

CHAPTER 9

Switzerland – A ‘Peasant State’?

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It is hardly possible to better describe the ground on which Swiss historical tradition is built than with this history painting from the nineteenth century. One hugely determined and fearless man – Uli Rotach – fights alone against vastly superior numbers of well-armoured warriors. He is wearing peasant dress from the nineteenth century,¹ symbolizing the confederate peasants who, according to the national historiography of the nineteenth century, were supposed to have liberated themselves in glorious battles during the Middle Ages from the yoke of aristocratic oppression.

Peasant heroes like William Tell and the depicted Uli Rotach contribute to medieval Switzerland often being seen as an exemplar of a ‘peasant state’. For instance, under the heading ‘peasant states’ in the *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (*Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages*), you can read that the lack of a centralized ducal power in particular in the southwest of the Empire in the thirteenth century had led to the unfolding of the confederate peasant movement. The alliance of the Swiss cantons of the valleys in 1291 had been a direct result, behind which the free peasants, encouraged by the local aristocracy, were the prime moving force.² Both from a Swiss perspective and in the perception from across the borders, there is a noticeable tendency to glorify the history of the Confederacy, combining it sweepingly with concepts of peasants and freedom and seeing Switzerland as representing ‘a lucky case’ in Europe.³ The Old Swiss Confederacy is equated with ‘peasant associations’ and a ‘peasant state’, as well as a ‘peasant populace’ or ‘mountain people’, and the inhabitants of the Swiss *Länderorte* (Uri, Schwyz, Ob- and Nidwalden, Glarus, and Appenzell) are called ‘self-governing rural producers’.⁴ The national historiography in

- 1 Heinrich Thommen, ‘Uli Rotach im Kampf gegen zwölf Feinde. Ludwig Vogels Historienmalerei von 1829’, *Appenzellische Jahrbücher* (2004), 59–75.
- 2 See ‘Bauernstaaten’ in Robert-Henri Bautier, et al. (ed.), *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 9 vols (Munich and Zurich: Artemis [vols 1–6] and LexMA-Verlag [vols 7–9], 1977–1999), i, 1622f.
- 3 Richard Wolfram, *Studien zur älteren Schweizer Volkskultur – Mythos, Sozialordnung, Brauchbewusstsein*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philos.-hist. Klasse 362, (Vienna: Verlag der Akademie, 1980), 7–8.
- 4 Thomas Brady, *Turning Swiss. Cities and Empire, 1450–1550*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6.



FIGURE 9.1 Uli Rotach in battle with twelve enemies, 1829. Rotach is depicted wearing peasant dress, referring to the role that was ascribed to the peasants in the nineteenth-century history of liberation.
OIL PAINTING BY LUDWIG VOGEL, KANTONSBIBLIOTHEK APPENZEL A. RH., TROGEN

Switzerland also claims the term ‘peasant state’ for the late medieval Confederacy, in order to point out the singularity of Swiss statehood. In this, the basic assumption is that of a general peasant mindset that supposedly had existed since early times:

In the traditional national historiography there is [...] general agreement that the Confederacy could be traced back to the foundation of a peasant state, that the peasant elements were a part of the nature of medieval confederations, and that the national consciousness that apparently emerged in the fifteenth century was to have shown a tendency to be influenced by the peasant population.⁵

- 5 Roger Sablonier and Matthias Weishaupt, *Die alte Schweiz als Bauernstaat*, Reihe Kurzfassungen der Projekte (Basel: Nationales Forschungsprogramm 21: Kulturelle Vielfalt und nationale Identität, 1991), 2.

Considering the still scanty knowledge of the peasant population in modern Switzerland, it is surprising to read with what certainty the history of the medieval Confederacy is associated with assumed character traits of the peasants. It has been the achievement of a research project led by Roger Sablonier at the University of Zurich in 1991 to fundamentally question labels of this kind.⁶ Using examples from recent scholarship about the economic, political, and social situation in the late Middle Ages, this contribution shows that the idea of Switzerland as a 'peasant state' is simply not tenable.

In 2006, the so-called *Bundesbrief* of 1291, the Letter of Alliance documenting the union of the three founding cantons, travelled to the US in order to be exhibited and – this was probably the main intention – to promote Switzerland. The fact that this icon of Swiss history was going to leave the country stirred the minds of many Swiss people.⁷ Even though scholarship had some time earlier been able to prove convincingly that this letter was simply a standard thirteenth century document produced in connection with the securing of the general peace, wide circles still see it as the one document that cements the foundation of Switzerland. This point of view is based on the stories concerning the oath made by three proud peasants on the Rütli – a meadow by Lake Lucerne – in 1291; about William Tell – heroic freedom fighter; and about the battle of peasants and cowherds against the Habsburg authority.⁸ Roger Sablonier sums up this foundation history succinctly and ironically:

freedom-loving Alpine peasants successfully battle against oppression and exploitation, come together in solidarity amongst equals in 1291 and oblige each other with mutual aid and loyalty, chase the aristocracy and the reeves out of the country, start the foundation of the independent Swiss state, and defend their fatherland as a united people at the battle of

6 In that year, the 700th anniversary of the foundation of the Confederacy was celebrated with great extravagance. For the culture of this kind of celebration, see Georg Kreis, Jubiläen und Schlachtgedenken. Zivile Überlegungen zur militärischen Erinnerungskultur der Schweiz, in: *Appenzellische Jahrbücher* 2004, 13–27.

7 Political liberals and the political right especially exhibited outrage at this journey, as is visible in the media coverage and countless letters to the editors of Swiss newspapers. Numerous politicians of the Swiss People's Party wanted to buy the *Bundesbrief* in order to stop it leaving the country.

