

THE G OZO OBSERVER

No. 34, Summer 2016



www.um.edu.mt/ugc/publications

Contents

Page

Editorial: New Developments in Gozo	2
When the Beaches Turn Blue Patrick J. Schembri	3
A Description of Gozo at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century Godwin Vella	6
The Maltese Elites and their Obituaries (1815 - c.1900) Michael Refalo	15
Ġużeppi Mercieca (1928-2016) – The Bishop who came from Gozo Geoffrey G. Attard	20
Book Review: A Decade of Australian Qala Association 1995-2005 Uniting People from Qala in Australia and Gozo Geoffrey G. Attard	23
Book Review: Ix-Xewkija. Il-Wirt Reliġjuż Geoffrey G. Attard	24
Recent Activities at the University of Malta – Gozo Campus Joseph Calleja	26

The Gozo Observer

The Journal of the University of Malta – Gozo Campus.

Published two times a year in collaboration with
the Ministry for Gozo.

Editorial Board:

Prof. Lino Briguglio, Mr Joseph Calleja,
Prof. Maurice N. Cauchi, Ms Caroline Camilleri Rolls

Editorial Office:

University of Malta - Gozo Campus,
Mġarr Road, Xewkija, XWK 9016, Gozo
Tel: (356) 21564559; Fax: (356) 21564550;
e-mail: ugc@um.edu.mt
Web: www.um.edu.mt/ugc

© University of Malta Gozo Campus and individual
contributors. 2016.

The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the
University of Malta or the Ministry for Gozo.

The Gozo Observer is distributed without charge, upon request,
to interested readers.

Front Cover Picture: Courtesy of Charlie Farrugia.

Editorial:

New Developments in Gozo

Many consider that Gozo has not quite benefitted adequately from the not inconsiderable economic advances that have occurred on the bigger sister island. It is therefore of interest to note that over the past years a considerable amount of funds, largely provided by the EU, has been directed to improvements in Gozo also.

Perhaps the most dramatic change occurring recently in Gozo has involved the transformation of the Ċittadella from a relic of the past to an attractive centre reflecting Gozitan historical existence.

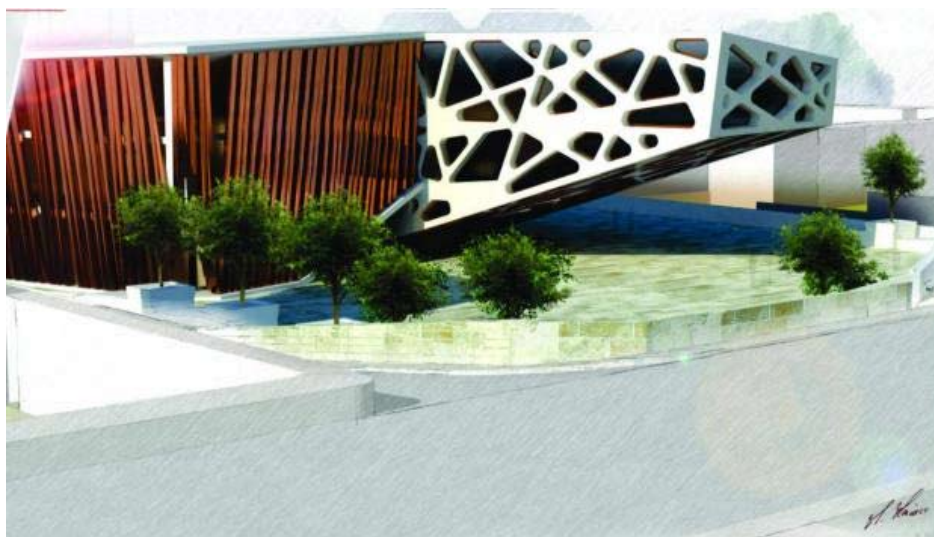
Major works of restoration and embellishment of the Ċittadella have now been completed, transforming a neglected backwater into an attractive historical and archaeological jewel. The work has included essential consolidation of crumbling bastions, as well as the more obvious cleaning of the walls and transforming neglected areas into green nooks which contrast with the solidity of the stoneworks. In addition, the work has involved paving of roads, restoration of buildings within the citadel, as well as work on the reservoirs.

The result has been described as ‘spectacular’ and will no doubt attract tourists both from Malta as well as from overseas. It will also encourage

various cultural activities, including concerts and exhibitions. This extensive work has been partly funded by the EU.

The next major development will be the Gozo museum. Plans for a new Gozo museum have been recently unveiled. It will be erected in place of the Ninu Cremona Boys’ Lyceum in Victoria. It is meant to be not just an old-fashioned museum but it is expected to serve as a cultural centre, that will “narrate the story of Gozo and the achievements of its people throughout the island’s history, from early Neolithic times to the present.” It will bring together the various collections currently scattered around the island. It will also contain a library as well as a 150-seat auditorium. Costing around €5 million, this will certainly be a new and important landmark.

Yet another projected development is that of the law courts. Up till now, these were housed in cramped conditions within the Ċittadella, causing considerable inconvenience for those who had to walk up the hill or park in the limited space up there. The law courts will now be built in Triq Ġorġ Borg Olivier (Victoria). The project is expected to provide ample underground car parking space. It is estimated that the cost will be around €12 million.



A render of the new law courts building

These developments will certainly have a major impact on the facilities available on the island. The investment of these not inconsiderable funds is bound to have an effect on the economy, on culture as well as, hopefully, on the level of education in Gozo.

Maurice Cauchi

When the Beaches Turn Blue

PATRICK J. SCHEMBRI

Introduction

“The sand was blue!” That was how one person described to me the appearance of the shore at ix-Xlendi in late May this year. Then she continued to describe how on approaching closer to the shore, the reason for the ‘blue sand’ became apparent: the sand had not turned blue but was covered with thousands of small, blue-coloured jellyfish that the waves had washed up on the beach overnight, leaving them stranded on the sand when the sea became calmer. Earlier in the year, the same phenomenon occurred on a number of Gozitan and Maltese beaches, and the latest ‘blue beach’ reported to me was ix-Xatt l-Ahmar in early June. In fact, ‘blue beach’ events have become a common phenomenon but it does not seem to have been so in the past. I have been studying the local marine environment since my student days in the early 1970s and the first time that I saw a mass stranding of blue jellyfish, rather than a few odd individuals washed up on local shores, was in 2001. By 2004 mass strandings were large enough to make people wonder about them and for reports to appear in local newspapers; now, such events occur practically every year with the really large ones often making the news.

By-the-Wind Sailor

The blue creatures that carpet the shore in their thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, look like jellyfish but are not really true jellyfish. A true jellyfish, which scientifically belongs to a group called the Scyphozoa, is a single animal that takes the form of an ‘umbrella’ which the animal

opens and closes in order to propel itself, and from the underside of which emerge a number of tentacles that in most cases carry stinging cells which the animal uses to capture its food. The most familiar example nowadays is the so called Purple Stinger, scientifically *Pelagia noctiluca*, which is the mauve-coloured jellyfish that occurs in large swarms during the summer months and is a nuisance to swimmers.

The creature responsible for the ‘blue beaches’ is known popularly in English as By-the-Wind Sailor, or sometimes Purple Sailor or Admiral’s Hat, and is scientifically called *Velella velella*. Although superficially they look like jellyfish, they belong to a different group called the Hydrozoa which is only distantly related to the true jellyfish. Moreover, the By-the-Wind Sailor is not a single individual but a whole group of them that not only live together but in which the tissues of each polyp (as each individual is called) are actually confluent with those of its neighbours. Such ‘joined-up’ organisms are described by biologists as being ‘colonial’ and coloniality allows nutrients and other substances to be passed from one individual



Plate 1. ‘Blue beach’ at ix-Xatt l-Ahmar in early June, 2016. The blue colour is due to thousands of individual By-the-Wind Sailor (*Velella velella*) stranded on the sand. [Photo credit: Stephen Schembri].



Plate 2. Close-up view of stranded By-the-Wind Sailor (*Velella velella*); blue individuals were recently deposited while the white ones were deposited earlier and have been bleached by the sun. [Photo credit: Stephen Schembri].

to the other; therefore, food is distributed evenly throughout the colony so it does not matter which individuals actually manage to capture prey as all will get a share. Coloniality has another advantage: it allows different individuals to specialise for different tasks, for example, feeding, defence and reproduction.

The By-the-Wind Sailor has long been considered a floating colonial hydroid but some recent work has suggested a different interpretation of the structure of the organism. Whatever its exact nature, the By-the-Wind Sailor is comprised of three different kinds of polyps, hanging from an elliptical plate some 4 – 6cm long and 3 – 4cm wide, made of a complex organic substance called chitin that the polyps secrete. This chitinous plate has gas-filled spaces inside and acts as a float, suspending the whole colony at the water's surface. The upper surface of the float is water repellent (rather like the non-stick coating of modern pots and pans), such that if the colony is overturned by a wave, it automatically returns to its original position with the float on top. The float also sports an upright sail that runs obliquely along the upper surface. When the wind catches this oblique sail, the colony is pushed at an angle of about 40° to the wind direction – in effect, the colony is able to sail in a similar manner to the way a yacht tacks the wind. This explains the common English

name of the animal 'By-the-Wind Sailor', as well as the common names for this creature in Italian, 'Barchetta di San Pietro', and in French, 'Barque de la Saint-Jean'. It also explains the origin of the scientific name, 'vela' being 'sail' in Latin. The other common names 'Purple Sailor' and 'Admiral's Hat' refer to the beautiful purplish-blue colour of the living animal, and to the shape of the float, respectively. The blue hue is actually a defence against predators, since it camouflages the animal against the blue colour of the open oceanic water where it lives.

The most abundant type of polyps are the long tentacle-like individuals found round the periphery of the float. These are the feeding polyps whose function is to capture food by 'harpooning' it using microscopic filaments shot out from stinging cells that cover their body. These stinging cells are similar to those of the true jellyfish such as the Purple Stinger already mentioned. However, in *Velella* the toxin injected by the stinging cells is less potent than that of the Purple Stinger and other stinging jellyfish and is also injected in much smaller amounts so that it is practically harmless to people unless one is especially sensitive to it. Most people would not feel anything if they come in contact with a *Velella* but some report a mild burning sensation. The prey are microscopic planktonic animals that occur close to the water's surface – *Velella*'s tentacles are very short so they can only capture the surface plankton. Once immobilised, the food is passed to a large central polyp that has a mouth leading to an ample stomach, where the food is digested; in effect this is a communal stomach, to which all members of the colony have access and nutrients are therefore distributed throughout the colony in this way. However, a close look at the underside of a living *Velella* will show that some of the polyps have a yellowish brown colour instead of the intense blue of the peripheral tentacles and the float. These polyps house microscopic unicellular algae known as 'zooxanthellae' in their tissues. Zooxanthellae are photosynthetic, that is, they use the energy of sunlight to manufacture organic compounds in the same way that green plants do. The association between the zooxanthellae and *Velella* is a mutually beneficial one for both organisms – the zooxanthellae shelter in the tissues of *Velella* and are exposed to bright light given

that the colony floats at the water's surface, and the *Velella* obtains organic compounds from the algae. Therefore, even if prey is scarce, the colony has a backup food source.

