King John’s Gloriette at Corfe Castle

A
rchitectural historians have recently directed their attention toward the “lesser sibling” of medieval architecture, the castle, formerly the preserve of archaeologists. In the last twenty years, scholars have turned away from the analysis of the defensible capabilities of castles and have begun to investigate them as architectural enterprises in their own right, with a comparable range of artistic effects and symbolism. Where castles were once considered little more than brutal engines of government policy, they have now become stately homes, the forerunners of contemporary mansions. Yet with few exceptions, castles remain essentially unintegrated into the narratives of medieval architectural history, which are still dominated by ecclesiastical architecture and which display a notable lack of interest in the Early Gothic period. However valuable for introducing castles into the spotlight of academic interest, this shift has served to produce two parallel narratives of architectural history: that of the church and that of the castle. To some extent at least, the polarization of church and castle has been related to an implicit association of castles with political power and martial prowess, and churches with the high-minded world of the clerical elite. Although such anachronistic divisions are now being relegated to the historiography of medieval architecture, the problem of integrating castles—both formally and stylistically—into the history of medieval architecture as a whole remains a problem central to the study of medieval buildings.

The Gloriette at Corfe Castle in Dorset is an elegant domestic palace built by King John in ca. 1201–5 (Figure 1). The structure is an important example of small-scale Early Gothic secular architecture, and indeed a significant example of Early Gothic architecture in its own right, yet it has hitherto eluded serious scholarly attention. Corfe Castle was sacked during the seventeenth-century civil war, which left most of the buildings either partially or wholly ruined. Fabric evidence for the Gloriette is, however, relatively abundant, and the building still preserves that rarity in Romanesque and Early Gothic secular architecture: a wealth of architectural moldings and worked stones that allow for an unusually comprehensive analysis of the building’s style and character. The evidence, even in its fragmentary state, has received high praise: as Howard Colvin noted in his History of the King’s Works, the Gloriette is an “elegant building, executed in faultless ashlar in the most advanced Gothic style of the period.” Our knowledge of its layout is supplemented by a survey and ground plan executed in 1586 by Ralph Treswell, steward to the then owner, Sir Christopher Hatton. In this article, we examine a range of problems associated with the royal palace in terms of its archaeology, iconography, style, and patronage. Analysis of the fabric demonstrates that King John’s palace was built by masons connected with the Early Gothic work at Wells Cathedral and Glastonbury Abbey, the premier architectural projects in western England between ca. 1175 and 1240. This thesis is argued on both stylistic and historical grounds. We then consider the social contexts of castle patronage and architectural style in the

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Early Gothic period, including the motivations and aspirations of patrons for exceptional domestic architecture.

The Gloriette: Documentation and Description

Corfe Castle stands on a high natural promontory in the Isle of Purbeck in southern Dorset, commanding an impressive view over the surrounding countryside and safeguarding the main route from Wareham to Swanage. Throughout the Middle Ages, Corfe was one of the premier royal castles, and undoubtedly the central one in southwest England. Upon John’s coronation in 1199, he inherited a heavily fortified stronghold. Corfe had been a royal castle since the reign of William the Conqueror, whose patronage is associated with the Old Hall in the west bailey and the fortification of the inner ward with a semi-circular curtain wall. The second major campaign occurred under Henry I in the early twelfth century with the construction of the monumental three-level keep in the inner ward. Given the ruinous condition of the buildings, it is now difficult to gain a complete impression of the castle prior to John’s reign, but if the author of the twelfth-century Gesta Stephani is correct, Corfe was “the most secure of all the English Castles.”

The date of King John’s construction of the Gloriette can be determined with some certainty. The Pipe Roll of the Exchequer for 1201–2 states that £275 were spent “in operatione domorum R[egis] de Corf.” This mention of “the King’s houses,” coupled with the substantial sum, suggests that major domestic building works were under way at Corfe in 1201, a point that is amply demonstrated by its stylistic sources. Having spent the early part of his reign between eastern England and Normandy, John first visited Dorset in April 1201, when the decision must have been made to construct the new royal residence. The date of completion cannot be determined from documentary evidence, but a possible terminus ante quem is suggested by John’s visit to Corfe in August 1205, which could have necessitated the use of the royal apartments.

The construction of the new royal residence was only the first phase in a wider campaign of expansion and fortification at Corfe Castle that went on sporadically throughout John’s reign, costing a total of over £1,400. John’s reign was characterized by an almost unprecedented expenditure on castles, and in cost, at least, the work at Corfe was second only to the contemporary building at Scarborough. The building of the Gloriette coincided with the construction of the defensive perimeter of the west bailey, which probably replaced former palisades. This campaign included the creation of the north, south, and Butvant towers that encircled the former Romanesque hall, on which £477 were spent between 1202 and 1204 “in operatione castelli de Corf.” In the fortification of his rising palace, John was very likely inspired by the reversal of fortunes of the English army in Normandy. Between 1207 and his death in 1216, John further equipped the castle by erecting...
substantial fortifications in the southwest and outer baileys. In 1207, the sheriff of Dorset was ordered to send masons and miners to Corfe, probably to cut a ditch between the inner and outer baileys. As political crisis no doubt prompted the fortification of the west bailey, so the rising tensions leading to the civil war demanded further strengthen- ing of the castle between 1212 and 1216, beginning with the erection of a large curtain wall around the outer bailey, punctuated by flanking towers. John’s reign was thus an important one for the architectural development of Corfe Castle: it witnessed not only the expansion of the royal residence in the inner bailey, but also the subsequent enclosure of this space within successive fortifications.

