

BOOK REVIEWS

ALESSANDRO BONNICI O.F.M. Conv. *Giulio Degli Oddi contro Martino De Redin 1655-1658. Contrasti tra un Delegato Apostolico e un Candidato alla Dignità di Gran Maestro dell'Ordine di Malta.* Roma 1973.

Fr. Alessandro Bonnici is certainly one of Malta's most assiduous and formidable historians. In addition to his invaluable and highly informative works in Maltese on Church History, meant to give the Maltese public which needs it so much a knowledge of the subject from a modern historical point of view, he has been regularly publishing excellent studies in Italian or English for several years, most of them the result of his extensive researches into the archives of the Inquisitors in Malta and Rome. After studies of the social milieu — chiefly on matters of religion and superstition — in Malta during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*Melita Historica*, 1966 and 1967; *Maltese Folklore Review*, 1973), he has published studies of the sources themselves (*Melita Historica*, 1968), of bishops Cagliares and Balaguer (*ibid.*, 1969), of the changing juridical powers of the Inquisitors over the Knights (reviewed in *ibid.*, 1972), and of the bad reputation acquired under Mgr. Gori Pannellini (*ibid.*, 1972). He has now given us a study in depth of the quarrels and intrigues into which Inquisitor Degli Oddi plunged soon after his arrival in Malta in 1655 to prevent the election of the Prior of Navarre, Martino de Redin, to the post of Grand Master after the death of the ailing Lascaris. Originally it was published as a series of articles in *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte* between 1970 and 1972.

Of course, this is not a detailed history of the whole span of the relations between the Inquisitor and the Order during the years 1655-58 but of one aspect of it and it must be said that in its restricted scope it can hardly be bettered, though the long extracts from contemporary documents in long-winded Italian written rather hurriedly and perhaps sometimes carelessly do not lighten the style as they were no doubt intended to do. We are regaled with all the details of the plots and counter-plots that took place between the various Knights all eagerly pushing forward their own candidate and doing their best to thwart the designs of their rivals. In particular we see the Pope's own nuncio endeavouring to impose his own will, declaring De Redin ineligible owing to the bribery he was accused of using to secure supporters, and after the election declaring his choice invalid. He supported the candidature of Bali De Valansè instead. But in this he reckoned without a proper understanding of the Knights' own psychology. In fact, even De Valansè seems to have preferred acting without the Inquisitor's support, because Degli Oddi's behaviour outraged the sentiments of innumerable Knights

who feared that gradually the Inquisitors in Malta might acquire so much power from the Papacy over elections to the post of Grand Master that they would eventually have the decisive voice in all subsequent vacancies. Perhaps this explains the humiliating rebuff Degli Oddi received in 1658: De Redin, though absent from the island at the time (he was acting as Viceroy in Sicily), was elected Grand Master in spite of the Inquisitor's open and relentless opposition, and the latter was himself promptly recalled to Rome. Even Bishop Balaguer, no friend of the Grand Masters, refused to make himself available to the Inquisitor on the day of the election, stealing away at an unearthly hour to the sacristy of St. John's to avoid an encounter with this troublesome prelate of the Holy Office.

Degli Oddi's character and activities are all superbly delineated. The same cannot surely be said to the same extent about those of De Redin himself, but Bonnici is really concerned with the former alone and, anyhow, it is not at all easy to obtain non-official documentation — as would be De Redin's own correspondence until he became Grand Master.

G. Wettinger

M. FSADNI, *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u fil-Birgu sa l-1620*. Il-Hajja Printing Press 1973, pp. 332, illustr. 22.

With this volume, Father Michael Fsadni has completed his history of the Dominican Order in Malta, up to 1620. In two previous volumes he had covered, first, the arrival and initial activities of the Order in Malta (1450-1512) and, secondly, the history of the Order's activities in Valletta (1569-1619). Now, in this third volume, he carries on the history of the Order's activities at Rabat and Vittoriosa up to 1620.

