

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

A. G. Hooper, 'The Lambeth Palace MS. of the Awntyrs off Arthure', *Leeds Studies in English*, 3 (1934), 37-43

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=134480&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

THE LAMBETH PALACE MS. OF THE AWNTYRS
OFF ARTHURE.

The MS. Lambeth 491, ff. 275-86 (=L), is mentioned by J. E. Wells (*Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, p. 61, sub "Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne"), but has not yet been published or collated.

The Lambeth Library (see *Descriptive Catalogue of MSS. in the Library of Lambeth Palace*, by M. R. James and C. Jenkins, 5 parts, Cambridge, 1930-2) "owes its inception, as a library available for students, to Archbishop Richard Bancroft (1604-10), who bequeathed it to his successor in the See: or otherwise to the then projected Chelsea College: or to the University of Cambridge. His successor, Archbishop Abbot (d. 1633) added considerably to it: Laud not much." After a brief transference to the University Library, the books were restored to Lambeth in 1664.

The manuscript library at Lambeth, with more than 1200 volumes, is divided into several distinct collections, the first known as Codices Lambethani (Nos. 1-576). This group includes the MSS. collected by Bancroft and Abbot with considerable additions, believed to be for the greater part by Sheldon.

Our MS. is thus described in the *Descriptive Catalogue*:

"491. Brut in English.
Poems.

Paper and vellum 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ by 5 $\frac{1}{2}$, ff. 329, 30 and 39 lines to the page. Two portions of Cent. xv in clear but not beautiful hands. It is no. 16 in the Carew-Sheldon list in MS. Tanner 275" (whose description runs: "an old MS. English Chronicle called Brute ending at K. Edw. 3 conteyning the story of the Kings of Cologn, the Seige of Jerusalem and the History of King Arthure. 4to"). The Catalogue adds that there are many scribbles on the margins, including proper names, the book evidently having been made for private use and being soiled and thumbed; many leaves are torn and edges cut off. The MS. contains

- I. 1. Brut in English
 2. þe sege of Jerusalem f. 206

 4. Gawayne and the Green Knight (sic) 275
 The Catalogue adds that it is "Essentially the same text, it seems, as that first printed from the Thornton MS., by Sir F. Madden, "Syr Gawayne," Bannatyne Club, p. 95." (i.e. "The Awntyrs of Arthure")

- II. Four leaves of blank paper, modern, separate the two portions, the second of which is in a later hand, and contains (piece no. 6).
 " (Ric. Hampole) Stimulus Conscientiae 296
 vv. 1-2482 only."

The text in this MS. of the "Awntyrs" is defective in vv. 14, 48 (in this case in all MSS.), 92-3 (bottom of f. 276^r missing), most of 120-3 (bottom of f. 276^v missing), most of 275, 383-5, 618-19.

In general, L is inferior to the other three extant copies of the poem—in MS. Ireland (=I), MS. Thornton (=T), and MS. Douce 324 (=D).¹ Yet it is of value not only for its own moments of lone superiority but also in confirming the actual or conjectured readings of the other texts.

It is a Southern copy, made in the first half of the fifteenth century, of a text which must have been more like T than either of the other two. Some of the northern characteristics of the original have been preserved, most often where they are necessary for rhyme, e.g. v. 2 "tellis" (third person singular), though the rhymeword has been altered in v. 4 "duellith" (third person plural). But in general southern forms have been substituted. Thus

- (i) the third person, singular and plural, of the verb appears commonly in -ith:

¹ I was published by J. Robson for the Camden Society in *Three Early English Metrical Romances* (London, 1842), T and D by F. J. Amours for the Scottish Text Society in *Scottish Alliterative Poems* (Edinburgh and London, 1897).

