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MELITA THEOLOGICA

Journal of the Faculty of Theology

“Qui narrant preterita...” (conf. XI, 17)

**Studies in Church History,
Ancient Christian Thought and Sacred Art**

Co-editors:

Nicholas J. Doublet, Jonathan Farrugia and Martin Micallef



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Editorial Note

“Qui narrant praeterita...” (*conf.* XI, 17)

The complexities of Christian thought and practice throughout history are best understood through the lenses of theology, culture, the arts, and the meticulous interpretation of documentary and other sources. This volume gathers a diverse collection of scholarly articles that explore significant dimensions of Early Christian theology, the historical evolution of Christianity in Malta, and the interplay between faith and artistic expression. Each article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of these themes, revealing how theological discourse and cultural contexts have shaped and continue to influence the Christian identity.

In light of these considerations, the Department of Church History, Patrology, and Palaeochristian Archaeology has aptly titled this volume of our Faculty’s peer-reviewed journal “Qui narrant praeterita...,” a phrase drawn from Augustine’s renowned work, *The Confessions*. This title, which translates to “Those who speak of past things,” encapsulates the essence of our Department’s scholarly pursuits, each engaging in explorations that invariably connect to historical narratives so that the lived experience of faith in the past continues to nourish present ‘witness’ within the fluid context of our contemporary society.

This volume is structured into three separate yet related sections, each representing a specific area of expertise within our Department. The initial two articles focus on themes derived from the later patristic period, while the subsequent four delve into pivotal moments in the lived experience of the Local Church. The final two articles examine diverse artistic expressions, highlighting the interconnections between the realms of art, archaeology, and theology.

The first section, *Early Christian Theology*, begins with Rev. Dr Jonathan Farrugia’s exploration of Gregory of Nyssa as a hagiographer. This study emphasises Gregory’s dual contributions to the development of Trinitarian

doctrine and his reflections on individual sanctity, drawing on his homilies and the lives of saints. By examining the qualities Gregory valued in the saints he commemorated, such as orthodoxy and miraculous acts, Farrugia illustrates how hagiography served devotional and polemical purposes within the theological landscape of the fourth century.

In a complementary vein, Rev. Dr Joseph Ellul OP, investigates the nuanced relationship between Oriental Christianity and early Islam. Initially perceived as mere military incursions, the establishment of Arab-Muslim presence in formerly Byzantine territories prompted apocalyptic interpretations of history among Christians. Ellul's analysis traces the evolution of this perception as peaceful coexistence emerged, necessitating the development of a theological framework that engaged Arabic terminology and Islamic doctrines.

Transitioning to *History of the Church in Malta*, the volume offers insights into the island's Christianization through Dr George Azzopardi's study. Azzopardi critically assesses textual and archaeological evidence, arguing for a gradual process of Christian conversion in Malta, shaped by various social and cultural dynamics. This exploration of the idea of mission is further enriched by Rev. Dr Nicholas Doublet's re-examination of a letter attributed to St Ignatius of Loyola for centuries preserved by the Jesuits in their Church in Valletta as a relic of their founder. This letter was instrumental in establishing the first Jesuit College in Messina, which became a model for future Jesuit institutions, including Malta. It emphasised education as a vital tool for evangelisation, reflecting Ignatius' strategic mission to form young men for spiritual and academic leadership. This legacy shaped Jesuit influence in Malta, anchoring their educational mission in the College of Valletta, which later evolved into the current University of Malta. The letter's preservation as a relic highlights its significance, both spiritually and in furthering Jesuits' missionary and educational goals.

Rev. Prof. Hector Scerri's study on Mauro Caruana OSB, provides a biographical account of Caruana's formative years, highlighting his pastoral activities in Scotland and his election to Bishop of Malta in 1915. This study contributes to understanding the Maltese Church's leadership during a pivotal moment in its history. Additionally, Rev. Dr Kevin Schembri examines the workings of the Particular Legislation Commission of the Maltese Episcopal Conference between 1983 and 1988, revealing the intricate processes behind the drafting of Maltese Church law in response to the revised Code of Canon Law. Schembri's work underscores the collaborative efforts involved in shaping local ecclesiastical legislation.

The volume's final section, *Art*, features two compelling studies that highlight the intersection of faith and artistic representation. Rev. Prof. Martin Micallef analyses Padre Pelagio Mifsud's drawings of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa, assessing their historical accuracy and contextual significance within the Marian cult. Through careful comparison with contemporary sources, Micallef's work enriches our understanding of the devotional practices surrounding this historical site.

Lastly, Rev. Prof. Paul Sciberras offers a biblical reading of Filippo Paladini's Baroque painting, *The Circumcision of the Child Jesus*, in the Jesuit Church in Valletta. Sciberras argues that while the artwork depicts the physical act of circumcision, it simultaneously emphasises the importance of naming—underscoring the theological significance of Christ as Saviour. This reflection on the painting invites a deeper appreciation of how art can convey profound theological themes within the liturgical context.

Collectively, the studies in this volume illustrate the richness and diversity of Christian thought and practice, from the early theological debates to the historical narratives of Maltese Christianity and the enduring legacy of religious art. By engaging with these varied dimensions, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of how theology, history, and art intersect and interact with one another in the ongoing story of the Christian experience.

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Gregory of Nyssa as a Hagiographer

The Sources and their Contexts

The younger brother of Basil the Great is primarily known for his clarifications on the Trinitarian dogma in the latter part of the 4th century, a century which had been plagued by a number of dissenting groups starting with the Arians and ending with the Pneumatomachians. He did, however, leave to posterity a number of works that deal with other themes – minor ones, of course, when compared to his complete oeuvre – but which give modern scholars a better idea of the length and breadth of this theologian’s contribution.

One such minor theme is hagiography. The works on [Christian]¹ Saints by Gregory of Nyssa that have survived fall into two different genres: the majority are homilies (two of which are extended panegyrics which he himself probably re-edited at a later stage), and one is a biography written as a letter. The protagonists of these texts are a number of martyrs, two bishops and a nun. All, but for the latter, were homilies preached on the feast-days of these saints.

* Jonathan Farrugia is a Maltese Catholic priest and academic, currently serving as the Head of the Department of Church History, Patrology, and Palaeochristian Archaeology at the University of Malta. His expertise lies in early Christian theology, especially 4th century Eastern theology, with a particular focus on Gregory of Nyssa. Farrugia earned his doctorate in Patristic Theology at the Pontifical Augustinian Patristic Institute in Rome. He is actively involved in translating patristic homilies and early Christian texts into Maltese and has contributed to numerous local and international conferences. His research interests extend to hagiography, early Church history, and Maltese ecclesiastical artifacts.

¹ The specification is deemed necessary because Gregory wrote also a *Life of Moses*. This is not included in this study because Moses is a pre-Christian and therefore cannot be easily defined as a “saint” in the same way as Christians who modelled their lives on Christ can. Secondly this *Life* is in actual fact a mystical work not a biography in the proper sense as some of the works discussed in this study are.

The earliest extant homily among these happens to be one of the sermons on the forty martyrs of Sebaste.² These were a group of soldiers from the *Legio XII Fulminata* who were sentenced to death by freezing on an Armenian lake in AD 320 during a persecution ordered by Licinius who was emperor in the East while Constantine ruled the West.³ Their cult – as well as their relics – spread all over the empire by the end of the 4th century. Daniélou dates this sermon to the feast day of these forty men, 9 March, of the year 379.⁴ The setting is almost certainly their shrine, the *martyrion*, in Caesarea because Gregory speaks of Sebaste and Armenia as two neighbouring provinces, therefore the place where this sermon was delivered must have been in Cappadocia, where the cult had been introduced some years earlier presumably by Gregory's mother. The same martyrs were the object of another sermon – divided in two parts⁵ because Gregory could not complete it on the saints' feast day due to the noise made by the crowded congregation in the *martyrion* at Sebaste⁶ – delivered four years later. The first part was delivered in the *martyrion* of Sebaste itself and the final two thirds of the homily were resumed the following day in a church in Sebaste.⁷ According to Daniélou this sermon was delivered when Gregory was working on the third book against Eunomius while paying a visit to his brother Peter who was bishop of Sebaste.⁸

² *In XL Martyres II (Mart II)*, ed. O. Lendle, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 159-169. The oldest homily has been recorded as the *second* homily in honour of these martyrs, probably because the 'first' one, divided in two parts, was placed in manuscripts before this one, hence one came to be known as the *first homily* and the other as the *second homily*. Studies have proven that the 'second' homily predates the 'first' by about four years. See Jean Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 29, no.4 (1955): 346.

³ Françoise Vinel, "Sainteté anonyme, sainteté collective? Le quarante martyrs de Sébastée dans quelques textes du IV^e siècle," in *Du héros païen au saint chrétien. Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre d'analyse des rhétoriques de l'Antiquité (C.A.R.R.A.), Strasbourg, 1-2 Décembre 1995*, Collection des études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 154 (Paris: Institut des Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 125.

⁴ Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," 346.

⁵ *In XL Martyres Ia (Mart IA)*, ed. Otto Lendle, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 137-142; *In XL Martyres Ib (Mart IB)*, ed. Otto Lendle, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 145-156.

⁶ Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," 362-363; Johan Leemans, "Mart IA," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, eds Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 483.

⁷ Jean Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères Cappadociens. Le prédicateur et son auditoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 306.

⁸ Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," 363.

Another military martyr who got a nod from Gregory was Theodore;⁹ he seems to have been invited to Euchaïta around 381¹⁰ specifically to preach in honour of the martyr in the shrine which held his relics.¹¹ Theodore was a recruit in the Roman army who was cast into a furnace for not rejecting his Christian faith and for burning down the temple of Cybele in Amasea. The events took place in the early 4th century,¹² some seventy-five years before Gregory preached in his honour. This homily bears strong influences of the rhetorical style of the Second Sophistic since it abounds in descriptions and paraphrases, and it also follows some traditional rules of classical rhetoric like those of praising the hero's fatherland and his natural qualities. Gregory uses this homily to touch briefly upon some other motifs, such as attacks on Arians,¹³ some theological issues¹⁴ and, most notably, fierce attacks against the pagan cult that the emperor Julian tried to revive some years before.¹⁵

The latest homilies in honour of a martyr that have survived are the two sermons known as *in sanctum Stephanum*¹⁶ and these were preached on the

⁹ *De sancto Theodoro (Theod)*, ed. John P. Cavaros, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 61-71.

¹⁰ The dating of 381 for this panegyric is not accepted by everyone. Daniélou maintains that it is correct because Gregory attributes a victory over the Scythians which happened a year before to the intercession of this saint. Theodosius had a great victory over this tribe in 380, so Gregory might be referring to this war. See Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," 355-356. Bernardi agrees with Daniélou. See Bernardi, *La predication des Pères Cappadociens*, 303. Leemans at first places it anytime between 379 and 381. See Johan Leemans, "A Preacher-Audience Oriented Analysis of Gregory of Nyssa's Homily on Theodore the Recruit," in *Studia Patristica: Proceedings of the 13th International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford, 16-21 August 1999*, vol. 37. *The Cappadocian Fathers; Other Greek Writers* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 140, but later he restricts the date between 379 and 380 without giving reasons why. See Johan Leemans, "Grégoire de Nysse et Julien l'Apostat. Polémique antipaienne et identité chrétienne dans le Panégyrique de Théodore," *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 53 (2007): 19.

¹¹ The site of the homily is confirmed because the bishop describes in great detail the shrine dedicated to the martyr where he is preaching.

¹² Leemans, "Grégoire de Nysse et Julien l'Apostat. Polémique antipaienne et identité chrétienne dans le Panégyrique de Théodore," 15.

¹³ *Theod*, 66, 7-8. 16-21; 71, 8-9.

¹⁴ The destiny of the soul after death (62, 13-14) and the impassibility of God (66, 16-21) are two examples.

¹⁵ Leeman's article, "Grégoire de Nysse et Julien l'Apostat. Polémique antipaienne et identité chrétienne dans le Panégyrique de Théodore," is an excellent study on this aspect.

¹⁶ *In sanctum Stephanum I (Steph I)*, ed. Otto Lendle, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 75-94; *In sanctum Stephanum II (Steph II)*, ed. Otto Lendle, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 97-105.

two days following Christmas of 386,¹⁷ probably at Nyssa.¹⁸ The first homily is focused around Stephen presented as a hero who fights and dies for his orthodox beliefs, giving Gregory ample room to criticise contemporary unorthodox currents represented by the Eunomians and Pneumatomachians. The second homily was preached on the day traditionally dedicated to the apostles Peter, James and John,¹⁹ and so these three saints feature in the homily as well, where Gregory curiously seeks to place the deacon Stephen on the same rank as the three great apostles closest to Christ.

The two bishops in honour of whom Gregory left very long sermons are Gregory, the first bishop Neocaesarea who lived a century earlier, and his own brother Basil, bishop of Caesarea who had died a couple of years before the eulogy in his honour was delivered.

The original version of the panegyric in honour of Gregory the Wonderworker²⁰ was probably delivered on 17 November 380.²¹ There is little doubt that the version we possess is an amplified version,²² so most certainly this is not the rendering that the people heard in 380. We do not know how the original rendition was, or its length. We can presume that the last part was added in the “revised” version made by Gregory, since after talking chronologically of the saint’s life till his death, he goes back a number of years – to the first months of the saint’s priesthood – to talk about the plague that ravaged the city. Other than this we have to mention that at various points the text shows that the original form was intended as a speech delivered to a congregation.²³ But certainly there

¹⁷ Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse,” 367. This scholar is certain of the date because in the second homily Gregory says that the feast of the martyrs he was commemorating (Peter, James and John) had fallen on a Sunday, and this was the only year in which the 27th of December happened to fall on a Sunday.

¹⁸ Scholars do not give details on the location, but I believe that these were held in Nyssa, since Gregory would have been bound to be in his diocese on Christmas, so presumably even the homilies in honour of Stephen were held there.

¹⁹ Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse,” explains that in the liturgical calendar of the Church of Cappadocia the three days following Christmas marked the commemorations of St Stephen (26 December), the apostles Saints Peter, James and John (27 December) and St Paul (28 December).

²⁰ *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* (*Thaum*), ed. Gunter Heil, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 3-57.

²¹ Bernardi, *La predication des Pères Cappadociens*, 308

²² *Ibid.*, 309.

²³ The opening lines prove as much: “Our words and the people gathered here have only one aspiration. The great Gregory is thus set in front of us to reflect upon during this gathering” (3, 1-3). Unless otherwise stated, translations are made by the author of this study.

were some parts added even along the body of the text, not just at the end. At some points there are some expressions which can be taken as proof that Gregory was aware that in his homily he could not mention all that he wished since he was limited by time, and this would mean that he already had in mind a later edition of the text wherein he would add the details he was obliged to omit in the vocal version.²⁴

Even though there is only one sermon in honour of Basil preached on 1 January 381,²⁵ Gregory's brother makes a brief appearance in the earlier homily on the forty martyrs. When the latter was preached Basil had been dead only a couple of months, so Gregory pays homage to him by stating that his brother had delivered celebrated panegyrics on these same saints.²⁶ Basil is described as an "image of philosophy" and Gregory calls him "great" – we have to bear in mind that this homily on the forty martyrs was being delivered in Caesarea, the city where Basil had been bishop till a few weeks earlier and where probably another bishop had not yet been appointed.²⁷ Daniélou calls this excursus a short panegyric on Basil, which would be the sketch of the eulogy that Gregory would deliver two years later. In the eulogy Gregory makes it clear from the very beginning that he is celebrating a *feast* in honour of a ποιμὴν καὶ διδάσκαλος (110, 1):

In a remarkable way, God has established an order and progression through the annual feasts we commemorate. [...] The sequence of these yearly celebrations aligns with the apostolic order. Yet, the first event stands apart from the others, as the theophany of the Only-Begotten Son, through His birth from the Virgin, is not merely instituted as a sacred feast but as the Holy of Holies and the Feast of Feasts. Let us, therefore, enumerate those who follow this sacred order, which for us begins with the assembly of apostles and prophets. Indeed, figures such as Stephen, Peter, James, John, and Paul embody the apostolic and prophetic spirit. After them follows the pastor and teacher who belong to this same order, and it is their legacy that we commemorate in this present celebration. What, then, is this festival? Should I speak of its name, or rather of the grace that suffices to reveal the person without need for a name? You are already aware that there is a teacher and shepherd among the Apostles, and you understand the significance of such titles. I refer here to Basil, the chosen vessel, distinguished for his virtuous life and powerful preaching... (*Bas*, 109, 4-6; 10-110, 5).

²⁴ "However, the many other great miracles he performed surpass written accounts and reports. Nevertheless, I will elicit one or two attributed to him" (44, 11-14).

²⁵ *In Basilium fratrem* (*Bas*), ed. Otto Lendle, Gregorii Nysseni Opera vol. 10 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 109-134.

²⁶ *Mart II*, 160, 5-19.

²⁷ Bernardi, *La predication des Pères Cappadociens*, 304.

The key term Gregory employs to describe the occasion for the homily he is about to deliver is *πανηγύρεως* (*Bas*, 109, 7), meaning “festive assembly.” Thus, the reason the congregation gathered in the church at Caesarea that day was not to mourn their former bishop, but rather to continue the sequence of feasts that began on Christmas. This celebration was fittingly part of the progression, for after Christ, the martyrs, and the apostles, Basil was deemed worthy of his own commemoration. Bernardi contends that Gregory was not solely responsible for instituting this commemoration in Basil’s honour, primarily because, as the bishop of a lesser city like Nyssa, Gregory had no authority in Caesarea, where Helladios served as metropolitan bishop. Bernardi believes that the commemoration was the result of a collective decision by the Cappadocian bishops, aimed at introducing a Christian feast to replace a pagan festival.²⁸ Basil’s saintly reputation, owing to his exceptional leadership, ecclesiastical-political acumen, and remarkable pastoral initiatives, made him a fitting figure for such a celebration.

Finally, Gregory of Nyssa speaks of his elder sister Macrina, whom he characterises as “a teacher of how to live, a mother in place of our mother.”²⁹ She is first mentioned in a letter he addressed to a certain John in 380, several months after her death on 19 July 379. Gregory later composed the more well-known *Life of Macrina*,³⁰ a biography structured as a letter to an ascetic from Antioch named Olympius. According to Silvas, Gregory and Olympius likely became acquainted following Gregory’s travels after the Council of Constantinople in 381, placing the composition of the text between late 381 and early 382³¹ — within three years of Macrina’s death. Maraval categorises the *Life of Macrina* as a “philosophical biography,”³² wherein Gregory’s principal objective is to

²⁸ “Ce discours relève d’une tentative de création liturgique pour la date du 1^{er} janvier. Grégoire est-il à l’origine de cet essai? C’est peu probable, si on considère qu’il prend parole dans l’église de Césarée à la tête de laquelle se trouvait depuis 379 Helladios. [] L’initiative a dû venir du clergé de Césarée, et en particulier d’Helladios. Il est vraisemblable qu’Helladios avait pris lui-même la parole le 1^{er} janvier 380, à l’occasion du premier anniversaire de la mort de Basile et qu’il fit appel ensuite au frère de Basile, puis à son ami. Le culte rendu à la mémoire de Basile apparaît donc comme une création collective de l’épiscopat cappadocien.” Ibid., 314.

²⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter* 19, 6, trans. Anna M. Silvas in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 176.

³⁰ *Vita S. Macrinae (Macr)*, ed. Virginia Woods Callahan, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 8 part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1952), 370-414.

³¹ Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 102.

³² Pierre Maraval, ed. and trans. *Grégoire de Nyse: Vie de Sainte Macrine*, Sources Chrétiennes 178 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 21-23.

demonstrate that his sister exemplified the Christian philosopher, living a life of exemplary virtue imbued with Christ. Gregory explicitly states his desire to highlight members of his family who were distinguished by their virtue but had been overshadowed by Basil's formidable reputation.³³ Chief among these virtuous figures is Macrina. Evidently, shortly after her death, or following Gregory's biography of her, Macrina became a widely venerated figure in Asia Minor, as attested by Gregory of Nazianzus in one of his epigrams: "The dust holds the illustrious virgin Macrina, [...] she who kept herself from the eyes of all men, is now on the tongues of all and has a glory greater than any."³⁴

Gregory's Models of Christian Living

The commemoration of saints in the early Church was regarded with profound reverence and was, in fact, an integral aspect of popular Christian devotion. Saints assumed the role that ancient heroes once held in what we might today refer to as 'popular culture,' acting as intermediaries between the divine and ordinary human beings.³⁵ The presence of a saint's relics—of one who bore witness to Christ and emulated His life—within a community signified a vital connection between the faithful and God.³⁶ This is attested even by Gregory himself in his panegyric on the *life of St Gregory the Wonderworker*:

The bodies of the martyrs were transferred to various locations, and the inhabitants celebrated their annual anniversaries with great joy, holding festivals in their honour. A clear testament to the wisdom of this great man lies in his ability to guide the people of his generation toward a new way of life. Like a skilled charioteer, he firmly yoked them to the reins of divine knowledge, ensuring that they, too, would find joy under the yoke of faith. Observing that the naive and untrained masses persisted in bodily pleasures fostered by the deception of idolatry, he sought to facilitate the most significant transition—from foolish superstitions to God. To achieve this, he allowed them to celebrate and express their joy during the festivals commemorating the martyrs, believing that, over time, they would naturally gravitate toward a more worthy and conscientious manner of life, aided by the faith, which would illuminate the path toward it (*Thaum* 53, 2-16).

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* 8,4 in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God*, 117-118.

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epigraph* 163, in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God*, 82.

³⁵ Manlio Simonetti, *Classici e cristiani* (Milano: Medusa Edizioni, 2007), 15-17.

³⁶ Antonio Quacquarelli, "L'antropologia del martire nel panegirico del Niseno a san Teodoro di Amasea," in *Arché e Telos. L'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa*, eds Ugo Bianchi and Henri Crouzel, *Studia Patristica Mediolanensia* 12 (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1981), 220.

Thus, in the perspective of the Wonderworker, as articulated by Gregory, these festive commemorations served as a valuable tool—if not an indispensable means—for redirecting the focus of people’s lives from the bodily pleasures associated with paganism toward a manner of living aligned with Christian teachings. Consequently, the primary motivation for bishops to promote the feasts of martyrs—and, eventually, other saints—was to guide the populace in “Christianizing” their pagan festivities, transforming them into celebrations characterised by moral integrity and good conduct.³⁷ Commenting about how the Wonderworker instituted the celebration of martyrs’ feast in order to transform people’s *forma mentis*, Quacquarelli says that:

Mediante le feste dei martiri cerca nuove occasioni per insegnare la fede cristiana ed elevare il livello popolare. Per Gregorio il Taumaturgo è un culto quello dei martiri che non può limitarsi solo agli anniversari, ma deve entrare profondamente nelle coscienze. Egli mira all’essenziale delle cose perché gli uomini possano fissare lo sguardo su Dio e non sulle vane superstizioni.³⁸

An intriguing aspect of early Christian veneration is that the first saints were primarily ordinary individuals—rather than influential community leaders—who chose to follow Christ unconditionally, unafraid of personal consequences. This is particularly evident in Gregory’s writings, where only two of his subjects were Christian leaders; the remainder included unranked soldiers, a deacon, and a nun, none of whom held prominent positions in society. This illustrates that Christians identified more readily with common individuals than with established figures of authority; thus, it was through these ordinary people that they perceived the potential for sainthood within themselves. Early texts, some dating back to the 2nd century, demonstrate the significant impact these individuals had on the Church. On the anniversaries of their deaths, Christian communities would commemorate them, initially by reading eyewitness accounts of their lives and deaths, and later by incorporating sermons about them into the liturgy.³⁹

Hence these texts being discussed, even the oratorical ones, were a form of hagiography.⁴⁰ Due to their Christian witness – be it through martyrdom or

³⁷ Bernardi, *La predication des Pères Cappadociens*, 311-312.

³⁸ Quacquarelli, “L’antropologia del martire nel panegirico del Nisseno a san Teodoro di Amasea,” 220-221.

³⁹ Elena Zocca, “Santo e santità,” in *Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino (Bologna: Marietti, 2010), 3:4703.

⁴⁰ René Aigrain, *L’hagiographie*, *Subsidia hagiographica* 80 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes 2000), 122.

otherwise –, these saintly models were looked upon as very powerful intercessors, as if they had some kind of influence on God.⁴¹ Local saints, in particular, were invoked for protection against all kinds of evil, especially against invasions by foreign tribes.⁴² The purpose of hagiographical texts – be they homilies preached on the occasion of the saints’ feast, or written texts narrating their lives – was that of portraying the person as a model worthy of imitation by other Christians. The subject, therefore, was not just the individual *per se*, but the individual as a person of God,⁴³ and this is what Gregory seeks to show in these texts.

Preachers, however, do not stop there. In the first part of this paper, it has been stated that in the two homilies on St Stephen Gregory launches attacks against Eunomians and Pneumatomachians, two heretical movements that developed three hundred years after Stephen died. Leemans gives a short but detailed description of how feasts would have been celebrated, and even shows how these occasions proved to be appropriate for preachers to address issues that were not strictly related to the saints:

Les panégyriques de martyrs étaient prononcés au jour anniversaire de leur mort, qui était, chaque année, le temps fort de leur culte. Ce jour-là, la communauté chrétienne locale, avec les amis et les proches, affluait vers le sanctuaire du martyr. Pareille fête d’un martyr ou *panéguris* commençait le plus souvent la veille au soir, par une veillée qui se poursuivait toute la nuit, tandis que la célébration eucharistique en constituait le point d’orgue liturgique. Un des éléments fixes de la liturgie de ce jour était aussi le transport des reliques en procession, qui rassemblait une foule de gens. Au cours de la liturgie célébrée en l’honneur du martyr, on prononçait évidemment aussi une homélie. Celle-ci était le plus souvent un éloge du martyr, bien que le prédicateur eût la liberté – lorsqu’il le jugeait nécessaire – d’aborder des sujets tout autres.⁴⁴

Gregory of Nyssa lived and worked immediately after the end of the era of persecutions, a time when other holy men and women, who did not shed their blood but who still lived exemplary lives, started to be celebrated and invoked as

⁴¹ Johan Leemans, “Introduction,” of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, eds Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen, Boudewijn Dehandschutter (London: Routledge, 2003), 11.

⁴² Examples of this are found in the homily in honour of the recruit Theodore. Gregory starts off by thanking the saint on behalf of the people of Euchaïta for having protected the city from the incursions of the Scythians; towards the end of the homily, he asks the saint to continue his protection and avoid any incursions in the future.

⁴³ Leemans, “Introduction,” of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 22.

⁴⁴ Leemans, “Grégoire de Nysse et Julien l’Apostat,” 16.

well.⁴⁵ The ‘new heroes’ – such as holy monks, strong-willed bishops and pious virgins – who started to be venerated in the 4th century along with the martyrs after Christianity gained imperial favour, were a necessity more than anything else: the faithful needed other spiritual models to imitate since their faith was no longer that of a persecuted minority. Proving that Gregory moved with his times, two (or three)⁴⁶ of these new models appear in his hagiographical texts as well. The increasing number of saints was a sign of the ever-growing faith which till a few decades before was considered as a *religio illicita*, as Leemans shows clearly in his introduction to a collection of translations of homilies preached on saints’ feast days:

The cult of the saints contributed greatly to this process of Christianising place and time. During the first centuries this cult was celebrated more or less in hiding, venerated with celebrations situated on or in the neighbourhood of their graves in graveyards at the outskirts of the cities. When Christianity grew, and certainly from the moment it enjoyed imperial support, the cult of the martyrs was celebrated more openly and with greater splendour, reflected in that the martyrs’ sanctuaries grew from modest chapels into splendidly adorned basilicas. These became visible signs of the Christian occupation of that particular part of territory. From the fourth century onwards not only martyrs were venerated but also important and pious bishops, monks and biblical saints, thus multiplying the number of sanctuaries. It also led to an increase in feast days since the memory of a saint was especially celebrated on his or her *dies natalis*: the day of the saint’s death. These feast days came to supplement the regular feast days, and certainly in big cities with many churches and sanctuaries the number of saints venerated could be considerable.⁴⁷

Gregory’s Style of Presenting His Models and Contextualising Them in the Late 4th Century

Leemans suggests that Gregory followed the rules of classical rhetoric, especially those of the Second Sophistic, in these hagiographic texts;⁴⁸ he extols the qualities and virtues of the saint in question and invites his audience to follow his or her example. The structure of the discourse typically comprises four key components. First, a prologue is presented, which emphasises the importance of

⁴⁵ The first among these was Anthony the Abbot; eventually others like Basil of Caesarea, Macrina and Martin of Tours followed.

⁴⁶ It is uncertain whether Gregory the Wonderworker, who died around 270, received martyrdom or not.

⁴⁷ Leemans, “Introduction,” of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

discussing the saint in question and includes the preacher's humble admission of his inadequacy to do so justice. This is followed by the corpus, where the social and familial context of the saints, along with their innate qualities, upbringing, education, and life and death, are celebrated. In this section, Gregory introduces a distinctive Christian perspective, choosing to highlight the dignity and perfection⁴⁹ of the saints rather than their earthly status and honours. The discourse also features comparisons⁵⁰ between the saints and other notable figures, often drawn from the Bible, to underscore their significance. Finally, the text concludes with an epilogue that serves as an exhortation for the congregation to emulate the example set by the saints. Instances where Gregory addresses current situations, such as heresies, are usually found in the second and third parts.

The precise location of Gregory's education remains uncertain – he refers to his siblings, Macrina and Basil, as his sole teachers – yet it is evident that he received comprehensive training in the principles of classical oratory. This influence is clearly reflected in the stylistic characteristics of his texts, where he employs metaphors to enrich his language and enhance the vividness of his expression. For example, in the *first homily on the Forty Martyrs* Gregory compares the noise made by the congregation to the sea;⁵¹ the faith of the martyrs against the forces of evil is compared to the armour used by soldiers in their military campaigns.⁵² The use of hyperbole is evident, generally in describing the persistence of the saint in the hour of trial, wherein super-human boldness is shown in the saint's words such as Theodore's speech before he is killed,⁵³ or even the countless miracles presented in the life of Gregory the Wonderworker. Sometimes comparisons are used to help the addressees understand better the message Gregory wished to

⁴⁹ This can be seen at the beginning of the homily on St Gregory Thaumaturgus.

⁵⁰ Among these homilies maybe the most notable comparison is that made by Gregory between his brother Basil and Moses. An excellent study has been made on this theme by Marguerite Harl in the 5th international colloquium on St Gregory of Nyssa: Marguerite Harl, "Moïse figure de l'évêque dans l'éloge de Basile de Grégoire de Nyse (381)," in *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa. Proceedings of the Fifth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Mainz, 6-10 September 1982)*, ed. Andreas Spira (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Patristics Foundation, 1984), 71-119.

⁵¹ *Mart Ia*, 142, 11-13; *Mart Ib*, 145, 16-21.

⁵² *Mart Ib*, 149, 11-17.

⁵³ "Because of my faith in him and my confession of it, let he who is wounding me cut me; let he who is whipping me lacerate me; let he who is burning me bring the flame close; let he who is taking offence at these words of mine cut out my tongue, for each part of the body owes to its Creator an act of endurance" (*Theod.*, 66, 8-12; trans. Johan Leemans as "A Homily on Theodore the Recruit," in *Let Us Die that We may Live*, 87).

pass, like when he compares the group of forty young soldiers to forty gems on a crown or a necklace⁵⁴ and when their imprisonment is compared to the training of athletes in a gymnasium.⁵⁵ Being an excellent orator Gregory makes also use of detailed descriptions (ἐκφρασις) in order to involve mentally and emotionally his audience into the events he is presenting.⁵⁶

In addition to recounting the testimonies of the saints, Gregory's hagiographical texts provide insights into various issues, thereby conferring historiographical value not only concerning the lives of martyrs who lived several decades or centuries earlier but also, and perhaps more significantly, regarding many aspects of the ecclesiastical situation in the late 4th century.⁵⁷ This integration of broader themes occurs both implicitly and explicitly; at times, Gregory merely references contemporary theological issues, while at other moments, he engages in extensive digressions. The primary purpose of addressing these additional subjects is to convey a message to his audience: when the texts are homilies, Gregory utilises them as vehicles to address specific concerns within the congregation; when they take the form of other literary works, such as the *Life of Macrina*, the intended audience is the readers. In any case, Gregory recognized the popularity of saints, making it unsurprising that these texts extend beyond strictly hagiographic content.

Thus, these texts do not merely recount historical facts regarding the lives of the saints; rather, they present these figures as representatives of the 4th century. In this context, the saints from both the distant and recent past, as well as from various geographical locations, are portrayed as responding to the situations present in Gregory's environment through their words and actions. These models serve as sources of inspiration for the audience, encouraging them to persist in their pursuit of perfection, even when faced with challenges. According to Leemans, scriptural or historical figures who embodied this ideal played a crucial

⁵⁴ *Mart Ib*, 148, 13-15.

⁵⁵ *Mart Ib*, 152, 5-9.

⁵⁶ The description of the changes suffered by the bodies of the forty martyrs as they freeze is remarkable: "Their youthful bodies became black, their beauty withered away and the colour of their flesh faded. Their fingers fell off, mutilated by the frost little by little and all their limbs and sense-organs were pounded to pieces by the bitter cold. For after a time their flesh became livid and swollen, it became rent all around the limbs until it fell off the bones and they could experience in reality the decay of a corpse" (*Mart Ib*, 154, 1-6; tans. Johan Leemans as "First Homily on the Martyrs of Sebaste (Ia and Ib)" in *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 105).

⁵⁷ Aigrain, *L'hagiographie*, 121.

role, as Christian writers depicted them as exemplars of Christian virtue.⁵⁸ Saints emerge as symbols of Christianity's superiority over Judaism (as seen in the figure of Stephen), paganism (represented by Gregory the Wonderworker, the Forty Martyrs, and Theodore), heresies (exemplified by Basil), and a worldly lifestyle (as illustrated by Macrina). Consequently, it is common for these texts, particularly the homilies, to conclude with an exhortation for the audience to emulate the virtuous qualities of the saints.

The Characteristics of the Saints

In accordance with traditional hagiography, Gregory enumerates specific characteristics possessed by his saints both in life and in death. Notably, despite the diverse backgrounds of the saints he extols – a deacon, soldiers, bishops, and a nun – certain common traits emerge among them. The most prominent of these is the public profession of faith, whether expressed overtly or subtly. This is unsurprising, given that sainthood is inherently linked to membership in the Church and adherence to orthodoxy. For instance, Stephen is depicted – consistent with the account of his martyrdom in the Acts of the Apostles – publicly affirming his faith prior to his stoning.⁵⁹ Similarly, Theodore frequently confesses his faith during his trial and martyrdom,⁶⁰ and the forty soldiers of Sebaste are likewise commemorated in this light in both of the sermons honouring them.⁶¹ Even non-martyr figures provide testimony to the truth they uphold: Macrina lives as an authentic witness to her beliefs, speaking of heavenly matters on her deathbed with her brother,⁶² while Basil ardently defends the truth against the rampant heresies of his time, even at the cost of his exile.⁶³ Gregory the Wonderworker articulates his profession of faith at the outset of his episcopal ministry,⁶⁴ maintaining it as a guiding principle throughout his life.

Orthodoxy is further reinforced through a vibrant relationship with God, which manifests in various ways. This relationship may take the form of a life

⁵⁸ Johan Leemans, "Reading Acts 6-7 in the Early Church: Gregory of Nyssa's First and Second Homilies on Stephen the Protomartyr," in *Studia Patristica. Papers Presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristics Held in Oxford 2007*, vol. 47 *Cappadocian Writers. The Second Half of the fourth Century (Greek writers)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 11.

⁵⁹ *Steph I* 86, 4-88,2.

⁶⁰ *Theod* 66, 5-15.

⁶¹ *Mart Ib* 148, 6-7.

⁶² *Macr* 389, 19-391, 4.

⁶³ *Bas* 121, 20-22.

⁶⁴ *Thaum* 17, 18-19, 5.

dedicated to prayer and service, particularly among the non-martyr saints, who praise God continually, especially during times of trial. This is evident across all examples: the martyrs endure torture while worshiping God; Macrina displays her faith during periods of ill health; Basil champions the truth amid heretical struggles; and Gregory the Wonderworker remains steadfast during persecution. Prayer also propels individuals toward service to those in need: Naucrati⁶⁵ leads a life marked by prayer, work, and service; Stephen assists the poor; and both Basil and Macrina demonstrate generosity, even toward Jews, during times of drought. Another indicator of orthodoxy, albeit one that may be considered unseemly by contemporary standards, is the fervent destruction of pagan shrines and temples. This is vividly illustrated in the homily on Theodore, who is labelled a “persecutor of idols” for having burned the temple of Cybele,⁶⁶ as well as in the life of Gregory the Wonderworker, who prioritises the destruction of all temples in Neocaesarea following his elevation to bishop.⁶⁷

A life in union with God, sustained by persistent prayer, necessarily fosters a journey toward ever-greater perfection, a quality that manifests to varying degrees among the saints. The forty soldiers of Sebaste are described as having been endowed with grace and achieving perfection through their deaths, having steadfastly trusted in God. Stephen’s perfection is characterised by his imitation of the Lord in his commitment to the truth; the apostles Peter, James, and John are perfected by their faith and understanding of the truth. Theodore, a devout man and true servant of the Crucified, actively spreads his faith in various ways. Basil is commended for loving God with all his heart, resulting in a life marked by poverty and purity. However, it is Macrina who takes centre stage in discussions of this particular quality: her unceasing prayer allows her to transcend natural limits and attain the highest summit of human virtue in her longing for union with God, all while attending to the needs of those around her, particularly her mother, who was devastated by the loss of her husband and son.⁶⁸

The wisdom of these saints is also highly commended. In his theological treatises, Gregory, like many of his contemporaries, associates wisdom with the Holy Spirit; thus, all his wise figures achieve this status by allowing the Spirit to work within them. The forty soldiers are portrayed as friends of Christ, characterised by their truthfulness and justice, and steadfastly adhering to their

⁶⁵ Another of Gregory’s siblings who died in an accident while living in solitude. He is mentioned in the *Macr* 379, 9-380, 16.

⁶⁶ *Theod* 67, 11-24.

⁶⁷ *Thaum* 55, 15-27.

⁶⁸ *Macr* 380, 17-381, 14.

faith. Stephen is described as being rich in wisdom and grace, a testament to his role as a proclaimer of truth, filled with the Holy Spirit. Basil and Macrina are notably esteemed for their wisdom, albeit presented in somewhat different manners. Basil is lauded for his ability to extract the best from pagan philosophy, thereby embodying the true essence of philosophy as it ought to be. This alignment with wisdom renders him pleasing to God and a chosen vessel. Gregory asserts that his brother is deserving of honour for purifying life through both his teachings and personal example. Conversely, Macrina, who does not hold the title of theologian like Basil, is celebrated for her wisdom in entirely distinct terms: she was well-versed in Scripture, demonstrated wisdom from a young age, and consistently managed to control her passions through reason, even amid family tragedies. She led a philosophical and ascetic life, characterised by a detachment from passions, striving to emulate the angelic existence as closely as possible. In essence, she was filled with the Holy Spirit, a point that Gregory emphasises repeatedly throughout his writings.

Authentic Christian living has historically been regarded as a struggle, not only during periods of persecution, and Gregory was acutely aware of this reality, having personally experienced insubordination and exile. Consequently, it is not surprising that he commends the courage exhibited by the examples he presents. The martyrs, in particular, are celebrated for their steadfast witness during the tortures they endured, which ultimately led to their glorification. Among the titles he attributes to them, the most notable include courageous soldiers and athletes of Christ, champions of the faith adorned with the armour of God. The forty soldiers, whose martyrdom is described in vivid detail, are particularly praised for viewing the cares of life as transitory, willingly offering their bodies to torment; thus, their inner strength is enhanced while their bodies endure suffering patiently. They are fortified by the love of God, demonstrating remarkable bravery rooted in their confidence in the Spirit's power. Stephen, for his part, willingly sacrifices his life, becoming a pure offering in honour of God. Basil and Macrina are also characterised as a soldier and an athlete, respectively. Macrina derives joy from her suffering and engages in daily acts of mortification, enduring trials with and for Christ. Basil's courage in participating in doctrinal debates serves as a cautionary example for other bishops. Although he was not a martyr, he faced exile and experienced daily suffering through his corporeal discipline and fasting, aligning himself with the martyrs in spirit. Both martyrs and confessors resist temptation throughout their lives and exhibit fearlessness in the face of death.

Gregory at times speaks about the physical appearance of these models. Most are of a beautiful countenance in life: the forty soldiers are said to have been adorned with beauty in life and chaste;⁶⁹ Macrina is said to have possessed unsurpassed physical beauty.⁷⁰ More attention, however, seems to be given to the transformation of their bodies at the moment of death and after. In the short interlude on Peter, Gregory says that he radiated with holiness when crucified; Stephen is described as taking the appearance of angel while he was being stoned,⁷¹ while Macrina is said to have a god-like face in death.⁷² The relics of Theodore and of the forty soldiers are described as treasures that bring sanctification and blessing. Even though their bodies are dead, they are still alive, because through the miracles they perform they show that the dead bodies are still active, a true sign of the immortality granted to God's loved ones.

Miraculous activity is yet another sign of sainthood, and all the models presented by Gregory, even his siblings who had been dead for only a couple of years, are surrounded by miracles in their lives and death. In the case of the life of Gregory the Wonderworker miracles abound: he is constantly healing people, raising people from death (and causing the death of some as well) and exorcizing temples. The martyrs, too, were granted divine visions in their moments of trial, and do not hold back the power they were given through their glorification because they still perform miracles in aid of their devotees. Basil is curiously described as a miracle himself: in one of the homilies on the forty martyrs he is defined as a visible miracle of divine providence; his birth was revealed before to his father in a vision while in his adulthood a divine light with no material source illuminated his room when he prayed at night. Macrina, too, was the vessel of miraculous works, namely the unending provision of food to the people who streamed to her retreat during the time of famine, the healing of her breast tumour,⁷³ and when she healed the infected eye of a child.

A final note on the characteristics shared by most of Gregory's models is their sense of communion in life and in death. Basil is admired for having revered the saints in his life; Macrina is praised for having founded a monastic community; while the forty soldiers are lauded for having endured their martyrdom together, being compared to a necklace which finds its value and its beauty as long as each stone stays linked to the others. This fraternity and communality are pursued

⁶⁹ *Mart Ib* 147, 23.

⁷⁰ *Macr* 374, 10-15.

⁷¹ *Steph I* 87, 10-13.

⁷² *Macr* 408, 21-409, 2.

⁷³ *Macr* 404, 20-406, 9.

even in heaven: Basil is now equal to the apostles and the martyrs, Theodore now rests in union with the other saints, as are the forty soldiers.

Gregory on the Cult of His Saints and Other Faiths

These texts offer some further interesting information on the shrines that honour these holy persons, built to hold the remains of these heroes of the faith, but which, of course, for any Christian, represented much more than just buildings. They were in fact a tangible guarantee of the real presence of the saint among the people, as well as a place where earth met heaven.⁷⁴ In the homily in honour of St Theodore Gregory gives a very detailed description of the magnificent *martyrium* of this saint found in Euchaita. From this same homily we learn what the shrine looked like, what decorations it had and also that inside the church there were many paintings depicting episodes from the earthly and eternal life of the saint.⁷⁵ In his account Gregory gives enough information to modern readers to understand that this shrine was not only a place of prayer, but also a centre where acts of charity were carried out:

To us he left the instructive memory of his contest, he who brings people together, who teaches the Church, who chases the demons, leads the peaceful angels, looks out for our interests in the presence of God. He turned this place into a hospital for the most diverse diseases, a harbour for those suffering from the storms of life, a well-filled warehouse for the needy, a convenient resting place for those who are travelling, a never-ending feast for those who are celebrating (*Theod.* 69, 24-70, 1; trans Leemans, 90).

Hence, the sanctifying presence of the martyr's remains propelled the people who assembled there to do acts of kindness to the poor and the sick who sought help in such places.

Gregory provides insights into the observance of the cult of saints, not only in the towns where he preached but throughout Cappadocia more broadly. Two specific practices, one of which likely has its roots in pagan traditions, include the custom of incubation in shrines and the practice of *inhumatio ad sanctos*.⁷⁶ The first practice, which can be traced back to the cults of Isis and Asclepius, involved the faithful sleeping in the sanctuary to receive healing through dreams

⁷⁴ Leemans, "Introduction," of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 9.

⁷⁵ The decorations did not just have an aesthetic value, but used to be made in order to help the people who entered the *martyria* to get a glimpse of the glory of the martyr, and thus helping in the faithful's personal edification.

⁷⁶ Leemans, "Introduction," of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 12-13.

or visions. In the second homily on the Forty Martyrs, Gregory references this practice twice: the first instance involves a limping soldier who is healed while sleeping at the shrine of the Forty Martyrs in Ibora,⁷⁷ the second refers to Gregory himself, who experienced a vision while sleeping outside the shrine established by his mother in Caesarea.⁷⁸ The second practice, *inhumatio ad sanctos*, pertains to individuals requesting burial near the remains of saints to protect their own remains from defilement and to attain resurrection alongside them. In the second homily honouring the Forty Martyrs, Gregory notes that his parents were buried close to the shrine commissioned by his mother for their relics.⁷⁹

However, there are numerous aspects of the cult of saints that Gregory's homilies do not address. Among these are two significant elements found in other contemporary texts. Firstly, some individuals exhibited inappropriate behaviour during social festivals, a topic discussed in the homilies of other preachers⁸⁰ but notably absent from Gregory's writings, with the exception of his remark about the excessive noise that prevented him from delivering his homily on the Forty Martyrs. Secondly, there are the devotional rites performed by the faithful in relation to the relics of the saints.⁸¹ While Gregory commends the shrines built to house the relics of saints, regarded as invaluable treasures, he appears more inclined to encourage people to emulate the saints rather than to engage in quasi-magical practices surrounding the relics. Nevertheless, he emphasises the importance of venerating the relics, particularly in the context of his sister's death, whom he clearly cherished more than other family members. The night before reaching Macrina's deathbed, Gregory dreams of holding radiant relics of martyrs, which he later interprets as symbols of his dying sister.⁸² Additionally, while attending to Macrina's corpse, he discovers a ring she wore that contains a relic of the Holy Cross, which he keeps as a cherished memento of her.⁸³

The cult of the saints frequently served as a tool in the polemic against other religions, particularly paganism and Judaism; Gregory's texts are no exception

⁷⁷ *Mart II*, 166-167.

⁷⁸ *Mart II*, 167, 11-168, 5.

⁷⁹ *Mart II*, 166, 9-12. Macrina, Gregory's elder sister, was also buried here (*Macr*, 408, 12-15).

⁸⁰ Basil, in his homily against drunkards makes reference to two drunken women, indecently dressed, who went inside the *martyrium* of a saint to dance (PG 31, 445). John Chrysostom, in his homily on martyrs exhorts his audience to avoid their usual custom of celebrating the feast with heavy drinking, playing dice and visiting brothels (PG 50, 661-666).

⁸¹ Chrysostom encourages the people to take home some oil touched to the martyrs' relics in order to obtain physical and spiritual healing when spreading it over the body (PG 50, 664; 673).

⁸² *Macr*, 387, 13-19.

⁸³ *Macr* 404, 17-19.

to this trend. Within these writings, the accounts of individuals who were executed for their Christian faith by pagan military officials constitute a clear denunciation of paganism, portraying it as a barbaric religion that lacks respect for both human dignity and the pursuit of truth. In the late-4th century context, this can also be interpreted as a subtle political agenda aimed at those, especially clergy, who supported rulers that did not uphold the Nicene Creed. This is particularly relevant considering that until 378, just a year before the first of these texts was produced, the Eastern Emperor was Valens, an Arian, and prior to him was Julian, a pagan. Thus, the glorification of young soldiers who sacrificed their lives for their commitment to the true faith can be seen as inherently intertwined with a condemnation of paganism and unorthodox beliefs, as well as a call for those in positions of power to resist any directives from their superiors that might compromise their faith.⁸⁴ Additionally, the reference to the feast honouring Mars, the god of war,⁸⁵ celebrated shortly before the feast of the Forty Martyrs in the second homily, indicates that pagan practices were still prevalent in those regions. The panegyric in honour of Gregory the Wonderworker repeatedly emphasises the superiority of the true faith over paganism, notably in the episode where Gregory exorcises a pagan temple and subsequently commands the demon to re-enter that same temple.⁸⁶

An interesting detail proposed by Leemans concerns the way Gregory refers to the tyrants who kill the martyrs. There is only one occasion when an evil ruler is called by name,⁸⁷ but Leemans believes this to be a scribal interpolation.⁸⁸ In all other occasions they are referred to as tyrants or enemies, compared to Herod and Pilate and to Satan himself.⁸⁹ According to this scholar the reason is not only to keep the spotlight on the martyr as a man of God without giving any

⁸⁴ Bernardi, *La predication des Pères Cappadociens*, 307; Leemans, "Introduction," of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 25.

⁸⁵ For a detailed study of the cult of Mars in the area refer to Johan Leemans, "The Cult of Mars in Late Antique Caesarea," in *Studia Patristica. Proceedings of the 14th International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford, 2003*, vol. 39 *Historica, Biblica, Ascetica et Hagiographica* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006¹), 71-76.

⁸⁶ *Thaum*, 20, 19-23, 9.

⁸⁷ In the homily in praise of Theodore there is a sentence which states: οἱ γὰρ ἀμφὶ Μαξιμιανὸν τότε τῆς βασιλείας ἠγοῦντο (*Theod*, 66, 2-3). This is the only indicator to a historical dating of Theodore's martyrdom.

⁸⁸ Johan Leemans, "At That Time the Group Around Maximian was Enjoying Imperial Power': An Interpolation in Gregory of Nyssa's Homily in Praise of Theodore," *Journal of Theological Studies NS* 57 (2006²): 158-163.

⁸⁹ *Theod*, 68, 16-18.

unnecessary details, but also to make a *damnatio memoriae* of these evil persons.⁹⁰ It is another way of saying that only the good will be remembered while the evil will be forgotten; this is the same destiny in store for the waning paganism *vis à vis* the ever-increasing Christianity. Leemans believes that in this context these texts may also have had an apologetic or polemic end.⁹¹

As in other texts by Gregory, here too, the Jews are subject to severe criticism, this time being presenting as scheming liars in the *life of St Gregory the Wonderworker*,⁹² and as murderous blasphemers in the *two homilies in honour of St Stephen*.⁹³ In these they are equated to heretics (Pneumatomachians and Eunomians) and to the devil himself. It was very convenient for preachers and authors to present the saint as a model of steadfast fidelity to the true faith, thus encouraging addressees to put aside any deviant theological opinion or any interest in other religions.

