

A community of families

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Reformed sympathies spread after 1535 among several of the leading families. The Muralto family, one of the noble houses of the *capitanei*, joined with other Locarnese families and with exiles from Milan and Piedmont to form a Protestant community, led first by Beccaria and later by Duno and by Martino Muralto, a cousin of the physician-surgeon Giovanni Muralto.¹ The families named in the sources include the Orelli, the Muralto, the Duno, the Trevani, the Galli, the Verzasca, the Appiani and the Rosalini.² Aloisio Orelli, who bought a pharmacy in Locarno in 1541 and who later traded in textiles in Zurich, belonged to the same circle. His daughter Lucia married Martino Muralto.³

The presence of exiles from Milan and Piedmont deserves attention. Locarno was a place of refuge before it became a place of expulsion. Its position under Confederate rule placed it outside the direct reach of the Milanese authorities and of the Roman Inquisition, which Pope Paul III reorganized in 1542, while its contacts with Zurich and Basel offered a further route of escape.⁴ For Italians who had come under suspicion in Lombardy, a town ruled by twelve Swiss cantons, several of them Reformed, was a jurisdiction of convenience in the literal sense. The same logic later brought Italian political exiles to Lugano and Capolago in the nineteenth century (Chapter C.II) and Italian capital to the banks of Lugano and Chiasso in the twentieth (Chapter D.II).

1 Women in the community

The sources of the 1550s give an unusual prominence to women. Barbara Muralto, born around 1508 and married to the physician-surgeon Giovanni Muralto, with whom she had eight children, became the best-known of a group of Locarnese women who defended the Reformed doctrine in person against the papal nuncio in 1555.⁵ The historical dictionary warns that the scarcity of contemporary sources makes it

difficult to separate fact from later narrative, and that Barbara Muralto's role was emphasized from the seventeenth century onwards. It nevertheless treats her case as an example of the active role of women in the Reformation, which contemporary sources rarely record and which Protestant memory valued only later. For the legal history of the episode the women's case has a further interest. It produced fines and confiscations against individual members of the community after the general decision on emigration had been taken. It also shows how long the legal aftermath of the exile lasted.

2 Notes

1. Nicoli, "Muralto, Barbara" (above). ↩
2. Campi, "Lutero e la Riforma a Sud delle Alpi" (above) (Orelli, Trevani, Galli, Verzasca, Appiani and Rosalini as families that "largely abandoned the town in 1555"); Nicoli, "Muralto, Barbara" (above). ↩
3. Martin Illi, "Orelli, Aloisio", DSS, version of 26 October 2009, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/027642/2009-10-26/> (born after 1486 in Locarno, died 13 July 1572 in Zurich; "Nel 1541 acquistò una farmacia e si dedicò ad attività commerciali"); Pauli Falconi, "Muralto, Martino" (above) (marriage with Lucia Orelli, daughter of Aloisio). ↩
4. Tosato-Rigo, "Protestantische Glaubensflüchtlinge" (above) (Italians from Lucca, Genoa, Cremona and Milan fled to Switzerland after the reintroduction of the Inquisition in 1542); Nicoli, "Muralto, Barbara" (above) (exiles from Milan and Piedmont in the Locarnese community). Bull Licet ab initio of 21 July 1542. ↩
5. Nicoli, "Muralto, Barbara" (above). ↩

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