

Chapter 6: Heraldry

This chapter first appeared in April 2009, in a somewhat different form, in Number 226 of *The Flag Bulletin*, the principal scholarly journal of vexillology (the study of flags). A copy of that issue will be sent to Yale with the Supplement. Almost all the pictures are from my heraldic collection. I drew the pictures of my arms, flags, and ermine spots in Section C.

“Heraldry is the short hand of history”

J. R. Planché, *The Pursuivant of Arms* (1842)

A: Heraldry and me¹

Where should I begin on this fascinating topic, which has been a constant source of pleasure and learning for me for 60 years? Heraldry is an infinitely rich study, the intersection of art and history, an auxiliary science of history, art history, political science and semiotics, a force in every area of art (“fine” and applied) in almost every province of Europe for the past 850 years, and a powerful engine of beauty for those who know how to recognize it.

The trick here will be to explain my interest in the subject without explaining the subject itself. To ease this problem for readers at Yale, I will send up as a Supplement a copy of *Simple Heraldry Cheerfully Illustrated*, a slender volume by Iain Moncrieffe and Dan Pottinger (Edinburgh, 1953). It is the most



¹ The illustration, from 1556, is a historiated initial T from an arms patent in the College of Arms in London. It shows an English heraldic official, Thomas Hawley, Clarenceaux King of Arms. His tabard shows the Tudor royal arms. That he looks a lot like me is purely coincidental.

charming and delightful introduction there is to this study, and can be read with satisfaction in half an hour. I buy copies of this book in quantities to give away. It gives a flavor of the subject without being technical.

I suppose I will have to say *something* about the subject generally for this chapter to be comprehensible. Heraldry is a system of recognition signs and patterns. These signs are typically projected onto a shield. Heraldic patterns (called for convenience *arms*) are made of combinations of geometric forms and stylized images, usually of animals or artifacts. These signs and patterns attach to individuals, families, territories, and corporations such as cities, dioceses and colleges. They can be combined and altered in meaningful ways according to systems (for example *differencing* and *marshalling*) which vary according to place and time.

Heraldry is a European art form, and efforts to export it to other countries (except for some former British territories) have been superficial and unsuccessful. Other comparable sign systems, such as those in Japan and medieval Islam, differ in significant ways from European heraldry. In the United States the association of heraldry with European aristocracy caused a deliberate rejection of heraldic forms, as can be seen in the quasi-realistic style of the seals adopted by American states and cities after independence, typically and boringly carried on the modern flags of American states and cities.

There is little understanding of heraldry in America, and little interest in or appreciation of it. What information there is has been almost entirely derived from English practice, and it could hardly be realized from the materials available in American public libraries, for instance, that there is heraldry anywhere in the world outside of the British Isles.

>Heraldry as a recognition system had a military origin and appeared relatively abruptly in many parts of western Europe in the middle of the 12th century. After its obsolescence as a military system it continued in the mock warfare of the tournament and was used for manifesting individual identity (and sometimes affinity) by members of the upper classes, for example on seals. Its use spread beyond the warrior class to churchmen, corporations and women, and in some countries beyond the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie and even peasantry. It survives and indeed flourishes today everywhere in western and central Europe, and its use in Eastern Europe is reviving after the fall of Communism.

In addition to the shield, the crests worn on their helmets by knights at tournaments became an important element in the heraldic system, with variations in many countries. Other ornaments external to the shield, such as supporters and coronets, also found a place in heraldic expression. Sometimes heraldic badges and elements from the shield (called in Italian *mobili*) are displayed without the shield. All these elements can be combined in ingenious and beautiful ways.

Related to heraldry are other studies, notably flags, awards (including orders, decorations, medals and medal-ribbons), insignia and regalia, graphic signs, and symbols and iconography. All of these have in common a non-verbal denotative element, and flags and medal-ribbons share the power of communication by line and color. It is artificial to distinguish among these fields, which I regard as one unified study. My view on this is unusual – indeed I am one of the very few people, if not the only one, who attends the conventions of heraldists, flag-scholars, and medal collectors alike.

I was attracted very early to this unified study – I have found that many people who went on to become scholars in the field began as children. One source of early imprinting, for me as for others, was the flag plate in the unabridged dictionary. I have seen children's drawings of simple flags (like that of Chile, for instance) tucked into unabridged dictionaries – they were much like the ones I made as a child. I paid a lot of attention to this plate at the time, fascinated not only by the information and the denotative quality of the designs, but also by the very arrangement on the page of many images of the same size, but with subtly differing patterns of color and line. The unmediated pleasure of that stimulus may have been as important as its informational component. Below are two examples – one compares Italian Army collar insignia,² and the other shows the flags of the Malayan state of Kelantan.³ If these thrill you, then you know what I mean. For more on the pleasures of heraldry, see Part B of this chapter.

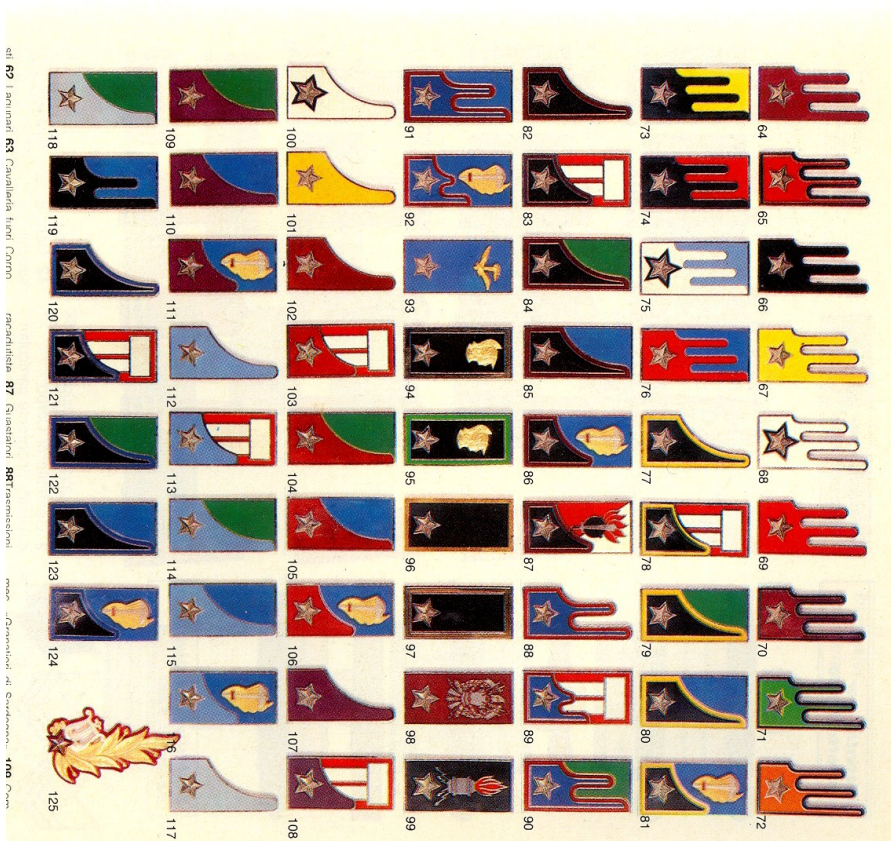
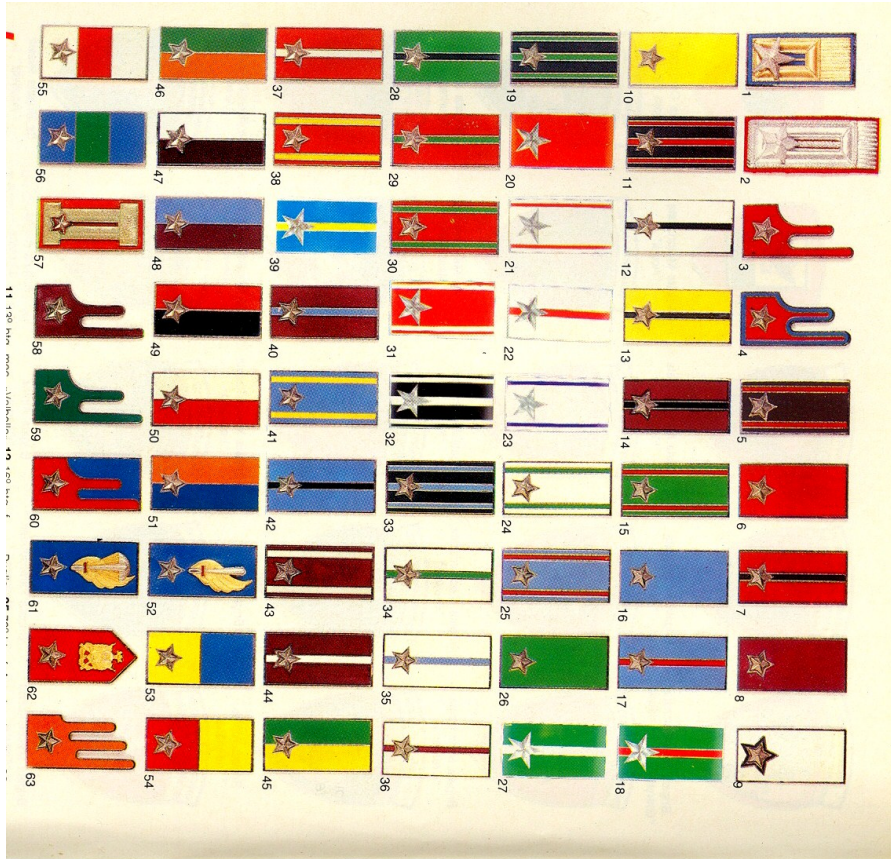
Elementary flag books like the British series *Flags of the World*,⁴ and later Preben Kannik's *The Flag Book* (New York, 1957), available in most libraries in my youth, helped me develop my interest in flags. The *National Geographic* published some



² From "Il Nostro Esercito," (Rome, 1987), an Italian army recruiting pamphlet.

³ From *Souvenir Coronation Celebrations of His Highness ... Sultan Ibrahim* (Kuala Lumpur, 1961) p. 27.