The construction of the Gloriette signaled the shift of the royal residence from apartments in the Romanesque keep to the new palace in the inner ward, placed against the east perimeter wall of the eleventh-century fortifications. Although the function of the palace is unrecorded in early-thirteenth-century documentation, its position and its orna- mentation indicate that it was a place of seclusion from the bustle of the court and royal administration that would have taken place in the keep and the Romanesque hall. Even in its present condition, John’s palace remains a clear sign of the increasing complexity of royal accommodation in the period and the demands for more private settings for the royal entourage. The Gloriette remained the principal royal residence at Corfe throughout the Middle Ages and, typical of important royal palaces, it received subsequent additions and restorations. Edward I (r. 1272–1307) repaired and expanded the palace, involving roofing, repairs to the chambers above the entrance porch, and the addition of two chambers near the Gloriette. Edward III (r. 1327–77) also undertook to remodel the palace. His work on the royal apartments seems to have been confined to the destruction of the former kitchen and its rebuilding between 1362 and 1367, probably on the site of John’s previous kitchens, and a remodeling of windows in the camera Regis. The last significant alteration to the Gloriette was the addition of a new tower at the south-east corner of the palace by Richard II (r. 1377–99) in 1377–8, appropriately called the “Gloriette tower.”

Treswell’s plan of the Gloriette (Figure 2) shows a roughly quadrangular structure based around a central court. Forming the east flank was the Great Hall, divided into two spaces on the sixteenth-century plan, while the south kitchen was delineated by the Long Hall, now existing only at the level of the barrel-vaulted cellar. To the west were the
kitchens (replaced by Edward III), and to the north an entrance porch with domestic chambers above. Although it is not shown on Treswell’s plan, traces of a north-south wall running between the Long Hall and the entrance porch are still visible. They suggest that a further kitchen may have existed prior to the composition of Treswell’s survey, which would have closed the west flank of the quadrangle. The entire palace was carried over a stone-vaulted cellar. Based on what remains of the domestic chambers, we can be certain that the domestic block was composed of at least three levels (Figures 3, 4), even if the actual functions of the rooms of the domestic block remain speculative. Later-thirteenth-century documentation refers to the upper chambers as the king’s and queen’s chambers, which likely indicates a continuation of early-thirteenth-century use. The first level consisted of an entrance vestibule, which contained a rectangular antechamber measuring 10 x 20 feet. On the east wall, there are two ornamented portals that lead into the chapel and King’s Hall, respectively. These two portals are the most elaborate in the Gloriette, and their ornament signifies the liturgical and ceremonial importance of the two chambers. The portals are formed by two continuous orders: the inner order is a forty-five-degree chamfered profile and the outer order is composed of a roll-and-hollow molding (Figure 5). Both portals are surmounted by rolled hood moldings that terminate in damaged stops. These broad portals allowed for easy passage in and out of the ceremonial rooms of the palace. On the facing west wall are the remains of a short stair, once encased in the thickness of the wall, which leads to an upper chamber located at a split level above the porch. The third level is suggested by a substantial fragment of masonry that juts upward above the northwest corner (see Figures 1, 3, 4).

Fortunately, the masonry of the hall is more abundant and thus poses fewer problems in reconstruction. Although the use of the hall is undocumented in the period, its size (44 x 22 feet) and high level of finish denote a sense of exclusivity and strongly suggest that it was semiprivate, accessible only to the king and his closest circle. The hall is an open design of four bays, each demarcated by lancet windows in the east and west elevations (see Figure 1). The hall was a single, uninterrupted space, originally covered by a wooden roof that rested on stubby corbels. Most of the vault on the ground floor is lost, but clear traces of its sharply pointed trajectory remain on the east and west walls (see Figure 8). There are single lancet windows in each bay of the undercroft, which are much smaller than those of the hall. The upper level was lit by elegant lancet windows, formed externally by two continuous chamfered orders sur-
mounted by rolled hood moldings and foliate label stops (Figures 6, 7); remains of the inner order are seen at the lower right of the window in Figure 7. On the exterior, buttresses with a steeply angled weathering divide the bays, while horizontal articulation is provided by string courses that reflect the internal division of first and second stories and the level of the second-story window sills. The articulated character of the exterior does not prepare us for the relative austerity of the interior (Figure 8). The windows have broad, single-splay jambs that carry three orders of chamfered, dying moldings in the arch. Between the windows, there are broad spans of flat, unadorned masonry. In the recesses of each window are molded window seats that accommodated one person on either side. The lack of vertical articulation and sculptural decoration in the King’s Hall may suggest that, in accordance with contemporary fashion, it was designed to accommodate a painted cycle or perhaps to bear tapestries.18

In scale and design, the hall is related to the exactly contemporary hall built by King John’s chamberlain, Hubert de Burgh, at Grosmont Castle (Gwent) of ca. 1201–5 (Figure 9).19 Since it has been badly robbed out, few architectural details are now discernible beyond the general layout. Like its counterpart at Corfe, de Burgh’s hall was built over a lower level (albeit of wood rather than stone) and contained a separate cell at one end. Also like Corfe, the hall was an open design of four bays with a wooden roof that rested on corbels on the lateral walls. These walls were articulated with large windows that may have borne comparison with those at the Gloriette. The decorative details of the two buildings may have also had similarities: excavations revealed fragments of carved stiff-leaf decoration that originally adorned the hall space, which recall the foliate label stops on the exterior of John’s palace.20 In any case, the formal resemblance between the two structures is suggestive of a small-scale form of aristocratic hall that predominated in the years around 1200.

