

# HYPERHEN

JUNIOR COLLEGE  
LIBRARY

**Aspects of British Colonial Policies  
and Maltese Patterns of Behaviour**

Edward L. Zammit

**Two Archaeological Sites recently  
discovered at L-iklin**

Anthony Bonanno

**Browning's Men and Women — The  
World they shared**

Vivienne Abela

---

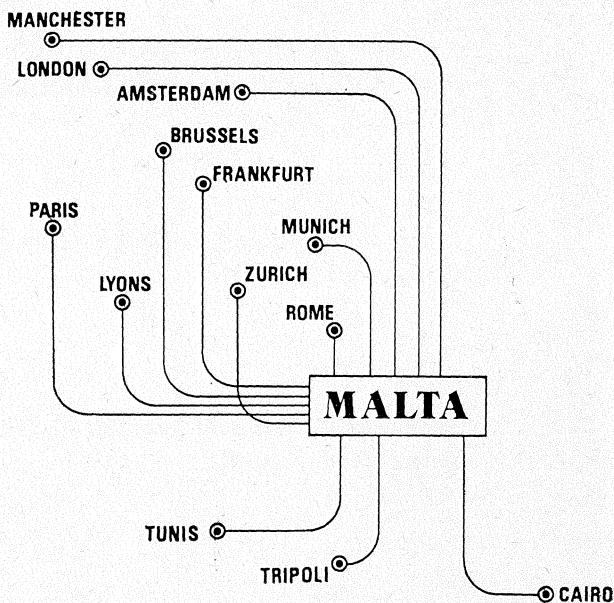
Volume II

1981

Number 5

---

# AIR MALTA



**Great destinations.  
Great airline.**



Reservations tel: 882922/29

# Hyphen

— A journal published by the Lyceum, Msida, Malta —

---

Volume II

1981

Number 5

---

## CONTENTS

	Page
Aspects of British Colonial Policies and Maltese Patterns of Behaviour Edward L. Zammit	195
Two Archaeological Sites recently discovered at L-Iklin Anthony Bonanno	212
Browning's Men and Women — The World they shared Vivienne Abela	221

---

**HYPHEN**

Published three times a year

Studies in Melitensia and papers related to the current 'Advanced Level' curricula should be directed to the Editor, Hyphen, The Arts Lyceum, Msida, Malta.

---

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

Editor — DR V. MALLIA-MILANES M.A., Ph.D.

Members — L. J. SCERRI M.A.  
J. ZAMMIT CIANTAR M.A.  
A. VELLA M.Sc.

---

Single Copy: £M0.40.0. Annual subscription: £M1.20.0., postage free.

---



---

# ASPECTS OF BRITISH COLONIAL POLICIES AND MALTESE PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR

Edward L. Zammit

In this essay an attempt is made to relate some aspects of Maltese social life to the policies implemented by the British Colonial Administration. The emphasis is on economic, political and religious institutions. The aim is to provide a sociological interpretation of certain processes and patterns of behaviour as these may relate to certain historical events. The evidence for these events is drawn from published secondary sources. Therefore in these respects, at least, there is no claim for originality. Nor does this account present a comprehensive assessment of the extent of British colonial impact on Malta's socio-economic life. Important areas which were deeply influenced by the exercise of colonial power structure, like education, health and sanitation are barely touched upon or simply mentioned in passing. Certain concepts like that of "elites" or "culture" which are widely used in this essay are intended as usually understood by sociologists. Thus the former refers to a political, economic or status minority which may be entrenched at the top of a society, group, or other social category whether this is openly democratic or not. The latter refers to the ideas, values and norms influencing social behaviour and defining inter-relations rather than simply to any artistic or literary heritage.

The period of British rule over Malta, stretching for a century and a half, is highly significant because during this time many characteristic aspects of Maltese social, political and economic life became firmly established. Undoubtedly the island experienced many upheavals during that period. Yet in some important respects the British simply continued filling a role which had been left vacant after the Knights' departure. And, ironically, the Maltese leaders themselves, who had protested strongly against the Order's return, expected Britain to play that role. True they also expected Britain to safeguard their interests, to revive the economy and to grant some form of representative rights.<sup>1</sup> But essentially they expected Britain to act as "*il piu' paterno dei governi*" and in this sense recognized the British king as their sovereign. For this reason British colonial administrators found little difficulty in suppressing any ideas of self-government and civil liberties which may have been nourished by a few 'political agitators'.<sup>2</sup> As a result the important

---

1. *Dichiarazione dei Diritti degli Abitanti di Malta e Gozo* (Malta 1802).

2. As the Maltese leader Portelli submitted to the Austin and Lewis Commission (1836): "The Maltese under the government of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem were accustomed to repress the sentiments of liberty..... and were restricted by the

changes which had been taking place in Europe, inspired by the French Revolution and the nationalistic movements of the period, did not gain ground within Maltese society — apart from a few of its urban and intellectual elites — until many decades later. Although the Order had been swept away precisely by these changes and ideologies, the new colonial administration which replaced it succeeded in establishing itself into the “old role” because it rallied the support of the main traditional social institution — the Maltese Church.

Towards the end of the Knights' rule, some ideas of revolt had actually found their way into Malta — following the usual route for novel ideas — from abroad. These ideas had been an unmistakable by-product of the French revolution. In fact, when Napoleon threatened to take over the Island, not a shot was fired in defence of the Order's “rights”. A Maltese delegation made it quite clear to the Order that they had no intention of resisting the French.<sup>3</sup> However, as the French had disregarded their initial promises to safeguard the Maltese religion and “privileges” so soon after their take-over in 1798, the Maltese naturally felt that they had merely exchanged one form of despotism for an even worse one. Indeed, the Order's rule, though absolutist, seemed paternalistic by comparison for, after all, the Knights had brought prosperity and security into the Island and they had been generous with their employees and proteges. When the French authorities in Malta started imposing heavy taxes and despoiling the churches so as to make up for revenue lost after the Order's departure, some reaction from the local leaders was inevitable.<sup>4</sup> It is well-known how, with the help of British, Portuguese and Neapolitan vessels, a blockade was organized on the French garrison who had locked themselves up in Valletta. They eventually surrendered and some Maltese leaders promptly asked for “British protection”. It seems, in retrospect, that these Maltese leaders had naively nourished unrealistic expectations from the British. Malta became officially a British “protectorate”

---

general system of absolute governments.” quoted by H.I. Lee, *Malta 1813-1914: A Study in Constitutional and Strategic Development* (Valletta, Progress Press, 1972), p.12. As Canon Don Francesco Saverio Caruana, one of the Maltese Generals during the French Blockade informed the gathering of the Assembly in Mdina on 4 September, 1798, “the ancient flag of Malta was nothing more than an historical reminiscence while what Malta then needed was the protection and aid of an existing power.” Anon, “Why Malta Chose Britain”, *Times of Malta*, 25 June, 1976, p.15 and 26 June, 1976, pp.6-7. Such an attitude dominated the pattern of fatalistic dependence to British paternalistic colonialism for many decades afterwards.

3. B.W. Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London, Faber, 1972,) p.156.

4. The church, whose interests were directly threatened by the French, played an important role in this revolt. As a result, probably for the first time since the Monroy uprising the Maltese of all social classes were united for a common, national cause. During this short period all the social divisions which had emerged under the Knights, were bridged. However, they re-appeared soon after — only to be exploited to the full by the British Imperial administrations.

through the Treaty of Paris in 1814 though Britain had really retained full control over the Island since 1800. The British initially hesitated as they were not sure of the value Malta had for them. Soon, however, they changed their minds and established on the Island an important defence base for their Mediterranean fleet and a centre for entrepot trade with Europe and the Eastern parts of their expanding empire. Therefore while it is generally true that the many changes which took place during the nineteenth century were mainly of a "quantitative" rather than a "qualitative" nature, it is also true to state that in many aspects of life the amount of "quantitative" changes was so much as to bring about, in sum, a radical or "qualitative" break with the past. They generally followed a pattern which had been established under the Knights — but at a much more accelerated pace. This was because the British, on their part, had very narrowly defined interests in Malta, namely, that of exploiting its strategic values.<sup>5</sup> They sought to interfere into local affairs as little as possible — except, of course, when their strategic interests required such interference. Where it suited them, on "internal" matters, they very conveniently professed their liberal philosophy of "*laissez faire*". Yet as military efficiency often depended upon civilian compliance and cooperation, the colonial administration could not escape getting heavily involved in managing local affairs. In so doing they introduced various social and material reforms often against the opposition of the local "elites" and other sections of the population. Other innovations, particularly of an ideological and political kind, generally entered Malta later as a result of informal association between the Maltese and the British and continental persons they came into contact with or as a reaction to colonial policies rather than by the conscious design of the colonial administrators. These ranged from the demand for political autonomy to the setting up of trade unions and reformist political movements.

---

5 Actually Britain was initially slow in recognising Malta's strategic value. Even Nelson who was mainly instrumental in securing British dominion over it wrote in 1799: "To say the truth, the possession of Malta by England would be a useless and enormous expense; yet any expense should be incurred rather than let it remain in the hands of the French." Cf. Lee, *op.cit.* p.14. Subsequently, however Britain's decision to retain Malta was based upon a reappraisal of the Island as a fortress in imperial defence. "Such a role necessitated government by one who, unfettered by local obligations, was responsible to the Secretary of State alone". Lee *op.cit.* p.16. The 1811 Royal Commission stated that "the military authority should be free from all restraint in superceding the civil power whenever the security of the Island appeared to demand it". (*Ibid*). In the same vein, a century later, Joseph Chamberlain stated in 1902 in the House of Commons, Britain's interest in Malta in this way: "We hold Malta solely and entirely as a fortress essential to our position in the Mediterranean. Not as an ordinary colony but as a fortress..... In a fortress anything like open agitation against the Government is a thing that cannot be tolerated on the face of it." Quoted by H. Frenzo, *The Maltese Colonial Experience 1800-1964* (Valletta, Libyan Arab Cultural Institute, 1977), p.6 mimeo. See also Lee, *op.cit.* p.217.

