

The humanist circle of Basel

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Erasmus was the centre of a circle of scholars who lived in Basel or passed through the city. Beatus Rhenanus, born in Sélestat in Alsace, worked for Froben as editor and corrector and published editions of classical authors, among them Tacitus and Velleius Paterculus, and a history of Germany. Heinrich Loriti, known as Glareanus, a Swiss from Glarus, taught in Basel and wrote on geography, music theory and chronology. Johannes Oecolampadius, who would become the reformer of Basel, worked as a corrector and editor for Froben and helped Erasmus with the Hebrew and Greek of the New Testament. Wolfgang Capito, later a reformer of Strasbourg, also worked in Basel in these years.¹

The circle also included younger men who would shape the later history of Basel. Bonifacius Amerbach, the jurist, became Erasmus's closest friend in his later years. Sebastian Münster, the geographer and Hebraist, came to Basel in 1529 and taught at the university until his death in 1552. Thomas Platter, born in 1499 in a poor family in the Valais, worked as a goatherd, wandered through Germany as a travelling scholar, learned Latin, Greek and Hebrew, became a rope-maker, a corrector, a printer and finally the headmaster of the Latin school of Basel. His autobiography, written in his old age, is one of the most vivid documents of social mobility in the sixteenth century.² It was Thomas Platter who, together with Balthasar Lاسius, printed Calvin's *Institutio* in 1536, as Chapter IV shows. His son Felix Platter became one of the leading physicians of his time and professor of medicine in Basel.

The circle illustrates the openness of the humanist world to talent from different social backgrounds and different countries. Rhenanus came from Alsace, Glareanus from Glarus, Oecolampadius from Franconia, Capito from Alsace, Münster from the Palatinate, Platter from the Valais. They formed an international community in which ability counted more than birth, at least within limits, and in which Basel served as a meeting place.

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This openness to foreign talent, which Basel practised in the sixteenth century, is a condition of every financial centre. The Swiss financial centre of today depends on the recruitment of qualified professionals from abroad, which the free movement of persons with the European Union has facilitated since 2002.

1 Notes

1. On the humanist circle around Erasmus and Froben in Basel (Beatus Rhenanus, Glareanus, Oecolampadius, Capito and others), see HLS, articles on the respective persons. To be verified. ↩
2. Thomas Platter (1499–1582), autobiography; see HLS, article "Platter, Thomas". To be verified. On Platter's printing of Calvin's Institutio in 1536, see Chapter IV. ↩

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