



HISTORY OF ZUOZ

The village

Most villages in the Upper Engadine were built along the through road. Contrary to that Zuoz grew out of the already mentioned episcopal residence and the Dorta Estate. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries an impressive piazza emerged in the centre of the village, surrounded by town houses and patrician houses. Until 100 years ago the landsgemeinde of the Upper Engadine was held in this piazza. The Crusch Alva House, the Luzius Church, the village tower, and the Planta houses show evidence of an eventful past. Each house has its own character and history. Other sights of the village include the late Romanesque Chapel of San Bastiaun with its old frescoes and its modern windows by the local artist Gian Casty, and the little Gothic Church Santa Catharina.

"The village of Zuoz is remarkable for its extremely pleasant location on the midst of many sites that are as attractive to the tourist as to the nature lover" (Dr. Jacob Papon, 1857)

The stateliness of this typical Engadine village with its magnificent houses and palatial buildings bears evidence of the politically as well as culturally leading position Zuoz held until the nineteenth century. Only a few other villages of the Grisons can look back on such a distinguished past.

Royal inn

The first documentary evidence of Zuoz dates from the beginning of the ninth century. The cadastral register of the Holy Roman Empire under Louis the Pious lists the payments made by the Tabernarii (innkeepers) of Chur, Lenz, Zuoz, and Ardez. There were similar inns in Sils and Bivio. The Royal Inn of Zuoz probably stood where the Hotel "Crusch Alva" stands nowadays. The great number of these inns suggests how important the old transalpine passage was, which

crossed the Julier and Maloja passes, and branched off through the Engadine into the Vintschgau. The word "Zuoz" seems to have come down to us from Latin "subtus", Romance "suot" or "sut" (indicating the lower inn as opposed to the upper one in Sils). In addition it is possible that the old German word for inn, "Suste", which also comes from Latin, contributed to the formation of the word. On the other hand the name "Zuoz" might refer to the new village which was then being built around the San Luzi Church and the Tavern. As a matter of fact the original Bronze Age settlement was located on the Chastlatsch hill above the Hotel "Castell".

Under Episcopal Rule

In 1136/39 the Bishop of Chur bought the Zuoz Estate from the Counts of Gammerdingen who had inherited it from the Counts of Upper Rhaetia. Even before that the Church of Chur had owned the Dorta Estate.

With this deal Zuoz became the centre of the episcopal authority in the Upper Engadine, and remained so for almost 400 years. The Bishop of Chur became responsible for jurisdiction, and thus moved to Zuoz twice a year, crossing the Albula pass, at San Gian's and San Michel's Day. Soon however the episcopal magistrates presided over the court days, until these rights were passed on to the people.

During the fourteenth century different episcopal duties in Zuoz were enfeoffed to the prestigious Planta family. They thus became the most powerful ministerial family in the Upper Engadine. During that time they acquired considerable rights. They couldn't however establish an actual territorial sovereignty in the Upper Engadine.

In 1367 the so-called "Gotteshausbund" (Church League) was founded in Zernez. The coming together of the episcopal ministers and the churchmen with the cathedral chapter was less intended as a defence against the episcopal sovereignty than against the menacing power of Austria. The Habsburgs had just acquired the near Tyrol, and had extended rights in the Lower Engadine.

In the Five-Seal-Letter (Fünf-Siegel-Brief) of the year 1462 the Upper Engadine gave itself its first constitution. Zuoz kept the seat of the criminal court. After the last sovereign rights of the Bishop over the area of the three Leagues were lost with the Ilanz-articles, the Upper Engadine acquired the status of sovereign member in the Free State of the Three Leagues: Church League (Gotteshausbund) 1367, Grey League (Grauer Bund) 1424, and Ten-Jurisdictions League (Zehngerichtebund) 1436.



Culture and education

The rich interior décor of the houses strongly contrasts with the rather sparse exterior, and shows the inhabitants' love of style, as well as their success in business, for many of them emigrated like other people from the Engadine, and returned home with riches. Members of noble families held office in the non-self-governing Valtellina, or were in the service of foreign princes, and also returned home wealthy. The Pout House deserves being mentioned here. Some of these influential families were the Plantas, the Travers', the Juvaltas, the Jecklins, the Schucans, etc.

Gian Travers was an influential spokesman of the intellectual life. He established written Romance, and in 1553 brought about the Reformation in the village.



Economic Supremacy

In the early summer of the year 1499 the village, which the Nuremberg humanist Willibald Pirckheimer had called a lovely little spot, was reduced to ashes. Pirckheimer was a witness to the fire. In the face of the Imperial Austrian Army, which had penetrated into the area over the Cassan pass, the inhabitants of Zuoz, like the people of the other Engadine villages, had cleared away the foodstuff, set fire to their own houses, and fled into the mountains. This was their way of forcing the enemy to retreat. Since then Zuoz has never again been victim to fire and sword, and so they could, during the reconstruction of their homes, develop their widely admired characterful architecture, and save it up to the present day. Then Zuoz was declared a village of national importance. After the Swabian War and the conquest of the Valtellina came the heyday for the whole of Rhaetia, though it was sometimes troubled by warlike clashes and civil turmoil. The key military position towards Italy and the through traffic put the rhaetian alpine republic into a position of importance within the Central European power struggle. Thus Napoleon could say: "The Grisons was a power in Europe."

The through traffic, the foreign service, and the fields and vineyards of the subordinate Valtellina as well as their own cattle breeding brought wealth and prestige. The village continued to be the political centre of the Upper Engadine until the beginning of the nineteenth century, although always in competition with Samedan.

Modern Age

As a result of the Mediation Acts, Rhaetia became part of Helvetia in 1803. With the end of the old Free State Zuoz lost all its benefits. From the end of the 19th century up to the present day there have been extensive economic and structural changes taking place, due to the reduction of agri culture and the parallel rise of tourism. Tourism is now the most important industry in the Grisons. Also Zuoz appreciates its invigorating effect, for the interactions between tourism and the other lines of business are varied. Today Zuoz has a population of 1400 inhabitants.

The churches

San Bastiaun

The post-romanesque building consists of a quadratic nave and a choir with old fresco-paintings of outstanding quality. The windows have been created by local artist Gian Casty.



San Luzi

Protestant church

In the choir are three windows, « La charited » - love, and « La sprauenza » - hope, created by Augusto Giacometti and a more recent one, « La cretta » - faith, by local artist Constant Könz. The window in the nave, showing the holy kings, has been created by Gian Casty. The little window above the gallery is a work of a student (Scartazzini) of Augusto Giacometti.



Santa Chatrigna

The catholic church

Small gothic church, catholic services, listed as a historic monument. Next to four arc-windows showing brother Klaus, Saint Francis of Assisi and the two patron saints Santa Catarina and Santa Barbara, a marvelous dove of peace by Gian Casty can be seen on the back wall.

