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# An Appreciation of Otto Hupp

by David F. Phillips, SHA

Otto Hupp (1859-1949), one of the greatest heraldic artists of the 20th or any century, needs little introduction to readers of *The Heraldic Craftsman*. He had a prodigious output over a long career. In addition to the annual *Münchener Kalender* which he published for more than 50 years, and for which he is still best known, he created monumental collections of German civic arms, and bookplates, postage stamps, coins and banknotes, trademarks and commercial graphics, type fonts, stained glass, ceramics, architectural decoration, and works of scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

Our pleasure in his art is enough by itself to justify the honour and respect we still have for him generations after his death. And of course mastery at the level of a great artist like Otto Hupp is to some extent indefinable – we know it when we see it, based on the overall effect of complete works. But artists and connoisseurs can gain much practical insight from a close study of his work. I made a systematic review of 39 issues of *Münchener Kalender* to identify qualities worth a practitioner's meditation.<sup>2</sup>

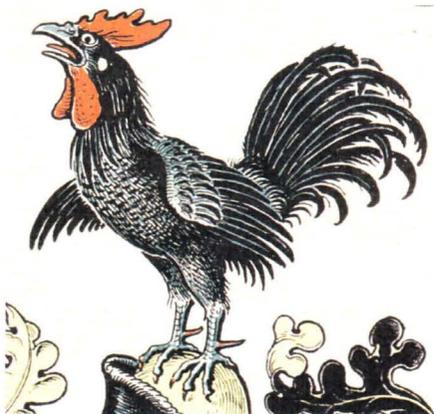
In the material that follows, all the images by Hupp are from *Münchener Kalender* (MK), and are identified by armiger, year and month. Angled shields are set vertically for convenient analysis. I follow *Heraldic Craftsman* house style by giving the original when quoting blazon.



This self-portrait is from his rendition of the crest of Paumgarten on the July 1903 page of *Münchener Kalender*. The blazon just says the crest-figure should be a bearded man, blue-clad and bare-headed (*bärtiger Mann, blaubeleidet, barhaupt*), but Hupp (who was around 43 when he created this image) gave him his own features.

The first thing we notice, the easiest quality to see in Hupp's work, is the vitality of his animals. They seem notably lively and capable of emotion and movement. They are highly stylized, as all successful heraldic animals must be. But *stylized* does not mean *stereotyped*. Stylization is the exaggeration of external features to convey the inner essence of the being or thing depicted. A stylized animal should look both alive and individual. Hupp succeeds at this perhaps more than any other heraldic artist of any period. The following examples, chosen from hundreds, make the point.<sup>3</sup>

Note especially in the lion shield on the next page how the angle of the head (not in the blazon), and the expression of the face and eyes, make individual and appealing what might otherwise have been just another heraldic lion. See also how artfully the tail occupies the space available for it, and how the top and bottom ends of the halberd actually touch the boundary of the shield, providing an anchor and a balance for the unusually backward-leaning lion.



<sup>1</sup> For a good overview of his work, see Hans-Enno Korn, *Otto Hupp: Meister der Wappenkunst 1859-1949* (Munich, 1985), a well-illustrated museum exhibition catalogue. The Hupp page on Ralf Hartemink's *Heraldry of the World* website, <http://tinyurl.com/ngw-hupp-page>, focusing on Hupp's civic heraldry projects, is very useful, with valuable images and links, and is in English. Maurice Grinberg: *Otto Hupp: Münchener Kalender* (Paris, 2004), contains the core armorial images from all the monthly pages from 1895 to 1936, plus 1891 (French noble arms). The images are very small and lack their frames, but Grinberg does include an index and all the blazons. The book is a helpful aid to study of the originals, but is not of much use without them. Wilhelm H. Lange, *Otto Hupp: Das Werk eines Deutschen Meisters* (Berlin, 1939), has many rare pictures of Hupp's three-dimensional work; for a pdf see [www.ngw.nl/books/Hupp-lange1.pdf](http://www.ngw.nl/books/Hupp-lange1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> I used the issues from 1895 to 1932, plus 1935. The issues before 1895, except for 1891, use zodiac motifs instead of authentic arms. There was no issue for 1933; MK ceased publication in 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Left to right, this page: rooster, Bylandt (1931:4); bear, Perfall (1925:7); boar's head, Dönhoff (1914:3); next page: owl, Herwarth (1906:11); dragon-Rumpf, Wylich und Lottum (1905:12); lion, Zimmern (1935:12). *Rümpfe* are the curious armless human and animal figures common in German crests, but little seen elsewhere. *Rumpf* literally means *trunk*, but a heraldic *Rumpf* includes the head.