8 See, for example, Matthias Weishaupt, 'Hirten, "Bauern & Bürger" und Bauernsoldaten. Die ideologische Vereinnahmung der mittelalterlichen Bauern in der nationalen Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz', in Albert Tanner and Anne-Lise Head-König (eds), *Die Bauern in der Geschichte der Schweiz*, Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, 10 (Zurich: Chronos, 1992), 23–39.

Morgarten in 1315 against the overly powerful Habsburg lords, the foreign oppressor...⁹

That much of this and what is supposed to have happened just before and after 1300 in central Switzerland is not historically verifiable did not stop the creation of a Swiss 'peasant-state foundation-history' by cleverly arranging stories in the tradition of nineteenth century national historiography. Most remarkable is the role of the German author who did not know the Confederacy through his own experience but still made arguably the greatest contribution towards promoting and entrenching the tale. Friedrich Schiller's drama *Willhelm Tell* (premiered in 1804) became the greatest promoter of the old liberation narrative.¹⁰ Unlike historians, a dramatist does not need to check the sources. Looking at the so-called foundation document of 1291, one would be hard pressed to find any indication that peasants had had a part in its creation; it is more likely that local gentry were the main initiators. The situation at the time suggests such elite involvement: the document could have been created shortly after the death of King Rudolf of Habsburg. As count and king, Rudolf had strengthened his power base in Switzerland, and his death meant juridical uncertainty. This is the background against which the alliance of 1291 must be understood. Representatives of the local authorities took over the task of keeping the peace, explicitly in recognition of the authoritative circumstances, as is noted in the document: every man should serve his lord according to his status. Peasants as the founders of a 'state' are in any case not visible.¹¹

1 Free Swiss Mountain People

The authors who made a substantial contribution to the national historiography of the nineteenth century saw the earlier circumstances quite differently.

9 Roger Sablonier, *Gründungszeit ohne Eidgenossen. Politik und Gesellschaft in der Inner-schweiz um 1300*, 2nd edn (Baden: Hier & Jetzt, 2008), 17.

10 Georg Kreis, *Geschichten zur Gründungsgeschichte*, in Erika Hebeisen, Pia Schubiger and Denise Tonella (eds), *Entstehung Schweiz. Unterwegs vom 12. ins 14. Jahrhundert* (Baden: Hier & Jetzt, 2011), 170–75, esp. at p. 175.

11 Compare for instance Werner Meyer and Heinz Dieter Finck, *1291 – Die Geschichte: die Anfänge der Eidgenossenschaft*, 4th edn (Zurich: Silva-Verlag, 1991), esp. 168ff. Further, 'Landfrieden' in Marco Jorio (ed.), *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, 13 vols (Basel: Schwabe, 2002–2014), <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D8951.php> (accessed 25.11.2011). A discussion of the *Bundesbrief* is also in Sablonier, *Gründungszeit ohne Eidgenossen*, esp. 163–78.

For Johannes von Müller, who wrote a monumental work of history in the 1820s, it was absolutely clear that the first Confederates had been peasants; he concludes his depiction of the so-called *Rütli* with the comment: 'at the time everyone went to their huts, was silent, and overwintered their livestock'.¹² This quote from Müller leads us to a discussion of the role of the cowherd, which has also been a significant part of the national historiography until present. Müller will have been thinking predominantly of cowherds as he wrote, as it was he who was responsible for bringing the term 'herdsman country' to prominence for the pre- and northern Alpine regions between the Appenzell and the Gruyère district.¹³

The figure of the herdsman had a special relevance in the assessment of the national Swiss historiography that was focused on the peasant. Towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the European bourgeoisie began viewing the Swiss Alps in a highly idealised manner, and it followed that the inhabitants of the Alps, with the cowherds seen as their main representatives, were also idealized.¹⁴ In the *Schweizerhirte* (*Swiss herdsman*), travellers – often townspeople tired of civilization – found their saving ideal. The Frankfurt professor Johann Gottfried Ebel, author of the book *Schilderung der Gebirgsvölker der Schweiz* (*Depictions of the Swiss Mountain people*), travelled to Glarus and the Appenzell and admired in the 'herdsmen of the Appenzell [...] the traits of a healthy mind and proper feeling [...] of these uncrippled sons of nature [...] and believed to be able to find in them [...] what seemed so hard to combine: simple customs, true humanity of unaffected nature, healthy intelligence, directness of character, rectitude of the soul, and simple trustworthiness'.¹⁵ But the travel writers found not only Arcadia in the Alps, but also a stronghold of liberty, as shown by the following quote from Ebel:

That form of government that is called democracy, or the pure rule of the people, and of which we read so much in the history of Greece, is now

¹² Johannes von Müller, *Der Geschichten Schweizerischer Eidgenossenschaft, neue verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage, erster Theil – vierter Theil*, Leipzig 1825/26, 644.

¹³ Von Müller translated Carl Victor von Bonstetten's *Briefe über ein schweizerisches Hirtenland*, 1782 from French into German and introduced the term 'Hirtenland' into the German language; see Matthias Weishaupt, *Bauern, Hirten und 'frume edle puren'. Bauern und Bauernstaatsideologie in der spätmittelalterlichen Eidgenossenschaft und der nationalen Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz* (Basel, Frankfurt am Main: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1992), 25, see Chapter 7, footnote 3.

¹⁴ Weishaupt, *Bauern, Hirten und 'frume edle puren'*, 17–33.

