

# **THE G OZO OBSERVER**

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## The Gozo Observer

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**Front Cover Picture:** Sunset at Xlendi  
Courtesy of Charles Farrugia

# Editorial:

The choice is between an aeroplane and a goose: both can fly, but in the first case, unless it flies it falls, while in the latter case, it has to stop flying to lay its golden eggs!

It seems that from the survival point of view we have to choose. Most of Malta and quite a bit of Gozo is now irretrievably destroyed with a mad scramble to build tall buildings of at least seven stories where grass used to grow.

The population has taken on its exponential trajectory, and with it the marked deterioration of the atmosphere that supports us, which uniquely in Europe has taken a marked turn for the worse. Withering heat, whirlwinds or floods will not undermine our determination to bloat ourselves on our winnings and damn the future desertification.

It is good to see that poorer countries have become determined to do something to stop this disaster. Ethiopia has only recently decided on the mammoth exercise of planting 350 million trees in a single day and more than 2.6 billion have so far been planted! Let this be a stimulus

to the whole world. In Malta we prefer to chop them down.

Why cannot we in Gozo emulate such an effort and plant trees where currently there is only barrenness to be admired? Why aren't our well-known seven (plus) hills not flourishing and turning into a green carpet that can be admired from outer space? Why are our coastline and bays not surrounded by trees like tamarisk which are still waiting to be given a chance to take hold and survive?

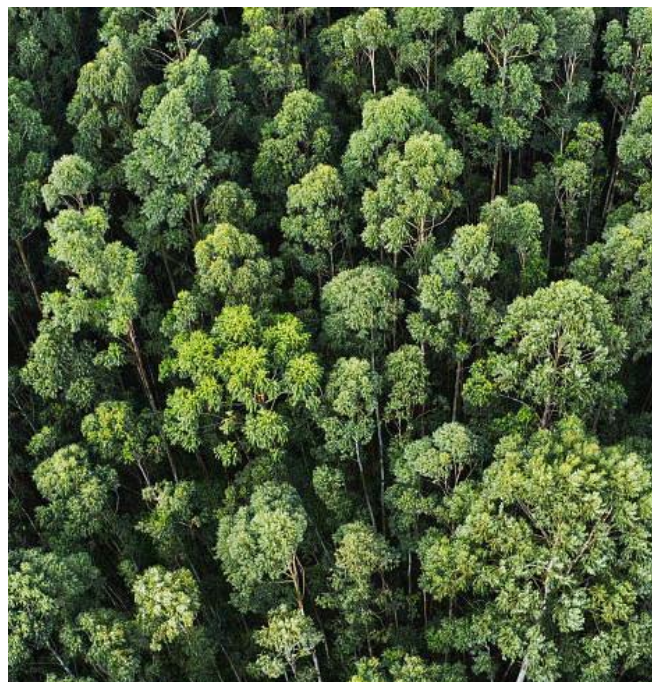
When our big sister island starts suffocating, maybe we can still be in a position to offer a niche get-away where oxygen is still plentiful and life is still liveable.

The choice is still ours (just!). We can choose to keep on aiming for the stars, flying higher and higher, until our wings get burned and Icarus-like fall to the ground, or we may pause in our mad pursuits and, humbly but wisely, like a good goose, encourage the laying of golden eggs.

*Maurice Cauchi*



A mad scramble to build tall buildings of at least seven stories where grass used to grow.



Ethiopia has only recently decided on the mammoth exercise of planting a 350 million trees in a single day.



# The Gozo Committee of Health Minutes during the Cholera Epidemic of 1837

JOSEPH GALEA

## Introduction

In the seventeenth century frequent pandemics of bubonic plague ravaged the populations of Europe, North Africa and Asia as far as China (Hays, 2005: 103; Brook, 1999: 163), while the nineteenth century world was tormented with wave after wave of cholera pandemics. The relative ease of population mobility across the vast empires in the dawn of the nineteenth century led to spread of diseases across continents and by 1817, cholera left the banks of the Ganges delta to reach Europe and the Americas. The first cholera pandemic started in Jessore, India in July 1817, appeared in Calcutta by September and reached Madras the following summer. After ten years of sowing death in Asia, cholera moved into Europe, affecting Russia in 1830, the United Kingdom in 1831, Marseille in 1835 and Naples and Sicily in the spring of 1837 (Figure 1). By the summer of the same year, it

had reached the Maltese shores, having already massacred 62 million people.

The Government in Malta was inexplicably under the delusion that as Malta was a small island fifty miles distant from the nearest mainland, this epidemic would be unable to cross the channel or would pass by without touching the Maltese shores' (Stilon, 1848: 7-8). Despite all this hope, the first cases of certified cholera broke out in the Ospizio in Floriana on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1837. The Ospizio was an asylum housing 'about seven hundred and fifty aged and impotent persons'. Cholera spread relentlessly among the inmates and by 19<sup>th</sup> June 1837, two hundred of them had died.

The then Governor of Malta Lieutenant General Henry Frederick Bouverie (1783-1852) and his advisors soon realised the gravity of the situation and on 13<sup>th</sup> June he ordered that the Ospizio inmates

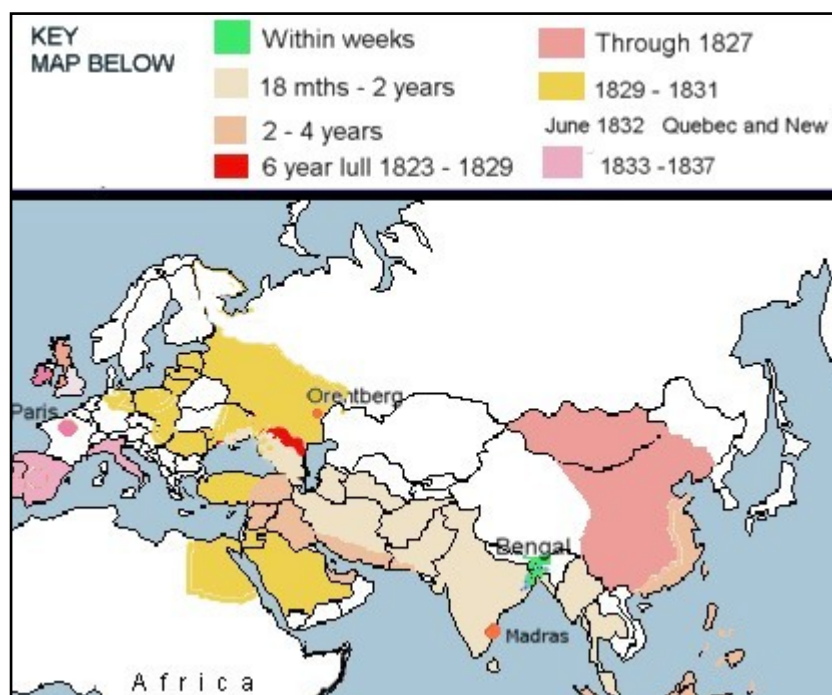


Figure 1. The spread of cholera from India to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mandx/page22cholera.htm> (accessed 27<sup>th</sup> September 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The committee was made up of Count Baldassare Sant (President); Baron Vincenzo Azopardi; Sig. Giuseppe Gauci Azopardi; Dr Clarke, Assistant Inspector of Hospitals; Dr Luigi Gravagna, Police Physician; Dr Liddell, Physician to the Naval Hospital; Nicholas Nugent, Esq. Treasurer to Government; Major Ward, Royal Engineers and George Ward, Secretary.

The Maltese Central Committee met on 22<sup>nd</sup> June (Government Gazette, 1837: 229) and proposed that:

- A well-arranged hospital should be provided for each of the country districts, situated in the highest and most airy part of the Casal.<sup>3</sup> These should be ready to receive the sick, furnished with appropriate remedies and have any requisite comfort.
- Local committees should be formed in each Casal consisting of the:
  - i. Deputy Luogotenente
  - ii. Parish Priest
  - iii. Principal Medical Practitioner
  - iv. Other respectable local inhabitants

These local committees were to have the duty to:

- i. remove filth from streets, courts and cellars,
- ii. visit houses in narrow lanes, damp and low-lying places,
- iii. oversee proper cleanliness,
- iv. ensure proper ventilation in abodes,
- v. discover any disease concealment,
- vi. encourage head of families to apply for medical assistance quickly,
- vii. present the poor and destitute early assistance either by sending them to hospital if they so wish or supply them with medicine at home if they opt to remain there,
- viii. supply the Deputy Luogotenente with printed instruction for the treatment of the disease,
- ix. trust to ‘animate the zeal of medical men’ (Government Gazette, 1837: 229).

A *Comitato di Salute* for Gozo was formed on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1837 and the minutes from the committee meetings are found in a manuscript located at the Gozo Public Library in Victoria (Figure 2). The contents of this volume are the subject of this monograph.

The *Comitato* was formed following “*una deputazione degli abitanti del Rabbato di questa isola (Gozo)*” to the Lieutenant Governor “*per pregarlo di aver la bontà di prendere in*

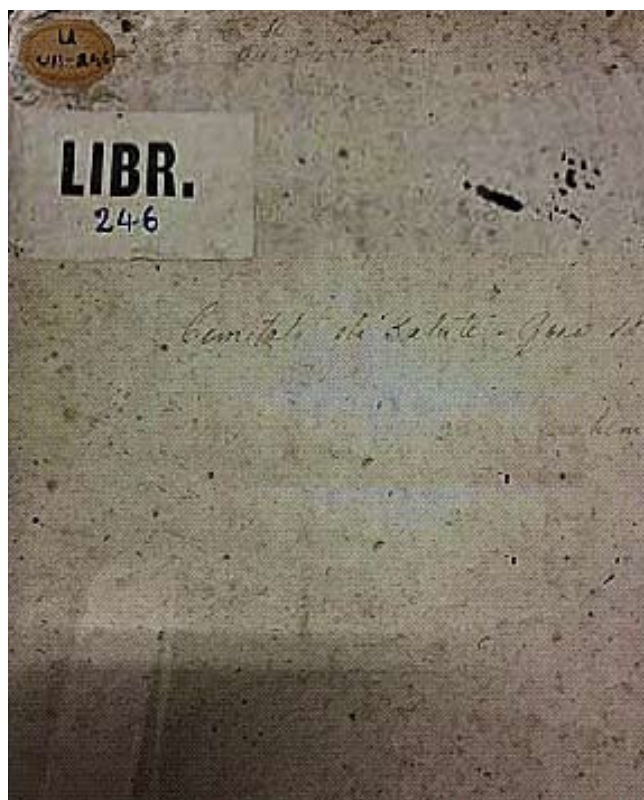


Figure 2. Manuscript Number 246 with minutes from the meeting of the *Comitato di Salute di Gozo*.

*sua considerazione lo stato presente di salute nell'Isola di Malta, come venisse rappresentato nella Notificazione di Governo della 19 del corrente mese, onde compiacersi di adottare quelle tali misure che posso essere richieste dall'esigenza del caso...*” to help manage cholera in Gozo.

The *Comitato* was made up of Magistrate Giovanni Battista Schembri (President), Mr James Somerville, Dr Eduardo Dingli, the Reverend Pro-Vicar, Canon Fr Publius Gauci, Father Guardian Pelagio, Dr Michel'Angelo Mizzi, Dr Eduardo Mallia, Dr Giuseppe Cutajar and Giovanni Montanaro. Dr Fortunato Mizzi was Committee Secretary and he kept the minutes of the meetings.<sup>4</sup> It was decided that it should meet every day at the Lieutenant Governor's Office in Rabat and at any hour of the day if there was the necessity. It also had to report its activities to the Lieutenant Governor of Gozo Major C.A. Bayley C.M.G

The Gozo Comitato met on the same day (21<sup>st</sup> June) at 5.30pm and established rules on the same lines

<sup>3</sup> Village.

<sup>4</sup> The Comitato di Salute del Gozo (1837) Manuscript at the Gozo Library.

as those that had been published in Malta. The rules issued on the 21<sup>st</sup> June stated that:

1) From then on, the dead should be buried at the cemeteries and not in churches with the exception of those who had their private tomb and the burial had to be under *sette palmi di terra* plus the necessary quantity of *calcina*<sup>5</sup> and always in the presence of a Police Sergeant who will make sure that all is done according to the rules. However, if someone wants to use their personal burial plot he must obtain permission from the *Comitato* – in the knowledge that this burial might be prohibited or controlled in case of cholera or suspected cholera, depending on what the committee decides in each particular circumstance.

2) The Lieutenant Police Officer of Rabat (Gozo) and the Deputy Lieutenants of the casals must inform the *Comitato* of all the suspected cases and deaths that occur in the districts they are responsible for and the parishes are prohibited to move or intern the cadavers without prior written permission from the Committee of Health.

3) Every morning the medical practitioners must report any cases in their care – which report should be given straight away in cases of death or suspected cholera.

4) All church burials must be well sealed.

5) Due to the current circumstances the *Magistrato del Mercato* is requested to pay special attention to the state and quality of fish, cured meat and other alimentary items that are being sold to the public and to perform frequently the obligatory inspection accompanied by one of the medics who will be appointed by the Committee for Health.<sup>6</sup>

The Gozo Health Committee reconvened the following day at 9.00 a.m. and released further notifications. These included a proposal to

designate well-ventilated buildings that are not far from the habitations in each of the localities to serve as hospitals in case cholera appears on the island and that these hospitals are adequately equipped where possible. At this sitting, they identified such buildings in each locality<sup>7</sup> and suggested that each hospital should have a designated doctor, priest and nurses who should report in their locality in the event of a case of suspected cholera. If a case of cholera or possible cholera arises, the stricken should be taken to these local hospitals and if the person could not or would not be transferred, the doctors and nurses are to offer all the assistance the patient can have in his own house. However, if the house of the affected is small and crowded, it was advisable that the persons living under the same roof are evacuated. In the same sitting the committee recommended the division of Rabat and its districts and the villages into sectors and to designate a person for each sector to execute the instructions of the same committee in preparation for the possible spread of cholera to Gozo. The committee also suggested that the Police Lieutenant of Rabat and the District Deputy Lieutenants should keep records and thoroughly inspect all habitations, the location and types of any animals kept, and if any animal dung is stored indoors or outdoors. They should then report their findings to the committee mentioned.<sup>8</sup>

At 11.30 a.m. of 23<sup>rd</sup> June, after confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting, the Lieutenant Governor appointed Captain Whyte of the 70<sup>th</sup> Regiment<sup>9</sup> to the *Comitato*. A letter of invitation was sent to Captain Whyte at the Chambray Barracks (Figure 3). During the same meeting the Lieutenant Governor presented the committee members an extract from the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1834 issue of the Malta Government Gazette, for distribution across the island. The extract carried an address with instructions to the people of Gibraltar who were visited by cholera in 1834. This was sent to the Government of Malta in 1834 in preparation for the arrival of the deadly cholera.

<sup>5</sup> Lime mortar

<sup>6</sup> Dr Michel' Angelo Mizzi was appointed for a week at the same committee sitting.

<sup>7</sup> These included the Conservatorio delle Zitelle in Rabat, Casa di Ghain Lukin in Casal Caccia (Xagħra), Casa di Don Alessio Cauchi in Xeuchia, Casa del Paris in Sannat, Casa di Don Fortunato at Nadur, Unnamed House vicina alla chiesa in Cala, Forte Garzes in Hain Sielem, Casa di Don Gio Maria Cini in Zebbug and Casa del Dr Cassar in Garbo.

<sup>8</sup> Victoria, Gozo, Gozo Public Library, 'Manuscript with Notamenti of the Comitato della Salute', Gozo' (1837) fols. 3r-4r.

<sup>9</sup> Also called the Surrey Foot Regiment and was deployed to Malta in July 1836 and left for the West Indies in January 1838.



On the following day the committee recommended that the slaughterhouse would be relocated from the centre of Rabat to a place distant from residential areas. The committee did not meet on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June 1837 but reconvened on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> at 5.30 p.m. and in the presence and approval of the Lieutenant Governor decided that:

1. Two committee members should carry out a thorough visit to the *Aromaterie* on the island to decide whether the drugs and medication were of good or bad quality and if they are of bad quality they should be thrown away. Also these members

were to check if these places are well stocked with cholera medications and then report their findings to the committee.

2. Since at that moment, the casals were not able to follow the first directive from the 21<sup>st</sup> June with regard to the burial of the dead outside the churches, it was recommended that they continue to be buried in churches with the proviso that the rules of the said directive are followed. This would not apply to Rabbato and its limits because they have a spacious and convenient cemetery.

