

**ANIMAL, VEGETAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLS IN THE COAT  
OF ARMS OF ROMANIAN ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS  
- A BIOLOGICAL INVENTORY**

**MALA-MARIA STAVRESCU-BEDIVAN, EMILIA BRÎNDUȘA ȘCHIOPU**

University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest

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**Abstract**

*The paper presents a list of 120 symbols (animal, vegetal, mythological) drawn up in the coat of arms of some Romanian administrative divisions (36 counties, 83 municipalities, 90 cities and other towns and 351 communes). We also discuss which of those elements are more frequent related to a certain macroregion.*

**INTRODUCTION**

According to the Constitution of Romania, Romanian territory is organized administratively into communes, towns and counties: at the county level – 41 counties (CO), and one city with special status (Bucharest, the national capital); at the town/commune level – 103 municipalities (M), 217 other towns (T) (for urban areas), and 2854 communes (C) (for rural areas) [1].

Elaboration of these administrative divisions coat of arms is made according to strict rules of science and heraldry art, taking into account the local traditions. These rules are stipulated in the methodology established by the National Committee of Heraldry, Genealogy and Sigillography subordinated to the Romanian Academy [2]. Heraldry purpose is to establish the theoretical principles, research, interpretation and development of the coat of arms of a state, city, family, corporation etc. [3].

The shield, as the main element of the coat of arms, represents the field that sits other heraldic elements, such as natural, artificial, chimerical figures. Natural figures can be taken from the stars, can be part of the human body, or may belong to the animal world, plants, etc. [3].

In the present study we intended: to outline a more complete list (for the vernacular names given in the Government Decisions we searched for a scientific correspondent) of animal, vegetables and chimerical/mythological items shown on Romanian coat of arms of the administrative divisions (counties, municipalities, towns, communes); setting the frequency with which these elements appear on the coat of arms (that reflect a certain symbolism or regional interests); distribution in

a map of the most common of these symbols for each macroregion of Romania (Figure 1).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

On the web, galleries of flags and coat of arms are available for every administrative divisions of a county [4]. Besides these images, we consulted Government Decisions published in the Official Gazette of Romania, which gives descriptions and meanings for different component elements of a coat of arms [5, 6, 7]. The proposal for a coat of arms ensure the compliance of its specific elements with economic, social, cultural and historical tradition of the village, town or municipality concerned, respecting the heraldic tradition and the laws of heraldry science [5].

We actually counted how many administrative units (M, T and C) of each county (CO) shows plants, animals or mythological elements on the coat of arms, relating them to all existing coats of arms illustrated or described in the law, available on the Internet. The figures in the tables compiled on account of this coat of arms database, represents the number of citations of an element for each administrative division in part.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 41 counties (CO) of Romania, only 5 (12.19%) have no plants, animals and / or mythological symbols on their coat of arms. Of the total administrative divisions (AD) cited for our country [1], we identified 120 such symbols: 36 in CO, 83 in M, 90 in T and 351 in C (Table 1). The last row in the table 1 shows the fraction between the number of each administrative divisions counted in this study, and the total number of administrative divisions at the country level. The symbols were analyzed and discussed as the frequency which they appear in the AD coat of arms, both separately on three categories: animals (47), vegetal-floral (63) mythological (10) and overall (Table 2).

Among the *animals*, the most common symbols on the administrative divisions coat of arms are: fish (10.78%), lion (9.70%), sheep (8.62%), golden eagle (7.28%), horse (7.00%), bee (6.4%), stag (6.74%), cattle (6.74%). Top five established for *plants*: wheat (23.35%), oak tree (12.84%), grape vine (11.28%), fir (8.17%), maize (6.22%). The most frequent *mythological* elements in the coat of arms: caduceum (35%), cornucopia (15%), dacian flag (15%) and the Capitoline Wolf (7.5%).

The top 10 most popular from the total of 120 animal, vegetal and mythological elements in the Romanian coat of arms is: wheat (12.97%), oak tree (7.13%), grape vine (6.27%), fir (4.54%), fish (4.32%), lion (3.89%), corn (3.45%), sheep (3.45%), tree (3.24%), sunflower (3.13%), golden eagle (2.92%).

From the total number of fish drawn on the coat of arms, 20% seems to be the common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), 5% trout (*Salmo trutta fario*), 2.5% European pike perch (*Stizostedion lucioperca*) and 2.5% common eel (*Anguilla anguilla*). From the total number of sheep (*Ovis aries*), 62.5% of figures showed ewes, 31.25% rams and a percent of 6.25 is represented by lambs.

