



15

1922
THE EPIC OF
SMYRNA REFUGEES
IN MALTA

Date

TELEGRAM.

SECRET

From Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

To Admiralty, R.A.Malta and S.N.O.(A) Constantinople.

PRIORITY. 253. 282. Owing to large influx of refugees and complete demoralisation of Greek Army steps are being taken to embark British Colony. The British residents are very scattered and it is impossible to ensure protection, alternative of concentrating them in one spot has been considered and rejected owing to difficulties of feeding and accommodation. There are large numbers of women and children and in order to guarantee their safety it has been arranged to embark them tomorrow Tuesday. It is proposed to send all British subjects who wish to leave to Cyprus(?) except Maltese who will be sent to Malta outside numbers for either place 1500. Request Colonial authorities be asked to make necessary arrangements for reception of the persons evacuated will only have provisions for the voyage. Consul General is telegraphing Foreign Office and Cyprus(?). Sent to Admiralty. Repeated to Rear Admiral, Malta, for information of Governor and S.N.O.(A) Constantinople for information of British High Commissioner. 253. 282.

1342/4.



Terror-stricken, thousands flocked to the city's long waterfront and begged to be taken aboard the western ships. Photo: Richard Ellis Archive.

1922. THE EPIC OF SMYRNA REFUGEES IN MALTA

Giorgio Peresso

Smyrna (today Izmir in Turkey) was a major multicultural and cosmopolitan centre within the Ottoman Empire. Maltese emigrants have settled in this important seaport city on the Aegean coast since at least the early years of the 19th century. By 1918, the Maltese were one small group in a very mixed population, estimated at between 1,800 and 3,000 persons. Most of them had been born in Smyrna and had no contact with Malta. Some were four generations removed from the island of their ancestors. The only link with Malta was mostly sentimental.

15.1 The Beginning of the End

Following the end of World War 1 (1914-1918) and the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, the Greek forces landed in the city on 15 May 1919, marking the beginning of the Graeco-Turkish War (1919-1922). Initially the Greeks advanced inland and took control of several other cities. However, their advance was checked by Turkish forces at the Battle of Sakarya (1921), and on August 1922 the Greek front collapsed. Smyrna was recaptured by Turkish forces on 9 September 1922.



*In the afternoon of 13 September 1922, a fire broke out in the Armenian quarter in Smyrna. It spread quickly and no effort was made to put it out. The great fire of Smyrna raged on for days.
Photo: Richard Ellis Archive.*

Initially, the Turkish occupation of the city was orderly. It was thought that the presence of the Allied fleet would discourage any violence against the Christian community. In fact, on the morning of 9 September, twenty-one Allied warships lay at anchor in Smyrna's harbour. Sailors and marines from the Allied fleet were landed ashore to guard their diplomatic compounds and institutions with strict orders of maintaining neutrality if violence would break out between the Turks and the Christians.

Very quickly, order and discipline began to break down. Thugs were roaming the city's streets and life was becoming dangerous. The Greek Orthodox Metropolitan bishop, Chrysostomos, was hacked to death while the witnessing French soldiers were prevented from intervening by their commanding officer. Greeks and Armenians started seeking refuge with the Americans and Europeans, who on their part were anxious to remain neutral not to harm their relationship with the leaders of the Turkish National movement.

In the afternoon of 13 September, a fire broke out in the Armenian quarter. It spread quickly and no effort was made to put it out. The great fire of Smyrna raged on for days.

Thousands flocked to the city's long waterfront and begged to be taken aboard the western ships that stood by watching this horrible spectacle. The fire lasted for three days destroying the Greek, Armenian and European quarters of the city, forcing the Greeks and Armenians out of their hiding places, while destroying the corpses in the homes and narrow streets of the city. Future estimates set the death toll as high as 100,000. George Horton, the United States Consul and witness to these terrible days, would later write:

“One of the keenest impressions which I brought away with me from Smyrna was a feeling of shame that I belonged to the human race.”¹

15.2 The Rescue

The imminent entry of the Kemalist forces into Smyrna was expected as the month of September 1922 approached. On 2 September, the British consul Sir Harry Lamb informed Admiral Sir Osmond De Beauvoir Brock, Commander-in-Chief of the British Royal Navy’s Mediterranean fleet commanding HMS *Iron Duke* Upon, of the Greek setbacks. Anticipating deterioration of the situation in Smyrna, Admiral De Brock started laying plans for the evacuation of British nationals: he brought the hospital ship HMHS *Maine*² into the harbour and requisitioned three merchant ships, including the S.S. *Bavarian*. He also ordered HMS *King George V* to head for Smyrna. All these ships were earmarked to evacuate British nationals to Malta³.

Consequently, he informed the naval authorities in Malta and in Constantinople about the large numbers of fleeing civilians, including several British subjects. Predictably they were to be moved to Cyprus and Malta which proved the most obvious destinations due to their connection with the Empire, though some Levantines ended up in Athens. In a secret telegram to Rear Admiral John Luce the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean pointed out the fact that British residents were scattered and it was impossible to ensure protection, short of concentrating them in one spot, an option that has been considered but rejected owing to difficulties of feeding and accommodation.

There were also large numbers of women and children. It had been decided to embark them immediately⁴. Since the decision to leave was a voluntary one, the British authorities made it clear that they would not provide maintenance for any refugee after they disembarked. This was emphasized in a notice posted at four embarkation points in Smyrna, no liability for compensation of any damage or losses sustained in consequence of one’s departure was accepted⁵. Later on, such affirmation was not sustained since humanitarian assistance could not be denied. However, the matter eventually became the bone of contention between the Government of Malta and the imperial authorities in London. For several reasons, it was highly anticipated that the Maltese Government would be ‘horribly “fed up” about it’⁶.

