

The background of the image is a stack of several old, handwritten letters and envelopes. They are resting on a wooden lattice surface, which appears to be part of a crate or a display stand. The letters are aged, with some showing wavy patterns from moisture damage. One letter in the foreground is clearly visible, featuring a one-penny postage stamp with a profile of a man. The handwriting on the letters is in cursive, and some names like 'Smith' and 'H. Green' are legible. The overall tone is sepia and historical.

Biographies in Global History

Biographies in the Middle Ages



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

Tutti i diritti relativi al presente materiale didattico ed al suo contenuto sono riservati a Sapienza e ai suoi autori (o docenti che lo hanno prodotto). È consentito l'uso personale dello stesso da parte dello studente a fini di studio. Ne è vietata nel modo più assoluto la diffusione, duplicazione, cessione, trasmissione, distribuzione a terzi o al pubblico pena le sanzioni applicabili per legge

Biography

- The genre was **inherited from antiquity**, but in the Middle Ages the **exemplary aspect** was emphasized more than the historical one
- Composition of works about **lay figures** (particularly kings) with a **celebratory purpose**
- Between the 11th and 12th centuries, a number of texts were composed that came to be known as “**mirrors for princes**”, intended to provide moral edification and instruction in the art of government for rulers
- **The panegyric intent** of the ancient world was also revived, especially through the composition of **poems and verse works**
- Between the 12th and 13th centuries interest in the psychological traits
- In the 14th and 15th centuries, the genre developed further, drawing ever more inspiration from antiquity — particularly during the Humanist period
- (*Biografia*, in *Le Garzantine. Medioevo*, Milano 2007, p. 218)

- **Vita Karoli by Einhard**, written after the death of the Frankish ruler in 814 and inspired directly by Suetonius' Life of Augustus
- Charlemagne is portrayed as a conqueror and restorer of culture
- (*Fonti medievali. Un'antologia*, a cura di T. Di Carpegna Falconieri, A. Feniello e C. Grasso, Roma 2017, p. 75)



- Suger of Saint-Denis' **Life of Louis the Fat**



- Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad's *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, leader of the *jihad* against infidels and the guarantor of Islamic unity

Fonti medievali. Un'antologia, a cura di T. Di Carpegna Falconieri, A. Feniello e C. Grasso, Roma 2017, p. 126

The Rare
and Excellent
History of Saladin

or
*al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya
wa'l-Maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyya*
by
Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād

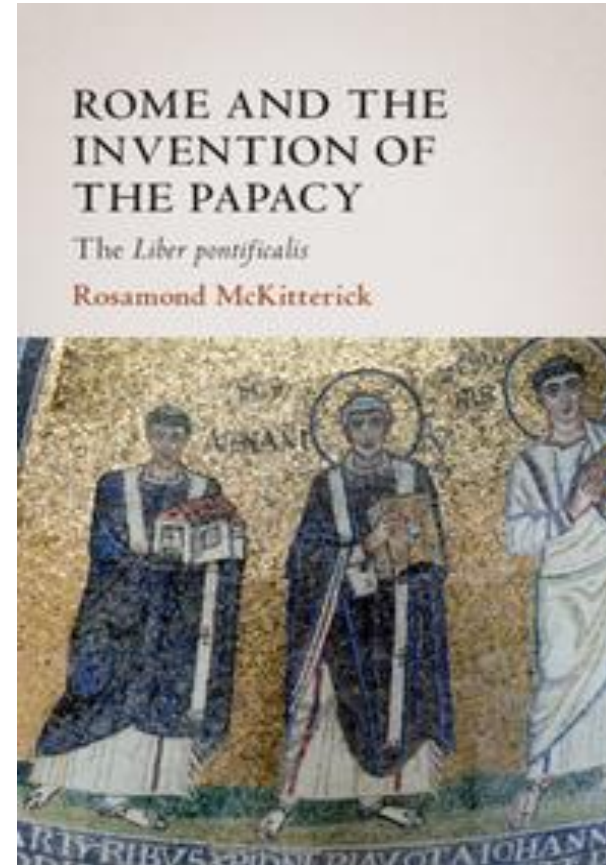
Translated by
D.S. Richards



- **Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim's Gesta Ottonis**
- Written between 965 and 967
- The only surviving epic work written by a woman, celebrating the deeds of Emperor Otto I
- (*Fonti medievali. Un'antologia*, a cura di T. Di Carpegna Falconieri, A. Feniello e C. Grasso, Roma 2017, p. 89)



- **Liber Pontificalis**
- Collection of papal biographies from Saint Peter to Pius II (†1464)
- Celebratory, memorial purpose
- (*Fonti medievali. Un'antologia*, a cura di T. Di Carpegna Falconieri, A. Feniello e C. Grasso, Roma 2017, p. 69)



