

THE

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The Gozo Observer

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Editorial:

Educational Developments in Gozo

It is always encouraging to hear about news relating to development of various aspects of education in Gozo. Over the past several months, a number of issues have been announced which reflect a positive development.

One such issue relates to the emphasis being made on learning languages. A recent report issued by the British Council pointed out that the ten most important languages for the UK included, in the first place, Spanish followed by Arabic, French, Mandarin Chinese, German, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Turkish and Japanese. While the needs of the UK might be different to ours, it is interesting to note that Spanish is quite a popular language learned in Gozo, where twice as many students study Spanish compared to Malta. It is also good to see that it is being taught in all secondary schools, and is now more popular than German, being second only to Italian and French.

A second issue relates to investment in MCAST in Gozo. Both the Prime Minister Joseph Muscat as well as the Minister for Education, Evarist Bartolo, referred to the need to improve on the facilities of Mcast in Gozo ‘to give it dignity and visibility’.

Minister Bartolo said: “We don’t want to give the impression we’re investing in institutions and not in MCAST, while at the same time encouraging

students in Gozo to take up courses at MCAST.” This is particularly relevant in view of the significant number of school leavers who could benefit from such an education.

Not to be ignored is the importance of a cultural education for school children, which provides the basis for future appreciation of the arts. It is crucial that the isolation imposed by living on a small island like Gozo should not result in the cutting off of cultural influences on our younger generation. One example recently of a good initiative is the Gaultitana Festival of Music where students were offered substantial discounts on tickets to the production of Tosca. Such initiatives should be encouraged.

At the other extreme has been the news that a medical school would be opened in Gozo.

The unexpected news that Queen Mary University (London) is negotiating to open a medical school in Gozo has been met with disbelief in some quarters and anxiety in others, based on the possibility of reduction of facilities at the current medical school.

There is no doubt that such a development would be a considerable plus for Gozo. In particular a link with such a prestigious university would no doubt have an impact on the practice of medicine at the Gozo Hospital, and on the staff there.

It is interesting to note that graduates from such a school would be given an MBBS degree (rather than the MD degree conferred by the University of Malta), emphasising a complete autonomy from the University of Malta. Teaching staff would be provided by Queen Mary University during the early (preclinical years), while Maltese hospital staff would run the clinical years.

This is an experiment, but it is bound to be of benefit to Gozitan students and to Gozo as a whole.

Maurice Cauchi



Barumbari, Giren and Mgiebaħ - Vernacular Gems in Oblivion

GODWIN VELLA

Introduction

Vernacular architecture is simplistically defined as buildings without architects, and is resultantly considered by many as being of inferior intrinsic value in comparison to polite architecture.¹ This erroneous assumption takes a further downgrade twist with respect to the rural realm where functionality and easily extractable raw material availability impart a definitive bearing on form, structural considerations and construction techniques. On several counts, however, vernacular architecture underscores the authentic character of its authors. It moulds the prevailing environmental scenario with man's instinctive resilience. Vernacular architecture is essentially man's adaptive response to the natural environment as it meets the needs of the end users by exploiting diligently the often limited range of resources made available by Mother Nature. Indeed, these unpretentious constructions commonly integrate seamlessly and respectfully with the environment, if not enhancing nature's pristine beauty itself, and are of fundamental relevance for a truly sound appreciation of the architectural patrimony of any culture.

Gozo, having been inhabited for some seven millennia by a countless succession of resourceful albeit mostly anonymous master masons, treasures an outstanding built-up patrimony in comparison to its restricted geographical footprint of just 67km². Besides the many monumental churches, impregnable strongholds and fine civil properties, the island's picturesque landscape is endowed with a wealthy corpus of vernacular constructions reminiscent of its stringent dependence on agricultural pursuits. While the economy on mainland Malta diversified and evolved *pari passu* with the exponentially flourishing maritime activity in the Grand Harbour area following

the arrival of the Order of St John in 1530, Gozo remained fully reliant on the limited produce of its own soil and herds (Vella, 2012: 13-21).

As expected no square inch of arable land was spared and most of the sister island's surface area was reclaimed for crop cultivation. This necessitated the partitioning of its hilly terrain into a maze of terraced fields which, as noted by MacGill (1839:141), climb up all the way to the summit of the distinctive flat plateaus. Kilometres on end of terrace walls, wind screens and passageways became crafted in due course, while an innumerable number of field rooms, water reservoirs and irrigation channels mushroomed all over the place.

Generally speaking, most tenants engaged themselves in livestock husbandry also and wherever opportune, or more convenient, relocated part of this activity away from their farmhouses that were in turn commonly planted in the immediate environs of village cores or stood clustered in hamlets. Pigeons, for instance, could do without intensive attention and were therefore frequently reared in isolated tower-like dovecotes.

Likewise, bee keepers kept their prized but tricky winged creatures away from their abodes. Many a time, the earthenware beehives were placed in sunny and sheltered spots, but the more keen owners erected dedicated structures for the purpose. The garigue stretches that were not taken up for agricultural purposes or urban development were equally encroached upon by vernacular architecture, in particular hunters' hides and bird traps. Practically all of Gozo's surface area has been sculpted relentlessly by its peasant inhabitants since time immemorial to the extent that the entire island can, or better still should be looked at as a cultural landscape resource of note.²

¹ Polite Architecture refers to buildings characterized by stylistic elements of design incorporated intentionally for aesthetic purposes which go beyond the building's functional requirements

² UNESCO's World Heritage Committee defines cultural landscapes as cultural properties representing the combined works of nature and man.



Aerial view of Mgarr ix-Xini Bay showing a maze of field terraces reaching all the way to the shoreline.

Unfortunately, an alarmingly increasing percentage of the small and less accessible arable plots are progressively being abandoned in view of the shrinking farming community and changing crop cultivation practices. Worst still, the necessary repair and maintenance of most retaining walls and other rural structures are not being given due attention. The character of many agricultural neighbourhoods is fading away little by little, but not all is lost. Gozo's rural landscape still preserves many vernacular constructions in a fair or salvageable state of repair.

A comprehensive highlight of each and every type of vernacular structure preserved on the sister island is not possible here in view of the prevailing length limitations. It would also entail significant repetition since the more pronounced elements like terrace walls and farmhouses featured on various occasions as subject matter of in-depth studies (Jaccarini, 1998). This paper will focus on three of the more overlooked elements, namely *barumbari* (dovecotes), *giren* (corbelled field rooms) and *mġiebaħ* (beehive shelters). It is not meant as a comprehensive study but simply a general introduction. In truth, it is highly hoped that other researchers in the field take on the arduous task to compile a definitive gazetteer of these and other vernacular gems in oblivion.

Frequent reference will be made to the placement of door and vent openings on the south-facing side of the respective constructions. Indeed, this constitutes an underlying planimetric consideration that ventures beyond vernacular architecture. The purpose of these openings is twofold, namely the provision of adequate shelter from the prevailing northern winds and the full exploitation of natural light.

Barumbari (Dovecotes)

Rock Pigeons are the world's oldest domesticated birds. Archaeological research suggests that this could have taken place as early as 10,000 years ago. Pigeons grow to a relatively large size in the nest before they are able to fly, and in this stage of their development they comprise a prized meat source ideal for soups and pies. A productive pair of pigeons can yield up to ten chicks each year and if allowed to graze in the open countryside the resultant feeding costs would turn out to be minimal. In a nutshell, pigeons equated to an abundant, convenient and economical source of meat.

When and how the local inhabitants started rearing domesticated pigeons may never be known with certainty, but the fine mosaic at the Domus Romana representing two doves perched on the lip of a bowl suggests that this practice was already well rooted in the Maltese Islands by the Roman Period.



Intricate mosaic floor centrepiece from the Domus Romana at Rabat-Malta.

Furthermore the regular occurrence of linear sets of pigeon nesting perforations in the extant late

medieval and early modern buildings within the Castello and elsewhere indicates that this activity infiltrated the urban sphere as well.



Early twentieth century snapshot of an extant early modern terraced house within the Castello (incorporated within the present Museum of Folklore) showing a series of pigeon holes placed above the door.

Back to the rural domain, pigeon holes are a recurrent feature in traditional farmhouse constructions, in particular along south-facing wall elevations overlooking first floor terraces. Occasionally, these can take enticing formations. A former detached farmhouse, datable to the nineteenth century, in Sump Street, Rabat retains a free standing screen wall consisting of five rows of around twelve pigeon holes.



Free-standing screen wall containing five rows of around twelve pigeon holes at house in Sump Street, Victoria. The asymmetrical distribution and varying shapes of the perforations suggest the recycling of the blocks from older *barumbari*.

Likewise, a more rustic and possibly older farmhouse at the lower end of Ta' Żejta Valley close by, preserves an arrangement of two rows of some fifteen pigeon holes at roof level besides a set of twelve corresponding burrows in the thickness of the wall underneath.



Farmhouse at Ta' Żejta Valley, Victoria showing a two-tiered screen of pigeon holes on its roof and a symmetrically laid out series of twelve corresponding nests burrowed into the wall underneath. The two smaller squarish cuts, a couple of courses further down, seem to have been intended as nests for sparrows, whereas the towering structure on the right hand side is a *barumbara* (dovecote).

Pigeon nesting facilities occur also in rather atypical properties and discreet spots like the roof of the early seventeenth century Santa Ċeċilja rural defence stronghold.

The numerous free-standing dovecotes in the precincts of sizeable properties or dispersed in the countryside comprise a more iconic testimonial to the diffusion of this farming practice. These *barumbari* (singular *barumbara*) take the form of slender tower-like structures comprising two or, occasionally, three floors with a cumulative height of up to ten metres. Their footprint rarely exceeds twenty metres square, and the resultant voids are frequently roofed over by large slabs resting over side corbels. Generally speaking their construction manifests rudimentary workmanship, but in a few instances the respective owners paid great attention to their design and finish.

An outstanding example survives intact at *Tal-Ħamrija*, limits of Xewkija. It stands next to an equally finely constructed and covered water reservoir overlooking the fertile agricultural district of *It-Taflija*. The inward inclined walls are crowned by a stringcourse that is in turn surmounted by ornate finials at each corner. A row of three evenly spaced and squarish vent openings and an underlying shelf-like projection are placed on the south facing wall. Side vents penetrate the entire thickness of the wall and link up with the inner void hosting the pigeon nests, whereas the shelf beneath is meant to act as a flying / landing platform for the same inquilines. Analogous setups occur in most instances, though some *barumbari* are accessed through a porthole



A fine barumbara at Tal-Hamrija, Xewkija. The horizontal projection serves as flying/landing platform for the nesting pigeons.

in the roof. As with the aforementioned pigeon holes burrowed into the exterior wall elevations of urban and rural residencies, the respective nests housed within the *barumbari* are fashioned out of the same building blocks making up the walls. Timber shelving was rarely resorted to in view of the ensuing prohibitive costs.

The locals also consumed wild pigeons and other game in great numbers. Several nineteenth century travelogues narrate how veritable daredevils climbed down the sheer cut cliffs rising majestically from the seabed with the aid of ropes to search in clefts and fissures for the chicks of wood pigeons and other nesting birds in the area (Fenech, 2010: 82-3). Significantly, one comes across the pigeon-related place names of *Għar il-Hamiem*, *L-Għar tal-Hamiem*, *Halq Hamiem*, *Harq tal-Għar il-Hamiem* and *Wied il-Hamiem* along the coast of Gozo (Zammit Ciantar, 2000: 77-84). Wild pigeon shooting from boats was also widespread. In 1699, for instance, Grandmaster Ramon Perellos y Roccaful (1697-1720) sailed round Gozo in his *speronara* to hunt wild doves. (Agius de Soldanis)



Hunting for wild pigeons nesting in the coastal cliffs (reproduced from *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 1879)

Giren (Corbelled Field Rooms)

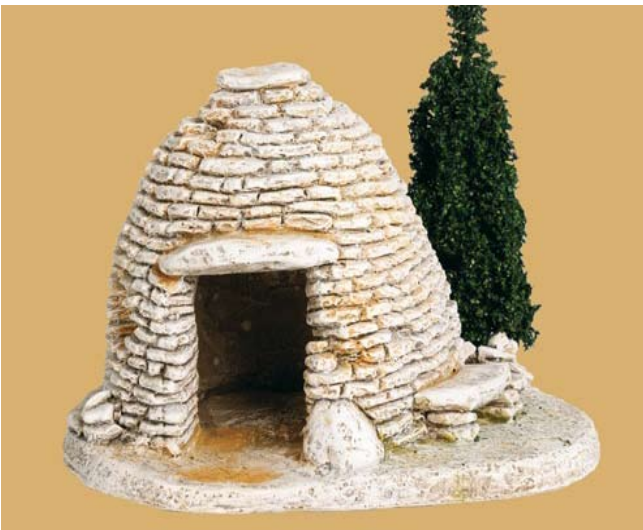
Giren (singular *girna*) are set apart from other field rooms in view of their characteristic roofing technique. Each course projects slightly with respect to the one underneath (corbelling) until the resultant opening is reduced to a small porthole that is in turn sealed off by one or two flattish blocks. This technique has been in use locally since prehistoric times as epitomised by the megalithic temples and was, to a lesser extent, exploited frequently in other buildings, notably the roofing of small spaces like *barumbari* with a span of up to some 2.5 metres. Corbelling has been mastered also by most Mediterranean cultures for a multitude of purposes, including the construction of storage facilities along ice-trade routes. For instance, analogous corbelled structures are commonly referred to as *neverie* and *borie* in Italy and France respectively. Also, the world-famous apulian *trulli* (singular *trullo*) follow the same roofing technique.



