

## VEXILLOLOGICAL MANUSCRIPTS

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The standard books and serial publications in the field of vexillology are well known to anyone who has done research in the subject. Much less well known are the manuscript resources for flag knowledge. Probably the most famous vexillological manuscript, which exists in three copies in Spain<sup>1</sup> is the one known as the «Libro del conocimiento de todos los reynos» which dates from the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century. Reprint editions<sup>2</sup> were published in Spain in 1877, reprinted in 1980, in Britain in 1912, this English version being reprinted in Liechtenstein in 1967. The flags of this manuscript have been illustrated in colour in the famous October 1917 «National Geographic Magazine» and various other sources. The «Flag manuscript 1669/70» came to light in the early 1960s; an annotated and fully illustrated reproduction was edited by Klaes Sierksma under the title «Flags of the World 1669–1670: A Seventeenth Century Manuscript»<sup>3</sup>. This work seems to be related – in age and coverage, if not in provenance – to two others, the «Moutton manuscript»<sup>4</sup> and «Bandiere Usate in Mare... [The Sketchbook]»<sup>5</sup>. Other manuscripts have been presented in lectures at International Congresses of Vexillology<sup>6</sup>. Other prominent vexillological manuscripts include the «Gradon manuscript»<sup>7</sup>, the «de Gorter manuscript»<sup>8</sup>, items in the «Karl Fachinger collection» at the German Shipping Museum, several items at the Netherlands Shipping Museum, several catalogues of trophy flags in Switzerland, the «Canby manuscript»<sup>9</sup>, and the many portolanos which have included flags<sup>10</sup>. A systematic search of other major libraries would undoubtedly increase significantly the number of flag manuscripts known to vexillologists.

It is doubtful that any single collection has a greater number of flag manuscripts than the Flag Research Center (FRC), which possesses exactly 100 items. The total is significant enough to warrant drawing some conclusions on the subject in general. Some definitions are required first, however. In the broadest sense, a manuscript is a work prepared by hand – whether written or typed, illustrated or not. If the contents of a manuscript are later published (whether in a facsimile or typeset version), the original document remains as a manuscript with historical, artistic, literary, and bibliographic value of its own. In analysing the FRC collection, typescripts as well as manuscripts were considered. Articles later published (or to be published) in «The Flag Bulletin», individual hand-written sheets, individual illustrations, notes, collections of notes, published books even if only a single copy was printed, and printed illustrations which were later hand-coloured have all been ignored as manuscripts. The only individual sheets included were Japanese scrolls (i.e. book-equivalents), single manuscript sheets with multiple flags, and two large paintings of individual flags. A few mixed-media items, incorporating hand-written, typewritten, and printed text with both manuscript and printed illustrations, are included because each is unique. There are also pamphlets bound in with some manuscript material, one item even incorporates actual

cloth flags mounted on poles. All items have been analysed in terms of the number of leaves, i.e. sheets of paper.

Of the 100 FRC items, 53 are typescripts of 20<sup>th</sup> century origin; of the 47 manuscripts in the restricted sense of the word, 14 are from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 24 from the 19<sup>th</sup> century [Fig. 1], eight from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and one from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the items were very precisely dated by their authors, others were begun in one year but elaborated upon over a period of years or even decades. Some, unfortunately, are undated and the identification (based on internal characteristics) gives only a tentative dating. In one instance the binding of the volume gives the year 1650, while the contents suggest that the material dates from a half century later. Some authors proudly added their names to what was evidently intended originally as a private document, while others left initials only or no identification at all. While only four of the 53 typescripts are anonymous, 24 of the 47 manuscripts have no author's name and several others have only been tentatively associated with names or initials appearing in the material.

There are 12 languages included in the collection: English for 19 manuscript items, 5 each in French and Dutch [Fig. 2], 4 in Italian plus 3 each in German, Japanese, and Portuguese, two in Danish, and a single item each in Chinese, Spanish, and Swedish. One typescript is half-English and half-Russian; one typescript each is in French, Russian and German; and the remaining 49 typescripts are in English. The listing for country of origin is somewhat different. The United States claims 30 typescripts but only 6 manuscripts; the United Kingdom counts for 14 typescripts and 10 manuscripts. Three typescripts are from Australia and one each from Ireland and Canada. There are two manuscripts from Portugal and one from Brazil, two manuscripts from India, and one from South Africa. For the other manuscripts there is a direct correspondence between the number in a given language and the country of origin. In terms of topic, the majority of manuscripts and typescripts are on flags in general. Signal flags account for 8 manuscripts and 3 typescripts, military flags for 4 manuscripts and 4 typescripts, with 3 manuscripts and 1 typescript in the field of heraldry or sphragistics. Of the typescripts 9 are stapled or included in some kind of binder, while 9 are simply collections of loose sheets. Among the manuscripts there are 29 bound as books, 11 collections of loose sheets, on scroll, and 6 individual sheets (two of which have been bound into books). The older volumes mostly have leather bindings, although some are cloth or paper. A few manuscript bindings in the FRC collection are very elegant with gold-embossed titles and stampings and with gold edging on the pages. In contrast the largest single-volume manuscript consists simply of loose sheets, grouped by country, between two pieces of cardboard connected by ribbons which provide little protection for the contents.

