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The Prince-Bishopric of Sitten refers to the area that was under the secular rule of the Bishop of Sitten from 999 until the beginning of the 17th century and legally until 1798. The prince-bishopric initially extended over the area from the sources of the Rhone to the Trent near Martigny and only after the conquest of the Savoy Lower Valais (1475 and 1536) roughly covered the area of the Diocese of Sitten.

## Table of contents

1. The gift of 999
2. sovereignty and territory
3. regalia investiture
4. jurisdiction and administration
5. The fall of the prince bishopric

sources and literature

More item information

# 1. The gift of 999

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In 999 King Rudolf III. of Burgundy Hugo, Bishop of Sitten, and his successors the County of Wallis with full rights. The donation, the authenticity of which is undisputed today, was part of the political program of the last Rudolfinger. In order to consolidate his weak kingship against the growing regional feudal powers, he employed the bishoprics more closely to serve as kings. He endowed the Tarentaise in 996, Basel and Sitten in 999, Lausanne in 1011 and Vienne in 1023 with county rights and thus founded a "Burgundian imperial church" based on the Ottonian model. The donation did not create a closed territory for the bishops of Sitten, who presumably had already asserted market and customs rights in Sitten and were important landlords in the diocese of Lausanne. However, it brought a considerable increase in unspecified secular rights formerly exercised by royal officials and was the starting point for the bishops' sovereignty. At the latest with the annexation of Burgundy to the Holy Roman Empire after the death of Rudolf III. In 1032 the bishops of Sitten, as imperial princes, united the spiritual and secular powers in the diocese. Titled Prefect and Count(*praefectus et comes*), which from the 14th century onwards was to emphasize the indivisibility of the imperial-princely-county prerogatives, the prince-bishops of Sitten exercised the regalia once reserved for the king, including all public rights, namely high and low jurisdiction, chancellery, Road, customs, tax, coin and market law, hunting, fishing and mountain regulations. With the exception of the tax and coin racks (1479/1480 first coins minted by Bishop Walter

Supersaxo, 1776-1778 last by Bishop Franz-Friedrich Ambühl), the regalia were loaned to others. In the lower part of the diocese, for example, the right to practice law (notarial supervision), which was also in competition with the cancellariat of the Abbey of Saint-Maurice, came to the cathedral chapter of Sitten as an episcopal fief in the 12th century.

## 2. sovereignty and territory

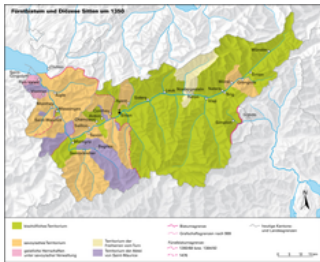
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The secular power of the prince-bishops ended in the west at the cross of Ottan between Martigny and Trento, mentioned in 1217. As early as the end of the 10th century, the possessions of the Abbey of Saint-Maurice, which was richly wealthy in the Chablais, were excluded, where the Counts of Maurienne-Savoyen had provided the bailiffs since the 11th century. Members of the count's family influenced the abbey and diocese, for example with Aimo, who was bishop of Sion from 1034-1053 and from 1046 also provost or abbot of Saint-Maurice. From the 12th century Savoy expanded into episcopal territories, which led to intertwined possessions in the western part of the prince-bishopric and to ongoing strife. The peace treaty of 1179 between Count Humbert III. of Savoy and Bishop Kuno shows the far-reaching fiefdoms of the counts to the lords of Aigle, Bex, Saillon, Etiez, Conthey and Granges in the Prince Bishopric of Sion and thus the complexity of the situation. A territorial demarcation did not become clear until the 13th century: Count Thomas I of Savoy bought the Lordship of Saillon in 1222 and 1232, followed by Count Peter II and Count Philip I of Burg

and Kastlanei Saxon in 1263 and 1277. During the interregnum, Peter II of Savoy conquered the episcopal castle of Martigny at the entrance to the Great St. Bernhard in 1260 and forced Bishop Henry of Raron in an exchange agreement to exchange the castles of Crest, Chamoson and Martigny and properties in Montreux for smaller Savoyard estates east of the Morge to be handed over to Conthey. The Morge thus became the border between Savoy and the episcopal Valais. Count Philip I of Savoy revoked the treaty in 1268. Conthey and Granges in the Prince Bishopric of Sitten and thus the complexity of the situation. A territorial demarcation did not become clear until the 13th century: Count Thomas I of Savoy bought the Lordship of Saillon in 1222 and 1232, followed by Count Peter II and Count Philip I of Burg and Kastlanei Saxon in 1263 and 1277. During the interregnum, Peter II of Savoy conquered the episcopal castle of Martigny at the entrance to the Great St. Bernhard in 1260 and forced Bishop Henry of Raron in an exchange agreement to exchange the castles of Crest, Chamoson and Martigny and properties in Montreux for smaller Savoyard estates east of the Morge to be handed over to Conthey. The Morge thus became the border between Savoy and the episcopal Valais. Count Philip I of Savoy revoked the treaty in 1268. Conthey and Granges in the Prince Bishopric of Sitten and thus the complexity of the situation. A territorial demarcation did not become clear until the 13th century: Count Thomas I of Savoy bought the Lordship of Saillon in 1222 and 1232, followed by Count Peter II and Count Philip I of Burg and Kastlanei Saxon in 1263 and 1277. During the interregnum, Peter II of Savoy conquered the episcopal castle of Martigny at the entrance to the Great St. Bernhard in 1260 and forced

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Prince-Bishopric and Diocese of Sitten around 1350 [...]