Conclusion: The Saints and their Devotees

Gregory unequivocally asserts that sainthood is an attainable option for all individuals. The saints serve as primary intercessors for their disciples and devotees on their journey toward this same goal. On numerous occasions, Gregory encourages his audience to emulate the saints and lead virtuous lives. In his homily honouring Theodore, he remarks that the devotion exhibited by the faithful – who constructed a splendid martyrion in Theodore’s honour – is a testament to God’s benevolence toward him. This implication suggests that those who live similarly will ultimately share in God’s favour.⁹⁴

Another significant theme that emerges from Gregory’s texts is the accessibility of every vocation within the Church, extending beyond members of the higher social classes. The martyrs he references were predominantly soldiers, representing common people, and his sister Macrina is depicted as an ordinary woman. Additionally, there is an intriguing account of Gregory the Wonderworker selecting the bishop of Comana, wherein he overlooks all the high-born and educated candidates in favour of a coal-cutter, who, despite his

⁹⁰ Leemans, “Introduction,” of *Let Us Die that We May Live*, 32; (2006²) 160.

⁹¹ Leemans, “Grégoire de Nysse et Julien l’Apostat. Polémique antipaienne et identité chrétienne dans le Panégryque de Théodore,” 15.

⁹² *Thaum*, 41, 19-43, 17.

⁹³ *Steph* I, 80, 14-81, 9; 84, 3-87, 6; 89, 17-21; *Steph* II, 97, 9-16; 100, 9-11.

⁹⁴ This same theme is present even in the three funeral orations we have by the Nyssen, wherein he says that the deceased (Meletius, Flacilla and Pulcheria) will enjoy God’s mercy since they lived as good Christians.

humble occupation, was a wise man who embraced that lifestyle as a form of asceticism. Through these narratives, Gregory illustrates that while social class may confer certain advantages in worldly pursuits, it is not a prerequisite for attaining sainthood.

As articulated in the homily honouring Theodore, the saints embody faith in the promise of future rewards. The “immortality” they experience through the veneration they receive from the faithful, alongside the miraculous events associated with their relics, serve as evidence of this promise. Although deceased, the saints are attuned to the needs of those who seek their intercession, offering peace and protection to their communities from external threats. While their relics rest in urns, the saints remain vibrant, acting as guardians and companions to those still navigating earthly existence. The recently departed, such as Basil and Macrina, are portrayed as exemplars of Christian living, sources of sanctification for others, and models who lead through their example; the communities they founded further attest to this legacy.

In conclusion, it is evident that while Gregory’s descriptions of his saints incorporate elements of wonder – particularly in his references to miracles – these models consistently retain their humanity. This is particularly evident in the sufferings endured by the martyrs and the struggles with heresy and health faced by his siblings. These examples underscore Gregory’s firm belief that sainthood is not the exclusive domain of an elite group; rather, it is a possibility available to all individuals, irrespective of status, gender, or condition. As Gregory articulates in the eulogy to his brother, recalling the lives of the saints enriches our own way of living.

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Oriental Christianity and Early Islam

From Arabian Prelude to Theological Disputation

Some Preliminary Considerations

One of the most problematic issues confronting any serious research concerning Islam is that what we know of its establishment and early development can only be ascertained from documentation originating from within the Muslim community itself. Furthermore, the early biographies of Muḥammad date back to about one hundred and fifty years after his death by which time Islam had already expanded outside the confines of Arabia, become an empire, and experienced political and, more importantly, religious dissent. This means that such accounts as well as the sayings of the Prophet (*hadīth*) are more likely to reflect the period in which they were written rather than that of Muḥammad's lifetime. Then again, Eastern and Oriental Christian¹ chronicles

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¹ One needs to distinguish between "Eastern" and "Oriental" Christianity. Eastern Christianity refers specifically to those Christian communities who adopt the Byzantine rite. Oriental Christianity refers to those Christian communities who not only do not adopt the Byzantine rite, but also refuse to adhere to canons the Council of Chalcedon, especially regarding the issue of the human and divine natures in Christ. They include the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (Jacobite Syrian Christian Church), the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, as well as the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Churches.

dating from the death of the Prophet referred to Islam in terms that were familiar to their respective traditions. They had scant knowledge of its doctrines and in most cases did not even consider it as a non-Christian religion. Pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian presence in Arabia, however, is quite well documented and recorded.²

Political and Religious Tensions in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Most introductory works on Islam refer exclusively to the establishment and preaching of Islam as if it were “a tale of two cities,” namely Makka and Madīna. Lately a more considered approach has shed light as to how Islam in general and Muḥammad in particular succeeded in transforming the religious and political landscape as well as the factors that brought about such developments. This approach takes into consideration the wider framework within which the preaching of Islam originated and flourished.

Long before the rise and establishment of Islam, the Arabian peninsula had already found itself in the thick of a centuries-long struggle between the Roman (and later Byzantine) and the Sasānid (Persian) empires. The former had adopted Christianity as its official religion during the reign of Theodosius I (d. 395), whereas the Persians embraced the Zoroastrian religion. The Byzantine emperors had long-standing aspirations toward the Arabian Peninsula and were occupied in seeking control of the lucrative spice trade in the area and ultimately its route to India. The struggle in this region took the form of a proxy war in which two buffer zones were created. The clients of the Byzantines situated at Ġabala the northwest of the peninsula were the Christian Ġafnids (often called Ġassānids) whereas those of the Persians were the Naṣrid rulers (the so-called Laḥmids) just northeast of Arabia at al-Ḥīra. Another strong client of the Persians was the Jewish Ḥimyarite kingdom situated in the southern highlands of the Yemen. By the end of the fourth century AD its population had for some reason relinquished pagan worship and embraced Judaism. In the early part of the sixth century Ḥimyar was ruled by Yūsuf (known as Dū Nuwās) who initiated a general persecution of Monophysite Christians throughout his kingdom.³

² In the Qur’ān one may detect many references to Biblical and Extra-Biblical episodes, together with Rabbinical writings especially the Babylonian Talmūd. Furthermore, Ethiopian, Coptic and East Syrian Christian presence, together with that of religious fringe movements of once Christian origin were also to be found scattered throughout pre-Islamic Arabia.

³ For a more detailed account of the presence of various Christian communities in Ḥimyar and south Arabia. See, Irfan Shahīd, “Islam and the *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 AD,”

He began by killing some Byzantine merchants who were passing through the region on their way to India. This episode is recorded in the *Zuqnīn Chronicle* attributed to Dionysius of Tel-Mahre which was written some three hundred years after the event:

Roman⁴ merchants used to pass through the countries of the Ḥimyarites to come to the country of the Inner Indians, which is called the Auzalis in India and also to the countries (situated) further away than those of the Indians and of the Ethiopians. There are, namely, seven kingdoms of the Indians and of the Ethiopians: three of the Indians and four of the Ethiopians. These are (more) distant and are within the southern countries (situated) on the shore of the great sea which surrounds the whole world (and) which is called the Great Ocean. When the above-mentioned Roman merchants passed through the countries of the Ḥimyarites to enter the countries of the Indians to trade there as usual, the king of the Ḥimyarites, Dimnos (i.e., Dū Nuwās), learned (about it), seized them, killed them and plundered all their merchandise, saying: '(This is) because in the countries of the Romans the Christians wickedly harass the Jews who live in their countries and kill many of them. Therefore, I am putting these men to death.' In this way he used to kill many (merchants) until many (others) were seized by terror and refused to come (to the country) and the trade in the inner kingdoms of the Indians and of the Ethiopians ceased.⁵

He then proceeded to destroy an Ethiopian church in Zufar (or Zaphar)⁶ and murder some three hundred Ethiopians. This act led to what was to become known as the pogrom at Nağrān⁷ where, after accepting the city's capitulation, Yūsuf then proceeded to massacre those inhabitants who had refused to renounce Christianity. This heinous act not only convulsed but also transformed the religious-political structure of central and south-western Arabia. At the instigation of the Byzantine emperor Justin I (d. 527), the Ethiopian Negus Ella Asbeha (also known as Kālēb) invaded south Arabia (c. 525 BC) and subsequently killed the king of Ḥimyar and burned down the palace of Saba⁷

in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, eds Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), 19-21.

⁴ The term "Roman" here refers to the Byzantines, who were known as "al-Rūm."

⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicle* (known also as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*) Part III, translated with notes and introduction by Witold Witakowski (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 50-51.

⁶ Today the city lies in the southernmost region of the Sultanate of Oman.

⁷ See Irfan Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najran* (Bruxelles: Societ  de Bollandistes, 1971). During this period Nağran was situated in the Yemen, whereas today it lies on the Saudi Arabian side of the border.

in order to avenge the martyrdoms of its Christians.⁸ This expedition and the events that triggered it brought him in close contact with the major centres of paganism and Judaism in central and southwest Arabia which were later to play a significant part in the establishment and spread of Islam throughout the Arabian peninsula.⁹

It was at this highly sensitive juncture that Byzantium, under its new emperor Justinian (d. 565), who succeeded Justin in 527, began to play an active role by exploiting the re-established presence of Christians in Ḥimyar in order to oppose their Persian enemies. His plan was to enlist the support of the Ethiopians.

Kālēb had installed Christianity as the official religion for the kingdom for nearly fifty years, which not only allowed the Negus in Axum (the then capital of Ethiopia) but the emperor in Constantinople as well as the king of Sasānid Persia to confront one another indirectly in this remote region by intervening in the politics and the religions of Arabia. This, in turn, positioned all three rulers to become power brokers in the rapidly changing world into which Muḥammad was born, in about 570 according to the Muslim tradition enshrined in the Prophet's biography (*sīra*). Having pacified the region Kālēb then withdrew from Arabia and returned to Axum. This step, however, brought about a revolt led by other Ethiopian Christians, who had remained in the region, against Sumyafa Ašwa' (Esimphaios), the king Kālēb had installed in Ḥimyar. Eventually, the Ethiopians in Arabia overthrew Esimphaios, had him imprisoned, and installed Abraha, the son of a Christian slave from the Ethiopian port city of Adulis in his place as king.¹⁰

These dramatic events created a power vacuum that allowed the international role of the great powers of the eastern Mediterranean to become far greater than it ever had been before. It allowed the Byzantine and Persian empires to expand their diplomatic and military activity in the Arabian territory substantially.

The above-mentioned Ethiopian-Byzantine alliance was uncomfortable from a certain perspective. From the doctrinal point of view the Ethiopians would have had a very uneasy relationship with those Christian churches who adhered to the Canons of the Council of Chalcedon even more so following their schism from Byzantine Orthodoxy in the aftermath the Council of Ephesus in 431.¹¹ But

⁸ G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98.

⁹ See *ibid.*, 103-104.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 103.107.

¹¹ With reference to the terms "Eastern Churches" and "Oriental Churches" as a result of this schism, see *supra* n.1.

Justinian seems to have detected an opportunity to disrupt Persian commercial activities in the Red Sea ports.

Abraha not only asserted his authority as the region's most powerful ruler and as a Christian, but at the same time he implicitly recognized his role as power broker, thereby exploiting and influencing the ambitions of the main players in the Near East. In 525 he launched a great expedition into central Arabia, north of Nağrān and south of Makka. His armies went both north-eastwards and north-westwards. This two-pronged assault into the central peninsula may well have represented an abortive attempt to move into areas of Persian influence south of the Naşrid (Laḥmid) capital of al-Ḥīra. Its failure and Abraha's eventual retreat marked the beginning of the end of his power.¹² That, in turn, provided precisely the opportunity for which the Persians had been waiting. An incompetent and brutal son of Abraha, whose name seems to have been Axum, presided over the dissolution of the Ethiopian kingdom of Ḥimyar.

The Ethiopian occupation and supremacy in south Arabia under Abraha and his two sons lasted for just half a century. Irfan Shahīd suggests that during this period some Ethiopic terms passed into Sabaic and Arabic, mostly military terms and possibly some religious Christian terms as well.¹³ The name of Abraha is associated with the Cathedral of San'ā¹⁴ and with a church in Ma'rib;¹⁵ and this lends credence to the theory that the spiritual needs of the Ethiopian army then based in the Yemen must have been met by a number of Ethiopian clerics who celebrated the liturgy in their own rite and were obviously in possession of an Ethiopic Bible.¹⁶ This would also explain the presence of Ethiopian preachers whose use of Scripture both in the Yemen and later on in Makka would introduce Muḥammad to both the Biblical and Extra-Biblical narratives which would later find their way in the Qur'ān and interwoven into some of its passages.

Eventually a Jew by the name of Sayf b. Ḍī Yazan succeeded in expelling the Ethiopians from Arabia with the aid of Chosroes I (Ḥusraw), king of the Sasānid

¹² See Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis*, 115-117. Muslim scholars would later affirm that this incident is recorded in Q.105, known as the Sūra of the Elephant. The besieging armies of Abraha who were surrounding Makka and made use of elephants were supposedly beaten back by a flock of crows carrying small stones in their beaks who then proceeded to pelt these large animals with them.

¹³ Shahīd, "Islam and the *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 AD," 13. See also, Martin R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'anic Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁴ The capital of present-day Yemen.

¹⁵ This city still lies within the borders of present-day Yemen.

¹⁶ See Shahīd, "Islam and the *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 AD," 14.

Persians,¹⁷ whom he approached through the mediation of Persia's Naṣrid (Laḥmid) clients at al-Ḥīra in order to seek military aid in consolidating his position. Chosroes responded favourably and the Ethiopians were expelled from Arabia once and for all.¹⁸

The Persians believed that Christians of whatever confession remaining in Arabia, both inside and outside Ḥimyar, were no more trustworthy than the pagans living in the peninsula. The expulsion of the Ethiopians created a religious instability that was held in check only by the occupying Persians as well as a diaspora throughout western Arabia. Also, it was in Makka that a strong Ethiopian colony was to be found in the forty years or so that followed the Persian occupation. The ensuing mixture of pagans and Christians on the one hand and Jews on the other in Yaṭrīb (later known as Madīna) as well as the pagan majority (*muṣ'rikūn*, "associators") of Makka at the time of Muḥammad, provided a fertile, if not volatile, environment in Arabia as well as an alibi for further conflict between the Byzantine Christian empire, which was allied with Ethiopia, and the Zoroastrian Sassānids allied with the Jews of Ḥimyar.¹⁹

Persian dominance, understandably welcomed by the Jews residing in the rest of the Arabian peninsula in view of former Persian backing of their co-religionists in Ḥimyar, was definitively established not long after Muḥammad was believed to have been born in Makka in the second half of the sixth century. As we shall see later, the existence of this hegemony would go a long way toward explaining the reason for the negotiations that took place between the two Arab tribes of Yaṭrīb (later called al-Madīna) which eventually led to the Prophet's departure and settlement in that city. This course of action would be known as the *hiḡra*.²⁰

Muḥammad and the Christians of the Arabian Peninsula

Due to the events referred to above, the sixth century witnessed an intensive Christianization of western Arabia, which affected Makka. The most important figure in it on the eve of the rise of Islam and during the early years of Muḥammad's mission was undoubtedly Waraqa b. Nawfal, the paternal first cousin of Ḥadiḡa, the wife of Muḥammad. He is associated with a Gospel, an *Inḡīl*, and both are the

¹⁷ Ḥusraw I, known as Ḥusraw Anūšīrvan (Persian: "Chosroes of the Immortal Soul"), or Ḥusraw the Just, (died AD 579), ruled the Sāsānid empire from 531 to 579.

¹⁸ See Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis*, 117.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 118.

²⁰ See *ibid.*

most relevant, even crucial, early contact of Islam with the Christian Orient.²¹ Some say that Warāqa was an East Syrian (Nestorian) priest and is revered in the Islamic tradition for being one of the first *ḥanīfs* (righteous people)²² to believe in the claim of Muḥammad to prophethood.

When Muḥammad began preaching Islam (around the year 610 according to Muslim sources) his audience comprised not only pagans but also Christians and Jews. His encounter with all three categories was perhaps already established during his childhood and youth when he accompanied his uncle Abū Ṭālib, a caravan merchant, during his commercial travels across Arabia and probably even Ethiopia. Even Makka his home town was already a venue for preaching missions by Ethiopian bishops and clergy. Consequently, Irfan Shahīd is therefore right in affirming that:

Christianity in Makka was reflected by both an Arab and an Ethiopian presence. The former was represented by such traces as *maqbarat al-Naṣrānī*, 'the graveyard of the Christians,' the alleged pictures of Jesus and Mary in the Ka'ba, and in such localities in the environs of Makka as *masāʿid Maryam*, 'the oratories of Mary,' and *mawqif al-Naṣrānī*, 'the station of the Christian.'²³

In the light of the above, it would come as no surprise that when Muḥammad and his small community of followers were being persecuted by the polytheistic Makkans, he sent some of them to seek refuge precisely in Ethiopia. While commenting on Q. 5:82,²⁴ which praises Christians for the humility and piety

²¹ Shahīd, "Islam and the *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 AD," 13.

²² This title is accorded to Abraham in the Qur'ān. See Q. 2:135; 3:67; 3:95; 4:125; 10:104; 16:120.123.

²³ Shahīd, "Islam and the *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 AD," 12-13; see also 26.

²⁴ This verse reads:

Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters; and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say 'We are Christians'; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud; and when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe; so do Thou write us down among the witnesses.

of their monks and priests, the renowned scholar of the Qur'ân al-Zamaḥṣarî (d. 1143) wrote this very interesting reflection:

God's characterization of the Christians as being tender-hearted and as weeping when they hear the Qur'ân is in accordance with what is reported concerning al-Nağāṣî (the Negus of Ethiopia). When the immigrants to Ethiopia (in 615) appeared before him with the idolaters (curses be upon them), the latter tried to stir him up against the immigrants, demanding that he use measures of force against them. He said to Ğa'far b. Abî Ṭalib: 'Is Mary mentioned in your scripture?' To this Ğa'far answered: 'In our scripture one sūra is devoted to Mary, and he began to recite this sūra (Sūra 19) up to the words: 'That is Jesus, son of Mary, in word of truth' (v. 34). Then he recited Sūra Ṭā Hā (Sūra 20) up to the words: 'hast thou received the story of Moses?' (v. 9), and al-Nağāṣî wept. His seventy men who came as emissaries to the Messenger of God also did the same, (for) when the messenger recited to them Sūra Yā Sin (Sūra 36), they then wept.²⁵

During the time that Muḥammad was preaching in Makka Islam was envisaged in the Qur'ân as if it were one of the three branches that grew out of the common trunk of monotheism (the other two being Judaism and Christianity). His adherence to this system of belief brought upon him the scorn of the majority of the tribal leaders of the city who at times couched their antagonism within the context of geopolitical events occurring outside Arabia itself, some of which are recorded in the Qur'ân in order to highlight a particular moral teaching:

The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years' time – God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice at God's help. He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful. This is God's promise: God never breaks His promise, but most people do not know; they only know the outer surface of this present life and are heedless of the life to come (Q. 30:2-7).²⁶

This Makkan sūra opens with a reference to the defeat of the Byzantines at the hands of the Persians in 614 in Syria. The Persians even succeeded in carrying

This passage from the Qur'ân has been quoted from *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

²⁵ Zamaḥṣarî on Sūra 5:82 in Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'ân and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretation*, trans. and ed. Alford T. Welch (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 134-135. I have taken some liberty with the text in inserting a different method of transliteration in order to make it consistent with the one adopted throughout this article.

²⁶ This passage from the Qur'ân has been quoted from *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

with them the relic of the Holy Cross. This tragic event is recorded in, among other sources, the *Chronicle* of Theophanes of Edessa:²⁷

Chron 1234 In year 6 of Heraclius and 27 of Ḥusrau, Šahrbaraz²⁸ struck against the city of Jerusalem, subdued it by war and killed in it 90,000 Christian persons. The Jews, because of their enmity for them, were buying them for a small price and killing (them). Šahrbaraz captured Zacharias, the Chalcedonian bishop of Jerusalem, and sent him to Persia, to Ḥusrau, with the revered wood of the crucifixion, and with treasure of gold and silver. He also exiled from Jerusalem the Jews.²⁹

This event boosted the morale of the Makkans who interpreted it as a victory of polytheism over monotheism. It also accorded a sense of security for the Jewish community throughout Arabia. The Qur'ân, however, refers to the subsequent victory of the Byzantines which was to take place in 624. From this one can conclude that when the fortunes were reversed and the Byzantines won a resounding victory, this was to please the believers, that is to say, the monotheist Muslims. The year of the Byzantine victory was also the year of the Muslim victory at Badr. By that time Muḥammad accompanied by his followers (*muhāğirūn*) had already been residing in Madīna for two years and the three Jewish tribes living there were becoming wary of this charismatic leader who held both a religious and a political status in the city. He had now become not only the religious leader of a community of believers but also the political ruler of both his followers as well as of the two Arab tribes that had invited him over. It must also be noted here that his departure for Madīna, known as the *hiğra*, was epoch-making. It was not merely a migration, but a definitive and irrevocable step. It meant a complete break with the past, a point of no return, a decision from which there was no turning back. It may thus be compared with the decision taken by Joshua to cross the Jordan and enter the land of Canaan. The Book of Joshua itself states that the manna which fed the people in the desert for

²⁷ Theophanes of Edessa, known also as Theophanes the Confessor (c. 758/760-817) was a Byzantine aristocrat who later became a monk. He is renowned for his continuation of the *Chronicle* initiated by his friend George Syncellus. His part records events beginning with the accession of Diocletian in 284 till the abdication of Michael Rhangabes in 813.

²⁸ Šahrbaraz was the Sasānid general tasked by Ḥusraw II with the campaign against the Byzantines.

²⁹ *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Robert G. Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 65. Once again, I have taken some liberty with the text in inserting a different method of transliteration in order to make it consistent with the one adopted throughout this article.

forty years ceased on the morrow of their first Passover since their entry, “and the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.”³⁰ Now they were no longer a desert people longing to return to Egypt. They now took possession of the Promised Land in order to build their future there.

The *hiğra* also brought about another dramatic development. First of all, the Arab tribes now found a political and a military leader who could stand his ground and thwart any possible alliance between the Jewish tribes of Madīna and the Persians (as was the case in the Yemen). Also, Muḥammad now demanded to be acknowledged by both monotheistic communities (Jews and Christians) as a prophet, a claim that neither community was ready to accept.

It goes without saying that neither the Jewish nor the Christian communities of Arabia were prepared to give recognition to Muḥammad as prophet for reasons that were obvious to both. The Jews believe that God’s revelation came to an end with the death of the last prophet to be recognized as such, namely Malachi. It is known that right up till the third century A.D. the rabbinic scholars had already arrived at a concurred decision as to which books were to be considered as divinely inspired and which were to be set aside. At that point in history the authority of the rabbinic scholars was deemed as binding upon all Jewish communities both in Palestine and in the *diaspora*. From that moment they could not accept the claims to prophecy of any other person. The Christians applied a similar line of reasoning. In the Christian tradition divine revelation ended with the death of the last Apostle. Furthermore, it is common doctrine among Christians that one should believe in Jesus Christ as *the* Word of God incarnate and thus the final, perfect, and definitive revelation of God to humanity. Consequently, if a Christian were to acknowledge the Qur’ân as divinely revealed and Muḥammad as a prophet in continuation with the biblical tradition, this would lead to the dismantling of the very foundation upon which the Christian faith stands.³¹

³⁰ Joshua 5:12. Texts from the Holy Bible are quoted from the *Revised Standard Version* (Catholic Edition).

³¹ A number of Muslim scholars, both in the Mediaeval period as well as in our day, claim that the Bible originally did foretell the coming of Muḥammad, but Jews and Christians had erased all reference to such an occurrence. This assertion is made in the light of the accusation made by the Qur’ân itself against the Jews (and later extended to Christians) that they distorted, manipulated and even altered the revealed texts (*tahrif*) that were originally sent down to them by God:

“God took a pledge from the Children of Israel... But they broke their pledge, so We distanced them [from Us] and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember:

Here one must also take into account the existence of major Christian communities such as the East Syrians (Nestorians or, as they are known today, the Assyrian [Nestorian] Church of the East) as well as of a good number of religious fringe groups of Christian origin (such as the Arians) who sought refuge in Arabia from persecution by the Byzantines. These groups spread their own teachings in the areas around their settlements.

For the Qur'ân Christians remain "People of the Scripture" (*Ahl al-Kitāb*). At the same time there always lingers a certain hesitation among some Muslim polemicists as to whether they should be deemed *monotheists* (see, for example, Q. 2:62; 3:110-115; 4:55; 5:69.82), *unbelievers* (*kuffār*, see Q. 5:17.72-73; 9:30) because of their rejection of the Qur'ân and its teachings,³² or *associators* (*mušrikūn*, see 5:72), due to their belief in God as Triune.

This issue explains the attitude of hostility that the Qur'ân later adopts when referring to Jews and Christians in Madīna as well as the way they were later treated by Muslims. During the conflicts that took place between Muḥammad and his followers on the one hand and the pagans of Makka on the other, the three Jewish tribes of Madīna were first accused of indifference, followed by suspicion, and finally of treason. One tribe (the Banū Qaynuqa) was exiled but allowed to take as much of their belongings as one camel per head could carry. Another (the Banū Nadir) was despoiled and exiled, whereas the third (the Banū Qurayza) was given the stark choice of conversion to Islam or death by the sword

you [Prophet] will always find treachery in all but a few of them. Overlook this and pardon them – God loves those who do good" (Q. 5:12a. 13; see also Q. 5:41; 2:75). This passage has been quoted from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's translation. There were also a number of Muslim scholars who were knowledgeable of the Bible (perhaps Jewish and Christian converts to Islam) and interpreted some of its passages both in the Old and in the New Testaments as residual of a possible reference to Muḥammad. Concerning the Old Testament, mention is made of Moses' foretelling of the advent of another prophet: "And the Lord said to me... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Deut. 18:18). As for the New Testament, a frequently cited text is that which forms part of the Farewell Discourse of Jesus during the Last Supper: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever" (Jn 14:16). This passage is frequently interpreted in the light of what the Qur'ân states:

"Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.' Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, 'This is obviously sorcery'" (Q. 61:6).

This passage has been quoted from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's translation.

³² The term "unbelievers" refers to those who do not embrace one's own religion, whereas "non-believers" are those who embrace no religion at all.

and slavery for women and children.³³ From this last tribe about 800 Jewish males were slaughtered.

Following these events, whoever refused to acknowledge Muḥammad as prophet and the Qur'ân as the sole criterion of truth³⁴ were condemned and considered to be the object of divine wrath. They were to be put to flight and humiliated; in the future they were to be fought “until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.”³⁵

These issues would frequently resurface in later centuries, when Islam began to rule vast swathes of territories that had once belonged to the Byzantine and Sasānid empires. We find them within the context of apologetics and polemics during debates between Muslim and Christian scholars outside of Arabia.

Before proceeding to the next stage of the narrative one must consider another major event which took place around January 632 when Muḥammad was now a triumphant religious and political leader, having entered Makka in triumph two years earlier and cleansed the Ka'ba of its idols and dedicated it to the worship of the one God, Allah.

The event concerns the arrival of a Christian delegation from Nağrān to Madīna in order to pay homage to the Prophet and to debate with him on certain key issues of Christian belief, especially those regarding Christology. This encounter is known as the *Mubāhala*. This delegation was composed of a magistrate (*‘āqib*), a leader of merchant caravans (*sayyid*), and, apparently, a bishop (*usqūf*). It is said that Muḥammad received them well and they were even allowed to celebrate the Eucharist in the courtyard of his residence, which doubled as a mosque. However, it appears that nothing substantial came out of these discussions. Nevertheless, the delegation returned to Nağrān with an accord (*muṣālaḥa*) which consisted in the payment of an annual tribute in return for protection and a guarantee of safety for their lives, their goods, and their worship. It recognized their hierarchy without tithe. Furthermore, it did not require military service from them nor the provision of troops.³⁶

³³ By this time the alliance between the Jews of the Yemen and the Persian empire would have already made all Jewish tribes of Arabia the object of suspicion.

³⁴ See Q. 2:41.137; 3:23; see also Q. 4:47.105; 5:48.

³⁵ Q. 9:29.

³⁶ Robert Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology* (Rome: P.I.S.A.I, 1998), 52. See also, Louis Massignon, “La Mubāhala, étude sur la proposition d’ordalie faite par le prophète Mohammad aux Chrétiens Bel-Hārith du Najrān en l’an 10/631 a Médine,” in *Annuaire de l’EPHE* (1943): 5-25.

The Expansion of Islam Beyond Arabia

Islam, through its holy book the Qur'ân, evolved in its formative period from a religion that was essentially concerned with eschatology, prophethood and divine omnipotence, into one centred on God as legislator. The continual tension between Islam as preached at Makka and Islam as preached at Medina has been the hallmark of this religion to the present day.

Following the death of Muḥammad in 632 the Muslim community, galvanized by the Qur'ân together with the Tradition (*Sunna*) of the Prophet, embarked on a series of wars of conquest that, within the time-frame of just a century, resulted in an empire stretching from southern and central Spain in the West to the northern border of India in the East. These territories formerly belonged to the western and eastern Roman empires as well as to the Sassānid (or Persian) empire, all of which could boast of a civilization and a culture that spanned more than a thousand years. Both in their turn had been influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, whether Platonic or Aristotelian. At the same time, they came under the influence of Gnosticism, both Neo-Platonic and Zoroastrian/Manichaean. Islam, therefore, had entered uncharted territories in more ways than one, and its intellectual adventure was just about to begin.

One may adduce various reasons for the success of the military campaigns of the Muslim armies that conquered vast areas of the Mediterranean and of the Middle-East. Among these the most important are the following:

- a. The decline in prosperity and strength of the Mediterranean world owing to the barbarian invasions coupled with the abandonment of agricultural land and the subsequent shrinking of the urban market.
- b. The weakening of the Byzantine and Sasānid empires due to epidemics and long-drawn-out wars. In the preceding two centuries vast swathes of territory belonging to the Roman Empire in the West were reconquered by Justinian I. However, this meant that the Byzantine forces were now overstretched and were not being reinforced due to matters of internal instability, political infighting and frequent reappearances of the plague.³⁷

³⁷ See William Rosen, *Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2007). As Harry Turtledove has noted, "[t]hese reconquests, though, had cost the Empire far more in men and wealth than it could hope to realize from the regained land. At the beginning of the seventh century its overextended frontiers collapsed, and the next 120 years were little more than a desperate struggle for survival." *The Chronicle of Theophanes: Anni mundi 6095-6305 (A.D. 602-813)*, ed. and trans. Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), vii.

- c. The Arabs who invaded the two empires were by no means a motley tribal horde, but an organized and disciplined force. Some of them had acquired military skill and experience in the service of these empires or in the fighting that followed the death of the Prophet. Also, use of camel transport gave them an advantage in campaigns fought over wide areas of the Middle East and North Africa. The prospect of land and wealth also served as an incentive and created a coalition of interests.
- d. In some circumstances the majority of the population of the conquered countries were indifferent to who ruled over them, provided that they were accorded security, peace, and affordable taxation.
- e. To some, replacement of Byzantines and Sasānids by Arabs even offered religious and civil advantages. Those opposed to the Byzantines by way of religious dissent³⁸ might have found it easier to live under a ruler who, contrary to the Byzantine emperor, was impartial in his treatment of so-called heterodox Christian communities. Also, Islam in these early stages did not as yet possess a developed system of doctrine and law and they were not interested in drawing distinctions among the various denominations under their rule, so long as they were numbered among the “People of the Scripture.”

The Initial Reactions Among the Christian Communities of the Middle East

The first Arab-Muslim incursions outside of the Arabian peninsula were initially considered by the majority Christian population of the Middle-East as yet another series of raids undertaken by Arab tribes for the sole purpose of acquiring booty. It was thought that, having accomplished their task they would then retreat once more into the desert. However, this opinion soon changed, when these attacks began to take the form of a systematic invasion of Byzantine and Persian territory. Damascus was taken in 636, Jerusalem in 638, and Alexandria (which, owing to its rich wheat production, was considered to be the breadbasket of the Byzantine Empire) in 642. In the space of ten years Byzantine hegemony in the Middle East had been dismantled.

Furthermore, just as with the case of Arabia, the Arab-Muslim conquerors were faced with a Middle-Eastern Christianity that had already for centuries been fraught with theological disputes and schisms, compounded by the incessant

³⁸ These Christian communities were mainly Oriental Christians. See *supra* n. 1.

production of polemical works. This dire situation would later play into their hands, as they wittingly or unwittingly found themselves presiding over a policy of divide-and-rule.

As stated above, not all Christian churches reacted in the same manner to Muslim rule. It all depended on their assessment of Byzantine Orthodoxy and whether their doctrinal divergences from its teachings led to a more forceful and bellicose approach toward them within the confines of its territories. Of course, as stated above, from the perspective of the Muslim conquerors these distinctions made no sense at all. All of them were Christians irrespective of what they believed and how they articulated their teachings. They were all regarded equally. Also, the question arose as to how these conquerors were to be known. The term 'Muslim' was not used from the very beginning. Instead, they were connected to the Biblical characters from whom traditionally the Arabs were descended, namely Hagar and her son Işmael. Therefore, they were known as Hagarenes and/or Işmaelites. This nomenclature was not only ethnic in nature but disparaging in intent given that according to the Book of Genesis both Hagar and her son were sent away by Abraham at the behest of his wife Sarah. It also explains the application of the term "Saracen" by some Fathers of the Eastern Church, such as St John of Damascus (d. 749), who define it as "abandoned by Sarah."³⁹

Faced with this increasing alien presence in their midst, whose nature and beliefs were still hard to define, Christian chroniclers and despatches from members of the hierarchy began to take on a more ominous and alarming tone. These invasions were described in apocalyptic and eschatological terms. Christian documents from this period rely heavily upon the symbolic language found in the Book of Daniel⁴⁰ and that of Revelation.⁴¹ Together with the later conquests of Armenia and Persia they were taken as signs of divine wrath for the infidelities displayed and sacrileges committed by the Christian populations of these areas. This reaction is clearly portrayed in the following excerpt from a

³⁹ In his tract *On Heresies*, John of Damascus writes that: "They are also called Saracens, which is derived from *Sarras kenoi*, or destitute of Sara, because of what Agar said to the angel: 'Sara hath sent me away destitute'" (Gen. 16:8). The text has been quoted from *Writings*, by John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church Series* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 37.153. Given that Islam in Mediaeval times was not as yet considered as a religion different from Christianity. The term *Saracens* applied to Muslims is in itself a word of uncertain etymology, even though certain sources indicate that it is derived from the Arabic *Šarqī / Šarqiyūn*, meaning *Oriental*.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Dan. 9:26-27; 11:11-12, 36-37.

⁴¹ See Rev. 11:2.

homily on Baptism by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (d. c. 638) delivered on the feast of the Epiphany around the year 636 or 637 in connection with the conquest of Bethlehem by the Arab-Muslim army:

Yet these vile ones would not have accomplished this nor seized such a degree of power as to do and utter lawlessly all these things, unless we had first insulted the gift [of baptism] and first defiled the purification, and in this way grieved Christ, the giver of gifts, and prompted him to be angry with us, good though he is and though he takes no pleasure in evil, being the fount of kindness and not wishing to behold the ruin and destruction of men. We are ourselves, in truth, responsible for all these things and no word will be found for our defence. What word or place will be given us for our defence when we have taken all these gifts from him, befouled them and defiled everything with our vile actions?⁴²

In spite of this sad account, the eventual capitulation of Jerusalem deserves to be mentioned, given its significance in history as the first encounter in open dialogue between two religious leaders, namely Patriarch Sophronius and Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb (d. 644) against the backdrop of the latter's visit to the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

Following the Battle of Yarmūk in August 636,⁴³ and the ensuing fall of Damascus in that same year, the Arab-Muslim armies had now set their sights on Jerusalem. The siege was conducted by general Abū ʿUbayda b. al-Ḡarrāh who offered the inhabitants the usual choices offered by besieging Muslim armies.⁴⁴ These were conversion to Islam, or capitulation of the city and the payment of a tax in exchange for security, or, in the case of continued resistance and the eventual fall of the city, destruction followed by death or slavery.

Given the fact that the earlier-mentioned sacking of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614 was still fresh in the memories of the Patriarch and the population, Sophronius with a heavy heart decided to surrender, but he placed one condition: that he would surrender only to Caliph ʿUmar in person. Abū ʿUbayda immediately despatched a messenger to Damascus in order to notify the Caliph. ʿUmar set out from Damascus and, having reached Jerusalem, presided over the

⁴² Patriarch Sophronius, *Holy Baptism*, 166-167 quoted in Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1997), 72-73. Given that in this homily there is no mention of the siege of Jerusalem one may conclude that the event had not yet taken place.

⁴³ The Battle of Yarmūk practically opened the way to the conquest of all Byzantine territory in the Middle East.

⁴⁴ This reflects the code of conduct in war throughout the Middle East going back to Biblical times. One only has to recall the advice of Jeremiah to King Zedekiah. See Jer. 38:7-23.

capitulation, which took place on the Mount of Olives (just outside the city walls) in February 638. The terms imposed were the following:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is the assurance of safety which the servant of God, 'Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, has given to the people of Jerusalem. He has given them an assurance of safety (*amān*) for themselves for their property, their churches, their crosses, the sick and healthy of the city and for all the rituals which belong to their religion. Their churches will not be inhabited [by Muslims] and will not be destroyed. Neither they, nor the land on which they stand, nor their cross, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted. No Jew will live with them in Jerusalem.⁴⁵

The people of Jerusalem must pay the taxes like the people of [other] cities and must expel the Byzantines and the robbers. Those of the people of Jerusalem who want to leave with the Byzantines, take their property and abandon their churches and crosses will be safe until they reach their place of refuge. Those villagers (*ahl al-arḍ*) who were in Jerusalem before the killing of so-and-so,⁴⁶ may remain in the city if they wish but must pay taxes like the citizens. Those who wish may go with the Byzantines and those who wish may return to their families. Nothing is to be taken from them before their harvest is reaped.

If they pay their taxes according to their obligations, then the conditions laid out in this letter are under the covenant of God, are the responsibility of His Prophet, of the caliphs and of the faithful.

The persons who attest to it are Ḥālid b. al-Walīd, 'Amr b. al-'Āṣī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, and Mu'āwīyah b. Abī Sufyān. This letter was written and prepared in the year 15/636-637.⁴⁷

Details of what followed the signing of the capitulation have been related by the learned physician and Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, Eutychius Sa'īd b. Baṭrīq (935-940). His *Chronography* from Adam to the year 938, written in Arabic, provides interesting and unique information on events that took place in the two major Byzantine patriarchates of the Middle East, namely Jerusalem and Antioch. One may object that this account was written two hundred years after the capitulation of Jerusalem. However, given that these details had been preserved for such a long period of time and were put into writing during a period

⁴⁵ Jerusalem had been barred to the Jews since the end of the Bar Kochkba rebellion in 135 AD.

⁴⁶ The meaning of these words is not clear.

⁴⁷ *The History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. XII: The Battle of Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*, trans. Yohanan Friedmann (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 191-192

when relations between Muslim authorities and Christian subjects were already becoming strained, one has to lend credence to its fidelity and authenticity. Here is how Eutychius described what occurred:

When the gate of the city was opened ‘Umar came in with his entourage and sat at the *atreion* of the Church of the Resurrection. When the time of prayer approached ‘Umar said to Patriarch Sophronius: ‘I want to pray.’ And he responded: ‘Commander of the Faithful, pray in the place where you are now.’ And ‘Umar [said]: I do not want to pray here.’ The Patriarch then led him to the church of Constantine [the Church of the Resurrection] where he spread a mat made of straw on the floor of the Church. But ‘Umar said: ‘I do not want to pray here either.’ He went out to the steps that are at the gate on the eastern side of the Church of St. Constantine and he prayed alone on the steps. Then he sat down and said to Patriarch Sophronius: ‘Patriarch, do you know why I did not pray inside the Church?’ he answered: ‘I do not know, Commander of the faithful.’ And ‘Umar said to him: ‘If I had prayed inside the Church, you would be losing it and it would have gone from your hands because after my death the Muslims would seize it saying: ‘‘Umar has prayed here.’ But give me a piece of *pergamene* to write for you a document.’ And he wrote that Muslims should not pray on the steps as a congregation, but individually, and that they should not gather here for the purpose of [communal] prayer, nor should be called together by the voice of a caller [*mu’addin*].’ And he gave it to the Patriarch... Then ‘Umar left to visit Bethlehem. When the hour of prayer approached, he prayed inside the Church under the western apse, which was completely decorated with mosaic. ‘Umar wrote a document for the sake of the Patriarch, that the Muslims should not pray in this place, except individually, the one after the other, nor congregate here for the purpose of praying, nor should they be called by the voice of a caller for prayer, and that no form of this document should be altered.⁴⁸

While a number of authors described scenes of social turmoil, natural and cosmic disasters, and plagues as presaging what they considered to be indicative of the nature of the Arab invasions and conquests, some inevitably were concerned with these events as being harbingers of the end times. By far the best-known text written in such ominous tones is the one that has reached us as *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. The Methodius of the title supposedly refers to the martyred bishop of Olympus in Lycia (today Çirali in Anatolia, Turkey) who is known to have been executed around the year 312. The author of the narrative foresees the temporary eschatological interlude of the kingdom of the Arabs, which was to

⁴⁸ Quoted in Daniel J. Sahas, “The Face-to-Face Encounter Between Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: Friends or Foes?” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Islam*, eds Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, David Thomas (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), 38-39.

be overrun by the Byzantines, thereby paving the way for the end times.⁴⁹ The account relies heavily on the prophecies laid out in the Book of Daniel.⁵⁰ This and other works written in a similar vein were designed to halt the alarming flow of Christian conversions to Islam as the Arab-Muslim rulers established and consolidated their position in these newly-conquered territories.⁵¹

Having consolidated their position and authority in newly-conquered lands, Muslim rulers took decisive steps in order to affirm Islam as religion and polity. Gradually Arabic became the new official language of the state, coins bearing Islamic symbols were introduced into the monetary system, non-Muslims were gradually barred from occupying high positions in the state bureaucracy. One of the signs indicating that a new political regime was now in place was the building of monuments whose clear intention was to demonstrate that Islam was leaving the stamp of its own authority. One of the clearest of these was the building of the Dome of the Rock (*Qibbat al-Ṣaḥra*) during the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705). The fact that it was built on the Temple Mount where the Temple built by Herod once stood was already a political-religious statement in itself. Furthermore, the inscribed verses of the Qur’ân that grace the outer rim of the cupola are all intended to demonstrate that both Judaism and Christianity have been superseded and rendered obsolete by Islam; their claims and doctrines are false.⁵²

What greatly startled Christian religious leaders was the alarming rate with which Oriental Christians in certain areas effortlessly abandoned their faith and embraced Islam. As one Syriac chronicler very candidly put it:

The gates were opened to them to [enter] Islam. The wanton and the dissolute slipped towards the pit and the abyss of perdition, and lost their souls as well as their bodies – all, that is, that we possess...

Without blows or tortures they slipped towards apostasy in great precipitancy; they formed groups of ten or twenty or thirty or a hundred or two hundred or three hundred without any sort of compulsion... going to Harrân and becoming Muslims in the presence of [government] officials. A great crowd did so... from the districts of Edessa and of Harrân and of Tellâ and of Rêṣ ‘Ayna.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings in Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam (13) (Princeton –NJ: Darwin Press, 1977), 266.

⁵⁰ See Dan. 11; 12.

⁵¹ These authors had, of course Matt. 24:13 in mind.

⁵² See Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2006).

⁵³ Amir Harrak trans., *The Chronicle of Zuqnîn: Parts III and IV; AD. 488-775*. Mediaeval Sources in Translation 36 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 324,

This new situation brought about a drastic transformation in the approach taken by both Eastern and Oriental Christian hierarchs and theologians.

Both Eastern and Oriental Christian theologians appeared to be fairly knowledgeable about the content of the Qur'ân and its points of agreement and disagreement with the Biblical narratives. The above-mentioned tract *On Heresies* by John of Damascus is clear evidence for this. The author affirms that throughout the Qur'ân one discovers abundant material that had been mined from the Bible, which was then interpreted in a highly distorted manner.

We find similar cases in tracts originating from Oriental Christianity. Such is the case of the Syriac Orthodox bishop Jacob of Edessa.⁵⁴ This comes in one of the many extant letters which he wrote to one John the Stylite⁵⁵ one of which discusses the tradition that the Virgin Mary was descended from the House of David. Jacob wrote as follows:

That, therefore, the Messiah is in the flesh of the line of David... is professed and considered fundamental by all of them: Jews, Muslims and Christians... To the Jews... it is fundamental,⁵⁶ although they deny the true Messiah who has indeed come... The Muslims, too, although they do not wish to say that this true Messiah, who came and is acknowledged by the Christians, is God and the son of God, they nevertheless confess firmly that he is the true Messiah who has come and who was foretold by the prophets; on this they have no dispute with us... They say to all at all times that Jesus son of Mary is in truth the Messiah and they call him the Word of God, as do the holy scriptures. They also add, in their ignorance, that he is the Spirit of God, for they are not able to distinguish between word and spirit, just as they do not assent to call the Messiah God or son of God.⁵⁷

The last sentence in this quotation clearly shows that Jacob is well aware of that verse in the Qur'ân which states: "People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word,

quoted here in the trans. of J. G. Segal, *Edessa, "The Blessed City"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 206.

⁵⁴ Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) was a Syriac Christian writer who wrote in the classical Syriac language. For this reason, he contributed much to the development of Syriac theological thought and is considered to be one of the most prominent contributors to the Syriac Christian tradition.

⁵⁵ John the Stylite (d. 737/738) was a Syriac Orthodox monk and stylite who belonged to the monastic community of Atarib. He was renowned as an author and a member of a circle of Christian intellectuals who worked in northern Syria during the Umayyad dynasty.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Psalm 2.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings in Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam (13) (Princeton -NJ: Darwin Press, 1977), 166.

conveyed to Mary, a spirit from Him (Q. 4:171).⁵⁸ In later times many Christian writers would repeatedly quote this passage in order to structure their apologetic arguments around it.

Christian scholars also had the advantage of a thorough formation in Greek philosophical thought, especially metaphysics and dialectics, an avenue which was not yet open to Muslim scholars. The latter method was inherited from Aristotle. Unlike the Muslims Christians were already in possession of these works in the original Greek, and in some cases in Syriac translation. In addition to following Aristotle, the Christians also applied a series of literary devices, primarily the Socratic method, which had already been in use for centuries. It had been applied in order to combat heresies and now in order to address arguments concerning Biblical texts and theological issues.

Together with this late acquisition of the full heritage of Greek thought, Muslim scholars in the 'Abbāsīd empire were already aware of the contents of the Bible, especially by way of those who converted to Islam from Judaism and Christianity. They could therefore debate with both Jewish and Christian scholars on points of scriptural and doctrinal diversion between the Bible and the Qur'ān.

It was now deemed both necessary and urgent for Oriental Christian theologians to compose and articulate apologetical manuals in order to argue the reasonableness of the Christian faith, as well as to preach its truthfulness. In the beginning, Syriac apologetical tracts took the form of a question-and-answer session intended to furnish Christian readers with handy responses to queries put by Muslims in their daily lives. In such works it is always the Muslim who takes the initiative to interrogate, and it is the Christian who responds usually by way of analogy. From these texts one may deduce that Muslim theological discourse had yet to develop and reach a level of maturity; on the other hand, Christians had to be wary so as not to put into question the dignity and status of Muḥammad within the Muslim community as well as to avoid totally any attempt at disparaging the Qur'ān. Among the early theologians involved in these debates one finds scholars such as Theodore Abū Qurra (c. 750 – c. 825) a Melkite bishop and theologian who argued for the reasonableness of the Christian faith against the challenges posed by Muslims and Jews as well as by Christians such as the East Syrians who rejected the dogmas proclaimed at the Council of Chalcedon (381). He was also a pioneer in articulating Christian

⁵⁸ This text is one of those that feature in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock.

doctrine not only in Syriac but also in Arabic thereby making use of Muslim theological concepts.

Furthermore, already during the late seventh century, Syriac writers were aware of problems involving the interactions of Christians and Muslims in religious matters, and they sought ways to address them from a pastoral perspective. A case in point is once again provided by treatises and letters written by Jacob of Edessa, regarding canonical laws regulating relations between Muslims and Christians, especially where marriages of disparity of cult or conversions to Islam and eventual returns from apostasy were concerned. Such issues had to be addressed urgently but, at the same time, Christian leaders, whether they were patriarchs or bishops, were well aware that such delicate matters required prudence as well as solicitude for the good of the persons involved. Here are two typical responses to such cases in reply to queries sent by Addai⁵⁹ and John the Stylite respectively. In both instances they reflect Jacob's profound theological erudition as well as his pastoral solicitude:

On distribution of the Eucharist to a woman married to a Muslim:

[#75] Addai: 'Concerning a Christian woman who willingly marries a Hagarene⁶⁰ [I want to learn] if priests should give her the Eucharist and if one knows of a canon concerning this. [I want to learn] if her husband were threatening to kill a priest if he should not give her the Eucharist, should [the priest] temporarily consent because [otherwise the husband] would seek his death? Or would it be a sin for him to consent? Or because her husband is compassionate toward Christians, is it better to give her the Eucharist and she not become a Hagarene?'

Jacob: 'You have abolished all your doubts concerning this question because you said, 'If the Eucharist should be given to her and she not become a Hagarene.' So that she will not become a Hagarene, even if the priest would have sinned in giving it and even if her husband were not threatening [the priest], it would have been right for him to give her the Eucharist. But [in truth] he does not sin in giving [it] to her. Then [as for] the other thing you said: 'If one knew of a canon concerning this.' If there is neither risk of apostasy nor her threatening husband, it is right for you to act in this way. Namely, because other women should fear lest they also stumble, for [this woman's admonition she should fall under the canons[sentence] for as long as it appears to those in authority that she is able to bear.'⁶¹

⁵⁹ Addai mentioned here appears to be a Syriac Orthodox priest who belonged to the intellectual circle led by Jacob of Edessa. He bears no connection whatsoever with the composer of the Syriac liturgy known by the same name.

⁶⁰ That is to say, a Muslim.

⁶¹ *Letter to Addai, Question 75* [*Harvard Syr.* 93, fols 26b-27a], slightly amended by the near-identical versions found in *Mingana* 8 and *Cambridge* 2023, in Michael Philip Penn, *When*

On returning to the Church after having converted to Islam:

[#13] John: 'If a Christian should become a Hagarene or a pagan and, after a while, he should regret [this] and return from his paganism, I want to learn whether it is right for him to be baptized or if by this he has been stripped of the grace of baptism.'

Jacob: 'On the one hand, it is not right for a Christian who becomes a Hagarene or a pagan to be [re-] baptized. He had been born anew by water and by spirit according to the word of our Lord. On the other hand, it is right that there be a prayer over him [said] by the head priest and that he be assigned a time of penitence for as long as is proper. After a time of penitence, he should be also allowed to share in the [divine] mysteries. We have this as confirmation: that those who were baptized by water but had not received the Holy Spirit were later made worthy of [the Spirit] by prayer alone and through the laying on of the hands by the head priest [Acts 8:14-18]. But concerning whether he had been stripped of the grace of baptism because he became a Hagarene, I have this to say: Concerning those things whose giver is God, it is not ours to say whether they are taken away, or indeed stripped, from whoever had received them. But this is God's alone [to decide]. He looks for their return and penitence because he does not want the death of a sinner.⁶² Rather, he wants him to be separated [from evil] and to return. So here, in this world and in this present life, he will not take grace from him. But there, on that last day, [the day] of judgment, he will strip him of grace, take the talent from him as from the evil servant [Mt 25:28-30], and throw him into eternal fire.'⁶³

Here again, one notes that Muslims were not as yet referred to by their formal name, but rather by a pejorative term indicating their supposed ethnic origin, that is to say, from Hagar and consequently from Išmael.