It is not surprising, of course, that signal flag books should appear in manuscript form. Most signal books prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century were considered important secrets of military value. Captains were under strict orders to destroy signal books if there was a danger of

their being captured. Changes in a signal system made old signal books obsolete, consequently, many were destroyed. In some cases, of course, albums of national flags also may have been used onboard ship serving to identify foreign vessels. More often the manuscript book of national flags was compiled by a hobbyist or scholar seeking to understand the subject or an artist charmed by the graphic beauty of flags. While some manuscripts of national flags seem to have been copied from existing sources, others clearly relied on personal observation or communications from others with first hand vexillological knowledge [Fig. 3].

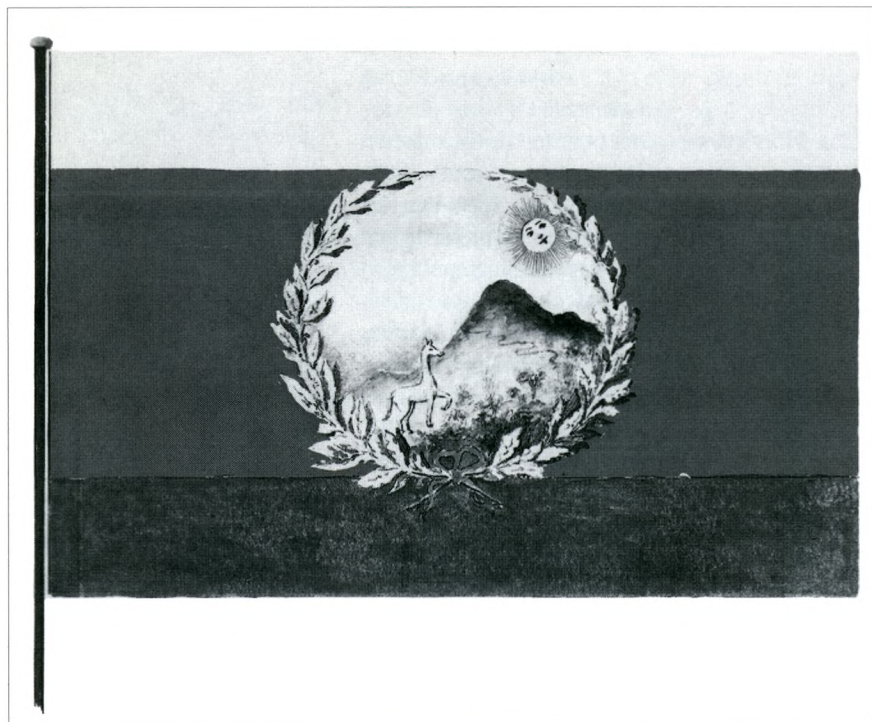
Publishers in the past – as the present – have been tempted to reprint flag books with few modifications because of the expense of keeping up with changing flag designs. Private collectors, on the other hand, have always welcomed knowledge of new flags and have often actively sought to create the most complete and accurate collection possible. This gives manuscripts an appeal for vexillologists that goes far beyond the aesthetic value inherent in the artwork. There is also a significant difference in the topics covered by typescripts and manuscripts. The latter are rather straightforward compilations of national, signal or military flags (or coats of arms), most of them with minimal text. Typescripts on the other hand, even those with illustrations [Fig. 4], rely heavily on analysis of data and present an organised review of a special subject, for example «Flags of the Regency of Algiers», «Flags of the Corporation of Trinity House», or «The Influence of Flags upon Textiles». The typescript is ultimately intended to become an article or book, to be shared with as wide a readership as possible, to offer a viewpoint to an audience, to establish a coherent perspective of some defined area of vexillology.

