. Sauval wrote (p. 9) that he had seen that “dans un vieux Glossaire Latin-Saxon, Leouar y est traduit *Castellum*”,⁷ and thus took Leouar to be the origin of Louvre. This glossary has never been seen again; it seems possible that Sauval actually saw a name in *Leon-* of the type *Leonum* mentioned above. A much better theory has been given by Wolf (1969), who derives Louvres and Louvre from Latin *Ad Rubrās* ‘at (the) red ...’, an accusative plural formation with an implied feminine noun such as *rūpēs* ‘rocks, cliff’. This is a known name with many classical examples from throughout the empire.⁸ The dissimilation to *l-* is very plausible; not only are there two successive syllables in *r-*, but with *ad* being taken as a fixed part of the name, the forward tongue position after the *-d* would also encourage the change. The rest of the phonetic development is regular. The most important example, *Ad Rubras* north of Rome on the Via Flaminia (at the modern Saxa Rubra), is said to have been *Lubre* in the middle ages (Ashby and Fell 1921: 146). Related examples include Massa Lubrense in Italy, and Lobre and Llobregat in Spain.⁹

We thus have three candidate French names which may be the origin of *LVVRE*. These can only remain hypotheses. We may further speculate that there was already a fort called *L(o)uvre* in Paris before 1086, and the Oswestry castle was named (perhaps ironically) from this. But given the high level of documentation available for Paris (Berty, 1885; CGP; Roblin, 1951), which does not mention such a fort, this seems unlikely.

There are several names in DB which were certainly or probably transferred from France or newly created in French: Battle (Sx; *La Batailge*), Boulge (Sf; *Bulges*), Bray (Bk; *Braia*), Cantlop (Sa; *Cantelop*), Capel St. Andrew (Sf; *Capeles*), Meshaw (D; *Mauessart*), Montacute (So; *Montagud*), Montgomery (Montgomeryshire; *Montgomeri/Montgumeri*), and a lost *Bolebec* (DB fol. 254r; PN Sa 1: xii). My analysis of *LVVRE* confirms its likely membership of this category, but the evidence is insufficient for a precise identification of a prototype.¹⁰

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Notes

1. For further background on DB castles, see Harfield (1991).
2. Margaret Gelling, personal communication. The document is Shropshire Archives 6000/9777, catalogued as “Account (compotus) of Sir Alan Thorpp”, called “SBL 9777” in PN Sa 1. It records the sending of two stallions from *Bromhurst* (probably a lost place near Oswestry) to *Castru’ Leo?*. The name occurs in the sixth line of the section headed *Custus stallonu’*.
3. This identification was made by John Freeman (private communication).
4. The name of the Holt castle is a recurring type in France and may be modelled on, or transferred from, one of the following: Lyons-la-Forêt (Dépt. Eure; *Saltus Leonis* 1050, *villa Leons* 1067, *Castrum Leonum* 1135); Châtillon (Eure, the former name of Conches; *Castellio* 1035, *Castellione* 1080, DT Eure); Castillon (Calvados; *Castellio* 1114) or Lion-Sur-Mer (Calvados; *Apud Leonem super Mare* 1234, DT Calvados). The recurring Italian names Castelleóne and Castiglióne appear to be identical. Whatever their ultimate origin (possibly a false division of *castellionem*; Ambrogio et al. 2004: s.nn. Castiglióne), some of these names have been (re-)interpreted as ‘Lion Castle’.
5. Vandœuvre and Vendœuvre are from Gaulish *vindobriga* ‘white fort’. Many other French place-names in *-vre* also derive from *briga* (Lacroix, 2003). Two examples of Grossœuvre (Eure, Cher), are from *silva* ‘forest’ (DENLF). A possible exception is Escaudœuvres, for which Gysseling (1960) asserts that *briva* ‘bridge’ is excluded by the topography, and so he favours Latin *opera*. I do not see that this is a necessary conclusion; Escadœuvres is 500m from the Escaut, with a bridge connecting it to Chapelle d’Aire.
6. There seems to have been some mutual influence of the names Le Havre and l’Eure; Cassini’s 18th-century map has *Heure* for the latter, apparently a blend of both names. Conversely, the existence of l’Eure may have caused the change of *-n* in the original ON *hafn* to *-re*, and caused the article to be added.
7. “In an old Latin-Saxon glossary, Leouar is translated *castle*”.
8. On a visit to Louvres on April 26th, 2008, I did not identify any red rocks or earth. I suggest that the name may have meant ‘at the milestone with red-painted lettering’; such a rubric may have been used at important junctions. In this case the implied feminine noun may have been *litterae* ‘letters’.
9. Speculating further, we may wonder whether Radlett (Hrt), which is at a junction on the Roman Watling Street and of uncertain etymology, might be OE *rēad-gelæte* ‘red junction’ rather than the *rād-gelæte* ‘road junction’ suggested in PN Hrt: 61. OE *rēad* occurs in several charters with reference to paths or ways, almost certainly just referring to the colour of the road surface. I suggest that a different interpretation is possible when the road is Roman and the word ‘red’ is applied to a junction. A red stone (*rēad/rēadan hāne* dat.) is a landmark in OE charter bounds in S:429, 468, 491, 496, 591, 699, 766, 1581 and 1589.
10. Loover Shaw (Sx; PN Sx: 361) and Lover (W) have no early forms and are unlikely to be related. English “louvre” in the sense ‘ventilation opening’ is of unknown origin (OED).

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