Overall, the fortunes of Christian communities during the eighth century greatly depended upon the inclinations not only of the caliphs but also of the regional governors. For example, Marwan II (r. 744-750) the last of the Umayyad caliphs to rule from Damascus appeared to be more amenable to Christians than some of his predecessors. The monastic chronicler Theophanes the Confessor (758-818) writes of his respect toward Christians as well as his justice in punishing those who had persecuted and killed them merely on account of their faith:

Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 164-165.

⁶² See Ezek. 18:32.

⁶³ *First Letter to John the Stylite*, Question 13 [*Harvard Syr.* 93, fols 42b-43b, in Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. 168-169. Concerning all three issues discussed by Jacob of Edessa in this article, see also, Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 67-69.150-152.171-172.

In the same year (744), at the request of the Christians of the east, Marwan allowed Theophylaktos, an Edessan priest, to be chosen patriarch of Antioch, since Stephen had died. Theophylaktos was adorned with spiritual gifts, and especially with discretion. With universal letters, Marwān commanded that he should be honoured by the Arabs.

In Emesa (present-day Homs), Marwan hanged one hundred twenty Kalbites⁶⁴ and killed ‘Abbās in prison;⁶⁵ ‘Abbās had shed a great deal of Christian blood and had overrun and conquered many places. For this purpose, Marwān sent him an Ethiopian, who went to him and smothered him. The Ethiopian had bags filled with quicklime, which he put round ‘Abbās’ head and nostrils. Marwān had devised this as a just punishment for a sorcerer. Many evils which have befallen Christians have sprung from wizards and summoners of demons. Also, ‘Abbās had a share in Walid’s blood.⁶⁶

Oriental Christian-Muslim Debate Sessions

With the defeat of the Umayyads in 750 and the rise of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate a marked development took place in the geopolitical setting of Islam especially in the Middle East. The early ambition of the new rulers was that of establishing what they considered to be a truly Islamic Empire. In spite of its geographically strategic position as being almost equidistant from the western and eastern borders of Islamic territory as well as the commercial advantages stemming from its proximity to the Mediterranean, Damascus was considered by many as an Islamized city rather than an Islamic one. After all, it is one of the oldest capitals in the world and its establishment dates back to ancient Biblical times. The ‘Abbāsīds, therefore, sought to build a new capital for the new civilization that they sought to construct. For this purpose, they chose to build Baghdad, which was far removed from the Mediterranean and North Africa. Spain was already lost to them with the establishment of the Umayyad Emirate, later to be called the Umayyad Kingdom, which was founded by the only surviving member of the

⁶⁴ The Banū Kalb was an Arab tribe which mainly inhabited the desert of northwestern Arabia and Syria. Before the triumph of Muḥammad in Arabia they had professed Monophysite Christianity, but then converted to Islam. They rebelled against Marwān II because of his granting favours to their enemies the Qays, but it was swiftly crushed by the caliph.

⁶⁵ Theophanes is here referring to al-‘Abbās ibn al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, the eldest son of caliph al-Walīd (r. 705-715) born of a slave concubine (*umm walad*). He was involved in the conspiracy to assassinate caliph al-Walīd II, who was a member of Marwān’s family. One would presume that this was the main reason for his imprisonment and subsequent murder, although this would not disprove the reason offered by Theophanes.

⁶⁶ See supra n.51. The above text is quoted in *The Chronicle of Theophanes: Anni mundi 6095-6305 (A.D. 602-813)*, n. 421, 111.

family 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dāḥil in 756. This new city was to be situated between the Tigris and the Euphrates right in the centre of what used to be called 'the Fertile Crescent.' It could therefore independently support a substantial garrison and a sizeable population. It lay also at the intersection between the trade routes of the Mediterranean and the Arabian peninsula and the Great Silk Road.⁶⁷ The 'Abbāsids' dream was that of making Baghdad the heart of their empire as well as a truly cosmopolitan centre for commerce, scholarship, the arts, and religious thought. The move from Damascus to the newly-constructed capital Baghdad, undertaken under the caliphate of al-Manṣūr in 767 appeared to be more advantageous to East Syrian Christians than to the Byzantine-leaning Melkites.

Such a transformation did not go unnoticed by Christian leaders. It was for this reason that the East Syrian Patriarch (or Catholicos) Timothy I (r. 780-823) decided to relocate the Patriarchal See from Seleucia-Ctesiphon (present-day al-Madā'in, which is situated around 35 km. south-east of Baghdad) to the new capital. In spite of the dubious means that he allegedly employed in order to accede to the Patriarchal throne, his leadership marked a golden age in the life of East Syrian Christianity.⁶⁸ He supervised the complete overhaul of the intellectual formation of the clergy thereby establishing a high standard of education for them as well as for the laity. He even succeeded in expanding the outreach of the Church to include the establishment of Christian communities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Asia and China. His presence in Baghdad brought him in close proximity with the caliphal court. It is precisely within this context that written accounts exist of a series of dialogues between him and caliph Al-Mahdī which took place around the years 781-782. These encounters again took the form of question-and-answer sessions, in which the caliph poses the question and the patriarch provides the answer. Here, the Patriarch adopts a two-fold strategy in his reply. On the one hand he applies philosophical discourse and argumentation while on the other hand providing coherent answers through the use of analogy. The exchange below refers to the issue of Christian belief in the Triune God:

⁶⁷ Marco Polo, together with his father Nicolò and his uncle Maffeo, would pass through Baghdad on his way to the court of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan in 1275.

⁶⁸ For a fuller account of the scholarly contributions given by East Syrian scholars during the eighth and ninth centuries see Sidney Griffith, "Syrian Christian Intellectuals in the World of Islam: Faith, The Philosophical Life, And The Quest For An Interreligious Convivencia In Abbasid Times," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 7 (2007): 55-73.

The Sixth Question

[The Blessed Trinity is One God]

He (al-Mahdī) said, 'You profess the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!' I (Timothy) said, 'Yes!'

He said, 'Three Gods?' I said, 'These names, for us, indicate persons of the one God. As the Commander of the Faithful, his word and his spirit are one, not three caliphs, without separation of your word and your spirit from you; so also God with his Word and his Spirit are one God, not three Gods, for there is no separation of his Word and his Spirit from him. In the same way, the sun, with its ray and heat; it is one sun, not three suns...

The Eighth Question

[The Three Persons United and Distinct]

[2. The analogy of the apple]

As the aroma of the apple does not proceed from [only] a part of it and its taste from another, rather, from the entire apple the aroma proceeds and [the entire apple] begets its taste, without separation between its taste and its aroma, nor are they separate from it [the whole apple] (although its taste is not its aroma, and each one is not it [the apple], and the three are joined while separate, and separate while connected); so also the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons, one nature with three intransitive properties. One God, with three essential revealed attributes.⁶⁹

Although these forms of dialogues usually ended in a stalemate, their purpose was never that of proving the truth of the Christian faith but rather that of establishing clarity as to what Christians really believe in as well as to demonstrate that their opponents have an erroneous impression of the content of Christian doctrine. The fact that these dialogues took place with the use of Arabic as a medium of communication substantially aided the process of inculturation of Christian intellectual and spiritual life within the fabric of Islamic civilization.

Also, mention must be made of two outstanding East Syrian theologians who excelled in the production of scientific and philosophical translations from Greek into Arabic as well as apologetical treatises throughout the ninth century. The first one is Ḥabīb b. Ḥidma Abū Rā'ita al-Tikrītī (d. c. 830) who applied Greek philosophy in his apologetical works and demonstrated a profound knowledge of Islam as a religion. The other theologian is 'Ammār al-Baṣrī who was also a renowned ninth-century apologist and he is reputed to have been the first to come up with a work of systematic theology in Arabic.

⁶⁹ *The Patriarch and the Caliph: An Eighth-Century Dialogue Between Timothy I and al-Mahdī*, A Parallel English-Arabic text ed. trans. and annotated by Samir Khalil Samir and Wafik Nasry Provo (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2018), 12.16.

The Establishment of the *Bayt al-Hikma*

Up until the first half of the ninth century, one could not yet speak of a level playing field when it came to apologetical debate between Christians and Muslims, since the former would always take the upper hand in clinching the argument. The way would be gradually cleared in the first half of the ninth century when the 'Abbāsīd caliph Al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833) founded in Baghdad in 832 the *Bayt al-Hikma* (House of Wisdom) which would serve as a translation bureau, a library, a book depository, as well as an astronomical observatory. The city had already developed into the political capital of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate; it was about to develop into the intellectual metropolis of the Islamic empire.

The caliph called together all the scholars throughout his domains in order to translate the entire corpus of Hellenistic thought from Greek, or from an already existing translation (presumably Syriac), into Arabic. This huge task was mainly undertaken by Christians, given the fact that they were bi-lingual and at times even tri-lingual. Among the most renowned Christian intellectuals and scholars who participated in such an enterprise mentioned must be made of Abū Zayd Ḥunayn b. Ishāq al-'Ibādī (808-873). He was fluent in four languages, namely Syriac, Greek, Arabic and Farsī. He was the most prolific translator of medical and scientific treatises, thereby laying the foundations of Islamic medicine. He is known to have translated more than a hundred works, which also included those originating from the classical Greek philosophical tradition such as Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Thus, the first translations of Aristotle, Plato, and Neoplatonic works from Greek into Arabic began to take place in the first half of the ninth century in Baghdad.

Al-Ma'mūn also availed himself of the aid offered by Indian mathematicians in order to enhance the study of mathematics, geometry and astronomy. In fact, the numerals that the Arabs use to this very day are Indian numerals and not Arabic.

This vast enterprise founded and financed by the 'Abbāsīds was to provide in the long term incalculable benefits to the entire world of scholarship both East and West as the translations undertaken would be copied and spread throughout the Islamic world, even as far as its western border in Spain. It also was the remote cause of the establishment and development of the Scholastic movement in Western Christendom, beginning with the University of Paris. It was precisely at this very centre of learning that the division and method of the sciences and their teachings as established by the Islamic philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. c. 950) and translated and adapted by Dominicus Gundisalvi (c. 1110-c. 1190)⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Dominicus Gundisalvi was Archdeacon of Cuéllar in the Archdiocese of Segovia. Together

in Spain took root. However, what became a gain for Western Christendom would not necessarily play to the advantage of the Oriental Christian world.

Decline and Eventual Disappearance

There was indeed a downside to this undertaking by Christian scholars. The positive steps achieved in employing Arabic terms to Christian theology and their application in the realm of Oriental Christian-Muslim theological debate gradually declined and ultimately ground to a halt by the middle of the eleventh century due to two significant developments. The first one was surprisingly that of the above-mentioned establishment of the *Bayt al-Ḥikma* (*House of Wisdom*) by Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833).

The translations undertaken mainly by Christians, especially in the field of philosophy, and particularly in the realm of dialectics, served to create a more level playing field when it came to Muslim-Christian debates. Following the translation of Aristotle's *Topics*, Muslims began to master the art of dialectics in order to refine their arguments and to counter those of Christians with their own. This development eventually served to render the entire enterprise of apologetical writings or theological debates ineffective given that the end result would be a stalemate.

But what really brought a steady decline and ultimately a halt to Christian-Muslim dialogue was the renewed interest of Muslims in the preservation of the Arabic language in its Qur'ānic form. Here we need to understand that by the ninth century the overwhelming majority of Muslims were no longer Arabs. Converts from Central Asia and Persia by far surpassed the Arabs. Islamic civilization in the ninth century also implies that here we are now talking of developments taking place two-hundred years after the death of Muḥammad. By that time Arabs had not only settled in non-Arab regions, but they also began allowing non-Arabic terms to enter into their own language. A significant difference was being detected between the Arabic of the Qur'ān and that being spoken in everyday life in the ninth century. There was a great risk that Qur'ānic Arabic would eventually become incoherent or indecipherable except for expert reciters (*qurrā'*) of the sacred text of Islam. This brought about a movement that spearheaded the study of Arabic grammar as applied in the Qur'ān, which led to

with his Jewish colleague Ibn Dāwūd (Lat. Avendauth) he helped translate twenty philosophical tracts by Islamic scholars. He was also the author of five philosophical works. Among these one finds *De divisione philosophiae*, which was an adaptation of al-Fārābī's *Iḥsā' al-'Ulūm* (*The Enumeration of the Sciences*).

the establishment of schools of grammar (the most noted being those of Baṣra and Kūfa) that initiated the compilation of dictionaries and manuals of Arabic grammar and philology. For this purpose, scholars sought the aid of nomad Bedouin tribes living in the Arabian peninsula (who were the least prone to contact with the outside) in order to determine the precise meaning of terms used in the Qur'ân, which had either fallen out of use or else had been replaced by terms of non-Arabic origin. This movement succeeded in preserving and disseminating Qur'ânic Arabic as well as stabilizing the language thereby avoiding the prospect of its being lost forever. There was however a significant downside to this process because it also meant that Arabic was now being increasingly identified with the Qur'ân and consequently with Islam. Therefore, the Islamization of the Arabic language left Christian Arabic bereft of any theological or cultural significance. The use of Arabic in Christian theological circles thus began to decline and ultimately fade into insignificance. This was naturally accompanied with a lack of interest in any theological engagement with Muslim scholars by the middle of the eleventh century.

Conclusion

In spite of the above, the engagement of Oriental Christian scholars and high-ranking prelates was not a vain exercise. It is a prime example of engaging one's opponent on common ground, but there is perhaps an even better reason to be drawn. It also serves as a lesson for present-day Christian theologians living and working in "Western" secular societies, where religious language and concepts are fast disappearing. It is primarily due to this religious illiteracy that tensions and violence erupt periodically on the European continent, where ridicule has become integral to the right of free speech, thereby blurring significantly the distinction between this practice and psychological abuse. One former prime minister of the Republic of France went so far as to state that "Freedom of religion cannot be achieved without freedom of speech, even if it is sometimes used to express derision."⁷¹ It would be more than worthwhile if we were to seriously consider the above-mentioned examples of Oriental Christian dialogue with Muslim religious scholarship and political authority as an effective approach method towards understanding Muslims living in our midst. For almost 1500

⁷¹ 63rd United Nations General Assembly – Plenary Assembly – Item 45, Culture of Peace – Statement on behalf of the European Union by M. Alain Juppé, former prime minister and Special Envoy of the President of the Republic, New York, 12 November 2008 <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Alain-Juppe-addresses-63rd-UN> (accessed, 1st June 2024).

years Oriental Christians have lived side by side with Muslims both as neighbours and as subjects to their rule. In some countries they continue to suffer politically, religiously and socially. Yet their continued existence, albeit in some cases as an almost insignificant minority, is testimony to their resilience as well as to their witness to Christ's message: "It is not you who will be speaking – it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."⁷²

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⁷² Matt. 10:20.

The Christianisation of Malta: A Discussion Based on the Available Evidence

Introduction

Like many other Mediterranean communities, the Maltese had long been familiar with a varied pantheon of deities pertaining to pagan – largely Punic and Roman – religions during Classical antiquity. Then, during the late Roman occupation (4th-6th centuries AD) of Malta (fig. 1), one comes across the earliest known material or archaeological evidence of Christian presence in Malta.¹ This evidence comprises a basilica church and a baptismal font at Tas-Silġ near Marsaxlokk,² a shrine / chapel and the attached catacomb complex at L-Abbatija tad-Dejr in Rabat (Malta) and a number of other catacombs and hypogea in several places around Malta, most notably in the Rabat area.³ But

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¹ Anthony Bonanno (with Daniel Cilia), *Malta. Phoenician, Punic, and Roman* (Malta: Midsea Books Ltd, 2005), 201.

² [Missione] *Archeologica Italiana a Malta. Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna 1963*, (Roma: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Università degli Studi di Roma, 1964), 55; *1964* (1965), 44-48, 53-54; *1965* (1966), 160-161, 172; *1966* (1967), 25-27, 33-35, 118-120, 128-130; *1967* (1968), 44-46, 110-111, fig. 3.

³ Bonanno (with Cilia), *Malta. Phoenician, Punic, and Roman*, 259, 262-271, 324-337. As they have already been described and discussed in detail in several other publications, no detailed descriptions or discussions of the Maltese catacombs / hypogea and of the Tas-Silġ basilica (including the baptismal font) are being repeated in this paper. Only certain references which are sufficient enough for the purposes of this paper are being given. The catacombs / hypogea

a careful reading of this evidence would seem to lead us to an earlier Christian presence than a superficial reading might lead us to.



Fig. 1. Map of the Maltese islands and (inset) with their location in the center of the Mediterranean. The map shows the main places mentioned in the text (Adapted from www.geocities.ws/maltashells/NatHist.html).

The Material Evidence

Consisting of a basilica church (including a baptismal font) and a number of catacomb burials the distinctive Christian character of which does not go back earlier than the 4th century AD, this kind of evidence is not suggestive of a simple Christian nucleus or of a Christian community in its infancy or in its early stages of existence. Rather, this evidence seems to indicate a fully-fledged, established, and well-developed community. In the 4th-6th centuries AD, this community was making use of burial places employing distinctly Christian symbols, iconography, and epigraphy (see further below) evidently reflecting established beliefs. It also had a basilica and a baptismal font implying an organised liturgy. This 4th-6th centuries AD evidence, therefore, indirectly points to an earlier origin of

and the said basilica (including the baptismal font) are, strictly speaking, included as part of the evidence and are, therefore, not so much within the main scope of this paper.

this community. For a community to have its own distinct burial spaces and worshipping places would mean that, by then (in our case, by the 4th-6th centuries AD), this community must have consolidated and established itself (and its identity) well enough and was also sufficiently organised to have its own distinct burials and worshipping places. Moreover, the Christian presence / community must have also, by then, grown or developed to such an extent that it also needed burial places of its own; perhaps also in view of the 4th century AD prohibition of Christian burials amongst pagan ones by the Council of Laodicea (c. AD 360) and St Hilary of Poitiers (Church Father and bishop, c. AD 315 – c. 367).⁴

As the organisation and consolidation of a community (even of its identity) and also its growth or development constitute a process which takes a considerable length of time (perhaps even centuries), then, our material evidence made up of the 4th-6th centuries AD catacombs / hypogea and basilica might be taken to represent the culmination (or a stage near the culmination) of this process: a process which, therefore, is expected to have seen its initiation earlier than the 4th-6th centuries AD.⁵ This might point to an earlier date like the 1st century AD when, according to the biblical *Acts of the Apostles*,⁶ Christianity was introduced to the island by the apostle Paul while the 4th-6th centuries AD evidence itself would seem to provide us with a *terminus ante quem* in respect of Christian beginnings in Malta.

The absence of (recognisable) material evidence of a Christian presence during this process' presumed earlier initiation period may be explained by the possibility that the Christian community was, back then, not yet sufficiently organised and consolidated (and its identity was not yet established) and was not large or developed enough to leave distinctive marks of its presence in the archaeological record. This may, therefore, also lead us to suspect that throughout this process – and, especially, during the early stages – of its consolidation, organisation, and growth or development, Christianity in Malta might have been somehow overshadowed by other pagan cults with which it may have co-existed. These pagan cults will be outlined below.

⁴ J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs. Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 10.

⁵ In view of the lengthy process required for the consolidation, organisation, and growth or development of a community to take place, had this Christian community seen its beginning in the 4th-6th centuries AD, one would expect to have the hallmarks (like catacombs and a basilica) of a well-established, consolidated, organised, and developed Christian community perhaps some two or three centuries later.

⁶ [*Acts of the Apostles* 27:39-44; 28:1-11.

A somewhat distinctive picture might be provided by the catacomb complex at Ta' Bistra in the limits of Mosta. What appears to have been a rock-cut *agape* table inside a *triclinium* towards the complex's eastern end seems to have been later hollowed and turned into a circular basin. This basin could have been used as a baptismal font as two similarly rock-cut, laterally facing steps on the front elevation possibly meant to facilitate access to the basin may seem to suggest.⁷ Unfortunately, this presumed font has long been mutilated but a photographic record prior to its destruction had been secured (fig. 2). Another baptismal font or baptistry in a funerary context is known, for example, from the Catacomb of Pontian on the *Via Portuensis* in Rome while an example closely analogous to ours at Ta' Bistra in its circular shape and general characteristics is the baptismal font discovered in June 2000 beneath the floor of the sacristy of the *Chiesa del Santo Sepolcro* in Cagliari, Sardinia.

The presence of the presumed baptismal font at Ta' Bistra would seem to confirm the Christian character of the Ta' Bistra catacomb complex. However, the inconspicuous location (in a catacomb complex) of the presumed baptismal font away from the urban center of Melite might assign this presumed baptismal

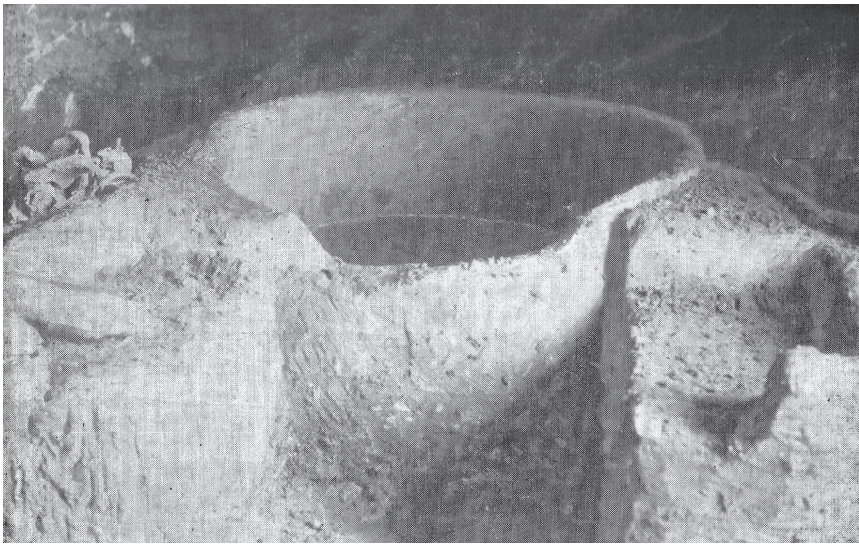


Fig. 2. The presumed baptismal font inside a *triclinium* at Ta' Bistra Catacomb complex in the limits of Mosta. It appears to have been cut out from an earlier *agape* table. The two laterally facing steps in the foreground were possibly cut to facilitate access to the presumed font (Source: Zammit (1935), 175(fig.4)).

⁷ Charles G. Zammit, "The 'Tal-Bistra' Catacombs," *Bulletin of the Museum* 1, no.5 (February 1935): 169-170, 175(fig. 4), 177.

font and, by extension, the catacomb complex inside which it was located to a period when Christianity in Malta was not yet fully established. This might further lead us to surmise that the presumed baptismal font at Ta' Bistra belongs to an earlier phase of Malta's Christianisation process than the one at Tas-Silġ (near Marsaxlokk) which, by contrast, is more conspicuous and is linked to a monumental basilica, evidently representative of a later phase of the Christianisation process in Malta. The baptismal font at Tas-Silġ was dated by its excavators specifically to the period between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries AD⁸ and may, therefore, provide a *terminus ante quem* in respect of the presumed baptismal font at Ta' Bistra.

The Literary Evidence

As discussed above, the introduction of Christianity in Malta may have taken place well before the appearance of the earliest known material evidence. Apart from the commentary on Paul's sojourn in Malta in one of the homilies of the 4th-early 5th century AD Church Father St John Chrysostom⁹ and a very brief reference in the 4th century AD apocryphal *Acts of Peter and Paul*,¹⁰ the biblical *Acts'* narrative is the sole literary evidence we have associated with the beginnings of Christianity in Malta.

The biblical *Acts'* narrative gives us the impression that the apostle and the new religious ideology he brought along with him were first embraced by the local '*barbaroi*' (people extraneous to Greek and Roman culture) while the local elite are likely to have remained attached for a long while to their own pagan religious traditions (see further below).¹¹ It was not unusual for the newly spreading religious ideology (i.e. Christianity) to be first embraced by people of low social standing (in both rural and urban contexts) amongst whom it seems to have enjoyed popularity due to the favourable treatment it accorded to them.¹²

However, one is not to imagine a quick and massive-scale shift. Apart from the fact that Paul's arrival in Malta was not a planned missionary journey, his being a prisoner implies that his movement – and, by implication, his activity – is likely to have been somewhat restricted. In addition, his three-month

⁸ *Missione 1966* (1967), 33-35, 119-120, 129-130.

⁹ 'Homily LIV on Acts XXVIII.1', in John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*.

¹⁰ *Acts of Peter and Paul*, 1st and 5th (unnumbered) paragraphs.

¹¹ See George Azzopardi, *The Extramural Necropolis of Għozo* (Gozo: The Author, 2007), 24.

¹² *Ibid.*

sojourn in Malta may have been too short to leave a long-lasting impact on the local population; unless he delegated someone to follow up and complete the task / mission he initiated.¹³ Whether he did or not, we do not know but evidently pagan cults continued to be practised for a long while as will be shown further below.

Paul the Healer

An interesting detail given by the *Acts*' author is the instance when, seeing no harm done to the apostle by the viper, the local '*barbaroi*' (presumably, countrymen hailing from the coastal surroundings of the beach where the apostle's vessel was wrecked) perceived him as a god.¹⁴ They are expected to have done so even more when Paul healed the father of Publius, the *Protos* / Chief man of the island and, then, saw him healing their own sick as well.¹⁵ One is tempted to guess that they might have identified him with the Punic healing god Eshmun or his Roman counterpart Aesculapius with whom they are expected to have been familiar (fig. 3). The apostle Paul had, in fact, undergone a similar experience when, along with Barnabas, he was at Lystra, in Lycaonia. There, upon seeing him preaching and curing a crippled man, the gathered crowds identified

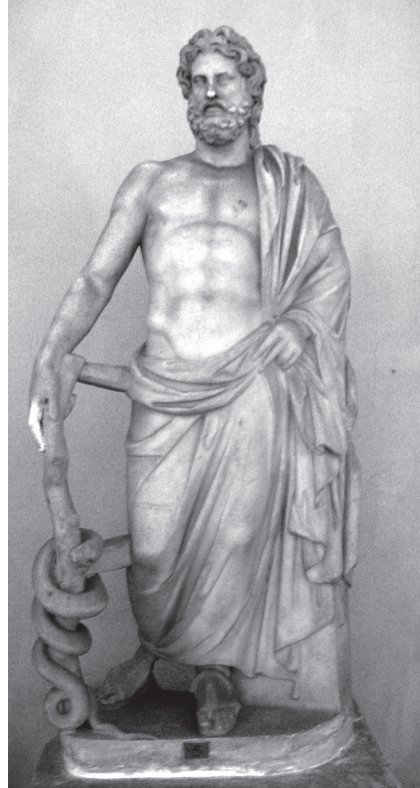


Fig. 3. A marble statue of the Roman healing god Aesculapius found at Ostia, near Rome, and now in the Vatican Museum. This statue is an early 3rd century AD Roman copy reproducing an iconographic scheme developed in late Hellenistic times (Photo: the author).

¹³ The origins of the tradition relating to the appointment of Publius (the *Protos* of Malta) as the first bishop of the island by the apostle Paul himself may, perhaps, be attributed to the Martyrology (*Martyrologium ad diem 21 Januarii*) of St Bede quoted in Seraphim M. Zarb, "Publius the Protos of Malta", *Scientia* 37, no.4 (1974): 163-164 (including footnote 15). But as this martyrology is rather a condensation of earlier ecclesiastical popular traditions, I refrain from resorting to it or to the other traditions to further elaborate this argument.

¹⁴ *Acts* 28:6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28:8-9.

Paul with the messenger-god Hermes, eloquence being an attribute of this god. Scarcely were the crowds persuaded that he was not Hermes.¹⁶

Perceptions surrounding the healing qualities of the apostle or of places closely associated with him seem to have survived for many centuries to follow. Until relatively recent times, dust or stone to which healing properties would seem to have been attributed used to be extracted from St Paul's Grotto in Rabat, Malta (see fig. 4).¹⁷ The dust was also used to produce *terra sigillata* medals¹⁸ one of which, depicted on a contemporary engraving showing the shipwreck of St Paul,

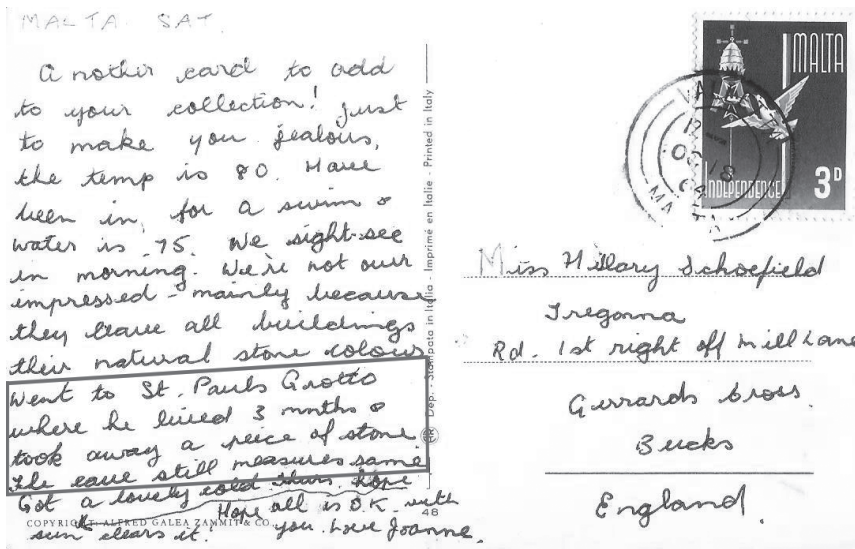


Fig. 4. The rear side of a Malta souvenir card (showing Gozo's Ta' Pinu shrine which is not visible here) sent by a British tourist visiting Malta in 1964. In her message, she tells her relative in Britain that she visited St Paul's Grotto in Rabat (Malta) from where she extracted a piece of stone (see framed sentences in her message) whilst recalling the locals' belief that the cave's dimensions remain unaltered (Author's collection).

¹⁶ Ibid., 14:6-18.

¹⁷ Thomas Freller, "The Image of the 'Island of St Paul'. A Story of Success of Baroque Historiography, Iconography, and Poetry," in *St Paul in Malta and the Shaping of a Nation's Identity*, eds John Azzopardi & Anthony Pace (Malta: Office of the Prime Minister, 2010), 103, quoting the 17th century French chronicler Francois Deseigne; Jean Quintin d'Autun, *The Earliest Description of Malta* (Lyons, 1536), trans. Horatio Caesar Roger Vella (Malta: DeBono Enterprises, 1980), 46-47. A commemorative marble inscription set up next to the entrance of the cave known as 'St Paul's grotto' in Rabat (Malta) to mark the embellishment of the grotto's immediate environs by Grandmaster Emmanuel Pinto in 1743, makes reference to the belief regarding the unchanging shape and dimensions of the grotto upon extraction of stone or dust from its walls.

¹⁸ See examples in *St Paul in Malta and the Shaping of a Nation's Identity*, 195-203.



Fig. 5. St Paul's shipwreck on the island of Malta. Engraving by Jacob Andreas Friedrich Snr (1684-1751). The medal (probably one of those made of *terra sigillata* from St Paul's Grotto in Rabat, Malta) represented below on the left shows the apostle with the viper twisted round his raised sword (evidently a *Zweihänder* or double-handed longsword that used to be carried across the shoulder as seen here) and the legend "TERRA:D.GROTTA·D·S·PAVL" / "Dust from the Grotto of St Paul" (Author's collection).

showed the apostle with the viper twisted round his raised sword and the legend "TERRA:D.GROTTA·D·S·PAVL" / "Dust from the Grotto of St Paul" (fig. 5). Incidentally, as a matter of observation, while local popular tradition would seem to have attributed healing properties to dust extracted from St Paul's Grotto in Rabat (Malta), the viper twisted round his raised sword would seem to recall the snake-entwined staff of the healing god Eshmun / Aesculapius (see fig. 3). It would seem that, in Maltese popular culture, not only certain places linked

to him but even the apostle himself may have remained associated with healing.

Besides St Paul's Grotto in Rabat, another place possibly associated with the healing qualities of the apostle is a water spring known as 'Għajn Rasul' / 'Rasul's Spring' in St Paul's Bay (see fig. 6)¹⁹ and, thus, not far from the traditionally held site of the shipwreck. Meaning 'a prophet'²⁰ or 'a messenger', the Arabic word 'Rasul' might be a reference to Paul as a prophet or a messenger of God (or of God's word / gospel) amongst the Maltese. We have also already seen the experience Paul underwent at Lystra (in Lycaonia) where, upon seeing him preaching (and curing a crippled man), the gathered crowds identified him with Hermes, the eloquent messenger-god (see above). The said spring in St Paul's Bay also features a statue of the apostle Paul. As healing properties were often attributed to water or to water sources (like springs)²¹ and as the apostle Paul might have been himself also associated with healing, this particular spring might have also enjoyed an association with healing: a possibility which may further explain the connection between St Paul and this particular spring.

Also in St Paul's Bay, the old chapel dedicated to the Shipwreck of St Paul always enjoyed great devotion from the inhabitants of Malta, and especially

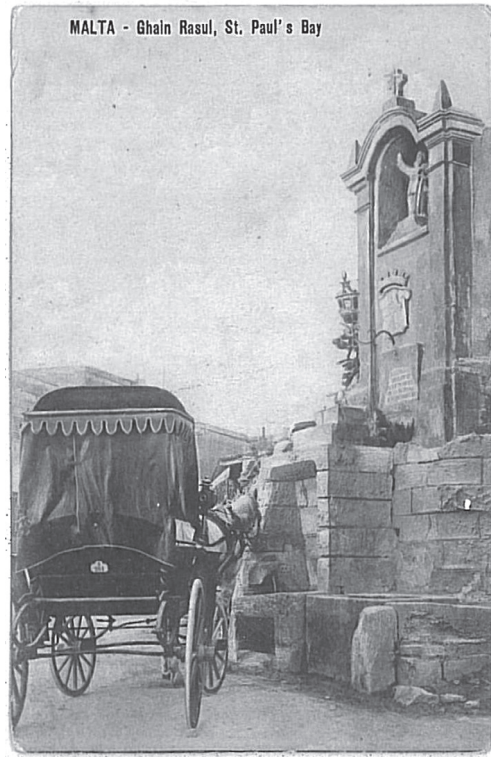


Fig. 6. Ghajn Rasul in St Paul's Bay as seen around the beginning of the 20th century. This water spring might have had healing properties much like the apostle Paul with whom it is associated (Photo: Author's collection).

¹⁹ Godfrey Wettinger, *Place-Names of the Maltese Islands. ca. 1300-1800* (Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group, 2000), 189 (sub Ghajn Rażun).

²⁰ Prophets in Islam include messengers.

²¹ See, for instance, Michele dall'Aglio, *I Culti delle Acque nell'Italia Antica* (Imola (Bologna): Angelini Editore, 2009), 14-16.

those who suffered illnesses of all sorts who, with the intercession of the Apostle, found here consolation.²²

A Pauline Cult?

At such an early stage as that which saw the arrival of Paul in Malta, one can perhaps imagine a hybridised cult centred on the figure of the apostle presumably identified with one of the gods whom, for a while, the Maltese continued to worship (see below). Having been familiar with polytheistic religious traditions, it might have not been difficult for them to include the apostle Paul in their pantheon of gods. Certain syncretised Christian elements, however, might have not been altogether excluded from this new hybridised cult.

Nonetheless, the filtering process through which the balance may have eventually tipped more in favour of Christianity is very likely to have been slow and gradual as evidenced by the presence of imperial and pagan cults until late imperial times. Such evidence is best provided by surviving or documented inscriptions, like *CIL* 7494 for the continuation of the cult of Proserpina after c. AD 69²³ and *CIL* 7495 (and, possibly, 8318) for the cult of Apollo in the 2nd century AD.²⁴ There is also epigraphic evidence for surviving imperial and pagan cults on the neighbouring island of Gozo (fig. 1) like inscription *CIL* 7507 for the cult of the deified emperor Hadrian during the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD²⁵ while the *cognomen* ‘Gallus’ in *CIL* 7506 (of the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD like the previous inscription) may possibly indicate the presence, in Gozo, of a cult of Magna Mater whose priests were known as ‘galli’.²⁶ Ritual activity connected with pagan cults also survived longer as witnessed at Tas-Silġ sanctuary evidently as late as the 2nd century AD and, to a much lesser extent, till the 4th century AD²⁷ and at what appears to have been a headland sanctuary

²² Archivum Cathedrale Melitense / Malta Cathedral Archive, Mdina, Malta, Misc. 57 [*Leggendario Maltese Raccolto e formato dal Pre Pelagio dal Zebug Capuccino, dato a conservare nella Libreria della S. Madre Chiesa Cattedrale nel 1775*], f.48r.

²³ See George Azzopardi, *Elements of Continuity. Stone Cult in the Maltese Islands* (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2017), 63-68.

²⁴ See Joseph Busuttill, “The Cult of Apollo,” *Journal of the Faculty of Arts (The Royal University of Malta)* 5, no. 3 (1973): 261-268.

²⁵ See George Azzopardi, *The Roman Municipia of Malta and Gozo. The Epigraphic Evidence* (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2023), 15, 17, 22-25.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 43-44.

²⁷ *Missione* 1966 (1967), 118, 128; 1967 (1968), 44; 1970 (1973), 100, 104.

at Ras ir-Raġeb as late as around the 4th century AD.²⁸ The same phenomenon occurred also on nearby Gozo where pagan rituals were practised at another headland sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija till the 2nd century AD and, possibly, down to the 4th century AD²⁹ and at a coastal shrine at Għar ix-Xiġ, overlooking Mgarr ix-Xini, till the 3rd century AD.³⁰

But external elements (perhaps in the form of missionary activity or Christian immigrants) could have, at some (evidently, later) stage, contributed towards a simultaneously continuing Christianisation process or flourishing in Malta, already initiated earlier. Such elements might have been of North-African origin or inspiration as suggested by the baptismal font at Tas-Silġ³¹ and by the significant number of 4th-6th centuries AD North-African red-ware lamps both from the area of the basilica church at Tas-Silġ and from certain catacombs / hypogea (see below).

Elements Suggestive of a Christian Inspiration

As said above, the Tas-Silġ basilica church and baptismal font are datable to the 4th-6th centuries AD. To the same period are, likewise, datable the distinctly Christian symbols, iconography, and epigraphy found in a number of catacombs / hypogea. The largest concentration of such catacombs / hypogea is to be found in the Rabat area (near Mdina) but other smaller groups or isolated ones were to be found in the then extra-urban areas like Salina Bay and Marsascala, near St Thomas' tower, amongst other places. One might possibly include even architectural elements found in these catacombs, like *agape* tables.³² Interestingly,

²⁸ Mario Buhagiar, *Essays on the Archaeology and Ancient History of the Maltese Islands: Bronze Age to Byzantine* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2014), 11-15.

²⁹ George Azzopardi, *Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary Revisited. A Re-Assessment of the Evidence and Newly-Informed Interpretations of a Punic-Roman Sanctuary in Gozo (Malta)* (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2017), 1-2, 16-62.

³⁰ George Azzopardi, "Religious Landscapes and Identities of the Maltese Islands in a Mediterranean Context: 700 BC – AD 500", Ph.D. e-thesis, Department of Archaeology, University of Durham (UK), 2014, 223-226, 230.

³¹ *Missione 1966* (1967), 33-35, 119-120, 129-130; *1967* (1968), 44-46, 110-111. See also, Claudia Perassi, "Rinvenimenti monetali da Tas-Silġ", in *Scienze dell'Antichità. Storia, Archeologia, Antropologia*, ed. C. Panella 12(2004-2005) (Rome: Università degli studi di Roma «La Sapienza», 2007), 376-381. For the suggested North-African inspiration of the baptismal font at Tas-Silġ, see Azzopardi, "Religious Landscapes and Identities of the Maltese Islands in a Mediterranean Context," 137.

³² Bonanno (with Cilia), *Malta. Phoenician, Punic, and Roman*, 262, 266-267, 269-272, 286, 324-337.

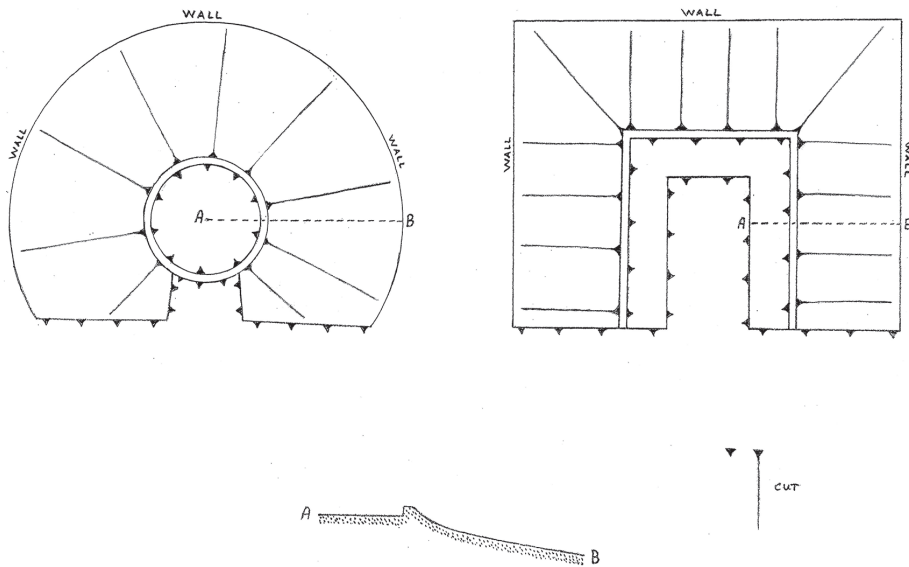


Fig. 7. Similar rock-cut dining features in the form of a reclining couch preceded by a shelf or ledge for food and drink (see profile in center, below) are noted to be shared by *agape* tables inside the catacombs' *triclinia* (see plan on the left, above) and the proposed banqueting arrangements in the *triclinia* at Ras il-Wardija Punic-Roman sanctuary (see plan on the right, above), albeit in circular and linear orientations respectively. Drawings are for illustrative purposes only. Not to scale.

the *agape* tables inside the catacombs' *triclinia* and the proposed banqueting arrangements in the *triclinia* (the one inside the cave and the two facing ones beyond the cave) at Ras il-Wardija Punic-Roman sanctuary³³ do share similar rock-cut dining features in spite of their respective circular and linear orientations (see figs 7 and 8), possibly suggesting assimilations between Christian and non-Christian banqueting customs during a transitional stage towards Christianity.³⁴

Other significant architectural elements inside the catacombs might include the rock-cut gabled tops, antefixes, and 'doorways' seen on certain tombs in some of the catacombs like those of St Paul's in Rabat or those at Salina Bay, evidently in imitation of contemporary above-ground domestic architecture (see fig. 9). Similarly imitated architectural elements in the form of tiled gabled roofs, antefixes, columns and 'doorways' are also often met with on both pagan and Christian sarcophagi, tomb stelae, and even cinerary urns beyond Maltese shores (see, for example, figs 10, 11, 12 and 13). While perpetuating (at least, in the case of the Maltese islands) a phenomenon that could be detected already in prehistoric

³³ Azzopardi, *Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary Revisited*, 32-35, 39, 53-54, 57-58, 60-61.

³⁴ For a further discussion, see *ibid.*, 57-58.



Fig. 8. Views of the rock-cut dining features in the form of a circular reclining couch preceded by a similarly circular shelf or ledge for food and drink characterising the *agape* table inside the *triclinium* at St Cataldus' catacomb in Rabat, Malta (left) and of similar features, albeit in linear orientation, marking the proposed banqueting arrangements in one of the two facing *triclinia* (interfered by an offering table at the far end) beyond the cave *triclinium* at Ras il-Wardija Punic-Roman sanctuary (right). Left photo: the author; Right photo: *Missione 1965* (1966), pl. 90(2).

times (i.e. the replication of contemporary above-ground architecture in an underground funerary context as at the Hal Saflieni prehistoric hypogeum), these elements would give the tomb (or sarcophagus or urn) an overall appearance of an abode where the deceased would 'dwell' while awaiting resurrection; a belief shared also by pagans. In fact, the tendency to view the tomb as a place where the deceased 'resided' can be also traced to the pagan Roman world not only through the shape and characteristics of sarcophagi and cinerary urns (see above) but even through the architecture of certain mausolea and sepulchral monuments recalling the houses of the living, sometimes even through the internal renderings in paint, marble, stone, or stucco of the useful and familiar objects like food and drinking vessels, furniture, etc., in the tomb interior to make the deceased feel at home inside the tomb.³⁵ This belief was maintained by Christians, echoing the

³⁵ J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 37-38, 132-143, 253. See also, Azzopardi, *The Extramural Necropolis of Gaulos*, 11-12.

Christian apologist Tertullian when, interpreting allegorically *Isaias* 26.20, he exhorts the deceased to “... enter into your chambers, shut your doors upon you, hide yourself a little for a moment, until the indignation pass away.” Tertullian likens the graves to chambers or store rooms where the bodies of the deceased are preserved with ointments and kept in the grave only to come out at the Lord’s bidding.³⁶

Though now badly mutilated, the Ghar Gerduf catacomb is the only one known so far in Gozo. However, in the absence of any distinctly Christian characteristics, symbols, iconography, or epigraphy, it cannot be securely claimed to be Christian (at least, exclusively) in character.³⁷ On the other hand, a rock-cut tomb of a clearly Christian character is reported to have been found beneath the soil of a field in St Mary’s Street at Marsalforn (Gozo) in 1893. Apart from some human bones (including a cranium), no architectural details or accompanying goods which could help us date the burial are mentioned. However, its covering slab (later moved to the public library while the tomb



Fig. 9. Gabled top of a tomb under a *baldacchino* in hypogeum 5 forming part of the Salina group of catacombs. Two of the four antefixes could be seen in the visible corners while the ‘spine’ running the whole length of the gabled top could be in imitation of *imbrices* that, in antiquity, used to be seen in the same location and position on top of tiled roofs. The same tomb also has a small ‘door’ opening (not shown in photo) at floor level. All of these details seem to suggest an imitation of contemporary above-ground domestic architecture (Photo: the author).

³⁶ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 27. See also, Alfred C. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 12, 121-122; Azzopardi, *The Extramural Necropolis of Gaulos*, 11-12.

³⁷ George Azzopardi, “Vestiges of Material Culture at Il-Lunzjata Valley and its Immediate Environs,” *The Gozo Observer* 41 (Winter 2020): 6-7. See also, Azzopardi, *The Extramural Necropolis of Gaulos*, 22-23.



Fig. 10. Sarcophagus at Split Archaeology Museum, Split, Croatia. Note the lid in imitation of a tiled gabled roof complete with antefixes at its corners (Photo: the author).

was destroyed) is reported to have carried two relief crosses.³⁸ Such a practice involving the display of two or more crosses on a tomb's cover is recorded, at least, from Mediaeval northern England. It appears that the number of crosses used to correspond to the number of persons buried in the tomb.³⁹ Could the presence of two crosses on our tomb likewise indicate two individuals (perhaps, a couple / husband and wife) that had been buried there? It is unclear if this practice has survived from an earlier Christian tradition or whether it was geographically unrestricted, although none can be excluded.

³⁸ G(iuseppe) Farrugia, *S. Paolo Apostolo e Padre dei Gozitani* (Malta: Tipografia G. Muscat, 1915), 182-183.

³⁹ Edward Charlton, "On the Sepulchral Slabs Existing in the Counties of Northumberland and Durham," *The Archaeological Journal* 5 (December 1848): 255-256.



Fig. 11. Sarcophagus with a high relief of the Good Shepherd in the middle of its longest side. From Salona (today, Solin), Croatia. Proconnesian marble, AD 310-330. Note the door imitation on the sarcophagus' shorter side, the columns at the corners, and the lid in imitation of a gabled roof with antefixes at its corners. Split Archaeology Museum, Split, Croatia (Photo: the author).

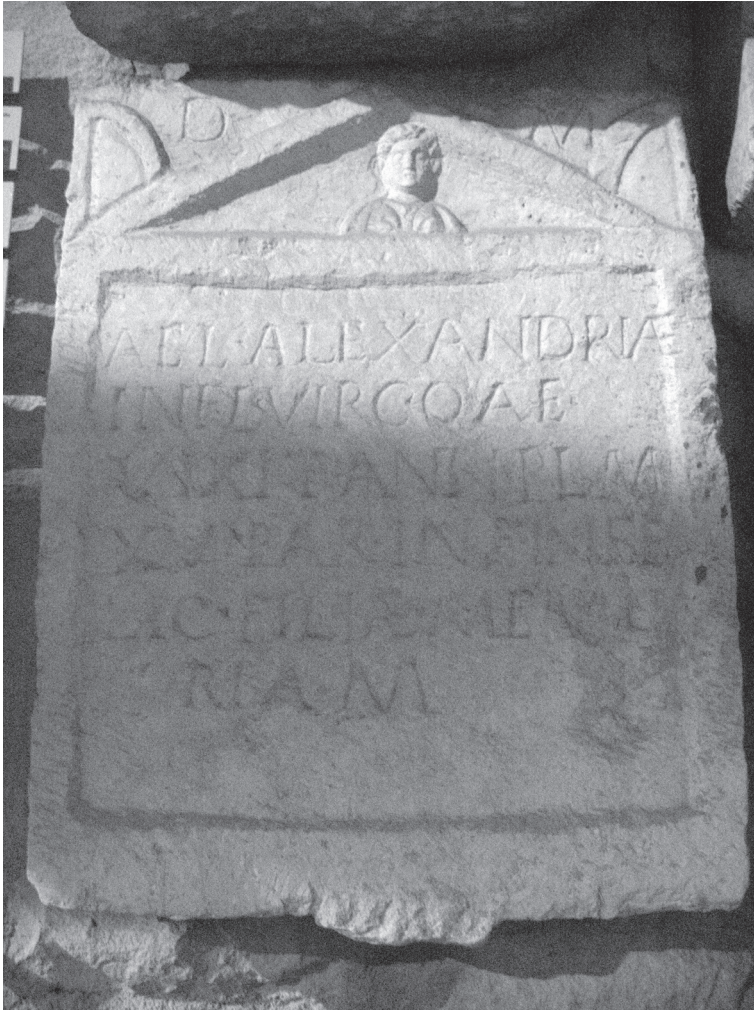


Fig. 12. Funerary stela erected in memory of Aelia Alexandria by her parents. From Salona (today, Solin), Croatia. End of the 2nd - beginning of the 3rd century AD. Carved in limestone, it carries a tympanum flanked by two antefixes on top. Split Archaeology Museum, Split, Croatia (Photo: the author).



