

Members' LETTERS

Will contributors please note that letters may be shortened or edited to conform to the standards of the Bulletin. The Bulletin is not responsible for the opinions expressed by contributors.

The Tournament Tapestry

*From Keith Downen, Assistant Curator of
Armour at the Royal Armouries, by e-mail*

I read with great interest Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal's article on the Valenciennes tapestry in the December issue of the *Bulletin*. I thought I knew the tapestry fairly well; however, her careful observations have led me to look ever more closely at it, revealing many interesting points of detail which I had failed to notice before. Whilst an interesting thought, I fear, though, that the author's identification of the crest of the knight in the foreground as that of a beaver is incorrect. As Ms Nijman-Bliekendaal has observed, the coat of arms depicted on the escutcheon of the horse's shaffron is indeed that of the Reimerswaal family of Zeeland, who had a lion as their crest (albeit with raised arms and crossed swords on the tomb of Adriaan van Reimerswaal (c.1550–75) at Bergen-op-Zoom). Indeed if one looks carefully at

the crest on the tapestry, the lion's paws, long narrow tail (curling behind its back) and shaggy mane can be discerned. As such, I do not believe any link can be established with Philip of Burgundy, Lord of Beveren and his part in the Peace of Senlis of 1493.

The identification of a number of the individuals is also problematic. This brings me on to my second point. Rather than dating to c.1494, the tapestry may actually relate to another event. Whilst the figure on the right does indeed resemble that of Charles VIII and may well be him, this view is not universally shared. Others, such as Colonel van Kretschmar in his 1910 publication *Der Turnierteppich im Museum zu Valenciennes*, believed it to be Maximilian. As to the woman next to him, she has been variously identified as Margaret of Austria, Anne of Brittany, Blanche-Marie Sforza or even Joanna the Mad of Castille. If, however, the identification of Margaret is correct, her presence and that of Charles may be in relation to either the Treaty of Arras in 1482 or those of Frankfurt and Montil-les-Tours in 1489. Given the fact Charles reneged on the engagement in 1491, I find it unlikely the tapestry would commemorate a later event (presuming the male figure is of him), although Adolphe Lefranq in the *Illustrated Catalogue of Works of the Musée des Beaux-arts at Valenciennes* (1931) suggested a date of 1497 and the Franco-Habsburg truce of that year. Some of these issues have also been highlighted in the catalogue accompanying the magnificent exhibition 'The Last Knight' in New York.

Undoubtedly there are still many mysteries surrounding the production of this tapestry worthy of future study in the years to come.

Nathalie has replied to Keith's points, and the letter from Marilyn Gabaret in the March Bulletin; see Research News, pp 21–4.

More thoughts on the Tournament Tapestry – a response to recent correspondence

Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal's article in the December 2019 Bulletin about the Valenciennes Tournament Tapestry prompted some interesting correspondence. We are grateful to Marilyn Garabet and Keith Downen for their observations and questions. Nathalie has kindly provided a comprehensive response to both.

Response to Marilyn Garabet's letter in the March 2020 Bulletin, pp 3-4

Thank you to Marilyn Garabet for her comments about the eyes of the unidentified man, being Perkin Warbeck/Richard, duke of York, on the Tournament Tapestry. At the time I had noticed it too. However, I wasn't sure. The difference between both eyes could also be explained by the fact that the textile had decayed in several places. In the Tournament Tapestry this is – for example – also evident in the image of Margaret of Austria.

Fortunately, we managed to obtain a slightly clearer image/close up of the face, enabling a better assessment. (see image 1). It is now possible to observe that the right eye clearly looks different compared to the left eye. There also seems to be some scarring next to this eye. Above the right eye, just below the eyebrow, you can also see an extra line or scar. The left eye does indeed appear to have turned slightly inwards, giving the impression of a squint.

Compared to other surviving tapestries of the era, the Tournament Tapestry incorporates surprisingly accurate woven portraits of the depicted nobles. For this reason, we can also assume that the portrait of the man I believe is Richard, duke of York/Perkin Warbeck, reflects his true appearance.

A contemporary source describes the appearance of Perkin Warbeck/Richard, duke of York: in a letter to the Duke of Milan dated the 21st of October 1497 the



1. Close up of the face from the Tournament Tapestry. Image comes from the exhibition/catalogue 'The Last Knight: The Art, Armor, and Ambition of Maximilian I' (New York, 2019). Photo taken by the author.

2. Sketch from the Recueil d'Arras



Milanese Ambassador in England writes: 'He tells him that the young man (Richard, duke of York/Perkin Warbeck) is not handsome, indeed his left eye rather lacks lustre, but he is intelligent and well spoken'.¹

In addition, we can also refer back to the famous sketch from the Recueil d'Arras. (see image 2.)

