

EVARISTO DE CHIRICO

Paolo Picozza

I. My father was a man of the nineteenth century; he was an engineer and also a gentleman of olden times, courageous, loyal, hard-working, intelligent and good. He had studied in Florence and Turin, and he was the only one of a large family of gentry who had wanted to work. Like many men of the nineteenth century he had various capacities and virtues: he was a very good engineer, had very fine handwriting, he drew, had a good ear for music, had gifts of observation and irony, hated injustice, loved animals, treated the rich and powerful in a lofty manner, and was always ready to protect and help the weak and the poor.

This means that my father, like many men of that time, was the exact opposite of most men of today, who lack a sense of direction and any character, are unskilled, incapable and, on top of everything, are unchivalrous, highly opportunist and full of stupidity.¹

Like all true gentlemen of the nineteenth century my father was pro-Jewish.²

In passing by the monument commemorating King Umberto's tragic death, far away memories from my childhood surfaced from the most remote recesses of my memory. I remembered my father, in Greece, when I was still a child. On the walls of the railway engineer office, among photographs of locomotives and railway bridges, hung two large portraits of King Umberto and Queen Margherita in carved wooden black frames. My father came home one evening with a newspaper displaying the announcement of the king's assassination in large letters. I remember my father's serious face as he sat at his desk that had an oil lamp with a conical green glass shade on it. My father spoke of the assassinated king and I looked at his portrait in the black wooden frame; it could barely be seen in the semi-darkness, it seemed to fade away and sink slowly into the great night of Time. I also heard talk of strikes, of minister Crispi, of teams of workmen that would be arriving from Italy, of railway concessions that were to be obtained from the Greek government.³

This is how Giorgio de Chirico described his father, whilst Alberto Savinio gives us further information using his chosen alias of Aniceto: "Evaristo, father of Aniceto, was the only one of seven

¹ G. de Chirico, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, Peter Owen Limited, London 1971, pp. 15-16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³ G. de Chirico, *Una gita a Lecco*, in "Aria d'Italia", Spring 1940, p. 76.

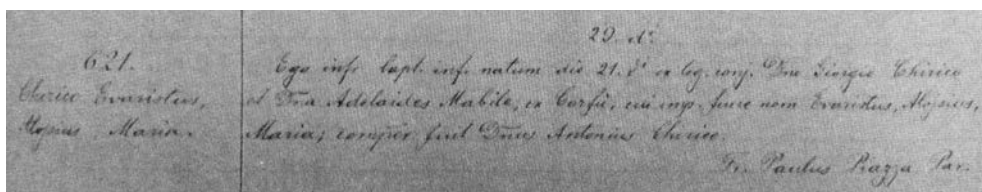


fig. 1 Birth register (detail): Evaristo Maria de Chirico, born 21 June 1841

brothers and sisters who worked; he studied engineering and devoted himself to building railways first in Tuscany, then in Bulgaria and lastly in Greece.”⁴

II. I have quoted several excerpts in which Baron Evaristo de Chirico’s sons talk about their father. These memories, despite being hazy due to the young age and trauma brought on by the early loss of a parent, correspond to the truth, at least concerning what his sons were directly or indirectly aware of.

If we examine the documentation about Evaristo de Chirico’s intense life, which was not long, it can be said first and foremost that his sons were under no illusions about their father. A sober and respectful description in his son Giorgio’s *Memoirs* is befitting of the man that Evaristo de Chirico was; an extraordinary man both due to his humanity and his proven entrepreneurial skills, so much so that even today his memory lives on and is held in high regard in Greece and in the city of Volos in particular.⁵

Evaristo de Chirico was born in Constantinople on 21 June 1841 to a noble family of Italian origin (fig. 1), with Neapolitan, Spanish and French roots on his mother’s side⁶. Aside from possessing full Italian citizenship, Evaristo de Chirico felt completely Italian, thanks to his upbringing, studies and culture acquired in Italy, and as Giorgio de Chirico recalled, he developed strong feelings that were pro-monarchy and pro-Risorgimento. We can speak of Evaristo as a great Italian who worked abroad but who never forgot his country of origin, towards which he felt a profound sentiment of belonging, rather than to the country in which he happened to be born.

By the age of 18, we find him in Tuscany at the prestigious Florentine Technical Institute where he studied between 1859 and 1861. In 1859, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was still in existence and was governed by the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty. Evaristo de Chirico subsequently worked in

⁴ A. Savinio, *Casa “La vita”*, Bompiani, Milan 1943, p. 270.

⁵ See G. dalla Chiesa: “There is no doubt that this engineer from Italy became a legendary figure in Greece and in Thessaly in a matter of just a few years” and “when the first part of the Volos-Larissa railway was opened on 22 April 1884, his father had already been honoured by the king in person together with Mavrogordatos. This time however Evaristo de Chirico outdid himself thus justifying the legendary standing which he still enjoys in this area today”. In *Verso i luoghi della formazione. Atene: scenario dell’anima Monaco: strumento della Bildung*, in *De Chirico nel centenario della nascita*, Mondadori, Milan 1988, p. 55. And again: “[...] whilst the technical abilities for which he is well known, his profound knowledge of people and places, require him to continually solve new problems; work involving reclamation and water supply. According to local history, he was also involved in the building of several clock towers, one in the city next to the cathedral of St. Nicholas and others in the villages of Pelion: Argalasti, Aghios Lavrendis. They were characterised by their style, which was different and that the local people would describe as ‘Italian’”. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶ See N. Velissiotis, *The Origins of Adelaide Mabili and her Marriage to Giorgio de Chirico. Restoration of the Historical Truth*, in these Journals, pp. 122-144.

N.° 365^o delle famiglie VIA S. S. Romualdo PIANO 4.° N.° civico 262

COGNOME	NOME	GENITORE	PATRIA	STATO	ETA'	CONFESSIONE	PROFESSIONE	ARRIVO IN ROMA	ARRIVO IN PARROCCHIA	PROVENIENZA	PARTENZA
De Chirico	Giorgio	Federico	Costantinopoli	leg.	70	c.c.	Proprietario		May 1861		
"	Mabile	Lorenzo	Isola di Brindisi	leg.	53	c.c.					
De Chirico	Alberto	Giorgio	Costantinopoli	c.c.	30	c.c.					
"	Zenaide	"	"	vul.	26	c.c.					
"	Evaristo	"	"	c.c.	24	c.c.					
"	Gustavo	"	"	c.c.	16	c.c.					
Pecorari	Marianna	Città di Castello		vul.	26	c.c.	St. S. Spirito		Nov 61		

fig. 2 Death register, parish of Santa Maria in Via Lata, Rome

Tuscany, Calabria, Sicily and Piedmont where he completed his engineering studies and gained his degree.⁷ Meanwhile the head of the family, Giorgio Maria de Chirico, who is believed to have taken up residence in Florence (although this cannot be conclusively confirmed), moved to Rome in May 1865 to live on Via San Romualdo 262 (fifth floor). This can be seen in the parish family records held at the parish of Santa Maria in Via Lata, which today is Via del Corso in central Rome (fig. 2).⁸

References by Savinio and de Chirico to their father's professional training and work in Italy are verified in a document which the author of this paper recently discovered in the records of London's *Institution of Civil Engineers*, showing his admittance to the register of engineers on 4 November 1890. This document is extremely important given that it was Evaristo himself who wrote his curriculum vitae about his studies and intense activity carried out from 1859 to the beginning of 1890 (figs. 3-4)⁹

From 1859 to 1861 he was a Student at the Technical Institute of Florence. From 1862 to '63 acted as Section Engineer for the Contractors, on the construction of the Railway between Pistoia and Bologna; from 1863 to '65, was in charge of the survey for Calabrian and Sicilian Railways, South of Italy; 1865 to '70 Engineer of the Northern Italian Railways in Turin and Savona; 1870-'73, in charge, on behalf of the Company, of the supervision of the construction of 80 kilometres of the Railway from Constantinople to Adrianople, 1873-'79, in charge as Director of the Works for the Contractors of the line from Sofia to Kustendjie (Bulgaria) 75 kilometres; and from 1881 to date has been head of the Firm of Chirico & Co., Civil Engineers and Contractors, engaged, amongst other things in the contraction of the Thessalian Railways, 200 kilometres.

