

Mulhouse: a Swiss ally in Alsace

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The relationship between Basel and Mulhouse forms a special chapter in the French history of the region. Part A noted that Mulhouse, an Imperial city in the southern Alsatian plain some thirty kilometres from Basel, concluded an alliance with the Confederates in 1515 and remained an associated member of the Confederation, a *zugewandter Ort*, until 1798.¹ Mulhouse became Protestant in the Reformation, joined the Christian Civic Union with Basel, Zurich and Bern and survived as a small Reformed republic surrounded by Catholic territory. When the rest of Alsace passed to France in the seventeenth century, Mulhouse remained outside the French kingdom because of its Swiss alliance. It was an island of Swiss sovereignty in French Alsace for almost a century and a half.²

During the eighteenth century, Mulhouse developed a textile printing industry whose cotton prints, the *indiennes*, were sold throughout France and abroad. Part D described how this industry, its chemists and its dyeing techniques contributed to the emergence of the chemical industry in Basel.³ Because the city was surrounded by French customs territory, its manufacturers depended on access to the French market. The French government used this dependence to put pressure on the small republic. In January 1798, after a customs blockade that had strangled its trade, the citizens of Mulhouse voted to join the French Republic.⁴ The union ended the Swiss chapter of its history, although the commercial, family and religious ties with Basel continued throughout the nineteenth century. Many Mulhouse industrial families were related by marriage to Basel families, and capital and technical knowledge circulated between the two cities across what had become a national border.

The linguistic history of Mulhouse after 1798 anticipates in miniature the history of Alsace as a whole. Its elite, who had spoken German and Alsatian as members of a Swiss associated republic, increasingly adopted French in business, administration and education during the nineteenth century,

while the workers in the textile mills continued to speak dialect. The Société industrielle de Mulhouse, founded in 1826, became one of the leading technical and scientific associations of France and conducted its proceedings in French.⁵

1 Notes

1. See Part A, chapter V of this book, and HLS, article "Mülhausen". ↩
2. On the status of Mulhouse as an enclave between 1648 and 1798 and its protection through the alliance with the Swiss Confederation, see HLS, article "Mülhausen", and the literature on the history of Mulhouse. To be verified. ↩
3. See Part D of this book on the links between the Mulhouse textile printing industry and the origins of the Basel chemical industry. ↩
4. On the economic blockade of Mulhouse by France and the vote of 4 January 1798 on union with France, see HLS, article "Mülhausen". Date to be verified. ↩
5. On the Société industrielle de Mulhouse, founded in 1826, and the role of French among the Mulhouse industrial elite, see the literature on the economic history of Alsace. To be verified. ↩

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