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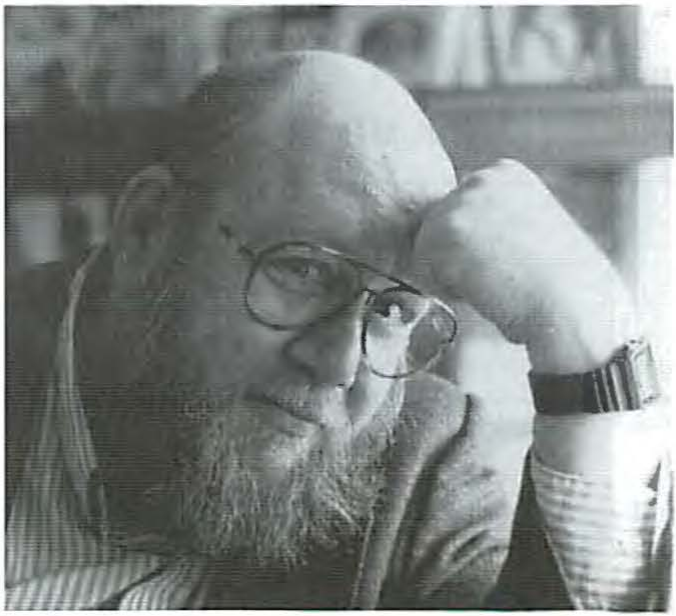
THE FLAG BULLETIN

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF VEXILLOLOGY

COVER PICTURES The **front cover** shows an image from the Hyghalmen Roll, analyzed on pp. 169-170. 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.

The **back cover** shows a page from Mowbray's Roll, an English manuscript made by French compilers around 1370. There are more than 2000 banners in the roll.

Both are owned by the English College of Arms, and are reproduced with permission.



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(Photograph by Klaudia Nelson)

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HERALDIC PLEASURES

by David F. Phillips

"Heraldry is the short hand of history."
J. R. Planché, *The Pursuivant of Arms* (1842)

The study of flags is intimately connected with heraldry. The two studies share many purposes, methods and pleasures. Like many others I was drawn early to both fields and found that each informed the other. What follows is a brief account of how my interest in these and related subjects grew and converged, and of the pleasures I have taken from them.

STUDYING HERALDRY

Heraldry is an infinitely rich study, the intersection of art and history, an auxiliary science of history, art history, political science and semiotics, a present force in every area of art ("fine" and applied) in every province of Europe for the past 860 years, and a powerful engine of beauty for those who know how to recognize it. It has been a constant source of pleasure and learning for me for 60 years.

Heraldry and flags are both stylized systems of recognition signs and patterns. In heraldry these signs are typically projected onto a shield-shape rather than a rectangular flag. Heraldic patterns (called for convenience *arms*) are made of combinations of geometric forms and images, usually of animals or artifacts, and typically attached 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 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 the United States, and little interest in or appreciation of it. What information there is has been almost entirely based on English models, 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 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

Fig. 1: CHART OF FLAGS OF KELANTAN

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. These elements can be combined in many ingenious and beautiful ways.

Related to heraldry are other studies, notably flags, awards (orders, decorations, medals and medal-ribbons), insignia and regalia, and symbols and iconography. All of these have in common a non-verbal denotative element, and flags and medal-ribbons share the power of non-verbal communication by line and color. It is artificial to distinguish among these fields, which I regard as one unified study.

I was attracted very early to this unified heraldic 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 sometimes seen children's drawings of simple flags (like that of Chile) tucked into unabridged dictionaries – they were much like the ones I made as a child. I paid a lot of attention to this page 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 differing patterns of color and line. The unmediated pleasure of that stimulus may have been as important as its informational component. For a good example see **Fig. 1 (p. 145)**, illustrating the flags of the Malayan state of Kelantan.[1]

Elementary flag books like the British series *Flags of the World*,[2] and later Preben Kannik's *The Flag Book* (1957),[3] available in most libraries in my youth, helped me develop my interest in flags. The National Geographic magazine published some special illustrated issues which were

Fig. 2: ARMS OF SCHRENCK VON NOTZING, FROM OTTO HUPP'S *MÜNCHENER KALENDER* OF 1918

important to my generation of flag scholars as well.[4] Also important was *Flags of Maritime Nations,* the U.S. Navy's official flag book (1899 edition), a remarkably beautiful production with rich lithography, bought for me by my grandmother when I was about six years old and an important instrument in my study of the subject.

