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Lions, Hearts and Savages – an analysis of heraldic developments in early Danish absolutism

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This paper will be discussing what could be conceived as heraldic augmentations in the heraldry of the nobility in the early Danish absolutism. In this context augmentations are not understood as formal granted additions to a coat-of-arms, but as augmentations on a more abstract level. The focus is on heraldic charges that establish a connection between the coats-of-arms of subjects and the arms of the sovereign.

The noted Danish armorist Sven Tito Achen has described it like this: «[Charges] that loyal subjects take themselves (...) Sometimes a simple combination of colours, a distinctive partition or a characteristic placement of charges can reflect the influence of the arms of the sovereign.» Achen called this phenomenon «heraldic similarization» which perhaps is a quite fitting term.¹

Absolutism was introduced in Denmark in 1660–1661 alongside the hereditary monarchy by king Frederik III. When his son Christian V became king in 1670 the new regime stood its first test. The natural enemies of the new regime was the nobility who had lost all political influence and now saw more changes in the coming years. The society that came out of the reforms under the reign of Christian V has been called «the rank society».²

The emergence of the rank society rested on several phenomena; first and foremost, the introduction of an order of precedence in 1671, where royal officials were granted a specific rank according to their office in the absolute government. The nobility had no place in this order of precedence, unless they were officials

as well. Status and public standing was now determined by loyalty to the king and not by noble descent. This became even more obvious in 1679, when the royal officials included in the order of precedence were granted the privilege of personal nobility and furthermore in 1693, when the highest ranking three classes in the order of precedence were granted hereditary nobility. A whole new concept of nobility, based on loyal service to the king was the result. On the same day as the order of precedence was introduced in 1671, the privileges of the count and barons were also granted, and a new titled nobility was created with two purposes; firstly it was a way to divide the nobility and secondly, it was a way to reward nobles and others who were loyal to the king.³

Coats-of-arms of royal officials

It is of interest to us to analyze the coats-of-arms of the new titled nobility and of the royal officials. In the privileges of the royal officials of 1679 the king grants them the use of a special helmet and the king will also change and improve the coat-of-arms for those, who apply for it as a special sign of royal grace.⁴ A total of 61 coats-of-arms granted to officials have been examined and 30 of them can be said to contain charges that in some way relates to the royal arms.

The lion is a most popular charge, being the main Danish royal symbol; it is seen in the crest of the arms of two branches of the Benzon family, both arms granted in 1679.⁵ The president of Copenhagen, Peder Resen is granted arms in 1680, and in the bottom half

¹ Achen, Sven Tito: Similarisering – en forsømt side af det heraldiske studium. *Heraldisk Tidsskrift* no. 15, 1967, p. 209.

² Jespersen, K.J.V.: For dyd, tro tjeneste og mandige bedrifter. De danske ridderordener og enevældens rangdelte samfund, in Bencard, Mogens & Tage Kaarsted (ed.): *Fra Korsridder til Ridderkors*. Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1993, p. 60. See also: Henningsen, Peter: Den bestandige maskerade. Standssamfund, rangsamfund og det 18. århundredes honnøtte kultur. *Historisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 101: 2, p. 313–344.

³ The definitive study of the rank society in early Danish absolutism is: Bartholdy, Nils G.: Adelsbegrebet under den ældre enevælde. Sammenhængen med privilegier og rang i tiden 1660–1730. *Historisk Tidsskrift*, series 12, vol. 5:3, 1971, p. 577–650.

⁴ The Danish National Archives, Copenhagen, Danske Kancelli A 102, Christian V's adelige patenter (patents of nobility of Christian V), no. 22. [Hereafter shortened to Chr. V. Nob.]

⁵ Chr. V. Nob, no. 39, 40.