¹⁵ Johann Gottfried Ebel, *Schilderung der Gebirgsvölker der Schweiz*, vol. I (Leipzig 1798), 69 u. 102.

nowhere in existence but in Switzerland. The range of the Swiss Alps is inhabited by many small peoples who have lived for the last four to five hundred years in a pure democratic constitution, and seem happy. Here though are the herdsmen, reduced in their desires, simple, uneducated, and rough like the mountains that surround them. How exceedingly beneficial were by contrast the conditions with which the Greeks were favoured.¹⁶

2 Democracy of the Cantonal Assembly (*Landsgemeinde*)?

Ebel's enthusiasm was fed by, amongst other things, his visit to an assembly of the Appenzell (*Landsgemeinde*), the yearly gathering of the male *Landleute* (*fellow countrymen*) eligible to vote.¹⁷ The assembly will have cemented his notion of the 'pure democratic constitution' of the mountain people. In this, he misjudged the real situation, since Ebel's depiction differs widely from the actual political and social circumstances of eighteenth-century Appenzell. Early information about the cantonal assembly is scarce, not very informative, and above all not contemporary. In the introduction to the older *Landbuch* of the Appenzell, a cantonal register from the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the process of legislation is set out and legitimized.¹⁸ According to this entry, in 1409 – shortly after the Appenzell wars – an unnamed *Landamman* (the chief magistrate) and the *Landleute* had come together to consult (*zu Rate gekommen*).¹⁹ This can be seen as a collective of eligible voters under the leadership of the magistrate, so something akin to an assembly, called *Landsgemeinde*, functioning as a legislative power. However, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the legislative competency had obviously moved away from the assembly to the council.²⁰ This loss of meaning as a legislative authority for a certain type of assembly can also be seen in the fewer by-laws (*Satzungen*) made out by the assembly itself. In the so-called *Older Landbuch* from the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the number of decrees published by the assembly and those by the council members were about equal. Since the 1570s,

¹⁶ Ebel, *Schilderung der Gebirgsvölker*, 78–79.

¹⁷ See 'Landsgemeinde' in *Historischen Lexikon der Schweiz* (accessed 25. 11. 2011).

¹⁸ Nathalie Büsser and Margrit Meyer Kälin (eds), *Die Rechtsquellen der Kantone Appenzell*, I: *Appenzeller Landbücher*, Sammlung Schweizerischer Rechtsquellen, Abt. 13 (Basel: Schwabe, 2009), xxxiv.

¹⁹ Büsser, *Appenzeller Landbücher*, 1.

²⁰ Philipp Dubach, *Gesetz und Verfassung. Die Anfänge der territorialen Gesetzgebung im Allgäu und im Appenzell im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Oberschwaben – Geschichte und Kultur, 6 (Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica, 2001), 103 and 130.

however, there is no sign in the sources that the assembly still had anything to do with legislation.²¹ The right of co-determination the *Landleute* held was thus at best slim in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. For instance, the assembly of Appenzell Ausserrhoden did not have the right of discussion. Had the *Landleute* had a general right of determination, the *Landsgemeinde* would have decided on all daily business, as was the case in the twentieth century until the assembly of the canton Ausserrhoden was abolished in 1997. This would mean that the assembly decided over war and peace, published new laws, elected the government, conferred citizenship, and swore in members. In actual fact, however, only three of these issues were continuing concerns of the whole assembly: the election of the council members with the magistrate at their head, all conferring of citizenship until the nineteenth century, and the swearing-in. Everything else was addressed by the council members, the so-called *gnädige Herren*.²²

Of the democracy of the assembly as Ebel described it in the nineteenth century, there was in actual fact only very little in existence. What he saw on his travels resembled an 'aristocracy of the *Landsgemeinde*' far more. In Ausserrhoden, many political functions remained in the hands of a small leading group for generations, whose members were not peasants or herdsmen but belonged to the social and cultural elite. For over 200 years, the two branches of the textile trading families Zellweger from Trogen supplied provisions to a council member 193 times. Over the course of seventy-four years, a Zellweger sat in the so-called chair, on the platform erected for members of the government at the assembly, and thus held the position of uncrowned cantonal king.²³

21 According to Nathalie Büsser at the book launch of the *Appenzeller Landbücher* in 2009. Her speech is available to the author of this contribution in manuscript form.

22 For example, Dubach, *Gesetz und Verfassung*, 103ff. For the eighteenth century, Fabian Brändle, *Demokratie und Charisma. Fünf Landsgemeindekonflikte im 18. Jahrhundert*, published dissertation, University of Basel, 2002 (Zurich: Chronos, 2005), 45–110. Brändle cites the two Bernese brothers, Vinzenz Bernhard and Niklaus Emmanuel von Tschärner, who visited the Glarner *Landsgemeinde* in 1749, and afterwards stated: 'if I am to tell you the truth it seemed to me that this *Landsgemeinde* which they are so proud of is simply plays game with freedom and is basically a show to please the people. They have a council of 100 members who decides over war and peace, on the law, and has highly aristocratic powers'. For the lack of modern democratic principles in the democracy of the *Landsgemeinde*, see Andreas Sutter, 'Die Genese der direkten Demokratie – Aktuelle Debatten und wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse (part 1)', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 62/3 (2012), 456–73, esp. 462–63.

