
THE LURE OF THE ORIENT

The Schranzes, the Brockdorffs, Preziosi and other artists

Dominic Cutajar

THE lure of the Golden Orient has been a well-known phenomenon of western culture – especially in the world of art – as far back as the fifteenth century. It looks akin to the fascination for the strange and the exotic, often finding vague expression in parading rare equatorial creatures, such as zebras, lions and various species of monkeys. In fact towards the end of the seventeenth century, the mystique for the magical world of the Orient became palpable. In all probability, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 had had an accelerating effect; if nothing else, it had brought one of the main centres of eastern exoticism to the shores of the Bosphorus – right on the door-step of Europe.

Due to their old ties with the Levant and the Aegean area, the Venetians were the first to register the impact of this inexplicable magnetism. They were too the first known western artists to cultivate contacts with Ottoman Constantinople, including among others Gentile Bellini, a brother to the more renowned Giovanni. But the Venetians' relations with the Sublime Porte were perennially fraught with problems, so that in the course of the sixteenth century they were supplanted, first by the French and subsequently by the British and the Dutch.

Of these, the French acclimatized themselves better to the sensual enchantments of the giant Ottoman capital. Whatever they were able to make of their trade opportunities, the French indubitably grasped most of the cultural chances that came their way. So that, mainly through the medium of the French, the flair for Oriental exoticism

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became one of the dominant themes of eighteenth century western European culture, permeating various fields of activity. In art, Oriental sensibility became a veritable rage among artists ranging from J. E. Liotard (1702–1789) to Delacroix (1798–1863) and Ingres (1780–1867). Even in literature, it fostered such masterpieces as Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* and Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas*, so that eventually it came to constitute one of the main tributaries feeding the swelling river of Romanticism, the dominant sensibility of post-1789 Europe.

Even tiny, remote Malta likewise felt the pull of this attraction. During the Knights' rule, terminated in 1798, the permanent state of war maintained with the Ottoman power had served to complicate the issue. Direct contact was *seemingly* blocked, although shipping records reveal a different story with constant trading links – mostly but not entirely through neutral shipping – dating as far back as 1654 when regular shipping records began to be kept. Rather, a host of indications suggest that Malta itself – with its archaic but picturesque social and political establishment – was felt to form part of that area of exotic interest actually lying farther east. Travellers were enticed to Malta, due to its relative accessibility, to its ties with the Order and the concomitant historical associations, and in particular on account of the cosmopolitan character of its society of which the Oriental element was far stronger than is generally imagined.

The main Oriental and specifically Muslim influence was due to the constant presence of a fairly large number of slaves. Thus a 1749 interior painting by Frenchman Antoine de Favray (1706–1798) – now in the Mdina Cathedral Museum – depicts a typical bazaar scene crowded by relaxing Oriental figures being flamboyantly entertained by an eastern performer. It would not have been out of place anywhere in the Ottoman Empire. In addition numerous travellers' accounts have preserved something of the writer's wonder at the quaintness of local costumes, especially those of the females.

Whatever actually attracted Favray to Malta,¹ the French painter certainly appreciated the embedded whiff of Levantine exoticism which in 1761 induced him to travel directly to Constantinople on

1 For the writer's opinions on the matter, *vide* Dominic Cutajar, 'Favray in Malta: Early contacts', *Antoine de Favray* (Malta, 1982), pp. 37–39.

board the *Corona Ottomana*, then being returned to the Ottoman Sultan. There in Constantinople, Favray was at first entertained as guest of the French ambassador de Vergennes, returning to Malta around 1772. Apparently, he kept using his Constantinopolitan sketch-books practically to the end, producing samples of eastern landscapes, as well as costumed figures of both Muslim and Greek ladies.

It is doubtful if Bonaparte's adventure in Egypt noticeably advanced the Oriental cult in Malta; but in France itself the fascination for eastern things rose to fever pitch, soon infecting other European countries. In Malta the establishment of British hegemony did much to efface the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the previous centuries. In compensation, it helped to forge a new link with the East. The Treaty of Paris (1815) had confirmed the award to Britain of the Ionian islands, previously conquered by the British from the French who had supplanted the Venetians. The appointment of Sir Thomas Maitland as Governor tied effectively the administration of both the Maltese and the Ionian islands under the "rule". British presence in the Mediterranean (thus) became incontrovertibly real, with naval stations placed in Gibraltar, Malta and the Ionian islands. The British had though lost the splendid harbour facilities of Mahon in the Balearic islands, but by then it mattered little in political terms.

ANTON SCHRANZ – From Southern Germany to Malta

Among the lives affected by these dramatic vicissitudes was that of a little known German painter, Anton Schranz, born at Ochsenhausen in the *Land* of Wurttemberg on 14 May 1769. He had established himself in Minorca while the British were still using Mahon as a naval base. How Anton Schranz – a son of poor crofters – gravitated towards art and the Mediterranean, and thence to Minorca, has remained a mystery.² In point of fact, Italy was then the Mecca of artists from all over Europe, some of whom were attracted to an Italian version of early landscape-painting, known as *vedutismo*

2 Egon Schneider, in the monograph *Anton Schranz (1769–1839)*, pub. 1985, suspects that the artist's link between Ochsenhausen and Naples were the Benedictine monks, thus extending the present writer's suggestion, in 'Artists of the Schranz Family', that Anton Schranz's art has affinities with the Neapolitan works of C.J. Vernet.

or view-making.

Through the employment of the *camera oscura*, the various *vedutisti* had come to interpret landscape-painting as more or less a feat of draughtsmanship, consequently tied to neat empirical observation of nature. In the course of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, this objective rendition of nature began to be affected by a tendency towards Romantic transfiguration, most of all in the works of Jacob Philipp Hackert (1737 – 1807), a German landscape artist who had spent many years in Italy and is actually known to have worked in Naples between 1791 and 1793.

The first trace of Anton Schranz as an adult is his marriage registration – the sequel of a romantic escapade – on 16 September 1794 at Port Mahon, to Isabella Howard Tuduri, a daughter of a British gentleman and his Spanish wife.³ He probably reached the Balearics after passing through Naples where he might have seen Hackert's landscapes, although his art continued to perpetuate the tradition of draughtsman-like objectivity. Hackert's influence is not noticeable in Anton's art, but it suddenly emerged in the works of his younger painter-son, Giuseppe, which fact does pose an artistic problem.

Anton Schranz's own artistic manner is solid and workman-like, marked by a *vedutista's* preference for clarity of outline, brightened by his taste for exotic settings although on a more restrained scale than either C. L. Vernet's or Louis Ducros', both of whom sought to inject in their work a picturesque and imaginative air touched with a vague feeling of nostalgia – qualities that are largely absent in Anton Schranz's more prosaic approach. He is though nearer to the art of Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714 – 1789) who had worked in Rome from 1734 to 1753, often paying frequent visits to Naples especially in 1746 and 1748.

Anton Schranz's admiration for Vernet becomes self-evident in a comparison between Vernet's *View of Naples with the Vesuvius* (now in the Louvre) and Schranz's *View of Port Mahón with British warships* that came up for sale at Sotheby's some years ago. Schranz could not have met Vernet personally, but he surely studied his Neapolitan landscapes, modelling his art closely upon that of the

3 I owe the precise date of Anton's marriage, as well as dates of birth of his children – all born in Minorca – to Mr. Egon Schneider.

French artist. He emerges as a competent artist, precise and correct in detail, but rather unenterprising. Yet he was to prove an excellent teacher, although probably all his three painter-sons were to exceed him, if not in sheer bravura, in their imaginative power and sheer breadth of vision.

The present writer tends to the opinion that Giovanni was more nearly his father's artistic successor, although his prowess found its best expression in lithography. In point of fact, the impact of Romanticism dealt a serious blow to the eighteenth century tradition of *vedutismo*. The more evolved Romantic temperament of such key artists as William Turner (1775–1851) and Friedrich Loos (1797–1890) soon had the effect of liberating landscape from the rigidity of harsh objectivity. *Vedutismo* was able to obtain a new lease of life through the discovery of the lithographic process which enabled the older tradition to survive as a topographical art – precisely the field in which Giovanni's future lay.

From the haven of Minorca, Anton Schranz continued to produce work until 1817. His unemotional, competent and attractive *vedute* – mostly showing British ships lying at anchor – appealed immensely to the British officer-class whose taste continued to reflect their native preference for nostalgic views of old provincial towns and gentlemen's seats – an art splendidly satisfied by such watercolourists as Fredrick Mackensie (1787–1854). Paradoxically, the Treaty of Paris (1815) must have alarmed Anton Schranz, as it meant that the British were going to evacuate Minorca, thus directly threatening his livelihood, forcing him to consider exploring the possibility of moving either to Gibraltar or to Malta, the new naval base of the Royal Navy.

It is likely, although unproved, that the connoisseur and art-dealer (and amateur artist) Filippo Benucci (1779–1848) may have played a part in persuading Anton Schranz to move to Malta. Benucci, described by one source as of Roman nationality,⁴ has another claim to our attention, since with another dealer, Peter Stuart, he must be held responsible for siphoning off Malta's immense art-treasures accumulated during the 270 years of the Order's rule. In 1825, Benucci brought

4 *Vide* Palace Archives, Departures Register no. 20, unpaginated; entry against date 24 August 1823 records that Filippo Benucci left Malta for Gibraltar; Benucci died in Munich in 1848.

out in Munich – where he had meanwhile settled – the first-ever lithographic views of Malta reproduced from Schranz's original drawings.

The first intimation of Anton Schranz's presence in Malta appears in Count Saverio Marchesi's jottings on his art purchases, against an entry dated 21 March 1818. He records the commission of an oil-painting – *A view of the Grand Harbour with the vessel Albion* – from the German painter Schranz.⁵ He could not have been more than a few months in Malta for his wife Isabella and all their nine children arrived on 17 July 1818.⁶ Now since Anton's youngest daughter, Giustina, was born in Mahon on 24 September 1817, the reasons for the father's unaccompanied appearance in Malta ahead of the family becomes obvious.

Yet, professionally, Anton Schranz seems to have felt encouraged; he would not have uprooted his family from Minorca, which island all the Schranzes continued to consider as their real home for decades following their removal to Malta. The Minorcan connections of the family remained solid and alive for decades afterwards;⁷ as shall be examined, all members of the Schranz family – understandably – continued to consider themselves as Spanish, in spite of their very mixed descent.

