

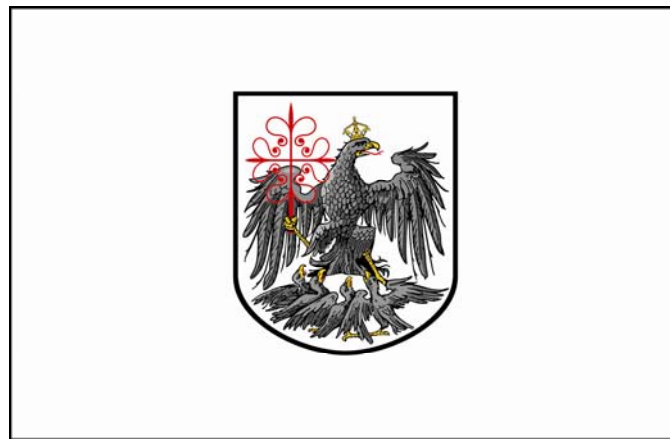


The Flag of the City of Buenos Aires: Four Centuries of History

Francisco Gregoric

Abstract

Even though the City of Buenos Aires, capital of the Argentine Republic, is more than 400 years old, the flag that represents it has just a 30-year history and was only adopted officially 15 years ago. However, the flag's central emblem can be traced to the founding of the city in 1580 by the Spanish conqueror Juan de Garay, who gave the city its first coat of arms. But in its early times this emblem was barely used. This symbol at the center of the city's flag is debated by some people that do not accept it today. They attribute incorrect meanings to it based on contemporary politics. This paper will study the origin of the flag's coat of arms and its background before and during its creation during late 16th century. Its scarce use in that era and its replacement by a different coat of arms shortly after its creation will be analyzed. Then the paper will describe the rediscovery of this first coat of arms at the end of the 19th century, and its use in several places in the city the following years. After that, the coat of arms became the accepted symbol of the city. The design of the flag will be studied, as well as its vexillographic challenges. All the initiatives to change this flag will be reported alongside the explanations from the people who proposed them.



Buenos Aires

The Flag of the City of Buenos Aires: Four Centuries of History

The Founding of Buenos Aires

The Río de la Plata (where the City of Buenos Aires is located) was discovered in 1516 by the Spanish navigator Juan Díaz de Solís¹ who sought a passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. When he saw the river's large estuary, he misunderstood it as a passage to the Pacific Ocean, but as the water was fresh instead of salty, he called it "Mar Dulce" (Freshwater Sea).²

The Spanish Crown became very interested in the area of the Río de la Plata. Therefore in 1536 the Adelantado Pedro de Mendoza founded the City of Nuestra Señora del Buen Ayre (Our Lady of the Fair Winds). Its name recalled the Virgin of the Fair Winds, protector of sailors.³

This first city did not have any local emblems to identify itself. It was more a *de facto* founding than a legal one. It did not follow the normal Spanish rules to found a city.

Even though the area was of great importance, this primitive city had difficulties because of lack of provisions. It also suffered from the hostility of the natives, from the Querandí ethnic group. For this reason, the city was abandoned in 1541. Its inhabitants retreated north via the Paraná River and reached present-day Paraguay, and settled down in the City of Asunción.⁴

Years after that, the Creole children of these first settlers left Asunción going south, founding cities in their way. Under the command of Juan de Garay, the city of Santa Fe was founded in 1573. In 1580 they reached the area of the old and abandoned city of Pedro de Mendoza and they re-founded it with the new name of Ciudad de la Santísima Trinidad y Puerto de Santa María de los Buenos Aires (City of the Holy Trinity and Port of Saint Mary of the Good (Fair) Airs.) The second part of the name recalled the old settlement of 1536.

It can be said that Asunción was born from the first Buenos Aires, and the second Buenos Aires was born from Asunción. The second Buenos Aires is the city that still exists after 430 years.

The Ortiz de Zárate and Torres de Vera y Aragón families

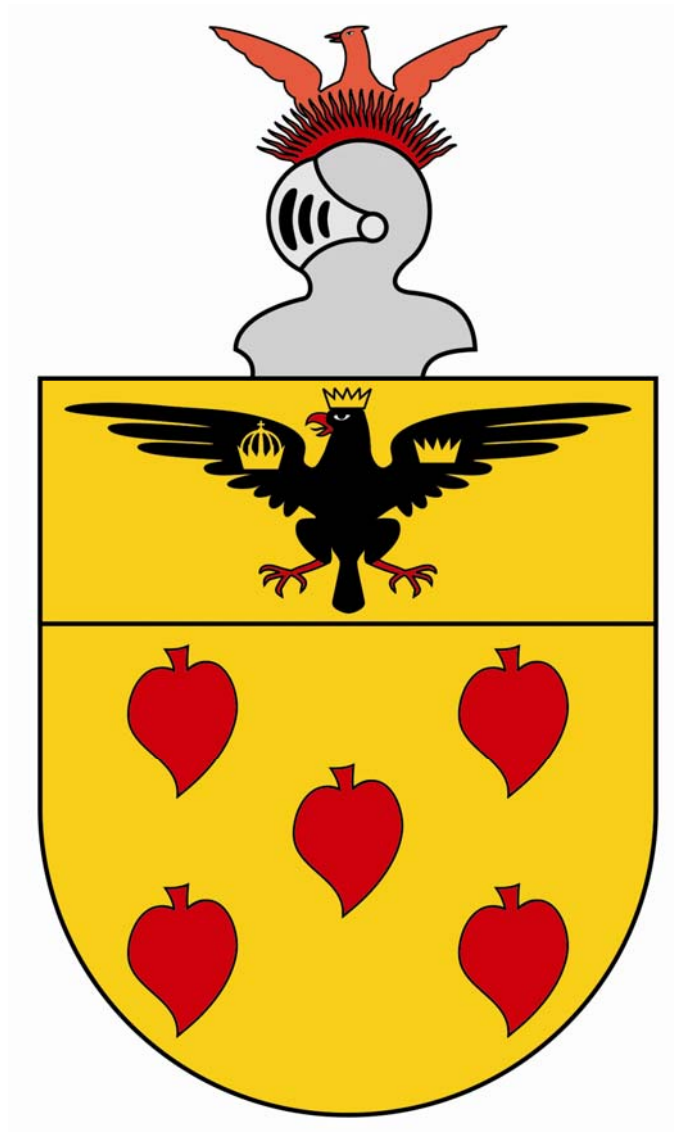
The first person related to this second founding of Buenos Aires was the Spanish nobleman Juan Ortiz de Zárate, who in 1569 signed an agreement with the Spanish King Philip II as a commitment to found four towns of Spanish domains of the Río de la Plata basin and in areas close to Asunción. In exchange, the King gave him the title of Adelantado and Governor for two generations. Therefore, those titles will fall to his hereditary son or the person he would choose. Ortiz de Zárate bequeathed his titles to the man who would marry his daughter Juana Ortiz de Zárate.

Juan Ortiz de Zárate organized a fleet to reach the area of the Río de la Plata and then, up the Paraná River to meet Juan de Garay in the recently founded city of Santa Fe. In 1575 he arrived in Asunción but died the following year.

In 1577 his daughter Juana married Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón, a lawyer, who received the titles of Adelantado and Governor of the new cities to be founded.

Therefore the second person related to the founding of Buenos Aires, Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón, appoints Juan de Garay to found the new city in his name. This was 11 June 1580.

The coats of arms of the families Ortiz de Zárate⁵ and Vera⁶ are the following:



Coat of arms of Juan Ortiz de Zárate
Illustrated by Francisco Gregoric



Coat of arms of Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón
Illustrated by Francisco Gregoric

It is important to say that the majority of the newcomers in the Garay expedition were not Spaniards but Creole, born in Asunción of a Spanish parents, or mestizos born of a Spanish father and a Guaraní mother. Of the sixty members of Garay's expeditionary forces, only ten were born in Spain.

Coat of arms of the city

On 17 October 1580, when the city was about four months old, its founder Juan de Garay distributed plots of land in the new city among the colonists through a signed document.

Three days later, on 20 October, Juan de Garay, the Mayor Rodrigo Ortiz de Zárate, and other officials met in the Cabildo (City Hall), and as a result of that meeting two important symbols for the city were chosen.

First, following a very important custom reflecting the deep Roman Catholicism of the Spanish

conquerors, a Holy Protector for the new city had to be chosen. The city had been founded in the name of God and the Spanish King Philip II.

To choose the protector, names of Saints were written in small pieces of paper and put into a hat. Once all the names were in the hat, one was randomly picked and Saint Martin of Tours was chosen as the Holy Protector. Therefore, 11 November would become the day of the Holy Protector of the city, as defined by the Roman Catholic Church.⁷

After the selection of the Holy Protector, Garay and the officers chose a coat of arms to represent the city.

In a document signed on 20 October 1580 appeared the following:

*“Este día, asimismo platicaron sobre el fin y propósito con que el celo y voluntad del señor general y conquistadores vinieron a poblar y poblaron esta ciudad, y que piden a su merced del señor teniente de gobernador que mande señalar armas a esta ciudad, sobre que se funde su blasón, para que así por su merced señaladas pidan confirmación de ellas a Su Majestad y entretanto usen de ellas y del blasón, y el dicho señor general dijo que señala por armas de esta ciudad **un águila negra pintada al natural, con su corona en la cabeza, con cuatro hijos debajo demostrando que los cría, con una cruz colorada sangrienta que salga de la mano derecha y suba más alta que la corona, que semeje la dicha cruz a la de Calatrava y lo cual esté sobre campo blanco**; y éstas dijo que señalaba y señaló por armas de esta ciudad, la razón de la cual y del dicho blasón es el haber venido a este puerto con el fin y propósito firme de ensalzar la Santa Fe Católica y servir a la Corona Real de Castilla y de León y dar, ser y aumentar los pueblos de esta generación que ha cuarenta años que están poblados y cerrados e iban en gran disminución, y esto da por declaración de las dichas armas.”*⁸

English translation:

*“On this day, there was talk of about the zeal and will of the general and conquerors that came to populate this city, and asked his highness the Lieutenant Governor that he choose the coat of arms of this city, in order to ask confirmation of it to His Majesty and the general said that he chooses as a coat of arms of this city **a black eagle painted in natural colors, with its crown on the head, with four children [eaglets] below as reared by it, with a bloody red cross that comes from the right hand [claw] higher than the crown, that this cross looks like the one of Calatrava and this over a white field**; and he said that he chooses as the coat of arms of this city, the reason of this heraldry is having come to this harbor in order to praise the Holy Catholic Faith and to serve to the Royal Crown of Castile and Leon and to give, to be, and to increase the population of this generation that was settled and closed since forty years ago by the decreasing of the population, and this provides for a declaration this coat of arms.”*

The meaning of the coat of arms created by Garay

First the word “children” should be read as eaglets and “hand” as claws.

Some of the meaning of the coat of arms appears in the document, while the hidden parts can be deduced.

The meaning of the eagle does not appear in the text, but as seen before, the eagle was a part of the coats of arms of the Adelantados Juan de Ortiz de Zárate and Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón. As the city was founded by Garay in the name of the second, who inherited the title because he married the daughter of the first, it is evident that Garay chose the eagle to pay homage to the two families responsible for the founding.

The meaning of the red cross in the “*right hand (claw)*” of the eagle and the crown on his head are defined in the document: “*having come to this harbor in order to praise the Holy Catholic Faith and to serve to the Royal Crown of Castile and Leon*”.

It is clearly specified that the cross is to be “*higher than the crown*” because the order of importance was God first and then the King.

It is said that the cross “*looks like the one of Calatrava*.” The Cross of Calatrava was the symbol of the Calatrava Order or the Calatravos Knights, founded in 1158 to protect the Ville of Calatrava (near the present day Ciudad Real) from the Muslims.⁹

When Garay’s description says “*bloody red cross*” it does not mean that the cross was literally bathed with blood. In the heraldic language of the time, the phrase specified a specific shade of red.

Finally, for the “*four children [eaglets] below*” reared by the eagle, there is no explanation of the meaning of these eaglets in the text of the document. It might reflect the last part of the document: “*to give, to be, and to increase the population of this generation*”, with the large eagle paying homage to the families of the Adelantados.

The first historian who studied this subject was Father Antonio Larrouy who, in 1905, suggested that the four eaglets stood for the four towns that Ortiz de Zárate promised to found. These cities would be, according to Larrouy: Santa Fe, San Salvador, Villarica del Espíritu Santo,¹⁰ and Buenos Aires. But by 1580, San Salvador had already been founded and abandoned very soon after.¹¹

This theory was advanced by Serafín Livacich the same year. However Livacich thought that the four eaglets stood for the cities of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Asunción, and Villarica del Espíritu Santo.

Finally in 1909, Enrique Peña gave this theory a new version by saying that the four eaglets stood for Santa Fe, Buenos Aires, San Juan de Vera de las Siete Corrientes (the present day city

of Corrientes), and Concepción de Nuestra Señora,¹² being the last to be founded after Juan de Garay's death.

This last theory has been the most accepted among historians during the subsequent years. However, the two first variants of the idea should not be dismissed completely, because nothing is said in the original document about the meaning of the eaglets and as mentioned, several cities were founded. Recounting the names of the cities that each author and historian believe are meant by the eaglets, it is obvious than more than four cities were founded during the period in question.

Cities or provinces?

There is a less known theory of interest that should be considered. Historian Adolfo Garretón, who wrote several articles about Argentine national symbols during the 1930s and 1940s, thinks that Garay wanted to symbolize provinces, not cities. Since nothing is mentioned in the 20 October 1580 document about future cities or provinces to be founded, the idea should not be dismissed.

According to Garretón, the four eaglets stood for the four provinces or regions of the area that would have benefitted from the new port of Buenos Aires. These were Paraguay, Tucumán, Audiencia de Charcas (a region around the City of Sucre in present Bolivia), and Chile (at this time, the present-day Argentine area of Cuyo with its cities of Mendoza and San Juan were under Chilean administration.)

Garretón thinks that the part of the document that says “*to give, to be, and to increase the peoples of this generation*” means that Garay wanted a common port for all the settlements of those four regions.

Several documents of that time would confirm that Buenos Aires had the potential to become a very important port for these four provinces or regions of the area.