Neviera at Villa Vela, along Strada Statale 287, from Noto to Palazzo Acriede



A cluster of Trulli at the World Heritage Site of Alberobello, Puglia, Italy.



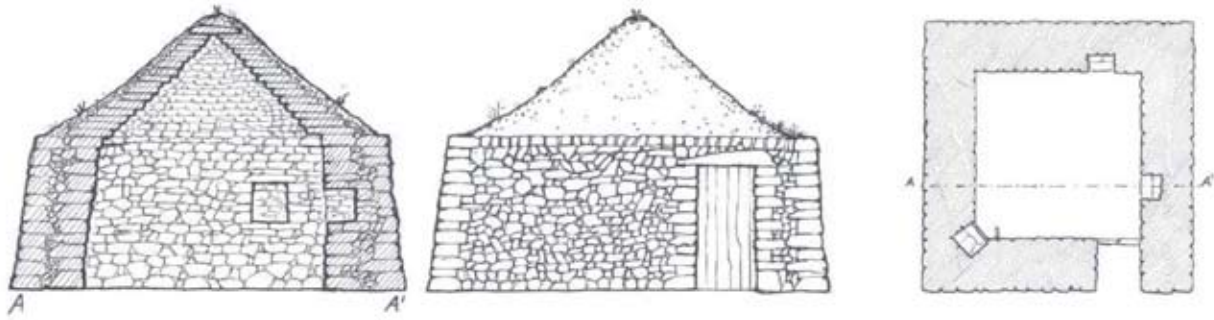
Model of a Borie for the decoration of Christmas cribs in Southern France.

Traditionally, in the Maltese Islands as elsewhere, *giren* are constructed in dry-rubble. Whether squarish or circular in plan their walls comprise two skins of rough stones laid without the use of mortar. The inner layer climbs all the way up to

form the corbelled ceiling, whereas the outer skin is commonly inclined slightly inwards and stops at a slightly lower level. Smallish rubble (Maltese *mazkan*) is used as infill in between said skins and to finish off the projecting tip of the corbelled structure. A compacted layer of gravel and earth is at times laid on the conical roof to enhance water proofing. The resultant corpulent walls are generally perforated only by a solitary door opening that is invariably set on the southern flank. Door headroom rarely exceeds 1.5 metres, while the average width is around 0.7 metres. While square-headed arrangements seem to have been preferred, in the absence of adequate blocks for the lintel rudimentary arch-crossings were composed. Lintels are in turn habitually reinforced by a surmounting relieving arch that could be set slightly apart to create a vent-like opening. Else a squarish window opening is sometimes placed directly above said lintels.

In the popular work *The Girna: the Maltese corbelled stone hut*, Michael Fsadni did not include the sister island in the same pioneering study, arguing that “in Gozo there are almost none at all” (Fsadni, 1998: 8). Gozo may have a lower concentration of *giren* per square kilometre with respect to Malta, but Fsadni and others who repeated this assertion are critically erroneous. Fsadni’s flagrant slip-up is best understood on taking into consideration an accompanying and equally blatant and intrinsic oversight. Chapter 1 of the publication in question presents an overview of the geographic distribution of *giren* but fails to provide a plausible explanation for the marked concentration in northwest Malta.

Contrary to Fsadni’s claim, urban sprawl is not to be blamed for the striking absence of *giren* in central and eastern Malta. Every site or monument has, or had, a landscape that constitutes an integral part of its essence and which is of paramount importance for its holistic appreciation. Since vernacular architecture mirrors the easily extractable natural resources abounding in the immediate environs, the decision to craft a field room in the form of a *girna* or otherwise was not spearheaded by personal aesthetic tastes. It was dictated by the prevailing building raw material at hand, which irrespective of the Maltese Islands’ petite proportions varies from locality to locality in relation to the diverse geomorphologic contexts.



Section drawing, elevation and plan of a *barraca de curucull* from the Spanish Island of Majorca (Reynés & Sastre: 36)

Giren have an innate charming quality but their construction requires notable craftsmanship and presents serious size limitations. For sure the respective builders would have opted for the construction of more spacious field rooms had it been technically possible with the same raw material.

Giren are invariably erected of smallish and fairly irregular boulders, which on closer inspection manifest a denser consistency compared to the honey-coloured Globigerina limestone employed profusely in more formal constructions. As a matter of fact, Coralline limestone is generally used throughout. Being notably harder than Globigerina, the quarrying of Coralline outcrops was very often limited to the peeling off of the fractured bedrock crust and the coarse break up of the resultant large boulders. The dressing of ashlar Coralline blocks, in particular slim roofing slabs, which can span up to well over two metres when crafted out of Globigerina (Jaccarini, 1998: 37), proved to be unfeasibly demanding and technically challenging due to the raw material's hardness, and was therefore omitted altogether with respect to most vernacular constructions. Faced by such constraint the resourceful builders had no other option but to make do with the smallish and irregular blocks easily available. A lightweight structure of reeds and clayey plastering (technically referred to as wattle and daub) would have necessitated frequent routine maintenance besides lessening thermal buffering drastically. The roofs of these field rooms planted away from Globigerina outcrops were, thereby, fashioned in the form of a false dome through corbelling.

This explains their marked presence within the

footprint of the extensive Coralline caps prevailing in northwest Malta and the equally notable absence from the gently rolling Globigerina plains defining most of the central-eastern region. With respect to the latter instance, field rooms are constructed of Globigerina limestone, which being easily quarried and worked into squarish blocks offers far more flexibility in terms of design and size.

The distribution of *giren* in Gozo follows a corresponding asymmetrical pattern. Indeed, the sister island treasures a lesser concentration of *giren* per square kilometre due to its diverse geomorphology, in particular the extensive fracturing and erosion of the Upper Coralline cap. Except for the spacious mesas of Rabat, Xagħra, Nadur and Qala all extant Upper Coralline deposits are fairly restricted in size and generally separated from each other by wide-floored valleys that sink all the way down to uncover broad Globigerina strips, while most of western, central-eastern and southern Gozo consists of Globigerina plains.

Clearly, for most agricultural neighbourhoods the farming community had ample Globigerina outcrops within a reasonable distance to source Globigerina blocks from, and most field rooms are resultantly constructed out of the same workable material and roofed over with slabs. On several counts, though, on moving closer to the perched Coralline caps the transportation of Globigerina blocks all the way up from the low-lying outcrops does not seem to have been deemed viable. Close by, but difficult to dress, Coralline boulders were resorted to more often than not, thereby the frequent occurrence of *giren*. Likewise, the most populous cluster of *giren* in Gozo is located in the spacious Upper Coralline uplands of Xagħra, Nadur and Qala respectively.



Girna or partially demolished stronghold? This early nineteenth century view of Victoria shows a girna-like construction on the left-hand side, namely along present day Archbishop Pietro Pace Street. It could however represent the remnants of one of the ancient towers placed beyond Rabat's defensive enclosure.



A fine *girna* in the idyllic setting of Qala's coastline.



Geological Map of Gozo. The green patches represent the Upper Coralline Limestone mesas, while the light brown equates the Globigerina Limestone plains. *Giren* are found atop and / or in the immediate vicinity of the respective Coralline outcrops.

Few or no examples are to be found in the environs of the globigerina plains. Besides farmers, the workmen engaged in stone-extraction along the northeast coast of Qala used to erect protective

shelters in the form of *giren* as suggested by their frequent encounter next to old quarrying sites.

Mġiebaħ (Beehive Shelters)

Besides its palatable sumptuousness, honey is of notable nutritious and medicinal relevance. It featured prominently in local cuisine.

By and large, honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) are found throughout the Mediterranean and have been supplying man with processed flowers' nectar since prehistoric times. The Maltese Islands are no exception. Numerous endemic colonies of *Apis mellifera ruttneri*³ grazed the colourful and fragrant flower meadows since time immemorial. Writing at a time when Malta and Gozo were apparently deserted the Iraqi geographer Ibn Hauqal (? – 988) related how the islands abounded in sheep and bees and how merchants came to collect honey and hunt the sheep. Al Idrisi (1099 - 1166) equates honey, in importance, with the pastures and fruit, while honey was also rated as very commonly found in the Maltese Islands by the fifteen century chronicler Al-Himyari (Buhagiar,



Detail of Old Refectory Mural Cycle (18th century) at Archbishop's Curia showing two honeycombs in the lower left and a honey ring (Maltese: *Qaghqa tal-Ghasel*)

³ The honeybees of Malta, named after Professor Friedrich Ruttner, comprise an endemic subspecies.

2005: 46 and Dalli, 2006: 27-8). Two-centuries later the Dutchman Dapper (circa 1635 - 89) reaffirms the plentiful production of honey in Gozo (Freller, 1997: 47), but in 1745 De Soldanis (1712-70) laments about the destruction of extensive tracts of lands formerly constituting primary foraging pastures for the honey bees, thereby reducing significantly the annual yield.⁴ This worrying situation seems to have somewhat abated by the turn of the nineteenth century when the then renowned honey of Gozo was said to have been surpassed by none for limpidness and richness of flavour (MacGill, 1839: 142).

Besides producing honey, bees are of fundamental importance to the agricultural cycle with respect to pollination. Indeed, the earthenware hives or *qliel* (singular *qolla*), hosting the respective colonies were often placed in the immediate vicinity of orchards to facilitate cross-pollination.



Earthenware beehives (maltese: *Qliel*)

Sheltered south-facing spots at the foot of high walls or mature trees were normally selected, and the earthenware hives were placed in a horizontal position on a shallow bench of stone. More zealous breeders constructed specialized shelters to harbour more effectively the beehives from the elements and possibly instil some form of protection against pillagers. These structures are referred to as *mġiebaħ* (singular *migbħa*) and their occurrence in a number of localities on mainland Malta is reflected in the toponomastic patrimony.⁵ As expected, analogous arrangements and structures are found in other parts of the Mediterranean including the Balearic Islands (Reynés Trias and Sastre, 2002: 111).



Casetes d'abelles as *Cubells*: makeshift beehives made out of hollowed tree trunks. (Reynés & Sastre: 111)

The *Revised Schedule of Protected Monuments* compiled by the then Museum authorities a few years following World War II, lists three beehive houses datable to the eighteenth century at *Wied Piskru* (or *Pisklu*), limits of San Lawrenz.⁶ Since then extensive sections of the valley flanks have been eaten away by quarrying or encroached upon by mounds of debris generated by the same activity. Unfortunately, two of these *mġiebaħ* seem to have perished in the process. The third and surviving example stands along the northern flank of *Wied Pisklu*'s upper section. Planted against a shallow cliff, *Wied Pisklu*'s extant *migbħa* comprises an elongated and shallow room accessed through a square-headed door at the eastern end. The



Interior view of *Wied Pisklu*'s *Migbħa*.

⁴ Gian Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis, *Il Gozo Antico e Moderno, Sacro e Profano* (N[ational] L[ibrary] [of] M[alta], Library Manuscript 145, Maltese translation by Mgr. Joseph Farrugia, English Translation by Fr. Tony Mercieca), Bk 1, Sec 3.4.

⁵ Two of Malta's most picturesque valleys are named *Wied il-Għasel* and *Wied L-Imġiebaħ* respectively.

⁶ National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta, Ancient Monuments Committee, 'A Report on the Present State of Ancient Monuments in Gozo which have been damaged by enemy action or otherwise', 22.02.1946, 'Monuments in the Parish of St Lawrence', No. 8.

resultant void is split into a series of six compartments standing along the south-facing wall.

These are, in turn, separated from the cliff-face at the back by a corridor running the entire breadth of the west-east axis. Each recess features three shelves designed to take up to three earthen hives each. The latter fitted into funnel shaped incisions perforating the one-skinned south-facing wall.



A block with a funnel-shaped perforation to receive an earthenware hive. (*Wied Pisklu's Migbha*)

Another *migbħa* survives at *Wied is-Seqer*, limits of Rabat. Its construction is of particular interest in view of the structural interventions carried out to fit in a two-tiered series of twelve circular vents aimed at accommodating an equal number of



Migbħa at *Wied is-Seqer*, Victoria.

earthenware beehives. Besides the demolition and eventual reinstatement of the southeast facing wall to replace the former lower courses by an arrangement of horizontal and neatly cut blocks to receive the beehives, the former adjoining door opening was shifted northwards. This *migbħa* fell in disuse during the 1980s when most of the fruit trees flourishing in the then quaint agricultural neighbourhood succumbed to urban sprawl. Its survival so far is miraculous but far from guaranteed. Unless a timely intervention is enacted to salvage the more significant architectural elements it will sooner or later give way to the contemplated urbanisation of *Wied is-Seqer* Street.

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Gozo 3D Immersion: Reality-to-Virtual Framework

SAVIOUR FORMOSA

Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Tools

Malta is required to adopt various national and international tools that are transposed into legislation, which tools aid the setting up of data-cycles for use in monitoring and reporting, particularly with regard to the environment. In turn, such tools can help users to familiarise themselves with the real spatial surroundings, to understand the data available and also to create scenarios that aid users to interact with others online. This would also help users to ‘know’ their spaces even when they are not physically present in these same places.

One may consider it ironic that we are creating virtual worlds, when one can easily take a stroll down a hill to experience the real thing: technology seems to be diluting one’s quest for real knowledge. However, information and communication technology is essential as it is leading to the development of new tools for environmental protection. Failing to prepare society for the inevitable ‘reality’ of virtualisation is likely to lead to major disadvantages.

