

A Window onto the Day-to-Day running of the Nazione Gozitana

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Introduction

A decade ago the Island of Gozo commemorated the two hundredth anniversary of the end of the Knights' rule, the eventful stay of the French and the eventual establishment of the short-lived *Nazione Gozitana*. The ad hoc commemorations organising Committee¹ within the then Parliamentary Secretariat for Gozo supported a number of initiatives including the publication of two monographs on the French stay in Gozo by Dr. Joe De Bono and Mgr. Dr. Joseph Bezzina respectively, in which a comprehensive overview of the French occupation between 10th June and 28th October 1798 is provided. Another published source of great merit is Carmel Testa's voluminous work "*The French in Malta*".

Governance in Gozo

A notable source is kept at the National Library of Malta, namely a copy of two detailed income and expenditure accounts for the period 23rd October 1798 to end May 1799 compiled by Archpriest Saverio Cassar as Head of Government and Superintendent of Gozo.² Entitled "*Copia delli due Conti presentati alla Deputazione dal Sig. Arcipere del Gozo³ Don Saverio Cassar*", these form part of Library Manuscript 1053 – "*Documenti insurrezione Gozo (1798), Lettere Cassar Bondi*", bequeathed to the National Library by Magistrate Edgar Parnis LLD in 1913. Surprisingly, listed publications seem to make little use of, if not overlook completely this source.

With a combined length of 87 A4-pages, these accounts shed valuable light on the governance of Gozo and on the outstanding capability of its people to rise to the occasion and overcome all sorts of challenges presented to them.

On 2nd September 1798 the Gozitans revolted against the 300 strong French garrison deployed on the island and succeeded in ousting them by 29th October, when an autonomous protectorate

within the Kingdom of Naples was created. Although redeeming themselves from a despotic government and gaining full control of both internal affairs and foreign policy, the island's resources had to be stretched to the limit to offer maximum resistance against emerging potential invaders and to procure supplementary food supplies from overseas. Indeed, except for a negligible percentage the total expenditure registered in the quoted source relates directly to the manning, upkeep and ammunition of the respective strongholds and corresponding strategic localities and to the shipping over of wheat and other foodstuffs from nearby Sicily. These preoccupations had been haunting the poor Gozitans for centuries, although the Knights' imposing presence on mainland Malta alleviated to a limited extent this perennial struggle in more ways than one. In Cassar's case, the situation was aggravated drastically due to the transfer to Malta of all food supplies and ammunition amassed within the Castello⁴ immediately after the surrender of the French.

Archpriest Saverio Cassar (1746 – 1805) was a born leader and a great benefactor of Gozo. He laboured to keep his fellow compatriots united and enacted audacious mitigation measures whenever the success of his mission was at stake.⁵ Notwithstanding these achievements, on 20th August 1801 Archpriest Saverio Cassar was kicked out of office by the Civil Commissioner of Malta Sir Charles Cameron. Besides witnessing the unceremonious termination of the *Nazione Gozitana* he was accused of money misappropriation, although the subsequent inquiry proved his innocence. Cassar died on 16th December 1805.

The Registers

What follows is a summarised version of the aforementioned income and expenditure registers. Wherever possible it has been deemed appropriate to leave the respective legends in their original wording.

