



The ARMIGER'S News

Orthodox Ecclesiastical Heraldry

by

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with line drawings by

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With an Introduction and Commentary by Father Guy W. Selvester, ACH Advisory Board

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The American College of Heraldry is extremely grateful to Cmdr. Valery Pavlovich Yegorov for bringing this article to our attention. Cmdr. Yegorov and David Johnson had labored long and hard on this proposal, which would never have seen the light of day had it not been for the former passing this document, still in David's handwritten stage with his own rough sketches, along to us. It should be noted that the original premise upon which this article is based, along with the sketches David had envisioned, was incomplete at the time of David's untimely passing - it was a work in progress, which Cmdr. Yegorov completed based on his own knowledge of Orthodox practice. We are indebted to Cmdr. Yegorov for preserving this unique work.

- David Robert Wooten, Executive Director

This article by the late Dr. David Johnson is an interesting attempt to codify in one place the collected knowledge, limited as it is, concerning heraldry in the Orthodox Churches. Generally speaking, ecclesiastical heraldry as we know it was, and still is, heavily influenced by European heraldry. As such, the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions have developed heraldic systems of their own. However, heraldry is less present in the Orthodox tradition. Nevertheless, in European countries where there is a large Orthodox Christian population, primarily in Eastern Europe, there are distinct heraldic customs, traditions and practices. In Greece, the Middle East and Africa the use of heraldry as we would understand it is not common among the Orthodox Churches.

Dr. Johnson's article serves as an interesting proposal. Some of what he proposes is extrapolated from existing heraldic traditions. Some of it may be in use in some of the Orthodox communities (such as the Russian) while not in others. Because of the decentralized nature of Orthodoxy it is impossible to impose a single unified system on a widely disparate group of ecclesiastical communities each with a distinct identity based on ethnicity and/or nationality. Still, Dr. Johnson suggests some interesting ideas that could serve as an excellent model for those positions held in common throughout the Orthodox world. Since he himself was an Orthodox Christian this was an area of personal and particular interest to him. The ideas expressed in this article may not be agreed with universally but they do give excellent food for thought and discussion. The American College of Heraldry does not necessarily endorse this system proposed by Dr. Johnson as normative but is happy to share this article to which he devoted so much time, effort and energy.

- Guy W. Selvester

Introduction

While emblems of many types have decorated military shields from time beyond memory, these do not represent true heraldry.

A.R. Wagner, Richmond Herald (England) in *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages*, defined true heraldry as ♦the systematic use of hereditary devices centered on the shield.♦ In due time the definition expanded to include nations, corporate bodies, institutions, the clergy and other individuals who might never have descendants. Initially, heraldic devices were used to clearly identify mounted warriors whose faces were covered with armour. Well before the era of armour had passed, those bearing heraldic Arms found them widely useful in a wide variety ways to identify individuals, corporate bodies and their property. Armorial bearings were soon decorating everything from china and silverware, to doorways and church windows. Far from being the relic of a bygone past, heraldry is more widely used today than ever before.

The first known heraldic usage occurred when Henry I of England presented a shield to his son-in-law, Geoffrey of Anjou in 1127. Shortly thereafter, heraldic usage appeared almost simultaneously throughout Western Europe, likely the result of knights gathered for participation in the Crusades and finding heraldry beautiful, interesting and useful for the purpose of identification.

Soon thereafter, heraldic usage expanded to corporate bodies, as well as to the gentry and clergy.

Russians began adopting armorial bearings during the 1400s, but Arms were never used there for military purposes. Carl Alexander von Volborth in *Heraldry of the World* noted that in 1472, Ivan III (1462-1505) married Sophia, niece of the last ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire regarded himself as the heir to the Byzantine Empire and emphasized this by assuming the title of Czar (a derivative of the name and style of Caesar), and taking the Byzantine double-headed eagle as his devise. He further noted that Peter the Great (1689-1725) had an active interest in the subject and in 1722 established a government department for heraldry directed by a master of heraldry, among whose duties was the creation of armorial bearings for all noble families that had none, and for all the officers of the army and navy. The vice-master of heraldry, was a Frenchman whose special task it was to design arms for Russian provinces and towns. An excellent source currently available is *Russian Heraldry and Nobility* by Mandich and Placek, published in 1992 by Dramco Publishers of Boynton Beach, Florida. Heraldry was inhibited in Greece and many other traditionally Orthodox nations with a brutal occupation by the Ottoman Empire. The strong Moslem governments in Turkey, Syria, Palestine and other areas with significant Orthodox populations, also acted to repel heraldic expansion.

