

# The Coat of Arms

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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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# HERALDRY IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S LEGENDARIUM

AGNIESZKA ŻUREK, B.A.

## Abstract

*J.R.R. Tolkien developed within a vast corpus of texts and pictures, not all of them published, a whole imaginary world of Middle-earth with its entire history, divided into four ages, its different races and cultures, and even its different languages. Heraldry served its own function within this complex system. Three contrasting heraldic systems can be discerned. That of the Third Age is analogous to the early phase of armoury medieval Europe, with certain important differences. In the Second Age there was a focus on creating attributed arms for the heroic period of the First Age. An original heraldic scheme for the First Age was developed by Tolkien in a series of drawings made in 1960, these being stylistically somewhat reminiscent of the Japanese mon. As a consequence of these different approaches, the heraldry of the First Age gives an appearance of being self-contradictory, partly due to the constant evolution of the author's ideas, partly to the little attention that Tolkien paid to heraldry. This paper details what can be deduced about how the author viewed heraldry, and how he made use of it as a foil to enhance his characterisations.*

Historical and fantasy novels frequently mention coats of arms, sometimes even comprehensive heraldic systems. Their main function is mimetic: if the presented world imitates a historical time and place characterized by an expanded heraldic system, the author can transfer it (or, if it is a fantasy novel, creatively transpose it) in order to make his work more authentic. However, numerous authors introduce only isolated motifs (usually derived from various places and times) to evoke an impression of an undefined remoteness. The heraldic vocabulary, even when used improperly, serves as a signal evoking a chivalric age, its image modelled by popular culture that is attractive to the reader who does not wield a developed critical apparatus. We might say that it has an ornamental function<sup>1</sup>. Heraldry is by definition a system of conventionalized symbols, so it is also a perfect medium to indirectly convey information about the presented world. Consequently, there are numerous examples of allusive arms which can inform us about their bearers' character or life experience. This can apply both to individuals and to groups such as nations. It may also be considered as having a symbolic function which literary heraldry shares with imaginary heraldry.

No discussion of heraldry in fantasy literature can be complete without considering the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. There is extensive literature about Tolkien but little research

<sup>1</sup> The definitions of mimetic and ornamental functions are partially inspired by the idea of two types of archaization defined by K.F. Rudolf in *Archaization in Literary Translation as Nostalgic Pastiche* (Berlin, Bern, Brussels New York, Oxford, Warsaw, Vienna, 2019). In his typology, mimetic archaization implies a meticulous reproduction of all language features characteristic of a specific age, whereas solemnising archaization only suggests these features in order to produce an undefined impression of solemn oldness. Such differentiation can be applied not only to linguistic stylisation but also to any imitation of historical background.

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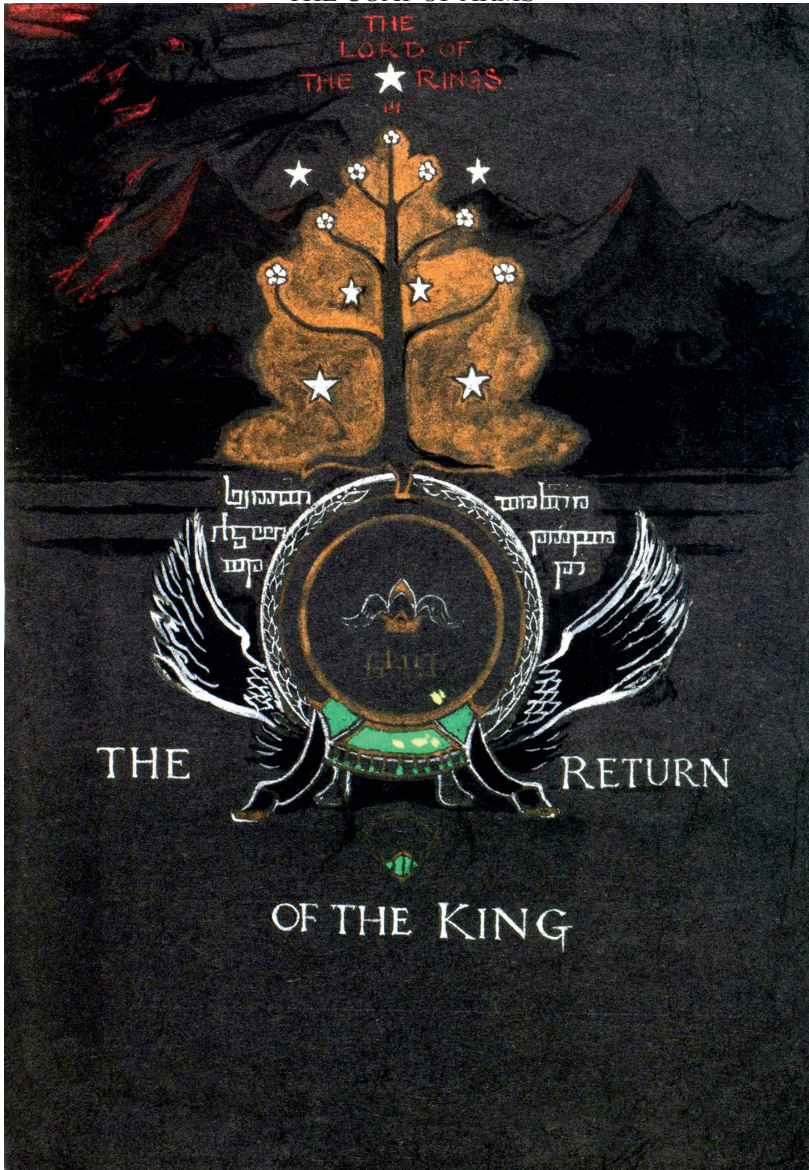


Figure 1: dust jacket design for *The Return of the King*. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 90, fol. 30 © Tolkien Trust 1992, 1995.

has been devoted to the heraldry in his works. It does not even get a mention in the vast majority of research on the role of medieval literature in Tolkien's, including important works such as the *Road to Middle-earth*, *Tolkien the Medievalist* and *Tolkien's Modern Middle-Ages*.<sup>2</sup> Some papers have been identified which contain valuable observations

<sup>2</sup> T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (Boston, 1983); *Tolkien the Medievalist*, ed. J. Chance (London, New York, 2003); *Tolkien's Modern Middle-Ages*, ed. J. Chance and A. Siewers (New York, 2005).



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and interpretations, but they cover only fragments of the legendarium.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, some of these date to a time before *The History of Middle-earth* was published, so the material they analyse is incomplete and their conclusions are often invalid.

The present article discusses the heraldic motives in all the texts and visual materials of the legendarium produced by Tolkien<sup>4</sup> himself, of which only a small part was published in print before his death. The corpus covers *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* and *The History of Middle-earth*, which is a textual base for *The Silmarillion*.<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, a problem of compatibility between the lexis used by Tolkien and heraldic terminology should be discussed. Tolkien never uses the term *coat of arms*, preferring the more general and non-specialist word *emblem* or alternatively the item that the arms are displayed on, typically a banner or a shield. Describing the shield, Tolkien uses *field* is but only rarely *charge*, replacing the latter with such words as *device*<sup>6</sup>, *token*<sup>7</sup>, *emblem*<sup>8</sup> and *badge*<sup>9</sup>. The noun *blazon* serves as a synonym for *charge*<sup>10</sup> and the participle *unblazoned* for “a plain shield”<sup>11</sup>. Tolkien does not describe other elements of the achievement, except for the crest<sup>12</sup> (and even then the word signifies non-heraldic

<sup>3</sup> Sam Long, ‘Heraldry in *The Lord of the Rings*’, in *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, vol. 1 (1970), pp. 5–7; Margaret R. Purdy, ‘Symbols of Immortality: A Comparison of European and Elvish Heraldry’, in *Mythlore*, vol. 9 (1981), no. 1, pp. 19–36; Catalin Hriban, ‘The Eye and the Tree. The Semantics of Middle-earth Heraldry’, in *Hither Shore*, vol. 8 (2001), pp. 198–211; Jamie McGregor, ‘Tolkien’s Devices: The Heraldry of Middle-earth’, in *Mythlore*, vol. 32 (2013), no. 1, pp. 95–111. The composition of the present article is partially (in the fragment concerning *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) compatible with the composition of Hriban’s and McGregor’s works (the arms of the protagonists and antagonists are discussed separately) due to an apparent similarity between the arms within the groups. However, I analyse more extended primary material (none of the above four articles discusses heraldry in *The History of Middle-earth*, except for *The Fall of Gondolin* which is rather superficially discussed by Hriban); as a consequence I have reached entirely different conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> Tolkien used without initials in this paper means J.R.R. Tolkien.

<sup>5</sup> Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were repeatedly revised by the author, so the editions are slightly different, but these changes are irrelevant to the purposes of the present study. I assume the reader knows the plot of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Ring* and, in general, *The Silmarillion* but will explain the detail about textual variants published in *The History of Middle-earth*.

<sup>6</sup> For example: “on his shield was the star on a blue field that was his device” (Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 4], ed. Ch. Tolkien [London, 2002], p. 106).

<sup>7</sup> For example: “with gilded banners bearing his token of the Ship and the Silver Swan” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* [London, 2011], p. 771).

<sup>8</sup> For example: “It bore a running horse, white upon green, that was the emblem of the House of Eorl” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* [London, 2011], p. 522).

<sup>9</sup> For example: “As soon as Aragorn catches the sight of the city, and of the enemy, he hoists his standard (the White Crown with the stars of Sun and Moon on either hand: Elendil’s badge)” (Tolkien, *The War of the Ring* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 8], ed. Ch. Tolkien [London, 2002], p. 399).

<sup>10</sup> For example: “Morgoth’s shield was black without a blazon” (Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 106).

<sup>11</sup> For example: “his vast shield, sable unblazoned” (Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 5], ed. Ch. Tolkien, [London, 2002], p. 284).

<sup>12</sup> “his helm was adorned with a device of metals and jewels like to two swan-wings” (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 1], ed. Ch. Tolkien, [London, 2002], p. 164).

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decorations of a helmet, especially a horsetail<sup>13</sup>). The tinctures are usually referred to by common English names. Only *sable*<sup>14</sup> is used more frequently than its common synonym *black*; *argent*<sup>15</sup> and *azure*<sup>16</sup> are occasional, while there are no instances of *or*, *gules* and *vert*. *Sable*, *argent* and *azure* are sometimes placed outside the context of heraldic terminology.<sup>17</sup> Tolkien used the words *white* and *argent* interchangeably in the single instance of the banner of the Stewards of Gondor.<sup>18</sup>

*The Hobbit*, which is the first published novel of the legendarium, contains some quasi-heraldic information about the colours of the banners of the Five Armies: green for the Silvan Elves, blue for the Lake-men<sup>19</sup>, red and black for the wolves and goblins.<sup>20</sup> The symbolism of tinctures is here maximally simplified, as banners metonymically define the particular troops. The colour green suggests the forest of Mirkwood, blue – the Long Lake, while red and black – a bloodthirsty army of the enemy.<sup>21</sup> No more complicated elements are introduced, probably because *The Hobbit* is dedicated to young readers.

The most consistent heraldic system can be found in *The Lord of the Rings*, though even here only a small number of arms are described. Arms are supplied for three of the protagonist states: Gondor (*Sable a tree argent*<sup>22</sup>), Rohan (*Vert a horse argent*) and Dol Amroth (*Azure, a ship with a swan-prow argent*). All three charges refer to the beginnings of the countries or their founding myths. The White Tree of Gondor represents the tree in the courtyard of Minas Tirith which is a symbol of continuity between Gondor and Númenor, where the seed came from. By taking care of the White Tree, the kings of Gondor legitimized the power of their own dynasty, as their remote ancestor was Elros, the first king of Númenor, who received the tree Nimloth from the Elves of Eressëa.

<sup>13</sup> For example: “Then one rode forward, a tall man, taller than all the rest; from his helm as a crest a white horsetail flowed” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 432).

<sup>14</sup> For example: “a white tree flowered upon a sable field” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 953), “his mighty shield/ a vast unblazoned sable field” (Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand [=The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 3], ed. Ch. Tolkien, [London, 2002], p. 248).

<sup>15</sup> “the standard of the Stewards, bright argent like snow in the sun, bearing no charge nor device” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 965–6).

<sup>16</sup> “a golden swallow that winged through an azure field” (Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 7).

<sup>17</sup> For example: “Until the twinkle of the early stars/ Is tangled palely in their sable bars” (Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 33); “Stands gazing out across an azure sea/ Under an azure sky” (Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 136); “white were its timbers as the argent moon” (Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 149).

<sup>18</sup> “white banners broke and fluttered from the battlements” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 751); “the standard of the Stewards, bright argent like snow in the sun, bearing no charge nor device” (ibidem, p. 966). A noteworthy detail is that *charge* and *device* are listed as separate items. I use the label “arms” (with quotation marks) to name the quasi-heraldic emblems of the First and Second Age of Middle-earth. The reasons will be explained in detail in the further part of the article; here should be only mentioned that these “arms” violate many rules of heraldry.

<sup>19</sup> Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, (London, 2011), p. 240.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> Hriban, ‘The Eye and the Tree’, pp. 202–3.

<sup>22</sup> A dust jacket design for *The Return of the King* (reproduced in Catherine McIlwaine, *Tolkien. Maker of Middle-earth*, [Oxford, 2018], p. 374) provides some information about the graphic form of the tree. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that the design does not present the actual arms but a symbolic representation of crucial elements of the plot, especially the titular “return of the king”.

