

Confession and the balance of the ruling cantons

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The Reformation split the ruling cantons. Zurich, Bern, Basel and Schaffhausen adopted the Reformed faith, Glarus became confessionally mixed, and Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, Fribourg and Solothurn remained Catholic. After the Second War of Kappel in 1531, the Second Landfrieden (peace settlement) of 20 November 1531 regulated religion in the common lordships in favour of the Catholic side, since it allowed communities and individuals to return to the old faith without granting the same right to the Reformed.¹ In the Italian bailiwicks the Catholic majority among the ruling cantons, together with the Catholic loyalty of the population, ensured that the Reformation did not take hold. The small Reformed community of Locarno was expelled in 1555 after a decision of the Diet, an episode that Chapter B.I treats in detail and Chapter B.II follows into the silk and banking history of Zurich.

For the governance of the bailiwicks, the confessional division had a lasting consequence. Reformed cantons appointed Reformed *landfogti*, who governed Catholic subjects under the supervision of a Catholic majority at the *sindacato*. Every appointment was scrutinized for its confessional implications, and every judicial or ecclesiastical dispute that touched the church could turn into a dispute between the ruling cantons. The subjects learnt to exploit these divisions. Communities that had a grievance against a Reformed *landfogto* could appeal to the Catholic cantons. The reverse was also true. Carlo Borromeo, archbishop of Milan from 1560, devoted particular attention to the Ticinese bailiwicks. He visited the parishes of his own archdiocese as their archbishop, whereas in the Comasque parishes he acted as papal visitor, because the diocese of Como belonged to the church province of Aquileia until 1751 and lay outside his metropolitan authority. His visitations and the Collegio Elvetico, which he founded in Milan in 1579 to train Swiss clergy, strengthened the Catholic identity of the bailiwicks and the influence of the archdiocese of Milan and the diocese of Como over them (Chapter B.III).²

1 The Leventina and the three-canton bailiwicks

The Leventina deserves separate treatment, since its position differed in law and in practice. The peace of 1480 had confirmed the valley's statutes and local institutions, and the Leventina retained a considerable degree of self-government: it formed a single valley commune divided into eight *vicinanze*, whose common affairs were settled by a general parliament convened every year and by a council with wide administrative and judicial powers. Its military contingents, apportioned among the *vicinanze*, fought regularly beside the men of Uri in the transalpine campaigns, and through the pack-animal transport (*someggiatura*) the valley's peasants shared in the income of the Gotthard route. Its people regarded themselves, with some justification, as junior partners of Uri with rights of their own.³ That self-understanding explains the violence of the revolt of 1755, discussed below, when Uri tried to impose new rules on guardianship in the valley.

Bellinzona, the Riviera and Blenio were the smallest and poorest of the joint bailiwicks. Bellinzona was a market town with a significant transit trade, whose burghers had submitted voluntarily in 1500 and who expected their privileges to be respected. The Riviera and Blenio were agricultural valleys with a strong tradition of seasonal emigration, especially of chestnut-sellers, chocolate-makers and chimney-sweeps (Chapter A.III). In all three bailiwicks the three ruling cantons rotated the office of *landfogto* on a two-year cycle, while their delegates met annually to hear appeals and audit accounts, in a smaller version of the *sindacato* of the twelve cantons.⁴

Common misconception. It is often said that Ticino was ruled as a "colony" of the Swiss. The word captures the absence of political rights and the extraction of revenue through justice. It misdescribes the legal structure, however. The bailiwicks were a condominium of lordly rights in the tradition of the medieval territorial state: the rulers took over the rights of the Duke of Milan, confirmed local statutes and privileges and left communal government, local taxation and the management of common land to the inhabitants. There was no settlement of colonists, no transfer of land and no systematic economic policy in favour of the ruling cantons. The resulting order was one of distant and fragmented lordship, with the injustices typical of that form.⁵

2 Notes

1. Hans Ulrich Bächtold, "Landfriedensbünde", in HLS, version of 20 November 2014, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/009807/2014-11-20/>; Peyer, *Verfassungsgeschichte* (above). ↩

2. Pablo Crivelli, "Borromeo, Carlo", in DSS, version of 27 August 2021, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/010211/2021-08-27/> (German: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010211/2021-08-27/>), on his attention to the Ticinese bailiwicks under Milanese ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the foundation of the Collegio Elvetico in 1579; Marco Jorio, "Aquileia", in DSS, version of 2 August 2001, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/006950/>, on the metropolitan authority of Aquileia over the diocese of Como from 607 to 1751. His role as papal visitor in the Comasque parishes is treated in Chapter B.III. ↩
3. Mario Fransioli and Tiziano Locarnini, "Leventina", in DSS, version of 14 March 2017, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008543/2017-03-14/> (confirmation of the statutes and local institutions in 1480, the eight vicinanze, the annual general parliament and the council, the military contingents in the transalpine campaigns and the someggiatura as a secondary occupation of the peasants). See also Ceschi, *Nel labirinto delle valli* (above). ↩
4. Chiesi and Crivelli, "Bellinzona (pieve, baliaggio, distretto)" (above), on the two-year term of the commissario appointed in rotation by the three cantons; Chiesi, "Riviera (baliaggio, distretto)" (above). ↩
5. The legal characterization follows André Holenstein, "Baliaggi comuni", in DSS, version of 21 September 2021, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/009817/> (the landfogti exercised low and high criminal justice, military command, supervision of the local administration and the administration of the revenues and rights of the lordship), and Peyer, *Verfassungsgeschichte* (above); on the confirmation of statutes and local institutions see Fransioli and Locarnini, "Leventina" (above), and on communal self-government Noah Businger, "Why is Ticino part of Switzerland?", Swiss National Museum blog, February 2024, <https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/en/2024/02/why-is-ticino-part-of-switzerland/> ("When ruled by the Confederacy, each commune had been self-governing to a large extent"). ↩

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