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MARCO MERLO, FABIO ROMANONI e PETER SPOSATO



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Stamp of the Teutonic Knights from the 14th century. (“Visitatorum Magister in Allemaniae”). Material: brass Deutschordens-Zentralarchiv, Singerstraße 7, 1010 Vienna, Austria Foto Frank Bayard 2012 Wikimedia Commons CC SA 3.0

The Black Ethiopian: Crusader King Ferdinand of Aragon and the Heraldry of Wallachia and Moldavia

by ALEXANDRU SIMON

ABSTRACT. The usage of human figures, “from head to toe”, coloured black continues to represent a delicate and controversial matter. In the cases of medieval Wallachia and Moldavia, the colour black seems to have been “genetically embedded” in their history, from the founding voivode of Wallachia (the “Black Voivode”), according to tradition, to the oriental name of Moldavia (*Carabogdan*), also rooted in the name of its first official ruler (Bogdan). The discovery of grant of arms made by King Ferdinand I of Aragon, in Perpignan (1415), to two brothers of Wallachian origin, in King Sigismund of Luxemburg’s retinue, allows us to readdress the issue in a larger framework. The said brothers, George and Valentin, the sons of Peter (*Petrusian?*) of Wallachia, had requested and received a standing armed “Black Ethiopian” from the Iberian monarch. They came from the extremities of the anti-Ottoman crusader front to those of the anti-Moorish crusader front. Nevertheless, the “Black person” on their coat of arms was not reduced to a decapitated head, but was depicted in a most dignified manner.

KEYWORDS: Ferdinand I of Aragon, Sigismund of Luxemburg, George and Valentin, sons of Peter of Wallachia, crusading, heraldry, “Black people” in the Middle Ages.

The symbolism of “Black people” representations in medieval Christian visual – political and social – arts, that is in various coats of arms (from the Archbishops of Freising to Thomas More¹), continues to pose numerous questions.² To them we add one coming from parts unknown for their me-

1 In More’s case, the black head however was on top of the helmet crest and not on the blazon.

2 E.g. Michael F. Schlamp, *Der Mohrenkopf im Wappen der Bischöfe von Freising* (offprint *Frigisinga*, 7) (Freising, 1930); Lorenz Seelig, “Christoph Jamnitzer’s ‘Moor’s Head’: A Late Renaissance Drinking Vessel,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T[homas]. F[oster]. Earle, K[atherine]. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge, 2005), 181-212; Joaneath

dieval interactions with “black people”, i.e., Wallachia, but for which the word “black” was rather often employed (e.g. *Negru Vodă* / “the Black Voivode”, that is the mythical founder of Wallachia, or *Carabogdan* / “Black Bogdan” for the ruler of Moldavia, called also *Bogdania*, after its first ruler).³ Explanations for the use of “black” rank, in the Wallachian case, from geography (in the chromatic geography of Eastern origins, black stands for the north) to status (black equals subjected/vassal).⁴ Considering also the altogether delicate nature of the topic, our focus will thus be quite narrow: on a coat of arms granted by Ferdinand I of Aragon to noblemen in Sigismund of Luxemburg’s entourage.⁵

Aragonese coats of arms granted to lords from the East of Europe in 1415

In autumn 1415, Ferdinand met with Sigismund in Perpignan, in the aim of accelerating the end of the Western Schism by determining Pope Benedict XIII to resign and therefore enable the election of one single pope.⁶ Even though Ferdinand and Sigismund bonded at summit in Perpignan, the Iberian born Benedict, also present at the gathering, refused to step down.⁷ Soon after, Ferdinand passed

Spicer, “Free Men and Women of African Ancestry in Renaissance Europe,” in *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*, ed. J. Spicer (Baltimore, MD, 2013³), 81-98, at 93 (note 19).

- 3 Adolf Ambruster, “Terminologia politico-geografică și etnică a Țărilor Române în epoca constituirii statale,” in *Constituirea statelor feudale românești. Studii*, ed. Nicolae Stoicescu (Bucharest, 1980), 251-260.
- 4 Tasin Gemil, “Cumano-tătarii și începuturile statelor românești,” in *Istoria ca datorie. Omagiu profesorului Ioan-Aurel Pop la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani*, eds. Ioan Bolovan, Ovidiu Ghitta (Cluj-Napoca, 2015), 333-342.
- 5 We have first addressed the matter in “Un negru pe blazon: cavalerii din Valahia ai regelui Sigismund de Luxemburg la curtea regelui Ferdinand I de Aragon (1415),” în “Multum laboravistis propter nos et propter bonum pacis et unionis: *episoade și reverberații ale Evului Mediu. Profesorului Ioan-Aurel Pop, în al șaptezecilea an al vieții*, eds. Adinel C. Dincă, A. Simon, I (Cluj-Napoca, 2025), 19-36.
- 6 Gerald Schwedler, *Herrschartreffen des Spätmittelalters. Formen – Rituale – Wirkungen* (= *Mittelalter-Forschungen*, 21) (Ostfildern, 2008), 459-460; *Perpignan 1415. Un sommet européen à l’époque du Grand Schisme d’Occident* (= *Geschichte und Kultur der iberischen Welt*, 15), eds. Aymat Catafau, Nikolas Jaspert, Thomas Wetzstein (Zürich, 2018).
- 7 Antal Áldásy, *Zsigmond király és Spanyolország* (Budapest 1927), 34-37; N. Jaspert, “Das aragonesische Dilemma. Die Heimat Benedikts XIII. zwischen Obödienzstreit, herrschaftlichem Umbruch und internationaler Verflechtung,” in *Das Konstanzer Konzil als europäisches Ereignis* (= *Vorträge und Forschungen*, 79), eds. Gabriela Signori, Brigit Studt (Ostfildern, 2014), 107-141.