⁷ The document from Turin Polytechnic has not yet been located.

⁸ The family nucleus was made up of Giorgio de Chirico, son of Federico of Constantinople, a married man of 70 years of age, as well as his wife Adelaide de Chirico Mabile, daughter of Lorenzo of the Ionian islands, aged 53, their children Alberto, Zenaide, Evaristo and Gustavo, aged 30, 26, 24, 16 respectively, and a servant, Marianna Pecorari from Città di Castello. Via S. Romualdo ran from Piazza Venezia to Piazza SS. Apostoli and took its name from the church of Saint Romualdo, which was demolished together with the road, today incorporated into Via C. Battisti, when Via Nazionale was created.

⁹ I would like to thank Carol Morgan, archivist of The Institution of Civil Engineers for providing me with reproductions of the documents.

Recd from Council at 10 June 1890

FORM A. 27

The Institution of Civil Engineers,

ESTABLISHED (AUGUST 2, 1818) — INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER JOHN 5, 1825.

25, GREAT GEORGE STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.
[TELEGRAMS, "INSTITUTION, LONDON." TELEPHONE, 3051.]

EVARISTO DE CHIRICO,

Christian and Surnames and Address in full, with date of birth, of 13 UNIVERSITY STREET, ATHENS, GREECE., being upwards of twenty-five years of age, born on the 21st day of JUNE, 1841, and being desirous of belonging to THE INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS, I recommend him, from PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE, as in every respect worthy of that distinction, because

FROM 1859 TO 1861 HE WAS A STUDENT AT THE TECHNICAL INSTITUTE OF FLORENCE.
FROM 1862 TO 1863, ACTED AS SECTION ENGINEER FOR THE CONTRACTORS, ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RAILWAY BETWEEN PISTOIA AND BOLOGNA; FROM 1863 TO 65, WAS IN CHARGE OF THE SURVEY FOR THE CALABRIAN AND SICILIAN RAILWAYS, SOUTH OF ITALY; 1865 TO '70 ENGINEER OF THE NORTHERN ITALIAN RAILWAYS IN TURIN AND SAVONA; 1870-73, IN CHARGE ON BEHALF OF THE COMPANY, OF THE SUPERVISION OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF 80 KILOMETRES OF THE RAILWAY FROM CONSTANTINOPLE TO ADRIANOPLE; 1873-79, IN CHARGE, AS DIRECTOR OF WORKS, FOR THE CONTRACTORS OF THE LINE FROM SOFIA TO KUSTENDJIL (BULGARIA) 75 KILOMETRES; AND FROM 1881 TO DATE HAS BEEN HEAD OF THE FIRM OF CHIRICO & CO., CIVIL ENGINEERS AND CONTRACTORS, ENGAGED, AMONGST OTHER THINGS, IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE THESSALIAN RAILWAYS, 200 KILOMETRES.

The Qualifications of the Candidate must be distinctly specified according to the spirit of Arts. 2, 4, 5 & 6, Sect. II, of the By-Laws (SEE OVER).

On the above grounds, I beg leave to propose him to the Council as a proper person to belong to the Institution.

Signature of the Proposer *John Brunles* Corporate Member.

Dated this 23rd day of April, 1890.

We, the undersigned, concur in the above recommendation, from PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE, and being fully convinced that *Evaristo de Chirico* is in every respect a proper person to belong to the Institution.

FROM PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE.	FROM PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE.
Signatures of at least FIVE Sponsors, all of whom must be CORPORATE MEMBERS of the Institution. [See Instructions on the back.] <i>Henry Roe</i> <i>William Kennedy</i> <i>John Innes</i> <i>Henry J. Pingle</i>	<i>W. H. Stables</i> <i>Chas. Brunles</i>

The Council, having considered the above recommendation, present *Evaristo de Chirico* to be balloted for as an Associate Member of THE INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS.

Read for the first time } 10th November 1890 18
 Passed by the Council } 18
 Signed, *John Brunles* Chairman.

Read at Ordinary Meeting 11th November 1890
 Balloted for 2 December 1890

To be filled up by the Council.

fig. 3 The Institution of Civil Engineers, telegram application to the institution completed by Evaristo de Chirico

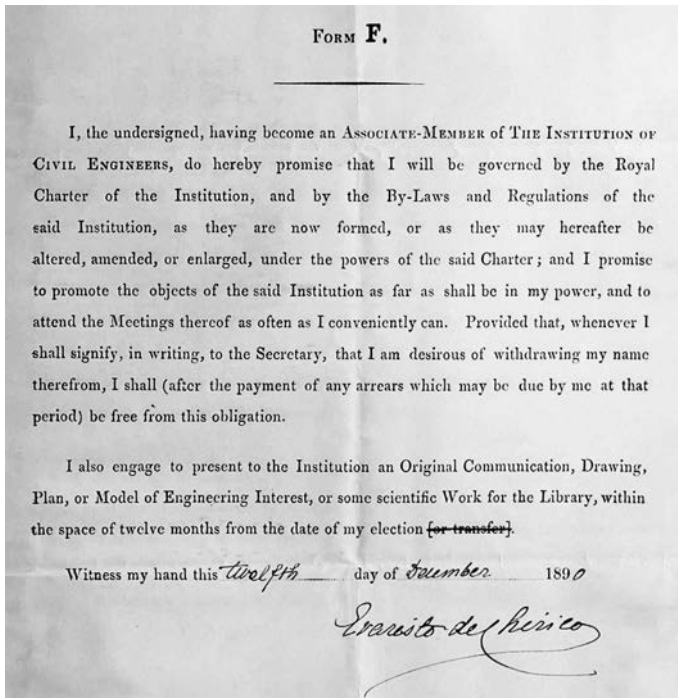


fig. 4 Oath of allegiance signed by Evaristo de Chirico on being accepted into The Institution of Civil Engineers, 12 December 1890

The indications given by Evaristo de Chirico are validated and confirmed in other documents, such as a letter he sent from Turin to his uncle Paolo Mabili (fig. 5)¹⁰, a watercolour given to him in 1870 in Turin by Felice Donghi¹¹, a friend who was a painter and technical draughtsman of railway projects (figs. 6-7), and again in a letter dated 1 October 1872 from his mother Adelaide to her brother Paolo

¹⁰ A letter from 6 November 1869 written on headed paper from the Ferrovie dell'Alta Italia (Railways of Northern Italy) to his uncle Paolo Mabili is interesting for its brief reference to the local situation which was in no way positive: "In a letter that I received yesterday from Livorno, my dear uncle gave me the very good news of the forthcoming wedding of dear Ester and I did not want to delay in expressing my joy at such a happy event. From what Alberto tells me of Mr. Rodostamo, I have reason to believe that my dear cousin will be as happy with her husband as she was at home with her parents, and that says it all; but surely she won't have everything that she deserves in keeping with her beauty, moral values, grace, spirit and upbringing. Please be sure to give her my sincerest congratulations. Dear uncle, before conferring my congratulations to you, it would be correct to ask you to accept my apologies for not having written sooner, but I'm banking on your kindness by assuring you that my silence has not been due to forgetting my duties or a lack of affection.

