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THE EMERGENCE OF THE WORD 'HERALDRY' IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY AND THE ROOTS OF A MISCONCEPTION

Torsten Hiltmann

1. Introduction

Heralds and heraldry are generally thought to have a close, even essential relationship, dating back to their origins. An intimate link is assumed to exist between the office of the heralds and the study of armorial devices that is heraldry. Heraldry, for a long time, were believed to be the foremost experts in all things heraldic, and to have come into existence with the sole purpose of systematising and cultivating the heraldic language and design, and governing and judging the proper and legitimate use of coats of arms in medieval society.

However, recent research on the office of heralds has demonstrated that this close connection between 'heralds' and 'heraldry' did not exist in the Middle Ages, and that for the most part the two institutions developed independently of each other. Only over the course of the history of the herald's office—and only at the end of the Middle Ages—did heraldry become one of their more important duties. Moreover, the degree to which heraldry was important to the herald's office differed greatly in different places and periods. Our understanding of 'the herald' as a historical phenomenon, therefore, has to be reconsidered in the same way as the proliferation and impact of heraldry as a means of communication in the Middle Ages needs to be reevaluated.¹

Such insights allow the herald's office to be reconsidered in its own right, separately from heraldry, and heraldry to be assessed as a means of mass communication that was available to the whole of medieval society, far from being the 'secret science' of heralds. But how did the misconception that equated and confused 'heralds' and 'heraldry' originate?

In this paper, I will suggest three reasons for the tendency of modern historiography to run together heralds and heraldry. The first reason lies in the shared historical roots of heralds and heraldry. They both came to life in the context of the twelfth-century tournaments, which lured historians into equating them from their very beginning. Although their common origins are evident, I will argue that at the time heraldry was not at all the heralds' primary occupation. The second reason that seems to be responsible for the misconception is the etymological origin of both terms. I will demonstrate that the definition of 'heraldry' as the study or science of coats of arms is in fact a modern interpretation that did not exist in the Middle Ages, where 'heraldry'

¹ I intend to address these questions in more detail in a separate paper, Torsten Hiltmann, 'Untangling heralds from heraldry: towards a reassessment of medieval heraldry', in preparation.

(if used at all) had a much broader sense. The third reason, finally, lies in the fact that for a long time heralds were almost exclusively studied by heraldists who, following *their* research interests, were primarily concerned with coats of arms.

This misconception of the relationship between ‘heralds’ and ‘heraldry’, I will argue in conclusion, points to the importance of close sensitivity to the evolving terminological and historiographical background, and invites us to reconsider our perspectives on heralds and heraldry.

2. The Shared Origins of Heraldry and Heraldry

Historically both heralds and coats of arms emerged from the context of the twelfth-century tournament. Tournaments were in fact the only place where heralds were to be found in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.² This was not, of course, a purely casual collocation. It cannot be denied that the heralds did recognize and announce the jousting champions by their coat of arms, but they were far from being the only people able to do so. Yet the co-occurrence of heralds and heraldry, and the skill of heralds in identifying coats of arms, have led historians and heraldists to believe that heralds and heraldry must be intrinsically related to each other. Following from the idea that the new sign system of coats of arms required its very own experts and interpreters to oversee its use and foster its development, scholars prematurely concluded that this must have been the core function and *raison d’être* of the herald’s office.³

An oft-cited argument in favour of this view is the first documented mention of a herald in Chrétien de Troye’s *Chevalier de la Charette* (1177–81), in which a herald meets the knight Lancelot at the Tournament of Noauz. Since the knight was bearing a coat of arms different from his normal one, the herald is curious whom the unfamiliar shield displayed outside an inn belongs to. Only when the herald enters the inn does he recognise the hero by his appearance:

L’escu trova a l’uis devant
Si l’esgarda ; mes ne pot estre
Qu’il coneüst lui ne son mestre,
Ne set qui porter le devoit.
L’uis de la meison overt voit,
S’antre anz, et vit gesir el lit
Lancelot, et puis qu’il le vit
Le conut, et si s’an seigna.⁴

² Silvère Menegaldo, ‘Les hérauts, les ménestrels et Jacques Bretel dans le Tournoi de Chauvency’, in *Lettres, musique et société en Lorraine médiévale: autour du ‘Tournoi de Chauvency’* (Ms. Oxford Bodleian Douce 308), edd. Mireill Chazan and Nancy Freeman Regalado (Geneva 2012), pp. 299–318 at 308.

