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SWISS TRAFFIC HISTORY: A RESEARCH REPORT

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The history of traffic is presently quite flourishing. At the annual meeting of the Swiss Society of Social and Economic History in 2007, some 36 lectures on traffic history were presented; two-thirds presented new or recent research results.¹ This boom was to be expected. A cluster of historical traffic studies resulted from the social and economic historical research of the 1960s and 1970s² as well as the fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation between geography and history in this country.³ Between 1980 and 2003, the 'Inventory of Historical Traffic Routes in Switzerland' (IVS) emerged,⁴ thereby providing a basis for the preservation of the cultural space of historical traffic routes yet extant as well as for continuing research in traffic history. Important protagonists in the past have recently assumed emeritus status and retired: Jean François Bergier (Middle

¹ The papers will appear in 2010 as volume 25 of the yearbook Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte – Société Suisse d’histoire économique et sociale.
² This context is best accessible in the focus on traffic history in Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte, 29 (1979).
Institutional Basis

Research beyond the Early Modern period is being conducted at the Department of the History of the Middle Ages at the University of Bern, where Rainer Schwinges was recently given emeritus status, and by Anne Kolb of the History Seminar at the University of Zurich\(^5\) and ViaStoria – Center of Transport History. For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, traffic history research and instruction reap numerous institutional benefits, especially at the Institute of History at the University of Neuchâtel, chaired by Laurent Tissot; the Department of Social, Economic and Environmental History at the University of Bern, with Christian Pfister, Christoph Maria Merki and Ueli Haefeli, and its close associate, ViaStoria – Center of Transport History, under the direction of Hans-Ulrich Schiedt.\(^6\) Other important institutions include the Research Center for Social and Economic History at the University of Zurich, with Jakob Tanner and Gisela Hürlimann; the Institute of Technology History at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich with David Gugerli; the University of St.Gallen with Rolf Peter Sieferle; the Institute of History at the University of Lausanne with Cédric Humair and Malik Mazbouri; the Department of Economic History at the University of Geneva with Gilles Forster and Gérard Duc; the ‘Geography of Settlements and Regional History’ group at the University of Bern under the guidance of Hans-Rudolf Egli; and the Institute for Transport Planning and Systems (IVT), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, with Kay W. Axhausen and Ulrich Weidmann. IVT is of particular importance to Swiss traffic history because it is the source of increasing questioning of scientific studies of traffic in traffic history.\(^7\) IVT also promotes important initiatives in the historiography of scientific traffic studies.\(^8\)

An expanded institutional basis of historical traffic research is afforded by the museums and special archives of the Museum of Transport in Lucerne, by the Museum of Communication in Bern, and by the PTT Archives and the Heritage Foundation SBB.

\(^5\) The Zurich professor’s main work concerning traffic history is A. Kolb, *Transport und Nachrichtentransfer im Römischen Reich*, Berlin 2000.


RESEARCH SURVEY

Current studies emerge mainly from institutions that emphasize historical research in technology, sociology, economics and the environment. Subdisciplines of traffic history remain to be developed. Rudimentary beginnings of such an institutionalization are evident in the cooperation between the Department of Economic, Social and Environmental History (Pfister) and ViaStoria – Center of Transport History at the University of Bern.

The current methods are pluralistic. In the process, however, there is a number of networking initiatives, including conferences, interdisciplinary cooperation, work on a common quantitative database and a virtual research project concerning Swiss traffic history.¹⁰

PUBLICATIONS

The diversity and the connections between subdisciplines are well represented in a number of recent works. In his work concerning the onset of the Swiss tourism industry, Laurent Tissot connects traffic history and the history of tourism through social-historical as well as cultural-historical questioning.¹¹ His circle has also published a series on traffic history.¹² In this context, Régis Huguenin has published a volume on urban traffic in Neuchâtel, whilst Christophe Simeon has published on the emergence of the Swiss aviation industry.¹³ Both topics have hitherto been the subject of very little research.

