

**Zeitschrift:** Die Schweiz = Suisse = Svizzera = Switzerland : offizielle Reisezeitschrift der Schweiz. Verkehrszentrale, der Schweizerischen Bundesbahnen, Privatbahnen ... [et al.]

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Verkehrszentrale

**Band:** 61 (1988)

**Heft:** 5: Schwarzwasser : Region um das Schwarzenburgerland = autour du pays de Schwarzenburg = la regione dello Schwarzenburgerland = the Schwarzenburgerland and its environs

**Rubrik:** [Impressum]

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## Vreneli of Guggisberg

Few Swiss girls have ever won such universal respect as Vreneli of Guggisberg. She has become a symbol, printed indelibly on the minds of the people, of the good and virtuous girl, a model of fortitude and fidelity. The name Vreneli is a diminutive of Verena, which is a form of Veronica, the Latin root of which denotes shyness and modesty. St. Verena of Solothurn and Zurzach has lived on in legend since the fourth century. Veronica, also canonized, is said to have accompanied Christ on his way to the cross and to have handed him the holy handkerchief, also known as the vernicle.

People have at all times needed symbolic figures as guides and models. The lovers who cannot stay together belong to this fellowship. In the so-called Guggisberg song Vreneli and her Hansjoggli are cruelly separated by mercenary service. The young bride spends her days weeping, torn between hope and fear. A rich farmer-prince then comes her way and woos Vreneli. But the girl remains steadfast; she would rather die than be unfaithful. Her words, in the dialect of the old song, are: "And if he cannot be mine, I shall die of sorrow."

This virtuous attitude is of course celebrated in many other stories in the West. But the fact that this example from Guggisberg was put into verse and into a striking melody in an emphatic minor key carried it out into the world, perpetuating the memory of Vreneli and attracting attention to the rather remote area between the River Sense and the Schwarzwasser. We do not know whether Joggeli ever came home. Two contradictory versions of the story have been passed down. A similar couple appears again in late eighteenth-century papers, but the text and music of the song are no doubt much older. The first evidence of it that we possess is that it was sung by a schoolmaster at a cheese repast in Wimmis in 1740. Tradition also has it that soldiers in foreign service were forbidden to sing it, because its sad and moving melody encouraged desertion. When in 1897 the Swiss Federal Mint needed a suitable subject for a gold coin worth 20 francs, the choice fell on the brave and steadfast Vreneli, who gave her name to the coin. The "Vreneli" coins are still being struck and collected today, though now worth far more than the original 20 francs.

### Schweiz

Monatszeitschrift der Schweizerischen Verkehrszentrale (SVZ) und des öffentlichen Verkehrs

Revue de l'Office national suisse du tourisme (ONST) et des transports publics

Rivista mensile dell'Ufficio nazionale svizzero del turismo (UNST) e dei mezzi di trasporto pubblici

Monthly magazine of the Swiss National Tourist Office (SNTO) and Swiss public transport

Bellariastrasse 38, Postfach, 8027 Zürich

### Suisse

### Svizzera

Redaktion:  
Roland Baumgartner, Esther Woerdehoff

Mitarbeiter:  
Dr. Karl F. Wälchli, Staatsarchivar des Kantons Bern,  
Werner Gilgen, Schwarzenburg

Photos:  
Michael von Graffenried, Bern

Regelmässiger Beitrag: «Der kleine Nebelspalter»,  
Redaktion Nebelspalter-Verlag, Rorschach

### Svizra

Nummer / Numéro 5/88  
61. Jahrgang / 61<sup>e</sup> année

Printed in Switzerland by BUGRA SUISE,  
CH-3084 Wabern, ☎ 031 54 81 11

Inserate / Annonces / Abonnement:  
BUGRA SUISE, CH-3084 Wabern

Abonnement: Schweiz / Suisse sFr. 47.—  
Ausland / Etranger sFr. 55.—

Einzelheft / Numéro: sFr. 6.— (+ Porto)

### Switzerland