
MEDLYCOTT'S DRAWINGS OF MALTESE NATURAL HISTORY

Joe Sultana¹ and John J. Borg²

In 1861 William Tallack wrote: "William C. P. Medlycott, Esq., an English gentleman, who spends a part of almost every winter in Malta, has also devoted much careful observation to its birds and ichthyology. He has drawn a series of very accurate coloured representations of the fish and crustaceans of the island, which, if published would be a valuable contribution to the natural history of Europe" (Tallack, 1861). Thirty-two years later, this paragraph was partly quoted by J. H. Cooke (1893), who added the question "Can any of our readers inform us of the whereabouts of these drawings?" The aim of this note is to bring to light the whereabouts of Medlycott's drawings, with the hope that someone in future may find the time and resources to make an in-depth study of them.

Sir William Coles Paget Medlycott (1831-1887) was the 3rd Baronet of the Medlycott family who lived in the famous Ven House in Sherborne. He was a naturalist and a Fellow of the Zoological Society. He used to visit Malta frequently to study and draw its Natural History and also to hunt and collect birds. He was a great friend of Charles Augustus Wright, a British pioneer of Maltese ornithology, who for several years was the Editor of the *The Malta Times and United Service Gazette*.

W.C.P. Medlycott's main published contribution to Maltese Natural History is an appendix (X) entitled "Notes on the Geology, Botany, and Natural History of Malta" in *Malta: Past and Present* (Seddall, 1870). He also published an undated catalogue of birds entitled "Catalogue of the Birds of Malta with their English and Maltese Names". This was printed only for private circulation in 1860, according to a handwritten note on Charles A. Wright's personal copy. A blank space was left after each species so that notes could be written on the catalogue.

In the course of carrying out research for the publication *Maltese Ornithology*, which is in preparation, one of the authors (JS) discovered Medlycott's drawings at the Natural History Museum in London. After W.C.P. Medlycott's untimely death at the age of 56 years, the drawings finally passed on to his youngest brother The Reverend (Sir) Hubert James Medlycott. In 1954 the latter's son, Sir Hubert Mervyn Medlycott, who was a professional soldier, donated all the sketches, together with some manuscripts, to the Natural History Museum in London.

Medlycott had already visited Malta at the age of 22 when he started drawing pencil sketches and water-colour drawings of plants and animals. Plate 1 (a) to (f) shows some examples of his drawings. Apart from visiting Malta frequently, he also traveled to several other countries including North America where he made a similar collection of sketches and water-colour drawings of plants, birds and fishes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Joe Attard Tabone for providing us with some of the literature referred to, Sir Mervyn Tregonwell Medlycott for giving us invaluable information regarding the Medlycott family, Alison Harding, Librarian, and Gillian Cornelius, Cataloguer, of the Natural History Museum at Tring for helping us in our research at the Library, and Dawn Hathaway of the Image Resources Department at the Natural History Museum, London for giving us permission to photograph and publish some of the sketches.

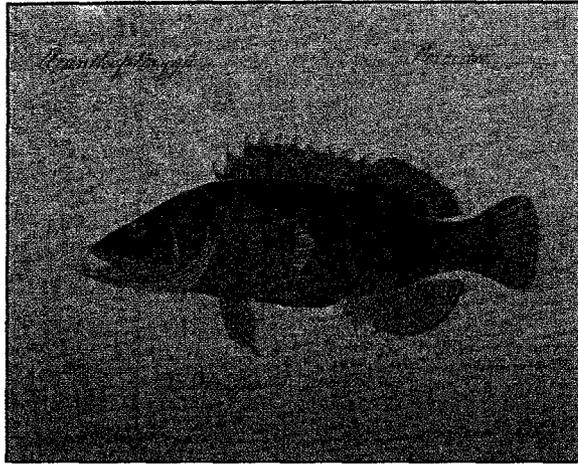
REFERENCES

- Cooke, J. H. 1893. Notes & News. *The Mediterranean Naturalist* 3 (26): 429-433.
Seddall, H. 1870. *Malta: Past and Present*. Virtue and Co., London.
Tallack, W. 1861. *Malta, under the Phoenicians, Knights, and English*. A.W. Bennett, London.

