

# **THE G OZO OBSERVER**

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## The Gozo Observer

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# Editorial: Byzantine Gozo

A large part of our history seems to have gone blank from the public gaze. We seem to have forgotten almost completely that Malta was under the rule of the Greeks from Constantinople for nearly four centuries (from 535 - 870), a stretch of time longer than under any other power since the Roman empire.

Recent research, summarised by Prof Stanley Fiorini in a recently published monograph (*The Gozo Cathedral: Its History and Treasures*, 2017, edited by Joseph Bezzina), features new findings which highlights Gozo's Greek-oriented historical experience.

While the history of Gozo mirrors and runs parallel to that of the sister island, there have been several instances where this was not the case, evidence which comes out clearly from this study which could explain why orthodox influences were stronger and more lasting in Gozo compared to Malta.

Older research has given the impression that the Arab invasion all but destroyed the Byzantine influence, with decimation of the population of Malta, which has been described as being 'uninhabited' for several years. While in Malta, the Arabs found considerable resistance from the 3000 odd Byzantine troops stationed there, and while the resulting destruction was brutal, this was not the case in Gozo, where there was no resistance and the Arabs seem to have been more lenient. The result was that Christianity (of the Greek orthodox type) survived better, and persisted for longer. In a survey carried out in 1241, 55% of Gozitans were Christians, compared to only 41% in Malta.

Not surprisingly, the Citadel in Gozo was occupied by Byzantines. Recent important evidence relating to Byzantine domination have been found from excavations in the cathedral square. Among these finds were lead seals belonging to a Greek 'acron' (chief), which also attest to this influence.

We also find several churches and chapels in Gozo named after saints which were particularly

venerated by Greeks. These include not only St George, (a Roman soldier of Greek background), but also St Dimitri, St Aristarchus (at San Dimitri Chapel), St Anton Abbot, Sta Dominca, and also the chapel in Comino, which was originally dedicated to the Return of the Holy Family from Egypt, a typical Greek theme not commonly seen in Latin churches.

We also find place-names like 'Ta San Cer' (St Cyraicus) in Għarb, Sta Dominca and Sta Verna which reflect Greek influence.

Evidence also shows that not only did Gozo have its own bishop, but a list of precedence, published in Fiorini's article shows this order of precedence: Syracusae (1)... Gaudos (15), Melita (16).

Surnames of Greek origin, e.g., Anastasi, Apap, Calleya, Callus, Camenzuli, Cumbo, Cuschieri, Grech, Grixti, Piscopo, Mallia and Schembri certainly attest to the lasting presence of Greek in the islands.

Perhaps some tweaking of history teaching could help correct our complete ignorance of certain pages of our history and fill the gaps with the results from more recent research, to give a more complete and holistic picture of our past.

These days, when it has become so easy, and relatively cheap, to determine one's genetic make-up through DNA analysis, it would be of interest to see what genetic contribution our rulers have left on us. The analysis of surnames would suggest that this has been determined primarily by those who left hard evidence, like monuments, in stone. Genetic research carried out at the University of Malta in conjunction with overseas workers indicate that our main genetic background comes from Southern Italy, which itself was under Byzantine Greek domination when Malta was. We look forward to more extensive delineation of Gozitan genetic background.

*Maurice Cauchi*



# THE *CAPITULA* OF GOZO, I

STANLEY FIORINI

A full treatment of the subject of the *capitula* of the Maltese Islands is found in *Documentary Sources of Maltese History* (DSMH), Part III No. 2 (Fiorini, 2014). The object of this paper is to distil therefrom conclusions regarding Gozo.

## Definition

We can take here as a working definition for *capitula* (Latin, plural of *capitulum*, meaning ‘chapter’), as “petitions or pleas to the authorities for the redress of grievances”. The format of these petitions laid out in paragraph/chapter-form – whence their name – gave rise to how

this genre of official documentation came to be called. A set of *capitula* is said to be ‘complete’ if it also includes the royal or vice-regal response to the respective ‘chapters’ with the unqualified or qualified *placet*, signed by the *Protonotarius* or *Secretarius*, as the case may be. Thus, for example, of the following sets of *capitula*, the one of 1450 is not complete. It may have been just a draft of demands intended to be presented before the King or Viceroy and, perhaps, never actually submitted; this will be discussed *infra*. Whatever the case, they reflect the aspirations and needs of the Gozitan people and of the *Universitas* at the time.

## The *Capitula* of Gozo: 1432-1531

Date	Original Source	DSMH III/2, Doc.	Ambassadors
*31.x.1432	ASP Canc. 68, ff. 33 <sup>v</sup> -4 <sup>v</sup> ASP Prot. 33, ff. 18 <sup>v</sup> -9 <sup>v</sup>	9	Johannes Urgelles
*20.vii.1439	ASP Canc. 74, ff. 603 <sup>v</sup> -4	15	Angelus de Manuele
19.x.1439	ASP Canc. 75, ff. 181 <sup>iv</sup>	16	?
*12.xi.1439	ASP Canc. 75, ff. 186-7 ASP CDR 20, ff. 9-10 ACM Misc. 34, ff. 134 <sup>v</sup> -5, 163 <sup>v</sup> -4	17	Angelus de Manuele
5.xi.1443	ASP Canc. 81, ff. 109 <sup>v</sup> -11	18	Nicolaus de Algaria
*[4.iii.1450]	ASP Prot. 5, ff. 301-2 <sup>v</sup>	20	Fra Mateus Zurki OESA
14.v.1453	ASP Canc. 90, ff. 202-3 <sup>v</sup> ASP Prot. 45, ff. 759-60	24	Johannes Urgelles
14.vii.1467	ASP Canc. 119, ff. 240 <sup>v</sup> -1 ASP Canc. 118, ff. 324 <sup>v</sup> -5	29	?
26.vi.1479	ASP Canc. 141, f. 605 <sup>v</sup>	32	?
*22.v.1507	ASP Prot. 214, ff. 283 <sup>v</sup> -5 <sup>v</sup> ASP Canc. 224, ff. 304 <sup>v</sup> -6	40	?
16.i.1516	ASP Canc. 249, ff. 321 <sup>v</sup> -4 <sup>v</sup>	45	Nicolaus Calabachi
6.iv.1521	ASP Canc. 269-270, ff. 365 <sup>v</sup> -9 <sup>v</sup>	47	Antonius lu Platamuni
11.vii.1530	NLM Lib. 670: 76-7 <sup>v</sup>	50	Franciscus Platamone
i-viii.1531	NLM Lib. 670: 42-5 <sup>v</sup>	52	Vitus Vagnolo, Jacobus Inguanes, Vallurius de Algaria, Andriotta Mannara

Further to these, one can also consider other sets of *capitula* which, though not sent by the Gozitan *Universitas*, are also of concern to Gozo. These include:

Date	Original Source	DSMH III/2, Doc.	Ambassadors
24.vi.1411	ASP Cancellaria 7, ff. 112 <sup>rv</sup>	2	Diego de Porto Carrero
6.iv.1419	MCM ACM Misc. 34, ff. 103-8 <sup>v</sup> ASP Protonotaro 20, ff. 121 <sup>v</sup> -6 NLM Università 9, 5 <sup>v</sup> -11	4	Johannes Vaccaro
13.v.1427	MCM ACM Misc. 34, ff. 255-8 NLM Lib. MS. 737, pp. 529-35 MCM ACM Misc. 27, ff. 305-8	5	Don Cataldo Cusburella Don Gregorio Bonello

A number of Maltese and Gozitan *capitula* appear to be paired, both bearing the same date or one differing only by a day or two; in the Gozitan list (*supra*), these are marked by an asterisk. Of these matched *capitula* the Maltese sets are as detailed hereunder:

#### Maltese *Capitula* paired with Gozitan *Capitula*

Date	Original Source	DSMH III/2, Doc.	Ambassadors
30.x.1432	ASP Canc. 68, ff. 32 <sup>v</sup> -3 <sup>v</sup> ASP Prot. 33, ff. 37-38	8	Simon de Mazara Antonius Desguanes
20.vii.1439	ACM Misc. 34, ff. 247-8 <sup>v</sup> ASP Canc. 74, ff. 601 <sup>v</sup> -2 <sup>v</sup> ACM Misc. 27, ff. 40-42	14	Angelus de Manuelli
4.iii.1450	NLM Univ. 11, ff. 66 <sup>rv</sup>	21	Fra Mateus Zurki OESA
22.v.1507	ACM Parchments Par 388 ASP Prot. 214, ff. 542 <sup>v</sup> -53 ASP Canc. 222, ff. 430 <sup>v</sup> -3 ACM Misc. 34, ff. 120-30 <sup>v</sup> NLM Univ. 9, ff. 188-98	41	Manfred Caxaro

In summary, of the fifty or so sets of *capitula* which have survived for both islands, eleven belong to Gozo and three others concern also Gozo. Five of these were presented jointly by the ambassadors of the two *Universitates*. Only four of the eleven Gozitan *capitula* have appeared in print before, the remaining seven appear for the first time in *DSMH*.

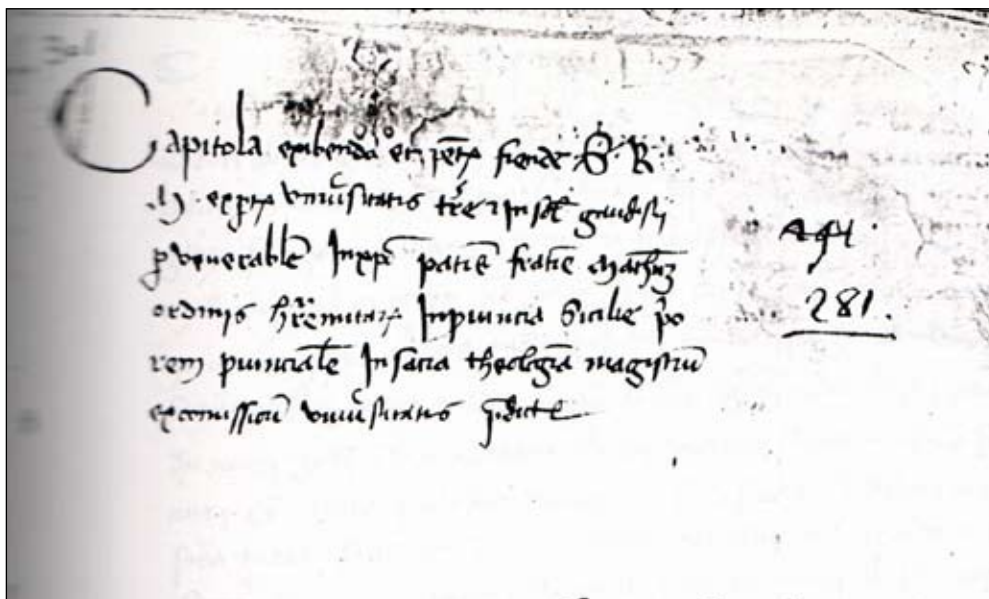
#### Frequency of Gozitan Appeals by *Capitula*

One notes that there seem to be three distinct periods which produced the Gozitan *capitula*. In the first period, covering the first half of the XVth century, one finds the first six sets of Gozitan *capitula* covering a span of 21 years, with successive *capitula* occurring within at most 7 years. In the second period, covering the second half of that century, one finds large gaps of time between successive sets – gaps of 14 years, 11 years and

28 years, respectively – until the beginning of the XVIth century when these gaps start to close up again, during the first 30 years of the XVIth century – the third period – with three sets occurring within 14 years, as originally. This is in sharp contrast with the Maltese *capitula* whose maximum gap between successive *capitula* is of 10 years, between 1439 and 1449. Various reasons can be adduced for this: the relative *capitula* may be lost, and evidence does exist for lost *capitula*. But what I retain more likely is that there may have been loss of interest and insufficiency of motivation – certainly not insufficiency of needs – of the Gozitan Council. One notes that none of the four sets of paired *capitula* belong to the second period, the middle 50 years. It is possible that when a joint effort was made between the councils of the two islands then the Gozitan *Universitas* acted. Another general remark is that Gozitan *capitula* tended to be much shorter than Maltese *capitula*.

