

# The Consul Riccardo Colucci. Biography and Career of a Diplomat of the Kingdom of Italy

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## 1. Colucci's Diplomatic Career before and after the Italian Unification

Riccardo Colucci was born in Alexandria, Egypt on 18 October 1814. After studying at the University of Bologna, he returned to his hometown where, he became the manager at the Casa di Commercio di Rosetta, involving himself primarily in overseeing the economic problems of production, and sales of local products. During such a period of great agricultural development, which resulted from a thorough reform, modern cultivation technologies and construction of irrigation canals were brought into practice and considerably increased traditional productions, making the industrial transformation of products such as rice and cotton possible. A contemporary programme of mechanised transformation processes led to semi-finished and finished products being manufactured and exported, so by the mid-1830s, Egypt had become the ninth largest producer of cotton yarn, half of which was exported.

There are traces of Riccardo Colucci's activity in the commercial sector in a page of a travel journal, made by Gustave Flaubert in the Far East between 1849 and 1852. In the February of 1850, during a visit to the rice fields in the Nile Delta, he writes, "*Le lendemain [lundi 19] pendant que je me lavais, entrée du docteur Colucci amené par le pacha; petit homme bon, franc, aimable. Nous sortons avec lui, nous visitons une manufacture de riz: grandes fouloirs en bois terminés par une vis en fer. Filature de coton à la main, homme qui tournait le dévidoir, courbé en deux, qui passait et repassait comme un cheval au moulinet souriait devant nous pour demander le batchis*" (Flaubert 1974:454).

Riccardo Colucci married Cleonice Avierinos (1828-1857) in 1842 in Alexandria, Egypt. She was from a Greek family involved in cotton production and trade in Egypt. Within nine years, they had had five children: Anna, Rosalia, Alberto, Alfonso and Leonzio. In 1850, Riccardo changed profession and entered the diplomacy of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies as vice consul in Cairo. From this period, there is little information from among documents in the Colucci family's private archive: a thank you letter from the Consul General of Greece for protecting their fellow citizens during the war between Greece and the Sublime Porte, and another, granting him the Knight's Cross and Commander of the Royal Order of Francis I.

After the death of his first wife, he remarried in 1859 to Anaïs De Regny (1838-1906), who was his niece-in-law and the daughter of Theodosia, the eldest sister of Cleonice. Anaïs gave him two more daughters, Alice and Maria.

With the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, Riccardo started his diplomatic career for the new state, keeping headquarters in Cairo, then in of April 1862 he was appointed Vice-Consul to Ibraila, now Brăila in Romania, where he remained for six years. Here, there was an important port on the Danube, which belonged to the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. These two principalities, vassals of the Ottoman Empire, were situated on the border of the Russian Empire, and had been the subject of bloody disputes between the two Empires for centuries, explaining why they were the focus of attention in the politics of European powers. The presence of an important Italian diplomatic representation with an Embassy

in Bucharest and a Consulate in Galatians, as well as a vice-consulate in Ibraila, was part of a complex sequence of international events following agreements by Paris after the Crimean War.

On 26 January 1868, Riccardo Colucci was appointed Consul of Cyprus, based in Larnaca. He carried out his diplomatic activity following the tradition of the consuls of the Kingdom of Sardinia, who had been present on the island since 1825.

Some of the Colucci documents that are still in the family's possession draw an accurate picture of the institutional activities to which Riccardo had to dedicate himself during his tenure. Short reports published in the *Bollettino Consolare*, or *Consular Report*, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs document the interest and expertise of the island's economic activities. For such work, Colucci gathered local statistics on local production, imports and exports, and on maritime transport, highlighting the possible business relationships that could strengthen their commercial exchange with Italy. Discovering the local situation and natural environment led him to collect samples of flora and fauna, which he then sent to the Museo di Storia Naturale in Florence, accompanied by reports and comments.

Private documents also record some episodes that reveal his hands-on approach to participating in the daily life of the citizens of Larnaca. During a period of prolonged drought on the island that led to conditions of famine, Colucci urged the Governor to ask for aid from Constantinople, and he also encouraged fundraising for those people suffering, together with Demetrios Pierides, the Metropolitan of Citium, Cyprus. He had institutional relations with diplomatic missions in Cyprus and Italy, as shown by his relations with Robert Hamilton Lang, with George Perkins Marsh, U.S. Minister Plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Italy.