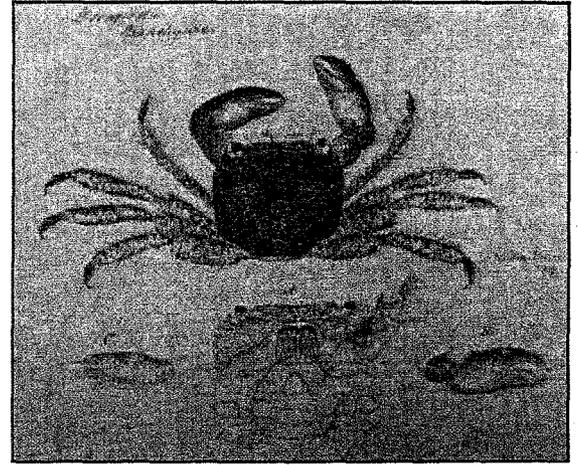
(Accepted 19th October 2003)

¹ Dar ta' Gajdoru / 3, Gajdoru Street, Xaghra, Gozo XRA 104, Malta. joesultana@maltanet.net

² The National Museum of Natural History, Mdina, Malta john.j.borg@gov.mt



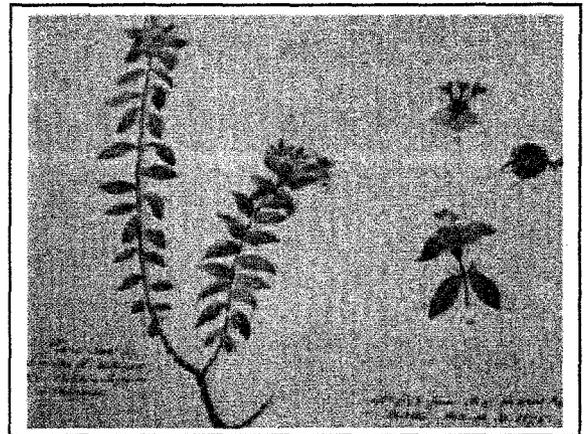
(a)



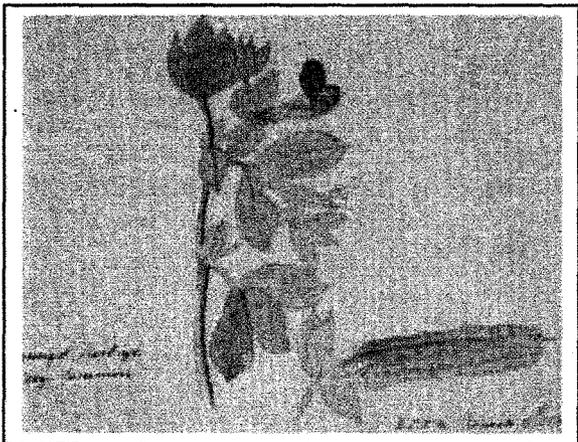
(b)



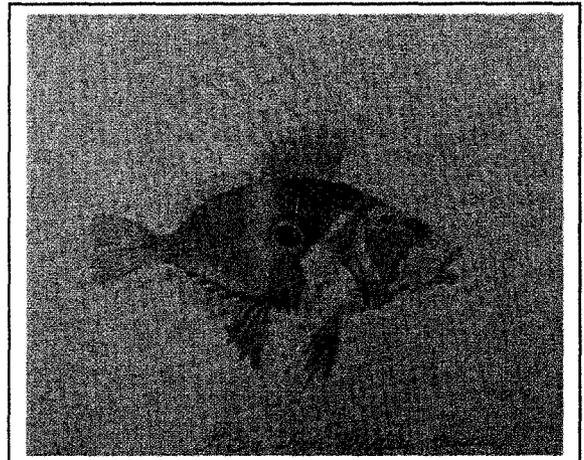
(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Plate 1. (a) Water-colour drawing of Painted Comber, *Serranus scriba*; (b) An ink drawing of the Mediterranean Shore Crab, *Pachygrapsus marmoratus*; (c) Water-colour painting of a sea hare, *Aplysia punctata*; (A hand-written note under the painting reads "a very common mollusk in the harbour amongst the beds of *Zostera marina* and on the stones and seaweeds in shallow water where the ground is muddy".) (d) Water-colour drawing of the Maltese Spurge, *Euphorbia melitensis* (drawn from a specimen from Wied Babu in March 1875); (e) Water-colour painting of Winged Pea, *Lotus tetragonolobus* (*Tetragonolobus purpureus*); (f) Water-colour painting of John Dory, *Zeus faber* painted in Malta on 5 January 1857.

(All photographs © The Natural History Museum, London.)