

## BEARS ON LATE MEDIEVAL STOVE TILES

**Urși reprezentați pe cahle medievale.** Articolul analizează reprezentări de urși pe cahle medievale din întreaga Europă, încercând să verifice și să nuanțeze teoria lui Michel Pastoureau privind istoria culturală a ursului, detronat ca rege al animalelor în secolul al XIII-lea. Există doar 17 asemenea cahle, cele mai multe dintre ele decorate reprezentări heraldice (ale orașului Berna), și câteva în spațiul actual al Cehiei, Slovaciei și Moldovei, reprezentând vânători de urși. O cahlă din Polonia include imaginea unui urs care joacă iar o piesă din Alsacia face din urs atributul iconografic al unei figuri alegorice identificate drept „ira”. Numărul redus al pieselor în discuție arată cu ursul nu se număra printre animalele favorite ale Evului Mediu târziu. Pe cahle el este reprezentat ca element identitar (în cazul blazonului orașului Berna), ca animal vânat, sălbatic dar totuși învins, ca animal de bălci sau chiar întruchipare a păcatului.

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In 2007 Michel Pastoureau published his book on the cultural history of the bear, the king of animals “dethroned” by the lion at the turn of the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> His thesis was that people started to admire and even venerate the bear during prehistory, but by the early Middle Ages numerous sources attest to the preeminent role that the beast played for the Germans, the Scandinavians, and partly for the Slavs and the Celts. The bear was not only admired for its strength and courage, being considered the king of animals, but it was also perceived as a totem animal, an ancestor, and a companion of the gods. So strong and pagan was this symbolism of the bear that the Church tried to fight against it by all means. It did so for centuries, but Pastoureau identifies that the great symbolic decline of the bear in popular culture took place sometime between the eleventh and the thirteenth century. The Church managed to overthrow the ancient king of animals through multiple means: promoting the image of the bear defeated by saints, overlapping important Christian celebrations over ancient festivities related to bears, and strongly associating the beast to the Devil and attributing it almost all capital sins. The final blow was the proclamation of the lion as king of animals in the end of the twelfth century when all his Biblical negative symbolism was incarnated by the leopard (“the bad lion”). Thus the bear was no longer a worthy royal hunt or gift, neither was he a revered ancestor, but he became a devilish, foolish and lazy creature, an amusement for the market fair.

The present paper aims at verifying and detailing Pastoureau’s theory through a case-study of bear representations and their possible reception on stove tiles. The selected source material nevertheless limits the research through its very nature. The first limitation is chronological, since decorated tiles started being used on a large-scale from the fourteenth century, flourishing over the subsequent three centuries. The second limitation is geographical, since only part of Europe favored tile stoves as heating

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *L'Ours. Histoire d'un roi déchu*. Paris, Seuil, 2007.

system: the German-speaking lands, central and eastern Europe, and only rarely the North, through contacts with the Hansa. There are nevertheless certain advantages as well in turning to stove-tiles for this topic: central and eastern European areas are almost completely absent from Pastoureau's geographical span and the distribution of such objects across almost all social strata makes them particularly suitable for reception analyses, as indicators of "popular culture".

The initial overview of animal depictions on stove tiles does indicate that bears feature rarely on such objects<sup>2</sup>; other animals, both real and fabulous, take precedence: lions, griffins, dragons, horses, stags, foxes, birds are more popular than bears, either as heraldic devices, as Christian symbols (the Lion guarding the Tree of Life, the lion breathing life over the three dead cubs, the Pelican in Her Piety etc.), as attributes (horse-back knights or saints), as metaphors (foxes and wolfs as preachers), or as purely decorative elements.

On stove tiles, most bears are heraldic, connected to the city of Bern. Even Pastoureau noted this exception, but suggested the selection of the bear as emblem was simply based on the similar sound of *Bär* and *Berne*<sup>3</sup>: the city's coat of arms depicts a bear (since the thirteenth century), the founding legend stating that Berchtold V, Duke of Zähringen, vowed to name the city after the first animal he met on the hunt, and this turned out to be a bear. Besides adopting the animal on their coat of arms, the authorities also started keeping live bears in the city center, in the Bear Pit (*Bärengraben*) since 1441. Unsurprisingly, a number of tiles from Bern and the surroundings depict the animal. The first and most explicit example is a large-size tile showing St. Vincent with a bear-decorated coat of arms under a Gothic arch, surmounted by a depiction of the Annunciation (Fig. 1)<sup>4</sup>. The tile was graphically reconstructed from ca. 30 fragments discovered in an unidentified location in the city, dated to around 1500.

