

Flags of the Regions of Bohemia

Aleř Brořek

When I talked about the municipal flags of Bohemia at the 11th Congress of Vexillology in Madrid six years ago, I mentioned that Czechoslovakia does not belong among such flag-rich countries as West Germany or the Netherlands. This fact can be supported when we compare the total number of Czechoslovak towns and municipalities with that of towns and municipalities, which used or have used their flags. Though there are about 600 towns and several hundred municipalities in Czechoslovakia, we only know about 250 Czech and Slovak municipal flags or banners. You therefore may be surprised that the aim of this lecture is to discuss regional flags in Bohemia. It is true that the contemporary regions of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic fly no regional flags and we do not presume that such reality will change. On the contrary, there are considerations that ten existing regions -five regions in Bohemia, two regions in Moravia and three regions in Slovakia- called *kraje* in Czech, will be dissolved in the future. Their administration, called *krajstky n rodní.vybor* -regional national committee- is already in the process of dissolution.

The number of regions has changed in Czechoslovakia several times since 1918 when this state was founded. However, no regional flags have been used in this century except for flags of

constituent parts of Czechoslovakia, called *země* -provinces-, namely Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, and the Carpatho-Ukraine. It can be assumed that the same situation existed in the 19th century. There were 16 regions in Bohemia at that time (Fig. 1). They were: Beroun, Bydřov, Budějovice, Boleslav, Chrudim, Čáslav, Loket, Kouřim, Klatovy, Hradec Králové, Litoměřice, Práchen -with the town of Písek as the capital-, Plzeň, Rakovník, Žatec, and Tábor.

In 1972 a small booklet accidentally came to my hands. It dealt the history of coronation of Bohemian kings and was published in 1890 (1). There was hardly any information in its 144 pages. However, when I read about the coronation of the last Bohemian king Ferdinand I in 1836 and his return from Prague to Vienna, I held my breath at page 126. Here the author stated, "There was an obelisque with the titles of H.M. standing on the square in the town of Čáslav. A banner of the region of Čáslav was flying from its top". Unfortunately, nothing more about this banner was given. It forced me, however, to investigate more about the coronation of Ferdinand I.

Coronation of Austrian emperors, the placing of the Bohemian crown on their heads, had

(1) Karel Ad mek, *Z paměti korování českých králův* (Třebíč, 1890).

an important meaning for the Czech nation. The emperor was inaugurated not only as the right heir to the Bohemian crown, but also with the consent of the Czech nation. Coronation confirmed the integrity of the ancient Bohemian kingdom, demonstrated state sovereignty, and the king had to vow to keep the privileges of Bohemia. When the Holy Roman emperor Francis II died in 1835, his eldest son Ferdinand I, who was weak-minded and incapable of really ruling, ascended the throne in Vienna. The emperor's manifesto of 29 January 1836 set the coronation for the Czech king to occur during the first half of September 1836. A coronation committee was established on 31 May 1836 and the gubernium issued a circular for regional offices. It was agreed that after the coronation there would be a national fete where representatives of all 16 regions would be present, a festive procession would be organized and wedding rites would be shown.

Ferdinand I and his wife Maria Anna, daughter of Victor Emmanuel I of Sardinia, left Vienna on 16 August 1836 and came to Prague through Brno, Hradec Králové and Jičín on 1 September 1836. The coronation ceremony of Ferdinand I was performed in the famous St Vitus cathedral in Prague on 7 September 1836. He and his suite trod carpets in the Bohemian colours of

red and white, according to reports in newspapers from this time (2).

The national fete was arranged on a large green field near the disabled soldiers' home on 14 September 1836. The peaks of this fete were wedding processions from all regions of Bohemia, in alphabetical order according to the regional names in German. A small booklet describing the program of this national fete in detail was published in German just before the fete (3). As it was based on written reports from regional administrations and differs only slightly from descriptions published in contemporary newspapers, we can trust it. According to it the wedding processions started with a herald of Prague who bore a banner in yellow and black with Prague arms. This confirms the affirmation by L. Mucha (4) that four Prague towns -the Old Town, the Lesser Town, the New Town and Hrad any- after



(2) *Bohemia*, No. 114, 1836.

(3) *Programm zu dem Volksfeste, welches zur Feier der Kr nung Seiner Majestat... von den bohmischen Standen veranstaltet wurde* (Prague, 1836)

(4) Ludv k Mucha, "The flag of the Czechoslovak capital Prague and the flags of 18 Prague towns," *The Flag Bull.* XI:2, p.249.

