

FOCAL POINT



Photography by - Ondre Camilleri Gaglione.

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SPECIAL EDITION includes
PART 1

GHOSTS PAST FROM THE PAST

Who was the first known 'REAL' war photographer?

By Kevin Casha



PRESIDENT'S VIEWPOINT

Dear members and friends,

Challenging times indeed! Who could have predicted how 2020 would turn out?

It is strange, troubled and frightful days that we are currently living in. One's life keeps being dominated by scary data highlighting the rising deaths and infections all over the globe. One feels a somewhat sense of helplessness in the situation and dark clouds keep gathering. This invisible scourge has turned our normal perhaps sheltered life, upside down and we are starting to have to live day by day, not even sure if we want to see or hear the latest news. My usual escape from much lesser challenges has normally been to put my head down and engross myself in work and go back on things which I have kept postponing – my character does not let me loose time. Life is short and one does not know what lies around the corner.

However, I am sure that the situation has forced many of us to reflect. What really are our priorities in life? Have we boxed ourselves in just going through the motions because of society? Can we make our life simpler? How has globalisation and internet changed our lifestyle? For the good or the bad? For sure, in the current lock down situation where we now cannot even hug a fellow human being, online media helps us to keep in contact and at least talk and see each other. I am particularly missing being unable to show affection to fellow human beings, staying away from even tapping someone on the back! But it's that time, isolation seems to be the only thing that can work against this demon virus.

I feel that we should employ this time to see what really makes us happy, to keep in contact, at least virtually, with friends and family who we might have neglected during our daily rush through life. Let us also try to rise to the occasion and feel more of a united nation and do our utmost to help in any way we can – naturally without endangering each other. Also, let us not politicise the situation and one common aim of getting out of this tunnel in the best way possible and hopefully as better persons.

As photographers, let us go through our archives; organize them better, introduce databases to help us search for images, do backups, perhaps print some photobooks which we have kept postponing. Let us get through this time and when in the future, we look back, we can have the satisfaction that it was not actually lost time. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all those who are on the frontline of this fight: the doctors, nurses, medical staff, politicians, police, leaders, pharmacists, postal staff, shopkeepers, army etc, etc. Let us not make their lives more difficult than they already are and cooperate with what they instruct!

I would like to end by informing you that Mario Borg has been appointed as our webmaster and Sita Azzopardi as our PRO. Stefan Cachia will be assistant PRO. I sincerely thank these persons for giving up their valuable time to help the MIPP. Thanks is also due to Jessica Tabone, our former PRO who due to time constraints has had to give up her post.

Kevin Casha

President

PS: knowing that many of you currently have more time on your hands, I have the pleasure of including in this Newsletter, my research paper entitled: Ghosts from the Past. I hope you enjoy its content.

Editor:
Kevin Casha

Design:
Sita Azzopardi

Articles:
Various contributors

Proof Reading:
Edward Sant Fournier

If you want your photographs featured on the newsletter's front page just send the images to: courses@mipp-malta.com
Your contributions are always welcome



MIPP ONLINE SKYPE SESSIONS

As you are hopefully aware by now, we have started doing lectures, image assessments and social talks each Tuesday. This helps us remain in contact with our members as well as give them some evenings to look forward to and be inspired and learn.

What you will need to do is firstly download SKYPE and then watch out for our weekly notices giving you the relative SKYPE GROUP NAME and the link to join the Group.

WE STRONGLY SUGGEST TO SWITCH OFF YOUR SKYPE VIDEO SO AS WE HAVE A STRONGER CONNECTION. PLEASE ALSO CHECK YOUR MICROPHONES.

See you (virtually) on Tuesdays at 7pm!



