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**“Fleur-de-lis and Trefoil – The Influence of Art
and Symbolism in the Scout and Girl Guide
Movements.”**

Assessment Task 4

Topic 3.

“Symbols grow. They come into being developed out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs.”

How significant is the influence of existing art on new arts, and how does its significance compare to other possible influences such as nature, psychology, and social circumstances?

ART 501

Theories of Criticism



The original emblems of the Boy Scouts (1908) and the Girl Guides (1910)

The Fleur-de-lis and the Trefoil: These two heraldic symbols have grown to encompass a way of life for around a billion members since 1907¹. As instantly recognisable as the logo for McDonalds, a Scout or a Girl Guide in uniform will generally be met with a smile by the general public, or greeted warmly with hugs, as a member of family, by a fellow Member. No matter where Girl Guides and Scouts go, they know they have friends, a place to stay, and a place to share commonalities.

Beyond these two symbols, Guides (I was a Girl Guide. In fact, I still am, but for this essay, I am largely referring to the organisations by the chronological order of their creation) and Scouts are bound together by the Links of Unity, or

¹ I have searched for a reference to the total number of Scouts/members of the World Organisation of Scouting Movements (WOSM) in that time, but so far, come up blank. Therefore, given that World membership for both organisations (the other being the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, or WAGGGS) has averaged 3:1 (WOSM:WAGGGS) over the past 110 years, and we know that there have been 250M members of WAGGGS, I have extrapolated from *How The Girl Guides Won the War* (Hampton, J. 2007) where I found that figure, to multiply by three for WOSM, and arrived at ~1Bn in membership.

Symbols of the Movement: The Threefold Promise², Law³ and Motto⁴, as well as the left handshake⁵, and the Salute⁶. Our respective World Emblems or Flags form another Link within each Organisation. There are few organisations or even experiences in this world sharing these commonalities, which surpass boundaries of culture, language and distance.

For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on the emblems of the two Movements, but it is important to understand that these other symbols interlink at every level. The two emblems, and their associated Symbols of the Movement, illustrate perfectly the significance of the influence of existing art, upon new arts.

In order to look at the influence of nature on existing art, I will finish by taking a brief look at a study on Fleurs-de-lis, by Christopher Dresser, in his book *Studies in Design* (1876), just before concluding my argument.

² Although it has morphed and changed through the decades, Promises around the world have their origin in *Scouting for Boys* (Baden-Powell, Maj.Gen Sir RSS;1908), as follows:

- On my honour I promise that...*
1. *I will do my duty to God and the King.*
 2. *I will do my best to help others, whatever it costs me.*
 3. *I know the Scout Law, and will obey it.*

³ Ten rules for living, placing aside race, religion or political persuasion, with an extra one added by Baden-Powell in his own hand, to a poster at Foxlease Training Centre in England, not long after it was opened in 1922, and upon seeing a Unit of Girl Guides during inspection in the rain: "A Guide is not a fool" (Appendix A).

⁴ "Be Prepared" (*Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell, Maj.Gen Sir RSS.1908)

⁵ Major General Sir Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell explains that the left handshake has its origins in the handshake of peace among African tribes. The right hand is the spear hand, the left for the shield. In order to shake hands in peace, tribesmen shifted their shield into their right hand, covering the spear and preventing them from threatening others. They then shook with the left hand. Girl Guides and Scouts salute with their right hand, as they shake with the left.

⁶ The Girl Guide and Scout salute holds the three middle fingers of the right hand aloft, together, and at cheek height, while the thumb holds the little finger down over the palm. A Full Salute used to be raised to the brim of the cap or hat, on formal occasions, but has fallen into disuse. However, the three fingers are also intended as a reminder of the Threefold Promise.

