

PREFACE

The multifaceted personality of a Maltese intellectual

This monographic issue of the *Journal of Maltese Studies* is dedicated to Giovanni Francesco Buonamico, the Maltese seventeenth-century intellectual mainly remembered as the author of the second oldest poem in Maltese, *Mejju ġie bilward u ż-żahar*, a work many readers will recall from their early school years, when it would have been learnt by heart.

However, this solitary poem in Maltese by Buonamico can hardly be said to do justice to his remarkably broad range of interests. And yet, apart from a pioneering study in 1971 by Giovanni Mangion, very little has been written about this seventeenth-century polymath up to the present publication. It is only recently that his eclectic personality has been revisited through specialised studies. The aim of this publication is to shed further light on the multifaceted scholarly activity of this Maltese doctor, an undertaking that could not have been attempted without the generous offer of Judge Giovanni Bonello to put at the disposal of different scholars the substantial collection of unstudied Buonamico manuscripts, bound in one volume, in his possession. This issue of the *Journal of Maltese Studies*, therefore, also commemorates the first time that different scholars

have gained access to rare Buonamico manuscripts, complementing previously known and accessed material by the same author. This has made it possible for the contributors to this issue to concentrate on particular and distinct aspects of Buonamico's prolific writings.

The articles in this issue will quickly reveal to the reader that Buonamico did not only write a poem in Maltese (Friggieri), but also produced different versions of it in French (Depasquale) and Italian (Brincat). His poetic sensibility is not limited only to praising Grand Master Cotoner, but also sings the praises of any cultural or physical entity associated with the Pauline tradition (Freller), for which he resorts to Latin versification (Vella, Azzopardi).

Buonamico's work goes well beyond literary pieces. He is the first Maltese to have given a detailed account of his travel experiences (Cassar); he touches, too, on several linguistic concerns, showing a keen interest in the etymology of words (Cassola). His varied cultural interests led him to jot down the different types of flora that characterised the Maltese archipelago (Stevens and Lanfranco).

In short, he was an inquisitive and energetic "homo faber", ready to take up any cultural, botanical, or literary initiative that came his way. This publication both commemorates and honours that disposition.

We are grateful to Professor Ivan Callus, of the Department of English at the University of Malta, for his last crucial advice on this issue of the *Journal of Maltese Studies* before it was sent for printing.

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