



## **Gibraltar: The Rock with its own Symbols**

**Roman Klimeš**

### **Abstract**

Gibraltar, a British Overseas Territory, is presented by means of geographic data and an historic overview. The history of the symbols of this territory began in 1502 when Spanish monarchs King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella granted the coat of arms of Gibraltar. Further development of the coat of arms is then described until the present day. The first flag used in Gibraltar, in 1870, was the colonial flag of the Government. Other flags from later periods are described down to the present. Other symbols used in Gibraltar, such as police emblem and flags of the Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club, are also described. There is also further demonstration of the use of various symbols in practice, such as on coins, banknotes, and stamps, and in houses, gardens, and public places.



The Arms of Gibraltar

# GIBRALTAR: THE ROCK WITH ITS OWN SYMBOLS

## GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Since 2007 Gibraltar has held the status of a British overseas territory. (Figure 1) It is under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, although this sovereignty has never been recognized by Spain. Gibraltar is a small, narrow peninsula located at the southern edge of Spain, on the north side of the Strait of Gibraltar, where Europe and Africa are closest. The territory covers a land area of 6.8 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 30,000. The border between Gibraltar and Spain is only 2 kilometres long and has a narrow neutral zone. On the Spanish side of the border is the town of La Línea de la Concepción. The territorial waters claimed by Gibraltar reach three nautical miles off the coast.



Figure 1.

Gibraltar stands at a unique position at the western entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. Today it is an important air base and international port. In addition, thousands of tourists travel here to see the Rock of Gibraltar, which covers the major part of the territory. (Figure 2) It is a monolithic limestone promontory with the highest point 426 m above sea level. Approximately 40% of Gibraltar's land area is a nature reserve, including most of the Rock's upper part, home to about 300 Barbary macaques. Known locally as Barbary Apes or Rock Apes, for many tourists they are the top attraction in Gibraltar. The flora and fauna of the Upper Rock Nature Reserve are of conservation interest and are protected by law.



Figure 2.

On 27 April 711 the Muslim Berber armies of Tariq ibn Ziyad landed at the foot of peninsula of Gibraltar and established a base prior to his conquest of Christian Spain. The name Gibraltar is derived from the Arabic *Jebel al Tariq*, which means “mountain of Tariq”, or the more obvious *Gibr al Tariq*, meaning “rock of Tariq”.

The first fort in Gibraltar was built about 1160. It was expanded in later centuries, and today is known as the Moorish Castle. The Muslims ruled Gibraltar until the *Reconquista* of 1492 (from 1309 to 1333 it was held briefly by the Castilian king Ferdinand IV). On 25 April 1607, during the Eighty Years’ War, the Spanish fleet surprised a Dutch fleet anchored in the bay of Gibraltar and destroyed it.

By the end of the Thirty Years’ War in 1648, the Spanish Habsburgs had lost their dominance in Europe. This was the time of the four English-Dutch naval wars in 1652–1784. The Second Anglo-Dutch War began in 1664, when the British attacked a Dutch convoy in the Strait of Gibraltar. After the peace agreement, British and Dutch forces made common cause against third parties. One of these joint actions occurred during the War of the Spanish Succession—the capture of Gibraltar on 4 August 1704 by Prince George of Hesse-Darmstadt aboard the Anglo-Dutch fleet under Admiral Sir George Rooke. The Spanish garrison was taken by surprise. Contrary to standard military tactics, the attack was made not at dawn but during the afternoon siesta. In 1713 the Treaty of Utrecht formally awarded Gibraltar to the British and in 1830 it became a British Crown Colony.

During World War II the civilian population of Gibraltar was evacuated and the Rock was massively tunnelled and converted into an underground fortress for up to 15,000 soldiers (parts of those tunnels can now be toured). The aim of this conversion was to meet a possible attack by the German Wehrmacht, named Operation Felix, which was planned in a draft of 20 August 1940 but was never carried out, as Spain was neutral. Before the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa, Operation Torch, the American General Eisenhower established his headquarters in Gibraltar on 5 November 1942. Three days later the invasion of Morocco by 300,000 soldiers began. On 4 July 1943, the Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile, General Sikorski, died at Gibraltar in a plane crash.

