

Sources for a financial history of medieval Basel

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The historian of finance in medieval Basel works with an exceptionally rich archive. The State Archives of Basel-Stadt preserve the charters of the bishop and of the city, the records of the council, the accounts of the municipal treasury from the fourteenth century onwards, the records of the guilds, the registers of real property and of the pledges and rents secured on it, and the papers of numerous families and institutions.¹ The municipal accounts, which record the income and expenditure of the city year by year, were edited and analysed at the beginning of the twentieth century by the economist Bernhard Harms in a three-volume study that remains a standard reference for the history of public finance in German-speaking Europe. The next chapter relies heavily on this material.

The ecclesiastical archives, those of the cathedral chapter and of the monasteries, add information on landholding, rents and credit. The records of the Council of Basel, discussed in Chapter IV, document the presence of foreign clergy, merchants and bankers in the city in the fifteenth century. The records of the university, from 1460 onwards, show the origin and number of students. Together, these sources allow a reconstruction of the economic life of the city that few other medieval cities of comparable size permit.

For the modern practitioner, the continuity of the archival record has a practical side. The land registers of Basel, the *Historisches Grundbuch*, allow the history of properties to be traced back for centuries. Rights of way, servitudes and obligations created in the Middle Ages may still appear in the land register or affect the use of a property. Anyone who acquires real estate in the old town of Basel acquires a piece of this history.

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1 Notes

1. On the holdings of the Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, including the municipal accounts (Jahrrechnungen) from 1360 and the Historisches Grundbuch, see the online guide of the Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt. To be verified. ↩

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