

A Scottish form of the Emblème de la Religion Réformée: the post-Reformation seal of St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews

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The ancient seals of the University of St Andrews form an interesting part of the University's muniments. The original University seal, which in a modern and reduced form is still used on diplomas, is remarkable for the way in which it embodies so much that is representative of the foundation and early function of the fifteenth-century *studium generale*. It has been fully described by H Laing (1850, no. 1114), J Maitland Anderson (1895, 15 ff), R G Cant (1970, 143, 3) and J H Stevenson and M Wood (1940, 1.106). The two forms of the seal of St Salvator's College and the three forms of the seal of St Leonard's College have also been described and catalogued (Laing, nos 1115-19; Anderson, 8 f; Stevenson and Wood, 1.107).

The second form of the St Salvator's seal and the second and third forms of the St Leonard's seal have variations which are post-Reformation. In the St Salvator's seal the book, held in the left hand of the figure of the Saviour, is replaced by a mond and a cross and there is no globe under the left foot. In the St Leonard's seals the changes are of greater significance. The figure of St Leonard wearing a mitre, carrying a crosier in the left hand, and a fetter-lock under the right hand raised in benediction, is replaced in the second form by a bearded doctor wearing a birettum and carrying a staff in his right hand and a book in his left. In this third form the bearded doctor is seated. Such alterations, small in detail, in all probability indicate an attempt to blend tradition with contemporary belief. It is not surprising that St Salvator's, a College noted for its somewhat conservative stand during the Reformation, should consider that no radical change in its seal was necessary. St Leonard's College, on the other hand, had long been associated with the new theological learning and the replacement of St Leonard, primarily identified by the fetter-lock, by a figure wearing a doctor's cap and holding a book is entirely in keeping with contemporary academic iconography and with the late sixteenth-century plans for University reorganisation.¹

In Birch's *British Museum Catalogue* (1895, 4.240 ff), Laing's *Ancient Scottish Seals*, and Stevenson and Wood's *Scottish Heraldic Seals* no mention is made of the pre-Reformation seal of St Mary's College, the last of the constituent Colleges to be founded, erected on the site of the earliest University buildings and incorporating the older but declining Pedagogy (Cant 1970, 33 ff). Indeed, one single indistinct impression of this seal has survived in the University Muniments,² attached to an undated document which from internal evidence belongs to the period 1556-9. The description is as follows. A pointed oval: a full length figure of the virgin with child in her right arm standing in a crescent; the virgin appears to be crowned and with a head nimbus; the figure is surrounded by a large rayed nimbus. The legend in Gothic capitals reads:

S. NOVI COLLEGII ASSŪMPTŌS B̄TE M̄E IN S̄CTO ĀDRE.

5.2 by 2.3 cm.³

As this College was in its dedication in 1537 placed under the patronage of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary it is wholly in keeping with contemporary faith that its seal should bear a representation of the Virgin standing on a crescent. This treatment of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven is that of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century artistic portrayal which appears in contemporary engravings and wood cuts (Hollstein 1962) (pl 18b). The form of representation is undoubtedly associated with the theological interpretation of Revelation 12, vv. 1 and 2: 'And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth in anguish for delivery'.⁴

What became of the seal matrix after the Reformation is not known. During the years 1560–79 the University suffered from the general uncertainty of the period. The re-organisation of St Andrews was a prime consideration of the Reformers of 1559–61, among whom John Wynram, sub-prior and Dean of Divinity, and John Douglas, Principal of St Mary's College, were leading advocates. An ambitious scheme was set out in the First Book of Discipline which owed much to local knowledge but nothing directly came of it (Cameron 1972, 58 ff). Four years later the celebrated humanist George Buchanan put forward his plan which was broadly similar and owed much to contemporary renaissance ideas on educational reform; but again nothing was accomplished (Cant 1970, 48 f). It was not until 1579 and after reform plans had been suggested during Morton's regency that a programme was drawn up, possibly under the influence of Andrew Melville and others, and a scheme for allocating special educational functions to the Colleges on the basis of subjects was carried into effect. 'The crown of the whole scheme was the school of theology which was to find a home in St. Mary's College' (Cant 1972, 51). For this reconstituted College, devoted almost exclusively to the teaching of reformed theological subjects, the old seal, even had the matrix been available, would not on theological grounds have been acceptable to the Principal and Masters. A matrix for a new and appropriate seal was undoubtedly required.

