

SECTION XII - What to Tell a New Person

2) Heraldry for Scribes — a really good primer (Spring, AS XXXI)

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Policy Level: Informational/Educational - a good “Heraldry 101” primer

Intended Audience: Scribes, Beginning Heraldry, and Populace

Abstract: An article written for Scribes, by a Scribe with an extensive knowledge of heraldry. The West Kingdom College of Scribes obtained permission to print this article, and once the Scribes showed it off, we (the Heraldry) decided it would be very useful for us as well (we got permission of Mistress Eowyn to reprint it here). Peredur ap Tristan enhanced the article by adding more images than were in the original.

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Heraldry for Scribes

-- Mistress Eowyn Amberdrake

(Adapted with the author's permission for Western usage,
by Master Khaalid al Jaraad with the assistance of Mistress Alison von Markheim.)

In this article, I will assume that the reader is a scribe who does not read fluent heraldese, but who has just been given an abstruse verbal description of a set of arms and a poor-quality black and white copy of a picture drawn by a non-artist. The scribe's goal is to redraw that picture in a manner consistent with heraldic practice, and to color it properly. This is not an introduction to heraldry, so I am also assuming that the reader has either a reference book or two or a tame herald available.

When SCA practice differs from mundane heraldic references, it is best to consult an experienced SCA herald about the difference, or to assume that the SCA practice is correct and is in keeping with our interpretation of heraldry.

I will specifically address the basics of heraldic drafting style (size and shape), heraldic conventions (what the blazon doesn't say), SCA specific rules, and enough heraldic terminology to understand what goes where and how it is painted. Since animals occur frequently and have their own peculiarities of color and position, they are in a section of their own. The reader should refer to nearly any heraldic reference book for illustrations of crosses and their variations: there are too many to cover here. There are some crosses that are SCA inventions: if they aren't in a mundane reference ask a knowledgeable SCA herald. Heraldic terms are printed in bold type the first time they are used, and the reader may wish to refer to an heraldic dictionary for a more complete definition. I particularly recommend An Heraldic Alphabet by J.R. Brooke-Little.

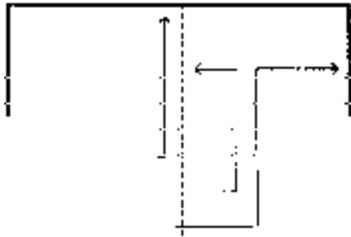
Some of the statements here are based on rulings gathered into the Laurel precedents documents. There are not exact quotes, but many interpretations. Nearly all are based directly upon mundane heraldry and heraldic illustrations and practices.

What goes on a shield?

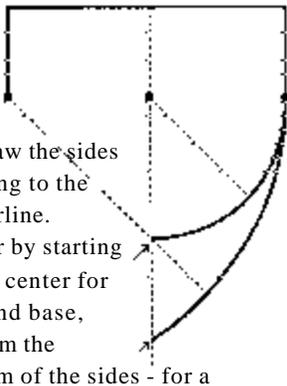
The duty of heraldic design is to be distinct, simple and impressive. To this end, good heraldic style is typified by the following qualities:

- **Clarity** A strong, simple design.
- **Contrast** Light colors are shown against dark ones, and vice versa, for maximum recognizability.
- **Balance** Designs tend to be symmetrical.
- **Repetition** Multiple objects are generally of the same kind.
- **Space Filling** Objects are drawn to comfortably fill the spaces provided for them. This may entail adjusting the placement of animals limbs or the size of the object. The space covered should be somewhat less than that left over.

Figure 1: How to Draw a Shield



1. Draw top line.
2. Draw centerline.
3. Draw sidelines
(Those drawn here are 1/3 the length of this top line.)



4. Draw the sides curving to the centerline.
Either by starting at the center for a round base, or from the bottom of the sides - for a pointed base.

Drawing a Shield

Figure 1 shows a basic shield shape. Draw the top of the shield and the center line. Draw straight sides 1/5 to 1/2 the width of the shield. 1/3 is a common length. Next, draw the sides curving to the center line. Either by starting at the bottom of the sides for a pointed base, or from the center for a round base.

The Blazon

The **emblazon** is the picture, the **blazon** is the description of the arms in formal heraldic wording. A blazon first describes the **field**, or background, then the color of the objects placed on the field. After that it describes **charges** place on top of charges, and so on, building up from the surface of the shield. If a **bordure** or **chief** is present, it and its charges are blazoned last. The order that charges are given (depending on how they are arranged) is: from **chief** (top) to **base** (bottom), from **dexter** (shield's right, observer's left) to **sinister** (shield's left, observer's right), and from center outwards. When describing the charges, their number and arrangement on the shield are mentioned first, followed by their positions, positional details, color and color details. Several charges of the same color would all be described before mentioning the next color. **Roundels** (disks) and **gouttes** (drops) are sometimes blazoned by other names that imply their color (see table 1).

Table 1	Roundels		Gouttes	
	Color	Name	Meaning	Name
Argent - White	Plate	Silver (plata)	de l'eau	Water
Azure - Blue	Hurt	Hurtleberry	des larms	Tears
Gules - Red	Torteau	Cake	de sang	Blood
Or - Gold	Bezant	Byzantine	d'Or	Gold
Purpure - Purple	Golpe	Wine		
Sable - Black	Pellet or	Cannon shot	de poix	Pitch
Vert - Green	Pomme	Apple	d'huile,	Oil, Olive oil
White and Blue	Fountain	Water		
Black and White	Tai-Ch'i	Yin-yang		