„Herzog dispott in der meren Walachy”

„Herzog von Ascholott hider der Walachye”

„Thebemur aus der Walachei”

Wallachian related coats of arms in Ulrich von Richental’s chronicle

(open access)

away (spring 1416), and Sigismund had to resume his imperial quest for Christian unity, not only in the West, but also between East and West, in view of yet another anti-Ottoman crusade.⁸

In this respect, Ferdinand’s death can be regarded as an important blow to Sigismund’s designs.⁹ The Aragonese monarch had also proven to be a generous host in relation to a select few members of Sigismund’s, as usual, most colourful retinue.¹⁰ The count-palatine of the Kingdom of Hungary, Nicholas II Gorjanski (Garai), was inducted by Ferdinand into the Order of the Jar and Stole he had established.¹¹ Peter Cech (Cseh), master of the horse (and a member of Sigis-

8 Attila Bárány, “Zsigmond király 1416-os angliai kísérete,” *Aetas*, 19, no. 3 (2004): 5-30, at 8-12; *Causa unionis, causa fidei, causa reformationis in capite et membris. Tanulmányok a konstanzi zsinat 600. évfordulója alkalmából*, eds. A. Bárány, László Pósan (Debrecen, 2014).

9 See also Ádám Anderle, “Az aragón kapcsolat (V. Alfonz, el Magnánimo és a magyar trón),” *Történelmi Szemle*, 38, no. 4 (1996): 401-411, at 409-410.

10 Cf. Francisca Vendrell Gallostra, “Caballeros centroeuropeos en la Corte Aragonesa,” *Miscellanea Barcinonensia*, 10 (1971): 19-43 (republished under the same title in *Magyar Történelmi Szemle*, 2, no. 2 (1971): 217-241).

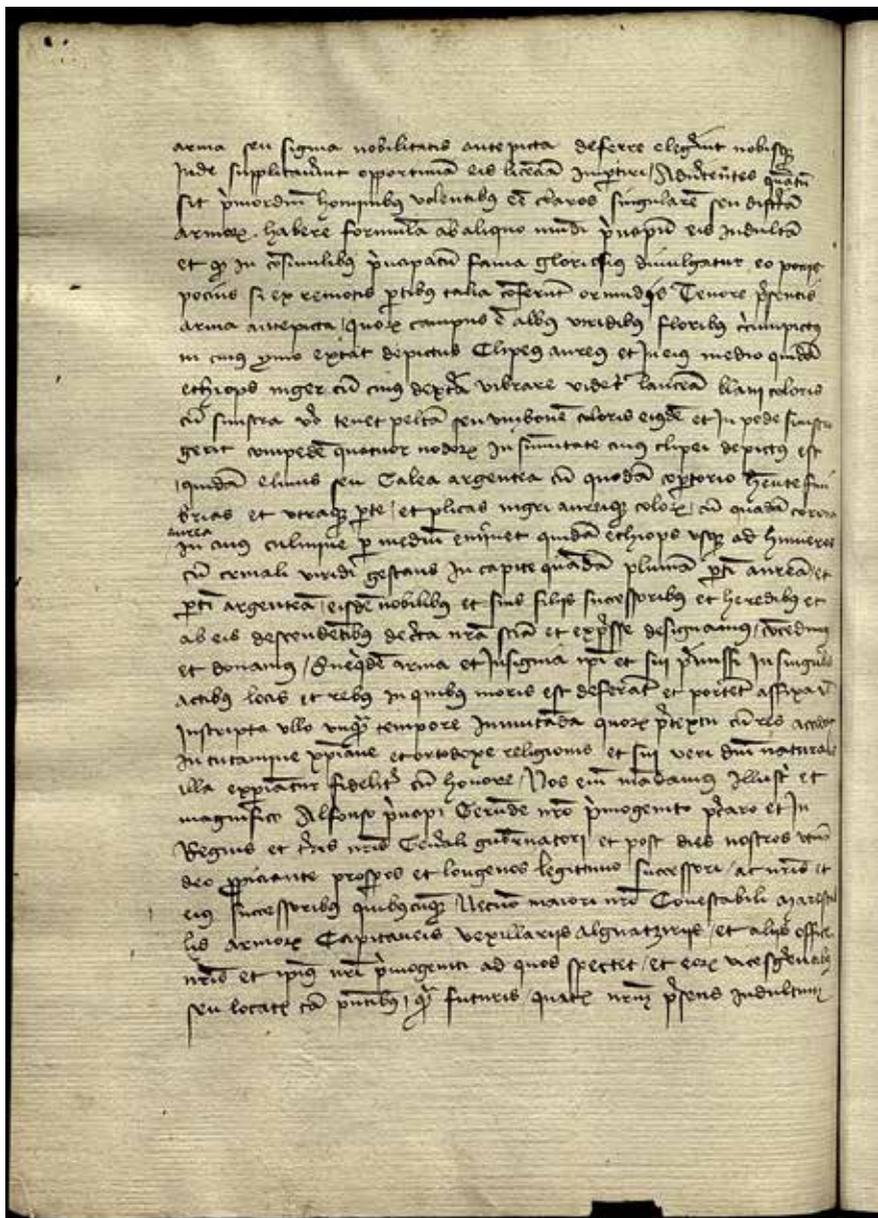
11 Archivo de la Corona de Aragon, Barcelona (ACA), Real Cancilleria, Registros, *Ferran I*, reg. 2391. 1415-1416 [=Comune Sigilii Secreti, <reg.>11], f. 61^r (20 December 1415; Vendrell Gallostra, “Caballeros centroeuropeos,” no. 7, p. 239; at that time, Garai had already left Perpignan, together with Sigismund, heading for Avignon and then Paris, where, on 26 March 1416, the palatine was granted a coat of arms, featuring a serpent, by King