I'm likely to be sent to Constantinople by the railway company in two or three months and it is my intention to pass by Corfu just as long as nothing prevents me from doing so. The newspapers here rarely publish correspondence with Greece so I am not really abreast of their internal affairs. This is a regretful situation as I have always been greatly interested by everything about Greece in general and about Corfu in particular. I cannot give you any news from here as it would only be disgrace, crime and scandal. Once again my congratulations and please do pass my warmest regards to my aunt, with love and respect, your nephew Evaristo."

¹¹ Felice Donghi (Milan 19 December 1828 - Turin 1 February 1887). He attended the Brera Academy and was a well known painter. His watercolours representing the barricades and the events of Porta Vittoria during the Five Days of Milan of 1848 were published in periodicals of the time. In 1868 he moved to Turin where he was employed as a technical draughtsman for the Ferrovie dell'Alta Italia, the same company where Evaristo de Chirico worked, as documented above. In July 1870 Felice Donghi gave Evaristo de Chirico a watercolour (seen in the above photograph) with the following dedication: "To Engineer Evaristo de Chirico from the painter Felice Donghi in memory of his friendship, 24 July 1870, Turin." Curiously, Giorgio de Chirico kept the watercolour in a folder on which he marked the date the painter gave it to his father as "1970".

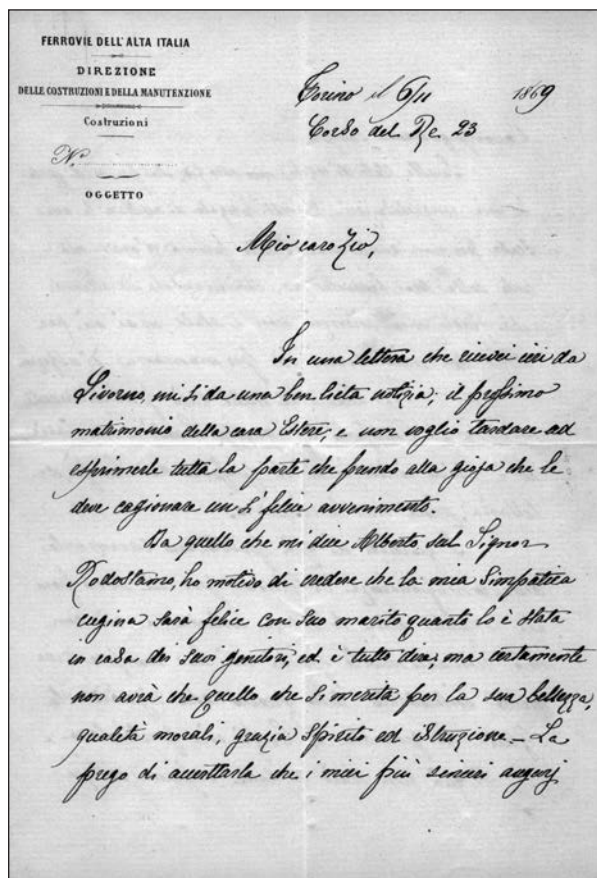


fig. 5a Evaristo de Chirico, letter written on Ferrovie dell'Alta Italia letterhead paper sent from Turin to his uncle Paolo Mabili, 6 November 1869, page 1

stating that Evaristo was “in the mountains in Turkey [where he is] working tirelessly, he is on the verge of a brilliant career, god willing.”¹²

III. The discovery of this important document made me pick up to research I conducted some ten years ago at the Foreign Ministry Archive in Rome following the introduction of Professor Giuseppe Baldocci who was Secretary General of the Farnesina at the time and to whom I must express my thanks. What encouraged me to undertake this research was the affirmation by certain scholars regarding a supposed “non-Italianness” of Evaristo de Chirico and his sons, who supposedly lacked all sense of belonging to Italy¹³.

From the documents that I was able to consult and which will be closely examined further in a forthcoming study¹⁴, we see not only Evaristo de Chirico’s full possession and exercising of his Italian citizen-

ship but also the frequent high level relations that he had with the authorities of the Italian Royal Government, including a direct encounter with Francesco Crispi.

Evaristo de Chirico nurtured Italian interests, not as a dragoman like his father and his grandfather, but as an Italian businessman, looking to promote the interests of Italy and of the country’s workers who emigrated in search of steady work.¹⁵

¹² A letter from Adelaide de Chirico to brother Paolo, Livorno 1 October 1872. See also N. Velissiotis, *The Origins of Adelaide Mabili...*, in these Journals (the letter is transcribed in full on p. 100 note 35).

¹³ P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919*, Bulfinch, New York 1997, p. 10: “[...] Evaristo de Chirico, a nobleman of Dalmatian blood, who styled himself a Florentine though he was born in Constantinople”. And again “Notwithstanding his and his brother Alberto’s regular assertions on the definite Italianness of their parents [...]” P. Baldacci, G. Roos, *De Chirico*, exhibition catalogue, Marsilio Editore, Venice 2007, p. 2.

¹⁴ This essay aims to simply present some important documents and several reflections that merit further examination.

¹⁵ Alberto Savinio’s portrait of his father is revealing: “Nivasio Dolcemare, an Italian engineer who crossed the Adriatic to take the railway civilisation to the Plain of Thessaly, belongs to the category of pioneers, of soldiers with no army nor uniform, of fighters with no battle, of heroes with no music and with no honour.” A. Savinio, *Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare*, 1941 (1973), p. 121.

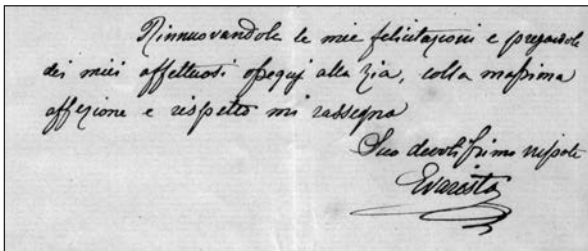
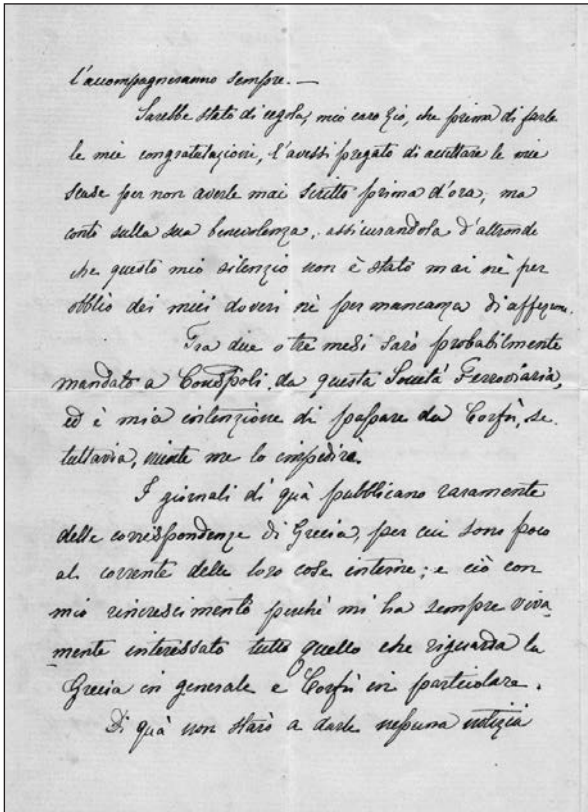


fig. 5b-c Evaristo de Chirico, letter written on Ferrovie dell'Alta Italia letterhead paper sent from Turin to his uncle Paolo Mabili, 6 November 1869, pages 2-3