That act symbolically sanctioned the continuity between the High Elves' tradition and the Númenoreans (Nimloth descended from Galathilion, the tree created as an imitation of Telperion which served as a symbol of all High Elves – see the discussion below). The charge manifests the Gondorians' belief that they are High Men, in contrast with the other peoples of Middle-earth whom they classify as Men of the Twilight and Men of Darkness<sup>23</sup> and thus symbolically legitimize Gondor's position as the leader of all the people of Middle-earth (**Figure 1**). It represents the tradition that passed from Elves to Men as well as the central conflict, as in legendarium the trees are strictly associated with light<sup>24</sup> and contrasted with the darkness of the Enemy's domain.<sup>25</sup>

### The primacy of Argent

The tinctures in Gondor's arms complete the symbolism of the charge: argent on sable represents the light triumphing over darkness. It is even more expressive for the arms of the kings. It is the only example of a difference between the arms of the ruler and the country and can be interpreted as evidence of an extraordinary status of the kings of Gondor (along with a plain argent banner of the Stewards which expresses the hope of the return of the king) and a more developed chivalric culture. The royal arms include two additional elements: a crown and seven five-pointed stars. The index for *The Lord of the Rings* claims that stars represent the seven palantiri which Elendil brought to Middle-earth from the ruin of Númenor.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, pp. 678–9.

<sup>24</sup> The tree motif is very popular in Tolkien's fiction, even in short stories outside the legendarium. In *Smith of Wooton Major* the King's Tree is the centre of Faery: "he saw the King's Tree springing up, tower upon tower, into the sky, and its light was like the sun at noon; and it bore at once leaves and flowers and fruits uncounted, and not one was the same as any other that grew on the Tree" (J.R.R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wooton Major*, ed. V. Flieger, [London, 2005], p. 28). *Leaf by Niggle*, a short story that is recognized as substantially autobiographical, depicts the Tree as a symbol of beauty which the artist's ultimate purpose, a reflection of the divine light. In the legendarium Silver Tree and Golden Tree produce light and their destruction signifies the end of the golden age. A fruit of the Golden Tree and a flower of the Silver Tree became, respectively, Sun and Moon. Therefore the White Tree of Gondor, though it does not emit light, constitutes its symbol. A detailed analysis of the symbolics of trees in Tolkien's work requires a separate study, so I purposefully omit the issue of the tree as a symbol of life (or *axis mundi*) as it only has indirect influence on the issue of tree in the heraldry of the legendarium.

<sup>25</sup> Darkness and lack of vegetation (or its fading) are the dominant features of Mordor and other lands conquered by the Enemy. See for example: "Even to the Mere of Dead Faces some haggard phantom of green spring would come; but here neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 631); "Ashes and dust and thirsty dune/ withered and dry beneath the moon./ under the cold shifting air/ sifting and sighing, bleak and bare:/ of blistered stones and gasping sand./ of splintered bones was built that land" (Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, p. 280). Consequently, every charge of a floral ornament should be recognized as a declaration of resistance against the Enemy's power.

<sup>26</sup> Such interpretation, as it was proposed by the author himself, should be recognized as the dominant one but it does not exclude another possibility: the seven stars may represent the constellation of Valacirca (which is the analogy of Ursa Major).

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*Figure 2:* a modern take on the arms of the kingdom of Gondor.  
Source, Wikimedia Commons

[they] originally represented the single stars on the banners of each of seven ships (of nine that bore a palantír; in Gondor the seven stars were set about a white-flowered tree, over which the Kings set a winged crown).<sup>27</sup>

In the first draft of *The Return of the King*, the royal arms included the symbols of a sun and moon instead of seven stars. Except for an obvious symbolism of light, they are also figurative emblems for Elendil's sons, as the names of Isildur and Anárion mean, respectively, "Servant of the Moon" and "Son of the Sun".<sup>28</sup> Identical symbolism

<sup>27</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 1152.

<sup>28</sup> Tolkien claimed the names of Isildur and Anárion are "heraldic", as well as the names of the cities they founded: Minas Ithil ("Tower of the Moon") and Minas Anor ("Tower of the Sun"), *Guide to the Names in the Lord of the Rings*, in *A Tolkien Compass*, ed. J. Lobdell [La Salle, Illinois 1975], pp. 153–201 (192). It can be interpreted as follows: these names, just like arms, constitute symbols. Their sequence is of particular significance, as the name of the first-born is derived from the Moon and the name of the second-born from the Sun. In the legendarium the Moon is older than the Sun. The Sun is strictly associated with Men and the Moon

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occurs in the engraving on the blade of Andúril: “a device of seven stars set between the crescent Moon and the rayed Sun”<sup>29</sup> which heralds Aragorn's reign over Arnor and Gondor as the heir of both Isildur and Anárion.<sup>30</sup>

The tincture argent represents white flowers and undersides of leaves of the White Tree. Silver has an exalted status in the legendarium. Pastoureau's research on imaginary heraldry demonstrates argent carries no negative connotations.<sup>31</sup> *Or*, on the other hand, can symbolise both pride and treason.<sup>32</sup> The virtues of silver perhaps derive from Biblical exegesis, in which the colour has been associated with faith, spiritual rebirth, chastity and virginity.<sup>33</sup> In Tolkien's notes the contrast between the complete positivity of silver and the dubious virtue of gold (often associated with moral degeneracy) is given a cosmological significance: the author explains that at the very beginning of the world matter was marred but not equally:

Morgoth's power was disseminated throughout Gold, if nowhere absolute (for he did not create Gold) it was nowhere absent . . . It is quite possible, of course, that certain 'elements' or conditions of matter had attracted Morgoth's special attention (mainly, unless in the remote past, for reasons of his own plans). For example, all gold (in Middle-earth) seems to have had a specially 'evil' trend - but not silver.<sup>34</sup>

It is not a coincidence that all three principal charges of the protagonists in *The Lord of the Rings* are of argent tincture. Conversely, an association of *Or* and *sable* has connotations of pride and submitting to evil forces, which can be demonstrated in the description of Númenorean banners during their assault on Valinor: “their banners were golden and black”<sup>35</sup>; “[the King's ship was] golden and sable”<sup>36</sup>. Another example is the arms of the House of the Harp of Gondolin which will be discussed in detail below:

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with Elves: “the Sun was set as a sign for the awakening of Men and the waning of the Elves, but the Moon cherishes their memory” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* [London, 2013], p. 110). The names of Isildur and Anárion tell the story of the Moon and Sun and the story of Elves and Men. S.B. Straubhaar ('Gondor', in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Drout, New York, London [2007], pp. 248–249) points out that Osgiliath can be recognized as another “heraldic” city as it refers to the name of Elendil (which means “Lover of Stars” in Quenya while Osgiliath means “Citadel of Stars” in Sindarin) and to stars which are older and more important than Sun and Moon.

<sup>29</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London, 2011), p. 276.

<sup>30</sup> Hriban ('The Eye and the Tree', p. 205) notes that reforging of the blade is a symbolic representation of “reforging”, i.e. reuniting the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Pastoureau, 'Figures et couleurs péjoratives en héraldique médiévale', in *XV Congreso Internacional de las Ciencias Genealógica Y Heraldica [Comunicaciones al]*, Madrid, 19–25 septiembre 1982, (Madrid, 1983), vol. 3, pp. 293–309 (297).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 298.

<sup>33</sup> Rudolf Suntrup, “Agenteus, argentum - silbern, silberweiß, Silber“, in: *idem*, *Lexikon der Farbenbedeutungen im Mittelalter* (Köln, 2011), pp. 83–116.

<sup>34</sup> Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 400.

<sup>35</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, p. 332.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 333. An early variant of the text provides different tinctures: “red as the dying sun in a great storm and as black as the night that cometh after” (Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 9], red. Ch. Tolkien [London, 2002], p. 385). Violence and domination occupy a special position within the symbolism of red; the tinctures strongly correlate with Ar-Pharazôn's plan to conquer Immortal Lands.

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Behind them came the host of the Harp, and this was a battalion of brave warriors; but their leader Salgant was a craven, and he fawned upon Meglin. They were dight with tassels of silver and tassels of gold, and a harp of silver shone in their blazonry upon a field of black; but Salgant bore one of gold.<sup>37</sup>

While the “brave warriors” use the argent tincture, their cowardly leader prefers Or, which is an allusion to his conceit and moral corruption. His exposition of a golden charge suggests Salgant wanted to seem royal (in medieval English sources or occurs in 80–90% of earls’ arms but in only 45–60% of knights’ arms<sup>38</sup>) and he was punished for that: he became a buffoon, a king’s parody.

The colour argent in Elendil’s charge serves as a manifesto of his opposition against the pride of the kings of Númenor and the return of the symbolism of light which is expressed also in Elendil’s name<sup>39</sup>. The royal arms in both forms (the earlier one, with Sun and Moon, and the later one, with seven stars) constitutes a complex symbol that evokes the beginnings of Gondor. It tells the story of Elendil and his sons (whose names are symbolized by the Moon and Sun), their return to Middle-earth with symbols of hope and renewing (White Tree and the palantíri) and their combat with Sauron (sable field and the winged-crown in the shape of a helmet).

Jamie McGregor suggests a different interpretation of the sable field:

Mere blackness in itself, then, is not evil; only the context makes it so. Likewise, in heraldic practice, the Enemy does not enjoy a monopoly on the use of black—although, as Aragorn notes, “he does not use white” (III.1.416), so that the clean and elegant contrast of the white tree on black differs substantially in its effect from the unrelieved darkness associated with Mordor, its armies and its denizens. . . . Indeed this difference recalls Tom Bombadil’s memories of “the dark under the stars when it was fearless—before the Dark Lord came from Outside” . . . The implications are of a primordial darkness immanent with mystery, profoundly awe-inspiring, and untainted by the shadow of evil.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the argument about the “primordial darkness” cannot be applied to the symbolism of heraldic tinctures. The fragment McGregor quotes corresponds with some early texts of the legendarium which confirms that before Melkor destroyed the original harmony of Arda, the darkness had no connotation with evil: “luring and restlessness and horror they brought, turning the dark into an ill and fearful thing, which it was not before”.<sup>41</sup> However, those times belong to a very remote past, when the Earth was unpeopled and only the most educated knew the glimpse of them from legends.<sup>42</sup>

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However, the text also suggests an alternative interpretation, contrary to the King’s intention: the image of stormy twilight and the upcoming night suggests the fate of the King’s army and Númenor itself.

<sup>37</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> Thorsten Huthwelker, *Die Darstellung des Rangs in Wappen und Wappenrollen des späten Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 2013), p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> The name Elendil is translated in two ways: “Elf-friend” or “Star-lover” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 1152). Silver has connotations with both of these meanings (an association between the Elves and silver, their beloved metal, is strongly established in the legendarium).

<sup>40</sup> McGregor, ‘Tolkien’s Devices’, pp. 99–100.

<sup>41</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part One*, p. 99.

<sup>42</sup> Surprisingly, McGregor did not invoke the most convincing argument for his thesis. In the incomplete story *Tar-Elmar* the Númenoreans come to Middle-earth on black ships with black sails and raise an enormous panic. Having been asked about the black colour, they answer: “The black sails are to us a sign of honour, for

Moreover, the blackness of Mordor is not unrelieved but contrasted with the charge of the Red Eye (see the discussion about the arms of the antagonists below). The main plot within the legendarium is the fight of light and darkness: the Valar create the vessels of light (the stars, Two Lanterns, Two Trees and finally Moon and Sun) and Morgoth destroys them or at least attempts to do it. The symbolism of light in Tolkien's works is too complex to discuss in detail; here should only be mentioned that blackness, defined as the lack of colour, symbolizes not only darkness but also void (see the discussion about Morgoth's arms below).

### Third Age kingdoms

Although it is not explicitly stated in any text, it could be assumed that the White Tree was on the arms of the kingdoms of both Gondor (**Figure 2**) and Arnor. There are three clues: the winged crown and seven stars allude to Elendil, the ruler of both kingdoms and ancestor of both dynasties; seven stars signify the seven palantíri before they were divided between two kingdoms; finally, in Elendil's intention the supreme authority above the kingdoms was supposed to be held by Isildur's heirs. There is only one textual fact that testifies against the hypothesis: the winged crown of the monarchy is named "The Crown of Gondor" and the kings of Arnor used the jewel Elendilmir as their insignia. However, it might be assumed that the dividing of the insignia between the two dynasties was formally performed after the elder dynasty lost their authority over Gondor. The label "Star of the North Kingdom" always evokes the actual jewel

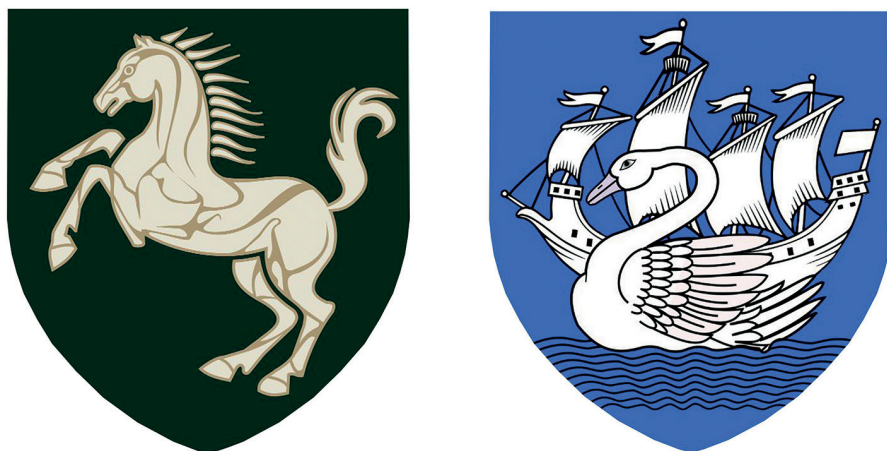


Figure 3, left 3a, a modern take on the arms of Rohan; right, 3b, a modern take on the arms of Dol Amroth. Source, Wikimedia Commons.

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they are the fair night before the coming of the Enemy, and upon the black are set the silver stars of Elbereth" (Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 12], ed. Ch. Tolkien [London, 2002], p. 436–437). However, in *Tar-Elmar* the Númenoreans are not morally blameless, they treat all people of Middle-earth as barbarians who do not deserve for fundamental rights: "Here the men of the West have resolved to make their homes, and the folk of the dark must depart – or be slain" (ibidem, p 437), so the black colour may be interpreted as a signal of their corruption.

## THE COAT OF ARMS

Elendilmir and not an abstract image that might have been placed on a hypothetical arms.