The Spanish government has never abandoned the hope of restoring Gibraltar to Spanish sovereignty, but without success. The citizens of Gibraltar have voted by a great majority to keep the status of British possession. As a British territory, Gibraltar is part of European Union, although many European laws do not apply there.

## COATS OF ARMS OF GIBRALTAR

### Coat of Arms 1502

The first symbol of Gibraltar was its coat of arms. (Figure 3) It was introduced by a Grant of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Castile in 1502. The elements of the coat of arms are used in Gibraltar to the present day. The coat of arms of Gibraltar is a typical example of simple and good Spanish heraldry. The clear pattern and appropriate symbolism made this coat of arms very popular in Gibraltar and elsewhere.



Figure 3.

## GRANT OF ARMS<sup>1</sup>

*PRIVILEGE of the Coat of Arms granted by their most Serene Catholic Majesties to the Most Noble and Loyal City of Gibraltar.*

*WE, Don Fernando and Dona Isabel, by the Grace of God King and Queen of Castilia, of Leon, of Aragon, of Sicily, of Granada, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of Majorca, of Seville, of Sardinia, of Cordoba, of Murcia, of Jean, of the Algarves, of Algeciras, of Gibraltar, of the Canary Islands, Counts of Barcelona, Lords of Biscay and of Molina, Duke of Athens and the Neopatria, Counts of Rosellon and Arдания, Marquises of Oristan and the Gociano.*

*TO YOU, the Council, Chief Mayors, Constable, Council-men, Commissaries, Knight, Esquires, Officers, and good men of the City of Gibraltar.*

## HEALTH AND GRACE

*KNOW YE, that we have seen a petition of yours by which you sent to pray us to command to be granted to the said City Arms to be put on its Seal, Standard and Banners, and on those other places where it may be considered necessary, as there are in the other cities of our Kingdom. And WE, deeming it right, and acknowledging that the said City is very strong and that by its situation it is the key between these our Kingdoms in the Eastern and Western seas, and the Sentinel of defence of the Strait and the said seas through which no ships or peoples of either of these seas can pass to the other without sighting it or calling at it;*

*BY THESE PRESENTS, We give you as Arms an escutcheon on which the upper two thirds shall have a white field, in the said field set a Red Castle; underneath the said Castle, on the other third of the escutcheon, which shall be a red field in which there shall be a white line between the castle and the said red field: on this a golden key which We give you, and which you may and shall place on the Seal of the said City, on its Standard and Banners and the Towers, and Gates, and Bridges, and on any other Place and Public Works you may make or paint; for which purpose we have ordered to be given to you this our letter written on parchment and sealed with our red-fronted Seal, and which we sent to Their Highness Princes Don Felipe and Dona Juana, Archdukes of Austria, Dukes of Burgundy, our most dear and honoured children and the Princes of the Blood, Dukes, Prelates, Counts, Marquises, Grandees of Castile, Masters of the Orders,*

---

<sup>1</sup> The English translation of this document was sent to the author by government of Gibraltar together with a letter dated 1 December 1981.

*Priors and Sub-Priors of the Military Religious Orders, and to those of our Council, and Judge of our Supreme Court, Mayors and other Officers of Justice whomsoever of our Household and Court and Chancery, and to all the Councils, Chief Mayors, Mayors and Constables Council-men, Knights, Esquires, Officers and good men, so that all the Cities, Towns and Villagers of our Kingdoms and Lordships which are now ours or may hereafter be, and to each one of them, that they may preserve fulfil and make to be preserved and fulfilled in all cases and by all respects as herein contained, now and for all time; and that against the tenor and form thereof they may not go, exceed nor allow others to go or exceed, now, or at any time, for any cause or reason whatever; and that neither one nor the other, neither you nor they, do such thing in any manner whatever, under pain of our displeasure and of a payment of ten thousand marawedis for our household by each one that shall so neglect the observance and fulfilment thereof. Besides which we have ordered the man who shall present to you this our letter, to summon you to appear before us at our court wherever we may be on the day you are summoned and up to and within the fifteen days first following it; under the said penalty, concerning which letter we order any Notary Public who may be called for the purpose to give whomsoever shall show me this, a testimony verified by his mark in order that we may know how our mandate is observed.*

*Given in the CITY OF TOLEDO on the tenth day of the month of July, year of the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, one thousand five hundred and two.*

*I THE KING*

*I THE QUEEN*

The coat of arms (Figure 4) is the most important symbol of Gibraltar. It appears on all other symbols.



