

Tristram and the House of Anjou

Author(s): Roger Sherman Loomis

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## TRISTRAM AND THE HOUSE OF ANJOU.

PROFESSOR G. L. HAMILTON in a recent number of this *Review* (vol. xv, p. 425) has written a characteristically learned and illuminating study of early heraldry and its relations to romantic literature. He there challenges my suggestion, stated in an earlier number of the *Review* (vol. xiv, p. 38), that Thomas, the author of *Tristan*, attributed to his hero the device of a golden lion on a red field, and my inference that Thomas wrote under the patronage of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine or of Richard I. No one is more grateful than I for the fulness of Professor Hamilton's discussion, partly because the subject is one in which I am, though ignorant enough, interested; and partly because I find among the works to which he refers much that confirms my own rather than his view. The point for which I am contending might seem hardly worth prolonged discussion, were it not that it is an important part of the evidence which I here propose to assemble, showing the special interest which various scions of the royal House of Anjou manifested in the romantic history of Tristram.

In trying to establish the heraldic charge assigned by Thomas to Tristram, I had pointed out that whereas M. Bédier could cite but one derivative of Thomas, Gottfried von Strassburg, in favour of the boar, there were three derivatives of Thomas which agreed on a lion.

Professor Hamilton believes that Gottfried's evidence is to be rated very highly on this point because, he asserts, the boar is a cognizance so utterly unknown in German heraldry before the end of the thirteenth century that Gottfried would never have adopted it unless he had had the precedent of Thomas. 'Down to the end of the twelfth century, at least, the boar does not appear as armorial bearings, nor is it mentioned as such in French epics and German courtly poetry of the next two centuries<sup>1</sup>.' This statement will not bear examination. Seyler, to whom Professor Hamilton refers, shows that in the twelfth century already the boar was familiar in Germany, if not as a heraldic blazon, at least as a personal badge. The *Kaiserchronik* (ca. 1140) says of Titus: 'Er vuort ainen gruenen van; Mit golde was geworht dar an Ain eber wilde' (ll. 5263-65). Again the *Rolandslied* of Pfaffe Konrad (ca. 1150) says,

<sup>1</sup> *M.L.R.* xv, p. 427.

of the Saracen king, Estorgant: 'Ein vanen fuorter ane there hant; Thar ane stuont ein eversvin, Alrot guldin' (ll. 4878-80). Seyler also figures the seal of Count Rudolph von Ramsberg, attached to a document of the year 1163, on which a boar appears<sup>1</sup>. Though the heraldic character of these instances may be questioned, no such doubt attaches to the boar which appears on the shield, housings, helmet, and pennon of the Margrave Diobold von Vohburg as represented in the Berne manuscript of Petrus de Ebulo's *De Rebus Siculis* (ca. 1196)<sup>2</sup>. When, moreover, we discover that in Konrad von Würzburg's *Trojanerkrieg* (ante 1269) the same beast is, next to the lion and the eagle, the most common charge<sup>3</sup>, Professor Schoepperle's citations from *Partonopier* and *Meleranz* prove to be by no means the irrelevancies that Professor Hamilton implies<sup>4</sup>. For they clinch the evidence that the boar was not a rare device in the thirteenth century, but was from the start familiar in German heraldry. There is therefore no reason for believing that Gottfried must have found the boar specified in his source; there is no reason for attaching special weight to his witness.

What of the three witnesses which I have adduced in favour of the lion? The Norse Saga's mention of the housings of Tristram's destrier as embroidered with gold lions on a red ground Professor Hamilton sets aside on what seem, at first glance, to be the most solid of reasons. In fact, I may confess to having been very gravely impressed when I read them. For Professor Hamilton maintains that the device cannot be derived from Thomas, who wrote before the Angevins had adopted the golden lions on a red field. But it is easily explicable as originating with Brother Robert, for we know that about this time his patron, King Hákon Hákonarson, adopted as the royal arms of Norway a rampant lion or on a field gules. The matter seems settled.

But does not Professor Hamilton contradict himself in this sentence: 'There is not the slightest evidence that Henry II did adopt such armorial bearings even if two, and three, lions are found on the seals of his successors to the throne, Richard I and John<sup>5</sup>'? For, if this evidence is not direct, it is at least evidence: and it becomes fairly strong when coupled with the fact that Henry's father, Geoffrey, apparently displayed

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Seyler, *Geschichte der Heraldik*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. E. Rota, pl. 36, 39. See also P. Ganz, *Geschichte der heraldischen Kunst in der Schweiz*, pp. 24 f.