Fig. 13. Marble funerary urn at the Academic Art Museum, Bonn, Germany. Note the two columns on the front and the lid in the guise of a gabled roof complete with antefixes at its corners (Photo: the author).

The Christian Character of (Certain) Oil-Lamps

Some of the (Maltese) catacombs / hypogea also yielded North-African red-ware oil-lamps of the 4th-6th centuries AD, a number of which bore distinctly Biblical or Christian symbols.⁴⁰ One such North-African red-ware oil-lamp of a clearly Christian character was found with two others (one of which was incomplete) in December 1961 within an urban context at It-Tokk (today's Independence Square) in Victoria, Gozo. On its dished top, this lamp carried a relief image of the two Hebrews carrying a huge bunch of grapes from the Valley of Eshcol in Canaan as found in the Biblical Old Testament book of *Numbers* (13.23). On the same dished top, between the said two figures and the stub handle, the lamp carried the distinctively Christian Chi-Rho monogram.⁴¹ The same biblical theme (but without the Chi-Rho monogram) is known from at least three other examples from Malta. Two examples are completely identical in both shoulder and dished top decoration where they exhibit this same biblical theme on their respective dished tops and a vine scroll on their respective shoulders. These two examples are, in fact, two incomplete lamps of the same type and period (i.e. North-African red-ware lamps of the 4th-6th centuries AD). One comes from Tas-Silġ⁴² while the other (Inv. No.X55), found on 5th November 1959, is kept at St Agatha's Museum, Rabat (Malta). The latter's provenance is unknown, but it is very likely to be from Malta. A completely identical example of the same type and date and with the same shoulder and dished top decoration is to be found at the Archaeological Museum of Sousse, in Tunisia. Its provenance is unknown but is presumed to be from Sousse. This last example from Sousse Archaeological Museum and the Maltese ones from Tas-Silġ and from St Agatha's Museum are very likely to be from the same North-African workshop, unless the Maltese examples were local copies fashioned on imported ones (see below). The third example from Malta is also of the same type and date. It is a complete lamp, though unprovenanced. Forming part of the reserve collection of the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, it shows the same above-mentioned biblical theme on its dished top but the decoration on its shoulders is different from that on the previous examples while it carries an undecipherable inscription within

⁴⁰ George Azzopardi, "Catalogue of Roman Lamps in Malta," unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of Classics and Archaeology, University of Malta, 1994, 16-19, 105, 107-108, 112-115, 118-122, 125-130, pls 65, 69-70, 74-75, 77-79, 81-84.

⁴¹ *M(useums) A(nnual) R(eport) for the year 1961* (Malta: Museum Department, 1962), 5, pl.V(c).

⁴² *Missione 1964* (1965), 57, 155, pl. 49(4).

its ring base. Similar oil-lamps (largely in fragments) were also found at Tas-Silġ, mostly in the upper levels in Area 2, location of the basilica church.⁴³

These mould-made oil-lamps were usually mass-produced in North-African workshops from where they were exported to the entire Mediterranean world,⁴⁴ including the Maltese islands where imported examples may have also served as archetypes to create local copies as was done in Sicily.⁴⁵ Though not all of them bore Biblical or Christian symbols and iconography, these oil-lamps would, nonetheless, continue to highlight the distinctive North-African link in the presumed on-going Christianisation process of the Maltese islands during the late Roman period. Once again, North-Africa seems to have been a source of religious influence as it had already been earlier through its Punic cults.

Conclusion

During the interval between the arrival of the apostle Paul in the 1st century AD and the earliest appearance, in late imperial times, of material evidence for Christianity in the Maltese islands, traditional cults were evidently not uprooted. But, at the same time, syncretised Christian elements perhaps under the guise of a new hybridised cult centred on the figure of the apostle Paul possibly identified with one of the traditional gods could have been absorbed (at least, initially) by certain (not necessarily all) rural communities (see above). In this case, they would have been mainly the political establishment and elite who constituted the conservative element that kept safeguarding the traditional and long-established cults.

In all likelihood, the 'new' cult was (initially, at least) subordinate and inferior to the long-established traditional ones to the extent that it left no material record of its initial stages. This might have been further aided by the unofficial nature of the cult itself and the small number of its initial adherents.⁴⁶

Eventually, the traditional pagan cults would seem to have been slowly and gradually 'Christianised' in a process that may have also followed on from previous religious developments. Initially, this presumed syncretised religious phenomenon might have been not only unofficial but also selective whereby

⁴³ *Missione* 1963 (1964), pl. 17(4); 1964 (1965), 47-48, pls 24(3-4), 49(1, 4); 1965 (1966), 35, pl. 15(2); 1966 (1967), 35, pl. 25(4-6).

⁴⁴ Donald M. Bailey, *Greek and Roman Pottery Lamps* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1963), 20-21, 32(pl. D).

⁴⁵ Azzopardi, "Catalogue of Roman Lamps in Malta," 17.

⁴⁶ Azzopardi, *The Extramural Necropolis of Gaulos*, 24.

the Maltese (particularly, the rural communities) might have retained previous elements and adopted others in a complex process motivated by what related to the Maltese communities, to their needs, or to their aspirations. It might have been, therefore, a continuous process marked by an ability to absorb new cults into existing structures. Thus, the initial 'Christianity' – or, rather, Pauline cult – of the Maltese could have been also of a hybrid character until it took on a more distinctively Christian look in a progressive manner.

The presumed syncretised adoption of Christianity at first by rural (and coastal) communities would seem to manifest the selective (and creative) approach of these communities in contrast to the conservative approach then apparently adopted by the Maltese urban elite who, despite their openness towards the mainstream religious trends, would seem to have shown reluctance in the face of the new religious phenomenon (i.e. Christianity) and rather favoured – perhaps, even conveniently – the long-established religious traditions which, for a long while, they continued to embrace and practise.

In summary, the tradition of early Christianity in Malta is quite possibly a later re-interpretation of its true origins. It might have originated as a hybrid cult (including pagan religious elements) perhaps rather centered on the figure of Paul (i.e. a Pauline cult) that was, then, integrated into Christianity through a long-term process of syncretism.

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Conserving a Letter of Saint Ignatius of Loyola Preserved in Malta

A letter attributed to Saint Ignatius of Loyola was for centuries preserved at the Jesuits' Church in Valletta, that is since the second part of the 17th century. The contents of this reliquary, formerly venerated in the Chapel of the Saint in the transept of the Church, were sent to Malta by the Maltese Jesuit Bernardus Bonici (d. 15 May 1660). It contains a letter attributed to Saint Ignatius, and several supporting documents which act as its *authentica*. These seek to document the transmission of this letter. Given the veneration attributed to it as a relic of their founder, the letter was for centuries kept sealed in its frame reliquary. The letter was first published by Pio Pecchiai in his fundamental study "Il collegio dei gesuiti a Malta,"¹ on the establishment of the *Compagnia* in Malta. However, since he based his study on archival material preserved in Rome, and

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¹ Pio Pecchiai in his fundamental study "Il collegio dei gesuiti a Malta," *Archivio Storico di Malta* 9, no.2 (1938): 321-322, wherein, in Appendix V, there is document No. 9 which is Ignatius' letter as it appears as a transcript in a notarial deed dated 16 August 1708. The archival reference provided is Fondo Gesuitico al Gesù di Roma, Collegia, Malta, ff. 92 et seq. For a study on the letter and its text see also, Vincent Borg, "Letter of Saint Ignatius of Loyola Concerning the Setting Up of a University at Messina and Other Documents Linked to this Letter," in *The Maltese Diocese During the Seventeenth Century* (Malta: 2015), 1165-1187. This exceptional

presumably had no access to the original letter sealed in Malta, the published text refers to a transumpt of the letter made by notary on 16 August 1708. To date, the accompanying documentation was neither transcribed, nor published.

Following a thorough conservation treatment to preserve this documentation, recently found to be in an advanced process of disintegration, the present study will seek to place the letter in its historical context while tracing its significance for the Jesuits who received it as a memento of their founder. It will also shed light on the seminal palaeographical study that the documentation contains, carried out by those who received it as a gift in the 17th century, in order to establish whether the letter was in fact in Ignatius' own handwriting. In doing so, we seek to document the lives of the Jesuits who contributed to its preservation and transmission. A final consideration will concern the cultic significance of such artefacts. The appendix includes images of the documents and the transcription of the whole corpus.

The Historical Context

The letter itself is related to the foundation of the Jesuits' College² in Messina. In December 1547, the jurats of Messina, together with the Viceroy Juan de Vega, presented a formal request to Pope Paul III asking that Ignatius send 14 of his companions to establish a college and other pious works in his kingdom. Notwithstanding the many requests for such apostolic works, Ignatius was receiving from various parts of Europe, the Messina project was readily taken up, since it fully resonated with his long-standing desire to establish a college at a strategic point in Europe that would enable the formation of young men to undertake missionary activity in the Islamic North African coast. In a brief history of the foundation of the colleges in the Sicilian Province, we read: "Il Collegio di Messina fu fondato nel 1548, per il cui sostentamento il Senato di Messina assegnò rendita sufficiente."³

Although the history of the foundation of the college in Messina, and the attempt at establishing a University administered by the Jesuits there, has long been documented and published, in works such as that of Paul F. Grendler,

work concentrates mostly on the foundation of the College of Messina. This present work simply seeks to add other details to it.

² ARSI, Sic. 203, *Sicula fundationis Collegiorum*, f.2r.-5v.: By the mid-17th Century, the Jesuits had established 31 colleges or formation houses in the Sicilian province. The first colleges to be established were the ones in Messina (1548), Alcamo (1650).

³ ARSI, Sic. 203, f.3r: The note continues: "come si puo vedere nella parte presente nella nostra Istoria l. 8 nru.13."

The Jesuits and Italian Universities,⁴ the present work will seek to revisit the documentation compiled in the manuscript *Sicula Foundationis Collegii Messanae*⁵ in a chronological manner, read through the lens of the letter of Saint Ignatius found in Malta. Since what is presumably the original *bella copia* of this letter can be found within the said manuscript in Rome, a palaeographic consideration of both the external and the internal characteristics of the version of this letter found in the Maltese reliquary, allows one to reasonably propose that the Maltese example is the draft *or brutta copia* of Ignatius' letter. Both versions bear the title "Capitoli circa il collegio et università De Messina proposti per parte della Compagnia de Iesu."⁶

The first ten Jesuits arrived in Messina during the Lent of 1548, and by April 1548 started lectures in the Church of Saint Nicholas, and a grammar school in the Archbishop's Palace. On 16 November 1548, Paul III, through his bull *Copiosus in misericordia Dominus*, established a University in Messina entrusting it to the Jesuits. Following some jurisdictional disputes with the jurats, by 1549 the University was split into two sections, with Philosophy, Theology and Letters under the direction of the Jesuits, while Medicine, Canon and Civil Law were entrusted to the senate who appointed the Rector. The *Primum ac Prototypum Collegium* and the *Universitas Studiorum* of Messina were thus established.

The letter contained in the reliquary is undated, but since in its title it refers to both the College and the University, it must be dated to c.1550, following the unilateral promulgation of the University Statutes by the Messina Senate on 11 June 1550. This went hand in hand with the dispute over the financial compensation due to the Jesuits for their teaching at the newly established university, fixed by the senate at 1500 scudi for 15 Jesuit teachers for both the university and the school. These decisions greatly disappointed Ignatius and Nadal,⁷ for after they had given up the Jesuits' full control of the University as decreed by the original bull, the city was now turning back on its word to

⁴ Paul F. Grendler, *The Jesuits and Italian Universities 1548–1773* (Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

⁵ ARSI, Sic. 197/i, *Sicula Fund. Colleg. V Messan.*

⁶ ARSI, Sic. 197/i, *Sicula Fund. Colleg. V Messan.*, fasc. XVIII, f. 138r-v, *Capitoli circa il collegio et universita De Messina proposti per parte della Compagnia de Iesu (Bella copia)*.

⁷ Jérôme Nadal (1507 – 1580) was a Spanish Jesuit priest of the first generation of companions of St Ignatius of Loyola. A very close collaborator of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, who entrusted to him the mission to visit the various Jesuit communities of Europe then established, the first draft of the Constitutions. Shortly before his death, Ignatius asked Nadal to oversee a project of producing engravings to illustrate the *Spiritual exercises*. See Markus Friedrich, *The Jesuits. A History* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023).

provide the 2000 scudi which they desperately needed, not only as payment for their teaching, but also to support all the Jesuit mission in the city.⁸

The Transmission of the Letter

The corpus of papers in the reliquary seeks to act as an *authentica* of the letter attributed to Saint Ignatius. It does so namely by documenting the transmission of the letter from the moment it was discovered by Padre Filippus Chambeius (Sansborius) at the church of the College of Santo Filippo and Santo Jacopo⁹ in Palermo sometime before 1618,¹⁰ to its gifting by the Jesuits, Paolo Pellizzeri and Nicolaus Bersetto, to Bernardino Bonici and its arrival in Malta. By establishing its transmission, Bonici seeks to support his claim that this was indeed an authentic letter of Saint Ignatius. He also attempted a palaeographic study of the script, to further strengthen his claim. Indeed, he states:

Per quella lettera che hoggi tiene, venera e mostra il Colleggio di Messina, credo che nissuno possa dubitare e che ogn' un tenga per certo esser stata scritta e firmata del Nostro Santo Padre Ignatio e perciò viene da tutti pertale tenuta, e riverita. Di quest' altra, che io mando, dico che mentre è indirizzata al Padre Paolo Pellizzeri non possiamo prudentemente congetturar altro se non che per assicurarsi dell' [...] dell'avviso della concessione di quel che si dimandava si mandano le lettere radoppiate vedendosi massime la somiglianza de caratteri, e delle sottoscrittioni etc.

E quando pur' altro non fusse stimo che d'ambidue lo sottoscrittioni del Nostro Santo Padre non sene possa dubitare.¹¹

The accompanying documentation claims that the letter attributed to Ignatius was found by Padre Filippus Chambeius himself by chance among the collection of papers left by Padre Paulus Achilles Seledas. Chambeius attributed the find to a divine intervention, because it seems that these heaps of papers had been destined by someone to be reutilized in forming the flooring of the Paschal

⁸ Grendler, *The Jesuits and Italian Universities 1548–1773*, 59.

⁹ ARSI, Sic. 203, f.2r.: *Il Collegio di Palermo si fondo nel 1549. Promosse questa fondazione Don Leonora moglie di Giovan di Vega allora vicire di Sicilia, alla quale concorsero il Senato di Palermo, Don Ludovico Sancio oviondo di Spagna, e Regnate di questo Regno, e Giovanni Platamone signor di famiglia principale, il quale hebbe il titolo di fondatore. Carlo V poi diede al Collegio di Palermo la Badia di Santa Maria della Grotta. Similmente Don Antonio di Bologna chiaro non meno per sangue, che per lettere, e pieta Christiana, e D. Francesca Perollo, e Lurchese Marchesa di Lucca venendo a morte lasciarono al detto Collegio le loro facolta bastanti a fondare duoi boni Collegi, et ultimamente il P. Pietro Salerno gli ha dato cento mila scudi.*

¹⁰ Cathedral Museum Mdina (CM), *Letter of Saint Ignatius*, p.8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

Sepulchre in the church of the College of Santo Filippo and Santo Jacopo, in some kind, one can suppose, of papier-mache structure. Having attributed the letter to Saint Ignatius himself, Chambeius chose to gift it on 5 February 1618, the feast day of Saint Agatha, patron saint of Catania, to the College in Messina, to which the letter referred. The one drawing up the declaration recording the transmission of the letter notes that Chambeius had been rector of the College in Messina. The letter remained there until Paolo Pellizzeri and Nicolaus Bersetto, the Provincial of Sicily, then also procurator of the college of Messina, gifted it to the Maltese Jesuit Bernardinus Bonici who in turn sent it to the Maltese College of the Society of Jesus in Valletta,¹² as noted in a letter signed by him dated “Palermo a 3 di Febraro 1657”¹³ and included in the corpus. The documentation notes that the one sent to Malta is an exact copy of the one preserved in Messina:

Idem Pater Bernardinus Bonicius
dono dedit
Collegio Melitensi Societatis Iesu
omnino consimilem ei, quae in Messinensi Collegio asservatur.¹⁴

In a letter dated “Palermo 1651,”¹⁵ Bonici not only documents how the letter arrived in his hands, but also presents arguments to claim that it was truly an autographed letter of Saint Ignatius. He explained that, although the letter he received bore the title “Copia d’una lettera del Nostro Beato Padre Ignatio scritta alla Città e Senato di Messina,” he had sound reasons to claim that this was not simply a copy of the original then held in Messina, but:

lettera mandata e scritta forse anche di pugno del Nostro Santo Padre e non solamente sottoscritta da lui, dico forse anche scritta di pugno etc., perche se bene noi non possiamo haver evidenza d’esser stata da lui stesso scritta e perciò posi il forse.

He supports his case through four arguments, namely:

1. Palaeographic analysis: The characters, that is the script does not seem different to that of the underlying signature;
2. Diplomatic analysis: the form of both letters, the one venerated in the Sacristy at Messina and the one he was gifted, are a copy one of the other for not only do the words used match even the same style of characters

¹² CM, *Letter of Saint Ignatius*, p.8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8. The same Father Bernardinus Bonicius has gifted to the Maltese College of the Society of Jesus an entirely exact copy to that which is preserved in the College of Messina.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

are used in both the main text and the signatures “*in maniera tale, che facilmente si potrebbe prendera cambio l’una per l’altra*”;

3. The note placed under the document does not claim that the letter is a copy, but simply states: “Epistolario hanc Beato Padre Nostri Ignatii dono”;
4. Historical reasons: Bonici argues that given the importance of the content of the letter and the significance of its original addressees, Ignatius would have wanted to send a letter in his own hands, and to send two copies for greater security, given the seriousness of the matter the letter dealt with.¹⁶

Jesuits Mentioned in the Corpus

At least five Jesuits are mentioned in the corpus accompanying the letter attributed to Ignatius, these being Achille Paulus (d. Palermo, 7 Maii 1586),¹⁷ Chablaeus Philip (d. Friburgi Helv. 17. VII. 1621),¹⁸ P. Berzettus Nicolaus (d. Romae 28 mart 1644),¹⁹ Pellizarus Paulus (d. Messanae 7 Apr 1648),²⁰ Bonicus Bernardinus (d. Panormi 15 Maii 1660).²¹

Since on most of these Jesuit priests very little, if any, has been published, it is opportune at this moment to record some details of the lives of Achille, Berzettus and Bonici, in chronological order. On Chablaeus and Pellizaro, no further details other than their chronological and topical date of death have as yet been discovered.

The letter attributed to Saint Ignatius was found among the papers of Paolo Achille.²² Born in Parma, he was won over to the Society of Jesus by the first companions of Ignatius, Pietro Fabre e Giacomo Lainez, and was received into the *Compagnia* in 1539. Since he was already a priest, in 1543 he was sent by Ignatius to assist the companions as a superior in Paris. In 1549, he was then sent to Sicily as the superior of the brothers sent there, as well as to teach philosophy. For twenty-three years he served as the rector of the newly founded college in Palermo and served the society twice as its vice-provincial in Sicily. At the time

¹⁶ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁷ ARSI, (Hist. Soc. 42, 73r.) Vitae 60 (140-141v)? Vitae 149, ff.94-101.

¹⁸ ARSI, Hist. Soc. 43, 185v.

¹⁹ ARSI, HS47 52v Rom (Vitae 167, ff 31-32v.)

²⁰ ARSI, HS 47 59v.

²¹ ARSI, HS48 20r Sic (Vitae 60, ff 83-87) (Gesuiti Maltesi Vitae 138, ff 21v-22) (Vitae 103 e 104, (piu P. Domenico Brunacci figlio del Re di Marocco e Fessa – su P. Bonici (Vitae 103, ff. 19-21) (Vitae 104, ff.225-227).

²² ARSI, Sicula, Necrologio I, 1540-1695, v. 189, ff. 65r-v.

of his death in 1586, he was acclaimed by all for his saintly virtues, so much so that a provincial council held in 1607 requested the General to ask Pope Paul V (1605-1621) to declare him Blessed.²³

Nicolaus Berzettus, together with Paolo Pellizeri, is recorded as one of the two Jesuits from whom Bonici received the letter of Ignatius. Berzettus died in Rome on 28 March 1644.²⁴ The two folios describing his life emphasize his frugal lifestyle and his commitment to missionary work in the countryside. He conceded nothing to himself, not even allowing himself to visit sanctuaries close to the places where he was carrying out a mission.²⁵ Bonici notes him as the provincial of Sicily. Even given his office, when travelling to houses belonging to the Society, he chose to live like the novices. The entry in the *necrologio* itself simply limits itself to a hagiographic picture of him, typical of the genre.

It is to the Maltese Jesuit Bernardo Bonici²⁶ that we owe the donation of the letter to the Jesuits Church in Malta. Born in Vittoriosa, son of Lorenzo, he joined the Society at the age of 20 on 24th August 1603. He seemed to have been a significant scholar as he is listed as a teacher of philosophy, scholastic theology and mathematics at the College in Palermo. He also served in roles of authority, including as the vice rector of the College in Palermo, and as the superior of the College in Messina, representing the province of Sicily in the eighth general congregation of the Society in 1655. He is praised for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, for his work as a confessor to his penitents, particularly to widows.

²³ Ibid. "Fece vedere la citta di Palermo dopo la morte, che segui alle 7 di maggio dell'anno 15... (empty space) il concorso che haveva havuto il servo di Dio in vita, per il numerooso concorso all'esequie, e per altre dimostrazioni, che non si fanno se non hai santi: e in conformita mostro la Compagnia di tutta la Provincia di Sicilia, il medesimo sentimento, mentre con i voti di una Congregatione Provinciale fatta l'anno 1607 dimando al R.P.N. Generale che procurasse dalla Santita di Nostro Signore il titolo di Beato per il P. Paolo Achille. Questi sacerdote ricevuto nella Compagnia dal S. P. Ignatio l'anno 1539 e da Lui mandato in Sicilia l'anno 1549. Orno in tal modo quella Provincia dal raro esempio che diede di persona publica e privata che pote ben dirsi maestro di virtu heroiche e norma dei superiori della Compagnia." Other details of his life are recorded in Arsi, Vitae 60, f. 140r.-141v. Memoria et Breve notitia di alcuni Padri e Fratelli della Compagnia di Gesu nella provincia di Sicilia illustri per virtu e fama di santita."

²⁴ ARSI, Vitae 167, ff 31-32v.

²⁵ Ibid. "Viaggiando non volse manco per qualsivoglia pretesto uscire di strada, o vero allungare camino anco per cose molte oneste, passo piu volte dalla Madonna di Frontiunvola andando a Perugia non arrivo mai a Scisi con tutto ad ne fussi pregato, andando o trornando da Fiorenza al Borgo San Sepolcro tre volte, non volse arrivare alla Dennia ne ad altri luoghi di devozione veri vicini. Così fece in Sicilia e così in Regno..."

²⁶ On P. Bonicus Bernardinus Panormi 15 Maii 1660 HS48 20r, ARSI, Sic, Vitae 60, ff 83-87; Gesuiti Maltesi Vitae 138, ff 21v.-22; Vitae 103, ff. 19-21; Vitae 104, ff.225-227.

He died in the *Casa Professa* in Palermo on 15 May 1660.²⁷ He is recorded with praise by Gian Francesco Abela in his monumental work *Malta Illustrata*.²⁸

Its Cultic Significance

Beyond the spiritual significance tied to the four-hundred year old veneration of this document, a relic of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, its importance lies in its embodiment of an ideal of a Christian civilisation that sees in academic formation a necessary tool for evangelization. The Jesuits in Malta received this gift from their brothers in the Sicilian province and placed it at the very heart of the Church of their *Collegium Melitense* in Valletta,²⁹ as they too continued their mission of academic formation, a mission now carried on by the University of Malta.

The importance of the letter has always been acknowledged. It is indeed included among the corpus of documents quoted and transcribed in the fundamental work documenting the establishment of the Society of Jesus in

²⁷ Arsi, Sicula, Necrologio I, 1540-1695, v. 189, f. 322: "Pentitentes suos opportunis consiliis ad perfectionis studium sedulò promovit, exteros innocentiae vitae, quam multis instructus virtutis, et miraculis clavus clauset magno omnium dolore in Domo Professorum Panormitana quarto idus Maii anno 1660, aetatis verò suae 77, Societatis 57, ab emissa professione quattuor Votorum 39."

²⁸ ARSI, Sicula, Necrologio I, 1540-1695, v. 189, f. 322: "De eo praeclarum texuit elogium Ioannes Franciscus Abela in sua Malta illustrata Lib. 4 nott:4. Abbas Rocchus Pirri Sicilia Sacra thom: 2 nott: 7 Ecclesiae Melivetanis, et P. Silvius Tornamira Lib. Vocat della Vergine conclus. Dell'opera pag:325 et lib. Prodigii dell'Eucharestia cap. 10 pag. 225."

"In comitis Provincialibus celebratis Messanae anno 1687 expositulum fuit ab antiquis, et gravioribus Provinciae Patribus coli in posterum (et gratia à novo generali eligendo impetranda) memoria P. Bernardini quolibet anno cum aliis Societatis viris illustribus in publica mensa sequenti elogio."

²⁹ The foundation of the Maltese college can be summarized as follows: *Il Collegio di Malta fu fondato nel 1588 da Tomaso Gargallo Vescovo di Malta, il quale chiamò i Nostri da Sicilia, e con facoltà avutene da Gregorio XIII attribui al detto Collegio scudi ducento annuali della mensa vescovile, et altri ducento cinquanta scudi pure annuali da dedusi secondo certa rata di Beneficii Ecclesiastici di quell'Isola*. See also, ACM, *Acta Collegii Melitensis, Historia Erektionis Collegii Melitensis*; Stanley Fiorini, "The Collegium Melitense and the Universitas Studiorum to 1798," in *Yesterday's Schools: Readings in Maltese Educational History*, ed. R. G. Sultana (Malta: Xirocco Publishing, 2017), 31-58; Carmel Cassar, "The Collegium Melitense: A Frontier Mission in the Interface Between the Christian and Muslim Worlds," *Al-Qantara* (Madrid) 36, no.2 (2015): 443-62. On the Jesuits Church: Gian Francesco Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata ovvero descrizione di Malta isola del mare siciliano e adriatico con le sue antichità, ed altre notizie* (Malta: Stamperia del palazzo, 1772), Lib.1, 47-50; Achille Ferris, *Descrizione storica delle chiese di Malta e Gozo* (Malta: 1866).

Malta published by Pio Pecchiai in 1938,³⁰ who quotes a transumpt recorded in a notarial deed published in Malta and dated 16 August 1708. In their continual litigation with the local clergy over the prospective founding of the Seminary, the simple benefices entrusted to the College, as well as a tax on the benefices enjoyed by the local clergy that had not died out, notwithstanding various provisions and Roman decisions, the Jesuits in Malta presented the letter as proof that it had always been the rationale of the Society that the local had to provide funding for the College. Indeed such had clearly been the example set by Saint Ignatius himself in the “Capitoli” for the founding of the College in Messina which the letter reports. The letter therefore becomes legal evidence for economic purposes.³¹ For this reason an attestation is obtained from the P. Giovanni Bellusi, rector of the College in Messina, that the letter in Malta conformed in everything to the original found in Messina. He declares:

Io infrascritto fo fede indubitata che essendosi riscontrata la sudetta lettera del Santo Padre, si è fedelmente trovata essere in tutto conforme all'originale che abbiamo in questo nostro Collegio. In fede di che ho fatto la presente attestazione oggi il 12 di Luglio 1708, in Messina etc.

P. Giovanni Bellusi Rettore del Collegio de' Studii di Messina della Compagnia di Gesu etc.

Sequitur extractio authentica notarii ex proprio originali et legalitas etc.³²

A “ricognizione” of the contents of the reliquary must have been carried out between 1885-1889, because the frame bears the seal of Bishop Antonio Maria Buhagiar.³³ In recent history, the sealed reliquary was first opened by the established historian, Mgr Vincent Borg, who in his role as the President of the

³⁰ Pecchiai, “Il collegio dei gesuiti a Malta,” includes the letter in Appendix V, No. 9, which is Ignatius’ letter as it appears as a transumpt in a notarial deed published in Malta and dated 16 August 1708. The archival reference provided is Fondo Gesuitico al Gesù di Roma, Collegia, Malta, ff. 92 et seq.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 130. In appendix he quotes the following as an introduction to the transcript of the letter: “Documento sull’origine del Collegio di Messina prodotto dal Collegio di Malta per dimostrare la rendita occorrente per il mantenimento di simili istituti fin dal tempo di S. Ignazio. Epistula S. Ignatii fundatoris Societatis Iesu circa foundationem Collegii Messanensis. Iesus etc. Die 16 Augusti primae Indictionis 1708. Praesens coram nobis etc. Rev Pater sebastianus Marcopoli Societatis mihi notario cognitus sponte etc. Exhibuit et praesentavit mihi infrascripto notario infrascriptam copiam illius litterae originalis Sancti Patris Ignatii subscriptam in fidem dictae litterae manu propria Rev. P. Ioannis Belluso Rectoris Vener. Collegii huius urbis eiusdem Societatis Iesu tenoris sequentis, videlicet.”

³² *Ibid.*, 321-322.

³³ Antonio Maria Buhagiar OFM Cap, born Spiridion Salvatore Constantino Buhagiar or Buhadgiar (19 November 1846 – 10 August 1891) served for a brief period as Apostolic

Capitular Commission of the Cathedral Museum, obtained the permission from the Ecclesiastical authorities, to take this reliquary to the museum in Mdina for exhibition and research purposes.³⁴ In these last months, these documents have now been meticulously restored at the Diocesan Archive Conservation laboratory, to ensure their conservation for future generations.

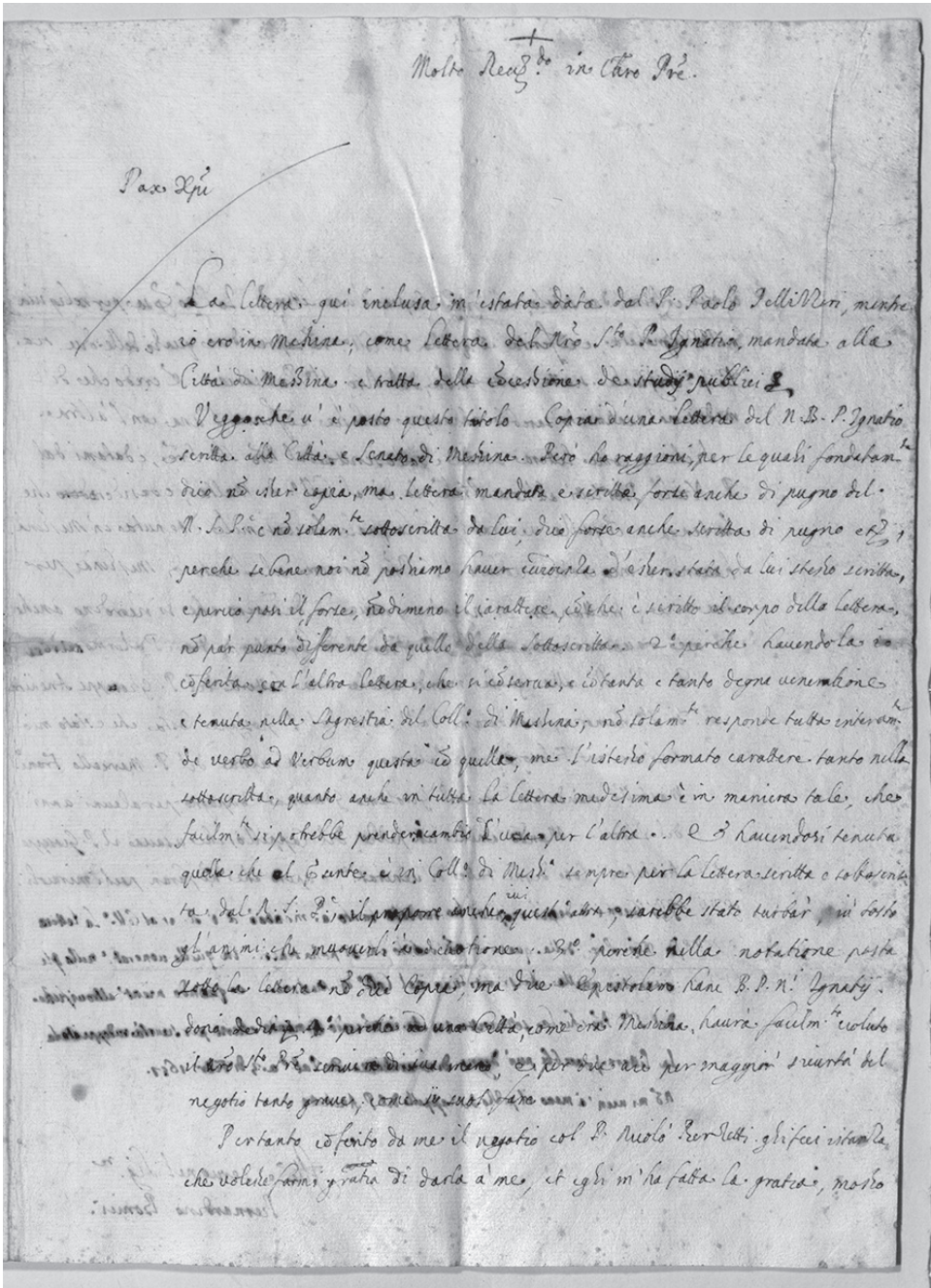
Independently of whether the letter attributed to Saint Ignatius is in his own handwriting or not, or if it is simply a draft prepared by a secretary or assistant, and signed by Ignatius, its significance lies in what it meant, not simply to those destined to receive their superior's instructions at a significant juncture in the history of the Society of Jesus and commitment to education, but also to all those for whom it later acquired the significance of a relic tied to the founder of the Society to whose mission they were dedicating their life. As any such document, these few papers open up a window on the life not only of Ignatius and his pragmatism in setting the foundations of the Society on a secure basis, but also on the work and devotions of these priests who faithfully transmitted this letter, and enshrined close to the altar dedicated to their founder in Valletta. Even if for centuries its contents remained largely unknown, it remained there as an object of cultic devotion, a kind of presence of Ignatius and his commitment to education at the heart of Malta's most significant formative establishment, a college that was destined to become a university.

Administrator of the Archdiocese of Malta between 1885-89. Catholic Hierarchy: <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bbuhad.html> (accessed, 12th June 2024).

³⁴ AAM, *Suppliche*, 1994, v. 438, fasc. 199A; *Suppliche*, 1995, v. 443, fasc. 327.

Appendix 1

Transcript of the corpus



original page number: 1

+ (invocatio simbolica)

Molto Reverendo in Christo Padre

Pax Christi

La lettera qui inclusa mi estate data dal Padre Paolo Pellizzeri, mentre io ero in Messina, come Lettera del Nostro Santo Padre Ignatio mandata alla Città di Messina e tratta della concessione de studii publici.

Veggosche si è posto questo titolo [,] Copia d'una lettera del Nostro Beato Padre Ignatio

scritta alla Città e Senato di Messina. Però ho raggioni, per le quali fundamentalmente

dico non esser copia, ma lettera mandata e scritta forse anche di pugno del Nostro Santo Padre e non solamente sottoscritta da lui, dico forse anche scritta di pugno etc.,

perche se bene noi non possiamo haver evidenza d'esser stata da lui stesso scritta, e perciò posi il forse non dimeno il carattere, con che è scritto il corpo della lettera,

non par punto differente da quello della sottoscritta. 2° perche havendola io conferita con l'altra lettera, che si conserva, e contanta e tanto degna veneratione e tenuta nella Sagrestia del Colleggio di Messina; non solamente risponde tutta interamente

de verbo ad verbum questa con quella, me l'istesso formato carattere tanto nella sottoscritta, quanto anche in tutta La Lettera medesima è in maniera tale, che facilmente si potrebbe prendere cambio l'una per l'altra. Et havendosi tenuta quella che al presente è in Colleggio di Messina sempre per La Lettera scritta e sottoscrit-

ta dal Nostro Santo Padre, il propone anche ivi quest' altra, sarebbe stato turbar, più sotto

gl' animi che muoverli à devotione. 3° perche nella notatione posta sotto la lettera non dice copia, ma dice Epistolario hanc Beato Padre Nostri Ignatii

dono [dec[hiara]z[ion]e]. 4° perche ad una Città, come era Messina, havrà facilmente voluto

il Nostro Santo Padre scrive[r]ne di sua mano, e per due [cop[ai]] per maggior' sicurtà del

negotio tanto grave; come si suol fare.

Pertanto conferito da me il negotio col Padre Nicolò Berzetti gli fai istanza che volesse farmi gratia di darla à me, et egli inha fatta la gratia, mosso

S. Ignatius of Loyola

1657

... a mio credito del titolo che dice Copia d'una lettera. Lo ho già per religione
 e ho voluto nella siglatura, e conferita è quella del Coll. ne saprei dire quale delle due sia
 la p. originale. unta e sottoscritta dal Nro S. Patriarca. E credo che di l
 medesimo sentimento unbi chiunque vorrebbe conferire l'una con l'altra.
 L'altro è come lettera scritta e sottoscritta dal Nro S. Pre, e datami dal
 S. Nicolo Bertolotti all'ho. Pre, la di al Coll. di Malta, e da si credono che
 la tengano co quella venerata, e la quale la conservo e tenuto in Malta
 avendo a mio credito voluto il S. Pre scrivere al Senato di Medina per
 due vice; trattandosi di negotio grave, e desidero che si rendino anche
 di me raccomandandomi al S. Pre. Nro Ignatio. Da Palermo alli
 D. V. R. alla quale mando anche una lettera del P. Giuseppe Anicheta
 di S. memoria, mandatami dall' Indio del P. Giuseppe. Costi che stato mi
 in Filosofia in Salorno. e un'altro del P. Marcello Frani
 Mandatami dal P. Girolamo Graunas: Compagno per alcuni anni
 del Padre. Mando anche un pelle del Cappello, che usava il P. Giuseppe
 Anicheta. Cosa degne talbe di venerat. e spira che si faran pochi miracoli.
 Per buoni e degni rispetti ho tardato tanto a mandarvi il V. R. et al Coll. la lettera
 di Nro Pre, della quale so ad debito che si possa trarre in quella venerat. nella gli
 e tenuto quella che si ritrova nel Coll. di Medina. e quando nient' altro si
 del S. Pre che la sottoscritta (e che io ho creduto di mandarvi chenti per vostra soddisfazione.
 La lettera) sarebbe pur degna di venerazione. Da Pal. a 3 di Febr. 1657.
 Non mi vien a meno il pelle del Cappello del P. Anicheta

Atto e sermo nel Sig.
 Leonardino Bonini.

original page number: 2

à mio credere dal titolo che due Copia d'una Lettera. Io l'ho presa per reliquia molto segnalata, e conferita con quella del Collegio. Non saprei dire quale delle due sia

la parte originale scritta e sottoscritta dal Nostro Santo Patriarca. E credo che del

medesimo sentimento sarebbe chiunque volerle conferire l'una con l'altra.

Si che io come lettera scritta e sottoscritta dal Nostro Santo Padre, e datami dal Padre Nicolò Berzetti all' hora [Pro[cura]t[or]e] la dò al Collegio, e desidero che

la tengano ed quella venerati, io la quale la consimile ritenuta in Messina havendo à mio credere voluto il Santo Padre scrivere al Senato di Messina per due vie; trattandosi di negotio grave e desidero che si ricordino anche di me raccomandandomi al Santo Padre Nostro Ignatio. Da Palermo nel 1651.

Di Vostra Reverendissima alla quale mando anche una lettera del Padre Gioseppe Ancheta

di Santa memoria, mandatami dall' Indie dal Padre Gioseppe Costa che è stato mio

scuolare in Filosofia in Palermo. Et un' altra dal Padre Marcello Francesco Mastrilli mandatami dal Padre Girolamo Gravina Compagno per alcuni anni del Padre. Mando anche un pezzo del Cappello, che usava il Padre Gioseppe Ancheta. Cose degne tutte di venerazione, e spero che non faran' pochi miracoli.

Per buoni e degni rispetti ho tardato tanto à mandar a Vostra Reverendissima et al Collegio la lettera di Nostro Padre, della quale io non dubito che si possa tenere in quella veneratione nella quale e tenuta quella che si ritrova nel Collegio di Messina e quando nient' altro vi fusse

del Santo Padre che la sottoscritta (non che io non credo timendo chersi per sicurtà raddopiarla la lettera) sarebbe pur' degna di veneratione. Da Palermo a 3 di Febraro 1657.

Non mi vien à mano il pezzo del Cappello del Padre Anchetta.

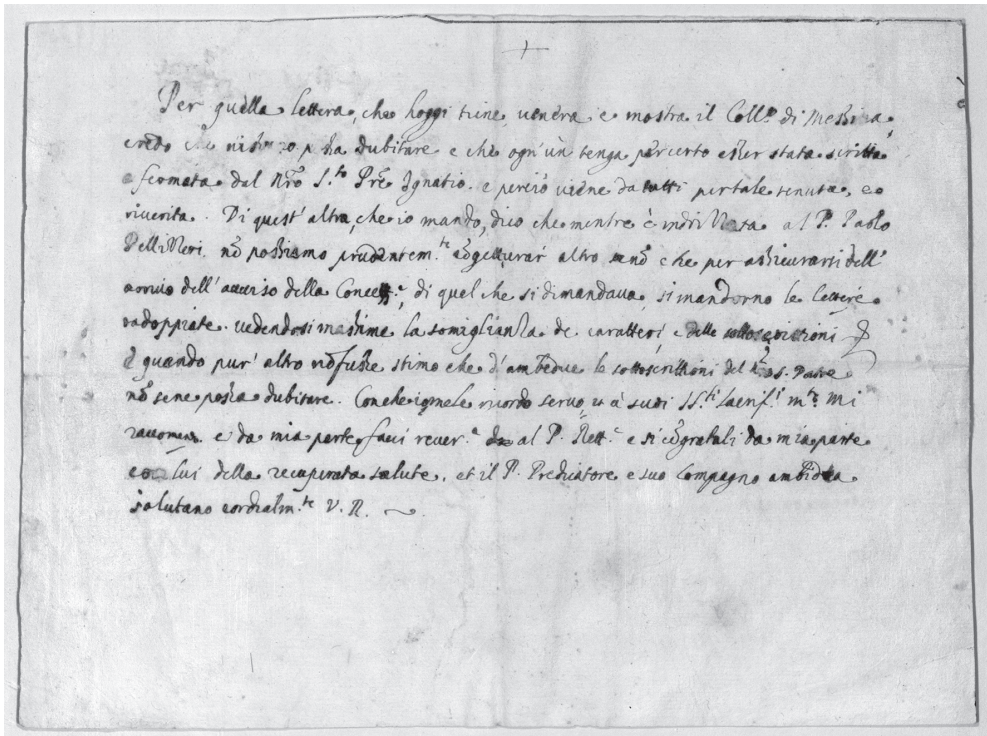
Fratello e servo nel Signore

Bernardino Bonici

I

La suma gra y amor eterno dexi n.s. sea siem-
 pre en mi favor y ayuda. receivi vna letra de
 y alegrame y ella en el o mo de la unije don
 Herculano pero que siempre sea deos mis ^{condes o to}
 como me muchos ^{señores} ~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~
 "se la le miera mas" ^{señores} ~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~
~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~ ^{señores} ~~señores~~
 de vna salud no me feris y ca
 de semma volgare de entenderla, por vna letra
 o del rector de ese collegio. yo estoy mejorado mu-
 cho deos loado. sea el servido co la salud y que
 quiera disposita de todos. ame. en vras ordenes
 mucho me enamorado. de Roma a 10 de oct 1554

original page number: 3
 (Spanish) not transcribed



original page number: 4

Per quella lettera che hoggi tiene, venera e mostra il Collegio di Messina, credo che nissuno possa dubitare e che ogni un tenga per certo esser stata scritta e fermata del Nostro Santo Padre Ignatio e perciò viene da tutti pertale tenuta, e riverita. Di quest' altra, che io mando, dico che mentre è indirizzata al Padre Paolo

Pellizzeri non possiamo prudentemente congetturar altro se non che per assicurarsi

dell'avviso della concessione di quel che si dimandava si mandarno le lettere radoppiate vedendosi massime la somiglianza de caratteri, e delle sottoscrizioni etc.

E quando pur' altro non fosse stimo che d'ambidue lo sottoscrizioni del Nostro Sante Padre

non sene possa dubitare. Conche io me ricordo seruo et à suoi Santissimi Sacrifici molto mi

raccomando e da mia parte feci reverenzia al Padre Rettore e si congratoli da mia parte

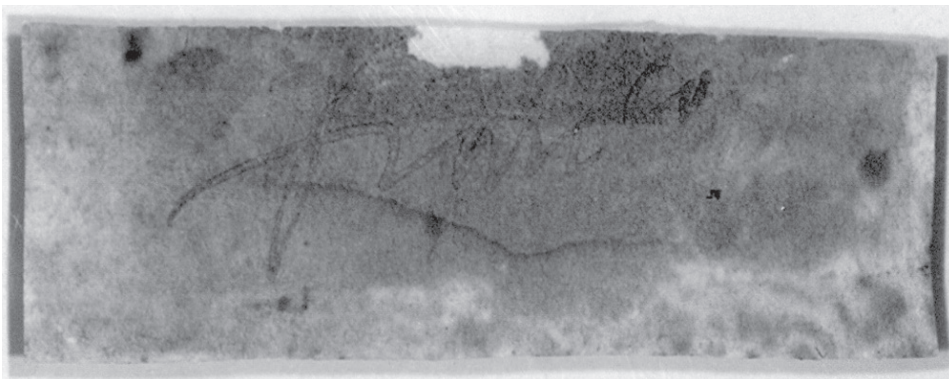
con lui della recuperata salute et il Padre Predicatore e suo Compagno ambi due salutano cordialmente Vostra Reverenza.



original page number: 5
Decorative fragment



original page number: 6
Illegible fragment



original page number: 7
Francesco

Anno 1616 Feb. 5 in V. Agae Sac. gratiam
 et annuos Sonores ~~Epistolam~~ Sanc. S. S. M. Ignacij
 Collegio Melitensi dono dedit P. Philippus C. S. S. S. S.
 eibi rector pegerat quam ante annu quadrage
 mo sine dicitur eodim a se restatur inventam in
 glunias P. Pauli Ac Selli sededat remore cogestas;
 aeq; ad compungenda Basedabij Sepulchri Tabulara
 in templo S. Philippi, et Jacobi Collegij, bene temporis,
 Panormitani destinatas Cam ad Sane decem
 aseruatam. Suis Collegij esse volui tanquam S. S.
 Epistolam, de Voluntatis in Sane Crifem Monumento

Epistolam hanc S. P. A. Ignacij
 a P. Antonio Bertello Profr. S. S. S.
 datam P. Bernardino Bonuis
 Sui huius factus, epus Bernardinus Bonuis.

Idem P. Bernardinus Bonius bono
 dedit Coll. Melitensi Societatis S. S.
 omnino edimile ei, qua in M. S. Coll. S. S.

original page number: 8.1

<p>Anno 1618 Februarii 5 in Divae Agathae gratiam et annuos honores.</p> <p>Epistolam hanc Beati Patris Nostri Ignatii Collegio Messanensi dono dedit Pater Filippus Chambeius cui rector praeerat; quam ante annum quadragesimum non sine divino consilio a se testatur inventam inter plurimas Patris Paulli Achillis Seledas temere congestas; atque ad compingenda Paschalis Sepulchri tabulata in templo Sanctorum Filippi et Iacobi Collegii, tunc temporis, Panormitani destinatas; Eam ad hanc diem asservatam.</p> <p>Huius Collegii esse voluit tamquam Beati Patris oraculum, et voluntatis in hanc Urbem monumentum.</p>	<p>In the year 1618, the 5th February, on the feast day and during the annual honours to Saint Agatha.</p> <p>Padre Filippus Chambeius has gifted this letter of our Father Blessed Ignatius to the College of Messina, to which he used to be the Rector; which [letter], before the fortieth year, not without divine intervention, he declared that it had been found by chance by himself among the very many heaps / collections of Padre Paulus Achilles Seledas; and that [these heaps] had been destined for forming together the flooring of the Paschal Sepulchre in the church of the College of Santo Filippo and Santo Jacopo, at that time, at Palermo;³⁶ [and that] up till this very day, it [this letter] is preserved. He wished that it be just like a divine announcement of the saintly father of this College, and a monument of his desire in this City.</p>
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³⁶ ARSI, Sic. 203, f.2r.: *Il Collegio di Palermo si fondo nel 1549. Promosse questa fondazione Don Leonora moglie di Giovan di Vega allora vicire di Sicilia, alla quale concorsero il Senato di Palermo, Don Ludovico Sancio oviondo di Spagna, e Regnate di questo Regno, e Giovanni Platamone signor di famiglia principale, il quale hebbe il titolo di fondatore. Carlo V poi diede al Collegio di Palermo la Badia di Santa Maria della Grotta. Similmente Don Antonio di Bologna chiaro non meno per sangue, che per lettere, e pieta Christiana, e D. Francesca Perollo, e Lurchese Marchesa di Lucca venendo a morte lasciarono al detto Collegio le loro facolta bastanti a fondare duoi boni Collegi, et ultimamente il P. Pietro Salerno gli ha dato cento mila scudi.* The document was generously translated by the late Victor Bonnici.

<p>Epistolam hanc Sancti Patris Nostri Ignatii a Patre Nicolao Bersetto Pr(ovincia)li Siciliae datam Patri Bernardino Bonicio [fuisse] [fatetur] ipse Bernardinus Bonicius.</p>	<p>The very same Bernardinus Bonicius has acknowledged that this letter of our Father Saint Ignatius had been given to Padre Bernardinus by Padre Nicolaus Bersetto, [the Provincial] of Sicily.</p>
<p>Idem Pater Bernardinus Bonicius dono dedit Collegio Melitensi Societatis Iesu omnino consimilem ei, quae in Messinensi Collegio asservatur.</p>	<p>The same Father Bernardinus Bonicius has gifted to the Maltese College of the Society of Jesus an entirely exact copy to that which is preserved in the College of Messina.</p>

original page number: 9

Capitoli circa [...] [co]llegi[o] et universita de Messina

proposti [...] Della Compagnia de Jesu

Dando la [Citta] de Messina (1500) scudi propositidi rendita non si puo obligar

la Compagnia a piu di 8 lettore in humanita philosophia et [theolo]g[i]a

Se questo pare troppo Il chè no puo parera a chi habbia praticia in studii la

cit[t]a s'informe d'homii dotti et buoni et vedera quale gratia fa la Compagnia.

Et si per questo non si satisfa vada et esperimenti quanto li cotarebe far venir

otto lettori in tal faculta o alla Cit[t]a dalla Compagnia e non havesse Di suoi

et havesse Da

condure altri lettori per compire alla obligatione che havesse.