Ann Wroe describes his left eye – as depicted on the Arras sketch – as follows: 'Neither the shape, nor the colour of this eye resembled the other, and the gaze was slightly misdirected. The eye did not seem blind, but its opacity suggested that his vision was dulled'.²

Both descriptions of these facial features correspond to the face of Richard, duke of York/Perkin Warbeck, as it is depicted in the Tournament Tapestry. What also strikes me is that the artist of the 'Arras sketch' has added something right next to the right eye, which could

Correction

There was a misprint in the letter appearing in the March issue of the *Bulletin* (p. 3, 'The Tournament Tapestry') that described Richmond Herald as 'Richard Herald'. Our apologies go to our correspondent, Marilyn Garabet.

indicate a scar. Also, an extra line (scar?) can be seen above this eye on the sketch. This, too, appears to match the right eye pictured in the tapestry.

Considering all of the above, I agree with Marilyn that the eyes depicted in the tapestry are clearly different compared to each other, which could indeed be an additional factor supporting my hypothesis: that this may be an image of Richard, duke of York/Perkin Warbeck.

However, I think this now raises a more interesting question: could this obvious difference between the two eyes be an indication that the real Richard of Shrewsbury, duke of York, is depicted in the tapestry? Considering the fact that a genetic eye disorder, known as congenital ptosis, 'drooping eyelid', seems to have occurred in the Plantagenet line of Yorkist descendants.³

Sometimes ptosis is present at birth (congenital ptosis). In other cases it occurs later in life due to injury or disease. Ptosis can cause a 'lazy eye', that often wanders inward or outward. It can also be the cause of (the appearance of) asymmetrical eyes, where one eye looks lower than the other.⁴ What if Richard of Shrewsbury inherited this genetic eye condition?

Then I think Philippa Langley was right when she noted the following in one of her talks about The Missing Princes Project: 'The defect in his eye is a significant factor that we must consider for his being the younger son of Edward IV and that it would be remarkable for an imposter to have this defect and to be accepted by those who knew the young prince if it was not a known birth mark'.⁵

Unfortunately, there are no known sources in history to suggest that the young prince Richard suffered from this genetic eye condition. However, Margaret of Burgundy (the boy's putative aunt), offers an intriguing statement about the young man she believed to be the youngest son of her brother, Edward IV. It comes from a letter from the dowager duchess to Isabella of Spain, written from her home in Dendermonde on 25 August 1493. Margaret writes:

I recognised him as easily as I had last seen him yesterday or the day before (I had seen him once long ago in England instead).⁶ He did not have just one but many visible and peculiar signs that hardly one person in thousands or even a million might be found who would have marks of the same kind.⁷

Notes and references

1. 'Milan: 1497', nr 548, in *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan 1385–1618*, ed. Allen B. Hinds (London, 1912), pp 310–41, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/milan/1385-1618>.
2. A. Wroe, *Perkin: a story of deception* (London, 2003), p. 10.
3. D. Jones writes about this genetic characteristic in *The Plantagenets: the kings who made England* (London, 2013).
4. General available information on the internet.
5. P. Langley, The Missing Princes Project, 2017.
6. The dowager duchess visited England in the summer of 1480 (July–September) when Richard, duke of York, was 7 years old. See C. Ross, *Edward IV* (1997), p. 273.
7. BN (Bibliothèque nationale de Paris), Fonds Espagnol 318, F. 83 ligne 69. Translation by Maria Leotta on behalf of The Missing Princes Project, 11 March 2020.

Response to Keith Downen's letter in this Bulletin, pp 3–4

My thanks to Keith A. Downen, MA, for the effort he took to respond to my article. His comments and contributions are interesting and I would like to take this opportunity to briefly respond.

In the recently published catalogue accompanying 'The Last Knight' exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (7 October 2019–5 January 2020), to which Mr Downen refers at the end of his letter, are the first clear and sharp photos of the restored and cleaned Tournament Tapestry. On one of these the crest on the helmet of the knight (left on the foreground) can be judged better, and I agree with Mr Downen that something resembling a long narrow tail and mane is visible, as described and observed by him. This means that the eye-catching crest can also be a sitting lion, instead of a beaver.

However, this makes no difference to the arguments for my hypothesis. More interesting is the fact that the coat of arms depicted on the escutcheon of the horse's shaffron is that of the Reimerswaal family of Zeeland. It is the only horse depicted with a coat of arms. This may be an additional clue that the tapestry was based on a tournament in 1494. I will expand on this below.

As to the identification of the French King Charles VIII: since the restoration and cleaning of the tapestry in 2019 there has been no doubt as to who the male figure in the ermine coat, depicted on the right, is. New photographs clearly show that this person is wearing the French livery collar of the Royal Order of Saint Michael. The typical cockleshells of the order are clearly visible.¹ And there is now also a shared consensus that the woman depicted next to him is Margaret of Austria, the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian.