The third type of individuals in a *Velella* colony are the reproductive polyps which bud off tiny medusae that look like microscopic jellyfish. These medusa are free-swimming and sink to deep water where they produce sperm and eggs which are shed in the water for fertilisation. The fertilised eggs become swimming embryos that then rise to surface again to become the next generation of adult By-the-Wind Sailors.

Velella colonies come in two forms. One has the sail running diagonally to the right and the other to the left. It appears that these forms occur in unequal proportions such that the most common form at any given locality is that which veers away from the major winds that tend to blow the animals towards the coast. No one has yet looked at the relative proportion of left and right handed colonies beached on our shores, but this would be an interesting exercise, especially if the results are then correlated with wind and current patterns. Normally, *Velella* is a creature of the open seas; however, prolonged episodes of winds blowing from an unusual direction or very strong winds in which *Velella*'s sail is not effective, will blow these animals onto the coast where they are then stranded in their multitude on the shore. This is what has been happening locally in recent years between early spring and summer.

A question that many people are asking is why are these mass strandings occurring almost annually when previously they were rare events? There is no simple answer to this. Numerous factors affect the rate of reproduction and survival of the By-the-Wind Sailor – obviously, the more young that are produced and the more that survive, the larger the generation that results; an unusually large generation is referred to as a 'bloom'. Reproductive output and survival depend on the availability of the food for both adult *Velella* and their developing offspring, as well as on reduced competition for food with other organisms coupled with diminished predation of, again, both adults and young. Although the reason for By-the-Wind Sailor blooms may be complicated to work out,



Plate 3. Living By-the-Wind Sailor (*Velella velella*) floating at the water's surface. Note the raised transparent 'sail' and that in all four individuals shown, this runs obliquely from left to right. [Photo

many scientists are taking the increased frequency of such blooms as a sign that the Mediterranean marine environment is undergoing important and rapid changes.

When there is lots of food and few competitors and predators, a bloom will result and if the wind and currents are in the right direction, there will be mass strandings and the beaches will turn blue, at least for a couple of days until the floats are bleached by the sun and become transparent and are eventually blown away by the wind.

Acknowledgements

This article is partly based on one originally published on 27 June, 2004 in 'The Sunday Times' that was written when the first mass strandings of the By-the-Wind Sailor started occurring. I am grateful to Dr Stephen Schembri and Ms Jacqueline Galea for providing the photographs that illustrate this contribution.

Patrick J. Schembri is Professor of Biology at the Department of Biology of the University of Malta.

A Description of Gozo at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century

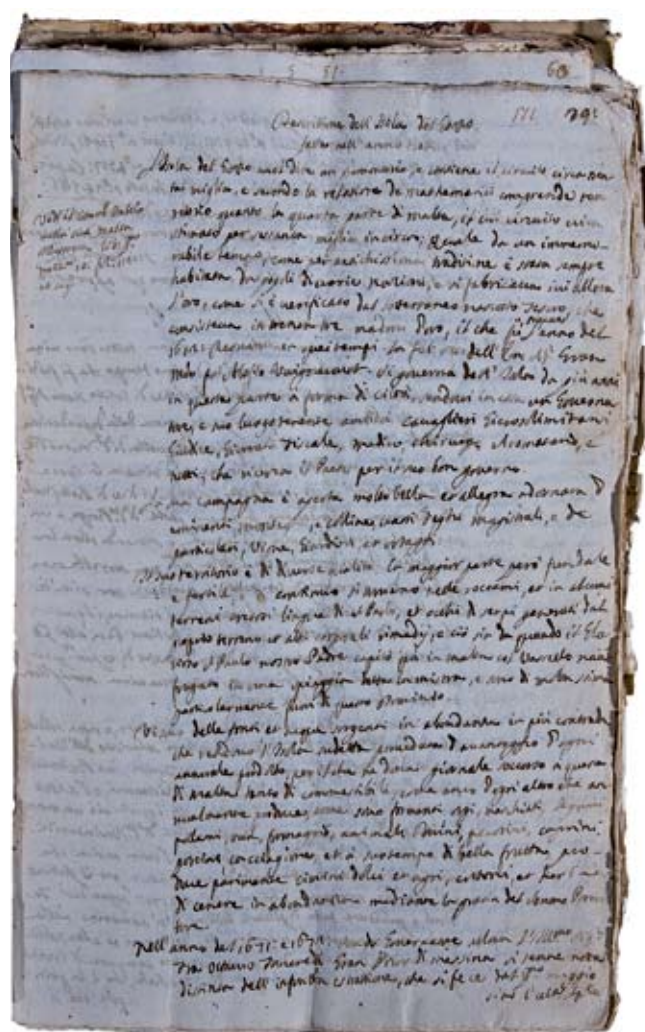
GODWIN VELLA

Introduction

Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis spared no effort to hoard historical writings of merit, particularly if related to his native island of Gozo. This labour of love was somewhat eased by his ever-growing reputation as an erudite ecclesiastic. Other learned personalities with common interests must have been keen to make his acquaintance and share their knowledge, including personal notes, with him. In the absence of realistic opportunities to publish such writings, the handover from one hoarder to another must have been deemed the safest way to ensure the preservation of their findings. Indeed, Agius De Soldanis' (d. 1770) bequest to the National Library includes six bound volumes, collectively referred to as *miscellanea inedita* or Library Manuscript 142, containing a number of writings on a variety of subjects by different authors including Antonio Bosio (d. 1629) and Giovanni Giuseppe Caxaro (d. 1742).

Caxaro's *Notizie de Gozo e Serie delle Giudici e Giurati in detta Isola da doppo la sopresa della medesima con le cose piu rimarcabili in tali tempi* is of particular note.¹ Compiled over a period of some four decades as a loose series of descriptions, occurrences and statistics, Caxaro penned a first description of Gozo in 1704, a revised version ten years later, a list of Judges and Jurors for the period 1560 to 1740, and a host of noteworthy happenings including the celebrations in honour of Gran Master's Marcantonio Zondadari in 1720. At some stage these writings ended up in the possession of Agius De Soldanis who made extensive use of the information contained therein in his celebrated

Il Gozo Antico e Moderno, Sacro e Profano (1746)² besides saving them for posterity by integrating them in said *miscellanea inedita* of Maltese history, which was added to the National Library Manuscript Collection during his tenure as Librarian during the 1760s.³



Caxaro's *Descrittione dell' Isola del Gozo fatta nell' anno 1704*.

¹ Library Manuscript 142, Vol. VI, Fol. 169 – 276.

² Agius De Soldanis' original manuscript (1746) is preserved at the National Library of Malta (Library Manuscript 145). This was eventually translated into Maltese by Mgr Ġużeppi Farrugia and published in 1936 (Vol 1) and in 1958 (Vol 2). An English edition by Fr Tony Mercieca was subsequently published in 1999.

³ Baille Jean-Louis Guerin de Tencin appointed Agius De Soldanis as first librarian of the then newly set-up Libreria Publica in 1763. His remuneration comprised an apartment and a salary of six scudi per month (Depasquale 2006).

Entitled *Descrittione dell' Isola del Gozo fatta nell' anno 1704*, Caxaro's description is reputedly the earliest known comprehensive portrayal of the island region of Gozo with particular emphasis on its organisational setup. It has an overall length of 25 A4-size folios (171 to 195) written in fairly legible calligraphy. Some words, nonetheless, proved to be extremely difficult to decipher. These are marked by three dots in the free translation presented below, that is in turn preceded by a short biographical note on Caxaro and by an overview of the state of affairs in early modern Gozo.

Giovanni Giuseppe Caxaro

Described as an old and distinguished Maltese and Gozitan family, (Abela, 1642: 470) the 'Caxaro', 'De Caxaro' or 'Caxar' lineage (Vella, 2010: 195) had a long lasting relation with the sister island. Some of its members qualified themselves as gaulitanus, as opposed to melitensis or siculus in mid-sixteenth century legal documents,⁴ and took active participation in Gozo's political⁵ and ecclesiastical⁶ affairs during the same century. The family, which features repeatedly in the post-1551 Church records, (Vella, 2010: 57) owned extensive properties,⁷ bequeathed various benefices to the local Church,⁸ and secured a number of marriages with other affluent families.⁹ The Caxaro heraldic emblem shows two pairs of silver bands separated by a gold band, all set on a blue background (Agius De Soldanis, 1746: Vol II, Ch 11).

According to Agius De Soldanis, Giovanni Giuseppe turned out to be the end line of the Caxaro's in Gozo. He served as Judge of Gozo from 1714 to 1720 and as Head Juror of the Gozo University during the years 1712, 1715-16 and 1719 respectively (Agius De Soldanis, 1746: Vol II, Ch 6). In 1720, Giovanni Giuseppe was promoted to the prestigious post of Judge and



The Caxaro heraldic emblem

Auditor of the Sea Consulate.¹⁰ He died in Malta in 1742 (Agius De Soldanis, 1746: Vol II, Ch 11).

A Harsh Insular Reality

Unlike Agius De Soldanis' *Il Gozo Antico-Moderno e Sacro-Profano*, Caxaro's *Descrittione dell' Isola del Gozo fatta nell' anno 1704* is not a tribute to the island's beauty and rich cultural legacy. Caxaro restrains his description to an overview of the island's governance, ecclesiastic organisation and the intermittent endeavours of its people to enhance their quality of life.

⁴ One of 29 gaulitanus surnames encountered on Gozo in notarial and court records during the years 1557 – 1566, (Fiorini 1996).

⁵ Angelo served as a University Juror during 1539, 1544, 1545 and 1548; Kola served as Juror in 1540, 1542 and 1543 and as Hakem during the three year term 1545-7; Pinu served as Juror in 1541; Saviour served as Juror in 1564 and 1565, Alfonso served as Juror in 1572; while Albano served as Juror during 1572 and 1576, (Agius De Soldanis Vol. 1, Sec. 6.2).

⁶ Don Lorenzo, Don Andrea (eventually promoted to chapter member at the matrice), Don Brandon (acting also notary) and Fra Adeodato OESA were all active during the first half of the sixteenth century, (Fiorini 2006, pp xi - liii).

⁷ These included Ngieret ta' Caxar at Rabat (Wettinger 2000, p 415), besides other fields as per subsequent footnote.

⁸ Orlandus and Victoria bequeathed land to Santa Maria Savina in 1511, Isabella (nee Caxaro) founded an animagium at Is-Sined ta' Caxar – Marsalforn in 1537, while Angelo bestowed the benefice of Ta' Ribazza at Gelmus to the Matrice in 1556. (Fiorini 2006, pp xi - liii)

⁹ These included the De Naso, who endowed the church in Gozo with several benefices, (Fiorini 2006, pp xi - liii).

¹⁰ NLM, Libr. Ms. 142, Vol VI, Fol. 253.

Many Mediterranean Islands were lands of poverty during the early modern period (Braudel, 1992: 114). Besides depending on a friable ecology where any short-lived draught and related natural calamities lead to famine and poverty,¹¹ small and isolated islands like Gozo were often devastated by marauding incursions. Indeed, during the fifteenth century the Gozitans appealed several times to the Sicilian authorities to be exempted from import tax or for a grant of a quantity of wheat because of the frequent devastating Moorish invasions (Wettinger, 1990). This precarious situation degenerated even further following the arrival of the Knights of St John in 1530 due to the Ottoman ruthless efforts to rid themselves of the Knights of St John once and for all and to gain supremacy in the central Mediterranean. Prior to the catastrophic siege of 1551, Gozo was raided eight times (Fiorini, 1996), while other assaults are recorded from the second half of the sixteenth century.

