

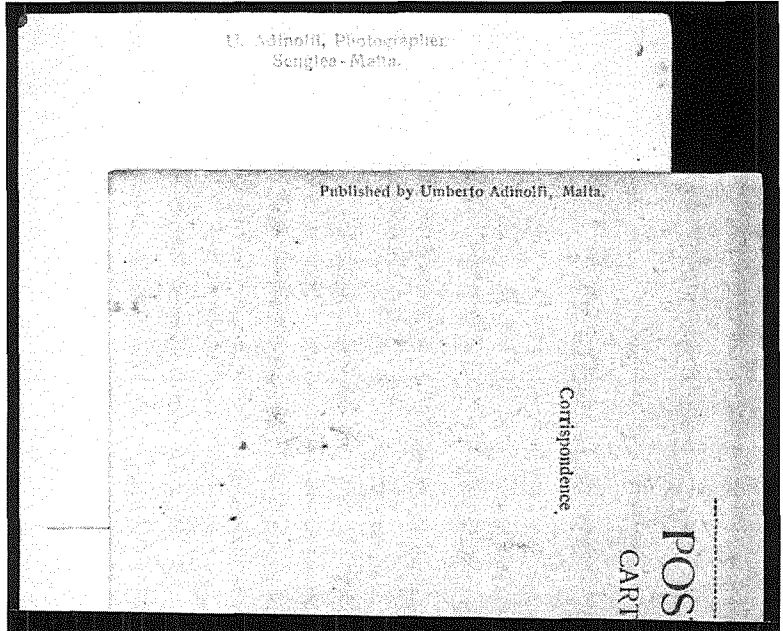
Umberto Adinolfi – A ‘Maltese’ Postcard Publisher

By
Giovanni Bonello

The name Umberto Adinolfi rings familiar with many Italians. He was probably the most infamous *camorrista* on the run from justice in recent times. When captured in a hideout in Spain a couple of years ago, the media made a meal of the event. Finally the bloodstained criminal would be required to pay his dues.

Less well known, in fact not known at all was another Umberto Adinolfi, from Senglea, some of whose postcards describe as a photographer and publisher. His signed output seems to be quite small, but I suspect him to be the – unnamed – publisher of other sets of popular cards. The historian of early Maltese photography did not know of him and fails to provide any information, or even mention him at all in her authoritative book.¹

I too know virtually nothing about him, except what can be culled from his published work. This lack of knowledge no way diminishes the value of this remarkable postcard editor.



(Fig. 1)
*Imprints on the
back of Adinolfi
postcards.
Top: real
photographs.
Bottom:
typographical
cards*

¹ Margaret Harker, *Photographers of Malta*, Malta, 2000.

In fact he is one of the only two or three (presumably) Maltese publishers who marketed their products abroad (the others were Domenico Foti and A. Farrugia, as Cesare Bornaccini was certainly an Italian). Adinolfi's pre-war cards, both in the typographical manner and as *real photographs*, illustrated Greece, Turkey and Palestine. Unfortunately, his *real photograph* cards with his imprint *A. Adinolfi, Photographer, Senglea, Malta* on the back (Fig. 1), do not identify the locality shown on the picture side.

Of the two untitled real photographic cards in my collection, one shows a giant water mill with an inscription painted on a wall "*Natural Phenomenum Unic in the World (sic)*" close to rough circular Union Jack, the other a town in a lush valley set against mountains – both possibly Greece or the Greek Islands.

His typographical postcards, finely printed in Saxony, bear on the back the imprint "*Published by Umberto Adinolfi, Malta*" (Fig. 1). In my collection are the following:

- Argostoli – Town and Harbour;
- Argostoli – Greek Church (HW);
- Argostoli – Marina (HW);
- General View Mitylene Island (Turkish);
- Patras, View of Fort;
- Platea, Landing Place;
- Platea, Front View of Bay;
- Corfù, the Esplanade, Maitland's Monument;
- Corfù, the Theatre (HW);
- Corfù, Royal Place and Villa "Mon Repos" (HW).

