

THE COAT OF ARMS

The journal of the Heraldry Society



Fourth Series

Volume II

2019

Number 236 in the original series started in 1952

The Heraldry Society is an educational charity. Its purpose is to promote greater understanding and appreciation of heraldry and its related subjects. The society organises lectures, study days, congresses, dinners and other social activities. It offers a course in heraldry leading to examination for a diploma. It publishes a range of source material at modest cost. Members receive the *Coat of Arms* and the quarterly *Heraldry Gazette*.

Help to support our work and participate in our social activities by joining today via our website www.theheraldrysociety.com

Registered office

53 Hitchin Street, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6AQ

The Society was registered in England in 1956 as registered charity no. 241456.

The Coat of Arms is a non commercial, non profit making academic journal. Advertising space is sold in order to subsidise the cost of printing. The contents of this journal will be made freely available to all online via the Heraldry Society website one year following distribution of paper copy to members. Images may be subject to copyright, and should not be reproduced without permission of the originator.

President

His Grace The Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal

Honorary Secretary

John Tunesi of Liongam

e-mail: honsecheraldrysociety@googlegmail.com

Membership Secretary

Jane Tunesi of Liongam

e-mail: membership@theheraldrysociety.com

Material appearing in *The Coat of Arms* does not necessarily represent the views of the Honorary Editor, of the Editorial Panel, or of the Society.

Printed in Bristol by 4Word Ltd.

©The Heraldry Society

ISSN 0010-003X

Founding Editor

† John Brooke-Little, C.V.O., M.A., F.H.S.

Honorary Editor

Dr Paul A Fox, M.A., F.S.A, F.H.S.,F.R.C.P., A.I.H.

Editorial Panel

Dr Adrian Ailes, M.A., D.PHIL., F.S.A., F.H.S., A.I.H.

Dr Jackson W Armstrong, B.A., M.PHIL., PH.D.

Steven Ashley, F.S.A, a.i.h.

Dr Claire Boudreau, PH.D., F.R.H.S.C., A.I.H Chief Herald of Canada

Prof D'Arcy J.D.Boulton, M.A., PH.D., D.PHIL., F.S.A., A.I.H.

Dr Clive.E.A.Cheesman, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A. Richmond Herald

Steen Clemmensen A.I.H.

M.Peter D.O'Donoghue, M.A., F.S.A. York Herald

Dr Andrew Gray, PH.D., F.H.S.

Prof Dr Torsten Hiltmann, PH.D., a.i.h.

Prof Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard, PH.D., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S., A.I.H.

Elizabeth Roads, L.V.O., LL.B., F.S.A., A.I.H. Snawdoun Herald

Advertising Manager

John J. Tunesi of Liongam,M.Sc., FSA Scot., Hon.F.H.S., Q.G.

Guidance for authors will be found online at

www.theheraldrysociety.com

BIRDS AND BEASTS IN ENGLISH HERALDRY 1100–1500: CREATION OR EVOLUTION?¹

ADRIAN AILES FHS, AIH

Abstract

Birds and beasts were among the first heraldic devices, the lion proving the most popular and enduring of all charges. When shown passant guardant it quickly became confused with the leopard (or pard) and was frequently described as such. This may have been due to bestiaries depicting leopards and pards full faced, and the term became a convenient shorthand for the longer blazon, lions passant guardant. Many animals traditionally associated with medieval heraldry, such as the griffin, elephant, and dragon, appeared relatively late in English heraldry, possibly because of their obscure appearance and possibly because, at least initially, they were too closely connected with the east and attributed to pagan rulers; the development of the less formal crest and badge may have helped pave their way as hereditary shield emblems. The double-headed eagle also appears to have originated from the east, as did many classic heraldic poses such as lions rampant and birds with wings-displayed. Towards the end of the Middle Ages nobles might be described by their beast-badges, the most famous example being the description of Richard III as a hog after his white boar badge.

It is well known that animal and bird devices had appeared on shields and banners long before the introduction of heraldry in western Europe during the second quarter of the twelfth century. Ancient Greek vases and coins bear testimony to numerous birds and beasts on shields, such as the owl of Athena or the winged boar of Geryon. Nearer to home the celebrated Bayeux Tapestry, completed over half a century before the appearance of arms in England, contains seven shields depicted with beasts, as well as Harold's famous dragon standard (probably a form of windsock) and a solitary raven pennon carried by a Norman. But none of these animal or bird charges, ancient or early medieval, were

¹ This paper is based on a lecture delivered to the Heraldry Society at Burlington House in September 2017, the annual Mark Elvins lecture.

heraldic in the strict sense of the term: definable and hereditary shield devices conforming to rules of usage and design.²

All this, however, changed between 1125 and the middle of the twelfth century when many of the first-known proto-heraldic and truly heraldic shield designs began to incorporate fixed and stylised images of recognisable beasts and birds and even some fish.³ A mid-twelfth century copy of Pliny's *Natural History*, possibly produced by scribes and illuminators working in le Mans for the Plantagenet court, and the Hunterian or 'York' Psalter dating to about 1150–70, both contain lion shields looking remarkably heraldic in design (**Figure 1**).⁴

² N. G. Mattias Engdahl, 'Understanding Shield Emblems on Ancient Athenian Vases: The Case of Geryon's Many Shields', *CoA*, 3rd series, vol. IX, no. 226 (2013), pp. 67–76. For animals and birds in the Bayeux Tapestry see Michael J. Lewis, "'Incipient Armory" in the Bayeux Tapestry?', *CoA*, 3rd series, vol. VIII, no. 223 (2012), pp. 1–26, and Carola Hicks, 'The Borders of the Bayeux Tapestry' in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Carola Hicks (Stamford, 1992), pp. 251–65. For the dragon windsock see also *At the Roots of Heraldry: Collected Papers of John Archibald Goodall*, ed. Steven Ashley (Harleian Society, new series 21, 2018), pp. 16–17.

³ For the twelfth-century luce or pike of the Lucy family see BM Seals, nos 11439, 2245; D. L. Galbreath and Léon Jéquier, *Manuel du Blason*, (Lausanne, revd 1970), p. 31 **hereinafter Galbreath**; and Nicholas Vincent, 'The Seals of King Henry II and his Court', **hereinafter Vincent** in *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp Schofield (Oxford, 2015), pp. 7–33 (20–21) **hereinafter Schofield**.

⁴ For both examples see Adrian Ailes, 'Heraldry in Twelfth-Century England: The Evidence' in Daniel Williams (ed.), *Twelfth-Century England: Proceedings of the 1988 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 1–16 (p. 11 pls 13 and 14). For the Pliny see also Patricia Stirnemann, 'Where can we go from here? The study of twelfth-century French manuscripts' in *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton and Penn State, 2008), p. 92, and Peter Lasko, *Ars Sacra, 800–1200*, 2nd ed. (London, 1994), pp. 247–48.