The book begins with a short summary of the first volume, in which the author recalls the relatively rapid flourishing of the Order of Preachers in Malta in a half-century. The first centre was at Rabat, about a mile outside the then capital city of the island. The conditions of life in Malta worsened after the turn of the 16th century; the population (around 20,000) was constantly exposed to the ravages of pirates and of pestilence and endured serious poverty. Nonetheless, around 1528, the Dominicans were fortunate enough to receive a house at Birgu, at exactly the time when Birgu was to become the new capital of the Knights; moreover social and economic conditions there were taking a turn for the better and the Dominicans again forged ahead for another thirty years. Then, around 1560, there came another crisis and another decline in numbers, but there also came the challenge of establishing a

new priory at the new city of Valletta, which the Dominicans begun in 1569. For a long time, these three priories, established in fairly rapid succession at the three cities each of which became the centre of Maltese life within a single century, were signs of the fact that the Order of Preachers had evidently placed itself in the mainstream of the social life of the island.

The next section of the book contains detailed descriptions of the two Dominican churches at Rabat and Birgu. The documentation supplied by Fr. Fsadni here shou'd provide useful references for historians and students of art and architecture in Malta — including some firm data related to the work of some of the finest Maltese artists, such as Tumas Dingli, who appears as an assistant sculptor working in stone at Rabat. The detailed accounts of the history of every chapel in the two churches can be of great help to anyone attempting a more aesthetically oriented evaluation of both these two churches and the two annexed convents. The Rabat complex is surely one of the most exciting architectural events which happened to the Maltese landscape, and it deserves further attention from this point of view: a task made much easier with the data which Father Fsadni has now made available.

Father Fsadni then turns from buildings to institutions. He gives accounts of the confraternities, the teaching establishments, and the governing bodies of the two priories. The account of the confraternities brings to the fore the constant dialectic between laity and clergy in the life of the Church; the account of the teaching shows the passage from the embryonic to a slightly more respectable condition of higher education in Malta at the time; the account of the government shows that, although formally dependent on a Sicilian Provincial, the local order was for practical purposes both autonomously and very competently run.

The final section of Father Fsadni's book is the one most likely to prove of the greatest interest to the reader who has no specialist concern for either Maltese Architecture or the Dominican Order, but has a more general curiosity about the social life of the island in the century of the Great Siege.

Father Fsadni begins the section with a broad picture of the life of the Dominicans before the Great Siege; there is little direct evidence for it, but some conclusions can be fairly drawn from the quantity and quality of gifts made to the priories, from the number and kind of young men who joined the order, from the accounts of services rendered to parishes and courses of sermons preached. Father Fsadni concludes that the first half-century of the Order of Preachers in Malta was, in general, one of healthy growth.

Next, he describes the disturbances in the life of the Friars caused

by the ups-and downs of the struggle of the Knights of Malta with the Berber pirates and the Turks (with particular reference to the role of the Friars in the Great Siege). Those disturbances were one of the contributing factors which turned the second half-century of the life of the Order of Preachers in Malta into a critical period. Another contributing factor, it seems, was the more general crisis in the Order and the Church provoked by the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Father Fsadni, however, notes his impression that it was perhaps not so much the Protestant propaganda then reaching Malta as much as the decline in the moral life and the deficiencies in the doctrinal training of the clergy which exp'ain the kind of crisis of faith (of which the decline in religious vocations is one symptom) which occurred in the decades following the Great Siege.

Here begins the heyday of the Inquisition in Malta. Among the main sources of documentation for the period are the archives of the Inquisition; hence it is natural that the gross misdeeds of the few should be recorded in greater detail than the mediocrity of the many. Father Fsadni puts the matter into a correct statistical perspective; but he does not fail to give the highly colourful life stories of the misdemeaning Dominicans brought up before the Inquisition. In another section, we find the Dominicans in their more familiar role as theologian-consu'tants to the Inquisitors, rather than as the accused before them. The association of the Inquisition with the Birgu Priory was one of the latter's main claims to fame. The association begun through the august personality of Thomas de Vio, who came to Malta to be the advisor of bishop fra Tomaso Cubelles. In 1561, this Bishop of Malta had received full authorisation from the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome whereby he was appointed Inquisitor in the Maltese Islands.