⁴ E.g., H. Gresham Carr, ed., *Flags of the World* (London, 1953).





special illustrated issues which were important to my generation of flag scholars as well.⁵

Also important was *Flags of Maritime Nations*, the U.S. Navy's official flag book (Washington, 1899), a remarkably beautiful production with rich lithography, an important instrument in my study of the subject. My grandmother gave me this book around 1950, when I was six; we bought it at the Argosy Bookshop on 59th Street. I must have asked for it, because why else would she have thought to buy it for me?

- Another reason I am sure I was well into this study at an early age is that in the second grade (age 7) I had a teacher named Mrs. Durham, and I remember drawing for her, in color, the arms of the City of Durham in England (right). I must have been fairly well along in my studies by that time to be able to produce an image like this from memory.



I have continued my study of flags with unabated fascination to this day and have accumulated a great many books and pamphlets on the subject, some of them quite scarce. Flags in the modern national sense are more recent than heraldry, and come in many interesting flavors – not only national flags but military and government flags of

⁵ For example the September 1934 “Flags of the World” issue.

many kinds, military rank flags, flags of shipping lines, and so on. Signal flags have little interest for me – their denotative content is much different from flags which have specific meanings, similar to the difference between a Chinese ideograph (fun) and an alphabetic letter (more practical but not as much fun).

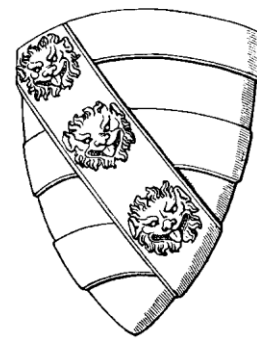
Although its property of non-verbal communication was one of the main attractions of heraldry for me, paradoxically another attraction was the complex and recondite heraldic vocabulary and grammar, by which I mean not only the grammar of *blazon* (the protocol for verbal description of an armorial display) but also the grammar of heraldic composition.

In my understanding of this subject I was guided, as were so many others, by the Reverend Charles Boutell (1812-1877), an English archaeologist who wrote a classic 19th century English heraldic treatise. In earlier centuries heraldry was, like many other subjects, taught by recounting unexamined traditions. The sequence of English treatises dates at least to 1394 and includes such titles as the *Boke of St. Albans*, by Dame Juliana Berners (1486), mostly about hawking and hunting but also including material on “diuysynge of Cote armours” [devising of coats of arms]. Later “authorities” such as Guillim and others merely repeated what had been said before, including many elements more or less made up, such as symbolic meanings for various heraldic charges, “abatements” for specific offenses against honor, and other rubbish.

But in the 1840s English antiquaries began looking at heraldry with a more scientific method, exemplified by Planché’s book *The Pursuivant of Arms, or Heraldry Founded Upon Facts* (London, 1842). Planché and others went back to primary sources – medieval arms rolls, seals, coins, tombs, tomb brasses and stall plates, architectural monuments, and the like – and reconstructed the study of heraldry based on empirical inquiry and authentic records. The work which came to be called *Boutell’s Heraldry* was first published in 1863; my childhood copy (also bought for me by my grandmother at Argosy) was the 8th edition (1898), revised by S.T. Aveling. It had superb line drawings (see examples at right), many taken from original artifacts and a lot of them dating back to the first edition. I well remember its textured red cover with the gold-impressed Victorian royal arms. I later learned that similar efforts were made in other languages, especially German.



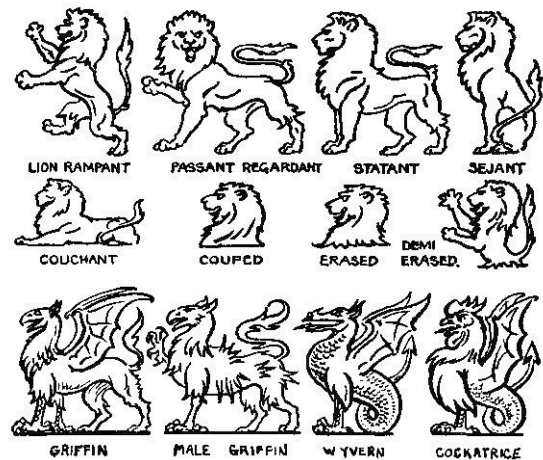
183. Shield of PRINCE JOHN OF ELTHAM, 1336, in Westminster Abbey



183d. PEMBRIDGE shield at Clehonger

I was probably around six when my grandmother gave me this book. I could read fluently at that age (see Chapter 5), and I taught myself heraldry by a thorough study of

Boutell. As noted heraldry has a highly elaborated specialized vocabulary, derived in large part from Norman French. Red, for example, is *gules*, blue is *azure*, and black is *sable*. A diagonal figure is a *bend*, or going the other way a *bend sinister*. Three red vertical stripes on white, forming seven bands of color, is *argent, three pallets gules*, but an even number of white and red vertical bands is *paly of six* [or eight, or whatever] *argent and gules*. There are *ordinaries* and *subordinaries* and *common charges*, all with exotic names. A lion can be *rampant* or *passant* or even *couchant* depending on its position, and *queue-fourché* if it has a forked tail. There are three ways to describe an animal's head shown parted from its body: *couped* (neck cut in a straight line), *erased* (torn off at the neck leaving a ragged edge), and *caboshed* (neck not visible at all).⁶ There are dozens of words for lines of partition, such as *dancetty*, *raguly* and *embattled*. And on and on, indeed, on enough to fill up a thick book like *Boutell's Heraldry*.



I found all this fascinating and challenging. It was not just fussy antiquarianism, either. The technical vocabulary was needed for precise description. With this vocabulary, and an understanding of blazon, it is possible to communicate a design very exactly without pictures. Many years later I encountered the same phenomenon in studying law, where a seemingly forbidding technical vocabulary and system of formal phrasing allowed expression to be exact to an exceptional degree.

- I note in passing that the English terms for the subject are rather confusing. The word *arms*, for example, is ambiguous, meaning also *weapons* and sometimes even *warfare*, and is inconveniently plural in form. *Coat of arms* refers both to a personal shield-based design and to an armorial surcoat worn over armor. *Heraldic* as a synonym for *armorial* gets confused with the functions of a herald (quite a different thing), because heralds supervised the development of the system. A heraldic scholar is a *heraldist*, an awkward term indeed. *Armory* is a very obscure word in English, except when it means a drill hall for the National Guard. All this is handled much better in German, where the word *Wappen* means what we call *arms* in the heraldic sense, *Wappenwesen* is the grammar and structure of heraldry, *Wappenkunst* means heraldic art, and *Wappenwissenschaft* means the study and knowledge of heraldry. A heraldist is a *Heraldiker*, a much clearer word in German than in English.

⁶ The illustration is from Gladys Davidson, *Tabard and Shield* (London, 1937), page 80.

Whenever Boutell got too technical for me to understand I turned to *A Heraldic Vademecum*, by John B. O. Richards (London, 1936), which I now recognize as a fairly routine primer but that's what I needed then. Eventually I figured it all out. After 60 years I can now picture a coat of arms very clearly in color by reading a blazon in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish or Portuguese. I can't read a newspaper in all these languages, but by now I have learned the technical vocabulary and the conventions of blazon well enough to get by.

In Paris in 1952 my parents bought me a set of 24 beautifully lithographed postcards with the arms of French provinces and cities. I was not quite eight years old at the time, and this is further proof that I must have started my heraldic studies well before then, or those postcards (which I wish I still had) would not have been thought a suitable present. I studied those cards very carefully – they were a early introduction to non-British heraldry.

There were (or were supposed to be) all sorts of rules about coats of arms. One of the marks of a heraldic amateur is excessive concern with whether an armorial composition follows the rules or not. For example, it was said to be forbidden to place metal on metal (that is gold [yellow] on silver [white], or the reverse), or a “color” (that is red, blue, green or black) on another color. Later, especially when I began to branch out from English heraldry to continental systems, with the help of Woodward and Burnett's *Treatise on Heraldry British and Foreign* (London, 1891), I learned that these rules, while well-grounded in considerations of visibility, were by no means the laws of nature they were presented to be in the English sources. In fact Archbishop Bruno Heim (1911-2003), one of the greatest heraldic artists of the 20th century, wrote a whole book called *Or and Argent* (1994) devoted entirely to showing that this rule was not a rule at all, but a custom very often disregarded in countries other than England.

This is not to say that there are not rules of *taste*, of which the alternation of metal and color is certainly one. Modern coats of arms, for example, tend to be very cluttered as people try to put in symbols of whatever is important to them. Sometimes they are even quartered, with a symbol in each quarter, reflecting a gross misunderstanding of what quartering is really useful for. The same is true of the flags adopted with depressing regularity by ignorant local authorities in the United States. Even in Europe, with its rich heraldic tradition, towns and regions now fly flags with trendy modern logos indistinguishable from those used (just as unfortunately) by corporate conglomerates.

This need not be. In designing arms and flags it is wise to be guided by the simplicity of medieval arms. It is not good practice to quarter a field and drop some device or other into each quarter – a microscope, say, and an outline of a factory, and a local monument, and a set of initials. Modern artifacts like locomotives don't look good in armorial compositions, or on flags. It is a sound rule of thumb not to put anything on a shield in a form unknown in the 14th century. A wheel alludes to transport better than a locomotive; a clarion (a medieval musical instrument) symbolizes music better than a saxophone or a

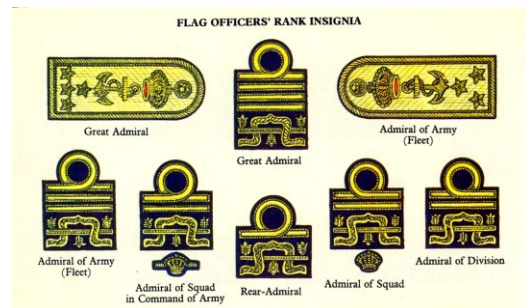
musical note; an arrow is better than a machine gun. Use of letters or words on shields is not generally a good idea, although they do it a lot in Spain. An appreciation of the heraldic conventions of different European countries enlarges the palette of a heraldic designer. You don't necessarily need a helmet and crest in the English style, for example – they don't usually use them in France. We learn also from medieval arms that everything on a shield does not have to have a particular meaning.



