



TOWER OF HERCULES

Coats of arms

At least since late fifteenth century the Tower of Hercules has been the image of A Coruña, as the City Council decided to use as the theme for its coat of arms. Ever since, the city and the Tower have been one and the same reality. The first representations known, dating back to about 1448, are very sketchy but throughout the 16th century the structure of the coat of arms came to be defined so that as early as in the mid decades of the 15th century all the key elements for the interpretation of the legend of Hercules were already there.

One of these representations is shown in the *Ejecutoria* of 1552 by Emperor Carlos V, along with the columns of Hercules. It shows the lighthouse on a headland presiding over a wide stretch of coast. Under the foundations of the construction there lies the crowned head of Geryon, which is titled to one side to serve as the plinth for the Tower. Capping it, reference is made to both the lamp that Hispan placed and the mirror that made it possible to spy enemy ships at a distance. Around the lighthouse there are the seven scallop shells that made up the Kingdom of Galicia and in some cases over the Tower the ciborium is represented as one of the arms of the Kingdom.

A variation of this iconography is found in a coat of arms kept at the *Museo Arqueológico del castillo de San Antón*. It dates back to late 16th century or 17th century. Here the crowned head is substituted by a skull that wears no crown. Instead, the crown lies next to the skull.

This iconography, with minimal variations is represented in the coats of arms that have survived from the 17th century and which can be seen at the City Hall and at the wall of the *Jardín de San Carlos*. In both cases, the Tower is carved with its beacon but the tilted head of Geryon has been substituted, in this case, by a crowned skull that is placed upright under the Tower's plinth.

It is from mid 17th century that we can consider that the heraldic image of the Tower has already been established and that there will be no significant changes to it, as evidenced in the city's coat of arms of 1781, barely ten years before Eustaquio Giannini starts with the restoration works. Undoubtedly, restoration works brought about a change in the image of the Tower. In early 19th century the profile of the new lighthouse was introduced and Geryon's head was substituted by a skull over two crossed tibias. Similarly, the seven shells, a symbol of the provinces, were reduced to four when the provincial division of the region was reorganised.