

Book Review:

D.M. Boswell and B.W. Beeley (compilers), *Malta*, revised edition, Clio Press, Oxford, 1998. xxvii, 277 pp. [World Bibliographical Series, vol. 64]
ISBN 1-85109-269. £52 stg.

This publication belongs to an important developing series that 'will eventually cover every country, each in a separate volume, comprising annotated entries on works dealing with its history, geography, economy and politics; and with its people, their culture, customs, religion and social organization' and other aspects relevant to individual countries. 'Each volume seeks to achieve, by use of careful selectivity and critical assessment of the literature, an expression of the country and an appreciation of its nature and national aspirations, to guide the reader towards an understanding of its importance. The keynote of the series is to provide, in a uniform format, an interpretation of each country that will express its culture, its place in the world and the qualities and background that make it unique'. The compilers of this volume have done just that for Malta. In this neat compendium of no less than 980 entries they manage to highlight the principal publications on Malta, covering a wide, continuous spectrum of relevant aspects from Geography and Geology flowing smoothly through Travel Guides, Flora and Fauna, Prehistory and History (including related areas such as Archaeology, Heraldry and Demography), Language, Religion, The Church, Anthropology, Social Conditions, Politics, Legal Structures, Foreign Relations, Economy, Tourism and Leisure, Trade and Industry, Transport and Communications, Labour Relations, The Environment, Education, Literature, The Arts, Mass Media and concluding with Reference Works.

As a similar publication had been compiled by J.R. Thackrah and published in 1985 this volume concentrates, generally, on the period 1983 - 1996, including works earmarked for the English-speaking readership and mostly published in Malta by Maltese authors. This constraint has meant the unfortunate exclusion of important works such as the facsimile edition of Quintinus' work of 1536, in Latin, *Insulae Melitae Descriptio*, published by the National Library of Malta in 1991, the proceedings, in Spanish, of an international meeting on Spanish-Maltese relations held in May 1990 and published the following year, Professor Albert Borg's ground-breaking study of Maltese grammar, *Ilsienna*, written in Maltese and published in 1988, also written in Maltese, M. Fsadni's, *Esperjenzi ta' Kittieb*, published in 1994, and *Missione a Malta*, a collection of studies, in Italian, on Malta's Prehistory edited by A.F. Anati and E. Anati and published in 1988. Most of these works contain important bibliographical references, in English, which would have been of interest to an English reading academic audience. Furthermore, although A. Cassola's *The Biblioteca Vallicelliana Regole per la Lingua Maltese* is, rightfully, included the same cannot be said of his later, equally important contribution to the same field, *Il Mezzo Vocabolario Maltese Italiano del '700* by the same publishers, Said International, because written in Italian. Other omissions, in English, include J.J. Cremona's *Malta and Britain: The early constitutions* (P.E.G., Malta, 1996) in the

section Constitution and Legal System (pp. 115-6), and, under Flora and Fauna (pp. 18-21), G.G. Lanfranco's *Maltese Mammals* (Malta, 1969). But then, the compilers' preferences in such a compilation are to be respected.

By and large the repositories of most of the included works are the Melitensia section of the University of Malta and the National Library in Valletta, thereby, complementing the earlier compilation that had tapped, rather, collections to be found in England such as that belonging to the Royal Commonwealth Society, now at Cambridge, and the similar collection in Rhodes House, Oxford.

One does not envy the authors who had to tackle the considerable problem of classifying works under specific titles, a task very efficiently handled even if the reader may not always agree with their solutions. Certain works can be classified under various headings. To give one example, the two volumes *Mdina. The Cathedral City of Malta: a reassessment of its history and a critical appreciation of its architecture and works of art* is equally a contribution to the art and architecture of Malta as it is to its history. Why it should appear solely under Architecture and not under Fine Arts or History is anybody's guess. Perhaps the solution would have been, in this case, to have a main reference in one of these sections but also to have cross-references in the other two. Admittedly, the title is descriptive enough for its contents to be identifiable in the Titles Index. This index (pp. 241-64) together with the Authors Index (pp. 233-40) and the Subjects Index (pp. 265-74) do go a long way to supplement the information in the main catalogue. Certain titles, however, could have been described in more detail, if only in the indexes. One instance is *Birgu. A Maltese Maritime City*, whose title must camouflage a whole gamut of subjects of interest pertaining to the twenty-one constituent chapters, including prehistory, medieval history, architecture, art, demography, folklore, ecclesiastical history, inquisition and so on; none of these are captured in the sieve of the various sub-sections. It must be said, however, that this limitation could well have been imposed on the compilers by the format of the book as dictated by that of the World Bibliographical Series to which it belongs.

A minor point of detail is that Maltese surnames written as they are in modern Maltese orthography look strange to Maltese readers and is contrary to standard practice which respects an older rendering. Apart from similar cosmetic remarks one must say that this volume is a solid contribution to Maltese bibliography without which any Melitensia collection would be deficient. The presentation is of the highest of standards with only very minor *lapsus calami*. It is a great asset not only for the specialized researcher into things Maltese but also for the general reader who is only interested in obtaining a bird's eye view of what constitutes Maltese culture in its various ramifications.

The volume is, very fittingly, dedicated to Dr Paul Xuereb, retired University of Malta Librarian, by way of acknowledging his life-long contribution to bibliography and to library development in Malta.