Hagiography

- “The writing of saints”
- The earliest hagiographies appeared during the persecutions of the 3rd century A.D. **Acts of the Martyrs**
- Subsequently, in the East, a new model of sanctity developed — that of **the confessors. The Lives of the saints**
- By the end of the 7th century appeared **Pope Gregory the Great’s Dialogues: channels of miracles**
- Thus, two models emerged: the Life of the founding saint of a community, offering guidance for those seeking to live through imitation of the saint; and collections of miracles, which lacked a didactic intent and often centered on relics
- After the year 1000, signs appeared of a change driven by the papal claim to the official recognition of sainthood — **canonization**. Lives from the 13th century onward either composed to initiate a canonization process or to summarize the results of an inquiry
- (G. Barone, *Scrivere dei Santi. Parlare dei Santi. Santità e modelli agiografici tra antichità e medioevo* in U. Longo, *La santità medievale*, Roma 2006, pp. 9-22)

Why and how to write biographies

Early Modern Age

Individuals in their Space

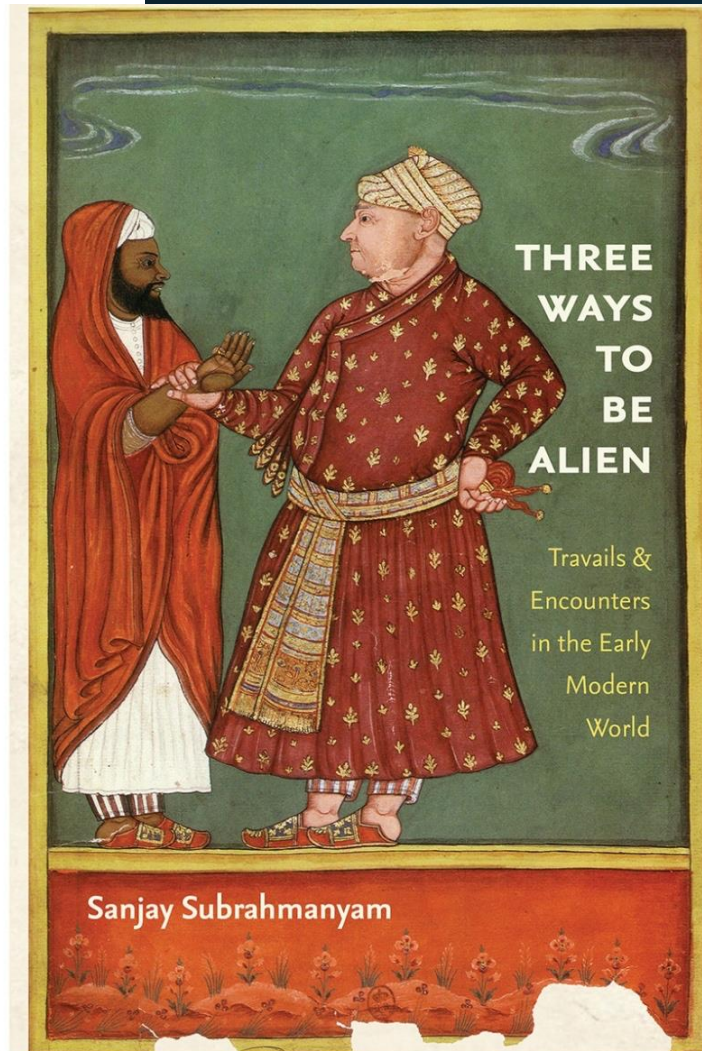
People on the move

Global Refugees



Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three ways to be alien. Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Brandeis University Press: 2011)

- **Biographical Lens:** Uses **three individual lives** to explore how personal trajectories reveal the dynamics of the early modern world.
- **Marginality as Insight:** Figures living **on the margins of empires and cultures** offer a unique view of global connections and tensions.
- **Beyond Exemplarity:** The biographies are not “representative,” but **tools to question fixed identities** and cultural boundaries.
- **Sources and Method:** Writing early modern biographies requires **cross-linguistic, fragmented, and hybrid sources** — reflecting the fluidity of identities.
- **Historiographical Aim:** Reclaims biography as a **method for global history**, moving beyond Eurocentric narratives to highlight **mobility, encounter, and exchange**.



