

A Description of Gozo at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century

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This article is a continuation of the one published by the same author in the previous edition of The Gozo Observer. This edition continues with Caxaro's description of Gozo (1704).

Annual Emoluments, Allowances and Salaries of the Governor, Lieutenants, Sergeant, Soldiers and Drummer

The Governor's basic emoluments total 312.4.10 scudi¹, being 294.4.10 scudi from the Order's Treasury and 18 scudi from the Gozo University. He is entitled also for an allowance to cover half of the expense required for keeping a guard and a horse besides other fringe benefits, namely six tari from each herd of ten or more sheep, a cartload of hay from every farmer who ploughs his fields with two oxen, two tumoli² of barley and a bale of hay from every owner of the militia horses, ..., six tari per month from every tavern outside the Castello, one fourth from all fiscal penalties imposed, and other benefits. These add up to circa 700 scudi per annum.

The Lieutenant has a salary of 100 scudi, while the Sergeant gets 82.7 scudi from the Order's Treasury plus 33 scudi for ... and 8 scudi to cover half the expense required for keeping a guard. Soldiers are paid 25 scudi each, while the drummer receives 20 scudi. The master bombardier gets ... scudi from the said Treasury whereas the Gozo University recompensed

him four scudi for the home-rent, another four scudi for the making of signalling bonfires from May to St Martin's, and 4.2.9 scudi for the manufacture of mortar paraphernalia. His assistant receives a salary of 23 scudi from the Treasury.

The Suburb of Rabat

Rabat stands at the foot of the Castello and has a much higher population count. A few modern residences include several commodities, but the majority follow an archaic idiom and are built of rubble.³ Rainwater is harvested and collected in four good cisterns built with two skinned walls of dressed stone, coated with pumice-based mortar, and located in different houses. Other domestic wells are employed for the storage of spring-water, albeit relatively hard due to the underlying clayey deposits. Freshwater is fetched from the Grand Fountain and from Bendu's Spring both sited in the magistral estate of the Great Spring.⁴



An early twentieth century photo of the 'Grand Fountain'.

¹ A scudo equals 12 tari, and each tari equals 20 grani.

² A tumolo is equivalent to 18.18 litres.

³ The main walls must have consisted of roughly shaped stones cemented together with terra soil (wet rubble), while the corners, jambs, lintels and arches must have featured ashlar blocks.

⁴ The Great Spring Estate lies 750m to the Castello's south-southwest.

Rabat's parish church of St George was reconstructed between 1672 and 1680, and became to share the same parish priest of the Matrice as from 1687.⁵ The Island's Militia occupy a loggia-fronted building overlooking a spacious square that serves for the grouping of the cavalry and all men of arms whenever required.⁶

The rural church of Santa Maria Savina⁷ houses many of the altar paintings formerly belonging to the profaned chapels and the tenth Canon of the Matrice, being the beneficiary of the resultant annual incomes, is obliged to celebrate their respective feast days by singing vespers and saying mass.

Two conventual churches are sited in the immediate outskirts of Rabat, namely that on the eastern side and adjacent to the beautiful Franciscans' Friary reconstructed in 1675,⁸ and that belonging to the Augustinians' Friary⁹ currently under construction on the opposite side. Both churches enjoy strong devotion and attract substantial donations for their upkeep and

for the running of the adjoining friaries.

Lying half a mile to the northeast of the Castello and overlooking a wide floored valley, the chapel of Our Lady of Graces¹⁰ is frequented by the neighbouring folk on a daily basis, and draws many pilgrims on Wednesdays and for the annual thanksgiving procession held on the second Sunday of January in fulfilment of the vow in connection with the aforementioned earthquake.

Another rural chapel is dedicated to the Annunciation and forms part of the magistral benefice known as ta' nunziata,¹¹ which comprises several fields, a lovely garden abounding in pomegranate and other fruit trees, and two copious water springs for the irrigation of the vegetables cultivated in this estate and in the adjacent fields. The holder of the said benefice sponsors the vespers and solemn feast which falls on 25th March, supplies the chapel with candles and related consumables, and is obliged to say mass on a regular basis.



Early twentieth century view of Rabat from the Ghajn Hamimiet neighbourhood. St Augustine's Friary and Church stand on the right hand side.