Under the British, the Maltese population trebled in size — from about 100,000 in 1820 to about 330,000 in 1960.<sup>6</sup> The geographical spread of the population shifted from the countryside to the urban and suburban areas around the harbours where about half of the population are now concentrated. The heavy dependence of the economy upon foreign sources continued to keep pace with the increase in population. The ability of government to provide direct and indirect employment became the determining factor in the living standard of the population as a whole. In fact this became another important tool at the disposal of the colonial administration through which it influenced the people's minds as it controlled their fortunes. This applied to civil servants, to industrial workers, and especially to those enlisted in the armed forces and in ancillary services. The enlargement of the dockyard around Cottonera to cater for British naval repairs on a large scale was a case in point. This establishment provided the largest, and until recent times a unique concentration of industrial workers in Malta. For that reason it also provided the "cradle of the Maltese workers' movement" — as it is popularly known. Frendo points out: "This fact is highly important in the country's social history during the colonial era, because the proletariat, on the whole, was favourably disposed towards the colonial regime, not so much because it agreed with its politics, but as a result of the fact that thousands of jobs were secured at a rate of pay which was not any worse, often rather better, than that paid to workers in private enterprise, on the farms, or indeed in the lower ranks of the Civil Service."<sup>7</sup>

The pattern of the British colonial policy in Malta was clearly indicated in the Royal Commission Report of 1812. The Commissioners decided that "The Maltese temperament was incompatible with an ordered system of representative government". Such a "conclusion" provided a convenient justification for colonial policy. Admittedly it was partly prompted by a first hand experience, by the Commissioners, of fundamental disagreements, intrigues and personal rivalries among the Maltese elites. But the memory of the effective, national resistance organized by them against the French was still vivid as to belie that conclusion. In any case, "complete authority" was to be vested in the Governor aided by a small advisory council made up of Maltese and Englishmen selected by him. The Commissioners also recommended that "The Roman Catholic faith was to be maintained and protected". In these respects the pattern applied in other British Crown colonies was to be followed here.<sup>8</sup> The man appointed to establish this policy in Malta, Sir Thomas Maitland, had been singled out for the success of his "benevolent despotism" in Ceylon a few years previously. As Lee points out: "His governorship was ... a continuation of the benevolent despotism of

6. Since then it has remained roughly at the same level due to the general acceptance of family limitation and emigration.

7. H. Frendo, *En Route from Europe to Africa: Malta, Her People and History* (Malta, AZAD, 1978), p.4 mimeo.

8. Lee, *op.cit.* p.17.

the Grand Masters, but far superior to it as a system by reason of its efficiency and even less popular than it because of its essential lack of any real sympathy with the Maltese people.”<sup>9</sup> He reorganized the civil administration and placed Englishmen at the head of every department. The Maltese were excluded “from all but the lowest offices”. As a result of such measures the latter “began to feel like strangers in their own country”.<sup>10</sup> On their part the English officials were often accused of “arrogance”, “conceit”, “insolence” and of being ambitious of showing their authority (towards) all classes of people”.<sup>11</sup> The exclusion of Maltese from high positions in the military service and in the dockyard continued throughout the period of British rule and this provided a constant source of friction and resentment among some aspiring Maltese individuals,<sup>12</sup> though the majority were generally complacent and submissive.<sup>13</sup> In the civil service, however, as a new “middle class” of educated Maltese gradually emerged, who had been socialized in the British style of government, who had developed pro-British loyalties and who could thus be relied upon to carry out acceptable policies, most of the administrative posts were handed over to them. It was, in fact, the development of such a “new middle class” — as distinct from the traditional “elite class” — which contributed to the emergence of rival political interests and parties in the latter half of the 19th century and which continued to dominate Maltese political life throughout the greater part of the twentieth century.

Maltese political and economic developments have never been so intricately bound together as under the period of British colonial administration.<sup>14</sup> This resulted from their policy of retaining absolute control over

---

9. *Ibid.*, p.18.

10. *Ibid.*, p.19 and p.237. In a recent article, A.D. Smith has argued that the emergence of “nationalism” as a movement for autonomy in colonial territories “has been preceded by attempts to make the relevant ruling bureaucracy more scientific and effective.” As a result of the exclusion of local elites from these centralizing forces, they “furnish the chief recruits of the nationalist movement”. A.D. Smith, “The Diffusion of Nationalism: some Historical and Sociological Perspectives,” *British Journal of Sociology*, 1978, Vol. 29(2), pp.234-248. In Malta’s case this happened in the nineteenth century with the emergence of the Nationalist Party and after the failure of the Malta Labour Party’s integration proposals and the threat of Dockyard closure in 1958.

11. *Ibid.*, p.19 and p.26.

12. *Ibid.*, p.75: British recruits were officially considered to be “men of a superior class” to the Maltese. Even after a “Royal Fencible Regiment” was set up for Maltese recruits in 1825, it had an inferior establishment, pay, rations, and barrack accommodation to British forces stationed in Malta. *Ibid.*, p.76.

13. Maitland actually disliked the “cowed servility” of the Maltese which was, ironically, provoked by the type of government he exercised over them.

14. As Busuttill observes: “Malta’s economic history makes little sense unless incorporated into the history of her political life”. S. Busuttill, *Malta’s Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (Malta, Union Press, 1973), p.1. Yet Price (*op.cit*) fails to re-

the reins of government — ignoring the constant pleas for autonomy from any aspiring local political leaders. And this was made possible by the increasing dependence of the economy upon military expenditure. Such measures offered no stable and secure means of livelihood but fluctuated according to the political situation which prevailed internationally and the strategic decisions taken by the Colonial and War Offices in London. As Busuttill has pointed out: "The economy of the Maltese Islands under Britain took the form of an artificial cycle determined not by the vicissitudes of the market, but by the exigencies of military security. War marked the upswing of the Maltese economic cycle; the return of peace was always the harbinger of a downswing."<sup>15</sup>

Throughout most of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries the social condition of the population was very bad. It often verged on starvation. This was partly the result of a policy which, like Maitland's, "did not aim at securing the best interests of the Maltese, but of Britain in the fortress of Malta. Not primarily concerned with the effects of (such) policy on the people but with the results of it in maintaining a secure strategic base in the Mediterranean".<sup>16</sup> This situation was officially acknowledged in the report of the 1838 Royal Commission who blamed the government for the poor state of affairs. "The islanders," the Commissioners reported, "were in a most miserable condition. Due to official policy, the educated among them were a handful. The nobles, formerly the backbone of Malta, were starving. The rest of the population fared even worse".<sup>17</sup> The Commissioners strongly condemned the manner used by many of the Englishmen who ran the Island, whom they depicted as "vulgar, offensive types". Reforms, however, were not easy to implement. Not only was it difficult to raise any money through local taxation, but the Maltese elites often instinctively suspected that any reforms would hit them adversely by diminishing their incomes, power or prestige among the population. They thus fomented popular discontent and raised a public outcry against any reforms whether of a badly needed drainage system or of the equally ailing educational set-up. Such an opposition was generally aimed at extorting from the British government a measure of local autonomy by making Malta appear as ungovernable without their participation. In reality, however, the vast major-

---

alize this and maintains that Maltese politicians were generally involved in purely political and cultural issues.

15. S. Busuttill, *op. cit.*, p.1. This pattern was established from the very start of British rule. "Great prosperity had been experienced during the Napoleonic Wars, and with a period of peace the Island was faced inevitably with an economic depression". Lee, *op. cit.*, pp.39, 244. See also, C.A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese — A Study of Nineteenth Century Migration* (Melbourne, Georgian House, 1954), pp.109-112, 208-9. G. Mangion, "Per una Storia di Malta nel Secolo XIX", *Studia*, 1965.

16. Lee, *op. cit.* p.22.

17. Reported in Busuttill, *op. cit.* p.9.

city of the population was subservient and compliant. This often puzzled the British administrators and made potential leaders appear as isolated "agitators". In 1878, for instance, the Secretary of State, Sir M. Hicks-Beach, could only attribute "the absence of any complaint of oppressive taxation from the Maltese to their ignorance, when the burden of taxation did fall in undue proportion on the lower classes".<sup>18</sup>

Therefore the most common Maltese response to their powerlessness in the colonial situation was their "quiescence and fatalism, the sense of inferiority and dependence arising out of the paternal tradition" which has impressed several foreign observers.<sup>19</sup> Among the most deep rooted Maltese values governing their daily lives are those of sobriety and thrift. The successive periods of relative prosperity and extreme depression which have characterized Malta's economic fortunes for centuries, have brought home the importance of "saving for a rainy day".<sup>20</sup> In adopting these attitudes they were certainly influenced by Church teachings. Yet, as Price observes, "when it came to a question of the 8th Commandment, poverty often defeated Canon Law in the struggle which took place in the minds of Maltese faced with complete destitution".<sup>21</sup> Thefts became so common that police protection and legal redress became practically useless. Offenders often threatened litigants and prosecutors with even worse retributions. Price concludes: "The Maltese may have been quiescent vis-a-vis his government and social order; he was certainly not quiescent as regards his neighbour's property".<sup>22</sup> During the present century the police have become better equipped and organized so that their control over criminal activities is effective. Besides the widespread prosperity and social services have reduced the need for widespread thefts. Public begging which was also widely practised in the nineteenth century has almost completely disappeared.<sup>23</sup>

Another characteristic Maltese response to their powerlessness, however, is still very much in evidence. This refers to the constant grumbling and other informal expressions of discontent which one hears in daily conversations on almost any topic of public interest. The Maltese have retained an unrealistic image of what to expect from Government partly as a relic of

---

18. *Ibid.*

19. M. Miegé, *Histoire de Malte* (Paris, 1840), Vol.1, p.168. H. Bowen-Jones, *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, pp.112, 334. Price *op.cit.*, p.19.

20. The results of a survey conducted by the author in 1976 show that even nowadays the traditional Maltese virtues of "ghaqal" and "bżuliġa" are still widely held by Maltese workers.

21. Price, *Ibid.*

22. Price, *Ibid.* A detailed account of the way bands of thieves were organized was described by the Royal Commission of 1836.

23. The official numbers of "professional" mendicants were listed in the early censuses published in the 19th century. Price, *op.cit.*, reports that in the mid-1830s there were as many as 2500 beggars reported in the villages alone. See also Lee, *op.cit.*, pp.45-46.



their past experiences under colonial rule. These expectations have also been encouraged by the attitudes of local politicians in their electioneering practices since the setting up of self-government in 1921. As a result, the concept of "il-Gvern" (the Government) is often "vaguely referred to by many Maltese — particularly those living in rural areas — as a remote centre of authority which is endowed with every conceivable power and which is held responsible for many economic and social problems".<sup>24</sup> In the context of such unrealistic expectations coupled with the absence of any formal channels of protest or representation, informal grumbling takes an added significance. The British colonial administrators taking a sarcastic, superior view had labelled it "Maltese gemgem" and their successors, the Maltese politicians in government, are equally puzzled by it.<sup>25</sup>

The Maltese language itself was obviously an excellent medium for grumbling against the foreign colonizers unable to speak it. This way it has served as a safe outlet and a defence against foreign intrusions. More recently it has also served as a positive national rallying symbol through which what is typically Maltese can find its true expression.<sup>26</sup>

In times of distress, particularly during times of war, outbreaks of cholera in the nineteenth century and other national disasters, the church usually came to the rescue as "the ultimate protector of the population".<sup>27</sup> Parish priests, in particular, were the undisputed leaders on the village level and anyone who aspired to local leadership needed their support. On its part, the Church like the other traditional elites, tended to suspect that any reforms introduced by the British administrators would intentionally or as a by-product, threaten its place in Maltese society. Accordingly it was easier for Britain to come to terms with the situation by maintaining good relations with the Church as the only powerful organization which could offer any effective opposition to their rule.<sup>28</sup> They also chose to ignore, as best

24. Bowen-Jone, *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, pp.158,344.

25. For example: Reno Calleja MP: "Undoubtedly the rule of the present (MLP) Government has confirmed that the Maltese people are professional grumblers." "Maltese Gemgem," in *Il-Hajja*, 9 February, 1973. See also: E. Mifsud, "Who are the Grumblers?," in *L-Oriżont*, 29 November, 1975. A. Darmanin S.J., "Grumbling," in *Problemi ta' Llum*, March, 1978, pp.79-83. Boissevain, *op.cit.*, (1975) p.7. Lee, *op.cit.*, (1972) p.21.