A lesser known theory

Estanislao Zeballos, who was one of the first historians to research Argentine national symbols,¹³ wrote a letter in 1911 to the Parliamentary Council of the City of Buenos Aires, which was then debating legislation for the official design of the coat of arms. In that letter Zeballos argued that the coat of arms had a religious meaning. According to him, the eagle rearing the four eaglets stood for the Roman Catholic Church giving life to the four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. He justified this idea saying that from the 15th to 17th centuries there were European books with illustrations of an eagle with four eaglets with this meaning. According to Zeballos, the concept that Garay wrote of “*in order to praise the Holy Catholic Faith*” is the proof of the religious meaning of the coat of arms. He denies the idea of eaglets meaning cities, by saying that when Buenos Aires was founded there were only three cities founded, including Buenos Aires.

Approval of the coat of arms in 1591

As it was customary in that era, the founding document read “ask confirmation of it (the coat of arms) to His Majesty”. In order to make the coat of arms fully valid, it had to be sent to Spain for its approval by the Real Consejo de Indias (Royal Council of Indies)¹⁴. The document with the coat of arms, alongside several other documents related to the new city (between them the confirmation of the foundation of the city itself), were sent to Spain, but there was no reply for quite some time. By 25 February 1590, after Garay’s death, the Cabildo of Buenos Aires decided to send another request for an answer to the set of documents previously sent.

On 20 September 1591 the Royal Council of Indies gave its answer, confirming the founding of the city. It also approved some other measures taken at that time and rejecting others. Among those approved was the coat of arms, saying:

*“Que señalaban y señalaron por armas las que el dicho Juan de Garay les señaló y se les de cédula para que dicha ciudad pueda usar y use de ellas”*¹⁵

Approximate English translation:

“The coat of arms designed [for the city of Buenos Aires] by Juan de Garay is authorized to be used”

Therefore the coat of arms, which until that time was used provisionally, became the official symbol, duly confirmed by Spain’s authorities representing the King.

The 1580 and 1591 documents are preserved today in the Archivo General de Indias (General Archives of Indies) in Spain.¹⁶ There are no known copies of the original documents in Argentina. Part of the proceedings of Buenos Aires Cabildo from the last part of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century were lost.

A coat of arms with five eaglets in 1615

Nevertheless, there is a document—currently archived in Argentina—from the Cabildo of Buenos Aires Cabildo dated 26 October 1615, mentioning the eagles of the coat of arms. However there is a change in the description: there are five eaglets in this description. In this document, the mayor of the city, Captain Víctor Casca, condemns a silversmith known as Melchor Miguel for of having hurt another person in a fight. The sentence is to engrave the coat of arms of the city. The document says:

“En este Cabildo, propuso el dicho capitán Víctor Casco alcalde ordinario, por causa que se hizo contra Melchor Miguel , sobre una herida que dio, le condenó entre otras penas a que hiciere y labrase en plata las armas de esta Ciudad, que son un águila con cinco hijos, y que la plata en que se labrase se le diese por el mayordomo de los propios, y que él no llevará otra cosa que la hechura como parece de la sentencia que está ante mi el escribano; pidió que se hiciere en la dicha razón acuerdo y se le diese la plata en la que se ha de labrar al dicho

*platero, y habiéndose tratado y conferido se acordó **que las armas que hallare haber elegido el general Juan de Garay, poblador de esta Ciudad, se labren y pongan en un sello de plata, y la plata que para ello fuere menester la entregue el mayordomo de esta Ciudad.***”

English translation of the bolded text:

“In this City Hall, captain Víctor Casco, Mayor, in the case against Melchor Miguel, due to wounds he made, will be sentenced – among other punishments – to engrave in silver the arms of this City which are of an Eagle with five eaglets as the arms chosen by General Juan de Garay, founder of this City.”

The interesting point is the change from “four to “five”. Not knowing for sure the exact meaning of the original four eaglets, it is hard to give an absolute answer about the change from four to five.

If we follow the Estanislao Zeballos theory of a religious meaning of an eagle that stands for the Roman Catholic Church and the four eaglets that stand for the four continents, the idea of a fifth eaglet would have been a mistake.

If the theory is followed that the four eaglets stood for cities, the fifth eaglet might stand for a fifth city. Enrique Peña, when analyzing the five eaglets, says the last one could have stood for the city of Santiago de Jerez.¹⁷

On the other hand, if the theory of the original four provinces or regions is followed, the fifth eaglet could have stood for Santa Cruz de la Sierra (present day Bolivia), a new region beginning in 1615.

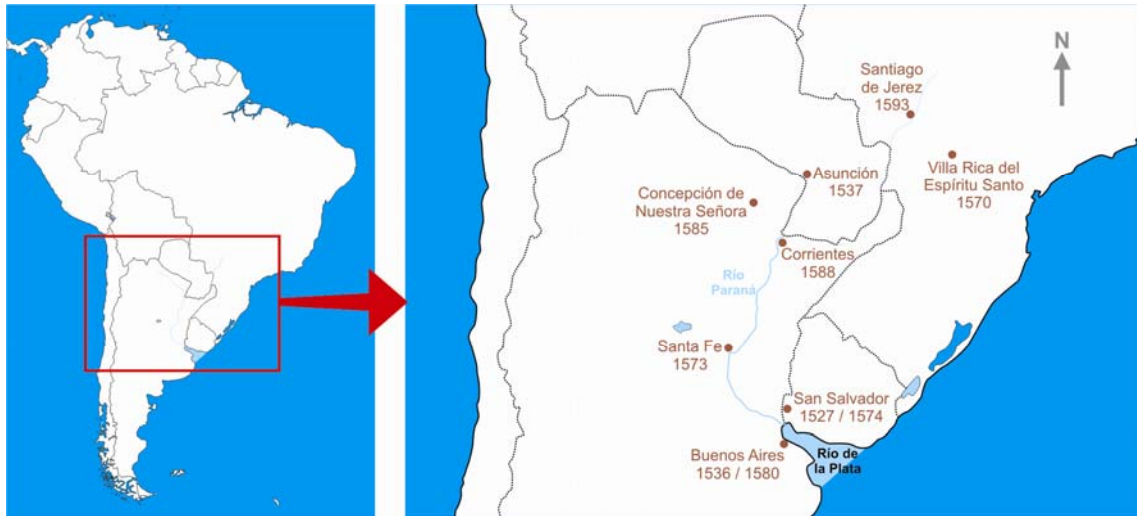
This 1615 document is the only one archived in Argentina to mention the eagle coat of arms.

With the exception of the 1580, 1591, and 1615 documents, there are no other written records of the eagle and eaglets on the coat of arms granted the city. Furthermore, there is no record of a coat of arms engraved by the silversmith Melchor Miguel, if he did ever serve his sentence.¹⁸

For example, when the first municipal banner of the city was made in 1605, the image of Garay’s coat of arms did not appear on it, but rather an image of the Virgin Mary.¹⁹

Unless the arms were used some time from 1580 to 1615 and forgotten after that and the documentation lost, apparently the coat of arms was never or seldom used. There are no known documents about the reason for this situation.

The most important point is that there are no images or representations of this coat of arms from the 16th and 17th centuries. It is not known if it was even drawn. There are no drawings of it in Argentine archives or in Spain.



Map of South America, with the approximate locations of the cities mentioned in the text (they appear inside the present-day international borders)

Illustrated by Francisco Gregoric

The coat of arms created by Jacinto de Láriz

On 5 November 1649, 34 years after the last known mention of the eagles on the coat of arms, the current Governor, Jacinto de Láriz,²⁰ called a meeting of the Cabildo proposing the creation of a coat of arms for the city of Buenos Aires. By this, we can conclude that Lariz had no knowledge of the existence of the first coat of arms. The minutes of that session of the Cabildo say:

“Lo cual todo oído y entendido y conferido por este Cabildo unánimes y conformes nomine discrepante acordaron que tenga las armas que aquí en este libro se pintan Esta ciudad que son los que abajo En esta Plana van señaladas atento no haberse hallado en el archivo de este cabildo y sus libros que haya tenido ni tenga hasta ahora armas alguna cuyo sello de armas sirva para sellar cualquier testimonios certificaciones pliegos cartas y demás recaudos necesarios”

English translation:

“Per what has been heard, understood, and given by this Cabildo in unanimity and in conformity, it is agreed that the arms for this City that are painted here in this book—aware that no previous one anywhere in the present or previous archives, documents, certifications, folio, letters, rent collections bills of this Cabildo are to be found, stamped on any document, books, or proceedings—it is agreed by this Cabildo that the city has the arms here painted to seal and stamp any folios, letters, and necessary bills.”

As clearly defined in the above transcription of the document, a drawing of the “new” arms was part of the text. The most important element in the “new” arms is the figure of a radiant dove flying over white waters with a partial anchor extending out of the waters over a blue

background. A scroll with the city's name "Ciudad de la Trinidad Puerto de Buenos Aires" (City of the Trinity, Port of Buenos Aires)²¹ was placed around the shield.

It is really very strange that only 34 years later after a reference to the eagles of the arms created by Garay, it was recorded that the city did not have a coat of arms at all. Maybe this had something to do with the extravagant personality of Governor Jacinto de Láriz, because even though the original documents of 1580 and the letter of 1591 asking for authorization of the coat of arms may have been lost in Buenos Aires, the document of the Cabildo of Buenos Aires of 1615 recorded the eagle as main device of the city arms.

Unlike the 1580 arms, the new coat of arms was never sent to Spain for its official approval, but the model created by Láriz—with some modification—it has continuously been used until the present.

In 1744, there was an order to restore a painting of the (Lariz) coat of arms, which had been made some time between 1649 and 1744 (the exact date when the painting was made is unknown). In this painting, the coat of arms of Buenos Aires appears hanging from a chain—like a medallion—below the Royal Spanish Arms. Outside and above the coats of arms, the image of the Virgin Mary (probably Our Lady of the Good Air) and Saint Martin of Tours, Holy Protector of the city, were placed. In the lower part there were two sailing ships.

On subsequent drawings of the coat of arms, these two ships became part of the coat of arms itself, gaining each time a bigger importance inside the coat of arms. This evolution can be seen since the second half of the 18th century and in all of the 19th century. This design finally became the present-day coat of arms of the city of Buenos Aires. The final design was approved in 1923.²²



1649



1744



1760



1887



1905



1923

The rediscovery of Garay's coat of arms

On 1876, Bartolomé Mitre²³ published the third edition of his work "Historia de Belgrano" (History of Belgrano) where he refers to Garay's coat of arms for the first time in historical studies. Mitre took the information from the Archivo de la Audiencia de Charcas, but he did not copy the document in which the coat of arms is described.

Years later, in 1887 the Cabildo's proceedings were published for the first time as a book, under the direction of Vicente Fidel López. This is the first time that the 1615 documents were made public. Because of a mistaken interpretation of the original document, the book mentioned “a pelican with five small pelicans” instead of the “eagle with five eaglets”.²⁴

In the following years, through contact with the Archivo General de Indias in Spain, the original documents of 1580 Garay's description and 1591 approval of the coat of arms were rediscovered.

As there were no images of the coat of arms anywhere, graphic reconstructions begun to appear. The first possible image of the coat of arms is by Alejandro Rosa in his book about commemorative medals published in 1895. On the cover of the book, there is an illustration of the crowned eagle rearing its eaglets. However, Rosa misunderstood the original description by Garay when reading “the cross that comes from the right hand higher than the crown” by putting an actual human hand with the cross, outside the shield in the form of a crest.



Illustration of the coat of arms taken from the book by Alejandro Rosa (1895)

In 1904, José Luis Cantilo, in his work about Juan de Garay, copied the 20 October 1580 document without trying to draw the coat of arms.

As mentioned, Father Antonio Larrouy and historian Serafín Livacich wrote their essays on the first coat of arms, both in 1905. In Livacich's work is a new image that recreates the arms,

imitating the heraldic style of late 16th century. But this image has a mistake also: the cross does not appear “*higher than the crown*”, as the 1580 text defined.

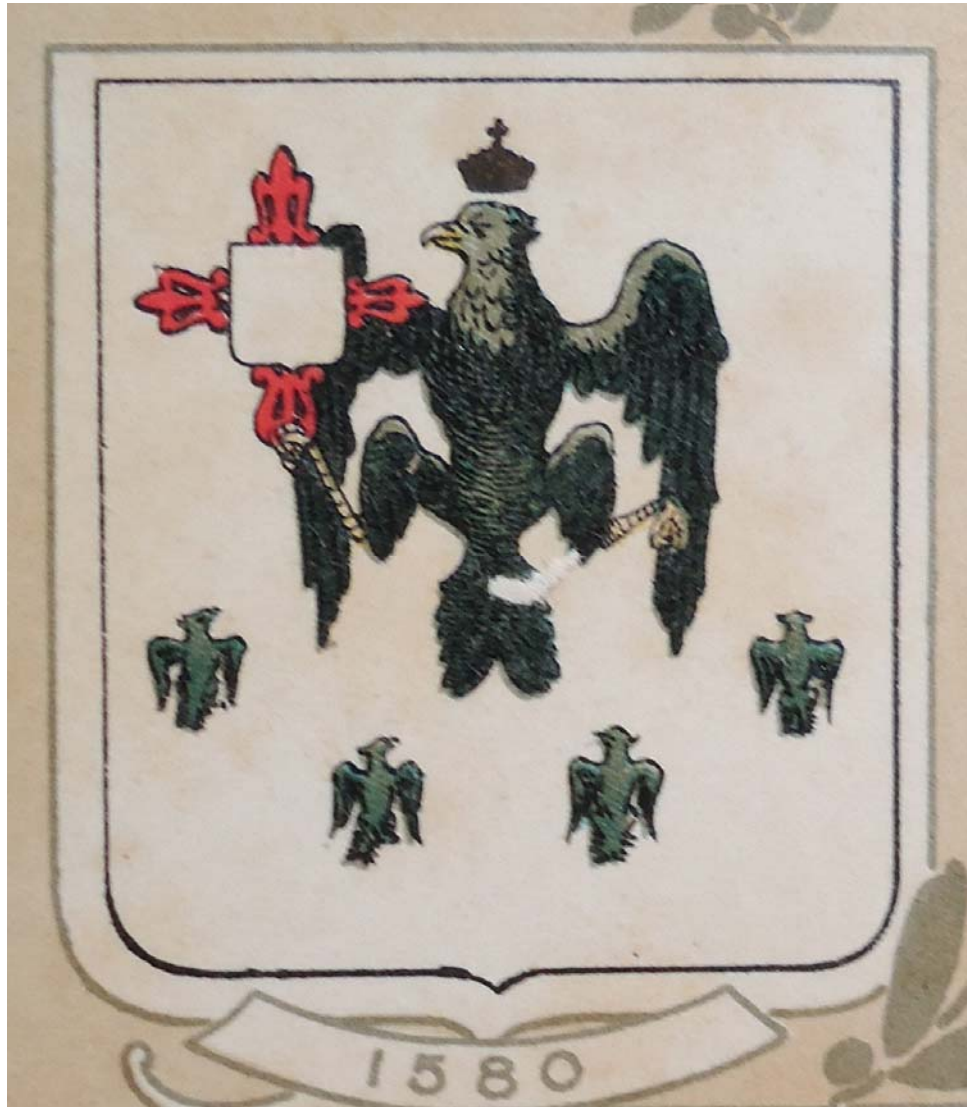


Illustration of the coat of arms taken from the work by Serafín Livacich (1905)

However, in 1909, Enrique Peña prepared his work about the Buenos Aires coat of arms. In order to show the first coat of arms, he worked with Spanish artist Manuel Velazco, who created the better-known image of the coat of arms. Peña requested the opinion of the Archivo General de Indias of his rendition. The Archives of Seville gave Peña an approval of his reconstruction and through an “official” certification of this representation of the arms. During the same year, the work was published for the first time as part of the volumes of the 1909 General Census.