23 Walter Schläpfer, 'Demokratie und Aristokratie in der Appenzellergeschichte des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts', *Appenzellische Jahrbücher* (1948), 3–26, esp. p. 20, and Albert Tanner,

Politically important families such as the Zellweger from Trogen or the Wetter from Herisau were also at the top of the economy. Appenzell Ausserrhoden was one of the most highly industrialized regions of Europe in the eighteenth century. Industries in linen and then cotton-weaving had existed there since the late Middle Ages. In the eighteenth century, the so-called *Verlagswesen* was common: the weaver families received the raw material from the traders, processed it into textile for pay, and in turn left the Europe-wide trade to the merchants. The Zellwegers were one of the most important of these; they visibly expressed their wealth and power by surrounding the assembly place in Trogen with stone palaces.²⁴ This strongly contradicts the idealized and idylized peasant and cowherd picture of Ebel and others. The lauded assembly democracy of the 'mountain people' of the Appenzell was in reality an aristocratic system governed by textile barons, rather than by herdsmen and peasants.

What do we know about the political structures and the development of communes? How can the participation of the peasants in the government be characterized for the Middle Ages? Was their role really as great as is frequently written?

If it is already unclear for the early stages of the Confederacy in 1300 whether peasants took part as 'founders of the state', in the fifteenth century the situation becomes even more opaque. That the Confederacy grew like a seed that was planted 1291 in central Switzerland is a widespread topos. Until the fifteenth century, hardly any overriding, para-state structures existed. The particular interests of the towns and states that kept allying themselves in new and different constellations were predominant.²⁵ The other notion, also built on the glorified view of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, that the federal states provided a model for the constitutional development of the Confederacy – as was proposed in the earlier quoted example of the travel writer Johann Gottfried Ebel – is also false. In actual fact, the role of the towns was probably much more important, as the examples of St Gallen and the state of Appenzell demonstrate.

Spulen – Weben – Sticken. Die Industrialisierung in Appenzell Ausserrhoden (Zurich: Juris Druck, 1982), esp. 405.

24 See, in more detail Andreas F.A. Morel, Andreas Moosbrugger and Peter Anton Moosbrugger, *Zur Stuckdekoration des Rokoko in der Schweiz*, Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte der Schweiz, 2 (Bern: Gesellschaft für schweizerische Kunstgeschichte, 1973), 91ff.

25 Bernhard Stettler, *Die Eidgenossenschaft im 15. Jahrhundert. Die Suche nach einem gemeinsamen Nenner* (Zurich: Widmar-Dean, 2004), 13–18.

3 Urban Constitutions as Role Model

The Appenzell is a model case for showing that the towns impacted rural constitutional development. In this case, it was the southwestern imperial cities – in the fourteenth century allied in the Swabian League of Cities – with their close relationship between the town of St Gallen as regional centre and regions of the Appenzell as part of the economic catchment area that played an important part. In the late Middle Ages, St Gallen was connected to the most important towns around Lake Constance. The active policy of alliances within the framework of the Swabian League of Cities, of which included more than thirty imperial cities in the 1380s, was the main medium. On 26 September 1377, the inhabitants of the Appenzell, Hundwil, Urnäsch, Gais, and Teufen allied with fifteen Swabian imperial cities, including St Gallen.²⁶ These Appenzell '*Ländlein*' (*little countries*, as they were called) were the first and only non-cities to be admitted to the League. The nearby town of St Gallen and the town Konstanz, by Lake Constance, stood as sponsors. The reason for this lies in the mutual interests of the Appenzell and the town of St Gallen, mainly that of detaching themselves from the authority of the abbey, and to assist each other in that goal. In joining the League, they expected the imperial cities to assist them in their process of emancipation. The conditions for admission, set out in a later document of 22 May 1378, are enlightening: they show the beginnings of constitutional power moving in the direction of a *Land* (country) Appenzell. St Gallen and Konstanz were to aid the four *Ländlein* and represent them at the assemblies. The people of the Appenzell were thus put under the care of St Gallen and Konstanz. Konstanz and St Gallen were given comprehensive rights to act in the name of the League and were established as a protective power (*Schutzmächte*).²⁷

The following is important in connection with the question of how the development of the constitution proceeded in the countryside: for the time before the acceptance of the Appenzeller *Ländlein* into the Swabian League, hardly any traces exist of a '*Land*' Appenzell with secure institutions of a political and legal constitution.²⁸ Contact with the town of St Gallen, whose constitution had been developing since the fourteenth century and was partly

26 *Chartularium Sangallense*, Otto P. Clavadetscher and Stefan Sonderegger (eds), 13 vols (St Gallen: Herausgeber- und Verlags- Gemeinschaft Chartularium Sangallense / Thorbecke, 1983-), ix (1373-1381), no. 5613.

27 *Chartularium Sangallense*, ix, no. 5646.

28 Stefan Sonderegger, 'Die Aufnahme der Appenzeller "lendlin" in den Schwäbischen Städtebund', in Peter Blickle and Peter Witschi (eds), *Appenzell-Oberschwaben* (Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, 1997), 33-64, esp. 49.



FIGURE 9.2 The Swabian league of cities around 1380, when the Appenzell was the only *Land* to be admitted into the League

already firmly established,²⁹ was stimulating. The acceptance into the League of Cities now started a new development: the towns demanded that the *Land* Appenzell institute a body of thirteen men who were to have the capacity to act and take decisions relating to the outside – in contact with the towns – and within.³⁰ In the towns, these tasks were attended to by the councils. What we can see here are the beginnings of the development of an Appenzell constitution, set in motion by the town of St Gallen and the Swabian League of Cities. There is hardly any sign of a communal movement emerging from the peasantry towards a peasant-influenced democracy of the assembly.

The strong urban influence on the constitutional development of the country is confirmed through a physical seal: attached to the documents of the alliance formed on 4 July 1379 between the thirty-two imperial cities, amongst them St Gallen, and the Appenzell, with the Dukes of Bavaria, the count

29 See 'St Gallen (Gemeinde)' in Marco Jorio (ed.), *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, 13 vols (Basel: Schwabe, 2002-2014), <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D1321.php> (accessed 25.11.2011).

