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MYTHOLOGICAL BEASTS IN ARMORIAL BEARINGS: RUSSIA VS BRITAIN

Abstract: In our days long text is losing ground and being replaced by a form that is easier to comprehend. These are so-called creolized texts, where a significant part is occupied by the visual component. Heraldry can be viewed as such variety of texts. As a rule, the description of the coat of arms includes its drawing and verbal description. One of the most impressing and complicated in interpretation aspects of coats of arms are non-heraldic armorial figures, especially mysterious beasts.

The zoonymic semiotics is an echo of ancient universal beliefs. Heraldry is full of animals' signs with a quite conventional drawing. Animals of various species appear as almost all elements of the coat of arms, namely, armorial figures, crests, supporters, badges in English heraldry. The range of animals is not related to their actual habitat.

Beasts' images, especially mythological monsters, give opportunity to touch very ancient views, analyze and compare cultural interpretation of the world. This aspect is quite significant but not very frequent. Still in Russian and British armorial bearings there is mostly the same list of characters and their pragmatics, although the echo of Eastern concepts is much more prominent in Russian tradition. Russia organically takes an intermediate position in the sphere of monsters. As the kernel the state armorial bearings of Russia and Britain have the double-headed eagle, lion and unicorn.

Keywords: Armorial Bearing, Badge, Coat of Arms, Heraldry, Dragon, Unicorn, Griffin, Monsters, Semantics, Semiotics.

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МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ БЕСТИАРИЙ В ГЕРБАХ: РОССИЯ — БРИТАНИЯ

Аннотация: В наши дни текст большого объема сдает позиции и заменяется более понятной формой. Это так называемые креолизованные тексты, в которых значительную часть занимает визуальная составляющая. Геральдику можно рассматривать как такую разновидность текстов. Как правило, описание герба включает его рисунок и словесное описание. Одними из наиболее впечатляющих и сложных в интерпретации компонентов гербов являются негеральдические гербовые фигуры, особенно мистические звери.

Зоонимная семиотика является отголоском древних общечеловеческих верований. Геральдика насыщена знаками животных с достаточно условными изображениями. Животные различных видов фигурируют практически во всех элементах герба, а именно, в гербовых фигурах, клейнодах, поддерживателях, предметных девизах в английской геральдике. Ареал использования животных как знака никак не связан с их реальной средой обитания.

Изображение зверей, особенно мифологических монстров, дает возможность прикоснуться к древнейшим представлениям, проанализировать и сравнить культурные интерпретации мира. Этот аспект весьма заметен, но встречается не очень часто. И все же в русских и британских гербах во многом присутствует один и тот же набор персонажей и их прагматика. Эхо восточных концепций гораздо более заметно в русской традиции. Россия органично занимает промежуточную позицию и в сфере репрезентации монстров. В качестве ядра в государственных гербах России и Британии выступают двуглавый орел, лев и единорог.

Ключевые слова: герб, предметный девиз, геральдика, дракон, единорог, грифон, монстры, семантика, семиотика.

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Heraldry as a semiosphere is based on ancient sign systems but still is a product of the Middle Ages. This cultural phenomenon reflects all the complexities of the period, forms a bizarre hierarchy of meanings. Each nation and state have a number of cultural characteristics. They manifest themselves, first of all, in the area of the semiosphere, which is divided into a vast collection of diverse semiotics. Signs are means of identification: a human being, objects of reality, emotions, concepts, etc.

The coat of arms is a very specific symbol in all its aspects, but there were many inconsistencies and deviations within. Heraldry is one of the most complex systems of signs, structurally similar to a natural language or a text. Many components of the coat of arms can be considered in analogy to linguistic elements.

In our days text, especially a full-length one, is losing ground and being replaced by a form that is easier to comprehend. These are so-called creolized texts, where a significant part is occupied by the visual component (drawing, diagram, etc.). This type, in addition to comics, posters, etc., includes quite ancient samples. Heraldry can be viewed as such variety of texts. As a rule, the description of the coat of arms includes its drawing and verbal text, although both parts can be used independently.

