

Roads over the Jura

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The prosperity of Augusta Raurica depended on roads as much as on the river. The Romans built a network of roads that connected the colony with the rest of the Empire. The most important led south over the Jura to the Swiss plateau, where it joined the road that ran from the Great St Bernard pass through Aventicum, today's Avenches, the capital of the Helvetii, to Vindonissa and the Rhine. Another road led west through the Burgundian Gate to Epamanduodurum, today's Mandeure, and Vesontio, today's Besançon, and from there to Lyon and the Mediterranean. A third followed the left bank of the Rhine northwards to Argentorate, today's Strasbourg, and Mogontiacum, today's Mainz.¹

The crossing of the Jura was the key section of the southern route. The Romans used the passes of the Upper and Lower Hauenstein, where traces of Roman road construction, including wheel ruts cut into the rock, have been found. These passes would remain the principal routes between Basel and the Swiss plateau until the construction of the railway tunnels through the Jura in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the old Hauenstein tunnel, opened in 1858 as part of the Swiss Central Railway, and the Hauenstein base tunnel, opened in 1916.² The railway tunnels made Basel the northern gate of the Gotthard route, which opened in 1882, and connected the city with Italy through the Alps. Part D examines how the railways transformed the Basel economy in the nineteenth century.

Roman roads were more than physical infrastructure. Equipped with milestones, stations for the change of horses and inns, they were used by the imperial post, the *cursus publicus*, which carried official messages and officials across the Empire at speeds that would not be matched in Europe until the eighteenth century. The speed and reliability of communication are, for a financial centre, as important as the transport of goods. Merchants and bankers live on information: about prices, about the solvency of their partners, about political events. The history of Basel as a

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financial centre is also a history of its position in the networks of communication, from the Roman roads to the post routes of the early modern period, the telegraph of the nineteenth century and the data networks of today.

1 Notes

1. On the Roman road network around Augusta Raurica (roads to Aventicum and the Great St Bernard, to Vesontio and Lugdunum, and along the Rhine to Argentorate and Mogontiacum), see Berger, *Führer durch Augusta Raurica*, 2012; HLS, article "Römerstrassen". To be verified. ↩
2. On the Hauenstein passes and the railway tunnels (old Hauenstein tunnel 1858, Hauenstein base tunnel 1916), see HLS, article "Hauenstein". Dates to be verified. ↩

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