By the early 1820s, the three painter-sons of Anton – Giovanni (b.1794), Antonio (b.1801), and Giuseppe (b.1803) – were old enough to be artistically active. Thus Marchesi had employed Giovanni Schranz to incorporate some figures into a painting by Giuseppe Grech – a common enough practice at the time; Marchesi's note is

5 *Vide* "Count Saverio Marchesi (1757–1833); his picture-gallery and his bequest to the Cathedral Museum" by Can. J. Azzopardi, in the *Proceedings of History Week, 1982*, pp. 28–43.

6 *Vide* NLM Arrivals 1818, vol. 8, unpaginated. The Schranz family arrived on board the brig *Madonna del Carmine* directly from Port Mahon; there were three other passengers, two Maltese and an Austrian, as well as cargo of 100 q. *patate*.

7 At least two of Anton Schranz's daughters married Minorcan expatriates locally, namely: (i) Marianna to Giovanni Quintana – *vide* P.A., Porto Salvo, Matrim. 4 Sept. 1827, p. 243; in 1844 this Giovanni Quintana edited *Guida dell'Isola di Malta e sue dipendenze*; (ii) Elisabetta *sive* Isabella (not to be confused with the mother) married Antonio Forbes, *vide* P.A. Porto Salvo, 20 Nov. 1838, p. 101, as well as Acts of Not. Salv Tanti, 17 Nov. 1838.

dated 22 January 1820.⁸ The other two brothers might have been specializing, each in his own way; in fact, in later years, Antonio was to be described as a *paesista e pittore di marina*, while Giuseppe emulated his father's gifted draughtsmanship which he was later to transform.

MALTA'S POST-1815 DIFFICULTIES

Effects of the post-1815 depression

But the country's market potential was too limited for four artists specializing in topographical art, gifted though they were. Moreover there were other competitors as well, including the ubiquitous Brockdorffs – originally North Germans, less gifted than the Schranzes, yet their work was in greater demand. Benucci's retirement from Malta in 1823 – when the economic depression began to hit even the moneyed classes – left the two rival German artist-dynasties locked in a struggle for survival.

By that time Malta had lost its privileged position as a thriving commercial *entrepôt*, making the most of the contraband opportunities provoked by Napoleon's ill-advised Continental System. Together with the effects of the 1813 plague, a fearful depression settled upon the Maltese islands, further aggravated by a continued demographic expansion. These disastrous conditions were not to be reversed until the later 1840s. Clearly, it was a situation in which art could hardly be expected to flourish.

Like so many of the Maltese themselves, the younger Schranz generation was forced to look elsewhere. Luckily, the joint administration established by the British over the Maltese and the Ionian islands seemed to offer to the more enterprising a way out of these economic troubles, so that a regular migratory flow to Corfu and Cephalonia got under way – the very first of such diasporas to be amply documented. Not much later, new opportunities – arising from the French conquest of Algiers in 1830 – were immediately and eagerly availed of by numerous Maltese, thus re-directing the bulk of their migratory flow, without halting the stream of migrants drifting towards the Ionian islands; the latter phenomenon was to continue un-

8 *Vide* Can. J. Azzopardi, p. 42.



Oil painting: "A view of Port Mahón, Minorca", (sold by Sotheby's in 1984); (Reproduced from "Anton Schranz (1769 – 1839)" by Egon Schneider).

interruptedly well into the 1850s.

The Schranzes were likewise tempted to try their luck in the same direction – an initiative which in their case was to have a development that none of them could at the time foresee. Probably the first to reconnoitre the new potential was Giovanni who apparently in 1824 travelled to the Ionian islands, to Italy and he also visited Palermo; we are though badly informed of this voyage. More impetuous and insistent were Antonio's efforts.⁹ His incurable wanderlust and his resources of energy cast him perfectly for the role of a full-blooded Romantic, affected by innate restlessness and a passion for wild, exotic places.

Not even Edward Lear – active later in the century when steamships had become common – had in fact travelled as much and as far as Antonio Schranz. His brother Giuseppe must have been equally adventurous, although unfortunately we lack fuller information of his movements. On the other hand, Giovanni was to prove by comparison a staid character, rather affected by nostalgia for familiar places – in which again he took after his father. Even the females of the Schranz family indulged in their uncommon love for travelling¹⁰ in an age when females of the middle and lower classes travelled for dire necessity only, and never unaccompanied.

The wanderlust of Antonio Schranz

Presently, we have incomplete record of nine voyages embarked upon by Antonio Schranz between 1825 and 1847. The first of these trips was to Corfu where the British administration had set up its headquarters. The Governor, Sir Thomas Maitland, had built a palace in Corfu, shipping Malta stone to that island and entrusting with the job Ferdinando Dimech who, with his wife and family, was a frequent commuter between the two islands.

Antonio Schranz's stay in Corfu lasted over 20 months, in the

9 In my initial study: 'The Schranz family of artists', *Mid-Med Bank Desk Diary 1985*, pub. Dec. 1984, I had described Antonio as 'the least enterprising of the family'! At the time I had no information of the frequent moves made by the various members of the family, in which case my judgement of Antonio Schranz would have rather been the reverse.

10 For a full account of the travels embarked on by the Schranz family, as currently researched, *vide* Schedule I of present work, p.135 *infra*.

course of which he sent such glowing reports that he was joined on the island by his brothers Giovanni and Giuseppe a year after his transfer. Thus the three younger Schranzes found themselves working among Greeks, who were then engaged in a bitter and bloody rebellion against Ottoman despotism – a long fight concluded in 1830 with the granting of independence (to the Greeks). The heroic struggle had enthused liberal opinion in Europe, engaging on behalf of the Greeks some of the finest Romantic intellectuals, such as Lord Byron. Indeed Shelley summed up the swell of emotion that swept over Europe with the famous cry ‘We are all Greeks’.

As a consequence of the struggle it was very difficult to reach the Aegean area, until peace was concluded in 1830 between the Russians and the Turks. In some obscure manner, Antonio Schranz got mixed up with these events, for he suddenly appeared back in Malta on 3 June 1833 upon the ‘brig of the Tsar, *Telemaco*’, which called hurriedly in Malta simply to disembark its sole passenger – Antonio Schranz who reported Poros (in the Saronic Gulf) as his port of departure.¹¹ An air of mystery surrounds this laconic entry.

Antonio must have been soon back on his travels, returning to Malta from Livorno on 22 December 1834. We are though able to document this voyage better for, during 1834, Antonio Schranz is known to have accompanied in Crete the fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, Robert Pashley, then engaged in compiling a survey of classical sites and antiquities in that island. Pashley was a meticulous scholar whose work is still held in great esteem by archaeologists. He scoured the island of Crete from one end to another between February and September 1834, then publishing his results in two volumes, (1837) illustrated by Antonio Schranz whose topographical gifts he had earlier spotted. It needed both courage and a spirit of adventure to roam around Crete in 1834 – a place which in Pashley’s opinion was ‘the worst-governed province of the Turkish Empire’. So that in picking Antonio as his companion, Pashley had no doubt taken in consideration the young man’s ardour, as well as his gifts.

Meanwhile, his brother Giuseppe had definitely departed from Malta in October 1828, travelling directly to Zante, although he soon established himself in Constantinople. The reports he sent, as well as his success, appear to have enthused the family, most of all Antonio

11 *Vide* Pal. Arch. Arrivals 1833, f.1610.

who in April 1836 sailed east to Smyrna and Constantinople. So infectious was their enthusiasm, that they were soon joined by their sisters Margerita and Francesca who stayed 17 months in the Ottoman metropolis. Less than three months after the sisters' return to Malta, Margerita with her mother, Isabella, embarked for Constantinople – a move indicating that the family may have been seriously considering another radical shift of residence, probably stalemated by Anton's declining health and his reluctance to abandon the third homeland to which he might have grown affectionate.

The Schranzes had in effect not quite yet made up their mind about themselves. Their mixed German, Spanish and English descent, together with their perennial instability of residence, often hovering between two cultures, may have served to disorientate them – with the exception of Giovanni who, after his Ionian travels, married a Maltese girl in 1833 and settled down in the island for good. He left the family nucleus, in which probably only Anton was determined not to go back on his travels. The weight of passing years was making itself felt.

The wife, Isabella, and her nine children, on their arrival in Malta on 17 July 1818 were registered as Spanish. The family continued stoutly to declare themselves either Spanish or Minorcan up to the second half of the 1860s. Thus, on 27 September 1827, Giovanni was registered – interestingly enough – as *Juan Schranz di Maona, pittore* upon his arrival from Corfu.¹² Then, after her husband's death in 1839, Isabella attempted to return to Mahon with her daughter Margerita in 1841, on which occasion their nationality was declared to be 'of Spaine'.

The registered nationality of Antonio was the one most variedly entered. In 1836 he was declared to be 'of Gibraltar'; in 1841, he was listed as *Maltese*, but from the following year onwards he was described as *English*. The confusion on their nationality inevitably arose from the family's inability to decide upon a place of residence of real permanence, a state of instability that coloured their emotional commitment.

Antonio Schranz's first visit to Constantinople – in the course of which he toured Anatolia, Syria and Palestine (December 1836 – September 1837) – lasted three years and seven months; he re-

12 *Vide* Pal. Arch. Arrival Reg. vol. 26, unpaginated.

appeared in Malta on 4 December 1939, probably hastily recalled by the family alarmed at his father's declining health. In fact Anton Schranz died 20 days later¹³ and was buried in the Floriana Capuchins' church, probably in a common grave for, some three months later, Giovanni and Antonio jointly petitioned the Civil Secretary 'to establish a family grave in the church of the Capuchins, Floriana'.¹⁴ The event may be a pointer to Antonio's inclination to remain in Malta where he and Giovanni had just established a partnership.

Giovanni Schranz had by this time a growing family on his hands. Fortune had smiled on him when Queen Adelaide spent a few weeks in Malta during the winter of 1839–1840. Her secretary, Penry Williams, published an account called *Recollections of Malta, Sicily and the Continent*¹⁵ noting among other things that the Queen had acquired 'several drawings of the most picturesque parts of the town, the original sketches of which I happen to see having become acquainted with Mr. Schrantz, the artist to whom she gave the commission'. With our present knowledge of the various displacements of the Schranz brothers, we can now confidently identify Giovanni with the Schranz artist in question.

