

Antenati a Costantinopoli

Esuli italiani negli anni del riformismo ottomano 1828-1878

Il Poligrafo publisher, Italy 2022

Luis Miguel Selvelli

The book “Ancestors in Constantinople. Italian Exiles in the Age of Ottoman Reforms 1828-1878” is dedicated to the stories of the many Italians who chose to take refuge in Istanbul in the troubled years when the Italian peninsula was still occupied by different “big powers” like the kingdom of Spain, the Austrian Empire and France, while the Vatican was also controlling a very wide territory therefore hindering Italian unification.

Many Italians, either to avoid arrest because of political reasons or simply to search for a better economic future, chose to come to Istanbul and create a new life there.

While providing also a general frame for the whole story, the book actually focuses in each chapter on the life of one or two very specific characters who in Istanbul ended up being involved in some special professional or cultural activity: music, painting, architecture, medicine, journalism, trade, freemasonry...

By following the adventurous life-paths of each character while settling down in Istanbul, the book nonetheless aims to provide a very detailed description of the amazing political experiments and cultural vibrancy determined by the “opening-up” of the Ottoman empire during the years of the Tanzimat. In fact, each of those Italians whose lives are narrated in the book ended up being involved and giving their contribution to the social, political and cultural transformations brought forward by the activity of enlightened statesmen like Mustafa Reshit, Ali, Fuat, Ibrahim Edhem, Halil Sherif and Mithat pashas.

The final chapters of the book focus on the role played by some Italians affiliated to Istanbul’s Masonic lodges in the exciting though dramatic events that brought to the deposition of sultan Abdulaziz in 1876 and the enthronement of Murat V with the aim of establishing a constitutional monarchy and a parliament, followed three months later by the coming to power of Abdulhamid that somehow marked the end of an epoch.

While being based on a very serious and precise use of sources (both archival and bibliographic, in Turkish, Italian, English, French and Greek languages), the book’s style aims to address a general public rather than a strictly academic one.

These are some names of the Italians involved: Giuseppe Donizetti (musician), Giuseppe Garibaldi (as a young seaman), Gaspare Fossati (architect of the Russian Consulate and the Sultanahmet building that in 1877 hosted the 1st Ottoman parliament), Callisto Guatelli (composer that became very close to both sultans Abdulmecid and Abdulaziz), Luigi Capoleone (private doctor of Murat V who played a key logistic role in the Freemasons’ plot to bring him to the power)...

And these some of the crucial historical events treated in the book, in mutual relation to both Italy and the Ottoman empire:

- the 1848-49 Italian 1st war of independence, when several cities (and most famously Rome) declared themselves as “autonomous” or “liberated”, implementing different forms of self-government;

- the Crimean War of 1853-1856, which had the effect of opening up the Ottoman Empire to the European support and influence, also in the form of several Masonic lodges that were instituted in Istanbul and other Ottoman cities;
- sultan Abdulaziz's 1867 trip to Europe, which had several last-longing effects on his administration and the future of the empire;
- the painting of *The origin of the world* commissioned to Gustave Courbet in Paris by Halil Sherif Pasha;
- the French-German war of 1870-71 and the following events of the Paris Commune, that saw the participation of some Ottoman dissidents also known as "Young Ottomans", who together with Namik Kemal and Ali Suavi were forced to find refuge in Western Europe because of their political opposition to the Ottoman government;
- the *coup d'état* of 1876 that deposed Abdulaziz and brought to power Murat V in order to establish a constitutional regime;
- the 1877-1878 (1293) war between Russia and the Ottoman empire, and the following events that brought to Ali Suavi's assault on Çırağan palace, in the attempt to liberate the deposed Murat V, kept secluded there by his younger brother Abdulhamid.

The book is around 260 pages long.

It has been published in Italy in March 2022 by the Padova-based publisher *Il Poligrafo*. (<https://www.poligrafo.it/antenati-costantinopoli>)

It includes a set of around 15 photographies from the 1860s and 1870s coming from the private archives of Ömer M. Koç (by kind concession of Bahattin Öztuncay) and Engin Özendes.

The author Luis Miguel Selvelli is an independent researcher, a member of the Levantine Heritage Foundation and a literary translator from Turkish and English language into Italian.

His grandfather Guido was born in Istanbul in 1917 in a Levantine family whose ancestor had reached the Ottoman capital in the early 1850s as a political exile. The grandfather of his grandfather, Italo Selvelli (1863-1918), was the composer of the *Reshadiye* March in 1909, the last imperial anthem ever adopted in the history of the Ottoman empire.