26. Gullick, "*Language and Sentiment in Malta*", pp.1-12; p.10. Cf. also C.J.M.R. Gullick, "Issued in the Relationship Between Minority and National Language: Maltese reaction to Non-Maltese Speakers of Maltese." Paper delivered at 1975 meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, mimeo. E.L. Zammit, "Adult Education: The Role of R.U.M.", *Journal of Educational Affairs*, Vol.1, No.1, pp.40-45; p.43.

27. Busuttil, *op.cit.*, p.9.

28. As the maintenance of cordial relations rested on mutual consultations which to a large extent depended on the personality of the local Bishop, the British were keenly interested whenever the succession of a new Bishop had to be decided. The various complications which this choice involved are illustrated by D. Fenech,

they could, any political agitation from other quarters and to appeal directly to the people's material interests. Any changes which they felt were necessary were usually presented in the name of "progress". This is particularly evidenced by the long political struggle stretching for half a century to introduce certain changes in the educational medium of instruction — particularly in supplanting Italian, the traditional language of the Church, law courts and the local elites, with English and Maltese. As Britain was a protestant country the Maltese Roman Catholic hierarchy was always on the alert against any hidden attempts at anglicising Malta. The other local elites had enough evidence to prompt their resistance to any attempt to supplant their traditional privileges by a new, pro-English middle-class which they saw emerging.

Eventually two camps were set against each other in a long-drawn out battle which went far deeper than the original issues warranted. The language dispute symbolised what H. Frenco has typified an opposition between the "Colonial dynamics" and the "patriotic consensus". The former comprises the (a) domination of one society by another; (b) modernization of techniques and living styles; and (c) the gradual assimilation of the colonized social, political and economic structures into those of the colonial country. The latter comprises (a) a demand for political and social autonomy; (b) the assertion of traditional values and structures, and (c) organized resistance often passive, through all means available including alignment with other foreign powers and symbols as a means of leverage to the overriding weight of the coloniser.<sup>29</sup>

The type of "resistance" which was commonly adopted by the average Maltese, as already stated, generally avoided a direct confrontation with the overriding powers of the coloniser. It was only on those rare occasions when a convergence of various issues was evident that some mass protests, or even riots, could be organized.<sup>30</sup>

For the most part the British administration managed to keep issues apart and usually to manipulate or exploit situations where the interests of one section of the population were opposed to those of another. A case in point is the "language controversy"<sup>31</sup> in which the country became po-

---

*The Making of Archbishop Gonzi* (Malta, Union Press, 1976).

29. H. Frenco, *The Formation of Maltese Political Parties* (D.Phil. Thesis, Oxford, 1976), *L-Evoluzzjoni ta' Partiti Politiċi fil-Gżejjer Maltin 1880-1926* (Floriana Cultural Institute, 1977) Mimeo.

30. The most spectacular riots occurred in 1919 when several sections of the population, each of which had its own particular grudge, joined forces in spontaneous demonstrations in the streets of Valletta. Some Maltese were killed and many wounded when the British soldiers opened fire on the crowd. These riots are generally credited with constraining Britain to grant a more liberal constitution to Maltese representatives democratically elected in 1921. Cf. Frenco, *Ir-Rivoluzzjoni Maltija tal-1919* (Malta, A.C. Aquilina & Son, 1970).

31. *Vide* p.42, *Supra*.

larized into two opposed camps engaged in a political confrontation over issues which on the face of it appear as having a relatively minor importance. It is not necessary here to enter into the detailed ramification of this prolonged dispute.<sup>32</sup> What matters is that the real though latent issues overshadowed by this controversy developed into a bitter politico-religious crisis in the Thirties and again in the Sixties when different political and religious leaders were on the scene. These crises followed the entrance into the political arena and the temporary coalition between two representative parties, one with its roots in the "working class" and the other among the "new middle class". Both of these "classes" had come into existence as a direct result of colonial policies in Malta.<sup>33</sup> Frendo has shown how this "party" had its foundations laid in the nineteenth century beginning with Sigismondo Savona's "Reform Party" in 1891 and has evolved through various splits and new foundations into the present-day Malta Labour Party.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise the present-day Nationalist Party has its roots in the "Partito Antiriformista" founded in 1884 by Fortunato Mizzi — having also passed through various permutations. In fact, this polarization between two political camps had occurred as early as the 1830's and the issue concerned the best way of dealing with the British colonial masters.<sup>35</sup> The "anti-reformist" side opposed any social and economic reforms introduced by the British Administration until constitutional liberties had been granted in advance. The "reformist" side was ready to compromise autonomy on humanitarian and utilitarian grounds. The "Anti-reformist" or "Nationalist" movement was constituted of the traditional, professional elites often in alliance with the Church hierarchy both of whom feared that any "reforms" would eventually remove their privileged status in Maltese society. They rallied behind them the majority of the local population who held them in high esteem. Thus, apart from combating the professional elites, whose privileges it sought to curtail, the "reformist" movement became successively involved in a bitter clash with the Maltese Church authorities. Such a clash was inevitable in view of the powerful, central position which the Church enjoyed in Maltese society and the new aspirants to local power had to re-define its jurisdiction and limit its influence over men's lives.

32. Cf. *Esposizione Documentata della Questione Maltese*, (Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930). E. Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp.38-107. A brief account is in Austin, *Malta and the End of Empire* (F. Cass & Co., 1971) pp.7-20 and in Boissevain, 1965, pp.9-12.

33. The "new middle class" was composed of pro-British importers, contractors and traders who flourished on the presence of the large garrison stationed in Malta and also of the civil servants and other employees in the civil administration. The "working class" was mainly composed of drydocks and other Admiralty employees who constituted the bulk of the industrial working force around the Grand Harbour.

34. Frendo, *The Formation of Maltese Political Parties*.

35. Lee, *op.cit.*, ch. 5 pp.8-109.

Eventually the "reformist" movement was also bound to conflict with its previous ally, protector and source of its inspiration — the British colonial overlords.<sup>36</sup>

The role played by the Church in Maltese politics in a natural consequence of the central part it plays in social life as a whole. As such it merits further consideration. Dench maintains that under the British, the Maltese "national church became projected into a new and more significant position as defender of the faithful population against an alien system of government."<sup>37</sup> It can also be said that this role had essentially been played by the Maltese church for several centuries under the Knights, long before the arrival of the British.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the replacement of the Catholic Knights by the Protestant British added a new dimension. It created a precarious situation with the local church becoming relatively isolated from the dominant colonial administration. It has been shown that the British interest in Malta was limited to its strategic values. Once this had been safeguarded, Britain was quite uninterested in Maltese domestic affairs. It even offered the local Church a measure of protection in exchange for its promotion of the people's loyalties towards their earthly sovereign. In other areas of social and economic life, however, British strategic interests inhibited local initiatives. These might have tampered with the centralized efficiency of a "fortress" administration. As most other areas of Maltese life — vital areas like economic and political activities — were beyond the control of the local population, "the energy and interest of the Maltese seem to have become displaced, as so often happens among powerless minorities, into religious activity and contemplation."<sup>39</sup> Accordingly the people's interests were concentrated on religious symbols which became the object of personal and collective pride and satisfaction. Not only was it important to save one's soul through leading a good life according to established moral principles and participation in religious ritual as presented by the Catholic Church anywhere, it also became important to contribute one's share to the parish church's physical aspect and its cult of patron saints which are celebrated everywhere with great pomp annually to this day. Class conflicts and political rivalries were likewise sublimated under an unending competition between "*partiti tal-festa*", often in the same village, each celebrating its own patron saint in the

36. After the failure of the MLP proposal to integrate Malta with the UK in 1958, the party has adopted an anti-British policy. Cf. Mintoff, "Isolation is no answer", *Times*, 1968.

37. G. Dench, *Maltese in London* (London, Routledge, 1975) p.11.

38. As David Martin has observed "a nation denied self-determination by another dominating society will either seek sources of religious differentiation or use the pre-existing religious difference as a rallying point." D. Martin, in G. Walters (ed), *Religion in a Technological Society* (UK, Bath University Press, 1968) p.35. Cf. M. Vassallo, *Religious Symbolism in a Changing Malta in Contribution to Mediterranean Studies* (Malta University Press, 1977), pp.232-249.

39. G. Dench, *op.cit.*, p.11.

best way it can.<sup>40</sup> Boissevain has also demonstrated how local rivalries over the cult of saints are often intermingled with national political contests. This is because a number of political and economic functions have been developed by the Church in the absence of secular structures which would not emerge due to the colonial situation.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, parish priests and other priests often acted as their parishioners' patrons and intermediated for them with civil authorities and other influential persons.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Maltese Church, even more than it did during the Knights' rule, assumed the role of national protector of the local population, represented their interests, provided leisure and other expressive pursuits, ordered people's lives and commanded their loyalties. As Dench has concluded: "Much of the passionate interest in religion displayed in Malta has therefore been escapist, and the alleged fatalism of the islanders simply a pursuit of spiritual goals rather than material — over which the Maltese individually and collectively enjoyed so little control... The central position of the church has for generations channelled political debate into essentially symbolic and unrealistic issues.<sup>43</sup> It is in this context that the language dispute and the political-religious controversies of the Thirties and the Sixties need to be interpreted. For the emergence of a new "reformist" movement initially implicitly and later explicitly challenged the traditional place occupied by the Church in Maltese social life. Ultimately, however, the Church was led into assuming this role by the circumstances of colonialism which imposed strict controls in certain vital areas of social life and adopted an indulgent, permissive attitude in others. The Maltese had been effectively reduced to a minority status in their own country. In such a situation, "a mixture of petulant irresponsibility and fatalism was a perfectly rational response to British paternalism."<sup>44</sup>

Thus paradoxically there was, under the British rule, a parallel development of both centralization and localism. Such opposite tendencies are still evident today in many spheres of Maltese social life. The 1973-1980 Development Plan, for instance, stresses that "Malta has a greater degree of social cohesion and solidarity" than other countries but also acknowledges the existence of deep internal divisions.<sup>45</sup> Such contrasting statements

40. J. Boissevain, *Hal Farrug: A Village in Malta* (New York, 1969), ch.7.

41. Boissevain, 1965.

42. Patronage, in fact, is one of the basic institutions in Maltese society — as it is in other Mediterranean societies — and usually expresses an image of society in religious terminology with God on top as the Supreme Patron followed, interrelated strata of patrons and clients in a hierarchy. Cf. M. Kenn, *A Spanish Tapestry* (London, 1961). Boissevain has elaborated a model of Maltese social interaction based upon friendship networks of patrons and clients. Cf. *Friends of Friends* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1974).

43. G. Dench, *op.cit.*, pp.12-13.

44. *Ibid.*, p.13.

