

# Emigration

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**O**n June 9, 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte appeared on Malta's horizon, ostensibly to ask for water for his fleet, and eventually received from Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch the capitulation of the island. Napoleon brought to an end an era that had endured for 268 years. In spite of the ease with which the French took Malta from the Knights of Saint John, their presence on the island lasted only two years and they spent much of that time behind the massive fortifications till General Vaubois capitulated to the British and to the Maltese on September 5, 1800.

The defeat of the French heralded the beginning of Malta's incorporation within the British Empire. On May 30, 1814, Europe's leaders met at Paris to formally sign a treaty. The Treaty of Paris aimed at bringing peace to a continent shattered by long years of wars. According to article seven of the Treaty, Malta was to pass formally under the sovereignty of the British monarch.

When Napoleon left Malta he took with him some 2,000 Maltese who had enlisted with the French and formed the so-called *Légion Maltaise*. Many of these recruits were to perish because of Napoleon's misadventures in Egypt, but R. Vadalà considers these men as the first arrivals of what was later to become one of the most populous Maltese colonies in North Africa.

Marc Donato believes that Maltese emigrants started leaving their islands as a consequence of 1798. He refers to the presence of Maltese immigrants in Algeria before 1830, the year when the French took over that country. Donato mentions a certain Eugène Fénech who was in Malta at the time of Napoleon's invasion. Fénech went to Paris to study medicine and his

degree helped him in no small way to make his name known in Malta. In later years Eugène and his brother Antoine left for Algeria. Eugène practised as a doctor in Bone while Antoine became mayor of the same town and a representative of France in Philippeville.

## The Imperial Bond

The transition from a self-contained island ruled for many years by the paternalistic Knights of St John to a colonial status within the vast British Empire was bound to produce radical changes in the life of the Maltese. It is for this reason that 1798 is considered as a milestone in Maltese history. That year marked the end of a Medieval system and paved the way for Great Britain to obtain a valuable base in the middle of the Mediterranean. The end of the rule of the Knights and the hurried departure of the French caused Malta to abandon centuries-old ties with Europe. What was previously an intensely Catholic state ruled by a Religious Order whose roots were Latin and aristocratic, became now a small colony and a strategic naval base. Great Britain, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and very distant, became the Mother Country of the Maltese.

The French interlude and the subsequent British connection put Malta's Mediterranean role in a secondary position of importance. Henceforth Malta's place was in the Empire and Imperial representatives in Malta made it clear that to their way of thinking Malta was a fortress with excellent harbours from which London intended to keep watch on what

was going on in the Mediterranean. That Malta was home to the Maltese was secondary to Imperial considerations. The men of Malta were employed to keep the military and naval facilities in good shape ready to defend the primacy of the British fleet in the Mediterranean. Those not involved in the maintenance of the Fortress were advised to seek employment overseas. Emigration was the only feasible solution for those unemployed who had no place within the defence system of the island.

The first years of British rule were relatively prosperous. Maltese harbours were busy owing to the international situation. In 1812 a Commission of Inquiry had noted that the Maltese had done well for themselves from 1800 till the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The presence of the British fleet in the Mediterranean had helped to reduce the piratical activity of the Barbary corsairs and Maltese entrepreneurs began to approach the shores of North Africa as traders when previously most Maltese had entered those areas as slaves captured by pirates. Agile sponararas owned by the Maltese were plying the narrow waters between Sicily, Malta and the neighbouring Arab lands. Maltese traders soon established contacts with the Arabs and with other Europeans in Algeria, Tunisia, Tripolitania and Egypt. The emigrant followed the trader and small colonies of Maltese came into being along the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

## Algeria and Tunisia

Maltese haphazard emigration to the western regions of North Africa proceeded rapidly after 1830 when the French under King Louis Philippe conquered Algeria thus opening that part of the Ottoman Empire to thousands of French and other European colons. Among the Europeans the Maltese were at one time the fourth largest group after the French, the Spaniards and the Italians.

Algeria was for many years the most

important country for emigrants from Malta. Indeed, by the 1850's more than half of those who had emigrated opted for that country. Miège, the French Consul in Malta, encouraged this movement because the French had difficulty in finding enough settlers from France itself and he considered the Maltese as safe foreigners because they had no political ambitions. Another prominent Frenchman who wished to see more Maltese emigrate to French North Africa was Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, who was in Malta in 1882. He spoke of the Maltese workers in Algeria as hard working people loyal to France and to the Catholic Church.

By 1847 the number of Maltese living in Algeria was estimated to be slightly over 4,000. In 1903 there were probably some 15,000 persons in Algeria who claimed Maltese ancestry, most of them living in Algiers, Philippeville and Bone. In a village near Bone called Allelik, a Gozitan immigrant family had a son on Christmas Day 1891. They named him Laurent. When he grew up Laurent Ropa became a well-known novelist whose works reflected the life of Maltese immigrants in Algeria.

On the east side of Algeria lay the territory now known as Tunisia which eventually was also drawn into the French sphere of influence. Since the shores of Tunisia are so close to Malta, settlements in that country began to take shape in various localities such as Tunis, Susa, Monastir, Mehdia and on the island of Jerba. By 1842 the Maltese population in Tunisia rose to 3,000 and in less than twenty years that number increased to 7,000. Paul Cambon, an influential French politician, urged the government in Paris to encourage more Maltese to settle in Tunisia because the Italians there were very numerous and Italy itself had schemes to take over the territory. Cambon referred to the Maltese in Tunisia as the "Anglo-Maltese Element" and he felt that the Maltese in North Africa owed their allegiance to France. In 1882 Cambon was administering Tunisia for France and he

wrote to the French consul in Malta to encourage more migrants from Malta to settle in Tunisia.

Close to Tunisia lay the two provinces of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. For centuries they languished under inefficient Turkish rule, but in 1911 the Italians occupied them and created a zone which they called Libia Italiana. As was the case with Algeria and Tunisia, Maltese traders had long-established links with the ports of Tripoli and Benghazi. They carried goods which Saharan traders had brought to the coast. There had been schemes for Maltese colonisation of Cyrenaica but the Italian occupation brought them to nothing. Unlike the French, the Italians did not like the presence of the Maltese because they feared British influence. They also had enough migrants of their own from the Mezzogiorno to meet their needs in Africa. It is probable that the number of Maltese in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica never rose to more than 3,000.

