Trends in German Heraldic Style

An Analysis of Siebmacher's *Wappenbuch von 1605*

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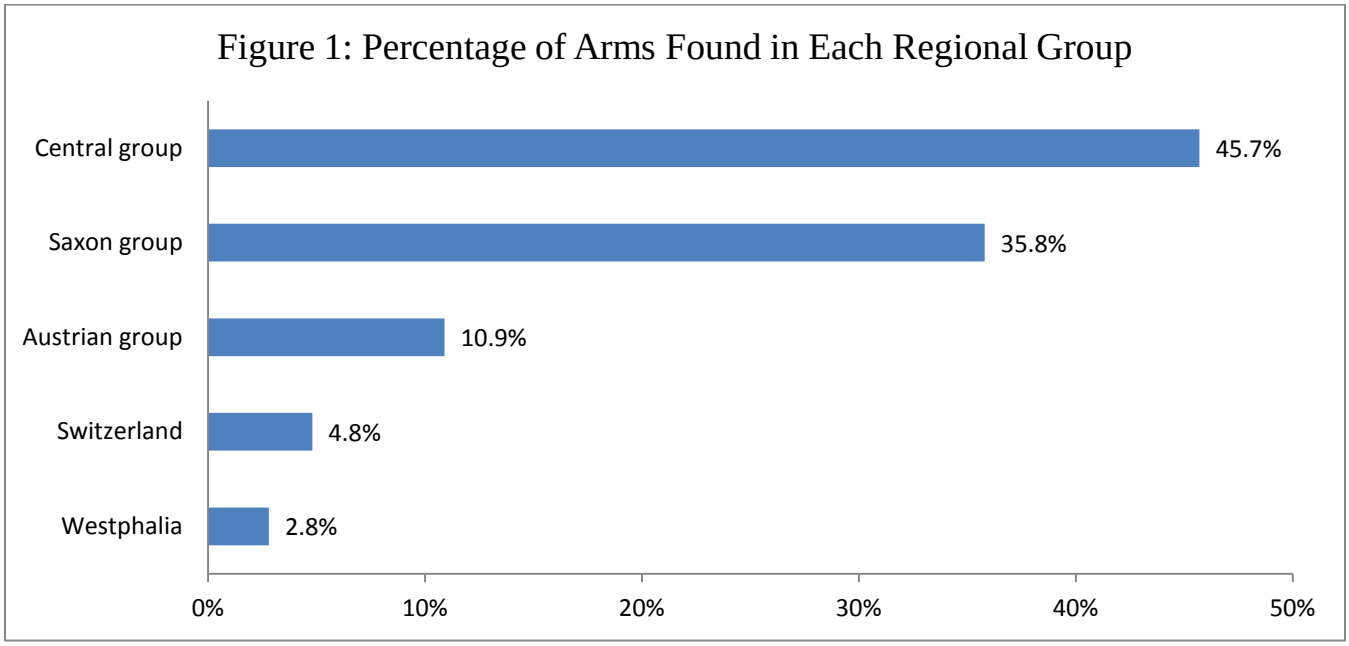
This paper analyzes plates 34-206 of Siebmacher's *Wappenbuch von 1605*, which depict the arms of nobles and knights ("Adel und Ritterschaft") from 18 regions of the Holy Roman Empire. Earlier plates in the book, which depict the arms of the greater nobility, as well as later plates, which depict the arms of honorable families ("ehrbare Geschlechter") and cities, were omitted to make the analysis as consistent as possible. The findings below were derived by coding and then conducting statistical analysis on the 2,745 devices found on these plates. Arms that would be considered marshaled under SCA rules were treated as multiple devices. Please see the methodology section at the end of the paper for more detail on how the results presented here were obtained.

Key Findings

- Argent and gules are the tinctures most frequently used in the Siebmacher sample, with argent appearing on 68% of devices and gules on 51%.
- A quarter of devices have divided fields, with the two most common field divisions, per fess and per pale, accounting for 57% of all field divisions. The unusual field divisions often associated with German armory appear very rarely, accounting for less than 2% of divided fields.
- Primary charges dominate the composition of the devices in the sample, with 69% of devices containing a primary charge group. In addition, 60% of all devices are composed of a primary charge group alone on the field (40% have a single primary and 20% a group of primary charges).
- The devices in the sample use a wide range of primary charge types. In general, primary charges include beasts, birds, humans, monsters, plants, celestial objects, abstract shapes and symbols, and human-made artifacts such as weapons and tools
- One-fifth of devices in the sample include ordinaries. Most devices use only a single ordinary, and the two most common ordinaries, fesses and bends/bends sinister, represent three-quarters of the ordinaries found.
- Secondary charges appear on only 11% of devices, and more than a third of all secondaries are mounts issuant from base.
- Peripheral ordinaries, tertiaries, and particularly overall charges appear rarely in the sample, with each found on less than 5% of all devices.
- Around 7% of all arms in the sample contain a violation of the rule of tincture. One possible explanation for some of the poor contrast charges is that proper charges may have been allowed greater leeway in violating tincture than were other charges. A substantial percentage of all poor contrast non-ordinary charges are found in colors in which they are found in reality.
- Nearly 6% of devices in the sample can be identified as cants. Canting charges most often appear as single or multiple primary charges alone on the field.

Regional Variation

Analysis of the data indicates that most of the 18 regions included in the Siebmacher sample fall into three geographical groups, which tend vary from one another in heraldic style with some consistency. The Saxon group, in the northeastern portion of the empire, includes Saxony, Brunswick, Meissen, Brandenburg, and Silesia. The Austrian group, in the southeastern portion of the empire, includes Austria, Styria, Carinthia, and Tyrol. The Central group, in the heart of the empire, includes Bavaria, Swabia, Alsace, the Rhineland, Hesse, Franconia, and Thuringia. Westphalia, in the northwestern portion of the empire, and Switzerland are the two regions that do not seem to fit into a group, but these two regions together account for only 8% of arms in the sample. Figure 1 shows the percentage of arms in the Siebmacher sample that are found in each region.



The findings discussed below indicate a number of instances where heraldic style differs for these regional groups. One notable area where these regional groups vary is in the appearance of marshaled arms. In the Austrian region, more than 41% of arms are marshaled, compared with less than 10% of arms in all other regional groups. In fact, the Austrian region accounts for nearly 38% of all marshaled arms in the sample, more than three times the percentage of arms made up by this regional group in the overall sample.

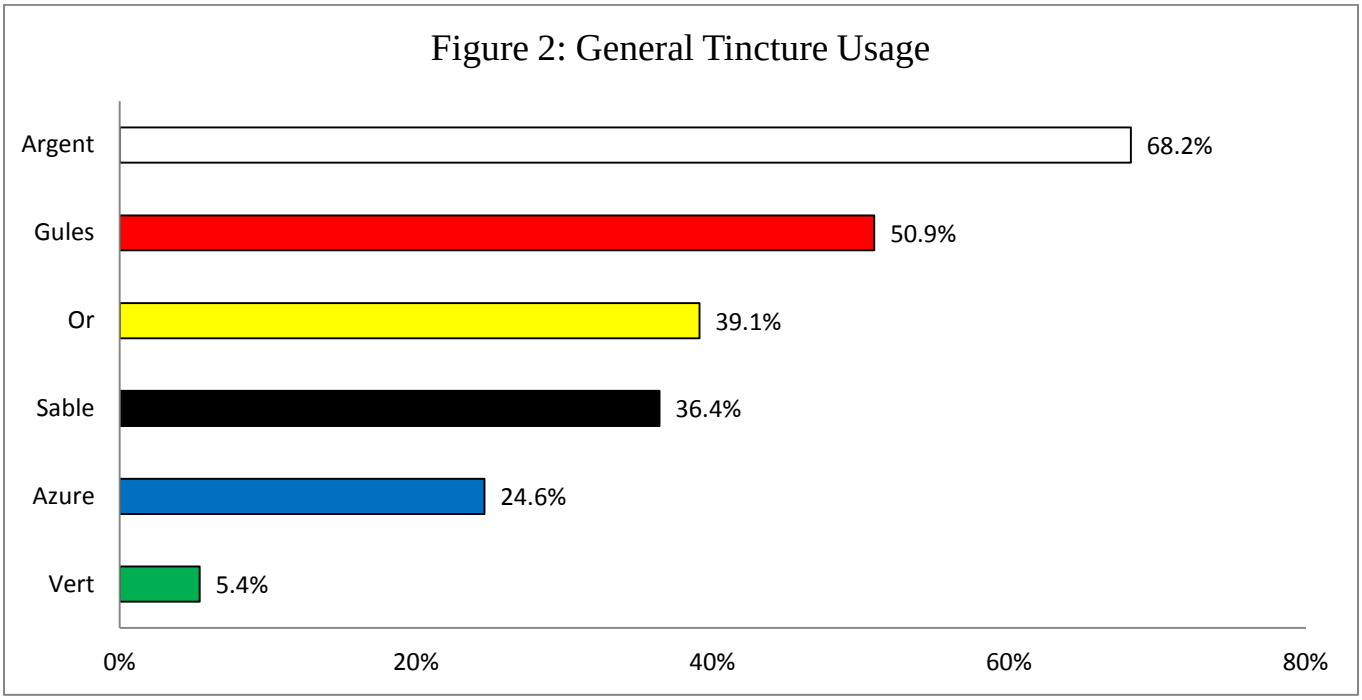
It is interesting to note that the regional groups identified in the Siebmacher data reflect historical groupings in the Holy Roman Empire. In 1500 and again in 1512, the empire was divided into a set of Imperial Circles for administrative purposes (an explanation of this division can be found in Wikipedia's article on the Holy Roman Empire). While the Imperial Circles were formally established only a century before Siebmacher created his armorial, they reflected existing political and cultural divisions within the Holy Roman Empire and so can be seen as indicative of how the people of that era viewed political geography. The regions found in the Austrian group in the Siebmacher sample were all part of the Austrian Circle, and with the exception of Silesia, the regions in the Saxon group were part of the Upper

