

Geneva as a seat of liberated thought

It is very remarkable that a city, which scarcely counts 24,000 souls and has a fragmented territory containing fewer than thirty villages, is nevertheless a sovereign state and one of the most prosperous cities of Europe. Geneva is rich because of its liberty and its commerce. [...] All the sciences and almost all the arts have been so well cultivated in Geneva that one would be surprised to see the list of scholars and artists of all kinds produced by the city during the last two centuries. Sometimes it has even had the good fortune to have famous foreigners choose it as their home, enticed by its pleasant location and the freedom enjoyed by its inhabitants. [...] "It is no small sign of the progress of human reason," writes M. de Voltaire, "that it was possible to publish in Geneva, with public approval, the statement (in the *Essai sur l'histoire universelle* by the same author) that Calvin had a cruel soul as well as an enlightened mind. The murder of Servetus today seems abominable." We believe that the praise which this noble freedom of thought and of writing deserves should be addressed equally to the author, to his century, and to Geneva. [...] One might add further, without any intention of approving the religion of Geneva, that there are few countries where the theologians and the clergymen are more opposed to superstition. As a result, because intolerance and superstition serve only to increase the number of unbelievers, one hears less complaint in Geneva than elsewhere about the spread of unbelief [...].

Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert, Article «Genva», 1757 (extracts)

Collaborative Translation of the *Encyclopédie* edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert Hosted by MPublishing, a division of the University of Michigan Library