Figure 4.

The original of the grant of coat of arms is deposited in San Roque, a Spanish town near Gibraltar, to which the descendants of the original inhabitants of Gibraltar had moved in 1704. In 1933 a photo was taken of the original grant and the English College of Arms made a copy and registered the coat of arms. A facsimile of the College of Arms' charter is on display in the Gibraltar Museum.<sup>2</sup>

### Coat of arms since 1836

A description of the coat of arms of Gibraltar appears in a 1932 British book:<sup>3</sup> (Figure 5)

*Party fesswise through the nombril point Argent and Gules, in chief a castle triple towered of the last, pendent therefrom by a chain a key wards downwards in base Or. Beneath the shield upon a scroll the Motto "Montis Insignia Calpe".*

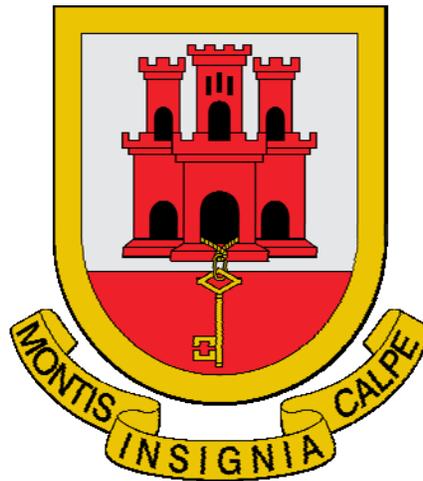


Figure 5.

In the original grant of 1502 only the shield is mentioned. Today, the official coat of arms as used by the government of Gibraltar consists of the original coat of arms with the addition of the motto MONTIS INSIGNIA CALPE (Insignia of the Mountain of Calpe, meaning the Rock of Gibraltar), which was granted by the College of Arms in 1836 to commemorate the 1779–83 Great Siege of Gibraltar. It is the oldest coat of arms in use in an overseas territory of the United Kingdom and is the only armorial insignia that dates from before the period of British colonial administration.

<sup>2</sup> “New Flags for Old Possessions”; in *Flagmaster* No. 82, Chester 1996, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> His Majesty's Stationary Office: *Flags, Badges & Arms of His Majesty's Dominions beyond the Seas and of Territories under His Majesty's Protection*, Part II – Arms, London 1932, page 25a.

## Government Coat of Arms

The arms of the government of Gibraltar (Figure 6) are the same as the government coat of arms of the United Kingdom combined with a badge featuring the coat of arms of Gibraltar.

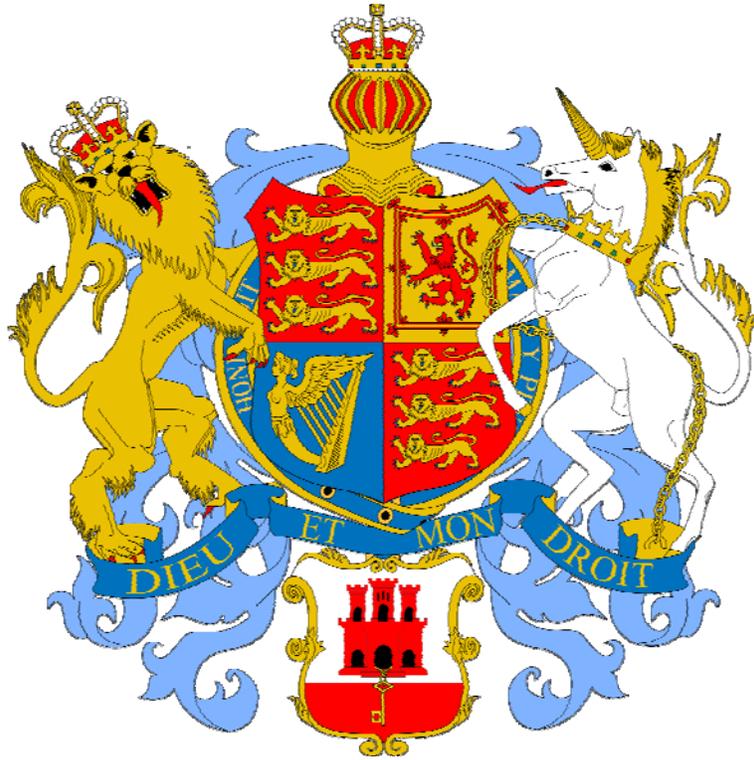


Figure 6.

