

CLÉMENT PRINSAULT, *Traité du blason*

In French, illuminated manuscript on paper

Northeastern France or Low Countries (Flanders or Hainaut), c. 1480-1500

*i* (modern paper) + 15 + *i* (modern paper) folios on paper, watermark similar to Briquet no. 1808, armoiries: trois fleurs de lis, Troyes, 1479-1488, Woerden, 1479, Aalst, 1484, Thury, 1485, Siegen, 1485, Cleves, 1486, Texel, 1487, Bielefeld, 1488, Namur, 1488, Worms, 1488, Anderlecht, 1489, Düsseldorf, 1489, Middelburg, 1486, and Lorraine, 1486, modern foliation in pencil, lower outer corner, 1-15, complete (collation *i*<sup>s</sup> *ii*<sup>s</sup> [-7; cancelled with no apparent loss of text]), ruled in light brown ink with full-length horizontal and vertical bounding lines (justification 142-143 x 90-92 mm.), written in dark brown ink in a calligraphic bâtarde script in twenty-four long lines, red rubrics, darkened in some instances, line fillers of blue and mauve with white pen decoration and burnished gold rounds, one-line initials of burnished gold on blue and mauve grounds with white pen decoration, marking divisions within the table of contents, two-line initials of burnished gold on blue and mauve grounds with white pen decoration, marking divisions within the text, NINETY-SIX SHIELDS painted in blue, red, purple, green, yellow, silver, gold, and black and outlined in black, corrections, marginal additions in scribe's hand, now partially cropped (f. 4) and in a slightly later hand, writing in brown ink in Dutch and French (ff. 8v, 14), an additional coat of arms, a blank shield colored in pale yellow topped by a helm decorated in blue, red, and pale yellow, has been pasted in on a small piece of paper (f. 7v), slight tears in the margins of ff. 4 and 12 and more substantial losses to the lower margin of f. 14 have been patched with paper, stain in the lower margin of ff. 11v-12, some slight transfer of paint and soiling of margins, small tears and wear along the edges of some leaves, otherwise in good condition. Bound in modern burgundy velvet, smooth spine, with a bookplate with a coat of arms pasted on the front pastedown, in a modern slipcase covered in marbled paper. Dimensions 197 x 140 mm.

Notable for its formal script and its extensive decorative program, this copy of Prinsault's Treatise on Heraldry is unusually fine. Its detailed table of chapters at the beginning and its epilogue are both possibly unique. Ninety-six painted shields vary in number and content from the program of illustration found in other copies, and lacking the usual captions, they suggest that this was a collector's copy rather than a practical teaching manuscript. The book's earliest owner may have resided in the Duchy of Burgundy, since many of the shields belong to families there.

## PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and watermarks indicates that this manuscript was most likely produced in Northeastern France or the Western Low Countries at the end of the fifteenth century, c. 1480-1500. Though further study of the arms within this manuscript is warranted, the inclusion of arms particular to this region – including those of Camphin-en-Pévèle, in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, those of the Lalaing family, of Hainaut, and those of the Hamal family, of Luxembourg – may indicate that this manuscript was made for the use of a herald or aristocratic family based in the Duchy of Burgundy.
2. One or more sixteenth-century(?) hands have noted the bearers of three of the arms depicted in this manuscript. On f. 8v, one hand, writing in Dutch and French, identified two sets of arms as those of "graaf van hoochstraten" and "baron de hamal." The arms identified as those of the Count of Hoogstraten are those of the Lalaing family (*gules, ten*

*lozenges argent places 3, 3, 3, and 1*); Antoine I de Lalaing became the first count of Hoogstraten upon his marriage to Elisabeth van Culemborg in 1509. Annotations on f. 14 identify the royal arms of Scotland as those of "Roy de escosse" and "coninck van schotlant." These bilingual annotations suggest that this manuscript remained in the western Low Countries in the sixteenth century, as does the focus of the f. 8v annotator on families living in the region.

3. Belonged to a member of the noble Flemish family of Kerchove d'Ousselghem, possibly the baron Edgard de Kerchove d'Ousselghem (1846-1926); armorial ex libris with the Kerchove family's motto, "ENDURER POUR DURER," and the initials "K. O."