Figure 1: Knight with lion shield, c. 1150–1170 (Hunterian Psalter, Glasgow University Library MS Hunter U.3.2 (229), f. 54v. Courtesy of the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

Contemporary fictional works such as the Arthurian romances and *romans d'antiquité* refer to lions, leopards, dragons, stags, eagles, pheasants, and martlets, on the shields and banners of knights. When, in Chrétien de Troyes' Old French Arthurian romance *Lancelot*, written in about 1177, the painted shields of combatants at a tournament are explained to the queen and her ladies, all but one shield consist of an animal or bird device.⁵

The earliest known true coat of arms, dating to the late 1120s, features lions on a blue field. It belonged to Geoffrey Plantagenet, count of Anjou and father of Henry II. He also wore lions on his cap and shoes, and virtually all his direct descendants in the Angevin royal house of England, including his grandsons, Richard I and King John, were to bear one or more of these beasts on their shields and other accoutrements.⁶

Further afield, Henry the Lion duke of Saxony and Bavaria, the counts of Flanders and, not surprisingly given their title, the kings of Leon, all bore a lion on their shields, banners, helms, and crests. They were followed by the king of Scots, and the kings of Norway and Denmark. In about 1217 that chronicler and fierce critic of the Angevin court, Gerald of Wales, noted that rulers and magnates were particularly keen to depict devouring beasts such as bears, pard (*pardos*) and lions on their shields and banners as a mark of their ferocity; only the more cultured and more Christian Capetian kings of France bore the simple fleur de lis.⁷

The bestiaries (or beast books) of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries describe the lion as proud and merciful and likened it to Christ, the spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah.⁸ The second-century Greek compilation, the *Physiologus* or *Naturalist*, from which these bestiaries were derived, had already bestowed the crown of 'king of the wild beasts' upon the lion and from a very early period it was often shown crowned in heraldry.⁹

Moreover, the image of a lion would have been well-known, having been sculpted in church decoration, incorporated into mosaics, painted in illuminated manuscripts and Gospels, astrologies, and bestiaries, engraved into metal, and embroidered on

⁵ Quoted verbatim in Gerard J. Brault, *Early Blazon: Heraldic Terminology in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Arthurian Literature* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 26–27 [**hereinafter Brault EB**] and *passim* for other birds and beasts in early fictional works.

⁶ Adrian Ailes, *The Origins of the Royal Arms of England: Their Development to 1199* (Reading, 1982) **hereinafter Ailes RA**

⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Instruction for a Ruler* (De Principis Instructione), ed. Robert Bartlett (Oxford, 2018), pp. 718–21. See below for the use of 'pards' rather than 'leopards' in this instance.

⁸ *Bestiary: Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford M.S. Bodley 764 with all the original miniatures reproduced in facsimile*, transl. Richard Barber (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 23–25 **hereinafter Bestiary**; Janetta Rebold Benton, *The Medieval Menagerie: Animals in the Art of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1992), pp. 82–87; Michel Pastoureau, *The Bear: History of a Fallen Animal* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2011), pp. 135–40, 143–45.

⁹ For an early (mid-13th century) example of a crowned lion in heraldry see the arms of Richard, earl of Cornwall, d. 1272 (*Rolls of Arms: Henry III*, ed., T. D. Tremlett and H. S. London (London, 1967) **hereinafter Tremlett**, pp. 20, 37). The tomb of Eleanor, daughter of Henry II of England, and her husband, Alfonso VIII of Castile, who both died in 1214, incorrectly shows the lions of England crowned.

THE COAT OF ARMS

imported eastern silks and clothing.¹⁰ Some individuals may have even seen a live lion in a menagerie or travelling fair or possibly on crusade.¹¹ It is perhaps, therefore, not surprising that one of the oldest known knightly or baronial seals in England, if not in western Europe, that of Ralph de Mortemor dating to about 1100, depicts a lion.¹²

There were other reasons for choosing the lion as an heraldic charge apart from its zoomorphic and anthropomorphic qualities and relatively common appearance. Powerful men wishing to ape the manners of those above them in the social hierarchy deliberately borrowed the lion of their superiors for their own heraldry, especially if they were in some way related to that person either by feudal tenure or by family connections. This was very probably the motivation behind Ranulf de Blundeville's late-twelfth century lion seal as earl of Chester.¹³ Hubert de Burgh, who began his career as chamberlain of John's household either before or in 1198 and continued to serve as a chamberlain of the royal household when John became king in 1199, bore three lions passant guardant on an early seal almost certainly to demonstrate his close proximity to the king who had since inherited the three lions coat of England from his own brother and predecessor, Richard I (**Figure 2**).¹⁴

Towns wishing to be associated with the king or to commemorate a royal charter or event, or simply wishing to symbolise their loyalty to the Crown, often placed a royal lion or lions on their corporate seals, such as in the first seal of the commune of Rouen in Normandy.¹⁵ In some cases, for example, Hereford, the lion or lions came to be

¹⁰ For early examples see Benton, *Medieval Menagerie*, pp. 85–88, 127; Francis Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages*, ed., Evelyn Antal and John Harthan (London, 1971) **hereinafter Klingender**, pp. 270, 279, 281, 304–5, 312, 321; and for England: Pamela Tudor-Craig, 'St Bernard and the Canterbury Capitals' in Williams (ed.), *England in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 205–17, plate 2.

¹¹ Henry I (d. 1135) is said to have kept lions at Woodstock, Oxfordshire (William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols (London, 1887–89), ii, p. 85). His grandson, William earl of Gloucester (d. 1147), bore a naturalistic-looking lion on his seal which may have also been used by his father, Robert earl of Gloucester (d. 1147), an illegitimate son of the king (Marion M. Archibald, 'The Lion Coinage of Robert Earl of Gloucester and William Earl of Gloucester', *British Numismatic Journal*, 71 (2002), pp. 71–86, Figure 2).

¹² Jean-François Nieuws, 'Early Aristocratic Seals: An Anglo-Norman Success Story', in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (Woodbridge, 2016), pp. 97–123 (at p. 97 and pl. 2). For a lion device on a seal (1196) later becoming heraldic by being placed on a shield (1204) see that of Roger de Meulan in Daniel Power 'The Declaration on the Norman Church (1205): a study in Norman Sigillography', in Schofield, op cit pp. 35–62 (at pp. 43, 45), and Galbreath p. 30.

¹³ The National Archives [TNA] DL 27/235; Roger H. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office: Personal Seals*, 2 vols (London, 1978–81), P1053; BM Seals no. 8530; T. A. Heslop, 'The Seals of the Twelfth Century Earl of Chester' in *The Earldom of Chester and its Charters: A Tribute to Geoffrey Barraclough*, ed., A. T. Thacker (Journal of the Chester Arch Soc, 71 (1991), pp. 179–97), and Adrian Ailes, 'The Knight's Alter Ego: From Equestrian to Armorial Seal' in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, ed. Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (London, 2008), pp. 8–11 (at p. 10). For Ranulf's royal connection see James W. Alexander, *Ranulf of Chester: A Relic of the Conquest* (Athens, GA, 1983), p. 2.

¹⁴ TNA Ward 2/197/2; BM Seals, no. 7943; BL Stowe MS 665 f. 86, and for his later arms Anthony Wagner, *Historic Heraldry of Britain* (Chichester, reprinted 1972), p. 42. For further examples see Ailes RA, op cit and Vincent pp. 19–20.

¹⁵ Paris, Archives Nationales S5199a liasse 16 no. 65, cited in Vincent, 'Seals of King Henry II and his Court', pp. 17, 19.