The White Horse of Rohan (**Figure 3a**) also harks back to the beginnings of the country. It recalls the name of the Rohirrim: “Masters of Horses”.<sup>43</sup> The charge may also represent Felaróf (the steed of Eorl) and indirectly, the Battle of the Fields of Celebrant, which was a founding action for the country of Rohan and its royal dynasty. These are the only arms in the legendarium for which an extratextual motivation must be considered as distinct from the inner logic of the presented world. There is a clear parallel between the Rohirrim and the Anglo-Saxons in terms of their language<sup>44</sup>, poetry<sup>45</sup> and some elements of material culture<sup>46</sup>. The readers can associate the White Horse of Rohan with the Horse of Uffington<sup>47</sup>, especially because of its colours (the

<sup>43</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 1185.

<sup>44</sup> *Lord of the Rings* uses the technique of a lost manuscript; the Prologue and Appendixes claim that the novel is in fact *Red Book of Westmarch* written by Frodo and translated into English by Tolkien. Appendix F claims that Common Speech was translated as English and the model for language of Rohirrim was Old English: “The Mannish languages that were related to the Westron should, it seemed to me, be turned into forms related to English. The language of Rohan I have accordingly made to resemble ancient English, since it was related both (more distantly) to the Common Speech, and (very closely) to the former tongue” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 1136). It is very significant that Tolkien used here a vague expression “ancient English” rather than “Old English” which would indicate a specific period in the diachrony of the English language. As Tolkien was a professional linguist, such a choice could not be accidental; probably he intended to obscure an association between the Rohirrim and Anglo-Saxons. This might be confirmed by an author’s note: “This linguistic procedure does not imply that the Rohirrim closely resembled the ancient English otherwise, in culture or art, in weapons or modes of warfare, except in a general way due to their circumstances: a simpler and more primitive people living in contact with a higher and more venerable culture, and occupying lands that had once been part of its domain” (ibidem, p. 1136). Nevertheless, Ch. Tolkien perceives that statement as illegitimate: “My father asserted that he had represented the tongue of the Rohirrim as Old English because their real language stood in a relation to the Common Speech somewhat analogous to that of Old English and Modern English. This is perhaps difficult to accept: one may feel that the impulse that produced the Riders of Rohan and the Golden Hall was more profound, and that my father’s statement should be viewed as an aspect of the fiction of authenticity - for the idea of ‘translation’ had a further fictional dimension in its presentation as a conception established from the outset” (Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, p. 71). The issue was exhaustively researched by T.A. Shippey (*J.R.R. Tolkien – Author of a Century* [Boston, New York, 2002]) and Thomas Honegger (‘The Rohirrim ‘Anglo-Saxons on Horseback’? An Inquiry into Tolkien’s Use of Sources’, in *Tolkien and Study of his Sources: Critical Essays*, ed. J. Fisher [Jefferson, North Carolina, London, 2011], pp. 116–132).

<sup>45</sup> The Rohirrim poetry and the Old English is similar in terms of its form (alliterations, metre) and its elegiac characteristics, a profound impression of passing away, fading and lamentation for the lost splendour of the fathers (Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien – Author of a Century*, p. 124). The poem *Where is the horse and the rider* is a paraphrase of a fragment of the Old English poem *The Wanderer* and *Arise, arise, riders of Theoden* is an adaptation of *The Finnsburg Fragment* (ibidem, p. 124).

<sup>46</sup> A probable model for the Golden Hall in Meduseld is Heorot as it was described in *Beowulf* (Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien – Author of a Century*, p. 121–122). The tombs of the kings of Rohan in Edoras might be recognized as a reflection of the tombs discovered in 1939 in Sutton Hoo (Deborah Sabo, ‘Archaeology and the Sense of History in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth’, in *Mythlore*, 26.1, no. 2 [2007], pp. 91–112).

<sup>47</sup> T.A. Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien – Author of a Century*, p. 92. That guess was confirmed by Ch. Tolkien, who mentioned his father’s admiration for Uffington Hill (John Garth, *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien. The Places*



geoglyph is graved in the chalky ground and surrounded by grass; from above it seems white on green). Until the twentieth century it was commonly believed that the Horse of Uffington was made by order of the kings of Wessex and, specifically, that Alfred the Great commanded its creation to commemorate the battle of Ethnadun.<sup>48</sup> The poem by G.K. Chesterton *The Ballad of the White Horse* (which Tolkien knew and was probably partially inspired by<sup>49</sup>) depicts it as a symbol of England and its capacity for rebirth despite numerous invasions. *Gules, a horse rampant argent* is the arms of Lower Saxony<sup>50</sup> and the county of Kent. The imaginary heraldry relates it to the medieval kingdom of Kent<sup>51</sup>; the brother of the legendary founder of Kent, Hengest, was named Horsa.

The charge of the swan-prow ship of Dol Amroth (**Figure 3b**) ought to be explained by its bearers' ancestry. The princes of Dol Amroth were descendants of Imrazôr the Númenorean and his wife Mithrellas, an elfin from Lórien, so the ship may represent Vingilot, the vessel of Eärendil (the ancestor of the royal dynasty of Númenor) or the swan-boats of Lórien. These explanations are not contradictory, as ultimately both of them allude to the swan-ships of the elven tribes of the Teleri who were ancestral to the rulers of Lórien, Celeborn and Galadriel, and of the royal dynasty of Númenor (via Elwing, Eärendil's wife). Such ships were described in *The Silmarillion*: "For that was their city, and the haven of their ships; and those were made in the likeness of swans, with beaks of gold and eyes of gold and jet"<sup>52</sup> and a similar vessel was painted by Tolkien on a watercolour from 1928 (**Figure 4**).<sup>53</sup> A swan in Tolkien's works does not bear the ambiguity characteristic of

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*that Inspired Middle-earth*, [London, 2020], p. 145). Garth notices also that the White Horse was believed to be the emblem of Anglo-Saxons during their invasion of Britain (ibidem).

<sup>48</sup> See William Plenderleath, *The White Horses of the West England*, (London, 1892). He quotes numerous historical research and literary pieces, including folk ballads that associate the Uffington Horse with Alfred the Great.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Clausen, "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Ballad of the White Horse", *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 39.2 (1974), pp. 10–16. Clausen indicates numerous structural parallels between *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Ballad of the White Horse*, including a cosmic battle of the alliance of "good" races against the outnumbering forces of evil and restoration of the rightful king to the throne. Joseph Pearce (*J.R.R. Tolkien. Man and Myth: A Literary Life*, [London 1998]) considers Clausen's statements overegged but he admits *The Ballad* contributed to Tolkien's imaginary landscape. In a letter to his son Christopher (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, [London, 1995], p. 104) Tolkien wrote that he read *The Ballad of the White Horse* in his youth and was profoundly impressed but years later he noticed the poem is glittering but superficial. The letter was written in 1944 when Tolkien worked intensively on *The Lord of the Rings*, so it does not deny the influence coming from the time he was fascinated with Chesterton's vision.

<sup>50</sup> Fifteenth-century heraldic legend has it that the original charge of the Saxons was a black horse; the tincture was changed into white when prince Widukind converted to Christianity. For a detailed discussion over the charge of Saxons see Christian Weyers, 'Das Sachsenroß: Biographie eines Hoheitszeichens', *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 54 (2008), pp. 99–146.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Friar, *Basic Heraldry*, (New York, London, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, p. 62.

<sup>53</sup> See reproduction in McIlwaine, op. cit., p. 221. It is a sailing ship with a swan-prow and swan-sides. There is a nine-rayed golden sun on the sail, the banner is red, and if there is any charge, it is illegible. The charge of a nine-rayed sun is not attributed to any person, family or country in the legendarium. Alternatively, it may indicate the "arms" of Finwë as it was designed about thirty years later (see the detailed discussion below).

THE COAT OF ARMS



*Figure 4:* swan vessel, Halls of Manwe. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 89, fol. 13 © Tolkien Trust 1973.

## TOLKIEN'S LEGENDARIUM

medieval bestiaries where it symbolizes not only love and music, but also pride and hypocrisy.<sup>54</sup> The swan as an element of courtly culture<sup>55</sup> particularly correlates with the characteristics of Dol Amroth. In many countries only noblemen had the privilege to own swans or to hunt them, so an association between these birds and high social classes has been forged<sup>56</sup>; in England since the thirteenth century all wild swans have been recognized as the king's possession.<sup>57</sup> Tolkien alluded to that tradition in a letter to Pauline Baynes: "[swans] were creatures who looked for the return of their rightful Lord, the true King".<sup>58</sup> People of Dol Amroth are claimed to be superior to all other citizens of Gondor<sup>59</sup> due to their pure Númenorean ancestry and to the elven blood in their rulers' veins. Consequently, the charge of the swan can be recognized as an indicator of the high court culture of the country.

All three arms (of Gondor, Rohan and Dol Amroth) serve a dual function: they refer to the founding myths of the countries, and they legitimize the power of their rulers. All of which places Tolkien's heraldry in the realm of imaginary heraldry rather than in the real world, with armorial charges that recall specific elements of the history of the country or family. The dynasties and their countries are represented by identical coats of arms. The only existing variation is the royal arms of Gondor which bore an augmentation of the national arms with the addition of a crown and seven stars. It seems almost certain that members of the dynasty, with the exception of the king, did not use the royal arms, but rather the arms of Gondor without augmentation; there is no sequence of abatements such as in English heraldry.

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The charge of Finwë has sixteen rays; moreover, the emblems of the Noldor should not be exposed on a ship of the Teleri (especially on the time in the presented world the watercolour refers to: based on the Sun and Moon depicted concurrently on the sky it can be precisely determined as the first year of the Sun, only few years after the kinslaying in Alqualondë).

<sup>54</sup> Michel Pastoureaux, *Bestiaires du Moyen-Âge*, (Paris, 2011), pp. 153–5.

<sup>55</sup> Chivalric romances tell of ladies and knights being transformed into swans or sailing in swan-drawn boats. In heraldic legend, the Swan Knight was the ancestor of families bearing the swan as charge or crest, for example Beauchamp; this ancestry was attributed to Godfrey de Bouillon (Anthony Wagner, 'The Swan Badge and the Swan Knight', *Archaeologia*, vol. 97 [1959], pp. 127–138).

<sup>56</sup> Andreas Deutsch, 'Das Tier in der Rechtsgeschichte – eine Gesamtschau', in *Das Tier in der Rechtsgeschichte*, eds. A. Deutsch and P. König (Heidelberg, 2017), pp. 11–102.

<sup>57</sup> Andreas Deutsch, 'Von Schwanereien und Schwaneneiern. Rechtshistorische Notizen zum Schwan', in *Festschrift für Gernot Kocher zum 75. Geburtstag : „...ich rief dich bei deinem Namen und gab dir Ehrennamen“*, edd. G. Kocher and B. Holcman (Maribor, 2017), pp. 87–122.

<sup>58</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 339.

<sup>59</sup> See for example: "And last and proudest, Imrahil, Prince of Dol Amroth, kinsman of the Lord, with gilded banners bearing his token of the Ship and the Silver Swan, and a company of knights in full harness riding grey horses; and behind them seven hundreds of men at arms, tall as lords, grey-eyed, dark-haired, singing as they came" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 771); "and with him went the Prince of Dol Amroth in his shining mail. For he and his knights still held themselves like lords in whom the race of Númenor ran true" (ibidem, p. 824). There is a discussion among the readers if "full harness" means plate armour which could mark a differentiation between the Men of Dol Amroth and other people of Gondor who bear only mail. The time it suggests as the source of inspiration, when plate armour was widespread, is later than the time indicated by the culture of Gondor, excluding Dol Amroth. The discussion is summarized (though not solved) by Thomas Honegger 'Riders, Chivalry and Knighthood in Tolkien', *Journal of Tolkien Research*, 4, no. 2 (2017).

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It should be considered why the number of arms in *The Lord of the Rings* is so small. The narration does not validate the hypothesis that other families and provinces had their own arms which were not described in the plot. The existing arms are strongly exposed, especially on the banners (for example, the banner of Dol Amroth is mentioned seven times and the charge of the Silver Swan six times). Of eight divisions of troops from Gondor's provinces described approaching Minas Tirith only one (of Dol Amroth) has its own banner. In the battle of the Black Gate of Mordor the entire army of Gondor and its allies has only three banners, although the soldiers differ in terms of their ethnicity, warfare and armaments. The army of Rohan (6000 men) in the battle of the Pelennor Fields has but one standard; Éomer, the king's nephew, does not use his own banner, even when he undertakes an independent military campaign. When Aragorn and his friends meet Éomer for the first time, the narration provides a detailed description of horses, riders, their clothes and armaments but no banner is mentioned. The only fragment contradictory to the thesis that the entire kingdom of Rohan was represented by only one banner, is an author's note about the First Battle of the Fords of Isen. It claims that after Théodred was slain and Grimbold forced Saruman's army to retreat, "above the hasty mound of Théodred in the middle was set his banner".<sup>60</sup> The syntax does not allow to determine unambiguously whether the banner belonged to Grimbold or to Théodred, but there are strong premises to believe it was Théodred's: Grimbold headed the left wing of the Rohirrim army in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields and he had no banner (neither did Elfhelm, the leader of the right wing). Théodred was the king's heir, and in the First Battle of the Fords of Isen he acted on behalf of his father, who did not take part in the campaign. It might easily be assumed that he was entitled to use the king's banner. The banner serves as a manifesto for the very idea of kingship, as demonstrated in the scene of passing the banner from dying Theoden to Éomer in the Battle of Pelennor Fields.<sup>61</sup> Théodred used it during the campaign when he, as the heir, embodied the king's authority.

There is one apparent solution to the dilemma of the small number of arms: Gondor's social stratification appears to be almost flat. There are no developed feudal relationships<sup>62</sup> and all the citizens are directly subordinate either to the king, or the Steward ruling in the king's name. The military leaders or governors of provinces do not have formal titles and even the possessors of hereditary offices are legitimized only by the king's will and their own competitions. Dol Amroth is excluded from the rule, as it was an almost independent country with a strong dynasty holding a unique title of a Prince.<sup>63</sup> Lack of expanded heraldry emphasizes the equality of Gondor's citizens, despite their different ethnicities.

<sup>60</sup> Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, London (1998), p. 473.