## The Maltese in Egypt

When the Treaty of Paris had been signed there were about 1,000 Maltese in Egypt. These included the survivors of those who had enlisted in Napoleon's Légion Maltaise. By 1882 Egypt was under the effective rule of the British who were to expand their sphere of influence over the Dark Continent from Cairo to the Cape. Politicians like Benjamin Disraeli had grasped the strategic value of Egypt and the Sudan especially when work on the digging of the Canal was finalised in 1869. By that time the Maltese population in Egypt had risen to 7,000. This number kept on increasing until just before the Second World War there were about 20,000 people of Maltese origin, mostly in Alexandria, Cairo, Suez, Rosetta and Port Said.

In the later years of the last century the Maltese in Egypt issued publications like "Melita" and "Egittu". In 1909 George J.

Vella edited a weekly newspaper under the name of "Li Standard tal-Maltin"; it ceased publication in 1912 but was resumed in 1919 and survived till 1924. Toni Said founded an association for the preservation and diffusion of the Maltese language. He tried to achieve this by publishing a literary review called "Il-Qari Malti", which appeared at intervals and survived till 1946.

There were other Maltese publications in Egypt supported by various societies. As the Maltese communities prospered, the children of the original immigrants received a sound education and many of them became accomplished linguists fluent in Maltese, English, French and Arabic. This flair for languages opened for them the doors of different careers. Maltese were to be found in consular offices and European companies operating in the Canal Zone found the polyglot Maltese very useful.

By 1926 Egypt had practically achieved independence from Great Britain though British forces were still stationed there. The Maltese, like other aliens living in that land, felt secure as long as there were British soldiers guaranteeing their lives and property. This dependence on external forces made many immigrants nervous and there were some who soon after the end of the Second World War started packing their belongings to seek a new home somewhere else, even if Egypt was the only country in the world that they knew. When the fateful year 1956 arrived the Maltese joined the mass departure of foreigners and sought refuge in Great Britain and in Australia where they began to rebuild their lives again.

## Corfù, Constantinople and Smyrna

The Ionian islands became a British protectorate in 1815. The British encouraged Maltese immigration into the islands because they needed workers and also to strengthen their position in an area which felt distinctly Greek. Sir Thomas

Maitland wanted migrants from Malta because he knew that they would be loyal supporters of the British connection.

In 1901 there were 1,000 people in Corfù who claimed Maltese ancestry. In Cephalonia the Maltese were just over 200. In 1864 the islands were returned to Greece and Maltese interest in the Ionian islands waned. Some of the Maltese decided to re-emigrate; this time their destination was Great Britain. They went to Cardiff where their descendants are still living. But the original Maltese colony in Corfù did not vanish. Two villages still bear names with a Maltese connotation: Maltezika (Malta) and Cozzella (Gozo). In the latter the Franciscan Sisters of Malta opened a convent and a school in 1907.

Constantinople and Smyrna also attracted a number of Maltese migrants. During the middle years of the nineteenth century the Sublime Porte had opened the capital to European traders because the Sultan needed Western cash and expertise. The Maltese were attracted by the prospects of work and trade in the Empire. In Constantinople they congregated in the district of Galata where they frequented the church of St Peter. R. Vadalà mentions two prominent Maltese who made a name for themselves in Constantinople: Dr Lewis Mizzi and Dr Parnis. The former was a well-known lawyer who also edited a newspaper, "The Levant Herald", while the latter was a legal adviser to the Sultan. Vadalà suggests that at the beginning of this century there were about 3,000 Maltese in Constantinople.

The sea-port of Smyrna (Izmir) on the Aegean coast of Anatolia was the other important town where some Maltese lived. There were about 2,000 Maltese living in Smyrna at the turn of the century, but tension between the Turks and the Europeans kept on rising until 1922 when the Young Turks turned on the Christians who fled in their thousands. By 1932 the Turkish leader, Kemal Ataturk, had practically expelled all aliens. Some of the Maltese, none of whom had been born in

Malta, found refuge in the island of their forefathers.

## Gibraltar and Marseilles

At the westernmost extremity of the Mediterranean lies the Rock of Gibraltar which became British in 1713. The presence of the navy attracted many foreigners, including Maltese, who found work at the dockyard and in the running of small businesses. By 1885 there were about 1,000 Maltese living in Gibraltar but in later years few Maltese went there. However, unlike the history of Maltese settlements in Moslem lands, the Maltese colony never became extinct and the descendants of the first immigrants from Malta are still to be found living in Gibraltar.

Still in the western basin of the Mediterranean lies the great French seaport of Marseilles. Some Maltese who had emigrated to the Maghreb eventually settled in there while others left directly from Malta to Marseilles in the hope of finding work in the busiest port of the Mediterranean. By the end of the nineteenth century more than 600 Maltese were earning their living in Marseilles as stevedores, artisans and general labourers. From 1919 to 1929, 4,172 Maltese were recruited to work on building sites in the regions which had been devastated by the war. Many of these went back to Malta once their contracts had expired, but some did stay in Marseilles. According to Angelo Camilleri, a priest from Gozo working with the Maltese in Marseilles, in 1929 there were about 3,000 Maltese in Marseilles. It was in that year that he acquired a chapel for his community. Today Marseilles must hold a considerable number of people with Maltese ancestry because many of the Maltese who were living in Algeria and Tunisia sought refuge there after they were compelled to leave North Africa.

## South America

Emigration from Malta was for many years haphazard and without any serious planning; nor were those who wished to emigrate prepared for life in a foreign country. There was no one willing to help financially those who had the will to emigrate but had no cash to realise their wish. When in 1912 a special offer appeared in the Maltese press of a free trip to Brazil, interest was naturally aroused. Some Brazilian landlords had contacted a local agent to recruit workers for their coffee plantations. The offer was tempting: free transport from Marseilles to Santos with work and accommodation guaranteed.

