

150 Years of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari

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A Cafoscarino in the World: Arturo De Luciano

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Abstract Arturo De Luciano was first a student at the Royal High School of Commerce (Regia Scuola Superiore di Commercio) of Venice, then active in several commercial enterprises in Lebanon and in Europe. The Historical Archive of Ca' Foscari keeps a copy with dedication of a singular treatise he wrote on the breeding of silkworms, published in Arabic in Beirut in 1897. This brief contribution intends to present the figure of this *cafoscarino*, with particular attention to the international dimension of his training and professional activity.

Keywords Arturo De Luciano. Regia Scuola Superiore di Commercio. Silkworms breeding. International students. Lebanon.

Since its foundation, Ca' Foscari has demonstrated an international vocation concreted in the teaching of foreign languages, European and extra-European, in the *curriculum studiorum* of the Regia Scuola Superiore di Commercio. The figure of Arturo De Luciano is an interesting testimony of the opening to the world typical of Ca' Foscari, even in this first phase of its history when language education was ancillary to commercial studies. Citizen of the world, he always maintained a privileged link with his *alma mater* and the city of Venice. A multifaceted and polyglot person, De Luciano is an example of the international dimension that still characterises Ca' Foscari University and its students.

Arturo De Luciano, son of 'cav. De Luciano-bey',¹ was born on 12 July 1859 in the island of Rhodes, at the time part of the Ottoman Empire.² He studied at the 'De Propaganda Fide' college in Smyrna (nowadays Turkey) and at

1 From the Turkish *beg* (lord): honorary title of the Ottoman empire used to designate a particular type of nobility, i.e. the fiscal or military manager of an administrative district and then as a sign of respect.

2 This and the following information on his career as a student are taken from the matriculation register of Arturo De Luciano (Regia Scuola Superiore di Commercio di Venezia, *Registro Matricolare*, anno 1879-1880, 147 r. 148).

I thank Dr. Antonella Sattin (Archivio Storico di Ca' Foscari) without whose precious help in finding documents and information on Arturo De Luciano this piece would not have been written.



Figure 1. Photo of Arturo De Luciano
(from *Bollettino* 24, 1906, 36)

the Saint Joseph University in Beirut.³ He was enrolled at the Regia Scuola Superiore di Commercio of Venice in 1879, with the admission examination obtained by presenting “a certificate from the Superior of the College of Propaganda”. Registered for the second time, with provisional registration, in the 3rd course of the ‘Sezione Consolare’, in the academic year 1882-83 he finally abandons the school. We know that he moved abroad for professional reasons. He features among the fifty-two members residing in the most diverse locations out of Italy (*Bollettino* 12, 1902, 68). Since 1897 he carries out various professional occupations and actively participates in the life of the Italian community in Beirut (then in the Ottoman Empire): he was “head of a commercial house in Beirut in Syria, agent of the Italian General Navigation (Navigazione Generale Italiana),⁴ judge at the consular court and the mixed court, and president of the Italian gymnastic club and the Italian charity association [in Beirut]” (*Bollettino* 24, 1906, 37).

In 1919, again in Beirut, he is involved in a trial that opposes him to Elia Sabbagh (Raccuia 2015, 62). We find him later in Barcelona⁵ as a shipowner

³ The Université Saint-Joseph is a prestigious Francophone university founded by the Jesuits in 1875 and still active in Beirut.

⁴ Founded in 1881 by the merger between the shipping companies Florio (Palermo) and Rubattino (Genoa) that operated in the Mediterranean and in the routes to the two Americas.

⁵ In 1924 his name features in the chapter “Riparazioni” (Raccuia 2015, 100-108, 102); he was probably already in Spain.

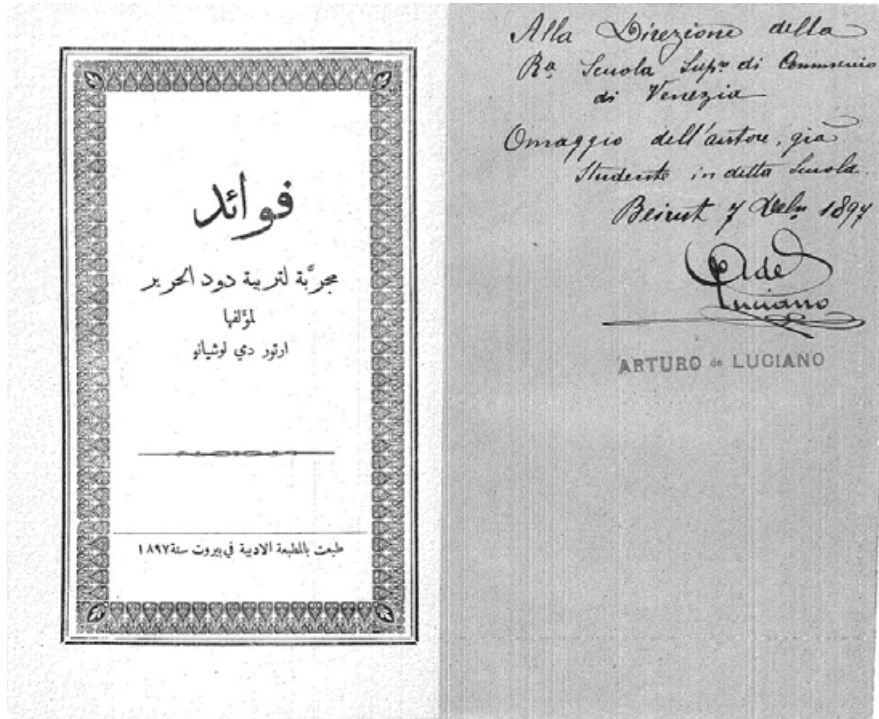


Figure 2. Title page of *Fawā'id muğarraba li-tarbiyat dūd al-ḥarīr* with the dedication to the alma mater)

