

New Directions in Heraldry [But there really is “nothing new under the sun”]

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Thesis: The modern innovations and the recent introduction of new charges, lines of division, tinctures, the current discussions on the transmission of arms by women, and so on that we see in the field of heraldry today are not a new phenomenon. They are only the continuation of a process of introduction and innovation which has existed since the earliest days of this art.

Introduction

The Chinese have a curse: “May you live in interesting times.” These are very exciting, or at least very interesting, times in the world of heraldry. It seems that all about us heralds and heraldists are introducing to the field new lines of division, new charges, new tinctures, incorporating designs and motifs from non-European, non-heraldic and aboriginal cultures, and allowing or, at the very least, discussing the transmission of arms by women to their descendants.

Whether we like some of these innovations, or whether we believe that they add anything positive to this “noble science”, are matters of personal taste and opinion which are outside the scope of this paper. What is being done here is to survey some of these recent innovations and then ascertain how “innovative” they truly are in light of the long history of the field of heraldry.

There is no way in the time allotted here that we could possibly discuss all of the “new stuff” going on in heraldry today, but I would like to review a few representative examples of recent innovations.

New Complex Lines of Division

Among the more recent complex lines of division, there is this line [Fig. 1] originated by Kaj Cajander of Finland, which the Finns blazon as *kuusikoro*¹ and the British as *fir tree*.² This line of division has been made even more well-known through its adoption and use by the Canadian Heraldic Authority, which has given it the blazon *sapiné* or *sapiny*,³ from the French *sapin*, fir tree.

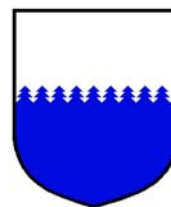


Figure 1



Figure 2

Other similar complex lines of division have been adopted into arms. One [Fig. 2], a logical extension of *sapiné*, is this one, which the CHA blazons as *sapinagé* or *sapinagy*, also from the French *sapin*. It is blazoned in England as *fir twig*⁴, in Finland as *havukoro*.⁵

Another complex line of division [Fig. 3] with an especially “Canadian” feel to it, consisting as it does of alternately facing maple



Figure 3

tree leaves, is by the CHA blazoned *erablé* or *erably*,⁶ and by the English College of Arms as *maple leaf*.⁷



Figure 4

The Bureau of Heraldry of the Republic of South Africa has also been doing some interesting things with lines of division. Here [Fig. 4]⁸, for example, is a uniquely South African line of division, which has been used, like *fleury*, to define not only a line of division but also ends of a charge. It used to be called *nowy of a Cape Town gable*, but is now merely *nowy gabled*⁹ (presumably the fact that it is a “Cape Town” gable is now considered the default) or, in the case of the charge on the field here [Fig. 5], *a mascle embowed, the points gabled*.



Figure 5

There are others, of course, but these few examples here should serve to illustrate the scope and ingenuity of the new complex lines of division that are being incorporated into coats of arms in recent years.

New Charges

We also see new charges being added to the heraldic lexicon. One of the better known examples has been named the *Canadian pale* [Fig. 6], first seen on the national flag of Canada. Unlike the standard pale, the *Canadian pale* takes up a full one-half of the field. (And I thought that things were always bigger in Texas.)



Figure 6



Figure 7

Charges are being introduced or adopted into heraldry from various native and non-heraldic cultures. Both the English College of Arms and the Canadian Heraldic Authority have granted coats with Chinese dragons. [Fig. 7] And there was a recent grant in England of a coat of arms charged with the Indian elephant-headed god Ganesha. The Bureau of Heraldry in South Africa has registered arms with native African shields, spears, and maces on them. [Fig. 8]



Figure 8



Figure 9

Again, the Canadian Heraldic Authority (often thought of as being a hotbed of heraldic innovation) has registered arms which contain various artifacts and symbols of their “First Nations” peoples, aboriginal Americans, including this coat [Fig. 9] containing an *inuksuk*, an Inuit stone marker, or the *inuksuk* and *qulliq*, an Inuit stone lamp, which appear in the arms of the Territory of Nunavut. [Fig. 10]



Figure 10

Another new charge which has been seen in armory is the *snowflake*. It is most often found as a strewn charge, rather like the real thing, and also like real snowflakes, there does not appear to be a single standardized form, the various depictions seen to date having only a six-armed symmetry in common. [Fig. 11]