St. Vincent, identified by the small palm branch he holds, was the patron saint of the city and an impressive cathedral was dedicated to him during the fifteenth century and hosted his relics<sup>5</sup>. The image is therefore expressing a strong local identity, combining the representation of the patron saint and the bear as heraldic device. The motif seems to have been quite popular, since 30 fragments of such tiles have been recovered from Bern. Besides being very expressive of local identity, the image is also rather favorable towards the bear that is places in the proximity of holiness (St. Vincent, the Virgin, and Archangel Gabriel).

Bern's coat of arms also features on other tiles discovered in the city or the neighboring regions<sup>6</sup>. Once it features on the tournament shield held by a knight in full

<sup>2</sup> I did not include here several uncertain depictions of bears (such as one from Iași, Moldavia: Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc, Sergiu Haimovici, *Elemente animaliere pe cahle descoperite în Moldova*, în *Arheologia Moldovei*, 26, 2003, p. 157, p. 159, fig. 6) and one from Feldioara, Transylvania: Daniela Marcu Istrate, *Cahle din Transilvania și Banat de la începuturi până la 1700*. Cluj-Napoca, Accent, 2004, p. 421, fig. 14) or tile fragments too small for a positive identification.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *Quel est le roi des animaux?*, in *Bestiaire du Moyen Âge. Les animaux dans les manuscrits*. Paris, Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2004, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Eva Roth Kaufmann, René Buschor, Daniel Gutscher, *Spätmittelalterliche reliefierte Ofenkeramik in Bern. Herstellung und Motive*. Bern, Staatlicher Lehrmittelverlag, 1994, p. 145, cat. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 68-69.

<sup>6</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 71-72.

armor leaning on a tournament spear against a Gothic architectural background (Fig. 2). The large-size, green-glazed tile was discovered in the center of the city, in Münsterplatz. Its *post quem* dating is 1476, the date inscribed on the flowing text band in the upper left corner<sup>7</sup>.

Two heraldic bears face each other on twin shields on another tile from the area (Fig. 3). The green glazed tile, dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, was found in Burgdorf Castle, Bern canton<sup>8</sup>.

Another tile is more difficult to interpret, since it is decorated with the image of a man, kneeling on his right knee, raising a club, and holding a shield with Bern's coat of arms. According to his clothes, he might be a peasant or a fool (rather the latter due to the grin). The green glazed item dated to the second half of the fifteenth century was discovered in an unidentified place in the city<sup>9</sup>.

Another group of representations depicts bears in less clear heraldic contexts. Tiles with paired animals have been discovered in Bern and the surrounding region, dated to the second half of the fifteenth century. They combine bears, double-headed eagles, lions, unicorns, dragons, and griffins. A rampart bear surrounded by vegetal decoration is once paired with a double-headed crowned eagle on a tile discovered in Wahlern (or Grasburg) castle (Fig. 5)<sup>10</sup>. Its pair tile depicted a lion and a rampant unicorn. A tile from the same series, pairing the bear with a unicorn, was probably used in Fribourg. The depiction is more naturalistic, with the hairy bear leaning its front paws against a tree (willow?) (Fig. 6)<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the more naturalistic depictions and the absence of heraldic shields, the series under discussion might have still used animals as visual identifiers, with the bear making reference to Bern (since the tiles are only known from that area). Besides, all the paired animals in this series are among those often selected on coats of arms. The series does reflect an interest in nature, in seeing animals in their natural habitat, but even the bestiaries do not include crowned two-headed eagles.

As for the bear tiles from Bern, it becomes apparent that from the perspective of our analysis, the area did represent an exception in selecting bears as identifiers, thus endowing them with positive values. The only exception might be the association with the fool (receiving ambiguous interpretations throughout the Middle Ages), but even in this case it might still be an identifier, simply showing the origin of the depicted character<sup>12</sup>. Despite the fact that it is the most preeminent area through the number of tiles depicting bears, there are still other animals that are more popular on tiles there, such as lions, dragons, and griffins.

<sup>7</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 136, cat. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 133, cat. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 147, cat. 105.

<sup>10</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 176, fig. 171.

<sup>11</sup> Kaufmann, Buschor, Gutscher, *Ofenkeramik in Bern*, p. 81, fig. 68.

