JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2006 #223

THE FLAG BULLETIN

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF VEXILLOLOGY

THE FLAG BULLETIN

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF VEXILLOLOGY

January-February 2006 No. 223 Volume XLV, No. 1

IN THIS ISSUE

The Flag Bulletin *is officially recognized by the International Federation of Vexillological Associations for the publication of scholarly articles relating to vexillology*

Color artwork for the back cover by Terri Malgieri

Postmaster: Send address changes to THE FLAG BULLETIN, Box 580, Winchester, Mass. 01890-0880 U.S.A.
THE FLAG BULLETIN (ISSN 0015-3370) is published bimonthly; the annual subscription rate is $68.00.
Periodicals postage paid at Winchester. www.flagresearchcenter.com

POLITICAL SYMBOLISM

by Whitney Smith, PhD

INTRODUCTION

The term symbol has wide currency in many academic disciplines; it carries specialized meanings in semiotics, psychology, religion, the fine arts, and other areas of study. In history and political science, symbols are those images, objects, conditions, and activities utilized by individuals and groups in social intercourse to achieve objectives through influencing or controlling behavior which involve beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Above all, symbols are employed to induce action by forming and maintaining a belief system. The emotional meanings associated with a symbol need not have a substantive relationship to it to be effective. Indeed most symbols, even when sanctioned by tradition, are intrinsically arbitrary. Moreover, meanings assigned to symbols may subsequently be altered, forgotten, or elaborated upon. It is often assumed that a particular symbolism — the use of red to stand for revolution, for example — is innate and eternal when in fact only long usage and/or constant repetition of the relationship has made the symbolism seem natural. Symbolic meanings, being purely conventional, often are subject to misinterpretation, multiple meanings, and degradation.

The potential ambiguity of meaning in all symbols can also be a positive characteristic, allowing for flexibility of use over time and in heterogeneous societies. Ultimately, symbols are justified not by their logic or sophistication of presentation, but by their success in ordering the life of a

community and in assisting political forces to promote their specific aims.

There are no non-social symbols: to a greater or lesser extent all symbols attempt either to maintain existing norms or to subvert them. Conversely, no known society has operated without the use of symbols. Collectively, they constitute an important force for social solidarity, transformation, and renewal. Symbols indeed appear to be necessary to establish social cohesion, to legitimize institutions and political authority, as well as to inculcate beliefs and conventions of behavior.

While anything may potentially be employed in the capacity of a symbol for social communication, four broad areas of political symbolism may be discerned — the active, verbal/auditory, concrete, and graphic. To bow before a head of state, to pin a decoration on a soldier, and to burn a worn-out flag constitute active symbolism. A declaration of independence, a battle cry, and the use of selective vocabulary in political discourse are examples of verbal/auditory symbolism. Concrete symbols can range from an elaborate temple to a pebble picked up on a pilgrimage and retained. Graphic symbols, regardless of medium, are those utilizing colors and images to convey meanings.

The most effective use of symbolism generally combines several of these types in a coherent and consistent fashion. Soldiers marching into a special stadium and taking an oath of allegiance as they display or salute banners provide a manifestation of the power inherent in concrete, active, verbal, and graphic symbolism united. Political symbols can also usefully be analyzed as referential (when they recall, retain, and order data), hortative (evoking, inciting, coercing, affirming, and effecting), or interpretative — i.e. those symbols

which justify and explain the unknown. Table I (**p. 32**) gives further examples of political symbols.

From the standpoint of nationalism, symbolism achieves its highest expression in the "civil religion" of a specific country or nationality. Ellis M. West defined that phrase in 1980 as the

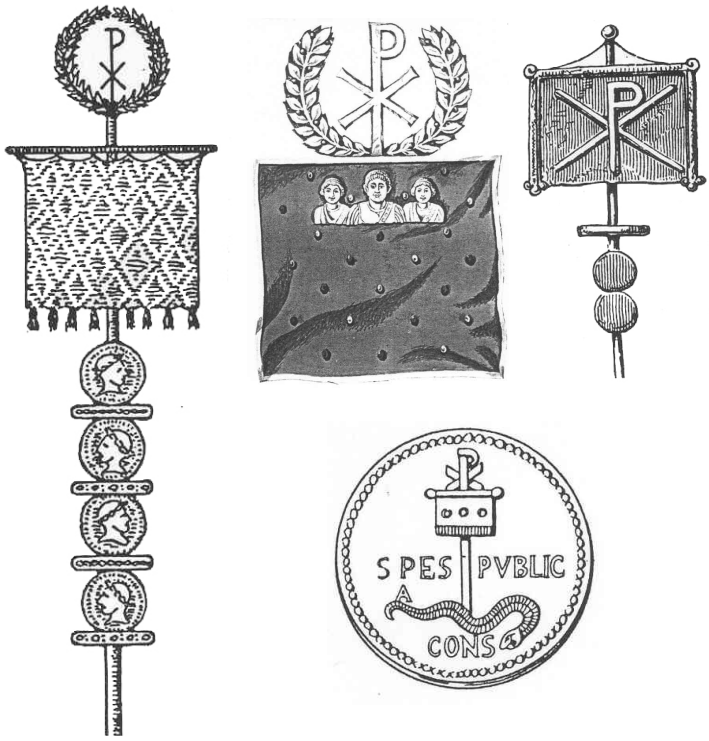
> set of beliefs and attitudes that explain the meaning and purpose of any given political society in terms of its relationship to a transcendent spiritual reality… expressed in public rituals, myths, and symbols.

This collective belief system — sometimes undeveloped, often challenged, and always in flux — uses symbols to define and justify the nation, its political system, its social norms and values, and the crucial questions of individual sacrifice and obedience which every society demands.

Traditional communities invented religion for the same purposes, justifying the predominant elites and social relationships as being natural, unique, ancient, and ordained by the very order of the universe. While often co-opting traditional religious institutions and forms, patriotism on behalf of the nation-state in every country, to a greater or lesser degree, essentially becomes a surrogate for religion, with its own leaders substituting for hierocracy. Thus one definition of the nation-state is a group of people accepting a common system of values expressed through symbols.

