

The Coat of Arms

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THE COAT OF ARMS

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THE SYMBOLISM OF THE AFRICAN NATIONS PART 1: ARMS INSPIRED BY CLASSICAL EUROPEAN HERALDRY

ROLF SUTTER, Ph.D., A.I.H. AND PAUL A. FOX, F.H.S., A.I.H.

Abstract

Heraldic concepts are a relatively recent introduction to the African continent, the earlier designs having been sent from overseas. Although the rules of heraldry are sometimes incompletely understood, or perhaps deliberately disregarded, the designs which it has inspired have in many instances become treasured. This has been achieved by the incorporation of indigenous flora and fauna, of landscape features, of locally crafted tools and artefacts, and by the inspired usage of colour, synchronised with flag design. African nations have modified armory into something which speaks powerfully to the heart of national sentiments, which include both past struggles and aspirations for the future.

Introduction

At the current time there exist in the world 193 sovereign states and around twelve semi-autonomous, not generally recognized territories. Of these 56, or around 29%, are located on the African continent. As geographical entities all of these countries, with but a single exception, were created in the twentieth century. What went before is an important topic which will be briefly considered.

Pre-colonial Africa

Our knowledge of the historical geography of the continent as a whole, of its early medieval empires, centres of rulership and kingdoms, is heavily dependent on the written accounts of visiting seafarers, beginning with the Portuguese in the fifteenth century.

Time of colonization, the *Scramble for Africa*

Colonialism and imperialism had a slow onset in the African continent between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. For France, the lost Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 was an impetus to press ahead with the expansion of colonies. This in turn challenged the British, who were concerned about their position in the world. The German Reich, under Prussian rule, was looking for sales markets and resources for its growing industry. Since large parts of the world were already divided between Belgium, Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Portugal, the focus for Berlin was Africa. The frenzy of colonisation reached its climax in the late nineteenth century following the Berlin Congress on Africa of 1884–5, when seven European states started the so-called *Scramble for Africa*.

The race for colonies was initially more ideologically than economically motivated. The interests of the colonial powers were a mixture of Christian missionary spirit, thirst for research, thirst for adventure, greed for profit and geopolitical strategy. By 1902,

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Figure 1: Colonial Africa in 1914.

over 90% of the African continent was divided into colonies, the boundaries of which did not correspond to existing geographical, social and ethnic structures (Figure 1).

The decolonization of Africa

Between 1950 and 1990, 52 former colonies or ‘protectorates’ achieved their independence, with a high point in 1960, when 17 countries were granted autonomy by their former colonial rulers. That is why 1960 has been called “The African Year”. Today, the continent consists of 56 individual states, two of which – Somaliland (alias: Republic of Somaliland) and Western Sahara (alias Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) – are ‘countries with limited international recognition’ (Figure 2).

A look at the state symbolism of the continent shows very different forms, which can be classified into three groups:

- I. Affected by, or based on, classical European heraldry.
- II. Purely emblematic.
- III. Analogous to European heraldry, but with African shield shapes.

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Figure 2: The countries of the African continent today with their coats of arms and emblems.

Part 1 of this article will consider the first category, the countries in **Figure 3**. The remainder will appear in the next issue of this journal.

1. Countries with arms inspired by classical European heraldry

These are 26 in number, beginning chronologically with Liberia in 1842 and ending with Namibia in 1992. The highest density can be found on the west coast of the continent, the area which corresponds to the first waves of colonization in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The countries are presented in alphabetical order.

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Figure 3: The countries included in this article.

Republic of Benin

Colony as “French Dahomey”	1892
Inclusion into French West Africa	1899
Autonomy	1958
Independence from France	August 1 st , 1960
Coat of arms adopted	1964
People’s Republic of Benin	1975–1990
Re-adoption of 1964 coat of arms	1990

Official description (Figure 4).¹

Crest: *Two cornucopias sable with ears of corn issuant therefrom;*

¹ Article 1, *La constitution de la république du Bénin* (1990).

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Shield: *Quarterly: 1, Argent, a somba castle or; 2, Argent, a Star of Benin proper; 3, Argent, a palm tree vert charged with fruit gules; 4, Argent, a ship sable sailing on a sea azure; the four quarters sewn with a line gules, at the centre point a lozenge gules.*
Supporters: *Two panthers or, spotted.*
Motto: *“Fraternité, Justice, Travail”* (Brotherhood, Justice, Work).

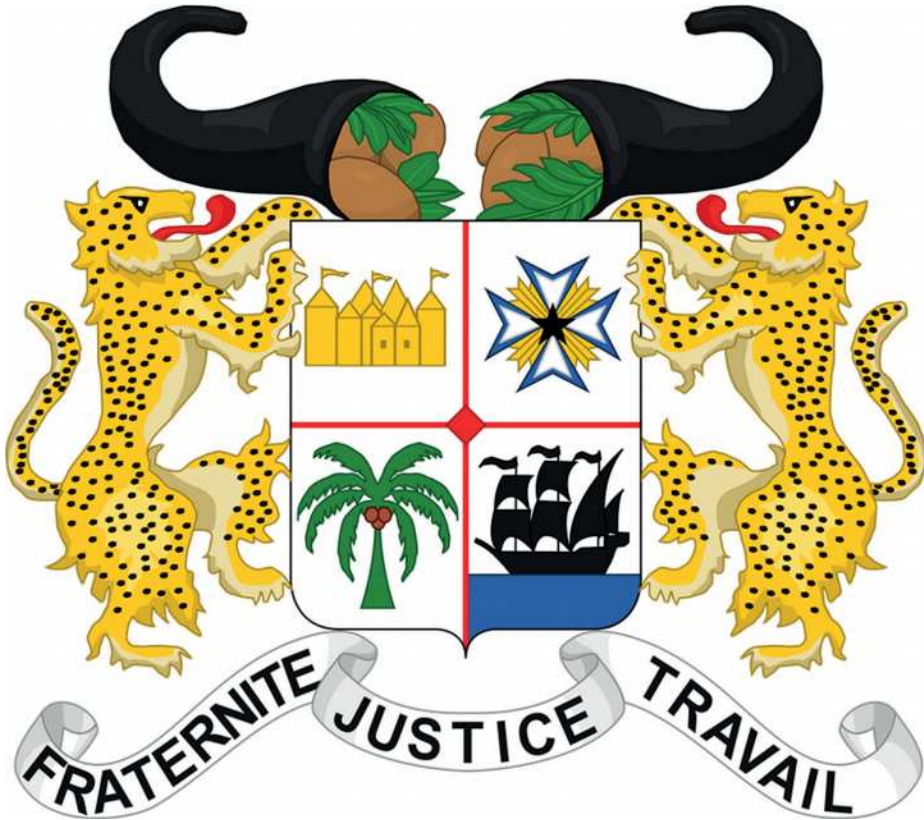


Figure 4: National arms of Benin. Wikimedia Commons.

Symbolic explanation

The crest of two horns stands for prosperity.

The shield is broken into four quadrants. The top left quadrant has a castle in the style of a traditional Somba tribal fortress or Tata Somba, representing the history of Benin. In the top right quadrant, is the Star of Benin, the highest award of the nation. Below this the ship stands for the arrival of Europeans in Benin, while in the lower left quadrant the palm tree represents natural resources.

The shield is supported by a pair of leopards, the national animal of Benin.

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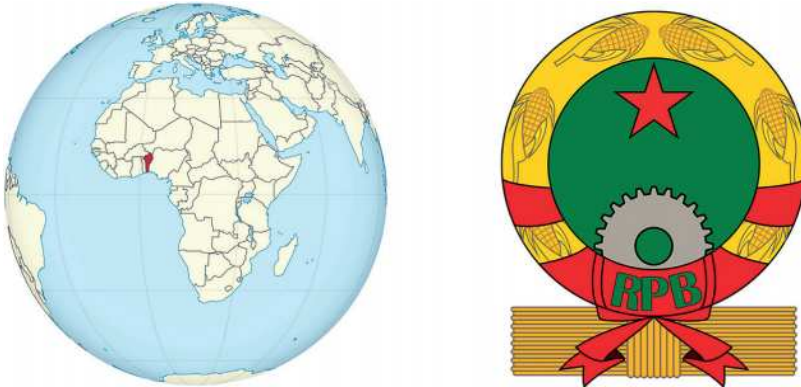


Figure 5: Left: location of the Republic of Benin; Right: emblem of the People's Republic of Benin 1975–1990.

Burkina Faso

(Formerly Upper Volta)

French Protectorate	1896
Part of French West Africa	1904
French Upper Volta	March 1st, 1919
Independence from France	August 5, 1960
Coat of arms adopted	May 4, 1961
Coat of arms changed	1967
Revolution name change: Burkina Faso	August 4, 1984
Coat of arms abandoned	August 4, 1984
New coat of arms adopted	August 1, 1997

Official description² (Figure 6)

In the chief on a ribband argent the name of the country: Burkina Faso.

At the heart an inescutcheon charged with the national flag (per fess gules and vert a five pointed star or) debruising two crossed lances, and supported by two stallions rampant argent.

Below, an open book. In base a ribbon bearing the motto of the country "Unité Progrès Justice"(Unity, Work, Justice), the ribbon supporting the lances, the stallions, and two millet stalks with three pairs of green, half-moon shaped, leaves.

History and Symbolic explanation

A continuous thread connects the three coats of arms used by the country since independence.

The supporters throughout have been the two stallions said to symbolize the nobility of the burkinabe people, and the shield has always been charged with the national flag

² Law No 020/97/II/AN, adopted by the National Assembly of Burkina Faso meeting in Ouagadougou on 1st August 1997.

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Figure 6: Arms of Burkina Faso, Wikimedia Commons.

which was changed in 1984. The black, white and red stripes of the original flag stood for the three tributaries of the Volta River, the Red, White and Black Volta. Placed over the shield on the original arms were the letters R.H.V for République de Haute-Volta (**Figure 7b**). When the shield was Africanized in 1967 these letters were removed (**Figure 7c**). The escutcheon on the third coat of arms of 1997 is the national flag adopted on 4th August 1984, comprising the pan-African colours, red for revolution, green for abundant natural resources and the yellow star being the guiding light of the revolution. For thirteen years following the revolution the national emblem was inspired by communism (**Figure 7d**), but retained an adze and stalks of millet from the earlier arms, and introduced a book. The name Burkina Faso means *Land of the Righteous*. When heraldic arms were restored in 1997 there was a return to arms quite similar to those adopted in 1961, with the lances symbolizing the determination of the sons of Burkina Faso to protect their country; their crossed design representing the vigilance and bravery of the nation. The open book symbolizes the quest for knowledge and education.

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Figure 7: Top left 7a, location of Burkina Faso; top right 7b, arms of Upper Volta 1958–1984; bottom left 7c, arms of Upper Volta 1967–1984; bottom right 7d, emblem of Burkina Faso 1984–1997. Wikimedia Commons.

Millet (sorghum) spikes symbolize the desire for food independence and abundance. Pearl millet is an important cereal grain cultivated in this country, where agriculture represents 32% of the gross domestic product. There were two millet stalks in the

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compartment of the 1961 arms, combined with two adzes (called *dabas*).³ In the 1967 revision the millet stalk was moved to become a single stalk crossed with a spear. The adze was retained in 1967 and 1984 but was removed in 1997. The only other change in 1997 was that of the motto from “*Unité Travail Justice*” (Unity, Work, Justice) to “*Unité Progrès Justice*”.

Republic of Cameroon

German colony	July 1884
French Cameroon	1916
British Cameroon	1916
Independence from France	January 1, 1960
Independence from UK	October 1, 1961
Coat of arms adopted	January 18, 1996



Figure 8: Arms of Cameroon. Wikimedia Commons.