<sup>12</sup> On fools depicted on stove tiles, see Ana-Maria Gruia, *Fools, Devils, and Alchemy. Secular Images in the Monastery*, in ed. James Hogg, Alain Girard, Daniel Le Blévec, *Central European Charterhouses in the Family of the Carthusian Order*. Levoča-Salzburg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2008, p. 149-159, p. 179 and in *Studia Patzinaka*, 6, 2008, p. 129-145 ([www.patzinakia.com](http://www.patzinakia.com)).

Another heraldic bear can be seen on a Czech tile. He features as supporter of a coat of arms surmounted by a crowned and feathered helmet crest, pairing a lion (Fig. 7)<sup>13</sup>. The coat of arms seems to be “invented”, since it cannot be identified. The tile has been dated to the second half of the fifteenth century and was discovered in the city of Přerov, in the Upper Square. The authors of the catalogue including this tile suspect that the bear in the image is wearing a sort of a pouch and that the representation might be allegorical. The hypothesis, though it does not indicate the literary source or the meaning of such an allegory, is supported by the discovery of analogies in distant places in the Czech Republic, namely Žďár nad Sázavou and Tábor. A local coat of arms is more likely to be depicted on objects distributed close to the area of production and in larger numbers on tiles. I therefore agree that some “pun” was probably intended, but its meaning is now lost.

In other parts of Europe such items are scarce. A recently published stove tile from Nitra (Slovakia) shows a bear hunt. A fashionably-dressed male character spears a rampart bear and a dog attacks the bear from behind. A large lily (or a tree ending in a *fleur de lis*) is depicted between the man and the bear (Fig. 8)<sup>14</sup>.

At least two such tiles (one a flat tile, the other a corner-tile), brown-glazed, dated to the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century have been discovered, together with numerous other tile fragments sharing the same style and technical characteristics, in a house in Mostna street. During that time, it might have been either a city hall or the home of preeminent burgher, heated with at least one decorated tile stove. The stove (or stoves, since fragments from at least 80 tiles have been discovered) also included religious representations (St. George, Adam and Eve, three holy kings), lay images (royal engagement, a stag), heraldic depictions, and decorative elements (rosettes). One other tile from this series draws attention: Samson fighting the lion. The character is dressed in the same way as the bear-killer, so one might ask whether the two tiles depict the deeds of the same person.

The Bible does mention such a person: David. Though not a soldier, David felt compelled to go out and fight Goliath, the giant who was insulting the Israelite army. He went to Saul and recounted how in his youth he had killed a lion and a bear that had threatened his family's sheep: “The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:36). Despite the Biblical writing is brief on the topic, medieval iconography did dwell on it. Some manuscripts and wall paintings depict David fighting the two beasts one at a time<sup>15</sup>. In fighting the bear he is usually armed with a club, but sometimes a spear. There is an argument supporting the identification of the character

<sup>13</sup> Ed. Dana Menoušková, Zdeněk Měřinský, *Kráska, která hřeje. Výběrový katalog gotických a renesančních kachlů Moravy a Slezska*. Brno, Slováké museum v Uherském Hradišti, 2008, p. 97, p. 115, cat. 368, fig. 368.

<sup>14</sup> Mário Bielich, Marián Samuel, *Kachlice*, in ed. Gertrúda Březinová, Marián Samuel, et al, *Tak čo, našli ste niečo? Svedectvo archeologie o minulosti Mostnej ulice v Nitre*. Nitra, Archeologický ústav SAV v Nitre, 2007, p. 84, fig. 86a, p. 103, fig. 99c.

<sup>15</sup> Iconclass code: 71H1431 - David kills a lion and a bear (or tells Saul about it). Images of bears at: <http://www.kb.nl/manuscripts/search/simple/bear/page/3>; [www.bildindex.de](http://www.bildindex.de) “Bär”; <http://tethys.imareal.oew.ac.at/realonline/“Tiere/ Bär”>, etc.

spear the bear on the tile in Nitra as David, namely the royal lily that might indicate the royal status of the man. But it might be another, anonymous royal hunt as well, with the dog as argument (not mentioned in David's story and absent from its visual tradition as well). The first author to mention David as possible bear-killer (but maintaining certain caution in that) was Zdeněk Hazlbauer, in connection to a tile from an unknown Slovak location (Fig. 9). The iconography of this fifteenth-century tile is slightly different, with the central lily replaced by a tree<sup>16</sup>.

An analogous tile fragment was discovered in Prague. The preserved left half of the fifteenth-century tile only shows the hunter, but the item has been graphically reconstructed (Fig. 10)<sup>17</sup>.