Despite the multiplicity of symbolic forms, no single type of symbol characteristic of nationalism has had the durability and intensity of use enjoyed by the flag. Although its origins are evident in many of the earliest civilizations, its

VERSIONS OF THE LABARUM OF CONSTANTINE



The most sacred symbols, often associated with miraculous events in the belief system of a country or community, remarkably can take quite different forms over the years without losing their power.

The cross that appeared to Emperor Constantine as an endorsement of his sacred crusade not only had many forms but many followers who vigorously denounced each other's rights to undertake the holy task they proclaimed to the world.

modern form and range of usages date only from the last decades of the 18th century. It has survived and grown in the succeeding two centuries despite challenges from ideological movements with international pretensions, changes in technology, revulsion against the flag excesses of several totalitarian regimes, globalization of the economic system, and manipulation by special interest groups.

The permeation of modern political structures by flag usage has intensified while many other symbols (such as court ceremonial, traditional heraldry, and religious icons) have stagnated or disappeared. Table II (**p. 34**) reflects some of the ways in which flags manifest themselves in many social situations, most of these being particularly evident in the politics of nationalism. Without degrading the significance of other symbolic forms, this article emphasizes the primacy of flags in nationalism by serving as the principal focus of the following sections.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Most human social organizations above the level of the family utilize common symbols to express the unity and identity of one group distinct from all others. In the nation-state, those symbols serve the group as a medium of communication with and as a form of participation in an "eternal society" (to quote Edmund Burke, 1861) "linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact."

Prehistoric societies relied heavily for their symbols on objects of nature and graphic forms based on them. From surviving artifacts the universality of certain themes is evident. The vitality of lions, wolves, bears, and other wildlife

made them objects of fear and reverence, suggesting their use as symbols to those clans and tribes which aspired to that feral power. As Ehrenreich suggested in 1997, combat was early a human experience made sacred by rituals of blood sacrifice, that "ecstasy of war" whose animal symbolism has never been lost. Other symbols helped explain life and death to people and maintained social order. Celestial objects were frequent symbolic design elements, the swastika (sun-wheel) being the most prominent. Architectural forms, burial ceremonies, agricultural rituals, and familiar objects in nature such as the "tree of life" date back tens of thousands of years, yet many continue as vital human symbols today.

One of the earliest symbols of social groups was the "self-flag," the use of body art (such as painting, tattooing, and mutilation) to identify the individual's relationship with other humans, with nature, and with the eternal. The totem, which Durkheim saw as the prototype of all later social symbols, expressed the origin and obligations of the clan and its relationship with others. The outward manifestation of that totem (a concrete and/or graphic symbol) was associated with ceremonies and words (active and verbal symbolism) as part of the religious traditions of a given society. This in turn was intimately linked with the political structure, since the elite maintained the legitimacy which allowed them to rule without resort to constant force only by conforming to the norms and expectations of a dominant myth structure.

More sophisticated forms of social organization eventually required both elaboration and modification of the traditional totem symbolism. Already in the fourth millennium BCE there existed distinctive vexilloids, in many ways comparable in their form to modern examples, which served as apotropaic emblems. Such standards, enhanced by the

ceremonies and prayers associated with them, represented a supplication that the gods look favorably upon the enterprises of the worshipper.

In many societies that standard was also believed to serve as a "lightning rod" through which the bearer could receive divine power insuring victory. Important new elements, which continue to characterize symbols in the modern era of nationalism, are first evident in such vexilloids found in Sumer, ancient Israel and China, early civilizations of the Indus River valley, among the Aztecs and Mayas, and elsewhere.

In these early civilizations the ceremonies and graphic symbols specifically intended to exalt the king and other members of the ruling class first appeared. Forms still reflected in vestigial form in modern ceremonies are in evidence — the diadem and crown, the mace and staff, anointment with sacred oil, ritual genuflection as a sign of obeisance, the sacrifice of humans or animals, visits to the nation's legendary point of origin, incantations in a secret language during sacred rituals, and the throne. The usefulness of symbols was extended through the replication of a unique sacred insignia: each replica acquired its symbolic power as it was touched to the original.

Symbols early began to be utilized by groups not based on consanguinity: military units and even geographical areas acquired symbols of their own. The red and white crowns and the plant badges of Upper and Lower Egypt and the standards of the Egyptian nomes are striking examples of these practices whereby fictional kinship ties were invented to serve political necessities.

Many specific symbolic images still current today may be traced back for five millennia. The dragon (either inspired

Where royalty predominates, in fact or in principle, the culture emphasizes those who are part of noble and royal families. Conversely in a democratic society a person of common birth and life-style may become a folk hero to the masses. Thus — regardless of the truth of the claims of her having made the first American flag — Betsy Ross ranks as such a figure. Indeed she is probably more familiar to the public than any other woman in American history, although totally unknown outside her family for decades after her death.

by Chinese usage or developed separately) spread from Iran to central Asia and the Roman Empire, eventually becoming known throughout Europe. Likewise the eagle and lion are evident in western Asia in this era as concrete objects (statues, jewelry, etc.), as graphic representations, as titles for rulers, and as mythic images in ritual and ceremony. While it is all too easy to read modern interpretations into ancient references, some links to the present can clearly be found in early texts such as the biblical "the children of Israel… pitched by their standards" (Numbers 2:34) and the statement by Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus that "every nationality marches beneath its own banner."

The Roman Empire employed various symbols to maintain unity and imperial discipline over wide areas. The Eagle standards and military decorations of the legions overawed restive populations by demonstrating the invincibility and divine mission of the Empire, while local symbols were brought back to Rome from wars as booty. So successful were the Romans in imprinting their civilization on the areas they ruled, many symbols and ceremonies they developed are still honored today.

The lion emblem of one legion, stationed in Spain, survives today as the symbol of the region of León, repeated in most Spanish national symbols. The dragon, originally a "barbarian standard," was adopted by the Roman army and left its mark in such diverse areas as modern Portugal and Wales. The Germanic peoples of northern central Europe, were never subdued by Rome, but their capture of several sacred Roman eagle standards began a tradition of using the eagle as a symbol repeated from Charlemagne to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation to the Second and Third Reichs to modern democratic Germany. The Roman impact

extended to the modern era when the republic was generally favored by nationalists as the best possible form of government.