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Christoph Maria Merki concerned himself in his postdoctoral lecture qualification thesis with the motorization of road traffic. Combining cultural-historical, economic and social-historical questioning, he analyzed the innovation of the complex, never individual and only rarely inevitable proliferation of automobiles. This work is a study of an emerging market, which exists not only on the basis of supply and demand but also in conjunction with a multitude of intermediary institutions.\textsuperscript{14}

In Switzerland, though, it is still the railway that draws most attention. The Geneva thesis by Gérard Duc discusses the historical economic development of railway fare structures and the state’s influence on them.\textsuperscript{15} A study published by the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War (ICE), and four very recent dissertations are concerned with twentieth-century railroad history. Gilles Forster addresses passenger service and the transportation of raw materials between Germany and Italy via the Swiss railway network during World War II, when Switzerland was accused of being too willing to assist Germany.\textsuperscript{16} Jonas Steinmann and André Kirchhofer examine financing and governmental railway policies, and in her important survey, Gisela Hürlimann takes a close look at automation, express traffic and the modernization of the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB).\textsuperscript{17} An informative outside view of Swiss transportation policy is provided in a dissertation by Markus Höschen, in which the latest history of the Swiss Alpine Transit (involving the major Swiss railway projects Rail 2000 and NEAT) is discussed.\textsuperscript{18} In his study of of freight transport, the economist Philipp Thalmann developed a statistical analysis in comparison with Great Britain.\textsuperscript{19} The historical context in this study, however, is not completely satisfactory.

Finally, in his postdoctoral lecture qualification thesis, Ueli Haefeli presents a synthesis which examines the ‘complex interdependency of supply and demand’

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Markus Höschen, Nationaler Starrsinn oder ökologisches Umdenken? Politische Konflikte um den Schweizer Alpentransit im ausgehenden 20. Jahrhundert (München, 2007).
\end{thebibliography}
in common transport policies and urban mobility. By comparing all modes of transport in several Swiss and German cities during the second half of the twentieth century, Haefeli widens the perspective of traffic history towards a comprehensive history of mobility.

Recently, several journals and yearbooks have published important articles on the history of transportation. An issue of the Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte (Swiss Historical Journal) provides a general overview of the history of transportation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An issue of traverse: Zeitschrift für Geschichte focuses on the question of traffic and economic development. A volume of the Revue historique vadoise emphasizing the history of tourism includes three articles on the synergies between the evolution of the transport system and the development of the tourism industry. Moreover, the 2007 yearbook of the Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte (Swiss Association for Economic and Social History) contains a number of articles on transport as an indispensable service.

**CURRENT TOPICS, MAIN AREAS OF RESEARCH AND PROJECTS**

Although individual modes of transport, especially railroads, still dominate, they are increasingly being interpreted as parts of the entire traffic system. Researchers are also examining the connections between spatial efficiency, logistics and mobility.

Some have seen a ‘spatial turn’ in traffic history. Appropriate analytical instruments for the examination of space are still missing in much of the current research, however. A first step towards supplying this desideratum is the recent development of a geographic information system in historical space and traffic research.

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23 Revue historique vadoise, 114 (2006); L. Tissot about the mountain railways, C. Humair about the funicular and M. Gigase about the steamboat.
Five further research projects are currently in progress:

A broadly based ViaStoria project conducted by Hans-Ulrich Schiedt explores the material conditions of pre-modern traffic, specially the development of roads and the transport on them.

A project at the University of Lausanne under the direction of Cédric Humair in collaboration with Marc Gigase deals with the history of tourism in the Lake Geneva region. Project researchers are studying cooperation in the development of the tourism industry and the evolution of technical infrastructure.

A project under the direction of Monika Dommann at the University of Basel investigates the heretofore neglected field of logistics, a complex arrangement of technical, social, economic, legal and political practices. The study deals with changes in transport, storage and conveyance, culminating in the channelized management of the entire flow of goods on a global scale as well as a fundamental complementary coordination between the flow of materials and the flow of information.

Another gap in traffic history is presently being closed at the University of Bern and at ViaStoria – Center of Transport History. Under the direction of Christoph Maria Merki, dissertation writers are investigating Swiss aviation in the second half of the twentieth century, including the influence of technology and politics on the development of Swiss aviation (the long-term development of technology; the political framework, laws, bilateral and multilateral contracts; and the influence of the military on civil aviation), the providers (the history of Swiss manufacturers of aircraft and components as well as the history of airlines which operated in Switzerland or used a Swiss basis for landing) and the airports and the demand for flights (building and development of airports from spatial, environmental and economic perspectives, the expansion of the route network, and the beginnings and growth of demand for both freight and passenger flights).

