AGRICULTURE IN MALTA
IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

No proper treatment of agriculture in Malta during the century or so before the arrival of the Order of St. John in the island has yet appeared in print. Nor could the subject have been adequately tackled before the recent effective opening of the various archives containing pre-1530 documentation, since the documents known up to some twenty years ago consisted mainly of government decrees and related papers when they were not entirely of ecclesiastical origin and interest (1). Now, with the full utilization of the surviving notarial registers and with the discovery and opening to research of such prime records as those of the bishop’s court and the tithal accounts, one can at last attempt at least a preliminary working up of the not inconsiderable information on several aspects of farming on the two islands of Malta and Gozo without the constraint of repeating endlessly what such authors as Quintinus and Abeja wrote centuries ago (2). More than two generations back, Mons. A. Mifsud wrote all there was to write then on the subject and, if one excepts Henri Bresc’s seminal study of Malta’s public finances, no one has added much to Mifsud’s account (3).

The notarial records, very fragmentary for the fifteenth century and only slightly less so for the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, contain a mass of information on landownership and leasing, on employment agreements and the sale of agricultural products and farm animals (4). Unfortunately, the oldest surviving register does not go beyond 1467, only five having survived down to 1500 and some 26 down to 1530 out of the hundreds which must have once existed. There is no reason for thinking that their contents are

2. Nevertheless both Quintinus and Abeja occasionally recorded matters never referred to in archival records. Thus Quintinus mentions such things as classical ruins, the productivity of Maltese fields and Maltese Pauline traditions in his time: text in Horatio C.R. Vella, The Earliest Description of Malta (Lyons 1536) by Jean Quintin d’Autun (Malta, 1980).
representative of those that have not survived, and statistical studies are therefore unreliable; in addition several of the surviving registers are in such a decayed condition that they cannot be examined without serious damage. Unfortunately, also, by their very nature they do not give any global statistical information on the size of the peasant population, that of their fields or the fiefs, of productivity and total production figures for any crop. On the other hand, the records of the bishop's court have proved to be surprisingly relevant to the study of several aspects of agriculture. The Church in the Middle Ages was much concerned with the concept of a 'just price' and, as a result, quite a few of the sets of proceedings which have survived concern this idea, usually on the sale of immovable property, especially of fields (5). They frequently contain scores of pages of evidence of the greatest significance to the economic historian. The tithe records themselves provide a mass of information on landownership in Malta (6). Unfortunately, the earliest regular list does not go back further than 1522, though lists of defaulters a century earlier survive. Each list contains precise if brief details on some 600 landholdings in Malta concerning ownership, the place of residence of the owners, the distribution of the holdings and the size of the tithes paid, with frequent references to previous and subsequent owners, the latter in later entries which frequently make the correct reading of the document somewhat difficult. Payments of tithes had become fossilized long before, and one is certainly justified in using them for illustrating the fifteenth century.

Since the strategic importance of the Maltese islands had not yet affirmed itself, their whole economy depended on agriculture. Certainly, as has long been known, Malta served as the base for corsair vessels, and a particular document of 1492 from Palermo shows that as many as six such vessels were then operating simultaneously from Malta though no sizable fleet was based permanently on its port (7). Nor did Malta then have a large garrison maintained from external funds. The garrison was small, no more than fifty men at the Castle-by-the-Sea, and it was paid normally entirely out of local revenues. Gozo's garrison was even smaller and was similarly maintained. There was, in fact, no great external direct or indirect subsidy on which the island could rely for its balance of payments. The island did not provide any mineral

5. These are mostly to be found in Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Curia Episcopi, Curia Episcopi, interspersed with proceedings concerning marriage, church benefices, and a wide variety of others concerning members of the clergy.
7. April 1492, Archivio di Stato di Palermo, Real Cancelleria, vol. 148, fol. 283r-v. A study of Maltese shipping and corsairing in the century or so before 1530 is not one of the desiderata of Maltese history.
resources, and fishing seems to have been relatively as unimportant to the island's economy then as it is now. This was true also of Gozo.

In reality, Malta did not produce enough wheat to feed its own people even though the total population then did not amount to more than a small fraction of what it does now. Practically every year large amounts of wheat and other cereals and pulses were imported from Sicily free of the Sicilian export duties. But none of this wheat was brought to Malta without payment to the Sicilian exporters, and the money for this came out of the proceeds from the export of Maltese cotton and cumin. In fact, it should be remembered that Maltese farming was sufficiently productive in one way or another to defray the expenses on wheat, on other foods as well as superior textiles and a whole range of other objects needed from abroad. It paid also, indirectly, for the island's normal needs of defence, and enabled substantial rents to be sent regularly abroad to absentee landlords like the members of the Pirolo and Alagona families as well as the bishop. Locally, farming provided a livelihood for the peasants and formed the basis of an economy which included several hundreds of craftsmen, masons, carpenters, a blacksmith, at least one physician and a surgeon, several notaries, and scores of priests secular and regular. Finally, at Mdina resided two or three scores of substantial landowners and fief-holders, who regarded it as degrading to engage in any occupation, relying on the income from their estates for their livelihood.

A certain amount of irrigation took place. This is proved by contemporary place-names like is-Saqwi or Habel is-Saqwi, found both in Malta and in Gozo. More than 100 place-names refer to gnien or ghajn lands and some 200 to wells of various sizes — bir, bjar, ġiebjja, ġibjet, ġibjun — and a few to reservoirs, again both in Malta and in Gozo (8). But there is no doubt that the predominant nature of Maltese farming was that known as dry farming entirely dependent on the vagaries of the weather for its supply of water. When the rains failed, as happened for three years in the later 1460s, landlords had inevitably to grant their tenants a remission of rent, as was done both by the Crown and the Cathedral in or around 1469 (9). The relatively numerous bur, marġ or marġa, and ghadir or ghadiru place-names indicate that Malta then had a less efficient system of getting rid of storm water than nowadays, so that relatively large areas, mainly at the head of valleys were swampy and probably, as in later times, malarious — land which could be profitably used for the retting of flax. In the gnien and ghajn areas horti-

culture was carried on, including much growing of vines for the production of wine. The karstic areas were mainly used for very rough grazing mainly by sheep and goats, the thorns and thistles growing there forming the island's only local supply of fuel.

LANDOWNERSHIP

The largest land holdings in fifteenth century Malta were the fiefs, originally blocks of royal land granted out, mostly on terms of military service, to influential inhabitants of Mdina who also frequently owned allodial land (10). There were some thirty or forty fiefs, located in a large circle from Budaqq and Benwarrat in the north, westwards to Bunuhhala, Għajn Ħiħana and Għajn Tuffieha, southwards from the last to Bингemma, Hemsija, Buqana, Dejr il-Bniet and Tabrija. In eastern and east central Malta there were the fiefs of Buleben, Marnisi, Dejr Limara, Petralonga (present-day Senglea), and Marsa, the largest of them all. Royal estates not yet alienated included localities like Fiddien near Rabat. The bishop of Malta had two fiefs on the island as well as a large estate at Lentini in Sicily. One fief stretched eastwards from Rabat, the other was near Hal Resqun in the centre of the island.

With few exceptions, the fiefs lay some distance away from the fifty or so villages still existing in the early fifteenth century (11). In fact, tithal evidence shows that between one third and one half of the villagers themselves owned a field or two mostly, but far from always, quite close to their villages (12). In fact, an analysis of the archidiaconal tithes for 1536 shows that, while the inhabitants of Mdina, almost invariably fief-holders or ecclesiastical bodies, paid five-eighths, those of the villages, mostly peasants, paid the remaining three-eighths of the tithes, indicating a division of properties between them in that proportion (13). Peasant ownership was, however, much less common in Rabat, the suburb of Mdina, than in the villages, perhaps because landless peasants tended to reside there, taking up a craft or accepting paid employment with the fief-holding inhabitants of Mdina whose

12. Thus Naxxar had 51 decanal tithe payers in 1536, ten of whom also paid tithes to the archdeacon for other lands in 1546, when there were also 13 other archidiaconal tithe payers in the same village: Cath. Mus., Md., Cath. Arch., Preb. 5 and 3 respectively.
13. Ibid., Preb. 3. Further results await analysis by computer, being undertaken by the present author and Dr. Stanley Fiorini of the University of Malta.
estates lay within easy reach (14). A similar situation might also account for the lack of tithe paying landlords at Zejtun, Axac, Gudja and Zabbar.

