

# The Pas d'Arms in Burgundian Style

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[Dedicated to my Knight, Duke Conor, K.S.C.A and my Grand-Knight, Duke Fabian, K.S.C.A, O.L., O.P.]

**The origin of the phrase Pas d'Arms:** “The Pageantry and imitation of romance... were echoed in the fifteenth century by the pas d'arms in which the hastiludes [i.e. combat] were given a specific setting... The pas d'arms seems to have originated in a challenger proclaiming his intention to defend a pass or narrow defile... Any knight who wished to travel through the pass had first to fight the challenger and was only allowed to go through if he acquitted himself well.” (*The Tournament in England 1100-1400,*)

**Prologue:** “Chivalry was a more complicated idea than simply ‘fair play’. But there was an ideal of conduct amongst [sic.] knights and barons, and it did surface upon the tournament field... The ideal of a medieval male was then generally called the ‘*preudomme*’ (ultimately from the Latin *probus hommo*, a [proven or] ‘upstanding [man]’). We find what the idea of this sort of admirable man was established as early as early as the *Song of Roland* (c. 1100)...” (*Tournament*, David Crouch)

--He was hardy, i.e. he was strong, tough and uncomplaining.

--He was reliable and was not only a man of his word, but capable.

--He was loyal to his master, but not subservient; a *preudomme* was valued for his independent and sound judgment, and he would tell his lord precisely what he thought in any situation.

--He was courteous and courtly.

--Confident and yet modest.

--Collegial and amiable with others of every station.

Since a baron or knight attended the courts of greater men, they had to be what was called in French *cortois*, or in Latin *curialis* [i.e. courtesy]. “This meant that they had to have a confident and amiable way with other people, great and small alike... To avoid envy, they had always to be modest about their talents and achievements however great they were... [like] William Marshal who was born to be a courtier as much as a soldier.” (*Tournament*, Juliet Barker)

## **I. The Joust, the Tournament and the Pas d'Arms.**

### **A. The Joust:**

1. The beginnings... It has been suggested that the origins of the Joust originated in the judicial duel, where one man risked his body to prove his right over another in connection with some

legal dispute. (*Jousts and Tournaments*, Steven Muhlberger, noting *The Medieval English Kings and the Tournaments*, Juliet Barker and Maurice Keen.) “More likely, jousts grew out of individual confrontations between armies or tournament teams before the groups themselves came into contact.” (*Jousts and Tournaments*, Muhlberger.)

2. The evolution... between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the joust evolved from preliminary fights between champions prior to tournament company melees into a feature of chivalric life. By the 14<sup>th</sup> Century in the time of Charny, these bouts emerged as the favorite marshal exercise of prowess. While professional soldiers scorned jousting as presumptuous and a waste of time, the joust became popular beyond compare as knights sought out the opportunity to take part in deeds of arms to extend their prowess. Jousts took place in a wider social context of festivities. While there were occasions for “pick-up” jousts, most jousts were advertised in advance to attract enthusiasts. (*Jousts and Tournaments*, Muhlberger, noting *The Medieval English Kings and the Tournaments* by Juliet Barker and Maurice Keen.)

3. During the reigns of the Dukes of Burgundy.... “Jousts of peace were increasingly frequent. Thanks to the financial record of the cities of Flanders, we know something about many jousts that are otherwise unrecorded. Some were competitions between the leading citizens, who took up sport in imitation of the nobility; other jousts were for nobles only. Jousts might celebrate such important occasions as a royal marriage or a diplomatic event such as Edward III’s offering of homage to Philip VI.” (*Jousts and Tournaments*, Muhlberger.) “Some forms of jousting... were more noble than others. By the fifteenth century, subtle distinctions were made in heraldic treatises between different forms of chivalric combat. During ‘jousts’ individuals ran lances against each other.” (*Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*.)

4. While jousts were not as valued as Tournaments or Pas d’Arms, not all jousts were equal... e.g., some like the annual “White Bear” joust were prestigious as this event included the presence of Burgundian courtiers, nobles and dukes.

