Given that Amari himself refers to Malta as ‘l’isola piccina’, it was inconceivable and unacceptable for a very small island to hold a higher political status than Sicily. This would have endangered the plans of Italian politicians, friends of Amari who wanted Malta to be part and parcel of the Risorgimento, for they considered Malta a terra irredenta, but once united to Italy she was to be subjugated to the bigger island of Sicily.

The same cannot be said of Arab and Muslim historians, who shared Amari’s political agenda that the reconquest of Sicily was a European event. Stating that it all started in Malta would have demeaned such a grand historical narrative. Given that Amari himself refers to Malta as ‘l’isola piccina’, it was inconceivable and unacceptable for a very small island to hold a higher political status than Sicily. This would have endangered the plans of Italian politicians, friends of Amari who wanted Malta to be part and parcel of the Risorgimento, for they considered Malta a terra irredenta, but once united to Italy she was to be subjugated to the bigger island of Sicily.

This false historical narrative served the local situation well. The period of Arab Malta was kidnapped by our history of secularisation. Stating that Malta was Christian during Muslim rule would have given credence to the local Roman Church, which sustained the idea that Malta was Christian from the time of St Paul. Therefore, denying the true fact that Malta had a strong Christian community in the 11th century became a political expediency for those who had an interest in lessening the importance of Christianità in the history of our islands, because such a historical fact started to be seen as a stumbling block in the process of the secularisation of Malta. What Karl Popper termed as ‘the falsification of science’ can be found applied and at work in the history of Arab Malta. Yet, if proof is needed on how politicised this story became, it is to be found in Al Athir’s text. Despite the fact that Al Athir felt it necessary to reaffirm the Byzantine conquest of Malta in 981 when he discussed the events that hit Sicily in 1052, Western historians still continue to refuse associating these events with Malta. On the other hand, the fact that Al Athir felt it necessary to make direct reference to this episode reconfirms that he was referring to the same place which, for 71 years, had been under Christian rule.

This time, Al Athir discussed how Malta became entangled in an internal feud over a woman that developed among the Arab rulers of Sicily at the turn of the 11th century. According to Al Athir, those events that he recounts happened in the year of the Hijra 444. Now, 1st Rajab AH 444 corresponds to Tuesday, 27 October 1052. In Metcalfe’s opinion, this internal feud was the true reason for the Arabs’ decline and their eventual loss of Sicily. The whole story began after one of the main Arab rulers in Sicily, Ben Al Thamra, found himself in serious trouble with his kinsmen. Like the previous articles, this reference is being translated into English by Frans X. Cassar.
Al Athir’s text is as follows:

ever mentioned a place called “Malta.” Instead, they say that Al Athir’s narrative is slightly exaggerated and his dating a bit problematic. It should be pointed out that Al Athir did not name the island or the town of Malta. The problem is linked to the way the text is dated. This is one of the instances, when, because his narrative contradicts the western line of historic thought, his timeline is considered erroneous by Western scholars.

Some Western scholars went as far as to argue that, perhaps, Al Athir exaggerated the Christian presence in this place which he called Malta, for the simple reason that Mileto of the mid-12th century did not have a big Christian community capable of going to the aid of one of the Arab factions of Sicily. Instead, they say that Al Athir’s story is a “presumably fictionalised historical set piece.” He describes the situation as one of civil war, which was turned into a Christian reconquest “when Ibn al-Thamna approached a group of Frankish and Muslim forces in Calabria and the European mainland.”

The latter considered King Roger the Frank as the one who had effectively conquered Mileto in the year 1052, which is the actual date of the event. Count Roger and the Franks were in Mileto in Calabria in the year 1061. Therefore, it seems clear that Al Athir’s story is a “presumably fictionalised historical set piece.”

However, the confusion increases as Al Athir refers to the time of the event as occurring, or else he could be referring to his own time when and how Malta came to be known when he was writing the chronicle. Both interpretations are possible. However, the confusion increases as Al Athir refers to the time of the event as occurring, or else he could be referring to his own time when and how Malta came to be known when he was writing the chronicle.