

Torsten Hiltmann/Miguel Metelo de Seixas (eds.)
Heraldry in Medieval and Early Modern State Rooms

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Torsten Hiltmann/Miguel Metelo de Seixas (eds.)

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Preface

This collection of papers is the result of a colloquium held in Münster from 16 to 18 March 2016. It brought together a group of researchers who, in one way or another, had focused their attention on the subject of heraldic decorations in medieval and early modern ceremonial rooms.

This symposium was part of our joint research project »In the Service of the Crown«, which dealt with the use of heraldry in royal political communication in late medieval Portugal. Funded by the Volkswagen Foundation as a supplementary module to the »Coats of arms in practice« project, the aim of this project was to learn from the Portuguese example how heraldry could be used by European monarchies in the late middle ages and early modern times as an instrument for the construction of a visual discourse.

This collection of papers includes most of the very inspiring and prolific presentations held at the conference. However, for one reason or another, not all of them made their way into these proceedings. Amongst these is the contribution by Christian de Mérindol who gave us important stimuli for the discussion by presenting the typology he developed in his studies dedicated to the subject of the conference. This also applies to the papers of Mario Damen, Elena Kashina, Helena Seražin and Andreas Zajic, who added a lot to the discussions during the conference and helped shaping a better understanding of our common topic. The contribution by Anne-Laure Connesson (Amiens), for its part, will be published in another volume of this series dedicated to »Heraldry in the City«, which will be edited soon after this one.

We wish to thank the Volkswagen Foundation for its generous support as well as Laurent Hablot (Paris), who helped with the revision of the texts in French, and Liselore Dourousset and Julia E. Hartmann who took care of the final preparation of the texts for printing. The linguistic correctness of the English texts, finally, was assured by the company *Stativa Text Works* as well as Maria do Carmo Paço d'Arcos and John O'Connor.

We hope this volume will help raise awareness of the potential of heraldry as a historical source and promote discussion about it.

Torsten Hiltmann,
Berlin, March 2020

Miguel Metelo de Seixas,
Lisbon, March 2020

Introduction

Heraldic Decor as a Research Problem

The »Sala dos Brasões« of the Sintra Palace and Heraldry in Medieval and Early Modern State Rooms

Miguel Metelo de Seixas (Lisbon)*
Torsten Hiltmann (Berlin)

Abstract: *The Palace of Sintra in Portugal is home to the striking »sala dos brasões«, a ceremonial hall with a large and exceptional heraldic programme. Although it has been the subject of many studies in the past, the usage and meaning of this hall, built by Manuel I in the first half of the 16th century, still remain unclear. The key to understanding is the heraldic programme, which did not serve for mere decorative purposes but conveyed the central message of this hall. In order to be properly interpreted, this programme must be compared with similar evidences of heraldic communication in medieval and early modern state rooms, which leads us to a field of research that has hardly been explored so far. This introductory article reflects on the historiographical issues as well as unresolved research questions in the context of this source group. Based on the contributions in this collection, it presents a comprehensive set of methodological reflections in order to better apprehend this kind of communication and provides initial elements for a typology of a group of sources whose communicative power and versatility have been largely ignored for a long time.*

INTRODUCTION

The present collection of papers owes its existence to a conundrum: the »sala dos brasões« of the Sintra Palace. Added to the palace in the first quarter of the 16th century, the meaning and use of this large hall in the palace, which can only be accessed via several narrow corridors, are still in the dark. The only indications are given by its particular architecture and the large heraldic programme it features on the ceiling and on the walls.

*This work is supported by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., in the context of the celebration of the programme contract foreseen in the numbers 4, 5 and 6 of article 23.º of D.L. no. 57/2016 of 29 August, as amended by Law no. 57/2017 of 19 July.

This heraldic representation is another example of the particular use of heraldry by the Portuguese crown, which may or may not find its parallels in other European courts – a question that has been addressed in a joint research programme, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, which set out to study the very use of heraldry in late medieval Portugal as a means of political communication and to place it in its European context¹. The present collection of papers is the first part of this contextualisation. It addresses the use of heraldry in medieval and early modern state rooms, a subject which has not been studied so far. It is therefore the aim of this collection to provide a first synopsis of the different uses of heraldry in this kind of representative halls and comparable rooms across different social and institutional contexts and geographical regions in Europe.

A second volume, which will place the »sala dos brasões« *per se* in the context of royal and princely state rooms in Portugal and Europe (and beyond), will follow soon².

THE »SALA DOS BRASÕES« OF THE SINTRA PALACE

The case of the »sala dos brasões« of the royal Palace of Sintra, however, is also exceptional within the Portuguese heraldic production. This ceremonial hall was built between 1515 and 1518 by King Manuel I (1495–1521) in a palace which had been, since the reign of John I (1385–1433), one of the main royal palaces near the city of Lisbon, capital of the kingdom³. This ceremonial hall has an octagonal dome-shaped ceiling with a heraldic decoration: in the centre, as the keystone of the whole, the coat of arms of the King of Portugal dominates; then, on each of the eight walls forming the cupola are placed the coats of arms of his children, *infantes* of Portugal; finally, along the square base on which the octagonal structure rests, are repre-

