

HISTORICAL ERRORS BEHIND THE CREATION OF THE NATIONAL FLAG OF SLOVENIA IN 1848

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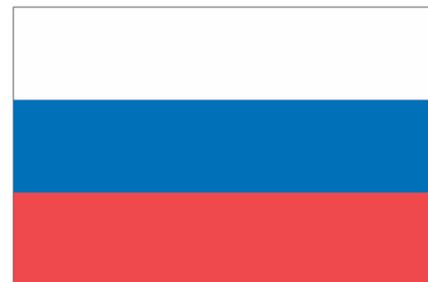
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INTRODUCTION

Slovenia United was the name of the political program of the Slovene national movement within the Austrian Empire, launched during the Spring of Nations in 1848. The three key points of the program were the creation of Slovenia as a distinct entity, the recognition of the Slovene language and opposition to joining the German Confederation. Slovenes were however spread across seven provinces - Styria, Carinthia, Gorizia and Gradisca, Istria, and Trieste – and especially in Carniola.



Left: Southern Austria, Austrian and Austro-Hungarian Empire, showing internal borders of Slovene provinces, 1849-1918 and modern borders of Slovenia in red.



Right: Slovenian national flag 1848-2015

— SLOVENIA

The Duchy of Carniola had a Slovene majority and a leading role in the movement for a United Slovenia, using its armorial colours as the basis for the white, blue and red national flag of Slovenia.

The oddity however is that in the 19th century these colours were not those of the Arms of Carniola. Yellow, not white, had been used since the Middle Ages. Yellow was disputed at the time because it was thought to have been put in the Arms by the “German” (Holy Roman) Emperor Frederick III in 1463. The Duchy sent a delegation to Vienna and secured restoration of white – the colour believed pertaining before 1463.

Or so it was thought. Until 15 years ago.



The history of the coat of arms of the Duchy of Carniola began during the rule of the (Bavarian) Andechs dynasty in the 13th century. The dynastic Arms - azure (blue), a white lion *passant* above an eagle *argent* (white) - are seen on a Seal (**left**) from 1229-1245 (Siegenfeld, Steierrischer Uradel, Vienna 1929).

Another source (1530, BSB Cod.icon. 391) shows the Andechs insignia, lion and eagle, as yellow (or “gold”) on blue.



Also shown in my photo from Andechs Monastery in Bavaria (**right**).

From 1364-1380, the Duchy of Carniola started using a blue shield bearing a white eagle - without the lion - as its own.



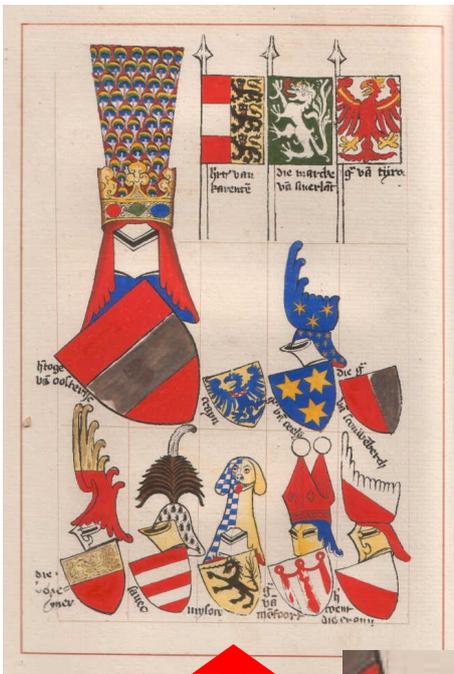
One of the oldest representations of these Arms of Carniola appears in a Seal (**left**) of King Ottokar II of Bohemia, struck in 1273 (HHStA Vienna), seen with three other shields on the horse's caparison. (The other insignia depicted on the Seal are those of Austria - Ottokar's shield – his white lion banner of Bohemia, and the local Arms of Styria, Carinthia, and Moravia).



In 1364 the Habsburg dynasty made the first of several changes to these Arms, transposing the colours – that is, to a blue eagle on a white ground (**right**) adding a crescent, chequered red and white, to the eagle's breast (my artwork **far right**).