The first batch left for Brazil on March 28, 1912. Another group left on April 18. In all 179 migrants, including women and children, left on what was naively described as "the founding of our little Malta beyond the ocean". The first arrivals were accommodated on the fazenda of San José de Fortaleza while the others were put on the fazenda of Santa Eulalia.

The Brazilian landlords were not impressed by the newcomers. None had any training for the work they were expected to do and they had no interpreter with them. The Maltese soon found out that food and wages were conditional on the amount of work they were able to do in one day. They also complained about the local food. As had happened before, they soon broke their contract and drifted towards the cities, destitute and very lonely. By August 1913 the Brazilian venture had ended in dismal failure.

In general the Maltese failed to grasp the potential of South America where millions of Europeans were emigrating. As has happened so often in Malta emigration became a political issue and the pro-British party was against interest in the vast regions of Latin America because these were places beyond the pale of the British Empire. The failure of the Brazilian project thwarted any real attempt at establishing a permanent foothold in that

part of the world. In 1924 Senator A. Cassar Torreggiani went to Paris to contact government officials from Argentina. The senator's report was presented to the Maltese Government on July of that year. According to that report Argentina welcomed agricultural workers who would be housed at the expense of the state. Politicians like Enrico Mizzi and Ignazio Panzavecchia supported emigration to Argentina even though Mizzi complicated the matter by saying that Italian was a useful language to learn because it was so similar to the Spanish language spoken in Argentina. Nothing was done to direct the flow of Maltese emigration to Latin America.

## Emigration to the USA

Europe after 1918 was a continent of confusion. Millions of displaced Europeans felt they had had enough of the quarrelsome nations in the Old Continent, and opted for a new life in the New World. In the first four months of 1920, 3,461 Maltese had applied for their passports stating that their final destination was the U.S.A. However by 1921 the American authorities checked the unrestricted entry of aliens by enforcing a Provisional Immigration Measure on May 19, 1921. This was also known as the First Quota Law and it limited the number of immigrants to 3% of the total of foreign-born persons as they were in 1910. Maltese immigrants prior to 1910 were few in number. Malta was placed with a group of small countries such as Andorra and Monaco. These were to share between them the grand total of eighty-six immigrants each year.

Before the First Quota Law interfered with the Maltese migratory movement to the U.S.A., a few thousand Maltese had settled in New York, Detroit and San Francisco. Detroit had the largest Maltese community not only in the U.S. but in the whole of North America. By the middle

1920's the Maltese in Michigan numbered 5,000. They were mostly men working in the automobile industry. Eventually they organised themselves into various associations and published some newspapers such as *Il Malti-American* and *L'Ecu Malti*.

Although the Maltese in New York were not as numerous as those in Detroit, yet their presence in that city preceded that in Detroit. In 1830 a certain Carmelo Caruana had a business in New York where he was known as "The Merchant Prince". Jean Piper, writing in the "Brooklyn Daily Eagles" of August 16, 1925, said that in that year there were 2,000 Maltese living in New York, spread out in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx.

A report published by the Malta Emigration Committee in 1900 stated that the Maltese in California numbered then about 200. A year later Charles Mattei claimed that he had helped 500 emigrants to settle in North America, most of whom had settled in San Francisco. In 1915 the Maltese in San Francisco had acquired a hall in the Bay View District which was converted in 1922 into a chapel and was given the title of St Paul of the Shipwreck Maltese Church.

By the late 1920's the Maltese living in the areas of San Bruno and Butcherstown had increased to about 5,000. A certain Francis Grech opened on February 1, 1930, the Maltese Club of San Francisco and in less than five years the Club had 750 members. However the crash of the Stock Market in 1929, coupled with severe restrictions on immigration, severely hampered the growth of the Maltese communities in the U.S. The rate of returnees was high. Within the ten-year period, April 1921 – March 1931, there were 2,891 departures from Malta to the U.S.A. Of these 2,188 came back, most of them beaten by the Depression.

When the dust of war began to settle down after 1945 an enormous movement of displaced people began taking place on

a pattern not unlike that of 1918. In Malta the situation was rendered more difficult by the intention of the British Government to run down the facilities of the Services with significant redundancies looming on a dark horizon. Again, emigration was thought to be the easiest way out of the two major problems facing the island: over-population and unemployment. Up to 1947 Malta was under direct colonial rule from Whitehall and the will to develop the island industrially was not there yet. Between 1947 and 1948 a little more than a thousand Maltese left their homes for a new life and security in employment. These migrants, among the first to travel directly by ship from Malta to the U.S.A., settled in the traditional receiving cities such as Detroit, San Francisco and New York where they were likely to be helped by friends and relatives.

In February 1950 the American Consulate in Malta was again reopened. According to the Emigration Report of the time the Consul was issuing visas at the rate of 200 a month. Between 1950 and 1952 3,146 emigrants left for destinations in the U.S.A., but again restrictive legislation was enacted in 1952 which established a nominal annual quota of 100 entrants for all colonial territories of the British Commonwealth. This enactment was the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Law, commonly known as the McCarran-Walter Act.

On the first of December 1965 an amendment was made which abolished the National Origins Quota System, but the effects of the amendment did take a long time to be felt. The annual intake of emigrants from Malta from 1954 onwards never reached the 300 mark.

## The Call of Canada

North of the American border lay the vast open spaces of British North America. During the nineteenth century very few Maltese had ventured that far, though a

successful businessman from Malta, Louis Shickluna had settled in St Catherine's, Ontario, in 1836. Shickluna had his own shipbuilding yard and was a very well-known person when he died in 1880.

In 1910 the Malta Emigration Committee stated that British Columbia was a region capable of absorbing many of Malta's unskilled labourers. There had been a few isolated cases of immigrants from Malta who had settled in British Columbia. Others were to be found in Toronto and Winnipeg. The major obstacle to emigration to Canada at the time was the expense involved. Among those who managed to make it, many were illiterate, unable to speak English and unprepared for life in that part of the world. The class of emigrants needed in Canada were farmers with capital. The unemployed labourers in Malta were labourers with no capital.

