

María José Sastre y Arribas: Vexillological Ancient Japanese Books in the Library of the “Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid”

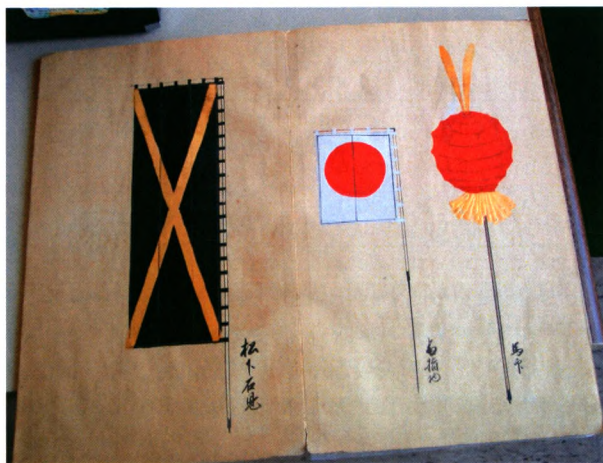
Abstract: *The Library of the “Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid” conserves lots of bibliographical jewels. Among them, a surprising collection of oriental books and prints. Usually known as “Legado Cebrián” (Cebrián Legacy), this collection contains two books from the 18th century and entirely painted with flags: they are a repertory of flags, different ensigns and vexilloids on every page, and beautifully hand-painted. This lecture will show these unknown ancient books to the vexillological community.*

Among the rich vexillological sources existing in Spain, one of the more unknown and, without any doubt, the most surprising of them, stays inside the Library of the “Facultad de Bellas Artes” (Fine Arts Faculty) at the “Complutense” University of Madrid, where a very important oriental, Japanese in fact, collection is preserved.

Probably, the collection arrived to the Fine Arts Library into the “Legado Cebrián” (Cebrián Legacy) ^[1], since long documentation seems to prove it ^[2].

In this oriental, Japanese collection (with about 800 engravings and some 30 books) two books concern our discipline: with the catalogue numbers J-A/11 and J-A/12, both of them are very similar, because of their size and because of their binding or the pictures they show.

This presentation tries to inform about the existence of these two unknown marvelous ancient books entirely filled with flags.



With size of 34,5 x 20,8 cm, format *Tate-e* (vertical) and blinding called *oribon* [3] in black millboard, both books are anonymous (but both have a small seal at their beginning) [4] and have been dated to the middle of the Edo period [5].

They are illustrated with flags (and vexilloids), a large quantity of flags, hand-painted in colours with artist's brush and water ink, some of them with gold paint. Only flags, nothing more: no text, except a little inscription close to the standard design at its lower right part (these inscriptions are the names of the ensign owners' families).

The book J-A/11 has 68 pages and the J-A/12 has 88 pages. On each page there are one or two vexillological objects with their respective inscription. These books are like *Armoriales of Vexillology*, flags *compendia* to identify the warrior in combat, but not only that, since not every picture because of its shape looks like an object to be carried in battle: some of them have an appearance more decorative and ritual (i.e. umbrellas, fans, lanterns,...); however the majority seems to be military flags.

Among these, we find the traditional *sashimono*, a long rectangular banner (about 5:1), the personal or family badge on it, to be carried at the back [6], but many other shapes are represented: the typology of flags is really assorted.

- A) Rectangular, more or less long, with or without a little pennant at the top of the pole; with or without tails.
- B) More or less square.
- C) Like a sleeve, one or two at the same flagstaff, or like a half-sleeve; usually with tails.
- D) More or less arborescent.
- E) Two flags forked.
- F) Like an oriental fan.

We have to note that flags are always with the pole at the right. We also remark that every flag design shows with a lot of details the way to be held (halyards and rings); and the poles are usually in right angle, to see the flags better when they are carried: they are very naturalistic representations

If the standards are very varied, the vexilloids are even more:

- A) One, two or three elements at the same flagpole (the simplest).
- B) Very different shapes: bulbous, crescents, horns, cylinders, circles, spindles, fans, feather dusters, tails of animals, hats, even an umbrella (only once in J-A/12) {24}, a cross (only twice in J-A/12) {17} or something like the Roman Vexillum (only once in J-A/11 {10}, and once in J-A/12) the Papal Umbrella (only once in J-A/11) {8}.

