

A mystery solved

Constantin Erbiceanu



Il fratello ritrovato. I spent a wonderful week in Istanbul from July 1st to the 8th 2005 in the nicest hotel in the heart of the ancient Byzantine metropolis, namely the "Four Seasons" (3 stars), close to S.Sofia, S.Irena and the Topkapi Palace. One of the purposes of my stay was to resolve the problem of the whereabouts of the tomb of Giuseppe Donizetti, a location seemingly unknown to the inhabitants of this immense city of fifteen million people.

I began my survey somewhat abortively with a "Tourist Information Centre" whence I visited a variety of Catholic Churches such as S.Antony of Padua in the Pera district where no trace of Giuseppe emerged. I heard of another church near the Hilton Hotel not far from the Taksim Square (whose Atatürk Cultural Centre hosted a *Cinderella* of Prokofiev on 2 July with the Monte Carlo Ballet under the patronage of Caroline, Princess of Hanover). Monday 4th July - the only rainy day of a splendid sunny week - saw me and my travel companion, the historian Filip Lorga, visit yet another "Tourist Information Centre" whose sleepy resident not only spoke German but and was able to inform me that the single Catholic church in this area was hidden inside the French College, Notre Dame de Sion, which was closed during the summer. Undeterred, I went to the College and after ringing many times an ancient Armenian lady named Juliet emerged, speaking French but having no information whatsoever about Giuseppe's whereabouts, live or dead. She told us that the church would open in about two hours but I started an account of my visit to Yerevan, and my invitation from the Armenian Catholikos, Karekin I to visit him at Etchmiadzin (the Armenian Vatican), which, together with a lecture upon how important Donizetti is to the Armenian people - *Poliuto* being situated under their antique auspices - resulted in both an offer of tea and a phone-call to a co-national (whose name was Zadig - courtesy more of Voltaire than Vaccai) who had some kind of vague notion that Giuseppe's tomb could perhaps be within reach.

After learning that I would grant a contribution to the coffers of the church this latter appeared with a bundle of keys as the tomb could not be actually inside the church but in a Christian Crypt hidden in a remote corner. (The main problem was that Zadig spoke only Turkish and Armenian which are not among the languages I know best. [*I find this particularly improbable Ed.*]) However, after rusty locks were turned and a poignant examination of the gloomy catacomb, amid the dust of ages I found myself standing before the marble cenotaph of Giuseppe Donizetti, the Pasha elder brother of Gaetano who died in 1856, the very same year that Notre Dame de Sion was founded. A monument impeccably preserved in his city of adoption, thus marking a moving coda to a frustrating search in the cause both of musical and fraternal solidarity

Requiescat in pace.

Opposite

(above) The Church of Notre Dame de Sion in the precinct of the Collège de France, Istanbul

(below) *The Inscription reads as follows:*

A
 GIUSEPPE DONIZETTI DA BERGAMO
 ENSIGNE DI BONAPARTE FREGIATO DELLA LEGIONE
 D'ONORE
 RESTITUTORE DELLE MUSICHE MILITARI OTTOMANE
 INSIGNITO PASCIA DA ABDUL
 MORTO A COSTANINOPOLI NEL 1856
 FRA VASTO E SCHIETTO COMPIANTO
 LA MOGLIE ED IL FIGLIO INCONSOLABILE

Below has been erected a lapide to Angela Tondi, his wife, an addition made by her grandchildren Giuseppe and Gaetano
(the red rose was added by Constantin)