A Major Project on Transforming Reality into Virtuality

In order to initiate the conversion of the physical domain into the internet virtuality, a project was initiated in 2009, entitled Developing National Environmental Monitoring Infrastructure and Capacity (MEPA, 2009). The project involved the monitoring of air, water, soil, radiation, noise and the marine environment. It also sought to acquire 3D terrestrial and bathymetric surveys. This project was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which provided 85% of the project’s funding and the Government of Malta, which financed the rest under Operational Programme 1 - Cohesion Policy 2007-2013 - Investing in Competitiveness for a Better Quality of Life, which also ensured the free dissemination of the project’s resultant data.

This project was preceded by three years of ground-setting exercises, conducted by experts in various environmental and technological fields. The scope of the project was to identify modes of baseline data capture across the domains, aimed at the enhancement of integrated data and the eventual porting to online virtual worlds. This was made possible through an analysis of the state of affairs relating to data access, harmonised datasets and validated data.

Although this exercise was highly supported by EU funds, it required major Maltese initiatives at the national level and technical inputs by individual researchers and legislators. The project led to important advances in technological and analytical processes with societal benefits, as identified by the GEO initiatives (GEO, 2014).

The GEO initiative focuses on:

- Reducing loss of life and property from natural and human-induced disasters;
- Understanding environmental factors affecting human health and well-being.
- Improving management of energy resources;
- Understanding, assessing, predicting, mitigating, and adapting to climate variability and change;
- Improving water resource management through better understanding of the water cycle;
- Improving weather information, forecasting and warning;
- Improving the management and protection of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems;
- Supporting sustainable agriculture and combatting desertification; and
- Understanding, monitoring and conserving biodiversity.

The first steps of this project sought an understanding of the reality on the ground as well as the implementation of various legislative tools. These included those relating to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention (OJ, 2003a), the INSPIRE Directive (OJ, 2007), the Freedom of Information Act (Government of Malta, 2012), Public Access

to Information Act (OJ, 2003b), and the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS, 2014). However, these tools, by themselves, were of little help to the public at large to access and understand the data and further work was needed in this regard.

Creating Baseline Data

The project ensured that a new set of baseline data was created from which to launch Malta's data capturing exercises across the different themes. Terrestrial and bathymetric data were made available at a high degree of resolution suitable for environmental modelling and EU reporting purposes.

The delivery included high resolution 3D terrestrial data coverage for the Maltese Islands using a combination of oblique aerial imagery and Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) data, as well as a bathymetric survey of coastal waters within a one nautical mile (nm) radius off the baseline coastline, using a combination of aerial LIDAR surveys, acoustic scans and a physical grab sampling survey. These technologies, as well as other fieldwork technologies, have equipped the researchers with a launching pad for the diverse physical, environmental and social studies that are undertaken in relation to the strengthening of social and environmental health.

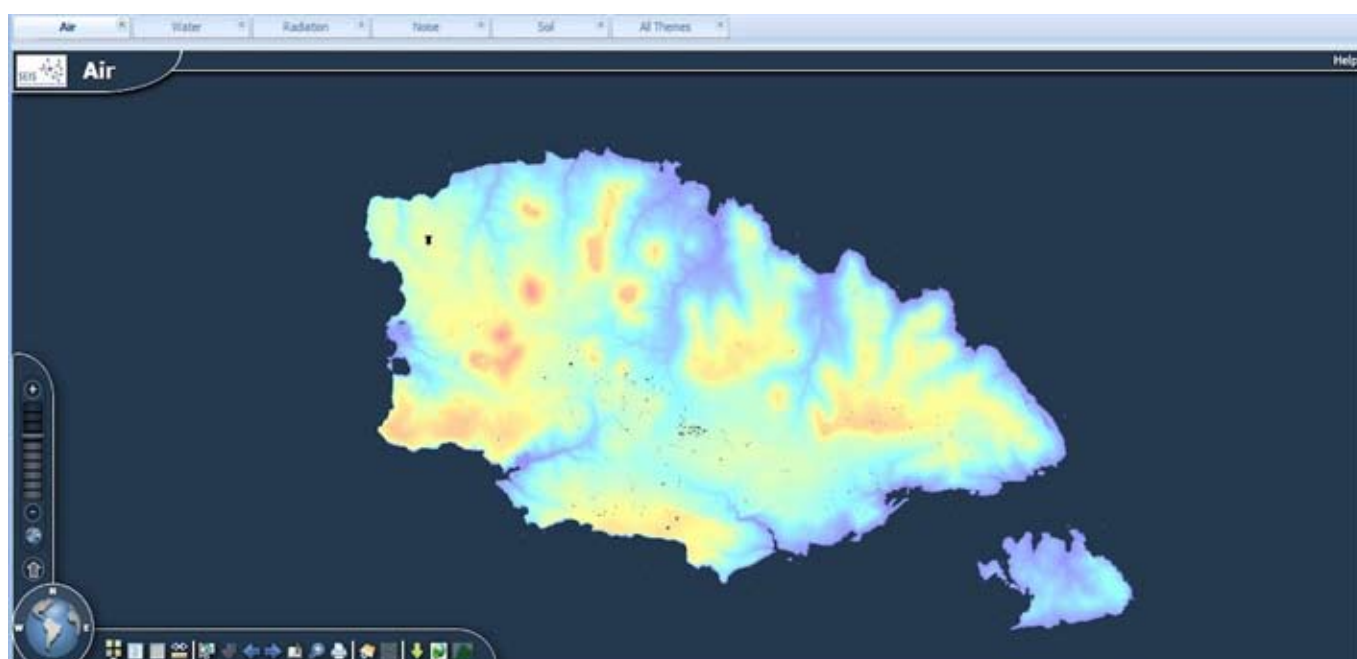
The 3D aerial surveys using LIDAR technology surveys can be used for various applications such as urban and transport planning, environmental impact assessments, modelling of runoff water, monitoring of and enforcement of landuse activities. In the case of this project, veritable advances were made to transform a real place into the virtual world. The resultant terrain 3D models and the bathymetric 3D models are being merged to form an innovative integrated 3D perspective for the Maltese Islands. All data from this project was also planned to be made viewable from a web portal, known as a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) available at www.seismalta.org.mt.

Relevance of the Project for Gozo

The project has major implications for Gozo, enabling various features of the island to be converted from the real to the virtual world. This entails the depiction of imagery and spatial data in an integrated technology, some yet to be developed. The SEIS portal allows the dissemination of the data on the environment themes as well as a digital elevation model and other spatial information. Figure 1 depicts one outcome of this dissemination effort.

The project has yet to produce a dissemination tool for immersive 3D technologies that allow

Figure 1: SEIS portal



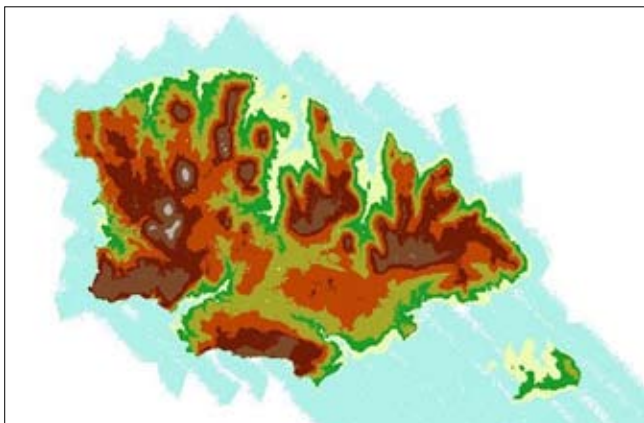
An image from the SEIS portal.

Figure 2: Satellite image of Gozo



This image can be overlaid onto the digital data providing a visual tool to serve as a reference point.

Figure 3: A Terrestrial Map of Gozo



A terrestrial map of the island at 1 point per 25cm, allowing for high resolution generation of virtual terrain.

for scenario building. This is currently being investigated through such tools as open source spatial information systems as well as affordable and readily accessible engines.

The initial experiments into this realm of investigation have resulted in interesting outcomes that would aid the real-world operators and the virtual-world explorers. Figures 2 to 5 depict the sequence of data capture processes that have established the baselines for high-end information structuring. Gozo now has a series of imagery that depicts remotely-sensed data, underwater datasets and imagery that shows building sides, which when

Figure 4: Bathymetric Map of Gozo



This bathymetric map enhances the analysis of the marine domain, mainly the submerged valleys to the north of Gozo.

Figure 5: Oblique and Ortho imagery



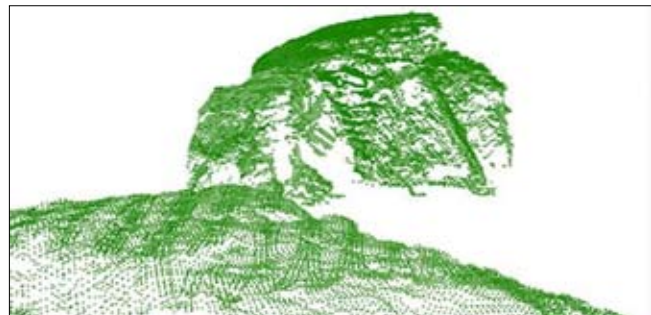
These imageries do not simply facilitate an analysis of the land from top-down but also sideways.

integrated, should prove essential for eventual porting to the virtual domain.

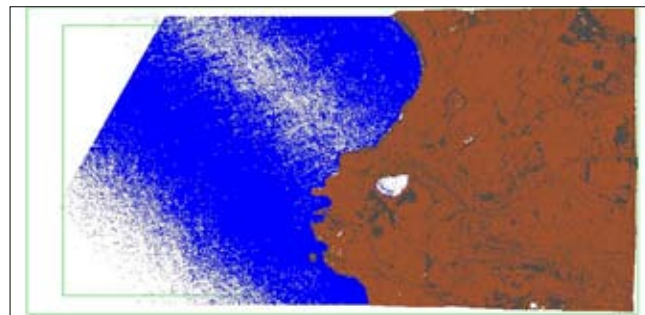
The capture of these datasets was a groundbreaking exercise that is expected to be integrated with the virtual world for scenario-building.

Figure 6 consists of eight images that depict the detail that ensued in an analysis of the integration of three main datasets in the Dwejra area, namely (i) terrestrial LIDAR, (ii) bathymetric LIDAR and (iii) bathymetric sidescan sonar. In addition, the images also show a 3D output of

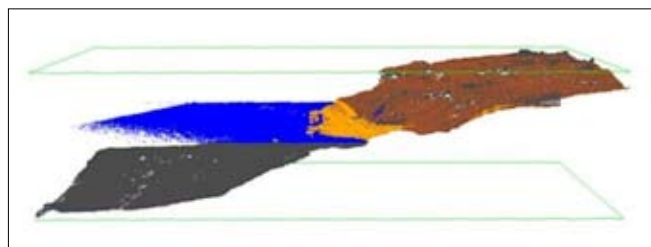
Figure 6: Progress Achieved In Integrative Exercise - The Dwejra Case Study



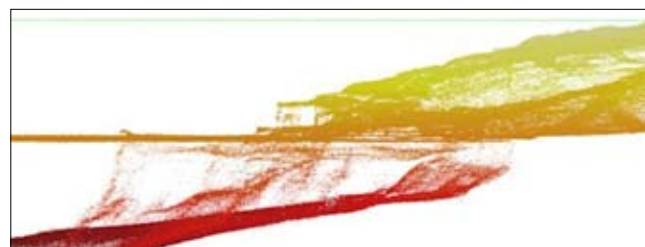
(a) Point Data extracted from the LIDAR scan.



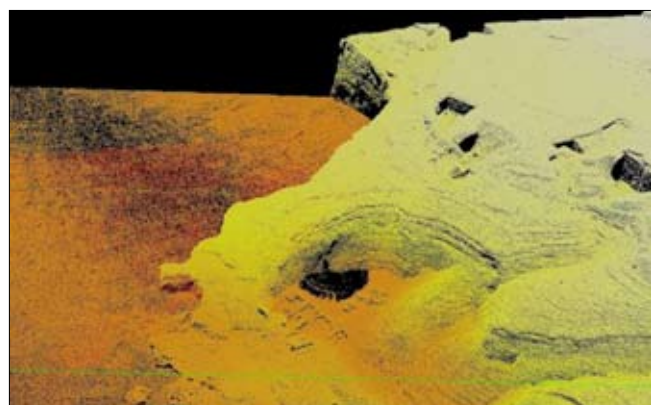
(b): Terrestrial and bathymetric data integration - top perspective.



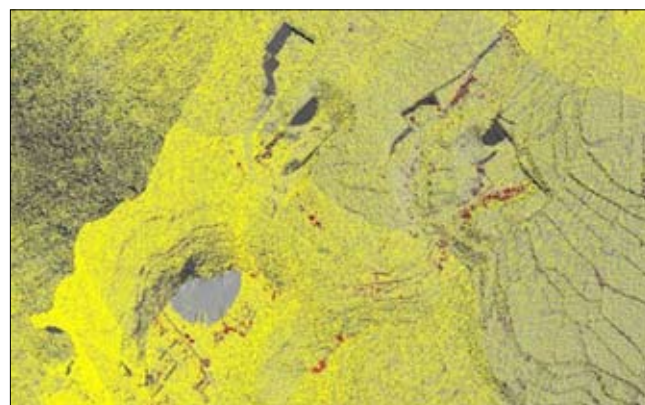
(c) Angled perspective of the three integrated datasets.