⁵ The two parochial units of Rabat kept sharing the same parish priest until 1976.

⁶ A 1798 pen drawing of the French Forces capitulation at present day Independence Square shows a protruding arched veranda to the left of the Banca Giuratale and corner with St Joseph's Street (De Bono, p 46). Independence Square is still known popularly as it-Tokk 'the central meeting place' (Aquilina Vol. II, p 1463).

⁷ The term rural may sound somewhat confusing as the church of Santa Maria Savina lied within the footprint of Rabat's historic core. Most likely this relates to transfer of the incomes and obligations of many profaned rural chapels. The then cubic, austere and low profile construction was replaced by the present edifice in 1902.

⁸ According to tradition the first Franciscan friars that settled in Gozo inhabited a series of caves underlying the same convent, while some form of above-ground premises were erected by the beginning of the sixteenth century (Agius De Soldanis Vol. II, pp 103-9).

⁹ The Augustinian friars were already in Gozo by 1453 and occupied an exposed site on the Xaghra plateau before moving to the outskirts of Rabat (Agius De Soldanis, BKII, pp 95-100).

¹⁰ The chapel of Our Lady of Graces was replaced by a spacious church annexed to the Capuchin Friary, the foundation stone of which was laid on 17 July 1737 (Agius De Soldanis, Vol. II, pp 113-5).

¹¹ The Saqqajja benefice seems to have been established during the first half of the 14th century by Sibilla d'Aragona (Fiorini, 1999).



Detail of Kerċem Parish's main altar painting by Salvatore Busuttill (1854) showing the annual procession of St Gregory winding its way down from the Castello.

1693 Camilleri was appointed chaplain of obedience of the Order and Don Domenico Habela was chosen as his successor.

The parish establishment decree stipulates that the canons of the venerable matrix retain the right to celebrate mass on the altar of St Elias erected within the same parish following the

A third rural and much frequented church in the vicinity of Rabat is in honour of SS Cosma and Damian.¹² Mass is celebrated every Saturday as per explicit foundation.¹³ Another country chapel bears the title of St Gregory and stands in the neighbourhood of Għar Gerduf.¹⁴ Its feast day is celebrated by a popular and grand procession¹⁵ as is customary on mainland Malta.

Villages

Xewkija heads the island's village list. Its church of St John the Baptist was erected parish in 1678, while the Blessed Sacrament was placed permanently therein on the following January 25th, being the festivity of the conversion of the glorious apostle and our national father St Paul. Don Gratio Farrugia served as Xewkija's first parish priest until his replacement in 1688 by Don Gregorio Camilleri. In

the profanation of his rural chapel¹⁶ whenever a general penitential procession for the island's needs is held.¹⁷ Along the way to Mgarr and within the parish's boundary is St Bartholomew's chapel.¹⁸ Xewkija has an overall population of circa 630 inhabitants, the greater part of which are poor.

Għarb comes second and occupies the western corner of the island. The parish church is dedicated to the Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth and is locally known as tal-Virtut.¹⁹ It was established in 1679 and has since been administered by Don Giovanni Maria Camilleri.²⁰ The village of Għarb is sizeable, boasts of a number of learned priests and clerics, and incorporates a church dedicated to St Lawrence. Its inhabitants include a number of prosperous and modest farmers though many are poor. A noteworthy garden known as Ta' Camenzuli produces white sour apples that can be preserved for the winter months.

¹² The cult of Sts Cosmas and Damian would seem to have been well-rooted in late medieval and early modern Malta. This chapel is recorded as early as 1364 (Agius De Soldanis Vol. II, p 64), and stood on the north side of "Il-Hotba" hillock along the way from Rabat to Għarb (Galea, 2001). The then Women's Hospital inside the Castello adopted their name at some stage before the mid 18th century (ibid, p 134), while one of the two altars adorning the Males' Hospital wards was dedicated to them (ibid, p 136). Besides, the Mdina Cathedral treasured their reliquary (Abela, p 351).

¹³ This Foundation was established on 21.X.1623 by Bastjan Grima (Agius De Soldanis Book II, p 65).