Reverend Charles Dobson, an Anglican clergyman and a New Zealander by birth who took the post of Anglican Chaplain of Smyrna on Easter 1922, was instrumental in tracking down British nationals. He set out to visit all the addresses where he knew British nationals to be staying. Picking his way methodically through the streets, Dobson brought news of

1 *Catastrophe at Smyrna*, Matthew Stewart, published in *History Today* Volume 54 Issue 7 July 2004

2 In 1900, HMHS *Maine* became a permanent hospital ship of the British fleet and for some years was on service in the Mediterranean, either as a floating hospital or for the transshipment of naval and military invalids. In 1920, the Royal Navy purchased a coal-burner built in 1902 with a speed of eight to ten knots and converted it to serve as a permanent hospital ship. The new HMHS *Maine* was kept in permanent commission between 1918 and 1939, being placed under the direction of the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station. (Source: Charles Savona-Ventura, *Military and Naval Hospitals in the last two Centuries*, Historical Hospitalium, Düsseldorf, 2001, 175.)

3 Lou Ureneck, *The Great Fire*, Harper-Collins, New York, 2015, 75.

4 NAM/CSG01/249/22 4 September 1922.

5 Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna’s Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide and the Birth of the Middle East*, University of California Press, London, 2012, 170

6 Dominic Fenech, *Endemic Democracy (1919-1930)*, PEG, Malta, 2005, 214.



Smyrniots were fleeing Smyrna in huge numbers by mid-September 1922. Photo: Richard Ellis Archive.

the impending evacuation to all the British nationals he could find⁷. He was also repeatedly called upon to intercede on behalf of terror-stricken people of other nationalities⁸. Reverend Dobson, together with his Greek wife and their two daughters, would soon join the Malta-bound refugees late in September 1922 on s.s. *Bavarian*. The family spent a month in Malta and left for Italy on 23 October 1922, where Reverend Dobson was to witness Mussolini's March on Rome.

15.3 Once More, the Nurse of the Mediterranean

Once more Malta was to be destined to become 'the nurse of the Mediterranean', the title dubbed during the First World War, for the provision of providing the necessary facilities to wounded soldiers. This time it provided humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing from Turkey.

Malta was considered a fortress serving British interests in the Mediterranean. During World War 1, the indigenous population was acquiescent as wars tended to provide relative prosperity to the Island. The situation changed dramatically with the Armistice in 1918, when Maltese servicemen returned home. As Dominic Fenech observed 'the irony was that

7 Giles Milton, *Paradise Lost: Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of Islam's City of Tolerance*, Sceptre, London, 2009, 302-03.

8 Joanna Hyslop, *A brief and personal account: the evidence of Charles Dobson on the destruction of the city of Smyrna in September 1922*. 70. Ms Hyslop is the granddaughter of Rev. Dobson.

prolonged war in Turkey was keeping the fleet away from Maltese harbours for unusually long time, causing more economic distress than there was already⁹. Consequently, the political climate in Malta became increasingly agitated and a riot broke out in June 1919.

Two years later, Imperial authorities granted self-government based on a diarchy. Both shared responsibilities and infrastructure in humanitarian assistance, such as that meted upon the Russian refugees fleeing the Bolshevik revolution. Immediately following the departure of the Russian refugees, the government had to deal with providing relief to the sizable number of refugees evacuated from Smyrna after the victory of the Turkish Nationalists in 1922.

The local authorities in Malta complied with the demands made by Admiral De Brock although the reception of the refugees was accepted with some hesitancy. The first group of refugees disembarked in Malta on 15 September 1922, arriving on the hospital ship *HMHS Maine*.

On that day, 416 refugees landed in Malta. These included 276 British, 82 Maltese (mostly born in Smyrna of Maltese ancestry), 26 Greeks, 14 Cypriots, 10 Dutch, 6 Swiss, a French and a Swede¹⁰. This arrival was reported in the *Daily Telegraph*: 'Peaceful Malta is to-day eager with excitement owing to the landing here of over 400 refugees.'

By 21 September, according to the report of the Chief Government Medical Officer, only 175 were able or willing to go to hotels. The others were provided with lodging and food at the Lazaretto on Manoel Island¹¹. Later on, additional facilities were provided at Fort Ricasoli and Cottonera Military Hospital (today St Edward's College). Out of the refugees perceived to be Maltese, only seven were born in Malta. Few, if any, of those who claimed to be Maltese were acquainted with any other language except Greek. Malta could not be considered their home in any sense¹².

There was no question that these refugees had to be supported. The controversy was about who should shoulder the financial burden. On 7 November 1922, the Maltese ministers declared that:

"On the assumption that the cost of maintenance of British born refugees will in due course be refunded by His Majesty's Government, the Government of Malta will advance the funds necessary for such maintenance" and that

"The established principle should be maintained that the keep of Maltese refugees not born in these Islands is not a proper charge on Malta Funds." "A case should, however, be made out for submission to His Majesty's Government, emphasizing the principle hitherto accepted without demur that

9 Dominic Fenech, *Endemic Democracy (1919-1930)*, PEG, Malta, 2005, 214 quoting Plumer to Devonshire, 27 March 1923 (CO158//432//16537).

