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# THE SOUTH EAST OF MALTA AND ITS DEFENCE UP TO 1614

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## ABSTRACT

The object of this presentation is to give an overview of how the south-east of Malta comprising the *Cappella of Sancta Catherina*, that is the Parish of Żejtun, was geared for enemy attacks before 1530 and after the arrival of the Order of St John until the last invasion of 1614, whose fourth centenary is being commemorated. It is shown how the coastal watch, the so-called *Maħras*, for this district, originally organized by the Mдина Universitas came to be dependent on St Angelo towards the mid- fifteenth century and how, at about the same time, fortification of the old Parish Church was undertaken to defend the villagers, in view of the distance of the parish from Mдина. The dependent hamlet of Żabbar was one of the identified *Dejma* (land force as opposed to the coastal *Maħras*) centres. It is suggested that one reason why the Port of Marsaxlokk appears to have been singled out by the Moorish corsairs for especial attention was retaliation for its use as the hub of Christian provocation, especially after 1530.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Muslims' expulsion from these islands in the mid-XIIIth century these shores became frontier territory – *in frontera barbarorum* – with Moorish North Africa and never ceased to bear the brunt of onslaughts from that direction. Nor, however, were they spared the damaging attention of Christians who were the enemies of the powers that happened to be ruling them at the time. Often it was Gozo, the relatively undefended island, that was dealt the most harmful blows. Thus, in 1274, the smaller island was sacked by the Genoese who were then enemies of the Angevins. In 1283, a fierce naval battle raged in Malta's Grand Harbour between the navies of Anjou and of Aragon, battling each other for domination of these islands. In 1298, then, destruction reigned in these islands when they were involved in the internecine struggle between the two reigning brothers, Jaime King of Aragon

and Frederick III King of Sicily.<sup>1</sup> The following century was witness to escalating Moorish attacks. The Hafsids of Tunisia took revenge on Gozo in 1389 following Manfred Chiaramonte's assault on Jerba with vessels which had left from these islands. The damage effected then was nothing compared to the devastation left behind by Qa'id Ridwan's tragic invasion of 1429, when a horde of 18,000 Moors pushed their aggression to the walls of Mдина and carried off into slavery no less than 3,000 islanders; this, again, was in retaliation for the Aragonese attack on Kerkenna.<sup>2</sup> This tit-for-tat repeated itself right down to the assault on the south-east of the island in 1614, the event we are commemorating this year, culminating in the massive invasions of 1551 and 1565 intended to take over these islands completely.

It is for these reasons that, in 1375, King Frederick IV of Sicily took action to

defend the realm's shores by organizing a coastal watch which, for this island in that year, was entrusted in the hands of Malta's Castellan. Thereafter, defence became less decentralized and it passed into the hands of the Municipal Council, or *Universitas*, of Mdina headed by its *Hakem*, four Jurats and other officials. It is worth remarking that the terminology used in the documentation for the organization of the coastal watch (known as *mahrās*) for the various districts of the island was precisely by amalgams of villages into *cappelle* or parishes, which is ecclesiastical language. This shows that the ecclesiastical organization of the island into distinct districts preceded the civil. Thus among the earliest militia lists and rosters, dating to 1417 and later, published by Professor Wettinger, one encounters the population around *Raħal Dingli* being referred to as *Cappella Santa Dominica Tartarni et Dinkili*. The same can be said for lists of c. 1450 related to the importation of wheat, wherein well-to-do islanders from the south-east of the island are grouped together under headings such as *Santa Catharina*.<sup>3</sup> This Church of St Catherine, precisely where this symposium is being held today, from very early times was the principal church of the district so-called *Iż-Żejtun*, so that when the parish network was set up it became the Parish Church of this district or *capella*. Before embarking on the subject-matter proper a few definitions and clarifications are in order.

### ***CAPPELLA SANCTA CATHERINA***

The name *iz-Żejtun* for the village as we know it today, both as an ecclesiastical and as a civil entity, does not go back further than the mid-XVII century. Thus, in the censuses of the population taken by the Order in 1590, 1614, 1617, 1632, reference is always made to the Parish or *Cappella* of St Catherine.<sup>4</sup> The appellative *Casal Zeitun* only begins

to appear after 1650, both in the *status animarum* records and in other collections of demographic data, although even here, it is often qualified as being composed of the villages of *Hal Bisbut*, *Hal Bisqallin* and *Hal Ġwann*.<sup>5</sup> Even for the historian Gio Francesco Abela, who produced his *magnum opus* in 1647, *Zeitun* is merely a *contrata* or district of the southeastern corner of Malta, by contrast with the two other main districts, also named for trees, *Il-Għarġhar* and *Iż-Żnuber*.<sup>6</sup> One cannot but help connecting this information with what is known about the constituent elements of Malta's Mediterranean forest in the XIIth century as described by the Arab geographer Al-Himyari (whose text was certainly not available to Abela).<sup>7</sup>

