

## Armorial as commercial ventures?

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A substantial number of late medieval armorials can be placed in six groups, and all appear to be desk works, not field notes. Their structure, form of manufacture and the relationships between members place them as candidates for being products of the commercial book business. Targeting a wider audience is evident for one of the groups with members made in Southern Germany, notably the *Richental* chronicle-cum-armorial. A few artisans were each involved in the making of more than one member of another group, named for the *Armorial équestre de la Toison d'or*.

The members of the groups are all composite armorials with many well-defined segments, sometimes fifty or more. The three key features determining the groups are concordant segments, common markers, and common iconography of imaginary arms.

Preliminary findings indicate that some armorials were made by heralds, mainly for their own use, while others were made for commercial purposes. Some possible ways of why and how groups and member armorials may differ and how their contents descended over time and space are discussed.

The answer to the title is a resounding yes, if commercial is defined as for a profit of money as well as for profit of promotion or as an item for bartering. Before going into detail, three questions should be considered: Who would buy? Who would make them? Are there any criteria for a commercial work? The answer to the first is simple: Anybody with enough money. Handmade books were expensive and illustrated books even more expensive. For the period discussed here, the late Middle Ages, the potential buyers or commissioners included princes, nobles, churchmen and wealthy burghers. Even heralds could in principle, and perhaps in fact, commission or barter armorials.<sup>1</sup> A gifted amateur might paint arms as a sideline or hobby, but most armorials would probably have been made by professionals. An artistically gifted herald is an obvious candidate for painting an armorial, but most commissioners could hire an illuminator or a painter for the job as well. At the time there would be plenty of artisans near princely courts or in large merchant towns.<sup>2</sup> Any criteria for discriminating between work for sale or barter and those for personal use would have to be tested, but one could propose the presence of miniatures, the artistic vigour present, the quality of the writing and the correctness of the coats of arms. The latter criteria reflect the duality of knowing the arms and executing the presentation of them.

To make miniatures requires more than average skills in drawing, painting and composing artwork, and their presence suggests a commercial element in the process. We know about 25 armorials with some kind of miniatures in them. That is 5 % of the surviving armorials, but probably 9 % of those preserved from the late Middle Ages. Examples can be given from most

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<sup>1</sup> At the time (c.1350-1500), late medieval armorials were likely to have been kept as sets of unbound quires rather than as bound volumes. In this sense, an armorial could be a few sheets or several hundred sheets with thousands of arms.

<sup>2</sup> Painters and illuminators were often members of different guilds - and could have different limits to the kinds of work they were allowed to undertake; Croenen PW and Konrad BK on the book trade and artisans.

regions: England (*Bruges Garter Book, Military Roll, Rous-Warwick Roll*), France (*Toison d'or, Berry, Revel*), Germany (*Manesse, Richental, Grünenberg*), and Spain (*Conoscimiento, Armeiro-Mor*).<sup>3</sup> But other armorials could also have a commercial twist, even though they only have tables of arms. From common contents and/or markers, many of the late medieval armorials can be placed in one of six groups. The groups include sets of armorials from either France (incl. the Low Countries), Germany or England.<sup>4</sup> Some of the groups include different types of manuscripts, e.g. ordinaries, mixed texts and tables of arms, and herald's compendia.

Making a manuscript requires some proficiency in drawing and writing, but it also demands a content - in this case descriptions of coats of arms! A herald (or an amateur armorer) may collect (or collate) arms by his own observation or exchange collections with fellow heralds (or armorers). He could then write his observations in blazon or draw sketches. No examples of such drafts have survived. All armorials appear to be desk works composed at leisure whether painted or written. From which follows that we cannot be sure that any coat of arms placed in an armorial was the result of the maker's own observation. The herald or artisan could have used his own notes, older armorials or fragments supplied by a commissioner. A professional artisan may even use drafts or fragments kept in the workshop. When discussing armorials, we need to discriminate between collating arms, compiling the items needed, and executing the manuscript.

### German armorials

As a starting point, imaginary arms would make fine objects for studying commerciality. Any such coat of arms would need both a story behind the name and a visual interpretation, and unless the name-arms combination is canting, compiler-artisans would most likely be using the same ultimate source (*figure 1*). The similarity of a large number of imaginary arms is the main criteria for defining the Bodensee group of armorials made in Southern Germany. The imagery can be followed back to the armorial appended to the chronicle of the Concillium held in Constance on the Bodensee during 1414-1418, written around 1430 by Ulrich Richental, who was a semi-officially employed eyewitness. For various reasons, the chronicle became very popular, coming into print in 1483 and being reprinted in 1536. Five different manuscripts with miniatures and arms have survived, each in an edition targeted to a specific audience. But these were all made

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<sup>3</sup> For reference to armorials and available publications, see the listing on [www.armorial.dk](http://www.armorial.dk).

