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The Coats of Arms of Puerto Rican Catholic Bishops

by Prof. Dr. J. J. SANTA-PINTER

Puerto Rico is knowingly under U. S. jurisdiction by virtue of the Paris Treaty, 1898 which has put an end to the Spanish-American war. The said jurisdiction does not mean that Puerto Rico is a U. S. territory, or a state of the Union: it is, since its 1952 Constitution, the "Commonwealth of Puerto Rico". The name doesn't in itself define its status, however its name in Spanish "Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico" (Free Associate State of P. R.) is more eloquent than its English version. Puerto Rico has indeed local autonomy but is subject to US Congress' authority.

As everything related to the Island, its heraldry is also just fascinating. As a consequence of certain "nationalizing" trends started a few years ago, Archbishop Davis of San Juan and Bishop McManus of Ponce have been transferred to the mainland U. S. their places being occupied by native Puerto Ricans.

These circumstances grant a legitimate interest for research to be done in Puerto Rican heraldry in order to disclose the constituent elements involved in such a heraldry. This is so because heraldry is an excellent means even for sociological and not only for historical or genealogical research. Some of those elements come from Puerto Rican national symbols, such as the Paschal Lamb, or the lion of Ponce de León; some others do refer to the history of Puerto Rico, such as the vessels of Columbus or the age-old *Porta Coeli* church of San Germán, or even the

woven basket of Bishop Arizmendi two hundred years back in history.

Old family reminiscences are reproduced in these ecclesiastical arms, such as the cross flory of the Counts Méndez, or the wavy band of the Albertys.

Several of them are *armes parlantes*.

Religious motifs are, of course, to be found in these arms, such as references to the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Saints. On the other hand, there are several references to existing religious Orders.

The tincture is also most interesting: we find colors with a deep historical significance (the Spanish and the Puerto Rican colors), others indicating political affiliation (the United States' colors) and again others with a liturgical significance.

In brief, Puerto Rican heraldry deserves a special attention because of the merger of so many and different items and constituent elements as a consequence of its rich historical background and its undeniable present interest¹.

The coat of arms of Archbishop Aponte Martínez

The coat of arms of Archbishop Aponte Martínez² of San Juan, P. R., composed of the shield with its charges, the motto, and the external ornaments, is an impaled blazon since the dexter impalement is in itself the shield of the Archdiocese of San Juan³ meanwhile the sinister is Msgr. Aponte's personal episcopal blazon. It is maintained that said combination



Fig. 1. The coat of arms of Archbishop Aponte Martínez

represents the union of the Archbishop with his Archdiocese.

Significantly, in the shield of the dexter we find the Paschal Lamb standing on a rock (or island). It comes from the official coat of arms of Puerto Rico⁴ since the Paschal Lamb is the symbol both of the Saviour and St. John the Baptist, the Patron of the City of San Juan, the archdiocese and the cathedral. However, the field is *gules* unlike the field on the seal of the City of San Juan where it is *azure* in order again to differentiate it from the field *vert* of the seal of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

¹ The writer gratefully acknowledges the generous cooperation of Bishop Méndez and Bishop Parrilla as well as the help granted to him by Prof. Ramón Zapata Acosta and Prof. Miguel R. Aguiló both from the Catholic University of Puerto Rico to facilitate his research.

² Archbishop Aponte Martínez was born in Lajas, P. R., on August 4, 1922, ordained priest on April 10, 1950, consecrated bishop on October 12, 1960. Prior to his appointment to San Juan, he was Chancellor of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Auxiliary Bishop of Ponce and successor of Bishop McManus in the same See, in February 1964, designated Archbishop of San Juan on November 4, 1964 and installed in that archepiscopal See on January 15, 1965 succeeding Archbishop Davis transferred to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe in New Mexico, U. S. A.

