

An independence under threat: Geneva and Savoy after 1536

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The independence won in 1536 long remained precarious. The House of Savoy did not renounce its claims on Geneva. When Bern returned to the duke, in the 1560s, part of the territories conquered in 1536 to the south and west of Lake Geneva, Geneva once again found itself surrounded by Savoyard lands.¹ The Republic strengthened its alliances: it concluded with Zurich and Bern a *combourgeoisie* (treaty of mutual citizenship) that widened the circle of its protectors.² The threat culminated on the night of the Escalade, in December 1602, when Savoyard troops attempted to seize the city by surprise. Their failure was followed by a peace treaty the following year.³

This lasting insecurity weighed on the Genevan economy. It imposed substantial military expenditure, complicated supplies and encouraged merchants to diversify their assets outside the city. It also forged a culture of vigilance and prudence, which later generations would carry over into the management of wealth: spreading risks, keeping assets in several countries, maintaining relations with several protectors. The international diversification of fortunes that characterises Genevan wealth management thus has roots in the experience of a small republic under threat.

1 Notes

1. Archives d'État de Genève (Geneva State Archives) (archives-etat-ge.ch), "Contexte 1564-1602": Treaty of Lausanne of 30 October 1564, "restitution to Savoy of the territories conquered by Bern" (bailiwicks of Gex, Ternier, Gaillard and Thonon), Geneva finding itself surrounded by Savoyard lands from 1567. ↩
2. Archives d'État de Genève (archives-etat-ge.ch), "Contexte 1564-1602": *combourgeoisie* of 1584 guaranteeing "the support and

protection of the two most powerful cantons of Switzerland” until 1798; Wikipedia (en), “Republic of Geneva”: “Geneva formed an alliance with the canton of Zürich in 1584”. ↩

3. Archives d’État de Genève (archives-etat-ge.ch), “Contexte 1564-1602”: Savoyard attempt to scale the rampart of the Corraterie on the night of 11 to 12 December 1602; Treaty of Saint-Julien of 21 July 1603, the first formal recognition of Geneva’s sovereignty; Wikipedia (en), “L’Escalade”: more than 2,000 attackers sent by Charles Emmanuel I, 18 Genevan dead and 54 Savoyard dead, thirteen prisoners executed. ↩

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