1 The project »In the Service of the Crown. The Use of Heraldry in Royal Political Communication in Late Medieval Portugal« aimed to better understand the use of heraldry as an instrument for the construction of a visual discourse by European monarchies in the late middle ages and early modern times, by the example of late medieval Portugal. The project was based on three case studies: the royal necropolis of the monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória in Batalha; the funeral chapel of Cardinal Jaime of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte, Florence; and finally, the »sala dos brasões« (coat of arms room) of the royal Palace of Sintra, which is at the centre of this contribution. Further publications of this project are: Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, Torsten HILTMANN, João PORTUGAL (eds.), *State-Rooms of Royal and Princely Palaces in Europe (14th–16th centuries). Spaces, Images, Rituals*, Lisbon (in press, 2020); Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, *L'héraldique de la chapelle funéraire du cardinal Jaime de Portugal à San Miniato al Monte de Florence*, in: Carla Varela FERNANDES (ed.), *Loci Sepulcralis – Pantheons and other places of memory and burial in the Middle Ages* (in press, 2020); and Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, *The heraldic frieze of the funeral chapel of Cardinal Jaime of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte. New perspectives on the relation between art, history and heraldry* (to be submitted in 2020). This work is also funded by Portuguese national funds through the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the Norma Transitória – DL 57/2016/CP1453/CT0041.

2 SEIXAS, HILTMANN, PORTUGAL (eds.), *State-Rooms of Royal and Princely Palaces* (as in n. 1).

3 The first main work on the Palace of Sintra based on investigation and presented in a scientific manner was Conde de SABUGOSA, *O Paço de Sintra*, Lisbon 1903. Since then, many authors have written monographs on this palace, such as Nuno Catarino CARDOSO, *Cintra. Notícia histórica-arqueológica e artística do Paço da Vila*, Porto 1930; Raul LINO, *The Royal Palace of Sintra*, Lisbon 1950; Francisco COSTA, *O Paço Real de Sintra*, Sintra 1980; Ana Brito CORREIA, *Palácio Nacional de Sintra*, Lisbon 1993; José Custódio Vieira da SILVA, *Palácio Nacional de Sintra. O poder de um lugar, séculos XV a XIX*, in: Gérard SABATIER, Rita Costa GOMES (eds.), *Lugares de Poder – Europa, séculos XV a XX*, Lisbon 1998, pp. 204–224; Inês FERRO, *Palácio Nacional de Sintra, Vila do Conde* 2011. For a historiographical synthesis, see the chapter »O Paço de Sintra« in José Custódio Vieira da SILVA, *Paços Medievais Portugueses*, Lisbon 2002, pp. 199–246.



Fig. 1: Sala dos Brasões, Royal Palace of Sintra (photo: Miguel Metelo de Seixas).

sented the coats of arms of the main families of the court nobility, 72 in total⁴. It is thus a highly symbolic construction, which transmits the idea of a monarchy organised around the sovereign by successive degrees or circles, the first being composed by the royal dynasty, the second by the court nobility (see fig. 1).

The Sintra hall may be linked to the political ideas developed by the House of Avis (sometimes by the very pen of members of the dynasty, such as Kings John I and Edward I and the Prince Regent Peter, Duke of Coimbra), notably to its neo-Platonic framework of thought⁵: by

4 Sintra's hall as a source for the history of the Portuguese nobility was largely studied by Anselmo Braamcamp FREIRE, *Brasões da Sala de Cintra*, 3 vols., Lisbon 1899–1905. More recently, the same hall has been pointed out as an iconographical expression of King Manuel's power by José Custódio Vieira da SILVA, *O Fascínio do Fim. Viagens pelo final da Idade Média*, Lisbon 1997, p. 133; see also the chapter »Palácio Nacional de Sintra«, pp. 13–22, and the chapter »Ainda o tecto da sala dos brasões em Sintra«, in Martim de ALBUQUERQUE, *Estudos de Cultura Portuguesa*, Lisbon 2000, vol. 2, pp. 157–188. About the curialisation of the Portuguese nobility in the 15th and 16th centuries, see Rita Costa GOMES, *L'ordre domestique et l'ordre politique. La société de cour dans le Portugal du bas Moyen Âge*, in: François FORONDA, Ana Isabel Carrasco MANCHADO (eds.), *Du contrat d'alliance au contrat politique. Cultures et sociétés dans la péninsule Ibérique de la fin du Moyen Âge*, Toulouse 2007, pp. 245–261.

5 João Abel da FONSECA, »A Virtuosa Benfeitoria« e o pensamento político do Infante D. Pedro, in: *Biblos* 69 (1993), pp. 227–252; Luís Rebelo de SOUSA, A alegoria final do *Livro da Virtuosa Benfeitoria*, in: *Biblos* 69 (1993), pp. 367–379;

divine right, the king was in the centre of the kingdom. It was from him that emanated the good, which then spread in successive concentric circles both in a social sense – that is, from the sovereign to the least of his subjects – as well as in a spatial sense – that is, from the central places of power to the extreme limits of royal authority. In the case of Portugal at this time, this also included Africa, the recently discovered continent of America, and even India, where Manuel I established a replica of the Portuguese monarchical structure under the authority of a governor or viceroy. In all these cases the king, the dynasty and the court were the symbolic, discursive and geographical heart of power.

Seen in this light, the »sala dos brasões« in Sintra may be read as a concrete projection of this idea of centrality, built by a royal power which perceived itself as imperial. In this line of thought, it may even be seen as an instrument of power designed to implement precisely this very idea of political centralisation.