Illustration by Enrique Peña and Manuel Velazco published in the General Census.

The strange thing about the image published in the General Census book is that the eagles are painted brown, not black. In the image a cross dripping blood can be seen. This is an erroneous interpretation of Garay's text. The idea of a "**bloody red cross**", as mentioned before, refers to the shade of red—it does not mean that the cross should literally drip blood. Another interesting detail of this image is that the eagle and the eaglets appear over a kind of nest on the ground.

A black and white photograph of this image appears in the same research by Peña, published as a separate book (in its three editions of 1910, 1944, y 1972).²⁵ Since then, this image of the coat of arms is the most often reproduced.



Illustration by Enrique Peña y Manuel Velazco
published in the book *El escudo de armas de la ciudad de Buenos Aires*

Notwithstanding the certification from the Archivo General de Indias, the image has a very naturalistic style closer to 20th-century designs than to 16th-century heraldry. The painting by Velazco looks almost like a photo of an eagle with its four “*children (eaglets)*”. Besides, the Calatrava Cross model of the Velazco image does not look like the ones used in the late 16th century, but more like later designs.

Velazco's design also makes a major heraldic mistake in depicting the eagle turning its head to its left (the right of the observer), probably in order to avoid a superimposition of the eagle's beak with the Calatrava Cross.

There are writings about a heraldic device looking to its left—that it means illegitimacy. Some authors have speculated that this might have been the reason for the short life of the 1580 coat of arms. However it must be said that this error occurred in the 1909 design by Velazco and it was not Garay's fault. And as mentioned, there are no known images of this coat of arms made in Garay's times.

For this reason, is the opinion of this author that the best image made of the coat of arms is the one by Serafín Livacich, published in 1905. Perhaps some minor changes in the Calatrava Cross and its position could be made in order to bring it closer to the heraldic style of the time and the description in the original document. In that way, the design could be closer to the possible look of the original one of 1580. However Velazco's version is the most frequently reproduced during the 20th century.

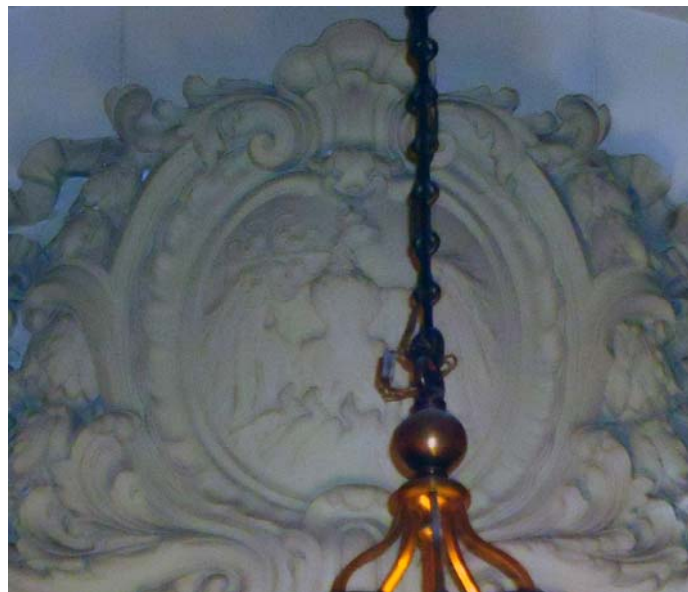
There is a building, built on early 1920s, where the coat of arms appears as a decorative bas-relief. The building, located in the Buenos Aires City neighborhood of Chacarita, belongs to the Municipal Government. Originally the building was the administrative office of a municipal incinerator, and houses an office of emergency services of the City.



Bas-relief with the coat of arms on a Municipal building

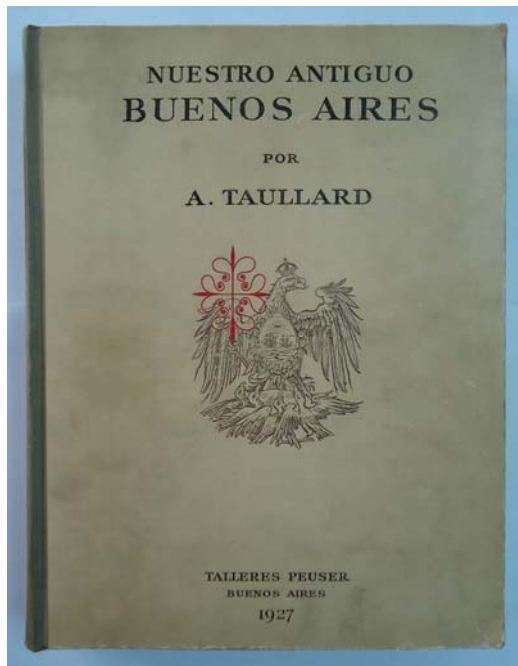
Photos by Francisco Gregoric

In the late 1920s during the building of the Concejo Deliberante de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Parliamentary Council of Buenos Aires City, today's City Legislature), the building was decorated with bas-reliefs of Garay's coat of arms that followed the design by Velazco. The blueprints of this building were approved by the government. Therefore the selection of Velazco's coat of arms version was not by chance.²⁶



Bas-relief in the Parliamentary Council of Buenos Aires City
(Today's City Legislature).
Photos by Francisco Gregoric

A curious version of Velazco's design of the coat of arms appears in the cover of the book *Nuestro antiguo Buenos Aires* (*Our old Buenos Aires*) by A. Taullard, edited in 1927. In this variant the official 1923 coat of arms of Buenos Aires City (the one with the dove and two ships) appears in the chest of the eagle. This second coat of arms, in the chest, appears between two laurel branches. A rising sun appears above the coat of arms. The laurel branches and the sun are taken from the Argentine national coat of arms.



Cover of the book *Nuestro antiguo Buenos Aires* (1927)

Inside the book is a small description, by Enrique Peña, of the coats of arms of the city of Buenos Aires. The image of Garay's coat of arms appears in its Velazco's variant, but in black lines, without any shadows. It appears that the original image was traced.



Image inside the book *Nuestro antiguo Buenos* (1927)

Even though the coat of arms created by Juan de Garay was not the official, its design was used in institutional elements of the municipal government, like, for example, in some commemorative plates.



Commemorative plates of the Municipality of Buenos Aires
Photo by Francisco Gregoric

Finally it is interesting to show another version of Garay's coat of arms, drawn by Architect Aquilino González Podestá for the cover of the book *Buenos Aires. Sencilla Historia. La Trinidad*, by Julio Ángel Luqui-Lagleyze, originally published in 1994.



Cover of the book *Buenos Aires. Sencilla Historia. La Trinidad* (1994)
Illustrated by Aquilino González Podestá

This image can be considered closer to the possible original arms. However there are two points that according to this author opinion are wrong: the cross dripping blood and the halo over the eagle's head. As it was explained before, the “bloody red cross” of the description was a heraldic way to refer to the color red, and did not mean that the cross was literally covered with blood. On the second point, no halo is described by Garay in the 1580 document.²⁷

As a conclusion, it can be said that all the images of the 1580 coat of arms have details which in one way or another differ from the probable original design.

The eagle coat of arms in the city's flag

In 1978, during an official visit by Spain's King Juan Carlos I and his wife, Queen Sofía, the city's mayor, Brigadier Osvaldo Andrés Cacciatore,²⁸ ordered several locations in the city decorated with images of Garay's coat of arms (the Velazco version). However, the colors of the coat of arms were changed. The eagles were painted gold instead of the original black, without any explanation of the reason for this change.

Two years later, in 1980, the city of Buenos Aires celebrated the 400th anniversary of its second and definitive founding by Juan de Garay. As part of the celebrations, Queen Sofía of Spain visited the city again, as along with several local and international official delegates.

As part of the celebration, Mayor Cacciatore ordered a white flag used, with the representation of the coat of arms created by Juan de Garay at the center. The central design used was the one drawn by Enrique Peña and Manuel Velazco in 1909. This flag was neither legalized nor normalized. It was a kind of *de facto* flag raised at official occasions and mainly used indoors in the office of municipal government executives, next to the Argentine national flag.²⁹

During the following years, the flag was used in municipal offices without any written rules, but always indoors. That is why the usage of the flag differed between offices and the flag was not very well known by ordinary citizens.

Because of this lack of normalization, in 1994 City Councilman José María García Arecha (member of the Unión Cívica Radical) conducted extensive research on the usage of the flag. He found out that there were no rules or any formal documents making the flag official. In order to fill this vacuum, García Arecha presented a proposed municipal ordinance to make the *de facto* flag official.

On 1995 the proposal was approved by the parliamentary groups of both the Unión Cívica Radical and the Partido Justicialista (Peronism).

The leftist groups of Frente Grande and Socialism were against the flag. Their councilmen (Aníbal Ibarra, Norberto La Porta, and María Elena Naddeo) accused the flag of being a symbol of oppression of the native peoples, emphasizing references to the cross with blood.

The Municipal Ordinance passed under number 49,669 on 28 September 1995. This Ordinance was promulgated by city's Mayor Jorge Domínguez on 24 October 1995. Finally on 6 November 1995 it was published in Municipal Bulletin No. 20,157, thus becoming official.

The text of the Ordinance said:

Art. 1 °. “Adóptese como bandera oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires el pabellón compuesto por fondo blanco, reproduciéndose en su centro la réplica del escudo creado por Juan de Garay el 20 de Octubre de 1580, integrado por un águila negra con su corona en la cabeza, cuatro hijos por debajo y una cruz colorada sangrienta que sale de su mano derecha”.

Art. 2°. “La bandera será rectangular, de un ciento cuarenta centímetros (140cm) de base por noventa centímetros (90 cm) de alto y el escudo se ubicará centralmente”.

Art. 3°. “La bandera adoptada por el artículo 1 ° acompañará a la bandera nacional en todos los actos oficiales y presidirá los despachos de los funcionarios de la Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires”.

Art. 4°. “Comuníquese juntamente con el dibujo que para mayor claridad acompaña, que forma parte de la presente ordenanza”.

English translation:

Art. #1. “It is adopted as the official flag of the City of Buenos Aires a banner with a white field, reproducing at its center a replica of the coat of arms created by Juan de Garay on 20 October 1580, made of an eagle with its crown on its head, four children (eaglets) below, and a blood-red cross that comes from its right hand (claw)”.

Art. #2. “The flag will be rectangular, of one hundred and forty centimeters (140cm) long by ninety centimeters (90 cm) high and the coat of arms will be located in the center”.

Art. #3. “The flag adopted by Article 1 will accompany the national flag in all official meetings and it will stand in the offices of the authorities of the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires”.

Art. #4. “Let this be published together with a drawing attached as part of this ordinance.”



Image of the flag's coat of arms published in the Official Bulletin of the city

During the first years after this legislation was passed, the flag was barely seen. It appeared indoors the offices of municipal authorities.

In 1996, the legal status of Buenos Aires changed. As a result of the National Constitutional Reform of 1994, Buenos Aires as a city began to enjoy greater autonomy, resulting in the direct election of the mayor by the people. (Before, municipal mayors had been chosen by the President of the Argentine Republic, because the city was the capital of the country.)

The city became the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires” (Autonomous City of Buenos Aires), and at last it started to function in nearly every way as another province. At first this did not imply major changes in the use of the flag. However, in 2000, when the Chief of Government (the new name for the mayor) was Enrique Olivera of the U.C.R., the city’s flag started to be known more. On 23 May of that year, a large flag staff was inaugurated on the Plaza República (Republic Square), next to the Obelisk located at the intersection of Avenues 9 de Julio and Corrientes.³⁰ This new flag staff was the companion of the old one on the other side of the Obelisk where the national flag had been raised for a long time.

Slowly, the flag started to appear outside in more offices related to the government of the city.

On 2005 the Legislature of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (the successor to the old Parliamentary Council) passed Law No. 1800, expanding the original text of Ordinance 49,669. The reformed legal text broadens the use of the flag to several offices of the City’s Government, Legislature, and Judicial Branch.³¹

Nowadays the flag flies on the buildings of the three powers of the City: the Government of the City (Executive), the Legislature, and the Justice Courts of the City (Judicial Branch). The flag also appears in the offices of the Ombudsman of the City and other control organizations. The flag is used in schools of the city as in corporations and companies owned by the city’s State as the Banco de la Ciudad (City’s Bank). Since 2010 the flag has been used by the new Policía Metropolitana (Metropolitan Police) in its offices and ceremonies.³²



Use of the city's flag on the Municipal Government building
Photo by Francisco Gregoric



A ceremonial city flag, indoors next to the national flag
Photo by Francisco Gregoric

Citizens do not usually fly the flag. This practice is neither permitted, nor legislated, nor prohibited, but it appears that citizens have not yet formed the custom of raising the city's flag. So far the flag of the city is more of a government symbol than a flag of the people.

