Third Series Vol. XI Part 1
No. 229
Spring 2015

THE COAT OF ARMS

ISSN 0010-003X
Price £12.00

an heraldic journal published twice yearly by The Heraldry Society

THE COAT OF ARMS

The journal of the Heraldry Society

Third series
Volume XI
2015
Part 1

Number 229 in the original series started in 1952

The Coat of Arms is published twice a year by The Heraldry Society, whose registered office is 53 Hitchin Street, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6AQ. The Society was registered in England in 1956 as registered charity no. 241456.

Founding Editor
†John Brooke-Little, C.V.O., M.A., F.H.S.

Honorary Editors
C. E. A. Cheesman, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A., Richmond Herald
M. P. D. O'Donoghue, M.A., F.S.A., York Herald

Reviews Editor
Tom O'Donnell, M.A., M.PHIL.

Editorial Committee
Adrian Ailes, M.A., D.PHIL., F.S.A., F.H.S.
Jackson W. Armstrong, B.A., M.PHIL., PH.D.
Noel Cox, LL.M., M.THEOL., PH.D., M.A., F.R.HIST.S.
Andrew Hanham, B.A., PH.D., F.R.HIST.S.
Jun.-Prof. Dr Torsten Hiltmann

Advertizing Manager
John Tunesi of Liongam

www.the-coat-of-arms.co.uk

PLATE 7

Grant of arms from the Emperor Sigismund to Heinrich Schlick, burgher of Eger (Cheb in Bohemia) and Heinrich's son Kaspar, his clerk (and future chancellor), 1416. Zámrsk, Statní Okresní Archiv, Rodinný archiv Šliků, Inv. Nr. 204, Sign. IV.1. *See page 60.*

Two exampes of the work of the 'Meister der Handregistratur', both 1446. Left (*a*), the imperial coat of arms, painted in a cartulary (the so-called 'Handregistratur') for Emperor Frederick III. Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Hs. Weiß 10 (Böhm 19); detail. Right (*b*), grant of arms issued by Fredrick III for the secular canons of Wiener Neustadt. Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Allgemeine Urkundenreihe 1446 II 15. *See page 62.*

PROJECT REPORT

Illuminated Charters as 'Gesamtkunstwerk': Graz University (Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities) and Austrian Academy of Sciences (Institut für Mittelalterforschung, Abteilung Editionsunternehmen und Quellenforschung).

This new project, supported by the Austrian Science Fund FWF and running for three years from June 2014,[1] builds upon interdisciplinary co-operation between the three areas of history, art history and digital humanities. It aims at amassing an electronic corpus of all the illuminated charters from the Middle Ages (i.e. down to approximately 1500×1520) scattered through archives and libraries worldwide. The material will be presented in a fully searchable open-access online database, by way of detailed calendar-style abstracts and with detailed commentary from historical and art-historical viewpoints,[2] supported (as far as possible) by digital images of the documents. The project team enter metadata online into a collaborative working environment provided by *www.monasterium.net*, the web's largest online metaportal of charters.

Ever since diplomatic studies became established as the key ancillary subject for history in continental Europe in the early eighteenth century,[3] the description of the extrinsic features of acts and charters has been a standard element in the analysis and editing of such materials. With a clear focus on investigative tools that can assist forensic analysis and the sifting of originals from forgeries, scholars have tended to concentrate on signs of authentication typical of chancery styles, leaving other graphic elements and decoration aside. On the other hand, as early as the first half of the nineteenth century, illuminated charters were, thanks to their sometimes flamboyant artistic form, displayed publicly in special exhibitions (e.g. in the Archives Nationales in Paris). Modern case studies of illuminated charters are often located at the intersection between historical and art-historical ancillary subjects, yet sometimes

[1] FWF P26706-G21. The project website is *http://illuminierte-urkunden.uni-graz.at*. The Principal Investigators are Georg Vogeler (Graz), Martin Roland and Andreas Zajic (Vienna); the researcher positions are held by Martina Bürgermeister (Graz), and Gabriele Bartz and Markus Gneiß (Vienna).