Figure 11

Adaptations or Extensions of Old Forms



Figure 12

We also see older heraldic charges and motifs being modified and adapted to modern heraldic applications. It is a comparatively small step philosophically to go from a field or a charge which has been *masoned* to look like bricks to one that looks like a honeycomb. Peter Gwynn-Jones, Garter Principal King of Arms, notes a modern example which alludes to a honeycomb¹⁰ [Fig. 12]; a Portuguese military coat is actually charged with a golden honeycomb, *um favo de ouro*, on its sable field. [Fig. 13]¹¹



Figure 13



Figure 14

We find, too, “ancient and honorable” charges being used in arms in new or unusual ways. One quick example may suffice to demonstrate how this new aesthetic is being applied: an English grant of arms from just a few years ago consisted of three piles fesswise issuant from sinister, each pile being divided *per fess gules and sable*. [Fig. 14]

New Tinctures

New tinctures, too, have been added to the heraldic palette in recent years, while yet others have been suggested.

One that remains in the proposal stage is *rainbow*; a field (or, as here, a charge [Fig. 15]¹²) that changes in gradual stages from red through orange to yellow, green, blue and violet from chief to base, just as a rainbow does.

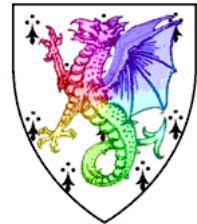


Figure 15



Figure 16

Other tinctures which have gone past the suggestion stage and have been incorporated into coats of arms, in these cases arms granted by the Canadian Heraldic Authority, are the metal *copper* and the color *rose*. The former is just what it sounds like, the color of bright, new copper; the latter is shade of pink, similar to - but not quite the same as - the tincture sometimes used for flesh proper, *carnation*. [Fig. 16]

The Bearing and Transmission of Arms by Women

One of the “hot topics” being addressed by and discussed among heralds and heraldists these days is that of the bearing, and the transmission to their descendants, of arms by women. We are seeing efforts in various ways in different heraldic jurisdictions to make heraldry less restrictive, more available, more egalitarian, in keeping with these more egalitarian times.

In many heraldic jurisdictions these days, it is no longer required that an armigerous woman bear her arms on a lozenge or a cartouche. (Who’s going to go tell Margaret, Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven that she can’t put her arms on a shield, but must use a lozenge? I am reminded of Marty

Feldman's line as Igor from the movie *Young Frankenstein*: "Wait, Master, it might be dangerous. You go first.")

Armigerous women married to non-armigerous men in England may now display their paternal arms on a shield, differenced with the addition of a "small escutcheon of suitable tincture".¹³

The Canadian Heraldic Authority has gone a step further, and not only permits the descent of arms through daughters as well as sons, but has established a set of permanent cadency marks specifically for daughters to use to difference their arms from their father's and brothers' arms.¹⁴ [Table 1]

Summary

That's a lot of excitement for a field which has a reputation, whether well or ill-deserved, of being highly conservative, or even "stuffy". New complex lines of division, the adoption of new and imported charges, new uses for ancient charges, new tinctures, and even the search for new ways for women to bear and transmit arms.

A History in Heraldry of Innovation

And yet ... how "new" or "innovative" are all of these inventions, really? As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it so well, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."¹⁵ The field of heraldry has always, from its earliest beginnings, been open to change and to the adoption of new lines of division, charges, and, yes, even to new tinctures. As was said so well nearly a century ago, heraldry "has developed along rhythmic lines in a beautiful and orderly sequence. It is not an invention, but an evolution."¹⁶ Let's take a look now at some examples of that evolution.

New Complex Lines of Division

As the table [Table 2] here helps to illustrate, while in the earliest days of heraldry there were a comparatively small number of complex lines of division used, there has been since then a long but fairly regular adoption of new lines of division. Some of these were plainly artistic variations or logical extensions of some of the older lines of division such as *raguly* or *urdy*; others were somewhat of a departure from the older lines (*e.g.*, *nowy*). (You will note that I have for the most part refrained from adding the many German and eastern European complex lines of division. These are, I believe, more appropriately the subject of a separate study, as being as much an aspect of a regional style as a part of the general evolution of new motifs in heraldry.)

The survey of lines of division here is hardly scientific: I simply pulled a number of heraldry books of various publication dates off the shelf and checked them to see what complex lines of division they included. In some cases, most notably some early cases of *nebuly* which may be an

error for a deeply-drawn *wavy*,¹⁷ it may be that the number of different types of complex lines is slightly overstated. Still, that the sources cited should give us at least a representative sampling in spite of any errors in identification which may have crept in, and that they demonstrate in at least a general way the introduction of new complex lines of division over the centuries.

