

Open questions for research

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The file on Calvin and the Geneva economy remains open. Several lines of research would merit further investigation, and practitioners interested in the history of their financial centre could contribute to them.

The first concerns the systematic study of sixteenth-century credit contracts, based on the notarial records held at the Archives d'État de Genève (State Archives of Geneva). A quantitative analysis of rates, terms, security and the profiles of lenders and borrowers would make it possible to measure the gap between legislation, doctrine and practice. Recent work on the usury cases of 1555 to 1557 shows the value of such an approach.¹

The second concerns the capital flows connected with the refugees: the sums brought in, the property left behind in the country of origin, the family networks for transferring funds and the investments made in Geneva. These flows financed the economic reconstruction of the city; their scale remains poorly understood.

The third concerns the economic role of women, whose importance in retail trade, crafts and small-scale credit is revealed by the archives, along with the particular severity with which they were treated in matters of usury.

The fourth concerns the comparison between Geneva and other Reformed or Catholic cities of the region – Lyon, Basel, Bern, Lausanne, Fribourg – in order to distinguish the effects of the Reformation from those of geography, alliances and immigration.

The fifth concerns the continuity of family fortunes over several centuries. Certain Geneva families have retained an eminent economic position since the sixteenth or seventeenth century. A study of their wealth, marriage and professional strategies would shed light on how the culture of stewardship has been expressed over the long term.

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The digitisation of archives and automated text-analysis methods open up new possibilities for this research. The registers of the Council, the Consistory and the notaries could be exploited on a scale inaccessible to earlier generations of historians. The financial centre, which lays claim to its history, would do well to support this work.

1 Notes

1. “Jean Calvin et le prêt à intérêt : de la chaire à la boutique”, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 2025/1, p. 155 et seq., abstract accessed September 2026. ↩

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