Between January 1909 and May 1912 82 prospective emigrants had applied for passports to go to Canada. Later on such applications were on the increase, and between January and July 1913, a total of 471 had actually left for Canada. A gentleman on the Emigration Committee, Dr Charles Mattei, made an extensive tour of Canada in 1912 to prepare the way for more emigrants. According to Mattei the Maltese could be easily employed in the canneries, in market-gardening, in the building industry and in the construction of railways.

In 1911 a few young men from Malta had found jobs in Winnipeg. Their success encouraged others to follow. A relevant comment on Winnipeg came from "The Malta Herald" of May 23, 1912:

"The rapid growth of Winnipeg during the last three years is almost unimaginable. From every country in the world the tide of emigration is steadily pouring to that place. Many are those here in Malta who are anxious to go there, but owing to the lack of money necessary to defray the voyage expenses, they cannot realise their wish."

After the end of the First World War the migratory movement from Malta to Canada began gaining momentum. Between

1918 and 1920 the number of Maltese emigrants was 611. However in 1919 the Canadian authorities imposed the Literacy Test and a year later foreigners entering the country were expected to have sufficient cash to help them settle in their place of destination. No immigrant was to enter Canada unless he had travelled directly from his own country. Since at the time there was hardly any direct shipping between Malta and Canada, this condition effectively barred many from reaching Canada.

In 1922 it was decided that no immigrant of any Asian race was to be allowed into Canada unless he carried on him the sum of 250 dollars. Eventually even the Maltese were required to have such money on them. A Canadian official told Henry Casolani, the Superintendent of Emigration in Malta, that he thought that the Maltese were physically unfit for life in a cold country like Canada and therefore their entry was not to be encouraged. In 1923 Ottawa issued a Privy Council Order which indicated the categories of British subjects allowed entry. That order specifically excluded the Maltese. In his report on emigration for 1930, Casolani complained that the Maltese alone seemed to fall victims to Canada's exclusion order: "All British, thousands of Italians and other European nationals are welcome. The Maltese alone are excluded."

Casolani called Canada a "*terra clausa*". He found Canadian indifference to the Maltese hard to understand, especially as the numbers of Maltese living in Canada in the 1920's were insignificant. Between April 1921 and March 1931, 631 Maltese had entered Canada. Of these 335 decided to come back to Malta, leaving a balance of 296 for ten years, or less than thirty Maltese migrants for every year in the period under consideration.

In 1939 the Maltese in Canada could not have been more than a thousand. They were mainly in Toronto in the area known as the Junction. There they had their own Church which had been acquired through

the initiative of their own priest, Alphonse Cauchi. He had also given his support to the creation of the Maltese-Canadian Society of Toronto which was to become a permanent feature in the life of the Maltese in that city.

On March 1, 1948, Malta's newly-elected Prime Minister Paul Boffa declared in Parliament that Canada had accepted 500 construction workers from Malta. These workers left on May 3 and on June 16, on the two ships "Marine Perch" and "Vulcania". By the end of March of that same year the Report on Emigration for 1948 showed that nearly 3,000 had registered to emigrate to Canada and by the end of April that figure had increased to 15,000.

In 1951 the number of assisted emigrants who actually arrived in Canada was 1,607. Statistics show that this was the highest figure ever achieved in the migratory movement from Malta to Canada though in 1964-1965 a total of 2294 Maltese went to live in Canada.

Up to 1957 the selection procedure of emigrants wishing to go to Canada was largely based on the sponsorship system. After that year the policy of Open Placement was introduced. A Canadian selection team used to interview applicants in Malta even if these had no one to sponsor them. If approved they were sent to receiving camps and jobs were provided. Three years later married men were allowed, for the first time, to proceed to Canada accompanied by their families. Those who chose to go on their own were usually joined by their dependants in less than a year. In 1962 there were only 371 emigrants going to Canada but 133 of them had been allowed to go because they had been approved under the Open Placement Scheme and they were able to take their families with them.

1962 saw the introduction of new immigration regulations. The Canadians finally decided to abandon all restrictions emanating from reasons based on race or other considerations while accepting

applicants solely on grounds of education, health, conduct and skill. Hence emigrants wishing to enter Canada no longer needed a sponsor nor had they to be accepted under the Open Placement Scheme. This meant that more Maltese were able to emigrate to Canada. In the period 1963-1965 there was an upsurge of 3,199 emigrants. Interest in Canada continued and by 1974 about 17,000 Maltese had made their new home there since the end of the Second World War. This made Canada the third most popular receiving country for Maltese emigrants after Australia and the United Kingdom.

What made emigration to Canada successful was the decision to base the migratory policy on the family unit. A man accompanied by his wife and children was bound to make a greater effort to succeed in a new land, a policy which brought stability to the Maltese ethnic group.

## Maltese in the United Kingdom

During the heyday of post-war mass emigration from Malta, Great Britain was the second most important receiving country. Emigration to the United Kingdom did not have as long a history as emigration to the U.S.A., Canada, Australia or North Africa. At the beginning of the twentieth century very few Maltese thought of settling in the United Kingdom, even if a tiny nucleus of Maltese immigrants had been forming in London in and around the Commercial Road. A Maltese priest from Valletta, Innocent Apap, was working in London in 1907 and from his correspondence we know that in 1912 he organised a gathering for his fellow countrymen and he gave them lectures in their own language during Lent of that year.

The First World War had brought the Maltese and the British that little bit closer and in Malta a number of mixed marriages had taken place. After the Armistice many Maltese brides accompanied their husbands



when they went back home, giving rise to an interesting Anglo-Maltese community in places with sea-going tradition such as London, Southampton and Portsmouth. The Anglo-Maltese element kept on increasing till well after the Second World War.