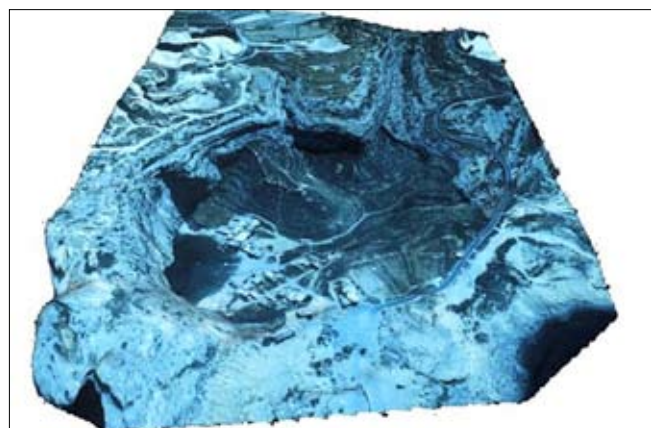
(d): Side perspective of the terrestrial and bathymetric data.



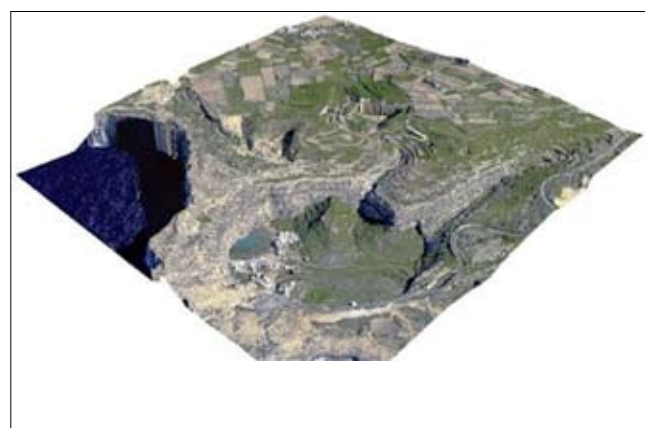
(e) LIDAR point data perspective, comprised of eight million points.



(f) Triangulated data depicting vegetation, buildings, quarries and other entities.



(g) 2004 overlaid image (aerial image overlaid on dem).



(h) 2014 integrated image (aerial image overlaid over LIDAR-data integrated vrml).

the data transposition for use by spatial planners. The images of Figure 7 depict the difference in resolution and clarity between the data that was available in 2004 and that available in 2014.

The Immersive Steps

The project results have been taken to the next step through the transposition of the LIDAR data into the social domain, where users can interact online within a ‘familiar’ space that they can relate to and in which they navigate their way. Away from the precursor Virtual Reality Modelling Language (VRML) that was difficult to use and rarely allowed for interaction, the new engines that have been developed for the gaming industry serve as the launching pad for immersive and social-interactive studies of life in the new worlds where the younger generations often operate. In addition, the new tools allow users to manipulate their space and in turn aid policy makers to morph

their world in neo-geographic forms not available in the real world.

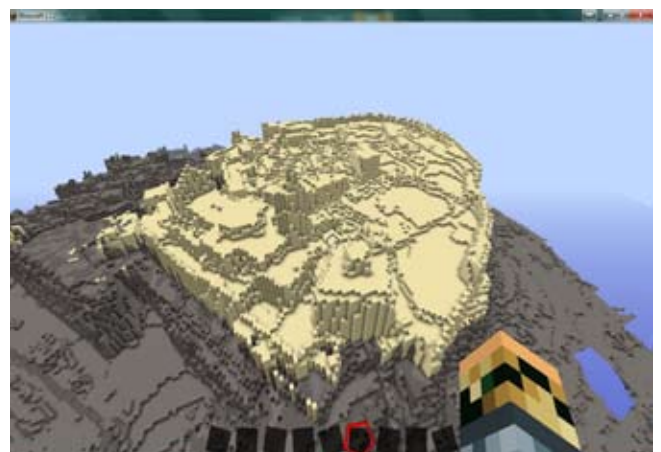
The engines utilised in this study are Minecraft and Unity3D, which are being experimented with. Some useful results have already been obtained with regard to their utility in place-recognition and scenario-building.

Figure 7, which contains four images, shows the results of the conversion of the Cittadella LIDAR data through raster mapping to a Minecraft world where users are able to fly around, walk within and interact in the virtual domain. These outputs are encouraging in that they provide users with various detailed levels with each block signifying a specific dimension. For example, each cubic block could be one of 10m, 1m or in this case 25cm, practically representing a real block of stone used in local building. Such a resolution allows for high-detail analytical work and scenario testing.

Figure 7: Cittadella Immersion Exercises (Minecraft world)



(a) Side perspective back.



(b) Side perspective front.



(c) Zooming in perspective.



(d) Immersive perspective.

Conclusion

The shift from the real to the virtual world is occurring at a rapid rate and the Gozitan analysis has shown that this technology can be harnessed for the benefit of society. The next steps would involve further developments relating to multi-thematics and cross-technology, which would allow further effective participation of the Gozitan society in matters that affect them, particularly those relating to the environment.

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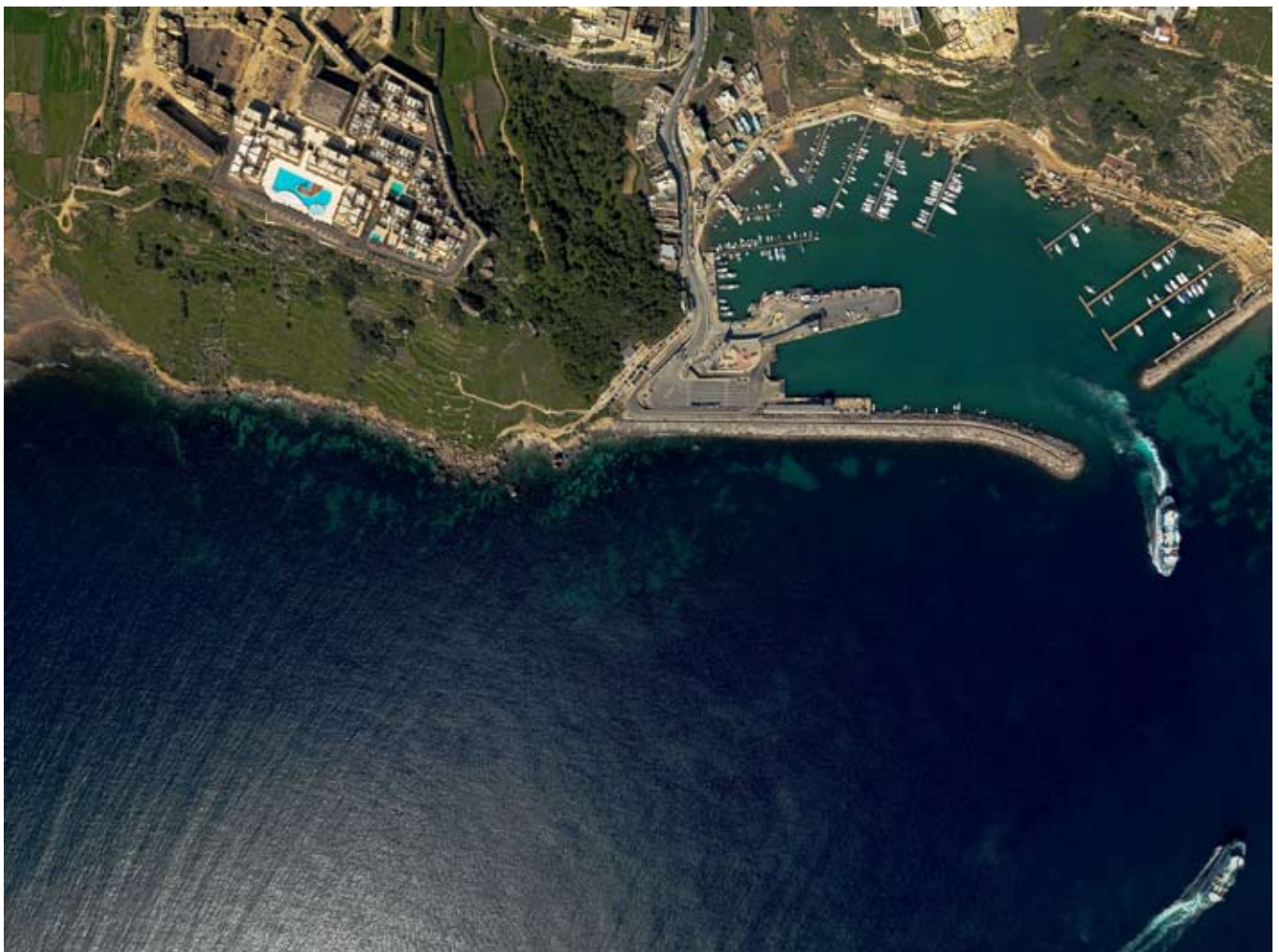
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With Remarkable Love Gozo — 150 Years a Diocese

JOSEPH BEZZINA

With remarkable love, on 16 September 1864, one hundred and fifty years ago, Blessed Pope Pius IX conceded to the requests and wishes of the priests and people of Gozo and established Gozo and Comino as a separate diocese. It had all begun on 30 October 1798 and for sixty-six long years, priests and people united their efforts towards that end.

La Nazione Gozitana

Gozo, the second largest of the three-island nation of Malta, has always nurtured a particular identity coupled with a degree of autonomy. This autonomy was in most cases the result of the island's natural isolation, rather than the outcome of a political decision.

Throughout the ages, this autonomy was sometimes enhanced, sometimes eradicated. The Gozitans slowly found out for themselves that when they had some say in the decisions affecting them, life went on more smoothly. So when their autonomy was from time to time suppressed, the Gozitans went out of their way to convince the political authorities that Gozo had its own particular needs and that this entailed a degree of self-government.

In ecclesiastical affairs, on the other hand, they had to recur continually to the bishop of Malta and the multiform problems that ensued, convinced them that the only solution was a bishop closer to home.

On 28 October 1798, the French in Gozo surrendered. The following day, “the place was delivered up in form to the Deputies of the island”. This fact is documented in a letter written by Alexander John Ball, the British captain responsible for the blockade, to Lord Nelson (Alexander J. Ball, quoted in A. MIFSUD, 1907). This means that on 29 October, Gozo with Comino became an autonomous region. The Gozitans, led by Saverio Cassar, Archpriest of the Matrice, Head of the Government, and Superintendent of the islands of



Fig. 1: Archpriest Saverio Cassar (courtesy: Cathedral Museum, Gozo)

Gozo and Comino (see Fig. 1), had organised the blockade single-handedly; the Portuguese and the British navies hastened its conclusion.

The emergency Government had taken upon itself the strenuous task to provide wages to the local troops, to import food from Sicily, and to organise the various sectors of administration. No wonder that the place was “delivered up in form” to Cassar and his deputies. Archpriest Saverio Cassar became Governor-General and Governing Head for His Majesty the King of Naples — *Governatore Generale dell'isola di Gozo and Capo Governante per Sua Maestà Re di Napoli*.

Gozo with Malta – according to a condition laid down by Emperor Charles V in the donation of the islands of Malta and Gozo to the Sovereign Military Order of St John in 1530 – had to return to the Emperor or his successors if and when the

Knights left the Maltese archipelago. Through this condition, Gozo passed under His Sicilian Majesty, then also King of Naples. The Gozitans became their own masters and their island an autonomous protectorate within the Kingdom of Naples.

On 30 October, hours after the Gozitans had taken the islands into their own hands, Archpriest Cassar addressed a petition to King Ferdinand III of Sicily (see Fig. 2) to grant permission for the establishment of a bishopric on this island. The petition was addressed to the King for two reasons: he had become the formal sovereign of the Maltese Archipelago; besides the kings of Sicily, through a privilege conceded by Pope Urban II in 1098, had the right to promote the establishment of Episcopal Sees in their territory. The Pope had the final word but, reasoned Cassar, if the King was in favour the Pope would approve.

Archbishop Alfonso Airoidi, the King's Counsellor for Ecclesiastical affairs, backed the petition: "The state of the island is such that it merits that Your Majesty, through Your benignity, exercise the rights inherent in Your Sovereignty and grant the petitioned request".



Fig. 2: King Ferdinand III (courtesy: Cathedral Museum, Gozo)

The favourable reception accorded to the petition is due to the high respect that Cassar enjoyed in the Sicilian Court as well as due to the invaluable service of Francesco Pace, the ambassador of Gozo in Palermo.

However, hardly anything could be done at the moment. The King was then doing his utmost to overthrow the Parthenopaeian Republic and could not be bothered about the petition; while Pope Pius VI was under house arrest in France. Besides, the French blockade in Malta further augmented the difficulties.

On 5 September 1800, Malta and Gozo passed under British protection and Cassar died on 5 September 1805, without seeing his wish fulfilled. The first petition had failed.

Petitions to the Pope, the King, and the Governor

The idea of a diocese was not entombed with Cassar. The abnormal situation prevailing in Malta during the first decades of British rule put the plan in hibernation for more than three decades.

The idea was revived in 1836. On 30 December, three representatives of the Gozitans – Canon Gaetano Bondi, Canon Francesco Portelli, and Notary Nicolò Tabone – personally presented a petition to Pope Gregory XVI. It was signed by 136 persons, amongst them the members of the Gozo Collegiate Chapter, of the Għarb Chapter, and all the professionals on the island. After a long description of their island and the many problems of a pastoral nature that they faced due to their isolation, they beseeched the Pope "to be kind enough to dismember the islands of Gozo and Comino from the Diocese of Malta and erect them into a separate diocese".

The Gozitans despatched a similar petition to King William IV of Great Britain to further their cause and begged Sir Henry Frederick Bouverie, the Governor of Malta (1836-1853), to give them his support. They also expressed their desire that the person chosen as a bishop be a member of the clergy of Gozo.

