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Heraldry in Contact

Perspectives and Challenges of a Connective Image Form

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Urte Krass and Miguel Metelo de Seixas

In 2012, the football club Real Madrid planned to build a theme park, the »Real Madrid Resort Island«. Not in Spain, but in Ras-al-Khaimah, in the United Arab Emirates. The investment of one billion dollars included a marina and yacht club to be shaped like the Real Madrid crest (fig. 1). This coat of arms consists of the club's initials, M, C, and F (Madrid Club de Fútbol) and of the royal crown, since in 1920, Alfonso XIII awarded the club the royal title »Real«. The heraldic royal crown of Spain is topped by a sphere surmounted by the cross. In the Islamic region, however, Christian symbolism seemed out of place. Very soon after the first negotiations with Arabian sponsors, the decision was taken that the crest of the football club should be altered

Fig. 1: Project visualization of the Real Madrid Island Resort, Al Marjan, Ras-al-Khaimah, UAE.

Fig. 2: Real Madrid crest with and without the Christian cross.

specially to fit its new regional context: The royal crown would lose its cross (fig. 2) – in order to »be sensitive towards parts of the Gulf that are quite sensitive to products that hold the cross« (Cromwell 2017). These are the words of MARKA, the most important advertising agency of the Persian Gulf. The altered version of the Real Madrid coat of arms is a recent example of transcultural negotiations affecting heraldic forms.

The outcome of these negotiations is, of course, the reverse of the imposition of European heraldry on non-Christian territories in the 15th and 16th centuries. The famous Waldseemüller map of 1507, for example, (fig. 3) shows a part of South Africa marked by the presence of a huge elephant and a tribe of naked men armed with bows and sticks. In this cartographic image, we also see the line of *padrões* running around the coasts of the African continent. *Padrões* are the stone pillars that the Portuguese explorers left in the 15th and 16th centuries on the African coastline to record their most important landfalls (see the contribution to this volume by Jessica Barker). Each one consists of a long column, the royal coat of arms, an inscription above that, and the Christian cross on top. These *padrões* were the first visualizations of the Portuguese claim of territory. They were pre-fabricated in Portugal from limestone. The inscription, however, was most probably carved into the object only by the time they were set in place. These columns were heavy cargo and not easy to erect. And they were hard to carry away – although not terribly hard to destroy or throw off the cliffs on which they stood, which was the fate that many of these land claim markers shared in the centuries following their erection. *Padrões* visualized the fusing of political and religious interests in the Portuguese campaigns of conquest. An interesting element in Waldseemüller's map is that one of these *padrões* has been

Fig. 3: Detail of Martin Waldseemüller's map, *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespucii aliorumque lustrationes*, Strasbourg 1507.

Fig. 4: Detail of Afro-Portuguese oliphant, Sierra Leone, c. 1500, Provincial Museum of Pontevedra.

Fig. 6: Ave Maria bowl with the Portuguese royal arms, porcelain, Ming Dynasty, Jiajing period, c. 1540, Lisbon, Museu Medeiros e Almeida.

Fig. 5: Ivory salt-cellar, Sierra Leone, c. 1490–1520, London, British Museum.

placed not only next to the naked African warriors, but its cross actually overlaps with the feet of two of these men. The makers of the map might have wanted to express through this detail that the Portuguese did not only lay claim on the land of Africa, but also on its inhabitants who would be converted to Christendom. The coat of arms including the cross is literally imposed on the local people.

