

A city that looks at its own sources of wealth

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The willingness of Basel institutions to examine the colonial origins of their wealth has grown since the early 2000s. Foundations have commissioned studies of the fortunes on which they rest. Museums have opened their inventories to provenance research. The university has supported research projects on Swiss colonial entanglements, and public debates have addressed street names and monuments that honour persons involved in the colonial economy.¹

This self-examination has a practical side for the financial centre. A family office, a foundation or a bank that knows the history of its assets can answer questions from clients, beneficiaries, journalists and regulators with evidence. An institution that ignores this history risks being confronted with it by others, at a moment it has not chosen. The archives of Basel, which allowed historians to reconstruct the business of Christoph Burckhardt & Cie, make such confrontations likely. Preparing for them is part of the reputational risk management that modern financial institutions practise.

1 Notes

1. On research initiatives and public debates in Basel since the early 2000s concerning colonial entanglements (foundations, museums, the university, street names), see the recent literature and press coverage. To be verified. ↩

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