

MAZZINI AND THE EARLY MALTESE PRINTERS: THE NAUDI EPISODE OF 1850

William Zammit

The liberal leanings and the political role played by the Maltese politicians who successfully strove to obtain press freedom for the Maltese islands during the early decades of British rule have been the subject of considerable research and are now quite well known.¹ The same, however, cannot be said about those individuals who were actually to transform that outstanding legal achievement into practice: the Maltese printing press owners of the late 1830s and 1840s. Far from being politically passive and solely motivated by commercial considerations, the latter were for the most part committed to the liberal political ideal, a commitment which was often and for obvious reasons not made so outwardly manifest and which as yet still awaits in-depth study.

The early Maltese printing firms: Luigi Tonna and Filippo Izzo

A major weapon in the Maltese struggle to obtain a free press and one which was availed of by the Maltese politicians, notably by George Mitrovich and Camillo Sceberras, was Luigi Tonna's dogged demands to be granted permission to operate a press on the island. Unperturbed by the local government's refusal or indeed inability to accede to his request, Tonna ended up presenting his demand in the form of a memorial to the King in Council in 1835. Tonna's memorial is a document of very significant political importance and, although referred to by a number of historians, deserves to be published *in toto*.² In his memorial, Tonna emphasised the commercial advantage of having private printing facilities on the island which would stimulate employment and stem the outflow of cash required to purchase printed works from abroad. Tonna moreover delved into the political aspect by commenting upon the fact that private presses were not only an indispensable characteristic of Malta's great and liberal colonizing power, but that they indeed also existed in states lacking a liberal political tradition. That Tonna was working in collusion with the Maltese politicians who were concurrently insisting upon some form of political say for the Maltese, cannot be doubted. Thus, following the publication of Mitrovich's *The Claims of the*

1 See the various publications by H. Frenzo and J.J. Cremona.

2 See Appendix, below.

Maltese People founded upon the Principles of Justice in London and which was sold in Tonna's own Valletta bookshop, Tonna submitted a petition to print an Italian translation of the book so as to make it accessible to the Maltese reading public. The government's refusal to allow this played into the hands of the Maltese who could now point out to the illogical situation whereby a book about Maltese political claims could be published in Britain and in a language not understood by the Maltese, while its publication on the island itself and in Italian was prohibited. Further confirmation of Tonna's involvement with the Maltese political movement was the fact that meetings of the *Comitato Generale Maltese* were held in his *Gabinetto di Lettura* or Reading Room, which he also had set up in Valletta. In March 1838 Tonna was granted the required licence to commence his printing activity.³

While Tonna was a major protagonist in the struggle for the granting of press freedom, it was actually Filippo Izzo (1801-1878) who was issued with the first licence to operate a private press on the island. As in the case of Tonna, Izzo was far from a politically-neutral entrepreneur. Born in Malta of Sicilian parents, Izzo's connections with Mazzini's *Giovine Italia* were known well enough for him to be refused entry in the Kingdom of Naples and for Governor Ponsonby to inform the Secretary of State that Izzo was considered a political tool in the hands of the Italian refugees on the island.⁴ As a member of the *Associazione Patriottica Maltese*, Izzo was among those who signed a protest against Governor O'Ferrall's reluctance to allow Italian refugees to land on Malta in August 1849.⁵ Izzo had acquired his printing press and equipment from Livorno with the help of the *Giovine Italia* and was in fact in a position to commence his printing activity well before the official enactment of the new law on 15 March 1839.⁶ The possibility that printing equipment thus available on the island was utilised even prior to the issue of a government licence cannot be excluded. The first of such licences to be issued prior to the abolition of censorship was that given to Izzo in January 1838. Both Izzo and Tonna immediately started publishing a spate of pamphlets in favour of the Maltese political cause. Among the earliest to come out was an Italian translation of the British jurist De Lolme's writings about the liberty of the press. The twelve-page publication, entitled *Delolme: sulla Libertà della Stampa* bears the imprint *Malta – Tipografia Izzo e Co*. Although the work is undated, the reference

3 For more details on this see W. Zammit, *L-Istorja ta' L-Istampar f' Malta*, Kullana Kulturali series, Malta, 2006.

4 S. Portelli, 'La pubblicistica periodica italiana a Malta, 1798-1840', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Malta, 2000, 40.

