

MZ7

MZ7  
P.B. 13

150 891

PYNCHON, V., AND THE MALTA CONNECTION

by

Arnold Cassola

JOURNAL OF MODERN LITERATURE  
Volume Twelve, No. 2  
July 1985

ARNOLD CASSOLA

UNIVERSITY OF ROME

## Pynchon, V., and the Malta Connection

"In Pynchon's novels the plots of wholly imagined fiction are inseparable from the plots of known history or science." Richard Poirier<sup>1</sup>

THE CHAPTERS IN *V.* that deal with Malta are an example of how Pynchon amalgamates fact and fiction, creating one inseparable whole. It is the writer's skill that renders this "inseparable whole" pleasant reading. It also takes a great deal of creative power to insert real facts into fiction, and Pynchon definitely possesses such capacity. Although Robert Sklar seems to have some doubts about the veracity of Pynchon's facts,<sup>2</sup> my aim is to prove, at least when talking about historical episodes concerning Malta, that Pynchon has taken the trouble to investigate everything to the last detail. His "historical" narrative is based on documentary evidence.

The plot of *V.* is centered not only around Stencil's search for an enigmatic woman, but also for his father, who disappeared under mysterious circumstances during the June 1919 riots in Malta. What were the June riots? They might not mean anything at all to the ordinary man, but to any Maltese patriot the *Sette Giugno* recalls to mind Malta's first aspirations towards self-government and eventual independence from Britain. To put it in H. Frendo's words, "A unique episode in Malta's

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon" in George Levine and David Leverenz, eds., *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon* (Little Brown and Company, 1976) p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Sklar, "An Anarchist Miracle: The Novels of Thomas Pynchon," in Edward Mendelson, ed., *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prentice Hall, 1978), p. 90: "How much one may care to rely on Pynchon's facts is another matter; this reader, at least, has not yet taken the trouble to verify Pynchon's account of Wilhelminian Germany's African policies or of Maltese political life; and given Pynchon's propensity to parody the fictional styles which have conveyed this sort of subject in the past, it might be wise not to make any bets on the basis of what one reads in *V.*"

colonial history, the genesis of Maltese nationalism, the *Sette Giugno* rising brought mourning to every Maltese home and heart, sealing Malteseness in the blood that was shed. The *Sette Giugno* also brought internal self government."<sup>3</sup>

A unique episode indeed! But how did Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, born in Glen Cove, Long Island, in 1937, get to know about the events of 1919 on a little island thousands of miles away on the other side of the Atlantic? It is Pynchon himself who gives us a clue towards the answer to this query. On the last page of his novel he describes the June riots as "A minor eddy in the peaceful course of Maltese government, preserved today only in one Board of Inquiry report."<sup>4</sup> The importance of this assertion lies not so much in Pynchon's evaluation of the 1919 uprisings, a very subjective evaluation which is not truly accurate, as in his pointing out the source of all his information. On 22 July 1919 a Commission was appointed by the Governor General in Malta "to inquire into and report on the events of the 7th and 8th June 1919, and the circumstances which led up to them, . . ." The said report was presented to His Honor, the Lieutenant Governor, on 18 September 1919 and published in the *Malta Government Gazette Supplement* on 7 October 1919.<sup>5</sup> The report, which, incidentally, was not considered to be impartial by all in Malta,<sup>6</sup> is divided into the following seven parts:

PART I	Preliminary
PART II	Events of 7th June 1919
PART III	Events of 8th June 1919
PART IV	Events which preceded or followed the disturbances of the 7th and 8th June and which serve to explain our remarks thereon
PART V	Comments on the events of the 7th and 8th June 1919
PART VI	Circumstances that led to the events
PART VII	General discontent

It is my intention to go through this official report and see to what extent Pynchon made use of it.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience* (Malta: Midsea Books, Ltd., 1979), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Pynchon, V. (Bantam Books, 1973), p. 463. The first edition was published by Lippincott in 1963. My citations are taken from the 1973 Bantam edition.

<sup>5</sup> *Reports of the Commission appointed to inquire into the events of the 7th and 8th June 1919 and into the circumstances which led up to those events - 18th and 19th September 1919*, in *Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. XXVI, 7 October 1919, pp. 167-80.

<sup>6</sup> I have in mind, amongst others, Giuse Orlando. In his *VII Gunju* ["VII June"] (Valletta: Stamperija Chretien and Co., 1927), p. 2, he says, "Cull ma hawn luk li sar fis-VII Gunju hua rapport ufficjali li kalleb il grajja u minfoc li gholliha, irriduciha f-actar baxxa." ["All that there is about what happened on the 7th of June is an official report which twisted all the facts and instead of edifying this event, reduced it to a very poor thing indeed."]

The "Epilogue" of V. depicts the 1919 events in Malta. Stencil senior arrives in Malta in Mehemet's Xebec to investigate the situation on the Island. The picture of Malta he has in mind is that provided by the official version, what the British authorities on the Island have sent over to Whitehall: "Lieutenant Mungo Sheaves, aide to the Officer Adminis- trating Government of Malta, had set before Whitehall an architecture of discontent: among the police force, the University students, the Civil Service, the Dockyard workers" (431).

A look at the official report on the 1919 riots will confirm that Pynchon obtained his information from the latter part of the report. In fact, of the five reasons of discontent given by the Commission in Part VI, three correspond with what Pynchon says. They are (A) *Unrest among Dock- yard people*; (B) *University Students*; (C) *Inaction of the Police*.<sup>7</sup> Pyn- chon's fourth cause of discontent, the Civil Service, is to be found in Part VII of the report in the paragraph entitled *Grievances of Civil Ser- vants*.

