

Book: Imxi ftit passi mieghi: Għażla ta' Poeżiji 1973-2013

Joe Axiaq

Melbourne: Published by Author, 2014, pp. 88.

REVIEWED BY GEOGGREY G. ATTARD

Joe Axiaq is one of the Maltese poets who has made a name for himself on the Australian continent where allegedly the Maltese community is more numerous than the population in the Maltese islands. *Imxi ftit passi mieghi* is the third anthology of poems by this poet born in Żebbuġ, Gozo in 1954. The previous two are *Bejn Vjaġġ u Ieħor* published in 1979 and *Irjiegħ* published in 1987.

Axiaq, who emigrated to Australia back in 1974, fell in love with the Maltese language when he was still a student. As soon as he arrived in Australia he involved himself in the main telecommunications company on the continent where he made a name for himself. He wrote many novels and poems most of which he read first on the redifusion and then on the radio. He also published many articles of a cultural and a historical nature. This latest anthology of his contains poems he composed between 1973 and 2013. As he wrote in the introduction of the book, the poems he published were chosen from many others which he wrote over the years. He divides the anthology into three sections which do not necessarily have a particular or distinct character but which are more or less autobiographical in inspiration.

The poet feels inspired by various themes and aspects from his own past life and from the activity that goes on around him. There is no doubt that nostalgia plays an important role in his poetry. Axiaq was born in Żebbuġ, a picturesque village of the island of Gozo overlooking the scenic bays of Xwejni and Marsalforn, which are extremely popular with the local people especially during the summer months. Żebbuġ in the late fifties and early sixties must have been quite primitive in character; it is still an enchanting locality to this very day and has grown in its popularity among the people of the sister island of Malta and also with foreigners who choose it as their second home. The poems vary so much in their themes that it is hardly possible to divide them according to subject. However the



autobiographical aspect is quite strong. At times he is also inspired by the cosmopolitan character of his second home which is the city of Melbourne. I admire the way he refers to his native Gozo and to his adopted country at the end of the introduction; he calls Gozo 'arti' literally translated to 'my land'; then he proceeds to call Australia 'pajjizi' which can be loosely translated to 'my country'. I wonder which of them would be considered the dearest by the poet but perhaps the art of poetry itself has taught the poet to avoid the comparative altogether. After all home is where one makes it, as the proverb goes.

The poet has kept himself abreast even with the latest changes in the writing of the Maltese language as decided by the Kunsill tal-Malti since I noticed various words which were faithful to the latest developments in Maltese orthography. In the world of the internet Australia is not as far away as it seems on a world-map and with this latest publication of his, Gozo-born poet Joe Axiaq immortalises once again his love for his native country, the land which imbued him with love for prose and poetry.

Book: Il-Viżta Appostolika ta' Monsinjur Pietru Dusina f'Għawdex fis-Sena 1575

Translated into Maltese by Anton F. Attard
Gozo: Published by Author, 2014, pp. 128.

REVIEWED BY MAURICE CAUCHI

Very little is known about the condition of Gozo after the Turks carried the vast majority of Gozitans into exile in Turkey in July 1551. It is therefore of considerable interest to be able to see what was going on in those days through the eyes of a visitor to the Island, a personage no less than the Apostolic Visitor, Mgr Pietro Dusina who arrived in these islands in July 1574. It is thanks to his report that we have available a wealth of information about not only the condition of the church, but also of the general, rather impoverished situation which affected both clergy and flock. All this information was available in various archives, but it is only now that it has been translated from Latin and made available to the public by Mr Anton F. Attard, B.A. This book, titled *Il-Viżta Appostolika ta' Monsinjur Pietru Dusina f'Għawdex fis-Sena 1575*, provides us with a wealth of information about the situation existing over four centuries ago.

The book is subdivided into four sections. The first section deals with the description of the state of the churches within the 'Kastell' itself. It is surprising to see the number of small churches that existed within that perimeter, most of which were found to be below standard and had to be condemned. On the other hand, the main church itself (dedicated to the Ascension of the Blessed Mary) was still in reasonable shape and had a considerable amount of *object d'art* and precious works of arts which somehow escaped the greed of the invading Turk.

The second section redeals with the various churches outside the *Cittadella*. This section gives us a wealth of information about the large number of chapels scattered around the island, a witness to the religiosity of the population and their need to visit these outlying churches. After the invasion, most of these chapels fell into disuse and had to be condemned. One striking characteristic was the absence of wooden doors to these chapels. Apparently, the severe lack of wood on the island made wooden doors a very collectable item, and these were among the first that went missing!

A third section gives us a glimpse of the interrogation process which the clergy has to go through to ensure that they had been adequately qualified to perform their work amongst their flock. What comes out very clear is the degree of ignorance and ill-preparedness of the

clergy, most of whom could hardly read and write. Poverty among them was of course rampant, seeing that their flock had all but disappeared following the Turkish invasion. Their grasp of their religion wasn't very more impressive – one of them (Fra Antonio Agius) even admitting that he was a heretic!

The final section gives us a glimpse at the inventory of the main church (now the Cathedral) inside the castle, emphasising that all was not lost to the invading Turk.

Of interest is the range of surnames which existed at the time which do not appear any more within the Gozitan community, eg: Chireno, Platamone, Infanatino, Deapapis, Deobaldo (Thobaldo). This book is valuable in that it makes it possible for the average reader to obtain information about aspects of life in the immediate aftermath of the decimation of the Gozitan population which took place in 1551. It confirms that the island had fallen into hard times when even doors from abandoned churches were filched to cook one's dinner.

This book should be read for its historical interest relating specifically to a period of history that has not been readily available to the general reader. As the author remarks, the number of persons capable of reading Latin is fast disappearing, and with it the ability to make sense of these important documents.

