

SLOVAK CIVIC FLAGS AND BANNERS

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The Heraldic Commission established by the Slovak Ministry of Interior in 1975 has consultative functions in connection with the legal capacity of town and community parliaments to assume heraldic and vexillological symbols. Fortunately enough, the law in force contained a provision requiring that any draft resolution presented to the local parliament should always be accompanied by approval of the respective Regional Archives director. However, the Archives, being under the control of the Ministry of Interior, were directed to consult the Heraldic Commission before giving such approval. Consequently, the final responsibility for changes of arms or the assumption of arms was vested with the Heraldic Commission. As we shall see later, this proved to be of capital importance for procedures taken in vexillological matters.

By 1988 revision and approval of newly adopted civic arms of all the 135 Slovak towns was completed and the work on codification of civic arms by publishing the results of these activities was started.

At that stage the author succeeded in persuading the Commission that purely heraldic symbols (i.e. arms, shields) were not the only or decisive symbols to represent a civic community and which should be seen day by day and should be used inside buildings as well outdoors. It was therefore accepted, that along with publication of arms civic flags and banners should be codified and published as well. The results of a research covering the territory of the then Czechoslovak Federation, made by the Prague Vexillological Club, showed that only 25 towns in Slovakia possessed civic flags and that only a few of them were in actual use. In some instances the same colour composition and partition was in use by more than one town.

The ad hoc vexillological group within the Commission accepted the author's proposal that, for practical reasons, the Commission should not be required to consult the 135 towns for confirmation of existing and creation of new civic flags. It was further accepted in principle, that the flags for the 135 towns would have to be designed and codified by the Ministry of Interior in such a way as to ensure uniqueness. It was not easy to guarantee that this principle of exclusivity of design was realised. We shall see later what measures were to be taken.

We took it for granted that for several reasons the new flags had to be as simple in construction as possible, to make it easy and not costly to have them manufactured. It was decided not to allow that an armorial shield (containing town arms) be placed on the flag.

To make a clear distinction between these civic flags and country (state) flags, the author's suggestion was accepted to introduce in all town flags a simple rectangular incision (indentation) called swallow-tail. Later, when communities without township status applied for arms and flags to the Heraldic Commission, the decision was taken to introduce a double swallow-tail (two incisions in the fly) in community flags to constitute a striking difference to town flags.

As we shall see, the interconnection between arms and flags (as far as colours are concerned) was respected and the decision was taken to follow heraldic practices and to limit flag colours to the basic seven heraldic tinctures only.

The task to create new flags for 110 towns involved analysing the composition of existing town flags. The following types of flags were found to serve as a guideline for new flags to be created and to be codified:

A.

Flags representing simply the contents of arms, e.g. BANSKÁ BYSTRICA [Fig. 1]. Here inherited patterns were accepted and reconfirmed.

B.

Monocoloured ones, such as that used since 1550 by NITRA [Fig. 2] were reconfirmed.

C.

Monochrome ones with a border in another colour, of ancient origin (1739) in BANSKÁ ŠTIAVNICA [Fig. 3], were also reconfirmed. This composition was applied for GELNICA [Fig. 4] when a flag for this ancient town was created by the Commission.

D.

As mentioned above, the Commission encountered several situations where the same flag was used by more than one of the 25 towns. Here the principle of seniority of the arms or the flag was applied, according to which e.g. the yellow and green flag was reconfirmed for LEVICE [Fig. 5], whereas ŽILINA [Fig. 6], using hitherto the same colour composition, has been granted another flag, the contents of which will be discussed later. The yellow and blue flag borne by KOŠICE [Fig. 7] for several hundred years has been reconfirmed, whereas ŽIAR NAD HRONOM [Fig. 8] was granted a new four-striped flag reflecting in its upper half the arms' tinctures and in the lower half the colours of its ancient flag.

E.