## Contents

The *capitula* fall within the broad category of official, as opposed to private, documentary source material, and perhaps this official character cannot be emphasized enough. Their authors generally belonged to the élite inner core of the town council which could undoubtedly exercise much influence on what was included and what omitted from the *capitula*. The *capitula* would, normally, be structured in the following way: an identificatory formula, noting the municipality making the demands and its ambassador or ambassadors through whom these were being conveyed, followed by an address professing loyalty and fealty to the Crown, and a customary *capitulum* demanding accommodation *in genere et in specie* of the whole municipality and the population it represented (or pretended to represent). Then a sequence of itemized *capitula* would follow, with a *capitulum* being reserved for each demand. Once the set of *capitula* is presented to the relevant authority – the King or Viceroy – the authority's response is appended at the end of each *capitulum* and signed by the *Protonotarius* or *Secretarius*. The response can be a straight refusal or acceptance – a *placet* – or a qualified *placet*. *Capitula* without these responses are worthless from the municipal point of view. After 1412 a viceregal *exequatur* – a writ of execution – became also mandatory to put the royal decisions into effect. This *exequatur* could be obtained soon after the royal assent or it could take a long time to obtain, depending on the political forces at play. This delay can be a cause of confusion where the date of the *capitula* is concerned.



even grovelling, of those who conceive them. This attitude revealed the reality of complete dependence on the royal authority, not only in minuscule municipalities like those of Malta and Gozo but also of prominent *Universitates* like those of Palermo or Messina. The

The title of the *Capitula* of Gozo to be presented by Fra Matheus Zurki O.E.S.A., Provincial of Sicily and Master in Sacred Theology, on 4 March 1450 [Archivio di Stato Palermo, Protonotaro 5, f. 301].

Demands tended to be related to grievances which can be conveniently grouped under the following headings: Political, administrative, social, legislative and economic issues. It emerges that certain patterns keep recurring over and over again: demands concerning the need to maintain an equilibrium between rival political factors; that everyone remains within the sphere of his jurisdiction, respecting those of others, even where ecclesiastics are concerned; that no encroachments on municipal administrative and fiscal rights take place; that royal favourites endowed with lucrative offices or Commissioners sent periodically to look into the Curia's affairs are to operate within reasonable boundaries avoiding extortive and oppressive policies to advance their own interests; that tax and customs exemptions be granted especially during times of crisis. By and large, jurisdictional and fiscal concerns were overriding.

Apart from these legitimate pleas, one should not ignore the fact that one could petition for favours, rights, privileges and other benefits. It was not infrequent for the municipality to ask for the right to have its responsibility extended within a particular new sphere, instead of demanding that the jurisdiction currently enjoyed by some other institution or person in that sphere be annulled. This strategy, while yielding much less bitter aftertaste than outright desperate pleadings, could also sometimes be more convincing and rewarding with the not-too-gullible Viceroys.

Worth noting is the dominant attitude revealed in the *capitula*, the frame of mind, one of abject humility,

terminology used – *flexis genibus, baciari la mano* – expresses the condescending royalty displaying its benevolent paternalism to kneeling supplicants. The harsh reality was that the power of decision lay wholly in royal hands.

## Ambassadors

The identity of the ambassadors is of some interest and importance. **Johannes Urgelles**, for example, appears twice, in 1432 and 21 years later. Urgelles is an interesting personality. He first appears in the documentation in 1431 being elected Jurat of Gozo. In that same year he was chosen to represent the island as its ambassador before King Alphonsus the Magnanimous in Messina with the *capitula* of that year. Clearly a Spaniard who had settled in Gozo, who could speak the language as well as His Majesty himself, was a clear choice for ambassador. Furthermore, he was also Jurat of Gozo, so that he knew well about the problems he was going to talk about. This was also to his own personal advantage, coming so close to the seat of all power in the kingdom. His star was, very obviously, in the ascendant. It appears that Urgelles had been engaged in royal service in the recently-constituted fleet against Barbary corsairs and he had excelled in this service. In compensation, the King, who now had even dealt personally with Urgelles as Gozo's ambassador, preferred him for the captaincy of Gozo, at the expense of the Palermitan Paulus Gallo, whom he removed from office for unstated reasons. The interesting thing is the way Gallo was removed from office. It was precisely in the IXth *capitulum* of 1432, presented by Urgelles, that the Gozitan *Universitas* had objected to Gallo, even if no names were mentioned, where the *capitulum* reads:

*IX Item, supplicari ki non obstanti qualuncata concessioni facta a qualsivogla persuna di la dicta capitania [del Gozo] di unu annu ad altru oi di unu annu si et altru no, la dicta capitania sia solamenti annuatim, revocandu omni altra concessioni facta a qualsivogla persuna modo predicto.*

*(IX Also, to plead [with His Majesty] that in spite of any other concession made by anyone concerning the captaincy [of Gozo] for one year to another or on alternate years, the said captaincy should last for only one year, while revoking any other concession made to any other person, as said.)*

The King, who did not need to beat about the bush, was very explicit in his response:

*Placet Regie Maiestati, annullando concessionem jamfactam de dicta capitania Paulo Gallo ab anno XII indicionis ...*

*(It pleases His Majesty to annul the concession already made to Paulus Gallo concerning the captaincy for the XII indiction ...)*

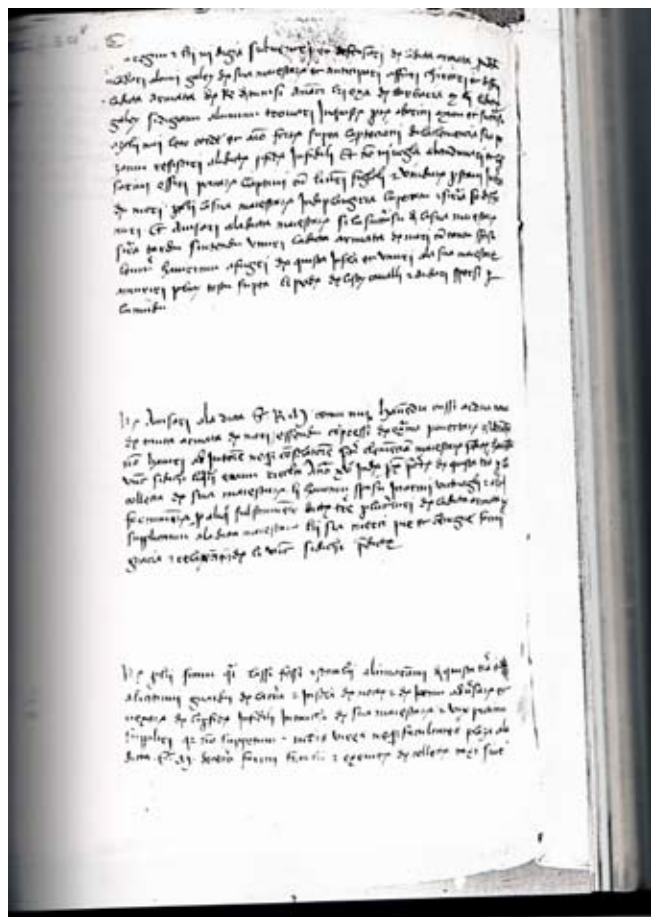
Gallo had, in fact, been given the captaincy of Gozo in 1431 for the two years 1431-32 in recognition of his services to the Crown both in the Naples campaign and elsewhere. It is not stated that Urgelles was promoting his personal interests and exploiting his unique position of ambassador, but the outcome of the whole affair was certainly beneficial to him.

He was chosen a second time to be ambassador of Gozo in 1453 and was elected Jurat of Gozo four other times, in 1450-51, 1457-8, 1462-3, and in 1467-8. In 1450-51 he was asked to declare what he knew about the Jewish physician Abraham Safaradi and the taxes he paid in Gozo. He certainly owned a house in *Terra Gaudisii*, probably in the *Castello*.

The next Gozitan ambassador to consider is **Notary Angelus de Manuele**, who, like Urgelles, was also chosen twice for this office, in July 1439 and again in November of that year. De Manuele was certainly Gozitan even if for most of his active years he had transferred himself and his family to Malta. The De Manuele family is Gozitan, Notary Angelus' earliest notarial work was performed in Gozo – cf. the wills and inventories of 1424-1427 drawn up for the Gozitan Pellegrino family [I/3: 207-209] – and as late as 1437 he is described as *habitor Terre Gaudisii* when he was Judge to the Gozitan Capitaneal Court [II/2: 388]. Yet, in 1436, he was acting as Judge of the Maltese Captain's Court. [II/2: 375]. While in Malta he came in contact with other legal professionals with whom he clubbed in order to monopolize the Judgeship of Malta, forming, with three other Notaries – Notary Corradus de Alaymo and Notary Fridericus Calavà, his contemporaries, together with Notary Antonius Falzon, their junior and a novice in the business – a kind of Notarial College or 'Union', if you like.

This 'union action' may well have been pursued to counteract opposing forces in the *Universitas*





Facsimile of ASP Protonotaro 5, f. 301v.

coming from feudatories who sought to monopolize other key lucrative posts such as the gabelles of the same *Universitas*. Like these, the notaries certainly exploited the prevailing situation in which King Alphonsus, very short of funds to finance his *amprisa* against Naples and eager to wring out of his subjects all the money he could lay his hands on, found it very convenient to pawn land and offices to interested parties prepared to come forward with the money. The pawning of the Maltese islands to Monroy was still very fresh in everybody's memory. Soon afterwards he 'sold' the Marsa fief to the Castellan Pedro del Busco for 3,164 gold ducats *cum carta gratie redimendi*, that is, with right of buying it back, in effect a pawning [II/2: 452]. He pawned the office of the captaincy of Malta to Antonius Desguanez and to his son Geraldus for 170 *uncie* [II/2: 467], and now the judgeship of the captain's court was acquired by these notaries for 300 *uncie* [II/2: 467, 548-9, 554]. The captaincy of Gozo was similarly pawned to Franciscus de Platamone and Antonius de Vagnolo for another 50 *uncie* [II/2: 476], whereas the King's representative, the Viceroy Baptista Platamone, taking the cue from his master,

even dared to pawn the whole of the island of Gozo to Johannes de Caro [II/2: 454] – a hitherto unnoticed incident. None of these goings-on were very palatable to the Maltese and Gozitans who protested loudly, quoting their right of resistance *manu forti* to stop them [II/2: 459].

These four notaries, under the leadership of Notary Corrau de Alaymo who appears to have handled all the writing, made a joint plea to King Alfonso to monopolize between them the office of judge of the captaincy of Malta taking it alternately in turns with effect from 1 February 1437. The King's favourable reply was issued on 21 January [II/2: 384]. The office was, in fact, being held by Notary De Manuele for the year 1436-37, as noted, and Notary Friderico had been promised that same post precisely for the year 1437-38, following [II/2: 375]. Nor was this the only lucrative post our notaries had their eye on. Similar pleas with the King and writs of execution to favourable replies by the viceroy can be verified for (i) Notary Corrau in respect of the treasury of the *Universitas* when he successfully objected that Jacobo de Carastro, a foreigner, had been given that office in violation of the privileges of Malta, to have him removed and himself appointed in his stead [II/2: 385], (ii) Notary Angelo de Manuele in respect of the post of judge in Gozo for the year 1437-38 [II/2: 388], (iii) Notary Friderico Calavà in respect of the office of comptroller of ports (*viceportulanatus Melite*) which carried a salary of no less than six gold *uncie* annually [II/2: 371], as well as the office of clerk in the Mdina Captain's Curia, which had earlier been, unrightfully given to the same Pino de Carastro [II/2: 372].

The resistance within the Council to similar moves can be gauged by their reaction to concerted efforts by the town carpenters in the 1460s and 70s. In the case of our notaries, King Alfonso had to intervene in order to restrain De Manuele from holding practically a double post of judge in both Malta and Gozo in order to give the opportunity to others; in this case, to the benefit of Notary Andrea de Benjamin of Gozo [II/2: 421-2]. In each of the two *Universitates* the number of salaried legal posts came to five or six, namely three judges and one notary at the Civil Court and an assessor or judge of the Captain's Court; later on a judge or notary of the Jurats' court began to be appointed as well. However, competition was tougher than it seems



at first as the Civil Court had only one post for a *judex litteratus* with the remaining two being filled by *judices ydioti* (that is, *indocti*), who did not require much legal training and were often quite illiterate and unable even to sign their own names as they quite often unashamedly admitted [I/3: 141-5]. By the mid-fifteenth century there were as many as seven or eight qualified notaries working contemporaneously, and some four or five other local *jurisperiti*, all of whom aspired for a steady annual salary. The situation was further exacerbated when the monarch made *ex gratia* appointments, foisted on the *Universitas*, which hurt most especially when the beneficiaries were foreigners. The argument that this practice ran counter to Maltese privileges at times paid dividends such as when Notary Corrau managed to oust Jacobo de Carastro using precisely this argument.