It was only during the course of the seventeenth century that the island was gradually granted a breath of fresh air. The threat of Ottoman incursions became evermore infrequent while the remodelling of the obsolete Castello, the construction of six coast watch towers, and establishment of a complementing network of lookout posts rendered the island much safer, thereby facilitating the evolution of rural settlements and sustaining a steady population growth. Likewise, the time honoured settlement of Rabat experienced a regeneration boom whereas the Castello assumed a more pronounced military role (Vella, 2007). The Gozitans, nevertheless, upheld maximum alertness whereby an average of one out of six inhabitants was actively enrolled in the militia.

The agro-economy of Gozo revolved around animal husbandry,¹² orchard cultivation and a few cash crops. Wheat and barley, the inhabitants'



Map of Gozo and Comino from the manuscript volume entitled 'Il Gozo Antico e Moderno, Sacro e Profano' by Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis (NLM, Lib. Ms 145)

¹¹ By their very nature, small islands are less ecologically variable than larger land masses in the same region and can support less species diversity. Extinction rates are therefore high, while natural adversities can wipe out entire populations, (Cherry).

¹² In 1716, Gozo's livestock population comprised 1478 cattle, 89 horses, 473 mules, 1072 donkeys, 1593 pigs, 3504 sheep and 870 goats. (NLM, Lib. Ms 142 Vol VI, fol 248).

staple food and a precious source of animal fodder, were widely grown, albeit failing to generate sufficient produce to feed the entire population. As a result, the Gozitans pooled their limited resources to supplement the island's food supplies through the introduction of a cost-effective and sustainable importation mechanism.

Within this harsh scenario, religion occupied a central role. Significantly, rural settlements were only listed as villages once promoted to the status of parish. Politics and religion merged seamlessly into one another. Popular religious manifestations like the annual devotional processions with the effigy of St Ursula were exploited by both church and state to consolidate their influence and authority on the people. Correspondingly, the poor Gozitans engaged themselves in pious processions and pilgrimages to invoke the Almighty or his vassals whenever faced with pressing communal threats like natural calamities and hostile incursions.

This interplay of fragility and resilience prevails throughout Caxaro's portrayal as shown below.

A Description of Gozo (1704)

Approximately one fourth the size of Malta, the promontory-like Island of Gozo has a circumference of thirty miles.¹³ It has been inhabited since time immemorial¹⁴ and was colonized by a succession of various peoples who flourished in gold production as betrayed by an underground treasure of thirty-three gold ingots discovered in 1612¹⁵ during the tenure of Gran Master Alof de Wignacourt.¹⁶ The Island is administered by a Governor and his Lieutenant (both Knights), a Judge, a team of Jurors, a doctor, a surgeon, an herbalist and other officials as necessitated by good governance.

Its landscape is particularly charming being adorned by eminent hills, extensive magistral estates, vineyards, gardens and orchards. The

quality of its soils varies, but is mostly deep and fertile. Valuable tongues of St Paul and serpents' eyes can be encountered in clayey deposits as a result of the miraculous intervention of the same Saint when shipwrecked in Malta.¹⁷ Fresh water springs abound in various localities and account for Gozo's healthy mix of agricultural produce, most of which is exported to Malta on a daily basis.¹⁸ This includes wheat, barley, vegetables, poultry, ... cheese, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, game, fruit, cumin, sesame seed ... and ash plant.

Governor Fra Octavio Tancredi kept a record of all exports from Gozo for the twelve month period commencing on 1 May 1671, namely 3373 turkey cocks, 14919 poultry, 1648 pigeons, 109 calves, 778 rams, 1111 sheep, 557 lambs, 557 goats, 213 cattle, and 1169 pigs.¹⁹



Gozo boats alongside the quay in Grand Harbour. Painting by Edward Caruana Dingli.

¹³ Gozo has a surface area of 67 km².

¹⁴ The Maltese Islands were colonised from nearby Sicily during the late sixth millennium BC.

¹⁵ A similar find was made at Zebbug in 1720, (Agius De Soldanis 1750, p 26).

¹⁶ Grand Master Alof De Wignacourt ruled the Order from 1601 to 1622.

¹⁷ According to popular belief, St. Paul converted into stone all poisonous snakes in the Maltese Islands. Their relics were available on the market. Serpents' tongues (actually fossilised shark teeth) were considered to be effective precautionary measures against poisoning (Zammit-Maempel p 391), while their eyes resemble precious stones and were worn encased in rings, (De Lucca 2004, p 32).

¹⁸ Houel (Vol. IV, p 77) states that each day six or seven boats carried agricultural produce from Gozo to Malta.

¹⁹ Fra Ottavio Tancredi served as Governor of Gozo in 1671 and 1672. His statistics are reproduced by Agius de Soldanis (Vol.I Ch.1, Sect.1).



1720's view of the Castello.

Gozo is endowed with a centrally located castle and adjacent suburb, six watch towers and eleven guard stations along the coast, six villages or parishes, and numerous rural chapels as described hereafter.

The Castello

The Castello sits loftily on a rocky hill which like Mdina on mainland Malta, predates the Passion of the Lord.²⁰ It used to occupy a much more extensive footprint prior to the devastating siege of 1551. The main entrance or Porta Reale was located close to the cross roads that radiate out in the direction of the four winds,²¹ while the encircling defensive walls survive in sections.²² Its size was eventually reduced by the Order of St John²³ following the notable drop in the Island's population. The Castello's east, south and west facing fronts are secured by three imposing bastions and an underlying ditch,²⁴ while the northern perimeter is characterized by high cliffs as at Mdina.²⁵

The Castello is manned by a sergeant and nine soldiers paid by the Order and a drummer paid by the Gozo University. It has two dominating cavaliers. The one on the eastern side is dedicated to St John, while that along the western front is named after St Martin. The latter abuts onto a spacious warehouse employed by the University to store food supplies.²⁶ Three well-provisioned gunpowder magazines are found, namely an older deposit along the passage leading down to the battery and two newer stores constructed in 1701 on top of said cavaliers. The greater part of the weapons and ammunitions are kept in the armoury. Day-to-day guardianship is provided by a station equipped with a bronze bell on each of the three bastions. That on St Michael's is central and is manned on a twenty-four hour basis, while the ones on St John's and St Martin's are activated after sunset.

The Castello encompasses three churches, of which the venerable matrix and collegiate church

²⁰ The Castello hill seems to have evolved into a flourishing fortified settlement during the Borg in-Nadur Phase c 1500 – 700BC, (Vella 2005).

²¹ Present day Republic Street's cross-roads where large masonry was unearthed in 1883 (Zammit, 1975)

²² Apparently, these served as basis for the entrenchments thrown up around Rabat by the German engineer Johannes Person during the emergency of 1708, (Spiteri 2004).

²³ The ancient line of defences encircling Rabat's historic core seem to have been allowed to fall in disrepair during the course of the Middle Ages. Likewise, the walls of the Castello were somewhat reinforced. Eventually, the Order of St. John replaced part of said medieval enceinte with gun-powder fortifications.

²⁴ The Gran Castello's refortification project lasted around 24 years and looks to have been completed in 1623.

²⁵ Mdina's medieval Rabat-facing front was remodelled during the 1722-1733 period, (De Lucca 2003, pp 23 & 31).

²⁶ The present construction was accomplished in 1776 and is presently employed as Heritage Malta's Gozo Area Office.

dedicated to the assumption of Our Lady is the most important.²⁷ This church was founded by Count Roger and holds a non negligible annual income. It is administered by an Archpriest, who is also the first dignitary of the chapter, and by nine canons. An original core of nine canons was established by the benefice of the collegiate's founder Rainerio Macanuto,²⁸ while a tenth canon was successively instituted in 1678 following the profanation of several rural chapels.²⁹ Enrolled on the collegiate's pay roll are also four choir chaplains, a master of ceremonies, a deacon and a sub-deacon, an organist, two sextons, ... and four altar attendants.³⁰

St Ursula enjoys particular devotion and the collegiate church treasures a reliquary in the form of a half-figured effigy.³¹ Its feast day, which falls on the 21 October, is commemorated with a solemn procession and the firing of a grand salute. The latter is sponsored by the Order and entails the deployment of nine soldiers, eighty musketeers, three pieces of artillery and seven mortars. A repeat is enacted on the second Sunday of January when the reliquary of St Ursula is escorted to the church of Our Lady of Graces in fulfilment of a vow for the cessation of the 12 January 1693 earthquake.³² St Ursula was invoked in other difficult situations, while the older folk confirm that no Turkish incursions took place following the reliquary's acquisition.

Being the matrix, collegiate and main church, both the Grand Master and the Bishop had a wooden throne therein. These were placed on the presbytery during the main festivities. The Grand

Master stood on the right hand or gospel side while the Bishop occupied the left hand or epistle side. These existed already by the time of Mgr Astria's³³ visit in June 1673, while during the visits of Mgr Molina³⁴ in 1679 and of the present Bishop³⁵ a canopy was set up on the left hand side of the presbytery. In 1692 the Grand Master's throne was replaced permanently by another canopy. As in the Malta Cathedral, a sung morning mass, vespers and the breviary are recited on a daily basis.



St Ursula's statue, believed to have originated as a figure-head of a galley.

²⁷ During the late Middle Ages said Matrix attracted the greater part of all property bequeaths and money grants in favour of the Church in Gozo, (Fiorini p xlviij).

²⁸ In actual fact, Macnuto's or Mahnuq's wealth was amalgamated to the Chapter's fund, (Agius De Soldanis Vol.II, Ch.3, Sec.4).

²⁹ The tenth canonicate of the matrix was funded from the income of 26 rural chapels., namely those of St Anastasia Virgin and Martyr at Ta' Dbiegi or Ta' Qabbieža, St. Andrew the Apostle at Żebbuġ, St. Anthony the Abbot at Ta' Dbiegi and at Għarb, St. Catherine of Alexandria at Ta' Dbiegi, St. Domenica at Xlendi Valley, St. Helen at tal-Egħżien and at Sannat, St. John the Baptist at Ta' Dbiegi, at Nadur and at Żebbuġ, St. Julian at Għarb and at Rabat, St. Leonard at Għammar, St. Lucija at Ta' Dbiegi, Our Saviour at Wied il-Mielah, the Assumption of Our Lady at Ghajn Xejba, at Ta' Giordan, at Għasri and at Sannat, St. Mary of the Lily, St Mary of the Snow at Rabat, St. Mary of the Cross at Sannat, St. Mary Magdalen at Ta' Kulkjat and at Dwejra, and St. Peter in Chains at Għarb, (Agius De Soldanis Vol II, pp 33-6).

³⁰ Altar attendants or acolytes were up to the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) the highest of the minor orders, having as duties the lighting of the altar-candles, carrying the candles in procession, assisting the subdeacon and deacon, and the ministering of water and wine to the priest at Mass.

³¹ Believed to have originated as a figure-head of a galley, St. Ursula's statue was donated to the matrix in 1614 by the Castilian Knight Fra Eugenio Romirez-Maldonado, who served as Governor of Gozo in 1610-11, (Bezzina 1999, p 31).

