

Kinship and marriage

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The families of the *Daig* were connected by marriage to a degree that is difficult to imagine today. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number of families eligible for marriage within the Basel elite was small, so the families intermarried repeatedly over generations. Cousins married cousins, widows married their late husbands' partners, while alliances between business partners were sealed by the marriages of their children. The genealogies of the Basel families show a web of relationships in which almost every member of the elite was related to almost every other.¹

Marriage served economic purposes. It combined capital, since the dowry of the bride and the inheritance expectations of both spouses brought wealth into the new household and often into the family business. It connected businesses, since a marriage between the son of a ribbon manufacturer and the daughter of a silk merchant created a relationship of trust between the two houses. It secured political influence, since the families that controlled the council and the guilds used marriage to consolidate their position. And it ensured the transmission of the family's status to the next generation.

The marriage strategies of the Basel elite were not unique. Similar patterns can be observed in the patriciates of Zurich, Bern, Geneva, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and other commercial cities. The Huguenot banking families of Geneva, as the companion volume describes, formed a similarly interwoven network that extended to Paris, Lyon, Amsterdam and London. What distinguished the Basel *Daig* was its persistence: many of its families have maintained their position in the city for three or four centuries, through the upheavals of the Helvetic Revolution, the division of the canton, industrialisation and the democratisation of politics.

The kinship network of the *Daig* had a financial function that is often overlooked. It was a network of trust, in which credit could be extended, partnerships formed and information shared on the basis of family

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relationships. A young merchant who needed capital could borrow from an uncle, a father-in-law or a cousin; a family business that faced a crisis could count on the support of related houses; a banker who needed information about a potential borrower could ask a relative. The network reduced the costs of information and enforcement that burden credit relationships between strangers, and it gave the members of the *Daig* an advantage in business.

1 Notes

1. On the marriage strategies and kinship networks of the Basel elite in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see the literature on the social history of Basel. To be verified. ↩

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