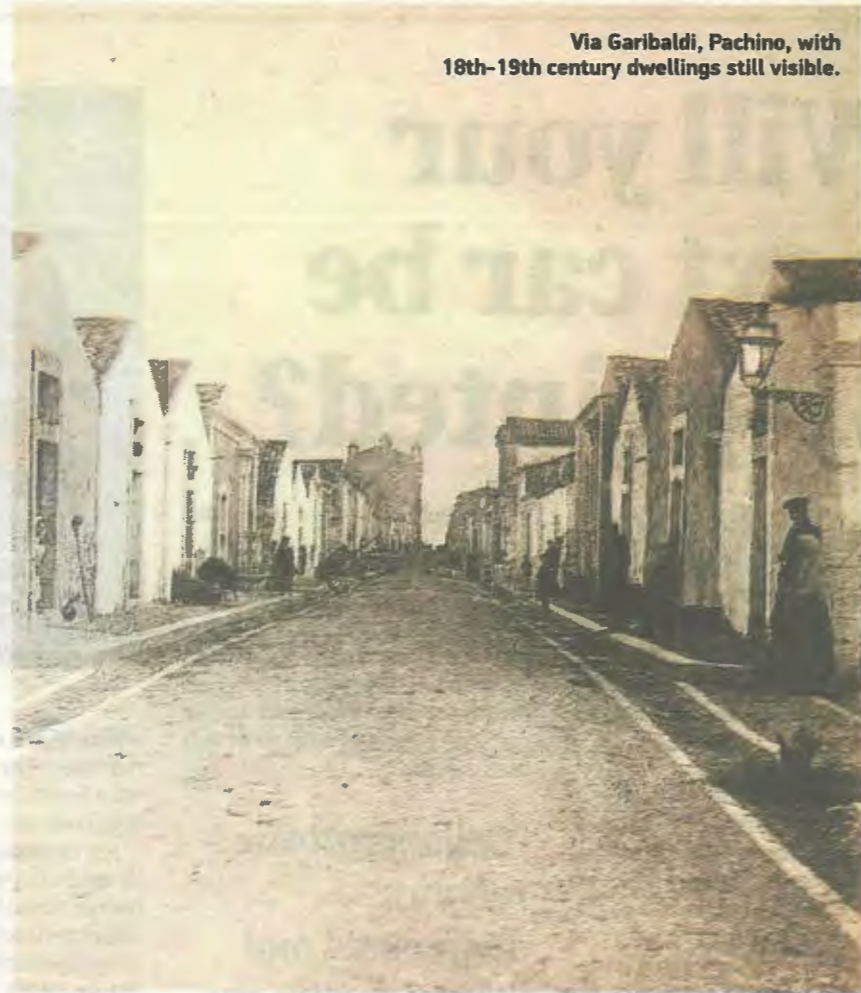


LIFE & WELLBEING HISTORY



The coat of Arms of Gaetano Starrabba, Prince of Giardinelli and founder of Pachino.



Via Garibaldi, Pachino, with 18th-19th century dwellings still visible.



Pachino's main square in the early 20th century.

The first Maltese inhabitants in Pachino... and a number of lies



ARNOLD CASSOLA

The Sicilian town of Pachino was founded in 1760 by Gaetano and Vincenzo Starrabba, the 'Principi di Giardinelli', on what was originally malaria-infested marshland. The concession was given to the Prince of Giardinelli by King Ferdinand IV through a decree dated May 26, 1756.

The building of the new town was subject to the following conditions: that the town was to be built at least two miles away from the sea, that it was to comprise at least 40 families and that the new inhabitants had to be Catholics originating from Greece, Illiria or Albania. This meant that originally Maltese citizens were not intended to be among the families that were to populate the new town.

In reality, the Maltese had already started arriving in Pachino before 1761. In fact, two Maltese who died in 1760 are recorded in the church of the SS Crocifisso *Registro mortuorum* (1760-1768). The first of these two Maltese was Pietro Scerri, who was given extreme unction by the parish priest Saverio Manzio three days before Christmas. A day later, on December 23, 1760, Giovanni Dingli from Malta also departed from this world.

In my 2014 book *Malta-Pachino - una storia in comune*, written jointly with Silvio Aliffi, I had pointed out how by 1763, the Maltese had already "invaded" Pachino. A census was carried out in that year by the town's parish priest, Don Giuseppe Runza. This document, known as the *Rivelo dello Stato di Pachino*, reveals

that of the 45 families present there, 36 declared themselves to be Maltese, four Greek and five Sicilian.

The surnames of the 36 families that declared themselves as Maltese were Dingli, Scerri, Spina, Grima and Vella, written in the form still in use today. Then, one finds Zerbo, Mangione, Greco/Grec, Falla, Zoppardi, Sicooperassi, Mommo, Mutigeggi, Borgh, Leon and Fella which, presumably, are variants of the current forms Zarb, Mangion, Grech, Failla, Azzopardi, Sciberras, Mamo, Buttigieg, Borg, Leone and Vella.

