



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Department of Asian
and North African Studies



Detail from Carpaccio, *La consecrazione dei diaconi da parte di san Pietro* [The consecration of deacons by St. Peter], 1511 - Gemaeldegalerie, Berlin

**1st Levantine Heritage Foundation
meeting in Venice, Italy**

Venice, Italians and the Ottoman Levant

24, 25 November 2022
Aula Mario Baratto, Ca' Foscari
University of Venice - Italy

14.05 Book presentation: Luis Miguel Selvelli,
(co-editor), *Smyrna and Italy. Communities,
relations and institutions of a Levantine city*

BROKERING EMPIRE



Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul

E. NATALIE ROTHMAN

7

Levantines

Genealogies of a Category

In a pathbreaking study over three decades ago, Giorgio Vercellin charted the arc of development of the categories used in the Venetian commercial sphere to refer to Ottoman subjects. According to Vercellin, by the turn of the seventeenth century Venetians distinguished between “Turchi” (“Turks”) and those “di nazioni suddite turchesche” (“of nations subject to the Turks”). This distinction, he suggested, gave way to the superordinate category “orientali” (“orientals”) by the later eighteenth century.¹ To the best of my knowledge, Vercellin’s remains the only attempt at a genealogy of categories of Ottoman alterity in early modern Venice (and in Italy, more broadly). Most other studies either have portrayed a pre-Orientalist golden age, during which categories of Venetian and Ottoman belonging were supposedly fluid and inchoate, or have sought to trace a direct line of uncompromising militant rhetoric against “the Turk” from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment and beyond.²

That these two strands of argument still coexist side by side in current scholarship suggests the limits of dialogue between social and intellectual historians. It also reinforces the need to pay closer attention to the different genres in which categories of belonging and alterity were articulated, negotiated, and transformed. Clearly, the emergence and proliferation of superordinate categories that refer to Ottoman subjects should not be reduced to a pre-Orientalist “before”

In 1541, the Venetian Senate recognized for the first time the right of *Ebrei Levantini* (“Levantine Jews”) to dwell in a newly opened extension of the ghetto, as long as they engaged in “pure mercantile activity.”⁴ For much of the sixteenth century, the term *Levantini* in Venice, as in other Italian port cities such as Ferrara, Ancona, and later Livorno, typically referred to a subset of diasporic Sephardim. These were Jews who, in the wake of their exile from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, had settled in the Ottoman Empire and had, as Ottoman subjects, come to enjoy special protections and tax concessions while trading on the Italian peninsula.⁵ Yet, over the course of the next century, the meaning of *Levantini* shifted quite dramatically as it came to refer not only to Jews but also to other Ottoman merchants sojourning in Venice, regardless of their ethnolinguistic identity or confessional affiliation.

The shift in the prototypical meaning of *Levantini* did not end there. By the end of the sixteenth century, it acquired the dual meaning of (1) shifty, even sketchy men and (2) natives of the Levant.⁶ With these definitions the paradigmatic focus of the term was no longer on diasporic commercial activity but, rather, on presumed provenance and its attendant character traits. This focus was carried over into French and English as the terms *levantin* and *Levantine* made their first appearances as dictionary headwords at the turn of the eighteenth century and were glossed, first, as “Natives or Inhabitants of the Levant, the Eastern People” and, only second, as “those that are employed on the Mediterranean.”⁷ The

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Levantini had a strong incentive to preserve their distinctiveness because they were the only Jews (and, for that matter, the only group other than Venetian citizens by birth) to enjoy preferential tax concessions in Venice and the much sought-after privilege of trading directly between Venetian and Ottoman territories. Levantini themselves often emphasized their distinctiveness vis-à-vis the *Tedeschi* (“German” or Ashkenazi) Jews who had long lived in Venice and who, as moneylenders and traders in secondhand clothes, were quite marginalized economically and politically.

Notably, Venetian officialdom frequently lumped the Levantini together with the *Ponentini*—Jews of Iberian descent who had settled not in the Ottoman Empire but in Amsterdam and other commercial centers in Atlantic Europe. To be sure, many Levantini and *Ponentini* were related by kinship or business ties. In a proposed charter drafted in 1589, Daniel Rodriga, the consul of the *Ponentini*, specifically asked the Venetian authorities to exempt his fellow *Ponentini* and Levantini from any communal taxation shouldered by the *Tedeschi*. Because they engaged



Book presentation and some critical reflections on “Levantine Studies”

*“We need history, but not like the spoiled
idler in the garden of knowledge...”*

Friedrich W. Nietzsche
On the use and abuse of history for life
(1874)



What is the topic of
“Levantine studies”?

A period of history?
A geographical area?
A community?
An institutional conundrum?