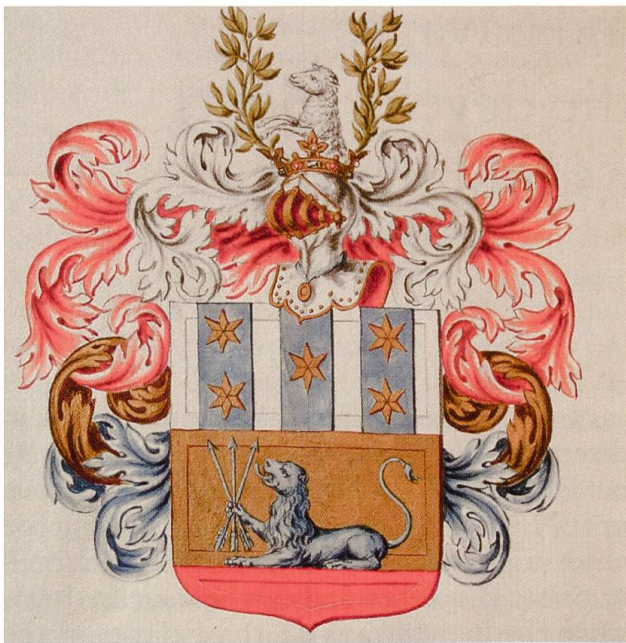


Illustration 1: The arms of Peder Resen, 1680.

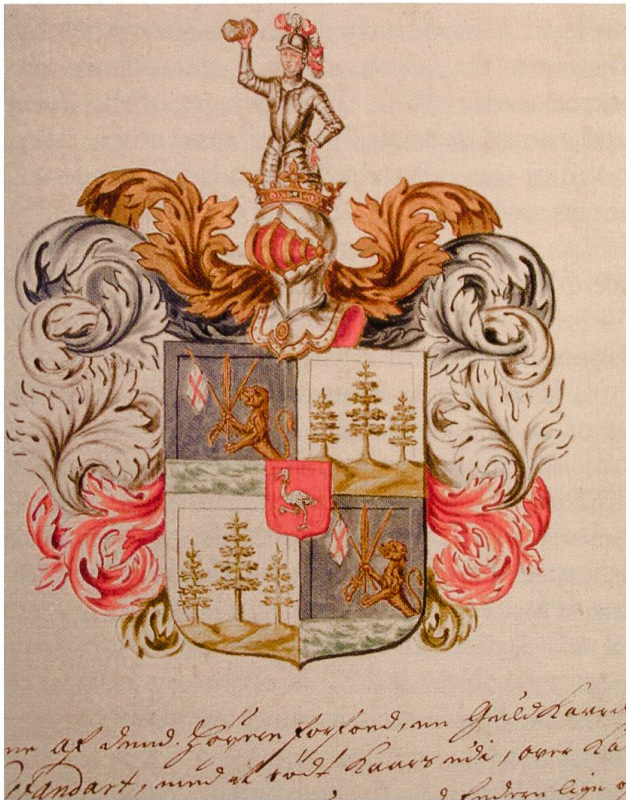


Illustration 2: The arms of Zacharias von Lemforth, 1688.

of the shield which is or is a lion azure holding three arrows, lying on a base gules – a royal lion in royal tinctures.⁶ (Ill. 1).

In the arms of the general prosecutor Christen Pedersen, also from 1680, the tinctures have been reversed, Azure, a lion or and for a crest three ostrich feathers in the colours of the Danish flag. Almost the same arms are seen in the 1st and 4th quarter of the arms of

⁶ Chr. V. Nob. no. 42.

Henrik Suhm from 1683.⁷ The brothers Nicolai and Lorenz Brüggmann is in 1680 granted arms, showing an inescutcheon gules with the crowned head of a lion or.⁸ The arms of Hans Christophersen Hiort from 1680 has in the 1st and 4th quarter the head of a lion, while the 2nd and 3rd quarters are bendy of the colours of the flag. The spruce tree in the crest indicates that he was a Norwegian. Another Norwegian, Zacharias von Lemforth, was in 1688 granted arms, featuring spruce trees in 2nd and 3rd quarter and in 1st and 2nd quarter yet another lion this time holding a banner with the Danish flag in reversed tinctures, a quill and a sword, indicating his service as an official in the war office and as general auditor of Norway.⁹ (Ill. 2).