Another Czech tile, from Brno, supposedly depicts a bear hunt with a different iconography, i.e. a standing man spears a large four-legged animal standing on all four. The quality of the reproduction though and the sketched drawing do not allow one to decide whether it is a bear or a wolf (though in the latter case that would be a unique representation)<sup>18</sup>. The publishers believe that in case of a wolf, the depiction might be symbolic of Christ's defeating Evil, while in the latter a possible representation of David killing the bear. An earlier reproduction<sup>19</sup> (though not much clearer) makes me believe the animal is indeed a bear. The text mentions that the tile also includes a representation of the Pelican in Her Piety in the tree behind this hunting scene, thus placing it in Christian context.

Indifferent of the identification of the character with David or not, such tiles do render the vision of bears as strong animals, still hunted, but nevertheless defeated. Two related items from Moldavia (Baia, town house<sup>20</sup> and Suceava, princely court<sup>21</sup>) contain the same motif, of a man, aided by a dog, facing a rampart bear, but they include elements that might change the meaning. The bear holds a club (?) in one paw and is not speared but seems to bite on the man's weapon. The hunter is wearing armor (Fig. 11).

These unglazed tiles dated to the end of the fifteenth century have received diverging interpretations. The authors of the discovery in Baia described it as a hunting scene<sup>22</sup>. Horst Klusch believed they depicted a man dancing the bear<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, medieval depictions of such scenes show the bear in chains, which is not the case here, and the presence of the dog and the man's armor stand against such a hypothesis. Paraschiva Batariuc, commenting on the item, argued against the hunting hypothesis as

<sup>16</sup> Zdeněk Hazlbauer, *Krásy středověkých kamen (Odras náboženských idejí v Českém uměleckém řemesle)*. Prague, Zvon, 1998, p. 59, fig. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Vladimír Brych, *Kachle: doby gotické, renesanční a raně barokní: výběrový katalog Národního muzea v Praze*. Prague, Národní Museum, 2004, p. 116, cat. 251.

<sup>18</sup> Menoušková, Měřinský, *Krásy, která hřeje*, p. 58, p. 67, cat. 195, fig. 195, p. 381, fig. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Dana Menoušková, *Ikonografie a ikonologie v kontextu středověkých reliéfně zdobených kachlů z Brna*, in *Archaeologia Historica*, 24, 1999, p. 381, fig. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Horst Klusch, *Zauber alter Kacheln aus Rumänien*. Sibiu, Herausgegeben von Demokratischen Forum der Deutschen in Rumänien, 1999, p. 75, fig. 6; Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc, *Cahle din Moldova medievală. Secolele XIV–XVII*. Suceava, Editura Istros, 1999, p. 235, fig. 38.2.

<sup>21</sup> *Unbekanntes Europa – Schätze aus der Bukowina. Europa necunoscută – Comori din Bucovina*. Suceava, Lidana, 2007, p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> Lia Bătrâna, Adrian Bătrâna, *Elemente decorative în ceramica monumentală de la Baia (jud. Suceava)*, in *Suceava*, 11-12, 1984-1985, p. 148-149, 150-153, fig. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Klusch, *Zauber alter Kacheln*, p. 75.

well, but on the basis of the fact that the bear is armed as well<sup>24</sup>. She believed it to be an illustration of a yet unidentified fable or medieval animal story<sup>25</sup>. Discussing tiles decorated with an episode from Chretien de Troyes's *Chevalier au lion*, namely the fight between a knight and a lion against a rampart dragon, Adrian Rusu notes the similarities in composition<sup>26</sup>. A compromise might be reached in stating that the image makes reference to a hunt gone wrong, with the bear allegorically fighting back. This could be a faint suggestion of a popular belief in the strength and cunning of a bear. Animal fables were a popular genre in medieval literature after the twelfth century, portraying animals as offering example of human behavior in bestiaries, animal fables, beast epics, and sermons. Nobles were seen as predators, the lion and the eagle as kings of the animal kingdom, therefore associated or impersonating just kings. Other predators, such as the wolf and the fox became incarnations of greed and cunning and paired with nobility gone astray<sup>27</sup>. Such perceptions spread from monastery and court to the unlettered masses, being illustrated on misericords, badges, and all sorts of surfaces, such as on stove tiles. Suffice to give the example of the wolf preaching to the geese, a parable against false preachers<sup>28</sup>. As for bears, the Middle Ages acknowledged their similarity to humans through outer look, the ability of standing on two legs, of grabbing things "with their hands", and their supposed sexual practices (like humans not like other four-legged animals)<sup>29</sup>. The image under discussion could therefore allude to such similarities between man and bear (standing up, dexterity of hands/paws) and the world upside-down of medieval marginal art, making the point that the hunted can fight back and attack their hunters<sup>30</sup>.