A way of life?
A state of mind?

10th September 1914

Mass celebrations in Istanbul for the Ottoman government's unilateral decision to abolish the capitulations



Manifestations populaires à l'occasion de l'abolition des capitulations - Place Sultan Ahmet -

FIGURE 2
MASS DEMONSTRATION ON THE OCCASION OF THE ABOLITION OF THE CAPITULATIONS,
SULTAN AHMET SQUARE
(ANTOINE KÖPE ARCHIVE, COURTESY OF ELIZABETH CHILDRESS)



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IL SOSTEGNO DEGLI ITALIANI ALLA RIVOLUZIONE GRECA



1821-1832 PROVE GENERALI DEL RISORGIMENTO



NEW ENTRY

COMUNITÀ

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Φ (Fi factor) = Philosophy

Π (Pi factor) = Politics

Ψ (Psi factor) = Psychoanalysis



Ψ = Psychoanalysis
= Because of what?

- Curiosity for one's own roots?

-Nostalgia for a period of exceptionality in one's own family or national history?

-Exoticism / Orientalism?

-Idealization of a bygone past?

-Sense of guilt?

-Empathy for the pain of others?



Φ = Philosophy = How?

Economics, Sociology,
Anthropology,
Jurisprudence
Theology
Political theory
Cultural studies
Postcolonial studies
Subaltern studies

“Splendour and catastrophe”



Π = Politics = For what?

Cosmopolitanism
Multiculturalism
Pluralism

Migration
Social justice
Reconciliation

Study of liminal and marginal communities

Inter-communal relations
Networks

Anacleto Cricca: esule risorgimentale, massone e omeopata a Smirne 1850-1909

LUIS MIGUEL SELVELLI

Anacleto Cricca was forced into exile because of his participation to the revolutionary activities of 1848-1849 in Italy, during the 1st war of independence that opened the way to the unification of Italy in the following two decades. Together with many others like him, in 1850 he eventually found refuge in the territory of the Ottoman empire and settled down in Izmir, where he lived until his death in 1909.

By using different archives and bibliographic sources I tried to trace the many different aspects of the life of this very eclectic but nonetheless forgotten figure, who kept being involved with revolutionary networks in Europe while at the same time developing a strong interest into masonic activities (he founded several lodges affiliated to the Grand Orient of Italy, becoming its official delegate for the whole Minor Asia region), and developing a sheer knowledge of homeopathic medical therapies (to the point of receiving an award from the Ottoman authorities thanks to his contribution to the terrible cholera epidemic that affected Izmir in 1865). Thanks to his tireless personality, and his involvement in several philanthropic activities, he became the most important and respected veteran of Izmir's Italian community in the last years of his life, as it is proved by Alberto Frangini's publication.

"(...) a quei generosi sventurati che soffrono le angosce del carcere, perché giurarono liberare la nostra Capitale dallo schifoso prete e dall'esoso straniero!"¹

La vita del bolognese Anacleto Cricca (1824-1909) si presenta come uno straordinario spaccato di quella generazione di esuli italiani che dopo aver preso parte alle insorgenze del 1848-1849 si trovarono

PROSOPOGRAPHY

Πρόσωπο: face, person, character

person (n.)

c. 1200, *persoun*, "an individual, a human being," from Old French *persone* "human being, anyone, person" (12c., Modern French *personne*) and directly from Latin *persona* "human being, person, personage; a part in a drama, assumed character," originally "a mask, a false face," such as those of wood or clay, covering the whole head, worn by the actors in later Roman theater. OED offers the general 19c. explanation of *persona* as "related to" Latin *personare* "to sound through" (i.e. the mask as something spoken

BETWEEN EMPIRES – BEYOND BORDERS

THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE EARLY REPUBLICAN ERA THROUGH THE LENS OF THE KÖPE FAMILY

Edited by

GÁBOR FODOR



Research Centre for the Humanities
Hungarian Cultural Centre in Istanbul
SALT Istanbul

Budapest, 2020

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October 20, 2018

The Incredible Life of Antoine Köpe

Episode 387

with Nefin Dinç

hosted by Chris Gratien

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Antoine Köpe was never a prominent politician or public figure, but he was witness to extraordinary events. Born in late Ottoman Istanbul to French and Hungarian parents,



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Il "cronista" della fine di un mondo

Antoine il fortunato, una vita tra due Imperi

2018 Francia 56 min

Giorgio del Zanna introduce per noi questo prezioso documentario che ripercorre ascesa e caduta di Antoine Köpe, eccezionale testimone a cavallo tra due imperi, quello ottomano e quello asburgico. Uno sguardo unico sulla realtà della vita dei primi due decenni del secolo scorso.

