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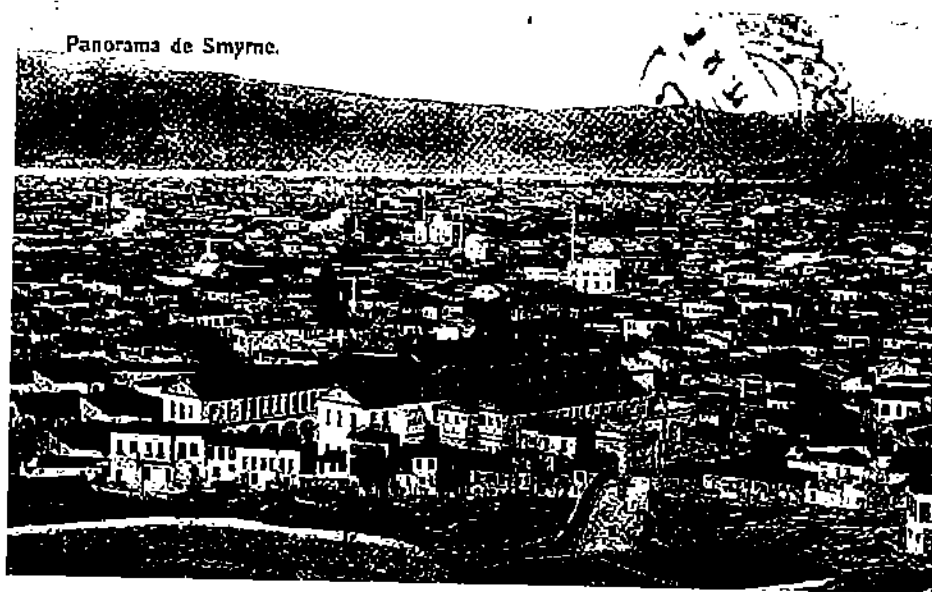
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Smyrna: comprehensive view, end of XIXth century, period postcard

Italian Architects in Smyrna

Cenk Berkant

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Smyrna was a cosmopolitan city inhabited by communities of various nationalities. The most significant, in terms of numbers, was the Turkish community, followed by the Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Levantines - "Levantine" referring to the population of Europeans who settled in the eastern Mediterranean area during the Nineteenth century for commercial purposes. Italians made up the majority of Smyrna's Levantine community. All of these different communities lived in different parts of the city. At the time, Smyrna was Turkey's second-most-populous city after Istanbul, counting more than 250,000 inhabitants.¹ The city's cosmopolitan character was justified by its maritime and commercial vocation; since the Eighteenth century its port had been one of the most important sites for trade between Western economies and Turkey.² Within the sphere of relations between Turkey and the West we must also include the construction of the first Turkish railroad, built between Aydin and Smyrna during the decade 1856-1866 to transport natural materials and minerals from Anatolia to the city's port, from whence they were exported to Europe by ship. Rapid development and the great opportunities arising from it were a magnet for many Italian immigrants; Smyrna at-

tracted Italian architects, engineers and construction workers to meet the needs of the expanding city. Among others, it gave refuge to exiles from the 1848 political revolt, such as Anacleto Cricca, founder of Smyrna's first Masonic lodge (Stella Jonia),³ which also made it possible for the engineer Luigi Storari to establish himself in Smyrna.

I have so far been able to individuate the names of ten Italian architects and engineers who worked in Smyrna, and of these, I have chosen four to discuss here: Luigi Storari, Luigi Rossetti, Stefano Molli and Giulio Mongeri.

Luigi Storari

Luigi Storari was born in Ferrara in 1821, as far as we can tell from his registration in the Pontifical Census of 1835 as the fourteen-year-old son of Felice Storari - indicated as a "landowner" - and Marianna Manfredini.⁴

In the archives of Ferrara we find Luigi Storari's personal data and some of his correspondence, but no information regarding his education or occupation in Ferrara. Unfortunately, the folder containing the Storari family documents within the sphere of the "population fund" of the *Register of the XIX century* have been lost. There is no evidence in the archives



L. Storari, *Guida con cenni storici di Smirne...*, Turin 1857, cover

of Ferrara nor those of Bologna to suggest his belonging to a secret society (the Carbonari movement), as has been hypothesized by Stéphane Yerasimos⁵ on the basis of documents from the Storari dossier in the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nantes. Other sources, mainly French diplomatic documents, indicate that Luigi Storari immigrated to Smyrna in 1849,⁶ where he worked as an engineer and cartographer.