Our research led to an exciting surprise in LEVOČA, where a flag composition having evidently medieval roots was discovered. The main armorial charge being the double cross of Slovakia [Fig. 9], the burghers decided to adopt the three cuts symbolising this double cross. An artefact with this symbol was found by the author in the LEVOČA town museum. The Commission took it as model for the LEVOČA flag design and for the design of all six Slovak towns having a double cross in their respective civic arms, e.g. ZVOLEN [Fig. 10] and ŽILINA, whose flag has been discussed earlier.

F.

As to the partition of the flag by stripes, there are two extreme positions in Slovakia:

- Flags consisting of two stripes, the colours of same usually representing the tincture of the arms' charge and that of the shield. This is the case of BRATISLAVA [Fig. 11]. In SABINOV [Fig. 12] the two flag colours are those of the arms' field. Several ancient flags of PEZLNOK [Fig. 13] always consisted of two colours, and the

actual arms' tinctures were derived from these colours, which is a rather unusual procedure.

– The ancient flag of KREMNICA [Fig. 14] displays seven stripes and can therefore be considered the opposite extreme as to the number of stripes (appearing in all four medieval arms' colours). In line with this complicated composition the Commission decided to create a flag with nine stripes when codifying the flag for SPIŠSKÁ STARÁ VES [Fig. 15].

G.

Between these extreme compositions we find flags of different age

composed of:

- three stripes, viz. BREŽNO [Fig. 16] or RUŽOM-BREROK [Fig. 17], granted in 1938,
- four stripes, e.g. HNÚŠŤA [Fig. 18],
- five stripes for KRÁL'OVSKÝ CHLMEC [Fig. 19] and SPIŠKÉ PODHRADIE [Fig. 20], both created by the Heraldic Commission.

H.

Quartered flags were used by one town only in Slovakia, TRENČÍN [Fig. 21], and their origin evidently derives from the Lamb's cross banner of the town arms. Similarly, as demonstrated above for LEVOČA, the quartering of the banner field of TRENČÍN represents a classical, purely heraldic approach. For nearby TRENČI-ANSKE TEPLICE [Fig. 22] the Commission approved a similar flag design. In the case of VRÚTKY [Fig. 23] the quartered flag corresponds to the quartered town arms.

I.

In the author's study on Slovakia's civic arms presented at the International Congress for Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences in Helsinki in 1984, attention is drawn to the fact that the most frequent charge in civic arms is hammers in saltire as symbols of mining, an industry of first importance in Slovakia during the Middle Ages. More than 50 towns and communities have this charge in their arms. The Heraldic Commission had to take these facts in consideration and finally decided to invent and introduce the saltire in flag design. Typical instruments of mining and related industries appear in numerous arms, and the corresponding saltire flag was derived from them, e.g. LIPTOVSKÝ HRÁDOK [Fig. 24], MEĎ-ZEV [Fig. 25], NOVÁ BAŇA [Fig. 26] or ROŽŇAVA [Fig. 27].

The Commission found the saltire flag composition suitable to be used in cases when other devices than mining and related instruments appeared in civic arms. For example halberds crossed per saltire in the arms of STRÁŽSKE (Fig. 28), or keys appearing in the arms of ZLATÉ MORAVCE (Fig. 29) induced the commission to avail itself of this type of flag in these instances. In the latter case the saltire itself consists of two colours, in accordance with two metals given to charges in the town arms of ZLATÉ MORAVCE.

J.

An unusual composition of a town flag is that of DUN-AJSKÁ STREDA [Fig. 30]. A heraldic artist (Püspöki-Nagy) designed both the new arms and the flag for this town,

and although far from local traditions, the Commission confirmed this creation.

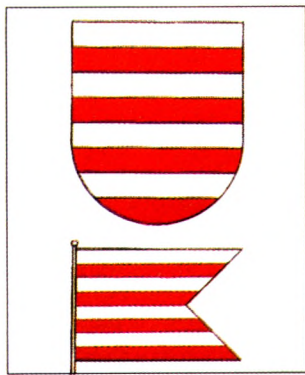
The illustrations of this article were taken from the book «Erby a vlajky miest v Slovenskej republike - Arms and Flags of Towns in the Slovak Republic» published by the Slovak Ministry of Interior in 1991. The captions of the book's illustrations are printed in both the Slovak and German languages.