¹⁴ Before its mutilation in the 1870s (Vassallo p 40), the catacomb complex of Għar Gerduf featured a series of deep arcosolia-tombs capable of accommodating up to seven burials.

¹⁵ St Gregory's procession used to take place on 12th March, the Saint's feast-day, and entailed the participation of all the members of the clergy in Gozo as well as all established confraternities. After 1851 it started to follow a different route that ended up at Kerċem's new church. St Gregory's procession was eventually suppressed in 1968 (Gauci, pp 52-3).

¹⁶ St Elias Chapel stood to the east of what is not the heliport and was deconsecrated in 1657 (Bezzina, 2004, p 64).

¹⁷ Votive processions for the alleviation of droughts and related natural calamities were still being held with great zeal during the late 19th century (Vella, 2004).

¹⁸ St Bartholomew's chapel is known popularly as the chapel of Our Lady of Mercy because the present altar-painting, executed by Gian Nikol Buhagiar in 1735, represents St Bartholomew interceding with the Virgin Mary of Mercy for the release of souls from the flames of purgatory (Bezzina, 1999, p 378).

¹⁹ 'Virtut' or 'virtute' means 'miracle' in Italian. According to tradition, a nearby miraculous oil spring that was to be harvested solely to replenish the church's oil lamp turned into fierce flames once a few greedy individuals aspired to turn it into a business venture (Galea, p 61).

²⁰ Don Giovanni Maria Camilleri was the brother of Xewkija's Parish Priest Don Gregorio Camilleri. They donated all their possessions for the setting up of a men's hospital in Gozo. (Vella, in print).

Sannat comes third, is on southern side and has a parish church dedicated to St Margaret. Since its establishment in 1688 Sannat's parish was administered by Don Lazzaro Camilleri. Sannat has a total population of 370 souls, who except for a few stable farmers, consist of poor peasants.

Sitting on a prominent northeast hill is Nadur. It was erected parish in 1688 and is dedicated to the Apostles SS Peter and Paul, while Don Bernardino Haber administered it ever since. Associated with the Nadur Parish is a devotional church in Qala commemorating the Immaculate Conception of our Lady. This church is believed to impart huge miraculous favours and attracts many pilgrims from both Gozo and Malta in fulfilment of their vows.²¹ The parish of Nadur encompasses around 494 inhabitants, many of whom are poor. It is endowed with several beautiful and well-watered gardens full of different fruit trees. One such garden was that constructed in 1678 in the locality of St Blaise and exploited for the cultivation of vegetables and long-lasting Neapolitan apples.

The above mentioned Qala church overlays a cave which according to an old tradition was the abode of a holy hermit.²² He was interred therein following his demise and many individuals were nursed back to health after visiting his burial place. Likewise, all general processions to this sanctuary to surmount distinctive communal hardships yielded the desired outcome thanks also to the mediation of Our Lady.

St Anthony tal Caccia,²³ comprising the neighbourhoods of ix-Xagħra tal-Għażzenin and Ta' Lukin, is Gozo's fifth village. It abounds in fresh water springs and boasts of a number of exquisite orchards. Erected parish in 1687 its church venerates the Nativity of Our Lady, known popularly as tal-Vittoria,²⁴ and has as parish priest Don Mario Antonio Grima. Don Grima succeeded Don Bernardo Formosa who was promoted to canon at the matrix church. Caccia has an extensive



Plan of Marsalforn Bay defences (including an underwater seawall) erected during the the first half of the eighteenth century. (National Library of Malta Collection) The time honoured chapel of St Paul marks the right hand extremity of the shoreline defences.

footprint, a population count of circa 563 and two affiliate chapels in honour of St Anthony and St Paul respectively. St Anthony's is endowed with a number of benefices while St Paul's, which overlooks the beach at Marsalforno bay, enjoys widespread popularity as attested by numerous general processions to save the island from calamities.

Żebbuġ is the sixth and remaining village. The parish church is dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady and has been lead since its establishment in 1687 by Don Francesco Vella. Żebbuġ's 367 inhabitants are predominantly poor.

Further to the *dretto della primitia* the annual income of each of the four parishes established in 1687 was augmented with the relocation of 20 scudi formerly due to St George's parish, while the most

²¹ Abela (p 386) confirms the widespread popularity enjoyed by this sanctuary in the early 17th century, while a modest pilgrim's hostel and adjoining animal stable were erected before 1745 on the opposite side of the square (Buttigieg, p 31).