Later in the "Epilogue" Stencil gets first-hand news from Maijstral about the situation on the Island. Maijstral confirms the state of unrest existing among dockyard workers and informs Stencil of an imminent attack on the *Daily Malta Chronicle*:

"What of the Dockyard people," Stencil asked. "They will attack the Chroni- cle. [A grievance stemming from the strike of 1917; the newspaper had published a letter condemning the strike, but had given no equal time for a reply.] There was a meeting a few minutes ago." Maijstral gave him a brief digest. Stencil knew all the objections. Workers from England got a colonial allowance: local yardbirds received only normal wages. Most would like to emigrate, after hearing glowing reports from the Maltese Labour Corps and other crews from abroad, of higher pay outside Malta. But the rumor had started, somehow, that the government was refusing passports to keep workers on the island, against any future requirement. "What else can they do but emigrate?" Maijstal digressed: "With the war the number of Dockyard workers swelled to three times what it was before. Now, with Armistice, they're already laying off. There are only so many jobs here outside the Dockyard. Not enough to keep everyone eating." (439)

From the point of view of plot development the above passage is of key importance because it illustrates all the motives behind the workers' unrest and, in a way, thus justifies their eventual rebellion against the British authorities. From a Pynchon critic's point of view, however, this

<sup>7</sup> The exact motivation, in this particular case, goes as follows: "The fact that nobody was prosecuted for the acts of violence committed by the people in February last on the occasion of the first meeting of the National Assembly, naturally encouraged the mob to greater violence on the 7th and 8th June. Further, the mob was certain that it would not be interfered with by the Police owing to the unrest in the Force and their inclination to go on strike." *Reports of the Commission Part VI, par. 78, p. 177.*

passage proves to be invaluable in that it is a perfect example of the author's powers of synthesis. In fact, the passage is none other than a summary of what is contained in Par. 60-64 in the *Official Report*. In the present context it would be difficult—and extremely tedious, too—to reproduce the entire contents of the *Official Report*. However, this is a point in case where an exception has to be made. It not only shows how Pynchon carefully documented himself before reproducing anything having to do with real historical events, but it also underlines the mastery with which a drab official document is transformed into interesting novelistic material:

A 1 - *Unrest among Dockyard people*

60. The Dockyard workers allege that they have grievances against the Imperial Government, the local Government and also against the well-to-do classes of the population.
61. They complain of differences in the pay and in the advantages between the English and the Maltese workmen. We have ascertained that the difference is not as between English and Maltese workmen, but between workmen sent out from England under an agreement and those locally employed. They admit that English workmen sent out from England should receive extra remuneration in the shape of colonial allowance, but their grievance is that for identical work and equal hours the English workman gets much more pay, and that the English workers are kept quite separate from their Maltese fellow workmen.
62. They were under the impression that the Daily Malta Chronicle had not taken up their cause, and a letter published in the Chronicle in 1917 condemning the strike which was just over, caused offence especially as they thought that the Chronicle had refused to publish a protest against that letter. In fairness to the Chronicle we have ascertained that the protests never reached the Chronicle Office.
63. Before the war the number of workmen at the Dockyard was about 4600. During the war it went up to about 12000. It was perfectly understood that that number could not be maintained and that discharges would soon take place, and that the local market could not afford employment to the men so discharged.
64. A rumour which gained considerable credence was spread that passports were being refused by the local government in order to keep the workmen in Malta should their services be again required at the Dockyard, at any time.

The Lieutenant-Governor has made a statement before this Commission to the effect that the rumour was unfounded and that His Excellency the Governor was doing his utmost to delay the discharges from the Dockyard.

As can be gathered from a quick look at the two texts reproduced, Pynchon has utilized the findings of the *Official Commission* and, through Maijstral, has given a sociological explanation for the future uprising of the dockyard workers. In effect, Pynchon is stating a priori what the Commission had only discovered through investigation, a posteriori. As the novel proceeds, the narrator becomes even more audacious and assumes a prophetic attitude. Like Dante in the *Divine Com-*

*media*, Pynchon can foresee what is going to happen in the near future. And he does it in a grand style, too. His foresight enables him to read not only into the dockyard workers' minds, but into that of most of the Maltese social classes. Needless to say, the list of the various components of Maltese society, with all their aspirations and ambitions (443-44), is taken from the *Official Report*.<sup>8</sup> I will simply list the Part and paragraphs in the *Report* which refer to the various social classes mentioned by Pynchon, while laying stress again on the way he has managed to condense a great deal of information into two or three lines without neglecting anything of importance.

<i>Pynchon</i>	<i>Official Report</i>
p. 443 The poor	Part VI - par. 68 and Part VII - par. 9
p. 443 The Civil Servants	Part VII - par. 96
p. 444 The Tradesmen	Part VII - par. 88
p. 444 Bolsheviks	—
p. 444 The anti-colonial extremists	Part VI - par. 70
p. 444 The abstentionists	Part VII - par. 80 and 81
p. 444 The Mizzists	Part VI - par. 69
p. 444 The Church	Part VII - par. 83

Pynchon's job consisted, therefore, in rethinking the Commissioners' Report. What could be considered normal practice from a juridical-administrative point of view—starting off from the effects in order to identify the causes—has been completely refuted by the author on the grounds that his intentions are not those of depicting the truth; his is meant to be a product of art and, therefore, of imagination. It is for this reason that Pynchon reverses the whole process by which the official inquiry was carried out. First he gives us the causes which led to the June riots and then the facts themselves; facts which have also been taken from the official inquiry but which have undergone the process of transformation already described. I shall not dwell on this matter at length. The examples provided are enough to prove that Pynchon documented himself exhaustively on the 1919 insurrection in Malta.

Another Maltese historical event which Pynchon deals with in *V.* is the siege withstood by the Maltese people in 1565 against the Turks. Here again, fact and fiction are deeply entwined. The Great Siege is recreated through the fictitious episode of Mara, the Maltese woman kidnapped by the Turks. However, all the details Pynchon gives about the Great Siege are historically true. He extracts them from the history book and places them in a different context. Trying to identify the source

---

<sup>8</sup> The only missing category is that of the "Bolsheviks among the yardbirds."

of Pynchon's information about the Great Siege, I have examined the three books on Maltese history which were most easily accessible in the late fifties—the period when, presumably, Pynchon was collecting material for his novel—and I have come to the conclusion that he obtained most of his information from Themistocles Zammit's *Malta: The Islands and Their History*.<sup>9</sup> Certain details in Pynchon's novel are only to be found in this particular textbook.

For example, when Mehemet is describing Mara to Stencil he says that she "was installed somehow as a concubine about the time La Vallette back on the island was blocking the creek between Senglea and St Angelo with an iron chain and poisoning the springs in the Marsa plain with hemp and arsenic" (435).