I have continued my study of flags with unabated fascination to this day. Flags in the modern national flag sense are more recent than heraldry, and come in many interesting flavors – not only national flags but military and government flags of many kinds, flags of shipping lines, and so on. Signal flags have little interest for me because their arbitrary denotative content is so much different from flags which have

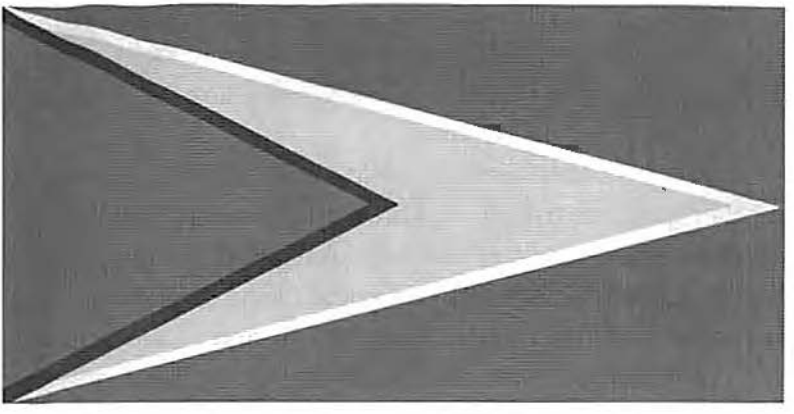
specific meanings, similar to the difference between a Chinese ideograph and an alphabetic letter.

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 times 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* (1486), by Dame Juliana Berners, mostly about hawking and hunting but also including material on "diuysynge of Cote armours" [devising of coats of arms]. Later "authorities" 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 antiquaries began looking at heraldry using a more scientific method, exemplified by Planché's book *The Pursuivant of Arms, or Heraldry Founded Upon Facts* (1842). Planché and others went back to primary sources – medieval arms rolls, seals, coins, 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 was the 8th

Fig. 3: NATIONAL FLAG OF GUYANA



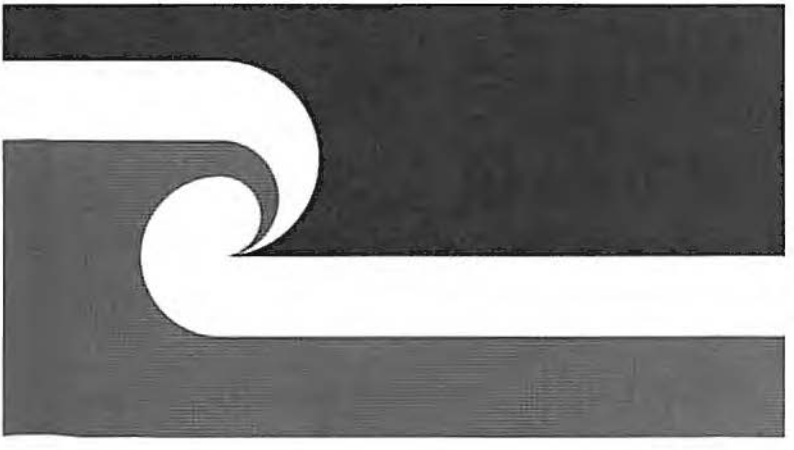


Fig. 4: MAORI FLAG, NEW ZEALAND

edition (1898), revised by S.T. Aveling. It had superb line drawings, many taken from original artifacts and a lot of them dating back to the first edition. I remember well its textured red cover with the gold-impressed Victorian royal arms. I later learned that similar efforts were made in other languages, especially German.

I was probably around six or seven when I my grandmother gave me this book, and I taught myself heraldry by an exhaustive 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 alternating colors, is *argent, three pallets gules*, but an even number of 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 at least 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). There are dozens of words for lines of partition – *dancetty, raguly, embattled*, and so on. And on and on indeed, 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

Fig. 5: RUSSIAN EAGLE, FROM U.S. NAVY'S *FLAGS OF MARITIME NATIONS* (1899)

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 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 in medieval times. 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, for example, where the word *Wappen* means what we call arms in the heraldic sense, *Wappenwesen* means the grammar and structure of heraldry, *Wappenkunst* means heraldic art, *Wappenwissenschaft* means the study and knowledge of heraldry, and a heraldist is a *Heraldiker*, a much clearer word in German than in English.

Whenever Boutell got too technical for me to understand, I turned to *A Heraldic Vademecum*, by John B. O. Richards (1936), which I now recognize as a routine primer but that's what I needed then. Eventually I figured it all out. After decades of reading blazon 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.

There were (or were supposed to be) all sorts of rules about constructing a coat of arms. One of the marks of an amateur heraldist 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, espe-

cially when I began to branch out from English heraldry to continental traditions, with the help of Woodward and Burnett's *Treatise on Heraldry British and Foreign* (1891),[5] 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 outside of Britain.

This is not to say that there are not rules of *taste*. 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 symbols 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 use 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 will make a better allusion to transport than a locomotive; a clarion (a medieval musical instrument

used heraldically as a symbol of music) will do better than a saxophone or the symbol for a musical note; an arrow is better than a machine gun. Use of letters or words on shields does not generally have a pleasing effect, 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 have 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 also of great interest. Medal ribbons have in common with heraldry a specific denotation by means of line and color only. OMD themselves can be extremely beautiful objects. Orders may be elaborately wrought in gold and enamel; and medals are ordinarily formed 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 the 1956 edition of *Ribbons and Medals*, by H. Tapprell Dorling, an English book with wonderful line drawings, learned text, and a fine color ribbon section.