From 1851 to 1854, Storari worked for the Imperial Commissioner of Smyrna, Ali

Nihad Efendi.⁷ Researchers have recently discovered in the Ottoman Archive of Istanbul a map of the zone of Kemeralti - the ancient market of Smyrna, which was destroyed by a fire - planned by Storari,⁸ drawn and signed on September 28, 1852. The map shows a typical Turkish market, and on the right, a table indicating thirty-six names of roads, streets, mosques and warehouses.⁹

In this period, according to the French researcher Guy Meyer, Storari was engaged to construct the road between Halkapinar and the Bridge of the Caravans, which at that time was extremely important, being the main link between Smyrna and Anatolia. In my opinion, he may also have worked on the construction of private houses or public buildings, but my research on this aspect of his career is still in progress.

In 1858, Luigi Storari donated¹⁰ to the Municipal Archive of Ferrara a map of Smyrna,¹¹ which he himself had drawn between 1854 and 1856 and dedicated to Sultan Abdul Megid (1839-1861) - the first map that showed the city in a highly detailed way - , and a guide to the city with historical notes, written by Storari himself and printed in Turin in 1857. Storari's guidebook contains three chapters: in the first chapter he writes in detail about the history of Smyrna from its earliest foundations to the 1850s; the second describes the old city and the modern city; and the third regards the surrounding area, in particular ancient sites in the province of Smyrna. In the part dedicated to modern Smyrna, Storari writes about religious freedom and



L. Rossetti, Holy Rosary Church, Alsancak quarter, Smyrna, 1903-1904, comprehensive view

notes the existence of numerous mosques, churches and synagogues in town. He also describes in detail Turkish houses built all of wood, perfectly analyzing them with the observation: "Turkish houses suggest a monastery on the outside, and a tent on the inside; they are further isolated in the middle of a small garden".¹² Luigi Storari died in Ferrara on January 13th, 1894 at the age of 73, of "widespread atheromatosis", as reported in the *Journal of death announcements and burials in the Municipal Cemetery of Ferrara*,¹³ in

which he is identified as "Engineer" Luigi Storari, widower of Elisabetta Cappati and a landowner.

Luigi Rossetti

Luigi Rossetti was born in Modane in the province of Savoia on March 20th, 1876, the son of Giuseppe Rossetti and Anna Caporale.¹⁴ He began his education in Chambéry and obtained his diploma in Grenoble.¹⁵ He graduated in Civil Engineering from the Royal Polytechnic for Engineers in Turin on December 21st,



L. Rossetti, Holy Rosary Church, Alsancak quarter, Smyrna, 1903-1904, façade

1900,¹⁶ and after graduating, enrolled in the Higher Education Course in Electrotechnics at the Italian Royal Industrial Museum of Turin on November 12th, 1901. He did not, however, attend the course, but rather began to practise his profession at the studio of engineer Pietro Fenoglio, one of the best-known names in the sector in Turin.¹⁷ In the Building Projects Catalogue of the Historical Archive of Turin, between January 1901 and April 1902 we find 19 building plans signed by engineer Fenoglio's office:¹⁸ Rossetti most likely worked and gained experience collaborating on these projects. In April 1902 he went to Smyrna, where he entered into a partnership with De Mazieres and Vial, the two French owners of

a studio that dealt with architecture and building, for which Rossetti developed plans. Among the most important of these were the Halkapinar tramway branch, the headquarters of the Institute of the Italian National Association, the Regina Elena Orphanage, the headquarters of Credit Lyonnais, and Austrian Lloyd, and numerous plans for private residences. In 1914, Rossetti still had an office in Smyrna¹⁹ and continued to work for the biggest city in Asia Minor. He died in Borriana on March 8th, 1949.²⁰

His main undertaking in Smyrna was the Church of the Holy Rosary. The church is located in Via 1481 n.8 in the Alsancak quarter. The first church structure on the site, initially dedicated to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, was built in 1859 and became the focal point of all the religious events in the neighbourhood, which at that time was called Punta and hosted Smyrna's Italian community as well as other European communities. The original church was too small, and it became necessary to build a larger one.²¹ With a construction permit - obligatory for any non-Muslim building - dated 1903, the sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) granted authorization for the construction of a new Dominican Friars' church to replace the old one in the Punta quarter of Smyrna.²² In the initial phase, the plans for the new church were handled by the French architect Raymond Charles Péré, who was better-known in Smyrna, where he had an architecture studio²³ and where he had worked for forty years, building, among other things, the Clock Tower,