For a detailed illustration of the occurrence of *Żejtun* as a *contrada*, the reader is referred to Professor Wettinger's paper read during another symposium, similar to this, held in 2001, where the documentation is taken back to 1419.<sup>8</sup> Documents being published in the *Documentary Sources of Maltese History* series push back these references into the XIVth century such as the concession of 1372 made to Joannes de Peregrino by King Frederick IV of Sicily of land *in contrata de lu Zeituni*,<sup>9</sup> and a similar grant a year later of the fief of *Petralonga* (a Sicilian surname) *in contrata de Lu Zayduni prope Putheum Salsum* (near *Bir il-Mielah*) and of the other fief of *Bullumeni* (*Buleben*).

In medieval times, this district of Malta counted within its boundaries a fair number of villages and hamlets which together formed the ecclesiastical entity, called *Cappella*, with its Rector, *il-Kappillan*, under the name of *Santa Katerina*, the patron saint and titular of the principal church, the one we are occupying now. Among these satellite villages one finds *Raħal Biżbud* (nowadays referred to as *Ir-Raħal ta' Fuq*), *Raħal Bisqallin* (which name, incidentally, has nothing to do with Sicilians but is merely the diminutive

of *Baskal*, *Baskal iż-żgħir* – this is *Ir-Raħal t'Isfel*, – *Raħal Gwann* (near *Bir id-Deheb*), *Raħal Bajda* (or *Bajjada*), *Raħal Ghaxaq*, *Raħal Temim Assant* (today, *Ħal Tmin*), *Raħal Ħarrat* (near the Church of St Cajetan on the road to *Ir-Ramla ta' San Tumas*), *Raħal Żabbar*, and close to it *Raħal Sajd*, *Il-Biċċieni* and *Il-Bidni*, *Raħal Ghadir* at *San Ġorġ ta' Birżebbuġa*, *Tal-Ġinwi* (later referred to as *Ħal Ġinwi*) and *Ħal Risqun*.<sup>10</sup> A number of other minor hamlets only known by their name are also found here, including *Raħal Arrig* and *Raħal Ghabdirżeq*, near *Bin Ghisa*, and *Raħal Spital* (*Ħas Saptan*). In this fairly extensive territory, there were important fiefs like *Il-Marnisi*, documented already in the mid-XIVth century,<sup>11</sup> *Buleben*, already noted, and *Dejr l-Imara* (*Delimara*) which appears towards the beginning of the XVth century. These *latifundia* were worked in Norman and Swabian times by serfs of the *Curia Regia*, who, for the Church, meant souls that had to be cared for by the *Kappillan* of the Parochial district. This spread of villages and hamlets (often not embracing much more than a farmstead or two) reflected a medieval demographic profile very different from what we are used to today, an extremely dense conurbation centred on Grand Harbour accounting for two-thirds of the entire population.

Before the coming of the knights the whole population, with its agricultural orientation, was very homogeneously spread all over the island. This is well illustrated by the spread of the population of the *Cappella S. Catherina* (with which we are concerned here) whose 110 men liable for militia duty (representing a total population of some 550) in 1419 are known to have come from *Temim Assant* (10 men), *Pasqualinu* (14 men), *Johanni et Buzubudi* (taken together because fairly close to each other) 40 men, *Zabar* (18 men), u *Axac* (28 men); five years later *Il-Bidni* is included with *Zabar*.

It was important to go into this detail in order to understand why the Church of St Catherine was chosen as the Parish Church, whence the sacraments were administered, in spite of the fact that it was not located in any of the villages mentioned. The church was sited, as it were, at the barycentre of the population (Fig. 1), minimizing the sum of the distances the Parish Priest had to travel to the several people's habitations.<sup>12</sup> Similar instances can be cited in the case of *Birmiftuh* and Birkirkara's *Santa Elena* at *Il-Għargħar*.