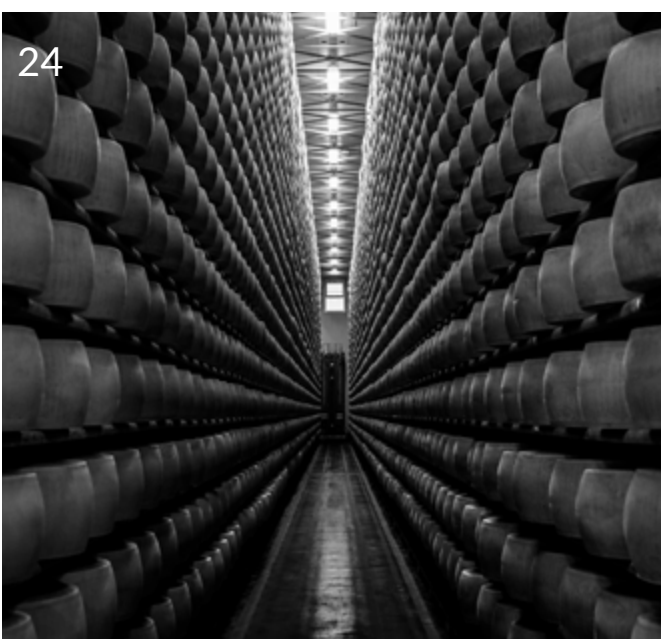
MIPP MEMBER ONLINE MEETING

<https://join.skype.com/bWrdzH2KpHMg>



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MIPP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

I would like to thank all those who made the time to attend our Annual General Meeting and Committee elections. I am sure that the response and appreciation of our members gives all of us that much needed impetus to keep giving our members the best possible service, events, tuition and enjoyment in a friendly networking atmosphere.

I want to publicly thank ALL those who were nominated and put their names forward to help the MIPP as well as those persons who work and help us behind the scenes.

Sita Azzopardi and Mario Borg have already declared their intention to keep on working and they will be an extended part of our Committee. They have always kept a low profile due to their characters but their work has been invaluable to MIPP. Besides normal committee duties, where would we be without Sita's designing skills and Mario's website management? Thank you Sita and Mario.

I also welcome on board Martin Agius and Keith Ellul, who are no newcomers to MIPP. They have been already helping from behind the scenes and now they have been kind enough to give time to the Committee. I would also like to mention Tonio Polidano and Jessica Tabone who have also been constant in their willingness to support and help.

As for myself, Charles Calleja and Edward Sant Fournier, we all look forward to working with this new group. Let us all pull our sleeves and work harder to take on the challenges of maintaining what we have built.

Kevin Casha
President

Do you want to be part of the
MIPP newsletter
by providing us with your write-ups,
photographs or any interesting features?
send email to : courses@mipp-malta.com



LET'S TRY AND HELP OUR SPONSORS!

Dear Members and friends,

In these difficult times, our thoughts should go to those who are facing problems with their income due to the complete or partial closure of their businesses. We are all in some way or other effected, but some are feeling the brunt more than others and I feel we should all try and come together and help in whatever manner possible. As you well know, the MIPP is attempting to tide over the time in the best way possible, with our resources, so my first appeal is to those who have not yet paid their 2020 subscription, and can do it to do so. It will help the MIPP to face these challenges as we have, as you know, had to suspend all our courses, thus reducing our operating income substantially. Still our frugal way of running the Institute is now helping as we do not have high recurring costs.





My second appeal and thought goes out to the MIPP's main sponsors, most of whom have employees and large bills to meet. In this dire time, why don't we all go through our images and work and try and print that travel album, that family picture etc? That way, in our own little way, we can try to help our sponsors by giving them some work, however small, in a period where they have none? This quiet period will also help us get over our backlog and things which we have been putting back. What better way than to look at our past memories and immortalise them in a photobook? Again, this appeal goes to those who can as for those who are hard up charity, naturally, begins at home.

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STORMCHASING

This session drew another one of our bumper attendances; and those who came were not disappointed. Samuel Scicluna, Steve Cutajar and Fredrick Muscat, the three photographers who kindly shared their work and experiences, regaled us with all that goes into producing amazing photographs in adverse and difficult conditions.



PAUL MIZZI AT MIPP

One of our last sessions at the MIPP premises, before lockdown forced us to temporarily close down, was with Paul Mizzi of The Fotografer. Paul and his wife Mariella have been MIPP members for a long time and have always been forthcoming when asked to cooperate.

It was a pleasure to see the professionalism that Paul has always been known for. How he has raised standards and expectations for Maltese photography and photographers.

His presentation gave us an in-depth insight of how he started, his challenges, his successes and his work.







GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

Who was the first known 'REAL' war photographer?