It has already been noticed that precise details of the size of the fifteenth century fiefs is almost invariably lacking (15). The evidence of incomes, rents and tithes indicates unmistakably that they must have been a score of times, the larger ones several scores of times, as large as a peasant’s normal field. Thus at a time when peasants’ fields were rarely rented for more than one uncia, the following fief rents were being exacted (16):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rent Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binghamma</td>
<td>26.vii.1499</td>
<td>12 uncie and one wether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budaqq</td>
<td>28.i.1511</td>
<td>16 uncie and six six sa’me of wheat or barley for half the fief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.viii.1526</td>
<td>35 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buqana</td>
<td>30.iv.1502</td>
<td>33 uncie and a pig, loan of 12 uncie annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dejr Limara</td>
<td>25.viii.1496</td>
<td>17 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.vii.1498</td>
<td>34 uncie 15 tareni, 1 salma of wheat, 1 wether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghajn Rihana</td>
<td>20.i.1495</td>
<td>70 uncie and 6 wethers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghajn Tuffieha</td>
<td>31.viii.1487</td>
<td>12 uncie (the <em>viridarium</em> alone?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.vii.1499</td>
<td>44 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghajn Zejtuna</td>
<td>22.iv.1496</td>
<td>8 uncie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>27.vii.1506</td>
<td>10 uncie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.i.1518</td>
<td>9 uncie 7 tareni 10 grani for one-eighth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gzemieri</td>
<td>4 ix.1493</td>
<td>14 uncie (<em>viridarium</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marnisi</td>
<td>6.vii.1498</td>
<td>32 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.v.1500</td>
<td>32 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mtahleb</td>
<td>31.viii.1487</td>
<td>15 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qlejgha</td>
<td>24.ix.1495</td>
<td>50 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.i.1501</td>
<td>60 uncie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabrija</td>
<td>19.vii.1522</td>
<td>at least 62 uncie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. In spite of its much larger population compared to Naxxar, Rabat had only 15 decanal tithe payers in 1536: *ibid.*, Preb. 5; it had 12 archidiaconal tithe payers in 1546, seven of them identical with those of 1536, and one the son of another who also appears in the earlier year: *ibid.*, Preb. 3.


In 1506 the fief incomes were estimated to amount (17):

- Gnien il-Firien and Qattara: 30 uncie
- Ghajn Tuffieha: 50 uncie
- Ghariexim: 20 uncie
- Marsa: 230 uncie
- Qlejgha: 80 uncie
- Saqqajja: 10 uncie
- Tabrija: 60 uncie

In 1499 Tabrija’s income apparently amounted to 36 uncie, Ghajn Rihana’s to ca. 70 uncie, and Buleben’s to 26 uncie; that of Ghemieri, Sammati, Bahurien and Bunuhhala together amounted to 30 uncie 15 tareni (18). Tithal records reveal the same great disparity of size between the fiefs and the peasants’ fields (19):

- Budaqq: 4 salmi of wheat
- Santi: 4 salmi of wheat
- Bunuhhala: 4 salmi of wheat
- Ghajn Rihana: 8 salmi of wheat
- Bingemma: 6 salmi of wheat
- Bahrija: 3 salmi of wheat
- Vnezja (territorio): 6 salmi of wheat

These payments should be compared with the total payment of 1 salma 12 thumeni 2 mondelli of wheat made by 23 landowners of Naxxar for a total of 29 holdings subject to archidiaconal tithes in 1546, and 5 salme 8 thumina 1 mondello paid by some 46 peasants of the same village for their 68 holdings subject to decanal tithes in 1522 (20). The peasants’ holdings in the other villages were roughly speaking, just as small in comparison with the fiefs, the tithes payable by the peasants of each village being roughly comparable to those payable by owners of individual fiefs.

Though the holdings of the peasants were undoubtedly small, and they hardly ever individually owned more than three or four, their ownership of

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17. NA[17]ional] L[ibrary of] M[alta], Univ[ersitā] 206, fols. 12v, 12, 8v, 10, 6v, 14v, 11v - 12 respectively.
18. NLM, Univ. 11, fols. 566v-567v, income calculated from tax liability at 15 per cent imposed on absentee landlords.
freehold land gave them a status far superior to the general run of peasants in the neighbouring island of Sicily, where the land was just about invariably owned by the King, the feudal lords or the church and never by the peasants (21). In Malta in 1522 there were 429 landowners who resided outside Mdina, who held between them 572 holdings subject to decanal tithes, a number which seems to have been reduced by 1556 to 423 landowners with 517 holdings (22). In 1546 there were 312 landowners subject to archidiaconal tithes for their 480 holdings, all different from those subject to decanal tithes though the owners were sometimes the same (23). Other peasants, of course, paid tithes to the Treasurer of the Cathedral, but the earliest set of records of the treasurer's tithes, that of 1541, is too defective for statistical investigation (24). It is, however, probable that Malta must have had, in the first half of the sixteenth century, some 800 village or peasant landowners unbound to anyone. The peasants also had grazing rights on land normally referred to as *spacium comune*, common land, a privilege which they were very careful not to lose to anyone.

The peasant's holdings were normally very widely spread out. Thus the Naxxar landowners in 1522 possessed land spread out over the whole 'empty' northern part of Malta as far away as Ghallis, Qortin Sammat and Wied Qannotta (25). In fact, among the identifiable decanal holdings surprisingly few seem to have been situated close in to Naxxar itself. The archidiaconal holdings of the peasants from Naxxar were possibly less widely dispersed, though some were as far away as San Pawl tal-Bindiqi. Budaqq. Mghatab and Gharqar (26). The tithes presumably originally represented tenths of the production of each holding, and thus represent fairly accurately the relative size of the latter. Petrus Buchaiar of Naxxar paid a total of 5 thumina of wheat for his holdings in 1522, Salvus Gauchi paid 6 thumina for land at Qortin Sammat near Qawra, and Franciscus Mifsud paid a similar amount for his own four holdings; these amounts must represent fairly large stretches of land, though still far smaller than that of any of the *fiefa* (27). Few of the other Naxxar landowners in 1522 paid in more than three thumina of wheat, most of them, in fact, less than one thumina. But some also paid tithes to the archdeacon and possibly

22. Ibid., Md., Preb. 6, provisional figures.
23. Ibid., Preb. 3.
24. Ibid., Preb. 11.
25. Ibid., Preb. 6, fols. 22-28, ignoring the later insertions as revealed by different writing.
26. Ibid., Preb. 3, fols. 18-19v.
27. Ibid., Preb. 6, fols. 22v, 25v and 24v.
also to the treasurer of the Cathedral. Ten out of the 51 Naxxar decanal tithe payers of 1536 also appear among the 23 Naxxar landowners who paid tithes to the archdeacon (28). At least six out of the 16 Rabat decanal tithe payers of 1536 also appear among the 12 Rabat inhabitants who paid tithes to the archdeacon in 1546 (29).