Thus, it is seen that Notary Angelus de Manuele was optimally placed to act as ambassador in 1439 for both Gozo, his island of origin, and Malta, where he settled with his progeny (from his wife Imperia he had four children, including Don Henricus, all settled in Mdina [I/1: 77, 163]) the city and island he got to know so well through his professional contacts and his very active and prominent presence in the City's Municipal Council. He exploited his prominent position and standing – in 1458 he was even Judge of the Appeals Court – by holding on simultaneously to the judgeship of Malta and of Gozo in 1438 at the expense of the Gozitan Andreas de Beniamin [II/2: 421]. By contrast, Beniamin was a very altruistic person. Of his own accord, Beniamin offered that the judgeship which had just been granted to him be shared with his colleagues Fridericus de Nicolacio and Petrus de Caxaro [II/2: 422].

The next ambassador to consider is the Augustinian friar **Fra Matheus Zurki de Malta**. This is the second time that a religious, not a politician, is chosen as ambassador to present *capitula*, the first time was when Don Cataldus Cusburella, *Cappellanus Major et Vicarius*, together with Canon Don Gregorius Bonello, in 1427 represented Maltese interests before the Viceroy in Palermo in the Monroy affair [III/1: 6]. Zurki was another very prominent personality. In 1434, when he is mentioned as the first known Inquisitor for Malta and Gozo, he is described as *Baccalarius in Sacra Theologia*, but he must have continued with his

studies as, when he was attending the Mdina Council sessions between 1450 and 1454, he appears as *Magister in Theologia*.

The draft of his Gozitan *capitula* has not been noted before although a gist of what could have been the corresponding Maltese *capitula* is extant in Council minutes of 5 March 1450. It is very likely that these parallel sets of *capitula* were never actually submitted for approval as it transpires that Malta's petitions were presented just three months later by Stephanus de Pirera with considerable overlap of content with Zurki's planned requests. Fra Matheus was present in Council on 21 October 1450 when a certain item on the agenda was being debated. The item concerned whether Stephanus de Pirera should be reimbursed for his journey to obtain an official statement that the *capitula* should come into force. Zurki's contribution to the debate was dry and to the point, hinting at some underlying rivalry between the two:

*Si utiliter capitula pro universitate impetravit et bene fecit et gessit quod habeat dictas expensas; si vero non utilia gessit quod nichil habeat.*

*(If the capitula he requested on behalf of the Universitas have proved useful and he did well, then he should be reimbursed his expenses; if, on the contrary, they were not useful, then he should get nothing.)*

Doubt was being cast on Pirera's effectiveness in his mission.

Not much is known about the next ambassador, **Nicolaus de Algaria**, except that he climbed the ladder of local Gozitan municipal power from the lowest rung: He started with a royal push when, in 1436, he was elected as an *acatapanus ex gracia* [II/2: 370]. Next he is heard of, in 1440, accusing a Gozitan Jew, a certain Sadia Inglisi, of theft of a wine-goblet; was he ingratiating himself with the powers-that-be, jumping on the anti-Semitic bandwagon? [II/2: 449]. Thereafter, he filled the post of Jurat several times, in 1443, the year he was chosen as ambassador, and later in 1457 and 1470 [II/2: 474, 585; II/3: 142].

Between 1446 and 1450 he was *gabellotto* of the Gozitan Vicesecrecia when he was investigated for a discrepancy in the balance, but ultimately acquitted by the Viceroy [II/2: 608]. The Viceroy's favour was

never lost as, we are informed, that the fact he had a family of 10 children in 1474, which became 11 by 1476, induced the Viceroy to grant him 2 *salme* or 32 *tomna* of royal land, adjoining his other land in Gharb, on which to plant a vineyard for his own use [II/3: 224, 263].

**Nicolaus Calabachi** was active in the Gozitan scene at the turn of XVIth century. He was Notary to the Civil Court of Gozo for 1488-89, 1499-1500 [II/4: 129, 433] and for 1504-05 [II/5: 92] and was elected Jurat for 1496-97 [II/4: 360] and for 1502-03 [II/5: 41]. In 1497 he was appointed Procurator for the Gozitan *Universitas* in a deal with the Viceroy concerning the purchase of grain for the island [II/4: 396]. For some unstated crime, in July 1504, he was tried, found guilty and sent into exile in the *Castrum Montis Sancti Juliani* [Erice] in Sicily for three years, but had his sentence commuted to the payment of a composition of 6 *uncie* [II/5: 101]; in May 1506, he was still being chased by the Curia to settle his debt of 6 *uncie* to the Crown [II/5: 129]. This did not preclude him from being appointed Jurat for a third time in 1505-06 [II/5: 111] and also responsible for the works on the Citadel – walls, ravelins and ditches – in the post of *Mastro Marammeri* [II/5: 114]. He was also Treasurer of the Gozitan *Universitas* for 1509-10 and 1511-12 [II/5: 203, 274].

For the years before 1530, the last of all to consider is **Antonius lu Platamuni**. Understanding the family background of Antonius is important. The Platamuni were a very prominent Sicilian family, who counted a Viceroy of the realm – *Babtista de Platamone* [1436-41] – among its members, have had early connexions with these islands, not all

above board. In 1344, Rev. Placitus de Platamone, a priest of Catania, had falsified a papal bull and the Bishop of Malta was sent by the Pope to look into the matter. In 1411, during the troubled years of the Western Schism, for some reason as yet not understood, Queen Bianca presented the Benedictine monk Dom Antonius de Platamone of Catania for the episcopacy of these islands [II/2: 148] even though he had already been consecrated Bishop of Malta two years earlier on 29 July 1409. At this time, Bertus di lu Platamuni already appears as a Jurat of Gozo for 1402-3 [II/2: 31]. We next encounter Franciscus Platamone as Captain for Gozo in 1428-9 [II/2: 251], who valiantly combatted the Moors during the invasion of that year, for which he was reappointed Captain of Gozo for 1432-3, having been Jurat for 1431-2 [II/2: 292, 322, 328-9]. Having supported King Alphonsus by a contribution of 50 gold *uncie* for the King's Neapolitan *amprisa*, Platamone and the knight Antonius Vagnolo managed to secure the captaincy of Gozo indefinitely and for as long as it was His Majesty's pleasure, starting in 1437 (when Babtista Platamone was Viceroy!) on alternate years between them [II/2: 343, 383, 413-4, 467, 476-7, 580]; Platamuni also succeeded in being a Jurat for 1454-5 [II/2: 558].

Twenty-seven years later, in 1464, Franciscus was still claiming this right to the captaincy on alternate years, but being unable to carry out his duties due to his old age and frail health, he managed to transfer this right to his son Sanchius [II/3:45]. In 1437 Franciscus requested and was granted by the Viceroy (Babtista Platamone!!) the lease of the royal barren stretch of land called then *Ix-Xaghra ta' Sannat*, bounded on the South and East by the



Nicolaus Calabachi who was active in the Gozitan scene at the turn of XVIth century was also responsible for the works on the Citadel which included the walls, ravelins and ditches. [Photo courtesy GTA website].



The *Ta' Ċenċ* cliffs. The surrounding territory probably got its name from Cianciu (Sanchius) Platamone when he inherited it from his father, Franciscu. [Photo courtesy Wikipedia.org].

cliffs above the sea and on the North by *Wied Mgarr ix-Xini* and *Tal-Gruwa*; this description clearly identifies the *xaghra* as what is now called *Ta' Ċenċ* [II/2: 415, 443, 492]. Sanchius also called Ciancius, Franciscus' son, also got a push forward by the Viceroy (always the same Platamone!!!) when, as a young person, he was twice appointed *Acatapanus ex gratia* in 1437-8 and 1440-1 [II/2: 408, 445]; later, he went on to become Jurat in 1473-4, 1477-8, 1483-4 [II/3: 186, 297, 400]. It was, very probably, due to him that present-day *Ta' Ċenċ* got its name, when he inherited his father's property. It is very clear that the family could throw its weight about using their connexions high up in the Sicilian echelons of power. Let me remind you that it was precisely the Viceroy Babbista Platamone who dared sell the whole island of Gozo to Joannes de Caro, just ten years after the Monroy affair, for which King Alphonsus came down on him like a ton of bricks! [II/2: 454 (1.xii.1440)]. Both Ciancius and his son Antonius – the ambassador of 1521 – were accused and convicted of rape and got away with it rather lightly with the payment of a composition [II/3: 348; II/4: 19, 91].

On another occasion in 1486 both father Ciancius, son Antonius and son-in-law Notary Pinus Saliba were investigated for some unstated misdemeanour [II/4:19]. It is clear that Antonio could pull strings in the right places and, in fact, the *capitula* he presented on behalf of Gozo were among the best received by

the Viceroy. He was elected Jurat of Gozo in 1486 [II/4: 32]. The incident of the raping of Fsadni's daughter (while her father was on the coast on *mahr* duty) occurred in 1488; it is stated in

the proceedings that that was not the first time that Palatamuni had molested the girl [II/4: 91]. He was appointed Notary to the Civil Court in 1496 [II/4: 360]. Locally too, he had good family connexions with legal background, very handy to represent him in court; his sister Nella was the wife of Notary Pino Saliba [V/1: 84]. By 1517 the sowing of wild oats of his youth was apparently forgotten in Gozo and he had acquired enough respectability to be appointed one of the guardians of Johanna, a poor orphan girl of the Kinzi family [V/1: 23]. He drew up his last will in 1538 from which we conclude that he owned a chapel of the Annunciation, somewhere in Gozo, in which he established an *animagium* to benefit his freed slave, Cerbonius, should he persevere in his vocation for the priesthood [V/1: 83].

For the ambassadors earmarked to face L'Isle Adam with requests concerning the preservation of their ancient privileges, soon after the arrival of the Order, let it be said simply and briefly that these were Jurats elected for 1530-31 and 1531-32. Let us turn to the contents of the capitula, starting with

### The Paired *Capitula*

In those *capitula* written as a joint effort with the Maltese *Universitas* one notes, naturally, certain requests which are repeated *verbatim* in both sets of paired *capitula*. One common plea is the confirmation of privileges granted by past



monarchs. Thus, in the presentation of *capitula* to King Alfonsus at Messina in 1432, *capitulum* VIII of Urgelles reads:

*Item, ... confirmari tucti nostri privilegii, consuetudini et preheminencii scripti et non scripti,*

*(Also, ... to confirm all our privileges, customs and preeminences, written and unwritten,)*

corresponding word for word to *capitulum* II of the Maltese *capitula* of that year. The same is found in 1507 where Manfred Caxaro, very probably the same ambassador for both *Universitates*, making representations to Ferdinando *el Catolico* at Naples' Castelnovo, repeats the same demand in the first *capitulum* of the Gozitan set and, in slightly different form and with respect to specific privileges, in the Maltese *capitula* XIV and XXII. This was an important demand that needed to be made to each successive monarch lest what had been achieved in the past gets forgotten and lost. This must be one of the reasons why privileges and *capitula* related to them were written on more durable parchment, rather than perishable paper, in order to preserve them for posterity. An extremely interesting reference, albeit taken from Stephanus de Pirera's Maltese *capitula* of 1450, is that Malta's *Universitas* reminds King Alfonsus of rights to certain stretches of land which had been given to Malta's *Universitas* a good 300 years earlier, that is, in the time of King Roger, a plea which the King respects if what was asserted can be proved. This preservation of privileges, of course, as a by-product, protected also the narrow interests of those compiling the *capitula*, with all they included and omitted to include, and of the ambassadors presenting them.