Such a matrix is in the possession of the University but its association with St Mary's College has been called in question. This seal is illustrated in J Maitland Anderson's *The Heraldry of St. Andrews University* (1895, 11) (pl 18c) and in a headpiece to Part III of the first edition of R G Cant's *Short History* where it is described as the 'Post-reformation seal attributed to St. Mary's College' (1946, 43). Laing (1866, No. 1299) gave the following description. 'A rudely executed design. An allegorical figure of religion. A winged female, leaning against a Tau cross, holding in her right hand an open book, extended towards heaven, standing in a crescent upon a skeleton (emblem of death). From the transverse limb of the cross is suspended a bit and bridle. Rays, intended perhaps for an aureole, surround the design.' The legend is clearly readable:

S. COLLEGII THEOLOGIAE DICATI F. ANDRE.
RELIGIO SUMMI SANCTA PATRIS SOBOLES:

On the basis of his researches Laing rejected 'all claim' for this as being a 'Scottish seal'. He noted that it had for some time been supposed that it was the seal of St Mary's College, but he held that it was more probably 'that of some continental College dedicated to St. Andrew'. He was certainly correct in seeking a continental origin and pointed out that 'that same device is found as a printer's device but without the inscription on three books, printed at Lyons in A.D. 1565, Geneva A.D. 1618 and Sedan A.D. 1633. The two former are Calvin's *Institutes* and the latter a Bible where it appears as a vignette on the title.' Laing noted that in the Lyons edition of the *Institutes* the design is accompanied with explanatory lines entitled '*Pourtrait de la Vraye Religion*' (see *infra*, p 252). Birch (1895, 4.242, no. 15) closely followed Laing, but his description

has some minor variations – ‘A sulphur cast from the original brass matrix in St. Mary’s College. Oval: an allegorical figure of RELIGION as a winged genius, draped in flowing vestments standing on a human skeleton, which is leaning against a tau-cross on which is suspended a gag or bit and bridle; and receiving an open book from the radiant heavens which encompass her’. Birch does not take any note of the crescent. Stevenson and Wood (1940, 106) give their own description, which also contains minor variants. ‘Religion represented as a half draped female figure with wings standing on a crescent which rests on a skeleton lying on the ground with its head against a Tau cross from which hangs a bit and bridle. The female rests her right arm on the cross and her left is extended upwards with an open book in her hand.’ These writers regarded Laing’s reasons for supposing it a foreign seal as ‘not conclusive’ and added that ‘a similar device is found on a book printed at Middelburg in 1607’.

Birch, and Stevenson and Wood show no knowledge of the additional information which J Maitland Anderson had brought to the discussion of the subject in 1895. To our knowledge he was the first to point out that the figure appears in Beza’s *Icones* published in 1580 (Anderson 1895, 10 ff) (pl 18d) but follows Laing in making the general statement that the device had been used before and after that date as a device by printers at Geneva, Lyons, Sedan and elsewhere. He leads one to believe, as all other authorities who refer to the use of the figure as a printer’s device, that the seal faithfully reproduces the device; in particular no reference is made to the variations, including the absence of the crescent in both the *Icones* and in the device as reproduced in the volumes cited by Laing. Anderson (1895, 12) had seen ‘no impression upon wax’ and stated ‘it is certainly somewhat difficult to connect such a seal with St. Mary’s College in the absence of impressions attached to documents’, but for him the matter was still open. He added ‘it is quite possible that the design may have been selected for the College shortly after 1579 in which year St. Mary’s was restricted to the teaching of theology’.

This more positive and scholarly approach has been fully justified by the recent re-discovery of a long-lost St Andrews manuscript containing early eighteenth-century transcripts relating to the history of the University.⁵ Among the items are descriptions of the University seals then in use. That of St Mary’s College is described (p 48) as follows. ‘Bears Holy Church or the True Religion under the embleme of a woman with expanded wings flying upwards and encircled with a Glory: her right arm leans upon the Cross; her left hand holds out the book of the everlasting Gospel and she treads Death under her feet; her upper garment is tucked up to her girdle discovering a star on her right thigh. Inscription: S. COLLEGII. S. THEOLOGIAE. DICATI. F. ANDREÆ. RELIGIO. SUMMI. SANCTA. PATRIS. SOBOLES.’ The association of this seal with St Mary’s College is accordingly beyond doubt. J Maitland Anderson had, however, made one important discovery; he had traced to its source the second part of the legend which is not found in any of the works which were at that time known to bear it as a printer’s device, although the St Andrews legend, as he noted contained ‘a slight variation’.