Ditlev Nicolas Piper was not only granted arms in 1695 but also the name Løwencron – lion crown – and a crowned lion is featured in the arms. The first and fourth quarter are barry of the colours of the flag. Viceadmiral Matthias Paulsens coat-of-arms from 1697 contains among other charges a bend gules with two lions or.¹⁰

Another popular charge was the savage, derived from the supporters of the royal arms. In the arms of Peter Brandt from 1679 the savage is featured in the crest, which is also the case for the brothers Brüggmann, mentioned earlier.¹¹ The crest of Conrad Bierman also features a savage, but this time he is holding a stick entwined by hop plants, so the crest may well be canting. He was also given the name Ehrenschild, «honour shield», with the grant of arms in 1681.¹² (Ill. 3.) In the arms of Henning Weseman from 1682, the savage appears in 1st and 4th quarter. In the arms of Hans Bøefke also granted in 1682 the savage appears in the inescutcheon, while the club usually held by the savage is found in the crest. In the arms of Henrik Butenant von Rosenbusch from 1688 the savage is found in the second half of the shield and in the crest.¹³

The heart, a charge also derived from the royal arms, appears in a few arms from the period; in the arms of Matthias Moth and his sisters, the heart features in the 1st and 4th quarter – in the tinctures of the flag. The 2nd and 3rd quarter features a reference to the family

⁷ Chr. V. Nob. no. 43, 65.

⁸ Chr. V. Nob. no. 44.

⁹ Chr. V. Nob. no. 57, 77.

¹⁰ Chr. V. Nob. no. 88, 93.

¹¹ Chr. V. Nob. no. 37, 44.

¹² Chr. V. Nob. no. 53.

¹³ Chr. V. Nob. no. 59, 60, 75.



Illustration 3: The arms of Conrad Bierman von Ehrenschild, 1681.

arms of the royal Oldenburg dynasty, a field or with bars gules.¹⁴ (Ill. 4). A sister to Matthias Moth was a maitresse of the king, and she had been created a countess in 1677 – with a coat-of-arms containing hearts, among other charges.¹⁵ A heart is also found in the arms of Adrian von Temming from 1697. In the arms of Peter Bladt, granted in 1679, three hearts are found in a coat-of-arms with tinctures that could be derived from the royal arms.¹⁶

References to the Danish flag, the Dannebrog, or to the Order of Dannebrog is also seen. The arms of Caspar and Rasmus Schøller from 1679 has a inescutcheon argent with a cross gules, in the same form as used in the cross of the order, but here in reversed tinctures. The arms of Henrik Span from 1683 has a crest an arm holding a banner gules with a cross argent.¹⁷ In the arms of Butenant von Rosenbusch, mentioned earlier, Dannebrog is also featured. In the crest of Matthias Nummesen five Dannebrog ban-

¹⁴ Chr. V. Nob. no. 24.

¹⁵ The Danish National Archives, Copenhagen, Danske Kancelli A 100, Christian V's grevelige patenter (comital patents of Christian V), no. 13. [Hereafter shortened to Chr. V. Com.J, Bartholdy, Nils G.: Rangkroner og –hjelme under den ældre dansk-norske enevælde. *Heraldisk Tidsskrift* no. 41, 1980, p. 15.

¹⁶ Chr. V. Nob. no. 94, 41.

¹⁷ Chr. V. Nob. no. 25, 64.