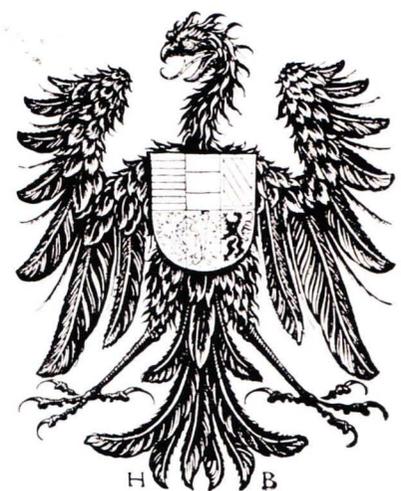


Hupp's animals, and indeed his larger compositions, echo great masters of the Renaissance like Dürer and Burgkmair, and lesser but still important heraldic artists like Conrad Grünenberg. Compare, for example, Dürer's owl (left) with Hupp's owl shown above.<sup>4</sup> But for all his facility in adapting the heraldic style of the Renaissance, Hupp was a man of a time when Art Nouveau was the impulse of the hour. As the examples show, Hupp combines a deliberately Renaissance style with Nouveau sensibility. The same potent combination is seen in his type faces.<sup>5</sup>

My only example not taken from a monthly MK page is the eagle (below left) Hupp used for the back cover of the 1913 and 1914 issues. The broad primary feathers of the outer wings alternate with narrower interstitial feathers. Like the

barbed tongue, this was a well-established Renaissance convention, although actual birds do not show either feature.<sup>6</sup> Compare the eagle by Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1505) (below right).<sup>7</sup> The single feathers drooping from the inner curve of the wing are another such convention.

Hupp's 1913 eagle has a distinctly Nouveau flavour despite its Renaissance foundation. For instance, the segments of the thin outer feathers curve in opposite directions, but do not touch. The naturalistic approach to the legs contrasts with the schematic treatment of the tail. The eagle's sidelong gaze, with its off-centre pupil, is not bird-like but almost human, which makes it more accessible to the viewer. (This treatment of the eyes is found in almost all his animals, including fish and birds.) The expressive method of Art Nouveau appears throughout Hupp's work, increasing over the years. His fusion of antique and modern styles reminds us of another great heraldic artist and innovator, Bruno Heim, who revived the simple forms of the early heraldic artists, but with a contemporary directness of approach and setting.



<sup>4</sup> Detail from *An Owl Fighting Other Birds* (c. 1510), in Willi Kurth, ed., *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer* (New York, 1963), figure 300.

<sup>5</sup> For a good look at his most important type faces, see <http://luc.devroye.org/fonts-33251.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Woodpeckers do have a barb-like tongue structure, but most birds, and certainly eagles, do not.

<sup>7</sup> From Freerk Haye Hamkens, *Alte Deutsche Reichsadler* (Brussels, 1944), plate 5. The same image appears, less clearly, in Hugo Gerard Ströhl, *Heraldischer Atlas* (Stuttgart, 1899), plate 9, figure 7.



The intensely observed natural details in the feathers of the crest-panache in Heyden-Rynsch (1932:5, above left), especially the dark outlines of each strand, and the thistle crest in Sydow (1930:11, above right), demonstrate the Art Nouveau style. A close look at Hupp's brushwork, below, from examples selected more or less at random from those reproduced here, show clearly that however much the roots of his art may lie in the Gothic and Renaissance, it flowered in Art Nouveau.<sup>8</sup> A century later his example still reminds us how necessary observation and drawing are to effective heraldic art, almost whatever the chosen style. Stylization is based on observation.



It is rare that heraldic animals borne as multiple charges display any individuality, but Hupp manages this. In the Oriola shield (1903:6, below left), varying the expressions (and the tongues and mouths and legs) of the five wolves gives them an unexpected individuality, and therefore vitality. Observe also how the body of each outer wolf is positioned to accommodate the central wolf and form a balanced saltire visually connected to those in the bordure. Hupp's human figures appear less often than his animals, but have a similar vivacity and charm, unusually convincing for heraldic figures.