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 satisfying 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 superb

Fig. 6: SHIELD WITH TWO LIONS, BY RUTH MARY WOOD (1936)

coverage of American insignia of World War I[6] and World War II[7] – these resources are well known to *aficionados*, as are Guido Rosignoli's series of insignia books.[8] There are just a few basic systems (American, British, French, Russian, Italian, Japanese, and some others) and most national systems are variations of these.

Symbols and iconography include many different fields, from graphic symbols to symbols in the broader sense (as used in art and decoration), religious and secular symbols (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.

For decades I have been collecting books and pamphlets on heraldry, flags, medals and insignia, and iconography, and 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. I have thousands of titles by now, in dozens of languages, and the more I study them the more I learn about all these subjects and the connections among them.

Philatelic covers are an important but naïve and little-known source of contemporary heraldic art, probably the sole remaining non-aristocratic, non-military source of commissions for heraldic artists. These are mostly special envelopes intended to carry postage stamps on their first day of issue so collectors can have them postally used on that day, with a special cancellation. They are called *first-day covers* in the trade (some are commemorative but not first-day covers), and have special designs on the left-hand side (the side away from the stamp). These designs are called *cachets*, and they are the most interesting part heraldically. I have learned a lot about heraldic art from the good and the bad examples found on philatelic covers.

Fig. 7: EAGLE BY OTTO HUPP, FROM
MÜNCHENER KALENDER (1914)

THE PLEASURES OF HERALDRY

The original attraction of heraldry and flags for me included:

- Bright colors and vivid forms.
- Hard lines and sharp boundaries.
- The ability to communicate specific meanings without words.

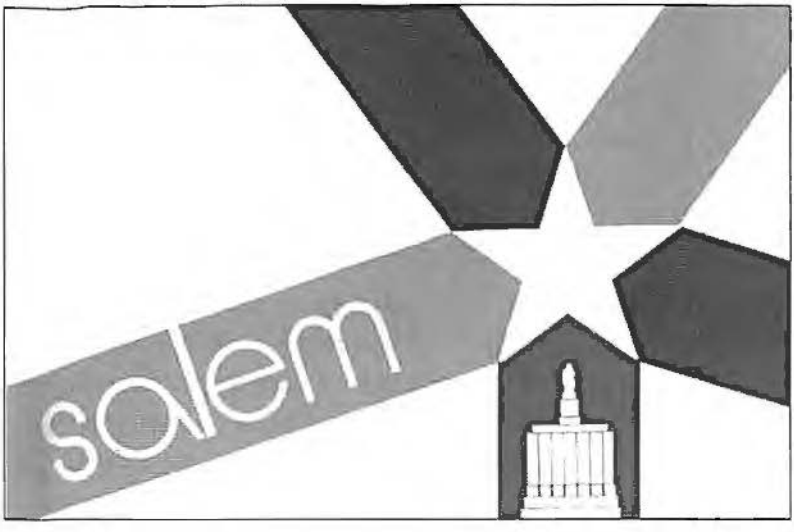
- The exhilarating mixture of uniformity and variation. A shield, for example, was a simple form, but the patterns that could be projected onto it were limitless.
- After I started exploring heraldry, I also liked the specialized vocabulary and grammar. As I mastered it, this gave me my first taste of the satisfactions of expertise.

The more I thought about the subject, the more I came to understand the pleasures of heraldry to be basically of two kinds: mediated and unmediated. The 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

Fig. 8: THE FLAG OF SALEM, OREGON



swung through the trees back then? Maybe, who knows? It isn't necessary for present purposes to get to the bottom of this 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 and flags, like many art forms and more than some, offer these pleasures to those who know where to look for them.

UNMEDIATED PLEASURES

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

Color

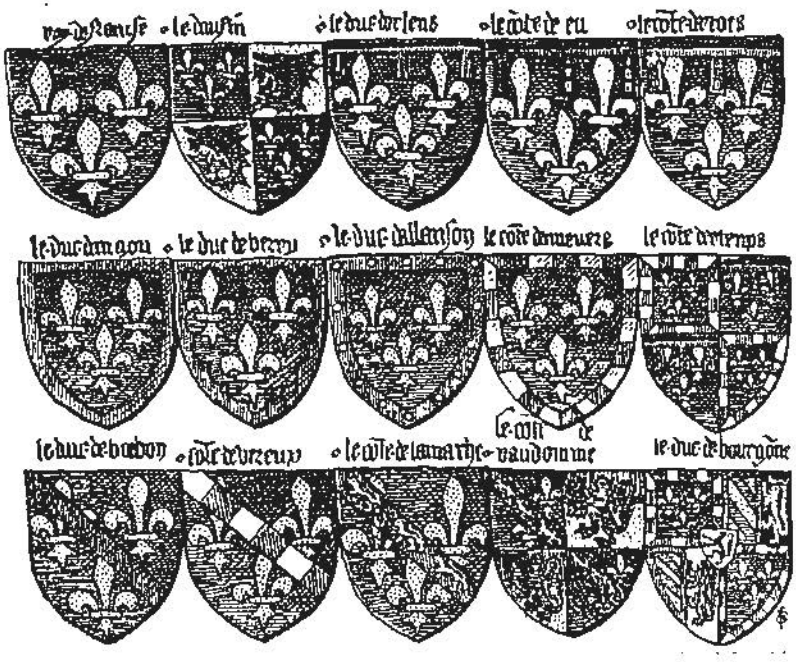
I include here the interplay of such qualities as value, hue, saturation and contrast. There are only six colors in general use in heraldry – white, black, red, blue, yellow and green. Except for green these are all primary colors (I'm including black and white as "primary" for this purpose, although 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 (there 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 also part of the pleasing effect.