³ The Diocese of San Juan, the first in the New World, was erected August 8, 1511 by Pope Julius II and elevated to Archdiocese on April 30, 1960 being immediately subject to the Holy See by virtue of Apostolic Brief "Actum Praeclare", February 20, 1903.

⁴ Cf. the writer's "El escudo de Puerto Rico" (The coat of arms of Puerto Rico) in *Horizontes*, Journal of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, IX No. 18, April 1966, p. 69; see Szabolcs de Vajay's comment in *Archivum Heraldicum*, LXXXI, Bulletin No. 2-3, 1967, p. 45.

The sinister impalement has for its main charge the *Porta Coeli* church of San Germán, the city in which Archbishop Aponte was ordained priest. His birthplace, Lajas, is also located in the San Germán district.

The symbols such as the "concha de Santiago" (the shell of St. James) — scallop shell or coquille—or the "concha de peregrino" (the pilgrim's shell), the heraldic rose, and the fleur de lis *could* actually be considered⁵ as making of the arms an *arme parlante* since the shell means a reference to the name of the Archbishop's father, the rose indicates his mother's name, and the fleur de lis refers to his own first (or Christian) name, Luis.

The tinctures are vert and argent indicating the dominant colors of the coat of arms of Puerto Rico and also the fact that Msgr. Aponte is the first Puerto Rican bishop consecrated in Puerto Rico⁶.

In sinister chief are three vessels or ships, the *Santa Maria*, the *Pinta*, and the *Niña* of Columbus symbolizing the date—October 12,—the anniversary of the discovery of America, that Msgr. Aponte was consecrated bishop.

The motto IN VIRTUTE DEI is taken from 1 Cor. 2, 5 and means that the Archbishop is seeking support "in the power of God" rather than in the wisdom of men.

The external ornaments are composed—as it is traditional—of the pontifical hat with its ten tassels on each side disposed in four rows for his archepiscopal rank, the same as the processional double cross (cross patriarchal), the precious mitre and the crosier being common to all Prelates with the rank of bishop.

The coat of arms of Bishop Méndez

Bishop Alfred F. Méndez, C. S. C., D. D. is the first Ordinary of the Diocese

⁵ I said "could actually be considered" and I mean by this that these symbols do not refer to the family name but to the Christian names in question, only.

⁶ The first Puerto Rican bishop Msgr. Juan Alejo de Arizmendi was consecrated in Caracas, Venezuela.

of Arecibo, P. R. which was created by Pope John XXIII on July 30, 1960 for the North-Western portion of Puerto Rico. Bishop Méndez was consecrated in the Sacred Heart Church of Notre-Dame University, Notre-Dame, Indiana, USA, on October 28, 1960. His coat of arms⁷ is a beautiful combination of the following elements as charges: the Paschal Lamb; the *Pinta* of Columbus; an allusion to Pope John XXIII; an allusion to St. Philip the Apostle and the Congregation of the Sacred Heart (C. S. C.); the family coat of arms of the Counts Méndez; and finally an allusion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and to Bishop Arizmendi.



Fig. 2. Bishop Méndez' coat of arms

It is a combined quartered achievement. The dexter impalement is the coat of arms of the Diocese of Arecibo, and the sinister, the personal arms of the Bishop.

In the diocesan arms in chief is the Paschal Lamb with banner resting on the book which has been taken from the coat of arms of the Archdiocese of San Juan, the oldest in the Americas⁸ indicating that the new Diocese was also carved mostly from the Archdiocese of San Juan and of which it is a Suffragan See. The pennon on the staff carried by the Lamb is charged with a fleur de lis from the coat of arms

⁷ This coat of arms is, as the majority of the arms of Puerto Rican and United States bishops, a creation of Mr. William F. J. Ryan, the American heraldry expert. Its description is to be found in the pamphlet "Ceremony of Consecration" of Bishop Méndez, 1960.

⁸ Cf. note 3.

of Pope John XXIII symbolizing that the Diocese was created by the said Pope.

