Evolution of the coat of arms of Spain

Autor:
Data de publicació: 11-03-2014

History and evolution of the coat of arms of Spain

The current coat of arms of Spain was defined by Law 33/81 of 5 October, that is, almost three years after the approval of the Constitution, so it is inaccurate to call it, as is commonly done, "constitutional coat of arms"; indeed, not only is it not included in this fundamental text, but also, during the first three years of the Magna Carta in force, constitutional Spain was represented by the so-called "Francoist shield", that of the eagle.

The coat of arms model that today identifies Spain is the result of a choice between the different formulas to present the traditional components, which have a long history of nine centuries, with roots that relate them to even earlier times. A history that is a reflection and consequence of the History of Spain.

The appearance of the emblems that make up the coat of arms of Spain responds to a general phenomenon in Western Europe: the adoption in the twelfth century of the system that we now call heraldic, but we can go back to much earlier times to find symbolic elements that identified the land and the people of what we (some) now call Spain.

Already at the beginning of the Christian era we find the first graphic signs referring to our territory. On the reverse of some coins of the Emperor Hadrian, Hispania, according to the legend that surrounds it, is represented by a figure of a woman holding an olive branch, reclining on the rock of Calpe (Gibraltar), with a rabbit at her feet, since it seems that in Antiquity this animal was considered characteristic of our fauna. It is also worth mentioning the well-known "Iberian rider", which appears on numerous coins minted by different peoples both in pre-Roman times and after Romanisation, and which was imitated in the ten- and five-cent coins issued in 1940 and 1953 (the popular "perras")

In the Visigothic period, the sign that appears on coins with a certain character of its own emblem is a cross with trapezoidal arms, widened towards the ends, which is presented at the top of a shaft on a base in the form of steps. It seems likely that this same cross was used as the ensign of the royal militias, carried at the end of a mast in the same way as it would later be done with flags. This same emblem would be used by the kings of Asturias after the Muslim conquest, since they considered themselves legitimate heirs of the Visigothic monarchy. The importance of the cross as an Asturian symbol has endured to the present day, when the autonomous community uses as its emblem a representation of the Cross of Victory, dating from this time.

These uses of the Asturian monarchy extended to the other nuclei of resistance that were formed in the Peninsula, and especially to Navarre and Aragon. This would reinforce the "crusade" character that was given to the Reconquista from very early on.

However, as we pointed out at the beginning, it was not until the twelfth century that the true heraldic emblems that have identified the Hispanic kingdoms emerged.

The arms of the main Hispanic kingdoms emerged almost simultaneously in the middle of the twelfth century. In the case of the Kingdom of León, the animal of the same name has been represented in various forms since the previous century, but it is in the time of Alfonso VII (1126-1157) and his successor Ferdinand II (1157-1188) that it adopts a clearly heraldic character. The coat of arms of León is one of the so-called "talkers", that is, it is intended to represent the name (León) with a homonymous figure (a lion), although the name of the Kingdom, derived from that of its capital, has nothing to do with this animal, but is a phonetic evolution of the Latin word "legio" (legion), having been founded by

the Romans as the basis of the Legion VII Gemina.

In Castile, around the same time, Alfonso VIII is the one who used the castle for the first time as "talking weapons" of his kingdom. In 1198, his heiress, Mrs. Berenguela, married Alfonso IX of León, and in 1230 their son and heir, Ferdinand III "The Saint", united the two kingdoms and symbolized this union through an important innovation to universal heraldry: the quartering, by dividing the coat of arms into four parts and placing both emblems alternate.

At the same time, in Aragon, Ramon Berenguer IV (1131-1162) began to use a gold shield with red stripes, in a number that varied according to the representations, and which would not be definitively fixed at four until well into the fifteenth century. It is well known that the King of France dipped his fingers in the wound of his vassal, the Catalan Count Wilfred the Hairy, and let them slip on his golden shield, leaving four red traces that would have been transformed into the four sticks or bars; however, this legend lacks any historical foundation.

Subsequently, a branch of the House of Aragon passed to the Kingdom of Sicily, adopting a new version of the quartering, since the shield was divided into four by two diagonal lines, instead of by a cross. This quartered cross combined Aragonese bars with the black eagle on a white background of the Hohenstauffen dynasty. When, in 1409, Martin I reunited the kingdoms of Aragon and Sicily, he composed his coat of arms by means of a party, that is, divided vertically in two, with the arms of one of the kingdoms in each quarter.

As for Navarre, also around 1150 seals began to appear in which the kings carried on their shields a metal reinforcement made of bars arranged in a radial shape, called "bloca". Over time, and as the memory of their practical function was lost, the bars and nails with which they were fixed were confused with links in a chain, and this confusion was mixed with the story or legend according to which the Navarrese king Sancho the Strong would have broken the chains that surrounded the tent of the Moorish king in the battle of Navas de Tolosa (1212).