Leaving aside the signal books, the older manuscript generally does not aspire to a practical purpose. Perhaps reflecting a feeling by each author that he was unique in his age and country as someone interested in flags, these manuscripts addressed an audience of one person only. While we may treasure them today for the knowledge they preserve, many were probably saved from destruction by later generations largely in recognition of the work that had gone into their compiling and illustrating. Such manuscripts are increasingly rare today as vexillologists seek to have their work turned into published books and monographs, rather than passed on to family members with little or no interest in them. Richly illustrated flag manuscripts of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may well be exclusively based on computerised collections of knowledge. Another trend which seems to be growing currently is the book which is self-published in limited quantities, reflecting the growth of desktop publishing and the difficulty of finding commercial publishers for highly specialised topics. While the search for flag manuscripts from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and previous times should not cease, scholars should not fail to focus their attention on new areas of documentation which are still in their early stages.

The great variety of material in the FRC manuscript collection makes it tempting to emphasise the unique and appealing features of individual items. A sheet from 1877 which presents both sides of the standard pre-

sented to the ruler of Balasinor for use in the royal durbar that year is frustrating because we know there must have been dozens more of these Indian princely banners, now lost to us. Our admiration is inspired by the almost 300 seal impressions collected by Ralph Brown who spent three years walking through South Africa, India, South East Asia, the Far East, North America precisely to collect them. The reader is staggered by the loving work which was put into the manuscript created in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by those unknown individuals who painted 1287 flags in water-colour – and carefully left indications of their documentary sources. Likewise, one cannot but be in awe of the more than 800 small silk flags, all double-sided and made by hand, which illustrate the 58 volumes of the Orsini collection. However, it is precisely the value and interest of the individual items which recommends against trying to deal with them in the present analysis. Quite simply, each deserves a separate and thorough presentation – ideally with full illustrations in colour – so that the vexillological community can derive the greatest potential benefit from them.

The overarching value of flag manuscripts in general is an appropriate subject to consider in concluding this presentation. Given the many thousands of vexillological books, pamphlets, articles, and charts which have been published – perhaps 15'000 in all – are flag manuscripts anymore than a curiosity? The answer to that question is to be found on several levels. First, there is an undeniable aesthetic appeal in many of these items which is lacking from published sources. The scholar, interested in knowledge, may be satisfied by highly organised well-written text alone, but the general public and the scholar alike can instantly understand the appeal of vexillology by examining these manuscripts. As documents, the manuscript frequently provides us with knowledge not available elsewhere. Undeniable there was much copying as the compilers looked for existing sources of flag information, yet most went beyond that to flags or coats of arms not generally available. A manuscript from 1838, for example, apparently drafted by a common sailor who happened to be on the west coast of South America, gives naive but carefully executed sketches of the arms of the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation and its flags. These provide what is perhaps the only contemporary source still in existence for these symbols. A 1785 English manuscript confirms the special Scottish version of the Union Jack and gives one of the earliest known representations of the Stars and Stripes, then barely eight years old. Other examples could be cited, but the point is simple: without these manuscripts there would be lost knowledge or flag facts unconfirmed by contemporary evidence and we as scholars would be the poorer for that. Finally, there is an inspirational aspect of manuscript creation. Whether through their children or in their activities, human beings strive to express themselves, to fulfil themselves, to leave for the future some token of their existence. For some individuals creation of a flag collection or manuscript provides an outlet for self-fulfilment in a constructive way. In so doing, however, the creator also inspires others by the substance of what has been produced and by the spirit of inquiry, hard work, imagination, and dedication to a precise goal.