3. The Committee members read the report by the central committee in Malta issued on 20<sup>th</sup> June and published on 22<sup>nd</sup> June in the Government Gazette and provided by the Lieutenant Governor and took the necessary measures to promulgate it immediately around the island.

The meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> June appointed two committee members, Dr Michel'Angelo Mizzi and Mr G. Montanaro, to visit the island's *Aromaterie* as was decided and discussed in the doctors' reports on the state of the health of the island.

The Gozo Health Committee had to prepare the buildings in Rabat and the casals to turn them into cholera hospitals, designate medical personnel to manage these hospitals and look after communities living in the casals and nominate various other persons as needed in preparation for the likely outbreak spread to Gozo. On the 28<sup>th</sup> June, the Gozo committee members asked the Central Health Committee in Malta for financial support for these reasons.

Giovanni Battista Schembri, president of the *Comitato* on the 29<sup>th</sup> June formally thanked Canon Don Giovanni Battista Ellul for his zeal both as an ecclesiastic and as a citizen in accepting the committee's decision to utilize the *Conservatorio delle Zitelle* as a cholera hospital in case '*si manifestasse in questa isola il morbo che affligge l'Isola di Malta*'.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> July the Committee met at 11.00 a.m. and decided that Maria Cassar<sup>10</sup> who might have been infected with cholera, could not be buried in

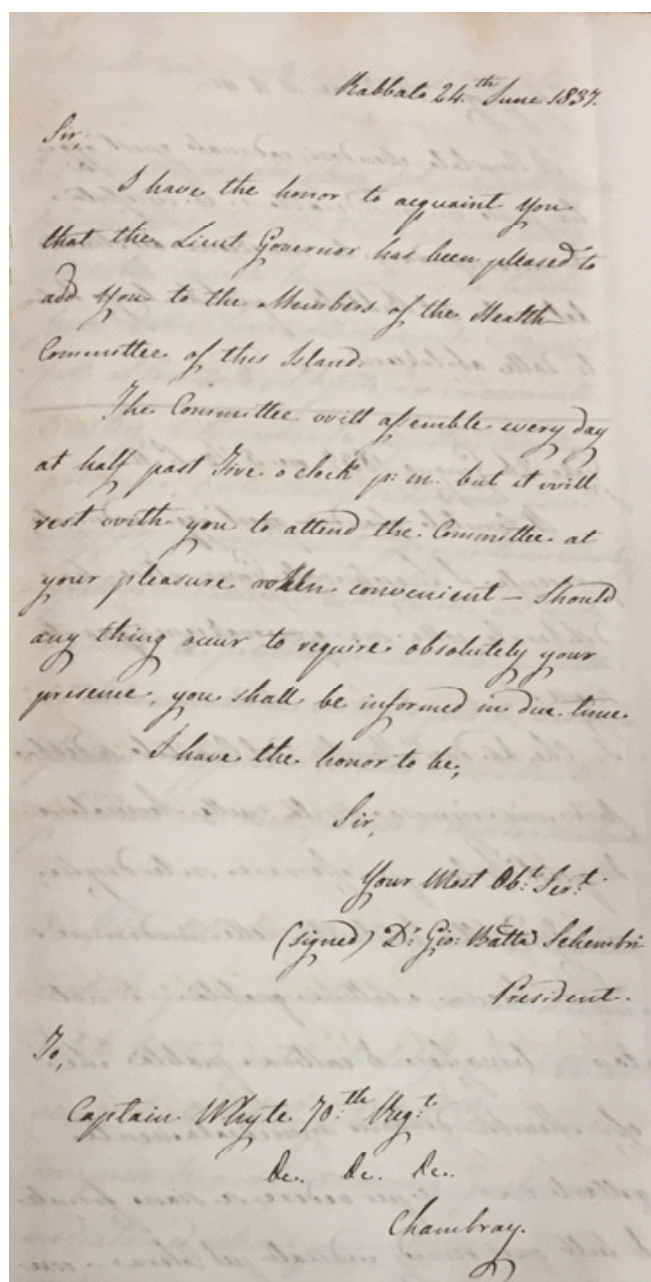


Figure 3. Invitation letter to Captain Whyte of the 70th Regiment to become a member of the *Comitato della Salute* of Gozo.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Cassar was not included in the list of patients who died from cholera which appears at the end of this same report.

the Matrice in Rabat in burial number 45 allocated by Archpriest Cutajar to Eduardo Busuttil, the husband of the dead woman's sister.<sup>11</sup> In the same sitting the committee asked the Lieutenant Governor for 84 pounds sterling so that *Casa San Calcedonio* (Figure 4) in Rabat be refurbished to be able to receive the inmates of the *Conservatorio delle Zitelle* (Figure 5).<sup>12</sup> It was also on the same day that the first casualty to cholera in Gozo was

recorded. The committee duly informed Lieutenant Governor Bayley that Dr Cutajar reported the first case of cholera in person of Giuseppa Falzon '*una povera disgraziata e povera indigente*' and the committee agreed with the report's conclusion.

The committee's concerns, when it met on 8<sup>th</sup> July, were mainly to organise the medical doctors on the island so as to act promptly when cases of



Figure 4. Casa di San Calcedonio received the inmates from the conservatorio delle Zitelle.



Figure 5. Conservatorio delle Zitelle transformed into a cholera hospital.

<sup>11</sup> The decision was based on examining the contract between Busuttil and the archpriest which attested that the burial ground could be used by Eduardo Busuttil and his family. Maria Cassar, being the sister of his wife, was not consanguineous and was not from his family.

<sup>12</sup> Comitato di Salute, Gozo, 1837, fols 8v -9r.



cholera were noted. They assigned each of the seven doctors available different locations and assignments (Table 1).

In addition, Dr M. Angelo Mizzi, Dr Cutajar, Surgeon Montanaro and Dr Sammut were each assigned ‘*un uomo a loro servizio*’ who would be paid a shilling a day on the days he was employed. All designated doctors were to commence work the following day. The deputy lieutenants of the casali were each urged ‘*senza alcun ritardo*’ to choose locations for cemeteries in their own area of responsibility and report straight away to the Comitato.

There is no mention in the minutes as to how many, if any of the cholera hospitals in the casals were operational. Although many patients listed in the manuscript were treated ‘*in ospedale*’, there is no mention of which specific cholera hospital was active in contrast to the ones in Malta, which were very active (Government Gazette, 1837: 233).

The first report regarding cases of cholera was presented to the Gozo committee on 9<sup>th</sup> July and covered the cases from 6<sup>th</sup> July to 8.00 a.m. on the 9<sup>th</sup> July and from then on there was going to be a daily report up to 8.00 a.m. Copies of these reports were sent to the central committee in Malta. In the afternoon the committee decided with urgency to appoint four priests to provide immediate religious

assistance to the sick and dying from cholera. Two of these priests were named as Don Ludovico Formosa and Canon Deacon Giuseppe Cefai.

During the meeting of Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> July, on the suggestion of Captain Whyte, the committee decided to appoint committees in the casals made up of the parish priest, the deputy lieutenant of the same locality and one or two prominent persons from the village. These local committees were to report to the *Comitato della Salute* about the cholera situation in their respective localities and receive instructions from the same committee. This proposition was communicated to the deputy lieutenants and they had to appear at the committee meeting in 48 hours with the names they had selected for the said local committees. On Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July the deputy lieutenants named the persons they had selected to serve on these local committees (Table 2).

When the government through the *Comitato* during the 21<sup>st</sup> July sitting asked the doctors to negotiate their payment, all the doctors answered that they were happy to accept any offer the government was pleased to establish and they all signed this declaration (Figure 6).<sup>13</sup> The committee was consistent in its ruling against home burials and on 30<sup>th</sup> July it denied the permit to bury Carmela Pace, who died from cholera, in her house.

Doctors	Assignments and Locations
Drs Mangion and Mallia and Surgeon LaSperanza	Civil and Cholera Hospitals; The district of Rabat, Gran Castello and their surrounding area.
Dr Michel Angelo Mizzi	The districts of Garbo (Għarb) and Żebbuġ and their surrounding area.
Dr Cutajar	The district of Casal Caccia (Xagħra) and its surrounding area.
Surgeon Montanaro	The districts of Nadur, Qala and Għajnsielem and their surrounding area and Comino.
Dr Sammut	The districts of Xewkija and Sannat and their surrounding area.

Table 1. Assignment of doctors during the cholera epidemic in Gozo.

<sup>13</sup> The Comitato di Salute del Gozo (1837) Manuscript at the Gozo Library fol. 12<sup>r</sup> “*La risposta delli medici e’ stata la seguente- Del Dott M.A. Mizzi – Io sono contento di tutto cio che il Governo si e’ compiacuto di stabilire*” Dr G.S. Mangion, Dr E. Mallia, Sig Speranza, Dr G Cutajar and Dr Sammut followed suit and signed the declaration.



The population of Gozo was 16,534 in the beginning of 1837<sup>14</sup> and the rate of 743 afflictions

345 patients succumbed to the disease but more than half (395) survived up to the end of August (Figure 11). The mortality rate from cholera in Gozo up to 31<sup>st</sup> August was 47% of those afflicted. Data from other sources shows that the mortality rate for the three summer months (July- September) was 359 of 804 patients (46%) (Chetcuti, 1837: 13). The mortality rate was therefore less than that of Malta, which was 3,893 of 7,981 or 51% (Chetcuti, 1837: 13). Possible contributions to a better outcome of

Casi di Colera nel Pers.			
Dati. 6. Luglio alle 11. Agosto 1837. Lat <sup>na</sup>			
	Nome	Pa.	Colera
			giornate
1	Luigia B. Giuseppe Bello	Ballate 12. Luglio	12
2	" 7. Maria Teresa	"	9. Luglio 12. giornate
3	" 8. Maria Felice	"	8. 12. giornate
4	Salvatore Agostini	"	8. 12. giornate
5	Giuseppe Agostini	Torino	16. 12. giornate
6	Emmanuel. Maria	Torino	9. 12. 12
7	Maria Battaglia	Idem	9. 12. 12
8	" 9. Maria Teresa	Idem	9. 12. 12
9	Salvatore Teresa	Ballate 11. Luglio	12. giornate
10	Alfonso Canale	"	16. 12. 12
11	Francesco Debonis	"	9. Luglio 12
12	Giuseppe Debonis	"	12. 17. Luglio
13	" 10. Giovanni Agostini	Torino	11. Luglio 12. giornate
14	Salvatore Debonis	Ballate 12. Luglio	12
15	" 11. Maria Teresa	Ballate 22. 12.	12

Figure 7. The first 15 consecutive patients on the list of patients afflicted by cholera.

Names of the Persons who have offered their services to the  
 Continental Congress and to the Committee of Health in Gen.  
 1777. 26<sup>th</sup> June, M<sup>r</sup>. Vincente Lopez  
 " " M<sup>r</sup>. Vicente Lopez  
 27<sup>th</sup> " M<sup>r</sup>. Vicente Lopez  
 30<sup>th</sup> " M<sup>r</sup>. Luigi Lallaja  
 " " M<sup>r</sup>. Fortunato Miro  
 " " Alessio Sammartino M.D.  
 " " Adriano Miotto M.D.  
 " " M<sup>r</sup>. Luigi Lallaja  
 1<sup>st</sup> July M<sup>r</sup>. Antonio Miotto  
 2<sup>d</sup> " M<sup>r</sup>. Luigi Pace  
 " " M<sup>r</sup>. Donato Todde  
 3<sup>d</sup> " M<sup>r</sup>. Paolo Paolo Lopez  
 4<sup>th</sup> " M<sup>r</sup>. Luigi DeStefano  
 5<sup>th</sup> " M<sup>r</sup>. Guglielmo Mattia.

---

G. F. V. Batta Lombardi  
 President

H. Miotto  
 Conf. del Congress

Figure 8. The list of honour of volunteers who helped in the fight against cholera.

<sup>14</sup> [https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Historical Statistics/Malta Blue Books/ Documents/1836 chapter13.pdf](https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Historical%20Statistics/Malta%20Blue%20Books/Documents/1836%20chapter13.pdf) (accessed 1 May 2019).



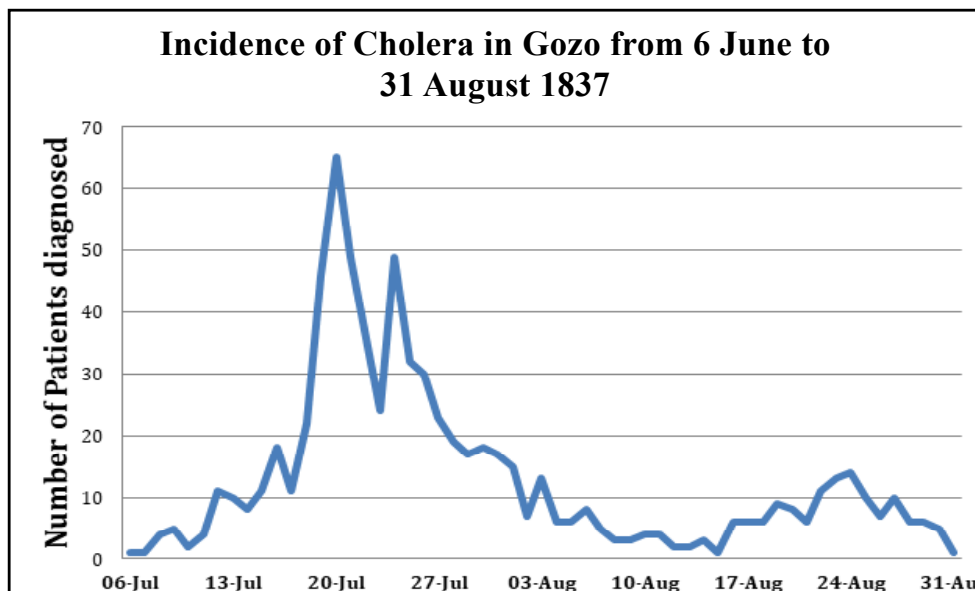


Figure 9. Cases of cholera diagnosed in July and August of 1837.

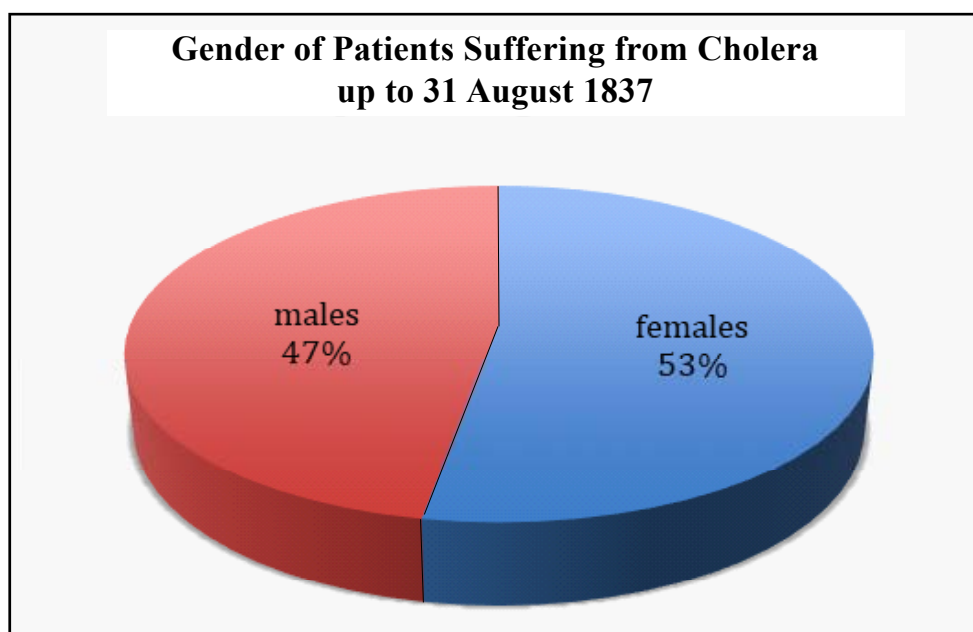


Figure 10. Gender of patients suffering from cholera in July and August 1837.