5 B. Fiorentini, *Malta rifugio di esuli e focolare ardente di cospirazione durante il risorgimento italiano*, Malta 1966, 140-1.

6 *Ibid.*, 46.

to thirty-seven years of British rule indicates that the work was printed during the early months of 1838. In the introduction to the translation – possibly written by Izzo himself – The British administration of Malta is taken to task for retaining censorship for its first thirty-seven years, with negative consequences on the islanders' standard of education. This comment constitutes one of the earliest criticisms towards the Colonial government to be printed on the island. Izzo and Tonna also pioneered the printing of the first independent journals. These included *Lo Spettatore Imparziale* (23 April 1838) and *Il Portafoglio Maltese* (12 May 1838), both by Tonna, and *The Harlequin* (12 July 1838) and *Il Mediterraneo* (1 August 1838) by Izzo. The latter journal, with a remarkable lifespan of almost thirty-three years, was the major mouthpiece of the Italian Mazzinian partisans in Malta.⁷

The nature of the relation between these early printers and some of their clients still requires clarification. To what extent were such printing concerns tied to the Italian national cause? Did they receive financial backing from the Italian liberal movement and, or from private individuals and if so how did the system actually work out? Were they commercially viable and was indeed profit always the main aim of these establishments? The possible survival, tracing and study of records pertaining to these Maltese printing establishments would certainly open up new and exciting possibilities in this area.

The Naudi printing concern

Shortly following in the steps of Izzo and Tonna was Francesco Naudi and associates who established their printing press at 278, Strada Reale, Valletta by the second half of 1838.⁸ The Naudi family was similarly favourable towards the liberal cause as is evidenced, among other, by membership in the *Associazione Patriottica Maltese*. In a police report dated 24 December 1850 Alessandro, Antonio, Enrico and Giovanni Battista Naudi were all listed as members of the said Society. All the listed members were described as *commercianti*.⁹ More overt sympathies with the Italian revolutionary cause by the Naudis are confirmed. In 1848 A.V. Naudi left Malta to join the Sicilian revolutionary fighters at Palermo, while in the following year Enrico Naudi was involved in the setting up of a fund for the relief of Venice from the Austrian blockade.¹⁰

7 On these journals and others see V. Bonello, B. Fiorentini and L. Schiavone, *Echi del risorgimento a Malta*, second edition, Malta 1982.

8 *Brighella*, issue 11, dated 20.4.1839, 44, 'Impresso, e vedesi nella Tipografia di F. Naudi, e Co. Strada Reale No. 278'.

9 Fiorentini, 149.

10 *Ibid.*, 134-5.

The first major publication which came out of the Naudi press was *Brighella ossia Miscellanea Gaulo-Melitense*. This satirical journal, edited by the erudite priest Giuseppe Zammit, was directed against the Protestant journals *The Phosphorus* and *The Harlequin* and was published between 11 November 1838 and possibly the end of 1845.¹¹ Other early journals published at Naudi's press comprised later issues of *The Harlequin* itself, *Il Corriere Maltese* (10 September 1839), *Il Globo* (1 January 1840) and *L'Unione* (14 January 1845). Issue number 65 of *The Harlequin* featured John Richardson's well-known scathing description of the Roman Catholic religion which resulted in the first prosecution and conviction under the ordinance which abolished censorship and which was promulgated just a few days before.¹² While this case is well-known, the reaction of Francesco Naudi – at whose press *The Harlequin* was being printed – has generally been ignored. In a leaflet published on 4 April Naudi apologised to the public for what had happened, claiming that he was sick at the time of the printing of Richardson's libel and that he had no previous knowledge of it. Naudi moreover disassociated himself from the offensive passage and stated his firm adherence to Catholic teachings.

A landmark publication that came out of the Naudi press was *Bertoldu*, the only known issue of which is dated 24 January 1839 and which, like *Brighella*, was edited by Giuseppe Zammit.¹³ This Maltese-language periodical was published as a reaction to the pro-English *Il Kaulata Maltia*, the first issue of which came out on 15 January from Cumbo's press. These two short-lived journals constituted the earliest local attempts at reaching the masses in their own language.