**COPIA DEL PRIMO CONTO PRESENTATO ALLA DEPUTAZIONE DAL SIGNOR ARCIPETE DEL GOZO
DON SAVERIO CASSAR IL 23 APRILE 1799.**

Revenues ⁶ (23.10.1798 – 18.04.1799) – including 221.4.8 from the University's assets		7534. 11: 20 ⁷
Revenues from the Assembly (22.10.1798 – 18.03.1799)		424. 6. 10
		7958. 5. 30
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione del Gran Castello ⁸ (23.11.1798 – 20.04.1799)		2286. 6. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione del Forte Chambray ⁹ (24.10.1798 – 20.04.1799)		1680. 0. 50
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre Garzes ¹⁰ (24.10.1798 – 17.04.1799)		506.9. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre del Comino (26.10.1798 – 20.04.1799)		596. 10. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre Ras el Cala (08.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		591. 6. 40
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Batterija Tocc ¹¹ (18.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		207. 8. 40
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre S. Biagio ¹² (14.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		330. 7. 20
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Guardia Ghorof ¹³ (18.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		156. 6. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Batterija Ramola ¹⁴ (18.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		407. 8. 40
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre Marsalfurno ¹⁵ (17.11.1798 – 20.04.1799)		1334. 2. 20
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione del Fortino S. Maria ¹⁶ (18.11.1798 – 17.04.1799)		341. 0. 20
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione del Fortino Colla el Bajda ¹⁷ (11.11.1798 – 20.04.1799)		505. 6. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre Duejra (05.11.1798 – 21. 04. 1799)		268. 7. 10
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre Scilendi (18.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		225. 8. 16
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Torre Migiar Isscini (18.11.1798 – 21.04.1799)		176. 0. 20
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione della Batterija Ghelmus ¹⁸ (10.11.1798 – 27.11.1798)		57. 0. 00
Pagamenti fatti alli servienti della Curia ¹⁹ (02.12.1798)		6. 3. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla Ronda del Zebbug (18.11.1798 – 09.04.1799)		77. 0. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla Ronda del Garbo (02.12.1798 – 31.04.1799)		75. 0. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla Ronda della Xeuchia (02.12.1798 – 03.04.1799)		90.0. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla Ronda del Nadur (01.12.1798 – 03.03.1799)		60.0.00
Pagamenti fatti alla Ronda della Caccia (12.01.1799 – 02.04.1799)		60.0.00
Spese Straordinarie ²⁰ (05/11/1798 – 20/04/1799)		789. 4. 12
Vicenda del Comino (28.02.1799 – 04.04.1799)		35. 0. 00
Vicenda di Chambray (16.03.1799)		20. 0. 00
Vicenda di Garzes (17.03.1799)		20.0. 00
Alimenti di Carcerati ²¹ (December 1798 – 22.04.1799)		162. 9. 50
Segnali ta' Dbiegi ²² (23.02.1799 – 22.04.1799)		81. 6. 40
Segnali del Nadur ²³ (03.04.1799 – 17.04.1799)		26. 3. 00
Danaro somministrato a quattro donne, i mariti di quali morirono nell'assedio di Chambray ²⁴		143. 0. 00
Spese fatte per la gente del Comino ²⁵		56. 4. 00
Danaro fornito agli Inglesi	Al padrone del Brick capitato nel Migiarro	50. 0. 00
	All'Inglese delli segnali (07.04.1799 – 17.04.1799)	17. 6. 00
		11442. 1. 12
Bilancio	Esito	11442. 1. 12
	Introito	7959. 5. 30
	Onde l-Esito avvanza l-Introito in	3482. 8. 90

L'avverta che restono da pagarsi il Capo Mastro e nove Cannonieri del Castello; ed i piu due cannonieri del Forte Chambray. Inoltre restano da pagarsi scudi sei cento e dieci avuti ad prestito per pagare li cento soldati che hanno bloccato il Castello dalli 24 Settembre²⁶ fino li 9 Novembre 1798 come dal giornale.

COPIA DEL SECONDO CONTO PRESENTATO ALLA DEPUTAZIONE DAL SIG. ARCIPRETE DEL GOZO
DON SAVERIO CASSAR – IL PRIMO GIUGNO 1799

