

Partisan identity in the French civil war, 1405–1418: reconsidering the evidence on livery badges

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Abstract

This article examines the efficiency with which John the Fearless used his personal badges during his conflict with Louis of Orleans and the Armagnacs, and questions current thinking on the relationship between the emblems of both parties. As early as 1405, he began distributing emblems that corresponded directly to his ideology: first the carpenter's plane, and from 1410 onwards, his mason's level, two symbols that were representative of his platform for reform. In August 1411, his urban supporters in Paris and elsewhere began wearing crosses of St Andrew, his patron saint, as a means of identifying themselves as Burgundian partisans. This study argues that in making a conscious decision to link his symbols to his ideology, and in making them available to his vassals and urban supporters alike, John the Fearless forged a strong Burgundian community that transcended social barriers. In so doing, he also manufactured an Armagnac anti-community, a tangible entity against which his partisans' animosity was directed from 1411 onwards. As badges of allegiance, the symbols helped fuel a war that had, thus far, remained a private conflict between the princely houses of Burgundy and Orleans.

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When John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy ordered the assassination of the king's brother, Louis duke of Orleans, in November 1407, he laid the foundations for the civil war that ensued (c.1410–35).¹ Until August 1411, the conflict had remained a relatively private dispute involving only the duke of Burgundy and Louis of Orleans' sons, with their respective allies. However, in August 1411, the duke of Burgundy's ally, the count of Saint Pol, mobilised a large group of Parisian butchers, skinners and tanners to seek out Orleanist supporters in the realm's capital. Consequently, people of all social levels were immediately drawn into the conflict. In September 1411, Pierre des Essarts, the provost of Paris, declared by royal ordinance that all Orleanists were rebels, and that it was therefore permissible to kill and confiscate the property of anyone who was suspected of belonging to their faction. Those who supported the duke of Burgundy began wearing lead and pewter badges bearing a cross of St Andrew, the patron saint of the duke, to differentiate themselves from suspected Orleanists (Figs. 1–4). Some of these popular badges also included the duke of Burgundy's personal emblems, the carpenter's plane and level (Fig. 2). The result of this overt sign of partisanship was that the Parisians were henceforth compelled to divide themselves according to their allegiance, and thereafter acquired the name of either 'Burgundian' or 'Armagnac'.² Fuelled by the terror in the capital, the conflict erupted into full-scale war as the factional divisions spread rapidly to other towns in the realm.

John began encouraging a Burgundian community among his aristocratic followers immediately after his first altercation with Louis of Orleans in 1405 by distributing his personal badge, the carpenter's plane, in the form of jewellery and armour to his retainers and allies. This was typical practice in the fifteenth century — part of what scholars refer to as 'bastard feudalism', when monetary reward rather than land tenure became the preferred form of payment for services rendered.³ Although the duke of Burgundy was not the first to distribute badges to his allies and supporters, his innovation lay in his ability to create a distinct 'Burgundian' community, one that was antithetical to the 'Armagnac' rebel faction, and which integrated partisans from the aristocracy as much as from urban society. Moreover, this community was an outlet

¹ The progression of the civil war between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs is well-documented. For the most recent monographs, see: R. Vaughan, *John the Fearless: the growth of Burgundian power* (Woodbridge, 2002); R.C. Famiglietti, *Royal intrigue: crisis at the court of Charles VI, 1392–1420* (New York, 1982); F. Autrand, *Charles VI: la folie du roi* (Paris, 1986); Jean de Berry: *l'art et le pouvoir* (Paris, 2000); B. Schnerb, *Les Armagnacs et les Bourgeois: la maudite guerre* (Paris, 1988), and *Jean sans Peur. Le prince meurtrier* (Paris, 2005); B. Guenée, *Un meurtre, une société. L'assassinat du duc d'Orléans 23 novembre 1407* (Paris, 1992). See also the earlier monographs by F. Lehoux, *Jean de France, duc de Berri: sa vie, son action politique (1340–1416)*, 4 vols (Paris, 1966–68), and M. Nordberg, *Les ducs et la royauté. Études sur la rivalité des ducs d'Orléans et de Bourgogne, 1392–1407* (Uppsala, 1964).

² *Chroniques du Religieux de Saint-Denis contenant le règne de Charles VI de 1380–1422*, ed. and trans. L.F. Belaguet, introduction Bernard Guenée, 6 vols in 3 (Paris, 1852, rep. 1994), vol. 4, 446 (hereafter, RSD); Jean Juvénal des Ursins, *Histoire de Charles VI, roy de France et de son règne, depuis 1380–1422. Nouvelle collection des mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France depuis le XIIIe siècle jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe*, eds. Joseph François Michaud and Jean-Joseph-François Poujoulat, 32 vols (Paris, 1767–1851), vol. 3, 467. The Bourgeois de Paris chronicler's version of events held that the Armagnacs received their name in 1410. *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris, 1405–1449*, ed. A. Tuetey (Paris, 1881), 10.

³ See K.B. McFarlane, 'Bastard feudalism', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 20 (1945), 161–80. For an overview of the scholarship, see G.L. Harriss, 'Introduction', in: K.B. McFarlane, *England in the fifteenth century. Collected essays* (London, 1981), ix–xxvii; and M. Hicks, *Bastard feudalism* (London, 1995). For the French context see P.S. Lewis, 'Decayed and non-feudalism in later medieval France', in: *Essays in later medieval French history* (London, 1985), 41–68. For a general understanding of the impact of change on courtly culture, see D'A.J.D. Boulton, *The knights of the crown. The monarchical orders of knighthood in later Medieval Europe 1325–1520* (Woodbridge, 1987), 1–26.

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