The emblem and the ten lines of Latin verse, known to J Maitland Anderson from the *Icones* and ‘the explanatory rhymes entitled “Pourtrait de la Vraye Religion”’, have a long and complicated history which has not yet been fully resolved. As long ago as 1853–1856 in the first four volumes of the *Bulletin de la société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* the seal which the Assemblée générale du Cercle de La Rochelle had engraved in 1621 for attaching to its ordinances and commissions was made the subject of an enquiry. This enquiry resulted in the discovery of a unique document bearing the seal from a circular matrix of which the subject was ‘exactly that of the vignette placed on the title page of Protestant works, Bibles, psalters, etc., printed at Paris or Saumur or La Rochelle or Rouen’ and with the legend PRO CHRISTO ET REGE (1 (1853), 345; 2 (1854), 8 ff; 3 (1855), 503, n. 1, 662; 4 (1856), 470–474). Obviously by

this time the emblem had become a generally recognised device closely identified with reformed religion.

Some 25 years later in the same periodical (30 (1881), 174–182) C L Frossard contributed an important article 'L'Emblème de la Religion Réformée' in which he traced the history of the emblem and the accompanying explanatory verses in Beza's *Icones* to the emblematic literature of the Renaissance. He pointed out that in the first edition of Beza's *Poemata*, published by Conrad Badius in Paris in 1548,⁶ there appeared an epigram of eight lines with the title 'Descriptio Virtutis' of which the first two lines are as follows:

Quaenam tam lacero vestita incedis amictu?
Virtus antiquis nobilitata sophys.

In the second edition of the *Poemata* (Gardy 1960, Item 5, pp 5 f), which included poems by George Buchanan and which was published in 1569, the epigram 'Descriptio Virtutis' is transformed to become a ten-line epigram entitled 'Religio'. The first lines are as follows:

Quaenam age tam lacero vestita incedis amictu?
Religio, summi vera patris soboles.

In this new form the epigram appeared in subsequent editions of the *Poemata* (Gardy 1960, pp 6 ff). Eleven years later it found a place in the *Icones*⁷ where it was accompanied by the emblem, a rectangular woodcut in an elaborately ornamented frame. The French version of the *Icones* (Gardy 1960, Item 340) published one year later has the same woodcut but with a less elaborately ornamented border. There is a minor variation in the first line which read:

Quaenam sic lacero vestita incedis amictu?

In the 1597 edition of the *Poemata*, attributed to Estienne and Stoer (Gardy 1960, Item 11, p 11, cf Items 9, 10, 31, No. XXXV), the verses are also accompanied by an emblem (Aubert *et al* 1953, 185 n. 78, 293 ff) and both are reproduced in the edition published by Stoer in 1599 (Gardy 1960, Item 12, p 14) but according to Gardy the figures are without ornamentation and according to Frossard there are some variants of little importance.

The figure in these works published between 1580 and 1599 accompanying the verses is not, however, exactly the same as that reproduced in the La Rochelle Assembly seal or in the St Mary's College seal. The wings of the allegorical figure are, as will be seen from the illustration (pl 18d, cf pl 18e), not stretched upward and outspread but folded, and further, it should be noted, that there is in all the continental forms referred to so far, no crescent.

The next question is therefore to determine as far as possible the history of the earlier forms of the figure and in particular to discover if there is an earlier form associated with the writings of Beza and other reformers and in particular with the Latin epigram. Frossard in the article cited noted that Beza had inserted in the 1562 edition of his *Confession de la Foy Chrestienne* (Gardy 1960, Item 106, pp 66 f) the figure entitled 'Portrait de la Vraye Religion' and on the opposite page 22 lines in French in explanation. Further researches have been able to show that in an earlier edition of the *Confession* published by Crespin in Geneva in 1561 (Gardy 1960, Item 99) this portrait and the French verses had already appeared and also in the edition published in the same year by Reboul for Durant and in two others of the same year (Gardy 1960, Item 101, cf Items 100, 103, 104). The portrait and verses would appear to have adorned subsequent editions of the *Confession* in 1563 (Gardy 1960, 107, 108, 111). Gardy refers to the woodcut of this figure used in the edition of the *Confession* of 1561 as 'La vignette genevoise'. The Latin text of the *Confession* published by Barbier and Courteau in 1563 (Gardy 1960, Item 115) contains on page 36 under the

title *Religionis non Papisticae sed vere evangelicae pictura* the ten Latin lines which as we have already seen were from 1569 to replace the epigram 'Descriptio virtutis' in the editions of the *Poemata*. Their appearance here in 1563 is in fact the first printing so far discovered of the Latin epigram 'Religio' but it is without the figure which had accompanied the French verses in the earlier editions of the *Confession*. The Latin verses are repeated in the edition of 1570 but again without the figure (Gardy 1960, Item 116, see also Items 117-22).