symbol of the city, in 1901.²⁴ However, due to disagreements regarding costs of construction, the job was passed to the younger Luigi Rossetti.²⁵ On October 4th, 1903, the first stone was blessed. Construction work progressed rapidly, and one year later, on October 1st, 1904, the church was consecrated by the Dominican archbishop Monsignor Marengo, and opened to parishioners. On that solemn occasion, the archbishop also published the decree establishing the new parish, dedicating it to the Madonna of the Holy Rosary. Construction of the church alone ended up costing 65,000 francs; other supplementary expenses (the construction of the bell tower, three marble altars, the baptistery, the stained glass windows, the pews, the painting of the Madonna of the Rosary and the landscaping of the garden) brought the total cost to 120,000 francs.

The first restoration was done in 1947, and was followed by other, less extensive refurbishments rendered necessary by earthquake damage in 1969-70, 1974 and 1977. The earthquake of 1974 was particularly intense, necessitating a partial demolition and reconstruction of the bell tower, and leading to its current appearance.²⁶ The church is in neo-Medieval style, blending Romanesque and Gothic elements. The structure has a rectangular plan, with three west-east naves; the central nave is higher than the lateral naves and is separated from them by two series of five columns. To the east is a semicircular apse, and there are two chapels in the south side and two in the north side. On the upper level, above the lateral naves, is a U-shaped women's



S. Molli, Italian Girls' School, Smyrna, 1903-1906, period photo

gallery. All of the church's naves are covered by barrel vaults. The entire building has a sloping roof. There are three entrances: the central entrance on the west end, and two side entrances on the north and south sides. The 25-meter-high square bell tower stands to the south-east of the main building. The church's main façade, faced with stone slabs, is monumental, but rendered dynamic by elements such as the two buttresses that divide it into three sections. In the centre of the façade, in the central field, is a large Gothic-style rose window. In the upper part of the north and south sides are two round-arched windows, and in the lower sections two rectangular windows. The façade is crowned by a decorative element bearing the dates



Smyrna after the destructive fire (September 1922), sea front with the Italian Girls' School by S.Molli

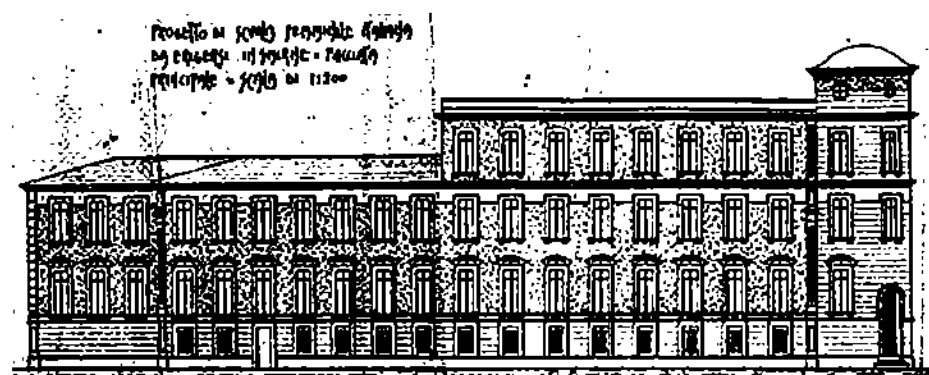
of the church's inauguration and restoration; at its summit stands a wrought-iron cross, and below, a porch with three round arches surmounted by a marble cross. The sides of the church are of unfaced stone, with two rows of four windows between four buttresses, and the interior chapels (two per side) are clearly visible, protruding slightly from the rectangular mass of the church. The church built by Rossetti, although it has had to endure the tests of time (earthquakes, fires and changing liturgical needs), is still today the pride of the Italian community, which has always willingly provided for necessary refurbishments.