³² St. Ursula's annual procession to the chapel of Our Lady of Graces (eventually annexed to the Capuchin's Friary), along with two similar processions to St. George's Parish in thanksgiving for her protection on the occasion of the plague epidemic of 1814 and of the cholera outbreak of 1837 respectively, was suppressed in 1968, (Gauci p 32).

³³ Mgr Lorenzo Astria served as Bishop of Malta from 1668 to 1677.

³⁴ Mgr Michele Molina served as Bishop of Malta from 1677 to 1681.

³⁵ Mgr Davide Cocco Palmeri who served as Bishop of Malta from 1684 to 1711.

A second church is dedicated to St John the Baptist and St Barbara.³⁶ The titular painting portrays also St Gerome. It is very old and commemorates the feast of both titular saints. The church of St Joseph,³⁷ where a feast in honour of its patron is celebrated on March 19, was erected by Bishop Cagliares.³⁸

During the tenure of Governor Castelnovo³⁹ the Castello became adorned with a clock tower. The Governor's tribunal was reconstructed in 1667 by the University. All criminal and civil court cases and related acts from the year 1551 onwards are kept in an orderly fashion in its archive. Earlier documents were lost during the tragic assault that same year. The administration of the tribunal comprises the Governor, a Judge, a finance officer, a notary, a night captain and a number of assistants and servants.

As officer in charge of the defence and of the administration of the Island, the Governor's residence includes an armoury.⁴⁰ His office is preceded only by that of the Maritime Squadron's General within the ranks of the Order.

The Castello contains fifty-six inhabited dwellings a number of which are in a poor state of repair or threaten to collapse. Another seventeen houses are demolished and full of debris.⁴¹ A total of sixty-eight capacious water cisterns are found, though five are broken. These play an important role in the eventuality of enemy incursions and were topped to the brim as a contingency measure during the alarm of a Turkish assault in 1701.

A Hebrew ghetto was located in the immediate neighbourhood of the belfry. The Jews are considered to be malicious, cursed and stout enemies of God.⁴² Access to and from the ditch during defence emergencies is facilitated by an

underground tunnel.⁴³ 300 good soldiers, food supplies for a month and adequate ammunitions to fight back the besiegers would render the Castello impregnable provided that the ramparts and the damaged domestic units are duly repaired.⁴⁴

Thirty-one iron and two bronze mounted artillery pieces of different calibres are deployed on the Castello's bastions, cavaliers and ravelin, while the Governor's armoury and related deposits contain:

*383 muskets,
10 rampart guns,
155 bandoliers,
101 pikes,
616 partizans,
a bronze mortar and pestle to prepare gunpowder,
30 swords,
99 spontoons with beechwood poles,
5 pole-arms with elmwood poles,
133 rotoli⁴⁵ lead pellets,
597 rotoli lead for making shot,
2123 rotoli fuse for the firing of explosive',
50 rotoli natural tree resin and Greek tar ...,
10 rotoli sulphur,
53 rotoli ...,
12 new lanterns,
96 iron spades,
36 iron shovels,
13 pickaxes,
47 stone-cutting hatchets,
178 bronze grenades,
53 firing mortars,
60 crucibles for the melting of lead,
3230 iron balls of various calibres,
97 artillery rods,
2 iron supports ...,
223 powder cartridges,
123 casks for water storage,
161 wicker baskets,
169 venetian planks,*

³⁶ St. Barbara is the patron saint of artillerymen and anyone who works with cannons and gunpowder.

³⁷ St. Joseph's chapel replaced an older chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas of Bari, (Bezzina 2000, p 34).

³⁸ Mgr Bathasar Cagliares served as Bishop of Malta from 1615 to 1633

³⁹ Fra Geronimo Galeano Castelnovo from Provence served as Governor of Gozo during 1639.

⁴⁰ Other weapons, ammunitions and tools were stored in a vaulted hall at the foot of St. John's Cavalier, (Spiteri 1999, p 115).

⁴¹ The Castello experienced a progressive depopulation wave following the tragic siege of 1551, (Vella 2008).

⁴² Caxaro's harsh words betray a long tradition of hostility vis-à-vis the Jewish Community. For instance in 1465 the town mayor of Gozo was accused of harassing the Jews, by imposing unjustified imprisonment in order to obtain payments to which he had no right. The Jewish Ghetto within the Castello looks to have been bought out by the Christians by the late 15th century, (Wettinger pp 24-7).

⁴³ St. Michael's bastion is linked with the underlying ditch via two sally ports.

⁴⁴ Contrary to Caxaro's assertion, all military engineers with the exception of Antonio Maurizio Valperga heavily criticised the Castello.

⁴⁵ A rotolo is equivalent to 800grms.

1610 planks,
 46 wooden beams,
 190 scantlings,
 208 half scantlings,
 500 iron grenades,
 39 bullet moulds,
 2 reams of paper for the manufacture of cartridges,
 98 cane ...,
 2 iron helmets,
 12 ...,
 10 rampart gun's stands,
 60 sieves,
 60 small brooms,
 600 grenade pins,

Moreover, a bronze mortar to sound the alarm to the cavalry and other men of arms whenever required, and seven other bronze mortars for the firing of a salute on Christmas, Easter, Corpus Domini, St John the Baptist, the Assumption of Our Lady, St Ursula's votive processions, visits by the Order's dignitaries and on the occasion of the installation and departure of the Island's Governors. For the Castello to defend and accommodate the Island's 5934 inhabitants in the eventuality of an Ottoman assault those houses that are in ruins are to be reinstated and in some instances replaced by open spaces, two large warehouses for the storage of ammunition and food supplies are to be created, whereas its defences need reinforcement and upgrading. At night, all defence personnel must stay within the Castello as customary until 30 years ago.

Governors reside inside the Castello throughout the year while from May to St Martin's⁴⁶ their Lieutenants spend the night at Rabat to co-ordinate the coast guard stations. The Castello's security roster involves three soldiers at a time on watch for 24 hours. They are deployed at their base by day and at St Michael's sentry box at night, and are expected to assist the sergeant in command in controlling the other guard stations at St Martin's and St John's bastions. The master bombardier and his assistant are obliged to reside inside the Castello and be on constant call. The same applies for those bombardiers on duty at the

Castello between May and St Martin's. All other bombardiers residing on the Island, coastal towers' castellans and respective apprentices are equally expected to enter into action if alerted by mortar firing from the Castello.

This article will be continued in a forthcoming edition of the Gozo Observer.

References

- Abela, G. F. (1642). *Della Descrittione di Malta*. Malta: Paolo Bonacota.
- Agius De Soldanis, G. P. F. (1750). *Della Lingua Punica*. Rome.
- Agius De Soldanis, G. P. F. (1999). *Gozo Ancient and Modern, Religious and Profane*. Malta: Government Press.
- Aquilina, J. (1990). *Maltese – English Dictionary*. Malta: Midsea Books.
- Attard Hili, A. (2003). "Il-Merzuq Hill," In *Marsalforn in Retrospect*. Gozo: Saint Paul Church.
- Bezzina, J. (1999). *Gems of Gozo: An Appreciation of Twenty Chapels*. Gozo: Gaulitana.
- Bezzina, J. (2001). *The Gozo Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum: History and Guide*. Gozo: Gaulitana.
- Bezzina, J. (2000). *The Gozo Citadel: A Pictorial Guide* 4th Edition. Gozo: Gaulitana.
- Bezzina, J. (2004). *Xewkija: The First Village of Gozo*. Gozo: Xewkija Local Council.
- Bezzina, J. (2005). *Gozo's Government: The Autonomy of an Island through History*. Gozo: Gaulitana.
- Bonello, G. (2000). *Histories of Malta: Deceptions and Perception Vol. I*. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.
- Braudel, F. (1992). *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. London: Folio Society.
- Bresc, H. (1975). "The Secrezia and the Royal Patrimony in Malta: 1240-1450." In Luttrell, A. *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights*. Rome: British School at Rome.
- Buhagiar, M. (2005). *The Late Medieval Art & Architecture of the Maltese Islands*. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.
- Buttigieg, A. (1980). *Grajjiet il-Qala*. Malta.
- Camilleri, M. (2006). "The National Library of Malta's Manuscript Collection." In Camilleri, M. and Vella, T. (eds)

⁴⁶ St. Martin's feast falls on November 11 and is traditionally celebrated in Malta on the nearest Sunday.

Celebratio Amicitiae: Essays in Honour of Giovanni Bonello. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

Cassar, P. (1964). *Medical History of Malta*. Malta: Wellcome Historical Medical Library.

Cherry, J. F. (1990). "The First Colonization of the Mediterranean Islands: A Review of Recent Research," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* Vol 3, No 2: 145-221. England: Equinox Publishing Ltd.

Depasquale, C. (2006). "Books and Libraries in 18th century Malta." In Camilleri, M. and Vella, T. (eds) *Celebratio Amicitiae: Essays in Honour of Giovanni Bonello*. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

Debono, J. (1998). *Gozo Under the French: A 141 Day Saga*. Gozo: Ministry for Gozo.

De Lucca, D. (2003). *Mondion – the achievement of a French military engineer working in Malta in the early eighteenth century*. Malta: Midesa Books.

De Lucca, D. (2004). *A Description of Baroque Malta by Albert Jouvin Rochefort*. Malta: Midsea Books.

Government of Malta (2008). *Financial Estimates 2008*, Budget Office Malta: 200.

Fiorini, S. (1996). "The Siege of Gozo and the repopulation of the Island." In Farrugia, J. and Briguglio, L. (eds) *A Focus on Gozo*. Gozo: University of Malta Gozo Campus in collaboration with the Ministry for Gozo.

Fiorini, S. (1999). "Sibilla d'Aragona and the Foundation of the Saqqajja Benifice on Gozo," *Melita Historica* Vol. XII, No. IV: 367-72. Malta: Malta Historical Society.

Fiorini, S. (ed) (2006). *Documentary Sources of Maltese History* Vol. V, Part I. Malta: University of Malta.

Galea, V. (2001). *L-Ghid ta' l-Assunta*, Vol. 36., Gozo: Gozo Cathedral

Gatt, J. E. (1937) *Guide to Gozo*. Malta: Malta Times.

Gauci, A. (1966). *Gozo – A historical and tourist guide to the Island*. Malta: St Joseph's Home Printing Press.

Galea, V. J. (1999). *Qwiel u Qaddisin: Folklore u Twemmin f'Għajdut il-Maltin u l-Għawdxin*. Gozo: Calypso Island Publications.

Houel, J. (2012). *Voyage Pittoresques des Isles De Sicile, De Lipari et De Malte* (Paris 1787). Paris: Hachette Livre-BNF.

Samut-Tagliaferro, A. (1993). *The Coastal Fortifications of Gozo and Comino*. Malta: Midsea Publications.

Spiteri, S. C. (1999). *The Palace Armoury*. Malta: Publishers Enterprise Group.

Spiteri, S. C. (2004). "The Gozo Citadel during the Great Siege," *Treasures of Malta* Vol. IX, No. 1: 47-53. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

Spiteri, S. C. (2005). *The Great Siege: Knights vs Turks MSLXV*. Malta: Gutenberg Press.

Vassallo, C. (2010). *Dei Monumenti Antichi de Gruppo di Malta: Cenni Storici* (1876). U.S.A.: Kessinger Publications.