5. From the beginning of Philip the Good’s Reign (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Burgundy) the presence of rulers and courtiers at jousts within town walls became regular; however, these were suspended from 1433 until the early 1443 due to a period of urban rebellion. Once the aftermath of rebellion had subsided, jousting resumed. The high point of Burgundian jousting occurred from 1444 to 1472; jousting and other chivalric events like pas d’arms enjoying the patronage of Duke Phillip the Good and later by his son, Duke Charles the Bold (the 4th Duke of Burgundy). Charles (well known for his marshal prowess) was an enthusiastic jouster until field warfare took him away from the urban centers and the lists.

## **B. The Tournament:**

1. Generally... The tournament (or the tourney) was the classic ‘deed of arms of peace’ in Chaney’s terminology... The original tourney of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century was a confrontation between troops or squadrons of mounted warriors not unlike the battles of the time, using the same techniques. In the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century, tourneys (as opposed to jousts and other deeds of arms) seem to have been reasonably frequent in France and England, but by the time Charny wrote, they had almost ceased to be organized:

- a. Tourneys had become too expensive for hosts.
- b. Changes in battle field tactics made the old tourney melee skills less relevant.
- c. The joust, which emphasized a knight's individual prowess, had become more important and popular.
- d. The 'tourney proper' became a nuisance as opposed to the climax of martial gathering and as such, the tourney had become obsolete except in exceptional opportunities (e.g. in 1342, King Edward III of England held a tournament with a reported 250 knights).
- e. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> Century, Charny, a Burgundian knight in service of the French Crown, still held that Tournaments (Tourneys) were still worthy as 'deeds of arms' to further the skills of the knighthood and for the furtherance of a knight's prowess.

(Jousts and Tournaments, Muhlberger.)

2. Tournaments differing from jousts... "Tournaments' were superior exercises, for they included individual combats with swords as well as lances, and sometimes incorporated team contests (*melees*). They were also dignified by religious solemnities, like attendance at mass on the morning of combat." (From *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*.)

3. There was a "sharp distinction between jousting—'all can joust and join in any knightly sports'—and the tournament proper, to which entry is strictly limited." (*The Knight and Chivalry*.) This typically German view of the tournament as the province of aristocrats may be based upon the tournament companies that enjoyed popularity among the German aristocracy and did not necessarily include tournaments in the Burgundian state; however, as the Tournament gave way to the pas d'arms, the pas d'arms became the province of the aristocracy.

### **C. The Pas d'Arms:**

"A third form, the *pas d'arms*, emerging in the early fifteenth century, adapted stories from romances, and involved an individual knight taking on all comers in various forms of engagement (on foot or on horse; with lances, swords or axes) and could also include melees. In theory, it was the most exclusive form of combat of all; only those who could prove four blood lines of nobility were supposed to take part." (*Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*.)

1. A pas d'arms was an event of high drama where the chivalric combat was merely the centerpiece of the "event". One of the trends in Burgundian chivalric activity was the pas d'arms which excluded all but the most noble from taking part. Between 1449 and 1472, the court of the Dukes of Burgundy held pas d'arms in Bruges at which citizens were spectators rather than participants as only nobles took part. It must be noted that these large-scale inter-urban pas d'arms were relatively rare except for the yearly May festivities in Bruges. (*Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*.)

2. Rulers utilized these pas d'arms to demonstrate magnificence. "Princely patronage was an important aspect of the tournament, by the early fifteenth century, led to an increasing emphasis

on splendor, display and literary framework.” The magnificent costume jousts of Edward III’s tournaments were outshone by the theatrical tournaments which appear fifty years later.” (From *The Knight and Chivalry*.) This was no different during the reigns of Duke Phillip the Good and his son, Duke Charles the Bold. (Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges.)

3. In Burgundy, the pas d’arms was more closely linked to urban life and government; Burgundian town councils like those of Bruges had their own reasons for helping to fund pas d’arms, tournaments or jousts even though they oftentimes subsidized these events; these events attracted wealthy princes and nobles (i.e. the cities/towns effectively became medieval “destination locations” for the wealthy elements of society) and ultimately, the events promoted the “honor” of the city or town. As such, while Duke Phillip and his son, Duke Charles supported these pas d’arms and while these pas d’arms attracted princely nobles, the urban centers loaned money and/or help subsidize these pas d’arms as it was in their best interest in terms of drawing wealthy customers and fostering civic pride. Even as the urban centers competed for royal favor, the Dukes of Burgundy richly benefitted from this arrangement. (From Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges.)

