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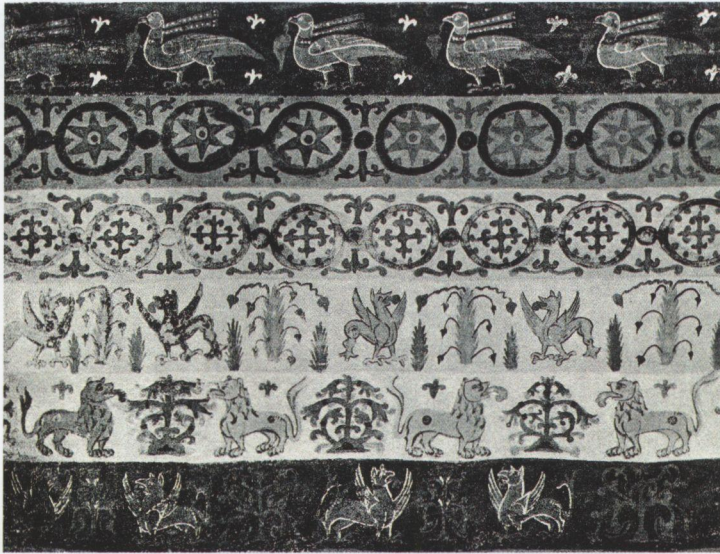
PLATE 1



Top (a), a copper-alloy openwork buckle plate bearing a lion passant regardant, from Pudding Norton, Norfolk (HER 7118). Image scanned from a Polaroid photograph. See page 2.

Below (b), lions charged with a cross potent on the mosaic floor of c. 1135-73, in the Abbey Church of Notre Dame, Ganagobie, in Provence. After G. Barrauol, *Provence Romane* vol. 2 (La Pierre-qui-vire, 1977), pl. 28. See page 2.

PLATE 2



Top (a), detail from a manuscript copy of an exotic textile from the Gospels of Otto III (c. 983-91), with a series of fourteen differently coloured horizontal bands each with a repeat pattern, employing foliate or cruciform *tamga*-like motifs, pairs of confronted lions, griffins or wyverns with the tree-of-life or Sassanian birds with ribbons. After A. Goldschmidt, *German Illumination* (Florence 1928), vol. 2, plate 48. See page 3.

Below (b), detail from a Carthaginian mosaic of the late fifth–early sixth century AD of a mounted Vandal whose horse bears a cross on its hindquarters. © Trustees of the British Museum. See page 3.

LIONS CHARGED WITH A CROSS POTENT CENTRAL ASIAN 'SHOULDER ORNAMENT' ON A TWELFTH- CENTURY BUCKLE PLATE FROM NORFOLK

Steven Ashley

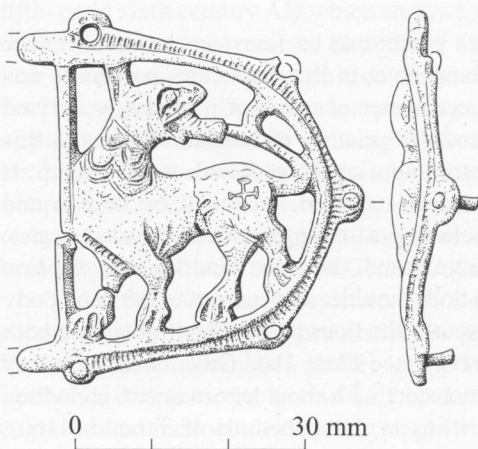


Figure 1: A copper-alloy openwork buckle plate bearing a lion passant regardant charged with a cross potent on its rump, from Shipdham, Norfolk (HER 35321). Scale 1:1.

A recently discovered elaborate openwork buckle plate from Shipdham, Norfolk,¹ displays a lion passant regardant biting its tail and with its hindquarters charged with a cross potent (see **Figure 1**). The decoration of the lion's rear in this manner is derived from Eastern exemplars where the shoulder and/or the rump of a beast carries one of a range of devices, variously interpreted as hair whorls, rosettes, stars or *tamgas*,² amongst others. The employment of such shoulder ornament on the Romanesque dress accessory described here demonstrates the extraordinary longevity of this early form of decoration, which was translated to the West *via* fine silks and textiles. It can be included with a number of other Central Asian and Oriental devices and motifs

¹ Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER) 35321; see S. Ashley, 'Recent finds of Anglo-Norman "high-status" objects from Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeology* 45 (2006), pp. 105-8 at 106, fig. 1, no. 4.

