

Felix V, Savoy and Geneva

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The election of Amadeus VIII of Savoy as Felix V connects the Council of Basel with the history of Geneva. Amadeus VIII had ruled Savoy for more than forty years, had obtained from the Emperor the elevation of the county to a duchy in 1416, and had extended his power over the region of Lake Geneva. In 1434, he retired from government, handing it over to his son, and withdrew with a group of companions to the priory of Ripaille, on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, where he lived as a hermit knight. When the Council elected him pope in 1439, he accepted, although he was a layman and a widower with children.¹

As pope, Felix V was recognised only by a few territories, among them Savoy, parts of Switzerland and some German princes. Residing partly in Basel and partly in Lausanne and Geneva, he financed his court and the Council largely from the resources of Savoy. In 1444, he assumed the administration of the diocese of Geneva, which he retained after his abdication.² His abdication in 1449 was negotiated with Nicholas V, who made him a cardinal and papal legate and recognised the ecclesiastical appointments he had made. He died in Geneva in 1451.

The episode shows the close connections between Basel, Savoy and Geneva in the fifteenth century. The Council brought Savoyard money to Basel; the decline of the Council brought the Medici from Basel to Geneva; the ex-pope Felix V ended his life as the administrator of the diocese of Geneva. The two cities that this book and its companion volume examine belonged to the same world of ecclesiastical, dynastic and financial relationships, and the Council of Basel was one of the knots of this world.

1 Notes

1. On Amadeus VIII of Savoy (1383–1451), duke from 1416, his retirement to Ripaille (1434) and his election as Felix V (1439), see HLS,

Felix V, Savoy and Geneva

article "Felix V."; the literature on the house of Savoy. Dates to be verified. ↩

2. On Felix V's administration of the diocese of Geneva from 1444 and his status as cardinal and papal vicar after his abdication in 1449, see HLS, article "Felix V."; the companion volume, Genève, place financière internationale, Part A. To be verified. ↩

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