

## **THE DESIGN OF THE SUN OF THE ARGENTINE FLAG** **(HISTORY - LEGISLATION - PROPOSALS)**

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There are basically two theories about the reason and meaning of the use of the sun in the Argentine flag: One explains its pre-Columbian/Inca origins, and the second one relates the sun with Free-Masons. However this essay will study the vexillolographic aspects of the sun rather than its meaning. For a more complete explanation about its possible original meaning, please see the essay *The Sun of May* presented by Gus Tracchia during the ICV XXI, Vexilobaires 2005, and part of these proceedings.

Looking at the different national flags used in Argentina, the vexillologist sees an anomaly with the fundamental differences in the details and design of the sun on different national flags.

For example, the shape of the rays of the sun changes from one flag to another as well as with the features of the face of the sun.

Several historical flags preserved in the National Museum of History in Buenos Aires, as well as historical flags in other Argentine museums show also very different designs of suns.

But what is the cause of this lack of uniformity in present and past day sun designs in Argentine Flags?

This problem starts with the original legislation for the Argentine Flag and continues with all the later legislation about the same subject.

To start from the beginning, the Congress of Tucumán declared the Independence of Argentina, known then as the Provincias Unidas Del Río de la Plata (United Provinces of the River Plate) on July 9, 1816. A few days later the same congress legally adopted and defined the Argentine Flag for the first time.

However in 1816 only the "Bandera Menor" or Civil Flag was defined: the horizontal plain triband of light blue, white and light blue. The same legislation left open the possibility of creating a "Bandera Mayor" (State Flag), by adding some extra element to the Civil Flag.

The sun was legally added in the flag in 1818 when a "Bandera de Guerra", War Flag and Ensign was adopted. The 1818 law text says:

"sirviendo para toda bandera nacional los dos colores blanco y azul en el modo y forma hasta ahora acostumbrada, fuese distintivo peculiar de la bandera de guerra, un sol pintado en medio de ella."

"serving as the only national flag the one of two colors, blue and white in the style and way already in use, a sun painted at the middle will be the peculiar feature for the war flag."

The 1818 law does not explain any details about the shape, design, quantity and characteristics of the rays, or about the exact color of the sun. However another resolution passed the same day about the Sash of the Supreme Director (an equivalent to a National President of that time) defines

a golden embroidered sun. In consequence, it was somehow understood that the sun of the flag should have had the same color and characteristics than the one of the sash. However not everyone followed that unwritten interpretation.

As nothing was said about the exact details of the sun, in the next 125 years, there would be several different designs of suns in Argentine Flags in this period of over a century.

The differences appeared in the proportions of the sun (relative length of the rays and diameter of the face), in details as the exact shape and quantity of rays, and features of the face.