In this way the Latin verses are known to date in print from 1563 and the vignette from 1561 but not in conjunction. However, an earlier Italian version of the *Confession* had been printed in Geneva by Crespin in 1560 and this contained on the verso of the title page the 'Vignette de la Religion, grand format, sans encardrement' (Gardy 1960, Item 133) and an Italian version of the explanation said to have been translated from the Latin.⁸ Chaix states (1966, 41; 154, 130, 182 f) that this woodcut of the figure in the Italian version of the *Confession* was used as a printers mark by François Duron in 1562 in his Italian Bible.

Apart from the publications already cited the Latin epigram was printed again without the figure in the folio edition of Beza's *Tractationes* published by Crespin in Geneva in 1570 (Gardy 1960, Item 258),⁹ but in the 1576 edition of this collection, now published by Vignon, of Beza's works the epigram is accompanied by the figure in the Crespin form and is reproduced in the 1582 edition (Gardy 1960, Items 260, 261). The 1576 edition is thus the earliest publication in which the Genevan vignette and the Latin verses appear together. A copy of this volume of early but uncertain accession is in the University Library, St Andrews.¹⁰ The form of the figure in these earlier works, as will be seen from the accompanying illustration (pl 18e, cf pl 18d) is not that of the later *Icones*, and very closely resembles that of the La Rochelle and the St Mary's College seals. It is to this early Genevan form of the vignette rather than to that which is found in the *Icones* of 1580-81 that the origins of the St Mary's College seal are to be traced.

The use of this Genevan vignette was not, however, confined to printers in Geneva. Very early in the 1560s it was employed as a frontispiece or printers device by a variety of printers of Protestant books of whom the most important were the Haultins of Lyons and La Rochelle whose output was predominantly religious works (Desgraves 1960). Laing had already referred to its appearance in the French edition of Calvin's *Institutes* published in 1565. This volume, one of two editions published at Lyons that year, was from the press of Pierre Haultin, who used the Genevan vignette as a printer's mark. The words 'La Vraye Religion Chrestienne' are printed on either side of the block (Baudrier 1895-1921, 98). From 1571 to 1623 the Haultin publication enterprise was carried on in La Rochelle. Various forms of the figure appear in Protestant books emerging from this press. The Crespin form of the vignette appears in a rectangular block with the words 'Religion' on one side and 'Chrestienne' on the other in a 1572 edition of the *Psalms* (Desgraves 1960, Item 4, p 4). On some works published between 1594 and 1597 the wings are folded and not deployed so that the figure resembles the form of the woodcut in the *Icones* of 1580 (Desgraves 1960, pp xxxiv f). This latter form with the wings folded would not appear to have been used at Geneva before 1580 nor at La Rochelle until 1594.

Frossard (1881, 179 ff) regarded the later *Icones* version as Beza's definitive one, but this may be questioned by the existence of the 1576 edition of the *Tractationes* and by the 1565 edition of Calvin's *Institutes* at Lyons. In the remaining part of his article Frossard gives the history of the forms of the figure in the seventeenth century. It was extensively used throughout by Protestant printers; he also notes some of the variants, but does not mention that he ever came across a form with crescent.

This evidence clearly establishes that from the early 1560s the Geneva vignette, explained in Latin and French verses by Beza and used by printers in Geneva and Lyons and La Rochelle, had

become well known and recognised as the emblem of French-speaking reformed Protestantism, and most fittingly formed the central feature of the seal of the French Protestant Assembly of La Rochelle in 1621. It was therefore appropriate that the vignette and a slightly modified line from the Latin epigram should be chosen as the central feature of the seal for the newly formed College of Protestant Theology in St Andrews, in this way linking it with its source in the French speaking Protestantism of Geneva. Indeed, as has already been indicated, the publication of the Latin epigram in the 1576 edition of Beza's *Tractationes* may well be the immediate source of the design for the St Mary's College seal matrix.

During that decade the connections between Geneva and St Andrews were very close. Andrew Melville, who had been called to the Principalship of the reformed College of Theology in 1579, had spent the years 1565–69 in France and the years 1569–74 in Geneva as regent of the second class of Calvin's Academy, of which Beza was the first rector and with whom he corresponded (Cameron 1963, xxix f). Further it must not be forgotten that George Buchanan, who had been Principal of St Leonard's College from 1567 to 1570 and whose poems had appeared jointly in the 2nd edition of Beza's poems (Gardy 1960, Item 5), was, like Melville, a friend and correspondent not only of Beza but of other scholars in Geneva. The ties between St Mary's and the reformed continental churches were such as to make the adoption of a common emblem as the basis for a seal a most natural development.