<sup>4</sup> The groups of armorials will be discussed in the forthcoming Clemmensen EA, most are listed in the conference proceedings from Bruges in 2004 (Clemmensen GR), and some are discussed in detail in my recent publications.

during 1460-1475.<sup>5</sup> At present, more than ten armorials have been shown to belong to the group, with those named for the merchant Conrad Grünenberg and the heralds Hans Ingeram and Jörg Rugen *al.* Georg Ruxner among the most prominent. Other members are known as *St. Gallen-Haggenberg, Uffenbach, Donaueschingen, Miltenberg, Berliner* and *Stuttgarter*.<sup>6</sup>

The artistic quality can be very high as in the three *Grünenberg* manuscripts with artwork by Friedrich Walther, Rudolf Stahel, and Andreas Haider.<sup>7</sup> These were all professional painters living in Constance. The two later manuscripts were copied from the one which, until it came to Berlin in 1841, was owned by citizens of Constance. Neither of these was likely to have been master armorists, though they probably had some experience with painting arms. It is a surmise, but a very probable one, that Conrad Grünenberg himself was the 'editor-in-chief', though some of the templates for the arms were probably taken from notes or armorials owned by other burghers or master-owners of workshops. A few entries may have been inspired by non-armorial artwork, e.g. the arms attributed to ancient kings of Rome (*figure 2*).<sup>8</sup>

There was a customer base as shown by the several manuscript and printed versions of the *Richental* and by the several armorials executed and sold by the Tirolean painter Vigil Raber.<sup>9</sup> The vendors, heralds or artisans, served the cultural tastes of the customers. If necessary, the basic tables with the arms of princes, nobles according to their membership of tournament societies as well as the main series of imaginary arms (magi, nine worthies, ternionen, and quaternionen), could be supplemented by a chronicle of the dukes of Bavaria amply supplied with coats of arms going back to their Troian ancestors.<sup>10</sup>

Technically, German armorials usually had the outline of the shields, helmets, crests and mantling prestamped with a carved woodblock. None of the woodblocks have survived, but the tracing is evident in several manuscripts. Details like the form of helmets and leafy or broad mantling could be redrawn in ink for variation. Whether the armorials are attributed to a herald or not, some woodblocks were reused over the years. This can be studied either in the manuscript or the published facsimiles, but care should be taken regarding position and gaps to avoid mis- and overinterpretation (*figure 3*).

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<sup>5</sup> Clemmensen KCR, Wacker KK.

<sup>6</sup> Clemmensen GRU, Becker ING, Waldstein ING, Clemmensen RUG, Clemmensen SGH, Clemmensen UFF, Clemmensen DWF, Loutsch MIL, Müller-Westphal BLW (in prep.), Clemmensen STU.

<sup>7</sup> Berlin, GStA-PK, ms.21; München, BSB, cgm.145; Zürich, ZB, ms.A.42 - identified by Bernd Konrad.

<sup>8</sup> Nickel KR.

<sup>9</sup> Arch VRN.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. by Jörg Rugen, see Clemmensen RUG.

### A french armorial

Gilles le Bouvier, the herald Berry (c.1385-1456), was a distinguished member of the French court used for diplomatic missions. In his retirement, a short time before he died, he intended to do a large composite armorial, probably as a gift for the king. Unfortunately, several things went wrong, and he died before the work was finished. Besides the dedication page showing the herald presenting a book to the king, this manuscript contains 28 other miniatures and nearly 1800 entries in tables of arms mediocly executed. The armorial was started on 93 leaves of parchment, but most of the tables of arms were done on 112 leaves of paper. Many of the sheets were left blank. In content some segments were probably arms he had acquired by himself, others were modified from older material.<sup>11</sup>

### The *Toison d'or* group

The *Grand armorial équestre de la Toison d'or & de l'Europe* is generally attributed to Jean le Fevre de St.Rémy *dit* Toison d'or, the chief herald of Philippe 'le bon' duke of Burgundy - at least as 'editor-in-chief'.<sup>12</sup> The attribution is possible, but unsubstantiated - and will be left as such. The feature of interest for the present discussion is neither the contents nor the vigorous mounted princes and knights, but the unknown artisan, who painted the tables of arms. This artisan also made another version of the English segment in the *Toison d'or*, which can today be found in a miscellany of documents relating to the English occupation of Normandy during the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The manuscript also has a selection of arms of delegates to the peace conference in Arras in 1435 from France and from the Concilium of Basle, and hundreds of arms of the retinue of duke Philippe.<sup>13</sup> Both the painting and the script are identical as is the concordance of the arms (*figure 4*).

The herald's compendia are a rarely noted group of manuscripts. These are miscellanea of notes on ceremonials, bits of chronicles, statutes of chivalric orders, essays of diverse subjects, some illustrated with coats of arms, as well as tables of arms. Wim van Anrooij recently presented the structure of and background for one compendium with the writing in the autograph of an Austro-Burgundian herald, Hendrik van Heessel (d.1470).<sup>14</sup> One of the elements in

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<sup>11</sup> Boos BER, facsimile on [www.gallica.bnf.fr](http://www.gallica.bnf.fr). The Artois segment was modified from the *Navarre*, see Clemmensen GR and Clemmensen EA.