Resistance and proposals to change the flag

During the discussions in the Parliamentary Council in 1995, there was resistance to the flag by the parliamentary groups of Frente Grande and Unidad Socialista (they soon merged in a bigger group named FREPASO or Frente País Solidario) made up of center-left and leftist politicians from Peronist and Socialist origins.

One of the major opponents of the flag design was then-Councilwoman María Eugenia Naddeo, who several times made arguments relating to “*violent conquest*”, to “*the cross with blood*”, and to the “*original (native) peoples*”.

However, acceptance of the flag passed with the votes of the Unión Cívica Radical and of the councilmen from the Partido Justicialista.

In 1997, by fulfilling the order of the reformed National Constitution in 1994, the city of Buenos Aires changed its status to an “Autonomous City”. Since then the people of the city have had their own local Constitution, as with any other Argentine province. They also could vote for their own “Chief of Government” (Before that the “Mayor” was chosen by the President of the Argentine Republic). The new legislative chamber changed from Councilmen to the new city “Diputados” (Representatives).

In order to write the local Constitution there was a Constituent convention. This convention was sovereign. That means that it could make changes in aspects of the city administration or its symbols. Although the strongest opponents of the flag with Garay’s coat of arms, the Frente Grande and the Socialists, were the largest group in the convention, they did not do anything to change the city’s flag. The convention only made a recommendation to the Chief of Government to organize an open contest to create a new coat of arms and flag for the city.

Soon after that, an open contest was held. The winning design was strongly criticized by historians and many others. As a result of this criticism, this symbol became a logo to identify the Government of the City, but not the City’s coat of arms.³³

The official flag and coat of arms continued unchanged: the coat of arms legislated in 1923 and the flag legislated in 1995.

Since 1998, there have been several attempts to modify the flag. Most of them came from leftist parliamentary groups, with the same ideas expressed in the 1995 debate. But some enthusiasm for a new flag also came from the center-right.

In 2000 Aníbal Ibarra, from the center-left FREPASO (at the time allied with the Unión Cívica Radical) became chief of government. Forming a coalition with the U.C.R. first and then with other political groups, Ibarra would be in charge of Buenos Aires government for five years. Even though the FREPASO had been opposed to the flag, it made no attempt to change the flag when it gained control of the executive government. The person who had been the biggest opponent of the flag, Councilwoman María Elena Naddeo also was an official in Aníbal Ibarra’s government.

The leftist representative of the city, Fernando Finvarb, attempted to change the flag but without success. He presented three proposed laws that were not passed.

During Ibarra's government, the most significant flag change proposals came from the center-right, but these proposals were not based on ideological ideas against the coat of arms. The parliamentary group *Compromiso con el Cambio* (which would become the PRO or *Propuesta Republicana*), the largest opposition parliamentary block in 2003–2007, presented proposals to organize a flag contest for the creation a new flag for the city. These proposals were just general ideas for an open contest, without making any definite plans as to how this contest would be organized. Nothing was said about when the contest was to be held or about who would be the jurors. If this idea had passed, it might well have had problems, unless it had been well defined.³⁴

In 2007, the center-right PRO assumed control of the City's Government, and since then attempts to try to change the flag have faded.

During 2010 and coinciding with the Bicentennial of the 1810 May Revolution, there were two parliamentary proposals to abolish the flag of the city. The ideas came from the left, again as an opposition block.

First, Representative Adrián Camps, from the leftist parliamentary group *Proyecto Sur*, presented a project to abolish the flag regulated in 1995. This project did not create a new flag, but left open the possibility in the future. Camps used the following idea, between others, to justify its proposal:

“The present-day flag of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires neither reflects at all the contents of the Constitution nor the thoughts of the habitants of the City of Buenos Aires. We live in a big, cosmopolitan, and democratic city. We do not deserve to have a flag that has authoritarian and monarchic symbols or that reflects by a “bloodied cross”, a religious hate that has nothing to do with the peaceful coexistence of all people that profess their beliefs with absolute liberty.

The native peoples that lived and live in our city, massacred by the colonial power in one of the most atrocious genocides of the history of humanity, do not deserve a colonial flag.

This justification once again confuses the color of the cross with a meaning of blood, hate, and genocide.³⁵

Another proposed law, by Representative María Elena Naddeo from the parliamentary group *Diálogo por Buenos Aires* identified with the former Chief of Government Aníbal Ibarra, called for organizing a flag contest with the participation of school children. This proposal suggested an 11-member jury but without any vexillological knowledge. The jury would make a pre-selection and the people would vote on the finalists.³⁶

Some of the justifications of this proposal were:

“the old Parliamentary Council of the City, a few months before the assembly of the Constituent Convention, proceeded with the adoption of an official flag before the approval of the Constitution of the City and with that the start of its incipient autonomy.”

But the Constituent Convention, being Sovereign body, could have abolished the symbols.

The text also says:

“the symbolic content of this flag recalls two aspects clearly opposed to the contemporary thought: the violent conquest, given the precise indication of ‘the bloody cross’ and the subjugation of the life and culture of the native peoples.”

The arguments are similar to those expressed by Representative Adrián Camps.

This flag matter arrived to the mass media and several letters to newspaper editors criticized the ideas proposed by Representatives Camps and Naddeo. A group of descendants of Basques in Argentina (Garay was of Basque origin), and the former city councilman José María García Arecha (author of the Ordinance of the flag),³⁷ explained that the founders of the city who traveled with Garay were mostly Creole from Asunción with a large percentage of children with a Spanish father and a Guaraní mother—in that way the city’s founding was a symbol of integration of both communities and *not* of genocide.

Many politicians offered public opinions, among them Representative (and former Chief of Government that did not change the flag) Aníbal Ibarra, who said that “in 1995 the city ordinance (on the flag) was passed” by the old Parliamentary Council “without being debated by the people” and that “surely most Porteños (people born in the city) have no relation to the Flag of the City”.

Both parliamentary groups that wanted to abolish the eagle flag begun to work together and called for a meeting of the City’s Legislature, where two historians spoke in support of changing the flag.³⁸

By the end of 2010 all these proposals came to nothing since none of these groups wanting to abolish the flag had enough votes in the chamber to do it.

It can be said, as a conclusion, that until now that proposals to change the flag usually come from the opposition parliamentary groups (the center-right was opposition from 2000 to 2006 and the left, in opposition since 2007), but when those groups reach the Executive Power of the city they desist in their plans.

Proposal for a flag to commemorate the city's Bicentennial

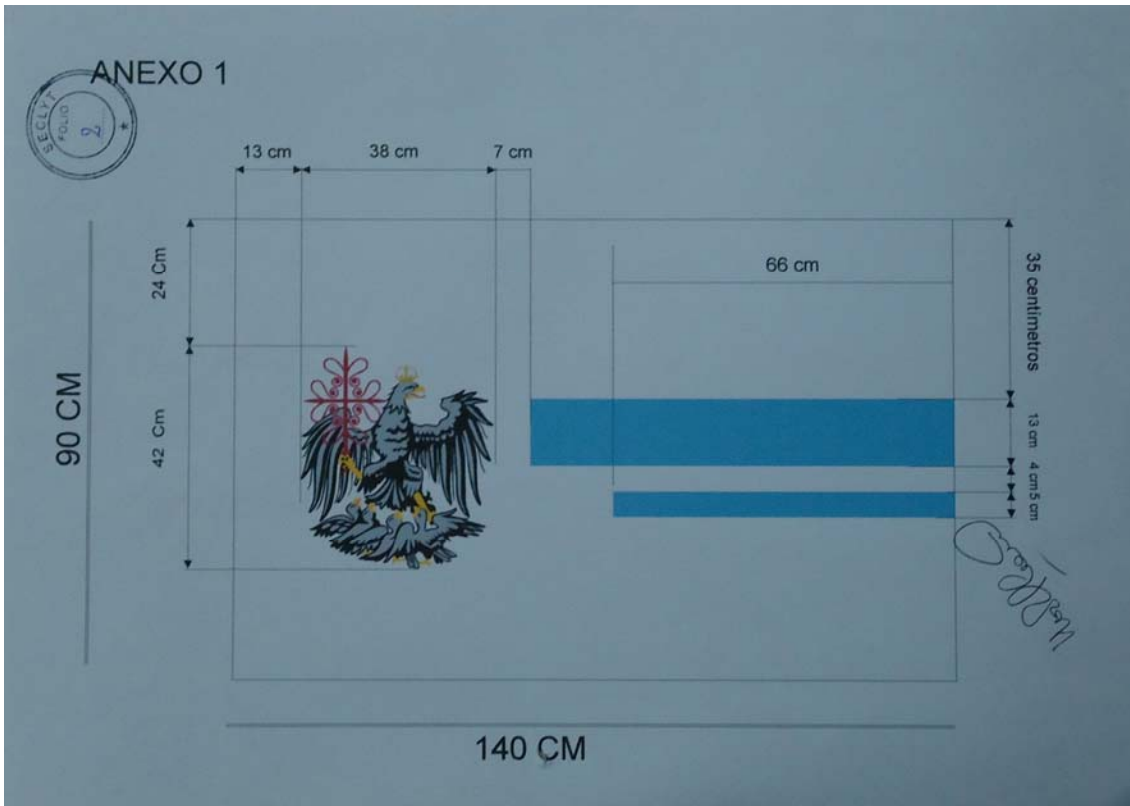
At the beginning of 2010, the Asociación Argentina de Vexilología (A.A.V.) was contacted by a Ceremonial officer of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires in order to ask its opinion on creating a commemorative version of the flag to celebrate the Bicentennial of the 25 May 1810 Revolution (not Independence but the first self-government of Argentina.) The idea was to use this commemorative flag during the 2010 celebrations.

The design of this commemorative flag erased the borders of the coat of arms. The eagles were smaller and it moved to 1/3 of the flag's length—close to the hoist. The design also added text above “Bicentenario de la gesta de mayo” (Bicentennial of May's Heroic Deed) and below “Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires” (Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires). Finally, two small horizontal stripes were placed between the eagle and the fly in order to recall the Argentine flag (in one of these stripes there was another text “1810–2010”).

The A.A.V. gave an unfavorable opinion of this idea on two basic points:

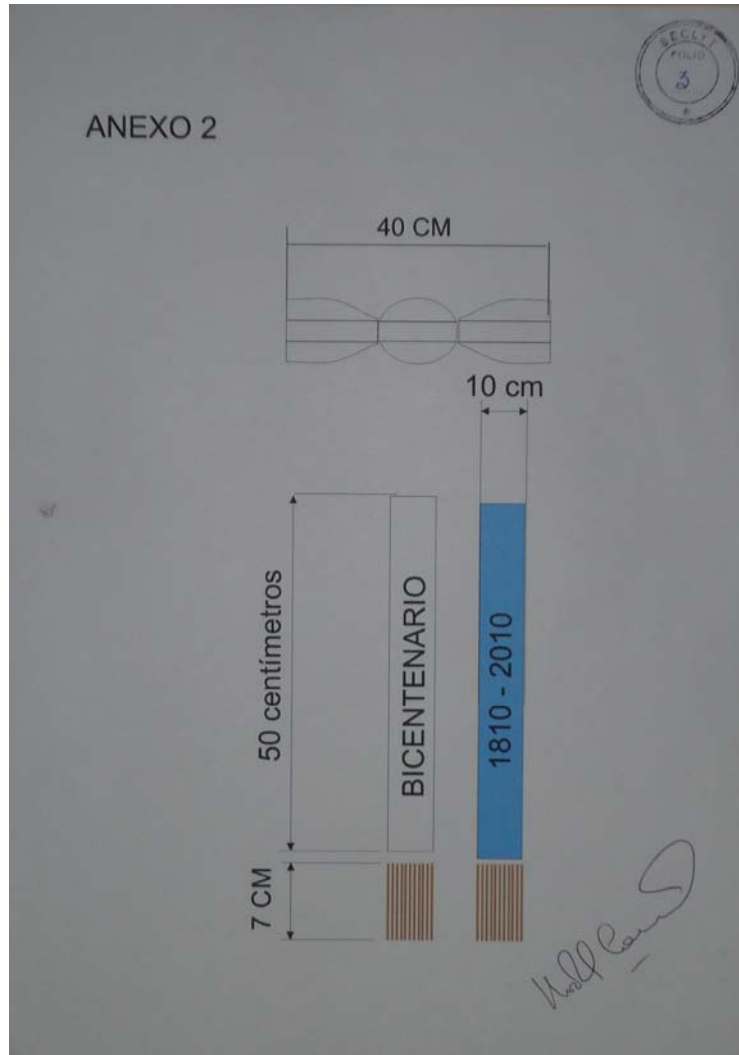
- The use of writing on flags is not recommended, a point with extensive consensus in the vexillological community.
- The proposed flag did not have in its design elements that recalled the first patriotic government of 1810 (the coat of arms of Garay was a symbol of the city's founding in 1580 and it was not used in 1810). The flag did not have any element that recalled the May 1810 Revolution.

Despite the recommendation, the office of protocol and ceremonial continued with its idea. It made a small modification and removed the text. This action resolved the first point that Asociación Argentina de Vexilología mentioned, but not the second. The A.A.V. communicated this point to the Ceremonial Office but its recommendation was not followed. The Chief of Government, Mauricio Macri, sent a proposal to the local Legislature to create the commemorative flag.



Proposal for the City's Commemorative Bicentennial flag

A special cravat or ribbon was created for the proposal



Cravat proposal for the City’s Commemorative Bicentennial flag

This project was under number 1354-J-2010.³⁹ In the letter presenting the proposal, the Chief of Government to the First Vice-President of the Legislature said the following:

“The initiative had the support of high level scholars of Vexillology and Heraldry, from national and international bodies.”

Even though the A.A.V. is in continuing contact with Vexillology and Heraldry scholars, we do not know who these mentioned vexillologists who approved this idea are!