While the chain episode is cited by Laferla,<sup>10</sup> Zammit also provides a diagram of the Turkish Siege where the chain between Senglea and Fort St. Angelo is clearly marked, and it is only in Zammit that the poisoning of the springs is mentioned:

The Grand Master knew that the Turks would, as a first step, occupy the plain of the Marsa, where there were important springs of fresh water, not far from the shore. . . . The Chief Court physician proposed fouling the water in such a way as to render it useless and even dangerous to the enemy. A special concoction of hemp, wheat, arsenic and other ingredients was prepared and added freely to the water in the Marsa wells. . . .<sup>11</sup>

In this case, Pynchon has chosen to portray those episodes which appeal most to human fantasy. Even Mara's dwelling place, a drab toponomastic term in Zammit's description of the construction of Valletta, assumes symbolic, and, I would add, oneiric connotations in Pynchon's version:

She [Mara] is—if you care for the word—a spirit, constrained to live in Xaghriet Mewwija. The inhabited plain; the peninsula whose tip is Valletta, her domain. (434)

Zammit had written,

This strip of land was known to the Maltese as *Xaghriet Mewwija* and its extreme point as *Scebb-ir-ras* [the future site for Valletta]. The meaning of

<sup>9</sup> Themistocles Zammit, *Malta: The Islands and Their History*, 2nd edition (Malta: "The Malta Herald" Office, 1929) (1st edition 1926). The other two books I consulted are A. V. Laferla, *The Story of Man in Malta*, Vol. I (Malta: Government Printing Press, 1935), and S. Iaspina, *Outlines of Maltese History* (Malta: A. C. Aquilina and Co., 1962) (1st edition 1943).

<sup>10</sup> "[Mustapha] made his miserable slaves drag his ships across the land from Pieta' to Marsa. It was an unexpected move but La Vallette was equal to the occasion: he stretched a chain across the creek between Borgo and Senglea and constructed a palisade in the sea along the shores of Senglea on the side of Cordin." Laferla, I, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Zammit, pp. 144-45.

these names is not very clear but the best interpretation of *Xaghriet Mewwiia* seems to be "the inhabited plain" and of *Scelb-ir-ras* "the light of the point."<sup>12</sup>

Any further comparison between Pynchon's account of the Great Siege (436-37) and Zammit's will confirm that Pynchon obtained most of his material from this Maltese historian, so much so, that even Pynchon's spelling of proper names corresponds to that given by Zammit.<sup>13</sup> However, whether Pynchon has consulted Zammit or other historians is immaterial. The fact remains, as far as research into Maltese history is concerned, that Pynchon left no stone unturned before embarking on his search for V.

## II

"Pynchon's books try to be seriously *there*; while he himself is somewhere else entirely." Edward Mendelson<sup>14</sup>

It has been quite a feat for Pynchon to protect himself from his admirers and jealously safeguard the facts that make up his private life, and he has been highly successful in his attempt. His life is completely shrouded in mystery. However, the amount, and variety, of detail Pynchon provides the reader with in V. is so great that one can use these particulars to shed some light on the author's biography. This is true, at least, insofar as the Malta episodes are concerned. Pynchon's description of the Island and of what goes on in it is so exhaustive that it could not have been just the fruit of his imagination and the result of his research. Pynchon must, necessarily, have spent some time on Malta. There are many instances which prove that he knew Malta well. None is more revealing than Pappy Hod and Fat Clyde's visit to Valletta as related in Chapter 16.

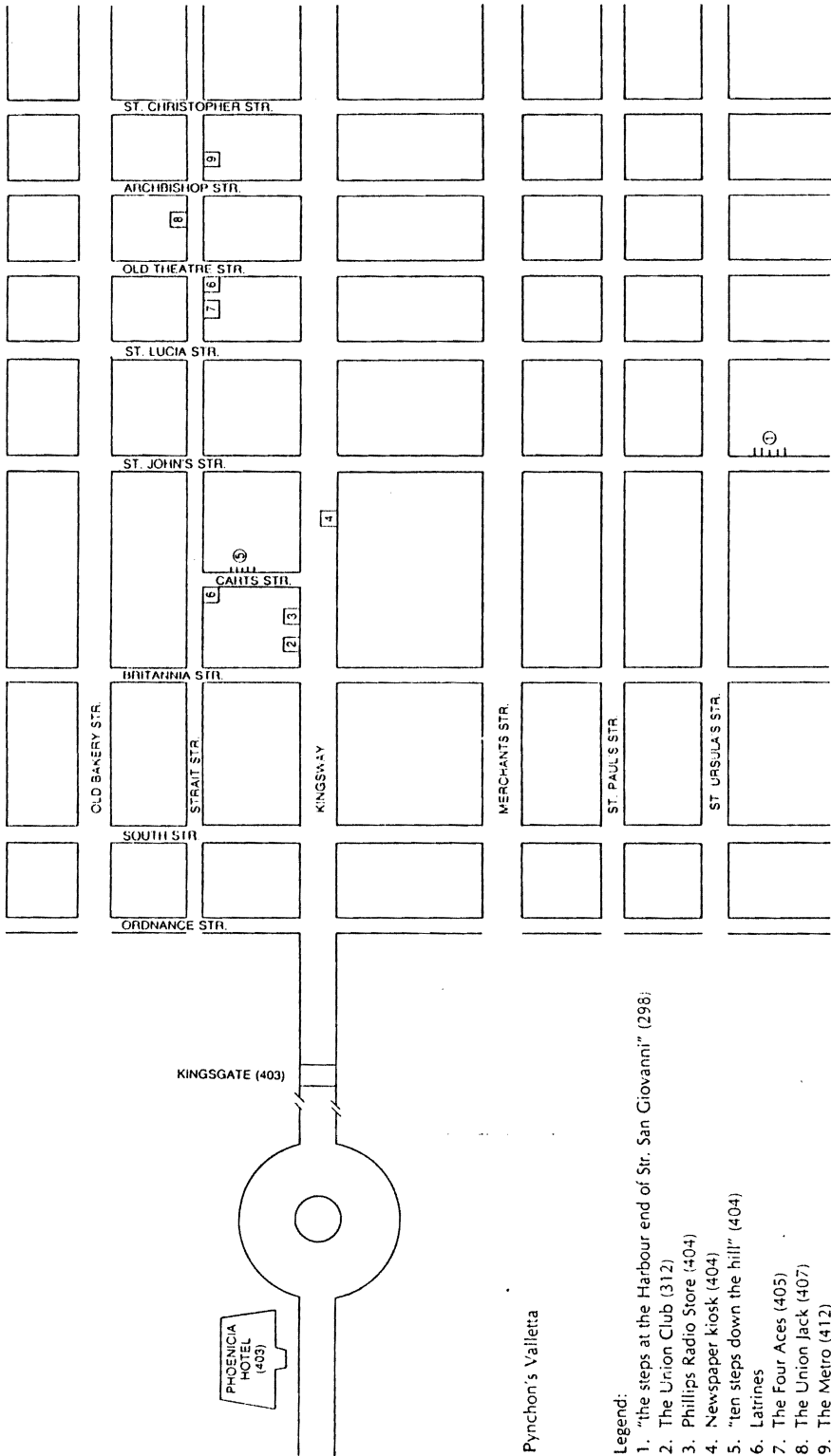
The chapter starts off with Pappy and Fat Clyde on board the *Scaffold* in HM Dockyard, Malta. "On the starboard side [of the *Scaffold*] rose a school or seminary with a clock tower, growing out of a bastion high as the surface-search radar antenna" (401). This means that the *Scaffold's* bow was facing land. In this position, to starboard one would have the Senglea Girls' Primary School which still exists today, exactly as Pynchon described it.

