

Andrea Soldi's portraits of Levant Company merchants (c. 1733-36): who are they?

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Andrea Soldi (c. 1703-1771) was a Florentine artist whose early career was spent producing portraits of the Levant Company merchants in Aleppo and Constantinople. The antiquary George Vertue, the most substantial source for Soldi's life and career, wrote of the artist:

from his own Country he set out to the Holyland which he had great desire to see, in his way there or back at Aleppo. he became acquainted with some English Merchants whose pictures having drawn. with much approbation. they advised him to come to England which he did – with some of them.¹

Soldi's journey to London from Aleppo would have taken place in or around 1735-6. Here he found 'portraiture dominated by the pupils of Kneller's Academy, none of whom could be termed exuberant,'² and quickly found success throughout the 1740s with patrons including the 4th Viscount Fauconberg and the 2nd Duke of Manchester. However, Soldi soon developed aspirations for personal ennoblement and ran into debt. Vertue writes:

Soldi. the painter by his Merrit and interest of Friends has had considerable Busines livd well kept house a Madam &c. Entertainments of which expences. put him under difficulties – running in debt – and behind hand. at present his creditors some of them prosecuted him to the Fleet, where he is now under composition. – But his high mind & conceptions grandisses. willing to be thought a Count or Marquis, rather than an excellent painter. – Such Idle vanitys, has done him no good. & in this Case will make it the more difficult for him to submit to his Creditors termes.- upon this occasion some friends of his – finding he has business in hand begun for Nobility & others of value, or a brace of hundreds. and prospects of going on well enough if he can make any abatements to his pride or Expenses – is some hopes he may be reestablished –³

But Soldi lost his reputation among his aristocratic patrons and died impoverished; his funeral was paid for by Joshua Reynolds.⁴

Soldi's earliest known portraits, dated between 1733 and 1736, are all presumed to represent British merchants of the Levant Company though the identity of the sitters often remains uncertain. The notable exception is the portrait of Henry Lannoy Hunter (who married Eleanor Bosanquet, 1736),⁵ known as 'Resting from Hunting, with a Manservant Holding Game' and now in the Tate Britain.



'Henry Lannoy Hunter Resting from Hunting, with a Manservant Holding Game'
(Tate Britain)

But who are the subjects of Soldi's other portraits of Levant merchants? Here are some of them, and I would greatly appreciate any suggestions or hints as to whom they might be.

Dated 1733, making this one of the earliest of Soldi's Levant portraits, the following 'Portrait of a Gentleman, possibly Richard Salwey' was auctioned in 2011 and realized 725% over estimate.⁶ This is evidently not the Richard Salwey (bap. 1615, d.1686) who, in 1645, sat on the Long Parliament as MP for Appleby in Westmoreland, joined the republican army at the siege of Worcester in June 1646, but subsequently avoided active service while remaining on good terms with Cromwell. In August 1654, he was appointed ambassador to Constantinople, but returned to England on the fall of Cromwell's protectorate in 1659. Escaping punishment at the Restoration, he was later associated with various plots but, apart from a short spell in the Tower in late 1663, remained at liberty. He died in 1688 and 'was survived by his wife Anne, with whom he had at least one son, John.'⁷



'Portrait of a Gentleman, possibly Richard Salwey'

The Weiss Gallery in London recently acquired Soldi's 'Unknown Gentleman in Levantine Dress' dated 1734, noting in their catalogue that this portrait is unusual since the sitter is wearing a full-length beard and no turban.⁸



'Unknown Gentleman in Levantine Dress'
(Weiss Gallery, London)

Sold at Sothebys in July 2011 for £421,250, the 'Portrait of a Merchant of the Levant Company in Turkish dress; a View of Aleppo Beyond,' may once have been owned by King Farouk II of Egypt (1920-1965), and was possibly sold on in 1954. The

Sotheby's catalogue points out that 'of all the known portraits Soldi painted in the Levant, this is the only known one to specifically make reference to Aleppo, in the form of a distant view of the city, to which the sitter points.'⁹



'Portrait of a Merchant of the Levant Company in Turkish dress; a View of Aleppo Beyond'

Dated 1735, the 'Portrait of a Levant Company Merchant' currently offered by Derek Johns of London, is inscribed 'L^o' which, if an abbreviation for London, would indicate that Soldi had reached England by that year.¹⁰

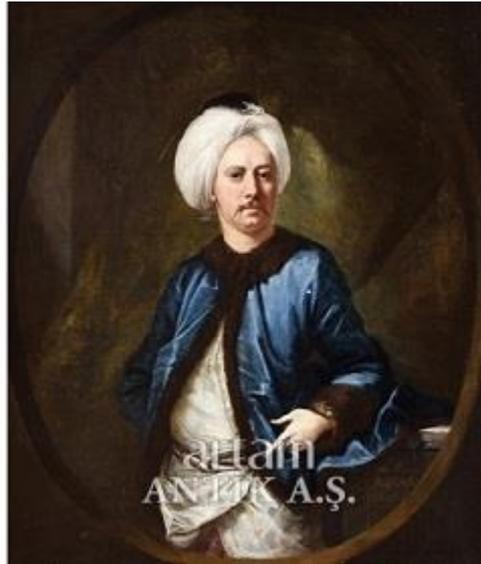


'Portrait of a Levant Company Merchant'

Attributed to Soldi, the following portrait has been said to be of an Ottoman official rather than a Levant Company merchant and is of uncertain date. It was sold at auction in Zurich in 2015.¹¹



Of uncertain provenance, another portrait attributed to Soldi came up for auction in Istanbul recently that may represent a Levant Company merchant.¹²



¹ George Vertue, *Vertue Note Books III*, ed., Katharine Ada Esdaile, et al, 7 vols (Oxford: for the Walpole Society, 1930-1955): 3: 109; see also 84, 132, 159; and see John Ingamells, 'Andrea Soldi – 1,' *Connoisseur* 185 (March 1974): 192-200; and 'Andrea Soldi – 2,' *Connoisseur* 186 (July 1974): 178-85.

² John Ingamells, 'Andrea Soldi – A Check-List of his Work,' *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 47 (1978-80): 1-20; this quotation p. 1.

³ Vertue, *Note Books*, 3: 120

⁴ Ingamell, 'Check List,' p. 1.

⁵ 'Hunter Papers' The National Archives, online at <<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/6435c73c-4f30-b63d-e821c4e30f72>> accessed 7 April 2019.

⁶ Found online at <<https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Portrait-of-a-gentleman-possibly-richard/AD2FA3290462E138>> accessed 7 April 2019.

⁷ C. H. Firth, revised by Sean Kelsey, 'Richard Salwey,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24588>> accessed 7 April 2019.

⁸ Found online at <<https://www.weissgallery.com/artworks/9406-andrea-soldi-c.1703-1771-an-unknown-gentleman-in-levantine-dress=1734/>> accessed 7 April 2019.

⁹ See <www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/old-master-british-paintings-day-sale-11034/lot.321.html> accessed 7 April 2019.

¹⁰ See <<https://derekjohns.co.uk/artworks/categories/2/870/>> accessed 7 April 2019.

¹¹ Found online at <<https://www.invaluable.com/artist/soldi-andrea-gms74zqlsl/sold-at-auction-prices/>> accessed 7 April 2019.

¹² Found online at <www.artnet.com/artists/andrea-soldi/osmanli-kiyafetli-portre-JTdPROIE-qbmX_70UXrFuQ2> accessed 7 April 2019.