Stefano Molli

Stefano Molli was born in Borgomanero

in the province of Novara on May 12th, 1858, obtained a physics-mathematics degree from the University of Turin on November 11th, 1878, graduated in civil engineering on December 31st, 1882 at the Polytechnic for Engineers of Turin²⁷ and later attended the Albertina Academy. Back in Rome, where he completed his cultural education, Molli joined the studio of engineer Carlo Ceppi.²⁸

The Catalogue of Building Plans of the Historic Archive of the City of Turin contains 13 building plans from between 1893 and 1914, signed at the bottom by Engineer Stefano Molli.²⁹ In 1898 he was hired to plan and construct buildings for the Sacred Art Exposition. Projects worthy of note in the field of private buildings include the Torino Typographic Editorial



S. Molli, Italian Girls' School, Smyrna, 1903-1906, heliography of the drawing of the façade (Ottoman Archives)

Union building, the reconstruction of the castle of Barengo, and the Borgomanero cemetery. Along with commander Salvadori, Molli developed the plan for the new Polytechnic. During the First World War, he founded the War Amputees Aid Society and presided over the constitution of the Re-education School House. He died in Turin in 1917.³⁰

Molli had good connections with the Salesian congregation, and planned buildings for Salesian missions in the Ottoman Empire, the United States and Asia.³¹ He left a few marks in Smyrna as well. According to Florio Santini, Stefano Molli, along with his friends and fellow Turin natives engineer Luigi Rossetti and the painter and Albertina Academy professor Smeriglio, founded a girls' school in Smyrna in 1902.³²

The plan for the Italian Girls' School of Smyrna was by Stefano Molli. According to Ottoman-language documents issued by Turkish authorities found in the Otto-

man Archive of Istanbul, the Italian community of Smyrna applied to the Turkish authorities to construct a new girls' school with definitive plans for the building. The National Italian Missionaries Aid Society sought to build and run a new girls' school on land owned by the Marquis Edmondo Giustiniani, in Via "Seconda Strada", near the Sporting Club of Smyrna's "Greek Orphanage neighbourhood", due to the insufficient capacity of the existing school. Turkish authorities responded with a permit, signed by Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909), granting the release on December 24th, 1904.³³ It allowed the construction of the Italian girls' school, expressly recording as motivations the fact that the Italian community in Smyrna had reached approximately 5,000, including about 350 female students; the only condition was that the association should have provided 7,500 Ottoman liras for the costs of construction. The permit document also states that the land has a surface

area of 1,302 square meters and specifies intentions to construct one portion of the building 4 stories high (17 meters) and another portion 3 stories high (12.5 meters).³⁴

Comparing the studio plans conserved in the ANSMI (National Italian Missionaries Aid Society) archives and the definitive plans³⁵ for the Italian Girls' School conserved in the Ottoman Archive of Istanbul, a change is evident: the originally-planned chapel is replaced by a gymnasiums and trophy hall.

The school was inaugurated on October 6th, 1906 located on the second street parallel to the seafront, on a rectangular lot. This building, which became one of the symbols of the Italian community, was Molli's most important and prestigious work in Smyrna, and ended up characterizing the silhouette of the city as well. It miraculously escaped the great fire of 1922, but in 1945, the Italian Girls' School of Smyrna was demolished on orders from municipal authorities, to allow for expansion the second street.

Molli designed the Italian Girls' School in an eclectic style, according to the prevalent taste during the Nineteenth century in Europe. Up to the first floor level, rusticated ashlar-work decorated the surface of the building; the first-floor windows were surmounted by pediments and festoons, while those of the upper floor alternated with niches. The tower, which had no specific function, was located at the northwest corner of the building, where it was most visible from the street and could be perfectly distinguished from the

sea. Although now lost, this work gained the engineer Molli great appreciation, and many still consider the school one of the loveliest buildings ever construction in Smyrna.

Giulio Mongeri

Giulio Mongeri was born in Istanbul in 1873. His father, Luigi, was physician to the Sultan Abdul Megid (1839-1861), while his uncle Giuseppe Mongeri (1812-1888), art historian and restorer,³⁶ taught at the Academy of Brera. At the age of 18, Giulio moved to Milan to study architecture at the Academy, where he was one of Camillo Boito's best students.³⁷ He crowned his brilliant scholastic career with the ex aequo receipt of the Chiericetti prize and, in 1897, having graduated, he returned to Istanbul.³⁸

The earliest evidence of his activity as an architect was his participation in the architecture exhibition held in Istanbul in 1903.³⁹ In January 1910 he was named professor of architecture at the Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi (Imperial School of Fine Arts).⁴⁰ In the first quarter of the Twentieth century, Mongeri created a significant proportion of Istanbul's buildings, including the Maçka Palace, the Karakoy Palace, the new Italian Embassy building, the Nursing Home in Şişli, the church of Sant'Antonio in Pera (now Beyoğlu) and the "Nurettin Bey" pavilion of the Haseki hospital. Between 1926 and 1929 he made a significant contribution to the definition of the new architectural morphology of Ankara, planning a series of public buildings, mainly bank headquarters, in the first



G. Mongeri, Banca Commerciale Italiana (Italian Commercial Bank), 64 Second Street, Smyrna, 1928 (Banca Intesa, historical archives)

Turkish national style.⁴¹ Mongeri worked intensively in Istanbul until 1940, when he returned to Italy. He settled in Venice, where he died in 1953.