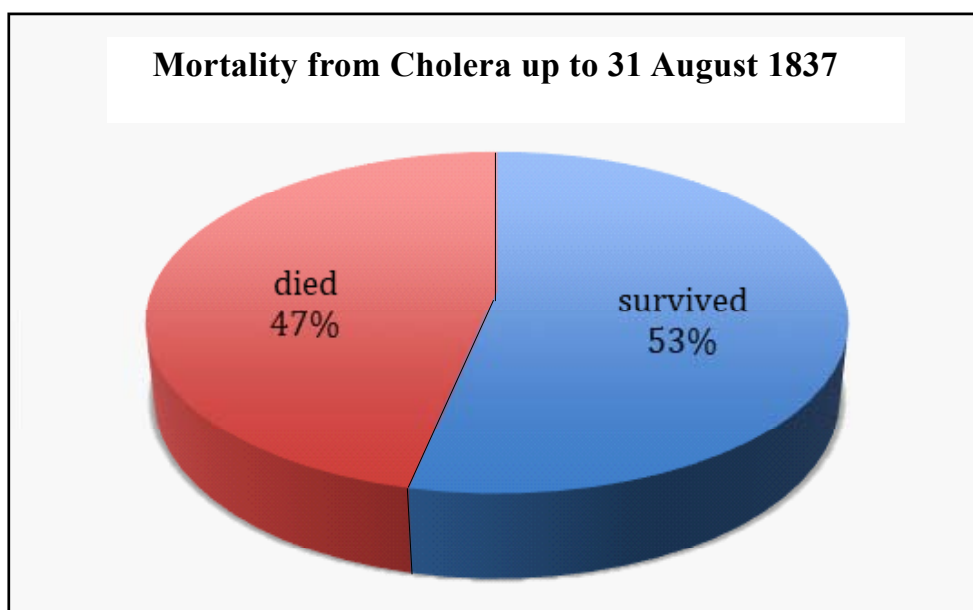


Figure 11. Mortality from cholera in Gozo occurring in July and August 1837.

Districts of Gozo	Cholera Cases	Population 1842 census (Bezzina, 1985: 342)
Rabat, Castello, Kercem and area*	380	4904 (7.7)§
Xagħra	180	1720 (10.4)
Xewkija	77	1391 (5.5)
Sannat and Munxar	39	899 (4.3)
Żebbuġ and Għasri	9	720 (1.25)
Nadur, Qala, Għajnsielem	20	3295 (0.61)
Għarb	4	1413 (0.28)
Ospizio and Ospedali civili	15	-
Others	13	-

\*Belliegha (17), Għajn Qatet (7), Hammimiet (1), Wied Sara (1), Wara s-Sur (1), Għammiesa (3), Għajn Tuta (2), Mandraġġ (1), Lunzjata (4), Hamrija (8) u Fontana (41).  
§ These percentages are only indicative because the cholera epidemic occurred five years earlier.

Table 3. Location of habitation of cholera patients in Gozo for July and August 1837.

cholera patients in Gozo include the preparation by the Lieutenant Governor and the *Comitato di Salute* before the epidemic touched Gozo as well as the cleaner air in Gozo.

The distribution of cholera cases in Gozo shows the majority of patients to come from Rabat and its surrounding territories, Xagħra and Xewkija. The incidence of cholera in Għarb, Nadur, Qala and Għajnsielem was low. The closest census to 1837 is the first recorded census five years later in 1842. Although the population is different from 1837 the above will give solid evidence where people lived in those years. No huge changes in habitation sizes would have changed in five years in those days. The incidence per district cannot be worked accurately but an approximate indication is possible. So one can assume crudely that the highest incidence was in Xagħra followed by Rabat, Xewkija and Sannat. Għarb has the lowest incidence and Nadur, Qala Għajnsielem and Żebbuġ show a relatively low incidence (Table 3).

In conclusion, the Gozo Public Library manuscript sheds important light on the way the first cholera epidemic in Gozo was tackled, including measures taken and the cleaner environment prevailing in Gozo at the time.

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## The *Capitula* of Gozo, Part II

STANLEY FIORINI

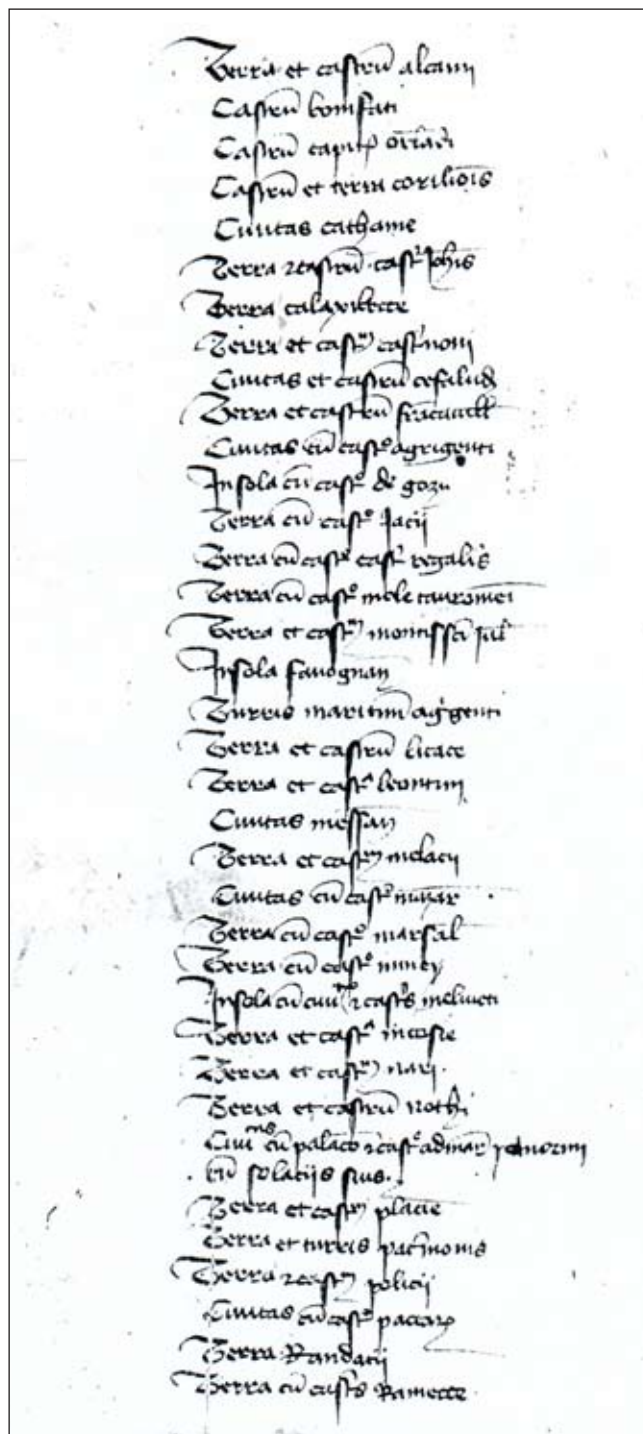
## Introduction

Having seen, in the first part of this discussion of the Gozo *Capitula* (Fiorini, 2018), the general framework within which this genre of legislation was produced, including an overview of the various Ambassadors representing Gozo before the King or his Viceroy in Sicily, it is fitting now to deal in more detail with the issues that were treated in these *capitula*. As in the first part of this article, there will be several references to the *Documentary Sources of Maltese History* series which will be briefly referred to as *DSMH*.

The last troubled decades of the XIV century were characterised by the rebellion against the monarchy in Sicily, which territory the *Quattro Vicari* – the four rebel barons – partitioned among themselves, with these islands forming part of the “tyranny” of the Chiaromonte. The resumption of royal power by King Martín I ushered in a period of sedateness in which the *Universitates* of these islands could again come into their own. Their workings are well evidenced by the earliest of the *capitula*. The set of *capitula* of 1409 makes reference to the important decision taken in 1398 to incorporate these islands within the royal demanum, an aspiration which the Maltese and Gozitans cherished very dearly. The first of these reannexations goes back to November 1198, even if the existence of the *Universitas* is datable even earlier to the days of Roger II (reigned 1130-1154) as evidenced by the VI *capitulum* of 1450.

## The Dawn of the XV Century

This earliest set of *capitula* of 1409 highlights, in *capitula* III and VI, another very significant aspect of the relationship of these islands to the demanium, namely the privilege that had been enjoyed by these islands for the previous half a century or so, that all excise dues on wheat and other imported foodstuffs from Sicily had been waived, as for other demanial towns, by the monarch. The concession to the Gozitan *Universitas* is explicitly asserted in a document of 24 March 1373, confirming an earlier



Facsimile of ASP Real Cancellaria 37, f. 43<sup>v</sup> (3 October 1398).  
The Syracusean Parliament determines those communities,  
including Malta and Gozo, which were to belong in perpetuity to  
the royal *demanium*.

concession by King Ludovico [*DSMH* II/1: 72]. This matter of free importation of grain from Sicily was often contested by the lesser Sicilian authorities and continued to bedevil these islands even after



the arrival of the Order of St John [DSMH III/2: 1, cap. III (briefly, 1: III), and 3: II, 7: IX, 8: III, 40: II, 41: XIV].

The peace and tranquillity that followed in the wake of 1398 was soon to be broken when rebellion again reared its ugly head. With the demise of the two Martini and the passing of the administration of Sicily into the hands of Queen Bianca, the widow of Martín I, the dormant barons saw this as their opportunity to make a second attempt at grabbing the power that had been wrenched from their hands by Martín I. The Justiciar of Sicily, Bernat Cabrera Count of Modica, made Gozo his headquarters of operations against Bianca whose cause, in these islands, was taken up by Franciscu Gattu from Mdina. Gattu managed to oust Cabrera from Gozo and to reduce the island to royal control. His reward from Bianca is enshrined in the *capitula* of 1411, not to mention the ‘prize’ of a high-handed remission from a disgusting crime [DSMH II/2:137; III/2: 2].

At this time Gozo was being victimized by both Muslims and Christians alike. Capitulum 4:1 of 1419 declares unequivocally how the fate of Malta was soon to follow the *finali excidiu et destructioni in la maynera di Gozu* (the final annihilation and destruction that had been Gozo’s lot). Doubtlessly, reference was being made to the recent unchecked, bold incursions on Gozo by Moors that had even burnt the *madia et barca dilu passu* – the ferry-boat

that connected the two islands – in 1405 [DSMH II/2:75.]. For this reason a strong plea was being made for the construction of a tower on Comino, the island that had been turned into a pirates’ den where they could hide unchallenged to pounce on unsuspecting shipping plying the waters of the Gozo Channel. Detailed plans are given in the 1419 *capitula* but nothing came of them for full two centuries.

There was to be no respite for the islanders. One of the reasons why work on the construction of the Comino tower was not under way was that King Alfonso had his mind more set on warring in Africa and on the continent, needing all available funds especially for his Neapolitan *amprisa*. This money-devouring campaign led the monarch to pawn his property to abetting magnates who were willing and able to exploit the situation. Alfonso’s demanial towns in Sicily fell easy prey to this deliberate policy – Aci (in 1420 was pawned for 10,000 florins), Sutera (for 700 *uncie*), Naro (for 15,000 florins), Marsala (for 4,300 florins) and the Castrum of Termini (for 600 *uncie*, all pawned in 1421), Taormina (for 550 *uncie* before 1423), Licata (for 3237 *uncie*) and Sciacca (both pawned in 1423), Reggio Calabria (for 3,000 ducats in 1425) and others later – were all exchanged for ready money (Bresc, 1986, II, 856. Valentini, 1941). This policy had disastrous repercussions on the Maltese Islands when these, like their counterparts in Sicily, were pawned to Consalvo Monroy in 1420-21 for no

less than 30,000 florins. The reaction of the Maltese was to rebel against their new overlord and preferred to fork out of their own pockets the exorbitant sum paid for the islands in order to rid themselves of the oppressive presence and be reintegrated within the royal demanium. This meant that the Maltese had to produce – *di intra li ossa nostri* (from the very marrow of our bones) [15: VI.] – the equivalent of 4,500 *uncie*, a sum which amounted



Torre Cabrera, Pozzallo. The seat of Bernat Cabrera.

to more than the total tax exacted from the entire Kingdom of Sicily in 1434 and 1439 (Dalli, 2002, 152-5. Bisson, 1986, 142-4). Without disclosing his sources (probably the *Archivo de la Corona de Aragón*, Barcelona) Dalli asserts that the first signs of rebellion actually sprouted in Gozo in 1425 and only a year later spread to Malta (Dalli, 2006, 205). By March 1427 Alfonso had become alerted to the smouldering unrest in these islands. As a result of negotiations in the Spanish Court, as detailed in the *Capitula* of 1427 and 1429 [DSMH III/2: 5-7], these islands were again reannexed to the royal demanum with a solemn promise on the part of Alfonso never again to be separated therefrom and the significant concession to the islanders of the right to resist, even *manu forti*, any attempts by the monarch and his successors so to separate them.

Words come so easy, even if engraved on beautifully decorated diplomas on parchment! Within a decade another attempt was being made this time to pawn Gozo to a Sicilian magnate in 1440. But the *manu forti* clause came in very handy and when the threat to enforce it was brandished the aggressor had to climb down [DSMH II/2: 454].

But before this came about these islands hardly had time to breathe after the Monroy incident when yet another major disaster was to befall them. Already during Monroy's rule, in the first indiction [1423-24] the later *capitula* of May 1437 provide evidence of a Moorish attack on these islands [DSMH III/2: 13]. In retaliation, Alfonso's brother Pedro had led an expedition against Kerkenna in 1424, that triggered off further Hafsids aggression against Aragon (Luttrell, 1975, 51). This culminated in a massive onslaught in September 1429 on the Maltese Islands, the unprotected soft under-belly of the kingdom, that all but took the islands, pushing the attack to the very walls of Mdina and carrying off into slavery no less than 3,500 captives, a third of the entire population of these islands (Mifsud, 1918-19. Valentini, 1937). In particular, the *capitula* of 30 October 1432 speak of the *extrema paupertati et distrucioni ki havi patutu* [8: III] ... *per la vinuti dili Mori ... perdio sua bestiame per modu ki non si po siminari, et la insula e povira et distructa* [8: IV; 9: II]. The Gozitan retaliation to the attack is encapsulated in the valour of one person, Franciscus de Platamone of Gozo, noted for posterity when, for the wounds he suffered in the defence of his native



The Gozitan coastline near *Mgarr* harbour where King Alfonso's ship berthed on 20 September 1432.

island, he was made Captain of Gozo for the year 1431-32 [DSMH II/2: 292].

The King did respond positively, however, with a retaliatory attack on Jerba, an expedition which he led in person in 1432 (Cerone, 1909-10). The tit-for-tat appears to have worked and a period of a fairly stable truce was established [DSMH II/2: 409; 496]. From this time there surfaces an interesting document in the form of a letter that the King wrote to his Gozitan *Secretus* from on board his galley that was berthed in *Mgarr*, Gozo when, returning from Jerba, the King stopped for a short while in these islands in September of that year [DSMH II/2: 484].

The Moorish invasion was not the end of foreign aggression against these islands. There were also Christian aggressors to deal with, Genoese enemies of Aragon and Calabrian pirates who found these islands an easy target if not always a fat prey. The Maltese *capitula* of 1437 show that there was real fear of an impending Genoese attack. Maltese who happened to be abroad at the time were recalled and islanders were prohibited from leaving for fear



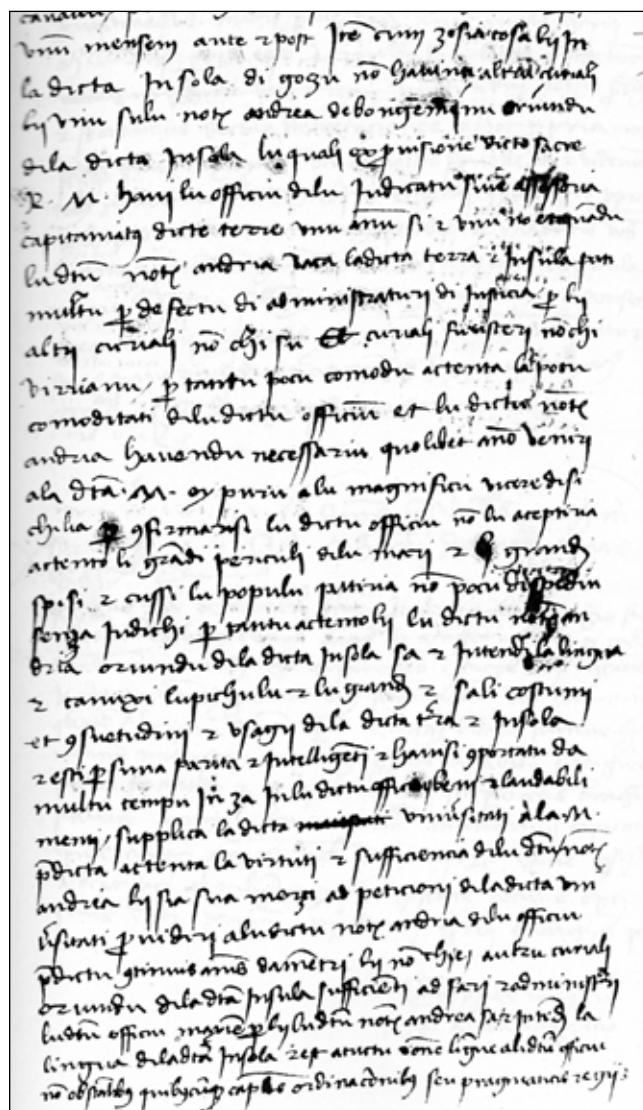
of weakening defences [13: VI, XV]. The Gozitan *capitula* of 1439 make much of their sufferings at the hands of both the Genoese enemies of the King – *regii inimichi maxime li Jenuysi [ki] iza arripanu spissu* – [DSMH III/1: 18.] (Wettinger, 1993: 5, 23) and of Calabrian pirates who ransacked the island and carted away all their sea-craft, reducing the island to a near state of siege [15: II, IV]. This fear from the perils of the sea spurred the Ambassadors to petition repeatedly for a minimisation of forced travel abroad, especially for reasons connected to attendance at the *Magna Regia Curia* [11: VII-IX; 12: III].