By Kevin Casha



“ Good pictures. Tragedy and violence certainly make powerful images. It is what we get paid for. But there is a price extracted with every such frame: some of the emotion, the vulnerability, the empathy that makes us human, is lost every time the shutter is released. ”

Greg Marinovich,
The Bang Bang Club



GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

who was the first known 'real' war photographer??

Society usually takes historical data as factual but, at times, this can be far away from the actual truth. Most historical accounts are recorded by persons who have a bias or who have not really researched in depth enough to unearth the hard facts. How about the often glaring misinformation on Wikipedia as an example?? Where photography is concerned, various controversies and claims abound. One aspect which has raised my curiosity is who was or were the first war photographers.

I think firstly we need to define war photography before we delve deeper into the subject:

***“War photography is the pursuit of capturing images of armed combat and what life is really like during war and in war-torn countries.
It is meant to portray the tragedy and triumph of war in all its aspects.”***

The world's first combat photographs were taken during the American-Mexican War of 1846-1847 by an anonymous photographer. These images were Daguerreotypes. Unfortunately, nothing has yet been unearthed about this pioneer photographer so our research moves on to 1848. The first name that is actually associated with the taking of early war zone photographs is rather not so well known. John McCosh (1805-1885), the son of a Scottish surveyor, was born in India. In 1831, he joined the Indian medical service after completing his studies on medicine in Edinburgh.

His grainy, *calotype* photographs, taken during the second Sikh war of 1848-1849, portray Sikh people and palaces of Lahore whilst those taken during the second Burmese War (1852-53), show military personnel, captured guns, architecture and Burmese people. His work counts as sufficient grounds, some historians maintain, to recognize him as another one of the first war photographers known by name.

McCosh was actually an enthusiastic amateur photographer and primarily took photos of British officers, but then gave other glimpses of the glory and tragedy of war. His images include many of the key figures from the campaigns, such as the battle-scarred British commander, General Sir Charles Napier, and Mul Raj, the sombre ruler of Multan. McCosh's photographs seem not to have been very well produced or maintained and their quality leaves much to be desired, furthermore, they fail to really depict the real horrors of war.



1



*Webster's Battalion Minon's
Pass - Mt. just N. of
Buena Vista Co. E.*

2



1

One of a set of images taken by an unknown photographer during the Mexican- American War depicting Webster's Battalion of American troops riding into the city of Saltillo at Minon's Pass in the mountains just North of Buena Vista, Mexico c. 1847-1848. These are the earliest known war photographs.

2

Daguerreotype portrait of a soldier of the Virginia Volunteers during the Mexican-American War, 1847.



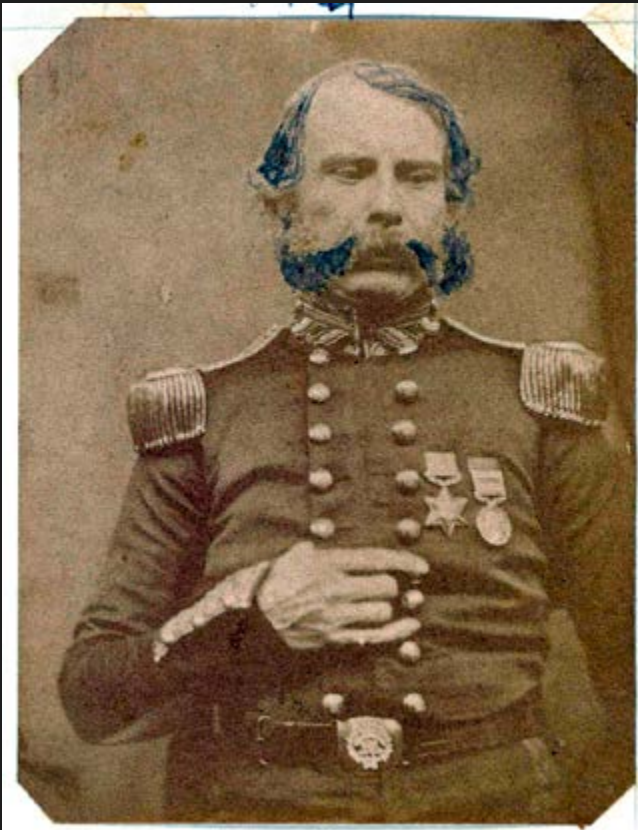
3



3

A haunting group photograph taken during the same Mexican-American war.