The Americans and French in the 18th century turned for inspiration to Rome for ceremonial forms and usages including the use of Latin mottoes, the fasces, the eagle within a wreath, the senate as an instrument of government, the cap of liberty, various civic forms, the oath of fidelity, the toga, the allegorical figure of Liberty, and the altar of civic sacrifice.

Cultural diffusion has characterized the development and growth of symbols in most societies. Rather than take full advantage of the nearly unlimited opportunities for unique symbols, countries in modern Europe and in areas once under its dominion (North and South America, Africa, and the Pacific) have constantly repeated rituals, protocol, and both graphic and concrete symbols familiar from earlier military or imperial use. Distinctive alternative symbols certainly exist, including the state umbrella of Southeast Asia, the Golden Stool of the Ashanti, the star and crescent of central and western Asia (later spread farther afield by Islam), and the dragon, elephant, tiger, peacock, and other symbols of undaunted power which substituted for the ubiquitous eagle and lion of the West.

Cultural diffusion also played an important role in Asian symbolism. For example, the mystic interpretations and multifold ceremonial and graphic usages of the yin-yang in South and East Asia are typical. From China they spread to Japan, Korea, and Viet-Nam just as the wheel of the law moved from India to Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. In most instances national pride has insisted that the invention

of these symbols was autochthonous despite clear historical evidence to the contrary.

Not surprisingly, when states are seeking to maintain or expand their internal cohesion and international political standing, a formula of proven success for governing which involves symbols has strong appeal. Like advances in technology, symbols are frequently imported and even ones originally imposed by force may survive when a state emerges from foreign subjugation. The same principle was later seen in the era of nationalism, although the variety of new symbols and adaptations of old ones has been substantially greater than in traditional societies.

In Europe and western Asia during the first millennium CE symbolism overwhelmingly reflected the dominant religions, Christianity and Islam. Both their conquests and their intellectual appeal advanced the spread of each faith, as did the emotional fulfillment which the Weltenschauung of each established. Their symbols thus spread to areas far beyond territories under the imperial rule or Rome, Constantinople/ Istanbul, or Baghdad.

The rise of Christianity created a challenge to the existing myths and symbols of the Roman Empire. Constantine, recognizing the growth of Christian power, attempted to coopt the sect. This process began with his incorporating the monogram of Christ (the Greek letters X and P combined) in the traditional army vexillum to which effigies of himself and his sons were added.

The resulting labarum standard, which took him to victory over Maxentius in 325 CE, was described by Eusebius. He related that Constantine was inspired by a dream in which he saw a cross and the Greek words "In This Sign Conquer." So powerful was that implied divine sanction of the state,

The French Revolution introduced slogans, new social organizations, political values, artistic styles, as well as programs for developing and spreading a new program for a future supposedly based on scientific principles of human society. In the decades that followed similar groups claimed the aura of authenticity — socialism, hedonism, nihilism, and fascism to name but a few.

the labarum was one of the symbols later specifically mentioned in the "Donation of Constantine," a document which, while fabricated, nevertheless long convinced many that the emperor had transferred all his secular power to the pope.

As supreme pontiffs increasingly claimed success in overruling the Emperor and lesser rulers through manipulation of the symbols of Christianity, a version of the labarum with its secular symbols omitted became an important tool for them. This gonfanon, featuring a cross, sometimes had relics of saints incorporated on it as well, both giving visual evidence that any edicts issued or battle campaigns undertaken beneath that standard were authorized by Christ through his vicar on Earth. Of course, the pope could withhold or withdraw such an approbation, giving him enormous political power.

The most famous gonfanons were given to Charlemagne in Rome in 800 and to Duke William of Normandy in 1066 before his invasion of England. Other forms of Christian symbolism were widely used to maintain the structure of feudal society by rewarding, punishing, establishing clear hierarchical principles for social order, justifying the political and economic system in the light of scripture, and maintaining the balance between mystery and revelation by giving reassurance to each class that its status was both necessary and just.

The rise of Islam led to a different but parallel system of religious symbols explaining (and controlling) the actions of armies and civil governments. Because of *shirk*, the Islamic injunction against representational art, graphic symbolism in Muslim countries tended to emphasize geometric forms and calligraphy. The Koran provided the verbal and ideological basis for structuring society while the traditions

associated with the life of the Prophet Muhammad inspired military standards.

The colors of those standards varied with the dynasties — white for the Ummayads, black for the Abbasids, green for the Fatimids, and red for the Ottomans and Hashemites — later providing the inspiration for modern Arab national flags which are predominately red-white-green-black, many incorporating religious inscriptions.

The Crusades against Islam became an important engine for social change requiring adjustments of the prevailing European belief system and its symbols. Distinctive coats of arms first came to be displayed as means of identification on the battlefield in the 12th century, but their use quickly expanded into an elaborate general system of social control. The hierarchy of rank in most countries of Europe depended in part on titles, heraldry, privileges, orders of knighthood, and other status symbols; controlling them augmented the growing power of kings. Rulers used them to proclaim and advance their privileges and pretensions.

The crown of St. Stephen was itself acknowledged as the legal sovereign of Hungary; elaborate theories demonstrated that the fleur de lis of France was a symbol of unique divine favor for that nation; the Blood Banner of the Emperor expressed his authority to authorize war and enfeoff princes. The popes flaunted crossed keys on their coats of arms, banners, and seals, reminding all of their power to deny or allow access to heaven (as referred to in Matthew 16:19).

In the first centuries of the second millennium CE, symbols of a national character also began to be developed. The coats of arms of kings originated as personal emblems but were progressively converted to dynastic and, ultimately, state emblems. The imperial pretensions of rulers were often

reflected in the use of an eagle, usually black on a gold shield, as in the Empire: later centuries saw those eagles become national symbols in Germany, Austria, Spain, Serbia, and Russia. The lion was another favorite symbol, each country (England, Flanders, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Bohemia, and elsewhere) being represented by unique variations of color and presentation. National orders of knighthood, myths of origin, distinctive crowns and ceremonies, collections of sacred relics, war cries, and similar exclusive entitlements were developed to vaunt the power of the king and aristocracy in each country. National patron saints were recognized (St. Olav of Norway, St. George of Genoa, St. Andrew of Russia, St. Blaise of Ragusa, St. Mark of Venice, etc.) and representations of them or of their attributes formed de facto distinctive national symbols.

