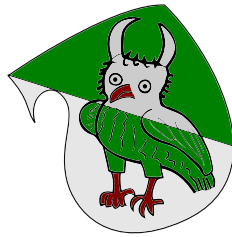


Art or document?

A glimpse at the contents of letters patent



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I WHAT ARE WE DOING?

SCA scribes do lots of cool stuff. One major motivation is to do, and learn to do, beautiful things that are modelled after and inspired by period manuscripts. There are numerous such manuscripts but mostly they are not recreated as such: in the end, few scribes write a full book of hours.

In practice, the most common kind of product that is requested from a scribe is a document with which a ruler gives someone something nice, in common SCA parlance an award scroll. A distant second category are letters that are sent to neighbouring rulers as invitations, declarations of war, or for other reasons. In all of these cases, one should keep in mind the reason for the letter: a well-designed document does what it was intended to do, nothing more nor less.

2 SCROLL AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENT

Ultimately, the reason for a document – whether a grant of arms, declaration of war, or a deed of sales – is to make it possible in the future to be certain what was done. A good document answers six questions: who, what, where, when, to whom, and why.

Such documents were traditionally written using a formula that originated from the judicial rhetoric of late antiquity and was relatively well standardised throughout Europe by 1300. Structurally, a document has three parts that can usually be rather clearly seen:

- Protocol: initial formalities, in our case typically
 - inscriptio: to whom the diploma is addressed
To all and Singular as well Nobles as Gentles to whom these presents shall come:
 - intitulatio: who gave out the diploma
We Gerhardt and Aurelia, Kinge and Queen of the realme of Drachenwald,
 - salutatio: greetings
greetinge.
- Text: the description of the act itself
 - arenga: reasons for the act
Forasmuch as it hath allwayes bene a rule in all well Guverned Kingdoms very requisite to grace and giue, Craditt to the vertuose and welldeseruing

for the Incorrigement of others to follow there stepps in all Honorable Actions and Heroyicall vertues and because the Just reward of vertue is Honor and to detayne a dutye where there weare cause to yeald it weare merely Iniustice being therefore required by Pietari Pentinpoika Uv to ranck him as Baron of Our Court in the societye of men of such a stature as casts the Heroes of the auncient time into eternal shade, of high worth and heroic courage, as alsoe fyndinge him to be a man of Such desert as he well deserueth to be Accompted in that nomber. Hereto also confirmyng before all Our intensions to distinguish the men of Good worth and merytt by Apprpropriating unto them selues some Signe of Honor.

- dispositio: the act described in the document
The premyses therefore considered, We Gerharddt and Aurelia, this ratify and confyr we unto the sayd Pietari Pentinpoika Uv, as valiant and mighty with the pen as with the sword.
- sanctio: punishment for breaking against the acts described
- Eschatocol: closing formalities
 - corroboratio: ways to ensure the authenticity of the document
In witness whereof We have put our hand and this Our Royale Seale of Drachenwald.
 - subscriptiones: witnesses of the act
 - datatio: the time and place of compiling the document
Dated the second daye of februarye in the XXXVI yeare of the Societie in the Baronie of Aarnimetsä during this Celebration of Midwinter.

3 FOLLOW A PERIOD MODEL?

Since the very early days, one of the strengths of our Society has been that people have a wide variation of interests. This of course applies also to scribal work. In the case of documents such as award scrolls this can mean that one looks for historical documents and adapts them to the task at hand; on the other hand, it can also mean that one composes something completely new that sounds beautiful and fits the format of another type of manuscript. Either way (or many others) is good as long as one makes sure that the document does what it is supposed to do.

As an example, one can take the grant of arms given in October 1596 by William Dethicke, Garter King of Arms, to John Shakespere – after all, such grants are ultimately the inspiration the Society had for devising a system of Awards, Grants, and

Patents of Arms. The Early Modern English of late 16th century can be understood by a modern English-speaker without too much trouble.