<sup>12</sup> Zammit, p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> La Valette is correctly spelled with one *l* in Laspina and Laferla. Zammit and Pynchon spell it with a double *l*. Pynchon also follows Zammit in the spelling of Mustafa, while Laspina and Laferla have, respectively, Mustapha and Mustafá.

<sup>14</sup> Mendelson, "Introduction," in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 1.





Pyncheon's Valletta

Legend:

1. "the steps at the Harbour end of Str. San Giovanni" (298)
2. The Union Club (312)
3. Phillips Radio Store (404)
4. Newspaper kiosk (404)
5. "ten steps down the hill" (404)
6. Latrines
7. The Four Aces (405)
8. The Union Jack (407)
9. The Metro (412)

The two nuns described on p. 401 no longer frequent the entrance of the Malta Drydocks today, but they were certainly a common feature at least until two decades or so ago on payday, usually every Friday afternoon.<sup>15</sup> The exit of the Drydocks is still in Gavino Gulia Square, the hill Pappy and Fat Clyde climbed is St. Paul Street, while the tunnel they walked through is known as the Ghajn Dwieli Bridge. All these places are to be found in the town of Cospicua.

The two sailors get off the bus in Floriana, just outside Valletta, in front of the Hotel Phoenicia. This hotel, although built in 1947, is today one of Malta's leading hotels. The palm trees are still to be seen chattering in the wind in front of the Phoenicia.

Pappy and Clyde "walked under an arch and into Kingsway" (403). The arch Pynchon refers to is Kingsgate. Originally built in 1630 by the Knights of St. John, it was known as Porta San Giorgio. In 1853 it underwent structural modifications and was henceforth known as Porta Reale (Kingsgate). In 1964 Kingsgate was demolished and replaced by what is today known as City Gate.

Walking down Kingsway the two men encounter some "trinket stalls . . . doing a peak trade in good luck charms and Maltese lace" (404). These trinket stalls were part and parcel of Valletta in days not so long gone by when the capital was thronged by hundreds of servicemen. Today, these stalls are no longer to be seen. What does still exist is the "Phillips Radio Store to their left" (404). It stands today where it stood in 1956 (the year the plot of the novel is set in) at 282 Kingsway, Valletta. The name of the street has changed—from Kingsway to Republic Street. What has altered completely is the spot where the "newspaper kiosk" stood in 1956. The building at 46 Republic Street now houses a branch of the Bank of Valletta. In 1956 the site of the present bank was still in ruins, due to damage caused during World War II. A little newspaper stand (Pynchon calls it a "kiosk," but the kiosk really consisted of a couple of wooden crates on which newspapers were piled up) was to be found there with a vendor selling *The Times of Malta*.<sup>16</sup>

The street to the left Pappy Hod cuts around abruptly is Carts Street. The steps mentioned in the novel still exist on this street. Strait Street is still renowned among the Maltese people as the chief red-light area on the Island. During the colonial period it was a very popular hangout

---

<sup>15</sup> The Admiralty used to give permission to the nuns to collect alms from the Dockyard workers on Fridays, when the latter received their pay packets.

<sup>16</sup> Employees of *The Times of Malta* tell me that the vendor in 1956 was a certain Emanuel Pisani. He is now deceased.



The Union Jack, in a Section of the Gut  
(August 1984)

with servicemen. The Four Aces is the first pub-cum-whorehouse that Pappy and Clyde visit. This pub really existed in 1956 and was to be found at 138 Strait Street, alongside the latrine situated at the corner with Old Theatre Street. The Four Aces now bears the name of Ye Old-Vic, a Music-Dancing Hall which has long been closed down.

Fat Clyde's next stop is the Union Jack. Even though not in use, the location of this pub still exists and is to be found exactly where Pynchon places it: half a block away from the Four Aces, at No. 70 Strait Street. As for Pappy's favorite haunt, The Metro, it is still located at 122 Strait Street. The signboard above the entrance says "The Metro Club." The door is locked with a rusty padlock and covered with dust. The place does not seem to have been opened for quite some time now.<sup>17</sup> It is

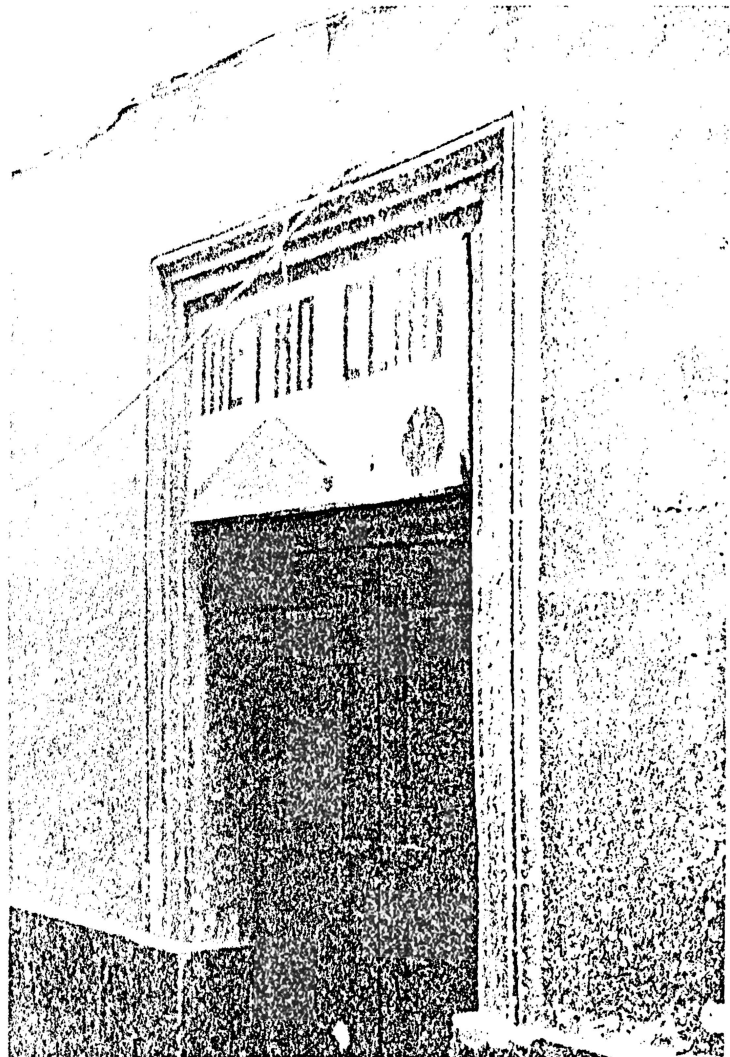
---

<sup>17</sup> With the departure from the Island of the American Sixth Fleet in 1971 and of the British Forces in 1979, many of the bars in Strait Street have closed down.

for this reason that I could not verify whether or not the inside of the Metro still corresponds, in some way, to Pynchon's description on p. 412.