<sup>61</sup> See note 100.

<sup>62</sup> The word *vassal* appears in *The Lord of the Rings* only once, as a metaphor (concerning eagles – *The Return of the King*, p. 948) and the word *liege-lord* appears twice, concerning the King (*The Return of the King*: pp. 880; 977).

<sup>63</sup> According to the author's note to *Cirion and Eorl* the title of Prince was granted by Elendil (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, p. 409). Ch. Tolkien notices that such conception cannot be agreed with the tale about the princes' origin from Imrazôr, who lived about two thousand years after the death of Elendil (ibidem, p. 409).

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It is suggested that in the past (in relation to the time of action) the heraldry of Gondor could have been much more developed. When recounting the times of slow decline during the reign of the last kings, Faramir claims: "Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry".<sup>64</sup> There are two possible explanations: either the heraldry of Gondor in the kings' time was more developed, or the sentence should be interpreted as a metaphor. The only evidence that the first option might be correct comes from a passage in *Unfinished Tales* concerning the war between Gondor and the Wainriders in the year 1944 of the Third Age. After king Ondoher was slain on the battlefield and the banner was captured, Minohtar, the king's sister-son and Captain of the Right Wing, "raised his own banner"<sup>65</sup> and took command of the army. The phrase "his own banner" may suggest it was Minohtar's family's arms; it would prove that noble families of Gondor other than the royal house and the house of Dol Amroth bore their coats of arms. However, in this instance the king had been slain, the rightful heir was a minor, and the entire country was under threat of the Wainrider's invasion, and Minohtar was effectively acting as regent. Raising the banner with the ordinary arms of Gondor without the royal augmentation, Minohtar took command and temporarily demanded the obedience which was paid to the king. As the king's banner was captured by the Wainriders, its symbolic qualities as the embodiment of the kingdom's power had to be continued by Minohtar's standard. It might be argued that the expression "raised his own banner" could be purely metaphorical, but in Tolkien's idiolect there are very few instances of the phrases with the word "banner" used only as a metaphor without a reference to a physical object.<sup>66</sup>

The passage about childless lords musing on heraldry is only one element of a long passus concerning the end of the age of kings:

Death was ever present, because the Númenoreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging. Kings made tombs more splendid than houses of the living, and counted old names in the rolls of their descent dearer than the names of sons. Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry; in secret chambers withered men compounded strong elixirs, or in high cold towers asked questions of the stars.<sup>67</sup>

Here a struggle for immortality degenerated into a pathological fascination with death, focusing on the past and neglecting the moral duties. A developed heraldic system can be recognized as a component of the illusion of immortality which was the main reason

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It might be asked why Tolkien conceived the two contradictory ideas. Probably he assumed that a unique status of Dol Amroth's princes could have been granted only by the founder of the kingdom.

<sup>64</sup> Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 678.

<sup>65</sup> Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, p. 379.

<sup>66</sup> For example: "you are our captain and our banner" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 501). In numerous contexts the meaning is primarily metonymical, indicating an army or its commander: "all men would flock to my banner" (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 398); "the banners of Fingon passed over Anfauglith and were raised before the walls of Angband" (*The Silmarillion*, p. 227); "the banners of the sons of Fëanor assailed the enemy in the rear" (*The Silmarillion*, p. 228). The level of literalness in these expressions varies from almost literal (the second one) to mostly metonymical (the first one) but in all cases a physical object exists in the presented world.

<sup>67</sup> Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 678.

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of the downfall of Númenor, and nearly drew the same fate on Gondor. John Bowers remarks that the idea of high court culture degenerating into morally marked weakness might have been inspired by the court of Richard II<sup>68</sup>, including the king's obsession with astrology, his ancestry and heraldry. Bowers draws a parallel between the kings of Gondor building the tombs more splendid than houses and Richard II investing in royal tombs in Winchester; he also compares "musing on heraldry" with the exposition of royal insignia on numerous works of art, including the Wilton Diptych.<sup>69</sup>

Tolkien did not consider heraldry itself as evil, as is proved by the richness of entirely positive symbolism of the protagonists' arms, and by several passages in the texts outside the legendarium, especially the poem *Mythopoeia* which clarifies Tolkienian theory of myth and its connection with theology:

I would with the beleaguered fools be told  
that keep an inner fastness where their gold  
impure and scanty, yet they loyally bring  
to mint in image blurred of distant king  
or in fantastic banners weave the sheen  
heraldic emblems of a lord unseen.<sup>70</sup>

Both heraldic emblems and coins are symbolic analogies of a person. The "lord unseen" although himself inaccessible, could be recognized symbolically through the code of heraldry.

### Heraldry of allies of the Dark Lord

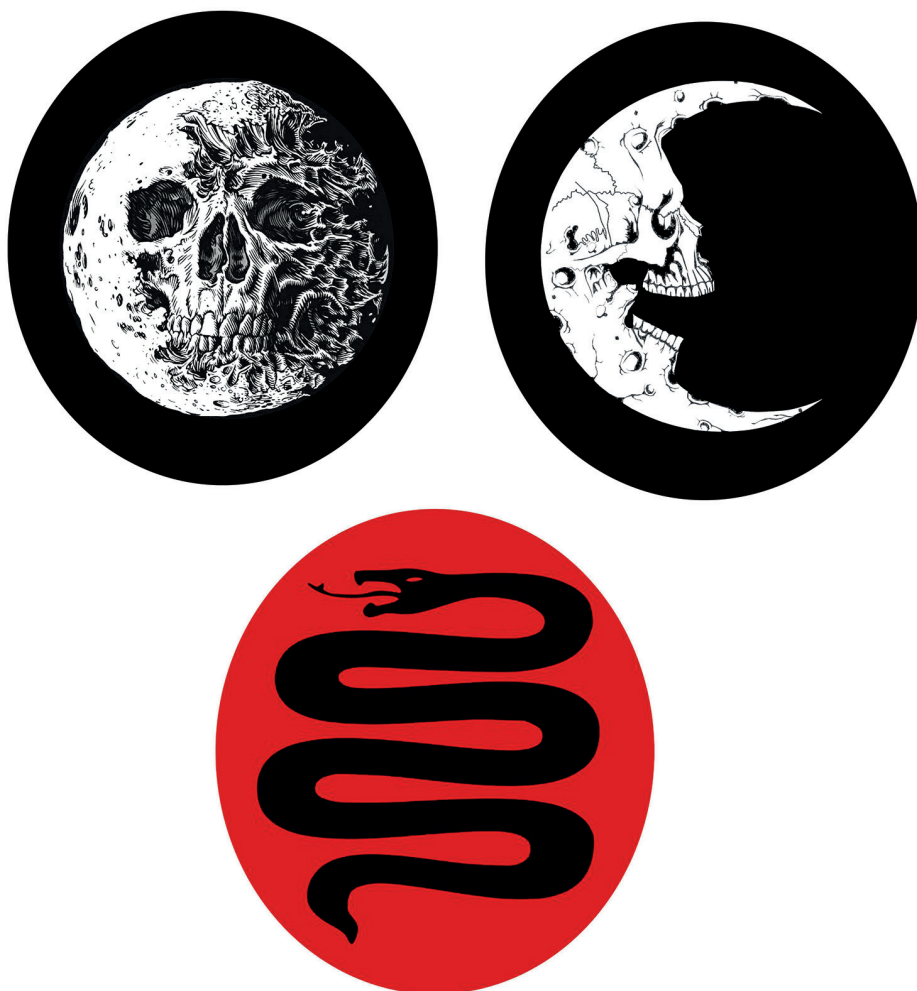
The first element to be discussed is the arms of Harad: *gules* (Tolkien uses the word "scarlet" which may suggest *sanguine* rather than *gules*), *a serpent sable* (**Figure 5c**). There is no information about the social structure of Harad, but it might be assumed that the Black Serpent is the dynasty's emblem as well as that of the state by analogy with the protagonists' arms. The clash of the armies of Rohan and Harad in the battle of the Pelennor Fields is described as a single combat between two heraldic beasts: "displaying his standard, black serpent upon scarlet, he came against the white horse and the green".<sup>71</sup> A metonymy that decodes a person by their heraldic charge is a common literary device but in *The Lord of the Rings* it has an extraordinary significance: the charges define the actual features of the persons and states they represent. Within the symbolic discourse of the epic, the serpent banner carries all the negative connotations of the animal. It is borne both by the leader of the Haradrim and by the country of Harad itself. In Christian symbolism the serpent's most common association is as an allegory of Satan, the serpent from Genesis being identified with the devil. In English tradition the serpent represents Satan (*Revelation*. 12:9, King James version) In the legendarium the word *serpent* can mean both a snake and a dragon; and thus the question arises which of these two the serpent on the banner of Harad is intended to represent. There is no explicit answer in the text, but there are some extratextual reasons to refute the

<sup>68</sup> John M. Bowers, *Tolkien's Lost Chaucer* (Oxford, 2019), p. 138.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138.

<sup>70</sup> Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf. Mythopoeia. The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthel's son* (London, 2001), p. 88.

<sup>71</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 839.



*Figure 5:* modern takes on the arms of the allies of Sauron. Top, 5a and b, two interpretations of the arms of Minas Morgul based on tattoo designs. The top left design is anonymous, the top right is after VonKowen; bottom, arms of Harad, source: Wikimedia Commons.

hypothesis of a dragon. In English heraldry the dragon occupies a significant position. It is the charge of Wales and it was ascribed in attributed heraldry to Uther Pendragon, sometimes to King Arthur himself.<sup>72</sup> It seems highly improbable that Tolkien would

<sup>72</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *Armorial des chevaliers de la table Ronde. Etude sur l'héraldique imaginaire à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 2006), p. 25.

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associate Harad, a country which is defined as culturally alien<sup>73</sup> with a symbol so closely connected with British identity.

The arms *Gules a serpent sable* violate the rule of tinctures. Hriban<sup>74</sup> claims it is a signal of Harad's ignorance or disdain towards the high culture of Gondor. However, it is highly problematic to talk about "ignorance" and "disdain" in the relationships between Gondor and Harad, as the cultural exchange between these countries was very small, and the heraldry of Harad had to develop independently. Consequently, violation of the rule of tinctures should be recognized as the signal of foreignness (corresponding with Sinex's remarks<sup>75</sup>) rather than of barbarity. An interesting aspect is that non-English speaking readers, even if they possess specialist knowledge in heraldry, may ignore that important detail. In some countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, sable is perceived as a neutral category that belongs neither to colours nor metals; therefore, putting sable on gules (or other colours) does not violate the rule of tincture. Moreover, Polish researches in heraldry suggest the neutrality of sable (or, in older studies, gules<sup>76</sup>) as a general rule applicable for all European heraldic systems.<sup>77</sup>

The symbolism of gules and sable is a more important topic than violation of the rule of tinctures. Both tinctures have negative connotations in the legendarium (see footnote 36 on Númenorean sails and the discussion over Morgoth's plain sable shield below) and their combination evokes danger, for example in the combat of Gandalf and the Balrog.<sup>78</sup> Other examples are the banners of goblins in the Battle of Five Armies and the emblem of Mordor. In the arms of Harad the combination of these two tinctures with the charge of serpent make a particularly compelling image of cruelty, maliciousness and violence.

The arms of Minas Morgul (**Figure 5a and b**) are a perfect example of an ally of Sauron adopting antagonistic heraldry. The tinctures are identical to those used in the arms of Gondor, argent on sable. The charge of the Moon deformed by a skull relates to a founding myth, just like the arms of its adversaries.<sup>79</sup> The Moon represents Minas Ithil, Tower of the Moon, and the skull evokes the Ringwraiths conquest of that Tower. Here is an explicit challenge and insult directed at Gondor, both in the parody of tinctures and in reminding of the dishonour which Gondor suffered by the loss of Minas Ithil. The Moon also stands for Isildur<sup>80</sup> whom Sauron particularly hated and feared. By conquering Isildur's fortress and transforming it into Minas Morgul the Ringwraiths manifested their Master's triumph, so emphatically expressed in the

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Sinex, "Monsterized Saracens," Tolkien Haradrim, and Other Medieval "Fantasy Products", *Tolkien Studies*, vol. 7 (2010), pp. 175–196.

<sup>74</sup> Hriban, 'The Eye and the Tree', p. 207.

<sup>75</sup> Sinex, op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Sylwiusz Mikucki, 'Barwa w heraldyce średniowiecznej. Cz. 1: Herby rycerstwa zachodniego i polskiego', *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Heraldycznego we Lwowie*, vol. 9 (1928–1929), pp: 191–250.

<sup>77</sup> Such definition of the rule of tinctures is included even in academic textbooks such as: Janusz Szymański, *Nauki pomocnicze historii*, (Warszawa, 2009).

<sup>78</sup> Miriam Miller, 'The Green Sun: A Study of Color in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*', in *Mythlore*, vol. 7 (1981), pp: 3–11 (7).

<sup>79</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 997.

<sup>80</sup> See footnote 28 about the "heraldic" names of Elendil's sons.



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charge of the disfigured Moon. Such interpretation is allowed by the characteristics of the Lord of the Nazgûl. His mode of speech (sophisticated, slightly archaic and full of metaphors) and behaviour (especially the challenge he sent to Eärnur, only to capture, torture and kill him) prove that he was perfectly aware of the conventions of high court culture and was able to manipulate them for his own benefit. The Disfigured Moon is neither a personal nor a family emblem of the Lord of the Nazgûl, who does not embrace his family identity, and acts only under function-names such as Wraith-king and Morgul-lord. The Ringwraiths have lost their personalities along with all individual features such as faces and names. Any personal token such as a coat of arms would deeply contradict such a conception.

The Red Eye of Sauron and the White Hand of Saruman should not be labelled as arms: the plot precludes any possibility they could be hereditary. They represent persons who cannot have any offspring and their domains are so strictly bound to these rulers that they collapse at the very moment of their defeat.<sup>81</sup> Their function is similar to that of the Turkic tamga: they were used to mark both items and living creatures that they possessed. The Red Eye depicted on the shields of orcs is not their liege-lord's arms but a proprietary sign; it reflects the social relationships in Mordor based on terror rather than loyalty. The soldiers of Saruman have his initial engraved on their helmets (the "S" rune). The Red Eye was engraved, painted or stamped on various items, starting with trees and ending on the human heads used as missiles during the siege of Minas Tirith. The emblem of the Red Eye serves as a signature, being placed mostly on disfigured or defiled items. There is a primal connection between the Red Eye, the entire country of Mordor it represents, and the imperative focussed on the destruction of high culture, as we define it.

