

Brotherhood across the Mediterranean: Italian Freemasonry and the Ottoman Mission of 1910

Luis Miguel Selvelli

Presentation at the Anglo-Turkish Society

Royal Anthropological Institute

London, 28th October 2025



Gianicolo Hill in Rome

27th May 1910

Delegation of around 100 Ottoman citizens participating to an official ceremony in front of Garibaldi's monument in Rome.

Indi salirono al Gianicolo, in 32 carrozze del Municipio, del Mov. Forestieri, degli Alberghi, parecchi autorevoli componenti la Missione Ottomana, a deporre una ricca mezzaluna di fiori sul monumento a Giuseppe Garibaldi.

La numerosa folla che ancora era per i viali e nel piazzale, al passaggio delle vetture applaudì calorosamente.

I turchi sfilarono prima per due attorno al monumento, poi deposti i fiori, Djemal bey — presidente giudiziario a Salonicco — pronunziò le seguenti parole in turco, tradotte in francese da Nessib bey: « Garibaldi ha salvato l' Italia dalla tirannia e dalla schiavitù. Noi, che usciamo da lotte e da rivolte abbiamo sentito fortemente il dovere di venire a rendere il nostro tributo devoto e gli omaggi all' Eroe, posando una corona di fiori ». Finisce gridando — e tutti lo imitano — « Viva Garibaldi », « Viva l' Italia ».

Molti componenti la Missione ottomana, poi si recarono a visitare la Basilica Vaticana, ammirando, estatici, i tesori meravigliosi d' arte che essa possiede.



29th September 1911: Italian declaration of war to the Ottoman empire

4th October 1911: first landing of Italian forces on the shores of Ottoman “Libya”

18th October 1912: end of the war with the signing of peace agreement in Ouchy (Geneve).



THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.

No. 3619.—VOL. CXXXIII SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 1908. SIXPENCE.

THE MONARCH WHO KEPT HIS HEAD DURING A REVOLUTION: ABDUL HAMID.

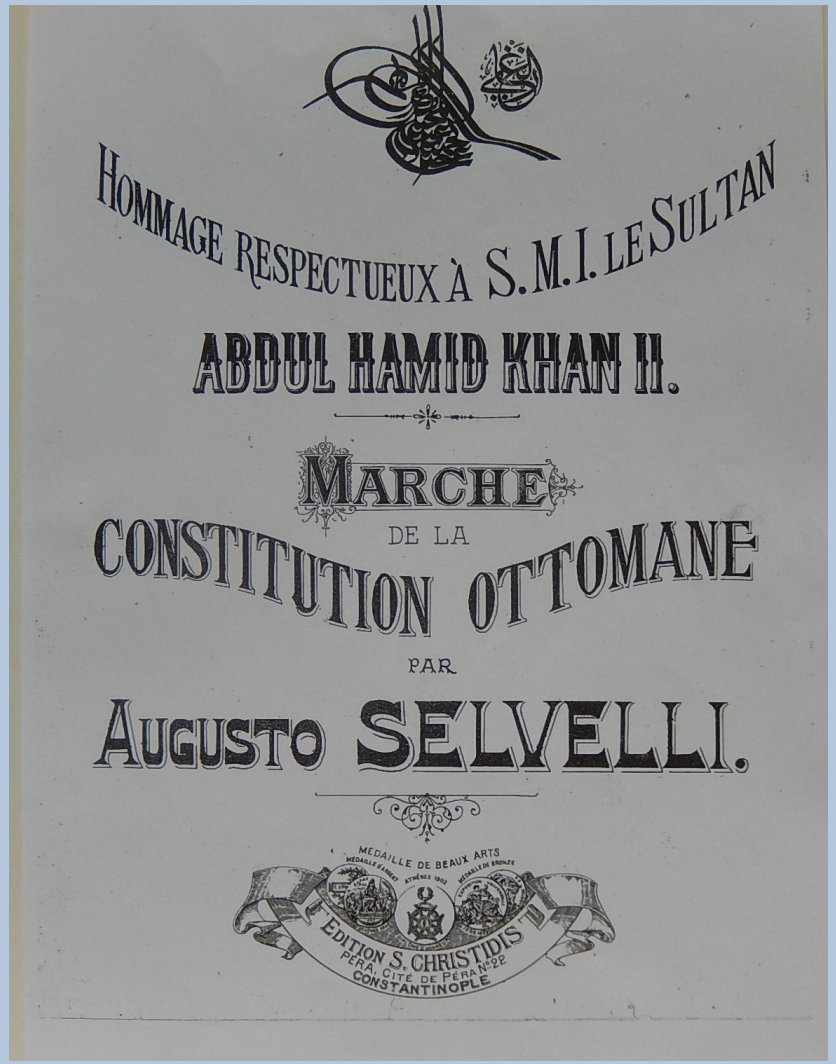
Abdul Hamid, now a constitutional ruler, is the thirty-fourth Sovereign of the Osmanli dynasty. He bears the title of Khan of Khans and Padishah.