10 NAM/CSG01/254/1922.

11 NAM/CSG01/254/1922, W.C.F. Robertson, Officer Adminstrating the Government to Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of the State for the Colonies, 21 September 1922. The refugees were distributed among the following hotels in Valletta: British Hotel, Great Britain Hotel, Hotel d'Angleterre, Hotel d'Australie, Hotel d'Estrangers, Hotel de France, Hotel de Paris, Osborne Hotel, Royal Hotel, Seguna Hotel and Westminster Hotel.

12 NAM/CSG01/263/22, Lord Plumer to British Minister Athens, 4 November 1922.

the maintenance of distressed Maltese who are Maltese by parentage, and not by birth, is a legitimate charge on the Foreign Office Vote.”¹³

Some correspondents of the international press came to Malta with the refugees on the HMHS *Maine*. Many refugees had a tale to tell; correspondents despatched their observations to their home office. Furthermore, these journalists interviewed refugees within a few days after disembarking in Malta. George Martin of the *New York Times* added the following comment in his report entitled ‘Smyrna Catastrophe Hospital Ship Maine:

“Christians have been placed in a terrible position owing to the highly irresponsible action of the retreating Greek army in burning towns and villages. Thousands of Greek refugees were laying in lighters in the port and on the breakwater in pitiable condition without food or water; although the British had given them what assistance was possible.”¹⁴

The Daily Telegraph provided a detailed account of refugee Roy Treolar’s ordeal just as he landed in Malta. He visited the paper’s correspondent living at Sliema where he articulated the events of which he was eyewitness, recording the time the fire started - Wednesday 13 September 1922 at 2pm in the Armenian quarter. Treolar also recollected the scene when a doctor, Dr Murphy, was brutally assaulted at his house in Smyrna while his elderly wife Helen together with the daughter Helen succeeded in escaping the outrage and found their way to Malta where they stayed for 15 nights¹⁵.

13 NAM/CSG01/317/1922, Cabinet Meeting held on the 7th November 1922.

14 *New York Times*, 15 September 1922.

15 *New York Times*, 21 September 1922.

*The British Naval Hospital
HMHS Maine at the Grand Harbour in 1925.
Three years earlier, on 15 September 1922 this ship brought
416 refugees fleeing from Smyrna. These were the first group of 1540
Smyrniot refugees brought over to Malta between September and December
1922. Photo: Malta Maritime Museum, Heritage of Malta.*



The *Daily Telegraph* of the 18 September 1922 reported through its own correspondent in Malta the arrival of HMHS *Maine* under the title “Lady Lamb safe”¹⁶. Lady Lamb, wife of the British Consul-General and her daughter stayed in Malta for just three days before proceeding to England. They resided at the Cecil Hotel, a family-run hotel in Old Bakery Street in Valletta.

In spite of the original stance that refugees had to fend for themselves, the Consul-General remained in Smyrna to oversee broader British interests while his deputy, vice-Consul Edgar Gout, who was based in 54 Strada Nuova in Sliema (today Triq Arturo Mercieca), was detailed to monitor the needs of the refugees while in Malta. One of the tasks performed by Gout was a head count of prospective refugees still in Turkish soil. He interviewed at Fort Manoel several camp refugees who provided information about families who were still stranded in Smyrna - 135 in all¹⁷.

The newspaper report added that another group of refugees made up of 750 persons, including a number of Maltese, had already left Turkey on the *Bavarian*. The precarious condition of the refugees was commented upon on the arrival of those disembarking from s.s. *Bavarian*. Captain Allen of the *Bavarian* singled out the appearance of Maltese refugees. He was astonished at the number of well-to-do Britons who scrambled on board his ship wearing a fur coat over nothing at all. ‘Half of the people arrived without clothes’ he said, ‘The poorer people, the Maltese has the most raiment’. It seems that the more affluent residents have been less prepared for the disaster¹⁸.

15.4 The Refugees

Between the 15 September and 10 December 1922, some 1540 refugees landed in Malta. They arrived in ten voyages, namely HMHS *Maine*, *Bavarian*, HMS *King George V*, *Karnak*, *Carnaro* (twice), *Pierre Loti*, *Adria* (twice) and the *Empress of India*¹⁹. About 1400 passengers held a British passport. Although many had never set foot in England, they held British passports and expected the British government to help them during the crisis.²⁰

About half of them were perceived to be of Maltese extraction. A small number of refugees consisted of Cypriots, Dutch, Egyptians, Swiss, and French and a trivial number of Americans, Armenians, Italians, Swedes and Ottoman Turks. The largest minority among the refugees was Greek, mostly former employees of important Levantine clans. The more affluent refugees could afford to leave Malta promptly and did so by the end of 1922. These totalled 32% of refugees disembarked. Their stay averaged 30 days, with the shortest being 3 days. Some of the longer stays totalled 100 days. Other refugees stayed even longer. Apart from those who had integrated with Maltese society, some refugees remained in Malta for several years.

16 *Daily Telegraph 18 September 1922* in Lysimachos Economos, *The Martyrdom of Smyrna and Eastern Christendom*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1922, 98-99.

17 NAM/CSG01/254/1922, Edgar Gout to the Lieutenant Governor W.C.F. Robertson to Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of the State for the Colonies, 21 September 1922.

18 Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, *Smyrna 1922, The destruction of a city*, Newmark Press, New York, 1988, 169.

19 This figure is by no means definite as a number of refugees came by independent means either through Athens or other ports rather than through direct link from Smyrna.

20 Michelle Tusan, 170.

The Lieutenant Governor Sir William C.F. Robertson called for the compilation of information about nationalities as well as the financial conditions together with learning the intentions of the British refugees. A cursory examination about the financial condition of most refugees revealed that they lacked financial resources and it was imperative that such refugees were maintained in Malta until they were moved to England²¹.