Another point that needs to be stressed is that, although in Malta there were two distinct parishes dedicated to St Catherine of Alexandria, namely *Żejtun* and *Żurrieq*, references to the latter are always in the form *Casalis Zuric* (or similar) so that *Capella Sancta Catherina* always meant *Żejtun* (Fig. 2). As a corollary, we have that a reference to *Sancta Catherina* dating back to 1270 and Angevin times alludes to *Żejtun*.<sup>13</sup> More solidly based, because specifying land descriptions, are references of a century later such as the fief of *Petralonga*, that is on the way to *Sancta Catherina*,<sup>14</sup> as we know of the same fief *in contrata dilu Zajduni prope pheidum Bullumeni*,<sup>15</sup> which is none other than *Buleben*, near *Iż-Żejtun*. The coincidence in time – the Angevin period – of the earliest reference to *Sancta Catherina* with the first ever mention of the Cathedral's Precentor – Alexander mentioned in 1274 – may not be due entirely to chance as it is known that the prebend of St Catherine belonged precisely to the Precentor,<sup>16</sup> as is evidenced by the fact that the right to celebrate Mass at the end of the yearly votive procession of St Gregory belongs precisely to the Precentor.<sup>17</sup> From this association also stems the presence of depictions of the Precentors' coats-of-arms displayed in the church sacristy. These start with Don Bartholomeus Axac (1366-1375), Don Paulus Nani (1388-1393), Don Bartholomeus Gatt (1419-



Figure 1: The Old Parish of St Catherine, Żejtun in the 1940s. Courtesy of Ruben Abela.



Figure 2: Reference to Parrochia S. Caterina and Parrochia Zurricho on P. Coronelli Map, 1689. Courtesy of Heritage Malta.

1428), Don Michael de Fabro (1431), Don Henricus de Bordino (1441-1480), Don Rogerius de Bordino (1480-1496) and their successors of the XVIth century and later.<sup>18</sup>

At this juncture, a little aside would not be out of order, as this Church of St Catherine is habitually referred to as St Gregory's on account of the votive procession, mentioned, that originally started at Mdina and ended here. Much has been surmised about the possible origin of this procession. Without citing any documentation, Dusina would have it associated with some Turkish attack.<sup>19</sup> Abela suggests the invasion by Qa'id Ridwan in 1429 or the visitation of plague in 1519.<sup>20</sup> A document is, however, cited by Fr Mikiel Fsadni O.P. who refers to a notarial act of 1543 which gives details of the procession supposedly ordered by Bishop Cubelles in that year.<sup>21</sup> But the procession could not have originated in 1543. It must be remarked that St Gregory the Great is habitually invoked in Church history on the recurring occasions of plague, doubtlessly because he had ordered the organization of a votive procession when the plague visited Rome in 590.<sup>22</sup> This would suggest the genesis of the Malta procession to have been connected with the plague, as Abela hinted. However, the present author has identified a document dated 1535 (eight years before Cubelles' order) related to this procession which describes how the parishioners of Naxxar and of Birkirkara clashed over precedence at the start of the procession at *Is-Saqqajja, Rabat*. Heads and processional crosses were broken and the fracas led to court proceedings before the Bishop (with appeals to Rome), yielding important details. In summary, Cathedral Treasurer and Parish Priest of Naxxar, Don Domenico Dimech [died 1541], claimed in his evidence that *ab antiquissimo tempore* the right of precedence belonged to Naxxar.<sup>23</sup> The qualification of time *ab antiquissimo tempore* must have signified at

least a century; otherwise, someone older than Dimech would have been found to contradict him. Although this argument does not preclude the invasion of 1429 as the motivating event, the association of St Gregory with votive processions of the plague would suggest some visitation of plague at the time. The most likely event would have been the Black Death of the 1360s which is known from Vatican sources to have visited also these islands.<sup>24</sup>

### THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST CATHERINE

Coming now to the Parish proper it is useful to consider the Parish Priests, *Kappillani*, in order to create a framework for events, actually related to defence. The earliest reference to a Parish Priest does not go further back than Bishop Senator de Mello's *rollo* of 1436, mentioning *La Cappella di Sancta Catherina*,<sup>25</sup> even if parishes were certainly in existence before that date. Recall *Cappella Sancta Dominica Tartarni et Dinkili* (1419) and *Sancta Helena* of Birkirkara already established in 1402. Furthermore, the *cappella* of the *Castrum Maris* is already in evidence in 1361 and later.<sup>26</sup> It follows that the establishment of a parish network must be pushed back at least to the XIVth century, even if for *Sancta Catherina* the earliest known Parish Priest remains Don Paulus Branchel noted in 1436. Branchel is actually encountered before – in 1428 – not, however, as a Parish Priest, but as someone owing money for tithes due to the Cathedral Dean.<sup>27</sup>

Many authors writing about Maltese Church History mention a certain Don Zullu as Branchel's immediate successor, citing the oft-quoted inscription reproduced in Abela.<sup>28</sup>

*Hoc opus fieri fecerunt Venerabilis Czullus dictu Baldu, et Honorabiles Paulus Dalli, et Jacobus Bonnici, Procuratores S. Catherine*