## BADGES OF GIBRALTAR

### Badge 1870–1982

The badge in use for over 100 years (Figure 7) shows a gold-bordered red baroque shield with a light brown castle with three towers, two black arrow-slits, and black windows. From the gate in the centre a golden key hangs on a golden chain. Beneath is a golden scroll with the motto in black MONTIS INSIGNIA CALPE, which means “The Badge of Mount Calpe”. *Mons Calpe* was the Roman name for the Rock of Gibraltar. The arms of 1502 were used as the source for a badge adopted on 31 January 1870 for the governor and commander-in-chief’s flag.



Figure 7.

### Badge since 1982

The most recent badge has, on a silver and red divided Gothic shield (Figure 8) a red castle with black gates and black windows and a golden key hanging on golden chain. Below the shield is a golden ribbon with black inscription MONTIS INSIGNIA CALPE. This badge has been used on the government ensign and civil ensign since 1982.

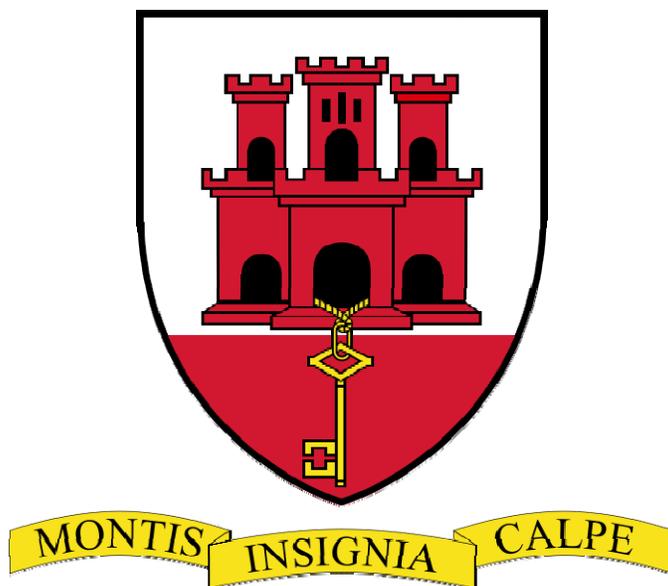


Figure 8.

## FLAGS OF GIBRALTAR

### Flag of Gibraltar since 1982

The flag of Gibraltar (Figure 9) is a banner of the arms of Gibraltar, in a ratio of 1:2. It is white over red (2:1), charged in the centre with a red three-towered castle with a golden key hanging on a golden chain. The flag has been used since at least 1966, but it was officially introduced on 8 November 1982, when it received Royal Approval.<sup>4</sup> The golden key refers to the important position of Gibraltar at the gateway to the Mediterranean. The strategic military importance is represented by the castle. White and red are national colours of Gibraltar.



Figure 9.

### Flag of the Governor 1875–1982

For over 100 years the governor used a Union Flag, with the approved badge of Gibraltar in the centre on white disc surrounded by a green laurel leaf garland. (Figure 10) In 1869, a circular despatch was sent to all colonies requesting that a sketch of the arms or badge to be adorned in the centre of the Union Flag used by the governor should be supplied to the colonial office<sup>5</sup>. The sketch submitted by the government of Gibraltar on 1 January 1870 depicted the triple-towered castle with dependent key and the motto *MONTIS INSIGNIA CALPE* underneath. This design was approved by the then-secretary of state and concurred with by the lords commissioner of the admiralty.

<sup>4</sup> “New Flags for Old Possessions”; in *Flagmaster* No. 82, Chester 1996, page 4.

<sup>5</sup> Colonial Regulations, Part 2D Flags, paragraph 123, Order in Council of Her Majesty of 7/8/1869.



Figure 10.