Introito	
Danaro somministrato in soccorso della Rivoluzione ²⁷	97. 0. 00
Danaro somministrato per mantemimento de Soldati ²⁸	255. 5. 00
Danaro avuto per la provisioni ²⁹	1095. 0. 00
Dal Magaziniere del vettovaglio venduto nella Rivoluzione	2841. 3. 40
Dalla Cassa dell'Universita	12559. 4. 00
Avuti dal Magaziniere	103971. 2. 60
Avuti da diversi per pubblici contratti	5695. 7. 15
Da Lorenzo Vella contribuiti da molti di Casal Caccia per le provisioni	1025. 0. 00
Avuti dal prezzo de fromenti portati dallo schifo trattenuto in S. Paolo	2062. 6. 00
<i>Others</i> ³⁰	745. 0. 50
	130,267. 4. 10
Esito	
<i>Various</i> ³¹	1089. 4. 50
Pagati a Salvatore Vella per spese da lui fatte nelli due viaggi fatti per Napoli ³² , ed in quello fatto per Siracusa ³³ a fine di portare dispacci per Sua Maesta e domandar provisioni e munizioni di Guerra.	733. 2. 00
Pagamenti fatti alla guarnigione del Gran Castello ³⁴ (04/05/1799 – 28/05/1799)	518. 0. 00
Chambray ³⁵ (03/05/1799 – 30/05/1799)	306. 0. 00
Garzes ³⁶ (04/05/1799 – 22/05/1799)	93. 0. 00
Comino ³⁷ (03/05/1799 – 19/05/1799)	88. 6. 00
Ras el Cala ³⁸ (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	122. 6. 00
Tocc ³⁹ (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	43. 9. 00
San Biagio ⁴⁰ (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	70. 0. 00
Ghorof ⁴¹ (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	35. 0. 00
Ramola ⁴² (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	87. 6. 00
Marsalfurno ⁴³ (03/05/1799 – 25/09/1799)	288. 9. 00
Santa Maria ⁴⁴ (03/05/1799 – 29/05/1799)	94. 6. 00
Colla el Bajda ⁴⁵ (04/05/1799 – 25/05/1799)	105. 0. 00
Duejra ⁴⁶ (06/05/1799 – 27/05/1799)	52. 6. 00
Scilendi ⁴⁷ (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	43. 9. 00
Migiar Issini ⁴⁸ (05/05/1799 - 26/05/1799)	35. 0. 00
Spese Straordinarie ⁴⁹ (14/05/1799 – 16/05/1799)	160. 7. 10
Carcerati (22/04/1799 – 31/05/1799)	45. 8. 00
Segnali ta Dibiegi ⁵⁰ (23/04/1799 – 29/05/1799)	15. 0. 00
Inglese del Nadur (30/04/1799 – 26/05/1799)	20. 0. 00
Inglese del Comino ⁵¹ (03/05/1799 – 29/05/1799)	217. 2. 10
Alla fregatina dell' Alesandro capitata nel Migiarro (06/05/1799)	25. 0. 00
Alle quattro Donne (05/05/1799 – 26/05/1799)	34. 0. 00
Somministrati al Commandante Pace ⁵² in diverse volte	1133. 6. 10
Pagati per mantenimento del Conservatorio ⁵³ fin tutto Maggio	168. 10. 00
Danaro Rimesso Gio Battista Frangipane	49,212. 2. 14
Pagamenti per le Compre di Vettovagli e Noli ⁵⁴ (13/10/1798 – 12/05/1799)	44,285. 3. 18
Pagati al Comandante Pace per spese fatte nel viaggio di Palermo ⁵⁵ fatto per ottenere dalla R.C. provisioni con dilazioni secondo le note da lui presentate	405.10. 00
Altre Spese per la spedizione delli Orzi ⁵⁶	180. 10. 00
Altre Spese per la spedizione di Fromenti ⁵⁷	308. 9. 00
Spese nelle compre de Filati ⁵⁸	7361. 3. 14
Fabrica ⁵⁹	18,051. 2. 50
Spese solite farsi dall' Universita ⁶⁰	2347. 10. 14
	127,755. 5. 60
Bilancio	
Esito	127,755. 5. 60
Credito come al Bilancio del Primo Conto	3482. 8. 90
	131,263. 10. 15
Introito	130,267. 4. 10
Resta Creditore l' Arciprete ⁶¹	996. 6. 50

Notes

¹ *Chairperson* Anton F. Attard; *Secretary* Frank Masini; *Coordinator* George Vella; *Members* Rev. Dr. Joseph Bezzina, John Cremona, Josienne Said and Godwin Vella.