The recognition of the prince-bishop's regalia rights in 1293 and the subjugation of the local nobility around Peter IV vom Turn 1294-1299 strengthened the position of the prince-bishop. After a peaceful period of economic prosperity, Bishop

Witschard Tavel, supporter of Savoy, went to war with the seven Zenden (</de/articles/009820/2015-07-22/>): 1352 Count Amadeus VI intervened. of Savoy in favor of Tavel and plundered the city of Sitten. In 1375 Tavel was murdered and in 1384 his successor, Bishop Edward of Savoy-Achaia, was temporarily expelled. However, the uprising was crushed by Count Amadeus VII of Savoy and the defeated Zenden ceded the episcopal territories of Martigny, Ardon and Chamoson to Savoy. The peace treaty of 1392 ended the turmoil, confirmed the border of 1384 and restricted the sovereignty of the prince-bishop to the area east of the Morge (*ob der Mors*), but decreed the return of the pledged episcopal castles (Tourbillon, Majoria, Montorge) and Savoy's renunciation of its possessions in the upper Rhone valley. Ultimately, the winner was not the bishop as sovereign, but the Zenden, who had established themselves as a political force alongside the prince-bishop and the nobility in Valais in the first half of the 14th century.

When Bishop Wilhelm II of Raron brought dynastic self-interest to the fore, the political turmoil in 1415-1420 plunged the diocese into a civil war, the Raron trade (</de/articles/017017/2012-01-18/>) . His Italian successor, Andreas dei Benzi von Gualdo, enjoyed the



The Battle of Planta on November 13, 1475 near Sitten. Depiction of the Zurich chronicler Gerold Edlibach (/de/articles/014734/2005-11-07/) from his chronicle, on which he worked from 1485/1486 ( Zurich Central Library, Ms. A 75, p. 312 ). [...]

favor of King  
Sigismund, who  
wanted a stable  
passport state.  
The bishops dei  
Benzi and  
Wilhelm III  
succeeded in  
pacifying the  
landscape. from  
Raron only  
under legislative  
concessions to  
the Zenden  
(state and court  
constitutions of  
1435 and 1446),  
which enforced  
Heinrich

Asperlin as bishop in 1454 against the will of Rome.  
With the help of the Zenden, during the Burgundian Wars in 1475, Bishop Walter Supersaxo conquered the Savoy Lower Valais up to Saint-Maurice, which later became the bailiwick of *the Morsmanaged* independently, and thus strengthened his position internally as well. Until the conquest of Monthey and Evian in 1536 and the western border at Saint-Gingolph in the Treaty of Thonon (/de/articles/024651/2014-02-19/) in 1569, this was the most significant territorial gain of the Prince-Bishopric of Sion, because despite federal support, that of Bishop Jost von Silenen, a partisan of France, in the Val d'Ossola's (/de/articles/007095/2009-12-03/) expansion against Milan in 1484-1494 was unsuccessful.



### 3. regalia investiture

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To protect the territory from Savoy, the prince-bishops of Sitten invoked the imperial immediacy of 1032, which King Henry IV confirmed in 1079 Bishop Ermenfried, who later became Chancellor of Burgundy ( Investiture Controversy (/de/articles/008724/2020-05-20/)). Another confirmation came in 1189 when King Henry VI. Bishop Wilhelm lent the regalia, whose investiture Count Humbert III. seized by Savoy. The Dukes of Zähringen, who from 1156 onwards exercised the regalia investiture in the dioceses of Geneva, Lausanne and Sion as the most important representatives of imperial power within the framework of the imperial bailiwick in Burgundy, were evidently unable to do anything against the Savoyards. The troops of Bishop Landrich von Mont had successfully fended off Zähringian claims to the County of Valais in 1211 in the historically controversial Battle of Ulrichen.



Obverse of a silver double taler from 1501, diameter 46.3 mm, minted by Bishop Matthäus Schiner ( Swiss National Museum , Zurich). [...]



Reverse of a silver double taler from 1501, diameter 46.3 mm, minted by Bishop Matthäus Schiner ( Swiss National Museum, Zurich ). [...]

While the prince-bishops maintained their independence from the Zähringens, in 1224 and 1233 they had to recognize Savoy's supremacy and its right to the investiture of the regalia, and thus

accept interference from the Counts of Savoy in the election of the prince-bishop. In 1293, Bishop Boniface

de Challant of Savoy obtained recognition of the episcopal regalia in the diocese, ie up to Eau-Froide near Villeneuve (VD), with reference to the so-called Carolina, the supposed gift of Charlemagne to Bishop Theodul. The investiture received by the Emperor found symbolic expression under Bishop Philippe de Chambarlhac (1338-1342), who was the first Prince-Bishop of Sitten to use the sword of the Regalia in his seal. His successors continued to receive the regalia from the Savoyards. It was only Bishop Walter Supersaxo who, in 1477, succeeded in consolidating and ideologically underpinning the episcopal rulership in the long term, reflecting on the Rudolfine donation and the Carolinas. After the Peace of Basel in 1499, the bishops of Sitten continued to bear the title of imperial prince, but no longer paid any contributions to the empire, so that the relationship between Sitten and the empire was limited to relationships of a symbolic nature.