Fig. 1

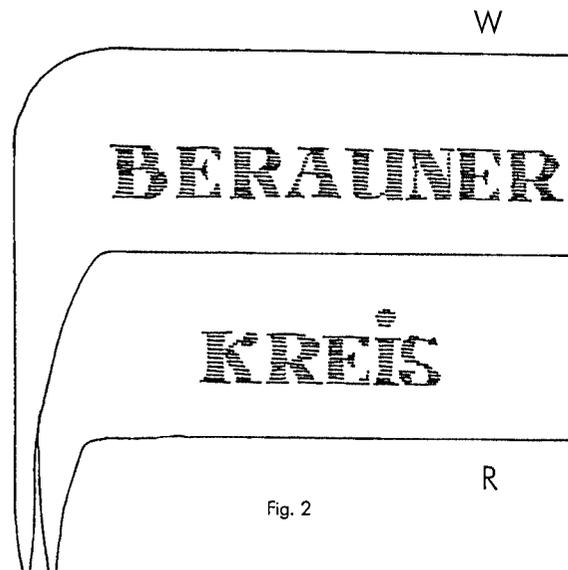


Fig. 2

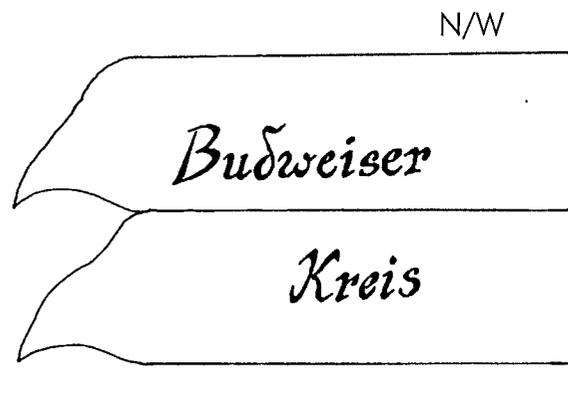


Fig. 3

joining together in 1784, used the Old Town arms and colours black and yellow until 1848. These colours were derived from the Old Town arms. Unfortunately, unlike the case of the Prague banner, further flag information is not so concrete in this booklet. Consider yourselves: The next procession was from the region of Beroun. Its flag-bearer bore a red banner of the region, followed by youngsters with small white-red flags. A rider from the region of Bydřov had a regional banner. A fore-rider from the region of Budějovice carried a banner of white and red with the inscription of the region. In front of the group from the Boleslav region there was a herald with a regional flag and so on. It can be summed up from this booklet that all 16 regions showed their own flags or banners even though they were only briefly described in three cases - Beroun, Budějovice, Litoměřice-, and no flag description but the term flag, banner, or regional banner was used in ten cases -Bydřov, Bolešlav, Chrudim, C slav, Lohet, Kouřim, Klatovy, Plzeň, Rakovnik, and Źatec-. No flags are mentioned in 3 cases -in wedding processions from Hradec Kr lov , Pr cheňsko, and T bor- but one can believe that they were used because the "program-booklet says e.g. "this procession was only slightly different from the others" in the description of the wedding procession from T bor.

How did these regional flags or banners



Fig. 4

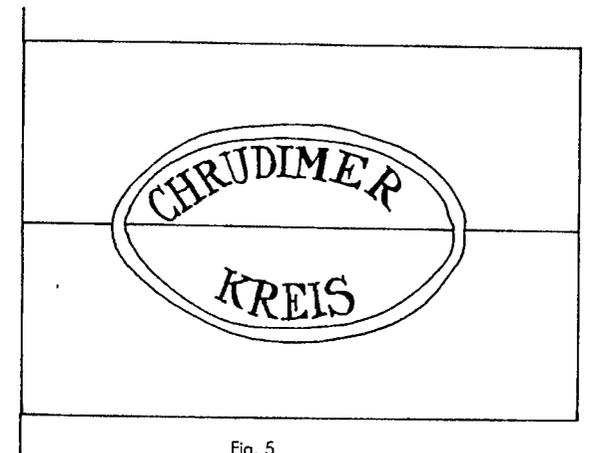


Fig. 5

look? Unfortunately, I have not found them yet in Bohemian museums so far. They are probably not preserved anywhere. However, thanks to the decision of regional administrations, some artists were asked after the fete to draw pictures showing not only wedding vehicles and wedding costumes but in some cases also regional flags. More than 30 pictures are still kept in archives and museums in this country. The appearance of regional flags can be reconstructed from these pictures as follows:

1/ The region of Beroun: a white-over-red flag with the regional name in German. The word of "Berauner" is on the white stripe, that of "Kreis" - region- on the red stripe (fig. 2).