THE GODDESS IN THE CAR IN THE TURKISH REVOLUTION.

SMYRNA'S SYMBOLICAL PROCESSION IN HONOUR OF LIBERTY, EQUALITY, AND FRATERNITY.

July 1908: Young Turks' (Second) Constitutional Revolution


HOMMAGE RESPECTUEUX À S.M.I. LE SULTAN
ABDUL HAMID KHAN II.
MARCHE
DE LA
CONSTITUTION OTTOMANE
PAR
AUGUSTO SELVELLI.
MEDAILLE DE BEAUX ARTS
EDITION S. CHRISTIDIS
PERA, CITÉ DE PÉRA N°22
CONSTANTINOPLE


Resna
MARCHE-HYMNE
DE LA
Libre et Grande Nation Ottomane
Rimes de MOUHAMER FERDI BEY
Musique du Mo
ITALO SELVELLI
Instructeur et Chef de Musique du Ministère de l'Artillerie (Top-Hané)
Propriété de l'Auteur
Déposée et enrégistrée au Ministère de l'Instruction Publique
PIASTRES 5
Imp. Dotzo Galata.
Tout exemplaire non revêtu du cachet ci-contre, sera considéré contrefait


MARCHE
DE SA MAJESTÉ IMPÉRIALE LE SULTAN
MOHAMMED V.
Officiellement adoptée
Composée par le Maestro
ITALO SELVELLI
Instructeur et Chef de la Musique de l'Artillerie (Top-Hané)
Propriété de l'Auteur
Tous droits réservés pour l'Empire Ottoman
Toute reproduction et vente frauduleuse sera rigoureusement poursuivie
Vente exclusive chez
Mr ERNEST COMENDINGER
343, Grande rue de Péra, 343
CONSTANTINOPLE


ZEKY BEY
Violoniste de
S. M. I. le Sultan
ITALO SELVELLI
Pianiste
DJEMIL BEY
Violoncelliste de
S. M. I. le Sultan



Selim Melhame Pasha (1849-1937)



Arap Izzet Pasha (1851-1924)



Guglielmo Imperiali di Francavilla (1858-1944)

Italian ambassador to the Ottoman empire between July 1904-March 1910.

He was never happy in this position.
In July 1909 he wrote a long letter to the Italian F.A. minister Tommaso Tittoni, stating that he was “praying with all his forces to receive a new appointment elsewhere (…) because Constantinople was for him just ‘a new Babylon’ (…) Lucky the one who can leave behind this world of filthy intrigues and dirty tricks…”

In the spring of 1910 he was finally moved to London, where he stayed until 1920, playing a crucial role during Italy’s shifting of Alliance during the First world war.