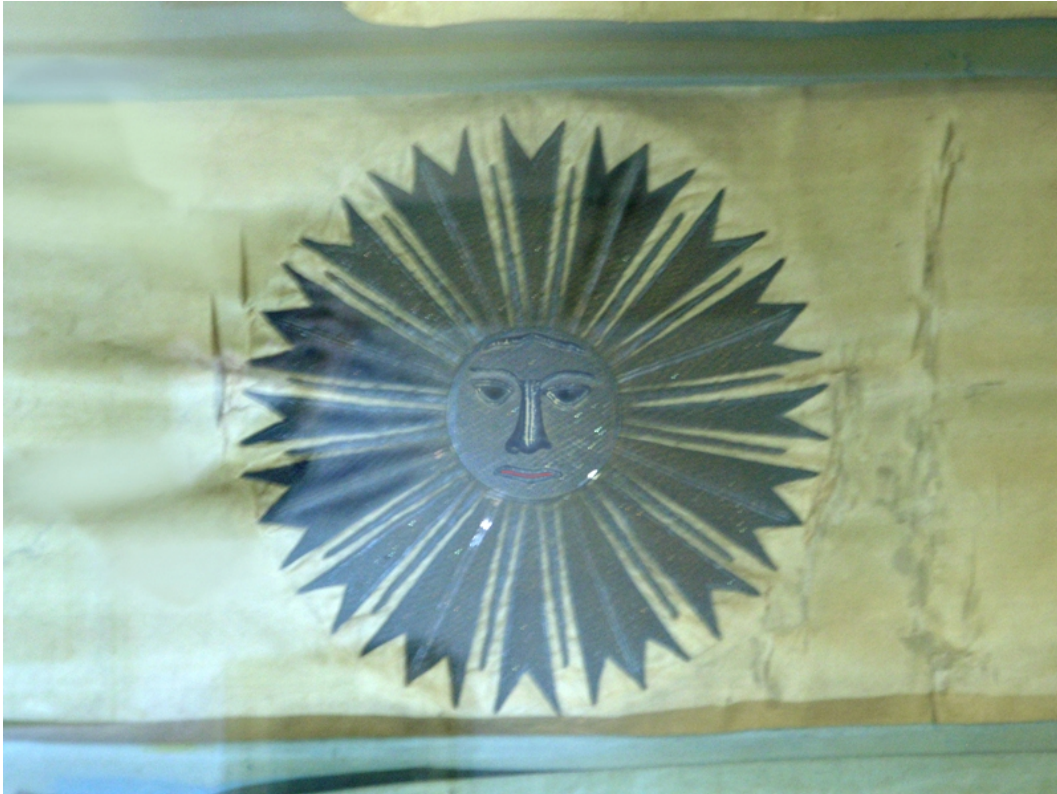
(Image 01) The following flag preserved at the National Museum of History was used by a military expedition led by Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1833. The shade of blue in all Rosas' federalist times was darker because sky blue was considered a "Unitario" (centralist) color. But going back to the sun, this flag has a really interesting design. It is a golden embroidered sun, but very different from the ones used nowadays. This sun looks like a fireball and all its rays appear very near between them. The face of the sun is really small.



(Image 02) This second flag of Rosas period used a sun that reproduced a full human face that even had hair. The rays of the sun look similar to a flower. Probably these suns with hair in their faces have been the most different ones in all Argentine History. This flag is nowadays at the Museum of History of the City of Luján (Province of Buenos Aires). It was used as personal ensign by Admiral Guillermo Brown in the 1840s. However some historians have classified it as belonging to the Police.



(Image 03) This flag preserved at the National Museum of History in Buenos Aires, was used by the "La Rioja Province Volunteers Battalion" during the war against Paraguay (1865-1870). It had 32 rays, but of three different kinds. All of them were straight rays, but some of them have a triangular shape. There is a similar flag preserved at the Mitre Museum in Buenos Aires.



These variants are shown as examples of the different sun designs used during the XIX and early XX century. Several other examples of this period of over a century could be chosen to continue finding different designs and characteristics. These differences were found even in basic details of the design: for example not all the suns in those times did have 32 rays.

During all the XIX century and first years of the XX century this lack of uniformity in symbols appeared also in the designs of the Argentine National Coat of Arms and in the Provincial Coats of Arms. But from a legal point of view, all variants were legal, because nothing was said in the actual laws and decrees about the exact graphic details of these symbols as to how they should be represented.

#### **Present day legislation:**

During the first decades of the XX century, a look for a solution to this problem began to be implemented. The first pattern model of the Argentine National Coat of Arms was established in 1907 (just partially respected though), and during the subsequent years, the provinces started also to regulate their own Provincial Coats of Arms on the exact details of their designs.

On late 1930s the task to unify the symbols, deepen. Great part of this initiative was due to the Argentine historian and scholar Dardo Corvalán Mendilaharsu, who was deeply interested in the Argentine national symbols and their history.

(Image 04) In 1942 the Academia Nacional de la Historia (National Academy of History) proposed a model to unify the design of the sun. This model was based on the sun that had appeared in 1813 in the first "national" coins minted in the City of Potosí when Manuel Belgrano's Army occupied the city. A reproduction of this model appeared later in 1944 in the book *Los Símbolos Patrios* (Patriot Symbols) by Dardo Corvalán Mendilaharsu. The idea of the project was to adopt one of the first sun designs used by patriots in the early 1810s.