A project led by Thomas Frey and Hans-Ulrich Schiedt is developing an online database of historical traffic statistics. Following the incorporation of railway data for 1920-1982 through the Department of Economic, Social and Environmental History at the University of Bern, ViaStoria – Center of Transport History is now adding the years 1847-1920. The emerging database includes not less than 110 variables for 150 railway companies. A next step will be to add cog and cable railways and municipal trolley lines.

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26 Project title: ‘Tourist system and technical culture in the ‘Arc lemanique’: actors, social networks and synergies (1852–1914)’.
CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................................................................................. 7
Gijs Mom, Gordon Pirie and Laurent Tissot

I The State of the Art

Towards a paradigm shift? A decade of transport and mobility history ..... 13
Gijs Mom, Colin Divall and Peter Lyth

Mobility: trajectory of a concept in the social sciences ......................... 41
Vincent Kaufmann

A natural intersection: a survey of historical work on mobility and
the environment ............................................................................................................. 61
Tom McCarthy

The history and future of automotive fetishism ........................................ 83
David Gartman

II Continents and Countries

Urban mobility without wheels: a historiographical review of
pedestrianism ............................................................................................................... 111
Peter Norton

A political turn: highways and mass transit in American mobility
history .......................................................................................................................... 117
Michael Fein

Mobility in Australia: unsettling the settled .............................................. 123
Georgine Clarsen

African mobility history: recent texts on past passages ....................... 129
Gordon Pirie

Knitting a nation together: three themes in Canadian mobility history .... 137
Liz Millward

Transport in China before the industrial age: comparative research
issues .............................................................................................................................. 141
Nanny Kim

From the Scythians to the Soviets: an evaluation of Russian mobility
history .......................................................................................................................... 149
Tracy Nichols Busch
NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN A NEGLECTED FIELD: TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICAN RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY ..........................................................159
Rodrigo Booth and Melina Piglia

NICHE DEVELOPMENT OR WIDER RENAISSANCE? ITALIAN MOBILITY HISTORY GROWTH IN THE LAST DECADE.................................................................167
Massimo Moraglio

NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL TRANSPORT HISTORY: TRENDS IN RECENT DUTCH RESEARCH ...............................................................................................173
Hans Buiter

ALL IS POLITICS: FIFTY YEARS OF MOBILITY HISTORY IN BELGIUM.........................179
Donald Weber

SWISS TRAFFIC HISTORY: A RESEARCH REPORT ..................................................187
Hans-Ulrich Schiedt

STILL FOCUSSING ON THE RAILWAY: TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY HISTORY IN AUSTRIA .............................................................................................................193
Bernd Kreuzer

AN INDISTINCT CONSTELLATION: MOBILITY HISTORY IN GREECE ..........................201
Aristotle Tympas and Irene Anastasiadou

BULGARIAN STATE OF THE ART: MORE TRANSPORT THAN MOBILITY HISTORY ..........213
Emiliya Karaboeva

III Topics

EUROPEAN MOBILITY POLICY: A TOPIC TO BE DISCOVERED .................................221
Christian Henrich-Franke

MOBILIZING RACE, RACIALIZING MOBILITY: WRITING RACE INTO MOBILITY STUDIES ..........................................................229
Cotten Seiler

GENDER AND MOBILITY: HISTORICIZING THE TERMS ............................................235
Georgine Clarsen

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: AT THE CROSSROADS OF URBAN HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF MOBILITY ........................................................................................................243
Arnaud Passalacqua

PRODUCTION VERSUS MOBILITY? NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR AN OLD DILEMMA .........247
Valentina Fava

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS ...........................................................................................253
For decades scholars in diverse fields have examined problems in the history of mobility. Their diversity was their strength but also their limitation, as disciplinary boundaries impeded the exchange of ideas that lets scholarship flourish. Since 2003 the International Association for the History of Traffic, Transport and Mobility (T²M) has served as a free-trade zone, fostering a new interdisciplinary vitality in a now-flourishing field.

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