THE »SALA DOS BRASÕES« IN PORTUGUESE HISTORIOGRAPHY

The importance of the Sintra hall for the Portuguese monarchy is thus evident. Its prestige never waned throughout the whole modern period, if one tried to interpret this hall in the light of the new political, social and cultural circumstances that followed⁶. Initially a mirror of the Manueline project⁷, the way it could be read was then continuously adapted to the needs of building an idealised image of both the monarchy and the nobility. Its description and interpretation were included in the main descriptive works of the Kingdom of Portugal, either of chorographical, historical or panegyric nature⁸. The Sintra hall thus became a sort of conservatory of nobiliary, dynastic but also, it must be said, national memory. In addition to this essential symbolic value, capable of constant reinterpretation, in the Portuguese context the Sintra hall was also unique: for the medieval and modern periods it was the only known example of a ceremonial hall with a heraldic decoration.

Though unknown outside Portugal, in Portugal itself much has been written about the »sala dos brasões«: about its allegorical value, the circumstances of its construction and its author, its relationship with political ideas and with the Manueline imperial project and its

Armando Carvalho HOMEM, Isabel Beceiro PITA, Rey y >totalidad nacional< en la obra de don Duarte. En torno a los conceptos de prudencia y consejo, in: *Hispania* 67 (2007), pp. 109–127; and Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, João Bernardo GALVÃO-TELLES, Elementos de uma cultura visual e dinástica. Os sinais heráldicos e emblemáticos do rei D. Duarte, in: Catarina Fernandes BARREIRA, Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS (eds.), *D. Duarte e a sua época. Arte, cultura, poder e espiritualidade*, Lisbon 2014, pp. 257–284.

6 This will be one of the main arguments of the chapter »La >sala dos brasões< de Sintra. Approches et enjeux historiographiques«, to be published in SEIXAS, HILTMANN, PORTUGAL (eds.), *State-Rooms of Royal and Princely Palaces* (as in n. 1).

7 SILVA, *O Fascínio do Fim* (as in n. 3), p. 133. For the application of these principles to the whole of Manueline art, see Paulo PEREIRA, *A Obra Silvestre e a Esfera do Rei – Iconologia da arquitectura manuelina na grande Estremadura*, Coimbra 1990.

8 This can be observed from the 17th until the 19th centuries. See for instance Manuel Severim de FARIA, *Notícias de Portugal*, Lisbon 1655, pp. 109–111; and Felix LICHTNOWSKY, *Portugal – Recordações do ano de 1842*, Lisbon 1884, pp. 143–144.

connection with the prestigious illuminated armorials that King Manuel I commissioned at the same time⁹.

One of the great Portuguese historians of the late 19th century, Braamcamp Freire, who introduced to Portugal the new concept of heraldry as an »auxiliary science of history«¹⁰, even published a monumental three-volume work about this site. However, its title »Brasões da Sala de Sintra« (»Blazons of the Hall of Sintra«)¹¹ leads to a misinterpretation: for him, the hall and its heraldry provide only the starting point for a vast and scholarly portrait of Portuguese medieval nobility. It is only in the introduction to his work that Freire discusses the room itself and its setting in a rather expeditious and prejudiced way. For the rest, heraldry is cited only in a complementary way to the history of the families the author deals with. Because of the work's title and its dimension, and the renown of the author, for a long time the idea prevailed that with this work the essential had been said about the Sintra hall. As a result, it has not been studied in more detail until now and due to its uniqueness and the fact that it was rather unknown outside Portugal, there are no comparative studies either.

OPEN QUESTIONS AND THE GENERAL STATE OF THE ART

Looking closer, however, many questions concerning the »sala dos brasões« remain unsolved: when, exactly, and most of all, why and for what purpose was this hall built and decorated? How was it used at that time? Since the hall is the only known example of a heraldically decorated state room in Portugal, it goes without saying that we must look beyond the borders of Portugal in order to better assess this room and its decor. The comparison between the heraldic decor of Sintra and its European counterparts seems essential for us in order to try to better understand the Portuguese context.

Did this kind of decor follow some pattern then in circulation in western courts and did the organisation of the coats of arms in the hall in Sintra find a parallel in other princely courts? Can the specific relationship established between the Sintra hall and the other means of representation of princely power (especially the armorials¹²) also be found in other cases? How were these other heraldic state rooms conceived by their authors, described and perceived by contemporary observers, and how were they ultimately used back then? Would it be possible to establish a link between the heraldic decor and the function of these rooms, in particular the

9 Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, *As insígnias municipais e os primeiros armoriais portugueses. Razões de uma ausência*, in: *Ler História* 58 (2010), pp. 155–179.

10 On the contribution of Freire to the renewal of heraldic studies in Portugal, see Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, *Heráldica, representação do poder e memória da nação. O armorial autárquico de Inácio de Vilhena Barbosa*, Lisbon 2011, pp. 430–432.

11 FREIRE, *Brasões da Sala de Cintra* (as in n. 4). The importance of Freire's book to the renewal of the study of the Portuguese nobility led to successive reprints in 1921 and 1930 (Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade); in 1973 by Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda with a preliminary study by Luís de Bivar Guerra; and, so far, a fourth reprint by the same editor in 1996.