³ See, for instance, Anthony R. Wagner, *Heralds of England* (London 1967), pp. 17f. and esp. p. 25, where Wagner states that ‘a technical subject cannot exist without specialists’. More recently, this sentiment is shared by Georg Scheibelreiter, *Wappen im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt 2014), pp. 136f.

⁴ ‘He found the shield outside the door, and as he saw it, he recognized neither the shield nor its master, clueless as to whom it might belong. The door of the house ajar, he entered and

Of course it can be argued, as has been done frequently before, that this source demonstrates the expectation that heralds memorise and recognise coats of arms.⁵ While this may be the case, it does not necessarily follow that knowledge of coats of arms was unique to the heralds, and that others did not possess such knowledge. What this source does demonstrate, however, is the fact that heralds were well able to recognise a famous nobleman by other means than heraldry alone, in this case Lancelot's face.

As a matter of fact, in tournaments the heralds' duties went far beyond the mere recognition of arms and the identification of those bearing them. They were also charged with proclaiming the combatants' *cris d'armes* and publicly elaborating their noble deeds in arms. Heraldry was the source of choice for any spectator who wished to know about the life of the jousting knights, not just their arms.

This is also what the herald in the *Chevalier de la Charette* did. He had to promise Lancelot he would not reveal his true identity, so he acted accordingly and did not mention his name:

Tantost de la meison s'an saut,
Si s'an vet, criant molt an haut;
'Or est venuz qui l'aunera!
Or est venuz qui l'aunera!'
Ice criait par tot li garz,
Et genz saillent de totes parz,
Se li demandent que il crie.
[...]
Et sachiez que dit fu lors primes
'Or est venuz qui l'aunera!'
Nostre mestre an fu li hyra
Qui a dire le nos aprist,
Car il premierement le dist.⁶

Recognition of coats of arms was merely a means to an end, namely knowledge of those whom the herald, like others, could identify by their coat of arms. To know about the noble heroes, to observe and record their deeds, and to further their honour by spreading word of them; this was the heralds' first and foremost occupation for centuries.

saw lying on the bed, Lancelot, and as he saw him, he recognized him, and crossed himself'. Chrétien de Troyes, *Œuvres complètes*, edd. Daniel Poirion et al. (Paris 1994), pp. 643f., vv. 5247–59. All translations by the present writer.

⁵ See, for instance, Anthony R. Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages* (2nd edn., Oxford 1959), pp. 46f., whose assumptions were adopted by many others.

⁶ 'Right away he left the house, and in parting he called out aloud: "Now has come the one who will take their measure! Now has come the one who will take their measure!" This did the lad cry all around, and people come from everywhere, asking him what he's crying. [...] And do know that this was the first time it was said, "Now has come the one who will take their measure!" And our master was a herald, who taught us to say it, since he said it first.' Chrétien de Troyes, op. cit. (note 4 above), p. 644, vv. 5571–84.

Thus whenever the terms 'faire heraudie' or 'heraulder' were used (which was seldom), it was the action of proclaiming, of speaking out aloud, and of giving praise to someone.⁷ The modern English verb 'to herald' still reflects some of this semantic heritage.

As these words' meaning already runs contrary to what modern semantics suggest, it seems appropriate to investigate the etymological origins and semantic properties of the term 'heraldry' in more detail.

3. The Semantic Link

In the English language the word 'heraldry' seems to have originally designated all activities of the heralds, whether involving coats of arms, pedigree work, proclamation or the settling of hierarchy or precedence. Instances of this broad application of the term are recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* down to the seventeenth century, along with later instances—doubtless antiquarian in character but still relevant as speaking to a genuine reminiscence of the word's earlier sense.⁸ However it is clear that from early on there was a tendency for the word's application to focus on the study and practice of coats of arms in particular. The latter sense is sometimes also called 'armory'. On the continent, in French, German or Dutch, such a distinction does not exist. Here the respective terms for heraldry (*héraldique*, *Heraldik*, *heraldiek*) refer unequivocally to the 'science of coats of arms', and despite occasional claims to the contrary this narrower sense of 'heraldry' is really the only current one in English too.⁹

Yet although this narrower sense of 'heraldry' may be the cause for the frivolous equation of heralds and heraldry, this understanding of the term is nothing but a modern definition that reflects a historical change in the duties of the herald's office. In the Middle Ages, any evidence for the use of the term 'heraldry' as a noun, or its cognate adjective 'heraldic', with specific reference to coats of arms is scarce.