## The Lull After the Storm

In spite of this overarching preoccupation with security, Gozitan life somehow managed to show a semblance of normalcy as reflected in the *capitula* of 1443 presented to the Viceroy by Ambassador Cola de Algaria. Pleas were made for a decision to determine the size of a quorum for the Council meetings [18: II], and for a reduction of *ex gratia* appointments by the monarchy [18: III] that, with the foisting of royal favourites on the Council, nibbled away at the free democratic voice of Gozitan voters, keeping local aspirants out of the seat of decision-making. The protection of public rights, including that of free collection of firewood from public land, was also appealed to, and the old grouse that the population was still labouring under the last vestiges of serfdom – the *angaria* of unpaid forced labour on the Castle walls and the night-long vigils at the coast of the *māhras* – could hardly be suppressed [18: VI]. Nor would it have been natural not to make another heartfelt plea for a waiver from the regular *collecta* [18: IV]. This plea for a waiver on taxation figures again in the next set of Gozitan *capitula* which had to be presented in 1450 by the Augustinian Fra Matteo Zurki [20: V]. The reason backing this appeal was again the precarious state of the island's defences [20: III], and an attempt to obtain a remission for the 'municipal sin' of unilaterally whittling away 16 *uncie* for this purpose from those intended for the last *collecta* [20: IV]. The ever-present threat of an imminent Moorish invasion and the ruinous state of the island's defences are stressed at the outset: *havimu nova et informacioni viridica comu lu perfidu Moru Re di Tunisi fa grossa armata di quaranta fusti in susu contra quisti insoli et aminaza*

*crudilimenti a quista insula* [20: II] ... *li nostri mura su in maiori parte dirruppati et tristi et peyu di armi ... et per consequens havimu grandissimu terruri et pagura dila dicta armata* [20: III] (We have secure and reliable new information that the perfidious Moor, the King of Tunis, is preparing a formidable armada of forty and more galleys cruelly threatening these islands ... and our walls are in a ruinously sad state completely lacking in arms ... on account of which we are dead terrified of this armada).

The Gozitan *capitula* of four years later, presented by Joannes Urgelles, concentrate more on the day-to-day occurrences of the rhythm of life in Gozo,



Facsimile of ASP Real Cancellaria 90, f. 203 (14 May 1453). The fifth plea of the *capitula* presented by Gozitan Ambassador Joannes Urgelles to His Majesty King Alfonso requesting that Notary Andreas Benjamin be allowed to act as the Gozitan Captain's judge on successive years contrary to custom and this because he was the only qualified person on the island to serve: *Lu dictu Notari Andria esti oriundu dila dicta insula, sa et intendi la lingua et canuxi lu pichulu et lu grandi et sa li costumi, consuetudini et usanczi ... et esti persuna perita et intelligenti.*



seeking to find practical solutions to the hundred-and-one small problems that crop up naturally: What is the *Universitas* to do with two Moorish black slaves captured on landing at the coast by the islanders, and claiming that they were deserters from the enemy [24: II]? How is the *Universitas* to deal with several thieves and other miscreants who roam the island for having slipped through the wide-meshed net of existing legislation; how are they to be restrained [24: III]? Can the Gozitan Jewry be made to provide a horse for the defence of the island [24: IV]? ... and ... Can one make an exception to the established custom that no one is to remain in office on two consecutive years, in the case of Notary Andreas de Benjamin the Captain's Judge, for lack of other suitable candidates [24: V]?

### On Resting on One's Laurels

It has been remarked in the first part of this contribution that, during the second half of the XV century, the presentation of *capitula* by the Gozitans was not much in evidence and that one reason for this may have been loss of interest by the existing oligarchy whose narrow concerns were, nonetheless, being well served (Fiorini, 2018: 1). Council remained dominated by a mere handful of homonymously-surnamed, well-ensconced individuals: the Platamone, the De Manuele, the Pontremoli, the Algaria, the Caxaro, the Riera, the Navarra, the Sahona, the Vagnolo and a few others [DSMH II/4: xxxv-xl, Tables I and IV]. The *capitula* constitute the best indictment of their selfishness. In the whole of fifty years down to the start of the XVI century the sum total of three requests was presented to the Viceroy by the Gozitan *Universitas*: (i) a plea that the King should provide a suitable person to fill the post of Island's Captain [29: I]; it should be noted that this request was made after the racket that had seen the Gozitan captaincy monopolised for decades by Francesco Platamone and Antonio Vagnolo had been stopped [DSMH II/2: xvii]; (ii) a plea for tax exemption in 1467 [29: II] when the Maltese islands were down on their knees from a period of prolonged drought (Fiorini, 2010); and (iii) a request in 1479 that foreigners should not be allowed to assume public office unless they had been domiciled on the island for many years; the response to this *capitulum* determined the period of continuous residence to be of five years [32: I].

### The XVI Century Before 1530

With the turn of the century the situation was on the mend and improving. In 1507, the island received royal assent for a confirmation of all privileges that had been granted earlier by previous monarchs [40: I-VI]. In 1516, Ambassador Cola Calabachi, was successful in obtaining a curbing of molestation by the Captain-at-arms of the Gozitan officials and people [45: I-II]; a smooth transfer of the office of surgeon for Gozo from an ageing Joanni Martines to a much younger Bernardo Vincella [45: III]; a sanctioning of a tax on meat like what the Maltese *Universitas* had enjoyed for decades [45: IV]; and a tightening on exemptions from *māhras* duties that had had a very debilitating effect on the island's defence system [45: V]. In 1521 then, Ambassador Antonio Platamone consolidated these acquisitions when he obtained a confirmation from the new Viceroy Ettore Pignatelli of what the same Pignatelli had promised Platamone before his viceregal appointment, that is between 1516 and 1520. These *capitula* included a toning down of Commissioners' fees, a curbing of their extorsions, and an assurance of their suitability, including their being able to communicate through qualified interpreters using the language of the Gozitan people [47: I-II, IV]; an introduction of a method of shortlisting of candidates to public office [47: III]; and (again as had happened in Malta) leave to found a piece of artillery from melted-down, false copper coins [47: V], and a replacement for an absent bombardier [47: VII].

### The Arrival of the Order

The year 1530 revolutionised the government that these islands had known for more than a century. All previous promises of perpetual annexation of these islands with the royal demanum were all thrown to the wind as Charles V ran roughshod over one and all in his determination to rid himself of the responsibility for these precarious islands and pass the baby into the lap of the Order of St John that was eagerly seeking a base for its activities. There were a few ineffectual initial mumblings against this tyrannical decision in the Maltese Council [DSMH III/3: xlvi-xlix]. We assume that something similar had taken place in Gozo, but we cannot be really sure about the Gozitan reactions as the corresponding records from Gozo have not survived. But come

1530 the population had acquiesced to this *fait accompli*. The local celebration with bonfires on the Eve of St John Baptist in June 1530 – so loved ever after by the Maltese – must have won over the locals' hearts!

The Hospitallers had good reason to celebrate. Two days before the bonfires, the Order's representatives and procurators, Fra Ugo de Copponis, *Drapparius* of the Order and Captain-General of its fleet, and Fra Joannes Bonifacius, Bailiff of Manosque and Receiver General of his Order, in the name of Grand Master Philippe de Vilhers Lisle Adam and of the whole Order, had concluded the 'business' of taking over the Maltese Islands, promising the islanders to respect all their customs and privileges. It appears that two distinct documents to this effect were drawn up, one for the *Universitas* of Malta and another for that of Gozo. The latter has survived and is registered in the acts of Notary Pinus Saliba, dated 21 June 1530. Appearing for the Gozitan *Universitas* were *quinque probi viri*, Paulus de li Nasi, *Capitaneus*, Franciscus de Plathamone, Matheus Rapa, Carceraldus Mompalao and Leonardus deli Nasi. As part of the deal, the Gozitan gentlemen even generously waived in favour of His Imperial Majesty the Gozitan contribution of two out of eleven parts of the sum of 30,000 florins which had been paid for the redemption of these islands from the hands of Monroy and which the reigning monarch had to pay back should he go back on his word and alienate these islands once more from the royal demanum, as he was now doing [National Library of Malta [NLM] Lib. MS. 670, ff. 83rv]. It is not clear where this obligation on the part of the king to reimburse the 30,000 florins is documented. Certainly, no such clause exists in the deed of reannexation of the islands to the royal demanum of 3 January 1428 [DSMH II/2: 245].

It appears that the local authorities did not rely on the Commissioners' promises but wanted to hear the confirmation of their privileges from the horse's mouth. A delegation proceeded to Syracuse to have the Grand Master himself sign a declaration to this effect on 16 July 1530 [NLM Univ. 9, ff. 293-294v]. The representatives were Paulus de Nasis and Joannes Calavà whose brief was *per congratularsi seco per la concessione di Malta alla Religione et a riconoscerlo per loro nuovo signore, tutti privilegii ed immunitati dell'Università*. It is not known

how and whether the Gozitan *Universitas* was represented. On 1 September 1530, the document was presented by Notary Julius Cumbo to Nicolaus Saguna and Bernardus Cassar, two of the Jurats of Malta; this does not exclude a similar presentation to the Gozitan *Universitas* which is now lost.

Up to this juncture, the *capitula* are completely silent. But when L'Isle Adam stepped on these islands on 26 October 1530, both *Universitates* made it a point to present themselves to him personally and obtain afresh (in spite of the Syracuse document of 16 July) from his hand detailed written confirmation, in the form of *capitula*, of what his commissioners had already promised them. There have survived various drafts of what the Maltese and Gozitan ambassadors wanted to request from L'Isle Adam [DSMH III/2: 50-53], but no copy with his responses survives. It looks very likely that the attempts at presenting them were many but precious little actually transpired. These draft *capitula* show what the aspirations of the Maltese and Gozitans were at this time and how their way of thinking and acting had not changed, not even now that the situation had metamorphosed completely.

The Gozitan *Universitas* was very quick to react and had actually already prepared a draft set of *capitula* by 11 July 1530 [DSMH III/2: 50], when L'Isle Adam was not yet on the island, but the fact that, very soon afterwards, within the year, these were re-written [DSMH III/2: 52] leads one to think that more mature judgement (or less) had prevailed. Even if these later *capitula* were, likewise and in all probability, never presented, it is worth looking into them to understand the *mens* of the Gozitans behind them. Both sets start with the usual preamble [50: I; 52: I] recommending the *Universitas* and the people to the Grand Master. They also both request the Grand Master to free the people of the burden (*angaria*) of the *maħras* and work on the *maramma* of the Citadel [50: V; 52: III]. They also both treat the usual issues of procurement of wheat for the people [50: IV, VI; 52: XIII]. The third *capitulum* of 1530 [50: III] that aims at ensuring that the Gozitan Captain and his Judge retain their time-honoured rights to *merum et mixtum imperium et gladii potestas*, is reworded in the later set as a plea for the present and future Governors of the Order not to interfere in the running of the Gozitan courts [52: IV] and certain requests concerning the organisation

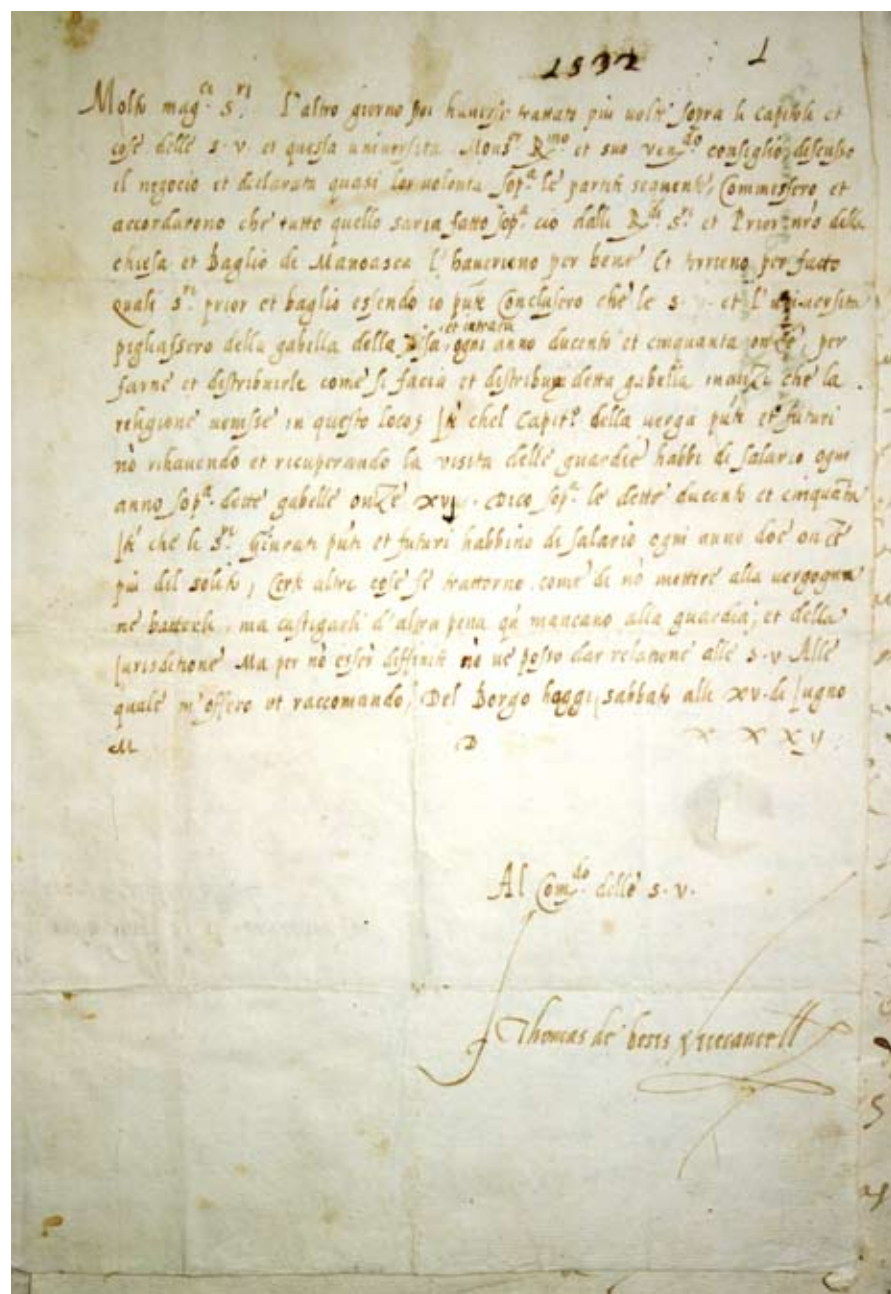
and running of the courts [52: VIII-X]. The blanket original second capitulum requesting preservation and ratification of all previous *capitula*, privileges and preheminences of the Gozitans [50: II] – the *raison d'être* of the intended embassy – disappears altogether, and is replaced by the only concern of the later Jurats, namely that of continuing to syndicate the Captain and his Judge themselves [52: XII].