BIRDS AND BEASTS



Figure 2: Seal of Hubert de Burgh, c. 1200–c. 1210 (TNA Ward 2/197/2). Courtesy of The National Archives.

embedded in the town's eventual arms.¹⁶ The lion did not, of course, have a monopoly when it came to civic and corporate heraldry and some towns chose other beasts or birds as their device, especially if they were a pun on the place name. The earliest surviving municipal seal in England, that of Oxford dating to 1191, depicted, not surprisingly, an ox, which on later seals can be seen crossing a ford, a rebus that was in time to become the city's arms.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hereford Cathedral Archives, A. 3218 (F. C. and P. E. Morgan, *Concise List of Seals belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral* (Hereford, 1966), p. 3); C. W. Scott-Giles, *Civic Heraldry of England and Wales*, 2nd ed. (London, 1953), p. 161 hereinafter **Scott-Giles**.

¹⁷ R. H. C. Davis, 'An Oxford Charter of 1191 and the Beginnings of Municipal Freedom', *Oxoniensia*, 23, 1968, pp. 53–65; Scott-Giles p. 311.

THE COAT OF ARMS

The primacy and popularity of the heraldic lion in the Middle Ages was impressive. Michel Pastoureau, who has done so much to increase our understanding of animals in heraldry, calculated that 15% of all arms across Europe feature a lion, followed by a fess at 6%, and then the eagle coming in at only 3%. Whilst this can only be taken as a crude guide, the new *Dictionary of British Arms*, which lists all the known medieval arms in Britain up to 1530, devotes nearly 100 pages to its listing of single-lion shields, followed by the eagle at about 18 pages, the griffin at 5½ pages, the dragon or wyvern at 1½ pages, and the dog at about 1¼ pages; everything else is a page or less.¹⁸

Before leaving the lion something should be said about the leopard in heraldry. This animal was according to the bestiaries, the degenerate progeny of an adulterous match between a male pard and a lioness.¹⁹ The mystic pard was a particularly unpleasant creature representing the Antichrist and spotted with many kinds of evil. As late as 1264 the propagandist poem the ‘Song of Lewes’, written by an ardent supporter of the barons in their revolt against Henry III, describes the king’s son, the Lord Edward, later Edward I, as a leopard, part brave and proud lion/leo but also part unreliable and inconsistent pard.²⁰

Yet, despite these negative associations, the lion passant guardant, running and looking full-faced out of the shield, began to be described in early heraldic blazon as a ‘leopard’ or ‘pard’. A number of important figures in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Old French epic and romance are, for example, described as bearing ‘leopards’ on their arms.²¹ Presumably these charges were not true leopards but rather a particular stylised form of lion whose two eyes and two ears could be seen.

In England the lions passant guardant featuring on the royal arms from about 1198 were, from the opening years of the thirteenth century, consistently referred to as leopards in both literature and the English royal and government records.²² When, as noted above, Gerald of Wales referred to the pards (rather than leopards) borne by the enemies of

¹⁸ DBA 4 vols

¹⁹ *Bestiary* p. 35.

²⁰ Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), p. 24.

²¹ Brault *EB* pp. 21, 225–27. Gerald of Wales refers to a ‘panther’ on a seal belonging to Henry II (Hugh Stanford London, *Royal Beasts* (Heraldry Society, 1956), p. 9 n. 3) and although this appears as a separate beast in the bestiaries it is possible that leopard was meant (the genus *pantherus* includes both lions and leopards); see Vincent pp. 16–17 for Henry’s ring. In a late 14th-century heraldic treatise the pard is likened to a panther (*Medieval Heraldry: Some Fourteenth Century Heraldic Works*, ed. Evan John Evans (Cardiff, 1943), pp. 112–13, and cf. Lorenzo Valla’s Letter of 1433 in Osvaldo Cavallar, Susanne Degenring and Julius Kirshner, *A Grammar of Signs: Bartolo da Sassoferrato’s Tract on Insignia and Coats of Arms* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 191).

²² See especially Siddons *Badges Vol. II, pt 1* pp. 157–60 and primary source extracts quoted in *Vol. I*; Caroline Shenton, ‘Edward III and the Symbol of the Leopard’, in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, ed. Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (Woodbridge, 2002), **hereinafter Coss and Keen** pp. 69–81; and Lisa Monnas, ‘The Making of Medieval Embroidery’, in *English Medieval Embroidery: Opus Anglicanum*, ed. Clare Browne *et al* (New Haven and London, 2016), pp. 7–23 (at p. 9). The earliest lion passant guardant on a shield on a French seal is that of Pierre de Gamaches, Ile-de-France, 1195 (Archives Nationale D 5717; Yves Metman and Michel Pastoureau, ‘La Faune dans les sceaux du Moyen Age’, in *Le Bestiaire des monnaies des sceaux et des medailles* (Paris, 1974), no. 160). In England it had certainly appeared by 1198 on the second great seal of Richard I, if not before.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

France he was very probably doing so to emphasise King John's many vices.²³ The emperor Frederick II was in no doubt about the species of these beasts and sent three leopards (and not lions) as a gift to John's son, Henry III, in 1235 in deliberate imitation of the English royal arms.²⁴ The celebrated 'Song of Caerlaverock', listing some of those with Edward I besieging that defiant Scots castle in 1300, describes the English royal banner as three leopards (*trois lupart*), 'courant, fierce, haughty and cruel'.²⁵ Edward's grandson, Edward III, struck coins known as the 'Leopard' and 'Léopard d'or' (leopard of gold), the king was known as 'the leopard', and he even took live leopards with him when travelling north to fight the Scots.²⁶ In the early fifteenth century Henry IV, or his son Henry V, created the office of Leopard Herald.²⁷ The term had clearly received official sanction, despite the spotted, mainless leopard of nature having entered English heraldry, albeit rarely, in the thirteenth century.²⁸

Not everyone, however, agreed with the use of 'leopard' for 'lion passant guardant', and, at least initially, there was confusion. Even the mid-thirteenth century chronicler and acute observer and painter of heraldry, Matthew Paris, was not sure when it came to blazoning the beasts on the royal arms, sometimes calling them 'lions', sometimes 'leopards', and sometimes 'lions or leopards'. Different versions of Glover's Roll dating to the same period appear similarly in doubt when describing the arms of the Somery family.²⁹ The poem 'On the Battle of Neville's Cross' written in 1346 uses the image of a lion and leopard interchangeably for Edward III.³⁰ Even today this terminological inexactitude continues to be used when describing the arms of medieval and early modern English monarchs, and in French blazon a lion passant guardant is still termed a *léopard* or, if rampant and guardant, a *léopard lionné*.³¹

It is quite probable that because the illustrators of bestiaries, which provided crucial visual evidence for so much zoomorphic decoration, usually drew their pards or leopards as spotless lions passant guardant, those seeking to describe the beasts on the English shield and having consulted these reference works, came to the reasonable conclusion

²³ *Instruction for a Ruler*, ed. Bartlett, pp. 718–21. The use of the phrase *invictus pard* (unconquered pard) on the tomb of Edward III, was doubtless to meet the leonine hexameter of the inscription (W. Mark Ormrod, *Edward III* (Yale, 2013), p. 583).

²⁴ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols (London, 1872–83), III, p. 324, cited in Vincent pp. 18, 29.

²⁵ *Rolls of Arms Edward I, 1272–1307*, ed. Gérard J. Brault (Woodbridge, 1997) **hereinafter Brault RA**, i, p. 437.

²⁶ Shenton, 'Edward III and the Symbol of the Leopard'.

²⁷ Walter H. Godfrey and Anthony Wagner, *College of Arms Monograph 1963* (London, 1963), pp. 271–72; cf. TNA E 404/20/115 and BL Stowe MS 440 f. 86.