Vella, G. (2004). *It-Talb għax-Xita fl-Aħħar Snin tas-Seklu Dsatax*, Wirja tal-Biedja u Snajja (14-15 August 2004

Vella, G. (2005). "Prehistoric Legacy of Gozo's Gran Castello," *The Sunday Times of Malta* 09.10.2005: 66-67.

Vella, G. (2006). "Two Late 16th Century Reports on Gozo's Fortifications by Giovanni Rinaldini Anconitano," *The Gozo Observer* No. 15: 5-10. Gozo: University of Malta Gozo Campus.

Vella, G. (2007). "The Order's Resolution to blow up Gozo's Gran Castello," *Treasures of Malta* Vol. XIII, No. 2: 55-59. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

Vella, G. (2007). "Settlement Dynamics at Rabat-Gozo," *The Sunday Times of Malta* 11 & 18.11.2007.

Vella, G. (2008). "Metamorphosis of the Gran Castello," *Treasures of Malta* Vol. XIV, No. 2: 62-69. Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

Vella Haber, K. (1946). *Is-Santwarju Nazzjonali tal-Qala u l-Kaddis Eremita ta' Wied il-Għasel*. Malta: Lux Press

Wettinger, G. (1990). "The History of Gozo from the Early Middle Ages to Modern Time." In Cini, C. *Gozo: The Roots of an Island*. Malta: Said Publications: 47-81.

Wettinger, G. (1985). *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages*. Malta: Midsea Books.

Wettinger, G. (2000). *Place-names of the Maltese Islands: Ca 1300 – 1800*. Malta: Publishers Enterprise Group.

Zammit, J. *Diario: 1871 – 1898*. Unpublished, author's collection: Vol. II, fol. 51.

Zammit-Maempel, G. (1975). "A Medieval Safeguard against Poisoning," *Melita Historica* Vol. VI, No. IV: 391-410. Malta: Malta Historical Society.

Godwin Vella is Head Curatorial Affairs within Heritage Malta.

The Maltese Elites and their Obituaries (1815 - c.1900)

MICHAEL REFALO

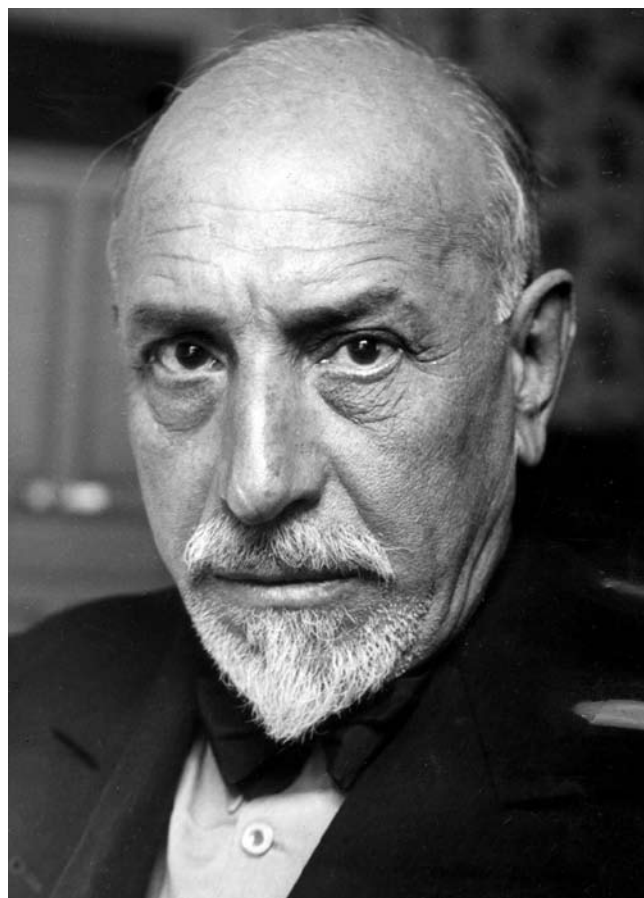
Introduction

The great Sicilian playwright and novelist, Luigi Pirandello has a short story in which the protagonist writes to his dead friend keeping him abreast of the world of the living. It should occur to the dead, he observes, that they list their faults and bad actions. It would then be a good idea to inscribe them on the back of the tombstone to counter the lies commonly carved on the front. In real life, of course, no one would dare do that! Much less would they do that in the obituaries of the dear departed. Nevertheless, a study of obituaries is an intriguing source of historical material. This is particularly so with nineteenth century obits because of their detailed and elaborate character. We can learn something about the dead themselves, those who wrote and read their obits, and their society.

Obituaries go back to at least the early eighteenth century, perhaps even earlier. But their antecedents are much older. Some historians trace obituaries back to (a) monuments or memorials for remembrance of individuals, (b) hagiographies, and (c) pious dispositions in wills.¹

In Malta, obituaries in their modern form first made their appearance in the Malta Government Gazette, the only available newspaper before the grant of freedom of the press (1838). It would, however, take the second half of the century for obituaries to, so to say, come to their full bloom, with more and more details about the deceased, his family, and his or her virtues and values, all dressed in hyperbolic and flowery language.

The authors of obituaries were generally anonymous. But not always. The most renowned was undoubtedly Nicola Zammit (1815-1899), doctor, architect, journalist, artist, and professor of philosophy. Whoever the author, there is a Latin



Sicilian playwright and novelist, Luigi Pirandello.

maxim which has always been followed ... almost. This recites: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* – nothing but good about the dead. And not only has it been adhered to, but most authors went even further: each individual, whether man or woman, young or old, was the paragon of honesty, piety, patriotism, beauty and innocence.

Consequently, the most striking element in these obituaries is the recurrent use of the superlative. Thus, one Giuseppe (surname not given), a merchant who died in April 1845 is described as an excellent father and the most honest of merchants.² A public broker, Michele Imbroll (d. 13 May 1851) is most loving father,³ and renowned merchant

¹ Bridget Fowler, *The Obituary as Collective Memory*, Routledge, New York & London, 2007: 41-42

² *Malta Times*, 15 Apr. 1845

³ *Mediterraneo*, 28 May 1851

Giuseppe Scicluna (d. 21 Feb. 1852) was most busy, in compensation of which, he was blessed with vast and the most profitable assets.⁴

However, it is in the case of women that the exuberance of the authors in loading the obituaries with superlatives reaches its climax. Extolling the virtue (*virtuosissima*), the affection (*affezionatissima*), the good manners (*maniere squisitissime*), rectitude (*rettissima qual era*) and diligence (*diligentissima*) permeates the obituaries dedicated to women.⁵ In lieu of the superlative, authors sometimes resorted to multiple adjectives to transmit the characteristics of the deceased: Antonietta Stivala (d. Nov. 1887) is described as a woman whose moral integrity, sincerity of heart, beauty and vivacious character rendered her most loved by everyone who knew her.⁶

Hyperbole places a pedestal under the commemorated dead as well as a halo round their head. They stand above the multitude that could (and should) look up to them as the carriers of the real and true virtues of citizenship, patriotism, piety.

Some of the authors, however, could not help inserting some measure of critical assessment, albeit often coated in mild, sugary language. It is, therefore, possible to encounter subtle, and sometimes more obvious criticism of deceased men (but never women). Those who held public office or were otherwise in the public eye were too well known to escape completely unblemished at death. Some warts were bound to show.

None, however, would be the recipient of such criticism, some sarcasm, and a dose of ridicule as one Archbishop. His Grace Count Carmelo Scicluna (1800-1888) was the beneficiary of four articles/obits in the *Risorgimento*.⁷ The first one, published on the very day of his death, was short and expressed sorrow for the passing away of the 'illustrious person.' A second one, a few days later, more an article than an actual obituary



Archbishop Count Carmelo Scicluna (1800-1888), heavily criticised in a leading article of the *Risorgimento*.

(signed Pessimista) refers to his funeral but soon becomes an extended biography. It narrates the circumstances attending his election, his true or fictitious connections with the rich merchant banker Scicluna, the Marquis Emmanuele (1820-1886), and the real or imagined benefits of such relationship. Further, it harps on his impatience at having been made to wait too long for the first papal audience when he just left and went home for lunch, and on his reluctance to allow the setting up of an African missionary centre in Malta. The article critically comments on his unwillingness to sanction the publication of a catholic newspaper. It further recounts Scicluna's reception of Cardinal Lavigerie in underwear while shaving and concludes by mentioning a rumoured will supposed to have provided so many things for the poor that these will be blessing

⁴ id., 25 Feb. 1852

⁵ cf. for example, id., 15 July 1878; 31 July 1878 28 Nov. 1878; 2 Jan. 1879; 24 Dec. 1879, 8 Oct. 1881, but this list hardly exhausts the examples.

⁶ id., 14 Nov. 1887

⁷ *Risorgimento*, 12 July 1888

his memory forever. Two days later more news about the rumoured will are published ... with a vengeance. The whole text was published in the 20 July 1888 issue preceded by a short note stating that the rumoured shower of pious legacies was just that. It was miserly for a man enjoying a colossal fortune. It provided the least possible, the benefits to the poor had merely been a pious wish of the population, nothing else.⁸