WESTERN SEPHARDI DIASPORA

Biographies in the Western Sephardi Diasporas

- 1492: Expulsion of Jews from the Spanish Kingdoms
- 1496: Mass forced baptism in Lisboa
- Western Sephardi Diasporas as a global network of people on the move
- The Global Ottoman Mediterranean as a hub for Jewish refugees





Salonika

COURAGE AND COMPASSION

A Jewish Boyhood in
German-Occupied Greece



Tony Molho, *Courage and
Compassion. A Jewish Boyhood in
German Occupied Greece* (2024)

Rhodes, Island of Roses

- 1522** – The **Ottoman Empire conquers Rhodes**. Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497) settle on the island, revitalizing the Jewish community.
- 16th–17th centuries** – The **Jewish Quarter (La Judería)** flourishes; the community speaks **Ladino (Judeo-Spanish)** and establishes synagogues, schools, and rabbinical centers.
- 18th century** – Rhodes becomes an important hub in the **Sephardic trade network**, linking the Eastern Mediterranean with North Africa and Italy.
- 19th century** – The community enjoys prosperity and cultural life; close ties develop with other Sephardic centers in **Salonika, Izmir, Livorno, and Alexandria**.
- 1912** – After the Italo-Turkish War, **Rhodes comes under Italian rule**. The Jewish population numbers about 4,000.
- 1920s–1930s** – Jews actively participate in commerce, education, and civic life under Italian administration.

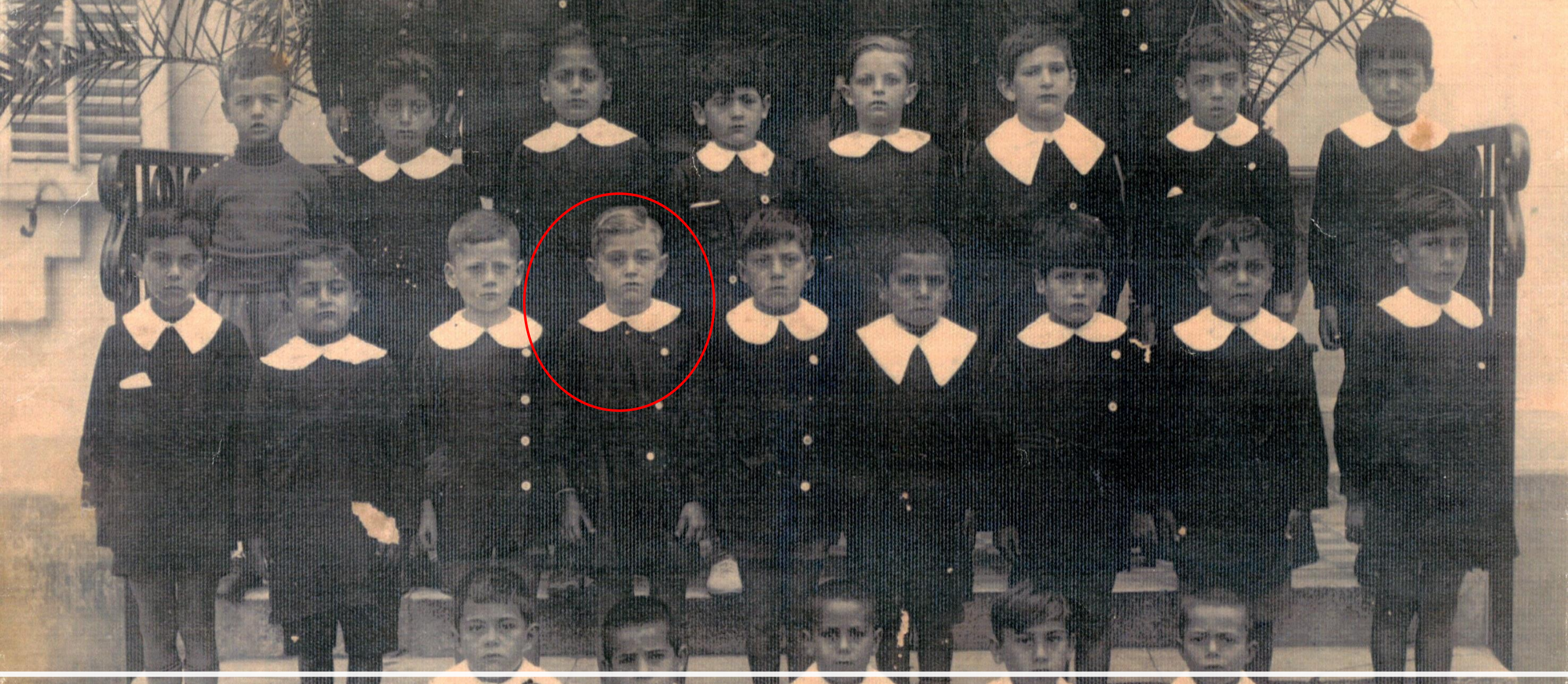


- 1938** – The **Italian Racial Laws** are enforced: Jews are expelled from schools, public offices, and face increasing persecution.
- 1943** – After Italy's armistice, the island is occupied by **Nazi Germany**.
- July 1944** – The **deportation of the Jews of Rhodes**: 1,673 Jews are sent to Auschwitz; only a few dozen survive.
- 1945–1950** – The community is largely destroyed; survivors emigrate to **Israel, the U.S., South Africa, and Italy**.
- Today** – Only a handful of Jews remain in Rhodes. The **Kahal Shalom Synagogue** (built in the 16th century) stands as a **museum and memorial** to the once-thriving Sephardic community.