Documents that are particularly interesting regard the involvement of cooperatives from Romagna, supported by the Royal Government, involved in the relocation of Italian labourers for the construction of railways subcontracted by Turkish and Greek governments: from the planned construction of the Vlore-Velinisti line¹⁶ to that of the Piraeus-Larissa line, an endeavour which had a negative outcome for Evaristo de Chirico's personal assets due to the withdrawal by the English company that was the chief contractor and default by the Greek government (fig. 8). A lengthy and passionate letter of protest sent from Volos on 22 December 1896 to the Italian Minister the Duke Avarna in Athens¹⁷ highlights Evaristo de Chirico's duty and ongoing relations with the Italian authorities at the highest level, authorities who had turned to him for an important entrepreneurial initiative that would have benefited Italian workers. The initiative came to nothing and then, as often happens in Italian affairs and amongst Italians, no appreciation of the work carried out in the interest of the Royal Government by one of its citizens was offered.

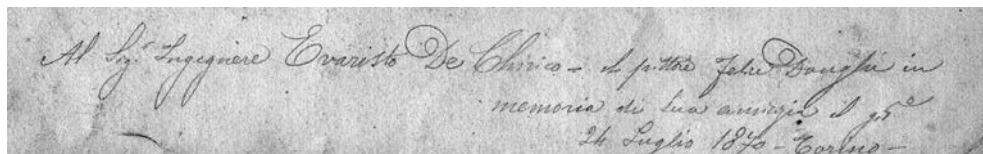
¹⁶ A memoir in preparation of a letter, dated 23 November 1890, reads:

"Athens, 23 Nov. 1890

Private and confidential

Dear Minister,

I consider it of great urgency that I inform you of the secret practices that Comm. de Chirico is carrying out with the intention of winning the contract to build a railway in Albania. Comm. de Chirico, of Florence, who I have had the opportunity of meeting on various occasions, sent a memorandum today to the Ambassador Fè d'Ostiani in Constantinople and he sent me copy of this together with a letter from him. I'm sending you the memorandum together with a copy of the cover letter that refers to the business that Comm. de Chirico is undertaking that is of the utmost confidentiality given that it states that it is of great importance that the matter be kept completely secret.



figg. 6-7 Felice Donghi, watercolour given to Evaristo de Chirico with a handwritten dedication on the back: "To Engineer Sir Evaristo De Chirico – the painter Felice Donghi in memory of his friendship on 24 July 1870, Turin"

As I mentioned and as you are already aware, it relates to issues regarding the contract of a railway that will start in Vlore and cross Albania to a point on the Greek border (Velinisti) in conjunction with the Thessaly railway and the railway for Thessaloniki and Constantinople which were recently sub-contracted by the Ottoman government to the German Kaulle. The planned line would be important for the Italian railway because it establishes an express maritime service between the Italian coast and Albania which could become the main means of transport for people travelling to the East. In addition to this, Comm. de Chirico, who is held in high regard and respected as an extremely able and honest entrepreneur, intends to engage Italian workers in the construction of the railway, given that he gives preference for work contracts on the ground to cooperatives of workers from Romagna who would thus secure regular and well paid work for several years in a country like Albania which is very close to Italy and where the Italian language is generally known.

This is why I have confidence that his Excellency will want to highlight the great importance of one of our countrymen securing a contract in Turkey now that the Germans, French and Belgians are eagerly competing for the privilege to build the railways to the East, in order for him to obtain the full and effective diplomatic support of our government. Engineer de Chirico who was until a few days ago in Constantinople and who negotiated the deal with great vizier told me that he had rather favourable arrangements and that he considered the building possible if you should let Constantinople know that you have taken the matter under your high auspices.

To his Excellency Foreign Minister Sir Francesco Crispi, Rome." (Foreign Affairs Ministry Archive). The letter written by Evaristo de Chirico to Count Fè d'Ostiani on 22 November 1890 deals with the issuing of the contract for the Vlore-Ioannina-Velinisti line by the Ottoman government. Evaristo writes about not being overly confident of a positive outcome "because what is against me is my nationality (Italian, ed.) which seems to surprise the Turks." He closes the letter by writing "whatever the outcome, I will send my request to Mr. Ambassador in Constantinople and I will do what he believes right; but I can assure Mr. Conte that success will depend on the support, substantial or otherwise, that the Royal Government affords me."

Lettre 23 Nov 1890

Reservato e Risponde

Vostre urgente informan^{te} S. V.
della pratica seguita che
sta facendo il Com. di Chirico
nell'intento di ottenere la
concessione di una fonderia
in Albani

Signore Ministro

Detto Com. di Chirico
di Roma, dal quale ho avuto
occupare di intermettere altre
volte V. E.; ho spedito in
giornate all'Ambasciatore di
Belino su Costantinopoli una
memoria della quale mi ha
rimesso copia, accompagnandola
con una ^{lettera} lettera

Spedisco la prima all'Ecceles.
Vostre e in copia copia dell'ac-
compagnatoria, la quale, al pari
di ogni altro documento che
si riferisce all'affare di
mi il Com. di Chirico si occupa
ha carattere riservatissimo
essendo di massima importanza
che la cosa sia mantenuta
in segreto nel più perfetto
segreto

A Sua Eccellenza
M. de France Crispi
Ministro degli Esteri
Roma

fig. 8 The first part of a draft of a letter dated 23 November 1890 which deals on Evaristo de Chirico's behalf with the procedure of securing the permit for the construction of the Vlore-Velinisti line

IV. Further proof of Evaristo's life in Greece is seen in his involvement with the Italian community in Volos. This included the building of the Catholic church and participation of its decor, by providing all the material and labour that was required and personally delivering several paintings from Italy, including an *Immaculate Conception* which can still be found in the church today.¹⁸

Although he was not able to be made Italian Counsel of Larissa given that he was a businessman, he nonetheless took on the management of it, as shown in a letter dated 12 December 1882 written by the priest of Volos.¹⁹

Without sacrificing time with his family, Evaristo's active work in Volos and Athens was well known and shared by his sons who had the chance to meet Italian soldiers, including those who supported Garibaldi during the 1897 war between Greece and Turkey, with whom they appear in a photograph (fig. 9).

This is how Giorgio de Chirico recalls this moment in his *Memoirs*: "English, French, Russian and Italian battleships arrived to protect the citizens of their respective countries. The Italian flag fluttered on the balcony of our house."