<sup>3</sup> P. Ganz, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> *Romanic Review*, III, pp. 433 f. Professor Hamilton is hardly correct in assigning to 'the late thirteenth century' the *Partonopier*, which preceded the *Trojanerkrieg*, which in turn was finished before 1269. The use of the boar in French heraldry is shown by *Galeran*, S.A.T.F., l. 5931.

<sup>5</sup> *M.L.R.* xv, p. 426.

the golden lions on a blue field very lavishly on his clothing and accoutrements. In fact, this combination of inferential evidence seems to me distinctly stronger than Professor Hamilton's argument *ex silentio*. But it is not necessary for me to prove this disputed point, though I consider it fairly secure. As I pointed out in my article, Bédier's dating of Thomas's poem before 1170 has been questioned. It was possibly written as late as 1189. It was certainly written when fully developed heraldic cognizances were in fashion, as is shown by the description of the shield of Tristan le Nain<sup>1</sup>. It is inconceivable that at a time when the fashion was fully established, the king of England, whoever he was, should not have had his armorial charge. If this king was Henry II, we have a right to infer that his charge consisted of gold lions on a blue or a red field. If this king was Richard, we are practically certain that his charge consisted of two gold lions on a red field. There is, then, at least a possibility that the description of the housings in Brother Robert reflects a feature in his source, deliberately introduced as a compliment to an Angevin king<sup>2</sup>.

This possibility becomes a very strong probability when we examine the passage in the Norse Saga. If it was Brother Robert's intent to flatter King Hákon, he would have introduced an elaborate description of his hero's arms and armour, and have mentioned scrupulously the blazoning of his shield, his pennon, and his horse-trappings. But this is precisely what we do not have. The shield, the kernel of heraldic decoration, is unblazoned. Only the casual mention of the embroidered housings permits us to infer the charge on the shield. Since Brother Robert later became an abbot<sup>3</sup>, he probably possessed diplomatic ability: but is this the calculated flattery of a man 'to been an abbot able'? On the contrary, it seems clear that this heraldic detail possessed little significance for Brother Robert. The whole passage, indeed, seems explicable only in the light of M. Bédier's conclusion that the Norse translator is here condensing from his original<sup>4</sup>. A piece of studied flattery it cannot be: it must be a mutilated version of the French. The Saga, then, definitely witnesses to the presence of the heraldic lion in Thomas.

It may possibly be objected that heraldic housings do not appear

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, *Tristan*, ed. Bédier, I, ll. 2182-84: 'Escu ot d'or a vair freté, De meime le teint et la lance, Le penun e la conissance.'

<sup>2</sup> That this is by no means an isolated instance of heraldic flattery may be determined by consulting H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances*, I, p. 364, and D'Ancona and Monaci, *Una Leggenda Araldica*.

<sup>3</sup> H. G. Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, *Tristan*, ed. Bédier, I, p. 61, note 1.

until more than forty years after Thomas wrote<sup>1</sup>. On the contrary, as early as Wace's *Roman de Rou* (1160–1174) we read of a destrier 'tot covert de fer'<sup>2</sup>. In a mosaic of the year 1178, which formerly existed at Brindisi, Bishop Turpin was represented on a horse, whose housings bore the device of the crozier in three places<sup>3</sup>. If, as there is reason to believe, the *Tristan* was composed some time after 1170, further references are in order. The *Lanzelet* (ca. 1195) describes an 'isern kovertiure' covered with green samite worked with golden lions (ll. 4414–19). The manuscript of Petrus de Ebulo, already cited, which is of about the same date, depicts many blazoned housings. They are of the same type as that shown on the seal of William Longespee, Earl of Salisbury (1198)<sup>4</sup>.

The witness of the Saga as to Thomas's account of his hero's heraldic charge is corroborated by two other direct derivatives from Thomas, the Middle English *Sir Tristrem* and the Chertsey Tiles. The value of their testimony Professor Hamilton questions. He says: 'The reference to a "Lyou" on the shield of Tristram in the English version is only a rhyme-tag to go with "dragoun" of a following line<sup>5</sup>.' Now if it were difficult to find rhymes for the word 'boar,' which, according to Professor Hamilton, was Tristram's cognizance in Thomas, there might be reason to believe that 'lyou' is here a substitution. But since there are plenty of such rhymes, we may perhaps persist in the belief that it was not rhyme but reason which led the author to assign the lion to Tristram: and that reason was that he found it in his source, Thomas.