These petitions almost accomplished the desired effect. The Governor made it clear that he "was

not averse from recommending such request to the favourable consideration of His Majesty, he having in view the spiritual advantages of the Gozitans". Yet further progress was halted by Francesco-Saverio Caruana, bishop of Malta (1831-1847), and Monsignor Filippo Amato, his Vicar-General, who could not hear of or bear a division of the diocese of Malta. They explained to the Governor that, according to Canon Law, a diocese could not be split or diminished during the incumbency of a bishop. They further added that the Gozitans had exaggerated their difficulties and that a diocese was definitely not necessary.

Due both to their aversion as well as to a diplomatic tug-of-war then going on between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the papal Secretary of State concerning the right of presentation to the Malta bishopric, the question had to be shelved for another eighteen years.

A Diocese was a Must

The Gozitans based the utility of the establishment of the Diocese on several factors, foremost amongst them, and from which all the others stem, is the isolation of Gozo from Malta. We who have lived in Gozo all our lives perfectly understand the perils, the loss of time, and the costs involved in travelling from Gozo to Malta and viceversa.

The situation was worse in the early nineteenth century. A voyage from Mgarr, Gozo, to the Grand Harbour, Valletta, took from four to five hours depending on the wind. Crossings were quite frequent, but there could be disruptions as long as four or five days long, when strong winds, not uncommon in Malta, prevailed. Mgarr harbour offered little shelter from the winds. There was neither a regular passenger service. Crossings could only be made by the cargo boats that offered neither shelter from the hot summer sun, nor protection from the cold wintry weather. They left at four in the morning and returned in mid-afternoon. The distance was created more by these circumstances, rather than by the stretch of space.

To make matters worse, the bishops of Malta were reluctant to cross over to Gozo. Between 1798 and 1857, when the Gozitan-born Gaetano Pace-



Fig. 3: Pope Pius IX (courtesy: Cathedral Museum, Gozo)

Forno became bishop, only six pastoral visits were carried out in Gozo – an average of one every ten years. Actually there were five up to 1822 and one in 1849, twenty six years later. Bishop Francesco-Saverio Caruana never set foot on Gozo, while his successor Bishop Publius Sant came only once. For this reason, the sacrament of Confirmation was conferred at widely spaced intervals. The majority never received this sacrament.

The poor means of communication also caused hardships to the those preparing for the priesthood. Difficulties in procuring board and lodging led many to desist from studying at the Seminary. They had nonetheless to travel to Malta for the examinations preceding every minor and major Order and subsequently for the Ordination itself. Rough seas sometimes hindered their presence to one or both.

The Gozitans rightly argued that with the foundation of the Diocese many of these difficulties would be overcome. Besides, the opening of a Seminary would follow suit and this would also put an end to rumours that were rife in Malta that the priests of Gozo lacked but the basic knowledge in ecclesiastical sciences.

Pope Pius IX Pities the Gozitans

After a hibernation for eighteen years, the Gozitans decided on a more direct line of action. On 9 June 1855, three representatives of the Gozitans – Canon Michelangelo Garroni, Canon Gaetano Bondi and Don Pietro Pace – brought up the matter of the diocese at length in a private audience with Pope Pius IX (see Fig. 3). The Pontiff pitied the petitioners and promised his support. A few days later, the Gozo Collegiate Chapter sent a formal petition to the Pope as a follow-up. Matters however would soon have stalled once more were it not for two great born leaders who entered the scene to direct the proceedings.

The first was the indefatigable Don Pietro Pace (1831-1914), a young Gozitan priest then terminating his University studies in Rome (see Fig. 4). He was born in Rabat, Gozo on 9 April 1831. He received private tuition from a number of priests, amongst them Dun Frangisk Mercieca, a saintly man. He proceeded with his studies at the Malta Seminary and, eventually, at *La Sapienza*, the University of Rome, from where he obtained a doctorate in Theology on 13 November 1852. He was ordained priest in Rome on 17 December 1853. In 1856, he also gained a doctorate in Canon and Civil Law. Up to 1858, he



Fig. 4: Monsignor Pietro Pace (courtesy: Cathedral Museum, Gozo)



Fig. 5: Sir Adriano Dingli (courtesy: Cathedral Museum, Gozo)

was private secretary to Vincenzo Cardinal Santucci. In Rome, he befriended many personalities within the Curia circles, foremost amongst them the great Jesuit Theologian Giovanni Perrone, who authored the dogmatic Bull of the Immaculate Conception. Towards the end of 1858, the bishop recalled him to Malta to lecture at the Seminary. He also lectured at the University of Malta.

The other was (Sir) Adriano Dingli (1817-1900), an eminent son of Gozo then slowly establishing himself as the *de facto* Governor of Malta (see Fig. 5). He was born in Valletta of parents from Rabat, Gozo. His father Paolo was the writer of the petition presented to the Pope in 1836. He studied in Malta and abroad and soon became one of the most eminent lawyers of Malta. In 1849, he was elected from Gozo to represent the island in the Government Council in the first ever elections held in the British Colony of Malta. Towards the end of 1854, he was chosen by the British Colonial Office as Crown Counsel in Malta. He slowly became the most trusted Maltese person by the Governor and without doubt he became one of the most authoritative officials after the Governor.

These two great leaders vowed that they would not rest until their dream of a Diocese became true.

The former was to pave the way at the Vatican, the latter was to obtain the indispensable approval from the British.

The promoters of the Diocese had by then understood that success could only be achieved during a *sede vacante* that is during the vacancy of the episcopal see. As Bishop Sant of Malta was then ailing in bed, they knew they must act without delay. So while the Vatican was dealing with the British concerning a successor to Bishop Sant, Pace and Dingli were striving hard to further their plan with the Vatican officials and the Colonial authorities.

On 18 June 1857, when it was sensed that the election of Sant's successor was imminent, the Gozo Collegiate Chapter despatched still another petition to Pope Pius IX. They reminded him of the audience granted to their deputation two years earlier and how much understanding and support he had shown them, and renewed their pressing request.

On 25 September, the Vatican elected an Augustinian friar from Gozo, Gaetano Pace-Forno as coadjutor to Bishop Sant. The Gozitan longings seemed wrecked, but in fact they were not; for in the *Propositio* or document of election, the Vatican reserved the right to alter the limits of the diocese of Malta at the will of the His Holiness. To the joy of the Gozitans, Pace Forno, who had previously supported the idea of a separate diocese, succeeded to the bishopric in December.

The Approval of the British

The Vatican, however, would not proceed without a crystal clear approval of the British authorities with whom the papal Government was then striving hard to keep the best of relations to convince them from taking sides in the thorny question of Italian unification. The Gozitans were convinced that if they succeeded to gain the British approval other difficulties would simply dissolve.

After being induced from Gozo, the Vatican sought that approval on 12 September 1860. The Foreign Secretary, Lord (John) Russell, sought in turn the views of the Colonial Office. On 26 September, Henry, Duke of Newcastle, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, asked the Governor of Malta, Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant whether there was any

reason to object to the proposed appointment. The Governor discussed the matter with Adrian Dingli, his Crown Advocate, and on 25 October drafted his approval (see Fig. 6).

In his letter, which stretches thirty two pages and has seventeen lengthy enclosures appended, Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant, the Governor of Malta, not only consented to the proposed erection of a Diocese but also expounded on the bountiful benefits that would be reaped as a result. The import of this despatch was unfathomable: enough to say that 25 October 1860, marked the beginning of the longed-for solution.

After further considerations, the Colonial Office conveyed the approval to the Foreign Office. On 21 November, Lord Russell acceded to the proceedings and duly informed Odo Russell, their representative in Rome, about the whole matter. Early in December, the latter eventually passed on the British approval to Giacomo Cardinal Antonelli, the papal Secretary of State.

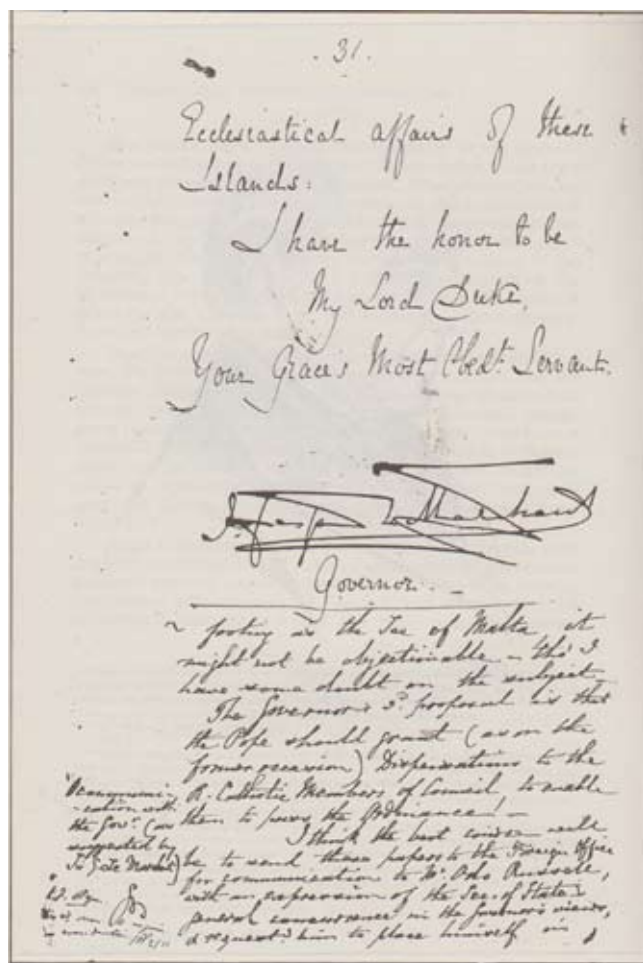


Fig. 6: The important letter signed by Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant (courtesy: National Archives, Malta)

The Difficulties to Overcome

It was only after this unequivocal reply by the British that the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs – the Congregation that dealt with matters in which religious and political interests were intermingled – started to tackle seriously the other related problems. These concerned the deficiency of a proper endowment for the bishopric; the candidate that was to be chosen as first bishop of Gozo; the setting up of a seminary; the never-ending resistance to the Diocese from certain ecclesiastics in Malta; and the perturbed political situation in the Papal States that further complicated matters.

The *second* difficulty was related to the *mensa*, a proper endowment for the bishopric. In the establishment of a diocese, the Vatican wanted to be rest assured that the bishop would have the financial means for himself and for his chancery. Many Gozitans were poor and the Church in Gozo did not have enough income from capital and property to provide for the running of a diocese. However after a fund raising campaign among the higher classes of the Gozitan society, enough funds were amassed to provide a temporary capital from the income of which a bishop would be able to survive.

A *third* hurdle was the finding of a suitable candidate for the bishopric. Local ecclesiastical circles were unanimous on their choice. The best candidate was Mikiel-Frangisk Buttigieg, at that time, archpriest at the Gozo Matrice, the highest position of the Gozo Church (see Fig. 7). Buttigieg – born in Qala, Gozo on 3 November 1793 and ordained priest on 21 December 1816 – was respected by everyone for a very simple reason. Beggars never knocked in vain at his door. In the parishes he directed, the churches were draped with fineries and embellished with decorations, for he provided the money that lacked; all sorts of pious practices were realised for he sustained and supported them. Above all, the Colonial Government found no fault in him either for it was known that he never got involved in affairs foreign to his ecclesiastical duties. By the beginning of 1863, the Vatican had no more doubts on the right choice.

The *fourth* problem that prolonged the process of the erection of the Diocese further was the provision for a seminary. One of the reform decrees of the



Fig. 7: Bishop Mikiel-Frangisk Buttigieg (courtesy: Cathedral Museum, Gozo)

Council of Trent had clearly laid down that the setting up of a seminary was at that time a *sine qua non* necessity with the establishment of every diocese. The problems related to such a foundation were threefold. First, there had to be a building spacious enough to accommodate boarding facilities and lecture rooms; secondly, there had to be enough funds for such a large-scale institution to function and survive; thirdly, there had to be a number of professors in ecclesiastical sciences to lecture to those preparing for priesthood.

These seemingly unsurmountable difficulties did not knock the Gozitans down. They suggested that the Church-owned Saint Julian Hospital for women, inaugurated in 1783, could be easily converted for that purpose. The hospital had become partly superfluous since 1838, when the Gozo Government Hospital opened its wards for females. The Saint Julian hospital offered its services free of charge, due to the number of bequests that the institution had received from benefactors since it began to function in 1454. The Gozitans argued that with the closure of the hospital, these funds could be transferred to the Seminary, with the permission of the Pope. The third difficulty was the hardest to crack. The Gozitans made contact with Pierre-Jean Beckx, the twenty-second General of the Society of

Jesus, seeking his help. After long discussions, it was agreed that he would happily send some Jesuit Fathers from Sicily to Gozo if a Seminary was to be established.

A *fifth* problem was brought about by a section of ecclesiastics in Malta who, with one letter after another to Rome, opposed the proposed Diocese. They even succeeded to win Archbishop Gaetano Pace-Forno, the Gozitan-born bishop of Malta and Gozo, to their side. These priests could not bear the fact that the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Malta was going to be diminished by the establishment of another Diocese. On 27 May 1862, during a private audience that Pope Pius IX conceded to Bishop Pace-Forno, the Pope himself invited the Bishop to terminate his opposition to the Gozitan petition.

Combined with these, there was a *sixth* problem related to the delay at the Vatican. At that time, the *Risorgimento*, the movement for the unification of Italy was at its best. Its leaders wanted to wipe off the map of the Italian peninsula the 1000-year old Vatican States and annex them to a united Italy. This was causing much worry to both the Pope and his congregations. The question of tiny Gozo was not a priority in comparison with this mammoth political and ecclesiastical issue. However, the Vatican eventually took the matter up.

An Auxiliary Bishop for Gozo

In the meantime, Pietro Pace and Adrian Dingli put their whole weight in their respective spheres of influence to hasten a solution. By 15 August 1862, when most difficulties had been evened out, the Chapter of the Gozo Matrice and the leading inhabitants of Gozo sent a fifth petition to the Vatican to reaffirm their situation and accelerate matters.