Our interpretation is supported by another fifteenth-century tile, discovered in Brâncovenesti that illustrates a medieval fable and depicts a man and a lion in combat (Fig. 12)<sup>31</sup>. It is interesting to note that in this case as well, the beast is upright and holds a spear and a shield. The shields of both man and lion are decorated with monstrous masks. The fable identified at the origin of this representation<sup>32</sup> makes the point that one cannot frighten the brave lion with a monster's mask, just as a brave man is not intimidated by idle threats.

<sup>24</sup> Batariuc, Haimovici, *Elemente animaliere*, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> Batariuc, *Cahle din Moldova medievală*, p. 110; Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc, *Motive decorative de inspirație literară pe cahle din secolele XV-XVI descoperite în Moldova*, in *Ars Transsilvaniae*, 5, 1995, p. 110-111.

<sup>26</sup> Adrian Andrei Rusu, *Cahle din Transilvania (III). Trei motive decorative medievale*, in *Acta Musei Napocensis*, 39/40, 2002/2003, p. 108, Pl. I b.

<sup>27</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, *Human animals of medieval fables*, in ed. Nona C. Flores, *Animals in the Middle Ages. A book of essays*. New York and London, Garland, 1996, p. 49-66.

<sup>28</sup> There are numerous such stove tiles: Zdeněk Smetánka, *Ad lupum predicantem. Reliéf pozdně gotického středověkého kachle jako historický pramen*, in *Archeologické rozhledy*, 36, 1983, p. 326-360; Zdeněk Měřinský, *Iterum „Ad lupum predicantem“*, in *Život v archeologii středověku, sborník příspěvků věnovaných Miroslavu Richterovi a Zdeňku Smetánkovi*. Prague, Peres, 1997, p. 459-466; Rusu, *Trei motive decorative medievale*, p. 107-114.

<sup>29</sup> Pastoureaux, *Quel est le roi des animaux?*, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Christa Grössinger, *The world upside-down. English misericords*. London, Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997.

<sup>31</sup> I thank Zoltán Soós for the photo.

<sup>32</sup> Elek Benkő, *A marosvécsi oroszlán*, in *Studia Caroliensia*, 3-4, 2006, p. 315-322.

A Polish tile, from the noble residence in Ujazd, depicts a bear in an interesting procession: a man with a tambourine, a man with an elephant mask (?) and a rampart bear walk towards a man in fool's costume who holds a pole supporting an inscription. Due to the poor reproduction of the item one cannot decipher the inscription (a few letters in Gothic script, a lozenge, and the year?). It seems that the character on the right keeps the bear on a leash that goes through the animal's nose (Fig. 13)<sup>33</sup>.

Several medieval manuscripts and marginal representations show dancing bears, accompanied by fools playing musical instruments, especially tambourines and bagpipes<sup>34</sup>. Other animals playing musical instruments and dancing are also known on stove tiles from Poland<sup>35</sup>. But the more detailed interpretation of the dancing bear tile, unique as yet, depends on a closer inspection of the item and hopefully, the reading of its inscription.

A stove tile from Alsace takes us one chronological step farther, to the sixteenth century, with a depiction typical for its age from several perspectives: the allegorical representation, the semicircular arch, the added inscription. The unglazed tile shows an armed woman with a bear at her feet, under a semicircular arch surmounted by the inscription "IRA" (Fig. 14)<sup>36</sup>.

This clearly puts the bear in a bad light, associating it with one of the seven deadly sins. Wrath (*ira*) was associated to color red and the bear, sometimes depicted as a soldier itself in sixteenth and seventeenth century prints<sup>37</sup>. Pastoureau is silent in his book on the "fate" of the bear during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but this stove tile does indicate a darker image of the bear in the decorative arts of that period.

I would like to mention one more stove tile, indirectly connected to the topic. An item from an identified location in Moldavia is decorated with the image of a man, dressed in medieval costume, with a battle knife hanging on his belt, holding by their neck a lion and a dragon (Fig. 15)<sup>38</sup>.