The proposal for a commemorative Bicentennial flag failed to pass in the Legislature. It coincided with the leftist proposal to abolish the official flag of the city. Neither the center-right political party in the executive government, nor the leftist parliamentary groups that wanted to

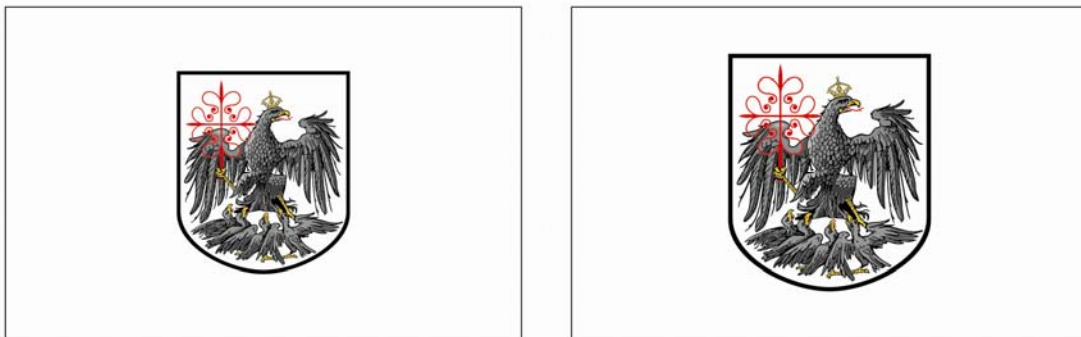
change the flag, had enough votes in the chamber. Other opposition political groups wanted to keep the flag as is without any of change. According to the city's Constitution, two-thirds of the Legislature's representatives (40 votes from a 60 member chamber) are necessary to change the city's symbols. Therefore nobody had the strength to make this kind of change. Things remained as they were before.

Vexillographic aspects of the flag of the City of Buenos Aires

The first vexillographic problem of the current flag is that the proportions are not correctly defined, neither of the flag itself nor its charge.

The legislation says that the flag should be 1.40 m x 0.90 m, defining a size instead of ratio or proportions. Following the text strictly someone could say that the only "flag of the city" would be the one with those defined dimensions. Therefore a bigger or smaller flag should not be the city's flag! It should be understood that smaller or bigger flags should follow that 9:14 ratio.

There is a problem with the internal proportions, too. Nowhere is the precise size of the coat of arms in center defined. By custom, there are flags where the width of the coat of arms is 1/3 of the flag's length. However, not all of the city's flags are that way—some of them have a larger coat of arms.



Relative sizes of the central coat of arms
Illustrated by Francisco Gregoric

The second problem is that vexillographically speaking the flag is very simple and at the same time very complex. It is simple because its design is a white field with a coat of arms in the center, but complex because the coat of arms is very detailed and complicated to reproduce and discern on a flag.

As mentioned, there are no images preserved of the coat of arms from Juan de Garay's times. Since the late 19th century there have been attempts to reproduce it. The better-known version is the one by Manuel Velazco for author Enrique Peña's work on the coat of arms of the city. As seen, the drawing was submitted to the General Archive of the Indies, which approved it by comparing it to the original 1580 description. However this approval was not correctly analyzed.

Velazco's image does not use the heraldic style of the late 16th century but rather the style of the late 19th or early 20th century. This can be seen in the style of the eagles and in the cross.

There is also the problem of the eagle looking in the wrong direction, Velazco's invention, as it was not defined in Garay's text.

But, no matter this error, it is really very complex to reproduce this very detailed image—it is almost like a photo. In particular, the eagle's feathers are drawn with a very high level of detail.

This kind of detail does not work when the flag flies by the wind in the distance. On the other hand, it is a very difficult to replicate the image from one flag to another. Even the Government of the City uses differing images on its flags. The images used in websites or graphic advertisements differ from those used in printed or embroidered flags. The problem runs deeper when the flags manufactured by private companies are added.

This problem can be seen in the following images.



Image of the flag's coat of arms used by the city government, in electronic format

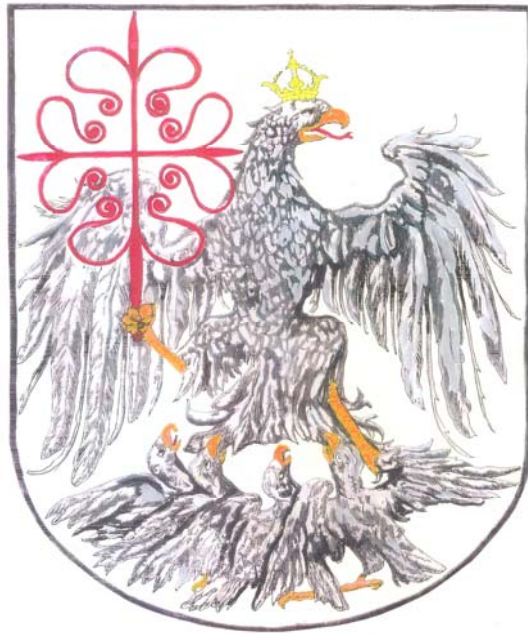


Image of the flag's coat of arms used by the city government to hand-paint flags
(It is used for creating huge flags)



Image of the flag's coat of arms, hand-painted



Image of the flag's coat of arms, printed (manufactured by a private company)



Image of the flag's coat of arms, embroidered



Another version of the flag's coat of arms, embroidered



Image of the flag's coat of arms, on a printed desk flag



Another version of the flag's coat of arms, on a printed desk flag



Image of the flag's coat of arms, on an embroidered desk flag



Another version of the flag's coat of arms, on an embroidered desk flag

As a curiosity, we can see an image of a flag patch with the design of the flag of Buenos Aires City.



Patch of the city's flag

The eagle was defined as black by Garay and also by the text of the city's flag law, but the images usually are in shades of gray or even embroidered in silver. Using silver is a big mistake because in heraldry silver is the same as white, not black.

The red color of the Calatrava is just defined by the legal text as "blood-colored", meaning blood red, but it is not standardized by any scale of colors.

The exact colors of the crown, beaks, and legs of the eagles are not defined at all anywhere in the legal text. It can be deduced that the crown should be gold, but it is most difficult to define the colors of the beaks and legs. These colors change from one flag to another—from yellow or orange to red.

An interesting detail is that the nest or ground that appeared in the original 1909 image by Manuel Velazco does not appear in the coat of arms of the flag.

Possible solutions

Without analyzing the problem whether or not the flag represents the present day City of Buenos Aires and if it should keep the symbolism of Garay's original coat of arms, some changes to the flag could make the design work better from a vexillographic point of view.

First of all, a simplified version of the coat of arms could be created, without trying to represent all the feathers of the eagle as in the current version. This way it would be much easier to reproduce the flag. It also would be interesting to represent the eagle with eaglets and the Calatrava Cross in a heraldic design closer to that of the 16th century instead of one of the early 20th century.

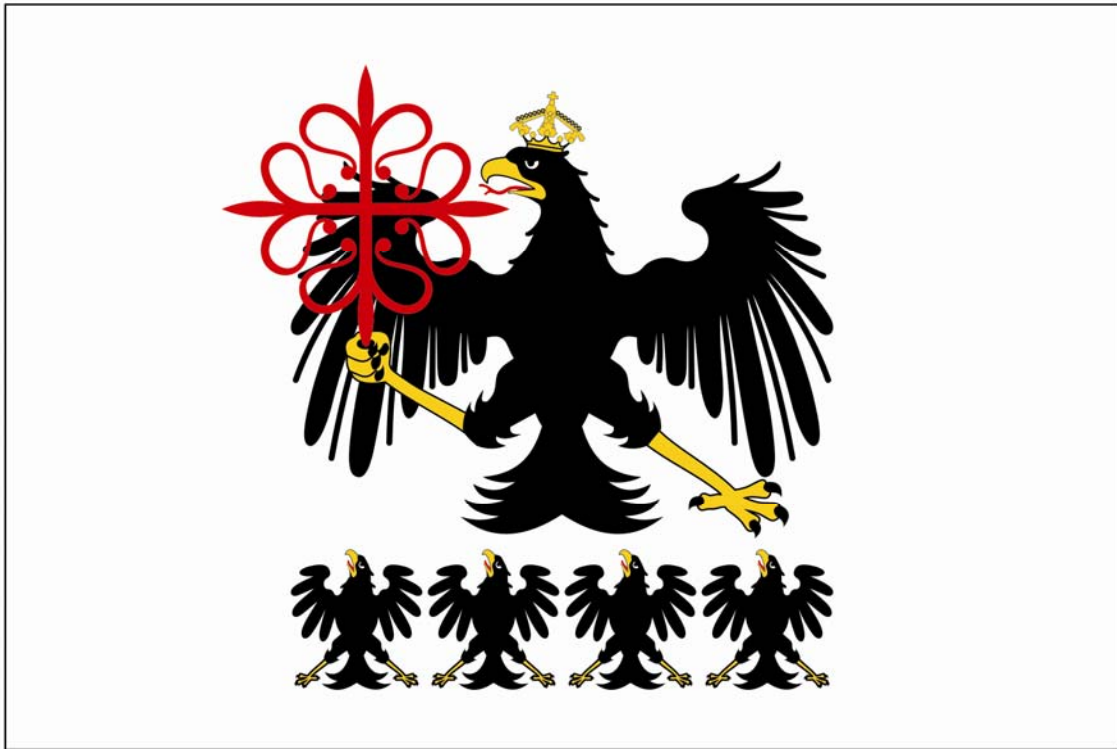
In the current version both the coat of arms and the flag itself have a white field. If a heraldic banner type of flag is the idea, the border of the coat of arms could be eliminated. The new "border" of the coat of arms would be the border of the flag.

Another vital goal would be the creation of a standard specification sheet in order to specify all the proportions of the flag and its parts. It would be important to determine a ratio and internal proportions instead of just one size or dimension, as the current description defines. In this way it would be easier to make smaller and larger flags.

The colors of the design should be defined correctly. The eagle could be plain black instead of the shadowed scale of grays used nowadays.

Finally, both the red color of the cross and the colors of crown, beaks, and legs should be defined in a normalized International standard of colors like CIELAB or Pantone®.

The upgraded flag might look like this:



Proposed and illustrated by Francisco Gregoric

Notes

¹ After Christopher Columbus reached the Americas in 1492 and confirmed that the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans were separated, the search for a passage between the two oceans was an important effort to improve routes of navigation and commerce. Juan Díaz de Solís (1470-1516) made a deal in 1514, with the Catholic King Ferdinand to look for that passage between the oceans. The following year he began an expedition that reached the Río de la Plata in 1516. He mistook it for the passage he was looking for, and entered the area to investigate it. Díaz de Solís was murdered soon after that by Charrúa or Guaraní natives. The true passage between oceans would be discovered in 1520 by the expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan.

² The Río de la Plata is considered the widest river in the world, 220 km. wide at its estuary, from Punta Rasa (Argentina) to Punta del Este (Uruguay). Geographically it is usually defined as a delta in formation, but continuous dredging for navigation prevents the delta from forming completely.

Solís mistook this wide opening as a sea but when he realized the water was fresh and not salty, it called “Mar Dulce” (Freshwater Sea). After that, when it was known that it not an passage between oceans but a river, Europeans called it “Río de Solís” (Solís River) to pay homage to its discoverer. Its final name of “Río de la Plata” (Silver River) was given because it was believed that in the area would have several silver deposits. That idea is also the origin of the words “Argentina” and “Argentinos”, which came from the Latin “Argentum”, meaning silver. Therefore “Argentinos” were the habitants of the Río de la Plata, but after that the word meaning expanded to all the habitants of present-day Argentine provinces.

³ The designation Virgin of Our Good Air, or more properly, Lady of the Fair Winds, has its origin in Cagliari (the present-day capital of Sardinia, Italy). According to the story, in 1370 a ship fully loaded with goods was about to sink during a big storm. Sailors threw all the cargo over the gunwale in an attempt to lighten the ship. When the last box touched the sea, the storm stopped. Then the box directed the ship to the Convent of Mercy in the Cagliari Gulf. Later, when the box was opened an image of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus was found inside. The image was baptized as “Nostra Signoria de Bonaria” or Our Lady of the Good Air. Since then she became the Holy Protector of sailors and navigators, who praying for good weather and fair winds to take them safely to their final destination. Buen Ayre or Buenos Aires, in Spanish.

⁴ The founder of the city, Pedro de Mendoza (1487-1537), was a Spanish noble and military man. He received the title of Adelantado in 1534, granted by the King Charles I (Emperor Charles V). In 1536, Mendoza arrived on the Río de la Plata where he founded the city of Santa María del Buen Aire on 3 February. The city did not follow the usual Spanish formalities for city founding. Soon after its founding, the habitants of the city had fights with the natives of the Querandí nation. This resulted in a lack of food for the Spaniards. For this reason, Pedro de Mendoza sent a small army to fight the Querandís. Mendoza’s army was defeated and at the end of 1536 the natives burned the city. Other military failures against the Querandís lead an ill Mendoza to return to Spain. However, he dies in 1537 before reaching Spain. That year another expedition, which left from Buenos Aires, founded Asunción Fort (Present day Paraguay). Finally, the remaining settlers of Santa María del Buen Aire left the city in 1541, going north to reach the area of Fort Asunción and transforming it into a city.

⁵ The coat of arms of the family Ortiz de Zárate was the following: Chief or charged with a crowned eagle displayed of sable of single head looking to the dexter, open beak and tongue of gules and spread wings with two crowns. An imperial crown on the dexter and a royal crown at the sinister. Field or five

panelas (Spanish heraldic device in the shape of hearts) of gules in saltire (souter). Helmet with a crest with phoenix of natural colors on fire with open wings. The reconstruction shown in this paper is based on the one shown by Enrique Peña in his 1910 book, but changing the shape of the coat of arms closer to one used in Spanish heraldic designs of the late 16th century instead of the one shown by Peña with a posterior shape.

⁶ The coat of arms of the family Torres de Vera was the following one: Field of three rows of vairs sable on argent. Bordure of gules charged with eight saltire crosses or. The shield is supported by a crowned eagle of sable with beak of gules holding a scroll with the motto “*veritas vincit*” (truth conquers). As in the case of the coat of arms of Ortiz de Zárate, the reconstruction shown in this paper uses the shape of the coat of arms closer to one used in Spanish heraldry of late 16th century instead of the one shown by Peña with a posterior shape. Manuel Figuerero in his 1921 work about the coat of arms of Corrientes shows the coat of arms of Torres de Vera this way. Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón founded Corrientes in 1583.