It is of interest to note how in the paired *capitula* at times the same ambassador, naturally and as expected, represented both islands – Notary Angelus de Manuele in July and in November 1439, Fra Matteus Zurki in 1450 and Manfred Caxaro in 1507 – which made economic sense. But on one occasion, even though the *capitula* of both islands were presented on the same day, the ambassadors were different. This happened on 30-31 October 1432 when Johannes Urgelles presented Gozo's and Simon de Mazara (together with four others) presented Malta's. One wonders why! The reason

can, perhaps be found hidden in Urgelles' XIth *capitulum* which innocently reads:

*[XI] Item, supplicari ki li frumenti dila curti non si pozanu extrahiri dila dicta insula, ymmo ki sia deputati per la dicta insula havenduchi necessariu.*

*([XI] Also, to plead that the grains of the Curia should not be allowed to be exported from the island, but rather that they should be reserved for the said island in case of need.)*

Urgelles tried to be not very explicit in making his point. What he actually wanted to say was: "Let Gozo enjoy its grain and let Malta solve its own grain problems". What the ambassador refrained from saying openly was stated explicitly for him by the not-so-dumb King Alfonso who, for the second time, was not prepared to beat about the bush:

*Placet Regie Maiestati quod frumenta que colliguntur in dicta Insula Gaudisii deputentur pro usu ipsius insule, ita tamen quod, si factis novis recollectionibus et, reollectis victualibus ipsius insule, frumenta superhabundant, vetera possint extrahi pro usu Civitatis et Insule Meliveti.*

*(It pleases His Royal Majesty that the grains harvested in the said island of Gozo should be channelled for the needs of that island, but however, if when new harvests are made it transpires that the grain is overabundant, then the old grain can be exported to the City and Island of Malta.)*

Thus it is seen that here we have a case of divergence of interests of the two *Universitates*. One can point at another document of 1335 where this is very evident.

A feature common in both Maltese and Gozitan *capitula* is a tendency to moan about poverty and sterility, at times in language that sounds very hyperbolic, although it may well be not very far from the truth. Thus, in the *capitula* of 1419, when pleas were being made for the construction of a tower on Comino for the defence of both islands, for which Gozo had to fork out a quarter of all expenses [cap. IX], it is stated that unless such a tower is erected, Malta *sirra per deveniri ad finali excidiu et destrucionem in la maynera di Gozu*. In the Gozitan *capitula* of July 1439, the levy of the



The Santa Marija Tower on Kemmuna, dominating Il-Flieg. The Capitula of 1419 clamoured for the erection of this tower in order to curb corsairs that had made the island their lair, whence to pounce on unsuspecting prey. The contributions by the Maltese and Gozitans were to be in the ratio 4:1, corresponding to the populations ratio. It took full two centuries, to the year, before this Maltese and Gozitan dream could be realized. [Photo courtesy visitgozo.com].

tax on Gozo is described as *teste Deu, extrahirimu quasi di intra li ossa nostri* [cap. VI], “God being our witness, the money was gouged out of us as if from our bone-marrow!”. This kind of language was frequently used in connexion with pleas to avoid taxation and other pleas for help. Citing from Gozitan capitula:

*actenta la extrema paupertati per la vinuta dili Mori per modu ki pirdiu tucta la bestiami et pero non si po siminari et la insula est povira et distructa* [III/2: Urgelles (1432), II];

*(in view of the extreme poverty following the Moorish invasion on account of which all farm animals were lost, it is not possible to sow and the island is poor and ruined.)*

This plea of course came very soon after the tragic attack of September 1429 when a Moorish horde of thousands carried away into slavery some 3,500 inhabitants.

*non haviamu speranza per la grandi paupertati et per carencia di navili, supplicandu, actenti la penuria la quali paciamu, ki non si trovava in la insola unu cochu di frumentu ne unu cochu di orgiu, et si non per Simuni di Mazara et Antoni Mule, ... ja moriamu di fami* [III/2: De Manuele (vii.1439), IV].

*(we have lost all hope on account of the extreme penury and the loss of [our] vessels, pleading that, in view of the*

*poverty under which we are labouring, [to the extent] that a grain of wheat or a grain of barley is not to be found on the island, and had it not been for Simon de Mazara and Antoni Mula, ..., we would have all died of hunger.)*

*la nostra paupertati, et grandi penuria supra quistu scoglu arridu et diviriamu essiri provisionati et scarichi et non essiri gravati di colta, declarandu ala Sua Signuria ki si la genti di quista insola havirissiru habilimenti di exiri, ja la insola sirria dishabitata* [ibid., V].

*([in view of] our poverty and great penury on this arid rock, we need to be provisioned, and not burdened with taxes, declaring to His Lordship that if the people of this island had the means of moving out of it, by now it would have been completely uninhabited.)*

*Item, perki simu quasi lassi, fessi et stanki ali marammi di quista terra ed ali continui guardii di la terra et insola di nocti et di jornu adversati et vexati di li perfidi infidili inimichi di Sua Maiestati, et vix putimu suppliri quia non suppetinu nobis vires neque facultates* [III/2: Zurki (1450), V].

*(Also, because we have lost all our energy, we are tired and exhausted [working] on the walls of this town and toiling at the [coastal] watches of this town [that is, the Citadel] and island, day and night, attacked and molested by the perfidious infidels, enemies of Your Majesty, we can hardly provide for ourselves because we do not have the means and the strength.)*

and finally, to get a taste of the language:

*nui stamu mal appuntu di muri, ki li nostri mura su in maiori parte dirruppati et tristi et peyu di armi ki non indi havimu et peius di victuagli ki murimu di fami et simu cussi poviri et inhabli ki non inputimu providiri, et per consequens havimu grandissimu terruri et pagura di la armata [di lu Re di Tunisi] ki trovandoni, quod absit, cussi sprovesti et mal appuntu, fussi nostra totali disfacioni pero supplicamu ala clemencia di la Maiestati predicta, fuis lacrimis, tantu humili et devotamenti quantu putimu ki per exaltamentu et hunuri di la gloriosa corona sia Sua merci vultari li ochi di la Sua pietati in ver di nui miskini isolani luntani et remoti [f. 301v] [dal]u regnu, et ki ni digia subveniri et defensari di la dicta armata providendu mandari alcuni galey di Sua Maiestati et anticipari affari chircari et disfari la dicta armata di Re di Tunisi ananti ki exa di Barbaria oy ki li dicti galey si digianu alu minu trovaru in quisti parti a darini ayutu et succursu azoki nui, leto corde et animo forti, supta la protezioni di la clemencia Sua pozamu resistiri ali dicti perfidi infidili. Et non ni vogla abandunari et lassarini essiri portati captivi cum li nostri figlioli et vinduti per scavi in terra di Mori, per ki la Sua Maiestati indi plangiria lu peccatu et sirria so dishonuri. Et avisari ala dicta Maiestati si lu succursu di la Sua Maiestati sirra tardu sintendu viniri la dicta armata di Mori cum tantu sforsu leviter havirimu a fugiri di quista insola et viniri ala Sua Maiestati a muriri pluy tost supta li pedi di li soy cavalli et andari spersi per lu mundu [ibid., III].*

*(We are badly provisioned with walls, because our walls are in a ruinous state, and worse can be said for armaments which we do not have, and worse still for victuals because we are dying of hunger and cannot provide for ourselves, on account of which we are terrified of the forces [of the King of Tunis] which, should they attack us, which God forbid, and find us so unprepared, that would mean the end of us all. We therefore plead the clemency of Your Majesty, shedding tears as humbly and devotedly as we can, that for the honour and the glory of the Crown, you would turn your merciful eyes towards us, poor islanders, distant and remote from the Kingdom [f. 301v] that Your Majesty would deign to come to our aid and defence, providing some galleys from Your Majesty's armada to preempt any attempt of the forces of the King of Tunis before they leave the shores of Barbary, or at least that the galleys find their way to these parts to come to our aid and succour so that we, with a*

*joyful heart and brave spirit, under the protection of Your Clemency, may be able to resist the perfidious infidel. And do not abandon us and permit that we and our children be carried captives and sold into slavery in a Moorish land, for should that happen, then Your Majesty would weep the sin and be dishonoured. And make it clear to His Majesty that if His help is late in coming rather than waiting for the Moors we would rather flee and die under the hooves of his horses and get dispersed on the face of the earth.)*

This kind of language must have been particularly effective when demands concerning the defence of the island were concerned or when the island needed grain badly for its survival.

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# Gozo since the Great Calamity: Resilience, Affluenza, Vulnerability

CARMEL CEFAI

## 30<sup>th</sup> July 1551. The Citadel, Gozo

The 'Drawn Sword of Islam' Admiral Turgut Reis relished the juicy grapes washed in the clear water of Ghajn Abdul as he oversaw the capitulation of the island. After a one week siege, the citadel surrendered and all the inhabitants were taken to the galleys at Mgarr ix-Xini to be transported to the slave market in Tarhuna, North Africa. The town, villages and hamlets were ransacked and burned. The 40 inhabitants allowed to remain on the island were old and sterile, ensuring that life will not survive. Redemption from slavery was remote for



The 'Drawn Sword of Islam' Admiral Turgut Reis, also known as Dragut, who watched over the capitulation of Gozo in 1551. [Photo courtesy: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragut>].

the 5000 destitute inhabitants. The day of retribution had finally arrived and the death sentence had been executed. The bastion walls where Turgut's brother had been burnt were now a gaping hole. His tormented spirit could now rest in peace and enjoy eternal bliss surrounded by beautiful maidens, precious stones, delicious food, and ever flowing water. Bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm.<sup>1</sup>

Turgut did not realise, however, that 300 Gozitans had climbed down the citadel walls and hid in the countryside during the siege. These carried the genes of the most resourceful and resilient inhabitants. Nor did he take into account that many of those who crossed over from Malta to repopulate the island after the siege, were driven by a spirit of entrepreneurship and a determination to start a new prosperous life. In less than 150 years the population of the island had reached the pre 1551 levels; in less than 500 years it had multiplied more than six times over. Life in Gozo today is marked by a relatively high level of per capita income, a high employment rate, a booming tourism industry, and GDP growth rate higher than those in most European island regions.

This positive growth and development over the last five centuries may be attributed to various factors, including macro level processes such as political, social and economic policies (though at times these were marked by neglect and marginalisation), the fertile land fed by the water springs found in every corner of the island (Gozo was highly dependent on agriculture in the past), and more recently the exploitation of the island's natural beauty and historical heritage through tourism. A key micro level factor in this development, however, has been the resilience of the inhabitants themselves, their ability not only to survive the odds, but to keep growing and thriving despite disadvantage such as insularity, poor accessibility and lack of resources.

<sup>1</sup> Translate to, "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful".

One of the most marked characteristics of the islanders is the hard work ethic coupled with resourcefulness and ingenuity in overcoming adversity, making use of all available physical and human resources while avoiding waste and overindulgence. This practical 'wisdom' of make maximum use of one's strengths and resources, had particular survival value in the many personal and collective adversities and calamities the islanders faced over the centuries. It provided also a degree of autonomy and independence, in turn leading to a sense of self determination which become more ingrained with time in the Gozitan psyche and identity.

Another protective factor in the island's resilience pathway has been the strong religious belief of the inhabitants, characterised by the innumerable religious buildings and artefacts found all over the island and the religious calendar which determined the inhabitants' way of life up to some decades ago. The traditions and legends found in every nook and corner of the island reflect such collective values as hope, justice, compassion, redemption through suffering, triumph of good over evil, and ultimate salvation. While blind faith may be tantamount to insularity and resistance to change and progress, the deep rooted religious beliefs served the islanders very well over the centuries, providing stability

and sense of meaning, giving them the strength they needed to cope in difficult times and the hope that times will get better, with eventual divine intervention to lift epidemics, relieve suffering, rectify injustice and provide good weather for the crops.