Orders, medals and decorations (OMD – there are technical differences among these three categories with which I will not trouble the reader) are part of the same interest. Medal ribbons have in common with heraldry a specific denotation by means of line and color only. OMD themselves are often extremely beautiful objects. Orders may be elaborately wrought in gold and enamel, and medals are shaped in bas relief and their designs often inscribed in a circle, a graceful form which gives me a particular thrill. OMD are closely tied to historical events and national symbolism. The original foundation of this part of the study for me was *Ribbons and Medals*, by H. Tapprell Dorling (London, 1956 ed.), an English book with wonderful line drawings, learned text, and a great color ribbon section. I have books now with at least some

coverage of almost every country in the world, and deep coverage of the United States and most European countries.⁷

Military insignia are another branch of this study – they share with heraldry an exact denotation with (usually) iconographic elements rather than explicit legends. It is great to be able to identify a lieutenant commander in the Uruguayan navy from his uniform – and if you don't know why, it's going to be hard for me to explain it to you. The National



Geographic published issues with great coverage of American insignia during World War I⁸ and again during World War II⁹ – these resources are well known to *aficionados*, as are Guido Rosignoli's series of insignia books.¹⁰ I have coverage of most European

⁷ The illustration shows the 1932 pattern of the Medal of Honor of the Cherifian [Moroccan] Police, from Pierre Rousseau, *Ordres et Décorations de l'Empire Chérifien au Temps du Protectorat Français au Maroc 1912-1956* (Versailles, 2005), page 182.

⁸ In the December 1919 issue.

⁹ In three issues (June, October and December 1943), combined in one volume called *Insignia and Decorations of the United States Armed Forces* (Washington, 1943), and reissued in revised form the following year.

¹⁰ E.g., *Army Badges and Insignia of World War 2* (2 volumes; New York, 1972, 1975).

countries and many others in my library. Most national systems are variations on just a few basic systems (American, British, French, Russian, Italian, Japanese, and a few others).¹¹



Symbols and iconography include many different fields, from graphic symbols used in printing to symbols in the broader sense (as used in art and decoration), religious and secular symbolism (attributes of saints, for example, and Buddhist and Masonic symbols), and many subtopics like tartans, cattle brands, pottery marks, academic hoods, writing systems, and club ties. I have been studying in this field since childhood also – I paid as much attention to the unabridged dictionary pages on signs and symbols as I did to the flag plates.¹²

In the 1980s, while I lived in Cape Cod, I made several attempts to write about heraldry. I had the time then, but I didn't yet have a word processor, which meant I had to use a typewriter and literally cut and paste text. I also didn't have a copier (although in a pinch I could use one at an insurance office a mile away), and color copiers were almost unheard of anywhere. Also my heraldic library was much smaller than it is now, with much less foreign material.

For these reasons among others my efforts to write about heraldry did not get very far. In 1990 I went to London to speak with Christopher's contacts at Quarto, a book packager, about a book I outlined for them tentatively titled *Heraldry for the Senses*. They were interested. But they were very restrictive about the time frame for delivering the manuscript, and in the number of pictures they would allow me to include. So nothing came of that either.

Later I got a computer, a color copier, and a scanner, but I found myself writing for a living (see Chapter 27B) and did not feel like doing any more writing than I had to. However, when I retired as a lawyer I started writing heraldic articles (all of which will be included in the Supplement). I may return to a book project.

I did produce two longish pieces of heraldic writing during the Cape Cod period. They were both very crude due to the materials I had to work with (typewriter, gluestick, colored pencils, spiral notebook). But they had their merits, and they too will go in with the Supplements. One was a small book called *New Flags for the States*. For historical

¹¹ The illustration on the preceding page shows rank insignia of Italian admirals during the late Fascist period, from *Guido Rosignoli, Naval and Marine Badges and Insignia of World War 2* (Poole, England, 1980), plate 34.

¹² The illustration shows, within an ornamental border, the mark of an English clothier, from a stone monument, 1505. From F. A. Girling, *English Merchants' Marks* (London 1964).

reasons, including but not limited to the anti-heraldic reaction after the Revolution, most American state flags are pretty bad. They typically feature the state seal (itself usually pretty bad also) on a blue background. This makes them dull, and also almost indistinguishable from a distance. My idea was to redesign most of the state flags using proper principles of flag design. Some good ones (Maryland, Hawaii, Texas, District of Columbia) I kept as they were; for some others (Alabama, California) I kept the basic elements but strengthened the design; and for still others I either restored a historic flag or created a wholly new design. I still have hopes for this book, which would need a new manuscript and more professionally drawn illustrations. But it is not impossible that it could see print some day. I will send the draft to Yale as a Supplement.

More problematic was *Royal Standards*. This was an ambitious project for examining the distinguishing flags used by sovereigns, in Europe and elsewhere, and analyzing the symbols and heraldic images they contained. These flags are among the most complex and beautiful anywhere, and it seemed to me that if I could show what they were about, they would be at least as interesting as the coffee-table books I had seen on such topics as cigar boxes and fruit box labels and hooked rugs.¹³ I produced a sample chapter, on Denmark's royal standard, which also included the closely related (for dynastic reasons) standards of Greece and the former German state of Oldenburg. But the book was too ambitious, especially given the cost problems of using copyrighted images, although I may return to it too some day and see what I can produce with older source materials and new equipment. I'll send this draft to Yale also.

A word on my heraldic library. I have been collecting for decades. There is little left of my first heraldic collection, but when I began taking this subject seriously again in my 30s I began collecting in earnest, and have not stopped since. I have about 12 linear feet of flag books, and about the same number on symbols and iconography, and about the same for pamphlets in pamphlet files. I have at least 25 linear feet on OMD and insignia, and this portion of the collection is catalogued – I made the catalogue to avoid buying duplicates. The Catalogue of Medal Books will go up with the Supplements. I have many times more material on heraldry, including general works



¹³ The standard of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and the central design of that of the Russian emperor, are shown in this chapter.

and monographs of specific topics, works on heraldic art, and hundreds of books and pamphlets on heraldry of particular countries. Cataloguing is in progress; partial picture above. There are thousands of titles in about 40 languages in this collection, many of them very beautiful and some rather rare.

I have a number of auxiliary book and pamphlet collections on related subjects such as coins, regalia, and decorative motifs. Coins, for example, often have heraldic designs, and their dates permit exact documentation of stylistic changes. Regalia are depicted in heraldic compositions such as sovereign arms and medals, and it is helpful to study the original object as well as its schematic representation. These beautiful objects can be interesting subjects in themselves, for example St. Stephen's Crown of Hungary on which I have several detailed works. The more I study these interrelated collections, the more I learn about all these subjects and the connections among them. For more on my collections, see Chapters 4.D and 29.B.

I also have a collection of heraldic art on philatelic covers (a *cover* is an envelope that has passed through the mail). These are mostly special envelopes intended to carry postage stamps on their first day of issue (or to mark a particular event) so collectors can have them postally used on that day, with a special cancellation. They are called *first day* or *event* covers, and have special designs on the left-hand side. These designs are called *cachets*, and they are



what I collect the covers for – I am not interested in the first day status of the cover and not all that much in the stamps. First day cachets are an important but naïve and little-known source of contemporary heraldic art, probably the sole remaining non-aristocratic source of commissions for heraldic artists outside the military. I have more than 4200 of these covers, also catalogued – the handlist will go up with the Supplements. The covers give me a lot of pleasure. I have learned a lot about heraldic art from the good and the bad examples in the cachets. I grab a handful and study them – often the same design is rendered by different hands on the stamp, the cancel and the cachet, offering stylistic issues to reflect on. Sometimes the designs are not just coats of arms or flags, but emblematic fantasias which support extended reveries. A lot of fun for about a dollar each.

B. Heraldic Pleasures

The original attraction for me of heraldry and flags included:

- Bright colors and vivid forms.

- Hard lines and sharp boundaries.
- The ability to communicate specific meanings without words.
- An exhilarating mixture of uniformity and variation. A shield, for example, was a simple form, but the patterns that could be projected onto it were limitless.
- After I started exploring heraldry, I also liked the specialized vocabulary and grammar. As I mastered it, this gave me my first taste of the satisfactions of expertise.

The more I thought about the subject, though, the more I came to understand the pleasures of heraldry to be basically of two kinds: mediated and unmediated. Unmediated pleasures, such as those of balance and proportion, appear to come directly to our brains without needing specific knowledge.

I am not enough of an evolutionary biologist to know where unmediated pleasures originate. When I see boys enjoying video games, I recognize them as young primates practicing such practical animal skills as hand-eye coordination, sensing of movement, and hunting techniques. These are obviously adaptive behaviors dating back to very early times, arboreal times for our species and probably earlier. Why does it feel good? Because we are wired to enjoy these things. Those of us who were not good at sensing movement were eaten by leopards and did not reproduce. These behaviors and satisfactions don't need to be mediated through anything – video games are designed to produce pleasures our brains are already adapted to enjoy.

Pattern recognition, an important element in flags and heraldry, seems similarly traceable to adaptive behaviors. And the others? Is the pleasure we get in a balanced, harmonious composition traceable to the need for balance as we swung through the trees back then? Maybe, who knows? It isn't necessary for present purposes to get to the bottom of the question – it is enough for this discussion to recognize that there are



some pleasures that just *feel good*. Balance and harmony and proportion seem like such pleasures – we like them because we like them. Heraldry, like many art forms and more than some, offer these pleasures to those who know where to look for them.

1. Unmediated Pleasures

I call the senses which respond to unmediated, intuitive pleasure the *interior senses*, although they may come to us through the exterior sense of vision. Here are some of the most important ones in heraldry.

Color

I include here the interplay of such qualities as value, hue, saturation and contrast. There are only six colors in general use in heraldry – white, black, red, blue, yellow and green. Except for green these are all primary colors (I’m including black and white as “primary” for this purpose, although in a scientific sense they are not really colors at all), and the pleasure these give in their raw, unmixed, undiluted forms is primary also. Flags add orange and a second shade of blue to this basic palette, and there are many more examples of flags in exceptional colors than there are of arms. Color relationships, such as the vibration perceived when complementary colors like red and green are placed together, are part of the pleasing effect.