Moving beyond specific animate figures, Hupp's work is notable for the strength and clarity of his lines and for the visual integration of the compositions themselves. In the Gaugreben page from May 1928, for instance (right), the strongly vertical arrangement of the shield is reinforced by the same pattern on the wings. This much is imposed by the blazon. But the frontal placement of the crest was a free artistic choice – the blazon requires only that each wing be charged with the pallets (*jeder Flügel mit den Pfählen belegt*). It was an artistic choice to define the wing-pallets with straight lines, rather than follow the modelling of the feathers (but the modelling is usefully preserved on the edges of the feathers and wing segments). It was another choice to



space the wings so that the gap between their two innermost white stripes is just enough to imagine a black one between them. It was a choice to scallop the top and bottom edges of the shield, which reinforces the pallets, as does the vertical placement of the shield. The mantling serves the composition – the parts that fall alongside the shield are almost vertical themselves, and are mostly black; the negative space between them, about the same thickness, stands in visually for white. Even the lettering (uniform throughout the year's issue) supports the design. The red strap and blue helm give accents of colour that,

<sup>8</sup> Thorns: Sydow (1930:11); paw: Oberpfalz (1906:5); feathers: Heyden-Rynsch (1932:5).

paradoxically, strengthen the black-and-white vertical theme by unifying the top and bottom of the design. *Münchener Kalender* is packed with similarly powerful compositions.

Hupp's treatment of mantling offers another insight into his method. Mantling as a vehicle for heraldic invention has fallen on hard times these past few centuries. Originally no more than a lambrequin to keep away the sun, or an extension of the fabric of the crest, it was cut and sliced and scalloped and feathered (*gezaddelt*, the Germans call these treatments), supposedly to suggest the wear of heavy combat with edged weapons. But this convention soon degenerated into ballooning foliage, lacking wit or purpose. This tendency was well-established by the time of Jost Amman in the 16th century, and has continued (with many honourable exceptions) to this day, occupying space with stereotyped forms that make no original contribution to the composition as a whole.

By contrast, Hupp's mantling is ceaselessly inventive. MK includes some examples of traditional acanthus-style floriation, but usually the mantling on every page represents a deliberate and specific compositional choice. The styles (a few illustrated here) run from lush to spare, from round to flat, from full to spiky, from strapwork to scrollwork, from cloth

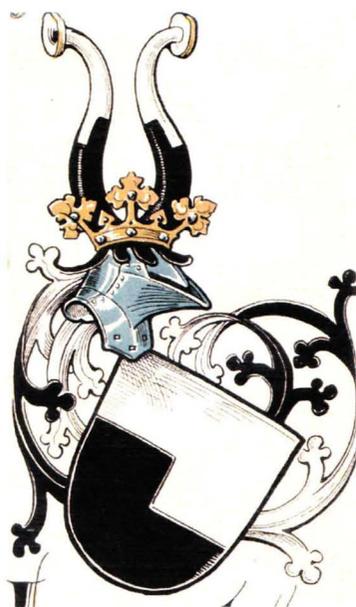
to leaves to fur to feathers. Some (for example Reibnitz (1912:9, bottom left), are just the narrowest of ribbons. The mantling occupies negative space in a harmonious way; but Hupp shapes that space to order, rather than merely filling in what an unrelated design happened to leave blank.

At its most inventive, Hupp's mantling is integrated with the shield and crest in a seamless configuration. In Buseck (1919:3, left), the mantling relates directly to the crest as black wool (above a ram's head shield-figure that is one of Hupp's most engaging images). In Landschad (1909:3, right), it is made of a human figure's hair and beard.<sup>9</sup> Examples could be multiplied.<sup>10</sup>

Heraldic achievements often exhibit a rigorous mirror-image symmetry along the palmar line. Even where, as in most cases, the shield and crest designs are not symmetrical, the helm may be frontally placed and the mantling identically disposed on either side. There are technical methods for reproducing this kind of symmetry, and facility in creating it is admired by many. The effect can be heightened by frontal orientation of crests such as paired wings, *Büffelhörner*, etc.