mund's Order of the Dragon), and his kindred were granted a coat of arms.¹² The recipients of the other coat of arms issued in Perpignan, on the same day, were the brothers George and Valentin, Peter of Wallachia's sons.¹³

Nos FFerdinandus etc. Regalem decet excellenciam ex innexa potestate illis quj armorum insignia preter propria gestare desiderant si ea deuote postantur libenti animo et munifico licenciam elargiri. Cum igitur nobiles Georgius et Valentinus Petri de Valquja¹⁴ fratres oriundi Regni Hungarie certis respectibus et motiuis honorem ipsorum dilatantibus arma seu signia nobilitatis ante picta deferre elegerint nobisque inde supplicauerint opportunam eis licenciam impartiri, Aduertentes quantum sit primordium hominibus volentibus esse claros singularem seu discretam armorum habere formulam ab aliquo mundi principum eis indultam et quod in consimilibus principatum fama gloriosius diuulgatur eo potius si ex remotis partibus talia conferunt oriundis. Tenore presentis arma antepicta quorum campus est albus viridibus floribus circumpictus in cuius ymo extat depictus Cli-

Charles VI of Valois; Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (MNL), Országos Levéltár (OL), Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény (DF), [no.] 283583; *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár, V. 1415-1416* (=A Magyar Országos Levéltár kiadványai, II, 27), eds. Elemer Mályusz, Iván Borsa (Budapest, 1997), no. 1694, p. 466). On the order (established in 1403): Angus MacKay, "Ferdinand of Antequera and the Virgin Mary," in *Love, Religion and Politics in Fifteenth Century Spain*, eds. Ian Macpherson, A. MacKay (Leiden – Boston – Cologne, 1998), 132-139; Emir O. Filipović, "O aragonskom viteškom redu Stole i vaze u srednjovjekovnoj Bosni," *Radovi: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest*, 52, no. 3 (2020): 69-99. According to his tombstone (but not according to any known document), Stephen, the brother of chancellor John Perényi, was also inducted into the Order of the Jar and Stove by King Ferdinand (A. Bárány, "English Chivalric Insignia in Hungary," in *Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: arisztokraták Magyarországon és Európában. Learning, Intellect and Social Roles: Aristocrats in Hungary and Europe* (=Speculum Historiae Debreceniense, 18), eds. A. Bárány, István Orosz, Klára Papp, Bálint Vinkler (Debrecen, 2014), 73-96, at 83).

- 12 Cf. László Fejérpataky, "A Hettyey család Aragoniai czimere," *Turul*, 15 (1897): 187-189. For the coat of arms (with a crowned leopard holding a bleeding hare between its teeth): MNL-OL, DF 283583 (20 October 1415). A coeval copy of the charter can be found in ACA, Real Cancilleria, Registros, *Ferran I, reg. 2394. 1413-1416* [=Gratiarium, reg. III. 1413-1416, and *Gratiarium Sicilie, reg. I. 1413-1414*], ff. 104^v-105^r (partially edited in Vendrell Gallostra, "Caballeros centroeuropeos," no. 5, pp. 237-238). Previously, on 29 September 1415, while still in Perpignan, Sigismund of Luxemburg had granted a coat of arms to Blasius Buzlai and his relatives. The coat of arms featured a griffon (MNL, Diplomatikai Levéltár (DL), [no.] 71753; Zs. Okl., V, no. 1091, p. 313).
- 13 ACA, Real Cancilleria, Registros, *Ferran I, reg. 2395. 1414-1416* [=Gratiarium, reg. IV. 1415, mayo-1416, marzo, and *Donacionum, I. 1414, agosto-1415, noviembre*], ff. 147^r-148^r (the document, mentioned in Hungarian historiography solely by Anderle, was partially edited in Vendrell Gallostra, "Caballeros centroeuropeos," no. 6, p. 239).
- 14 Written above. In the text (erased): *Vallria, Valliria* or *Vallocia*.



