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Coats of arms of Puerto Rican Universities

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Travail d'admission à l'Académie internationale d'Héraldique

I. The armorial seal of the University of Puerto Rico

The use of an armorial seal in favor of the University of Puerto Rico, an official institution¹, has been granted by Law 18 L.P.R.A. 632² insofar as there is a special mention among the diverse powers of the Superior Council of Education—constituting the corporation called “The University of Puerto Rico”—concerning the right “to adopt and use a common seal and alter it at will.”



Fig. 1. The seal of the University of Puerto Rico.

Although this seal belongs to “corporate heraldry,” yet it is possible to qualify it as one of the *armes parlantes* (canting arms) since the classic Greek academic styled building of the seal is, indeed, reproducing the idea of an academic institution³ (Fig. 1).

The academic styled building is representing the first University building as

¹ The University of Puerto Rico has been established by Act of March 12, 1903, p. 94 with several amendments, among them Act of July 21, 1925, No. 50, p. 282; Act of May 7, 1942, No. 135, 18 L.P.R.A. (Laws of Puerto Rico Annotated,) sec. 631 ff. The new law concerning the University is Act of January 20, 1966, No. 1, in Suppl. Vol. 4A, 18 L.P.R.A. 601 ff.

² This provision has not been changed by the law of 1966.

³ BENNER, THOMAS E.: “Five Years of Foundation Building—The University of Puerto Rico 1924-29”. The author expresses hereby his appreciation to Mr. José Norberto Morales, Assistant to the Director

remodeled to some extent having been constructed originally in 1902. The seal, a creation of Felipe Janer, has been adopted on July 2, 1903 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico.

The exuberant tropical landscape with the rising sun, the palm tree and the sea are representing a direct invocation of the typical panorama of the Island of Puerto Rico. The periphery of the seal bears the legend in Spanish “Universidad de Puerto Rico,” with “1903,” the year of its adoption.

Very significantly, the armorial seal of the University of Puerto Rico is making no indication at all to the well known coat of arms of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico the charges whereof are practically to be found in all other Puerto Rican corporate armorial seals⁴.

It is worthy to mention that on the facade of the Tower of the University there are three coats of arms, that of San Marcos University (1551), Lima, Perú and that of Harvard (1636) and between those two that assumedly destined to be the coat of arms of the University of Puerto Rico, designed by Rafael W. Ramírez in about 1937 which, however, has never been adopted officially⁵.

of Academic Affairs, University of Puerto Rico; to Mr. Manuel del Nido, of the UPR Library and to Professor Miguel R. Aguiló, Catholic University of Puerto Rico, for their valuable help in preparing the present essay. Concerning the academic styled building, cf. for instance the armorial seals of the Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, or that of the American University, Washington, D.C. (the Capitol building).

⁴ See *El escudo de Puerto Rico* (The coat of arms of Puerto Rico) by the author, in *Horizontes*, The Journal of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, IX, No. 18, April, 1966, p. 69 ff.

⁵ Cf. *U.P.R. Campus Reporter*, April 9, 1946, p. 2. Puerto Rico, called officially The Commonwealth of

II. The coat of arms of the Inter American University of Puerto Rico

This is a quarterly divided coat of arms which contains four distinctive symbols as a reflection of the tradition and service of the University ⁶ (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The coat of arms of the Inter American University of Puerto Rico.

About description and significance of this coat of arms we may say as follows :

Dexter chief, the Steps, remaining from the first building constructed on the campus in San German bear the traditional symbol of the history of the University going back to 1912 ⁷.

Sinister chief: the lamp of learning, symbolizing the University's concern for, and pursuit of, academic excellence.

Dexter flank : the geographical figure of the Americas indicating the location of Puerto Rico between the two Americas. It also symbolizes bilingual and bicultural Puerto Rico ⁸. This symbol might be regarded as a characteristic of the *armes parlantes*.

Sinister flank : a Constantine type *crux immissa* (Latin cross) implies the strong Christian heritage and continuing Christian character of the University ⁹.

Puerto Rico (in Spanish Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico) is located in the Caribbean Sea and has a population of about two million and a half.

⁶ The author appreciates sincerely the valuable information granted to him by Mr. Charles M. Bacon, Executive Assistant to the President of the Inter American University.