The design of sun of the 1813 coins has 32 rays, being 16 straight rays and 16 wavy rays (all the wavy ones should have the same clockwise direction of the wave). The expression of the face in this sun could be considered a serious one (or at least not a smiley one) and that is the reason as to why the sun in the Argentine Flag appears that way.

In 1943 it was established by decree the use of this model of sun. This was ratified the following year (1944) by the Decree #10302 of Patriot Symbols, which has been the most detailed Argentine legislation on the flag. Art 2, of the above decree rules about the sun:

"Se reproducirá en el centro de la faja blanca, de la bandera oficial, el Sol figurado de la moneda de oro de ocho escudos y de la de plata de ocho reales que se encuentra grabado en la primera moneda argentina, por Ley de la Soberana Asamblea General Constituyente del 13 abril de 1813, con los treinta y dos rayos flamígeros y rectos colocados alternativamente y en la misma posición que se observa en esas monedas. El color del Sol será el amarillo del oro."

“At the center of the white stripe of the official flag the sun with face taken from the gold coin of eight Escudos and the silver coins of eight Reales of the first Argentine coins minted by law of the Sovereign General Constitutional Assembly of April 13, 1813 with thirty two wavy and straight rays displayed alternative will be reproduced and in the same position as seeing in those coins. The color of the sun will be golden yellow.”

First, the legislation establishes for the State Flag the design of the sun of the eight Reales coin and the eight Escudos coin from 1813. The suns in both coins are similar, but they are not exactly the same. There are differences in details.

(Image 05) The 1813 coins were minted as a symbol of autonomy and Independence by the Soberana Asamblea del Año XIII (Sovereign Assembly of the Year XIII) even before the official Argentine declaration of Independence in 1816. The Assembly of the Year XIII could be considered the first truly autonomous legislative body in Argentina. It legislated in several areas, looking for autonomous ways and breaking with the Spanish legislation of the time.

The Seal of the Assembly was used to be stamped on the coins. However, the seal was split in two parts. On one side of the coin the seal was put without the sun (an oval divided per fess blue at the top and white the bottom with two shaking hands holding the spear of liberty with the Liberty Cap at the top. The oval is surrounded by two branches of laurels symbolizing Victory), and on the other side of the coin the sun of the seal alone, but in full with 32 rays

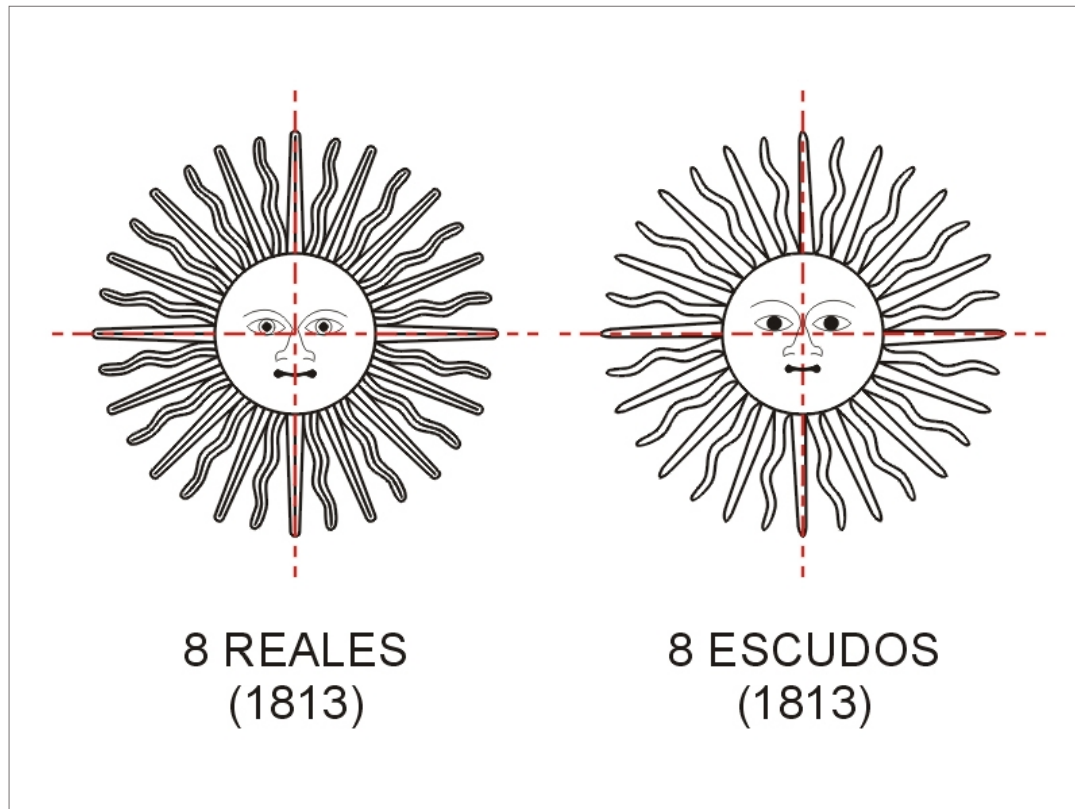
The sun on the 8 Reales silver coin each ray appears "divided" by a central line that also could be interpreted as a thinner ray inside a bigger one. In this coin the rays are perfectly arranged over the symmetry axis of the sun.