Soon after the erection of the first *padrões* on the west coast of Africa, African artists began including Portuguese coats of arms into objects carved from ivory (fig. 4). One example is an oliphant from Sierra Leone that was probably made between 1494 and 1500 by order of King Manuel I of Portugal (see the contribution by Luís Urbano Afonso and Miguel Metelo de Seixas). Local artists, trained in ivory carving long before, now had to tackle a novel type of image. Perhaps a salt cellar from the British Museum (fig. 5) bears witness to the early phase of this object group, as here, the coat of arms is wrongly positioned upside down on the surface of the container (Levenson 2007, 68 and cat. A-6). The same error can be found in a series of early

porcelain objects containing European heraldic decoration (fig. 6): the cups made in Jiangxi around 1540, decorated with the armillary sphere (as badge of King João III) and the Portuguese royal arms upside down (Santos 2007: I, 138–143). This may be dismissed as a mistake, but unlike the two examples of heraldry in transcultural contact situations described above (the censorship of the European coat of arms in the UAE and the literal imposition of the European coat of arms on the local populations in Africa), the way in which the ivory carvers on the African west coast, as well as Chinese porcelain-makers, grapple with the coats of arms testifies to an early process of creative imitation – if not yet appropriation – of this European device. While the monumental heavy *padrões* were intended for permanent placement at their respective locations, the ivory oliphants and salt cellars as well as the porcelain bowls were destined for shipment to Europe. They were thus the first objects that brought back European heraldry as perceived through the eyes of African and Asian artists and craftsmen, integrated into new kinds of objects made from rare materials with hybrid stylistic characteristics novel in European collections and markets. These objects inverted the Western gaze; they provided a retro-reflection of European heraldry, and judging by the quantity of African ivory artifacts and Chinese porcelain that show European coats of arms, European consumers must have been fascinated by this new inversion of familiar imagery. After, initially, the Portuguese royal coat of arms had been brought to equatorial Africa in the 15th century through the *padrões*, soon coats of arms of individual representatives followed: Royal arms were displayed alongside those of the king's envoys, bishops, governors of provinces or forteresses, commanders of fleets or vessels, high-ranking officers, noblemen, etc., including sometimes simple merchants. A new phase was reached around 1500, when the Manikongo – the ruler of the Congo who had converted to Christendom – was awarded his own coat of arms by King Manuel I of Portugal (see the contribution by Pedro Sameiro).

People across time and regions have used heraldry to negotiate and visualise the terms of their contacts. Some individual studies have showcased how worthwile it is to follow the renderings of coats of arms on journeys to continents other than Europe in early modernity. Mónica Domínguez Torres, for one, has focused on indigenous heraldry in colonial Mexico and Peru. By analyzing several case studies, she concludes that these coats of arms were not simply visual manifestations of the process of acculturation undergone by native communities in the »New World«, but that indigenous coats of arms could function »as tools of political and cultural negotiation and, in some instances, even as arenas of contestation« (Domínguez Torres 2012, 98). In another article, Gerardo Gutiérrez has searched for the reasons why, in central Mexico, Nahua political systems adopoted royal Spanish heraldry. A close reading of a case study enabled him to compare and contrast indigenous narratives of allegiance and resistance to Spanish colonialism (Gutiérrez 2015). Mexico and Peru seem to be particularly interesting regions for this research question. Not only were indigenous iconographies and events related to the Spanish conquest incorporated as heraldic charges into the coats of arms of the conquistadores, but in these regions, even before the arrival of the Spanish, there did exist what one might call a pre-Columbian Mesoamerican »heraldry«: Indigenous political visual codes used a complex system of military insignia to honour victorious fighters and to mark institutionalised hierarchies, ethnic affiliation, and geographic origins (Gutiérrez 2015; Olivier 2008; Galarza 1987, 95): Here, thus, »the European coat of arms would have been a readily understandable device.« (Haskett 1996, 105).

