

Ilanz

by [Corinna Ehlers](#)



On their way to the diet (Bundstag) in Ilanz, envoys from the Three Leagues passed through the Upper Gate. Since 1513, the gate was adorned with the coats of arms of the Three Leagues.

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Alpine alliances and reform movements (constellations)

In the late Middle Ages, communes in present-day [Graubünden \(Switzerland\)](#) joined together to form regional alliances (Gotteshausbund, Oberer Bund, Zehngerichtenbund) in order to represent their rights against the local aristocracy and the bishop of [Chur](#). These “Three Leagues” (*Drei Bünde*) were organized in a decentralized manner from the individual communes, but their cooperation intensified from the 15th century onward. Envoys of the Leagues came together at diets (*Bundstage*) in the three main towns of [Ilanz](#), [Chur](#) and [Davos](#) in rotation, in order to negotiate on matters that concerned all of the Leagues.

The Three Leagues controlled Alpine passes through which the trade between surrounding territories ([Holy Roman Empire](#), [Swiss Confederation](#), [Tyrol](#), [Milan](#), etc.) was conducted. This made them important to these neighbouring lands, but it also meant that they were likely to

become involved in conflicts between these realms. Traffic through the passes meant that members of the Three Leagues were in contact with merchants and scholars on both sides of the [Alps](#).

Diverse ecclesiastical and social reform movements developed in the surrounding lands around 1520. Humanists like [Erasmus](#) in [Basel](#), the Spiritualists in [Italy](#), reformers like [Ulrich Zwingli](#) in [Zurich](#) and the Zurich Anabaptists all sought a renewal of the church, each in their own different ways. At the same time, groups of peasants went into revolt in [southern Germany](#) and Tyrol. They demanded a reduction of the taxes paid to rulers and the church, the abolition of serfdom, and the right for congregations to elect their own clergy. In the Three Leagues, preachers such as [Johannes Comander](#) in Chur followed Zwingli's call for reform of the Church. Peasants and townspeople rallied against overpriced church dues and other ecclesiastical abuses.

The Ilanz Articles: strengthening the communes and maintaining a precarious religious balance (differences)

The Three Leagues reacted to the religious and social tensions with a number of resolutions. The Oberer Bund adopted articles which regulated the conduct of the clergy. These were supplemented with demands to reduce the burden on the peasants. The result was adopted by the Three Leagues as a whole at the diet in Ilanz in April 1524 ("First Ilanz Articles"). In 1525, the abbot and cathedral chapter of Chur raised the charge of heresy against Comander and other Protestants. The diet of the Three Leagues responded by convening a theological disputation, which was held in January 1526 in the Church of St Margaret in Ilanz. However, this did not lead to a definite decision. In June, the diet in Ilanz adopted the "Second Ilanz Articles". These restricted the power of the bishop in secular matters, the dues paid by the population to the church were reduced, and congregations received the right to elect their own clergy.^[1]

While in other places the territorial ruler or the municipal authorities determined the religious affiliation of the entire territory, the Ilanz Articles gave each commune the choice of opting for or against the Reformation simply by allowing them to elect their clergy according to their religious persuasion. Thus, Ilanz officially became Protestant and removed the depiction of Mary from the town seal. Other communes, such as the neighbouring [Laax](#), continued to adhere to the old faith. A decentralized church structure emerged, mirroring the political structure of the Three Leagues.

However, the issue of whether individuals should have the right to practice a faith deviating from the one practised by the majority of their own commune continued to be controversial for quite some time. Definite rules for communes with a mixed population were only established in 1557. Thereafter, a *modus vivendi* emerged in daily life in some respects (for example, some church buildings were used alternately by both faiths), while in other respects conflicts persisted (for example over mixed marriages).

The two faiths also pursued their religious interests on the political level. When the Protestants became a majority in the Gotteshausbund in the late 1530s, they campaigned

for the dissolution of monasteries. In [Veltlin](#), which remained Catholic and was a subject territory of the Three Leagues, there were efforts to bring an end to the toleration of Protestants.

A side effect of the decentralized church structure was that religious groups that were marginalized elsewhere were able to survive in the Three Leagues. From the mid-1520s, Anabaptists who had been expelled from [Zurich](#) arrived. Quite a few local people adopted their religious beliefs. In the 1550s, Italian [Spiritualists](#), who were no longer tolerated in Swiss cities, came to the Three Leagues. Both of these groups faced repression from the Protestant majority in particular.

A decentralized model of religious coexistence and its limits (significance)

The Ilanz Articles enabled religious coexistence by means of a decentralized solution. As the decision was left to the individual communes, different religious persuasions legally coexisted in the Three Leagues as early as the 1520s. This was initially intended as a pragmatic solution. At a time when it was unclear what would eventually emerge from the various religious and social reform movements, it was an attempt to defuse conflicts in a way that was consistent with the decentralized political structure of the region. In the event, however, it resulted in unusual diversity. In particular, the presence of religious outsiders was seen as an unfortunate by-product by many other inhabitants of the region. To outsiders, however, the legal situation offered opportunities denied to them in other territories. Protestants and Catholics also had to develop forms of political cooperation and daily coexistence – without relinquishing their respective claim to the only true faith. Religious coexistence and confessional polemic were not mutually exclusive. Instead, events in the Three Leagues show how they interacted with and depended on each other.

(translated by Niall Williams)

Further Reading

Jan-Andrea Bernhard, The Reformation in the Three Leagues (Grisons), in: Amy Nelson Burnett / Egidio Campi (eds.), *A Companion to the Swiss Reformation*, Leiden 2016, pp. 291–361.

Jan-Andrea Bernhard / Cordula Seger (eds.), *Die Ilanzer Artikelbriefe im Kontext der europäischen Reformation – The Ilanz Articles in the Context of the European Reformation*, Zurich 2020.

Florian Hitz et al., Art. Graubünden 3. Der Freistaat der Drei Bünde (14.–18. Jahrhundert), in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, Version of 2018-01-11. URL: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007391/2018-01-11/>

Ulrich Pfister, *Konfessionskirchen, Glaubenspraxis und Konflikt in Graubünden, 16.–18. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg 2012.

Immacolata Saulle Hippenmeyer, Nachbarschaft, Pfarrei und Gemeinde in Graubünden, 1400–1600, 2 vols., Chur 1997.

Notes

1. [↑](#) Cf. Artikelbrief Quasimodogeniti 1524, Bundesbrief 1524, and Ilanzer Artikel 1526, in: Constanz Jecklin (ed.), Urkunden zur Verfassungsgeschichte Graubündens, Chur 1884, pp. 78–98. URL: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5169/seals-595907>.

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