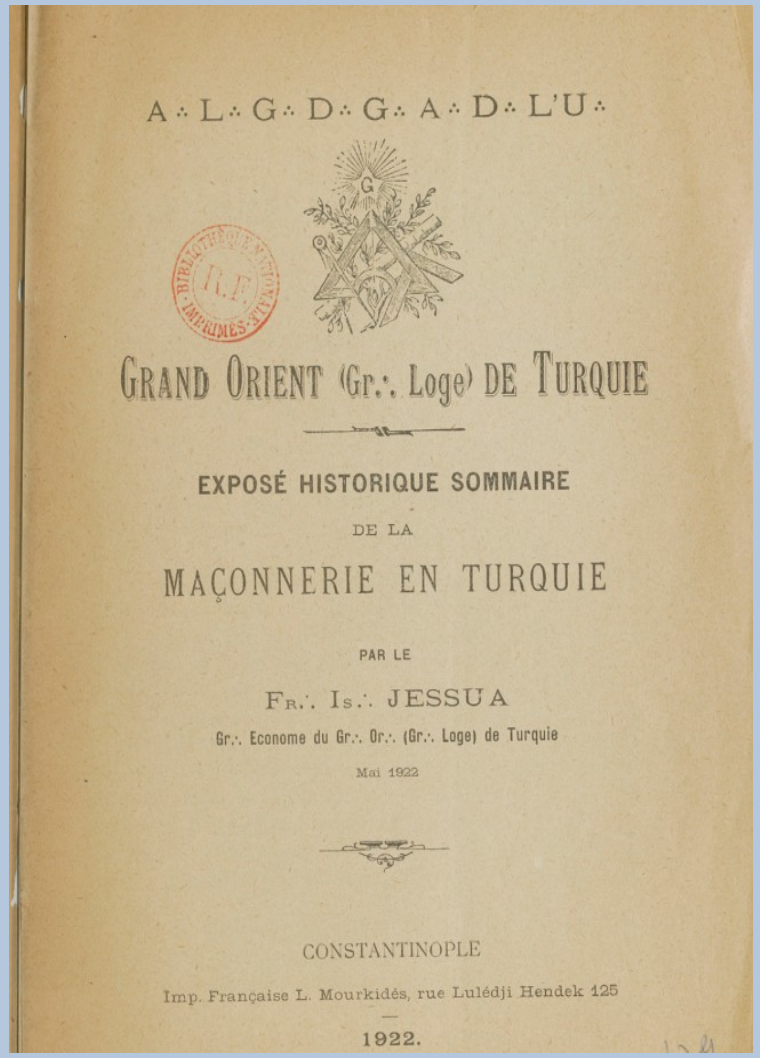
Giovanni Romei Longhena (1865-1944)

He arrived to Istanbul in March 1904 with a minor military appointment in the context of European attempts to “help” the Ottoman government to reorganize their gendarmerie (especially in the context of social unrest in Macedonia).

Within a very short time he became a “favorite” of sultan Abdülhamid, and in March 1905 he married the daughter of Selim Melhame (Feride).

Despite his minor military appointment, Romei Longhena ended up becoming a sort of shadow ambassador in Istanbul, with an almost direct contact with the Sultan…

But immediately after the Young Turks’ revolution, he decided to abruptly leave the country and never return, causing serious damage to Italy’s diplomatic capabilities in the Ottoman capital in a crucial phase of transition.



A∴ L∴ G∴ D∴ G∴ A∴ D∴ L'U∴

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE IMPRIMÉS R.F.

GRAND ORIENT (Gr.∴ Loge) DE TURQUIE

EXPOSÉ HISTORIQUE SOMMAIRE

DE LA

MAÇONNERIE EN TURQUIE

PAR LE

FR.∴ IS.∴ JESSUA

Gr.∴ Econome du Gr.∴ Or.∴ (Gr.∴ Loge) de Turquie

Mai 1922

CONSTANTINOPLE

Imp. Française L. Mourkidès, rue Lulédji Hendek 125

1922.

The strong connection of the Salonica-based Young Turks (most of the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress in 1907) with Italian Freemasonry and other European Freemasonry networks has been already proved and studied by several different scholars.