The affair had yet another important development. Exploiting the good connections made on the occasion, Giovanni was allowed to set up a lithographic establishment of his own. The development might have influenced Antonio's decision to return to Malta in 1839. Soon the two brothers were jointly running the Schranz lithographic establishment which in the following years produced what one can consider the finest collection of lithographic prints of Malta, generally inscribed *Schranz Brothers*, mostly issued in the 1840s. A brief visit to the Adriatic region is preserved through the record of his return on 11 February 1841 from Trieste and Lussino Piccolo, probably to be connected with the acquisition of the necessary presses and equipment for the new lithographic establishment.

Suddenly competition in the field of lithographic prints became keener, as more and more artists awakened to the potential and the

13 *Vide* P.A. Porto Salvo Morti 1831–1842, p. 537 – 25 Dec. 1839.

14 *Vide* Pal. Arch. Register of Petitions 1838–1842, petition no. 846, dated 7 April 1840 and endorsed by Sir H. Greig.

15 *Vide* Penry Williams, *Recollection of Malta, Sicily and the Continent*, (Edinburgh, 1857), p. 25.

market demand for the medium, so that, as soon as a new opportunity to travel further afield came his way, Antonio Schranz grabbed it with his usual eagerness. In 1841, Viscount Castlereagh – nephew to the more famous personage of the name who with Metternich had dominated the Congress of Vienna – had embarked upon a grand tour of the Orient, reaching Malta on 26 November 1841. It is fairly certain that Antonio immediately joined his entourage as the expedition's artist, accompanying him on a journey that took in Alexandria, Petra, Palmyra, Damascus and Aleppo. In 1847 the Viscount published an account in two illustrated volumes, *A Journey to Damascus*, in the preface of which the Viscount declared that 'the plates are selected from a large collection of drawings taken on the spot by one of my companions, Mr. A. Schranz of Malta'. Antonio had in the meanwhile reached Malta on 5 October 1842 on board the steamer *Phoenix*.

By now the artist's wanderlust had become uncontrollable, so that only his interest in the Schranz Brothers Lithographic establishment served to hold his tenuous links with Malta. Soon, he was back in Egypt between September 1745 and May 1747, by which time his decision to abandon Malta as a base had matured. After only a few days in the island, he proceeded to Italy, probably to cultivate contact earlier established, returning in July, to sail out once more to Alexandria, probably never to return, although evidence is equivocal on the point.

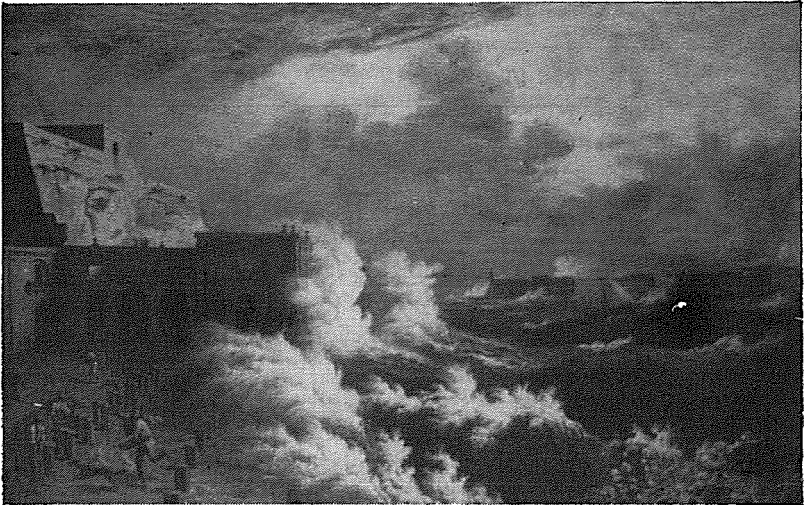
Muir's Malta Almanack for year 1845 reports 84 Strada Zecca, Valletta as the address of a Schranz artist not better identified; it is though the same which his brother-in-law Giovanni Quintana listed in his *Guida di Malta e sue dipendenze* (1844) as Antonio Schranz's studio. In the 1847 edition of the *Almanack*, also issued by Muir, the address for another unidentified Schranz artist is placed in Strada Ponente, and it might well have been that of Antonio too, for Giovanni Schranz had been settled in No. 4 (or 6 as variously reported) Strada Sant'Ursola, probably since 1838, certainly since the 1844 report by Quintana, and hence continuously as confirmed by *Muir's Almanack* right up to the 1851 and 1853 editions.

Antonio Schranz practically vanishes after his 1847 passage to Alexandria; faint traces of him appear again for a decade or so enough to indicate that he was still alive. From the confidence shown in him by contemporaries as Robert Pashley and Lord Castlereagh – both discriminatory characters – he emerges as a draughtsman with a formidable reputation. His brother-in-law Quintana uses the phrase *paesista e pittore de marina* to describe Antonio, which strangely over-

looks his drawing prowess, for which gift his services were most sought after.

The present writer has been able to examine some drawings, water-colours and marine paintings of Antonio. They reveal a meticulous but rapid worker with a fluid line; his vision remains fairly objective, although he was capable of poetic transformation, especially in depicting overpowering natural phenomena, such as sand-storms and heavy seas. In the topographical views, his approach tends to the literal, often lapsing in schematic treatment, although the weakest of all are his figures. In the writer's opinion, Antonio's best work was done when he felt released from the constraints of topography, so that his marine pieces in oils become veritable paeans to the forces of nature. It might well be that Quintana's summary of Antonio as *paesista e pittore di marina* represents more nearly what the artist felt to be the best of himself. Thus Antonio Schranz emerges as a valid Romantic artist, restive of the shackles of mere topography; the facility of his draughtsmanship camouflages a deeper poetic vein, marking the authenticity of his vocation as a Romantic artist in tune with his time.

Oil painting by Antonio Schranz: "Rough seas off old Customs House, Valletta",



(private collection)

ANTONIO SCHRANZ'S KNOWN VOYAGES

| Departure | Return |
|---|--|
| 1) 23 July 1825 to Corfu | 14 April 1827 from Corfu ¹⁶ |
| 2) – | 3 June 1833 from Poros. |
| 3) In Crete ¹⁷ | 22 December 1834 from Livorno. |
| 4) 26 April 1838 to Smyrna and Constantinople | 4 December 1839 from Constantinople. |
| 5) 26 September 1840 to Italy and Marseilles | 11 February 1841 from Trieste and Lussino Piccolo. |
| 6) 26 November 1841 ¹⁸ | 5 October 1842 from Alexandria. |
| 7) 27 September 1845 to Alexandria | 5 May 1847 from Alexandria. |
| 8) 13 May 1847 to Sicily and Naples | 24 July 1847 from Marseilles and Leghorn. |
| 9) 11 November 1847 to Alexandria | – |

GIUSEPPE SCHRANZ

The youngest of the three artist-brothers of the Schranz family was Giuseppe (born 5 February 1803). In temperament he was nearer to Antonio, yet he exceeded him in artistic skill and poetic depth – just as Antonio exceeded both Giovanni and his father Anton. History has dealt most unfairly with these two most gifted of the Schranzes until, in my study 'The Schranz family of Artists' – published in the *Mid-Med Bank Desk Diary* for 1986 – I drew attention to Giuseppe's extraordinary artistry. Until then they had virtually faded from memory, so much so that even contemporary publications referred to Antonio as Arturo.

In the above-mentioned study, I felt the need to have justice done to Giuseppe, referring to him as 'the star-artist of the Schranz family'. The opinion can now be confirmed with greater emphasis

- 16 On this particular occasion Antonio Schranz returned from Corfu in the company of *Pierre Adol: Raife, Francese, pittore*; the surname could also be read *Raise*.
- 17 In this voyage Antonio Schranz was in Crete with Robert Pashley from February to September 1834.
- 18 Actually, the date given here is that of the arrival of Lord Castlereagh's yacht; it is almost certain that Antonio left on the same vessel.

after examining photographs of watercolours in the Searight Collection, now held by the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹⁹ Giuseppe was the best draughtsman in a family of artists that made virtue of this accomplishment due to the topographical bias necessitated by their art. Yet, Giuseppe was more than just a splendid draughtsman; he possessed the gift of imagination far more than his father or Giovanni, as well as a keener poetic sensibility than Antonio.

Giuseppe's basic training must have been received from his father, although he did not indulge in the sombre and sentimental nostalgia so characteristic of his father's work, whose art remained close to the eighteenth century picturesqueness of J. C. Vernet. It is likely that Giuseppe's Romantic liberation occurred early in his career, maybe through the example and influences of Antonio's more emancipated art. Still, the lure of the Orient was just as strong in Giuseppe as in Antonio; so much so that, on 15 June 1826 Giuseppe and Giovanni followed their other brother working in Corfu. Giovanni was by then already 32 years old and Giuseppe only 23. Four and a half months later, the youngest of the brothers returned to Malta having savoured the first taste of the exotic eastern world – then still completely dominated by the Ottoman Turks.

Less than two years later Giuseppe took the plunge, leaving Malta for Zante on 1 October 1828. It is likely that he rejoined Giovanni on that island (he was probably there), but Zante was also an important port-of-call for vessels sailing up the Adriatic, so that Giuseppe Schranz might easily have availed himself of the opportunity to travel in Italy – where he would have studied the landscapes of J. P. Hackert – before proceeding to Constantinople, most likely after the 1830 cessation of hostilities between the Russians and the Turks.

Although knowledge of Giuseppe's movements is scarce, yet he leaves the impression of having been a very active artist. We know that he reached Syria in 1832, while a number of his early works – done in Constantinople – and datable to 1832–1834, were acquired by a British connoisseur in Constantinople.²⁰ A later confirmation of

19 My thanks to Dr. Briony Llewellyn, keeper of the Searight Collection, for the opportunity to examine photographs of the watercolours and drawings in the collection.