45. *Development Plan for Malta 1973-1980* (Valletta, OPM, 1974) p.205.

about the Maltese social structure are commonly made and manifest dual normative standards of reference. The "ideal" and the "real" are worlds apart.<sup>46</sup> It can be argued that Maltese culture offers a typical example of what Parkin has called the "subordinate value system" in relation to the "dominant value system" implanted by successive generations of colonial domination. "The subordinate class tends to have two levels of normative reference, the abstract and the situational... The generation milieu of these values is the local underclass community."<sup>47</sup> Not only were the Maltese powerless in tackling their own problems but they often lacked any alternative solutions of their own other than those imposed upon them "from above". They thus felt compelled by sheer necessity and the general circumstances of colonial presence to adapt themselves even if this implied the transgression of traditional norms. Whenever this happened, however, it was accompanied by strong public condemnations from local religious sources — as a means of safeguarding the "well-being of society" in general and of traditional institutions in particular. The incidence of prostitution which is a common form of Maltese criminality at home and abroad is a typical example of the types of dual constraints confronted by many Maltese individuals.<sup>48</sup> Dench has attributed this notorious form of Maltese criminal behaviour in London to a "central dilemma in colonial Maltese society, revolving around the discrepancy between an extremely strict set of moral principles on sexual matters, and a practical reality of extensive prostitution in the Island, meeting the needs of the large garrison."<sup>49</sup> He argues that this situation particularly manifested to the Maltese "their dependent status and inability to control their own lives."<sup>50</sup>

A less noticeable yet more important response to British colonialism on the part of Maltese individuals was the widespread resort to patronage. This practice has deep roots in Maltese society colouring social interactions at every level. Thus in spite of its widespread condemnation as a corrupt practice — giving some citizens an unfair advantage over others — everyone admits that it is arguably the most effective way to secure scarce resources ranging from a house to a telephone.<sup>51</sup>

46. Cf. E.L. Zammit, "Some Social Aspects of Maltese Development". Paper presented at a Seminar on "Development — The Maltese Experience", Ruskin College, Oxford and Young Socialist League, University of Malta, (April 1977).

47. Parkin, (1975) pp.94-95.

48. Zammit, (1971).

49. Dench, *op.cit.*, p.107.

50. *Ibid.*

51. "Patronage" or "clientelism" is, of course, a typical asymmetrical form of social relationship which often develops in situations of unequal access to scarce resources. Those who dispose of such resources put their dependents under a personal obligation, expect their esteem and services in return. While such relationships tend to predominate in Mediterranean and other "traditional" societies they are by no means confined to these. Recent reviews of such studies are found in: E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (eds.) *Patrons and Clients* (London, 1977) Duckworth & Co. and

In the colonial context, Malta itself was in the situation of a "client-state". Its economic and political dependence upon the "mother country" was well known. Internally it still incorporates a highly paternalistic set of social and religious institutions with a self-conscious system of patron-client relations challenged by a monopolistic and centralising politico-bureaucracy.<sup>52</sup> In the situation which developed under British rule where most economic activities — including employment opportunities — were under their direct control,<sup>53</sup> the colonial administrators had at their disposal an unlimited supply of patronage potential. Unlike some other colonies, the local administration of the civil service has long been entrusted to Maltese personnel who readily followed the patronage pattern which had been firmly established since the times of the Knights. These bureaucrats/patrons therefore, joined the ranks of the traditional professional, clerical and other influential persons whose clientele resided in the villages or their immediate localities. With the advent of representative government most of their power passed on to the elected deputies who needed the support of electors and had rather more to offer in return. To the clients, of course, patronage presents a possible way of coping with a generally difficult situation through a personal intervention with power holders. Patronage, of course, depends upon the inadequacy of formal institutional arrangement to provide for the needs of the powerless. From the colonial viewpoint, the availability of widespread resort to patronage— though offending their declared principles and official policies — served an important divisive function.<sup>54</sup> This it provided an important concomitant to a nominally "paternalist" policy.<sup>55</sup> The latter's is basically "a collective form of social organization" in which "all subordinates basically stand in the same relation to the paternalist."<sup>56</sup> The ideological basis which justifies paternalism as a manner of administration rests

---

J. Davies, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (1977). Weingrod and Boissevain have shown the extension of patron-client relationships into the system of political parties. A. Weingrod, *Patrons, Patronage and Political Parties. Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1968), pp.377-400. Boissevain, *op.cit.*, (1965 and 1974).

52. Boswell, (1978) pp.1-2.

53. S. Busuttil, *op.cit.*

54. As Catanzaro and Reyneri have pointed out: "Polarization can generate conflicts only when a social group is in contact with another, the members of which have similar occupational income and social status. Where class conflicts do not occur, we have a ruthless individualistic struggle to enter the employment benefit and security system. R. Catanzaro and E. Reyneri, *Multiple Job Holding and Class Structure in a Southern Italian Town* (1978), p.8.

55. "The principle of benefits shows clearly one of the most important aspects of clientelistic associations: paternalism." M. Caciagli and F. Belloni *A Contribution to the Study of Clientelism: The New Clientelism of Southern Italy* (University of Malta, 1978), p.2.

56. N. Abercrombie and S. Hill, *Paternalism and Patronage* (in B.J.S. Vol 27, 1976), pp.413-429; p.414.



upon the care and relationships of parents towards their children in an ideal-type family and ultimately of God, the Divine Father of all men. This implies that "people tend to be treated as members of a group who share a similar position rather than as individuals who have unique relationships with the paternalist..... benefits become common to the whole group rather than varying from person to person, and the customary regulation of relationships develops for all." 57 Thus though in the Maltese situation paternalism and patronage were both essential tools for the colonial system, they ultimately militated against each other.

In recent years there have been various attempts by colonial and local Governments at reducing and possibly eliminating Malta's dependence upon paternalism or its "client state" once and for all. Ambitious investment and industrialization programmes were promulgated aimed at transforming the Maltese economy. This was the declared objective of a series of official reports and development plans since World War II. 58 These suggested ways of diversifying the economy in view of a succession of anticipated rundowns of British service establishments in Malta. Such measures brought about a heavy loss of foreign exchange, employment and other economic setbacks on Malta. For these reasons there was a general consternation and an antagonistic reaction in Malta each time such plans were effected. The development plans also aimed at raising the social living levels of the population to that of accepted western standards through education and the establishment of statal agencies to act as official brokers and cater for people's needs without recourse to personal favours. 59 This has been viewed by some ob-

57. Abercrombie and Hill, *op.cit.*, p.414.

58. In addition to five development plans covering from 1959 to 1971, the most important reports were: W. Woods, *Report on the Finances of the Government of Malta* (London HMSO 196, 1946). G.E. Schuster, *Interim Report on the Financial and Economic Structure of the Maltese Islands* (Malta, Government Printing Office, 1950). T. Balogh and D. Seers, *The Economic Problems of Malta* (Malta, Government Printing Office, 1955). W.F. Stolper, *et.al.*, *United Nations' Economic Mission to Malta* (U.N., New York, 1964). Lord Robens *et. al.*, *Joint Mission for Malta Report* (Malta, Department of Information, 1967).

After its return to power in 1971, the Labour Government announced its determination to revise the Financial and Defence Agreement with Britain of 1964. A new treaty was signed with the intention of accounting for "the financial requirements needed to enable Malta to achieve economic independence in the shortest possible time". Subsequently a new development plan was published with the aim of realizing this goal. *Development Plan for Malta 1973-1980* (Malta OPM 1974) p.4.

59. Boissevain has argued that these "social and political" goals were explicitly formulated by Labour Party development plans whereas the previous Nationalist Party plans were merely interested in promoting economic growth. He sees in this change a logical sequence in "*Maltese perceptions of progress and development*". Boissevain, *A Causeway with a gate: the Progress of Development in Malta*, in S. Wollinan (ed): *Perceptions of Development*, (Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.14.

servers as representing a progressive trend in Malta towards "a modern, rational, bureaucratic and industrial world" in which there is no need or even room for traditional patrons and clients.<sup>60</sup> It is, of course, highly debatable whether these efforts are effectively promoting a lasting form of economic and social "development" or only a "modernized" form of neo-colonial dependence.<sup>61</sup> "Modernization" refers to a diversification of the economic base and the consequent changes in living styles, consumption and employment patterns for those directly or indirectly affected by such a transformation. A standard criterion to measure the extent of "modernization" in a particular country is that of economic growth. Such processes can, of course, take place within a neo-colonial context where economic, social and political activities in one "client state" remains on the periphery and to depend upon its "mother country" as the source of its growth. On the other hand, in the case of true "development" the dependent country itself generates its own wealth. This is achieved through the contribution of the mass of its people who are rallied behind local leadership and inspired by a local ideology. Some scholars have attempted to attribute the failure of "underdeveloped" countries to "develop" to a persistence of "traditional" thinking and to a failure of a strong, central government in such countries.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed what happens in many "under-developed" former colonies is that their available political and intellectual leadership, their economic elites and their dominant ideologies are only conducive to "modernization". Economic activities, particularly in satellite firms owned by large, international companies which provide employment, higher incomes and consumption levels, depend not on local sources but on activities generated at the "centre".<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, as A. Black has argued, one needs to specify the historical conditions which produce the available leadership and ideologies in particular former colonies. This involves "a clear specification of the particular, historically-determined class structures and struggles through

60. Boissevain has expressed such a view in "When the Saints go marching out", in Geilner and Waterbury, *op.cit.*, (1977) pp.81-96. This view has been challenged by Boswell *op.cit.* (1978) p.7.

61. P. Schneider, J. Schneider and E. Hansen, *Modernization and Development — the Role of Regional Elites and non-corporate Groups in the European, Mediterranean. Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1972) Vol. 14, pp.328-350. For a recent re-statement of this problem: P. Schneider and J. Schneider "Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily" (1977).

62. N.J. Smelser "Mechanisms of Change and Adjustment to Change" (1962) in T. Burns (ed): *Industrial Man*. (Penguin 1969) pp.43-68. Similarly, the "end of ideology" theorists have sought to explain the persistence of widespread industrial and class conflicts in Italy and France despite a developed industrial base to "extra industrial elements of society" such as "issues concerning the place of religion and the traditional status structure". Mann, *op.cit.*, (1973) p.11.

63. As argued by P. Schneider and J. Schneider, *op.cit.*, (1977).

which the system is actually worked out.”<sup>64</sup> Only then can one explain the contrasting development paths followed by the undeveloped neighbouring countries like Malta and Sicily.

A quick glance at the changing patterns of employment in Malta in recent decades reveals that in this respect planned development has had a remarkable degree of success. The hand-over of government controls to local politicians proceeded apace with decisions to reduce British military spending on the Island.<sup>65</sup> The constant threats of large scale redundancies provided an ideal incentive for workers to rally behind their leaders in the Labour Movement. The need to create alternative employment for those who were losing their jobs with the Services also presented a constant challenge to successive local governments to restructure the local economy.

