

The Daig, discretion and the GGG

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Part C described the old families of Basel, the *Daig*, and the culture of discretion that governed their wealth.¹ That culture also governs how they give. A Basel saying, often quoted in this context, holds that one has money but does not show it. The donor who funds an acquisition, a building or a concert series often remains anonymous or appears in a list of supporters without further emphasis. This reticence contrasts with the practice of naming galleries and buildings after donors that is common in American and British institutions.²

The culture of discretion has institutional roots. In 1777 Isaak Iselin, the Enlightenment patrician whom Part C introduced, founded the Gesellschaft für das Gute und Gemeinnützige, known as the GGG, to promote the public welfare through education, social institutions and culture.³ The society created or supported a large number of institutions over two and a half centuries, among them the savings bank that Part C mentioned, schools, libraries and social services. Today it runs the GGG Stadtbibliothek, the city's public library network, and supports a wide range of charitable organisations.⁴ The GGG embodies the idea that the wealthy owe a contribution to the common good, which is best made collectively and without display.

The guilds, the *Zünfte*, and the civic community of Basel, the *Bürgergemeinde*, belong to the same tradition. Many of them maintain their own funds for social and cultural purposes and support local projects with a discretion that matches the GGG.⁵ For an outside observer, the resulting patronage can be difficult to see, since much of it never appears in the press. For an incoming family, it offers a ready-made form of integration, as membership of a board, a society or a circle of supporters remains one of the most effective ways to become part of the city.

1 Notes

1. On the Daig and the Basel culture of discretion, see Part C, Chapter II. To be verified. ↩
2. On the Basel maxim "Me het's, aber me zeigt's nid" (one has it, but one does not show it) and on the discretion of Basel patrons, see the literature on the Basel patriciate and on Swiss philanthropy. Wording to be verified. ↩
3. On the Gesellschaft für das Gute und Gemeinnützige (GGG), founded in 1777 by Isaak Iselin, see the Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz, article "Gesellschaft für das Gute und Gemeinnützige"; the publications of the GGG. To be verified. ↩
4. On the institutions created or supported by the GGG, including the Zinstragende Ersparniskasse (1809) and the GGG Stadtbibliothek Basel, see the publications of the GGG. To be verified. ↩
5. On the social and cultural activities of the Basel guilds and of the Bürgergemeinde der Stadt Basel, see the publications of these bodies. To be verified. ↩

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