Le résultat des élections du 1 Août 1909 fut le suivant :

Gr.∴ M.∴	— TALAAT PACHA.
» » *Adjt.∴*	— GÉNÉRAL GALIB.
1 *Surv.∴*	— Dr MEHMED ALI.
» » *Adjt.∴*	— DE NARI EDOUARD (Vén.∴ de la Bisanzio Risorta).
2 *Surv.∴*	— OSMAN FEHMI.
» » *Adjt.∴*	— NADRA MOUTRAN.
Orateur	— RIZA TEVFIK.
» *Adjt.∴*	— M. NORADOUNGHIAN.
Secret.∴	— OSMAN TALAAT.
» *Adjt.∴*	— CASANOVA SOLON.
Trésor.∴	— Dr MODIANO.
Econome	— Dr SOUHAMI.
Maitre des Cérém.∴	— RAPHAEL RICCI.
Experts	— ALGRANTI VICTOR, TEVFIK BEY.



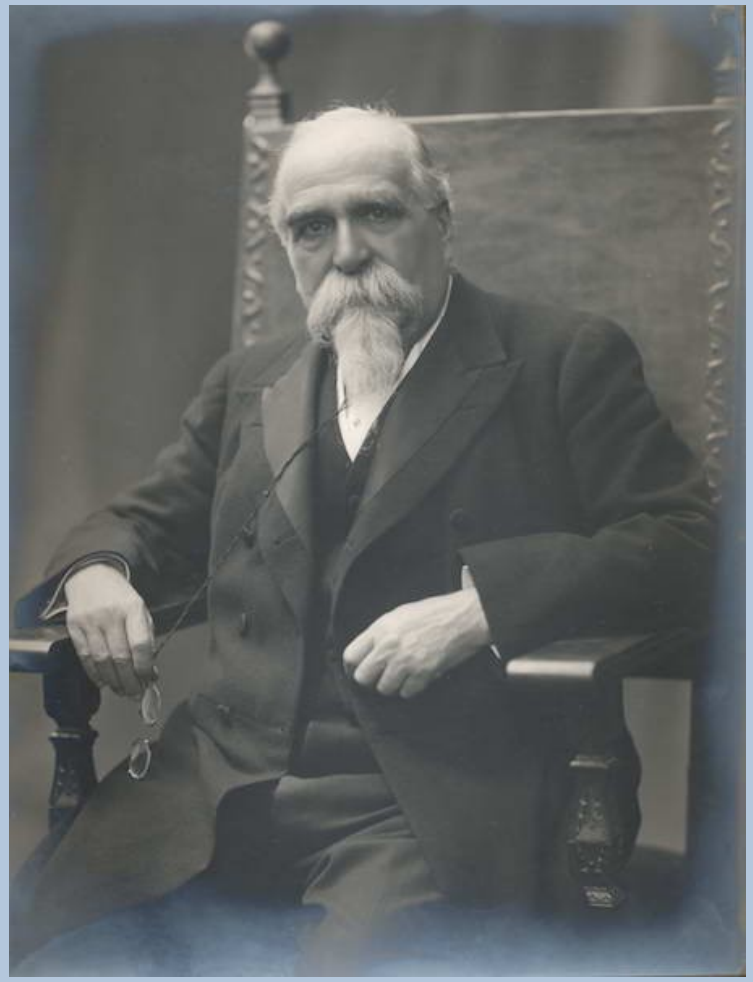
“The Giolittian Era” (1901-1914)

Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928) was the absolute playmaker of Italian politics during the long decade before WW1.

During these years he was several times either Prime minister or Minister of the Interior, and even when he stayed out of office to take a period of rest, he would be able to have a trusted person leading Italian politics according to his will.

His ability as a statesman rested in his pragmatic attitude (based on his chameleonic abilities, known in Italy with the generally derogatory term of “trasformismo”), that allowed him to go beyond ideological divides in order to put together variable parliamentary majorities according to his political priorities of that specific period.

It must be said that the Ottoman empire and the related geography never happened to be within his diplomatic, economic nor political priorities.



Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927)

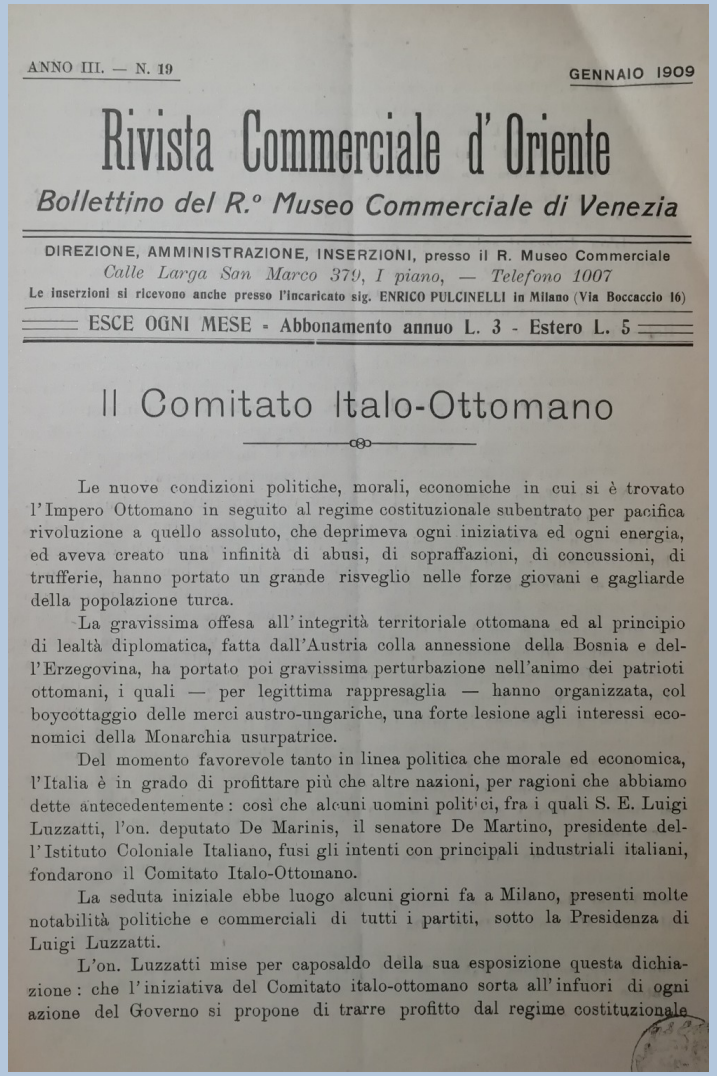
Born to Jewish parents in Venice.
Studied Law in Padua. In 1863 moved to Milano, where he was initiated to Freemasonry at the Cisalpina lodge.

In 1867 he was appointed professor of Constitutional law at the University of Padua, a position he kept for decades (in Rome at a certain point)

In 1868 he was one of the 3 founders of the Ca' Foscari university in Venice.

He was 3 times Minister of Treasury between 1896-1906, then Minister of Industry & Agriculture in 1909-1910.

Given his pragmatic attitude (in similar way to Giolitti…), he was able to work with different figures of the political panorama.



ANNO III. — N. 19 GENNAIO 1909

Rivista Commerciale d' Oriente

Bollettino del R.° Museo Commerciale di Venezia

DIREZIONE, AMMINISTRAZIONE, INSERZIONI, presso il R. Museo Commerciale
Calle Larga San Marco 379, I piano, — Telefono 1007
Le inserzioni si ricevono anche presso l'incaricato sig. ENRICO PULCINELLI in Milano (Via Boccaccio 16)

ESCE OGNI MESE - Abbonamento annuo L. 3 - Estero L. 5

Il Comitato Italo-Ottomano

Le nuove condizioni politiche, morali, economiche in cui si è trovato l'Impero Ottomano in seguito al regime costituzionale subentrato per pacifica rivoluzione a quello assoluto, che deprimeva ogni iniziativa ed ogni energia, ed aveva creato una infinità di abusi, di sopraffazioni, di concussioni, di trufferie, hanno portato un grande risveglio nelle forze giovani e gagliarde della popolazione turca.