Finally, Father Fsadni gives accounts of other activities by the Dominicans, leading to the perception, that, after the critical period, the Order of Preachers not only recovered the moral impetus of its initial half-century, but, furthermore, built up a system of education which led to the Order in Malta acquiring the same reputation for theological learning as it had elsewhere. It is on this happy note that Fr. Fsadni concludes his study.

He has built on foundations which others of his confreres (Callus, Vella, Forte) had laid, but he has added a large amount of hitherto unpublished material and he has organised in a systematic way the history of the Dominicans in Malta from 1450 to 1620. In the course of the book he alludes to other research projects that could be undertaken (e.g. study of the property left to the Order), and it is to be hoped that,

although a cycle of research has now been successfully completed by Father Fsadni, he will continue to produce more and more documented information from the archives.

P. Serracino Inglott

A. ZAMMIT GABARETTA, *The Church of the Grand Masters and Inquisitors*, Veritas Press, Malta, 1974, 71 pp., illus.

The history of our cities and their churches still needs to be tackled seriously. In his book Can. A. Zammit Gabaretta attempts to give a historical descriptive guide to the Collegiate Church of St. Lawrence of Vittoriosa to initiate such a step in the study of the history of the old city of Birgu. The guide is flavoured with a nostalgic yearning for the past in which the author observes a more disciplined respect towards liturgical traditions and artistic heritage.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part I a brief history of St. Lawrence Church is given. It is traditionally assumed that St. Lawrence was erected a parish in 1090. The Church served as the Conventual Church of the Hospitallers between 1530 and 1571. It was also patronized by the Apostolic Delegates to Malta, especially Mgr. Ruffo. Through the intervention of the Apostolic Delegate, a college of priests, known as "Beneficiati", was officially established in 1725. This was turned into a Collegiate Chapter in 1820.

Through the detailed description of the Church given in Part II, one can learn a lot about St. Lawrence and the interest of the people of Birgu in their traditions. The present church was built in 1681-1687 according to the plan of Lorenzo Gafa'. A tower was added in 1913. The church is decorated with frescoes and paintings which were executed by Ignazio Cortis, Michael Busuttil, Giuseppe Cali, R. Bonnici Cali and other well known painters. The altarpiece, "The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence", is a masterpiece of Mattia Preti. It was donated to the church in 1689. Other notable works of art include an artistic pulpit, a very old Crucifix, and the statue of St. Lawrence.

Attached to the Church there is a Museum in which precious articles are conserved. These include 15th Century sacred vestments, a rare 16th Century edition of Palestrina, missals and chalices, and La Valette's sword and hat.

This book could serve as an excellent guide to people who are interested in visiting St. Lawrence Church. It could also serve to spur greater interest in our heritage and the way it should best be preserved.

C. G. S.

HILDA LEE: *Malta 1813 - 1914*, Progress Press, Malta, 1973, 292 pp.

This book presents a study in the constitutional and strategic development of Malta throughout the 19th century until 1914. It is evident that during the 19th century the British Government appreciated Malta as a strategic base and that it assumed that it was to use the Island in terms of Imperial interests vis-a-vis the power game in the Mediterranean. The fortifications of the Island were utilized to serve the military and naval forces. It was for this reason, for example, that Col. Dickens reported on the state of the Grand Harbour fortifications in 1813. The British thought of the importance of retaining Malta to maintain diplomatic power in the Mediterranean, however, they considered it as a financial liability.

Britain's imperial interests were given priority over the needs of the Island — the c'aims of the Maltese were consequently given an indifferent reception. The administration of the Island, soon after its taking over from the French, was directly influenced by the Colonial Office: Maitland's efficient though despotic reforms were meant to secure the best interests of Britain in Malta. The government departments provided sinecure offices while legislation, especially during the first half of the 19th century, was based on military despotism. It is worth noting that at one time, the grant of any legislative representation was considered objectionable by Britain. Those who claimed representation were not always considered to be of the most respectable class.

During the years preceding the Crimean War, the economic and social conditions of the people were extremely low. The Island was unable to provide enough food and labour, a heavy tariff system raised the cost of living, quarantine charges impeded the transit trade and French and Italian competition affected the carrying trade. Thus in an Island burdened with over-population, mendicancy and thieving grew to alarming proportions. To soften down the problem, charitable institutions were provided and emigration considered.

