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Representation of a Dog in a Coat of Arms on a Building in Romanshorn (Switzerland)

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Abstract

In the Swiss town of Romanshorn, on the shores of Lake Constance, next to the old, renovated Evangelical church, there is a building with a coat of arms on its wall. It is very

interesting that the shield in the coat of arms features a dog. The subject of our research is precisely this dog.

Keywords: Coat of Arms, Dog, Romanshorn

Introduction

It is interesting that the dog, known as man's best friend and a faithful companion to humans for thousands of years, appears rather infrequently in official symbols, coats of arms, flags, and emblems of states or cities. It can occasionally be found, rarely, on the coats of arms of some cities, though these are typically not the capital cities of the countries in which they are located.

In a detailed presentation and heraldic explanation of coats of arms, symbols, and insignia (Bortnik, Rezko, 2007) ^[1], in a comprehensive collection of 10,000 examples, not a single dog is depicted. As the authors state, no two coats of arms are alike. In Switzerland, the oldest archaeological finds of a domesticated dog date back to around 14,000 years ago. The oldest archaeological evidence is dated between 14,100 and 14,600 BC. Skeletal remains, including parts of the upper jaw, were discovered in 1873 at the Kesslerloch site near Thayngen (Canton of Schaffhausen). It was determined that the upper jaw does not belong to a wolf but to a dog. The teeth in the jaw also confirm that it is not a wolf but a dog. The discovery was published by scientists Hannes Napierala and Peter Uerpmann from the University of Tübingen in the journal *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*. (<https://www.archaeologie-online.de/nachrichten/aeltester-haushund-aus-dem-ke4sslerloch-nachgewiesen-1609/>).

This archaeological site is among the most significant in Europe from the period of the late Ice Age. It is assumed that hunters used this cave as a summer camp.

When it comes to depictions of dogs in religious scenes, it is worth noting that Islamic religion and Judaism portray the dog as an unclean animal, and thus it is to be avoided (Bruce-Mitford, 2011) ^[2]. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, dogs are rarely seen accompanying saints, while in Roman Catholic Christianity, dogs appear more frequently, most notably as companions of Saint Roch and Saint Dominic.

Generally speaking, dogs do not often appear on coats of arms. One interesting example, featuring two dogs, is the coat of arms of the city of Mount Pearl in Canada. It clearly displays two Newfoundland dogs, which are internationally recognized as a breed and represent a source of national pride.



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=munt+pearl/>

Picture 1: Coat of arms of Mount Pearl (Canada)

Another one, one of the rarer coats of arms with a dog, comes from the 16th century, from England.



Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Sudbury_Achievement.png

Picture 2: Robin S. Taylor. SUDBURY (Borough and town council), Incorporated into: 1974 Babergh The arms were officially granted on September 20, 1576



Source:

https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/wiki/Simon_Sudbury

https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/wiki/Simon_Sudbury

Picture 3: SIMON SUDBURY Born: Deceased: June 14, 1381 Bishop of London, 1361-1375. Archbishop of Canterbury, 1375-1381

The subject of our analysis is a dog depicted on a coat of arms displayed on a building in Romanshorn (Switzerland).

The Dog in Swiss Heraldry

In general, the dog appears rarely in Swiss heraldry. It is practically absent from the coats of arms of cities. However, it can be found in the heraldic symbols of wealthy families or high-ranking church officials such as bishops. One such example is the coat of arms of the municipality of Hundwil, located in the canton of Appenzell, which features a dog.



Source: <https://www.hundwil.ch/>

Picture 4: Coat of arms of the municipality of Hundwil

The dog is accompanied by a bear. Both animals are facing the heraldic right side. It should be noted that the right side in heraldry is considered the positive side (Ćirić, 1988) [3]. Therefore, both the bear and the dog are viewed as positive symbols. The date of origin of the coat of arms is unknown. It is visibly clear that the dog wears a broad, ornate golden collar around its neck. The dog symbolizes loyalty, strength, and respect.

In the literature available to us, there is no information indicating that any other municipality in Switzerland features a dog in its coat of arms.