²⁸ An early example of the real leopard in heraldry is the 13th-century arms of Cantelupe (*Rolls of Arms: Henry III*, ed., Tremlett and London, pp. 120–21, and Wagner, *Historic Heraldry of Britain*, pp. 43–44). Moreover, the late fourteenth-century heraldic treatise *Tractatus de Armis* clearly distinguishes a spotted mainless leopard from a lion (see below) in heraldry.

²⁹ *Rolls of Arms: Henry III*, ed. Tremlett and London, pp. 36, 58, 134.

³⁰ Shenton, 'Edward III and the Symbol of the Leopard', pp. 72–73.

³¹ For a summary of views on lion or leopard see Pastoureaux, *Traité d'héraldique*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1993), pp. 143–44; Galbreath pp. 126–27; Brault *EB* pp. 225–26; and H. Stanford London, 'Lion or Leopard?', *CoA*, vol. 2 (1952–53), pp. 291–92.

THE COAT OF ARMS

that they must be either pards or leopards, since that is what they looked like (**Figure 3a and b**).³² The Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, for example, produced sometime between 1290 and 1310, depicts both a lion and a leopard.³³ The two animals are virtually identical save that the leopard is shown full-faced, that is guardant. Moreover, the term was a much more succinct and useful description than the cumbersome phrase ‘lions passant guardant’ and, appearing as it did countless times in the official Exchequer and Great Wardrobe accounts, for this very practical reason alone may well have come to stand for the English lions.

Notwithstanding the leopard’s dubious parentage, no shame was applied, at least not initially. In the late medieval and early modern period, however, perhaps as heraldic treatises and manuals became more widespread, opinions changed, and the term was superseded, at least in Britain, by the more correct ‘lion passant guardant’.³⁴ For the French the description was a propagandist gift and they continued to use the term for the English royal beast.³⁵

Lesser beasts (and birds) did not fare so well in the armorial ark despite their prominence in bestiaries, myth and legend, or indeed, in their appearance in everyday life. For some, the explanation is fairly obvious – many mythical and exotic animals must have been known only to a very select band of beast and bird watchers. Take, for example, the much-maligned bonacon. No one is still quite sure what this fabulous monster is: bison, bull, cow, hybrid. They only know that it had a rather backward form of defence having useless curled-in horns at the front. Yet it graced the folios of many a bestiary, and even makes a central appearance on the *Mappa Mundi*.³⁶

The problem, as with so many fictional birds and beasts, was that very few people would have ever heard of it, and even if they had, they would not have known what a bonacon actually looked like when it came to painting one on a shield, let alone recognising it in the fray of battle or tourney. The bonacon was, therefore, one of many similar monsters that did not make it into the British heraldic zoo until at least Tudor times, and only then as a crest (**Figure 4**).³⁷

³² Examples of leopards and pards shown full-faced in bestiaries include: BL Royal MS 12 XIX f. 28v (c. 1200–c. 1210); BL Harley MS 4751 f. 6r (late 12th, early 13th century); Aberdeen Bestiary, Univ Lib. MS 24, f. 8v (c. 1200); Bod MS Bodley 764, f. 9v (c. 1225–1250); BL Harley MS 3244 f. 37r (1236–c. 1250); Westminster Abbey Bestiary MS 22, ff. 15r, 17r (late 13th century); I am grateful to Matthew Payne, Keeper of the Muniments at Westminster Abbey for advice on the Westminster Abbey Bestiary. For the direct copying of one bestiary to another see Ilya Dines, ‘The Copying and Imitation of Images in Medieval Bestiaries’, *J Brit Arch Assoc*, 167 (2014), pp. 70–82.

³³ Sarah Arrowsmith, *Mappa Mundi: Hereford’s Curious Map* (Logaston, 2015), pp. 75–76.

³⁴ Pastoureau dates this change to c.1350–80 (*Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Age occidental* (Paris, 2004), pp. 65–66).

³⁵ See, for example, William M. Hinkle, *The Fleurs de Lis of the Kings of France, 1285–1488* (Southern Illinois, 1991), pp. 57–58.

³⁶ *Bestiary* pp. 47–48; Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (London, 1975), hereinafter *Dennys* pp. 151–52; Benton, *Medieval Menagerie*, pp. 72–74; Arrowsmith, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 68. A rare medieval example is painted in a set of mid-14th century murals partly inspired by bestiaries on a wall of Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough.

³⁷ H. Stanford London, ‘Minor Monsters’, *CoA*, vol. 4 (1956–58), p. 33.

BIRDS AND BEASTS



Top, Figure 3a: Lion Below, Figure 3b: pard. From the Westminster Abbey Bestiary, late 13th century (Westminster Abbey MS 22, ff. 15r, 17r). Courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

It is also important to remember that heraldic treatises, which did so much to expound the finer points of birds and beasts in heraldry and, like bestiaries, to attribute to them certain qualities, and to interpret them as symbols of moral and metaphysical truths, date only from the fourteenth century. Even at the end of that century, John de Bado Aureo's *Tractatus de Armis*, written at the behest of the late Queen Anne, wife of Richard II, lists only nine beasts suitable for heraldry, three of which are the pard, the lion and the leopard (bearing in mind his royal commission); his list does not include, for example,

THE COAT OF ARMS



Figure 4: Bonacon crest of Hugh Holynsyde of Bosley, Cheshire, drawn by A. Colin Cole from the grant dated 1 July 1560 (BL Add. Ch. 46907). Reproduced from CoA no. 25 (Jan 1956) p. 34.

the elephant or unicorn. Interestingly, he differentiates the spotted mainless leopard of nature from the lion.³⁸

There were other reasons too, apart from ignorance and uncertainty, for not initially welcoming certain birds and beasts into the heraldic fold. The griffin, an inhabitant of far-away Scythia or India, had a long and distinguished history, and its fearsome reputation was well known throughout western Europe in the Middle Ages. In ancient times it had appeared on neo-Sumerian and early Babylonian seals, and its image,

³⁸ See especially Dennys pp. 68–69, and for the original: *Medieval Heraldry: Some Fourteenth-Century Heraldic Works*, ed. Evans (especially pp. 110–11, 157–59). See also Klingender, p. 452. See *A Heraldic Miscellany: Fifteenth-Century Treatises on Blazon and the Office of Arms in English and Scots*, ed. Richard J. Moll (Liverpool, 2018), p. 34 for Bado Aureo and animals.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

like that of the lion, was possibly imported westwards by way of central Asia, Eastern Europe and Byzantium, and maybe also through Muslim Spain. It appears, for example, on Roman coins and sculpture, on highly prized silks and textiles, and even within the decorative borders of the Bayeux Tapestry.³⁹

Griffins featured heavily in the Latin bestiaries where they were often shown attacking a horse or boar or other large animal to demonstrate their immense strength.⁴⁰ During the second half of the twelfth century a griffin attacking an elephant was depicted on various seals belonging to members of the de Redvers, earls of Devon, and by itself on late-twelfth-century seals of the de Lacys, constables of Chester (**Figure 5**). Neither of these families, however, is known to have borne it on a shield and both were soon to drop it as a personal or family device in favour of more conventional heraldic designs – a lion for the de Redvers, and wheat sheaves or a quarterly shield for the de Lacys.⁴¹ The griffin was clearly not a favoured heraldic charge in these early days.