The Maltese people desired public discussion and representation. It was assumed that popular legislative power would have helped to solve various local problems. Hence followed the presentation of petitions by C. Sciberras and Mitrovitch which led to the Austen-Lewis Commission. The Maltese liberals demanded freedom of the press, reform of Charitable Institutions, education, and the employment of Maltese in executive grades. Throughout the period a tug-of-war between the Maltese people and the British government is evident: the British considered Malta as a vital strategic base and therefore generally opposed Maltese constitutional advance. Thus Wellington wanted a military government for Malta,

Governor Le Marchant thought of the Maltese as an Asiatic people and led to much antagonism and, J. Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, considered Malta as a fortress entrusted to the interests of the Empire — Malta was equated with a man-of-war. The many questions connected with religion, language and taxation have to be seen within this background.

Moreover when following the protests of F. Mizzi and Strickland, the 1887 Constitution was granted to Malta, there were some who still maintained that the legislative system was incompatible with the position of Malta as an Imperial fortress and unsuitable to the circumstances of the Island and the political capacity of the people.

The development of Malta's constitutional history during the 19th century seems to have been determined by Britain's interests in the Mediterranean on the one hand and the political activities of Maltese leaders on the other. During the Crimean crisis the harbour defences were strengthened and precautions were taken to face the iron clad ships that came into being. During the last decades of the 19th century, as the tension which led to the First World War was mounting, the naval strength of the Island was considered in terms of other powers — Lintorn-Simmons even tested the possibility of an invasion. At the outbreak of war, Malta was prepared to fulfil the role of a defensive naval base and, in spite of Britain's unwillingness to grant constitutional demands and political misdemeanours, Maltese loyalty was unquestionable.

Lee's heavily documented book indicates that Britain's assumption of supremacy in the Mediterranean was based on the efficiency with which the Maltese Islands were turned into an unpregnable naval fortress. During the last years of the 19th century, the Franco-Russian alliance necessitated the strengthening of Malta as a base and following the Anglo-French entente this need became vital. In spite of the fact that Maltese constitutional advance was opposed, the Maltese leaders' policy made headway.

Malta 1813-1914 is a historical analysis worth reading.

C.G.S.

C. SCICLUNA — G. B. GAUCI (editors): *350 Sena Kolleġġjata 1623-1973*, Lux Press, Malta, 1974, 75 pp., illus.

In December 1973 special celebrations were held in Gozo to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the erection of the Collegiate Church of the Assumption. This Church subsequently became the Cathedral of

Gozo when it was made a diocese in 1864. A fully illustrated diary of the celebrations is presented in this book. It includes commemorative essays and poems as well as analytical and juridical articles of historical interest. The poems are written by Anton Buttigieg, Gorg Pisani and Mgr. A. Gauci. The results of an essay competition and excerpts from the speech of Mgr. N. Cauchi, Bishop of Gozo, which was made on the conclusion of the festivities, are also published here.

Chev. J. Borg reviews the history of the Collegiate Church in his article "Il-Knisja 'Matrici', Kolleggjata u Katidrali t'Ghawdex". He explains how the canonical prebends were established and gives lists of privileges granted to the church and of parish priests and archpriests who were at one time or other in charge of the Church of the Assumption. It is of particular interest to note that a new church was built on the plans of Lorenzo Gafà following the destruction of the earlier building as a result of the earthquake of 1693 and that the pectoral cross that the Gozitan canons wear, is a decoration awarded by Grand Master De Rohan.

In "Il-Grajja Bikrija tal-Knisja Matrici t'Ghawdex 1435-1551", Dr G. Wettinger throws new light on ecclesiastical history: the Church of St. Mary was already referred to as a *matrici* (senior church) in 1435; there are various 15th century notarial acts which refer to this church as *matrici*; the 'Rollo' of Bishop De Mello of 1436 gives a list of *already* existing benefices including ten parishes in Malta. The Church of the Assumption was especially popular among the richer families: they enriched it by favouring it with legacies and the building of chapels. In 1494 the Noble Lady Paola de Navarra wanted to set up a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto; by 1543 the Castelletti had a chapel dedicated to St. Catherine; by the beginning of the 16th century the Pontremoli and the Monpalao also had established their chapels. The Church of the Assumption was popular among the Gozitan upper class and especially among those who lived within the walls of the Cittadella.