Finally the evidence of the Chertsey Tiles, which twice represent on Tristram's shield a single rampant lion, comes under fire. Professor Hamilton argues that we need not look to Thomas as the source of this beast, for 'it is quite natural to find the arms of the royal family of England introduced with intention in a work of English art of the end of the thirteenth century<sup>6</sup>.' Now I scarcely need to inform Professor Hamilton that the royal arms were then not a single rampant lion, but three lions passant (otherwise described as leopards). This the designer of the tiles, as we see from his picture of Richard the Lion Heart, knew perfectly, and he could never have supposed that in the single rampant

<sup>1</sup> G. Demay, *Costume d'après les Sceaux*, affords no example of housings before the 'housse de maille' of Robert de Montaut, on a seal of 1214, and no heraldically adorned housings before 1217. See pp. 179, 181.

<sup>2</sup> Wace, *Roman de Rou*, ed. H. Andresen, l. 7512.

<sup>3</sup> E. Bertaux, *L'Art dans l'Italie méridionale*, I, p. 498.

<sup>4</sup> W. L. Bowles and J. G. Nichols, *Annals and Antiquities of Lacock Abbey*, pl. I, opposite p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> *M.L.R.* xv, p. 427, note.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

lion of Tristram there was any reference to a contemporary sovereign. Indeed Professor Hamilton seems to feel the weakness of his explanation, for he goes on to say that even at that late date blazonings were variable. But the only support he gives for this statement is Konrad von Würzburg's confusion of tinctures in attributing three *red lions* on a *gold field* to the King of England. Now Galle has demonstrated that Konrad's heraldry is full of blunders<sup>1</sup>, and this error of his, far from proving that the arms of England were indeterminate quantities, merely illustrates Konrad's unreliability. The single rampant lion was not the device of the Angevins in the thirteenth century. It may have been, as we have seen, the device of an Angevin king eighty or a hundred years before. The lion on the Chertsey Tiles may well go back through Thomas to this early Angevin device.

Three direct derivatives from Thomas, therefore, concur in ascribing to Tristram the device of the lion. Many remoter derivatives confirm the point. Besides the *Tavola Ritonda* and the list attached to *Gyron le Courtois*, which I have already cited in a previous publication<sup>2</sup>, an English manuscript of the thirteenth century (Bibliothèque Nationale, Français 94) displays on the first page a red lion and above the word 'Tristany<sup>3</sup>.' An illumination in a fifteenth century manuscript of the prose romance shows a number of banners, some depending from trumpets, one floating from Tristram's ship, all blazoned red with a golden lion<sup>4</sup>. That this beast should be so persistently and widely assigned to Tristram cannot be reconciled with Professor Hamilton's hypothesis. For it is highly unlikely that Brother Robert's Saga was ever read south of Denmark. But once grant that this feature is due to Thomas, and the matter is clear.

My contention also dovetails into another set of evidences. I am convinced that the House of Anjou and its immediate connections took a special interest in the romance of Tristram. By whom and for whom were all the Tristram poems of the twelfth century, whose origin we can trace, written? The Lay of *Chievrefoil* was written by Marie de France, who dedicated her work to a king, universally admitted to be King Henry II. The theory has been advanced with a high degree of plausi-

<sup>1</sup> A. Galle, *Wappenwesen und Heraldik bei Konrad von Würzburg*, in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, LIII.

<sup>2</sup> R. S. Loomis, *Illustrations of Medieval Romance on Tiles from Chertsey Abbey*, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> E. Hucher, *Sur les Représentations de Tristan et d'Yseult dans les Monuments du Moyen Age*, p. 12, in *Bulletin de la Société d'Agriculture, Science, et Arts de la Sarthe*, 1871. P. Paris, *Manuscrits français*, I, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Petit de Julleville, *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature française*, I, p. 272.

bility that Marie was no other than Henry's half-sister<sup>1</sup>. Crestien de Troyes, who wrote of King Mark and Isolt la Blonde, enjoyed the patronage of Marie de Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Another daughter, Matilda of Saxony, after a visit at the Angevin court, caused the 'estoire' of Tristram to be turned into German by Eilhart von Oberg. It would then be in perfect accord with all the *a priori* evidence that Thomas also, a courtly poet, an Anglo-Norman, a panegyrist of London town, should have written for a patron or patroness of the Angevin House.