The description of the coat of arms granted to the George and Valentin, the sons of Peter of Wallachia, by King Ferdinand I of Aragon, in Perpignan, on 20 October 1415

(Archivo de la Corona de Aragon, Barcelona, Real Cancilleria, Registros, *Ferran I*, reg. 2395. 1414-1416 [=Gratiarum, reg. IV. 1415, mayo-1416, marzo, și Donacionum, I. 1414, agosto-1415, noviembre], f. 147^v)

peus aureus et in eius medio quidam ethiops niger cum eius dextera vibrare videtur lanceam blauj coloris, cum sinistra vero tenet peltam seu vmbonem coloris eiusdem [...] (Perpignan, 20 October 1415).¹⁵

Their coat of arms had a black Ethiopian at its centre, depicted holding a lance and a shield, in almost majestic manner.¹⁶ This had been the request of the brothers granted to them by Ferdinand I of Aragon.¹⁷ Given that little is known about Wallachian/Wallachian related heraldry and chivalric culture (we are informed only that the members of the ruling elites had an eye for Western fashion,¹⁸ that Wallachians participated in jousts in Buda in 1412,¹⁹ and that Mircea I, officially still the ruler of Wallachia in 1415, had knighted a Moravian nobleman some two decades earlier²⁰), the choice of the brothers seems odd. Additionally, previously, the oldest documented coats of arms received by Wallachians/Wallachian related figures dated to John Hunyadi's time as governor of Hungary.²¹

15 ACA, Real Cancilleria, Registros, *Ferran I*, reg. 2395, f. 147^{r-v}. For the charter: Simon, "Un negru pe blazon," 29-32.

16 We advise much caution in relation to the "reconstructions" of the coat of arms granted by Ferdinand of Aragon on 20 October 1415, appended at the end of Vendrell Gallostra's study "Caballeros centroeuropeos," (drawings by Susana María Alkarovits). A comparison with Peter Cech's preserved coat of arms (in MNL-OL, DF 283583; of which the first editor of the documents was seemingly unaware) reveals very few common elements.

17 The text of the charter is more than explicit in this respect.

18 For an overview (in relation to both Wallachia and Moldavia): Adrian Ioniță, Beatrice Kelemen, A. Simon, AL WA: prințul negru al Vlahiei și vremurile sale (= *Minerva*, III, 14) (Cluj-Napoca, 2017), 47-63, 456-461.

19 Jan Długosz, *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae* (= *Jan Długosii Senioris Canonici Cracoviensis Opera omnia*, 10-14), ed. Alexander Przedziecki, IV (Krakow, 1877), 140-141. On the source: P[etre]. P. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân* (Bucharest, 1944¹), 133-134.

20 For the ring: Heinz Rohlik, "Rohlik," *Deutsches Geschlechtsbuch*, 219 (2007): 155-174, at 166. On the context: A. Simon, "At the Turn of the Fourteenth Century: Notes on Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Wallachian Princely *Stars* of the Fifteenth Century," *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis*, 19 (2020): 135-155, at 149 (note 82).

21 Dénes Radocsay, "Gotische Wappenbilder auf ungarischen Adelsbriefen," *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 5 (1958): 317-358, at 356; Ioan Drăgan, *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania între anii 1440-1514* (Bucharest, 2000), 198-202.

“Blackheads” and Turks in the 1410s

The summit in Perpignan was held after the beginning of the Council of Constance (1414-1418).²² Based on Ulrich von Richental’s posthumously published drawings,²³ the council witnessed also the emergence of “blackheads” on coats of arms associated with either *Walachia Maior* (Wallachia, whose official insignia was an aquila) or *Walachia Minor* (Moldavia, whose coat of arms had an auroch at its centre).²⁴ With one exception dating from precisely 1415 (the coat of arms for John Baróc Mellétei and his relatives, granted in March, and in Constance, by Sigismund),²⁵ no “blacks” can be encountered in medieval Hungarian heraldry,²⁶ to which the brothers George and Valentin, explicitly mentioned as *oriundi Regni Hungarie*²⁷ in Ferdinand’s charter, should have related their image choices. Amidst the controversies generated by the “unofficial” Wallachian state coats of

22 Philip H. Stump, *The Reforms of the Council of Constance (1414-1418)* (=Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 53) (Leiden – New York – Cologne, 1994); Sebastian Kolditz, “Byzanz und das Konstanzer Konzil (1414-1418). Beobachtungen zur griechischen Präsenz und zur vorkonziliaren Korrespondenz Sigismunds und Manuels II.,” *Jahrbücher der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 67 (2017): 43-64.

23 Ulrich Richental, *Die Chronik des Konzils von Konstanz* (=Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Digitale Editionen, I), ed. Thomas Martin Buck (Munich, 2019) (at <https://edition.mgh.de/001/html/>); Gisela Wacker, *Ulrich Richentals Chronik des Konstanzer Konzils und ihre Funktionalisierung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Aspekte zur Rekonstruktion der Ur-schrift und zu den Wirkungsabsichten der überlieferten Handschriften und Drucke* [PhD Thesis (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen)], I (Tübingen, 2002), 10-28. Futile to say perhaps that there is no consensus on Richental’s text(s) and images.