Captain Valery Pavlovich Yegorov kindly provided several examples of early ecclesiastical heraldry used by distinguished clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church. These are included for general reference. However, no formal heraldic system was discovered for the Orthodox clergy in Russia or elsewhere.

Orthodox Heraldry

The clergy of the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions have long enjoyed a well-developed system of ecclesiastical heraldry. This has proven extremely useful in the visual identification of an individual and his priestly or episcopal rank through symbolism. However, since no ecclesiastical heraldic system had been developed for Orthodox clergy, they tended to bear their arms as might a layman. In the very old examples of the heraldry employed by Russian clergymen, it is clear that some elements of the designs were borrowed from Western ecclesiastical heraldry, and without entirely desirable effect.

An increasing number of armorial requests are being received from Orthodox clergymen and institutions in Russia and the United States. Some requests are for the creation of new and technically correct heraldic designs. Others request a proper ecclesiastical format to bear and display the arms they have inherited. In the absence of any formal heraldic system for the Orthodox clergy, very significant problems are thereby encountered. Obviously, Orthodox clergymen would not be wise to display their arms in styles appropriate for laymen. It would also be highly inappropriate for them to display their arms in the clerical styles of heterodox [I would say *non-Orthodox* GS] communions. The Orthodox structure of hierarchy, and even what is meant by that term, differs quite significantly from that of other communions.

Purpose

The purpose here has been to develop an attractive, meaningful and unified system of heraldic design appropriate for the Orthodox clergy and institutions that might wish to use them. The system was created through a decade of study, development and refinement by Orthodox laymen with extensive heraldic experience, with consultation, suggestions and corrections by Orthodox clergymen having an interest in the subject.

It has never been the desire or intent of those connected with this study to attempt to impose an heraldic system on the clergy, nor even to suggest that they should adopt the use of heraldry. Rather, the goal is to provide a useful and systematic approach to Orthodox ecclesiastical heraldry for the use and benefit of those Orthodox clergymen and institutions that might wish to use it. It is intended that the system be Pan-Orthodox in use, and despite occasional differences between jurisdictions, be flexible enough to be useful by all. For the sake of clarity, the following recommended system will be presented as a widely accepted formal system, though it has only recently been actively employed. It is understood that in due course some fine-tuning may be desirable.

The Armorial Bearings of Primates of the Eastern Orthodox Churches

Many, or perhaps all of the Primates of the Eastern Orthodox Churches utilize heraldic or heraldic-like seals. However, these appear to be corporate seals of office rather than personal armorial bearings. A sample may be seen in the design used by His Beatitude Diodoros I, Patriarch of Jerusalem, of blessed memory, presented to the author several years ago. The design reverses the staff (crozier) and processional cross, differing it thereby from the much earlier personal armorial bearings of Russian hierarchs. That change may have been influenced by Western styles for clergy arms, perhaps inserted by a well-meaning Western heraldic artist, or, more likely due to the earlier Russian heraldic archives being unavailable to the Jerusalem Patriarchate. The crown is also of Western style. These are merely observations and not in any way intended as criticism.



Should Eastern Orthodox Primates elect to display inherited or newly acquired armorial bearings, for personal rather than corporate identification, the following pattern is recommended.

- **Shield:** The shield is the most central and personal element of an armorial design. In ecclesiastical heraldry the shield has no reference to the secular military weapon of defense. Rather, the

reference is to the **shield of faith** noted by Saint Paul the Apostle in Ephesians 6:16. The shield may be decorated with symbols allusive to the individual, his origins, history, and interests, including allusions to his Christian faith.

- **Mantle:** The great, or more elaborate, mantle represents the spiritual authority and administrative responsibility of a member of the episcopacy. The design also obviously alludes to, but does not attempt to duplicate the mantiya and may be of any tincture appropriate for his office, often a purplish red. On the mantle are seen **rivers**, a red band within a broader white band, as well as **tablets** at the base. The fabric of the mantle is gathered and bound in chief by golden cords and tassels, and has a golden fringe. The interior of the mantle is of ermine which specifically and uniquely identifies the bearer as primate of the Church he heads. *[There are also instances where the mantiyas should be lined in yellow to distinguish it from a secular mantle as per B.B. Heim GS]*
- **Mitre:** Above the mantle is the mitre of an Orthodox bishop. Naturally, the details may be drawn in a number of ways and the tinctures are generally those of the mantle and gold.
- **Staff (Crozier) and Processional Cross:** These follow the earliest examples of the heraldry used by Orthodox hierarchs and are in reverse position to that of Western hierarchs. *[There is no fixed position for Western bishops so I am not sure of this reference - GS]* To the dexter of the mitre appears the top of a processional cross and to sinister the top of an Orthodox bishop's staff, both gold.
- **Summary:** Shield; great mantle of appropriate color, with rivers and tablets, doubled ermine; cords, tassels and fringe gold; mitre of chosen color, between to dexter a processional cross and to sinister a crozier gold.