Adjoining the north of the Great Hall was a narrow, rib-vaulted cell of two bays, measuring 22 x 11 feet, which is now destroyed except for the remains in the southwest corner. Treswell’s plan shows that this room was accessed by a portal in the north wall of the hall and by the ornamented doorway leading from the vestibule. There has been some disagreement about whether this room functioned as the royal chapel or the king’s private chamber. A more conclusive answer in favor of the former can be gleaned from late-thirteenth-century documentation and from the unusually lavish architectural detailing.21 In the southwest corner of the room are the remains of a vault springer with a stepped triple-roll molding. It sits on a damaged Purbeck
marble capital that sat on a detached shaft and base, also in Purbeck marble. To the left is a continuous order with an angle roll molding between two hollows; to the right is a continuous order with a broad chamfer (Figure 10). From the trajectory of the rib it appears that the chapel was vaulted in two bays. In form and orientation, the chapel conforms to twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century convention by being integrated into the lord’s hall and chambers.22 In evocation of a long line of castle chapels, ornament was used sparingly in the public rooms of the castle and more lavishly on the devotional space, including detached shafts and ribbed vaulting to signify its liturgical importance as the king’s private chapel.23

In the essentials of its plan, the Gloriette descends from a sequence of twelfth-century quadrangular palaces based around a central courtyard. In England, this tradition of centrally planned palaces seems to have originated in the first quarter of the twelfth century with the episcopal palaces built by Bishop Roger of Salisbury at Sherborne and Old Sarum. It was followed thereafter in the less rigidly planned palace at Wolvesey built by Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester (1129–71).24 John Blair has recently suggested that the origins for the quadrangular palace plan might lie in a lost group of eleventh-century monastic buildings “on the border between secular and monastic.”25 However, the ultimate referent for this tradition may not be found in medieval buildings, but rather in the centralized plans of Roman domestic architecture. Although such a suggestion cannot be proven, an iconographic association would accord well with the intellectual climate of architectural patronage in the “twelfth-century Renaissance,” and not least with Henry of Blois, whose interests in ancient Rome are well known.26 Perhaps more signif-
icant to the context of John’s patronage, the tradition of centrally planned quadrangular residences also had important precedents in the history of the royal works. John’s father, Henry II (r. 1154–89), built quadrangular residences at Windsor Castle and in the gardens at Woodstock, Oxfordshire. The possibility that John had in mind recent building projects in the royal works is an attractive one. A likely source for the design and placement of the Gloriette must be the former quadrangular apartments at Windsor, built between 1165 and 1173. By the end of Henry II’s reign, Windsor comprised two fortified wards: in the lower ward were the original Romanesque buildings associated with William the Conqueror, while the upper ward held the Romanesque keep constructed by William II, and the domestic palace, set against the perimeter wall. The formal arrangements of the palaces up to ca. 1215 when the perimeter walls of Corfe were expanded are sufficiently close to suggest that John’s patronage at Corfe may have been a reflection of arrangements at Windsor.

Design Sources and Authorship

King John is hardly one of medieval England’s most charismatic patrons of art and architecture. His reputation as Rex crudissimus has left little room for consideration of his aesthetic sensibilities, nor much insight into his motivations as a patron. The proliferation of royal documentation in the reign of his son, Henry III, has served to distort John’s significance as an art patron within the history of the King’s Works. The fabric remains and historical context of the Gloriette, however, allow for an extended discussion of the stylistic sources and iconography of one of John’s significant architectural achievements. The style of the Gloriette is closely related to the premier Early Gothic building projects in the West Country at Glastonbury Abbey and Wells Cathedral. As has long been known, the two building campaigns, conducted only eight miles apart, were connected both by stylistic and political ties. While similarities with the architecture of Wells Cathedral have been noticed, they have been used as dating criteria to show that the Gloriette was contemporary with the Early Gothic fabric of Wells and to further prove a connection between the Gloriette and the documentary reference of the domorum Regis, rather than locating the Gloriette within its proper stylistic context.

In order to establish the appropriate architectural context for the Gloriette’s stylistic sources, it is necessary to briefly rehearse the related campaigns at Wells and Glastonbury. The beginning of the campaign at Wells dates from early in the episcopate of Reginald de Bohun, bishop of Bath (1174–91). Analysis of the fabric has shown that the early building was conducted in three major phases. The first witnessed the erection of the east chapel and the first three bays of the choir together with the east bays of the transept. A terminus ante quem of 1184 can be determined on the basis of a change in material from Doulting to Chilcote stone. The Doulting quarries were owned by Glastonbury Abbey, and after a fire of 1184 that largely destroyed the abbey church, the monks required the Doulting stone for their own rebuilding. The second phase saw the completion of the transept and the early beginnings of the nave around 1205. The third phase witnessed the construction of the nave to three bays from the west when work may have been halted due to the Papal Interdict, between 1209 and 1213. At Glastonbury, the Lady Chapel was rebuilt between 1184 and 1186/9, and the Great Church was commenced in 1185.