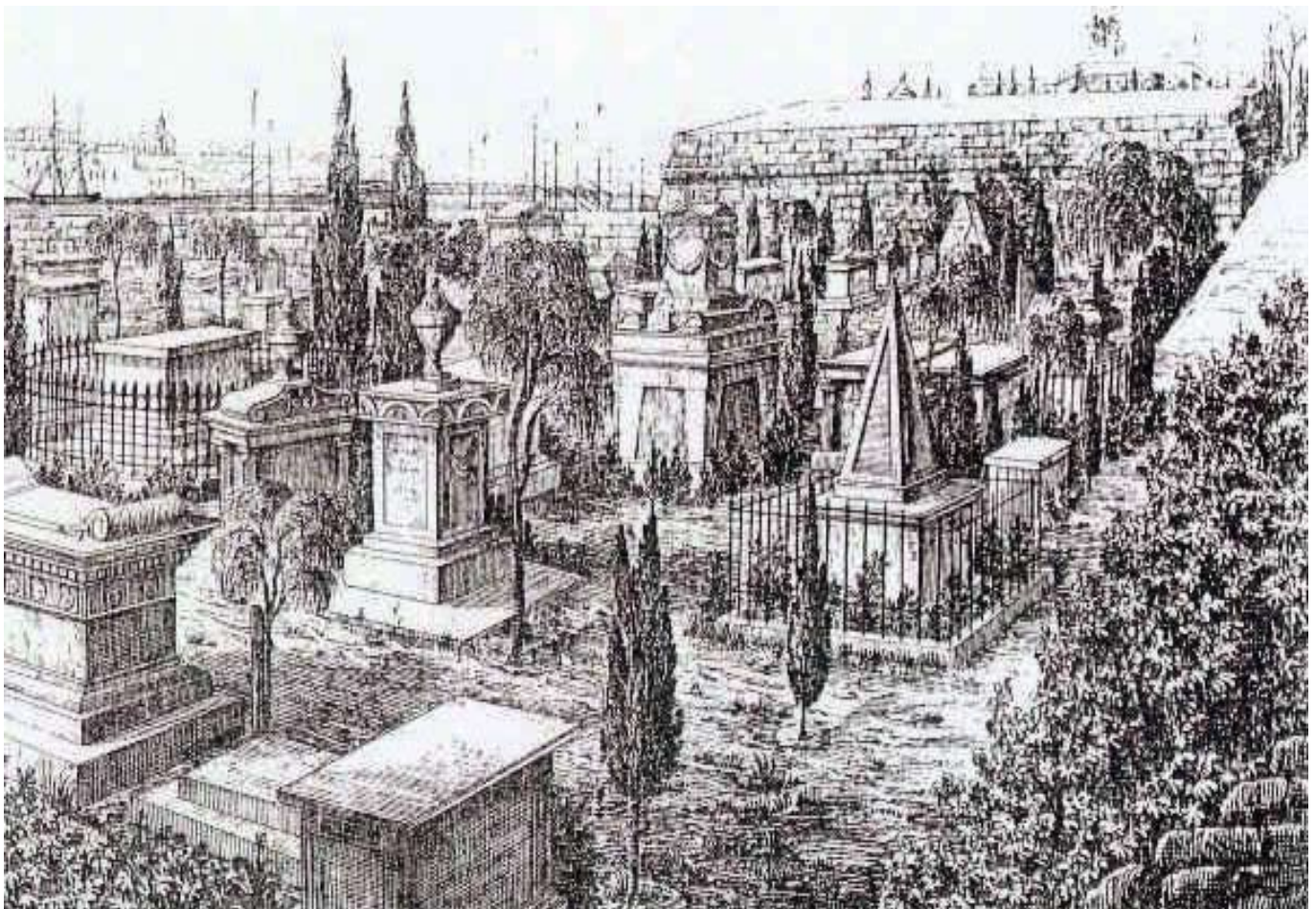
Social Functions of Obituaries

The social function of obituaries seems to have been threefold. They were, first of all, signposts for the community of which the deceased formed part. The virtues, values and qualities attributed to the deceased clearly indicated the characteristics perceived to distance the few from the many. Praise served to validate and entrench those virtues and qualities. Additionally, obituaries

indicated boundaries of identity as well as ‘badges’ confirming membership.

Delimiting the boundaries at the lower end meant ensuring a net distinction from the mass of the people. Once a physical barrier was impossible, another one was necessary. In a small island like Malta, more particularly its urban and suburban centres – Valletta and the Three Cities across the Grand Harbour in particular – the lines of demarcation between the rich and the poor, the elites and their inferiors were often, and necessarily, blurred.

The forces at the upper end were cultural and political rather than physical. The elite we are referring to lived on an island where effective political power was wielded by the colonial power, Great Britain. Despite protestations of loyalty to the British crown, there was always some fissure



Ta' Braxia Cemetery: Burial ground for non-Catholics.

⁸ id., 20 July 1888



Addolorata Cemetery, burial ground for Roman Catholics.

between the upper and middle classes on the one hand, and those with ultimate political power on the other: Roman Catholic versus Protestant, English versus Italian were the recurrent areas of potential conflict which, though hardly ever reaching boiling point, were the recurring undercurrent throughout. Compounded to this was the awareness that the British looked condescendingly, and often with a sense of superiority, on the Maltese. Consequently, there was the necessity to assert superiority if not politically, at least in cultural, moral and ethical terms.

Obituaries were one way of showing loudly and clearly that there was an elite in Malta that could not be confused either with the mass of the population or with the ruling foreigner. In that sense, they were also markers of boundaries.

Clearly, then, the praise heaped upon the deceased was also an indication of those requirements for entry into the class. If the upper and middle classes deemed philanthropy, piety, popularity and paternal (and maternal) qualities as their own constitutive characteristics, so also acceptance within the folds required measurement against them. A civil

servant, a teacher, a bank clerk who advanced in rank, and a monk or a priest who climbed the ecclesiastical ladder and/or was patronised by the better sort of people would be admitted to the fold, and in his turn would be invested with those same self virtues which were the preserve of the better sort of people. Once this was done (and money for publication, and an author, were available), s/he would be regaled with an obituary.

Advertising the death of worthy individuals during the nineteenth century was a common feature in newspapers of the period. Whether it was a leading article as in the case of the more renowned individuals, a normal obituary or just a short death notice it was felt that the departure of a meritorious person needed to be publicly acknowledged. The loss of the individual was a loss for the whole social group. Through the obituary, the deceased, his family and the community of which s/he formed part created a bond which commemorated the individual, elevated the family and strengthened the social bonds within the community. Consequently, anything connected with death whether this is bereavement, the funeral, mourning, or the obituary, renders death both a spectacle and an

affirmation. Within the particular circumstances of nineteenth century Malta this may arguably assume additional relevance because the community which, more than all others, presented candidates for obituaries was in an intermediate position. Hemmed in between the mass of the population on the lower side and the colonial master on the other, the middle and upper classes of local society had, necessarily, a need to assert their identity – and to have it publicised.

Historical Value

What I am trying to show is that beyond their immediate relevance for the contemporary newspaper-reading public, obituaries serve a dual historical function: they provide biographical details of the individual deceased, and they open a window on the characteristics, values and virtues – real or imagined – of particular sections of Maltese society. Additionally, the process of interpretation, the peeling off of the layers of obvious exaggeration and at times hagiography, leads to a better understanding of the society of which they were a feature. It might be true to say that they do constitute a minor clue on our reading of Maltese nineteenth-century society. Nevertheless, it is with such minor clues as the passage of time has left untouched that we are able

to put forward our interpretation of the individuals as well as the times and place which produced them. This is what I am attempting to do.

Like all other primary sources, obituaries have to be handled with care: neither blind belief nor total scepticism should be reserved for them. This is, after all, applicable to all historical sources. It is the hermeneutical process that enables us to propose a vision of nineteenth-century Maltese society which stood on the threshold of modernity, while still embracing the age-old paternalism that is the characteristic of the island colony.

‘Waking the dead’ eschews all connotations connected to the supernatural. However, it is consciously intended to remind us that the dead and the traces they leave behind, if seriously and dispassionately recalled, analysed and interpreted shed light on our explanation and understanding of the living – us.

Michael Refalo, a Notary Public, obtained the BA at the University of Malta - Gozo Campus, and completed his Ph.D. thesis on the Maltese commercial class of the late 19th century.

Ġużeppi Mercieca (1928-2016) – The Bishop who came from Gozo

GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

Introduction

Throughout the years a great amount of literature has been written about the life and ecclesiastical career of the late Archbishop Ġużeppi Mercieca, who was archbishop of Malta from 1976 to 2006. Mr Charles Buttigieg's monumental biography of Mgr Mercieca, *Ilkoll Ahwa Fi Kristu. Ġużeppi Mercieca – Memorji*, published in 2014 by Klabb Kotba Maltin is the jewel in the crown among all the writings that dealt with the long life of Dun Ġużepp Tal-Mewta, as he was known in Gozo, before he moved to Rome for his studies and eventual colourful career in the Sacra Romana Rota.

Gozitan Roots

It is interesting to note that Archbishop Mercieca's autobiography, immortalised in book form by Charles Buttigieg, who was for many years the PRO of the Archdiocesan Curia, was made possible by another Gozitan who was very close to the deceased archbishop, namely Mr Pawlu Mizzi, the founding-father of Klabb Kotba Maltin, also a Gozitan who was born in the whereabouts of Pjazza Tomba – now known as Pjazza Santu' Wistin – just a stone's throw away from Triq il-Providenza – the street in which the late Mgr Mercieca was born. To render this coincidence more alluring, after his marriage to Marija neè Scicluna, Pawlu Mizzi moved from Gozo to Malta and settled at number 1, Archbishop's Square and in the mid-seventies became Archbishop Mercieca's life-long neighbour.

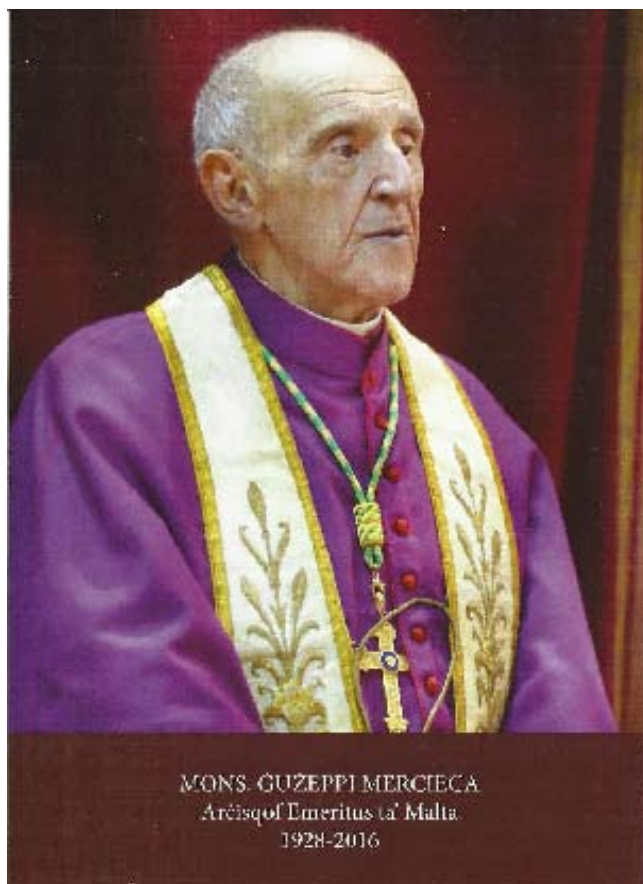
Childhood in Rabat, Gozo

Ġużeppi Mercieca was born in the family home in Triq il-Providenza, one of the narrow winding streets that make up the old medieval town of Rabat. St George's Parish Church – the church in which he was baptised and received his First Holy Communion and also confirmed, was only a corner

away from the house. He was born on the 11th of November 1928, the eldest child of the family.

I remember vividly how on one of my regular Sunday visits to my paternal grandfather, Baskal Attard, Archbishop Mercieca became the subject of the conversation. At one point my grandfather referred to Archbishop Mercieca as his second cousin. Later on, when I was old enough to put my shyness away and was able to pose a couple of questions to my grandfather, it became clear that Archbishop Mercieca's maternal grandmother, Marinton Vassallo, was a younger sister of my grandfather's maternal grandmother, Marirož Gatt. Even unto this day, many old families of Victoria are somehow related to each other.

It would be interesting to note that Mgr Mercieca came from a very religious family; two brothers of



Mgr Ġużeppi Mercieca

his father, Saverio, were priests. From his mother's side, a cousin of hers – Mgr Tarčisju Gatt – was also a priest, known for his dedicated service as vice-parish priest of the Cathedral Parish. The family was one of humble roots and his father earned a living through winemaking and the running of a traditional *hanut tal-inbid* (wine drinking shop) which still stands at the corner between Providence Street and St George's Street in the heart of Rabat.

Seminarian and Priest

Mercieca went to the school run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Palm Street and later on attended the primary school and the Minor Seminary, both in Victoria. He frequented the Oratorju Don Bosco for catechism lessons. Bishop Ġużeppi Pace of Gozo was of the opinion that the young seminarian Ġużeppi Mercieca should further his studies at the Collegio Capranica in Rome, a stone's throw away from the Pantheon. He came back to Gozo for his ordination which took place in St James' Church in the main square of Victoria; the other candidate to be ordained with him was Dun Saver Calleja, a priest who also hailed from Victoria. The ordination took place on the 10th of March 1952.