Heraldry itself is a complex sign system that forms cultural texts and broadcasts them, including within the modern cultural space. Armorial bearings are connected with property, with the land exactly. Thus, it was as a mark of owning, and family coat of arms was connected with the arms of the area. Heraldry is closely linked to seals and monetary system. All the symbols were shared between arms, seals and coins. One of the most impressive components of coats of arms is non-heraldic armorial figures, especially mysterious beasts.

Studies of symbols, heraldic signs as well, give way to basic cultural and cross-cultural analyses. It provides a clue to national peculiarities and culture functioning. It is always relevant for today's study, especially as armorial bearing is quite productive in the modern socio-cultural sphere. The research is based on both Russian and English works. It concerns images of beasts in heraldry as one of the most stable cultural characters. The main accent is made on the mystical creatures in Russian as the native armory and British as the most fundamental one. The work is limited by the elements of land arms or close to it and just a few characters.

The socio-cultural values of the nation are shown in the coat of arms as certain symbolic elements. They were associated with ancient emblems and the path of development. There are many parallels as well as differences in the heraldry of Russia and Great Britain.

The phenomenon of heraldry is alien to both countries — it is borrowed. English heraldry is fully consistent with the European tradition, although it has its own characteristics. Britain organically embedded it in the framework of the European Middle Ages. Though Russia created its system on the patterns already existed [7, 8]. Armorial bearings are the sign of power so here are tight connections between the arms of a person, a family and a land, state symbol as well.

Within heraldic signs there are specific subtypes of charges (emblems): the honourable ordinaries, the subordinaries, objective heraldic charges (animals, birds, objects etc.).

The zoonymic semiotics is an echo of ancient universal beliefs. Heraldry is full of animal's signs. The drawing of beasts on the coat of arms is quite conventional. Variety of these figures can be distinguished. The most productive way is to divide them into animals, birds, fish, reptiles, insects and mythological creatures. Animals of various species appear as almost all elements of the coat of arms, namely, armorial figures, crests, supporters, badges in English heraldry. The range of animals is not related to their actual habitat. Thus, the lion is found everywhere in heraldry, including where it has never been found in real life.

There are also figures that are difficult to identify, such as a lion and a leopard (which differ mainly in its pose) [14]. Besides the creatures that do not exist in nature, many hybrid animals appear (for example, the tail of the beaver is attached to the body of the tiger, and the head is transformed into the head of the otter — on the coat of arms of the Irkutsk region). However, fictional characters raise even more difficulties in interpretation.

Several figures were selected for analysis. Their use is quite culturally determined. Here we can talk about symbolic homonymy. The accent is made on the mythical beasts widely used in heraldry. Among monsters such characters can be distinguished as: the dragon, the wyvern, the cockatrice, the hydra, the griffin or the gryphon, the unicorn, the mermaid, the sphinx, the centaur, the chimera, the harpy, the phoenix etc.

The topic of monsters in heraldry is extensive. Any aspect can be viewed from different angles and deserves separate research. As the basic point we have chosen state and land armorial bearings.

Any coat of arms is an identification mark. Such signs, undoubtedly, exist among all states and peoples of the world and traditionally fall under the jurisdiction of heraldry, although they do not always have the structural features of a full-fledged coat of arms.

For Russia, certainly, the double-headed eagle, which can also be classified as a mythical creature, plays a special role. It is the kernel of the state arm as a text. The double-headed eagle is quite controversial in Russian culture. Like many other mythical creatures, it has a long history and manifests itself almost everywhere. The double-headed eagle is presented in the art of Ancient Egypt and Assyria. In Mesopotamia there were also images of the three-headed eagle. In Antiquity, the eagle was an attribute of Zeus and Jupiter. In general, the eagle was completely traditional symbol of power and was found in many cultures, mythologies and cults, having the semantics of the divine power. In Europe it was also used as a sign of realms. Besides it was associated with God the Father [2]. Thus it is very difficult to discover its origins in Russia. Scientists associate the eagle in Russ with several hypotheses: borrowing from Byzantium, South Slavic countries, the Holy Roman Empire, the Golden Horde, and the Principality of Tver. In heraldic tradition the double-headed eagle is a sign of imperial power, and the single-headed eagle is a sign of royal power. In Russian culture there are many mythological creatures or bird symbols (some of Indo-European origin, some of aboriginal origin). We will not dwell on it in detail as there are many researches on this point, of the author as well.

