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Memories of MV Silvaplana, from the book by P.-A. Reymond, "Lettres de Mer".

.... As for our stowaway, Ahmed, he is in the ship's hospital cabin, locked up, but he says nothing. He takes it easy and sleeps a lot, day and night.

Ahmed Saad claimed to have been born around 1911 in Benghazi, Libya. He was found aboard the "Cruzeiro do Sul" after the stopover of that ship in Calcutta. The man claims that he worked as a "port watchman" during the stopover and that he fell asleep before the ship left. The fact remains that the Indian authorities never wanted to allow him to land in the country and that this Levantine ended up as a clandestine on a ship of the Suisat Company, which was flying the Liberian flag.

My cousin, P.-H. Piguet, who was then a newly appointed officer aboard the Silvaplana, attended him longer than I did. He wrote about him in his memoir:

I suppose that the various captains, who had recorded it under the name of "Amadeo Salino", were fed up with the fellow and passed him from one ship to another when they were in a same port.

The man was probably not a bad guy, but he did nothing to please the crew. He was not loved by anyone. From the beginning this messy bearded man monopolized our hospital, the "sick bay". So, he had a toilet and a personal shower, a privilege that was not enjoyed by the members of the crew. Then he lived like a pig in that space, which he never cleaned. Originally, we had tried to make him work, so he would pay back at least his roof and his food, but he had refused. Once again, the crew had no great reason to appreciate him, and he usually remained locked up in its hospital-cabin; he did not go out to breathe on deck until evening, after dinner. His meals were brought to him daily by the messboy.

In the ports immigration authorities forced the man to remain locked up in his cabin. One day, however, in the London docks, the mess boy forgot to lock the cabin after bringing his meal: Ahmed or whatever his name was, seized the opportunity to jump into the cold water of the docks, dressed in all the rags he possessed. But he was fished out by the London Bobbies and taken back on board, "manu militari".

I didn't have much reason to appreciate our Moor either, but I was probably a little more humane than most. He had claimed that one or the other crewmember had tried to shoot him with an air rifle. I don't know if this was true, but there are indeed trigger-happy fools everywhere, including on ships.

My memory is fuzzy, but I think he sometimes was happy to find a person to talk to, he who was ignored and despised by all. I went once or twice to converse with him in his disgusting "cabin". I was curious to try to find out more about his background and his life. Like many Levantine people, the man spoke half a dozen languages.

We arrived in Toronto and a young, junior journalist got on board and asked the Old Man for permission to write a piece on our ship: at that time our Swiss flag was then still intriguing enough in the area to justify a few lines in her the local paper. The captain, a

nice old Italian whose name I have forgotten, appointed me to be the journalist's guide. I gave him the usual tour: bridge, machine and everything, and it was quite by chance, while walking past of the porthole of the hospital accommodation, that I remembered our clandestine passenger. "Would you like to meet our stowaway?", I asked ingenuously. Of course, the reporter jumped on this opportunity for a possible scoop. I didn't know anything about journalism and I didn't even know the word "scoop". I obtained the cabin key from the messboy and the reporter had his interview and his pictures.

On the next day the journalist's article had front page exposure in the newspaper. Later came many other reporters, from other papers, from television and all the media. The Old Man asked me for explanations when all these invaders with cameras appeared. But I had only followed orders and shown the man the boat and its occupants...

This mini-scoop travelled across the border to the USA. Several Arabic aid organizations were alarmed by the fate of this unfortunate traveller who could not land anywhere, and donations began to pour in. Not millions, apparently, but a nice sum for a penniless tramp.

In the epilogue of this story, thanks to the media hub, our stowaway soon obtained a passport for stateless or assimilated persons, issued by the UN. Our company was finally able to legally get rid of its cumbersome passenger. At the time I couldn't help thinking that the shipowner owed me a debt of gratitude and that he might have thought of giving me a little recognition. It did not happen!

Ahmed had spent six years on various ships of the Suisat Company. Of course, my cousin never received a medal for his act. He would have well deserved one, as well as a "thank you" from the shipowner who had finally been released from what was indeed a problem for the company.

Abstract from the book "Lettres de Mer" by P.-A. Reymond ©



—Globe and Mail, Franz Maier

Disillusioned and hopeless, Ahmed Saad gazes listlessly through his cabin door at one more dockside.

Man without a country

By TERRY TREMAYNE

Ahmed Saad arrived in Toronto yesterday after a six-year journey. His trip is not over yet. He has no destination. He's a man without a state.

He arrived in Toronto aboard the tramp cargo ship *Silvapiana*, operated by the Suisse-Atlantique Line of Lausanne, Switzerland.

When the ship docked at Pier 28 to unload a cargo of sugar at the Redpath Sugar Refinery, Mr. Saad was locked in the ship's hospital to keep him from jumping ship.

Mr. Saad, who claims to have been born about 1910 in Benghazi, Libya, has been travelling around the world as a non-paying, unwanted guest of the Swiss line since 1961. He claims that he fell asleep aboard one of the line's ships before it left Calcutta.

Since then, he has been refused re-entry into India and entry into Egypt and Holland. Earlier this year he jumped into the water at Liverpool, but was returned to the ship.

A spokesman aboard the ship said Mr. Saad is allowed on deck

while the ship is at sea, but while it is docked, he is locked up.

Mr. Saad admitted yesterday that if the door to his small cabin was left unlocked, he would jump ship and find his way to Libya.

He complained of being beaten and kept without proper food or water. A ship's officer said Mr. Saad did not get beer or soft drinks, but received the same food as the rest of the crew. He said the ship's captain had taken pity on Mr. Saad and had given him cigarettes. He called the beating story nonsense.

He said Mr. Saad had been offered work aboard the ship but he "just didn't want to work at all."

Saad is the name the man claims, but on the ship's manifest he is listed as Amadeo Salino. This is also the name that appears on identity papers issued in Geneva. No one seems to know how he came by the second name, and it is assumed it was given to him by an Italian captain when he started his cruise in 1961.

Mr. Saad was interviewed in the small room that has been his home since he joined the *Silvapiana* in

1964. The room, containing a bed and two bunks, measures about 8 by 10 feet. An officer sat near the door throughout the first part of the interview but later left for supper.

He asked the reporter to padlock the prisoner if the interview was finished before he came back.

Mr. Saad said his travels began in 1961 when, while working as a watchman aboard the *Cruzeiro do Sul* in Calcutta, he fell asleep before the ship left port.

He joined the *Silvapiana* in 1964 after he had been taken from the *Cruzeiro do Sul* to hospital in Rotterdam. He said police in Holland had told him they had made arrangements for him to be returned to India after his discharge from hospital, but instead took him to the *Silvapiana*.

An officer aboard the ship said Mr. Saad had only been allowed to land in Holland on the understanding that after he was released from hospital he would be picked up by the next ship of the same line to call at Rotterdam.

The ship leaves Toronto on Monday.

