Medieval heraldry is an underexplored topic. Most of the studies are performed by heraldists, who, although their research can be thorough and valuable, are mainly interested in only a small portion of this huge theme. Due to this lack of research, heraldry remains in the margin of medieval society and many myths persist. The fourth edition of the ‘Journées d’études héraldiques’ was dedicated to start altering this. This aim would be achieved through an interdisciplinary approach, bringing historians, art historians and heraldists together. The introductory presentations of the two organizers pointed out the two main themes of this conference.

First, LAURENT HABLOT (Poitiers) and TORSTEN HILTMANN (Münster) stressed that in the Middle Ages, heraldry was everywhere; at funerals, in churches, on clothing, at taverns, etc. These heraldic symbols could be applied on many different sorts of materials, ranging from metal to wood and, although not very common, ginger bread. The second major theme was the need to cut loose the seemingly inextricable connection between heraldry and heralds. Torsten Hiltmann noted that on a workshop on heralds, two weeks earlier, it became very clear that heralds were not only engaged in heraldry, but that they had many tasks and responsibilities. This conference on heraldic artists deconstructed the myth of the mutual exclusiveness of heralds and heraldry from the other side, by demonstrating that heralds were not the only ones who performed heraldic art and display. In fact, most of this was done by other artists. Heraldry, it was emphasised, was not a marginal phenomenon, but stood in the centre of medieval society. The many presentations of this conference underlined and acknowledged this claim.

Different papers demonstrated that heraldic paintings, sculptures and other artistic expressions were applied in many different contexts on various materials. RADU LUPESCU (Cluj) dealt with the heraldic presentation in sculptures and architecture in Transylvania, using examples of coats of arms on a sarcophagus and a memorial plaque on a church. TANJA JONES (Tuscaloosa, AL) treated Pisanello’s portrait medals and in particular his relation to the heraldic emblems. Many medieval charters contained illuminated coats of arms, as ANDREAS ZAJIC (Vienna) showed in his presentation on the grants of arms issued by the chancellery of the Holy Roman Empire. The artists ANNE-SOPHIE BESSERO (Paris) studied were engaged in the production of the heraldic decors at funerals in 16th and 17th centuries France. At these funerals, coats of arms were ubiquitous, ranging from depictions on coffins to fitted sheets and church walls. Heraldry played an important role in ceiling paintings as well, as was stressed in CHRISTIAN DE MÉRINDOL’s (Paris) thorough presentation on the paintings in the castle of Beaucarne and STEEN CLEMMENSEN (Farum) addressed the many challenges of a traditional heraldic source of the Middle Ages; the armorial.

Heraldry was thus everywhere. Coats of arms were clearly a means of communication that could be used in almost any imaginable circumstances. The challenging question that emerged after many presentations was: what did these coats of arms exactly communicate? MARTIN ROLAND (Vienna) argued in his lecture on heraldic presentations in grants of arms that grants were legal documents that did not require decoration. The heraldic illuminations therefore had no legal function but served only to impress the spectator. By showing a difference between the descriptions of the coats of arms in the documents and the way the coats of arms were presented, this conference on heraldic artists underlined the need for an interdisciplinary approach in heraldic studies.

1 The workshop to which is referred is ‘History of heralds in Europe (12th-18th century)’ held at 26-28 March 2014 in Münster. For a report of this conference, see: http://heralds.hypotheses.org/391
depicted he supported his claim. However, others pointed out that if the coats of arms were surrounded by text, these images had a judicial function due to the fact it could never be altered. In Lorraine, it was noted, the coats of arms were placed in the right bottom of the letter and were concealed by the fold. This discussion on the use of coats of arms in the specific context of charters demonstrates that in heraldic communication there were regional differences and different uses.

Heraldry appeared almost everywhere and often with some very similar characteristics. MICHEL PASTOUREAU (Paris) surveyed the heraldic stylisation that artists and painters had to work with. He listed the special aspects of heraldic rules that heraldic artists had to follow, such as the heraldic colour rule, the orientation of the figures and the arrangement of the symbols. This does not mean heraldic art was static. The gothic heraldic style dominated in Florence until the middle of the 15th century, but ALESSANDRO SAVORELLI (Pisa) showed that the work of the Della Robbia family marked the transition to a new classical naturalist Renaissance style. The characteristics of this new style were particularly visible in heraldic depictions of animals. Lions, for instance, were presented in a more aggressive, wild and energetic manner. In Transylvania, Lupescu showed that different workshops had different styles of execution of the heraldic art and beneficiaries could choose between them according to their needs.

Hence regional and contextual differences and developments mark the study of medieval heraldic artistic production, but all the presentations made clear that heraldry was not a marginal phenomenon. At the same time they showed that, in order to understand this complex means of communication, a lot of regional and comparative research is needed.

In the introduction it was stressed that heralds and heraldry were not mutual exclusive, and the various lectures underlined this statement by answering the seemingly easy but evenly challenging question: who made the heraldic art and presentations? The answers demonstrated that many different people were involved in the heraldic artistic production.

This realization does not mean that heralds were not engaged in heraldic art at all. JEAN-CHRISTOPHE BLANCHARD (Nancy) showed in his presentation on heralds and heraldry in the duchy of Lorraine that in the 16th century the heraldic images were painted by heralds. However, this was the result of a recent shift in their responsibilities, since in the 15th century the herald acted mostly as a messenger and the heraldic art was made by painters.

