



By the Boke

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Designing Conflict-Free Armory

By Aryanhwy merch Catmael, Boke Herawde

I. TSCA and why you don't want it.

One of the most frustrating parts of trying to register your coat of arms is when your design gets returned for conflict with already registered arms. Most people want to resubmit arms as close to the original submission as possible. One of the most common ways of redesigning arms to avoid conflict is to slap on a bordure. This is so common, far more common than in medieval armory, that it is known as "TSCA" — or "typical SCA". Something is TSCA when it's more common armory of the Current Middle Ages than armory in the real Middle Ages. That's where this article comes in: We will explore ways to redesign armory that maintain flavor of the original arms, but use changes that are more common in period armory and less common in the SCA. Not only will you have a better chance of having arms without a conflict, but you'll have that pleasant inner knowledge of knowing that your arms are more medieval than they had been.

Because the majority of my armorial knowledge is of English heraldry, statements about commonality should be taken to be of English armory, and not continental, unless otherwise noted. However, all the suggestions for redesign can also be found in continental armory.

II. Ways to redesign

- Arms that use just one central charge are far more common than arms that use any other number, yet you'll often find charges come in groups of three in period armory. Since this motif is less-used in the society, quite often changing the number of charges in the center of the field from one to three can clear the original conflict and not introduce any new conflicts. The use of six charges (three, two, and one) is also quite common in medieval arms, and even more underused in the SCA than three.
- Suppose your primary charge is an ordinary - a pale, a fess, a bend or bend sinister, a chevron, etc. - and so cannot easily be multiplied into three. Two ways to modify arms with a central ordinary with little change to the rest of the design are to use a complex line of division (such as embattled, engrailed, invected, or indented; these are the four most common type of complex line of division) or to add cotises; cotises are charges that lie on either side of the ordinary and are roughly 1/5 - 1/6 of the width of the ordinary. Cotised bends, in particular, are fairly common in medieval heraldry.

Sometimes, the ordinaries may already have complex lines of division, or the central charge group already has three or six charges. Never fear! There are still a number of options left:

- Add strewn charges on the field, such as billets (rectangles), roundels (circles), or crosses; these three types of charges are three of the most common types of strewn charges in medieval arms. There is a drawback, though, with this method: I only recommend it if you are a glutton for punishment when it comes to embroidering/appliquing/painting your arms! In the same vein as this, if you have a charge or field that is sable, Or, or argent, consider using one of the ermine tinctures - ermine (black spots on white), counter-ermine (white spots on black), erminois (black spots on yellow), or pean (yellow spots on black).

- Divide the field between more than one tincture, especially into multiple parts, e.g. barry (horizontal stripes), paly (vertical stripes), bendy (diagonally from upper left to lower right, while looking at the field), checky (checks), or lozengy (diamonds). Fields of more than one tincture are underutilized in SCA armory, and make for very spiffy banners and heraldic garb if you chose this route.
- Divide one of the charges the same one. In English armory, fesses and chevrons checky are not uncommon. In Germany and other parts in the east of Europe, animals such as lions and unicorns are often found divided between two tinctures.
- If your central charge is an ordinary, consider putting charges on it. To keep continuity with the rest of the design, you can pick one of the other charges you're already using, and use the same tincture as the field, and you'll be surprised at how unobtrusive the change is. Another alternative, if you have a beast of some sort as your main charge, is to put a charge on the shoulder of the beast, such as a rose or a mullet or a fleur-de-lys.

III. Some examples

We'll consider a couple of examples: "Azure, a decrescent and a chief embattled argent", "Per fess sable and gules, a fess between three griffins passant argent", and "Argent, a unicorn rampant gules".

Azure, a decrescent and a chief embattled argent

- Azure, three decrescents and a chief embattled argent
- Azure, six decrescents and a chief embattled argent
- Azure, a decrescent and on a chief embattled argent, three decrescents azure
- Azure, a decrescent checky argent and sable, a chief embattled argent
- Bendy azure and Or, a decrescent and a chief embattled argent
- Azure billey, a decrescent and a chief embattled argent

Per fess sable and gules, a fess between three griffins passant argent

- Per fess sable and gules, a fess cotised between three griffins passant argent
- Per fess sable and gules, a fess engrailed between three griffins passant argent
- Per fess sable and gules, a fess engrailed cotised plain between three griffins passant argent
- Barry sable and argent, a fess between three griffins passant gules
- Per fess sable and gules, on a fess between three griffins passant argent three roundels gules
- Per fess sable and gules, a fess between three griffins passant argent each charged on the shoulder with a rose sable

Argent, a Catherine wheel gules

- Argent, three Catherine wheels gules
- Argent, six Catherine wheels gules
- Argent crusily sable, a Catherine wheel gules
- Argent, a Catherine wheel gules charged with a cross sable
- Barry vert and argent, a Catherine wheel gules
- Argent, a Catherine wheel paly gules and Or

As you can see, the possibilities are endless.