4



4

A portrait of surgeon John McCosh, who was also an amateur photographer. He was one of the earliest pioneers of war zone photography



Our next photographer, Stefano Lecchi, is an Italian who actually has connections with Malta. In 1804, Lecchi, (1804 - c.1864) was born in a small urban settlement near Milan, Italy and grew to become a minor painter and a bold pioneer of photography. Lecchi travelled quite extensively – to Paris, to the south of France, to Rome and to Naples - where he was commissioned by “King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies”, to photograph the spectacular ruins of Pompeii.

He is considered a pioneer of war reportage and a collection of his work, produced in 1849, shows the devastation of the struggle between the Papal and French forces on the one side and the supporters of the failed Roman Republic on the other. These images, depicting a general air of desolation, constitute what is thought to be the very first photographic documentation in history of some of the devastation of war. It is only recently that Giovanni Bonello has revealed that, for a short period, Lecchi was in Malta working with photography. The discovery came through a full-length portrait by Lecchi of Giuseppe Garibaldi discovered in the Palazzo Falson Archives. This dated photograph is marked as having been taken at the Imperial Hotel¹ in Valletta on the 24th of March, 1864. Lecchi is most likely to have practiced photography in Malta between 1860 till at least 1864, from his atelier at 141 Strait Street, Valletta.² I tend to agree with researcher Giovanni Bonello’s theory that Lecchi had either a sudden stroke or Alzheimers’ which eventually prevented him from carrying on with his photographic work. The Italian Biblioteca Treccani puts his death around 1863 most probably in Rome, but this recent discovery by Bonello clearly moves it at least till after 1864.³

Lecchi’s work in Italy, between 1849 and 1859, particularly the photographs that document the Garibaldian defence of Rome in 1849, are viewed as a valuable record of the first meaningful photography coming from a war zone. The Garibaldian conflict photographs by Lecchi date his war zone work to 1849 which evidently precedes Szathmary’s photographs of 1853, Fenton’s Crimean work of 1854, as well as Robertson and Beato’s 1855 oeuvre in the same theatre.

Another important name associated with war photography is not that of a British, French or American photographer but that of a Romanian of Hungarian origin! Carl Baptiste de Szathmary (1812-1887), took his camera to the Crimea a year before the more famous Roger Fenton arrived. In 1853, Szathmary was already documenting the conflict between Russia and Turkey over Wallachia and other Rumanian territories which would eventually devolve into the Crimean War. Besides landscapes, fortifications and battlefields, Szathmary managed

1 The Imperial Hotel was situated at 134 South Street, Valletta, a few doors away from Lecchi’s atelier. Arriving on 23 March, 1864, General Garibaldi and his two sons, Menotti and Ricciotti, stayed at the Imperial and left the hotel the following day to board the evening steamer which was to take them to London. The hotel’s owners, the Gabaretta family, put up a marble plaque in its entrance to commemorate Garibaldi’s visit. They changed its name to St. James Hotel in 1917. A German parachute mine destroyed the building in March 1941 and the Embassy Cinema (now the Embassy Complex) later replaced it.

2 Bonello, Giovanni; Stefano Lecchi tracked down to Malta in the 1860’s; The Sunday Times of Malta, 1 February, 2016; pages 36-37.

3 *Ibid.*



to photograph various troops, both Turkish and Russian, and their commanding officers. When the Turks occupied Bucharest, he arranged to get a 'session' with their commander Omar Pasha (although Fenton's later 'likeness' of Pasha would become more famous). Szathmary used a wagon specially equipped with a darkroom for processing the glass plates with wet collodion.

He went to the Danube's banks and various other places to document the war. In April 1854 his van became a target for the Turkish artillery who thought it belonged to a Russian spy. It was fortunate for the photographer that the gunners were not accurate enough to hit him. Unfortunately very little survives of Szathmary's war work and it is perhaps one of the reasons why he has nearly faced obscurity.

Similarly to the previously mentioned McCosh, Austrian born Ludwig Angerer (1827-1879)⁴ was primarily employed with the military. On 13 March 1854, during the Crimean War, he had joined the army, becoming a pharmacist at the Military Medicine Department. He came to Bucharest with the Austrian occupation troops, working at their field hospital. Apart from his pharmacist duties, Angerer practiced photography, using his extensive equipment to take pictures of the civilian population, capturing some of the earliest images of Bucharest, showing parts of the city before they were redeveloped during the late 19th century. He documented the inhabitants of the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, creating an interesting ethnographic portrait of their society.