1935 - Modiano
Family in Rhodes

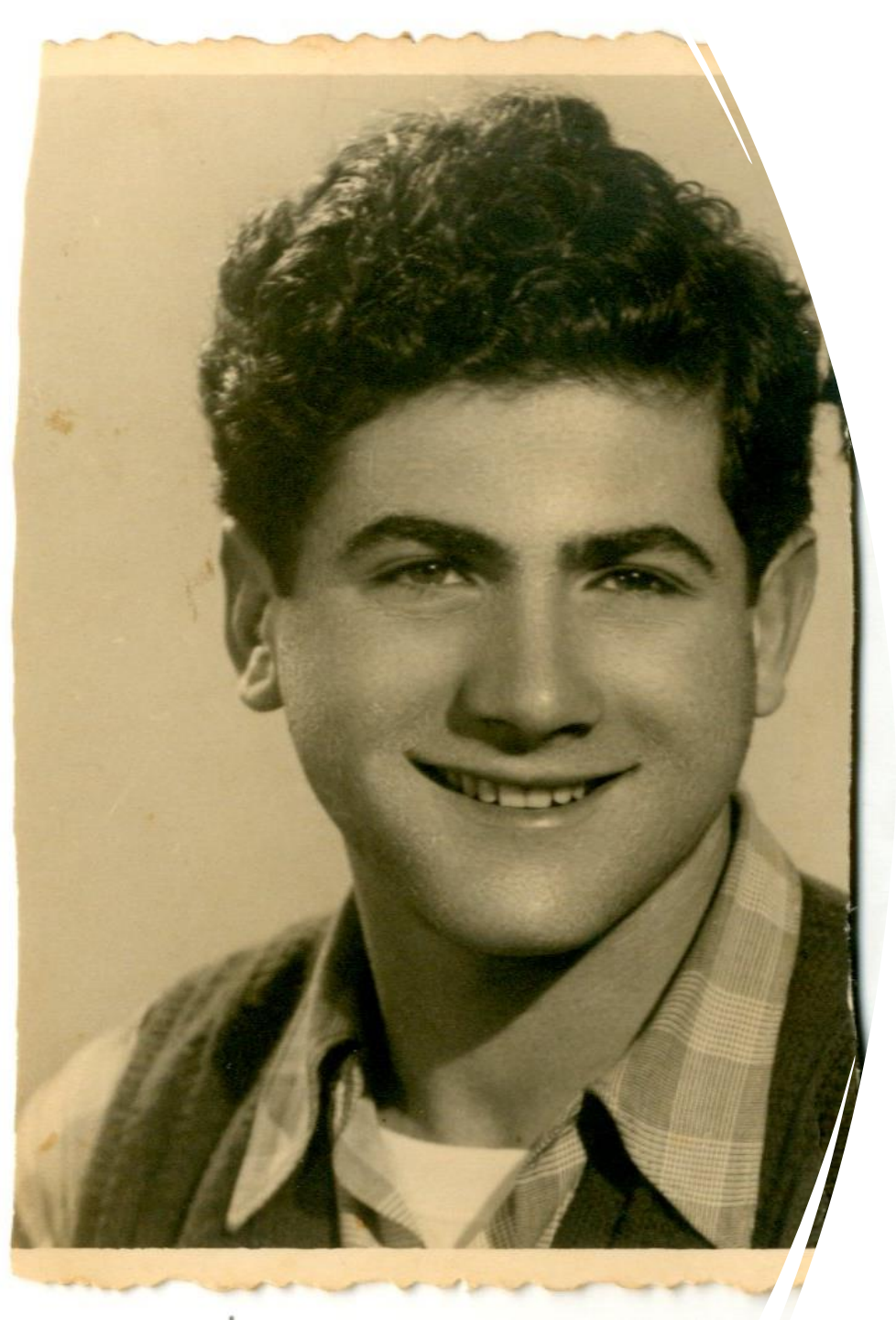


1936 – First grade in the Italian boy school





4 generations of Modiano family



1946 - Ostia



Lucia
Modiano
before the
Deportation



1946 – Group of ten friends



1952: Sami
in Belgian
Congo



2012: Sami in Rhodes



2012: Sami and
Selma in Rhodes