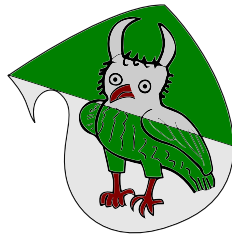


Art or document?

A brief glimpse at the jurisprudence of scribal work



Birgitta Lulli

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1 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 are traditionally written using a formula that was relatively early established throughout Europe. 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
Be it known unto all whom these presents do come that
 - intitulatio: who gave out the diploma
We, Jurgan, King by Right of Arms and Lilliard, Our fair Queen of all Drachenwald,
 - salutatio: greetings
 - arenga: reasons for the act
knowing well the extraordinary service done on behalf Our Realm by Our most noble Pietari Pentinpoika Uv who has by his sacrifices and labors as a herald greatly improved the lot of Our subjects, and hearing the multitudes of voices lifted in praise
- Text: the description of the act itself
 - dispositio: the act described in the document
do most joyfully welcome him into Our esteemed Order of the Pelican, that all may know his worth. Further do We bestow upon him the sole right throughout the Known

World to these Arms by Letters Patent, to wit: per bend vert and argent, an eagle owl counterchanged.

- *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 set Our Hand and seal
 - *subscriptions*: witnesses of the act
 - *datatio*: the time and place of compiling the document
this third day of January Anno Societatis thirty-two at Our Last Court.

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, but one could start equally well with, say, a 15th century Swedish letter granting nobility.

However, 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.

To all & singular Noble & gentlemen of what estate or degree, bearing Armes to whom theis present shall come. William Dethicke Garter principall King of Armes sendeth greeting: Know ye that wheras by the Authority & Ancient priuiledges pertaining to my office from the Queenes most excellent Maieslie & 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 & Cottres Soe it is very expedient in all ages, that some men for their valiant facts, magnanimity, virtues, dignities & deserts, may vse & 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. Wherefore 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. I 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 displaid, 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: Shakespere, & for his Children, Issue & posterity, at all times & places convenient, to beare & make demonstration of the said blazon or Atcheiuelement 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 Excerises, according to the lawes of Armes & customes, that to gentlemen belongeth, without let or interruption, of any other person or persons, for vse or beareing the same: In witnes & perpetuall remembrance hereof, I haue herevnto subscribed my name & fastened, the Seale of my office, endorsed with the signet of my Armes, At the office of Armes, London the xx day of Oclober the xxxviijth of the raigne of our soueraigne Lady Elizabeth by the Grace of God Queene of England ffraunce & Ireland defender of the ffaith: &c: 1596.

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 the 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 award of arms can be quite 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 S. Praxedis' eve a.S. xliij? It's rare to need an award of arms scroll for its nominal purpose, but we have had cases where missing Order of Precedence data has had to be looked for elsewhere.