LEASEHOLDS AND METAYAGE

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was already normal for several, if not most, of the larger properties, whether freehold or fief-land, to be leased out to the actual farmer or to an intermediary who let them out in smaller portions to the farmers themselves. Thus in 1495 Antonius Gatt Desguanes, a prominent landowner of Mdina, was the 'principalis gabellotus bonorum dili Alagoni sistentium in insulis Meliveti et Gaudisii' (30). In this quality he sub-let to two peasants, Salvaturi Spiteri and Gilio Cumbu called Xileype, the garden-type land called Ghajn Stas at a fixed annual rent paid partly in money and partly in kind. On 20 January 1495 the magnificus Paulus de Aragona, a citizen of Syracuse, leased to Nicolaus de Caxaro of Mdina the tenimentum terrarum at Ghajn Rihana consisting of arable and non-arable land, including three garden-type fields, for four years at the substantial money rent of 73 uncie and six wethers (31). On 21 September of the same year, Nicolaus Caxaro renewed the lease of the jardino of Ghajn Rihana for another four years in favour of the sitting tenant, to be added to the three years already agreed upon at a rent of ten uncie for the period of six years still remaining (32). Of course, numerous other examples could be given.

The peasants frequently obtained land belonging to the inhabitants of Mdina on a rental basis for periods of four years, sometimes for three or even six years, presumably determined by the crop rotation in use in the field in question. Longleases of 90 years have been found, but so rarely that such census-paying land was frequently referred to as iedereis, iedereus, iedereus from that fact (33). The peasants also occasionally rented out their land to each other, mostly when they could not work it themselves through sickness, old age, migration, another occupation, incarceration, and so on. But

28. Ibid., Preb. 5, fols. 16-20v, and Preb. 3, fols. 18-19v.
31. Ibid., under that date.
32. Ibid., under that date.
quite frequently they passed on land to each other by way of mezzadria or metayage, by virtue of which half the produce was retained by the tenant and half was surrendered to the landlord. Thus on 17 October 1488 Rogerius de Bordino, a canon of the cathedral, leased out to Rogerio Grima for four years his vineyard at Wied il-Bużbież ad medietatem fructus (34); on 18 November 1495 Cataldus Xebras of Naxxar leased out ad campensiam et nomine campensie iuxta usum Malte to Gregorio Bertelli two arable fields adjoining Habel id-Dejr for the following two seasons: the tenant had to cultivate and plough the fields well, sowing grain in that season and cotton on suitable portions of the field in the following year, and receive the loan of twenty carleni which he had to return at the end of the lease (35). It would not seem that the greater landowners frequently resorted to metayage when they leased out their land. But it was in that way that the territory of Vnezja was leased out in 1487 by its owner nobilis Antonius Gatt Desguanes (36).

LAND HUNGER

One peculiarity of land-leases of fifteenth century Malta and Gozo was that they frequently involved the loan of money from the tenant to the landlord. This custom is explained in a pre-1450 text from Gozo which states that land was then so scarce on that island owing to the great increase of population that this method of persuasion was adopted by would-be tenants to obtain land from the landlords (37). It was therefore a sort of key-money disguised as an interest-free loan to get round the Church sanction against usury. At earlier times, the Gozitan text explains, when people were fewer and tenants more difficult to find, it had been the landlord who offered loans to would-be tenants and not the other way round.

Land increased much in price during the course of the fifteenth century both in Malta and in Gozo. On the latter island in 1449 land was reputed to have become half as dear again as it had been twenty or twenty five years previously because, as it was claimed, that island was more heavily populated than it had been: 'ki a lu presenti esti chui pupolata la insula di Gozu' (38). At the turn of the same century, witnesses in three sets of usury proceedings claimed repeatedly that land prices had increased in the preceding 15, 17, 20, 30 or 40 years by a half or even by two-thirds (39). One of the villagers, Bartho-

35. Not. Jacobus Sabara, NAV, R 494/1, under that date.
39. Ibid., fols. 18, 24rv, 26v, 207v, 209v, 212v, 292, 299v, 302, etc.
lomeus Buttigieg, attributed this to an increase of people and of houses in Malta (40). On 10 May 1492 complaints were made that in several places public ways had been taken over and enclosed so that it was impossible to go about the island (41). The expulsion of the Jews in 1492 does not seem to have adversely affected land prices because several witnesses insisted that land prices had actually risen since the departure of the Jews—never, however, intimating that it had anything to do with that event (42). Manfridus Axac, a substantial landholder from Mdina, said that 'land now costs a lot, having risen sky high'. (45). It is also borne out by what is known of the increasing incomes of fief-holders. Thus in 1499, the widow of Petro di Baldes, who held half the fief of Marsa and died in 1479, claimed that her late husband used to receive an income of twenty uncie from that source; it produced 60 uncie in 1499 (44). Luca Barberi in 1506 stated that the fief of Qlejgha, once producing 30 uncie annually, then produced 80, that of Gheriexem had risen from 12 to 20 uncie, that of Tabrija from 20 to 60, Ghajn Tuffieha from 22 to 50 uncie, Gmien il-Friren and Qattara from five uncie to 30 and Saqqajja from six to ten (45).

Improved management methods might have been the main factor which increased the proceeds from the larger estates, but better husbandry cannot be ruled out (46). In 1499 Matheus Vella, nicknamed Zirquna, of Mqabba, claimed that in the district of Birriffuh leases were much higher than they used to be and the tenants consequently tried to get more out of the land, cultivating previously untilled areas, converting them into cotton fields if possible (47). Members of all classes, in fact, obtained grants of common waste land, through-

40. Testimony dated 29 January 1499; ibid., fols. 81v-82.
43. 'scit tamen che al presente lo terreno vali gran prezzo et esti muntato ali cheli', 8 November 1499: ibid., fol. 220.
44. Testimony, 30 October 1499: ibid., fol. 168.
45. NLM, Univ. 206, fols. 6v, 8v, 11v-12, 12, 12v, 14v.
46. The surviving documentation does not reveal whether leasing land was more profitable than working it by paid labour, nor show the comparative advantages to the owner of rental or share-cropping arrangements. Unfortunately, in the debate in the town council on 20 July 1481 which finally ended with the decision to lease Tiżieb ir-Rih to the highest bidder for a period of ten years, those who spoke in favour of share-cropping arrangements did not have their reasons recorded in the minutes: NLM, Univ. 11, fols. 490v-492v, opinion of Nardus Calava giving second preference to share-cropping on fol. 491 and that of Antonius Falca on fol. 491v, who would seem to have preferred renting for two years to share-cropping for four years.
47. Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, AO, vol. 2, fol. 99v. One owner improved his field by repairing the surrounding wall, erecting an inner one to separate off the threshing field, digging a cistern, and clearing the field of stones and manuring it; ibid., fol. 93.
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out the fifteenth century and later, from the government both in Malta and in Gozo (48). This was not caused by presumed mere rapacity on their part or because of the increased family prestige resulting from an increase of landed wealth, but must have made good economic sense, an aspect of the matter which has been ignored, so far, by the historians who have alluded to it. On 11 February 1463 the town council agreed with one dissentient that ‘lu ridumi’, the cliff face, should be transformed into a meadow (49). On 6 January 1499 the town authorities leased a large stretch of common grazing land at Mizieb ir-Rih to a private person for six years at eleven unci a year, after fighting off for years, a generation before, the encroachments of Antonius Desguanes and his son Angaraus (50). About four years before that, grants of land were made, four thumina at a time, both to increase the revenues of the Crown and ‘to help the poor’ (51). These individual plots were much larger than would be required for the construction of a house, and must have been intended for exploitation as fields.

AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

It is possible that paid labour was the first solution to the landlords’ labour problem created by the extinction of serfdom in Malta apparently during the course of the fourteenth century (52). In 1455 paid labour was considered so important that the town authorities complained that the continual disputes between employees and their employers were leading to the neglect of cultivation on the lands of the latter (53). Surviving employment contracts show prominent landowners like Simoni de Mazara, Guillielmu Desguanes, Johannes de Nava, Antoni Lancia Desguanes, Antoni Gatt Desguanes, Nardus de Vaccaro, Manfridus de la Chabica and Manfridus Axac using paid labour in their fields or vineyards. (54). Other employers included craftsmen like Nicolaus Xara and Jacobus Hakym as well as the town surgeon Michaele.