[Fig. 31] shows the coat-of-arms (1), the seal (2) and the flag (3) of MYJAVA. All envisaged variants of the basic form of the flag of MYJAVA are discussed in the book in pp.308-311 and the various types of the town banner designed by the author are shown [Fig. 32, 4-10]. Number 6 of [Fig. 32] corresponds to the proposed banner for the mayor of MYJAVA.

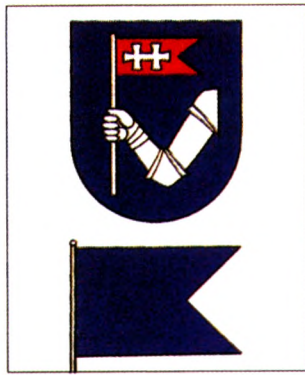
As mentioned earlier, the primary task of the Commission was to deal with heraldic and vexillological symbols of all 135 towns in Slovakia. As soon as the above mentioned book, fully illustrated in colour, came into hands of those interested, communities not having township status started contacting the Heraldic Commission. They wished to have their arms duly examined, and the Commission did this along with suggestions and proposals for community flags. At present there are more than one hundred community flags, which were codified by the Commission. The double swallow-tail, common to all the community flags, has the function to distinguish between town and community flags. Almost all of these new flags have a different number of stripes [Figs. 33 to 38]. It proved necessary to introduce flags with stripes of a different width to avoid identical flags of two or more communities, which had the same colours. The saltire was used as well for community flags, like the one of CHMEL'NICA [Fig. 39], a community whose arms and flag were created by the Commission.

There is a fortnightly periodical, «Verejná Správa» (Public Administration), published by the Ministry of Interior in both a Slovak and a Hungarian edition. Each issue has a description and illustration of the heraldic and vexillological symbols of a community as approved by the Heraldic Commission. The figures 33 to 39 each show the back cover of different «Verejná Správa» issues. Due to the number of approved new community arms and flags and the publication schedule of «Verejná Správa» it will take some time to have all of those symbols published. Nevertheless, this publication certainly proved to be the proper marketing device for the Commission's purpose.

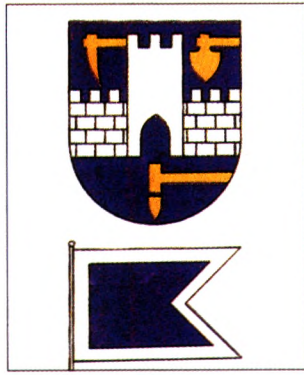
This outline of the situation in Slovakia shows the importance of meaningful co-operation between the protagonists of heraldry on one hand and of vexillology on the other hand to the benefit of proper symbols of civic entities.



