

Book Review: Ir-Refugjati Maltin f'Għawdex fi Żmien il-Gwerra

Frank Bezzina and Charles Bezzina

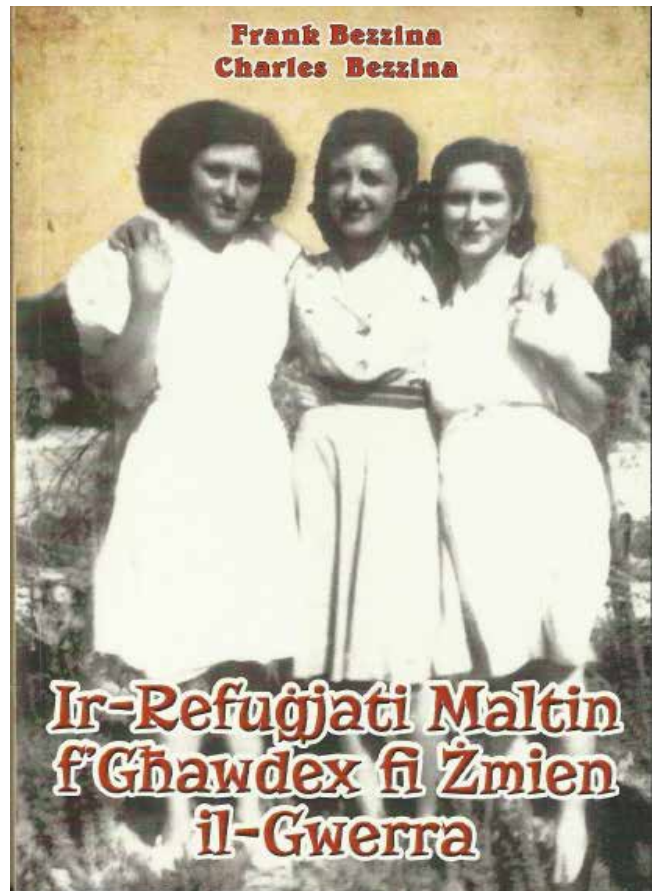
Gozo: A & M Printing. (2017); 119 pages

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

Charles Bezzina is in no need of introduction; his poetry inspired by the sea and by solitude is synonymous with Gozo and he is certainly the most renowned Gozitan poet with various anthologies to his name. However, poetry is not his only love. Charles takes after his father and strictly speaking, he has continued where his father had stopped. In the last decade or so, he has given us a couple of books about the Second World War and his native island of Gozo.

Ir-Refugjati Maltin f'Għawdex fi Żmien il-Gwerra is the name of his latest publication, which he co-authors with his late father who was a collector of documents related to Gozo and the last war, Bezzina goes into detail as he provides us with precious information about the various Maltese families and personalities who decided to move to Gozo during the war. Gozo, being a backwater, was much safer than Malta. The area around the Dockyard, Valletta and the Three Cities known as Cottonera were at the centre of attention during the Second World War. There are those of the opinion that Malta was the most bombed place during the war. Gozo was saved much of the trouble although as Bezzina narrates in this book and the previous ones about the war and Gozo, the island had its fair share of suffering. Nadur, Ta' Sannat and even Victoria were at times hit by the enemy. Still, Gozo was safer than the main island and the government encouraged many Maltese families to move to Gozo and settle on the island for the war years.

Frank, the author's father, narrates how he saw the first refugees from Malta arriving in Victoria in June 1940; Frank kept notes about the proceedings of the war in Gozo – had he not done so, much of what we know about Gozo during the war would have been lost for posterity. Both authors quote various sources such as the daily *Il-Berqa*, documents of the Police Department as well as other official reports to substantiate their arguments. Various shreds of information are gleaned from veterans of war and by word of mouth. Information about the whereabouts of the refugees in Marsalforn during the war and the building of the Victoria Male Branch of the Society of Christian Doctrine is also to be found in the book. The reminiscences by such notable personalities like President Emeritus of the Republic Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, himself a prolific writer, author and architect



André Zammit and Victor Wickman – just to mention a few – make for interesting reading. In this latter part of the book, the contributors write from their own experiences and mention by name the Gozitans with whom they mixed and shared their everyday life during these hard times for our islands.

Bezzina's book is interesting also from a social point-of-view. Although poverty was rampant in those days, the Gozitans – together with the Maltese refugees – were not idle at all. They organized plays on stage and participated in the procession with Baby Jesus that the members of the MUSEUM made it a point to coordinate every Christmas. The book has a foreword by war expert Laurence Mizzi and an introduction by ex-Minister for Gozo Anton Tabone. Many photos feature for the first time. The book was sponsored by the Bank of Valletta and has a useful bibliography. The arduous work that has been put into the book is a guarantee that makes the book an authoritative one on the subject it deals with and sheds light on an important period in the history of Gozo.