[2] The full text version of calendars, descriptions and commentary will be in German to start with, but by the end of the project shorter versions or abstracts (at least) will be available in English.

[3] For the impact of Jean Mabillon on the Continental tradition of diplomatic, see e.g. L. Duranti, *Diplomatics: new uses for an old science* (Lanham 1998), and, more recently, C. Williams, 'Diplomatic attitudes: from Mabillon to metadata', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 26 (2005), pp. 1-24.

fail to meet the scholarly expectations of both disciplines at the time. A reliable and exhaustive survey on a European level is still wanting.[4]

For the purposes of the project, the term 'charters' applies to legal documents in 'original' transmitted form (usually engrossed on parchment), subject to certain internal and external criteria of (textual) composition and layout. Illumination in cartularies and in manuscript copies of charters is excluded from our study. The adjective 'illuminated' is a technical term used in art history, more specifically in research into book painting. It refers to manuscripts containing artistic decoration, without regard to the quality or quantity of these elements. Besides luxury manuscripts with various – albeit exclusively historiated – forms of decoration (i.e. scenes referring to the content of the text) we also find merely graphic decoration without any association with the text. These elements may vary considerably in extent and quality, and range from amateurish daubing to the most elaborate graphic refinement.

Accordingly, we define illuminated charters as charters with graphic (drawn or painted) features which either exceed the usual standard of decoration (such as simple initials) in charters or are significant of specific chancery styles.[5] A special focus is laid on charters displaying historiated figural or representational decoration and on documents displaying decoration in colour. In addition, charters with graphically elaborate signs of authentication are included. In order to determine the intensity of the investigation and to capture the totality of the corpus of documents the following distinctions are important:

Illuminated charters in a broader sense are charters which contain graphic or painted elements, quite apart from their text. In this respect any form of decorative make-up featuring in charters belongs to our field of research, such as display scripts and graphic symbols and special signs, like chrismons, monograms, *rotae*, *benevalete* and notarial *signa* or marks. By contrast, illuminated charters in a stricter sense are those that contain historiated elements, i.e. whose decoration refers to the content, issuer, recipient, beneficiary and viewer, and those where the scheme of decoration makes significant use of colour.

By the time of the project's completion (in summer 2017) the database is expected to contain about 1000 illuminated charters prior to *c.* 1500×20, offering richly annotated source material which future researchers may investigate even further. Amidst the entire body of material we make out two major groups of material: on the one hand, illuminated collective indulgences issued by the bishops of the papal curia in Avignon in the second third of the fourteenth century and the Roman cardinals at the end of the fifteenth century, and, on the other hand, grants of arms issued by the

[4] For different approaches to national collections of illuminated charters see the recent volume, *Les chartes ornées dans l'Europe romane et gothique*, edd. Ghislain Brunel and Marc Smith (*Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 169: Paris 2013).

[5] See M. Roland and A. Zajic, 'Illuminierte Urkunden des Mittelalters in Mitteleuropa', *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde* 59 (2013) pp. 241-432; M. Roland and A. Zajic, 'Les chartes médiévales enluminées dans les pays d'Europe centrale', in *Les chartes ornées*, pp. 151-253. Both articles provide exhaustive bibliographic reference to the relevant older literature on imperial grants of arms.