(Image 06) In the gold 8 Escudos coin the Seal/Coat of Arms appears with four flags, two cannons, and one drum plus all the common features of the Seal. On the other side, the sun is different from the one of the silver coin. On gold pieces, the rays do not have the central line, and they are thinner than on the silver coin. They also do not coincide with the symmetry axis of the sun. Finally the face of the sun is slightly different from the face in the silver coin.



(Image 07) In this comparative chart the differences between both coins can be seen: the rays with a central line in the 8 Reales silver coin and the rays displaced from the symmetry axis in the 8 escudos gold coin.



The second problem of the 1944 Decree is that the decree defines a sun of a coin for a flag. As a coin is a tri-dimensional object and a flag a bi-dimensional one, when this tri-dimensional object is transported to be represented in two dimensions, there could be several ways to draw it according to the way the tri-dimensional element is illuminated. In fact, there are several models of sun drawings used in flags with "shades" represented in darker colors to give volume, but all are legal because the 1944 Decree establishes all this technical aspects with great ambiguity.

Even though it is commonly seen in flags manufactured abroad a black or darker line in the border of the sun to separate its yellow color from the white of the central stripe and also to represent the features of the face of the sun, nothing is said about that in Argentine Legislation. So in the moment of writing of this article, it could be said that both variants are legally correct if they reproduce one of the two 1813 coins.

Nowadays there are several variants of sun that follow the 1944 decree. The main differences are more obvious in the rays of the suns as some of them follow the 8 Reales coin, and others the 8 Escudos coin. That is why in some suns there are a darker line inside each ray and in other suns this line does not appear.

The other point that changes a lot from one flag to another is the shadow area of the face of the sun. There are several variants and again all of them are legal as in the case of the darker line in each ray.



**Some designs used nowadays:**

(Image 08) This embroidered sun has a more realistic face than the one that appeared in the 1813 coins. Its eyes, nose and mouth are more nature-like than the ones established in the 1944 Decree. Another detail are that wavy rays have less waves that in the coins. This design is also used in printed flags.



(Image 09) This printed sun looks similar to the 8 Reales silver coin minted in 1813, because there is a darker line inside each ray. Therefore it could be considered a legal design because it follows de 1813 design. This sun has some shadows to make the illusion of volume. However this is not legislated and it is a decision made by the manufacturer. Therefore, as a coin shows different shadows according to how it is lighted, there could be different ways to show volume and all of them could be considered legal.



(Image 10) This printed sun also looks similar to the 8 Reales silver coin minted in 1813: it has darker lines inside each ray. However the shadows in the face are different from the previous example. As it was explained before, there could be several ways to show volume by drawing shadows in the sun face. This sun has a minor mistake. The wavy rays are a little shorter than the straight ones.



(Image 11) This third printed sun shows another possibility to represent the face. The wavy rays are wrong because they are displayed counter-clockwise.



There are also wrong designs that do not follow the 1944 decree. One often mistake is on the face of the sun when its design does not follow the face of the sun in the 1813 coins.

However the most common mistakes that are most likely to find in Argentine flags, appear in the rays of the sun.