24 G[eorghe]. M. Ionescu, *Etiopienii în Dacia preistorică* (Bucharest, 1926), 47-50; Constantin Karadja, “Delegații din țara noastră la Conciliul de la Constanța (în Baden) în anul 1415,” *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, 3rd series, 5 (1927): 59-91, at 66, 81; Dan Cernovodeanu, *Știința și arta heraldică în România* (Bucharest, 1977), 77-78.

25 MNL-OL, DL 50512 (26 March 1415). We return below to his grant of coat of arms (first published by Albert Nyáry, “A Mellétei Baróczy-család armálisa 1415-ből,” *Turul*, 1 (1883): 26-29).

26 For an overview: Iván Nagy, *Magyarország családai: czimerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal*, I-XIII (Pest, 1857-1868); Iván Bertényi, *Magyar címertan* (Budapest, 2003). With focus on Sigismund: Szidonia Weisz, *The Price of Fidelity. Donations of Coats of Arms for Nobles from Transylvania during the Reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg* [MA Thesis (Central European University)] (Budapest, 2007). Apparently, Hungarian medieval heraldry was predominantly animal related.

27 The same wording was used in the charter for Peter Cech and no mention of Sigismund was made in either charter.

arms featuring between one and three “blackheads”,²⁸ the choice of black (head/person) could be regarded as a “Wallachian one”.

The safest explanation for the presence of the black Ethiopian on the brothers’ coat of arms would have been their participation in Ferdinand of Aragon’s much celebrated anti-Moorish actions of 1410 (the conquest of Antequera).²⁹ Nothing of the sort was recorded in the king’s charter for the sons of Peter of Wallachia. Furthermore, the standing black Ethiopian conflicts the symbolism of the four – decapitated/severed – Moorish heads, attached to the so-called Cross of Alcoraz, on the coat of arms of Aragon.³⁰ These four heads stood for the four Moorish kings that had allegedly lost their lives to Pedro I of Aragon in 1096, during/after the battle of Alcoraz.³¹ In comparison to the House of Aragon, the crusader “track-record” of Sigismund of Luxemburg was, in spite of his propaganda, debatable at best, if one chose to look away from the anti-Ottoman disaster at Nicopolis in 1396.³²

Therefore, as duly noticed by the contemporaries, a key part of Sigismund’s entry into Perpignan was a ‘Turkish king’/‘king of Turkey’, who opened the procession, not as a prisoner of war, but as the sword-bearer of the king of the Romans.³³ The paraded king had been defeated by Sigismund and had consequently

28 For an altogether excessively critical review of historiography: Constantin Rezachevici, “Stema cu «capete de negri»: înlăturarea unei legende din heraldica românească nord-dunăreană,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie A. D. Xenopol*, 24 (1987): 71-98. Not much has been contributed to the topic over the past four decades.

29 Pascual Martínez Sopena, “La conquista de Antequera (1410). Reflexiones sobre la construcción de la memoria en la Castilla bajomedieval,” *Boletín de Literatura Oral*, 6, suppl. 2 (2019): 295-310.

30 Maribel Fierro, “Decapitation of Christians and Muslims in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula: Narratives, Images, Contemporary Perceptions,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45, no. 2 (2008): 137-164, at 137-140.

31 Bernard F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under King Alfonso VI, 1065-1109* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 282-283.

32 Mark Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Imperial Response to the Ottoman Turkish Threat, c. 1410-1437* [PhD Thesis (Royal Holloway, University of London)] (London, 2014), 79-81; Tamás Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács: A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare, 1389-1526* (= *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage*, 63) (Leiden – Boston, 2018), 67-68.

33 G. Schwedler, “Perpignan 1415. Union of Monarchs for the Union of the Church. Diplomatic ceremony between politics and protocol,” in *Perpignan*, 443-482.



The coat of arms of the Hettyey family, i.e., of Peter Cech of Levice (Lévai Cseh) and his relatives, received from King Ferdinand I of Aragon, in Perpignan, on 20 October 1415

(Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény, [no.] 283583)

embraced Christianity.³⁴ It was recently claimed that this all was just an act and that a famous errant poet, Oswald von Wolkenstein, one of Sigismund's interpreters,³⁵ played the part of the 'Turkish king'.³⁶ At any rate, a proper 'Turkish king'

34 Álvaro Garcíá de Santa María, *Crónica del Rey don Juan, segundo Rey deste nombre en Castilla y en Leon*, in *Crónicas de los Reyes de Castilla*, ed. Cayetano Rosell, II (Madrid, 1877), 277-696, at 365; *Crónica incompleta del reinado de Fernando I de Aragón* (= *Textos Medievales*, 69), ed. Luis Vela Gormedino (Zaragoza, 1985), 63.

35 *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein* (= *Altdeutsche Textbibliothek*, 55), ed. Karl Kurt Klein (Berlin – Boston, 2015⁴), no. 18, p. 48; no. 44, pp. 138-139.

36 See N. Jaspert, "Courtly and Commercial Mobility: The Meeting of Perpignan (1415)

had come in June 1415 to the court of Mircea I of Wallachia, still Sigismund's vassal, namely Mustafa Çelebi, Bayezid I' son.³⁷ Mircea had (unsuccessfully) attempted to be a sultan-maker during the Ottoman civil war (1402-1413)³⁸.