Per le medessime conf[er]ma]tioni havendo di esser 15 lettori veda la cit[t]a

mettendosi avanti de la conscientia Il debito [per] la giustitia et equita [...] piu

[...] augmentar la

[...] per haver il pieno numerosi [di] 15 lettori per una opera di tanto servizio d'

Iddio frutto dell' anime et prosperità de la Citta et per mezo di essa anche del

[Re]gno.

Et se ala Citta li par[is]ce tuttavia che la Compagnia fa poco gratia et li ha

poca rispetto sopra la conscientia nostra se puo af[...]era]i et veder che di tutti li

collegii et opera fundate gi[a] et che si fundano nella compagnia a nulla si sa

hauto et si ha tanto rispetto come a Messina perche fin' hora la compagnia ha

fundati et effettuati 15 collegii con rendita Di (2[0]000) Scudi et in tutti non

ha obligationi

original page number: 8.2

sinon [...] oltra di questi sono 3 collegii senza questa di Sicilia [...] fudano. Et sono le collegii in tutti quasi li studii Generali principali della Christianita et altri Citta primarie veda [...] a citta. Et si risolva faccia Il Signore sia a maggior gloria [La Sua] divina magiesta.

Ma in ogni risolutione che voglia pigliar la Citta in nulla [...] del far a benplacito la compagnia se non si come la compagnia si obligar perpetualmente cossi perpetua rendita assignata al collegio et universita a libera dispositione del retto et etc

Et in caso che la Compagnia [non] servasse l'obligatione che pigliera la Citta non sia obligata a dar la rendita sinon fusse per che manchesse alchuno o alchuna [...] per morte o per [...] o per esser chiamati Dal superiore o per guerra o per peste [o] simili

casi nelli quali habbia la Compagnia il suo tempo a proveder di lettori o passi l'impedimento

necessario et inevitabile. In questo et in qual si voglia altra controversia fra la Citta et la Compagnia sia Iudice la giustizia del Papa qui pro tempore fuerit come e necessario et ragionevole si in qual si voglia causa di Religiosi etc.

Ignatio

La Somma Gratia, et amor eterno di Cristo Nostro Signore sia se-
 pre in nostro favore, et aiuto. Ho ricevuto la vostra lettera de
 29, e mi sono rallegrato con essa nel Signore nostro, che habbia rime-
 so Don Antonio. Spero, che l'Idio nostro Signore sarà sempre
 con noi. Ne godo molto, che gli minora più sempre il Divino, che
 l'humano. Nella vostra salute non mi scrivete, et haucvò in caro,
 che mi fate d'essa consapevole ogni settimana con lettera vostra
 ò del Rettore di questo collegio. Io mi trovo assai meglio, sia l'Idio
 lodato. Egli sia servato con la salute, e con qualsiasi altra
 dispositione di tutti Amen. Nelle vostre orationi molto mirac-
 colando. Roma 6. Ottobre. 1554.

original page number: 10

La Somma Gratia, et amor eterno di Cristo Nostro Signore sia sempre in nostro favore, et aiuto. Ho ricevuta la vostra lettera de 29, e mi sono rallegrato con essa nel Signore nostro, che habbia rimesso Don Antonio. Spero, che Iddio nostro Signore sarà sempre con noi. Ne godo molto, che gli muova più sempre il Divino, che l'humano. Della nostra salute non mi scrivete, et havevò à caro, che mi fate d'essa consapevole ogni settimana con lettera nostra ò del Rettore di cotesto colleggio. Io mi trovo assai meglio, sia Id' dio lodato. Egli sia servuto con la salute, e con qualsisia altra disposizione di tutti Amen. Nelle nostre Oratorii molto miracomando Roma 6 Ottobre 1554.

Appendix 2

Transcript of the letter by Saint Ignatius preserved at ARSI, originally at the College in Messina.

ARSI, Sic. 197.i, Sicula Fund. Colleg. V Messan., fasc. XVIII, f. 138r.-v. (Bella copia)

f. 138r. Capitoli circa il collegio et universita De Messina proposti per parte della Compagnia de Iesu

Dando la citta De Messina 1500 scudi di rendita non si puo obligar la Compagnia a/piu di 8 lettore in humanita phia et Theologia/ Se questo pare troppo Il chè non puo parera a chi habbia praticha in studii la cita/ S'informe d'homini dotti et buoni et vedera quanta gratia fa la Compagnia.//
Et si per questo non si satisfa voda et esperimenti quanto li costarebe far venir otto/ lettori in tal faculta o alla Cita o alla Compagnia ser non havesse Di suoi et havesse da/ condurre altri lettori per compire alla obligatione che havesse.//
Per le medessime considerationi havendo Di esser 15 lettori veda la cit[t]a mettendosi avanti/ De la conscientia il debito de la giustitia et equita quanto piu ha di augmentar la rendita/ per haver il pieno numerosi De 15 lettori per una opera Di tanto servizio d' Iddio frutto/ dell'anime et persperita De la Citta et per mezo di essa anche del Regno.//
Et se ala Citta li paressi tuttavia che la Compagnia fa poco gratia et li ha poca/ Rispetto sopra la coscientia nostra se puo assicurar et veder che di tutti li collegii et/ Opera fundate gia et che si fundano nella Compagnia a nulla si ha havuto et si ha tanto rispetto/ come a Messina perche fin' hora la compagnia ha fundati et effettuati 15/ collegii con rendita di (24000) Scudi et in tutti non ha obligationi sinon di 8 lettori et/ oltre di questi sono 13 collegii senza questa DE Sicilia che si fudano et sono li collegii/ in tutti quasi li studii Generali principali de la Christianita et in altri Citta promarie/ veda la citta et si risolva faccia Il S. (Signore) sia a maggior gloria De sua divina magiesta.//
Ma in ogni risolutione che voglia pigliar la Citta in nulla maniera vol star a benplacito/ la compagnia se non si come la Compagnia si obligar perpetualmente cossi perpetua/rendita sia assignata al collegio et universita a libera dispositione Del rettor et etc f. 138v. Et in caso che la Compagnia non servassi l'obligatione che pigliera la Citta/ non sia obligata a dar la rendita si non fusse per che manchesse alchuno o alchuni lettori/ per morte o per malatia o per esser chiamati Dal superiore o per guerra o per peste/ o simili

casi nelli quali habbia la Compagnia il suo tempo a proveder di lettori o passi / l'impedimento necessario et inevitabile. In questo et in qualsivoglia altra controversia/ fra la Citta et la Compagnia sia Iudice la santita del Papa qui pro tempore/ fuerit come e necessario et ragionevole sia in qualsi voglia causa di Religiosi.

Ignatio L. F. 139v. Scrittura di N.B. Pre sopra la fondatione di Collegio di Messina.

Rev. Dr Nicholas Joseph Doublet
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Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B. (1867-1943): His Formative Period, His Years in Scotland And His Election to the See of Malta in 1915

The Birth and Upbringing of a Future Pastor

A complete and comprehensive biography on Mgr Maurus Caruana O.S.B., Archbishop-Bishop of Malta from 1915 to 1943 has never been published as a volume running into various chapters.¹ Various anniversaries concerning this illustrious prelate have come and gone in the past decades, namely the centenary of his priestly ordination in 1991, the centenary of his episcopal consecration in 2015, the sesquicentennial of his birth in 2017 and the eightieth anniversary of his death in 2023. Over the years, a number of articles by different authors have featured in various non-academic fora. This article seeks to focus only upon the first forty-eight years of Caruana's life, namely the period leading to the formal commencement of his long episcopate in Malta. The main focus of this work

* Hector Scerri is a priest of the Archdiocese of Malta since 1993. He is a Professor in the Department of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Malta. Since 1998, he has lectured in christology, sacraments, theological anthropology and ecumenism. Since 2008, he is the President of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, Archdiocese of Malta. In 2014, Pope Francis appointed him Consultor to the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity. In 2024, the Holy See appointed him to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. He is also the President of the Doctrinal Commission of the Maltese Episcopal Conference.

¹ See Adrianus Koster, *Prelates and Politicians in Malta: Changing Power-balances between Church and State in a Mediterranean Island Fortress (1800-1976)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 280, n.11. Way back in 1984, Koster stated that "a detailed biography of Mgr Caruana, who died in 1943, would supply an indispensable element in the study of Maltese political and religious developments between the wars, but unfortunately that biography has still to be written." Forty years have passed and, so far, no one has undertaken this task. Perhaps this research article may be the proverbial first stone leading to the construction of an impressive edifice.

lies on Caruana's formative years in Scotland, as well as on the events which took place between his nomination to the see of Malta in January 1915 and his solemn entry in the cathedral church at Mdina, three months later.

The quintessential emphasis on Caruana's vocation as a Benedictine monk was ably summarised by Auxiliary Bishop Emmanuel Galea (1891-1974) who delivered the oration at Caruana's funeral in 1943. Galea, who not only knew Caruana very closely but also was one of his most trusted collaborators, stated:

Elevated to episcopal dignity and arrayed in episcopal robes, he never set aside the religious spirit. And I have good reason to believe that as a monk he read excerpts of his monastic rule every day, because he always kept it near his desk and he often quoted parts of it, which he knew by heart. Moreover, as he knew that St Benedict had composed it after a very wide experience, he often consulted it in the difficulties which he encountered in the administration of the diocese. Therefore, he remained always a true religious and it was not by mere chance that besides the name of Mgr Caruana he was also commonly known among us as Dom Mauro.²

The future Dom Maurus, Luigi, was born at Strada Stretta, Floriana, Malta, on 16 November 1867,³ the youngest of three sons, his elder siblings being Francesco (1864-1943) and Alfredo (1865-1953). His parents, Enrico Caruana and Elisabetta Bonavia, were united through the sacrament of matrimony on 2 July 1863 at the church of Santa Catarina d'Italia in Valletta. Luigi was baptised on the day he was born. He was taken to the parish church of St Publius, in Floriana, and was baptised by the assistant parish priest, Rev. Emmanuel Borg. Besides the name Luigi (Aloysius), he was given the names Carlo, Giovanni, Giuseppe, Publio. His godparents were his maternal uncle, Thomas Emmanuel Bonavia, and his spouse Lorenza, who lived in Valletta.⁴

² Funeral Oration by Mgr Emmanuel Galea, Titular Bishop of Tralles, Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General of the Diocese of Malta, at the conclusion of the solemn funeral Mass of Mgr Maurus Caruana, Archbishop-Bishop of Malta, St John's Co-Cathedral, 21 December 1943. See Fabian Mangion, "From Fort Augustus Abbey to the Bishopric of Malta," *The Sunday Times of Malta* (1 February 2015): 36.

³ Malta Public Registry, Act of Birth no. 0047546. Surprisingly, the Act of Birth document does not state where Luigi Caruana was born. Some researchers hold that Caruana was born in a house (with no specified number) in Gunlayer Street (*Strada Miratore*), Floriana, while others hold that he was born in Strait Street (*Strada Stretta*), Floriana. Yet another supposition is to be considered: when Caruana was born, the family residence was possibly at 10, *Strada Seconda* (currently, *Trejjet il-Foss*), Floriana, since the place of the premature death – in official records – of his mother, on 25 January 1869, a mere fourteen months later is this latter address.

⁴ Floriana Parish Archives, *Liber Baptizatorum*, vol.3, fol.7.

Luigi and his siblings were orphaned when their mother, Elisabetta, died at the age of 27, on 25 January 1869. She died at Floriana at no. 10, Strada Seconda. Subsequently, the family moved to Senglea.⁵ It was their devout father, Enrico, who gave Luigi and his elder brothers a solid Christian upbringing. Enrico was the Assistant Secretary of the Supervising Admiral at the Shipyards in Malta. In 1876, at the age of nine, Luigi was enrolled by his father at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Gozo, then run by the Sicilian Jesuits,⁶ where he started his earliest studies. This educational institution, founded in 1866, enjoyed an excellent reputation, “so much so that, from the very beginning, not only the sons of the best families in Gozo, but also many intellectually talented boys from Malta and even from Sicily attended the Jesuit-run Seminary.”⁷ The rector at the Gozo Seminary, during the scholastic year when Luigi was a student was Rev. Giuseppe Galvagno S.J. (1814-1889).⁸

The following year, he proceeded with his studies closer home when he proceeded with his education at St Ignatius College, St Julian's, Malta, which was run by the English Jesuits.⁹ After its inauguration in 1877, St Ignatius' College soon came to the forefront as one of the leading schools in the Island. Not long after its genesis it became a boarding school. A refectory, dormitories, a gymnasium, study halls, laboratories and sports facilities were located within the magnificent building and its campus. This was the locus where the seeds of Luigi's vocation to the consecrated life were sown. Furthermore, the discipline at both the Seminary in Gozo and at St Ignatius' College moulded the young Luigi and proved to be a providential preparation for the completion of his secondary studies far from the shores of Malta.

⁵ See Joseph R. Gatt, “L-Arcisqof-Isqof ta' Malta Dom Maurus Caruana OSB – Arcisqof-Isqof Furjaniż,” *Il-Mument* (29 April 2001): 20.

⁶ See Joseph Bezzina, *The Sacred Heart Seminary. The Heart of Gozo* (Victoria/Gozo: Sacred Heart Seminary, 2016), 77-85; 89-105; Joseph Bezzina, “The Gozo Seminary. A Historical Note,” in *Sacred Heart Major Seminary. Directory 54, Formation Year 2023-2024* (Victoria/Gozo: Sacred Heart Seminary, 2023), 6.

⁷ See Bezzina, “The Gozo Seminary,” 6.

⁸ See Bezzina, *The Sacred Heart Seminary*, 240.

⁹ *Ex Alumni Societatis Iesu, Melitenses et Gaudisienses* (1935), 73. See *Malta Taghna* (6 February 1915): 2.

Caruana's Monastic Vocation

Luigi Caruana's innermost desire was to respond to the monastic vocation which he had been nurturing. In fact, in 1882, when he was only 15 years old, he was accepted to continue his secondary studies at the Abbey school at Fort Augustus, on the margins of Loch Ness, in Inverness-shire, Scotland. The Benedictine monastic community at Fort Augustus was a relatively very recent foundation. In fact, it was in 1876 – a mere six years prior to the arrival of Luigi – that the 13th Lord Lovat (Simon Fraser, 1828-1887), member of a prominent Roman Catholic family in Scotland, passed on the land to the Benedictine monks of the English Congregation whose desire was to establish a monastery in Scotland. The construction of the monastery, designed by Peter Paul Pugin (1851-1904), was quite rapid, and in August 1880, it was solemnly inaugurated, although some parts required completion. In 1882, the monastery – or rather, more precisely, St Benedict's Abbey – did not remain part of the Anglo-Britannic Benedictine Congregation, and became autonomous.¹⁰ In 1878, together with a number of Catholic lay teachers, the Benedictine monks had established a school which soon became the Fort Augustus Abbey school which in its heyday accommodated 150 students.

Luigi Caruana's stay at the school was a successful one. He was a fellow pupil of the future 14th Lord Lovat (Simon Joseph Fraser, 1871-1933) and his two younger brothers, Hugh Joseph and Alastair Thomas.¹¹ Moreover, he was chosen to be *Captain of the School*,¹² this being a sure sign of his talents and capabilities. His vocation continued to mature. On 21 March 1884, then the feast of St Benedict, he joined the Benedictine monks of Fort Augustus. On 21 September of the same year, Luigi received the Benedictine habit from the prior of the abbey, Dom Jerome Vaughan (1841-1896), and was given the name of Maurus.

He made his simple profession on 11 November 1885, while on 11 November 1888, three days short of his twenty-first birthday, he made his perpetual vows before Dom Leo Linse (1850-1910), the first Abbot of Fort Augustus. Linse, a native of Württemberg, Germany, had previously been the prior of the Beuronese monastery at Erdington, a suburb of Birmingham in the West Midlands. He

¹⁰ Pope Leo XIII, by his brief *Summa cum animi laetitia* of 12 December 1882 erected St Benedict's Abbey as an independent abbey, immediately subject to the Holy See.

¹¹ See *The Tablet* 125/3899 (30 January 1915): 140.

¹² This information was obtained by means of a note sent by Dom Andrew John-Baptist McBride O.S.B. (1913-1998) from the Abbey of St Benedict, Fort Augustus to Michael Galea. See Michael Galea, "Mons. Dom Mawru Caruana (1867-1943). Fl-Ewwel Ċentinarju ta' l-Ordinazzjoni tiegħu (1)," *Leben is-Sewwa* (24 August 1991): 8.

established a more austere way of life which was more formal than that in English Benedictine monasteries. Less than three years later, on 14 March 1891, Dom Maurus was ordained a priest by the bishop of Aberdeen, Mgr Hugh MacDonald C.S.S.R. (1841-1898). In that same year, the newly-ordained Maurus was sent to the college of Sant'Anselmo, on the Aventine Hill, Rome, to further his studies in canonical legislation, while perfecting himself in philosophical and ecclesiastical studies.

A Young Enthusiastic Benedictine Priest Engaged in Pastoral Ministry

After returning to Scotland, Dom Maurus was entrusted to teach philosophy, theology and Latin literature at the Abbey at Fort Augustus. He was especially linguistically gifted and was often invited to preach outside the abbey. He was appointed Rector of the clerics at the Abbey, counsellor and secretary of the monastic chapter. He also learned the Gaelic language.¹³ This was indeed a blessing as he was able to devote himself more intensely to pastoral work in the Scottish Highlands where he was well-loved by the scattered Catholic community at Domie in West Ross-shire.¹⁴

Not long after this initial pastoral experience, Dom Maurus assisted Rev. Andrew MacDonell O.S.B. (1870-1960), parish priest of Fort Augustus, Glengarry and Glenmoriston.¹⁵ His fluency in Gaelic was extremely providential when he himself was parish priest of the same parish between 1901 and 1905, and again, between 1912 and 1914.¹⁶ Caruana was also gifted in liturgical music.¹⁷ He was choir master. In 1912 Caruana was appointed Director of the Abbey choir. It is known that he specialised in Gregorian chant, according to the

¹³ This information, too, was obtained through the correspondence exchanged between Dom McBride O.S.B. and Michael Galea. See *ibid*.

¹⁴ See Fabian Mangion, "From Fort Augustus Abbey to the Bishopric of Malta," *The Sunday Times of Malta* (1 February 2015): 36.

¹⁵ For a detailed biographical note on MacDonell, See <https://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2017/06/father-andrew-macdonell-mbe-mc-osb.html> [accessed, 1.4.2024].

¹⁶ The parish is still active today. See <https://stmarysbeaulieu.org/fort-augustus/history/> [accessed, 1.4.2024]. See *Malta Taghna* no.1457 (6 February 1915): 2.

¹⁷ See *La Diocesi* 1, no.1 (1916): iv. *La Diocesi* was a diocesan publication by the Curia in Malta, and whose genesis lies in the first year of Caruana's episcopate. It ceased publication in 1921, and was succeeded in 1937 by *Lucerna*, a bulletin for the clergy.

Solesmes version. This role made Caruana renowned, and he was often asked to assist in the formation of choirs in Scotland.¹⁸

An Interlude in the Philippines?

Dom Maurus Caruana's talents were easily noticeable and it came as no surprise that on account of his intellectual and moral qualities, in 1905 he was chosen – although coming from a different Benedictine congregation – to be private secretary to Dom Ambrose Agius (1856-1911), a Maltese Benedictine monk who was appointed by the Holy See to be Apostolic Delegate in Manila, the Philippines. Born to Maltese migrant parents in Alexandria, Egypt, Agius joined the Benedictine Order in 1871 and was ordained priest in 1881. In September 1904, Pope Pius X appointed him titular archbishop of Palmyra and Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines. He was ordained bishop by Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val (1865-1930), Secretary of State. Agius died suddenly of peritonitis, in the Philippines on 12 December 1911 when he was only 55 years old.¹⁹ Most sources describe Caruana's stay in the Philippines, his pastoral ministry as chaplain to U.S. military personnel, and some daring episodes in that country.²⁰ Some researchers opine that after less than two years, possibly a span of about eighteen months, it seems that Dom Maurus was back in Scotland in his beloved monastery. Strong evidence of this short duration in the Philippines is found

¹⁸ See Galea, "Mons. Dom Mawru Caruana (1)," 8.

¹⁹ Ambrose (Tancred Alfred) Agius, born 17 September 1856, Alexandria, Egypt; entered the Benedictine Order, 8 September 1871; solemnly professed, 13 December 1873; ordained priest of the same Order, 16 October 1881; appointed titular archbishop of Palmyra, 3 September 1904; appointed Apostolic Delegate in the Philippines, 5 September 1904; ordained bishop, 18 September 1904 at the church of Sant'Ambrogio, Rome; died, 12 December 1911. It is interesting to note that Agius – a monk of Ramsgate Abbey of the Benedictine Cassinese Congregation of Primitive Observance, and for a time attached to the Abbey in Subiaco – was sent to Malta in 1881, together with the pro-visitor of the Congregation, in order to establish a Benedictine community at the priory of Santa Maria at Nigret, Żurrieq. After the departure of the monks from Malta, some years later, Dom Ambrose Agius rejoined his community at Ramsgate, until he was called to Rome in 1893, as secretary of the procurator of the Order. He is not to be confused with his namesake, Ambrose Agius (1890-1978), also a Benedictine monk, of Downside Abbey, and later at Ealing Priory.

²⁰ See Gatt, "L-Arcisqof-Isqof ta' Malta Dom Maurus Caruana OSB," 20; Galea, "Mons. Dom Mawru Caruana (1)," 8.

in the diocesan publication *La Diocesi*.²¹ It is almost certain that the contents of Caruana's short biographical note in the latter were reviewed by Caruana himself. Consequently there must be some basis to the Filipino interlude.²²

Moreover, if, as stated below, Caruana preached Lenten sermons in London in 1908, it must have been quite unlikely that he travelled all the way from the Philippines to Britain for such a task. The possible dates of what I am calling "the Filipino interlude" for Caruana would either be 1905-1906, or 1909-1911,²³ the latter being the year when the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Agius, died. Joseph Flask contends that Maurus Caruana never went to the Philippines. A great-nephew of Archbishop Ambrose Agius O.S.B. stated: "I do not think Mgr Caruana ever went to the Philippines with my great-uncle. He was appointed, but it was felt he was not suited to the job, and I think Dom Stephen Rawlinson O.S.B. went in his place."²⁴ It might also have been possible that Dom Maurus Caruana's name was confused with that of a Maltese (then, junior) member of the Holy See's diplomatic staff, Rev. George Caruana (1882-1951) who was sent to the Philippines at roughly the same time. But again, what does one make of the information about the "Filipino interlude" given both in the official publication

²¹ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 January 1915): 6; *The Tablet* (30 January 1915): 140; *Malta Taghna* (6 February 1915): 2; *La Diocesi* 1, no.1 (1916): iv; Arthur Bonnici, "Death of His Grace the Archbishop Bishop Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B.," Supplement to *Malta Review* (21 December 1943): 2. *Malta Review* was the weekly bulletin of the Malta Information Office. See also, Editorial, *Scientia* 20, no.1 (January-March 1944): 3; A.E. Abela, *A Nation's Praise – Malta: People, Places & Events – Historical Sketches* (Malta: Progress Press, 1994), 22.

²² Indirect evidence about Caruana's stay in the Philippines was obtained by the author during a personal conversation (on 23 April 2024) with Fr Keith Bonnici, formerly a monk at Fort Augustus. Bonnici attests that in the Monastery Library, he once came across a small Hispano-Tagalog dictionary which belonged to Dom Maurus. Tagalog is the native language used in the Philippines. Readers are invited to make their own conclusions.

²³ In December 1909, Dom Maurus was certainly in Scotland, as it is documented that he was present at the priestly ordination of Dom Ambrose Geoghegan at St Benedict's Abbey, Fort Augustus, on 12 December 1909. See *The Tablet* 114/3633 (25 December 1909): 1035. Since Dom Maurus was committed to pastoral work in a parish from 1901 to 1905, and from 1912 to 1914, and was involved in preaching missions in 1908-1909, the only feasible considerable stretches when he could have been in the Far East on a mission which required prolonged residence would have been 1905-1906 and either 1909-1911 or 1909-1910.

²⁴ Personal correspondence by Joseph Flask to the author of this article (12 February 2015). Flask refers to a letter he had received in 1993 from the late Dom Dennis Agius O.S.B. where the quoted details are given. Further research shows that Dom Bernard Steven Rawlinson (1865-1952) from Downside Abbey served as an educationalist with the Benedictine Order in the Philippines. See <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001258061213045901?journalCode=tdra> [accessed, 3.4.2024].

of the diocese of Malta, and later in the necrology of the abbey of Fort Augustus when Archbishop Caruana passed away? Moreover, how can one explain the presence of a bishop from the Philippines at Caruana's episcopal ordination in Rome in 1915?

A Fertile Preaching Ministry in Great Britain

On account of his fluency in Italian, Caruana was often asked to minister and preach to Italian migrants who left their homeland to seek work opportunities in the shipyards in Glasgow, as well as in Edinburgh. On account of his impeccable Italian pronunciation and idiom and his love of music, as well as because of his Italian-sounding surname, many Italians thought that Dom Maurus was their fellow countryman. His reputation as a fine preacher was considerable. In 1908, he delivered Lenten spiritual talks and conducted a mission at Westminster Cathedral, London.²⁵ Some days later, Dom Maurus preached on Holy Saturday at the Servite church, Fulham Road, Westminster, during the poignant ceremony of the blessing and distribution of flowers and the crowning of the statue of the Sorrowful Mother and heralding the Easter dawn.²⁶ In April of that same year, Dom Maurus was also in Rickmansworth, a town in south-western Hertfordshire, seventeen miles north-west of central London. It was reported that for the first time since the foundation of the Catholic mission in Rickmansworth a retreat was preached. During the five-day-long duration of the retreat, the congregation was deeply moved by Caruana's "earnest and eloquent discourses on the principal truths of the Catholic faith ... [and impressed by his] touching explanation on the sacrifice of the Mass."²⁷

In August 1910, Dom Maurus took part in the celebrations which took place during the consecration and opening of a church at St Andrews. On 4 August 1910, he delivered "an appropriate and eloquent sermon" as part of the solemn

²⁵ Caruana delivered Lenten sermons at Westminster Cathedral on 8, 15, 22, 29 March and 5 April 1908 at 7:00 p.m. He also conducted a mission on 15, 22 and 29 March 1908 at 8:00 p.m. This consisted in a mission service, a sermon and benediction. See *The Tablet* 111/3540 (14 March 1908): 412. See also, *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 January 1915): 6; *Malta Tagħna* (6 February 1915): 2; Abela, *A Nation's Praise*, 22. He also preached on Easter Sunday at Westminster Cathedral, 19 April 1908, after compline, benediction and devotions. This was announced in *The Tablet* 111/3544 (11 April 1908): 572, and in *The Tablet* 111/3545 (18 April 1908): 612.

²⁶ See *The Tablet* 111/3546 (25 April 1908): 663.

²⁷ *The Tablet* 111/3545 (18 April 1908): 620.

liturgical celebrations at that church.²⁸ In November 1912, Caruana was invited to preach “a triduum of prayer for the beatification in regard to the approval of the veneration of Blessed Bonaventure Tornielli,”²⁹ a fifteenth-century priest of the Order of the Servants of Mary. This triduum, held on 8 – 10 November 1912, was celebrated in the Servite Church on Fulham Road in the Archdiocese of Westminster. It was reported that

on the Friday [8 November] he spoke of the saintly Servite as one of those men raised by God to do a special work and given the ability to do it. On the Saturday [9] he treated the importance of imitating him in not only avoiding sin, but destroying it in others, and on Sunday [10] he dwelt upon the graces and glory conferred on him by heaven in reward for his co-operation with grace.³⁰

In February 1913, we encounter Dom Maurus together with his fellow monk from Fort Augustus, Dom Columba Edmonds O.S.B., an accomplished author on the early history of Christianity in Scotland, preaching a fortnight’s mission, concluded on 23 February, in Arundel, in the South Downs, West Sussex.³¹ He also preached a panegyric on St Ignatius of Loyola at the Jesuit College at Stonyhurst in Lancashire, and some thought he was English on account of his mastery of the language. He also preached in French and in Spanish. At the time of the outbreak of the First World War, Caruana was engaged in missionary outreaches in both Scotland and in England.³²

Caruana Nominated to the See of Malta

In December 1914, Caruana was preparing to travel to Brazil where he was to establish a new Benedictine monastery,³³ and thoughtfully he decided to pause for some days in Malta in order to visit his now elderly father, aged 78, and to greet his relatives. It was while he was in Malta that Dom Maurus received a telegram to suspend his journey to Latin America, and to travel to Rome.³⁴ The popular narrative which was repeated and found its way in most newspapers, journals and biographical notes on Caruana states that while he was called to Rome, he was summoned and informed that Pope Benedict XV was appointing

²⁸ *The Tablet* 116/3666 (13 August 1910): 251.

²⁹ *The Tablet* 120/3784 (16 November 1912): 776.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *The Tablet* 121/3799 (1 March 1913): 338.

³² See Abela, *A Nation’s Praise*, 22.

³³ *La Diocesi*, 1, no.1 (1916): v.

³⁴ See Mangion, “From Fort Augustus Abbey,” 36.

him to the see of Malta and to the titular see of Rhodes *in partibus infidelium*. The news was announced by the Holy See on 22 January 1915, the liturgical *memoria* of St Publius, one of the patron saints of Malta, thus adding colour to the narrative. The Holy See was probably oblivious of this liturgical feast, particular to the liturgical calendar used in Malta. Moreover, contrary to what has been repeatedly reasserted, Caruana was indeed in Malta when he received a telegram from the Holy See.³⁵

³⁵ The anecdote is that Caruana first received a telegram, while in Malta, telling him “Don’t move,” followed by another telegram stating “Proceed to Rome.” See Galea, “Mons. Dom Mawru Caruana (I),” 8. Again, there are conflicting versions on the sequence of events. While some researchers state that Caruana first went to Rome where he was informed about his nomination to the see of Malta, a nomination which was made public on 22 January 1915 (all available sources agree upon this date), the newspaper *Malta Taghna* provides readers with a slightly different version of events which is more plausible. This newspaper (6 February 1915, p.2) reports that on Thursday, 28 January 1915, Dom Maurus Caruana left Malta aboard the ship *Birmaniam* for Rome (“*relak għall Ruma, fejn ser ikun icconsagrat.*”) The text, reproduced here in the pre-1930s Maltese orthography, is stating that Caruana departed for Rome after his nomination was announced. *Malta Taghna* is the only source which provides us with the name of the ship for the journey to Rome. This shows that the anecdotal “Don’t move,” followed by “Proceed to Rome” in two separate telegrams has been often misinterpreted by certain researchers.

What was reported in *Malta Taghna* had been previously disclosed in what was the then most important newspaper in the Maltese Islands, *The Daily Malta Chronicle*. It is clear from the latter that the nomination to the see of Malta was made on Friday 22 January. Dom Maurus received a telegram on his nomination on the following day, Saturday 23 January. This is the text of the newspaper: “A telegram received by a high church dignitary in the island from Rome on Friday evening last [22 January] announced that the Very Reverend Father Dom Maurus Caruana, O.S.B., of Fort Augustus Monastery, Scotland, has been ‘elected bishop.’ No further details were received, although it was freely rumoured that Father Caruana had been appointed to succeed the late Mgr Pace as Bishop of Malta and Archbishop of Rhodes. On Saturday evening Father Caruana himself received telegraphic information of his appointment as Bishop, from His Eminence Cardinal Gasquet, who congratulated him and asked him to be his guest while at Rome.

‘Father Caruana arrived about a month ago on a visit to his family, prior to proceeding on an important mission to Brazil. Last week he received instructions from the Vatican to await orders at Malta, the reason for which is now revealed.’

‘Father Caruana will leave today [26 January] for Rome, where he will be consecrated, and is expected to return in a month’s time to assume the administration of the diocese as Bishop of Malta and Archbishop of Rhodes.’ (*The Daily Malta Chronicle* [Tuesday 26 January 1915]: 7. Here, one observes a different date for the departure for Rome from that reported later in *Malta Taghna*.

In the subsequent issue of *The Daily Malta Chronicle*, similar information concerning the telegraphic instructions received by Dom Maurus was reiterated. The paper reports that “several dignitaries of our Church have been mentioned as his [Pace’s] likely successors; and, of course,

The Daily Malta Chronicle sought to interpret the delay in appointing a successor to the late Archbishop-Bishop Pietro Pace who died on 29 July 1914. The events of the earliest phase of the First World War could have affected the preliminary consultation regarding the appointment of new bishops. Reference was also made, in this newspaper, to the Simmons-Rampolla Agreement in 1890 between Great Britain and the Holy See which included the procedure to be followed in the nomination of the bishops of Malta and Gozo.³⁶ Briefly, this stipulated that the British Government was to be informed about the possible nomination of a bishop in the Maltese Islands. Historians and researchers have unearthed evidence which shows that there were instances when the nomination of a priest to the episcopate was either blocked by the colonial authorities or put on a back-burner because he happened to be a Francophile, or later because of pro-Italian sympathies.³⁷

Father Caruana's name was in the list. When, as stated in our last issue, that reverend gentleman, who is at Malta on a visit to his family, received telegraphic instructions from the Vatican last week not to proceed to Brazil but to await orders in Malta, the rumour went about that his appointment to the See was merely a question of time" (27 January 1915): 6.

Further proof concerning the actual sequence of events is derived from Reuter's. In fact, a few days later, the same daily paper reported: "From our Reuter's Postal Service we learn that Reuter's Correspondent in Rome telegraphed on the 22 January last to London that 'the Pope had appointed Mgr Caruana, of the Benedictine Order, to be Archbishop of Malta.' Evidently, Reuter's omitted to wire the news to Malta believing that it was already known here." (*The Daily Malta Chronicle* [1 February 1915]: 6). As stated above, Caruana was actually in Malta and while expecting new instructions received word about his appointment to the Maltese See.

³⁶ The possibility of future conflict on the nomination of bishops to the dioceses of Malta and Gozo became very remote on account of the positive results of the amicable negotiations carried out between a representative of the British Government, a former Governor in Malta, Sir John Lintorn Simmons (1821-1903) and the Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro (1843-1913). In a nutshell, the agreement stipulated that when the Pope was in the process of nominating a bishop to one of the two sees in question, the Papal Secretary of State would communicate with the British Government about the person to be nominated. See Arthur Bonnici, *History of the Church in Malta* (Malta: Veritas Press, 1975), 3:13-14; *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 January 1915): 6.

³⁷ The Capuchin Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Malta, Bishop Antonio Buhagiar, had his nomination in 1889 to the see of Malta "blocked" because he openly nurtured French sympathies. Later, when a successor was being sought to Archbishop Maurus Caruana who in the late 1930s and early 1940s was often in ill health and contemplating a return to Fort Augustus, the British authorities were initially averse to the appointment of Mgr Michael Gonzi, Bishop of Gozo, to the See of Malta, on account of what a section of the population considered to be his pro-Italian sympathies, particularly after the politico-religious dispute with Lord Gerald Strickland, leader of the pro-British Constitutionalist Party in Malta. The opposition to Mgr Gonzi waned after the latter collaborated with the Governor of Malta and the local colonial

While it was rumoured that he was being considered to be appointed to one of the dioceses in Scotland or to be made abbot of Fort Augustus, it is deemed highly probable that Caruana was recommended, and his name presented by Cardinal Francis Aiden Gasquet (1846-1929), former Abbot of Downside, President of the English Benedictine Congregation and member of the Consistorial Congregation.³⁸ Caruana's name was among those who were being mentioned as possible successors of the late Mgr Pietro Pace, Archbishop-Bishop of Malta.³⁹ Caruana was already in good standing vis-à-vis the Holy See, as well as with the British colonial authorities in Malta. These factors contributed to his eventual appointment to the see of Malta. Adrianus Koster (1945-) states that a section of the population referred to Caruana "as an Anglophile who had no choice but to oppose [prime minister and leader of the pro-British Constitutionalist Party] Lord Strickland because the latter went against the authority of the Church."⁴⁰ After briefly describing his personality and style, Koster explains that "the British were later to find out that the appointment of this apparently pro-British prelate failed to guarantee smooth Church-State relations."⁴¹ Unfortunately, the dispute between the Church and the State in the late 1920s and early 1930s festered,⁴² and would re-erupt (in different contexts and for different reasons) between the mid-1950s and 1969, and in the period 1977-1987.

It is interesting to observe the contents of the evaluation made in 1929 by Mgr Paschal (David) Robinson O.F.M. (1870-1948), titular Archbishop of Tyana and an Irish ecclesiastical diplomat, whom the Holy See sent as an envoy to judge the simmering situation in Malta. He describes Mgr Caruana as an exemplary monk who was very well-educated and who exercised a great deal of self-discipline. While noting the different mentality characterising Caruana,

authorities when – in the context of the Second World War – he was instrumental in successfully persuading farmers and millers in Gozo to forfeit their extra supplies of grain or flour in favour of the population in the larger island of Malta which was on the brink of starvation in the first eight months of 1942.

³⁸ See Joseph Flask, "Appreciation: Dom Denis Agius O.S.B.," *The Sunday Times* [of Malta] (6 October 1996): 46. Here, Flask writes: "In one of his letters, Dom Denis told me that Archbishop Gonzi had told him that 'it was Cardinal Gasquet who advised the Pope to appoint Archbishop Maurus Caruana O.S.B. to Malta (in 1915).'"

³⁹ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 January 1915): 6.

⁴⁰ Koster, *Prelates and Politicians in Malta*, 83.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Max Farrugia, *Enrico Dandria. Qassis, Politiku, Patrijott* (Malta: Kite, 2017), 81-171, esp. 94-96; Joe Calleja, *Ugo P. Mifsud (1889-1942). Prim Ministru u Patrijott* (Malta: Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 1997), 163-179; Abela, *A Nation's Praise*, 23-24.

Robinson criticises the negative attitudes shown by members of the Cathedral Chapter, together with their bickering and resistance to what Caruana sought to implement. Robinson described the archbishop of Malta as a very conscientious person who showed magnanimity and nobility of character even towards those who consistently put the proverbial spokes in his wheel.⁴³ Caruana's personality and general demeanour were described by Sir Charles Bonham Carter (1936-1940), British Governor of Malta in his personal diaries, as erudite and charming, while not sparing some negative features about him. On 20 April 1936, barely four weeks after his arrival in Malta, Bonham Carter writes:

I have also paid a visit to Archbishop Caruana – a charming man who was for many years at Fort Augustus. He is a kindly soul (a Benedictine monk of course) and very friendly, but I am told a weak character and past files bear this out. For he appears to be dominated by some violently pro-Italian advisers.⁴⁴

On the other hand, the English Catholic weekly *The Tablet* had fine words on Caruana after his appointment to the see of Malta:

With the exception of a period spent in the Philippines as secretary to the late Archbishop Agius, Dom Maurus' priestly activities have been chiefly confined to Scotland, where he is well known as a zealous and successful missionary. He has the reputation of a sound scholar and theologian, an accomplished linguist and a fine musician, and his gifts as a preacher are of an exceptionally high order, as those can testify who have heard him at Westminster Cathedral and elsewhere.⁴⁵

Episcopal Consecration

Mgr Maurus Caruana was consecrated bishop on 10 February 1915, feast of the Shipwreck of St Paul in Malta, and also the liturgical *memoria* of St Scholastica, sister of St Benedict.⁴⁶ Although the decision about the date of the episcopal consecration had been made known, prudence seemed to have dictated that the Cathedral Chapter be formally informed. This was done by means of a

⁴³ Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), *Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Inghilterra Posizione* 209, fascicoli 41 [known as the Mgr Paschal Robinson Report, 17 July 1929], referred to extensively in Farrugia, *Enrico Dandria*, 158-159.

⁴⁴ John Manduca, ed., *The Bonham Carter Diaries 1936-1940* (Malta: PEG, 2004), 67. See also, *ibid.*, 38, 59, 84.

⁴⁵ *The Tablet* (30 January 1915): 140. This text was reproduced verbatim (with the source being acknowledged) in *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (9 February 1915): 3.

⁴⁶ See Abela, *A Nation's Praise*, 22.

telegram (in French) from Rome, a copy of which is to be found at the Cathedral Archives in Mdina.⁴⁷

The solemn liturgy which commenced at 8:30 a.m. took place in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome. Mgr Carinci and Mgr Tani, the pontifical masters of ceremonies, supervised the solemn liturgy.⁴⁸ On the same day, in Malta, a festive ringing of church bells at 10:00am announced the ordination of the new bishop.⁴⁹ Caruana was ordained by Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val (1865-1930), Secretary of the Congregation of the Holy Office, and formerly Secretary of State to Pope Pius X. The two co-consecrators were Mgr Algernon Charles Stanley (1843-1928), titular bishop of Emmaus, and Mgr John McIntyre (1855-1935), titular bishop of Lamus and Rector of the Venerable English College, Rome.

The choir of the Pontifical Scots' College in Rome,⁵⁰ then at its premises on Via delle Quattro Fontane, participated in the solemn liturgy. Among the guests present at Mgr Caruana's consecration, one is bound to mention the following: Enrico, his father; Sir Henry Howard (1843-1921), the British envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Holy See,⁵¹ accompanied by the members of the legation, Messrs Gregory and Wilson;⁵² Mgr Giuseppe Petrelli (1873-1962), Bishop of Lipa in the Philippines whom Caruana had acquainted during his stay in the Philippines;⁵³ Mgr Pietro La Fontaine (1860-1935), the newly-

⁴⁷ See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 31. The telegram was received through the Eastern Telegraph Company Limited at the Malta Station on 3 February 1915, and was addressed to the Dean of the Cathedral Chapter, Mgr Vincenzo Vassallo at Malta, Notabile. The content was: "Consecration dix fevrier Eveque Caruana."

⁴⁸ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 February 1915): 6.

⁴⁹ See AAM. *Floriana*, Editti, vol.36: *Editti di Mgr Fr[a]ngelo Portelli O.P., Amministratore Apostolico di Malta Sede Vacante dall'8 agosto 1914 al 22 Febbrajo 1915*, [Lettera] Circolare (9 February 1915), fol.26. This Circular Letter was signed by Can. Luigi Attard, the then Vicar General.

⁵⁰ The Pontifical Scots' College (*Pontificium Collegium Scotorum de urbe*) was founded in 1600 by Pope Clement VIII in order to prepare priests for the Scottish mission during the two centuries when Roman Catholics were persecuted in Scotland.

⁵¹ Sir Henry Howard was the first formal British envoy to the Holy See in over three centuries.

⁵² See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 February 1915): 6.

⁵³ Mgr. Petrelli was described as "companion to Caruana when both belonged to the Apostolic Delegation of the Philippines" (*The Daily Malta Chronicle* [27 February 1915]: 6). See Alfons M. Galea, *L'Iskof ta Malta* [= Cotba tal Moghdija taz-Zmien 150] (Valletta: G. Muscat, 1915), 46. Petrelli hailed from Montegiorgio in the archdiocese of Fermo, Italy. He was bishop of Lipa, in the Philippines, from 12 April 1910 to 30 May 1915; and Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines from 30 May 1915 to 27 May 1921. He was later nuncio to Perù until 1925. If the information provided by the *Chronicle* is correct, and if Caruana was actually in the Philippines, and if both worked in the Apostolic Delegation, then Caruana must have been in the Far East sometime

appointed Patriarch of Venice who some years earlier had been apostolic visitor to Malta;⁵⁴ Mgr Augustin Dontenwill O.M.I. (1857-1931), Titular Archbishop of Ptolemais in Phoenicia, and previously Archbishop of Vancouver in British Columbia; the Generals of several religious orders; Rev. Oswald Hunter-Blair O.S.B. (1853-1939), the second abbot (from 1913 to 1918) of St Benedict's Abbey, Fort Augustus;⁵⁵ Dom Fidelis de Stotzingen O.S.B. (1871-1947), the second Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation; Dom Azimari O.S.B., the representative of the Abbot of Monte Cassino; Mgr Donald Mackintosh (1876-1943), Rector of the Pontifical Scots' College in Rome, later Archbishop of Glasgow; Rev. Leonidas Perrin S.S. (1878-1944), Rector of the Canadian College; Lord Wellesley; Mr Mounsey; Mgr Prior; Baron and Baroness Zonotti;⁵⁶ the Maltese sculptor Antonio Sciortino (1879-1947), as well as a number of Maltese priests, including Rev. Enrico Dandria (1892-1932), then studying at the Pontifical Gregorian University and who would be ordained priest in the following September); and Rev. Michael Gonzi (1885-1984) who had just been appointed to be Caruana's secretary.⁵⁷

between 1905 and 1906 or 1907. The fact that Petrelli, an Italian priest (and diplomat), was ordained bishop in the church of St Francis *extra muros*, in Manila, on 12 June 1910, indicates that he was probably already working in the Philippines (where he was already well known), otherwise he would have been ordained in Italy. Thus, Petrelli's and Caruana's paths probably crossed each other prior to 1910, even more so before 1908 which is the year when Caruana was deeply engaged in preaching in Great Britain.

⁵⁴ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (24 February 1915): 3.

⁵⁵ See Canon Welsh, ed., *The Catholic Directory for the Clergy and Laity in Scotland 1915* (Edinburgh – Glasgow – Cambridge: Sands & Co, 1915), 95. Besides the names of the members of the male Benedictine community at Fort Augustus, one also finds that Maurus Caruana is described as being “in charge of mission,” thus referring to his role as parish priest. Regarding the interesting life of Sir David Oswald Hunter-Blair. See http://www.benediktinerlexikon.de/wiki/Hunter-Blair,_Oswald (accessed, 5.4.2024).

⁵⁶ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 February 1915): 6.

⁵⁷ See Michael Galea, “Dom Mawru Caruana. Fl-Ewwel Ċentinarju ta' l-Ordinazzjoni tiegħu (II),” *Leben is-Sewwa* (31 August 1991), 7; *Daily Malta Chronicle* (11 February 1915): 7. It was reported in the latter newspaper that the episcopal consecration in Rome was a great success. J.F. Asphar, on behalf of the Old Boys of St Ignatius' College in St Julian's, sent a telegram of congratulations to the newly-consecrated bishop who had received his primary schooling at that College:

“Bishop Caruana

Rome

Old Ignatians offer heartfelt congratulations for Auld Lang Syne ask blessing.”

The following reply was received by Dr J. Dunbar Vella, one of the Old Ignatians:

“Brazilian Consul, Malta. Thanks and blessing Old Ignatians – Maurus Caruana.”

After the episcopal ordination, a reception was held at Palazzo San Callisto, just a stone's throw away from the Basilica. There were several guests, including Cardinal Merry del Val. During this celebration, Archbishop Caruana was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta conferred upon him by the Grand Master, Fra' Galeazzo von Thun und Hohenstein (1850-1931).⁵⁸ Cardinal Merry del Val himself fastened the prestigious decoration on the new bishop's episcopal garments, amidst the jubilation of the guests. After descending into the courtyard of the Palazzo, the papal photographer took a group photo of those who had been present at the solemn episcopal consecration. The cheers of the students of the Pontifical Scots' College enlivened the joyful gathering. On the same day, in the evening, Sir Henry Howard hosted a banquet in honour of the new bishop at the premises of the British legation to the Holy See. Among the attendees, one is bound to mention Cardinal Merry del Val, Cardinal Gasquet, Mgr Stanley, Mgr McIntyre, Mgr Canali, Mgr Mackintosh and Mr Caruana.⁵⁹ So many messages congratulating the new bishop were sent to him in Rome that it was practically impossible to answer each one of them individually. *The Daily Malta Chronicle* reported the following:

As was to be expected, numerous congratulatory telegrams were sent from the Island to His Grace ... and practically the whole of Malta, through its various recognized bodies, as well as some of its principal citizens, hastened to convey the expression of its felicitations and devotion to its new Pastor. His Grace having found it impossible to send a reply to every telegram received, has requested us to thank all in his name, in the following wire we received yesterday:

Rome – 12th February, noon.
To Editor *Chronicle*, Malta.
Impossible to answer all telegrams.
Please thank senders.
Maurus Caruana,
Archbishop.⁶⁰

Archbishop Caruana sent a telegram from Rome to the Archdeacon of the Cathedral Chapter while sending his best wishes to the canons and thanking them for their congratulations.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (11 February 1915): 7; *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 February 1915): 6.

⁵⁹ See *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (27 February 1915): 6.

⁶⁰ *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (13 February 1915): 3.

⁶¹ See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 61. The telegram was received through the Eastern Telegraph Company Limited at the Malta Station on 15 February 1915, and was addressed to

In a Circular Letter on the beginning of the season of Lent, Bishop Angelo Portelli O.P., Apostolic Administrator, devoted the last paragraph to formally announce the episcopal consecration of Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B. had taken place and that the new bishop was to be welcomed in due course as God's messenger.⁶² Later, prior to departing from Rome, he was received in an audience by Pope Benedict XV who gifted him with a precious pectoral cross. The episcopal motto chosen by Archbishop Caruana was *Fortis et ardens*⁶³ which reflected his personality, character and spiritual attitude.

Meanwhile, the Cathedral Chapter was carrying out the required formalities entailed during the period leading to the Solemn Entry of the new bishop into his Cathedral church. An extraordinary meeting was called on 18 February 1915 in order to listen to the formal reading of the letter about the nomination of the new bishop.⁶⁴

Embarking on a New Pastoral Mission in Malta

The next step in this meteoric elevation of Archbishop Caruana was to travel to Malta. He reached the island on 25 February 1915 aboard the Italian naval

the Archdeacon of the Cathedral Chapter at Malta, Notabile.

⁶² See AAM, *Floriana, Editti*, vol.36: *Editti di Mgr Fr[a] Angelo Portelli O.P.*, [Lettera] Circolare (11 February 1915), fol.27: "Cogliendo l'occasione vi annunziamo, l'elezione del Pastore di questa Diocesi, la quale è annunziata ufficialmente dalla Santa Sede, nella persona di S.E. Rev.ma Mgr Don [sic] Mauro Caruana, Monaco Benedittino della Congregazione di Scozia, il quale ha ricevuto la consecrazione [sic] Vescovile in Roma, il dì 10 corrente, e che voi accoglierete poi a tempo suo, come l'Angelo speditovi dal Signore."

⁶³ See Gatt, "L-Arcisqof-Isqof ta' Malta Dom Maurus Caruana OSB," 20.