During research at the archive of the Italian Commercial Bank (BCI) I discovered two previously unknown plans by Giulio Mongeri. One of these was for the BCI's new Istanbul branch.⁴² I also found a four-page letter⁴³ that confirms Mongeri's proposal, dated December 26th, 1922, to work for the Italian Union for the Study of Reconstructions and Building Works in

Asia Minor. In his proposal, the architect Mongeri carried out a study of the current state of affairs and proposed possible solutions for Smyrna after the great first of 1922, which had destroyed nearly half of the city. He hypothesized the establishment of a new construction company, or the advantageous establishment of a single Italian-Turkish Union that would have worked in a monopoly regime. He also mentioned the existence of an "Anonymous Ottoman Construction Company" which, in spite of its name, was owned

by a limited number of foreign shareholders, nearly all Italian, including the Società Commerciale d'Oriente, the Banco di Roma, the Bank of Salonicco, the merchant Edoardo De Nari and the architect Giulio Mongeri. I was able to find a map of the zone that had been devastated by the 1922 fire in the archive of the Italian Commercial Bank, along with a plan by the Anonymous Ottoman Construction Company dated 1927.

The second newly-discovered plan⁴¹ was for the BCI branch in Smyrna. The building was located in Second Street n. 64, or Via Parallela, one of the city's main arteries and the centre of the bank and public office quarter. The BCI Smyrna branch building, built on a design by Giulio Mongeri in 1928, is in neo-Renaissance style, but also clearly inspired by the first Turkish national style, which characterizes the Stock Exchange building alongside it. The plan of the two-story building is rectangular. The façade has plastered surfaces with wide brick designs and is decorated with a frieze at the attic level, divided into five sections by four pilasters. There are five windows on the first-floor level, while the ground floor has four windows, with the entrance door in the centre. All the openings have round arches. The original plan indicated the words "Italian Commercial Bank" written in Ottoman language over the entrance arch, but this writing was never carried out, due to the change of alphabet in Turkey in 1928. Today the building serves as the Aegean Region headquarters of the Turk Ekonomi Bankasi (Turkish Economic Bank).

Notes

- ¹ A. Frangini, *Italiani in Smirne*, Bologna 1903, p. 1.
- ² M.C. Smyrnalis, "Gli italiani a Smirne nei secoli XVIII e XIX", in *Altrettalia*, 12 (July-December 1994), p. 40.
- ³ A. Iacovella, "Fratelli in Migrazione. Caso di Costantinopoli", in *Iiram, Rivista del Grande Oriente*, 2002, no. 4, p. 40.
- ⁴ Pontifical Census of 1835 in the Municipal Historical Archive of Ferrara
- ⁵ S. Yerasimos, "Quelques Éléments sur l'ingénieur Luigi Storari", in *Architettura e Architetti Italiani ad Istanbul tra il XIX e il XX Secolo, Istanbul, 27-28 November 1995, Acts of the Conference*, Italian Institute of Culture, Istanbul n.d., p. 118.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ The Ottoman Archive of the Prime Ministry of the Turkish Republic, Internal Affairs Section, no. 16128.
- ⁹ Z. Arkan, "Storari'nin Kememli Planı- Pianta di Kemerali di Storari", in *Izmir Kent Kültürü Dergisi*, September 2001, no. 4, pp. 76-80.
- ¹⁰ Municipal Historical Archive of Ferrara, Register of the XIX Century, Public Library Education Section, no. prot. 986.
- ¹¹ Municipal Historical Archive of Ferrara, Register of the XIX Century, Public University Education Section, Gifts (Folder 47).
- ¹² L. Storari, *Guida con Cenni Storici di Smirne*. Turin 1857, pp. 26.
- ¹³ Municipal Historical Archive of Ferrara, *Giornale delle denunce di morte e dei trasporti e seppellimenti nel Cimitero Comunale di Ferrara*, Year 1894, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ "Rossetti" Family Section of the Demographic Service, Municipality of Borriana
- ¹⁵ A. Frangini, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
- ¹⁶ Turin Polytechnic, Museum and Historical Documentation Centre, Historic Archive of Students, Civil Engineer 1900, diploma no. 3569.
- ¹⁷ A. Frangini, *op.cit.*, p. 20
- ¹⁸ Catalogue of Building Plans (1780-1915) of the Historical Archive of the City of Turin
- ¹⁹ *Annuaire Oriental (Edition 1914): Commerce, Industrie, Administration, Magistrature de l'Orient*, Constantinople 1914, p. 1644.
- ²⁰ "Rossetti" Family Section of the Demographic