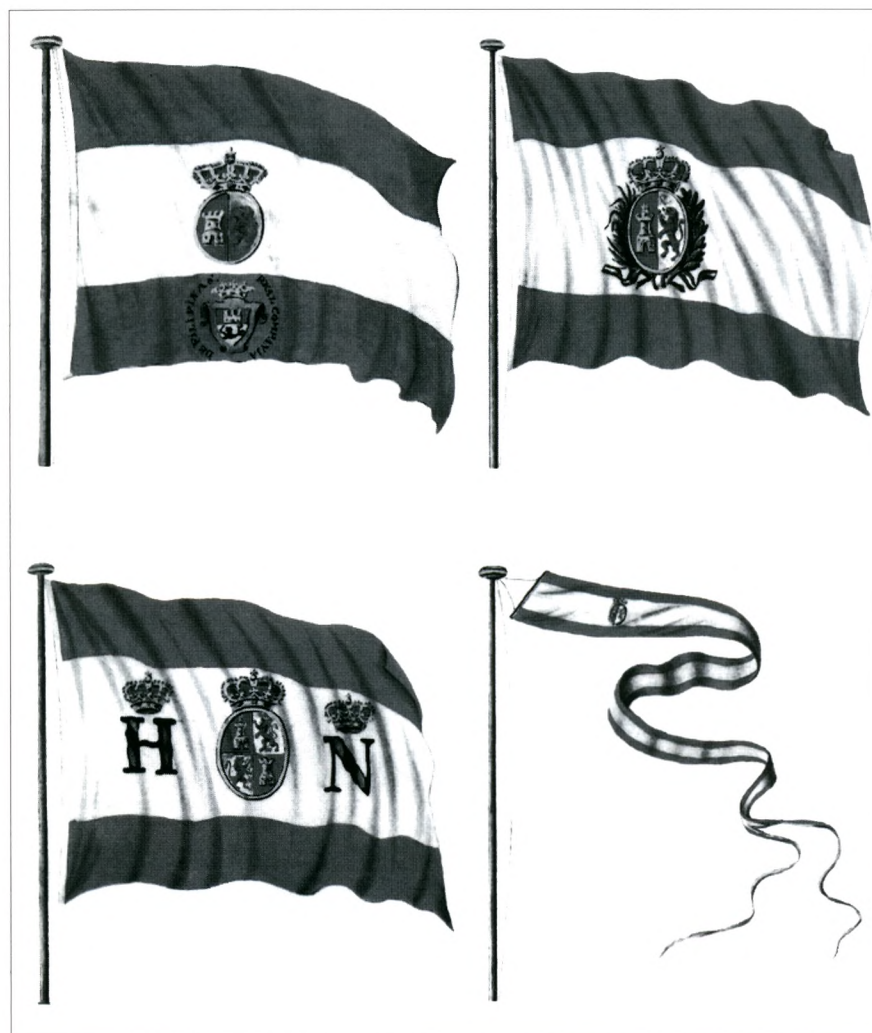


**Fig. 1**  
The Bolivian national flag of 1826 with yellow, red and green stripes (from top to bottom).

The great influence in stimulating interest in vexillology which may be attributed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Catalan flag manuscript or to individual manuscript items published in a book like «Flags Through the Ages and Across the World» cannot be measured but certainly has been an important factor. For this reason if no other, the creation of manuscripts by vexillologists should be encouraged. Those who develop flag manuscripts will grow in knowledge and understanding in the process. If published, the manuscripts will benefit thousands of others, but even in unpublished form they have the potential to inspire enthusiasm and to convey knowledge even centuries after their completion.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Two copies are in the National Library in Madrid, the third in the Royal Library.
- <sup>2</sup> 1877, edited by Marcos Jimenez de la Espada, Fortanet, Madrid, 1980, Barcelona, El Albir, 1912, Sir Clements Markham, Hakluyt Society, London, 1967, Kraus Reprint Ltd., Nendeln.
- <sup>3</sup> Published by S. Emmering, Amsterdam, 1966. See also Whitney Smith, «A Seventeenth Century Manuscript on Flags», in: «The Flag Bulletin», Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 54–55. The original Flag Manuscript 1669/70 is now in the collection of the Flag Heritage Foundation (Winchester, Massachusetts).
- <sup>4</sup> Louis Mühlemann, «Les Pavillons des Nations Maritimes au XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle d'après le Manuscrit de J. Moutton», 4<sup>th</sup> ICV proceedings, Turin: Centro Italiano di Studi Vexillologici, 1975, pp. 153-180.
- <sup>5</sup> Howard Millar Chapin, «Seventeenth Century Flag Books», American Book Collector, Vol. III (May-June 1933), pp. 332-334, and Vol. IV (July 1933), pp. 338–342.
- <sup>6</sup> Aldo Ziggio, «Gli Antichi Libri di Bandiere della Biblioteca Reale e dell' Archivio di Stato di Torino», 4<sup>th</sup> ICV proceedings, Turin; J. Visser, «Parole de presentation de Flaggeboek Hesman», 6<sup>th</sup> ICV proceedings, Muiderberg, 1975; Klaes Sierksma, «Het Vlagge-Boeck van den Herr Paulus van der Dussen, Capitein», 8<sup>th</sup> ICV proceedings, Vienna, 1985; William G. Crampton, «Flags of the English Civil War», ibid.; Maria-José Sastre y Arribas, «Representaciones Vexilológicas en las Cántigas de Alfonso X el Sabio», 11<sup>th</sup> ICV proceedings, Madrid, 1987; This list is not exhaustive, further lectures having been presented by A. de Ceballos, S. Herreros, A. Ferrero, M. Ghibellini and M.-J. Sastre.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert Gradon, «Collection of Naval Flags and Colours», 1686 (manuscript 1608 in the Pepysian Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge University).
- <sup>8</sup> Manuscript 155662 in the Royal Library of Brussels.
- <sup>9</sup> William J. Canby, a paper read before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 14, 1870, entitled «The History of the Flag of the United States», Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- <sup>10</sup> On this subject see Tony Campell, «Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500; Flags, Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean», Volume I in the series «The History of Cartography» edited by J.B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 398–401.