¹To all & singular Noble & gentlemen of what estate or degree, bearing Armes to whom theis present shall come. ²William Dethicke Garter principall King of Armes ³sendeth greeting: ⁴Know ye that wheras by the Authority & Ancient priuiledges pertaining to my office from the Queenes most excellent Maiestie & by her highnes most Noble & victorious progenitors, I am to take generall notice & record & to make declaration & testimonie for all causes of Armes & matters of gentlemen through all her Maiesties Kingdomes, Dominions, Principallities, Isles, & Provinces, To the end that as many gentlemen, by their auncient names of families Kindreds and descents, haue & enioy certaine Ensignes & Cottes Soe it is very expedient in all ages, that some men for their valiant facts, magnanimity, virtues, dignities & deserts, may use & beare such tokens & worthines, wherby their name & good fame may be the better knowne & divulged, & their Children & posterity in all vertue to the seruice of their Prince & Country encouraged. Wherfore being solicited, & by credible report informed that Iohn Shakespeare of Stratford vpon Avon in the Countie of Warwickshire gentleman, whose Parents & late Grandfather, for his faithfull & Valiant Seruice was advanced & rewarded with lands & reuennewes giuen him by the most prudent Prince King Henry the Seventh of famous memory: Sithence which time they haue continued in theis parts being of good reputation & credit: In Consideration of the premisses, & that the said Iohn, hath married the daughter of, & of the heirws of Robert Arden of Willingcote in the said county, Esquire, & for the encouragement of his posterity, to whome such blazon of Armes & Acheiuements, by the ancient customes of the lawes of Armes descend. ⁵I the said Garter, principall King of Armes haue Assigned, granted & confirmed, this sheild or Cote of Armes: viz, Gould, on Bend Sables, a speare of the first steeled, Argent, & for his creast or Cognizance A Falcon, his wings displaied, Argent standing on a wreath of his Coullors supporting a speare gould, steeled as aforesaid, sett vpon a helmet with mantells & tassells, as hath bin accustomed, & doth more plainly appeare depicted in this margent: Signifying hereby & by the Authority of my office aforesaid, ratefing that it shall be lawfull for the said Iohn: Shackespeare, & for his Children, Issue & posterity, at all times & places convenient, to beare & make demonstration of the said blazon or Atcheiue-ment vpon their Shildes, targets, Escucheons, Cotes of Armes or Cognizances Pennons Emidons, Seales, Rings, Edefices, Buildings Vtensiles, Liueries, Tombes, Monuments, or otherwise for all lawfull warlike facts, or ciuill vse or Excercises, according to the

¹Inscriptio

²Intitulatio

³Salutatio

⁴Arenga

⁵Dispositio

lawes of Armes & customes, that to gentlemen belongeth, without let or interruption, of any other person or persons, for use or beareing the same: ⁶ In witnes & perpetuall remembrance hereof, I haue herevnto subscribed my name & fastened, the Seale of my office, endorsed with the signet of my Armes, ⁷ At the office of Armes, London the xx day of October the xxxvijth of the raigne of our soueraigne Lady Elizabeth by the Grace of God Queene of England ffrance & Ireland defender of the ffaith: &c: 1596.

4 VARIATION AND COMMONALITIES IN PERIOD

Late period English grants of arms aren't the only possible model, even if they are the ones easily readable by most Society scribes. The same overall format was used all over Europe during middle ages, and it can be useful to have a wider perspective. Not all Letters Patent were beautifully illuminated, either.

On October 29, 1435, King Erik of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden gave to Henrik Klasson a letter that is currently in the Swedish National Archives (SDHK 22469). The recipient lived in what is currently Finland, and there's a transcript of the letter, with abbreviations expanded, in the Finnish national archives (DF 2158).



⁶ Corroboratio

⁷ Datatio

⁸Wy Erik, met Gudz nadh Danmarkx, Sweriges, Norges, Wendes ok Gotes konung ok hertugh j Pomeran, ⁹gørom witherlikit met thetta wort opne breff, ¹⁰at fore trooscap ok th[i]anista, som thenne brefforare, wor elskelik thienere Hinrik Clausson, oss oc rikit her til giort haffuer oc an her effter trolika gøre skal swo lenghæ han liffuer effter sin ytersthe macht, ¹¹tha haffue wy vnt oc giffuat hanum oc hans retta echte affkomma oc arwingha swadane frihet oc frelse til ewich tidh, som andre woro riddare oc swene haffue oc nydhe j Swerighe, vppa two røka jordh j Ylela sokn j øffra byen, som hans fadher ther køpt haffuer til thet hans fadher ther til forene haffdhe met schiffthe fangit fore Danzskila aff Hans Garp, som han wort breff til forendhe vppa haffuer. ¹²Thy forbiwdhe wy alle woro foghede oc embitz men oc alle andra, ee hwo the helzt are, fornempde Hinrik Clausson her amot j noghra mathe at hindhra vforrette eller vmake widher wort hyllest oc nadh. ¹³Datum in castro nostro Stokholm anno Domini mcdxxxv°, jn crastino beatorum Symonis et Iude apostolorum, ¹⁴nostro sub [secreto].

