

The language of heraldry : coats of arms represent established order

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Rhodes, as did the Social Democrats in Schaffhausen and Glarus, although in the latter case as in other cantons with only one National Council member the personality counted more than the party. The Swiss People's Party was top in Thurgau and also passed the Christian Democrats in Grisons – a canton which we include in eastern Switzerland for economic reasons.

The region between Berne and Zurich to which we add Fribourg – which is the biggest in population terms – is both urban and rural. Town suburbs are also

an important element. Here too the Swiss People's Party is now in a dominant position, coming top in the big cantons of Berne and Zurich, as well as in the populous canton of Aargau. Soleure went to the Liberal Democrats, while the Christian Democrats confirmed their supremacy in Fribourg.

There remain Valais and Ticino. In the first attempt to rob the Christian Democrats of their absolute majority failed, and in the second the advance of the Ticino League was halted at around 20%.

of medieval England was the Norman nobility.

The origin of the white cross

While the coats of arms of individuals distinguished them from each other, those of cities, countries or communities kept people together. The Swiss coat of arms came about in this wise: the chronicler reports that at the Battle of Laupen in 1339 the Bernese and their allies – those of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Oberhasli and Simmental – stitched on a white cross as their common symbol.

The rules of heraldry were laid down centuries ago. There is nothing new. This is the way it goes: if you want to be part of it, accept the tradition; if you do not like it, keep out of it.

Strict colour regulations

A coat of arms is always coloured. Out of the many natural tinctures heraldry uses black, red, green, blue and purple. There are also the metals: or (yellow) and argent (white). The ordering of metals and colours is based on one important rule: colours must be separated by a metal, and vice versa. This leads to strong contrasts. But the rule was sometimes breached, as the Bernese heraldry specialist, Hans Jenni, points out. Since gold was worth more than silver or black, some bearers of arms brought new colourings to their coats of arms when they had done particularly well in an endeavour. "The rule was kept most strictly", he says, "when the Confederation was made up of eight cantons. From 1803 on the politicians had more to say than the arbiters of heraldry". He uses as examples Aargau, which put black against blue, and Thurgau, which put a golden lion in a silver field – which were real heraldic sins.

In the days when armorial bearings decided matters of life and death, it was very important that they should be im-

Why there is no canton for the Swiss Abroad

The community of the Swiss Abroad is frequently described as the Fifth Switzerland, which is a reference to the four linguistic cultures. Following the introduction and the later extension of voting rights for our compatriots abroad, the idea of a special constituency for them was examined. But in the end it was rejected for both legal and political reasons.

Two motives lay behind the decision to give the Swiss Abroad the right to vote by correspondence from July 1, 1992. The first was to give those Swiss Abroad interested in the political process in Switzerland the opportunity of taking part. The second was a desire to integrate the Swiss Abroad into the political life of our country. For this reason it was immediately made clear that after registration at their diplomatic post those resident abroad entitled to vote would be in the same position as voters at home, i.e. they would be entered on the electoral roll in a Swiss municipality of their choice.

In our system it is the Swiss municipality of origin which gives the right to vote. But according to the principle of freedom of movement throughout Switzerland any other municipality of residence in the country may give the same right by analogy. So logically speaking the right to vote for the Swiss Abroad could be included in this system only if an actual canton for them were established, which would so to speak create its own 'right of origin'. But the possibility of creating such a canton immediately posed many legal questions which finally made such a structure appear unrealistic. The most important unanswered questions were as follows:

- Would the change in the constitution indispensable for the creation of a new canton be approved by the people and the cantons?
- Where would the centre of such a canton be and what would its infrastructure look like?
- Would it be possible to force over 500,000 Swiss Abroad who were at the same time subject to the legal system of their country of residence to become citizens of this canton? As a rule motivation for exercising the right to vote rests on a complex link to an actual place, whether it is the municipality of origin or a place in which the voter once lived. An abstract creation could not replace this.
- Would not the extension of the jurisdiction of a Swiss Abroad canton to Swiss citizens living abroad be in breach of the sovereignty of the country of residence?
- Would Swiss Abroad find acceptable any tax obligations towards Switzerland which would certainly result from the creation of a Swiss Abroad canton and the substantial extension of their rights implied?