La gravissima offesa all'integrità territoriale ottomana ed al principio di lealtà diplomatica, fatta dall'Austria colla annessione della Bosnia e dell'Erzegovina, ha portato poi gravissima perturbazione nell'animo dei patrioti ottomani, i quali — per legittima rappresaglia — hanno organizzata, col boycottaggio delle merci austro-ungariche, una forte lesione agli interessi economici della Monarchia usurpatrice.

Del momento favorevole tanto in linea politica che morale ed economica, l'Italia è in grado di profittare più che altre nazioni, per ragioni che abbiamo dette antecedentemente: così che alcuni uomini politici, fra i quali S. E. Luigi Luzzatti, l'on. deputato De Marinis, il senatore De Martino, presidente dell'Istituto Coloniale Italiano, fusi gli intenti con principali industriali italiani, fondarono il Comitato Italo-Ottomano.

La seduta iniziale ebbe luogo alcuni giorni fa a Milano, presenti molte notabilità politiche e commerciali di tutti i partiti, sotto la Presidenza di Luigi Luzzatti.

L'on. Luzzatti mise per caposaldo della sua esposizione questa dichiarazione: che l'iniziativa del Comitato italo-ottomano sorta all'infuori di ogni azione del Governo si propone di trarre profitto dal regime costituzionale

The Italian-Ottoman Committee

After 6 months of Luzzatti's growing interest towards the new Ottoman constitutional regime, in late January 1909 the Italian-Ottoman Committee is founded in Milano, but its effective headquarter will be established in Venice in February.

Its aim is to foster economic and political relations between the two countries and peoples, by strengthening mutual understanding, commercial networks and academic exchange.

A crucial role is to be played by the Venice-based *Museo Commerciale*, an institution established in 1907 by the local Chamber of commerce in order to provide a permanent source of information (also thanks to its monthly publication) for local tradesmen interested in Oriental markets (with a special focus towards the Near-East).

Towards the Ottoman mission to Italy of May 1910

In August 1909 Primo Levi (1853-1929) is appointed Italian Consul to Salonica.

In mid-December 1909, Luigi Luzzatti is appointed Minister for Agriculture, Industry & Commerce. Shortly after, in March 1910, we will become Prime Minister (for the first and only time in his life) keeping the position until March 1911.

At the end of 1909 the organization for an Ottoman mission to Italy (composed by around 120 notables from the economic, political and bureaucratic elite) is confirmed and started.

The organization is generously supported by official institutions of the Italian state as:
- Istituto Coloniale Italiano
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- City Municipalities

And several other institutions as:
- Museo Commerciale di Venezia
- Local Chambers of Commerce on the whole Italian territory touched by the mission
- Masonic lodges

The steamship *Solunto* that carried the Ottoman mission from Istanbul to Italy and back.



La nave

Prua a clipper, due alberi, un fumaiolo.

Stazzava 3.474 tonnellate e sviluppava una velocità di 12 nodi.

Trasportava 400 passeggeri, per lo più emigranti, sulla linea Genova - Brasile - Rio della Plata.

Fu varata il 23 aprile 1897 (vedi foto).

Il passaggio su questa nave verso i porti sudamericani costava dalle 850 lire in cabina del ponte di prima classe alle 370 lire nella stiva di terza classe.

Nel 1908 fu ceduta alla *Navigazione Generale Italiana* e ribattezzata *Solunto*.

Nel 1910 fu trasferita alla *Società di Navigazione Servizi Marittimi*.

Continuò a navigare per la *S.N.S.M.* finché il 25 giugno 1916 fu presa a cannonate ed affondata da un sommergibile tedesco ad 80 miglia al largo dell'isola di Majorca.

Route and program of the 1910 Ottoman mission to Italy

27th April: the ferry *Solunto* (provided by Istituto Coloniale Italiano) departs from Istanbul.
28th April: the ferry calls at Salonica, the city where most of the delegates get on the ship.