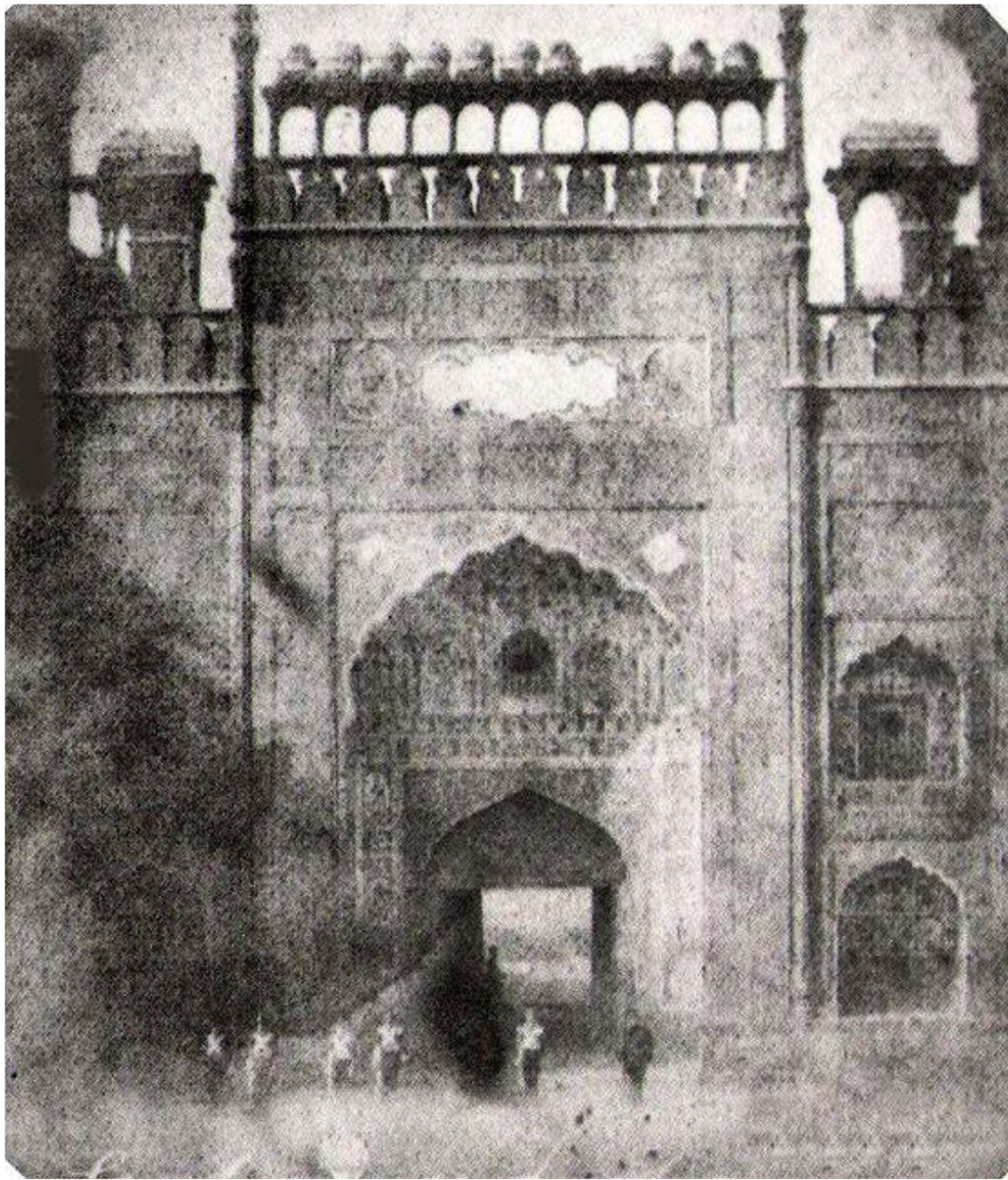
Moldavia and Wallachia were already both occupied by Russian troops since July 1853 and Angerer also took pictures of Turkish and Russian troops, placing him amongst the world's first war photographers. Angerer returned to Vienna around 1857 and on 13th April 1858 resigned from the army in order to focus on photography. Ludwig became Austria's premier photographer being appointed photographer of the Imperial Court and receiving medals in London, Paris and Berlin in the 1860s. His refined work amply demonstrates his technical and aesthetic skills and he is a photographer who merits more study and acclaim. He is also credited with introducing the *carte de visite* to Vienna and was the brother of photographer Victor Angerer.