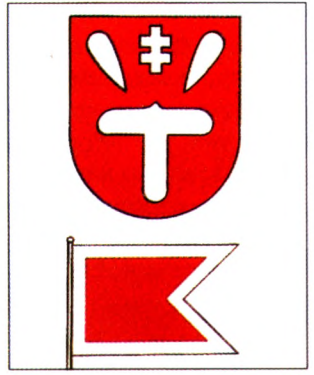
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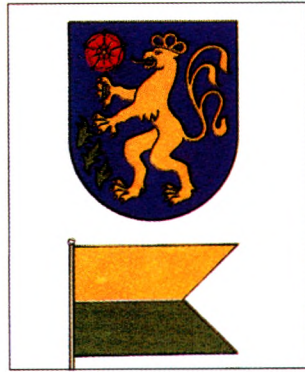
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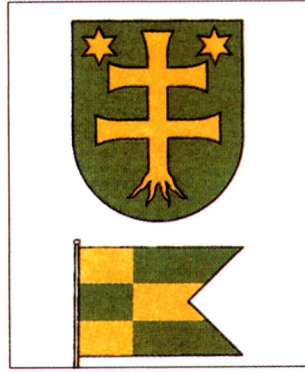
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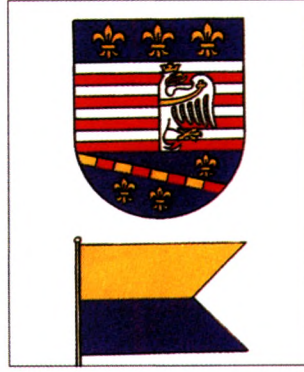
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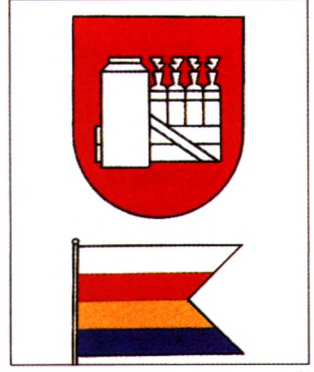
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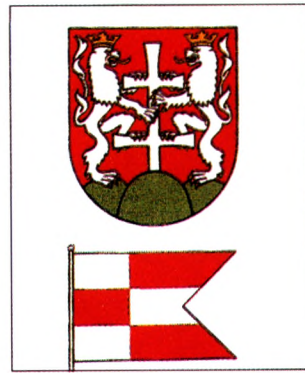
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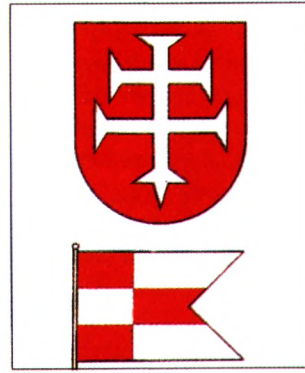
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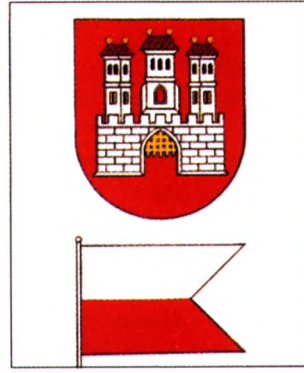
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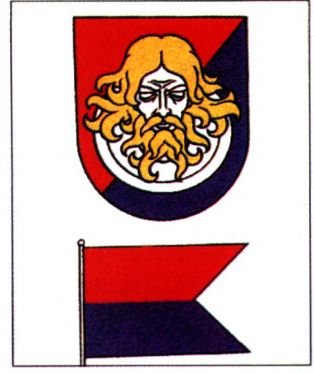
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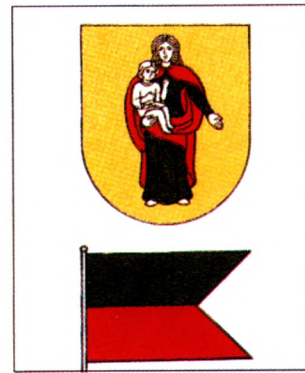
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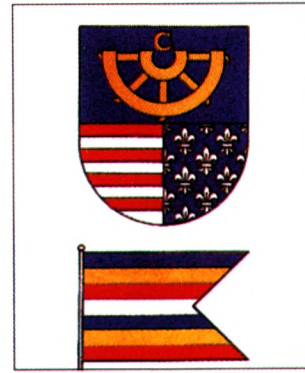
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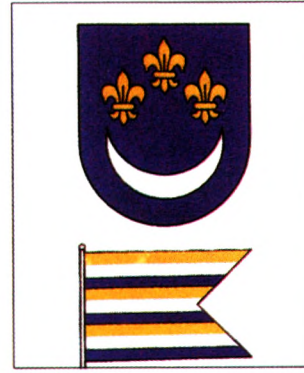