² The word *tamga* is probably of Alanic origin; G. Vernadsky, 'Note on the origins of the word Tamga', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76 (1956), pp. 188 f. It can be found used for the tribal marks of the twenty-four Turkic tribes as shown in the Leiden Ms. The nomadic Turks employed these marks as cognizances on banners, tents and as cattle brands; H. Nickel, 'Tamgas and runes, magic numbers and magic symbols', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 8 (1973), pp. 165-73 at 168 f., fig. 14. See note 14 below.

that were absorbed into the applied arts in Europe, and which had a considerable influence on the birth and development of European heraldry.³

Lions, Crosses and *Tamgas*

Since first describing the buckle plate in 2006 the present writer has noted a number of closely related depictions of lions and other beasts that help to elucidate the origins of the use of the cross potent on the lion's rump. These are discussed here. At least two more examples of this form of buckle plate are known from Norfolk. However, one is also incomplete and the detail very worn (see **Plate 1a**),⁴ whilst the other is only a small fragment.⁵

Lions similarly charged with crosses potent can be found in the mosaic floor of the Abbey Church of Notre Dame, Ganagobie, in Provence. This pavement was laid in c.1135-73 and the style and subject matter of much of it is clearly derived from Byzantine or other Eastern textiles.⁶ The section of mosaic relevant to this note is located in front of the north-eastern apse at the east end of the church. It comprises three horizontal bands, differently coloured, inhabited by dragon and bird-like monsters, lions, and birds (including a one-eyed double-headed eagle). Of the three lions which occupy the central band, the right hand body of the lion passant bicornate has a cross potent on both shoulder and rump (the left hand body is undecorated), and to the right (to the south) the lions passant confronted are both charged with a cross potent on the rump only (see **Plate 1b**).⁷ Other twelfth-century mosaics employ a variety of beasts and monsters with shoulder ornament, including, for example, centaurs, elephants and griffins in the cathedrals of Taranto (1160), Otranto (1163-5) and Brindisi (1178).⁸

³ Modes of transmission for Eastern motifs could have included any portable decorated object. For example, John Goodall discussed the 'lion slayer motif' found on Assyrian seal stones and intaglios and its influence on English seals and arms in 'From the Assyrian Royal Palace seal to a fourteenth-century English coat of arms' (unpublished Ms in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London).

⁴ From Pudding Norton (HER 7118). Both this example and the buckle plate from Shipdham were subsequently sold on the antiquities market and their present locations are unknown. The buckle plate from Pudding Norton appears in P. G. Murawski, *Benet's Artefacts* (Ely 2003), p. 460, M12-0305. Also illustrated here is a very worn, although apparently complete, closely related or variant type of buckle plate with an identical openwork lion and integral narrowed bar, said to have been found in Nottinghamshire (personal communication from P. G. Murawski) (p. 459, M12-0304).

⁵ From Kenninghall (HER 35407), this comprises part of the frame, the lion's head, shoulders and stumps of the front legs.

⁶ For a discussion of the date of the mosaics see G. Barruol, *Provence Romane*, vol. 2 (La Pierre-qui-Vire 1977), pp. 159 f.

⁷ See also fig. 13 in G. Zamecki 'Germanic animal motifs in Romanesque sculpture', *Artibus et Historiae* 11.22 (1990), pp. 189-203 at 196. The 'Germanic' element considered here is the motif of the tail piercing the body of the beast.

⁸ N. Rash-Fabbri 'A drawing in the Bibliothèque and the Romanesque mosaic floor in Brindisi', *Gesta* 13.1 (1974), pp. 5-14 at 6, fig. 4, p. 7, fig. 5, and p. 9, fig. 9.

The content and schemes of some of these mosaics may have been copied directly from textiles or from painted copies of textiles in manuscripts. A remarkable example of a manuscript copy of an exotic textile can be found on a page from the Gospels of Otto III (c. 983-91). This shows a series of fourteen differently coloured horizontal bands each with a repeat pattern, employing foliate or cruciform *tamga*-like motifs, pairs of confronted lions, griffins or wyverns with the tree-of-life or Sassanian birds with ribbons.⁹ Each of the ten lions displays a roundel on its rear (see **Plate 2a**).