The first example is still closely tied to the heralds' importance in recognising and announcing the champions of the tournament. In Jacques Bretel's *Tournoi de Chauvency* (1285) Bretel, a minstrel, challenges the heralds to a competition in naming the combatant knights:

⁷ See the entries for 'heraudie' and 'herauder' in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1500)* (2012), online at www.atilf.fr/dmf (accessed 5/6/2015), especially the reference to the verb 'faire heraudie'. See the famous description of the office of arms by Dame Prudence in the fifteenth-century *Le débat des hérauts d'armes de France et d'Angleterre*, edd. Léopold Pannier and Paul Meyer (Paris 1888), p. 1: 'Et toutes choses faictes en grans magnificences et tendans a honneurs par vous doivent estre herauldées [*sic*] et publiées en divers royaumes et pays; donnez courage a plusieurs princes et nobles chevaliers de faire de haultes entreprises par quoy il soit d'eulx longue fame et renommée, et devez dire verité en armes et departir les honneurs a qui ilz appartiennent.'

⁸ *OED* s.v. 'heraldry, n.', online at www.oed.com/view/Entry/86052 (accessed 4/5/2015).

⁹ For modern invocations of the distinction see, for example, Rodney Dennys, *Heraldry and the Heralds* (London 1982), p. 8. Wagner also distinguished heraldry in a broader and in a narrower sense, that is coat of arms; *Heralds of England* (note 3 above), p. 24.

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Adont escrient cis hirauc.
Chascunz huia en son latin,
Et je crioie 'Bazentin'
Que je cuida que ce fust cil.
— 'Diable vos fait si soutil',
Dist uns hirauc, 'en hiraudie.'
— 'Tais toi, mesias, Dex te maudie,
C'est Bazentins'. — 'Vos i mentéz!'¹⁰

At least in Bretel's account, he did better than the heralds did. However, 'heraudie' here means, above all, to recognise the champions on the tournament field, not necessarily or primarily to deal with coats of arms.

The first use of the term that suggests such a meaning dates back to the first half of the fourteenth century. The Anglo-Norman treatise *De heraudie*, an explanation of the blason of arms, describes the business of the herald's office of arms as follows:

De heraudie le mestier
Si est les armes divider
Les colours et les propretees
Q'en armes sount trouvez [...].¹¹

Other evidence for the use of the terms 'heraldry' or 'heraudie' in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth century does not seem to exist. It is not until the sixteenth century that they occur again: In *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio invectiva* (c. 1526/1527), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa mentions, alongside other arts and sciences, the *ars heraldica*, and defines it as *heraldorum ars, philosophia in censendis distribuendisque istis nobilium clypeis admodum occupata* ('the art of the heralds, methodical study in assessing and allotting the shields of the nobles').¹²

These references, it appears, are the only medieval evidence for a semantic relation linking heralds to heraldry understood as the 'science of coats of arms'. When, then, was this link eventually established as firmly as it exists today?

Although heralds in England were far more involved in the administration of coats of arms than in France or Germany,¹³ the English term 'heraldry' only emerges in the second half of the sixteenth century. In John Bossewell's *Workes of Armorie*

¹⁰ 'At this moment the heralds cried, everyone shouted in his way, and I cried "Bazentin", since I thought that would be him.—"The devil made you so clever", said one of the heralds, "in heraldry".—"Be quiet, *mesias* [uncertain term of address], God may curse you, it's Bazentin."—"You are lying!"; Jacques Bretel, *Tournoi de Chauvency*, ed. Maurice Delbouille (Liège and Paris 1932), p. 18, vv. 472–9.

¹¹ 'The business of heraldry (*heraudie*) is to devise the coats of arms the colours and the properties that in coats of arms are to be found.' Ruth J. Dean, 'An early treatise on heraldry in Anglo-Norman', in *Romance Studies in Memory of Edward Billings Ham*, ed. Urban T. Holmes (Hayward 1967), pp. 21–9 at 25.

¹² Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio invectiva etc.* (Cologne 1531), cap. LXXXI.

¹³ See Hiltmann, 'Untangling heralds from heraldry' (note 1 above).

