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Press release

Bern / Zurich, 14 May 1998

Jacob Burckhardt accused of anti-Semitism -The Swiss National Bank comments

In recent weeks the historian Jacob Burckhardt - the personality depicted on the new 1000 franc banknote of the Swiss National Bank - has been accused of anti-Semitism. The imputation is based on a number of passages in Burckhardt's voluminous private correspondence.

Burckhardt, one of the greatest historians of culture and art in the 19th century, is an internationally renowned personality. The fact that, apart from his extensive complete works, his correspondence contains isolated anti-Semitic statements is to be deplored. Jacob Burckhardt's complete works may not be judged solely from this angle. The National Bank regrets that such passages hurt the feelings of some members of the community.

Burckhardt was selected to illustrate the new 1000 franc note in appreciation of his complete works as a historian of culture and art. Burckhardt's writings (The Age of Constantine the Great, The Cicerone, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, Contributions to the Art History of Italy, History of Greek Culture, Force and Freedom: Reflections on History) contain no passages that could be labelled anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism is not a subject that runs through Burckhardt's works.

The National Bank chose Jacob Burckhardt for the 1000 franc banknote on the recommendation of a group of experts who submitted proposals based on the central theme and the time period defined for the new series (mixed cultural subjects, personalities from the fairly recent past). That Burckhardt was selected has been public knowledge since 1989, the time of the press conference on a competition of ideas for the new series of banknotes. Since this announcement up to shortly before the 1000 franc note was issued in April 1998 no criticism whatsoever was voiced with regard to this choice either by academic circles or in any other quarter.

Swiss National Bank