Between 1919 and 1929 there were 3,354 Maltese officially listed as having emigrated to the United Kingdom, though 1,445 of these are known to have come back in later years. Even those listed as having stayed in Great Britain did not actually stay in the country but moved on to the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and to other parts of the Empire. [The report on emigration for 1918-1920 states:]

"It may seem strange that in the present unsettled state of the labour market in England, 225 Maltese emigrants should have gone to the United Kingdom between Armistice Day and March 31, 1920. On a small scale a certain number of Maltese have always filtered to the Mother Country. They are attracted by friends, or go to join relatives who are there, and they belong as a rule, either to the Dockyard or Domestic classes". }

Emigration from Malta to the United Kingdom intensified after 1946. By 1974 more than 30,000 had left Malta for Great Britain. This intake is second only to that of Australia. That figure includes those emigrants who had been processed by the Emigration Department in Malta. Those who had emigrated on their own initiative or arrived in the United Kingdom not directly from Malta (as many Maltese from North Africa did), are not included in that figure.

For many years no formal arrangements were made to regulate the flow of emigrants from Malta to Great Britain. An applicant was allowed to go if he was considered suitable for settlement overseas and had a good conduct. He only paid one fourth of the passage money and was given a passport free of charge. Those who did not apply for financial assistance were free to go without too much formality.

On November 1, 1961 the government at Westminster introduced the Immigration and Deportation Bill which took effect on

July 1, 1962. This was an effective measure to control the entry of Commonwealth citizens. The Emigration Report for 1962 noted that "Paradoxically the new British legislation would appear to have had an opposite effect on Maltese migration in as much as the number of emigrants admitted during the year was the largest for some years." The number referred to was that of 1,129 immigrants. That ascending trend continued for a few years. Only in 1967 did the total intake fall under the one thousand mark. From that year onwards Maltese emigration to the United Kingdom kept falling until by the end of the seventies it became insignificant. }

## Pioneers in Australia

In strict geographical terms the very distant land of Australia should have been the last place to attract Maltese migrants. Attract it did, in thousands. In 1991 it was estimated that there were 57,778 people in Australia whose births had been registered in Malta. According to the Melbourne-based newspaper "Il-Maltija" of October 1, 1991, there were in Australia about 119,504 people of Maltese ethnic origin.

It is probable that some Maltese reached the shores of the "*terra incognita australis*" soon after the Treaty of Paris (1814) when the Maltese Islands joined the same British Empire of which Australia was a major possession. Of course these unknown arrivals by no means point to the beginning of Maltese emigration to that part of the world.

Although before 1900 Maltese interest in Australia was mild and sporadic there were those who felt that Queensland was the part of Australia capable of absorbing Malta's surplus population. Alexander Balbi and two brothers, Joseph and Charles Busuttill, had done well in Queensland where the sugar industry was expanding and workers were in such a demand that in spite of the Australian determination to keep Asians out some of

the landlords were recruiting workers from the Solomon Islands.

The first governor of Queensland, Sir George Bowen, knew the Maltese and he preferred to have them on the sugar plantations rather than the Kanakas. It is for this reason that he wrote to Malta suggesting that Maltese workers should be sent on contract to his State. According to C. Price, some Maltese were interested but there was general ignorance in Malta at the time about Australia. The problem of how to finance transport to Queensland was also difficult and Bowen's suggestion eventually came to nothing.

It is not correct to state that the Maltese had ignored the possibility of establishing some contact with Australia. Some twenty years after Bowen's suggestion a Maltese businessman, Francesco Decesare, was invited to go to Australia to inquire about the possibility of sending Maltese workers there. Again it was the landlords of Queensland who showed the greatest interest because opposition to the presence of the Kanakas was growing and the landlords needed the Maltese to fill the place of the Kanakas.

The mission of Decesare resulted in the sending of the first organised group of Maltese emigrants we know of to date. About seventy men left Malta for Australia in October 1883 on board the ship S.S. Nuddea. They had a priest with them, Ambrose Cassar. They travelled as steerage passengers and disembarked at Brisbane some six weeks later. From Brisbane they were taken to Townsville and were given work on a five-year contract. Fr Cassar wrote to Malta to complain that the Maltese were not receiving the same wages as other European workers. Some complained about the hot weather and others were downright homesick. By the end of 1884 most of them had broken their contract and drifted towards Sydney. But Fr Cassar himself stayed in Australia for the rest of his forty-five years. He worked among immigrants of different nationalities as he was conversant with various

languages. He also encouraged some of his own relatives to emigrate to Australia and their descendants are now living in and around the city of Mackay.

## Emigration to Australia before 1939

Australians were acutely aware of the important decision they had to make regarding the future of their country: populate or perish. In 1912 Percy Hunter, Director of Immigration for New South Wales, stated that it was Australia's goal to swell its population to twenty million. Another Australian who was also the president of the Immigration League, Richard Arthur, wrote in 1912 to some politicians in Malta suggesting that the Maltese had better forget all about other countries such as Brazil and Canada and think of Australia as the land of their future. The suggestion had its supporters in Malta as the comment of "The Daily Malta Chronicle" of September 28, 1912 rightly shows:

"Whom could Australia admit after Englishmen, with greater advantage to herself than emigrants from Malta? We have the same flag as Englishmen and Australians. Our skin is about as fair, except for the tanning done by a semi-tropical sun. We are as proud of our place in the Empire as they are of theirs. Our physique is all that could be desired by the most fastidious selectors of immigrants. Our moral values are above dispute."

Dr Richard Arthur had first-hand knowledge of the Maltese as he had been on a visit to Malta. He claimed that Australia should admit the Maltese especially in the more remote regions where they could withstand the climate better than Englishmen. Such writing sounded like sweet music to those who championed Malta's British connection. By emigrating to Australia Malta would be helping to keep that large island under the British Crown and would also strengthen its own ties with Great Britain. The teaching of the English language would receive a great boost and the supremacy of Italian would

be done away with.