The charge of the Red Eye is not only a symbolic representation of an abstract idea but an actual image of Sauron as he was imagined by the characters. We have no clue about the physical body Sauron adopted at the end of the Third Age.<sup>82</sup> His name is never spoken or spelt by his subjects<sup>83</sup> nor many of his enemies<sup>84</sup>, so they use the label "the

<sup>81</sup> The destruction of Mordor is an inevitable consequence of Sauron's fall, though some aspects of corruption or marring the material world last much longer. Isengard is transformed (into a garden), rather than destroyed, and this fact is an explicit illustration of the victory of nature over a technological dictatorship. The tree (a vertical emblem associated with nature) triumphs over the White Hand (a vertical emblem manifesting human supremacy). Such transformation should be recognized as a signal of Tolkien's attitude towards nature and human attempts to dominate it or deform for utilitarian purposes.

<sup>82</sup> McGregor ('Tolkien's Devices', p. 103) notices that many readers assume the fiery eye was the physical embodiment of Sauron only because they are influenced by P. Jackson's movies. The text does not provide any reason for such level of confidence: the vision Frodo saw in the mirror of Galadriel might have been symbolic and Pippin did not see an eye in palantir.

<sup>83</sup> See: "Neither does he use his right name, nor permit it to be spelt or spoken" (*The Two Towers*, p. 416).

<sup>84</sup> See for example: "The Nameless Enemy has arisen again" (*The Fellowship of the Rings*, p. 245), "not if the Nameless One himself should come, not even he could enter here while we yet live" (*The Return of the King*, p. 822). Such reluctance to name the Enemy, derived from abomination rather than fear, can be found also in *The Silmarillion*: "But that name he has forfeited; and the Noldor, who among the Elves suffered most from his malice, will not utter it, and they name him Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World" (p. 23). Also, Mordor is called the Nameless Land and Cirith Ungol the Nameless Pass.

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Eye”.<sup>85</sup> This is an emanation of his persona as a vigilant, ever-spying and ever-watchful ruler of a totalitarian country. He is also spoken of as the *Lidless Eye*, the eye that never closes or sleeps. Such omniscience points to one of the sources of inspiration: in Christian iconography the eye is a symbol of God.<sup>86</sup> Since both Morgoth and Sauron intend to place themselves in the position of God, the emblem of the Red Eye manifests their usurpation of God’s prerogatives. There is also a more contemporary inspiration: an eye is a symbol of invigilation and absolute control. Consequently, the Red Eye on the banners, shields and helmets of Mordor’s soldiers serves not only as a manner of identification and a proprietary sign, but also a warning for the orcs who are held in obedience only by a fear of their powerful and omniscient lord.<sup>87</sup> The Eye highlights the crucial characteristics of the relationships of dependency in Mordor: the charge is recognized as a source of fear, and not one of pride, and neither is it representative of any sense of belonging. The fear is amplified by numerous “small eyes”, *i.e.* the spies and denunciators that Sauron’s army is so full of. The symbol taps into human society’s widespread belief about the “evil eye” which may cause physical harm by a mere look.<sup>88</sup> Sauron’s merest look is a form of torture in itself.<sup>89</sup> Finally, Edward Lense has suggested the Celtic god Balor (often nicknamed Balor with the Evil Eye) as a possible inspiration for the Red Eye charge.<sup>90</sup>

Saruman’s emblem (*Sable a hand argent*) is more ambiguous. An open hand corresponds with Saruman’s actions, as he preferred parleying and deceptive promises over open violence.<sup>91</sup> In contrast with the Red Eye, Saruman’s charge does not aim to produce fear but to decrease the potential victim’s vigilance. We must also think of the symbolism of the *Manus Dei* (hand of God) as a visual demonstration of God’s power.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>85</sup> There are too many examples to enumerate them all. See: “Is Saruman the master or the Great Eye?” (*The Two Towers*, p. 446); “You ought to know that they’re the apple of the Great Eye” (*ibidem*, p. 452); “I was heavy with thought, and weary after my struggle with the Eye of Mordor” (*ibidem*, p. 499), “But we must at all costs keep his Eye from his true peril” (*The Return of the King*, p. 880).

<sup>86</sup> Liselotte Kaute, ‘Auge, Auge Gottes’, in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 1: *Allgemeine Ikonographie. A-Ezechiel* (Freiburg, 2012), pp: 222–3.

<sup>87</sup> The Orcs are presented as rebellious by nature and inclined to inner feuds. See: “they were certainly dominated by their Master, but his dominion was by fear, and they were aware of this fear and hated him” (Tolkien, *Morgoth’s Ring*, p. 417); “But there remained one flaw in his control, inevitable. In the kingdom of hate and fear, the strongest thing is hate. All his Orcs hated one another, and must be kept ever at war with some ‘enemy’ to prevent them from slaying one another” (*ibidem*, p. 420).

<sup>88</sup> Amica Lykiardopoulos, ‘The Evil Eye: Towards an Exhaustive Study’, in *Folklore*, vol. 91 (1981), no. 2, pp: 221–230.

<sup>89</sup> See: “The Eye: that horrible growing sense of a hostile will that strove with great power to pierce all shadows of cloud, and earth, and flesh, and to see you: to pin you under its deadly gaze, naked, immovable” (*The Two Towers*, p. 630); “He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye.” (*The Return of the King*, p. 841).

<sup>90</sup> Edward Lense, ‘Sauron is Watching You: The Role of the Great Eye in *The Lord of the Rings*’, in *Mythlore*, vol. 4 (1976), no. 1, pp: 3–6.

<sup>91</sup> McGregor, ‘Tolkien’s Devices’, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup> Oskar Holl, ‘Hand Gottes’, in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 2: *Allgemeine Ikonographie. F-K* (Freiburg, 2012), pp: 211–2.

Perhaps Saruman, who has unwittingly made himself Sauron's parody, is using this charge to manifest that he possesses absolute power, like Sauron himself. The tincture argent is a consequence of Saruman's epithet "Saruman the White", he having begun his career as a White Wizard until which he betrayed the values of his order. McGregor suggests an interesting interpretation of the sable field's symbolism, or to be more precise, its lack of symbolism:

Where the royal standard of Gondor evokes a profound night sky, and Mordor's banners the blackness of the abyss, that of Isengard does neither. It is curiously abstract in fact, as if aiming at nothing more than a pretentiously stylish contrast.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Twelve Houses of Gondolin**

In the early texts of the legendarium there are two extensive passages concerning heraldry and it might be deduced that originally the author intended to create a much more developed heraldic system that we can reconstruct from *The Lord of the Rings*. The most researched fragment is the enumeration of the Twelve Houses of Gondolin and their banners.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately only three of the twelve arms can be entirely reconstructed from the text (**Table 1**): the House of the Mole, the House of the Heavenly Arch and the House of the Harp. The others are either mere fragments, or the charge can only be guessed based on the name of the House or the colour of its clothing. Such guesses may prove to be false: for example, the charge of the House of the Swallow is the arrowheads. His descriptions serve as further evidence that Tolkien did not pay particular attention to the rules of blazon.

These are not family arms because the affiliation to particular houses did not depend (or depended only secondarily) on family bonds. Some houses were built up around a prominent person (such as Tuor or Meglin), others were gatherings of craftsmen performing particular occupations, or were associations based on common likings and conventions of behaviour. Relatives could belong to different houses and a person was able to switch house, as is proven by the founding of the House of the Wing. Consequently, the "arms" of the Houses might be compared with the arms of municipal guilds, and the charge of the Stricken Anvil certainly alludes to a craft.

The "arms" of three houses: the King's guard, the House of the Wing and House of the Mole are particularly interesting in terms of an antecedent symbolism which can be discerned. Firstly, let us consider the heart emblem of the Royal Guard. Turgon, Elven king of the Noldor, bore a charge comprising of three elements: sun, moon and scarlet heart. According to *Gilfanon's Tale: The Travail of the Noldoli*, Turgon adopted the

<sup>93</sup> McGregor, 'Tolkien's Devices', p. 109.

<sup>94</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 172–4.

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House	Charge	Tincture of charge	Field	Clothing
King's Guard	Sun, Moon, Heart	Argent, Or, Gules (sanguine? <sup>95</sup> )	_96	Silver, gold, scarlet
Wing	Wing	Argent	_97	-
Mole	plain sable			Black
Swallow	Arrowheads	-	-	White, dark blue, purple, black
Heavenly Arch	Jewel of seven gems	(colours of gems)	Azure	Many colours
Pillar	-	-	-	-
Tower of Snow	-	-	-	-
Tree	-	-	-	green
Golden Flower	Sun	Or (?) <sup>98</sup>	-	-
Fountain	-	-	-	-
Harp	Harp	Argent	Sable	-
Hammer of Wrath	Stricken Anvil	-	-	-

*Table 1: the Seven Houses of Gondolin.*

scarlet heart as his charge to commemorate his father Finwë Nólémë<sup>99</sup> who was killed by the orcs in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears and his heart was cut out. The sun and moon probably represent the trees Glingol and Bansil which were planted in the king's courtyard in remembrance of the Two Trees of Valinor (the Sun and the Moon descended

<sup>95</sup> Tolkien uses the label "scarlet".

<sup>96</sup> A dash represents a lack of information.

<sup>97</sup> Hriban ('The Eye and the Tree', p. 200) deduces it was purple on the basis of the *Tale of Eärendel*: it claims Tuor's sails during his last voyage were purple. However, *Tale of Eärendel* does not describe the charge of the Wing on Tuor's sail. It might be suggested by the name of the ship, Swanwing.

<sup>98</sup> It might be deduced from the name of the House and the proper colour of the Sun.

<sup>99</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part One*, p. 241. The names could be misleading, as Tolkien modified the narration many times and gave the existing names to new characters. The characteristics of Finwë Nólémë was later splintered into two characters: Finwë and his son Fingolfin who is the father of Turgon in *The Silmarillion*. In *The Book of the Lost Tales* the Battle of Unnumbered Tears took place before the founding of Gondolin.

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from a flower and a fruit of the Two Trees). Turgon's "arms" can be recognized as neither hereditary nor bound with the kingship over Gondolin but rather an individual emblem strictly connected with personal experience. This common characteristic of Elvish heraldry is a direct consequence of a key difference between Elves and Men, which is immortality. A clear separation of the person and their rank and an idea of the coat of arms as a symbol identifying position rather than a person can only develop if the office is more enduring than the individual. Among the Elves an individual might even be more long-lived than a country. In this society the position of a king (or any other ruler) is not intended to be inherited; the king's life can only be ended with a dramatic event such as war or murder. Human societies in contradistinction evolved a concept of kingship having a duality or "two bodies", the mortal and the immortal.<sup>100</sup> Among the Elves the king's physical and spiritual bodies are almost entirely united and there is no need for separation between the arms representing the king and his office.

Secondly, the wing of the House of Wing. Tuor, a human hero of the First Age, bore arms which are again a record of previous experiences, commemorating the swans which guided him on his way to a fateful meeting with Ulmo. *The Fall of Gondolin* describes how this device was granted to Tuor by his sovereign, king Turgon:

Upon a time the king caused his most cunning artificers to fashion a suit of armour for Tuor as a great gift, and it was made of Gnome-steel overlaid with silver; but his helm was adorned with a device of metals and jewels like to two swan-wings, one on either side, and a swan's wing was wrought on his shield.<sup>101</sup>

No document or official proclamation is mentioned but the mere giving of the gift (especially if it was made publicly) is tantamount to making a proclamation.<sup>102</sup> The charge of a swan-wing and a crest of swan or seagull wing were adopted by a group of Elves who assembled around Tuor when he married princess Idril, which led to the establishment of the House of the Wing. It is also suggested that "arms" of a swan-wing was hereditary: "Then were the Gondothlim glad, and they made in after days the Eagle a sign of their kindred in token of their joy, and Idril bore it, but Eärendel loved rather the Swan-wing of his father".<sup>103</sup> This passage proves that heraldry of the First Age

<sup>100</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton and Oxford, 2016). The idea of the two bodies can be traced within the legendarium but only in human societies. It is singularly manifested during the battle of Pelennor Fields and the mode Éomer succeeded Théoden as the king of Rohan. The words "Théoden king .. He is dead. But Éomer King now rides in the battle" (*The Return of the King*, p. 845) vividly resemble the famous expression "The king is dead! Long live the king!" which Kantorowicz interprets as the very incarnation of the idea of two bodies (Kantorowicz, op. cit., p. 412). Arno Meteling ('Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Zum Politischen in J. R. R. Tolkiens *The Lord of the Rings*', in *Parole(n) – Politische Dimensionen von Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, vol. 2, ed. C. Roeder [Ludwigsburg, 2020], pp. 199–212) claims that Aragorn's public image and behaviour allow us to recognize the duality of his body. Meteling does not involve heraldry in his research but the augmented arms of the kings of Gondor representing the spiritual body of the king confirms his conclusions.

<sup>101</sup> Tolkien, *The Books of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 164.

<sup>102</sup> Hriban, 'The Eye and the Tree', p. 200.

<sup>103</sup> Tolkien, *The Books of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 193.

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Ἰδρίλ Ἰνδῆ Ἰνδῆ



Figure 6: Idril's Device. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, f.11  
© Tolkien Trust 1973, 1992, 1995.

was remarkably fluent: the elves who survived the battle forsook the emblems of their houses and adopted the charge of the Eagle.