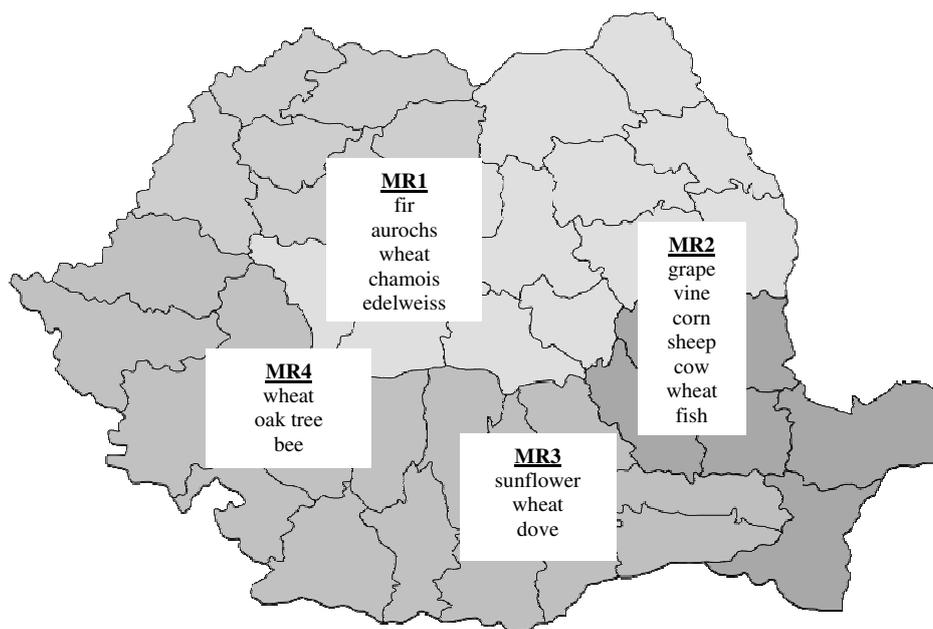
**Table 1**

**Administrative divisions of Romania related to the four macroregions (MR): counties (CO), municipalities (M), cities and other towns (T), communes (C). Each number represent the number of divisions presenting animal, vegetal and mythological symbols identified in the coat of arms**

MR [ 1 ]	CO (abbreviation)	M	T	C	
1	North-West	BH,BN,CJ,MM,SM,SJ	3,1,4,2,1,1	1,2,1,1,-,1	2,-,1,2,-,1
	Center	AB,BV,CV,HR,MS,SB	3,3,1,2,1,1	4,2,2,1,3,7	8,10,14,2,14,1
2	North-East	BC,BT,IS,NT,SV,VS	2,2,1,2,5,2	1,2,2,1,8,1	1,36,1,-,96,1
	South-East	BR,BZ,CT,GL,TL,VN	1,2,2,1,1,-	1,-,-,1,1,-	-,3,4,1,4,-
3	South	AG,CL,DB,GR,IL,PH,TR	3,2,1,1,3,1,4	1,-,2,1,2,9,9,-	10,4,-,-,4,40,-
	Bucharest-Ilfov	B,IF	1,1	-,3	-,8
4	South-West	DJ,GJ,MH,OT,VL	3,2,2,1,2	1,4,1,-,4	4,5,-,13,5
	West	AR,CS,HD,TM	-,2,6,2	5,3,6,4	-,47,4,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 / 41</b>	<b>83 / 103</b>	<b>90 / 217</b>	<b>351 / 2854</b>	

The biological inventory drawn up for Romanian coat of arms, contains also some elements that are not appear in the table 2 or in figure 1: crawfish (*Astacus* sp.), frog (*Anura*, *Amphibia*), snake (*Serpents*, *Reptilia*), dinosaur, hen/cock (*Gallina* sp.), duck (*Anatidae*, *Aves*), pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), ostrich (*Struthio camelus*), peacock (*Pavo cristatus*), swan (*Cygnus olor*), Western capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), Eurasian black grouse (*Lyrurus tetrrix*), great bustard (*Otis tarda*) (extinct since 1981, but considered the Bărăgan Plane bird emblem), common crane (*Grus grus*), pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), sea eagle, falco (*Falco* sp.), Eurasian sparrow hawk (*Accipiter* sp.), crow (*Corvidae*, *Aves*), raven (*Corvus corax*), wisent (*Bison bonasus*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), European brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), dolphin, squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), griffin, dragon, manticore (legendary creature similar to the Egyptian sphinx, having the body of a red lion, a human head with three rows of sharp teeth; the tail is that of either a dragon or a scorpion [8]), unicorn, Phoenix