30 Sonderegger, 'Die Aufnahme', 52.



FIGURE 9.3 Left is the seal of the city of St Gallen (Chartularium Sangallense, Bd. V, S. 546, Nr. 153), and right the first Appenzell state seal of 1379, with its likeness to that of St Gallen. (Chartularium Sangallense, Bd. IX, S. 586, Nr. 545)

palatinate of the Rhine, and the Margrave of Baden, is the oldest seal of the Appenzell, bearing the inscription S(IGILLUM) COMUNITATIS IN ABBA-TISCELLA.³¹ Seals were used for authentication, just like present-day signatures. As a rule, those who had a seal commanded a degree of legal agency. The charter from 1377 however, from two years earlier, when the people of the Appenzell joined the League of Cities, has the private seals of the Appenzell magistrates (*Ammänner*) attached to it. It is therefore safe to assume that at that time there was no cantonal seal as yet in existence. But as a new member of the League, the Appenzell needed one, in order for them to identify themselves as a politically active authority like the cities. They obviously procured one in those two years. That this first state seal of the Appenzell is attached to the charter of the League of Cities is not a coincidence. Sealing as a community was taken over by the cities; as an ally, it was necessary for the state to possess a legally binding mode of authentication, just like the towns. The first Appenzell state seal is less an expression of a communal movement from the inside or from below, as it is viewed within the regional historiography still attached to the communalism theory,³² than the result of a constitutional development

31 Otto P. Clavadetscher, 'Die ältesten Appenzeller Siegel als Quellen zur Verfassungsgeschichte', *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde*, 54 (2008), 85–98, esp. 86.

32 Peter Blickle, 'Bäuerliche Rebellion im Fürststift St. Gallen', in Peter Blickle (ed.), *Aufbruch und Empörung? Studien zum bäuerlichen Widerstand im Alten Reich* (Munich: Beck, 1980), 215–95.

furthered mainly by the city of St Gallen, and therefore, from the outside. The leading role of St Gallen is obvious, as the imagery of the newly created Appenzell state seal is closely modelled on that of the city of St Gallen.

The written and illustrated depictions of the Appenzell wars at the beginning of the fifteenth century are in a line with the tradition of the national historiography. The wars are seen as a 'movement of the people' (*Volksbewegung*),³³ a 'peasant rebellion',³⁴ as a battle between the peasants and the regional rulers – the Abbey of St Gall. The Appenzell wars, often called the 'Appenzell wars of liberation', are thus presented as an exemplar of communalism emerging from the peasant population.

The historiography of the Appenzell reads like a smaller version of the early history of the Swiss Confederacy. Both for the Appenzell and for central Switzerland, similar constitutional developments – the 'state formation from below' – have been promoted. In both cases, the topos of the cantonal assembly-herdsman democracy (*Landsgemeinde-Hirtendemokratie*) is common. Both – the people of central Switzerland in the wars for freedom in the fourteenth century and the people of the Appenzell in the battles of Vögelinsegg in 1403 and by the Stoss in 1405 – had apparently heroically fought to rescue themselves from territorial rule. A quote from the book entitled *Schweizerschlachten* (*Swiss Battles*) by Hans Rudolf Kurz exemplifies this:

The hot pursuit of freedom from the power of the aristocracy in order to independently control their fate that in the fourteenth century ruled the thoughts and actions of the states and towns of the eight confederate localities and that forced a violent decision through the wars of liberation also led to bloody controversies between the *Ländchen* and the Abbey of Saint Gall [...]. In the same spirit, the victories won at Morgarten, Sempach, and Näfels gave enormous stimulus to the striving for freedom of the people of Appenzell [...]. In a surprising inner and outer similarity in both battles of the Appenzell, the battle for freedom of the forest cantons (*Waldstätten*) and the Glarus repeated itself. In both cases, a people filled with the aspiration of freedom rises against its oppressors and rather chooses death in battle than the continuation of an unbearable rule.³⁵

33 See 'Appenzeller Kriege' in Marco Jorio (ed.), *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, 13 vols (Basel: Schwabe, 2002–2014), www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D8874.php (accessed 25.11.2011).

34 Blickle, et al., *Aufbruch und Empörung*, 215.

35 Hans Rudolf Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten* (Bern: Francke, 1977), 58.



FIGURE 9.4
Tell (in the left pillar) and Uli Rotach (in the right pillar). Frontispiece to the collection of all magistrates of the canton of Appenzell A. Rh., Edited by M. Steiner (1835). The combined depiction of the 'freedom heroes' of the Appenzell and Confederacy emblemizes the parallel drawn in the historiography between the liberation myths of the Confederacy and the Appenzell.

The parallels drawn by Kurz are striking. Both the people from the Appenzell and those from central Switzerland are seen as being unafraid, courageous, freedom-loving peasants. William Tell, the confederate figure of battle and freedom, is opposite the equally legendary figure of Uli Rotach who, as the picture at the start of this contribution showed, is to have given his life in heroic battle, with his back to the wall in a hut set on fire by his enemies. As the most important detail of the legend, it is recorded that he chose – after killing some of his enemies – to give up his life in the flames rather than allow himself to be taken.

The common name '*Appenzeller Freiheitskriege*' points to the widespread idea that it had been a fight limited to rural society against territorial rulers. This view is false and indebted to the local patriotic viewpoint of the Appenzell. The so-called Appenzell liberation wars are in fact a perfect example of town and country acting in conjunction against their rulers.

