

Coppet: finance, ideas and politics

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After his retirement, Necker settled at the château de Coppet, on the Vaud shore of Lake Geneva, which he had acquired a few years earlier.¹ From the end of the eighteenth century his daughter, Germaine de Staël, gathered there a circle of intellectuals from all over Europe, known as the “groupe de Coppet” (Coppet group). Benjamin Constant, the Genevan historian and economist Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi and other thinkers debated politics, literature and economics there.²

The Coppet group occupies an important place in the history of European liberalism. Its members reflected on the conditions of constitutional government, the protection of individual liberties, the role of public credit and the social consequences of the market economy. Sismondi, in particular, went on to develop a critique of the effects of competition and of economic crises which made him one of the forerunners of social economics.³

For the Geneva financial centre, Coppet illustrates the link between finance, ideas and politics. The former banker turned minister, his daughter the writer and their friends helped to shape a liberal culture committed to the rule of law, economic freedom and political moderation. That culture would permeate the Genevan elites of the nineteenth century and accompany the construction of modern Switzerland.

1 Notes

1. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. “Necker, Jacques”: “château de Coppet (acquired in 1784)”. ↩
2. Wikipedia (fr), “Groupe de Coppet”: constellation gathered around Madame de Staël at the château de Coppet, acquired by Jacques Necker, with Benjamin Constant, Charles Victor de Bonstetten, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Sismondi, as well as Mathieu de Montmorency,

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Prosper de Barante, Chateaubriand and Juliette Récamier; active for some fifteen years until the death of Madame de Staël in 1817; Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. “Sismondi”: participation in the group from the summer of 1804. ↩

3. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. “Sismondi, Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de”: born 9 May 1773 in Geneva, died 25 June 1842 in Chêne-Bougeries; *De la richesse commerciale* (1803), *Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Âge* (1809-1818), *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique* (1819), critiques of the classical school, *Histoire des Français* (1821-1844); member of the Conseil représentatif (1814-1841). ↩

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