

1852, was already represented in the Library's collection, by a sketch in the area dated a week previously.

The 'Sicilian' drawings, made during William Swainson's period of military service in the Mediterranean (1807-1815) are larger than the New Zealand sketches and some are carefully finished. Several are in water colour, others pen and wash, pencil and wash, or pencil. All are in his characteristic monochrome, grey or sepia, except a fragment on the back of a drawing, where sea, palm trees, flags and a soldier's coat are touched with colour. The drawings seemingly were mounted by Swainson himself and like the New Zealand drawings have survived more than a hundred years without foxing. Evidently he cherished these scenes, for one seascape is fully described on the back in his writing, with a note: 'Drawn in 1813 (finished 1838) on a voyage from Genoa to Palermo.'

William Swainson wrote in his *Autobiography* of his experiences when plague broke out in Malta. For two months his street was cordoned off and provisions were brought by the authorities and received into the house by an opening out through the door. 'This imprisonment enabled me to finish many of my Sicilian and Grecian sketches, and arrange the plants and animals. In short, I was almost sorry, on my own account, when our street was released from quarantine, and I had again resumed my official duties.'

Later, the withdrawal of the French from Italy and William Swainson's transfer to Naples and later Genoa enabled him to study art. '... the glorious works of the Italian painters, so profusely scattered in the churches and galleries of Rome and Florence, cooled for a time, my passion for natural history. I began collecting their pictures, sketches, and etchings, — particularly those of the Genoese school — without however, neglecting the plants and insects of Northern Italy.'

The Library's 'Sicilian' sketches, which may have passed through the plague in Malta, predate William Swainson's great period of enthusiasm for Italian art, but they do show, in the watercolours especially, more conscious artistic purpose than in the later years when technique and handling of composition were more instinctive, and the subject was pre-eminent. The watercolours show a greater interest in volume, form and light than in the New Zealand drawings. The subjects were different, of course — the huge bare mountains of Sicily, which Swainson said were 'perfectly woodless,' contrasted with the oppressive forests of New Zealand. Perhaps it was the closeness of the forest which made his New Zealand drawings small — or it may have been shortsightedness or lack of leisure or a fashion for small sketchbooks — but it is only in the Sicilian land- and seascapes that there is sweep and space. The New Zealand scenes are mostly details, small vistas framed in nearby trees or larger scenes seen small. Between the Sicilian drawings and those done in