The original source of the main figure in the seal and its legend need no longer be in doubt. The legend is adapted from the 2nd line of the Latin epigram

Religio, summi vera Patris soboles

The substitution of *vera* by *sancta* would appear to be a St Andrews variant, as it has not been discovered elsewhere; it is perhaps of little moment.

The addition of the crescent which we have already mentioned several times is a variant that perhaps defies an adequate explanation. As has been pointed out there is no recorded continental example of the figure standing on a crescent and there is nothing in the epigram which would make such an addition to the emblem necessary. To connect this post-Reformation seal in any way with the pre-Reformation seal of St Mary's College and to regard the crescent as residual or vestigial is scarcely tenable. On theological grounds the earlier College seal would not have been acceptable. It was essentially medieval, the new seal is essentially reformed.

It is at this point that the early eighteenth-century description of the seal may be of help. 'The woman with expanded wings flying upwards' is held to be an emblem of 'Holy Church or the True Religion', and this takes one back to Revelation 12, vv. 1, 2 and 14, and to the sixteenth-century exegesis of this chapter in which the early Church's identification of the woman with the Church is resumed (Prigent 1959, 55 ff). In Augustin Marlorat's *Novi Testamenti catholica expositio ecclesiastica*, the woman is taken to represent the Church and she is treading mutability with her feet.¹¹ The moon and the skeleton taken together mean 'change and death'. And this is the interpretation found also in Napier's *A Plaine Discovery of the whole Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh, 1593, p 156) (see also Desgraves 1960, 212, 200).

The association of the figure with the Biblical passage Rev. 12, would be natural for Protestants who identified Beza's figure of 'True Religion' as 'Holy Church', and the insertion of the crescent to emphasise the Biblical significance of the emblem wholly justified.

NOTES

- 1 Laing, and Stevenson and Wood describe the figure in the second and third forms of the St Leonard's seal as a representation of the saint.

- 2 St Andrews University Muniments, SM110.MB16(2). See pl 18a.
- 3 Maitland Anderson (1895) who first described this seal, read the indistinct legend as *Sigillum Novi Collegii Assumptionis Virginis Mariae in Sancto Andrea*.
- 4 For a full discussion of the history and exegesis of Revelation 12 see Prigent 1959, *Apocalypse 12: Histoire de l'exégèse, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exégèse*, No. 2. Tübingen.
- 5 St Andrews University Muniments, SL156. This MS known as Pringle's Book consists of 318 pages including a few blanks, of transcripts of and commentaries on University documents. The book is almost entirely in the hand of Francis Pringle, regent and professor of Greek, St Leonards College, 1699-1747, but a few documents up to p 47 are in another hand on leaves which appear to have been taken from an earlier, late seventeenth century volume. As the seals are described in Pringle's hand on p 48 the description was probably written early in Pringle's tenure of office.
- 6 See for details, Gardy 1960, Item 1, cf items 2, 3, 4.
- 7 *Icones, id est Verae imagines virorum doctrinae simul et pietate illustrium . . . quibus adiectae sunt nonnullae picturae quas emblemata vocant. Theodoro Beza Auctore*, Geneva 1580. See Gardy, Item 338, pp. 180 ff, cf Items 339-42, see pl 18d.
- 8 Gardy (item 114) does not state that these Latin verses were printed in the Latin edition of 1560.
- 9 A copy belonging to Andrew Melville is in the University Library, St Andrews.
- 10 University Library Typ. SWG B76 VB.
- 11 1561 *sub Apoc. 12: Mulier Id est Ecclesia credentium . . . Et luna sub pedibus eius. Per hoc significatur temporalium bonorum iuxta praescriptum Dei administratio, quibus bonis sancti imperant, non serviunt. Nam luna, quae mutatur, statum et conditionem rerum huius seculi pulchre demonstrat . . . Haec vera est servorum Christi nota, si unius Christi gloriae intenti caetera despiciant, et tanquam sub pedibus habeant.*

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a



b



c



d



e

a Pre-Reformation seal of St Mary's College (St Andrews University Muniments SM110, MB16\2); b Albrecht Dürer, Virgin on the crescent (C W Talbot *et al*, *Dürer in America: his graphic work*, New York 1971, fig 19); c St Mary's College post-Reformation seal (from the original brass matrix in St Andrews University Muniments); d emblem XXXIX from Théodore de Bèze, *Les vrais portraits des hommes illustres ...*, Geneva 1581, 279. This is the identical block used in the first (1580) edition of the *Icones* and in the 1597 edition of the *Poemata*, p 258; e 'La vignette genevoise' from Théodore de Bèze, *T Bezae Vezelii volumen tractationum theologiarum ...*, Geneva 1576, i p xx