In England the first known appearance of a griffin on a shield or banner that can be identified as belonging to a non-fictional individual or family occurs as late as the opening years of the fourteenth century.⁴² Indeed, it was only in the fifteenth century that it was widely used in this country, possibly because of its acceptance in the interim as a royal beast-badger.⁴³

Why, then, did it take so long to make the heraldic grade? It may be that the griffin, part-bird, part-beast, and often depicted entangled with its prey, was simply too confusing and obscure a charge for the purposes of recognition in battle. More likely it was considered too oriental, too exotic, too 'other'. In Adenet le Roi's French epic *Les Enfances Ogier* composed in the late thirteenth century it is the Saracen king, Cardos de Bradigans, who bears a griffin on his shield, as does the king of Syria in Cooke's Book dating to the reign of Edward II, and the king of Griffony (Constantinople/Greece) in several early rolls of arms.⁴⁴

³⁹ Pastoureaux, *Bear*, pp. 46, 138; *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, ed. David Buckton (London, 1994), pp. 17, 153; Henry Maguire, *Image and Imagination in Byzantine Art* (Farnham, 2007), p. 1047 and Figure 19; Heinz Mode, *Fabulous Beasts and Demons* (London, 1975), pp. 101, 127–28, 170–71; *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era AD 843–1261*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York, 1997), **hereinafter Evans and Wixom** p. 226; Steven Ashley, 'Anglo-Norman Elite Objects from Castle and Countryside' in *Castles and the Anglo-Norman World*, ed., John A. Davies, Angela Riley, Jean-Marie Levesque and Charlotte Lapiche (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2016), pp. 281–98 (at 292, 296); and Hicks, 'The Borders of the Bayeux Tapestry'. For an excellent overview of the griffin see Peter Armour, 'Griffins' in *Mythical Beasts*, ed. John Cherry (London, 1995), pp. 72–103.

⁴⁰ For example, *Bestiary* pp. 38–39; Benton, *Medieval Menagerie*, pp. 129–30; *The Medieval Treasury: The Art of the Middle Ages in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Paul Williamson (London, 1986), p. 85.

⁴¹ De Redvers: Ailes RA pp. 87–88; Tremlett pp. 29, 65, and Robert Bearman, *Charters of the Redvers Family and the Earldom of Devon, 1090–1217*, ed. Robert Bearman (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1994), pp. 50–51. Lacy: seal (1178) of John de Lacy, Constable of Chester (TNA E 326/11357); *Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals*, ed., Lewis C. Loyd and Doris Mary Stenton (Oxford, 1950), no. 519, and seal (late 12th century) of Roger, constable of Chester (Ellis, *Personal Seals*, P663); see also Tremlett pp. 22–23, 26, 60–61, and Ailes RA, p. 107, n. 75.

⁴² Simon de Montagu in Brault RA vol ii, p. 297; Lord Howard de Walden, *Some Feudal Lords and their Seals* (reptd, Bristol, 1984), **hereinafter de Walden** p. 124. For its late start on the continent see Dennys p. 177.

⁴³ Dennys p. 177; *Siddons Badges Vol. II, pt I*, pp. 130–31.

⁴⁴ Brault RA vol ii, p. 207; Dennys p. 177; Brault EB pp. 217–18.

THE COAT OF ARMS



Figure 5: Seal with griffin of John de Lacy, Constable of Chester, 1178 (TNA E 326/11357). Courtesy of The National Archives.

The elephant was another familiar figure of the bestiary. Here it is sympathetically described as powerful, chaste, intelligent, and merciful.⁴⁵ Elephants appeared in various early medieval manifestations: from a Norman font at St Nicholas Church in Dunkeswell, east Devon, to a Romanesque capital in the church of St Pierre in Aulnay, in southern France. A late-tenth-century Byzantine silk patterned with elephants was placed in Charlemagne's tomb at Aachen in 1000; the great man may even have owned an elephant.⁴⁶ In 1255 the sensational arrival at the royal menagerie housed in the Tower of London of a live elephant gift from Louis IX of France to Henry III attracted flocks of curious sight-seers; Matthew Paris drew the animal twice.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Bestiary* pp. 39–42, and in general see C. Osborn-Jones, *The Heraldic Elephant* (London, 2015).

⁴⁶ Evans and Wixom, p. 436.

⁴⁷ BL MS Cotton Nero D I. f. 169v, and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 16, f. iv; Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Aldershot, 1987), pp. 212–16; Richard Cassidy and Michael Clasby, 'Matthew Paris and Henry III's Elephant', finerollshenry3.org.uk/redist/pdf/fm-06-2012.pdf.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

Yet, here again, the elephant was not a popular heraldic shield device, at least not initially. This may be because it was rarely seen in the flesh – Paris believed that Henry's elephant at the Tower was the only one ever seen in England or in any country north of the Alps. Possibly, its poor reputation for being terrified by mice, and the understanding that once fallen it could not get back up again, was not the best symbol for a derring-do *miles Christi* – knight of Christ. But its heraldic modesty may again owe more to its close association with the east where Indians and Persians were said to place large wooden towers upon its back from which to fight the enemy, including presumably those from the west; hence the term 'elephant and castle' (**Figure 6**).⁴⁸ In the Arthurian literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries an 'olifant' or elephant (though possibly an ivory horn), only appears on the shields of two characters, both fictitious Saracen kings, Abilant and Primonus, whose kingdoms were both associated with elephants.⁴⁹ Its eventual acceptance into English heraldry possibly owes much to the use of the elephant and castle device by the city of Coventry in the late thirteenth century⁵⁰ and its adoption in the fifteenth century first as a badge and then as a crest by the Cutlers' Company of London – ivory being an important component for the handles of quality knives (**Figure 7**).⁵¹

Another beast that may have suffered from the same delays in heraldic quarantine was the dragon and its close relation, the two-legged wyvern – for ease I shall conflate the two.⁵² As already noted, Harold's dragon standard is depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry, and English kings up to and including Edward III continued to use it as a standard, possibly as a signal for war or as a rallying device. Since about 800 the red dragon had come to be particularly associated with the fiery resistance of the Britons against the white dragon of the invading Saxons (**Figure 8**). Geoffrey of Monmouth writing in the late 1130s, at exactly the same time that armorial bearings were introduced into England, ascribed a dragon standard and helmet crest to the legendary British king, Arthur. Perhaps not surprisingly, the early fifteenth-century Welsh rebel leader, Owain Glyn Dwr, adopted a dragon for his standard and crest in his campaign against the English king, Henry IV – the Welsh word *draig* (dragon) had long been used to denote a warrior chief.⁵³ It was again used by the part-Welshman Henry VII in 1485, this time as a dynastic hieroglyphic to help legitimise his usurping house of Tudor – the red dragon dreadful, proud symbol of British history, had at last triumphed.

But despite its high political profile, the dragon's popularity amongst the general armigerous classes was very low in Britain during the Middle Ages. As already noted,

⁴⁸ *Bestiary* pp. 39–41.

⁴⁹ Brault *EB* p. 248.

⁵⁰ For Coventry see and W. H. St John Hope, *The Corporation Plate and Insignia of Office of the Cities and Corporate Towns of England and Wales*, 2 vols (London, 1895), ii, p. 386; Scott-Giles, *Civic Heraldry of England and Wales*, p. 376.

⁵¹ Charles Welch, *A History of the Cutlers' Company of London*, 2 vols (London, 1923), vol. 1, pp. 132–33; for the arms see *ibid.*, pp. 137–38; John Bromley, *The Armorial Bearings of the Guilds of London* (London, 1960), pp. 66–68; and Osborn-Jones, *The Heraldic Elephant*.