4. The relationship between the pas d’arms and the “romance” utilized a complex depiction of a theatrical productions production complete with settings that formed the underlying story; in this type of carefully planned tournament/pas d’arms, nobles performed deeds of arms in a theatricalized setting. The extent of the theatrical production varies from being a question of thematically oriented props and a fictional pretext for performing the arms to a full-blown dramatic including additional actors to supplement the production. The “chapitres” which specifically outline the rules of the pas d’arms were sometimes composed in romance or allegory form. Several historians have criticized the “romance influence” aspect of these pas d’arms as “empty gestures” constituting a sign of the decline of chivalry in terms of war-time or battle and a manifestation of medieval decadence. (*The Poetics of the Tournament in Late Medieval Chronicle and Romance*, Catherine R. Blunk, noting *Chivalry*, Maurice Keen and Collette Boeaume’s introduction to her translation of *Le Livre des Faits du Bon Chevalier*, Jacque de Lalaing.)

## **II. The Influence of Medieval Literature on Pas d’Arms.**

A. “Through the influence of romances, the quest for individual prowess had become the overriding theme of chivalric ambitions by the fifteenth century, and the most successful secular orders of chivalry reflected this: it was those with an exclusive membership, such as the Garter and the Golden Fleece, which outlasted the more amorphous larger orders like the French Order of the Star. At the outset, the Order of the Garter had successfully capitalized on the camaraderie of the tournament team to produce a body of knights with a strong corporate identity: a hundred years later, its exclusiveness appealed to a different sense of chivalric values which placed individual achievement above all else.” (*The Knight and Chivalry*, Barber.) The Order of the Golden Fleece exceeded all other orders in terms of success due in large part to the wealth, energy and political acumen of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy and their Imperial and Spanish heirs. Most of the orders barely survive the King who founded them, the exception being the English Order of the Garter (600 years of continuous existence) and the Burgundian Order of the

Golden Fleece. Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy (the third Duke of Burgundy) inaugurated the Order of the Golden Fleece to commemorate his marriage in 1430 to Isabella of Portugal; Duke Philip's son who was to become the fourth Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, was eventually brought into this order as his martial prowess was well known.

B. During the 14th and 15th centuries, the chivalric ideal of a noble knight clashed with new and more deadly forms of warfare. During the Hundred Years' War companies of low-born yeomen armed with longbows (trained from youth to develop the strength and accuracy) could wound and knights from a distance. The battles of Poitiers, Crecy and Agincourt, changed the course of warfare and with the advance of gunpowder, even relatively untrained common soldiers could destroy massed cavalry charges. Pike formations introduced by the Swiss could effectively repel massed cavalry charges with a simple sixteen foot spear of ash. (Duke Charles the Bold suffered his first military defeats at the hands of these Swiss pikemen and he eventually fell in battle to the Swiss as he refused to recognize that these pike formations more than adequately countered mounted knights and mounted warriors.)

C. As such, the noble classes began to differentiate themselves in "games" of chivalry that mirrored courtly chivalric romances of the 12th century. For the noble classes the line between reality and fiction blurred as the deeds they read about became re-enactments.

D. This romanticized "Chivalric Revival" drew upon manifested itself in the splendor of the pas d'arms which utilized iconic aspects of the Chivalric ideal of set forth in the Arthurian stories of Chretien de Troyes, sagas like the *Song of Roland* and legends like the Roman miles Honorius who defended the bridge leading to the city of Rome against an entire army of barbarians or Comnenas the "Frankish Knight" waiting at a crossroads for the sole purpose of finding another knight to challenge. The Arthurian motifs were particularly popular: the quest (Sir Galahad and Sir Percival seeking the Holy Grail), the vow to defend a lady (Sir Lancelot), the traveling knight errant, a knight who holds a bridge (Sir Lancelot) so that he might challenge another passing knight (turn the tables of this challenge, e.g. Sir Yvain who fights and defeats a knight who vows to protect a magic fountain).