⁶⁴ See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 57. The letter, dated 15 February 1915, calling the canons of the Cathedral Chapter to the meeting, was signed by the Dean, Mgr Vincenzo Vassallo. It is surprising to note that a formal letter by the Apostolic Administrator, Bishop Angelo Portelli O.P. with regard to the nomination of Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B. was only sent to the Chapter on 15 February 1915. Portelli writes that it was his duty to send to the Chapter a copy of the letter received from the Sacred Consistorial Congregation regarding the nomination. See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 58. Indeed, the Cathedral Archives are in possession of a copy of the letter by Cardinal Gaetano de Lai (1853-1928) of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation (Prot.n.1325/14 of 6 February 1915) which states: "La pubblicazione avvenuta in Concistoro della nomina del Rev.mo P. Mauro Caruana O.S.B. a Vescovo di Malta subito dopo che le pratiche per la sua scelta erano compite, [h]anno impedito di poter prevenire la S.V. Rev.ma di questa designazione." De Lai states that although the news was well known, but he felt it was his duty to officially inform the Apostolic Administrator and the Civil Government. See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 59.

vessel *Apollonia*.⁶⁵ Since the publication of Caruana's nomination and just prior to his arrival in Malta, the pro-British newspaper *The Daily Malta Chronicle* spared no words or column space in extolling the talents and fame enjoyed by Caruana in Great Britain. From what has already been stated in this article, it is evident that the British colonial authorities were very keen in having a safe candidate to the see of Malta, namely, a prelate who harboured pro-British sentiments, especially in light of his formative years and rich experiences in Great Britain, particularly in Scotland.⁶⁶ In its number for Wednesday 24 February 1915, when the *Apollonia* was meant to arrive – yet, its journey from Syracuse was delayed by one day due to stormy weather – *The Daily Malta Chronicle* reports:

Since Mons. Caruana left Malta three weeks ago ... we have had more than one opportunity of ascertaining the high opinion that is entertained of him in the United Kingdom, and especially in Scotland where he has spent the greater part of his life and almost the whole of his sacerdotal career; and the merited tributes recently paid to his abilities and zeal by English papers of various denominations have fully confirmed the high expectations we have formed of the administration he is about to assume of this historic and important See.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ In a Circular Letter issued on 20 February 1915 by the then Vicar General, Can. Luigi Attard, and signed by the Curia Chancellor, Rev. Paolo Vella Mangion, the faithful were invited to welcome (“chi vuole ossequiare”) the new bishop at the Customs House (“alla Dogana”) at his arrival. See AAM, *Floriana, Editti*, vol.36: *Editti di Mgr Fr[a]ngelo Portelli O.P.*, [Lettera] Circolare (20 February 1915), fol.28. The naval vessel *Apollonia* is described as “[un] piroscavo postale.” In a subsequent Circular Letter, on 22 February 1915, an order was given by the Church authorities to greet the arrival of the new bishop by a festive pealing of bells. See AAM, *Floriana, Editti*, vol.36: *Editti di Mgr Fr[a]ngelo Portelli O.P.*, [Lettera] Circolare (22 February 1915), fol.29, stating that the Apostolic Administrator “ordina che all’entrare in porto di detto piroscavo si suoni a festa per qualche tempo e che allo sbarco si suoni anche a festa per un quarto d’ora, sempre dopo il segno dato dalla Con-cattedrale di S. Giovanni.”

⁶⁶ See Louis Cilia, ‘*Kollni kemm jien għalikom.*’ *Il-Ħajja Mqanqla ta’ Mikiel Gonzi u Żminijietu (1885-1984)* (Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2017), 69-70; 201-203. The important considerations by Cilia provide a character-profile of Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B., particularly in light of the process which eventually led to his nomination to the see of Malta. Despite the arguments that Caruana was very aloof from the Maltese context because until 1914, he had spent 32 years away from Malta, the British authorities looked at him as a ‘safe’ candidate because of the pro-British leanings of his family, as well as because of the long years spent within the British milieu. Furthermore, his candidacy was further promoted through the successful efforts of Cardinal Gasquet within the Concistorial Congregation of the Holy See. Moreover, being away from Malta for so long a span of time worked out in favour of Caruana who was considered – by both Rome and London – as being untainted by the petty struggles within Malta, both on a macroscopic as well as a microscopic level.

⁶⁷ *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (24 February 1915): 3.

Hugh crowds of Maltese flocked to the vantage points around the Grand Harbour of Valletta and the Three Cities. This rendered Caruana's arrival even more solemn than he expected it to be. At 8:30 a.m., a welcoming party went aboard the *Apollonia*. This included Count Captain Giuseppe Theuma Castelletti, the aide of the Governor of Malta; Mgr Luigi Attard, the Vicar Delegate to Bishop Angelo Portelli O.P., Apostolic Administrator of the diocese; Mgr Gauci; and a number of the bishop's relatives. As Mgr Caruana was disembarking at 9:15 a.m., the *H.M.S. Egmont*, present in the harbour, fired a nine-gun salute. He passed through the customs house accompanied by Rev. Santino De Piro and Rev. Gaetano Mifsud, together with Rev. Edward Farrugia Bugeja, Mr Enrico Caruana (the bishop's father) and Count Captain Theuma Castelletti. As he left the customs house, another gun salute was fired from the Lower Barracca gardens.⁶⁸

The Cathedral Chapter,⁶⁹ the collegiate chapters in the diocese of Malta, the parish priests, the Provincial superiors, the Crown Advocate, as well as the

⁶⁸ See Galea, *L'Iskof ta Malta*, 47-48.

⁶⁹ In actual fact, documentation reveals that the members of the Cathedral Chapter who were present at the Customs House were not allowed to greet the new archbishop after being introduced to him. This transpires from a letter of complaint written on 4 March 1915 by Rev. P. Muscat, Chancellor of the Chapter, to Count Theuma Castelletti. The letter asks why Mgr Archdeacon, Mgr Vincenzo Caruana Gatto, was not allowed to introduce the Monsignors to the Archbishop at the Customs House. The letter expresses the regret shown by the canons who observed that various officials and the Acting Superintendent of Police were allowed to personally greet the archbishop. See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 92. From a statement made by J. Frenzo Azopardi, the Acting Superintendent of Police on 8 March, it seems that the canons forming the welcoming party were the Archdeacon and Mgr Mifsud, Mgr Ignazio Panzavecchia, Mgr Matteo Cortis, Mgr Luigi Maria Camilleri, Mgr Ferris, Mgr Peter Cavendish, Mgr Farrugia and Mgr Giovanni Sarreo. See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 95.

In a letter, dated 10 March 1915, Count Theuma Castelletti politely deplored the misunderstanding committed by members of the Chapter. He writes that "it was agreed that, in order to avoid delay and crowding at the moment of first landing, the Archdeacon alone should be presented among the first introductions, and that he should subsequently present the Canons to His Grace after the inspection of the Guard. Apparently, this arrangement was not clearly understood by the Chapter who, as His Grace's boat reached the shore, moved forward in a body and took up a position between His Grace and the Guard of Honour, which was at that moment presenting arms as a compliment to His Grace. Seeing that His Grace was somewhat incommoded I merely requested the Canons to retire and await presentation until after the inspection of the Guard, in accordance with the arrangements previously made. I much regret that the eagerness of the Reverend Canons to express an immediate welcome should have rendered necessary any intervention on my part, and I regret also that my action in attempting to carry out the programme of reception in an orderly manner should have been misinterpreted by them." See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 93, 94.

members of the judiciary and representatives of the Maltese nobility and the *Camera Pontificia* gave a most hearty welcome to the new shepherd of the flock.⁷⁰ On account of the large crowds filling the streets of Valletta, it was not easy for the Bishop's motorcar to reach the Episcopal Palace in the same city. On arriving at the Episcopal Palace, Archbishop Caruana was formally welcomed by Bishop Angelo Portelli O.P. (1852-1927), titular Bishop of Selinus [*episcopus Selinonte*] and the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, and a number of priests and friends of the archbishop. That afternoon, Archbishop Caruana paid a courtesy visit to Field Marshal Paul Methuen (1845-1932), the British Governor.⁷¹ On the same day, Archbishop Caruana published his first pastoral letter to the Church in Malta. In this letter, he expressed his feelings at having to leave the Benedictine abbey to which he was so attached – something which had never crossed his mind – and his joy at returning to his motherland after over thirty-two years and meeting his countrymen and his friends. In this Pastoral Letter he writes:

When lately I was paying you a short visit before sailing, as I thought for Brazil, I did not for a moment suppose that I should in fact abandon my journey, and take up permanent residence in your midst as your Bishop. But just as it was a keen delight to revisit my country, my relatives, and my friends after so long an absence, so now you will understand that it is a bitter pain to leave the monastic home to which the most sacred ties unite me, and to abandon the regular life of the cloister, the sweet yoke of the Benedictine Rule, that it has been my privilege to bear from my youth.⁷²

On 1 March 1915, the members of the Cathedral Chapter convened at the Cathedral in Mdina⁷³ in order to listen to the formal reading of the proclamation of the Papal bulls appointing Caruana as Archbishop of Rhodes and Bishop of

⁷⁰ See Galea, "Dom Mawru Caruana (II)," 7.

⁷¹ See Galea, *L'Iskof ta Malta*, 48-49.

⁷² Archbishop Maurus Caruana O.S.B., *Pastoral Letter* (25 February 1915). See AAM, *Floriana, Editti*, vol. 37, Mons. Caruana, *Pastorali e Circolari 1915-1943*. The Pastoral Letter is found in Latin, as well as in its English, Italian and Maltese translations. The English translation of the above excerpt was also available in *The Daily Malta Chronicle* (1 March 1915): 4.

⁷³ See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 74. The Dean of the Cathedral Chapter, Mgr Vincenzo Vassallo, on 25 February 1915, summoned the canons to the meeting held on 1 March 1915. The said Dean, on 27 February 1915, summoned the canons (See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 85) to yet another meeting on 3 March in order to listen to the reading of a letter by Archbishop Caruana detailing the proxy which was to be made so that Mgr Giuseppe De Piro could make the 'urban possession' on behalf of the new bishop. In fact, the proxy document was signed on the same day, namely, 27 February.

Malta. It was then the normal canonical praxis that these bulls were to be received and read out in order that the new bishop would be officially recognised by the diocese as its legitimate pastor. After the reading of the mentioned documents by Rev. Paul Vella Mangion (1868-1929),⁷⁴ the Curia Chancellor, the bishop's cathedra was, by order of the Chapter, erected anew in the Cathedral church after the death of Archbishop Pace, more than seven months earlier, and the new archbishop's coat of arms raised above the main door of the Cathedral. The bishop's cathedra at St John's Co-Cathedral was also to be erected. The Cathedral Chapter also decided to pay a formal courtesy visit to the Mgr Caruana after the necessary arrangements were to be made.⁷⁵

Although he had not yet formally commenced his pastoral mission, one of Archbishop Caruana's first actions as spiritual shepherd of his flock was to visit the sick. One of the local papers reported that Mgr Caruana, accompanied by his chaplain, Rev. Gaetano Mifsud, visited the General Civil Hospital in Floriana. Upon his arrival, he was welcomed by Dr A. Marras, resident medical superintendent, and by Hon. G. Ferris, acting controller of charitable institutions. He then visited several wards, pausing to meet individual patients and converse briefly with them.⁷⁶ This was indeed a very significant sign of Caruana's pastoral solicitude. A Circular Letter on 2 March 1915 announced that Archbishop Maurus Caruana O.S.B. had appointed Bishop Angelo Portelli O.P. as his Vicar General, Mgr Giuseppe De Piro as the General Secretary of the diocese and Rev. Paolo Vella Mangion as Curia Chancellor.⁷⁷

In keeping with an ancient tradition when the bishops of Malta – in mediaeval times – often resided in Sicily and feared to make the southward journey because of corsairs, the so-called 'urban possession' of the diocese was carried out by proxy by a bishop's delegate, prior to the solemn entry of the bishop in his cathedral church. Although circumstances had changed drastically and it was safe to travel – and Mgr Caruana was already in the diocese – Mgr Giuseppe De Piro, co-adjutor to the Cathedral Chapter Dean was delegated by the archbishop to

⁷⁴ See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 73; Galea, *L'Iskof ta Malta*, 49. A letter by Archbishop Caruana was also read out during the Chapter meeting.

⁷⁵ See *Daily Malta Chronicle* (2 March 1915).

⁷⁶ See *Daily Malta Chronicle* (6 March 1915).

⁷⁷ See AAM, *Floriana, Editti*, vol.37, Mons. Caruana, *Pastorali e Lettere Circolari*, fol.2. Subsequent Circular Letters by Auxiliary Bishop Angelo Portelli announce the "urban possession" of the diocese on 14 March 1915 (See *ibid.*, fol.4), and the Solemn Entry into Mdina on 19 April 1915 (See *ibid.*, fol.11).

undertake the ‘urban possession’ of the diocese. This canonical procedure took place on 14 March 1915.⁷⁸

The Formal Inauguration of Caruana’s Episcopate at St Paul’s Cathedral, Mdina

The Solemn Entry took place on Monday 19 April.⁷⁹ According to a long-established tradition, the new Bishop left the Episcopal Palace in Valletta on the previous afternoon, at 4:15 p.m. He was wearing “the habit and the black cowl of the Benedictine Order, only relieved by a purple zucchetto.”⁸⁰ A solemn cortege, composed of the Bishop’s gala carriage, drawn by four black horses, festively adorned with scarlet plumes and rosettes,⁸¹ the British Governor’s aide-de-camp’s carriage and other carriages carrying church dignitaries, inched its way through Valletta, Floriana and Hamrun. Large crowds lined the streets on

⁷⁸ See *Malta Taghna* (20 March 1915): 3; Galea, “Dom Mawru Caruana (II),” 7; Alexander Bonnici, *Mons. Gużepi De Piro* (Malta: Soċjetà Missjunarja ta’ San Pawl, 1985), 2:35. The proxy document which was signed on 27 February 1915 bears the signatures of Archbishop Caruana, Mgr Giuseppe De Piro, Alfonso Maria Galea and the notary, Paolo Vassallo. See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 87, 88. With regard to the “urban possession,” see also, ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 113 verso and fol. 114r; fol. 117.

⁷⁹ Mgr Giuseppe De Piro, in his role as General Secretary of the Diocese, on 16 March 1915 informed the Dean of the Cathedral Chapter, Mgr Vincenzo Vassallo, about the Solemn Entry. See ACM, *Min. Capit.*, vol. 60, fol. 131. The faithful had been notified about the Solemn Entry or *Ingresso* of the new archbishop by means of a Pastoral Letter which was read out in all churches. See *Daily Malta Chronicle* (6 April 1915). The solemn feast of St Publius in Floriana was originally scheduled for Sunday 18 April 1915 since that was the third Sunday of Eastertide, the annual recurrence of the feast in that parish. In order not to clash with the vigil of the new bishop’s Solemn Entry, the Floriana archpriest and clergy decided to postpone the feast by one week. This eventually made it possible for Mgr Caruana to preside, on Sunday 25 April, at the solemn liturgy for the feast of the parish of his birth and baptism. See *Daily Malta Chronicle* (12 March 1915). Moreover, the Colonial Government decreed that government offices were to remain closed on the day of the *Ingresso*: “Il Gvern hareg avvis fejn ordna illi nhar l’Ingress ta l’Iskof Mons Caruana, li icun fid-19 ta April, l’officini tal Gvern icunu maghluca ghall din l’ocasioni” (*Malta Taghna* [3 April 1915]: 2). Very detailed accounts about Caruana’s Solemn Entry featured some days later in “The New Archbishop of Malta. Popular Rejoicings,” *The Tablet* 125/3911 (24 April 1915): 528, and a few weeks later in “The Bishop in Malta. Solemn Entry into His See” *The Tablet* 125/3916 (29 May 1915): 700-701. At first glance, the prominence given by *The Tablet* in reporting these events in great detail is surprising.

⁸⁰ Mangion, “From Fort Augustus Abbey,” 36; Mangion, “Dom Mawru Caruana OSB (1867-1943): Minn Monaku fl-Abbazija ta’ Fort Augustus ghal Arcisqof-Isqof ta’ Malta,” *Knisja 2000* 27, no.111 (January-March 2015): 105-107.

⁸¹ See Mangion, “From Fort Augustus Abbey,” 36.

that Sunday afternoon. On the way, parish priests gave short addresses to the Archbishop and bands played festive music. Various congregations of nuns, too, as well as children residing in church institutions flanked both sides of the main thoroughfare through which the corteo was passing.

As soon as the cortege reached the slope leading to the old capital city, Mdina, the horses drawing the bishop's carriage were replaced by men. The carriage proceeded to the Dominican convent in Rabat where the bishop was to spend the night. Along the road, more joyous crowds expressed their enthusiasm at the sight of their new shepherd. After entering the Dominican convent at about 8:00 p.m. – following what had been a momentous afternoon and evening – the Archbishop welcomed the members of the Cathedral Chapter, addresses were exchanged and gifts presented to Caruana.

On the morning of 19 April 1915, punctually at 8:00 a.m., Archbishop Caruana left the Dominican convent and proceeded to the Church of St Mark, run by the Augustinian friars. On arrival, accompanied by the members of the Cathedral Chapter, he entered the church where he put on the episcopal attire and a cope. Again, according to a venerable tradition, he rode upon a white mare decorated with precious cloth. Eight representatives of the Maltese nobility carried the ornate baldacchino beneath which was the Archbishop on horseback. A solemn procession in which the parish priests, the religious orders, the canons of the collegiate chapters of Malta and canons of the Cathedral Chapter participated – followed by the Archbishop – wound itself through the few roads separating St Mark's Church in Rabat and the Cathedral Church in Mdina. The Archbishop blessed the crowds who filled the streets, as well as balconies and the rooftops.⁸² Flowers were showered upon Caruana. Prior to reaching St Paul's Square, namely the square in front of the Cathedral, the corteo paused for some time, next to the Banca Giuratale where a welcome discourse was pronounced in Latin by one of the clerics, Albert V. Pantalleresco (1891-1963), ordained priest a few months later.⁸³

On arriving at the Cathedral parvis, the Archbishop dismounted and entered the Cathedral where the *Te Deum* was sung.⁸⁴ Archbishop Caruana then

⁸² On this unique festive occasion and in order to encourage the population from all over the Island to participate in the Solemn Entry, arrangements were made by the management of the Malta Railway for a special service of trains, meaning that a special timetable was devised with trains running more frequently. See *Daily Malta Chronicle* (15 April 1915).

⁸³ A local newspaper described Pantalleresco's address as follows: "un magnifico indirizzo che fu molto apprezzato da S.E. il Vescovo." See *Malta* (19-20 April 1915).

⁸⁴ See Mangion, "From Fort Augustus Abbey," 36-37.

presided at a solemn pontifical Mass and eloquently delivered a fine sermon in Italian on the Good Shepherd.⁸⁵ After this liturgical celebration where Caruana formally took possession of the diocese, he then greeted the distinguished guests led by the British Governor, Lord Methuen, in the main hall at the Archbishop's Palace in Mdina. The Dean and the members of the Cathedral Chapter and the Provincial superiors also greeted the Archbishop.

Conclusion: A Scholar and a Gentleman

The aim of this article is to focus on the period 1867-1915 in the life of Maurus Caruana, namely his origins, formation, life as a Benedictine monk in Scotland, right up to the first days of his mission as bishop of Malta. A proper account and evaluation of his long bishopric until 1943 merits more research and a separate academic study. It would be very appropriate if seasoned scholars and able researchers were to strive towards the publication of a proper detailed biography on Archbishop Maurus Caruana O.S.B. His formative years, followed by his many endeavours as a young Benedictine priest – outlined in this article – offer a possible hermeneutical locus to the many subsequent complex issues and intricacies which arose during his long episcopate, as well as an appreciation of his pastoral mission as a true shepherd in the challenges facing Maltese society in the period between the two World Wars. The accomplished Church historian Arthur Bonnici (1903-1978), then diocesan secretary, penned a well-written and masterful early evaluation of Caruana, a few days after his death:

From the day he arrived in Malta, His Grace showed himself ready to work hard. Full of St Benedict's spirit he aimed at destroying everything that was wrong, encouraging every good initiative and introducing any innovation that would lead to the spiritual welfare of his fold and to the honour of the Church in Malta. And this has proved true from the almost 500 Pastoral and Circular Letters which he personally or through his Vicar Generals addressed to the Maltese community in several occasions, when he felt it necessary or convenient.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ The homily was praised in these words: "Una bellissima omelia in buon Italiano, prendendo occasione dell'accoglienza fattagli, elogiando la fede dei maltesi ... Questa omelia mise in rilievo una delle belle doti, che adornano la benamata persona del nostro amato Diocesano, quella cioè di ottimo oratore" (*Malta*, 19-20 April 1915).

⁸⁶ Arthur Bonnici, "Death of His Grace the Archbishop Bishop Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B.," Supplement to *Malta Review* (21 December 1943): 2.

Bonnici then proceeds to provide the reader with an X-ray which sums up who Archbishop Caruana was, and what his main positive traits were. He describes him as:

a priest full of zeal for God's magnificence, as a Pastor who cared for the spiritual welfare of his fold, an upright and merciful Father, as a man outstanding for his dignity, especially during religious functions, as one who fought for justice and righteousness, faithful to the supreme Head of the Church, loyal to the British Crown, a scholar, a gentleman, generous and sincere.⁸⁷

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⁸⁷ Ibid.

Drafting Particular Law for Malta and Gozo: The Operations of the Commission of the Maltese Episcopal Conference (1983-1988)

When Pope John Paul II promulgated the new Code of Canon Law for the Latin Catholic Church on 25 January 1983, he left several matters that required local legislation for appropriate implementation. Some of these matters fell under the jurisdiction of diocesan bishops, while others necessitated the involvement of episcopal conferences or the attention of bishops within an ecclesiastical province. In response, the Maltese Episcopal Conference (MEC) established a special commission tasked with preparing particular legislation for the Church in Malta and Gozo and providing guidance to the local bishops. Following an overview of particular legislation within the Catholic Church, this article will shed light on the operations, diligent efforts, and one notable limitation of the Commission.¹

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¹ The primary source for this study is the minutes of the Commission's meetings (hereafter cited as "Minutes"). The Minutes form part of the "Acts of the Particular Legislation Commission," housed in the Archive of the Maltese Episcopal Conference within the Archbishop's Curia in Floriana, Malta.

Particular Law in the Catholic Church

In the Catholic Church, particular legislation differs from universal law in that the latter applies to the entire Catholic Church worldwide or, at the very least, to a broad group of Catholics across the globe, while the former generally applies to a limited geographic territory or pertains to a specific group of Catholics or certain specific procedures. Universal laws, at times referred to as “general” or “common” laws, are typically promulgated by the Pope in his capacity as the head of the entire Church, by the world’s bishops assembled with the Pope, by the bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches with the approval of the Pope, or by dicasteries of the Roman Curia acting in the name of the Pope and with his endorsement. Particular laws, on the other hand, are issued by bishops of a particular region, country, or diocese. Particular legislation may also encompass “proper” laws, such as the norms governing a dicastery of the Roman Curia or the rules of an institute of consecrated life, or “special” laws, such as the norms guiding a specific process or procedure, for instance, the election of a new Pope or a cause of canonisation.²

Particular legislation has constituted a fundamental aspect of the Church since its inception. However, the Western Church experienced significant transformations during the Middle Ages, transitioning from a relatively decentralised communion in the patristic era to a structured feudal kingdom and ultimately evolving into a hierarchical system where much authority was centralised in the Pope.³ During the last century, there was a restoration of the role of particular legislation within the life of the Catholic Church.⁴

Following the codification of its laws in 1917, the Church began to recognise that too little attention was being paid to the diversity of the particular churches and the pastoral implications of rigid and strictly uniform laws. In 1931, Pope Pius XI, although primarily referring to civil society, spoke of the principle of subsidiarity.⁵ In subsequent years, Pius XII emphasised the universality of this principle, stating its applicability not only to social life but also to the life of

² On the nature and types of laws in the Catholic Church, see canons 7-20 of the Code of Canon Law.

³ See William W. Bassett, “Subsidiarity, Order and Freedom in the Church,” *CrossCurrents* 20, no.2 (1970): 141–63.

⁴ See Sofia Natalia Markovich, *The Development of the Principle of Subsidiarity in the 1983 Code of Canon Law* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2021).

⁵ See Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, 15 May 1931, *AAS* 23 (1931): 177–228.

the Church and its laity.⁶ Pope John XXIII applied the principle of subsidiarity to the Church in his speech to the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council (CELAM), specifically concerning the relations between CELAM and the Apostolic See.⁷ Later, he explicitly addressed subsidiarity in two encyclicals; however, in these instances, he focused solely on civil society and not on the internal governance of the Church.⁸ The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) advanced the resurgence of the principle of subsidiarity and emphasised the role of particular legislation within the life of the Church.⁹ The Council acknowledged the necessity of adapting the Church's structures and laws to the diverse local cultures it served, deepened the understanding of particular churches, and underscored the authority of diocesan bishops. Additionally, it advocated for the establishment of new entities, such as episcopal conferences, that directly influence the development of particular legislation.¹⁰

Consequently, particular legislation featured prominently among the ten principles proposed to guide the revision of the 1917 Codex. These principles were drafted by the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law and submitted to Pope Paul VI, who determined that the principles should be reviewed by the 1967 Synod of Bishops.¹¹ The Third Principle, addressing the

⁶ See Pope Pius XII, *Address to the College of Cardinals*, 20 February 1946, *AAS* 38 (1946): 144–51; *Letter to Charles Florit*, 18 July 1947, *AAS* 39 (1947): 446; *Address to the Second World Congress on the Lay Apostolate*, 5 October 1957, *AAS* 49 (1957): 922–39.

⁷ See Pope John XXIII, *Address to Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops Participants in the Third Meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Council*, 15 November 1958, *AAS* 50 (1958): 997–1005.

⁸ See Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, 15 May 1961, *AAS* 53 (1961): 401–64; Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963, *AAS* 55 (1963): 259–64.

⁹ Vatican II explicitly referred to subsidiarity in the context of international order and in consideration of the right of every person to education. See Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, *AAS* 58 (1966): 1025–115, n. 85; Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, *AAS* 58 (1966): 728–39, n. 3.

¹⁰ See Second Vatican Council, Decree *Christus Dominus*, 28 October 1965, *AAS* 58 (1966): 673–96, nn. 8, 11, 38; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, *AAS* 57 (1965): 5–67, nn. 23, 27. On the use of the principle of subsidiarity during the conciliar deliberations of *Christus Dominus* and *Lumen Gentium*, see Markovich, *The Development*, 39–45.

¹¹ See “Principia quae Codicis Iuris Canonici recognitionem dirigant,” *Communicationes* 1 (1969): 77–85. An English version is available in Jordan F. Hite and Daniel J. Ward, *Readings, Cases, Materials in Canon Law. A Textbook for Ministerial Students* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 84–92. For an overview of the catalysts and reasons behind the Code Commission's decision to include this theme among the guiding principles, see Markovich, *The Development*, 146–69.

pastoral nature of the future Code, advocated for granting greater freedom to Ordinaries, particularly in mission areas, to ensure that the Code would embody a truly pastoral spirit and character. Similarly, the Fourth Principle called for an overhaul of the canonical system for extending faculties to Ordinaries and other superiors. The Fifth Principle, meanwhile, advocated for enhanced power and authority for particular legislation, aiming to foster robust decentralisation and distinctly reflect the unique characteristics of individual churches. It emphasised that the new Code should serve a dual purpose: reinforcing legislative unity in fundamental and major pronouncements of law, while recognising the reasonableness or need of individual institutions to provide for their own advantage. Most of these recommendations were ultimately acknowledged, as noted earlier, with the 1983 Code of Canon Law leaving several issues open for legislation by diocesan bishops, episcopal conferences, or ecclesiastical provinces.¹²

Establishment of the Maltese Commission

In this context, following the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law on 25 January 1983, the Maltese Episcopal Conference established the Particular Legislation Commission. The Commission had a dual objective: to formulate a particular law for the Church in Malta and Gozo and to provide essential guidance to the local Bishops in this regard.

The Commission's appointed members included Mgr Annetto Depasquale, Mgr Arthur Said Pullicino, Rev. Joseph Borg, OSA, Rev. Dionysius Attard, OCarm., and Rev. George Frendo, OP. At the request of the Bishop of Gozo, Mgr Giovanni Gauci joined the Commission during its third meeting, although the Minutes indicate that Gauci seldom attended the Commission's meetings.¹³ At that time, Depasquale served as Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Malta and Promoter of Justice in the Ecclesiastical Appeal Tribunal, also lecturing in canon law at the Faculty of Theology. He would later assume the roles of Vicar General and Auxiliary Bishop of Malta. Said Pullicino held the position of Judicial Vicar for the Metropolitan Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Malta. Borg, Attard, and Frendo were actively involved in the Regional Appeal Tribunal. Frendo would later serve as Provincial Superior of the Dominicans, and subsequently

¹² For a broad compilation of particular laws issued by episcopal conferences that complement the new Code, see Jose T. Martin de Agar, ed., *Legislazione delle Conferenze Episcopali Complementare al C.I.C.* (Milano: Giuffrè Editore, 1990).

¹³ See the Minutes of 15 October 1983, n.13.

Auxiliary Bishop and Archbishop of Tiranë-Durrës in Albania. Gauci served as the Officialis of the Diocese of Gozo and lectured in canon law at the diocesan seminary.

Five Years of Endeavour

The Commission convened for the first time on 29 September 1983. During this inaugural meeting, Depasquale elucidated the Commission's purpose, following which the other members appointed him and Said Pullicino as the Chair and Secretary of the Commission, respectively. Within the same meeting, Depasquale distributed two lists: one containing those canons from the new Code that called for particular laws by the episcopal conference and another containing canons about particular laws falling within the diocesan bishop's jurisdiction. During his presentation, which extended to the following meeting, Depasquale also emphasised the distinction between those cases where the bishops were obliged to establish particular norms versus cases where they were free to do so.¹⁴

From the outset, it became evident that formulating a particular law for the Church in Malta and Gozo would demand extensive efforts. Consequently, on 4 November 1983, Archbishop Joseph Mercieca, acting in his capacity as the President of the MEC, addressed a letter to Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, requesting an extension to prolong the period during which the Commission would work on the preparation of the particular law. It appears that the MEC was not the sole entity making this plea. Four days later, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Secretary of State of the Vatican, wrote to the episcopal conferences worldwide, informing them that the Pope had acknowledged their practical challenges. In the same letter, Casaroli urged the episcopal conferences to promulgate temporary norms on significant matters to prevent a period of *vacatio legis*. In December 1984, the Bishops of Malta and Gozo submitted yet another request for an extension.¹⁵

Meanwhile, on 22 November 1983, five days before the new Code came into effect, the Bishops of Malta and Gozo issued a circular letter informing

¹⁴ See the Minutes of 29 September 1983 and 6 October 1983.

¹⁵ See the Minutes of 3 November 1983, n.39, 10 November 1983, n.45, and 6 December 1984, n.172. See also the letters of Archbishop Mercieca and Cardinal Casaroli in the section "Episcopal Conference: Congregations 1977-1984" at the Archive of the Maltese Episcopal Conference. The letter of Cardinal Casaroli is also available in Martin de Agar, ed., *Legislazione delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 37-38.

the faithful of both dioceses that, until the promulgation of particular norms, matters requiring local legislation would remain as they were. The bishops assured the faithful that they would be duly informed when decisions regarding particular norms were made. The circular letter also highlighted two significant changes in the new Code with potential practical implications for the faithful: the revised age at which the Church considers someone an adult (can. 97 §1), and the possibility of receiving communion twice in the same day (can. 917).¹⁶ A few days later, on 25 and 26 November, Archbishop Joseph Mercieca, in his capacity as diocesan bishop, issued specific instructions for the Archdiocese of Malta concerning the registration of Confirmation (can. 895) and the promulgation and taking effect of particular laws for the Archdiocese (can. 8), respectively. On 9 December 1983, another instruction was given regarding parochial registers in light of canon 535.¹⁷

As previously noted, the Commission convened for the first time on 29 September 1983, and held a total of 141 meetings over a span of five years, concluding its work on 8 October 1988. Within the final three months of 1983, the members held 11 meetings. In 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987, they convened 33, 36, 32, and 21 times, respectively. In 1988, the Commission met eight times. These meetings were held at the Augustinian Convent in Valletta, each lasting between three and four hours, typically from 9:00 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. or 4:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The minutes of these meetings, recorded in Maltese, span 461 pages and are divided into three volumes. Following each meeting, a copy of the minutes was disseminated to the Bishops to inform them of the Commission's progress.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the period coinciding with the Commission's operations was marked by considerable turbulence for the Church in Malta and Gozo.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Konferenza Episkopali Maltija, "Ittra Ċirkolari: Il-Kodiċi l-ġdid tal-Liġi Kanonika," *Bullettin tal-Arċidjoċesi u Liturġija tal-Kelma* 40 (1983): 215.

¹⁷ See the different decrees and instructions of Archbishop Mercieca in *Bullettin tal-Arċidjoċesi u Liturġija tal-Kelma* 40 (1983): 216–30.

¹⁸ See the Minutes of 6 October 1983, n.7.

¹⁹ Several challenging incidents are worth mentioning, including the disputes between the State and the Church concerning church schools, hospitals and properties, the attack on the Maltese Diocesan Curia on 28 September 1984, and the expulsion of foreign religious from Malta and of the Faculty of Theology from the University of Malta. See Charles Buttigieg, *Ġużepi Mercieca: Raġġaj għal Kull Staġun* (Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2017), 195–360.

Draft Preparation

Throughout its five years of operations, the Commission prepared multiple draft norms. DePasquale frequently took the initiative to draft and distribute the initial versions to fellow members for collaborative discussion and revision. He often provided supplementary materials to enrich the deliberations or highlighted pending issues that required the Commission's attention. Practical challenges stemming from the prevailing civil legislation were occasionally addressed, as exemplified when the Commission tackled the registration of adopted children.²⁰

The Commission occasionally delegated other constituted bodies to draft norms on subjects within their purview, which were then forwarded to the Commission for examination.²¹ For instance, in February 1984, Mgr Joseph Lupi, the President of the National Liturgical Commission, was tasked with preparing norms concerning various aspects, including qualifications of aspirants for the ministries of the lectorate and the acolytate, formation for the permanent diaconate, adaptation of the Ordo of Initiation of Adults, location for administering Confession, administration procedures surrounding Baptism, materials used for fixed and mobile altars, participation of the laity in preaching during Mass, the liturgical directory, processions, and common celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick. Simultaneously, the Commission sought the collaboration of Mgr Lawrence Gatt, the Rector of the Seminary of Malta, and Rev. Arthur Vella, SJ., the Rector of the Seminary of Gozo, to draft the Ratio for the Formation to the Priesthood and new Seminary Regulations.²² In June 1984, Rev. Joseph Borg, the Chair of the Commission of the Means of Social Communication, was tasked with preparing norms related to the Church's presence in the media.²³ In April and May 1987, the Commission initiated correspondence with Rev. Ugo Cremona, OP, the Chair of the Ecumenical Commission, concerning norms on prayer and study meetings involving Catholics and Christians from other churches. Concurrently, Rev. Charles Caruana, SJ., the delegate for the Secretariat for Christian Education, along with Rev. George Deguara and Rev. John Attard, delegates of the Bishops of Malta and Gozo for Catechesis, were called upon to commence the formulation of a set of norms regarding Christian education in schools.²⁴

²⁰ See the Minutes of 26 June 1984, n.123.

²¹ See the Minutes of 1 December 1983, n.54.

²² See the Minutes of 11 February 1984, n.74.

²³ See the Minutes of 26 June 1984, n.121.

²⁴ See the Minutes of 11 April 1987, n.429, 16 May 1987, n.432, and 23 May 1987, n.434.

Extensive Consultation

The entities mentioned above were once again consulted after the Commission thoroughly reviewed and refined the drafts received from them. Throughout this process, the Commission also sought the counsel and support of other individuals and bodies. For instance, in February 1984, Depasquale informed the Commission that the draft norms concerning Marriage had been forwarded to the Council of the College of Parish Priests, to all the parish priests individually, and to the Acting Director of the Cana Movement.²⁵ A minor controversy arose in local newspapers two and a half years later regarding the involvement of the Cana Movement in drafting the particular law on Marriage. However, this matter was swiftly resolved.²⁶

Following the Commission's review and revision of the norms related to the academic formation of seminarians, the draft was once again circulated to the rectors of the two seminaries and to Mgr Vincent Borg, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology.²⁷ Likewise, the draft of norms concerning lay preachers underwent further circulation among Rev. George Deguara and Rev. John Attard, who served as respective delegates of the Bishops of Malta and Gozo for Catechesis, Mgr Aloysius Deguara and Rev. Tarcisio Camilleri, delegates of the Bishops for the Laity, and Rev. Valentino Borg and Rev. Frankie Sultana, delegates of the Bishops for the Liturgy.²⁸ In January 1988, Depasquale informed the Commission that the draft principles and guidelines for Christian education in schools were passed to Br Emmanuel Sciberras, FSC, the Delegate for the Secretariat of Education and Culture. He also reported that the draft norms about Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion had been reviewed during a meeting of the College of Consultors and discussed in a meeting of the Delegates of the Secretariats and the Officials of the Archdiocese of Malta.²⁹ In September of the same year, Depasquale informed the Commission that the same norms had been deliberated in the Presbyteral Council and the Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese.³⁰

The Commission members frequently engaged in direct discussions with various individuals. For instance, in January 1984, Mgr Innocent Borg, the Head of the Marriages Office of the Archdiocese of Malta, was invited to a meeting

²⁵ See the Minutes of 11 February 1984, n.74.

²⁶ See the Minutes of 13, 20, and 27 September 1986.

²⁷ See the Minutes of 11 October 1986, n.378.

²⁸ See the Minutes of 21 March 1987, n.422.

²⁹ See the Minutes of 23 January 1988, n.467.

³⁰ See the Minutes of 12 September 1988, n.480.

where the Commission continued its analysis of the pre-marriage inquiry form.³¹ In February 1986, Rev. Joseph Borg attended a meeting where guidelines for broadcasting the Holy Mass on television were under examination.³² In March 1984, Said Pullicino participated in a meeting of the College of Parish Priests to discuss the draft norms on marriage.³³ In February of the following year, Said Pullicino met with Mgr Philip Calleja, the Administrative Secretary of the Archdiocese of Malta, to deliberate on the role of parish priests in the administration of material wealth, mainly because of the guidelines of the *Documento di Base* and the pontifical bulls held by some collegiate churches.³⁴

The Acts of the Commission reflect that Depasquale had numerous personal meetings or phone calls related to drafting the particular law. Some examples include his communication with Archbishop Mercieca and Mgr Calleja regarding the reform of the benefices system,³⁵ discussions with Rev. Albert Micallef, OFM., and Mgr Lupi concerning the collection for the Holy Land,³⁶ interactions with the Rector of the Seminary of Malta regarding the role of the Pastoral Director,³⁷ conversations with Rev. Ugo Cremona, OP, regarding ecumenical matters,³⁸ and dialogues with Br Dominic Rosso, FSC, concerning Christian education and spiritual directors in schools.³⁹ Depasquale regularly appraised the Commission of the reactions of the Diocesan Representative Council and the Diocesan Financial Council regarding their work.⁴⁰ Frendo recounts that Depasquale used to consult him personally in matters about consecrated life, such as the representation of the religious in the Presbyteral Council or their participation in the means of social communication.⁴¹

³¹ See the Minutes of 14 January 1984, n.64.

³² See the Minutes of 6 February 1986, n.310.

³³ See the Minutes of 10 March 1984, n.81.

³⁴ See the Minutes of 2 March 1985, n.201.

³⁵ See the Minutes of 27 June 1985, n.245. On Mgr Calleja's role in the reform of the benefices system, see Charles Buttigieg, *Philip Calleja. Għex għall-Bniedem Maqluġh minn Għberuqtu* (Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2019), 254–256.

³⁶ See the Minutes of 7 December 1985, n.284, and 13 December 1985, n.288.

³⁷ See the Minutes of 15 November 1986, n.391.

³⁸ See the Minutes of 13 June 1987, n.440.

³⁹ See the Minutes of 28 November 1987, n.455.

⁴⁰ See the Minutes of 13 December 1985, n.291.

⁴¹ See George Frendo, "Mons. Depasquale u l-Ħajja Reliġjuza," in *Annetto Depasquale. Wirt Għażiż tal-Knisja f'Malta*, eds Anthony Gouder and Kevin Schembri (Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2021), 87–89.

On certain occasions, the Commission requested other individuals or bodies to seek specific advice or pertinent material on its behalf. For example, in November 1984, Mgr Joseph Lupi, acting at the Commission's request and in his capacity as Secretary of the MEC, corresponded with all the collegiate chapters of Malta and Gozo to request a copy of their statutes, along with information concerning the practical relations between the collegiate chapter and the parish priest. Furthermore, Lupi sent letters to the religious provincials, the Diocesan Representative Council, and the priests of the Archdiocese of Malta to seek their advice on the draft norms on the contributions to the needs of the Church.⁴² The Bishop of Gozo also discussed these norms with the parish priests of his diocese.⁴³ Similarly, the Diocesan Representative Council forwarded the draft norms regarding the Parish Economic Council to the College of Parish Priests for their feedback.⁴⁴

Throughout their work, the Commission members were curious about how foreign bishops were legislating for their territories. They frequently examined pertinent points from the particular laws that the Italian Episcopal Conference was presenting to the Holy See.⁴⁵ In December 1983, on the initiative of Borg, the Commission reviewed the norms of the Irish Bishops concerning the obligation of penance on Fridays.⁴⁶ In November 1984, the Commission examined the decisions of the episcopal conferences of Brazil and Bolivia concerning the participation of the clergy in social communication.⁴⁷ In another instance, the Commission tasked Mgr Lupi with writing to the German Episcopal Conference to request a copy of their prepared particular legislation. In the same meeting, the members also took note of the responses provided by the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code on certain crucial points.⁴⁸

Sometimes, the members sought informal advice, such as when Attard and Borg approached the members of their respective religious communities to discuss the celebration of Mass on the days of obligation.⁴⁹

⁴² See the Minutes of 21 December 1985, n.293, and 15 March 1986, n.326.

⁴³ See the Minutes of 12 December 1987, n.458.

⁴⁴ See the Minutes of 23 February 1985, n.198.

⁴⁵ See the Minutes of 5 May 1984, n.106, 10 November 1984, n.161, 20 December 1984, n.176, 11 May 1985, n.226, 17 May 1986, n.346, 13 September 1986, n.367, and 30 January 1988, n.470.

⁴⁶ See the Minutes of 10 December 1983, n.58.

⁴⁷ See the Minutes of 24 November 1984, n.169.

⁴⁸ See the Minutes of 13 October 1984, nn.153–155.

⁴⁹ See the Minutes of 3 November 1983, n.38.

Approval and Recognition

When the Commission members deemed certain draft norms ready for presentation, they would submit them to the MEC. Following this step, individuals providing new comments or suggestions on those norms were encouraged to forward their proposals to the Bishops directly.⁵⁰

The MEC conducted a comprehensive review of all drafts prepared by the Commission during a series of meetings held between November 1984 and September 1988. These meetings were usually convened at the Archbishop's Palace in Mdina and Dar Santa Marija in Mellicha, Malta, and at the Bishop's Conservatory in Rabat, Gozo.⁵¹ At these meetings, the Bishops were always joined by Mgr Lupi, serving as the Secretary of the MEC, and Depasquale and Said Pullicino, fulfilling their roles as Chair and Secretary of the Commission. In the event of an emergency arising in an MEC meeting and insufficient time to convene the Commission, Depasquale and Said Pullicino acted on behalf of the Commission, with the members subsequently being informed. As Administrative Secretary of the Archdiocese of Malta, Mgr Calleja attended the meeting of 13 August 1985, when the MEC deliberated on the draft norms concerning acts of administration and the reform of the benefices system.⁵²

The MEC approved most prepared norms in four distinct sets, often with minor adjustments. As will be shown below, some drafts produced by the Commission were set aside for future use or for a decision to be made by the diocesan bishop. Each set of norms approved by the MEC was translated into Italian and was then forwarded to the Apostolic Nuncio, who would submit the norms to the Congregation for Bishops for their recognition. The Congregation was competent to give the 'recognitio' to the norms after consulting with the relevant dicastery of the Roman Curia and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.⁵³ The members of the Commission were actively involved in this process and often drafted the cover letters to be sent to the Congregation.⁵⁴ The Congregation would sometimes reply to the MEC and propose certain

⁵⁰ See the Minutes of 23 May 1987, n.434.

⁵¹ The Minutes indicate that meetings of the MEC took place on 12 and 27-28 November 1984, 17 December 1984, 28 June 1985, 13 August 1985, 29-30 September 1985, 11 November 1985, 27-28 May 1986, 17 November 1987, and 13 September 1988.

⁵² See the Minutes of 31 August 1985, n.248.

⁵³ See Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, 15 August 1967, *AAS* 59 (1967): 885-928, art. 50, and Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 28 June 1988, *AAS* 80 (1988): 841-934, art. 82.

⁵⁴ See the Minutes of 20 December 1984, n.176.

amendments or suggestions on the norms sent. For its part, the MEC provided its reactions after consulting with the Commission. Once the laws received recognition, the MEC would promulgate them. The Acts reveal that Depasquale appeared responsible for drafting the promulgation decree.

Promulgation of the First Set of Laws

The first set of particular laws comprised 13 decisions and 65 norms on various matters related to specific canons of the new Code of Canon Law, as elucidated below alongside each point. These laws, after receiving the recognition of the Holy See on 28 October 1985, were promulgated on 1 December 1985 in the first volume of the Acts of the Maltese Episcopal Conference.⁵⁵ All laws, except for the norms about the Presbyteral Council, took effect a month later, on 1 January 1986. The norms about the Presbyteral Council were to take effect later and separately in each diocese after the conclusion of the ongoing session of the Council. In fact, on 17 January 1986, Archbishop Mercieca renewed the statute of the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese in Malta – which had been set up in 1967 by his predecessor, Archbishop Michael Gonzi – and decreed that the new statute would come into force immediately after the closure of the current session in June of that year.⁵⁶

The 13 decisions were divided in two: one particular decision on general absolution (can. 961 §2) that featured at the end of the set of norms on the place where the Sacrament of Confession can be celebrated (see below), and a set of 12 other decisions about the following matters: the promulgation and the taking effect of particular legislation of the MEC (can. 455 §3), post-retirement remuneration for parish priests (can. 538 §3), the promise of marriage or engagement (can. 1062 §1), the duties of the College of Consultors (can. 502 §3), regulations for parish registers (can. 535 §1), the age requirements for Confirmation (can. 891), the age requirements for the permanent diaconate and the priesthood (can. 1031 §2), the establishment of a specific rite for Marriage (can. 1120), the determination of holy days of obligation (can. 1246 §2), lay

⁵⁵ See Ġużepi Mercieca, “Digriet,” 20 November 1985, in Konferenza Episkopali Maltija, *Atti tal-Konferenza Episkopali Maltija*, vol.I (Malta, 1985), 3. The particular law for Malta and Gozo, beside being published in volumes I-IV of the Acts of the MEC, also appear in Martin de Agar, ed., *Legislazione delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 403–454.

⁵⁶ See Ġużepi Mercieca, “Digriet tal-Arċisqof u Statut tal-Kunsill Presbiterali,” 17 January 1986, *Bullettin tal-Arċidjoċesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* 49 (1986): 298–302.

judges in the ecclesiastical tribunals (can. 1421 §2), procedures in legal acts (can. 1714), and appeals against administrative decrees (can. 1733 §2).

The 65 norms also addressed a range of subjects: 12 were associated with the ministries of the lector and the acolyte (can. 230 §1), 17 dealt with the registration of Baptism for adopted individuals (can. 877 §3), two, as an appendix, concerned the registration of the Confirmation of adopted individuals (can. 895), six applied to the Presbyteral Council (can. 496), 18 functioned as a Statute for the College of Consultors (can. 502), five focused on the place where the Sacrament of Confession can be celebrated (can. 964 §2), four concerned the attire of clerics (can. 284) and one concerned fasting and abstinence (cann. 1251 and 1253). It is worth noting that in February 1986, the Commission recognised that certain priests desired greater clarity on the norm on fasting and abstinence. Consequently, the Commission proposed a reformulation of the norm to the Bishops, who concurred with the suggestion and resubmitted it to the Holy See to replace the existing regulation.⁵⁷ The new norm on fasting and abstinence was enacted in the fourth set of particular laws, as elaborated below.

The Second Set: On Marriage

The second set of particular laws pertained to Marriage. It served two objectives: to regulate the preparation and celebration of marriages in Malta and Gozo and to establish rules for marriages between a Catholic party and a non-Catholic party. This set comprised a total of 56 norms and seven forms as appendices to the same norms, addressing the betrothal (can. 1062 §1), the preliminary meeting of those to be married with their respective priest, their examination, and the marriage banns (can. 1067), the minimum age for the lawful celebration of Marriage (can. 1083 §2), and mixed marriages (cann. 1126 and 1127 §2). The second set of laws received the recognition of the Holy See on 28 October 1985 and 19 April 1986, and was promulgated on 1 July 1986 in the second volume of the Acts of the Maltese Episcopal Conference. These laws took effect two months later, on 1 September 1986.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See the Minutes of 22 February 1986, n.317.

⁵⁸ See Ġużeppe Mercieca, "Digriet," 13 June 1986, in *Konferenza Episkopali Maltija, Atti tal-Konferenza Episkopali Maltija*, vol. II (Malta, 1986), 3.

The Third and Fourth Sets of Laws

Like the first, the third set of particular legislation encompassed various topics. These laws received recognition from the Holy See on 21 February 1987, and were promulgated on 1 January 1988 in the third volume of the Acts of the Maltese Episcopal Conference. They took effect a month later, on 1 February 1988.⁵⁹

Some of the norms in this set were pastoral, while others were administrative: eight on the use of means of social communication and the participation of clerics and religious in radio and television programmes (cann. 772 §2 and 831 §2), five on acts of administration (cann. 1277, 1292 §1, and 1297), seven on the reform of the benefices system (can. 1272), six on the catechumenate and baptism of adults and nine, as an appendix, on the preparation of baptised individuals to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church (cann. 788 §3 and 851), four on the administration of Baptism (can. 854), seven on the postponement of infant Baptism (can. 868 §1, 2), and one on the appointment of parish priests (can. 522). The third volume of the Acts of the Maltese Episcopal Conference also featured six directives issued by the National Liturgical Commission as a follow-up to the norms promulgated by the MEC on the administration of Baptism, specifically baptism by immersion.

The fourth set of particular laws received recognition from the Holy See on 21 March 1988 and was promulgated in the fourth volume of the Acts of the Maltese Episcopal Conference.⁶⁰ It included eighteen norms regarding the permanent diaconate (cann. 236, 276 §2, and 281), one on the interstice between the institution of the lectorate and the acolytate (can. 1035 §1), four on preaching by the laity (can. 766) and nine on how the faithful are to give their support to the Church (cann. 1262 and 1265 §2). Another two norms on fasting and abstinence (cann. 1251 and 1253) replaced the original norm on fasting and abstinence from the first set.

Drafts that Were Used Later

As previously mentioned, certain norms drafted by the Commission were not encompassed within the four sets of particular law. For example, the norms developed for the Charter of Priestly Formation in terms of the requirement of

⁵⁹ See Ġużeppi Mercieca, “Digriet,” 28 November 1987, in *Konferenza Episkopali Maltija, Atti tal-Konferenza Episkopali Maltija*, vol. III (Malta, 1988), 3.