Connections with the Seminary

Mgr Mercieca was to return to Gozo once more and strengthen his ties with the diocesan seminary which he once attended as a secondary school student. It was in 1959 that he was recalled from Rome by Bishop Pace who asked Mercieca to teach the students at the secondary level as well as the seminarians in the Major Seminary. It was during this period that Bishop Pace named Mercieca as Rector of the Sacred Heart Seminary. Mercieca was to serve as rector from 1958 to 1969 and was then succeeded by the late Patri Anton Azzopardi S.J. The Jesuits continued to run the seminary in Gozo until 1997 when Bishop Cauchi appointed a diocesan priest for the office. As rector of the Seminary, the future archbishop of Malta was the fourth priest from Victoria to fill the post; the previous two were Mgr Giuseppe Farrugia known as Tal-Vers, Mgr Alfons M. Hili who later on became Archpriest of the Cathedral Church and Parish Priest of St George's and Mgr Antonio Vella.

Promoting Gozo

Archbishop Mercieca was also a promoter of Gozo and its diocese. When the superiors of the diocesan seminary in Gozo decided that it was right and just that the newly-ordained priests in Gozo be awarded a baccalaurate in Theology at the end of their studies, Mgr Mercieca was instrumental in the proceedings. Without blowing trumpets, he used his influence in Rome to affiliate the Gozo Seminary with the Pontifical University of St Thomas known in short as the Angelicum. This happened in 1994 and the news was greeted with jubilation on Archbishop Mercieca's native island. The late Bishop Cauchi and the late Archbishop Mercieca worked together in various ways and many-a-time they wrote together the various pastoral letters addressed to the Church in our islands. The pastoral letter which addressed the issue of Malta's inclusion in the European Union was perhaps the most renowned among these important documents.

Later Years

When in 1974 Mgr Mercieca was nominated by Pope Paul VI as auxiliary bishop to Archbishop Gonzi, it was more difficult for him to visit Gozo for long periods. His visits to the house in which he was born became less frequent although he remained close to his two brothers, especially to his brother priest Dun Ġwann. In 1976 he became archbishop of Malta and moved to Mdina. I remember when as a seminarian, we visited him as a group at the Palace in Mdina; his face would radiate with an unexplainable joy every time people from his native Gozo paid him a visit. As seminarians, we would stand in a straight line and as he shook our hands he would ask us where we hailed from in Gozo; in more than one case, he would know quite well a member or two of our families. His memory was certainly clear in this regard.

Until a few years before his death he would also preside over the Thanksgiving Mass on the Third Sunday of July at St George's Basilica – his native parish – on the occasion of the titular feast of St George, Patron Saint of Gozo, at the end of which he would intone the Te Deum.



Archbishop Mercieca on the 60th anniversary of his ordination to priesthood

Archbishop Mercieca was awarded the Ġieħ Ghawdex Award by the Circolo Gozitano on Sunday the 17th January 2010.

Mgr Mercieca will be remembered as a humble priest with a great heart, a gentle speaker but a wise man, economic in his words but clear in his thoughts.

I just hope that at some point in time, Gozo will erect a monument that would make future generations aware that once a prelate from Gozo rowed the barque of Peter in our islands with fairness and brotherly love even in times of turmoil and division.

I will always remember Mgr Ġużeppi Mercieca as the soft-spoken priest who acted wisely over the period of three decisive decades in the history of our island nation.

Geoffrey G. Attard was ordained priest for the diocese of Gozo in June 2004. He graduated M.Th. in Ecclesiastical History from the University of Edinburgh in November 2005 and he graduated M.Lit. in Practical Theology from the University of St Andrews with a dissertation entitled "Climate Change and the Catholic Church" in 2008. He has recently published his dissertation in book form.

Book: A Decade Of Australian Qala Association 1995-2005. Uniting People from Qala in Australia and Gozo

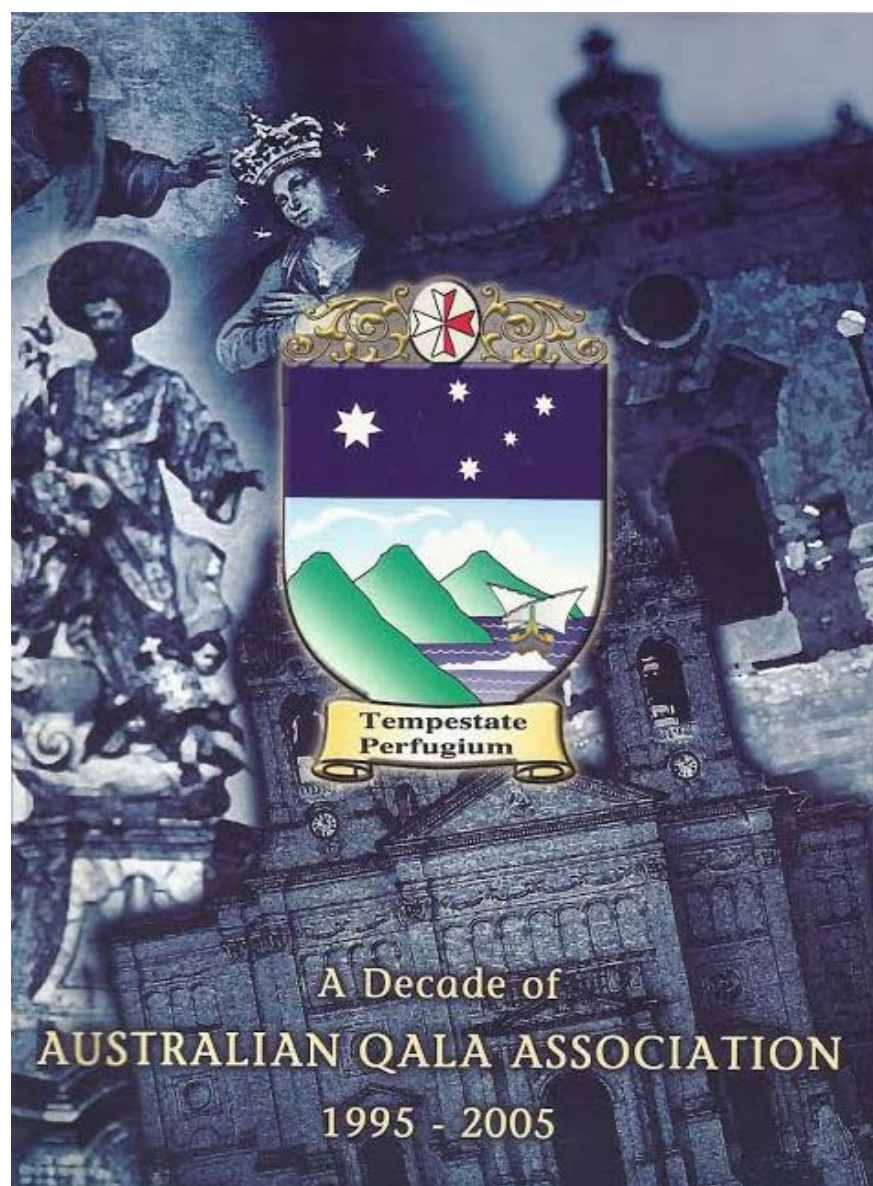
Raymond C. Xerri

Malta: A & M Printing (2005); 200 pages

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

A Decade Of Australian Qala Association 1995-2005 is a publication that every native of Qala should be proud to have on his private book-shelf keeping in mind that various personalities from Qala gave their contribution to the island of Gozo and its culture. Qala is considered to be the easternmost village on the island of Gozo, the village which is farthest from the town of Rabat. Mentioning Qala reminds one of what I once read in Dr Anton

Buttigieg's autobiography *Mill-Album ta' Hajti* which was recently published again in one volume by the ambitious publishing House Klabb Kotba Maltin of Santa Venera. It was in this book of his that the 'poet of nature' and ex-President of the Republic of Malta narrates how he used to go to school at the Seminary in Gozo on foot from his native Qala to Victoria and back again; an impressive feat in itself which never ceases to astonish me.



The publication is a mixture of autobiographical sketches of the author himself who is definitely one of Qala's main ambassadors on the international scene as well as a narrative history of the various successes of the Australian Qala Association. After the Second World War many people from Qala and from all over Gozo decided to emigrate to Australia to find a better future for themselves and for their children.

The book contains an introduction by Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina who was for many years Head Department of Church History, Patrology and Paleochristian Archaeology at the University of Malta. In his foreword, Rev. Dr Bezzina writes about the first references to Qala in local documentation. He also refers to the census taken by the Gozo Church in 1667 listing 65 persons as living in fourteen households in 'La Cala'.

The first part of the book contains also messages by various people who have contributed to the Qala

Association in Australia. Among these, I feel bound to mention the late Mgr Ġużepp Buttigieg, Mr Michael Buttigieg, who is the President of the Australian Qala Association, Mr. Joe Mizzi who is the Vice-President of the same association, Mr Joe Magro who is the Secretary-General of the Australian Qala Association as well as messages by two ex-parish priests of Qala together with a message by Rev. Dr. Charles Buttigieg who, besides being a biblical scholar, is also a distinguished son of the village.

The book is rendered more interesting through the number of photos that feature in it. It contains photos of historical places in Qala itself such as the Fort St Anthony which at the time of publication was still abandoned but which has since been fully restored by the Qala Local Council and the Ministry for Gozo. There are also various photos of the author himself with distinguished Australian personalities who have been introduced to the Association. Autobiographical information features strongly in the book since Xerri is also one of the co-founders of the association itself.

The book's cover features the motto of Qala in Latin *Tempestate Perfugium* literally meaning 'a harbour that offers refuge in stormy weather'. Hondoq ir-Rummien is definitely one of the most popular bays on the island of Gozo and prominent spot within the territory of Qala. The book's cover features also the coat-of-arms of the village as well as old pictures of the ancient sanctuary church of the Immaculate Conception which once served as the parish church for the entire eastern part of Gozo and the present parish church dedicated to St Joseph. The titular painting of the Marian sanctuary showing the Blessed Virgin Mary being crowned by God the Father also features on the book's cover.

A Decade of Australian Qala Association is a study of the contribution that *Qalin* of various generations have and are still giving to their adopted country of Australia where according to recent studies, the population of Maltese (and Gozitan) people settled there is now larger than the entire population of the Maltese archipelago itself.

Book: Ix-Xewkija. Il-Wirt Reliġjuż

Raymond C. Xerri
Malta: BCD Printing (2013)

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

Ix-Xewkija. Il-Wirt Reliġjuż is a book aimed to promote the rich cultural, historical and religious heritage of the oldest village of Gozo. It was in 1678 that Xewkija was given parish status by the then Bishop of Malta and Gozo Fra Girolamo Molina. It was to be the first parish outside the wall of the medieval town of Rabat.