### Flag of the Governor since 1982

The new flag of the Governor (Figure 11) introduced on 8 November 1982, is the Union Flag defaced in the centre with the roundel of the arms surrounded by a green garland of laurel leaves.<sup>6</sup> The badge used for the governor's flag in Gibraltar since 1875 was changed in 1982, because of the incorrect arms.



Figure 11.

---

6 "New Flags for Old Possessions"; in *Flagmaster* No. 82, Chester 1996, page 1.

### Government Ensign 1870–1921

The first Government Ensign (Figure 12), used from 1870 to 1921, was the British Blue Ensign with the badge on white disc in the fly. The diameter of the disc is  $\frac{4}{9}$  of the width of the flag.<sup>7</sup>

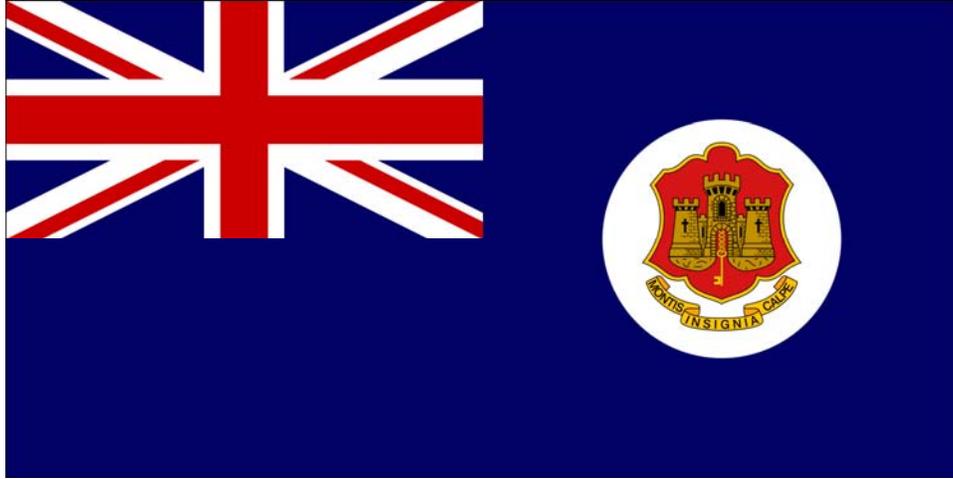


Figure 12.

### Government Ensign 1921–1982

The second government ensign (Figure 13), used from 1921 to 1982, was the British Blue Ensign with the badge in the fly. The height of the badge including the scroll is approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the width of the flag. The flag was proposed on 1 June 1921, agreed on 7 July 1921, confirmed by the governor on 22 September 1923, and included in the 1925 amendments to the 1915 edition of *Flags of All Nations*.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Flagmaster* No. 83, FlagFax, A *Flagmaster* Supplement Series B, No.6, Chester 1996.

<sup>8</sup> FOTW – Gibraltar: Martin Grieve, 7 Apr 2005.

### Government Ensign since 1982

The latest government ensign (Figure 14), used since 1982, is British Blue Ensign with the new badge in the fly.

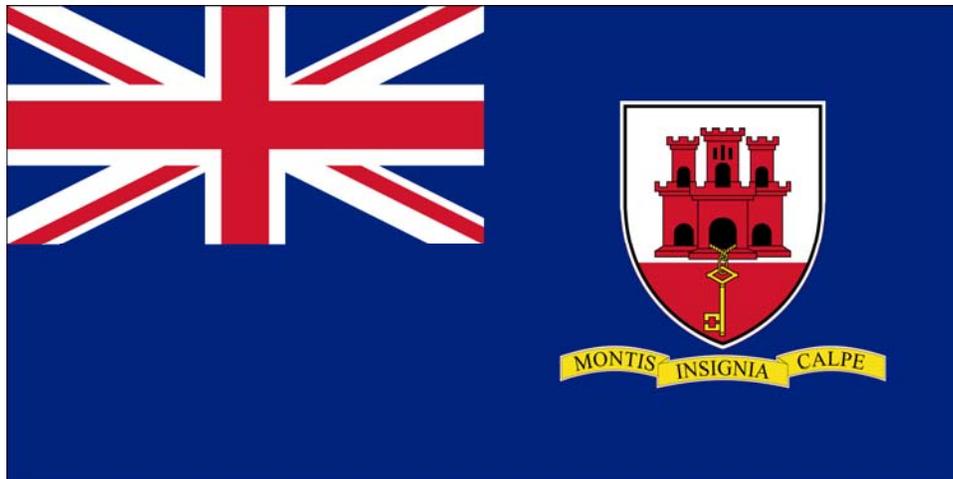


Figure 14.