The second change a few years later, probably in the last quarter of the 14th century, shows the shield yellow instead of white, as recorded in both the Gelre Armorial of 1369-1396 (**below left**) and twice in Hendrik van Heesels Armorial of 1440 (**below**) showing twelve Arms of Habsburg hereditary lands (and below these, the Arms of duchies within Austria).



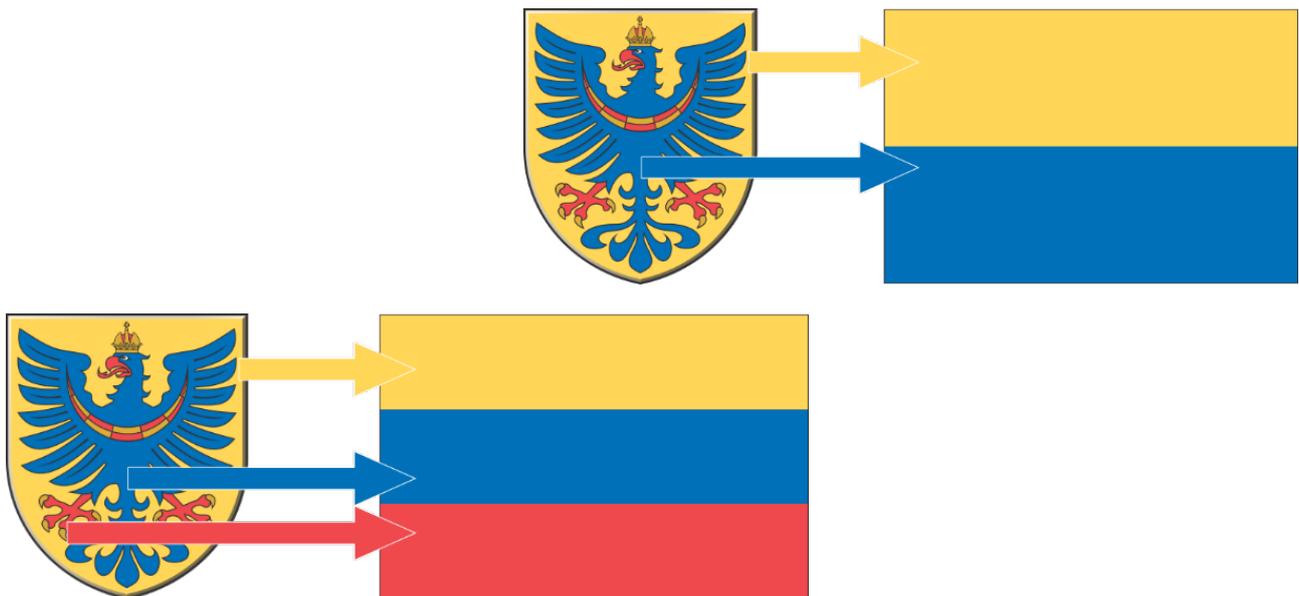
Finally, in 1463, during the reign of (Holy Roman) Emperor Frederick III, the Arms were changed for the last time until 1836 – the chequered crescent rendered yellow and red, and the eagle endowed with the personal crown of the Emperor (**below left**, and **below right**, the Emperor's Decree).



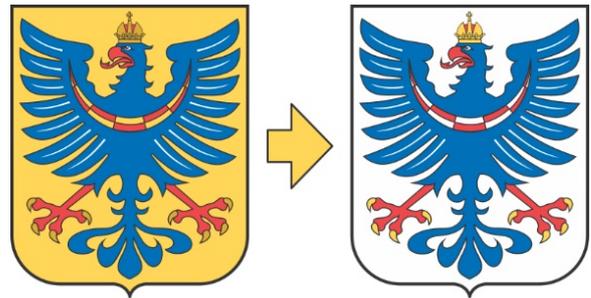
NEW INFORMATION

Digitalizing the Archives in the last decade has revealed new information from medieval sources long forgotten or overlooked. It is now obvious that the Emperor did not change the main colours in 1463, for the Coat of Arms already had a yellow shield from the 14th century, suggesting new flags in 1835 for Carniola and Istria among the provinces of southern Austria – see below.