As can easily be gathered, Pynchon's description of Valletta is too precise to have been taken from some historic account. The latrines, warehouses, shops, and newspaper stands he mentions are not places worthy of inclusion in any tourist guide, so Pynchon must have seen them himself. There is enough internal evidence not only to prove he was in Malta, but also to fix his presence on the island within a certain period of time.

The Metro Club in Strait Street  
(August 1984)



in an English-speaking country must have been very similar to those of the *TOM* and *STOM*, the source of information being, most probably, the same one (Reuter's). It is only through an analysis of Pynchon's references to local news that one can ascertain the approximate dates of his stay on the Island.

Stencil's conversation with the old priest, Father Avalanche, provides us with a clue towards the dating of Pynchon's visit to Malta. In the course of the conversation Father Avalanche mentions the "Ghallis Tower murder last year" (422). This murder has gone down in the annals of Maltese history as one of the most audacious crimes ever committed. A clerk carrying a sum of money was murdered cold-bloodedly by a bank employee who later disposed of the body by dumping it into the well of the Ghallis Tower. The trial by jury of the accused started on Monday, the 23rd of July, 1956, and ended on Wednesday, the 8th of August of the same year, with the accused being sentenced to life imprisonment. The trial was followed by what was described as "abnormal public interest" and "unprecedented interest,"<sup>22</sup> so much so that the scene outside the law courts in Valletta was characterized by throngs of people queuing up early in the morning in order to be able to get a seat in the courtroom. Moreover, the local newspapers gave such wide coverage to the trial that sometimes more than forty percent of their content was devoted to the event.<sup>23</sup> The Ghallis Tower trial was definitely the talk of the town, and it was to remain so for quite some time: anybody visiting Malta in the latter half of 1956 had to have heard about it.

Other local news items referred to by Pynchon are the "grade intersection—an underground tunnel—at Porte-des-Bombes" and the "new pumping station going up at Marsa" (427). Regarding the first, an article bearing the title "Portes des Bombes Project" had appeared in the *TOM*, No. 6515, Monday, August 13, p. 7. The same title was to be utilized as a subtitle in the *TOM* issue of November 28, 1956 (No. 6607), on the page devoted to questions in Parliament.<sup>24</sup> As for the second, answers given to questions by MP's on the apparatus at the "new Malta Power Station" were reported in different issues of the *TOM*.<sup>25</sup> However, the

<sup>22</sup> *TOM*, respectively No. 6507 (Friday, August 3, 1956) and No. 6512 (Thursday, August 9, 1956).

<sup>23</sup> Between July 24 and August 9, 1956, the *TOM* and *STOM* devoted twenty articles to the trial.

<sup>24</sup> "Portes des Bombes Project." In reply to another question by Mr. Jones, Mr. Ellul Mercer, Minister for Works and Reconstruction, said it was estimated that, apart from pedestrian subways which were valued at about £5000, the project for Portes des Bombes would cost £20,000. The tunnel would be 35 feet wide with a 33-foot carriageway. It was expected that works would be terminated in ten months' time."

<sup>25</sup> No. 6570 (Tuesday, October 16, 1956, p. 13); No. 6582 (Tuesday, October 30, 1956, p. 12); No. 6596 (Thursday, November 15, 1956, p. 3); No. 6602 (Thursday, November 22, 1956, p. 3).

greatest amount of information about Malta in 1956 is to be gleaned from what the author says about the Suez crisis and the consequent military activity on the Island.

Pappy Hod's visit to Malta coincides with that of many British war-ships. Among these, *HMS Ark Royal* ("The Ark Royal was in" [403]) and *HMS Ceylon* (Nasty Chobb returns to his ship "wearing an English sailor hat [picked up by mistake after a fight] with *HMS Ceylon* printed on the band" [416]). It is quite interesting to note that both these ships really belonged to the British Navy, the *Ark Royal* being an aircraft carrier and *HMS Ceylon* a cruiser. Browsing through the *TOM* and *STOM* of the period, I came across some interesting information. Particularly rich is the *TOM* No. 6583 of Wednesday, October 31, 1956. The front page headline, "Britain to move into Suez," is very similar to Pynchon's "red scare headlines . . . BRITISH INTEND TO MOVE INTO SUEZ!" (404).

More important still is an article on the front page entitled "Malta Forces' activity," whereby there is an account of the intensive movement in Malta harbor: "The increasing tension in the Middle East yesterday was highlighted by intense military and naval activity at Malta with the Grand Harbour as the focal point. . . . The heavy repair ship *HMS Rampura* left harbour yesterday after embarking ammunition; an arrival was the cruiser *HMS Ceylon*." This means that the *HMS Ceylon* had actually arrived in Malta on October 30, 1956.<sup>26</sup>

On p. 7, the same newspaper gives the reader still more interesting news: " 'Ark Royal to Recommission' -The aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal* is recommissioning at Plymouth tomorrow following a refit. The angled deck has been extended and there is now increased space for living accommodation below decks."<sup>27</sup> This means that up to the end of October the *Ark Royal* had not been involved in the military build-up connected with the Suez crisis. However, the following news snippet confirms that the aircraft carrier must have visited the Island a few days later: " 'Sequel to theft from "Ark Royal" ' -Five sailors from the aircraft-carrier *HMS Ark Royal* are at present undergoing a term of imprisonment for having stolen a number of 'Zwicky' filters and 'Goosenecks' from

<sup>26</sup> Official confirmation of this date was given to me by M. R. Wilson of the Naval Historical Branch, Ministry of Defence, London, in a letter dated 22 September 1983: "HMS CEYLON arrived in Malta on 30 October from the UK and sailed again on 1 November. She returned to Malta on 23 November and sailed again, this time for the UK on 5 December. She may have gone to sea for a day or days exercises in this short period at Malta but I have no record of precise details."