12 The two monumental armorials illuminated during the reign of Manuel I were: António Godinho, *Livro da nobreza e perfeição das armas*, ed. by Martim de ALBUQUERQUE, João Paulo de Abreu e LIMA, Lisbon 1987; *Livro do Armeiro-Mor*, ed. by José Calvão BORGES, Lisbon 2000.

ones which were possibly ceremonial? What can be learned by other European examples about the hall in Sintra? Finally, could one speak of a European phenomenon when referring to the heraldic decorations of ceremonial rooms in which one could incorporate our Portuguese example? In order to better understand the hall in Sintra, one must understand the use and meaning of medieval and early modern heraldic programmes in state rooms in general.

This, however, is not as easy as one would expect. In fact, the topic is largely unexplored. There are hardly any studies that could help us here. Concerning the heraldic decor of princely state rooms, there are only a few known examples which have been studied in more detail, often without a conclusive answer about the meaning and function of those decors and rooms. To quote just one example, there are several studies about the »Wappensaal« in the castle of Lauf (a.d. Pegnitz). This castle was built from 1356 onwards by emperor Charles IV, who was also the king of Bohemia. It features one room which is decorated with more than 100 coats of arms, carved into the wall and painted. Below the Bohemian coat of arms, there are the coats of arms of the dukes and counts, the dioceses, the most important cities and the most important families of Bohemia. Some say that this is a representation of the actual king's court, others say that this is an ideal representation of it, and one could argue as well that it is just the representation of the kingdom of Bohemia as such¹³. Here again, we know nothing about the use of this room – besides the fact that the king was merely present in this castle¹⁴.

HERALDIC DECOR AS A RESEARCH PROBLEM

The problem with all studies of this example (as in many other cases) is that they focus on coats of arms as distinctive marks that represent either a person, a family, a title, or a dominion. Thus, depending on one's perspective, very different conclusions could be drawn about the meaning of this heraldic arrangement. However, the problem with coats of arms is that each of those perspectives can be correct¹⁵. As a matter of fact, coats of arms are open to interpretation and can potentially represent all of those meanings. Depending on the actual situation of communication and the audience, the same representation of a coat of arms can refer either to a person, family, title, territory, or to all of these at the same time.

Furthermore, as Menéndez Pidal pointed out, the multiplicity of interpretations of heraldic emblems also depends, in the last instance, on the material nature of their representation¹⁶. Thus, acts of heraldic communication must not only be contextualised in time, in the respective

13 For more information on the castle and the »Wappensaal« see Georg Ulrich GROSSMANN, Hans-Heinrich HÄFFNER (eds.), *Burg Lauf a. d. Pegnitz. Ein Bauwerk Kaiser Karls IV.*, Regensburg 2006; for the different interpretations of its armorial decor especially Barbara SCHOCK-WERNER, *Die Burg Karls IV. in Lauf als Mittelpunkt eines geplanten neuen Landes*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 19–24, and Lenka BOBKOVÁ, *Die Oberpfalz und die Burg Lauf in den territorial-dynastischen Plänen Karls IV.*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 25–34.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

15 For a discussion of the functioning of heraldic communication see Torsten HILTMANN, *L'héraldique dans l'espace domestique. Perspectives historiques sur les armoiries et le décor héraldique dans l'espace profane (espace germanique, XIII^e–XVI^e siècle)*, in: *Le Moyen Âge 123* (2017), pp. 527–570, pp. 528–533.

16 This is the central argument of Faustino MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *Los emblemas heráldicos – Una interpretación histórica*, Madrid 1993, largely developed more recently in ID., *Los emblemas heráldicos – novecientos años de historia*, Sevilla 2014.

epoch and society in which they occur: the concrete physical space in which such emblems are represented must also be taken into account. The detailed understanding of heraldic emblems depends on this complex contextualisation. The same coats of arms do not necessarily have the same meaning in each of their material manifestations, although they are represented identically. The message of each manifestation also varies according to its spatial location and its concrete material execution. Understood and used as an act of communication, heraldic emblems fit in with a series of other semantic codes and expressions designed to express, substantiate and project a particular image, as the agent who created these expressions or had them created intended to display. In this context, the heraldic image does not function as a mere abstraction, but as a concrete act of communication with its originator, addressees, observers and possible commentators. Each manifestation thus establishes an intrinsic relationship to the space in which it is located¹⁷.

Moreover, these coats of arms did not only refer to a person, family etc., they could also convey a whole range of different messages about them, their alleged origins and relations, their partisanship and political affiliations, their actual or claimed possessions and dominions, and so on. It should also be remarked that the interpretation of a set of heraldic emblems corresponds to something more than the simple sum of the interpretation of each one of these emblems: there is a set value created by the principle of choice that underlies the selection of that series. Finally, the context of their use, the location of their representation and the way they are represented could also add further meaning to the representation in question and further modify and elaborate its function; which is particularly true if they were represented in groups, as shall be studied here, where they are spatially and visually put in relation to each other. Thus – and this is important – coats of arms were not mere signs to refer to an entity or even a mere decorative element. They were a very versatile and complex means of communication which could add an important element to the communication within a given room: a means of communication which would be understood on different levels by a much broader part of society than has been assumed so far. As a matter of fact, heraldic communication was part of the common knowledge and practice in the late middle ages and early modern period¹⁸.

Since coats of arms were hitherto only read in the perspective of identifying marks or decorative elements, they did not gain much attention. Another reason which added to this was the sheer abundance of heraldic communication in medieval and early modern society and heraldic decor in medieval and early modern houses and palaces.