20 *Vide* Briony Llewellyn and Charles Newton, *The People and Places of Constantinople* (London 1985), p. 6. The authors have assumed that the Schranz artist in

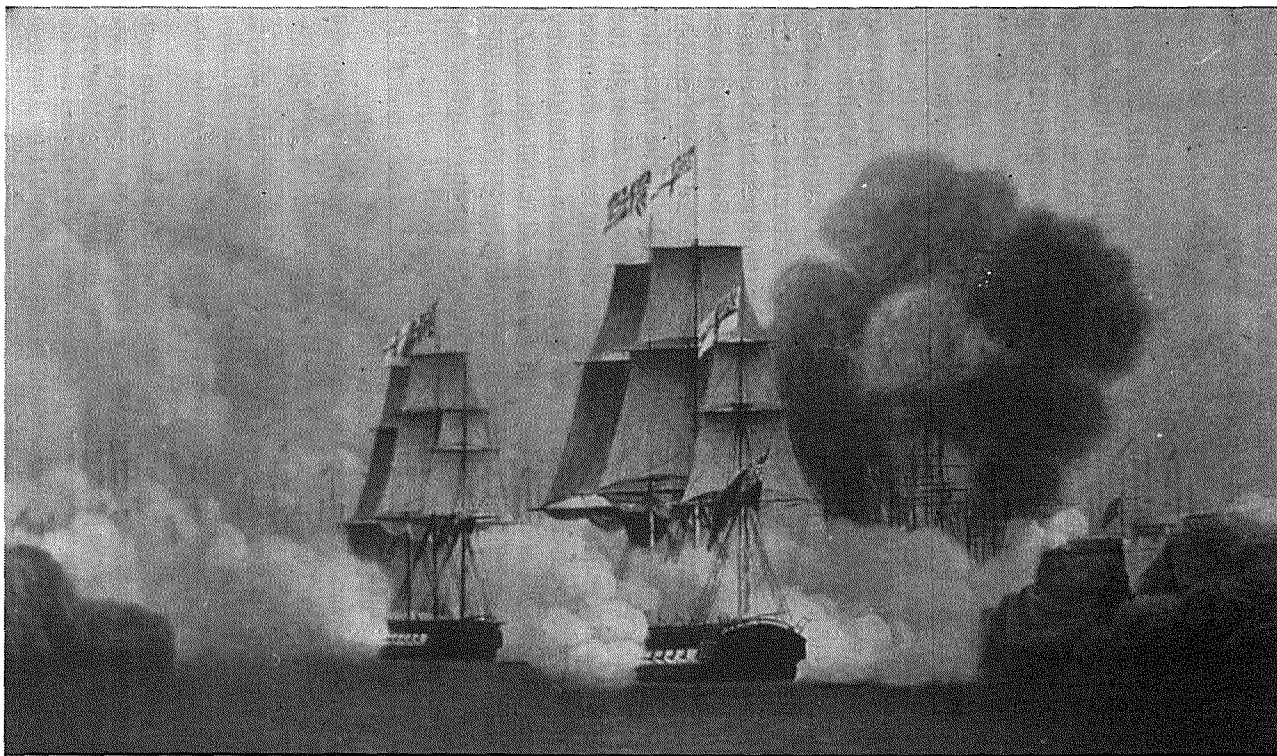
Giuseppe's residence in Constantinople is afforded by the baptism-registration of one of Giovanni's children on 30 August 1838 which specifically declares that Giuseppe was a resident in the Ottoman capital.²¹

The father's death in December 1839 brought the scattered members of the family together. It looks that Giuseppe returned to Malta some time after his father's demise, although so far no trace of his entry into Malta has been located. Yet there exists copies of a print dated 1843 by Giuseppe Schranz entitled *HMS Arethusa in the Grand Harbour, Malta, by Joseph Schranz*. Luckily we now have other evidence of his presence in Malta around this time, namely an entry registering his departure from Malta on 5 October 1844.²²

That brief interlude, lasting maybe a little over a year, seems to have concluded Giuseppe's precarious relations with Malta. Unfortunately, little else could be learnt about the rest of his career, except that he was still in Constantinople just before the outbreak of the Crimean war; indeed a lithograph showing the French, British and Turkish fleets lying at anchor off the coast of the Bosphorus before entering the Black Sea, was issued in Paris – reportedly in December 1852. The present writer thinks the correct date should be December 1853, since the French and British fleets did not pass through the Dardanelles before late October 1853. According to the inscribed information, the landscape was drawn by Sabatier and the ships by Giuseppe Schranz. Yet a version, later reproduced in the volume *Le Bosphore*, attributed the lithograph to Sabatier after J. Schranz – a more likely arrangement since by then Giuseppe's knowledge of the Bosphorus was second to none.

question is Giovanni. Apart from the fact that Giovanni Schranz did not proceed abroad after 1830, one also seriously doubts if he ever made it to Constantinople, even between 1824 and 1830 when he did travel.

- 21 *Vide* P.A. San Paolo Batt. 1833 – 43, p. 540; Carolus Moreno of Villalava stood as godfather by proxy – representing Giuseppe: *tamquam vicesgerens Dni Joseph Schranz residente in Constantinopolim*. Significantly the child was given the name of Costantino.
- 22 In my *Artists of the Schranz Family*, I had stated, as regards the print and its implications: *although it has the superior qualities we associate with Giuseppe's art, the identification with Malta is suspect*. Luckily, since then, evidence of Giuseppe's presence in Malta at the time has come to light, so that there is no further need for prudence on the matter. His name appears as a passenger leaving for Trieste on 5 October 1844 – *vide* Pal. Arch. Arrivals & Departures vol. 69, f.895.



Oil painting by Giuseppe Schranz: "Vessels of Royal Navy in action against pirates in Crete (?)" (private collection).

Regretfully we have no information of Giuseppe Schranz's later years. The reputation of this fine artist faded from memory with the passage of time; he was as superb a painter as he was a draughtsman. The Valletta Museum of Fine Arts possesses two exceptionally fine *Greek landscapes* that had been attributed to Giovanni Schranz until I drew attention to the discrepancy of style between these works and another adjacent landscape in the same Museum more securely attributable to Giovanni. The two *Greek landscapes* possess the unerring feeling for authentic atmospheric effects which Giuseppe was able to evoke, creating a convincing illusion of inner spatial depth, so different from his father's and Giovanni's 'window' effect. His palette tended to deep rich colours without the sombre heaviness of his father's work. His brush could evoke spontaneously natural forms, a quality that – in addition to the feeling of aerial depth – serves to distinguish his work from that of Antonio's. The vivid animation he imparts to his landscape differs substantially from the more showy, but less lively qualities of Giovanni.

Therefore as an artist he belonged fully to his time, his imagination prone to warm to hints of wild and exotic suggestibilities, enabling him to render his skies with enthusiastic sweeps, thus alluding at superhuman immensities, like the genuine Romantic that he was. His grasp of Romantic essentials did not weaken his ability to analyze the flamboyance of the Levant with western eyes, so that he provokes a *repressed* sense of emotional excitement. By contrast, the exotic glamourhunt of Amadeo Preziosi inundates us with its cascading sensuousness. Giuseppe Schranz remained at heart a western artist and a lucid poet; Preziosi, himself overwhelmed by Oriental glamour, became a sensuous aesthete and a mystic.

GIUSEPPE SCHRANZ'S KNOWN VOYAGES

Departure

- 1) 15 June 1826 to Corfu
with Giovanni.
- 2) 1 October 1828 to Zante
- 3) 5 October 1844 to Trieste.

Return

6 November 1826 from Corfu.

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GIOVANNI SCHRANZ

Of the three Schranz brothers, the better known has always been the eldest, Giovanni (born 16 September 1794) who was seven years older than Antonio, and already some sort of partner to his father when the family transferred itself from Minorca to Malta in July 1818. Their first home was in *Strada della Città, Floriana*, according to a St. Paul's parochial census of 1820 where the elder son's name is erroneously reported as Giuseppe and even confused with the head of the family.²³ By early 1820, Giovanni was already sharing some of Marchesi's commissions with his father.

Although solid confirmation is still lacking, it seems that Giovanni travelled in Italy, Sicily and the Ionian islands during 1824. The fact can though be inferred from a sketch-book of Schranz drawings – now held by the Athens art-dealer George Goutis – which contains views of Rome, Corfu and Palermo, apart from one inscribed *Zante 1824*.²⁴ If the information is correct, then Giovanni travelled twice more to the Ionian islands, after which he does not seem to have stirred out of Malta at all. In 1833 he married Maria Concetta Scolaro, settling down to an unexciting existence as a local artist specializing in landscape, and, after 1839, in the production of lithographic prints, at first in partnership with Antonio, then on his own, following the latter's departure from Malta in November 1847.

There are vague hints that his marriage did not altogether please the family, especially the parents, but by then Giovanni was old enough and independent enough to impose his will. They had eight children, including three sons who survived to adulthood; two of these were Rinaldo (b.1935) and Costantino (b.1939) who tried to follow their father's profession, until their progress in art was cut short by an early death which occurred within 17 days of each other in April 1865.

Giovanni appears to have spent his actually married life since 1838 at *no. 6 Strada Sant'Ursola, Valletta* which he is actually documented

23 *Vide* P.A. San Paulo, Status Animarum 1822–1825 (the correct date is 1820). Strada della Città, Floriana, is now St. Anne's Street.

24 In the Goutis sketch-book, one of the drawings is inscribed and dated *Zante 1824*, while another has *G. Schrantz fecit et pinxit*. Since Giuseppe was at the time considered too young to travel on his own, the contents are more likely to be by Giovanni. Information about the Goutis sketch-book was kindly intimated by Mr. Egon Schneider. The present writer has had no opportunity of examining the Goutis sketchbook.

to have lived in at least since 1844. There is though some mystery about the matter, for in the *Government Gazzette* of 31 July 1849, page 86, the tenement is listed as the residence of the Nazarener painter Giuseppe Hyzler. It is possible that Giovanni Schranz and his numerous family occupied a part of the same large house. One deduces too Giovanni's ability to adapt himself to the island's artistic establishment of the nineteenth century, by then a rather tame affair, for decades dominated by Giuseppe Hyzler.

