

The Principles of Recent Public Heraldry in Norway

By HANS CAPPELEN

I Introduction

A heraldic revolution in Norway? Hardly, if we think of such "revolutions" as Napoleon's imperial heraldry and the c Nevertheless, approximately in 1930 there was a break with past tradition in the development of new civic arms in Norway was the new idea. During the last 50 years this heraldic programme has been consolidated. It is now the dominating guideline private heraldry.

The force behind this new direction has been Mr. *Hallvard Trættemberg*, a former First Archivist of the National Archives an artist and the heraldic advisor to the Crown, to Governmental bodies, the Church etc. Mr Trættemberg has succeeded Norwegian governments to support his heraldic programme.

In the course of my lecture I shall comment on (II) the basic norms of recent public heraldry in Norway; (III) the theory and (IV) some criticisms that might be raised.

II The Principles

The making of a successful coat of arms is, like a cake, dependent on a good recipe. Of course the creation and reproduction is a more sophisticated process than this analogy would suggest.

There are various minimum conditions for making correct arms. The minimum conditions qualify some distinctive signs. Some minimum conditions may be called "principles", while the many alternative ways of creation and reproduction may be called "norms". Several reasons both of them may justifiably be called heraldic "norms".

In my opinion, the basic *principles* are the following:

1. Arms are distinctive signs centred on the shield.
2. Arms shall have tinctures.
3. Arms shall have charges (and/or partitions).
4. It must be possible to reproduce the arms in a heraldic style.
5. It must be possible to describe the arms in a blazon.
6. The bearer shall have legal rights to the arms.

These conditions are fulfilled by the modern public arms in Norway, as in most countries of Western Europe.

What is peculiar to the Norwegian scheme, is that principles No. 2-4 have been further limited:

New arms are restricted to only two tinctures, one type of charge/partition (which may be in a two-dimensional style without perspective and shade-lines).

There are, however, some exceptions.

III Theory and sources

The trend towards more simplicity in Norwegian public heraldry is said by Hallvard Trættemberg (*Heraldisk Tidsskrift*, p. 16) to be a return to the first principles of heraldry and to be "aesthetically correct".

I favour the argument that simplicity helps arms to serve as *distinctive signs*. This argument was essential to make public arms today suitable for advertising, public buildings, road signs at municipal borders, door marks on vehicles etc.

The norms of recent public heraldry are established by the practice of the granting authorities: The Ministry of Local Government, and the Supreme Command for military arms. We must look at recently authorized arms and take into consideration the practice made by the superior authorities.

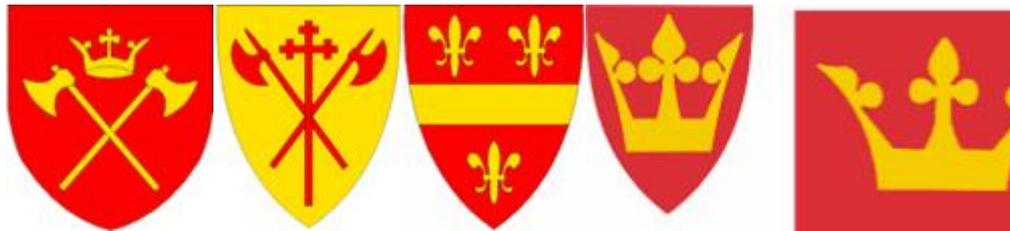
When refusing proposals for new public arms, the Governmental authorities argue the necessity of following "heraldic rules". Proposals that do not adhere to the "rules" are not approved by the granting authorities.

In municipal heraldry the principles and rules are not given in statutory regulations. The superior authorities of the municipalities included the heraldic principles in written instructions regarding - the emblems of their units. These principles are worded so that they are the same as in the practice of municipal heraldry.

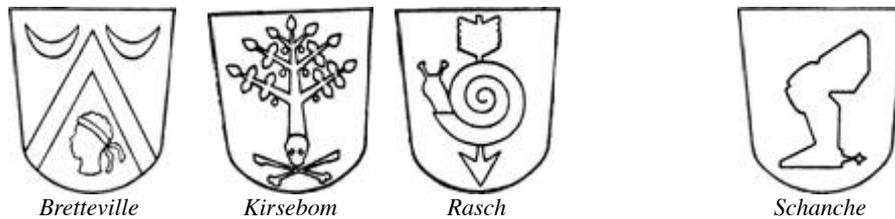
Even though the strict principles and the obligatory simplicity are sanctioned by the authorities, it is obviously difficult to enforce the programme in all cases. Proposals for new arms do generally combine too many charges and tinctures. So the superior authorities make efforts to convince applicants that their proposals must be altered. Their efforts are not always successful. Some grants consist of one kind of charge and two tinctures.