The sharp lines I like so much give the 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 *un*ambiguity. As an example of heraldic art affording this pleasure, the **back cover** of this issue reprints a page from Mowbray's Roll (c. 1365), a manuscript in the collection of the English College of Arms.[9] 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. The line is a continuation of a point, for the drawing of which there must have been motion.

Fig. 9: VARIATIONS ON THE FRENCH ROYAL ARMS, IN 15TH CENTURY STYLE, BY FR. FIDÈLE-GABRIEL (1923)



The line directs our vision from one point to another. The pleasure of following this motion is cognate to the basic animal 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 (**Fig. 2, p. 147**). The national flag of Guyana, designed by Whitney Smith (**Fig. 3, p. 149**), offers a similar sensation. For a soothing example of lines at rest, imparting a sense of stability, see the beautiful 14th century English seal at **Fig. 24** (p. 190).[10]

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 she does, we gain pleasure. The unofficial Maori flag used in New Zealand (**Fig. 4, p. 149**) 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. In stylization, an image departs from nature to express the essence of the thing portrayed. Heraldry develops this to a higher level than any other art. One of the principal pleasures of heraldry lies in the tension between natural and stylized form, in the exchange between ideal and essence. The Russian imperial eagle, from the United States Navy's flag book of 1899 (**Fig. 5, p. 151**), 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 on the wings.

Other pleasures of form include the relation of charge to 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 available for it, and the shape of the field determines the shape of the charges. In **Fig. 6 (p. 155)**, for example, a two-lion shield by Ruth Mary Wood, the length, posture and aspect of the lions differs with their placement.[11] For another example, see the griffin in the 15th century Italian panel at **Fig. 21 (p. 189)**, so handsomely contained within its lozenge.[12]

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 felt rather than learned, although discerning 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 finally 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 are shown by such effects as the invisible border. In **Fig. 7**

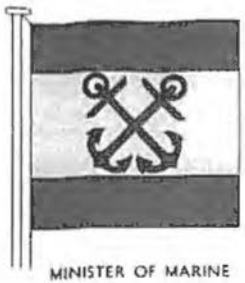
(p. 157), an eagle by Otto Hupp, the rectangular border around the eagle is not shown, but is comprehended anyway as a *Gestalt*.[13] This square, invisible but nonetheless seen with its four corners, is a basic figure in sacred geometry, representing the earthly world of bounds and limits. Its sides 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 heartshield 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 heartshield and the height of the segments above and below it.

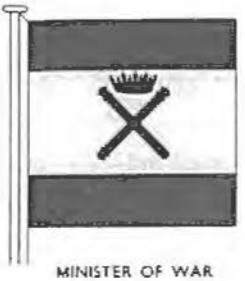
These are not the only resonant classical proportions present even in this one image. The presence of proportions like these within and among the elements of a heraldic composition is part of what allows it to give unmediated pleasure.

An ungainly flag, poorly proportioned and off balance, can create an unmediated *dis*pleasure in the observer, like a musical dissonance or unresolved progression. The civic flag of Salem, Oregon (**Fig. 8, p. 159**) is a particularly ugly example; the national flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost as bad.

Fig. 10: SPANISH RANK FLAGS, FROM BRITISH ADMIRALTY'S *FLAGS OF ALL NATIONS* (1958)



MINISTER OF MARINE

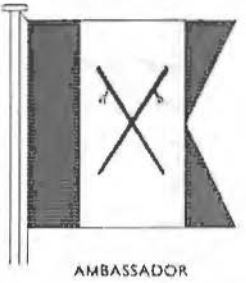


MINISTER OF WAR

MINISTER FOR AIR

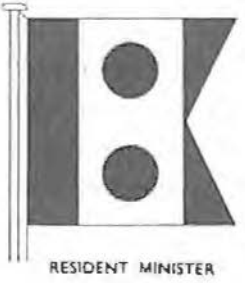
CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (30 C.M. x 30 C.M. AS A CAR FLAG)

CHAPLAIN GENERAL OF THE FORCES (30 C.M. x 30 C.M. AS A CAR FLAG)

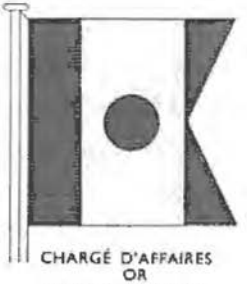


AMBASSADOR

ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY OR MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY



RESIDENT MINISTER



CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES OR CONSUL GENERAL

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 center (palar) line are turned so they face each other. Exquisitely delicate effects are possible in marshalling.

