

Maltese for *Counterscarp*¹

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Dun Karm Psaila in his important *Dizzjunarju Ingliz–Malti* (Valletta 1947) translates the English word *counterscarp* as *kontraskarpa* (p.274). The counterscarp is the outer wall of a ditch surrounding the fortifications.

The word is repeated by Erin Serracino-Inglott in *Il-Miklem Malti* (vol. V, Valletta 1978, p.163) as well as by Professor Joseph Aquilina in his *Maltese–English Dictionary* (vol. I, Valletta 1987, p.684).

The word *counterscarp* originated as *contrescarpe* in French military treatises in the late sixteenth century and was simultaneously

translated in Italian works as *controscarpa*, from which the Maltese word. Unknown to the compilers of these dictionaries, it did not take long for the Gozitans, and possibly also the Maltese, to find an appropriate Semitic word for the Romance *controscarpa*.

A document of 1730, preserved at the NAG • the National Archives Gozo Section (NAG, UNIVERSITAS GAUDISII, *Acta et Negotia*, 12 (1730-32) 56r) cannot be clearer as regards the Maltese translation of *counterscarp*. In giving the description of a *clausura* or piece of land, it states that its western section bordered on “la contrascarpa del Castello che la chiamano *Haġġarija*.”

The *Haġġarija* of the Gozo Citadel is still in place obstructed by the buildings bordering *It-Telgħa tal-Belt*, *Pjazza Indipendenza*, *Triq ir-Repubblika*, and *Triq Ta' Wara s-Sur*.

Aquilina in his *Maltese-English* dictionary (vol. I, Valletta 1987, p.477) rightly describes *il-Haġġarija* as a place-name in Rabat-Gozo. Up to the 1930s, the street going up to the Citadel from Triq Sant'Orsla was in fact known as *Triq il-Haġġarija*. The British rather naively, and wrongly, translated it into Castle Street and it became *Triq il-Kastell*.

The Maltese language is richer than many think! The Victoria Council should put right this wrong and save a place-name.



Plan of the *clausura* bordering *il-Haġġarija* – reproduced by kind permission of the NAG.

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¹ This note fulfills a promise made to the readers of *The Times* (9 Oct 2009: 10).