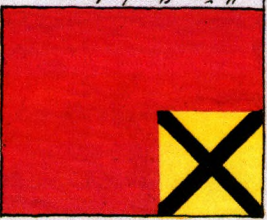
**Fig. 2**  
A Dutch manuscript depicting Spanish maritime flags, dated 10<sup>th</sup> March 1840.

Fig. 3  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> century German manuscript with rulers' standards of German states.

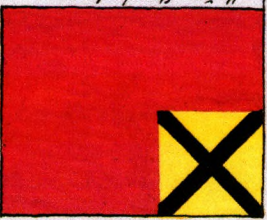
III. Markung vfr. -1.

Tafel 3.

**Königreich Preussen.**  
siehe  
Flaggen- u. Salb-  
Kreuzemf.




**Fürstenthum Reuss ältere Linie.**




Bestimmungen über Grösse der Standarte sind nicht gegeben.  
In der Standarte stellt ein gelbes Feld mit schwarzem Kreuz die Hälfte der Breite aus, während die Länge der ganzen Standarte die 2/3 theil von der Länge des gelben Feldes erreicht.  
Haus - Standarte.  
Kongrerd. Sachsen.

**Fürstenthum Reuss jüngere Linie.**  
führt keine besondere  
Standarte,  
sondern die Landesflagge  
schwarz-rott-gelb, liegend.




Standarte Sr. Majestät des Königs von Sachsen.  
Die Prinzen u. Prinzessinnen des königlichen  
Hauses haben keine besonderen Standarten.

**Herzogthum Sachsen-Altenburg.**



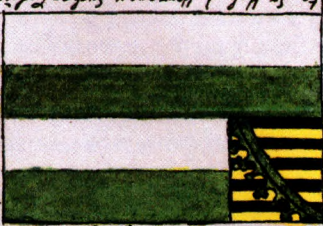
Standarte Sr. Hoh. d. Prinzen Moritz u. Sachs-Altenb.  
3 m

**Herzogthum Sachsen-Gotha.**



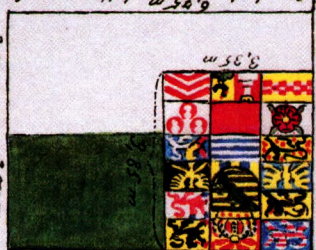
Nationalflagge und Standarte mit Wappen.  
9,95 m

**Herzogthum Sachsen-Gotha.**



Standarte Sr. Hoh. d. Herzogs u. Sachs-Gotha.  
Die Prinzen u. Prinzessinnen der Herzoglichen Häuser von Sachsen-Gotha u. Weissen-  
Meiningen.  
6,95 m

**Standarte Sr. Hoh. d. Herzogs u. Sachs-Gotha u. Weissen-  
Meiningen.**



2,50 m

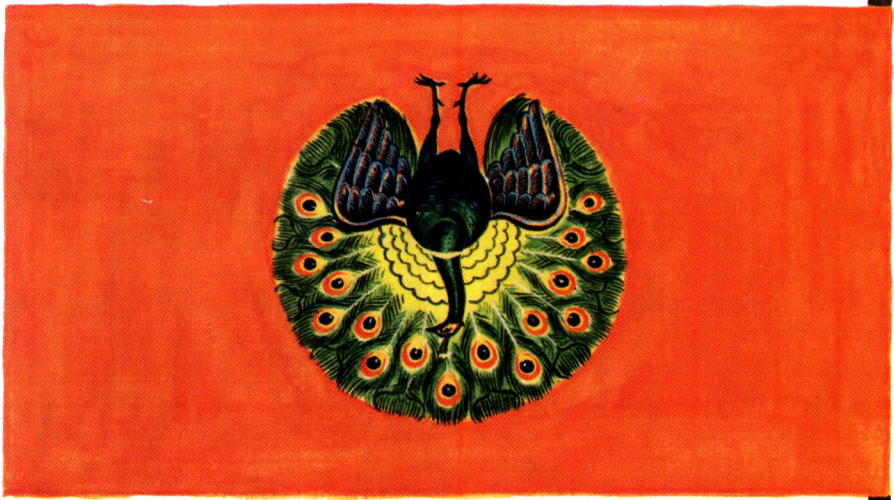


Fig. 4  
The flag of the president of Burma  
(nowadays Myanmar), from an illustrated  
typescript, c. 1950.