COGNITIVE PLEASURES

In contrast to the unmediated, intuitive pleasures the interior senses, the cognitive pleasures of heraldic art require prior knowledge. The pleasure 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 graphic connection. Flags share this 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-lys 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.[14] But the pleasure lies in making the connection and recognizing what the fleurs-de-lys mean. A Florentine fleur-de-lys (one only, red on white) means something quite different from a royal French one.

Fig. 11: ARMS OF SAXE-MEININGEN,
BY AGI LINDEGREN (1898)

The fleurs-de-lys 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 variations – see **Fig. 9 (p. 161)**, a display of examples by the Belgian heraldic artist Fr. Fidèle-Gabriel.[15] Likewise the fleurs-de-lys were used in the *chief* (the top third of the shield) by the leading "good towns" of France. In a special form (three fleurs-de-lys with a red geometric device called a *label*) they formed the *capo d'Angiò*, in Italian heraldry a mark of adherence to the Guelph party, allied with the Pope (and later with the French invaders of Italy). For an example of the *capo d'Angiò*, see **Fig. 25 (p. 198)**.[16] 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, **Fig. 10 (p. 165)** is a page of Spanish rank flags.[17] 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 is red or blue, for example, indicates whether he is in command or not.

Recognizing what heraldic devices mean can be very satisfying. I once looked 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 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 completer 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, will be immediately recognized as St. Peter. Likewise two crossed keys on a shield usually means a church of St. Peter, 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.

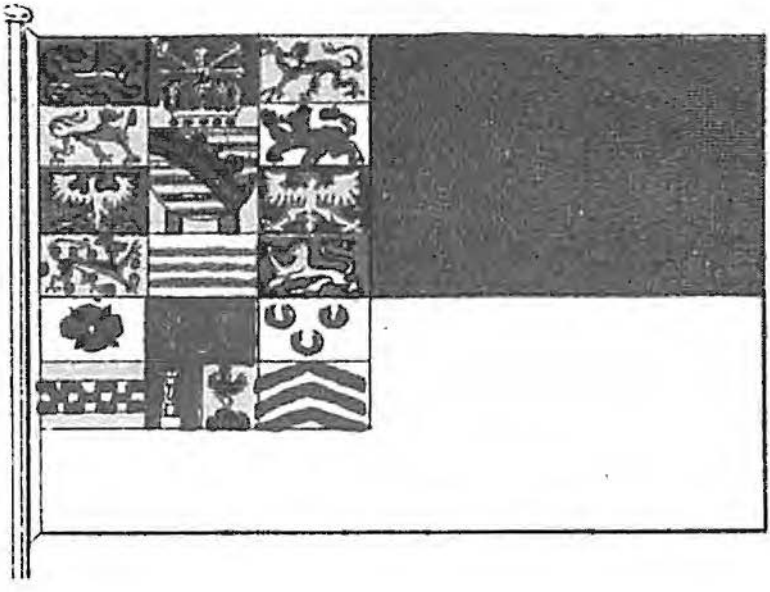
A fine example is an image from the manuscript called the Hyghalmen Roll (c. 1400) at the English College of Arms (**front cover**).[18] It shows an angel holding in one hand the arms of the Church, ensigned with the papal tiara, and the arms of the Emperor, with his distinctive crown, in the other. 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 expressed 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. Being able to recognize the complicated ideas expressed without words in this beautiful composition exemplifies the cognitive pleasures 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.

A special case is *arms of dominion*, which in Europe typically collect the arms of as many fiefs and territories as a particular sovereign can claim and marshal them all onto one shield. Recognizing these for what they stand for is one of the pleasures of heraldic art. As an example, **Fig. 11 (p. 167)** is a rendition of the arms of the former Duchy of Saxe-Meiningen by the Swedish heraldic artist Agi Lindegren.[19] **Fig. 12** shows the same arms displayed in a different format on the grand duke's personal standard.[20]

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 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 right to

Fig. 12: STANDARD OF SAXE-MEININGEN,
FROM RUSSIAN NAVY'S FLAG BOOK (1904)



shed blood in judgment). There is a pillar (a canting charge, or pun, on the name of the Roman family *Colonna*, carried here as a pun for a lordship called *Römhild*), a *Rautenkranz* (a hybrid mixture of geometric elements and a coronet), and an *escarbuncle* (a charge probably derived from the reinforcing elements of an actual shield). The *Rautenkranz* appears on a *heartshield* (the crowned shield just above center on Fig. 11). This was 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 **Fig. 20 (p. 188)**.[21] 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 traditions projected beyond Europe are an index of cultural penetration. Today, after colonialism is 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 the delight of 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 (**Fig. 13**).[22] But to see Renaissance values expressed in this design, and to see it imitated in the Renaissance revival designs of Otto Hupp 400 years later, takes some grounding in art history.