The sharp lines I like so much (see Chapter 5) give the unmediated pleasure of discrimination – red up to here, then yellow. Ambiguity and shading have their place in art, but this isn’t it – heraldry offers the distinctive pleasure of *unambiguity*. As an example of heraldic art affording this pleasure, shown above is a page from Mowbray’s Roll (c. 1365), a manuscript in the collection of the English College of Arms.¹⁴ The arms are shown as rectangular banners — possibly some of the bearers were knights banneret. The patchwork effect of a marshalled shield (containing more than one field) contributes to the pleasures of vibration, contrast, discrimination, and pattern recognition.

Line

Among the intuitive, visual pleasures of heraldry are those deriving from the line. A line is the continuation of a point; for a point to continue there must be motion. The line directs our vision from one point to another. The pleasure of following this motion (in the mind’s eye, because the point does not actually move) is cognate to the basic animal

¹⁴ College of Arms manuscript MS.1 M.5 f.5. Mowbray’s Roll is an English manuscript made by French compilers around 1370. There are more than 2000 banners in the roll.

function of detecting movement. A heraldic artist, at his best, is capable of imparting the sensation of movement to a still image. For an example see Otto Hupp's rendition of the



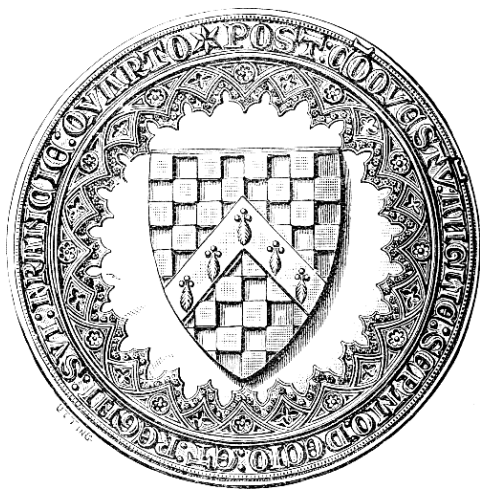
arms of Schrenck von Notzing, from his *Münchener Kalender* of 1918 (left). The national flag of Guyana, designed by Whitney



Smith (center), offers a similar sensation. In the arms of Eulenburg from Hupp's *Münchener Kalender* of 1902 (right) the crest above the arms



provides an even more vivid example – note the lines of force proceeding in three directions at once, from the animal's tongue and claws and from its tail, and from the wings (which are to be understood as part of the helm rather than of the crest-beast).¹⁵ For a soothing example of lines at rest, imparting a sense of stability, see the beautiful 14th century English seal (below left).¹⁶



Other line pleasures include enjoyment of the vigor and assurance with which a line is drawn, and its clarity of delineation. We can appreciate a line's cleanness when its force is undiminished by completing impulses, and we can likewise appreciate its subtlety when it is varied or ramified by integrating those same competing impulses. It is up to a heraldic artist to choose her



emphases and display them with lucidity – when

¹⁵ There are several other lines of force in this composition as well.

¹⁶ Counterseal of Earl Thomas de Beauchamp (1344). Engraving by R. B. Utting, figure 447 in Charles Boutell, *English Heraldry* (London, 9th edition, 1907), page 320.

she does, we gain pleasure. The unofficial Maori flag used in New Zealand (above right), called the Tino Rangatiratanga flag, makes a brilliant use of clean, forceful line.

Form

Stylization of image is one of the most important elements of heraldic art. Different artists do this in different ways, but heraldic images are not supposed to look “natural.” During the 18th and 19th centuries, a time of degraded standards in heraldry, artists did sometimes draw lions to look like the ones in the zoo. This was a bad idea – a shield is not the natural habitat of a lifelike lion. Not only animals but plants, artifacts, heavenly bodies, the helmet and mantling which form part of the *timbre* of a heraldic achievement, and almost all the other images in heraldry, are highly stylized and should be shown that way.¹⁷



A stylized image departs from nature to express the essence of the thing portrayed. Heraldry develops this to a higher level than any other art – Otto Hupp, whose work is shown above, was a master of stylization. One of the principal pleasures of heraldry lies in the tension between natural and stylized form, the exchange between ideal and essence. The Russian imperial eagle in the United States Navy’s flag book of 1899 (left) shows a particularly fine example of a stylized creature – note especially the tongue, the feathers of the legs, wings and tail, and the thin feathers painted between the thicker ones.¹⁸

¹⁷ The word *achievement* here is a term of art, meaning not an accomplishment but a complete heraldic display.

¹⁸ Note also that the *seemingly* natural arrangement of feathers on the left leg is mirrored exactly on the right, an effect not possible in nature.



Other pleasures of form include the relation of a charge to the field. Parts of an animal or plant are often varied or extended to fill the available space in a harmonious way and arrive at a satisfying balance between figure

and ground. The field for a heraldic image is determined by the portion of the shield (or seal, or coin) available for it, and the shape of the field determines the shape of the charges. In the two-lion shield by Ruth Mary Wood, for instance, shown at left, the posture and aspect of the lions differs with their placement.¹⁹ For another example, see the griffin in the 15th century Italian panel at right, so handsomely contained within its lozenge.²⁰



Panel - carved and inlaid wood ~ Italian 15th cent?

Balance and Harmony

There is a lot of overlap among these intuitive pleasures. Balance and harmony involve aspects of proportion – of the parts of a figure in relation to the other parts, of the parts in relation to the whole, of the figure(s) in relation to the ground, of the accessories in relation to the shield. Proportion is something sensed rather than learned, although discerning the aspects of proportion in a complex composition *can* be learned.

Another aspect of balance and harmony in heraldic art is the sense of completion. After moving as directed by the artist, the eye is finally brought to rest. The pleasure of release is similar to that felt in music when, after a complex progression, a chord is at last resolved. These pleasures are available in many art forms, not just heraldry; but they are vividly noticeable in heraldic art.

A special case of the pleasures of balance and harmony is shown by such effects as the invisible border. In the eagle by Otto Hupp (below), the rectangular border around the eagle is not shown, but is comprehended anyway as a *Gestalt*.²¹ This square, invisible

¹⁹ Arms of Edington, detail from the front cover of the *Exhibition Catalogue, City of Birmingham* [England] *Museum and Art Gallery Heraldic Exhibition* (1936).

²⁰ Drawing by Herbert Cole, from page 87 of his *Heraldry and Floral Forms Used in Decoration* (New York, 1922). Note the positioning of the tail.

²¹ The image is from the back (advertisement) page of his *Münchener Kalender* for 1914.

but nonetheless seen with its four corners, is a basic figure in sacred geometry, representing the earthly world of bounds and limits. Its sides relate in the proportion 1:1 – the proportion of identity.

When a grid is superimposed on this composition, other proportions used in classical art become evident – for example:

- 1:2 (*diapason*), the ratio set off by the *palar line* down the center of the image;
- 2:3 (*diapente*), the ratio between the breastshield and the smaller shields on the wings;
- 3:4 (*diatesseron*), the ratio of the eagle's leg to its claw; and
- The *golden mean* (ϕ), the ratio between the height of the breastshield and the height of the segments above and below it.

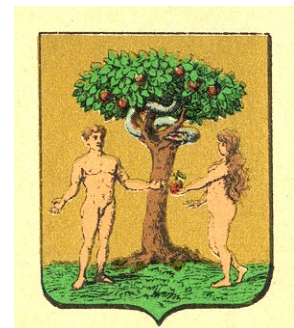


These are not the only resonant classical proportions present even in this one image. The presence of proportions like these within and among the elements of a heraldic composition is part of what allows it to give unmediated pleasure.

An ungainly composition, poorly proportioned and off balance, can create an unmediated



displeasure in the observer, like a musical dissonance or unresolved progression. The arms of the City of Baja, Hungary (left), imposed in the 1960s by the Communist régime, is an appalling example.²² The pre-Communist arms of Baja, showing Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (right), were bad enough, and unheraldic, but at least they did not shock the senses.²³



²² From *A Magyar Városok Címerei* (Budapest, 1975), page 77.

²³ From Karl Lind, *Städte-Wappen von Österreich-Ungarn* (Vienna, 1885).

Marshalling

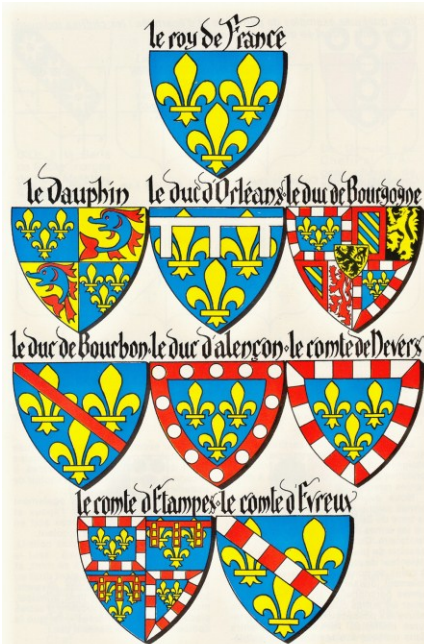
This is a special case of proportion, relating to the arrangement and distribution of the segments of a shield on which several different arms (*Wappen*) are projected and sometimes repeated. This is sometimes a matter of blazon but sometimes a matter of art. In continental Europe, for example (although rarely in England), animals on opposite sides of the paler line are turned so they face each other. Exquisitely delicate effects are possible in marshalling.

2. Cognitive Pleasures

In contrast to the unmediated, intuitive pleasures of the interior senses, the cognitive pleasures of heraldic art require prior knowledge. The pleasure (as with the allusive poetry and rhetoric of past ages) comes from recognizing the allusions.

Semiotic Pleasures

Heraldry is, as noted, the three-way intersection of art, history and art history. It has been called the “writing-table of history,” for it links history and geography with art in a unique visual connection. Developing and understanding the graphic links among

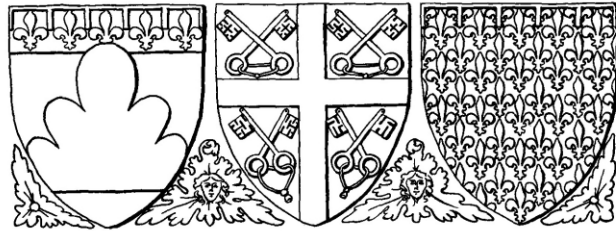


history, geography and art gives rise to semiotic pleasures, derived from an appreciation of the connection between signs or symbols and the things or ideas they signify. For example, three golden fleurs-de-lis on blue mean France, specifically royal France. This image as denoting France was originally more or less arbitrary, although there is a large literature about it.²⁴ But the pleasure lies in making the connection and recognizing what the fleurs-de-lis mean. A Florentine fleur-de-lis (one only, red on white, with stamens) means something quite different from a royal French one.