In the dexter base is the vessel *Pinta* commemorating the event that Columbus took possession of Puerto Rico on land supposedly in Aguadilla, on November 19, 1493, which is now a part of the Diocese of Arecibo. The two spots on the vessel indicate that this happened on his second voyage.

The tinctures are gules, or, and argent—the colors of Castilla and León. Those colors of Spain gradually blend into the red, white, and blue of the United States, in which Puerto Rico now holds the status of Commonwealth.

The undy (ondé) bends, argent and azure, beneath the vessel refer to the insular nature of Puerto Rico. The two fish on the lower undy blue band designate St. Philip the Apostle as the titular of the cathedral in Arecibo⁹.

The partially woven basket above the vessel honors Bishop Juan Alejo de Arizmendi, the first native-born Puerto Rican bishop. The 200th anniversary of his birth was celebrated the same year 1960 that Bishop Méndez was consecrated. The basket indicates charity since Bishop Arizmendi used to carry such a basket to sell and to support his poor. The fact that it is unfinished indicates that charity never ends.

In the chief of the family arms, i.e., the sinister chief of the achievement, the arms of the Congregation of the Holy Cross (C. S. C.) attest the membership of Bishop Méndez in that religious Order.

The sinister base is formed by the family arms of the Counts of Méndez since the Bishop stems from Count Hermenegilde Méndez the *mayordomo* of King Alfonso III. His grandson was Blessed S. Rosendo, Bishop of Mondoñedo, who died in 977. On the American side, the Bishop's grandfather, José Méndez de Arcaya was the last Spanish

⁹ Cf. the story of the multiplication of the five loaves and two fishes in John 6, 1-15.

Governor of Ponce, P. R. He was born in Aguadilla, P. R.

The Méndez coat of arms consists of a cross flory, gules, on a field argent. To differentiate the family arms, the silver field has been strewn with heraldic roses—gules—to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas¹⁰, especially of Mexico where the story of Guadalupe has originated in 1527.

The motto *CARITAS* indicates reference to Bishop Arizmendi as explained and also to the love which Bishop Méndez has for the people entrusted to him¹¹.

The external ornaments are the same for every Prelate with the rank of bishop in the Roman Catholic Church, i.e. the pontifical hat with its six tassels on each side disposed in three rows, all vert, and the precious mitre, the processional cross and the crosier, all or.

The coat of arms of Bishop López de Victoria

Msrgr. Juan de Dios López de Victoria y Alberty, the Auxiliary Bishop of San Juan, was consecrated on September 3, 1963. His coat of arms is an *arme parlante* par excellence. The shield, or, has a bend, sable, charged with a palm, argent, and a heart, gules, in its inferior extreme, in sinister chief a pomegranate fruit (apple of Granada), gules, charged with a cross in chief, in the dexter base a wolf passant, sable, and a band base undy (ondé) azure brochant sur le tout.

The wolf stands for the family name López (from Latin *lupus*);¹² the palm¹³ stands for his other family name De Victoria; the pomegranate fruit stands for his first (or Christian) name Juan de Dios, his Saint Patron¹⁴.

¹⁰ Pope Pius XII declared so on October 12, 1945.

¹¹ Cf. John 18,9: "Of them whom Thou hast given me, I have not lost anyone".

¹² The wolf is in the arms of the different branches of the Spanish López family.

¹³ Symbol of victory.

¹⁴ San Juan de Dios (1495-1550) was the founder of the Order of Charity or the Hospitallers in the city of Granada, Spain and is represented with an apple of Granada in his statue in St. Peter's, Vatican City.



Fig. 3. The coat of arms of Bishop López de Victoria y Alberty

The tinctures of the palm—argent—and of the bend—sable—stand for his sister, Sor Ramona, O. P. of the female Order of the Dominicans who have those colors as their own. The heart—or—indicates his other sister, Sor Concepción, a member of the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart Congregation.