In his book, *Le décor peint de la maison médiévale. Orner pour signifier en France avant 1350*, TERENCE Le Deschault de Monredon studied 55 houses with mural paintings dating from before 1350 in France. However, for his study he took only into account those mural paintings that

17 Cf. Miguel Metelo de SEIXAS, *Heráldica municipal e apropriação simbólica do espaço urbano medieval português*, in: Amélia Aguiar ANDRADE et al. (eds.), *Espaços e poderes na Europa urbana medieval*, Lisbon 2018, pp. 205–225; and Laurent HABLLOT, *Le décor emblématique chez les princes de la fin du Moyen âge. Un outil pour construire et qualifier l'espace*, in: Thomas LIÉNARD et al. (eds.), *Construction de l'espace au Moyen Âge. Pratiques et représentation*, Paris 2007, pp. 147–165.

18 As shown in the first volume of this series, esp. Torsten HILTMANN, *Arms and Art in the Middle Ages. Approaching the Social and Cultural Impact of Heraldry by its Artisans and Artists*, in: ID., Laurent HABLLOT (eds.), *Heraldic Artists and Painters in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, Ostfildern 2018, pp. 11–23.

feature figurative representations. He candidly admits having left out all the decor where coats of arms were solely represented within geometric motives:

»Cependant, j'ai délibérément choisi de ne pas aborder les nombreux décors uniquement constitués d'écus armoriés au sein de motifs géométriques en réseau. Ces décors mériteraient qu'une étude complète leur soit consacrée, afin de mieux comprendre l'enjeu d'une telle prolifération durant les XIII^e et XIV^e siècles.«¹⁹

The same applies to the analysis of the coats of arms in the mural paintings he actually studied. He states that heraldry was an integral part of those arrangements, e.g. when coats of arms accompanied a painting in the form of a heraldic frieze. He used those coats of arms only to identify the initiator and to date the image²⁰. He is well aware of the importance of heraldry in this context:

»L'héraldique constitue dans tous les cas un système symbolique riche qui ne doit pas être négligé lors de l'étude d'œuvres dans lesquelles elle apparaît.«²¹

However, he was forced to put this valuable information aside, since the amount of it was not manageable in the framework of his study. This means that heraldic elements have not been studied here in the context of mural paintings in medieval buildings in France not because of the little information they conveyed, but on the contrary, because they were too rich a source to be adequately analysed.

There is, of course, a myriad of very specific case studies on heraldic decor, scattered chronologically and geographically. Those studies were usually focused on the issue of the identification of coats of arms represented in the mural paintings. However, the results they reached regarding this specific question are often of a very questionable nature – especially from a methodological point of view²².

In fact, there are few, although important studies that we can quote here that take a more general, overarching perspective and treat the heraldic decor as an object of research in its own right.

At a colloquium on armorials held in 1994, Emmanuel de Boos and Christian de Mérindol discussed heraldic decorations in comparative terms. Emmanuel de Boos expressed the very stimulating and inspiring idea of understanding wall paintings in the same way as collections of coats of arms, as we find them in books (armorials) – underlining once again the complexity and richness of those sources²³; a perspective which helps us to better understand the transmediality of heraldic programmes and thus their effects in different contexts. Christian de Mérindol, for his part, provided a first typology for heraldic wall paintings and a first collection of

19 TERENCE LE DESCHAULT DE MONREDON, *Le décor peint de la maison médiévale. Orner pour signifier en France avant 1350*, Paris 2015, p. 22.

20 We shall note that the use of heraldry to date and identify documents or works of art was at the core of its qualification as an »auxiliary science of history« since the nineteenth century. See Alessandro SAVORELLI, *L'araldica per la storia: una fonte ausiliaria?*, in: Maria Pia PAOLI (ed.), *Nel laboratorio della storia. Una guida alle fonti dell'età moderna*, Rome 2013, pp. 289–315.

21 *Ibid.*

22 HILTMANN, *L'héraldique dans l'espace domestique* (as in n. 15).

23 Emmanuel DE BOOS, *Les décors héraldiques sont-ils des armoriaux?*, in: Louis HOLTZ, Michel PASTOUREAU, Hélène LOYAU (eds.), *Les armoriaux. Histoire héraldique, sociale et culturelle des armoriaux médiévaux*, Paris 1998, pp. 259–272.

relevant examples for late medieval France²⁴. He has pursued his studies on this subject ever since and published an important corpus, followed by a general study of heraldic representation as an image of the Kingdom of France²⁵.

A first and illuminating analysis of the development of heraldic wall paintings in a cultural-historical framework has been provided by Sabine Sommerer and Hans Rudolf Meier²⁶. The authors illustrate how the focus of content and thus the way of representation changed from the depiction of group membership to the representation of the individual and his origins. On this basis, Torsten Hiltmann then provided an overview of heraldic decor in the German speaking area in the late middle ages²⁷. In so doing, he emphasises the growing diversity of heraldic programmes, which go far beyond personal themes, and emphasises the importance of material and technical aspects as well as, in particular, the respective context for the interpretation and assessment of these representations.

With respect to the heraldic programme in the »sala dos brasões«, we can conclude that even if we want to compare it to potential European counterparts, so far there is no basis on which to do so. The meaning and function of heraldic decor have not yet been studied in a more comprehensive way, neither in princely and royal or other kinds of state rooms nor in medieval houses. Regardless of the outstanding importance of these sources for historical research, there is still a tremendous gap here.