(Image 12) A really common mistake that usually appears in flags manufactured abroad is a design with wavy rays that appear alternately clockwise and counter clockwise. The fact is that following the design of the 1813, all the rays should be clockwise. The origin of this wrong design is an official publication made by the Argentine Interior Ministry in 1968. That publication shows a drawing with wavy rays that appeared alternately clockwise and counter clockwise. Although the publication was official, its drawing was wrong, because it did not follow the 1944 Decree text.

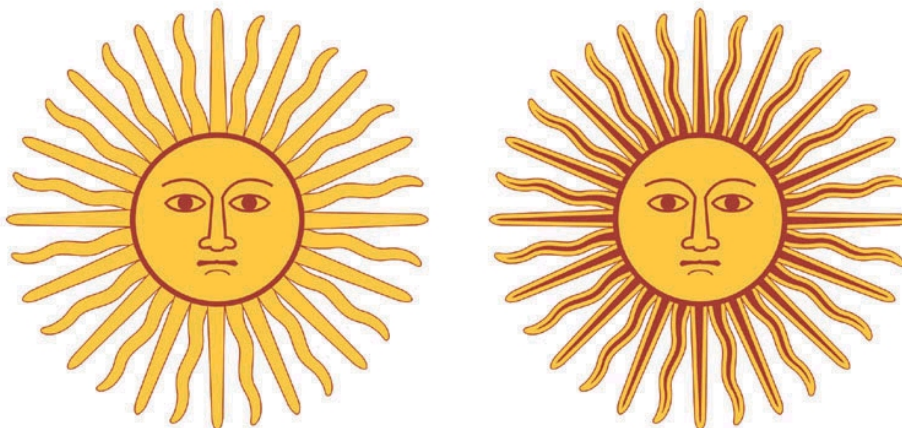


Image 13) the following model of sun has appeared recently. It has a mistake: the wavy rays appear shorter than the straight ones. The correct way of representing the rays following the design of the sun in the 1813 coins, is by having the tips of each ray touching a virtual circle.



(Image 14) As a conclusion, an image with the **possible** correct designs of sun according to the 1944 Decree appears. They are based upon 8 Escudos gold coin and the 8 Reales silver coin minted in 1813.

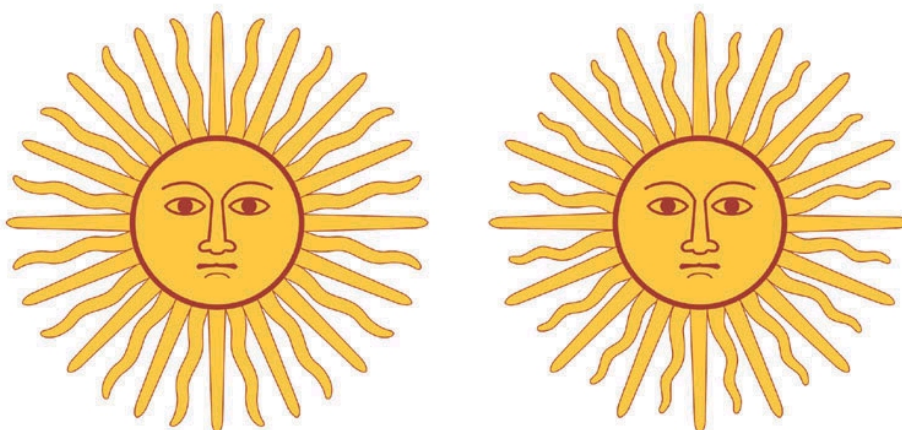
### Possible variants according to the 1944 decree



*Illustrated by Francisco Gregoric*

(Image 15) The following two images can be seen in Argentine flags. However both of them are **wrong designs** because they do not follow the design of the 1813 coins prescribed in the 1944 decree.

### Wrong variants that do not follow the 1944 decree



*Illustrated by Francisco Gregoric*

## **Conclusion:**

The solution to this problem of lack of uniformity will be fulfilled when just one model of pattern for the sun will be chosen. First it would be necessary to choose just one of the 1813 coin (8 Reales or 8 Escudos), due to their differences. Then it would be necessary to prepare an exact bi-dimensional image of how the sun will be represented (in both versions, printed and embroidered). It is important also to establish the colors of the sun in international systems like Pantone and to look for all the possible equivalencies in other systems (like CMYK, RGB, CieLAB, web safe colors, etc.). All of this should be established by the legislation. The 1944 decree established the "amarillo oro" (golden yellow) that is a definition not very clear.