<sup>27</sup> An article entitled "Ark Royal's Recommissioning" describes the structural modifications underwent by the aircraft carrier. See *TOM*, No. 6584, Thursday, November 1, 1956, p. 7.

on board their ship. . . . [Three Maltese] were charged before the Magistrate Dr G. O. Refalo with having purchased 'Zwicky' filters and 'Goosenecks' when they knew that these had been stolen."<sup>28</sup>

*HMS Ceylon* and *HMS Ark Royal* could have met in Malta on or around November 20, 1956. I have tried to ascertain whether any American Navy frigate destroyers were on the Island undergoing repairs at the Drydocks during this period. Unfortunately no Drydocks records prior to 1959 exist on the Island.<sup>29</sup> However, the present PRO at Malta Drydocks distinctly remembers a U.S. Navy frigate destroyer in the docks in the latter part of 1956. The name: *USS Coney*.<sup>30</sup> It is a long shot, but Thomas Pynchon could have been serving aboard this ship when he came to Malta.

If my line of reasoning is correct, then many (too many, really) of the Malta episodes in *V.* tally with episodes relating to Pynchon's biography. And if so many fictitious episodes correspond to reality, it would not seem too audacious on my part to suggest an inversion in the chronology of Pynchon's life. Winston says he heard a rumor that Pynchon was married for a short time before joining the Navy. If we were to go by what happens in the novel—Pappy Hod visits Malta while in the Navy, meets Paola, takes her over to the States and marries her—then the sequence of events could be reversed to read in this way: Pynchon was married for a short time *after* joining the Navy. This is an interesting hypothesis which, however, is difficult to prove.<sup>31</sup> Probably, only Pynchon himself can confirm such a theory or dismiss it as merely the fruit of fantasy.

<sup>28</sup> *IOM*, No. 6603, Friday, November 23, 1956, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> When the Drydock transferred from a naval administration to a civil one, all records were taken over to London by the Admiralty. Due to the thirty-year rule the official operational records of the Royal Navy during the Suez crisis will not be available to scholars until 1986.

<sup>30</sup> The PRO's memory may be slightly at fault. In fact, in another letter from the Naval Historical Branch, Ministry of Defence, London, dated 10 October 1983, and signed M. McAloon for M. R. Wilson, I am told "First, the ship he saw would not have been the CONEY (actually the EDGAR F. CONEY)—this was a tug built in 1904, chartered by the USN in 1917 and returned to civilian life in 1919! There were in 1956, however, two destroyers the CONY and the CONE.

"The CONE was in the Mediterranean in early 1956. During the Suez crisis she joined a Tank Force which sailed (from the USA?) to the Eastern Atlantic to stand by, then called at Lisbon and returned home when its services were not needed. The CONE was back in the Mediterranean in 1958.

"The CONY served in the Mediterranean with US Sixth Fleet in both 1955 and 1957, but not, you will notice, during the crucial months of 1956."

Did the CONE or CONY ever visit Malta? The lack of any documentary evidence only adds to the mystery of Pynchon's biography.

<sup>31</sup> I have been through the marriage records for 1956-57 at the Public Registry in Malta. Nobody by the name of Pynchon was married in Malta in these years.





## GLOSSARY

The following Glossary does not include all those elements in *V.* connected with Malta. My intention is to give a brief explanation of the places, names, and episodes which are recurrent in the novel so that the reader of *V.* can better understand the situations having a "Malta" background.

In compiling this Glossary I have made use of the following bibliographical sources:

- A. V. Laferla, *British Malta* (Malta: A. C. Aquilina and Co., 1947), II.  
 Rob. Mifsud Bonnici, *Dizzjunarju Bijo-Bibliografiku Nazzjonali* [*National Bio-bibliographical Dictionary*] (Malta: Dipartiment ta' l-Infommazzjoni, 1960).  
 Victor F. Denaro, *The Houses of Valletta* (Malta: Progress Press Co. Ltd., 1967).  
 Alfie Guillaumier, *Bliet u Rhula Maltin* (*Maltese Towns and Villages*), 2nd ed. (Malta: Lux Press, 1972).  
 Erin Serracino Inglott, *Il-Miklem Malti* [*The Maltese Dictionary*] (Malta: Klabb Koiba Maltin, 1975-81), I-VII.  
 Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience* (Malta: Midsea Books Ltd., 1979).

## A. NAMES OF REAL HISTORICAL FIGURES

## Chapter 11

1. *L'ISLE ADAM*. Philippe Villieres de L'Isle Adam was elected Grandmaster of the Order of St. John in 1521. Under his leadership, the Knights of St. John resisted for six months against the Turks in Rhodes. They were defeated in 1522 and for seven years the Knights of St. John were deprived of a permanent home. In 1530 L'Isle Adam and his knights were given Malta by Charles V. L'Isle Adam died in 1534 respected by one and all.
2. *M. PARISOT*. Jean Parisot de La Valette, Grandmaster of the Order between 1557 and 1568, will always be remembered among the Maltese people as the greatest of all the Grandmasters. Under his able leadership the Maltese defeated the impressive Turkish Armada which besieged Malta in 1565. La Valette laid the foundation stone of Valletta, the new capital city which was named after him, on 29 March 1566.
3. *LA VALLETTE*. See Note 2.
4. *GOVERNOR DOBBIE*. Lieutenant General Sir William George Sheddon Dobbie, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.C.O., was Governor of the Maltese Islands from the beginning of 1940 to May 1942.
5. *ARCHBISHOP GONZI* (1885-1984). Bishop of Gozo since 1924, he was made Archbishop of Malta in 1944. He clashed with the civil authorities a number of times (1930, 1956).

## Epilogue

1. *ENRICO MIZZI* (1885-1950). The seventh Maltese Prime Minister. A staunch defender of Malta's "Italianity," he very often clashed with His Majesty's representatives on the island.
2. *Major General HUNTER-BLAIR*. Major General Hunter-Blair, C.B., C.M.G., was Lieutenant-Governor during the June disturbances in 1919.
3. *Dr. MIFSUD* (1881-1942). In 1919 Dr. Ugo Mifsud was appointed secretary of the National Assembly. He served as Prime Minister for two terms (1924-27; 1932-33). In 1927 he was knighted by the British Crown and was thenceforth known as Sir Ugo Mifsud.

