

The Arms of Jean Grolier

BY KIT CURRIE

The arms of Jean Grolier (1479–1565) are probably the most famous and recognizable ones in book collecting, even among those collectors who do not acquire fine bindings or sixteenth-century books. They were used on only a few of his bindings, but were sometimes painted at the bottom of the opening leaf, or some other leaf of text. On the actual bindings which he commissioned, the great bibliophile generally used one of his numerous mottoes such as 'Io. Grolierii et amicorum,' or 'Portio mea, Domine, sit in terra viventium,' the latter being a modification of the original text in Psalm 142, verse 5: 'Thou art all I have in the land of the living.' There seems to be no record of exactly when Grolier first used his arms, but he was probably ennobled when he became royal secretary at Blois, or possibly when he was made Treasurer to the French army in Milan, where he is first recorded in 1506. Certainly

they were not used by his father, Etienne, who is described as a *marchand bourgeois* as late as 1495. The Grolier family claimed descent from Veronese nobility and supposedly established themselves in France in the thirteenth century. Jean's father, Etienne, was a gentleman attached to the house of Orléans, specifically Louis, duc d'Orléans, who attained the crown of France in 1498 as Louis XII, owing to the sudden death of Charles VIII. Etienne was now in an important position as treasurer to the king, who sent him to the duchy of Milan. Before leaving for his duties in Milan he produced one son, our Jean Grolier, born in 1479. In 1510 Jean succeeded his father as treasurer-general of the duchy of Milan.

Jean Grolier of Lyon, Chevalier, Vicomte d'Aguisy – as he became – was treasurer of the French army in Italy, Ambassador to Rome under François I, and Treasurer of France under François I, Henri II, François II and Charles IX. In October 1516, at the age of 37, he married Anne Briçonnet of Brittany. Grolier's own arms consisted of *d'azur, à trois besants d'or en pointe, mis en fasce, accompagnés en chef de trois étoiles d'argent, rangées de même*: on an azure field, three gold bezants accompanied by three silver stars. A bezant (or besant) was originally a gold coin, first struck at Byzantium, and

current in Europe from the ninth century onwards. Heraldically, it became a gold roundel signifying that the bearer had been to the Holy Land. Grolier used these charges within the very distinctive shield in the form of a horse's head-armor. This particular shape of a jousting-shield was found almost exclusively in Italy, and not before the sixteenth century.

After his marriage Grolier used his arms quartered with those of his wife, Anne Briçonnet, *d'azur, à la bande componnée d'or et d'azur de huit pièces, au lion de gueules sur le tout*: eight alternating bands of blue and gold, surmounted by a red lion.

Jean Grolier had no surviving direct male issue, but the family known as Grolier de Servières, in Lyon, used the same coat of arms and produced another well-known collector, a grand-nephew, Antoine.

Preface

BY ERIC HOLZENBERG

Visitors to the Grolier clubhouse are greeted at the street entrance by Jean Grolier's arms in carved stone, and in the first floor lobby by a version in polychrome plaster over the fireplace. But above the level of the first floor visitors look in vain for the Grolier arms, unless they happen to come across a member wearing the Club tie. The Grolier coat of arms, like all heraldic devices, is a wonderful thing to look at: intricate, colorful, a concatenation of symbols all the more attractive for being a bit mysterious – mysterious, at any rate, to those of us unschooled in heraldry. Moreover, the Grolier device is an important reminder of what the Club is: a group of men and women who delight in sharing their passion for books with friends, as did their patron, Jean Grolier. So the apparent scarcity of examples within the Club is a puzzle.

The truth is that, if one knows where to look, versions of the Grolier arms are endlessly repeated in the Club. For although our founders thought it