

The Roman legacy and the modern financial centre

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Several threads link the Roman period with the modern Basel financial centre. Some are direct. The site of the Roman colony lies in the heart of today's industrial region: the Schweizerhalle chemical site and the Rhine port of Birsfelden and Muttenz are located a few kilometres from the ruins of Augusta Raurica, in the corridor along the Rhine that the Romans had already used. Others are institutional. The Roman law of obligations, received through the universities and the learned lawyers of the late Middle Ages, forms the basis of the Swiss Code of Obligations, which governs the banking contracts, the loans, the securities and the companies discussed in later parts of this book. The Roman concept of the *depositum*, the safekeeping of fungible goods, underlies the legal construction of the bank deposit; the *mandatum* underlies the asset management mandate; the *societas* underlies the partnership, from which the private banks of Basel took their legal form.¹

Others still are cultural. The Roman ruins of Augusta Raurica, excavated systematically since the nineteenth century and today one of the best-preserved Roman sites north of the Alps, have become part of the region's identity. They attract visitors, researchers and school classes, while the theatre is used for concerts and performances. The Museum Augusta Raurica and its reconstructed Roman house show how a provincial town of the Empire lived. Basel's humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries studied the ruins, and Basilius Amerbach, the jurist and collector whose cabinet became the core of the Basel public art collection, carried out one of the first archaeological investigations of the theatre in the 1580s.² The Amerbach cabinet, acquired by the city and the university in 1661, is considered the first public museum collection in the world owned by a city. It forms the core of today's Kunstmuseum Basel. The link between wealth, collecting and public culture, which begins with the Amerbach cabinet, is a thread that Part H follows to Art Basel and the art market.

1 Notes

1. On the Roman roots of the Swiss law of contracts, in particular deposit (Art. 472 ff. CO, irregular deposit Art. 481 CO), mandate (Art. 394 ff. CO) and simple partnership (Art. 530 ff. CO), see the standard commentaries on the Swiss Code of Obligations (SR 220). ↩
2. On Basilius Amerbach's excavations at the theatre of Augusta Raurica (1582–1585) and the Amerbach cabinet as the basis of the Kunstmuseum Basel and the Historical Museum, see HLS, article "Amerbach, Basilius"; Berger, *Führer durch Augusta Raurica*, 2012. Dates to be verified. ↩

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