“Black knight” vs “blackhead”

Under the circumstances, connecting the black Ethiopian on the coat of arms of the brothers George and Valentin, the sons of Peter of Wallachia, to the ‘Turkish king’ in Sigismund of Luxemburg’s entourage that accompanied him to Perpignan (September-November 1415), and/or to the ‘Turkish king’ who was indeed the guest of Mircea I of Wallachia, earlier, in the summer of the same year, provides the most plausible explanation for the distinctive heraldic feature of the coat of arms granted by King Ferdinand of Aragon in Perpignan in October 1415. The latter connection, i.e., to Mustafa Çelebi, the (defeated) ally of Mircea, has to be considered also because, Peter of Wallachia (an uncommon name for Wallachia at that time), George and’s Valentin’s father, can be identified only (for the time being) with the mysterious *Petrusian*, the associate of Mircea († 1418), at the end of the voivode’s rule (from c. 1412 onwards).³⁹

The dignified manner in which the “black warrior” was featured – by the chancery of Ferdinand of Aragon⁴⁰ – on the coat of arms of the brothers bears no resemblance to the depictions of the defeated and beheaded Moors on Aragon’s

and its Effects,” and Sieglinde Hartmann, “Oswald von Wolkenstein à Perpignan: Le chanteur courtois et son seigneur le roi Sigismond,” in *Perpignan*, 260-274, at 272-273 (and note 91), and 389-411, at 400-403. Hence, other attempts at identifying that king were not made.

37 *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, B. Țara Românească, I. 1250-1500, eds. P. P. Panaitescu, Damaschin Mioc, (Bucharest, 1966), no. 38, p. 82.

38 Șerban Papacostea, “La Valachie et la crise de structure de l’Empire Ottoman. (1402-1413),” *Revue Romaine d’Histoire*, 25 (1986), no. 1-2: 23-33; Dimitris J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid. Empire building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413* (=The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, 38) (Leiden – Boston – Cologne, 2007), 2-3, 133.

39 Mircea and *Petrusian* issued together ducats (e.g. László Réthy, “Adalékok a havaselvi vajdaság numismatikájához”, *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, 12, no. 5 (1892): 433-436; Octavian Iliescu, *Monetele lui Mircea cel Bătrân*, eds. Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Ionel Cădea (Brăila, 2008), 111-112). Mircea already had an associate, his son and successor Michael.

40 The charter was inserted in the register by Pablo Nicolás, the best-known among Ferdinand’s secretaries (Francisco Sevillano Colon, “Cancillerías de Fernando de Antequera y de Alfonso el Magnánimo,” *Anuario Historico del Derecho Español*, [12] (1965): 169-216, at 193-194).



Duke Witold of Lithuania's coat of arms in Ulrich von Richental's chronicle
(open access)

coat of arms⁴¹. It also differs significantly from the mentioned coat of arms confirmed – it must be emphasized⁴² – only a few months earlier by King Sigismund to John Baróc Mellétei (of Meliata) and his relatives,⁴³ in which two “blackheads” were placed one above the other (one on the shield and the other on top of the helmet of the shield).⁴⁴ The latter charter is important chiefly because it shows that heraldic usage of “blackheads” in the Kingdom of Hungary predated spring 1415 and Sigismund’s major diplomatic journey to the West.⁴⁵ This possibility must be also taken into account for the coat of arms of brothers George and Valentin, of ostensibly higher social standing than the Baróc Mellétei (members of the county

41 See also Tamás Szálkai, who, in “Mórabrázolások a heraldikában,” in *Interdiszciplinaritás a régió kutatásban*, III, eds. A. Bárány, T. Szálkai (Debrecen, 2013), 7-20, related the “Moorish head” to Saint Maurice, in the case of settlements. On a “grander scale”, the image on the coat of arms of George and Valentin can be also placed in relation to the late medieval (post 1350) image of two of the Three Magi: Balthazar and also Caspar, deemed and depicted as a *Ethiops niger* chiefly in German-speaking environments (Kristen Collins, Bryan C. Keene, “An African King in Art and Legend,” in *Balthazar: A Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, eds. K. Collins, B. C. Keene (Los Angeles, 2019), 1-33, at 13).

42 [...] *arma seu nobilitatis insignia in praesentium litterarum nostrarum capite depicta maiestati nostrae exhibendo, ab eadem maiestate nostra eadem arma seu nobilitatis insignia sibi, et per eum annotato patri necnon Georgio, Emerico et Frank carnalibus, item Dominico dicto Rez filio Nicolai et Emerico filio Pauli similiter Barocz dicti de eadem Melleite patruelibus fratribus suis ac haeredibus et posteritatibus ipsorum universis ex liberalitate nostra dari et conferri humiliter et devote supplicavit [...]* (MNL-OL, DL 50512; 26 March 1415).

43 István Kádas, “The Society of the Noble Judges in Northeastern Hungary during the Reign of King Sigismund (1387-1437),” in *Secular Power and Sacral Authority in Medieval East-Central Europe* (= *Central European Medieval Studies*, 2), eds. Kosana Jovanović, Suzana Miljan (Amsterdam, 2018), 97-110, at 101, 103.