Savinio's memories about the war are even more detailed:

After the departure of the black steamships, the port was as empty as a cursed lake and here an iron ship bristling with canons arrived one morning amongst long wails of a siren. On the stern flew the Italian flag. My life changed once again. I now had contact with Italy, that mysterious land that prior to this point I had heard talked about only as a dear but distant thing.

The ship's officers were all handsome and destined from the first to the last for everlasting glory. One of them had a double set of teeth, a high-pitched laugh and a particular fondness for me. He let me cross a part of the prow from the breech to the stern. In all, I had the stature of a large bullet. A battery of sailors had set up tents in our garden and at night they sang Santa Lucia and kept vigil on our sleeping house. What a pity my great friends had departed! Those stuck-up boys would have seen the

¹⁷ "I don't want to exaggerate anything; but if I associated myself with the Royal Government it was because of the insistence of the people who represented it and in order to help promote work which, in itself, was good. [...] Despite these very important undertakings, instead of workers the cooperatives sent around a hundred socialists who were anything but workers, who set off again a fortnight after they had come, and for services, victuals and barrack sent an individual who was arrested with others from Romagna for being a counterfeiter [...] the pulling-out of the English and the default by the Greeks would not have reduced me to such a miserable condition if the cooperatives had sent me two or three thousand workers, or even one thousand, instead of a hundred socialists who were thieves and swindlers. [...] As I requested from Mr. Barone Blanc in writing when he was Foreign Minister and from his Excellency Mr. Crispi in person, either the Royal Government ensures I get paid by the Greek Government or the Royal Government itself pays me or we take on debts that are not large, and credit that is a large of the business; and one day the Royal Government will get back everything that it has spent, because either it will have a positive arbitrary sentence or work on the line will become active; and because sooner or later this Government will be obliged to undertake work, it cannot begin without paying the subcontractors and me especially."

¹⁸ "For the chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, [Evaristo de Chirico] brought a large painting of the Virgin from Italy" in M. N. Poussos-Mihidonis, *Giovanni Dalesio (1856-1898) e la comunità cattolica di Volos*, Athens 1993, p. 21. In addition to news about the family, a letter of 24 October 1883 written by Evaristo to the Archbishop and Apostolic Delegate in Greece, Mons. Marango, is particularly interesting on the subject of the strategy to purchase the land for the building of the church. "Any intervention of mine would cause the prices to raise exorbitantly instead of making them drop. This is because it is a game of the people of Volos to target, as they say, anyone who is part of the railway. I therefore believe the best thing would be to wait for Signor Robert to return" (Episcopal Archive of Athens).

¹⁹ "Signor Robert [Consul of France] with whom one often talks about the new Church told me one of his ideas which I support and I'm putting forward for your approval. I would therefore think, Sir, that it would be a good idea to call upon the assistant bishop of Paris, who also holds the title of Archbishop of Larissa in Partibus in order to make him feel obliged to help the worshippers of this parish. Mr. Kirykos who is the director of the Consulate of Larissa can write to him, and I can also do it at the same time being the priest of Volos and Larissa." (Letter written in Greek and dated 12 December 1882 from the vicar of Volos Marinos Xanthakis to the Archbishop of Athens Giovanni Marangos).

²⁰ "The war had moved into the background. I heard about clashes between the Greeks and the Turks near Larissa. I watched the torn soldiers pass



fig. 9 Giorgio and Alberto with Garibaldi soldiers during the Greco-Turkish war of 1897

difference between their country and mine!²⁰

V. If we look solely at what has been detailed so far, we can say without a shadow of a doubt that Evaristo de Chirico was not only an Italian citizen (as Giorgio and Alberto's baptism papers show and is likewise shown in the parish death register) but he also had a strong sense of belonging to the Kingdom of Italy, sharing the ideals of the reunification movement and whose belonging and ideals he fondly passed down to his sons in all of its forms. We only need cite some examples from the brief biography that Giorgio de Chirico sent to Giovanni Scheiwiller in 1928 with the following tone: "My father gave me my first lessons on Italian literature by having me read Dante, Tasso, Ariosto and Ugo Foscolo. I then carried on by myself and studied Latin, Ancient Greek, French and German" (fig. 10).

It is therefore clear how important it was to Evaristo that his sons who were born in Greece received and nurtured a profound Italian upbringing, both in the studying of the language and literature of their distant homeland and in learning to understand and respect its traditions and eminent figures. Mention is made of portraits of King Umberto and Queen Margherita which hung on the walls of Evaristo's study in oval wooden carved frames, but all of Giorgio's *Memoirs* are also peppered with examples of the two boys' everyday life marked by an education in Italian culture (as well as international culture), entrusted to a large extent to a community of Italians who had moved to Greece to work and who gravitated, as so often is the case, to one another. The recollections in the book include notes on Italian, arithmetic and history lessons that were given to the brothers by Pistone, an Italian master mason who would come to their

by, some of them injured. I was lurking with my ears pricked for the mysteries that were surrounding me. Despite precautions taken to shield me from events, one day I found out that the Catholic priest, 'our' priest, was discovered in the manse with a dagger in his back. The silence of the night was sometimes broken by the gallop of a horse, a shot fired in the distance, the howling of a dog. A Greek doctor friend slept in the drawing room on two armchairs. Life had never been this varied, entertaining.

One day my father announced that Garibaldi's men were about to arrive. The happy news I inferred from my father's beaming face. They came in a group. They were noisy and bearded, and wielded pistols and wore red shirts. The house was turned upside down. The sumptuously decked tables in the garden abounded with flowers and flags. On flaming fires pasta steamed on one side whilst epic cuts of meat smoked on the other. The sun was high in the sky, cyclopean feasts and cheers. We children dressed up like Garibaldi's men. The correspondent from I don't know which newspaper who travelled behind the paladins of independence, made us pose and took our photograph. In the afternoon we all went to the station together to see off Garibaldi's men who were setting off for Domokos. I don't know who picked me up. I found myself face to face with a young man who smiled at me from the window of his carriage. I gave him the bunch of flowers that I held in my hand. He took the flowers, put them in the barrel of his rifle and while the train set off amongst 'hurrahs', he blew me a kiss." See A. Savinio, *Achille Innamorato*, Adelphi, Milan 1993, pp. 177-179.