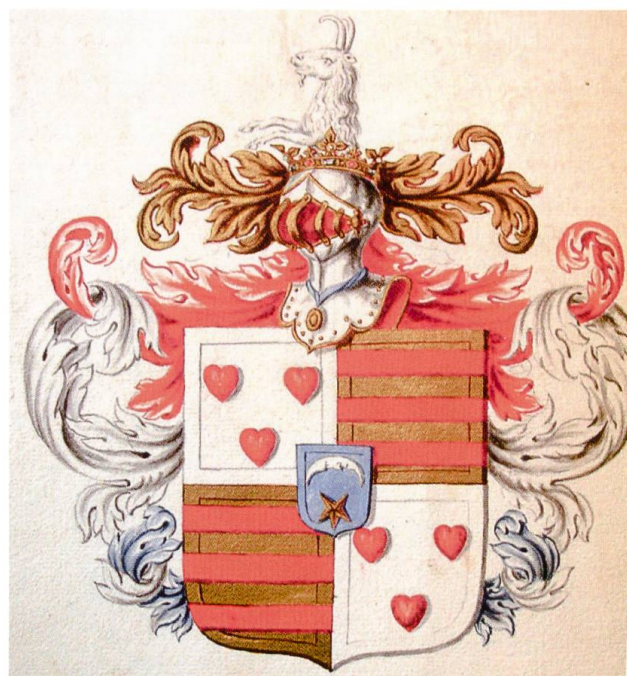


Illustration 4: The arms of Matthias Moth, 1679.

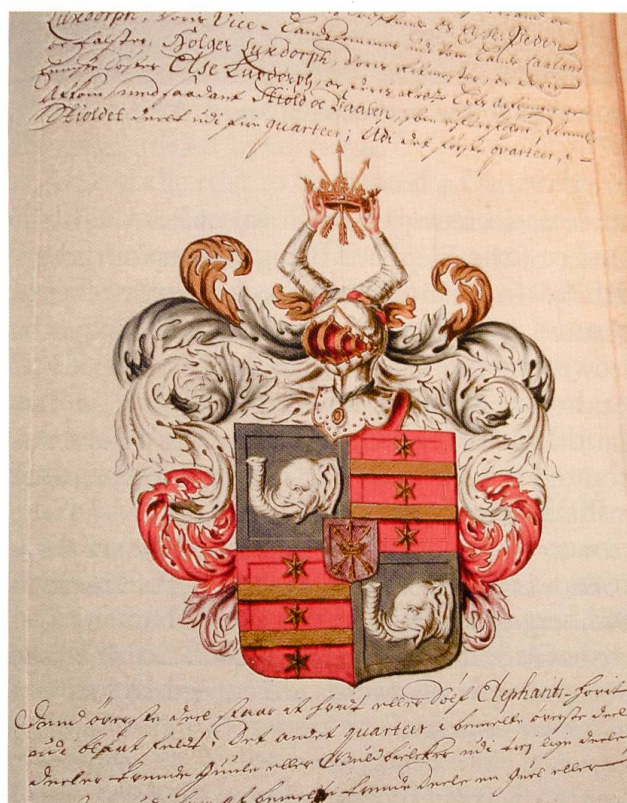


Illustration 5: The arms of Bolle Luxdorph, 1679.

ners are seen, and in the 1st and 4th quarter of the arms from 1688, the helmet granted to the royal officials are used as a charge.¹⁸

A very common charge in the arms from this period is an open crown enfiled by other objects; in the arms of Schøller it is three keys – appropriate for a chamber secretary. In the arms of Bolle Luxdorph from 1679 it is arrows – and the elephant heads is a reference to Luxdorphs

¹⁸ Chr. V. Nob. no. 75, 80.



Illustration 6: The arms of count Schack of Schackenburg, 1671.

office as secretary of the royal orders, with the Order of the Elephant being the senior order.¹⁹ (Ill. 5). In Heinrich von Stöckens coat-of-arms granted in 1681 two fans are enfiled by the crown. In the arms of the brothers Jens and Andreas Harboe granted in 1684 it is two gauntlets.²⁰ Major General Andreas Fuchs was granted arms in 1685 and it shows among other military attributes two canons enfiled by the crown. In the arms of Hans Rosencreutz from 1686 it is two quills and in the arms of Friedrich Weiberg granted in 1693 it is two banners that are enfiled. In the arms of Anthon Günther von Pottendorpf two swords are enfiled by a crown in a coat-of-arms.²¹

Coats-of-arms of counts and barons

In the arms of the new titled nobility, counts and barons, the lion is a very popular charge as well. The arms of count Christopher Parsberg, count Hans Schack of Schackenburg and count Mogens Frijs of Frijsenborg all have lions as charges in their arms, all granted in 1671.²² The lions azure in the arms of count



Illustration 7: The arms of count Griffenfeld, 1673.