Thus, before we can state anything new about the hall in Sintra, we first have to take a broader approach and establish a more comprehensive understanding of the content and function of heraldic decor in medieval and early modern state rooms themselves. Besides that, we also need to refine our methodology on how to deal with such sources – or at least collect initial elements to do so. This is what this volume sets out to do. It aims to explore heraldic programmes in state rooms in medieval and early modern Europe from as broad a social and institutional perspective as possible, and to collect initial material for a typology of this phenomenon and the methodology for its study.

Here, we aim to address the use of heraldry in all the different forms it could be employed: displayed in a variety of media including, but not limited to, paintings, stained glass, sculptures, tiles, tapestries, curtains, furniture, either permanently installed or, as part of ceremonies, as ephemeral decor. This led the directors of this book to choose among many exciting proposals those that ensured a large diachronic, geographical and typological diversity. The articles collected here cover the period from the middle ages to the 19th century, spreading over a wide geographical and social area. Covering Europe from England to Italy and from Portugal to Hungary, these papers deal with residences of patricians and town halls as well as with noble manors, princely castles and royal palaces. As a kind of extension of the representative room,

24 Christian DE MÉRINDOL, Recueils d'armoiries et décors monumentaux peints et armoriés à la fin de l'époque médiévale, in: HOLTZ, PASTOUREAU, LOYAU (eds.) *Les armoriaux* (as in n. 23), pp. 291–331.

25 See Christian DE MÉRINDOL, *Images du royaume de France. Décors monumentaux peints et armoiries, art et histoire*, Pont-Saint-Esprit 2013.

26 Hans Rudolf MEIER, Sabine SOMMERER, *Von der kollektiven Identität zur individuellen Ahnenprobe. Heraldik in der spätmittelalterlichen Profanraumdekoration*, in: Eckart Conrad LUTZ, Dominique RIGAU (eds.), *Paroles de murs. Peinture murale, littérature et histoire au Moyen Âge = Sprechende Wände. Wandmalerei, Literatur und Geschichte im Mittelalter*, Grenoble 2007, pp. 167–182.

27 HILTMANN, *L'héraldique dans l'espace domestique* (as in n. 22).

monasteries and churches are also included. They thus offer a broad perspective that will help us to better understand the use and function of heraldic decors in state rooms and their methodological challenges. Just to be clear: the aim of this volume and of the papers compiled here is not to identify and explain the individual coats of arms or the various armorial collections. They want to shed a new light on the question of how heraldic decor contributed to communication in representative rooms wherever they have been depicted, in order to better understand and assess those rooms and the messages they were planned to convey and the ways in which they were perceived. It is about heraldic decors as historical sources and how they can be used to learn more about the different acts of communication in which they participated and therefore about medieval and early modern society and its forms of expression and (self-)representation. These contributions start with the assumption that heraldry was not merely some form of decoration, but where it has been depicted it is an important and sometimes very decisive and elucidating part of what these rooms communicate by themselves.

SOME RESULTS

The various contributions in this collection clearly confirm the assumption that the heraldic decor of a particular room adds important elements to its meaning and plays an important role in shaping it. However, they also demonstrate the difficulties we encounter in dealing with this kind of visual sources. They show that, in order to correctly interpret them, we need at least a good understanding of the precise function of the room or a valid identification of the coats of arms represented there. If both these elements are lacking, it is next to impossible to make sense of the situation.

The question of state rooms and the importance of context

Which brings us to our first point: the definition of what we understand here as state rooms. During the conference it became more and more clear that it is quite difficult to adequately define these kinds of rooms.

Initially, we defined them as rooms used for ceremonies and receptions, able to construct and express an identity that was meant to be witnessed by members of the community itself as well as outsiders. In doing so, we have a definition based on the function of the room.

On the one hand, it is often difficult to understand the exact function of a given room if we do not have further elements to narrow it down. Also, architectural features are often not sufficient, as can be seen by the example of the castle of Lauf (a.d. Pegnitz)²⁸. The heraldic programmes appear to have been intimately tied to the functions of these rooms and the strategies of self-representation and communication employed by commissioners and users of such places. But heraldic programmes are not limited to these kinds of rooms, sometimes the same coats

28 For the difficulties in assigning a clear function to the »Wappensaal« at the castle of Lauf see Daniel BURGER, Michael RYKL, Die Raumstruktur der Burg Karls IV. in Lauf, in: GROSSMANN, HÄFFNER (eds.), Burg Lauf a. d. Pegnitz (as in n. 13), pp. 35–66, 48–50.

of arms can be found in different rooms of the same building²⁹, while not every state room features a heraldic decor.

On the other hand, the same function can also be fulfilled by other rooms in the same building or even beyond, where power was exercised by delegation. Thus also churches, convents and chapels could be used for reception, ceremonies and display, and therefore play a considerable role in self-representation through heraldic decorations.

If we look at the heraldic decor of a given room in any kind of residence or palace, it is helpful to take into account as well the other rooms of the building with which it often forms a coherent whole. Inside the buildings this privileged relationship is established notably with all the reception rooms, including the galleries, but also with transitional spaces such as staircases and courtyards; outside it fits especially with the facades, the portals and, once again, the courtyards. It is important not to study the heraldic decor of a given room isolated from the rest of the building, but to understand it as part of a larger context, especially in the sense of a processual sequence following the path to access the given room. This makes the study of heraldic decor in state rooms even more difficult. But to study it isolated from the rest of the building would deprive it of some of its meanings.