In retrospect it appears that as the Maltese politicians battled endlessly among themselves — as a by-product of the divisive policies pursued by the British colonialists — both sides unwittingly ended up having very similar beliefs and fears. Thus, for instance, both the dream of some prominent Nationalists of a political unification of Malta to Italy in pre-war years and that of the Malta Labour Party plan to integrate Malta with Britain in the fifties, had two basic things in common. They both stemmed from a profound disenchantment with the Maltese citizens' inferior status to that of their colonial masters and an equally deep conviction that Malta was powerless to stand on its own feet in a hazardous world. In this context, the achievement of political independence in 1964 along with the decision to abandon Malta's "fortress role" after the complete departure of the British Services in 1979, are indeed important milestones in Malta's socio-economic history. Yet it would be unrealistic to expect these events to signal the actual termination of the influences of former colonial policies on Malta's social life. These are likely to remain with us — even if imperceptibly — for some time to come.

---

64. A. Black, *Tourism and Migration — Causes and Effects in Social Change* (1978), p.4. For instance the Maltese tendency to hoard savings rather than indulge in conspicuous consumption makes sense when considered in the historical context of a siege economy and traditional insecurity.

65. One of the most important decisions was that stated in the Defence White Paper of 1957. The threat to close down H.M. Dockyard and other Service establishments in Malta led to the downfall of the proposal to "integrate" Malta with Britain, subsequently, to the Labour Government's resignation. *Defence Outline of Future Policy* (HMS, Cmnd 124, 1957).

---

## TWO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT L-IKLIN

**Anthony Bonanno**

---

### Temple

The area known as L-Iklin lies on the southernmost slope of the extensive hill on which Naxxar and Gharghur are perched. To the south the slope is enclosed by a triangle formed by Birkirkara, Balzan and Lija. The area had, to my knowledge, never produced any archaeological finds until in 1967 a group of youths were reported in the local papers to have discovered there a megalithic temple.<sup>1</sup> Attention to the site was drawn in the first place by Mr. Carmel Attard of Birkirkara, and eventually a short report accompanied by a rough plan of the structure was produced in a local cyclostyled newsletter.<sup>2</sup>

The new site was not, then, officially registered in the records of the Museum authorities and was never included in the survey of prehistoric antiquities of the Maltese islands published by Evans in 1972.<sup>3</sup> My attention to the 'temple' was drawn once more by Mr. Carmel Attard in whose company I visited the place in 1979. The visible remains aroused my interest and I jotted down a few notes. My purpose here does not go beyond bringing the existence of the site to the knowledge of the archaeologist and of the interested reader.<sup>4</sup>

The site occupies a very small field with a surface area of about 100 metres (G.R. 510745). The surrounding stretch of land bears the name of L-Iklin and is flanked by others known as Ta' Simblija and Tat-Tabib. It is situated about 1 km from Naxxar on the narrow winding road from Naxxar to Lija and Birkirkara. The ancient remains consist of a few megaliths in part visible and in part covered by rubble walling supporting a raised field. Two of the megaliths are about 3 metres long and stand some 1.50 metres above soil level. Most of the blocks seem to have been dressed but erosion has not failed to leave its mark on them.

The alignment of these two megaliths and a group of smaller blocks a few metres to the north suggests the shape of two lateral apses, or

- 
1. E.g. *Times of Malta*, 22 September 1967; *Malta News*, 22 September 1967; *L-Orizzont*, 22 September 1967.
  2. D. De Lucca, ed., *Il Qedem Illum* no. 3 (October 1967) pp.16-18. I am grateful to Mr Joe Meli for these references.
  3. J.D. Evans, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands; a Survey* (London 1971).
  4. The annexed plan of the surviving remains and later accretions has been drawn by J. Young.

lobes, of a typical four-apsed Copper Age temple. This *prima facie* similarity, however, raises serious doubts on the exact interpretation of the structure. The topographical layout of the feature suggests that whatever masonry is visible belongs to the outer shell of a megalithic temple; but this normally has a horse-shoe shape with either side forming a single, continuous curve. This is not the case at L-Iklin where we have what appear to be segments of two separate curves. In a temple context this could only be the inner masonry crust of two of the side apses. On the other hand, if this is the case there remains no visible trace of a structure which could correspond to the outer wall. Furthermore, as regards the curves of the walls, that of the line of smaller megaliths seems to be wider than that of the larger ones, suggesting a wider apse. This would appear to be in direct contrast with the norm according to which the bigger the apse the larger the blocks used.<sup>5</sup> A further possibility is that one group of megaliths belongs to the outer wall and the other group belongs to the inner wall.

One other problem involves the location of the entrance. Both the Press release and the report on the discovery place the entrance on the east although in the plan drawn by L. Casapinta attached to the report it appears on the north. In the modern rubble wall there is indeed an opening on the north side which provides access to the small field, but if one examines carefully the other isolated megaliths partially hidden underneath the field wall one notices two neatly dressed blocks at the south end which face each other in such a way as to suggest that the entrance was originally at this end rather than on the north end. One should remember, however, that there exist examples of megalithic temples with two doors, one at the front end and the other right at the back. Another instance of such a duplication of access is not to be excluded at L-Iklin.

There is no doubt that these and other problems posed by this archaeological site cannot be solved until it is thoroughly and scientifically investigated by means of excavation. Until then one can only forward solutions on a hypothetical level.

#### Villa

The second site was partially explored by means of excavation in June 1975 before a house was built over it. Ancient remains were uncovered while a building plot was being cleared for the laying of foundations (G.R. 505737). The co-operation of the owner of the plot was acknowledged in the Department of Information Press Release.<sup>6</sup> Excavations were undertaken by the

5. See, for example, the larger temples at Tarxien and those at Mnajdra and Haġar Qim.

6. See, for example, *Times of Malta*, 17 July 1975, p.9. *The Reports on the Workings of the Government Departments* for 1975/76, p.60 make only a brief reference to the discovery. It is precisely in this and similar circumstances that one misses the mine of information which used to be contained in the much more extensive

Museums Department whose Director invited the present writer to help in the supervision of the operation. The excavation was limited to the plot of land which was threatened by immediate development but there was ample evidence that the remains extended underneath the adjacent plot to the north. In fact, ancient clay bricks, normally found in association with Roman hypocausts in Malta, were visible in a vertical section previously cut into by the mechanical excavator during the clearing operation. But, as the latter plot was not in immediate danger of being destroyed, the Museum authorities decided to postpone its exploration to a later date. The two plots were flanked by newly-built houses.

Before the Museum authorities intervened the soil on the area had already been cleared by the mechanical excavator which had cut through some walls and displaced several large ashlar blocks. At least one floor, made up of lozenge-shaped tiles, had also been partially broken up. Further up the hill, to the east, one could still see large ashlar blocks of the Punic or Roman type among the heaps of earth which had been previously displaced in the clearance of neighbouring building plots. Lozenge-shaped tiles and fragments of Italian sigillata ware were collected from those heaps.

The first important feature to be discovered on the first day of excavation was a small room with a floor of lozenge-shaped tiles which lay about 5 cm below the top surface of the first layer of dressed, ashlar blocks. The room seemed to be surrounded on three sides by a large courtyard enclosed by thick foundations. Its north side was not investigated as it lay under the adjacent building plot. Because of pressures to complete the investigation in the shortest possible time, the diggers had to content themselves with simply uncovering the top surface of the visible walls. Other walls, therefore, could easily have escaped their notice. With this method another small room was identified at the south-east corner of the courtyard. The room was divided below the floor surface by a narrow wall which flanked a deep trench cut in bed-rock. A flat slab, about 13 cm thick and lying directly on the soil on the south-west corner of the room, seemed to have been a threshold. It had a channel, 11cm wide, along the whole of its length with a circular hole, 7 cm in diameter and 7 cm deep, at its north end. This hole was probably a pivot for the door post.

A few soundings were made on selected points but none of them revealed any stratigraphy. Two of them, 5 and 7, revealed channels cut in bed-rock. Trench 5 also produced two fragments of a thin slab of stone which when joined presented a round hole at the joint and traces of a similar hole on one of the broken ends. I later discovered that it was certainly part of a seat

---

*Museum Annual Reports* as they used to appear up to 1970. One hopes that in the near future this serious failure will be remedied by some other publication containing full reports of investigations made by the Museum during the year.

of a typical Roman lavatory.<sup>7</sup> A similar seat had been discovered a long time ago in a room at the Roman baths of Ghajn Tuffieħa.<sup>8</sup> The same type of lavatory seating is often encountered in public latrines on several of the major archaeological sites of the Roman world.

This item as well as the few clay bricks noticed in the adjacent site bring to mind similar finds made at the Ghajn Tuffieħa baths. Although it would be too daring to suggest anything comparable to that building, one can safely compare the L-Iklin remains to those of the villa at Ramla Bay in Gozo.<sup>9</sup> The very presence of a lavatory and the proportionally large amounts of fragments of fine imported table wares discovered on the site are indicative of a certain degree of luxury and, though no traces of marble flooring or wall veneering were found, I would tend to believe that the building of L-Iklin was more probably a country resort than a rural farmstead.<sup>10</sup> No evidence of agricultural instruments normally encountered in such contexts was met.

Unless there had been different phases in the life of the building which could not be accounted for by the hasty excavation, the fragments of black glazed ware and of Italian *terra sigillata* discovered during the operation point to the first centuries B.C. and A.D.<sup>11</sup>

#### Cisterns

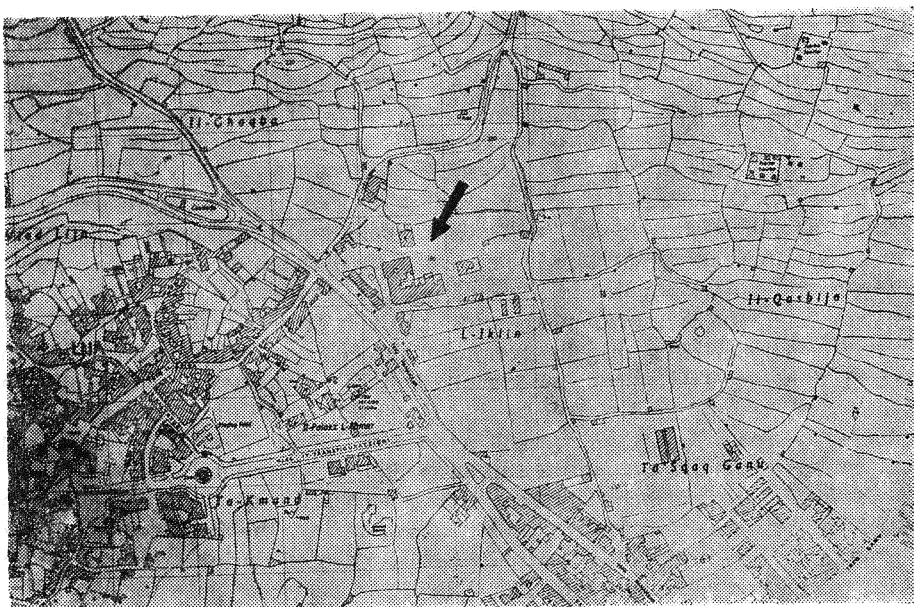
During the excavation of the same site I came to know from several individuals living in the neighbourhood of the existence of two old cisterns in the immediate vicinity. A few weeks after the end of the excavations a small team, consisting of Mr. Ivo Caruana, Mr. Tony Lautier and myself, set out to explore and record them. Mr. Lautier provided his climbing equipment and experience while Mr. Caruana prepared the drawings.