<sup>12</sup> Pastoureau ETO 2:37.

<sup>13</sup> London, BL, Add.11542, *Paix d'Arras*; Clemmensen RH, Clemmensen APA.

<sup>14</sup> *Complainte des héralts* or *Heessel Compendium*, Anrooij CHE, facsimile on [www](http://www).

this compendium is a set of tables of arms representing Austrian and Bohemian nobles. The arms are fully concordant with similar segments in the *Toison d'or* and the *Bergshammar*, given the usual transposition of fragments.<sup>15</sup> If not painted by the same hand, the arms were drawn in a style very similar to that of the *Toison d'or* (figure 5). For comparison, 66 pairs from the 176 Austrian items in the *Toison d'or* and the 192 in the *Heessel* were selected. 40 were identical in execution, while 26 were slightly different. The other coats of arms present in the compendium were drawn in a different, high-quality, German style. The similarity of the painted arms in the three manuscripts suggests that professional armorial painters were employed in mid 15<sup>th</sup> century Greater Burgundy.

In summary, armorials or fragments of armorial were made with the intention of selling to a defined set of customers or to barter or present as gifts in gratefulness or for personal advancement. Some, but not all, had miniatures of varying artistic quality. The script and the tables of arms would normally be of good to high quality, but so might armorials made for private consultation be. For the time being only internal evidence, knowledge of the provenance of a manuscript, and of the relations between armorials, can be used to discriminate between the intended uses. The commercial aspect was universal, but may have been present to varying degrees in different regions. The socio-cultural climate among the non-princely German nobility and town patricians organized in tournament societies must have been a major factor in the commercial manufacture of armorials. Some were commissioned by amateur armorists and executed by professional artisans, while others were probably compiled, and possibly painted or written, by heralds. It is difficult to determine the extent of involvement of heralds in the production of late medieval armorials, but they must have been key parties in the collation of arms. The employment and social conditions of heralds may have been very variable - and perhaps only a few heralds in few regions really sold armorials commercially.

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<sup>15</sup> Raneke BHM, items 642-817 Austrians, 2113-2158 Bohemians, Pastoureau ETO, items 10-185 Austrians.

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Figure 1: Descendance of the arms of two 'Worthies'. From *Richental*, KCR-P:244r, to *Ingeram*, ING:28n, and *St.Gallen*, SGH:17n.



Figure 2: *Grunenberg*, GRU:2v, arms of Tarquinius Superbus inspired by a medaillon from the workshop of Donatello (c.1386-1466), presently in Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Florence, derived from an original by Dioskourides (fl. 30 B.C.) showing Diomedes seizing the Palladium of Pallas Athene of Troy.

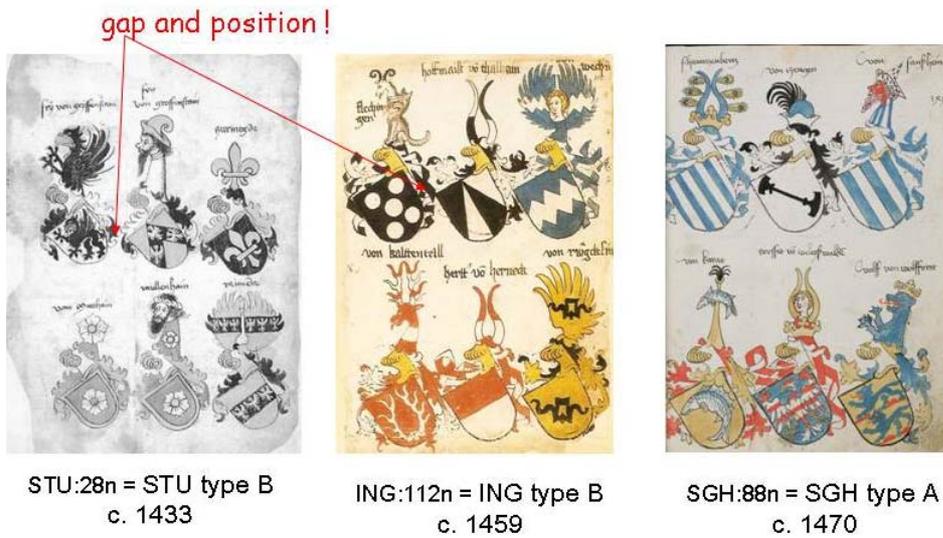


Figure 3: Comparisons of woodblock prestamps suggesting that ING-B is similar to SGH-A, but not to STU-b.



Figure 4: Parts of *Toison d'or*, ETO:7r2-4+r7-9, and *Paix d'Arras*, APA:95v2-4+6-8, with arms of english nobles. de Bohun E.Northampton, ETO:7r7 and APA:95v3; Maorves, ETO:7r8 and APA:95v4.



Figure 5: Coats of arms of austrian nobles in *Toison d'or* and in the *Heessel* compendium.