44 The head on the shield belonged to a bearded elderly man. The one on top of the helmet was younger and shaved. Both had kerchiefs around their foreheads. Yet the charter did not describe the duly featured coat of arms in its text, which only read: [...] *praescripta arma seu nobilitatis insignia hic depicta ac pictoris magisterio distincte descripta virtute praesentium conferimus [...]* (MNL-OL, DL 50512). The separate description of the coat of arms is nowhere to be found. Additionally, John Baróc Mellétei was apparently not a member of Sigismund’s retinue and had travelled to Constance to meet the monarch.

45 Sigismund was absent from Hungary from late 1412 to early 1419 (Pál Engel, Norbert C. Tóth, *Itineraria regum et reginarum Hungariae (1382-1438)* (= *Subsidia ad Historiam Medii Aevi Hungariae Inquirendam*, 1) (Budapest, 2005), 95-103). The wording of the charter for John Baróc Mellétei and his relatives however does not allow us to consider that the coat of arms of the family from modern-day Slovakia predated Sigismund’s Hungarian reign (i.e., the year 1387).



The coat of arms granted by King Sigismund of Luxemburg to John Baróc Mellétei and his relatives, in Constance, on 20 March 1415

(Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest, Diplomatikai Levéltár, [no.] 50512)

nobility),⁴⁶ and who (unlike said nobles) can be linked to the “black” anti-Ottoman front, also through their father, Peter of Wallachia.⁴⁷ The difference between the (severed) blackhead and the standing black Ethiopian was in fact manifest.

Ferdinand of Aragon was not completely unaware of Eastern habits. Some three years earlier, he had sent Alfonso Mudarra, officially on pilgrimage, to East-Central Europe (1411-1412).⁴⁸ After, the knight met with Sigismund, he also stopped at the courts of Witold/Vytautas (Alexander) of Lithuania and Alexander I of Moldavia, but not, apparently, at that of Mircea I of Wallachia.⁴⁹ At the Council of Constance, or only in Ulrich von Richental’s posthumously spread drawings, the traditional mounted knight on Witold’s coat of arms was accompanied by a “black person”/a “Moor”, with sword and shield⁵⁰ (in comparison, Mircea’s personal coat of arms, both at Constance and on the seal appended to his treaty of 1411 with Władysław II Jagiełło of Poland, Witold’s unwanted Lithuanian “associate”, was a lion, much similar to that of House of Luxemburg⁵¹). Witold’s (German) armed, and ready to fight, “Moor” is the closest analogy we have for the (Aragonese) Ethiopian, with shield and lance, of George and Valentin, Peter of Wallachia’s sons.⁵² Aside from legends that station either a Moor or a Tartar (*Kara/Black Mîrza*) as Witold’s “bodyguard”,⁵³ this in fact returns us to

46 Bálint Ila, *Gömör megye, I. A megye története 1773-ig* (Budapest, 1976), 88.

47 Anti-Ottoman warfare had recommenced in 1414 in Sigismund’s absence (Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 66).

48 Werner Paravicini, “*Fürschriften und Testimonia. Der Dokumentationskreislauf der spätmittelalterlichen Adelsreise am Beispiel des kastilischen Ritters Alfonso Mudarra, 1411-1412*,” in *Studien zum 15. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Erich Meuthen*, eds. Johannes Helmuth, Heribert Müller, II (Munich, 1994), 903-936.

49 On this strange journey, see also S[tephen]. C. Rowell, “Du Europos pakraščiai: Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės ir ispanų karalysčių ryšiai 1411-1412 ir 1434 m. tekstuose,” *Lietuvos Istorijos Metraštis*, [33], no. 1 (2003): 149-188.

50 E.g. *Arms and people in Ulrich Richental’s Chronik des Konzils zu Konstanz, 1414-1418*, ed. Steen Clemmensen (Farum, 2011), 87 (no. 217), 148 (no. 620), 248 (no. 8742), 371 (no. 896), 404 (no. 742), 406 (no. 779).

51 Ovidiu Cristea, “Stema cu leu a voievodului Țării Românești. O ipoteză,” *Revista Istorică*, 5, nos. 3-4 (1994): 303-307.

52 A potential connection of the brothers to Moldavia (where Peter was a princely name) remains therefore to be explored.

53 E.g. Emilian Żernicki-Szeliga, *Die polnischen Stammwappen: ihre Geschichte und ihre Sagen* (Hamburg, 1904), 147; Giedrė Mickūnaitė, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania* (Budapest – New York, 2006), 195.

Sigismund's network, because the (grand) duke of Lithuania, was the personal troublesome ally of the king of the Romans.⁵⁴

Personal initiative – hegemonic designator

In essence, blackheads and black warriors defined in the days of the Council of Constance the men of Roman emperor-to-be Sigismund.⁵⁵ In particular, the relation between the two shielded and armed “blacks” (the “Lithuanian Moor” and the “Wallachian Ethiopian”) enables a handful of speculations (from the Tartar history of the East⁵⁶ to the Roman or only Italian roots of the Wallachians⁵⁷ and of the Lithuanians⁵⁸ that were being “discovered” in the early 1400s in the name of Latin Christianity⁵⁹). Such connections certainly befit the shows put on by Sigismund during his European tour, but, due to the same tour and its highly practical and immediate purposes,⁶⁰ more simple explanations must (also) be looked-up, explanations that are not necessarily valid simultaneously in all “black cases”.⁶¹

54 Chiefly in relation to Witold's much desired royal crown, see Přemysl Bar, “Der Krönungssturm König Sigismund von Luxemburg, Großfürst Witold von Litauen und das gescheiterte politische Bündnis zwischen beiden Herrschern,” *Roczniki Historyczne*, 83 (2017): 65-101.

