

The Genevan elites and the Empire

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

The Genevan elites adopted a variety of attitudes towards French rule. Some notables collaborated with the imperial administration, held public office and took part in the life of the departmental institutions. Others withdrew to their estates and kept their distance. Others still emigrated, notably to England, where they kept alive the hope of a restoration of independence.

The learned and cultural institutions played an essential role in preserving Genevan identity. The Société des Arts, founded at the end of the eighteenth century to encourage the applied sciences, the arts and industry, continued its activities.¹ Genevan scholars published journals and kept up correspondence with the whole of Europe, including Great Britain, despite the war.²

This intellectual life sustained the networks and skills that would make Geneva's revival after 1813 possible. The notables who formed the provisional government of the Restoration often came from these learned and patrician circles. Their knowledge of languages, law, diplomacy and finance enabled them to negotiate Geneva's entry into the Confederation and to rebuild the institutions of the new canton. Part D traces that reconstruction.

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (fr), "Société des arts de Genève": "The Société pour l'avancement des arts, de l'agriculture et des manufactures de Genève was founded in 1776 by the watchmaker Louis Faizan and the scholar Horace Bénédicte de Saussure"; three classes (fine arts, agriculture and the art of living, industry and commerce); owner since 1863 of the Palais de l'Athénée, donated by Jean-Gabriel Eynard. ←

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2. Wikipedia (en), “Marc-Auguste Pictet”: “In 1796, he, his younger brother Charles, and his friend Frédéric-Guillaume Maurice began editing a monthly periodical entitled Bibliothèque Britannique”, circulating in translation the work of Davy, Herschel, Rumford and Wollaston. ↩

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