



Giovanni, the Last of the Querini Stampalia Family

Count Giovanni (1799-1869) is an extraordinary character. He was the last descendent of the Querinis of Stampalia, Astipalea, the Greek island in the Aegean Sea, a commercial port and military base belonging to the Republic of Venice that was conceded to this family, one of the wealthiest, most illustrious and influential in the city.

"I have a free spirit, with no caves where shame and hypocrisy hide. I crave neither theatres nor coffee houses, pleasures nor clothes. I crave only study and peace" is how he described himself.

Giovanni graduated in law from the University of Padua. He was a brilliant student and an omnivorous reader. He loved his studies, particularly those of a scientific nature, and he cultivated numerous interests: numismatics, heraldry, natural history and botany. His only distractions were riding and fencing. He refused to marry, which caused some friction with his parents. He inherited a significant patrimony and he managed it prudently. He was an innovative entrepreneur, reclaiming his lands with the first steam-powered dewatering pumps. He expanded his brickworks and modernised the family spinning mills,

hiring many from the local female workforce. His silk would win acclaim at the Universal Exhibitions in London and Paris. On the basis of this success, he relaunched Veneto yarn on the international markets. Using his assets, he either directly led research activities or he financed them. He had a chemistry and physics laboratory built in his palace. He was the first to pilot public electric lighting in Venice in 1852. He donated medicines and avant-garde machines to the civic hospital, including an electric microscope. He financed the Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere e Arti, becoming an honorary member, and the Ateneo Veneto, of which he was elected president. He had a great sense of civic duty and at the end of 1868 in his last will and testament he bequeathed the creation of the foundation that bears his name. He died on 25 May 1869. On 21 June the Fondazione Querini Stampalia came into being, at precisely the same time that the unification of Italy was taking shape. The Veneto had become a part of Italy just three years earlier. The Querini would also play a part in tracing the outline of a modern country that was full of enormous contradictions, but which was open to the possibilities of the future.