When Robert Baden-Powell came up with the concept of Scouting (since *Scouting for Boys*⁷ pre-dates Guiding by two years⁸), he needed a symbol to encompass the concept, and a badge to be worn by all members. A military man all his life, an experienced military scout and intelligence officer, well-read, and with a great love of the outdoors, he had used the Fleur-de-lis as a personal badge to be worn by the men he had trained in the military. To those who saw it, it denoted mental alertness, and endurance.⁹



The first release of the bronze Army Intelligence badge designed by B-P in 1885.¹⁰

In my research for this paper, I have also discovered that from c.1500, the heraldic symbol of a fleur-de-lis was a mark of cadency for a sixth son¹¹. Never one to miss a chance to heap meaning-upon-meaning, this may also be a reason

⁷ Baden-Powell, Maj.Gen Sir RSS. *Scouting for Boys*. 1908

⁸ *Pamphlet A: A Scheme for Girl Guides* (Baden-Powell, Maj.Gen Sir RSS. 1910)

⁹ Kiernan, R.H. *Baden-Powell* 1939. p84

¹⁰ Img Source: International Badgers Club member, and http://cgi.ebay.co.uk/Baden-Powell-1885-Army-Scout-Fleur-De-Lys_W0QQitem7752138807.htm

¹¹ Diagram Visual Information Ltd. *Understanding Heraldry* 1997; p44

why Robert Baden-Powell, a sixth son - and eighth of ten children¹² - chose the emblem. It is ironic that despite the growth in Scouting between the original publication of *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* in 1909, and the revisions in the 1950s, Fox-Davies and those who revised later editions make no mention of the universality of the fleur-de-lis as a symbol of that Movement, while mentioning many other uses.

From a purely sociological point of view, the “Hero of Mafeking” had returned from the Boer War to almost universal adulation. Anything to do with him was snapped up and garnered attention and interest, and so a distinctive symbol for the Scouting Movement, as created by B-P, would almost inevitably have become a rallying-point for social change. From the letters he received from boys, and boys’ organisations such as the Boys Brigade, in response to his *Aids to Scouting* (1899), and from his own observations on his return to London:

“He began to feel that there was a great work to be done among boys in developing ideals, strength of character, self-reliance, and the sense of adventure. As the years passed he was to find that these aims became increasingly desirable, when towns and villages grew, factory work extended, life was speeded up, nature retreated from the urban centres, and existence became more crowded, rushed, and unhealthy.”¹³

B-P ran a test camp at Brownsea Island, for his concept to fill this need, in December 1907, and his book, *Scouting for Boys*, came out the following year. Among the rituals and symbols he created for his organisation, he also came up

¹² Scout Assn of Australia, *Scout Leaders Handbook* 1996. p14

¹³ Kiernan, *Baden-Powell: for Boys of All Ages* 1939 pp. 83

with the “Court of Honour”, and his Scouts were to be that Court’s “Knights”. A product of the mid-Victorian era (born in 1857), and the son of an Anglican Reverend, Robert Baden-Powell would have been influenced by that period’s Arts and Crafts movement, as well as Neo-Medieval Romanticism, which fed into the art and aesthetics (indeed, the Aesthetic Movement itself), of the first years of the new century.

It seemed logical therefore, that Robert Baden-Powell should have turned to the highly delineated art of heraldry, with its strictly defined symbolic language used by knights to create visually-identifiable devices for the household and battlefield, and chosen the traditional “flower of chivalry”, the fleur-de-lis, as an emblem. Historically the fleur-de-lis’ dates back at least to fifth century France, and the reign of King Robert (son of Hugh Capet)¹⁴. The three petals then represented Faith, Wisdom and Chivalry,¹⁵ all qualities that Baden-Powell (B-P for short) wanted to see develop in boys, but which fed into his design intentions for the Scout emblem.

Art and design functions as a sociological language as well. Critics, claiming the Scouting movement looked too militaristic, were reminded by Baden-Powell (an accomplished artist and designer himself¹⁶) that the Fleur-de-lis, or lily, far from looking like “A spear-head, the emblem of battle and bloodshed”, was a symbol of purity and peace.¹⁷ In a world where the attitude towards military uniform has

¹⁴ Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*. 1969, pp. 205-208

¹⁵ <http://bonsecoursassociates.org/about-us/history-of-the-fleur-de-lis-symbol/>

¹⁶ See Appendix B

¹⁷ Baden-Powell of Gilwell, Lord RSS. *Lessons from the Varsity of Life* 1933

swung many times, from admiration during wartime, to revulsion during peace (one only has to look at letters to the Sydney Morning Herald's editor about Girl Guide uniform in the early 1920s, or to the soldiers of the Vietnam War, where the revulsion finally spilled into the period of war itself), the concept of appearing "too militaristic" meant that design and symbolism had to be carefully selected. That, or face alienating the families of the very members the Scouts and Girl Guides wanted to attract.

