

Geneva, Refuge and Migrations (16th-17th Centuries). Foreword

Natalie Zemon Davis



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NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS

University of Toronto, Department of History

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Foreword

These splendid papers bring us new insight into the entangled motives which account for the movement between Protestant and Catholic polities in the seventeenth century, when some form of religious coexistence was possible either within polities or in nearby polities. Evidence from the late sixteenth century is drawn on in these papers, too, but their major emphasis is on the decades when the Edict of Nantes allowed both Roman Catholic and Reformed worship and institutions in France, and Protestant and Catholic polities coexisted, if not always peaceably, in Switzerland and Savoie. Nicolas Fornerod follows the movement of Catholic clergymen, mostly monks and religious, from different parts of France to Protestant Geneva and sometimes back again. Monica Martinat examines the back and forth of artisans and traders, women and men, between the Reformed city of Geneva and the Catholic city of Lyon, some 100 kilometers below on the Rhône River, each city with flourishing commercial fairs and industrial crafts. Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci takes as her twosome the walled city of Geneva, high on its hill, the center for Reformed refuge, and the adjacent Catholic countryside and towns of Savoie, home to dedicated Catholic missionaries. Nicolas Fornerod and Monica Martinat track persons and migrations as they surface in archives; Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci analyses the divergent discourses about Geneva of Catholic travelers and missionaries, on the one hand, and Protestant inhabitants and voyagers, on the other.

Several significant themes emerge from these papers. First is the importance of urban structures of welcome, aid, evaluation, exclusion, and control. Both religious and charitable organizations

play a role: in Geneva the *Vénérable Compagnie des Pasteurs* and the *Bourse de pauvres étrangers français*, founded already in the early days of the Reformation; in Lyon, the *Aumône-Générale*, the civic welfare organization established in the 1530s, the seventeenth-century Catholic reformation *Compagnie pour la Propagation de la Foi*, and the deacons of the Reformed Church. Second, cities have a distinctive image or counter-image, which acts as a pole of attraction. Geneva is a beacon city, tranquil and well-ordered and welcoming refugees who are of good life and doctrine, or in Catholic description a den of debauchery and false belief.

Third, both conversion and migration emerge as complex and related processes, with religious and socio-economic motives interlaced. Fornerod shows that conversion itself is often an extended process, its first stage being the man's departure from the convent and his shedding of his religious garb. Religious sensibility and movement to different French settings interact, culminating only in Geneva after a time with a declaration of faith. Conversion/migration also appear to be processes in the life-cycle, as the ex-religious ordinarily arrive when they are young adults.

If economic aid and a new vocation were important to these ex-Franciscans and ex-Capuchins, socio-economic concerns were strongly entangled with religious ones for the artisans, men and women who moved between Lyon and Geneva, Geneva and Lyon, finding jobs in the silk or other textile manufacture. And they often converted: they converted when necessary (and it certainly was in Geneva, where one could sojourn legally only as a Protestant) or when they desired religious change, or when they were pressured or enticed, say, by the *Compagnie pour la propagation de la foi*. Some stayed on in their new abode, others returned to their initial city and reconverted. As with the ex-religious, these artisanal migrants usually started out young.

Let me now make four observations that I hope will lead to further reflection on the exciting material in these papers. First is the role of gender and family. Women were prominent among the artisans moving between Lyon and Geneva. The women of Geneva – presumably middle-class and elite women – were especially active in pressing questions about religion on visitors to their town and discussing true belief among themselves. One thinks immediately of the active Catholic women inspiring the great reformer François de

Sales, nearby in the Savoie. In any case, it looks as though women are especially active in the family networks that spread information about migration, about the urban structures of aid, and strategies for religious conversion. We see these networks at work between a Protestant mother in Geneva, who, in trouble for “*propos diffamatoires à la Justice*,” goes to join her Catholic immigrant daughter in Lyon. And Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci tells us that between Geneva and Savoie, “*la frontière divise les familles, mais ne coupe pas entièrement le réseau de solidarité sociale et les parentés*”.

Among the pieces of information passed on in such networks was the need for a letter of attestation of one’s good life, faith and morals, if one hoped to advance or move elsewhere. Nicolas Formerod describes how these were extracted and used by the ex-religious, and how pastors shared information with each other about the character and reliability of Protestant migrants. Such letters are part of the documents of identity, which Valentin Groebner has studied for the early modern period¹. They are part of the story of both early modern migration and surveillance.

One of the men who obtained such a testimony from the pastors of Geneva was the ex-Dominican Louis Bodin. Several months after Bodin had departed, the Company of Pastors received a letter from the pastor of Poitiers warning them about Bodin’s capacity for dissimulation: “*lorsqu’il se trouve avec les papistes, c’est le plus ferme et zélé de leur religion et de mesme quand il se trouve avec les nostres: et le tout n’est [...] que pour passer son temps sans foy, sans loy et sans religion, et principalement quand il est en nécessité.*” We have in Louis Bodin a fine example of what Calvin was to denounce as Nicodemitism. We can see that similar dissimulation was practiced by some of the artisans who converted and reconverted between Lyon and Geneva. Rather than it being an expression of the desire to live “*sans foy, sans loy et sans religion*”, it was an expression of the attitude Stuart Schwartz has found among free-thinking folk in the Iberian world: each can be saved according to his law, the good Jew, the good Christian, the good Muslim². Examples can also be found of such dissimulation and

1. Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*, New York, Zone Books, 2007.

2. Stuart B. Schwartz, *All can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008.

its justification among Muslims and Christians moving around the mixed waters of the Mediterranean.

Finally, I call attention to a powerful image given us by Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, a “gray zone of belief” (“*zone grise*” de la *croyance*) around Geneva, an area where Capuchins give handouts to Protestant beggars and Catholic peasants owned heretical books and neglected mass. This is a mixed space, allowing crossovers and sustained economic relations between Catholics and Protestants. Benjamin Kaplan has been exploring such boundary zones in Germany and the Netherlands as especially apt places for improvising strategies for tolerance³. Thus if boundaries are often the setting for violent struggle, they can sometimes produce a setting for accommodation and exchange. We are grateful to our three presenters from Geneva and Lyon for opening for us these wide new vistas⁴.

nz.davis@utoronto.ca

3. Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

4. Very preliminary versions of these articles were presented as papers for the panel «Shiftig dynamics in a refugee City», at the International Conference «Early Modern Migrations. Exiles, Expulsion and Religious Refugees, 1400-1700», Toronto, April 19-21, 2012, Center for Renaissance and Reformation Studies.