Hupp does not usually favour symmetry in his designs. Very few of the hundreds of achievements in MK are symmetrically arranged; shields, for example, are usually angled. Many emphasize their asymmetrical structure, for example Reibnitz, where the mantling lies almost entirely on one side. In Leoprechting (1913:6, right), positioning the helm and crest by the dexter edge of the shield reflects the structure of the arms. Note also here how the extreme dexter position of the helm, and the frontal orientation of the crest despite the profiled helm, create a strongly vertical alignment to balance a strongly horizontal shield design. The curved mantling eases and mediates the transition.

Even where Hupp gives the impression of symmetry, this is often deceptive. In Manteuffel (1909:6, on the next page), for instance, the shield is vertical. Helm, shield

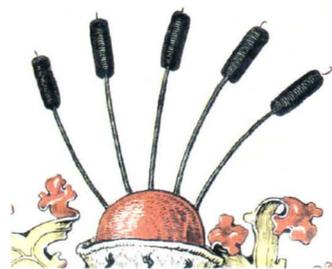


<sup>9</sup> Gustav Seyler, in a text comment to the MK blazon of the Landschad achievement, says this crest was so treated in the late Gothic period also.

<sup>10</sup> Hupp goes so far as to work deer hooves into the mantling for the stag's-head crest of Zimmern (1935:12) (with thin red blood vessels on the inside of the pelt), and elephant feet for the canting elephant-crest of Helfenstein (1908:5).



and crest are all centred and frontal, and the two sides of the mantling appear to mirror each other. But close examination reveals that the mantling is not exactly the same on both sides. This takes more skill to execute than actual symmetry. Sometimes Hupp will dispose an element of a charge or crest just so it will *not* be symmetrical. An example is the crest of Guttenberg (1922:6, right): five cattails proper (*funf natürlichen Rohrkolben*). The blazon says only that, and another artist might have arranged them symmetrically, but Hupp bends them all to the sinister, giving a more lifelike aspect.



As a master of Art Nouveau, Hupp excelled at creating powerful, graceful lines that the eye wants to follow. We see this in the extended neck on the *Vogelrumpf* crest of Müffling (1915:8, below left) – the line of the crest echoes that on the shield.<sup>11</sup> As Hupp paints the arrow (or dart, German *Pfeil*) in Schrenk von Notzing (1918:8, below centre), we experience a sense of movement almost impossible to resist – our eyes are practically forced off the page. This may feel inevitable from the pointed charge, but it could have been rendered in much less active ways. In Redwitz (1922:8, right), modelling gives an almost three-dimensional feel to the geometric pattern of the shield. In one of his most thrilling effects (in Gilsa (1927:4), below right), Hupp



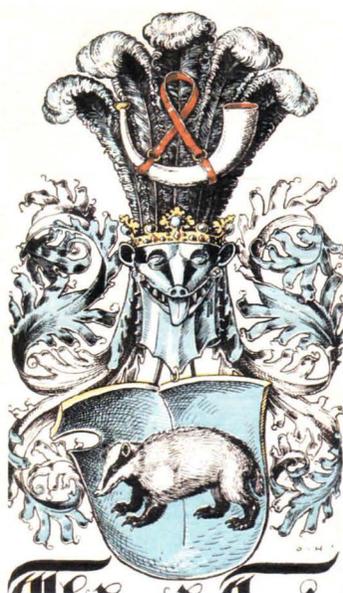
makes the mantling vibrate together with the wavy pattern of the shield and crest.<sup>12</sup>

Another favorite technique of Hupp's I call *transgression* – deliberately extending the figure (or mantling) beyond the image frame. A good example is Waldbott (1900:12, on the front cover of this issue), where the audacity of the transgression makes it a prominent element in the balance of the entire composition. By dominating the frame, the central image asserts itself as more than two-dimensional, more than a just a picture, as uncontainable by its frame – and so, by extension, uncontainable by the conventions of art, and therefore in some sense alive. This technique, much cherished by heraldic artists, is used



often in bookplates, stamps and other strongly framed compositions. Hupp demonstrates it in uncounted variations throughout MK. Notice the same method used in the Oriola shield, where the wolves on the central field overstep the boundary of the bordure.