In a display case in the Weltmuseum in Vienna we find an intriguing juxtaposition of two feather objects produced in Mexico (fig. 7). Both objects are dated to the years after the Spanish conquest (Feest 1996). One of them, an object classified as »insignia or fan«, shows a butterfly in its center. Feather fans like this were used in Aztec times as badges of rank or office, as symbols for messengers, ambassadors, and travelers. Next to it in the vitrine lies a Christian miter made from hummingbird feathers at more or less the same time. This object exhibits a shield bearing the Jerusalem cross and coats of arms in silk embroidery that were stitched on at a later time to personalize the miter for the bishop who wore it. The exhibition situation impressively demonstrates that in many cases European heraldic image culture entered contexts abroad in which similar sign systems and insignia that functioned – like heraldry – on the basis of a highly codified visual symbols were already in use (see also the contribution of Julia Hartmann on the Japanese Mon). As has been ascertained recently, the »Aztec« butterfly insignia was made after the arrival of the Spaniards, which means that there was a time when different emblematic sign systems were used side by side. The Meso-American contact zones are only one example of this phenomenon.

Fig. 7: Insignia or fan (exhibited next to Christian mitre), Mexico, 16th century, Vienna, Weltmuseum.

Thinking about European heraldry in African, Asian, and American regions is, to be sure, a Eurocentric endeavor as we follow European actors spreading a European pictorial phenomenon into regions where Europeans often forcibly inserted themselves. Despite its Eurocentricity, however, our overarching question serves as an attempt to learn more about the modalities of negotiation in contact zones. To what extent were local actors able to develop their own attitude towards invasive and invading colonisers and missionaries by adopting and transforming the European image form of the coat of arms?

These themes formed the basis of a conference held at the University of Bern at the end of January 2020. It was a small conference with only seven contributors from various countries (Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Mexico, Portugal, and Switzerland). And it was the beginning of the collaboration between the two editors of this book, who decided to take the topic seriously and explore it more thoroughly. The plan was not to produce a standard compendium

of conference proceedings, but to try out a different format: a larger collection of short case studies involving experts from many subfields that could give readers an idea of the diverse and fascinating ways in which heraldry can function as a visual contact tool. The editors fused their networks so that an international and interdisciplinary group of contributors were involved in the creation of this book. The present volume contains 26 contributions by scholars of many disciplines, including in its core a number of case studies written by genuine heraldists. The result is not an all-encompassing and authoritative final statement about the topic, but rather a multi-voiced conversation in which different areas of expertise flank and complement each other. It marks the beginning of an open-ended research endeavor. All contributions have been read and commented on by external peer reviewers who were selected according to their respective expertise and furthermore, the finalized volume has been peer-reviewed, to ensure the quality not only of the individual contributions but of the volume as a whole.

The book's interdisciplinary approach as well as the temporal breadth of the collected case studies ranging from the 14th to the 20th century entail a certain heterogeneity, which was mitigated by the overarching focus on »heraldry in contact« – although the variety of case studies and methodological approaches reflects the dynamism and diversity of the topic itself. We have assembled the contributions into six chapters, proposing descriptive categories within which the various phenomena can be grouped diachronically and transregionally in a meaningful way. Thus, we have created a sort of unity-in-variety that allows functionally related heraldic case studies to enter into dialogue with one other, even though they may be far apart in time and space.

The central argument, one shared by all of the authors, is that heraldic images are a type of image that is particularly relevant in contact situations. The presumed origin of heraldry itself has already been seen as a consequence of situations of contact. Regardless of whether these contacts were warlike confrontations between helmeted combatants or courtly tournaments that led to the development of coats of arms to identify the participants, the new sign form of the coat of arms arose in Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries as a result of encounters between men who wanted to recognise each other. Heraldry is thus per se unthinkable without situations in which people enter into contact with each other: it does not (and cannot) function in private isolation. The military origin of heraldry has, moreover, been contested by the most recent historiography of the topic (Hablot 2019). This thesis regards not so much the origins of heraldry in the West, whose warlike roots are clearly evident in its visual and written lexicon, but rather as regards its subsequent dissemination. This was as rapid as it was comprehensive, both in terms of geographical area and in the social scale it covered. The importance of relating the first expansion of the heraldic phenomenon to the sharp increase in inter-community communications that occurred during the 12th century in Europe, at the end of a long period in which local or regional autarky was the rule, as has already been pointed out (Menéndez Pidal 2014). In a society where individuals increasingly had to make themselves known to strangers, the use of legible visual identification codes provided an obvious solution, not least because of widespread illiteracy. The reasons behind the success of the heraldic code are, therefore, very close to those that explain, for the same period, the diffusion of two other identification systems: onomastics and sigillography (Bedos-Rezak 2019; Chassel and Gil 2011). In this sense, it is not adventurous to say that the »contact« factor lay at the very origin of the heraldic code, and in its resounding and, in many ways, unexpected success and longevity.