48. See below, pp. 31-33.
49. NLM, Univ. 11, fol. 180v.
50. Ibid., fol. 557. See above, fn. 46, and below, p. 32-33.
51. 21 January 1496: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 192, fol. 192rv.
53. Para. 6 of the capitoli of 2 November 1455: NLM, Libr. Ms. 494, fol. 32.
54. Contracts dated 15 May 1487, 31 May 1487, 27 October 1494, 8 July 1496: Not J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; 13 February 1497, 12 January 1498, 15 July 1499, 19 August 1499: idem, NAV, R 494/2; 8 October 1488, 1 July 1495: idem, R 494/1.
de Ferriolo and notary Jacobus de Falczono (55). Other prominent townsmen like Nicolaus de Caxaro, Guillelmus de Riera, Petro de Brancato and Salvo de Falczono together with a large number of miscellaneous land owners, some actually living in the villages, also occasionally employed paid labour, men like Petrus Zammit of Mdina and Petrus Nuar of Siggiewi (56). The Carmelites themselves employed a man in 1467 (57). Since most of the employers lived at Mdina, the employees frequently came from Rabat or Dingli. Others lived at Mosta, Qormi, Attard and Safi. Engagements were mostly either annual or monthly; involving work in the vineyards several stipulated that the term of employment should run from just after the grape harvest in September to the following 8 May. Payment, by the year or monthly, was effected only partly in actual money, which varied between 6.5 and 10 Maltese unci if annual and at 2 unci if monthly, the heavier wage here compensating for the instability of employment. In addition, some three salme of wheat or its equivalent in wheat and barley were paid to the employee together with the ‘usual’ provision of shoes and clothes. Employees undertook to perform all tasks normally done by free men except the carrying of dung, the latter task being therefore apparently left for yet another even lower class of worker to perform, presumably the slaves, Moslems or recently converted captives or slaves born in captivity, of whom there seems to have been a fair number in private ownership (58). Paid employees or day labourers occasionally reserved the right to stay away to harvest their own land (59). One was given leave for two weeks to till his own vineyard (60). Obviously not all paid labourers lacked land.

55. Contracts, 4 July 1499: Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2; 30 May 1486 and 17 August 1486; idem, NAV, R 494/1; 8 November 1499 and 31 July 1499: idem, NAV, R 494/2.
57. Contract, 22 October 1467: Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, fol. 34.
58. Enough documentation survives for a brief paper on slavery in Malta before the coming of the Order.
59. Thus Masiu Zupardu reserved the right to gather in his own harvest, 31 July 1499: Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2.
60. Johannes Casaha (sic) was given the right to absent himself for one week at the first hoeing of the vineyards and another week at the second in order to till his own vineyard, 8 July 1496: idem, NAV, R 494/1.
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WHEAT, BARLEY AND MAHLUT

With a population almost reaching 10,000 in 1419-20, diminishing somewhat around 1450 but regaining its former size by the end of the century and just about doubling again by 1530 (61), Malta needed for its own provision some 14,000 to 28,000 salme of wheat or their equivalent in barley or the mixture of the two grains known locally as mahlut (62). Gozo's needs can be put at about a third those of Malta. In the fourteenth century Malta still occasionally exported wheat, but it is likely that even then this was very rare. In 1356 the King directed the town mayor of Malta and Gozo and of a few other localities in Sicily to permit the export of grain to Messina in order to alleviate the famine raging there, and subsequently he ordered that two merchants of Messina be permitted to export wheat from Malta on their vessel (63). Grain is also known to have been exported from Malta in 1371 to Messina and barley in 1377 to Palermo (64). In 1398 the absentee bishop of Malta was permitted the free export of the products of his property (65), and in 1399 Antonius Birtellus exported 83 salme of wheat intending at first to take it to North Africa (66). No later sizable exports of grain from Malta are known, but in 1419 permission was given for the export of redundant grain (67). In Gozo instructions were given in 1437 for the export to North Africa of a quantity of wheat and barley two years old (68), but in 1440 the scarcity of wheat was already so great that a foreign ship was forced to unload its cargo of wheat in the island (69). The abundance of wheat in Gozo in 1454 led to an extraordinary lowering of its price (70), just two years after the island had been desperately trying to stave off famine (71). In fact, the inelasticity of demand for grains is

62. Diego de Quadro in 1590 calculated that the Maltese population of his time, amounting to 28,864 persons, would need some 40,572 salme. However, the Sicilian viceroy, the Conte d'Alva, estimated Malta's real needs with that population at a mere 25,833 salme or thereabouts: ASP, Tribunal del Real Patrimonio, numero provvisorio 2032, fol. 195v.
63. C. Coantino, Codice diplomatico di Federico III d'Aragona re di Sicilia (1355-1377) (Palermo, 1885), doc. CCCXXVII, p. 262.
64. Bresc, p. 132, ft. 31.
65. 26 November 1398: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 35, fol. 48r.
68. 28 October 1437: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 73, fol. 130v.
69. ASP, Lettere viceregio, vol. 18, fols. 7v-8.
71. ASP, Lettere viceregio, vol. 50, fol. 164.
excellently illustrated by what happened in Malta and Gozo throughout the fifteenth century. In 1439 the town complained that there was a shortage of grain every two or three years (72) and yet such evidence of importation as survives consistently shows that until the 1480s there hardly ever was any talk of the importation of more than 1,000 or 2,000 salme to prevent famine (73). In 1480, however, members of the town council considered the importation of 2,000, 3,000 and even 5,000 salme of wheat (74). The situation must have been quite alarming. In 1492 the Maltese authorities were content to ask for an annual supply of 1,000 salme free of export duty (75). Even that suggests that the supply of local wheat had seriously deteriorated in relation to the demand compared to the situation in 1439. In fact, by 1530 the two islands were having to import some 9,000 salme of wheat annually from Sicily (76).

With a perennial scarcity of wheat one would have thought that the Maltese farmer would have striven his utmost to meet the demand by increasing his production, but the increase, if it ever occurred, must have been very moderate. The wheat from Sicily was normally sold at a substantially higher price than local wheat, but the local producer was not allowed to raise his price during times of scarcity to match that of the foreign wheat (77). During 1450-1523 Maltese wheat was officially supposed to sell at 12 tareni a salma, barley at half that price and mahlut (half wheat and half barley) at an intermediate price (78). In Gozo the price of wheat was a fourth part less than what it was in Malta (79). The price of foreign, normally Sicilian, wheat varied

72. Capitoli of Malta, 14 July 1439: Giambruno & Genuardi, p. 409.
73. NLM, Univ. 11, fols. 152 (1462), 185 (1463), 252v (1473), 288v (1474), etc.
74. ibid., fols. 431-434v, meeting of the town council, 28 July 1480.
75. Capitoli, 10 May 1492: Cath. Mus., Md., Cath. Archives, Ms. 34, fols 113v-114
77. Thus on 22 October 1477 it was arranged that wheat was to be procured in Sicily at 30 'grani lu thuminu di Malta' while Maltese wheat was not to be sold at a higher price than 15 'grani pro thumino': NLM, Univ. 11, fols. 367v-368.
78. For Maltese wheat see NLM, Univ. 11, fol. 68v (22 June 1450); ibid., fol. 573v (3 October 1469); ibid., fols. 199-200 (28 December 1470); ibid., fol. 347 (17 November 1475); ibid., fol. 368v (22 September 1477); Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, AO, vol. 2, fols. 204v-205 (4 November 1499); ibid., vol. 7A, fol. 144 (6 February 1522); for barley see NLM, Univ. 11, fol. 68v (1450); ibid., fol. 573v (3 October 1469); ibid., fol. 368v (22 September 1477); Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, AO, vol. 2, fol. 205 (4 November 1499); ibid., vol. 7A, fol. 144 (6 February 1522); for mahlut see ibid., vol. 6, fols. 352 and 353v.
79. In 1454, owing to its abundance, wheat was priced officially at 10 'grana lu tumminu' in Gozo: ASP, Letters viceregie, vol. 53, fols. 37-38; directions were given
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between 16 tareni and 28 tareni and more for every salma, depending completely on its market value at the Sicilian ports of embarkation (80). Possibly Sicilian wheat was considered of superior quality to Maltese and Gozitan grain: in at least one court case numerous witnesses claimed that local grain was of little estimation, so much so that there was a time when it was sold at a lower price than the one fixed by the authorities (81).