*de Żejtun MCCCCLXXXII. Vltimo Februarii X. Indictionis.*

This writing, dated end of February 1492, declares that the (unspecified) work on the church was performed in the days of Don Zullus, nicknamed Baldu, and of the church procurators Dalli and Bonnici. Although Don Zullu is not stated to be the Parish Priest, one may presume he was in that year as he is known to have been at the Mdina Council meeting of 1474.<sup>29</sup> We do not know how long Don Zullu remained as Parish Priest, but a *Vicecapellanus*, a certain Don Antonius de Nicolachio, appears in 1496, on behalf of the church, commissioning a silver chalice for the church from the silversmith Antoni Mazzuni of Syracuse.<sup>30</sup> Returning to the inscription, the appellation *dictu Baldu* for Don Zullu only occurs here, whereas Don Zullus de Theobaldo is well documented elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> It is not improbable that even in Abela's days the inscription was already not very clear and Abela may have misread *'de Theobaldo'* as *'dictu Baldu'*.

From researches in the Vatican Secret Archives another Parish Priest of *Sancta Catherina* occurs between Branchel and De Theobaldo. This was Don Andreas Catalano, described as *familiaris et commensalis* of Pope Pius II, by whom he was very well-favoured. Suffice it to mention that when the Birkirkara rectorship became vacant upon the resignation of Don Matheus Galea, Pius II ordered the Archdeacon Lanceas Inguanes to have the pretender Don Michael Falzon removed and have Catalano instated in his stead. Three weeks later, on 23 March 1462, when Catalano offered to pay his first annate, this was waived by the *Camera Apostolica*.<sup>32</sup> By September of that year, Catalano had already moved up to more lucrative positions, while still deriving the 12 ounces of Tours from the Birkirkara prebend, the payment of which was waived for a second time.<sup>33</sup> On 22 December 1463 he was given the

tithes prebend of the *Matrice* Collegiate Church of Gozo – *prebenda decimarum Collegiate Ecclesie Beate Marie Terre Gaudisii Milevitane Diocesis* – which was vacated by Don Raymondus Navarra on his demise;<sup>34</sup> (it appears from this that the Gozitan collegiate was no XVIIth-century foundation!!!). This prebend earned for Catalano another 24 ounces of Tours, over and above an income of another 100 ounces from other benefices (including Birkirkara to which he had held on). As if this was not enough, in April of that year he was also made Parish Priest of *Sancta Catherina* of Żejtun.<sup>35</sup> According to Gianfrancesco Abela,<sup>36</sup> who cites Rocco Pirro, in 1467, Pius II's successor, Pope Paul II, appointed him Archdeacon of the Catania Cathedral. We may conclude that Catalano's connexion with Żejtun ended here, some four years after his installation.

#### DEFENDING THE SOUTH-EAST OF MALTA

This longish ecclesiastical apparent detour was quite intentional and does have its purpose, precisely because the defence of the south-east of Malta – the subject matter of this presentation – is intimately tied with the church and with Catalano, specifically. An interesting document related to the defence of the south-east of Malta can likewise be recovered from the Vatican Secret Archives, dating precisely from the years of Catalano's rectorship. It transpires from this document that Catalano's parish of Żejtun is described as *sita in confinibus infidelium qui illam pluries invadunt atque spoliant* – that is, is located on the frontier with the infidels who often attack it and despoil it – and for this reason, the (unnamed) predecessor of Catalano in the Żejtun rectorship had begun constructing a tower close to this church in order to defend his parishioners and the many islanders who flocked there out of devotion. It was for this reason that

Pope Pius II was granting indulgences – *decem annos et totidem quadragenas* – to all who contributed – *manus porrexerint adiutrices* – towards the completion of this tower.<sup>37</sup> One asks: Where could this tower have been located? I do not think one needs to search very far afield. If we look at the elevation of the church from its south-east end it does not take much to conclude that the architectural style is quite military rather than ecclesiastical. This argument was proposed by Professor Mario Buhagiar himself in 1979 even before the first mention of medieval towers in this locality.<sup>38</sup> The suggestion was later taken up by Quentin Hughes, who had said nothing about it in his first book, *The Building of Malta 1530-1795* (London: Tiranti 1967), but took it up later in his last writing on the subject towards the end of his life.<sup>39</sup> Here he

suggested that the church was given a military garb in order to serve as a look-out post to control the south-east coast of the island, adding (without citing sources) that it was also used to send signals to Mdina.