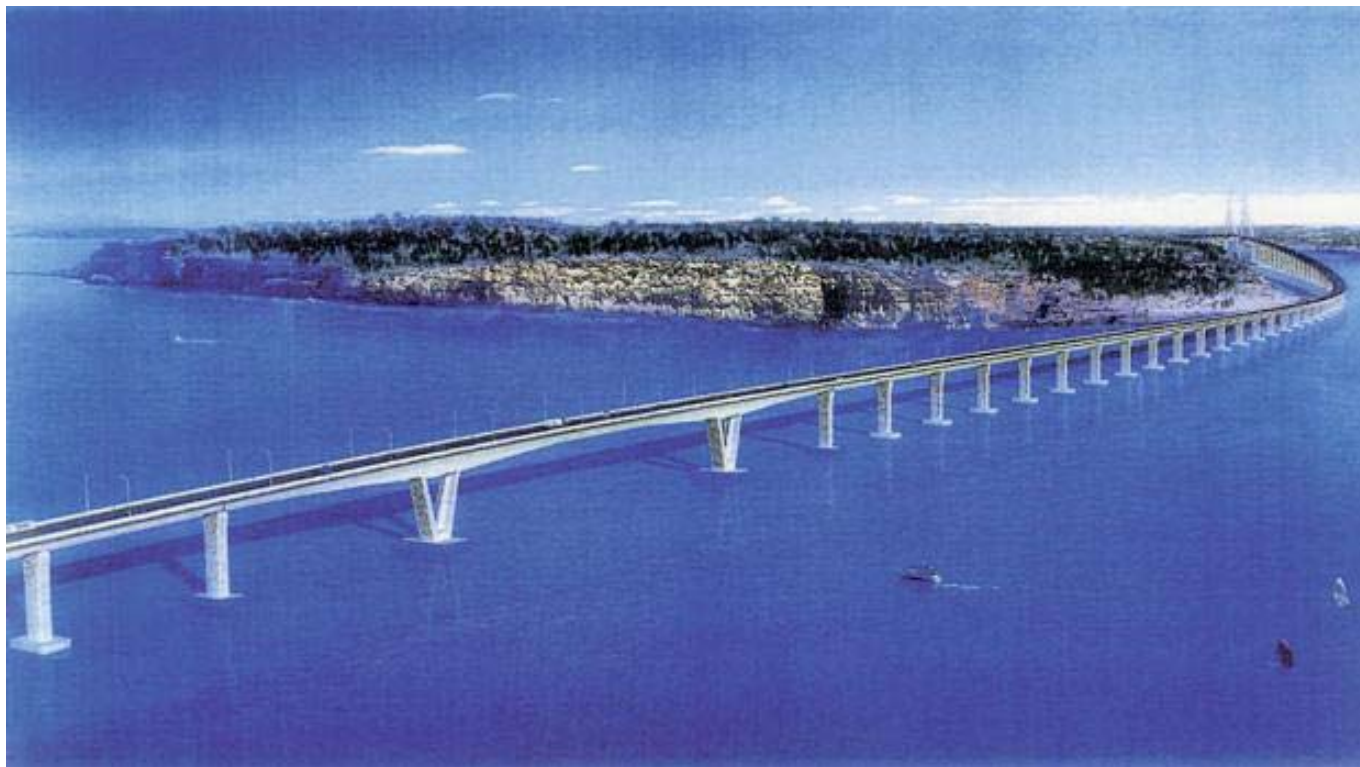
The sense of community found in the little villages, hamlets and neighbourhoods also bound the islanders together, serving not only as social capital for the families and communities, but strengthening their resolve to keep improving their and their villages' lot. For many centuries the island operated as a series of self-reliant, semi-autonomous agricultural communities with limited communication with the outside world. Though such communities may have sometimes operated as oppressive systems, with little breathing space for difference and diversity, they provided safety, physical and social support, and sense of community which ensured the survival and wellbeing of their inhabitants.

The hard work ethic, deep religious faith, social connectedness, ability in making use of own strengths and the resources around them, and the skill in steering clear of unnecessary battles, served the Gozitans very well over the five centuries since the great catastrophe of 1551. It lead to a 'steeling' (hardiness) process which ensured not



An aerial view of the Gozo Citadel [Photo courtesy: <http://www.guidememalta.com>].





Would Gozitans be tempted by the grand plan to physically link Gozo to the mainland and sign the death sentence of the island as they know it? Photo courtesy of [www.timesofmalta.com](http://www.timesofmalta.com) accessed on January 2018.

only their survival but their continued growth and development, contributing to their present prosperity and relative affluence.

Affluenza, however, may be as much a risk factor in the island's development as deprivation and poverty. It might lead to unbridled development resulting in the destruction of fertile land, town and village centres, landscapes and coastline. The resilience processes driving the Gozitan way of life protected the inhabitants and their land against adversity, turning their island into a thriving, prosperous community built on hard work and self-reliance balanced with connectedness and collaboration. The challenge today is whether these qualities will also serve the islanders in times of relative affluence as well as they did in times of adversity and deprivation.

Would they be able to resist lucrative offers of short term financial benefits and comforts but the long term destruction of their hills and valleys, villages and towns? Would their reputed astuteness and practical wisdom let them see through such schemes fuelled by unscrupulous speculators leading to the eventual destruction of the natural beauty and ecology of the island, its healthy environment, and

its booming tourism industry which contributes to half of its GDP? Would they realise that their long-standing skill of accommodation may not be adaptive when the livelihood and wellbeing of their own children and grandchildren may be at stake in the long term? Would they be tempted by the grand plan to physically link Gozo to the mainland and sign the death sentence of the island as they know it? (digital technology is making such an apparent necessity increasingly obsolete). Would they let others, including those from their own, do what Turgut failed to do 500 years ago? Would they fall back on their traditional 'steeling' to protect their island? Would they be as resilient in the face of affluenza as they have been in adversity and deprivation?

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# Gozitan Women: A Study on the Transition from Marriage into Widowhood

JOSANN CUTAJAR

## Introduction

The focus of this paper is on how a sample of young Gozitan women transitioned into widowhood. In this research I utilised personal narratives, interviews with service providers, as well as statistical and textual analysis to find out what barriers widowed Gozitan women faced as gendered, classed, ethnicised and aged individuals in their communities and in their dealings with Maltese state structures, practices and service provision. This study looks at succession and social welfare discourses prevalent within the Maltese Islands. The focus is on how these discourses and practices positioned the fourteen women who took part in this research project, and how these women negotiated/or resisted these discourses and practices.

An underlying theme in this paper is location and positionality. This text revolves around Gozo's location within the nation and the women's location within the community. These multiple levels of locations had an impact on the kind of societal developed resources the fourteen women could access in their dealings with bureaucratic structures and practices. Knowledge of and comprehension of state discourses and practices also seemed to be influenced by the location and positionality of the community vis-a-vis the political centre, although the individual's location within the community was also taken into consideration. This research made it evident that the positionality of various groups within the nation, and the position of the women within the group, altered the experience of citizenship for those concerned.

The transition from marriage into widowhood takes place either gradually or suddenly. Some of the respondents spent years taking care of a sick and/or disabled husband, watching him waste away in front of their eyes. In the case of others, the husband's passing away was sudden. The family's

socioeconomic location within the community, together with the community's location in the nation-state and the nation-state's location within the global context came to mediate access to social services and resources.

## Succession

The intergenerational transfer of property and goods involves a number of actors - namely the successors, their relatives, their legal representatives, banks, insurance companies, as well as the state and its various representatives. Inheritance also involves the interplay of both cultural and material factors. It involves the inter- and intra-generational transfers of various forms of material resources that modify the processes of upward/downward mobility of the economic trajectories of the individuals involved (Clignet, 1992: 192).

The information contained in this paper is derived from widowed respondents who at the time of this fieldwork were mainly in their thirties and forties, with only a few in their fifties or early sixties. The older respondents had adult children, but the majority had dependent children. A few had none. Apart from interviews with these, a number of service providers involved in the marital transition process – legal representatives, tax officials, court registrars, and social security experts – were also interviewed.

A widow can start the paperwork to delineate her change in marital status as soon as she obtains a death certificate. One of these chores involves paying the “denunzja”, the duty paid on the document that officially proclaims the transfer *causa mortis* of immovable property. The women needed to draw up this document as quickly as possible, especially those with joint bank accounts. This was because the banks ‘froze’ the accounts that appeared under the husband's name until they received instructions from the clients' and

the bank's legal representatives. Some of the respondents were unfortunate enough to have the bulk of their money tied up in joint accounts.

Some of the husbands had drawn a will prior to their death, others for one reason or another, did not. This was especially true for younger women with dependent children. The Maltese law decrees that in the instance where the wife and husband draw up one will, *unica charta*, he or she can bequeath ownership or usufruct of all their property to the surviving spouse. Usufruct means the right of use, habitation and analogous rights of enjoyment with respect to what is not owned by the surviving spouse (Department of Information, 1993: A 945).

When a spouse dies intestate, the Maltese law adjudicates who gets what. If the deceased has left children behind, or their descendants, as well as a spouse, then half of the succession will devolve on the children, or their descendants, and the other half will devolve on the spouse. The Maltese law protects the rights of the children/descendants and spouse. It sets aside a portion of the estate - the reserved portion. This portion is reserved in favour of the descendants and the surviving spouse. Children, whether conceived or born in or out of wedlock, are entitled to either one-third of the value of the estate when there are up to four children; or to one-half of the value of the estate when there are five or more children (Mifsud Parker, 2016).

This is what one of the younger respondents with dependent children had to say about the Maltese succession law:

"I think that the law has a point up to a certain extent. [...] I agree that the children should inherit half of their father's estate. All in all, he was their father in the end. [...]. At the same time though, if something happens and I need that money, it's not mine anymore. As it is, that property was the product of our joint effort during our married life. [...]. We worked side by side to get what we own. How can I explain myself? In a way I agree that the children should benefit from their father's estate. On the other hand, the responsible and dependent wife should also be justly compensated for her troubles. She should enjoy what she and her husband worked so hard to get."



The Courts of Justice Building in Valletta

This issue was referred to by one of the widows who had to raise dependent children with half of the resources available to her after her husband's death. Overnight, the money she and her husband had amalgamated, was halved, since this money by right belonged to the young children. To access this half, widows had to petition the court. Not all the widows had children though in this sample.

### Legal Representative

In the majority of the cases, the respondents only had a rough idea of what they had to do to settle succession issues. Therefore the first item on their agenda was to hire a legal expert so that she or he could guide them through the process.

Only a few of the respondents had dealt with succession matters in the past. This familiarity with succession matters was more prevalent among the older respondents. It is unfortunate that these bureaucratic issues have to be settled just after the death of a loved one, which means that the person in question might not be that well to deal with all this paperwork. The respondents were physically and mentally incapable of attending to these issues themselves in the days after the death of their husbands. They delegated this task to a relative, or one of their older children. The respondent took over the dealings when she regained her physical and mental equilibrium. Some of the respondents did not live near their family of origin, which meant that they did not have anyone they could resort to for help. They had to deal with these matters on their own.



In the majority of the cases, the respondents had to hire a legal expert so that she or he could guide them through the bureaucratic process.

The younger respondents were more likely to have post-secondary level of education. They tended to approach legal and financial experts on their own, even though they were not much familiar with the terrain, thinking that their education would stand them in good stead when dealing with these matters. When individuals are dealing with issues such as marriage, divorce, death, they often resort to the help and advice provided by their social network (Clignet, 1992, p. 190). A number of respondents felt that information surrounding succession and/or social benefits were not that available. As one of the respondents pointed out, “You are [involuntarily] penalised when you are not informed of what you have to do”.

Respondents felt that there should be more information on estate planning and division. They felt that widows needed to familiarise themselves with this information before they approached a notary, banks, the Inland Revenue Department, courts, the Social Services Department and/or insurance companies. As the respondents pointed out, only a few of the legal representations they approached bothered to explain and discuss some of the succession issues with them. Some of the respondents were therefore surprised to learn that some of the decisions their legal representative had made in their regard, infringed on their rights.

The respondents felt that the state, more than self-help organisations, should be involved in promulgating information about the rights and responsibilities of legal beneficiaries. As the respondents pointed out, certain self-help organisations such as Caritas, Minus One and isolated legal advisors used the media to disseminate information regarding succession.

Some of the respondents did not trust their lawyer/notary and therefore did not think that she or he could be a reliable source of information or advice. A number of the respondents felt that their legal representative was not so familiar with succession matters: this is because in the Maltese Islands few legal representatives specialise on this specific aspect of the law.

When the legal representative lacked familiarity with succession law, respondents tended to face negative percussion when the estate was eventually divided. In some instances, the legal representative was more concerned with protecting the children’s rights than that of the surviving spouse, a phenomenon to be expected in a country that favours intergenerational transfers over intra-generational ones. Knowledge about intestacy rights would have enabled these women to challenge their legal adviser’s decisions as well



as the decisions taken by other official bodies. Others felt that the notary had unduly prolonged his or her time in order to hike up the bill.

The majority of respondents felt that in dealing with notaries on succession matters, they needed to know the law inside out themselves if they wanted to settle succession matters in the shortest time, with the best outcome for themselves and with the minimum financial liabilities possible.

### Settling the Estate

The notary's first task was to ascertain whether the deceased husband had left a will. Some of the respondents had husbands who had worked abroad. This meant that the notary had to ascertain whether any wills were registered at the Public Registries in Gozo and Malta, and beyond.

The notary had to draw up an inventory of all the movable and immovable property belonging to the deceased before she or he could propose how the estate was to be divided. Some of the respondents had the deeds and documents of the relevant property at hand. Others did not. This was especially true of widows who for one reason or another left financial and bureaucratic matters to their husband. One respondent relegated this task to her husband because she did not drive. The majority of the respondents however felt that this was their responsibility when the husband was alive.