³ The drawing in figure 7b is inaccurate in showing only one stalk of millet.

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Official description⁴ (Figure 8)

The constitution of Cameroon describes the coat of arms as follows:

*The coat of arms of the Republic of Cameroon shall be an escutcheon surmounted by the legend “Republic of Cameroon” and supported by two fasces. In base the motto “Paix Travail Patrie” (Peace-Work-Fatherland). The escutcheon shall be composed of a star on a field [vert] and triangle gules (actually party per pale vert and or, a pile gules) charged with the geographical outline of Cameroon azure, and surcharged with the sword and scales of justice sable.*⁵

Symbolic explanation

The shield is based on the colours of the national flag, a tricolour of green, red and yellow, which from 1975 was charged with a five pointed yellow star. The fasces are a symbol of authority, and the scales represent justice. Note that as currently used the legend and the motto are reversed, and the text is given in both French and English.

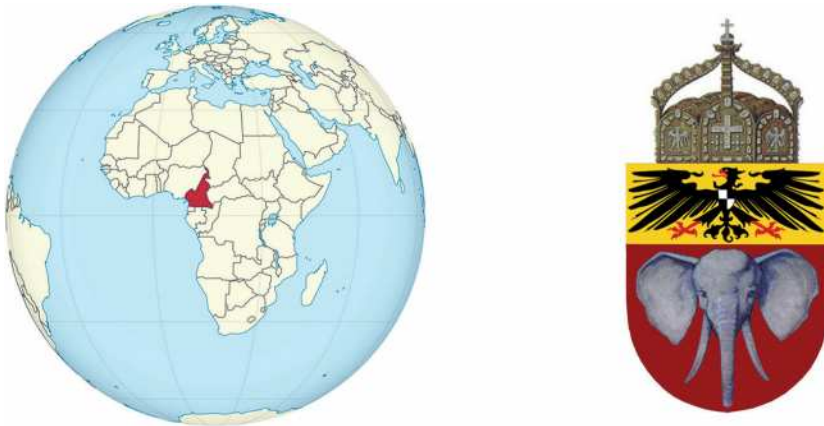


Figure 9: Left: location of Cameroon; right: coat of arms designed for the German colony in 1914 but never used as a consequence of the First World War.
Wikimedia Commons.

Central African Republic

French colony as “Ubangi Shari”	1894
French protectorate	1911
Autonomy	December 1, 1958
Independence from France	August 13, 1960
Coat of arms adopted	May 17, 1963

⁴ Law No.96/06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June, 1972. Part I. Article 1. Num. 4–7.

⁵ The official English language version of the text is somewhat garbled and does not adequately describe the arms which were actually used.

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Official description (Figure 10)⁶

Crest. A golden sun (originally bearing bearing the date December 1st 1958), topped by a ribbon bearing “ZO KWE ZO” (All People are People). *Shield:* Quarterly 1: Vert, an elephant’s head caboshed argent; 2: Argent, a baobab tree eradicated vert; 3: Or, three mullets of four points sable, one and two, each charged with a roundel argent; 4: Azure, a hand coupé pointing to dexter chief sable. Upon an inescutcheon gules a roundel argent charged with a map of Africa sable surmounted by a mullet or.

Supporters: The flag of the Central African Republic.

Motto: “Unité, Dignité, Travail” (Unity, Dignity, Work).

Below the shield is the national order, the Order of Central African Merit.

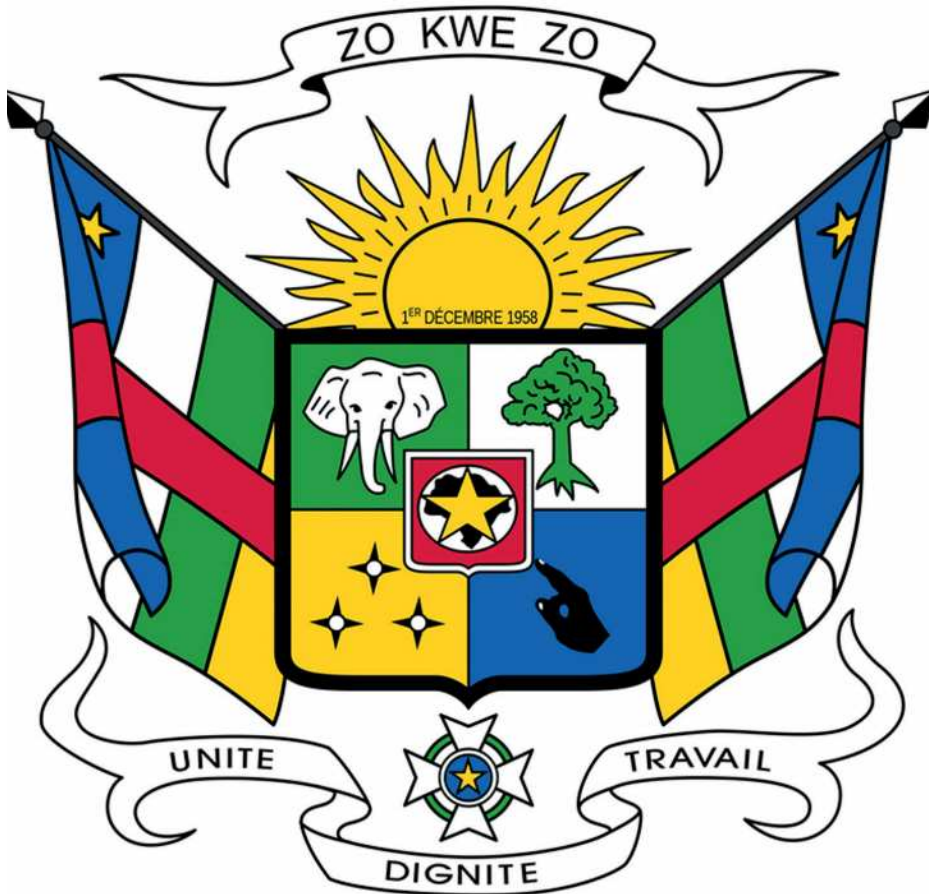


Figure 10: Arms of the Central African Republic. Wikimedia Commons.

⁶ The blazon is supplied in the Constitution of 18 Juillet 2013 Titre II Art. 19.

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Symbolic explanation

ZO KWE ZO, the motto in Sango, means “A man is a man” or “All people are people”. The elephant and the baobab tree represent nature and the backbone of the country. The gold star on a map of Africa symbolizes the position of the Central African Republic. The hand was the symbol of the dominant MESAN party in 1963 when the arms were adopted. The bottom left quarter represents three diamonds, which symbolize the mineral resources of the country.



Figure 11: Left: location of the Central African Republic; right: the imperial coat of arms of the Central African Empire with the imperial crown of Bokassa I, in use 1976–1979. Wikimedia Commons.

Republic of Chad

French colony	1900
Part of French Equatorial Africa	1910
French overseas territory	1946–1958
Autonomy	November 28, 1958
Independence from France	August 11, 1960
Coat of arms adopted	August 11, 1970

Official description (Figure 12)⁷

Crest: *A demi sun gules.*

Shield: *Barry dancetty of eight or and azure.*

Supporters: *Dexter, a goat guardant; sinister a lion or, both charged on the shoulder with an arrow the point upwards gules.*

Suspended below the shield, the medal of the National Order of Chad.

Motto: *“Unité, Travail, Progrès” (Unity, Work, Progress).*

⁷ Jean-Christophe Blanchard. *Drapeaux et armoiries des pays issus de la décolonisation de l’Afrique équatoriale française et de l’Afrique occidentale française. Un marqueur d’indépendance ?*. 2019, p.2.

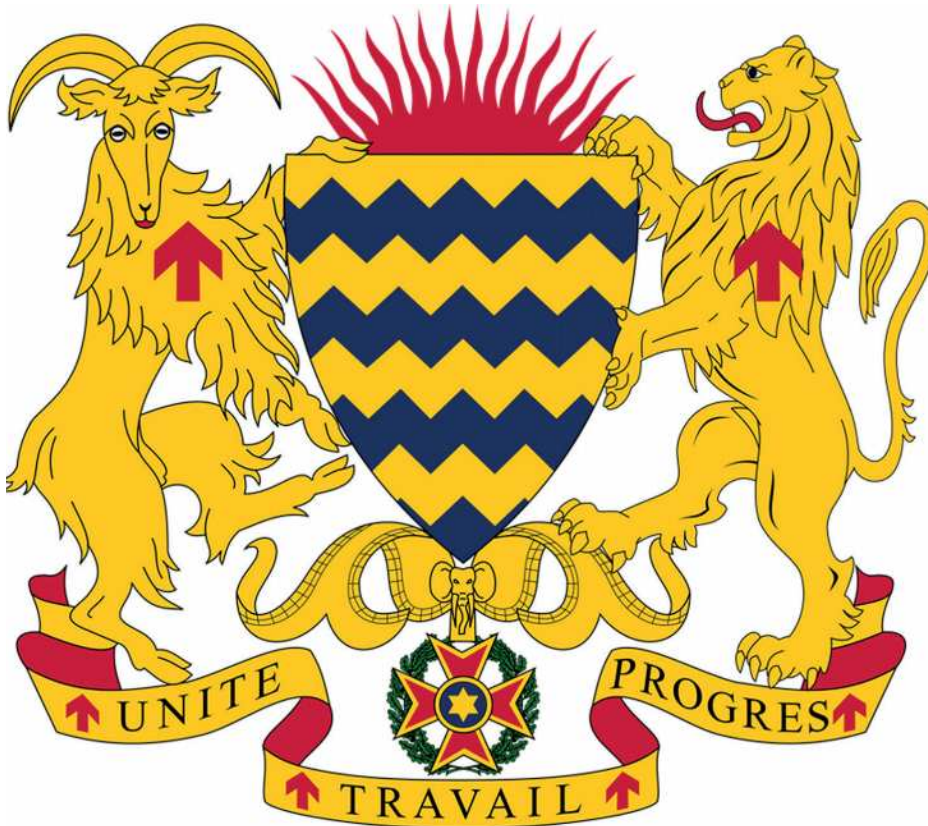


Figure 12: Arms of the Republic of Chad. Wikimedia Commons.

Symbolic explanation

The arms were designed by Baron Hervé Pinoteau.⁸ The colours of the arms reflect the tricolour colours of the national flag: blue, red and gold. The crest of the rising sun is representative of a hoped for new beginning for the country. The wavy lines on the shield symbolize Lake Chad. The mountain goat supporter represents the northern half of the state, which has mountains to the north west, while the lion represents the southern lowland savanna. The red arrows on the supporters and motto are for salt, in the form of natron, mined from the area of Lake Chad and anciently traded to the north across the Sahara by camel train. The National Order of Chad was instituted on April 12, 1960, by President François Tombalbaye, assassinated in 1975.

⁸ Blanchard, op. cit., p.2.

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Figure 13: Left: location of the Republic of Chad; right: medal of the National Order

Republic of Congo⁹

French Colony	1880
Part of French Equatorial Africa	1910–1958
Independence from France	August 15, 1960
Coat of arms adopted	August 12, 1963
People's Republic of Congo	1970–1991
Coat of arms restored	June 10, 1991

Official description translated (Figure 14)¹⁰

Crest: *A special forest crown forest crown or. On the circle of the forest crown the words "République du Congo" in letters gules upon a scroll or.*

Shield: *Or on a fess wavy vert a lion rampant gules, armed and langued vert holding a torch sable flamed gules.*

Supporters: *Two elephants sable tusked or, issuing from the flanks of the shield, supported by a tree trunk gules.*

Motto: *"Unité, Travail, Progrès" (Unity, Work, Progress).*

Symbolic explanation

There is no official explanation of symbols of the state coat of arms as described in the constitution of the country. Only in the national anthem, *La Congolaise*, is there perhaps an allusion to the natural habitats in the country, which can be found in the design of the coat of arms: "Des forêts jusqu'à la savanne, Des savannes jusqu'à la mer". From forests to the savanna, From savannas to the sea. Forests (crown of trees), savannah (habitat of elephants and lions). The fess wavy perhaps represents the Congo river.