In the Crusades all Christians at first fought under the Banner of Victory, the red cross on a white background which artistic representations depicted Christ as bearing in the Resurrection. The need grew, however, for emblems expressing both Christianity and nationality simultaneously. Thus Scots were enjoined to wear on their clothing, when in battle, a white diagonal cross, the Bretons a black cross on white, the French a white cross on blue, the Swiss a white cross on red. National self-consciousness was in an embryonic state at the time, yet many of these symbols survived changes in the political myths of the states and eventually achieved standing as national symbols.

Thus the famous Union Jack of the United Kingdom, in its present form dating from 1801 and becoming a true national flag only in the 20th century, combines symbols with proven continuity from the 13th century and with mythic roots in the 9th century. Similarly the Sun Disk Flag of Japan

has antecedents from the 7th century and the eagle and snake motif of Mexico from the 14th century, both with proven continuity of use to the present. A white cross on red, originally a military emblem, evolved into a state emblem and, later still, a national emblem for both Denmark (1848) and Switzerland (1889).

Other conditions in the Middle Ages and Renaissance encouraged a more sophisticated range of secular symbols in Europe. Seals were needed for authenticating documents, for example. Marks of ownership in the form of vanes or pennants for ships were developed when coastal commerce expanded and maritime traffic to Africa, Asia, and the New World led to still more systematic usage of flags for shipping. In the 13th century we have the first references to flags being used on ships to identify their origin, particularly among the small city states of Italy and the Hanseatic ports.

The maritime city of Hamburg legally required a red pennant for its vessels in 1270, adding the municipal arms (based on its seal), around 1500; today's red flag with a white castle dates from 1644. At first, personal standards and flags of port cities were prominent, but gradually recognizable emblems of nationality — frequently the national cross emblem or coat of arms or simply stripes in the same colors — came into use. Heraldic banners representing sovereigns were used in the 14th century. Many of these designs have survived in form, while undergoing substantial transformation in meaning and usage.

In the late 16th century the Netherlands began a struggle for national independence against its Spanish overlords, culminating in victory in 1648 at the end of the Eighty Years' War. The Netherlands differed in language, religion, economy, and other significant cultural characteristics from

Spain and its leaders effectively employed local symbols in the process of mobilizing the population for its liberation struggle. The colors orange, white, and blue — popular in uniforms, decorations, and artifacts — were apparently taken from the livery of their leader, Prince William the Silent, who was further honored by the battle cry "Orange on top!" From 1587 onward flags flown on Dutch ships and carried by Dutch troops utilized these colors. The orange was later altered to red, producing the tricolor still serving as the national flag of the Netherlands.

Both American and French revolutionaries more than a century later hailed the Dutch patriots as their precursors and a reasonable if not conclusive argument may be made that the Dutch "Prince's Flag" can be considered as the first national flag in the modern sense. England in the 17th century likewise saw a significant change in attitudes towards symbols. Most of the old royal heraldry, elaborate system of titles and symbolic privileges, as well as the national myth justifying the divine prerogatives of the monarch were swept away by Cromwell and his forces. While the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution left an ambiguous heritage, there is no doubt that ultimately symbols of English nationalism were thereby advanced both in the mother country and in the English colonies of North America.

On the Continent, the Thirty Years' War indirectly contributed to the development of national symbols by acknowledging sovereignty for Switzerland, the Netherlands, and parts of the Holy Roman Empire as well as by promoting the principle that the religion of a ruler determined that of his people. The participation of conscripts in the mass armies of the era began a fundamental alteration of warfare:

In many cultures the power of spiritual forces is treated as an explanation for the success and failure of human endeavors. In that context it is not incongruous to see Napoleon in secular garb — and with a halo suggesting divine approbation of his enterprises.

feudal obligations and mercenary service retreated as the bases for national defense.

The new involvement of citizens as soldiers meant that increasing numbers of people experienced direct and active participation in a social organization beyond their local community. This encouraged them to fight not simply for a lord or for pay but in order to protect and advance the well-being of their homeland. New symbols had to be framed to make that community and participation in it by the average soldier a reality defined by common culture, language, heroes, rituals, and myths.

THE MODERN ERA

No state in human society has ever existed without symbols of some kind and the creation of a new state or of a new system within an existing state requires and engenders a new symbol system. As part of a wider range of technological and ideological forces that altered the political landscape in the Western world and later extended to other continents, the American and French Revolutions had profound impact on the specific symbols and symbolic usages characterizing political discourse.

New weaponry and changes in military organizations increased the importance of the common soldier relative to the elite forces which lingered from the past; long-standing traditional regimes received fundamental challenges to their legitimacy; increasing literacy and economic prosperity linked with intellectual (especially scientific) advancements and the decline of theology for the first time made possible mass political movements capable of permanently seizing control of governments and states. In country after country the common soldier, the burgher, the craftsman, the sailor,

and those in many other classes found common cause against the old elites by helping to form and by participating in a new community known as "the nation."

The old hierarchies began to lose their influence and the symbols associated with them ceased to command respect. The same divine grace which had justified both a sovereign and his claims to territories acquired by conquest, inheritance, purchase, or through marriage came to be seen as justifying a new version of the state based on natural rights to liberty and self-government, the common destiny of a people with shared culture and language, and a willingness of citizens to die for those ideals.

The new national states were not in fact entirely natural ones but rather imagined communities, to use Anderson's phrase of 1983. These new nation-states were created and maintained through elaborate systems of ceremony and symbolism capable of permeating the bureaucracy, armed forces, community organizations, educational system, and other social structures. They did so in part by displacing or co-opting many of the traditional religious organizations of the society.

