

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

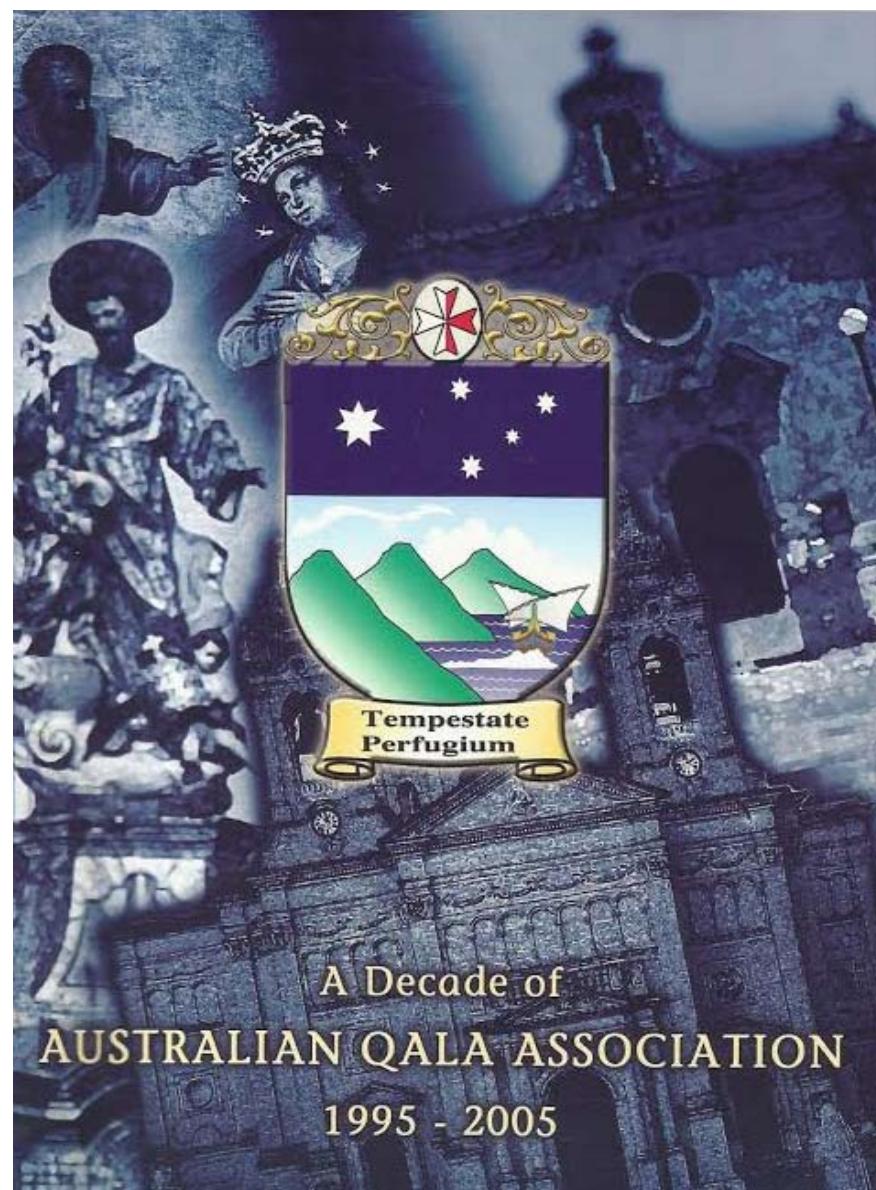
Raymond C. Xerri

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

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Book: Ix-Xewkija. Il-Wirt Religjuż

Raymond C. Xerri

Malta: BCD Printing (2013)

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

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

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

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

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

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

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