- v. 177 helpith (sg) : helps
 243 brekiþ (sg) : brekes
 242 makiþ (pl) : makes
 592 bannith (pl) : bannene D: bannes I.
 although there are a few plurals in -in:
 449 breydin : breydes (sg) T: braide D.
 456 servyn : serue T and I.
- (ii) the past participle commonly in y—(e):
 274 ywonne : wonnene
- (iii) the present participle commonly in -yng:
 342 ledyng : ledand 344
 15, 27 gliteryng : gleterande T and D: gliderand I.
- (iv) the infinite in -(e)n:
 237 wyten : wiete T: wete I: wetene D.
 423 wryngyn : wring D and I.
- (v) O.E. ā commonly written o:
 45 hore. 199 more.
 524 sore. (all changed in rhyme).
- (vi) 3, y for initial g, although g may be necessary for alliteration.
 232 yeve : gyffe T, D.
 254 zeftis : gyftis T: giftes D: giftus I.
- (vii) pronouns regularly “þey” (176), “her” (255), “hem” (179).

Apparently the Scribe also had difficulty with some of the unfamiliar northern place-names; e.g. in v. 2 “turmentis” (for “Terne Wahethelyne”) has been substituted in L, the only MS. which does not contain the name, and in vv. 667-8 “Gryffones castelle” (Criffones - D; Kirfre - I) and “Husters Haulle” (Vlstur halle - D: Hulkershome - I) have been replaced in L by “—cuntres and castels” and “Hulster al holy.” So, too, some typically northern words have been changed in L, e.g. in v. 82 “snetrand” and “snayppede,” of Norse origin, have been replaced in L by “sliteryng” and “snowid.”

A sample stanza (with the corresponding one from T) will perhaps give a better idea of the MS:—

In the tyme of Arthur an Auntur bytid,
 In talkyng of his turmentis, þe tale of hym tellis,
 As he to carlille was comyn, conquerour ykyd,
 Dukes and duspers, þat wiþ þe Kyng duellith,
 To hunt at þe herdis þat long had be hid.
 On a day þei hem dighte to the depe dellis
 To felle of þe femals, þat in þe forest were fryd,
 So faire in felawship by fritthis and fellis.
 Thus wyde are þei went, þe worthiest in wedis,
 Bothe the Kyng and the qwene
 And alle þe dospers bydene;
 Gawayn, gaynest on grene,
 Dame Gunnore he ledis. (Stanza 1)

Stanza 1 from T runs:—

In Kyng Arthure tyme ane awntir by-tyde,
 By the Terne Wahethelyne, als the buke tellis,
 Als he to Carelele was commene, that conqueroure kyde,
 Withe dukes, and with ducheperes, þat with þat dere duellys,
 For to hunnte at the herdys, þat lange hase bene hyde;
 And one a daye þay þam dighte to þe depe dellis,
 To felle of the Femmales, in the Foreste wele Frythede,
 Faire in the fernysone tyme, by frythis and fellis.
 Thus to þe wode are thay wente, the wlonkeste in wedys,
 Bothe the kyng and the qwene,
 And alle þe doghety by-dene;
 Syr Gawane, gayeste one grene,
 Dame Gayenoure he ledis.

That L is a copy of a MS. most like T is clear from the following facts: (a) that L and T are in common error more often than any other combination of two MSS, (b) that in some forty or fifty instances, in some few of which their superiority is clear, L and T have similar readings where each of the other two differs, or where one is deficient, and (c) L and T agree against D and I in a few lines where it is often impossible to decide which group has the better reading. Examples of (a) with L and T in common error are to be found in v. 94 "hit is the clips of the mone": ". . . of the sune" (D and I), and in

vv. 408 and 495 where they have substituted non-alliterating words; of (b) in v. 212 where L and T have

Alle blendis my blood þi blee is so blake :

D—Al bledis my ble þi bones arne so blake :

I—Alle blynde is my ble thi blode is so blake ;

of (c) in v. 478 where L and T have

Two soppys : Thre soppes (in D and I).

The value of L is diminished since it often stands alone in error, and unfortunately is also in common error occasionally with each of the other MSS: it is in fact clear that all four go back ultimately to a copy which was already corrupt, for e.g. v. 48 is missing in all four MSS., and in v. 56 "swyne" is redundant and contrary to the general sense.

But despite obvious corruptions, in many instances L's reading appears at least as good as those offered by the other three; in several lines it shares what is clearly the best reading, sometimes confirming two MSS. against the third, and sometimes supporting one MS. previously in a minority against the other two; and in a few lines it seems to supply the best reading itself.