Besides battles and tournaments, there were, of course, many other contact situations in which coats of arms played central roles: Marriages, diplomatic interactions, trade relationships, performative public displays, visual communication with the beyond, and, of course, multifaceted colonial contact situations including trans-cultural and inter-religious negotiations of power as well as the brutal show of force in asymmetrical power relations. More often than not, these situations were accompanied by some kind of use of heraldry. And it is the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon that we want to explore in this volume.

Heraldry is a complicated science in its own right. Coats of arms are one of the most heavily encoded categories of images and also the image category that has been theorized in the most elaborate way. It may be that the elaborate heraldic conventions applied to heraldry in Europe were suspended when they left the continent, allowing that specific image form to enjoy greater freedom on other continents than in its place of origin. There are at least three characteristics that were conducive to the success or translatability of the image form heraldry in new territories (besides the fact that, as we have mentioned, in some places, heraldic signs encountered related pictorial phenomena in local cultures). The first favourable feature is that the most obvious quality of heraldry is the economy of its means: Heraldry is a semiotic system which is particularly successful in saying much with limited iconographical and visual means. Secondly, in spite of this shorthand visual appearance of coats of arms, their performance is extraordinary: One important characteristic is heraldry's ability to signify time and space. Coats of arms can define and visualize territorial claims, they work as markers of spatial expansion, and at the same time they are vectors into the past as they can mark, for instance, the temporal extension of a family's genealogy or an empire's history. The third crucial aspect of coats of arms is that they can be translated into every medium and onto every support surface. As Michel Pastoureau puts it: »On peut dire que l'armoirie est une image immatérielle« (Pastoureau 1993, 315). This immaterial image can even work without a support, as already the written description of a coat of arms, the blazon, is the actual coat of arms. Even the heraldic colours participate in this same kind of abstraction: a field azure will always be a field azure, regardless of the shade of colour, in the gradation of blues, that the artists give to its plastic expression. And perhaps this is one of the reasons why the heraldic colours ended up favouring, in so many languages (but not all) terms that are used exclusively for their designation, based on old French words like *gueules, sinople, sable*.

Heraldry can offer fruitful insights into cutting edge areas of research related to the anthropology of images, visual (culture) studies, and questions of performativity, materiality, and mediality. In this volume, we follow the coat of arms into situations and zones of contact. Our collected case studies not only analyse situations of transcultural contact but also interactions of individuals belonging to the same culture who then use the coat of arms to negotiate the modalities of their specific personal contacts. Thus, a table made in connection with a marriage can also be perceived as a contact zone (see the contribution by Sasha Rossman). The volume thus brings together contributions that focus on collisions or interactions of cultures within processes of transregional connectivity as well as those that look at individual cases not of trans-cultural but of »inter-personal« communication via coats of arms. The aim is, on the one hand, to reveal the complexity that speaks from each of these case studies and to point to the almost inexhaustible potential of heraldry as a contact tool throughout history, as well as, on the other hand, to try and come to terms with how this specific type of image actually worked

or was meant to work in each specific case. In order to be effective, a coat of arms is dependent on human actors. Because it is, in essence, an act of visual communication, with its senders, receivers, observers, hermeneuts – and also, frequently, with its detractors, alterers, or even destroyers. All the authors have taken a close look at these respective actors wherever sources or image analyses made this possible. As Hermione Giffard writes, it is the people behind things, images and ideas, that matter, because »cultures can be carried by inanimate things, images or ideas but are created and translated by people who make active choices [and] it is the interests of actors who drive translation that should be the focus of historians studying cultural interactions (Giffard 2016, 30).«