The urban contribution is especially obvious when you ask the question of who actually fought in the so-called Appenzell wars. The battle of the Stoss on

17 June 1405 is seen as the culmination of the wars and as an exemplar of how the peasant fighters defeated an army comprised of nobles and townspeople. The not wholly historically verifiable figure of Uli Rotach symbolizes the courage, the power, and the willingness to sacrifice oneself of the Appenzell people. The sources tend to argue against a real existence; however, due to numerous paintings and prints, Uli Rotach took on an ever more real appearance in the nineteenth and twentieth century. One decisive contribution undermining the existence of this 'symbol of the Appenzell struggle for liberation'³⁶ came in 1936. At the behest of the Appenzell Innerrhoden government, a so-called *Fahrtbrief* (pilgrimage letter) had been created for the yearly pilgrimage to the place of the battle, the Stoss. The text written by the *Landschreiber* (head clerk of the chancery) was to, '[...] on the basis of irreproachable historical facts, impressively show why the procession to Stoss was being undertaken.'³⁷ This rather late testimony was justified by the fact that it was: 'what actually would have been expected from our ancestors when they took the pilgrimage oath.'³⁸

In 1939, the *Fahrtbrief* was looked at by a conservator from the Swiss National Museum, and the text was translated into understandable High German. 'Finally, the *Fahrtbrief* was given a "proper charter-like appearance" and the state seal attached. With this pseudo-medieval document, a state-sanctioned conception of history including Uli Rotach was constructed that – due to the religious context of the pilgrimage – ultimately eludes any critical discussion [...]'³⁹ – but could easily be used for the *geistige Landesverteidigung* (the moral defence of the nation during and after the Second World War).

Peasant state ideology and facts could hardly lie further apart than in this case. There are hardly any reliable sources for the battle of the Stoss, and even archaeological finds are lacking. This is quite different from the second military operation on the same day in front of the gates of the town of St Gallen. One part of the attacking army under Austrian command had not moved towards the Stoss, but beleaguered the town St Gallen, as an ally of the people of Appenzell. In front of the town – and thus not at the Stoss – was the Duke of Austria. From one contemporary entry in the oldest necrology of the St Gall church of St Laurence, it is evident that thirty members of the ducal army and two St Gall citizens ('*de nostris*') fell in battle and that, to commemorate them,

36 Agathe Nisple, *Appenzell. Ein Dorf- und Kulturführer* (Herisau: Appenzeller Verlag, 2001), 33.

37 Quoted from Matthias Weishaupt, 'Uli Rotach. Faktum oder Fiktion?', in Peter Niederhäuser and Alois Niederstätter (eds), *Die Appenzellerkriege – eine Krisenzeit am Bodensee?*, Forschungen zur Geschichte Vorarlbergs, Neue Folge, 7 (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2006), 175–79, esp. p. 178.

38 Weishaupt, 'Uli Rotach', 178.

39 Weishaupt, 'Uli Rotach', 178.

a procession was led into a chapel near the town.⁴⁰ This written evidence is supplemented by the archaeological. In the autumn of 1913, during the building of a water pipe at the place where this chapel used to be, a mass grave was excavated, containing thirty skeletons and, according to the experts called in, they must be the remnants of the victims of the battle outside the town of St Gallen.⁴¹

The number of victims and the description of the battles indicate that there had been no large open battle before the gates of the town with large armies clashing into each other. Rather, there were smaller skirmishes. It is a plausible assumption that the citizens of St Gallen were playing for time, pre-arranged with the people of the Appenzell, and disturbed the Austrian division with repeated attacks. In this way, they could keep the enemy near the town, into which they themselves could retreat. They thus aided or even enabled the victory of the Appenzell forces at the Stoss. The skeleton finds of 1913 were widely publicised at the time, but soon forgotten again: urban citizens did not accord with the idea of the confederacy as a 'peasant state'.

4 Economic Spread of the Town to the Surrounding Countryside

The facts presented here show clearly how strongly the idea of Switzerland as a 'peasant state' distorts the view of the facts. In the Middle Ages, the towns were the economic centres with strong ties to the countryside; this is the case for Switzerland as a whole, and also for the eastern part of it. St Gallen was the largest and most important town in the region. The food supply of grain, meat, dairy products, and meat stock was based in large part on the delivery from the surrounding countryside.⁴² Conversely, the rural population bought commodities at the town market. Added to that, many estates in the countryside were the possessions of townspeople and urban institutions.⁴³ This enabled the town to directly influence the rural economy and enforce commercial interests.

40 Stefan Sonderegger, 'Ein beinahe vergessener Beitrag der St. Galler zu den Appenzellerkriegen', in Peter Niederhäuser and Alois Niederstätter (eds), *Die Appenzellerkriege – eine Krisenzeit am Bodensee?*, Forschungen zur Geschichte Vorarlbergs, Neue Folge, 7 (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2006), 117–28, esp. 123–24.

41 Sonderegger, 'Ein beinahe vergessener Beitrag', 123–24.

42 In more detail, see Stefan Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in der Nordostschweiz. Eine Untersuchung ausgehend von den wirtschaftlichen Aktivitäten des Heiliggeist-Spitals St. Gallen*, St. Galler Kultur und Geschichte, 22, published dissertation, University of Zurich, 1993 (St. Gallen: Buchhandlung am Rösslitor, 1994).

43 Rezia Krauer, 'Der Erwerb von Besitzrechten im Umland der Stadt St. Gallen durch St. Galler Bürger von 1370 bis 1389', Licentiate Phil., University of Zurich, Zurich, 2010.