In 1479, when Ferdinand of Aragon married Isabella I of Castile, they brought together their respective arms in a composition that once again resorted to the figure of the quartering. Thus, in the first and fourth quarters is placed the quarters, in turn, of Castilla-León, while in the second and third quarters goes the district of Aragon-Sicily. Later, with the conquest of Granada, they incorporated the arms of Granada in the lower part of this shield, which in a new example of "talking" heraldry are formed by a representation of the fruit of the same name. This coat of arms was adopted by his daughter Doña Juana I La Loca.

Her husband, Philip I the Fair, was Archduke of Austria and Duke of Burgundy, and bore the following quarters on his coat of arms: Austria (red with horizontal silver stripe); Modern Burgundy (blue strewn with gold lises, with a border composed of alternating red and silver squares; Old Burgundy (blue and gold diagonal stripes, with red border); Brabant (on a black background, golden lion) and on the whole, Flanders (on a golden field, black lion)

Charles I of Spain and V of Germany join the coats of arms of their parents, placing Joan's quarters at the top and Philip's at the bottom. This composition is always shown supported by the double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire, and flanked by the Pillars of Hercules with the legend "Plus Ultra", as a symbol of overseas expansion. Philip II, not inheriting the imperial title, dispenses with the eagle, as he does with the columns and the legend, but adds the arms of Portugal when by his first marriage he becomes the holder of that kingdom. The other kings of the House of Austria will use the same coat of arms.

In the year 1700, the death without succession of Charles II made his nephew Philip of Bourbon, Duke of Anjou,

grandson of Louis XIV France, King of Spain, who reigned as Philip V. He removed the Portuguese arms from the coat of arms, since this kingdom regained independence in 1640, moved those of Flanders and Tyrol to the lower part of the shield, and placed the arms of Bourbon-Anjou on the whole: on a blue field, three gold lises and a red border.

Neither the ephemeral reign of Louis I nor that of Ferdinand VI led to changes in the coat of arms.

Charles III, son of Philip V's second marriage and brother of Ferdinand VI, adds the arms he inherited from his mother: Farnese, (in gold, six blue lises) and Medici (in gold, five red circles and at the top, a blue circle with three gold lises) which he placed each on one side of the shield. while the quartering of Castile and León with Granada, moves it to the centre of the shield, on a shield, and in the centre of this, in turn, the arms of Bourbon-Anjou.

The following kings Charles IV, Ferdinand VII and Isabella II did not introduce changes to the royal coat of arms, although an interesting innovation occurred during the short-lived reign of Joseph I, imposed by Napoleon. This "intruder" king adopted a shield divided into six quarters: Castile, León, Aragon, Navarre (for the first time in a royal coat of arms outside the kingdom of Navarre), Granada and the Indies, represented by two terrestrial hemispheres flanked by the Pillars of Hercules. On the whole he places the arms of the imperial family: a golden eagle on a blue field.

After the revolution of 1868, which overthrew Isabel II, the Provisional Government adopted a new coat of arms that would be the basis of the current one. The barracks were simplified, leaving only those of Castile, León, Aragon, Navarre and Granada, the columns of Hercules were recovered and the royal crown was replaced by another of the "mural" type, which reproduces a wall with towers. Likewise, the fleurs-de-lis shield, typical of the overthrown dynasty, was abolished.

When Amadeo of Savoy accedes to the throne, the royal crown and the central shield are restored, this time with the white cross on a red background of the Savoy house.

The Republic (11 February 1873) hardly changed things, since it limited itself to abolishing the shield of Savoy and the royal crown, without the new regime having the material time to adopt new symbols. When the monarchy was restored in the person of Alfonso XII, the royal crown and the fleurs-de-lis reappeared on the Bourbon shield.

The Second Republic recovers the coat of arms model adopted in 1868, and places it in the center of a new national flag, with the colors red, yellow and purple.

The military rebels in 1936 hoisted the red and yellow flag in front of the republican tricolor, but kept the same coat of arms as the legitimate government until 1938, when a decree of February 2, a new coat of arms appeared. This is based on that of the Catholic Monarchs, with the eagle of Saint John and the yoke and arrows, but replacing the barracks of Sicily with that of Navarre. This will be the coat of arms representing the Franco regime with some modifications in its design, and with a simplified model that showed only four quarters instead of the multiplicity of quarters of the other model. The slogan "One, Great, Free" is also a novelty.

The arrival of democracy and the approval of the Constitution did not immediately imply a change in the symbols of the State, since the Magna Carta only refers to the flag, so it was not until 1981 that a law of 5 October defined the new model of the coat of arms. This is fundamentally based on the one adopted by the Provisional Government in 1868, but replacing the mural crown with the royal one, adding crowns to the columns and superimposing the Bourbon-Anjou shield, symbol of the monarchical restoration, on the emblem of democratic Spain.