The undy band base azure comes from the coat of arms of the Alberty family, the Bishop's mother's branch.

The tinctures or and gules indicate the liturgical colors of Divinity and *Caritas*, respectively.

The motto *UT UNUM SINT* is to be found in St. John 17, 21 and has also been the motto of Vatican II¹⁵.

The coat of arms of Bishop Fremiot Torres Oliver

The coat of arms of Bishop Fremiot Torres Oliver¹⁶, a jurist and a musician, has similar constituent elements to those already mentioned, such as, its nature of being an *arme parlante*, impaled, showing the historical symbol of the City of Ponce, P. R. of which he is the Bishop having been consecrated on December 21, 1964.

¹⁵ Bishop López de Victoria has been consecrated during the period of that Council, in 1963. Concerning the drawing and other data cf. *El Debate*, Ponce, P. R. III, No. 127, September 29, 1963, p. 5.

¹⁶ Be noted that the writer is dealing with the coats of arms of the Puerto Rican Bishops in chronological order of their consecration.

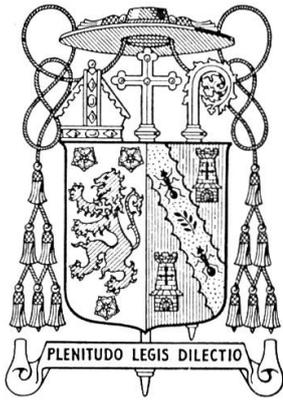


Fig. 4. The coat of arms of Bishop Torres Oliver

The dexter impalement, argent, is the coat of arms of the Diocese of Ponce¹⁷, composed of a purple lion rampant, the breast charged with a cross cercenada of the field, all on a field argent. The lion stands for Ponce de León, the companion of Columbus on his second voyage when Puerto Rico was discovered, and appointed Governor of Puerto Rico in 1509. The crown on the head of the lion has been omitted in order to differentiate the arms of the Diocese from the original coat of arms of Ponce de León.

The three roses, indicating the Holy Trinity, have been added to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, the "Mystical Rose", the Patroness of the Diocese of Ponce.

The sinister impalement, gules, is the personal coat of arms of Bishop Torres. The principal tinctures are or, the liturgical color (gold) for the Divinity, and gules for the liturgical color (red) for the Humanity of Our Lord.

The towers in or—for his family name Torres—along with the olive branch and the ants make this an *arme parlante*. Between the two towers, both charged with a cross pomme of the field, is a bend engrailed bearing the symbol for Fremiot which is a diminutive of "fremi", a regional form of "fourmi" which means ant¹⁸. The towers and the ants, sable.

¹⁷ The Diocese of Ponce was erected on November 21, 1924 and comprises the South-Western portion of the Island of Puerto Rico.

¹⁸ Their significance is labor and industry, success and happiness in cooperation and also for man as a social being.

The olive branch, vert, between the two ants, sable, speaks for the Bishop's mother's name Oliver which comes from the fruit of the olive tree.

The motto *PLENITUDO LEGIS DILECTIO* comes from Rom. 13, 10 and indicates the bishop's training in Law (LL. B., LL. M.)¹⁹ and also Christ the Supreme Legislator.

The external ornaments are the usual heraldic trappings of a prelate with the rank of bishop²⁰.

The Coat of Arms of Bishop Antulio Parrilla

Msgr. Antulio Parrilla, S. J. was consecrated on August 15, 1965 and is the Auxiliary Bishop of Caguas. His coat of arms is again an *arme parlante*, however its structure is completely different from other Puerto Rican Bishops' coats of arms.²¹

¹⁹ Bishop Torres Oliver has been Associate Dean of the Law School at Catholic University of Puerto Rico until his consecration, 1964. Practically he has organized the said Law School while the creation of the said University was one of the many outstanding works done by former Bishop McManus of Ponce.