One result was the specialization of the agriculture of livestock and viticulture in certain zones of the surrounding countryside. This meant that the rural population became dependent on a supply of grain and other daily commodities to a certain extent. Within this economic regionalization, urban actors organized – with the exception of the urban market – the exchange of goods across the region and loaned money to the peasants in exchange for agricultural products. In addition, they advanced large mortgaged credit to livestock farmers from the Appenzell. Urban supply of foodstuffs and other goods to the countryside, as well as money loaned from the town, bound parts of the rural population enduringly to the town.

These economic dependencies between the town of St Gallen and the Appenzell in the fourteenth and fifteenth century can explain the mutual assistance of town and countryside in the emancipation from their shared ruler, the Abbey of Saint Gall. The relationship between the town of St Gallen and the Appenzell at the time of the Appenzell wars in 1405 was so tightly knit that there can be no distinguishing of urban and rural interests. It is literally nonsensical against the backdrop of this history to see the conflict as a purely peasant rebellion.⁴⁴ Both rural *and* urban parties were involved.

Our results correspond with other regional studies in Switzerland. How much the urban and rural economy, as well as the politics of the towns and cantons of the Confederacy of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, were intertwined can be exemplified by the Glarus: '[...] as Swiss history en miniature, as Glarus's path into the heart of the Confederacy and as parallel history to that of the history of the Uri, Schwyz, or Unterwalden.'⁴⁵ The aspiration of the people of Glarus was always seen to be freedom from Habsburg rule. The battle of Näfels on 9 April 1388 has traditionally been depicted in this light: with this battle, the people of Glarus freed themselves from the rule of the Habsburgs and became a part of the Swiss Confederacy – the same pattern as in the case of the Appenzell wars. However, the most recent studies show that, in opposition to the traditional view, the leading groups in power in Glarus before 1380 had close connections to the Habsburg rulers. They were in part local aristocrats or had inherited their positions. It is decisive that many of the leading Glarus elite were part of long-distance trade, which is the reason they often lived in Zurich. One could call them commuters between the town of Zurich and the *Land* Glarus.

44 Peter Blickle, *Aufbruch und Empörung*, 215.

45 Rolf Kamm, 'Die Schlacht bei Näfels 1388 – Kampf gegen den Erzfeind?', in Hans Rudolf Fuhrer (ed.), *Geschichte der Schweiz. Fenster in die Vergangenheit* I, Publikationen der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Militärgeschichtliche Studienreisen, 32 (Wettingen: Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Militärgeschichtliche Studienreisen GMS, 2011), 61–69, esp. p. 63.

After 1390, significant changes are noticeable with the emergence of social climbers in the fourteenth century. Many of these came from the *hinterland* of Glarus, some of which violently enforced their economic interests, which were focused on export. Similar to the northeastern part of Switzerland, where a strong influence of the town of St Gallen on the countryside is perceptible, in Glarus you can see the influence of Zurich. The economic interests of this centre were what played the most important part, something that can be demonstrated very well by the animal husbandry and Alpine economy. The beginning of commercialization of the Alpine economy, at first with foreign livestock, became the most influential economic system in Glarus, and this lasted until the mid-fifteenth century. The loans for the capital-intensive trade in animals mainly came from Zurich; the commuters mentioned above, between Glarus and Zurich, functioned as 'door-openers'. As in the case of St Gallen and the Appenzell, in the case of the intertwined economy of Zurich and Glarus, hardly any distinctions can be made between urban and rural interests. The dependency of the town manifests in yet another aspect: it was not only Glarus's exports that tied the *Land* to the town, the imports did, too. Glarus imported massive amounts of grain, with Zurich playing an important part as the place of acquisition.⁴⁶ We can assume that this grain came from southwestern Germany in the Middle Ages; Zurich was effectively the regional distribution centre. This dependency of Glarus on the transport of foodstuffs is connected to the intensification of the export-orientated Alpine and pasture economy. Here, too, there are parallels to eastern Switzerland: the specializing in livestock farming in the pre-Alpine Appenzell backed by the town of St Gallen and the dependency on Swabian grain imports.⁴⁷

Economic interests were a strong reason to intensify political relations. In eastern Switzerland, one can draw attention to the Swabian League of Cities discussed above, where the town of St Gallen urged the Swabian cities to accept Appenzell from own economic interests in its surroundings. Later, during the Appenzell wars at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the town of St Gallen again formed alliances with surrounding communities. Here, too, we can see parallels between the region of St Gallen / Appenzell on the one hand, and the town of Zurich and parts of its surrounding countryside on the other: in 1408, Zurich entered into an alliance with Glarus, although one that was strongly tailored to the interests of Zurich.⁴⁸ Glarus represents only one of the places Zurich was reaching out to in relation to economic and political issues.

46 Rolf Kamm, *Glarus zwischen Habsburg und Zurich. Die Entstehung des Landes im Spätmittelalter*, published dissertation, University of Zurich, 2009, (Baden: Hier & Jetzt, 2010), 184.

47 Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, 207ff. and 241ff.

48 Kamm, 'Die Schlacht bei Näfels', 67.

The region of Schwyz also presented a natural *hinterland*, and in a slightly less pronounced way this was also the case for Uri.⁴⁹ Over a long period of time, the influence of the towns was primarily tied up with the activities of the towns' citizens. What Roger Sablonier has observed concerning Zurich and central Switzerland agrees with our observations of eastern Switzerland: he starts with the premise that the political influence of the towns was already greater in the fourteenth century than previously assumed. He also believes that: '[...] the written constitutionalism of central Switzerland as we see it in alliances and royal documents may well have occurred due to stimulus from the town. The interest of the towns to organize the *hinterland* is shown in the inclusion of the *Länder* in the League of Cities in 1327'.⁵⁰

The circumstances depicted here show the role played by the towns in the late Middle Ages: in the fourteenth century, the towns grew more and more important, generally and also within the Swiss Confederacy. They were not only economically, but also politically setting the tone and reaching out to the countryside.