The drawing should be defined by classic ways like illustrations kept in official branches of the State, ministries, official archives, museums, etc. but also it would be necessary to have the sun defined in an electronic format by CAD (Computer Assisted Drawings), and vectorial graphics programs. This kind of electronic drawings give the possibility of magnify and/or reduce the size of the sun without any deformation in its details, opposed to what a pixel image would be. The electronic image should be available in government web sites for manufacturers and general public. Recently some countries have started to do this, and it is a way to try to eradicate wrong reproductions of the symbols.

To reach this final exact model for the sun it would be recommended to create a workshop made by vexillologists, historians and numismatics experts.

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**Extra material to the essay:**

**Annex 1: War Flag and Supreme Director Sash laws of 1818 (in Spanish):**

Buenos Aires, Febrero 25 de 1818

Habiendo pedido el Supremo Director se declarase la divisa que deberían usar los Generales en campaña á consecuencia de lo acordado sobre el uso de las bandas en cuanto á los grados oficiales de la Legión de Mérito de Chile, y así mismo las banderas que deban usarse, así en las plazas fuertes y buques de guerra de la Nación, como en los mercantes de la misma, por requerir ya las circunstancias que se diferencien, como es práctica en todas las Naciones; el Congreso Nacional resolvió:

1º- Que sirviendo para toda bandera nacional los dos colores blanco y azul en el modo y forma hasta ahora acostumbrada, fuese distintivo peculiar de la bandera de guerra, un sol pintado en medio de ella.

2º- Que todos los que por ordenanza, decreto ó estatuto deban ó puedan traer bandas, incluso los grandes oficiales de la Legión de Mérito de Chile, la usen del modo ordinario y acostumbrado, y porque la banda que sirve de divisa al Supremo Director del Estado debe diferenciarse de las otras, de suerte que jamás se confunda con ellas, y que sea bastante notable la diferencia, serán peculiares y privativos de ella los dos colores blanco y azul que la distinguen en la forma que hasta ahora se ha usado, y en ella se pondrá un sol bordado de oro en la parte que cruza desde el hombro hasta el costado, de modo que caiga sobre el pecho y se haga bien visible.

## Annex 2: Patriotic Symbols Decree of 1944 (in Spanish)

DECRETO NACIONAL N° 10.302/944

B.O. 10/05/1944

**Artículo 1°** - Téngase por patrones de los símbolos nacionales, los ejemplares y textos mencionados en los considerados de este decreto, y cuyas reproducciones auténticas corren agregadas al expediente número 19.974. F. 1943.

**Art. 2°** -La Bandera Oficial de la Nación es la bandera con sol, aprobada por el "Congreso de Tucumán", reunido en Buenos Aires el 25 de febrero de 1818. Se formará según lo resuelto por el mismo Congreso el 30 de julio de 1816, con los colores "celeste y blanco" con que el General Belgrano creó el 27 de febrero de 1812, la primera enseña patria. Los colores estarán distribuidos en tres fajas horizontales, de igual tamaño, dos de ellas celeste y una blanca en el medio. Se reproducirá en el centro de la faja blanca, de la bandera oficial, el Sol figurado de la moneda de oro de ocho escudos y de la plata de ocho reales que se encuentra grabado en la primera moneda argentina, por Ley de la Soberana Asamblea General Constituyente de 13 abril de 1813, con los treinta y dos rayos flamígeros y rectos colocados alternativamente y en la misma posición que se observa en esas monedas. El color del Sol será el amarillo del oro.