The cistern which is situated further uphill, to the east of the ancient remains just described, may or may not have formed part of that building. It is extremely well preserved. It is entirely rock-cut except for a few large rectangular blocks built over its openings in order to prevent soil from falling in. A round perforation, 20 cm in diameter, in one of the blocks served as a drain hole.

The cistern is bottle-shaped with a concave bottom.<sup>12</sup> It is almost 6 m

- 
7. The slab had already disappeared from the site when I visited the site only three days after the end of the excavation. Fortunately, however, I had photographed it and had it drawn soon after its discovery.
  8. T. Zammit, "Roman Villa and Thermae at Ghajn Tuffieħa — Malta", *Bulletin of the Museum I*, pp. 62-3.
  9. T. Ashby, "Roman Malta", *Journal of Roman Studies*, V (1915) pp.70-74; A. Bonanno, "Roman Villa at Ramla Bay, Gozo", *Heritage* no. 32, pp.634-637.
  10. As suggested in the respective Press release: see note 6.
  11. No date was suggested in the same Press release. The plan of the site was drawn by Mr F.S. Mallia, Director of the Museums Department, with whose kind permission it is being published.
  12. As at the time of the exploration the bottom was covered with much mud and rubbish its exact shape could not be recorded, but soundings with a wooden pole

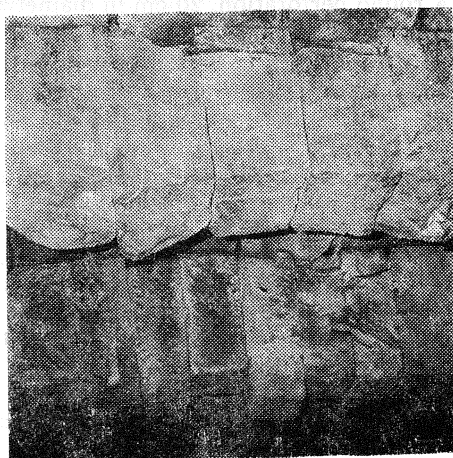
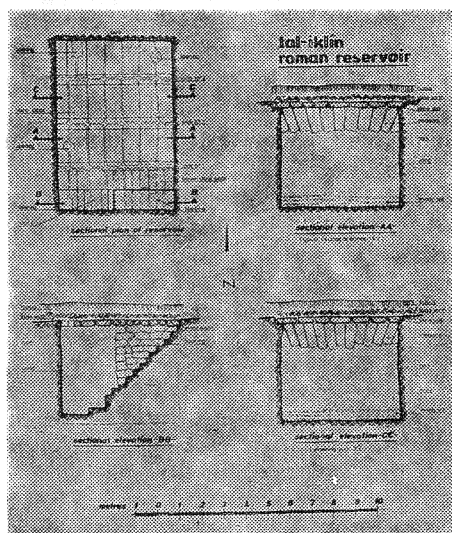




Map showing the foot of L-Ikkin hill in the limits of Lija and Birkirkara. Site of the remains of a Roman building and two cisterns indicated by arrow. The area has now been developed. (above)

Plan and sectional elevations of ancient rectangular cistern at L-Ikkin. (below left)

View of two of the flat arches in the rectangular cistern. (below right)



deep and 5.25 m in diameter at the widest point. Bottle-shaped cisterns are very common in Malta but the L-Iklin one has a strange feature which, to my knowledge, is not recorded in other examples. It is a funnel-shaped opening cut vertically into the east side of the cistern in such a way that an object, say a bucket, lowered down from this opening, could reach the bottom without hindrance. The cistern has thus two equally serviceable openings and the resulting shape in section elevation is that of an elongated tea-pot.

The purpose of the second opening is rather obscure, the more so since we cannot establish whether it was an original feature or cut at a later date. Among the possible explanations three seem to be the more plausible. The cistern could have been excavated beneath two separate properties in the first place so that the tenant of each had access to it. Otherwise it might have been decided at a later stage to perforate a second opening for the same purpose after a division of a previously single property. This might also have been resorted to because of a need to shift the opening due to some change in the nature of the property above.

The cistern is lined all round up to about 30 cm below the mouth edge. The lining is of first rate quality and is preserved almost in its entirety. It presents a smooth, polished surface except in the lowest metre or so, where the shiny surface has been eroded to uncover a very friable clayey layer. A sample of the lining has been extracted from an already damaged spot for eventual analysis.

The unlined rock surface just below the opening carries tool-marks which are indicative of the cutting technique. The surface is scored by shallow grooves, about 10 cm long and 2 cm wide, which suggest the use of a wide-edged instrument like a pickaxe or chisel.

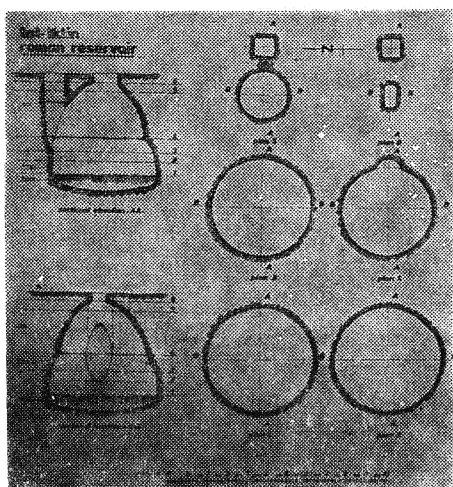
The shape of the cistern cannot, unfortunately, be used to determine its antiquity. Bottle-shaped cavities in the ground go back at least to the Bronze Age in the Maltese islands. Some of these, when found in a Bronze Age context have been indentified as silo-pits.<sup>13</sup> Similarly-shaped water tanks, however, are known to have been cut in very recent times<sup>14</sup> and most of the Maltese houses built in the first half of this century have water cisterns of this shape.

A great deal more may possibly be deduced on the chronology of individual cisterns when a comparative study of the linings used in different periods is completed.<sup>15</sup> It is with such a study in mind that the present writer ex-

---

revealed the inclination of the floor towards the centre.

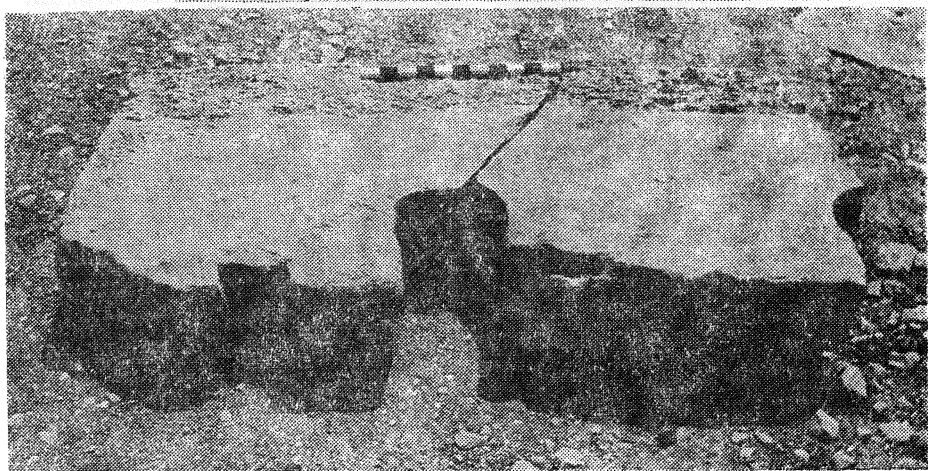
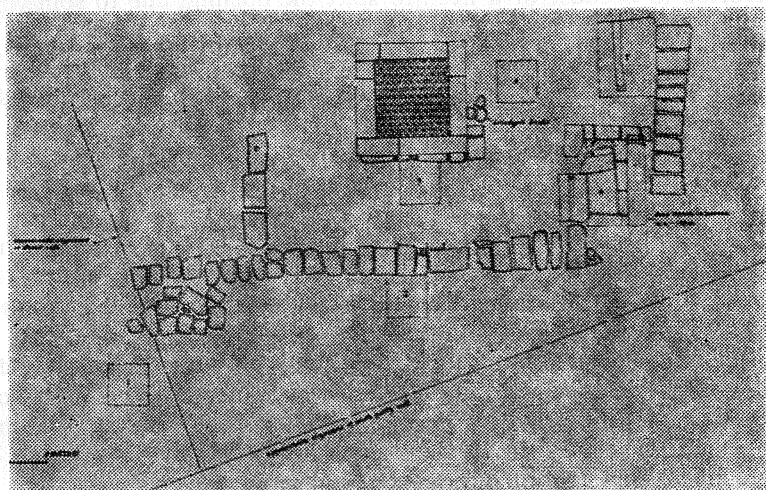
13. E.g. *Museum Annual Report*, 1960 p.4-5, fig.1; *ibid.* 1970 p.2. A number of such bottle-shaped pits were excavated in 1972 by Mr T. Gouder, Curator of Archaeology, at Il-Wardija ta' San Gorg, near Dingli Cliffs (report in preparation).
14. A good example is the unfinished one cut right into a chamber of the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum in the beginning of this century.
15. Studies of this type have been conducted with impressive results in north Africa, e.g. M. Solignac, "Recherches sur les installations hydroliques de Kairouan et des



Plans at various levels and sectional elevations of bottle-shaped cistern at L-Iklin. **(top)**

Plan of ruins of Roman building at L-Iklin. **(middle)**

Fragment of a stone latrine seat. **(bottom)**



tracted samples of the lining in this cistern. Excavation of the deposit inside the cistern might also throw some light on the periods in which it was in use.

The second cistern in the area was much more likely connected with the villa because it certainly belonged to the Roman period and was situated only a few metres downhill from the building in a very good position to receive the rain water from its roofs. The cistern is rectangular in shape and measures 7.5 m by 5 m. At the time of the exploration the bottom was covered by about 50 cm of silt and it was not possible to ascertain whether there was a depression below any one of the four openings, as is normally the case in large cisterns of this sort.

When the cistern was explored access into it was through a square hole in the south-west corner of the roof, but there were three other openings which were then blocked up. It is very likely, however, that a further opening existed in the south-east corner where a staircase has been spared in the living rock to provide physical access to the bottom. The upper part of the staircase has been built up most probably to support some cracked capstones above.

The most remarkable feature in this cistern is the way it is roofed over. The actual tank is a rectangular depression hewn in solid rock but the roof is entirely constructed. The latter consists of four rows of thick, rectangular slabs of globigerina limestone, each approximately 2 m by 1 m, supported on three flat arches. The arches are made up of large, tapering voussoirs of varying lengths. The first and second arches have eleven voussoirs each whereas the third arch has thirteen. The voussoirs are roughly dressed on the exposed surfaces, but the joints are cut with great precision to form a perfect fit. No mortar seems to have been used in the joints.

The waterproofing lining, which covers all the visible vertical surfaces as well as, presumably, the bottom surface, is preserved in good condition. Samples, have been taken from damaged areas where two layers of different date can be identified, one superimposed on the other. The wall built over the staircase is covered by a lining of a different kind altogether. It is very thick and consists of three layers bound together.