The difference in price must, however, have created great problems of enforcement. Unless the wheat itself was recognizably different, it would have been an easy matter to store it away until the foreign wheat came on the market (82). On the other hand, one must remember that a very large proportion of the local crop was never sold at all but was consumed by the producers themselves if they were small-farmers or was given in part-payment of wages if produced on the larger estates. Still, a sufficient amount must have been produced on these latifundia-like estates for sale to the rest of the population: Tabrija alone in 1523 produced almost 300 salme (83).

COTTON

The whole of the economy of the Maltese islands until the arrival of the Order depended on the growing of cotton. Maltese cotton is mentioned in Genoa at least once in the second half of the twelfth century (84) and, though that it should be sold at 12 tareni per salma, same as in Malta, the price of barley being exactly half: ASP, Lettere viceregie, vol. 56, fol. 84v.

80. It cost 16 tareni a salma at Syracuse in 1462: NLM, Univ. 11, fol. 157 bis; at Malta in 1487 and 1495 it was priced at 20 tareni a salma: NAV, Notary J. Sabara, R 494/1, contracts dated 24 November 1487 and 26 November 1495; its price was the same on 5 December 1511; Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, AO, vol. 6, fol. 64; in 1497 it was procured from Licata at 22½ tareni a salma: ibid., vol. 198, fol. 30v.

81. Evidence, 4-8 November 1499: ibid., vol. 2, fols. 201-216.

82. See below, p. 48. On 28 December 1470 it was directed that local wheat was to be sold before Sicilian wheat: NLM, Univ. 11, fols. 199-200. It was not to be mixed with Sicilian wheat: ibid., fol. 347.

83. See below, p. 48.

84. For the mention of Maltese cotton at Genoa in 1164: D. Abulafia, 'Henry Count of Malta and his Mediterranean Activities: 1203-1230', in Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights, pp. 106-07. Towards the end of that century Genoa traded in English woollens as well as French and Fleming woollens, cotton from Malta, cloth from Germany, red and blue, etc.: L. Cibrario, Della economia politica del medio evo, (Turin, 1842), III, 281, fn. 1, citing Protocolli di Lanfranco and other unknown notaries in the notarial archives of Genoa, 1180, 1192.
the thirteenth century is almost totally silent about it (85), the fourteenth shows it being exported mainly to Syracuse and through there farther afield, but it was also occasionally exported direct to Tripoli, Venice, Ancona, Bari and Barcelona (86). Malta is listed by Pego'otti among the six countries growing cotton in the first half of that century (87), but it is impossible to obtain a clear indication of the importance of Malta's cotton exports, except that cotton from Malta and Alexandria formed the basis of the cotton industries of Genoa, Montpellier and Barcelona (88). Taking both fourteenth and fifteenth centuries together, Del Treppo affirms that Maltese cotton eventually took the place of Turkish cotton at Barcelona where Sicilian and Maltese cotton continued to form the bulk of the cotton imports (89), foreshadowing a connection between Barcelona and Malta which was to last until the very last days of the eighteenth century. (90) Travellers to the Maltese islands both in 1394 and ca. 1470 remarked on the cultivation of cotton on one or other of the islands (91), and by the sixteenth century Rabelais in France used the phrase "blanc comme cotton de Malthe, as white as Malta cotton (92).

85. A Syracusan barcha captured by a Genoese privateer or pirate on 21 June 1272 while sailing between Malta and Sicily contained 30 rotolos of cotton yarn in its cargo: Cancelleria Angioina, VIII, 246.
87. R.S. Lopez & I W. Raymond, Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World (London, 1955), 109; unfortunately Pegalotti, La Pratika della mercatura, ed. A. Evans, was not available to the present writer.
88. J. Heers, op. cit.
89. M. del Treppo, I mercanti catalani e l'espansione della corona aragonese nel secolo XV (Napoli, 1968), 69; see also ibid., pp. 96, 97 and 105.
92. MM. Burgaud des Marets et Rothery, Oeuvres de Rabelais collationnees pour la pre
The early references to the export of cotton from Malta or the production of it there invariably refer to quite small amounts, but this is no indication of the scale of production of cotton on the Maltese islands; of that there is really no reliable information at all. In 1372-74 the royal secreto of Malta obtained a revenue in kind of 65 cantara (equivalent to 5,161 kilos) of un-ginned raw cotton (93). A royal official paid the sum of 121 uncie at Messina during 1372-73 obtained from the sale of Maltese ginned cotton; at the price of 16 florins a cantaro, this cotton must have amounted to 38 cantara, equivalent to some 114 cantara of unginned cotton (94). In 1439 the town authorities of Malta complained that 'the said town and island is almost destroyed and rendered incapable of paying the said money owing to the dryness of the weather of the last five years, especially of the present one, which has been unproductive of grains, cotton and cumin and other revenues and proceeds by which this island maintains itself' (95). With the first surviving notarial register, that of 1467, one begins to obtain a regular and fairly abundant documentation of the sale of raw cotton at various stages of production (98). However, in that very year (1467) the town authorities of Gozo pointed out, in an effort to obtain an exemption from a proposed tax, that:

this island does not have any other livelihood, subsidy or sustenance except from cotton, and when [the] cotton [crop] fails the island cannot earn a penny and it is already four years that cotton has failed and thus the people of the island do not possess a penny and, what is worse, the grain harvest has been very poor and it is necessary to obtain grain from abroad, and we are thus in some confusion, not knowing how to sustain ourselves and maintain the said island.

It is clear that cotton was considered to be the only cash crop of Gozo worth mentioning. In this, Malta must have resembled Gozo.

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94. Letter to Notary Petrus de Brullis, 20 August 1373: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 6, fols. 242v-243. The price and quantity are given in or calculated from the 1373 document. Unginned cotton is three times as heavy as ginned cotton: M. Miege, *Histoire de Malte*, I, 361.

95. Capitoli of 19 July 1439: Giambruno & Genuardi, p. 408.

96. Between the first surviving register, that of notary Paulo Bonello (1467) and the next, that of notary J. Saba (1486) there is a long gap almost totally uncovered by notarial documentation.

The approximate size of Malta's cotton exports may perhaps be calculated by offsetting it against the contemporary importation of wheat. To balance the importation of an occasional thousand salme of wheat at first, then an annual thousand, and finally up to some 9000 salme a year, the island must have exported at first an occasional then an annual 166 cantara of ginned cotton and, around 1528, well over 1000 cantara (98). This must, however, be reduced by the substantial sums earned by the export of cumm but the money thus obtained had also to cover cost of importation of several other articles of trade: all types of cloth, timber for beams and for ship-building or repair, as well as all things in daily use from paper to nails, iron for blacksmiths, spices and chemicals, gunnery and explosives. On the other hand, much of the cotton was spun into yarn before export raising its price at least by a third.

Cotton was sown in March or April and did not mature for harvesting before September or even October (99). Its growing season, therefore, fell largely in the warmer and dryer months of the year. In fact, after March rain in Malta becomes utterly unreliable, and only fields with an assured supply of water were really suitable for cotton growing. One therefore finds land always classified in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century into one or other of two types, that suitable for grain and pulses, and the other with a more abundant water supply also adapted to the growing of cotton. The latter was much more valuable. Thus in 1449 it was claimed that (100):

> arable land of two crops, viz. land which is suitable for the production of wheat and barley and cotton in this island of Gozo, was and is better and more valuable than land of one crop, that is land which is not suitable for the cultivation of cotton, and it is worth and usually valued if not by a half at least by a third more.

The same distinction was made fifty years later (101):

> According to the custom of Malta the valuation [of land] is made in accordance with the quality of the land: when it is good and of two crops on sites which could be used for building, a túnino of such land is usually valued at a common price

98. For imports of wheat, see above pp. 13-14. The calculation is based on wheat prices as given in footnote 80. Ginned cotton prices: in 1467 it cost 12 florins a cantaro according to contracts dated 4 September, 7 and 9 October; in deeds of Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, fols. 7v, 23v, 25v; it varied mainly between 8 and 15 florins down to 1500 as in the deeds of Not. J. Säbara and Not. Graciano Vassallo, passim, and mainly up to 25 florins between 1500 and 1530, as in deeds of Not. C. Cauchur and Not. J. Bondin. It is hoped in a future edition to give price lists in graph form both for wheat and for cotton, (unginned, ginned and yarn).

99. See below pp. 20 and 45 for the time of sowing.


101. Ibid., fol. 56, testimony of Nicolaus Curmi, 19 January 1499.
of two good uncie, and when it is rocky and of one crop it is valued usually at about six Maltese uncie (ie. less than one uncia *ponderis generalis*) the thumino.

In other words, the good quality land, here complicated by its suitability for building, was valued at slightly more than twice the less valuable land.

Court proceedings started in Gozo in 1449 to revoke as usurious the sale back in 1424 of a field of some 5.55 acres situated in the district of Santa Cecilja provide the historian with a remarkable amount of economic information otherwise unobtainable (102). The plaintiff argued that the field was fertile and of the best land in Gozo, able to render, on a biennial crop rotation of wheat or barley followed by cotton, an annual income of eight or nine Gozitan uncie (103):

**TABLE 1. Production of the field Tal-Berbri at Santa Cecilja Gozo, ca. 1424/1449**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>12/14 salme</td>
<td>2u. 4t. per salma</td>
<td>25u. 18t. to 29u. 26t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>straw</td>
<td>24/28 loads</td>
<td>1 carlinu per load</td>
<td>12t. to 14t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thorns</td>
<td>6/8 loads</td>
<td>1 tari per load</td>
<td>6t. to 8t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First year, if wheat is grown**

Total value: 26u. 6t. to 30u. 18t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>16/18 salme</td>
<td>lu. 2t. per salma</td>
<td>17u. 2t. to 19u. 6t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>straw</td>
<td>40/50 loads</td>
<td>1 carlinu per load</td>
<td>20t. to 25t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thorns</td>
<td>6/8 loads</td>
<td>1 tari per load</td>
<td>6t. to 8t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First year, if barley is grown**

Total value: 17u. 28t. to 20u. 9t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cotton</td>
<td>10/12 cantara</td>
<td>2u. Ot. per cantar</td>
<td>20u. Ot. to 24t. Ot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thorns</td>
<td>6/8 loads</td>
<td>1 tari per load</td>
<td>6t. to 8t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Second year, with cotton as main crop**

Total value: 20u. 6t. to 24u. 6t.

The plaintiff stated that on Gozo the land was customarily cultivated continually without any period of rest, a cereal crop of wheat or barley alternating, when suitable, with cotton (104). A witness put it differently,

103. Pleas of Antoni Rekise, 18 December 1449: *ibid.*, fols. 32-33. Presumably, the income referred to is the rental value of the land.
claiming that the cereal crop was followed by *maisi*, fallow, cotton being sown only when the land had obtained enough rain (105). The production claimed for the field at Santa Cecilia could only justify the increased value of land ‘of two crops’ if only a half or even only a third of the field was suitable for cotton growing, as was claimed by some past tenants (106). Alternatively, one has to allow for the possibility that a fodder crop was grown immediately before the sowing of cotton (107).

It would appear that in 1449 normal tenure on Gozo was arranged on a metayage basis, the landlord receiving half the income on the wheat and barley crops, including half the straw, and the whole of the thorns (108). However, he received only one fourth of the value of the cotton crop together with the thorns collected that year, the tenant obtaining another fourth, the remaining half going to the *cuttunerius*, or cotton farmer, who actually worked the land for the production of the cotton crop (109). Rather unexpectedly, the cotton grower was therefore normally a distinct person quite different from both the land-owner and the tenant; he undertook to grow the cotton, surrendering a fourth to the land-owner and another fourth to the tenant, and satisfying himself with the remaining half (110):

Jacobus Fisatini... said that it is the custom of the island of Gozo that out of the wheat and barley produced on the land that is farmed, the landlord or owner of the said land has a half and the farmer or tenant the remaining half, and of the cotton the landlord or owner of the land has a fourth part and the tenant has another fourth part and the remaining two fourths of the cotton belong to the *cuttunerio*, that is to him who sows the cotton and does the hoeing of the cotton.

This type of tenure survived well into the sixteenth century. Numerous contracts of lease *ad cattaniam* can be found in the registers of Notary Jacobo

105. Jacobus Fisatini (Fsa dni), 22 December 1449: ibid., fol. 34v.
106. Ibid., fols. 26, 34v.
107. ‘Le terre non producono consecutivamene cottone, ma alternativamente seminati. L’anno però destinato al cottone, si tirano dalle viscere della terra due prodotti, Il primo si raccoglia nel principio del verno in erbe ortalizie, legumi sulla ed orzo detto forraina. Il Marzo finiscono le anzidette produzioni, e si preparano le terre per la seconda messe del cottone. In vista di un duplicato raccolto nel medesimo anno..... la gente di campagna impiega molto contante e si occupa indelessamente ogni quattro o otto anni a dissodare la terra, a concimarla e migliorarla.’, report by the Chamber of Commerce, Valletta, 17 June 1776: NLM, Libr. 1020, Item 20, p. 4 (my pagination).
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., fol. 34v, testimony given on 22 December 1449.
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Sabara (1486-1501) and Notary Consalvo Canchur (1488-1531) (111). Unfortunately they invariably refer to Maltese custom without ever explaining what it was. It is clear, however, that they practically always cover periods of just one season and frequently mere portions of fields, presumably the parts suitable for the cultivation of cotton. On the other hand, normal metayage arrangements were also quite frequent by the end of the fifteenth century, and instances occur where particular fields were rented out for four years on the understanding that cotton was to be grown repeatedly for the whole period (112). Fief-holders themselves were not averse to growing cotton on their fields. In 1493 the nobleman Petrus de Vaccaro referred to the fields he had inherited from his mother which were producing bombici or cotton in that particular year and to another five salme of land similarly growing cotton (113). In 1497 Antonius Gatt Desguanes, another nobleman, sold more than thirteen cantara of ginned cotton in one transaction alone (114), and two years later his cousin and namesake Antonius Lancie Desguanes actually let out some land to a peasant ad cuttuneriam sive cattaniam (115). The nobles could hardly have succeeded in improving their revenues from the land without switching over to the production of cotton.

CUMIN

Cumin seed was another of Malta’s principal cash crops, second in importance only to that of cotton. That it never eclipsed the latter in importance until the twentieth century, when it survived for several decades after the disappearance of cotton growing, can be deduced from the fact that it almost invariably received a secondary mention in contemporary documents after cotton. In 1394 the Italian notary Niccola de Martoni stated that on Gozo there were vineyards and a great quantity of cotton and cumin and meat of

111. Eg. contracts dated 6 September and 15 December 1486. Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; 14 December 1500, 7 and 27 January 1501, 21 October 1516, No. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/1, fols. 71 and 79, R 140/7, fol. 49; 27 January 1518, Not J. Bondin, NAV, R 69, fols. 35v et seq.; 22 February 1531, ibid., fols. 37v et seq.