Several specific design features serve to illustrate connections between the Gloriette and the architecture of Wells and Glastonbury:

1. Lancet windows with two continuous orders with forty-five-degree chamfers (Figures 11–13; see Figure 7)
2. Roll moldings. The juxtaposition of a continuous roll-and-hollow moldings outside a continuous chamfered order in the doorway to the Great Hall of the Gloriette is paralleled in the triforium of the transepts and nave at Wells (Figure 14; see Figure 5).
3. Similar stiff-leaf foliage label stops (Figure 15; see Figure 7)
4. Buttresses with steeply angled weathering and continuous string courses (see Figures 6, 11)
5. Molded corbels with two horizontal rolls separated by a deep hollow (Figures 16, 17; see Figure 11)
6. Vaulting ribs with triple, stepped rolls (Figures 18, 19)
7. The alternation of continuous and noncontinuous orders on the inner face of the entrance arch to the chapel of the Gloriette is a common motif of the West Country school of Early Gothic architecture. The precise juxtaposition is not matched at Wells, but continuous roll moldings in hollows alternating with noncontinuous orders appear in the transept piers of the Great Church at Glastonbury (Figure 20). Detached shafts are used in the Lady Chapel at Glastonbury where blue lias substitutes for Purbeck.
8. The sharply pointed wall arches of the undercroft of the Gloriette are closely allied to the transverse arches of the aisles at Wells and the formerets of the north and south walls of the Glastonbury Lady Chapel (see Figures 8, 19).

The similarities between the Gloriette, Wells Cathedral, and Glastonbury Abbey provide unusually strong evidence for attributing the authorship of the Gloriette to a master mason with intimate knowledge of both buildings. How
might these builders have come into the employ of King John? John’s closest connection to these projects was through Savaric Fitzgeldewin, bishop of Bath and Wells (1192–99) and bishop of Bath and Glastonbury (1199–1205). Savaric was a close advisor to John and appeared at the king’s right during the coronation ceremony in 1199. In 1192, Savaric seized Glastonbury Abbey and its vast estates, and received royal sanction from Richard I to fashion himself “bishop of Bath and Glastonbury.” On his coronation, John was instrumental in helping Savaric maintain control over the abbey. Savaric’s favor with John resulted in two grants to the “ecclesie Wellensi” from the episcopal manor in North Curry in 1201–2 and 1203–4, and earned Wells the right to hold a fair in 1205. King John’s close contact with Bishop Savaric provides a compelling context for the transmission of an important master mason from Savaric’s building projects to John’s new palace at Corfe. The documented transfer of the Wells Master “L” (probably master mason Adam Lock) from the rising...
**Figure 14** Wells Cathedral, south transept, west triforium

**Figure 15** Wells Cathedral, north nave aisle, bay four, west label stop

**Figure 16** Corfe Castle, Gloriette, Great Hall, exterior, east wall, detail of corbels
Figure 17  Glastonbury Abbey, Great Church, south nave aisle, corbel

Figure 18  Corfe Castle, Gloriette, southwest corner of chapel, detail

Figure 19  Wells Cathedral, south nave aisle, view toward the east
may have been a “calculated act of appropriation,” a direct allusion to the murder of Thomas Becket and the subsequent rebuilding of Canterbury. In his emulation of the new project, Henry II may have wanted to connect himself with the visual signifiers of the martyr in order to illustrate spiritual and moral continuity between the two men, thus to relieve himself of the burden of guilt for Becket’s murder. Such a suggestion gains weight when it is recalled that Henry II founded a number of monasteries, apparently, as Giraldi Cambrensi suggested, as a public act of penance for his involvement in the Becket fiasco. Another possibility is that the east arm of Canterbury, built to house the shrine of Thomas Becket, represented a particularly aristocratic model of building, as Becket himself was represented in his hagiography as a model of aristocracy and courtliness. Whether or not the borrowing of style had political associations is open to further discussion (indeed, it would be surprising if it did not), but there is little doubt that at Dover, Henry was keenly interested in being *au courant* with the latest trends in architecture.

The relationship of John’s work at Corfe to contemporary church building raises a number of significant problems—none of which can be discussed at length here—pertaining to the development and interpretation of architectural forms in contemporary secular and ecclesiastical buildings. As an aspect of what might be called the poetics of architectural patronage, it is possible that the borrowing or employment of masons from great church building projects was emblematic of a particular cache of aristocratic taste. We do not risk an anachronism in suggesting that in a very modern sense it was fashionable to imitate the most prestigious ecclesiastical architecture of the day and to be able to boast of a having used a famous mason in the construction of one’s residence. This preference for “name-brand” artists is addressed in other spheres of aristocratic patronage, namely contemporary narratives of romance literature, where architectural settings are frequently associated with celebrated artists. In the contemporary *Romance of Horn*, for example, we are informed that a private chamber in the castle was built by a famous mason: “the alcove of her room [was] made by the master Bertin, a skilled master since King Pepin’s time.” Elsewhere, gold rings are exchanged that were “crafted in Daniel’s time by Marcel the Goldsmith. The sapphire he put into it was worth a whole castle.” In the late-twelfth-century *Prise d’Orange*, of which more is said below, the narrator twice informs us that the palace was built by the architect “Grifon of Almeria, a Saracen of most marvelous vice.” These sample passages provide important literary complements to evidence offered by stylistic analysis, and they represent

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*cathedral of Wells to build the Elder Lady Chapel of St. Augustine’s, Bristol, in 1218–20, provides a close parallel with the situation we envisage at Corfe.*