Human-wise, Giovanni managed to do reasonably well, in the process succeeding to arrange favourable marriages for his daughters, one of whom married a well-known neo-classic architect – Dr. Nicola Zammit. At his death, which occurred on 28 December 1882, Giovanni Schranz – then 88 years old – was a widely respected figure; his wife had preceeded him by rather less than five months.²⁵

With Giovanni's demise, the Schranz link with painting was unfortunately severed, as his two artist-sons had predeceased him. In fact the general artistic climate was by then changing radically, rewarding personalized expression rather than sophistication upon the family-artisanship of former centuries. Through these changes, a marine version of the old *vedutismo* – more defusedly Romantic – did in fact perpetuate itself largely through the efforts of marine watercolourists.

In a way Giovanni Schranz's reputation had gained through his two brothers' disappearance from Malta. So that soon in Malta, everything that was Schranz – with the exception of a few works documented to be by Anton – was indiscriminately lumped together and attributed to Giovanni, a lamentable error which the present writer took the trouble to correct in his 1984 study.

Although Giovanni's art was somewhat inferior to that of both Antonio and Giuseppe, he was no mean craftsman and can probably be counted the best lithographic artist of nineteenth century Malta.

25 For references connected with Giovanni Schranz's personal life, and that of his wife and children, *vide* Dominic Cutajar, 'The Schranz Family of Artists' in *Mid-Med Bank Desk Diary 1985*, (Malta, 1984). Giovanni Schranz's death registration – P.A. San Paolo, Morti 1875 – 1903, p. 198 – 28 December 1882 – states that he expired "in his Valetta home in Strada Sant'Ursola" and that he was buried in *Deposito no. 565*, as his own grave – no. 3 Addolorata Cemetery was not yet ready.

There is no doubt that his lithographic production is technically and artistically a cut above the deadpan, rigid approach of Charles Fredrick von Brockdorff, although the lithographs of Michele Bellanti are likewise notable and appealing.

Giovanni Schranz's style and draughtsmanship are definitely more showy than those of his brothers, tending to staticity and to an oppressive kind of sombreness harking back to his father's manner. He resorted to naturalistic forms but without Giuseppe's inspiration or his gift of transformation, so that often his chromatically vivid landscapes become lifeless *mise-en-scenes* – except for his treatment of the sea for which he reveals genuine feeling. His defects are in-built tendencies in the art of *vedutismo*, a pedantic attachment to objectivity, stickling at details and accuracy at the expense of the poetic dimension.

GIOVANNI SCHRANZ'S KNOWN VOYAGES

Departure

Return

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1) A possible voyage to the Ionian islands, Italy and Western Sicily undertaken in 1824 inferred from the Goutis sketchbook. | |
| 2) 15 June 1825 to Corfu, with Giuseppe Schranz. | 27 September 1827 from Corfu. |
| 3) – | 7 September 1830 from Zante. |

THE DRIFT EAST – Amadeo Preziosi and other artists

It has always been a well-known fact that in the small confines of Maltese art, the lure of that exotic world called Constantinople had claimed Amadeo Preziosi, an aristocrat with a particularly refined sensibility that was to find best expression in a series of richly hued watercolours, splendidly capturing the dreamy 'Arabian Nights' atmosphere of Ottoman Constantinople and the Levant milieu of mid-nineteenth century.

Earlier, the magic of the Orient had claimed the Schranz brothers, gathering in its enchanted lap the best two of them years before Count Preziosi. And so strong was to prove the power of this call that, before the middle of the century had been reached, other artists had succumbed to its siren enticements, most of all to the spell exercised by the great

eastern metropolis where so many cultures merged or persisted side by side in an atmosphere of rarified decay and of fabulous Oriental cosmopolitanism. Constantinople was then still a scenario where munificence and fantastic opulence stood cheek-by-jowl with sights of vile brutality and degradation.

Some notion of this fantastic world is conveyed in a beautiful monograph on the watercolours of Amadeo Count Preziosi entitled *The People and Places of Constantinople*, issued in 1985 by the Victoria and Albert Museum. Its joint authors – Briony Llewellyn and Charles Newton – remarked thus on the remarkable attachment shown by Maltese artists for Constantinople (page 7):

‘It is not certain when Preziosi arrived in Constantinople, but it seems to have been by November 1842, the date on a group of drawings of Constantinople subjects’. Slightly earlier, the same authors had remarked (page 6):

The place he selected for his escape was Constantinople, for reasons which, in the absence of any declared motives, must be surmised. Malta, in the middle of the Mediterranean, was visited by many travellers en route between Western Europe and the Near East. Several of its indigenous artists found their way eastward and in particular to Constantinople. Among these were several members of the Schranz family who made their living by drawing views in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, as well as Malta, for gentlemen – travellers. One of Giovanni Schranz’s (1794 – 1882) specialities seems to have been large panoramic views of Constantinople, often on several sheets of paper joined together, with buildings and shipping delineated in minute detail. Some of these can be dated c.1832 – 1834, but he certainly visited the city more than once. Another Maltese artist active in Constantinople around this time was Luigi Brocktorff. If as is likely Preziosi knew something of the work of these artists, this may well have contributed to his decision to see Constantinople for himself.

The passage relevantly draws attention to the concentration of activities by Maltese artists in the Ottoman capital. It is a subject so far not delved into methodically. To be more precise, the Schranz artist active in Constantinople around 1832 – 1834 was in fact Giuseppe, and not Giovanni, as we have already shown. Giuseppe’s panoramic views created by attaching sheets of paper together seems to have been inspired by a similar practice of the Genevan watercolourist Louis Ducros who had visited Malta in 1788 – 89 and again in 1800 – 1801. We can help clarify the Brockdorff’s connections with Constantinople, apart from clearing the minor mystery regarding Preziosi’s ascertained transfer to the great metropolis on the Bosphorus.

Throughout the period under discussion, a fair number of important figures in the world of art had passed through Malta in their

search for the more exotic corners of the Mediterranean. One of these famous figures was William Turner who turned up briefly in Malta on 7 May 1828 on board the *pacchetto a vapore* – a 250 ton Neapolitan packet-steamer (very much a novelty) – *Real Ferdinando*, hosting 49 distinguished passengers, including the Bavarian prince Thunn-Taxis. The vessel sailed out the very next day bound for Messina and Naples.²⁶

Among other celebrities passing through Malta, we find David Roberts, who stayed on from 16 June to 7 July 1839, on his return West from Alexandria and a tour of the Orient. Yet another was the restless Edward Lear whose first stay in Malta followed hard on his Albanian tour, reaching Malta from Corfu on 13 December 1848 and leaving for the East by the end of the month.²⁷

It is probably clear by now that the interest of Maltese artists in Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean in general grew out from a vaster Maltese drift taking shape after 1820 and directed mostly towards the Ionian islands. In fact, among the first to move to Corfu were various artists of the Dimech family, especially Ferdinando Dimech, a sculptor-cum-architect commissioned by Governor Maitland to erect a number of buildings for the British administration. Between 1823 and 1835 he kept ferrying between the two islands on at least four or five occasions, often taking his wife and children with him. Other artists who also commuted between Malta and Corfu were William Baker (1833), Giovanni Battista Dimech and Michele Faenza (both in 1827). It will thus be seen that the Schranzes' interest in the Ionian islands was far from an isolated phenomenon.

The Brockdorffs

Strange as it may seem, the Brockdorffs – who at the time still

²⁶ *Vide* Pal. Arch. Departures vol. 27, entry no. 511.

²⁷ For David Roberts' passage through Malta, *vide* Pal. Arch. Arrivals & Departures vol. 49, ff. 318 and 348. For Edward Lear's first stop in Malta from Italy, *vide ibid.* vol. 85 f.321 (8 April 1848); his later moves are difficult to rationalize since the information is incomplete, for which *vide ibid.* vol. 88 f. 1257 - 13 December 1848 (from Corfu); also *ibid.* vol. 88 f. 1307 – 30 December 1848 (to Levant), and *ibid.* vol. 89 f. 211 – 1 March 1849 (arriving from Alexandria). Coincidental with Lear, one notes also the arrival in Malta of Franklin Lushington – with his father and two sisters on 25 October 1848.

formed a fairly strong familial nucleus in keen competition with the Schranzes – did not exhibit any interest in the opportunities opening up in the Ionian islands, that is, if the passenger-lists are an accurate reflection of movements between Malta and those islands. There is a note of Giovanni Brockdorff returning to Malta from Syracuse on 23 January 1831, while Luigi Brockdorff left for Leghorn on 13 June 1835, returning directly from the same port on 23 September 1835. It seems the earliest record of a voyage engaged by Luigi Brockdorff which might just have enabled him to pay a very quick visit to Constantinople, since Leghorn was one of the main ports in the Mediterranean; the writer though finds the argument unconvincing.

Maria Antonia Brockdorff, wife of Federico, sailed for Smyrna on 22 February 1837. It is the first solid evidence of the Brockdorffs' interest in the Levant, confirmed by the transfer to Constantinople – on 21 March 1844 – of Federico Brockdorff together with his wife and two children.²⁸ Only a few years before, Federico had petitioned the Civil Secretary in these pathetic terms: 'being poor, (he) prays for a remission of Lazzaretto dues'. The request which, one notes with satisfaction was promptly granted, is dated 9 February 1838²⁹ and seems to record the artist's return from the East, a fact that necessitated his entry in the Lazzaretto.

The next Brockdorff to sail east, this time directly to Constantinople, was Francesco, the nature of whose interest in the region is though unclear. He left Malta on 12 March 1841, returned on 13 September 1844, only to sail back to the Bosphorus almost immediately, on 29 September of the same year – 16 days later.

The more important figure for our purpose is Luigi Brockdorff who might have been in Constantinople in 1835. Nevertheless he did arrive in the Turkish capital several years later, because he returned to Malta from that city on 22 August 1844, to migrate again to Constantinople five weeks later (on 3 October 1844) accompanied by his wife Giacchina and his son Saverio. Yet other factors help to confirm that Luigi was still active in Malta from 1836 as late as 1842.³⁰

28 *Vide* respectively, Pal. Arch. Arrivals & Departures vol. 43 f. 3029, and vol. 66 f. 125.

29 *Vide* Pal. Arch., Register of Petitions 1838 – 1842, listed by date.

30 For Francesco Brockdorff's moves to and fro Constantinople, *vide* Pal. Arch. Arrivals & Departures vol. 54 f. 14, and again vol. 69 ff. 841 and 766. For the relative references concerning Luigi Brockdorff's moves in the East, *vide ibid.* vol. 69, ff. 802 and 790.