The fleurs-de-lis of France (to continue the example) were used to represent royal France in many contexts. Different dynastic lines showed their connection to the royal house by armorial variations – see the display of

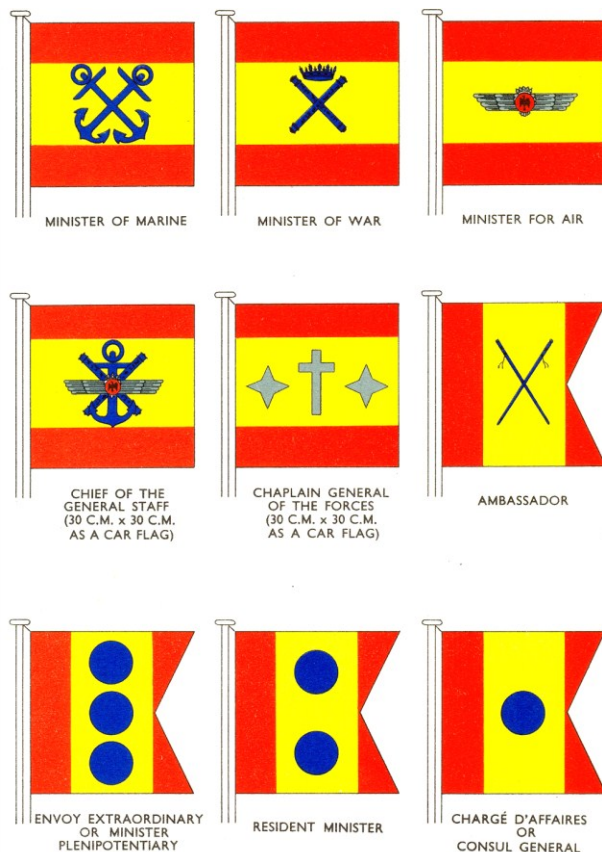
²⁴ See, e.g., William M. Hinkle, *The Fleurs de Lis of the Kings of France 1285-1488* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1991).

examples (above) by the French heraldic artist Pierre Joubert.²⁵ Likewise the fleurs-de-lys were used in the *chief* (the top portion of the shield) by the “good towns of France.” On a chief with a red geometric device called a *label*, they formed the *capo d’Angiò* [chief of Anjou], in Italian heraldry a mark of adherence to the Guelph party, allied (usually) with the Pope and later with the French invaders of Italy. For an example of the *capo d’Angiò*, see the drawing at right of a fourteenth century bas-relief from the Palazzo dei Consoli in Gubbio, Italy, showing the arms of Gubbio, the Church, and Anjou.²⁶ The opposing Ghibellines, allied with the Emperor, used a chief formed of the imperial arms (a double-headed black eagle on gold). The French connection explains the use of the fleur-de-lys in present-day Québec, and in the arms of the Medici when they ruled Tuscany. And so on, not only for fleurs-de-lys but for countless other heraldic devices.



Flags can offer comparable pleasures. For example, at right is a page of Spanish rank flags.²⁷ Small differences in the basic design can show very specific things about the office the bearer holds. Whether a roundel on a Spanish admiral’s flag was blue or red, for example, indicated whether he was in command or not.

Recognizing what heraldic devices mean can be very satisfying. Once I was looking at a book which my friend said contained images of Prussian flags. But I saw on the binding an image of a lion, horizontally striped and carrying a sword. Because I recognized it, I was able to say to my friend “not Prussian, but Hessian.” Similarly another friend showed me a



²⁵ From his *Les Armes, Initiation à l’Héraldique* (Rennes, 1977), page 58. Joubert has painted these arms in the style of the so-called *Armorial of the Golden Fleece*, circa 1450.

²⁶ Drawing by Donald Lindsay Galbreath, figure 4 in his *Papal Heraldry* (Lausanne, 1930). Note the labels at the very top of the shields on both the left and the right.

²⁷ From the British Admiralty’s official flag book *Flags of All Nations*, v.2 (London, 1958).

photograph she had taken of a baby in northern Nigeria. The baby had a silver coin hanging around its neck. A lot of the coin was hidden, but by a heraldic detail I was able to identify the coin as coming from the French second empire, and knowing that allowed me to identify and date the coin exactly. These satisfactions may not necessarily be of much practical value, but they feel really good.

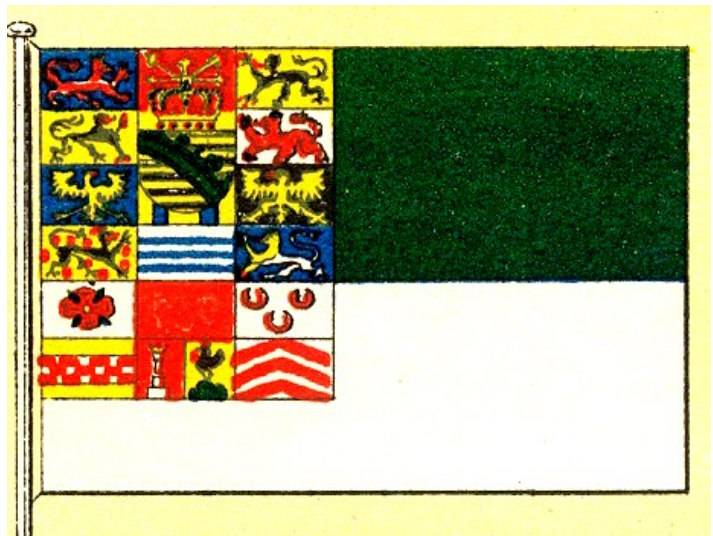
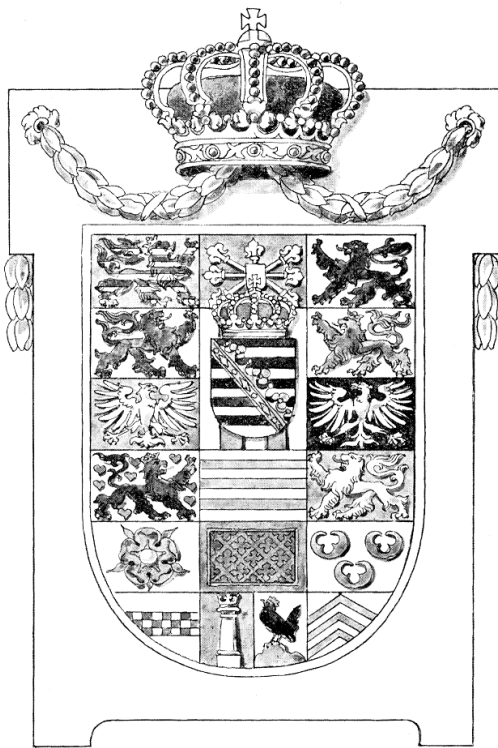
Understanding heraldic symbols and emblems allows a complete appreciation of ceremony, especially ceremonies or displays connected with state power and other manifestations of sovereignty like flags, coins, stamps, banknotes, insignia and monuments. As with any other iconographic medium, heraldic art comes into focus if you can read the signs. If you know the iconography, an image of a bald man with two keys, for example in a stained-glass window, can be recognized immediately as St. Peter. Likewise two crossed keys on a shield usually means a church of St. Peter, or a city whose principal church is dedicated to him, or in another context the Papacy. I mention this only as an example – heraldic art is an art of historical and cultural allusions, and being able to read the references is a large part of the pleasure it gives.

A fine example is an image from the German manuscript called the *Hyghalmen Roll* (c. 1400) in the English College of Arms (next page).²⁸ It shows an angel holding in one hand the arms of the Church, ensigned with the papal tiara, and the arms of the Emperor, with his distinctive crown, in the other. The two shields are inclined toward each other and rest in perfect balance, touching at their corners and supporting each other like the stones of an arch. This composition expresses the medieval conception of society under which the universal Church, personified by the Pope, and the universal State, personified by the Emperor, encompassed the whole world between them. This reciprocally reinforcing arrangement was sanctioned by God, indicated here by the angel supporting the whole composition. “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Matthew 22:20. The delicate relation between the two shields representing the temporal and spiritual realms corresponds to that between body and spirit in the lives of individuals, so that the divine ordering of the outer world becomes a symbol of the ordering of the inner world as well. “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:21. In recognizing the complicated ideas expressed without words in this beautiful composition, the viewer experiences the cognitive pleasure of heraldry. The world-view expressed in this image was exploded by the Reformation, which explains the X’s drawn over the arms of the Church and the papal tiara by a later hand.

²⁸ College of Arms manuscript 2 L12/7b. The *Hyghalmen Roll* was created in Cologne around 1450. It is a *general roll* – that is, not made for a particular occasion. The name means *High Almain*, or High German, *Almain* being cognate to the French *Allemagne*.



Arms of dominion form a special case. In Europe these typically collect the arms of as many fiefs and territories as a particular sovereign can claim and marshal them all onto one shield. Recognizing what these stand for is one of the pleasures of heraldic art. As an example, below left is a rendition of the arms of the former Duchy of Saxe-Meiningen, done in 1898 by the Swedish heraldic artist Agi Lindegren.²⁹ Below right, the same arms are displayed on the grand duke's personal standard.³⁰



Notice that of the 19 separate arms on the shield, all but one referring to specific territories, we have 13 beasts – six lions with various color schemes and attributes, two eagles, and a hen (for *Henneberg*). We have four plants: a rose, leaves of rue, and two fields of heart-shaped elements (not originally hearts but derived from the leaves of aquatic plants [*Seeblätter*]). We have five fields of geometric designs, and one field of one color only (the *Regalienfeld*, signifying the sovereign's right to shed blood in judgment). There is a pillar (a canting charge on the name of the Roman family *Colonna*, carried here as a pun for a lordship called *Römhild*), a *Rautenkranz* or *crown of rue* (a

²⁹ From F.-U. Wrangel, *Les Maisons Souveraines de l'Europe* (Stockholm, 1898-99), volume 2, page 668.

