

Income, tolls and debt

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The income that the route brought to the valleys took several forms. There were the carriers' fees, the charges of innkeepers and stable-keepers, the sale of hay and provisions to travellers and the wages of those who kept the road open in winter. There were also tolls, levied by the cathedral chapter of Milan in the Leventina, by the Milanese dukes at Bellinzona and by the lords and communes along the northern side of the pass.¹ The combined burden of tolls between Lucerne and Milan was considerable, and merchants regularly complained about it. The toll system was nonetheless essential to the maintenance of the route, because the revenues financed bridges, walls and the clearing of snow.

For the valley communities the route was a source of cash in a largely non-monetary economy. Cash allowed them to buy grain from Lombardy, to pay dues to their lords and to borrow on the strength of future income. Communes that had to rebuild a bridge after a flood or to pay a war levy borrowed from merchants and notables and repaid from transport income. The opening of the Gotthard thus created a small credit economy in the valleys, in which future transport fees served as the security for present loans. This is one of the points at which the history of the pass meets the history of finance, and Chapter A.IV follows it into the early modern period.

1 Uri, the Leventina and the logic of expansion

The opening of the route also changed the political geometry of the region. Uri, the community on the northern side of the pass, depended on the same route as the Leventina and had every interest in keeping it open, safe and cheap. Its cattle and dairy producers sold in the markets of Lombardy and bought grain, wine and salt there. Any interruption of the route by war, by excessive tolls or by the closure of markets hit Uri directly. The Confederate advance into the Leventina, described in the next section, can

be read as an attempt to secure the southern half of a trade route on which the northern community depended. The later disputes between the Confederates and Milan over tolls, market access and the supply of salt belong to the same logic.

In figures. The Gotthard pass lies at 2,106 m. The Schöllenen gorge was made passable around 1200 to 1230 by a bridge and a rock gallery. Saint Godehard of Hildesheim, whose name the pass bears, was canonized in 1131. Henry VII granted Uri direct subjection to the empire in 1231.²

2 Notes

1. DSS, art. "Gotthard" (above), on the transport sections in the Leventina and the Fuhrleite; DSS, art. "Milano (ducato)" (above). ↩
2. DSS, art. "Gotthard" (above), which gives 2,108 m for the pass; the road summit is signed at 2,106 m (Wikipedia, "Gotthard Pass", above); DSS, art. "Uri" (above). ↩

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