55 This sounds otherwise like a far-fetched overstatement, considering the widespread usage of “Black/Moorish” insignia.

56 For instance: Virgil Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (=East-Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 20)* (Leiden – Boston – Cologne, 2012), 221-222, 276-278.

57 E.g. Armando Nuzzo, “Coluccio Salutati e l’Ungheria,” *Verbum*, 7, no. 2 (2005): 341-371, at 350-351.

58 An overview: Rimvydas Petrauskas, “Palemon und die vier Sippen. Die römische Abstammungstheorie der Litauer,” in *Abstammungsmythen und Völkergenealogien im frühneuzeitlichen Ostseeraum (=Studien zur Geschichte der Ostseeregion, 2)*, ed. Stefan Donecker (Greifswald, 2020), 195-209, at 197-198

59 We therefore add that in two variants of Richental's chronicle, Mage Melchior (of Arabia), neither Caspar, nor Balthasar, has a moor (blackamoor), holding a shield and a banner, on his coat of arms, similar (with the exception of the shield) to the moor on the coat of arms of Johannes (III) Flemming, abbot of Austrian Melk (*Arms and people*, 83, 132, nos. 192, 504).

60 Franz-Reiner Erkens, “...Und wil ein grosse Reise do tun. Überlegungen zur Balkan-und Orientpolitik Sigismunds von Luxemburg,” in *Studien zum 15. Jahrhundert*, II, 739-762, at 742, 751, 758-760.

61 By this we mean above-all the “blackheads” on the Hungarian (one) and on the “Richental-Constance” coat of arms.

The “Turkish king” of Sigismund in Perpignan (September-November 1415) and the Turkish prince of Mircea I in Argeş (June 1415) therefore remain the main explanatory coordinates for the Ethiopian of George and Valentin in Perpignan (October 1415). However, no mention was made of Sigismund in Ferdinand of Aragon’s charter for the two brothers, who, although Hungarian subjects, were, as the sons of Peter of Wallachia, not automatically profoundly bound to either Sigismund or Mircea. The above-outlined limitations should reconcentrate our attention on the motif of the *Ethiops niger*.⁶² From the text of the Aragonese grant of a coat of arms we can infer that for some, for the two brothers and also for the anti-Moorish king Ferdinand, there was no shame in having a mighty black warrior as insignia. This was valid on both anti-Muslim crusader fronts: in the Iberian Peninsula⁶³ and at the limit of the Balkan Peninsula. This lack of “racial bias/constraints”⁶⁴ might prove useful in explaining the Turkish arrangements of both Sigismund and of Wallachian figures over the coming decades,⁶⁵

62 The topic may prove far more complex (I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the findings mentioned below). Archaeological excavations in Budapest, both in the area of the royal palace (from the period of Sigismund of Luxemburg; post 1400) and in the Szentpétermártir (Saint Peter the Martyr) suburb of Buda (from the period of Louis I of Anjou; post 1370), have revealed the existence of stove tiles featuring the head of a moor on top of helmet (Imre Holl, “Középkori kályhacsempék Magyarországon (IV),” *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, 117 (1990): 58-95, at 82-83, fig. 30; András Végh, “Anjou-kori kályhacsempé lelet a budai Szentpétermártir külvárosból,” *Budapest Régiségei*, 35, no. 2 (2002): 617-632, at 620, 629, fig. 5). Both findings were interpreted in relation to the previously mentioned coat of arms of John Baróc Mellétei (1415). In our opinion however, the noticeable differences between the Baróc Mellétei coat of arms and the images on the tiles (that derived from one and the same coat of arms), the tiles in question point towards a previously unknown bearer of a “Moor/Saracen insignia”. The “Angevine roots” of the motif and its “Sigismundian presence” make the topic worth further analysis.

63 See also Norman Housely, *The Later Crusades, 1274-1580: From Lyons to Alcazar* (Oxford, 1992), 82-83, 283-286.

64 We believe, erroneously perhaps, that in such 15th century cases race (“aspect”) took precedence over religion (“faith”), because it was more explicit (visual) than implicit (spiritual). See, for instance, in the post-crusader context of the battle of Belgrade, the “Kusturica type images” in the letter sent by Niccolò Lisci, the protonotary of Ladislas V of Habsburg, king of Hungary and Bohemia, to Enea Silvio Piccolomini, on 21 November 1456 (Fabio Fomer, “Enea Silvio Piccolomini e la congiura contro Ulrich von Cilli,” in *Margarita amicorum. Studi di cultura europea per Agostino Sottili*, eds. F. Fomer, Carla Maria Monti, Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Milan, 2005), 351-376, at 368).

65 On Christmas eve 1433, at Council of Basel, [...] *venit alter dux Walachiae, Turcorum frater* [...]. The [...] *quidan dux ex parte regis Turcorum* [...] came [...] *cum maximis*

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