### Civil Ensign since 1996

The civil ensign (Figure 15), adopted on 19 March 1996,<sup>9</sup> is the British Red Ensign with the new badge in the fly.



Figure 15.

<sup>9</sup> Royal Order in Council 1996 No. 281. The Merchant Shipping (Gibraltar Colours) Order 1996, 14 February.

## OTHER SYMBOLS OF GIBRALTAR

### Royal Gibraltar Police Crest

The Police Crest (Figure 16) shows the shield from the coat of arms on a white disc within a blue ring framed in gold inside and outside and with ROYAL GIBRALTAR POLICE in gold, placed on silver (grey) eight-pointed police star surmounted with the British Crown of St. Edward.



Figure 16.

### Royal Gibraltar Police Flag

The flag of the Royal Gibraltar Police (Figure 17) is blue with the crest of Royal Gibraltar Police near the hoist. The proportions of the flag are 1:2.



Figure 17.

## Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club Flag

The Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club was founded in 1829 by officers of the regiments then stationed in the garrison.<sup>10</sup> The special ensign of the Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club (Figure 18) is the Blue Ensign of Her Majesty's Fleet defaced with the arms of Gibraltar surmounted by the royal crown.<sup>11</sup>

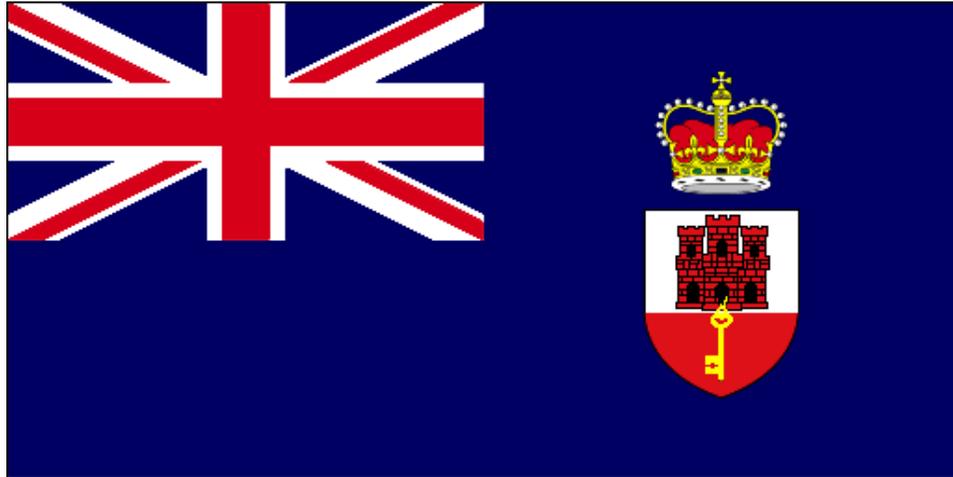


Figure 18.

## Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club Burgee

The club burgee (Figure 19) is a white triangular flag, with a blue St. George's Cross and the arms of Gibraltar in the centre surmounted by the Royal Crown.

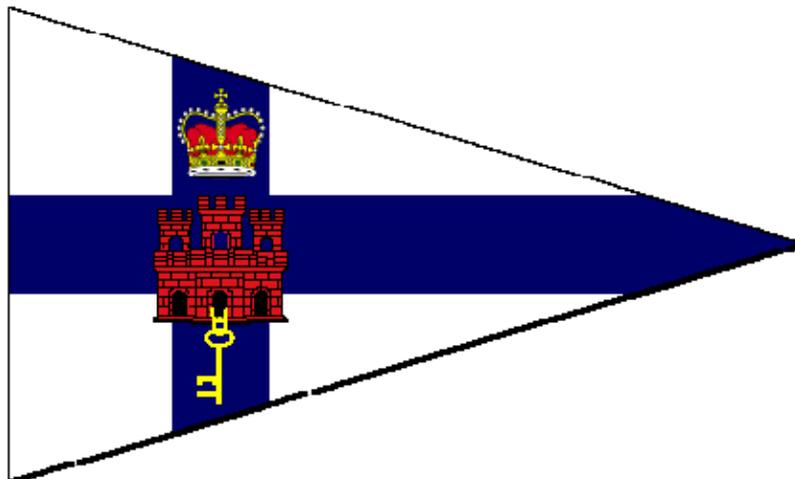


Figure 19.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rgyc.gi/history.php>

<sup>11</sup> *Flagmaster* No. 82, Chester 1982, page 4.

