

P. BARTOLO, *X'Kien Gara Sew: Fis-Sette Giugno 1919*, Malta, Klabb Kotba Maltin, 1979, 232 pp., 16 pp. illus., £M1. 75.

Various publications on this subject have seen the light of day, the latest being Paul Bartolo's work. At last, we have a publication on the 7th June events which tries very hard to look at what actually and really happened without the use of rose-tinted glasses. This is done by the simple and, in my opinion, quite effective technique of reproducing relevant excerpts of the evidence tendered to the Commission of Enquiry — set up less than three months after — which heard the testimony of about 150 Maltese and English witnesses.

The book is divided logically into three parts. In the first part, Mr. Bartolo explains the situation prevalent in 1919 and thus prepares the setting for Part II which comprises a good three-fourths of the work. The crux of the subject lies here in the second part because it is here that evidence on the happenings of 7th to 10th June is presented to the reader(who is left to make up his own mind as to the varacity of the details being narrated and to the state of mind of the particular witness at the time. It is to the credit of the author that he does not lay any emphasis on any one particular point of view, be it be it *Nationalist*, *Labourite*, or *Imperialist* but tries his utmost to be impartial by allowing each point

of view to present its own particular evidence though he does comment on the Chairman's anglophobia. This care for objectivity is also evident in Mr. Bartolo's introductions to evidence. Mr. Bartolo also does his best not to be biased in Part III where he analyses what the Maltese gained as a result of the riots.

A very important part of the quoted testimony is that given by Dr. Enrico Mizzi who, in his evidence, showed quite clearly his sincerity, honesty and a refusal to compromise for convenience's sake. I hasten to add that his book is no adulation — partial or complete — of Dr. Mizzi and would like to point out that the qualities listed above have been attested to even by Mizzi's political opponents.

One point which seems to emerge from the evidence is that the police were not particularly effective in handling the situation or in trying to forestall some attacks which one expected were going to happen, the most glaring case being the attack on Colonel Francia's house. Nor does it seem that the police were very keen to remember faces — except of a very few — though whether this was the result of discontentment within the force or the fact that the Maltese all live in a small area and 'know' each other too well is a moot point. The evidence also seems to indicate that the military was badly led, and that the forces used were too small in number — on the first day's riots anyway; this could explain the soldiers' eagerness to fire into the crowds which so overwhelmingly out-

numbered them.

On the debit side one must remark that Wenzu Dyer's surname should have been properly spelt and the mistake on the Addolorata Cemetery Monument — where it is mis-spelt Deyer — should not have been perpetrated in a printed work. Also, a comprehensive index at the end of the book would have further enhanced this work.

All things considered, however, I think that this book should find a place on every sincere Maltese citizen's bookshelf although there is no place for it in the homes of those who persist in looking at events only through 'political lenses'.

Joseph F. Grima

J. MICALLEF, *L-istorja ta' Hal Safi*, Malta, Stamperija Indipendenza, 1980, 81 pp., £M1.

After his *Hal Luqa, Niesha u Grajietha* and *Rahal fi Gwerra*, Fr. Micallef has produced another highly readable monograph about one of Malta's smallest villages covering the period between the beginning of the fifteenth century to the present day. His idea seems to be the presentation of the texture and tenor of life of the common people and what really constituted *national* life in the past history of our islands. His aim is certainly not to re-write our island's history through the discovery of some long-lost material but rather to use even the material which used to be discarded by historiographers when

writing on a national scale and show how our forefathers really lived in their particular *rahal*. It should be pointed out that parochialism is not the scope behind this publication. The work itself is in fact valuable as a sociological study and has ample material which reflects the economic aspect in the life of the Maltese.

What emerges is a well-balanced and amply-documented presentation of life in one of our smallest and remotest villages and which, I think, is an instructive addition to our *Melitensia*.

Joseph F. Grima

W.L. ZAMMIT, *Malta Under the Cotoners 1660-1680*, Malta, Lux Press, 1980, 97 pp., £M1.

In this work, Mr. Zammit purports to show us the salient events in Maltese history during the two decades of Cotoner rule. There is no doubt that this work is conscientiously built up mainly on primary sources and the notes at the end of each chapter are something the serious reader of history really appreciates.

This very readable account contains interesting information about various topics including the Cotonera Lines, the hospital, St. John's Conventual Church, the Order's fleet and the Corso, relations between the Cotoners and the Bishops and the Inquisitors, and the Plague of 1675-6. The Style is mainly discursive with perhaps a lack of some pointed comments by the author; this is probably the result of this work being a con-

densed degree thesis although I have a sneaking feeling that the author has a subconscious admiration for the Cotoner brothers which may have precluded him from being too critical of them. The last chapter about financial difficulties in 1679-80 seems to be too abrupt and a mistake in the footnote on page 96 leaves the reader in the dark as to the number of the National Library Manuscript which is the source of the Appendix. The printing is neat and well-presented on good quality paper and it's a pity, really, that the author could not manage to publish his thesis in its entirety.

To sum up, this work is a very useful addition to our *Melitensia* and should serve as a very acceptable reference to the Cotoner period for a number of years to come.

Joseph F. Grima.
Bisu u sara fuq tħaliex. Birkirkara: CH. J. B. GRECH, 1979. Umbrellel fuq tas-Sliema: *Tifkriet tal-Gwerra*, Malta, Klabb Kotba Maltin, 1979, 196 pp. + 32 pp. illus., £M1.75.

An autobiographical account of life during the Second World War, this work has its sociological value as well. The book is written in simple direct language which easily makes the reader picture the events taking place. The statistical notes in the appendix are to be appreciated.

However, one cannot but help noticing that, notwithstanding the author's many reminiscences, he fails to mention, among note-

worthy events, the award of the George Cross to Malta in April 1942, in particular how this award was received by the people at large. I'm quite sure that news of this award did reach Sliema, so why the hush-hush? Also, I'm sure that the dates given for Carnival Sunday and Passion Wednesday of 1943 — 15th March and 1st April — have been mixed up since they're too near each other. One has also to point out that after all the minute details given — including heart-warming ones of old Aunt Karm kissing all the holy pictures when going to a makeshift 'shelter' during Malta's first air-raid, and of men sleeping at their homes fleeing to the shelters in panic and in their underpants after a rude awakening by bomb explosions — we are suddenly told on page 169 that the author had had a new baby brother. Since babies do not grow on trees, I fail to see why this fact was not even mentioned before. After all, showing how a pregnant mother under war conditions coped with a family of two boys and a husband after just having had another son killed would have enhanced the value of the book.

The book is neatly printed at the Lux Press. However, the spelling of some Maltese words such as *mit* for *mitt* (hundred) and *kulmeta* for *kull meta* (whenever) — to mention a few exemplars — is debatable and certainly not common usage. I presume that the blank pages on pages 24 and 158 denote main divisions in the book. If this is so, a note in the foreword should have explained such a

division of the subject-matter since unwary readers can easily think that they have a damaged copy on their hands.

On the whole, this book is worth reading and Mr. Grech deserves a pat

on the back for producing this welcome addition to the literature on civilian life in Malta during four of the most terrible years in the history of our islands.

Joseph F. Grima.

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