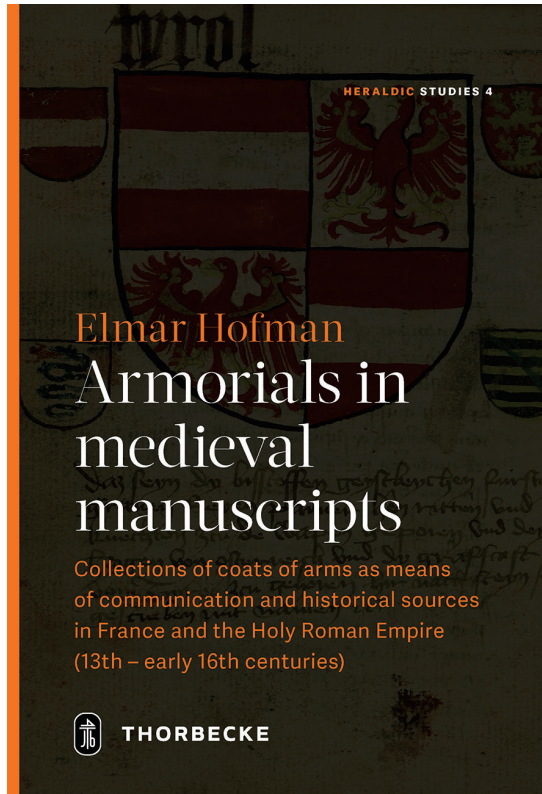


BOOK REVIEWS

Elmar Hofman, *Armorial in Medieval Manuscripts: Collections of coats of arms as means of communication and historical sources in France and the Holy Roman Empire (13th – early 16th centuries)*, *Heraldic Studies* 4, Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2022. 378 pp. ISBN: 9783799515542. €58.



Medieval armorials are a key source for historians and heraldists alike. Since the nineteenth century, many have been edited in one form or another (facsimile, heraldic editions, databases), and they figure prominently in the scholarly literature. Nonetheless, while we know a lot about individual armorials, general studies on the genre are largely lacking. It is therefore most welcome that Elmar Hofman's monograph (the published version of his Ph.D. thesis) provides an overview of manuscripts armorials from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Based on the study of many manuscripts Hofman addresses many fundamental questions: Who produced and used these manuscripts? How were arms selected, arranged, and presented? Which conventions guided both the production and the (medieval) understanding of these armorials? How can we date the manuscripts? And crucially, how can we determine what the purpose of these works was?

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The first chapter contains an overview of existing scholarship, including a brief but illuminating account on various heraldic editions of armorials (and, sadly, in many cases their shortcomings). Hofman contrasts the more or less continuous interest in armorials by heraldists with the more recent interest by academic historians. He himself identifies as a historian, with his main question being how medieval armorials can be ‘studied as means of communication and as historical sources’ (p. 24).

Chapter two is mainly devoted to the tricky question of defining armorials. As Hofman rightly points out, many of the existing definitions are quite broad (indeed, sometimes vague), but in practice many scholars silently adopt a very narrow definition of ‘armorials proper’: books or perhaps rolls containing hundreds of arms but little if any other content. As Hofman makes clear, such a narrow definition is both unfounded and detrimental to research. Consequently, his own corpus of 135 manuscripts includes all ‘major’ armorials, many lesser-known examples, but also a fair share of borderline cases. At the same time, he strictly excludes medieval armorials extant only in modern copies (e.g. *Bigot* or *Charolais*). For pragmatic reasons he gives preference to manuscripts available in facsimile editions or digital form. The selection is not entirely consistent, though. For example, of the six manuscripts of the chronicles of Diebold Schilling found at www.e-codices.ch, Hofman includes only one, even though all six are lavishly illuminated with many coats of arms and heraldic banners. Yet the crucial point is that Hofman’s corpus is both large and diverse.

The next chapter makes a strong case for the use of medieval manuscripts, rather than modern copies or editions. As Hofman makes clear in a number of fine case studies, medieval manuscripts often were the result of a multi-stage production, and even if they were finished at some point (many were not), later readers would often make further changes, with coats of arms being added, deleted, painted over, and so on. The quire structure, changes of hands, incomplete paintings, the use of different inks and colours, or sometimes even the pricking provide valuable evidence for these developments. Hofman is definitely correct that most of this precious information is lost in modern copies of these armorials and that it also tends to be ignored in most heraldic editions; hence one can only agree with his conclusion to work from manuscripts rather than editions whenever possible.

Chapter four concentrates on the ‘content’ of armorials, that is, content other than the arms themselves. Evidence comes from additional materials (above all texts), but also the selection and arrangement of the arms. This brings up the question of classification of armorials, which traditionally was based on these criteria, e.g. ‘occasional rolls’ (containing arms of participants of certain tournaments or other events) or ‘ordinaries’ (with arms arranged by charges and ordinaries). Hofman provides an overview of textual markers which are found in his manuscripts and which often serve as chapter title of sorts, i.e. dividing an armorial into sections while also indicating the selection criteria for the arms found in the respective section (‘wapen van Holland’, ‘tout les contes’, ‘reichsstedt’ and the like, p. 109). On this basis, he distinguishes sixteen different patterns of arranging arms, providing examples for all of them. One of his findings is that the famous *marches d’armes* (or ‘kingdoms’ of individual heralds) in medieval times were but rarely used to arrange the material. Likewise, when it comes to armorials linked to specific events (‘occasional rolls’), Hofman makes a compelling case that older scholarship was often rash in interpreting the arms in question as those

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of participants. Instead, most compilers of armorials were primarily concerned with social status when it came to selecting and arranging coats of arms. This is not an entirely new finding, but Hofman adds valuable findings on the basis of a large corpus of armorials, and also makes clear that much more research can and should be done on this topic.