Further to these, a number of other interesting requests were made, quite a few of which were shared by the contemporary list of pleas of the Maltese *Universitas* [DSMH III/2: 51], datable to July-September indiction III [1529-30]). These include, (i) freedom of travel in and out of the island [52: XI; 51: IV], already hinting at and anticipating the refusal of certain families, both in Malta and in

Gozo, to continue to live under the Order, as in fact was already happening (Fiorini, 1993: 14); (ii) the right for suitable Maltese and Gozitans to become members of the Order in the Langue of Italy [52: II; 51: II]; (iii) a general amnesty from most crimes committed in the past according to the established custom of Princes on assumption of office [52: V; 51: V]; and (iv) a waiver from the payment of the *canuni* on crown lands now devolving to the Order [52: VII], in exchange for which the Maltese *Universitas* offered to present to the Grand Master a peacock every year [51: VI]. (Isn't receiving a peacock as a gift at least as prestigious as receiving a falcon?) The Gozitans also requested a remission from the payment of tithes [52: VII] and from *censuali minuti* [52: VI]; they wanted no new *angarie* to be imposed on the people [51: III], and

reiterated their protection of the Maltese clergy against the foisting of foreigners on the local Church by the Bishop [51: VIII].

The timing and the content of these two sets of draft *capitula* hint at close collaboration between both *Universitates*. Essentially, they were both requesting an exemption from as many burdens as possible and, otherwise, to retain the status quo as they had been doing for a long time, still adducing in their claims the *Constitutiones et Capitula Regni* [53: XI, IV], oblivious of the fact that the new masters now had absolute control. By now it was already a question of survival. The Maltese and Gozitan vain aspirations to knighthoods had quickly evaporated into thin air. Within the first few months the Grand Master's intentions that he was going to run the island as he



Facsimile of NLM Univ. 6, f. 1 (15 June 1532). The terse reply of the Order of St John, over the signature of Fra Thomas Bosio, to the requests of the Maltese and Gozitan *Universitates* pleading for the preservation of their rights and privileges.



pleased and without any interference from anyone were patently clear to all. In a council meeting held on 8 June 1531 the Maltese Jurats expressed their wrath, wanting to protest to L'Isle Adam that he had no right to act as he was wont to do in Rhodes, riding roughshod over all and sundry and, in particular, usurping unto himself the right of dictating regulations governing the running of the watch, in flagrant violation of all of his commissioners', and his own, sworn promises; a letter of protest was drafted by the Jurats [DSMH III/3: 1148]. Over the next few years, there were several protests by the Maltese *Universitas* against the Grand Master's highhanded approach in this and several other issues [DSMH III/2, lxxi-lxxiii]. We can only speculate about similar bones of contention concerning Gozo, but there is no way of proving it, short of the resurfacing of lost Gozitan documentation. This was the beginning of the end of municipal autonomy.

As stated, neither *Universitas* is known to have actually sent its ambassadors with these requests. The reason why becomes obvious from the last set of *capitula* of ca. February 1532 [DSMH III/2: 53]. Although no version of the 1532 *capitula* that included the Grand Master's responses appears to have survived (if it ever existed), it is clear that they were presented and some sort of reaction was given via a letter, dated 15 June 1532, over the signature of Fra Thomas Bosio (later Bishop of Malta but then only Vice Chancellor of the Order) to the Jurats [NLM Univ. 6, f. 1, and Univ. 9, ff. 301rv]. It is very dismissive of the real problems that needed to be tackled concerning the watch, jurisdiction over the parishes and other issues, trying to fob off the requests by a cheap offer of filthy lucre for the officials personally [DSMH III/2: 53].

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Professor Stanley Fiorini, former Head of Mathematics at the University of Malta, has published several works on Malta's medieval history, notably the fifteen-volume *Documentary Sources of Maltese History*. He is now retired Professor Emeritus who, in recognition of his historical output, has been awarded by the same University a Senior Fellowship.

# The Heraldry of the Nobility and Gentry of Gozo

## - From Medieval Times until the Onset of British Rule

### Part 1

CHARLES A. GAUCI

#### What is Heraldry?

Heraldry concerns the study of Coats of Arms, which are simply insignia of identification and which may be personal (and hereditary) or impersonal. Heraldry, in the form we know it today, originated in the second quarter of the XII century. Coats of Arms were essential to identify people on the field of battle in the days of full body armour. They were also very useful for identification purposes in a time of widespread illiteracy. Although the original purpose of heraldry has gone, the science has persisted, mostly as a status symbol.

#### Office of the Chief Herald of Malta

On 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019, upon the recommendation of the Honourable Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary at the Office of The Prime Minister, Heritage Malta, through its subsidiary Heritage Malta Services Ltd, established the Office of **Chief Herald of Arms of Malta**, which now regulates heraldry, both corporate and personal within the Republic of Malta. I have the singular honour of being appointed Malta's first ever Chief Herald.

#### Gozo Historical Background to its Gentry

Prominent among the citizens of Gozo, were its Jurats (*Giurati*) who were elected to an administrative council known as the *Università*, which was founded in 1350. The Electors were chosen from the nobility, landed gentry, honoured citizens, professional people or those exercising a liberal art, secular priests, businessmen and artisans. Jurats were qualified to display Coats of Arms, although their use was largely unregulated. Up until 1551, the *Università*, was presided over by the *Capitano della Verga* (*Hakem*) who had by statute to be a Gozitan elected by the jurats. In 1551, his title was then changed to that of Governor. After

that year, the Grandmaster usually, but not always, appointed a Knight as Governor.

#### The Nobility and Gentry in and of Gozo

Gozo had its own nobility and landed gentry in the upper stratum of society. These two classes provided most of the *Giurati* (Jurats) and *Capitani della Verga* (Civil Governors) of the island. There also existed holders of Maltese titles of nobility based on Gozitan fiefs together with Gozitans awarded titles of nobility in Malta. In a very short article such as this it is not possible to discuss all the elite families or go into any great detail about the ones mentioned. It is also not possible to show all the coats of arms of the families concerned, however interested readers are referred to the many books, which I have written on the subject (*see bibliography*).

#### Aragonese Creations and Some of the Old Titled and Non-Titled “gentle” Families of Gozo

**Asciaq (Ghaxaq, Axac):** Tomasio Axac was created *Regio familiaritas* in 1373 by King Frederick II of Sicily - hence the eagle in chief, on the Asciaq family Arms (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Asciaq family Arms

The Ascias family were originally established in Mdina but left Malta to settle in Gozo, between 1570-1578, so as to escape the attention of the Inquisition. Several prominent Mdina families were embracing the Lutheran doctrine and Don Andrea Axac a practising Lutheran was convicted for harbouring prohibited books. His father, Manfredo, was a Jurat of Mdina where his brother Antonio was *Capitano d'Armi* in 1517. The family was connected by marriage to many other families belonging to the Gozitan gentry such as Apap, Abela, Cuzkeri and Bonici. They founded a rich *primogenitura* which eventually passed into the Bonici family by marriage. They were also related to the Barons of Grua. Dr Martino Ascias was a Jurat in Gozo in 1807. The Tombstone of Dr Felice Axac can be seen at the Gozo Cathedral (here, the Axcias arms are conjoined with those of Apap). He was the major benefactor for the reconstruction of the *Matrice* after the 1693 Earthquake destroyed the previous Cathedral. (see Fig. 2).

**Attardo:** The *Milite* Francesco Attardo, was granted the fief of *Saccaya* in Malta in 1360 and given the privileged status of a royal *familiaritas* in 1372. His descendant Giulio Attardo settled in Gozo



Figure 2: The tombstone of Dr Felice Axac



Figure 3: Attardo family Arms

and in 1601 married Mattea or Marietta Dimech, with issue. He thus started the Gozitan line of the family which intermarried with other noble Maltese families such as Viani and Fiteni and with the Gozitan gentry (Jurat) families such as d'Anastasio, Seychel, Agius and Pace. The family Arms are shown in Fig. 3.

**Avola:** Don Carlo d'Avola, "Captain of Naxxar", 1570-1580 fought in the Great Siege of 1565 displaying great heroism in the fighting near Mosta. On 5 June 1569 he was granted the right to bear arms by King Philip II of Spain, for his services in the Siege. His arms displayed two military belts bearing two moors' heads. (Fig. 4). His descendants lived in Gozo.



Figure 4:  
Avola family Arms



**Barberi:** Antonio Barberi, who arrived in Malta c. 1550 with his siblings, was the son of Vincenzo Barberi of Sicily. He was created a Baron in 1562 and having become a widower, married in Gozo (1566) his second wife, Isabella Sceberras. Most of their descendants settled in Gozo. For the family, Arms see Fig. 5.



Figure 5: Barberi family Arms

**Bonnici/Bonici:** Giacomo Bonnici/Bonici of Florence, Italy, moved to Gozo in 1356 and married Selvagia Doria, with issue. Their descendants settled in Gozo from where they eventually moved to Malta. (Created Barons of Qlejja, 1737). Many members of this family served as Jurats in Gozo between 1400 and 1721. For the family Arms see Fig. 6



Figure 6: Bonnici/ Bonici family Arms

**Bocchio:** Bocchio di Bocchio, was granted the fief of La Grua in Gozo, in 1347. He married Beatrice Mileto. His descendant, Elvira di Bocchio, 6th and last holder of the fief of Grua (Aragonese creation) sold it to the Order in 1541. She married (c 1530), Damiano Psinga. Their daughter, Grazia Psinga married Giovanni Carbott in 1559; their descendant, Saverio Carbott Testaferrata was granted the fief of Grua by the Order in 1794. The Family Arms are shown in Fig. 7.



Figure 7: Bocchio family Arms

**Bordino:** The first reference to this family (in Malta) is to the *Milite*, Federico de Bordino, a Jurat in Malta 1406. In 1510, his descendant Giovanni Bordino was granted the fiefs of Benwarrad and Culeja in Malta. A line of the family became part of the landed gentry in Gozo. Ismeralda Bordino the wife of Antonio Vagnolo (viv. temp. 1419), founded several benefices. Domenico di Bordino (died 1507) was *Castellano* in Gozo. For the family Arms see Fig. 8.

**d'Anastasio:** The d'Anastasio family came over with the knights in 1530 and settled in Gozo. Dr Paolo d'Anastasio JUD married Imperia Abela in 1612. She descended from Raimondo Abela, the son of the *Milite* Ferrone de Abela, who came with the Aragonese to Sicily from Spain and was



Figure 8: Bordino family Arms

created *Signore* of Giaesi, Castellanio di Agiro and Raginelgi. Their daughters married into the Cassia family transmitting to her issue the Baronies of Castel Cicciano in Naples and of Għariexem in Malta. Beatrice Cassia d'Anastasio, Baroness of Castel Cicciano also acquired the barony of Gomerino in Malta jointly with her husband, Paolo Testaferrata in 1710.

The d'Anastasio family were also descended from the Cassia family in their own right. Gabriele d'Anastasio, Emilio d'Anastasio and Fabrizio d'Anastasio were Jurats in Gozo, in the XVI and XVII centuries. The family Arms are shown in Fig. 9.

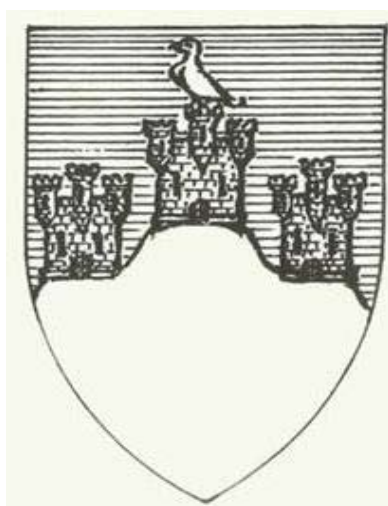


Figure 9: d'Anastasio family Arms



Figure 10: d'Aragona family Arms

**d'Aragona:** There are various d'Aragona lines in Malta and Gozo with both legitimate and illegitimate descending from King Frederick II (III) of Aragon-King of Sicily and Malta 1296-1337 and King Frederick III (IV) of Aragon, King of Sicily and Malta, 1355-1377. Blasco d'Aragona and Sigismondo d'Aragona were both Jurats in Gozo, in the XVI century. The d'Aragona escutcheon is shown in Fig. 10.

**Cadumi:** Salvo Cadumi of Gozo, was created Baron of San Marciano in 1398. His descendants, extinct in the male line by the late XV century lived in Gozo for many years but the fief of San Marciano was eventually returned to the government, to be re-granted to the Galea Feriol family (see Part 2).

**Cassar/o:** The Cassar/o family descended from an ancient family who once held the fief of Castel Cassar near Syracuse in 1392 and occupied many high offices in Malta. A branch of the family established itself in Gozo. Members of the family were Jurats in the XVI and XVII centuries. Giuseppe Cassar was Governor of Gozo, 1729. On 18 September 1798 during the uprising against the French, the Gozitans, taking the lead from the Maltese, set up their own provisional government in a special congress. Don Saverio Cassar, the archpriest of the Gozo *Matrice*,

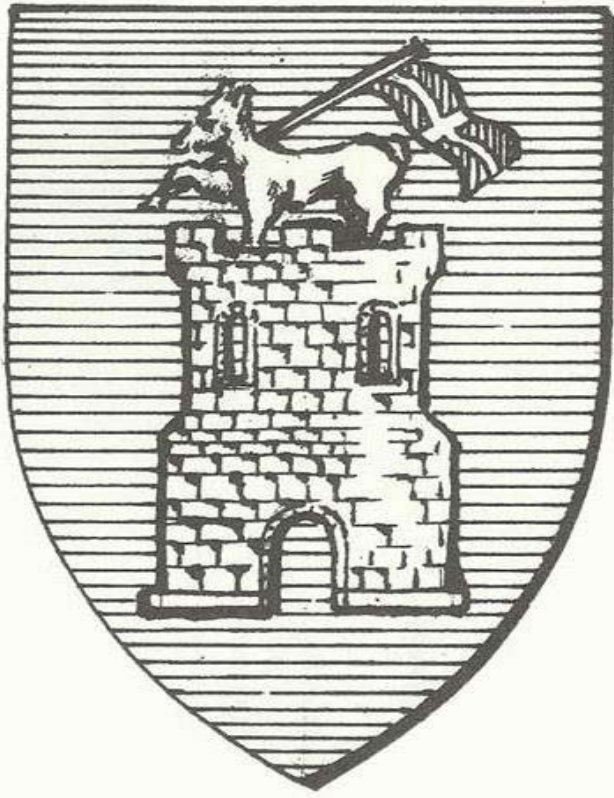


Figure 11: Cassar family Arms

was elected head of the provisional government and superintendent general of Gozo. For the family Arms, see Fig. 11.

**Cassia:** The earliest reference to the Cassia family in Malta is to Judge Gaddo Cassia of Mdina –*viv. temp.* 1450. His great-grandson, Carlo Cassia married Isabella Sansone in Gozo in 1571 and this line of the family settled in Gozo. Giovanni Cassia, served as a Jurat several times between 1650 and 1696 and was Governor of Gozo, 1664. The Maltese branches of the Family became Barons of Ghariexem in 1638, inherited the Barony of Castel Cicciano and were jointly created Barons of Gomerino in 1710. For

the family Arms see Fig. 12.



**Castelletti:** The first recorded member of the Castelletti family in Malta was Giovanni Castelletti /Castelletta who belonged to a Catalan family which settled

Figure 12: Cassia family Arms

in Palermo, Sicily from where Giovanni made his way to Gozo in 1497. Here, in 1498, he married Imperia Navarra. Giovanni's ancestor, Gilberto Castelletti, was a Catalan knight who was sent to Sicily by King James II of Aragon, James I of Sicily and Malta (1285-1295). In 1521, Giovanni purchased some properties in Gozo from the di Vivaia family. He founded the chapel of St Catherine (situated in the Cathedral at Victoria) in 1532 where he was buried, following his death in 1544. He served as a Jurat in Gozo, 1531. His son, Andrea, *viv. temp.* 1578, served as a Jurat in Gozo, 1542 but eventually settled in Malta where he married Antonella de Nava, the daughter of Francesco and of Almeria Montalto. For the family Arms, see Fig. 13.



Figure 13: Castelletti family Arms

**Catalano:** Almuccio Catalano was created Baron of San Cosimo in Gozo sometime before 1350. He produced no issue, so the fief was then conferred on Enrico de Osa in 1364. For the family Arms, see Fig. 14.

