

A CONSULAR REPORT FROM VALLETTA: FEBRUARY 1812

by

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From the time of the Continental Congress down to the present day the government of the United States has sent diplomatic and consular representatives to many different countries. The office files which have accumulated in these various posts over the years have become part of the permanently valuable records of the Federal Government in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.

In general the records of consular posts consist of instructions from the Department of State and copies of reports sent to this Department, miscellaneous correspondence received and sent, records of fees received for shipping, notarial, and other services, records of passports issued or visaed, comments on important events, inventories of consular property, etc. With respect to sea port consulates there are records of the arrival and departure of American vessels and descriptions of their cargoes, records concerning services performed for American vessels and seamen, and other pertinent maritime documents (1).

For Valletta, Malta, the consular despatches of the United States now available for research purposes and which have been issued in microfilm form cover the years 1801-1935. These letters from consular correspondence represent an untapped source of valuable information for the study of economic and political history for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This information can be useful in revealing special facets of Maltese life and activities.

The letter printed below from Joseph Pulis, the Consul for the United States in Valletta, to His Excellency Robert Smith, the American Secretary of State, is taken from Volume I of the micro-film copies of the Consular Despatches from Malta and covers the chronological period from May 16, 1801 to December 4, 1834. The letters and various documents are arranged chronologically within this file. The spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the original letter are retained in this reproduction.

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1. Cf. "List of Foreign Service Post Records in the National Archives (Record Group 84)" compiled by Mark G. Eckhoff and Alexander P. Mavro (Washington, D.C., 1958).

Excellency,

I have the honor to transmit to Your Excellency a list of all the American Ships arrived in this Harbour of La Valette during the Period from August to December 1811 together with the different Particulars relating thereto, which will serve for Your Excellency's information ———

I beg leave in the same time to acquaint Your Exce'lency with the indisposition of His Highness the King of Sicily (1), who in consequence of which has appointed his son the Prince heir of the Crown to be a Regent of that kingdom, and the latter has a'ready entered upon the excercise of the Royal Functions soon after this alteration has taken place in Sici'y. I have been told that many Ministers of State were changed in that Court. Some days back arrived in this place from England a few Troops directed to Sicily where they already have proceeded to.

A Maltese Nobleman of a very respectab'le Family and personal Character [*sic*] went to London some months back to represent to that Government several Claims of the Maltese Natives the resu't of which is unknown yet.

I think that the preceeding Circumstances are worthy to be communicated to Your Excellency, and I shall not fail to continue such communications, as far as it will be in my power, whenever Your Excellency will be so good as not to disaprove my Zeal.....

Interim with the greatest Esteem and respect I have the honor to style myself

La Vallette
1 Feb. 1812 ———

Your Excel'ency's
Most obedient and
Very humble Servt. ———Joseph Pulis

To His Excellency
Robert Smith (2)
Secretary of State
Washington

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1. The King referred to was Ferdinand I (d. 1825), ruler of the Two Sicilies.
 2. Robert Smith (d. 1842), a native of Pennsylvania served as Secretary of State during the presidency of James Madison, a native of Virginia and the fourth President of the United States.