

Mariroż Gatt: a late nineteenth century renowned Gozitan midwife

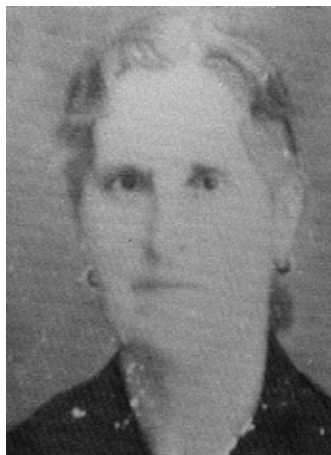
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Introduction

The Gozitan women at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century may have not been at the centre of attention of many. They certainly led an ordinary life either working in their homes or otherwise serving their community by helping out their husbands in the fields or in the little grocers or shops that spotted the Gozitan town and villages. Midwifery would have been one of the various services offered by a handful of women who would have conceived of their work more as a service rather than a profession.

Family Background

Mariroż Scicluna of Victoria would have been no exception. Born in 1873 into the family of Ġianna Xuereb and Ġużeppi Scicluna in the area of San Ġorġ tal-Ħaġar at the very heart of Gozo's town, (Mizzi, 2007: 3-39) Mariroż was baptised at St George's Parish Church by Archpriest Mgr. Felic Refalo on the 21st March 1873 and named Maria Rosa, Josepha, Annunziata.¹ Mariroż grew up in Rabat, Gozo. She married Ġorġ Gatt of Victoria, son of Felic and Josepha Caruana on the 5th of September 1893 at St George's Parish in Rabat.² Four children came of the marriage; Adelina who married Ġużeppi Attard (ta' Kuncetta) a carpenter from Victoria, Anastasia who married Ġorġ Tabone (ta' Gerit) who had no issue, Ġużeppa



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who married Neriku Mizzi of Vittoriosa (Malta) and Tarċis, who became a priest and later a canon of the Gozo Cathedral. Dun Tarċis, as he was affectionately known, was for many years the master of ceremonies (ċerimonier) for Bishop Mgr. Ġużeppi Pace. He also served as spiritual director to the Leone Band of Victoria and it was through his work and enthusiasm that the statue of the Assumption manufactured by the Francesco Rosa Company of Rome in 1897 was donated to the Cathedral Parish and thus became the titular statue of the Matrice Church. Dun Tarċis' remains were lately transported to the Cathedral Church and were interred in the chapel where his beloved statue of Santa Marija is permanently revered.

Descendants

By a twist of luck or coincidence whatever one might want to call it, Mariroż happens to be the great-aunt of Archbishop Emeritus Ġużeppi Mercieca (a sister to his maternal grandmother), the great-grandmother of Gozitan singer Adelina Attard, local writer Joe M. Attard and Rev. Dr. Fabio Attard SDB and the great-great-grandmother of Gozitan-born news-readers Nathaniel Attard (NET TV) and Melissa Vella (Super 1) and painter Mark Sagona. She also happens to be my great-great grandmother.

Death

Mariroż died on the 3rd of December 1952; she was buried at the Santa Marija Cemetery of Victoria. The memory of Mariroż "ta' Qaraboċċu" as she was simply known by all, will continue to be cherished by various Gozitan folk for many years to come.

Reference

Mizzi, P. (2007). "Mariroż il-Majjistra," *Il-Ħajja f'Għawdex*, 3-39. Gozo: Gozo Diocese.

Fr. Geoffrey G. Attard was ordained for the diocese of Gozo in June 2004. He graduated M.Th. in Ecclesiastical History from the University of Edinburgh in November 2005 and he graduated M. Lit. in Practical Theology from the University of St Andrews.

¹ *Liber Baptizmorum* Vol 11, St George's Basilica, Victoria

² *Liber Matrimoniorum*. Vol V, St George's Basilica, Victoria