²² This holy man is popularly known as San Kirrew and is thought to have lived during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. His tomb was allegedly discovered on the 3rd October 1937 (Vella Haber, p 26).

²³ Present day Xagħra.

²⁴ Besides being the liturgical feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, on 8 September 1565 the Turks lifted the Siege on Birgu and Senglea (Spiteri, 2005, pp 502-15).



Pencil drawing of Ta' Pinu Chapel by Giuseppe Calleja, dated 1887 (Heritage Malta Collection).

serene and late Grand Master Gregorio Caraffa²⁵ transferred to them the revenues from a number of public territories. Their parish priests are obliged to present a white candle to the Archpriest of the Matrix every August 15th.

The island of Gozo has three more rural churches dedicated to St Martin, St Domenica and to the Assumption of Our Lady respectively. St Martin's²⁶ and St Domenica's²⁷ are frequented regularly between Easter and Pentecost. That of the Assumption is located in the neighbourhood of Ta' Għammar and is known popularly as Ta' Pinu, its founder and owner of adjacent lands.²⁸

²⁵ Grand Master Gregorio Caraffa ruled the Order from 1680 to 1690.

²⁶ St Martin's chapel was incorporated within Garzes Tower.

²⁷ St Domenica's chapel was originally hewn-out of live rock. Its precise location is unknown, but could have formed part of an extensive network of spacious caves bordering Xlendi Valley. After being declared unfit for worship in 1637, the statue of St Domenica was transferred to the Chapel of St Martin's in the whereabouts of present day Manresa Retreats House (erected 1810) along the road from Rabat to Munxar.

²⁸ Pinu Gauci lived during the course of the 17th century while his son in law, the noble Giovanni Gourgion, sponsored the restoration of the chapel's fabric. In the 1880s two spinsters from Gharb heard a miraculous voice while in the chapel and Ta' Pinu soon evolved into Gozo's most popular Marian shrine. The present monumental basilica was consecrated on 13th December 1931. (Gauci, pp 108-9).

²⁹ Featured list is not comprehensive. Xaghra, Nuffara, Żebbuġ, Ghar Ilma and il-Mixta are omitted.

³⁰ In 1904, a large stone statue of Our Saviour holding a wooden cross was placed on a high pedestal on the summit of Il-Merżuq Hill to commemorate the consecration of Gozo to Christ the Saviour by the Gozo diocese. From then on, the hill started to be popularly referred to as Is-Salvatur (Attard Hili, p 67).

³¹ Mgr Luca Beuno served as Bishop of Malta from 1666 to 1668.

³² The via crucis running all the way to the summit was created during the early 1970s.

³³ Grand Master Martin Garzes ruled the Order from 1595 to 1601.

Hills and Hillocks in Gozo²⁹

- In-Nadur hill has a vast plateau and was erected parish in 1688.
- Id-Dabrani hill
- Il-Merżuq³⁰ hill
- Il-Qolla s-Safra hillock
- Il-Ħarraz hill
- Ta' Kuljat hill
- Ta' Gelmus hill sits next to the Castello and abounds in precious minerals like gold, silver, vitriol and sulphur which according to tradition were exploited by the ingenious ancient inhabitants to produce gold.
- Ta' Dbieġi hill is the highest on the island and was formerly crowned by a small chapel in honour of Our Lady that was built in thanksgiving by a captain who survived a severe storm at sea. It was eventually deconsecrated during Bishop Beuno's³¹ pastoral visit of 1667.
- Ta' Għammar³² hill bears the name of its ancient owner.
- Ta' Ġiordan hill is also named after a former proprietor.

Coastal Towers Guarding the Bays and Ports of the Island

Constructed out of the generosity of the Eminent Grand Master Garzes,³³ Garzes Tower overlooks Mġarr harbour and follows the design of a miniature castle. Besides a small chapel dedicated to St Martin where mass is celebrated on Sundays, obligatory festivities and other popular devotions, it accommodates the castellan, soldiers and their families. Garzes Tower incorporates also an armoury and a gun powder magazine, and is armed with artillery, mortars, rampart guns, muskets, halberds, gun powder, cannon balls and related ammunition.