and Lower Saxon Circles (Silesia, which abuts the Upper Saxon Circle, was linked to Bohemia and was not part of any Imperial Circle). The regions in the Central group were all part of the Bavarian, Swabian, Franconian, or Upper Rhenish Circles. The two regions that did not fit into a grouping based on heraldic style were not part of any of the Imperial Circles just named. Westphalia was part of the Lower Rhenish-Westphalian Circle, and Switzerland (or, more accurately, the Swiss Confederacy) was not part of any Imperial Circle and was politically isolated from the rest of the empire.

General Tincture Usage

Argent is the tincture most often used, appearing in more than two-thirds of all devices, followed by gules, which appears in half of all devices. Or, sable, and azure are all used but somewhat less frequently. Vert appears in 5% of devices (Figure 2). Purpure is found only in a single instance that can be interpreted as proper (grapes). Furs are extremely rare in the Siebmacher sample. Vair appears on only a handful of devices, and other furs are represented by a single example of counter-ermine.

Figure 2: General Tincture Usage

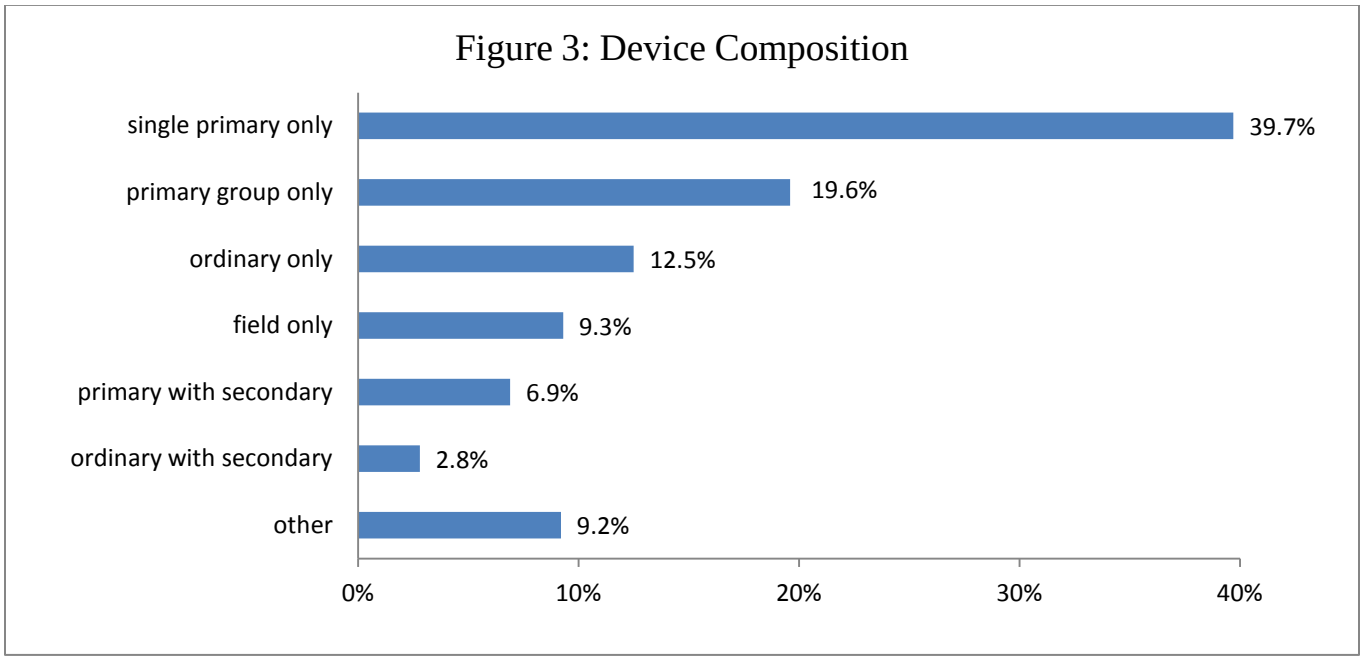


Note: Percentages add to more than 100% because of multiple tinctures on devices.

In general, tincture usage seems fairly consistent across the regional groups. However, arms from the Saxon regional group and from Switzerland are more likely to use the tincture vert. The Saxon group accounts for almost 45% of the instances of vert in the sample, while representing only 36% of all arms. Similarly, Switzerland accounts for nearly 10% of the instances of vert, double the 5% of arms in the overall sample that are from that region. Arms from the Central group, on the other hand, are less likely to use vert. This group accounts for only 35% of the instances of vert while making up 46% of arms in the overall sample.

Device Composition

Out of all the arms found in the Siebmacher sample, 91% fit into one of a limited number of patterns in terms of composition. Devices with only a primary charge group represent a substantial majority of the arms—40% of all devices have a single primary charge alone on the field and another 20% have a group of primary charges alone on the field. Field-only armory and armory with only an ordinary or a group of ordinary diminutives together comprise just over 20% of all devices. Another 10% of devices include a primary or ordinary charge group with one or more secondaries. The remaining 9% of devices include all those that have peripheral ordinaries, tertiaries, and/or overall charges (Figure 3).