⁵² For the dragon see *Bestiary* pp. 183–84; Sydney Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship* (London, 1992); Siddons *Badges* vol. II, pt 1, pp. 83–87; Dennys pp. 49, 186–92; and Carl Lofmark, *A History of the Red Dragon*, ed. G. A. Wells (Conwy, 1995).

⁵³ Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, pp. 56–58; Brault *EB* p. 23; Dennys p. 189.

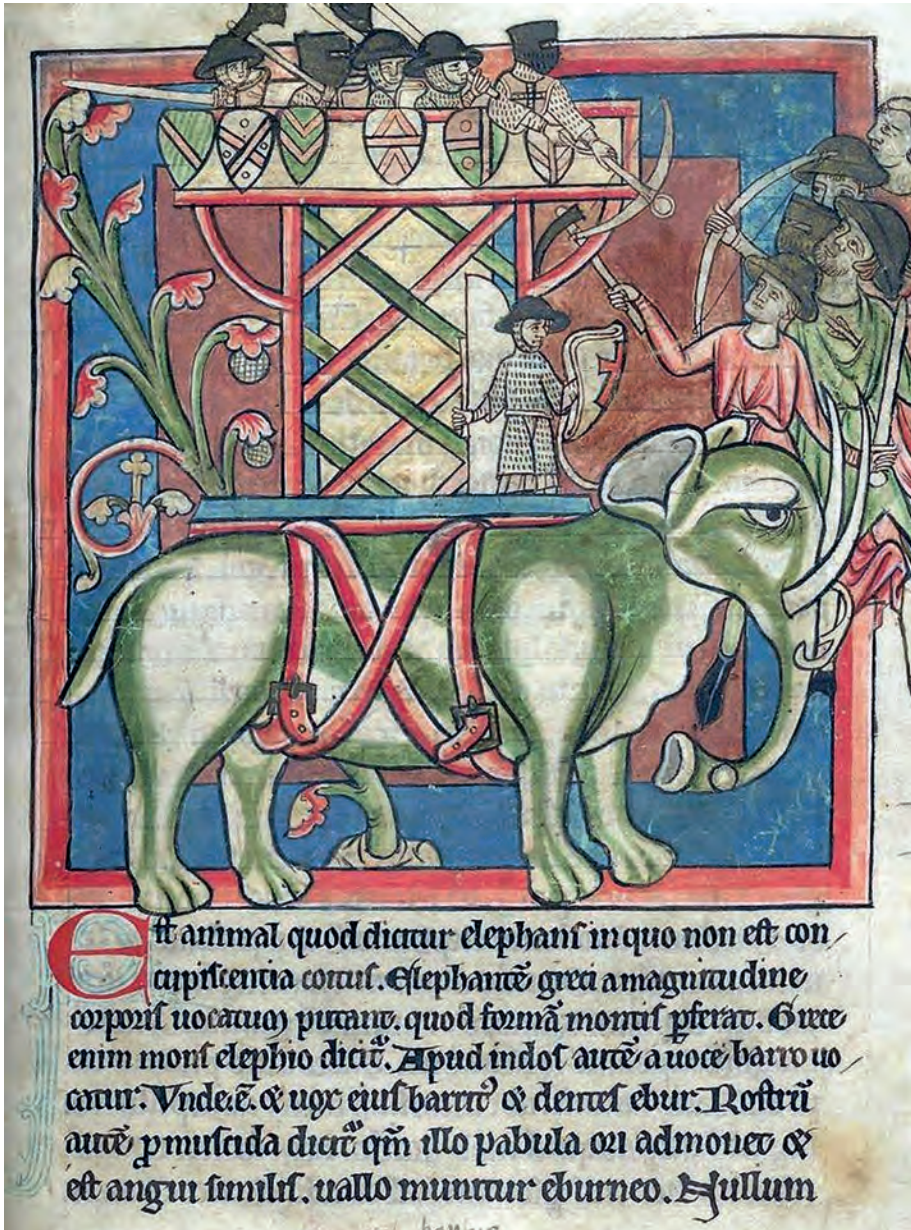


Figure 6: 'Elephant and castle' from bestiary, c. 1225–c. 1250
(BL Harley MS 4751, f. 8). © British Library Board.

it was abandoned as a standard by the English kings in the fourteenth century. Maybe it too suffered from the same public relations problem as the griffin and elephant in being too Eastern, too 'other'. In the bestiaries it is likened to the Devil – an enormous proud



Figure 7: Seal of Cutlers' Company of London, c. 1476
(Charles Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company* [London, 1916] vol. 1).

winged serpent-like creature – the embodiment of evil.⁵⁴ Its popularity in England must have suffered particularly badly with the adoption in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the Christian martyr St George as the nation's patron saint who slays a rapacious dragon.⁵⁵ In the fictional literature of the day the dragon was commonly ascribed to the pagan enemy. In the early twelfth-century Old French 'Song of Roland' it is borne by the Saracen king and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it is the emblem of heretics and Muslim chiefs.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Another animal associated with the devil, evil and death, was the toad – as seen in the Douce Apocalypse produced sometime between c. 1250 and 1275 where it is emblazoned upon the shield and banner of Satan himself (Dennys p. 111–12; Adrian Ailes, 'Heraldry in Medieval England: Symbols of Politics and Propaganda' **hereinafter** Ailes *HME*, in Coss and Keen pp. 83–104 (at p. 84); Mary E. Robbins, 'The Truculent Toad in the Middle Ages' in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nora C. Flores (London and New York, 2000), pp. 25–47).

⁵⁵ Jonathan Good, *The Cult of St George in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 43–46.

⁵⁶ Michel Pastoreau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1993), p. 156; Pastoreau, *Bear*, p. 143, and idem, *Histoire symbolique du Moyen Age occidental*, p. 59.

THE COAT OF ARMS



Figure 8: Fight between the red and white dragons depicted in the verse continuation of Wace's, *Roman de Brut*, c. 1340

(BL Egerton MS 3028, f. 25). © British Library Board.

In time, like the griffin and elephant, the dragon was accepted into English heraldry. Its debut as a two-footed wyvern in an English roll of arms occurs in about 1312 in the Parliamentary Roll, and the first four-footed dragon appears in around 1400 or perhaps a little earlier.⁵⁷ But once again we have to wait to the late Middle Ages, and especially the Tudor period when it gained new status as a royal beast, to witness its mainstream heraldic rehabilitation. Today, it is one of the most popular of heraldic beasts.

Like the dragon and the griffin a number of other exotic and mythical creatures only gradually crept into the armorial ark; they include the pegasus⁵⁸ and, perhaps rather

⁵⁷ Dennys, p. 191.