My contention is that the tower was located at the south-east corner of the back of the church (Fig. 3) and it was encroached upon by the extension works of 1492 mentioned in the inscription. These were, possibly, an elongation of the main axis towards the east and the addition of the transepts (Fig. 4a) and the dome in 1606 (Fig. 4b), judging by the present-day inscription in the dome<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 4c). This explains the so-called ‘secret passageways’ (Fig. 5a) above the sacristy with look-out windows facing towards Marsascala and Marsaxlokk (Fig. 5b), which would have



Figure 3: The south-east elevation of the Old Parish Church, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2014.



Figure 4a: One of the transepts which were added to the original structure of the church in the early 17th century, Old Parish Church, Żejtun. Photograph: Christina Dalli, 2014.



Figure 4b: The dome which was built in 1606, Old Parish Church, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2013.

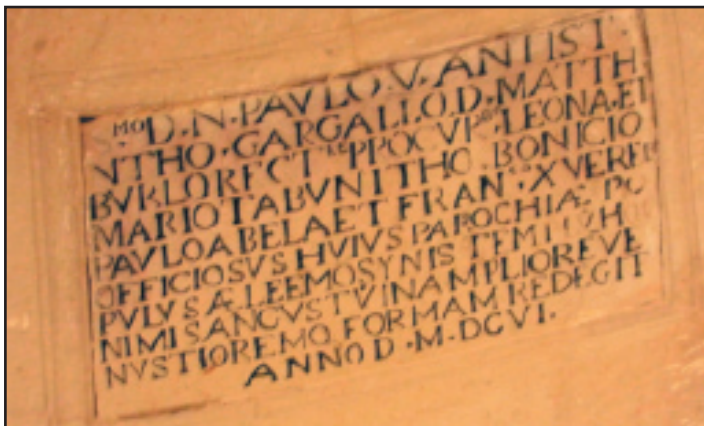


Figure 4c: The inscription in the dome, Old Parish Church, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2013.



Figure 5a: The 'secret passageway', Old Parish Church, Żejtun. Photograph: Christina Dalli, 2014.



Figure 5b: Look-out window facing Marsaskala, Old Parish Church, Żejtun. Photograph: Christina Dalli, 2014.



been part of the original tower and which continued to serve that purpose even after the tower was half destroyed, or better, incorporated within the rebuilt church structure. The purpose of the tower was to raise the alarm in case of enemy sightings on the south-east shoreline. One cannot help pointing out the connexion with the event being commemorated when, as late as 1614, the last such landing occurred at *Il-Gżira ta' San Tumas, Wied il-Għajn*.<sup>41</sup> One should also keep in mind that the Parish of *Sancta Catherina* was the furthestmost district from Mdina, unprotected by the high cliffs of the south, with several coastal indentations offering excellent cover to the enemy, and with the village of *Żabbar* (within its territory) being one of the few villages for which its *Dejma* contingent (distinct from *Il-Maħras*) is documented at this time.<sup>42</sup> In this connexion, I would like to point out that we may even be in possession of a contemporary representation of the tower. Reference is being made to the Buondelmonti map of the island dating to c. 1470, recently published by Soler and Ganado, exhibiting fortifications in this corner of the island; the authors, unaware of the Vatican documentation discussed above, opine that this representation must have been mistaken.<sup>43</sup>

In connexion with this tower one cannot help remarking about the large quantity of bones that were found in the 'secret passageways' at the top of the tower. This material constitutes a very important archaeological element that should help date the structure. Admittedly, the bones have been under the scrutiny of anatomists of the University of Malta, the Indian Dr Ramaswamy and the Maltese Dr Pace, who performed a valuable palaeopathological examination of them. They conclude that the bones were, at some time interred,<sup>44</sup> and, as suggested by Professor Buhagiar, it is very likely that they were disturbed when the new foundations for the structure were laid.<sup>45</sup>

But historically they are bound to remain hanging *in vacuo* before a precise dating for them is obtained. This can easily be determined by the use of carbon dating, a simple, albeit perhaps costly, procedure that has not been availed of yet. It is interesting to note that anatomists Ramaswamy and Pace found no traces of syphilis, so that one may possibly infer (even if negative arguments are not conclusive) that they predate the XVIth century as the *morbo gallico* only entered the island after 1500 and the discovery of America. I strongly urge Wirt iż-Żejtun to find means of having this examination performed to enhance the local history of Żejtun.