As a matter of fact, a few months afterwards the Vatican took the first definite step. In the Secret Consistory of 16 March 1863, Pope Pius IX appointed the already mentioned Mikiel-Frangisk Buttigieg as Titular Bishop of *Lete in partibus* and Auxiliary Bishop of Malta with instructions to reside on the island of Gozo. Soon afterwards, he travelled to Rome where he was consecrated bishop on 3 May 1863 by Niccola Cardinal Clarelli-Paracciani. The ceremony took place at the church



Fig. 8: The Bull Singulari Amore (16 Sep 1864) (courtesy: Cathedral Archives, Gozo)

of the *Santissima Trinità a Montecitorio*, a church that eventually was demolished to make way for the chamber of deputies of the Lower House of the parliament of Italy.

On 14 June 1863, Bishop Buttigieg made his solemn entry in Gozo. Hundreds of Gozitans journeyed to Mġarr harbour and gave him a rousing welcome as soon as he set foot on the island. The main street from the harbour to Rabat, the town of Gozo, was bedecked with banners and palm fronds. As soon as the carriage carrying the bishop arrived next to the Governor's rest house, at the entry of Rabat, the horses were unbridled and the carriage was pulled up the whole length of *Strada Corsa* (Triq ir-Repubblika) and *Salità della Città* (It-Telġħa tal-Belt) by the populace in jubilation. Two local bands accompanied the cortege from the crossroads (Is-Salib tat-Tigrija) to the Matrice within the Citadel.

A *Te Deum* of thanksgiving was sung within the Matrice and the celebrations proceeded throughout that whole Sunday.

With Remarkable Love

In the following months, events quickly headed to the desired conclusion. On 14 July 1864, the Vatican initiated the proceedings for the eventual establishment of the Diocese. On 14 September, Archbishop Alessandro Franchi, the already mentioned Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, briefed the Pope on the final developments. That same morning, the Pope formally conceded to the diocese and the



Fig. 9: The solemn entry of Bishop Buttigieg (courtesy: Cathedral Chapter, Gozo)

redaction of the Bull, a papal document issued for important matters and referred to by its first two or three Latin words.

It is indeed an honour for Gozo that the initial words of the Bull that might have been suggested by the Pope himself declare the papal love for the Gozitans. *Singulari Amore* – With Remarkable Love, Pope Pius IX established Gozo and Comino into a separate Diocese directly subjected to the Holy See (see Fig. 8). It also established the Matrice of Santa Marija or mother-church of Gozo as the Cathedral of the new diocese. The Bull, dated 16 September 1864, is one of the treasured documents at the Gozo Cathedral Archives.

On Sunday, 23 October 1864, Bishop Mikiel-Frangisk Buttigieg made his solemn entry into the new Cathedral amidst the deafening cheers and enthusiastic applause of his devoted flock (Fig. 9).

One hundred and fifty years afterwards, the Diocese of Gozo, led by its eighth bishop, His Lordship Monsignor Mario Grech, still strives strenuously to fulfill its purpose – that can be summed up in one word: evangelisation – in face of the challenges brought about by modern times. Though one of the smallest in the Roman Catholic Church, with a population that, according to the 2011 census, has risen to 31,296, the Diocese is certainly trying to fulfill its purpose of being in a laudable way.

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Joseph Bezzina studied at the University of Malta and the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He was ordained priest by Pope Paul VI in 1957. He was for many years Head of Department of Church History at the University of Malta and Senior Lecturer in history in the Faculty of Theology at the same University and at the Sacred Heart Seminary, Gozo. He is the Assistant National Archivist of Malta and Head at its Gozo Section that he founded in 1989.

‘Hain Selem’ - The Village that Flourished around a Spring

KEVIN CAUCHI

Introduction

As the ferry approaches Mġarr Harbour, one is immediately enthralled by the scenic high flat hills, the Knights-era battery and the spires of churches on the skyline. Beneath these hills lies an extensive spread of land divided by a valley which meanders its way down to the sea. The spring water that flows through this valley led to the establishment of the village of Ghajnsielem together with the formation of its cultural identity.

The village name is a composite of ‘Għajn’ (spring of) and ‘Is-sliem’ (peace) with the Latin motto of the village being ‘*Ob fontem prosperitas*’ meaning ‘Flourishing because of a spring’ with the spring in the area being the magnet that attracted the first inhabitants that eventually led to the prosperity of the place.

A look back at the history of the village will help us understand the connotation that this ‘spring of peace’ has with Ghajnsielem and its Ghajnslemizi.

The Prehistoric Era

The people who first colonised Gozo probably lived in the caves in the north-west of the island. Evidence of shreds and fragments unearthed in this area are of purer pedigree than any other pottery found elsewhere in the Maltese Islands. It can safely be assumed that these inhabitants soon started to spread about in search of agricultural land and the present area of Ghajnsielem, with its bountiful springs, must have been inhabited since early times.

One of the greatest undertakings of this period was the Ġgantija Temple (circa 3600 - 3000 BC) in Xagħra - a temple that represents an important



Mġarr Harbour - 1960 (Photo courtesy of www.DelCmpe.net)

turning point in the cultural evolution of prehistoric man in both Malta and Gozo. However, an equally important temple once stood within the limits of present day Ghajnsielem at the sites known as *Tal-Qighan* and *L-Imrejzbiet*. These two sites were probably a single complex with a unique combination of a major temple, a cult center for one or more settlements. The excavation of a temple period hut around four hundred metres away from the megalithic remains in the late eighties confirms that this area was chosen as a settlement site during this period. However, it is difficult to imagine such a scene in this area today because the temples have since been disjoined and trounced by the modern Victoria - Xewkija - Qala road.

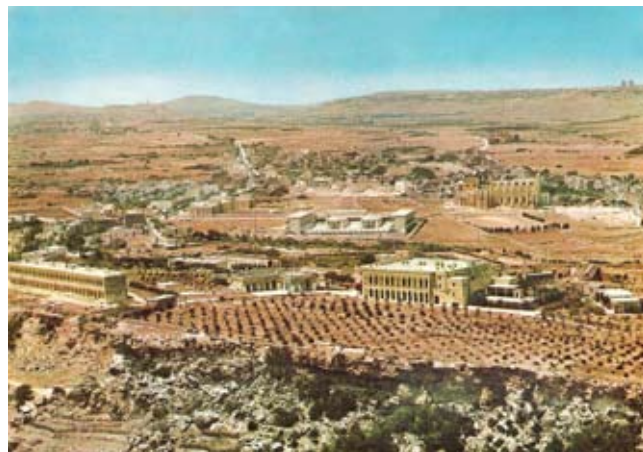
The Early Civilisations

Around 700 BC, Malta and Gozo were colonised by the Phoenicians and around 550 BC, by the Carthaginians, who remained masters until 218 BC. A Punic inscription indicates that the Carthaginians had a temple on the present Citadel hill which was partly fortified. No activity seems to have been carried out in Ghajnsielem at the time.

The Romans took over in 218 BC at the beginning of the second Punic War, making Gozo a municipium independent of Malta with a republican sort of Government that minted its own coins. The Romans turned the Citadel into their acropolis and a town developed beneath its walls.

Two hundred years later, the Arabs besieged Malta, killed most of the inhabitants, and left the archipelago in ruins. In the year 1045 a group of Saracens came over from Sicily and recolonised the island. The roots of the Maltese language were laid down by these Arab-speaking Muslims, who gave the name of Ghawdex to the island of Gozo. The toponym of Ghajnsielem must have also originated at that time.

In 1091, Count Roger the Norman established a nominal suzerainty over Malta, but the Saracens remained masters paying an annual tribute. The population – concentrated within the Citadel and Rabat – began to rise steadily. The increase of commerce between the islands must have led to the foundation of a settlement close to Mgarr Harbour. However, during the summer months, living in the area was dangerous. A constant flow of corsairs



Ghajnsielem in the 1950s.

entered the harbour to replenish their cisterns with water and to plunder. In 1418, the local government petitioned the Aragonese rulers to help them build a tower on the Island of Comino as the passage between the islands was wrought with danger due to the many corsairs seeking refuge in the caves and coves on the island. The project did not materialise due to lack of funds.

The Middle Ages and the Village Name

On the 23rd of March 1530, Emperor Charles V donated Malta and Gozo to the chivalrous religious order of the Knights of Saint John. Initially the Knights made no improvement to Gozo and in 1551, the island suffered its worst siege in history when the entire population of about 5000 were taken into slavery. Grandmaster Juan d' Homedes and his Council initially entertained the idea of abandoning Gozo. Yet sweet home soon attracted back the few hundred who had escaped from slavery and the fewer who were redeemed. The Citadel was slowly rebuilt and it flourished once again.

Until 1637, Gozitans were bound by law to spend the night within. But when this law was repealed, residents began to abandon the Citadel to more spacious houses in Rabat. The settlements started to be developed into the three-tiered pattern common to most medieval regions: a fortified city, its suburb, and the quasi-villages. The area between Rabat and Mgarr Harbour started to gain popularity. It was during this period that the Sistine Chapel (limits of Ghajnsielem) was first recorded.

The first record of the village name was registered during this period, referred to as 'Hain Selem' in a

notarial act drawn by Joannes Domenico Formosa on 17th February 1587 (National Archives, Malta MS836, 76R). The 'Spring of Peace' probably refers to a natural spring which used to supply water. This spring (situated in the end of the valley of Simirat) is connected with a legend about Nardu, a man from Xewkija, who returned to Gozo from slavery on the Barbary Coast. On his return he looked for his wife and daughter, Ursula. The latter being the sole survivor, he found her, by now a married woman, near this spring. Since then, the spring started to be called Ghajn is-Sliem, because Nardu found peace when he met his daughter.

However it is interesting to note that there is another version from where the village name could have been derived. 'Ghajn Salem', a corrupt name for Selim, a Turkish naval commander, who ordered his crew to disembark at Mġarr and replenish their water supply from this spring every time he happened to be sailing by the Maltese Islands.

The First Inhabitants in Ghajnsielem

Ghajnsielem was the last village to develop on the island, if the Mġarr harbour area is excluded. It is in fact not mentioned in a detailed census of Gozo taken in the first half of 1667. The site was dangerously close to a landing place at a time when the Mediterranean was infested with pirates. It was still the time of the Knights, when fierce corsairs from Barbary ruled the waves and people were loath to live near the coast. What was worse, the fresh water springs close to the port were known to friend and foe.

It was only from the middle of the 17th century, when Garzes Tower (a tower constructed on the promontory overlooking Mġarr harbour) and later, Fort Chambray that rendered the place safe and sound, that the first farmhouses were built close to the spring that gave its name to the village.

The Gozo-Malta channel was also rendered safer in 1618 when Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt financed the construction of Santa Marija Tower on the mid-channel island of Comino. Gradually the fear began to erode as the threat from the Berber pirates declined and peace reigned over the seas. People began to descend to the fertile land near the coast.

In 1667, there were 57 persons living in fourteen households in the Mġarr area. This small community was still part of the Citadel Parish until 1688, when it passed under the newly founded parish of Nadur. It was around this time that the first houses were raised in Ghajnsielem close to the fountain at the end of the valley of Simirat. With corsairs and pirates a thing of the past and with steadily rising commerce between the two islands, the population of Ghajnsielem continued to grow.

The Early Formation of the Village

In 1710, Grand Master Raymond Perellos, after getting the approval of his Council General, ordered the construction of an arcade around the spring at the very end of Simirat valley. Beneath the arcade six stone washing basins were constructed into which water from the spring was channelled. These facilities proved to be a boon to the increasing population of the late 18th and 19th century. Women found them especially suitable for washing laundry. For over two centuries, from dawn till dusk, throngs of chattering women would gather around the spring. The women-folk would congregate there in the mornings washing laundry in the troughs. Rare was the occasion when the spring remained idle. According to written and spoken testimonies by elderly villagers, even at night one could hear the sound of splashing water and constant vigorous scrubbing.

On 5th September 1800, the British took the Maltese islands under their protection. Malta and Gozo became a British Crown Colony in 1813.



1850 photo of the arcade built by Grand Master Raymond Perellos.

Fort Chambray was put to very good use by the British and this generated trade and jobs for many Ghajnsielmizi.

Meanwhile, the population had by then increased considerably and Ghajnsielem was in the process of becoming a parish on its own.

A New Parish is Born

The roots of the parish started when Anġlu Grech, who lived in the vicinity, used to take his sheep and goats to the spring every day. While the flock quenched its thirst, he sought shade under a carob tree (*Harruba*) and often knelt down in prayer. One day, he beheld a vision just across the spring. A beautiful lady dressed immaculately in white invited him to raise a statue in her honour on an area of land close by. A shrine would enhance his prayers and encourage fellow farmers to raise their minds to God. Anġlu recounted his experience to the few families which at the time lived in Ghajnsielem and told them the mysterious lady's wish. The people immediately collected money to commission a stone statue of 'Our Lady of Loreto' and built a niche to house it. After the statue was placed in the niche, people used to gather around it to recite the Rosary. A small nearby chapel was built in 1810 and blessed in 1820. Although Ghajnsielem was part of the Nadur Parish, the inhabitants were finding it difficult to go up to the Nadur parish church to hear mass and carry out their spiritual needs.

The first vicar in charge was Dun Guzepp Xerri, who was succeeded by Dun Frangisk Xkembri and in 1842 by Dun Anton Cauchi from Rabat. He managed to convince Archbishop Publios Sant to erect a new parish church. On 1st January 1854, the region became vice parish and the procedure for the establishment of a parish was set in motion. Ghajnsielem was officially established a parish in the 26th of January 1855.