Horst Klusch published the tile as showing Gilgamesh. Though the Babylonian epic hero did boast of killing various wild animals and was sometimes depicted as fighting two affronted beasts, one wonders if such texts or images were popular enough in fifteenth-century Moldavia as to become the topic of stove tile decoration. I suggest the image was rather influenced by some depiction of David killing the lion and the bear. I mentioned above the second possible pattern in illustrating the scene, with David fighting both rampart animals as once, as can be seen on a French fifteenth-century

<sup>33</sup> Aleksander Andrzejewski, Leszek Kajzer, *Badania zamku i rezydencji w Ujeździe koło Tomaszowa Mazowieckiego przeprowadzone w 2003 roku*, in *Łódzkie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne*, IX, 2004-2005, p. 234, fig. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Claude Gaignabet, Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Âge*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1985, p. 80-87.

<sup>35</sup> For example in Janusz Kuczyński, *Kafle z XIV/XVI w. W zbiorach Muzeum Świętokrzyskiego: katalog wystawy*. Kielce, Muzeum Świętokrzyskie, 1968, p. 12, cat. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Paul Minne, *La céramique de poêle de l'Alsace médiévale*. Strasbourg, Éditions Publitotal, 1977, p. 318, cat. 240.

<sup>37</sup> *Lust and Vice. The Seven Deadly Sins from Dürer to Nauman*. Bern, Zentrum Paul Klee, 2010 (available online at <http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/index.cfm?nav=1245,1397,1443&SID=2&DID=9&aID=297>).

<sup>38</sup> Klusch, *Zauber alter Kacheln*, p. 78, fig. 11, 12.

*Speculum humanae salvationis* manuscript (Fig. 16)<sup>39</sup>. Though on manuscripts like this one the scene is often rendered with David holding both hands between the animals' jaws, in wall painting he sometimes holds them by the neck.

If one were to take the analysis further chronologically, a nineteenth century stove tiles from present-day Ukraine shows the perception of the bear at that time: a man raises the cup in front of a rampart bear that smokes a pipe and plays the violin (Fig. 17)<sup>40</sup>. All the strength, wildness and dignity of the bear have gone, and the animal is reduced to a drinking companion, associated with merry-making through drinking, pipe smoking, and playing music.

As seen above, there are only 17 late medieval stove tiles depicting bears, unlike the hundreds decorated with lions, griffins, horses, dogs, and birds. This indicates the very small interest in bears at the level of this type of material culture objects. There are two main contexts in which bears are still depicted: as heraldic devices (on coats of arms or as heraldic supporters) and as hunted animals.

The only clear cases of heraldic bears are the tiles from Switzerland showing the devices of Bern (Fig. 1-4). The way these bears are depicted indicates they were simply meant as identity markers, with little interest in their physical traits. Their fur is not depicted, and neither are their claws. Their teeth and tongue are rendered since this was the heraldic pattern of the device, probably trying to preserve at least some of the traits that made bears strong and fearless, as all heraldic animals are during the Middle Ages. One must also note the fact that on these tiles, heraldic bears have no anthropomorphic features – they are not rampart, but walking on all fours, they have no elements of human costume or dress and do not hold anything with their paws. The tiles under discussion were found in the city of Bern and one in the near-by castle of Burgdorf, all dated to the second half-end of the fifteenth century. Two more tiles (Fig. 5 and 6), pairing the bear with other animals (once a two-headed eagle and once a unicorn), dated to the same period and found in a castle and probably a city, might be heraldic, but they also show an increased interest in nature: bears are shown in nature, they have more of their wild animal traits (fur, teeth, tongue, and claws). These depictions show the bears standing up, but it seems to me it does not place accent on their similarity to humans, but on their behavior in the natural habitat.

Three more related tiles show a bear and a lion as heraldic supporters of a shield with an unidentified device. I agree with previous researchers in suspecting these are rather illustrations of some literary story, since the bear wears a pouch, is in a very human-like upright posture and holds the shield and the crest with its paws. In medieval iconography, money bags are usually indicators of avarice and greed, traits with which the bear was sometimes associated. Still, the iconography of these three Czech tiles (Fig. 7) also emphasize all of the animal's ferocious elements mentioned above. So, unlike on clear heraldic depictions, this small series places the bear in a bad light – though associated with the lion, the bear holds more allusions to sins: greed, avarice, cruelty.

<sup>39</sup> *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Français 188, fol. 18, at [http://expositions.bnf.fr/bestiaire/grand/b\\_02.htm](http://expositions.bnf.fr/bestiaire/grand/b_02.htm) (accessed 28.09.2011).