In his commentary on *The Fall of Gondolin* Ch. Tolkien suggests a different explanation for the swan charge's origin: *Of Tuor and his Coming to Gondolin* informs us that the swan was an emblem of Tuor's foster-father Annael and his kinsfolk the Grey Elves. Since Tuor's actual father was Huor and not Annael it must be assumed that in his youth he used the "arms" of his genetic father's House of Hador.<sup>104</sup>

The "arms" of the House of the Mole, *plain sable* at first sight appear discrepant since such a device is attributed to Morgoth in various texts: *The Lay of Leithian*, "his mighty shield a vast unblazoned sable field"; *Quenta Noldorinwa* "Morgoth's shield was black without a blazon"; *Quenta Silmarillion* "his vast shield, sable unblazoned";

<sup>104</sup> See Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, pp. 85–86: "Then at last Húrin sprang into his saddle, and his golden banner was unfurled". The golden colour is not identical to the colours of Húrin's sovereign, king Fingon (see the discussion below on the "arms" of Fingolfin's family) which suggests the House of Hador was represented by their own coat of arms.

*Grey Annals* “his vast black unblazoned shield”.<sup>105</sup> The tincture sable here represents darkness and nothingness, with black being here understood as a lack of colour rather than a colour. According to *Myths Transformed* Morgoth's aim was not just to dominate but to utterly annihilate the world. Having enslaved all living creatures he would have destroyed also his slaves and the very matter of the world had the world been in his power.<sup>106</sup> The aims of Sauron are different: he intends to dominate the world but not to destroy it. His emblem sable stands in contrast with gules.

Although Meglin, of the House of the Mole, is definitely a negative character in *The Fall of Gondolin* (though in later texts he became a tragic figure), the members of the House of the Mole were not aware of their leader's treason. Since they are miners who spend a substantial part of their lives underground sable serves as a metonymy for their profession. The shields of the House are plain but the warriors use the symbol of a mole and therefore they wear sable skins on their helmets. Although the similarity between the shields of the House of the Mole and Morgoth's shield cannot be recognized as a random coincidence in view of the characteristics of Meglin, the tribal symbolism does not connote nothingness but rather the dark tunnels of the mines.

Meglin's plain sable shield also reminds us of the black knight who appears not infrequently in Arthurian romances. In this corpus the nameless knight with a monochromatic shield (typically sable, gules or vert) is hiding his identity, usually for heroic reasons, but sometimes acting as a villain.<sup>107</sup> A monochromatic knight brings chaos and poses a threat to the stability of social structures.<sup>108</sup> Meglin acts as an outsider, his black clothes and arms among the colourful folk of Gondolin emphasises his otherness<sup>109</sup> and he ultimately brings destruction to the city. In the eyes of Tuor, the central character of the story, Meglin can be interpreted as a “black knight”: a mystery and danger (though not fully realized) which has to be faced in final combat.

*The Fall of Gondolin* is crucial for the legendarium. Tolkien referred to it as a real text existing within the fictional world: “Of the deeds of desperate valour there done, by the chieftains of the noble houses and their warriors, and not least by Tuor, much is told in *The Fall of Gondolin*”.<sup>110</sup> Ch. Tolkien believes that his father did not abandon the concept of the rich heraldry of Gondolin and would certainly have included it in his last and most developed version (*Of Tuor and his Coming to Gondolin*) had it been completed.<sup>111</sup>

Alex Lewis and Elizabeth Currie suggest a complex parallel between the heraldry of Gondolin and medieval romances of Troy but they do not provide sufficient evidence.

<sup>105</sup> Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, p. 285; *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 106; *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, p. 284; *The War of the Jewels*, p. 55.

<sup>106</sup> Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 396.

<sup>107</sup> Dean Miller, *Epic Hero* (Baltimore, London, 2000), p. 263–4.

<sup>108</sup> Bruno Quast, “Monochrome Ritter. Über Farbe und Ordnung in höfischen Erzähltexten des Mittelalters“, in: *Die Farben Imaginierten Welten. Zur Kulturgeschichte ihrer Codierung in Literatur und Kunst vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. M. Schausten (Berlin, 2012), pp. 169–182 (171,176).

<sup>109</sup> Meglin's otherness is highlighted by his physical characteristics, as he is dark-skinned while other people of Gondolin have light complexion; Meglin is even said to “have Orcs' blood in his veins” (Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 165). Monochromatic sable encodes Meglin's physical and psychological otherness, which likens him to mystical or even supernatural figures of chivalric romances.

<sup>110</sup> *The Silmarillion*, p. 291.

<sup>111</sup> Tolkien, *The Book of the Lost Tales. Part Two*, p. 211.

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They have also posited the Nine Worthies and their imaginary arms (as they are depicted on an illumination from the late fourteenth-century manuscript *Le Chevalier Errant*<sup>112</sup>) as the source of Gondolin heraldry.<sup>113</sup> Among the nine arms they focus on five and indicate them as a possible inspiration for Tolkien. They include: king David (*Azure a harp or*) for the House of the Harp; Alexander the Great (*Or a double-headed eagle displayed sable*) for the House of the Tree; Juda Maccabeus (*Argent a bird sable*) for the House of the Wing and the House of the Swallow; Charlemagne's *fleur de lis* and Godfrey of Bouillon's *Argent a cross potent between four crosses Or* for the House of Golden Flower. Of these only harp seems remotely plausible. Birds are so common in heraldry that it seems unreasonable to link Judas Maccabeus's sable bird with a white swan wing and for swallow (which additionally occurs only in the name of the house, while the charge was arrowheads). A visual similarity between the cross of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the sun is at least doubtful; even less convincing is the suggestion that a double-headed eagle might be taken for a tree. It seems that Lewis and Currie's arguments are based on the pre-assumed idea that the medieval retellings of Troy myth are the ultimate source for *The Fall of Gondolin*. It was criticized by Thomas Honegger, who claims that: "to argue that Tolkien consciously modelled his tale on several of the medieval versions of the fall of Troy seems to me to overtax parallels that are likely to occur in any medieval account of a siege".<sup>114</sup>

### Elvish heraldry

A long passage about Elvish heraldry can be found in Tolkien's *The Shaping of Middle-earth*:

And three great armies had Gelmir<sup>115</sup> under his lordship, and Golfin his son was captain of one, and Delin his son of another, and Lúthien (not that Lúthien of the Roses who is of another and a later tale<sup>116</sup>) of a third; and Golfin's might was in swordsmen, and Delin had more of those who bore the long... elfin spears, but Lúthien's joy was in the number and... of his bowmen and the bow has ever been the weapon wherein the Elf-kin has had the most wondrous skill. Now the colours of the Gnomes were gold and white in those ancient days in memory of the Two Trees, but Gelmir's standard bore upon a silver field a crown of gold, and each captain had a fair banner; and the sign of Golfin in those days was

<sup>112</sup> *Le Chevaliere Errant*, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, fr. 12559, fol. 125.

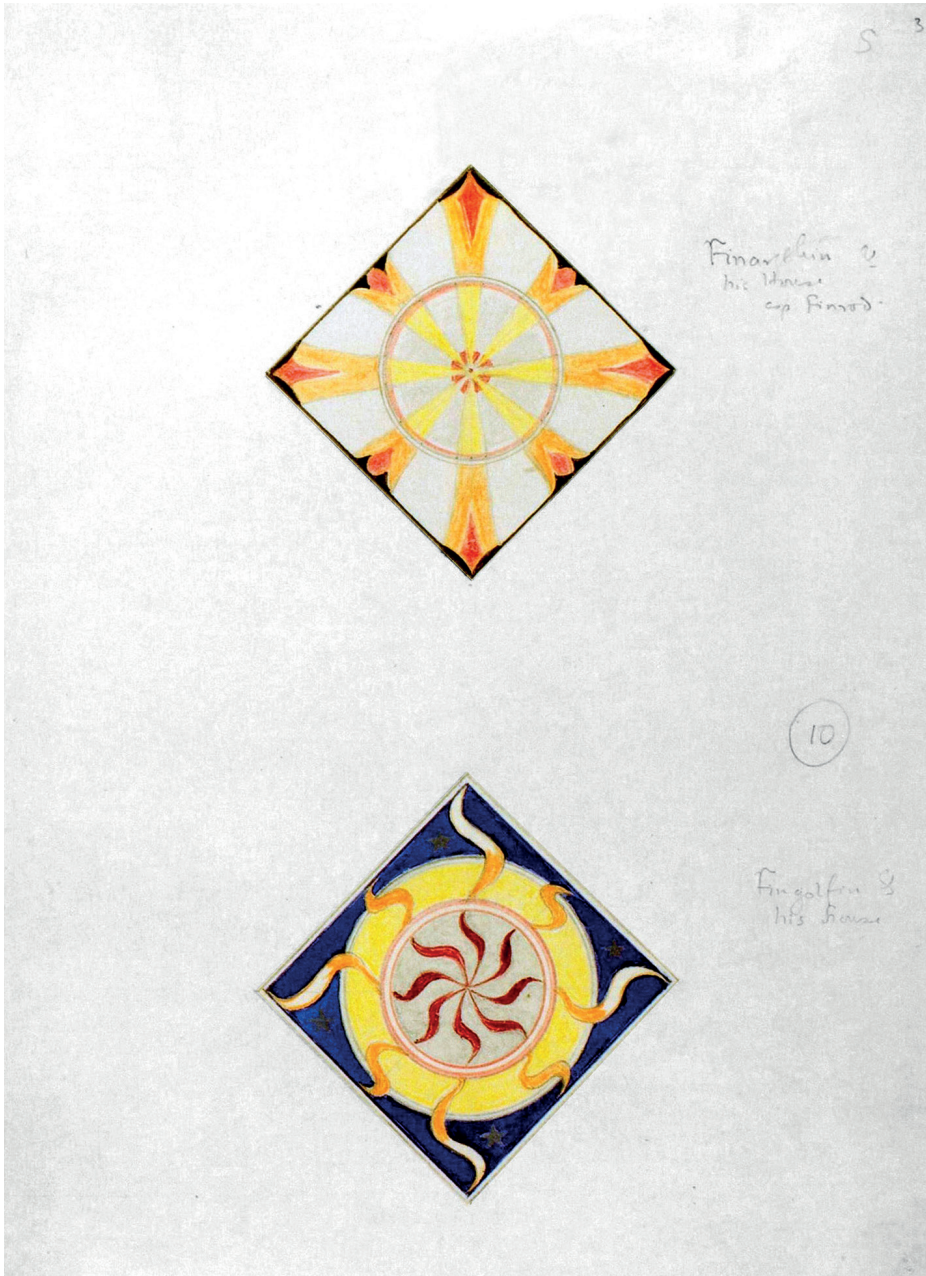
<sup>113</sup> Alex Lewis and Elizabeth Currie, *The Forsaken Realms of Tolkien. J.R.R. Tolkien and the Medieval Tradition*, (Oswestry, 2009), pp. 50, 54. Although the entire subchapter is titled "Heraldry in linguistic games", only a small part actually concerns heraldry.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Honegger, "The Passing of the Elves and the Arrival of Modernity: Tolkien's 'Mythical Method'", in *Tolkien and Modernity*. vol. 2, ed. by T. Honegger and F. Weinreich (Zurich, Wien, 2006), pp. 211–233, p. 218.

<sup>115</sup> That character should be confused neither with Gelmir son of Guilin of Nargothrond nor with Gelmir of the Havens who brought a warning from Ulmo to Orodreth of Nargothrond. Here Gelmir is the High King of the Noldor in the time they returned to Middle-earth, analogically with Finwë Nólemë from *The Book of Lost Tales* and Fingolfin from later texts.

<sup>116</sup> Lúthien of the Roses is Eriol, the main character of the frame story of *The Book of the Lost Tales*. Of course, none of them corresponds with Lúthien, daughter of Thingol.





*Figure 7: Heraldic devices for the houses of Finarphin and Fingolfin.*  
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 3r  
© Tolkien Trust 1973, 1995.

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upon gold a silver sword, and of Delin a green beech leaf upon silver diapered with golden flowers, and of Luthien a golden swallow that winged through an azure field as it were the sky set with silver stars, and the sons of Feanor wrought that standard and those banners, and they shone by sunlight and by mist and by moonlight and by starless dark by the light of the Gnome-wrought gems that sewed them.<sup>117</sup>

There are four “arms” here and two of them violate the rule of tinctures (Or on argent for Gelmir’s banner, argent on Or for Golfin’s banner). In living heraldry the rule which precludes putting metal on metal was broken even less frequently than the related rule concerning the placement of colour on colour.<sup>118</sup> There are at least two possible explanations why Tolkien did not apply this traditional prohibition. The first would be that he was simply unaware of it. In his scholarly works he focused on the Old English and Middle English periods, and the rules of heraldry were only just beginning to be codified towards the end of the latter period. Moreover, he usually analysed the texts in terms of their language and poetics and not the historical data which could be deduced from them, an approach which he described in *Monsters and Critics*.<sup>119</sup> Violation of the rule of tinctures might have been deliberate to suggest that the tale belongs to a very remote time, taking the end of the Third Age as the reference point. While the Third Age roughly corresponds with medieval Europe, the First Age should be defined as “heroic times” characterised by epic poetry. Metatextual qualities of the tales about the First Age suggest they are much closer to a myth or heroic epic than to a novel.

In the above text there is an obvious connection between the charges and the troops who bear them: a sword for swordsmen, a branch for spearmen (branch and spear share such features as the shape and material) and a swallow for the bowmen; in *The Fall of Gondolin* the best bowmen were gathered in the House of the Swallow. The royal banner (*Argent a crown or*) bears no individual quality and represents the idea of kingship itself.

In other texts concerning the First Age information about heraldry are scattered, and present numerous contradictions. A clue about a developed heraldic system of the Noldor might be deduced from *The Annals of Aman*: “and shields they made displaying the tokens of many houses and kindreds that vied one another”.<sup>120</sup> Here not only the royal house but also other families are using unique arms, but surprisingly, other texts provide only very fragmentary information about the arms of the members of the dynasty. A coherent description of Fingolfin’s “arms” can be reconstructed from various texts about his duel with Morgoth: in *The Lay of Leithian*, “shield he bore with field of heaven’s blue and star of crystal shining pale afar”<sup>121</sup>; in *Quenta Noldorinwa*, “on his shield was the star on a blue field that was his device”<sup>122</sup>; in *Quenta Silmarillion*, “his blue shield was set with crystals”<sup>123</sup>; and in *Grey Annals*, “his blue shield set with

<sup>117</sup> Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Bruno Heim, *Or and Argent* (Gerrards Cross, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>119</sup> Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (London, 1997), p. 17.