Umberto Adinolfi is listed with the publishers who issued postcards of Palestine, but of these I have not seen any.

Before I turn to speculation as to Adinolfi's paternity of other sets of Maltese cards, I will record his known postcards of more strictly *Maltese* interest – his attractive set of "real photographs" to accompany the ships of the Royal Navy based in Malta during their Mediterranean cruises. The joint authors of a book on the Royal Navy claim that "*Ugo (sic, but Umberto) Adinolfi of Senglea had a hand in the Mediterranean fleet's annual cruises – he was commissioned to design their souvenir cards.*"²

Unfortunately the authors do not record the source of this information. Personally I have doubts whether the naval authorities would have commissioned those souvenir cards. Saving evidence to the contrary I rather believe his was a

² Joseph Bonnici and Michael Cassar, *A Century of the Royal Navy at Malta*, Malta, 1999, p.56.

normal commercial initiative of Adinolfi which found a ready market with officers and sailors based on Malta.

The cards consist of the photograph of a named warship in Grand Harbour inset on a scaled map of what part of the Mediterranean the ship would visit from Malta on that particular cruise, together with the estimated dates of each visit with the imprint “Copyright – U. ADINOLFI, Senglea, Malta”. The ones in my collection range from 1933 to 1935, though some pseudo-Adinolfi naval souvenir cards with other dates are also known. Below I am listing the 13 cards in my album, though I have no doubt there must be many more. (Those marked with a question mark (?) are not signed by Adinolfi.) All I believe to be quite scarce. Collectors could compile their own lists and add to this first tentative one.

1933

HMS *Royal Sovereign*, Second part of summer cruise (?)

HMS *Shropshire*, First part of summer cruise

1934

HMS *Achates*, 1st summer cruise

HMS *Boadicea*, spring cruise

HMS *Boadicea*, 1st summer cruise

HMS *Codrington*, 1st summer cruise (Fig. 2)

HMS *Coventry*, 1st summer cruise

HMS *Cyclops*, 1st summer cruise (Fig. 3)

HMS *Cyclops*, 2nd summer cruise

HMS *Ramilles*, 2nd summer cruise (?)

1935

HMS *Byrony*, 1st summer cruise

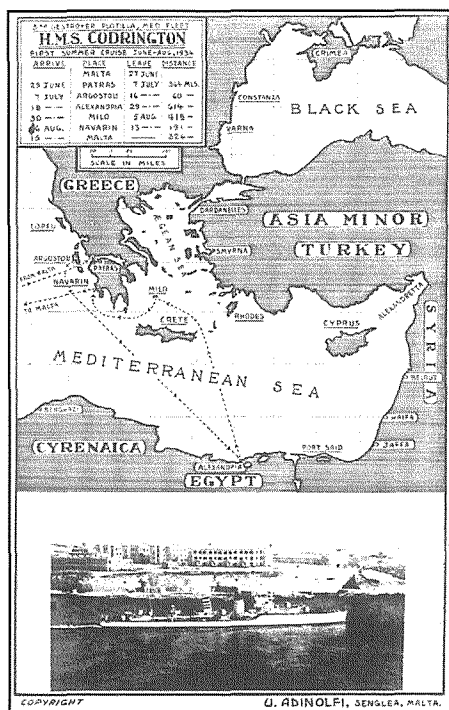
HMS *London RA*, winter cruise

HMS *London RA*, 2nd summer cruise (Fig. 4)

Hadrian Wood has in his collection an Adinolfi *real photograph* of Malta, untitled but showing the Grand Harbour