bird, another mythological creature (with aurochs head and half-moon body), beech/beechnut (*Fagus sylvatica*), pine (*Pinus* sp.), yew (*Taxus baccata*), chestnut tree (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), poplar (*Populus* sp.), birch tree (*Betula* sp.), willow (*Salix* sp.), linden (*Tilia* sp.), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), cypress (*Cupressus* sp.), olive tree (*Olea europaea*), laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), sycamore maple tree (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), elm (*Ulmus* sp.), durmast (*Quercus petraea*), hazel tree/hazelnuts (*Corylus avellana*), walnut (*Juglans regia*), European cornel/cornels (*Cornus mas*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), plum tree-plum (*Prunus domestica*), sour cherry (*Prunus cerasus*), strawberry (*Fragaria* sp.), rice (*Oryza sativa*), carrot (*Daucus carota*), pepper (*Capsicum annuum*), beet (*Beta vulgaris*), eggplant (*Solanum melongena*), tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*), potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), garlic (*Allium sativum*), common mushrooms (*Agaricus* sp., Fungi Kingdom), poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*), flax (*Linum usitatissimum*), tulip (*Tulip* sp.), Snake's head fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*), narcissus (*Narcissus* sp.), peony (*Paeonia* sp.).



**Fig. 1. The most representative vegetal and animal symbols drawn in the coat of arms of administrative divisions, related to the four macroregions of Romania (see the counties for each MR in Table 1) (map source: [9])**

*Table 2*

**List of the most frequent animal and vegetal symbols identified on the coat of arms of the Romanian administrative divisions : counties (CO), municipalities (M), cities and other towns (T), communes (C)**

Symbol	CO	M	T	C	No. of citations (from a total of 925)
<b>honey bee</b> <i>Apis mellifera</i>	3	1	2	19	25
<b>fish</b>	3	5	3	29	40
<b>white dove</b> Columbiformes, Aves	-	-	1	12	13
<b>golden eagle</b> <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	3	5	4	15	27
<b>black vulture</b>	1	3	1	6	11
<b>sheep</b> <i>Ovis aries</i>	1	2	-	29	32
<b>deer</b> <i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	1	-	1	10	12
<b>stag</b> <i>Cervus elaphus</i>	1	1	7	16	25
<b>cattle</b> <i>Bos taurus</i>	-	-	1	24	25
<b>aurochs</b> <i>Bos taurus primigenius</i>	3	5	-	10	18
<b>horse</b> <i>Equus caballus</i>	3	10	4	9	26
<b>brown bear</b> <i>Ursus arctos</i>	-	2	1	7	10
<b>lion</b> <i>Panthera leo</i>	7	12	4	13	36
<b>ermine (fur)</b> <i>Mustela erminea</i>	-	3	1	6	10
<b>tree</b>	2	3	7	18	30
<b>fir/Christmas tree</b> <i>Abies</i> sp.	1	7	8	26	42
<b>oak tree</b> and /or acorns <i>Quercus</i> sp.	3	3	11	49	66
<b>grape vine</b> <i>Vitis vinifera</i>	6	3	11	39	59
<b>apple tree</b> and/or apples <i>Malus domestica</i>	1	-	-	19	20
<b>maize</b> <i>Zea mays</i>	-	-	3	29	32
<b>wheat</b> <i>Triticum</i> sp.	6	10	7	97	120
<b>sunflower</b> <i>Helianthus annuus</i>	-	2	1	26	39
<b>edelweiss</b> <i>Leontopodium alpinum</i>	-	2	3	8	13

Rhododendron (*Rhododendron kotschyi*), philodendron (although in the law [6] appears with this vernacular name, we consider, seeing the image of the coat of

arms attached, that flowers belongs to *Rhododendron* species), rose, Piatra Craiului pink (*Dianthus callizonus*), common dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), bellflower (*Campanula* sp.), lily (stylized, fleur-de-lys; it was made popular by the kings of France, who used it as a royal emblem [10]), Siberian iris (*Iris sibirica*), oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum* sp.), thistles (*Cirsium* sp./*Carduus* sp.), common reed (*Phragmites australis*), white water-lily (*Nymphaea alba*).

## CONCLUSIONS

1. We identified so far in the coat of arms of some Romanian administrative divisions 120 symbols - representations of animals, plants, or mythological creatures.
2. The most popular figures shown in the Romanian coat of arms (and representative for each macroregion) are: common wheat, oak tree and acorns, grape vine, fir, fish, lion, sheep, maize and sunflower.

## REFERENCES

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