⁹ Also known as Congo-Brazzaville. Not to be confused with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

¹⁰ The arms were adopted by decree no.63–262, 12th August 1963, see *Journal Officiel de la République du Congo*, 15 aout 1963 pp.717–8.

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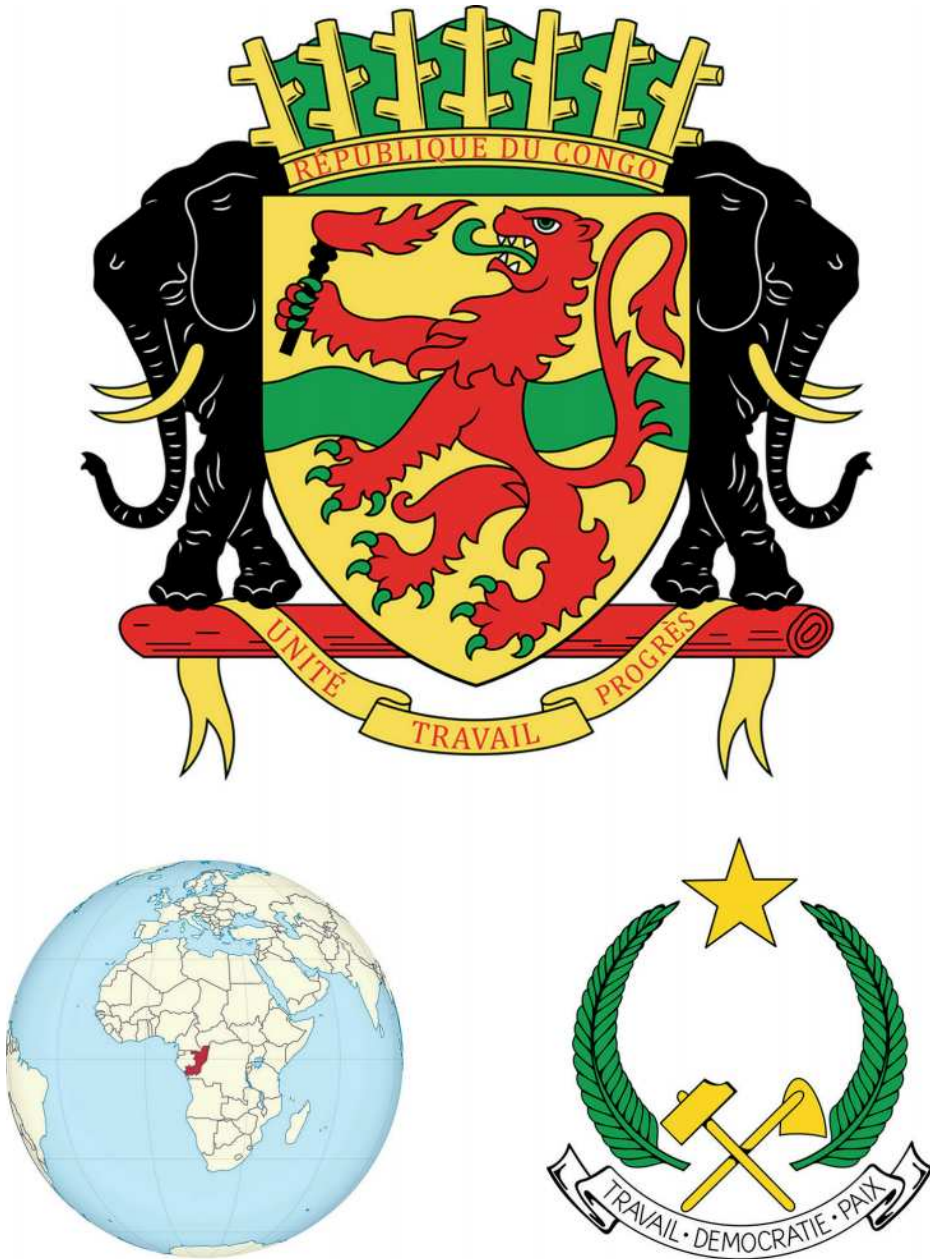


Figure 14: Top, 14a: arms of the Republic of Congo; bottom left 14b: location of the Republic of Congo; bottom right 14c: emblem of the People's Republic of the Congo 1970–1991. Wikimedia Commons.

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Republic of Equatorial Guinea

First discovered by the Portugal

Ceded by Portugal to Spain, becoming Spanish Guinea

Independence from Spain

Coat of arms adopted

1472

1778

October 12, 1968

August 21, 1979



Figure 15: Left: Location of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea; right: arms of Equatorial Guinea. Wikimedia Commons.

Official Description (Figure 15)

Crest: *Six stars of six points or.*

Shield: *Argent, a silk cotton tree proper.*

Motto: “*Unidad, Paz, Justicia*” (Unity, Peace, Justice).

Symbolic explanation

The silk cotton tree, *Ceiba pentandra* is understood to represent the location where the first treaty was signed between Portugal and the local ruler. The tree, which can grow up to 77m in height, goes by a variety of names including kapok. A different sub-species is a native of central and south America, and the Caribbean, and thus it is the national tree of Guatemala and Puerto Rico. The six stars are for the continental mainland and the five main islands. The arms are placed on the centre of the national flag which was adopted in 1968, and they derive from the arms of the Spanish colony of Rio Muni, the mainland part of Spanish Guinea (**Figure 16**). The tree was retained, and the crown morphed into the stars.

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Figure 16: arms of Rio Muni. Wikimedia Commons.

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Republic of Gabon

French protectorate	1838/1841
French colony	1885
Part of French Equatorial Africa	1910
Independence from France	August 17, 1960
Arms adopted	July 15, 1963

Official description (Figure 18)¹¹

Shield: *Or, a ship sable flying the flag of Gabon (tierced in fess vert, or and azure) sailing upon an azure sea; a chief vert charged with three bezants.*

Supporters: *Two black panthers guardant*

Compartment: *An Okoumé tree.*

Motto: *“Union, Travail, Justice” (Unity, Work, Justice).* A second ribbon is placed beneath the branches of the okoumé tree and has a motto in Latin *“Uniti Progrediemur” (We shall go forward united).*

Symbolic explanation

The arms were designed by the Swiss heraldist and vexillologist Louis Mühlemann. The three background colours of the shield follow those of the national flag, on which the green represents the equatorial rain forest, the gold the sun, and the blue the sea. The bezants stand for the mineral wealth of the country, which includes gold, manganese and uranium. The ship is now stated by government sources to represent the Gabonese ship of state moving towards a brighter future, while the supporting panthers have become the vigilance and courage of the president who protects the nation. The Okoumé tree *Aucoumea klaineana* is used to produce plywood, one of the country’s most important exports.



Figure 17: Location of the Republic of Gabon. Wikimedia Commons.

¹¹ Blanchard, op cit, p. 3.

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Figure 18: Arms of the republic of Gabon. Wikimedia Commons.

Republic of the Gambia

British Protectorate	1821
British Colony	1888
Independence from UK	February 18, 1965
Arms adopted	November 30, 1964

Official description (Figure 19a)¹²

Crest: *An oil palm tree proper on a helmet to dexter, mantled azure and or.*

Shield: *Azure a Locar axe and a Mandinka hoe in saltire or, a bordure parted per bordure vert and argent.*

¹² CA Register I 83 p.27.

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Figure 19: Top 19a: arms of the Gambia; bottom left 19b: location of the Republic of the Gambia; bottom right 19c: colonial badge of the Gambia. Wikimedia Commons.

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Supporters: on either side a lion guardant proper, the dexter supporting a locar-axe and the sinister an adze, both or.

Motto: “*Progress, Peace, Prosperity*”.

Symbolic explanation

The arms were granted by the College of Arms prior to independence. The crossed axe and hoe on the shield, and borne by the supporting lions, represent the importance of agriculture. They represent the two major ethnic groups of the Gambia: the Mandinka (hoe) and the Fulani (locar-axe). The colours of the shield match the blue, white and green of the lower half of the national flag; the form of the national flag was being determined concurrently with the arms. The African lions themselves convey courage, national pride and steadfastness. The African oil palm *Elaeis guineensis* which is native to west Africa is used to produce palm oil, a principal trade crop. A palm tree featured on the colonial badge of the Gambia which was in use between 1888 and 1965 (**Figure 19c**). The original arms concept submitted to the College of Arms was by Nicholas Potin, a government employee with the Department of Surveys, who won a national design competition.¹³

Republic of Ghana

British Crown Colony Gold Coast	1847
Independence from UK as Ghana	March 6, 1957
Adoption of coat of arms	March 4, 1957

Official description (Figure 20a)¹⁴

Crest: *A black star bordered in gold on a torse of the national colours, green, red and gold.*

Shield: *Azure on a cross vert fimbriated or a lion passant guardant or, in the first quarter a linguist's staff and ceremonial sword crossed in saltire or, in the second quarter issuant from five bars wavy argent and azure a castle argent upon a mount or, in the third quarter affixed in a grassy plain a cocoa tree proper and in the fourth quarter upon a grassy plain a mine proper.*

Supporters: *Two eagles displayed or around each of whose neck hangs a black star fimbriated or suspended from a ribbon tierced gules, or and vert upon a grassy compartment proper.*

Motto: “*Freedom and Justice*”.

Symbolic explanation¹⁵

The Ghanaian government in 1956 charged one of its graphic artists, Mr Amon Kotei, with the design of a new national coat of arms. He was instructed to divide the shield

¹³ Bakary Dabo, *The voice of the people: the story of the PPP 1959–1989* (Baroueli, 1992) p.76.

¹⁴ CA Register I 82 p.98.

¹⁵ ‘The nation’s Coat of Arms’, an interview with Amon Kotei published in the *Ghanaian Times* Tuesday, March 6, 2007, p.41.