The consular representatives in Malta were expected to arrange for repatriation of their nationals. This exercise proved to be more difficult with Greek citizens.

Many of the refugees who had rushed to the British Consulate in Smyrna asserting that they were British subjects, held a dubious claim. Their acceptance as British subjects served as an impetus to gain relocation to Malta. Once in Malta they alleged Greek connection since that was the only language they knew and, in some instances, they had a Greek spouse. Several refugees had Greek Christian names.

This situation made the repatriation procedure rather complicated. The Greek Consul in Malta vetted visas application punctiliously while the British High Commissioner in Athens, Sir Francis Lindley warned Lord Plumer that Greece was the last place to which they should be sent as at the time; just one month after the Greek exodus from Smyrna there were about 600,000 refugees including 50,000 in Athens alone²².

Some families of refugees were separated in different countries. This was the case of a Canadian couple, Haritopoulos. The wife Ekaterina Haritopoulos was at the Cottonera Camp while her husband John was in Larnaca Cyprus. Eventually she was sent to Athens to be reunited with her husband²³.

The separation of families created by separation was quite a toll. A Greek refugee from Smyrna, Maria Zicakis, whose husband was kept as a prisoner by the Kemalist authorities, stranded in Greece and having no relatives there, was longing to join her father, Cazimir Cassar who was a refugee located in Fort Manoel. However, her father rejected her since having no relatives in Malta and, being a refugee himself, he was unable to support her²⁴.

Others were luckier. Anthony Barker obtained a British passport in Malta on 6 October 1922, later discovered to be obtained by fraud. He had landed with the *Maine* refugees. After obtaining a visa to travel to Greece, he left Malta on s.s. *Eden Hall* bound for Piraeus proceeding to Salonica. He was really an Ottoman citizen and his passport was confiscated after his actual identity was revealed as being that of Anastasios Varkaoglou. His reputation was described as 'unsavoury' and was reported to have been in prison²⁵.

On the other hand, in the chaos created during the evacuation, some of the perceived Maltese ended up in Cyprus while others found themselves in Greek territories, such as Volos and Mytilene. After landing, the Cypriot authorities undertook similar procedures adopted by their counterparts in Malta. Consequently, these were invited to proceed to Malta. A case in point is that Constantine Zammit and his family of four as well as that of Henry Calleja and his family of three. Both families were completely destitute and did not

21 *ibid* NAM/CSG01/254/22.

22 NAM/CSG01/287/22. British Minister Athens to Governor Malta, telegram 21 October 1922.

23 NAM/CSG01/820/22. C. Hartipp, British Legation Athens to Peter J. Sarantis, New York, 10 November 1922.

24 NAM/CSG01/32/23, Lord Plumer to A/British Consul Salonica, 8 February 1923.

25 NAM/CSG01/23/23, E.C. Hole to Lord Plumer, 5 March., 1923.

desire repatriation as they knew no language except Greek and had never been in Malta.²⁶ The Government of Malta preferred to accept to pay for their upkeep in Cyprus rather than shoulder the burden of their stay in Malta.

Attempts were made to send some refugees who landed in Volos to Malta. As in the case of Cyprus, the Government offered to pay for their upkeep in Volos of 13 Maltese British subjects, mostly women and children, as there was difficulty in arranging additional accommodation for refugees in Malta; ministers preferred that Maltese refugees be maintained in Volos at the expense of the Malta Government.²⁷ The family of Alfred Hadkinson had succeeded in reaching Piraeus but required the Governor's permission to proceed to Mytilene in the island of Lesbos. It was easier for them to hold on the mirage of a return to Smyrna since Lesbos was about 90 kilometres away²⁸.

The top priority of the immigration authorities in Malta was to move the refugees out of Malta as quickly as possible. Those British subjects who were convinced that the return to Smyrna was a futile illusion did leave Malta as they needed no visa to enter Britain. The other nationalities had no other option but to apply for one.

The Government of Malta had to perform multiple tasks in the distribution of these refugees. Having been relieved of those who chose to leave on their own accord, another relief came from those who were accepted in the community by their relatives.

Both the Imperial authorities and some of the refugees themselves held on to the prospect of return in view of the value of their profession or occupation. Since a mass return to Turkey was ruled out, preference was expected for those whose occupation was needed in case where any vacancy could not be filled by Turkish citizens. A report on the profession and occupations of the refugees was drawn for the attention of the High Commissioner Sir Horace George Montagu Rumbold.²⁹

On the other hand, the Government wanted to assess the situation of those Maltese who had relatives or local business connections and therefore could be forced out of the camps. Inspector J.E. Agius prepared a report about whether the relatives in Malta of the Smyrna Refugees were willing to support and contribute towards their maintenance. One survey of 17 refugees, carried out by Agius, showed that there were no local families willing and capable to support their relatives from Smyrna. Most of the 'relatives' indicated by the refugees were either in dire straits or expressed that they shared no family relationship or else were distant relatives. In one case the relative indicated by the refugee had been dead for 40 years³⁰.

The office of the Lieutenant Governor was the authoritative source able to deal with diverse requirements of actual and potential refugees in Malta. The most important function was approving payments of various subsidies especially those pertaining to approval of travel tickets. It dealt with enquiries about the whereabouts of refugees inside Malta and elsewhere. Such enquiries were conveyed through British consular services. The parameters under which the cooperation was relatively flexible as expressed by the British Consul-General in Naples:

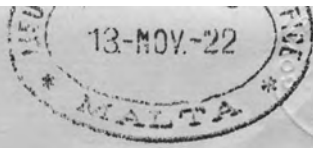
26 NAM/CSG01/273/22, High Commissioner Cyprus to Governor, Malta.