It is precisely this fact that puzzles the experts. After all, it makes no sense that the French King Charles VIII and Margaret of Austria would be depicted together on a tapestry after the year 1491. The French king had broken off his engagement with Margaret in 1491 in favour of



3. Philip: age 12 (c.1490); and painted portrait, dated towards 1499



4. Margaret: age 10 (ca.1490/91); and portrait (c.1500) based on a panel of a diptych dated 1493-5, National Gallery.

Anne of Brittany, who at that moment was still married – by proxy – to Maximilian. In 1493, as a consequence of the Treaty of Senlis, Margaret was sent back to her father and brother in the Burgundian Low Countries, which was a considerable personal and political humiliation not only for her, but also for her father Maximilian. Therefore, it is argued, that the tapestry must be attributed to an earlier year.

In a recent article about the Tournament Tapestry, included in the aforementioned catalogue, Pierre Terjanian writes that he considers it probable that the tapestry was commissioned while Charles and Margaret were still betrothed, which means before 6 December 1491, and that the tapestry might celebrate the Treaty of Arras (1482) or another treaty, concluded before 1491.²

Mr Downen also points this out and considers it plausible.

However, this assumption implies that the underlying sketch/cartoon of the tapestry must have been made before (or at the very least in) the year 1491. This seems highly unlikely. Both images of Philip the Handsome and Margaret of Austria presented on the tapestry bear a strong resemblance to portraits which were created a considerable time after 1491. When we look at the tapestry, Margaret does not look like a 10-year old child (her age in 1491). She is depicted as a young woman about 14 years of age. Philip, too, seems to be considerably older than 12 or 13 on the tapestry (see images 3, 4 and 5).

For me this means that the underlying sketch/cartoon of the Tournament Tapestry must have been made after



5. Philip and Margaret as depicted on the Tournament Tapestry (after 1494). All images in the public domain

1494. This dating also seems more plausible, given the fact that the person who is generally regarded in literature as the commissioner of the tapestry, namely Elector Frederick III of Saxony (himself a well-known tournament enthusiast), was one of Maximilian's most important guests during the inaugural celebrations of Philip the Handsome in 1494.

In my article in the December 2019 *Bulletin* I give a substantiated explanation why the French king is depicted on the tapestry together with his rejected bride Margaret and why the representation of the tournament chosen may refer to the Peace of Senlis in 1493. An explanation that cannot be viewed in isolation from the central figure on the tapestry: the person I believe to be Richard, duke of York/Perkin Warbeck.³ It is about this man. His face is the only one depicted full frontal. All the other nobles depicted are presented in side view, and with faces looking in different directions.

It may well be that the tournament scene depicted on the tapestry is based on a sword tournament that was held during the inauguration of Philip the Handsome as count of Zeeland on 6 November 1494, in the Zeeland town of Reimerswaal.⁴ The conspicuously visible escutcheon on the horse of the left rider with the coat of arms of Reimerswaal may be a subtle reference to this. This inauguration took place shortly after the extensive inaugural celebrations in Louvain (September 1494) and Antwerp (October 1494).⁵

After that the royal entourage moved to Reimerswaal, where Philip was honoured as the new count of Zeeland in the beginning of November. This was the same county where in the previous year, on 28 July 1493, he had been welcomed together with his sister Margaret, shortly after her painful return from France as the rejected bride of King Charles.⁶

Notes and references

1. With regard to the identification of this person, I am grateful to the former director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Valenciennes, M. Vincent Hadot. He was so kind to show me some new clear photos of the male figure on the left with the ermine coat. On these photos it is clear that this person, who was previously thought to be the Roman King Maximilian I, is wearing the livery collar of the French knightly order of St Michael and not the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece.
2. Pierre Terjanian, 'Tournament Tapestry of Frederick the Wise' in the catalogue of "'The Last Knight": the art, armor and ambition of Maximilian I', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2019, p. 153–5.
3. See: *Ricardian Bulletin*, December 2019, pp 45–53 and the website of The Missing Princes Project: www.revealingrichardiii.com/two-pretenders.html.
4. Reimerswaal was the third most important city in Zeeland in the fifteenth century. In 1489, Maximilian and Philip the Handsome appointed 'their faithful knight, counsellor and chamberlain, Claes van Reimerswaal' as Bailiff of the city of Reimerswaal in Zeeland: original charter from 1489; Zeeuws Archives: 'manuscript collection State Archives in Zeeland, 1206–1948', inv. nr 1083).
5. Cornelius Aurelius, *Divisiiekroniek* (1517) fol. 413 V and 'Dagvaarten van de Staten van Zeeland' (1318–1572) nr 1280 a-e. J. J. Müller (1718) writes about Philip's inauguration festivities in 1494 in *Des Heil. Röm. Reichs, Teutscher Nation (etc.), Erster Teil, 1486 bis 1496*, Cap. IX, p. 231: 'Von Löven [from Leuven], gienge der ruckzug nach Antorf [back to Antwerp] ... schiffete folgends in Seeland nach Römerswall [then left for Reimerswaal in Zeeland]'
6. 'Dagvaarten van de Staten van Zeeland' (1318–1572) nr 1267.

Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal