

Book Review:

Maltese Lace. History & Mystery. Four Centuries of Bizzilla

Consiglia Azzopardi

Malta: Kite Group Publications (2019); 574 pages

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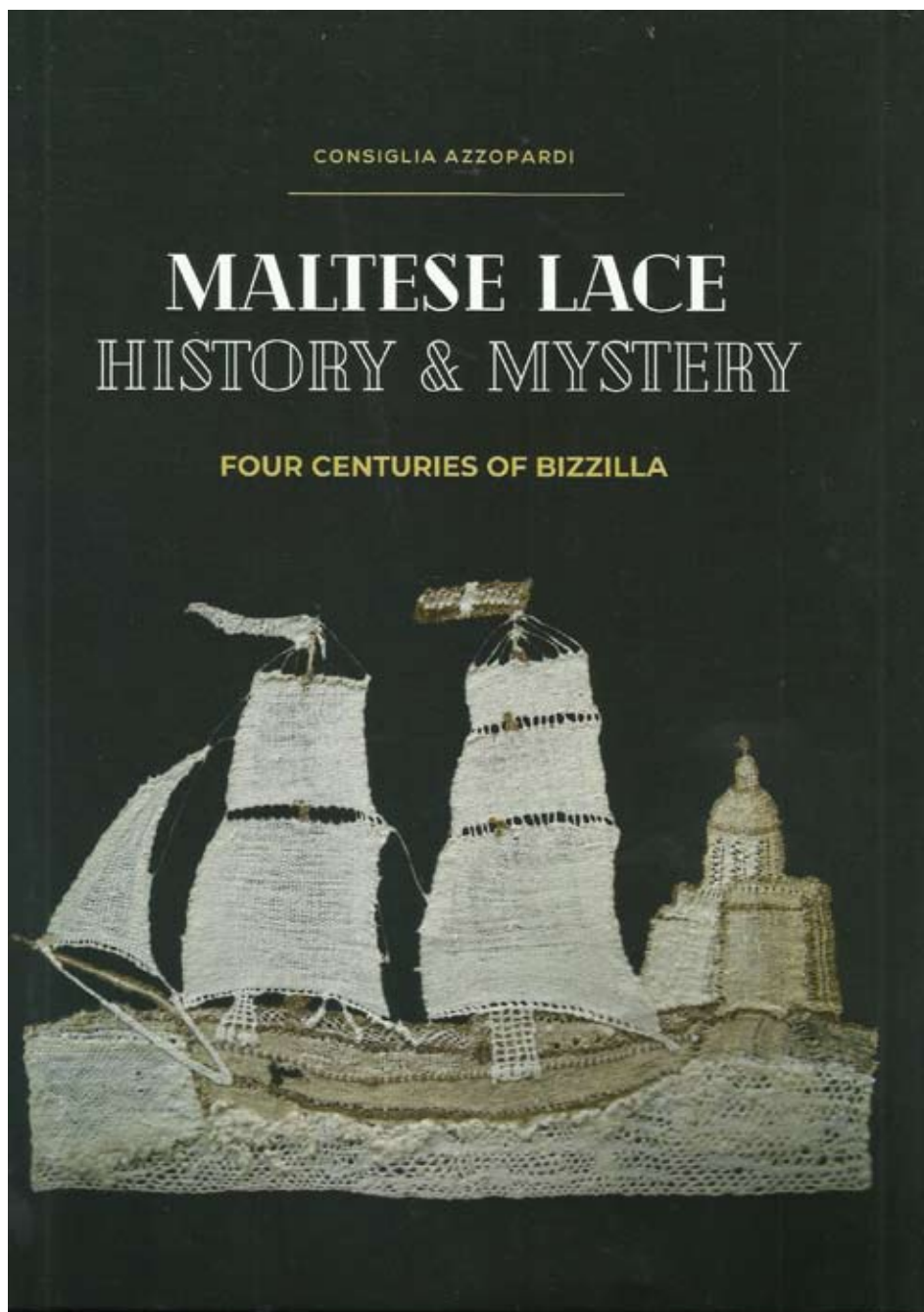
In a socially cosmopolitan and fast-changing society like the one we are experiencing in our islands in this contemporary age of ours, it is becoming quite difficult to say what stands out as quintessentially Maltese. Considering the phenomena of double-insularity affecting the smaller island of Gozo, the attempt may present itself as slightly less difficult. In fact, if I were to be asked to mention something which reminds me instantly of my native Gozo, I would most probably refer to Gozo's lace. A visit to a couple of Maltese websites would reveal that during the 1830's Queen Victoria ordered sixteen pairs of

long and short mittens, and a scarf from Malta. Later on, during the 1840's she was given a piece of lace by priest Dun Ġwann Curmi, 'tal-Grotta' and the same happened on the occasion of her diamond jubilee when she bestowed her name on Gozo's ancient town of Rabat.

The above, and hundreds, not to say thousands, of various other details related to the history and production of lace on our islands, with a special focus on the island of Gozo, are what make up the monumental publication that Consiglia Azzopardi, a

native of the ancient village of Għarb in the west of the island, has produced, the fruit of a lifetime characterised by a unique love-story with lace and its production. In fact, Azzopardi's life has evolved around lace. Consiglia's love for the subject moved her on in her life to sit for an M.Phil. and eventually a Ph.D on the subject. Her efforts to promote the production of lace were strong enough to convince the administration at the University of Malta Gozo Centre to introduce an academic course that would promote this very tradition. She was fortunate enough to find the then Minister for Gozo, the Hon. Anton Tabone of Victoria, backing her in her attempts to present lace-production as both an artistic and a scientific travail. The technicalities involved in the making of lace which are well explained in the book, are a proof that lace-making gradually developed to become a discipline in itself, embracing a solid vocabulary which is proper to the subject. Azzopardi enhances this by referring to historians such as Abela and De Soldanis both of whom documented this traditional artistic endeavour in their writings.

Azzopardi's publication is attractive from various perspectives. First of all, the author, through her vivid style and presentation, attracts the reader by merging together the scientific as well as the artistic. It is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins and this is due to her originality of style. The colourful pictures together with the great amount of photographs that document the many works of lace that are to be found all over the island of Gozo, render Azzopardi's book a coffee table publication. However to limit oneself to such an aspect would be to belittle the sumptuous book that we now have in our hands. The book will be appreciated by both the amateur



and the professional; it will attract the attention of the historian and anthropologist alike. It is in many ways a history of Gozo from a socio-religious perspective since it presents the promotion of lace-making as an ecclesiastical project that helped to make better the life of the poor as well as decorating the house of the rich and the well-to-do.

Maltese Lace. History & Mystery is a book that will immortalise Consiglia Azzopardi's connection with lace for generations to come. It is a book that makes every Gozitan proud of his or her native island, a book that reminds the world of Gozo's standing when it comes to hard work, originality and purpose, the three of which have become both legendary and mythical.