Gustavo Sorg, a historian and researcher from Corrientes, says that this reconstruction of the coat of arms of Juan Torres de Vera y Aragón is wrong. According to his research and analysis, the coat of arms should have been per pale, field of three rows of vairs sable on argent, bordure of gules charged with eight saltire crosses or. Paly of or and gules. The shield has a royal crown or and is supported by an eagle of sable with beak of gules holding a scroll with the motto “*veritas vincit*” (truth conquers).

An image of a reconstruction based on Sorg’s analysis is below.



However, the important point for this work is to show that the coat of arms had an eagle, in both possible reconstructions.

⁷ Saint Martin of Tours was born in Savaria Pannonia (present-day Hungary) on 316. He was the son of a member of the Roman military. For that reason Martin was a member of the Imperial Roman Army from a young age. It is told that while he was assigned to a military unit in present-day France, he was riding his horse when he saw a naked beggar freezing. As he did not have anything else to give the beggar, Martin cut his blue cloak with his sword, and gave it to the beggar. At night, Jesus Christ appeared to him in a dream, thanking him for the cloak. After this, Martin converted to Christianity and founded several monasteries in present-day France. Finally he was elected Bishop of Tours. He remained in that position for 27 years. He died on 8 November 397 and was buried three days later on 11 November. The half cloak that Saint Martin of Tours had cut for the beggar was preserved as a relic and a sanctuary was built to keep it. In Latin, the word “*capella*” means “small cape” for the way it looked after being cut. From this expression comes the word “chapel”. Saint Martin of Tours is a very important saint in France. The original blue color of France’s national flag derives from Saint Martin’s cloak.

⁸ The original text in old 16th-century Spanish says:

*“Este dia asi mismo platicaron sobre el fin y proposito con que el celo y voluntad del señor general y conquistadores vinieron a poblar y poblaron esta ciudad y que piden a su merced del señor teniente de governador que mande señalar armas á esta ciudad, sobre que se funde su blason, para que asi por su merced señaladas pidan confirmacion dellas a su magestad y entretanto usen dellas y del blason y el dicho señor general dixo que señala por armas desta ciudad **una aguila negra pintada al natural con su corona en la cabeça con quatro hijos debaxo demostrando que los cría con una cruz colorada sangrienta que salga de la mano derecha y suba más alta que la corona que semexe la dicha cruz a la de calatrava y lo cual esta sobre campo blanco** y estas dixo que señalaba y señalo por armas desta ciudad la rrazon de lo qual y del dicho blason es el aver venido a este puerto con el fin y proposito firme de ensalçar la santa fee catolica y servir a la corona rreal de castilla y de leon y dar ser y aumentar los pueblos desta generacion que a quarenta años que estan poblados y serrados e yvan en gran disminucion, y esto da por declaracion de las dichas armas”*

⁹ When the Calatrava Order was founded, the Iberian Peninsula was the scene of major struggles between Christians and Muslims. When the order was founded, the town of Calatrava was in an area of continuous struggle, on the border between the Christian Kingdom of Castile and the Muslim kingdoms of the South. In the latter years of that century the town was reconquered by the Muslims.

The continuing wars and importance of the order during the reconquest of the peninsula by the kingdoms of Castile and Leon gave the order prestige. In 1477, during the final phase of the reconquest, the Catholic King Ferdinand was elected as Master of the Order and since then all Spanish kings have held that honorary title.

In 1580, when the city of Buenos Aires was founded for the second time, the Order still enjoyed substantial prestige, due to its importance during the Reconquista (Reconquest) that had been completed just 90 years before.

The Calatrava Cross can be found today in several municipal flags and coats of arms of Spanish cities of the Province of Ciudad Real.

¹⁰ Villa Rica del Espíritu Santo had been founded in 1570 by Ruy Díaz de Malgrejo. The city was later resettled several times. Today it exists as the Paraguayan city of Villarrica del Espíritu Santo, capital of the department of Guairá. The original city founded in 1570 was located inside present-day Brazilian state of Paraná.

¹¹ San Salvador was originally a fort founded by Sebastián Gaboto in 1527. It lasted just two years, and then was abandoned. Later, in 1574, Juan Ortiz de Zárate re-founded it as Ciudad Zaratina de San Salvador. The city was abandoned again in 1576. It was located in the present-day Uruguayan department of Soriano.

¹² Concepción de Nuestra Señora was founded on 1585, in the present-day Argentine province of Chaco. The city was abandoned in 1632 because of the hostility of the natives.

¹³ Estanislao S. Zeballos (1854-1923), intellectual, politician, officer, representative, historian, and writer, wrote *El escudo y los colores nacionales* (The national coat of arms and colors) published in 1900. Thanks to his research, the design of the National Argentine coat of arms was normalized and standardized for the first time in 1907, as previous representations reflected artistic license. Zeballos's design was used until 1944 when it was replaced by the standard design used today.

¹⁴ The *Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias* (Royal and Supreme Council of Indies) was the office that advised the Spanish King on the administration of the Spanish territories in the Americas and in the Philippines. Through this office, the king could make all necessary decisions for the administration of the territories. The Council was originally created on 14 September 1519 and it was an important institution until the 18th century when reforms made by the Bourbon Kings withdrew some of its functions. During the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, the Council ceased its functions; they were restored after Spain became free. Finally, in 1834, when most of the old Spanish territories had become independent, the Royal Council of Indies ceased to function.

¹⁵ The original text in old 16th-century Spanish says

“en quanto la dicha ciudad pide se le confirme la fundacion de la dicha ciudad y los capitulos y mercedes que en su rreal nombre diço el general juan de garay e particularmente las armas que le señalo – dixeron que las señalaban y señalaron por armas las quel dicho juan de garay les señalo y se les de cedula para que la dicha ciudad pueda usar y use dellas”

¹⁶ The *Archivo General de Indias* (General Archive of the Indies) is located in Seville, Spain. It was founded in 1785 by the King Charles III in order to preserve in one place all the documents related to the discovery, exploration, conquest, and history of the Spanish Americas.

¹⁷ Santiago de Jerez was founded in 1593 by Ruy Díaz de Guzmán. It was located in an area that today is part of the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul. It was relocated several times. It was finally abandoned in the first half of the 17th century.

¹⁸ Adolfo Garretón, in his 1940 work *El primer escudo de Buenos Aires* (*The first coat of arms of Buenos Aires*), says that the correct name of this silversmith should have been Miguel Pérez because that person was the only silversmith confirmed to have resided in Buenos Aires in that time. According to this, the name in the 1615 text, “Melchor Miguel”, is apparently wrong.

¹⁹ The first banner of the Buenos Aires Cabildo (City Hall) was donated by the Contador de la Real Hacienda (Royal Estate Controller) Fernando de Vargas Machuca in 1605. It was a red banner with the image of the Virgin Saint Mary of Buenos Aires on one side and the Spanish royal coat of arms on the other side. It did not have the image of the eagle coat of arms created by Juan de Garay. This banner was shown in the streets of the city for the first time on 11 November 1605, the day of Saint Martin of Tours,

Holy Protector of the City. Nowadays it is preserved in the Museo Histórico Nacional del Cabildo y de la Revolución de Mayo, in Buenos Aires, being the oldest vexillological item in an Argentine museum.

²⁰ Jacinto de Láriz was a Spanish military man, a member of the Order of Jacques, and Governor of Buenos Aires from 1646 to 1652. He was considered “the crazy governor” because of his extravagant, illegal and even dictatorial attitudes. He showed great contempt to the City Hall members and also to the city’s Bishop, Cristóbal de la Mancha y Velasco. Láriz did not respect the rules of religious ceremonies and he also committed several acts of corruption and through a state of paranoia, persecution against people he considered opponents. The bishop began the process of excommunication against Láriz three times. When he was not behaving as madman, Láriz would take naps in his underwear reclined in seats located outdoors next to the main square. Finally in 1652, when a new Governor arrived, Láriz was detained and sent to Lima to be tried. There, under his own recognizance, he was given the whole city of Lima as his jail, but he broke his gentleman’s word and escaped from the city. When he was captured, the authorities sent him to Spain where he was tried again. He was found guilty and became disqualified to work as a state officer. He was prohibited to travel close to the Americas. He had to pay compensation and he was condemned to exile. The creation of the second coat of arms of Buenos Aires in 1649 is probably one of his few good actions of government. However it was a strange decision because the city already had an adopted and approved coat of arms.

²¹ The meaning of the coat of arms of Buenos Aires created by Jacinto de Láriz is the following: the dove stands for the Holy Spirit, one of the three figures of the Holy Trinity. Trinidad (Trinity) was the name of the city. The dove flies over water with an anchor. This showed the idea of the city as a harbor. After that, when the representation of the coat of arms received colors, the water was painted white (silver or “plata” in Heraldry) for the name of the Río de la Plata, and the upper half was sky blue for the sky. These are common colors used in the images of the Virgin Mary. This is probably the origin of the Argentine colors of sky blue and white.

²² The proposed municipal ordinance was prepared by Councilman Eduardo Crespo, who worked on a design based on the evolution of the coat of arms created by Jacinto de Láriz. Before sending his proposal for consideration, Crespo consulted several historians with a deep knowledge of the national symbols. Almost all these experts agreed on the idea of using a design based on the coat of arms created by Láriz instead of the one created by Garay.

²³ Bartolomé Mitre (1821-1906) was a politician, military man, historian, journalist, and President of Argentina from 1862 to 1868. He is considered the father of historical research in Argentina. He first published his work *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia Argentina (History of Belgrano and the Argentine Independence)* in 1856. His following editions were updated and corrected. The second edition was published in 1858-59, the third in 1876, and the fourth and definitive one in 1887. He is also the author of *Historia de San Martín y de la emancipación sudamericana (History of San Martin and the South American emancipation)*. He was the founder of the newspaper *La Nación* in 1870. This newspaper still exists and it is one of the most widely read in Argentina.

²⁴ Adolfo Garretón, in his 1940 work *El primer escudo de Buenos Aires (The first coat of arms of Buenos Aires)*, explains this error. In 1887 the *Acuerdos del extinguido Cabildo de Buenos Aires (Proceedings of the Extinct City Hall)* were published as a book for the first time, under the direction of Vicente Fidel López (1815-1903), son of Vicente López y Planes, author of the lyrics to the Argentine National Anthem. When the 26 October 1615 document (where the coat of arms is described) was copied, a error was made by interpreting the old hand-written word as “pelicano” (pelican) instead of the correct one “águila” (eagle). In 1887, López was unaware of the information of the 1580 and 1591 documents,

because they were not preserved with the Cabildo of Buenos Aires documents. That is why he did not know that the first coat of arms of Buenos Aires had an eagle with the small eaglets.

Vicente Fidel López, or someone from his work team, may have known the heraldic meaning given to the pelican during the Middle Ages, as a bird that, supposedly, when it did not have any food to feed his chicks, cut his own chest in order to feed them with his own blood (an allegory of Jesus Christ). This erroneous 1615 coat of arms of Buenos Aires with a pelican was reproduced by several historians, because of the work by Enrique Peña, who presented this concept of a pelican's coat of arms.

²⁵ In the final part of his book *El escudo de armas de Buenos Aires: Disquisición histórica*, Enrique Peña copies the certification of the Archivo General de Indias about the drawing by Manuel Velazco. The text in Spanish is:

“Don Vicente Lloréns Asensio, Secretario del Archivo General de Indias, en Sevilla:

Certifica; que el Escudo de armas que acompaña a esta certificación y que lleva mi firma y el sello de este Archivo, está de acuerdo con la descripción contenida en un documento que se conserva en el mismo, titulado “Traslado de los autos proveídos por el General Juan de Garay, fundador de Buenos Aires sobre el orden que había de guardarse en el repartimiento á sus pobladores de tierras, solares, estancias, &. – Trinidad de Buenos Aires 17 de Octubre de 1580, - Estante setenta y cuatro, cajón cuatro, legajo diez y ocho” y en uno de sus párrafos dice lo siguiente:

*“Este dia asi mismo platicaron sobre el fin y proposito con que el celo y voluntad del señor general y conquistadores vinieron a poblar y poblaron esta ciudad y que piden a su merced del señor teniente de gobernador que mande señalar armas á esta ciudad, sobre que se funde su blason, para que asi por su merced señaladas pidan confirmacion dellas a su magestad y entretanto usen dellas y del blason y el dicho señor general dixo que señala por armas desta ciudad **una aguila negra pintada al natural con su corona en la cabeça con quatro hijos debaxo demostrando que los cría con una cruz colorada sangrienta que salga de la mano derecha y suba más alta que la corona que semexe la dicha cruz a la de calatrava y lo cual esta sobre campo blanco** y estas dixo que señalaba y señalo por armas desta ciudad la rrazon de lo qual y del dicho blason es el aver venido a este puerto con el fin y proposito firme de ensalçar la santa fee catolica y servir a la corona rreal de castilla y de leon y dar ser y aumentar los pueblos desta generacion que a quarenta años que estan poblados y serrados e yvan en gran disminucion, y esto da por declaracion de las dichas armas”*

/
Y para que conste, donde convenga, á petición del Señor Don Enrique Peña, y en orden del Señor Jefe de este Archivo, expido la presente en Sevilla á tres de Mayo de mil novecientos y nueve.

²⁶ The cornerstone of the Parliamentary Council building, located across Plaza de Mayo, was laid in 1926. Construction started in 1927 and the building was finished in 1931. Its neoclassical architectural design was a work of Architect Héctor Ayerza. It was used as Parliamentary Council until 1943 when there was a coup. During the first two governments of General Juan Domingo Perón (1947-1955) there was no parliamentary council for the city and the Fundación Eva Perón was located in the building. After Peron's overthrow the building reassumed its parliamentary functions. Today it continues to have a legislative function, as the Legislature of the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

²⁷ The halo appears in the Saint John Eagle that is part of the Spanish coat of arms used during the time of the Catholic Kings, because the bird is an iconographic representation of Saint John, one of the four Evangelists. The other three Evangelists are represented by the Angel (as the symbol of Saint Matthew), the Lion (as the symbol of Saint Mark) and the Ox (as the symbol of Saint Luke). According to this

author's opinion, Garay did not make any reference to Saint John when describing the coat of arms. Therefore, this eagle did not stand for him and no halo should be represented on the eagle's head.