The use of yellow predating Emperor Frederick's grant of Arms was not common knowledge in the 19th century, but interest in the history of the national emblems grew after the Office of the new Emperor Ferdinand I on 17 November 1836 decreed to the Landstände (political representatives of the estates of the realm) new versions of the Greater, Lesser and Minor Arms and also led to the devising of new flags, a bicolour for Carniola and a triband for Istria among the southern provinces of Austria, as shown here:



However, with no reasons given, all the new Imperial versions had lost the yellow in the historic shield and the crescent on the eagle, and likewise the flag of Carniola. Nor to this day are there any reasonable explanations why such change was made. The Landstände opposed the decree and sent the protest to Vienna on 10 April 1837, but received no reply

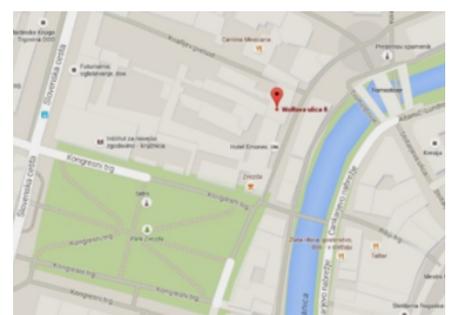


THE NATIONAL FLAG

Despite opposition from the Landstände, the triband was subsequently recognized by the government as the official flag of Carniola. This formal recognition, albeit on a regional level, was an exception to the policy of the Imperial Austrian Government which tended to suppress separate national symbols in the Empire. In fact, the authorities saw all tricolours as basically nationalist and potentially revolutionary symbols, and so Austrian provinces (as the Empire itself) were only allowed to use bicolours. (The flag of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia was the sole exception, interpreted as a combination of the Croatian and Slavonian bicolours).



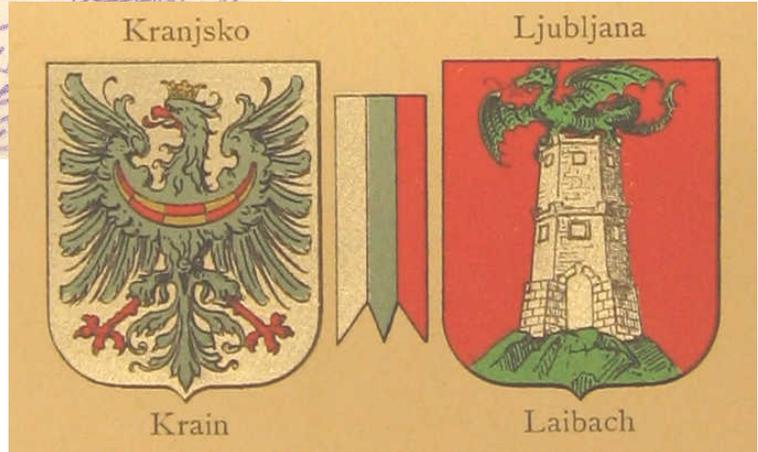
The white-blue-red Slovenian flag based on the flag of Carniola first flew on 7 April 1848 on a building at No. 8 Wolfova Street, between Congress Square and Prešeren Square in Ljubljana, raised by a group of patriotic students led by the nationalist poet Lovro Toman.





Left: A late 19th century postcard decorated with the national colours and sprigs of linden leaves, the national floral emblem of Slovenia.

Right: Emblems of Carniola 1848-1918 and the City Arms of Ljubljana in K. Lind, *Städte-Wappen von Österreich-Ungarn nebst den Landeswappen und Landesfarben*, 1885. (State Arms and Colours of Austria-Hungary)



Left: Flag of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia 1945-25 June 1991.



Left and above: The Slovenian national flag on the summit of the highest peak of the Triglav formation, stylised in the badge later added to the upper corner.

