

“Some Thoughts on *The names and creacions of all or the moste of the nobilitie from William the Conquerour untill the yeare of grace 1586*”

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As the manuscripts librarian at the Clark, I don't often get to work on the materials in the Chrzanowski collection – but those that do come by my desk are really the cream of the crop. I didn't think I would catalog a letter by Queen Elizabeth I in my career, but here we are. I will not be talking about that letter today, but instead about the lovely heraldic manuscript with the unwieldy title – The names and creacions of all or the moste of the nobilitie from William the Conquerour untill the yeare of grace 1586.



As you might guess from the title, this manuscript illustrates the arms and the brief biographies of each ennobled house, named in chronological order with their arms illustrated in full color alongside. The entries are all written in the same neat secretary hand, with embellished headings for the individuals' names, and the pages are all carefully ruled, with wide margins.



The creator and original owner are unknown; also unknown is whether they were the same person, but I feel strongly that this manuscript was the work of a hired scribe. The thoroughness and the uniformity of the text would tend, in my experience, to point to a professional artist – it would not be unexpected for an amateur antiquarian to have left off completing all of the color, or to have inconsistencies or a large number of errors and emendations in the handwritten text.



The figures on the arms are also very well drawn, which indicates to me that perhaps a trained artist was at work as opposed to an amateur. Other heraldry books and manuscript at the Clark include endearing but definitely very clumsy dragons and unconvincing lions, and compared to those, these are very good.



That said, not everything here is perfect and pristine. Looking a bit more critically, there are some inconsistencies. Though the quality of the line drawings and coloration always remains good, there is a definite falling off in some of the neatness at the end of the volume.