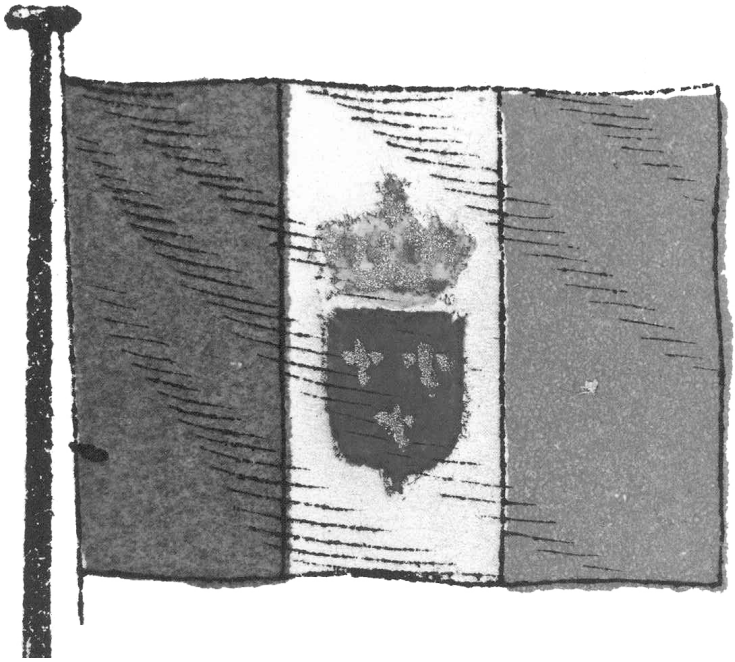
Symbols justified the theoretically self-evident nation — its cultural characteristics, citizenry, territory, and aspirations. The nation was made to appear divine, inevitable, an innate part of human life, while other nations were often defined as alien, less civilized, and threatening. A system of rewards and punishments encouraged nationals to promote the goals of the community; other symbols assisted in socializing the masses and mobilizing them for political action. New political elites were erected and honored and, frequently, a specific political ideology or program was intimately associated with the new nation.

In the process the individual, often honored in principle, frequently became part of a monolithic machine dedicated to promoting the nation even when that required the individual to subordinate himself to it completely. A fundamental part of nationalism was the invention of a past which could explain and legitimize the present. Considered a living organism, the nation had required and would continue to require sacrifice, often literally on the battlefield.

Certain categories of symbols have been preeminent in the age of nationalism. Holidays, originally religious in nature, become a platform for celebrating the nation. Statues, monuments, and even cemeteries honor the virtue of national heroes, often individuals of humble origin. Education, art, literature, and music vaunt the glories of national history and culture even though much of what is presented has been carefully edited, popularized, or even fabricated. Architecture, clothing, protocol, government documents, coins and decorations, and even the acceptable forms of the national language are recast to reflect the new ethos.

Particularly when a state achieves independence through war or when an existing regime is overthrown in the process of realizing the nation, even long-standing norms are cast aside. Old symbols are often ritually destroyed, ridiculed, outlawed; in their place arise new symbols — especially a flag, national anthem, "sacred texts," and an image of the true patriot. New nations create new capital cities (Washington DC, Islamabad, Abuja) and new names for the country (Ghana, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Khwarezm), sometimes even a new calendar (revolutionary France and Russia) or alphabet (Turkey).

The process of creating a coherent body of symbols for a nation is never simple nor static. The Ancien Régime rarely



The Count of Chambord was the presumptive heir to the throne of France when, following the overthrow of the Second Empire in 1871, both monarchists and republicans in France were amenable to the possibility of a titular ruler. So important were the symbolic meanings of the Tricolor for republican France and the royal significance of the White Flag for Henri IV, he made it clear that "Henry V cannot abandon the White Flag of Henry IV." The irony is that the image of a compromise flag was found in his library — a Tricolor bearing the royal coat of arms (original shown above).

yields power without a struggle. Interest groups, individuals, and institutions struggle to advance their own programs through alternative symbol systems. Some ideological groups may seek to identify the country as part of another nation, as in the struggle following World War I to redefine Austria as part of Greater Germany rather than as an independent state. Nationalism frequently meets opposition from internal nationalities: those favoring independence for Quebec have been warned by First Nation inhabitants in the north that they likewise have a right to self-determination, while India has faced Kashmiri demands for independence since achieving its own sovereignty in 1947.

Creating a national consciousness in areas previously under European rule, especially in Africa, has often proven difficult in part because opposition to colonialism rather than common objectives for the future informed the independence movement and its symbols. Even in countries where national unity is not fundamentally challenged, major contradictory visions of how the nation should define itself have resulted in bitter political strife, sometimes to the point of civil war: 20th century Australia, Canada, South Africa, China, Germany, and Afghanistan provide important case studies in conflict concerning symbols.

Although it is only one of many symbols in the struggle to define the nation, the national flag — its design, symbolism, and usage — is often a central issue. There is no international legal requirement that a country have a national flag and even decades into the age of nationalism, no national flag existed for a great number of independent states. So fundamental did the existence of a flag come to be considered, however, no recognized state in the 20th century was without one. The "Year Zero" program of the Khmer Rouge,

which even eliminated coinage and postal services in Cambodia, did not fail to establish a distinctive national flag. Indeed the process of vexillification can provide important insights into the understanding of nationalism, although few systematic studies have been undertaken.

The Continental Colors of the United States (1776) and the Tricolor of France (1794) were the two first true national flags. Both were subject to variations in design and usage, particularly in their early years, yet each survives today as the basis for the national flag.

The striped flags of the radical Sons of Liberty apparently provided the basis for the Continental Colors, the canton of which (the Union Jack of Great Britain) was an indication that the early stages of the American Revolution were fought in the name of liberty and justice rather than of independence from Britain. The official introduction ceremony of that flag is significant: it was hoisted on 1 January 1776 in honor of the formal birth that day of the Continental Army. A large version was intentionally hoisted prominently, such that it could be seen by the British forces in nearby Boston.

The design was consciously chosen to symbolize the commitment of the people to a struggle for their rights as a nation, rather than reflecting territorial claims, the prerogatives of the rulers, religion, or other principles traditionally favored for official symbols. In the year following the Declaration of Independence, a blue canton with 13 white stars "representing a new constellation" replaced the Union Jack in the flag. This and subsequent elaboration of the flag's design, usage, and symbolism constitute important elements in the process by which the United States began to define itself not simply as a state participating equally in the international arena, but as a nation.