For example, L supports T in:

- v. 68a None but sir Gawayn . . .
 158 And broghte to that body the berde so brighte.
 212 Alle blendis my blood þi blee is so blake.
 371a Wiþ a crowne of cristalle . . .
 413 The kyng carpis on highte
 448 Hay hendly þei hevid in hekkys in highte.

L supports D in:

- 222b . . . þat boght þe on rode
 248 Wisse me quod Gunnor some wey if þou wost
 577a He brochid hym wiþ his brond . . .
 601 The knyghte of corage was cruelle and kene
 664b . . . wiþ garnysone of gold.

L supports I in:

- 77 Thereof was Arthur yrke
 372b . . with meny a proud prene

456 In selvir so shene þei servyn of þe beste

465 I shal encountre wiþ þat knyghte

609 Wondir rathely he ras.

and in the following lines L seems superior to each of the other three:

80b . . for þe flawis þat felle

This provides the necessary rhyme with "snelle": "helle": "zelle," whereas T has "and to þe fawe fellis." D reads "to þe fewe felles" and I "fro the fau fellus," which have involved changes of "zelle" to "zelles," of the adverb "snelle" to "snelles," and in I of "helle" to "(lauyst in) hellus," which last line is missing in D.

85 Glode to dame Gunore gatys vngayne

Here the first half-line agrees with T and I, and the second half-line with 'vngayne' seems much more likely to have been used in the original of a ghost 'in liknes of lucifer, lothliest of helle' than I's "hyre gates were gayne," T's "the gatis fulle gayne" or D's "þe gates to gayne."

87b . . wiþ wonges ful wete

This is definitely superior to I's "with wlonkes full wete" and T's "withe vengeance fulle wete," and to D as it stands: "with waymynges wete."

337 Rode to Randilsete halle : wente

353 In palle puryd with pane prouwdly ypighte

This combines a first half-line confirmed by T: "In paulle purede with pane . ." and I: "With palle puret in poon (: D's " . . pured to pay"), with a second half-line confirmed by D: "prodly pight" and I: "was prudliche piȝte" (: T's "fulle precyously dyghte").

365 She was þe worþiest wighte þat eny weld wolde =
" . . that anyone might wish to possess."

Of the other versions, T " . . þat any wy myghte welde" provides good sense but bad rhyme; D " . . þat eny wede wolde" probably represents a poor attempt to make something of a corrupt passage; and I " . . that any wee wold" would probably be the best if "wurliche" in the first half-line were in the superlative.

460 And whan þe rial renke was raghte to his rest

Here 'raghte' seems preferable to 'gone' as in T and D (although it is not necessary to have four alliterating syllables in the line), and is confirmed by I's "As tyde as that rialle was rayket to his rest."

595-8 Bothe sir lete and sir lake
Miche mornyng þei make;
Gaynor gret for her sake
Wiþ her grey eyen.

This combines something of D and I (a leaf, including this stanza, has been lost in the Thornton MS).

I reads as follows (beginning with v. 594):

Hit hurte King Arther in herte, and mængit his mode;
Both sir Lote and sir Lake
Meculle menyng con make;
Thenne Dame Gaynor grette for his sake,
For Gawan the gode.

And D reads:

Thene gretes Gaynour, with bothe here gray ene,
For þo douzeti þat fizte,
Were manly mached of mighte,
Withe oute resone or righte,
As al mene sene.

The last line (598) of L is superior to that of D or I, as is indicated also by the iteration in the first line of the next stanza, which D has used as v. 594. Vv. 595-7 agree with I, which however has the West Midland "con make" : "þei make" (the northern form as expected).

603 Alle þe coste of the knyghte he cleviþ doun clene

Here "cleviþ" (: "keruys" I: "carf" D) is probably preferable, since in general 'cl-' alliterates only with itself (e.g. cf. vv. 94, 106, 119).

A. G. HOOPER.

Yale.²

² Dr. Hooper, who held a Commonwealth Fellowship at Yale University during the academic years 1932-4, has been appointed to a Lecturership in English Language in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.