In emulating recent ecclesiastical building projects and using their masons and designers, King John’s patronage at Corfe was by no means novel. Since at least the time of the Norman Conquest, ecclesiastical and secular architecture had been closely connected by common ateliers and by the interpenetration of ecclesiastical and secular forms. The Gloriette at Corfe, however, stands among a number of important secular buildings erected for the court in the last quarter of the twelfth century following the model of England’s Early Gothic great churches. The impact of the Gothic east arm of Canterbury has been noticed at Henry II’s work at Dover Castle and at the contemporary work at Oakham Castle for Walkelin de Ferrers, both of which have been associated with the second Canterbury master, William the Englishman. The capitals and moldings of the pointed arch from the nave to the central axial tower of Hastings Castle Chapel, also executed for Henry II, similarly reflect knowledge of Canterbury. In his discussion of the fabric of Dover, John Goodall has suggested a political impetus to the emulation of Canterbury: the work at Dover...*
telling signs of the value systems of patrons of both architecture and literature.

Fashionable though the Gloriette and related buildings may have been, they beg two questions: Who created this trend, and what ideas or associations validated it as a style for aristocratic building? John’s Gloriette may be understood as a product of the appropriation of ecclesiastical motifs in secular and ecclesiastical architecture. On the one hand, certain elements in Anglo-Norman great churches, such as the façade of Lincoln Minster and the wide staircases of Durham Cathedral, are characterized by a strong reliance on secular architecture. On the other hand, castles at Rising (Norfolk), Hedingham (Essex), and Sherborne are enriched with a range of motifs that had earlier been confined to the ecclesiastical realm. The trend continues with Henry of Blois in his palace at Wolvesey, in which both Purbeck and Tournai marble were used. The phase of English architecture known as “Early Gothic” saw the intensification of this flow of traffic, such that the massive ecclesiastical buildings of Canterbury, Wells, York, and others became important sources of inspiration for patrons of secular buildings. Accordingly, much of the domestic architecture of the Early Gothic period, of which John’s Gloriette is an important example, is characterized by the use of ornament based primarily on ecclesiastical structures, which endows these buildings with the style of contemporary great churches. That the Early Gothic churches of the period were important in disseminating the Gothic style to secular buildings is hardly surprising; headed largely by reform-minded prelates and centralized cathedral chapters, they were physical manifestations of the rising power and influence of the church in the medieval West.

In understanding this pattern of influence from great churches to secular buildings, we may turn to what Norbert Elias aptly called “the civilizing process.” Following Elias’s lead, C. S. Jaeger has persuasively argued that the “civilizing” of the medieval secular aristocracy was part of a pedagogical process led by the church, and particularly by the court bishops, who, through a process of reform, instructed the aristocracy in matters of taste, decorum, and manners, and discouraged the brutishness, aggression, and violence that characterized the aristocracy in the eyes of its critics. A clear example of this trend is the flourishing of romance literature in the period: written largely by clerics and courtiers for the secular aristocracy, the romance genre was created in order to civilize the aristocracy by providing good models of conduct. The evidence presented above suggests this narrative of reform might usefully be applied to architecture—its own tangible manifestation of aristocratic taste—to explain the influence of great churches on secular buildings. As a style that had its origins and fullest expression in the architecture of great churches, its transfer may have been emblematic of not simply fashion, but also the adaptation of the mores of the clerical elite by their secular counterparts.

The Iconography of the Gloriette

A further avenue for interpreting the possible iconographic and symbolic meanings of the palace presents itself. Here we are fortunate that the extant documentation for the castle actually provides a name for the palace: it indicates that our subject is first called “Gloriette” ( vocatur Gloriette) in 1280–82, and continued to carry this name into the fourteenth century. John’s palace at Corfe was one of a number of high-status secular buildings in medieval Europe to bear the name “Gloriette.” In England, later-thirteenth-century antecedents can be cited at the royal castles of Leeds (Kent) and Chepstow (Gwent). Built during the reign of Edward I and held by his queen, Eleanor of Castile, the Gloriette at Leeds is a centrally planned island enclosure set within an artificial moat and joined to the castle buildings by a bridge (Figure 21). At Chepstow, “la Gloriette” was a chamber in the center of the domestic lodgings in the lower ward built by Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk (r. 1270–1307). Gloriettes also featured in continental architecture. The most famous example is Count Robert of Artois’ palace at Hesdin, built in the late thirteenth century (now lost), with its fabulous gardens, automata, and hydraulic fountains; it had a tower with domestic chambers named Glorieta. The use of a common name seems to suggest that, in the mind of medieval contemporaries at least, the Gloriette was a recognized building type. But what type of building was implied?