One politician who agreed with the pro-British platform was Sir Gerald Strickland. Although born in Malta in 1861 he had a British father and had connections with Australia where he had been governor of various States. On becoming Prime Minister of Malta in 1927, besides strengthening Malta's ties with the Empire and reducing cultural ties with Latin Europe to a minimum, Strickland also sought to establish a Maltese colony in Australia. On February 22, 1928 he informed Malta's Legislative Assembly that his Australian friend, Sir James D. Connolly had written to him to let him know that the Australian Government was ... "strongly disposed to encourage Maltese emigration to the Berkeley tableland, a portion of Australia with a climate very similar to that of Malta, with an assured rainfall and a very fertile soil."

Some Australians were willing to accept Maltese immigrants with one important proviso: they were to stay in the outback and avoid at any cost the cities. Thus when Richard Arthur wrote about allowing the Maltese into Australia he had in mind the vast and empty regions of North Queensland and the Northern Territory. He was certainly not referring to cities like Sydney and Melbourne. There was strong opposition from the trade unions against foreigners competing for city jobs. A letter, written in 1912 by a Maltese living in Melbourne, illustrates this point:

"No Australian or Englishman will work with the Maltese. We are beginning to feel ashamed of ourselves on this account. In Sydney the Maltese are utterly cold-shouldered. A few days ago I read that the unions decided against Maltese membership."

It was only four years after this letter that the Maltese were subjected to a nation-wide series of humiliations. Some 214 emigrants, hailing mostly from Gozo, had departed for Australia on board the French steamer "Gange". The world was at war and many young Australians had lost their lives in Europe. As the "Gange" approached the port of Fremantle, the Australian Prime Minister, W. Hughes, was conducting a vigorous campaign in

favour of conscription. His opponents raised the alarm about the Maltese who were about to enter the country when the Prime Minister was intending to send young Australians to the fronts. The ship was not allowed to enter any Australian port but was told to proceed to Noumea in the French island of New Caledonia. The Maltese were kept there for three months. Even when they returned to Sydney their trial was not over yet. They were transferred to an old ship away from public view until employment was found for them.

The "Gange" affair was discussed at the sitting of the Council of Government in Valletta on January 13, 1917. During that meeting a certain E. Bonavia complained that

"there has been for some time past a good deal of unrest in Australia in the matter of importation of labour and a strong public feeling has all along existed against any newcomers who could, with or without reason, be regarded with suspicion as people who were willing to work long hours for low wages. They are not looked upon with any friendly eye by the Labour unions."

By 1919 Australia had stopped the entry of Maltese except for wives and dependent children of Maltese nationals who were already permanently living in the country. Those few who were admitted were urged not to walk in groups or speak Maltese aloud. They were strongly advised to avoid the cities.

Between April 1, 1920, and March 31, 1921, there were 278 Maltese who expressed their intention to emigrate to Australia. Even before President Harding of the U.S.A. had passed the First Quota Law in 1921, Australia was already receiving the highest intake of emigrants from the Maltese Islands.

In May 1922, Malta's chief spokesman on emigration, Henry Casolani, was in London on an official visit to contact representatives of Canada, U.S.A. and Australia. Casolani met Percy Hunter and urged a more liberal attitude from the Australians towards the Maltese. Casolani noted:

"I am glad to be in a position to state positively that Mr Hunter's views are very favourable to our migrants."

John McWhae, the Agent General for the State of Victoria, was not convinced. He was a staunch supporter of the White Australia Policy and for him White meant British and British meant what it said: a person born in Great Britain of pure British parentage. To McWhae the Maltese were aliens and he told Casolani that he intended to keep all aliens away from Australia to make sure that his country remained Anglo-Saxon.

In 1925 McWhae was back in Australia more determined than ever in his opposition to foreign immigration. At the same time there was a recrudescence of anti-Maltese articles in the Melbourne press. In 1924, Adelaide witnessed some ugly disturbances and when the police intervened it was revealed that among those arrested were some immigrants from Malta. In Sydney and in Perth people were warned about the imminent take over of Australia by hungry undesirables from Southern Europe. Organisations speaking on behalf of returned soldiers insisted that any available jobs should go to those who had fought for king and country.

As far as the Maltese were concerned there was no imminent danger from their part of taking over "the Lucky Country". In 1922 there were less than 2,000 Maltese in Australia. (Malta Government Gazzette, Vol. XIV, no.36). At that time the entry of Maltese into Australia was regulated by the quota system which allowed 260 immigrants each year. In later years the quota was abolished and by 1927 the Maltese population in Australia was near the 3,000 mark. In that same year Casolani published his book "*L-Emigrazzjoni tal-Maltin*" where he still complained about the prejudices against the Maltese which were rampant in some sections of the press in Australia. The author urged the Maltese not to be discouraged by such prejudices. In a later book published in 1930 under the title "Awake Malta" Casolani insisted on

the need of preparing those who intended to emigrate and that those who were selected should settle in the country not in the crowded cities.

Casolani also insisted on three basic points in order to make Maltese emigration successful: First, educate prospective emigrants. Second, appoint an official representative to speak and act on behalf of the Maltese living in a foreign country. Third, encourage priests to settle permanently in areas inhabited by the Maltese.

It did take some years before these suggestions were taken up by the Maltese authorities. The choice of Captain Henry Curmi in 1929 was a good one. Curmi was in Australia in that year and his arrival coincided with the Depression. He therefore warned the Maltese authorities against sending too many emigrants while the situation remained as it was. In 1930 no new passports were issued for would-be migrants unless they had close relatives in Australia who would be willing to help them out during the initial months of their arrival.

Although Captain Curmi had to give up his work soon after his arrival in Australia because of failing health he was back as Malta's commissioner on June 8, 1936. At that time there were about 4,000 Maltese, mostly in Queensland, but there were other communities in various States of Australia. In 1937 Curmi was in New South Wales and he found out that the Maltese in that State actually outnumbered those in Queensland. Curmi was of the opinion that New South Wales and Victoria were to become the major focal points of Maltese immigration into Australia. During his visits to the two States, Curmi noted that the Maltese did not stick to one particular type of work. Many worked in factories, hotels, shops, and on the wharves. Others owned small businesses such as general stores, groceries, cafes and fish shops.

