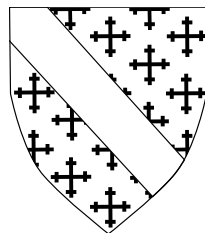

Use of heraldry in the Luttrell Psalter

Genevieve la flechiere de Duram

Elizabeth Brown

bend_gules@yahoo.co.uk



This brief survey is intended to accompany the in-class viewing of the Luttrell Psalter facsimile at KWHS 2008. For a richly decorated book, the Luttrell Psalter actually uses very little heraldry in its artwork. This article summarises the occurrences I've found of heraldic artwork in the psalter. I've drawn heavily on the introductory commentary in the facsimile to provide some context for the artwork. To translate the psalms I used a Douay-Rheims Bible (a Catholic translation) and a Clementine Vulgate, both available online, with modern verse numbers. The text of the psalter is actually Gallican Vulgate, but I couldn't find one easily.

The artwork is presented in the order it appears in the psalter.

Page 23 recto

Line filler of three birds on a swirling blue ground, possibly referring indirectly to Geoffrey Luttrell's arms: Azure, a bend between six martlets argent. Commentary suggests that the watery background is triggered by the text 'In laqueo...' in Psalm 10 beneath it.

Page 41 recto

Bas-de-page artwork of helm with a fan crest, and a shield with the arms of the Sutton family: Or, a lion rampant vert. Luttrell's family connections to Sutton and Scrope are prominent in the heraldic artwork.

Page 51 recto

Bas-de-page artwork depicting the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, complete with the arms of one of his named murderers, FitzUrse (Gules, three bears' heads couped argent). It's not clear if these arms actually date back to 1170, the date of the murder, or are ascribed by tradition, with canting arms providing the visual cue to readers to the well-known martyrdom story. Papworth does not list a FitzUrse with these arms. The scratching-out of the saint's face follows the 1539 Henrician edict to erase images of Thomas Becket.

Page 82 recto

This bas-de-page artwork shows a Christian knight jousting against a Saracen. The knight bears the arms of England; the Saracen's caparison is hung with bells. Brown suggests the horses' playful poses, the belled caparison and the caricatured face of the Moor refer to a festive recreating of Richard Lionheart and Saladin, rather than a serious reference to the wars in the holy lands.

The verse directly above the image is part of Psalm 41:10 'I will say to God: Thou art my support...'

Page 101 verso

Herald angels (literally!) blow the trumpet of judgement over naked souls. The lowest pennant depicts a lion rampant, possibly a reference to Agnes Sutton, who died in 1340 (thus possibly while this book was being illuminated).

The verse directly above the art is Psalm 54:16: 'Let death come upon them, and let them go down alive into hell. For there is wickedness in their dwellings: in the midst of them.'

Page 157 recto

A rather gloomy looking herald carries a banner with the Luttrell arms on a spear, while a second man carries a helm, and wears a bellows on his head.

Page 161 recto

A herald-grotesque blows a trumpet bearing the arms of Scrope (Azure, a bend Or) with a label. This image is possibly a reference to the hope of a Scrope heir: Sir Geoffrey's only surviving son Andrew married Beatrice le Scrope, and this marriage was the Luttrell family's strongest 'dynastic' connection.

The verse on the page is Psalm 89:24 'My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted.' Other horns appear in the line fillers, playing on the reference to a horn.

Page 163 recto

A bird grotesque bears the Luttrell arms on its wing, and a helm on its head. The bas-de-page shows a fashionably dressed man riding a horse carrying a falcon on its gauntlet, so this may be repeating a motif for emphasis.

Page 171 recto

A human-bird grotesque holds up the Luttrell arms, which are also hanging from a convenient tendril of floral decor. The arms on this page possibly connect to both the verse and the other artwork on this page. The verses are Psalm 94:4-7:

For in his hand are all the ends of the earth: and the heights of
the mountains are his.

For the sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry
land.

Come let us adore and fall down: and weep before the Lord that
made us.

For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture
and the sheep of his hand.

The bas-de-page artwork is part of the series of agricultural scenes for which the psalter is so famous. On this page, a man is harrowing the field sown with seed, while a second man uses his sling to fend off crows. The agricultural references in the verse trigger the farm scenes. In turn, Sir Geoffrey's arms are hung prominently over the farming scene, to reinforce ownership, and the 'people of his pasture', his farm labourers.

Page 202 verso

The well-known image of Geoffrey Luttrell depicted in armour, his banners, surcoat, shield and horse caparison showing his arms (though in some cases with a bend sinister). He is attended by his wife and daughter-in-law, both wearing marshalled heraldic surcoats to reflect their prominent ties to the Sutton and Scrope houses. This image is an idealised one of Sir Geoffrey's lifetime achievements, rather than a portrait. (In his youth, he would not yet have a grown daughter-in-law.) The image appears in the middle of Psalm 108, which includes on this page v.30–31:

I will give great thanks to the Lord with my mouth: and in the
midst of many I will praise him.