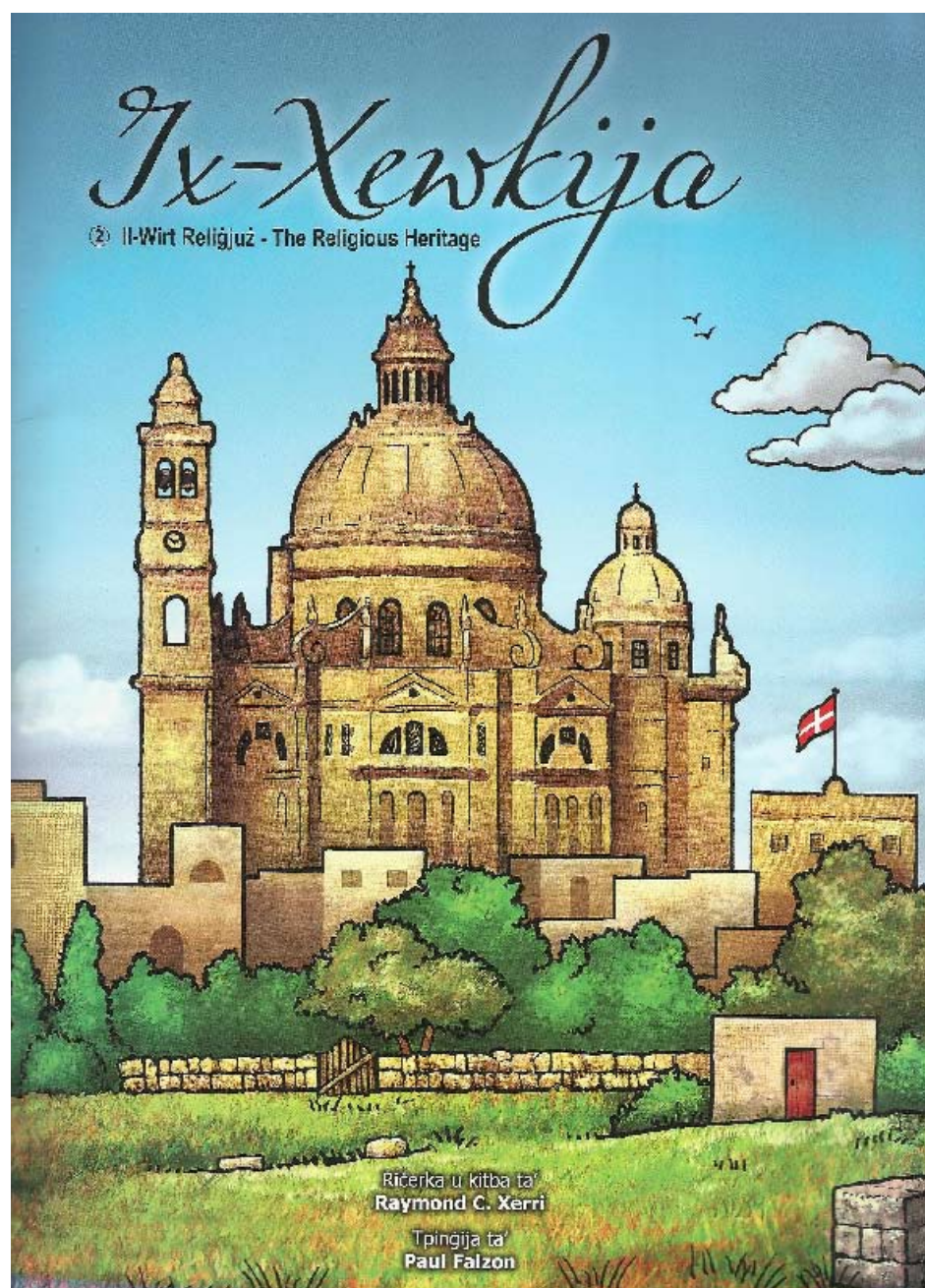
The book is the second among a list of publications dealing with the history of Gozo. However it is the fourteenth production in a series entitled *Għawdex u l-Għawdxin* as the reader may notice in the page dedicated to the cataloguing-in-

publication data. One would be fair in saying that ideally the publication should have had a number for each page. The publishers might not have felt the need for such a thing since the book contains mainly illustrations that are intended to be coloured by children. The illustrations have been prepared by Paul Falzon, a *Xewki* himself, who is a professional designer of pictures and is a young expert in the art. Hailing from Xewkija himself can be considered a strength since the publication is imbued with a sense of belonging that renders the book more attractive. Illustrations vary from designs of the previous parish church which used

to stand on the spot now dominated by the Rotunda to the old titular painting by Gioacchino Loretta (1681) which can be admired within the Sculpture Museum adjoining the church. A strong tradition holds that St Paul was heard preaching from Xewkija as he was addressing a congregation on the plains of Rabat, Malta. A design of the statue of St Paul commemorating this event features in the book. All designs are named in both Maltese and English rendering the publication bi-lingual.

Ix-Xewkija. Il-Wirt Reliġjuż has an introduction by the Mayor of the village, Mr Paul Azzopardi. It also contains messages by Paul Falzon, the designer of the book and Dr Raymond C. Xerri, the

author of the publication. Although hailing from Qala, Xerri has a soft spot for Xewkija as can be deduced from reading the book and doesn't refrain from expressing his love for the locality. In fact, Dr Xerri can be considered as one of those Gozitan personalities who cherish all that is Gozitan and all that has to do with the history and culture of the island; his other publications are a proof of this. The publication of the book was rendered possible through an initiative taken by the International Office within the Education Division of Gozo in a joint effort with the Xewkija Local Council. The book was mainly intended for the students of the Roża Magro Primary School within the Gozo College.



Recent Activities at the University of Malta - Gozo Campus

JOSEPH CALLEJA

Examinations at the Gozo Campus

Almost all Gozitan students following courses at the Msida Campus of the University of Malta were again given the opportunity to sit for their end-of-semester examinations in Gozo. During the January/February 2016 session, around 650 examinations were organised both at the University Campus in Xewkija and at the Examination Centre in Victoria. More than 700 examinations were similarly held during the June session. Gozitan students are finding this service very convenient and from year to year it is becoming more popular.

As in past years, the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, organised the Maltese and English Proficiency Tests for prospective Gozitan applicants. The tests were held at the Gozo Campus in April and in June.

GoGoGozo 2016

During the month of May the University Gozo Campus hosted a number of activities as part of GoGoGozo 2016, an intensive 10-day course combining digital theory and technology with the practices associated with cultural geography. A strong contingent of students and staff from five different universities (Manchester, Warwick, Utrecht, Olomouc and Malta) engaged themselves in a series of lectures, projects and outdoor games. This was the second year that this course was organised in Gozo thanks to a successful Erasmus Plus grant application.

Students Advisory Services

On 16th and 17th July, the Students Advisory Services of the University of Malta were available at the Gozo Campus to provide prospective



The students and staff from five universities after the completion of a 10-day field experience in Gozo.

students with the necessary information and advice on University courses. This service, which is offered every year at the Gozo Campus, is of great benefit to Gozitans, saving them from crossing over to Malta.

Team Building Activity

On 20th July, the Office for Human Resources Management and Development, at the University of Malta, organised a one-day activity at the Gozo Campus, for its staff. This activity served as a learning session as well as a team building occasion.

Courses at the Gozo Campus

The courses running at the Gozo Campus during academic year 2015-2016 were:

- Pre-tertiary Certificate in Baroque Architecture (Yr 1)
- Certificate in Proof Reading: Maltese (Yr 1)
- Diploma in Commerce (Yr 1 and 2)
- Bachelor of Commerce (Yr 3)
- Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) (Yr 1)
- Master of Arts in Islands and Small States (Yr 1)

A number of courses were offered via the video-conferencing system. Through this technology Gozitan students could follow from Gozo all lectures delivered at the Msida Campus. The video-conferencing system offers a number of technological features which allows geographically distant users to see and talk to each other in real-time. It also incorporates the real-time sharing of data from computer based presentations and videos.

The video-conferenced courses were:

- Certificate in Clinical Practice (Yr 1)
- Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education (Yr 1)
- Higher Diploma in Public Accounting and Finance (Yr 3)
- Executive Master of Business Administration in Business Administration (Yr 3)
- Executive Master of Business Administration in Public Management (Yr 1)

A number of short courses were also offered at the Gozo Campus. The Lace Making Programme organised two courses entitled 'Introduction to the Art of Making Lace' and 'Making a Lace Jacket'.



The students following the MA in Islands and Small States Studies visited Dwejra as part of their fieldwork in Ecology and Biogeography of Islands. During this fieldwork students drew a report on the geological formation of the area and on its ecological aspects.

The courses, which were spread over one academic year, were well attended.

Another short course offered at the Gozo Campus was that in e-Marketing. This course was organised for the second consecutive year by the Malta University Holding Company Ltd. It was held during the months of January, February and March 2016.

The University of the Third Age, which forms part of the University of Malta, organised a number of lectures as part of its programme for this academic year. Mgr Joseph Farrugia delivered a number of lectures on Mediterranean Civilizations, while Ms Sina Bugeja delivered a study-unit on Healthy Aging. Professor Joe Friggieri, delivered a series of lectures relating to Philosophy. Over fifty elderly people attended these lectures.

Other Activities

The facilities of the Gozo Campus were also used by various other entities for their activities.


The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board made use of the video-conferencing facilities to organise a number of interviews with students who sat for MATSEC exams. In this way Gozitan students could be interviewed directly in Gozo without the need to cross over to Malta.

In March the Gozo Social Work Unit within the Ministry for Gozo, organised a two-day course as part of an in-service training to social workers working within the Unit, while in August the Measures and Support Division within Ministry for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto organised an information session about the launch of two calls for project proposals under the Business Enhance ERDF Grant Schemes.



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
L-Università ta' Malta

GOZO CAMPUS



Courses at the University of Malta - Gozo Campus

Further information about these courses may be obtained from the University of Malta website at: www.um.edu.mt/courses or from the main office of the University of Malta - Gozo Campus, Mgarr Road, Xewkija, Gozo.

The University of Malta will be offering a number of courses at the University Gozo Campus at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate level as from October 2016. The courses on offer are the following:

- ▶ Diploma in Gozo Studies
- ▶ Diploma in Lace Studies
- ▶ Diploma in Commerce
- ▶ Bachelor of Commerce in Economics and Management (for holders of the Diploma in Commerce)
- ▶ Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Economics or Management
- ▶ Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Criminology
- ▶ Executive Master of Business Administration in Business Administration (via videoconferencing)
- ▶ Master of Arts in Hospitalier Studies
- ▶ Master of Arts in Islands and Small States Studies

All courses listed above will commence subject to there being a sufficient number of qualified applicants.

☎ +356 2340 7900
✉ ugc@um.edu.mt
Application forms can be filled by accessing: www.um.edu.mt/apply
Applications Deadline: 21 July 2016

The flyer issued by the University Gozo Campus publicising the courses offered in Gozo for academic year 2016/17.

Other entities which used the Gozo Campus facilities were the Gozo Youth Council, which organised a number of conferences and MEUSAC, which held a number of information sessions to the general public. The Environment and Planning Review Tribunal held a number of sittings at the Gozo Campus, while Jobsplus held a number of lectures as part of their programmes.

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



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

The Gozo Observer is distributed without charge, upon request, to interested readers. Current and past issues of the magazine can be obtained, subject to availability, from:

The Editor, Gozo Observer, University of Malta - Gozo Campus, Mgarr Road, Xewkija, Gozo. Tel: +356 21564559, Fax: +356 21564550, E-mail: ugc@um.edu.mt