Often these early local periodicals also shed light upon the strategies utilised for their distribution. Some journals could be bought directly from the press premises while others were available for sale in well-known and centrally-located establishments. Foremost among the latter was Salvu Said's coffee shop, of 278, Strada Reale, Valletta, the same address as Naudi's printing concern. *The Harlequin*, *Brighella*, *Il Kaulata Maltia* and *Bertoldu* all state that issues were available for sale from there.

11 Bonello et. al., 38. See also Portelli, 50-1.

12 *The Harlequin*, issue 65, dated 21.3.1839, 'a system of religion the most detestable the world has ever seen – a system which leaves the mind at a loss to determine whether it is better than no religion at all'. On the case see also G.P. Badger, *Trial of Mr J. Richardson for an alleged libel against the Roman Catholic religion*, Malta 1839 and C.F. Schlienzy, *Liberty of publishing in Malta with especial regard to religious publications*, Malta 1839, among others.

13 On *Bertoldu* see Bonello et. al., 39. A copy of the single known issue is available in the National Library of Malta.

In the Three Cities *Brighella* could be bought from S. Micallef of number 71, Strada Marina, Cospicua.¹⁴

Giovanni Battista Naudi and the Mazzinians

The pro-Italian liberal feelings held by the early exponents of the Maltese free press were confirmed by a serious incident which involved Giovanni Battista Naudi. The latter had become active in his family's printing business since at least 1845 when he started printing *L'Unione* (January 1845-September 1846). The paper, albeit short-lived, constituted yet another platform for the expression of liberal ideas by both the Italian refugees and the Maltese.¹⁵ On 25 February 1850 Giovanni Battista was arrested at Palermo upon his arrival there from Messina. The Bourbon authorities had in fact been tipped the month before that Naudi would be carrying letters written by Italian refugees in Malta and addressed to their fellow compatriots in Sicily with the specific aim of fomenting fresh revolts on that island. In all Naudi had been carrying twelve letters. These had been written by Marquis Francesco Milo Guggino, Alberto Maria Sichera and Michele Bottari.¹⁶ In the eyes of Governor O'Ferrall, Milo Guggino was responsible for the dissemination of 'socialist doctrines' in Malta.¹⁷ Some of the letters were addressed to Corrado Lancia Brolo, son of the Duke of Brolo and an ex-officer of the Sicilian engineers. Others were to be passed to a certain Ammirata, an armourer by profession. At least one was written by the Maltese Vincenzo Bugeja, and was addressed to Errico Cataliotti, the son of an eminent lawyer. While not describing any specific plan for action, the letters generally had an inflammatory tone and spoke of a general outbreak or Vespers being at hand, not only in Sicily but also on mainland Italy and directed against both the Papacy and the Bourbon monarchy. Besides the letters Naudi was carrying another packet addressed to the British consul in Palermo, John Goodwin. This had been sent to the British consul by the editor of *The Malta Mail* at the insistence of the Maltese patriot Camillo Sceberras. When the

14 *Brighella*, issue 2, dated 24.11.1838, 8, 'Malta – Tipografia F. Naudi e Co. – si vende nel Caffè di S. Said, Strada Reale No. 248. e nella Cospicua da S. Micallef Strada Marina, No. 71'; *L'Arlecchin*, issue 42, dated 6.12.1838, 168, 'Malta – Stampat mn' [sic] Izzu u Siehbu, u jimbieh fil caffè ta Salvu Said f'hâra Riali Numru 248'; *Il Kaulata Maltaia*, issue 1, dated 15.1.1839, 4, 'MALTA – Stampât min Cumbo nal' [sic] Editor tal' Arlekkîn, u jimbieh fil kafe ta Salvu Said f'Hâra ir-Rjâli No. 248'; *Bertoldu*, issue 1, dated 24.1.1839, 4, 'Malta, mill'istamperia Naudi, u Siehbu. Jinbih fil Caffè ta-Sur Salvu Said ma ruf [sic] ma Malta kollha. N. 248'.