27 NAM/CSG01/813/22, telegram Governor to British Consul Volos 21 November 1922.

28 NAM/CSG01/813/22, British Consul Mytilene to Governor Malta, 31 October 1922.

29 NAM/CSG01/770/22, *Return showing the profession or occupation of British refugees from Smyrna who are still in Malta*, 29 September 1922.

30 NAM/CSG01/264/22, Report by Inspector J.E. Agius, 2 October 1922.



CABINET MEETING HELD ON THE 7TH NOVEMBER 1922.

All Ministers present with the exception of the Minister
for Industry and Commerce.

Government Line of Policy in regard to the Smyrna Refugees.

I.

On the assumption that the cost of the maintenance of British born refugees will in due course be refunded by His Majesty's Government, the Government of Malta will advance the funds necessary for such maintenance at an average rate of 2s/6d per head per diem.

II.

The established principle should be maintained that the keep of Maltese refugees not born in these Islands is not a proper charge on Malta funds. While sympathising with these unfortunate people in their sad plight, the Government cannot, in the present condition of the finances, increase its burdens, especially in view of the large expenditure already incurred on the maintenance of necessitous Maltese abroad who are eligible for this assistance by reason of their birth in these Islands. A case should, however, be made out for submission to His Majesty's Government, emphasizing the principle hitherto accepted without demur that the maintenance of distressed Maltese who are Maltese by parentage, and not by birth, is a legitimate charge on the Foreign Office Vote.

X.
III.

The Maltese Imperial Government's policy regarding the Smyrna refugees, approved by 'Cabinet' on 7 November 1922 and signed by Head of Ministry Joseph Howard. It dealt exclusively with the financial aspects. It is interesting to note that since the early days of self-Government, the Maltese ministers adopted the Cabinet convention even though this institution did not feature in any constitution granted by the UK Parliament before 1962. Photo: The National Archives of Malta.

III.

The present cost of the maintenance of 606 Maltese amounting approximately to £80 a day, is more than the Revenue can bear for an indefinite period. The cost of six weeks' maintenance has already been disbursed.

IV.

In the circumstances set forth above, Ministers are of opinion:-

(i) that the British refugees should be accommodated and kept separately from the Maltese, in order to facilitate the keeping ^{of} accounts, etc., and that, consequently, all the Maltese refugees should be concentrated at Fort Manoel, those already sent to Cottonera being retransferred to the Fort,

(ii) that the Maltese refugees should be informed that after the 1st December 1922, attendants who are not absolutely necessary shall be withdrawn; that the work hitherto done by them shall be performed by the refugees themselves under the supervision of the Public Health authorities; and that, as regards diet, the arrangements shall be the same as those obtaining at the Poor House;

(iii) that the whole position should be reconsidered on the 1st January 1923; and

(iv) that the Refugees Fund Committee should be invited to issue another appeal to the philanthropy of the public for further financial assistance.

J. Howard

Head of the Ministry.

“The fire at Smyrna is so abnormal a character that it would seem to be necessary to relax many regulations in order to deal with the numerous refugees who have lost their homes and have been forced to go to other countries.”³¹

At a very short notice, provision had to be made at the Lazaretto and Fort Manoel for the supply of accommodation, food, clothing, laundry and other services required by a large group of people: men, women, children of different nationalities and creeds. The medical condition of the refugees on arrival was good overall, but surveillance was constant since the risk of an outbreak of disease in a restricted area was high. Arthur Galea, Comptroller of Charitable Institutions reported:

“With the assistance of the Military Authorities the Lazaretto and Fort Manoel were fitted out in a few days and on the 15th September 1922, the first batch of refugees arrived. The British refugees have since the 2nd November 1922 arrived, been transferred to a new Camp at Cottonera Hospital and, at the beginning of January 1923, the Maltese refugees and a few other nationalities were transferred to Fort Ricasoli in order to prepare Fort Manoel for any eventual arrival of refugees from Constantinople.”³²

Providing humanitarian relief to the Smyrna refugees was a mammoth endeavour. At the time, Malta had a lean bureaucracy, trained to deal with a variety of tasks; it rose to the occasion despite the evident challenge. The arrival of these refugees coincided with a new constitutional situation in Malta. In 1921, the Maltese Islands had been granted self-government on diarchical lines. While the Maltese government oversaw internal affairs, the imperial government was responsible for defence and foreign affairs.

Prime Minister Joseph Howard (then known as the Head of the Ministry), formerly a director of a Greek company operating in Malta, held that the Malta government should not be financially responsible for the maintenance of any Smyrna refugees. The choice of an even-handed as Head of the Ministry augured well for moderation³³. The political climate inside and outside the local parliament was rather polluted. His moderation won him the support of the Governor Lord Plumer in the way he effectively portrayed the interests of the Maltese Government. Howard was adamant that all refugees, Maltese included, should be repatriated to Smyrna as soon as convenient. He had to deal with the challenges emanating from the British Government’s position that ‘only refugees who are natives or have their origin in the United Kingdom will be maintained by Imperial Funds.’ Howard remarked:

“I am informed that among the British refugees there may be many who are neither natives or have their origin in the United Kingdom being descendants of English families who for generations have settled in the East. Not even the so-called Maltese Refugees should be assisted by the Malta Government, as they also belong to families who for generations have lived out of Malta.”³⁴

As if this was not enough, even the Greek Government did not want to pay for the upkeep of its citizens in Malta. There were protracted discussions between the Maltese Imperial

31 NAM Maltese Imperial Government File 735/22 Philip Somers Cocks to William C.F. Robertson, 12 October 1922.

32 *idem*

33 Giorgio Peresso, *The Enigma of Malta Italica – the saga of irredentism while it lasted*, unpublished dissertation, Masters, History of Art Department, University of Malta, 2011, 61.

