

Giovanni Francesco Buonamico (1639-1680)

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The Environment and Resources Authority has set up the Buonamico Award on the occasion of the World Wildlife Day in recognition of contribution by enthusiasts to our knowledge on the environment. The first Buonamico Award winners were Mr Hubert Spiteri and Mr Michael Briffa. The award-giving ceremony was on 9th March 2017 under the auspices of Her Excellency President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca. This award is inspired by Giovanni Francesco Buonamico, also known as Ġan Frangisk Bonamico.

Buonamico was a 17th century Maltese traveller, poet, writer, doctor and naturalist, who also wrote the first Flora of the Maltese Islands. As an intellectual he is best renowned as the author of the second oldest poem in Maltese, “*Mejju ġie bil-ward u ż-żahar*”, but has also written various accounts of his travel experiences.

His varied intellectual interests resulted in the writing of at least four important manuscripts on natural history, which included the first flora of the Maltese Islands, the so-called “Brevis Notitia” manuscripts - two manuscripts written in 1670, and another two manuscripts on the Malta Fungus: “*Dissertatio De Fuco Spicato Coccineo Melitensis*”. These are undated, but the general consensus is that these go back to a date either earlier than or contemporary with the “Brevis Notitia”.

The manuscript on the Malta Fungus essentially describes this species for the first time, and the “Brevis Notitia” includes notes on the flora and agriculture in

Malta, with information on cultivated and ornamental plants at the time. The latter also included a detailed list of species of wild flora observed by Buonamico comprising 244 entries – a major feat considering that no earlier studies of the sort seem to have been carried out.

Unfortunately, Buonamico’s naturalistic works were never published and survive only as manuscripts in the National Library of Malta in Valletta. Due to this, such pioneering works remained mostly unassessed, despite their considerable importance, and were thus underestimated until studied recently by Darrin T Stevens and Edwin Lanfranco.

Buonamico is therefore considered as a good metaphor to show the importance of undervalued people, who still give valuable input to the academia and authorities in the environment field.

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