15 V. Bonello et.al., 64-5.

16 On Bottari see *ibid.*, 187, *passim*.

17 N[ational] A[rchive] M[alta] Gov 1 3 7, O'Ferrall-Grey, 14.3.1850.

packet was handed over to the British consul, the latter found out that it contained the fourth and fifth issues of Mazzini's paper *L'Italia del Popolo* which was at the time being printed at Lausanne. Copies of this paper were sent to Malta, where they were circulated by Emilio Sceberras, Camillo's son and a major figure in the local Mazzinian movement.¹⁸ While refusing to take possession of the packet, the British consul informed the British ambassador in Naples that he had no connections with either Camillo Sceberras or with the editor of *The Malta Mail*.¹⁹

On the same day of his arrest Naudi wrote to the British consul in Palermo, asking for his intervention. The consul was given access to Naudi and had him questioned. Naudi insisted that he had no knowledge of the contents of the letters and that his trip to Sicily was purely a business one. The letters however spoke of Naudi as being a person in whom those receiving the letters could place their trust and communicate as freely as with the writers themselves.²⁰ This incrimination made Naudi's assertion untenable even to the British authorities in Palermo and Naples who tried to secure his liberation. Naudi ended up being taken to Naples where he was detained until 28 February when he embarked on a French packet to Malta. In the tense political context of the time, the Neapolitan decision to free Naudi and allow his return to Malta was indeed considered as an act of leniency.

The Bourbon government, however, did not intend to let the matter stop there. On 5 March the Foreign Minister, Cavaliere Fortunato, sent a confidential note to William Temple, the British ambassador in Naples. In his communication the ambassador insisted that the authors of the letters and specifically Milo Guggino, Sichera and Bottari be expelled from Malta. Upon being informed of this, Governor O'Ferrall ordered the expulsion of the three refugees from the island. Not only was such an expulsion approved by the British Secretary of State, but the latter assured O'Ferrall that he was endowed with full authority to expel from the colony any person who, in his judgement, constituted a threat to the security of the colony or of any neighbouring country.²¹

On his part Giovanni Battista continued to protest his innocence in the whole matter. In April 1850 the Naudi family appealed to Palmerston to intervene with the

18 R. Farrugia Randon, *Camillo Sceberras: his life and times* Malta 1991, 64.

19 NAM Gov 1 2/30/55, correspondence between John Goodwin and William Temple, dated 25.2.1850 and 26.2.1850 (copy political) and 26.2.1850 (copy private).

20 Ibid.

21 NAM Gov 1 2/30/55 Temple to O'Ferrall, dated 2.3.1850; 1 2/30/56, Temple to O'Ferrall, dated 13.3.1850; 1 3 7 O'Ferrall to Grey, dated 14.3.1850.

Neapolitan government to make good the damage suffered by the family's business concern as a result of the incident. In his reply, however, Palmerston declined to intervene, again warning about the adverse consequences for those Maltese who meddled in the Italian political troubles.²²

The British administration in Malta kept its eyes open for any activity related to the Mazzinian cause. During the Crimean War, and following information received from the British consul at Genoa, Governor Reid informed the War Department of the presence of an American ship in the Mediterranean loaded with weapons for Mazzini's partisans and inquired as to what course of action he should follow.²³ In its reply the War Department stated that the British government was not to interfere in any way unless the ship tried to enter the Black Sea, which was, of course, unlikely or that the weapons could in any way end up in possession of Britain's enemy, namely Russia. Three years later Reid had Giuseppe Fanelli unceremoniously deported to England as the latter was considered to be an agent of Mazzini on the island.²⁴

I would like to end this talk by referring to a work by Mazzini which bears the imprint *In Malta 18 Luglio*, but which does not give either the year of publication, presumably 1859, or the printer's name. The item consists of two pages or sheets and contains Mazzini's strong reaction against the peace of Villafranca. The manifesto starts with the phrase *La pace di Villafranca. La delusione è scesa più rapida che noi stessi non credevamo* and the full text of the item is given in volume 64 of the *Edizione Nazionale* of Mazzini's writings.²⁵ The original Maltese edition of this work does not seem to be available in the local public collections and its acquisition, even in facsimile form, would be a fitting gesture on this 200th anniversary of its author's birth.

22 NAM Gov 2 1 46, Grey to O'Ferrall, dated 15.5.1850, enclosing a copy of Palmerston's answer to the Naudi family, dated 13.5.1850.