⁷ The Steps are used in graduation ceremonies.

⁸ Cf. the Preamble of the 1952 Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico : „We consider determining factors of our life the American citizenship...; the coexistence in Puerto Rico of the two great cultures of the American Hemisphere...”

⁹ See *Inter American University Bulletin*, General Catalog, an annual publication.

III. The armorial seal of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico

The Catholic University of Puerto Rico, called originally “Universidad Católica Santa María” has been founded in 1948 by the then Bishop James E. McManus, C.S.S.R., J.C.D. of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ponce. In addition to its being affiliated to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. ¹⁰, it is accredited by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico, the Superior Council of Education of Puerto Rico, the Middle States Association of Colleges and the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York.



Fig. 3. The armorial seal of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico.

1. Description and significance

The blazon : quarterly azure and argent, a cross quarterly throughout of the second, gules, in chief of the first quarter three crescents of the second, over all a book or, garnished, thereon a Paschal Lamb couchant of the second, the cross on the banner of the third ¹¹.

The seal : a silver (argent) scroll, golden edged (or), is placed at the base of the shield on an argent background between

¹⁰ I am including here the armorial seal of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (Fig. A) which is the following :



Fig. A. The armorial seal of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

¹¹ The same as the coat of arms of Puerto Rico, adopted by Act No. 7 of August 8, 1952 (1 L.P.R.A.).

the shield and the inner periphery of the seal and bears the motto "Sancta Maria Mater Dei" in letters gules. A periphery or, double edged in gules, bears the legend "Universitas Catholica Portoricensis" at the top and "1948" in the base, between two crosses formée, all in gules (Fig. 3).

The primary tinctures of the shield are blue and silver, the colors of the Holy Virgin Mary, the titular of the University. The Blessed Virgin is also honored by a silver crescent, her symbol under the title of the Immaculate Conception. The three crescents are emblazoned on the shield of Bishop MacManus who as a founder of the University was then the Bishop of Ponce and the Chancellor of the University.

The cross, alternately silver and red is appropriated from the shield of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. to indicate the affiliation to that American educational institution.

Over all a silver Paschal Lamb is charged on a golden book, edged in silver. These charges are abstracted from the historic coat of arms which appears on the official seal and on the banner of the Governor of Puerto Rico¹², to indicate the location of the University and at the same time to honor the country which has given birth to the University.

The periphery of the seal bears the colors gold and red¹³, and the legend in

34), created originally by Act of January 31, 1901 (cf. also Act of March 9, 1905). I am going to reproduce here the coat of arms of Puerto Rico (Fig B):



Fig. B. The coat of arms of Puerto Rico.

¹² See 3 L.P.R.A. 53 (2).

¹³ Gold and red are the national colors of Spain to which Puerto Rico belonged until its cession by Spain to the United States in the Paris Treaty of December 10, 1898 which ended the Spanish-American war. The fringe around the periphery, gules and sable, repro-

Latin "Universitas Catholica Portoricensis" with "1948" in the base between two crosses formée.

The motto "Sancta Maria Mater Dei" is taken from the second part of the "Hail Mary"¹⁴.

2. The armorial seal of the CUPR School of Law



Fig. 4. The armorial seal of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico School of Law.

The Law School was founded by the now Most Rev. Fremiot Torres Oliver in 1961, then Associate Dean and now Bishop of Ponce. This armorial seal is a combination of that of the University and the symbol of Justice (the scale). The motto "Ars boni et aequi" suggests the old classic Roman definition of the concept of law. The periphery of the seal bears the legend in Spanish "Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico—Escuela de Derecho," vert (green), the original color dominant in the coat of arms of Puerto Rico. "1961" means the year of the creation of the School (Fig. 4).

The color of the periphery is sable (black), and it indicates one of the colors of the City of Ponce. On the other hand, the color of the shield, gules, is a reference to the other dominant color of the City of Ponce where the School is located at the main campus of the University¹⁵.

duces the colors of the City of Ponce where the University is located (the main campus).

¹⁴ The author expresses his acknowledgment to the Office of the President of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico for the valuable cooperation granted to him, concerning the background of the seal of the University.

¹⁵ Actually, this seal of the School of Law of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico has been prepared, in 1963, with the advice of the author of this essay, by the first graduate law students to be used by students and faculty.