2/ The region of Budějovice: a white-over-red flag with the name of the region in German (fig. 3). The "program-booklet mentions a white-over-blue flag with the arms of the house of Schwarzenberg and the inscription "Wittingau" of the estate. Such a flag was carried in the middle of the procession. White and blue were the colours of the house of Schwarzenberg.

3/ The region of Boleslav: a red vexillum with a white fringe. It bore a white inscription "Bunzlauer" in an arch and a white inscription "Kreis" below on red standing for the name of the region in German (fig. 4). There is another flag, probably the municipal flag of Liberec because it is red over white with the arms of Liberec in the

centre. Such a flag was used in Liberec in the 19th century as it was drawn on shooter's targets, which are still kept in the Liberec museum. It can be mentioned that the flag of Liberec used in the procession in 1836 was readopted after 142 years in 1978 (5). In addition to it there is a lot of white over red, yellow over blue, and red over black flags with the names of estates -e.g. "Herschaft Hohlinn"-

4/ The region of Chrudim: a red-over-white flag with a yellow inscription -"Chrudimer Kreis"- in a yellow oval (fig. 5). There were small blue, white-blue-white and white-red-white flags on the last but one vehicle.

5/ The region of Čáslav: a white flag bore a black inscription "Czaslauer Kreis" in the middle. It seems that the border was made of small red triangles (fig. 6).

6/ The region of Kouřim: a red vexillum with a white fringe and the white name of region in Czech (fig. 7).

7/ The region of Klatovy: a white-over-red flag with a red inscription "Klattowsko" -the name of the region in Czech- on a white stripe (fig. 8). The representatives of the Domařlice estate used, however, a white flag with a red narrow stripe going along three sides of the flag in the

(5) Aleř Brořek, "Z historie libereckých vlajek," *Vexilologie*, No. 55, pp. 1135-1141.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

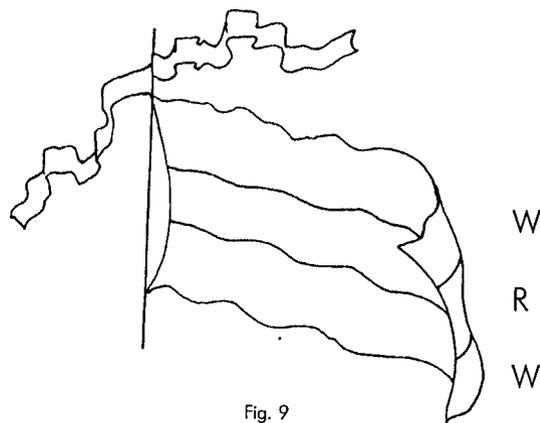


Fig. 9

procession.

8/ The region of Hradec Kr lov : a simple flag consisting of three horizontal stripes, white over red over white (fig. 9).

9/ The region of Litom r ice: it showed a lot of interesting flags and banners in the procession. According to the "program-booklet two countrymen carried two big flags with an inscription "Leitmeritzer Kreis -the name of the region in German- and "Duxer Herrschaft" -the name of the estate of Duchcov in German-. Another group from this region displayed blue and white flags with an inscription "Herrschaft Lobositz" -the estate of Lovosice-. Pictures kept in museums can give precision to their descriptions. There were flags of white over light blue with yellow inscriptions - "Leitmeritzer Kreis" and "Herrschaft Lobositz" respectively- and yellow ornaments in the shape of flowers in the corners of the flags. In addition to it, one picture also showed a red-over-white flag with a yellow inscription -"Leitmeritzer Kreis"- (fig. 10) and lots of yellow-over-blue flags with a quartered shield in their centre. As the municipal flag of Litomerice consists of the same colours, it may be assumed that these flags influenced the municipal flag of the capital of this region. -The yellow-over-blue flag of Litom r ice could not be derived from municipal arms because they do not include these two colours-

10/ The region of Pr che sko: it was the only region where simple white-over-red flags, e.i. the Bohemian national colours, were displayed if lithographs kept in museums were reliable. A black inscription "Prachiner Kreis" was on a blue shield, which was not a component of these flags. A book on the history of P sek (6) mentions a flag of red and white with the municipal arms of P sek on the reverse and the Czech inscription "Kr lovsk  m sto P sek"-the king's town of P sek- on the obverse which was made only for the procession. It was drawn by Jan Hub cek who got a fee of 2 zlat y and 72 krejcar. However, lithographies do not confirm the display of the municipal flag in the procession.