The most frequently cited and unfortunately the most misleading response to this question was provided by Marguerite Charageat and subsequently supported by John Harvey, who suggested that “Gloriette” was “a word of Spanish origin for a pavilion placed at the centre of a garden of four quarters of Moorish type.” In her analysis of the landscape architecture at Hesdin, Charageat made a crucial misunderstanding of the documentation in which she identified the Gloriette as the pavilion that formerly stood in the marshes within the environs of the castle, thus associating it with a building placed in a garden setting. She went further by suggesting, implausibly, that the construction of the castle and park was influenced by the ducal palace of La Zisa in Palermo, which Robert of Artois visited in the 1280s. The link between the pavilion and the Gloriette was provided by an inscription at La Zisa that states, “Here is the earthly paradise . . . this is
called al 'aziz"; the Spanish word glorieta is a free translation of the Arabic aziz (the glorious).62 Similarly, in the palaces of Islamic Spain, the association of the garden with paradise had a long history, where the Arabic word for paradise, janna, has the additional meaning of "garden."63 Through this linguistic tangle, it has come to be accepted that the Gloriette was based ultimately on a type of Islamic garden planning imported to Moorish Spain and Italy and then to greater Europe. Following this interpretation, the Gloriette becomes an exotic import, a vestige of medieval Europe's romance with the East and growing internationalism, and a sign of the increasing elaboration of secular architecture. When applied to our Northern European buildings, however, this interpretation, too, is problematic on many levels. First, there exists little evidence for gardens of this sort in or around any of the buildings named "Gloriette."64 Second, none of these structures bears any features that are overtly Islamic in form or ornamentation, even given the remarkably elastic concept of iconographic similitude in medieval architecture.65 A closer examination of the documentation shows that, in each case, the Gloriette refers not to a garden enclosure or pavilion arrangement, but to a building or a chamber within a structure intended for domestic rather than military or administrative use. Owing to the documentary research of Anne Hagopian Van Buren and Rick Turner, the Gloriettes at Hesdin and Chepstow have been correctly located in the count's and earl's apartments, respectively.66

If the association with Islamic garden architecture does not stand up to scrutiny, this does not mean that the name "Gloriette" did not also carry exotic or foreign associations. Illuminating but overlooked sources on the subject are the late-twelfth-century French epics La Prise d'Orange and Aliscans by Guillaume d'Orange, which feature a building called "Gloriet" as the principal architectural setting in the narratives. La Prise d'Orange recounts the conquest of the famous Spanish Gloriette, which housed the African Queen Orable, wife of the Saracen King Tiebaut.67 The story unfolds through a series of changes of identity and chance encounters, concluding with the siege of the palace, the conversion of its inhabitants to Christianity, and the wedding of Guillaume and Queen Orable. Although the narrator does not provide a straightforward description of the palace (and this would be too much to expect), he does dwell on its architectural embellishments: Gloriet is an elegant palace adorned with pillars and walls of brass and green and black marble, paved marble floors, finely wrought golden eagles, window casements sculpted in silver, and painted images of birds and lions on the walls. Typical of the fabled buildings of medieval romances, Gloriet is so magnificent that it quite literally overpowers the senses. The profusion of marble, gold, and silver was clearly intended to endow the Saracen palace with a sense of "easternness," a possibility that is underscored by the naming of the architect "Grifon of Almeria, a Saracen of most marvelous vice" (ll. 270–1, 1161–2).

The literary evidence provides an important context for interpreting aspects of the Gloriette as a building type. Even though the association between Gloriettes and garden landscapes is misleading, this should not be taken to imply that the Gloriette itself could not be considered both exotic and paradisiacal. Indeed, on entering the palace, the
hero twice states that “this is Paradise here!” (ll. 675, 687). In Guillaume's narratives, Gloriet is also a site of pleasure and romantic love. Aragon says of King Tiebaut, “In Gloriet he enjoys his loves,” perhaps based on a common medieval notion of the Islamic East as decadent and lascivious. Similarly, in Aliscans, when Guillaume must leave Orable to travel to France, he pledges, “My lips will not touch any other mouth until they have kissed and tasted yours in this palace” (ll. 2001–4). Unfortunately, we cannot know whether King John's Gloriette was ever used in this fashion. An English precedent may, however, be cited in the aforementioned quadrangular garden enclosure at Woodcock, Oxfordshire. Known during the Middle Ages as “Everswell,” it was a cloistered palace containing fountains and a series of interconnected water pools. During the reign of Henry I, it enclosed a large park stocked with exotic animals including lions, leopards, camels, and other eastern joyeux. During Henry II's reign, it may have been the setting for his trysts with his mistress, Rosamund Clifford, after whom a chamber was named. In an often-quoted analysis, Howard Colvin not only linked the design to the garden pavilions in Palermo, but also suggested inspiration from the garden settings of the romance of Tristan and Isolde, a copy of which was probably written for Henry himself.68

What does all of this bring to bear on the Gloriette at Corfe? It is tempting but untenable to conclude that the Gloriette at Corfe was based on the fabled palace of Guillaume d'Orange's romance, although we do know that King John had a keen interest in romance literature and even adopted the guise of the swashbuckling hero Tristan.69 While other Gloriettes discussed above contain features that may refer to the architectural setting of Guillaume's narratives, there is little evidence at Corfe that points in this direction.70 What can be concluded about the handful of buildings named Gloriette is twofold. In the first place, they all appear to have been the principal domestic or residential spaces, either rooms within buildings or buildings themselves, within their respective palaces or castles. As such, they were likely places of less formality than their administrative and military counterparts, and were thus designed around a different set of ideals and expectations pertaining to their function. Although we have been skeptical of the association of Gloriettes with landscape architecture, there is every reason to suggest that similar paradisiacal connotations may have applied. Indeed, the domestic nature of these structures and their literary contexts indicate that the thirteenth-century examples discussed here may represent the domestication of the earlier precedents—thus subsuming their range of associations into one building designed for pleasure and relaxation. As such, they may also be understood as progenitors of later medieval and Tudor pleasure palaces such as the Pleasance in the Marsh (le Plesauns in Mares) built by Henry V at Kenilworth Castle. The Pleasance in the Marsh stood on the far side of the marsh area at Kenilworth, and contained a hall and various chambers. It was referred to as a “praty banketynge house of tymbre” by John Leland in the sixteenth century, indicating that it was made of wood and used for entertainment. It appears to be connected in structure and use to the Gloriettes: it was positioned on a moated site and had rectangular towers at the corners and apparently no buildings in the center, suggesting a central garden or courtyard.71