Younger widows, especially those with children under sixteen, were more likely to be the

testamentary executor. Older widows with independent children sometimes delegated this task to their eldest child. This was more likely the case when the woman in question had physical ailments or was unfamiliar with the bureaucratic set-up.

When an inventory of the disposable property was ready, the next step was to settle the transfer of property and pay the duty related to *causa mortis*. Widows with dependent children took it for granted that they would administer the property their children had inherited on their father's death. Yet the husband (before his death) or the court could have chosen somebody else to act as administrator if a relative had raised a query regarding the mother's competence in this matter.

The surviving parent had the obligation to administer the property until the child reached majority age, when they then became entitled to their inheritance. The Maltese law decrees that testamentary executors (or administrators) had to hypothecate their property as a guarantee that they will "faithfully carry into effect the will of the testator" (Department of information, 1995: 251) or of the law. One of the legal representatives remarked that the legal hypothecate was only a formality since the court and the family's legal representative rarely bothered to check on how the surviving spouse was managing her issues' estate. These respondents often mentioned the word "ipoteca" (legal hypothec) but only a few knew what it referred to.

When the respondents had adult children, they had to get legal permission (probate) from their children to act as testamentary executors. Some of the older respondents had some difficulty in persuading their children that they had the necessary skills to act as testamentary executors.

### "Id-Denunzja" or Duty on Documents and Transfers Act

The division of the estate, the settlement of the succession tax and the application for a survivor's pension and other social benefits were issues that the respondents had to concurrently deal with within the first six months following their husband's death.



For succession to take place, the notary has to draw a list of the property to be transferred, a description of the property, its whereabouts, its value and to whom it was going to be transferred. Some respondents complained that when their husband passed away, their private life came under the scrutiny of a number of state experts and officials. One respondent decried the fact that she had to share intimate information with total strangers. Another had to get the medical proof that her dead husband was the father of the child she was pregnant with at the time of his death. These 'private' conversations were usually held in areas with little to no privacy since the people in the vicinity could easily overhear what was being said.

The main complaint among the respondents was that they had to pay duty on this transfer as soon as the declaration was submitted to the Inland Revenue. The estate could only be divided once the transfer duty was paid. Not all the respondents could pay this duty. As one of the notaries pointed out, when the deceased owned a lot of property, there was no way that the widow concerned could raise the duty in question without selling some of the property concerned. At the same time, the widow could not sell the property if she could not pay the duty! The notary added that when something like this happened, the legal representative could always try to reach some kind of agreement with the Inland Revenue Department.

### **Of Money and Bank Accounts**

When the duty was paid and the transfer documentation processed, the respondents could approach the banks to start transferring the money. In an interview with two bank representatives it emerged that the bank's lawyers sometimes did not concur with the legal ruling made by the client's notary. In this case, the latter's legal ruling was revoked. The bank adhered to the instructions issued by the bank's lawyers, not the client's legal representative. Some of the branches in Gozo had to liaise with the bank's estate section which was located in Malta. This often meant that the ruling took a long time to be processed.

When I asked these service providers what happened when the husband died intestate and



Sometimes the bank's lawyers did not concur with the legal ruling made by the client's notary.

left a wife and dependent children behind, they said that in the majority of the cases, the surviving spouse got half the money in the accounts under the husband's name. The other half was divided equally among the children. When joint accounts were involved, the surviving spouse received half the money and then her husband's half was divided between her and her children. This happened because the respondents in question had adhered to the community of acquests marital regime. As testamentary executor or administrator, the mother then opened bank accounts for each child and the money pertaining to them was transferred into separate accounts. The surviving spouse had no access to this money, although by law she could use the interest that accrued from these accounts (usufruct).

### **Reactions to Legal Rulings**

Respondents reacted differently to their lawyer's and the bank's legal rulings. There seemed to be a correlation between the age of the widow at the time of the transition and their reaction to the legal rulings. Younger widows were more likely to have a husband who had died intestate. They were also more likely to be raising dependent children on their own. These respondents felt that if their husband had not died, they would have shared the expense of raising their dependent children. As things stood, they became their children's sole provider after his death with half the money at their disposal. This increased their hardship because at this stage of family life, a surviving spouse might also be trying to cope with the expenses concerned with the building or mortgage of the house of residence.

One of the respondents said that she had been lucky that they had succeeded in redeeming the mortgage before her husband died. Others were not that lucky. Some of these women knew though that if they could not manage financially, they could always petition the court of voluntary jurisdiction to give them permission to use their children's part of the estate.

In her research, Lopata (1996: 134) found that when the husband died intestate, older children often transferred their share of the estate over to their mother out of filial respect and appraisal of her financial condition. This did not always take place among my respondents. Only one participant said that her children voluntarily granted her their share of the money.

When the husband who had died intestate had been insured, the same policy used to divide the money in bank accounts was applied when it came to dividing the insurance money. One of the respondents said that her husband had listed her as the main beneficiary. Her lawyer, however, insisted that she should share the money with her children, in spite of the insurance company's ruling.

One of the respondents said that in spite of all the lip service successive Maltese governments pay to gender equality, the law, especially succession law, still discriminates against women. As she pointed out, she was not just a housewife. She had helped her husband set up his business. Since the enterprise had been a small one, she had never asked for, or expected a salary because whatever they made, she thought, she would benefit from in the end. She did not mind giving birth and raising her children, taking care of her home and her husband and helping him with the business because she did it out of love and concern for her family. The law, however, did not compensate her for all this unpaid work. When her husband died intestate, the law, which defined her as a dependent since she was not registered as employed, never acknowledged the unpaid work she had been carrying out within the household and the family enterprise. The enterprise was transferred on to her children. "Why do I have to be financially dependent on what my children give me," she asked "when I have contributed so much to this family?"

The women who had the right of usufruct to part of their husbands' estate faced other problems. As some of them stated, what was the point of having the usufruct of their husband's property, when they had to ask for their children's signature whenever they had to cash in the interest or rent cheque accruing from rented property or bank accounts? One of these respondents said that she was fed up of all the red tape involved, and so she had the money transferred on to her children.

## **House of Residence**

Ownership of and use of the house of residence was also a very important issue for the respondents. Those respondents whose husband had died intestate, became co-owners of the house of residence, together with their children. One of the women was still in the process of building the house. She said that she found it totally unfair that she was investing so much of her money in the house when her children owned half of it, and would probably ask for their share of this property when they grew up.

The widows who enjoyed usufruct of their home were somewhat worried about the future. According to law they enjoyed the right of residency until they died or re-married, when the property in question would then revert to their children. Some of them mentioned instances when children evicted their ageing mother, or sent her to a home, even though the latter did not want to leave what she regarded as her 'home'. The notaries agreed that when the mother and her children were co-owners or the former enjoyed the usufruct of the house of residence, the children could demand to use the place, although legally they could not evict the mother. They said that a widow's right to the use of the house of residence was only protected when she was bequeathed the house or owned it herself. Few of the key respondents held full ownership of their house of residence though.

## **Survivor's Pension**

Although the majority of the younger respondents worked, they could still apply for a survivor's pension if they had dependent children. The survivor's pension and the supplementary children's allowance came in handy at this stage





in life. Since women tend to be employed in lower paid, and hence less paying occupations, these social benefits were a godsend. Older respondents could only apply for this pension if they were inactive.

### **Husbands Who Used to Work Abroad**

One of the issues raised by these widows was the fact that some of the husbands used to work in another country, namely Australia, Canada and/or the United States. Gozitans tend to migrate in search of work (Cauchi, 1998). The longer their husband worked abroad, the lower the pension they got. One of the respondents said that some months prior to her husband's death, she and her husband had gone to the area office in Victoria to find out whether they could pay the missing contributions. They could not cover all the years he had spent abroad prior to his death, and the widow ended up getting such a low pension, that she had to apply for supplementary allowance.

This often resulted in delays in adjudicating the pension. One widow was in the process of separating from her husband and could apply for a survivor's pension because the separation had not been legally effected before his death. Another participant had to carry out a pregnancy test to certify that her unborn child was the son of the deceased. These issues indicate that although the term 'widow' might allude to a particular cohort, individuals within this cohort might have different issues to deal with.

### **The Transfer of the 'Family' Business**

Three of the husbands had their own small business before they died. One of the widows took over the business. She had never helped her husband with the business because she considered herself as being a housewife and mother first. So she was very unexperienced when she took over. It was in a way a baptism of fire but she had no alternative since the survivor's pension was not enough to raise a family on. Another respondent had to close the enterprise and sell the goods.

An older respondent whose husband had also died intestate had been informed by her notary that the business would be automatically transferred on to her sons. Her sons gave her some of the proceeds they derived from this business because they knew that she could not manage on the survivor's pension she was receiving.

### **'Rikors' - Petitions to the Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction**

When the husband died intestate and the transfer or sale of certain goods was involved – the respondents mentioned vehicles, goods and shotguns – the surviving spouse had to apply to the court of voluntary jurisdiction to be given permission to transfer or sell the possession in question. When minors were implicated, the court became involved.

Three of the respondents had to sell their husband's car when he passed away. One of the women said that when she filed for "rikors", she had to tell the court why she needed to sell the car at the price she was asking for. The car in question was almost a total loss, and she wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible before it became totally defunct. She had found a buyer, but court officials were of the opinion that she was charging too low a price, so they sent for a car assessor to come over from Malta. She had to wait for two months before the assessor turned up. When he did turn up, she was informed that she had to cover his professional fee as well as his transportation expenses. This is an added cost where Gozitans are concerned.

The majority of the respondents knew people who could guide them through the bureaucratic

procedures involved. Others had to resort to the intercession of “il-qaddisin” (the saints, as politicians are referred to in the Maltese Islands). These “qaddisin” were usually approached by widows who were not that familiar with the bureaucratic system they were dealing with, or who needed something they were not able to get through the normal channels.

The majority of the respondents however did not like to be indebted to these “qaddisin”, and tried their best to avoid resorting to them for help. Respondents who either had a high standard of education or who knew people (friends or relatives) who were insiders to the system, had no need to resort to politicians. Respondents with a higher standard of education were more likely to be acquainted with experts who could help them sort the paperwork in the shortest time possible.

The older respondents tended to have a lower level of education, and could not access these resources. They usually resorted to the help offered by their children, who tended to have a better standard of education than their mother.

### **Income Tax**

This transition in marital status proved to be an expensive business on all fronts for these women. The respondents not only lost a breadwinner: they lost a portion of their joint estate to their children while

they had to deal with the medical, funeral and/or legal expenses that accrued from the whole process.

The expenses did not stop here though. Some of the women said that after their husband’s death, the Inland Revenue Department often sent them a letter asking them to settle their husband’s pending tax bills. Some had to pay thousands in taxes at a time when they could ill afford to do so. Some were able to extract this money from the husband’s estate: others did not. If the tax bills were sent once the estate was divided, they often settled these bills from their own pocket since they did not look forward to getting entangled in any more red tape.

### **Transition in Marital Status**

A will is shaped by both collective and individual factors - the law and the decisions made by the testator. What the surviving spouse inherits from her husband, is informed by the history of the material and cultural environments in which the deceased had grown up or lived in at the time prior to his death. The decisions made by the testator are also influenced by the amount of and the nature of the assets accumulated as well as the ideology prevailing among the testator’s reference group (Clignet, 1992: 156-7).

The definition of heirship solutions seems to have had a great impact on what the surviving



Some of the women said that after their husband’s death, the Inland Revenue Department often sent them a letter asking them to settle their husband’s pending tax bills.

spouse received. The Maltese successoral models affected greatly in what the surviving spouse could inherit, in what form and in what manner she could enjoy what the law decreed was hers. A number of respondents, especially those acquainted with successoral models available in other countries, argued that the Maltese succession law discriminated against the surviving spouse since it favoured intergenerational transfers when the husband died intestate.

Women without a job or in precarious employment were more likely to lose out when their husbands died intestate. Inactive women with dependent children, and women who did not have access to a secure, well paid job, were put in a precarious financial predicament when the husband died. Wives were more likely to lose out when the husband had been the sole breadwinner. When the husband had been the sole breadwinner, the house of residence, business and/or other property was more likely to be in the husband's name. When this was the case, the wives had more to lose when the husband died intestate.

### **Natural Support Systems**

As mentioned before, the respondents often resorted to individuals they were familiar with when they were looking for information or assistance in dealing with the transactions mentioned above. These support systems represent a community's capacity to help itself (Delgado, 1998: 55). Natural support systems usually consist of family or friends as well as self-help groups or the church (Delgado, 1998: 37). These support systems provide a range of expressive, informational and instrumental assistance to those who ask for it, or accept it in times of crisis. This assistance is logistically, psychologically, conceptually and geographically accessible to all sectors of the community.