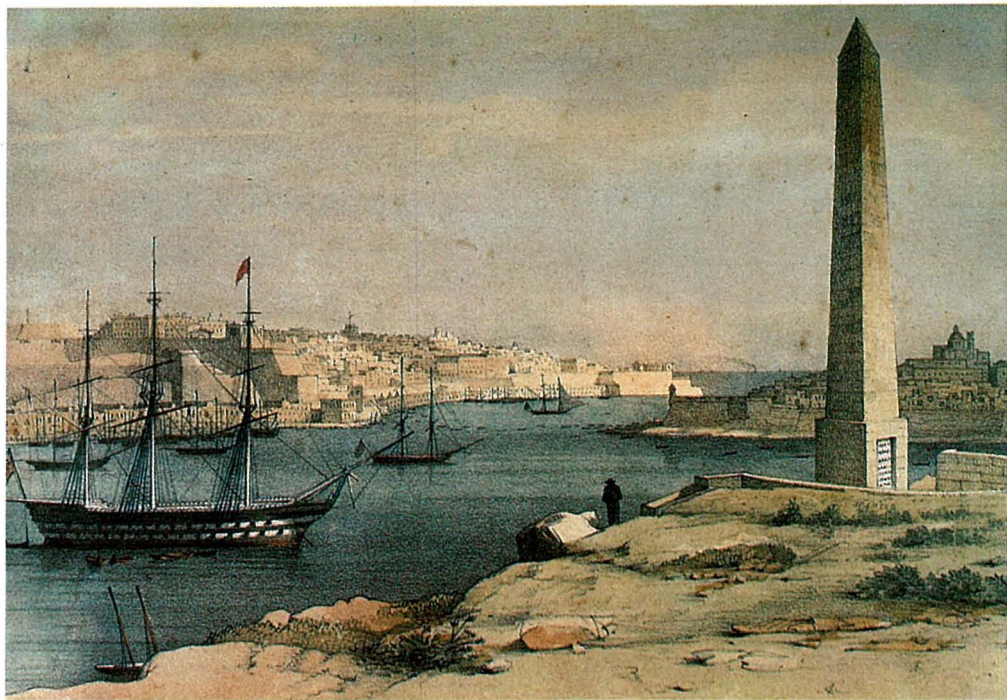
By the end of 1844 three of the Brockdorffs were definitely based in Constantinople, two of them – Federico and Luigi – together with their families. So far it has not proved possible to plot their early connections with the East in general; the confirmed dates of their presence in Constantinople do not antedate 1841, with the exception of Federico, whose wife's move to Smyrna in 1837 as well as his own petition of 1838 are the earliest records of the Brockdorffs' interest in the Levant. Indications are lacking that Luigi was in Constantinople either in 1835 or before, as Briony Llewellyn and Charles Newton have assumed. The general conclusion is that the Brockdorffs were drawn East by the reports of the considerable successes being scored in Constantinople by Giuseppe and Antonio Schranz, the more so after so many of the Schranzes had congregated in the eastern metropolis between 1836 and 1838.

Malta's Artistic Milieu around the mid-nineteenth century

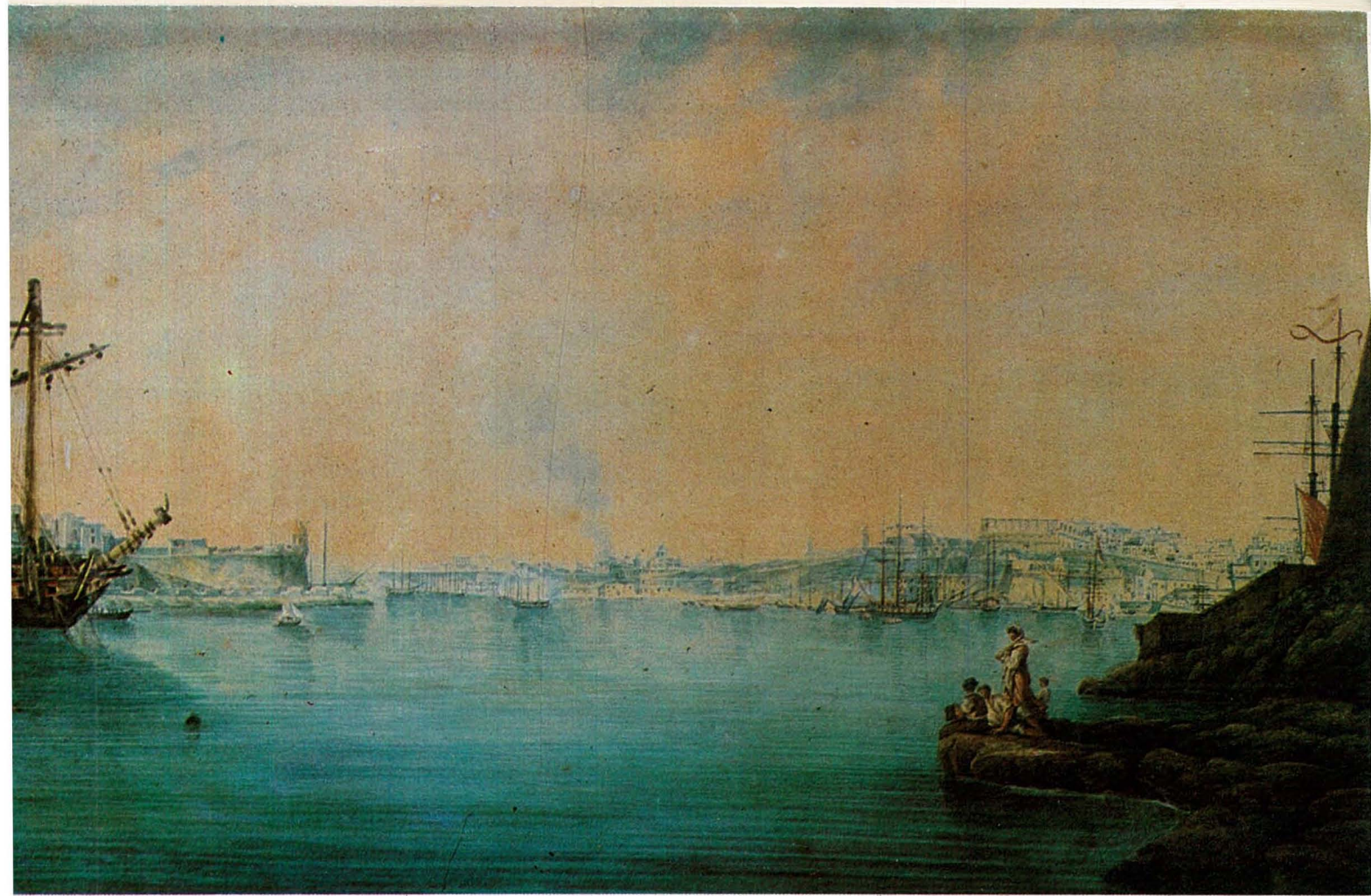
From the general climate outlined, it becomes easier to understand Amadeo Preziosi's growing interest in the Levant, especially when one appreciates the intense concentration of artistic activities indulged in Constantinople by the Schranzes and the Brockdorffs, Preziosi had arrived back in Malta, together with his brother, in 1840 – fresh from his 'studies' in Paris. His family was on practically equal social terms with the family of Sir Vincenzo Casolani, one of whose sons – Henry Casolani (b.1817) – was at the time studying at the *Accademia* in Rome in company with Vincenzo Hyzler, a younger brother of the better-known Giuseppe.

To ignore the same opportunity and to decide to sail to the Levant (18 June 1841) reveal that other things were on Amadeo Preziosi's mind, specifically the lure of the Orient and the Romantic appeal attached to the notion. He reappeared back in Malta, just over a year later, on 10 July 1842. It is by no means clear whether he touched Constantinople on this voyage, but by then his mind was certainly made up, despite the opposition of the family immersed in rigid conventionality. Only two-and-a-half months later – on 28 September 1842 – Count Preziosi embarked on board the French steamer *Eurotas* and sailed away to Constantinople.³¹ Llewellyn and Newton

31 *Vide* Pal. Arch., Arrival & Departures vol. 55 f. 383, and again vol. 60, ff. 487 and 669.