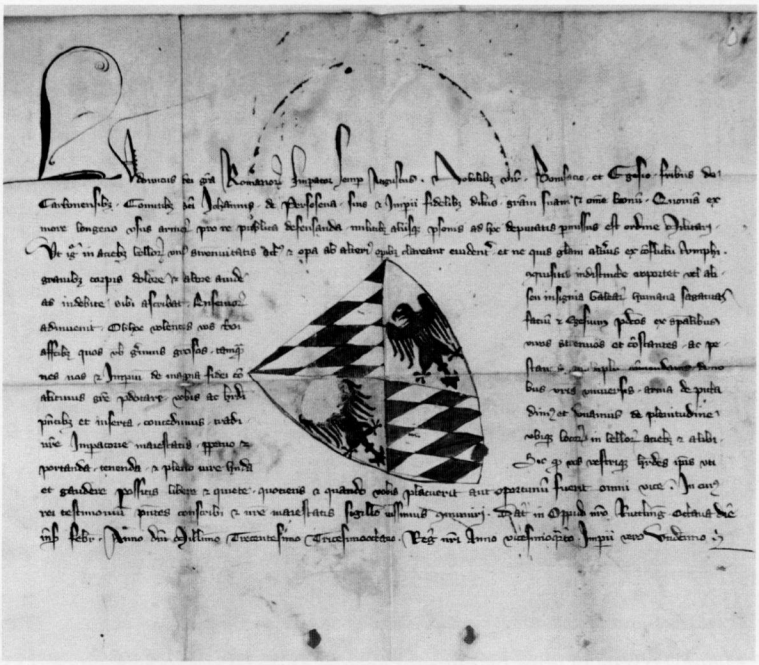

Photo courtesy FWF Project "Illuminated Charters as "Gesamtskunstwerk""

Figure 1: Grant of arms by Emperor Louis the Bavarian to the Counts Carbonesi (*per saltire* Bavaria and the Empire), 1338; detail. Bologna, Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Ms Gozzadini 74/a.

Roman Kings and Emperors from the middle of the fourteenth. It is this latter topic of (imperial) grants of arms which will undoubtedly be of most immediate interest to heraldists.[6]

When the sealed private charter became the predominant form of written evidence of legal transactions north of the Alps (by the early thirteenth century), the importance and number of heraldic seals grew substantially. As a consequence, the use of (heraldic) seals ceased to be restricted to the aristocracy, but was soon adapted by non-noble bearers of arms such as clergymen and ecclesiastical institutions as well as towns and, later on, corporations such as companies, universities and confraternities. At the same time the attempt to codify juridically the hitherto more-or-less unregulated practice of bearing coats of arms led to an increase in the making of charters by which (within the framework of private law) coats of arms or elements of heraldic achievements (especially crests) became objects of transaction, by sale or inheritance. And learned jurists (such as the celebrated Bartolo da Sassoferrato) started to reflect upon the legal basis of heraldry in Roman law.

[6] At present the database contains entries for about 400 grants of arms issued as illuminated charters (letters patent) by European monarchs, the overwhelming majority of them emanating from the imperial chanceries during the 15th century.

Photo courtesy FWF Project 'Illuminated Charters as "Gesamtskunstwerk"'

Figure 2: Grant of arms by Emperor Charles IV to Giacomo Santacroce, 1355; detail of illumination showing the handover of an escutcheon with the Luxemburg lion differenced by a barrulet. Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, inv. 2042.

In the course of the fourteenth century the imperial chanceries developed a new genre of charters, granting to recipients in the name of the Emperor the right to bear a particular coat of arms. Following their chronological order of appearance, we discern two groups of documents which may best be labelled as the 'old' and 'new' type of grants of arms. Acts of the older type were initially often concerned with armorial designs which obviously represented or at least suggested to the beholder prestigious (personal) ties between the issuer and the recipient. They are good examples of what French heraldry has recently termed 'partages héraldiques',[7] i.e. the transfer of elements of the ruler's arms to the grantee. For instance, the Emperor Louis IV (Louis the Bavarian, emperor from 1328 until his death in 1347) as well as Charles IV (emperor 1355-78) augmented the existing coats of arms of some of their loyal Italian servants and supporters by adding allusions to their own dynastic or territorial arms (e.g. the lozenges of Bavaria or the Luxemburg lion) or the imperial coat of arms (*Or an eagle displayed sable*): see **Figures 1** and **2**. More than once, such augmentations of arms were accompanied by promotion into higher ranks of nobility, such as the bestowal of the dignity of a lord or a count on the recipient.