The combination of the red and blue cockades worn by the National Guard in July 1789 and the royal white cockade of King Louis XVI provided the basis for the French flag. The resulting blue-white-red emblem became official on 4 October in an era when the cockade was an important form of political symbol. Many new military flags reflected the same choice of colors and the next year an early variant of the Tricolor (originally red-white-blue vertical stripes) was established for the navy. On land the three colors were expressed in all kinds of flags, decorations, clothing, artifacts, prints and documents, and artwork before the Tricolor as it is known today was finally recognized in 1794.

To underline this transition from absolute sovereignty over territory to symbolic rule over the nation, the king's title was altered in October 1789 from "King of France" to "King of the French." The Festival of the Federation, first held on 14 July 1790 and involving hundreds of thousands from around the nation, acted out the consecration of the French nation. The National Guard paraded its colors and General Lafayette, before a tricolored flag, took an oath on behalf of all present to be faithful forever "to the nation, the law, and the king."

Similar festivals were held around the country and two years later at a similar festival all the symbols of the aristocracy were burned. These and similar activities, although melodramatic and based on religious and royal ceremonies of the past, served their purpose well. Elaborated on under the First Republic, they convincingly provided public confirmation of the nature of and need for the political and social transformation of the country.

The Tricolor, sealed in the blood of many wars during the next quarter century, achieved a mythic status which al-

lowed it to continue to challenge the White Banner of the Bourbon dynasty after the 1815 Restoration. In 1848 the poet Lamartine hailed the Tricolor, when its replacement by the radical Red Banner was threatened, by referring to its having made "a tour of the world with the name, the glory, and the liberty of the fatherland!"

In 1871 the count of Chambord refused the crown of France because the French Assembly made restoration of the monarchy conditional on his accepting the Tricolor. Chambord, the Assembly, and the people well understood that the whole concept of France as a nation was a choice between two incompatible alternatives, the Tricolor and the White Banner. Similar confrontations over the definition of nationality through symbols have characterized dozens of nations since these first national flags and related symbols proclaimed a new form of legitimacy for the existence of a nation.

While many of the functions of the new American and French flags had existed prior to the era of nationalism, there were also important new characteristics associated with them and with national symbols in general. Overwhelmingly, the new symbols were reproduced in endless numbers and in multiple graphic and concrete manifestations, whereas the old symbols had been largely restricted to infrequent ceremonies of the highest significance.

Many of the former flags had been unique venerable relics, such as the *sanjak sherif* supposedly carried by the Prophet Muhammad which was brought out of storage on infrequent occasions of great danger to ensure victory on the battlefield. In contrast, the Blood Flag of the Nazis, also considered a unique and precious original, symbolically transferred its power to hundreds of identical replicas on many occasions.

This quasi-religious nature of flags is also reflected in the modern era in the words and ceremonies associated with their use, which in some countries is strictly regulated by law and enforced by severe penalties for "desecration."

Modern symbols of nationalism are intentionally chosen and their color symbolism, design, and display are both explicit and widespread. In many cases the flag is enshrined in the constitution, requiring a revolutionary change of government to alter the fundamental symbol of the nation. Its unique status is jealously protected against foreign rivals and domestic challenges.

Most importantly, the flag is present in all circumstances where the concept of nationality is implicitly presented, explained, or defended — elections, inaugurations, court hearings, public gatherings, legislatures, on aircraft and boats and vehicles of all kinds, in schools and churches, in funerals and at sporting events and holiday festivities, in international conferences and competitions, and above all in every form of military activity. Like other symbols the flag ultimately is a mental construct, although it may appear represented as a graphic form, in cloth as a concrete object, or as a metaphor in verbal and written manifestation.

Weitman in 1975 analyzed the common messages borne by nearly all national flags — the vitality, immortality, sacredness, and supremacy of the nation as well as its peaceableness, indominatability, equality vis-a-vis other flags, and uniqueness. In addition, flags reflect the presumed distinguishing characteristics of the nation, such as its struggle for existence, its natural resources, its ethnic or religious composition, and its dedication to such virtues as peace and progress. Those meanings are communicated to citizens by formal schooling but also through their association with spe-

A symbolic gesture equivalent to the raising of the US flag at Iwo Jima marked the great victory of the Red Army expressed in this photo, taken when the Soviet flag was hoisted over the Reichstag. The photograph was staged days after the event but the victory was real even if not in the midst of battle as it appears here. It retained its symbolic validity since the war was won by the Allies and the Red Flag remained in Berlin for another 45 years.

cific experiences and situations which reinforce the desired perception of the symbol.

Flags are a particularly useful form of symbol because of their adaptability, the appeal of their colors and emblems, their relative inexpensiveness and ease of manufacture, their hypnotic motion when flying, their long-distance visibility, and their ability to recall to individuals and groups certain ideas and events. The exact authentic origin of most flags being either unknown to the general public or relatively obscure, they are well suited to myth-building because their age, creation, involvement in historic events, and similar characteristics can easily be manipulated or falsified without the likelihood that most people will be aware of the deception.

SYMBOL STUDIES

Symbols are directly involved in issues of power, authority, the political culture, group unity, political demands and responses by elite and masses, international intercourse, and social stability and change. In particular symbols serve the cause of nationalism by justifying the moral basis of the nation's claim to statehood, explaining its past and its objectives for the future, and defining the acceptable forms of political dialogue which all patriots must respect. No comprehensive analysis of all types of symbolism has been published. General analyses of political behavior and histories of specific societies refer to symbols but they infrequently serve as the central theme. Some specialized theoretical works have appeared in print, but there is no consensus on a single rigorous theory of political symbolism.

The special interest provoked by struggles around the

definition of a specific nation and the importance of the flag in its national ethos have resulted in important work among scholars in countries such as the Germany and United States, although numerous other countries (Israel, Canada, India, and Russia, for example) would be candidates for similar in-depth analyses. Specialists in technical studies such as heraldry and vexillology have produced impressive collections of data but have infrequently even attempted to correlate this to the political systems of the countries in question.