² Provisional Government of Gozo was created and constituted by its People on 18th September 1798. (Bezzina 2005, p 56)

³ Saverio Cassar was installed Archpriest of the Matrix church on 6th December 1773 and created Provicar of Gozo on 1st January 1775. (Bezzina 1998, p 39)

⁴ Being 3200 sacks of corn, 50 barrels of gunpowder, 9000 ball cartridges, 1000 musket cartridges without ball, 1700 flints, 38 eighteen-pound cartridges, 140 twelve-pound cartridges, 450 six-pound cartridges, 268 four-pound cartridges, 25 three-pound cartridges, 88 two-pound cartridges, 18 eighteen-pounder guns and 200 shots, 2 twelve-pounder guns and 900 shots, 4 six-pounder guns and 2985 shots, 400 hand grenades, 90 pikes and 90 halbers.

⁵ Cassar imprisoned one of the Rabat Commanders and three Cannons suspected of treason vis-à-vis the Gozitan efforts to win back the Gran Castello from the French Garrison.

⁶ The only entries of rent received are 50 scudi each from the tenants of the Xaghra and the Xewkija Windmills, and 100 scudi from the tenant of the Ta'Hamet estate. Saverio Cassar had issued a *bando* stating that all farmers who were unable to pay their rent for their fields 'on account of the confusion following the French invasion and the subsequent struggle to throw them out' were granted a moratorium until further notice. (Testa p 579)

⁷ Monetary values: 1 scudo = 12 tari, 1 tari = 20 grani

⁸ The French Garrison inside the Gran Castello surrendered on 28th October 1798.

⁹ The French garrison inside Fort Chambray escaped clandestinely to Malta on 16th September 1798.

¹⁰ Erected in 1607, Torre Garzes had a massive construction. It was eventually demolished in 1848. (Samut-Tagliaferro pp 81-108)

¹¹ The true purpose of this stronghold is unclear. The naïve but accurate coloured pen drawing of the French Capitulation at It-Tokk shows a one-storey high property along the northern side of the square (the site of present day Castle Pharmacy) with barricaded doors at ground floor level and what look to be three gun embrasures puncturing the overlying parapet wall.

¹² Originally called Torre Nuova, Torre S. Biaggio was referred to also as Ta' Dahlet Qorrot, Ta' Sopu and tal-Rdum il-Kbir. (Samut-Tagliaferro p 181)

¹³ The whereabouts of "Tal-Ghorof" could not be identified.

¹⁴ During the 18th century Ramla Bay was defended by two batteries (Balincourt and Nadur respectively), a central redoubt, an entrenchment along the entire breath of the bay, a fougasse on the Nadur side and an underwater sea-wall. (Samut-Tagliaferro pp 216-7)

¹⁵ Torre Marsalforn was erected in 1720 to replace an earlier construction (1616). It was eventually demolished in 1915 to make room for a Wireless Telegraph Station. (Samut-Tagliaferro pp 111, 191-200)

¹⁶ The Santa Marija Battery was erected in 1715 and stood on the site of the present Qbajjar promenade parking. (Samut-Tagliaferro p 214)

¹⁷ Il-Qolla l-Bajda promontory was defended also by the Xwejini Redoubt. (Samut-Tagliaferro p 210)

¹⁸ Ironically, Ta' Gelmus Hill was always listed out by the respective military engineers who inspected the Island's defences during the Order of St. John's presence as a menacing threat for the Gran Castello defences.

¹⁹ The Nazione Gozitana's early headquarters were sited in a farmhouse beneath the plateau at Ta' Gelmus. (Bezzina 1998, p 39)

²⁰ These include the upgrading and routine maintenance of the fortifications and the repairs of damages inflicted on the same fortifications during the insurgence, artillery transport and repair of mounts, transport to and from British vessels, purchase of ammunition and related supplies, accommodation of security corps, and messenger services.

²¹ Even though the island of Gozo was exploited by Maltese authorities as a dumping ground for the exile of unwanted elements (Testa p 79), quoted amount seems to refer to the prisoners of Cassar's government.

²² A Semaphore Signal Station was erected on Ta' Dbiegi Hill in 1848. It was eventually relocated next to Ta' Giordan Lighthouse after being damaged severely by bad weather.