<sup>120</sup> Tolkien, *Morgoth’s Ring*, p. 96.

<sup>121</sup> Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, p. 285.

<sup>122</sup> Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 106.

<sup>123</sup> Tolkien, *The Lost Road*, p. 284.

a star of crystal".<sup>124</sup> Six texts mention the banners Fingolfin ordered to display when his folk returned to Middle-earth and all versions refer the same colours "blue and silver" without information about the charge.<sup>125</sup> The tinctures correspond with Fingolfin's shield.

It has been suggested that that *Azure a star argent* was inherited by Fingolfin's sons. *Of Tuor and his Coming to Gondolin* claims that Fingolfin's banner was displayed in Gondolin.<sup>126</sup> In several of Tolkien's writings Fingon's banner is blue and silver.<sup>127</sup> However, in other versions it is plain argent.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps Tolkien twice changed his mind but another explanation seems more convincing: Fingon does not act only as a representant of the family but as a leader of a broad and unstable alliance, and not all its members accept his supremacy as the High King of the Noldor. It can be easily imagined that Fingon decided to expose the least controversial emblem which could symbolise the League instead of his family "arms". Additionally, a banner of plain argent constitutes the most expressive contrast with plain sable banners of Morgoth.

According to *The Shibboleth of Fëanor* (1968) Gil-galad's<sup>129</sup> shield was "overlaid with silver and set with a device of white stars, shone from afar like a star in sunlight

<sup>124</sup> Tolkien, *The War of the Jewels*, p. 55. *Quenta Silmarillion* does not mention the charge but it should not be presumed that the author changed his mind (*Grey Annals*, written at the same time, informs about the star) but only rearranged the text; it is strong evidence that the precision of blazoning was not important for Tolkien.

<sup>125</sup> *Sketch of the Mythology* written between 1926 and 1930, *Quenta Noldorinwa* from 1930, *The Earliest Annals of Valinor* from 1930, *The Later Annals of Valinor* written between 1930 and 1937, *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1937 and *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1958.

<sup>126</sup> Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, p. 74. It does not contradict *The Book of the Lost Tales*, where Turgon's "arms" is Sun, Moon and Scarlet Heart as it should be recognized as Turgon's personal emblem and Fingolfin's banner (*Azure a star argent*) represents the family. However, the origin of Scarlet Heart involved in *The Book of the Lost Tales* is no longer valid in *Quenta Silmarillion* (the story about Finwë Nólemë's heart cut off by the orcs disappears in later versions).

<sup>127</sup> *Sketch of the Mythology*, *Grey Annals* and *Narn I Chin Húrin*. See also Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 26: "Finweg falls, his blue and silver banner is destroyed"; *The War of the Jewels*, p. 75: "He was overborne by the Balrogs and beaten to the earth and his banners blue and silver were trodden into dust"; *The Silmarillion*, p. 229: "and his banner, blue and silver, they trod into the mire of his blood" (the paragraph comes from *Narn I Chin Húrin* – Douglas Kane, *Arda Reconstructed. Creation of the Published Silmarillion* [Bethlehem, 2011], p. 186).

<sup>128</sup> *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, *The Lay of Leithian*, *Quenta Noldorinwa*, *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1937 and *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1958. See Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, p. 96: "when the white banners of the ruined king were rent with spears"; *ibidem*, p. 212: "The song of Fingon Elves yet sing./captain of armies, Gnomish king./ who fell at last in flame of swords/ with his white banners and his lords"; *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 118: "he was beaten to the earth and his white banners were trodden under foot"; *The Lost Road*, p. 311: "he was overborne by the Balrogs and beaten to the earth, and his white banners were trodden underfoot".

<sup>129</sup> The concept of Gil-galad's lineage was changed multiple times. For the first time he is mentioned as a descendant of Fëanor, then as a son of Felagund. *Grey Annals* and *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1958 state Gil-galad was Fingon's son. Ch. Tolkien included this version in *The Silmarillion*; he even modified such texts as *Aldarion and Erendis* to fit it (Tolkien *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, p. 351). Lastly, a note written about 1968 claims Gil-galad's father was Orodreth (*ibidem*, pp. 350–1); Ch. Tolkien did not decide to modify the earlier texts following it.

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or moonlight<sup>130</sup>. It corresponds with a poem included in *The Lord of the Rings* (incipit: “Gil-galad was an Elven king”): “the countless stars of heaven’s field were mirrored in his silver shield”.<sup>131</sup> Of course, these “arms” once again violate the tincture rule; a white charge on a silver field would be faintly visible. A drawing from 1960 depicts two visual representations of Gil-galad’s “arms”: *Azure, twelve stars argent*. As could be seen, the tinctures are the same as in Fingolfin’s and Fingon’s “arms” but the charge is twelve stars instead of one.

In *The Lord of the Rings* the charge of the house of Fëanor is an eight-rayed star, visually represented on the west gate of Moria. It might suggest a Silmaril: on a drawing from 1960 the Silmarils have eight facets.<sup>132</sup> There are four sketches of the gates of Moria (all reproduced in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*<sup>133</sup>); all of them present a single eight-rayed star, although the first version of the text mentions three stars, not one: “More clearly than all else there shone forth palely three stars with many rays”.<sup>134</sup> Gandalf’s statement that the star is the charge of the house of Fëanor, appears only in the third, final version of the text<sup>135</sup>, when Tolkien decided that Celebrimbor, the carver of the signs on the gate of Moria, was Fëanor’s grandson<sup>136</sup>. This fact demonstrates that heraldic function was only secondarily given to the star.

The group of symbols on the gate of Moria comprises an eight-rayed star, two trees which signify the High Elves (i.e. the Noldor, corresponding with the texts quoted above that the Noldor adopted gold and silver as their colours in remembrance of the Two Trees); a hammer, anvil, crown and seven stars.<sup>137</sup> It cannot be determined unambiguously whether “the emblems of Durin”<sup>138</sup> that Gimli mentions are only the hammer and anvil or also the crown and the stars.

Some passages of *The Silmarillion* confirm that the sons of Fëanor had their own common “arms”, different than the “arms” of the ruling house of Fingolfin. For example: “in the east was raised the standard of the sons of Fëanor, and in the west the standard of Fingon, High King of the Noldor”.<sup>139</sup> If, as *The Lord of the Rings* suggests, the star was both Fëanor’s and Fingolfin’s charge, the “arms” should differ in terms of

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<sup>130</sup> Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, p. 347–348.

<sup>131</sup> *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 185. Tolkien used a similar metaphor to describe Thingol’s banner (*The Lays of Beleriand*, p. 154): “the starlight in his banners caught”.

<sup>132</sup> Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings. A Reader’s Companion* (London, 2014), p. 28.

<sup>133</sup> Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* (London, 1995), p. 183.

<sup>134</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 6], ed. Ch. Tolkien (London, 2002), p. 449.

<sup>135</sup> Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard* [= *The History of Middle-earth*, vol. 7], ed. Ch. Tolkien (London, 2002), p. 180.

<sup>136</sup> The evolution of the concepts of Celebrimbor’s lineage is summarized in Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, pp. 317–8.

<sup>137</sup> Although the crown and seven stars appears also in Gondor’s coat of arms, there is no genealogical association between them. The gate was forged in the Second Age, about two thousand years before the state of Gondor was founded.

<sup>138</sup> *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 304.

<sup>139</sup> *The Silmarillion*, p. 224.

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tinctures but there is no such information in the text. Although “the banner of the sons of Fëanor” or “the banner of Maedhros” is mentioned in almost all versions of the story about the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, no colour or charge is indicated.

The charge of the youngest line (i.e. the descendants of Finarfin) is described in detail in the story of Beren and Lúthien. The context is always the same: the charge is sculptured on Felagund's ring:

to see the jewels green that burned  
in Beren's ring. These Gnomes had set  
as eyes of serpents twined that met  
beneath a golden crown of flowers  
that one upholds and one devours  
the badge that Finrod made of yore  
and Felagund his son now bore<sup>140</sup>



*Figure 8:* Device for Lúthien Tinúviel  
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 7  
©Tolkien Trust 1973, 1992

<sup>140</sup> Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, p. 190, *Lay of Leithian*, lines 1097–1103.

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and:

    this ring was like to twin serpents, whose eyes were emeralds, and their heads met beneath the crown of golden flowers, that one upheld and the other devoured; that was the badge of Finarfin and his house<sup>141</sup>

Because these “arms” do not appear in any other context (for example, on a shield or banner) the field is never described. The evolution of the text reveals an interesting detail: in the first version of *Lay of Leithian* the Noldorin prince who aided Beren is Celegorm (the same character who acts as an antagonist in later texts) and he gave Barahir the ring forged by his father Fëanor. However, the description of the ring does not change even if its bearer is a completely different character of a different lineage. Here once again we see Tolkien’s lack of careful attention in dealing with the sphere of heraldry; a charge of two serpents is a mere ornament and it does not belong to any developed heraldic system. It can be assumed it was established for the sake of Beren and Lúthien’s story only. The design of two entwined serpents perfectly harmonizes with the shape of a ring.

In *The Lord of the Rings* the sons of Elrond bear “a banner of silver”<sup>142</sup> which might suggest their father’s family emblem. Plain argent corresponds with the description of Vingilot, the ship of Elrond’s father Eärendil, provided in Bilbo’s song at Rivendell. The version which was eventually published claims only: “light upon her [Vingilot’s] banners laid”<sup>143</sup> which does not indicate the colour unambiguously but an alternative version confirms that the banners of Vingilot were silver: “with silver were her banners sewn”.<sup>144</sup> Not just the banners but the entire ship shared the same colour: “white were its timbers as the argent moon, golden were its oars, silver were its shrouds, its masts were crowned with jewels like stars”.<sup>145</sup> Vingilot constitutes an important component in the symbolism of light that Eärendil represents.<sup>146</sup> The plain argent banner should not be recognized as his “arms” but it does share a function of coats of arms as a metonymy for the character. The silver banner of Elrond’s family on their arrival at Minas Tirith can similarly be interpreted as a manifestation of the symbolism of light. In the Third Age a complex parallel is created between Aragorn and his ancestors, Eärendil and Elendil. The name that Aragorn was given as a child, Estel (“Hope”) corresponds with the name of Eärendil as the Morning Star, Gil-Estel (“Star of Hope”).

A common element of the “arms” of the First Age is that they tend to bear a rich encrustation with jewels. Not only are banners ornamented in such way, but also shields. The most expressive example is the shield of the House of the Heavenly Arch

<sup>141</sup> *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1937; text was included in *The Silmarillion* on p.195, the only modification which Ch. Tolkien inserted is the name of Finarfin adjusted to the actual version):

<sup>142</sup> *The Return of the King*, p. 972.

<sup>143</sup> *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 234.

<sup>144</sup> Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard*, p. 103. Ch. Tolkien argues that it was the final version prepared for publication but the manuscripts were mislaid and accidentally the publisher received the earlier version (ibidem). Also, a line from an early-abandoned version of the poem serves as indirect evidence that the Vingilot’s banner was silver or white: “as flying foam her banner flowed” (ibidem, p. 103).

<sup>145</sup> *Quenta Noldorinwa* in: Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 152.

<sup>146</sup> For detailed discussion over the symbolical transformation of Eärendil into the Morning Star see Kristen Larsen, “Sea Birds and Morning Stars: Ceyx, Alcione, and the Many Metamorphoses of Eärendil and Elwing”, in *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources*, ed. J. Fisher (Jefferson, NC and London, 2011), pp: 69–83.

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of Gondolin which includes seven precious stones: ruby, amethyst, sapphire, emerald, chrysoprase, topaz and amber. The shield of Fingolfin is “set with crystals” and the shields of the Noldor of Valinor are “emblazoned with devices of silver and gold and gems”.<sup>147</sup> Later classical heraldry eschews such ornamentation of the shields. An intratextual motivation is possible, since the Noldor designed most beautiful jewels, but an extratextual motivation seems equally convincing: such ornamented shields have been found to be associated with early examples of heraldic art, such as the tomb of Wiprecht von Groitzsch. Created in about 1225, his shield has precious stones placed



*Figure 9: device for Lúthien Tinúviel*  
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 9  
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<sup>147</sup> Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 277. That passage was not published in *The Silmarillion*, although it is a part of *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1958 which is the base for that part of the book. Kane claims it is an example of numerous omissions in the chapter which were dictated only by Ch. Tolkien's preferences (op.cit., p. 89).

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at the umbo and around the rim.<sup>148</sup> We might infer from this that the early eras of the legendarium are set either in the pre-heraldic age or in the very early period of heraldry.

### An original heraldry for the First Age

Finally, a group of “heraldic devices” designed by Tolkien in 1960 should be discussed. There are 28 completed drawings and some barely started pencil sketches.<sup>149</sup> They depict the personal “arms” of various characters of the First Age of Middle-earth: five versions of Idril’s device, three of Eärendil, two of Finwë, Finarfin, Gil-galad and Lúthien and one of Fëanor, Fingolfin, Finrod, Elwë, Melian, Beor, Hador, Beren, Haletha and the Silmarils, plus a further two unlabelled drawings. (**Figures 6,7,8 and 9**) Most of the devices of men, plus Finrod’s device, are figurative, while the majority of Elvish devices could be defined as multicolour kaleidoscopic mandalas.<sup>150</sup> They are composed of geometrical and floral elements —the latter dominate in the devices of females. Their structure is characterized in a concise note penned by Tolkien:

Women within a circle personal  
Men within a lozenge  
general (impersonal) designs or  
emblems of a family square  
(or [?] once, circular).  
The rank was usually held to be  
shown by number of ‘points’ which  
reached the outer rim  
four was prince) 6–8 kings  
the great ancestors  
sometimes had as many [as] 16 as in  
House of Finwë.<sup>151</sup>

The rules defined in the note have been applied in most of the drawings but there are some exceptions. For instance, the device of the House of Haleth is presented in a lozenge while it should have been a square or a circle as the House was founded by a woman. Sometimes there is a short commentary along with the bearer’s name, for example the device of the Silmarils is labelled as “Ancient Emblem representing the derivation of the Silmarils from the Light of the Trees upon Ezellohar”<sup>152</sup> and one of Idril’s devices as “Menelluin Irildeo Ondolindello”, which in Quenya it means “Cornflower of Idril from Gondolin”.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Claudia Kunde, “Grabmal des Wiprecht von Groitzsch (Abguss)“, in *Der Naumburger Meister. Bildhauer und Architekt im Europa der Kathedralen, Vol. 2: Ausstellungskatalog*, ed. H. Krohm and H. Kunde (Petersberg, 2011), pp. 847–851.

