

Huguenots, silk and the Église française

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After the Reformation of 1529 had made Basel a Protestant city, the wars of religion in France during the second half of the sixteenth century brought the first waves of French-speaking Protestants to its gates. Earlier parts of this book described how refugees from France, the Low Countries and northern Italy contributed capital, skills and commercial connections to the city.¹ Among them were families who would become pillars of the Basel economy for generations. The Sarasin family, which came from Lorraine in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, is the best-known example. Its name later became attached to one of the city's private banks.²

The French-speaking Protestants of Basel organised themselves in a congregation of their own. The Église française de Bâle, founded in the 1570s, held its services in French and has continued to do so, with interruptions and changes of form, into the present.³ The congregation offered more than worship. It served as a meeting point for newcomers, administered poor relief for its members, arranged marriages and apprenticeships and maintained correspondence with sister churches in Geneva, Neuchâtel, Frankfurt and the Netherlands. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, a new wave of Huguenots crossed Switzerland, most of them on their way to Brandenburg, the Netherlands or England. Basel admitted relatively few of them as permanent residents, because the guilds were anxious to protect their privileges, although the city supported many in transit.⁴

The silk ribbon industry, whose history Part B described, connected Basel with the French silk economy in a more lasting way. Raw silk and silk yarn came from Italy and southern France, while Paris and Lyon shaped the market for fashionable ribbons. Since Lyon was the centre of the European silk trade and of fashion in silk fabrics, the ribbon manufacturers of Basel watched its patterns, prices and fairs closely. Their agents travelled there,

their letters were written in French and their bills of exchange were drawn on Lyon houses.⁵ When the ribbon loom with several shuttles, the *Bändelmühle*, was introduced in Basel in the second half of the seventeenth century despite resistance from the guild craftsmen, the industry grew into the largest employer of the city and its rural hinterland. Its commercial language towards the west remained French.⁶

1 Notes

1. See Part A, chapter V and Part B of this book on religious refugees in Basel and their contribution to trade and industry. ↩
2. On the origins of the Sarasin family in Lorraine and its settlement in Basel, see HLS, article "Sarasin". Dates to be verified. ↩
3. On the history of the French Reformed congregation in Basel (Église française de Bâle), see its own historical publications and HLS, article "Refugianten". Date of foundation to be verified. ↩
4. On the Huguenot refugees after 1685 and the policy of the Swiss Protestant cities, which granted transit aid while restricting permanent settlement, see the literature on the Refuge in Switzerland, e.g. HLS, article "Hugenotten". To be verified. ↩
5. On the Basel silk ribbon industry (Posamenterei) and its commercial links with Lyon and the French market, see Part B of this book and the literature on the economic history of Basel, e.g. the relevant volumes of the *Basler Stadtgeschichte*. To be verified. ↩
6. On the introduction of the multi-shuttle ribbon loom in Basel in the 1660s and the conflicts with the guilds, see HLS, article "Seidenbandindustrie". Date to be verified. ↩

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