**Caxaro:** Luigi Caxaro was created a Baron in 1409. He married Zuna d'Amodeo, establishing their family in Gozo. Members of the family served as Jurats between 1512 and 1719. Manfredo Caxaro was *Credenziere*, 1513. Nicola Caxaro was





Figure 14:  
Catalano family  
Arms

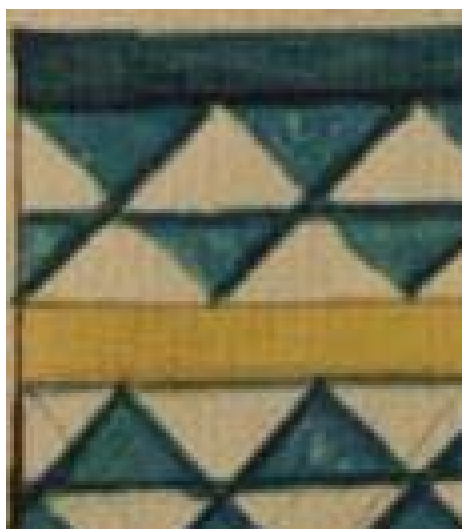


Figure 15:  
Caxaro family  
Arms

Governor of Gozo, 1545-1546. The Caxaro family also held the post of *Viceammiraglio* of Gozo. For the family Arms, see Fig. 15. The Caxaro are ancestors of Catherine Elizabeth Middleton, the wife of HRH, Prince William of Wales, Duke of Cambridge.

**Cuzkeri/Cuschcieri:** Gaddo Cuzkeri was the son of Federico de Cuzkeri, a soldier in Messina, who married (c. 1340), Donna Antonia d'Aragona. Gaddo, the first Maltese holder of the office of *Secreto* of Malta was appointed to that post by King Frederick III (IV) of Sicily and Malta in 1375. He was also created Baron of Frigenuini in Malta. The fief remained in the Cuzkeri family up until 1513, when it was sold to the Stuniga family. Some of his descendants settled in Gozo to establish the family there. Alessandro Mompalao-Cuzkeri was

re-granted the barony in Frigenuini in 1737, but being without issue, on his death the fief reverted to the Order. Members of the family served as Jurats between 1649 and 1697. For the family Arms, see Fig. 16.

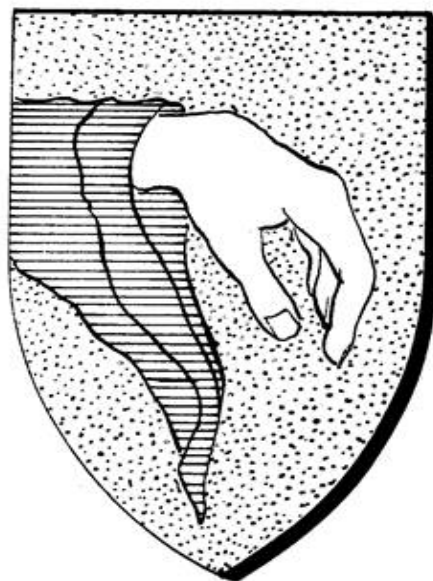


Figure 16:  
Cuzkeri/  
Cuschcieri  
family Arms

**De Osa/o:** Enrico de Osa/o was created Baron of San Cosimo in 1364 (purchasing the fief from the Catalano family). The family became extinct early in the XVI century.

**Guantis:** Baron Pietro Guantis, was *Vice Capitano* of Gozo, 1360-70. For the family Arms, see Fig. 17.



Figure 17: Guantis family Arms

**Inguanez:** This line descended from Antonio Inguanez, a Spanish Baron who became, by marriage, the 4<sup>th</sup> Baron of Djar-il-Bniet and Buqana in Malta. His descendant, also Antonio Inguanez served as Capitano della Verga, 1437. Members of the family served as Jurats, between 1530 and 1599. For the family Arms see Fig. 18.



Figure 18: Inguanez family Arms

**Mannara (Almenara):** Manfredi Mannara was Jurat in Gozo, 1403, 1439. Matteo Mannara was a Judge in Gozo, 1433 and Andrea Mannara was a Jurat in Gozo, 1530 and Governor of Gozo, 1533. For the family Arms see Fig. 19.



Figure 19: Mannara family Arms

**di Manuele:** *Miles* Rodolfo di Manuele *viv. temp.* 1347 in Sicily was Baron of Burgetto in that island. From him descended several members of the family who served as Jurats in Gozo between 1401 and 1550. A Guglielmo di Manuele, married Imperia, the daughter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron Rapa (*see below*). Their granddaughter, Isabella di Manuele married. (1562) Notary Tommaso Gauci, another prominent Gozitan, from who descended the Baron Gauci. For the family Arms see Fig. 20.



Figure 20: di Manuele family Arms

**Navarra:** A Sicilian family which moved to Gozo at the start of the XV century. Ugolino Navarra was a Jurat in Gozo 1428, 1432. Andrea Navarra was a Jurat in Gozo 1445. His daughter, Imperia married Giovanni Castelletti, the first of that family to settle in Gozo. Paolo Navarra was a Jurat in Gozo 1532, 1537 but he later moved the family to Malta. Ignazio Moscati Falsoni Navarra was made Count of Bahria in Malta, 1743. For the family Arms see Fig. 21.



Figure 21: Navarra family Arms

**de Nava:** This was a Castilian, warrior, corsairing and noble family extinct in Malta by 1583. They were virtually the hereditary keepers of the Castle of St. Angelo. They held many fiefs in Malta. A line of the family settled in Gozo. Pietro de Nava was a Jurat in Gozo, 1550. For family Arms see Fig. 22.

**Pellegrino/Perregrino:** A very powerful family. In 1362, Giacomo de Perregrino/Pellegrino married Margherita d'Aragona ("*La Fata*") daughter of Guglielmo d'Aragona, the natural son of King Frederick III (IV). Giacomo was *Castellano* 1356-1372, *Capitano della Verga*, 1356 and *Giustiziere* all in Malta. In 1372, he led a serious rebellion against the crown which was crushed leading Margherita to plead with her kinsman, the king for



her husband's life. In 1361, Giacomo was granted the Maltese fief of Ġnien-is-Sultan. Some of his descendants settled in Gozo, where we find Pino de Pellegrino (i), Jurat in Gozo 1406, Federico Pellegrino, Jurat in Gozo 1441, Pino de Pellegrino (ii), Jurat in Gozo 1469, 1471. For the family Arms see Fig. 23.

**Platamone:** Battista di Platamone, a doctor of law and *Regio Consigliere*, was sent to Malta by the Viceroy of Sicily in 1420 to hand possession of the islands over to Don Antonio Cardona. Platamone himself, later jointly occupied the post of Viceroy of Sicily in 1440, in the name of Alfonso I of Sicily. In 1438, a Francesco di Platamone was *Capitano della Verga* in Malta. The Platamone family eventually settled in Gozo where they were one of the leading families. They occupied the posts of Jurats between 1469 and 1530. Antonio Platamone was Governor of Gozo, 1531. Francesco Platamone (ii) was Governor of Gozo 1532, 1536. Bartolomeo Platamone was Governor of Gozo, 1534. Ludovico Platamone was Jurat of Gozo and Ambassador of Malta to the Order of St John, 1530. For the family Arms see Fig. 24.

**Rapa:** Antonio Rapa (i) was *Capitano della Verga*, 1435. Notary Salvatore Rapa, Jurat in Gozo, 1453, 1459 was created Baron Rapa in 1453; the title became extinct early in the XVII century. Antonio Rapa (ii) was a Jurat in Gozo, between 1522 and 1530. Giovanni Rapa was Ambassador of Malta and Gozo to the Viceroy of Sicily, 1527. Gio. Domenico Rapa was a Jurat in Gozo, 1593. For the family Arms see Fig. 25.

**Savona/Sagona/Saguna:** The common ancestor of this family is Leonardo (*sive* Nardus) Sagona, Jurat in Gozo, 1471 and 1476. In 1487 he was appointed "*Soprintendente alle pubbliche fabbriche*". In 1463, he was appointed one of the Gozitan *Accatapani*. Giulio Sagona was a Jurat in Gozo, 1542 and *Capitano della Verga*, 1548-49. From him descends Horace II Walpole, (1723-1809), 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Walpole of Wolterton, created 1806 Earl of Orford in UK. Niccolo' Saguna served for eight terms as a Jurat of Gozo during the period 1513-31. He was appointed *Vice-Secreto* in Gozo by a privilege granted him (from Brussels) by Queen Joan and King Charles on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1516. He was appointed *Vice-Secreto* for Gozo for life on 23<sup>rd</sup>

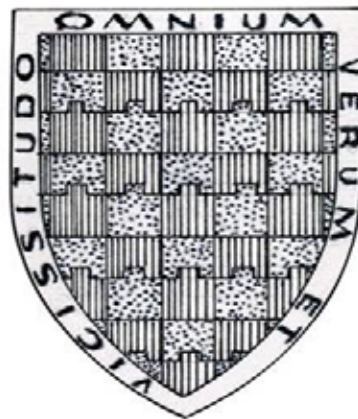


Figure 22: de Nava family Arms



Figure 23: Pellegrino/Perregrino family Arms



Figure 24: Platamone family Arms



Figure 25: Rapa family Arms



June 1530. He married Violante natural daughter of Don Lanza Inguanez, Baron of Għariexem, Lord of the Mugiirro, Archdeacon of the Cathedral (1431-1493) Vicar-General of the Diocese of Malta c. 1480 and subsequently. For the family Arms see Fig. 26.

**Soria:** Giovanni Soria, *Capitano della verga* of Gozo, 1530 or 1531, was the first-ever *Capitano* directly chosen by the Grandmaster (de l'isle adam). He served as a Jurat in Gozo, 1534. For the family Arms see Fig. 27.

**Torres:** An ancient and very noble Spanish family. A branch established itself in Malta and later in Rome (1577). Francesco Torres was created Baron of Fiddien in Malta in 1520. His descendant, Don Giovanni Torres, 4<sup>th</sup> Baron of Fiddien married 1567 (at the Matrice Gozo) Caterina dei Baroni Nicolao-Rapa, a descendant of the (5<sup>th</sup>) Baroness Rapa. For the family Arms see Fig. 28.

**Vagas/Vargas:** The Vagas/Vargas family were very prominent in Spain where they played a major role in the *Reconquista* – the battles between Christians and Moors for control of the Iberian Peninsula during the middle ages. They were Knights of St John, Santiago, Calatrava and Alacantara and held many fiefs and titles in Spain. Alonso de Vagas was *Capitano della Verga*, in Gozo, 1544. For the family Arms see Fig. 29.

**Vagnolo/Bagnolo:** First mention of this family is in a contract of purchase of land in Gozo in the name of the *Milite* Antonio Vagnolo. King Alfonso I named him *Milite* in 1447. His son, also Antonio was Jurat in Gozo, 1470, 1491, 1493. Vito, Giacomo Vito and Biagio Vagnolo all served as Jurats in Gozo between 1530 and 1584. For the family Arms see Fig. 30.

**Vassallo (Paleologo):** Count Ludovico de Vassallo Paleologo married (in Palermo) 1570 Leonora Corvera dei Baroni di Miserindino from whom was born Count Matteo de Vassallo Paleologo born c. 1577 who married firstly (in Palermo) 04-11-1611 Emilea Platamone dei Baroni di Cefalù and who married secondly (Matrice Gozo), 1622 Caterina di Rinaldo. He settled in Malta 1622 establishing branches of the family in both Malta and Gozo. His great grandfather Count Niccolò de Vassallo Paleologo was Councillor to Emperor John VIII



Figure 26: Savona/Sagona/Saguna family Arms



Figure 27: Soria family Arms



Figure 28: Torres family Arms



Figure 29: Vagas/Vargas family Arms



Figure 30: Vagnolo/  
Bagnolo family Arms

Palaeologos (1425-1448) and to Constantine XI (XII) when Despot of Morea. He eventually settled in Sicily, 1436, where he was recognised as being of imperial blood by King Alphonso the Magnanimous. For the family Arms see Fig. 31.

**Viani:** A very old and noble Maltese family. They displayed great heroism during the Great Siege and were awarded the right to display a moor's head in their Arms (*see also* Avola above). Teodora Attard Fiteni, married in 1702 at the Matrice in Gozo, Isidoro Viani, Baron of Tabria in Malta. For the family Arms see Fig. 32.

**Testaferrata:** Ercole Martino Testaferrata, Baron of Gomerino, Rector of the Benefice of S. Maria Annunziata della Saccaia nel Gozo (known as La Nuza, today's Lunzjata valley) *eretto da D. Sibilla d'Aragona, come si legge in una provisione del Re' Martino, qui' fu' donato l'anno 1372 dal Re' Federico, ritrovandosi in quest' isola a 12 di Novembre al Sacerdote Bartolomeo Axac.* For the family Arms see Fig. 33.

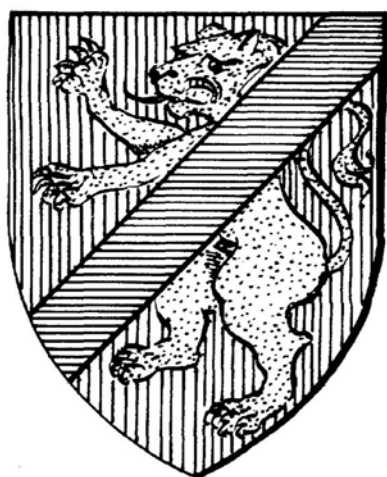


Figure 31: Vassallo  
(Paleologo) family  
Arms



Figure 32: Viani family Arms



Figure 33: Testaferrata family Arms

## Other Medieval Landed Gentry in Gozo

- D'Alagona
- Algaria
- Barba
- Benfanti
- Bonafede
- Bordino
- Boniamin
- Bordino
- De Bovadilla
- Caraffa
- Cardona
- Federico
- Hernandez
- Infantino
- Mahnuq
- Medrana
- Messina
- Migliares
- de Nasi
- Nicholaci
- Pontremoli
- Rajadel
- Rajneri
- Reggio/Riggio
- Rioles
- Sanctoro
- Vaccaro (Barons)

## Other Jurat Families of Gozo

De bono	Jurat	1726
Agius	Jurat	1576
D'Armenia	Jurat	1627
Arpa	Jurat	1773
Azzopardi	Jurat	1764
Bajada	Jurat	1771
Bencini	Jurat	1766
Bonello	Jurat	1597
Bondi	Jurat	1539
Boradella	Jurat	1578
Borg	Jurat	1798
Burgio	Jurat	1588
Burlo'	Jurat	1598
Busuttil	Jurat	1776
Caccialepre	Jurat	1629
Caruana	Jurat	1709

Carbone	Jurat	1667
Candiu de Candia	Jurat	1558
Cilia	Jurat	1595 (*)
		(*) Budaq 1590

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## To be continued

Charles A. Gauci teaches human anatomy at the University of Malta. He retired to Gozo in 2013 after a long career in Anaesthesia and Pain Medicine in the UK, which included service in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He holds Pain Clinics at both Mater Dei Hospital and Gozo General Hospital. Charles lives in Sannat, where he is Vice-President of the St Margaret Band Club. He is also President of the Malta G.C. Branch of the Royal British Legion. In March this year, on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary, Heritage Malta appointed him Malta's first-ever Chief Herald of Arms.



# Appreciation: Maestro Professor Joseph Vella (1942-2018)

LINO BRIGUGLIO

Mro Vella (born 9<sup>th</sup> January 1942, died 25<sup>th</sup> February 2018) was a highly successful music composer and conductor. He became the first Maltese citizen to graduate Bachelor of Music, from the University of Durham, UK and continued his studies in London, Venice and Siena, particularly with Franco Donadoni in Composition and Franco Ferrara in Conducting. His first major composition presented to the public was an orchestral suite Three Mood Pieces op 4 at the Manoel Theatre, Valletta in 1958. Together with Verena Maschat, he set up the School of Music in Valletta in 1972. In 1994 he was appointed Associate Professor of Music at the University of Malta.

## Diversity of Styles

Vella's style is contemporary, with influences from the neo-classical movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but his diversity of styles – including a Mediterranean



flavour - is very evident in other works. Vella's official catalogue of works amounted to 154 opus numbers of which ten concertos, five symphonies, five oratorios, eight song cycles for different combinations, two cantatas, and the ever popular Mass in D op 20, composed to be performed at St George's Basilica in Gozo (Malta) on the saint's feast day.

He has also written about 150 minor works (liturgical pieces, hymns, marches, music for wind band, etc.), which are not listed in his official catalogue. Vella's works have been performed in many European countries and elsewhere, including the USA and Japan.