Within the state Russian coat of arms there are several mythical creatures. Besides the eagle dragon can be mentioned. In Russian and European culture dragon as a character is widely used in different spheres.

The dragon is an ancient and universal symbol in world culture, which appears everywhere with quite stable semantics. The serpent can be viewed as a basement for the character. It is possible that the image of the dragon was transformed from the image of the serpent during the transition to a more complex structure of the social sphere. Thus, in archaic cultures there was the snake, carrying dual semantics, close to female goddesses who unite earth and sky (connection with water, knowledge, life and death), with hierarchical stratification and rethinking of social functions, the dragon — a largely negative character — appears. The word “dragon” comes into the European languages from Greek Δράκων (in Latin — dracō), derived from δρακεῖν — “to see clearly”, demonstrating one of its main characteristics — “knowledge”.

The greatest difference is observed in Western and Eastern symbolism in the field of semantics and syntactics. Despite the fact that the dragon appears to be a reptile or a creature close to it, in Western iconography it is closer to a beast, in Eastern iconography it is closer to a serpent (closer, but not identical).

A serpent is a mechanical combination of several animals. It is the same phenomenon as the Egyptian sphinxes, ancient centaurs, etc. Images of the serpent in art show that, along with its main

type (reptile + bird), it can be composed of very different animals <...>. Another phenomenon can be observed here. The serpent, the dragon, appears approximately simultaneously with the anthropomorphic gods. This is not an absolutely exact law, it is a tendency [6, p. 210].

Dragons are used as minor elements in both Russian and British arms (the sacrifice of St. George and the dragon of Wales). However, in Britain it is less dependent and has lesser negative semantics.

Dragons are divided into types. Besides the Chinese dragon — mostly a snake with four legs, there are Western dragons with four legs and wings or two legs and wings (wyverns). Chinese dragons are also different in images. Dragons are associated with water and fire elements and treasures, knowledge and power; they are guardians. Weather phenomena, such as thunderstorms, rain, and sometimes volcanic eruptions, are often mentioned in regard to the dragon. For the East, it is mostly a positive figure; for the West, it is an ambivalent figure, for Russia it is mostly negative one. For the East, the dragon is a symbol of creation and wisdom, the superior being, for the West — first of all, is cunning, greedy and evil one.

In Russian culture, the dragon is perhaps more closely associated with the serpent (including the serpent-Gorynych). Most often, the serpent-Gorynych is a multi-headed monster, which has analogues, to a greater extent, in Eastern cultures. The character guards the bridge to another realm, kidnaps maidens, and is also a negative character, associated with the devil or the enemy. It represents chaos and irrepressible power.

Here lives the dragon evil,
My master old.
And in the dragon's cave
There is no mercy, no statute... [16, p. 166].

As a rule, the dragon, especially mixing variety of a dragon and a serpent, acts as an opponent of the hero (here is the dragon-slaying motif of both pagan and Christian times) — Marduk, Siegfried, Beowulf, George the Victorious etc.

Returning directly to heraldry, both Russian and British, the following points stand out.

There is also a mixture of the images of the dragon and the serpent. There are native authors who use the terms as synonymous [4, p. 125–127]. P.P. Winkler distinguishes “dragon” and “winged serpent”, but without explaining the differences [3, p. 38]. Y.V. Arsenyev gives the following interpretation of the figures:

A dragon (Drache, dragon) is a reptile, but at the same time a winged beast, with a large pointed head and an open mouth, from which, as well as from the nostrils, a flame is often depicted. It also has an extended tongue and large teeth; its wings, like those of a bat, have claws at the end of the bones. Its front legs are like those of a lion or an eagle, instead of the hind legs it has a thick annulate tail.... The winged serpent (Lindwurm) is similar to the dragon, but differs from it only in that it has the hind legs of the lion [1, p. 248].

The emblem of a horseman, slaying a dragon with a spear, was associated with the history of Moscow. The horseman is mixed with the image of George the serpent fighter, although sometimes he is interpreted as a prince. In folk tradition, he merged with the epic heroes, defenders of his native land. In Western European books, next to the portrait of Vasily III, a coat of arms with that emblem was placed. So here we have some hint to eternal opposition of a dragon and a hero.

