

# **BANNER MOTIFS IN OLD GRAPHIC ART.**

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Information to the Exhibition**

In the Polish Commonwealth banners used by individual provinces and lands found broad application in state ceremonies especially in funeral processions of kings and in ceremonial entries marking particular occasions. They also added splendour to other ceremonies at the court such as royal weddings. They represented the emblem of a particular land. The banners were different in size and shape and sometimes in colour of a plate in Poland from the 14<sup>th</sup> century until 1794, the every fought under banners of particular families of the gentry or of particular lands, which represented the coat of arms of a family or a land.

The formation of Polish coats of arms dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, especially to the reign of king Casimir the Great which testified to the development of the state's territorial structure. Some coats of arms derived from former emblems of dukes, other constituted new heraldic compositions which emblems and colours of vague origin. The look of coats of arms dating back to that period has been preserved mainly in architecture, royal sphragistics and banners. New administrative units of the Polish Commonwealth increased the number of coats of arms of individual lands. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the number reached more than thirty.

The coats of arms of Polish provinces and lands are characterised by their diversity and the richness of iconographic motifs. Among emblems there are images of persons (a knight on horseback) incorporeal beings (Archangel), eagles, lions and imaginary animals such as a griffon or a two-headed eagle. The animals were also shown together with other iconographic motifs, such as a crown around the neck and a letter on the chest. Mention must also be made of the presence of astral bodies, such as the Sun and stars and artificial figure representing objects produced by Man such as a banner.

It should be stressed that among a number of zoomorphic motifs used in territorial heraldry, the image of an eagle became the most popular. With minor iconographic varieties it constituted the emblem of as many as nine lands. The compositions of colours in territorial heraldry developed principally in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was limited to two metals: gold and more frequently silver as well as the basic colours: red (which was most often used), sky blue, black and green. The heraldic image underwent changes of style reflecting the spirit of individual epochs. The shapes of coats of arms changed along with the frames and the stylistics of emblems.

The collection of old books at Warsaw University Library is one of Poland's major collection of its kind. It contains 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century prints with particular bibliographic value. Among valuable foreign prints of special merit are the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century polonica, which significantly contributed to the popularisation of Polish heraldry. Among prints on show at the exhibition pride of place goes to the collection of statues and privileges known as Laski Statute brought out in 1506. It contains among other things a woodcut depicting the Polish Parliament featuring the king and the chambers in session. It is surrounded by a circle of 25 coats of arms, both Polish and linked with Poland representing state, dynastic, aristocratic and territorial emblems. The heraldic images shown there were meant to transmit an important political and ideological message. It should be noted that it exerted a strong influence on later heraldic compositions known from official prints, publications marking special occasions, historiographic works and, above all, collections of coats of arms.

Printed collections of coats of arms recorded and codified Polish heraldry of the day. Not surprisingly at the University Library shows prominently major armorial books including THE COATS OF ARMS OF POLISH KNIGHTHOOD of 1564 and THE NEST OF VIRTUE of 1576 by Bartosz Paprocki as well as Ksper Niesiecki POLISH CROWN of 1728 – 1744. Woodcuts on heraldic topics are also contained in other works on display including Marcin Nielski's POLISH CHRONICLE of 1597. SARMATIAE EUROPEAE DESCRIPTIO of 1576 by Aleksander Gwagnin and STATUA REGNI POLONIAE by Jan Herburt of 1563.