³⁰ From Plate XLIV-B of *Shtandartof, Flagof i Vympelov Rossiskoy Impery i Inostrannykh Gosudarstvy* [Album of Standards, Flags and Pennants of the Russian Empire and Foreign Countries], the official Russian Navy flag book (St. Petersburg, 1904).

hybrid mixture of geometric elements, plant forms, and a coronet), and an *escarbuncle* (a charge probably derived from the reinforcing elements of an actual shield). There are four more artifacts if you count the crowns on some of the beasts, and on the pillar. The list comes to more than 19 elements because some fields have more than one element.

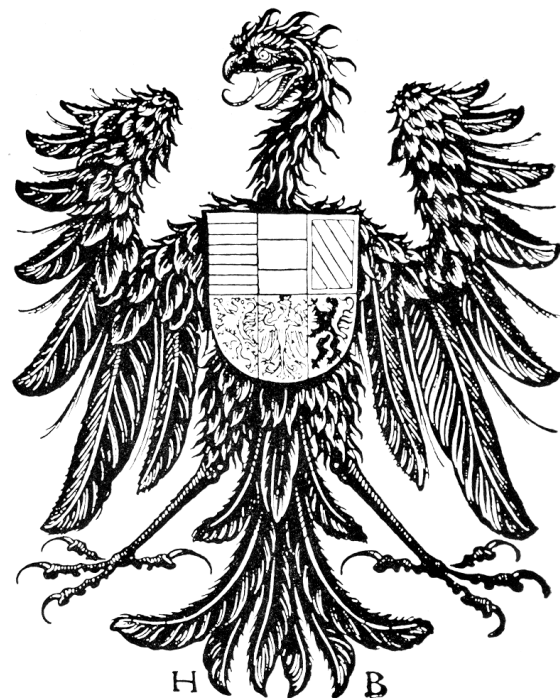


The *Rautenkranz* appears on a *heartshield* (the crowned shield just above the center point). It formed the “family arms” of the Wettin dynasty, whose lands these fields represented. For a 14th century example of this shield alone, without all the quarterings which accrued later, see left.³¹ There are four more artifacts if you count the crowns on some of the beasts, and on the pillar. The list comes to more than 19 elements because some fields have more than one element.

European heraldic conventions in use beyond Europe are an index of cultural penetration. Today, after colonialism has ended, the persistence of these forms shows how much cultural influence remains. In Canada and Ireland, for example, heraldry in the British style still flourishes, and there is a Chief Herald who operates very much like an English (or Scottish) King of Arms. By contrast in Angola and Mozambique, which once had elaborate civic arms in the Portuguese tradition, and in India, where European-style heraldic achievements were created for the local princes, little trace of them now remains.

Relation to Time and Style

Heraldic art varies markedly by period and province. Every century has its own style. One of the cognitive pleasures of heraldry is delight in recognizing the elements of period style. Without any prior knowledge, we may respond intuitively to the vitality of the eagle drawn in 1505 by the Renaissance artist Hans Burgkmair (right).³² But to see the Renaissance values expressed in this design, and to hear its echo in the Renaissance revival designs of Otto Hupp



³¹ Drawing by Hugo Ströhl, after the 14th century seal of Duke Erich I of Saxe-Lauenberg, figure 49 in his *Deutsche Wappenrolle* (Stuttgart, 1897).

³² From Conrad Celtes, *Rhapsodia de Boemannis* (Augsburg, 1505), reprinted as Plate 5 in Freerk Haye Hamkens, *Alte Deutsche Reichsadler* (Brussels, 1944).

400 years later, takes some grounding in art history.

Heraldic art has gone through many stages: Gothic power, Renaissance vigor, baroque excess, Victorian decadence and decay, rediscovery of medieval sources, rediscovery of Renaissance sources, and the work of modern masters. It reflects these cultural influences to a remarkable degree. It is possible for a modern heraldic artist to make a fine composition in many different historical styles, although preferably not in all styles at once. The important thing, apart from the beauty of the composition itself, is the artist's fidelity to the style he has chosen.

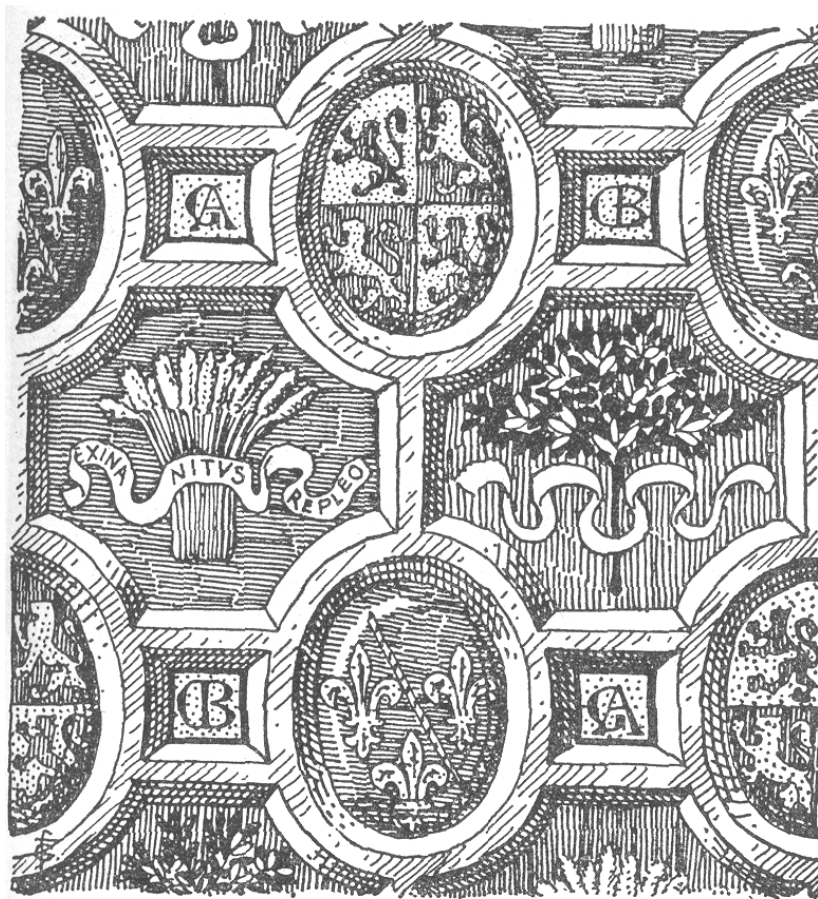
Just as heraldic art reflects the influences of its time, it also reflects the influences of its place. Europe is formed of many heraldic provinces, including especially the British Isles, France, Germany and Austria, the Low Countries, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Provinces such as Scandinavia, Switzerland, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary and Russia are just as distinctive, if less important artistically. After years of study and exposure I have learned to recognize where an example of heraldic art comes from, as well as when it was made. I am not always right, but usually I know them by smell. So part of the joy of heraldic connoisseurship is being able to say: this is Spanish, or Italian, or German; and it is from the 14th century, or the 16th, or the 20th; and it is a stallplate, or a bookplate, or a plate of Majolica ware.

Sometimes it is possible even to identify the artist. A practiced eye can usually recognize on sight an engraving by George Eve, or a composition by Robert Louis or Otto Hupp. The same goes for the works of older, often anonymous masters. A page from a 14th century work like *Gelre's Armorial* or the *Codex Manesse* is as instantly recognizable as one by Hugo Ströhl or Bruno Heim. As with art in any other genre, recognizing artists and their influence adds to the pleasures of appreciation.

Heraldry has developed as a decorative art rather than as one made to look at in isolation, as with some paintings or sculptures. There are magnificent examples in almost every medium, including printing, manuscripts, painting, engraving, embroidery, jewellery, enamel, wood, ceramics, ironwork, seals, tapestry, fabric, stone, glass, coins and medals, and many others. Heraldic motifs appear on flags, roof bosses, uniform buttons, wine labels, tankards, silverware, stationery, manhole covers, coach doors, advertising posters, cigar bands, currency, city buses, and much much more (and much more in Europe than in the United States). Part of the satisfaction of heraldic art is seeing its adaptation, not only to time and place, but to medium. See for example, below top, a Dutch heraldic wall covering from around 1900,³³ and below that a detail of an armorial ceiling at the

³³ Drawing by Godschalk, figure 270 in T. van der Laars, *Wapens, Vlaggen en Zegels van Nederland* [Arms, Flags and Seals of the Netherlands] (Amsterdam, 1913).

Papal Palace in Avignon, decorated in 1565.³⁴



³⁴ Sketch by Fr. Fidèle-Gabriel, figure 365 from Émile Gevaert, *L'Héraldique: Son Ésprit, son Langage, les Applications* (Brussels and Paris, 1923).

3. The heraldic vision

The world created by heraldic images seems a strange one to our modern eyes, far different from the world we inhabit or recognize. Colors are flat and pure. Objects take stylized forms, spaced at regular or artistically chosen intervals. People and animals assume rigid and stereotyped or hieratic postures suitable for displaying characteristic features. A figure's attributes are important, but its individuality hardly matters – ideals are uncorrupted by individuality. This is a world largely without perspective or much of a third dimension, without shadows, often without a horizon. Things float without support against solid or patterned backgrounds, and their relative sizes often bear no relation to those in the “real” world.

These ways of seeing did not seem strange to the artisans of the late Romanesque and early Gothic periods who executed the first heraldic designs, on painted shields and fabric, and in stone and glass and enamel. They were accepted artistic conventions at the time, when the focus of the viewer was on the interior essence rather than on the exterior. The craftsmen of the time saw the world through these conventions. With the Renaissance – including the discovery of perspective and renewed emphasis on the individual and on accuracy in reflecting nature – conventions began to change. Artists were again attracted, as they had been in classical times, to the goal of holding a mirror to life and nature. Art began to converge on reality, a tendency which continued until the 19th century when the two began to diverge again.

Although the conventions of most art followed the Renaissance toward the present day, those of heraldic art did not. To be sure, Renaissance heraldic art looks very different from that of the Gothic period. But the Gothic and pre-Gothic artistic vision remains – a world (at least on the shield) in two dimensions, formed of stylized images without perspective or shadow or ambiguity.