And near in a horse tournament
The image of George
shone above the serpent. ...
He remembered those glades
At the moment by his chase
He tramples enemy tanks
With their threatening dragon scales! [17, p. 350].

For Russian heraldry, the dragon is not frequent, appearing more often in the form of a defeated enemy (dragon-slaying motif), found in all coats of arms with St. George the Victorious, as, for example, in the Moscow coat of arms. Here, however, it is more of a serpent than a full-fledged dragon type.

The first emblems with the dragon, which later turned into Moscow coat of arms, appeared shortly after the Battle of Kulikovo. The horse warrior who defeated the dragon symbolized the liberation of Russian lands from the Tatar yoke and the formation of an independent Moscow state. Soon the horseman was united with the image of St. George, although sometimes he is interpreted as a prince, tzar or heir. The cult of St. George entered Russ from Byzantium in the 10th century. Since the 16th century the image of a horseman killing a dragon was accepted by foreigners for the coat of arms of the Russian state [9].

In the Kazan coat of arms, the dragon Zilant appears as the guardian of the land on the grand seal of Ivan IV. A character apparently dates back to the period of totemism, but is precisely connected with the local legends about the dragon living in that territory and requiring periodic sacrifices in the form of maidens. This dragon is not really a dragon as well, but a wyvern (a two-legged dragon).

In Europe, in particular Great Britain, the dragon was quite popular, although it is far from frequency of the lion, for example. It is a prominent figure in Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Viking mythology. In the coats of arms, it is represented, to a greater extent, as a completely independent character. It was a symbol of power and authority. Besides the incarnation of the enemy of St. George as the patron of England, as well as Russia, the dragon appears quite close to state symbols, being a badge of Wales. It is not represented on the UK royal coat of arms, but still exists as the traditional emblem. The red dragon of Wales was often attributed to Welsh prince of the 7th century, Cadwalader.

The Welsh red dragon was also associated with the Tudors. The red dragon was one of the supporters of the Tudor kings and was used by Henry VII, Henry VIII and Edward VI. However, Elizabeth I changed the colour of the dragon, as her supporter, to gold, her favoured colour. There are no evidences that the dragon on the Royal Arms was actually of Welsh origin. Though it was definitely used by King Henry III.

Certainly there is one more quite important cultural example of dragon as a heraldic symbol: King Arthur's sign. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth King Arthur had dragon on his helmet and standard for his father's name was Uther Pendragon, and he also had such symbol, so that the dragon was associated with Arthur and his father, though it was traditional symbol of the Saxons, Western especially [10].

An additional badge (on a mount vert, a dragon passant gules, charged on the shoulder with a label of three points argent) has been assigned to His Royal Highness. This action was taken with the desire in some way to gratify the forcibly expressed wishes of Wales, and it is probable that, the precedent having been set, it will be assigned to all those who may bear the title of the Prince of Wales in future [18, p. 22–23].

The armorial bearings of the City of London with two dragons argent charged with St. George's cross is known for long time (different resources give dates 14–17th centuries) [15].

According to Fox-Davies the dragon looks very similar to the griffin, it has four legs and a pair of wings. The dragon's head is unlike anything else in heraldry, with its neck, belly, legs and back covered in fish-like scales. The dragon wings are always depicted as bat wings. In general, he identifies many dragon-like creatures: the wyvern, the basilisk, the cockatrice, Lindwurm (in German heraldry) [13].

The dragon is depicted in various poses and can be black, red, silver, or gold (sable, gules, argent and or).

Fox-Davies identifies the wyvern as a variety of the dragon [12]. In English heraldry, the wyvern has two legs, a curled tail, and is usually depicted resting on its legs and tail. It is the image that is most often called a “dragon” in other countries. Sometimes it can be found sitting on its tail with its claws raised. Sometimes the wyvern is depicted without wings and with a curved tail. The colour of the wyvern is usually green. Often it is used as a crest, and in general, are more frequent in family coats of arms, as well as the dragon.