But then one comes across the following 11 surnames that have never been registered in Malta: Naso, Astor, Capo, Canicattini, Negro, Monte, Montenegro, Spinelli, Tela (Iela), Nigreto and Schinzina. One must add to these Tommaso and Lucchese, which could be related to the Maltese surnames Tomasuolo and Lucchese. However, the first of these surnames was registered in our country for the first time only in 1999, while the second surname only appeared in 1769, therefore after the Maltese started going to Pachino.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the surname Salibba, which is indicated as a Greek surname, is in reality quite a popular Maltese one.

Why are there so many incongruities in the list drawn up by the parish priest Runza?

Are these genuine errors on the part of the parish priest or were they intentional ones?

In my opinion, the second hypothesis is quite a credible and realistic one. In fact, though Sicilians were de jure prohibited from becoming residents of the new town, inhabitants of Noto and Spaccaforno (today's parish of Spica), in particular, settled down in the newly-established town, thus incurring the wrath of the Marquis of

Spaccaforno, Francesco Maria Statella, and of the noblemen of Noto. Could it be possible that the Sicilians who had taken up residence in Pachino declared themselves as Maltese to parish priest Runza so as not to be expelled?

Or could it have been that the parish priest himself who recorded them as 'Maltese' so as to spare the concerned families an eventual expulsion? What happened five years later, in 1768, during an official inspection ordered by the King, gives credibility to this supposition.

"This recently discovered 1761 document sheds new light on the development of Pachino"

Whatever, the 1763 Rivelo confirms that by that year the presence of Maltese in Pachino was not only tolerated but it was totally accepted. The fact that a number of Sicilians might have declared themselves as 'Maltese' meant that declaring oneself as a Maltese in Pachino was not risky at all.

As the years passed, the situation became intolerable for the rulers of nearby towns. In June 1767, the Marquis of Spaccaforno, Francesco Maria Statella, accused the Prince of Giardinelli of having accepted other Sicilians as part of his town's inhabitants. Then, in November of the same year, the noblemen of Noto accused Pachino of being a haven for thieves and bandits who



Gaetano Starrabba, Marchese di Rudini, Principe dei Giardinelli, founder of Pachino.

dealt in contraband goods. In view of all this, the king ordered an official inspection and sent to Pachino his delegate, Don Giuseppe Ruffino, who was accompanied by Don Alfio Marzano.

The inspection was held on May 16, 1768, and was supposed to check on the number of inhabitants of Pachino, their towns of provenance, how long they had been there and if their family was composed of Sicilians, Greek Catholics or Albanians. The results of this census were finalised on June 2, 1768.

In his 1968 book *Pachino e i suoi dintorni nella storia e nella leggenda*, Simone Sultano maintains that since the families in Pachino were not all foreign ones, the Prince of Giardinelli ensured that a Maltese person was to be placed in the dwelling of each family of Pachino. Thus, every time the king's delegate knocked at the doors of the 50 families, he always got an answer in Maltese. The king's delegate, believing all these families to be Maltese, therefore confirmed in

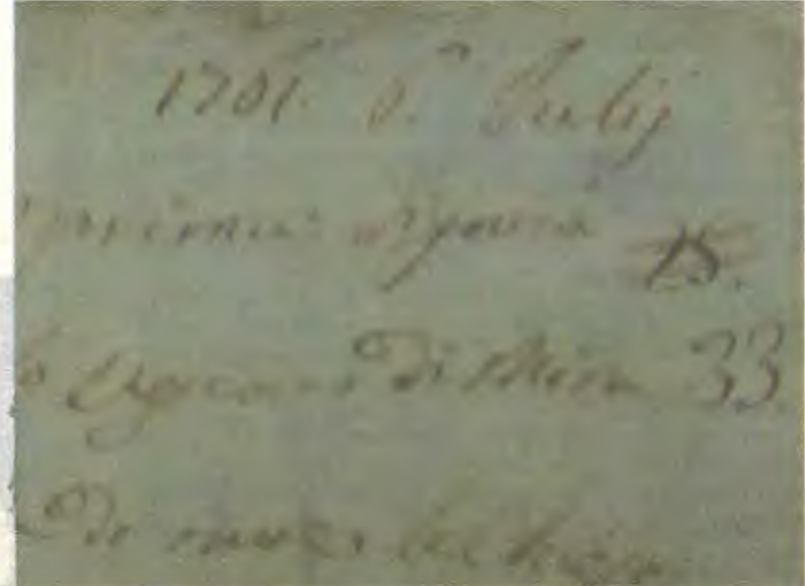


SS. Crocifisso church, Pachino.

his report that there were no Sicilians present in Pachino and thus no provisions were taken against them and the prince. Was this trick a continuation of the possible 1763 Rivelo lies?

A few weeks ago, Guido Rabito, director of the Centro Studi di Recupero Beni Culturali ed Archeologici di Pachino, discovered a manuscript dated July 6, 1761, which contains a hitherto unknown first census of the inhabitants of Pachino. This census had been commissioned by the parish priest of San Nicola in Noto, Don Mariano Mazzone, but was carried out by the priest in Pachino, Don Saverio Manzio.