34 NAM/CSG01/81/22, Minute by Joseph Howard, 5 October 1922.



Government and the Greek Consulate in Malta over the reimbursement to the Maltese Government of expenses incurred in the housing, feeding and repatriation of Greek refugees. Out of the 70 Greek arrivals in Malta, only 20 remained by the end of 1922. Although the numbers in Malta were a mere fraction of the hundreds of thousands who had fled Greece, Nikolaos Kalogeropoulos, Greek Foreign Minister, initially refused to accept liability. After their arrival in Malta, some Greek-speaking refugees who had declared British citizenship just to be granted passage out of Smyrna started to claim Greek passports to settle in Greece. The Greek Diaspora in Malta consisted of about 30 well-to-do families, 14 of which, together with the Greek Ladies Charitable Fund, contributed financially towards the welfare of their compatriots.

Smyrna refugees resettled from Malta to Greece were granted alien status and subject to working and residence permits. Over time, it was therefore natural for some to seek to acquire Greek citizenship. Most were married to Greek women. In Patras, the issue was encouraged and complicated by Italian fascist propaganda and money. Indeed, some people elected to change citizenship from British to Italian rather than Greek.

The British diplomatic mission in Athens faced a constant stream of work because of complaints from destitute Maltese residing in Greece. Financially vulnerable refugees, whether in Malta or Greece, relied on some form of relief for their subsistence. As mentioned earlier, they considered themselves ethnically closer to Greece despite their roots in a British colony.

There was also a small number of Dutch who arrived in Malta on British ships. The Netherlands Government argued that the refugees ought to remain in Malta rather than be transferred to a country where the climate differs considerably from that to which they were accustomed. It consisted mainly of descendants of Dutch subjects who settled there during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Only a very restricted number of these refugees understood the Dutch language or had relations in Holland³⁵.

Most refugees in Malta held on to the expectation of a swift return to Smyrna. Admiral De Brock instructed Captain Henry Thursfield, Senior Naval Officer and R.W. Urquhart, British Vice-Consul, both in Smyrna, to draw up a report about the desirability of the return of British subjects previously domiciled in Asia Minor. This report stated that the nationalist government in Angora (today's Ankara) did not recognise the consular representatives of any of the governments only recently at war with Turkey. It was observed that many properties had been destroyed, not just because of the Great Fire. Commercial operations were at a complete standstill. All non-Turkish employees had been dismissed immediately after the exodus and were replaced by Turks³⁶.

In due course, while a few stayed in Malta, many refugees were relocated to several countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, United Kingdom, And United States. Those headed to Greece found themselves in such places as Athens, Chios, Corfu, Crete, Alexandroupoli, Kokkinia, Larissa, Lesbos, Patras, Piraeus, Rhodes, Samos, Syros And Thessaloniki. As time went on, Greece developed the infrastructure to accommodate not only Smyrna refugees but also those Greeks formerly residing in other Ottoman territories. Consequently, out of the 770 refugees repatriated from Malta between 1923 and 1930, 70% ended up in Greece.

35 NAM/CSG01/81/22 R. de Marees van Sinderen to Lord Curzon, 3 October 1922.

36 NAM/CSG01/262/22, Henry Thursfield and R.W. Urquhart to Lord Plumer, 30 Oct 1922.

The so-called Maltese refugees, who ultimately succeeded in returning to Smyrna, were distrusted by the Turkish authorities as they were considered Greeks in disguise. Unwanted twice over, in Malta, the country of their ancestors and Smyrna, their birthplace, they pinned on Greece, which they considered their homeland, their only hope for acceptance. Still, they were reluctant to exchange their British passport for a Greek one, for several reasons, including an abhorrence of conscription.

15.5 Some Faces

Every refugee had his or her own story; these are some of them.

Baker John Cilia (Tsilia) was born in Smyrna in 1886. As a British subject he, his wife Kirioki and their children Liberata, Marcos, Mary and Francis were entitled for protection. Therefore, the family boarded the *Bavarian* bound for Malta and arrived on 18 September 1922. Eventually, they were repatriated to Greece with a group of refugees who left Malta between 1 July 1924 and 11 March 1925. They settled in Nea Kokkinia (renamed Nikaia). This was one of the largest refugee quarters established near Piraeus in 1923³⁷.

John Cilia's name re-appears in the 1935 records of the British Consul in Athens as an applicant for British relief. Once more, he was destitute after attempting to make a living out of selling home-made cakes, itself an occupation relying on favourable weather conditions. His fragile subsistence had been aggravated by the flooding of his home. The Government of Malta disowned him, and relief was denied on the pretext that he had already received financial assistance during the years he had spent in Malta.