Returning to our subject of the coastal defence, it appears that, years before our tower was constructed, the Żejtun district had been the responsibility of the Mdina *Universitas*; this was certainly the case till 1425. After the Moorish invasion of 1429, however, for some reason that is still unclear – possibly the devastating effect this attack had had on this area – the men of Żejtun began to disappear from the Mdina documentation. We find that in 1460-61 there was a protest by the Żejtun villagers against the payment of Mdina taxes as they claimed that they belonged to the jurisdiction of the *Castrum Maris* (*St Angelo*) for defence purposes.<sup>46</sup> It does not appear that the matter was settled there and then. The Żejtun Parish Priest, Don Zullu (de Theobaldo) attended a meeting of the Council in 1474,<sup>47</sup> and Żejtun representatives were, likewise, present at another meeting in 1472 which discussed the contribution of the several parishioners towards the cutting of a ditch at the Mdina land-front for the defence of the city at a time of a threatened Turkish attack;<sup>48</sup> this attack actually took place and was directed on Birgu and St Angelo. Yet, at the meeting of 7 April 1474 on taxation the Żejtun representatives were conspicuous by their absence.<sup>49</sup> It is also true that the

men from the *Cappella Sancta Catherine* did not participate at all in the cutting of the Mdina ditch in the 1480s.<sup>50</sup> It took a long time to resolve this issue as matters came to a head towards the end of the century with a confrontation between the St Angelo Castellan, Pedro de Nava, and the Mdina *Universitas* who took the issue before the *Magna Regia Curia* in Sicily where proceedings dragged on into the early decades of the XVIth century.<sup>51</sup> A kind of compromise was reached in the codification of the *capitula* of 1494, whereby the right of the City's *Hakem* was acknowledged by the Viceroy to send the Żejtun men to the *Castrum Maris* in time of crisis, but should he fail in this obligation, then the Castellan was entitled to order them.<sup>52</sup> The building of the tower behind the church in the 1460s is best viewed as another rung in the escalation of this confrontation between the Żwieten and Mdina.

## CONCLUSION

During the XVIth century, and especially after the arrival of the Order of St John, Moslem attacks on Marsaxlokk and surroundings increased rather than abated. The author E.B. Vella, citing the Order's historian, Giacomo Bosio, lists an attack by the Jewish corsair on 26 October 1533, and two others by Dragut on 21 July 1547 and in 1556. It must be said that there may be a valid reason why Marsaxlokk attracted so much attention of the enemy, and that is, because there was no lack of provocation from the Christian corsairs who were using precisely the south-east harbour as the hub of their operations. Thus, the same author Vella notes how not much before Dragut's attack of 1547, that is, on 10 August 1545, Prior Gattinara had landed at Marsaxlokk no less than 400 Moslem slaves captured on the high seas.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, if one goes to the original sources embodied in the

Notarial Archives, one notes how Notary Placido Abela records in the 1550s several corsairing contracts, described as *ad pyraticam exercendam*, drawn up in Marsaxlokk. Some indicate the locality with more precision, such as the Church of St George at Birzebbuga, and that is precisely because the Christian corsairs' vessels were berthed precisely there. Many other interesting details emerge from these notarial contracts. Party to these contracts on behalf of the knights one encounters very often someone no less prominent than Mathurin Lescaut Romegas. Among Maltese corsairs and financiers one finds Salvu Mamo, Paulu Tonna and Orlandu Magro. An interesting episode involves Paulu Tonna who, having looted and landed a Moorish vessel, he changed its name to *Sancta Maria della Gratia* before re-selling it in 1558.<sup>54</sup> This is very significant because it shows how the Żabbar sanctuary, *sub parrochia Sanctae Catherinae*, at the time inspired these activities. Dusina himself, in 1575, records how in that year the sanctuary was decorated with a multitude of votive offerings, 'hanging high up on the walls lest they be touched'.<sup>55</sup> The present-day well-equipped Sanctuary Museum gives details of so many stories behind these offerings, many of which are related to corsairing.<sup>56</sup>

In the wake of the Great Siege, the Order took up in earnest the defence of the island in general and of the south-east in particular, prominent among which fortifications is the St Lucian tower built by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt in 1610. Doubtlessly, this formidable deterrent made the attackers of 1614 think twice about entering Marsaxlokk Harbour and kept circling until an unprotected landing place was sighted. This was *Il-Gżira ta' San Tumas* where they did land. After the event, the same Grand Master saw to it by erecting St Thomas Tower on that site in that same year of 1614.