Cisterns of the same shape and period are well attested in Malta. A very well known example is that close to the Ta' Kaččatura villa complex. The slab roof of the latter, however, rests on a series of massive square pillars.<sup>16</sup> Another example with pillar supports is the cistern near the Ta' Ġawhar Tower.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand flat arches, of seven voussoirs each, occur in combination

---

steppés tunisiennes du VIIe au XIe siècles", *Annales de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales: Faculté des Lettres de l'Université d'Alger*, X (1952) pp.5-273; XI (1953) pp.60-170; Id., "Remarques de Méthode sur l'Etude des Installations Hydroliques Ifriqiyennes au Haut Moyen-Age", *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 47-48 (1964). References owed to Dr A. Luttrell.

16. *Museum Annual Report*, 1914-15, p.3; Ashby, p.64.

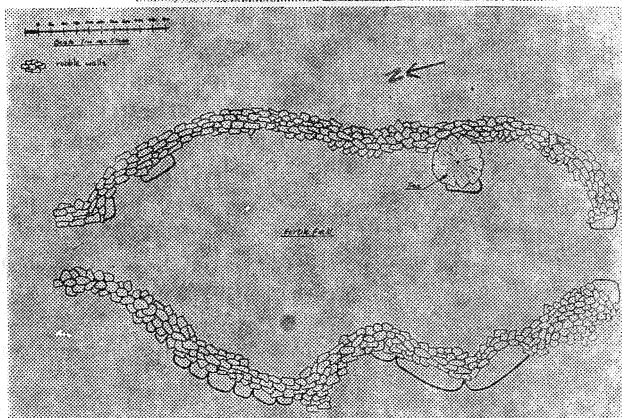
17. *Museum Annual Report*, 1915-16, p.8; 1960, p.6.

with vertical pillars in a cistern at Tal-Brolli.<sup>18</sup> The cistern discovered in 1915-16 at Wied is-Sewda is almost identical to the L-Iklin one: it has five flat arches and a staircase on one side.<sup>19</sup>

At the time of the investigation it was reported by one of the residents of L-Iklin that the government had plans to preserve the cistern and reinforce it with concrete. Such a project is highly recommended as it would preserve a rare example of an ancient Maltese technique in water preservation, and at the same time provide a practical and much needed service.



Map of L-Iklin hill. Field with megaliths indicated by arrow. **(above)**



Plan of small field at L-Iklin showing rubble walls built over megaliths. **(below)**

18. Ashby, p.64; D. Trump, *Malta, an Archaeological Guide* (London, 1972) pp.84-85.

19. *Museum Annual Report*, 1913-14, p.4.

DR. A. BONANNO, B.A.(Hons.), D.Litt., Ph.D., Lecturer at The University of Malta, is the author of *Portraits and Other Heads on Roman Historical Relief up to the Age of Septimius Severus* (Oxford 1976) and other scholarly works.



---

## BROWNING'S MEN AND WOMEN - THE WORLD THEY SHARED

**Vivienne Abela**

---

It was a Victorian precept that only servants talked about people; gentlemen discussed things. Robert Browning, brought up in an atmosphere of middle-class industry and piety, talked about people in his poetry — but his voice was dramatically in revolt.

Browning's life, like Tennyson's, spanned the whole of the 19th century, a century too conveniently dubbed 'Victorian' because of the accident of Victoria's youthful accession and her long reign. This fact alone imposed an illusory show of continuity and uniformity on a tract of time where men and manners, science and philosophy, the whole fabric of social life changed more swiftly perhaps, and more profoundly, than they have ever changed in an age not Sundered by a political or a religious upheaval. The Victorian revolution began with the ballot and went on to compulsory education and a federated Empire.

Industrialism came over England like a climatic change. While the new proletariat was sinking below the median line of decency the emerging middle classes were raising themselves above it to a higher respectability. England was shifting uneasily and convulsively from an old to a new discipline, and the early stages were painful. The practical ideals of English society were at odds with its religious profession, and its religious belief was at issue with its intelligence.

This, then, was the world in which Browning lived, a shifting panorama of human life and circumstance, over which the poet's intelligence could operate at will. But Browning's interpretation of the life of the 19th century remains partly obscured by the inner tensions of the artist and his personal experience. Most of Browning's education took place in an informal and tolerant home atmosphere, where indulgence and persuasion replaced discipline. As a boy, the poet had free and uncensored access to his father's library. This youthful exploration of the world of legend and history provided the poet with the background and characters for so many of his poems but also earned him his contemporaries' charge of 'coarseness' and 'vulgarity', and the more serious one of 'obscurity'.

If the range of Browning's reading was free and liberal by Victorian standards, his religious education, under the direction of his mother, was narrower and more sombre. Weekly attendance at the York Street Congregational chapel gave Browning his life-long distrust of the Catholic Church, his immense Biblical knowledge and his skill in religious controversy. This early in-

fluence was strengthened and deepened after his marriage by the profoundly-felt faith of his wife. But a poet of such wide-ranging intellectual curiosity could not escape the religious doubt that afflicted so many of his generation. The great Victorian pendulum swung between faith and doubt, between hope and despair. In fact Browning's men and women provided him with the voices he needed to explore so many 'soul-states', as he aptly called them.

Another major inspiration of many of his finest poems, those most deeply felt upon the pulse, was Art. This was a boyhood passion which grew and struck fresh sparks after Browning's first visit to Italy and during the years he lived there after his marriage. The art treasures of Venice and Padova, the wealth and magnificence of Renaissance architecture, statuary and painting at Florence caught the poet's imagination and stimulated his keen perception and appreciation of art and the artist's creative processes. This total and willing self-immersion in this fascinating world of art added psychological authenticity to his many portraits of painters. But Browning was not just a poet who happened to write with Romantic feeling *about* painters; his poetry is, rather, the expression of what his own unerring artist's eye saw and apprehended in life.

The country, which quickened Browning's feeling for art in such a remarkably intense way, became in fact a major pervasive influence on his work and life alike. His love for the country of his adoption is celebrated in the oft-quoted lines from 'De Gustibus':

Open my heart and you will see  
Graved inside of it, 'Italy'.

Henry James praised "Browning's own particular matchless Italy, from the first the felt, rich coloured air in which we live ... The Rome and Tuscany of the early fifties had become for him so at once a medium, a bath of the senses and perceptions ... that wherever he might be touched afterwards he gave out some effect of that immersion."

Running parallel to Browning's appreciation of Art is his enthusiasm and feeling for Music, which can also be traced back to his boyhood. His own musical accomplishments ensured a responsiveness to music and familiarity with its techniques which made his poetic rendering of the composer's or performer's experience as vivid and as personal as that of the painter. Writing from inside knowledge of the subject gives Browning the vantage-point of a direct participant in the musical experience.

Browning's own private experience lent maturity and emotional fulfilment to one other theme of his poetry. His exploration of the most complex of all human relationships gained spiritual depth and intensity from the success of his courtship of Elizabeth Barrett and their subsequent marriage of Love. This famous Romantic love-story — on which Hollywood was quick to capitalise — led to the poet's exaltation of love as THE supreme experience in life, at the same time that he truthfully admits to the possibility of its loss or decay and goes on to register the consequent bitterness. For sheer range of



mood and sensibility of feeling, Browning's memorable love poems have hardly, if ever, been surpassed.

Literature, Religion, Art, Music, Love — this, then, was Browning's world. To what extent did he share this world with his men and women? It is interesting to note that, after Browning's initial lack of success in the composition of verse dramas, he turned to a form which was peculiarly suited to the limitations as well as the strength of his natural gifts. The dramatic monologue presented some character thinking aloud in a moment of stress or at some point of crisis, confiding to the reader, in his or her individual idiom, the conflicts of thought and emotion involved in this particular predicament. It showed, in short, what Browning himself referred to (in the preface to "Strafford") as action in character rather than character in action.

It is a matter for contention among the critics, though, whether Browning's men and women are effectively objectified as living lives of their own or whether they remain subjective self-dramatisations on Browning's part, mere projections of his own personality and preoccupations. He himself categorically denied any intention of self-portraiture. "You may be right," he wrote to Ruskin, "however unwitting I am of the fact. I *may* put Robert Browning into Pippa and other men and maids ... but I don't see myself in them at all events." The French critic, Joseph Milsand, however, came closer to the truth when he said that Browning's talents were "not in turn, but simultaneously, lyrical and dramatic, subjective and objective." While Cleon and Karshish, Andrea del Sarto and Fra Lippo Lippi each has a personality and life of his own, the voice with which they all speak, and the world they inhabit, are always identifiably Robert Browning's. The portraits in this rich and varied picture gallery still bear the stamp of the same master.

A portrait that stands out and arrests attention is that of Andrea del Sarto. Called the "faultless painter", this artist's sad meditations about his own life and activity present, in a way that is deeper and more thoughtful than that of any other Browning character, the poet's attempt to find a philosophical answer to those baffling questions 'What is success? What is failure?' As an artist, Andrea has fallen short of his ideal; as a man, he feels himself the slave of circumstance as his weary fatalism puts it "All is as God overrules"; as a lover, he is sacrificing his moral, and in some degree, his artistic, conscience to a woman who does not return his love. He looks blankly at the future, does nothing about the present and only bemoans the past. It is a many-sided sadness compounded of many failures, ironically underlined by the fact that Andrea's self-knowledge is only intermittent and partial, and made hopeless by the fact that he is passively resigned to the situation. There might even be despair in his concluding words. The man's self-abasement and over-whelming sense of failure are too deep for contempt; rather, tragic pity is evoked by this ironical self-portrait.

This great 'artist' monologue provided Browning with perfect opportunity to delve deep into the nature of art and the artist. All that Andrea

painted so perfectly remained yet a travesty of the ideal. It was Browning's faith that life is greater than art, and he never ceased proclaiming this in his poetry. Andrea has not committed the familiar Browningsque sin of rejecting life for art; but his tragedy is a double one. For both life and art have betrayed him, and he is debarred from tasting the full joys of either world. The tragedy of the creative artist, then, is to be viewed in the wider context of the tragedy of man in general.

It is to Andrea del Sarto that the privilege falls of giving voice to a main tenet of Browning's philosophy of life:

"Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a Heaven for?"

The aspiration is, indeed, all and the soul's consummation is attained through striving rather than achieving. Through Andrea, Browning is saying not only that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, but that safe and effortless arrival is worth far less than the intensely experienced struggles of a journey which affords many glimpses of heaven, even if it ultimately ends in non-arrival at the hoped-for destination. If it was indeed Andrea, and not just Browning, who had this belief, the tragedy of his weary passivity becomes all the more striking.

Browning's quest for truth, his toleration, his broad Christian sympathy and sense of humour must have led him to choose the protagonist of his other 'artist' monologue. Like Andrea del Sarto, Fra Lippo Lippi was also a painter, and all the facts related about both of them are historical. But that is where the similarity ends. The melancholy cadences of Andrea's slow musing have been left far behind. This a lively friar, surprised by the guard while he was about to return from an equivocal neighbourhood after a night's frolic. Undismayed by the capture, he proceeds to supply a fair excuse for the escapade. This self-justification makes no apologies, has no regrets or complaints, but rather explains a set of beliefs which has shaped Lippo's entire life.