²⁸ Brigadier Osvaldo Andrés Cacciatore (1924-2007) was Municipal Mayor of the City of Buenos Aires from April 1976 to March 1982. He was the second Mayor designated by the *de facto* President Jorge Rafael Videla after the coup of 24 March 1976.

²⁹ In an interview, former Senator and Councilman José María García Arecha said that this flag was already used unofficially by the municipal government since the mid-1960s, during the municipal administration of Mayor Francisco Rabanal (1963-1966). According to García Arecha, this white flag with the coat of arms was also used in the early 1970s.

³⁰ The Obelisco (Obelisk), is one of the better known symbols of Buenos Aires City. It was built in 1936 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the city's first founding by Pedro de Mendoza. Its site also recalls the place where the national flag was raised within Buenos Aires City for the first time on 23 August 1812. At that time, the Church of Saint Nicholas of Bari was located there. That church was moved when the Avenue (Boulevard) 9 de Julio was opened. The Obelisco is 67.5 m high and its interior cannot be visited as one can the Washington Monument of Washington D.C. Only municipal maintenance employees can go inside the Buenos Aires Obelisk. A small staircase inside accesses the top.

³¹ The text of the Municipal Ordinance number 49,669, modified by Law No. 1800 of 2005, and in force present day is the following (in Spanish):

Art. 1°.- “Adóptese como bandera oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires el pabellón compuesto por fondo blanco, reproduciéndose en su centro la réplica del escudo creado por Juan de Garay el 20 de Octubre de 1580, integrado por un águila negra con su corona en la cabeza, cuatro hijos por debajo y una cruz colorada sangrienta que sale de su mano derecha”.

Art. 2°.- “La bandera será rectangular, de un ciento cuarenta centímetros (140cm) de base por noventa centímetros (90 cm) de alto y el escudo se ubicará centralmente”.

Art. 3°.- “La bandera adoptada por el artículo 1° acompañará a la bandera nacional en todos los actos oficiales y los desarrollados en las escuelas e institutos educacionales de gestión pública y privada.”

Art. 3° bis.- “La bandera de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires presidirá los despachos del señor Jefe/a de Gobierno, de los señores Secretarios/as, Subsecretarios/as y Directores/as Generales del Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, así como también las oficinas del personal jerárquico de los organismos descentralizados, entidades autárquicas, organismos de la seguridad social, las empresas y sociedades del Estado, sociedades anónimas con participación estatal mayoritaria, sociedades de economía mixta y todas aquellas otras organizaciones empresariales donde el Estado de la Ciudad tenga participación mayoritaria en el capital o en la formación de las decisiones societarias.”

Art. 4°.- “Comuníquese juntamente con el dibujo que para mayor claridad acompaña, que forma parte de la presente ordenanza”.

Art. 4° bis.- “El Poder Judicial, el Consejo de la Magistratura y la Legislatura de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires dictarán las reglamentaciones necesarias para garantizar la presencia del pabellón de la ciudad en todos los despachos y oficinas de los Jueces/as, Diputados/as y demás personal jerárquico”.

La Ley 1800 que reforma la Ordenanza original fue publicada en el Boletín Oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires N° 2326 del 25 de noviembre de 2005

³² The Policía Metropolitana (Metropolitan Police) is a new police department under the command of the Buenos Aires City Government. It was created to deal with the security in the City of Buenos Aires. It was created by Law 2894 of the city on 2008. It started its activities at the beginning of 2010.

³³ The winners of the contest in 1997 (when Fernando De la Rúa was the city's Mayor) were graphic designers Carlos Bastas and Juan Carlos Federico. The winning design simplified to the end the elements of the Jacinto de Láriz coat of arms. This synthesis was so extreme that the dove disappeared, the two ships became one silhouette similar to a ship, and the waves of the bottom half were also simplified. There were a lot of complaints by historians about this logo. It was never voted on by 2/3 of the Legislature. Therefore it never became the official coat of arms of the city, but it was used as a logo by the City Government. It was unofficially known as "the fork" because of its shape, by the employees of the municipal government. It was used between 1997 and 2000, approximately.

In 2003 (during the government of Aníbal Ibarra) it was replaced as logo of the City Government for another image (closer to the Lariz's coat of arms). This model was a simplified version of a woodcut created by artist Juan Antonio Spotorno and published in 1939.

At the end of 2007, Mauricio Macri came to lead the government and the logo was changed again. Since the beginning of 2008 there is a new logo where all the elements of Jacinto de Láriz's coat of arms disappear.



1997



2003



2008

These designs have been only used as logos of the Government, and each administration has changed them so far, in order to differentiate itself of the previous one. However, the official coat of arms of Buenos Aires City continues to be the design adopted in 1923.

³⁴ The proposed law to change the flag 347-D-2004 (presented again in 2006 as 1387-D-2006) presented by Representative Gabriela Michetti says (in Spanish):

PROYECTO DE LEY

Artículo 1° El Poder Ejecutivo, a través del organismo correspondiente y dentro del plazo de tres meses, contados desde la promulgación de la presente ley, deberá convocar a los ciudadanos y demás

organizaciones sociales a concurso abierto de proyectos para el diseño de la Bandera de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

Artículo 2° La Bandera de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires deberá ser izada, conforme las formalidades previstas en el decreto 1997/1944 (B.M. N° 7163); en el frente y en las demás puertas de acceso, que no estén ubicadas en el frente, de todos los inmuebles públicos de organismos centralizados y entes descentralizados de la administración pública de la Ciudad, entidades públicas no estatales, las sedes administrativas de las empresas privadas que presten servicios públicos exclusivamente dentro del ámbito de la Ciudad, Sociedades del Estado y organismos interjurisdiccionales.

Artículo 3° Lo dispuesto en el artículo anterior será de aplicación a los inmuebles que estén destinados a establecimientos educativos oficiales y privados, museos públicos y privados, tribunales con jurisdicción local, Poder Legislativo y cualquier otro que la reglamentación establezca.

Artículo 4° Todos los despachos donde cumplan sus funciones el Jefe de Gobierno, Secretarios, Subsecretarios, Diputados y Jueces locales deberán exhibir una bandera local.

Artículo 5° La bandera de la Ciudad deberá ser reemplazada una vez por año o antes, cuando su deterioro lo haga estrictamente necesario.

Artículo 6° El Poder Ejecutivo deberá entregar, en un plazo no mayor a seis meses, contados a partir de la promulgación de la presente ley, un mástil y su correspondiente bandera, conforme el número de puertas de acceso y despachos que existan en los organismos mencionados en los artículos precedentes.

Artículo 7° El Poder Ejecutivo deberá reemplazar, en un plazo no mayor a seis meses, contados a partir de la promulgación de la presente ley, todas aquellas banderas que se encuentren deterioradas.

Artículo 8° El funcionario responsable que no cumple con lo dispuesto en esta ley incurrirá en falta grave y será pasible de las sanciones que corresponda por parte de sus superiores jerárquicos. Los establecimientos privados a que se refieren los artículos precedentes que infringieran la presente ley serán objeto de multa de \$ 5.000 a \$50.000, que deberá ser fijada por el organismo público bajo cuya jurisdicción se halle.

Artículo 9° Los gastos que ocasione el cumplimiento de esta ley serán imputados a la partida presupuestaria correspondiente.

Cláusula transitoria 1° Hasta tanto no se realice el concurso abierto y se obtenga un diseño ganador, deberá ser entregada la bandera de Ciudad con su diseño actual (Ordenanza 49.669 B.M.20.157).

Artículo 10°. Comuníquese, etc

Señor Presidente: ...

Después de la Reforma Constitucional del año 1994 la Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires deja de ser tal para pasar a ser una Ciudad con gobierno autónomo y con facultades de legislación y jurisdicción propias. Así se convocó a una Convención Constituyente, que dio origen a la Constitución de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, y fue en el marco de dicha convención y del espíritu renovador,

que se sancionó la resolución, en la cual se encomendaba al Jefe de Gobierno la convocatoria a concurso abierto a fin de obtener nuevos símbolo para la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

Es dentro de este contexto que en el año 1996, mediante decreto N° 557/96 se convoca a concurso abierto, y finalmente a través del decreto 1.338/99 (BOCBA N° 738) se aprueba el nuevo escudo institucional. Sin embargo, en lo atinente a la bandera local no ha sucedido lo mismo. Es por ello, que se hace necesario convocar a concurso abierto a fin de obtener una nueva bandera, que simbolice el cambio institucional por el que está atravesando la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

Por otra parte, si bien dentro del ámbito municipal habían sido sancionadas normas en relación con el izamiento, formalidades y ubicación de la Bandera, ellas hacían referencia a la Nacional, ni siquiera aún después de la creación de la bandera local actual se sanciona una regulación que cubrió este vacío; es de este modo que esta ley, viene a subsanar la falta de regulación con relación a los lugares, en los cuales debe ser izada la bandera, las formalidades que deben seguirse, además del modo y plazos en los cuales debe ser reemplazada.

En virtud de ello es que se ha previsto el izamiento de la Bandera local no solo en los frentes de los edificios, sino también en todas las puertas de acceso que no se hallen ubicadas en el frente. Sin embargo ello no excluye, que además de los lugares mencionados no se las pueda colocar en otros lugares que se estime conveniente. Han sido incluidos no solos los inmuebles pertenecientes a la administración centralizada, sino también los que pertenezcan a los entes descentralizados, entidades públicas no estatales, las sedes administrativas de las empresas privadas que presten servicios públicos exclusivamente dentro del ámbito de la Ciudad, Sociedades del Estado, organismos interjurisdiccionales, entidades educativas oficiales y privadas, museos públicos y privados, tribunales con jurisdicción local y el Poder Legislativo. También se ha establecido un plazo para el reemplazo de las banderas locales, con el fin de evitar el deterioro excesivo de aquellas, de todas maneras se ha producido una excepción al plazo anual para cuando el deterioro de la bandera haga necesario su reemplazo en un termino menor.

Asimismo se prevé la obligación de todos los despachos oficiales, donde el Jefe de Gobierno, los secretarios y subsecretarios, los diputados y jueces locales ejerzan sus funciones deberán poseer una bandera de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

Por las consideraciones expuestas es que se propone la pronta sanción de esta ley.

³⁵ The proposed law 1299-D-2010 by representative Adrián Camps is the following (in Spanish):

PROYECTO DE LEY

BANDERA DE LA CIUDAD DE BUENOS AIRES

Art. 1°. Derógase la ordenanza N° 49.669

Art. 2°. Mientras la Legislatura de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires no adopte una nueva bandera, la bandera nacional estará presente en todos los actos oficiales y presidirá los despachos de los funcionarios de la Ciudad.

Art. 3°. De acuerdo con las atribuciones otorgadas a la Legislatura en el artículo 89 de la Constitución; se dispone que la aprobación, derogación o modificación de los símbolos de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires tienen procedimiento de doble lectura.

Art. 4°. Comuníquese, etc.

Sr. Presidente

La ordenanza N° 49.669 del 31 de agosto de 1995, estableció la adopción de una bandera oficial para la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Dicha resolución dice en su Art. 1°: “Adóptase como bandera oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires el pabellón compuesto por fondo blanco, reproduciéndose en su centro la réplica del escudo creado por Juan de Garay el 20 de octubre de 1580, integrado por un águila negra con su corona en la cabeza, cuatro hijos por debajo y una cruz colorada sangrienta que sale de su mano derecha”

En la página oficial del Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, se encuentra una detallada explicación histórica acerca de los elementos que conforman el escudo que ilustra la bandera de la Ciudad: “Está integrado por un águila negra, la cruz de Calatrava y una corona como símbolo del reinado de Castilla y León y cuatro aguiletas que representan las cuatro ciudades que debían fundarse. La primera fue Santa Fe, la segunda La Trinidad. Las otras dos ciudades fundadas después de la muerte de Garay habrían sido Concepción de Nuestra Señora, a orillas del Río de Vera y Aragón y la ciudad de Vera, luego llamada San Juan de Vera de las Siete Corrientes”. Al mencionar La Trinidad, se refiere a Buenos Aires.

Queda claro, según la información brindada por el Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires que nuestra bandera contiene el símbolo monárquico del imperio español, representado por la corona que lleva el águila negra en su cabeza.

Respecto del águila, según la Universidad del Salvador, reproduce el escudo de Austria. Según el Gobierno de la Ciudad, el águila formaba parte del blasón del adelantado Ortiz de Zárate, que fue quien ordenó a Juan de Garay la fundación de las ciudades. Si tenemos en cuenta que la casa gobernante de España tenía su origen en Austria, no parece haber mayor contradicción

Siguiendo con la información brindada por la página oficial del Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires puede leerse que “En 1591, el Real Consejo de Indias, aceptó como armas las que le dio Garay, permitiendo a la ciudad utilizarlas” Surge de este párrafo que nuestra bandera, en realidad, fue aprobada por el Consejo de Indias y que la ordenanza que proponemos derogar ratificó la decisión de este organismo representativo del colonialismo español.

Un capítulo especial merece la “cruz colorada sangrienta” que menciona la ordenanza y que en realidad es la cruz de Calatrava, un símbolo de una orden militar española. De acuerdo con la explicación oficial del Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. “La Orden Militar de Calatrava, fue la mas antigua e importante entre las españolas....y se originó en la defensa de la Villa de Calatrava frente a los ataques de musulmanes” podemos leer mas adelante: “La orden de Calatrava adquirió una posición de privilegio dentro de las que había en España. Llegó a tener grandes riquezas e influencias, comprometiéndose por su parte a defender la fe católica y a luchar sin descanso contra los musulmanes”. Más adelante dice la información: “Algunos de sus miembros, pretendiendo ser maestros, por la influencia que gozaban tanto como por sus cuantiosas rentas, hicieron jugar a la orden un papel lamentable envuelto en luchas políticas”

El día 1° de octubre de 1996, con posterioridad a la ordenanza que estableció la bandera, la Asamblea Constituyente de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires sancionó nuestra Constitución. En su preámbulo establece “Una democracia fundada en la libertad, la igualdad, la solidaridad, la justicia y los derechos humanos”

A su vez el Art. 1° de la Constitución dice: “La Ciudad de Buenos Aires, conforme al principio federal establecido en la Constitución Nacional, organiza sus instituciones autónomas como democracia participativa y adopta para su gobierno la forma republicana y representativa. Todos los actos de gobierno son públicos. Se suprimen en los actos y documentos oficiales los títulos honoríficos de los funcionarios y cuerpos colegiados”.