Much emphasis has been placed on the imputed symbolism of colors and emblems, while the functional aspects of the symbols remain inadequately analyzed. Specialized collections, teaching, and research programs focusing on political symbolism are absent from most academic institutions; focus on symbols tends to be found in disciplines such as semiotics, cultural studies, religion, and art history rather than political science. As a consequence those who consider themselves vexillologists have extensive work before them.

TABLE I
GENERAL TYPES OF POLITICAL SYMBOLS

Context and select examples

ACTIVE SYMBOLISM: parades, investitures, inaugurations/coronations, voting, pilgrimages, parliamentary debates, obeisances, salutes, military drills, courtroom procedures, holiday celebrations, worship ceremonies, destruction of enemy symbols, unveilings, award presentations, burials

VERBAL/AUDITORY SYMBOLISM: formal speeches, slogans, war cries, mottos, ideological platforms, pronouncements, titles and nicknames, historic sayings and documents, ultimata, songs, hymns, myths, anthems, chants

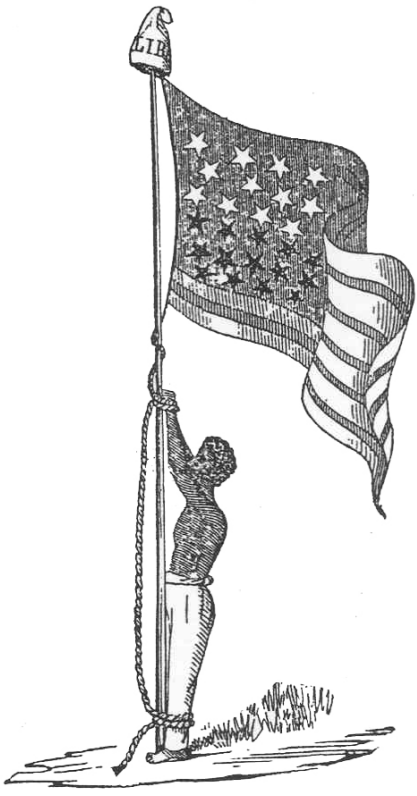
CONCRETE SYMBOLISM: mountains, rivers, battlefields, buildings, monuments, statues, tombs, weapons, animals, trees

GRAPHIC SYMBOLISM:

DESIGNS: abstract images, letters, numerals, flora, fauna, humans, characteristics of nature, celestial objects, combinations of the preceding

MEDIA: flags, coats of arms, seals, cockades, tattoos, arm bands, placards, campaign buttons, bumper stickers, clothing, hairstyles, medals and decorations, posters, coins, stamps

Every political system has some degree of hypocracy. The United States began its Declaration of Independence "All Men Are Created Equal..." — totally ignoring millions over decades for whom the words "Liberty Cap" and "flag of freedom" belied the promise of the fundamental rights of human beings, such as the slave in the 1850s cartoon who is bound hand and foot to the halyards of a flag but allowed no possibility of security in the present nor security in the future.



FOURTH OF JULY.

TABLE II
FLAG MANIFESTATIONS

Context and select examples

ACTIVITIES: ceremonies, desecration, burning, burial, consecration, decorating/honoring individuals and objects, votive offerings, Blood-Flag ceremony, symbol interpretation, instruction in use and meaning, hoisting, lowering, embellishment, breaking-out, laying-up, replicating, parading, timed display, dipping, museum display, massing, flag days/weeks, folding, restricting/banishing, waving/tossing, mourning, protesting, claiming territory/victory, warning, transferring authority

DISPLAY LOCALES: monuments, shrines, tombs, battlefields, public buildings, schools, borders, homes, thoroughfares, forts, ships, vehicles, churches, statuary

DISPLAY MEDIA: coats of arms, logos, seals, coins, stamps, cockades, advertising, packaging, uniforms/clothing, art, statuary, decal/stickers, bunting, films

GESTURES: dances, hand gestures (salutation, pledge, blessing, prayer, embrace, threat, handshake), kneeling, bowing, facing towards/away, kissing, eating, spitting/urinating/defecating, shedding blood

PEOPLE: color guards, standard-bearers, vexilliferous individuals, designers, makers, conservators, heralds

WORDS: usage codes, desecration laws, war cries, pledges, salutations, music, chants, anthems, titles/ranks, letters and ciphers, prayers, nicknames, documents, slander

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, London.

Apter, David E. (1963). "Political Religion in the New Nations," *Old Societies and New States*. Free Press, New York.

Askegaard, Søren (1988). The National Flag and the Myth of the Nation. *The Flag Bulletin* 17:16-22.

Crampton, William G. (1994). *Flags as Non-Verbal Symbols in the Management of National Identity*. Doctoral thesis, Department of Government, University of Manchester.

Deutsch, Karl W. (1953). *Nationalism and Social Communication*. Wiley, New York.

Doob, Leonard W. (1964). *Patriotism and Nationalism: Their Psychological Foundations*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Firth, Raymond (1973). *Symbols Public and Private.* Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Guenter, Scot M. (1990). *The American Flag, 1777-1924: Cultural Shifts From Creation to Codification*. Associated University Presses, London.

Hayes, Carlton J. H. (1960). *Nationalism: A Religion*. Macmillan, New York.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger (editors) (1983). *The Invention of Tradition.* University Press, Cambridge.

Jilek, Wolfgang G. (1999). Nazi and Communist Flags: The Semiotic Aspects and Psychophysiological Dynamics of Totalitarian Symbols. *The Flag Bulletin* 38:3-40.

Marvin, Carolyn, and Ingle, David W. (1999). *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Pross, Harry (1974). *Politische Symbolik: Theorie und Praxis der öffentlichen Kommunikation*. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.

Rabbow, Arnold (1970). *dtv-Lexikon politischer Symbole*. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munich.

Schramm, Percy E. (1954-1956). *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom dritten bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert*. Monumenta germaniae historica, Stuttgart.

Smith, Whitney (1975). *Flags Through the Ages and Across the World*. McGraw-Hill, New York.

Weitman, Sasha R. (1973). "National Flags: A Sociological Overview," *Semiotica* 8:328-367.