[Caveat: these stylized pas d'arms did not begin in Burgundy as one of the first and most famous of these thematic tournaments was the Castilian "Passo Honroso" (which was to last 30 days or until 300 lances were broken), held at a bridge at Orbigo by Suero de Quinones and his companions in July 1435 described in detail by Pedro Rodriguez de Lena. This demonstration of power and wealth of the Castilian nobility drew challengers from Aragon, Leon, Catalan and as far as Germany. While it is clear that these "Burgundian festivals" were imitating the "Passo Honroso" as well as earlier and less well recorded Spanish, French and Flemish Festivals, but the Burgundians elevated the level of pageantry and theater that surrounded the actual tournament.]

E. The number of knights holding the field could include an entire tournament company or it could be a single combatant, e.g. Jacques de Lalaing, councilor and chamberlain of Philip the Good of Burgundy at the pas d'arms of the "Fountain of Tears".

F. Despite the death of Charles the Bold, the last Duke of Burgundy at the hands of the Swiss, the Order of the Golden Fleece and the concept of pas d'arms continued, supported by the Imperial and Spanish heirs to the Dukes of Burgundy (Maximilian and then the Hapsburgs), but this chivalric display of opulence lost some of its luster as the "exaggerated concerns with outward forms is a symptom of loss of contact with serious values... chivalry was losing touch with ideals and becoming concerned solely with externals." (From *Chivalry*.) The connection between the caste conscious tournament and the even more exclusive pas d'arms was "symptomatic of the loss with and confidence in" the values of chivalry and the measure of living up to the standard of attaining the ideal of being a worthy '*preudomme*'.

### **III. The Burgundian Pas d'Arms (Examples).**

A. Olivier de la March included an account of Les Pas de l'Arbre Charlemagne, near Dijon, in 1443 in his memoirs and Monstrelet includes the chapitres (rules) for this pas d'arms in his chronicle. This pas d'arms was held at the "Charlemagne" tree outside of Dijon for two weeks in the summer of 1443. According to the Chapitres, two shields were hung on the tree corresponding to the types of arms to be performed: a black shield represented mounted combat and a purple shield represented combat on foot. Olivier's account indicates the following

1. Two units faced each other and there is a brief mention of a post-combat meal.
2. The Duke of Burgundy sat as judge of the field, but he did not stay for the duration of the pas.
3. The account does not develop the "Charlemagne" motif other than the name, but it can be concluded that this historical/romantic figure of a warrior king represented the theme.
4. The account does not include any mention of ladies providing inspiration.
5. There is some religious iconography, i.e. "Notre Dame"/"Our Lady" (the Virgin Mary) and St. Anne (the mother of the Virgin Mary).
6. The pattern of the pas consisted of the following:
  - a. The name of the visiting competitor (venan from the French venir "to come") along with a description of him and his arms, clothing, armor, horse, his "character" within the drama and his physical appearance.
  - b. A description of his retainers and those who accompany him as well as their horses.
  - c. The name of the home team competitor (tenan from the French tenir "to hold"), along with a description of him and his arms, clothing, armor, horse, his "character" within the drama and his physical appearance.
  - d. A description of his retainers and those who accompany him as well as their horses.
  - e. Allusions to the presentations (drama).
  - f. Distribution of weapons.
7. Upon completion of the round or "run", the results were noted and judged.

B. Le Pas de la Belle Pelerine was held in 1449 near Saint-Omer for six weeks in 1449 by Jehan de Luxemborg, described as the “bastard de Saint Pol”, Seigneur de Halboarding, conseiller et chambellan du Duc de Bourgoigne. The uniqueness of this pas d’arms lies in the fact that most of the combat is recorded as being on foot. The pas gets its name from the story of the beautiful pilgrim who composes a letter to a valiant and kind knight requesting that he accompany her to Rome on pilgrimage in order to ensure her safety from villains. The knight met by this lady pilgrim when he saves her from villains early in her pilgrimage. Six squires dress as pilgrims and Haulbourdin is referred to only as “le Chevalier de la Pelgrine” throughout the pas; however, only one knight accepted his challenge during the six week period; however, a second knight answered the challenge, but due to illness, this part of the pas was held in Bruges later. Other than most of the runs being fought on foot, the standard conventions of the pas, as noted above, were in place.