(1572), 'herehaultry' appears for the first time with regard to matters of 'armory'. In his dedication to William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley, Bossewell sets out to give an account of all those who have already written about armory in the English language, but at the beginning of the list he states: 'I find so fewe, that I coulde almoste haue saide none, to haue written in our native tongue, of the science and skill of Armory.'¹⁴

Nevertheless, there are after all a few Bossewell can and does mention. Amongst them is Gerard Leigh who, in Bossewell's words, 'was of late specially in this kind of Herehaultry, a very fruteful and worthy writer master'.¹⁵ Here too, however, Bossewell speaks only of 'this kind of Heraldry' and not of heraldry as such.

In French, the term 'héraldique' was initially used as an adjective only. When François de Belleforest in 1579 addresses the origins of the office of the king of arms and refers to the authority of 'tous ceux qui ont escrit de l'art heraldique en France' ('all those who wrote about the art of heraldry in France'),¹⁶ he still tends to refer to heralds as such rather than armory in particular. And when Belleforest writes about the heralds, he underlines that this office required kings of arms to know the nobility and to possess some understanding of warfare. If there is any link between heralds and armory, it is that Belleforest's remarks on heralds come immediately after his thoughts on armory. Yet this link is anything but close. At the end of his explanations about coats of arms, where Belleforest proves by citing Caesar that already in ancient times coat of arms were in use, the subject is changed quite abruptly, without suggesting any thematic continuity:

Cesar leur [sc. to the veterans who fought against him with elephants] octroya de porter desormais les Elephans pour leurs armoiries, mais laissons ce propos à d'autres à vuidier, & venons à noz Herauds d'armes, que noz majeurs ont appelez voir-disans, c'est à dire veritables, ou disans verité.¹⁷

The first reference in French which links the term 'héraldique' explicitly to coats of arms and not necessarily heralds dates no further back than 1635, when Louvan Géliot states that authors writing about the 'art of armories' called it 'héraldique': 'Encore que de tous ceux qui ont escrit de l'art des armoiries qu'ils appellent Heraldique, il n'y en a point qui fasse l'introduction des brisures plus anciennes que le President Fauchet.'¹⁸

¹⁴ John Bossewell, *Workes of Armorie* (London 1572), p. i.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. ii.

¹⁶ François de Belleforest, *Les grandes annales et histoire générale de France etc.* (2 vols., Paris 1579), vol. 1, p. 760.

¹⁷ 'Caesar allowed them to bear from now on elephants in their coats of arms, but let us leave this topic to others, and let us turn to our heralds, whom our ancestors called 'voir-disans', which means truthful, or truth-telling.' Translated from Belleforest, *ibid.*

¹⁸ 'Again, among all those who wrote about the art of armory, what they call Heraldry, there is none who would date the introduction of cadency marks earlier than the President Fauchet.' L. Géliot, *Indice armorial, ou Sommaire explication des mots usitez au blason des armoiries* (Paris 1635), p. 26. See also *ibid.*, pp. 51, 122, 188 etc. Note though that Claude Fauchet, for his part, always seems to use the word 'armoiries' when he speaks of heraldry in the sense of coats of arms. He does not appear to use the word 'héraldique' at all; see, for example, C. Fauchet, *Les antiquitez et histoires gauloises et françoises* (Geneva 1611).

Only with the middle of the seventeenth century, does the term gain appreciably wider currency, especially in expressions such as 'art héraldique' or 'science héraldique'. It is only then that the terms 'héraldique' and 'heraldry' come to refer particularly to the science of coats of arms in both French and English. In England, this period sees the publication of books entitled *A Display of Heraldrie* (1611) by John Guillim, *A Brief Historical Discourse of the Original and Grovvtb of Heraldry* (1672) by Thomas Philipot, and *An Essay to Heraldry in Two Parts* (1684) by Richard Blome. In France, there are works such as *Abbrégé méthodique des principes de la science héraldique* (1647) by Jean-Claude Favre, *Trésor héraldique ou mercure armorial* (1657) by Charles Segoing, or the *Discours de l'origine des armes et des termes receus et usités pour l'explication de la science héraldique* (1658) by Claude-François Menestrier in France. In German, the earliest references to the corresponding term *Heraldik* does not occur until the eighteenth century.¹⁹

It appears therefore that our modern understanding of the term 'heraldry' in the sense of 'armory', denominating the 'science of arms', is mostly a creation of seventeenth-century scholars. Before then, the use of the term heraldry in this sense was haphazard. And just as in earlier times, people continued to use words derived from the term 'arms', such as the English 'armory', the French 'armoiries' or German 'Wappen', when they spoke about the science of coats of arms in the seventeenth and following centuries.

