

29. Boppard Panel - Siegfried von Gelnhausen and his Wife

This panel was thought to have been located at the foot of the Tree of Jesse window from Boppard, as shown on the left. The dexter shield (which is on the shield bearer’s right and our left) is described as “per pale argent and gules, an eagle displayed sable and lily argent dimidiated”. This means the shield is divided in two vertically, with silver and red backgrounds and half an eagle combined with half a lily. This shield was identified by Professor Hans Wentzel of Stuttgart as



SIEGFRIED VON GELNHAUSEN AND HIS WIFE

that of Siegfried von Gelnhausen, a rich merchant living in the area. The sinister shield (an heraldic term meaning that the shield is on the bearers left and our right) is described as “sable a swan naiant argent”, which means a black background with a white swan swimming to the viewer’s left, and could be that of his wife. More recent researchers have left the couple unidentified. What is certain is that this is a donor panel depicting a man and woman who funded part or all of the construction of the window.

The practice of portraying donors started in the mid 12th century when funding was donated to a church or cathedral during major projects. It gradually became increasingly popular until the 15th and 16th centuries when it became a widespread display of faith and good conscience. Donating a major window like this would have been a way of saving your soul and ensuring your immortality, as well as showing off your wealth and importance. It could also be a good political move – this panel would have shown the allegiance of the merchant to the Carmelite order in a region dominated by their influence. Donor panels are commonly found at the base of a stained glass window, sometimes with an inscription such as the Siegfried von Gelnhausen panel. From the 16th century onwards donor panels become less common as secular glass began to gain preference over religious glass.

Other examples of donor panels in the Burrell Collection include a 14th century kneeling donor figure which may have come from Gresford (45.9), an early 16th century German panel depicting a kneeling mother and her two daughters (45.436), and the more well known Princess Cecily, who would originally have been positioned alongside the donor portraits of her parents and siblings at the foot of the Royal Window at Canterbury Cathedral.



TREE OF JESSE WINDOW FROM BOPPARD