## 4. jurisdiction and administration

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As sovereign, the Bishop of Sitten was the largest landlord and supreme secular judge in the County of Valais. The episcopal table goods (*mensa episcopalis*) becomes more and more clearly comprehensible in lists of goods from the 11th to the 13th century. It consolidated, among other things, between 1138 and 1148 around the farms of Leuk and Naters. In addition to the domains in the Savoyard part of the diocese (Massongex, Martigny, Chamoson, Saint-Pierre-de-Clages, Ardon and Magnot), the table goods

temporarily also included goods between Vevey and Villeneuve (Montreux), in the Bernese Oberland (Alps Gurnigel, Engstligen and Felsenburg as well as the Mülinen festivals in the Kandertal) and in the Aosta Valley (including the Valle d'Ayas). The table goods, which were interspersed with allodial and Savoyard fiefdoms of the local nobility, only achieved their natural territorial unity in the 14th and 15th centuries, especially after the purchase of the goods of the von Turn in 1376 and the incorporation of the inheritance of the von Raron (lordship of Anniviers) as a result of the Asperlinhandel 1460-1482.

Secular jurisdiction and administration of the episcopal domains bestowed upon nobles and tax-paying peasants were vested in civil servants. High and low courts were initially exercised solely by the grand viztum of Sitten instead of the episcopal *advocatus* mentioned in 1005-1054 . From 1235 several Vicedominates are proven. Spatially, they were based on the major parishes (Leuk, Raron, Naters, Visp, Ernen, Münster in the Upper Valais), the centers of which were partially fortified by castles that also served as bishop's residences. From the 13th century onwards, alongside the viztum (*vicedominus*) were the maiors (*maior*), who were equipped with lower court powers , and the administrative-police offices of the weibel (*salterus*).and Mechtrale (*mistralis*) mentioned. The hereditary nature of the offices and the merging of the judicial powers of Viztum and Meier affected the jurisdiction of the prince-bishops from the 14th century and were fought against the Savoyard model with the centralized institution of Kastlanei. The small-scale jurisdictions of the cathedral chapter and the so-called free courts (*liberae*

*jurisdictions*) , former allodial jurisdictions acquired from free farmers, competed with the episcopal sovereignty in the late Middle Ages. Some of these courts, such as the free court of wood (</de/articles/008226/2008-01-08/>), survived as parastatal entities without political influence until 1798, while others were merged into the Zenden organization in the 16th century, which replaced the medieval territorial administration.

## 5. The fall of the prince bishopric

Author: Gregor Zenhauser

From the late Middle Ages, the seven Zenden were the prince-bishops' most powerful external allies and their greatest domestic rivals. Their rapid rise after the Raron trade (1415-1420) and the Burgundian wars (1475-1476) weakened the prince-bishops: in 1435 the Zenden wrested a state and court constitution from the prince-bishop which, like the Articles by Naters, which were enforced by force of arms in 1446, was democratic in colour. In 1487, the Zenden used the military defeat of Bishop Jost von Silenen in the Val d'Ossola for an electoral capitulation favorable to the Valais district administrator. Attempts by bishops Walter Supersaxo and Matthäus Schiner to legally consolidate their rule in the land rights of 1475 and 1514 as part of the rewriting of Valais customary law failed. In 1571 it was anchored in the constitution; the worldly rights of the prince-bishop were there as a result of the politically and denominationally divided landscape according to Schiner, who, as administrator of pope and emperor, had embodied the imperial princely position like no one

after him, but in fact had already been eroded in favor of the Zenden. Schiner's successors, whose relationship to the distant empire was limited to rare visits to the diets, were pushed onto the defensive by the district administrator during the confessional struggles (1524-1613). Rejected as a forgery, the Carolina in particular, as the origin of the prince-bishop's rights, met with bitter resistance from the Zenden at the beginning of the 17th century. The renunciation of the Carolina, which was imposed on the prince-bishop and the cathedral chapter in 1613 and confirmed by them in 1634, meant the separation of spiritual and secular power, of church and state and reduced the political role of the prince bishop to rights of honor (chair and vote in the district administrator). Until the Helvetic Constitution of 1798, the bishop of Sitten still bore the title of imperial prince, but the Zenden democracy actually prevailed as early as the beginning of the 17th century.

## sources and literature

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literature

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## systematics

Political Entities / Former State (/de/search/category?f\_hls.lexicofacet\_string=2/006800.006900.008200.)

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Religious-ecclesiastical units / diocese, diocese (/de/search/category?f\_hls.lexicofacet\_string=2/006800.009500.010200.)

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## citation suggestion

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