Although it may seem to defeat the arguments presented above, there is some room to debate whether King John's palace was originally built as a Gloriette or whether the name was added at a later date, as it first appears in documentation from the reign of Edward I. The naming of buildings with exotic appellations like “Gloriette” in late-thirteenth-century sources has led previous scholars to associate the phenomenon of designating castles or parts of castles with the romantic culture of the late-thirteenth-century Edwardian cult of chivalry, and the importation of so-called Spanish styles into England as a result of Edward's marriage to Eleanor of Castile.72 While there is much in this opinion that is valid, it places undue emphasis on the Edwardian military achievement as a period of apogee or watershed, rather than what could be better understood as the continuation and elaboration of a long-standing tradition in the design and symbolism of secular buildings.73 In support of this view, it is worth noting that the documentary evidence for the Gloriette at Chessy, dating from 1271, indicates that it was being repaired rather than rebuilt, thus suggesting the presence of a former Gloriette on site. Also, as Michael Kauffmann has recently shown, the Gloriet tower from La Prise d'Orange was featured on a painted wooden casket of ca. 1200, thus pointing toward the likelihood that the connection between the narrative and actual architecture had been made by ca. 1200.74 There thus appears to be ample literary and documentary evidence to create a much earlier context for the Gloriette as a building type. Unfortunately, in the absence of firmer evidence, the place of the Gloriette at Corfe at the beginning rather than later in this tradition remains hypothetical.

Conclusion
The Gloriette at Corfe Castle is an important building that offers several problems of analysis and interpretation and raises questions that are central to the study of European secular architecture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
Viewed more broadly within the narratives of medieval architectural history rather than “castle studies,” the Glori-ette poses a still greater range of difficulties in analysis and interpretation pertaining to the employment and interpenetration of form and style in ecclesiastical and secular architecture. In this article, we have attempted to integrate the style and iconography of the Glori-ette into the history of medieval architecture, and particularly into the history of the great West Country churches of Wells and Glastonbury. The relationship of the Glori-ette to contemporary ecclesiastical design is readily demonstrable on stylistic grounds; however, larger problems are posed by the meanings of these transfers. Some possible solutions have been offered here, but much more work remains to be done to integrate the histories of secular and ecclesiastical medieval architecture.

Notes
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4. Colvin, King’s Works, 617.

5. Ibid.


12. In 1235–36, approximately £300 were spent on the keep to renew and alter the interior arrangements. See Colvin, King’s Works, 620.

13. For a brief discussion of Edward I’s works, see Colvin, King’s Works, 621–2. The documentary evidence is contained in the extant constable’s accounts: Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), E101 46/0/28–29.

14. On the remodeling of the kitchen range, see Colvin, King’s Works, 622 n. 7. For the remodeling of the windows, see PRO E101 46/0/30 M 2 verso.

15. The particulars of the account of William Hugyn, mayor of Corfe, which deal predominantly with the construction of the tower called Glori-ette (“vocatam le Glori-ette”), are in PRO E101 461/9. See also Colvin, King’s Works, 622–3.

16. See n. 21 below.

17. Toy, “Corfe,” pl. 37, reconstructs slender shafts in the undercroft between the windows to carry the springing of the undercroft vault. No evidence exists to support this reconstruction.


20. Knight, Three Castles, 19.

21. The use of this room as a chapel is confirmed by late-thirteenth- and fourteenth-century documentary evidence; PRO E101 461/1 (8–10 Edw. I) states: “In servicio Henrici de Wulle cooperates qui cooperavit camaram ultram portam ad capellam,” which tallies exactly with the design of the upper room above the entrance porch. Confirmation of this arrangement is found in PRO E101 461/1 (31 Edw. III), which mentions “pro camera et latrina ante capellam ad introitum de la Glori-ette.”

23. “The richer articulation of the chapel within the castle—and in particular the use of the vault to reflect its liturgical significance—has a long history in England. From the late eleventh century, there are St. John’s chapel in the Tower of London and the castle chapel at Colchester (Essex). At Sherborne (Dorset), the undercroft of the chapel is groin-vaulted while the upper story has rich beadhead decoration on the ribs. At Castle Rising (Norfolk), two bays of groin vaulting were used in the nave of the chapel, while the sanctuary was rib vaulted, and at Middleham (Yorkshire), Conisborough (Yorkshire), Newcastle, and Dover (both at Kent), molded ribs articulated the chapel vaults.


29. John’s pride in the Gloriette is illustrated by a writ of 1215 demanding that the constable of Corfe Castle allow Count Robert of Dreux, should he enter the region, “to be entertained with due honour and hospitality in our hall in the bailey of the castle.” Hardy, *Routli Litteratur*, 138b (see n. 8). This reference is characteristic of the pride of patrons in aristocratic buildings during the Middle Ages and should be compared to Henry III’s writ allowing Gaucher de Chatillon to be shown his new work at Dover Castle “so that the magnificence (nobilitas) might be fully apparent to him.” Charles Coulson, “Structural Symbolism in Medieval Castle Architecture,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 132 (1979), 75.