Kilgore (1999: 191) maintains that knowledge and skills can be shared among the members of a particular group. The community's intellectual and political development is very much tied with the development of its individual members. The skills of an 'expert' or 'reference' person could be beneficial to the whole community. The social location of the respondents impacted on the access this person had to a particular pool of 'experts'

and the information or skills these had at their disposal.

A number of studies have demonstrated (see Reitz, 1995; Swamp, 1992) that members of ethno-minority groups (and Gozitans tend to be treated as such in Malta) are more likely to resort to ethno-specific resources rather than mainstream ones. Although accessibility is important, the client's perceived level of comfort with the structures and personnel is critical. Minority groups are less likely to seek help from structures and agencies that do not adopt the same cultural patterns of help seeking used by them (Reitz, 1995: 9). And this is an important issue where Gozitans are concerned.

### **Centre and Periphery**

In this research, the real experts on matters related to the bureaucratic requirements associated with widowhood were in Malta. They were the individuals implicated in the prescription, implementation and interpretation of policies. Gozitans were less likely than their Maltese counterparts to resort to these experts for a number of reasons, namely geographical and social distance from the political centre. This lack of access had negative repercussions for the Gozitan widows involved in this research project. The process took longer, and there were sometimes extra costs involved.

In my interviews with Maltese public service and trade union officials as well as the leaders of certain Maltese self-help groups, I became aware that Maltese social activists had plenty of opportunities to meet up with policy makers. They ran into each other formally and informally. These meetings provided the three sets of agents with the opportunity to share information and/or recommendations for legislative changes. Leaders of Maltese self-help groups often consulted officials/politicians/union representatives when they needed help, information and/or when they felt that certain policies and practices were discriminating against a particular social group. Maltese and Gozitan officials, union representatives and representatives of social organizations on the other hand rarely had the opportunity to interact with each other - formally or informally.



Gozitan widows, as a result, do not often have the opportunity to benefit from such interaction.

## Maltese Counterparts

The self-help groups in Gozo were more likely to provide social and emotional help to their members than was the case in Malta. Eight out of the fourteen respondents were members of such groups. However the self-help groups from which these respondents sought assistance, were not always of sufficient support. The Gozitan widowed community tried to help each other when they could, with the limited resources at their disposal. At the same time these groups were too far removed from the political centre to make their voices and opinions heard. Those who perceive themselves as being distant from the political centre, feel that they do not have the power to bring about change.

## Conclusion

Gender, ethnicity, class, age and marital status impinged on widowed women's social rights within the Maltese nation. These interlocking difficulties impacted on widowed women's dealings with mainstream and ethnospecific structures and institutions within Gozo and Malta. At the same time it was evident that widowed women's place within the Gozitan community and Gozo's location within the nation also influenced access to national social services and benefits.

While state officials might believe that all citizens have equal access to social benefits and services, in practice this is rarely the case. State discourses and practices are created and implemented by particular powerful social group/s within the nation - usually upper class men deriving from the dominant ethnic group. These ensure that the state structures and practices are designed to answer their own particular needs and interests. Subordinated social groups that want their needs to be addressed by these structures, often have to challenge the biased perspectives of those in power if they want to ascertain that these structures/practices cater as well to their needs and interests.

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# Monsignor Archdeacon Luigi Vella – 90 years from his demise

JOE ATTARD

One of the renowned Gozitan authors whose works were instrumental in the promotion and development of Maltese literature as we know it today was undoubtedly Monsignor Archdeacon Luigi Vella. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his demise will be commemorated later this year.

Monsignor Vella was born in Victoria, Gozo on the 17 December 1859. At the age of twelve he started his secondary education at the State Secondary School and after five years he entered the Gozo Seminary, at that time run by the Jesuits, to further his studies. He terminated his studies ten years

later and was ordained to the priesthood on the 19 December 1882. When he left the Seminary, after having served as Prefect and Headmaster for some years, he fully dedicated himself to his priestly work. Regularly in the evening he used to gather boys, youngsters and adult men, most of whom showed reluctance in practicing their faith, at the church dedicated to St Sabina, where he brought them closer to the Holy Sacraments through Catechism.

In 1887 he was assigned the responsibilities of Chaplain at the Civil Hospital in Victoria in which

role he served for about twelve years. Seventeen years from his ordination to priesthood Fr Luigi was given the title of Canon at the Gozo Cathedral following a competitive exam. In 1900 Monsignor Vella graduated in Theology following further studies and examinations. Nine years later he was appointed to occupy the chair of Dogmatic Theology at the Gozo Seminary where he served as a Professor in this science for eighteen years.

Monsignor Vella did not only carry out his ministerial duties as a Preacher and Professor. He was also the Spiritual Director of the Communities of Dominican and Franciscan Sisters and a much sought-after Confessor for over forty years.

He implemented significant projects and works at the church dedicated to St Sabina in Victoria. In 1902 he started the rebuilding of the old church. These works were finalised on the 29 April 1923, when the Papal Legate, Cardinal Testaferata, inaugurated it as the



Church for Perpetual Adoration. One notes with satisfaction that this church has steadfastly served this function up to this day, its doors open all through the day, the whole year round, not only for the local faithful who regularly spend time of adoration in front of the Holy Sacrament but also for many foreigners who choose to pay a visit during their day trip to Gozo. Currently this Church for Perpetual Adoration is being directed by the Reverend Monsignor Joseph Gauci, who although in his elderly years has taken over these duties from his late brother the Archdeacon Mgr Giovanni Bosco Gauci, both close relatives of Monsignor Luigi Vella. Bishop Camilleri had appointed Monsignor Luigi Vella as its first Rector. For his outstanding endeavours, Pope Pius XI decorated Mgr Vella with the 'Benemerenti Medal' whilst Pope Leo XIII endowed him with the decoration 'Pro ecclesia et Pontefice'. The now St Pius X, wanted to appoint him as Coadjutor to Bishop Pietro Pace of Malta – an honour and a great responsibility that in his humbleness, Mgr Vella was afraid to accept. On the 12 March 1923, he was appointed by the Vatican as Archdeacon of the Gozo Cathedral.

However Mgr Luigi Vella will not only be remembered for his services as Rector and Canon of the Gozo Cathedral, but also for his contribution as one of the best Gozitan authors who strongly endeavoured to promote Maltese as a written language during his times. Vella wrote several works in Maltese, spiritual books used for Meditation and Adoration, writings on the lives of martyrs and on religious faith, historical books recounting the history of the island of Gozo. For many years he was the Director of the periodical 'The Eucharist – Preacher of the Blessed Sacrament'. Before starting this work he had also published the monthly 'The Marian Devotee'. Without any doubt we can easily extract a clear and authentic picture of Monsignor Vella from the numerous books he left as his legacy. Today, ninety years from his death, their might not be any living Gozitans who remember him, as they would have been able to witness his qualities as a person and about his views upon the problems and values of life.

In order to structure his historical novels, Archdeacon Luigi Vella frequently needed to

conduct his research at the Archives in Sicily. Very often he had to compare what had been written by the Arab and Sicilian writers with that written by the Maltese authors, in order that he could extract concrete and historical facts that were true and faithful to what had in fact happened. He gave a much worthy helping hand to Mr Alfonz Maria Galea in his writings of 'Mogħdija taż-Żmien' (*Passing the time*). Issue numbers: 63,69,70, and 125 of this collection were all written by the Gozitan historian Mgr. Luigi Vella. Amongst his works one may find the historical novel 'Nikol Abdul' or rather 'The Last Years of Arab Rule in our Islands'. The author was assigned with the proof reading of this work by *Klabb Kotba Maltin* in order that it could be re-published and for some years it was also included as a textbook used by students studying for their Maltese Matriculation Certificate. Together with this book, Mgr Vella also wrote the novels: "Bint il-Hakem" (The Ruler's Daughter), "Ferdinandu Montanier" – a story from Gozo, "Bernardo De Puo'" – a tale from Gozo during the rule of Grand Master D'Omedes, "Eufrosina", "Il-General Ruman" (The Roman General), "San Mamante" – a tale of the 3rd century, "Isolda" – a tale from Malta, as well as "Abdullah Ghaxrif", which Mons Vella wrote as a commemoration of the Eucharistic Congress held in Malta in 1913.

Albeit the Maltese Orthography has changed drastically since the times when Archdeacon Luigi Vella wrote his works, the fact still remains that this cleric was one of the main authors who provided our people with numerous books be they of a religious or historical themes as well as those of a lighter nature. He possessed eloquent and expressive writing skills that included the use of articulate and idiomatic language. Proof of this is given in the following excerpt taken from his historical novel "Nikol Abdul" with which we also conclude this profile that comes in commemoration of his death which occurred on the 17 July 1928.

***Nikola ta' Abdul, jew kif kienu jsibuh l-Gharab, 'Halif', kien Ghawdxi. Imrobbi tajje minn ommu fir-religjon nisanija u mbagħad minn Patri Gawdenz, mill-Kunvent tal-Madonna tal-Ferh jew ta' Gajdoru, li dak iż-żmien l-Agostinjani kellhom fir-Ramla, f'żgħožitu, niesu***



*baghtuh Sqallija jitghallem f'Paliermu, fejn sar jaf lil Tarik, u dahal fil-Milizia, f'rigment li kellu bi Kmandant tieghu lill-istess Tarik. Mibghut dan ir-Rigment f'Ghawdex mill-Emir ta' Sqallija, Nikol gie wkoll mieghu taht l-istess Kmandant. Ghalkemm Nikol kien jinsab qalb l-Gharab Missilmin, b'tigrib kbir ghal ruhu, huwa baqa' dejjem shih fil-Ligi Nisranija u habib ta' Patri Gawdenz.*



The monument which was unveiled in Savina Square, Victoria in honour of Mgr. Luigi Vella. [Photo courtesy: <http://www.gozonews.com>]

*Barra minn ommu u missieru, Nikol kellu wkoll ohtu li kien jisimha Marija, xebba li fit-tjubija taghha kienet ahjar minnu; bhalu mzejna bil-ghaqal u ghall-almu taghha hadd ma kien jehodha. Sabiha u helwa, izda ftit sewdenija, Marija kienet mahbuba minn kull min kien jafha.*

*Nicholas of Abdul, or rather 'Halif', as the Arabs knew him, was a Gozitan. Well reared by his mother within the Christian faith and subsequently by Brother Gawdenz, from the Convent of Our Lady of Joy also known as Ta' Gajdoru, that in those days the Agostinians had in Ramla, when he was in his young age his relatives sent him to Sicily to study in Palermo, where he got to know Tarik, and he enrolled in the militia, in a regiment whose Commander was the same Tarik. When this regiment was dispatched to Gozo by the Sicilian Governor, Nicholas also came with it under the same Commander. Although Nicholas found himself amidst the Muslim Arabs, with great risk for his soul, he always steadfastly abided by the Rules of the Christian faith and remained a friend to Brother Gawdenz.*

*Besides his parents, Nicholas also had a sister called Maria, a spinster who surpassed him in gentleness, was gifted with wisdom as much as him and noone questioned her skills. Beautiful and sweet, but somewhat dark-skinned, Maria was loved by all those who knew her.*

Chev. Joe M Attard is the Secretary of the Gozitan Journalists Association which post he has occupied since the Association's inception in 1960. Mr Attard is a prolific writer of prose and poetry mostly related with Gozitan history, religion, literature and culture and he has published two books. For the past 25 years he has also been an avid broadcaster. Mr Attard worked as a Maltese Language teacher, Assistant Head and Acting Head of the 6th Form in Gozo. In 1984 he was appointed Knight of the Unione Cavalleria Cristiana Internazionale (UCCI).