Some of the examples cited on this table may not have been used, indeed, some of them almost certainly were not used, in actual coats of arms for the dates cited. As Professor Gerard Brault noted: “The writers of medieval heraldic treatises ... did not always reflect actual practice, but fantasized about it or rationalized matters, often to an astonishing degree.”¹⁸ The same is true of some of the later heraldic writers. Nonetheless, the fact is that these innovative lines of division were, at the very least, being proffered as being appropriate for use in arms on the dates cited.

This table should make it reasonably clear that heraldry has always been open to the introduction of new lines of division, and the number of lines available for use in armory expands as we move from heraldry’s early days to modern times.

New Charges

The following statement should be nothing new to anyone here, but I believe it needs to be made explicit. Heraldry has adopted new charges into its lexicon for as long as it has been in use.

It would take at least several hours and uncounted pages to list all of the new charges that have been added to arms over the centuries; the following examples are a simply a few to illustrate the point.



The *cross patonce* [Fig. 17], a charge now well-established in armory and found in even the most basic texts on the subject, does not seem to have appeared before the 16th Century.¹⁹

Figure 17 The Renaissance was a fertile ground for the addition of new monsters and charges to heraldry, as were, though often with less happy results, the 18th and 19th Centuries. The *griffin* was one of the earlier additions, though it was not adopted universally, as this narrative by Thomas Moule illustrates. “Unnatural animals appear in the heraldry of all nations. It is related that an Austrian nobleman asked an English ambassador at Vienna, whose arms presented a griffin, ‘in what forest that beast was met with?’ to which the ambassador readily answered, ‘the same in which the eagles with two heads are found.’”²⁰

An example of the “less happy results” variety of innovative charges may be found in the arms of Sir William Herschel, the astronomer who discovered the seventh planet of our solar system, Uranus (though he named it *Georgium Sidus*, after King George III of England): *Argent, on a mount vert a representation of the ‘forty-feet reflecting telescope’ with its apparatus proper, a chief azure, thereon the astronomical symbol of ‘Uranus’ or ‘Georgium Sidus’ irradiated or.*²¹ Yet, it says something positive that the heralds were at least open to such innovation.

New Tinctures

So much has been written in the past about the standard heraldic tinctures and stains that I do not feel that I can add anything new or profound here. However, in this next table [Table 3] are considered the various ermine and vair variations, as well as *papillony* and *plumetty*, along with *natural fur*, as tinctures. This grouping can be considered to be somewhat arbitrary, but I believe that, with the possible exceptions of *papillony* and *plumetty*, they have been treated for all purposes as tinctures in their own right and not as being constructed of their component colors and metals.

Here again we see the same general pattern being followed that we saw for the complex lines of division. That is to say, in its earliest days, heraldry used a limited number of the furs, and over the centuries has added to them, even if only theoretically rather than in actual armorial use.

It should be noted that while there is certainly a general trend, there is not a pure progression of more furs as we move from ancient times to modern; some of the furs went through periods of disuse. Berry, writing in 1810, notes that “in old coats of arms what are termed varyy cuppy, and counter varyy, are sometimes, though very seldom found: ... but as they do not occur in modern bearings, they are omitted in the plate [in his book] where the furs are delineated.”²²

Once again, I will not repeat here what the table makes reasonably clear: the field of heraldry has been open to the introduction of new furs as tinctures, and the number of furs available for use in armory generally increases as we move from heraldry’s early years to modern times.

The Transmission of Arms by Women

Finally, while it may be considered currently to be a “hot topic” in heraldic circles, discussion of various methods for the transmission of arms by women to their children is nothing really new. At least as far back as *The Boke of St. Albans* in the 15th Century, there have been suggestions as to how arms appertaining to a mother may be transmitted to and borne by her children. Dame Juliana Berners (or whoever may have actually written *The Boke of St. Albans*; there is some disagreement), suggested two methods by which a man may bear his mother’s arms. The first way was to bear his mother’s arms on a bend (though the example cited has the mother bearing *sable plain*) [Fig 18]:



Figure 18

The best manner of ways certainly of bearing of diverse arms in one shield is in these bends bearing for a man that has a patrimony left by his father, and other certain lands by his mother coming to him, to the which lands of his mother’s are appropriated arms of old time for it may happen that these arms come to her by the way and descent of her progenitors, then may the heir and him list bear the proper arms of his father in the whole shield. And in such a bend he may bear his mother’s arms.²³

The second method recommended for slightly different circumstances was for him to bear his mother's arms on the field and his father's arms on a chief [Fig. 19]:

And know you that in the headed arms [by which she means, arms with a chief] is a good manner of bearing of diverse arms as by fortune some nobleman has many lands and great lordships by his mother, for the which lands of his mother's he intends to bear the arms of his mother, and so he may do, for it is rightwise; but he that descends of a noble father or of a gentleman, by the which he had any simple patrimony, then such a nobleman, if he will, may bear the proper arms of his mother in the lower part of his shield, and in such a head [chief] as I said before he may and he will bear the whole arms of his father.





