The Episcopacy

All of the episcopate of the Orthodox Church are spiritually of equal rank and each has a single vote in consular conclaves. Nevertheless, some are titled Bishop, while others may be titled Archbishop, or Metropolitan. The titles beyond bishop are generally extended by his peers in a consular conclave in honor of distinguished service, or for reasons of administrative responsibilities. In some national Orthodox Churches the title of archbishop is an honor beyond that of metropolitan. In other national Orthodox Churches the reverse is the case.

Other than for the unique and individual design painted on the shield, with one exception all members of the episcopacy bear identical arms to that of the primate. The interior of the mantle is white for those of episcopal rank, rather than the ermine of the primate. In this way the underlying consular nature of the Church is emphasized.

- **Summary:** Shield; great mantle of appropriate color, with rivers and tablets, doubled white; cords, tassels and fringe gold; mitre of chosen color, between to dexter a processional cross and to sinister a crozier gold.

Mitered Archpriests and Protopresbyters

Priests of whatever rank are the personal representatives of their bishop in their parish and other places of responsibility. The more simple mantle represents their spiritual authority, reflects their dignity and reflects the respect and affection of the faithful for the priest and bishop. The armorial design is as follows:



- **Shield:** The shield is painted with a unique design.
- **Mantle:** Priests bear their shield on a simple mantle, less elaborate than that of a bishop. The mantle may be of any tincture other than black, white or gold, with a white interior, gathered in chief and bound by golden cords. The lower extremity of the mantle is fringed in gold for a mitered archpriest, and with alternating strands of gold and red for a protopresbyter.
- **Mitre:** Above the mantle is placed a mitre for a mitered archpriest, usually reflecting the color of the mantle and gold. A protopresbyter would place there whatever style and color of ecclesiastical hat he is authorized to wear. These designs cannot be mistaken for the arms of a bishop since the mantle is a simple one and since no processional cross or staff is present.
- **Summary for Mitered Archpriests:** Shield; simple mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords, tassels and fringe gold; mitre.
- **Summary for Protopresbyters:** Shield; simple mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords and tassels gold, fringe of alternating gold and red; authorized ecclesiastical hat.

Archpriests

Archpriests bear the same general armorial pattern as a mitered archpriest, except that they would substitute for the mitre the style and color of the ecclesiastical hat to which they are entitled.

- Summary: Shield; simple mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords, tassels and fringe gold; authorized ecclesiastical hat.

Priests

Priests bear the same armorial design as archpriests, except they would display no fringe around the base of the mantle.

- Summary: Shield; simple mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords and tassels gold, no fringe; authorized ecclesiastical hat.



Protodeacons

The shield of a protodeacon is ensigned by an ecclesiastical hat of the type and color he has been authorized to wear. The shield is environed by an orarion of the color of his choice, other than black, white, or gold. It is doubled, fringed and bearing crosses of gold.

- Summary: Shield; environed by an orarion of chosen color doubled, fringed and bearing crosses gold; authorized ecclesiastical hat.

Deacons

The armorial design for a deacon is the same as for a protodeacon, except the orarion is doubled, fringed and bearing crosses of white.

- Summary: Shield; environed by an orarion of chosen color doubled, fringed and bearing crosses white; authorized ecclesiastical hat.



Abbots

The head of one or more monasteries, whatever the exact title, bear the shield on a great mantle of black with a white interior. The mantle is gathered and bound in chief by golden cords and tassels and has a golden fringe. Above the mantle is placed a mitre, or by whatever other ecclesiastical hat he has been authorized to wear. Beside the headwear is seen, to dexter the top of a processional cross, and to sinister the top of a veiled staff with a crossbar, to difference it from a bishop's staff.

- Summary: Shield; great mantle black doubled white; cords, tassels and fringe gold, mitre or authorized ecclesiastical hat between to dexter a processional cross and to sinister an Abbot's staff gold with veil of selected color.

Hieromonks with advanced titles of honor

Exact titles may differ somewhat from one national Orthodox Church to another. However, monks who are also priests and have received advanced titles of honor are generally included in this category. They bear their shield below the ecclesiastical hat of a monastic and depending therefrom a black veil doubled white, alluding to, but not attempting to duplicate his actual attire. To indicate the advanced honors the veil has a black fringe along the mantle's lower edge.

