This tremendous compilation, a critical edition of seventeen heraldic scrolls, is the result of more than seven years work by the foremost of American heraldists, Gerard J. Brault, who is also one of the foremost experts in Arthurian heraldry. It developed from his 1958 Ph.D. dissertation, where in dealing with the tournament in Escanor, an Arthurian romance by Girart d’Amiens dated c. 1280, he found that the coats of arms in the poem were both fictional and historical. After the publication of an essay, ‘Arthurian Heraldry and the Date of Escanor’ (1959), and of two books, Early Blazon: Heraldic Terminology in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Arthurian Literature (1972, second ed., 1997) and Eight Thirteenth-Century Rolls of Arms (1973), Brault was invited by the late Sir Anthony Wagner, at the time Garter King of Arms, to take on the editing of the armorials of the reign of Edward I. However, this daunting task had to wait for a sabbatical leave (1987) to be taken up in earnest. (In my copy, pp. 88–120 were lacking.)

Although true heraldry, the systematic use of hereditary devices centered on the shield,’ as defined by Sir Anthony Wagner (1956), originated only in the second quarter of the twelfth century, by the end of what we consider the Middle Ages there were more armorial bearings—an estimated 800,000—than even the most knowledgeable of heralds could memorize. Heraldic devices, coats-of-arms and crests (the devices on the top of helmets, a term that all too often is falsely used for that shield charge) served not only to identify a knight in battle or on the tournament field, but they were also legal marks on seals, boundary stones, etc. This vital material was collected in armorials, or rolls of arms. About 350 medieval armorials are still in existence; they contain c. 80,000 coats of arms. Of these armorials 130 are for England alone. Although rolls of arms were compiled in France and England already by the middle of the thirteenth century, the reign of Edward I (1272–1307), with eighteen rolls still surviving, was seen by Sir Anthony Wagner as the golden age of heraldry, not only for England, but also for all of Western Europe. The plates, especially the color plates taken from Charles’s, Lord Marshal’s and Sir William le Neve’s Roll, are testimonies to this claim. On the Continent, they would be paralleled by the Wijnbergen Armorial (1265–1288) and the only slightly later Codex Manesse (c. 1320) and the Zurich Wappenrolle (c. 1340). The seventeen rolls edited by Brault contain 5,126 entries. The language of their captions, aside from a few in Latin, is Anglo-Norman or French. These entries refer to about 2,100 individuals, who as Brault says in his Introduction, ‘were the movers and shakers of the England of Edward I and, when the many foreigners named in these rolls are also taken into consideration, of contemporary medieval Europe.’

The rolls of arms edited here are: Heralds’ Roll (c. 1279), Dering Roll (c. 1280), Camden Roll (c. 1280), St. George’s Roll (c. 1280), Charles’s Roll (c. 1285), Segar’s Roll (c. 1285), Lord Marshal’s Roll (1295), Collins’ Roll (1296), Falkirk Roll (1298), Guillim’s Roll (1295–1305), Caerlaverock Poem (1300), Galloway Roll (1300), Smallpeice’s Roll (1298–1306), Stirling Roll (1304), Nativity Roll (1307–8), Fife Roll (temp. Edward I), Sir William le Neve’s Roll (temp. Edward I).

None of these rolls are ‘official’ armorials, as would have been compiled on the authority of the king; rather, they were done by interested individuals, such as professional heralds, and some were made apparently for patrons. Twelve of these rolls are illustrated by shields painted in full colors, five are blazoned only, i.e. described in heraldic terms (Falkirk, Galloway, Stirling, Nativity Roll and the Caerlaverock Poem); one—Camden Roll—is painted and blazoned as well. It is pointed out that ‘tricked’ shields, i.e. line drawings with colors indicated by abbreviations, came up only by the second half of the fifteenth century. While six manuscripts exist only as single copies (Lord Marshal’s, Galloway, Smallpeice’s, Stirling, Fife and Sir William le Neve’s), of others are up to eleven copies extant (Heralds’, Dering).