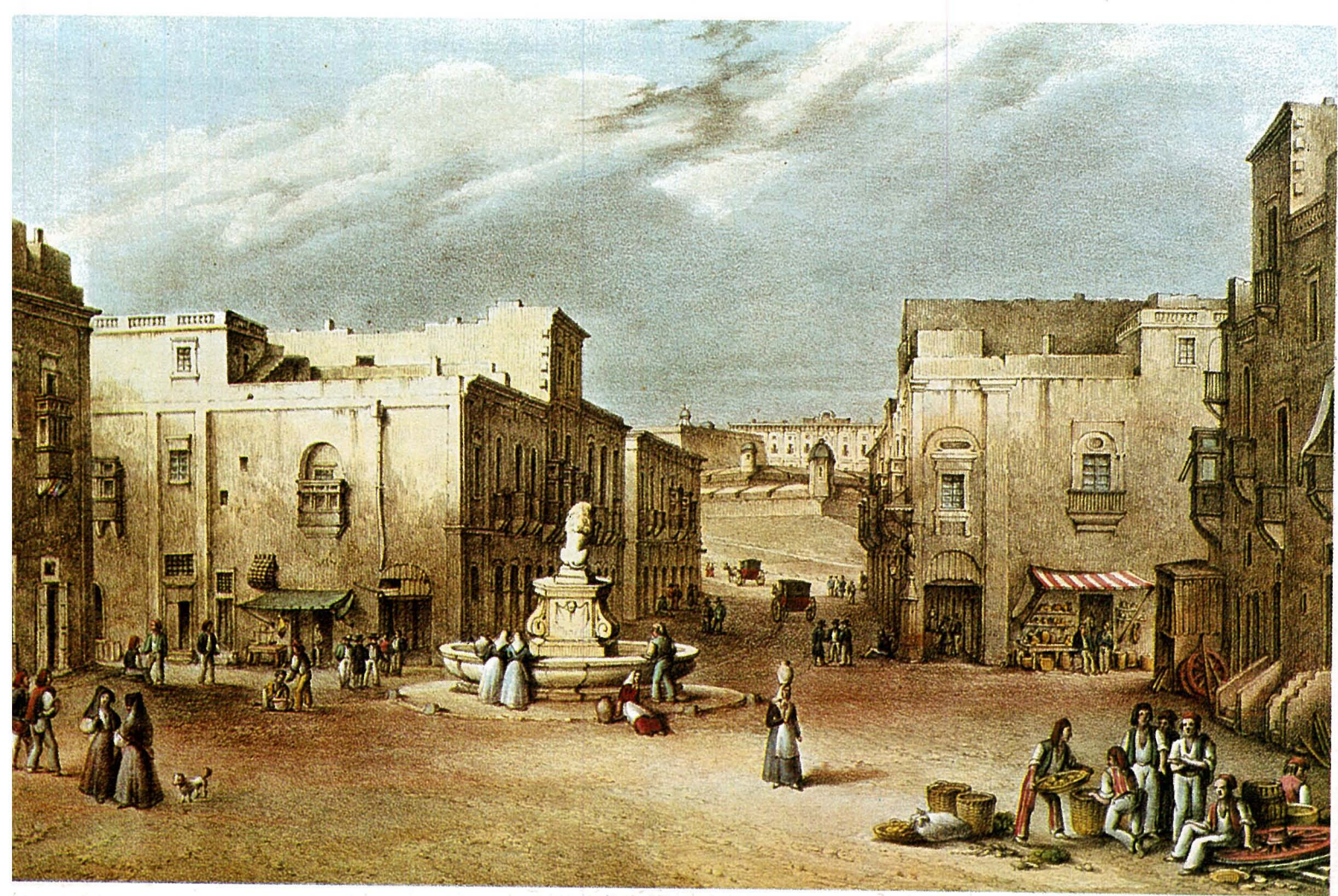


A view of Grand Harbour from Corradino Hill – lithograph by Michele Bellanti
HYPHEN

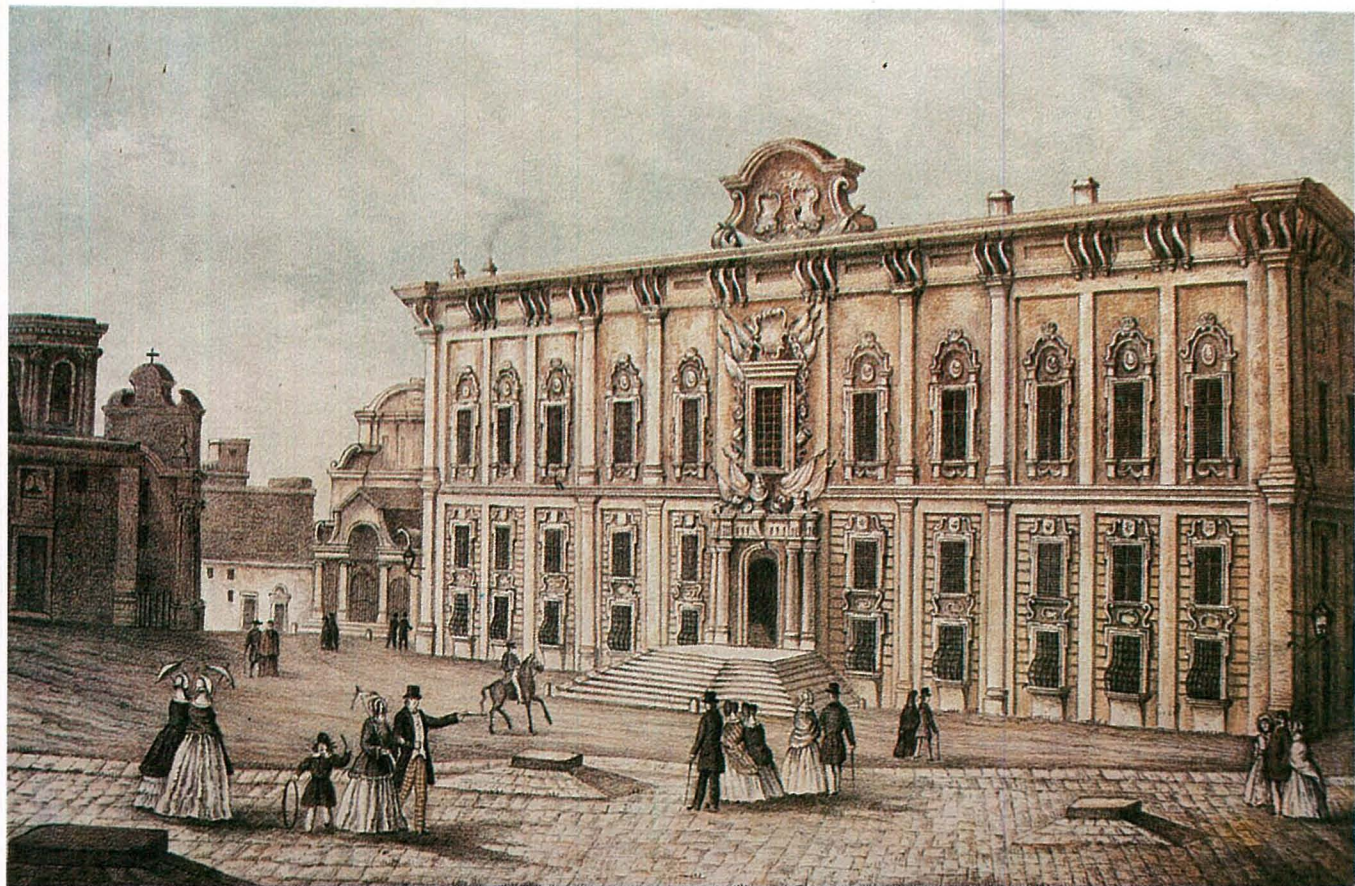


A view across the Grand Harbour from St. Angelo – lithograph, probably by Giuseppe Schranz (c. 1845)

HYPHEN



Strada della Città, now St. Anne Street, Floriana – lithograph by Schranz Brothers (c. 1845)



A view of Auberge de Castile – lithograph probably by Charles Brockdorff (1840)

HYPHEN

suggest that Preziosi was working in the Ottoman capital by November 1842, which agrees to perfection with the date supplied above.

The art of Amadeo Preziosi is a blend of sleek drawing and glowing colours, so that the sensuous excitement of the exotic cosmopolitan life of Constantinople with its bewildering contrasts suited to perfection his adventurous temperament with its yearning for wild rhythms and chromatic outbursts. He was particularly sensitive to the riot of Oriental sensuality thinly veiling most aspects of life in the Levant. Precisely such suggestibility enlivens Preziosi's art and still preserves its attraction.

Preziosi should be viewed as a superb illustrator, inebriated by the spectacle of an archaic but decaying splendour, imaging an age on the point of vanishing for ever. Preziosi was in fact an avid visual annotator of a transient reality, in a special way the documentor of its garish shell; by way of contrast, Giuseppe and Antonio Schranz had seen *through* this layer, to communicate the abiding factor of eastern reality – the grandeur of its natural vista.

Michele Bellanti and the Maltese Nazareners

Apart from the artists already mentioned, yet another Maltese painter enticed by the glamour of the East, albeit apparently briefly, was Michele Bellanti (1807 – 1883) who appears to have reached Constantinople only a little ahead or after Preziosi. He had previously travelled in Italy (and maybe in France) together with his brother between September 1839 and May 1840. In Rome he had contacts with the influential Nazarener group at a time when a Maltese nucleus was taking an active part in its solemn attempts to revive a new Christian art. Bellanti's return from Constantinople is documented on 12 May 1843, so that his stay in Constantinople could not have lasted very long.³²

Evidence is missing that either the two Hyzler painters, or their close friend Henry Casolani, were in fact tempted to sample the attractions of the Levant, although all three were on familiar terms with the Schranz family, and on quite a different level with the

32 For Michele Bellanti's re-entry from Constantinople, *vide* Pal.Arch., Arrival & Departures vol. 65 f. 749. For his earlier voyage to Marseilles and Italy, *vide ibid.* vol. 50, f. 432, and vol. 51 f. 228.

Preziosis. Giuseppe Hyzler had accompanied his brother Vincenzo to Rome on 16 August 1839; both were warmly welcomed by the Nazarener group established in that city by Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869) and soon formed long-lasting ties of comradeship. A month later Michele Bellanti joined them, and it is thus that the art of all three came to adopt the same rigorous approach of the Nazarener Brotherhood. Giuseppe Hyzler returned to Malta in September, leaving Vincenzo in Italy where he remained for the next four years, participating fully in the movement's vicissitudes. Apparently Vincenzo needed persuasion to return home for, on 6 June 1843, Giuseppe Hyzler proceeded back to Rome, to return on 27 July of the same year duly accompanied by his brother Vincenzo and his close friend Henry Casolani.³³

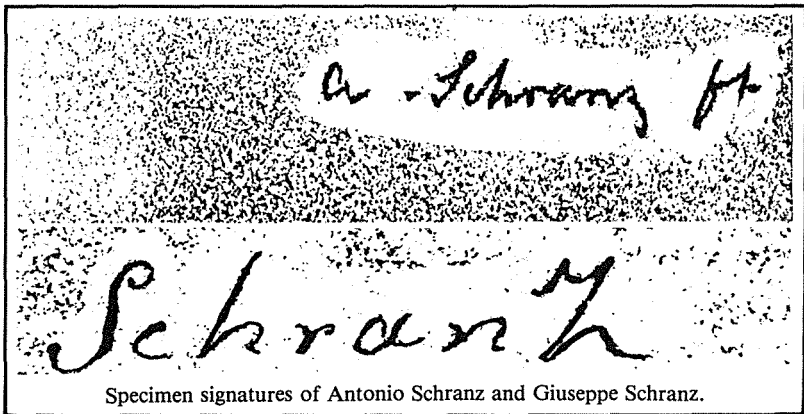
The above circumstances are not bereft of ulterior interest, since they bring into relief a net division of interest in Maltese nineteenth century art, between the traditionalists who sought a 'serious' renewal through an infusion of Nazarener ideology – a group among which the Hyzlers were the main protagonists – and those open to the Romantic impact seeking to fulfil it in the wider Mediterranean context – prominent among which were the Schranzes, the Brockdorffs and Amadeo Preziosi. That the division was apparently not felt by the participants themselves is plainly evidenced by Michele Bellanti's ability to manoeuvre from one sphere to another, and by the network of social relations that linked most of these artists.

