

The Orelli as scholars

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From the eighteenth century onwards the Orelli produced a remarkable sequence of scholars. Johann Konrad Orelli (1770–1826), son of a notary in Wädenswil, became professor of sacred history at the Zurich Carolinum in 1794 and professor of ethics and natural law in 1796. He served as pastor and canon and as rector of the Carolinum in 1815–1816, and he edited the Christian apologist Arnobius (Leipzig 1816–1817).¹ His cousin Johann Caspar von Orelli (1787–1849) became one of the leading classical philologists of his time. After serving as pastor of the Reformed congregation in Bergamo from 1807 to 1814 and teaching at the cantonal school of Chur, he became professor of eloquence and hermeneutics at the Carolinum in 1819 and librarian of the university from 1831. He edited Cicero in twelve volumes (1826–1838), Horace, Plato and Tacitus, received an honorary doctorate from Basel in 1827 and became a corresponding member of the academies of Munich, Berlin and Vienna.²

Johann Caspar von Orelli's years in Bergamo are worth noting. Bergamo was one of the Lombard towns in which Zurich silk houses kept representatives, and the small Reformed congregation that he served from 1807 to 1814 lived as a Protestant minority in a Catholic city. A descendant of the Locarnese exiles thus served as minister to the Protestants of a Lombard city two and a half centuries after his ancestors had left Lombard-speaking Locarno. Johann Caspar was also a driving force behind the founding of the University of Zurich in 1833, where most of the first chairs were filled on his proposals, and he taught there until his death in 1849.³

1 Jurists and public servants

The nineteenth-century Orelli included jurists who shaped Swiss private law. Aloys von Orelli (1827–1892) taught at the University of Zurich from 1853 and later became full professor of German law. He wrote on the family in German and Swiss law (1859) and on the international protection of

copyright (1887), sat as a cantonal judge from 1862 to 1869 and as a conservative member of the Grand Council from 1869 to 1878, and was elected president of the Swiss Lawyers' Society (*Schweizerischer Juristenverein*) in 1877.⁴ His interest in private law and copyright reflected the needs of a commercial society in which intellectual property, family law and the law of succession were becoming matters of practical importance.

Heinrich von Orelli (1783–1860) followed a judicial and political career. He was a district judge in Zurich from 1808, a member of the Grand Council from 1815 to 1839, a judge of the Zurich Supreme Court for most of the period from 1819 to 1843 and a delegate to the federal Diet in 1829–1830. In 1809 he co-founded the Zurich institution for the blind and deaf.⁵ The Muralt contributed to science and education as well: the physician and anatomist Johannes von Muralt (1645–1733), the theologian and educator Johannes von Muralt (1780–1850), who worked with Pestalozzi and became a pastor in St Petersburg in 1810, the historian Leonhard von Muralt (1900–1970), co-editor of Zwingli's works in the *Corpus Reformatorium*, and the physiologist Alexander von Muralt (1903–1990).⁶

2 Notes

1. Otto Hunziker, "Orelli, Johann Konrad (der ältere)", in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 24 (1887), 416–417, https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/ADB:Orelli,_Johann_Konrad (consulted 4 October 2026). ↩
2. Edgar Bonjour, "Orelli, Johann Caspar", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 19 (1999), 585–586, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz73729.html> (consulted 4 October 2026), which also names Johann Konrad Orelli (1770–1826) as his cousin. ↩
3. Edgar Bonjour, "Orelli, Johann Caspar von", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 19 (1999), 585–586, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz73729.html> (consulted 5 October 2026): preacher of the "kleinen ref. Gemeinde" in Bergamo from 1807 to 1814; called to the Carolinum at the age of 32 as professor of eloquence and hermeneutics; "1833 wurde die Zürcher Hochschule eröffnet", whose foundation had been his chief aim, and "Die meisten Professuren wurden nach O.s Vorschlägen besetzt"; professor until his death on 6 January 1849. Keller, "Der Einfluss der Hugenotten" (above), on the representatives of Zurich houses in Bergamo. See also Otto Hunziker, "Orelli, Johann Caspar von", *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 24 (1887), 411–416. ↩

4. Wikipedia, "Aloys von Orelli", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloys_von_Orelli (consulted 4 October 2026). ↩
5. Wikipedia, "Heinrich von Orelli", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_von_Orelli (consulted 4 October 2026). ↩
6. Bonjour, "Muralt, von" (above). The article describes Johannes (1645–1733) as "Arzt und Anatom", Johannes (1780–1850) as "Mitarbeiter Pestalozzis und seit 1810 Pfarrer der deutsch-ref. Kirchengemeinde in St. Petersburg" and Alexander (1903–1990) as "ein bedeutender Physiologe". Wikipedia (German), "Leonhard von Muralt", https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonhard_von_Muralt (consulted 5 October 2026; used as a last resort): "Mitherausgeber der Werke von Ulrich Zwingli im Corpus Reformatorum". ↩

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