of the Lega Navale Italiana (Italian Navy League) (Agustina 2014, 26) where he features in 1925 as auditor of the Italian Chamber of Commerce (Gonzalez i Vilalta 2009, 37); in 1936-37 he is listed among the members of the Fascist party (Raccuia 2015, 200). After this date there are no traces of him.

De Luciano also worked as a publicist: he was among the collaborators of the ephemeral Venetian artistic-literary periodical (it only lasted from May to August 1881) *La Gioventù Italiana*, which published poetry, essays of novels and pieces of literature and which included among its collaborators the famous Venetian playwright Giacinto Gallina (see Iveser 2018b). Another cooperation, more in line with his professional activity, is that with the *Bollettino del R. Museo Commerciale di Venezia* (originally *Rivista Commerciale d'Oriente*) published in Venice from 1907 to 1911, which contained relevant information on economic relations with the countries of the Levant, the Balkan area, Russia and the Far East: reports of fairs and exhibitions, reviews and reports of specialised texts, etc. (Iveser 2018a).

De Luciano seems to be strongly attached to Ca' Foscari and to Venice as well. Perpetual member of the Association of Old Students of the High School of Commerce (Associazione degli Antichi Studenti della Scuola Superiore di Commercio), he sends to his *alma mater* a copy with dedication of a work he penned, a manual of twenty pages for the breeding of silkworms, in Arabic: *Fawā'id muğarraba li-tarbiyat dūd al-ḥarīr* (Tested

Information for the Breeding of Silkworms) (De Luciano 1897).⁶ The dedication, dated Beirut, 7 October [?] 1897, states “To the Direction of the Royal High School of Commerce of Venice. Gift of the author, former Student at the School”, it is undersigned with De Luciano’s both signature and stamp (fig. 2).

In his preface the author states that he learned the topic during his studies at the Royal High School of Commerce of Venice. Noting that “in the land of Syria” (De Luciano 1897, 3) silkworm breeding is practiced with little profit and antiquated methods, with this brochure it intends to offer professionals in the sector an instrument to improve their activity and to keep the silkworms in good health. The detailed treatment, divided into nine sections, closes with the guarantee of success for those who follow the instructions contained in the manual and with the (non-disinterested!) recommendation to purchase “eggs of Italian silkworms available from the author” (De Luciano 1897, 20). The elaborate dedication to Na’ūm Bāšā (Naum Coussa), the Greek Catholic of Melkite rite who was governor of the Province of Mount Lebanon between 1892 and 1902,⁷ is an interesting testimony of De Luciano’s relations with the local authorities.

De Luciano, a businessman, was also a man of letters: on the occasion of the collapse of the bell tower of San Marco (1902) he published a poem in French in the *Bollettino* of Associazione degli Antichi Studenti (1902, 48-9). The nostalgia for his city of adoption (and probably also for youth) clearly transpires from the lines of the poem composed on 31 July 31 1902 in Beirut. The fate of the bell tower, referred to in anthropomorphic terms, is thus assimilated to De Luciano’s fate, for his words seem to allude to some difficulties of his life in Lebanon.

Non ! C’est incroyable !
Même, épouvantable !
Quoi, Lui s’écrouler,
Se laisser tomber ?
Finir en un instant sa vie,
Sans se plaindre, sans agonie ?
Impossible ! C’est trop fort !
Je ne puis croire à sa mort !
Cependant l’annonce est officielle,
Je ne puis, donc, douter de la nouvelle !
Hélas ! Je n’entendrai plus ton doux carrillon,

6 The copy, which bears the signature Misc. B 1842, is kept in the Ca' Foscari Historical Archive.

7 Mutaşarrifiyya Ğabal Lubnān: an administrative division established in 1860 by the Ottoman Empire in accordance with foreign powers and subject to the jurisdiction of a foreign Christian governor (who should have not been a Turkish or a Lebanese).

Berçer à minuit, rêves et imagination,
Ni verrai de ton Ange d'or la robe,
Scintiller aux premiers éclats de l'Aube ?
Je ne viendrai plus, dans l'ombre, le soir,
Parler à tes pieds d'amour et d'espoir ?
Ni te contempler du fond noir de la lagune,
Quand au ciel brillent les Astres et la lune ?
Tout n'est plus, qu'un éloigné souvenir !
Dans ce monde tout doit un jour finir ?
Adieu ! Ami de ma jeunesse,
Je sens, comme toi, ma vieillesse.
Bientôt à mon tour. Je suivrai ton sort.
Je tomberai sans larmes, et ma mort,
Tranchera la lutte de cette pauvre vie
Passée à Beyrouth, au fond de la Syrie !

De Luciano, a polyglot and a citizen of the world, can be considered an interesting example of that openness to the world and of the combination of technical-commercial knowledge, humanistic training and linguistic skills that have characterised and continues to characterise the history of Ca' Foscari.

Bulletins

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