<sup>149</sup> The number is provided in <https://tai.tolkienists.org/t/heraldicdevices>. The drawings were reproduced in various publications such as calendars by Harper Collins Publishers, catalogues of exhibitions and research books devoted to Tolkien’s art. The biggest collections can be found in: Christopher Tolkien, *Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien* (London, 1979); Hammond and Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien* and McIlwaine, op. cit.

<sup>150</sup> Hammond and Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 196; McIlwaine, op.cit., p. 80.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted by: Hammond and Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 191.

<sup>152</sup> Ch. Tolkien, *The Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 85.

<sup>153</sup> Hammond and Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 193.



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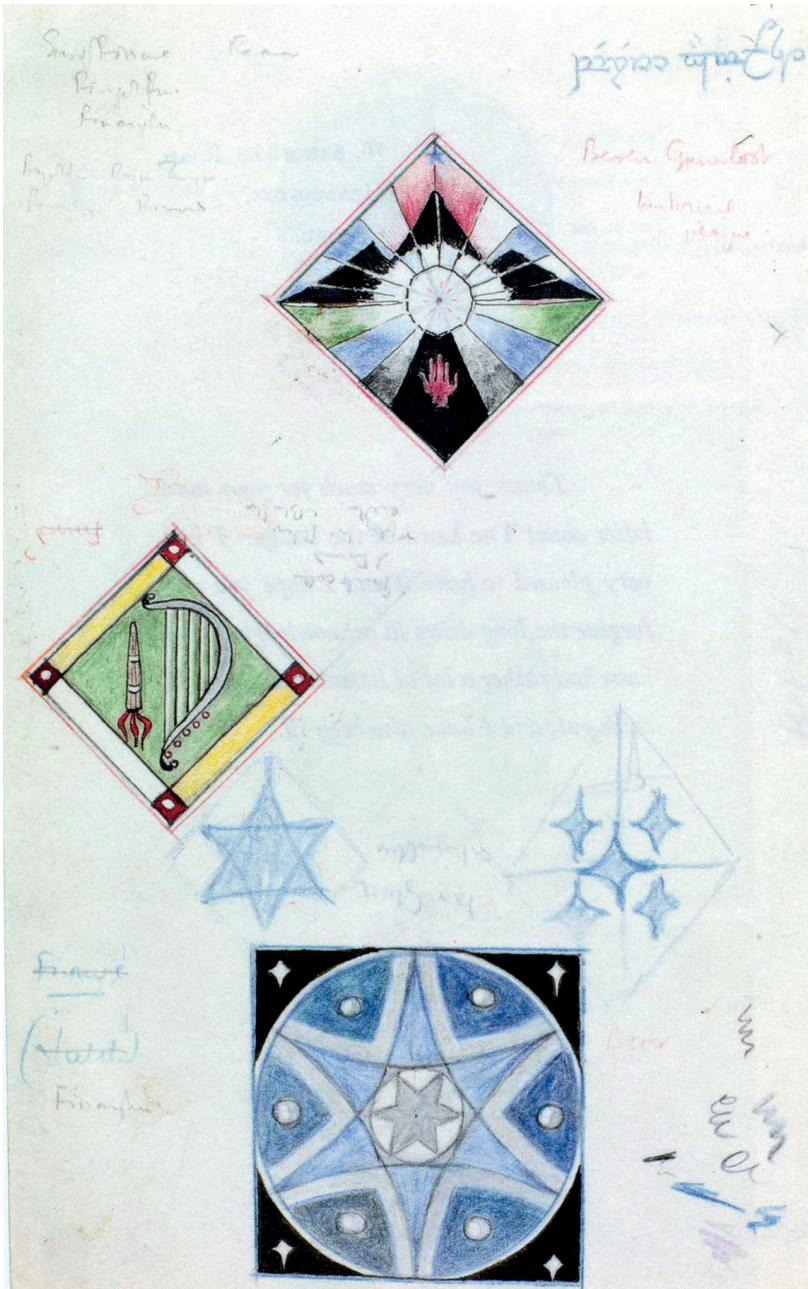


Figure 10 heraldic devices for Finarphin, Finrod and Beren.  
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 29  
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Many of these “heraldic devices” include some elements which associate them with the life of their bearers. A harp and torch in Finrod’s device presumably recall the episode when Finrod met the first group of men in Beleriand and played his harp for them. A torch might be a metaphorical representation of “light” he brought. Beren’s device depicts a three-peaked mountain, a jewel, and a bloody hand; such a cluster of visual elements illustrates Beren’s deeds, as he came into Morgoth’s fortress under the three-peaked mountain of Thangorodrim and won a Silmaril but lost his right hand. **(Figure 10)** Some allude to the etymology of their bearers’ names. There are stars in Gil-galad’s device (his name means “Starlight”) and flames in Fëanor’s device (“Spirit of Fire”). More difficult is to indicate similarities based on family relationships, for instance, the devices of Elwë and Finwë (who were not relatives) differ only in terms of colours, and one of Finarfin’s devices is almost identical to one belonging to Eärendil, although the family relationship between them was very remote.

The device of Finwë poses a particular problem because it is labelled “Winged Sun”. All texts agree that Finwë was slain before the Sun arose for the first time. Purdy claims Finwë’s device might be an example of later attributed heraldry, or might have been adopted by Finwë after his reincarnation.<sup>154</sup> The second hypothesis should be refuted as *Quenta Silmarillion* from 1958 states Finwë never reincarnated (the text was published in *Morgoth’s Ring* in 1993 so it was not known to Purdy in 1981). Hammond and Scull propose a different interpretation: according to Tolkien’s notes published in *Myths Transformed* the actual cosmology of the legendarium harmonizes with contemporary astronomy, making the Sun older than the Earth.<sup>155</sup>

The characteristics of these “arms” in terms of their style, colour, shading, with commentaries that attribute most of them to individuals rather than families or offices, might appear strange to scholars of conventional heraldry. Their visual form has much in common with the aesthetics of two styles of art: Art Nouveau and Art déco.<sup>156</sup> The stylistic similarities with Japanese the mon (monshō, mondokoro, kamon) are much more recognizable than with any European arms. If there is any association with the art of Europe, it might lie with tangled floral ornaments depicted on the shields of the statues on the west choir of Naumburg cathedral **(Figure 11)**.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Purdy, op. cit., p. 21–22.

<sup>155</sup> Hammond and Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 194.

<sup>156</sup> John Garth (“Artists and Illustrators’ Influence on Tolkien”, in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopaedia*, pp: 36–37) states that the “heraldic devices” and other Tolkien’s pictures drawn at the same time, such as Númenorean tiles and carpets were inspired by the works of William Morris, particularly by his handicraft.

<sup>157</sup> Such ornaments so uncommon in later heraldic art, that sometimes they are not recognized as heraldic figures at all (Heiko Brandl, “Westchor”, in *Der Dom zu Naumburg*, vol. 2: *Ausstattung*, Regensburg [2018], pp. 383–498).

Vaclav V. Filip claims Wilhelm’s shield was modelled after proto-heraldic shield of Wiprecht von Groitzsch (“Die Wappenbilder der Stifterfiguren”, in *Der Naumburger Meister*, pp: 990–7). The originality of the ornaments (although the colours were in some cases altered when the statues were repainted in the sixteenth century) was confirmed by infrared scanning and microscopic examination, see Daniela Karl, *Die Polychromie der Naumburger Stifterfiguren. Kunsttechnologische Untersuchung der Farbfassungen des 13. und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg, 2015).

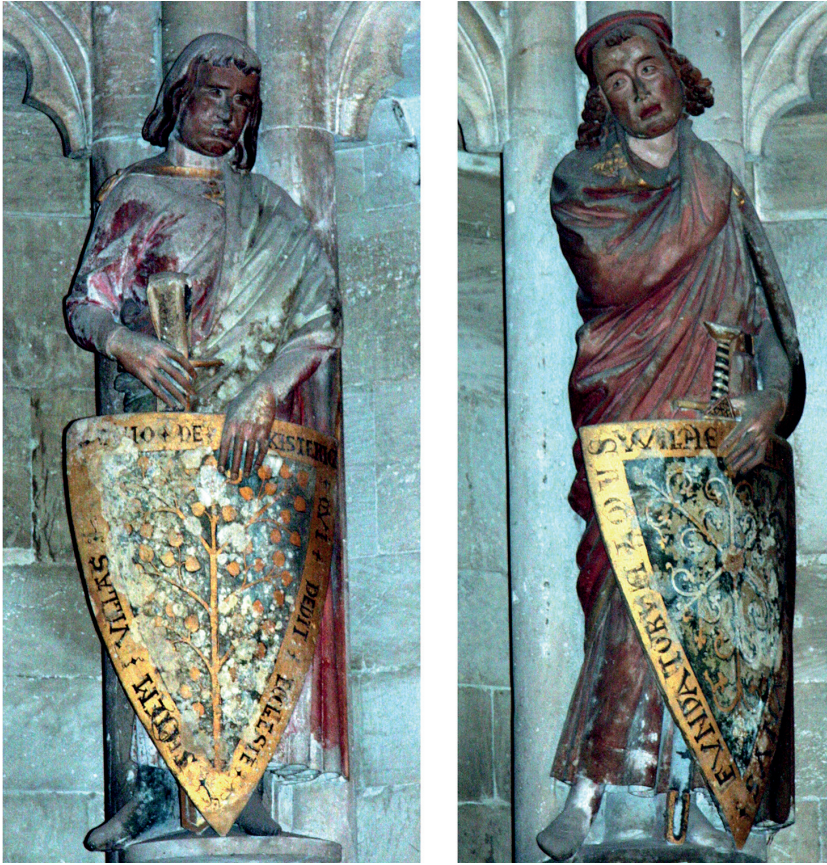


Figure 11: shields from Naumburg cathedral. Photographs by Adam Žurek.

With few exceptions, the drawings are mostly at variance with the information about the heraldry of the First Age provided in the texts. One possibility is that Tolkien developed a new heraldic system which he intended to include in the *Quenta Silmarillion*, but this conclusion seems improbable. According to notes collected in *Myths Transformed* all tales about the First Age were written by the Men of Númenor in the Second Age, whose reflections were transmitted in the framework of the heroic epic. What is recorded in the narration is not the actual heraldry of the First Age but a later Númenorean tradition. On that basis the drawings of 1960 might represent original emblems prior to their transformation by later tradition. The drawings perhaps constitute a visual analogy with the concept of *Essecilmë*, which is a name every person adopted in early youth as distinct from the name or names given at birth by parents.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 214–215. There is an argument against associating the “heraldic devices” with *Essecilmë*, as the text discusses only the customs of the Noldor and the drawings depict the devices of men as well as those of the elves. In answer to this I would point out a statement made in *Quenta Silmarillion* that the men of the Three Houses of Edain adapted the high culture of the Noldor so they might borrow their proto-heraldic practices.

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Such private names connect with the person's inner character rather than their public persona. *Essecilmë* cannot therefore appear in "heroic tradition" as the stories included in *The Silmarillion* do not record the *Essecilmë* of any character of the First Age, with the single exception of Fëanor, who acted publicly under his *Essecilmë*, but it was identical with the name chosen by his mother. For the same reason, the narration does not confirm the presence of the devices presented on the drawings.

### Conclusions

To summarize, Tolkien's texts and drawings suggest there are three separate heraldic systems in the legendarium, with varying compatibility with the rules of real-world heraldry. The heraldry of the Third Age roughly reflects the rules established in medieval Europe. Charges such as a tree, a horse and a ship are found in numerous authentic coats of arms. The tincture used, argent, sable, azure, vert, and gules correspond with the tinctures of classic heraldry. *The Lord of the Rings* presents only human arms so it may be inferred that in the legendarium heraldry was invented and codified by men. The information about heraldry in the texts concerning the First Age can be interpreted as a form of attributed heraldry with interpolations made by human authors. The texts present ideas about the pre-heraldic age held by the first generations of the heraldic age, when the rule of tinctures did not apply, and precious stones were placed on shields. The quasi-heraldic devices depicted in the pictures from 1960 belong outside the convention of the heroic epic. They perhaps reflect the "real" life of the characters, rather than the interpolations of a later narrator. They do not look properly heraldic because they belong to pre-heraldic times.

Such conclusions can only be drawn by following clues about the legendarium placed in notes which Tolkien made in his later years. By utilising these it has been possible to bridge the apparent divide between the three heraldic systems. There is every indication that the science of heraldry was a matter of small importance for Tolkien. For him it does not play a mimetic function, he tends to use arms more as a vehicle for symbolism. Certain tinctures and charges can be decoded by following founding myths and utilising the known hierarchy of colours within the legendarium, a precision which would be impossible in real-world heraldry because numerous sources provide different, mutually exclusive keys to the symbolism of charges and tinctures. Tolkien's heraldic system is quite uncomplicated, including as it does only a small number of arms, a reflection on the flat social structure of his imaginary societies. Hriban's conclusion that "the heraldic rules and visual canon are treated with the same philologist's care as the vocabulary and grammar rules of his created languages"<sup>159</sup> seems overstated. Tolkien did of course treat many aspects of his fictional world with "philologist's care" but for him heraldry was primarily an ornament and a space for symbolic narration.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Hriban, 'The Eye and the Tree', p. 211.

<sup>160</sup> This paper is a reworking and an adaptation of a paper with the same title published in Polish in *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Heraldycznego* N.S. vol. 20, 2021, pp. 139–174.