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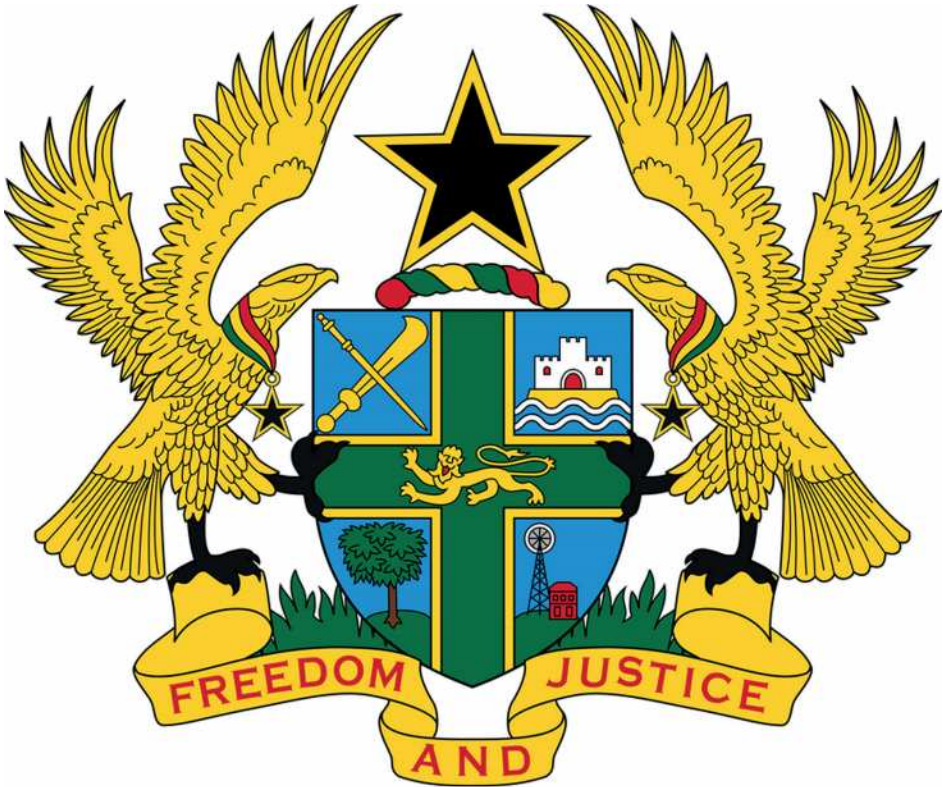


Figure 20: Top 20a: Arms of Ghana; bottom 20b: location of Ghana.
Wikimedia Commons.

into four parts. In the first quarter a sword used by chiefs, and a staff, used by the linguist (known as an okyeame in Akan), at ceremonies, are symbols for the traditional authority of Ghana. In the second quarter is a representation of Osu Castle on the sea, the presidential palace on the Gulf of Guinea, symbolizing the national government. In

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the third quarter: a cacao tree embodies the agricultural wealth of Ghana. In the fourth quarter a gold mine stands for the richness of industrial minerals and natural resources in Ghana. Kotei's design was sent to the College of Arms, which added the British lion to the centre of the shield to represent Ghana's membership of the Commonwealth. The Ghanaian authorities were minded to remove the lion, but the cabinet voted to retain it. The crest of the Black Star of Africa with gold outline is also found on the gold stripe at the centre of the national flag, and represents African emancipation. The tawny eagle supporter (*Aquila rapax*) is a native species and wears around its neck the national order of the Star of Ghana. The national colours of green, red and gold which feature on the flag are the pan-African colours, following those of the original free African state, the Ethiopian Empire.

Republic of Guinea

Colonized by France	September 29, 1898
Independence from France	October 2, 1958
Adoption of coat of arms	1958
Second coat of arms	1984
Third coat of arms	December 23, 1993

Official Description (Figure 21b)

Shield: *Argent, a four branched olive sprig or* (the exact positioning of the branches specified); *in base an inverted arch tierced in pale with the national colours gules, or and vert.*

Crest: *A dove argent holding in its beak the olive branch which extends over the shield.*

Motto: "*Travail, justice, solidarité*" (Work, Justice, Solidarity).



Figure 21: Left, 21a: location of the Republic of Guinea; right, 21b: arms of Guinea. Wikimedia Commons.

THE COAT OF ARMS

History and symbolism¹⁶

The somewhat unsatisfactory arms currently in use show aspects of continuity from those adopted on independence. The original shield was *Party per pale gules and vert an elephant with trunk raised or* (**Figure 22a**). The olive sprig in the mouth of the dove was originally vert, and formed part of the crest. The arms were changed following a bloodless coup d'état in 1984, the olive branch altered to gold took the place of the elephant and was charged with a sword and a rifle in saltire, and the inverted arch in base was then added (**Figure 22b**). The national colours, as found on the flag, are the pan-African colours red, green and gold. The sword and rifle were removed in 1993, and the field of the shield was changed from gules and vert to argent. Symbolically the dove of peace must be seen as aspirational in a country which has seen a long series of military coups. The original 1958 shield was in the national colours, the elephant being an apt symbol for a country ruled in dictatorial fashion by the strong man Sékou Touré.

Following his death the elephant had to go, and its replacement with a sword and a rifle was equally apposite following the coup which introduced a new dictatorship. Presumably the removal of these same items in 1984 was an attempt to soften the image of the regime.

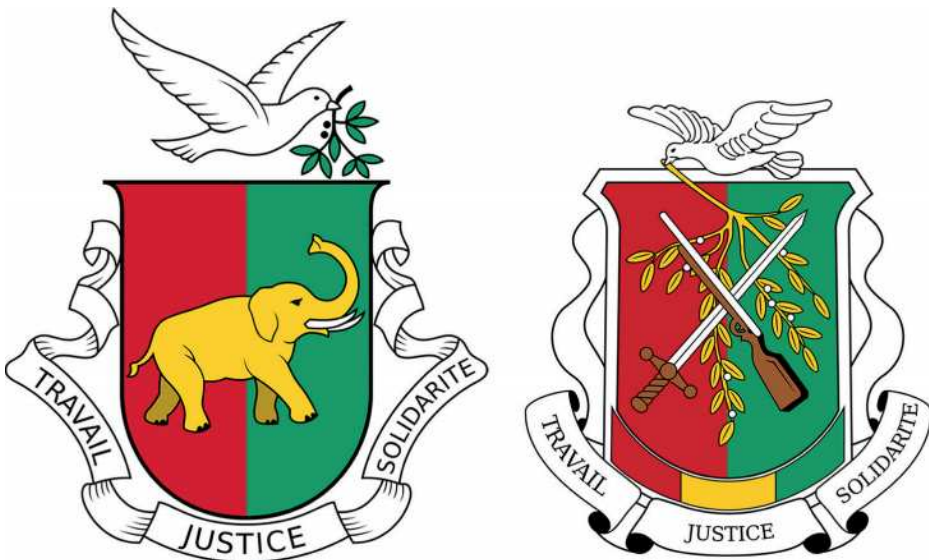


Figure 22: left, 22a: arms of Guinea 1958–84; right, 22b: arms of Guinea 1984–93.
Wikimedia Commons.

¹⁶ Blanchard, op.cit., p.3.

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Republic of Ivory Coast

Colony of France

March 10, 1893.

Independence from France

August 7, 1960

Adoption of coat of arms

February 20, 1960

Coat of arms revised

September 21, 1963

Official description (Figure 23)¹⁷

Shield: *Vert an elephant's head (couped and facing to dexter) argent.*

Crest: *An issuant eclipsed sun radiating of nine parts or.*

Supporters: *Two palm trees or.*

Legend: *Below the shield on a strip or the words "République de Côte d'Ivoire" in letters argent.*

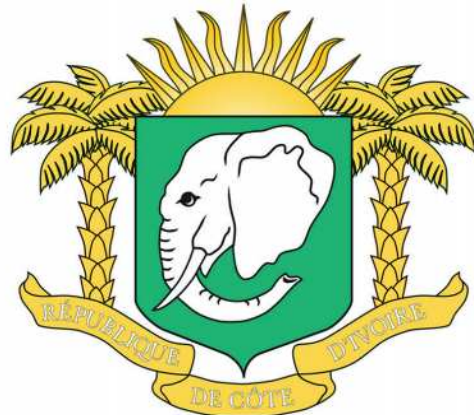


Figure 23: Left, 23a: location of the Republic of Ivory Coast; right, 23b: arms of Ivory Coast. Wikimedia Commons.

Symbolic explanation

The elephant is the largest animal found in Ivory Coast and the source of ivory for which the nation is named. The rising sun is a traditional symbol of a new beginning. The original field colour of the shield was azure. The change brought the arms in to line with the colours of the national tricolour flag of green, white and gold.

¹⁷ *Journal Officiel de la République de Côte d'Ivoire* 20 février 1960, p.224 decret n° 60-78, modified by decret n° 63-389 of 21 septembre 1963, *Journal Officiel* 18 Juillet 1964, p.913.

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Republic of Liberia

Colony of the USA
Independence from USA

December 11, 1821
July 26, 1847

Official Description (Figure 24)

No official blazon is existing, only a description from the 1847 constitutional convention: Shield: *A dove on the wind with an open scroll in its claws. A view of the ocean with a ship under sail. The sun just emerging from the waters. A palm tree, and in its base a plough and spade. Beneath the shield the words Republic of Liberia and above the Motto: "The love of liberty brought us here".*¹⁸



Figure 24: Left, 24a: location of the Republic of Liberia; right, 24b: arms of Liberia. Wikimedia Commons.

Symbolic explanation

The ship symbolizes the ships which brought the freed slaves from the United States to Liberia. The plow and the shovel represent the dignity of labour and hard work through which the nation will prosper. The rising sun in the background represents the birth of a nation. The palm tree, the nation's most versatile source of food, represents prosperity. The white dove with a scroll represents the breath of peace.

¹⁸ David Kazanjian, 'The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia', *American Quarterly*, vol 63, p. 863.

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Republic of Malawi

Nyasaland Protectorate	September 15, 1891
British Nyasaland	1914–1963
Coat of arms of Nyasaland	May 2, 1914
Central African Federation ¹⁹	1953–1963
New coat of arms adopted	June 30, 1964
Independence from UK as Malawi	July 6, 1964

Official Description (Figure 26)²⁰

Crest: On a helmet to the dexter mantled or and gules a rising sun radiant or above two waves proper, the sun charged with a hovering Fish Eagle.

Shield: Tierced per fess 1: Barry wavy of four azure and argent; 2. Gules, a lion passant or; 3. Sable, a rising sun radiant or. Supporters: On the dexter side, a lion, and on the sinister side, a leopard both guardant.

Compartment: representing the Mulanje mountain proper.

Motto: Unity And Freedom, in black lettering on a ribbon or.



Figure 25: Left, 25a: location of the Republic of Malawi; right, 25b: shield of Nyasaland. Wikimedia Commons.

History and symbolism

The arms derive key elements from the arms granted to the Nyasaland Protectorate on May 2, 1914, which remained in use until 1953 when Nyasaland was federated with Rhodesia. The shield of Nyasaland (Figure 25) was *Argent on a rock a leopard statant proper and on a chief wavy sable a rising sun or*. The rising sun earlier featured on the arms of the British East Africa Company. The fish eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* is taken from the crest of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, granted on August 24, 1954: *A fish-eagle regardant or, perched upon and grasping in the talons a fish argent* (Figure 27). The

¹⁹ Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland consisting of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

²⁰ CA Register I 83 p.12.

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Figure 26: arms of the Republic of Malawi. Wikimedia Commons.

eagle is now said to represent the tenacity of the people of Malawi. The shield shows in its upper part the waves of Lake Malawi, in the middle is the lion of England, while the sun in base (and on the crest) symbolises the rise of a new nation, or alternatively, the dawn of freedom in Africa. The name Malawi is taken from the Chewa word meaning flames, an allusion to the flaming waters of Lake Malawi, seen as the sun rises. This metaphor is strongly evident in the national flag. Mount Mulanje (3000 m.) is the highest mountain of Malawi. The lion and leopard supporters are the two largest predators in the country.

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Figure 27: arms of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Wikimedia Commons.

Republic of Mauritius

French Colony

1715–1810

British Colony

December 3, 1810

Armorial badge adopted

December 14, 1869

Coat of arms adopted

September 13, 1906

Independence from UK

March 12, 1968

Official description (Figure 28)²¹

Shield: *Quarterly azure and or: 1, A lymphad or; 2, Three palm trees vert; 3, A key in pale the wards downwards gules; 4, Azure a pile, and in chief a mullet argent.*

²¹ CA Register I 75 p.43.