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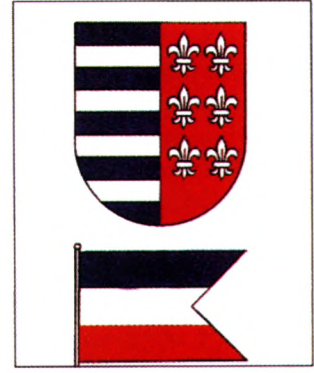
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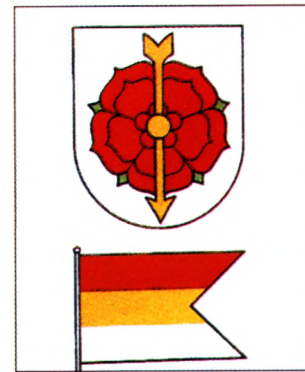
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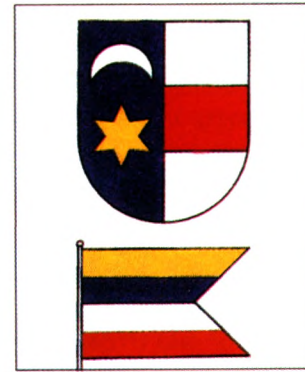
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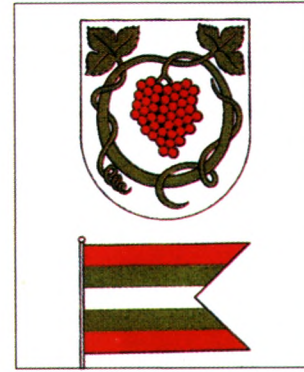
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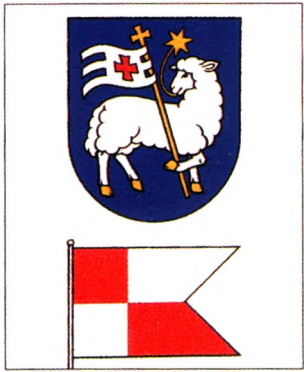
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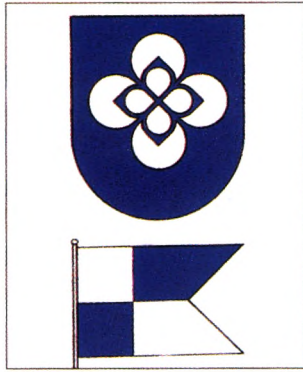
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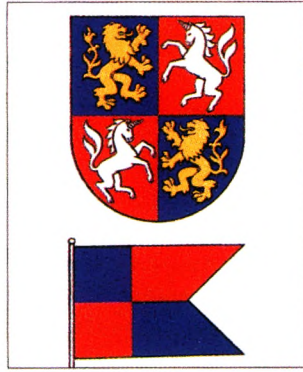
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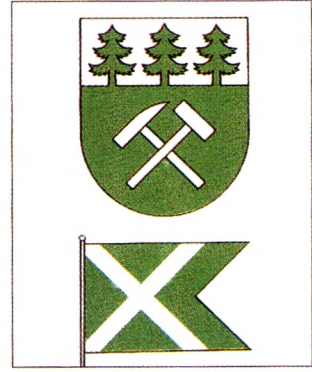
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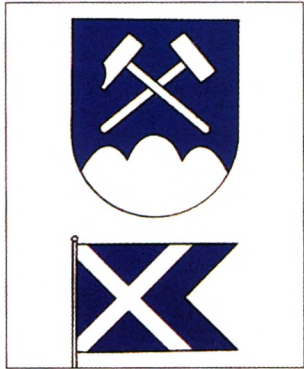
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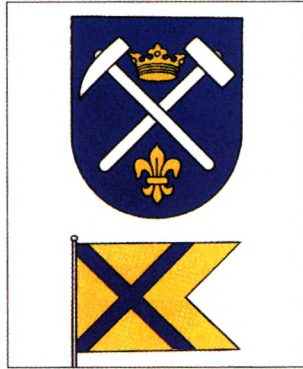
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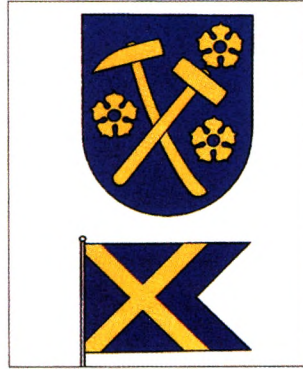