11/ The region of Plze : a red-over-white flag with a red inscription "Pilsner Kreis." in red on a white stripe (fig. 11).

12/ The region of Rakovn k: a red-over-white flag with an inscription "Rakonitzer Kreis." in yellow. Its border consisted of red and white dogs' teeth (fig. 12). A lot of white-over-red and red-over-white flags were used in this procession, as well.

Finally, we can summarize that we know the appearance of 12 regional flags, which were used in Bohemia in 1836. One can expect that the

(6) Augustin Sedl ček, *D jiny P sku II (P sek, 1912)*, pp. 130-135.

remaining region -Byd ov, Loket,  atec and T bor- used similar flags. They repeat the Bohemian national colours of white and red, which were derived from the historical arms -a silver Bohemian lion on a red shield- of Bohemia. The majority of regional flags used the name of the region on the field consisting of two stripes, red and white, although some regional flags are more striking. Municipal flags -Prague and Liberec- appeared in these processions as well and one can assume that the present municipal flag of Litomerice was influenced by a similar flag used in the processions in 1836. It is not known whether these regional flags were displayed only in the national fete but it can be presumed that they were designed for this purpose. They represent an interesting contribution to the history of Czechoslovak flags.

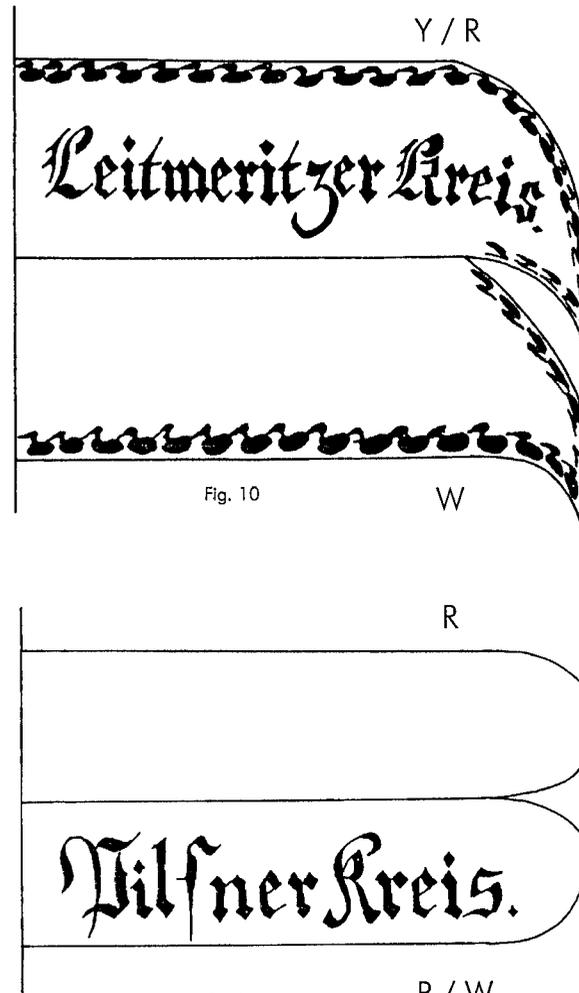


Fig. 10

Fig. 11

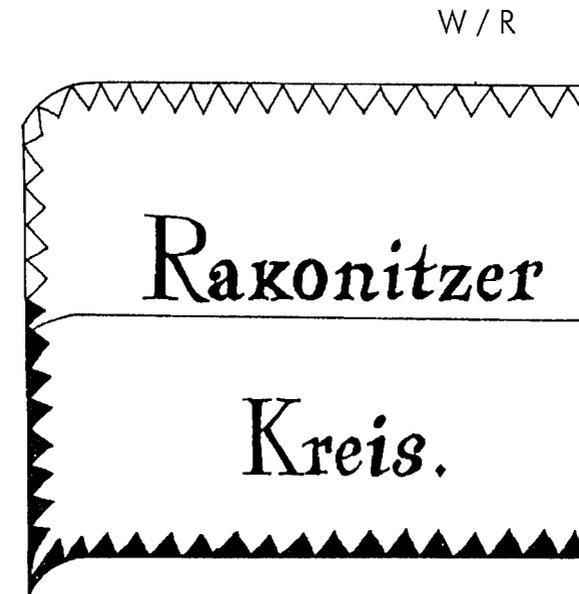


Fig. 12