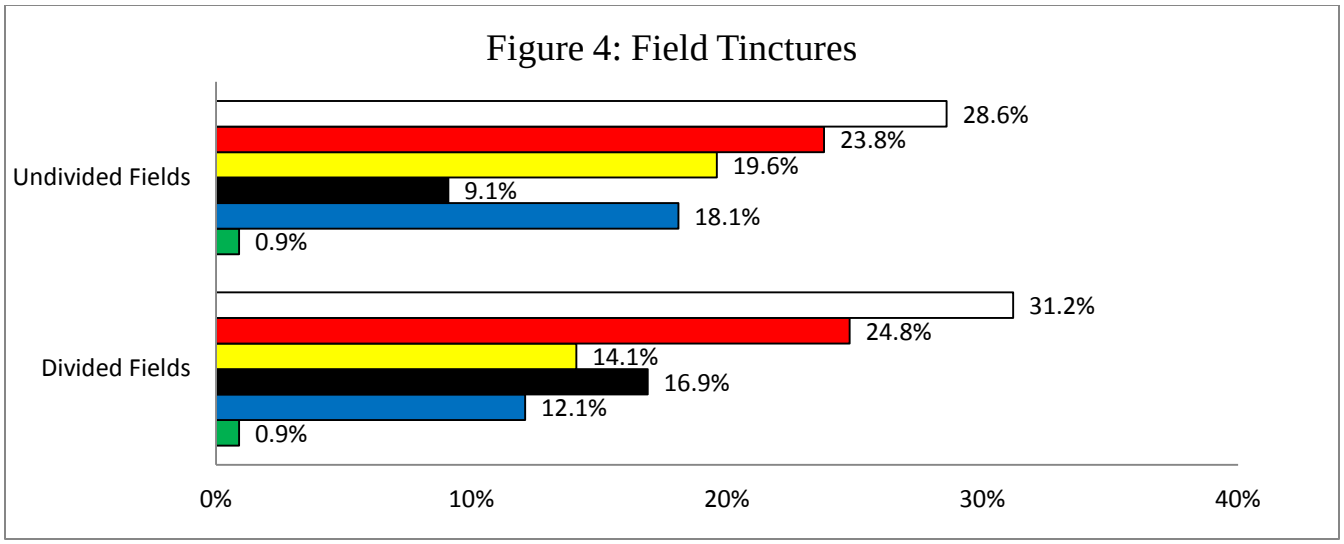


Some variation in device composition can be seen across regional groups. In particular, field-only armory and armory with only an ordinary or a group of ordinary diminutives are more common in the Central regional group. Devices in this regional group include 58% of field-only armory and 54% of ordinary-only armory although this group represents 46% of all devices in the sample.

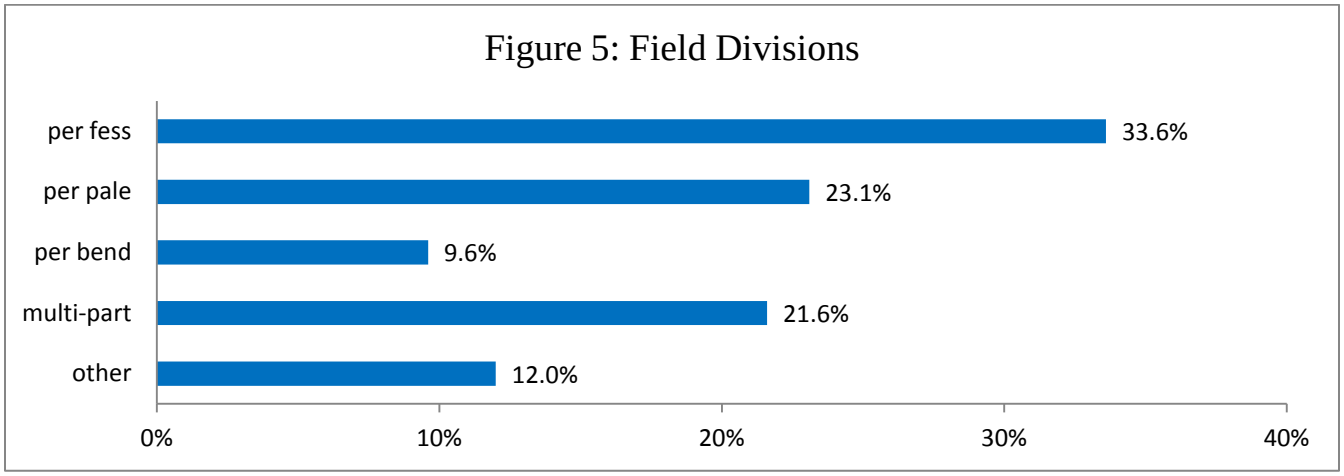
Field Tinctures and Divisions

Among arms with undivided fields in the Siebmacher sample, argent is the most common field tincture, followed by gules, and those two tinctures account for over half of all undivided fields. Azure and Or fields each represent about 20% of undivided fields, with undivided sable and vert fields appearing much less frequently (Figure 4).

Among arms with divided fields, on the other hand, sable appears considerably more often, surpassing Or as the third most common tincture found. Argent and gules remain the most common tinctures on divided fields, but Or and azure are less frequently found (Figure 4). Most divided fields include both a color and a metal. However, 2% of divided fields include only Or and argent and another 10% include only colors. Of the divided fields that include only colors, gules nearly always appears as one of the colors, typically with sable or azure.



Just over a quarter (27%) of the devices in the Siebmacher sample have divided fields. While a range of field divisions are found, the most common by far are per fess, per pale, and to a lesser extent, per bend/per bend sinister,[1] which together account for two-thirds of all divided fields. Multi-part field divisions comprise just over one-fifth of divided fields (Figure 5). On multi-part fields, barry appears most often, followed by checky, bendy, and paly. Multi-part field divisions are much more likely to appear on field-only armory than on devices with charges.



Germanic armory is often thought of as using many unusual field divisions, but this assertion does not hold true for the Siebmacher sample. Unusual field divisions make up less than 2% of all divided fields. Of those, the two most often found are per fess with right step (blazoned in Hussmann as "mit rechter Stufe geteilt" and in Leonhard as "rechte Stufenteilen") and per fess with a single embattlement (blazoned in both Leonhard and Hussmann as "mit Zinne geteilt"). Examples of these lines of division can be seen on Plate 45 (bottom right) and Plate 84 (top left) in Siebmacher.[2] As in these examples, the unusual lines of division seen in the sample nearly always appear as field-only armory.

[1] No distinction was made between per bend and per bend sinister in this analysis. Siebmacher's pattern of orienting armory based on its location on each plate makes this distinction impractical.
[2] Examples from Siebmacher are hyperlinked to https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Siebmachers_Wappenbuch.

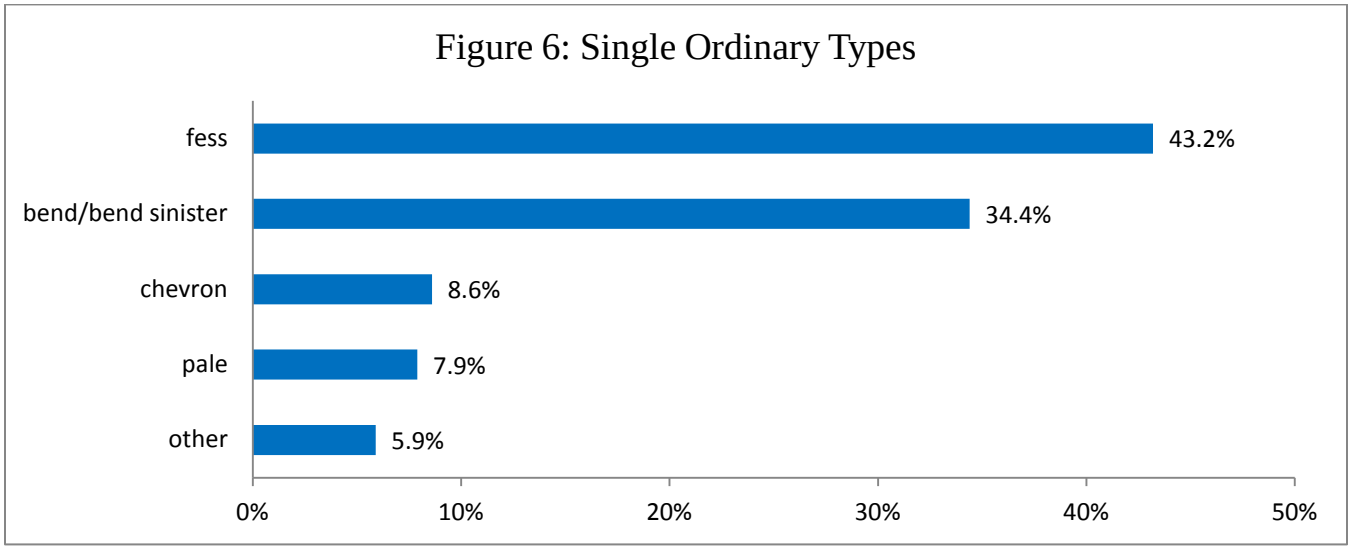
Almost 13% of all the divided fields in the sample include more than one field division. In two-thirds of these examples, the field is divided into two parts, with one part then further divided with a multi-part division. For example, Plate 51 (middle right and bottom left) shows instances of both a per pale and a per fess division with one half checky. The device with the per fess division (*Per fess argent and checky sable and argent, in chief a demi-eagle sable*) follows a pattern found in nearly a quarter of multiply divided fields, where a per fess division has a multi-part field division on one side and a plain field with a charge on the other side (usually, but not always, in chief). A second pattern, found in 20% of multiply divided fields, shows a per fess division with one side divided per pale. An example can be seen on Plate 157 (center).