Translated to Modern English, this reads roughly

We Eric, by the Grace of God King of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Wends, and the Geats,¹⁵ Duke of Pomerania, make it known with these our letters patent that for the loyalty and service that the bearer of these letters, our beloved servant Henry Clason, has given to us and our realm and will likely do in the future as long as he lives to his utmost capacity, so have we given and granted to him and his lawful issue and heirs such freedom and tax exemption¹⁶ for all eternity, as other knights and esquires have and enjoy in Sweden, for two smokes of land¹⁷ in the parish of Yläne, village of Ylikylä, that his father has bought in addition to what his father had there of old by exchange to Danskila from Hans Garp, who has our letters for keeping them. Therefore do we prohibit all our bailiffs, officers, and all others, whoever they are, from preventing in any way said Henry Clason from enjoying these rights we have gracefully granted. Given in our castle Stockholm in the year of our Lord 1435 on the day after the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude under our seal.

⁸Intitulatio

⁹Inscriptio

¹⁰Arenga

¹¹Dispositio

¹²Sanctio

¹³Datatio

¹⁴Corroboratio

¹⁵Or, as the last two were usually interpreted in Latin, the Vandals and the Goths

¹⁶As per the Statute of Alsnö, given in 1279, those who contributed a mounted soldier received tax-exempt status for the specified estates. This system of *frälse* developed into hereditary nobility in the 16th century, and baronial and comital ranks were added at the coronation of Eric XIV in 1560.

¹⁷A *smoke* was a unit of land taxation, essentially an inhabited farm.

5 CAVEATS

When modifying a historical text to a new use one should take care to read what exactly are the acts that the document performs. Quite often, there are parts of the original that cannot be straightforwardly used.

It's obvious that the names and titles of the central people in the document, as well as the authority and reasons for granting arms, have to be changed. However, it may not be as obvious that a clause 'for his Children, Issue & posterity' grants arms not just to the recipient but also to all their descendants. There are examples where the arms of the recipient's children are also shown in the grant, with due differencing. Sometimes such details make their way to an SCA award scroll as well, and correcting an accidental and unintended award of arms can be awkward for everyone concerned.

It is equally unfortunate if something necessary is missing. Typically the date can be forgotten or be specified in a form that is difficult to read: when was the Feast of S. Vitus and Modestus, a.S. xxxv? While it's rare to need an award of arms scroll for its nominal purpose, we have in the history of the Society had quite a few cases where missing Order of Precedence data has had to be looked for elsewhere.

6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR VARIATION

- Protocol: initial formalities
 - You'll need to include at least the names and positions of the people giving out the letter. It is, however, possible and often desirable to add a more impressive list of titles. For instance, many royalty already have comital or ducal titles that can be included.
 - The recipients of the letter can be omitted altogether ('We – – make it known') or listed ('We – – make it known to all and singular, as well noble as humble, to whom these presents shall come')
 - Note that the phrase 'Letters Patent' implies a peerage and the verb 'grant' a GoA-level creation. Do not use these for an AoA-level or non-armigerous award.
- The text proper
 - The reasons for giving out the award can be written in a manner as brief or verbose as there is space.
 - It is possible to embellish the thing given: for instance, if the recipient has a suitable household name registered, one can – as in the Swedish example above – give them tax-exemption for those estates.

- Do not mention heirs or descendants: Society awards are always personal.
- It is possible to include sanctions for breaking against the letter. For instance, many medieval Scandinavian Letters Patent have a clause along the lines of 'and so do We forbid anyone, whosoever they are, from breaking against these Our Letters under pain of Our Royal vengeance and wrath'.
- Eschatocol: closing formalities
 - It would be best to use the month and day number instead of, or at least in addition to, descriptions like saints' feast days. Not only is it more clear and unambiguous, but care should be taken to stay within the Society policy on religions.
 - Mention a seal if one is to be attached to the letter, but only if this is the case.
 - It is possible, especially for items not given under the Great Seal of a Kingdom, to mention witnesses for the act and attach their seals and/or signatures to the document.