

The Upper Rhine network after 1501

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The accession to the Confederation did not sever Basel's ties with the Upper Rhine cities. Trade continued to flow along the river, the book trade connected Basel with Strasbourg and Frankfurt, and the families of Basel continued to intermarry with those of Alsace and the Breisgau. The Reformation, which Basel, Strasbourg and several other Upper Rhine cities adopted in the 1520s, created a new community of faith that crossed the political borders.

A particular link connected Basel with Mulhouse, the Alsatian city some thirty kilometres to the north-west. Mulhouse concluded an alliance with the Confederates in 1515 and remained an associated member, a *zugewandter Ort*, of the Confederation until 1798, when it voted to join the French Republic.¹ For almost three centuries, a Swiss city thus existed in the middle of Alsace, whose merchants and manufacturers maintained close relations with Basel. In the eighteenth century, Mulhouse became a centre of the production of printed cotton fabrics, the *indiennes*, whose entrepreneurs came from Protestant families with Swiss connections. In the nineteenth century, it was one of the great industrial cities of France, with a textile and chemical industry that developed in parallel with that of Basel.

The Mulhouse connection illustrates a pattern that the later parts of this book examine in detail: the formation of a regional economy of the Upper Rhine that crosses political borders, in which capital, entrepreneurs, workers and technologies move between Basel, Alsace and Baden. The chemical industry of Basel, whose founders included entrepreneurs from Alsace and Germany, grew out of the textile dyeing industry of this region. The trinational region of today, with its cross-border commuters, its joint airport and its integrated labour market, is the modern form of this regional economy.

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1 Notes

1. On Mulhouse as an associated member (zugewandter Ort) of the Swiss Confederation from 1515 to 1798 and its union with France in 1798, see HLS, article "Mülhausen". To be verified. ↩

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