## TEXT

ff. 1-2v, Table of contents, *Cy commence le table des rubriques de ce present traicte du blason darmes, Et premierement le prologue*, incipit, "LE premier chapitre contient par quelles personnes et a quelle fin ont est trouues armes et a quelle condition de gens elles ont este octroyees ... Comment ou dousime et desrenier chapitre est descrite la maniere de blasonier quinze escus difficilles cy desoubz pourrais auec la conclusion de ce present traictie ['c' of "traictie" inserted above]";

ff. 3-14, *Cy commence le premier chapitre contenant par quelles personnes a quel fin ont este trouue armes et a quelle condition de gens ont est octroyees*, incipit, "LE tresuaillant et victorieus Roy alixandre de macedonne le tresprudent empreur Jules cesar et pluseurs aultres nobles princes desirans scauoir comment les vassaus et subgets se portoient vaillantiment es faits darmes ... et selon la difference qui est en icelles choses a fin que de les mieulx congnoistre"; [f. 15r-v, blank but ruled].

This manuscript contains a complete copy of the *Traité du blason* of Clément Prinsault, compiled between 1466 and 1470 (Jefferson, 1996, pp. 90-91 n. 68). A full table of contents precedes a treatise of twelve chapters that is illustrated with ninety-six painted shields, some possibly unique to this manuscript. It concludes with an epilogue that may also be unique. The treatise circulated in at least eighteen known manuscript copies and was very popular in print in the sixteenth century.

There are two modern editions of the text. Jefferson's critical edition (1996, pp. 100-117) was based on a late fifteenth-century manuscript in a private collection, collated with three other manuscripts. The earlier edition by L. Douet-d'Arcq (1858) was based entirely on Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 3711. Collation of the text in the present manuscript with Jefferson's text supports her assertion that the text was fairly stable. There are, however, some textual variations in our manuscript, many of which agree with readings Jefferson records from Paris, BnF, MS fr. 5936 (possibly the presentation copy). In both manuscripts the final chapter is considerably longer than in other copies, although the dedicatory prologue present in MS fr. 5936 is lacking in the manuscript described here. The epilogue (which follows the twelfth chapter on ff. 13v-14) in our manuscript appears to be unique, as is the complete and accurate table of contents. Its illustration also diverges somewhat from these other manuscript in the number and content of its painted shields and, notably, in the absence of any verbal descriptions of the blazons depicted (see below).

This text circulated widely shortly after its composition in a number of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts. Douet-d'Arcq identifies and describes seven manuscript copies

of the text (1858, pp. 267-271) and Saffroy includes five of these in a more recent list of ten manuscripts (1968, vol. 1, nos. 2036-2044). Jefferson identifies three additional manuscripts, including one in private hands (1996, pp. 70-74, 91 n. 69). Our manuscript was not included in any of these lists. Three additional copies have been on the market in the last century, two with Les Enluminures. First printed, without attribution to Prinsault, as *Le blason des armes* in Paris by Guillaume Nyverd between 1500 and 1515 (GW 4 Sp.242a; Saffroy, 1968, vol. 1, no. 2022) and was a popular text in the sixteenth century, issued in at least twelve other editions (Saffroy, 1968, vol. 1, nos. 2023-2034).

This particular copy of Prinsault's *Traité* is an unusually fine one in its formal script and decorative program, and there is evidence that suggests that it may not have been intended for practical use as a teaching text. It is not followed by an armorial, and the painted shields accompanying the treatise itself warrant closer examination in light of their treatment in this particular manuscript. What is immediately striking here is that none of the blazons painted in the manuscript have been described. (We may note that this is also true in another copy described on this site, TM 462; the decorative program of these two manuscripts also appears to be more closely related than it is to the manuscripts discussed by Jefferson). The pedagogical value of this treatise is quite evident in most other copies where every painted shield is labeled with a written description of its blazon; this enabled readers to connect the terms and rules of the treatise with their application in particular cases. Here, while the shields do illustrate the subject matter of particular chapters, the connection is not spelled out. This appears to be a deliberate choice, although it is possible that the scribe meant to add these descriptions since there is space where they might be added.