23 NAM Gov 2 5 2 Newcastle-Reid, dated 30.10.1854

24 NAM Gov 1 3 9 Reid-Sec. State, dated 30.11.1857. In his despatch, Reid asked to be reimbursed the sum of twelve pounds he had to pay out of his own funds for the deportation of Fanelli. On the latter's presence and activities on the island see B. Fiorentini (1966), 139, 142, 172 and 179.

25 G. Mazzini, *Scritti. Edizione Nazionale*, vol. 64, Imola, Galeati 1933, 309-19.

Appendix

Tonna's memorial requesting the setting up of a printing press in Malta

Malta April 6th 1835

Sir,

I beg leave to submit to you, Sir, a Petition which I wish to forward to His Majesty's consideration. The reasonable and moderate prayer which it contains gives me sanguine hope that you, Sir, will be pleased to support it with your efficient protection; through which Sir, you may afford in general a very considerable benefit to the Maltese Population.

I Have etc.

(Signed) Luigi Tonna

To The Right Honorable

The Secretary of State

For the Colonial Department

etc. etc. etc.

London

[p. 352: blank]

[p. 353]

copy

To The King's Most Excellent Majesty in Council

The humble Petition of Lewis Tonna of the Island of Malta, Bookseller

Humbly sheweth

That your humble Petitioner on the commencement of the present year, forwarded a Petition to the local Government of Malta, stating that during the long course of his dealings he had occasion to observe, that owing to the total want of Public Printing Offices in this Island, very large sums are annually expended for the constant importation of books from the Continent, as well as for the necessity of printing every literary production abroad, the whole to the entire benefit of Foreigners, and to the great prejudice of the Natives of Malta.

That Your Majesty's humble Petitioner with the view, on one hand [p. 354] of affording a general advantage to his Country, and on the other of deriving an honest recompense for his labors, he prayed the local Government of Malta, to allow him to establish in Valletta a Public Printing Office, with the same privileges as enjoyed by Printers in Great Britain or on the Continent, subject however to the Laws in force in

Malta, for the purpose of printing under a Maltese Edition, all ancient classical works appertaining to the Sciences and Literature; books required for Public Instruction in the Island; and Modern Productions of national and Foreign authors; thereby deriving to Your Majesty's Maltese Subjects the considerable [p. 355] advantages of purchasing books at a low price, of circulating in the Island the money hitherto expended abroad, and a source of employment to a number of workmen.

That Your Majesty's humble Petitioner in answer to his said Memorial received a written communication from the local Government, dated 5th February last stating 'that the said application cannot be attended to for the present'.

That Your Majesty's humble Petitioner subsequently thereto, made a Second Memorial on the subject, wherein he submitted to Your Majesty's local Government, that from the nature of the said answer, he entertained sanguine hopes of obtaining at a future permission to establish a Public Printing Office as aforesaid, [p. 356] but as the period when such permission would be granted was not defined, he prayed therein that the local Government would be pleased to fix a future time, in which Your Petitioner might renew his application on the subject with a certainty of obtaining a favourable Decree, in order that he might in the interval make such expenses and preparations as are requisite for the undertaking, without impairing his Interests by a long or uncertain delay.

That Your Majesty's humble Petitioner in answer to this Memorial was informed on the 18th March last, that 'his application could not be granted under present circumstances, nor was it in the power of the Lieutenant Governor to say [p. 357] whether the permission of establishing a printing Office by private Individuals will ever be granted, and therefore that the Petitioner had better abstain from incurring any expense on the subject', from which it would appear that the local Government is not authorised to grant such permission.

Wherefore, Your Majesty's humble Petitioner pray that Your Majesty will grant him the faculty of establishing in Valletta a Public Printing Office, a Privilege exercised by other Towns in Your Majesty's Dominions as well as by several Foreign Countries not enjoying the Blessings of a liberal Government; and premising that such an establishment is consonant with the views of Your Majesty's Paternal [p. 358] affection, in promoting and encouraging the General welfare and Prosperity of Your Majesty's faithful subjects.

And Your Majesty's humble Petitioner as in duty bound will ever pray.

(Signed) Luigi Tonna
Valletta, Malta April 6th 1835.

[Source: NAM Gov 2/1/28, 351-8].



Mazzini in his early twenties