Zelinsky, Wilbur (1988). *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill

SYMBOLS OF AKKALKOT

by Whitney Smith, PhD

As part of British India, Akkalkot[1] was a small territory lying in part along the border of Hyderabad, the largest Indian state. Today Akkalkot falls in that portion of the State of Maharashtra that borders on the western part of the State of Karnataka. Akkalkot acceded to India on 8 March 1948. As in other Indian princely states, official recognition of the traditional privileges and symbols of Akkalkot – including its flag — was lost in 1960.

Originally statehood had been granted to Akkalkot by Shahu, the raja of Satara. The head of state, a Maratha *sardar* (army leader) was resident in the capital, Akkalkot Town. In 1849 when Satara became a feudatory state as part of British India, Akkalkot was also transferred to British overlordship. For the rest of the 19th century the British alternated between ruling the state directly and designating a new *sardar*. The Union Jack replaced the Akkalkot flag under the British, but under the *sardars* a special Maratha flag was used.

Sri Shivaji Chhatrapati was the leader of the forces that created the great Maratha Empire in the 17th century. According to tradition, Chhatrapati, following his conquest of much of the former Mogul Empire, offered sovereignty over his new realm to his spiritual guru, Sri Ramdas Swami. That gift was accepted but then was immediately granted back to Chhatrapati. Because the swami had worn saffron-colored clothing as part of the austere regime he followed throughout his life, Chhatrapati adopted that color in honor of having received title to his empire from Sri Ramdas Swami and as a token of respect for him.

Sri Shivaji Chhatrapati subsequently utilized a flag of plain saffron known as the *bhagwa zenda* ("saffron-colored flag"). The grandson of Chhatrapati in turn bestowed the saffron flag on his prime minister in 1764. Subsequently many of the states in the area used the *bhagwa zenda* as their own to indicate their common allegiance to the Maratha Empire.

In Akkalkot, the form of the flag varied. On stamps issued for use on documents to indicate payment of a fee, the flag appeared as a triangle (**Fig. 1**). The Akkalkot royal coat of arms appearing on the stationery[2] of the Huzur [i.e. Private Secretary's] Office (**Fig. 2**) included two swallowtailed flags set on black towers connected by a wall with an open port. Three silver arrows and a silver bow were set between the flagpoles and a ribbon bearing the name of the state appeared below. At the bottom of the arms crossed silver swords were transversed by a black ribbon with a red motto in Devanagari script.

A manuscript sketch on the same envelope shows two triangular flags flying on a single staff (**Fig. 3**), each with its hypotenuse side facing downward. It would appear that the definition of the flag required only that it have a plain field of saffron, the shape of which consisted of one or two triangles. That leniency in design definition was consonant with practice concerning other Indian state flags of the era.

It is not known what exact functions the flag played in the era before Akkalkot became part of an independent India. It seems likely that it served as the personal standard for the ruling *sardar* and, quite possibly, as a state flag. It would have had no legal standing during the periods when the state was under direct British rule. The use of a single basic flag for different territories sharing cultural similarities and a common history is not unknown elsewhere. The

nations of Central America and the individual states of what is today the United Arab Emirates provide a usage parallel to the display by Maratha states of the *bhagva zenda*.

NOTES

1. The name is pronounced ah-kuhl-KOT. Historical documents sometimes give the alternate spellings Akulcotta or Akalkot.

2. Original envelope in the Karl Fachinger collection, Deutsche Schiffahrts Museum, Bremerhaven.

Figs. 1 and 3: AKKALKOT STATE FLAG VARIANT DESIGNS

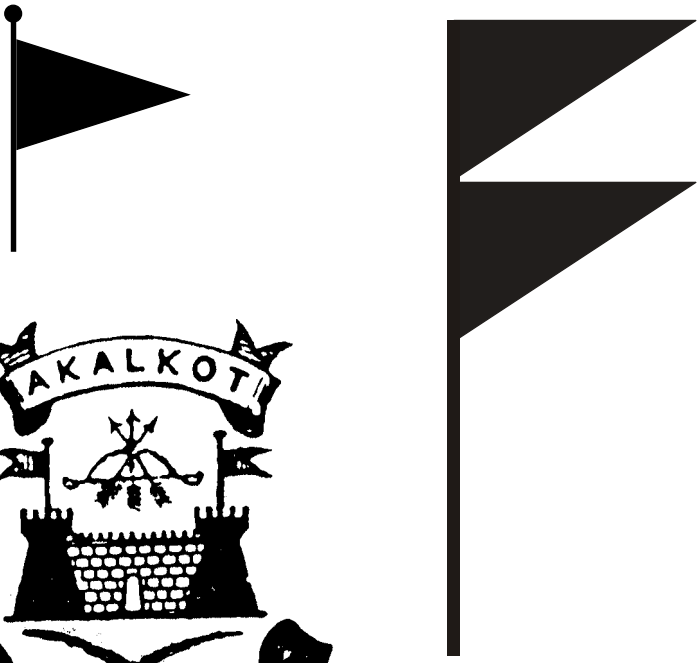


Fig. 2: AKKALKOT COAT OF ARMS

COVER PICTURES On the front cover of this issue an ancient Chinese painting presents warriors with their banners. Each of the five colors — red, yellow, blue, white, and black — was associated with certain military formations.

On the back cover (**Figs. A and B**) are represented two national flags of 20th century China. The Five Bar Flag was adopted following the overthrow of the monarchy and was the Chinese national flag in use from 12 June 1912 until 8 October 1928.

While the colors were the same as in the ancient military banners, they are joined together to emphasize the unity of China. Red stood for the Han (Chinese), yellow for the Manchus, blue for the Mongols, white for the Muslims, and black for the Tibetans.

The modern People's Republic of China maintains the symbolism of five in the number of stars in its national flag while emphasizing the red and gold of the Communist Party.

110 YEARS AGO

On 1 July 1896 the territory of Perak became part of the British-run Federated Malay States. It had previously been an independent nation from 1824 onward. The British imposed a protectorate in 1874 with a British resident as superviser. The original Perak flag was plain white; a new national flag with horizontal stripes from top to bottom of white, yellow, and black was created in 1879. The colors stood for the traditional court officials.

Figure A

Figure B