<sup>40</sup> Ahniya Kolupayeva, *The Ukrainian stove tiles of XIV to early XX cc. History. Typology. Iconography. Ensemble tunes*. Lviv, Instytut Narodoznavstva NAN Ukrainy, 2006, p. 46, fig. 7.



The second iconographic pattern shows bears as hunted animals. Some of them might allude to the scene when David killed a bear, but even that Biblical connotation not intended, the bear hunt remains the main context. These six tiles (Fig. 10, 11, 13-16), found rather in cities, but once in a princely court, were found across Central and Eastern Europe, from the Czech lands to Slovakia and Moldavia. In these cases the bears have accented ferocious traits; they are strong, but nevertheless defeated. They also show human traits, standing up, grabbing the spear that kills them, sometimes even being armed themselves. If bear hunts seem to have diminished as a practice in Western Europe in the early Middle Ages, the *topos* at least persisted in the Central and Eastern parts of the continent during the fifteenth century.

The two most negative depictions of bears picture them in market-fair processions or in strong association with sin. The tile from Poland (Fig. 13) shows a chained bear, dancing on the rhythm of a tambourine, while the one from Alsace (Fig. 14) would have him as iconographic attribute of the allegory of wrath.

One must also note the association of bears and saints, angles and Christian allegories (St. Vincent, The Virgin, Archangel Gabriel – Fig. 1; the Pelican in Her Piety on the tile from Brno), but also with fools (Fig. 4, Fig. 17), rendering the ambiguity of the bear. They also have allegorical functions, being employed in the construction of literary and visual narrative episodes with allegorical function (Fig. 7, Fig. 14). Though sometimes ambiguous, stove tiles overall indicate the general anthropomorphic perception of bears. On most of the tiles under discussion they stand up, hold objects (shields, clubs, the spear that kills them), one might have a pouch and most of all, they are associated with human sins: avarice, greed, wrath, uncontrolled violence. Stove tiles thus illustrate the popular perception of bears as strong but defeated, mocked, the incarnation of sin and most of all, as being very similar to humans. The only real exceptions are the Swiss tiles, when bears preserve their dignity as heraldic objects or simply the people's interest in them as animals, seen in their natural habitat.

No.	Iconographic scene	Place of discovery	Type of site	Present-day country	Fur	Teeth	Tongue	Claws	Anthropomorphic traits	Dating
1. (Fig. 1)	St. Vincent and Annunciation scene	Bern	? city	Switzerland	-	+	+	-	-	around 1500
2. (Fig. 2)	Bern coat of arms on the shield held by a knight	Bern	city, Münsterplatz	Switzerland	-	-	+	-	-	1476 or after
3. (Fig. 3)	Heraldic bears on affronted shields	Burgdorf, Bern canton	castle	Switzerland	-	+	+	-	-	second half XV
4. (Fig. 4)	Fool/peasant with Bern coat of arms	Bern	? city	Switzerland	-	-	-	-	-	second half XV
5. (Fig. 5)	Eagle and bear	Wahlern /Grasburg	castle	Switzerland	-	+	+	+	+	second half XV
6. (Fig. 6)	Unicorn and bear	Fribourg?	?	Switzerland	+	-	+	+	+	second half XV
7. (Fig. 7)	Bear and lion and heraldic supporters	Přerov	city, Upper Square	Czech Republic	+	+	+	+	+	second half XV
8.	Bear and lion and heraldic supporters	Žďár nad Sázavou	?	Czech Republic	+	+	+	+	+	second half XV

9.	Bear and lion and heraldic supporters	Tábor	?	Czech Republic	+	+	+	+	+	second half XV
10.	Bear hunt/David killing the bear	Nitra	house in Mostna St. (city hall?)	Slovakia	+	+	+	+	+	end XV – beginning XVI
11. (Fig. 9)	Bear hunt/David killing the bear	? Slovakia	?	Slovakia	+	+	+	-	+	XV
12. (Fig. 10)	Bear hunt/David killing the bear	Prague	old town	Czech Republic	+	+	+	-	+	XV
13.	Bear hunt and Pelican in Her Piety	Bmo	city, Masarykova	Czech Republic	+	?	?	?	-	first half XV
14. (Fig. 11a)	Bear hunt	Baia	town house	Romania (Moldavia)	-	-	-	+	+	end XV
15. (Fig. 11b)	Bear hunt	Suceava	princely court	Romania (Moldavia)	-	-	-	+	+	end XV
16. (Fig. 13)	Bear in carnival procession?	Ujazd	noble residence	Poland	-	+	?	+	+	XV
17. (Fig. 14)	Allegorical representation of wrath	?	?	France (Alsace)	+	-	-	-	-	XVI