⁶⁰ See Ġużeppi Mercieca, “Digriet,” 27 September 1988, in *Konferenza Episkopali Maltija, Atti tal-Konferenza Episkopali Maltija*, vol. IV (Malta, 1988), 3.

canon 242 of the new Code were subsequently incorporated into the 'Major Seminary Guidelines and Regulations' issued in August 1990 for the Archbishop's Seminary in Malta. The Commission diligently deliberated on these norms over approximately forty meetings from December 1985 to May 1987.

The norms concerning the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were likewise not promulgated by the MEC but were left to the discretion of each diocesan bishop. Archbishop Mercieca promulgated these norms for the Archdiocese of Malta on 26 October 1988 after conducting additional consultations with the Presbyteral Council and the Pastoral Council and engaging in discussions with parish priests, priests, and parish councils.⁶¹

Conversely, in October 1987, the members of the Commission noted that official discussions had commenced between the Government of Malta and the Church in Malta regarding Christian education in primary and secondary schools. As a result, they chose to suspend their ongoing work in drafting a set of specific norms in terms of canon 804 §1 and instead prepared and presented a set of general principles and guidelines for the consideration of the MEC. These guidelines would later serve as a valuable reference for the Bishops in formulating norms adapted to the specific circumstances.⁶²

Absence of Lay Persons and Women Religious

Notwithstanding this extensive work, one noticeable limitation of the Commission's operations was the lack of involvement of lay persons and women in religious orders. The Commission itself did not include any lay person or women belonging to religious orders. Besides, it appears that lay persons and female religious persons participated in consultations only when certain norms, such as those related to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, were discussed within the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

On one hand, the absence of lay persons and female religious persons is not entirely surprising. Indeed, at the time, members of the clergy and male religious still led the diocesan secretariats. Additionally, the norms discussed within the Commission pertained to matters still considered primarily within the purview

⁶¹ See Ġużeppi Mercieca, "Digriet tal-Arcisqof u Normi dwar il-Ministri Straordinarji tat-Tqarbin," 26 October 1988, *Bullettin tal-Arcidjoċesi u Liturġija tal-Kelma* 60 (1988): 96–98.

⁶² See the Minutes of 17 October 1987, n.448. Subsequently, discussions between the Government of Malta and the Church in Malta concerning Christian education in State schools culminated in the signing of an Agreement between the Republic of Malta and the Holy See on 16 November 1989. An Additional Protocol to the Agreement was signed on 18 February 2003. For further details, see *AAS* 90 (1998): 30–41.

of the clergy at that time. To give an example, the first set of particular laws contained a decision regarding canon 1421 §2 of the new Code. The decision stated that the MEC did not currently accept the nomination of lay people as judges in the ecclesiastical tribunals due to the lack of individuals with the necessary qualifications.⁶³ This policy remained unchanged for two decades until 2005, when two women were appointed as the first lay judges in the First Instance of the Metropolitan Tribunal.⁶⁴ However, it is worth noting that the Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese, drafted between 1980 and 1985, nearly concurrently with the work of the Commission, had highlighted the need for four new judges in the First Instance of the Metropolitan Tribunal.⁶⁵ Moreover, the Universal Church had granted the faculty to lay people to serve as ecclesiastical judges as early as 1971.⁶⁶ It is no wonder that while addressing a meeting for the clergy in 1989, Jesuit priest Arthur Vella observed that the model of the Church in Malta was mainly clerical, focusing on the authority of the bishop and priests, to whom lay people were supposed to remain obedient. Vella added that the Maltese laity were kept passive, although lay persons were allowed to help priests or in religious associations.⁶⁷ Similarly, two years later, diocesan priest René Camilleri emphasised that the laity were not valorised by the local Church and that the clergy must learn to look at the Church through the lens of the laity.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the absence of lay persons and female religious persons does indeed come as a surprise. Firstly, the Commission commenced its work almost two decades following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, which brought to light the evolving role and mission of the laity in the Catholic Church.⁶⁹ Moreover, although the leadership of the Church in Malta and Gozo

⁶³ See Konferenza Episkopali Maltija, *Atti tal-Konferenza Episkopali Maltija*, vol. I (Malta, 1985), 5.

⁶⁴ See Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signature, *Decree: Prot. 4865/05 SAT*, 18 March 2005, unpublished. See also Charles Buttigieg, *Ilkoll Ahwa fi Kristu: Ġużepi Mercieca. Memorji* (Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2014), 231.

⁶⁵ See Arcidjoċesi ta' Malta, *Pjan Pastoral 1986-1991* (Malta, 1985), 103.

⁶⁶ See Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Causas Matrimoniales*, 28 March 1971, *AAS* 63 (1971): 441–46, V.

⁶⁷ See Arthur Vella, “Il-Knisja f’Malta dawn l-Ahhar Erbghin Sena,” in Segretarjat għall-Kleru, *Lejn Preżenza Ġdida tal-Knisja fis-Socjetà Maltija. Atti tal-Kors tal-Aġġornament tal-Kleru* (Malta: Edizzjoni Istitut Kattoliku, 1989), 10.

⁶⁸ See René Camilleri, “Il-Knisja: Bejn l-Ideal u r-Realità,” in Kummissjoni Ġustizzja u Paċi, *Malta llum ... u Forsi Ghada: Analizi tar-Realta' Soċjali Maltija* (Malta: 1991), 111.

⁶⁹ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, *AAS* 57 (1965): 5–67; Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November 1965, *AAS* 58 (1966): 837–64. See also Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, *AAS*

primarily consisted of clergy and members of consecrated life, lay people and lay associations had been actively involved in the Church for decades. Various lay individuals participated in different ecclesial councils, such as the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Diocesan Council for the Apostolate of the Laity and the various parish councils, established in Malta in 1966, 1969 and 1974, respectively. Additionally, several laypersons served on the working committee, research board, and feedback commission for the new Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Malta for 1986-1991.⁷⁰ This plan resulted in the establishment of the Secretariat for the Laity on 3 December 1986 and the Forum of the Catholic Associations and Movements of the Laity on 19 February 1988, replacing the Office for the Laity and the Diocesan Council for the Apostolate of the Laity, respectively.⁷¹ In 1990, less than two years after the Commission concluded its work, ten lay men and women addressed the annual diocesan in-service course for priests, which was dedicated solely to the theme of the laity.⁷²

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this matter is that members of the Commission had close connections with the laity and women religious. Frendo, Borg and Attard were religious themselves.⁷³ Additionally, Depasquale, upon completing his studies in Rome, became a leading promoter of the laity within the Archdiocese of Malta, mainly through his collaboration with Rev. Benny Tonna in the Pastoral Research Services. In fact, upon his return to Malta, he assumed the roles of Secretary of the Pastoral Council and Representative of the Archbishop in the Diocesan Council for the Apostolate of the Laity. Depasquale's desire for the Church to give greater importance to the dignity and mission of the laity is evident in a scholarly article he wrote in 1973, where he expressed concern that the 1917 Codex did not adequately recognise this reality. He also

69 (1976): 5–76, n.73. In 1967, on the recommendation of n. 29 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Pope Paul VI instituted the Council of the Laity (see Paul VI, Motu Proprio *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, 6 January 1967, *AAS* 59 (1967): 25–8), which, after 10 years, became the Pontifical Council for the Laity (see Paul VI, Motu Proprio, *Apostolatus Peragendi*, 10 December 1976, *AAS* 68 (1976): 696–700).

⁷⁰ See Arcidjoċesi ta' Malta, *Pjan Pastorali 1986-1991*, 9, 14.

⁷¹ See Ġużeppe Mercieca, "Digriet dwar it-Twaqqif tal-Forum tal-Għaqdiet u l-Movimenti tal-Lajċi," 19 February 1988, *Bullettin tal-Arcidjoċesi u Liturġija tal-Kelma* 58 (1988): 383. The original statutes of the Secretariat and the Forum are found in the same volume, on pages 386–9 and 384–6, respectively.

⁷² See Segretarjat għall-Kleru, *Il-Lajċi fil-Knisja u s-Socjetà Maltija tal-Lum*.

⁷³ See for instance, George Frendo, "Ir-Reliġjużi Quddiem l-Isfidi f'Malta tal-Lum," in Konferenza tas-Superjuri Maġġuri Reliġjużi u Ċentru Istituti Reliġjużi, *L-Isfidi tal-Ħajja Reliġjuża* (Malta: KSMR & CIR, 1993), 5–22. See also, George Frendo, "Sintesi tal-Eżortazzjoni Appostolika 'Christifideles Laici,'" *Knisja2000* 8 (July-August 1989): 15–25.

emphasised this theme in other writings and interviews, along with a speech on the Graduation Day of the Faculty of Theology in December 1983, where he highlighted various aspects of the new Code concerning the laity.⁷⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite this limitation, when considering the comprehensive scope of the Commission's operations, one cannot help but marvel at the remarkable and extensive work undertaken between 1983 and 1988. The members of the Commission diligently prepared norms to address all cases where, under the new Code of Canon Law, episcopal conferences were required to issue particular complementary norms. Moreover, the Commission addressed almost all instances where the episcopal conferences could issue particular norms though they were not bound to do so. Through this effort, the members of the Particular Legislation Commission of the Maltese Episcopal Conference demonstrated unwavering dedication and commitment to its task, exemplifying the ethos of service to the Church in Malta and Gozo.

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⁷⁴ See, for instance, Annetto Depasquale, "Towards a 'New Deal' for the Laity in the Church's Legislation," *Melita Theologica* 25, nos.1-2 (1973): 1-12; "What's New in the New Code of Canon law?" *Bulletin tal-Arcidjoċesi u Liturġija tal-Kelma* 40 (1984): 238-44; "The Learning Church," in Theology Students' Association, *The Dove Homing in the Owl's Nest* (Malta, 1989), 139-145. These articles appear also in Gouder and Schembri, *Annetto Depasquale*, 241-252, 253-262, 263-268.

The 1763 Writings and Drawings of the Shrine of Our Lady of Mellieħa by Padre Pelagio

Padre Pelagio Mifsud Gauci Piscopo (1708-1781), a Capuchin priest and a former diocesan priest from Haż-Żebbuġ, Malta,¹ is remembered for his keen interest in local history,² though few are aware that he was also an art lover as manifested in a number of sketches which he had drawn. Even though these cannot be considered as outstanding works of art, some of these sketches are of great relevance since they are the only extant artistic impressions recorded by this Capuchin friar. These sketches include site plans of different places in Malta and Gozo, a small map of the Maltese islands, portraits, and other drawings illustrating various coats of arms which Padre Pelagio reproduced from various tomb inscriptions.

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¹ See Vincent Borg, *The Maltese Diocese During the Eighteenth Century*. Melita Sacra IV, Part Two (Malta: Metropolitan Cathedral Chapter, 2002), 632-634.

² See Frans Ciappara, *Enlightenment and Reform in Malta 1740-1798* (Malta: Midsea, 2006), 1-20. See also, Martin Micallef, “L-Ghejun Bijografiku u Biblijografiku tas-Seklu 18 dwar Patri Pelagju Mifsud minn Haż-Żebbuġ,” in *Speciosa Città Rohan: Haż-Żebbuġ – aktar fuq ġrajjetu u niesu*, eds Philip Balzan, Evelyn Pullicino, Joseph Ciantar (Malta: Gutenberg Press, 2021), 381-385.

This study deals with Padre Pelagio's writings and artistic impressions related to the shire of Our Lady of Mellieħa. We will dwell on the sketches of this shrine drawn by Padre Pelagio in 1763, with the additional historical information that he furnishes about this holy place of national interest. In doing so, we will highlight Padre Pelagio's great interest in Maltese history and how his writings and drawings depicting various sites in Malta and Gozo, make him stand out as one of the foremost eighteenth century historians of the local scene.

The Sketch of the Mellieħa Shrine

Among Padre Pelagio's sketches are those of the rock-cut church, better known as *trogloidytic* church,³ situated at Mellieħa. This church is famous for its icon depicting Our Lady which according to an ancient legend, was painted by St Luke the Evangelist at the time he was in Malta with St Paul.⁴ In his *Uomini illustri di Malta*, Padre Pelagio himself writes about St Luke as the painter of this holy image.⁵

The friar's sketches of the Mellieħa Shrine are found in two different manuscripts of his. In MCAM, Misc. 56, ff.95r-110r he provides a series of 5 *Notizie* on this place, with an additional number of diagrams of the place. Then, in MCAM, Misc. 54, he inserts a number of other sketches of the same place together with a write-up corresponding to these sketches, as part of the information which he gives about different convents and friaries located in Malta

³ For further studies on these types of churches in Malta see, Aldo Messina, "Trogloditisimo medievale a Malta," *Melita Historica* 10, no.2 (1989): 109-120.

⁴ A number of publications discuss the relationship of St Luke to this holy image. See, for example, Giovanni Francesco Abela, *Della descrizione di Malta isola nel mare siciliano, con le sue antichità ed altre notizie* (Malta: Paolo Bonacota, 1647), 371; Vincenzo Caruana dei Conti Gatto, *Malta artistica illustrata*, Parte 1ma Pittura (Malta: Tipografia della Casa di San Giuseppe, 1905), 8-35. For scientific arguments which counter the idea that this is a first-century icon, see Mario Buhagiar, *The Iconography of the Maltese Islands 1400-1900 – Painting* (Malta: World Confederation of Salesian Past Pupils of Don Bosco – Lions Club Malta, 1987), 10; Vincent Borg, "Harsa ġdida lejn l-ikona tal-Madonna," in *Il-Mellieħa mal-milja taż-żmien*, ed. Joe Catania (Malta: Kunsill Lokali Mellieħa, 2002), 77-78.

⁵ See N[atational] L[ibrary] of M[alta], Libr. MS. 1123, *Uomini Illustri di Malta*, ff.3-5. The original manuscript written in the eighteenth century by an anonymous Capuchin friar was later transcribed by Count Saverio Marchese (1757-1833). A number of entries indicate that the anonymous Capuchin friar was none other than Padre Pelagio. This conclusion is reached by examining and comparing the internal evidence of this manuscript, which includes a number of details about Haż-Żebbuġ, the native town of Padre Pelagio, with similar references in *Componimento Storico*, compiled by the same Capuchin friar.

and Gozo at that time. In this study we will focus on the information found in MCAM, Misc. 54, “Pianta della Capella della Madonna della Mellehha 1763.”⁶

Folio 175v which is divided into two, depicts Padre Pelagio’s sketch of the shrine (right-hand side), while on the other side he uses the same method which he used in other similar sketches, marking with different letters of the alphabet the various locations of the site plan. He starts by the sign of the ‘+’ and then he proceeds to the letter ‘B’ ending with the letter ‘T’, and an additional explanation to each letter.

Corresponding to the mark of the ‘+’ is the site of the main altar which was made up of coloured marble.⁷ Corresponding to the letters ‘BB’ he mentions a pedestal for the columns on which rest the white marble statues representing St Paul the Apostle and St Luke the Evangelist.⁸ Corresponding to the letters ‘CC’ he refers to a passage that joined the sacristy to the chapel.⁹ Corresponding to the letters ‘DDD’ he locates a passage that joined the sacristy to the chapel, which according to Padre Pelagio was hewn in the year 1747 for the occasion of the Consecration of this chapel.¹⁰ Corresponding to the letter ‘E’ we read about one of the chapel’s doors that was made anew.¹¹

Corresponding to the letters ‘FF’ the Capuchin friar then indicates the first arch on the altar, with nine silver sanctuary lamps hanging on this arch.¹² At this point, Padre Pelagio inserts a note corresponding to the letters ‘*FFF’ to mark the remaining old circumference of the cave.¹³ Corresponding to the letter ‘G’ he denotes the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary.¹⁴ Corresponding to the letter ‘H’ he writes a note about another door overlooking the square in front of the chapel, as in the case of letter ‘E.’¹⁵ Corresponding to the letters ‘I I’ he pinpoints

⁶ See M[etropolitan] C[athedral] A[rchives] M[dina], Misc. 54, f.175r.

⁷ “+ Altare con sua nicchia tutto di marmo di vario colore.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

⁸ “BB. Pedicini delle colonne sopra delli q[ual]i posano due statue di marmo bianco rappresentanti S[an] Paolo Ap[osto]lo, e S[an] Luca Evangelista.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

⁹ “CC. Passagio dalla Sacristia alla Capella.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹⁰ “DDD. Andito e passagio dalla Sacristia alla Capella scavato l’an[no] 1747 in occasione della consacraz[i]one della med[esim]a.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹¹ “E. Una delle Porte della Capella novam[ent]e fatte.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹² “FF. Piede del primo arco che forma Presbiterio, e da cui pendono nove lampadari di argento.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹³ “*FFF. Il rimanente della circumfurenza antica della Sac[ra] Grotta.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹⁴ “G. Capellina della Madonna del S[antis]s[imo] Rosario.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹⁵ “H. Altra Porta della Capella riguardante la gran platea come la pred[ett]a E.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

the location where the second arch ended.¹⁶ Corresponding to the letters ‘KK’ Padre Pelagio mentions the place which was reserved for the confessionals.¹⁷ Corresponding to the letters ‘LL’ he points out the two marble inscriptions placed on the same wall, commemorating the Consecration of this chapel.¹⁸

Corresponding to the letter ‘M’ he refers to the door of the sacristy.¹⁹ Corresponding to the letter ‘N’ he refers to a form of an altar on which the priest could put on or take off the sacred vestments before and after Mass.²⁰ Corresponding to the letter ‘O’ Padre Pelagio indicates the place where the priest could prepare himself before celebrating Mass.²¹ Corresponding to the letter ‘P’ Padre Pelagio writes how till recently during his time, there was still a passage located in this place which was close to the other place marked ‘Q.’ Then, he alludes to a room in which the priests could spend time in silence to prepare themselves for Mass. At this point, Padre Pelagio refers to Don Aloysius Gauci²² who had barred this door in order to place a beautiful marble *lavatorio* - a wash-hand basin - in the wall so that the priests could wash their hands before celebrating Mass. In addition, Padre Pelagio comments on the nearby room which served other purposes.²³

Corresponding to the letter ‘R’ we read about the exterior door of the room marked by the letter ‘Q.’²⁴ Corresponding to the letter ‘S’ we learn that in the midst of the two doors and in the midst of the façade overlooking the square, there was a niche with a stone statue representing St Paul the Apostle.²⁵

¹⁶ “*II. Piedi dell’altro arco.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹⁷ “*KK. Luogo adatto agli Confessionali.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹⁸ “*LL. In questo muro di rincontro si vedono attaccate due iscriz[io]ni in marmo esprimenti la memoria della Consacraz[io]ne.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

¹⁹ “*M. Porta della Sacristia.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

²⁰ “*N. Luogo formato a modo di altare ove si vestono e si spogliano li sacerdoti celebranti.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

²¹ “*O. Preparatorio per li sacerdoti celeb[ran]ti.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

²² For biographical details about Don Aloysius Gauci (1698-1765) see Borg, *The Maltese Diocese During the Eighteenth Century*, 2:490.

²³ “*P. Qui poco tempo fa vi era un passaggio per vicina Q. Stanza che serviva di comodo da ritirarsi i R.R. sacerdoti per quietam[ent]e prepararsi alla S[anta] Messa; quale porta il R. Don Aloysio Gauci la chiuse, e dentro il muro formò un galantino lavatorio di marmo; e la vicina stanza la riserbò appartata per altri usi.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

²⁴ “*R. Porta di fuori della stanza Q.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

²⁵ “*S. Qui in mezzo alle due porte evvi in mezzo al frontispizio verso la gran platea una nicchia con dentro una statua di pietra nostrale rappresentante l’Apost[o]lo San Paolo.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

Corresponding to the letters ‘T T’ we read about the church’s belfry in the form of a tower, whose door is marked by the letter ‘T’.²⁶

A 1760 Description of the Mellicha Shrine

Once Padre Pelagio finishes off with the plan of this chapel, he proceeds to the next folio to furnish a detailed description of the items found in this holy place, together with those of its sacristy and a cave beneath it. The information that he provides here dates to 1760, the year when Padre Pelagio was writing.²⁷

He describes the main altar of the chapel as one covered with colourful marble and beautifully decorated.²⁸ It is here that the image of the Blessed Virgin, under the title of the Nativity of our Lady, is venerated. This image, painted in oil on red brass, depicted Our Lady holding the Child Jesus in her right hand. According to Padre Pelagio, this painting was of the same size of a niche enriched by other golden and silver ornaments, together with other precious gifts.²⁹

He adds that behind it, in the rear of the niche hewn in the rock, there was the icon painted by the glorious St Luke the Evangelist. It represented an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, painted in Greek style. Underneath, written in Latin, there was a devout prayer addressed to the Blessed Virgin, in praise to her Nativity, who according to the Capuchin friar, it was mistakenly believed to have been written by St Augustine. This prayer translated into Latin and written in golden letters upon the paint, lay underneath the image of the Virgin on a white marble. The inscription stated: “Let us celebrate the birth of the Blessed Mary so that she herself may intercede on our behalf to Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the year of the Lord 320.” This prayer was put in place in 1744 with great piety in the presence of many testimonies.³⁰

²⁶ “TT. Torre, ò sia Campanile della Chiesa con sua T Porta.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175r.

²⁷ “Descrizione distinta e minuta di tutto quanto contiensi in questa Santa Cappella, nella Sacristia, e nella Grotta sotteranea, quale si trova nel presente stato del 1760.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v.

²⁸ “La macchina dell’altare maggiore è tutta di marmo di diversi colori assai galantam[ente] artificciata, e vistosa.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v.

²⁹ “Ivi per tutelare si venera la B[eatissima] Vergine sotto tit[olo] della Lei Gloriosa Natività, dipinta ad oglio col S[anto] Bambino in braccio destro, sopra lamina di rame rosso della grandezza tutta della nicchia delineata fornita di lamine d’argento e di altri adornamenti di oro e di argento, e di altri preziosi donativi.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v.

³⁰ “Dietro a questa nel fondo della nicchia scavata nella rocca viva, si conserva dipinta dentro una nicchia scavata nella rocca viva intonicata dal Glorioso S[an] Luca Evangelista l’effigie della med[esima] B[eatissima] Vergine Maria delineata alla Greca; con al di sotto scritta in Idioma Latino una divota Orazione diretta ad essa B[eatissima] V[ergine] in lode della sua Natività

Next to this icon and inscription fixed on the wall, Padre Pelagio mentions two coats of arms. The coat of arms on the right-hand side belonged to the Bishop of Malta, Fra D. Bartolomeo Rull, while the one on the left belonged to the Inquisitor and Apostolic Delegate, Mgr D. Gregorio Salviati.³¹ Above the mentioned icon, newly framed in white marble, there were three engraved Greek letters, which Padre Pelagio notes were written differently in the writings of Count Abela.³²

On either side of the altar, the Capuchin friar writes that there were two pedestals on which two statues were venerated and wrought in white marble, of very fine workmanship. The one on the right, represented St Paul the Apostle, with an inscription beneath it, stating that it was made by the Venerable Bailiff Fra Don Ferdinandus Correa in 1733. The statue on the left-hand side represented St Luke the Evangelist, with a 1753-inscription beneath it, recalling the Benedictine Nuns of the City of Notabile and other pious persons who had undertaken to have this statue made in the year 1753.³³

creduta per errore composta già, e formata dal S[anto] Padre e gran Dottore S[an] Agostino; quale Orazione fù trasportata all'Idioma Latino, e scritta parimente sopra l'intonicato a caratteri dorati col mordente, come si vede sotto la Madonna ed trasposta in una tavola di marmo bianco, e si ammira posta sotto il quadro esteriore in piano della nicchia, ed è dal tenore qual siegue =

NATIVITATEM B. MARIAE CELEBREMUS, UT [...] PRO NOBIS INTERCEDAT AD DO[...]M JESUM CHRISTUM: A[...]NO DNI. CCCXX.

Il trasporto seguì nel 1744 con tutta fedeltà avanti testimoni." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v. In expanded form, the above inscription would read: NATIVITATEM B[EATAE] MARIAE CELEBREMUS, UT [IPSA] PRO NOBIS INTERCEDAT AD DO[MINU]M JESUM CHRISTUM: A[N]NO D[OMI]NI CCCXX.

³¹ "Accanto della quale Tavola ed Iscrizione alla destra si vede attaccata l'arma gentilizia del moderno Vescovo di Malta Fra D. Bartolo[meo] Rull ed alla sinistra quella di Monsig[nor] Inq[uisito]re e Delagato Apost[oli]co D. Gregorio Salviati." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v.

³² "Sopra il d[ett]o Quadro e sua rinovata sua cornice in cartello di marmo bianco si vedono oggidì segnate in Greco queste tre lettere ò Zifre =

MP	AMV	QU
<i>MHTHP</i>	<i>AVE MARIA VIRGO</i>	<i>QEYOY</i>

che il Command[atore] Abela lib.3. not.4, p.371 la riporta così =

MP QU - *mitir Theu.*" MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v.

³³ "Alli lati dell'altare sorgono uno per parte due piedistalli sopra delli quali si veneravano alzate due statue di marmo bianco di assai gentile lavoro: una alla destra rappresentante l'Apost[ol]o S[an] Paolo con al di sotto questa iscrizione =

VEN[ERABILIS] BAIVLIVVS F[RATER] D[OMINUS] FERDINANDVS CORREA FIERI FECIT AN[NO] D[OMI]NI 1733.

L'altra alla sinistra rappresentante l'Evangelista S[an] Luca con al di sotto la memoria qual siegue =

At this point, Padre Pelagio repeats the same mistaken information recorded by his ancestors, namely, that this place had been consecrated by a number of bishops who on their way to Africa to convene an Ecumenical Council, stopped at this sacred shrine in Malta.³⁴ The Capuchin friar notes that this event was marked by a number of paintings on the rocky walls which were still visible during his life, and are also mentioned by the Maltese historian, Abela.³⁵

Padre Pelagio then testifies that the Maltese people had since time immemorial shown devotion to this shrine, and due to this great manifestation of piety, Bishop Alpheran saw it fit to have this holy place consecrated. This event was held with great solemnity on 22nd May 1747 in the presence of countless people. This is attested by an inscription engraved on the front of the main altar, stating that during the rite of consecration, the bishop placed the relics of the martyrs Saints Boniface, Pius, Victoria and Candida in the altar.³⁶

Facing the main altar, placed against the wall, and corresponding to the bell-tower, Padre Pelagio describes two marble inscriptions, above which lay the coat of arms of the same bishop, Alpheran de Bussan sculpted in marble. In the right-hand inscription one reads: “The effigy of the Mother of God having been painted by St Luke, our ancestors have thrice embellished this naturally excavated cave under its glorious title. Thus enriched, thus protected, and

MONIALES S. BENEDICTI CIVITATIS NOTABILIS ET ALIAE PERSONAE PIAE F[IERI] C[VRA]VERVNT ANNO 1753.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.175v.

³⁴ On this tradition see, Carlo Cortis, *Is-Santwarju u il-Madonna tal-Mellieħa. Miġjub bil-Malti minn Dun Ġużepp Farrugia*. It-Tieni Edizzjoni (Malta: G. Muscat, 1923), 8; Ġanni Mifsud, *Il-Madonna tal-Mellieħa* (Malta: Parroċċa Mellieħa, 1987), 17-18. For counter-arguments calling this tradition as ‘legendary’ see, Stanley Fiorini, “Il-Parroċċa tal-Mellieħa fil-Medju Evu,” in *Il-Mellieħa mal-milja taż-żmien*, 2:36.

³⁵ “Che questa Ven[eranda] Cappella, e divotiss[imo] Santuario sia stato altre volte consacrato, e che in essa si tenne una Con[gregazio]ne Conciliare ed Ecumenica di molti SS. PP. Cattolici, unitam[ente] alle rispettive vestigia che tuttavia si venerano nella rocca viva sopra l’intonicato, corse in tutt’i secoli passati e persevera sino a tempi nostri costante Tradizione, al intorno a questo fa parola il Com[mendatore] Abela nella sua *Malta Il[ustrata]*, lib. 3 not. 4, pag. 372.” MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.175v- 176r.

³⁶ “In sequela di tanti monumenti di cristiana pietà dei Maltesi in ogni tempo rimostrati verso questo Santuario, in pegno dell’ardente sua divozione, ed a fine di vieppiù accrescere la venerazione l’Ill[ustriss]imus et Rev[erendissimus] Mons[ignor] Vescovo di f.r. Fra Paolo Alferan de Bussan, Arciv[escovo] di Damiatia l’Anno 1747 con sollenissima pompa e concorso di gente senza numero attese tutto giulivo a consacrarlo e di ciò vi è uno attestato inciso nel frontispizio attorno la sacrata Mensa di d[ett]o Altare Maggiore, ed è del tenore seguente = Ill[ustrissimus] et Rev[erendissimus] D[omi]nus Fr. D. Paulus Alpheran de Bussan Archiep[iscopu]s Damiatiae Ep[iscopu]s Meliten[sis] die 22 Maij An[no] 1747 solleniter consecravit hoc altare, in quo posuit Reliq[uias] SS. Bonifacij, Pij, Victoriae, Candide Martyrum.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176r.

afterwards made illustrious by its traditions, their descendants, earnestly striving, famously rendered this shrine into a temple and by the kindness of the Ever Virgin, this monument, thriving for the past seventeen centuries through the greatest piety of those who congregated here, has been preserved and they have made its veneration everlasting.”³⁷

The inscription located on the left, recalls the memory of the Consecration of this church, stating: “This Sanctuary, worthy of worship by so many memorable events, adding a new reason for its veneration, the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord Fra Paolo Alpheran, Archbishop of Damiatia and Bishop of Malta, has consecrated with solemn rite on the 22nd day of May in the year 1747, whose remembrance every year he ordered to be held on the 7th day of September and by Apostolic Authority he marked it out perpetually with a plenary indulgence.”³⁸ Padre Pelagio adds that around the chapel, on its rocky walls, one could still see the paintings representing the Melevitan Council of

³⁷ “Di rimpetto all’Altare Maggiore in dorso del muro, che corrisponde al Campanile, attaccati si vedono due cartelli di marmo sovra delli quali parim[ent]e allogata vi stà in marmo l’Arma Gentilizia dello stesso Vescovo Alferan in un delli due cartelli alla destra si legge inciso come segue =

SPECUM INCAVTE EFFOSSUM
D. LUCAS EFFIGIE DIEIPARAE DEPICTA
MAIORES TER GLORIOSO EIUS NOMINE CONDECORARUNT:
SIC DITATAM, SIC MUNITAM, DEIN ILLUSTRATAM TRADITIONIBUS
AEDICULAM, POSTERITAS AEMULA IN AEDEM CONCINNAVIT:
SED PERENNIS VIRGINIS BENEFICENTIA, MONUMENTUM SERVATUM
CONFLUENTIUM SUMMA PIETAS POST XVII SAECULA EXCRESCENS
EIUS VENERATIONEM AETERNARVNT.”

MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176r.

³⁸ “Nel cartello della parte sinistra si legge memoria della riferita Consagrazione corrispondente alla preaccennata ed è di questo tenore =

SANCTUARIUM HOC
TOT MEMORABILIBUS MONUMENTIS VENERABILE
NOVUM VENERATIONIS ARGUMENTUM ADIICIENS
ILL. ET REV. D. F. PAULUS ALPHERAN ARCHIEP. DAMIAT. EPUS MELIT.
SOLEMNI RITU CONSECRAVIT XI KAL. IUNIJ ANNO MDCCXLVII.
CUIUS MEMORIAM QUOTANNIS RECOLENDAM
PRAESCRIPTIT DIE VII SEPTEMB. ET DE APOSTOL. AUCTORIT.
INDULGEN. PLENARIA IN PERPETUUM INSIGNIVIT.”

MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.176r-176v.

Bishops, together with some painted crosses recalling the first consecration of this chapel by these bishops.³⁹

Here, the Capuchin friar includes a number of references to his first site-plan of the shrine by the use of some letters of the alphabet, by which he indicates particular sites in this holy place. He writes that on the left-hand side of the main altar there was a door marked by the letters 'CC' indicating a passage that leads from the sacristy to the chapel.⁴⁰ On the right-hand side, he mentions a door, marked by the letter 'F' which gives light to the chapel.⁴¹ He then turns to an arch neatly hewn in the rock, from which hang nine silver sanctuary lamps, and which were always lit before the image of the Virgin Mary. On the right-hand side of the arch, he mentions another small door, marked by the letter 'D'.⁴² Here the author is repeated in other words what he had already said on f.175r.

Immediately, beside this door, there was an altar dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary with a painting reproduced in oil by a gifted artist. At the rear of this same painting, Padre Pelagio notes the coat of arms of the Benefactor.⁴³

He also reproduced a sketch of this coat of arms divided into three sections. On the upper part there is the Cross, indicating that the benefactor might have been one of the Knights of Malta. The lower part is an empty semi-circular form. The centre part depicts a griffon and appears as part (quarters 2 and 3) of the Castelletti emblem, referring to the female side of the family.⁴⁴ This may indicate that the benefactor of this painting is a member of the Castelletti family with some connection with the Order of St John.

³⁹ "D'intorno la Capella nel muro della rocca viva, come si disse, tutta via si ravvisano in buon essere le pitture rappresentanti i Padri del Concilio Melevitano, ed alcune Croci parim[ent]e dipinti indicanti la rispettiva primiera Consagrazione." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

⁴⁰ "Alla mano sinistra accanto l'altare maggiore vi è la porta CC. dell'andito, ò sia passaggio dalla Sacristia alla Cappella." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

⁴¹ "Alla mano destra evvi la Porta F. che rende la Cappella assai illuminata e vaga." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

⁴² "Immediatam[ent]e succede un arco pur di rocca viva, ma positam[ent]e arteficiato da cui nel mezzo pendono nove lampadari di argento che di continuo ardono in onore della B[eatissi]ma Vergine. Appresso il zoccolo del d[etto] arco alla sinistra vi è l'altra Porticella D." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

⁴³ "Ed immediatam[ent]e un'altare dedicato alla stessa B[eatissi]ma Vergine sotto titolo del Rosario, dipinta ad oglio di buona mano, e nel fondo di esso quadro si ravvisa dipinta l'Arma Gentilizia del Benefattore." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

⁴⁴ See Charles A. Gauci, *The Genealogy and Heraldry of the Noble Families of Malta*, 2 vols. (Malta: Gulf, 1981; PEG, 1992), I:272. "Castelletti: Quarterly, first and fourth: Gu a castle of three towers Or. second and third: Az a griffon sergeant Arg. Worth noting is that both the Inguanez and the Castelletti were Barons of *Dejr il-Bniet* (together with Apap-Bologna-

Bernardine Scicluna, in her MA dissertation includes a footnote on this coat of arms stating: “In AAF VP Buenos (1667 - 1668), Volume XX, f. 757v, one reads that the Rosary altar was founded a few years before 1668. The coat-of-arms of the benefactor, who was a member of the Order, appears at the bottom right-hand corner of this altarpiece, which, according to ACM Misc. 56 *Notizie Miscellaneae*, f. 109r, belongs to a certain ‘*Sig. Don Ignazio Enguanes*.’”⁴⁵

On the other hand, Padre Pelagio informs the readers that for the benefit of all those who recite the rosary in front of the image of the Holy Virgin, His Excellency Don Ignatius Inguanes, under the date 7th June 1669, procured the granting of the indulgence through Mgr Pietro Maria Passionei, Procurator and General Vicar of his Order, who happened to be in Rome. With regards to this Indulgence, Padre Pelagio states that there was a memorial hanging on a wall granting the permission to erect a confraternity of the Holy Rosary on the said altar.⁴⁶

The Capuchin friar then refers to another arch, similar to the previous one, under which there were two confessionals, one bearing the coat of arms of Bishop Gori Mancini, and the other the coat of arms of the reigning bishop Mgr Rull. In addition, he writes that on the back wall, there were two inscriptions, and how one can exit from this place to the square through a door marked by the letter ‘H.’⁴⁷

Looking up to the main altar, towards the middle of the arch, Padre Pelagio records a wooden inscription placed over the sanctuary lamps. The wording of the inscription, on oil painting, stated:

Sceberras and D’Amico, as appears in the coat-of-arms of the barony (Gauci, Vol.II, pp. 3-4). The Inguanes emblem is: Gules tree pallets wavy Or.” The author is grateful to Prof. Stanley Fiorini for providing him with this information.

⁴⁵ Bernardine Scicluna, *A Stylistic Analysis of Stefano Erardi’s Painting*. A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of Arts in the University of Malta, October 1997, p.185, no.344.

⁴⁶ “A beneficio sp[ettan]te di chiunque reciti tutta la corona del Rosario ad onore di Maria S[antis]sima l’Ill[ustriss]imo Sig[nor] D[on] Ignazio Inguanes, sotto li 7 Giugno 1669 ottenne Indulgenza dal R[everendiss]imo Pr[ocurator]e G[eneral]e delli Domenicani il P[ad]re Pietro Maria Passionei Procuratore e Vicar[i]o G[enera]le del suo Ordine, e di ciò tuttavia conservasi appesa nel muro memoria autentica. (*il q[ua]le trovandosi in Roma ottenne Indulto che in d[ett]o altare si potesse erigere una Conf[raterni]tà del Rosario).” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

⁴⁷ “Succede n’altro arco simile al prede[tt]o entro il cui vano ve ne sono allagate due sede confessionali uno coll’Arma del Vescovo Gori Mancini, l’altro coll’Arma del regnante Monsig[nor] Rull, e nel muro dorsale le sovrannotate due Cartelli colle rispettive Iscrizioni; ed appiè ed accanto di questo arco verso la Platea si esce fuori per l’altra Porta H.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.176v.

Ancient tradition and monuments bear witness that formerly, very many bishops, while speaking against Pelagius, had consecrated this chapel of the Blessed Mary of Mellicha in the year of the Lord 409. Famous historians say that this same Council, commenced under the most blessed Popes Sylvanus and Augustinus, the enemy of Grace, was condemned.

The ancient awe of this temple terrifies the Turks and entices the faithful, and an abundance of new graces are obtained. O faithful reader, worship the honey-flowing Mother and you shall be awash with grace from a copious fountain. (This ancient inscription was related in the acts of Bishop Michele Balaguer, 1644).⁴⁸

Then, on the next folio, Padre Pelagio refers to another door situated on the right-hand side and marked by the letter 'D', through which one could enter into the sacristy from a new passage hewn in the rocks. Immediately after these details, the Capuchin friar describes the items that adorned the sacristy of this shrine. First, he mentions a *Cassarizzo*, that is, a form of a wooden case for church's vestments, situated on the right-hand side, in the form of an altar table with a

⁴⁸ "Di quindi rivolgendo l'occhio verso l'Altare Maggiore, e guardando in sù verso la metà dell'Arco maestro in un cartello di legno che vi stà attaccato e sovrasta alli lampadari si legge scritto ad oglio la memoria del tenore seguente =

CAPPELLAM B. MARIAE DE MELLEHA
 PLURIMOS EPISCOPOS CONTRA PELAGIUM
 SUPRA APPELLANTES ANNO DOMINI 409 CONSECRASSE
 VETUS TRADITIO, ET MONUMENTA TESTANTUR
 IN EODEM CONCILIO INITO SUB SYLVANO
 ET *AUGUSTINO* SANCTISSIMIS PONT[IFICIBUS]
 INIMICUM GRATIAE FUISSE CONDEMNATUM
 AIUNT HIST[ORICI] *NON IGNOBILES.*
 TURCAS TERRET, FIDELES ALLICIT
 PRISCA TEMPLI REVERENTIA,
 ET REGENTIUM COPIA GRATIARUM *SEQUUNTUR*
 MELLIFLUAM LECTOR MATREM DEVOTUS ADORA,
 ET TIBI DE PLANO GRATIA FONTE PLUET
 (*INSCRIPTIO ANTIQUA IN ACT. EP. MICH. BALAGUER*
1644 COMMÉMORATA)."

MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.176v-177r. Words in italics were omitted by Padre Pelagio; supplied from the Acts of Bishop Balaguer 1644 to which the inscription particularly refers. See AAM, VP 15 (Balaguer), f.290. The whole inscription must have been copied from an ancient inscription and then recorded in the pastoral visit of Bishop Balaguer done on the 18th November 1644. Today the inscription has been replaced by a modern tablet which contains that inscription described in Balaguer's Pastoral Visit of 1644. It seems that in order to give it authenticity and strengthen its source, the reference to the pastoral visit was added to the inscription. Probably the ancient one was no longer completely legible.

platform.⁴⁹ Above the back-wall, there was a niche in which a statue representing the Holy Virgin with the Child Jesus in her right arm was venerated. This stone statue was seven palms high,⁵⁰ bearing an inscription recalling how it was donated by Wolfgang Philip Guttenberg in the year “17-04.” In between the numbers of this date, Padre Pelagio sketches the coat-of arms of this benefactor.⁵¹

Walking towards the right-hand side of that same wall, the Capuchin friar refers to another door which originally led to a small room for the use of the priests to prepare themselves before celebrating Mass. In this room there was a simple marble water basin. From here, Padre Pelagio writes how one could walk towards a door of this sacristy, marked by the letter ‘M,’ leading to the outer square.⁵² On the right-hand side of this door, there was a small door marked by number ‘1’ leading to a room marked by the letter ‘Q,’ which was once used by priests to prepare themselves before Mass. According to Padre Pelagio, this place was destined for other uses by the recent Procurators of the Sanctuary.⁵³ Next to this room, on a higher level, there was a hole from which the pilgrims who visited this holy place, could fetch water from a common well. They used to do so nearly every day, as a means of devotion towards this sanctuary.⁵⁴

The Exterior of the Mellieħa Shrine

Padre Pelagio mentions how on the right-hand side of the aforementioned door marked by number 1’ there was an arch built during the time of Bishop Fra

⁴⁹ “Piegando da quindi il pie alla destra, per la Porta *D* si entra per un andito nuovam[ent]e scavato nella rocca viva nella Sacristia, ove a primo giungersi di fianco destro si tocca un Cassarizzo formato a modo di mensa di altare con sua bradella ò sia pedana e serve per comodo da riporvi dentro, ed esporvisi sopra gli utensili sagri da dire la santa messa.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177r.

⁵⁰ One palm (Maltese *xiber*) is equivalent to 10.3 inches or 0.26 metres.

⁵¹ “Al di sopra in dorso del muro in una nicchia si venera una statua di pietra nostra rappresentante la B[eatissi]ma Vergine col S[anto] Bambino allo braccio destro, alta settipalmare, e nel seguente tenore = *F. Wolfgangus Filippus L.B.D. de A. Guttemberg S.Io. Hier. Bajulius Brandeburgensis Germaniae Anno reparatae salutis 17.. 04 =.*” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177r.

⁵² “Volgendo il camino per il destro fianco in quel muro entro il vano di certa porta (che altre volte comunicava con un Camerino formato per Preparatorio appartato per li Sacerdoti) si vede formato un semplice Lavatorio di marmo. Appresso si volti il passo per la Porta *M.* di essa Sacristia, e riesce alla gran Platea.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177r.

⁵³ “Alla destra di questa porta uscendo a mano destra a cui la Porticella *I.* della Stanza *Q.* altre volte destinata per Preparatorio dei R[everendi] Sacerdoti, ma dalli moderni Procuratori riserbata, e destinata per altri usi e commodi loro proprij.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177r.

⁵⁴ “Appresso a questa più in sopra evvi il buco, ò sia comodo da tirare l’acqua dal pozzo commune per uso di quanti vi concorro, quasi giornalm[ent]e, per divozione del Santuario.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177r.

Davide Cocco Palmieri, on which one could still see his coat of arms. On the right-hand side of the same wall or on the exterior frontispiece of the chapel, one could appreciate the beautiful symmetrical architecture made up of two doors marked by the letters 'E' and 'H.' In between these doors there was a beautiful and fine façade, built and paid for during the reign of Grandmaster Antonio Manoel de Vilhena and Bishop, Fra Paolo Alpheran, with their respective coats of arms showing. In between, there was a niche with a stone statue of St Paul the Apostle.⁵⁵

Padre Pelagio then informs the reader that besides the door of the church, marked by the letter 'H' there was a tower, better known as a belfry, built during the same period, with three bells. The largest one was donated by the aforementioned bishop Alpheran in the year 1733. The smallest one was donated by a benefactor in the year 1755. An engraving on the bell stated that it was donated to Our Lady in that year 1755 by Francesco Spagnolo, of Maltese nationality. The middle one was donated by the contemporary Grandmaster, Emmanuel Pinto in 1759.⁵⁶

At this point of his writing, Padre Pelagio inserts a rather long note marked by the symbol #, written on another smaller folio inserted on the other side of f. 177v. Due to the sequence of thought it would be profitable if we refer to this note later on.

The Capuchin friar then testifies that close to the belfry, there was a covered lodge for the use of the pilgrims. There was also a niche in which a sculpted statue representing Our Lady was venerated. This statue was commissioned by

⁵⁵ "Alla sinistra parte della d[ett]a Porta, che fù fabbricata al tempo di Monsig[nor] Vescovo Fra Davide Cocco Palmieri, di cui pertanto al di sopra l'arco si ravvisano l'Armi Gentilizie del Med[esim]o, alla parte destra dell'istesso muro, ò sia frontispizio del vano della Cappella si vedono in concertata simetria d'architettura al di fuori formata le due Porte *E* et *H* con in mezzo una galantina prospettiva, e finimento, fatti fabbricati a tempo ed a spese della divozione del Sereniss[im]o Principe Frà D. Antonio Manoel, e del religiosissimo Vescovo inanzidetto Frà D. Paolo Alpheran, di caduno delli quali a quest'effetto si ravvisano le Armi Gentilize, con in mezzo entro una Nicchia una Statua di pietra nostrale rappresentante l'Appostolo S. Paolo." MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.177r-v.

⁵⁶ "Appresso alla Porta della Chiesa *H*. immediatam[ent]e siegue congiunta la Torre, ò sia Campanile fabbricato nello stesso tempo ove si ammirano tre Campane, la più grande donata dal de[tt]o Monsignor Vescovo Alferan l'Anno 1733. La più piccola è dono di un benefattore seguito l'Anno 1755 in cui evvi scritto così = 1755. Francesco Spagnolo di nazione Maltese la diede alla Madonna = La Mezzana è dono del regnante Sereniss[im]o Principe Frà D. Emmanuele Pinto nel 1759." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177v.

the famous Guttenberg.⁵⁷ Subsequently, on the other part of the open space, facing towards the East, Padre Pelagio refers to a number of rooms built to house freely those families who went there, with an additional residence for the priest who lived there as a Chaplain and Confessor.⁵⁸ On the other corner of the open space overlooking the South, there was nothing else to add, if not a plain wall, with a common door guarded by a heavy wooden gate, while in the middle of the open space there was a water fountain.⁵⁹

This information then continues on f.185r where Padre Pelagio refers to the water of this fountain that reached through hidden canals from a cistern situated above the hill overlooking the Sanctuary, and where the rain water was collected.⁶⁰ Surmounting the fountain there was a stone statue of Our Lady with the Child Jesus in her arms. The statue was made during the same time when the frontispiece of the shrine was built. Padre Pelagio adds that the first-time that water gushed out from this fountain was on the occasion when Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena, after ordering works on the road leading to the Sanctuary making it suitable for carriages to travel along, brought precious gifts in the year “17 ... [omissis].”⁶¹ In the open space, Padre Pelagio notes how one could enjoy the shade of the many trees planted there which rendered the place rather pleasant and delightful.⁶²

⁵⁷ “Attaccato al Campanile si vede un Loggiato coperto per comodo uso dei concorrenti, e quivi sotto il d[ett]o ripostimento in una Nicchia si venera una statua della Madonna fatta scolpire, ed espostavi dal prelodato Guttenberg.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177v.

⁵⁸ “Successivam[ent]e nell’altro quarto della Platea verso Levante evvi una tirosa di stanze fabbricatevi per comodo e gratuito uso delle famiglie di riguardo che concorro, e per abitazione ordinaria del R[everendo] Sacerdote, che ivi indispensabilm[ent]e risiede in grado di Capellano e Penitenziario.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177v.

⁵⁹ “Nell’altro angolo della Platea che riguarda a mezzodi non vi è altro di presente, se non semplice muro, colla Porta commune fornita di forte Grate di legno. In mezzo alla Platea si gode alzata una Vasca con suo finimento a modo di fontana, che sponde dell’acqua a placito di chi.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.177v.

⁶⁰ “[che sponde dell’acqua a placito di chi] tiene la cava, a l’acqua proviene per via di canali occulti derivata da una Gebia, ò sia conserva d’acqua piovosa a tall’effetto scavata sopra il poggio, o sia monte, che sovrastra allo Santuario.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185r.

⁶¹ “Fà finimento alla vasca una statuetta della Madonna col S[anto] Bambino in braccio scolpita in pietra nostrale, artefatta nello stesso tempo, che fù fabbricato il Frontispizio della Cappella, e la p[rim]a volta che si lasciò spandere dell’acqua fù in occasione che il Sereniss[imo] Principe Manoel (fatta accomodare tutta di lungo la strada, e renduta carozabile) vi si portò a venerarla e l’arricchì di molti doni, locche segui l’Anno 17 ... [omissis].” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185r.

⁶² “Per la Platea si gode l’ombra di diversi alberi a tall’effetto ivi piantati, che rendono il luogo assai ameno e delizioso.” MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185r.

Coming out from the door of the open space and proceeding further on, the Capuchin friar mentions a staircase that descended to a big underground cave, situated between the fountain and the rooms built above. Facing you as soon as you make your way, one can admire a lavabo or trough for running water which flowed continuously from the rocks. Padre Pelagio describes this water as sweet, fresh and light.⁶³

He then states that around this cave, one could see various niches, in each of which in the past there were statues for veneration, made of local stone, seven palms in height, representing various saints. He adds that during his time, due to the negligence of the gentlemen Procurators, one had to put up with the bad behaviour of certain troublesome individuals which led to a state of total disarray and ruin. Padre Pelagio then adds the date when he was visiting this place, namely 29th and 30th August 1763.⁶⁴

The Capuchin friar then acknowledges his custom of searching for some inscriptions that were still legible. He writes how all around this cave several niches could be seen and in each of them, in times gone by, statues representing saints, hewn out of local stone and reaching up to seven palms in height, used to be venerated here.

Owing to the *laissez-faire* attitude of the procurators, these statues fell into a pitiful state of utter dilapidation. He attests that on the 29th and 30th day of August 1763, he found himself among these niches, and was gripped by an ardent curiosity, if he, by chance, could recognise anything about their original condition. Exerting all his knowledge on the subject, he recognized one of these statues, although it was in a horrible state and headless. On its huge pedestal he could make out this inscription: "In Thee, O Lord, I have placed my trust"; a coat of arms was also inscribed followed by some loose letters "DE ... DIT" and the words "D[omino] Joanne Iacobo La Fiol – the latter was the son of Signor Giovanni Fiol, the Secreto of Grandmaster Niccolo Cottoner, the husband of Catarina Calleia. He then refers to the Epitaph of the Fiol family in the Collegiate Church of St Paul at Valletta, in Mifsud Saverio, page 143. He then adds that in

⁶³ "A [prim]o incontro ed in frontispizio si ammira una vasca, ò sia recipiente di acqua corrente che continuo scorre da dentro la viva Rocca, assai dolce fresca, e leggiera." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185r.