So painters did not need to be heralds, as was stressed as well by MARC GIL (Lille) in his examination of the role of the heraldic paintings in the activities of the painters in the Burgundian Netherlands and Picardy, from 1300 to 1500. He pointed out the resemblance of the Dutch words for shield (schild) and painter (schilder) which shows the connection between the production of shields and the profession of the painter. In the artistic corporations in these areas, many painters were engaged in heraldic paintings, but this was often not their only activity. Interestingly, the painting of coats of arms seemed to be a way of learning the profession.

MATTEO FERRARI’s (Poitiers) lecture also demonstrated that, in a different region in a different time, the heraldic art was not produced by heralds either. Artists that produced coats of arms in the Italian cities in the 13th and 14th centuries were painters, some of which were well-known, but others were not. These artists were often not exclusively specialised in heraldic images; they produced other works and sometimes had other professions as well. Thus a wide variety of artists were hired by the city communities to produce heraldic images.

The execution of the heraldic art for funerals in France in the 16th and 17th century displayed a similar variety in artists engaged in heraldic artistic production, as Bessero showed in her presentation. Since many funerals could not be foreseen, a large amount of heraldic artwork had to be produced in a short amount of time, so often many artists were contracted for a funeral. Some artists were involved in the painting of coats of arms for different funerals and some of them had been working together more often, as in a sort
of partnership, with all their own specialisations, ranging from glass to metal, complementing each other. Although some artists only seem to have been painting heraldic presentations occasionally, others appeared to have specialised in it and were able to work with different kinds of materials.

But if heralds were so often not involved in the production of heraldic art, did that mean that heraldic knowledge was more widespread? LUISA GENTILE’s (Turin) presentation on the relation between artists, heralds and heraldry in Savoy showed it did. Heralds occurred late in this region, only from the 16th century onwards. Before that, heraldic knowledge was held by clerks, specialists in law, judges and notaries. Gentile noted that it is not a coincidence that Bartollo de Sassoferrato was a jurist. Further, some professional painters showed interest in armorials and heraldry, and different forms of artistic expressions in the region (such as heraldry on castles, seals and medals) indicated that heraldic knowledge was present.

Heraldic artists however, did not make coats of arms on their own initiative. They were ordered to. To understand the production of heraldic art, the commissioners should be taken into account too. And often, commissioning and executing went hand in hand and influenced the heraldic presentation, as Zajic showed in his examination of the grants of arms issued by the chancellery of the Holy Roman Empire. In the traditional literature one often reads that the execution of these letters was determined by the chancellery, but according to Zajic the situation was a bit more complicated. Often people outside the chancellery, the beneficiaries, determined the artistic execution. The artists were often hired professionals and followed the indications of the beneficiaries.

This conference has brought together scholars from different disciplines and the various approaches complemented each other, as they each highlighted a different aspect of heraldic artistic production in the Middle Ages. The lectures revealed the wide range of artists that were involved in the production of heraldic art. Sometimes it had been the work of professionals, sometimes not, but it is certain that there were not only heralds behind the heraldic expressions. The omnipresence of heraldic art indicated that heraldic communication stood central to the medieval society. There is still a lot of work to do in order get a better understanding of the creators of heraldic art. Case-studies should shed light on the regional diversities and development in time. Conclusions should be differentiated and contextualised. The presented papers were a promising take-off for further studies and this conference demonstrated that if a multidisciplinary approach is applied the subject of heraldic artists and painters will prove to be a fruitful field of study that sharpens our view on the interconnection between medieval heraldry, art and society.\(^2\)

**Conference overview:**

**Introduction**

Laurent Hablot (Poitiers) / Torsten Hiltmann (Münster)

Michel Pastoureau (Paris), La stylisation héraldique. Essai de définition à partir des armoiries médiévales

**Actors**

Matteo Ferrari (Poitiers), Au service de la Commune. Identité et culture des « artistes héraldistes » dans les villes italiennes aux XIIIème-XIVème siècles

Marc Gil (Lille), Peinture d’armoiries, une activité parmi d’autres du peintre médiéval ?

Luisa Gentile (Turin), Artistes, hérauts et héraldique de part et d’autre des Alpes Occidentales

Jean-Christophe Blanchard (Nancy), Georges Gresset, peintre et héraut d’armes des ducs de Lorraine (1523-1559)

**Creations**

Radu Lupescu (Cluj), Heraldic commissions in architectural context. The architectural workshop of Cluj in the fifteenth century

Christian de Mérimond (Paris), Le peintre du plafond de Beaucaire (1454-1461)

Anne-Sophie Bessero (Paris), Les fournisseurs d’armoiries funéraires au XVIe siècle

Martin Roland (Vienna), Illuminated charters, heraldry and artistic excellence

Andreas Zajic (Vienna), La procédure d’expédition des concessions d’armoiries impériales

Steen Clemmensen (Farum), Armorials as commercial ventures?

Case studies: The great artists

Tanja Jones (Tuscaloosa, AL), Vivified Heraldry: On Pisanello’s Medalllic Imagery

Alessandro Savorelli (Pisa), L’héraldique „naturaliste“ des Della Robbia à Florence et en Toscane