About 10% of all field divisions use a complex line. Many per chevron divisions (and chevrons for that matter) are drawn ployé. Examples can be seen on Plate 108 (middle right and bottom left). Leaving those aside, indented and embattled lines make up three-quarters of the complex lines seen on the field.

Ordinaries

One-fifth of all devices in the Siebmacher sample include an ordinary or a group of ordinary diminutives. More than 80% of the arms that contain ordinaries use a single ordinary, and among these single ordinaries, fesses and bends/bends sinister[3] are by far the most common types found, comprising more than three-quarters of all single ordinaries. Pales and chevrons are found to a lesser extent, along with a limited number of crosses, piles, and saltires (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Single Ordinary Types



Diminutive ordinaries mirror single ordinaries in type, with bars representing nearly half of all diminutive ordinaries and bendlets/bendlets sinister making up another quarter of this group. Pallets and chevronels together account for 20% of the ordinary diminutives seen. Among arms that use ordinary diminutives, two is the most common number, representing three-quarters of these devices while devices with three diminutives represent nearly all of the remainder.

[3] No distinction was made between bends and bends sinister in this analysis. Siebmacher's pattern of orienting armory based on its location on each plate makes this distinction impractical.

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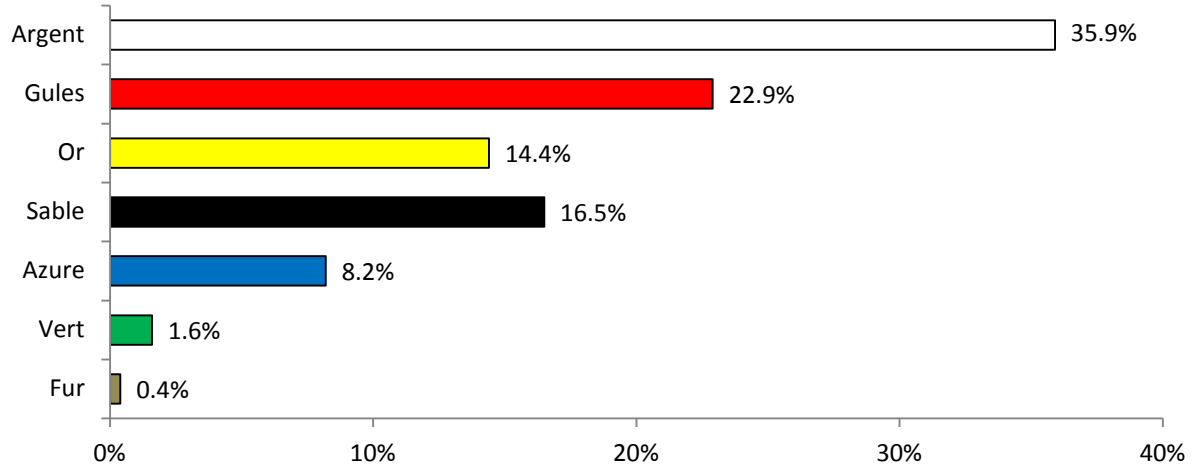
About 10% of ordinaries are divided, with more than half of these using the multi-part divisions checky, barry, and paly. Another 30% are divided either per pale or per fess, and three-quarters of those ordinaries are counterchanged with the field. Complex lines are found on 17% of ordinaries. Chevrons, as previously mentioned, are often drawn ployé, while indented, embattled, and wavy lines are also found. Fesses are more often indented, usually in the form of a dance, while bends/bends sinister are more likely to be wavy. Diminutive ordinaries are somewhat less likely to be divided than single ordinaries but are somewhat more likely to use complex lines.

Among ordinaries in the sample, argent is the tincture most often seen, with gules, sable, and Or coming next. Azure, vert, and furs (vair and one example of counter-ermine) are also found but in fewer instances (Figure 7).The distribution of ordinary tinctures resembles that of divided fields except that ordinaries are less likely to be azure. Ordinaries also tend to follow the rule of tincture, with less than 5% having poor contrast with the field.

Figure 7: Ordinary Tinctures



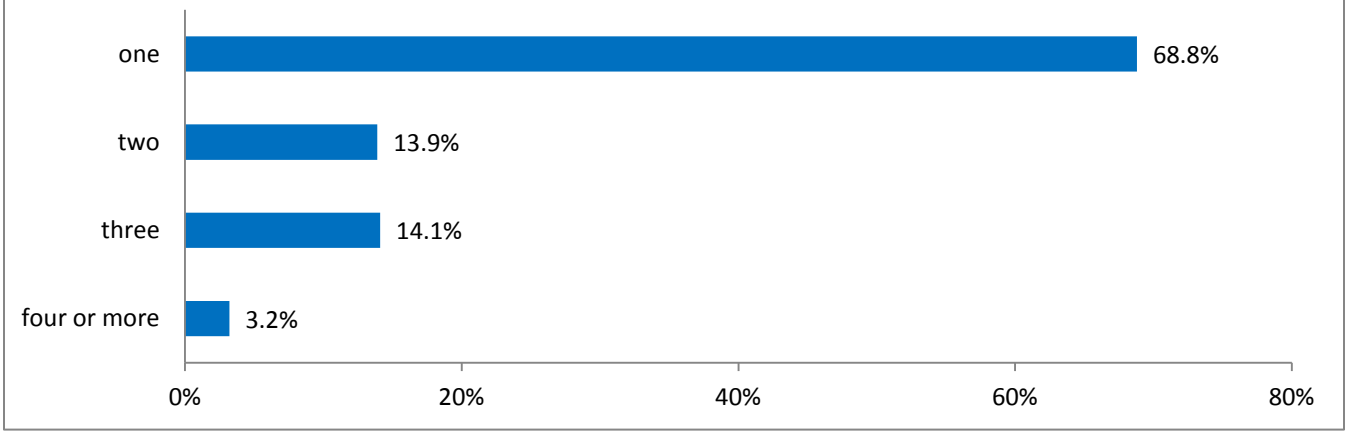
Peripheral ordinaries are quite rare in the Siebmacher sample, found in only 3% of devices. Three-fifths of the peripheral ordinaries seen are bordures (32%) and chiefs (29%). Peripheral ordinaries are most often Or (31%) or gules (26%) with less than 2% sable or vert. Peripheral ordinaries are as likely than other ordinaries to use a complex line of division. Among the 17% that use complex lines, the types of lines are diverse and include nebuly, embattled, wavy, and indented. About 7% of peripheral ordinaries violate the rule of tincture, with labels and bordures most often having poor contrast.

Peripheral ordinaries are more likely to be found in the Central regional group and in Switzerland than in other parts of the Holy Roman Empire. More than half (52%) of peripheral ordinaries come from the Central group, compared to 46% of all devices, and another 14% come from Switzerland, compared to 5% of all devices. More than 61% the peripheral ordinaries found in Switzerland are bordures while a full range of peripheral ordinary types found in the Central regional group. On the other hand, peripheral ordinaries are less often found in the Saxon regional group, with this group representing 24% of peripheral ordinaries versus 36% of all devices in the sample.

Primary Charges

As noted in the discussion of device composition, devices with primary charges are the dominant pattern in this sample of arms. Fully 69% of all devices in the sample contain one or more non-ordinary primary charges. Most often, primaries appear as single charges although they can also be found in groups of two and three or occasionally more (Figure 8). The typical number of primaries does vary by charge type and will be discussed further below. Nonetheless, devices with a single primary charge make up nearly half of all arms in the Siebmacher sample and so represent an important pattern.