According to their contents, rolls of arms are divided into two different categories: general rolls, which are usually painted, and occasional rolls (rosters of a muster or battle) which are often blazoned only, although this difference might be purely accidental, because in the field it would be easier to jot down blazons than to carry a paint box for full-color illuminations. Also, all of these above-mentioned rolls of arms record only the shields of the armigers, and ignore the crests so beloved in later days. As a striking difference between contemporary French and English rolls of arms, Brault points out that the French are organized by regions, while the first English roll with a similar breakdown is the Parliamentary Roll (c. 1312), which is not treated in this compilation because its date is later than that of the death of Edward I (1307). The foreign entries for France and the Netherlands in Heralds’ Roll 358–384, however, are regionally organized by marches and seem to have been taken over from French armorials.

For reason of its huge size, the work of editing these rolls had to be subdivided into two volumes. The first volume contains an apparatus of 21 pages of bibliography, 7 pages of Short References and Sigla of Rolls of Arms (English, French, and foreign), 36 pages of comprehensive Introduction that includes a brief bibliography of Edward I, and 445 pages of the edited rolls of arms themselves, arranged chronologically. (A major problem, solved by Brault by painstaking archival research, is the definite dating of the rolls.) Each edited roll is preceded by a List of Copies (if any), Notes to the Manuscripts and on the Date of the Roll, and is followed by an Index. The second volume consists of biographical and heraldic information about the individual armigers, arranged alphabetically and of truly staggering dimensions. The final section of the second volume, pp. 467–552, is an Ordinary of the charges, listed in alphabetical order, from ‘Annulet’ to ‘Wyvern.’ This certainly would become the most perused part of the volume, invaluable to researchers who stumbled on a coat-of-arms without a clue to the owner’s name. (Although the entry ‘Lion,’ not surprisingly, runs for eleven pages with more than 400 names of proud bearers, there is not a
single entry 'Dragon' or 'Unicorn'?) Finally, there is also a four page annex of identified shields without names, of captioned blank shields, and of unidentified and/or blank shields.

As to be expected, most of the armigers represented in these scrolls are Englishmen, although there are Welsh, Irish and, in particular, many Scottish knights to be found in addition to a considerable number of foreigners, such as the Gascons and Savoyards who were attached to Edward's household at one time or other. Five rolls (Heralds', Camden, Segar's, Lord Marshal's, Smallpece's) start out with a listing of kings, with an attempt to grade them according to their hieratic importance; Heralds' and Segar's place Prester John first, Camden and Smallpece's the King of Jerusalem, Lord Marshal's the Emperor of Constantinople. Interestingly, the King of England is ranked no. 3 in Smallpece's Roll, no. 7 in Camden and Segar's, and no. 9 in Heralds' Roll. On the other hand, four rolls put the arms of the king of England in the first place without any foreign competition (St. George's, Collins's, Guillim's, Galloway), while in Dering Roll—possibly based on a roster of castle-guards for the Constable of Dover—the arms of Richard FitzRoy (d. 1253) are no. 1, followed by those of English knights, who held lands in Kent and Sussex. In the rolls that include foreign potentates (Heralds', Camden, Segar's, Lord Marshal's, Smallpece's), some of these are from truly faraway places, such as Babylon and India. Many of their arms are of dubious historical value, as for instance the arms of 'Le Roy de Bealme': Azure, three barges or (Heralds' 18, Camden 12), that became inexplicably attributed to Wenceslas II, king of Bohemia (d. 1305).

In spite of this, imaginary heraldry is a fascinating field in itself. The outstanding examples represented in the rolls are the arms of Prester John, who according to Wolfram von Eschenbach was the son of Parzival's half-brother Feirefiz and the Grailmaiden Repanse de Schoye. The charge in Prester John's arms is a crucifix and one variant: Or, a crucifix between two scourges, is recognizable as a fanciful interpretation of a Mongolian tamgha. The roundel arms of the King of Besaia (Bougie) in North Africa and of the Sultan of Babylon (Lord Marshal's 13, 19) are adaptations of Mamluk blazons. English imaginary arms from the pre-heraldic period are those of St. Edmund, Edward the Confessor and King Karold (Herald's 6, 7, 19). In one copy of Heralds' Roll (27) the historical arms of Llewellyn ap Gruffyd, prince of Wales (d. 1282): Quarterly or and gules, four lions rampant guardant counterchanged, have been given to King Arthur by a later抄写者。

For Arthurian heraldists this thoroughly researched and awe-inspiringly voluminous work would yield somewhat meager results, but it will prove an almost inexhaustible mine of information—especially in the biographical section of volume II—even for those historians who regard heraldry only as a somewhat frivolous sideline.

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