The interesting thing about this 1761 census is that it gives us the list of Maltese inhabitants of Pachino in that year. In reality, in 1761 there were only seven Maltese families residing in the new town - the Salidda, Zoppardi, Scerri, Zarda, Morano, Greco and Vella families.



The manuscript containing the first Pachino census, dated July 6, 1761.

And, in total, 25 individuals qualified as Maltese.

The first family listed was the Salidda (Salibba) one. The pater familias was Don Michielangelo Salidda di Malta, who was accompanied by his wife Elisabetta and his two daughters, Aleonora and Teresa. The four were numbered as residents 186, 187, 188 and 189 respectively.

An interesting point to note is that 'Michielangelo is qualified as a 'Don', which means he must have been considered, because of the high level of his profession, as belonging to the category of 'gentlemen'. The most numerous Maltese family was instead the one headed by 'Giuseppe Zoppardi di Malta' (resident n. 190). 'He was living in Pachino together with his wife Margarita (n. 191) and their five daughters, Concetta (n. 192), Aleonora (n. 193), Salva (n. 194), Felicia (n. 196) and a second Concetta (198), and their son, Giovanni (n. 197). Don Manzio must have been quite distracted when counting the siblings since he skipped number 195 in his mathematical exercise.

The next Maltese seems to have been a bachelor, or a man who had settled down in Pachino without his family. 'Antonio Scerri di Malta' is in fact recorded as the lonely 199th inhabitant of Pachino. 'Paolo Zarda (Zarb?) di Malta' is instead the 200th one and he is accompanied by

his daughter Vera (n. 201) and son, Mariano (n. 203).

The last three families were made up of "Batta Morano di Malta", with his wife Rosa, son Santo and daughter Modesta (Mrs. 204, 205, 206, 207 respectively), another possible bachelor, "Bartolomeo Greco di Malta" (n. 208), and "Orazio Vella di Malta (n. 209), accompanied by his wife Maria and their siblings Orazia and Santo (all unnumbered).

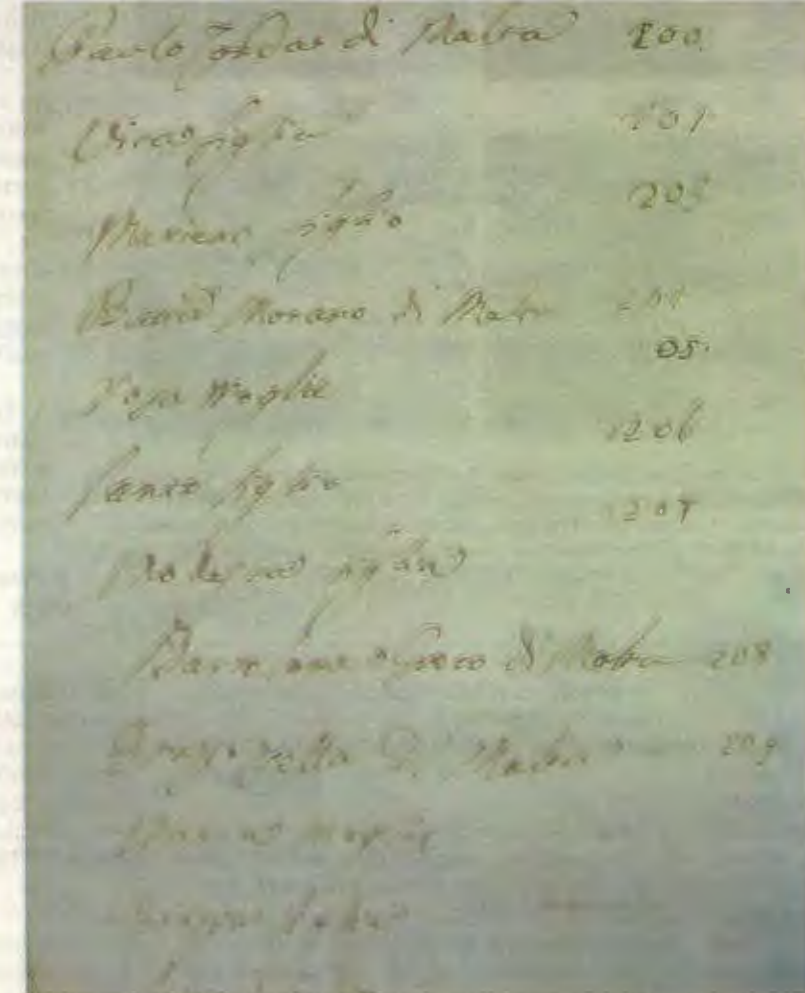
This recently discovered 1761 document sheds new light on the development of Pachino and, in particular, the involvement of the Maltese: in a matter of 24 months, the resident Maltese families increased from seven to at least 23. This goes to show not only that the promise of a 20-year tax holiday for the new inhabitants was quite an incentive for the Maltese but also that Pachino provided yet another Sicilian safe haven for our Maltese forefathers at a time when they were fleeing from poverty and from the lack of proper economic opportunities in their own motherland.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Sicilian researcher Guido Rabito for informing the author of his discovery and for having provided scans of the 1761 document and other illustrations.



The Maltese listed in the 1761 Pachino census.



The second page of the 1761 list with Maltese names.