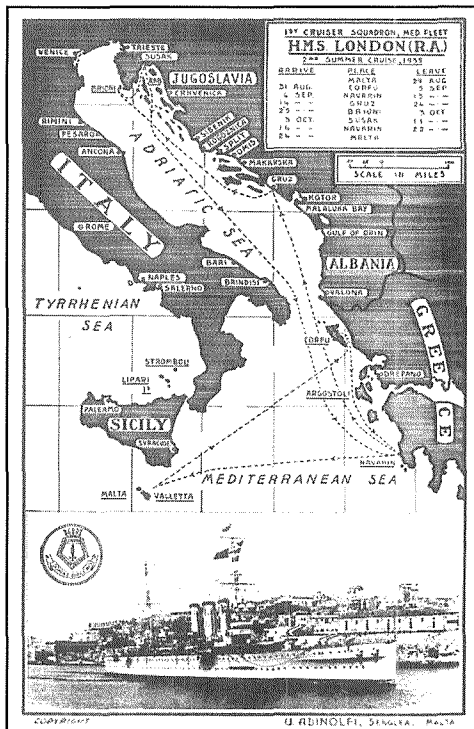
(Fig. 2)

Adinolfi, souvenir card for HMS *Codrington*

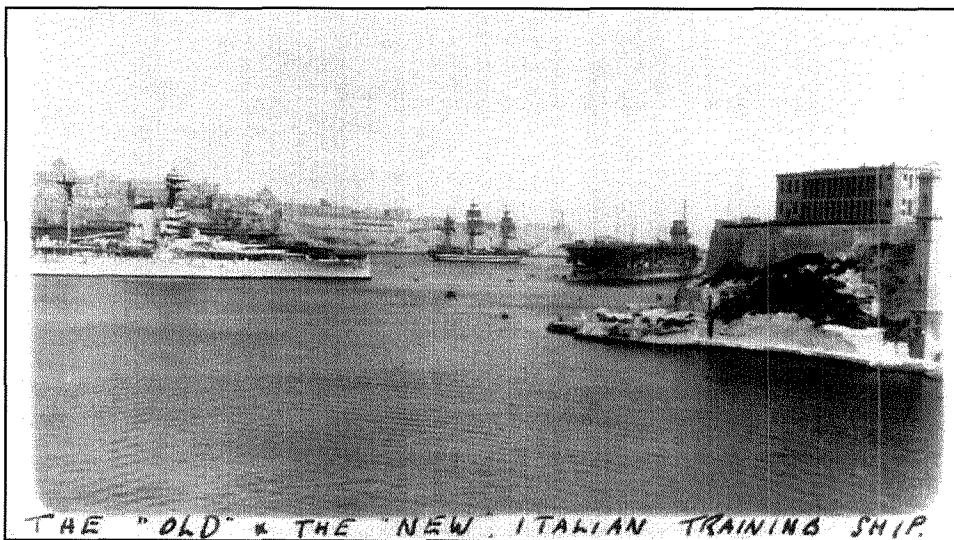




(Fig. 3)
 Adinolfi, souvenir card for HMS Cyclops



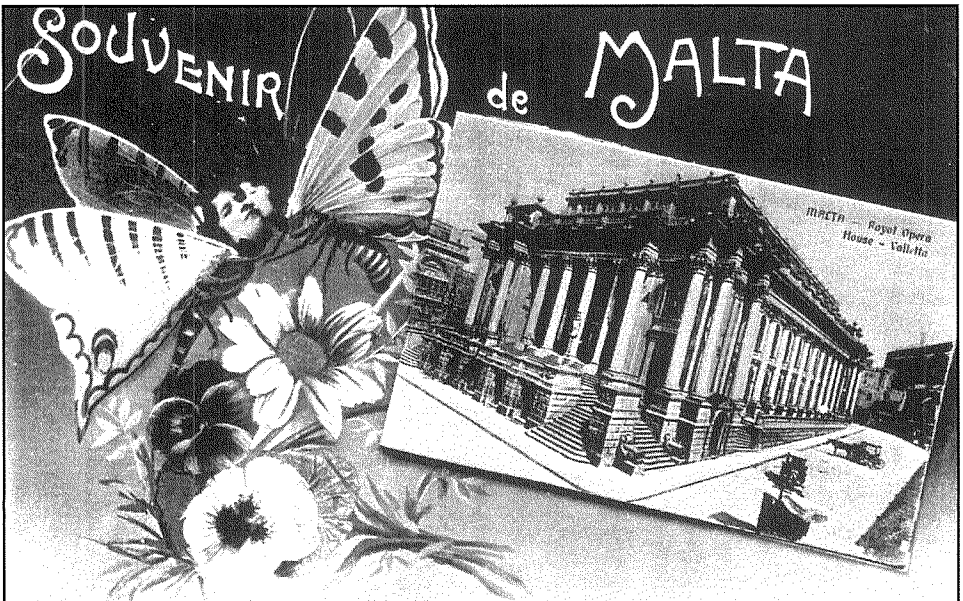
(Fig. 4)
 Adinolfi, souvenir card for HMS London RA