Its artillery pieces and those of Comino Tower³⁴ traverse and intersect fire to shield Mgarr harbour.

Garzes tower is run by a castellan, a resident bombardier and three soldiers. These soldiers are salaried by the Order, follow a watch roster of three 24-hour shifts, and are obliged to spend the night therein. The castellan receives an annual salary of 60 scudi and two oil measures, and is licensed to operate a tavern for the benefit of the tower's soldiers and neighbouring inhabitants. The fixed salary of the resident bombardier is supplemented by ten scudi, while each of the soldiers is entitled to 48 scudi per annum. Moreover, a small plot of arable land is assigned to the castellan and soldiers for their use.

St Martin's chapel is supplied with candles and related consumables by the Order. In addition to the soldier on constant watch, four guards are deployed in an underlying coastal station in the evening.³⁵ A second group of four sentinels used to patrol the tower's hinterland but owing to personnel shortages this practice had to be abolished.

The prominently sited New Tower³⁶ at Dahlet Qorrot was constructed by the Island's University during 1669 and 1670. The Order contributed the artillery, rampart guns, muskets, spontoons, cannon balls and

related equipment. Both castellan and his assistant are paid by the University, and receive 36 scudi and 25 scudi per annum respectively. Said castellan is entitled also to a yearly allowance of 10 scudi for oil consumption. They alternate every hour during the day coast-watch shift and remain on constant call after nightfall. Night shifts are manned by three guards.³⁷

Marsalforn³⁸ Tower was erected during the reign of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt on the tip of the north facing promontory overlooking Marsalforn Bay.³⁹ Its construction comprises a fine design and offers comfortable accommodation. Marsalforn Tower is equipped adequately with artillery, rampart guns, mortars, muskets, spontoons, cannon balls and other ammunitions. The castellan, a bombardier by training, receives an annual salary of 60 scudi and two oil measures. He is entitled also to cultivate a nearby plot of public land, while the University pays him 4 scudi per annum extra to man signalling fires⁴⁰ from May to St. Martin's feast. Said castellan is assisted by two bombardiers paid by the Order and who alternate every other week, and by four night guards stationed in the tower's sentry box.⁴¹

Built by the University in 1658, Dwejra Tower guards the underlying bay along the western coast and is provisioned with artillery, muskets,



Early nineteenth century drawing of Garzes Tower attributed to Salvatore Busuttill (Heritage Malta Collection).

³⁴ Comino Tower was constructed at a hefty cost of 18628 scudi, 5 tari and 10 carlini (Samut-Tagliaferro, p 128).

³⁵ A total of 28 guards per week.

³⁶ The tower at Dahlet Qorrot was frequently referred to as Torre Nuova.

³⁷ Totalling 21 guards per week.

³⁸ The "marsa" component of the word "Marsalforn" means a place of anchorage (Aquilina, Vol. II, p 788).

³⁹ Present day Ghajn Damma Plateau. In 1599 Giovanni Rinaldini Anconitano identified it as the most advantageous site for Gozo's new fortified town (Vella, 2006).

⁴⁰ Ghajn Damma enjoys a direct line of vision with the sentry box at St John's demi-bastion.

⁴¹ Totalling 28 guards per week.

spontoons, cannon balls and other armaments by the Order. The post of castellan, who needs to be a bombardier by training, carries an annual salary of 60 scudi, namely 40 scudi by the Order and 20 scudi by the University. He receives also 2 scudi for oil consumption and is entitled to harvest the underlying saltpans. Each year, said University forks out also 23 scudi for the salary of his assistant. During daylight the castellan and / or his assistant remain on constant watch and are both obliged to stay on call after sunset when three guards are deployed therein.⁴²

Xlendi⁴³ Tower oversees the small southwest-facing port. Once more its fabrication was undertaken by the University in 1658⁴⁴ whereas the Order supplies the artillery, muskets, spontoons, cannon balls, and

similar necessities. The University covers the annual salary of both castellan and his assistant whereby the former, who acts also as bombardier, receives 20 scudi plus 2 scudi for oil consumption. The latter earns 29 scudi. Three guards are stationed here all year round for the night watch.⁴⁵