The general attraction which the Levant and the East Mediterranean came to exercise over the minds of some of the artists in Malta between 1820 and 1850 represents a new and revealing historical insight.

The origin of Maltese migration

It should be recalled that it all grew out of a more massive phenomenon – the large-scale migratory flow of Maltese to the Ionian Islands, rendered easier by the latter's annexation by the British during the Napoleonic wars. This migration came to assume consider-

33 For the various passages to Italy and back by the Hyzler brothers and Henry Casolani, *vide* Pal. Arch., Arrivals & Departures, vol. 49 f.412; vol. 50 f.504; vol. 63 f. 314; and vol. 64 f. 475. The other fairly numerous displacement by Casolani have been ignored.

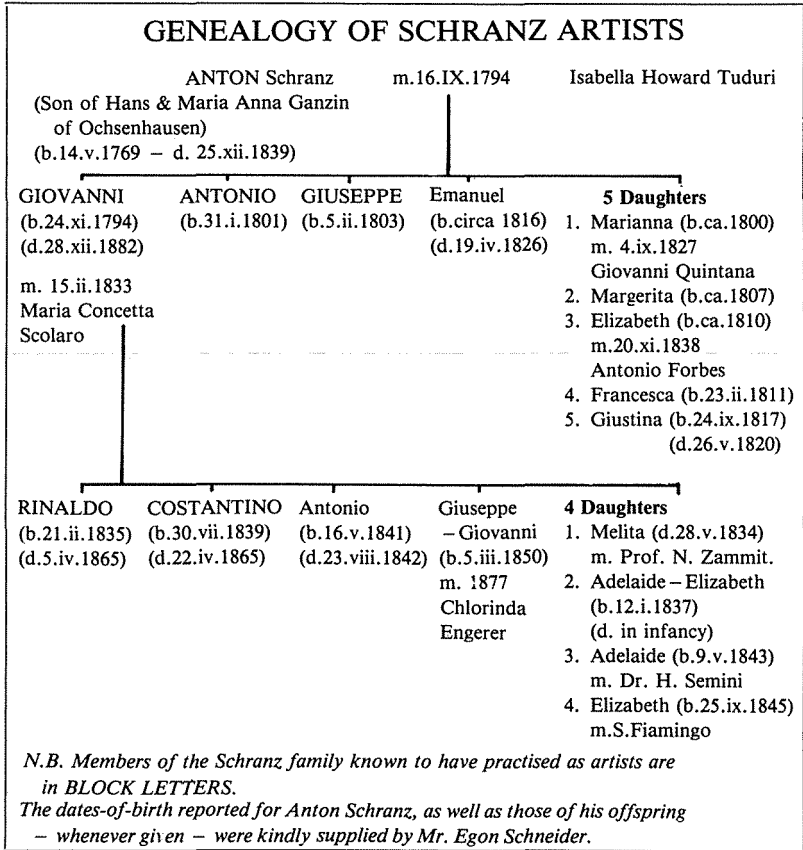


able proportions, so much so that the 1826 Departures Register records the first known *organised* attempt to establish a colony of Maltese outside Malta. On 16 September 1826, the English brig *Adolfo* embarked 285 Maltese, accompanied by a priest and a medical doctor, with the expressed purpose of setting up a colony on the island of Cephalonia: *Sieguono i nomi di 285 Maltesi formanti una colonia per Cefalonia compreso il Prete, Medico e loro famigliari partiti col Adolfo* . . . Very similarly organized attempts at mass settlements were again made 11 years later, although this time directed much further afield, to the Caribbean area: on 16 September 1839, 157 emigrants departed for Georgetown, followed on 29 October 1839, by 167 emigrants for Grenada.³⁴ The far-flung nature of the latter two attempts was untypical, as by mid-century outgoing migrants in the vast majority of cases continued seeking outlets within the Mediterranean.

A major breakthrough arrived with the 1830 conquest of Algiers by the French; in the very same year of the conquest, shiploads of Maltese migrants directed themselves to that port, and others on the Algerian coast as these fell to the French. Yet throughout these events, the Ionian Islands never ceased to attract Maltese families.

One of the effects of the capture of Algiers was to open up other ports in North Africa and in the East Mediterranean to European

34 For the officially organized attempt to found a Maltese colony upon Cefalonia in the Ionians, *vide* Palace Archives, Departures vol. 24, unpaginated; the record is entered against date of 16 September 1826. For the similar Georgetown attempt, *vide ibid.* Arrivals & Departures, vol. 50 f. 469 – 16 September 1839; while for the Grenada colony, *vide ibid.* vol. 50 f. 537 – 29 October 1839.



penetration after 1830. The Maltese themselves made great use of these new facilities, particularly in Tunis, Sfax, Alexandria, Smyrna, and – to a lesser degree – Constantinople.

Even the eastward diaspora of Maltese artists between 1820 and 1850 has to be interpreted as a direct consequence of the massive dispersion of Maltese to the east and south Mediterranean throughout the nineteenth century – without, of course, excluding the influence of other less tangible factors. The phenomenon of mass Maltese migration in the first half of the nineteenth century is, though, a social phenomenon whose importance cannot be exaggerated, and one hopes it will receive its due attention.

SCHEDULE I

Recorded displacements by the Schranzes 1818 – 1847

| Departures | | Destination | Arrivals | | Point of Origin |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 23.vii.1825 | Antonio | Corfu | 17.vii.1818 | Isabella & children | Mahon |
| 15.vi.1826 | Giovanni & Giuseppe | Corfu | 14.iv.1827 | Antonio & P.A. Raife | Corfu |
| | | | 6.xi.1826 | Giuseppe | Corfu |
| | | | 27.ix.1827 | Giovanni | Corfu |
| 1.x.1828 | Giuseppe | Zante | 7.ix.1830 | Giovanni | Zante |
| | | | 3.vi.1833 | Antonio | Poros |
| | | | 22.xii.1834 | Antonio | Livorno |
| 26.iv.1836 | Antonio | Smyrna & Constantinople | 4.xii.1839 | Antonio | Constantinople |
| 20.vii.1836 | Margerita & Francesca | Odessa | 8.xii.1837 | Margerita & Francesca | Odessa and Constantinople |
| 19.ii.1838 | Isabella & Margerita | Constantinople | 29.viii.1838 | Isabella | Constantinople |
| | | | 5.i.1841 | “Caterina” (= Margerita) | Constantinople |
| 26.ix.1840 | “Schranz” (= Antonio) | Italy & Marseilles | 11.ii.1841 | Antonio | Trieste & Lussino Piccolo |
| 28.viii.1841 | Isabella & Margerita | Mahon | 28.v.1842 | Isabella & Margerita | Algiers |
| 26.xi.1841 | Antonio leaves with Castelereagh | | 5.x.1842 | Antonio | Alexandria |
| 5.x.1844 | Giuseppe | Trieste | – | | |
| 27.ix.1845 | Antonio | Alexandria | 5.v.1847 | Antonio | Alexandria |
| 13.v.1847 | Antonio | Sicily & Naples | 24.vii.1847 | Antonio | Marseilles & Leghorn |
| 11.xi.1847 | Antonio | Alexandria | | | |

N.B. Destination and port of embarkation are in all cases those reported by the vessel's captain.

SCHEDULE II

Some displacements by the Brockdorffs, Preziosi, Bellanti and by several other Maltese artists - 1820-1850

| Departures | | Destination | Arrivals | | Point of Origin |
|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|---|----------------------|
| 13.vi.1835 | Luigi Brockdorff | Leghorn | 23.i.1832 | Giovanni Brockdorff | Syracuse |
| 22.ii.1837 | Maria Antonia Brockdorff | Smyrna | 23.ix.1835 | Luigi Brockdorff | |
| 12.iii.1841 | Francesco Brockdorff | Constantinople | 13.ix.1844 | Francesco Brockdorff | Constantinople |
| 3.x.1844 | Federico Brockdorff & family | Constantinople | — | | |
| 29.ix.1844 | Francesco Brockdorff | Constantinople | — | | |
| 3.x.1844 | Luigi Brockdorff & family | Constantinople | 22.viii.1844 | Luigi Brockdorff | Constantinople |
| 18.vi.1841 | Amadeo Preziosi | Levant | 10.vii.1842 | Amadeo Preziosi | Levant |
| 28.ix.1842 | Amadeo Preziosi | Levant | — | | |
| 12.ix.1839 | Michele Bellanti | Italy and Marseilles | 6.v.1840 | Michele Bellanti | Leghorn |
| — | | | 12.ix.1843 | Michele Bellanti | Constantinople |
| Other artists | | | | | |
| 24.viii.1823 | Filippo Benucci | Gibraltar | 8.iv.1827 | Gio. Batt. Dimech | Corfu |
| 31.viii.1827 | P.P. Caruana | Leghorn | 28.x.1827 | P.P. Caruana & family | Leghorn |
| | | | 8.viii.1827 | Michele Faenza | Corfu |
| 2.xi.1832 | Luigi Taffien | Gibraltar | | | |
| 19.v.1833 | William Baker | Corfu | | | |
| 23.ii.1833 | Salvatore Busuttill | Leghorn | 2.ii.1837 | Giovanni Farrugia <i>incisore</i> | Leghorn |
| 16.viii.1839 | Giuseppe & Vincenzo Hyzler | Italy & Marseilles | 26.ix.1839 | Giuseppe Hyzler | Leghorn |
| | | | 27.v.1841 | Raffaele Caruana | Marseilles & Leghorn |
| 6.vi.1843 | Giuseppe Hyzler | Marseilles | 27.vii.1843 | Giuseppe & Vincenzo Hyzler with Henry Casolani | Leghorn |
| 26.xi.1843 | Raffaele Caruana | Marseilles | 18.ii.1844 | Raffaele Caruana | Marseilles & Leghorn |
| 23.vi.1845 | Raffaele Caruana | Liverpool | — | | |

N.B. Destination and port of embarkation as reported by vessel's captain. List of Other Artists is selective.