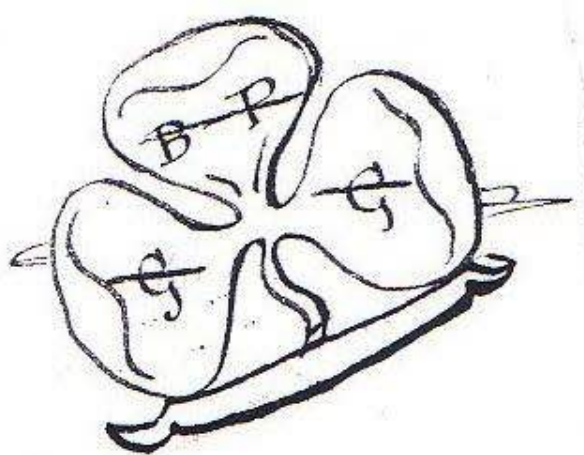


The WOSM Emblem since 1955

In Scouting, the fleur-de-lis' three petals were also meant to represent the Threefold Promise, and to this, B-P added a five-pointed star on the left and right, representing the ten Scout Laws. A compass point shows the right way forward, and it's no coincidence that the fleur-de-lis often marks north in cartography. In

1955, WOSM added a circle of rope, knotted with a reef knot of binding friendship.

The stars and compass point would later be added to a new heraldic Trefoil (the three-leaf clover, symbol of Guiding), on the formation of WAGGGS in 1928. This time, however, the meaning of the two stars was changed, to represent the Promise and Law. Prior to this, in 1910, Agnes Baden-Powell (Robert's sister) had created a Trefoil as a membership pin for the BP Girl Guides. It is clear that the Trefoil was considered an aesthetically softer alternative to the fleur-de-lis, more "appropriate" for girls, especially after the media outrage over Girl Scouts at the 1909 Crystal Palace Rally¹⁸ made it clear that an alternative was needed to meet the demands of the girls, in a more "feminine" way. In 1920, a star was added in the centre of the top leaf (replacing the "BP" lettering), with the five points and five inverses representing the ten laws.



The original patent design drawing for the BP Girl Guide Trefoil (No. 563052). Drawn by Agnes

¹⁸ In fact, there had been Girl Scouts for almost as long as the Scout movement had existed. The first unit was registered in 1908, and by September 1909, there were over 6000 girls registered with headquarters in London. Baden-Powell was untroubled by girls' interest, and even actively encouraged it, but their visibility at the Rally brought matters to a head, the public cried outrage (Appendix A. *The Spectator*, Sept 1909), and B-P handed the task of creating the Girl Guides to his sister, Agnes.

*Baden-Powell and registered 23rd May 1910.
Letters are struck-out, as they cannot form a part of a patent.¹⁹*

Looking deeper at the World Trefoil of WAGGGS (see below), members are taught that the three leaves (again) represent the Threefold Promise. The flames of the modern trefoil are an extension of the traditional heraldic flames of the old (1928-1991), and are representative of the Flame of the Love of All Mankind. The gold colour represents the sun, shining over all the children of the Earth, represented by the blue. The ring around the new WAGGGS Trefoil adds yet more meaning: It is a circle of friendship, with a space, meaning that there is always room for more.



The old and the new Trefoils of WAGGGS. 1928-91, and 1991-Present.

