

RON AS A MATERIAL FOR DECORATION IN 19TH CENTURY IN LUXEMBOURG

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Luxembourg's contribution to the subject of this colloquy is necessarily modest and also cannot be limited exclusively to the first half of the 19th century for the following reasons:

After very impressive creations in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially in the so-called golden age under the reign of Empress Maria Theresia, there was a span of approximately fifty years in Luxembourg in which the great tradition of wrought and cast iron crafts was interrupted and lost almost entirely. As a result of the French revolution, Luxembourg became a continuous deployment zone and staging area of foreign armies with destruction, requisitioning, war taxes, monetary devaluation, change of the administration into a "forest department" in its wake. In addition, abbeys, monasteries and estates were seized by the state and sold, the citizens of Luxembourg were recruited for foreign military service, part of the rural population arose in the so-called "war of the bobbins;" Napoleon's beaten armies passed through the country. In 1815 the Treaty of Vienna ceded the areas east of the Moselle, Sauer and Our Rivers to Germany; contrary to the provisions of that treaty, Emperor William I of Holland, Grand Duke of Luxembourg, had the country ruled like a remote province of the United Low Countries, much to the anger of the population. Hence, it was not surprising that the Belgian revolution against Holland in 1830 caused the open country, except for the fortress of Luxembourg, to join the Belgians; a Luxembourg corps of volunteers even took part in the battle. William I drew his conclusions from this attitude, and after 1831 Luxembourg was administered independently; however, under the London Treaty of 1839 the Wallonian provinces with 176,000 inhabitants went to Belgium. With William II'S accession to the throne things improved slightly, even though there were still some points of debate which caused a minor revolution in 1848, as a result of which a new constitution with general elections to the chamber was enforced. But an era of prosperity did not begin until 1860. I think this introduction was necessary for better understanding of the difficult situation of Luxembourg and its arts and crafts. In 1812 a number of ironworks were in operation, for instance, at Rollingen/Mersch, Bissen, Fischbach, Berburg, Simmern (Septfontaines), Weilerbach, Grundhof and Lasauvage. They processed bog iron ore and consumed 374,000 steres of wood per annum. While, from 1817 onwards, iron industry in nearby Belgium began to use hard coal as a fuel for iron ore smelting, Luxembourg adhered to the old method, because of its rich wood resources, and the change to hard coal was not made until very much later and with great reluctance.

In 1818 the first rock ore, called minette, was discovered in the south of the country, but for the time being the discovery remained without major repercussions, because there was an excess of bog iron ore which supplied ten times more iron than the country was able to consume.

In the meantime, hardly any new wrought iron ornaments had been created for the small number of important buildings, most of them public buildings, smaller schools and a few churches. The old designs were simplified and employed for grills, gates and crosses on church towers. The few chimney plates made in the early 19th century had become very simple, even plain, unless older motifs were copied.

In 1837 August Metz and his brothers set up August Metz und Cie. ironworks to lease the existing plants and exploit the minette ore deposits. In 1839 the output of pig iron from bog iron ore amounted to 7000 tons per annum; two melting furnaces each were operated at Fischbach, Bissen and Rollingen, one each at Berburg, Colmar-Berg, Grundhof, Ansemburg and Dommeldingen. Only rich ores were processed, and the iron billets produced were exported abroad. As a result of the separation of Belgium there was no longer any company in the country to produce ironware, except for nail production. Suddenly it was remembered that as far back as the 14th century guns had been cast in Luxembourg, huge cannons for that time, and that in the 17th and 18th centuries the most beautiful chimney plates had been made. This led to a tremendous breakthrough of cast iron as a decorative material.

It was used for the balustrades around William's Square and the new townhall, the new boundary demarkations with Belgium, for tombstone and church crosses, curbs of graves, whole monuments on graveyards, screens and gates, lanterns, banisters, spiral staircases, communion benches, chimneys, even for beds, tables, chairs and settles. One altar was equipped with a cast iron superstructure; there was a tremendous enthusiasm for this decoration so easy and quick to make.

The heads or busts of renowned people were preserved in cast iron for posterity; the founders of the new iron industry were buried under cast iron ledgers carrying their portraits as half reliefs; cast iron tombstones decorated with coats of arms indicated the burial places of the Herren von Birtringen; fences around graveyards were stylishly made of cast iron. Cast iron grave crosses in many variations either simply stood in the ground or were put on top of tombstones. In some cases, customary tombstones were even simulated entirely in cast iron. Balcony rails were fabricated almost in mass production; for this purpose, mostly traditional designs were used. The other grills and iron barred gates often combined wrought and cast iron work. For instance, lances made of cast iron were attached to the wrought iron at Ansemburg Castle. Around the middle of the century the Gothic Revival style exerted a tremendous influence which continued until the turn of the century.

Particularly decorative and playful examples are the insides and outsides of banisters, resurrections of ornamental forms of the 18th century blended with motifs from the Empire and Restoration periods. Occasionally the banisters of outer staircases were crowned by canopies over the entrance doors.

Filigree window grills, mostly with wooden handrails for support, were becoming the custom everywhere, even on 17th and 18th century facades where they replaced wrought iron ornaments. The wealth of forms was almost inexhaustible, stemming from many trends and styles of decorative arts.

Also outside doors were caught in the new wave: cast iron decorations made use of motifs of the Late Gothic and Renaissance periods, frequently concentrating on mythological subjects.

Crowns on roofs and towers were partly made of cast iron, partly of plate or copper on the basis of old motifs.

Doorknobs and knockers, sophisticated shoe scrapers, pumps and pump arms, consoles and columns, buffers, flower vases and low decorative grills around lawns, all made of cast iron, were very famous products of iron foundries. Cast iron even penetrated inside buildings. The catalogues of the Eicher-Hütten-Verein Metz & Cie. give an impression of the wealth of products turned out by their foundry; there were communion benches for churches, the most beautiful spiral staircases, chimneys, attic windows, stoves with mantels, column stoves, consoles,

holy-water fonts, beds of austere classic forms or curved Baroque designs with rich decorations, holders for tongs and shovels, coat hooks, carriers for umbrellas, coalboxes, mortars, stoves from Luxembourg, Belgium and France, cribs for horses, kettles for animals, irons, clock weights, bootjacks, melting crucibles, waffle irons, flower vases, garden furniture, tables etc. All these were not mere articles of daily use, but carefully thought-out, well designed means of decoration. In fact, they were so much in demand as to be fabricated for many more decades. Yet, by far not all possibilities were exhausted, as is shown by the 1870 balance sheet indicating 910,000 tons of iron ore production, of which only 36 % were fed to the twelve existing blast furnaces of Dommeldingen, Eich, Steinfort and Hollerich, the balance being exported.

It is very difficult to try and analyse the elements of style in all these creations and, above all, pinpoint foreign influences. I should be very happy indeed, if this contribution could help to fill some gaps in the research work of my colleagues or provide them with information on which to expand their activities. Unfortunately, there are as yet no thorough studies or surveys in Luxembourg about the subject of iron decorations. I hope this colloquy will act as an incentive to our younger scientists also in Luxembourg to start comprehensive research on the uses of iron.