In the western suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne Curmi noticed how successful Maltese market-gardeners were. He thought

that some Maltese, particularly the Gozitans, had holdings which in 1937 were worth £10,000 or more. He wrote:

"It is a pleasure to mention that I have seen a poultry farm and a dairy farm each owned and kept by a Maltese and both of which are models of their kind. The success of the Maltese as market-gardeners is proverbial and landowners have written to me to obtain settlers from Malta because they knew that the Maltese have proved to be a success in their avocation."

A great achievement for Captain Curmi was when in March 1938 the Australians finally decided to accord British status to the migrants from Malta. It was a belated decision but a very welcome one at that time. Casolani had worked hard for a British status and Curmi reaped the results. A British status for the Maltese meant that henceforth applicants from Malta were considered on a par with applicants from the United Kingdom. There were no objections to their being approved for entry into Australia except that they had to abide by the general rules concerning health and general adaptability. By 1938 the negative effects generated by the Depression were nearly over and as the economy improved, Australia began recruiting more workers. The Government of Malta was offering financial assistance by paying half the passage of those families who had been nominated by sponsors already living in Australia.

## Post-War Migration

In 1947 the Maltese were again granted self-government and the ensuing elections returned the Labour Party to power. The new government faced the old and double problem of an expanding population due to numerous marriages contracted as soon as hostilities were over and the lack of employment because of the redundancies made by the British forces. Peace brought the same old problems to an island that knew much of its prosperity to fighting in the Mediterranean region. This was the prediction Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of*

*Malta* had in mind when he said that nothing was more welcome to Malta than wars. It came as no surprise to anybody when Paul Boffa's administration declared emigration as "the safety-valve" of the nation.

One of the first moves of the new government was to create a Department of Emigration with a minister and director responsible for it. A Standing Committee was formed to advise the minister on how to encourage the Maltese to emigrate. This Standing Committee was described by John Axisa, the director of emigration, in these words: "It is today a powerful element in the formation of Government policy with regard to emigration." In just over a year after taking power the Labour Government needed all the advice it could get because on its books it had more than 25,000 Maltese who had registered in order to emigrate.

In September 1948, a Ministerial Mission left for Canada, U.S.A. and Australia. The minister responsible for emigration, J.J. Cole and his director, J. Axisa, obtained from the Australian Government an agreement on passage assistance which was <sup>1</sup> to take effect as from January 1, 1949. The Australians also agreed to nominate a <sup>2</sup> large number of workers for important State projects. This made the emigration of those with no one willing to sponsor them possible. There was also an agreement on the inception of a Child Migrant Scheme <sup>3</sup> which had been in operation with the United Kingdom for many years and which was to be extended to Malta with the cooperation of Church authorities in Malta and in Australia.

By 1953 a Maltese migrant going to Australia was paying the nominal fare of £10. There was also an allowance of £20/£30 to the dependants of migrants when the heads of families were emigrating ahead of their wives and children. These financial concessions had removed the great barrier which had hindered the development of emigration to distant lands on a significant scale. Direct shipping from

from Malta to Australian ports also facilitated the transport of thousands of migrants. This was even more improved when emigrants started leaving Malta by air. Besides such obvious advantages emigration to Australia received a considerable boost when the Archbishop of Malta, Michael Gonzi, went on a pastoral visit to see the Maltese in Australia in 1953. The effect of this visit is clearly seen in the emigration figures for 1954 when 11,447 assisted emigrants left Malta, with 8,470 preferring to settle in Australia. This was the highest figure ever achieved in the history of emigration.

Yet only two years after that exodus the trend of emigrations to Australia went on a downward direction. In 1957 the number of those who left for Australia with an assisted passage was only 1,286. This trend lasted for three years, when during the 1960's emigration to Australia was again on the increase. It was at this time when some people began to have second thoughts on how wise it was to accept emigration as an inevitable fact of life.

Plans began to be considered for the economic development of the island, though a political solution had to be found so that the Maltese would free themselves of the humiliation of being a colony. The great British Empire was now only a weak shadow of what it was before 1939. The British wanted to retain their bases but did not feel bound to provide the same amount of jobs they formerly generated. If Malta were to take the road to economic development, emigration had to be controlled and the Maltese people were to have the full reins of their own country in their own hands.

This way of thinking began to attract a lot of people. Not only fewer people wanted to emigrate but some of those who had gone began returning home. The emigration figure of 1,286 for 1957 has to be examined against the number of returnees for the same year which was 1,097. Unfortunately words were not matched by facts. Many of the returnees

had to reluctantly admit that the Maltese situation was still in a state of flux and they went back. For much of the sixties there was a lot of political turmoil coupled with widespread industrial unrest. All this made life unpredictable. The very year of Malta's independence, 1964, saw the exit of 8,788 of its citizens. Again it was Australia that received about 59% of Maltese wishing to settle abroad.

In 1960 the Single Young Women Migrants Scheme (SYWMS) was launched to help ladies in the age-group between eighteen and thirty-five years to emigrate. Mass emigration had produced an unpleasant side effect. Malta, and to a larger extent Gozo, became a country where young women did not find enough male partners. In 1960 there were more than 9,000 girls of marriageable age than there were young men. In some villages in Gozo the young male population had vanished. The Governments of Malta and Australia enlisted the support of Church authorities to redress this imbalance, especially when on the Australian side the problem was the reverse. The Church in Malta, through its Emigrants' Commission which had been active since 1950, helped to run this scheme in conjunction with the Female Catholic Immigration Committee of Australia.

In 1962 Church and State collaborated in working the Child Migration Scheme which has been already referred to. Children from local institutions and others with no particular bright prospects for their future, were sent to institutions in Australia where they received a good education and were trained for particular jobs. More than 250 boys and girls were eventually sent to Western Australia, their ages ranging from six to sixteen. Their progress was monitored by welfare officers till they reached the age of twenty-one. This scheme did provide an opportunity for a completely new start for some. However the Scheme had its critics too. They argued it was not right to send children to another country at an age when they did not fully realise what was being decided for them.

Eventually the scheme was allowed to die out.