His pioneering work and continuing interest in early Maltese music has led to a renewed awareness of significant 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century compositions, which he has edited, performed and promoted both locally and abroad. Vella has rightly been accredited as being the father of the Maltese revival movement and Malta's leading contemporary composer.

### **Public Spirit**

Since 1970, until his passing, Joseph Vella acted as musical director of the Soċjeta' Filarmonika La Stella

Band and the Astra Opera Theatre in Gozo. In this latter capacity, he conducted many opera productions including Rigoletto, Lucia di Lamermoor, Aida, Nabucco, Macbeth, Turandot, Forza del Destino, Gioconda, Trovatore, Traviata, Un Ballo in Maschera. Maestro Vella was also the first resident conductor of the National Orchestra in Malta, and was also Musical Director of the Soċjeta' San Pawl Banda Konti Ruggieru of Rabat (Malta) for 40 years.

Maestro Joseph Vella was also the Artistic Director of the Victoria International Arts Festival, and the Artistic Director of "Mediterranea" — a festival focusing on Mediterranean culture, including archaeology, history, folk traditions and cuisine. The main event of this festival is the annual production of two performances of an opera.

### **A Humble Person**

In spite of his very successful career and his international acclaim as a composer and conductor, Mro Vella remained a very humble person, always with a smile on his face. He is survived by his wife Nathalie, his elder son Alan and his wife Anna, his other son Nikki and his fiancée Michelle, and his grandchildren Cristina and Andrea.

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## **Tony Borg (1962-2018)**

### **His Life was One of Continuous Service to the Gozitans**

LINO BRIGUGLIO

Tony Borg was 56 when he died (born in 1962), after a battle with cancer which lasted six and a half years. I got to know him when he was a student at the University of Malta during the 1980s. I was one of his lecturers and we remained friends since then. I also got to know his parents very well.

During my time as Director of the University Gozo Campus, I often resorted to Tony's assistance when he headed the secretariat of Minister Giovanna Debono. Liaison between the University and the Gozo Ministry was of major importance for imparting tertiary education in Gozo and Tony's support in this regard was invaluable.



Tony was known for his good humour and his willingness to assist anybody who required his help. He was very energetic and a multi-tasker, as a public officer, in his capacity as Mayor of Fontana, as well as a family man. People who knew him had only pleasant things to say about him, especially because he was so generous with his time in helping others.

It was a great shock to me when I learned that he was suffering from cancer, and I admired his courage in fighting this illness over many years. According to Mario Calleja, in an appreciation which appeared in The Times of Malta of 6 January 2019, when cancer was diagnosed, the doctors had informed Tony that he would die within a couple of years at most. However, through perseverance, Christian faith and his love for life he lived for more than six years suffering from cancer during which he remained active against all odds, even swimming and going to the gym daily till the last days before he was hospitalized.

Tony passed away on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018, at the Gozo General Hospital. His funeral took place on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2019. The funeral mass, held at Ta' Pinu Sanctuary, was led by Archbishop Alfred Xuereb and attended by a large number of personalities, including the then President Marie-



Tony, with his wife Mary, and sons Alex and David

Louise Coleiro Preca, whom he got acquainted with through the Malta Community Chest Fund, and by many relatives, friends and acquaintances. The large congregation that attended to pay their last respects was a clear sign of the high esteem which Tony enjoyed. When his coffin was carried shoulder-high, those present saluted him with loud applause.

Tony left to mourn his loss his wife Dr Mary DeBono Borg, his sons Dr Alex and David, his sister Antoinette, his brothers George and Saviour, his wife's sister Sonia, their spouses as well as many nephews and nieces, relatives, colleagues and numerous friends.



Tony's funeral mass, held at Ta' Pinu Sanctuary, was attended by a large number of personalities, including the then President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, and by many relatives, friends and acquaintances.



# A Tribute to Pawlu Mizzi (1929-2019)

SERGIO GRECH

Pawlu Mizzi's narrative is one of courage and perseverance. Those were my first thoughts when Pawlu's death was announced on 5<sup>th</sup> August. I came to know Pawlu when we two served on the National Book Council, some years back, and we used to have frequent chats during the Malta Book Fair which I will cherish forever. There were occasions where Pawlu and I crossed swords over book trade in Malta but such encounters never damaged our sound relationship. Undeniably, Pawlu was the guru in the field, and I respected his opinion which after all was proven and tested.

On the day of his death, I realised that I had come to know Pawlu even before my tenure at the National Book Council. In my teenage days, an outing to the Naxxar Trade Fair was a must and I clearly remember Pawlu and his wife and his kids Maria and Joseph on their stand selling books and talking proudly to customers about their latest products. Personally as a teenager, it never crossed my mind that one day, I would know Pawlu the way I did and even collaborate closely with him. He was an encyclopaedia in his field. An excellent reference point. His opinion was clear and unequivocal.

Hailing from tiny Gozo, almost an insignificant island for a long period of time, he studied in Malta and, being keen on Maltese – a language with almost no historical tradition – he made history by founding one of Malta's main publishing houses, the Klabb Kotba Maltin.

It was not an easy decision to take. It was an epoch when Gozo lacked investment and many Gozitans chose or rather were forced to choose the internal emigration option settling down, away from their families, in Malta. Still, it was an epoch when Malta chose the Independence path, and when decolonisation was not an easy route for a people whose DNA was characterised by continuous colonialism. So Pawlu not only fought Gozo's insularity but also the people's closed frame of mind and mentality.



Pawlu managed to infiltrate into the Maltese society and employed his investment skills. I would define this as a family affair coming from Gozo. He opened a business that on paper could have yielded only failure because, unfortunately, books were never really on the nation's agenda. Still, he went on looking for material in an era when book trade was inexistent. It was a period when literature was in the closet and perhaps 'dominated' by two or three authors who kept repeating Dun Karm, the island's national poet.

Of course, Pawlu never forgot his roots, and books and projects on Gozo were periodically included in his publishing ventures. Pawlu himself wrote a book about St George's Basilica. That area was a soft spot for Pawlu and no compromises could be made when the subject was raised.

It is not a coincidence that up to some years ago he was still publishing articles about Gozitan personalities, famous and not-so-famous, in “Il-Hajja f’Għawdex,” a magazine dedicated to Gozo and published by the Gozitan diocese. Those articles had sociological and anthropological value.

Mizzi went one step ahead and based his venture on mostly new authors, to a certain extent inexperienced. But it transpired that they were to be the future of the new wave literature. Still, he understood a very crucial strategy. He had to offer variety otherwise the whole venture would wreck and his ship would sink. In the process, he also discovered new authors. The likes of Mario Azzopardi, Victor Fenech, Oliver Friggieri and Ġorġ Mallia worked closely with him. Through his efforts, and with other book publishing companies like Merlin, a solid library of Maltese was being built. Maltese language and literature were given a new vest.

Mizzi did history by registering a number of milestones in the history of local publishing. Of foremost importance are Erin Serracino Inglott’s “Miklem Malti” and Ġużè Aquilina’s dictionaries. He also curated “Heritage,” a series of publications about Malta’s and Gozo’s history. The facsimile editions of key books from the past are a must for Melitensia lovers. Pawlu also opened his arms widely to academics so that the latter could publish their findings related to Malta’s chequered history.

Mizzi’s achievements will be cherished for ever. He has a unique place in the history of local publishing. On a personal level, I will miss him. Of course, his books will live forever.

P.S. From now on, I will be missing the verse *Pawlu Mizzi, Editur Ġenerali* on books published by the Klabb Kotba Maltin.



Pawlu Mizzi’s funeral mass attended by many dignitaries. (Photo courtesy of Martin Agius)

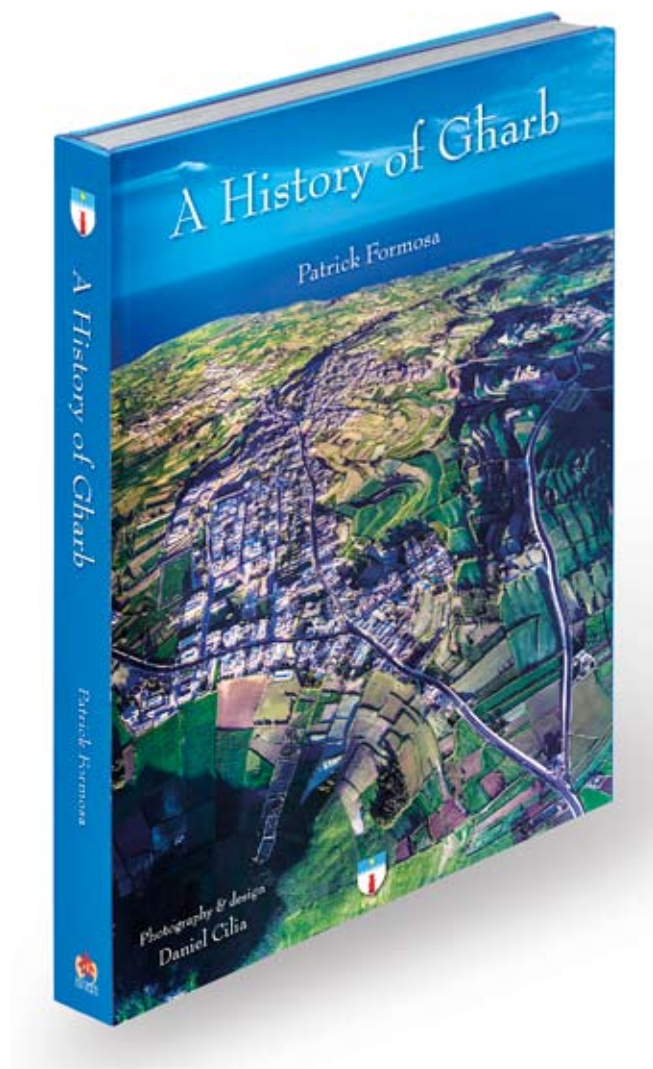


# Book Review: A History of Għarb

Patrick Formosa

Malta: Salesians of Don Bosco (through Fr. Charles Cini SDB) (2018); 304 pages

REVIEWED BY MAURICE CAUCHI



Many have gone through the process of highlighting their birthplace by writing its history, but surely no one has produced such a comprehensive, detailed, fascinating volume such as the one just published by Patrick Formosa, *A History of Għarb* (2018). And if this is considered to be an exaggeration, I will follow it with another: This volume is by far the most comprehensively illustrated, the most visually attractively laid out of any such attempt at informing the nation of what village life was all about.

Following an introductory chapter describing the layout, geography and geological formations of the village, Formosa looks at the history of Għarb over the ages. It takes us back to Neolithic times to discuss remains first excavated by Dr David

Trump, right to the most recent discoveries in Piazza *Gerano* (formerly known by the more homely name *Fuq il-Blata*).

For outsiders, one of the most characteristic features of Għarb has been the more obvious remains of a Semitic heritage as manifested in vocabulary as well as some characteristics of pronunciation (now largely lost), indicating a link with Semitic languages, particularly, in my opinion, with that of Lebanon/Syria rather than with North Africa. It is an unfortunate fact that the last evidence of origins has practically disappeared. Such language remains – no more than language equivalent of archaeological shards – have to be clearly distinguished from the so-called ‘Brejku’ (‘Brajku’ ‘Ebrajku’) which some still confuse with the Għarb dialect, which the initial investigators (Mikiel Anton Vassalli and others) have shown was no more than a gimmick, a way the villagers show their irritating foreign visitors that they were not welcome, a metaphorical raised middle finger in fact.

The history of Għarb ranged over the desolate Arab and subsequent periods. Many lives were lost to pirates, particularly when Gozo was practically cleared of able-bodied persons, and in the raid of 1551. The author makes the point that since the local villages were better off than most others, perhaps they were in a better position to rescue their relatives from slavery.

During the French occupation, Malta and Gozo were divided into ten districts, and Għarb formed part of the ninth district. The revolt of the Gozitans was quick and effective: After only 42 days the French were ousted, but not before two Gozitans (one of them from Għarb) were taken prisoners for their role in the uprising and shot. I find it ironic that while we celebrate the events of the ‘Sette Giugno’ when four Maltese were accidentally shot, we seem to have complete amnesia about those who were deliberately shot for their part of their active participation in an uprising!



Until 1893 the village of San Lawrenz was part of Għarb, and the author describes several issues which do not form part of Għarb any more, but did so in the past. This includes Dwejra. In fact chapter three is devoted entirely to the mysterious and much sought after ‘fungus Melitensis’, which is neither a fungus, nor strictly speaking entirely ‘Melitensis’ either. It was however, guarded by the Knights and British rulers for its perceived medicinal properties.

A chapter on churches in Għarb highlights the great respect that the inhabitants had for their religion. Chapels abounded, spread all over the terrain, built by those who could afford them, close to their homes or fields, aiming at reducing the time spent travelling to their homes. An argument brought to convince the hierarchy that Għarb needed a parish of its own was the fact that it took several hours to walk to the matrice in Rabat, having to leave home when it was dark, posing physical and even moral risks to women, some, it was said had even been raped. But the main problem seems to have been the maintenance of all these chapels, built with enthusiasm which could not always be maintained. When Pope Gregory XIII sent Mgr Dusina as Apostolic delegate in 1575 to check on the state of

the chapels, he found several chapels which were derelict and were condemned. It appears that church doors were a very collectible item at the time, and most chapels were without a door.

This is followed by chapters about the parish churches, the old one ‘Taž-Żejt’ as well as the one that later superseded it. They are both treated with extensive, interesting, historical detail. As in previous chapters the illustrations are simply magnificent and greatly enhance the attraction of this book. Dealing with the third major church in this village, Ta’ Pinu, Formosa outlines the process which started with Karmni Grima’s mystical experience, a vision which, as only locals seem to know, was also shared by Franġisk Portelli (who, as it happens, was also my mother’s uncle). The gargantuan efforts involved in raising the funds for the building of this magnificent temple through donations from ordinary people are well described. In particular, the contributions of humble parishioners like the famous ‘Frenċ tal-Għarb,’ who is said to have included doctors among his patients, have contributed greatly to the success of this project, which later on were extended to the erection of a via crucis up the hill opposite the church.



The book bristles with interesting historical details, varying from description of the cat hole with its curved outline ensuring easy access to the house while reducing draught, to the cost of building the domus curialis which amounted to ‘611 pounds sterling, 13 shillings 8 pence 1 farthing’: certainly emphasising the value of money at the time.

The transformation of a village population into the educated majority it is today has taken the best of a couple of centuries, starting from a time when elementary school education was the only one that could be afforded. The language question even left its mark: students in elementary schools were asked to choose to learn either English or Italian.

A chapter on legends and traditions highlights a number of well-worn aspects which specifically relate to this ancient village, as well as others which have not quite reached such notoriety. It emphasises also the widespread presence of niches containing statues of saints – a testimony to the highly ingrained respect for religious practice in the past.

A chapter on other various aspects of life in Gharb couldn’t escape mentioning the dramatic demographic changes that have occurred over the ages. From a population of around 500 persons up to the mid of the 18th century, the population tripled to over 1600 by the end of that century, and remained at this high level until the 20th when it fell again to below 1000, largely as a result of emigration which has affected this village more severely than any other locality elsewhere in the Islands.

Interesting also are the comments on other aspects of life which have now largely disappeared, including the making of roofs using crushed potsherds (deffun), which unfortunately might have caused the crushing and destruction of any archaeological remains. As everyone knows, bizzilla was a flourishing industry which kept women busy earning few pennies.

In another chapter the pastimes and customs of the inhabitants are described in considerable detail, including some that are believed to be unique to this village, from pre-TV era, when the street was the meeting place. More recently, the football club and the band club have taken prominent roles in these fields also.



The book includes a USB card with more than 40 exclusive interviews done with the people of Gharb between 1971 and 1973.

One unusual and certainly attractive feature is the addition to this book of recorded interviews, thus providing facilities for actually listening to the unique dialect of this village, which has long since disappeared. It reminds one of the rich vocabulary used by locals for their various activities, whether at work or at play. It counteracts the current mania for introducing foreign vocabulary while at the same time forgetting our own language.

One superb feature of this publication is no doubt the photography and design of the book by Daniel Cilia. No effort has been spared in ensuring that these magnificent photos were taken from every possible point of view, from aerial photography to views from cat-holes.

The provision of facilities for students to undertake a course of serious studies at tertiary level, leading to a dissertation as part of a BA (Hons), has to be recognised and acknowledged.