However, McCosh, Angerer, Szathmary and Lecchi are often ignored and in most historical accounts, (particularly those originating out of Britain), Roger Fenton⁵ (1819 -1869) is often debatably considered as being the first war photographer. The war he depicted was again the cruel Crimean conflict which lasted between October 1853 and March 1856. On 8 March 1854, Fenton landed at Balaklava, a seaport in the South of Crimea and remained there until 22nd June. Fenton's work was a systematic and aesthetic attempt to document the war which, in my opinion, fell rather short largely due to the fact that his employers wanted to

⁴ Angerer was actually born in a part of Malacky, which now makes part of Slovakia.

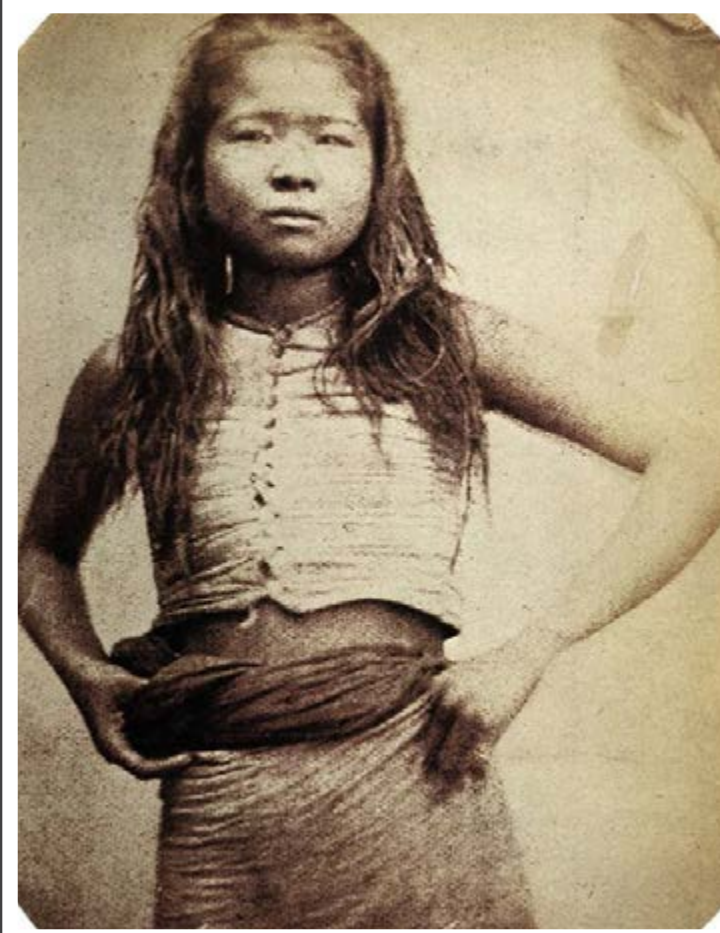
⁵ Roger Fenton, who was taught by early pioneer Gustave Le Grey, within a year Fenton was exhibiting his work nationwide and across Europe. In 1853, he was instrumental in helping to found what would later become the Royal Photographic Society under the patronage of Prince Albert. However, it was not until war broke out in Crimea, between the British, Ottoman and French Empires on one side and the Russian Empire on the other, that his most famous photographs, that would define him in later years, were taken. Based in the Crimea for nearly 18 months, the 350 images he took are among the most enduring portraits of the Crimean War. Yet, these did little to counter the negative public reaction back in England. In 1869, at his home in Potter's Bar in Hertfordshire, Fenton died after a week-long illness. He was just 50 years old. Recent findings of the work of Italian photographer Stefano Lecchi put the latter's war zone work in 1849. Lecchi's work challenges the belief that Fenton was the first war photographer as it precedes Fenton's Crimean work of 1854 as well as Robertson and Beato's work of 1855.