Social circumstances, too, have played a part in the way the Girl Guide Trefoil has changed in meaning over course of a century. Robert and Agnes Baden-Powell's original intent was that Guiding and Scouting were "... game for those without a bat, or even a ball. This game is for those with little, and those with nothing at

¹⁹ UK Patent Office, courtesy of Alan Shrives.

all.”²⁰ In other words, they were intended to be accessible to people of all social classes. Indeed, the trefoil “membership”, or “tenderfoot” or “promise” badge, with all its symbolism, was described in 1912²¹ as being called a Guide’s “life”. It could be taken away if the Promise was broken; “for a day, or a week, as the captain thinks fit”, until it was earned back. At this time, when girls often left school by the age of 11-14, Guiding was a genuine means to continue their education, and badges such as “Telegraphist” and “Domestic Service” genuinely assisted young women in gaining employment. Some British factories during World War I would *only* employ Girl Guides, for their honesty, reliability, and efficiency. This goes to illustrate how it came to be that so many European refugees from the First and Second World Wars came to tell of their trefoil badge - their only remaining possession - being hidden under a lapel as a secret sign between “sister” Guides, or in extreme cases, being hidden under girls’ tongues during searches, to avoid discovery.²² The strength and depth of feeling that this one little symbol holds for many Guides is boundless, and continues to grow and change. The addition of the Circle of Friendship to the World Trefoil in 1991 serves to illustrate the recognition that in giving service (the Love of all Mankind), so we gain friendship.

²⁰ Traditional Guiding campfire song *The Chief*. Date and author unknown.

²¹ Baden-Powell, Agnes. *How Girls Can Help to Build up the Empire – A Handbook for Girl Guides*. 1912. pp. 431

²² Hampton, J. *How the Girl Guides Won the War*, 2007. Ch 1.



Leaving the Scouts and Girl Guides aside, I felt it important to touch on a piece which has hung on my wall since I graduated from my Undergraduate Design degree (hence silhouette in the picture, with apologies). Plate VIII from Christopher Dresser's *Studies in Design* (1879) depicts a collection of eight variations upon fleurs-de-lis in his distinctive, Arts and Crafts style. As usual, Dresser – writing during the years in which Robert Baden-Powell grew up - is ahead of his time, and we see a suggestion of the beginnings of Art Nouveau, and even a small amount of Art Deco, as well. The influence of medieval art, as well as nature, can clearly be seen. There are lilies, and irises (known as lilies in medieval times). Clearly the designer has gone back to the basic flowers, with the two small images on the bottom row. These are alternated with more linear,

almost Egyptian designs. The plate is dominated in the top right, by a strong, dusky blue exploration, more based upon the iris, while below that, and to the left, is a simple bouquet of three lilies, bound by the stem and some leaves. To the top left is a phantasmagorical firework of swirls and what may be snowdrops, poppies and a central orchid. The clue to all of this is the top centre design, which more closely references the traditional heraldic display. All fleurs-de-lis on this plate display perfect vertical symmetry. For me, this plate epitomises the influence of nature in reinterpreting older artworks and symbols. Even though the fleur-de-lis is a stylized icon in itself, Dresser's plate takes stylisation to the next level, to create something which this family audience has enjoyed seeing every day for twelve years.

In conclusion, therefore, existing art has a substantial influence on new arts, because the human mind has a natural tendency to return to the familiar, in order to gain an understanding of the new. As Robert Baden-Powell used the familiar symbol of chivalry to represent his groundbreaking organisation, so new artists reference old art, in order to give their audience a reference-point for understanding their message. The artist's intentions may be for a broad interpretation, or they may be deep, accessing our soul, or spirit.

The nature of the art (or nature itself!) may have an impact on new arts, especially if these new arts are a reaction to something which hooks into the psyche, the general feeling, of people on the planet at the time of creation. And finally, the social circumstances of both artist and audience will have an impact

on the how and why of art-creation, as well as the way the art is perceived by different sections of the audience.

The fact that symbols **do** grow and change with time, and the needs and attitudes of the audience, their social circumstance and what's "going on in their heads", means that we cannot - as artists, designers and art-historians – discount the potential value of any of these factors for significance over-and-above any of the others, until we have looked at the individual work. It cannot be dismissed that symbols can shrink, too, and lose their significance over time and cultural change, even as letters in an alphabet shift, change, and fall into disuse over centuries.