For future studies it would be important to further limit and specify the meaning of the concept »state room« and how it can actually be applied to medieval and early modern times, whether we want to part from a given architectural setting or from a certain function that a given space (like a church) can fulfil in a given situation. Here, we also have to consider the polyvalency of rooms in medieval and early modern times.

The state of preservation

A further prerequisite for an adequate analysis is knowledge of the exact state of conservation of a given heraldic programme. What is the relationship between what can be seen today and the way the room and the decor would have looked like at the time that interests us?

To what extent can the current state of the decor be supplemented by material analysis of the location and written sources in order to provide a better understanding of the former composition and the successive changes of a given decor? In fact, we have to be very careful because such spaces and decorations could undergo many different alterations in the course of time and have little in common nowadays with their medieval or early modern situation. Almost every contribution to this collection has been facing such problems. There were replacements, additions, deletions, enhancements, relocations and recontextualisations as well as restorations that led to very different outcomes than the assumed original. Therefore, we should not consider the object of our study simply, as if it had always been the way it presents itself today. Such decors could be very dynamic and subject to various changes and adaptations – either purposeful or not. In some cases, there are parts missing, in others the wooden panels painted with coats of arms have been hidden during times of turmoil and later possibly reassembled the wrong way. In other cases again, a new owner saw fit to remove the heraldic decor from one place and dis-

29 See in this volume, Laura CECCANTINI, Delphine GRENET, *Les programmes héraldiques des demeures patriciennes du sud de la France au XV^e siècle*, pp. 220–234.

play it elsewhere, and so on³⁰. Thus, very often we cannot be sure about the order or completeness of the heraldic programme we encounter in a representative room. Sometimes we cannot even be sure whether it was made for this room at all.

But there are some measures that can help us to address this problem: the careful scrutiny of account books may well give some insight, as is also the case for old pictures. But even these sources can have their limits: for example, if the accounting officer describes the ordered coats of arms incorrectly or incompletely or omits the explanations altogether.

However, looking for any documentation of the conception and execution of the heraldic programme, as well as later descriptions or depictions, is a necessary step in its interpretation since it is the best and sometimes also the only means to gain some insight into the way this decor came to be, how it was intended and how it was seen and understood by different viewers. It may also give us some information about models and inspirations used by those responsible for the making of these decors.

The situation within the room

It is important to know about the original arrangement as well as the different changes in order to better understand the heraldic programme and its possible intentions, since the meaning of the decor is closely linked to place and space.

As Christian de Mérindol stressed during the conference as well, it makes a great difference where and how and in which order the coats of arms were arranged. For instance, whether a coat of arms or a series of coats of arms has been depicted above the door, inside or outside, or above the fireplace, within the window glass or on the keystone of the vault. Whether they are in the direct line of sight of a person entering the room through a particular door, or whether they are rather hidden and inaccessible but still present. There are also hierarchies at play which give the depicted coats of arms different significances, whether they are shown rather to the left or to the right, rather above or below or right in the middle. In the end, represented in different places, they could perform different tasks. Attached above a portal, they could indicate the boundary between two rooms and spaces, which is quite different from a position on the keystone of a vault that spans the room. A more coherent list of different places and functions of coats of arms has yet to be established. The papers presented in this collection nevertheless provide some first insights.

The context of other sign systems

Much as we stressed that heraldic programmes should not be interpreted isolated from the other rooms and the layout of the building of which they form a part, heraldic representations in other media like furniture, tapestries, draperies, stained glass or even clothes and jewellery

30 See in this volume, amongst others, Pierre COUHAULT, *Dynastique, impérial ou local? Les décors intérieurs des hôtels de ville et de châtellenies dans le comté de Flandre au milieu du règne de Charles Quint*, pp. 185–204, and Sabine SOMMERER, *Facebook avant la lettre. Fictive Friends and Heraldic Allusions in Medieval Urban Houses*, pp. 207–219.

have to be included in our analysis as well. Either as decorative objects or utensils, they could also complete the heraldic decor still visible today.

This is even more true for other symbolic systems that can be found in their respective rooms. Emblems and badges, monograms, mottos, portraits, astrological or zodiacal elements and figurative representations, could all contribute to elucidate and sharpen the meaning of a heraldic programme and consequently of a room. Thus, it is important to understand heraldic decors likewise from within their symbolic context, which could finally also include different legal meanings. Although these points must be examined more thoroughly, they nevertheless contribute to the methodological complexity of the interpretation of heraldic programmes, which relates to the iconographic density of medieval and early modern decorative programmes.

The heraldic programme itself

This finally leads us to the heraldic programme itself. Taking into account how coats of arms work, this is certainly the most difficult part of their interpretation. As a matter of fact, coats of arms communicate in a very complex manner. Depending on the context, they can convey very different meanings and fulfil very different functions³¹.

It is almost never definitively clear what a coat of arms refers to. So, as we have seen, a representation of a known coat of arms could either refer to a person, his family, the dominion they rule or come from, or even to the title associated with this dominion. For instance, the coats of arms of France could refer to the king of France, the royal family, to France as a kingdom or to the kingdom of France as such, depending on the communication situation and the individual observer. This offers different levels of understanding for the very same heraldic representation or depiction of a heraldic programme, which may also not have been specified intentionally. On other occasions we encounter the same coat of arms several times within a heraldic programme, which leads us to the question whether these several representations are referring to the same or to different possible interpretations of this coat of arms. If we do not have further sources which give us an account of a certain intention of the makers of the heraldic programme or about the preferred reading of it by contemporaries, we have to deal with this undecidability.

