

Uri, Urseren and the politics of the road

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The Confederacy grew along the Gotthard road. Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden formed their alliance in the late thirteenth century, and Lucerne joined in 1332. The valley community of Urseren, which controlled the section between the Schöllenen and the pass, concluded a *Landrecht* with Uri in 1410 and thereby came under Uri's influence while keeping its own institutions.¹ South of the pass, Uri's ambitions were directed at the Leventina, which belonged to the cathedral chapter of Milan and later to the Visconti. The phases of Uri's expansion, from the treaty of protection with the valley in 1403 through the defeat at Arbedo in 1422, the pledge of 1441 and the battle of Giornico in 1478, are described in Chapter A.II.² What matters here is the effect on the route: after 1480, when Milan recognized Uri's possession of the Leventina, the entire road from Flüelen to the gorge of the Biaschina was under a single government, and after 1500, when Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden occupied Bellinzona, the Confederates held the southern gate of the valley as well.³

Control of the road meant control of its revenues and of its organization. Uri used its position to develop the road through the Piottino gorge, to establish a customs station at Rodi, and to regulate the carriers, the inns and the warehouses along the route. Its government in Altdorf appointed the officials at the tolls and received complaints from merchants. The Leventina became a bailiwick of Uri alone, administered by a *landfogto* (*Landvogt*, bailiff) who resided in Faido. When the valley rebelled in 1755 against new rules of Uri on guardianship and against the disregard of rights confirmed in its statute of 1713, Uri suppressed the revolt and on 2 June 1755 executed three of its leaders in Faido.⁴

1 The southern ramp and the two roads to Milan

At Bellinzona the Gotthard route divided. Goods for Milan could take the water route or the land route. On the water route, they were carried across

the Magadino plain to the port of Magadino on Lake Maggiore, shipped down the lake to Sesto Calende and from there down the Ticino river and along the Naviglio Grande, a navigable canal built by Milan from the late twelfth century onwards, to the city.⁵ On the land route, they crossed the Monte Ceneri to Lugano, were shipped across Lake Lugano to Capolago or taken along the shore, and continued through the Mendrisiotto to Chiasso, Como and Milan. For centuries the Ceneri was a dangerous pass because of robberies and attacks on travellers: merchants complained of them as early as 1309, and the last assault on a stagecoach took place in 1864.⁶ Both routes crossed territories that came under Confederate rule after 1500 and 1512/1513, so that the Confederates controlled every stage from the Lake of Lucerne to the edge of the Lombard plain except the last one. That last stage, from Chiasso and Luino to Milan, remained in the hands of the Duke of Milan and his successors. It was the subject of the treaties examined in the fifth section of this chapter.

Date Event on the Gotthard route c. 1200–1230 Schöllenen made passable (Twärrenbrücke, first Devil's Bridge) by 1230 Chapel of St Gotthard on the pass (consecration by tradition) 1231 Charter of King Henry (VII) for Uri 1410 Landrecht between Urseren and Uri 1478–1480 Giornico; Milan recognizes Uri's Leventina 1561 Dazio Grande at Rodi 1595 Stone Devil's Bridge 1707–1708 Urnerloch tunnel (Morettini) 1827–1830 Carriage road over the pass 1882 Gotthard railway tunnel opened 2016 / 2020 Gotthard and Ceneri base tunnels opened

2 Notes

1. HLS, art. "Ursern" (as above): "1410 schlossen die Ursner [...] mit Uri ein Landrecht"; the valley community kept its Talamann and its own courts. ↩
2. See Chapter A.II. HLS, art. "Leventina" (Mario Fransioli, Tiziano Locarnini, version of 14.03.2017), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/008543/2017-03-14/>, for the treaty of protection of 1403, the defeat of 1422, the recovery of 1439/1441 and the peace of 1480. ↩
3. HLS, art. "Uri" (as above), for Uri's complete control of the Gotthard road from 1480 to 1798; HLS, art. "Bellinzona (Gemeinde)" (version of 05.04.2017), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/002031/2017-04-05/>, for the submission of Bellinzona in April 1500 and the Treaty of Arona of 1503, which placed it under Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden. See Chapter A.II. ↩

4. HLS, art. "Leventina, rivolta della" (Hans Stadler, Italian translation Luisa Rima-Cassina), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/017207/>, which names the three leaders executed at Faido on 2 June 1755 (Giovan Antonio Forni, Lorenzo Orsi and Giuseppe Sartore); HLS, art. "Leventina" (as above), for the bailiff resident in Faido. ↩
5. Regione Lombardia, in-Lombardia, "Naviglio Grande", <https://www.in-lombardia.it/en/visiting-lombardy/navigli/naviglio-grande>: begun around 1177, extended to Milan in 1209 and navigable from 1272. ↩
6. HLS, art. "Ceneri, Monte" (Graziano Tarilli, version of 17.05.2016), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008835/2016-05-17/>. ↩

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