(Fig. 5) Adinolfi, real photo card of an Italian training ship in Grand Harbour (HW)



(Fig. 6) Adinolfi, greeting card for Platea, Greece

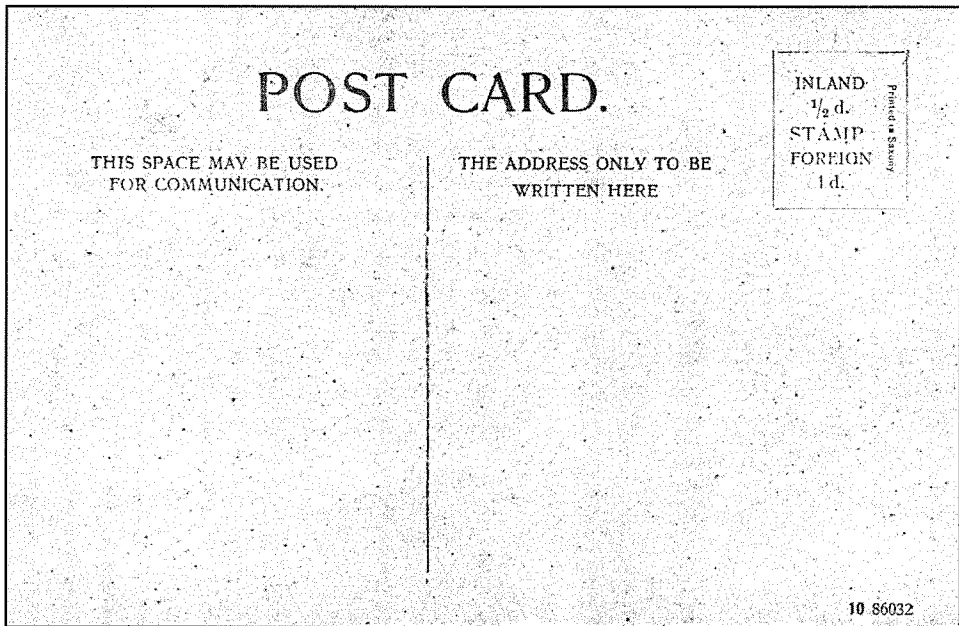


(Fig. 7) Anonymous greeting card for Malta. Possibly by Adinolfi

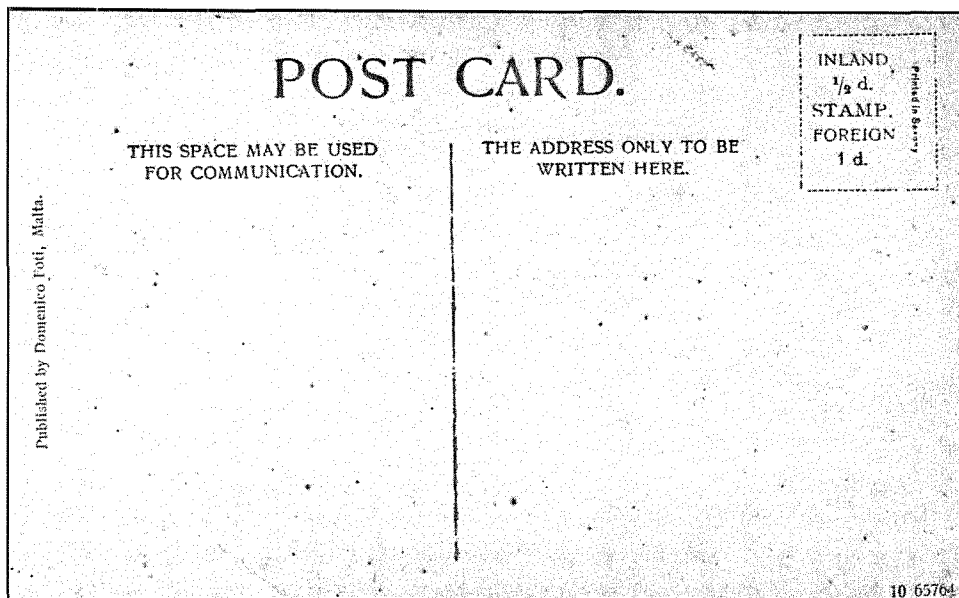
with an Italian training ship (Fig. 5). I have seen advertised for sale a postcard “*Malta – Gozo Lace worker, Adinolfi*” but it was not illustrated. These are the only two totally Maltese cards by this publisher I know of and would indicate there are still other local cards of his to be discovered.

My collection also houses two cards by Umberto Adinolfi, both *Souvenirs de Platea (Greece)* (Fig. 6) which resemble uncannily the large series of anonymous greeting cards marketed in Malta around the First World War – real photographs hand or stencil-coloured with aniline dyes: *Greetings from Malta, Souvenir or Souvenirs de Malta or de Malte and Saluti da Malta*. Some of these are signed D C Cortis Sliema, or have a circular GEBM monogram. But other unattributed Maltese Greetings cards, similar in style, letting, graphic layout, colouring etc. to Adinolfi’s Platea cards (Fig. 7) make me suspect that the large series of unaccounted for Maltese “*Greeting cards*” could also be by Adinolfi.

One final speculation. Adinolfi’s *typographical cards* (of Greece, Turkey and Palestine) are printed in Saxony and have on the *verso*, in red, the usual postcard back plus the year code (10, i.e. 1910) followed by a five-digit serial number. For all intents and purposes they are identical in monochrome bias, typographical font and every other