## B. TOPONOMASTIC NAMES AND LANDMARKS

## Chapter 11

1. *VALLETTA*. The capital city of Malta. Built by Grandmaster Jean Parisot de la Valette on Mount Xeberras after the Great Siege of 1565. It is situated on a peninsula overlooking the Grand Harbour on one side and Marsamuscetto (Marsamxett) on the other.
2. *DOCKYARD*. It is situated in the Cottonera area. The original nucleus was built by Grandmaster Perellos in 1707. It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the Dockyard was fully developed by the British. In 1959 the administration of the dockyard was transferred by the Admiralty to a private company, Bailey (Malta) Ltd.
3. *KINGSWAY—STRADA REALE*. The main street in Valletta. It stretches the whole length of the city from City Gate (formerly Kingsgate—Porta Reale) to Fort St. Elmo. During the rule of the Order of St. John it was known as Strada San Giorgio. The French named it Rue Nationale, and today it is called Republic Street—Triq Ir-Repubblika.
4. *HAGIAR KIM* (today *HAGĀR QIM*). The site of Malta's oldest temples of the Neolithic period. It is situated in the southern part of Malta, in the Qrendi area where the Haġar Qim temples overlook another small island of the Maltese archipelago, Filfla.
5. *GHAUDEX* (today *GHAWDEX*). The second largest island of the Maltese archipelago, it is more fertile and hillier than its sister island, Malta. Its Italian name is *Gozzo*, *Gozo*: hence the English *Gozo*.
6. *VITTORIOSA*. One of Malta's three cities (see n. 11). Originally known as Borgo, it was given the name Vittoriosa by the Knights of St. John after the victory over the Turks during the Great Siege of 1565. The Maltese name is *Birgu*, deriving from the Italian *Borgo* and Sicilian *Borgu*.
7. *SLIEMA*. Situated on the southeastern coast of Malta, the town was practically nonexistent at the beginning of this century. Originally a summer resort, Sliema has become Malta's largest town.
8. *TA KALI* (today *TA' QALI*). A military airport which was very active during World War II, the airport has long since been closed down and now houses various local industries. It is known as the Crafts Village.
9. *PHOENICIA HOTEL*. Malta's oldest hotel of a certain standing. Situated on the outskirts of Valletta, in Floriana, it is still today one of the major hotels on the Island.
10. *STR. SAN GIOVANNI*. One of the many streets crossing Kingsway in Valletta. Once known as Strada del Monte, it was renamed Rue du Peuple during the two years of French rule (1798-1800). Now it is known as Triq San Ġwann or St. John's Street.
11. *THE THREE CITIES*. The Cottonera Area, named after Grandmaster Nicolò Cottoner (1663-1680), comprises the three cities of Senglea, Vittoriosa (Borgo), and Cospicua.
12. *THE HARBOUR*. Also known as the Grand Harbour, it is made up of various natural creeks. The east side of the city of Valletta overlooks the Grand Harbour. It is on the other side of the harbour, that known as the Cottonera area (which also comprises the Dockyard), where most docking activity goes on.
13. *MARSAMUSCETTO* (Italian name for *MARSAMXETT*). An inlet on the western side of Valletta, facing Manoel Island and Tigne Point, in Sliema.
14. *GRAND HARBOUR*. See n. 12.
15. *XAGHRIET MEWWIJA*. The Maltese name for Mount Sciberras, the hill which was to become the site for the City of Valletta.
16. *ST. ELMO* (Maltese *SANT'IERMU*). A fort in Valletta, overlooking the entrance to the Grand Harbour. It was built in 1488 by the Sicilian Viceroy and later rebuilt by Grandmaster Juan D'Homedes in 1552-53.

## Chapter 15

1. *STRAIT STREET*. Parallel to Kingsway. Strait Street was once a residential quarter. Now it is mostly occupied by bars, restaurants, and cheap lodging houses and is a very popular hangout with sailors.

## Chapter 16

1. *FOUR ACES*. A bar to be found at No. 138 Strait Street. The name of the bar has now changed to Ye Old-Vic Music and Dancing Hall. It is now closed.
2. *METRO (METROPOLITAN)*. A bar at No. 122 Strait Street. The premises still exist today under the name of The Metro Club, but the bar is closed.
3. *BRITISH OFFICERS' CLUB*. Better known as The Union Club. See Epilogue, n. 18.
4. *THE UNION JACK*. A bar at No. 70 Strait Street. The premises still exist, but the bar has long been closed.
5. *PORTE-DES-BOMBES*. This gateway to Floriana was built by Grandmaster Perellos in 1721. Between June and December 1956 a fly-over was constructed near Portes-des-Bombes in order to ease the traffic flow from Valletta.
6. *MARSA*. A town situated more or less halfway between Valletta and Vittoriosa. Because of its position and the fertility of its land, the Turks set up camp here when they landed in Malta in 1565.
7. *THE GREAT LIFT*. The lift which, between the first decade of this century and 1973, served as a short-cut between the upper part of Valletta and the quay and the former Customs House. The Great Lift was dismantled in August 1983.

## Epilogue

1. *FORT ST. ANGELO*. Originally built by the Arabs, and completed by the Aragonese, Fort St. Angelo underwent various structural alterations under the Knights of St. John.
2. *RICASOLI*. On entering the Grand Harbour, Ricasoli is the first point to the west to be encountered.
3. *SANCTUA*. One of the three cities forming the Cottonera area. Named after Grandmaster Claude de La Sengle who, in 1554, elevated the locality to the status of a city.
4. *NOTABILE*. The old capital of Malta, known as Melita under the Romans, as Mdina (its present name) under the Arabs, and as Notabile under the Knights of St. John.
5. *BORGO* (see *VITTORIOSA*). See Chapter 11, n. 6.
6. *GOZO* (see *GHAUDEX*). See Chapter 11, n. 5.
7. *MELLIHA BAY* (now *MELLIEHA BAY*). Mellicha is the northernmost parish in Malta. Situated on the coast, it was one of the Turks' favorite hunting grounds for slaves during the sixteenth century.
8. *AUBERGE OF ARAGON, CATALONIA, AND NAVARRE*. There exists no Auberge by this name in Vittoriosa. The Auberge of Aragon is to be found in Britannia Street, Vittoriosa.
9. *STRADA STRETTA* (see *STRAIT STREET*). See Chapter 15, n. 1.
10. *JOHN BULL*. A bar in St. Nicholas Street, Valletta, corner of Kingsway.
11. *CAFE PIOENICIA*. No records exist about this café. Probably a fictitious name.
12. *FLORIANA*. Named after the Italian architect, Pietro Paolo Floriani, this town, which lies on the outskirts of Valletta, was built between the second half of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century.
13. *MANOEL THEATRE*. The oldest theatre in Europe. Named after Grandmaster Manoel De Vilhena whose aim was to provide the people with "honest recreation." The theatre was built in the short space of ten months and inaugurated on 19 January 1732. It became the major theatre on the Island after the Royal Opera House was destroyed by German bombs in 1942.
14. *CUMIN-SEED*. A reference to the island of Kemmuna (Italian Comino). The meaning of the word *comino* in English is "cumin-seed."