112. Thus on 7 March 1496 half the field Bita Turbe sive Habel Turbe at Rahal Tarxen was given to Vincenti Barbara and Gracie Briffa ad cuttuneriam for four successive seasons ‘during which they should continuously sow cotton and everyone should collect the share pertaining to him of the said cotton’: Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.

113. Will of nobilis Petrus de Vaccaro, 8 June 1493: deeds of notary Bartholomeus Sil- lato, NAV, Ms. 1069, fol. 38.


115. Contract, 23 November 1499; ibid. In Maltese, shiftless and rather violent persons are still frequently called ta’ qattâni, hitherto miss-spelt ta’ qattaghni.
all kinds (116). In 1439 the town authorities of Malta complained that the current lack of rain ruined the crops of cereals, cotton and cumin (117). In 1468 the Gozitans did not even mention cumin when they complained that the crops of cereals and cotton on which the island economy depended had failed utterly that year (118). The Flemish traveller Adorne round about 1470 wrote that on Malta grew cotton and cumin (119). Paolo Bonello's notarial register, covering the months of September to December 1467, contains seventeen contracts involving cotton but none about cumin and, lest it be observed that this is easily explainable by the fact that it coincided with the cotton harvest, one can point out that the second volume of Notary Jacobus Sabara (18 January 1497 to 24 February 1501) contains twenty contracts on cotton and eight only on cumin. Even Quintinus clearly gives the primacy to cotton over cumin in 1533 (120).

Contemporary references commonly distinguish between two types of cumin growing on Malta and Gozo, the bitter and the sweet. The bitter, which survived in Maltese fields down to the 1950s, botanically known as Cuminum cyminum L., (121) was used principally for the flavouring of food and drinks, for pharmaceutical preparations and for perfume. The sweet, botanically Pimpinella Anisum L., in Maltese hlewwa, in English aniseed (122), is used as a condiment for food especially sprinkled over bread before baking. The bitter type occurs much more frequently in the surviving notarial records down to 1530, and was produced in greater quantity than the sweet in Abela's time: 5000 cantara of bitter cumin, 1000 cantara of sweet cumin (1647) (123). Sowing takes place in winter and harvesting in June in fields with a light soil (124). Like cotton, land for cumin growing was often leased out, even by tenants on a share-cropping basis, to cultivators on a cattania type of contract. Thus on 4 January 1487 Matheus Calleya granted ad cuttuneriam to Laurencius Zamit a portion of the field-strip called Ilhulje (125):

119. R. Brunschvig (ed. & tr.), Deux recits de voyage inédits en Afrique du nord au XV siècle, p. 179.
121. J. Borg, Descriptive Flora of the Maltese Islands (Malta, 1927), 414-415.
122. Ibid., p. 414.
124. For Quintinus see H.C.R., Vella, op. cit., pp. 36-37.
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for the sowing of bitter cumin and also for the sowing of a pensa [about four kilos] of bitter cumin in another stretch of ground called Tarahibe as well as for the sowing of cotton in two field-strips Izahurura for the present season.

The whole crop of bitter cum in and most of the sweet cumin or aniseed were exported.

VINEYARDS AND VITICULTURE

Ancient Malta does not seem to have been renowned for its wine. The Muslims themselves must have strongly disapproved of it. In post-Muslim times, vineyards are mentioned in a vague and general way in one of the surviving Angevin documents (1273) (126). It is known that Jacobus de Peregrino, one of the principal notables of the island, had a vineyard at Marsa in 1361 (127). Three vineyards are mentioned in 1399 in the district of Dejr Handul (128), another at Zurrieq (129) and one on the southern border of the land called Ghajn il-Qasab at Tewnit on the island of Gozo (130). An excise duty on wine already existed in 1372 both in Malta and Gozo (131), and other wine duties were imposed in Malta in 1398 (132). In 1434 the town authorities of Malta complained that the importation of foreign wine was harming Maltese viticulture which provided a livelihood for a thousand inhabitants, a figure acceptable only if it included the labourers together with their dependents (133). It would not seem from such taxation figures as have survived that the importation of wine increased to such an extent down to 1530 that it threatened Maltese viticulture seriously (134). In fact, in 1462 claims were made that the bad weather and the abundant production of local wine in the previous year had resulted in 'little wine, nearly none at all' being imported so that the tax-farmer had actually lost some two-thirds or more of the tax money he

127. 18 June 1361: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 7, fol. 450.
129. 22 August 1399: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 36, fol. 93v.
130. 30 August 1399: ibid., fol. 104v.
131. The wine tax farm in Malta was partly remitted in consequence of the fighting there in 1372: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 12, fol. 207. For the assisia vini of Gozo for the year 1372/73, see ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 12, fol. 203, and H. Bresc, 'The "Secrezia" and the Royal Patrimony', p. 130.
132. These were temporary taxes for the duration of the siege of the Castle-by-the-Sea, 14 February 1398: ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 30, fol. 37.
133. Capitoli of 14 August 1434: Giambruno & Genuardi, p. 305.
134. Wine importation tax figures in H. Bresc, 'The "Secrezia" and the Royal Patrimony', p. 135; more complete figures will be given in a projected paper on crafts and trade in Late Medieval Malta.
had promised to pay the town authorities (135). In later times, partly perhaps as a result of the excessive importation of Sicilian wine as well as the probable extension of cotton growing, Maltese viticulture died out almost completely, and was not revived before the opening years of the twentieth century (136).

Fifteenth and sixteenth century documentary evidence shows that vineyards existed mainly where there was a reliable supply of water from springs or streams, rain alone being unreliable. In the valleys and on the hill-slopes north of Mdina, vineyards were to be found at Wied il-Bużież, Fiddien, Dejr Handul, Hofret ir-Rih, Bahrija, Wied ir-Rum, Ghar Gholliqa, Ghajn Klieb, Gherexem, Ghar Tarq at Mtarfa, and at Qalellija (137). Farther afield one could find them also at Hal Pessa (ie. at Gnien ta' Hal Pessa, Bieb Malf, and Ta' Gerguba) (138), at l-Ahfar (e. Gharib l-Ahfar, Habel ta' Cilia, ta' Lahlah) (139), at Xwieki (Gnien il-Gharib, il-Habel, Hirbit il-Keejjen) (140), and at Gharghar (ie. at Ta' Burga, Dukkiena ta' Zerqa and Ta' Gulgibien) (141). Qadi not far from the port of Benwerrad and Marsa at the head of the Grand Harbour each had at least two vineyards (142). Watercourses all over Malta and cisterns were similarly associated

135. Viceroy to secretary of Malta, 25 July 1462; copy in NLM, Univ. 11, fol. 154.
ciated with vineyards: Wied Tabrija, Wied il-Kbir, Wied Qannotta, Wied il-Qlejgha, Wied Hażrurn, Bir il-Hut and Bir il-Megil (143). Rahal Tabuni, Rahal Ghaxaq, Rahal Manin, Rahal Qorimi, Rahal Ghakruux, Rahal Tartarni, Rahal Dingli, Rahal Tarxien and Rahal Millieri all had at least one vineyard in their vicinity (144). Gozo had several vineyards; among those recorded are the vineyards at Xlendi, Wied Sara, Qabbieza và Marsalforn (145).

Quite often vineyards also had a number of other trees, mostly fruit trees. This was true of the vineyard called Ta' Fasula at Wied il-Kbir, Gnien Hiruna at Xaghret il-Ghar, Ta' Hajjim at Qallelija, Tal-Hamra at Gharb, Gozo, Ta Kwejla at Qlejgha, and of a vineyard at Sancti Pauli tal Bundachi (146). Fields with vines and trees include one at Gnien il-Far, one at Hal Kirkop and another at Siggiewi (147).