As a starting point for this remarkable invention of illuminated grants of arms we may consider the interaction between the cultural landscapes of Northern and

[7] Cf. the title of a workshop organized by Laurent Hablot (CESCM) in Poitiers in 2013: *www.sourcem.fr/content/3e-journees-d-etudes-heraldiques*.

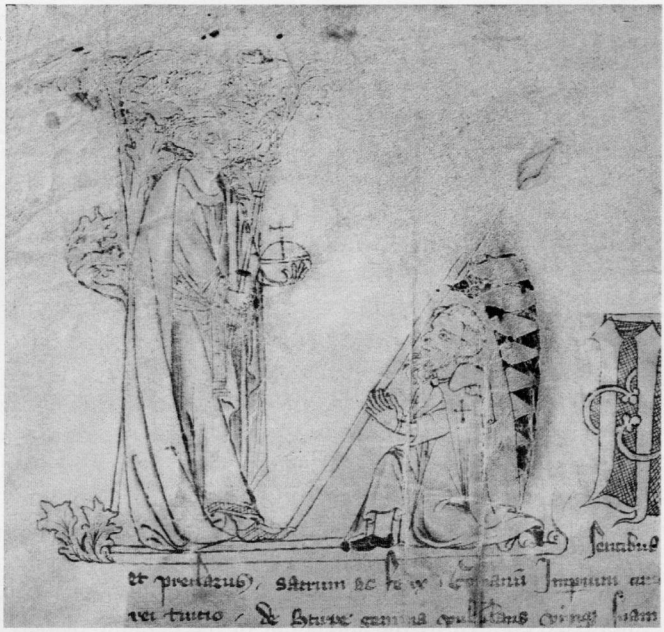

Photo courtesy FWF Project 'Illuminated Charters as "Gesamtskunstwerk"'

Figure 3: Emperor Louis the Bavarian confers the Duchy of Lithuania on the Teutonic Order, 1337. Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preußischer Kuluturbesitz, Staatsarchiv Königsberg, Schieblade 20, Nr. 29.

Central Italy, where there was an early inclination to illuminated charters containing heraldic elements, and the imperial chancery of Louis the Bavarian, with its tendency towards iconographic concepts with equally strong heraldic impact (such as initials with enfeoffment scenes, focussing on the Emperor handing over a heraldically designed banner to a liegeman: cf. **Figure 3**). It was perhaps just a short step from these decorative heraldic elements in fourteenth-century charter illumination to the painted coats of arms in the centre of nearly contemporaneous imperial grants of arms.

It was not until the end of the fourteenth century that the imperial clerks and scribes produced grants of arms of the 'new' type. According to the text of these charters, the Emperor claimed the right of granting arms as an exclusive privilege derived from his imperial plenitude of power and grace. Now, most of the coats of arms granted by imperial charters were deliberately chosen by the recipients (often it was indeed just that older arms were to be solemnly confirmed) and no longer constituted a visual relation to the issuer. This 'new' type of document obviously struck a chord with both parties: the issue of such acts with their rather lengthy formulaic texts constituted a considerable source of fees and revenues for the members of the chancery under whose charge they came. For the recipients, many of them belonging to wealthy urban office-holding elites with ambitions of social ascent into nobility, they were appraised and prestigious proofs of their (allegedly) close relationship to the Emperor, drawn upon as a diplomatic means of distinction from their competitors. Gaining a simple grant of arms did not—despite the claims of older literature—cause

the transformation of non-nobles into nobility, but it did often accompany a promising career track that was to culminate in a formal patent of nobility. But we find among grantees not only physical persons but also corporations and entities such as boroughs, market towns and companies, which it seems had not previously borne coats of arms, nor used them in seals. Personal armigers from the northern parts of the Empire who could look back on a longer family tradition of bearing arms were only slowly in the early fifteenth century adopting the new fashion of asking for imperial confirmation (not to mention grants) of arms. And a small number of lords and noblemen preferred to petition for augmentations, which in the early fifteenth century consisted of rather minor or marginal changes, such as the replacement of a silver crown on the helm by a new golden one.