On 20 April 1848 the Landstände sent a request to the government finally to solve the protest from 1837 about the colours. The core issue in this request - in which they expressed the hope that the Duchy of Carniola would not be deprived of the yellow in the Coat of Arms - was at last discussed. This time the Interior Ministry, given the tumultuous situation of the 1848 revolutionary wave, quickly resolved the application, on 19 June 1848. The Government confirmed the regulation of 1836, but the Landstände of Carniola were temporarily allowed to use the yellow-blue-red flag as the Carniolan provincial colours (if necessary).

Some members of the Slovenian Club of Ljubljana and other Carniolan National Members later visited the Interior Ministry. They defended the use of white, and referred to medieval sources, particularly Frederick's Decree in 1463, in their assumption that he was the one who first changed the shield colour to yellow.

The text of the Decree was unfortunately not fully understood and the nation, imbued with nationalism, had rejected any adjustment to the coat of arms by a German Emperor. In their final Decree of 23 September 1848, the Government resolved the issue in favour of the new colours – white, blue and red – as approved by Emperor Ferdinand I in 1836. The Decree was presented by the Governor of the Kingdom of Illyria, Count Welsersheimb in a letter of 29 September 1848. Tired of the unrest of 1848, the Government once again relented and authorized the Landstände to use yellow, blue and red for local occasions and purposes, except in the Arms.

THE FINAL QUESTION

Why was the white so important?

Was it really all about a set of medieval colours?

The official recognition of the Carniolan white-blue-red tricolour was seen as a major achievement by the Slovenes, and with that victory, it quickly became the symbol representing the idea of a United Slovenia.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Slovenian national tricolour became the only truly all-Slovenian symbol, representing all Slovenes, regardless of the historical region in which they lived.

So, was a “fake fact” deliberately used to create a flag that could be seen as in solidarity with the pan-Slavic nationalist movement, or was it just the result of a very poor translation of the Emperor's document from 1463? Even though official history claims there is no connection between the Pan-Slavic movement and the Slovenian flag design, that assertion remains unproven.

In 1991 when Slovenia regained its independence, the national flag was amended and distinguished from the Russian and other similar Slavic tribands by the addition “in canton” of a newly devised shield in the blue and yellow livery of the medieval Duchy of Carniola and the Counts of Celje. Fimbriated red, the shield features a hyper-stylized representation of the landmark Triglav peaks, rivers and littoral in blue, and three yellow stars from the armorial bearings (**right**) of the Counts of Celje. The stars are arranged as an inverted triangle in opposition to the central Triglav summit.



IMAGES/SOURCES

- 1 Map of Slovenia in Austro-Hungary - late 19th to early 20th century.
- 2 The national flag of Slovenia.
- 3 Counts of Andech. Alfred Ritter Anthony von Siegenfeld, Steierischer Uradel, 1229-1245, Siebmacher's roßes Wappenbuch, Vienna, 1929.
- 4 The seal of King Ottokar II of Bohemia, 1273. HHStA Vienna.
- 5 The coat of arms of Carniola, 1364-1380 and as drawn by Aleksander Hribovšek, 2009.
- 6 Gelre Armorial, 1369-1396
- 7 Hendrik van Heesel Armorial, 1440
- 8 The decree of Frederick III, Holy Roman Emperor, 1463, ArCh iv RS - SI AS 1063, Zbirka listin, št. 716.
- 9 Colours changed by Emperor of Austria Ferdinand I in 1836. Monograph by Aleksander Hribovšek, 2011.
- 10 The site where the Slovenian flag first flew on 7 April 1848 at 8 Wolfova Street, Ljubljana. Photo: Aleksander Hribovšek, 2015.

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- MAL, J. Grb in barve dežele Kranjske, Ljubljana: Slovenska straža, 1916

BIOGRAPHY



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After secondary school I became involved in history at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of History and was employed at the City Museum of Ljubljana. A founder and creator of a web-based resource of Slovenian heraldry and vexillology in 2007 - **Slovenska Heraldika Grboslovje.si**, a member of the Commission for Public Symbols, Coat of Arms, Flag, Seals and Stamps within the Department of State Archives, 2008-2009, and a member of the Heraldry Society of Slovenia – **Heraldica Slovenica** in 2010-2012, Secretary 2012-2015, Vice-President 2015, President (December) 2016. New flag adopted 2016.

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