C. Le Pas de l’Arbre d’or was held in Bruges in 1468 was held in honor of the wedding of Margaret of York and the fourth Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold. It spanned from Sunday July 3 through Monday July 11<sup>th</sup>. The pas included jousts (a favorite of Charles). Due to the extremely festive nature of this event, two observations must be made:

1. The theatrical event surrounding this event, which was based on the theme of the Golden Tree, is extremely elaborate and dramatic.
2. Unlike the male centric pas d’arms, women are clearly an important presence as spectators; nevertheless, their presence does not approach the female role of the romance tournament convention; the presence of women as spectators to the pas has been attributed to the fact that in the center of this pas was a wedding. Other than the inclusion of a female presence, the conventions of this pas is fairly standard.

D. Le Pas de la Dame Sauvaige was held in Ghent in 1470 by Claude de Vauldray, Seigneur de l’Aigle from January 14<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>. Three noblemen jousted per day on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday and four jousted on the following Sunday, the last day of the pas. The interruption appears to be due to a feast on that Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The Duke of Burgundy was present and his arrival coincided with a feste; however, the feste was not a major part of the pas. The pattern of the fighting varies from other pas d’arms as there was a stipulation that first run would include lances followed by sword fighting on the following run. The theatrical aspects of this pas did not include the combatants. At the end of this “emprise”, two young ladies present the names of the combatants to the Duke of Burgundy and the Duke thanks the combatants; at the ensuing banquet, prizes are awarded and there was dancing open to the townspeople of Ghent in the town hall.

E. Le Pas de la Fontaine des Pleurs took place in Chalon-sur-saone in 1449-1450. Jean Le Fevre de Saint-Remy, known as the king of arms Toison-d’Or, acted as the judge of this event on behalf of the Duke. This pas followed the standard Burgundian conventions:

1. The name of the visiting competitor (venan) along with a description of him and his arms, clothing, armor, horse, his “character” within the drama and his physical appearance.

2. A description of his retainers and those who accompany him as well as their horses.
3. The name of the home team competitor (tenan), along with a description of him and his arms, clothing, armor, horse, his “character” within the drama and his physical appearance.
4. A description of his retainers and those who accompany him as well as their horses.
5. Allusions to the presentations (drama).
6. Distribution of weapons.
7. Upon completion of the round or “run”, the judge throws down his baton; the results were noted and judged.
8. Upon completion of the pas, the Judge throws down the baton marking the end of the combat and there is final judging.
9. It is noted that the combatants made the sign of the cross before combat and that this religious convention was observed by all combatants.
10. This description notes that at the end of the combat, the two men would touch (hug) and this would represent their “brotherhood” (“frère”).
11. The descriptions of this pas had extensive notations of heraldic arms and heraldry. While this extensive description marks this pas, it is perceived by scholars that this was fairly usual and contained in other manuscripts simply as marking the clothing, shields and armor of the combatants.

F. Le Pas du Perron Fée was held in Bruges in 1463 when the Duke of Burgundy granted authorization to Philippe de Lalaing to hold a pas d’arms. The chapitres are highly Romanesque and recount how a poor knight looking for lodgings happens upon a pillar on which a horn is hanging. The knight follows the instructions inscribed on the pillar and blows the horn only to be imprisoned by a dwarf. The Dame de Perron Fae (Lady Fairy of Perron?) offers him freedom on the condition that he will hold a pas d’arms on the second Sunday of each month. Three shields are hung on trees representing different forms of combat:

1. The first being jousting with the lance (until a lance is broken) followed by sword fighting with 27 counted blows or hits during the first four days of the pas.
2. The second represents nine courses to be run in war armor and will take place during the second four days of the pas.
3. This third represents eleven runs at lances in jousting armor.

G. In short, there is no one “Burgundian” pas d’arms; rather, they all differed to some degree, but as to the standard conventions, most of the descriptions retained these as noted above. It is also important to reiterate that while ladies were probably present, they did not always play a major role in the pas; furthermore, there is little if any evidence that the ladies provided formal “inspiration” to the combatants as there was no conventional combat in honor of a ladies honor or favor with the exception of religious motifs. That being said, women were present in some or



most of the pas and it would clearly ring true that the best and most hardy combatants obtained the attention of the ladies present; however, that is conjecture and not noted in the extant period chronicles of these six pas d'arms as noted above and as reference by *The Poetics of the Tournament in Late Medieval Chronicle and Romance*, Catherine R. Blunk.

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