If the term 'heraldry' in its modern application did not appear until the seventeenth century, it is important to realise that the similarity of the terms 'heralds' and 'heraldry', and thus the close relation between the heralds and the science of coats of arms that it implies, in fact reflects a perception of seventeenth-century writers, and not necessarily the medieval circumstances. Quite the contrary: the term only came into existence *after* the late medieval heyday of the office, at the end of its unprecedented social and institutional rise.

By the seventeenth century, the office had already undergone crucial transformations. The numbers of heralds had decreased, and their office often came into the hands of noblemen and artists entrusted with duties entirely different from the heralds' medieval role as, primarily, messengers and minstrels. Ceremonial matters and genealogical studies became the crucial element of their office; one possible result of this was that heraldry increased in importance. Unfortunately, however, this phase in the herald's history is poorly studied, and it is not yet possible to give a conclusive explanation for this shift in meaning, favouring 'armory' at the expense of other duties previously entailed by 'heraldry' in the sense of the business of the heralds.

In short, the modern sense of the term 'heraldry' reflects a modern perception of the heralds' function. Reading it back into the Middle Ages unchallenged thus risks neglecting and ignoring the possibility of historical development and change.²⁰

¹⁹ Georg Estor, *Probe einer verbesserten Heraldic etc.* (Steinmarck 1728); Sebastian Jacob Jungendres, *Einleitung zur Heraldic für die Jugend in Frag und Antwort etc.* (Nuremberg 1729).

²⁰ That there indeed was an on-going historical development of the herald's office was impressively demonstrated by the papers given at the conference 'The History of Heraldry: State of the

4. The Limited Focus of Former Studies

Nevertheless, scholars have tended to equate heraldry with the function of heralds. The third underlying cause of this false equation, and the final one to be addressed in this paper, lies in the fact that most studies on the herald's office hitherto published have been written by heraldists and—in the case of England—modern professional heralds themselves. Their approach to the medieval office of the heralds was of course motivated by *their* primary interest in heraldry in the sense of armory, and restricted to the heralds' duties relating to coats of arms.

This bias towards the armorial aspects of the office of the medieval heralds has not been observed, let alone compensated for, by other scholars and has subsequently been tacitly perpetuated. Textbooks on the herald's office by heraldists and heralds have been uncritically perceived as providing the full picture on medieval heralds. This is also due to a lack of other studies on the history of heralds that might take into account different aspects of their office, and thus give a fuller view of what the term 'herald' might actually entail in regard to the Middle Ages.²¹

In the most influential study on heralds so far, Sir Anthony Wagner's *Heralds and Heraldry* (1956), the title already welds together the two terms, and that the book is indeed concerned with the heraldic expertise of the heralds becomes even more obvious in its subtitle, 'The Growth of the Armorial Function of Heraldry'. While Wagner's *magnum opus* itself aims to put the nexus of heralds and heraldry into a historical perspective, it has more than once been understood by later scholars as a study on the history of heralds in general. Similarly, Michel Pastoureaux's seminal study *Traité d'héraldique* (1979) on heraldry is often cited in French publications as a secondary source on heralds, even though Pastoureaux's book contains only *one* chapter on heralds, the title of which explicitly limits the scope of enquiry to 'the heralds and the armorial system of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries'.²²

As for German scholarship, Egon von Berchem's study *Die Herolde und ihre Beziehung zum Wappenwesen* (1939) has long been cited as a textbook on heralds. This is even more misleading than the cases just mentioned, since Berchem not only limited his focus to the specific relationship between heralds and heraldry, but explicitly set out to write the book to prove this connection. It was never meant as a

Art and New Perspectives', which took place in two sessions in 2014 and 2015 in Münster. For reports on workshops, see the blog Heraldica Nova, online at heralds.hypotheses.org/391 and heralds.hypotheses.org/703 (accessed 20/8/2015).

²¹ Though the situation has changed over the last 15 years. See, for example, Gert Melville, 'Un bel office. Zum Heroldswesen in der spätmittelalterlichen Welt des Adels, Der Höfe und Fürsten', in *Deutscher Königshof, Hoftag und Reichstag im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Moraw (Vorträge Und Forschungen, 48: Sigmaringen, 2002), pp. 291-321; Torsten Hiltmann, *Spätmittelalterliche Heroldskompendien. Referenzen adeliger Wissenskultur in Zeiten gesellschaftlichen Wandels (Frankreich und Burgund, 15. Jahrhundert)* (Munich 2011); as well as collaborative volumes edited by Bertrand Schnerb, *Le héraut, figure européenne (XIVe - XVIe siècle)* (= *Revue du Nord* 88) (Lille 2007), and Katie Stevenson, *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge 2009).

