

The Italian refugees

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The first significant group of refugees came from Italy. In the 1540s, the reorganisation of the Roman Inquisition and the failure of attempts at reconciliation with the Protestants led many Italians who sympathised with the Reformation to leave the country. They came from Lucca, Siena, Naples, Venice, Milan, Locarno and other cities and settled in Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Strasbourg and other Protestant cities.¹

Several of the Italian refugees in Basel were scholars and theologians whose views went beyond the Reformed orthodoxy. Celio Secondo Curione, a humanist from Piedmont, taught rhetoric at the University of Basel from 1546 until his death in 1569 and published works that defended the salvation of a large part of humanity against the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Bernardino Ochino, a former general of the Capuchin order who had converted to Protestantism, lived in Basel and Zurich and was expelled from Zurich in 1563 for his unorthodox views on marriage and the Trinity.²

Pietro Perna, a printer from Lucca who settled in Basel in the 1540s, became one of the most important publishers of the Italian exile. He printed the works of Italian Protestants and dissenters, translations of Italian literature and political works, among them a Latin translation of Machiavelli's *Prince*, and he acted as an intermediary between the Italian exiles and the book markets of Europe.³ Perna's career shows how the Basel printing industry, described in Chapter I, provided a platform for refugees who could not publish in their home countries.

The Italian merchants who came to Basel brought experience of the silk industry and of Italian commercial and financial techniques. The silk industry of Lucca, Florence, Milan and Venice was the most advanced in Europe, whose techniques of spinning, dyeing and weaving silk were jealously guarded. Refugees who had worked in the silk trade carried this knowledge across the Alps and founded silk workshops in Zurich, Basel

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and other Swiss cities. The silk industries of Zurich and Basel, which became the leading industries of both cities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, owed their origins in part to Italian refugees.

A particularly significant group came from Locarno. In 1555, the Protestant community of Locarno, a town in the Italian-speaking bailiwicks ruled jointly by the Swiss cantons, was expelled by the decision of the Catholic majority of the cantons. The Locarnese refugees, about two hundred persons, went to Zurich, where they founded silk and textile enterprises and became part of the Zurich elite. Families such as the Muralt and the Orelli descended from them.⁴ Some members of these families also had links with Basel. The companion volume on Zurich examines the Locarnese contribution to the Zurich economy.

1 Notes

1. On the Italian Protestant refugees (esuli) of the 1540s–1560s in Geneva, Zurich, Basel and elsewhere, see HLS, article "Glaubensflüchtlinge"; the literature on the Italian Reformation in exile. To be verified. ↩
2. On Celio Secondo Curione (1503–1569) and Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564), see HLS, articles "Curione, Celio Secondo" and "Ochino, Bernardino". To be verified. ↩
3. On Pietro Perna (c. 1519–1582), printer in Basel, and his publications including a Latin translation of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (Basel, 1560), see HLS, article "Perna, Pietro"; the literature on the Italian press in Basel. To be verified. ↩
4. On the expulsion of the Protestant community of Locarno in 1555 and its settlement in Zurich (families Muralt, Orelli and others), see HLS, articles "Locarno" and "Glaubensflüchtlinge". To be verified. ↩

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