- Summary: Shield; monastic hat veiled black doubled white; fringe black.

Hieromonks

A hieromonk's armorial design is the same as noted in the previous section, except the mantle would not be fringed.

- Summary: Shield; monastic hat veiled black doubled white, no fringe.

Hierodeacons

A hierodeacon's armorial design is the same as that of a deacon, except the orarion is black, doubled, fringed and bearing crosses of white.

- Summary: Shield; environed by an orarion black doubled, fringed and bearing crosses white; authorized ecclesiastical hat.



Cathedrals

The shield of a cathedral is borne on a great mantle of any color other than black, white, or gold, doubled white, gathered and bound in chief by gold cords and tassels and with a golden fringe. Above the mantle is seen the tops of a processional cross between two processional fans, all gold.

- Summary: Shield; great mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords tassel and fringe gold; a processional cross between two processional fans all gold.

Parishes

The shield of a parish is borne on a simple mantle of any color other than black, white, or gold, doubled white, gathered and bound in chief by golden cords and tassels, and with a golden fringe along the lower edge.

- Summary: Shield; simple mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords, tassel and fringe gold; a processional cross between two processional fans all gold.



Missions

The armorial design of a mission is the same as that of a parish, except it would have white cords and tassels and no fringe.

- Summary: Shield; simple mantle of chosen color doubled white; cords and tassels white, no fringe; a processional cross between two processional fans all gold.

Monasteries

The armorial design for a monastery is the same as that of a parish, except the mantle is black doubled white. The mantle is gathered and bound by golden cords and tassels and the mantle's lower edge is fringed gold.

- Summary: Shield, simple mantle black doubled white; cords, tassel and fringe gold; a processional cross between two professional fans all gold.

Sketes

The armorial bearing of a skete is identical to that of a monastery, except the cords, tassels are white and there would be no fringe.

- Summary: Shield; simple mantle black doubled white; cords and tassels white; no fringe; a processional cross between two processional fans all gold.

Descendants of Orthodox Clergy

The armorial bearings of clergymen who have children, or in a marriage into which children may be born, should receive blazons (technical heraldic descriptions of the arms) which include an heraldic crest (that part of arms which rises above the helmet) for the use of descendants. The crest would never appear in the clergyman's ecclesiastical arms, but the heraldic arms inherited by his descendants would be incomplete without it.

Archives and Preservation

Orthodox clergymen and institutions, desiring to acquire armorial bearings, will be assisted by laity who are expert in armorial design. The arms of Orthodox clergymen and institutions, as well as those for the laity, are to be recorded and preserved in appropriate collections through print, or electronically, as may be desirable.

[While I realize this article is intended as a suggested system I know of no Orthodox monk below the rank of Archimandrite (Abbot) who uses any personal device. Also I know of very few Orthodox institutions that make use of corporate heraldry. - GS]

About the author and heraldic consultants

[The late] David Pittman Johnson earned the B.S. degree at Huntingdon College and the M.S.W. and D.S.W. degrees at Tulane University. Prior to retirement, he served as professor of psychopathology and psychotherapy in the Graduate School of the University of Alabama, and maintained a private practice in psychotherapy for some thirty years. He continued to serve as Colonel (Infantry), Headquarters, The Alabama State Defense Force. Dr. Johnson served as President of The American College of Heraldry for over thirty years, focusing on the study of, designing, blazoning and publishing armorial bearings. Through the years he served as a Grand Officer of The Imperial Ethiopian Order of the Lion; as a Knight of The (Hungarian military) Knightly Order of Vit; and as a Knight of The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem. He also served for several years as one of the Commissioners of the International Commission on Orders of Chivalry. Dr. Johnson and his family were active members of

Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Birmingham, Alabama.

The author wishes to thank Cmdr. Valery Pavlovich Yegorov, B.S., B.A., Russian Navy in Reserve, Retired, who now serves as the St. Andrews Principal Herald Master of the Collegium Heraldicum Russiae, and as the Vice President of the Russian Heraldry Society; as well as his wife Natalie Rostislavovna Yegorova, the Principal Heraldic Artist to the CHR, both learned armorial scholars and extraordinary heraldic artists, for their consultation, assistance and encouragement. A debt of enormous gratitude is due perhaps a dozen Orthodox clergymen who directed and guided the way along the often complex ecclesiastical issues encountered, but who were far too modest to allow mention of their gracious assistance.

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