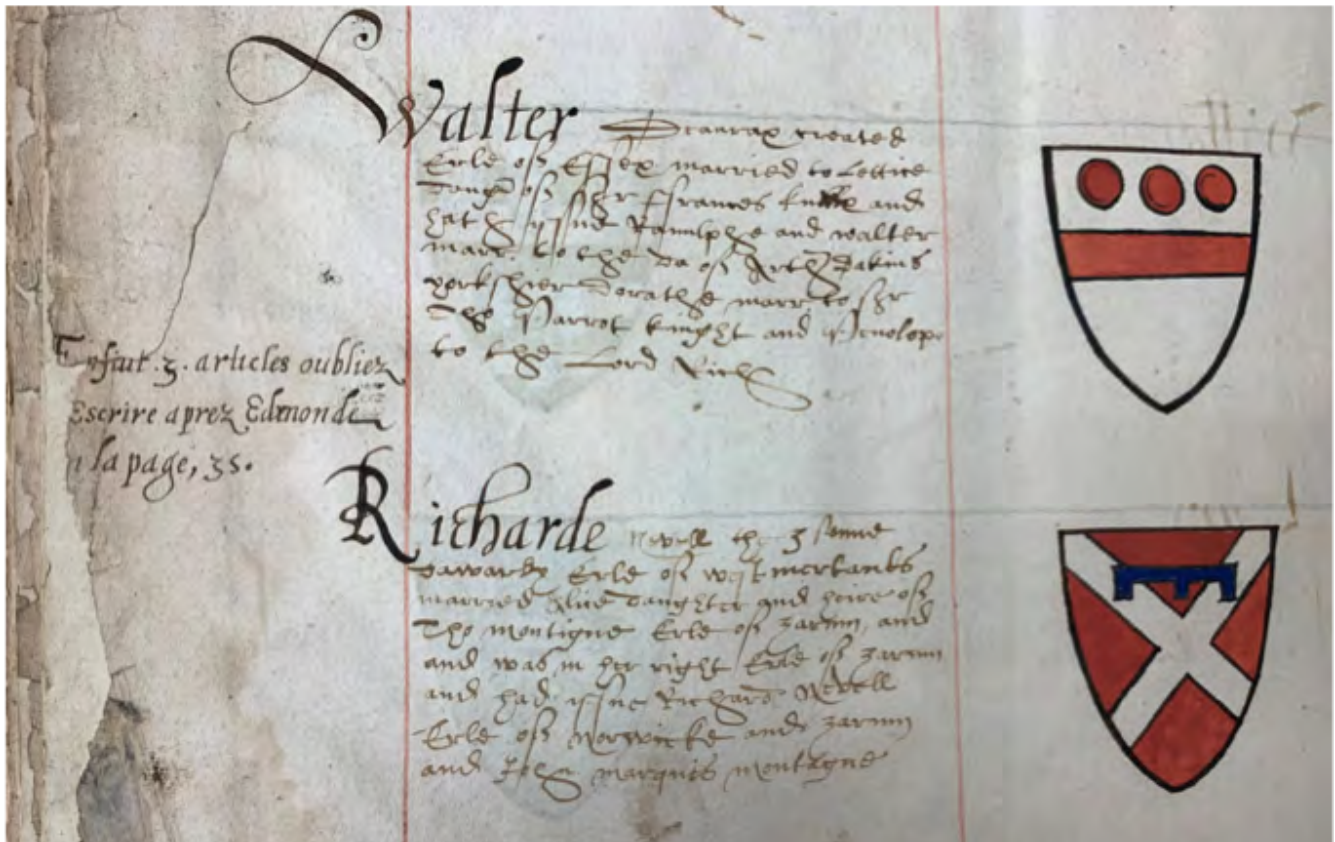


There are also a few places where the writer's voice appears, speaking directly to us, in French:



Apparently here, he (and I am actively assuming that this writer was a man) had forgotten to include some names in the correct place, and also mentions that several additional names that are appended to the end of the text. And if you find the places where those names are inserted, there are further notes pointing you back to this original note and those names' proper placement. Whether this indicates an amateur at work or simply a professional who made a few mistakes – I can't say, but I will certainly be

thinking more about them.



In his own research on this manuscript, which he passed on to us, Paul discovered a manuscript at the Walters Museum in Baltimore that is quite similar in overall style and content.¹ It is clearly not by our same scribe – the shadowing on the paintings in their volume, for example, is more skilled than the work seen in ours – but the content and the general layout is very much the same.

Interestingly, when I consulted the digitized images for the Walters manuscript, their library record indicated that it was quite similar to another manuscript at the British Library, Stowe 693, but did not describe in what ways. I've been unable to examine any images of Stowe 693, but from looking at the library catalog record² it is obvious that the general format and subject of the manuscripts are the same. And indeed, if you just google something like “heraldry manuscript names and creations of all or most of the nobilitie,” you will find that there are a somewhat surprising number of superficially similar manuscripts out there in the world, making our manuscript a local representative of an entire genre.

¹ Digital images of this manuscript, Walters W.847, are available via the Walters Museum website: <http://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W847/>

² Catalog record for Stowe 693: http://searcharchives.bl.uk/IAMS_VU2:IAMS040-001953523



During the mid-16th century, England saw a huge uptick in interest in heraldry amongst the public, fanned by the increased publication of more and more reference works and encyclopedias on the topic. Starting in 1562 with Gerard Legh, writer after writer – most of them with no connection to the college of Arms – issued books on heraldic basics and history, as well as on the arms of the nobility. Increasingly, to be knowledgeable about arms and heraldry was the sign of true gentlemanliness – as Kathryn Wills put it in a dissertation surveying heraldry in early modern popular culture, “the sophistication with which a person discussed heraldry – became a social marker in and of itself.”³

³ Will, Kathryn Karen. *Cultivating Heraldic Histories in Early Modern English Literature*. Diss. 2014. <<https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/107232>>



It then follows that the most sophisticated readers of heraldry would own not just a few printed books on heraldry, but full-color illuminated manuscripts on them, like ours – the uniqueness and preciousness of likely commissioning such a work from a professional placing them in an even higher echelon of knowledgeable and honorable and (likely) ennobled people.

Though to our eyes, this book almost seems like it could be analogous to a coffee table book – something nice looking that might get browsed but not read. But actually, as you might have already seen on some of the previous slides...



...there is a lot of annotation by other owners in this volume – it's just quite subtle, perhaps because of the text's generous margins that leave plenty of room for addition, unlike the crowded margins of a printed book. But looking through the volume, there is actually quite a lot. Many appear to be by a later owner, likely antiquary James Sotheby (died 1720) whose name is at the top of the first page.



These annotations largely supplement the scribe's original source with updated information from further reading or private knowledge. So you can see, as in many manuscript items from the early modern era, an intergenerational dialogue with the text – one of the things I love most about the manuscripts I work with here at the Clark, this manuscript not excepted.



In looking more closely at this manuscript and diving into only a few of the many questions it poses, I feel as though I've found even more avenues to explore. In some ways, heraldry has been a topic much dissected by scholars and gentlepeople of the past, but the study of the study of heraldry seems to me to be something that needs more exploration – perhaps a survey of chronological English heraldry manuscripts, which would help to identify works written by the same scribes is in order. For me, the chance to explore this particular manuscript more thoroughly has also taught me that there is much more than just blazons and rules when it comes to heraldry. Paul, thank you so much for all that you have given us here at UCLA, and, really, to the world with your enthusiasm and love for the materials that you've seen fit to pass on to us at the library.