

ABSTRACT

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“Approval of the Coat of Arms of Latvian Towns: Continuity and Novelty”

The first discussions about municipal heraldry in the Republic of Latvia were led in 1923. Many town and district councils wrote to the Department of Self-government of the Ministry of Interior with questions about the usage of their former coat-of-arms. In 1923 Saeima passed “The Law of the Coat-of-Arms of Self-governing Institutions”. According to this Law the Heraldry Committee was established and self-governments were allowed to enjoy the right to coat-of arms.

Between 1923 and 1939 the Heraldry Committee had developed and successfully approved the projects of 61 coat-of-arms of Latvian cities and towns. The majority of armorial bearings were developed anew. Some projects used the motives of old arms and seals. Basically symbols of foreign states and sovereigns were deleted and some tinctures were changed.

During the first period of its work the Heraldry Committee kept the unwritten rules of Heraldry, was respectful to opinions of the town councils and small details, and took into consideration cultural, historical and geographical characteristics of town-applicant. Later process of the arms’ development should be considered as formal with confidence, because the artistic performance took the first plan. In perspective of Heraldry it was very unprofessional. Unfortunately, one third of Latvian communal arms are developed with different infringements in bodies. This welcomes further investigation.

The Heraldry Committee succeeded in the development of the municipal heraldry system: armorial emblems were created for all Latvian towns and cities with respect to the heraldic rules; heraldic images were fulfilled in single stylistic manner.

In Soviet Latvia heraldry fell into decay, because it was treated as character of the nobility. Only in 1988 the revival of people’s interest to the history of Latvia and local lore was reflected in government regulations – the Heraldry Commission was established by the Supreme Soviet of LSSR. Main task of its work was to restore the historical arms of towns and cities, which were approved in 1920-1930s.

In 1994 the State Heraldry Commission was established and its functions were clarified by the President’s resolution. Since that the Commission has approved arms for all towns and cities and has begun the work under districts’ arms (first approved in 1997). The Present Commission works with a great respect to the rules of heraldry, however the artistic performance still is specially emphasised (which is not an object of Heraldry). Hitherto the blazon in the Latvian language is one of the unresolved problems of the modern Latvian Heraldry.

In general, the State Heraldry Commission is continuing to form the single municipal and personal heraldry system, which basis was established in 1920-1930s.