²⁰ The writer regrets that he was unable to obtain information concerning the coat of arms of Bishop Rafael Grovas of Caguas, the newly created Diocese (November 4, 1964) for the East and South-East portion of Puerto Rico, including the islands of Culebra and Vieques. Msgr. Grovas was consecrated on March 28, 1965. In order to complete the heraldic panorama of the Puerto Rican bishops, I am going to simply reproduce here the coat of arms of Bishop Grovas which is this:

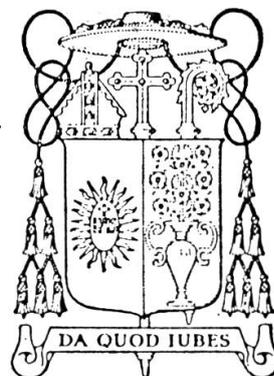


Fig. 5. Bishop Grovas' coat of arms

²¹ For more details see *El Debate*, August 15, 1965, page 5.

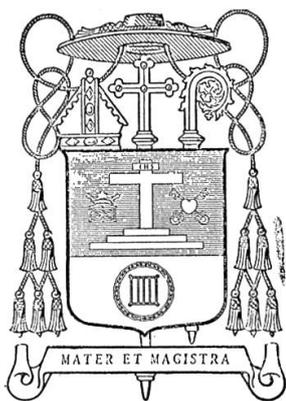


Fig. 6. The coat of arms of Bishop Antulio Parrilla

The Cross Calvary argent on a greece of three steps indicates that the Bishop was ordained on May 3, 1952, the feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross; that he made his noviciate in the El Calvario establishment of the Jesuit Fathers (La Habana) and finally that he entered the Order of the Jesuits on September 14, 1957, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The monogram of Christ, IHS gules, in the bar in chief, argent, also indicates his membership in the Society of Jesus as well as the fact that he was consecrated Bishop in the Sweet Name of Jesus Cathedral of Caguas.

The monogram mounted with a crown in chief, argent, of the Holy Virgin Mary, dexter of the cross, indicates the Bishop's devotion to Mary. It also symbolizes that he has studied in the St. Mary Seminary at Emmitsburg, Maryland as well as that his consecration took place on August 15, 1965, the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin.

The two keys in saltire turned down, argent, interlaced in the heart brochant argent signifies the Church, Msgr. Parrilla's other great devotion. On the other hand, the keys indicate St. Peter the Holy Patron of the Bishop's father. The heart is an allusion to St. Augustin for his mother's name (Agustina Bonilla).

In the base argent a gridiron gules surrounded by a chain of nineteen links azure indicating the nineteen Parrilla brothers. "Parrilla" comes from "parra" —gridiron. It makes a reference to the Bishop's native town San Lorenzo, named after St. Lawrence the martyr who was fried on a gridiron. The chain, on the other hand, also is used as a symbol of Our Lady of Mercy, the Patroness of the town San Lorenzo and also that Msgr. Parrilla has received his Jesuit robe on September 24, 1957, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, the Patroness of the prisoners. The links of the chain symbolize, in addition to the nineteen Parrilla brothers, union, force, and co-operativism since Msgr. Parrilla has been active in that socio-economic movement.

The tincture also has a special significance: argent symbolizes one of the sisters of the Bishop, Sor Agustina of the Congregation of the Good Shepherd; azure stands for his other sister, Sor Esperanza, a member of the Immaculate, Daughters of the Charity. Both argent and azure makes an allusion to Bishop Grovas of Caguas (the principal colors of his coat of arms) since Msgr. Parrilla was the first Puerto Rican priest consecrated by a Puerto Rican bishop (Msgr. Grovas).²²

The motto MATER ET MAGISTRA comes from the Encyclical letter of Pope John XXIII and indicates a socio-political doctrine of the Church so largely practiced by Bishop Parrilla.

The external ornaments, vert and or, respectively, are common to any Catholic prelate with the rank of Bishop.

²² The gules of the gridiron stands for the martyrdom of St. Lawrence.