## Endnotes

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- 1 A.T. Luttrell, *Medieval Malta. Studies on Malta before the Knights* (London: British School at Rome 1975) 41-44.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 46, 51.
- 3 G. Wettinger, *Acta Juratorum et Consilii Civitatis et Insulae Maltae*, (Palermo: Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani 1993) [=Acta Jur.], Doc. 25.
- 4 National Library, Malta [=NLM], Università [=Univ.] 2, f. 39 (1590): Santa Catherina del Zeitun; NLM AOM 6385, f. 121 (1614): La Parochia de S. Catherina con el Casal Bisbud y con el Casal Juan y con el Casal Zabar que son desta parochia ay animas mil seicentas treinta y quatro; *ibid.*, f. 125<sup>v</sup>: In la Parrochia di Santa Catherina con Casal Bisbut, Casal Juan et Casal Axac anime mille dugento et otto; NLM Lib. MS. 162, f. 127 (1632): S. Catherina fuochi 907.
- 5 NLM Univ. 2, f. 165 (1658): La Parrochiale del Zeytun, 1268; *ibid.*, f. 246 (1680): Omnes animae ... ex statu animarum praesentis anni 1680, in Casal Zeitun, a[nimae] 1700.
- 6 G.F. Abela, *Descrittione di Malta isola nel Mare Siciliano* (Malta: Bonacota 1647; facsimile Midsea 1984), 78-9, 106-7. According to the manuscript notes of the same Abela (NLM Lib. MS. 140, ff. 40<sup>v</sup>), this threefold subdivision of the island corresponds to the three distinct religio-ethnic constituent elements of medieval Malta: Moslem, Jewish, Christian. The text is published in A.T. Luttrell, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: Tradition and Invention in Maltese Historiography', *Melita Historica*, vii/2 (1977) 130-1 (Appendix II); Cf. also comments in W.R. Zahra, *Storja taż-Żejtun, i* (Malta: Veritas 1978) 74-7.
- 7 Text in J.M. Brincat, *Malta 870-1054: Al Himyari's Account and its Linguistic Implications* (Malta: Said 1995) 11.
- 8 G. Wettinger, 'Iż-Żejtun qabel l-Ordni', *Iż-Żejtun fiz-Żminijiet tan-Nofs* (Malta: Kunsill Lokali Żejtun 2002), 9.
- 9 S. Fiorini, *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Pt. II: Documents in the State Archives*, Palermo, No. 1: *Cancellaria Regia 1259-1400* (Malta: University Press 1999) [=DSMH II/1]: 42 (12.xi.1372).
- 10 G. Wettinger, *Place-names of the Maltese Islands: ca. 1300-1800* (Malta: PEG 2000).
- 11 DSMH II/2, Docs 18 (17.iii.1402), 28 (5.ix.1402, including the transumpt of 24.xi.1356).
- 12 By 1575 the trend was to move away from this 'centre-of-gravity' location, as is clear from the fact that the Apostolic Visitor Dusina wanted to suppress the preeminent position of this Church of St Catherine in favour of the more centrally placed Church of St Mary in the Village of Raħal Bisqallin (DSMH IV/1, 73<sup>v</sup>), a move resisted by the Żwieten. The reason behind Dusina's thinking may also have been motivated by the shift in the population that had taken place by then, when several outlying hamlets had already been abandoned. According to Abela (1647, 365), Bishop Cagliares, in 1615, that is soon after the 1614 invasion, ascribed Dusina's decree to his concern about the Holy Sacrament falling prey to Turkish invaders.
- 13 V. Laurenza, 'Malta nei Documenti Angioini del R. Archivio di Napoli', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, v/1-4 (1934): X (8.viii.1270).
- 14 DSMH II/1, Doc 130 (24.iv.1375): *Territorium Petralonga secus [via] qua itur ad S. Catherinam*.
- 15 *Ibid.*: 73.
- 16 Dusina, ff. 329<sup>v</sup>. J. Busuttil and S. Fiorini, 'The Rollo de Mello (1436) and the Will of Don Bernardus Yaner (1442)', in: T. Cortis, T. Freller and L. Bugeja (eds.), *Melitensium Amor. Festschrift in Honour of Dun Ġwann Azzopardi* (Malta: Gutenberg 2002) 63
- 17 A. Ferres, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo* (Malta: 1866; facsimile Midsea 1985) 373-4. Abela 1647, 336.
- 18 S. Fiorini, 'The Clergy of Malta: 1244-1460', *Melita Historica*, xiii/2 (2001) 165-208.
- 19 DSMH IV/1, f. 74<sup>v</sup>.
- 20 Abela 1647, 366.
- 21 M. Fsadni, *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u fil-Birgu sa l-1620* (Malta: Il-Ħajja 1974) 258-9.
- 22 D. Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: University Press 1997) 217.
- 23 Museum of the Cathedral, Mdina [=MCM] *Archivum Cathedralis Melitae* [=ACM] 10, f. 579 (18.iii.1535).
- 24 DSMH IV/2, Doc. 93 (11.ix.1363).
- 25 Busuttil/Fiorini, 66.
- 26 Fiorini 2001, 169.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 28 Abela 1647, 364-5.
- 29 *Acta Jur.*, Doc. 571.
- 30 DSMH I/2, Doc. 403 (28.xii.1496).
- 31 DSMH I/3, Doc. 63.
- 32 DSMH IV/2, Doc. 197.
- 33 *Ibid.*, Doc. 198 (26.iv.1463).
- 34 *Ibid.*, Doc. 199.
- 35 *Ibid.*, Doc. 200 (24.iv.1464).
- 36 Abela 1647, 480.
- 37 DSMH IV/2, Doc. 200 (24.iv.1464).
- 38 S. Zarb and M. Buhagiar, *St. Catherine of Alexandria: Her Churches, Paintings and Statues in the Maltese Islands* (Malta: Żejtun Parish Council 1979), 81 and 113 Plate 1.