## COAT OF ARMS AND FLAG OF SAN ROQUE

San Roque is a small town and municipality in Spain, a short distance inland from the Bay of Gibraltar to the north of the Gibraltar peninsula. The modern settlement of San Roque was established by the former Spanish inhabitants of Gibraltar, after the majority fled following the takeover by Anglo-Dutch forces and their Spanish allies during the War of the Spanish Succession in 1704. The establishment became a new town in 1706, addressed by King Philip V of Spain as “My city of Gibraltar resident in its Campo” and “My well beloved”, because it remained loyal to his cause during the War of Succession. Gibraltar’s city council, banner, and records were moved there. San Roque’s official motto is “Very Noble and Very Loyal city of San Roque, where Gibraltar lives on”.<sup>12</sup>

The coat of arms and flag of San Roque were introduced on 18 September 2007.<sup>13</sup>

The coat of arms (Figure 20) retains the main elements of the coat of arms granted to Gibraltar by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Castile. The escutcheon with the castle and the key is surmounted with the Spanish open king’s crown.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 20.

---

12 Spanish: Muy Noble y Muy Leal ciudad de San Roque, donde reside de la Gibraltar.

13 *Boletín Oficial de Junta de Andalucía* núm. 184, Sevilla, 18 de septiembre 2007, p. 10. RESOLUCIÓN de 6 septiembre de 2007, de la Dirección General de Administración Local, por la que se admite la inscripción en el Registro Andaluz de Entidades Locales del escudo y la bandera del municipio de San Roque (Cádiz) (Expediente núm. 023/2007/SIM).

14 Original Spanish text: Escudo español, cortado en campaña: 1°. de plata, un castillo del que pende una cadena de tres eslabones de oro con llave de lo mismo sobre la campana de gules, y el paletón o guarda orientada a la diestra; orla de oro. Al timbre, corona real abierta.

The flag (Figure 21) is very similar to Gibraltar's. The proportions of the flag are 2:3. It is white over red (2:1), with the town's coat of arms in the centre of the flag.<sup>15</sup>

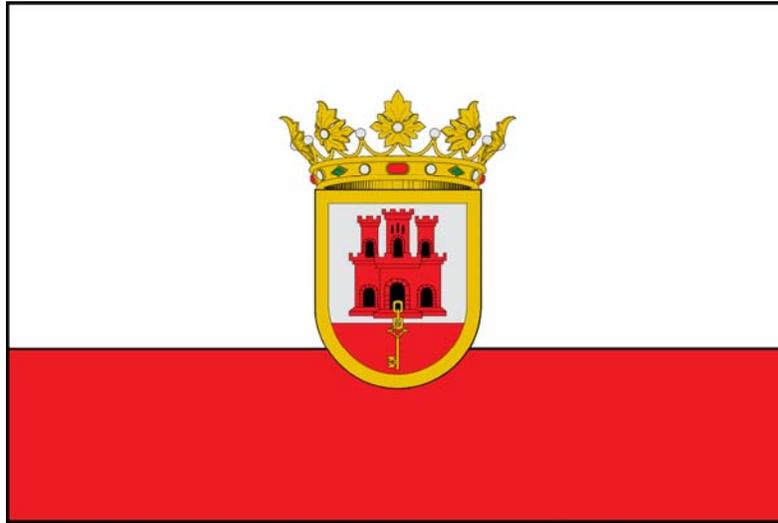


Figure 21.

## SYMBOLS OF GIBRALTAR IN USE TODAY

Gibraltarians are very proud of their flag and coat of arms, as well as their national colours—red and white. They see symbols of Gibraltar every day because the coat of arms appears on banknotes (Figure 22) and coins (Figure 23).