15. *PEPPERCORN*. A reference to the little island of Filfla, which lies about four miles to the south of Malta. The name Filfla derives from *felfel*, which means "peppercorn."
16. *HAMRUN*. One of the largest towns on the Island. In 1921 its population was 12,347. It is about one mile southeast of Valletta.
17. *MANDERAGGIO*. An area in Valletta originally meant to serve as an artificial creek. Due to the hardness of the rock, this project had to be abandoned. The Manderaggio became a slum area, and it was only in the fifties that the slums were done away with and the area reconstructed.
18. *UNION CLUB*. During World War II, the Union Club was housed in the Auberge de Provence, Kingsway, Valletta. The Auberge de Provence, built by Girolamo Cassar in 1571, was evacuated by the Union Club in 1941 after receiving a direct hit. Today it houses the National Museum of Archaeology.
19. *LYCEUM*. Malta's most prestigious State school. It was created in 1837 during Governor Bouverie's term of office and housed in Merchants Street, Valletta, on the ground floor of the old Jesuits College.
20. *PALACE*. The Magisterial Palace in Valletta built during the reigns of Grandmasters Del Monte and La Cassiere (1572-82). It was the official residence of the British Governors on the Island and is today the official residence of the President of the Republic. It is also the seat of the Maltese Parliament.
21. *LASCARIS WHARF*. A wharf on the Valletta side of the Grand Harbour, used by the British naval forces and named after Grandmaster Giovanni Paolo Lascaris (1635-57).

### C. FICTITIOUS PROPER NAMES IN THE MALTESE LANGUAGE

#### Chapter 11

1. *FAUSTO MAIJSTRAL*. *Fausto*, Italian for "happy"; *Maijstral*, Maltese for "North-western Wind" (note Italian *maestrale* and Maltese *majjstral*).
2. *DNUBIETNA*. "Our sins"; *Dnub* "a sin"; *Dnubiet* "sins."
3. *ELENA XEMXI*. *Elena* + "sunny." *Xemx* "sun"; *Xemxi* "sunny" (m.); *Xemxija* "sunny" (f.).
4. *SATURNO AGHTINA* (today *AGHTINA*). *Aghtina* "give us". *Ta'* "to give"; *Aghti* "give" (imperative) plus *Saturno* (Italian name for Saturn).
5. *TIFKIRA*. "remembrance" or "keepsake."

#### Epilogue

1. *MARA*. "woman" or "wife"; pl. *Nisa*.
2. *THE BARONAGE OF SANT'UGO DI TAGLIAPIOMBO DI SAMMUT*. This name does not appear among the names of the Maltese nobility. The name *Samut Tagliaferro*, however, exists in Malta. It is highly probable that Pynchon is parodying this name (*Tagliaferro* is the Italian equivalent for "ironbreaker"; *tagliapiombo* stands for "lead breaker").

### D. OTHER MALTESE LEXICON

#### Chapter 11

1. *MOHH* (today *MOHH*). "Brain," but also used as "mind."
2. *MARID B'MOHHU* (today *MARID B'MOHHU*). "Sick in the head," "mad," "crazy."
3. *IKUN LI TRID INT*. "Thy will be done": part of the *Missierna* ("Our Father").
4. *HEKK IKUN*. "So be it": a religious term.
5. *"MISSIERNA LI-INTI [LI INT] FIS-SMEWWIET, JITQADDES ISMEK. . ."* "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . ." ("Our Father").

#### Chapter 15

1. *SAHHA* (today *SAHHA*). "Health" or "strength." When one greets a person with "Sahha," he wishes him good health. The word is also used as a farewell term.

## Epilogue

1. *LEJL, HEKK IKUN*. "Night, so be it!"

## E. REAL MALTESE NAMES

## Chapter 16

1. *LAFERLA*. A Maltese surname. The *Star of Malta* belonged to the Laferla Steamship Company.
2. *CASSAR*. A Maltese surname. Four witnesses in the Ghallis Tower Murder Trial were surnamed Cassar.
3. *AQUILINA*. A Maltese surname. Incidentally, the surname of the courier murdered in 1955 whose body was disposed of in the Ghallis Tower.

## F. HISTORICAL EVENTS

## Chapter 16

1. *GHALLIS TOWER MURDER*. A notorious murder carried out in 1955. A clerk carrying a sum of money and checks was murdered by a bank employee who later disposed of the body by dumping it into the well of the Ghallis Tower, situated on the southeastern coast of Malta. The trial by jury started on 23 July 1956 and was given wide coverage in the local papers.
2. *JUNE DISTURBANCES*. These have gone down in Maltese history as the *Sette Giugno*. On 7 June 1919 British troops opened fire on the thousands of people demonstrating in Valletta. Three people were killed and a fourth victim died on 8 June as a result of injuries.

## Epilogue

1. *GREAT SIEGE*. The 1565 Siege. Thirty thousand Turks landed in Malta with the intention of ousting La Valette and the Knights of St. John from the Island. After a four-month siege the Maltese and the Knights, although heavily outnumbered, drove the Turks back to the sea.

## G. OTIHERS

## Chapter 16

1. *STAR OF MALTA*. The ferry boat which, during the fifties, plied between Malta and Syracuse and Malta and Tunis.

## Epilogue

1. *CHRONICLE* (or *DAILY MALTA CHRONICLE*). An Anglophile newspaper, the premises of which were situated on 58 Old Theatre Street, Valletta.
2. *GIOVINE MALTA*. The club La Giovine Malta, situated in Strada Santa Lucia in Valletta, was the venue of the first meeting of the National Assembly, held on 25 February 1919.
3. *DANTE ALIGHIERI*. Enrico Mizzi founded a Malta branch of the Società Dante Alighieri in 1913. In government circles, it was considered to be pro-Italian and anti-British.
4. *IL COMITATO PATRIOTTICO*. The political party headed by Canon Ignazio Panzavecchia (1855-1925).
5. *LA VOCE DEL POPOLO*. A nineteenth-century newspaper. Its publication was started once again by the Comitato Patriottico during the 1917 election campaign to defend the interests of the Panzavecchians.
6. *NATIONAL ASSEMBLY*. L'Assemblea Nazionale di Malta set up on the initiative of Dr. Filippo Sciberras comprised representatives of every constituted body on the island of Malta.