Regia: Nefin Dinç

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Malte Fuhrmann



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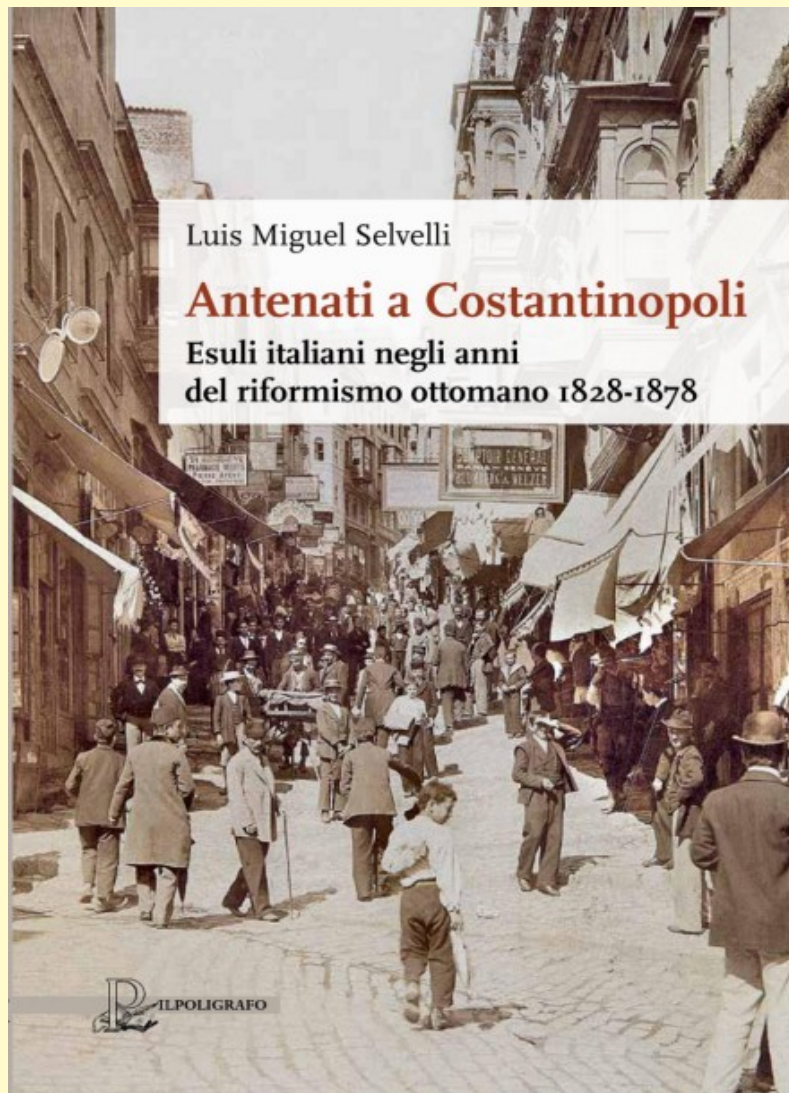
Urban Milieus vs. National Communities

The Case of the Levantines

The construction of clear-cut national identities required a good degree of symbolic violence no matter what group within the urban order (and no less in the countryside) was concerned. It becomes even more complicated when extended to milieus that offer neither the potential to define them as a linguistic group, nor a clear-cut religious group with an official status (*millet*), nor even like the Dönme as a group with a common (real or imagined) origin.¹ The nineteenth-century so-called Levantines constitute such a case. More than any other part of urban society, they were a product of the circumstances that made the Eastern Mediterranean port cities and they ceased to function as major players once the port cities lost their status.

What makes up nineteenth-century Levantine identity? A question that at first glance seems simple proves difficult to answer, as this identity is rather elusive. I will therefore refrain here from big claims and limit myself to a criticism of existing hypotheses and assumptions, while only indicating the direction where I believe answers should be sought.


The existence of Levantines was intimately entwined with the Ottomans' rather liberal practice in dealing with international maritime trade. While for example China and Japan before the mid-nineteenth century were extremely cautious and restrictive in granting foreign merchants access to their soil, the Ottomans in some cases encouraged international trade and in others simply failed to enforce restrictions on the duration of foreigners' stays, their access to real estate, limits on



Luis Miguel Selvelli

Antenati a Costantinopoli

Esuli italiani negli anni
del riformismo ottomano 1828-1878

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National state / Political ideology

To believe that the aim is to take away an “imposed mask” in order to go finally back to one’s own true (imagined/invented) “origin”: this condition will then grant a clear and safe future for a defined and limited “us”.

Levantinism

There is no “origin” or “roots”: human nature is based on moving, traveling, always brokering & finding compromises. Because no safe future is given, we continuously need to find the middle-way between “all of us”.