The next variety is rare — the cockatrice. The difference between the wyvern and the cockatrice is that the latter replaces the head of the dragon with the head of the rooster. Like the rooster, the beak, comb and wattles are often of a different shade. The cockatrice is sometimes called the basilisk.

The symbols of dragons are not very popular in land heraldry both in Russia and Britain. Although they are different in character, form and colour. Russian dragon mostly is a victim or patron of a land, for Britain it is patron. Russian dragon is presented as dragon sable or wyvern sable with wings gules. British dragon is presented as dragon argent in London coat of arms or dragon gules of Wales.

The supporters were not supposed to be recognized as quite important and stable element of coat of arms earlier the reign of Edward III. The supporters were changing even in the royal family. Monsters appeared e.g. as supporters of Henry VII (the dragon and the greyhound); Edward VI (the lion and the dragon); Mary I (the eagle and the dragon); King James I introduced the unicorn of Scotland [11].

The unicorn is a symbol of purity, the moon, strength and often white magic. The beast has extraordinary strength and wisdom, but only an immaculate virgin can curb it. The horn was used in medicine and was endowed with magical properties. In medieval legends it occurs quite often throughout Europe with approximately the same semantics.

Like as a Lyon, whose imperiall powre
A prowde rebellious Unicorn defyes,
T'avoide the rash assault and wrathful stowre
Of his fiers foe, him to a tree applies,
And when him running in full course he spies,
He slips aside; the whiles that furious beast
His precious horne, sought of his enimies
Strikes in the stocke, ne thence can be releast,
But to the mighty victour yields a bounteous feast [19, p. 57].

The unicorn is a mysterious creature with quite definite exterior, presented as a mixture of parts of different animals (horse, lion, deer).

The unicorn, however, as it has heraldically developed, is drawn with the body of a horse, the tail of the heraldic lion, the legs and feet of the deer, the head and mane of a horse, to which is added the long twisted horn from which the animal is named, and a beard. A good representation of the unicorn will be found in the figure of the Royal Arms herein, which is as fine a piece of heraldic design as could be wished [13, p. 158].

Its origin is not entirely clear. Probably, the image goes back to antelopes, and then, with repeated descriptions and redrawings, it acquired its current appearance. Apparently, the unicorn appears in European coats of arms as a result of the Crusades, when knights fighting encountered the wild antelopes of Syria and Palestine. They are armed with long, straight, spiral horns placed close together so that when viewed from the side they blend together. The horn that allegedly belonged to these antelopes was brought from remote corners. In fact, the horn belonged to a narwhal. The Bible translators probably also caused confusion by replacing the rhinoceros with a unicorn.

All the books on natural history so late as the seventeenth century describe at length the unicorn; several of them carefully depict him as though the artist had drawn straight from the life [13, p. 157].

On the one side of the small seal of Ivan the Terrible there is the unicorn, on the other — the double-headed eagle. Despite the unicorn was absent on the state emblem, it is found on the seals of Boris Godunov, Mikhail Romanov, and Alexei Romanov.

Tatishchev claimed that the unicorn was Ivan the Terrible's own coat of arms, but it is certain that Ivan the Terrible sealed his private correspondence with that emblem. It should be noted that on many monuments of Russian art of the 16th and 17th centuries there was a figure of the double-headed eagle, surrounded by images of symbolic animals: the lion, the unicorn, the dragon (or eagle) and the gryphon [1, p. 250].

Besides the unicorn presented Turkestan on great state armorial bearings of the Russian Empire.

The griffin is one of the hybrid monsters so beloved in heraldry. It is found in mostly all ancient cultures, as a mixture of the eagle (a front part) and the lion. It has the wings of an eagle and the ears. There is a version that the origin of the griffin was the result of a diminution of two coats of arms, the origin of the armory dates back to about the end of the 11th century, but the griffin can be found in much earlier time. The griffin can be depicted in a variety of poses [13].