Figure 19

As can be seen from these two examples, then, the inheritance of arms from women isn't a new topic; it was being discussed, and suggestions were being made of ways to go about it, some 500 years ago.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me refer to the original thesis of this paper: The modern innovations and the recent introduction of new charges, lines of division, tinctures, the current discussions on the transmission of arms by women, and so on that we see in the field of heraldry today are not a new phenomenon. They are only the continuation of a process of introduction and innovation which has existed since the earliest days of this art.

Table 1
Cadency Systems

Birth Order	English (Sons)		Canadian (Daughters)	
	Image	Label	Image	Label
1		Label		Heart
2		Crescent		Ermine spot
3		Mullet		Snowflake
4		Martlet		Fir twig
5		Annulet		Chess rook
6		Fleur-de-lis		Escallop inverted
7		Rose		Harp
8		Cross moline		Buckle
9		Octofoil ¹		Claricord

¹ Sometimes, Anchor

Table 2

Complex Lines of Division Date Chart	Engrailed	Inverted	Indented	Dancetty	Wavy/Undy	Nebuly	Embattled*	Embattled Grady	Raguly	Dovetailed	Urdy	Potenty	Flory	Counter-Flory [†]	Rayonny	Crested	Angled	Bevilled	Escartely	Nowy	Arched/Enarched	Doubly Arched	Grafted	Clover Leaf	Fir Tree	Fir Twig	Saxonized
1987 (Friar)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
1981 (von Volborth)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x		x	x						
1976 (Neubecker)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x									x	x	x	
1924 (Grant)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x					
1899 (Curtis)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x															
1894 (Grant)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x					
1866 (Cussans)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x					x		x	x	x	x							
1810 (Berry)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x							
1795 (Porny)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	x									x				
1780 (Menestrier)	x	x	x	x	x		x		x				x	x			x	x									
1726 (Kent)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x				x	x													
1660 (Guillim)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x				x	x													
1605 (Siebmacher)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x						x		x								
1586 (Ferne)	x		x	x	x		x		x		x																
1486 (St. Albans)	x		x	x	x	x	x		x				x	x													
14 th C (Zurich)			x [‡]	x	x	x	x										x										
13 th C (Humphrey-Smith)	x		x	x	x	x	x						x	x													
12-13 th C (Brault)			x	x	x		x																				

* Includes *counter-embattled* and *bretessed*† In most examples of *counter-fleury*, the arms noted are those of Scotland‡ Wildenstein, and Gundelfingen, Zürich Wappenrolle, a bend *garnie d'épines*, may be the same as a *bend indented*. See, e.g., Brault, *Early Blazon*, fig. 108, and *crois endentee*, p. 156.

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Endnotes

1. *Terminologi*, #95
2. Gwynn-Jones, p. 54
3. Greaves, p. 44
4. Gwynn-Jones, p. 54
5. *Terminologi*, #82
6. Greaves, p. 44
7. Gwynn-Jones, p. 54
8. Figures 4 and 5 are reprinted with express written permission from Marcel van Rossum, Assistant State Herald of South Africa, on behalf of the South Africa Bureau of Heraldry
9. van Rossum, 2002-05-10
10. Gwynn-Jones, p. 120
11. Figure 13 is reprinted here with express written permission from the Exército Português/SIPRP/Gab CEME
12. Figure 15, a *rainbow wyvern proper*, reprinted here with express written permission from the Editor of *The Baronage Press*, <http://www.baronage.co.uk>
13. Brooke-Little, p. 231
14. *See, e.g.*, Greaves, pp 54-55
15. Ecclesiastes 1:9
16. Gorham, p. 10
17. For example, Humphrey-Smith gives Damory, p. 32, as ... *three bars nebuly* ..., while the same arms appear in Brault, *Aspilogia III*, Vol. II, p. 133, as ... *three bars undy*
18. Brault, *Aspilogia III*, Volume I, p. 72
19. London, p. 109
20. Moule, p. 206
21. Burke, p. 483
22. Berry, p. 57

23. Modern English version by the author, from the heraldry portions of *The Boke of St. Albans* published in Dallaway, 1793.