Por su parte el Art. 11 del texto constitucional establece: “Todas las personas tienen idéntica dignidad y son iguales ante la ley”.

“Se reconoce y garantiza el derecho a ser diferente, no admitiéndose discriminaciones que tiendan a la segregación por razones o con pretexto de raza, etnia, género, orientación sexual, edad, religión, ideología, opinión, nacionalidad, caracteres físicos, condición psicofísica, social, económica o cualquier circunstancia que implique distinción, exclusión, restricción o menoscabo”

Surge con claridad de la lectura del texto de la Constitución de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires que nuestra Ciudad se organiza como una República, que adopta principios de democracia participativa y que no acepta ningún tipo de discriminación o menoscabo por razones de creencia religiosa.

La actual bandera de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires no refleja en absoluto el contenido de la Constitución ni el pensamiento de los habitantes de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Quienes vivimos en esta gran ciudad, cosmopolita y democrática, no nos merecemos tener una bandera que contiene símbolos autoritarios y monárquicos o que refleja mediante una “cruz sangrante” un odio religioso que nada tiene que ver con la convivencia pacífica de todos aquellos que profesan sus credos con absoluta libertad.

Tampoco se merecen esta bandera colonial los pueblos originarios que habitaron y habitan nuestra ciudad y el territorio argentino, masacrados por el poder colonial en uno de los genocidios más atroces de la historia de la humanidad.

Hace 200 años, la Ciudad de Buenos Aires se levantó contra el poder colonial español y comenzó una lucha por la independencia que, bajo el mando del general José de San Martín superaría el ámbito geográfico del Virreinato del Río de la Plata para dar libertad a Chile y Perú. Posteriormente, el ejército libertador sumó sus fuerzas con otros hermanos latinoamericanos, que comandados por Simón Bolívar concluyeron la liberación del continente.

Buenos Aires es la “hermana mayor” de la independencia argentina y artífice de la independencia latinoamericana; su bandera debe ser fiel reflejo de su lucha por la democracia y reflejar el pluralismo de la composición de su sociedad.

Entendemos que la adopción de una nueva bandera para la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires debe estar precedida por un amplio debate en el seno de la sociedad y por dicho motivo, de acuerdo con las atribuciones que nos otorga nuestra Constitución proponemos establecer el mecanismo de “doble lectura” para la aprobación de un nuevo símbolo.

Por todo lo expuesto, solicito la aprobación del proyecto presentado

³⁶ The proposed law 1425-D-2010 by representative María Elena Naddeo is the following (in Spanish):

PROYECTO DE LEY

Artículo 1°.- El Poder Ejecutivo, a través de los organismos correspondientes y dentro del plazo de dos meses, contados desde la promulgación de la presente ley, convocará a concurso de ideas y diseños para instituir la Bandera de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires en el Bicentenario de la Patria.

Art. 2°.- En el concurso podrán participar alumnos y alumnas de los establecimientos educativos y culturales de la ciudad de Buenos Aires de todos los niveles, así como centros culturales y organizaciones sociales que se inscriban al efecto.

Art. 3°.- El diseño propuesto para la bandera deberá incluir elementos y simbologías identificatorias de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

Art. 4° Los contenidos sugeridos por el diseño de la bandera tendrán en cuenta los principios y valores establecidos en la Constitución de la Ciudad.

Art. 5°.- Los diseños finalistas serán elegidos por un Jurado constituido por:

- a. Dos representantes de las escuelas de enseñanza artística de la Ciudad.
- b. Un representante de las carreras de diseño de la Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- c. Un representante del Instituto Universitario Nacional de Arte (IUNA).
- d. Un representante propuesto por la Sociedad de Artistas Plásticos.
- e. Un representante de la Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Histórico Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.
- f. Un representante de la Junta de Estudios Históricos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires
- g. Dos integrantes propuestos por las Comisiones de Cultura y Educación de la Legislatura.
- h. Dos representantes propuestos por el Ministerio de Educación y el Ministerio de Cultura de la Ciudad.

Art. 6°.- El Jurado deberá ser asistido y asesorado por el Ministerio de Cultura de la Ciudad que actúa como autoridad de aplicación de la presente ley y brindará los recursos necesarios para implementar las acciones propuestas en el plazo de tres meses.

Art. 7°.- Los diseños seleccionados por el Jurado como finalistas serán exhibidos en el Centro Cultural Recoleta, y sometidos a la consideración del público, el cual podrá emitir su opinión a través de un sistema de voto popular organizado a tal efecto, a fin de determinar el diseño definitivo.

Art. 8 °. Finalizado el proceso concursal, quedará derogada en forma automática la ordenanza 49.669, adoptándose como bandera oficial de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires la que surgiera del concurso establecido en la presente.

Art. 9.- La Comisión de Cultura de la Legislatura deberá efectuar el seguimiento de lo establecido en la presente ley.

Art. 10°.- Establécese el plazo de seis meses para el cumplimiento de la presente, debiendo incorporar el mecanismo de doble lectura.

Art. 12°.- Los gastos que demanden las acciones previstas en la presente ley serán asignadas a las partidas presupuestarias vigentes.

Art. 13°.- Públiquese, etc.

FUNDAMENTOS

Sr. Presidente:

El Bicentenario de la Nación Argentina es una oportunidad que ofrece la Historia para debatir entre otros temas de particular importancia los símbolos identificatorios y representativos de nuestros territorios.

El antiguo Concejo Deliberante de la Ciudad, a escasos meses de la convocatoria a Convención Constituyente, avanzó con la institución de una bandera oficial antes de que fuera aprobada la Constitución de la Ciudad y con ella puesta en marcha su incipiente autonomía.

La aprobación de la ordenanza 49.699 realizada con muy poco tiempo de debate. Generó sin embargo algunos señalamientos centrados en la inoportunidad indicada anteriormente y en la necesidad de avanzar en mayores márgenes de consenso para que la insignia aprobada pudiera expresar las ideas y objetivos vigentes en el imaginario, en la sensibilidad y en la conciencia de nuestros habitantes.

El escudo de la Ciudad, en uso habitual desde el siglo XIX, más exactamente desde la época de Sarmiento, contiene una simbología acorde con su época, muy difundida y vinculada a la actividad del Puerto de Buenos Aires.

Por el contrario la bandera aprobada por ordenanza 49.699 se limitó a reproducir la bandera del conquistador español y fundador de la Ciudad, don Juan de Garay, de 1580, con lo cual adoptó anacrónicamente una simbología vinculada al Imperio español de ultramar: el Águila imperial, la Cruz de Calatrava como orden religiosa y militar de la edad media española, vinculada como otros símbolos a las guerras de la Reconquista, a las luchas contra los musulmanes, judíos, y otros considerados heréticos, y particularmente por la expansión colonial de los territorios conquistados en América, con el sometimiento de las poblaciones indígenas.

Por tanto, el contenido simbólico de dicha enseña remite por lo menos a dos aspectos claramente opuestos a la reflexión contemporánea: la conquista violenta, dada la indicación precisa de “la cruz sangrienta” y el avasallamiento de la vida y cultura de los pueblos originarios.

Esta circunstancia es tanto más inaceptable en el año del Bicentenario de la Revolución de Mayo, tanto por la necesidad de avanzar cada vez más en una sociedad integradora, pluralista y con mayores posibilidades de igualdad y justicia, como por desarrollar aspectos postergados de aquel mandato originario.

No podemos hoy olvidar que el compromiso de Mariano Moreno con la causa de la independencia americana se inicia en el Alto Perú, veinte años después del aplastamiento de la rebelión de Túpac Amaru, oficiando de abogado defensor de indígenas y con su tesis doctoral *Disertación jurídica sobre el servicio personal de los indios*, en la que analiza la situación de los pueblos originarios, su explotación por parte de los funcionarios españoles, y la necesidad de restaurar sus derechos.

Del mismo modo, Manuel Belgrano lanza el 4 de diciembre de 1810 una proclama a los indígenas de Apipé, Corrientes, diciendo: “*La Junta me manda restituirlos en vuestros derechos de libertad, propiedad, seguridad de que habéis estado privados por tantas generaciones sirviendo como esclavos a los que han tratado de enriquecerse a costa de vuestros sudores y aun de vuestra sangre*”.

Y es conocida la orden dada por Juan José Castelli en Tihuanaco, el 25 de mayo de 1811: “*... los indios son y deben ser reputados con igual opción que los demás habitantes nacionales a todos los cargos, empleos, destinos, honores y distinciones por la igualdad de derechos de ciudadanos...*”

En la versión taquigráfica de la sesión del 28 de setiembre de 1995 se pueden leer las observaciones críticas formuladas por algunos concejales quienes sin embargo no pudieron impedir o postergar el tratamiento.

Importante análisis hace de este tema la lic. Leticia Maronese, miembro de la Comisión de Cultura de esta casa y actualmente Presidenta de la Junta de Estudios Históricos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires en el artículo titulado: “La invención de la bandera de la Ciudad.” Publicado en el Congreso de Historia de la ciudad en octubre del año 2009. En su introducción podemos leer lo siguiente:

“El 28.09.1995, en la Sesión Ordinaria 22º de ese año, el Honorable Concejo Deliberante de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (HCD), con los votos de los Bloques de la Unión Cívica Radical y el Partido Justicialista y la oposición del Frente Grande y la Unidad Socialista, consagraba a la que iba a ser la bandera oficial de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires a partir de esa fecha. Un rápido trámite de 15 días por una sola Comisión Parlamentaria, sin estudios, debates ni informes técnicos, sólo como un mero trámite administrativo; ³⁶ la Ordenanza 49.669 instituía como símbolo de la ciudad a la bandera denominada por algunos de Garay, por otros de Cacciatore ...”

Realiza a continuación un minucioso y erudito análisis de los contenidos de la bandera propuesta así como de los debates y cuestionamientos planteados por numerosos concejales entre quienes se pueden mencionar a María Elena Naddeo, Aníbal Ibarra, Eduardo Jozami, Raúl Puy, Abel Fatala, Raúl Fernandez.

Por último, la Ordenanza 49.669 instituyó un símbolo de tal importancia para los porteños sin ningún tipo de consulta ni participación popular, contraviniendo desde ya el espíritu participativo de nuestra Constitución.

Sr. Presidente, la conmemoración del Bicentenario es un momento especialmente oportuno para replantear una simbología adoptada tan recientemente, que no despierta en los porteños identificación manifiesta, y que debe intentar reflejar el proceso de autonomía iniciado con la Constitución porteña.

Por todo ello es que solicitamos la aprobación del presente proyecto de ley.

³⁷ See the letters sent to the editor published in *La Nación* newspaper by Mauricio Goyenechea and José María García Arecha in the Bibliography.

³⁸ This meeting occurred on 29 June 2010. Historians Mario “Pacho” O’Donnell and Osvaldo Bayer participated in it. The second author wrote an article arguing against the flag of Buenos Aires city in the newspaper *Página 12*. See the Bibliography.

³⁹ The proposed law 1354-J-2010 with the letter by Mayor Mauricio Macri where he explains about the commemorative flag is the following (in Spanish):

Letter of the Mayor Mauricio Macri, sent to the First Vicepresident of the City of Buenos Aires Legislature Oscar Moscariello (part of the Proposed Law 1354-J-2010)

Tengo el agrado de dirigirme a usted con el objeto de remitir a consideración del Cuerpo Legislativo que preside el proyecto de Ley que se acompaña, por el cual se propicia adoptar como bandera oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, conmemorativa del Bicentenario de la Revolución de Mayo, un nuevo pabellón con las características que surgen del diseño que obra como Anexo I del proyecto de Ley que se adjunta.

La Bandera del Bicentenario propuesta utiliza el diseño de la Bandera de la Ciudad, aprobada por la Ordenanza N° 49.669, promulgada mediante el Decreto N° 1.291/95, y le incorpora dos fajas desiguales de color celeste similares a las de la Bandera de la República Argentina, con el fin de conmemorar los doscientos años de la Revolución de Mayo de 1810.

En esta inteligencia, la referida bandera será de uso exclusivo desde la entrada en vigencia de la Ley y hasta terminados los festejos conmemorativos.

La iniciativa ha contado con el apoyo de especialistas en Vexilología y Heráldica de alto nivel, tanto del ámbito nacional como internacional.

La aprobación del proyecto que se acompaña dará realce a las celebraciones del Bicentenario de la Revolución de Mayo en nuestra Ciudad, e incorporará a la simbología de la Ciudad un elemento de tributo a la gesta patria.

Por lo expuesto, se solicita al cuerpo Legislativo la consideración y aprobación del proyecto de Ley adjunto.

Sin más, saludo a Ud. con la consideración más distinguida.

PROYECTO DE LEY

Artículo 1°.- Adóptase como bandera oficial de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, conmemorativa del Bicentenario de la Revolución de Mayo, al pabellón compuesto por fondo blanco, cargado por faja de una onceava parte horizontal de color celeste hasta su tercio al asta, repite faja de menor tamaño mismo color inferior a la anterior, resaltada por las cargas del escudo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires sin boca de escudo y con sus proporciones disminuidas a la habitual, cuyo diseño en Anexo I forma parte integrante de la presente Ley.

Artículo 2°.- La bandera tendrá forma rectangular, de ciento cuarenta centímetros (140 cm.) de base por noventa centímetros (90 cm.) de alto, y el escudo se ubicará un tercio al asta.

Artículo 3°.- Apruébese el diseño de la corbata y moño con gusanillo e inscripción de oro, con lema Bicentenario 1810-2010, de conformidad con el Anexo II que a todos sus efectos forma parte integrante de la presente.

Artículo 4°.- La bandera a que refiere el artículo 1° será de uso exclusivo desde la entrada en vigencia de la presente Ley y hasta terminados los festejos conmemorativos del Bicentenario.

Artículo 5°.- Comuníquese, etc.

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Aquilino González Podestá

Ricardo Ostuni (he worked alongside José María García Arecha in drafting the flag`s Ordinance)

Gustavo Tracchia

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