Mġarr ix-Xini⁴⁶ Tower dominates the tiny southeast haven and was built by the University sometime after 1658.⁴⁷ The Order furnishes all defence equipment like artillery, muskets, spontoons, and cannon balls, while the University contributes the annual salary of the castellan and his assistant, namely 36 and 25 scudi respectively. The castellan is entitled also to 2 scudi for oil consumption and shares with his assistant the income generated from the nearby saltpans. Night watch entails three guards per roster.⁴⁸



Coloured drawing of Mġarr ix-Xini Bay and coast watch tower (Casa Rocca Piccola Collection).

⁴² Totalling 21 guards per week.⁴³ Xlendi echoes a type of Byzantine boat (Aquilina, Vol. II, p 1579).

⁴⁴ Xlendi Tower was completed by 29th June 1650 (Samut-Tagliaferro, p 147).

⁴⁵ A total of 21 guards per week.

⁴⁶ Mġarr ix-Xini means the wharf of the galley (Aquilina, Vol. II, p 1573).

⁴⁷ Mġarr ix-Xini Tower was completed by June 1661 (Samut-Tagliaferro, p 171).

⁴⁸ A total of 21 guards per week.

Eleven Coast Watch Huts Complementing the Towers⁴⁹

Guards on duty, who are to be armed with a sword, a spontoon and a sling⁵⁰, report one hour after sunset and remain on watch until sunrise. These huts are sited at:

... (close to Daħlet Qorrot Tower), with three guards;
St Mary's⁵¹ with three guards and a horseman to relay urgent messages to the Governor;
... with three guards;
Qolla l-Bajda⁵² with three guards and a horseman;
Ras ir-Reġqa with three guards;
Wied il-Għasri with three guards and horseman;
Tas-Salvatur at Dwejra⁵³ with three guards and a horseman;
St Simon's⁵⁴ with three guards and a horseman;
Ras il-Hobż with three guards;
It-Twaġen with three guards and a horseman;
Ras it-Tafal⁵⁵ with three guards.

Each night, a total of 56 sentinels,⁵⁶ that sum up to 392 a week, supplement the aforementioned castellans and supporting full-time personnel in guarding the island's ports and easily accessible foreshore. In addition, horsemen are stationed in six huts as listed above from May to St Martin's, while two more guards monitor vessel movement during daylight from the island's west and east capes respectively. All information regarding suspicious vessel movement is conveyed to the Governor for eventual communication to mainland Malta.⁵⁷ After sunset, a sheave is set on fire and dropped into the Castello's ditch for each vessel spotted.

The third and concluding part of this article will be published in a forthcoming edition of The Gozo Observer.

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⁴⁹ Agius De Soldanis (Vol I, p 58) gives a list of eleven guard stations. These were setup following a visit to Gozo by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt in 1622 (Agius De Soldanis, Vol. 1, Sec 6.2).

⁵⁰ Gozitan men manipulated the sling with admirable skill and were capable of hitting distant targets with relative ease. (Samut-Tagliaferro, p 348).

⁵¹ St. Mary's Point Battery was subsequently constructed by 1716 (Samut-Tagliaferro, p 208).

⁵² Qolla l-Bajda Battery was subsequently constructed by 1716 (Samut-Tagliaferro, p 208).

⁵³ The chapel of the Holy Saviour at Dwejra, which overlooked the Azure Window, was profaned in 1657 (Agius De Soldanis, Vol. II, p 90).

⁵⁴ Planted on the Munxar side, St Simon's Chapel at Xlendi was already in ruins by 1615 (Agius De Soldanis, Vol. II, p 91).

⁵⁵ Fort Chambray was subsequently constructed on Ras it-Tafal between 1749 and 1761 (Samut-Tagliaferro, pp 257-292).

⁵⁶ Namely 33 guards in listed huts, 20 guards in respective towers, 2 guards at St. Martin's and St. John's stations inside the Castello, and a soldier at Garzes Tower.

⁵⁷ One of the main advantages listed by Rinaldini vis-à-vis the relocation of Gozo's new fortified town at Ghajn Damma's promontory was precisely the control of vessel movement along the north coast (Vella, 2006).

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