The 19th and Early 20th Century

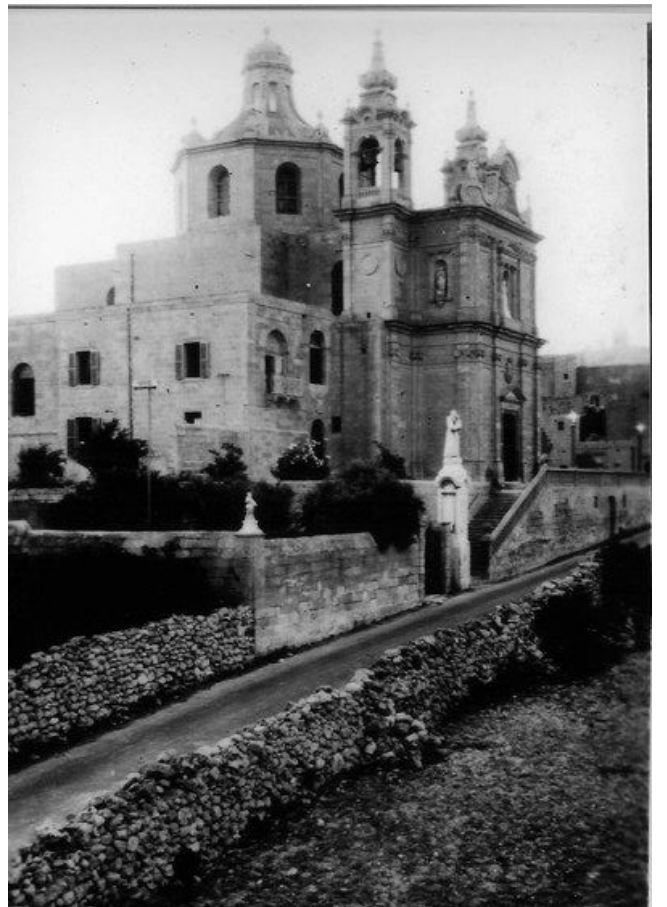
The status of the settlement was elevated from that of a *ħara* (area) to a *raħal* (village). The British had an indirect part in this development and they also played their part in the establishment of the diocese of Gozo in 1864.



1887 - A church was built after the vision beheld by Anġlu Grech.

In 1861, the people of Ghajnsielem made up 6.09% or 942 of the 15,459 Gozitans. The population reached its peak of 1,333 in 1901 but then, with the beginning of organised emigration to Australia and America, the growth came to a halt. The situation changed again after World War II with the so called baby-boom. There were many marriages and naturally more births in the immediate post-war years.

As the population increased, the village spread in all directions simultaneously: to the north along *Wied*



St. Anthony's church - Mgarr Road.

Simirat, in the area know as *Il-Ġnien*, and also *Fuq il-Għajn*; to the east towards *Il-Hamri*; and to the West towards *Il-Fawwara* and *Ta' San Mikiel* next to the new parish church.

Being close to the harbour, the majority of the villagers were engaged in sailing and farming. The church occupied special importance, especially on Sundays when the sermon used to be delivered to a full church with the congregation overflowing into the square.

The Titular Statue, St Anthony's Church and Lourdes Chapel

The present titular statue was ordered by Parish Priest Refalo after Għajnsielem was spared from Cholera in 1865. The people of Għajnsielem immediately donated over 500 scudi for the statue which was produced in less than a year. The artistic statue was manufactured by Gallard et Fils of Marseilles and arrived in Gozo on 14th October 1866 costing 420 scudi.

During this period there were apparations of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous in the Grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes, France and Lourdes soon became a centre of pilgrimage and prayers. It was Christianity's foremost pilgrim site. This was not the exception in Gozo and in the year 1888, a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes was built on a hill which used to be known as *tal-Qortin*, overlooking Mġarr harbour. The work was finished by the Maltese architect Caruana Galizia on a Gothic style and the benefactor of the statue was Carolina Mamo with the artist being Carlo Darmanin.

On the 22nd November 1899 Franciscan Minors, *Ta' Ġiezu* came to Gozo and settled in a house called *Ta Gliex* in St Anthony Street, Għajnsielem, which leads to the villages of Nadur and Qala. This was the first convent for the Franciscans on Gozo. A piece of land was later donated so that the Friars could build their own convent. The brains behind the construction of the convent was that of the custodian Anton (Tonin) M. Cesal who eventually, with some other friars, decided to erect a big church near the convent and dedicate it to Saint Anthony of Padova. The plans for this project were made by Fr. Joseph Diacono.

Modern Times

World War II brought profound changes to Għajnsielem. Emigration started to take place due to the lack of job opportunities on our islands. But the development of Mġarr harbour in the late sixties helped Gozo to unleash a new lease of life and a new era of prosperity for Għajnsielem.

As the population of the village increased, the need to build a new larger church was felt. The new church was to be built on a Gothic-Lombard style on the basis of a Latin cross. Work on the building of the Sanctuary was halted on several occasions, the longest of which was undoubtedly that between 1939 and 1946 - during the war years. Parish Priest Espedito Tabone gave a new impetus to the project and the building was finally completed with the blessing of the bell tower in June 1979.

During the same period, several clubs were also being formed including the St Joseph Band (founded in 1928) and Għajnsielem F.C. (founded in 1936). In the late 20th century, these two clubs built their premises adjacent to the new parish church.

Two hotels and a number of private bars and restaurants eventually opened in the vicinity. In recent times, Mġarr harbour has been turned into a modern port with berthing facilities for small boats, a waterfront park and a modern ferry terminal. Fort Chambray was turned into an upmarket residential estate thus attracting a number of foreigners to Għajnsielem



1950's - A new and larger parish church was built to meet the needs of a growing village.



Ghajnsielem today.

Village Administration

During the last century, Ghajnsielem officially has had two administrations partly responsible for the village. The first was the Gozo Civic Council, a statutory local government body having a distinct legal personality, established on 14th April 1961. The Council and the district committees functioned until 1973. The second administration was the Local Council with the first election for the Ghajnsielem Local Council taking place on Saturday, 19 March 1994. The first Mayor was Francis Cauchi.

Conclusion

Ghajnsielem grew around a spring which for many years was the meeting place of the village. And although today this veritable ‘Spring of life’ is no longer in existence (buried deep under what is now a modern square) it still lives on in the name of the thriving community which proudly bears its name.

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Studying the History of Lace Making

CONSIGLIA AZZOPARDI

Introduction

This article deals mostly with two studies written by myself in connection with my studies at the University of Malta (Azzopardi; 2011; and Azzopardi, 2013). In these studies I trace the development of lace making in Malta and Gozo.

One important finding of my studies is that there have been several factors which contributed to the development of lace making in the Maltese Islands, giving it a particular and a distinctive character, distinguishable from other types of lace practised in nearby Mediterranean countries.

Personal Experience

My interest in lace making started in my childhood years. In 1969, as a young teacher at the Primary School in Xagħra, Gozo, during the two-hour mid-day break, I used to join veteran teachers in preparing materials for the needlework and the housecraft classes. This involved tracing designs, borrowing patterns from magazines with instructions and demonstrating techniques, sometimes learnt from older Gozitan teachers.

In the vicinity of the school, weavers and spinners were then still very active in their workshop, making blankets out of sheep-wool, and from my classroom window I could watch clusters of lace makers working at their door-step in the nearby alley. A certain Miss Vena Sciberras who was in her last year of teaching before retiring, invited me over to her house, where she introduced me to her two spinster sisters one of whom was blind. The three of them were known in the village as excellent lace makers. As they were considering giving up lace work and shifting to coarse knitting, they offered me some fine lace pricking sheets, at the top of which was pinned a sample of matching worked lace, which was very finely made, and that, I felt, was worth treasuring. Later I got to know that the Sciberras sisters were

the daughters of the first entrepreneur who in 1909 was in charge of the lace school-factory at Xagħra known as *Casa Industriale*. This is just one example of how masterpieces of lace and lace designs could be discovered by chance. The work of the Sciberras sisters served as useful information for my theses.

In the 1970s, lace making in Gozo deteriorated very fast among the younger generation, as it was considered a craft suitable for older people who did not have much else to do. It was the time when rolls of original designs pillows and bobbins had started to be discarded. When in 1978 I returned to Xagħra as a teacher of lace making at the Gozo Girls' Trade School, I was shocked to see that the lace workshop was deprived of anything that was connected with lace, except for a cardboard box with about a dozen pillows standing inside, holding a jumble of threaded bobbins tangled over the pins of what seemed to have been simple edgings - a very sad welcome for me as a teacher of lace! This in spite of the fact that the out-going former lace teacher, Miss Stella Zerafa, was a proficient lace maker who came from a family of lace designers and teachers at Nadur, with a long tradition of making lace pillows, bobbins, winders and who invented tools to help facilitate hand-work. The unequipped lace workshop was an indication that interest in lace making had declined drastically, and the subject had completely lost its popularity with fourteen-year olds. These girls were keen on subjects such as sewing and machine knitting that prepared them for employment at the expanding wearing apparel and knitwear factories.

Useful Information

In order to identify the factors that gave an identity to Maltese lace, I traced the craft as was locally practised way back in the 16th and 17th centuries. I explored the character of lace made in Malta during these early years by investigating the development of contemporary laces in



Lace for church vestment from late 19th century

Western Europe. Via the cotton trade, Malta had close connections with the main Mediterranean markets, especially with the ports of Naples and Genoa from where our lace is likely to have been descended. Indeed, Italian, French, Spanish and Flemish influences may all have contributed to a specific artistic culture which is rightly termed by the Maltese as ‘ours’

Lace pieces in the churches, as well as the National Archives and the National Library were the three main sources which provided important information for my studies. Additional information came from viewing surviving lace worn in Malta during the 17th and 18th centuries, owned by descendants of Maltese nobility. Studying contemporary portrait paintings of high dignitaries in the social, political and ecclesiastical spheres in Malta was also crucial in this regard. Useful information was also obtained from old laces which had been discarded to the back drawers as unattractive, outdated and old-fashioned.

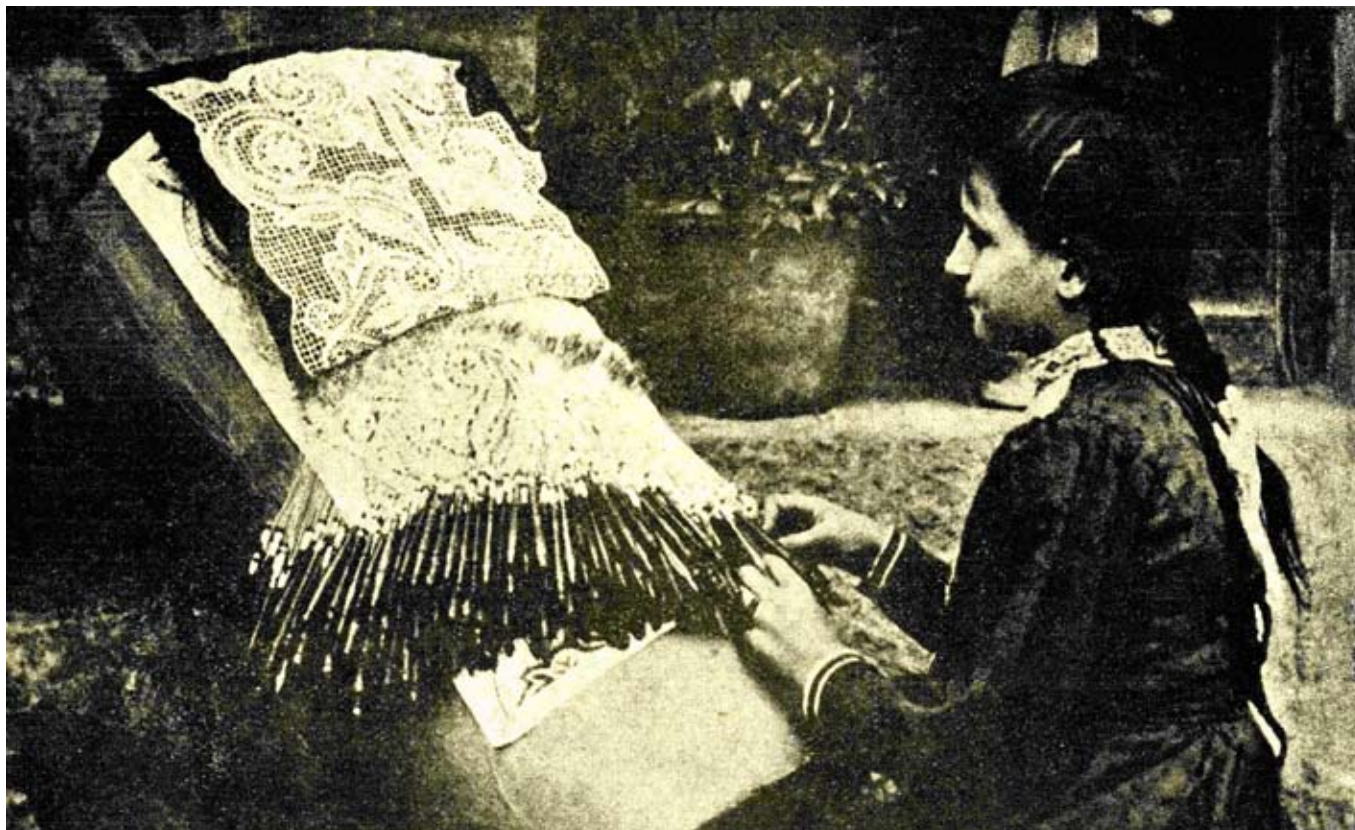
Many lace pieces must have been imported by merchants tracking along the Mediterranean lace markets. But imported lace served as a model from which local artisans copied various patterns and techniques. This is most clearly evident in the works by Antoine de Favray (1706 – 1798), the French artist working in Malta for the Grand Master and the Order, who moved in the high circles of nobility and leading merchants. In his painting *Maltese Ladies Paying A Visit*, Favray confirms that the nobility not only wore lace but also worked it! While Favray documented lace making in Valletta, the historian Giann Piet Francesco Agius de Soldanis (1712 – 1770), documented the existence of lace making in Gozo, stating as well that the tradition had been practised for many years (*minn żmien żemżem*).