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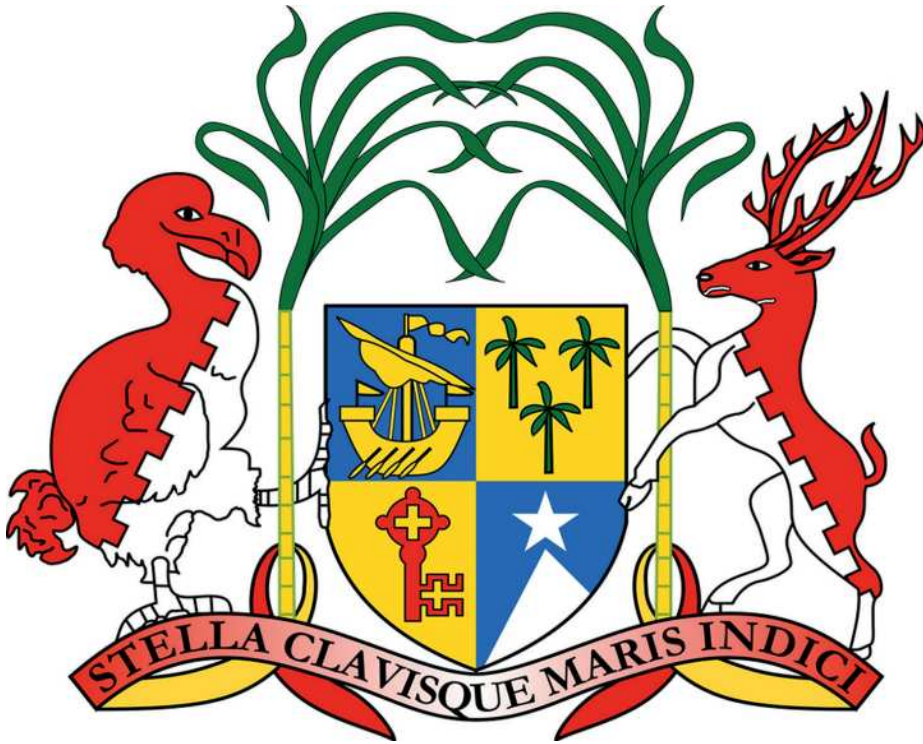


Figure 28: arms of Mauritius. Wikimedia Commons.

Supporters: *dexter*; A dodo *per bend sinister embattled gules and argent*; *sinister*; A sambar deer *per bend embattled argent and gules*, each supporter holding a sugar cane erect proper.

Motto: “*Stella Clavisque Maris Indici*” (Star and Key of the Indian Ocean).

History and Symbolic explanation

Mauritius, although in the Indian Ocean, is geographically part of the African continent. The arms were strongly influenced by the shield on the badge of the colony which was adopted in 1869, which also had the same motto (**Figure 29b**). The blazon of the earlier shield is as follows: *Quarterly*, 1, A three-masted ship on waves of the sea, proper; 2, Or three stalks of sugar cane proper; 3, Sable a key erect or; 4, Party per fess argent, in chief azure, a six-pointed star argent, in base vert a pile argent, the star being in contact with the pile.

The main difference between the two coats of arms is that the sugar cane has migrated from the shield to the supporters of the full achievement, sugar being important for the local economy. The ship refers to the European settlers: the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English. The three palm trees stand for the tropical vegetation and the three dependencies of Mauritius, the Cargados, Agalaga islands and Rodrigues Island. The key symbolizes its strategic importance, while the fourth quarter shows the island as the star of the Indian Ocean. The supporters: an (extinct) dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) and a sambar deer (*Rusa unicolor*), symbolize the extinct and present wildlife.

AFRICAN NATIONAL SYMBOLS

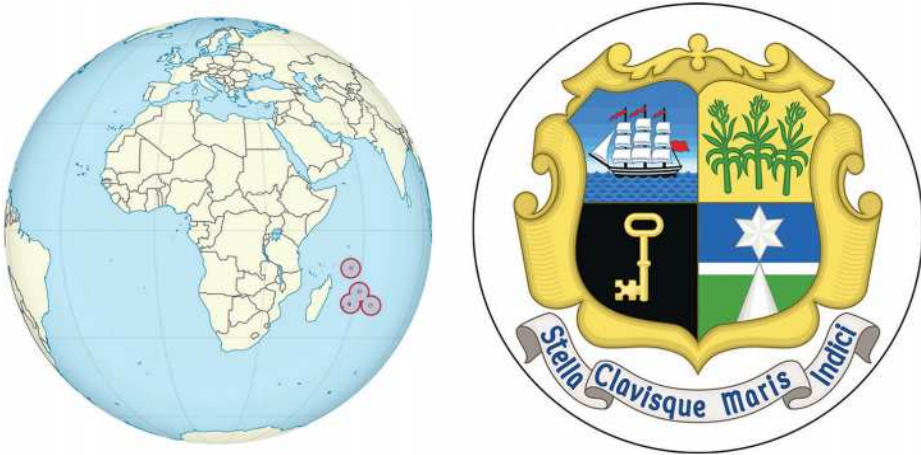


Figure 29: Left, 29a: location of the Republic of Mauritius; right, 25b: badge of Mauritius 1869–1906. Wikimedia Commons.

Kingdom of Morocco

French Protectorate	March 30, 1912
Spanish Protectorate	November 27, 1912
Independent of France and Spain	March 2, 1956
Independence Day	November 11, 1956
Coat of arms adopted	August 14, 1957

Official description (Figure 30)²²

Crest: *The royal crown of Morocco or, embellished with pearls alternately gules and vert, sustained on two cornucopias.*

Shield: *Gules a bar enarched vert, adorned with two chains of seven lozenges held by the points, in chief or and in base argent; in chief the Atlas mountain range azure surcharged with a demi-sun rising, with fifteen rays or; in base a pentagram vert reaching over the fess.*

Supporters: *Two lions proper, the one in dexter in profile and the one in sinister affronté, the shield bordered with lambrequins or, sustained on two cornucopias.*

Motto: *In Tansourou Allaha Yansouroukoum (If you glorify God, He will glorify you).*

²² <https://www.maroc.ma/en/content/armorial-bearing>. There is no official blazon but it is blazoned here exactly as it appears on the government website.

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Figure 30: Top: arms of Morocco; bottom: Location of the kingdom.
Wikipedia Commons

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Symbolic explanation

The arms contain symbols for the Empire (the rising sun), the Territory (the Atlas Range), the State (the pentagram, representing the five principles of Islam), and the ruler, represented by a crown for his civil authority and lions for his armed authority.

The motto is a part of Surah 47 verse 7 of the Qu'ran: "O you who believe! If you help Allah, He will help you and will make your foothold firm".

The achievement was designed by the French heraldist J. Hainaut.²³ The key element of the arms is the green pentagram or seal of Solomon that was adopted as the flag of French Morocco by the Sultan Moulay Youssef on November 17, 1915, and remains the national flag of the kingdom.

Republic of Namibia

Colonized as German South West Africa	1884–1915
Mandated to South Africa as South West Africa	1915–1983
Independence from South Africa	March 21, 1990
Coat of arms adopted	March 28, 1990

Official description (Figure 32)²⁴

Crest: Upon a traditional head-ring vert charged with six lozenges conjoined or, a fish eagle rising wings elevated and displayed proper.

Shield: Tierced per bend sinister azure, and vert, a bend sinister gules fimbriated argent and in dexter chief a sun with twelve straight rays or charged with an annulet azure (the Flag of Namibia).

Supporters: Two oryx proper.

Compartment: A Namib sand dune with a Welwitschia mirabilis on the foreground.

Motto: Unity Liberty Justice.



Figure 31: Left, 31a: location of the Republic of Namibia; right, 31b: proposed arms for German Southwest Africa 1914. Wikimedia Commons.

²³ *Archivum Heraldicum* 1957, p.44.

²⁴ *Government Gazette of Republic of Namibia* no.4, March 28, 1990, p.3.

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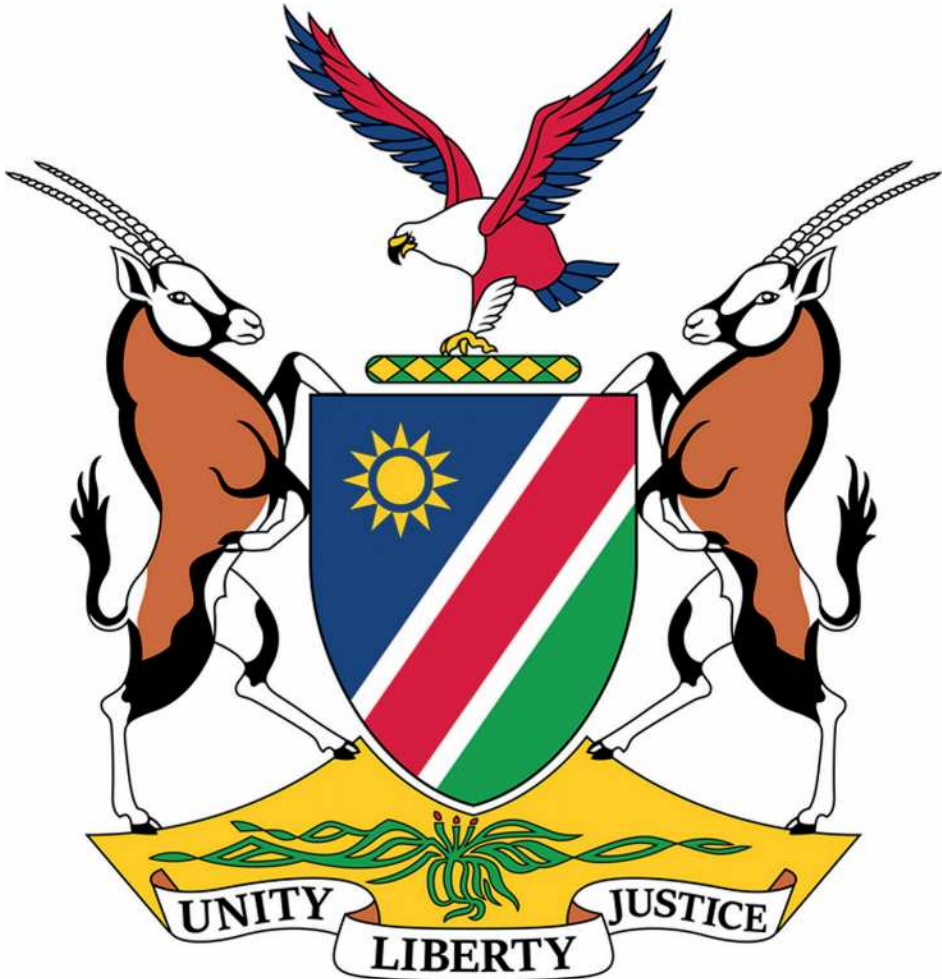


Figure 32: Arms of Namibia.

Symbolic explanation²⁵

The official explanation of the elements of the national flag which comprises the shield: the sun is for life and energy. Gold is for warmth, and the colour of the plains and the Namib Desert. Blue represents the Namibian sky, the Atlantic Ocean, the marine resources and the importance of rain and water. Red is for the Namibian people, for their heroism and determination to build a future of equal opportunity for all. White is for peace and unity. Green stands for Namibia's vegetation and agricultural resources.

The explanation of the remaining elements: The African Fish Eagle has excellent vision and stands as a symbol of the farsightedness of the country's leaders. The headband on which the eagle rests represents national traditions and the diamond shapes

²⁵ <http://www.orusovo.com/symbols/>

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its mineral resources The Oryx supporter stands for courage, elegance and pride. The *Welwitschia mirabilis* of the compartment is a unique desert plant found in the Namib desert. It is a fighter for survival, a symbol of the nation's fortitude and tenacity.