Heraldic art has gone through many stages, including 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

Fig. 13: EAGLE BY HANS BURGKMAIR (1505)

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. 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 sense. 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 Bruno Heim or Robert Louis or Otto Hupp. The same goes for the works of older, often anonymous masters. A plate 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 of course fabric (including but not limited to flags), but also printing, manuscripts, painting, engraving, embroidery, jewellery, enamel, wood, ceramics,

ironwork, seals, tapestry, 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, **Fig. 14 (p. 177)**, a detail of an armorial ceiling at the Papal Palace in Avignon, France, decorated in 1565[23] and **Fig. 22 (p. 189)**, a Dutch heraldic wall covering from around 1900.[24]

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 would not have seemed 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

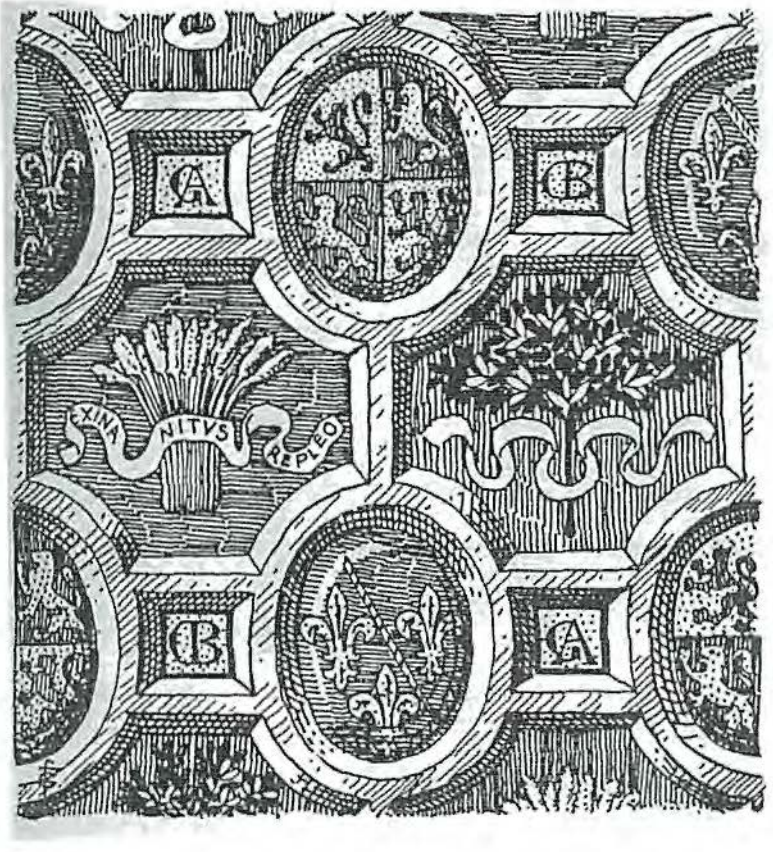
the viewer was on the interior essence rather than on the exterior. The craftsmen of the time saw the world through these conventions. With the Renaissance - including the discovery of perspective and renewed emphasis on the individual and on accuracy in reflecting nature - conventions began to change. Artists were again attracted, as they had been in classical times, to the goal of holding a mirror to life. Art began to converge on reality, a tendency which continued until the 19th century when the two principles began to diverge again.

Although the conventions of most art followed the Renaissance toward the present day, the conventions 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 (**Fig. 15, p. 179**). 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 for 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.

IMAGE AND ARCHETYPE

Heraldic expression is a highly developed manifestation of the *archetype of the sign*, expressed in a graphic image which

Fig. 14: ARMORIAL CEILING FROM PAPAL PALACE, AVIGNON (1565)



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 (especially 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 synonym for 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 puns (called *canting charges*), 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 **Fig. 16 (p. 181)**, a detail of a woodcut by the Renaissance master Albrecht Dürer, shows a wheel from the triumphal car used by Duke Maximilian of Austria (later Holy Roman Emperor) in the procession celebrating his brilliant marriage to Mary the Rich, Duchess of Burgundy, in 1477.[25] 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 -