Figure 22.



Figure 23.

15 Original Spanish text: Paño de proporciones 3:2 (largo por ancho) dividido horizontalmente en dos partes: la superior de 2/3 de la anchura, de color blanco, y la inferior de 1/3 de la anchura, rojo. Al centro del paño, el escudo municipal.

The motif of Gibraltar's arms on coins has been popular at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is documented on copper coins called quarts, issued by Royal Mint in 1842 solely for local circulation in Gibraltar. (Figure 24) The symbols are also often used on postage stamps, for example on Queen Elizabeth II Definitive Architecture of 1994. (Figure 25)



Figure 24.



Figure 25.

Around the city, Gibraltar's symbols can be seen at every step, for instance the interesting embossed coat of arms (Figure 26) on the wall of the passport control building, the flag of Gibraltar alongside the flags of the United Kingdom and the European Union (Figure 27) near the entrance to the Great Siege Tunnels.



Figure 26.



Figure 27.

The flag of Governor (Figure 28) appears on a flagpole in front of Governor's House, and the emblem of the City of Gibraltar (Figure 29) adorns such everyday items as litter-boxes.



Figure 28.



Figure 29.

A giant Lego flag of Gibraltar (Figure 30) can be seen at the John Macintosh Hall, a cultural centre. That flag, made of 393,857 Lego bricks, is 4 by 8 metres. Beautiful emblems of Gibraltar (Figure 31) are displayed on both sides of the main entrance to the Botanical Garden.



Figure 30.



Figure 31.

Another unusual emblem (Figure 32) has been created out of bricks on the lawn in the Dell, a beautiful poetic place in the heart of the garden.



Figure 32.

The inhabitants of Gibraltar are very patriotic, as can be seen in the decoration of a building (Figure 33) during the celebration of the Tercentenary of British Gibraltar in 2004. Flags are absolutely everywhere. Apparently nobody bothers with flag etiquette. Flags are displayed in every way possible (Figure 34), but from the heart.



Figure 33.



Figure 34.

On 10 September 1967 the vast majority of Gibraltarians voted in a referendum in favour of the territory remaining under British sovereignty. Every year on that day they dress in red and white (Figure 35) and celebrate Gibraltar's national day in the streets.



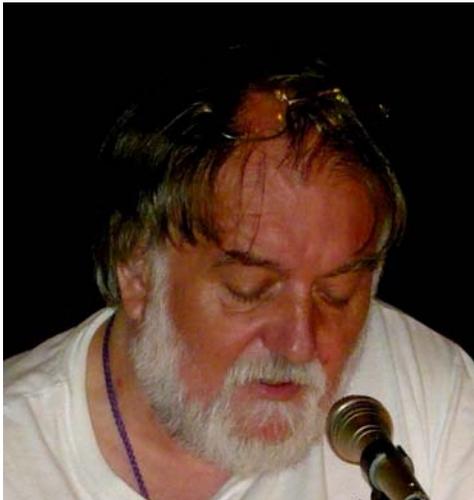
Figure 35.

## About the Author

Roman Klimeš was born 1948 in Prague, Czech Republic, emigrated in 1976 to Germany, and returned in 2003 to Prague. He studied Slavonic philology and politics at the University of Bonn. Interested in flags from childhood, he has since 1980 been involved in the methodical study of flags, coats of arms, and seals.

He is founder and director of the World Vexillological Research Institute, established in 1992 and a member of FIAV since 1993. Since 1986 he has published the quarterly journal *Flaggen, Wappen, und Siegel* (Flags, Coats of Arms, and Seals). This publication was taken over by the World Vexillological Research Institute in 1992.

He has participated in and presented papers at several International Congresses of Vexillology and written numerous articles in vexillological and heraldic journals around the world. He also published a booklet on the symbols of the Free Town of Danzig 1920 to 1939. His main fields of interest are the territory of the former Czechoslovakia, Carpatho-Ukraine, Baltic Sea Area, Oceania, Antarctica, and all dependent and autonomous territories in the world.



Roman Klimeš  
Sklenská 35  
19800 Praha 9  
Czech Republic  
e-mail: [romanklimes.flawas@email.cz](mailto:romanklimes.flawas@email.cz)