

Canada, Symbols of Sovereignty: An Investigation of the Arms and Seals Borne and Used From the Earliest Times to the Present in Connection with Public Authority in and Over Canada, Along with Consideration of Some Connected Flags. CONRAD SWAN. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c1977 [xxxviii], 272 p. [12] leaves of plates. ill., coats of arms. ISBN 0 8020 5346 7 \$29.95.

A number of scholars possess a practical knowledge of the techniques for handling seals and armorial devices as archival or museum objects, but relatively few understand the principles represented by such devices. The main contribution of Conrad Swan's book is that it studies the arms, seals and flags of public authority not primarily as artifacts, but rather "as the expression of principles of constitutional as well as international law." In this respect, it offers a fresh approach to the history of our country and its constitutional evolution.

Armorial bearings of sovereign states relate less to a given territory than to the concept of sovereignty. Ignorance of this distinction led the Canadian Government after Confederation to adopt unauthorized armorial bearings that were an aggregate of provincial arms. This approach soon broke down when several new provinces joined Confederation, thus overloading the federal shield of arms. In 1921, Canada obtained new armorial bearings which were no longer identified with a specific territory, but rather expressed the principle of sovereignty.

Swan's book contains an impressive body of unpublished information. It provides a detailed account of the procedures followed by Great Britain in assigning seals to its dependencies and later replacing them as monarchs changed. The volume also clearly defines the areas where Canada has assumed responsibility for adopting its own symbols of sovereignty and those where the granting authority still resides with the Crown.

In conducting his research, Swan obviously consulted a broad spectrum of specialists and the collections of many institutions in England, Scotland, Canada, France and Spain. For the section dealing with armorial bearings, he made extensive use of the little-known documentation of the College of Arms and consulted a large number of key documents in Canada. Unfortunately, some important material not yet (or just recently) placed in Canadian repositories seems to have escaped the author's attention. Certain subjects are also not considered fully. The Canadian Red Ensign, for instance, could have had a large chapter of its own.

Without being pedantic, the author's style is somewhat formal and occasionally has an archaic or even poetic ring to it. Specialized terminology is limited to heraldic and sigillographic descriptions and a glossary of terms is provided at the end of the book. These descriptions do interrupt the flow of the narrative, but they are indispensable to anyone having to identify, classify, catalogue and study arms, seals or flags. The author's comments on the artistic merits of some of the designs of Canadian arms and seals are judicious and to the point. Most of the illustrations are well reproduced and the artistic rendering of many of the armorial bearings is refreshingly original compared with the stylistic monotony which usually prevails in depictions of these official symbols.

Swan's book is to a high degree a pioneering work which studies an aspect of arms, seals and flags that had received little attention so far. It is a useful and reliable reference work which will be appreciated by museologists, archivists, librarians, historians, collectors and by anyone who takes an interest in this aspect of Canada's past.

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