The compartment is based on that of the arms granted to Southwest Africa in 1963 and designed by Dr Coenraad Beyers of the South African Bureau of Heraldry, founded that year (**Figure 33**). These arms were discontinued in 1980 because of their political association with white South Africa. They were blazoned as follows:

Shield: *Per chevron ployé argent and gules, dexter a karakul ram's face caboshed sable and sinister the head and neck of an Afrikander bull proper, in base two miner's hammers in saltire or and there-under three triangular diamonds argent two and one; on a chief gules a pale argent charged with an eagle sable langued and membered gules, dexter a representation of Fort Namutoni and sinister a Portuguese padrao both argent.*

Crest: *A gemsbok statant guardant proper.*

Supporters: *Dexter a springbok and sinister a kudu, both proper, resting on a desert-like knoll, with a growing Welwitschia mirabilis in the foreground proper.*

Motto: *Viribus Unitis* (With United Forces).

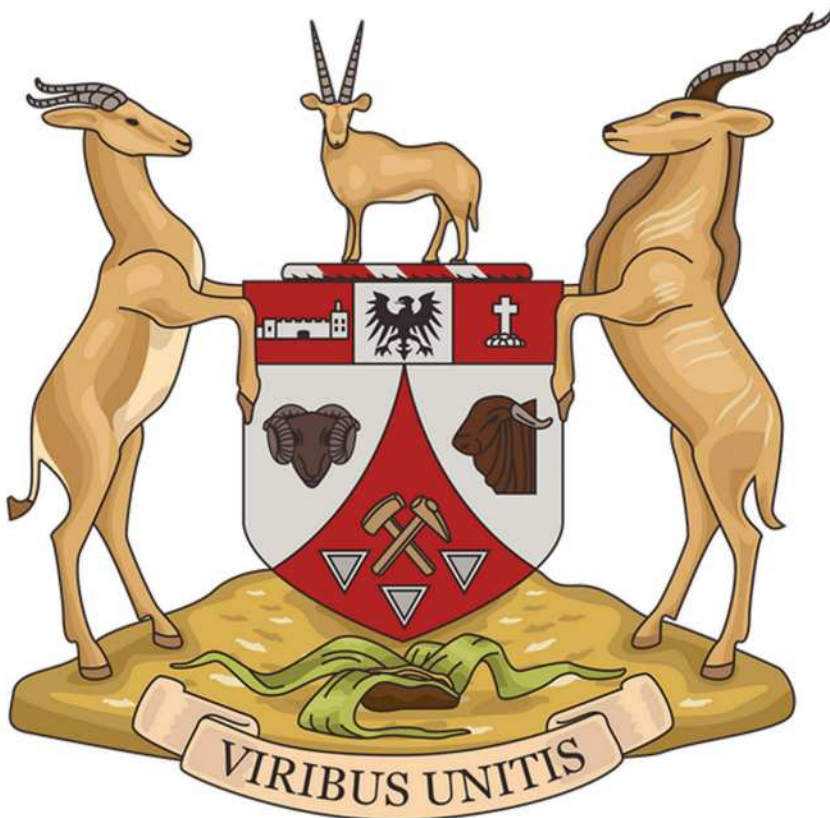


Figure 33: arms of Southwest Africa 1963–1980.

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Republic of Niger

French control within French West Africa
Independence from France
Coat of arms adopted

1895/1922
August 3, 1960
December 1st, 1962

Official description (Figure 34)²⁶

Shield: *Vert, a sun in splendour or; between to dexter with a spear in pale charged with two Tuareg swords in saltire, and to sinister three ears of millet, one in pale and two in saltire, in base the head of a buffalo, all or.*

Supporters: *This shield rests on a trophy formed by four flags of the Republic of Niger.*

Motto: *République du Niger – Republic of Niger.*

Symbolic explanation

The green field, as on the national flag, stands for the grass plains in the south and west through which the Niger River flows. Representing the people and agriculture of northern part of the country, the Sahara Desert, is the buffalo head and the Tuareg swords, the Tuareg being the Berber nomads. The spear and the millet stand for the Hausa people of the south and their agriculture. The radiant sun which unites all is said to represent the readiness of the people of Niger to fight for their rights.



Figure 34: Arms of the Republic of Niger. Wikimedia Commons.

²⁶ www.presidence.ne/les-symboles. The blazon is given in Article 1 of the *Constitution de la République du Niger, Adoptée le 18 juillet 1999*.

AFRICAN NATIONAL SYMBOLS

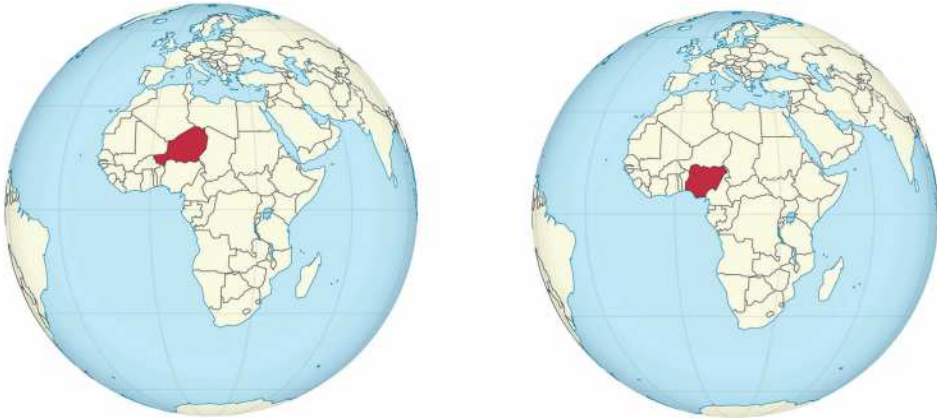


Figure 35: Left: location of the Republic of Niger; right: location of the Republic of Nigeria. Wikimedia Commons.

Federal Republic of Nigeria

British Protectorate Lagos	August 6, 1861
British Colony Lagos	March 5, 1862
Oil Rivers Protectorate	1884
Independence from UK as Nigeria	October 1st 1960
Coat of arms adopted	May 20, 1960

Official description (Figure 36)²⁷

Crest: *An eagle displayed gules on a torse argent and vert.*

Shield: *Sable a pall wavy argent.*

Supporters: *Two horses argent.*

Compartment: *A grassy field proper speckled with the yellow flowers (incorrectly shown as red in the image) of *Costus spectabilis*, Nigeria's national flower.*

Motto: *Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress.*

Symbolic explanation

An achievement for Nigeria was granted by the College of Arms under royal warrant of 20th May 1960, four months before Independence. The black shield represents Nigeria's fertile soil (today it also brings to mind the country's oil wealth) the wavy white pall symbolizes the meeting of the Niger and Benue Rivers at Lokoja. The supporting horses ('chargers') on each side stand for dignity. The eagle represents strength, while the vert and argent colours of the torse allude to the rich national soil. *Costus spectabilis* was chosen for inclusion in the coat of arms as it is found all over Nigeria, and also stand for the beauty of the nation. The original motto was "*Unity and Faith*". It was amended in 1978.

²⁷ CA Register I 82 p.185.

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Figure 36: Arms of Nigeria. Wikimedia Commons.

Republic of Senegal

French conquest of Senegal	1695
Colony of France	1895
Independence from France	August 20, 1960
Coat of arms adopted	December 23, 1965

Official description (Figure 37a) ²⁸

Crest: *A mullet vert*

Shield: *Per pale, sinister half, Or a baobab-tree proper and in base a fess wavy vert; dexter half, Gules a lion rampant or.*

Supporters: *Two palm leaves argent.*

Motto: *"Un Peuple, Un But, Une Foi"* (One Nation, One Goal, One Faith).

Order: *Star of the National Order of the Lion (Figure 37c).*

²⁸ Blanchard, op.cit., p.3, adopted by government décret n° 65-906 du 23 décembre 1965.

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Figure 37: Top, 37a: arms of the Republic of Senegal; bottom left, 37b: location of Senegal; bottom right, 37c: Senegalese Order of the Lion. Wikimedia Commons.

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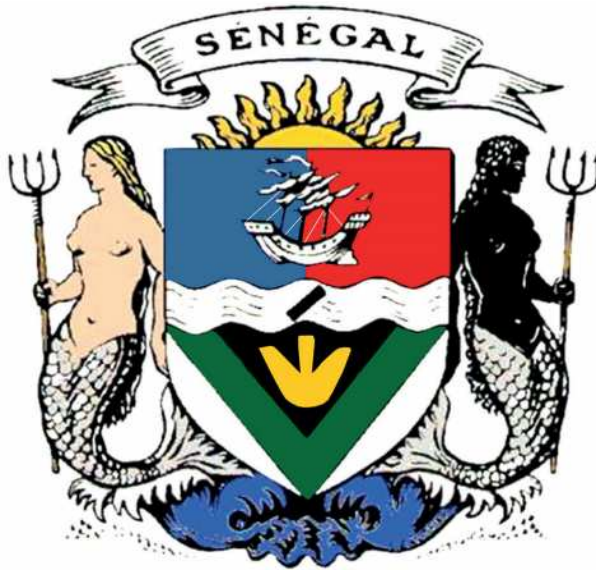


Figure 38: The colonial arms of Senegal. Wikimedia Commons.

Symbolic explanation

The arms were designed by the heraldist Suzanne Gauthier.²⁹ The mullet vert of the crest is taken from the green star at the centre of the national flag and alludes to Islam, the main religion in Senegal. The flag is in the pan-African colours of red, green and gold, and the arms follow the same colour scheme. The lion was adopted on independence as the key element of the presidential seal, while at the same time the baobab tree was incorporated onto the seal of state. The lion stands for strength and was used a symbol of power by kings before the French colonised Senegal. The baobab tree *Adansonia digitata*, representing the territory of Senegal, is a defining representative of the local flora. Groups of centuries-old baobab trees are the centre of many villages, its leaves consumed as a vegetable, and its trunk providing strong fibres. The fess wavy vert below the tree represents the Senegal River.

Prior to independence an entirely different coat of arms was in use, designed by the same artist, Suzanne Gauthier, in 1956 (**Figure 38**), blazoned as follows:

Crest: *A rising sun in splendour or.*

Shield: *Parted by a fess wavy argent charged with a bend sinister coupé sable; the chief party per pale azure and gules, a sailing ship, sails furled argent; in base, Argent, a pile reversed vert per pile reversed sable the last charged with a spade or.*

Supporters: *sinister, a black mermaid and dexter, white mermaid, each armed with a trident on a compartment of the waves of the sea azure and argent.*

Title: *SÉNÉGAL on a ribbon in chief.*³⁰

²⁹ *Archivum Heraldicum*, 1966 p. 13.

³⁰ *Archivum Heraldicum*, 1956 pp. 10–11.

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The fess wavy with the bend sinister coupé symbolizes the river Senegal and the island of St. Louis. The upper part of the arms is the coat of arms of the city of Dieppe from which the French mariners sailed to settle in Senegal. The green pile symbolizes Cap Vert, protruding into the Atlantic. The golden spade on the black pile represents those key ancient sources of wealth in Senegal: gold and groundnuts. The tetrads carried by the mermaids are used in Senegalese coastal fishery, and the supporters emphasize the importance of the sea as a natural resource.

Republic of the Seychelles

British colony
Independence from the UK
Coat of arms adopted

April 23, 1811
June 29, 1976
May 27, 1976



Figure 39: Arms of the Republic of the Seychelles. Wikimedia Commons.

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Figure 40: Top left, 40a: location of the Republic of the Seychelles; top right, 40b: badge of Seychelles 1903–1961; bottom, 40c: badge of Seychelles 1961–1976. Wikimedia Commons.