Service, Municipality of Borriana

- ²¹ *La guida della Parrocchia del SS. Rosario "1904-1994, 1 90 Anni della Nostra Chiesa"*, Izmir 1994, p. 6.
- ²² The permit document for the construction of the Church of the Holy Rosary of Smyrna, a copy of which was given to us by parish priest Stefano Negro, can be found in the church's archive.
- ²³ *Annuaire.... cit.*, p. 1630.
- ²⁴ C. Berkant, *Emir 'li Bir Minar: Raymond Charles Péré, Masters Thesis in Western and Contemporary Art at the Social Sciences Institute of the University of the Aegean, Smyrna 2005*, pp. 2, 35.
- ²⁵ *La guida.... cit.*, p. 8.
- ²⁶ *La guida.... cit.*, pp. 16, 19-20.
- ²⁷ Turin Polytechnic, Museum and Historical Documentation Centre, Historic Archive of Students, Civil Engineer 1900, diploma no. 1478.
- ²⁸ The Polytechnic's virtual museum: <http://www2.polito.it/strutture/cedmed/museovirtuale/storia/2-02/2-2-03/2-2-0341.htm>
- ²⁹ See Catalogue of Building Plans (1780-1915) of the Historical Archive of the City of Turin
- ³⁰ See the Polytechnic's virtual museum: <http://www2.polito.it/strutture/cedmed/museovirtuale/storia/2-02/2-2-03/2-2-0341.htm>
- ³¹ *Bollettino Salesiano*, 22 (March 1898, no. 4), p. 82.
- ³² F. Santini, *Italiani nel Mondo, emigrazione come libertà*, Massarosa 1969, p. 130.
- ³³ The Ottoman Archive of the Prime Ministry of the Turkish Republic, Education Section, folder 4.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ B. M. Alfieri, "D'Aronco and Mongeri: Two Italian Architects in Turkey", in *Avante sponde... Presence of Italy in the Architecture of the Islamic*

- Mediterranean*, conference proceedings edited by A. Petruccioli, Roma, October 1990, *Environmental Design. Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 8 (nos 9 - 10, 1992), p. 152.
- ³⁷ İ. Aslanoglu, "The Italian Contribution to 20th Century Turkish Architecture", *ivi*, p. 156.
- ³⁸ E. Godoli, "Mongeri, Giulio", in *Architetti e Ingegneri Italiani dal Levante al Magreb 1848-1945*, edited by E. Godoli and M. Giacomelli, Florence 2005, p. 243.
- ³⁹ İ. Aslanoglu, *op.cit.*, p. 156
- ⁴⁰ E. Godoli, *op.cit.*, p. 243.
- ⁴¹ In this style, Seljuk and Ottoman architectural and decorative elements are utilized to symbolize Turkish identity. This was in fact a reflection of "Turkism", an ideology that was widespread in Turkey between 1908 and 1930; see İ. Aslanoglu, "Two Italian Architects: Giulio Mongeri and Paolo Vietti-Violi during the periods of First Nationalism and Early Modernism in Ankara", in *Architettura e Architetti Italiani ad Istanbul*, *cit.*, pp. 13-19 and M. Bernardini, "L'Architecture italienne et le style nazionaliste", *ivi*, pp. 39-45.
- ⁴² Historical Archive of Banca Intesa, Patrimony Banca Commerciale Italiana (ASI-BCI), Real Estate Valuations IMM, v, file 109, folder. 2 (Istanbul-Ljubljana)
- ⁴³ Historical Archive of Banca Intesa, Patrimony Banca Commerciale Italiana (ASI-BCI), Personal papers of Bernardo Nogara PN, folder 3 (Italian Union for the Study of Reconstruction and Building Works in Asia Minor: 2 letters to Nogara, with attached report by Giulio Mongeri to the Union)
- ⁴⁴ Historical Archive of Banca Intesa, Patrimony Banca Commerciale Italiana (ASI-BCI), Real Estate Valuations IMM, v, Cart. 13, folder 1 ("Vistarino Valuation" referring to the BCI branch of Smyrna)