

Depiction of Bucharest in the Second half of the 19th Century in Amedeo Preziosi's Paintings: Art as Chronography

by Victoria Sara Dazin

Amedeo Preziosi (2 December 1816 – 27 September 1882) was born in 1816 to a noble family in Malta. His father, Giovanni Francesco Preziosi, held high-level positions in the local administration and represented the Maltese people at the negotiations of the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. His mother, Margareta née Reynaud, was of French origin. His younger brother Leandro Preziosi became one of the pioneers of early photography in Malta.

Amedeo was attracted to the arts from an early age and was taught by Giuseppe Hyzler, a highly distinguished painter in Malta. While his father wanted Amedeo to study law, sending him to study at the Law School at the Sorbonne, Amedeo was more interested in arts and continued his painting studies at the École des Beaux-Arts. Amedeo did not find Malta a suitable environment for an artist, and left for Istanbul.

Preziosi was proficient in the colloquial languages of the region (Greek and Turkish), as well as the major European languages (English, French, Italian). He worked as a deputy of the Dragoman in the British Embassy as well as the First Dragoman of the Greek legation.

His earliest drawings of Istanbul are dated back as far as November 1842. Two years later, in 1844, Preziosi was commissioned by Robert Curzon, the private secretary of the British Ambassador to Istanbul, Lord Stratford Canning, 1st Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe to create an album called *Costumes of Constantinople*, which is now located in the collections of the British Museum. In 1858, he decided to publish his most popular and recognizable works in the form of lithographs, fashioned at the Lemercier workshop in Paris.

His workshop was routinely visited by tourists wanting to take a with a souvenir of Istanbul, and amongst his guests was, Edward VII of the United Kingdom, then the Prince of Wales, who bought several watercolors from him in April 1869.

In 1866, as the Prince of Romania, Carol I visited Istanbul, he met Preziosi and invited him to Romania.

Preziosi came to Romania in June 1868 and began drawing scenes from Bucharest as well as several other places around the country. The sketches he draw were later turned into watercolors in his workshop in

Istanbul, which he would then sell to the Prince of Romania for prices ranging from 300 to 1200 Francs. The following year, between May 30 and July 15, Preziosi spent time again in Romania, his drawings in pencil, ink and watercolors are found in a sketchbook *La Valachie par Preziosi*, now found at the Municipal Museum in Bucharest.

Preziosi was killed by an accidental firearm discharge while hunting. He was buried in the Catholic cemetery of Yeşilköy, Istanbul. After his death, his works were forgotten for decades.

In Bucharest, his works were presented again to the public in 1934 and in 1985. Some of his works were displayed during an exhibition at London's Victoria and Albert Museum that was dedicated to his works. In 2003, an exhibition of his works in Bucharest was organized by the Museum of Bucharest.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amedeo_Preziosi

Amedeo Preziosi travelled to the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1868 and 1869 illustrating more than 250 sketches, which are not only some of the best renditions of Bucharest in painting, but possess immense research and academic value to historians and anthropologists.

Perspective from the Filaret Hill, Amedeo Preziosi, 1868



The painting offers an almost complete panoramic view of the city. In that period, construction work on the railway station connecting Bucharest

and Giurgiu was in full swing. The train station on the hill of Filaret was built in 1889 and still exists today.

Bucharest seen from the Tower of Coltea, Amedeo Preziosi 1868



The view is drawn from the Tower of Coltea which offers an accurate view of the city at that time. Built between 1709-1714, the tower had been the tallest building in Bucharest (50 m) for more than a century.

The fish market, Amedeo Preziosi, 1869



One of the most distinctive qualities of Preziosi's watercolors is that they depict the mundane quotidian life of ordinary people; the way they dressed, what they ate, the markets, the fairs and the shops also puts a special emphasis on the hustle and bustle on the streets of 19th century Bucharest.

Dâmbovița sweet water, an aquarelle by Amedeo Preziosi, 1868



Clean water was still somewhat of a luxury in the 19th century Bucharest. Many people used to bathe and do their laundry in the Dâmbovița or Colentina rivers, and in order to make the water drinkable, they would purify it using grains of alum.

<https://www.rodiscover.com/culture/19th-century-bucharest-in-the-paintings-of-amedeo-preziosi>

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