like to take into consideration the translation and annotation of the afore-mentioned slabs.

The book should be of interest to both the general reader and the history student. History is however quite a general term and it does have its various connected branches. Epigraphy and heraldry are two such arms. The lover of coat-of-arms and crests could easily feast his eyes on this book. In Gozo, where local noble families were never in their dozens, it was the Church which provided the possibility of flaunting heraldry to its advantage. As to those who might have developed a special fancy for the macabre, Stones of Faith is a must. The reader should not forget that in the Catholic Church, parish churches served as cemeteries from time immemorial and it was only the civil law that forbade such use of sacred places through the prohibition of October 1974.

Vitor Vella. L-Imghallem Bennej Tas-Santwarju Ta’ Pinu

Victor Vella Muskat,

_Vitor Vella. L-Imghallem Bennej Tas-Santwarju Ta’ Pinu_ is the name of an interesting publication which focuses on Victor Vella, arguably the most renowned mason in the entire history of Gozo. The book is definitely a positive contribution to Gaulitana – the term which has been coined to denote all that has to do with the history, archaeology and folklore of the island of Gozo – especially when one takes into consideration that it was researched by his own great-grandson, Mr. Victor Vella Muskat of Victoria.

The book consists of twenty-seven short chapters through which the author provides the reader with a chronological review of the life and works of master mason Vitor Vella. In a small place like Gozo where people were known more through their family nickname rather than through their name and surname, one has to begin by stating that Vitor Vella was referred to by all and sundry simply as ‘Vitor tal-Qanfuda’.

The entire book makes for interesting reading; once you begin reading, it is difficult to put it down. Chapter five is one of the most enticing, providing a couple of curiosities about some particular tombstones. The glossary in the first appendix is very helpful especially for the beginner. The second appendix would be of interest mostly to the researcher. The book has definitely proved itself unique in the fact that it provides between its two hard bound arms the first ever photographic collection of all the stone slabs in the Gozo Cathedral. I would suggest to those who have the history of Gozo close to their heart to obtain a copy of this timely publication. I have no doubt that I will see it referred to in scholarly papers and Melitensia publications in the near future since it has focused on a theme which has until lately been abandoned on the wayside of history.
The name itself commanded respect during Vitor’s lifetime since he managed to establish himself as the island’s main master mason. However to state this would be short of the truth. Vitor was looked upon with admiration even by various parish priests and church builders in Malta. This fact comes out clearly in the publication itself.

Victor Vella Muskat dedicates the first chapter of the book to providing us with information about the birth and first years of Vitor. In the following chapters he writes about how Vitor came out of a family of builders and stone-workers. He writes also about Vitor’s first and second marriages.

The book then delves deeper into the career which made him such a sought-after mason on the island, especially in the sector of church building. Vitor was involved in the building or enlargement projects of the Kerċem parish church, the Santa Luċija church, the Gozo Cathedral, the Xewkija parish church, the Imġarr parish church in Malta, the Sannat, Nadur and Qala parish churches and the convent of St Anthony in Għajnsielem. Last but not least he was involved in the building of the dome of his native parish church of Żebbuġ.

However it has to be stated that Vitor Vella put his name on the map of the architectural history of ecclesiastical Gozo through his input in favour of the Ta’ Pinu Sanctuary; it is in the building of this glorious edifice that his unique artistic abilities are to be noticed and admired. The book’s author dedicated chapter thirteen, which is the most important chapter of the publication, to this massive building project. It took him seventeen years to build the church together with the belfry that stands next to it. Since the book has been researched by a great-nephew of Vitor, the author could also include some rectifications considering that Mr. Victor Vella Muskat owned important family documents related to the great master-mason. Referring to four different documents or publications, Vella Muskat rectifies a couple of errors that these writings may have contained. Chapter twenty-six consists of various laudatory and appreciative remarks celebrating the prolific career of Vitor Vella. The authors vary from the late Bishop of Gozo Mgr. Nikol G. Cauchi to local writers and clergymen who knew Vitor personally.

The book has an extensive bibliography considering the size and research of the book and includes an introduction by the late Bishop Cauchi. Black and white photos and designs of churches on which Vitor Vella worked are not lacking and the book’s size makes it handy. The book has a good presentation and the design is quite attractive although the designer does not seem to have been acknowledged in the following pages. A copy of the book can be obtained from the main local bookshops or from the Żebbuġ parish office.