

The Collège and the Académie

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In 1559, Geneva founded its Collège and its Académie.¹ The Collège provided secondary education, in particular Latin, Greek and letters. The Académie offered higher education in theology, biblical languages and the arts, and would later take in other disciplines. Théodore de Bèze was its first rector.² The institution's statutes, inspired in particular by the Strasbourg model of Jean Sturm, organised the classes, the curricula and the discipline.³

The Académie quickly attracted students from all over Reformed Europe: France, the Netherlands, Scotland, England, Germany, Hungary, Poland. It trained pastors who would go off to preach in France, where the Reformed churches multiplied around the turn of the 1560s. Robert M. Kingdon has shown the role of Geneva in organising these churches and in sending out ministers, at the moment when France was entering the Wars of Religion.⁴

The institution changed over the centuries. The Académie would become the University of Geneva in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵ It educated a significant part of the Geneva elites, including lawyers, economists and bankers. The Collège founded in 1559 today bears the name Collège Calvin.⁶

For the Geneva economy, the investment in education had considerable effects. An educated population commands writing, arithmetic and languages, skills indispensable to trade and banking. The elites trained at the Académie shared a common culture, which facilitated trust and cooperation. And the prestige of the institution attracted foreign families, who brought with them their capital and their connections. The work in economic history presented in the next chapter moreover underlines the role of education in the economic performance of Protestant regions.

Key point. The Collège and the Académie, founded in 1559, gave Geneva lasting human capital and international influence. The training of educated elites, with command of writing, arithmetic and languages, constitutes one of the most solid foundations of the future financial centre.

1 Notes

1. Article “Calvin’s Geneva”, Wikipedia (en), cited above, for the foundation of the Académie in 1559. ↩
2. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. “Université de Genève”: “The University of Geneva, an academy until 1873, has its origin in the establishment, in 1559, of a humanist and theological seminary”; “Théodore de Bèze, who came from the academy of Lausanne, was decisive in its management and development”. ↩
3. Wikipedia (en), “Collège Calvin”: “It was not until May 29, 1559, after the Leges Academiae Genevensis (Order of Collège de Genève) that work began on the actual building”; Wikipedia (en), “Johannes Sturm”: Protestant gymnasium of Strasbourg founded in 1538, a model curriculum based on rhetoric and the classical authors. ↩
4. Robert M. Kingdon, Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563, Geneva, Droz (“Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance”, XXII), 1956, ix-163 pp.; by the same author, Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564-1571, Geneva, Droz, 1967; Wikipedia (en), art. “Robert M. Kingdon”. ↩
5. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. “Université de Genève”: “In 1873, the Grand Council decreed the creation of a faculty of medicine and the transformation of the academy into a university. The latter opened in 1876”, on the initiative of the naturalist Carl Vogt; four faculties (letters, sciences, law, theology) and twenty-six chairs at the Restoration. ↩
6. Wikipedia (en), “Collège Calvin”: institution founded in 1559 under the name Collège de Genève, “the oldest public secondary school in Geneva, Switzerland”, “renamed the Collège Calvin in 1969”. ↩

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