Figure 8: Number of Primaries

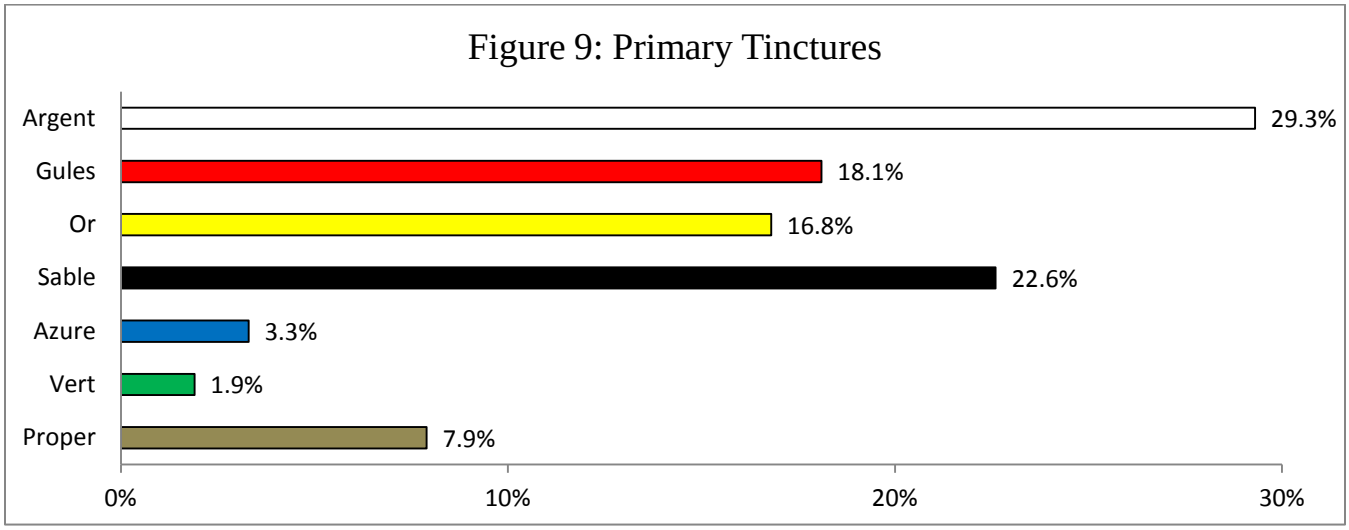


The vast majority of single primary charges (94%) appear on the center of the field. Single primary charges that are located away from the center of the field—most often in chief or in base—are nearly always found on a divided field. For groups of more than one primary charge, arrangements vary. Groups of two primary charges are most often found in fess (43%), in saltire (26%), or in pale (21%). Groups of three primary charges are most often arranged two and one (50%), in pall (12%), in fess (10%), in pale (10%), or in bend (8%). Groups of two or three primary charges also exhibit mirror or rotational symmetry in 7% of instances. Several examples can be seen on Plate 143 (top middle and bottom left) and Plate 161 (top right and bottom left).

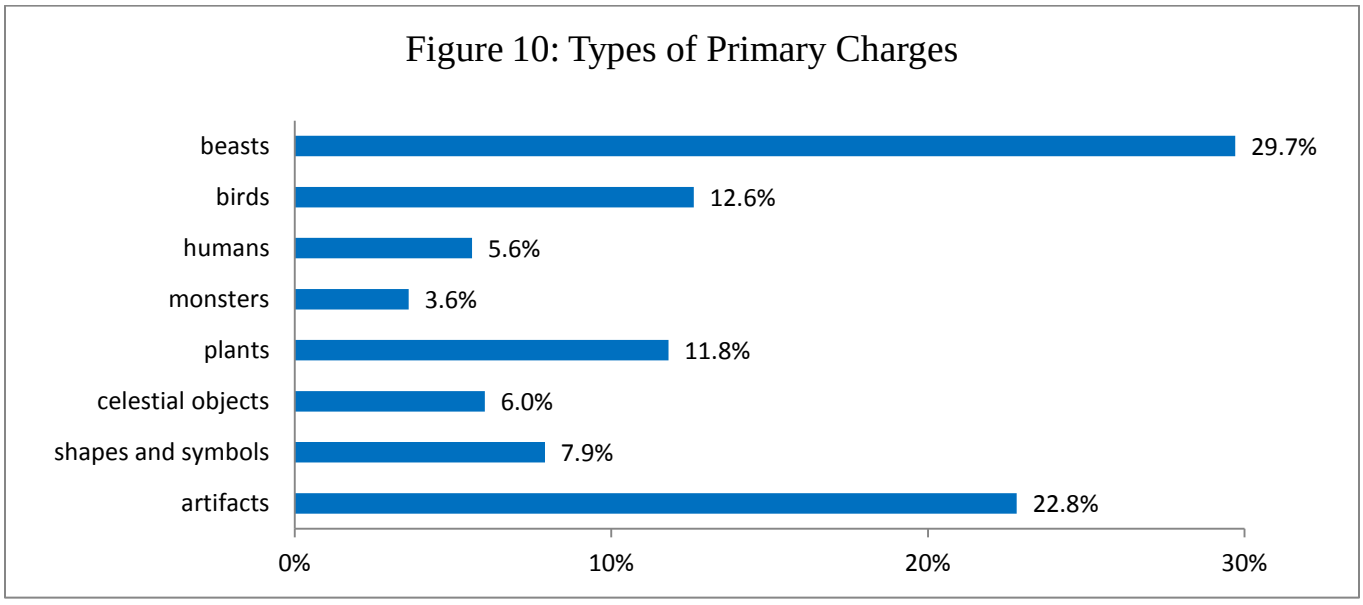
Mixed-type primary charge groups appear occasionally in the Siebmacher sample, representing just over 3% of primary groups. The vast majority of these mixed primary charge groups (94%) are the only charges on the device. Most mixed primary charge groups (61%) include two charges, and almost half (44%) are arranged in pale. Some examples of mixed primary groups arranged per pale include one charge standing on or issuing from another while others include a per fess field division with different charges on each side. Examples of these types of mixed primary charge group can be seen in Siebmacher on Plate 52 (bottom right) and Plate 75 (top right).

In terms of tinctures, primary charges vary somewhat compared to fields and ordinaries. In particular, sable is seen more often on primaries than on fields or ordinaries, appearing on more than 20% of primary charges and surpassing gules as the second most common tincture. Azure is much less often found on primaries than on fields or even on ordinaries, appearing on only 3% of primary charges (Figure 9). Proper tinctures are not uncommon in the Siebmacher sample, occurring in about 8% of

primary charge groups, more often than either azure or vert. The charge types most likely to appear with proper tinctures are human figures, beasts and beast parts (such as heads or antlers), and plants. Together these three charge types account for three-quarters of all proper charges. Examples of proper human figures, beasts, and plants can be seen in Siebmacher on Plate 39 (top right), Plate 109 (middle right), and Plate 203 (bottom right). Like ordinaries, primary charges tend to follow the rule of tincture, with only 6% having poor contrast with the field.



The arms in the Siebmacher sample use a wide range of primary charge types, making it challenging to narrow down the charge types sufficiently to allow for meaningful analysis. In general, primary charges include beasts, birds, humans, monsters, plants, celestial objects, abstract shapes and symbols, and human-made artifacts such as weapons and tools (Figure 10). Within each of these broad categories, however, there are many different individual charges. The devices in the sample also use a considerable number of charges that can best be described as parts of other charges—demi-beasts, human heads, tree stumps, a quarter of a wagon wheel, and many other examples.



Beasts

Beasts are the largest category of primary charges, accounting for nearly 30% of all primaries in the sample. Full beasts are most common—accounting for 63% of all beast primaries—and 85% of full beasts are single primary charges. Lions make up more than one-third of full beasts—see Plate 127 (middle left and right) for typical examples—but there is substantial variation in the remaining beast types. Other beasts found with relative frequency include goats, wolves, stags, and dogs, including talbots and levriers—see Plate 50 (top right) and Plate 81 (top left). Less common are sheep, horses, bears, boars, foxes, bulls, and felines other than lions—primarily catamounts. The only non-mammalian beasts found with any frequency are fish.

Partial beasts are also common, including demi-beasts—half of which are lions—as well as beast heads and limbs. Beast horns also appear, more than half of which are stag's antlers while many of the others are bull's horns, which are also a common crest in German armory (blazoned in Leonhard as "Hörner"). Nearly a quarter of beast parts appear in groups of two, and antlers and horns are particularly likely to fit this pattern. See Plate 111 (top left and bottom left) for examples of both these charges.

