

Expenditure: walls, wars and territories

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The expenditure of the city was dominated by three items. The first was defence. After the earthquake of 1356, the city built a new outer wall that enclosed the suburbs that had grown up outside the older inner wall. The construction, carried out in the second half of the fourteenth century, was one of the largest public works of the period and required enormous resources.¹ Three of its gates survive: the Spalentor, the St. Alban-Tor and the St. Johannis-Tor. The wall was maintained and modernised until the nineteenth century, when most of it was demolished to allow the expansion of the city.

The second item was war. Basel participated in the conflicts of the region: against the Habsburgs, against the nobles of the Sundgau and the Breisgau, against the Armagnacs who invaded the region in 1444, and, as an ally of the Confederates, in the Burgundian Wars of 1474 to 1477 and in the Swabian War of 1499. Because wars required soldiers, weapons, provisions and subsidies to allies, they were the principal cause of extraordinary expenditure.

The third item was the purchase of rights and territories. The city paid considerable sums to the bishop, to noble families and to the Habsburgs to acquire lordships, offices and revenues. These purchases were investments: they brought the city income and power. But they were financed largely by borrowing, which increased the debt of the city.

1 Notes

1. On the construction of the outer city wall of Basel after 1356, completed around 1398, and its surviving gates (Spalentor, St. Alban-Tor, St. Johannis-Tor), see HLS, article "Basel (Gemeinde)"; the publications of the Denkmalpflege Basel-Stadt. Date of completion to be verified. ↩

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