- 39 Q. Hughes, 'The Architectural Development of Hospitaller Malta', in: V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798* (Malta: Mireva 1993) 501-502. I am grateful to Mr Carmel Grima for kindly pointing out this reference.
- 40 According to Hughes (pp. 48 [fn. 121], 119, 207) it was added later in the mid-XVIth century, possibly from the hand of Gerolamo Cassar. For the addition of the transepts, cf. L. Mahoney, *5000 years of architecture in Malta* (Malta: Valletta Publishing 1996) 171. The inscription of 1606 in the dome sheds light on this matter. It reads: [S[UMMO] P[ONTIFICE]] D[OMINO] N[OSTRO] PAVLO V, ANTISTITE / N[OSTRO] THO[MA] GARGALLO, D[OMINO] MATTH[EO] / BVRLO RECT[ORE], PROCVR[ATORIBUS] LEONA[RDO] ET / MARIO TABVNI, THO[MA] BONICIO, / PAVLO ABELA ET FRAN[CIS]CO X[A]VER[IO] F..., / OFFICIOSVS HVIVS PAROCHIE POP-/-VLVS ÆLEMO SYNIS TEMPLVM H[OC] / NIMIS ANGVSTVM IN AMPLIOREM VE-/-NVSTIOREMQUE FORMAM REDEGIT. / ANNO D[OMINI] M.D.CVI. (During the pontificate of Paul V, when Thomas Gargallo was our Bishop [of Malta], when the church procurators were Leonardus and Marius Tabuni, Thomas Bonici, Paulus Abela and Franciscus Xaverius F..., the devoted parishioners, with their contributions, changed the narrow construction of this temple into one that is wider and more attractive, in the year of the Lord 1606). The reference to the widening of the templum angustum suggests that the transepts were added at this later date. The year 1606 is very much in keeping with the primitive saucer-like dome.
- 41 Details are given in the Żejtun Parish Archives, Liber Baptizatorum II. These are repeated in the inscription at the right side of the main altar.
- 42 S. Fiorini, 'Id-Dejma, il-Maħras and the defence of the Maltese Islands in the late medieval and early modern times', *Sacra Militia*, 2 (2003) 16-28.
- 43 W. Soler and A. Ganado, *The charting of Maltese waters: A historical account* (Malta: BDL 2013) 9-11.
- 44 S. Ramaswamy and J. Pace, 'The Medieval Skeletal Remains from St Gregory's Church at Żejtun (Malta): Pt. I. Paleopathological Studies', *Archivio Italiano di Anatomia e di Embriologia*, lxxxiv (1979); 'Pt. II. Anthropological Studies', *ibid.*, lxxxv (1980).
- 45 M. Buhagiar, 'The Date of the Skeletal Remains at Żejtun', in: T.F.C. Blagg et al., 146.
- 46 *Acta Jur.*, Doc. 101.
- 47 *Acta Jur.*, Doc. 571.
- 48 *Acta Jur.*, Doc. 466.
- 49 *Acta Jur.*, Doc. 564.
- 50 MCM ACM Misc. 437 No. 7 (1485).
- 51 MCM ACM Misc. 27, p. 283 (2.x.1504).
- 52 Capitulum #XIV of 1494. Cf. DSMH III/2, Doc. 37.
- 53 E.B. Vella, *Storja taż-Żejtun u Marsaxlokk* (Malta: Empire Press 1927) 36-37.
- 54 NAV Not. Placido Abela MS. 514 (1588) ff. 95-6, 155, 161 et passim.
- 55 DSMH IV/1, f. 77<sup>v</sup>.
- 56 G. Zarb, *Is-Santwarju ta' Haż-Żabbar fi żmien il-Kavaleri* (Malta: Veritas 1969).