Fig. 15: FRONTISPIECE OF *DEUTSCHER WAPPENKALENDER 1920*, BY GUSTAV ADOLF CLOSS

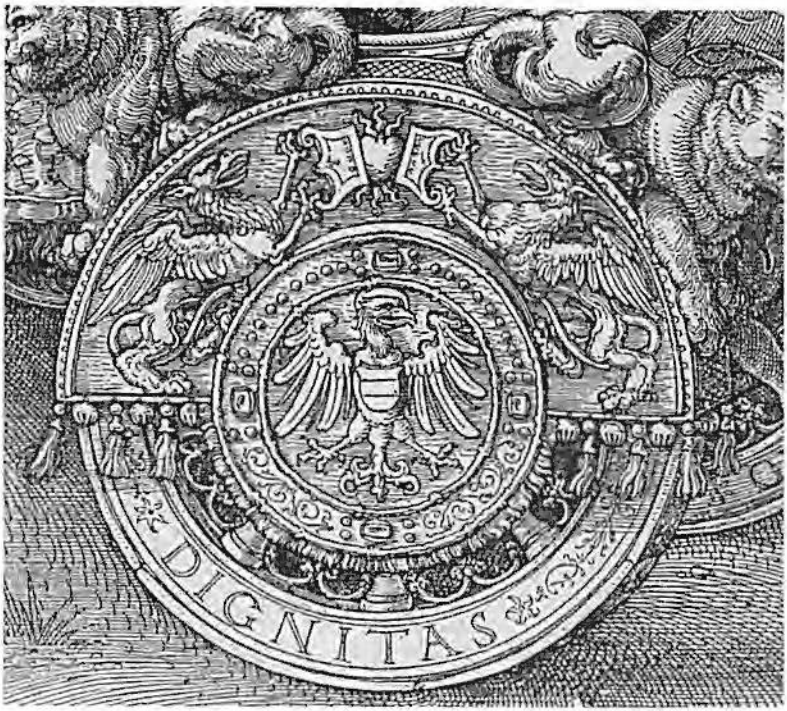
these became the conventional supporters of the Austrian arms around the time of Dürer's woodcut. Griffins, traditionally guardians of treasure, here guard the flint-and-steel badge of the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece. The flint and steel, itself a symbol of creation (of light from darkness), 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),[26] 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.

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 elements in design.
- Round and straight; vertical, horizontal and diagonal; up and down; left and right; periphery and center. See, for example, **Fig. 17 (p. 183)** – a badge of a Spanish decoration with a notably pleasing symmetry and radial elements originating at a center point.[27] For another example, see the Scottish seal at **Fig. 23 (p. 190)**.[28]

Fig. 16: WHEEL FROM MAXIMILIAN'S CARRIAGE, BY ALBRECHT DÜRER (1518)



- Symmetry and variation.
- Simplicity and elaboration.
- Stylized and natural approaches to a figure.
- Two- and three-dimensional imagery.

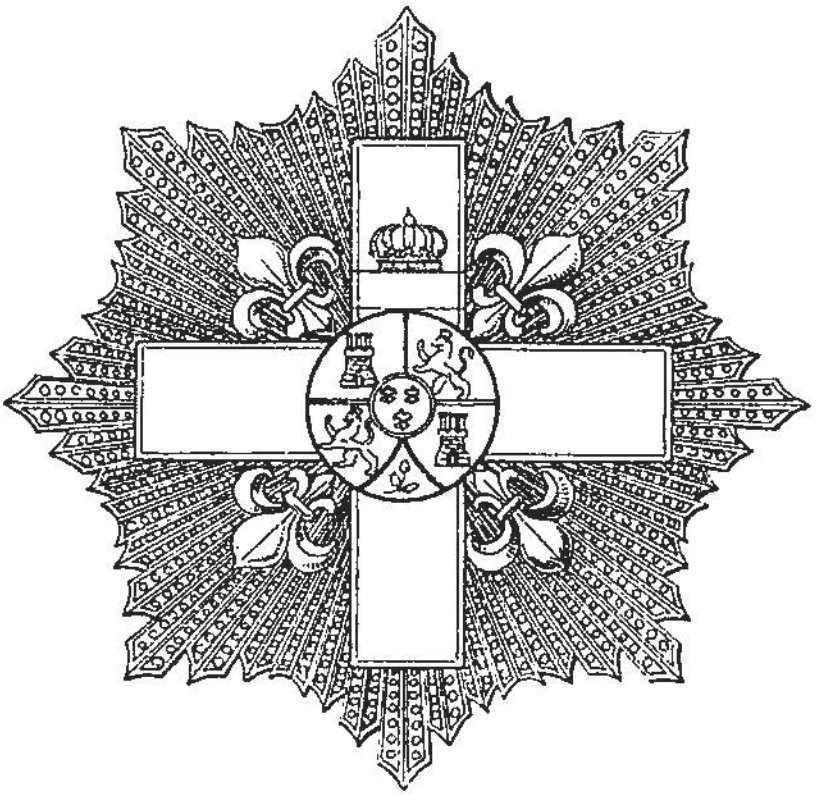
The shield is by its nature two-dimensional – when three-dimensional figures are placed on it they also become two-dimensional. But there is room for artistic expression. For example, when a figure like an animal is shown patterned

like a checkerboard (as 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 (**Fig. 18, p. 185**).[29] 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.

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, if 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 lines, five, seven and five. But within that form: 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,

Fig. 17: GRAND CROSS STAR OF THE SPANISH MILITARY SERVICE ORDER (AROUND 1893)



are the coherence of the entire composition and the imaginative use of details. For a superb example see **Fig. 19 (p. 187)**, a rendition of the British royal arms by the master herald-painter Gerald Cobb.[30] 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 essay on the pleasures of heraldry.

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
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.

NOTES

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

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

3. Preben Kannik, *The Flag Book* (New York, 1957).

4. For example the September 1934 "Flags of the World" issue.

5. John Woodward and George Burnett, *A Treatise on Heraldry British and Foreign* (London, 1891), reprinted by Charles E Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont, 1969.