The idea of the present book was not to cover the phenomenon in all its aspects, but to show how these aspects can be diversified both in time, space, and materiality – or immateriality as the case may be. The starting point was the colonial and postcolonial reality, already at the heart of the Bern colloquium, and which forms the first chapter of the book. In the first article, Jessica Barker analyses a privileged instrument of symbolic appropriation of the overseas territories, as we have already mentioned: the *padrões* that the Portuguese carried on their ships and which they erected in strategic locations to take possession of land abroad. But Barker's analysis focuses not only on the initial act of placing the *padrões* and their meaning. It also addresses the question of the survival of these landmarks in the neo-colonial and post-colonial context of the contemporary era. This diachronic perspective is present throughout the chapter. The second text, by Antoine Robin, also focuses on visual instruments of appropriation of overseas space, but on the part of the French Crown, namely through the Gaspé cross. And the third text, by Carlos López-Fanjul de Argüelles, approaches the use of heraldry in the opposite sense, so to speak, by trying to understand how signs considered as belonging to the »enemy« were incorporated into Spanish heraldry. Raphaèle Preisinger then draws attention to the construction, in the Mexican colonial context, of emblems belonging to the criollo populations, which later came to play a crucial role in the symbols adopted by an emerging Mexican nation in the 19th century. Finally, the first chapter closes with two texts referring to the use of heraldry in the post-colonial period. Leonor Calvão Borges shows how a European palace, the castle of Miramare in Trieste, was decorated with mixed heraldry to represent Maximilian of Habsburg, Emperor of Mexico. The final article in the group, written by Miguel Metelo de Seixas, deals with a complex case of literary recreation of the heraldic universe: the book *Romance d'A Pedra do Reino*, through which the writer Ariano Suassuna, founder of the Armorial Movement in 1970, proposes to use heraldry as a primary instrument of (re)construction of a Brazilian national identity.

The second chapter comprises three case studies that deal with heraldry connected to situations of diplomacy and gift-giving. Pedro Sameiro focuses on one of the first cases of heraldic acculturation of African sovereigns: the case of the kings of the Congo, converted to Christianity and attracted to the Portuguese orbit in the transition between the 15th and 16th centuries. Jumping a few centuries and changing continents, but always within the orbit of the Portuguese Crown, Maria João Ferreira and Miguel Metelo de Seixas examine the presence of heraldic elements in the embassy sent by João V of Portugal to the Chinese emperor Yongzheng, and their subsequent deployment in the career of ambassador Alexandre Metelo de Sousa Meneses. Finally, Julia Hartmann studies the complex case of the use of heraldry in the context of diplomat-

ic relations between Japan and the Netherlands, in a diachronic perspective between the 17th and 19th centuries.

Intercultural contacts were, of course, not limited to the diplomatic sphere. They could also reveal themselves in circumstances related to marriages and unions. In this sense, Luís Urbano Afonso and Miguel Metelo de Seixas propose a new interpretation for the set of ivory oliphants produced on the west African coast by order of King Manuel I of Portugal, bearing his arms and badge, occasionally combined with those of the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella. In the second text of this chapter, Francesco Gusella explores the meaning of the heraldry present in a peculiar object: a cup commissioned by Constantine of Braganza, viceroy of India, in which the author analyzes the combination of erotic, exotic, and antique elements. The last paper, by Sasha Rossman, seeks to examine the heraldic marks inserted into a table at New Hardwick Hall as evidence of hierarchical relationships established through matrimony, exploring, as the author explains, the issue of marriage as a further zone of contact and contract.