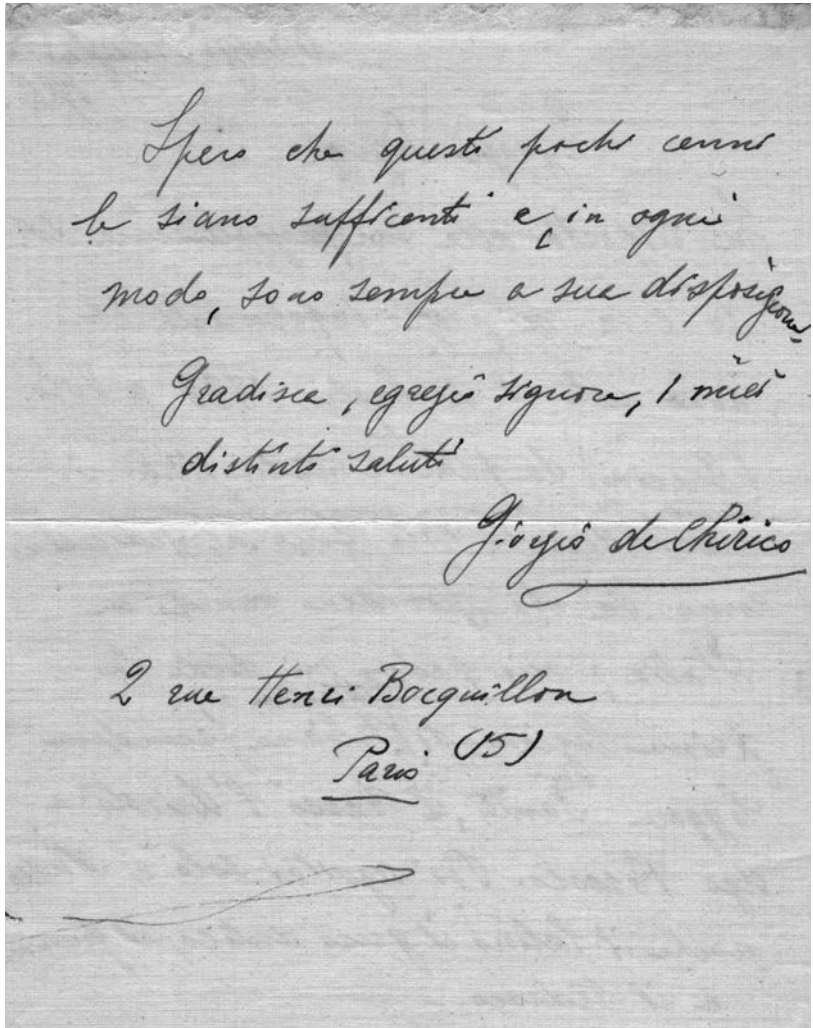
Parigi 14 luglio 1928

Egregio Signore

In risposta alla sua pregiatissima del
 10 e. m. mi prego informarla che
 sono nato il 10 luglio 1888 a Volo
 (Grecia) da padre e madre italiani. -
 Son vissuto colà fino al sedicesimo
 anno di età, poi sono venuto in
 Italia; mio padre mi diede le
 prime lezioni di ^{Letteratura} italiana facendomi
 leggere Dante, il Tasso l' Ariosto e
 Ugo Foscolo. Poi seguirono solo e studiai
 anche il latino il greco antico, il francese
 e il tedesco. -

fig. 10a-b G. de Chirico to G. Scheiwiller, handwritten letter with a biographical note, Paris 14 July 1928.
 Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico Archive, Fondo Vastano

house, and who was later succeeded by Vergara, a Sicilian teacher, as well as the description of a subsequent Italian painting teacher called Barbieri. A brief recount of time spent at the Leonino high school (named after Pope Leon XIII), run by Catholic priests and attended by the children of Italian residents in Athens, is also included. Amongst other characters who enliven the colourful mosaic of his *Memoirs* is painter Bellincioni di Bologna (in reality Guglielmo Bilancioni from Rimini) who had frescoed the cupola of the Catholic church of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens and the home of the Engineer Serpieri, who was shown young Giorgio's early drawings and studies. The *Memoirs* also bear witness to the childhood reading of a beautifully illustrated volume of *I nani burloni* (The prankster dwarfs) that was given to the artist, which anticipates the feelings of stupor and marvel



that de Chirico later assigns in his *Meditations of a Painter* to the real work of art, which must abandon all logic and good sense, thus nearing “the dream state and mental attitude of a child”. He also added that whilst reading *Thus spoke Zarathustra* he felt: “the same impression I had as a child when reading *The Adventures of Pinocchio*”.

And we must not forget the Italian newspapers such as “Domenica del Corriere” which were delivered to Evaristo de Chirico’s home and which his sons read, as well as the food packages sent from Italy that included stationery and even mineral water.²¹ It seems clear however that the two

²¹ A. Savinio: “I was born an Italian in Greece [...]. But from the yearned-for prize, from the invoked paradise, from Italy revealed in its beauty, sweetness, in the magnificence of an ineffable pre-spectre, something came to me from time to time, a voice or an object, in the form of a huge forest: a sweating mortadella, a weeping provolone, the plays of Ermete Novelli.” Savinio goes on: “the tins of butter that came from Codogno were branded

brothers grew up immersed in a foreign but lively milieu in which Italy was for the de Chirico family, as for other emigrants, a shared feeling that was ever present in the culturally stimulating, international community in which they lived. It was certainly not an idealisation by someone who learns about Italy via television as happens today in developing countries, but something that was experienced on a daily basis with tradition that would also continue in Italy. Savinio recalls the moment when they left Greece at the end of the summer in 1906: "I was leaving the land where I was born and where I had lived the mythical part of my life, I left for another land of which I possessed just an idyllic knowledge of but to which I felt connected by bonds of blood and thoughts."²²

VI. In the face of such a thorough and enlightening description, one can only feel seriously perplexed by the statements made by those who see intrigue and conspiracy everywhere in the history of the de Chirico family. According to whom, the family's origins "have always presented dark and mysterious aspects, a time referred to only with the declarations of interested parties and that were almost always vague, unclear or categorically untrue."²³

In light of what has been shown, as well as from the documents cited, it is clear that such statements are unfounded. It is indisputable that his sons described what they knew of their father and that there was no need for them to lie or to change anything. Evaristo de Chirico was – and felt – Italian through and through, and where he happened to be born was completely by the by. Furthermore he was given Italian honours, including the title of *commendatore*.²⁴

For years, some have focused their attention on rewriting Giorgio de Chirico's entire life story²⁵ in an arbitrary fashion, with a constancy that smacks of doggedness to the point of obsession, with a

with obese heifers grazing on lawns of spinach, of the like that Attica had never even dreamed of, not even before the geological stripping that Plato talks of in *Critias* [...]. A wardrobe at home with lots of little glass-fronted drawers and called "The Products of Italy" was the microcosm of my beloved universe [...]. Following a typhoid epidemic in our town in Thessaly, my father started to have water from the Serino sent from Naples in demijohns, and we sipped the elixir of life from this precious water. [...] In this search for 'Italian products', there was more than desire for things that were different to what was indigenous: there was the idea of seizing the virtues of a fatherland and nourishing them that was similar to the way that one believes through communion: there was faith in the spirit of the products, there was the idea that brought the soil of Poland to the Roman monument to Pilsudski [...]. The arrival of Ermete Novelli was announced from afar as the light at the end of a dark tunnel [...]. For the evening in his honour, Novelli added a canto from the *Divine Comedy* to the programme. 'A heavy thunder shattered the deep sleep in my head, so that I came to myself, like someone woken by force' and with these words, pronounced by that voice, the soul of Italy rushed into my heart. 'Listen to him carefully,' urged our father 'from him you will hear the most beautiful Italian.'" In *Ascolta il tuo cuore, città*, Bompiani, Milan 1944, pp. 147-149.

²² A. Savinio, *Narrate uomini la vostra storia*, Bompiani 1942, p. 143.

²³ P. Baldacci, *Evaristo de Chirico was born in Istanbul and not in Florence. The importance of a seemingly unimportant question - Evaristo's birth and baptism certificate found*. An article published on the website of L'Archivio dell'arte metafisica (2010/7).