The creation of a Swiss Abroad canton would also have little sense on political grounds. A disparate group of Swiss citizens, linked only by the fact that they live abroad, would immediately risk turning into a political eccentricity. Such marginalisation of the Fifth Switzerland, however, would be diametrically opposed to the objective of civic integration. The interests of the Swiss Abroad can be looked after through existing political structures and with the support of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, which is recognised by the government, more efficiently than through the creation of a new canton which it would be virtually impossible to provide with a proper legal basis.

Minister Thomas Füglistler, head of the Service for the Swiss Abroad at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

The language of heraldry

Coats of arms represent established order

You find them on coins and seals, castles and schools, flags and even motor cars. Coats of arms are ancient symbols of the independence of families, municipalities and cantons.

had to be painted with a sign visible from afar. In this way those who met him knew whether he was friend or foe.

In the great hosts that set out for the Crusades there were so many coats of arms that the simple man was overwhelmed. Recognising and knowing all

Alice Baumann

about coats of arms became an art. Those versant in it were the heralds. The word descends from Middle English 'herald' – which itself came from the Germanic 'Heer-Walt', the man who orders the host. The name well expresses the original purpose of the coat of arms, which was to ensure order in battle. The herald gave his name to the science of heraldry. In France the technical terms were laid down in the Middle Ages, and most of them were used in English because the ruling class

mediately identifiable. A coat of arms with only one colour was theoretically possible, but in practice it scarcely ever happened. The simplest pattern for a coat of arms was a straightforward division. Zurich, Zug and Lucerne, for example, are divided into blue – possibly symbolic of their lakes – and white.

Stylised forms

Figures and objects, plants and animals, heavenly bodies and beasts of fable provided many design opportunities. But they all had one thing in common: they were simplified to the point of formality. A heraldic lily, for example, bears practically no resemblance to its

botanical origin. The heraldic sun makes the astronomer smile. Indeed heraldry created its own image language. "They are never illustrations. Coats of arms are signs; they must be as easy to read as traffic signs". This is how Hans Jenni explains their symbolism.

The terms used to describe an armorial bearing (the technical expression is 'blazoning') are disconcerting, but the definitions are clear. For example, stars represent a number. Specialist Jenni explains how Aargau added three stars when it took possession of the Freiamt, the county of Baden, and the Fricktal. The thirteen stars on the Valais coat of arms also represent the number of districts.

'Dexter' and 'sinister'

A peculiarity of heraldic language was the use of directions. What we call right is left on a coat of arms. This stems from the warlike origins of heraldry. Right and left were as seen by the wearer. The shield was worn on the left arm. In advancing the right hand side of the shield was turned towards the enemy. The heraldic right may also be interpreted as forward and the left as behind. So the figures and signs on an armorial bearing always look to the right, which means they are advancing. This is because advancing is judged better than retreating. Exceptions are Cantons Neuchâtel and Schwyz: their crosses are on the wrong side.

SH
Schaffhausen



AR
Appenzell-Outer Rhodes



AI
Appenzell-Inner Rhodes



SG
St. Gall



GR
Grisons



AG
Aargau



Joined the Confederation:

1501

1513

1513

1803

1803

1803

Seat of government:

Schaffhausen

Herisau

Appenzell

St. Gall

Chur

Aarau

Population in 1995 (in 1,000):

73.9

54.2

14.7

440.7

184.2

535.1

Foreign nationals (in 1,000):

13.9

7.5

1.5

80.5

25.7

93.9

Land area in km²:

298

243

173

2026

7105

1404

TG
Thurgau



1803

Frauenfeld

220.3

42.0

991

TI
Ticino



1803

Bellinzona

302.1

80.6

2812

VD
Vaud



1803

Lausanne

602.1

153.4

3712

VS
Valais



1815

Sion

269.3

45.2

5224

NE
Neuchâtel



1815

Neuchâtel

164.2

36.4

803

GE
Geneva



1815

Geneva

381.7

147.7

252

JU
Jura



1979

Delémont

69.0

8.1

836