For representations of lesser known or prominent coats of arms, it becomes more complicated. Because, here, we first have to identify the individual coats of arms, which is never a simple task. In addition to this basic polyvalence, that is, the question to which level of meaning the coat of arms refers (person, family, dominion, etc.), we have to pose the question as to whom or what it refers at all. This is complicated since the same heraldic design could be borne by different persons and families which have no relation whatsoever to each other. In the *Ordinary of Medieval Armorial*s database by Steen Clemmensen, we find that about 3.000 of the approximately 19.000 different heraldic designs listed here have been documented to be borne by at least two distinct families, and 700 of them even by five or more³². We are often bound to the context in order to identify the possible bearer of a given coat of arms. If we are confronted

31 For a more detailed account on this matter see HILTMANN, L'héraldique dans l'espace domestique (as in n. 22).

32 Steen CLEMMENSEN, *Ordinary of Medieval Armorial*s. Blazons of Coats of Arms and Crests, database vs.2.1, published: July 2017, Internet: <http://armorial.dk/> (accessed: 23/03/2020).

with several unknown coats of arms, this may lead us to a vicious circle if we use one identification of an unknown coat of arms to narrow down the possibilities for the identification of another. Sometimes, as it will be shown in this volume, it is possible that it may not be clear whether a given heraldic design represents a coat of arms at all or rather a heraldically shaped decoration³³.

This would not be such a problem if the coats of arms and heraldic programmes came with some captions specifying whom these coats of arms are representing or what a collection of coats of arms is meant to represent. But, and this is important, these representations are mostly without any written hint as to their meaning. And if there is any, they often only give a name without any further information. As a result, heraldic representations and also heraldic programmes are very open to different interpretations and without written sources we have to accept and work with this polyvalence and uncertainty. As stated above, it may be that there are completely different readings of the same heraldic representation and that, depending on the situation and the beholder, they are all potentially possible. Thus, it is necessary to know more about the function of the room or to know all the coats of arms therein and, if possible, the person or institution who commissioned them. Otherwise it would be next to impossible to draw any conclusions from a heraldic depiction. It is already difficult enough to do so, even if we have this information.

The question of what a heraldic decor expresses can therefore have very different answers. Some are related to a specific event (battle, treaty, alliance, marriage, solemn act, passage of a prince, tournament, etc.) to which they relate directly. Others express a real or fictitious kinship and thus serve to build a genealogy; others again focus on the depiction or creation of a group, or adherence to a group, reflect political ideas or religious doctrines, or represent a number of territories, domains and jurisdictions. The apparent diversity of heraldic decorations should not obscure the view of what connects them: their ability to summarise and express complex statements, claims, contexts and narratives in a visual representation.

First elements for a typology of heraldic programmes

We would like to conclude our introductory paper with a collection of the initial elements for a typology of the various contents of heraldic programmes in medieval and early modern state rooms.

Quite often we encounter representations of a particular coat of arms referring to the bearer's rulership and identity. This is the case when a city displays the coats of arms of its jurisdiction or when a king places his own arms, or those of his kingdom, in prominent places in the state room. These kinds of heraldic programmes can be found in particular in princely and noble residences and town halls. From the 15th century onwards, we also find genealogies that represent the family itself and its origins.

Sometimes these heraldic programmes also feature the relation to a superior authority – either to emphasise a special relationship or to show allegiance, both of which can serve to illustrate or to establish a special status. Thus, heraldic programmes can express power and subordi-

33 See in this volume SOMMERER, Facebook *avant la lettre* (as in n. 30).

nation, sometimes simultaneously, in order to place and to describe the user of the state room and commissioner of the decor in question.

In other cases, these heraldic programmes can be used to highlight a particular group of people or families, which can have very different purposes. Starting from friends and partners of a family to the powerful families of a city. Even the clerics of a family could be indicated this way. Or, and here we rather touch the domain of historical events, the dead of a particular battle.

In fact, historical deeds and events could also be featured in heraldic decors. These can be events such as battles, but also historical narratives in a larger perspective in order to inscribe them in a particular reading of history.

And sometimes, but this is rather to be found in patrician houses, as it seems, the coats of arms serve to display the whole world and the powerful families and their dominions.

CONCLUSION

What we can learn from this list and from the various examples gathered in this volume is the astonishing variety and complexity of heraldic programmes in medieval and early modern state rooms, since these different contents and types could also be combined and mixed. This volume, which focuses primarily on methodological questions, can therefore only give a first impression of the diversity and variety of heraldic decoration in medieval and early modern state rooms. It is evident that much more research is needed in order to understand these heraldic programmes and to be able to interpret and assess them adequately. The authors mentioned above are right if they underline the richness of heraldic representation beyond the simple dating of the decor and the identification of its commissioner. It is for this reason that we should not leave them out of our studies, but, on the contrary, finally unlock these very prolific sources.

There is in fact a general conclusion that can be deduced from this volume: the first steps towards understanding a concrete case – the Sintra »sala dos brasões« – have led us to envision a new field of research in its own right. Its unexpected complexity justifies the publication of this volume, which is indeed the first ever to address the phenomenon of heraldry in medieval and early modern state rooms on a larger scale.