30. The fundamental studies remain Harold Brakspear, “A West Country School of Masons,” *Archaeologia* 81 (1931), 1–18; and Carolyn M. Malone, “West English Gothic Architecture 1175–1250” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1973). Both studies were concerned solely with ecclesiastical architecture, and therefore Corfe Castle and other secular buildings are not discussed.

31. As Colvin noted, “At Corfe . . . the domus Regis was in the Inner Bailey . . . where there is still to be seen the ruins of a compactly planned thirteenth-century house whose architectural detail . . . is paralleled at Wells Cathedral in work known to have been in progress during the reign of John.” Colvin, *King’s Works*, 617 (see n. 3). Pamela Tudor-Craig, “Wells Sculpture,” in Linzee S. Colchester, ed., *Wells Cathedral: A History* (Wells, 1982), 105; and Geoffrey Webb, *Architecture in Britain: The Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, 1956), 68.


38. Ibid., fig. 3.

39. Other buildings in the West Country speak of strong connections with the Wells atelier, such as the west front of Llandaff Cathedral, the Lady Chapel at Sherborne Abbey, the nave arcade of St. John at Hawkhchurch (Devon), the nave arcades of St. John at Slimbridge (Gloustershire), the nave piers of St. Cuthbert at Wells, the chancel arch of St. James at East Lambrook (Somerset), a doorway at Court Farm at Wootey (Somerset), the south doorway of St. Mary Magdalen at Wedmore (Somerset), the south arcade of the chancel of St. Margaret at Queen Charlton (Somerset), the chancel arch of St. Peter and St. Paul at Shepton Mallet (Somerset), the thirteenth-century additions to Chesstow Castle keep, the font at All Saints, East Pennard (Somerset), and a figure at Muchelney Abbey.


44. Examples through the first half of the twelfth century are far too numerous to be catalogued here, but some works from later in the century and the early thirteenth century serve to establish the principle. In English buildings, this tradition may be traced at least as far back as the early post-Conquest gatehouse at Exeter Castle, where iconographic and technical details relate to ecclesiastical architecture: the triumphal-arch iconography is paralleled in the west front of Tewkesbury Abbey, while the construction of the retaining arch is comparable to the east face of the “crossing” at Wooton.


50. See p. 180 and n. 67.


On the exchange of religious and military forms in Romanesque and Early Gothic architecture, including St. Denis, see Stephen Gardner, “The Influence of Castle Building on Ecclesiastical Architecture in the Paris Region, 1130–1150,” in Kathryn Reyerson and Faye Powe, eds., The Medieval Castle: Romance and Reality (Dubuque, ca. 1984), 96–123. In his description of the west block of St. Denis, Abbot Suger indicated that the function of the military features of the west block—towers and crenellations—were both symbolic and functional, “both for the beauty of the church, and should circumstances require it, for practical purposes.” Erwin Panofsky, Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1979), 47.

52. On this issue, see most recently Paul Crossley, “The Nave of Stone Church in Kent,” Architectural History 44 (2001), 195–211.

53. The authors differentiate style from form in this section: the years after ca. 1215 saw the elaboration of this trend, by which great halls such as the archbishop's at Canterbury and the episcopal hall at Lincoln were endowed with the forms of great church architecture in the use of monumental tracery windows. See Crossley, “Nave of Stone Church.”

54. Important exceptions exist, however, such as Orford Castle, which uses a vocabulary of forms deliberately out of step with church architecture. See Heslop, “Orford Castle,” 47–54 (see n. 2).


56. PRO E101 460/27 rot1 m2, rot2 m4.

57. Alternate spellings in the documentation include “Gloriete,” “Gloriect,” and “Gloryette.”


62. Charageat, “Le Parc de Hesdin,” 100; Harvey, Medieval Gardens, 44.


64. Other examples of English royal gardens, however, may have been based


66. Van Buren, “Park of Hesdin,” 122. Van Buren’s criticism is based on the lack of Islamic names and the absence of a positive connection to Al Jazari’s *Book*. Van Buren, however, did not fully explore the literary sources for the Gloriette.


68. Colvin, “Royal Gardens,” 18–19; and see n. 64.


70. While the lack of adequate physical evidence can only allow for a tentative suggestion, it is worth noting that the Gloriettes at Leeds and Hesdin may have contained features that were either inspired by Islamic palace architecture, or that echoed features of *La Prise d’Orange*. At Hesdin, the Gloriette contained a fountain in the shape of a tree at its center, which may have been a reflection of the tree described at length by Guillaume in the middle of the Gloriette (ll. 650–55). Van Buren, “Park of Hesdin,” 122. The Gloriette at Leeds now features a central fountain, which was the result of nineteenth- and twentieth-century restorations of the interior. However, the nineteenth-century owner of the castle who was responsible for its restorations stated that when he purchased the castle in 1821, “the whole of the rooms from the end of the hall . . . formed a small garden with a fountain in the centre.” That a fountain may have been originally positioned in the center of the Leeds Gloriette is suggested by documented repairs to the waterworks in 1367 and 1438–41. If this were the case, the Gloriette at Leeds would not only accord with aspects of the description by Guillaume, but would also recall the centralized courtyards of Islamic palace architecture. Martin, *Leeds Castle*, 47–50 (see n. 58).

71. See Colvin, *King’s Works*, 685.


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