1st May: the ferry arrives to Bari in the morning. After a short ceremony it departs again at 4 pm.
2nd May: arrival to Venice, where the delegation stays for 2 nights

With a special train provided by the organization, the mission goes on to Padova, Verona, Brescia, Milano (10th May), industrial region of Northern Lombardy, Novara, Torino (20th May), Genova, La Spezia, Livorno, Firenze, Roma (26th May) and finally Napoli (29th May).

1st June: the same ferry *Solunto* departs from Napoli to bring back all the delegates back to Salonica and Istanbul.

The head of the mission was Nessib Bey, former director of Agricultural works in the province of Salonica. Shortly after the mission he will be appointed as personal assistant of the crown prince Yusuf Izzettin.

ALL' ESPOSIZIONE DI VENEZIA







AL GIANICOLO



April 1909 in Salonica



May 1910 in Rome

Hüseyin Hüsnü Pasha (1856-1926)

After a long career in the military, Hüseyin Hüsnü found himself based in Salonica during the 1908 revolution, and his appeasing behavior (due to Masonic connections, and his daughter having married Rahmi Arslan Bey) earned him the respect of a relevant section of the Young Turks.

His position in Salonica was confirmed (as the Commander of the aged soldiers battalion) and he found himself playing a crucial role (helped by young Mustafa Kemal) in the steady decision to move the troops to Istanbul after the attempted coup in 04/1909.

Few months after that he was appointed as governor (*vali*) of Trablusgarb province.
According to Italian diplomatic sources, his profile and attitude in this position was generally appreciated.

Hüseyin Hüsnü Paşa
1856-1926
Kosova vâlisi Mayıs-Ağustos 1909; Trablusb vâlisi Ağustos 1909-Temmuz 1910; Meclis-i â'yân azası Eylül 1911.

TRABLUSGARB

Ali Aşkar Paşa	Temmuz 1838
Mehmed Emin Paşa	Mayıs 1842
Mehmed Râgıb Paşa	Şubat 1847
Ahmed İzzet Paşa	Eylül 1848

Receb Paşa	Ekim 1904
Ahmed Fevzî Paşa	Aralık 1908
Hüseyin Hüsnü Paşa	Ağustos 1909
İbrahim Edhem Paşa	Temmuz 1910
Ne'şet Bey	Kasım 1911

Mareshal Ibrahim Edhem Pasha (1850? -1915)

Also coming from a long military career, in 1908 he was holding the post of 3rd Army commander in Salonica, and he also seemed to close an eye on Young Turks' activities in the area.

No relation with Freemasonry, but his son Nureddin was politically close to the most militarist section of the Young Turks.

After the 1908 revolution Ibrahim Edhem is not assigned to any relevant position, but after a 2 year hiatus he is appointed as *Vali* of Trablusgarb in place of the too "soft character" Hüseyin Hüsnü…

He will soon become the nightmare of Italian representatives in Libya, as he seemed to systematically hinder all their attempts to strengthen Italian economic presence in the region…



Further lines of research:

FOR THE OTTOMAN MISSION:

MICROHISTORY: investigating all possible local sources (newspapers, city archives, …) to gather supplementary details on the mission's impact on Italian society and public opinion.

PROSOPOGRAPHY: searching for diaries, memories or other sources to gather all possible information on how the Ottoman mission affected the perception of its members and other involved personalities.

FOR THE PROCESS THAT LED TO WAR IN LIBYA IN 1911:

PROSOPOGRAPHIC POLITICAL HISTORY: by searching Ottoman archival sources, as much as memories and other biographic works, we need to reach a better understanding of the internal dynamics and struggles within the Committee of Union and Progress, to contextualize the political process that led to the appointment of Ibrahim Edhem instead of Hüseyin Hüsnü as governor of Trablusgarb… (HINT: follow the traces of Germany and Mahmut Şevket Pasha)



THANK YOU!

For any further contact:

luismiguel.selvelli@yahoo.it