⁵⁸ Dennys, p. 157.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

surprisingly bearing in mind its Marian symbolism, the unicorn, which was only adopted by the Scots kings sometime in the fifteenth century.⁵⁹ Even animals much more familiar and closer to home such as the boar,⁶⁰ bear,⁶¹ and horse⁶² were late starters in European heraldry, usually only appearing when canting devices. FitzUrse is the only family to use a bear (Latin *ursus* or in Old French *ors*) on any English rolls of arms dating to Edward I's reign (**Figure 9**).⁶³ Pastoureau has calculated that during the Middle Ages the appearance of the bear hardly exceeded five out of every thousand European coats of arms (except perhaps for northern Spain and certain regions of Germany).⁶⁴

Let us now turn briefly to birds. Rodney Dennys observed that in general birds were less well observed and attracted fewer symbolic properties; they were thus considered less significant in early heraldry. As with beasts the variety of species rose dramatically in the fifteenth century. In the late fourteenth century Bado Aureo listed only nine types of birds (including the griffin but not the peacock) which were suitable for heraldry, while Nicholas Upton in his treatise *De Studio Militari*, dating to 1446–47, let fly with thirty-six real birds and three fabulous winged inventions (the griffin, caladrius and martlet).⁶⁵

As an heraldic charge the eagle, king of the birds, beat both all other birds and beasts in popularity except the lion (**Figure 10**).⁶⁶ It had an impeccable pedigree having crossed Europe on the coins and legionary standards of Rome and later on highly prized silks from Byzantium and the Near East, often reflecting earlier Sassanian eagle motifs.⁶⁷ The symbol was adopted by Charlemagne in the ninth century to symbolise his revival of the old Roman imperium and in the second half of the twelfth century the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who regarded Charlemagne as his great imperial predecessor, promoted the eagle as *the* heraldic symbol of the emergent western Empire. A sumptuous casket commissioned by Frederick II and completed in 1215 to rehouse Charlemagne's

⁵⁹ There was a Unicorn Pursuivant in 1426, and James III of Scotland (1460–88) struck coins depicting a unicorn supporting the royal arms. See London, *Royal Beasts*, p. 47; Mark Dennis, 'The Unicorn', in *Emblems of Scotland* (Dunfermline, 1997), pp. 20–31; Pastoureau, *Histoire symbolique du Moyen Age occidental*, p. 68; Dennys, pp. 99–100, 163–65.

⁶⁰ Literary heroes such as Tristan replaced their boar shields with those of the more acceptable lion (Pastoureau, *Bear*, p. 143). In Britain, families such as Bore, Swynton and the de Veres (Latin *verres*) used it as a canting device as did Richard III of the house of York (*Eboracum*).

⁶¹ Pastoureau, *Bear*, passim. The Bruen, Barwood, Beresford and Barnard families in Britain bore bears, *DBA* vol i, p. 200.

⁶² Pastoureau, *Histoire symbolique du Moyen Age occidental*, p. 68; Dennys, p. 69.

⁶³ Brault *RA* vol ii, p. 174. The earliest depiction of the FitzUrse arms is in a depiction of Becket's martyrdom, c. 1170 (BL Cotton MS Claudius B II, f. 314).

⁶⁴ Pastoureau, *Bear*, p. 144.

⁶⁵ Dennys, pp. 68, 168. See also Klingender, p. 452.

⁶⁶ Dennys, pp. 48–49.

⁶⁷ An example is the Byzantine silk from the reliquary of St Geminus, c. 1000 (Evans and Wixom, pp. 224–25; Klingender, p. 270ff). A 10th or 11th-century marble panel, probably from Constantinople and now in the British Museum, displays eagles very much in later heraldic pose (*Byzantium*, ed. Buckton, cat. No. 151; Klingender, p. 272). *At the Roots of Heraldry*, ed. Ashley (at p. 16) questions to what extent the medieval heraldic eagle owed its origins to the eagle of Classical antiquity.



*Figure 9: Reginald FitzUrse (bear on shield) striking Thomas Becket, 1225
(BL Harl. MS 5102 f. 32r). © British Library Board.*



Figure 10: Banner of the Honour of Pevensey from the Great Cowcher Book of the Duchy of Lancaster, c. 1402 (TNA DL 42/2 f. 15r). Duchy of Lancaster; copyright material in The National Archives reproduced courtesy of the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

THE COAT OF ARMS

sacred bones, depicts an eagle above the emperor's tent, whilst his men-at-arms carry shields bearing the same device.⁶⁸

Crusaders in Spain and the Near East may have come across a new version of the bird – the *double-headed eagle* – on silks and in sculpture; since the early twelfth century it had been the badge of the Seljuk Sultans.⁶⁹ During the following century this decorative and majestic motif was gradually appropriated by the Holy Roman Emperors. They may have done so to distinguish themselves, heraldically-speaking, from the kings of Germany who continued to use the single-headed variety. In England the eagle proved popular from the very beginning. Edward III adopted it as a crest; it was one of his favourite devices and was frequently used by his successors and close members of the royal family.⁷⁰

The martlet, a more gentle swallow-like creature, was the next most popular bird and again dates back to the early days of heraldry.⁷¹ In the description of shields at a fictional tournament in Chrétien's *Lancelot* we are told that one was made in London and depicted two martlets.⁷² This bird was usually given feathers for feet, possibly because people thought it could not perch on the ground but rather took its food while in the air. Alternatively, the feathers may denote nothing more than tufted feet. The *Tractatus de Armis* suggests that those who bore martlets in their arms were noble but 'without foundation' – lacking means of subsistence.

Other birds from the heraldic aviary include the swan, a particular favourite of the de Bohun family and royal house of Lancaster, the cock and crow (both often canting devices), falcon (a royal badge), heron (again often canting), and the pelican usually shown in its piety pecking its breast to feed its young, symbolising the sacrifice of Christ's blood. Less popular are the duck, ostrich, owl, pheasant, popinjay, and lastly the partridge, perhaps not surprising when its medieval symbolism for immoral behaviour and lies are taken into account.⁷³

It is possible that the eventual acceptance of many of these late-starter birds and beasts into heraldry owes much to their initial role as accompanying supporters, crests, and badges. Here they may have been regarded as less formal than shield devices, being rarely recorded and often not heritable, more decorative than permanent. Men and women may, therefore, have been more willing to experiment with everyday animals such as the boar and bear as well as with more mythical and exotic species such as griffins and even crocodiles⁷⁴ to

⁶⁸ Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon, *The Legend of Roland in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (London, 1971), i, pp. 170–74; ii, figs 147, 148, 150.

⁶⁹ Benton, *Medieval Menagerie*, p. 49, Figure 41. *The Legacy of Islam*, ed. Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (Oxford, 1931), p. 132. See also David F. Phillips, *The Double Eagle* (Danvers, 2014), where Phillips does not agree that such vestments were the source of the Western double-eagle (pp. 20–21); he dates the first use of an heraldic double-eagle to 1185 (p. 31).

⁷⁰ Siddons *Badges* vol. II, pt 1, pp. 92–95; Dennys, p. 168; Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry* (Woodbridge, 1982), p. 69.

⁷¹ Dennys, p. 168.

⁷² Quoted in Brault *EB* p. 27.

⁷³ Cf. the list in the treatise *De Heraudie* (Dennys, p. 61), and for the partridge see Clive Cheesman, 'The History of a Prohibition', *CoA*, 3rd series, IV pt 1 (2008), pp. 29–62.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth, Lady de Say, widow of Sir John Montgomery, employed two knotted-tailed crocodiles to support her impaled shield of arms (TNA E 327/620, seal dated 1449/50).

BIRDS AND BEASTS

fulfil these secondary armorial roles. In time such birds and beasts having been accepted as armorial adjuncts were repeated on the shield as heraldic charges in their own right.