In 1962 the quota for Maltese emigrants to Australia was increased from 2,000 to 3,000 a year. Half of this quota was made up of persons sponsored by close relatives who were permanently resident in Australia. These were financially helped under the Passage Assistance Agreement which had come into force in 1949 and which had been periodically renewed. The other half consisted of those who qualified for help from the Maltese side.

According to a census held in Australia in June 1966 there were in the country 55,104 persons who had been born in Malta. Maltese interest in Australia continued till 1974 when a total of 2,595 assisted emigrants left for various destinations in Australia. After that year there was a decline, punctuated by two exceptions in 1980 and 1981. The low figures for emigration contrasted with the high numbers of returnees. It can be said that as from 1975 emigration to Australia and to other traditional receiving countries ceased to be a relevant factor in the life of the Maltese.

Significant to the changes of the times was the Maltese Government's decision in May 1991 to "reconstruct" the Department of Labour and Emigration. The very term "emigration" was dropped and a new body came into being known as Secretariat for Maltese Living Abroad. There was also to be a Commission under a similar title which was supposed to suggest policies concerning people of Maltese origin living in other lands and to present them to the Government for approval.

The Maltese living abroad are a statistical fact which should not be ignored. Between 1946 and 1974 more than 137,000 emigrated. The number of those who returned should be taken into consideration but it is also a fact that most of those who left did so with the intention of settling permanently in their country of adoption.

Although the situation of our migrants world-wide differs considerably from one country to another, it is possible to arrive at some conclusions. To begin with the oldest category: the Maltese of North Africa. Most of their descendants are spread out in many countries. There are significant groupings in the U.K., France and Australia. Those in Australia have established contacts with the other Maltese, though they are careful to preserve their individuality and can be marked out by their flare for business and pursuit of higher learning. A number of people in the professions in Australia who carry Maltese names are in fact Maltese from Egypt.

In the United Kingdom and in France there are associations made up of people who had to leave their homes and possessions in North Africa. In England most of the immigrants are from Egypt whereas in France they were originally refugees from Algeria and Tunisia. The British and the French governments offered them shelter and these people are now proud of their British and French citizenship. In Great Britain there is an Association of Maltese Communities of Egypt, originally founded in Alexandria in 1854 and transferred to London in 1956. It is still very active and publishes its own newsletter. In Paris there is the Association France-Malte, which among other activities, organises tours to Malta for members eager to discover their own roots.

More recent emigrants settled in Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the U.S.A. Those who went to the United Kingdom and to the U.S.A. are not as vibrant in their identity as the others. Although more than 30,000 Maltese left for Great Britain between 1946 and 1974, the rate of returnees was very high so much so that it is probable that the present population of Maltese in Great Britain is about half that total. As Russel King noted, "the whole idea of Maltese emigration is more in the nature of an

adventure, a relatively short-term work contract, than permanent migration.” Since a number of those who did actually remain were single men they married non-Maltese women and in such mixed marriages the children were unlikely to be brought up as Maltese. In some cases there was a cultivated attitude to ignore one’s past so as to become thoroughly assimilated. Then there are those who because of the ease with which one can travel between Malta and Great Britain spend some time in one place and some time in another.

The case of the Maltese in the U.S.A. is roughly similar to that of their brethren in the United Kingdom. Not only are they relatively few but they are also scattered in different cities which are miles and miles apart. For many years foreign immigrants in America were under intense pressure to conform with the majority. There was an evident dislike of the unlike. The Americanisation Committees insisted on conformity in habits and in language to such an extent that many were encouraged to change their names. The situation did change after the Second World War and the Americans slowly adopted the Canadian policy of respecting ethnic culture; hence the idea of multiculturalism.

The Maltese in Detroit, New York and San Francisco had their own clubs, some of which still function to this day. Some of the earliest Maltese newspapers away from Malta were published in Detroit. The Maltese in the U.S.A. were also very generous in supporting the Malta Relief Fund to help the besieged population of Malta during the war. However, the total intake of Maltese immigrants after the war was not impressive, perhaps just over 9,000. As in the United Kingdom, the number of unmarried men who emigrated to the U.S.A. was considerable. This brought about a situation with similarities already noted with the situation prevailing in Great Britain.

The Maltese presence in Canada and in Australia is identifiable with permanence.

During the peak years of Maltese emigration the two countries received more than 97,000 men, women and children. Agreements between the two receiving countries on one hand and the Maltese authorities on the other, ensured that the migratory movement was based on preserving the unity of the family. A number of priests not only accompanied the emigrants but also settled in places where the Maltese were present in good numbers. Priests also acted as welfare-officers and interpreters.

Both Canada and Australia have accepted the principle that they are multicultural. The immigrant can be integrated without being assimilated. Multiculturalism allows an ethnic group to take pride in its own language, culture and religion without being considered as a despised minority. There are newspapers published by the Maltese in Canada and in Australia. These are either bilingual or in Maltese. The editor is sometimes elevated to the status of a spokesman of the community. Prof. H. Frenzo says on the ethnic press in Australia: “People would phone to enquire about anything and everything, occasionally reducing the editor and his staff to journalists – turned – counsellors.”

Some libraries have sections of Maltese books. There are ethnic radio and television programmes with the radio broadcasts in Maltese perhaps being one of the most popular means of communication. Religion also helps to preserve a national identity because, as H. Frenzo asserts, “most central to this unmistakable feature of Malteseness is the festa of the patron saint of the town or village of origin, in which the brass band plays an active part.”

Will the Maltese language survive in an alien environment? Emigrants born in Malta with Maltese as their native language will undoubtedly speak Maltese till the very end. Children born to Maltese couples stand a fair chance of retaining the language. Maltese however tend to enter into mixed marriages and the children of



such unions, especially when the mother is not Maltese, will not be able to speak the language of their father.

It is also unfortunate to note that the Maltese are poorly represented in the professional classes, and although some

have gone to university and entered State parliaments, their impact on cultural circles in the receiving countries, including Canada and Australia is negligible; it is certainly not commensurate with their numbers.

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