⁶⁴ "Attorno a questa Grotta si vedono diverse nicchie, ed in cadauna di esse ne' trasandati tempi si veneravano delle statue sette palmari di pietra nostrale rappresentante diversi Santi. Oggidì per la dissattenzione delli Sig[nor]i Procuratori, supposta la indevozione di alcune persone moleste, che ivi capitino, si deplorano tutte rovvinate, e in gran parte disfatte. Tra queste nel corrente anno 1763, e di 29 e 30 Agosto." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185r.

the midst of the inscription there were the remnants of the benefactor's coat of arms, but they were so worn out by the humidity and the decay, that he could not recognize their details.⁶⁵ At this point, Padre Pelagio sketches a frame for the coat of arms of Fiol, although he left this frame empty, probably because the coat of arms was not legible anymore.

Afterwards, Padre Pelagio acknowledges that he tried to look with the same enthusiasm for some other information regarding the other statues, which were all broken, without a head, and lying on the floor and uncared for. Among these, he managed to find just one, laid in a corner hiding loathsome activities, because it served those who, knowing no fear of God, used it as a place to empty their stomachs. On its pedestal there was written the following inscription: Ioseppe Cilia, with a coat of arms in the middle. Contrary to the previous one, Padre Pelagio manages here to draw the referred coat of arms made up of five crosses: two on the upper part with the other three beneath them. He then states that underneath the coat of arms, there was inscribed the name of St Joseph. He therefore concluded that the dilapidated statue represented precisely this great saint, so badly mistreated.⁶⁶

Padre Pelagio then passes on to recount a number of stories related to this holy place which are known from other sources. Among these he refers to what

⁶⁵ "Ritrovandomi colà mi sono mosso in ardente curiosità in di riconoscere, se per sorte mi fosse riuscito, la qualità, e la condizione di alcuna di quelle, e con tutta l'attenzione adoprato mi è sortito di arrivare a riconoscere una tuttavia riposta nella sua nicchia, non già di quel Santo ella sia, per essere assai maltrattata, e senza capo, pur pure nel piedestallo a gran stento ravvisai che ve ne sia questa Iscrizione =

IN TE DOMINE CONFIDO de <stemma> ...DIT D[OMI]NO JOANNE (questo era Secreto dell' G.M. Frà Nicolò Cottoner, sepolto in S. Paolo della Valletta con epitaffio) Iacobo, La Fiol = In mezzo vi è il vestigio dell'Arma Gentilizia del Benefattore ma più essere sfatta dall'umido, e dalli maltrattamenti, non ho potuto ricavare l'impresa; questo era figlio del Ill. Sig. Gio. Fiol Secreto dell'Emo F. D. Niccolo Cottoner, marito di Catarina Calleia. Vide Epitaphi Familae Fiol in Eccl. Colleg. S. Paoli Valletta, Mifsud Saverio, pag. 143." MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.185r-185v.

⁶⁶ "Con uguale impegno mi sono industriato ricavare qualche altro vestigio nelle statue dell'altra banda, che tutte le deplorai trabalzate a terra, enormemente, sconciate, rotte, tutte senza capo, ed alcune indegnam[ente] non curate; ma frà queste mi riuscì di scoprire una, che stava in un cantone e faceva riparo ad usi li più stromachevoli, perche serviva apunto di riparo a quel tanto li non timorosi di Dio ivi scaricavano le stomaco; ed in rivolendo questo busto per riconoscerlo, mi è sortito di ravvisare nel piedistallo scritto ed inciso come siegue = Ioseppe la Cilia = un' Arma Gentilizia in mezzo: così = e sotto l'Arma, inciso come siegue = *Sancte Ioseph* = donde evidentem[ent]e diducosi che quella è una figura del Patriarca S. Gioseppe; e che un tale e tanto Santo trovasi per dissatten[en]te, in tale guisa non curato, anzi malissimam[en]te, trattato." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185v.

happened in 1614, when sixty Turkish galleys landed in Malta and attacked this shrine, while they also harmed the Icon of Our Lady with strokes of military instruments.⁶⁷ He then refers to a certain benefactor who decorated and rebuilt a beautiful fountain at his own expense.⁶⁸ The Capuchin friar then, mentions how for the same church and with great faith, many islanders have contributed to show their gratitude to Our Lady. Among these he refers to the year 1640 when in the midst of a period of drought, the people prayed for rain. The grace they so ardently prayed for was conceded by the Blessed Virgin Mary. It rained heavily some time after, and on the 1st of May of that year, many people went to venerate Our Lady.⁶⁹ Padre Pelagio follows this story with another one that took place in 1645, during which many people hailing from different towns and villages of Malta went to his holy place by holding a universal procession, similar to that of 1640, begging Our Lady's intercession to free them from the Turkish invasion.⁷⁰

Padre Pelagio also refers to the story of what happened towards the end of the month of September 1600, when one of the Chaplains of the Order of St John went there with all his family. When they drank from the fountain of this holy place, which purportedly out to have produced the most fresh water in Malta, his mother and his two brothers and others died. Many attributed the death to the poor quality of this water.⁷¹

The Plan of the Two Grottos Adjacent to the Shrine and the Northern Flank

At this point we can recall the note that Padre Pelagio inserts as part of his description of the Mellieħa Religious complex. This note is marked by the # symbol. It is written on both sides on a smaller folio and inserted on the other side of f.177v. On the front page, top right-hand, there is the enumeration "178." On the back page – without any enumeration (for the sake of clarity, we will refer to the back page as 178v) – Padre Pelagio furnishes another plan related to this holy site.

This second sketch consists of a plan of the two grottos adjacent to the Mellieħa Shrine, and its northern flank. In this plan, Padre Pelagio once again uses a number of letters taken from the alphabet – namely, from 'A' to 'H' – to

⁶⁷ See MCAM, Misc. 54, f.185v.

⁶⁸ See MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.185v-186r.

⁶⁹ See MCAM, Misc. 54, f.186r.

⁷⁰ See MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.186r-186v.

⁷¹ See MCAM, Misc. 54, ff.186v-187r.

which he adds more information of the place that corresponds to each letter of the alphabet.

The note on f.178r starts with a reference to the lower part of the belfry. He writes that coming down from the belfry, and coming out from a door, marked by the letter 'A' and going towards the left side under the first portico, one exits through the door marked by the letter 'B', leading to a side courtyard marked by the letter 'C' situated behind the belfry marked by the letter 'D', and the shrine marked by the letter 'E' whose façade faces West. Here there were two doors marked by the letters 'FF' which secured the two grottos. One of these grottos, which is smaller than the other, contained a kitchen for use by the general public who visited this place. The other grotto situated next to the shrine, is marked by the letter 'G.' This grotto in bold red, was circular in shape, hewn in rock, both from the back and from its front. Upon careful inspection one can tell that it was very old, and not hewn by hands by the first Christians who went to stay there, that is the Augustinian friars. These friars established their first residence in Malta, and made use of a cemetery. Looking around him, Padre Pelagio states how one could clearly notice some ancient tombs hewn in the rocks. In order to render this place more comfortable for those who visited this place and spent the night there, in the year 1630, the Bali of Brandenburg of the Order of St John, Frà Claudio di Rosenbac, sponsored a project which consisted of the enlargement, the cleaning, and the necessary embellishment of the place which served as a lodge for pilgrims. At the end of the folio, Padre Pelagio states how all of this was documented.

On the other folio, the Capuchin friar goes on to say that this documentation was inscribed on white marble fixed to the wall above the door of this area. Here one could also notice the family coat of arms of this benefactor, as well as other memories in conformity of what Padre Pelagio adds, namely a design of the coat of arms of the Bali of Brandenburg of the Order of St John. At this point of his writing, the Capuchin friar sketches this inscription together with the respective coat of arms of the Bali of Brandenburg. The sketch of this coat of arms is located on the left-hand side of this small folio.

Hail, Mary, Hail.

In the year of our Lord 1630, the 9th day of August.

<coat-of-arms>

Fra Corrado of Rosenbac,
Bailiff of Brandenburg.⁷²

⁷² "# Calato giù dalla Torre, ed uscito per la porta *A*, volgendo il camino d'intorno la med[esim]a a mano sinistra, e camminando in piano per sotto il primo porticato, si esce per una Porta *B*, in un appartato Cortile *C* esistente dietro d[ett]a Torre *D* e la Chiesa *E*, in prospettiva dello quale

Then, on the right-hand side of the sketch of this inscription, Padre Pelagio provides the sketch of the two grottos together with their northern flank of the Shrine, using a number of letters from the alphabet to explain the exact locations he was referring to. Thus, corresponding to letter 'A' is the door of the belfry.⁷³ Corresponding to the letter 'B' is the door of the courtyard.⁷⁴ Corresponding to the letter 'CCC' is the courtyard.⁷⁵ Corresponding to the letter 'D' is the back wall of the belfry.⁷⁶ Corresponding to the letter 'E' is the back wall of the shrine.⁷⁷ Corresponding to the letter 'FF' are the doors of the divided grotto.⁷⁸ Corresponding to the letter 'G' is another back wall of the shrine.⁷⁹ There is no information corresponding to the letter 'H,' though on the upper part of the site plan, the Capuchin friar inserts the letters 'Hh' and beside them he writes "48 palmi."⁸⁰

guardando verso Ponente si vedono due Porte *FF* che chiudono due grotte; una, ch'è più piccola dell'altra, osservasi accomodata per uso comune di cucina in servizio del pubblico di tutti li concorrenti, l'altra esistente accanto della Chiesa *G* è molto rossa, di figura circolare, tutta per intiero ad ante scavata nella rocca viva, ed a bene osservarla è antichissima scavatasi senza mano dalli primi Cristiani abitatori di quella Parrochia, ò meglio dire dalli primi Religiosi Agostiniani risoluti di stabilirvi loro primiera residenza; e ne facevano uso di Cimiterio: ravvisandovisi tuttavia d'intorno patenti le vestigia delle sepolture antiche, formata nella rocca viva, che in appresso, ad ogetto d'ingrandirla, e rendela più commoda per l'alloggio di pernottari dentro le genti, che vi concorrono, la pietà del religiosissimo Sign[or] Balì di Brandemburg dell'Ord[ine] Gerosol[imatano] Frà Claudio di Rosembac l'anno 1630 a proprie spese la rese più polita, più vaga, et fornita de' necessarii comodi da dormire, e di cio rende irrefragabile testimonianza una lapida tripalmare di bianco marmo ingastata nel muro sopra la Porta della med[esima], in cui si ravvisano incisa l'Armi Gentilizie di esso Ill[ustrissi]mo Benefattore, ed alcune memorie nella conformità si dà qui sotto delineata =

VIVE M[ARIA] VIVE
 ANNO DO[MINI] 1630 A DI 9 DI AGOSTO
 <STEMMA>
 ILL^{MO} SIGNOR FRÀ CORRADO
 DI ROSENBAC
 BAGLI DI BRANDEMBURG."

MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷³ "A. Porta della Torre." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷⁴ "B. Porta di questo Cortile." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷⁵ "CCC. Cortile." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷⁶ "D. Dorso della Torre delle Campane." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷⁷ "E. Dorso della chiesa." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷⁸ "FF. Porte delle divisata Grotta." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁷⁹ "G. Altro dorso della chiesa." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

⁸⁰ "Hh. palmi 48." MCAM, Misc. 54, f.178v.

On f.184r Padre Pelagio provides a list of the chaplains and rectors of the Mellieħa Shrine, starting with the first one who goes back to the year 1436, and reaching to the last one mentioned in the year 1703. In between the information on the Mellieħa Shrine and this list, the Capuchin friar furnishes a site plan of what he calls: “Pianta del antichiss[imo] Palaggio Batteano nella Mellieħa.”⁸¹

The Value of Padre Pelagio’s Drawings of the Mellieħa Shrine

Padre Pelagio’s information and drawings about the Mellieħa Shrine reveal how this holy place continued to be embellished and restored even till the very day when he was writing.⁸² The site plans of the Mellieħa Shrine drawn by Padre Pelagio do not feature in the publications post-dating his writings.⁸³ As far as we can say, it is a booklet about the Mellieħa Shrine published for the occasion of Pope John Paul II’s visit to Malta in 1990, that includes the site-plans of this place drawn by the Capuchin friary.⁸⁴ Raymond Saliba, in his “Il-Madonna tal-Mellieħa,” then includes a reference to Pelagio’s writings on the Mellieħa Shrine, as part of a note in his bibliography on the Marian icon that makes this place so special for the local church.⁸⁵

This omission probably reveals that Pelagio’s Manuscript - MCAM, Misc. 54 - which includes all this information, is unknown to many local historians.

⁸¹ See MCAM, Misc. 54, f.180r.

⁸² For more recent publications dealing with the history of this place and how it continued to be decorated see, Vincent Borg, “Marian Devotions in Malta,” in *Marian Devotions in the Islands of Saint Paul (1600-1800)*, ed. Vincent Borg (Malta: The Historical Society, 1983), 41-42; Raphael Bonnici Cali, *Our Lady of Mellieħa - Malta* (Malta: Progress Press, 1952).

⁸³ See for example one of the oldest publications about the Mellieħa Sanctuary by Carlo Cortis, *Il Santuario e la Madonna tal Mellieħa. Descrizione storica con note illustrative dalla storia di Malta* (Malta: Tipografia G. Muscat, 1921), which omits to mention Padre Pelagio’s description of this place. Carlo Cortis republished this book two year later. Carlo Cortis, *Is-Santwarju u l-Madonna tal-Mellieħa, miġjub bil-Malti minn Dun Ġużepp Farrugia. It-tieni edizzjoni* (Malta: G. Muscat, 1923).

⁸⁴ See Vincent Borg, “Il-Madonna tal-Mellieħa – The Mellieħa Madonna,” in *Iż-żjara tal-Qdusija Tiegħu il-Papa Ġwanni Pawlu II fis-Santwarju tal-Mellieħa – 26 ta’ Mejju 1990. Programm ta’ Tifkira*, 7-28.

⁸⁵ “Il-biblijografija dwar din ix-xbieħa hi vasta. It-tagħrif l-aktar antik u mportanti jinsab f’arkivji Ekkleżjastiċi, u l-aktar fid-deskrizzjonijiet li kienu jhallu l-isqfijiet waqt iż-Żjarat Pastorali u fil-kotba ta’ l-amministrazzjoni tas-santwarju. Tagħrif iehor f’manuskritti, bħal dawk ta’ Patri Pelagju (1722-1773) [sic], f’arkivji pubbliċi jew privati fihom bażikament bħaż-żjarat imsemmin jiw minn kotba ppubblikati fis-sekli sbatax u tmintax, aktar b’rabta ma’ l-aspett devozzjonali milli artistiku.” Raymond Saliba, “Il-Madonna tal-Mellieħa,” in *Il-Mellieħa mal-milja taż-żmien*, 220, no.22.

Nevertheless, these sketches together with his historical information, are of great historical importance as they can help us to establish the structural modifications of this holy place and gain more information about this national shrine.

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A Biblical Reading of the *Circumcision of the Child Jesus* by Filippo Paladini (at the Jesuit Church in Valletta, Malta)

In order to keep to netiquette, when we write emails, we customarily insert a “Subject.” Heading an essay with a title is normal literary custom. Every chapter in a book is titled. The artist from Tuscany in Central Italy, Filippo Paladini (1544-1614), has also put a title to his undated main *pala d’altare* at the Jesuits Church in Valletta, Malta, depicting the *Circumcision of the Child Jesus*.¹

The Retable

Looking at the grand *revedos* framing its high altar painting² at the top of the Baroque work of art behind the main altar, one should notice the heavenly

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¹ Giuseppe Fiaccola, “Mannerism, Naturalism in Paladini’s Paintings,” *The Times of Malta* (16 August 2015), @ <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/mannerism-naturalism-in-paladinis-paintings.580904> [accessed 10 February 2023].

² See Therese Vella, *The Paintings of the Order of St John in Malta: Hospitaller Art Collections and Patronage from the Late Fifteenth Century to the Eighteenth Century* (PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol, Department of History of Art [Historical Studies], June 2012. This electronic thesis or dissertation has been downloaded from Explore Bristol Research, <http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk>) @ <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/34507538/573754.pdf> [accessed 10 February 2023/].

scene of six angels around the three-lettered monogram 'JHS' engulfed in rays of light. These three letters can be considered as the title of the painting. 'JHS' are the first three letters of the name Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*, Jesus) in Greek capital letters, transliterated into Latin letters: IHΣΟΥΣ > JHSOUS.

Paladini's *Circumcision* takes pride of place in the Church of the *Collegium Melitense*, that up to the suppression of the Jesuit Order in Malta by the Portuguese Grand Master Manuel Pinto da Fonseca in 1768 was managed by the Jesuits, and consequently evolved as the University of Malta.³ Understandably, since the JHS is, as it were, the coat of arms of the Company of Jesus, the three-lettered emblem is given due prominence in the retable of the painting. The foundation stone of the baroque church was laid on 4 September 1595, but had to be rebuilt due to explosions that occurred in the building. The architect was the military engineer of the Order of St John, Francesco Buonamici. Architecturally, it emulates the same style as La Chiesa del Gesù in Rome, with the same title of *the Circumcision of Jesus*. The church in Valletta is the first building in Malta designed by a well-known foreign architect.⁴

Dominic Cutajar expertly informs us that the main altarpiece of the Jesuits Church in Valletta, representing the *Circumcision of the Child Jesus*, was restored in 1995-1996 by George Farrugia, after some accidental damage which took place in the church. "The work reveals the ability of Paladini in handling animated crowded scenes" – nine figures in our painting, besides two angels and the Child Jesus – "with conviction and success, a feat he continued to refine and elaborate in his numerous Sicilian works, a consideration that helps in dating the *Gesù* altarpiece towards the end of his stay in Malta."⁵

The Name Iēsous - Jesus

The pre-Pauline Christological hymn in the Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11 is contentwise considered by scholars as the Hymn to Christ Jesus in his kenotic annihilation and in his exaltation and glorification.⁶ Most probably, the Apostle

³ Dominic Cutajar, "Filippo Paladini: His Activities in Malta," *Treasures of Malta* 7, no.1 (Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2000), 25.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 281-288; Michael J. Gorman, "Philippians: The Hymn of the Crucified Lord in the Crucified Community," in *Apostle of the Crucified Lord. A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 419-423; 434-439; Gordon D. Fee, "Christology in Philippians," in *Pauline Christology. An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson,

Paul found the hymnic eulogy already being used in the liturgical assemblies of the First Christians and inserted it into his letter.⁷ In vv. 9-11, Paul writes: “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the *name* that is above every *name*, so that at the *name* of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁸

Although Paul writes: “in the name of Jesus,” in the name *that is* Jesus,⁹ he then qualifies the expression, explaining what this name is, by writing: “every tongue should confess: ‘Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’” Consequently, the name Paul is referring to, the name before which every created being bows down to worship, is ‘Lord Jesus,’ Jesus who is Lord.¹⁰

“Lord” was the title that the Old Testament gave to God creator, saviour, provider, God of the Jewish People. In the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures (the Septuagint version) the title *kúrios* translates the ineffable Name of God, YHWH.¹¹ But in the New Testament, the same title is applied also to Jesus. The First Christians saw and experienced that Jesus, by rising from the dead, obtained and was worthy of the same glory of God that the Hebrew Scriptures attributed to YHWH. Upon resurrection and glorification, the Church was able to give the title of *kúrios*, Lord, to Jesus.¹²

2007), 370-401; Stephen O. Stout, *The “Man Christ Jesus.” The Humanity of Jesus in the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 115-116.

⁷ See Gorman, *Philippians*, 434; Bonnie B. Thurston – Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon*. Sacra Pagina 10 (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier – Liturgical Press, 2005), 77-79.

⁸ Italics mine for emphasis. Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are taken from *The New Revised Standard Version*.

Part of this verse – “In nomine Iesu omne genu flectatur”, the Latin Vulgate translation for “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend” – is given pride of place at the top of the retable of the painting.

⁹ “The name of Jesus,” *en tῷ onómati Iēsou* (v.10), can be considered an exegetical construction, with *Iēsou*, of Jesus, explaining *ónoma*, as genitive of apposition: the name, that is Jesus: see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 79-81.95-100. For the meaning of the name Jesus, see Stout, “The Man Christ Jesus,” 67-68; “Ἰησοῦς” [*Iēsous*], in Walter Bauer – Frederick W. Danker – William F. Arndt – F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 373-374.

¹⁰ See Thurston – Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon*, 94-85.

¹¹ See Takamitsu Muraoka, “κύριος” [*kúrios*] and “יהוה” [*Y’howāh*], in *A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 72; 218.

¹² For a detailed analysis, see Gottfried Quell, “κύριος” [*kúrios*]: The Old Testament Name for God,” and Werner Foerster, “κύριος [*kúrios*] in the New Testament,” in *Theological Dictionary of*

The Saving Name Jesus

In the two accounts of the birth and childhood of Jesus, both Matthew and Luke write that the name to be given to the child should be “Jesus”: “She [*Mary*] will bear a son, and you [*Joseph*] are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins... When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus” (Matt 1:21.24-25); “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus... After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Lk 1:31; 2:21).

In Matthew we come across a slight anomaly, but which is actually a more qualified description of the name Jesus. Between the angel ordering Joseph to name Mary’s son ‘Jesus’ and the actual naming by Joseph, Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy: “All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanu-el,’ which means, ‘God is with us’” (Matt 1:22-23). In his earthly life, Jesus was never called by the name of Emmanu-el. Thus, Matthew intends to say that God will be with human beings - Emmanu-el - in the salvation he wants to give them, because the name *Y’shûà*’ means ‘God saves’,¹³ and the Child “will save his People from their sins” (Matt 1:21).¹⁴

The Hebrew lexeme for salvation is *yeshû’ àh*, from where the name Jesus is derived: *Y’shûà*’, or Isaiah, *Y’sha’ yāhû*, or Joshua, *Y’hôshûà*’. The Hebrew lexeme *yeshû’ àh* is based on the roots y-sh-’ (yud-shin-qayin).¹⁵ It demonstrates the same

the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:1058-1081 and 1086-1098 respectively.

¹³ See Stout, “The Man Christ Jesus,” 67-68.

¹⁴ Basil the Great comments on the name given to Jesus in his *Homily on Psalm 61:2*: “Now, it is a custom in Scripture to call the Christ of God, salvation, as Simeon says: ‘Now let your servant depart in peace, O Lord, because my eyes have seen your salvation.’ Therefore, let us subject ourselves to God, because from him is salvation. He explains what salvation is. It is not some mere active force, which provides us with a certain grace for deliverance from weakness and for the good health of our body. What then is salvation? ‘For he is my God and my Saviour: he is my protector, I shall be moved no more’ (Psalm 61:3 LXX). The Son, who is from God, is our God. He himself is also Saviour of the human race, who supports our weakness, who corrects the disturbance that springs up in our souls from temptations.” *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament III – Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 49.

¹⁵ See Heinz-Josef Fabry - John F. Sawyer, “עשׂ” [*y-sh-’*] etc, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds G. Johannes Botterweck – Helmer Ringgren; trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:441-448.

roots of the Maltese lexeme “wisa.” The interchangeability of the consonants *j* and *w* is frequent in Maltese: “Qajjem għalina qawwa ta’ salvazzjoni” (“He has raised up an horn of salvation for us” [Lk 1:69]), but “Jekk Kristu hu mxandar li qam mill-imwiet, kif jgħidu xi whud minnkom li ma hemmx qawmien tal-mejtin?” (If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? [1 Cor 15:12]).¹⁶ The ‘x’ and ‘s’ often correspond;¹⁷ and the Hebrew *qáyin* is the ‘gh’ in Maltese. Thus, in the local context of Paladini’s painting and retable, Jesus’ name gives a subtle interpretation of the concept of salvation: a leading into a spacious place.

The Psalmist groans to God: “For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place” (Ps 66:10-12).

Salvation does not have to do only with the realm of what is solely spiritual (like, say, the forgiveness of sins or liberation through exorcism), but with everything that helps to bring the person out into the spaciousness of freedom, where they are released from the scrunching and crouching of their person to the breadth and width of their complete personality, to regain their wholeness, in body, soul, and spirit, so much so that when God looks at them, he can yet again say: “It is so very good” (Gen 1:31)! Healing is part and parcel with salvation, and salvation of the whole created person: body and soul.¹⁸

The miracle of the healing of the paralytic man who was brought down from the roof in front of Jesus (Mk 2:10-12) highlights the concept of universality of salvation. Jesus gives a corporeal sign that points to his power to heal the spiritual realm of the paralytic man: “So that you may know that the Son of Man

¹⁶ For more examples of the interchangeability of the *w* and the *j* in Maltese, consider the verb ‘mejjitha’ (he disheartened her) but also ‘mewwitha’ (he disheartened her); mejjet (dead) – mejtin (dead [plural]) – mewt (death) – miet (he died); dam (he took long) – dewwem (he made someone to take long; kept someone long) – dejjem (always); bidwi (farmer) – bdiewa (farmers) – biedja (agriculture); buq (trumpet, large hollow reed) – bwieq (reeds, trumpets) – bieqja (bowl) – bwieqi (bowls) – bewwaq (cause to become flabby).

¹⁷ In Judges 12:5-6 the pronunciation of *shin* as *sin* in the lexeme *shibbólet* was a password-test used when the Ephraimites sought to cross the Jordan River to return home. Each was asked to pronounce the word ‘shibbólet.’ The ‘sh’ sound did not exist in the Ephraimite dialect, and thus, the Ephraimites pronounced the word in a way that, to Gileadites, sounded like ‘sibbólet.’

¹⁸ John Navone, *Themes of St. Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1970), 146-148; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 94-102; Jan G. van der Watt – David S. du Toit, “Salvation,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed (Downers Grove, IL – Nottingham: IVP Academic – Inter-Varsity, 2013), 826-832, especially 829-830.

has authority on earth to forgive sins... ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat [a constant reminder of your physical disability] and go to your home’” (vv.10-11). “He stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’” (v.12).

The question immediately crops up here: what had they not seen before? They had seen Jesus exorcise a man with an evil spirit, and they had marvelled at the authority of his words, and at his power that even evil spirits were subdued at his command (Mk 1:21-28). They were present when he healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31). They had witnessed themselves the healing of all those who were sick and the casting out of a number of demons from those who were possessed (Mk 1:32-34). They had followed him, attracted by his preaching (Mk 1:35-39). They had even witnessed him “cleansing” (*katharisthēti*, Mk 1:40-45) a leper.

Would it be that they had not yet grasped the fundamental issue that physical healing has now become a sign of spiritual healing in Jesus, the Saviour? Or maybe that perhaps physical and spiritual healing together have become the sign of complete salvation?

The healing account of the woman with the haemorrhage (Lk 8:43-48) highlights how salvation through faith is physical healing that comes from God. If she could just touch the hem of his cloak (probably, the tassels – *tzitzit* – at the edges of his praying shawl (*thallit*), the shawl that connected him with God in prayer in an awe-inspiring manner (Lk 11:1), she would be healed. This man, the sick woman reasoned, can unite me to God and from God comes life in its wholeness.

It is interesting to note that when Jesus healed her, he addressed her with very singularly specific words: “Daughter, your faith has saved you (*sēsōkén se*, v.48); go in peace” (Lk 8:48). Jesus singled out her faith that saved, not that healed, her.¹⁹ When Jesus noticed that someone had touched him and that a power had gone out of him and asked who had touched him, she came forward to confess everything and testified how as soon as she touched the edge of his cloak she was healed (*hōs iáthē*, Lk 8:47), thus identifying salvation with physical healing.

The Greek verb *sōzō*, “to save,” “to heal” and the lexeme *sōma*, body, are derived with a very strong degree of evidence from the Sanskrit in the root *śka*, in Greek *sōs*, that is at the root of words like: *sōzō*, *saóō*, I cure, I save; *sōtēr*, saviour, healer;

¹⁹ Matt 9:21 uses *sōthēsomai* (saved, not healed).

sáos, healthy, integral; *sōos*, *sōs*, prosperous, saved; *sōkos*, strong, in health.²⁰ *Sōma* probably refers to the *casing, covering, wrapping* (veil or skin), that protects (and “saves”) the body. Later Greek uses it for an animated body, seeing body as the *receptacle* of life, as against the soul, the contents *psychē* as in *sōma psychikón*, the spiritual body. Salvation and saviour definitely do not have only to do with the spiritual realm.²¹

According to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 12:27): “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it,” and thus we are the Body of the Saviour Christ Jesus who heals and saves – in Christ Jesus we are a saved and saving Body at the same time.

In the gospels, salvation is very clearly not just a spiritual achievement of God in human beings. Salvation is holistic. Salvation is God’s healing finger touching the body, soul, spirit, emotions, feelings, psyche, the will, and indeed the whole person.

Joy as Right Response to Salvation

Luke’s pattern of personal free response to God’s salvific will is evident when we consider clusters of expressions in his gospel.²² To mention just one example, Luke groups together verbs and nouns that emphasise receptivity of God’s salvific action in chapter 8:4-21, where we come across the parable of the sower (vv.4-15), the lamp under the vessel (vv.16-18), and his relatives coming in search for him (vv.19-21): “seeds” (vv.5.11), “ears” (v.8), “hear” (vv.8.10.12.14.15.18.21), “understand” (v.10), “see” (vv.10.16), “word” (11.13.15.21), “believe” (vvv.12.13), “receive” (v.13).²³ However, Luke has similarly extensive patterns

²⁰ See Henry G. Liddell - Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), *ad loc*; also Werner Foerster, “σῶξω, σωτηρία, σωτήρ, σωτήριος [σῶζω, sōtēria, sōtēr, sōtērios],” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:965-969.

²¹ See Paul Sciberras, “The Church as Body of Christ: Pavel Florenskij’s *The Concept of Church in Sacred Scripture*,” *Melita Theologica* 69, no. 1 (2019): 111.

²² For a detailed analysis of clusters of joy in the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles, see Navone, *Themes of St. Luke*, 71-87; Marshall, *Luke – Historian and Theologian*, 123-124; 202-204; Robert O’Toole, *The Unity of Luke’s Theology* (Good News Studies, 9; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 225-260.

²³ For a detailed analysis of these pericopes, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (I-IX)*. The Anchor Bible 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 699-715; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol.1:1-9:50. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 716-53; François Bovon, *Luke 1. A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*. Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Donald S. Deer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 303-316.

about the responses to the experience of God's salvific activity. Luke wants his readers to understand these patterns as the correct reactions to God's salvific will. Joy is, according to Luke, one of these patterns of right responses and reactions. His three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons in Luke 15 are dotted with rejoicing.

The Infancy Narratives abound in expressions of joy. Mary greets Elizabeth and the latter's child leaped (*skirtaō*, 1:41; *agalliāō*, 1:44) in her womb. Mary magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her saviour (*agalliāō*, 1:47). John the Baptist's birth is similarly sprinkled with joy. Elizabeth's neighbours (*perioikoi*, 1:58) rejoiced with her that the Lord had shown great mercy to her. It is also manifested in the restoration of relationships (as in the *Benedictus*: salvation from the hands of enemies, Lk 1:71.74), faith saving body, perspectives, identity, and priorities.

When Jesus was born, the shepherds are encouraged by the angel not to be afraid for he brings them good news "of a great joy for all the people" (*idoū gār euangelizomai humin charàn megálēn hētis éstai pantì tō laō*, 2:10). Both the heavenly hosts and the shepherds glorify and praise (*doksázō* and *ainéō*) God for the birth of the Saviour Jesus (2:13-14.20).

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus pronounces his sermon on the plain, promising laughter (*gelāō*) in the third blessing (6:21), and ends his four macharisms with "Rejoice (*chárēte*) in that day and leap for joy (*skirtēsate*)" (Lk 6:23).

The return of the Seventy with its expressions of joy is proper to Luke. They come back to Jesus "with joy" (*hupéstrepsan dè hoi hebdomēkonta [dúo] metá charas* (Lk 10:17). Jesus also gives them the reason why they should rejoice: "Do not rejoice... but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (*mē cháirete... cháirete dè...* (v.20). He himself rejoices in the Spirit (*ēgalliásato*, v.21).

As far as the three parables in Luke 15 go, the ending of each parable highlights the joy (*cháirōn*, v.5) that ensues at the recovery: in vv.5-6 the joy of the shepherd at finding his lost sheep who calls in his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him (*sunchárēté moi*, v.6); in v.7 the joy comes in the application of the parable: there will be even more (*houtōs... ē*) joy (*charà*) in heaven for a sinner who returns to God. The father of the two lost sons orders a feast with much merrymaking (*euphranthōmen*, vv.23-24) for the return of his younger son. Similarly, joy and merrymaking fill the rest of the parable, even during the tense moments of the elder son's return from the fields (vv.25.27.29.30.32).

The air of joy both in the parables and in their application is markedly similar "rejoice with me" (*sunchárēté moi*, vv.6.9); the shepherd and the woman invite

their friends and neighbours, and in v.10: “Likewise... there is joy” (*houtōs... gínetai charà*). The father shows his elder son that “we had (*édei*) to celebrate (*euphranthēnai*) and rejoice (*charēnai*), because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (15:32).

It is to be carefully noted that neither the shepherd nor the woman rejoice alone for their recovery of their lost sheep and coin respectively. They invite their friends and neighbours to join them in their rejoicing: “rejoice with me” (*sunchárēté moi*, vv.6 and 9). If the two parables (together with the following parable of the lost two sons) are addressed primarily at the Pharisees and the Scribes, grumbling at Jesus for welcoming sinners and eating with them, then it ensues that the Pharisees and the Scribes are also being invited by Jesus to rejoice with him for these sinners who are repenting by coming to listen to him.²⁴

In the parable of the lost two sons (15:11-32), the elder son rebukes his father: “Yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends” (v.29). As with the shepherd and the woman in the other two parables, the father wants to be in the midst of the rejoicing with his two sons, his household and friends, and not provide for rejoicing to the elder son and his friends by themselves.²⁵

Joy characterises Jesus’ going up to Jerusalem. In the pericope of Zacchaeus, the invitation by Jesus to Zacchaeus to come down the tree “for I must stay at your house today” (Lk 19:5) is cause of great joy for the chief tax collector: “So he hurried down and was happy (*chairōn*) to welcome him” (v.6). Nearing the city of Jerusalem, “The whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully (*chatrontes ainein*, 19:37) with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen.”

Finally, after his resurrection, leading the disciples as far as Bethany and giving them the Great Command to proclaim him throughout the world, he was ascended into heaven and “they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy (*metà charas megálēs*); and they were continually in the temple

²⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, in his *Commentary on Luke, Homily 106* (see *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament III – Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 243, asks the Pharisees: “Tell me, O Pharisee, why do you grumble because Christ did not scorn to be with publicans and sinners, but purposely provided for them this means of salvation? To save people, he yielded himself to emptiness, became like us, and clothed himself in human poverty.”

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of the parable in its narrative perspective, see Jean-Noël Aletti, *Il racconto come teologia*. Studio narrativo del terzo Vangelo e del libro degli Atti degli Apostoli (Roma: Dehoniane, 1996), 167-205.

blessing God” (24:52-53). Joy pervades the entire gospel of Luke, a characteristic that Paladini did not surely miss in his painting.

In Paladini’s *Circumcision*, we can detect a discreet smile of joy on the child John the Baptist’s face (the only figure that is looking at the viewer), joy that comes both from his Hebrew name *Yôhānān*,²⁶ meaning ‘God has mercy,’ a sure participation in salvation through his future preaching of loving kindness (Hebrew, *hêsed*)²⁷ and mercy as well as from his mission (see Lk 1:13-17.78).

Salvation is restoring humankind to the original state of creation in front of which God himself can again exclaim: it is so very good (see Gen 1:31).²⁸ Salvation is faith saving body, perspectives, identity, and priorities! Salvation is making whole again. Salvation is healing. And if humankind is whole and healed, it shares in the same attribute of God: holiness. Salvation as spaciousness, liberation from restricting, oppressive experiences both physical and spiritual occur frequently in the Old Testament (Ps 4:2; 18:17-20; 25:17; 31:9; 118:5; Est 4:14). However, there must be the right perspective: everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, not who calls upon some miracle worker. It is in Jesus who died and who conquered death that we can be healed and heal others.

Then, “salvation must be seen as the freeing of a person so that such a person can come out to the freedom of salvation in Christ.”²⁹ Salvation is wholeness, healing and holiness.³⁰

No wonder Filippo Paladini gave so much structural importance to the JHS in his *pala d’altare* at the Jesuits Church in Valletta. It is found at the topmost point of the *reredos*; repeated at the top part of the painting itself, surrounded by putti, and indirectly referred to in the biblical inscription at the circular part of the retable, above the central sculptured Child: “In nomine Iesu omne genu

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of *hānan*, see Heinz-Josef Fabry - John F. Sawyer, “חָנַן” [*hānan*] etc, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds G. Johannes Botterweck – Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 5:22-36.

²⁷ For *hêsed*, see Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “חֶסֶד” [*hêsed*], in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, trans. David. E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:44-64.

²⁸ See Gerald O’Collins – Edward Farrugia, “Salvation,” in *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991), 212.

²⁹ Paul Sciberras, “All Flesh Shall See the Salvation of the Lord’: The Function of Paul’s Shipwreck Account in Acts 27-28: A Proposal,” *Melita Theologica* 65, no.2 (2015): 62.

³⁰ See the common etymology of the adjectives healed, whole and holy in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. Charles T. Onions, with the assistance of George W.S. Friedrichsen and Robert W. Burchfield (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), and Walter W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005).

flectatur” (at the name of Jesus every knee should bow), taken from the Latin Vulgate translation of Philippians 2:10. Paladini also uses chromatic expertise when he painted the Child Jesus awash in light in contrast to the surrounding figures in the background.

Proclaiming the Saving Name of Jesus

Another type of healing that is needed: salvation comes from proclamation of the name of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Paul again in Romans 10:14-15: “How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” The Word of God, as opened and broken for us by Jesus, the Saviour, the Lord, is a mighty way of healing and salvation. Salvation comes from calling on the name of Jesus, whose name points to him as the Saviour. Calling on is the fruit of faith and “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).³¹ Indeed, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved” (Rom 10:9-10). This might be yet another reason why Paladini gave such importance to the Name in his *Circumcision*.

The Lower Part of the Painting

A huge and very prominent basin for ritual washing and purification³² in the foreground of the painting immediately draws the attention of the viewer. It seems that Paladini wanted to give particular emphasis to the Child’s mission as an agent of purification,³³ a cleanser, a saviour of those who look at the picture to meditate on it, rather than on the characters themselves in the painting.

³¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*. The Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 594-601; Daniel Harrington, *Romans. The Good News According to Paul* (New York: New City, 1998), 105-107; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*. Sacra Pagina 6 (Collegetown, MN: Michael Glazier – Liturgical Press, 1996), 323-328.

³² For a detailed analysis of occurrences of *katharismós*, see Hans-Georg Link – Johannes Schattenmann, “Pure, Clean: καθάρως” [*katharós*], in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 3:102-108.

³³ See Mal 3:2-23: “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness.”

Luke (who writes to Christians from the Gentiles rather than from the Jews) seems to be oblivious to the fact that actually the purification was legally for the mother only, not for the baby as well.³⁴ He writes: “When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Lk 2:22). The mother would be considered unclean for forty days (eighty for a girl) before she could touch anything sacred (Lev 12:2-8).³⁵ After eight days the child would be circumcised, and the mother would wait at home for another thirty-three days. After the forty days – when the time of her purification comes to an end (Lev12:6) – the mother would go to the Temple and make her offering. In the Old Testament and in the Jewish tradition the presentation of the first child is never mentioned.³⁶ Exodus 13:1-2 says that every first male child had to be redeemed, and Numbers 18:16, that this had to be done after one month from birth. Most likely, Luke gets the idea of the presentation from Samuel’s presentation by Anna (1 Sam 1:22-24). He seems to combine two ceremonies in one: the circumcision³⁷ with the presentation. Purification and redemption are also part of salvation.³⁸

The name that was given to the baby was that of Jesus, the Saviour, but who is Lord, Master, who saves by making the entire creation whole anew: “He [*God*] has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time (*plērōma tōn kairōn*),³⁹ to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:9-10).

³⁴ Luke T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier – Liturgical Press, 1991), 54; Bock, *Luke*, 234-236; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 99.

³⁵ Bede, however, comments on the purification of both the mother and the child: “Mary, God’s blessed mother and a perpetual virgin, was, along with the Son she bore, most free from all subjection to the law. The law says that a woman who ‘had received seed’ (Leviticus 12:2 LXX) and given birth was to be judged unclean and that after a long period she, along with the offspring she had borne, were to be cleansed by victims offered to God.” *Homilies on the Gospels* 1.18, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament III – Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 47.

³⁶ See David W. Pao – Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds Gregory K. Beale – Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic – Apollos, 2007), 268-271.

³⁷ See Hans-Cristoph Hahn, “Circumcision: περιτέμνω [*peritēmnō*],” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 1:307-312.

³⁸ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 99.

³⁹ Gal 4:4 links the fullness of the time (*plērōma tou chrōnou*) with the birth of Jesus from a woman: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman.”

The Circumcision

Paladini's *Circumcision* depicts the central figure of Simeon, solemnly attired as High Priest, performing the circumcision to the Child Jesus with extreme discreetness:⁴⁰ the circumcision knife blade can barely be seen.⁴¹ We might surmise that the fugitive Tuscan painter meant to give more importance to the naming than to the circumcision rite, by giving the three-lettered monogram JHS of the name of Jesus high prominence but almost concealing the circumcision itself.

Leviticus 12:3 lays down that: "On the eighth day the flesh of his [*male firstborn*] foreskin shall be circumcised." Circumcision was the ceremony that sealed the Covenant of Israel with God⁴² in the ability to beget children, in the power of generating those who would continue the family, the tribe and indeed the People of Israel as the People of God, that makes Israel a covenant generation, and that binds itself to God in its very life and existence. It is the consecration of the People of Israel in its firstborn sons. "Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine" (Ex 13:2).

Paladini depicts the figures of two couples in the painting: Joseph and Mary on the left side, next to baby Jesus, and another couple on the right side. From the iconographic representation it appears that the baby in the arms of the woman on the right is John the Baptist; the woman should be no one else but Elizabeth. John was a six month old baby by then (see Lk 1:26), and in the *Circumcision* it is the only figure that is looking at the viewer. Later in his life, John would be able to proclaim: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's

⁴⁰ See Lynn H. Cohick, "Judaism, Common," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd edition, ed. Joel B. Green (Downers Grove, IL – Nottingham: IVP Academic – InterVarsity, 2013), 454.

⁴¹ Bede, in his *Homilies on the Gospels* I.II (see *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament III – Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 44, writes: "He therefore received circumcision in the flesh decreed by the law, although he appeared in the flesh absolutely without any blemish of pollution. He who came in the likeness of sinful flesh – not in sinful flesh – did not turn away from the remedy by which sinful flesh was ordinarily made clean."

⁴² Cyril of Alexandria, in his *Commentary on Luke, Homily 3*, describes Jesus' circumcision as "prefiguring in itself the grace and efficacy of divine baptism. Formerly a male who was circumcised was included among the people of God by virtue of that seal; nowadays, a person who is baptised and has formed in himself Christ the seal, becomes a member of God's adopted family." *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament III – Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 45.

voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:29-30).

The central figure in the painting is Simeon, ‘the High Priest,’ not the Child Jesus who is being circumcised: the baby is lying on its side; Simeon in the very centre, both vertically and horizontally. Again, the emphasis is on the presentation and naming,⁴³ because Simeon is identified with the hymn he sings in the Holy Spirit: the *Nunc Dimittis* (Lk 2:29-32). “Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him” (Lk 2:25), a description that fits those who in the Old Testament are called the ‘*Anāwīm*.’⁴⁴

The name Simeon is the Jewish name *Shim’ôn*, from the verb *sh-m-*, to listen, to hear, reminding us of the female figure of the couple to the left of the painting: the Baby’s Mother, Mary, and the Word to whom she gave flesh as the Son of God with her obedient avowal (Lk 1:38). Most probably that is why we combine it with what Luke wrote in 2:21: “After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb,” in the account of the Annunciation to Mary! There she could “bend her knee” (see Phil 2:10) in obedience to God’s will: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). In a similar vein, Joseph, when he “awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her [*Mary*] as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus” (Matt 1:24-25).

Full extraordinary emphasis is given to the fact that Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit. Three times in three verses: in his description (Lk 2:25); while he was reassured he would not see death before seeing the Messiah with his own eyes (2:26); and when he was moved to utter the hymn of the *Nunc Dimittis* (2:27-28).

The hymn by Simeon, the central figure of Paladini’s painting, proclaims universal salvation that Simeon was perceiving in the eight/forty day old baby he held in his arms. “Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under

⁴³ Hans Bietenhard – Frederick F. Bruce, “Name: ὄνομα [*ónoma*],” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 2:648-656.

⁴⁴ The humble, meek, poor, as opposed to the wealthy and powerful. See אָנָוּ [‘*ānāw*], in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J.A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 6:502.

the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God... “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Lk 2:27-32).

Conclusion

Perhaps the fact that the scenes of the presentation and of the circumcision in the Temple are combined together in Paladini’s *The Circumcision of the Child Jesus* proffer the idea that it is a timeless scene, one that points to eternity. Consecration to God is lived in the time and space of this earthly life but points to eschatological reality.⁴⁵

In the child Jesus – whose name means God is with human beings in his salvation from their sins and its consequences – Simeon (the one who listens to the Word in the Spirit) sees the Saviour of all humanity. Simeon perceives the long-term work of God in the Saviour, the moment he sees salvation, God’s action of liberation, that God took care to prepare for a long time before. Moved by the Spirit, Salvation for Simeon meant light to all nations, and glory to the People of Israel. Light: because faith is compared to it in the lives of human beings, seeing that it illuminates what they are adorned with, even if they are not yet aware of it. Glory: because the Jews were chosen as a model for other nations. That Gentiles receive the light that manifests to them God already at work in them, and that they come to know him is a mission of the Jews.

Paladini’s *Circumcision of the Child Jesus* seems to be affirming, ‘Be like this newly born child: light of the world and salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-14) just as “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8:12; 9:5).

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⁴⁵ Bock, *Luke*, 234-236.

Book review:

Kolawole Chabi, *Augustine, prédicateur de la Trinité: La Trinité dans l'histoire du salut et dans la vie du chrétien selon ses Sermones ad Populum.*

Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum, 159 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum and Firenze: Nerbini International, 2021), 554 pp. ISBN 978 88 6434 704 2

The book *Augustine Prédicateur de la Trinité* by Kolawole Chabi offers a thorough analysis of Saint Augustine's teachings on the Trinity, particularly as articulated in his *Sermones ad populum*. It is structured into seven chapters, each tackling different aspects of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine and its implications for Christian life and salvation history.

The introduction sets the stage for the exploration of Augustine's thought on the Trinity, establishing its relevance in contemporary theological debates. Chabi emphasizes the importance of understanding Augustine's views in light of historical and modern challenges to his doctrine.

The first chapter outlines various criticisms of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine as presented in *De Trinitate*. Chabi begins by establishing a "paradigm" that examines the heritage of theological critiques, particularly those stemming from Théodore de Régnon and subsequent theologians. Among the key figures discussed are Henri Couget, Étienne Portalié, and Michael Schmaus, each presenting unique perspectives that challenge the traditional understanding of the Trinity. The chapter also addresses critiques from various theological schools, including psychological models of the Trinity proposed by modern theologians such as Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, and Catherine M. LaCugna. These

critiques argue that psychological analogies oversimplify the complexity of the divine relationships and risk leading to heretical interpretations. Chabi concludes the chapter by summarizing the major critiques and setting the foundation for responses in subsequent chapters.

In the second chapter, Chabi provides responses to the objections raised in Chapter I, drawing on Augustine's writings and interpretations by contemporary scholars. He critically evaluates the Régnonian paradigm, revealing its limitations while defending Augustine's use of psychological analogies as significant in articulating the relational dynamics of the Trinity. Chabi argues that Augustine's analogies should be seen not as definitive explanations but as tools to guide understanding of the divine relationships. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of Augustine's responses to the critiques, emphasizing the enduring relevance of his trinitarian thought for contemporary theological discussions.

The next chapter places Augustine's *Sermones ad populum* within the broader context of ancient Christian preaching. Chabi examines the literary genre, language, style, and intended audience of Augustine's sermons, placing them alongside the works of earlier Latin Fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, and Ambrose of Milan. The analysis reveals how Augustine's sermons not only convey doctrinal teachings but also serve as a means of engaging the community and fostering spiritual growth. Chabi highlights the importance of Augustine's context—both cultural and ecclesiastical—in shaping his preaching style and theological content, illustrating how he sought to address the spiritual needs of his congregation.

In the fourth chapter, which concerns the theological significance of the *Sermones ad populum*, Chabi posits that the *Sermones ad populum* function as a crucial theological site for transmitting doctrinal teachings. He explores the liturgical and pastoral contexts in which these sermons were delivered, emphasizing the role of the preacher as a servant of the Word. This chapter underscores Augustine's understanding of the relationship between preaching and prayer, the spiritual communion between the preacher and the congregation, and the confessions of the preacher as integral to effective ministry. Chabi also discusses the impact of the sermons on the spiritual lives of the audience, noting how they served to deepen the understanding of faith and promote moral living in accordance with the teachings of the Church.

The fifth chapter traces the evolution of Augustine's doctrinal understanding of the Trinity throughout his life, particularly in his sermons. Chabi examines key sermons from Augustine's presbyterate and episcopate, illustrating his views on the indivisibility of the Trinity, the equality of the Persons, and the unchanging nature of God. The analysis demonstrates how Augustine's sermons

reflect a deepening understanding of the Trinity's role in salvation history. Chabi highlights significant moments in Augustine's thought, showing how his reflections on the Trinity matured over time and responded to various theological controversies.

Chabi explores how Augustine articulates the revelation of the Trinity within the historical context of salvation in the sixth chapter. The chapter examines the intra-Trinitarian life and the distinct roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as their missions in the economy of salvation. The use of similarities to communicate the relationships within the Trinity is highlighted, providing insight into Augustine's pedagogical approach. Chabi discusses how Augustine's understanding of revelation shapes the believer's relationship with God and emphasizes the transformative power of the Triune God in the life of the Church.

The final chapter addresses the practical implications of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine for Christian living. Chabi emphasizes how Augustine's teachings on the Trinity inform the spiritual life of the believer, focusing on themes of love, communion, and the transformative power of the Triune God. He explores how understanding the Trinity can lead to a deeper experience of faith, fostering community among believers and guiding ethical living in accordance with God's will. The chapter concludes by reiterating the relevance of Augustine's thought for contemporary Christian practice, encouraging readers to engage with the Trinity in their spiritual journeys.

Overall, Kolawole Chabi's *Augustine Predicateur de la Trinité* is a scholarly yet accessible exploration of Augustine's rich theological insights on the Trinity, showcasing the relevance of his thought for both historical understanding and contemporary theological reflection. The book serves as a vital resource for anyone interested in the intersection of Augustine's theology, preaching, and the life of faith in the Christian tradition.

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