Birds and beasts made particularly attractive supporters which first appeared in the early thirteenth century as no more than space fillers between the shield and the surrounding legend on a personal seal.⁷⁵ Henry of Lancaster's seal attached to the famous Barons' Letter to the Pope dated 1301 reveals just how close these decorative figures were to metamorphosing into the truly heraldic supporters of half a century later (**Figure 11**).⁷⁶

The seals of the Barons' Letter also highlight the popularity of bird and beast crests by this date; lions, wyverns and eagles are all evident. They clearly lent themselves to this purpose as life-like three-dimensional sculptures having first appeared atop the helm at the end of the twelfth century.⁷⁷ The English arms included in the celebrated late fourteenth-century *Gelre Armorial* depict crests of a swan, griffin, and a boar, all of which had so far rarely featured on shields, and the crest on the medieval stall plates of the knights of the Garter at Windsor include either the whole or parts of a dragon, wyvern, griffin, boar, ermine, lion, talbot, ass, unicorn, cow, eagle, peacock, falcon, swan, cockerel as well as the mythical harpy of Sir John Astley KG.⁷⁸ But perhaps the most prolific and most accessible use of beasts and birds, real or fanciful, in medieval heraldry was the badge, which only appeared in the early fourteenth century. A man or woman could use several different badges at the same time; they could be distributed and worn by scores of followers as a mark of ownership or allegiance usually on the livery of retainers or by tournament teams; they were often depicted on multiple pennons and standards rather than the solitary personal banner, and they were not necessarily hereditary.⁷⁹ One effect of all this was that it brought a host of animals and birds, whether real or fanciful, to the attention of a broad section of society, not just the military and noble elite. Richard II liberally distributed his white hart badge to secure support and demonstrate friendship,⁸⁰ and about a century later Richard III ordered for his coronation in 1483 four standards carrying his boar badge, two others with white lions, 740 pensels stamped with his boar, and 13,000 'cognizances' of fustian painted with the same badge.⁸¹

⁷⁵ The best treatment of this subject is W. H. St John Hope, *Heraldry for Craftsmen and Designers* (London, 1913), p. 193ff; . See also the mid-thirteenth century examples in C. H. Hunter Blair, 'Armorialia upon English Seals from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Centuries', *Archaeologia* 89 (1943), pp. 1–26 (at pp. 13–16), pls I–XVII, esp. pls VII (a) and IX (w).

⁷⁶ TNA E 26/1 cord E; de Walden, pp. 29–30. The vast majority of dragons/wyverns on the seals of the Barons' Letter to the Pope in 1301 are space fillers either side of the shield (Dennys, p. 191).

⁷⁷ Galbreath p. 173. Richard I bore a lion on his fan crest as seen on his seal dating to 1198. See especially Hope, *Heraldry for Craftsmen and Designers*, pp. 123–164 for the development and treatment of crests in the Middle Ages.

⁷⁸ Galbreath Figure 495. William St John Hope, *The Stall Plates of the Knights of the Order of the Garter 1385–1485* (London, 1901).

⁷⁹ For hereditary badges see Siddons *Badges* vol. I, pp. 8–9.

⁸⁰ Siddons *Badges* vol. I, pp. 44–45; vol. II, pt 1, pp. 134–35.

⁸¹ Siddons *Badges* vol. I, p. 78. So widespread was the use of animals and birds in the later Middle Ages in this context that some have sought to distinguish between personal 'badges' and 'beasts', and it is true that the accounts of Tudor times make this distinction.

THE COAT OF ARMS



Figure 11: Seal of Henry of Lancaster, Lord of Monmouth, attached to the Barons' Letter to the Pope, 1301 (TNA E 26/1 cord E). Courtesy of The National Archives.

Such was their popularity that in the late Middle Ages badges took on political connotations standing in the place of their owners. This was especially true in political and historical verse, much of it inspired by the Hundred Years' War, the deposition of Richard II, and the Wars of the Roses. In a political poem written in about 1449 bemoaning recent English setbacks in France, the swan represents Humphrey duke of Gloucester, the white lion: John de Mowbray duke of Norfolk, the talbot dog: John Talbot earl of Shrewsbury, the bear and ragged staff: Richard Neville earl of Warwick, and so on.⁸² But perhaps the most famous example of personages appearing under the guise of their heraldic beast-badge occurs in that well-known late medieval lampoon aimed at Richard III and his supporters:

⁸² Robert Gayre of Gayre and Nigg, *Heraldic Standards and Other Ensigns* (Edinburgh. 1959), pp. 93–95, and Siddons *Badges* vol. I, pp. 94–95; Klingender pp. 371–72.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

*The Cat, the Rat and Lovell our Dog,
Rule all England under a Hog*

The boar was Richard III, the cat: Sir William Catesby, whose device was a spotted cat, the rat: Sir Richard Ratcliff, and the dog or wolf: Lord Lovell, whose crest was a wolf (*lupellas*). Other bird- and beast-badges symbolised their owners in prophetic texts foretelling future political developments.⁸³

Central Asia and Byzantium helped supply the burgeoning new world of western European heraldry not only with exotic beats and birds, such as the griffin and double-headed eagle, but also the stylised heraldic poses for these and other creatures.⁸⁴ They include the passant and rampant positions for beasts and wings displayed for birds. Examples of proto-heraldic eagles, lions and griffins can, for example, be seen today in mosaics in the Palazzo Reale (Royal Palace), at Palermo, Sicily, built by Roger II and his successor William I in the 1160s.⁸⁵ One transmission that did not, however, survive beyond the very earliest days was the tail shown between the legs of beasts – presumably because this came to be associated with fear – hardly a virtuous attribute for the belligerent knight.⁸⁶ Whilst ancient, Classical and Byzantine examples clearly influenced early heraldic bird and beast charges, so too did the imaginative miniatures of the early medieval bestiary, which, like the first coats of arms, straddled the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. This was more a case of evolution than creation.

Whatever the breed, whether real or mythological, animal and bird charges in medieval heraldry tended to be dynamic, vibrant, and often symbolic. Above all, these heraldic birds and beasts made a striking visual impact, perhaps more so than the simple geometric ordinaries such as the chevron. They were, therefore, memorable – an essential quality when it came to identification and recognition. The probability is that, apart from church decoration, seals and coins, the occasional embroidered costume or material artefact, and maybe fairs, it would be in heraldic art and sculpture that most folk encountered many of the non-domestic and fanciful species discussed in this paper. A closer examination of their use in heraldry, their stylistic origins, and what heraldic treatises in particular have to offer might well help us in our understanding of changing attitudes to the animal world in the Middle Ages and the ways in which contemporaries sought to comprehend and learn from the expanding animal kingdom around them.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ailes *HME*, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Pastoureaux, *Bear*, pp. 46, 138; Hicks, 'Borders of the Bayeux Tapestry'; *Byzantium*, ed. Buckton, pp. 17, 153; Maguire, *Image and Imagination in Byzantine Art*, p. 1047 and Figure 19; Klingender, pp. 268–76, 459; Mode, *Fabulous Beasts and Demons*, pp. 101, 127–28, 170–71; Ashley, 'Anglo-Norman Elite Objects from Castle and Countryside', pp. 292, 295, 296.

⁸⁵ Klingender, pp. 272–74, and see also pp. 278–81, 304–7, 390.

⁸⁶ As seen at Palermo and, for example, on the mosaic in the monastery of Ganagobie, Alpes de Haute-Provence dating to about 1124 (Arian and Christian Delacampagne, *Here be Dragons: A Fantastic Bestiary* (Princeton and Oxford, 2003), Figure 142) and on a shield in the mid-twelfth century Pliny, 'Natural History' from Le Mans (see above). Hicks discusses this position of the tail ('Borders of the Bayeux Tapestry', p. 259).

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Steven Ashley for having read a draft of this paper and for making a number of useful suggestions.