The previous lines only explain the shapes.

Concerning the accessories, the finial appears sometimes as the pole of flags and vexilloids (see the illustrations).

With respect to the flag surface, or field, it is usually in only one colour (with or without charges). Not very often we discover divisions.

Regarding the colours, they are more restricted than shapes: black, white, red, gold (sometimes in relief), exceptionally yellow (once in each book), and blue (three times, and very light, in J-A/11; three times also, but darker, in J-A/12)

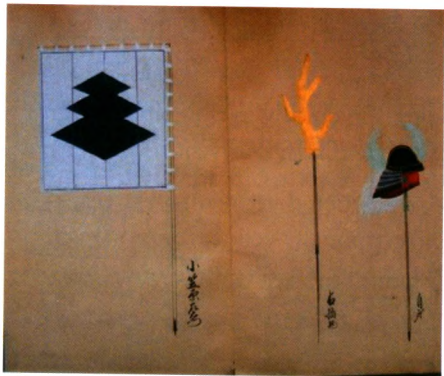
Relating to the motifs or patterns (charges) on flags, they generally are geometrics. The circle is, with no doubt, the champion (and note that a red circle on a white flag appears twice in J-A/11) {1}, but there are also four-sided figures, stripes, something similar to Celtic spirals {14}, silhouettes like oriental coins (i.e. a circle with a small hole, circular or square, at the centre) {24} or like Japanese doors {5}, vegetable shapes, and even crosses (only in J-A/12) ^[7] or inscriptions (only in J-A/12 and in few occasions) {16}.

Although analogous, these two books offer us some differences. The book J-A/11 seems to have more pages with two drawings and the J-A/12 more of them with a single illustration. Flags with inscriptions are only in J-A/12, as well as the cross pattern; furthermore we think that J-A/12 shows no military, but ceremonial vexilloids (those with more fragile or less aerodynamic appearance) {20}.

In spite of this, in both two books we discover, on the same page or continuous pages, flags and vexilloids with the same colours and patterns {11}, as if all of them belonged to the same family and each

individual object had a different function according to the occasion (war, ceremony) or were in use by specific members of the “family” (in its largest meaning), so the sashimono, big for *daimios* or smaller for *samurais*. The reading of the inscriptions associated to the flags will elucidate our hypothesis.

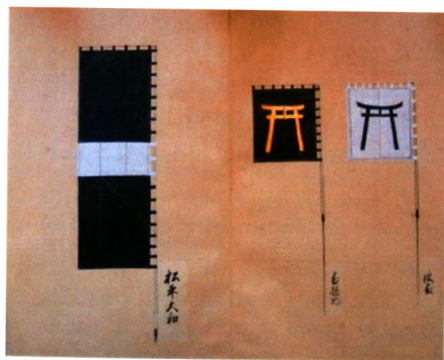
NB.: Illustrations numbers 1 to 14 are from J-A/11 and illustrations numbers 15 to 24 are from J-A/12.