Romanshorn

Located in the canton of Thurgau, on the northern shore of Lake Constance (Bodensee), lies the town of Romanshorn. Today, it is an important tourist destination and a major port on the Swiss side of the lake. The town has a long history. Archaeological excavations have confirmed that people inhabited the area as far back as prehistoric times. The oldest evidence dates to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. The earliest recorded mention of the name Romanshorn dates back to the year 779. At that time, it was referred to as Romolteshorn. This name appears in a document of the Abbey of Saint Gall (an ecclesiastical domain of influence). The earlier form of the name was Rumanishorn. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanshorn>)

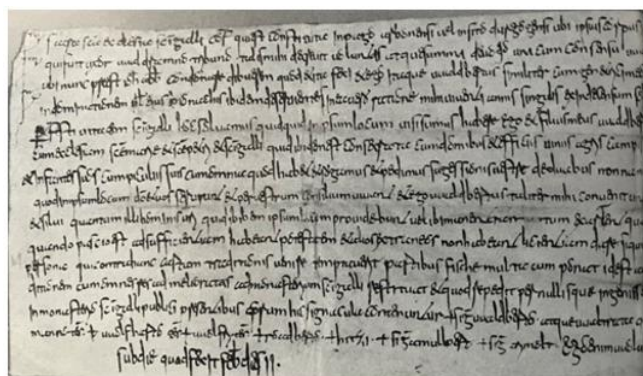


Foto: Tobler, 1985

Picture 5: Part of the document from 779, in Latin, where the first the road is mentioned by Romanshorn

During the Roman period, approximately from the 1st century BCE to the 5th century CE, this region was a border area of the Roman Empire. Accordingly, the influence of the Roman Empire was considerable, despite the fact that Romanshorn itself was not a large town. At that time, Romanshorn was located within the Roman province of Raetia, which encompassed a large portion of what is now eastern Switzerland.

The town was not situated directly on major Roman roads but was certainly connected to them. A very important Roman settlement and road junction was the present-day town of Bregenz, located on the eastern shore of Lake Constance, now within Austria. In Roman times, Bregenz was known as Brigantium. A true Roman town with fortifications near Romanshorn was Arbor Felix, known today as Arbon.

Brigantium was located within the Roman province of Raetia. Due to its geographical location on Lake Constance, it held significant strategic importance, being situated at the intersection of several important roads. The Romans were well known for constructing roads throughout their empire, linking major settlements. Key routes that passed through Brigantium (Bregenz) included:

Via Claudia Augusta – One of the main Alpine transport routes, this road connected Altinum (near Venice) and Augusta Vindelicorum (Augsburg). It passed through the Reschen Pass toward Brigantium, establishing crucial lines of communication and transport between Italy and the Germanic territories.

A road leading to Curia Raetorum (Chur in present-day Switzerland), which served as an important administrative center and transportation hub.

A local road running along the shore of Lake Constance, connecting local settlements, including Arbor Felix (Arbon) and Constantia (Konstanz).

In Brigantium (Bregenz), a Roman military garrison was stationed, indicating active communication with other parts of the empire. The Roman roads leading to and from Bregenz were of great importance for communication. To better understand why a dog might appear on a coat of arms, it is helpful to look back at the Roman Empire and the time when it governed what is now Swiss territory.

One particularly important fortification was Vindonissa (modern-day Windisch), a major Roman military camp from

14 to 101 CE. Three Roman legions were stationed there: Legio XIII Gemina, Legio XXI Rapax, and Legio XI Claudia. The camp housed up to 5,000 legionaries. It was established by Legio XIII Gemina during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Interestingly, the site had originally contained a fortification built by the Celts.

Why would such a Roman military camp be relevant to dogs? The answer lies in a clay lamp. A relief of a dog was found on a fragment of one such lamp (Urošević, 2009) [5]. Lamps of this kind were used in Roman camps throughout the empire. The depiction of a dog may simply represent the dogs that lived in that area and were familiar to the soldiers. Vindonissa was connected by road to Brigantium (Bregenz). That Bregenz was an important Roman military post is further confirmed by the fact that it was connected by road to Salzburg in the east (Swarz, 2000).