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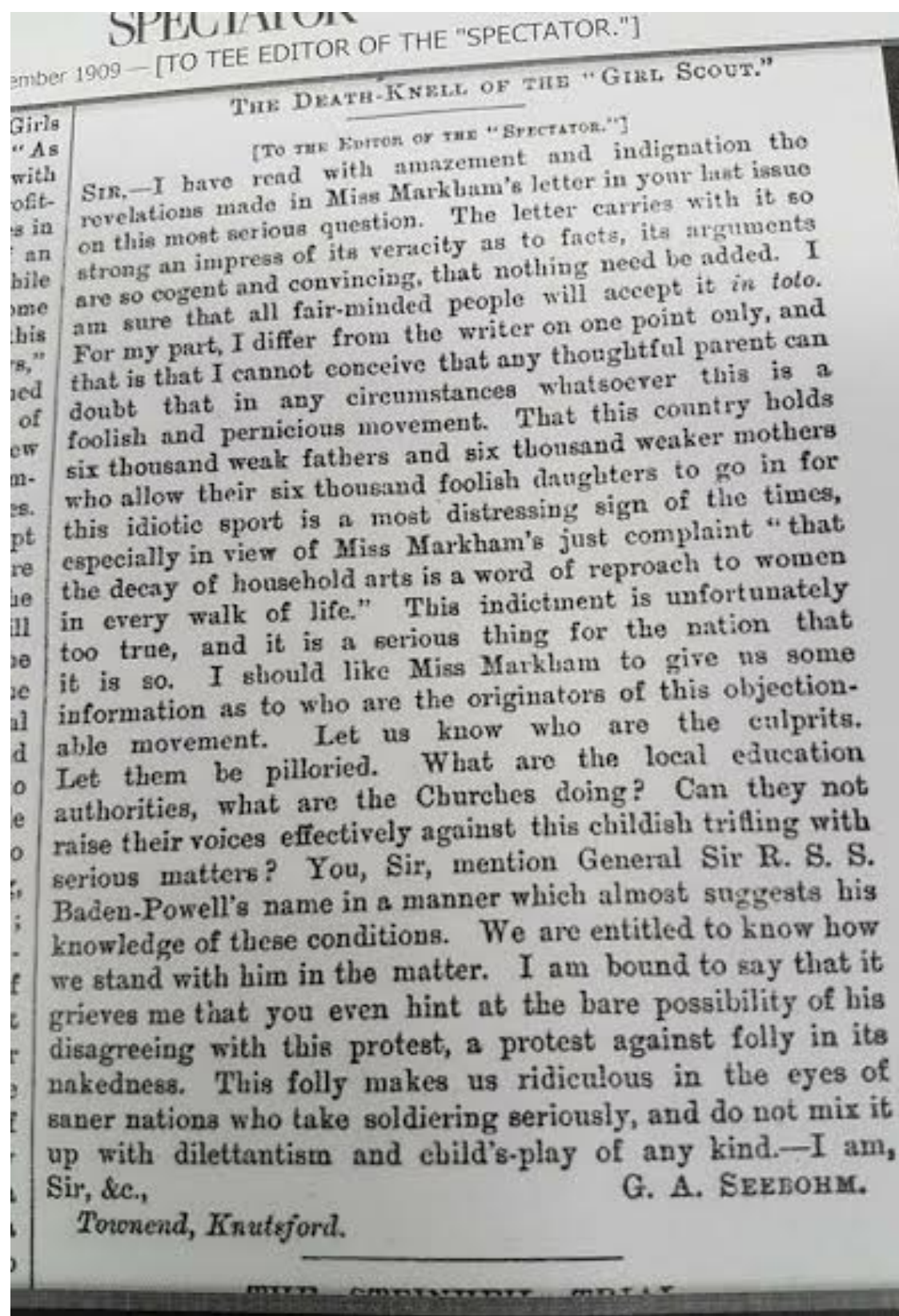
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Appendix A



Appendix B

Design for the nurses' uniforms during the Siege of Mafeking, by the then Major General, Robert Baden-Powell (Ewing, 1975). Practical as ever, he includes what would later become the famous Scout hat to keep the sun off. This was used during the Siege, but dropped in later versions of the design, which changed colour and carried on into the First World War. Robert Baden-Powell's works are peppered with sketches, drawings and cartoons just like this. Many are extremely funny.