The third chapter in the volume focuses on performative objects and transcultural actors. It begins with an article by Simon Rousselot about a 15th century Nasrid sword, on which heraldic emblems can be seen that result from a fusion between Christian/Western practices and their adaptation to the specific political, cultural, and religious reality of the Islamic society of the Iberian Peninsula. Next, Hugo Crespo examines a Chinese-made cup carved from a rhinoceros horn, decorated with the arms of the Portuguese nobleman Antão Vaz Freire. The author establishes a relationship between traditional Chinese Taoist iconography and Christian motifs, in relation to which heraldry plays the role of mediator. In the third contribution,Tamara Kobel deals with an object of a different kind: a tapestry, datable from the late 17th century, presenting it as the result of the cultural intersection between exiled French Huguenots and the civic authorities of the city of Bern. The text by Ricardo Roque takes us to a very distant place: the island of Timor, a Portuguese colony between Asia and Oceania. Roque also brings us to a more recent era, between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. His text contemplates the use of the Portuguese flag, both in its monarchic and republican versions (i.e., before and after 1910), as an instrument of colonial identity construction. For the same period, Julia Strobel analyses the use of heraldry in the context of Swiss society as an instrument for the formation of a national historical consciousness, in a process of visual pedagogy applied to schools.

The fifth chapter examines the subject of »Cross-Cultural Layerings and Fusions«, grouping together a number of diverse case studies. It begins with a reflection by Emir Filipović on the creation of heraldry attributed to the Ottoman Empire by Christian sources, in what heraldists call »imaginary heraldry«. The author investigates a diversity of sources – which also corresponds to a diversity of heraldry. He concludes by describing a curious phenomenon, which has nonetheless frequently occurred: as early as the 19th century, this imaginary heraldry was transformed into the heraldry actually used by the Ottoman Empire until its eclipse in the 20th century. The second text, by Nicolai Kölmel, applies the notion of »contact« to an armorial object, a brass ewer now belonging to a Hamburg museum. The author points to this object as a case of difficulty in using heraldry as a resource for identification (and dating); on the other hand, he shows how the ewer's heraldic marks reveal the object's complex trajectory between Early Modern Germany, Venice, and Syria. In the third text of this chapter, Alberto Saviello also deals with an object: a 16th century ivory casket from Sri Lanka. This casket is marked by a

hybrid heraldry, mixing Sinhalese and Portuguese elements, which the author explains through the use of this object in the context of the political relations established between Dharmapāla, king of Ceylon who converted to Christianity, and the Portuguese Crown. Also in the sphere of Portuguese influence in Asia, Barbara Karl provides a broad perspective on the presence of heraldic elements in Indian textile production, in particular highly-prized »*colchas*«. Finally, Urte Krass analyses a manuscript written in Goa in the mid-17th century by a Franciscan, which comprises numerous drawings of a heraldic nature. As the author shows, this heraldic presence opens new insights into the way in which coats of arms could serve as nodal points of intercultural negotiation in that particular 17th-century contact zone.

The final chapter takes us to the Heavens. Or rather, to the use of heraldry as an instrument of contact between the terrestrial world and the celestial sphere. The first text, by Laurent Hablot, attempts to provide a general framework for the phenomenon of heraldry as a visual instrument of mediation between mankind and God. Or, more precisely, between men and Salvation. In the second article, Gregor von Kerssenbrock von Krosigk reflects on the imaginary heraldry attributed to Saint Maurice on the basis of a painting in Namur. Next, Olga Karaskova-Hesry deals with the subject of rabbinical reaction to the use of heraldry, establishing a reflection on the way in which a religious culture apparently opposed to heraldry nonetheless deployed heraldic images in certain cases. Finally, José Antonio Guillén Berrendero looks at the case of heraldic iconography linked to the figures of the Count of Olivares, famous minister of King Philip IV of Spain, and his wife, relating their arms to the discourse on spiritual nobility.

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