

Mission Statement for Levantine Heritage Foundation, 2015

The Levantine Heritage Foundation is a UK registered charity, founded in the year 2010 by a group of academics interested in the Levant. We share a vision of a foundation dedicated to researching the history of the Levantine communities of Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean. The information is published on its website, which has been online since 2004. The website has over 100 contributions describing, amongst others, the Churchill family who were the first non-governmental newspaper publishers in the Ottoman Empire; the Whittall family, commercial pioneers in Istanbul and Izmir for over a century; the diary of Grace Williamson, a nurse in Izmir from 1914-1922; and the story of the Catoni / Beard families whose descendants still operate a maritime business in the Levant.

The term Levantines is used to describe the different communities who traded and settled in the area. They were diverse in origin and faiths, including Italians, French, British and many others. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after 1918, many of the cosmopolitan communities of the Levant region scattered around the world. The Levantine Heritage Foundation is piecing together their histories and legacies for future generations to study and build on. The Levantine Heritage Foundation aims to rethink the history of the eastern Mediterranean, emphasising the importance of families, businesses and cities, as well as states and nationalities. Its research confirms the crucial role of Levantines in the development of, among other cities, Istanbul, Izmir, Iskenderun, Aleppo, Beirut and Alexandria.

The Foundation, together with friends in Turkey, had its first international conference, on 'Levantines Past, Present and the Future', under the sponsorship of the Izmir Chamber of Commerce between 3-8 November, 2010. A post conference book with the same title was published by the Chamber of Commerce and a re-print will soon be published by the Foundation itself.

The Foundation supported a second conference in Izmir on 31 October, 2014, again bringing together a diverse mixture of local and international researchers and descendants. The Foundation also had a very successful conference in Istanbul with the title 'The Levantines: Commerce & Diplomacy' between 3-5 November 2014. It was sponsored by many local companies, was held in Istanbul in the British Consulate General and the Italian Cultural Institute and was attended by 150 people from all over the world. The post-conference book will be published in Istanbul in 2016.

In addition to these meetings more informal gatherings with talks have been organised in London since 2009. These meetings act as a platform for helping to shape the future of the Levantine Heritage Foundation through the exchange of ideas among the trustees, members and guest speakers.

The Levantine Heritage Foundation is currently preparing its next conference, with the title 'The Levant & Europe: Shipping & Trade, Networks of People & Knowledge' to be held on 2-4 November 2016 in Europe House and the Hellenic Centre in London. This conference will emphasize the role of trade as the central dynamic in the creation of a Levantine world, with complex economic networks giving rise to equally complex social, cultural, political, and material interactions and syntheses. The confirmed keynote speakers include Elena Frangakis Syrett, Sibel Zandi Sayek and Emrah Safa Gürkan.

The Levantine Heritage Foundation is non-political and non-partisan and is open to people of all religions and nationalities.

Many of our members actively contribute to a central body of knowledge which we are gradually digitising and making available to all – see www.levantineheritage.com. We raise funds through membership subscriptions and donations which we use to advance research and make it publicly accessible. The Levantine Heritage Foundation is currently creating study groups in Istanbul and Izmir and planning local libraries, where family papers and books on the Levant can be housed to assist future research.

The Levantine Heritage Foundation is looking for collaboration with similar institutions. For more information, please refer to our website where future events are publicised and where we also inform readers of the latest additions to our website and events that would be of interest to our membership or e-mail: contact@levantineheritagefoundation.org

Current [trustees](#) include: Quentin Compton-Bishop (chairman), Craig Encer (secretary), Dr. Philip Mansel, Jonathan Beard, Osman Öndeş, Dr. Kalliopi Amygdalou, Prof. Axel Corlu, Zeynep Cebeci Suvari.