detail to the large series of “*Saxony*” postcards of Malta published in large numbers from 1909 to 1914 (as evidenced by their code numbers). These sets, printed in enemy country, stopped with the outbreak of World War One. This close resemblance between Adinolfi’s Saxony cards and the Maltese Saxony



(Fig. 8) *Back of Maltese Saxony cards*



(Fig. 9) Back of Domenico Foti cards of Corfù, Genoa, Messina and Montecralo, identical with the Maltese Saxony cards

cards is quite unlikely to be coincidental, and I would suggest that the Maltese Saxony cards could be attributed to Umberto Adinolfi.

And a small footnote on Domenico Foti (incidentally he also shared a name with a notorious mafia *pentito* in Italy). No Maltese postcards by Foti are known to me, but he published, from Malta, a substantial number of cards of other Mediterranean countries. I have seen of Genoa, Messina, Monte Carlo and Corfù with the imprint “*Published by Domenico Foti, Malta*”. They too are printed in Saxony and share with the Maltese Saxony cards (Fig. 8) an identical back in red, year code (always 10 = 1910) and the five-digit serial number. Quite curiously for Italian cards, both the back and the caption of Foti’s cards are in English and in sterling: *Inland 1/2d stamp, Foreign 1d.* (Fig. 9). One wonders why. What connection can there be between Foti and Adinolfi, and Foti and the Maltese Saxony postcards? Both Adinolfi and Foti published postcards for Corfù. But so did A. Farrugia, possibly Angelo Farrugia of *Photos Amateur*, Gozo, of whom I have seen three Corfù cards.

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