Rev. Dr. Alexander Bonnici examines critically the erection of the Collegiate Church in "It-Twaqqif ta' l-Ewwel Kolleggjata f'Ghawdex". Mgr. Cagliares, Bishop of Malta (1615-1633), erected the Collegiate Church so that a number of pious bequests could be fulfilled — a transcription and a translation of the Edict (1623) are provided. Since 1623 the parish priest of the Assumption was referred to as Archpriest. Subsequently a number of acts were made to confirm the Erection: in 1625 the bequest of Nico'a Mahnuq was applied; in 1631 the Congregation of the Council confirmed the Bishop's deeds; in 1639 Pope Urban VIII issued the Bull *Nostri Pastoralis Officii* thereby reviewing what had been done so far; in 1661 Inquisitor Casanati sent an appeal to Rome asking for an

official confirmation of the Erection. In answer to an appeal made by the people and the clergy of this church, Pope Alexander VII issued the Bull *Superna Dispositione* in 1663. In this memorable Bull the history of the Church of the Assumption is again reviewed and an official apostolic approval to the Erection of the Collegiate Church is given.

The publication of such a collection of articles and literary works certainly renders the commemoration of such an occasion memorable.

C. G. S.

KARMENU ELLUL GALEA — *L-Istorja tat-Tarzna*, Hajja Printing Press, 1973, pp. iv, 620, illustr. 100.

As Englishmen once depended mainly on coal mines and South Africans still depend mainly on gold mines for their livelihood, so, for over 100 years, the Maltese have depended mainly on the Dockyard for their living. Thus has Karmenu Ellu' Galea introduced his book *L-Istorja tat-Tarzna*.

After a short description of ship building and repairing along the coastline of Birgu during the Order's rule, the A. starts the history of the Dockyard proper, speaking of the construction of Dock No. 1 in 1847 and Docks 2-5 in 1892-1906. He dwells on the Hydraulic and the Floating Docks and other D'Yard appurtenances — the Parlatorio, the Ordinance, Kalafrana, Ricasoli and Manoel Island, the Admiralty House and the D'Yard Terrace.

Thousands of otherwise unemployed people found work in the Malta D'Yard. Better means of transport since the 1920s attracted more workers from the countryside. The best days for the Yard were during the two World Wars.

With the end of World War One, work slowed down and the D'Yard Authorities decided to close the Yard on Saturdays and pay workers for 5 instead of 6 days. This, jointly with cases of corruption, nepotism and vexation caused discontent among the workers, which led to the first general strike in 1919. Feeling the need of a stronger tie between them, D'Yard workers set up the first Union — of which the A. was a co-founder — published a gazette and founded a Maltese Benefit Society.

In several chapters the A. speaks of events during World War Two — the construction of shelters, the D'Yard Brigade, the air-raid upon the aircraft carrier "Illustrious" and the sinking of the M.V. "Moor", the visits of Churchill and Kekovich.

Two years after the last war, the Workers started the fight for a

5-day week. In order to achieve their aim they banned overtime and ordered a go-slow strike. As a result they were locked out. The Prime Minister had to intervene. The worse came when in 1957, the Naval D'Yard Authorities informed the employees that the Yard was going to close down. Commissions were set up, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, the Archbishop, the Cathedral Chapter and the College of Parish-priests pleaded for a reconsideration of the issue. Instead of a close-down, notices of discharges were given. The riots of the 27th February 1959 followed.

Not long after, a joyful ceremony celebrated the change of the Naval D'Yard into a commercial enterprise under the direction of Messrs Bailey. Other strikes followed. The D'Yard was again on the verge of closing. All political parties joined to avert the disaster. On February 14, 1963, it was announced in Parliament that the government was taking over the Dockyard.

Mr. Ellul Galea's work is a product of 44 years of personal experience at the D'Yard and 7 years of research work. The A. deals delicately with the involvement of politics in the events. In our opinion, the work would have appeared better, had the diverse chapters been grouped under seven or eight more comprehensive titles. From a literary, social and historical point of view, this contribution deserves our praise and it should find a place in our libraries.