Pic. 2



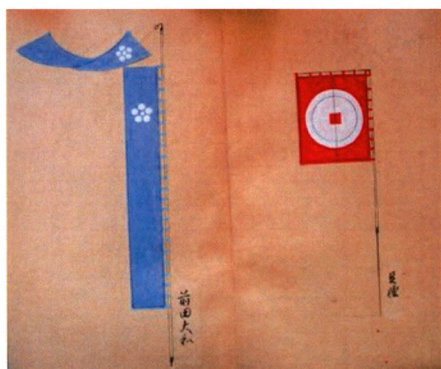
Pic. 3



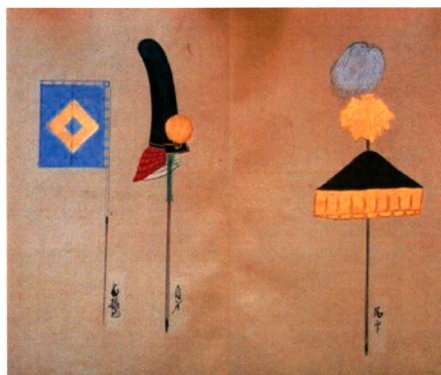
Pic. 4



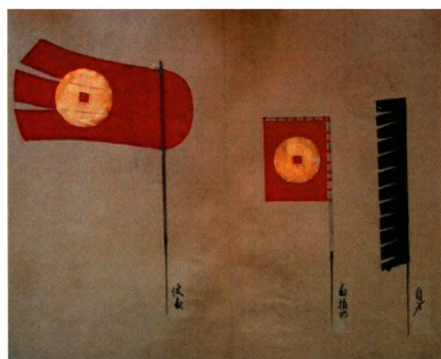
Pic. 5



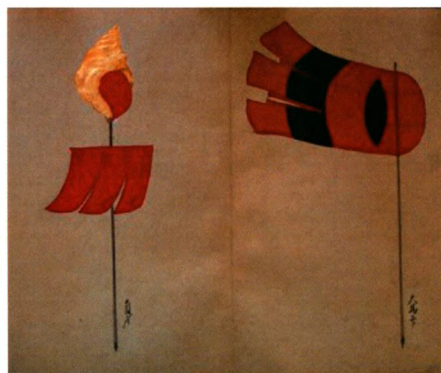
Pic. 6



Pic. 7



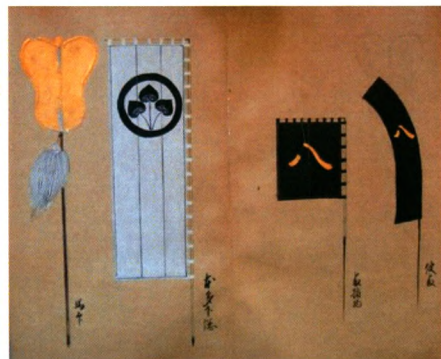
Pic. 8



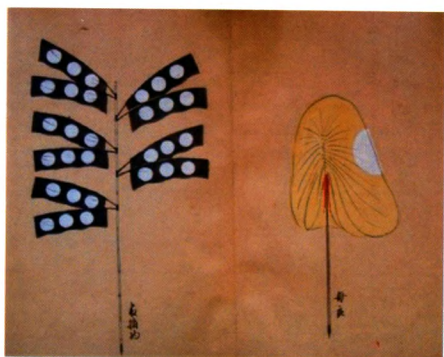
Pic. 9



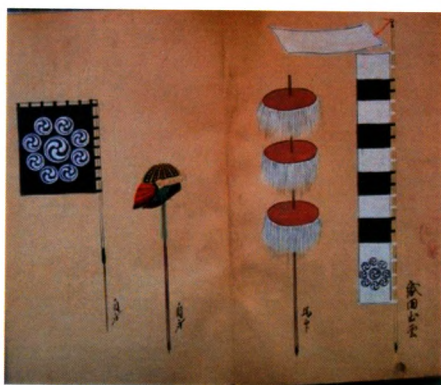
Pic. 10



Pic. 11



Pic. 12



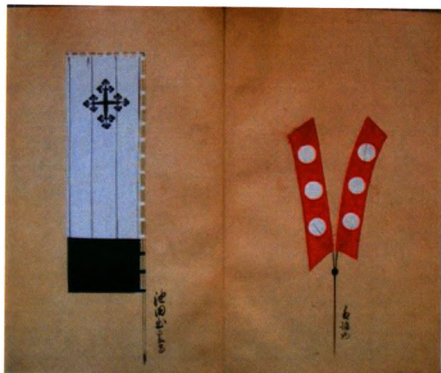