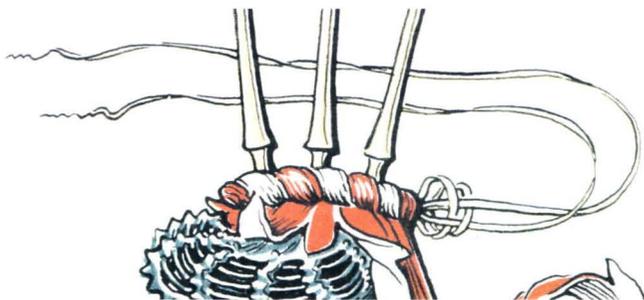
Some of Hupp's most accomplished effects come in accents created not from the blazon but solely from his imagination, added to the composition as a gratuitous artistic flourish. For example, he sometimes gives his helms human or animal faces. Thurn und Taxis (1897:11, left), is a striking instance of this fanciful technique used to unify a composition. The arms are simple: a white badger on blue (*ein silberner Dachs in blau*). Hupp shows the badger mostly white, but actually in proper colours, and in a very naturalistic style. But above this mild display, the helm appears as a monstrous steel super-badger, set off from the crest by a gold crest-coronet (not in the blazon). The mantling beside the shield suggests a badger's powerful front paws; its lobes evoke badger-claws without



<sup>11</sup> *Vogelrumpf* is a bird-*Rumpf*. Vide note 3.

<sup>12</sup> Barrulets wavy – the blazon calls them *Bäche* (streams).

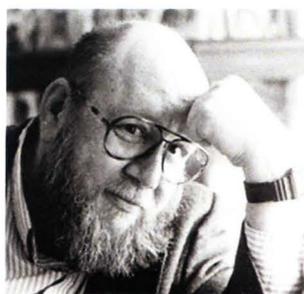
quite depicting them. In Degenfeld (1900:4, right), a face-figured helm interacts with a shield whose size and shape suggest a body; the mantling, forming arms and hands, animates the whole achievement. There are many more examples in MK.<sup>13</sup>



Other accents (among many that could have been chosen) include the torse strings in Knesebeck (1926:8, above left), the jaunty shield-foot in Oberpfalz (1906:5, above centre), a helm painted in the pattern of the shield (Merode, 1905:9), and a pale from the shield impressed on the mantling (Völderndorff, 1920:12). None of these accents are mentioned in the blazons, but spring solely from Hupp's imagination. It is this freedom of invention (we might even say freedom of *inspiration*), more than any specific technique, that may be Hupp's most powerful lesson for the modern practitioner.

Because this study is confined to the monthly achievements in MK, I have not touched on the complex frontispiece in every issue, or the ornamental borders, different every year (and sometimes every month, many figurative, many in abstract Art Nouveau style and even some presaging Art Deco), or the dramatic covers, each one a fugue of intricately patterned backgrounds of thorns or snakes or strapwork, angels or leafy branches or architectural structures, each a graduate course for heraldic designers.

Of course, as mentioned, MK itself was only one annual piece of a vast artistic output.<sup>14</sup> But Hupp was perhaps freer here than anywhere else in his work – freer (apart from blazon) from constraints of form, and from demands outside his own imagination. These calendars as a composite work epitomize Hupp's lifetime of experiment and learning, and form an inexhaustible treasury for us to learn from as well. The more we study them, the more we see.



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Ed notes: *Hupp will repay further study. For example, he produced a vast range of commercial art as well as metal work and distinctive ceiling and wall paintings.*

*Totally irresistible is this breath-taking column and ceiling in the Weinmuseum in Speyer presenting scores of wine-related arms linked by delicate tendrils.*

*Beside the extensive sources listed in David's first footnote, you will find the complete set of the Kalender on disc - along with a compilation of other seminal articles on Hupp, including essays by Anthony Wood, PSHA (from *The Heraldic Craftsman*, 2006) and Bernard G High - simply by e-mailing Jane Tunesi [librarian@theheraldrysociety.com](mailto:librarian@theheraldrysociety.com) who will be happy to send you your copy for £20. Or you can download the order form at [www.theheraldrysociety.com/publications/HeraldryArchive.pdf](http://www.theheraldrysociety.com/publications/HeraldryArchive.pdf) where Dr Andrew Gray, the Archive Editor, will process it speedily.*



<sup>13</sup> Hupp gives Brockdorff (1905:5), whose arms are a winged fish (*geflügelte Fisch*), a toothy fish-head helm.

<sup>14</sup> There were 600 monthly pages over 45 years (not counting the early zodiac-based calendars, and counting 72 for the 1934 issue and 48 for 1936). A front cover and frontispiece for every issue, plus at least seven different armorial back covers and several extra charts, bring the total more than 700 original heraldic compositions for MK alone.