An earlier example of a cross used in a similar manner both to that on the buckle plate and to the Garnagobie mosaic can be seen on a Carthaginian mosaic of the late fifth-early sixth century AD which shows a mounted Vandal whose horse carries the device on its hindquarters (see **Plate 2b**).¹⁰ This cross, probably representing a *tamga*-like brand, has expanded terminals, three of which bifurcate and curl inward, and one, the uppermost, is an upward-pointing crescent.¹¹ Furthermore, Turkic carvings of the first millennium AD showing an armoured, probably Avarian, horseman and his mount with a cruciform *tamga* of similar form to the Carthaginian example on its rump, and a riderless horse bearing a cross in the same position, have been recorded on rocks in the Siberian steppe.¹² *Tamgas* were, and may continue to be, used as horse brands by the nomadic tribes of Central Asia.¹³

The crosses on these depictions of the mounts of nomadic horsemen can be compared with marks on other associated personal objects and possessions. *Tutulus* fibulae found in Sarmatian graves in the Western Roman Empire, such as that at Vermond, dating to the second half of the fourth century AD, are decorated with engraved and nielloed devices that might relate to Sarmatian and Avar *tamgas* (see over, **Figure 2**).¹⁴ These possible *tamga* devices are also strikingly similar to the cross in roundel motif repeated in two bands of the late tenth-century Ottonian manuscript referred to above (see **Plate 2a**).

⁹ A. Goldschmidt, *German Illumination* (2 vols., Florence 1928), vol. 2, plate 48.

¹⁰ D. Bucton, 'Fragments of a large mosaic pavement', in D. Bucton (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections* (London 1994), pp. 65-7, cat. no. 55 (a-b). Eurasian nomadic Vandals and Sarmatian Allani settled in North Africa in the fifth century AD where their kings styled themselves *Rex Wandalorum et Alanorum*.

¹¹ However, in this context it could be a version of the Christian cross, or, if the rider is an Alan rather than a Christian Vandal, it might represent the spirit of the cosmic Four Directions, or both (Helmut Nickel, personal communication).

¹² The former, at Suljek, is illustrated in H. Russell Robinson, *Oriental Armour* (London 1967), p. 58, fig. 31a. See H. Appelgren-Kivalo 'Alt-altasiatische K nstendenkm ler, Briefe und Bildermaterial von J. R. Aspelins Reisen in Sibirien und der Mongolei 1887-1889', *Finnische Altertumsgesellschaft*, (Helsingfors 1931), Abb. 93; A. M. Tallgren, 'Inner Asiatic and Siberian rock pictures', *Eurasia septentrionalis antiqua* 8 (1933), pp. 175-210, fig. 50; and J. A. Goodall 'At the pre and proto-historic roots of heraldry: a study of the possible influence of some ancient and medieval Asiatic devices on European heraldry', unpublished Ms in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

¹³ C. Humphrey Waddington, 'Horse brands of the Mongolians: a system of signs in a nomadic culture' *American Ethnologist* 1 (1974), pp. 471-88.

¹⁴ D. Schorsch 'The Vermand Treasure: a testimony to the presence of the Sarmatians in the western Roman Empire', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 17-40, at pp. 31-4; see

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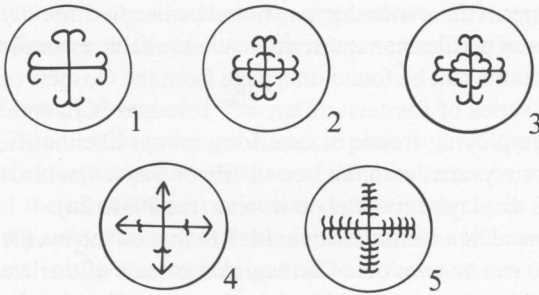


Figure 2: Engraved and nielloed *tamga*-like devices from *Tutulus* fibulae found in Sarmatian graves in the Western Empire, dating to the second half of the fourth century AD. From: 1. Cortrat 5; 2. Vermand; 3. Cortrat 6; 4. Vert-la-Gravelle; 5. Fel. After A. France-Lanord, 'Un Cimetière de lètes à Cortrat (Loiret)', *Revue Archéologique*, 3rd ser., 1 (1963), pp.15-35, fig. 17).