Pic. 13



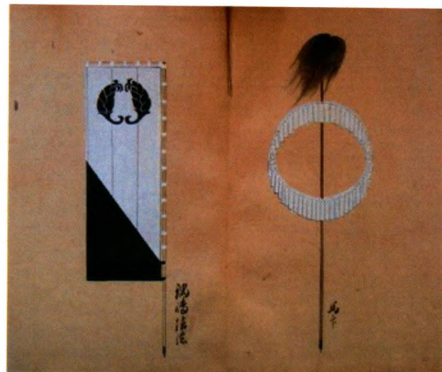
Pic. 14



Pic. 15



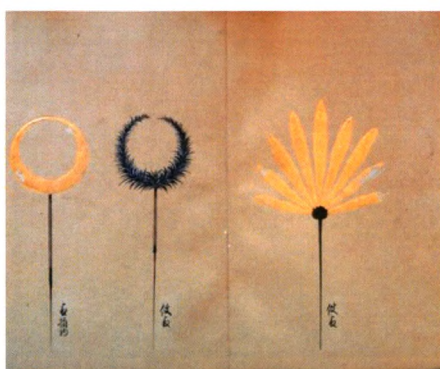
Pic. 16



Pic. 17



Pic. 18



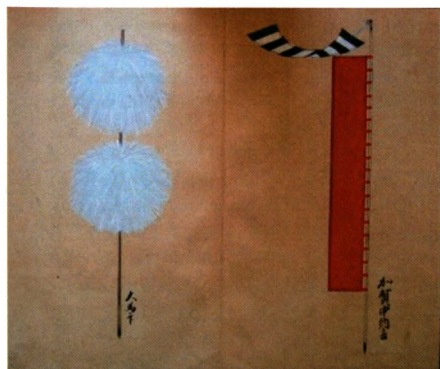
Pic. 19



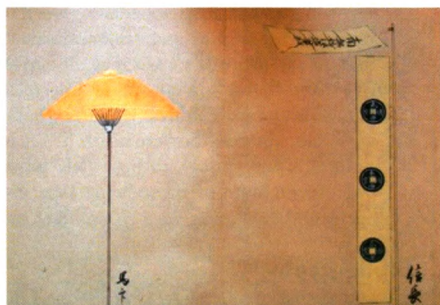
Pic. 20



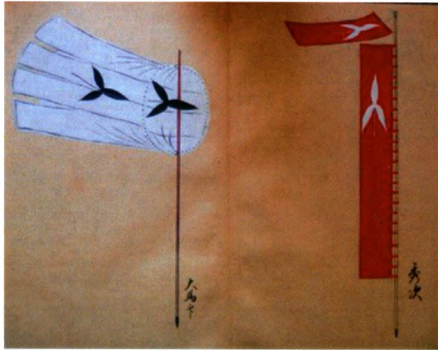
Pic. 21



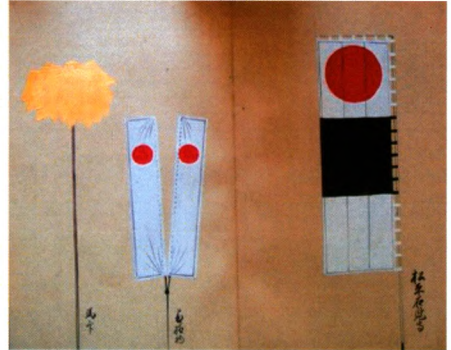
Pic. 22



Pic. 23



Pic. 24



Pic. 25

Literature and Notes:

1. Juan Carlos Cebrián (1848-1935), extraordinary man well-known in intellectual circles at his time, civil engineer and architect, lived in the USA and travelled around the world buying books that he, subsequently, gifted to numerous Spanish and American cultural institutions. His inclusion into the great Spanish Encyclopaedia ESPASA illustrates his relevance. Vid. ESPASA, apéndice tomo 2, 1931, p.1338-39, and M. López Otero, Biografía de D. Juan Cebrián y elogio de su obra”, in “Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando”, nº108, 4º trimestre, 1933, p.139 and foll.
2. Flores de Edo. Samurais, artistas y geishas, Madrid, UCM, 2004, p. 16 and foll.
3. The orihon is a type of binding born in the 17th century, the appearance of which resembles an accordion.
4. Note that the books start back to front if we consider our way.
5. The Edo, or Tokugawa period, goes from 1603 to 1868 A.D. Then, the books would date from about 1730-1750
6. It seems that the sashimon comes from China, in Ming Dynasty, where they were employed in war strategy. Introduced in Japan in 1573, they remained in use until the end of the Edo period. Vid. Susana Lumbreras Manzano, Catálogo de libros y estampas de la Biblioteca de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de Madrid, Madrid, U.C.M., 1996. p. 76, according to the Enciclopedia ragionata delle armi, Milano, 1979. The sashimono flag was used by daimios and samurais, smaller for these, bigger for the former. Remember that the samurai was a warrior at the service of a daimio.
7. The form “cross” is not necessarily related to Christianity. The “cross” is a universal outline in human cultures: it can be found all over the Earth. Only once in these books we could suppose the “cross” to be an imitation of occidental, Christian, models (18th century is late enough to be widely possible): it is the case of the nice flag in J-A/12, page 16 (in spite of these being Japanese books, we have numbered the pages in the occidental way just as we do): a perfect ending in fleur-de-lys black cross on white {17}.

Bibliography:

1. Catalogue number J-A/11 (Biblioteca de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid).
2. Catalogue number J-A/12 (Biblioteca de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid.).

3. ENCICLOPEDIA ESPAÑA, apéndice tomo 2, 1931.
4. Flores de Edo. Samurais, artistas y geishas, Madrid, U.C.M., 2004 (exhibition catalogue).
5. LÓPEZ OTERO, M., Biografía de D. Juan Cebrián y elogio de su obra, in "Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando", nº 108, 4º trimestre 1933, p.139.
6. LUMBREERAS MANZANO, Susana, Catálogo de libros y estampas de la Biblioteca de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de Madrid, Madrid, U.C.M., 1996.
7. MORBY, John E., A világ királyai és királynői, Budapest, Maccenas Könyvkiadó, 1991.

Acknowledgements:

First of all to Ms. Ángeles Vian Herrero, Chief Librarian of the "Facultad de Bellas Artes" Library in the "Universidad Complutense de Madrid", who welcomed me with an extreme affability in the Library she manages and permitted me to consult these two extraordinary books: without her help this lecture would not exist. Then to Mr. José Antonio Pino, friend and colleague, specialist on digital photography and new technologies: his pictures allow us to enjoy the ancient flags designs.

About the author



María José Sastre y Arribas was born in Madrid (Spain) and holds degrees from several European Universities: Madrid (Spain), Valladolid (Spain), Paris (France), Aix-en-Provence (France), Sofia (Bulgaria) and Debrecen (Hungary). In 1978, she graduated in "Genealogía, Heráldica y Nobiliaria" at the "Escuela de Genealogía, Heráldica y Nobiliaria" (Madrid) associated to the Spanish "Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas" (High Council for Scientific Research) and since 1978 she is Professor of Genealogy in this School.

Specialist in symbolic culture, among her many publications are *El Escudo de Madrid* (1987), *Diccionario de Vexilología* (1988), *Normas de Descripción y Codificación vexilológica* (1989) and *La Bandera de*

Madrid (printing).

Winner of the FIAV-**Vexillon** in 1993, her first attendance was at the XI. ICV in Madrid (1985) (presentation about flags in the Spanish Middle Ages). From then, Mrs. Sastre read papers at several vexillological congresses, both international and Spanish. She also delivered lectures about Heraldry, Genealogy and Sigillography and she teaches all these subjects in Spain (Vexillology since 1985).

María José Sastre has elaborated technical dossiers for cities and regions on flags and coats of arms. She was Directress of the "Instituto Madrileño de Vexilología" and Editress of "Moharra" (vexillological magazine) for some years from their foundation in 1986.

She is a member of the *Real Academia Matritense de Heráldica y Genealogía* and Honorary Member of the *Instituto del Sacro Romano Impero*, the *Circulo de Estudios Genealógicos familiares* and others.

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