Another dramatic case was that of Ferdinando Cilia La Corte, the eldest of 8 siblings who arrived in Malta with their father Polycarp on the hospital ship *Maine* on 15 September 1922. Two years later, in September 1927, when was 25 years old, Ferdinando left for Australia in on the *SS Orvieto*. He stayed in Australia for just two days and on 19 October he left back to Malta on the same ship claiming that he was denied entry into Australia as he was found him medically unfit, contrary to the opinion of the medical authorities in Malta; he arrived on 2 December 1927. Few days later he retracted the medical unfitness claim and declared that he left Australia since there was unemployment. He was denied accommodation at the Ricasoli Refugee Camp because the Superintendent of Emigration Henry Casolani felt that the saga was all made up because of the refugee's home sickness. Moreover, the Officer-in-Charge of the Refugee Camp penned a scathing report against him, claiming that "since his first arrival in Malta he has never done or tried to do anything."³⁸

Francis Cilia was an example of how Smyrniots clung to the illusion of an eventual return. Cilia, a blind refugee, could not work because of his condition. He did not give up the hope to return to his birthplace and on 15 April 1931 he submitted an impassioned plea at the office of the Lieutenant-Governor in Valletta to arrange and pay for his and his wife's return to Smyrna³⁹. His plea was dismissed as he did not have a permit from the Turkish authorities to reside in Smyrna. The British Government continued to issue subsidies well after the Second World War to destitute refugees irrespective of their final place of residence.⁴⁰

37 Renee Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*, Berghahn Press, New York, 1988, 2.

38 NAM/CSG01/348/1927

39 NAM/CSG02/126/31

40 NAM/OPM/1948-0055/1948, Relief to distressed Maltese in Smyrna, a/c for first quarter 1948.



Ferdinando Cilia La Corte, a clerk born in Smyrna arrived in Malta as a refugee on 15 September 1922. He was sent to Australia in September 1927 but returned immediately claiming that he was not allowed to enter the country as he was declared medically unfit. Back in Malta he was not allowed in the refugee camp as it was felt that he was making up his problems. Photo: The National Archives of Malta.

Refugees came mostly in family groups, while a few were accompanied by their servants. One of the young refugees, who later made a name for himself, was the Alec Issigonis (knighted in 1969). He later became famous as the automobile designer who created the best-selling Mini and the popular Morris Minor. He was accompanied by his mother, Hulda Prokopp, and his father, Constantine, who was blind. Constantine spent most of his time in Malta in hospital, where he died on 1 June 1923 and was later buried at Ta' Braxia cemetery outside Valletta. The Issigonis were of Greek extraction but became British subjects once his father Constantine Demosthenes Issigonis became a British subject in 1897.

Other noteworthy names include the Whittalls. Seventy members of the entire family and other relatives such as the Charnauds and the Gouts ended up in Malta. Herbert Octavius Whittall was the head of this extended family and he was considered the unofficial dean of the Smyrna refugee community in Malta. His family was described as 'a nation not a family.' In Turkey they were princes in their own right; their wealth and power, and to some extent their arrogance, had almost no limits.⁴¹ For all his reputation he lived in one of the refugees' camps. He was the spokesman of the community participating in various reports about the refugee's grievances, demands for subsidies as well as claims about the confiscation of their properties in Turkey. In a despatch to the Duke of Devonshire Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Plumer observed 'that members of the family should not be dependent on public relief

⁴¹ Philip Mansel, *Levant, Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean*, John Murray, London, 2011, 191.

No. 697
 Date 20/5/26



A
 DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY APPLICANT FOR PASSPORT. (b)

I, the Undersigned, (Edward Sidney WHITTALL)
 at present residing at Fort Riccasoli hereby declare that I am

(c) For a MARRIED WOMAN OR WIDOW (to be struck out in other cases).
 Particulars of HUSBAND'S birth to follow.
 the wife of Edward Sidney Whittall and that my husband is
 a British Subject by birth having been born
 at Smyrna on the 5th day of May 1888.

For PERSONS BORN ABROAD, who derive British nationality from a father or paternal grandfather born within His Majesty's Dominions. (To be struck out in other cases).
 my paternal grandfather Charles Whittall having been born within His Majesty's Dominions at
Liverpool on the 17th day of 1781

and not having lost the status of British Subject thus acquired, I hereby apply for a Passport for travelling to Cyprus Malta Greece for the purpose of residing there

(e) (accompanied by my wife (and children under the age of 16), as indicated in the margin, who do not possess separate Passports)

Date of presentation 20 MAY 1926
 MALTA

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICANT.
 Age 38
 Profession Accountant
 Whether married or single Married
 Domicile or ordinary place of residence Smyrna
 Maiden name of widow or married woman:

Place of birth Smyrna
 Date of birth 5th May 1888
 Height 6 feet 8 inches
 Colour of eyes Brown
 Colour of hair Brown
 Visible distinguishing marks or peculiarities

I declare that I have no Passport already in my possession [other than ~~that~~ those which I annex hereto for cancellation] (f).

I further declare that I have made no other application for a Passport [since the last Passport was issued to me] (g).

(h) Signed E. Whittall

AND I, the Undersigned, (Doctor Paul Testa M.D.)
 of N. 12, Strada Reato, Valletta hereby declare that to the best of my personal knowledge and belief the above made Declaration and description of the said Mr. Edward S. Whittall is true, and that I can FROM MY PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE of him vouch for him as a fit and proper person to receive a Passport.

REFUGEE Signed P. Testa, M.D.

DESCRIPTION OF WIFE OF APPLICANT IF TO BE INCLUDED ON THE PASSPORT.
 Name in full Dorothy Jane Whittall
 Age 35
 Profession none
 Place of birth Smyrna
 Date of birth 4th of October 1890
 Maiden name Dorothy Jane Peacock
 Height 5 feet 4 inches
 Colour of eyes Brown
 Colour of hair Brown
 Visible distinguishing marks
 Signature of wife of applicant D.J. Whittall

- Children under the age of 16 if to be included on the Passport.
- Christian Names and Surname — Date of Birth — Sex.
Iris Evelyn Whittall 21st April 1914 female
Dorothy Marian Whittall 25th January 1918 female
Monica Daisy Whittall 5th November 1918 female
Edward James Francis Whittall 20th December 1921 male
Helen Adelaide Whittall 18th January 1923 female

Applicants, and persons recommending them, are warned that should any of the statements contained in their applications be found to be untrue, they will be liable to prosecution.