Shoulder Ornament

The origins of shoulder ornament might be very ancient indeed. Helene Kantor notes that it is first found on lions carved on the funerary chapel of the Egyptian Queen Neit during the Sixth Dynasty (in the twenty-third century BC).¹⁵ This decoration was exported to Syria and Palestine around the middle of the fourteenth century BC and appeared in Assyria in the seventh century BC. Thereafter, Scythians, and Achaemenid and Sassanian Persians all used shoulder ornament in depictions of animals. However, S. Rudenko sees similar decoration in Persian art of the fifth century BC as being derived from that of the 'horse-breeding tribes' of the Asiatic steppes. Here such decoration was used to accentuate the body with the head of an elk or griffin, or an 'aurochs' horn', or at a later date with more abstract figures resembling

[Note 14 continued]

in particular fig. 22, no. 1, after A. France-Lanord, 'Un cimetière de lètes à Cortrat (Loiret)', *Revue Archéologique* 3rd ser. 1 (1963), pp. 15-35, fig. 17. Nomads of the Eurasian steppe used *tamgas* as clan symbols and signs of authority. They appear as petroglyphs, as carvings on tombs and gravestones, and as marks of ownership on a variety of metal objects such as mirrors, buckles and cauldrons; T. Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians* (London 1970), pp. 151-5, plates 37-40 and Nickel (1973) pp. 165f. It is likely that they had magic or protective significance. The combinations of angled, cross-shaped, curved and crescentic elements that formed *tamgas* seem to have had an influence on the development of Polish heraldry, where they appear on the arms of the *Szlachta* (nobility). There some are transformed into charges that combine such things as swords, horseshoes, crosses and crescents. (See Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians*, p. 167 and fig. 56, and H. Nickel 'The mutual influence of Europe and Asia in the field of arms and armour', in D. Nicolle (ed.), *Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour* (Woodbridge 2002), pp. 106-25 at 117 and fig. X-46). For the influence of *tamgas* on Saracenic and Islamic heraldry see L. A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry* (Oxford 1933), pp. 18 f., and W. Leaf and S. Purcell, *Heraldic Symbols: Islamic Insignia and Western Heraldry* (London 1986), pp. 76-82.

¹⁵ H. J. Kantor 'The shoulder ornament of near eastern lions', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (1947), pp. 250-74 at 250. See also A. Vollengraff-Roes 'The lion with body markings in Oriental art', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12 (1953), pp. 40-9.

a point, comma, bracket or haricot bean.¹⁶ Early examples of ‘shoulder ornament’ on the hindquarters of animals (a lion and a bull) appear on a Sarmatian vessel belonging to the first half of the eighth century AD, discovered in Perm, Russia.¹⁷

Discussion

The lion was a popular choice for the decoration of Anglo-Norman dress fittings and horse gear. According to medieval bestiaries, the lion, king of the beasts, embodied the noble attributes of strength, courage, compassion and slowness to anger.¹⁸ Lions were employed in proto-heraldic pairs as guardians above gateways, at doors and on tombs. Personal items, such as the buckle plates discussed here, might also have taken on some apotropaic significance when decorated with a lion.¹⁹

The placement of a device on the rump of the lion could have been due to the Western artisan directly copying a textile or manuscript source, or following ‘un-understood tradition’. However, the choice of a cross potent (or billety)²⁰ as the device, possibly suggested by the positioning of one or more cruciform *tamgas* in the source material, was perhaps more meaningful in the context of Christian Europe. It might have referred to the Crusades, although its most notable use in this form, in the arms of the kingdom of Jerusalem, is uncertain before the thirteenth century.²¹ Later armorial beasts are charged in a similar manner to that discussed here.²² One such example can be seen in Walford’s Roll (c. 1273) in an unusual version of the arms of Bohemia, *Argent a lion rampant sable crowned or charged on the shoulder with a cross or*.²³

The mode of transmission for these motifs, imported cloth, a conspicuously high-status commodity, was sometimes applied to the face of a knight’s shield. Patterns formed by the woven structure of the material, comprising differently coloured vertical, horizontal, zigzag, chevronny or checky bands, when displayed on the shield in this way must have had some influence on the development of the

¹⁶ S. J. Rudenko, ‘The mythological eagle, the gryphon, the winged lion, and the wolf in the art of northern nomads’, *Artibus Asiae* 21 (1958), pp. 101-22 at 118f.

¹⁷ Shoulder ornament is also present on the forequarters; see Kantor, op. cit. (note 15 above), p. 262.

¹⁸ See A. Payne, *Medieval Beasts* (London 1990), p. 19.

¹⁹ See Ashley, ‘Recent finds’ (note 1 above), p. 107.

