

## PHD RESEARCH

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### **Networks uniting Belgian and Italian Freemasons and Laymen from the late Nineteenth Century to the Second World War. How the Italian ‘Fuorusciti’ were welcomed in**

**Belgium** - [Original Title : *Les réseaux unissant francs-maçons et laïques belges et italiens de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle à la Deuxième guerre mondiale. Prémisses et réalisation de l'accueil en Belgique des ‘fuorusciti’ italiens*] Université libre de Bruxelles & Università degli Studi della Tuscia, 2013. Supervisors : Anne Morelli (ULB) & Leonardo Rapone (Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Italy).

The aim of my research is to investigate further the experience of the Italian freemasons and freethinkers who were forced into exile as a consequence of their persecution by the Mussolini regime. In fact, the first associations to be persecuted by the Italian dictator were the freemason and freethinkers associations, but until a few years ago, contemporary historiographical debate hadn't really focused on the consequences of these actions because of the limited access to the archives of these associations.

It was only at the beginning of this century that these documents were found and have been put at the disposal of researchers. The study of part of these documents demonstrates that these freemasons and freethinkers, who had taken the decision to leave their country in order not to accept dictatorship, were political emigrants and found asylum in some European countries thanks to the masonic and freethinking networks that they had established from the end of the 19th century. Belgium was one of these countries, but more importantly the one where the networks described were born and developed. This fact

allows us to explain the reason why many Italian freemasons and freethinkers passed through or lived in Belgium. Even if Belgium wasn't the final country in which most of them settled.