Official description (Figure 39)³¹

*Crest: On a torse of the national colours azure, or, gules, argent and vert, above water—barry wavy azure and argent — a White-Tailed Tropic Bird (*Phaeton lepturus lepturus*) volant proper.*

*Shield: Azure, a female Coco de Mer Palm (*Lodoicea maldivica*) issuant from in base a grassy mount, thereon a Giant Tortoise (*Testudo gigantea*) the whole in front of water rising therefrom to the dexter an island and sailing thereon a two-masted schooner in full sail all proper.*

³¹ Republic of Seychelles National Symbols Act no.3, 18th June 1996.

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Supporters: *On either side a Sail Fish (Istiophorus platypterus) proper.*
Motto: “*Finis Coronat Opus*” (The End Crowns the Work).

History and Symbolic explanation

The first elements of the arms adopted were the Coco de Mer Palm, the Giant Tortoise, and the motto, which were placed on the badge of the colony in 1903 (**Figure 40b**). This badge was modified in 1961 to take the form of the shield which was later incorporated into the full achievement (**Figure 40c**). The latter was designed by the College of Arms and granted by royal warrant of 27th May 1976. The subjects represent the island’s typical wildlife, of which the Sail Fish and the Tropic Bird are fairly widespread, but the palm and the tortoise are rather special and distinctive species belonging to the Seychelles. The Coco de Mer or Sea Coconut is a rare tree originating in these islands (despite its name *Lodoicea maldivica* –which arose because the seeds were found in the Maldives, having been washed across the ocean) and produces the world’s largest seed. The Giant Tortoise is similarly endangered and an atoll in the Seychelles is one of its few remaining habitats. The schooner represents the fishing industry. The original torse was in the colours gules, argent and azure, these being the colours of the first national flag. After the adoption of the third national flag in 1996, with its five colours, the colours of the torse were changed, but the mantling was kept in the original colours.

Republic of Sierra Leone

British Crown Colony	1808
British Protectorate	1896
Shield adopted	August 3, 1914
Independence from the UK	April 27, 1961
Coat of arms adopted	November 13, 1960



Figure 41: Left, 41a: location of Sierra Leone, Wikimedia Commons; right, 41b: shield of Sierra Leone 1914, for source see ref. 33 p.31.

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Figure 42: Arms of Sierra Leone. Wikimedia Commons.

Official description (Figure 42)³²

Shield: *Vert a lion passant or armed and langued gules standing on a base argent, two bars wavy azure, on a chief indented of four points argent, three flaming torches sable, the flames gules.*

Supporters: *Two lions rampant or, armed and langued gules, each supporting a palm-tree proper.*

Compartment: *A grassy ground vert.*

Motto: *"Unity, Freedom, Justice".*

Symbolic explanation

The arms were granted by the College of Arms shortly prior to independence, the principal colours of azure, argent and vert being those of the national flag. The lion beneath a zigzag border represents the Lion Mountains, after which the country was named. The bars wavy in base are for the sea, specifically the harbour of Freetown,

³² CA Register I 82 p.195.

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while the three torches have been interpreted in various ways, including ambition for liberty and knowledge.

The lion supporters underscore the canting aspect of the lion on the shield, while the palm trees take us back to the badge of the colony granted by the College of Arms on 30th July 1914, and blazoned: *Per pale, dexter, A seascape, a sailing ship in the distance, and a liberated African slave on the shore, all proper; sinister, Or, a palm-tree proper; overall a chief of the first Union Jack* (Figure 41b).³³

Federal Republic of Somalia

Italian protectorate Somaliland	1880
Under British control	1941–1950
UN trust territory under Italian administration	1950–1960
Coat of arms adopted	October 10, 1956
Independence from the UK and Italy.	July 1 st , 1960

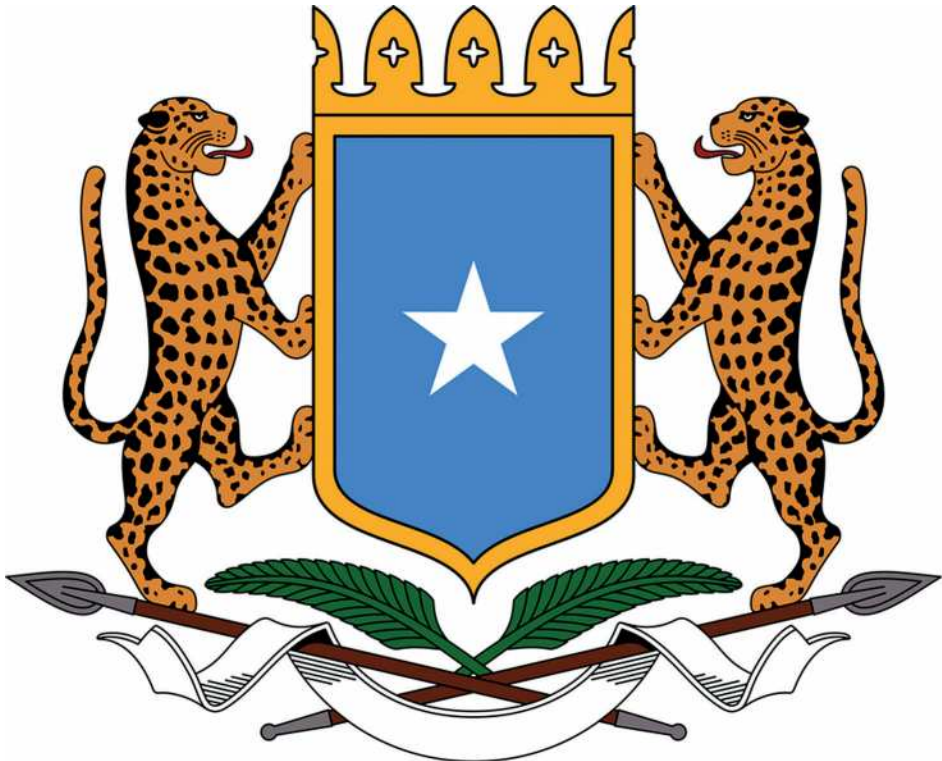


Figure 43: Arms of Somalia. Wikimedia Commons.

³³ *Flags, Badges & Arms of His Majesty's Dominions Beyond the Seas and of Territories under His Majesty's Protection*. Part II. (London, 1932), p.31; CA Register I. 77 p.114.

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Note: Somalia is composed of two parts:

- 1) Italian Somaliland, Former Italian colony, where Italy obtained control in 1889 and incorporated it as a state in Italian East Africa in 1936. Italian East Africa was formed through the merger of Italian Somalia, Italian Eritrea, and the newly occupied Ethiopian Empire.
- 2) British Somaliland, whose coast came under British influence in the early nineteenth century, fell under Italian control in World War II. Britain invaded in 1941 and retained control until it became a U.N. trust territory under Italian administration in 1950. In 1960, both parts were united to form the independent Republic of Somalia. On May 18, 1991, Somaliland left the state federation and declared its independence, which, however, has not been internationally recognized.

Official description (Figure 43)³⁴

Crest: A decorated emblem with five golden heads, with two lateral ones halved.

Shield: Azure a five-pointed star argent, a bordure or.

Supporters: Two leopards proper.

Compartment: Two palm leaves (and two crossed spears) interlaced with a white ribbon.³⁵

History and symbolic explanation

Both British and Italian Somaliland possessed coats of arms, and elements from both have been incorporated into the arms of the independent state. Those of British Somaliland were granted by the College of Arms under royal warrant of December 18, 1950, and are blazoned as follows:

Crest: On a wreath azure and vert a kudu-head guardant, between its horns the Imperial State crown.

Shield: Per pale: dexter: Vert, a minaret or; sinister: Azure two bars wavy argent, in chief a dhow sailing to the dexter and in base an anchor per pale or; above all a chief or, two spears in saltire charged with a Somalian shield proper (Figure 44b).

The arms of Italian Somaliland were used over a much longer period, having been adopted by decree of the 3rd of April 1919.³⁶ They are blazoned:

Crest: An antique crown of nine points.

Shield: Parted by a fess wavy argent, in chief, Azure a leopard passant guardant proper, above his head a mullet argent; in base, Gules two stars of six points argent (Figure 44a).

As can be seen, the arms lend particularly from those of the Italian colony, from which we have a variation on all the key elements. The mullet argent on an azure field taken from the chief is now rationalised as representing the five territories inhabited by the Somali people: the former British and Italian colonies, Djibouti (formerly French Somaliland), the Ogades of Ethiopia and northern Kenya. The leopard from

³⁴ Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia, August 1, 2012, Article 6, p.2.

³⁵ The spears are accidentally omitted from the official blazon.

³⁶ Giacomo Bascapé, & Marcello del Piazzo, *Insege e Simboli. Araldica Pubblica e privata medievale e moderna* (Roma, 1983).

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the chief has become the supporters, and the antique crown has morphed into the curiously described ‘decorated emblem with five golden heads’, which takes the form

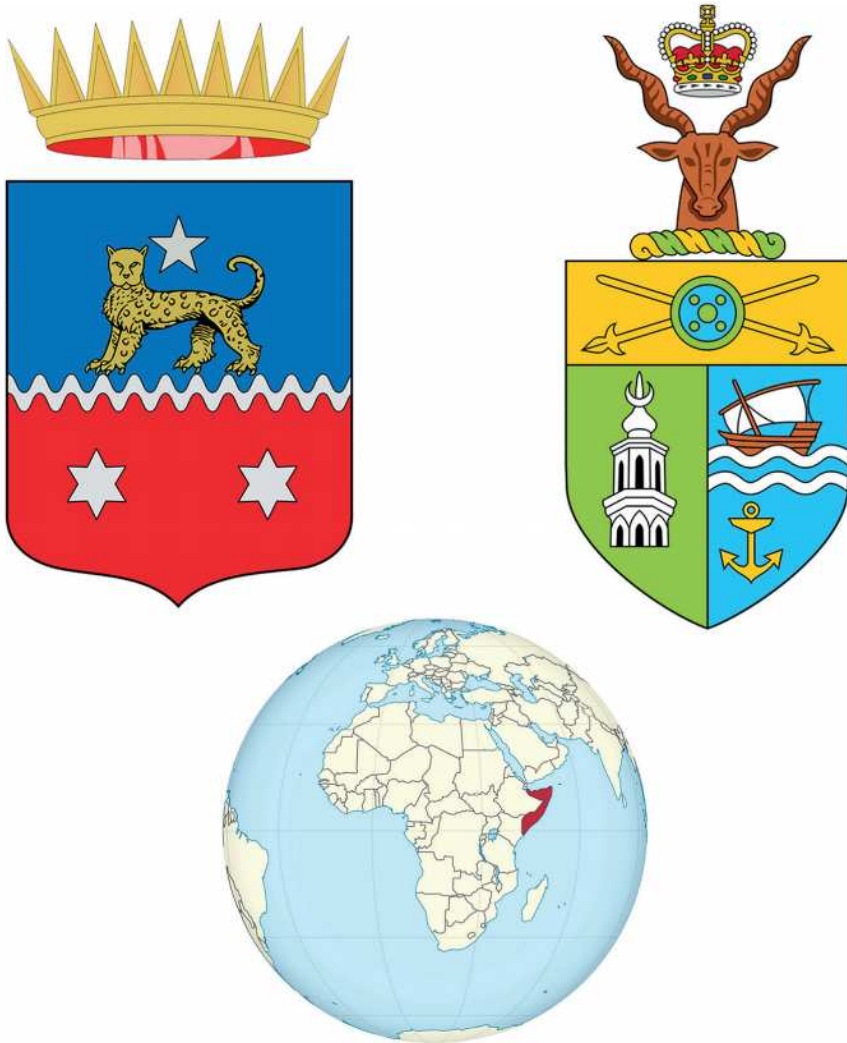


Figure 44: Top left, 44a: arms of Italian Somaliland; top right, 44b: arms of British Somaliland; bottom, 44c: Location of Somalia. Wikimedia Commons.

of traditional Somali architectural elements. From the arms of British Somaliland we have only the tribal spears, and the crest of the Great Kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros* has been incorporated into the badge of the Somali police.