Birds

Birds make up nearly 13% of primary charges in the sample. Almost 60% of these are full birds, and as with full beasts, 85% are single primary charges. Of the full birds, 43% are eagles—see Plate 131 (bottom left) for an example. The remaining full birds vary quite widely in type and include hawks and falcons, waterfowl such as swans, geese, and ducks, corbies, long-legged waterfowl such as herons, cranes, and storks, chickens, and doves as well as generic birds.

The other 40% of bird-related primary charges include demi-birds, which are almost always eagles, as well as birds' heads and legs, the latter of which are most often depicted couped a la quise—see Plate 157 (middle left) for a typical example, complete with the couped section of the leg tinctured gules. Wings, both singly and in pairs, are seen particularly often, accounting for almost half of partial bird primary charges—the example on Plate 147 (top right) is typical. Nearly a third of bird parts appear in groups of two, a pattern driven by the prevalence of pairs of wings.

Humans

Humans comprise less than 6% of the primary charges in the sample. Only 27% of the humans depicted are full figures, some of which are recognizable as specific types of people—see the monk on Plate 144 (middle right) for an example. Another 38% are demi-humans—see Plate 84 (bottom left)—and the remainder are human heads or limbs, most often arms. A considerable majority (80%) of the full and demi-human figures are male, but female figures do appear occasionally. Full and partial humans appear as single primary charges 85% of the time.

Monsters

Monsters account for less than 4% of primary charges in the sample. The most common monsters seen are the unicorn and the griffin, which together make up 70% of all primary monsters. Examples of these monsters can be found in Siebmacher on Plate 104 (middle right) and Plate 190 (top right). Other

monsters include wyverns/dragons, panthers, mermaids, and sea-monsters. Another occasional pattern seen is monsters made up of parts of beasts, including fish with wings or stag's attires and animals with the heads or tails of different animals, such as the eagle with a wolf's head seen on Plate 171 (middle). Demi-monsters, primarily unicorns, and monster heads make up 28% of the primary monsters in the sample. Nearly all monsters and monster parts (97%) are single primary charges.

Plants

Plants comprise almost 12% of primary charges. Roses and fleurs-de-lys are particularly common, accounting for 44% of plant primary charges—see Plate 145 (top left) and Plate 92 (top middle) for examples. Leaves, sprigs, trees, and tree stumps make up 24% of plant primaries. A related charge is the ragged staff, blazoned by Leonhard as a dry branch ("trockener Ast"), and most often depicted as in Plate 55 (top left). Together, branches with leaves and ragged staffs account for 19% of plant primary charges. Plants are more likely than most other charge types to appear as multiple primary charges, with 28% found in groups of three and 7% found in groups of four or more.

Celestial Objects

Celestial objects make up 6% of primary charges in the sample. The most common celestial objects by far are mullets and crescents, representing 94% of the celestial objects found. Mullets are nearly always depicted with six points—see Plate 201 (top middle). Both mullets and crescents are likely to appear in groups of multiple primary charges, with 31% in groups of two and 20% in groups of three.

Abstract Shapes and Symbols

Abstract shapes and symbols comprise about 8% of primary charges in the sample. Lozenges, roundels, and annulets make up just over half of this primary charge category. Other shapes seen occasionally include escutcheons, hearts, billets, and crosses couped, the last of which tend to be plain, formy, or moline. These abstract shapes often appear in groups of multiple primary charges, with 29% found in groups of three and 14% in groups of four or more. Words and letters appear occasionally in the sample. In addition, in arms from Silesia, the area closest to Poland, there is a pattern of seemingly abstract charges similar to charges found in Polish heraldry—see Plate 75 (bottom) for several examples.

Human Artifacts

Human-made artifacts are the second largest category of primary charges in the Siebmacher sample, representing 23% of all primaries, and are the category with the greatest diversity of charges. Within the category of artifacts, tools are the largest group, comprising nearly a third of all artifacts. The most common tools seen include:

- wheels, approximately one-third of which are demi-wheels (including both half- and quarter-wheels)—see Plate 148 (middle right and bottom left),
- farming tools such rakes, hoes, sickles, and shovels,
- hunting horns, crampons, and ladders.

Weapons make up over a quarter of artifacts, and most often appear as arrows or axes. Weapons are more likely than other charge groups to appear in groups of two, many of them arranged in saltire. Household objects comprise another 28% of artifacts, with the most common examples including:

- an array of headgear, most often in the form of a long cap (blazoned "Heidenhut" in Leonhard)—see Plate 42 (middle left),
- keys, pairs of shears, covered cups, and chess pieces.

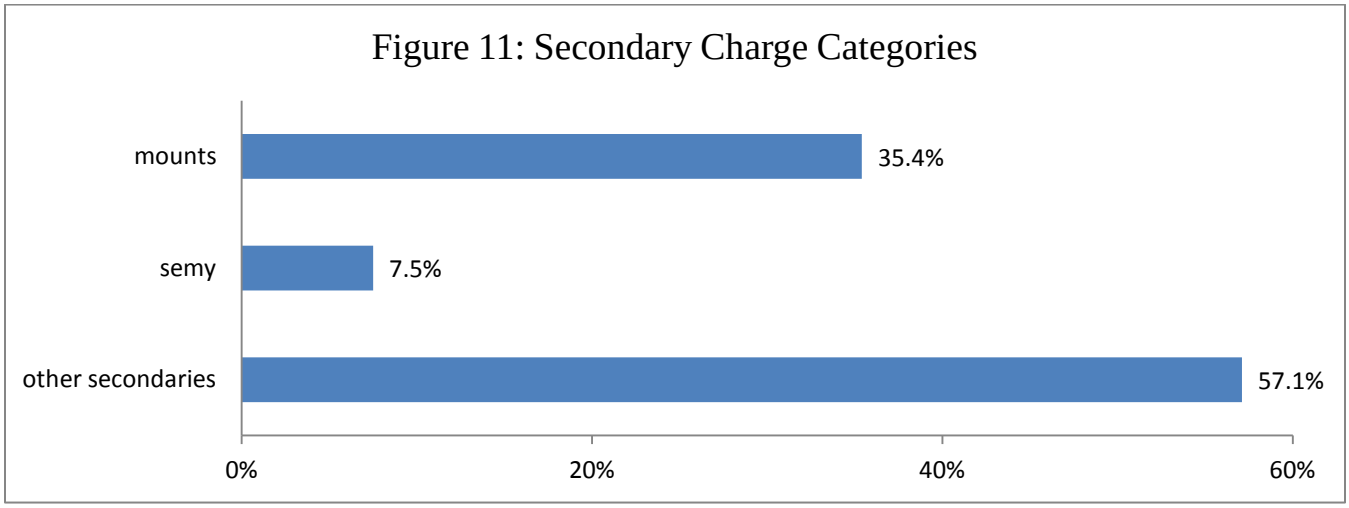
The remaining 14% of artifacts include buildings, particularly towers, and items associated with royalty such as crowns and orbs. While a number of human artifacts appear only once or twice in the sample, many undoubtedly cants, some of these unusual charges stand out as interesting reflections of what medieval people would have thought appropriate to put on arms. These include:

- a pavilion—see Plate 93 (bottom left),
- an antique table viewed from the end (blazoned "Tischwange" in Leonhard)—see Plate 137 (middle right), and
- a reliquary, which closely resembles examples seen in a late 15th C woodcut depicting the reliquaries held in a Bavarian monastery (Robinson, pp. 70-73)—see Plate 197 (top middle).

Secondary Charges

Secondaries appear on slightly less than 11% of all devices in the Siebmacher sample. These secondary charges fall into three general categories: mounts, semy of charges, and other secondaries, with the last category comprising 57% of secondaries in the sample (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Secondary Charge Categories



The most common type of secondary is the mount, representing 35% of all secondary charges. These mounts, always found issuant from base with a primary atop them, represent a pattern seen in nearly 4% of devices in the sample. Nearly half (47%) of the mounts in the sample are vert, with another 35% either Or or argent. Mounts do not always follow the rule of tincture—21% have poor contrast with the field. Most of these are vert mounts on gules or azure fields—see Plate 117 (bottom left) for an example. Mounts are more commonly found in armory from the Austrian regional group, with this group including over 21% of mounts in the sample, versus 11% of all devices.