In the next chapter, Hofman addresses the makers and users (or ‘consumers’, as he calls them) of the armorials. Like Torsten Hiltmann and others, Hofman stresses that it was the exception rather than the rule that armorials were composed or used by heralds. At the same time, there is ample evidence for other readers – mostly from the high nobility, but also ecclesiastical institutions and townsmen. Hofman rightly stresses that many of his manuscripts can be shown to have been ‘commissioned, received, and possessed’ by high nobility (p. 190). The importance of armorials for courtly culture is beyond doubt, but one could also have mentioned that compared to other manuscripts, those commissioned and/or possessed by dukes and kings had a much higher chance of being preserved, studied, and digitized. After all, these lavishly illuminated codices tended to end up in national libraries, where they were relatively easy to access, and the same national libraries often took the lead in the digitization of manuscripts.

The sixth chapter deals with the ways arms were typically presented and arranged. For example, certain arms were often highlighted by placing them prominently at the beginning of a section, or in the upper left corner of a page, and/or painting them larger than the following arms; this pattern is often used to display the arms of a lord and his vassals. In contrast, many armorials present large numbers of coats of arms in very uniform fashion and in the same size, thus stressing equality within the respective group, for example members of the same tournament society, ecclesiastical institution, or city council. Hofman presents these and other arrangements of arms that could be understood as representing social relations, whether they stressed hierarchy or equality.

Only after having carefully discussed the social background and the different conventions does Hofman turn in chapter seven to the interpretation of armorials in the narrow sense: what was the purpose of individual manuscripts? By this point, he has already made clear that existing classifications are often too coarse, and indeed often rely more on speculation than solid evidence from the sources. Hofman distinguishes four main purposes: the transmission of knowledge of actual arms and also heraldry; ‘commemoration’ (e.g. the memory of extinct families or the origins of a dynasty); ‘expression of identity’, above all by making clear who belongs to a specific group (a tournament society, an urban elite, etc.) and who does not; and ‘support of a claim’, for example legitimate rule over certain territories or political unity within specific groups like the Hanseatic League.

The final chapter presents the conclusions, repeating above all the call to study medieval armorials from the manuscripts themselves. Indeed, Hofman has presented a cogent case that much remains to be done, and that both historians and heraldists will profit from such studies. The book is therefore both a welcome contribution to our understanding of medieval armorials, and a call for future research.

While it cannot hide its genesis as a Ph.D. thesis, and presentation may not always be very elegant (there are sub-sub-sub-chapters of sometimes only two pages, there is a fair share of internal overlap, and occasionally academic jargon prevails over clarity),

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Hofman's book is an excellent study. He knows the manuscripts in question very well, he is thoroughly familiar with the scholarly literature (whether written in Dutch, English, French, or German), and he makes compelling arguments concerning the variety of forms, and purposes, of medieval armorials. Importantly in a book that relies so heavily on visual evidence, there are many high-quality illustrations. Readers who want to take a closer look at the manuscripts Hofman so frequently refers to will find very useful the list of digitized armorials at <https://heraldica.hypotheses.org/1770> – a list to which Hofman has contributed substantially but which he curiously does not mention in his book. Another feature sadly lacking are indices; in particular, a manuscript index and one for armorials would have been most welcome.

Yet these are minor issues given the overall quality of the book. Clearly both historians (who so often have neglected armorials) and heraldists (who all too often relied on imperfect editions) will profit from reading this book; it is a must-read for any future editor of pre-modern armorials. Hofman's book itself already marks considerable progress in the study of medieval armorials, and hopefully will inspire even more research into these manuscripts.

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Ioanna N. Koukouni, *Chios dicta est... et in Aegæo sita mari: Historical Archaeology and Heraldry on Chios*. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2021. 330 pp, 18 figures, 6 maps, 125 plates. Paperback ISBN 978-1-78969-746-9 £54.00 E-book ISBN 978-1-78969-747-6 £16.00

This volume on the archaeology and heraldry of Chios follows in the wake of another from the same publisher which dealt with medieval carved stone (much of it armorial) from the island of Rhodes¹ and the subject matter of both books shares similarities of geography, history, and presentation. The island of Chios is the largest Greek island in the eastern Aegean and is situated c. 290 km to the NW of Rhodes. Both Chios and Rhodes lie just off the Turkish coast and both have been affected by the despoliations of devastating earthquakes and conquest by the Ottoman Empire.

Chios has a well-harboured coastline, is agriculturally rich, and advantageously positioned for trade. It has changed hands many times. In 1304 the island was ceded from the Byzantine Empire to the Genoese, it was repossessed in 1329, and captured back again by Genoa in 1346. In 1566 it was invaded by the Ottomans. There was even a short-lived Venetian occupation of the island in 1694.

Following a comprehensive introduction in which there are useful discussions on the historical significance of lead seals, heraldry, and vernacular sculpture, the book is divided into two parts. The first, 'Historical Archaeology of Mount Amani', includes a broad and well-illustrated survey of the archaeology, historic topography, settlement patterns, defensive works, and material culture of rural NW Chios, centred around

¹ A.M. Kasdagli, *Stone carving of the Hospitaller period in Rhodes: Displaced pieces and fragments* (Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2016), reviewed by the writer (S. Ashley, 2019, *CoA* 4th series 2, no. 236, pp. 234–6).