NOTE.—Two small (一寸) duplicate photographs of the applicant (and wife if to be included) must be submitted, one of which must be retained on the basis of the recommendations. (See Part 6 of Regulations overleaf.) In the case of children under the age of 16 years requiring a separate Passports, the parent or guardian must submit two such photographs.

A THREE PENNY Stamp should be affixed to the application form before production at the Passport Office.



CAUTION
 *The attention of persons who are asked to sign this declaration is specially called to the fact that it can only be signed from personal knowledge of the applicant, and not from information obtained from other persons.

Edward and Dorothy Whittall. Seventy members of the Whittall family, a great merchant family in Smyrna, ended up in Malta as refugees. This couple, together with their children Iris, Dorothy, Monica, Edward and Helen (born in Malta), moved on to Greece in 1926. Their passport application indicates that the passport was issued free of charge since they were refugees. Photo: The National Archives of Malta.

and charity.¹⁴² In time Herbert Whittall grew disheartened with the irreversibility of the flight from Smyrna and retreated to Tunisia where he died in 1929.

Upon taking over the administration in Smyrna, the Turkish Nationalists started hunting the Levantines who had collaborated with the Greek occupation. Walter Whittall, who arrived on the *Maine* on 15 September 1922 was identified as being one of them. He was accused of not only of spreading pro-Greek propaganda but of organising for the defence of British property in Bournabat, (today's Bornova) thus, according to Turkish sources, delaying by some hours the advance of Turkish

42 NAM/CSG01/330/22, Lord Plumer to Duke of Devonshire 17 November 1922.



15th April 1931.
Malta.

Sir

With most respectfully manner I am going to write you this letter to inform your gentleness that I am Francis Cilia Refugii without eyes blind man so here I cannot live because I cannot work no I and neither my wife because my wife is sick with Diabeter with the Doctor, so please I beg to your gentleness to pay to me the passage to go to Suirna, because here I cannot stop without any profit, so now I know that you are of good hearth and you make Charity please I hope that you will give me good answer with thanks.

I am your truly servant
Francis Cilia
Strada Nuova No. 60
Dospicena

Francis Cilia 'begging' the Governor's office to pay for his passage to be able to return to Smyrna. Photo: The National Archives of Malta.

15th April 1931
Malta

Sir

With most respectfully manner I am going to write you this letter to inform your gentleness that I am Francis Cilia Refugee without eyes blind man so here I cannot live without work no I and neither my wife because my wife is sick with Diabetee with the Doctor, so please I beg to your gentleness to pay to me the passage to go to Smirna, because here I cannot stop without any profit, so now I know that you are of good hearth and you make charity please I hope that you will give me good answer with thanks.

I am you truly servant

Francis Cilia

Strada Nuova No. 60

Cospicua

DEPARTURE OF REFUGEES

Left by the S.S. "LJUBLJANA" for Syracuse
on 20:1:23.

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Name	Nationality	Profession	Address	Ship arrived
Wilkin Chars H	British	Marine-Engineer	Cottonera	S.S. Maine.
Agnes E	"	wife	"	"
Wilfred	"	clerk	"	"
Issigonis Hulda	"	"	"
Alex. C.	"	son	"	"
Keyøer Elsie A.	"	"	"

N.B. - Passages paid by Government - All proceeding to United Kingdom.

The record of the departure to England from Malta of child refugee Alex Issigonis, the future designer of the Mini, together with his mother Hulda. His father died in Malta and is buried at Ta' Braxia Cemetery.



9 December 1922. Former Ottoman Sultan Mehmed VI Vahideddin arrives in Malta on a British warship. The Turkish Grand National Assembly abolished the Sultanate on 1 November 1922 and expelled Mehmed VI from Istanbul. On the left is the sultan's 10-year-old son Prince Mehmed Ertuğrul Efendi.
Photo: Giovanni Bonello Collection.

troops in Smyrna⁴³. Being under special surveillance, Whittall was advised by the Government to keep out of Turkey under the circumstances.

Although not from Smyrna, a very important refugee that arrived in Malta in 1922 was the Ottoman Sultan himself, Mehmet VI Vahideddin, the 36th and last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. He was compelled to abandon Turkey because of the Nationalist revolution led by Atatürk, who eventually became President of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923, like the Smyrna refugees. Evacuated from Constantinople on the British battleship *Malaya* on 17 November 1922, Sultan Mehmet VI landed at the Grand Harbour on 9 December⁴⁴. The Sultan stayed in Malta for a month as a guest of the British authorities, enjoying comforts most other refugees at the time could only wish for. Eventually he settled in San Remo where he died in May 1926.

Giorgio Peresso, graduated in history at the University of Malta. His Master's degree dissertation is entitled *The Enigma of Malta Italica - the saga of irredentism while it lasted*. He has authored a number of academic papers including some of which were presented at the Universities of Malta, Edinburgh Reading and Bristol. In November 2018 he presented the paper *The Role of Malta in the Smyrna Humanitarian Crisis of 1922* at the Levantine Heritage Foundation Conference held in Athens. He published the book *Giuseppe Donati and Umberto Calosso - Two Italian anti-fascist refugees in Malta*.

43 NAM/CSG01/320/22, 4 November 1922, Robert William Urquhart to Horace Rumbold, 24 October 1923.

44 Martin Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, Volume One, Stoddart, Toronto, 644.