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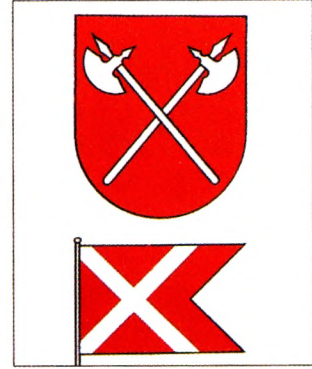
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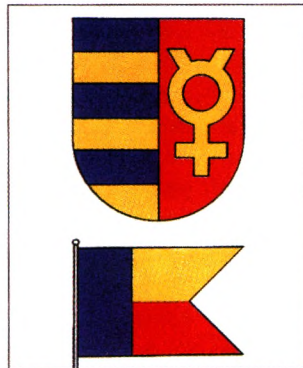
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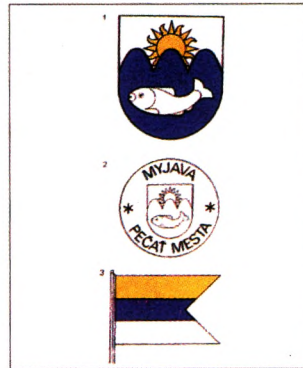
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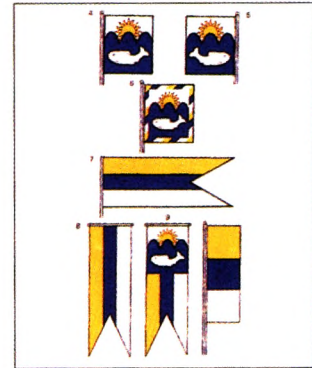
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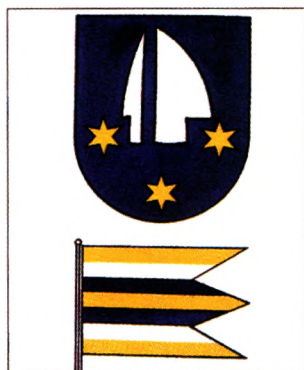
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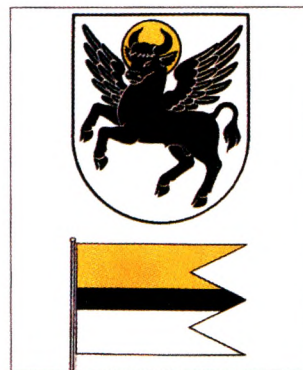
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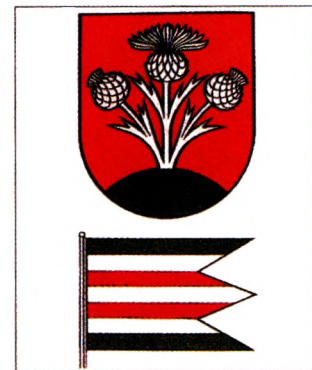
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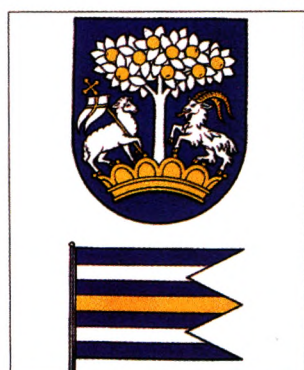
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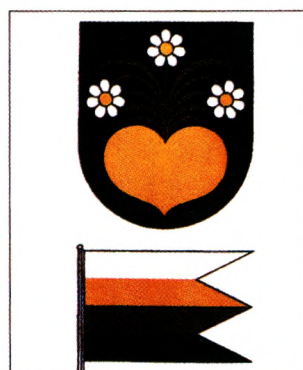
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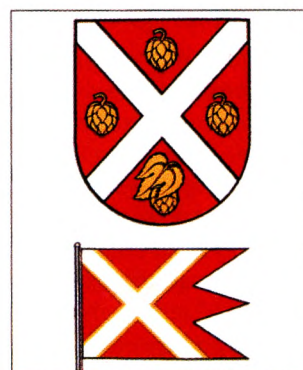
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