As an explanation for this is that some exceptions to the principles have been made, especially the adoption of an old

An alternative for a reluctant municipality is to use the heraldically unsatisfactory emblem without any Royal grant prohibition against doing this, but such emblems cannot be used as municipal flags, according to the wording of the Act on use of flags on municipal buildings etc. A number of municipalities use emblems that are nonheraldic or only partly a coat of arms e.g. shields with many charges and tinctures - often quite naturalistic in motif and design. The terms "coat of arms" and "heraldic" are in official language reserved for arms in full compliance with the actual heraldic "mark" or "emblem" are applied to the distinctive signs that only in some -- but not all - respects fulfil the demands of the heraldic law. Distinctive signs such as those of Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, are excluded from the noble circle of heraldic coats of arms. Nevertheless, I take it that they are "coats of arms" in the sense of that expression in Norwegian statutory law. All heraldic municipal arms will then be protected by the Norwegian Penal Code, Trade-Marks Act and Design Act.



Arms of Hordaland, Sør-Trøndelag, Ullensvang and Vestfold with flag



Bretteville

Kirsebom

Rasch

Schanche

Family arms from my book "Norske slektsvåpen" (Norwegian Family Coats of Arms)

IV Some criticism

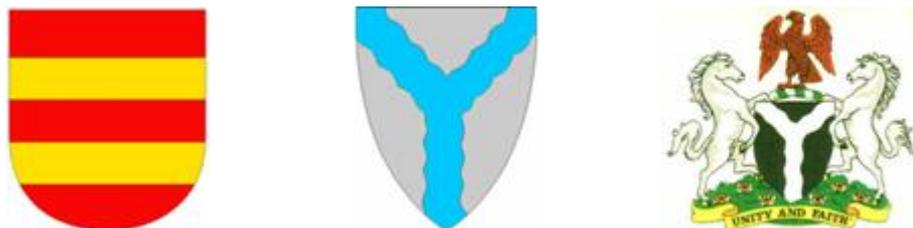
All that I have said above, might be seriously criticized from different points of view!

It should be noted that deviating heraldic systems are working in Finland and our other Nordic countries, as well as in other countries. All the foreign public arms are even in principle protected in Norway by our statutory law. And generally it is the law of each country that defines what is a public coat of arms of that country. Neither authorities, heraldists nor lawyers in Norway can close their eyes to the practices of other nations!

The principle of one charge/partition and two tinctures is applauded in foreign heraldic handbooks. But in practice the most countries. Finland and Sweden allow two charges without hesitation. Other countries have more charges and tinctures in their granted arms.

The chief argument against the "Norwegian simplicity" in new public arms, is the possibility of confusion with existing arms therefore being misleading. One solution to this problem is to ignore arms whose owners are not well-known, or well-known only, and the like. This solution is applied in recent Royal Decrees, as they are accompanied by the following statement: "Infringing the rights of others that one needs to take into consideration".

I am not convinced, however, that all new public arms in Norway through the last decades, have been granted with due regard to the provincial arms of Aust-Agder (R.D. 12.12.1958) are identical with those of the royal house of Oldenburg with reversed



Arms of Aust-Agder and Oldenburg, Kvinnherad and Nigeria.

Also open to criticism are the arms of the county of Kvinnherad (R.D. 18.6.1982) which look like the national shield of province of Vestfold (R.D. 30.1.1970) (Gules an open crown Or) which are identical with well-known trade-marks for coffee. Up to a few years ago, the granting authority has been quite careful to approve civic arms with combined charges only when such as a ship with a sail (province of Nordland, R.D. 15.1.1965), or a branch with apples and leaves (county of Leikanger) however, a kneeling man with a bow in R. D. 8.11.1979 (county of Melhus), and a woman with strips of cloth in her hair (county of Varteig). These two motives refer to famous events and personages of Viking times. Personally I am not fond of combined heraldic charges. However, it is possible that the trend in Norwegian public heraldry today is to permit motives, as e.g. with unusual combinations such as a fish with horns (county of Inari, 25.2.1955) or a cross with a key hole on it (county of

Keep in mind the fact that Norway's national arms have a crowned lion with a battle axe in its paws! I have heard no proposal of heraldic principles". A winged arrow was allowed in R.D. 23.9.1983 for the county of Finnøy, but it was based on a historical

In this lecture I have only touched on a small number of the many problems relating to recent public heraldry in Norway. Heraldists will accept my challenge to study and discuss the problems.