Coat of Arms; The Medieval Era

Coat of Arms, as well as heraldry, is a complex system of symbols and marks on the armor of knights. The various symbols were organized together in a certain order on a surcoat, tunic, or shield. This special organization arrangement gave birth to the term, "Coat of Arms." This system also identified knights with family lines and feudal- social positions. The coat of arms became hereditary just as a knight inherited the right to lead or the duty to follow another leader in battle. A knight's family also had the right to display his coat of arms. Each family owned their own coat of arms. There had said to be a book with records of the family name, and specific details of their coat of arms.

Heraldry is the art of blazoning, assigning, and marshaling a coat of arms. Heraldry emerged in the twelfth century during the golden age of feudalism to distinguish each knight. The markings were placed on the largest surface area, such as the shield, or the mounting of a crest on the helmet. Historians once theorized that a coat of arms enabled a knight to be recognized by followers during a battle. It prevented friends from striking another friend during the heat of a battle. As warfare advanced, development of armor, particularly a helmet that hid the face, increased the need for identifying a knight. Therefore, it also increased the popularity of heraldry. As heraldry became popular, there was a high possibility that two knights unknown to each other might be using the same insignia. To prevent this from happening, records were kept to ensure a knight to their rights of a particular pattern, or symbols.

The oldest known document of the first use with coat of arms was in 1127, when Henry I of England bestowed it onto his son, Geoffrey Plantagenet. Henry gave Geoffrey a shield with several figures of little gold lions. Geoffrey's shield was pasted down to his grandson, which demonstrated that heraldry soon became a hereditary tradition. Soon later, aristocrats grew bored with the abstract designs and replaced them with concrete symbols. King Richard I developed a new design on a shield, it contained two lions facing each other. This design was later changed to 3 golden lions on a red shield. This pattern soon became the official arms for the Royal Arms of England.

As thirteenth century started, heraldry was used so often that arrangement of arms had to grow more sophisticated in order to keep distinctiveness. Heraldry used two categories of colors: a dark "color" (red, blue, black, green, or purple) and a light "metal" (yellow representing gold, and white representing silver). The background color of a design was called the field. The main design, such as an animal, was called the charge. Color arrangement became more complex because the increasing sophistication of heraldry. The function of color arrangement soon developed an importance meaning. Order of color had to be strictly obeyed; a knight who mixed colors would be kicked out, or banned from a tournament. The proper technical description of the coat of arm is called the " blazon of arms." It contains the shield, the mantling, the helm, the wreath, charges, and the crest; which is not on all arms.

In conclusion, coats of arms became very popular. In England, coats of arms were legal symbols authorized by the king. Coats of arms continued to be passed down in family histories, tournaments, and ceremonies. With the end of the medieval era, coats of arms remain popular with various European families.

Extra Information:

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| **COLORS** | ***Even the colors can have special meaning in a "family crest" or coat of arms:*** |
| Gold (Or) | Generosity and elevation of the mind |
| Silver or White (Argent) | Peace and sincerity |
| Red (Gules) | Warrior or martyr; Military strength and magnanimity |
| Blue (Azure) | Truth and loyalty |
| Green (Vert) | Hope, joy, and loyalty in love |
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| Black (Sable) | Constancy or grief |
| Purple (Purpure) | Royal majesty, sovereignty, and justice |
| Orange (Tawny or Tenne) | Worthy ambition |
| Maroon (Sanguine or Murray) | Patient in battle, and yet victorious |

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| **Heraldic Lines and Ordinaries:** | |
| Nebuly Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/nebuly.gif | Clouds or air |
| Wavy Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/wavy.gif | Sea or water |
| Engrailed Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/engrailed.gif | Earth or land |
| Invected Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/invected.gif | Earth or land |
| Indented Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/indented.gif | Fire |
| Dancette Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/dancettee.gif | Water |
| Raguly Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/raguly.gif | Difficulties that have been encountered |
| Embattled Linehttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/embattled.gif | Walls of a fortress or town (also, fire) |

Charges:

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| Crown of thorns | Adversity |
| Cup (often covered)http://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/cup2.gif | Office of the king's butler |
| Cushionshttp://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/cushion.gif | Authority |
| Knight (especially on horseback) | The soul guiding the body; man's journey through life |
| LionRampant Lion (See [Sample Lions](http://www.fleurdelis.com/lions.htm)) | Dauntless courage |
| Mullet  (Star)http://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/mullet.gif | Divine quality from above; mark of third son |
| Pale/Palet/Pallet/Paly http://www.fleurdelis.com/graphics/pale.gif | Military strength |
| PelicanPelican Vulning | Self-sacrifice and charitable nature; When feeding her young ("in her piety"), symbolizes the duties of a parent or parental love |
| TigerTiger (Heraldic) | Fierceness and valour; resentment; dangerous if aroused |
| Unicorn [See Sample Unicorns](http://www.fleurdelis.com/unicorns.htm) | Extreme courage; virtue and strength |