Because he hath stood at the right hand of the poor, to save my
soul from persecutors.

Perhaps this is how Sir Geoffrey saw himself, or wished to be seen: as a Christian knight standing up for the poor and oppressed.

Page 203 recto

The page facing the image of Geoffrey Luttrell's family includes heraldic beasts from both his arms and those of the Sutton family – lions rampant and martlets. If these figures were originally in silver gilt, they may have tarnished.

Page 208 recto

The famous dining scene marks the end of the agricultural vignettes. The servers start on the opposite page, bringing dishes to the table of their lord. The hanging behind the table is strewn with martlets and ermine spots.

This page and the preceding page are part of Psalm 114 and 115, and the verses read:

The Lord hath been mindful of us, and hath blessed us.
 He hath blessed the house of Israel: he hath blessed the house
 of Aaron.
 He hath blessed all that fear the Lord, both little and great.
 May the Lord add blessings upon you: upon you, and upon your
 children.
 Blessed be you of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
 The heaven of heaven is the Lord's: but the earth he has given
 to the children of men.
 The dead shall not praise thee, O Lord: nor any of them that
 go down to hell.
 But we that live bless the Lord: from this time now and for ever.
 I have loved, because the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer.
 Because he hath inclined his ear unto me: and in my days I will
 call upon him.
 The sorrows of death have encompassed me: and the perils of
 hell have found me. I met with trouble and sorrow:
 and I called upon the name of the Lord. . .

This image of Sir Geoffrey lifting his cup, facing out from the page, may reflect this prayer that God bless his family, his properties and his servants.

Bonus image—page 185 verso

This bas-de-page figure has no heraldic reference, but I think he's great. He appears on the page of Psalm 105, under this text:

Give glory to the Lord, and call upon his name: declare his
 deeds among the Gentiles.
 Sing to him, yea sing praises to him: relate all his wondrous
 works.
 Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that
 seek the Lord.

So either he's singing the praises of the Lord, as instructed, or the 'calling upon him' is interpreted as confession (the historiated initial shows a man confessing to God), and this is the counterpoint to confession blowing hot air from both ends!

References

- [1] Brown, Michelle P. 2006. *The Luttrell Psalter: a facsimile*. (British Library).
- [2] The Unbound Bible. 2005–2006. (Biola University), <http://unbound.biola.edu/>, accessed August 2008.
- [3] Papworth, John W. 1977. *Papworth's ordinary of British armorials*, introduction by J.P. Brooke-Little (Bath: Five Barrows).



FIGURE 1. Page 23 recto

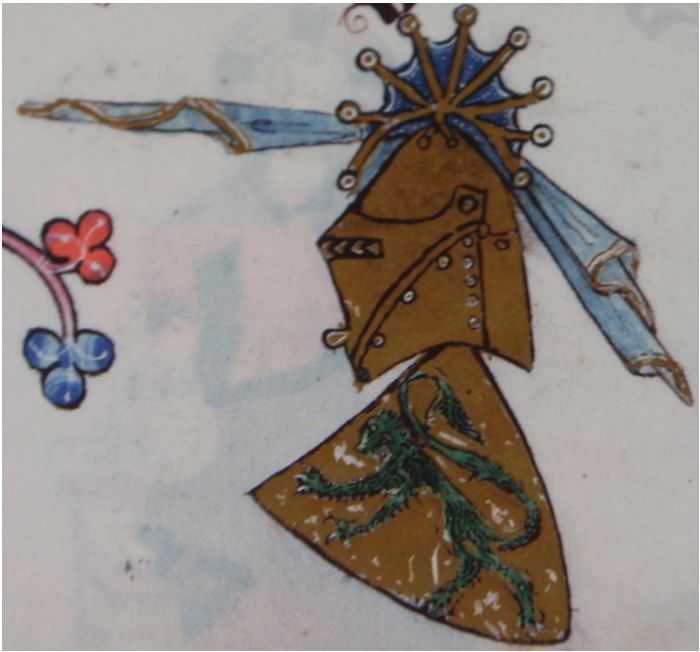


FIGURE 2. Page 41 recto



FIGURE 3. Page 51 recto



FIGURE 4. Page 82 recto



FIGURE 5. Page 101 verso



FIGURE 6. Page 157 recto



FIGURE 7. Page 161 recto



FIGURE 8. Page 163 recto



FIGURE 9. Page 171 recto



FIGURE 10. Page 202 verso



FIGURE 11. Page 203 recto



FIGURE 12. Page 208 recto



FIGURE 13. Page 208 recto: closeup of the scene



FIGURE 14. Page 208 recto: second half of the table



FIGURE 15. Page 185 verso