Fate had led the eight-year-old half-starved orphan to the convent. The allurements of food landed him with the monkish dress, which, in Lippo's case, certainly could never be equated with a vocation for the priesthood. Having received his earliest inspiration in the streets, it was no wonder that when Lippo started painting, flesh obtruded too much for the liking of the prior who complained that he could not see the soul for all the arms and legs! This launched Lippo on an exuberant, zestful exposition of what he conceived to be the artist's real function, at the same time that it served as a self-revelation and a self-defence.

The artist's cleared vision enabled other men to see what Lippo called "the beauty and the wonder and the power of this world." The eye that preferred the prior's niece to the patron saint was that which searched the beauty of the world, satisfied with it as a reflection of the beauty of God. In this doctrine, there is no conflict between flesh and spirit. The miracle of the senses is a help, rather than a hindrance, enabling man thus to discover his soul.

Take the prettiest face,

The Prior's niece ..... patron-saint — is it so pretty  
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear,  
 Sorrow or joy? Won't beauty go with these?  
 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,  
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash.

This is, unmistakably, Browning's voice with his insistence on the goodness of life; Art is only a product of Life after all. But this vivid appreciation of life, which Lippo says is an essential prerequisite for Art, is conveyed not merely by statement, but by demonstration. And so simultaneously we hear Lippo's own voice, the voice of an excitable human being who loves life and squeezes from it the last drop of enjoyment. Words tumble out of his mouth, some times incoherently but all the more forcefully and credibly. The syntactical dislocations, broken-off half-sentences, sudden exclamations and ejaculations, homely phraesology and imagery are all in character. This is a monologue emphatically rendered in a major key. Lippo lives triumphantly in it from beginning to end; Browning is just one step behind, applauding and cheering him on.

No less alive than these two historical figures are such creatures of Browning's own invention as Cleon and Karshish. In both their epistles there is much soul-searching about religion, the Christian mystery and the enigma of existence. The solution remains finally hidden from both of them, though it is Karshish who trembles on the verge of truth since he is more receptive to new experience. In fact, Karshish reflects much of 19th century scientific spirit that Browning would have admired, especially its eager curiosity and healthy but not destructive scepticism. On the other hand, Cleon reflects a less admirable current of 19th century thought: the frequently expressed smug assumption that the 19th century had 'progressed' dramatically beyond all previous civilisations.

Cleon is an ancient Greek thinker writing to king Protus, his friend and patron. His epistle is a rational statement of his conviction that the immortality conferred by art is not enough to satisfy the innermost yearnings of a man's spirit, and that art alone can thus never constitute a way of life. The conception of youth and strength and wisdom is not its reality; the knowing (and depicting) what joy is, is not the possession of it. Therefore, the surviving of the artist's works, when he himself is dead, is but a mockery all the more because they still live on while he

the feeling, thinking, acting man  
 the man who loved his life so over much

sleeps for ever.

Cleon's soul thus cries out for an affirmation of permanence, sensing the existence of a

perfection hid,

Reserved in part, to grace the after-time.

His unsatisfied craving is reflected in the tormented cry "but is there **nothing more?**" His soul aspires to and longs for some future state limitless in its possibilities of joy — but he ignores the chance of this when it is within his grasp. This is the bitter irony crystallised in the conclusion of his epistle. He is too obtuse to recognise a truth plainly perceptible to us. Arrogantly and cursorily he dismisses the ability of any other philosophy to hold the key to truth. How could Paul, "a mere barbarian Jew", have "access to a secret shut from us"? His final contemptuous affirmation that "their doctrine could be held by no sane man" slams the door on the very solution towards which his intuition had led him.

Like so many others of Browning's men and women, Cleon is all the more credible because he has his own distinguishable idiom and speech-rhythms — those of the civilised rationalist philosopher. Calm language and orderly syntax present his deliberately reasoned argument. The tempo changes when personal frustration and spiritual hunger break up his utterance, though the final note is once again matter-of-fact.

The verisimilitude of both the inner and larger experiences that Karshish relates in his Epistle is similarly reinforced by Browning's precision in the creation of the voice with which he makes Karshish speak. The Arab physician is a scholar and philosopher, intensely interested in all forms of experience and possessing an enquiring mind. His scientific matter-of-factness makes him examine life and natural phenomena with a clinical, dispassionate eye.

It is in this vein that he makes his diagnosis of the "strange medical experience" of Lazarus. All his basic principles encourage him to interpret the situation in terms of medicine and madness, with Christ as "the learned leech" and Lazarus as "the madman", whose reason has been impaired by a too sudden awakening from a prolonged epileptic trance. It was consequent to this that Lazarus laboured under the fixed idea that he had been raised from the dead by the Nazarene physician who was no other than God in human form.

The very fact that Karshish reacts so strongly to this suggestion of Christ's divinity proves that this scientist is religious after his own fashion:

This man so cured regards the curer, then,  
As — God forgive me! who but God himself,  
Creator and sustainer of the world,  
That came and dwelt in flesh on it a-while!

While he regards this idea as mad, Karshish is, nonetheless, haunted and perplexed by its consistency and especially by the manner in which Lazarus' supposed vision of the heavenly life has transformed, even inverted, the man's judgement of earthly things. Karshish tries to combat this impression by recounting all his scientific discoveries — the new plants, minerals, sicknesses, or cures to which his travels in Judea have introduced him. But, the possibility of an alternative explanation persists — that Lazarus, unable to forget the world of the spirit, lives in a state of perfect realisation of the

imperfection of the world of the flesh.

The way Karshish is puzzled and intrigued by these strange matters, and the wonder with which he relates them belie his scepticism and show that he is less dogmatically hardened than Cleon, less curt in his dismissal of the possibility of salvation by means of Christianity. But Karshish too fails his testing moment. Confronted with a saving revelation, he finds this truth too tremendous to encompass, and does not, or will not, recognise it. But while conviction finally eludes Karshish, he has all our sympathy because his ranging, inquisitive mind has struggled manfully for truth all along. The last lines of his monologue, therefore, have a lingering impact with the pathos and irony of his final compulsive exclamation at the possibility of a truth which he cannot quite accept — as yet:

The very God! think, Ahib; dost thou think?

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too —

... The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

It is not only religious belief that proves to be so enigmatic and elusive. Love, too, tantalizes the tired man of "Two in the Campagna". It is a sentiment best expressed in the poem's concluding words:

Infinite passion, and the pain

Of finite hearts that yearn.

The sufferer is a man who longs to rest in the affection of a woman who loves him, and whom he also loves, to achieve that condition of oneness in which he can identify his will completely with hers, see with her eyes, set his heart beating by hers. This longing is, however, perpetually thwarted of its fulfilment by the ultimate aloneness of each human soul. So, he is left asking the meaning of it all. The clue to the enigma seems to glance across him, in the form of a gossamer thread. The campagna all around them with its "feathery grasses" and drifting thistledown mirrors the elusiveness of "the floating weft" of thought the speaker tries in vain to grasp and hold fast. Just when he is on the brink of discovery, the revelation once more escapes him and the consummating spiritual union is as far away as ever. And this lover is worse off than Karshish, for his bafflement is that of bitter frustration.

Like this lover, the speaker in 'A Toccata of Galuppi's' remains anonymous. But his man-to-man tone makes credible his colloquy with the old composer. It creates a fantastic little vision of bygone Venice, evoked by the music of the old Venetian master. The toccata thus mirrors the ephemeral joy of life and youth and love, a brilliant but transient gaiety. But the introduction of solemn chords also conveys the warning of dust and ashes and the chill of annihilation soon to replace the glow of life. Browning, who is known to have enjoyed playing Galuppi toccatas on the organ, has imparted to the speaker in this poem his own technical familiarity with the form and his re-

sponse to the music's quality so that the fast, flowing verse-movement both evokes and echoes the organ-music until it can almost be heard by the inward ear.

What Childe Roland evokes is a different type of romanticism. The style of this "gloomy hieroglyphic" poem relies heavily on suggestive symbolism and strong dramatic elements. This is Browning's version of the "Pilgrim's Progress" story of the soul of Everyman on its journey. It turns out to be Browning's variation on the 'wasteland' theme. This knight is, therefore, a convenient medium for the expression of Browning's philosophy. But he also, identifiably, shares with all the other Browning men and women the idea that life is a search and a quest for the revelation of some ultimate truth which will make suddenly plain the purpose of human existence, too often hidden by chance and circumstance.

Though weary with travelling, Childe Roland courageously and stoically continues on the path which should lead him to his destination. Numberless others had set out before him but failed along the way. But neither their failure nor the nightmarish landscape which he has to traverse serves to daunt him or keep him back from pressing on. In fact, this accumulation of horrors in the diseased landscape is related in detail to the psychology of the Knight, to his mind overclouded with the idea of failure. Seldom has man's dark night of the soul been more powerfully conjured in such compulsive images of negation, repulsive ugliness, disgust and cruelty.

This sense of menace comes to a pitch in the vision of hills, which appear firstly

crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight

and then

like giants at a hunting, lay —

Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay.

But from out the horror and menace and the sense of failure, there comes, finally, action:

Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set  
And blew.

This is not the horn-blast of triumph or revelation, but rather the final determined act of chivalric self-dedication, affirming man's identity and the invincibility of the human spirit, in spite of all the odds.

This unrelenting pursuit of knowledge epitomises another of Browning's men. The dry-as-dust Grammarian has consumed his life with a hungry passion and a sacred thirst for learning. He "decided not to live but know". In the process, his infinite search for knowledge raised him with smug self-satis-

fied intellectual superiority above the level of the common herd. This is familiar Browning philosophy. The dedication of self to a high ideal unattainable in this life is better than success in a lower aim:

That low man goes on adding one to one,  
 His hundred's soon hit:  
 This high man, aiming at a million,  
 Misses a unit.

The inevitable corollary of this idea is an unquestioning belief in personal immortality. It is in the life to come that a noble failure here will be crowned with success:

He said, What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes;  
 Man has For Ever.

The Grammarian is now dead and his disciples honour him by carrying his body to its burial-place, the top of a high mountain, symbolic of the higher reaches of thought to which he had aspired. But what seems to be an apparently straightforward paean of praise by the Grammarian's students develops ironic revelations about the constricting nature of a life lived among books with no time left to taste the immediacy and intensity of first-hand experience, perfunctorily dismissed by him as "life's pale lure". Even while the students' peroration gathers momentum in accents of confidence, admiration and respect, it is given the lie by the increasing, if perhaps unconscious, savagery of their comments, questions, asides and ejaculations. Revulsion struggles with reverence. The real feeling which forces itself through the students' appropriate sentiments of respectful obituary is a human recoil from the spectacle of a wasted life.

In a letter written to Elizabeth Barrett, Browning once claimed: "I only make men and women speak, give you truth broken into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light". If we today recognise something 'modern' in the themes, forms, and above all in the varied voices of Browning, we are, perhaps, recognising the modernity of the experience of Robert Browning and its continuing relevance for us today.