The lace story was greatly affected by the political events that led the Maltese Islands to pass from under the Order of St John, the French, the British and beyond, influenced by demographic patterns and social classes. The church also had an influence in lace making by promoting lace education as well as by rendering lace making as a means of reducing unemployment and as a means of income. The church also fostered an interest in lace as this was used in ecclesiastical vestments.

Philanthropists settling in Malta contributed to the rediscovery of lace and its development in line with European fashions, thus attracting royal interest in Maltese Lace. Some lace historians accredit the revival of lace making to the support of British philanthropists who settled in Malta in the beginning of the 19th century.

Revival of Lace as an Industry

The research carried out by myself led to the discovery that the revival of the industry took place in Gozo, as an immediate result of Genoese lace workers who settled in Malta as political refugees during the *Risorgimento*. The theory that the Bishop’s Conservatory in Gozo housed early lace teaching efforts was confirmed by studying the early lace styles promoted by Canon Salvatore



Young lace making student at *Casa Industriale*, Xaghra, Gozo c.1895

Bondi`. Dun Giuseppe Diacono, who was the only writer to document the history and development of the lace technique as it developed in Gozo, wrote the names of the first lace promoters, artists, teachers and merchants who succeeded in producing lace masterpieces, containing the typical Maltese cross and the borrowed wheat-ears stitch, which they named *Moski*. Experiments at simplifying the technique led to successive stages of development in Maltese lace making. It appears that lace making was always subject to the economic situations mainly as a substitute to the decaying weaving and spinning industry.

During the 19th century, national and international lace exhibitions indicate that Maltese lace, which was mainly produced in Gozo, was acclaimed for its richness in design and exquisite execution.

The Glory Days of Lace Making

The third quarter of the 19th century can be considered as the glory days of lace making in Gozo. During this period large black silk shawls and Maltese blonde lace (made of silk thread) in white and ecru, were very popular, but yellow and

multi-coloured silk laces were produced as well. Among the masterpieces remaining on the island are those found in churches and in the possession of high-ranking church ministers – including bishops and monsigneurs. Commercial laces were exported, thus forming the bulk of Maltese trade until the turn of the century. Very rarely was lace worn by the same locals who made it, because finished lace was quickly exchanged with supplies for the daily running of the family or with gold jewellery for the girls' dowry.

The climax of lace development occurred during the last decades of the 19th century when a model school-factory was opened. It was meant to cater for the education of women and for the establishment of a system of industrial training for paid work at home. Dun Giuseppe Diacono, promoter of the House of Industry in Gozo, who was also a lace designer, took advantage of the export market by designing pieces in line with the fashion of the time. He left a legacy of original designs of Maltese Lace.

Blueprint designs were a new development in the early 20th century, resulting from the formation of

the Malta Industries Association led by Cecilia de Trafford, who was a key-player in lace making in Gozo.

Subsequently other prolific designers emerged during the 20th century and more masterpieces were produced, some ending in the possession of the British Royal family. The bulk of the lace produced during this period was exported.

The designs were usually rolled in scrolls and kept in drawers. Many such scrolls, unfortunately, were later burnt in bakeries with the furniture they were in. Most surviving lace from that period was that produced devotedly for the church, still proudly exhibited on the altars and during the yearly village-feast processions.

Importance of Public Memory

The history of Maltese lace, as presented in my M.Phil and Ph.D. theses required piecing together knowledge from my own experience as practitioner and teacher of the craft, and as a

collector of public memory from older persons involved in lace making, who recalled their own experiences from years gone by.

The booklet *Bizzilli Li Jinhadmu F'Għawdex u F'Malta*, published in Valletta in 1920, written in rhetoric form and in the old Italianated style of the Maltese language, remains the basic source of reliable information about the history and technique of Maltese lace during the early 20th century. Its author chose to remain anonymous. In addition, the booklet, was written in Maltese – considered as the 'kitchen language', and not in Italian, the official language of Malta in those days. The text consisted of a short patriotic history and simple code of instructions meant to be memorised by girls in their lace class.

When analysing the information contained in the booklet, and placing it within its appropriate timeframe, one may safely assume that the author was none other than Dun Giuzepp Diacono, the founder of the Gozo House of Industry in 1893. Very few original copies of this booklet have



Cetta Apap in her 90s talking of her experience at *Casa Industriale*, Gozo



The Hon. Anton Refalo attends Lace Day 2014 (Photo: MGOZ George Scerri)

survived, but there is a photocopy available at the National Public Library, Victoria, Gozo. Information is brief but precise and provides a wealth of information to researchers and lace historians. It certainly served as an important source of information for my thesis on documenting the development of Maltese lace during these last two centuries

The information contained in this booklet, presumably written by Diacono, was supplemented by additional information gathered during interviews with individuals who had close contact with the House of Industry. Prominent amongst these was Miss Maria D. Micallef, headmistress of the Girls' Grammar School in Gozo where I was a student and later a teacher. Micallef is the last surviving lace maker of Diacono's Casa Industriale, and she provided me with various patterns and lace tools which were used at the House of Industry. She also introduced me to

Diacono's catalogues of lace designs known as *Campionarii* and encouraged me to pursue the cause of reviving Gozo lace.

Turning over the pages of Diacono's *Campionarii* one realises that lace was produced in a much higher quantity at that time when compared to the present time. The growth of the lace industry was spectacular, and many lace makers could be seen outside working away at their doorsteps, in many places in Gozo.

In another interview, this time with Cetta Apap (1905 - 2007) from Qala, more information was obtained regarding the evolution of lace making in Gozo. She recollected her childhood training at the *Casa Industriale* first at Xagħra and later at Rabat. The vivid description of her experience revealed that there had been several stages of skill development in lace making, requiring different types of pillows for each particular work. In her

own words: *Kien hemm x'kull imhadda kbira daqs tentazzjoni!*²

This fits very well with Diacono's writing when referring to lace pillows: *Jigiu ucoll maghmulin imhadet xorta ohra ghax xoghol tal bizzilli. Actarx isiru bhal rombli uesghin xorta uahda ma tulhom collu; hecc jigiu maghmulin l'imhadet li fukhom jinhadmu il bizzilli li jeghdulhom tal balla u minn daun l'imhadet jisseihu tal balla..... Id-dar Industriali ghanda imhadet maghmulin xort'ohra li fukhom hadmet bizzilli.*³

Examples of extraordinary lace worked on these special pillows can be studied from surviving masterpieces, from which a few were selected for the purpose of my studies. Other examples survive in parish churches and can be seen displayed on the altars during the village festa. On beholding these masterpieces, one may be tempted to think that our very talented ancestors had plenty of time to practice this craft. In reality lace making was just one of many activities in the household, as alongside lace making, many women were involved in raising their family, performing daily housework and cooking, and sometimes even working in fields and on the farm, although chores were shared between different members of the household. Definitely it was not just job satisfaction that drove the lace makers to sit for long hours at their pillow, but also the substantial income that could be derived from such work. Even though prices were low, compared with what one would expect nowadays, many accepted to engage themselves in the constant repeating of the same patterns, as dictated by the business persons who ordered the lace work.

Lace in the Post-War Years

The post-war years saw a rapid decline in lace making. Unemployment during the 1950s and 1960s led to a surge of mass emigration from

Malta and Gozo, mostly men at first and later entire families. Organised emigration contributed to the formation of small colonies of young Gozitans in the United Kingdom, Canada, United States and Australia.

Education in Malta at that time was not directed towards the preservation of traditional crafts. The last lace makers in Gozo had grown old or had died. Younger persons became attracted to other handicrafts, such as crochet and knitting – handmade or machine made – which were very quick to produce and yielded more income than the receding lace industry.

The real setback to the lace industry in Gozo was caused by industrialisation and the opening of textile factories during the 1970s. This, together with an increasing number of girls attending secondary schools, brought about a revolution in the life-style of Gozitan females, most of whom did not have much interest in lace making. With communications between the two islands improving, and with tertiary education promoted, the majority of Gozitan girls ended up studying at University and many undertook jobs in Malta.

Present Situation

In 1989, the Gozo School of Art was opened in Għajnsielem and lace making was introduced as a main subject from the beginning. I was the teacher of lace at that school.

Many criticised the fact that lace was taught at a school of art, arguing that lace should not be considered as an art subject, but just as a craft. However very quickly the lace classes were crowded, with about half the school population attending these classes. It attracted adult females not only from Gozo but also foreign residents, and some crossed over from Malta for their weekly lesson.

² Loosely translated "There were various large pillows".

³ Loosely translated "Various types of pillows are used for lace making .. They are generally formed in the shape of a wide cylinder. ... ; the pillows for lace making called tal-balla are made in this way and this is why they are called tal-balla... the House of Industry possess other types of pillows for lace making."

The years I spent teaching lace at this school served as a good preparation for my thesis, as this kept me close to lace makers from all the localities of Gozo, and from all sectors of society. These included relatives of skilful lace makers, descendants of lace merchants and those who produced lace pieces for the church. Some had stories to tell, lace to show, experiences to relate, old patterns to ask about, curiosities about strange tools, and all kinds of lace-talk to discuss. Laces different churches were brought over for discussion about their care and the best way of cleaning or restoring them, and all this gave me plenty of ideas and information about stylistic designs and lace techniques.

Eventually the ‘Lace Making Programme’ was introduced at University of Malta Gozo Campus (UGC), where a certificate course was offered, under my tutorship and coordination. Besides the practical aspect of lace making, the course at the UGC, which is still being offered, also includes design and history of Maltese lace.

In 1997, students who finished the three-year certificate course decided to form a lace co-op, named ‘Koperattiva Għawdxija tal-Bizzilla u Artigjanat Limitata’. They also formed a Lace Guild in 2000. The Koperattiva supplies lace work to those who order this product, while the Lace Guild contributes to the literature on lace, organises lace events and also publishes a quarterly magazine in English and Maltese. These



A lace making lesson in progress.

two organisations promote lace making as a heritage art and produce high quality publications on lace making.

Many women, on retiring from their job, are returning to the traditional craft and are willingly facing the challenge of learning how to make it using traditional methods. With interest in lace making growing daily among middle-aged persons, the craft has the possibility of being revived to its former glory.

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Dr Consiglia Azzopardi is a well-known expert and teacher of lace making. She possesses a PhD degree from the University of Malta. She coordinates the Lace Making Programme at the University Gozo Campus.

Recent Activities at the University of Malta - Gozo Campus

JOSEPH CALLEJA

Gozo Lace Day 2014

On Sunday 27th April, the Lace Making Programme of the University Gozo Campus organised the “Gozo Lace Day”. The event, which was held for the eighteenth consecutive year, included a number of exhibits and demonstrations of Gozo lace and talks on matters related to lace-making. Present for the event were the Hon. Anton Refalo, Minister for Gozo, Dr Consiglia Azzopardi, coordinator of the Lace Making Programme, and Professor Joe Friggieri, Pro-Rector for Gozo.

In their address Dr Consiglia Azzopardi gave an overview of the courses offered by the Lace-Making Programme at the Gozo Campus, while the Hon. Anton Refalo highlighted the importance of Gozitan products for the local economy. He mentioned a number of initiatives which the Ministry for Gozo is taking in this regard. The



The Hon. Anton Refalo, Minister for Gozo, presenting a certificate to a successful participant.

Minister then presented certificates to a number of participants who successfully completed lace-making courses. Accompanied by Professor Joe Friggieri, Pro-Rector for Gozo, he was then shown round the exhibition by Dr Consiglia Azzopardi. The Minister also had the opportunity to meet and talk to a number of lace-makers and visitors.



The Hon. Anton Refalo, Minister for Gozo, addressing those present.

Examinations at the Gozo Campus

During the January/February and the May/June sessions of examinations, almost all Gozitan students following courses at the Msida Campus were given the opportunity to sit for their end-of-semester examinations at the Gozo Campus. During the May/June session, over 650 exams were in Gozo.



One of the examinations at the University Gozo Campus

Courses at the Gozo Campus

At present nine courses are being run at the University Gozo Campus. These are in the areas of Arts (Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology), Commerce, Criminology, and Inclusive Education. Courses in Clinical Nursing Practice, Public Accounting and Master of Science in Sustainable Energy are being offered via video-conferencing.

In October, the University of Malta will be offering a number of other courses at the Campus at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The courses on offer include:

- Diploma in Gozo Studies
- Diploma in Commerce
- Bachelor of Commerce
- Bachelor of Commerce (Honours)
- Bachelor of Arts in German and Philosophy
- Bachelor of Arts in German and Psychology
- Bachelor of Arts in German and Sociology
- Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Psychology
- Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Sociology

- Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology
- Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Criminology
- Executive Master of Business Administration (via video-conferencing)
- Master of Arts in Philosophy (Preparatory Programme)
- Master of Arts in Islands and Small States Studies
- Master of Arts in Hospitalier Studies

These courses will be offered subject to there being a sufficient number of qualified applicants.



Joseph Calleja is Administrator of the University of Malta - Gozo Campus.



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