Another link connecting Thomas with the dynasty has been generously brought to my notice by Professor W. R. Lethaby. One of the Patent Rolls for 1207 shows King John acknowledging the receipt of his regalia, and in the itemized list we find 'duos enses scilicet ensem Tristrami et alium ensem de eodem regali<sup>2</sup>.' Romantic though the theory appears, there can be little doubt that this sword of Tristram is still represented among the present regalia of England. According to the romance, the hero left a splinter of his sword in the skull of Morhaut. After King John's time we hear no more of Tristram's sword among the regalia, but instead there appears 'Curtana,' the short (French *court*) or blunt sword. Its identity with Tristram's sword, though forgotten in England, was known in France, for the author of the prose *Tristan* (ca. 1250) says that his hero's sword passed into the hands of Ogier the Dane, and, being shortened, was called 'cortaine<sup>3</sup>.' When at the Restoration a new Curtana was made to replace the original, lost during the Commonwealth, it possessed a splintered edge as if the point had been broken off<sup>4</sup>. At some time since, this jagged edge has been smoothed off, and an interesting vestige of the hold of romance upon the sovereigns of the Anjou dynasty has been obliterated.

We may now recur to the Norse translation of Thomas made in 1226 at the instance of King Hákon. Dr Henry G. Leach has brought together a remarkable array of facts demonstrating that the King of Norway not only was in constant friendly communication with Henry III, but also patterned his own court in many significant ways upon the English<sup>5</sup>. His palace at Bergen was modelled after that of Westminster, and, as we have seen, he adopted armorial bearings similar in device and identical

<sup>1</sup> *English Historical Review*, 1910, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> T. D. Hardy, *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium*, 77 b.

<sup>3</sup> E. Löseth, *Roman en Prose de Tristan*, p. 302.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Edward Walker, *Circumstantial Account of the Preparations for the Coronation of Charles II.* Fig. unnumbered plate, 'Curtana.'

<sup>5</sup> H. G. Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, pp. 50-55, 110 f.

in tincture with those of Henry. Nothing was more natural, accordingly, than that on the occasion of his marriage he should order to be translated into Norse the favourite romance of the English court.

The Chertsey Tiles, again, are an indication of Angevin interest in Thomas's poem. I have already published the grounds given by Professor Lethaby for connecting this magnificent pavement with Henry III<sup>1</sup>. Executed about 1270, probably at the king's instance, it may have been destined for some royal palace and left on the abbey's hands at the king's death. At least, to modern notions, the incongruity of this passionate romance with the hallowed precincts suggests some such explanation. Nevertheless, when the nearly contemporary romance, *L'Escoufle* (ll. 579 ff.), shows us the Count of Montivilliers offering at the high altar of the Holy Sepulchre itself a golden hanap enamelled with scenes from the loves of Tristram and Ysolt (perhaps not unlike that preserved at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan)<sup>2</sup> as a receptacle for the Eucharist, who will say that Henry would have considered it inappropriate to bestow on the abbey this amorous imagery to pave their church and to furnish matter for the contemplation of the monks?

Finally, one more straw which shows the wind blowing from the same quarter. Though in most cases the information which the prose romances give about their authors and their origin is properly suspect, the version of the prose *Tristan* which attributes itself to Rusticien de Pise has not, so far as I am aware, been challenged. It purports to have been translated 'du livre monseigneur Edouart, le roi d'Engleterre, en cellui temps que il passa oultre la mer ou service nostre seigneur Dame Dieu pour conquerer le saint sepulcre<sup>3</sup>.' This particular bit of literary history furnished by Rusticien, which has so far obtained acceptance, accords so well with the other facts adduced in this article that it may almost be regarded as proved. And Edward I may be added to those descendants of Geoffrey of Anjou who displayed an interest in Tristram.

ROGER SHERMAN LOOMIS.

NEW YORK.

<sup>1</sup> R. S. Loomis, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Figured in F. Malaguzzi-Valeri, *Corte di Lodovico il Moro*, I, p. 557.

<sup>3</sup> E. Löseth, *op. cit.*, pp. 423 f.