Riccardo Colucci received numerous honours in Italy and abroad. He was appointed an officer of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus by the Sublime Porte, officer of the order of the Medjidie, and officer of the Crown by the Kingdom of Prussia.

## 2 Riccardo Colucci: passionate collector and archaeologist

Following the example of other diplomats on the island, Riccardo Colucci wanted to collect ancient objects to send to Italy. With permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cyprus's Ottoman Government, he carried out excavations and was able to send numerous antiquities to the Museum of Florence.

Other shipments followed to museums and private subjects: in the autumn of 1871, The Archaeological Museum of Madrid had organised a study excavation in the Mediterranean, directed by archaeologist and numismatist Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado. The excavation was officially carried out on the *Arepile* frigate, a Spanish navy battleship. On 22 August 1871, during his stay in Cyprus, consul Colucci not only assisted the Spanish archaeologists, he also gave them some items that were part of an exhibition at The Archaeological Museum of Madrid, as stated by the Spanish archaeologist (Rada y Delgado II 1878: 725-726):

“Despues de quanto llevamos expuesto, bien poco tenemos que añadir para que nuestros ilustrados lectores aprecian en todo su valor la pequeña pero notable coleccion de vasos chipriotas que tuvimos la fortuna traer à

nuestro Museo al regresar de nuestro viaje en Oriente, adquiridos todos ellos en Larnaca, gracias a la generosidad del cònsul italiano, que con el mayor desprendimiento los cediò para España así como los notables fragmentos escultòricos ya descritos”.

The donation included ceramics, sculptures, glass containers and coins (Madrid Museo Arqueològico: Card no. 2642). Relations between the consul and Spain continue, as it appears from the draft of a letter dated 4 January 1872, addressed to “sig. Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado Jefe en el Museo Arqueològico Nacional Madrid”, which reports some information on how to locate a statue and gives an overview of how to find antiques.

“Safe in the knowledge that you have happily returned home, I am writing these few lines to inform you that the British consul, Mr Lang, has returned from his recent trip to England. During these last few days, he has expressed his regret in having learnt upon his return that his agent had sold a statue, of which I had had the great honour of submitting. He said that the statue was part of some magnificent pieces discovered at the temple of Dale [Dali, the ancient Idalion], most of which are found in London, and at the museum of that very capital, the statue in question may also be found among the repertoire and is in tight negotiation to be sold. The aforementioned Mr Lang added that I have the head of the statue here, and in good condition. He assures me that it is Egeria with a majestic head of hair. I will be sure to take care of obtaining this and hope that my actions result in achieving what is desired. Mr Lang longs to have the imprint of the ornamental bust. As it is in my interest to satisfy his desires, I pray that you are able to seal the deal as soon as possible. Satisfying him in this manner will make it easier to obtain the head in question, which will be my duty to retrieve, but in the meantime, please tell me how I may carry out the shipment.

I am, however, continuing to carry out excavations here, and although I have found a few things, I hope to be luckier once work resumes in the spring so that I am able to send you some of my findings”.

A letter dated 23 October 1872, addressed to Mr De Koenig, attaché à la légation de l'empire d'Allemagne, Constantinople informs his desire to send his Cypriot collection to Dresden, stating:

“J'espère recevoir par le courrier de demain vos lettres et peut être aussi le permis que j'ai demandée a M. de Radovitz pour l'exportation libre de ma collection d'antiquités que j'ai destiné au musée de Dresde”.

The letter goes on to announce his upcoming departure for his new post of Consul in Shkodra, and takes leave from his post as representative of the German Empire, outlining that he will leave the archives in order and well organised.

In September 1872, he was appointed Consul of Shkoder in Albania, another city that was subject to the Sublime Porte. A few months later on January 17 1873, he died in Ragusa whilst on a mission, suffering from a sudden illness.

Anais with children, who were still in Larnaca, went back in Cairo