Illuminated imperial grants of arms remained a rather peripheral type of deed until the reign of the Emperor Sigismund, when the Council of Constance (1414-18) as a dynamic melting pot of ideas and hotspot of European cultural transfer processes seemed to drive the demand for these hitherto unpopular charters. Heraldic display was ubiquitous all over the city of Constance: coats of arms painted on sheets of paper and parchment were attached to the street fronts of the inns where ambassadors and legates were lodged. As the Council's business wore on, increasing numbers of foreigners—whether in attendance at the sessions or employed as messengers—were impressed enough by the splendour of the heraldic display around them to take the opportunity while they were there and acquire an imperial grant of arms. These grants were painted in the professional illuminators' workshops that obviously acted in close cooperation with the chancery clerks. To be sure of being granted precisely the coat of arms they wanted, petitioners apparently submitted to the chancery a basic design, prepared by an illuminator in the place where they lived or at some other Court location. This sketch then formed the basis for the blazon as drafted by the chancery in the charter. In a handful of acts, especially from the early fifteenth century, verbal blazoning was in fact completely omitted, so that the image alone provided the juridically significant heraldic information.

In charters drawn up by the imperial chancery, the coats of arms blazoned in the text were—from the very beginning in 1336 until the nineteenth century—normally depicted at the centre of the parchment in full colours and using gold (see **Plate 7**). Charters produced by the Hungarian royal chancery would by contrast place the rectangular frame containing the illumination in the upper left corner, before the opening of text (see **Figure 4**). In principle, it seems, the chancery scribes left blank the space for the secondary illumination, and it was the recipient who had to arrange for the addition of the artwork to the charter, which was handed over to him completed and sealed; if requested by the recipient, it was also copied into the imperial register, though without the eye-catching images. With the grantee commissioning the illuminator (and choosing accordingly from a broad range of quality and price levels), the parchments sometimes became costly 'show pieces' in the true meaning of the term. Depending on the patron's choice, we sometimes find prominent masters of manuscript illumination executing the artwork in late medieval imperial grants of arms.

Once the classic chancery form for illuminated grants of arms had been arrived at around 1400, the fundamental structure of the text— including typical phraseo-