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Republic of Tunisia

French protectorate	May 12, 1881
Independence from France as a kingdom	March 20, 1956
Adoption of coat of arms	June 21, 1956
Declaration of republican status	July 25, 1957
Coat of arms revised	May 30, 1963



Figure 45: Arms of the Republic of Tunisia. Wikimedia Commons.

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Figure 46: Left, 46a: location of Tunisia; right, 46b: arms of Tunisia 1957–63.

Wikimedia Commons.

Corrected official description (Figure 45)³⁷

Crest: A white circle with a figure of a red star with five points encircled by a red crescent.

Shield: Or, party per pale, on the sinister side a lion rampant sable turned to the right armed with a scimitar argent; on the dexter side, a set of scales sable; on a chief or, a ship sable with sails argent and flying flags gules sailing on a sea azure. In the centre a scroll or with the motto of the Republic: Liberty – Order – Justice, inscribed sable.

History and Symbolic explanation

The arms of the newly independent kingdom in 1956 (a republic from 1957) bore a shield with the same elements as the current arms, of which the ship is representative of freedom, the lion of order, and the scales symbolize justice (**Figure 46b**). The crest of the red crescent and star placed on a white disk is taken from the centre of the national flag, and is the oldest component of the shield. The flag was adopted on 20th October 1827 (ratified 1831) by decree of Husayn, Bey of Tunis, and became the flag of the French protectorate in 1881. In 1963 the lower elements of the shield were transposed and the colour scheme was changed. The scribe who recorded the official blazon at this time was no heraldist, and confused sinister with dexter.

³⁷ Décret du 21 juin 1956 (12 doul kaada 1375) sur les armoires du Royaume; *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, Loi N° 63–26 du 30 mai 1963 (7 moharrem 1388); relative aux Armoires de la République.

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Republic of Zambia

British Protectorate of Northern Rhodesia	1911
Coat of arms adopted	August 16, 1939
Independence from the UK as Zambia	October 24, 1964
Revised coat of arms adopted	October 24, 1964

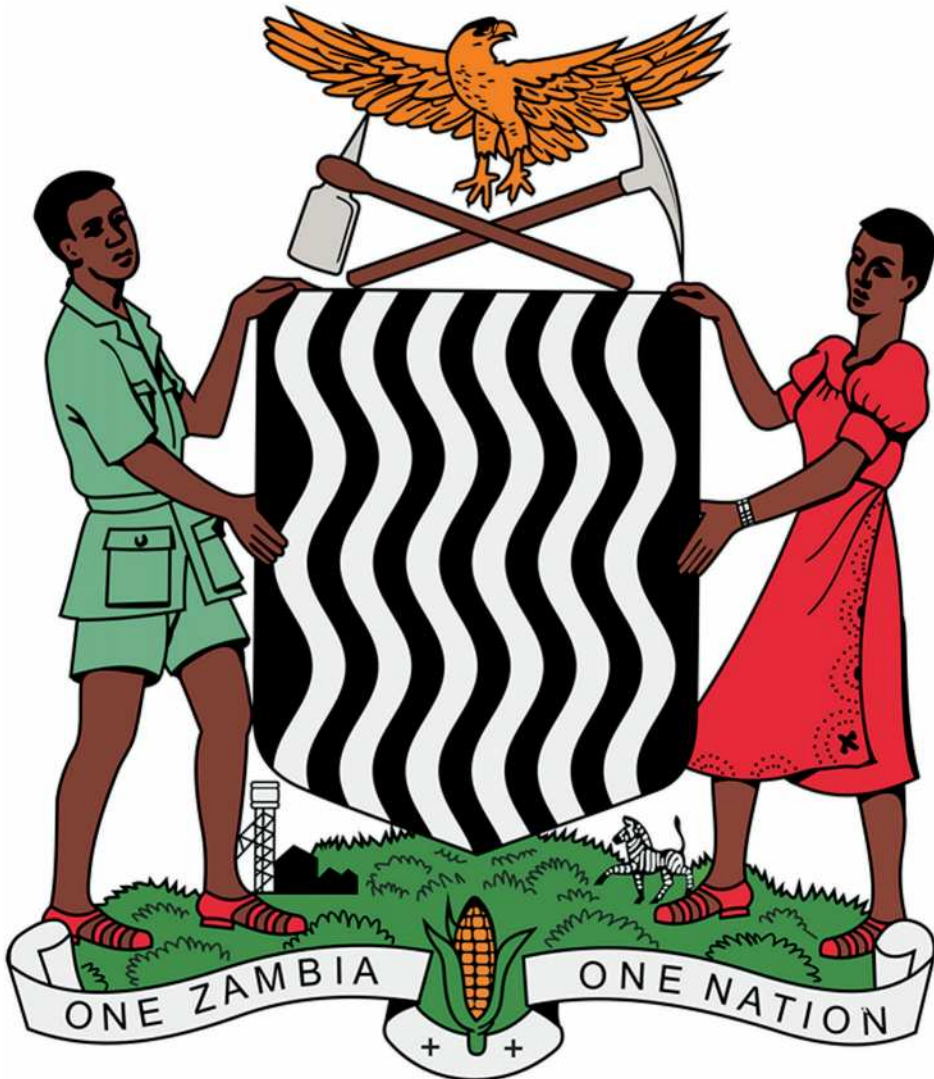


Figure 47: Arms of the Republic of Zambia. Wikimedia Commons.

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Official description (Figure 47)³⁸

Crest: *An eagle or displayed above a crossed hoe and pickaxe proper.*

Shield: *Sable six pallets wavy Argent.*

Supporters: *Sinister, A Zambian man in bush khaki shirt and shorts; dexter, a Zambian woman vested in traditional garb gules.*

Compartment: *On a grassy ground on the dexter the escalator of a pit, in the middle an ear of maize, and on the sinister a zebra, all proper.*

Motto: *“One Zambia, One Nation”.*



Figure 48: Left, 48a: location of Zambia; right, 48b: shield of Northern Rhodesia 1939–1953. Wikimedia Commons.

Symbolic explanation

The shield represents that great national icon, the Victoria Falls, with white water cascading over black rock. The magnificent falls are on the Zambezi River, from which derives the name of Zambia. The African Fish Eagle, a symbol of Zambia's freedom, is also known as the Eagle of liberty, and represents the people's ability to rise above every problem. In nature it has a striking white head and neck, but here in gold. The pick and hoe represent the country's economic backbone, agriculture and mining. The man and woman symbolize the Zambian family. The man is dressed in bush khaki shirt and shorts, the clothes of a worker before independence, and the woman is in traditional dress. The height of both genders is the same, depicting equality.

The maize cob, the mine shaft-head and the zebra on a green compartment symbolize the natural resources, agriculture, minerals, game, and the land. The country's motto emphasizes the need for unity in the country of over 72 ethnic groups.

The original colonial coat of arms, comprising a shield only (**Figure 48b**) was the same, but with the eagle holding a fish in its talons (identifying it as a Fish Eagle), placed

³⁸ CA Register I 81 p.12.

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on a chief azure. Between 1953 and 1963 this shield was combined with elements from the arms of Southern Rhodesia (see next) and Nyasaland (see Malawi) as part of the Central African Federation (**Figure 27**). The revised 1964 arms were not granted by the College of Arms.

Republic of Zimbabwe

British colony of Southern Rhodesia	1924
Coat of arms adopted	July 11, 1924
Renamed as Rhodesia	October 7, 1964
Unilateral declaration of independence	November 11, 1965
Restoration of British suzerainty	December 12, 1979
Independence from the UK as Zimbabwe	April 18, 1980
New coat of arms	September 21, 1981

Official description (**Figure 49**)

Crest: On a torse or and vert a mullet gules charged with the Great Zimbabwe Bird or.
Shield: Vert the ruins of Great Zimbabwe argent and a chief paly wavy of fifteen pieces argent and azure.

Supporters: On each side a kudu; behind the shield a hoe and an A.K. automatic rifle in saltire, both proper.

Compartment: The African soil charged with a cotton flower between a sheaf of wheat and a maize-cob proper.

Motto: "Unity, Freedom, Work".

Symbolic explanation³⁹

The crest of a Great Zimbabwe Bird was copied from the arms of Southern Rhodesia, and is a highly important cultural artefact of the Shona people. Eight examples carved from soapstone, and believed to represent Bateleur Eagles, were excavated from the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, which gives its name to the country. Great Zimbabwe flourished as a city for centuries before being abandoned in around 1450. The red star and the A.K.47 rifle convey the revolutionary nature of the 1980 achievement of black majority rule. The bird and star also occupy the base of the national flag. The rifle and adze in saltire mark the transfer from war to peace. The chief of the shield is copied from the arms of Zambia, where it represents the Victoria Falls that lie between the two countries. It is said with the green field of the shield to stand for the soil and water of Zimbabwe.

The previous arms adopted in 1924 (**Figure 50**) are blazoned as follows:

Crest: On a helmet to the dexter lambrequined or and vert, the Great Zimbabwe Bird or.
Shield: Vert, a pick or and on a chief argent a lion passant gules between two thistles leaved and slipped proper.

Supporters: Two Sable Antelopes proper.

Motto: "Sit Nomine Digna" (May She be Worthy of the Name).

³⁹ <https://zimembassydc.org/country-profile/>.

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Figure 49: Top: arms of Republic of Zimbabwe; bottom: location of Zimbabwe.
Wikimedia Commons.

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Figure 50: Arms of Southern Rhodesia 1924–1964 and of the Republic of Rhodesia 1965–80. Wikimedia Commons.

The chief was taken from the arms of Cecil John Rhodes, the founder of Rhodesia on which the central bend is *argent a lion passant gules between two thistles proper*. The motto alludes to his name becoming that of the country. The pick is for the mining industry which made Rhodes such a wealthy man. The antelopes were presumably changed to kudu to avoid too much correspondence to the earlier arms.

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese, who were working up the Zambezi river from the coastland that is now Mozambique, encountered the Kingdom of Mutapa, which was centred on the area that is now Zimbabwe. It has been incorrectly stated that in 1569 Sebastian I, king of Portugal granted arms to the king of that region, which were later illustrated as *Azure an African hoe barwise bladed or and handled argent between two*

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arrows in pale argent (**Figure 51**).⁴⁰ King Sebastian did indeed send an expedition into the region in 1569, and it was later recorded that Chisamharu Negomo, king of Mutapa, bore as his ceremonial objects a small hoe with an ivory handle and two assegai spears.⁴¹ The king threw the hoe at people who displeased him from time to time. We can be fairly confident therefore that the arms described were merely attributed on the basis of the published reports of this expedition. The kingdom came to an end in the eighteenth century.

⁴⁰ Stephen Slater, *The Complete Book of Heraldry* (London, 1999), p.228.

⁴¹ S.I.Mudenge, *A political history of Munhumutapa* (Harare, 1988), p.113 note 31.

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Figure 51: The great king of Mutapa (Monomotapa) as envisaged by Nicholas Larmessan in 1655–80, with his attributed arms © The Trustees of the British Museum, Museum number O,3.219.