²⁴ The title of *commendatore*, cited in the obituary by the Railway company, published in the journal ESTIA: "Engineer E. de Chirico who was a director of the Thessaly railway died last Thursday. Born in Florence to a noble family, he moved to Constantinople and managed the construction of the railway line in Turkey and Bulgaria. After the annexation of Thessaly to the Greek State, he moved to Athens as a representative of Theodoros Mavrokordatos and managed the building of the Thessaly railway, the best in Greece. He was made a director of the company and later also became the commercial director, offering his services especially during the period of the occupation of Thessaly by the Turks. He was an eloquent man, highly cultured, a worldly man in all respects, a real gentleman who was loved and held in high regard by all. The funeral took place yesterday and saw a large turnout that included members of the Board of Directors of the Thessaly railway, the Italian and French ambassadors and the most important members of the Italian community. On E. de Chirico's casket were written the honours of the *Croce d'Oro del Salvatore* and of a *Commendatore of Italy* as well as others; military honours were made and magnificent wreaths were laid." Savinio recalls that during his father's funeral, the band that accompanied the casket played the funeral march from Ludwig van Beethoven's *Sonata* n. 12 op. 26 in C major.

²⁵ Baldacci (and Roos) often change their version of the de Chirico family's relations with the Kingdom of Sardinia. From a first citing of Evaristo as a self-styled Florentine (Baldacci 1997, p. 10), Baldacci then went on to illustrate the de Chirico family's relations with the Kingdom of Sardinia, from which their Italian citizenship would have derived, firstly perhaps in the form of dual diplomatic citizenship which then became effective and complete for the members of the family who moved to Italy (p. 11). And subsequently about Giorgio "Filigone" de Chirico, after having stated that he was a "representative of the Kingdom of Sardinia in Constantinople" (p. 11), Baldacci explains that "in reality he was only a diplomatic interpreter of the Kingdom of Sardinia" (p. 30, note 10). Ten years later in *De Chirico* (Baldacci-Roos 2007, p. 2) it was proved that "Baron Giorgio Filigone de Chirico

strange *transfer* that makes them see lies and distortions everywhere. Such action is carried out in order to establish a theory that would explain the origins of de Chirico's artistic and existentialist poetry based on the assumption that secrecy surrounded the family's true origins and that the artist suffered from a lack of fatherland. All we can suggest to these authors is that they look elsewhere if they want to continue to say something other than the historical truth found in Giorgio's and Alberto's recollections, as well as in official documents. Evaristo de Chirico's Florentine origins refer to his being a citizen – before the unification of Italy – of Florence i.e. the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and this is what is recognised by the Italian authorities. Following the unification of Italy, he would be identified as Italian, as shown by Giorgio's and Alberto's baptism certification and in the parish records of the Church of Athens in which Evaristo's death was registered.²⁶

The written account Savinio gave when the Fascist regime (regardless of the fact that Savinio himself wrote for the regime's newspapers) attacked the de Chirico family accusing them of having Jewish origins (which in any event would surely have been an honour for Giorgio de Chirico), was a historical reconstruction that certainly held truth or indeed was entirely truthful. Saying Savinio had lied in a text written in defence of foreseeable persecution had the authorities rightly or wrongly considered them of the Jewish "race", signifies a total misunderstanding of Savinio's use of irony. By stating that their grandfather Giorgio Maria Maria was the first to take the Italian flag to the East when the Kingdom of Sardinia became part of the Kingdom of Italy, Savinio brilliantly removed all doubt as to the family's history. Giorgio Maria must have already been in Italy (if he had not stayed on in Constantinople); at the time, Evaristo was living in Florence where he was a student at the Technical Institute.

Baldacci and Roos's affirmation that the grandfather had "subsequently become ambassador of the newly born Kingdom of Italy", must be duly verified.²⁷

(Constantinople 1794-1875), [...] had linked the origins of his family to the Savoy dynasty, taking on diplomatic representation of the Kingdom of Sardinia which had previously been his father Federico's, and subsequently becoming ambassador of the newly-founded Kingdom of Sardinia. It was thanks to this position that the de Chirico's Italian citizenship had its origins, many of whom moved to Tuscany and Rome after unification". As we can see, these "hard fact" statements are taken as acquired historical data. Just three years later in *Evaristo de Chirico was born in Istanbul...* (*ibidem*, 2010) the story changes once again – but not for the last time – with statements that we have already seen regarding the substantial importance of the birthplace "of the father and mother of the two artists". In this publication there is also an accusation levelled at the Foundation which is "obstinately set – for reasons which I largely fail to grasp – upon defending the fantastical versions spread by the two brothers" which, as we have seen, are not fantastical in any way.

Just a year later, in *Origins and History of the Chirico or Kiriko Family from Dubrovnik to Constantinople* (*ibidem*, 2010/10) it changes radically to come to the surprising conclusion that "Giorgio Filogono de Chirico, alleged father of Evaristo and grandfather of Giorgio and Alberto, never existed" and is the result of an overlapping of two different historical figures. Velissiotis, who is not a historian by profession, is right when he states a simple truth: when a historian finds himself faced with facts that are not proven, "he normally pauses and makes further investigations" never mind that a historian proceeds "with adjustments and approximations just because they fit his theories". (See Velissiotis, in these Journals, cit.). In reality Giorgio de Chirico (whose middle name was Maria, as was Evaristo's and Giorgio de Chirico's) was the second son of Federico de Chirico, born after his brother Antonio, who would become Evaristo's godfather, as shown in the relevant documentation, and who would die in Rome on 9 November 1867 and would be buried in the historical Verano cemetery.

²⁶ Noting Evaristo de Chirico's death in the parish records, with the calendar used at the time, priest Don Brindisi writes "Anno Domini 1905, die 18 mai (in reality 5 May) Evaristus Chirico, *italus*, improvviso morbo corruptus, animam Deo redditit, cuius corpus seppellitum est in coemeterio, 63 annorum", p. 87 no. 495 of the parish book of deaths. On Giorgio de Chirico's baptism certificate of 29 July 1888 in Volos, we can read: "Ill. mus Dominus Franciscus Maria Canonicus Braggiotti cubicularius ad honorem, de mei consensu baptizavit infantem natum in hac civitatem die 10 huius mensis Evaristo de Chirico italo et Gemma Co(e)rvetto coniugibus huius Paroeciae, qui imposita sunt nomina *Josepb Maria Albertus Georgius*. Patrinii fuerunt Carolus Constenoble et Adelaides Evaristi de Chirico." (p. 36-37, no. 117 of the baptism register) For his son's baptism, Evaristo brought another priest from Athens as he did not get along with the priest Don Dalesio of Volos who often interfered in civil affairs. Giorgio de Chirico's baptism certificate, which is conserved in the Foundation's archive, was issued to de Chirico on 2 August 1938. With the specification that Evaristo was Italian and Catholic. De Chirico probably required it in order to dismiss Bragaglia's accusation that he was Jewish. Bragaglia also accused Giorgio de Chirico's art of being degenerated art. In the newspaper "Il Tevere", in the column *Tutto, nulla e qualche cosa* (Everything, nothing and something) under the headline: *Straniera, bolscevizzante, giudaica* (Foreigner, Bolshevik, Jewish), de Chirico's painting depicting *The Archaeologists* appeared alongside other images (article by Telesio Interlandi, 24-25 November 1938).