A. B.

ANDREW P. VELLA. *Storja ta' Malta*, Vol. I, St. Paul's Press, Malta, 1974, pp. 213.

This excellent book by Prof. A. P. Vella, Head of the Department of History at our University, provides the reader with a comprehensive panorama of Maltese history from the earliest times to 1565. It is a subject in which the author has a vast experience and to which he has already made valuable contributions. This volume is to be followed by two others; one dealing with events from 1565 to the French occupation and the other covering the British period up to the gaining of independence in 1964.

A notable feature of this work is the extensive coverage which the author devotes to the Arab occupation. He does not hesitate to debunk several undocumented traditions associated with this period. The reader will value the author's broad approach drawing as he does upon the political vicissitudes of neighbouring Sicily and their influence on events in our Island.

The book is provided with numerous useful notes and references which make possible a more detailed study of those aspects of Maltese history of special interest to the reader.

The choice of the Maltese language for such a detailed work may not appeal to everyone. Your reviewer thinks that the text would have flowed more easily, in certain parts, in the English language. Besides, the book would have reached a wider readership, not only in Malta, but also abroad.

It is elegantly produced in an attractive binding and cover with a clearly printed type on very good quality paper.

There are neatly reproduced illustrations in black and white. Had their source and the location of the objects shown been given, the reader would have been stimulated to delve into the other works for more illustrations and to visit the places where the objects are preserved. In this manner a wider pictorial view of our past would have been opened especially to the younger generation for whom the book may be the first excursion into our history.

As a considerable portion of the sources quoted in the references consists of published works, one may gain the impression that the available literature on our history is all in print and that no manuscript material remains to be tapped. But is it so? One wonders whether a systematic examination of the manuscript holdings of the Cathedral Museum at Mdina and of the various *Univ.* volumes (apart from No. 11) at the Public Library may not reveal new facts and cast fresh light on some obscure facets of our past. I believe that the final word about our medieval period cannot be written until an exhaustive search for documents bearing on Maltese affairs has been carried out in the State Archives of Sicily. I am the first to admit that this task can only be undertaken by scholars who are on the spot and who are familiar with the contents of their archives. I wish to suggest to our Minister of Education to ask the help of his counterpart in Italy in this respect in the hope of obtaining, at least, a list of documents preserved in Sicilian State Archives that have some relation to our Island. Such a step would indicate what type of primary sources exists in Sicily and where these can be consulted. This information would constitute an indispensable tool not only in the hands of Maltese but also of foreign scholars interested in the Middle Ages. Perhaps the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* at Malta may be in a position to join in this quest and thus render an invaluable service to Maltese-Sicilian culture.

PAUL XUEREB, *Melitensia: A Catalogue of Printed Books and Articles in the Royal University of Malta Library referring to Malta*, Malta University Press, 1974, 76pp.

Despite the comparative youth of the Malta University Library in its modern form, its Melitensia section has become a most convenient place for those working on Maltese subjects. Much credit for this achievement must go to Dr. Xuereb, the author of *Melitensia*. The historian tends to greet published library catalogues with mixed feelings. He can expect new titles and be sure of finding them in the library concerned, if it is accessible to him, but books which are not in that library will not be in its catalogue; therefore, as in this case the author himself is careful to point out, his work "is not a bibliography but a catalogue". By way of compensation, Dr. Xuereb does in fact provide a comprehensive list of bibliographies which many historians of Malta will find the most original and useful section of his catalogue. The second section, on "Biography", will also be valuable to historians; in particular, it collects together titles referring to some of those gifted scholars who made late eighteenth century Malta a centre of academic interests and activities. This circle seems to have withered away when the departure of the Knights and the British occupation of Malta severed its varied continental connections, but it deserves study as a group. The student of Maltese history faces thousands of books and articles, and this preliminary catalogue of 628 items can naturally do little more than provide him with some unexpected or unknown references to rarer works and unpublished theses. However, the author announces further more specialized catalogues for the future, and this first volume constitutes a step towards the fulfilment of a daunting, perhaps impossible, task: the creation of that complete bibliography of Maltese History which have for so long been considered a *desideratum*.

Anthony Luttrell