

## Heraldry & Names

### Part A:

In the SCA, people are encouraged to develop personas, a character which could have existed at some time in the Middle Ages but did not in fact exist (taking on the persona of a historical person is generally frowned upon). Part of this is choosing a name, and sometimes a coat of arms, which could have been used by a medieval person in some culture and era. People can register their names and arms with the College of Arms; such registration protects the name and arms from conflict -- other names or arms that are identical or similar -- and ensure that at least some level of historical accuracy is attained.

How do you choose a name or arms? The best way to do this is to find examples of medieval names and pick elements that were known to have been used in period, and to look at examples of medieval armory and design something similar. Modern history books can be used as a place to start, but they should not be the end of your research: Many history books change the spellings of the names of historical people to modern spellings. Your local herald may have books on names and armory that you can flip through, and there are also numerous web sites available. You want to make sure, however, that the websites you look at are reliable: The best way to determine if a certain web page is reliable is to see whether it lists dates for the information listed in the article and whether it cites its sources. If it does, you're probably in luck. Two good places to start any foray into choosing a name and arms are the Medieval Names Archive (<http://www.s-gabriel.org/names>) and the Medieval Heraldry Archive ([www.s-gabriel.org/heraldry](http://www.s-gabriel.org/heraldry))

Don't rush into things. A person's name is a very personal choice, and too often you'll hear stories of someone who picked a name at their first event, and later found out that it isn't a medieval name. Or, you may pick a name which is medieval, but then later on find a name that you like much better. Allow yourself time to browse many lists of names and armory before you set your heart on something.

A bit about names: This is of course going to be very broad and not completely accurate for all time periods and culture. But the basic constructions of names remained the same throughout most of our period. By about the 8<sup>th</sup> century, most people had one given name and one byname (a type of nickname describing some characteristic). These bynames could be locatives (based on the bearer's place of residence), patronymics (based on the bearer's father's given name), occupational (based on the bearer's occupation), or descriptives of other characteristics ("the short", "the red", "the bald", etc.) Until the last few centuries of our period, these bynames were used literally; for example, a woman would not have been known as <Johnson>, because a woman can't be any man's son. When these bynames became inherited surnames (like modern day surnames, passed down from parent to child without any regard for the root meaning) varied from culture to culture, but most western European cultures were using inherited surnames by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (Eastern European cultures often didn't adopt this custom until much later). The same is true for both women taking their husband's surname and

the use of middle names (more than one given name); these customs were used only in a few cultures, and only late in our period.

A bit about armory: Armory tended to be simple and easily identifiable. A good rule of thumb is to pick no more than three tincture, and only two different types of charges. One pitfall that people new to the SCA make is the idea of "my life of arms" - "I'm interested in sewing, Middle Eastern dance, cooking, and beer, so I'd like to have a needle crossed with a spoon between a dumbek and a goblet". This isn't how arms were designed in the Middle Ages; often the armorial design had no reflection of the life of the bearer. There is one exception to this, and this is the practice of 'canting'. A cant is a pun on the bearer's surname. For example, someone with the surname <Pike> might have fish on their arms, someone with the surname <Olyphant> might have an elephant on their arms. This is an excellent way to "personalize" your armory.

Your local herald is your contact person for any questions about names and armory. If they don't know the answer, they should know whom to contact. Anyone is also welcome to email the Northshield heralds mailing list at [ns-heralds@mailman.itsca.net](mailto:ns-heralds@mailman.itsca.net)

#### Part B:

##### Glossary:

Given name - Your first name, also known as a Christian name

Byname - A general term for elements other than given names. The term 'byname' is generally used to refer to literal bynames.

Surname - A type of byname, usually used to refer to inherited bynames.

Charge - The different elements of a coat of arms

Tincture - The colors used in armory. The tinctures are divided into two types: Colors (gules = red, sable = black, vert = green, azure = blue, purpure = purple) and Metals (argent = white/silver, Or = yellow/gold).

##### Bibliography:

- Foster, Joseph, *The Dictionary of Heraldry* (New York: Arch Cape Press, 1989).
- Pastoureau, Michel, *Heraldry: An Introduction to a Noble Tradition* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997).
- Reaney, P. H., & R. M. Wilson, *A Dictionary of English Surnames* (London: Routledge, 1991; Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Uckelman, Sara L., "Annotated Bibliography of Books and Website", originally published in the *Northwatch*, now online at <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/sca/boke/bib.pdf> (for names)
- Uckelman, Sara L., "Designing Medieval Armory", originally published in the *Northwatch*, now online at <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/sca/boke/medievalarms.pdf>
- Von Volborth, Carl-Alexander, *Heraldry: Customs, Rules, and Styles* (Poole, Dorset, UK: Blandford Press, 1983).
- Withycombe, E.G., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

HL Aryanhwy merch Catmael, Sara L. Uckelman