Parsberg are in a field or holding a shield gules charged with a crown or, so a royal lion holding a shield with a crown in the livery colours of the Oldenburg dynasty. A similar royal lion is seen in the arms of count Schack (Ill. 6); in the arms of count Frijs the lions are argent on a field gules, the colours of the flag. In the arms of count Frijs we also see a charge where a crown is enfiled to keys, like the instances mentioned earlier. In a series of arms the lions are or, as in the count of Brockdorff's arms from 1672 and in the arms of the count Ahlefeldt also granted in 1672.²³ The arms for another Ahlefeldt, count Ahlefeldt of Langeland, also from 1672, shows in 2nd and 3rd quarter azure a crowned lion or rising from water proper. This in itself becomes the arms of the county of Langeland in 1677. A lion is featured in the 2nd and 3rd quarter of the arms of count Wedell of Wedellsborg from 1673.²⁴

A very illustrative example is seen in the arms of Peder Griffenfeld, the powerful and influential statesman, who was chancellor under king Christian V, until his fall in 1676 where he was sentenced to death for high treason. He was pardoned and spent the next 22 years until his death in prison. This son of a

¹⁹ Chr. V. Nob. no. 25, 26.

²⁰ Chr. V. Nob. no. 52, 67.

²¹ Chr. V. Nob. no. 69, 72, 84, 86.

²² Thiset, Anders & P.L. Wittrup: *Nyt dansk Adelslexikon*. København: Vilh. Trydes Boghandel, 1904, p. 210, Chr. V. Com. no. 1, 2.

²³ Chr. V. Com. no. 7, 6.

²⁴ Chr. V. Com. no. 8, 9.

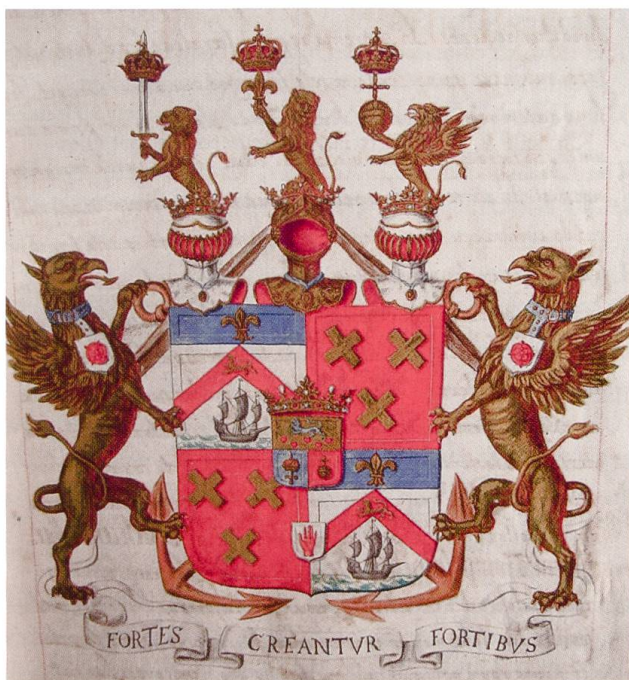


Illustration 8: The arms of Cornelis Tromp, count of Sølvisborg, 1676.



Illustration 9: The arms of baron Ruse of Rusenstein, 1671.

wine trader originally called Schumacher rose to the highest offices in the kingdom, became a count in 1673 as well as a Knight of the Order of the Elephant.