Strewn charges are extremely rare in the Siebmacher sample, appearing on less than 1% of devices. Devices that are semy of roundels, billets, or crosses make up nearly three-quarters of the examples, and nearly 60% of these charges are either Or or argent—as seen on Plate 127 (top and bottom right). No examples of strewn charges have poor contrast with the field.

Setting aside mounts and strewn charges, arms with other types and/or arrangements of secondary charges account for only about 6% of all devices in the sample. More than 60% of the secondary charges seen are either plants or celestial objects, with mullets, roses, leaves, fleurs-de-lys, and crescents predominating. Secondaries seen less often include lions and shapes such as roundels and lozenges.

Almost 60% of arms with secondary charges have either two or three secondaries, while another 24% have a single secondary charge. The most common arrangements for secondaries are around ordinaries (35%) or around primaries (32%)—see Plate 144 (top middle) and Plate 56 (top right) for examples. More than 80% of secondary charges are argent, Or, or gules, and 11% violate the rule of tincture.

Mixed secondary charge groups are unusual but do occur in about 7% of arms with secondaries, in most cases appearing as two different charge types on either side of an ordinary. Secondary charges in the sample exhibit mirror or rotational symmetry in 13% of instances. Nearly two-thirds of these charges are arranged around a primary as in the examples on Plate 147 (bottom right) and Plate 48 (middle).

Tertiary and Overall Charges

Tertiary charges are quite unusual in the Siebmacher sample, found on only 4% of devices. The vast majority of these tertiaries (82%) lie on ordinaries, while another 13% lie on primary charges and the remaining 5% on peripheral ordinaries, including chiefs, cantons, and bordures. The overwhelming majority of tertiaries found on ordinaries lie on bends (65%) or fesses (27%). Nearly a third of tertiaries found on primary charges lie on a wing or pair of wings. Tertiaries tend to be either a single charge (42%) or a group of three charges (48%). Groups of three tertiaries most often lie on ordinaries while single tertiaries appear on a variety of underlying charges. Typical examples of devices with tertiaries can be seen on Plate 112 (bottom left) and Plate 154 (top right).

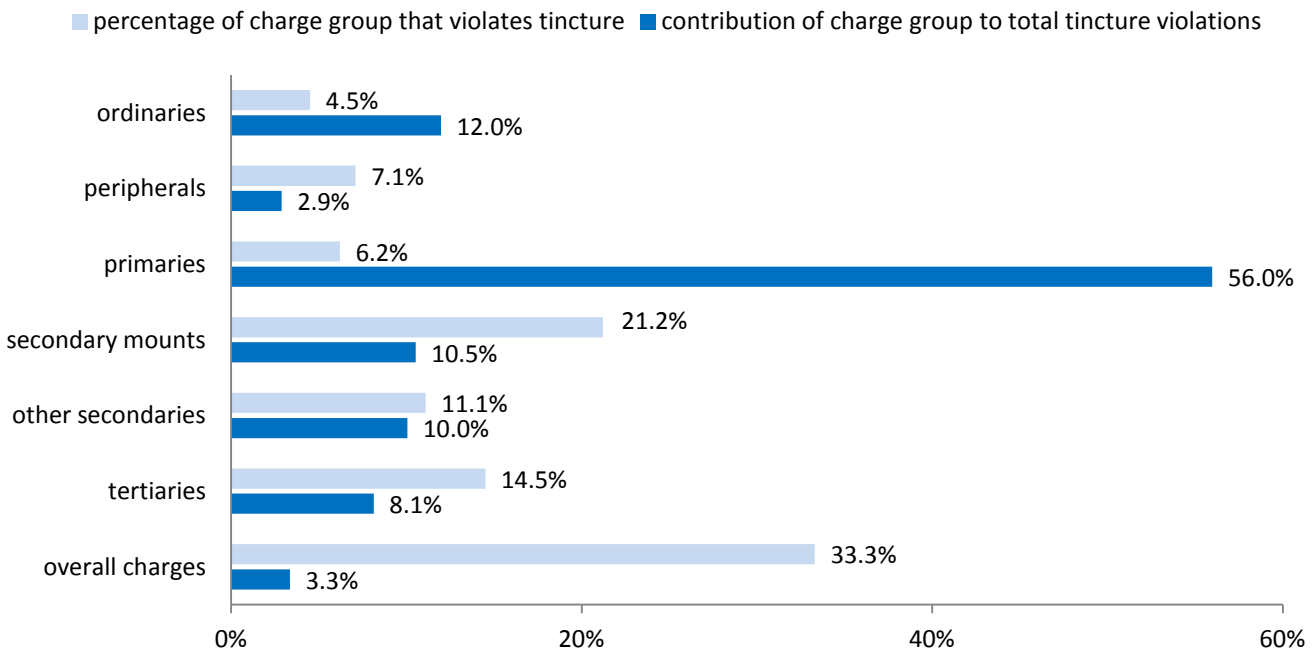
The most common charge types for tertiaries are plants, particularly roses; shapes such as roundels, annulets, and bars; beasts and birds, particularly eagles; and celestial objects, particularly mullets. Gules is the most common tincture for tertiaries (32%), followed by argent and Or (21% each). Like secondaries, tertiaries are more likely than ordinaries or primaries to violate the rule of tincture, with nearly 15% of tertiaries showing poor contrast with the underlying charge.

Overall charges are vanishingly rare in the Siebmacher sample, appearing on less than 1% of devices. Just over 60% of overall charges lie over primary charges while the remainder lie over ordinaries. About 40% of overall charges are themselves ordinaries. Nearly 80% of overall charges are either argent or gules. Overall charges are much more likely than other charges to violate the rule of tincture, with one-third of all overall charges in the sample doing so. Most of the tincture violations found among overall charges involve a combination of gules and azure—see Plate 92 (bottom right) for an example.

Tincture Violations

Around 7% of the arms in the Siebmacher sample violate the rule of tincture in some way. As the discussion above has indicated, secondaries, tertiaries, and overall charges are considerably more likely to violate the rule of tincture than are ordinaries and primaries, with secondary mounts and overall charges showing poor contrast the most often. However, the relative rarity of these charge categories in the sample means that they actually contribute less to the total number of tincture violations than do ordinaries and primaries, which together account for 68% of all tincture violations (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Percentage of Charge Group That Violates Tincture Versus Contribution of Charge Group to Total Tincture Violations



Ordinaries that violate the rule of tincture are much more likely than other ordinaries in the sample to appear on vert fields. In fact, over 36% of the devices with both vert fields and ordinaries have ordinaries that are poor contrast. The most common tincture combinations for poor contrast ordinaries are gules on azure, Or on argent, argent on Or, sable on gules, and gules on vert. Most poor contrast ordinaries are either bends/bends sinister or fesses, with bends outnumbering fesses, which is not the case for all ordinaries. Almost half of the poor contrast ordinaries seen in the sample are charged with tertiaries, compared to less than 18% of all ordinaries.

Primaries that violate the rule of tincture are more likely than good contrast primaries to appear on gules and azure fields. The most common tincture combinations for poor contrast primaries are sable on gules, gules on azure, and Or on argent, which together account for 60% of the instances of poor contrast primaries in the sample. Poor contrast primary charges are more likely than good contrast primaries to be plants, particularly roses, or human figures and body parts. In fact, human figures and body parts account for 15% of all poor contrast primaries, and these poor contrast humans make up nearly a quarter of all human figures and body parts found.

One possible explanation for some of the poor contrast charges in the Siebmacher sample is that proper charges may have been allowed greater leeway in violating tincture than were other charges. Over half (54%) of the poor contrast primaries in the sample can be considered proper, as can 42% of poor contrast secondaries and 47% of poor contrast tertiaries. The caveat is that proper here is defined as a color in which the charge is commonly found in reality rather than the more precise definitions of proper used in SCA heraldry.[4] Certainly the human figures that violate tincture could be seen as fitting this pattern. These figures are typically depicted with proper Caucasian skin, and poor contrast clothing—see Plate 46 (top left) and Plate 162 (top middle) for examples. Items of clothing not actually on a human being, such as long caps, are also seen to violate the rule of tincture more often than other charges, and clothing can, of course, appear in many colors in reality. In addition, poor contrast primaries and secondaries found in the sample include gules roses and foxes, Or crowns and stalks of wheat, vert grapes and laurel chaplets, sable boars, gules crayfish (which are red when cooked), an argent swan, and a vert frog—any of these charges can be seen as commonly appearing in these colors. Vert mounts are another possible example of this pattern, especially given that some are drawn quite realistically—see for example Plate 58 (top and middle right). Finally, charges that appear in non-heraldic proper tinctures such as brown and grey are also seen to violate the rule tincture. Plate 68 (top middle and bottom left), for instance shows brown stag's antlers and a brown rabbit proper on azure fields while Plate 115 (top left) shows a grey ass proper on an argent field.