²² Michel Pastoureaux, *Traité d'héraldique* (Paris 2003), pp. 59-65.

an open-minded historical study on the herald's office in general, but a tendentious argument that might well have developed out of Berchem's personal quarrel with Felix Hauptmann. Hauptmann had, to Berchem's dismay, originally put forward the idea that in the Middle Ages there was no exclusive relationship between heralds and heraldry, although he failed to give any conclusive evidence.²³ Berchem wanted to prove Hauptmann wrong, and in doing so he purposefully not only omitted in his study other aspects of the medieval herald's office, but also omitted any evidence that contradicted his main argument. Unfortunately, this did not prevent scholars from citing Berchem's study as a general introduction to the office of heralds. This was, as was mentioned before, also due to a lack of alternative accounts.²⁴

It seems reasonable therefore to argue that the disciplinary bias of modern heraldists and professional heralds contributed to the widespread belief that heraldry, understood as the 'science of arms', was the primary occupation of medieval heralds. This bias was what has hitherto stunted the production of open-minded studies on the full scope of duties, functions and varieties of the herald's office.

5. Conclusion

Scholarship has come to realise that an uncritical acceptance of the idea that 'heraldry' is the business of 'heralds' does not do justice to the historically and geographically diverse duties of the herald's office, and that an understanding of heralds as the harbingers of the 'secret science'²⁵ of heraldry is underestimating the widespread use and knowledge of heraldry in the Middle Ages. Despite overwhelming evidence calling for a critical and independent study of heraldry and heralds in their own respective rights, it is crucial to understand how the misconception that equated heralds and heraldry came into existence in the first place, in order to understand and approach both phenomena properly and independently.

The seemingly self-evident connection between 'heraldry', understood in the sense of 'armory' or the study of armorial devices, and 'heralds' as medieval officials only became as close as it is today from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, when the historical relationship of heralds and heraldry had changed completely as

²³ See Felix Hauptmann, *Wappenkunde* (Munich and Berlin 1914), pp. 5f.

²⁴ For Germany see now Nils Bock, *Die Herolde im römisch-deutschen Reich des späten Mittelalters. Studie zur adligen Kommunikation im späten Mittelalter* (Ostfildern 2015).

²⁵ The idea of heraldry as the heralds' 'secret science' only appears at the end of the fifteenth century, when the authors of armorial treatises began to argue that the strange names given to the colours and devices of coats of arms were imposed on purpose in order to bar laymen from this kind of heraldic knowledge. The first mention, as far as I am aware, can be found in the treatise *Nouvelle maniere de blasonner armes* (1494) that has been included among the *Blason des couleurs* treatises, previously attributed in error to Jean Courtois, Sicily Herald. The text is edited in Elizabeth Nelson, 'Le Blason des Couleurs. A Treatise on Color Theory and Symbolism in Northern Europe during the Renaissance' (Brown University PhD thesis 1998), pp. 356f. For the difficult history of the most important medieval treatise on coats of arms, see Torsten Hiltmann, 'La paternité littéraire des hérauts d'armes et les textes héraldiques: Héraut Sicile et le Blason des couleurs en armes' in *Estudos de Heráldica Medieval*, edd. Maria de Lurdes Rosa, Miguel Metelo de Seixas (Lisboa 2012), pp. 59–83.

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compared to the Middle Ages. Only over the course of their office's history, and only at the end of the medieval epoch, did heralds become, it seems, predominantly engaged in matters of genealogy and the science of armory, so that eventually they lent their name to it.

In the Middle Ages themselves, modern scholarship shows that this relationship was far less intimate and exclusive. The similarity of the terms, their co-occurrence at the tournaments of the twelfth century, and the fact that medieval heralds have almost exclusively been studied with respect to heraldry, have lured heraldists and historians into a false sense of security.

An investigation of the relationship between the terms 'heralds' and 'heraldry', however, demonstrates the semantic openness and changeability of terminology. This underlines the importance of taking into account conceptual history when approaching both primary and secondary sources. Presuppositions inherent in the use of key terms influence assumptions and approaches. An awareness of these semantic presuppositions can open up more refined perspectives both on the office of the heralds and on heraldry as a means of communication in the Middle Ages.