



1st joint Levantine Heritage Foundation / [Royal Asiatic Society](#)
live lecture gathering with guest speaker Michael Cottakis
Venue: Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London, NW1 2HD
4 November 2021, 6.30 – 8.30 pm



Echoes of the Levant: Salonica and Smyrna in the Aegean Near East

For much of the last thousand years, Salonica and Smyrna were among the most important commercial centres in the East. Straddling trade routes north to south, east to west, the cities had connections all over the world. Turks, Greeks, Jews, Slavs, and westerners mingled in their markets, bound together by the levelling force of commerce. But all this was to change. War, destruction, population exchange, nationalism: the Levantine past of both was seemingly airbrushed from history. Salonica became Greek Thessaloniki; Smyrna became Turkish Izmir. In once diverse international emporia, homogeneity now reigned. Yet whatever nations seek to impose, cities have a life of their own. In surprising ways, the past has lived on in Thessaloniki and Izmir. Trade fairs, activist mayors, entrepreneurs: the assumed rupture and memory loss are not so plain. Could it be that these cities will soon return to international prominence? Will regional politics allow them to?

Booking essential: Matty Bradley by e-mail: mb@royalasiaticsociety.org



A colourised photograph of the Salonica waterfront, circa 1916.



Michael Cottakis is an historian based at the LSE, and founder and director of the international think tank, 89 Initiative, whose eight branches across the UK and Europe seek to develop an urban, transnational, approach to politics. He writes regularly on the state of British and European politics and society through the 89 Initiative, and has contributed to such publications as the Washington Post, El Pais, and the EU Observer. In parallel, he is completing a doctorate at the LSE European Institute, where his research focuses on the economic and social history of Mediterranean port cities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He is particularly interested in the connections between such cities, and how these helped foster the first recognisably cosmopolitan and globalised societies.

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