Nonetheless, a pattern of proper charges breaking the rule of tincture cannot explain all the examples of poor contrast found in the Siebmacher sample. Ordinaries certainly have no natural color, and other devices that violate the rule of tincture present charges in ways that cannot possibly be interpreted as proper. Plate 174 (top right), for example shows a gules unicorn on an azure field while Plate 52 (middle right) and Plate 182 (bottom left) have divided all-color fields with animate charges counterchanged across the line of division.

An important factor to note, as well, is that violations of the rule of tincture, particularly poor contrast charges that cannot be seen as proper, are more common in the Saxon regional group than in other parts of the Holy Roman Empire. The five regions in this group account for 59% of the instances of poor contrast seen in the sample even though these regions account for only 36% of the arms in the sample. In addition, 64% of the poor contrast ordinaries in the sample come from this regional group as do 68% of the poor contrast primary charges that cannot be interpreted as having proper coloration.

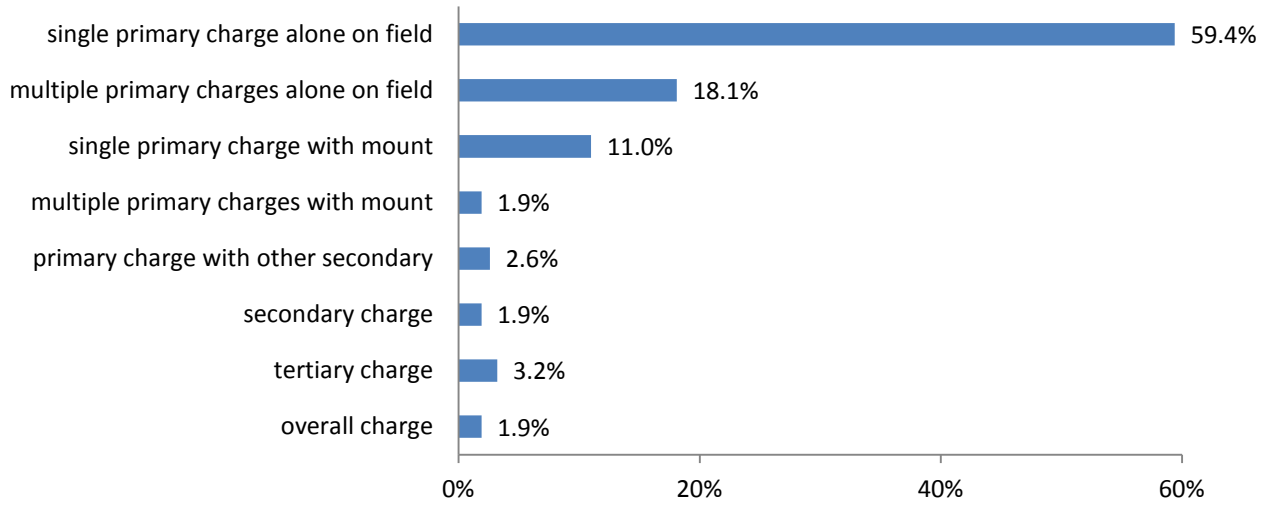
On the other hand, arms from the Central regional group are less likely than those from other regions to violate the rule of tincture. Only about 27% of the examples of poor contrast come from these regions even though they represent 46% of all arms in the sample. This regional group also accounts for only 24% of poor contrast ordinaries and 13% of poor contrast but not proper primary charges.

[4] For example, in SCA heraldry a proper rose is gules barbed vert seeded Or. In this analysis, any gules rose would be considered proper.

Cants

Nearly 6% of the arms in the Siebmacher sample can be clearly identified as cants although this percentage very likely underrepresents the actual number of canting arms found in the sample.[5] Among the identified canting arms, the actual cant is found in the primary charge group in 93% of cases. In fact, 90% of cants fall into one of two categories: a primary charge group alone on the field or a primary charge group with a mount. In both cases, the canting charge is more often a single primary than a group of primary charges. In a small percentage of cases, the canting charge is found in a secondary, tertiary, or overall charge group (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Canting Charge Categories



Cants can be found among a range of charge types found in the Siebmacher sample. Beasts are the most common type of canting charge, representing 35% of all cants, with birds and tools making up another 26% of the cants. Rebus cants do occur on occasion as in a hunting horn on a trimount for *von Hornberg*—Plate 118 (middle left)—or a demi-man vested gules for *die Rot Mann*—Plate 136 (bottom left).

Among the canting charges that appear most often are wolves, bears, cats, boars, foxes, dogs, beavers, goats, stag's antlers, cranes, ravens, monks, roses, suns, burning brands, hunting horns, and mounts. Some interesting unique canting charges include:

- an angel for *von Engelshofen*—Plate 97 (middle),
- a sleigh for *von Schlittsted*—Plate 170 (top left),
- a right angle for *die Winckler*—Plate 161 (bottom right),
- bare human feet for *die Barfüse*—Plate 174 (middle left), and
- a corpse for *von Leichnam*—Plate 156 (bottom right).

[5] Regional dialects and linguistic changes over time make it challenging to identify cants even in English armory. This problem is compounded for an English-speaking author examining German armory.

Areas for Further Research

This analysis does not take into consideration the orientation of charges on the field. Dexter/sinister orientation is a problematic area in Siebmacher. In many case, the artist seems to have oriented charges based on their location on each plate with those in the first two columns and those in the last two columns facing each other. For example, on Plate 131, the lions in the first and fourth columns face sinister while those in the second and fifth columns face dexter. This pattern continues for animate and some inanimate charges throughout the sample and makes it impractical to conduct an analysis of dexter/sinister orientation. However, an analysis of other patterns of orientation may prove useful. In particular, the Siebmacher sample includes a number of charges oriented in surprising ways, such as for example, the eagles displayed fesswise and bendwise on Plates 120 (middle left) and 71 (bottom left).

This analysis also did not take into consideration the posture of animate charges. Beasts and birds appear in a variety of postures in the Siebmacher sample. Postures include rampant, salient, sejant erect, sejant, passant, statant, and courant for beasts, as well as displayed, close, and rising for birds. Further research may be able to discern patterns correlating bird or beast type with posture as well as possible regional variations in the use of particular postures.

Methodology

The starting point for this research was a set of blazons for the arms in Siebmacher created by Master Owen ap Morgan, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for saving me considerable time. I reviewed each of these blazons in comparison with the emblazons in Siebmacher and occasionally changed the blazon to what I believed to be the correct one. I then created an Excel spreadsheet with columns for all of the factors I wanted to consider about each device and a coding system that allowed me to categorize various aspects of the device, including tincture, field divisions, ordinary and charge types, tincture violations, marshalling and cants.[6]

Over a period of several months, I coded each of the 2,745 devices in the sample in the Excel spreadsheet. For arms that would be considered marshaled by SCA standards, I coded each individual device separately. When the coding was complete, I ran a number of tests to clean the data and then exported the data into the statistical program SPSS where I again conducted data cleaning. I also used SPSS to create some composite variables based on my original codes (such as grouping primary charges by type). Finally, I ran frequency counts and cross-tabulations in SPSS to produce the analysis discussed above. For cross-tabulations, I used a chi-squared test to get a sense of the level of statistical significance for each correlation.

When looking at regional variation, I initially ran cross-tabulations using all 18 regions, but it quickly became clear that there were regional groupings that displayed relatively consistent patterns of variation, particularly in terms of marshalling and tincture violations. That discovery led me to create the regional groups used in the analysis and to research the geography and history of the Holy Roman Empire to establish some historical justification for these groups.

[6] A copy of this Excel file with an accompanying codebook will be made available to anyone who wants to continue (and hopefully expand) this research. Please contact the author for details (wenthlyan@yahoo.com).

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