While most of the painted shields included in this manuscript do serve an illustrative function, demonstrating the applications of particular rules or depicting the blazons enumerated in the treatise, they vary in number and content from the program of illustration found in other manuscript copies of the treatise. In some cases, the artist appears to have omitted, ignored, or reinterpreted the content of the treatise. For example, the shields illustrating ordinaries (f. 7v), geometric figures running the length of the shield, all enumerated in the fifth chapter, diverge from common practice insofar as they exclude the orle entirely and do not illustrate the manner in which an ordinary can be multiplied within a single blazon, for all that the chapter addresses this subject at relative length. In another instance, in conjunction with the seventh chapter's discussion of the manner of distinguishing false arms from true ones, the artist has apparently reinterpreted the false Duchesne arms (*or, an oak tree argent*), depicting a silver chain (*chaîne*) on the gold field (f. 9v) instead of a silver oak tree (*chêne*).

Elsewhere, the artist has included the arms of contemporary noble families that do not always appear in other copies of the treatise. Perhaps inspired by Prinsault's mention in the sixth chapter of the arms of two families (Laval and Pully), this manuscript features eight shields in place of the Laval and Pully arms (f. 8v). As later annotators of the manuscript have observed, these include the royal arms of France as well as those of prominent families in France – including the Montmorency family (whose arms, along with those of France, are also included in TM 462) – and in the western Low Countries, including the Lalaing and Hamal families. Further examination of the arms within this volume might yield additional information regarding its origins and earliest intended audience.

Little is known about the life of Clément Prinsault, but his work shows him to have been a fifteenth-century heraldist, strongly influenced by the *De insignis et armis* of Bartolo da Sassoferrato (1315-c.1359). Prinsault's name is connected to this treatise through in the dedicatory preface found in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 5936 (possibly the presentation copy), and in BnF, MS n.a.f 1075. Identifying himself in that preface as "treshumble serviteur de tresreverend pere en dieu Monseigneur de Castres," he dedicates the work to Monseigneur de Castres' nephew, the young son of his brother, Jacques d'Armagnac (1433-1477), duke of Nemours (transcribed in Jefferson, 1996, p. 100).

The *Traité du blason* is an introductory treatise to the rules governing the blazoning arms. With the beginning of heraldry in the Flemish and Anglo-Norman regions toward the end of the twelfth century, anyone could create a coat of arms, but a set of rules gradually developed that controlled the right to bear arms and the designs that were used. These rules were set down in heraldic treatises, often accompanied by armorials recording the actual arms of important families. An armorial, also attributed to Prinsault, usually accompanies this treatise, and the treatise provided a guide to describing and identifying these and other arms. Within its twelve chapters all the necessary elements of fifteenth-century heraldry are clearly explained and illustrated: the tinctures (metals, colors, and furs), the ordinaries, the charges, and the technical language as it applies to the coat of arms or blazon. The treatise also explains the symbolic meanings of the colors assigned in heraldry. Argent (silver), for example, is associated with the virtues of humility, purity, and innocence, with the zodiacal signs of Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces, and with the phlegmatic humor, the moon, the pearl, the element earth, and the day of the week Monday. Gules (red) is associated with the virtue of courage, with the zodiacal signs of Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius, and with the choleric humor, Saturn, the ruby, the element fire, and the day of the week Saturday (or Tuesday, according to a variant in this manuscript).

## LITERATURE

Dennys, Rodney. *The Heraldic Imagination*, London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1975.

Douet-d'Arcq, L. "Un traité du blason du xv<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue Archéologique* 15 (1858), pp. 257-274 and 321-342.

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Saffroy, Gaston. *Bibliographie généalogique, héraldique et nobiliaire de la France, des origines à nos jours, imprimés et manuscrits*, 5 vols., Paris, 1968-1983.

Thomas, Antoine. "Jaques d'Armagnac bibliophile: notes et documents complémentaires," *Journal des Savants* (1906), pp. 633-644.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

[Prinsault, Clément,] *Le blason des armes nouvellement imprime*, Paris, Guillaume Nyverd, c. 1500-1515  
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8605451s>

"Traité du blason, Clément Prinsault," Jonas Database, IHRT, 2013

<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/6473>

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