5 Instead of Peasant Myths

Concluding, we can say that the assumption that the late medieval Confederacy had been a 'peasant state' cannot be upheld. Regional studies, based on the evaluation of archival sources, show that in late medieval Switzerland the towns grew increasingly prominent. It has become clearer and clearer that the towns, rather than the *Länderorte*, were the most influential in the politics and economy of the Old Confederacy. The examples mentioned above of the town-countryside relations in eastern Switzerland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries underline this. Images of Switzerland as a peasant state have no basis in academic historical research and need to be explained through the political discourse that ultimately in Switzerland still exists to this day. In a political study of the early 1990s, it was shown that although only 4 percent of the Swiss population are farmers, 40 percent of Swiss people still identify strongly with agriculture and the rural farming population.⁵¹

Much more important than celebrating myths surrounding the peasant is the study of the living conditions of real peasants. This means that the discussion

49 Sablonier, *Gründungszeit ohne Eidgenossen*, 90. See also Thomas Maissen, *Geschichte der Schweiz* (Baden: Hier & Jetzt, 2010), 24–25.

50 Sablonier, *Gründungszeit ohne Eidgenossen*, 189–90.

51 See Urs Paul Engeler, 'Der Tanz ums Kalb. Hirte, Held und Heimatschützer – der Schweizer bleibt in seinem Herzen, was er nie war: ein Bauer aus dem Bilderbuch', *Bauern, was nun?* NZZ Folio, (9/1994), 40–45, esp. 42.

should be guided again towards the study of rural society – by far the greatest part of the population until far into the early modern period. It is to be remembered that there were close links between town and countryside – cooperation and dependencies.⁵² Swiss historiography has already much innovative research to offer, but the archives still contain many sources that have not yet been studied. The challenge of the future will be to make sure the rich tradition of economic and social historical research is not abandoned. To achieve this, the combined effort of many different institutions is needed, above all that of universities and archives. How fruitful the cooperation between teaching, research, and archival study can be is shown by such long-term projects as that on historical demographics⁵³ led by Markus Mattmüller (University of Basel) or that of Roger Sablonier (University of Zurich) on rural society.⁵⁴ These have led to countless MA theses and doctoral studies on different Swiss regions that have significantly broadened the current state of research on the economic, social, and cultural history of the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and that have also found their way into international discussion.⁵⁵

- 52 Stefan Sonderegger, 'Getreide, Fleisch und Geld gegen Wein. Stadt-Umland-Beziehungen im spätmittelalterlichen St. Gallen', in Frank Konersmann and Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt (eds), *Bauern als Händler. Ökonomische Diversifizierung und soziale Differenzierung bäuerlicher Agrarproduzenten (15.-19. Jahrhundert)*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte, 52 (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 2011), 17–33.
- 53 Bernhard Degen, Fridolin Kurmann, André Schluchter, et al. (eds), *Fenster zur Geschichte. 20 Quellen, 20 Interpretationen. Festschrift für Markus Mattmüller* (Basel, Frankfurt a.M.: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1992); Markus Mattmüller, Fridolin Kurmann and André Schluchter, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte der Schweiz*, Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 154, 2 vols (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1987).
- 54 See Thomas Meier and Roger Sablonier (eds), *Wirtschaft und Herrschaft, Beiträge zur ländlichen Gesellschaft in der östlichen Schweiz (1200–1800)* (Zurich: Chronos, 1999); See also the evaluation of Roger Sablonier's contribution to regional history in Thomas Meier and Regula Schmid, 'Roger Sablonier, 16. April 1941 – 8. Juni 2010', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 60 (2010), 494–97; see further Hans-Jörg Gilomen, 'Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Schweiz im Spätmittelalter', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 41 (1991), 41–66; Katja Hürlimann and Stefan Sonderegger, 'Ländliche Gesellschaft im Mittelalter', *Traverse. Zeitschrift für Geschichte/Revue d'histoire*, 18/1 (2011), 48–76. See also the homepage of the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für ländliche Geschichte: <http://www.rural-history.ch/slg/>.
- 55 Stefan Brakensiek, 'Regionalgeschichte als Sozialgeschichte. Studien zur ländlichen Gesellschaft im deutschsprachigen Raum', in Stefan Brakensiek and Alex Flügel (eds), *Regionalgeschichte in Europa. Methoden und Erträge der Forschung zum 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, Forschungen zur Regionalgeschichte, 34, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 197–251; Julien Demade, 'The Medieval Countryside in German-Language Historiography since the 1930s', in Isabel Alfonso Antón (ed.), *The Rural History of Medieval European Societies: Trends and Perspectives* (Turnhuot: Brepols, 2007), 173–252 points to the innovative nature of Swiss research on rural society; Gilomen, 'Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte', 41–66.

PART 4

Appendix



The Northern World

NORTH EUROPE AND THE BALTIC C.400–1700 AD
PEOPLES, ECONOMIES AND CULTURES

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Jón Vidar Sigurdsson (*Oslo*)
Piotr Gorecki (*University of California at Riverside*)
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Peasants, Lords, and State

*Comparing Peasant Conditions in Scandinavia
and the Eastern Alpine Region, 1000–1750*

Edited by

Tore Iversen
John Ragnar Myking
Stefan Sonderegger



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