

A network of persons, print and correspondence

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The Italian Protestant network functioned through three channels. The first was the movement of persons: preachers, teachers, physicians and merchants who moved between refuges as opportunities opened and closed. The second was print: Basel, Geneva and Poschiavo produced Italian Reformed books for readers south of the Alps, who received them through the same trade routes that carried silk and grain. The third was correspondence, above all with Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich, whose surviving correspondence of about 12,000 letters, some 10,000 addressed to him and 2,000 written by him, is one of the largest of the Reformation and includes extensive exchanges with the Italian exiles.¹ The Locarnese leaders, Duno, Muralto and Ronco, were part of this correspondence network before 1555. It was through Bullinger that their cause reached the Zurich council and the Diet.

Essentials. The flight of Italian Protestants began in earnest after the reorganization of the Roman Inquisition in 1542 and produced refugee communities in Geneva, Basel, Zurich, the Grisons and beyond. Geneva received the largest numbers and the merchant families of Lucca, Basel offered a university and printing presses, Zurich offered a church and later a market for the Locarnese silk entrepreneurs, while the Grisons offered communal religious choice and, after 1557, a regime of coexistence in the subject lands. Ochino, Vermigli, Curione, Zanchi, Vergerio and the Sozzini moved between these refuges. The Locarnese of 1555 were, in this period, the only community of the network that Swiss authorities expelled as a body, and another Swiss authority received them.

1 Notes

1. Patricia Scheurer, "Bullinger digital", report in Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte (2020), 472–474, https://cl.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:a187fce9-cd27-462a-b6cb-49a13f63e0c0/SZ_RKG_2020_Bericht_472_474.pdf ("Rund 12'000 Briefe sind erhalten, von denen etwa 10'000 an ihn gerichtet und 2'000 von ihm verfasst wurden"; about 3,000 edited by the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationgeschichte). ↩

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