**Table 1. Medieval stove tiles depicting bears.**



Fig. 1



Fig.2

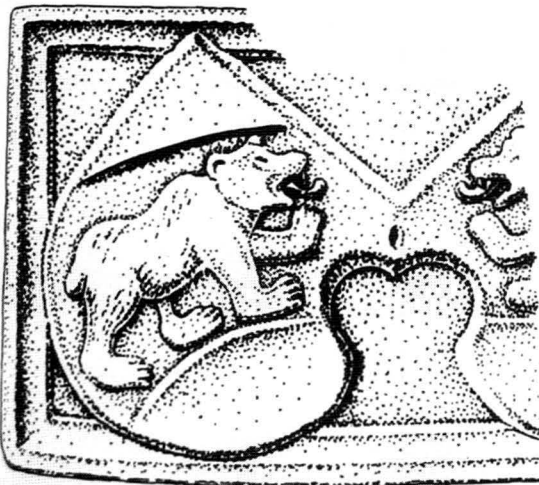


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

- Fig. 1. St. Vincent with the coat of arms of Bern and Annunciation scene, Bern.  
 Fig. 2. Bern coat of arms on the shield held by a knight, Bern.  
 Fig. 3. Heraldic bears, Burgdorf Castle (Switzerland).  
 Fig. 4. Fool (?) with Bern coat of arms, Bern.

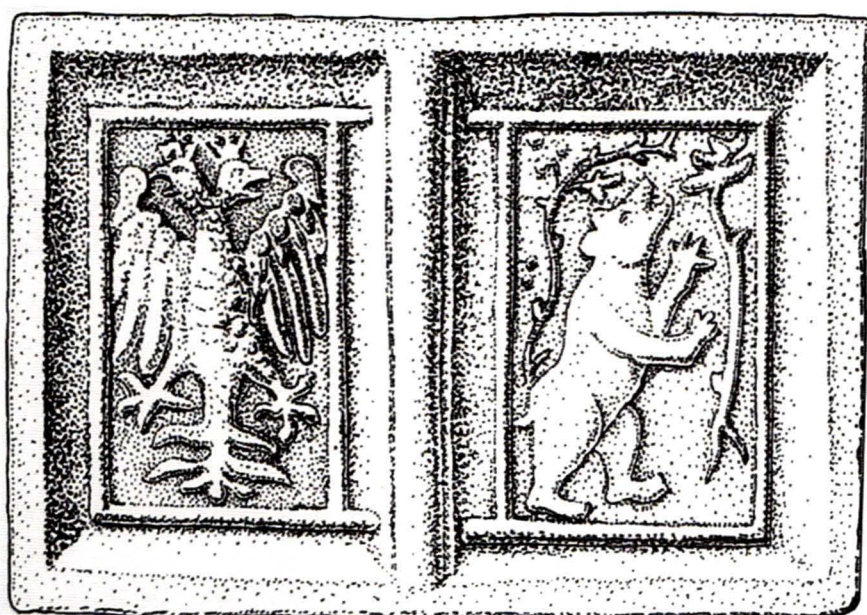


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Fig. 5. Eagle and bear, Wahlern (/Grasburg) (Switzerland).  
Fig. 6. Bear and unicorn, Fribourg (?) (Switzerland).



Fig. 7



Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b

Fig. 7. Bear and lion as heraldic supporters, Přerov (Czech Republic).

Fig. 8. Bear hunt, Nitra (Slovakia) (a. reconstructed tile and b. graphic reconstruction).





Fig. 9



Fig. 10a



Fig. 10b

Fig. 9. David fighting the bear (?), unidentified place in Slovakia.  
 Fig. 10. Bear hunt, Prague (a. preserved fragment and b. graphic reconstruction).



Fig. 11a



Fig. 11b



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Fig. 11. Knight, bear, and dog, a. Baia and b. Suceava (Moldavia).

Fig. 12. Man and lion in combat, Brâncovenesti.

Fig. 13. Carnival procession (?), Ujazd (Poland).



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Fig. 14. Allegorical representation of wrath, unknown location (Alsace).  
Fig. 15. Unidentified scene, in the collection of the Museum of Glass and Ceramics, Bucharest.  
Fig. 16. David fighting the bear and the lion.