

Lotharingian Lions: Prosopography with a Heraldic Slant.

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Throughout its development heraldic design has relied heavily on, and has been to a large extent a reflection of, family relationship. Consequently for the early and poorly documented period one can think in terms of mutual services which researchers in heraldry and aristocratic genealogy may conceivably render each other. It would be of particular help if we could determine the circumstances in which heraldry began to be systematized. It might be possible to generate insight by noticing aesthetic connections among shields. One assumes that shields of the comital rank are especially relevant here, for emblems chosen by counts were probably elite symbols that only gradually diffused among lesser families.

Inevitably attention must fall on the extraordinary proliferation of the lion motif on aristocratic shields of Lower Lorraine. All the higher officers of this region bore the lion. The lion of ducal Brabant in sable and or – the imperial colours – contrasted with that of rival ducal Limbourg in argent and gueules – the banner colours ('Lotrike') attributed to Godfrey of Bouillon. The count palatine of the Rhine distinguished his lion from ducal Brabant's through the addition of crown in gueules. In the 1130s-40s there was actually a second count palatine, whose family (Salm in Ardenne) did preserve the Limbourg colours, albeit in a different motif (two salmon – disposition of the crown is unknown). The count of Holland pretended occasionally to margravate and wore lion in or and gueules. The count of Flanders, whose limited affiliation with the empire included similar pretensions, for no apparent reason other than collegiality gave up his original shield (mid-12th cent.) and took a lion in or a sable. A margravate of Namur was created for the count of Hainaut in 1184; the later Namur lion is a brisure of Flanders.

By one means or another most other comital families of Lower Lorraine came to wear a lion motif, thus the houses of Berg, Blankenheim, Geldern, Hainaut, Heinsberg, Jülich, Kessel, Luxembourg, and Valkenburg. The counts of Geldern discarded one variant of lion or on azur (brick-strewn field) and adopted another (forked-tail lion), while meanwhile their original arms were adopted by their relatives the counts of Nassau, who also discarded an earlier lion shield (without bricks). Though from east of the Rhine, the counts of Nassau functioned as standard-bearers for the archbishop of Cologne, the foremost ecclesiastical prince of Lower Lorraine. Relatively few functionaries (notably Zähringen, Thuringia and Bohemia) followed suit elsewhere in the empire.

It appears that the lion passed not simply in an aristocracy but in a consanguinity. This is suggested by a comparison with Upper Lorraine, where despite some predilection for animal motifs very few lions are found. When they do occur they are in distinctively pallid colour combinations – argent on azur for Saarbrücken, ameliorated with strew of crosses in or – and sable on argent for Dabo, surmounted at some stage with carbuncle in or. If certain families of Upper Lorraine accepted lions extraordinarily, this would have been on the strength of their relationship with the lion families of Lower Lorraine where the symbolism must genuinely have inhered. Perhaps in these cases it will be possible to determine the criteria of relationship according to which lions were assigned.

A symbol of extraordinary nobility, the lion was placed in apposition to the imperial eagle, as is shown by the occurrence of eagles in two Lower Rhenish families, the houses of Are and Saffenberg. Their direct heirs were Hochstaden and Sayn, and in the late twelfth century we find isolated documentation of landgravia offices assigned to those houses, suggesting that the predecessors were heraldically distinguished from others through the special office. This allows us to discern an approximate point in time when shields of Lower Lorraine were systematized. It is generally believed that the landgravia office was brought into being by Emperor Lothar of Supplinburg (1125-37). In creating such offices for those counts, Lothar must have permitted them the eagle. Sayn did not wear an eagle, but a leopard – thus the Saffenberg eagle must have been devised early – while Are and Hochstaden carried the now rare name of Lothar suggestive of descent in common with that emperor. It is remarkable that these eagles should follow the essential colour contrast of Brabant and Limbourg.

Contrary to current opinion the lion was probably an emblem of the Lotharingian kingdom from an early date. In the chronicle of Widukind of Corvey (c. 970) there is a passage about a confrontation in 953 between Duke Konrad Rufus of Lotharingia and his vassals: *Ille vero inperterritus, leoninum exerens animum, signa signis contraria invexit* (3.17). The juxtaposition of Konrad's 'baring of his leonine spirit' with a command for the signa to advance seems sufficiently transparent.

The nobility of the lions is stressed by scholars and may suggest that the motif first disseminated among families of Lower Lorraine as a mark of descent from Emperor Lothar (855) – that is, from the senior imperial Carolingian line, a topic for further investigation. Lothar of Supplinburg, whose name nevertheless need not have been inherited from this direction, since it derives more clearly from the Saxon name Liuthar, may have had good reason to systematize the lions shields. There is ongoing evidence of Lotharingian separatist tendencies in the eleventh century in connection at least with imperial elections. Apparently Lothar was related with the high aristocracy of Lower Lorraine, namely with the palatine family of the Ezzonen (cf. Alberic of Troisfontaines Chronicon, ad 1037), in which event he could comfortably foster relations; indeed he may have owed his own controversial election in large part to Lotharingian help.

Why Lower and not Upper Lorraine? All evidence suggests that from 959 onwards the independence of Upper Lorraine was jealously guarded by the monarchy. Regional aspirations seem to have pervaded aristocratic mentality in the Upper duchy to the same extent as ancient tradition did that of the Lower.

Occasional Publication of the Unit for Prosopographical Research no 1, Donald C. Jackman, *Criticism and Critique. Sidelights on the Konradiner* (Oxford, 1997), is available from Oxbow Books, Park End Place, Oxford OX1 1HN, tel. (01865) 241249.