His arms is filled with references to the royal arms: The lion or leopard in 1st and 4th quarter is a reference to the royal arms – in reversed tinctures – and the base that is bendy of or and gules are a reference to the dynastical arms

of the Oldenburg dynasty. The hearts 2nd and 3rd quarters are a reference to the hearts in the royal arms, here in the colours of the flag. The inescutcheon has as a charge a griffin holding an axe; this is canting, referring to the name Griffenfeld, but also a reference to the arms of Norway – the county of Griffenfeld was in Norway.²⁵ (Ill. 7).

An interesting case is the arms of Cornelis Martin Tromp, created count of Sølvisborg in 1676. Tromp was a Dutch naval officer who for some years was in service to the Danish king. His coat-of-arms, who already had augmentations from the English and French king, was augmented with an inescutcheon with a lion azure and hearts gules in a field or, the royal crown and a sword and the royal orb.²⁶ (Ill. 8).

Supporters can also be a reference to the royal arms, as the savages in the arms of count Reventlow from 1673.²⁷ Lions are supporters in the arms of count Wedell-Jarlsberg granted in 1684, but it can be discussed if they are a reference to the royal arms or not. In the 2nd and 3rd quarter of the arms we see seven Dannebrog banners enfiled by a crown.²⁸

One of the first to be created a Danish baron in 1671 was Henrik Ruse baron of Rusenstein. His arms has in the 2nd and 3rd quarter to lions argent in the tinctures of Dannebrog – the lions are crowned with the coronet befitting a baron. In the 1st and 4th quarter there are towers with canons and the flag of Dannebrog, which is a reference to his office as inspector of the military fortresses.²⁹ (Ill. 9).

Baron Holck of Holckenhavn was granted arms in 1671, and in the 1st and 4th quarter there are seven red banners enfiled by a crown, and in the 2nd and 3rd quarter a crowned lion gules is standing by a canon proper in a field or. Furthermore the supporters are two savages. Savages as supporters are also found in the arms of Wilhelm Gyldenkrone baron of Wilhelmsburg granted in 1673.³⁰

In the arms of Godaert Adrian van Rheede baron of Amerongen from 1671 we again find a charge where a crown enfiles other objects, in

²⁵ Chr. V. Com. no. 11.

²⁶ Chr. V. Com. no. 13, Bartholdy 1980, p. 12, Siddons, Michael Powell: *The Heraldry of Foreigners in England 1400-1700*. London: The Harleian Society, 2010, p. 320-326.

²⁷ Chr. V. Com. no. 10.

²⁸ Chr. V. Com. no. 21.

²⁹ The Danish National Archives, Copenhagen, Danske Kancelli A 101, Christian V's friherrelige patenter (baronial patents of Christian V), no. 2. [Hereafter shortened to Chr. V. Bar.]

³⁰ Chr. V. Bar. no. 5, 10.



Illustration 10: The arms of baron Fuiren of Fuirendal, 1677.

this case arrows – and the crown is the coronet of a baron. In both arms of baron Juel of Juelling – he was granted one in 1672 and a new one in 1680 – we see anchors enfiled by a crown.³¹

As it was the case for the arms of Nummesen mentioned earlier rank helmets could also be used as charges; here in the arms of baron Fuiren of Fuirendal granted in 1677 the rank helmet of a baron with seven bars is used as a charge in the 2nd and 3rd quarter.³² (Ill.10).

Conclusion

It has been the aim of this paper to analyze the concept of «heraldic similarization» in the arms of the titled nobility and the royal officials of early Danish absolutism. The heraldic privileges and developments in the 1670's in to the 1690'es are just some of the several ways in which the absolutist regime tried to attach loyal officials to the central government and to divide the old nobility to minimize opposition. The social politics of the absolutist government succeeded in transforming the concept of nobility and indeed the whole society.

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³¹ Chr. V. Bar. no. 3, 9, 16a.

³² Chr. V. Bar. no. 11.