6. In the December 1919 issue.

7. 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.

Fig. 18: ARMS OF REDWITZ, FROM OTTO HUPP'S *MÜNCHENER KALENDER* OF 1922

8. E.g., Guido Rosignoli, *Army Badges and Insignia of World War 2* (v.1, New York, 1972; v.2, New York, 1975).

9. College of Arms manuscript 2 L12/7b. Reproduced with permission.

10. Engraving by R. B. Utting, figure 447 in Charles Boutell, *English Heraldry*, 9th ed., 1907.

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

12. Drawing by Herbert Cole, from p. 87 of his *Heraldry and Floral Forms Used in Decoration* (New York, 1922).

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

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

15. Figure 306, by Fr. Fidèle-Gabriel, from Émile Gevaert, *L'Héraldique: son Ésprit, son Langage, les Applications* (Brussels and Paris, 1923). Fidèle-Gabriel's design is modeled on a page from the so-called *Armorial of the Golden Fleece*, c. 1450.

16. Drawing by Donald Lindsay Galbreath, figure 4 in his *Papal Heraldry* (Lausanne, 1930).

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

18. College of Arms manuscript MS.1 M.5 f.5. Reproduced with permission.

19. From v.2, p. 668 of F.-U. Wrangel, *Les Maisons Souveraines de l'Europe* (Stockholm, 1898-99).

20. 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).

21. Drawing by Hugo Ströhl, figure 49 in his *Deutsche Wappenrolle* (Stuttgart, 1987).

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

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

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

25. 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.

Fig. 19: BRITISH ROYAL ARMS, BY GERALD COBB (1926)

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

27. Figure 615 in Maximilian Gritzner, *Handbuch der Ritter- und Verdienstorden* (Leipzig, 1893), reprinted in Graz, 1962.

28. Engraving by J. Forbes Nixon, figure 54 in Arthur C. Fox-Davies, *The Art of Heraldry* (London, 1904).

29. From his *Münchener Kalender* for 1922.

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

Fig. 20: EQUESTRIAN SEAL OF DUKE ERICH I OF SAXE-LAUENBERG, 14TH CENTURY[25]

Fig. 21: CARVED AND INLAID WOOD PANEL, ITALIAN, 15TH CENTURY

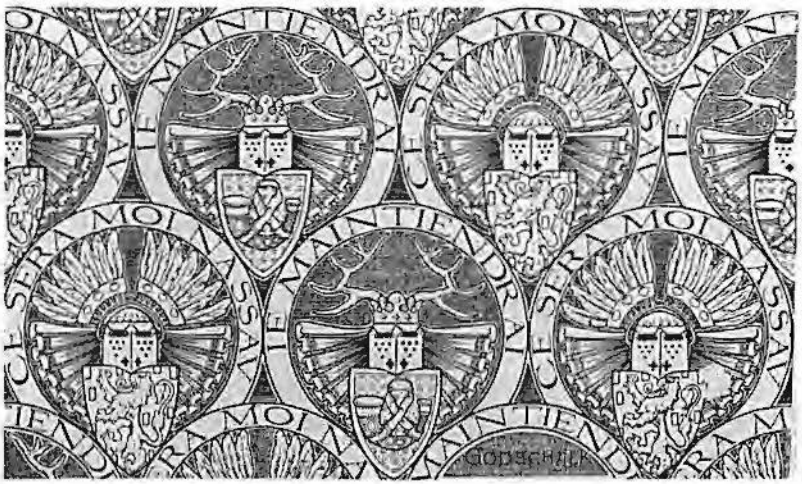


Fig. 22: ARMS OF NASSAU AND ORANGE, FROM A DESIGN FOR A WALL COVERING, DUTCH, AROUND 1900

Fig. 23: HERALDIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE DUKE OF ARGYLL, BY J. FORBES NIXON (1893)

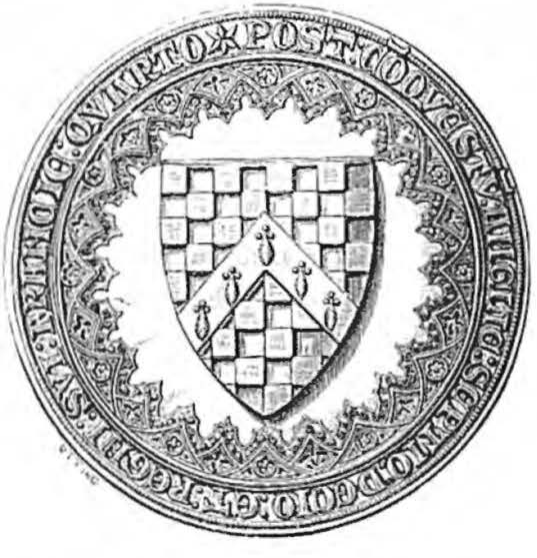


Fig. 24: COUNTERSEAL OF THE DUKE OF WARWICK, ENGLISH (1344)