VII. From what has been briefly shown, it is clear that the following statements are totally unfounded and verge on the absurd: “In fact ascertainment beyond the shadow of a doubt that the family was not originally of Italian nationality would not only explain the two brothers’ vague attitude on the matter but would confirm an interpretive picture in which the lack of a ‘certain homeland’, and therefore the tormenting search for a national identity, was one of the chief drives behind Giorgio de Chirico’s poetics.” The author Baldacci bases this on one of his own prejudicial statements which is widely disputed by what is presented here, given that both the geographical origins (Italian and Neapolitan) of Giorgio and Alberto de Chirico’s family and the cultural ones are beyond doubt.

When they left Greece at the age of 18 and 15 respectively, both de Chirico and Savinio must have felt disoriented as is only natural when one is separated from one’s place of birth where one has lived the early and most important phase of their life, involving the loss of friendships and childhood affections. However, this simple acquisition of good sense in no way meant (as has been suggested) that the de Chirico brothers lost, or even worse, had never had, a sense of national identity, which their father had indeed given them, and that they were instead “frantically searching” for this identity.

On the other hand, it is true and has been proven that, thanks to a perfect command of the Italian language and their classical education, both de Chirico and Savinio quickly fitted in in Italy; unlike in Germany where they never fully felt completely at home and where they continued to spend time with Greek friends who were studying at the Academy of Munich.

The reluctant behaviour of the two brothers to report for military service (their mother enrolled them in the District of Florence as an obligation for the subjects of the Kingdom) merely confirms certain negative traits that are typically Italian. And the “voluntary” involvement of the two young men in the First World War was anything but voluntary, in that, following the outbreak of the war, France would have sent them back to Italy where Giorgio could take advantage of the amnesty given by Royal Decree no. 673 of 20 May 1915. This is perhaps one of the very rare cases in which the two brothers wanted to portray their actions as different to reality. As for the claimed Italianness by choice, which Savinio talks about in a clever literary game, we need only read it in the context of the period in which Savinio wrote *l’Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare* (The childhood of Nivasio Dolcemare), a book that was also read by Bottai as shown in his diary.²⁸

²⁷ A. Savinio, *Lettere. De Chirico non è ebreo*, in “Meridiano di Roma”, 28 November 1937.

²⁸ Savinio writes: “An Italian born outside Italy, Nivasio Dolcemare considers himself to be privileged. This ‘indirect’ birth is an ironic situation, a stylish solution, a condition which adds some nuances, some subtleties, some semitones and quartertones to Dolcemare’s national faculty, prohibited to a man of ‘direct’ birth.”

The birth of an Italian outside Italy is the same as painting in patinas and musical reproductions. It is in the problem of race, the achievement of style. The analysis of the Italian Nivasio Dolcemare results as such: an Italian more Italian than an Italian because the ‘Italian’ in him is not a ‘local state’ but an evolved, discovered and conquered condition.

It is not however a given that the condition of being an Italian born outside of Italy, does not also give him some unpleasant surprises. In May 1915, Nivasio Dolcemare arrived at Turin station from abroad. They directed him to a table near the arrivals gate, behind which sat a kindly-looking, pot-bellied colonel, a family man in uniform. The colonel said ‘hello’ and took the piece of paper that Dolcemare gave him. – Born in Athens? But you are Greek! Why are you coming to look for trouble here? Nivasio Dolcemare looked around him and saw, looming out of the smoke from the rooftops, an Italy with a tower on its head; and this Italy, who knows why, was laughing behind its moustache.” *Giuseppe Bottai’s Diary 1935-1944* (edited by Giordano Bruno Guerri, ed. BUR 2006) details his favorite books. In the diary entry of 23 December 1941 we find the note “Alberto Savinio, *l’infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare*” (p. 293), just out, and 20 July 1942 the note “Alberto Savinio. *Narrate uomini la vostra storia*” (p. 315).

It is interesting at this stage to quote Livio Missir de Lusignan: “Political identity, cultural identity and any other identity in which, even before responding, is necessary to make preliminary clarifications that put the reader on guard about the risk of conclusions that are too quickly founded on the biased – if not erroneous – use of parameters that are false or not real and inadequate.

And this is where we find the problematic situation Giorgio de Chirico wrote about in his *Memoirs* speaking of Apollinaire’s dramatic attempt to acquire (or reacquire?) full French identity through the offer of self-sacrifice on the battlefield (*le champ d’honneur*, which in other times would be the *oblatio ad curiam*). An attempt which, due to the association of ideas, allows de Chirico to make it understood that his family did not need this because, despite being born in Volos, he was – at the beginning of the First World War – drafted to the military district of the Italian city of Florence”. In fact, as Missir de Lusignan observes: “in a work, a life and a past like Giorgio de Chirico’s and that of his brother Alberto Savinio – by examining each of their different components – is there not perhaps a part of Europe...?”

This is a question to which we can reply affirmatively, given the plurality of the brothers’ international experiences. The idea of Europe is proven by one of de Chirico’s calligrammes called, *À travers l’Europe*.²⁹

In this sense, looking at the wider picture, here are the profound considerations made by Wieland Schmied who writes:

Giorgio de Chirico was Italian. His parents had Italian origins and they spent a substantial period of their lives in Italy [...]. But that’s not all. Giorgio de Chirico was also at home in other worlds, which for him were no less important than his fatherland. Through his birth in Thessaly, his roots in Greek mythology, his love of painters like Böcklin, Klinger and Thoma, the mark made on him by philosophers Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Weininger, for whom he possessed a particular inclination, such as his friendship with Apollinaire, he is also linked to the spiritual realms of other countries and it is entirely understandable that he was also considered in a context outside of Italy [...]. In Greece he was inspired by a curiosity for the modern and later felt nostalgia for the disappearance of antiquity. Wherever de Chirico found himself, nostalgia for something else never left him. He always had the feeling that something was missing, he also believed that he felt the calling of the unknown from afar. His metaphysical art was born of this. Giorgio de Chirico was the most important artist of the 20th century. Without his contribution to modern art, important stimuli would be missing. If there had not been significant evolutions, whole chapters of our history of art would have remained very poor.³⁰

²⁹ The abovementioned quotes are from a short, typed text that Livio Missir de Lusignan sent to Professor Jole de Sanna in 2001 for publication in “Metaphysical Art”, but was not published. The author (who at the time was not aware of the recently found documents), examines the problem of Giorgio and Alberto de Chirico’s sense of nation or even for Europe.

³⁰ W. Schmied, *Sulle tracce del mistero. Gli anni formativi di Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio*, in G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti, Monaco Milano Firenze 1906-1911*, Edizioni Bora, Bologna 1999, pp. 14-15.

In conclusion, there is no sense in talking about the “heartrending” search for an Italian identity (no matter how romantic) in order to state that this search was the principal inspiration of de Chirico’s poetics. If anything the opposite is true: it is the profound Italian culture and especially the culture that he assimilated and experienced in Florence³¹ that forms the basis of de Chirico’s poetics. The Italian Piazza theme is the clearest proof of this. Giorgio de Chirico transferred into painting the very sense of national identity evoked by the Italian piazza. It is not by chance that his first metaphysical painting of 1910 depicts Piazza Santa Croce in Florence, even if transfigured by his revelation experienced on that clear autumn afternoon³².

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Translated by Rosamund King

³¹ See the article by V. Noel-Johnson in this review, pp. 137-177. The fact that Giorgio de Chirico makes specific reference to the birth of his art in Florence is sign of his strong sense of belonging to that city.

³² The fact that Great Italians who honoured their country with their art and their lives are buried in the church of Santa Croce is significant.