²⁰ G. J. Brault, *Early Blazon: heraldic terminology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with special reference to Arthurian heraldry* (Woodbridge 1997), pp. 155 f.

²¹ The cross potent or billety appears in the arms of Jerusalem in a number of thirteenth-century painted rolls, see G. J. Brault, ‘The cross in medieval heraldry’, *AntJ* 47 (1967), pp. 214-23 at 222, and *Early Blazon* (1997), p. 154. The earliest object known to bear these arms (*Argent crusilly a cross potent/billety or*) is a Limoges enamelled gemellion (basin) belonging to the third quarter of the thirteenth century, now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Rogers Fund, 1949 [49.56.8]).

²² For example lions charged with annulets, billets, crescents etc., listed in *DBA* 1, pp. 154f.

²³ Ottokar II the Victorious, King of Bohemia 1253, d. 1278. These arms are otherwise unknown; T. D. Tremlett and H. S. London, *The Rolls of Arms of Henry III (Aspilogia* 2, London 1967), p. 168, no. 10.

ordinaries in early armory. Likewise, symmetrical pairs of lions, griffins and other beasts in ‘heraldic’ postures, and other repeat pattern motifs such as fleurs-de-lis, carried on fine silks, provided nascent charges for the burgeoning noble fashion for armorial display in the twelfth century.²⁴

This buckle plate, whatever the ultimate derivation of its ‘shoulder ornament’ (although in fact on the rump) joins a number of finds of proto-armorial or armorial metalwork made over recent years that demonstrate the translation of Eastern exemplars *via* silks, textiles and luxury goods to the West from the twelfth century and earlier.²⁵ Other examples of Eurasian and Oriental themes and devices adopted in this manner include the ‘dragon-and-pearl’ motif,²⁶ double-headed eagles²⁷ and confronted and addorsed beasts and monsters, often found flanking the tree of life.²⁸

²⁴ T. R. Davies, ‘As it was in the beginning’, *CoA* 2nd ser. 3 (1978-80), no. 109, pp. 114-24 at 120-24; id., ‘Diaper, paillé and papelonné’ *CoA* 2nd ser. 6 (1984-6), no. 129, pp. 2-9; H. Nickel, ‘Mutual influence’ (note 14 above), p. 117 and fig. X-45; T. A. Heslop, ‘Courtliness and the culture of consumption’ (1997 Slade Lectures, Cambridge; *CoA* forthcoming). An example of an early imported silk decorated with pairs of panthers, birds and griffins, was found in the tomb of Edward the Confessor, see H. Granger-Taylor, ‘Silk from the tomb of Edward the Confessor’, in Bucton (ed.), *Byzantium* (note 10 above), pp. 151-3, cat. no. 166. Decoration derived from a similar source can be seen on a fragment of a twelfth-century ivory casket found at Old Sarum, Wiltshire, where two griffins flank a rosette that probably represents the tree of life; P. Armour, ‘Griffins’, in J. Cherry (ed.), *Mythical Beasts* (London 1995), pp. 72-103 at 82.

²⁵ For example, on the influence of oriental silks on Ms illustration, see C. R. Dodwell, *The Canterbury School of Illumination, 1066-1200* (Cambridge 1954), pp. 75-8.

²⁶ H. Nickel, ‘The dragon and the pearl’, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991), pp. 139-46; S. Ashley ‘The “dragon-and-pearl” motif on a medieval armorial roundel from Norfolk’, *CoA* 3rd ser. 3 (2007), pp. 19-23.

²⁷ See S. Ashley ‘A wyvern on a twelfth-century armorial weight from Norfolk’, *CoA* 3rd ser. 4 (2008), pp. 93-9 at 95 note 13.

²⁸ For example on twelfth-century horse furniture, as illustrated and discussed in S. Ashley, ‘The use of lions combatant on late twelfth/early thirteenth-century horse furniture’, *CoA* 2nd series 13 (1999-2000), no. 187, pp. 125f.; id., *Medieval Armorial Horse Furniture in Norfolk* (East Anglian Archaeology 101, Gressenhall 2002), pp. 8f., fig. 9, no. 29 and p. 29. See also a pendant from Old Sarum, N. Stratford, ‘Harness pendant’, in G. Zarnecki, J. Holt, and T. Holland (edd.), *English Romanesque Art 1066-1200* (London 1984), p. 278, no. 295.

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