

Projects submitted by Certificate in Lace Studies Students

Between October 2003 and June 2004 the University of Malta offered for the first time a Certificate course in Lace Studies at the University Gozo Centre. At the end of the course, students were requested to submit a project on a topic related to lace making. The following is a short description of three of the projects submitted.

Parasol in Maltese Lace

MARY LOUISE BAJADA

Parasols became very fashionable during the Victorian era. It is quite common to come across paintings and lithographs of Victorian ladies carrying the parasol. It even attracted Claude Monet's attention - he used it in one of his paintings. However, ladies with parasols are included in various scenes in many other masterpieces.

During the Victorian period, the parasol was very much in use not only in England but also in Malta, some of which were made with Maltese lace. One particular instance is a Maltese lace parasol which was done in Gozo and presented by the Maltese people to Queen Mary as a wedding gift. And that is not the only instance of a documented Maltese lace parasol. In Marquis Nicholas de Piro lace collection at Casa Rocca Piccola in Valletta, one may find some of the finest Maltese lace parasols.



My project for the Certificate in Lace Studies course (2003-2004), was based on the Victorian lady with a Maltese lace parasol. A small porcelain doll dressed in a Victorian costume holds a reproduction of a miniature Maltese lace parasol. The dress is decorated with my design of a border of tallies (*moski*) and edges (*puntina*) worked in silk bobbin lace. Naturally, the main feature is the parasol worked with very fine silk thread. I designed the pattern on an eight-pointed star the point de Paris ground (*punt tal-balla*) - a distinct Maltese lace characteristic. The Victorian Lady with a Maltese lace parasol project was very time consuming but rewarded with satisfying results.

Festuni

MONICA BONNICI

The circular motifs or as they are better known in Maltese 'Festuni' were developed in the early 19th century by a Gozitan priest, Dun Salv Bondi. Towards the end of the same century Dun Guzepp Diacono worked hard to create modern designs on these motifs. There are many different types of these 'festuni' but the most common are the Star, the Flower, the Maltese Cross, the Sun, the Crescent Moon, the Palm, the George Cross, the Cluster of Leaf and a variation of Flower motifs.



In the 19th and 20th century, Gozitan ladies produced extremely beautiful masterpieces especially church vestments with these motifs. This inspired me to create my project for the Certificate in Lace Studies course. I selected four types of 'festuni' and made a lace insertion for a small curtain to cover a cupboard's glass pane. I used linen cloth and linen thread as linen is a very durable type of material.

Linen is one of the earliest products known to mankind. It was widely used by the Egyptians and other civilizations in later periods. Linen is made from a plant known as flax and its main areas of cultivation are Russia, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. There is also proof that flax was cultivated and linen was produced in the Maltese Islands. In fact, in the valley between Sannat and Xewkija in Gozo there are baths, which are believed, were used for the manufacture of linen.

'Balla' Lace and the Armorial Altar Lace Insertion at Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta.

ANNA MARIA GATT

Maltese 'Balla' lace incorporating liturgical symbols, feature predominantly in church vestments such as in lace trimming for altars. Many lace workers worked and contributed lace for ecclesiastical purposes. My research features the historic and cultural events leading to the introduction of the 'Balla' lace in the Maltese Islands and how Church lace became

characterised as 'tal-Balla'. The technical drawing of the 'Balla' stitch, its technique applied in Maltese lace and its significance, are also discussed and illustrated.



Cathedrals, churches and museums have extensive collections of altarpieces. One such altar lace edging design depicting an armorial motif is in the private collection of Marquis Nicholas de Piro at Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta. The history, origin, design and commissioning of this particular lace work are also discussed in this research.

The reproduction of a section of the original pattern, the use of old thread and technical drawing of the boll stitch and other techniques used in Maltese lace explaining the sequence of work, are all included in this project.

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