A predominantly architectural photograph taken by John McCosh; c. 1849. It is one of the earliest photographs taken of the Indian sub-continent showing the gateway of Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, India

6



6

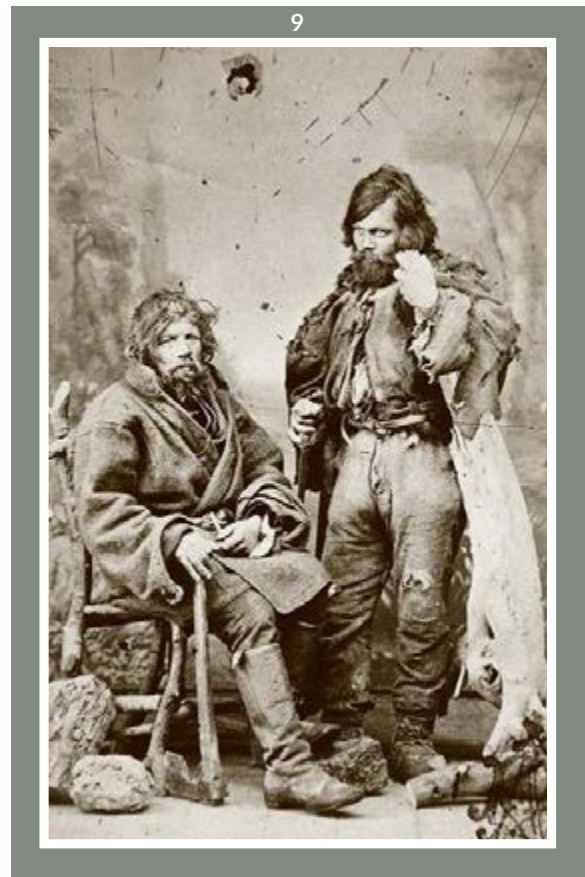
Burmese girl
(John McCosh; 1852).

7

An image taken by Stefano Lecchi during the siege of Rome in 1849, shows the devastation of the struggle between the Papal and French forces on the one side and the supporters of the failed Roman Republic on the other. Lecchi is known to have been in Malta.

7





8

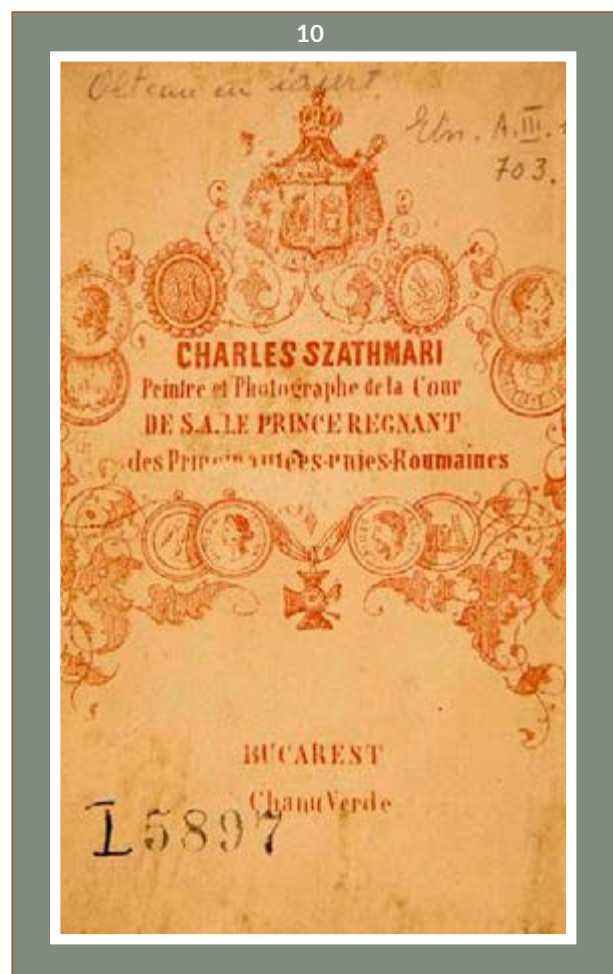
Carte-de-visite of Carl Baptiste de Szathmary, possibly a self-portrait.