A good recent example is the frontispiece of *Deutscher Wappenkalender 1920*, by Gustav Adolf Closs (next page). Even at this late date the old conventions are intact – notice especially the distribution of the flowers on the ground and the stars in the sky. When we shift our viewpoint to that of the heraldic world, we manage for a moment to find ourselves on the inside of former times, looking out. For that moment we have broken free of time and become 13th-century people. The sensation of transcending time is one of the greatest pleasures heraldic art can offer.



4. Image and archetype

Heraldic expression is a highly developed manifestation of the *archetype of the sign*. The graphic image of a lion in a heraldic design is not really about a lion – it stands for something else. Arms, although not a representation of a person, manifest and proclaim his identity. As noted, this began on the battlefield and continued on the tournament ground, where an armorial design identified a person who was himself invisible inside his armor. Likewise an armorial banner marked the position of a leader or his faction on the

battlefield. It continued with seals, which were evidence in a largely illiterate age of the assent or command of the person the seal represented. In theory as well as practice a person's arms became a kind of abstraction of the person himself. A person's armorial badge identified his servants. His arms on his carriage, or on a bookplate, identified an object as his. This was true for corporations as well, although arms of cities and churches were often derived from non-armorial seals, and those of cities sometimes had a representational (although stylized) character. In Portugal today you can tell where you are by the coat of arms on the municipal trash containers.

Most heraldic images, except for canting charges and dynastic emblems, do not have specific symbolic meanings beyond their express denotation. But some of them – especially beasts like lions and eagles, which are solar symbols – do have an archetypal significance. It gives delight to recognize these for what they are. When we see the sun and the moon together in the sky (common in German and East European civic arms), we should read them as meaning *under the day and night sky*, or *always and everywhere*. Likewise with the lion and unicorn supporters of the British royal arms – the lion is a solar symbol, and the unicorn is a lunar symbol. The reading is *sovereign everywhere within our realm*.

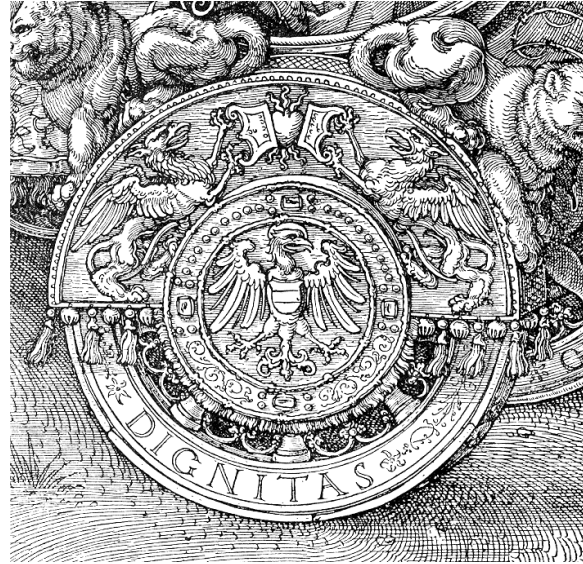


Heraldic images often do have archetypal or political meanings which, while not explicit, are deeply resonant. For example, at left is an armorial banner of the Swiss town of Frauenfeld.³⁵ It shows a lady holding a lion on a leash. The lady (*Frau*) is of course a canting charge derived from the name of the town. But the meaning of the image is deeper than that – it shows fierceness under conscious control, the dominance of the superego over the id. Whether this was the deliberate intention of the designer of the image (originally the lion and the lady were set back to back, and there was no leash) is of little consequence. The vivid stylization of the lion contrasts powerfully with the attempted naturalism of the lady.

For an example in a different mode, see below a detail of a woodcut by the Renaissance master Albrecht Dürer. It shows a wheel from the triumphal car used by Duke Maximilian of Austria (later Holy Roman Emperor) in the procession celebrating his brilliant marriage

³⁵ Thurgau Museum, Frauenfeld. Image from Ottfried Neubecker, *Heraldry: Sources, Symbols and Meaning* (London, 1976), page 109.

to Mary the Rich, Duchess of Burgundy, in 1477.³⁶ The wheel itself bears the arms of Austria. The marriage brought lands to Austria including what are now Belgium and the Netherlands. Above the wheel are two griffins – these became the conventional supporters of the Austrian arms around the time of Dürer’s woodcut. Griffins, traditionally guardians of treasure, here guard the flint-and-steel badge of the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece. The flint and steel, itself a symbol of creation (of light from darkness), by its association with the Golden Fleece represents the wealth of the Low Countries.



Griffins are half eagles and half lions. By combining the fiercest animals of the earth and the sky, they stand for all who have a dual nature, including the Duke (who had a mortal natural body and an immortal political body),³⁷ the Duke’s religion (Jesus was both man and god), and the new polity formed by joining the old Hapsburg lands with the new Burgundian territory.

5. Artistic tension

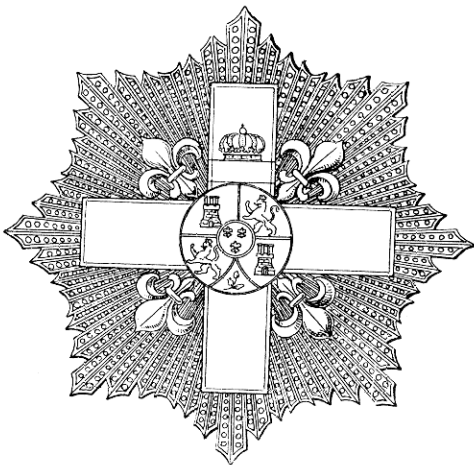
One of the strongest pleasures of heraldic art, available in all accomplished works but requiring some discernment to enjoy, is recognition of artistic tension. Heraldic art, and flag design too, are full of elements in tension. Among these are:

- Figure and ground.
- Geometrical and figurative design elements.
- Round and straight; vertical, horizontal and diagonal; up and down; left and right; periphery and center.

³⁶ Detail of “The Great Triumphal Car,” from *The Burgundian Marriage*, cut by Dürer in 1518 and published in 1522. Reproduced from Willi Kurth, *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer* (New York, 1963), a Dover reprint of the English translation of the German original, published in London in 1927.

³⁷ See, e.g., Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957).

- See, for example, below left, a badge of a Spanish decoration with a notably pleasing symmetry and radial elements originating at a center point.³⁸ For another example, see the Scottish seal, below right.³⁹
- Symmetry and variation.
- Simplicity and elaboration.
- Stylized and natural approaches to a figure.
- Two- and three-dimensional imagery.
 - The shield is by its nature two-dimensional – when three-dimensional figures are placed on it they also become two-dimensional. But there is room for artistic expression. For example, when a figure like an animal is shown patterned like a checkerboard (as is the eagle in the arms of Moravia), should the checkerboard lines run straight or follow the contours of a three-dimensional bird? The artist follows his vision, and the connoisseur gains pleasure from following his choice. See, for example, the “three-dimensional” diagonal figure on the horizontally striped field in Otto Hupp’s 1922 arms of Redwitz (below center).⁴⁰ Also there are three-dimensional elements like crests and coronets in many heraldic compositions, but they too are often shown in two dimensions. There is much scope here for artistic discretion.



³⁸ The grand cross star of the Spanish Military Service Order, figure 615 in Maximilian Gritzner, *Handbuch der Ritter- und Verdienstorden* [Handbook of Knightly and Service Orders] (Leipzig, 1893).

³⁹ Engraving by J. Forbes Nixon (1893), figure 54 in Arthur C. Fox-Davies, *The Art of Heraldry* (London, 1904). The achievement is that of the Duke of Argyll.

⁴⁰ From his *Münchener Kalender* for 1922. See also the carving of the arms of Pembridge, on page 134 above.

The most important of the tensions in heraldic art is that between blazon and rendition. A blazon states exactly what the elements of a heraldic composition are to be – the artist cannot vary it by putting four stars where the blazon calls for three. If he does so (and of course there are exceptions), he changes the arms and the integrity of the result is destroyed.

On the other hand, as long as he follows the blazon, he may interpret it in any style he (or his patron) favors. The blazon determines the colors, for example, but the artist chooses the shade. An artist may choose any style, from early Gothic through to jagged modern or even cubist. Different artists follow the same blazon in very different ways. This complete freedom within rigid limits is similar to that of a poet in highly structured forms like a haiku or a sonnet. A haiku *must* have 17 syllables: five, seven and five. But within that form, there is freedom. Heraldic art depends on the tension between artistic freedom and fidelity to blazon. Seeing how heraldic artists use both the freedom and the fidelity is one of the most intense pleasures of heraldry.

My present interest in heraldry is heavily weighted toward the artistic element. Among the things which please me the most, in addition to the elements mentioned above, are the coherence of the entire composition and the imaginative use of details. For a superb example see the rendition of the British royal arms on the next page, by the master herald-painter Gerald Cobb.⁴¹ Note especially the use of the mantling to fill otherwise unoccupied spaces, the way the hooves and claws of the supporters relate to the elements they are touching, and the extension of bits of the composition into its borders. There is so much going on in this wonderfully vigorous work – it seems like a good one to use as the last exhibit in this section on heraldic pleasures.

6. Elements of excellence

From my studies and long experience I have distilled a sort of checklist of excellence in heraldic art. Here are eight qualities I use in appreciating a work of heraldic art.

1. Clarity of expression
2. Vigor of line
3. Skill in stylization
4. Proportion and balance among its elements

⁴¹ Plate 55 in College of Arms, *Heralds' Commemorative Exhibition Catalogue* (London, 1936).

5. Coherence of composition
6. Clarity of allusion
7. Fidelity to blazon
8. Fidelity to chosen style

For excellence in flags I would use the same list, substituting for fidelity to style a different criterion: how well the design is recognizable at a distance when moving in the wind.



C. My arms and flag

In 1990 I bought a house, and there was room for two flagpoles on the front. Naturally, I thought, I would fly the American flag from one, but it would be fine to fly a personal flag from the other. But I didn't have a personal flag, so I needed to design one. After forty years as a heraldist, it seemed obvious to me that the best design solution would be a banner of my arms.