To the east of Romanshorn lies the Swiss canton of Appenzell. Aside from its reputation for fine cheese, this region is also known for its indigenous breed of herding dog, the Appenzeller. All of this suggests that both historically and today, livestock farming has been well-developed in the area surrounding Romanshorn, which in turn necessitated the breeding and use of dogs for guarding and managing herds.



Foto: M. Urošević

Picture 6: Fragment of a Clay Lamp with a Dog (Albert Heim Stiftung, Bern)

The proximity of the Appenzell region, known for its developed livestock farming—and consequently, for dog breeding—contributed to the dog becoming a popular and respected animal.

The Coat of Arms

In Romanshorn, in front of the old Evangelical Church, there is a building that bears the coat of arms which is the subject of our study.



Foto: M. Urošević

Picture 7: The Old Evangelical Church, Renovated, and the Large Building Beside It

The building also represents a new form of a renovated old structure that originally stood on the same site. The original building was constructed in the year 1404, as clearly indicated on a stone plaque mounted on the façade. According to the inscription, the building was renovated in 1988.



Foto: M. Urošević

Picture 8: A stone plaque that clearly states when the building was built and when it was renovated

On the wall of the building, there is a coat of arms. Since the building is located directly adjacent to the Evangelical Church, it can be assumed with considerable certainty that the building once belonged either to the Church or to a bishop personally. The coat of arms clearly displays several symbolic elements.

At the top of the coat of arms is a bishop's mitre, which is a symbol of episcopal ecclesiastical authority. This strongly suggests that the coat of arms belonged to a bishop from one of the surrounding dioceses, such as St. Gallen or Konstanz. The building was likely under their ownership and used as a pastoral residence, and possibly even served as an administrative center.

The bishop's mitre as a symbol of ecclesiastical authority began to appear in heraldry during the 12th and 13th centuries. This historical detail allows for the assumption that the coat of arms was placed on the building either when it was constructed—at the beginning of the 15th century—or sometime thereafter, which is perhaps the more likely scenario.



Foto: M. Urošević

Picture 9: The Coat of Arms in Romanshorn (Photo: M. Urošević)

Above the shield, prominently displayed, are cross-shaped pastoral staffs. These also represent the insignia of a bishop. Beneath the bishop's mitre (ceremonial headpiece), in the central part of the coat of arms, is a shield divided into four fields.

In the upper left segment, there is a strong animal (possibly a lion?). Interestingly, this powerful creature faces the heraldic left, which is not considered the positive side in heraldry.

In the upper right quadrant, there is a sheep or lamb with a cross. In Christian iconography, the lamb is often represented as Agnus Dei (the Lamb of God). The lamb faces the heraldic right, signifying it as a positive element. Since the lamb is depicted with a cross, this further supports the assumption that the shield belonged (or still belongs) to an ecclesiastical dignitary.

In the lower right heraldic quadrant, there is an ornament resembling a mill wheel. However, it likely carries another meaning, as it is divided into four parts, with a spear-like symbol extending vertically through the center.

In the lower left heraldic quadrant, there is a dog. Generally, in heraldry, the dog symbolizes loyalty, vigilance, protection, and strength. The dog wears a collar, which further emphasizes loyalty and watchfulness. As previously mentioned, Romanshorn is near the canton of Appenzell, a region with a long tradition of livestock farming, and since Roman times, powerful guard dogs have been bred there. The dog is turned to the heraldic right, indicating that it represents a positive symbol. Dogs have always had—and still have—a positive role.

The dog may also represent a spiritual guardian of the flock—a shepherd who watches over and protects the faithful members of the Church. It is possible that the dog symbolizes the bishop's personal sentiment of loyalty and protection towards his flock. In Catholicism, the dog appears as a companion of St. Roch and St. Dominic. When it comes to St. Roch, the dog is always depicted next to the saint, which is not the case here, so St. Roch can be definitively excluded. The symbol of the Dominican order is a dog with a torch (*Domini canes*). Since no torch appears in the coat of arms, St. Dominic can also be excluded as the dedicatee. This leaves a rather strong assumption that the coat of arms is dedicated to an ecclesiastical dignitary—most likely a bishop—given the presence of bishop's symbols in the design.

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