²³ A Semaphore Signal Station was erected on the southwest tip of the Nadur plateau (Ta' Kenuna neighbourhood) in 1848. Its towering structure was employed as an Electric Telegraph and Cable Station between 1861 and 1883.

²⁴ Giovanna Mizzi two scudi per week as from 21/11/1798; Maria Calleja two scudi per week as from 22/11/1798; Maria Grima two scudi per week as from 02/12/1798; Rosa Saliba I scudo per week as from 18/12/1798. Their husbands lost their life on 14th September 1798 during

the third Gozitan attack on Fort Chambray. (Bezzina 1998, p 38)

²⁵ The provision and transport of food stuffs, including Sicilian cheese.

²⁶ A supply of arms and ammunition was made available by the Portuguese fleet blockading the Great Harbour. (Bezzina 1998, p 49)

²⁷ The leading benefactors (five out of seven) hailed from the clergy, namely three cannons, a priest and a cleric.

²⁸ A total of 54 donors including ten members of the clergy and six ladies.

²⁹ A total of 14 donors including two members of the clergy and a lady.

³⁰ Less substantive incomes originating from various activities/sources including the profits from the sale of bread.

³¹ A six page list featuring various expenses in connection with variety of activities, particularly the procurement of food stuffs (eggs, vegetables, fruits, olives, local & Sicilian cheese, poultry, mutton and beef), transport costs (including to and from Portuguese vessels), provision and transport of ammunition, and the donation of tobacco to the British forces.

³² Primo Viaggio di Napoli – 57. 9. 0, secondo 564. 2. 0

³³ Viaggio per Siracusa – 161 . 3. 0

³⁴ Two gunmen, a goal keeper and 53 soldiers.

³⁵ A gunmen and 29 soldiers

³⁶ A complement of 10 defenders

³⁷ A complement of 10 defenders

³⁸ A complement of 14 defenders

³⁹ A complement of five defenders

⁴⁰ A complement of eight defenders

⁴¹ A complement of four defenders

⁴² A complement of 10 defenders

⁴³ A complement of 33 defenders

⁴⁴ A complement of nine defenders

⁴⁵ A complement of 12 defenders

⁴⁶ A complement of six defenders

⁴⁷ A complement of five defenders

⁴⁸ A complement of four defenders

⁴⁹ This includes the Ronda of Casal Caccia, Casal Nadur and Casal Żebbug.

⁵⁰ Manned by Giuseppe Abela.

⁵¹ Including the provision of beef, pork and wine.

⁵² Dr Francesco Pace met his future wife Lucia Dei Baroni Forno during these trips (De Bono p 48). Their son Gaetano served as Bishop of the Maltese Islands between 1857 and 1874.

⁵³ The Girls Conservatory was constructed through the generosity of Bishop Labini in 1789. (Gauci p 46)

⁵⁴ Wheat and barley were imported from Sicily, namely through Syracuse and Agrigento. The quoted figure includes retail prices, transport to Gozo and *per diem* allowances granted to respective officials travelling abroad to oversee the deal.

⁵⁵ Pace landed at Licata and proceeded overland to Palermo.

⁵⁶ A total of 2000 salme (maltese *modd* – 0.2909m3) of barley were procured. Quoted amount includes various service charges like the drawing up and eventual copying of the procurement contract, and the fees of the respective Licata Harbour authorities.

⁵⁷ Similar charges as in preceding note.

⁵⁸ The payment for the wheat and barley purchased from Sicily was defrayed by sending all the spun thread produced on behalf of the Gozo Government in monthly shipments transported gratis to Sicily. (De Bono p 48)

⁵⁹ Namely the purchase of the raw material, its manufacture, packaging in 99 sacks and eventual transport via Mgarr.

⁶⁰ Being various salaries, additional expenses related to the procurement of wheat and barley and other extraordinary expenses.

⁶¹ Even though the Congress of the people of Gozo established a *Cassa Nazionale* for the provision of food supplies for the people of the island of Gozo (Bezzina p 47), Cassar seems to have made available his personal liquid capital to lubricate the day-to-day transactions.

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