

A pass with a patron saint

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Two further pieces of evidence point to the same period. At the summit a chapel was dedicated to St Gotthard, the Bishop of Hildesheim who had been canonized in 1131. According to tradition the Archbishop of Milan consecrated it at some date between 1166/1176 and 1230, and a hospice at the summit is attested from 1237. The dedication shows that the ecclesiastical authorities of Lombardy regarded the pass as part of their sphere and that they had an interest in its use.¹ In 1231 King Henry (VII), son of Emperor Frederick II, took the valley of Uri under the direct protection of the Empire and redeemed it from Count Rudolf of Habsburg. The charter says nothing about the pass, but most historians connect the interest of the Staufer in Uri with the new road to Italy, which gave the Empire an alternative to the Brenner and the Grisons passes at a time when Frederick II was at war with the Lombard cities.² The first secure mention of a road through the Schöllenen is found in the annals of Albert of Stade, who became abbot of the Benedictine monastery of St Mary at Stade in 1232 and joined the Franciscans in 1240. His *Annales Stadenses*, a world chronicle that ends in 1256, contain a dialogue between two monks on the roads to Rome, in which the way over the "Elvelinus mons", one of the medieval names of the Gotthard, appears among the routes across the Alps.³

By 1300 the Gotthard had become an established transalpine route, although it carried less traffic than the Grisons passes. The search for its medieval traffic volume depends on the fiscal records of the towns at either end of the road. The best series is the register of the *Zentnerzoll* of Lucerne, a duty levied per hundredweight on goods passing through the town, which Fritz Glauser analysed for the years 1492 to 1505.⁴ For 1493–1503, the only years for which the source base is secure, an average of about 170 tonnes of goods (852 loads) crossed the pass each year, while the much lower Brenner carried about 4,500 tonnes. So small a tonnage could pay for the road only if the goods in long-distance transit were valuable in relation

to their weight. Bulky goods moved over the pass mainly in a regional exchange: from the late Middle Ages central Switzerland was bound for centuries into a cycle in which it traded cattle and cheese for grain, wine and rice.⁵

1 The Gotthard among the Alpine passes

The Gotthard never had a monopoly. Its competitors were the Grisons passes to the east (Septimer, Splügen, San Bernardino), which led to Chiavenna and Lake Como, the Lukmanier, which led through the Val di Blenio to Biasca and joined the Gotthard route at the southern end, the Simplon and the Great St Bernard in the west, and the Brenner, which carried most of the trade between Venice and southern Germany.⁶ Merchants chose the route according to cost, safety and political conditions. When war closed one pass, traffic shifted to another. When a lord or a town raised its duties, merchants avoided it if they could. The competition between passes is a constant theme of the documents. The governments along the routes, from Uri and the Grisons Leagues to the dukes of Milan, tried to attract traffic by granting toll exemptions in their treaties and by guaranteeing safe conduct on the roads. In the eighteenth century several cantons began to build carriage roads, having recognised that such roads enlivened trade, increased toll revenue and promoted their own crafts.⁷

This competition had a legal consequence that is relevant for the modern financial centre. A road that depends on voluntary traffic can survive only if the carriers are reliable, the duties predictable and the courts accessible to foreign merchants. The treaties discussed below exempted the goods of Confederate merchants from Milanese tolls, regulated their access to justice in the Duchy and secured their supply of grain and salt. They were an early form of the market access agreements that Switzerland negotiates today.⁸

2 Notes

1. HLS, art. "Gotthardpass" (version of 30.08.2016), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007466/2016-08-30/>: "Gemäss Überlieferung soll die Kapelle zwischen 1166/1176 und 1230 vom Erzbischof von Mailand eingeweiht worden sein"; the French version (as above) gives 1237 as the first attestation of the hospice. ↩
2. HLS, art. "Uri" (canton, version of 30.05.2017), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/007384/2017-05-30/>, on the charter of 1231 and on

the control of the Gotthard route as the main aim of Uri's territorial policy in the late Middle Ages. The connection between the charter and the pass is an interpretation, since the charter does not mention the road. ↩

3. *Annales Stadenses* auctore Alberto, ed. Johann Martin Lappenberg, MGH SS 16 (Hanover 1859). Wikipedia, "Annales Stadenses", https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annales_Stadenses (consulted as a last resort), on the dialogue between two monks about a journey to Rome and on the first secure mention of a road through the Schöllenen; Wikipedia, "Albert of Stade", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_of_Stade (consulted as a last resort), for his abbacy from 1232, his entry into the Franciscan friary of Stade in 1240 and the end of the chronicle in 1256; HLS, art. "Gotthardpass" (version of 30.08.2016), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007466/2016-08-30/>, which lists Mons Elvelinus among the historical names of the pass. ↩
4. HLS, art. "Uri" (as above), notes that the Gotthard was much less frequented than the Grisons passes. Fritz Glauser, "Der internationale Gotthardtransit im Lichte des Luzerner Zentnerzolls 1492 bis 1505", *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 18 (1968), 177–245, cited after the bibliography of HLS, art. "Gotthardpass" (version of 30.08.2016), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007466/2016-08-30/>, which also lists Fritz Glauser, "Der Gotthardtransit von 1500 bis 1660", *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 29 (1979), 16–52. ↩
5. HLS, art. "Gotthardpass" (version of 30.08.2016), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007466/2016-08-30/>, for the annual average of 170 t (852 Säume) in 1493–1503 and about 4,500 t over the Brenner, and for the exchange of "Vieh und Käse gegen Getreide, Wein und Reis" in which central Switzerland was involved from the late Middle Ages. The inference about the value of the long-distance goods is the author's. ↩
6. HLS, art. "Pässe" (Klaus Aerni, version of 27.09.2010), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007963/2010-09-27/>: "Er wurde bedeutend für die Pässe in Graubünden – Septimer, Julier und Maloja, Splügen, San Bernardino, Lukmanier – und für den Grossen St. Bernhard und den Simplon im Wallis"; HLS, art. "Gotthardpass" (as above), for the comparison with the Brenner. Further literature: Werner Schnyder, *Handel und Verkehr über die Bündner Pässe im Mittelalter zwischen Deutschland, der Schweiz und Oberitalien*, 2 vols (Zurich 1973–1975). ↩
7. HLS, art. "Mailänder Kapitulate" (as above), on toll freedom under the treaties; HLS, art. "Märkte" (Anne-Marie Dubler, version of

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27.10.2009), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/013739/2009-10-27/>, on "der am Ort gebotene Marktfriede und der Geleitschutz auf den Zufahrtswegen"; HLS, art. "Pässe" (Klaus Aerni, version of 27.09.2010), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007963/2010-09-27/>, on the eighteenth century, when "verschiedene Stände erkannten, dass der Bau von Kunststrassen den Handel belebte, vermehrt Zölle eintrug, das eigene Gewerbe förderte" (Bern from 1742, then Lucerne, Zurich, Zug and the prince-bishop of Basel). Further literature: Schulte (as above), vol. 1; Schnyder (as above), vol. 1. ↩

8. HLS, art. "Mailänder Kapitulate" (Fritz Glauser, version of 13.01.2011), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/017199/>, on toll freedom, the regulation of legal proceedings and the supply of grain and salt. The comparison with modern agreements is the author's. ↩

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