If I were making up this story I would say I then set about designing a coat of arms, so I could have one to make a flag from. But I already had a coat of arms. Under the ancient law of arms a person of sufficient rank may assume arms for himself as long as the arms do not duplicate those borne by someone else in the same country. The law varies from country to country as to what this rank has to be, but I believe *all* Americans qualify for arms because we don't recognize distinctions of nobility in our country. The same is true, for example, in Switzerland, where arms are borne by burghers and peasants and there is no nobiliary establishment.

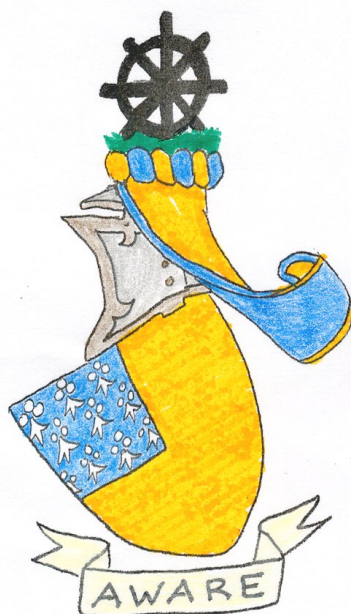
Some countries have qualified the ancient laws of arms by requiring, as in England for example, that arms be granted by heraldic authorities under a Crown or its successor institution. We don't have a crown here and there has never (since independence) been any such legislation for Americans. So in my view the law of arms applies in the United States in its ancient form, and any American may assume arms provided no other American (outside his family anyway) bears the same arms. Good practice, although not the law of arms, dictates that these assumed arms should not duplicate those borne elsewhere either.

- In note in passing that I would probably have qualified for arms anyway under European rules. Under very deservedly obsolete nobiliary doctrine there were three classes of nobles – *noblesse de la race*, meaning those anciently noble (in German *Uradel*), *noblesse de l'épée*, nobles of the sword, meaning military officers, and *noblesse de la robe*, meaning those who qualify by office or learning, including prelates and (conveniently for me) holders of the *juris doctor* degree. Fortunately none of this applies to Americans.

Since I had the right to assume arms, years ago I decided to assume some. By this time I knew enough to choose a pattern simple but unique, something I could draw myself with my extremely limited skill (no animals for example), something that would look good in color or in outline, and something that would not have seemed out of place in a medieval arms roll. I knew better than to follow debased modern practice and start with a quartered field, dropping symbols of my work and hobbies into each quarter.

Below is a rendering of my coat of arms. I began with a plain gold (that is, yellow) field – in my mind (since a heraldic artist can choose whatever shade he wishes of the basic six tinctures) a rich yellow with some red in it. I chose this because in my experience yellow

fields make the most strikingly beautiful arms – they stand out on a page of arms of other colors. A plain field is common in the classic period of medieval heraldry.



Then I laid out a single quarter – not a canton (traditionally one-ninth of the field), but a good sturdy *francquartier* occupying the upper left fourth of the shield as seen from the front. I wanted something *semé*, or strewn, on the quarter. The idea was to allude to being an American by using the *basic pattern* of the American flag – an upper left quarter powdered with small geometric charges. But instead of stars I used *ermine spots*. These are figures representing the black-tipped tails of ermines, attached to a garment made of their white fur.⁴²

Ermine is a heraldic fur (distinct technically from both colors and metals), and the ermine spot is a simple figure used only in heraldry. The three dots at the top represent the stitching – heraldic literature reveals dozens of ways to show an ermine spot (a few are shown below). By using ermine spots instead of stars I was not *copying* the

American flag, just *alluding* to it, and was at the same time alluding to the importance of heraldry in my life by adopting a figure found nowhere else.



And now for the tinctures of the quarter. Ermine is traditionally black on white, following nature, but there are variants – white on black, gold on black, and so on. Variants beyond black, white and gold are exceptionally rare. I chose white on blue, for two reasons. First, blue and white are the colors of Israel (see Numbers 15:38) and could allude to my Jewish ethnicity more subtly than by using a Star of David or some other directly emblematic figure. And second, ermine in white on blue is almost unique – I know of only one other example in the world and not on a *francquartier* – and so by using it I could ensure that my arms would not duplicate someone else's, without having to use a unique charge or combination of charges, or complicated partition lines.

This composition – blazoned *or, a quarter azure ermined argent* – met all my

⁴² The ermine, or stoat, or short-tailed weasel (*Mustela erminea*) turns white in the winter in snowy climes, except for the tip of its tail, which stays black as a decoy for predators.

requirements. It had a medieval simplicity and a simple blazon, was unique but easily drawn, looked just as elegant in outline as in color, and made three important allusions to my life (American, Jewish, heraldist).

- Actually there was a theoretical ambiguity in outline form – plain ermine in the traditional black on white were the ancient arms of the Duchy of Brittany, and carrying the basic arms (*Stammwappen*) in a geometric figure on a plain field was a classic method of showing bastardy. So in *outline* my arms could have been taken for those of a medieval Bastard of Brittany. But not in color. I was willing to take this risk.

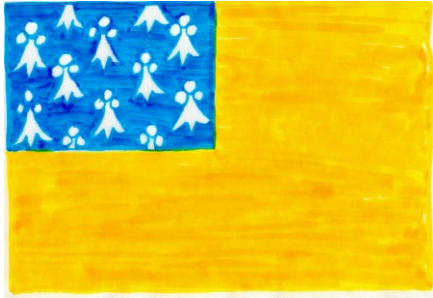
I use the ermine spot (by itself or in an oval) as a heraldic badge. In theory this, rather than my arms, should be used to mark the livery of my servants. I'm working on that. I have a rubber stamp with the ermine spot device (drawn myself) and I use it as an ownership mark in some of my heraldic books. I also mark my pocket notebooks with this badge.



- At the international heraldic congress in Dublin in 2002, the herald-painters at the office of the Chief Herald of Ireland made an *occasional roll*, which is a record of the arms of the participants at a specific occasion. In olden times the occasion was usually a tournament (as with the *Military Roll*) or a battle (as with the *Roll of Caerlaverock*). This roll was of the 25th International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences. I thought my simple but elegant medieval-style arms would look pretty good on the roll, and they duly painted me in, but they got the field wrong, giving me white instead of yellow.

How should I project these arms onto a banner? The traditional usage prescribed a square field, perhaps with a compony border (containing alternating compartments in the principal colors). But a flag in the traditional naval proportions of 3 x 5 pleased me better – it gave a more ample fly, showing more of that delicious rich yellow; and it looked better alongside my American flag, bought off the shelf in those proportions instead of the official 10 x 19. The compony border isn't usually used for flags in oblong proportions (although there are exceptions, for example the flag of Prince Edward Island). What I ended up with is shown in below left. I had Steve Tyson's flag company in San Francisco cut a pattern for the *appliqué* ermine spots and make me two flags (actually in proportions 1 x 2). Over the years the wind and the sun wore the flags out, and a tree in front of my house overgrew the flagpole sockets, so I didn't replace them. One of them appears below center, so badly faded I took it out of use. But they looked beautiful while they lasted. The picture below right was taken in 1991, the second year I was in the house, before the tree took over.

While I was designing arms, I adopted a crest, too – a white pegasus. This was an allusion to my name, *Phillips*, which means in Greek *fond of horses*. The wings on the



horse made it a traditional symbol of imagination. On the outward wing of the pegasus I added a purple roundel with an ermine spot. The roundel represented a dose of LSD, and the ermine spot echoed a charge from the shield, an established heraldic practice. For a motto I chose AWARE – this was a neat bit of heraldic wordplay, awareness being a



Buddhist objective, and bit of a boast (as a heraldic motto should be), meaning *you can't fool me, I know* but also alluding to my birthplace in Delaware. As a single word it also qualified as a war cry.

At left is a tile made for me from my design by Maitreya Bowen, the daughter of my Hindu teacher Michael Bowen (see Chapter 18.F). It follows the Tudor traditions of *Prince Arthur's Book* and other manuscripts of the time by showing the arms on a banner, held by a heraldic beast (in my case my crest-beast) standing on a *compartment* representing natural ground.⁴³ I used an

⁴³ See, for instance, the examples in Joseph Foster, *Banners, Standards and Badges from a Tudor Manuscript in the College of Arms* (London, 1904), pages 22-58.

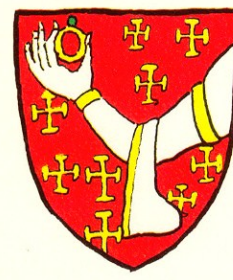
eight-spoked wheel, a traditional symbol of Buddhism representing the Noble Eightfold Path, as a finial for the flagstaff. I had Maitreya put California poppies on the compartment and surround it at base by wavy lines of blue and white, the heraldic representation of water (I live a block from the Pacific Ocean).

I have since changed my crest to a simpler one, easier to draw – the new pattern appears in the image of my arms above. I now use the Buddhist wheel as a crest, resting on a grassy mound so it won't seem disconnected at the base. Below is a flag in the pattern used by Scottish chiefs for their clan standards. The arms are at the hoist. The fly is divided between the principal colors of the arms and adorned with the crest image (the wheel), the ermine spot badge, and the California poppy (a plant badge) and bisected by a diagonal panel bearing the war cry. As a final touch I use the wheel again, as a finial.



Document 6-1 is a papal fantasia. It shows my arms with the tiara and keys of a Roman Catholic Pope, along with my style as Pope Alexander IX (I chose the name *Alexander* in tribute to Pope Alexander VI Borgia, Renaissance prince, patron of art and learning, divider of the world).⁴⁴ The papal style was just a fantasy, of course, but it was fun to do, and if the College of Cardinals ever gets around to electing another Jewish Pope, I will be ready. My *faux*-papal arms were adapted on the computer from a design by the Swiss heraldic artist Paul Boesch of the arms of Pope Pius XI, also shown.⁴⁵ Below these is a tile I created in Washington DC years ago when I brought my nephew Noah, then quite young, to a store set up for children to make ceramic objects. So far it is the only heraldic ceramic I've ever done.

Tailpiece: Arms of Conrad von Lösenich,
after *Armorial de Gelre*, c. 1320.



⁴⁴ Sure, he had some problems. But nobody's perfect!

⁴⁵ Frontispiece to Donald Lindsay Galbreath, *Papal Heraldry* (Lausanne, 1930).

Document 6-1: My arms as Pope