# Book Review: Anton Tabone. Il-Pont bejn Għawdex Reġjun u Malta Nazzjon

Sergio Grech

Malta: Kite Group Publishers (2017); 330 pages

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

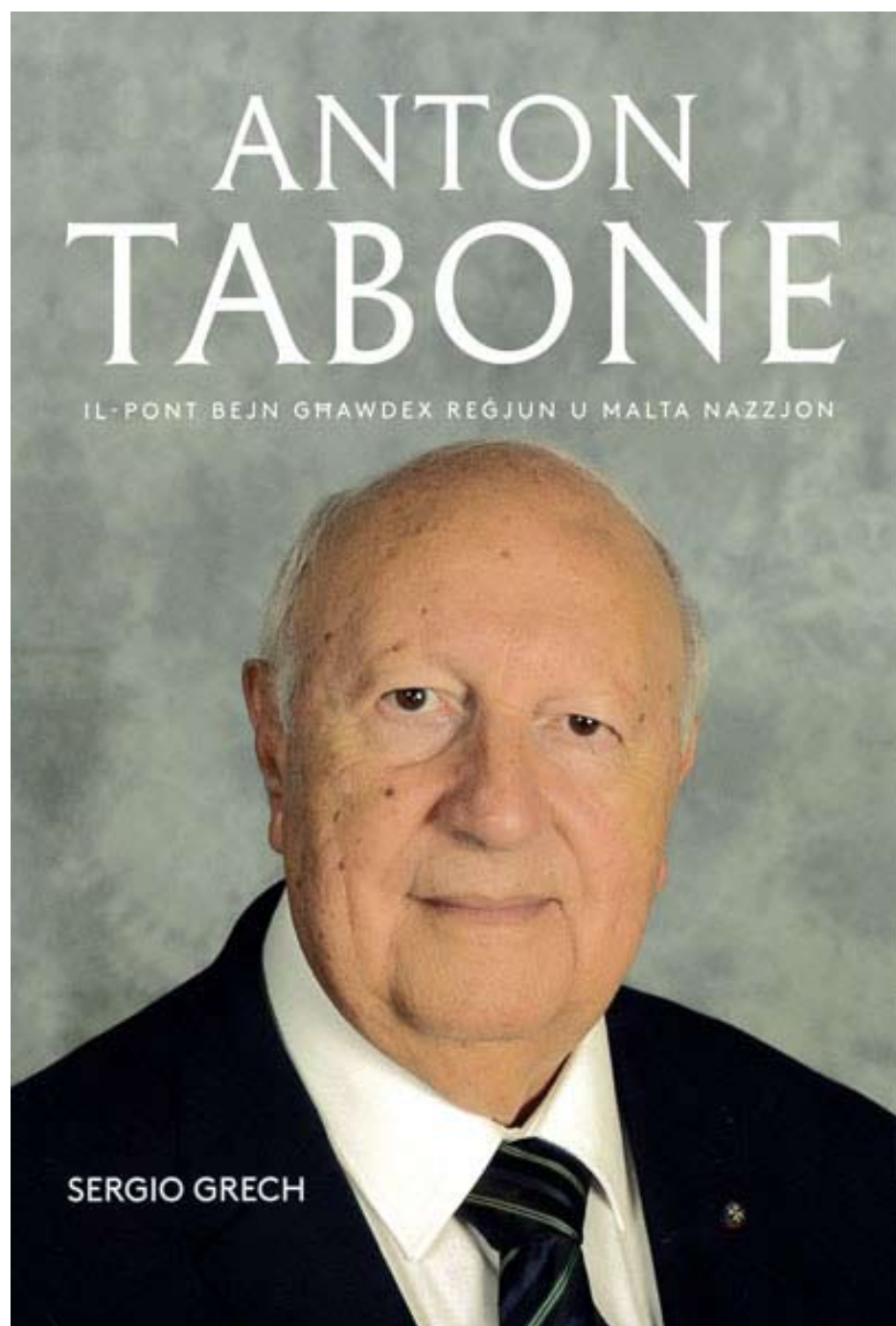
Gozitan patriot, Minister for Gozo, Speaker Emeritus of Parliament, promoter of Gozo, its history and its culture, Anton Tabone is a name that become synonymous with Gozo and with all that is Gozitan. He dedicated his entire life for

the promotion of the second largest island of the Maltese archipelago, the island that gave him birth, the island of his fathers, the land of his inspirational ancestors who went out of their way to see Gozo become a separate diocese and enjoy a status that

the island had enjoyed two thousand years ago when the Roman imperial power ruled supreme in the Mediterranean and the countries surrounding its basin.

Anton Tabone. Il-Pont bejn Għawdex Reġjun u Malta Nazzjon is not a mere biography; it is a political statement. As the name of the book shows, Anton Tabone was instrumental in preparing the way for the European Union to be able to consider Gozo as a region in its own right, part of the Republic of Malta, speaking the same language, professing the same religious beliefs yet with a different anthropological tinge. As author Sergio Grech aptly shows in this biographical account, Anton was the right person at the right moment and therefore with the right timing to pull the strings in order to open before us the stage on which the idea of a ministry for Gozo was to be set.

The reader who goes through the pages of the book will notice how the notion of a ministry of Gozo as dreamt by





Tabone and as put into reality by the Nationalist Government of the late eighties was not to interfere with the greater reality of a Maltese nation. Carrying the disadvantage of double insularity, the ministry was not 'of Gozo' but rather 'for Gozo' thus emphasising that with the delegation of power emanating from Castile, Parliament was not rendering Gozo an autonomous entity; instead, the newly-set ministry would address issues such as health, education and infrastructure in such a way that the particular needs of Gozo would not be misunderstood or handled indifferently. The ministry for Gozo was not therefore another department within a greater entity. When becoming the first Minister for Gozo, Anton Tabone showed how this was not only possible but beyond that, it was an idea that had become a reality.

Genealogy, local history, Maltese politics and a historical milieu leading to the entrance of Malta into the European Union all play their important part in the gradual unfolding of the biographical sketch. As I said before, this is hardly an ordinary biography; it is the history of an island and an epoch, focusing on important and timely events which changed the face of Gozo leading the island to a point of no return. Gozo could never be the same again after the consolidation of the Gozo ferry

modern service, the introduction of local councils and the abandoning of the idea of a ministry of Gozo by a new Labour administration. It is true that setbacks are part of history yet the abolition of Gozo's ministry must have struck Tabone very hard. It was only the enhancement of Gozo as a region by the E.U. that could give Gozo the status that could bring it out of its limbo. Having said this, it is important to state the fact that even in his own political party, Tabone found colleagues who did not believe in the idea of Gozo having a ministry of its own and the same can be said for the rival party. Yet for all their misconceptions of the idea or lack of agreement, Tabone still commanded respect on both sides of the parliamentary chamber. His love for Gozo was never perceived as parochial, provincial and inward-looking; on the other hand, Anton Tabone was always seen as part of the whole, and a healthy part at that.

Sergio Grech's book is a must for those who want to better understand Gozo and its recent history. Being only a few kilometres to the north-west of the main island of Malta, it has its own mystique, a mystique that enchants the foreigner and boosts the locals to identify themselves with the island which gave them birth and made them what they are today.



Mr Tabone welcoming Mr Shimon Perez during his visit to Gozo. [Photo courtesy: <https://www.bdlbooks.com>]



# Book Review: The Gozo Cathedral: Its History and Treasures

Joseph Bezzina and Daniel Cilia

Gozo, Malta: Gozo Cathedral Chapter (2017); 400 pages

REVIEWED BY MAURICE CAUCHI

This recent publication (2017) represents the definitive collection of information about one of the most prominent landmarks, both geographically as well as historically, of Gozo, brought together by the well-known historian Prof Joseph Bezzina, and brilliantly illustrated by Daniel Cilia. It is a massive volume of 400 pages, divided into nine

parts which deal with all aspects of this cathedral's history.

In addition to several chapters written by Bezzina himself, other chapters are contributed by well-known experts including Prof Stanley Fiorini, George Azzopardi, Paul Cassar, Alaine Apap Bologna and Noel Anastasi.

An introductory chapter relates to the religious significance of the Citadel Hill itself, going back to the cult of Astarte, and emphasizing the significance of this unique site in Gozo, particularly as the root of Christianity in Gozo.

The second part by Prof Stanley Fiorini gives a detailed exposé of the Byzantine - Greek influences which persist to this day as seen from several surnames which still survive in Gozo. The Islamic two-century rule of Malta is discussed, and, interestingly, the author dismisses the theory that the islands had lost their Christian tradition during this time. While this has a broader impact on the history of Mediterranean, it has a special relevance to Gozo itself.

Fiorini goes on to discuss specific issues relating to





the Matrice as it established itself in medieval times, which is continued in the next section by Bezzina himself, who, in the next part, discusses with the period from the 17th century to the present time.

Further parts of this book deal with the art and architecture of the Cathedral (Paul Cassar), a description of the church's plates and various other ecclesiastical objects which constitute a priceless collection (Alaine Apap Bologna), as well as with various aspect of the music archives, and music at the cathedral (Noel D'Anastas).

The book is richly illustrated by Daniel Cilia, well known now for his excellent photography.

The production of the book is simply superb, and deserves a place in the home of every Gozitan, and anyone interested in Maltese melitensia.



The book is richly illustrated by Daniel Cilia. [Photos courtesy: <https://www.bdlbooks.com>]

# Recent Activities at the University of Malta - Gozo Campus

JOSEPH CALLEJA

## Courses at the Gozo Campus

In October 2017 a new course leading to a Diploma in Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship was opened at the Gozo Campus by the Edward de Bono Institute of the University of Malta. This course is being offered in Gozo for the first time. The Faculty of Education again opened the course leading to the Diploma in Inclusive Education. Both courses are on a part-time basis and the latter is being offered via video-conferencing.

Four other courses started in February 2018. The Maltese Department opened, for the fifth consecutive year, the popular course leading to the Certificate in Proof Reading: Maltese. During the same month, the Faculty of Education opened two other courses, namely the course leading to the Masters in Educational Leadership and the Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Ethics in Schools. Both courses are being offered to Gozitan students through the video-conferencing system. In March, the Institute for Physical Education and Sport, commenced a Foundation Course in Coaching.

Other courses running at the Gozo Campus during this academic year are those leading to the Bachelor of Psychology (Hons), the Bachelor of Commerce and the Executive Master of Business Administration.

## University of the Third Age

The University of the Third Age in Gozo also started the current academic year at the Gozo Campus. This year's curriculum includes various informative sessions regarding different subjects such as medicine, literature, history and also geographical information.

During this year's inauguration, Minister for Gozo, Justyne Caruana, said that the U3A concept can be developed through the continued collaboration with the University of Malta in order that it may be further strengthened by the introduction of new subjects and classes. These sessions are not only providing useful academic information, but they also serve as a valid active ageing exercise for the adult group of persons who attend them, since



A lecture of the Certificate in Proof Reading: Maltese course in progress.





A Holy Mass was celebrated during the inauguration of the U3A academic year.

they give them the opportunity to keep contact and actively participate within society outside their homes. She explained how the Ministry for Gozo is committed to offer the best opportunities on a regional level in order that the elderly in Gozo may benefit through an active ageing experience within the holistic concept of the national strategy on active ageing. It is within Government's remit to support and ensure the implementation of this strategy for the benefit of the elderly and the University of the Third Age is an important tool for its accomplishment.

Whilst thanking the Ministry for Gozo for its continued support, Professor Marvin Formosa, Head of Department at the Faculty for Social Wellbeing of the University of Malta and Director of the U3A, urged for more participation by elderly persons in this initiative so that they could also benefit from the advantages it gives them to keep themselves active within society.

## Graduations

During the graduation ceremonies held at the University of Malta in November and December, a number of students were awarded their degree after having successfully completed courses at the University Gozo Campus.

Five students obtained the Diploma in Commerce, while four others were awarded the Master of Art



The students who followed the Diploma in Commerce.

in Islands and Small Studies. Certificates were also awarded to a group of eight students who successfully completed a course leading to the Certificate in Proof Reading: Maltese. Seven other students were awarded the Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Ethics in Schools and a student was awarded an Executive Masters in Business Administration in Public Management. A group

of ten students were awarded the Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education.

## Examinations

The Gozo Campus once more contributed in the organisation of the end-of-semester examinations for Gozitan students. During the January/February 2018 session of examinations, around 650 examinations were held, partly at the Examination Centre in Victoria and partly at the University Gozo Campus in Xewkija. The majority of Gozitan students following courses at the University of Malta are opting to sit for their written exams in Gozo.



The four students who successfully completed the Master of Arts in Islands and Small States Studies, together with Dr Stefano Moncada, lecturer at the University of Malta.



The group of students who were awarded the University's Certificate in Proof Reading: Maltese and the proof reading warrant from the National Council for the Maltese Language.

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





The Gozo Observer is published twice a year by the University of Malta - Gozo Campus. It contains articles relating to all aspects of life in Gozo, including culture, education, business, arts and literature. Those wishing to submit articles for inclusion in the Gozo Observer should contact the Editor of the magazine (contact details below).

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