

## Tips for Petitioners to Design Good Heraldic Emblems

As a part of our mandate to guide the Royal House of Georgia and its steadfast supporters in the effective use of heraldry and vexillology, the Royal Heraldic College of Georgia has prepared this brief outline of a few major tips for petitioners for grants of arms from the Head of the Royal House of Georgia to keep in mind when working with the heralds of the College to devise the design(s) for their heraldic emblems. As such, we encourage all petitioners and prospective petitioners to review this document and to keep in mind this guidance as they consider what they might like to see in their heraldic emblems, though we stress that many of these principles are malleable and contextual rather than rigid requirements (unless otherwise noted).

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### *Simplicity, Symmetry, & Balance*

Heraldry as an art is said to have originated in part from the practical need for identification on the battlefields of Medieval Europe. As such, good designs were those which were unique and could be easily identified from afar. While heraldry has since evolved to become something beyond these origins, it remains true that the strongest designs in heraldry tend to be those which avoid being over-complicated.

- For example, using no more than three tinctures (one color, one metal, and another color or metal) while focusing on a smaller variety of symbols on a shield will tend to produce better designs more consistently than shields with many distinct symbols placed upon them in many different colors.

Symmetry is something which lends itself very well to producing strong, memorable designs which are well-balanced by their very nature. Even in those cases where the design is not outright symmetrical, designs which are nonetheless balanced will also tend to be good designs more often than those which are not balanced. While neither of these are essential to creating a great design and many non-symmetrical and non-balanced designs exist which work quite well, creating designs which are balanced or outright symmetrical are safer routes to take in devising a design which plays into what works best in heraldry.

### *Layers of Meaning*

Contrary to popular belief, in general heraldry does not have strict, pre-assigned meanings for symbols. While some symbols may be restricted and assigned a particular meaning in a given jurisdiction, and many others may have common connotations, for the vast majority of elements there are no fixed, universal meanings. What is

more important is what meaning a given motif has for the bearer of arms and what notions they have intended to represent with it.

Symbols may also stand in for multiple meanings, which is why choosing a few strong elements for a design can be the best approach to a design which is both visually-appealing as well as richly meaningful through selecting symbols which carry multiple meanings to the petitioner. That said, having rich symbolism is not a requirement and certain elements may be chosen simply for their visual appeal to a petitioner with no deeper meaning.

- One common approach seen in many coats of arms and other heraldic emblems is to select symbols which work in whole or in part as puns or allusions to an armiger's family name, nickname, physical traits, etc., made even stronger when they can symbolize other meanings at the same time.

### ***Being Personal with an Intergenerational Eye***

When devising heraldic emblems, it is a good idea to strike a balance between choosing symbols and meanings which are very meaningful to oneself while also being something which will be relevant to future generations of one's family, recognizing the nature of heraldry as a hereditary form of visual identity. Choosing adaptable symbols with multiple layers of symbolism to oneself is the best approach to having something which can at once be very much tied to one's own lifetime & characteristics while also being able to represent currents which will outlive oneself and be meaningful for generations to come.

While choosing symbolism which ties into one's ancestry can be done well, finding symbols and meanings which go beyond simply representing one's ethnicity and country of origin will help to produce far more distinctive and personally meaningful designs. Looking to important career achievements, stories & events from one's life or one's family's history, passions, defining principles, and other such currents will help one go beyond the most reductive descriptions of oneself and towards things which can speak to your life and accomplishments across the ages and transcend into an important aspect of familial identity.

### ***Keeping to the Spirit of the Rule of Tincture***

The "Rule of Tincture" is both a principle of design and a rule in heraldry in which "colors" (namely red/"gules", blue/"azure", green/"vert", black/"sable", and purple/"purpure") should only be placed on metals (yellow/gold/"or" and white/silver/"argent") as well as vice-versa, and that therefore colors should not be placed on colors and metals should not be placed on metals. This is to avoid issues with lack of proper contrast and to produce designs with strong aesthetic appeal.

While there are the seldom exceptions to the rule of tincture (and fewer still which work well), and a few “loopholes” which have been used to technically abide by it, good heraldic design almost invariably respects the rule of tincture not just in the letter of the rule but in the spirit underlying it. Trying to find ways to circumvent the rule is generally a self-defeating exercise as designs which go against the spirit of the rule are more likely than not to be designs which do not work well visually.

### ***Remaining Distinct***

Just as much as simplicity is encouraged, designs must be unique. Consequently, some very simple, classic designs (such as a plain field with a lion placed upon it) will almost certainly have already been used before. As such, coming up with a design which is at once both simple *and also* distinct can present a challenge. Perusing various online armorial registries (“rolls of arms”) can provide some insight into designs already in use, though there is no comprehensive database of all coats of arms. Indeed, at times armigers in different jurisdictions would accidentally have identical arms. The College will strive to guide petitioners through the design process with an eye to avoiding designs which are likely to already be in use, however a good general principle is to look to think of interesting (if still reasonably simple) combinations of charges which are not necessarily common. For example, a lion of any color on a plain field of any metal is likely to be a design already in use, however if that lion’s fur is dotted with a semy (repeating pattern) of a certain charge (like seven pointed stars) and is holding a torch, the likelihood of the design being unique is increased considerably without the design becoming overly complicated. Again, this can be a difficult line to walk and the College will provide assistance in navigating this course, but keeping the need to be distinct in mind with the benefits of simplicity is something worth doing.

### ***Awards, Titles, and Entitlements***

As a form of visual identification transcending its original purpose on the battlefield, heraldry has a long history of expressing various aspects of status, both in the core design of heraldic emblems and in various additaments which can be conferred to those who have been granted various honors and hold particular statuses, as well as heraldic privileges which might be conferred directly as a reward from a *fons honorum*.

The Royal Heraldic College of Georgia regulates the use of heraldry in the context of the Royal Georgian Orders, providing approval for the use of the insignia of the Orders as external elements in armorial achievements. The College will also devise arms which incorporate certain restricted elements like supporters (figures which hold the shield from behind or from the sides) and coronets of rank based on the proper holding of certain Georgian honors, such as title of nobility. These elements are not to be used by those not entitled to

them, and these will only be granted to those bestowed with the prerequisite honors or who are otherwise extended exceptional heraldic privileges by the gift of the Head of the Royal House of Georgia.

Honors beyond those of the Royal House of Georgia and heraldic entitlements associated with them will be addressed on a case by case basis, fully subject to the sole discretion of the Head of the Royal House of Georgia, in a manner similar to the registration of foreign heraldic emblems with the College.

It should be borne in mind that heraldic emblems such as the coat of arms, crest, badge, motto, mantling, and flags are grantable without special status, but supporters, a compartment, a mantle or a mantle & pavilion, a crown or coronet of rank, and use of insignia from orders is restricted. Helmets in general are available to all, though some specific forms are restricted based on the status of the petitioner.