9

A study of peasants by Carl Baptiste de Szathmary.

10

The verso of a carte-de-visite by Carl Baptiste de Szathmary, taken in Bucharest.



glamorize the conflict and hide its true horror.

Fenton was a leading figure in British photography and had been commissioned by a firm of publishers, Thomas Agnew and Son, to create a photographic record of the war. He masterfully used large format glass plate cameras and the *collodion*, or wet plate, process which required long exposure times of up to twenty seconds or more. Moreover, each plate process had to be sensitized directly before being used and developed immediately after exposure, before the emulsion dried, necessitating the use of some form of “mobile” darkroom. In Fenton’s case, this took the form of a converted wine merchant’s wagon, probably similar to Szathmary’s wagon. The naïve unpreparedness of the British in the Crimean conflict was evident with disastrous results – around 10000 soldiers died from malnutrition, disease and weather exposure before the real battles had even begun! Yet, Fenton’s Crimean war photography is glaringly bereft of scenes of actual death and destruction, although his letters and diary reveal that he saw plenty of evidence of the horrors of war. On one occasion he came across the body of a dead Russian:

“lying as if he had raised himself upon his elbow, the bare skull sticking up with still enough flesh left in the muscles to prevent it falling from the shoulders.”

Technically, there was no reason why Fenton could not have photographed this subject in a more graphic manner. However, the Crimean War was extremely unpopular with the British public and press, and the British government hoped that Fenton’s photographs would actually counteract the negative reports of military mismanagement. Taking into account the concerns of Fenton’s regular royal patrons, coupled with the need to create images that would have some commercial potential, it is hardly surprising that he chose not to record the full horror of war. In fact, Fenton, who in 1853 was one of the founders of the *English Photographic Society*, regularly did family portraits for Queen Victoria and might have thought it wise to tone down the disasters of a war which did not go particularly well for the British Empire. Fenton’s photographs tend towards showing a more artistic and glorifying content: his well-studied images mainly depict soldiers, officers and personnel in contrived, heroic poses or proudly at rest. Taking nothing away from Fenton’s remarkable images, the fact remains that he only took ‘positive’ images of the war and thus the argument arises about whether he was a war photographer in the true sense of the word.

Incidentally, evidence exists that proves that Roger Fenton did set foot in Malta, albeit for a single day! Fenton was on one of his passages from the Crimea on the way to Constantinople when his ship berthed for just one day in Valletta harbour; most probably for provisions as well as to give passengers an opportunity to break up their sea voyage.

In a letter to his wife, Grace, in 1855,⁶ Fenton recounts his arrival in the Grand Harbour as looking forward *“at the prospect of a good days’ sightseeing.”*

6 Roger Fenton’s letters from the Crimea; letter number 2; 2 March, 1855. Recipient: Grace Fenton letter-book: Joseph Fenton letter-book, Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre



11



11

Studio portrait of Ludwig Angerer before 1879.

12

A studied image by Ludwig Angerer of four men in a studio

12



Part 2 of this paper
will be published in the next MIPP Newsletter.





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Non-Profit organizations like the Malta Institute of Professional Photography are constantly in need of funds in order to be able to function in a modern and professional manner. That is why it is important to have various sponsors interested in networking with the MIPP and at the same time involving them in important issues concerning the photographic trade.

The MIPP feels it is vital to stimulate joint events and initiatives together with our sponsors. This policy helps our members to be constantly aware of products and services that our sponsors market thus not only encouraging an increase in business but also benefitting our members through special occasional offers and deals.

This co-operation and belief by our sponsors, most of who have been with us since the MIPP's inception, has helped in no small way in making the Institute what it is today. It is one of the MIPP's main objectives to help to keep this co-operation improving. We urge our members to truly support our sponsors by making use of their services and products whenever possible.


The main sponsors of MIPP are AVANTECH (CANON); ILAB Photo, PHOTOCIANCIO (FUJI) and PHOTOIMAGES.

Our sponsors show faith in the MIPP so it is only fair that our members should reciprocate. Give your custom to the companies and entities who help us.





CONTACTS

 Web:
www.mipp-malta.com

 Email:
courses@mipp-malta.com

 Address:
76, MIPP, Britannia Street, Paola,
PLA 1426
Malta

 Tel No:
0356 99470106

 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mippwall/>

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