This publication should be in the hands not only of every person living in the village, but also those interested in the micro-history of our nation. It will hopefully spur other villages to undertake similar studies to highlight the contribution of the average person to the creation of a national identity, and serve as an antidote to our current concept of Maltese history as a period of servility to foreign landlords.

The book is available from the author on 79440029.



# Book Review: The Making of a Medico - *A Memoir*

Maurice Cauchi

Malta: Book Distributors Limited (2019); 164 pages

## REVIEWED BY JOSEPH CALLEJA

This is an unusual memoir by a well known member of the Gozitan society and member of the Board of management of *The Gozo Observer* of which he has been executive editor since its inception in 1992.

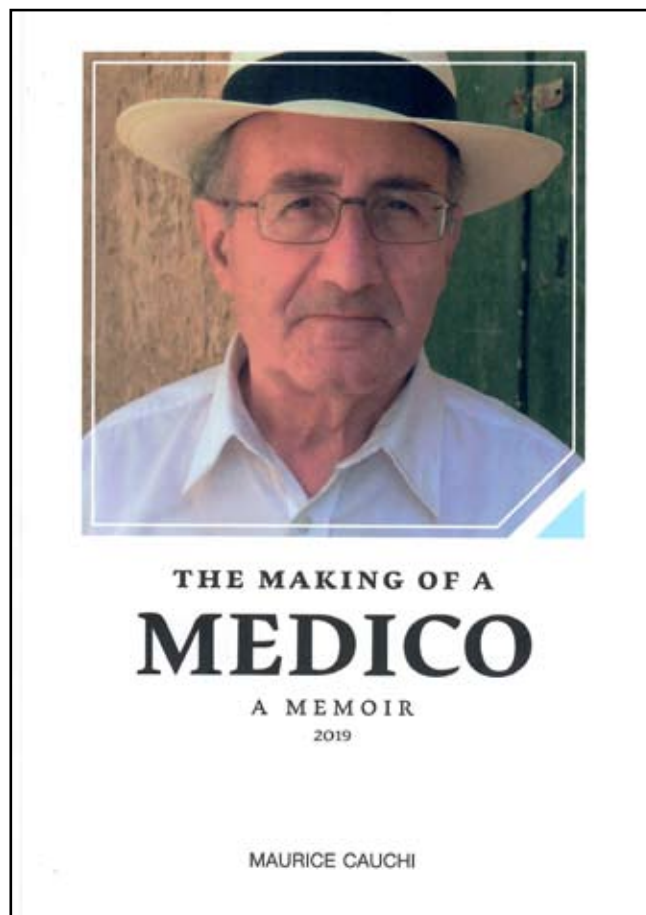
It starts in Gharb where the author was born and where he spent the first years of his life. He goes briefly over his experience at the Lyceum, Gozo, followed by university where he graduated MD. Of interest to all Gozitan students would be his comments on life of a Gozitan living in Malta, issues which have still not entirely disappeared.

His experience as a post-graduate student in London in the 1960s, which he describes as idyllic, give a glimpse of life for a student surviving in less than wealthy conditions. Having obtained his higher qualifications he tried his luck as a lecturer at the University of Malta, where he undertook rewarding research in the causes of anaemia among the Maltese.

His sojourn in his homeland did not last long, and within six months he had resigned his position and was on his way to Australia as Senior Lecturer at the newly established Monash University in Melbourne.

Unfazed by the challenges that face any migrant, he soon established himself, first as a respected researcher, and secondly as a champion of migrants, and especially Maltese migrants around the world. His many publications, including books and hundreds of research papers attest to his wide-ranging interests.

On his retirement from work in Melbourne he returned to Malta as professor of Pathology where he started a new career, as a director of hospital department of pathology, as well as head of the university department where he concentrated on ensuring that students, be they in the technical field, or those aiming at higher degrees in medicine, are given every opportunity to succeed. He takes special



pride in his efforts in abolishing that bugbear which haunts all students, namely the oral examination, relegating it to those who happen to be borderline.

His efforts at raising interest in the general public about migration, science and medicine has resulted in a flood of talks on these subjects, including an eight hour seminar held last year at the University of Malta Gozo Campus relating to '*Health and Society*', a monograph published by the Malta University Press, 2018.

This book would be found of interest to anyone involved in the above issues, and particularly to medical, science, including social science students.

It is available at all major bookshops, or directly from BDL (Book Distributors Ltd), (email: [info@bdlbooks.com](mailto:info@bdlbooks.com)). Retail price €15.



# Book Review: Mar-Ritmi tal-Baħar. Poeżiji

Charles Bezzina

Gozo: Charles Bezzina (2018); 207 pages

## REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

Gozitan poet Charles Bezzina does not need any introduction; his various anthologies of poetry published over the last two decades have earned him a name among the main poets of our islands. His latest anthology is *Mar-Ritmi tal-Baħar* and it covers the period between 2014 and 2017. It contains numerous poems about various subjects which however are inspired by one central theme: the sea that surrounds us.

As I went through the anthology, I felt I was reading a diary of a different sort. *Mar-Ritmi tal-Baħar* is, in my opinion, an autobiographical piece of work, but not in the traditional sense of the term. With the clear exception of *Meta Waqgħet it-Tieqa tad-Dwejra* carrying the historical date of the 8th of March 2017, the author does not refer to particular episodes of his life by mentioning specific names or historical occurrences. Still, I perceive the anthology as autobiographical; there must have been particular moments in time when the poet felt he had to express himself through a poem after having been inspired by a situation or personal experience which he felt he could not allow to pass unnoticed. As is to be expected from our poeta tal-baħar, all the poems are somehow attached to the theme of the sea. The poet's mind feels unsettled as much as the waves of the sea move to and fro creating the natural force that renders man so tiny and insignificant. However, the poet stands to gain from the marine forces; every time he observes the movements of the sea, he feels the urge to bring pen to paper and write down his feelings which he transforms into sublime verses. The sea has the ability of stirring up from the very depths of the poet's soul, various events and thoughts that remind the poet of his past life (*Meta Lbierah Dalam Sewwa*). Sometimes it is the light reflected from the moon that brings these sentiments forth; on other occasions, it is the current of the sea itself that causes the poet to write down his poetry (*Boghod 'Il Barra*).

The sea is not the only reality that inspires our poet. Being born and bred within the European Christian tradition, Bezzina allows his Christian faith to come out and he communicates to us some unusual beautiful lyrics that express how deep his faith is. However, his religious beliefs, though rooted in his being, are considerate and somehow unobtrusive. His poem *Hobż U Inbid Irrid*



*Nitolbok* is simply staggering; through its lines, the divine becomes one with the human without losing any aspect of its awe. We come across the poet's wish to become one with his Creator in his other poem *Ilbierah Dhalt Infittxek* where God comes across as the divine doctor who is the only one who can sooth and cure.

*Mar-Ritmi tal-Baħar* is the product of multi-faceted spiritual experiences of a poet who is on an earthly journey towards his eternal home. A strong sense of solitude, a love towards mother nature and a unique ability to converse with such distinct realities varying from a mere wave to the Lord and Creator of the cosmic realities, are what make Charles Bezzina's latest anthology a must-read for all lovers of Maltese literature. It is a book of delectable poetry; every reader can take the poet's place and make each and every poem his own. While on one hand, the poems are the result of personal experiences, on the other hand, most of the poems reflect the common universal experience of man. *Mar-Ritmi tal-Baħar* is a diary that one can make his very own.

# Book Review: A Magna Maxima. Rabat – Città Victoria

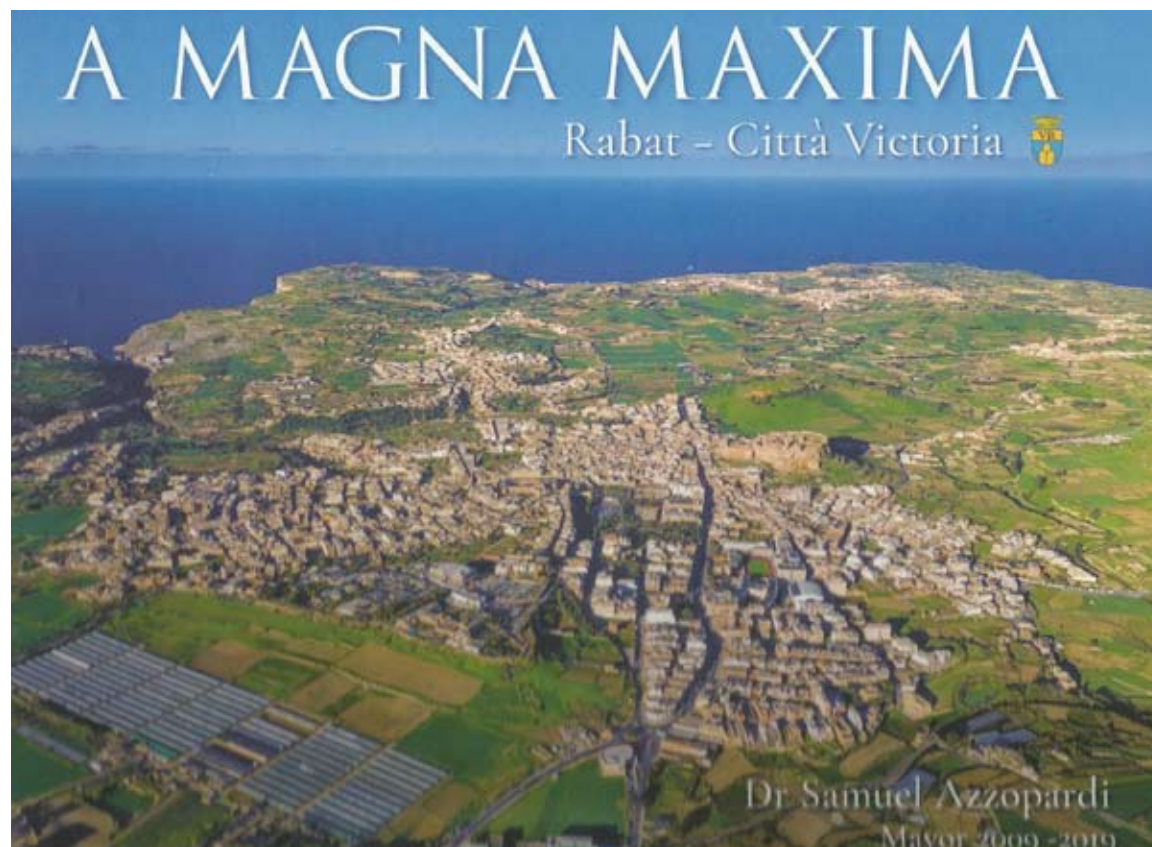
Various Authors

Gozo: Samuel Azzopardi (publisher) (2019)

## REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

*A Magna Maxima. Rabat – Città Victoria* is the name of a recent publication by outgoing Victoria mayor Dr Samuel Azzopardi featuring exquisite photographs by renowned Gozitan photographer Daniel Cilia and with contributions by four Gozitan writers and academics. Gozo's town has in the past decade inspired various authors to write books and historical articles inspired by its history, geography, archaeology and similar themes. Now, at the end of his ten-year term in office as Victoria's seventh mayor, lawyer Samuel Azzopardi is bequeathing us a magnificent publication, another book in the long list of coffee-table books that feature the island of the three hills. Dr Azzopardi wrote a short introduction to the book which he considers as a 'symbol of deep gratitude towards his fellow citizens, staff and people' of Victoria. Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina wrote the section about the history of the ancient town which is crowned by the medieval citadel known by one and all as the *Gran Castello* or *Cittadella*. It is followed by Edward Scerri's chapter entitled

*Victoria's Streetscapes and Urban Texture*; Scerri is a sought-after architect who hails from Victoria itself. Notary Paul George Pisani, son of the late Gozitan poet Ġorġ, writes about 'Art in Victoria' and introduces the reader to the artistic heritage of the city. Last but not least, Dr Maria Frendo, a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Malta writes the last entry entitled *A Siren's Song* concluding the sumptuous publication on a musical note. Only fifty copies have been published of *A Magna Maxima*, the publication commemorating Dr Samuel Azzopardi's ten-year service to his native town as mayor; the publication carries no date or place of publication but Azzopardi signs his *preamble* at the beginning of the book on the 1st of June 2019. On the 10th of June 2019, Victoria commemorated the 132nd anniversary since Queen Victoria bestowed on it city-status. Incidentally, the 24th of May 2019 was the bi-centenary of Queen Victoria's birth, an anniversary that was duly commemorated at *Il-Haġar* complex a few weeks ago.





# Recent Activities at the University of Malta - Gozo Campus

JOSEPH CALLEJA

## Courses at the Gozo Campus

This year the University of Malta continued with the offering of a number of courses at its campus in Xewkija. The courses running at the Gozo Campus during academic year 2018-2019 are:

- Bachelor of Commerce (Yr 3)
- Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Facilitating Inclusive Education (top-up) (Yr 1)
- Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) (Yr 4)
- Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Criminology (Yr 1)
- Diploma in Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Yr 2)
- Diploma in Lace Studies (Yr 1)

The lectures of these courses were normally held every week on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings.

A number of other courses were offered during week days through the video-conferencing system. This facility allows Gozitan students to follow the lectures held at the Msida Campus, without having to cross over to Malta.

The courses offered via video-conferencing are:

- Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education (Yr 2)
- Executive Master of Business Administration in Public Management (Yr 2)
- Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Maltese as a Foreign Language (Yr 2)
- Master of Arts in Educational Leadership and Management (Yr 2)
- Higher Diploma in Community Access for Disabled People (Yr 3)

Four of these courses came to an end and the successful students are awaiting their graduation later this year.

## University of the Third Age

The University of the Third Age continued with the offering of its programme for elderly people in Gozo. Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina, delivered a series of interesting lectures on the history of Gozo while Ms Borg Debrincat held a course on 'Mindfulness-Based



Students following the BA (Hons) in Facilitating Inclusive Education top-up degree course at the University Gozo Campus, with Dr Barbara Baschiera (front row - 3<sup>rd</sup> from left).



A lecture of the U3A in progress.

Cognitive Therapy'. Attendance for these course was very good.

The main aim of the U3A is knowledge and learning for its own sake — as an end in itself rather than as a means to improving one's academic credentials. There are no admission requirements and the U3A is open to everyone above the age of sixty, irrespective of any educational or academic qualifications.





The participants of the course in Toursim after the presentation of certificates ceremony. Also present in the photo are the Hon. Minister for Gozo, Dr Justyne Caruana (8<sup>th</sup> from left), Prof Godfrey Baldacchino, Pro-Rector (1<sup>st</sup> from right), Dr Marie Avellino (10<sup>th</sup> from left), and Ms Joyce Farrugia, Director at the Ministry for Gozo, (9<sup>th</sup> from left).

### It-Turizmu f'Ghawdex — Certificate Presentation

On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2019, fifteen practitioners from the tourism and hospitality sector in Gozo were presented with certificates after the successful completion of two study-units offered by the University of Malta from its campus in Xewkija.

The study-units — Tourism in Gozo and The Gozo Experience — were delivered and coordinated by the University's Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture (ITTC). The innovative programme of study, which was endorsed by the Gozo Tourism Association, was delivered in the Maltese language in back-to-back sessions on Monday evenings and Tuesday mornings over a number of weeks, and financially supported by the Ministry for Gozo.

Present for this occasion were Dr Marie Avellino, Director of the ITTC, Pro-Rector Professor Godfrey Baldacchino and the Hon. Minister for Gozo, Dr Justyne Caruana.

### Examinations

Gozitan students following courses at the Msida Campus of the University of Malta, were offered once again the opportunity to sit for their end-of-semester exams in Gozo. In fact, during the June 2019 session

of examinations more than 700 exams were held, partly at the University Gozo Campus in Xewkija and partly at the Examination Centre in Vicotria. During the September 2019 session around 140 examinations were similarly held at the University Gozo Campus.

### Gozo Lace Day 2019

On 28<sup>th</sup> April the Lace Making Programme organised its annual event 'The Gozo Lace Day'. As in previous years, this event included a number of talks on matters relating to lace making, as well as a good number of exhibits and demonstrations on Gozo lace. The event was attended by many, especially by foreigners and Maltese.



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

### Errata Corrige

With reference to Geoffrey G Attard's article *The Ciantar Family of Gozo: The Ghajnsielem-Xewkija Connection* (The Gozo Observer (No. 39) – Winter 2019, page 30), the dates in the last paragraph on the left hand side, the 24th of May 1879 and the 4th of October 1879 are the dates of birth of the two priests mentioned and not the date of their ordination to the priesthood.





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