The armorial bearings of the royal house are not directly related to the state symbols, although in most countries the coat of arms of the state merged with the coat of arms of the monarch. The coat of arms of the House of Romanov since the 19th century was compiled by Baron B.V. Koene. One of the few noble families that did not have coats of arms at that time was the royal one. The non-royal branch of the Romanovs ended in 1654 with the death of the childless boyar N.I. Romanov, cousin of the first czar of that family. To compose the coat of arms, Koene used family tradition and a banner of boyar N.I. Romanov. However, the banner itself was lost; the drawing was a reconstruction of the second half of the 19th century according to the description of the second half of the 17th century. The Romanov coat of arms depicts the red griffin in a silver field (argent, griffin gules), holding a gold sword and a tarch, crowned with the small eagle, on a black border of 4 gold and 4 silver torn off lion heads. Koene changed the colour of the griffin from gold to red (in comparison with the boyar coat of arms), which implies the Livland roots of the family (Livonia had the opposite tincture combination — gules, griffin argent, although the founders of the family left Prussia).

Baron M.A. Taube traces the Romanovs' griffin as a symbol from Mikhail Romanov's grandfather, boyar Nikita Romanovich Zakharyin-Yuryev, who became famous in the Livonian War. Although that symbol was considered the personal emblem of the boyar, who borrowed the emblem of Livonia. The coat of arms received by Livonia in 1566 was the coat of arms of Jan Chodkiewicz (the Polish ruler of Livonia) [5].

The Romanovs in the 17th century used the image of griffins as secondary emblem (the main was the black eagle). Some confusion and inaccuracy in the composition of the coat of arms of the Romanovs was aggravated by the fact that Koene followed the Western tradition in drawing up the coat of arms, without taking into account Russian specifics.

There is a certain peculiarity in English heraldry. The male griffin does not have wings, but is decorated with spikes. The male griffin in English heraldry is nothing more than a British development and form of the unknown continental heraldic panther [13]. The male griffin is very rare. Although we consider the griffin to be a purely mythical animal, there is no doubt that earlier writers firmly believed in the existence of such animals.

The topic of heraldic signs is vast. It can be viewed in different aspects. Different classifications would be presented by different list of symbols. Here is only the smallest amount of figures manifested in armorial bearing of some realms. As signs of realms are organically connected with family signs, sometimes it is quite complicated to separate different representations of coat of arms. Heraldic monsters in both Russia and Britain mostly of an ancient origin, were widely used in Medieval time full of symbols and hidden meanings. Animals reflect archaic beliefs, presented in the patron of the land or kin.

Besides there were hybrids as the melusine or the centaur. In pre-Christian Russ, the signs of a centaur became widespread. In opposite to the Western European interpretation, according to which the centaur is a symbol of the devil and vice, in Russ he, especially armed, had the meaning of an ancient political emblem. His image was very common in Russian lands. The centaur symbolizes fury, riot, intemperance, passion, nobility, strength, as well as arrogance.

There is no evidence that these characters are widely used in heraldry, especially in comparison with lion or eagles. Dragons are used as minor elements (the sacrifice of St. George and the dragon of Wales). However, in Britain it is more valuable and less of negative semantics. The unicorn relates to purity and the lunar aspect. Unicorns represent e.g. Scotland and Turkestan. The semantics of animals, like all other charges or elements of the coat of arms, in Britain is predominantly denotative, in Russia it is predominantly polysemantic and connotative.

For both countries heraldry is not a native phenomenon, so that the period of its formation took different time. Heraldry is a structured practice, it can be determined that British heraldry was not formed until the First Crusade (when the arms became inherent), and Russian one was adapted much later. Yet the social aspect of heraldry in both modern countries is very productive.

Thus, heraldry is a sign language, a means of intercultural communication, a reflection of national values, emotions and historical events. For Britain, the coat of arms is a special algorithm of life and a sign of prestige; for Russia, it is a political instrument and an element of the cultural game.

Beasts, especially mythological monsters, give opportunity to touch very ancient views, analyze and compare cultural interpretation of the world. This aspect is quite significant but not very frequent. Still in Russian and British armorial bearings there is mostly the same list of characters and their pragmatics. Though the echo of Western concepts is much

more prominent in Russian tradition. Russia organically takes an intermediate position in the sphere of monsters. As it was already mentioned, monsters are not very popular, although as the kernel both state armorial bearings have double-headed eagle, lion and unicorn.

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