

## Juan Bautista Alberdi

(\* 1810 Tucuman - † 1884 Paris)

An almost universally educated man, Juan Bautista Alberdi stands out as one of the foremost intellectual giants not only of his native Argentina, but also for the whole of Latin America. In the civil war, that ravaged Argentina in the 1840s and early 1850s Alberdi stood firmly to the liberal Federalists against the dictator Manuel Rosas. In 1852 he wrote, what became the manifesto of his party, and what made him perhaps the most important constitutionalist in the Spanish-speaking world. In his masterpiece “Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina” he argued for a decentralised political order that would limit governmental powers over the citizens. Many ideas from that book were incorporated into the Argentine constitution of 1853, which in many ways was his work. For decades it provided Argentina with a degree of political stability unusual for Latin America in these days and secured a long period of prosperity to the country, until dictatorial experiments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about a steady decline.

Alberdi's writings were not only concerned with legal and constitutional studies, but covered a wide range of topics – music, the arts, sciences, philosophy and political economy. He held correspondence with the greatest minds of Europe.



One of his more visionary political projects remained unrealised: a free trade area for the whole of Latin America. It was not only meant to bring about prosperity for the people, but was also conceived to promote peace in that region. Although still seen an enormously relevant intellectual figure in Latin America, Alberdi is (undeservedly!) hardly known anywhere else. A translation of his works into other languages than Spanish is long overdue.

### Literature:

- Juan Bautista Alberdi: *Escritos de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, Quilmes 1996
- Michael C. Monson: *The Life, Death, and Resurrection of an Economy*; in: *The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty*, May 1993, p.169ff

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