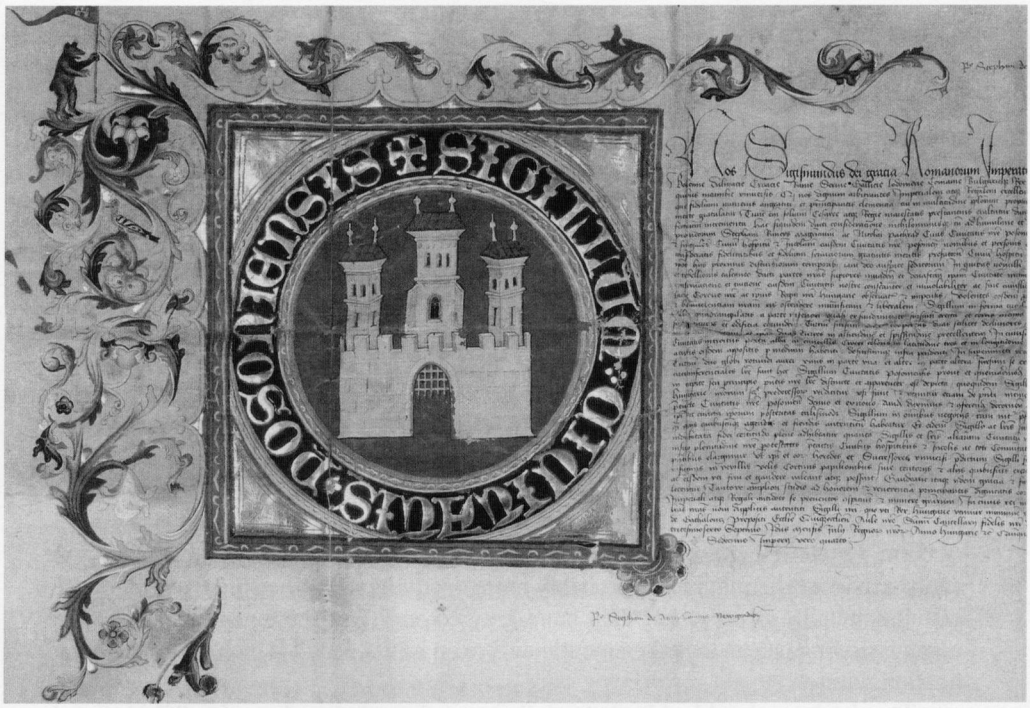

Figure 4: Grant of arms from the Emperor Sigismund to the City of Bratislava, 1436; detail. Bratislava, Archiv Mesta, Sign. 1435.

logy and imagery within the blazoning—and the standard layout, with the centrally located illumination, were used and reused throughout the centuries until the end of the Empire in the early nineteenth century.

In respect to grants of arms, the project will try to find out why the (royal) granting of arms turned into such a heterogeneous phenomenon throughout Europe, in spite of the fact that heraldry itself was undoubtedly a supranational cultural tie across the whole Continent. English kings only very rarely made formal grants of arms to individuals and corporations in the late Middle Ages (and after 1484 definitively left the field to the Office of Arms, acting with delegated prerogative).[8] The rulers of France sometimes issued letters patent by which they themselves granted arms directly, but this happened only in very small numbers (and only a very small proportion of the deeds were illuminated). In the Empire, by contrast, grants of arms became one of the most prominent types of charter issued by the chanceries in the late fifteenth century. The imperial model was apparently adopted by the Bohemian Kings from the mid-fifteenth century, while the Kings of Hungary continued to issue grants in line with the older traditions of their territory.

A special strand of the project will be dedicated to an innovative methodological approach towards some of the masterpieces of heraldic illumination contained in

[8] Cf. A. Ailes, 'Royal grants of arms in England before 1484', in *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen. Essays in Honour of Maurice Keen*, ed. P. R. Coss (Woodbridge 2009), pp. 85-96.

the corpus. The artwork of nearly a dozen grants of arms dating between *c.* 1446 and 1459 is likely to belong to the oeuvre of the so-called 'Meister der Handregistratur', a highly skilled Viennese painter who was also responsible for one of the most superb and precious illuminated manuscripts commissioned by Emperor Frederick III (see **Plate 8**). The recipients of the grants of arms decorated by this artist came from a very wide social and financial spectrum, ranging from Austrian monasteries favoured by the Emperor to a burgher of Bratislava (today in Slovakia), and from Austrian towns to influential Hungarian counts. The only connection between these various patrons was their deliberate choice of outstanding quality in terms of document painting. But did commissioning the same painter mean paying the same price? The aim of a collaborative investigation with the newly founded Centre of Image and Material Analysis in Cultural Heritage (CIMA) in Vienna is to analyse by different means (e.g. X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, Raman spectroscopy) the composition of the colour pigments that were used. The goal is to find out whether the illuminator used the same materials for all clients and prepared his work to the same standard for each of them. Or were there, perhaps, two types of pigment in use: a basic (cheaper) one and also a more distinguished (probably more opaque) one? When did the painter use genuine metallic silver rather than mere grey colour? Was there any chance for the commissioning patron to make amendments to an initial pencil sketch underneath the final miniature?

The database should add substantially to our knowledge about the diffusion and outreach of an originally exclusive type of imperial charter granting arms to subjects of the Empire as well as to foreigners.

Andreas Zajic