**Art. 3°** - Tienen derecho a usar la Bandera Oficial, el Gobierno Federal, los gobiernos de provincias y gobernadores.

Los particulares usarán solamente los colores nacionales en forma de bandera sin sol, de escarapela o de estandarte, debiéndoseles rendir siempre el condigno respeto (Art. 3° derogado por Ley N° 23.208 B.O. 20/08/1985)

**Art. 4°** - La Banda que distingue al Jefe del Estado, autorizada por la Asamblea Constituyente en la Reforma del Estado Provisorio del Gobierno del 26 de enero de 1814 y alcanzada por la distinción del 25 de febrero de 1818, ostentará los mismos colores, en igual posición y el sol de la Bandera Oficial. Esta insignia terminará en una borla sin otro emblema. Tanto el sol como la borla serán confeccionados con hilos, con baño de oro, de óptima calidad y máxima inalterabilidad en el tiempo. (Conforme texto Art. 1° del Decreto Nacional N° 459/984, B.O. 9/2/984).

**Art. 5°** - En adelante se adoptará como representación del Escudo Argentino, la reproducción fiel del Sello que usó la Soberana Asamblea General Constituyente de las Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata, el mismo que ésta ordenó en sesión del 12 de marzo de 1813, usase el Poder Ejecutivo.

Se reservará y usará como Gran Sello de la Nación, el diseño del Sello de la Asamblea de 1813, es decir, conservando la región coronaria comprendida entre las dos elipses de la figura.

**Art. 6°** - Adóptase como letra oficial del Himno Argentino, el texto de la canción compuesta por el Diputado Vicente López, sancionado por la Asamblea General Constituyente, el 11 de mayo de 1813, y comunicado con fecha de 12 de mayo del mismo año, por el Triunvirato al Gobernador Intendente de la Provincia. Para el canto se observará lo dispuesto por el Acuerdo de 30 de marzo de 1900.

**Art. 7º** - Adóptase, como forma auténtica de la música del Himno Argentino, la versión editada por Juan P. Esnaola en 1860, con el título: "Himno Nacional Argentino - Música del maestro Blas Parera". Se observarán las siguientes indicaciones:

En cuanto a la tonalidad, adoptar la de Sí bemol, que determina para la parte del canto el registro adecuado a la generalidad de las voces; 2º) reducir a una sola voz la parte del canto; 3º) dar forma rítmica al grupo correspondiente a la palabra "vivamos"; 4º) conservar los compases que interrumpen la estrofa, pero sin ejecutarlos. Será ésta en adelante, la única

versión musical autorizada para ejecutarse en actos oficiales, ceremonias públicas y privadas, por las bandas militares, policiales y municipales y en los establecimientos de enseñanza del país.

El Poder Ejecutivo hará imprimir el texto de Esnaola y tomará las medidas necesarias para su difusión gratuita o en forma que impida la explotación comercial del Himno.

**Art. 8º** - Por el Ministerio del Interior se reglamentará el tratamiento y uso de esos símbolos; se reproducirán los tipos y modelos que se adoptan y depositarán en el mismo Departamento.

Por el mismo Ministerio se dispondrá la impresión de un volumen con transcripción del presente Acuerdo, el decreto reglamentario que se ordena, los modelos y textos respectivos, con antecedentes y referencias históricas y legislativas que contribuyan a ilustrarlo.

Edelmiro Julián Farrell

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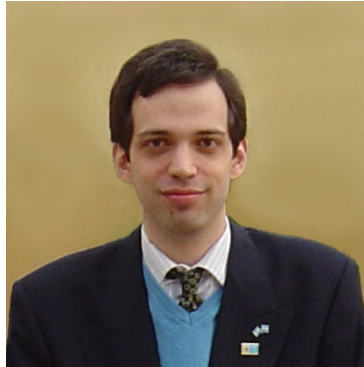
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Francisco Gregoric studied Industrial Design at the *Universidad de Buenos Aires UBA*, and currently works in Graphic and Industrial Design areas as a freelance designer and illustrator. Between 2003 and 2005, he has also worked in a project of creating on-line catalogs for the public libraries in the City of Buenos Aires.

He recently illustrated the book *Manual de Vexilología Universal* written by Alberto Rubén Perazzo, the President of the AAV, and published by Editorial Dunken. Buenos Aires, 2005, and he made the new illustrations of the third edition of the book *Nuestras Banderas : Vexilología Argentina* also written by Alberto Rubén Perazzo.

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