

Book Review: *Il-Bolla Tal-Kollegġjata Tal-Għarb*

Horatio Caesar Roger Vella

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REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

With his various translations of renowned works from Latin into Maltese or English, Professor Horatio Caesar Roger Vella has gradually become Malta and Gozo's leading scholar of Classics and Classical Literature. However, the ancient European languages of culture are not his only area of interest. Maltese History in general is a field to which he is no beginner. *Il-Bolla Tal-Kollegġjata Tal-Għarb*, the name of his latest publication, is living proof of this.

In the westernmost part of Gozo lies the ancient village of Għarb. Anyone familiar with Arabic or with some of the terms that were used by our forebears until let's say a hundred years ago, would be able to tell you the the word '*Għarb*' is another term for the Romance word '*ponente*.' In fact, it is a byword for the Maltese '*punent*'. It was here that in 1774 the controversial Pope Clement XIV, who became notorious for his suppression of the Jesuits, established a 'collegiate' or 'college of canons' within the ancient parish church of Our Lady of the Visitation. At the time, the erection of the new *kollegġjata* made history since only the Matrice Church within the castle walls of Gozo's Cittadella had a college of canons. Għarb became the second church in Gozo with a number of priests affiliated to it promising to pray or sing the Liturgy of the Hours every single Sunday of the year and on feast days and of course solemnities.

The *Bolla* or Bull establishing the new college of canons for Għarb must have attracted the attention of Professor Vella a long time ago since back in 2005, he finished working on the cleaning and cataloguing of the archives of Għarb; Mgr Carmelo Gauci was then archpriest of the parish. His successor, Mgr Dr Joseph Sultana encouraged Vella to work on a new and fresh translation into Maltese of the collegial bull. The document had to wait until the time was ripe. With the support of the present archpriest Mgr Trevor Sultana, Professor Vella could see his dream come true and now the lover of history and Melitensia at large can enjoy reading a decent but attractive publication containing not only the Maltese rendition of the bull but also an interesting introduction to it. It contains ample genealogical and historical details together with photos in colour featuring the altars of

the parish church together with those of Pope Clement himself and the various priests and prelates who were the mind behind the establishment of a college of canons for Għarb's ancient parish community. Professor Vella traces the origins of the collegiate to its very roots confirming that it was the Axiaq family of priests who made it possible for Għarb to have its first canons ever.

Considering that such famous places of worship such as St Peter's in Rome and the Collegiate Church of St Peter in Westminster, known simply as Westminster Abbey, are both collegiate churches, reading *Il-Bolla Tal-Kollegġjata Tal-Għarb* becomes all the more interesting. The book is in fact a statement that even Gozo, though tiny and possibly insignificant in the eyes of many, still had and continues to have a number of priests who amidst the hustle and bustle of the contemporary age, find time to come together to pray and worship God through His own inspired Word, out of which the Psalms are perhaps the best and most perfect expression.