Ownership of vineyards was not restricted to only one class. In 1434 it was claimed that viticulture was the main source of sustenance not only of the


wage-earning labourers but also of the gentry and townspeople (148). Probably most of the major landowners had at least one vineyard, and others of a lower rank, such as notaries, craftsmen and even mere peasants also sometimes owned a vineyard. Notary Ingomes de Brancato had a vineyard at Ghajn Ballut, the lawyer Marcus de Brancato had one at Habel I-Iblaq, the lawyer Laurencius de Falczon bought one, another was owned by Michael de Ferriolo the town surgeon in 1499 and by Jeronimo Callus the town aromatist in 1514 (149). On the other hand, it was claimed that Franciscus Vella had earned his living from his vineyard "working in it and cultivating it himself and the bees which he kept there during his lifetime" (150), and Bartholomeus Buttigieg 'earned his own living, working as a farmer and in his vineyard', but he was a substantial peasant of Zebbug who claimed to be worth a total of 170 uncie in property and money (151).

No sales of grapes have been encountered in the surviving documentation which, however, records several sales of must or grape juice ready for fermentation. In 1467 Antonellu Gattu Desguanes sold a quantity of must to Dominicus Fenec of Rabat, and Blasius Muchola of Mdina sold some of the same liquid to Paulus Axac and Bartholomeus Bugeya of Zebbug (152). In 1530 Nicolaus Frendu of Rabat sold a barrel of must to Gabrieli Martin of Mdina (153). In 1432 Franciscus Gattu, the owner of three fiefs and much other land, bequeathed six buttes of must annually to his widow (154), and ca. 1428 several defaulting tithe payers were recorded to have made some partial payments of tithes in must, one of them in actual wine, instead of the usual wheat or barley (155). There is no clear evidence that independent vintners existed, though it is probable that some tavern owners occasionally or habitually produced wine of their own, relying mainly on must bought from the farmers. In January 1485

149. Notary Ingomes de Brancato: 29 January 1500, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2; Marcus de Brancato: 3 March 1500, ibid.; Laurencius de Falczone: 24 July 1499, ibid.; Michaeli de Ferriolo: 8 November 1499, ibid.; Jeronimo Callus: 11 October 1514, NLM, Univ. 12, fol. 92.
154. Photostat in the possession of the present writer of a fifteenth century copy of the will of Francesco Gatto in the possession of Dr. John Montalto, 12 March 1432.
155. Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, Quaderni diversi 'a', fol. 2v, entry of Don Johanni Vella, fol. 4v, entry of Ugolinu Sillatu; in wine, fol. 2v, entry of Don Johanni Vella again, and fol. 4v, entry of Cola Sillatu.
Isabella, the wife of Andria Bonchi of Gozo, leased her husband’s vineyard to Paulus Albanisi a vigneri or vintner at ‘dui pro chincu’, two for five, according to the custom of Gozo, giving him a mattock for tilling the ground and the key to the building in the vineyard (156).

HORTICULTURE

Garden type agriculture was carried out mainly in localities called viridaria or pomeria in the Latin documents and sometimes jardino, in the Italian ones. These words appear much more frequently than vinea, vineyard, but there is little doubt that most of them contained at least one vineyard. A large number of the viridaria had names, possibly very old ones, which indicated their horticultural character, e.g. ġnien garden, ġnejjen, ġnejna small garden, ġonna gardens, ġhajn spring, ġhejjun springs (157):

- il-Gnejjen (Qrendi)
  - ġnien Hira (near Mdina)
  - ġnejjen I-Istas
- il-Gnejna (Ghajn Rihana)
  - ġnien il-Kbir (west of Pwales)
- il-Gnejna ta’ I-Mġarr
  - ġnien il-Laring (Ghajn Rihana)
- ġnien il-Far (Dejr is-Saf)
  - ġnien Il-Laring (Ghajn Rihana, Gozo)
- ġnien il-Fieres (Wied il-Qlegha)
  - ġnien Musfar (Ghajn Rihana)
- ġnien tal-Ghaqba (Zurrieq)
  - ġnien is-Sultan (Qala, Gozo)
  - ġnien is-Sultan (west of Rabat)

A number of other viridaria are associated with place-names referring to water:

- Bir Merqis (Zurrieq)
  - Mgarr Vaccari (Mgarr)
- Tal-Menqa (Gebel Chantar)
  - Nixxiegha (Zurrieq)
  - Qbiela ta’ Ghar Ilma (Dejr il-Bniet)

157. All these place-names are appearing in ‘Early Maltese and Gozitan Place-names’, published in the new monthly periodical called Civilization, with precise spellings and documentary references. It is not practical to publish them here. For those in
The references to water are: bir well, really water cistern, menqa water enclosure, mgarr water courses, plural of migra water course, qattara trickling spring, ilma water, saqwi irrigated fields.

Other viridaria have other names unconnected with the supply or presence of water, more often than not names of persons somehow at some time connected with the locality:

- Ta' Bezzina
  (Hal Gharghur)
- Tal-Bidnija
  (above Ghajn Rihana)
- Bunuhhalal
  (Ward.ja)
- Buqa
  (Pwales)
- Tad-Dahla
- Dejr il-Baqar
- Dejr il-Bniet
- Dejr is-Saf
  (Buskett)
- Dejr is-Safsa

It should be observed that at least 63 localities with gnien and 36 with ghajn place-names are not recorded to have had any viridaria or even vineas associated with them. Perhaps in such places preference was given to the growing of cash crops like cotton or cumin instead of fruit or vegetables which could only have had a local and very limited market in a community where practically everyone had access to a stretch of land or to the humble and ubiquitous fig trees so often to be found sheltering beside the rubble walls that even then protected the fields from wind and water erosion (158).

Very little information has survived on the types of fruit that grew in Malta. In 1533 Quentin wrote that the orchards in Malta had palm-trees which were sterile, olive trees and vines as well as fig-trees and every other kind of


158. It should, however, be emphasized that the Latin or Italian descriptions are not meant to be fully descriptive of the place-name but frequently refer to an aspect of momentary importance. Thus these places might be described quite truthfully as fiefs without any implication that they were not viridaria, etc., in their economic function.
fruit, in fact all the fruit-producing trees which grew in Italy (159). Unfortunately fruit is never included in the more or less detailed price lists which survive from ca. 1450 onwards, and even mere references to fruit are scrappy in the extreme, except that there were orange groves at Dejr is-Saf in 1549 (160). Olive trees were certainly quite rare.

FLAX

It would seem that Maltese flax (in Maltese *kittien*), which had earned itself a well-deserved reputation in Roman times (161), declined in importance during the course of the Middle Ages, though it still continued to be produced in relatively small amounts right down to the early sixteenth century (162). It figured regularly in the income of the royal secreto back in the fourteenth and early fifteenth century records though when explicit figures are given it was represented by far smaller amounts than those for cotton: in fact in the year 1372 only eighty rotula of flax were received by the secreto, a negligible quantity compared to the 65 cantara of unginned cotton (163). On 26 January 1479 Fredericus de Pontremulo and his wife bequeathed the following property (164):

a viridarium sited and placed in the territory of the island of Gozo in the district of Teunit called *di bin xible* [ie. of Sibilia’s son] with all and singular its rights etc. with which it used to be leased and especially with the watered lands *terræ aquaticæ* situated there called *issacuj* [ie. the irrigated land] where aquatic cotton [ie. flax] is usually produced...

On 16 July 1522 Matheus Darmania of Mdina leased to four inhabitants of Axiac (165):

a pool of stagnant water where flax is retted called in our words [ie. in our language] *menca de gadir* [really Menqa ta’ l-Gadir], situated on the island of Malta in the district of Ghadir for the retting of flax solely for the present season, that is for the Tenth Indiction at the [rental] price of 3 unc. 18 tr.

164. Will of the noble Fredericus de Pontremolo and his wife Francia, 26 January 1479: copy in deeds of Not. Domenico Portelli, NAV, R 399/7, fol. 296v.
This locality seems to be identical with that indicated by the name *Sancti Georgii gadir*, described on 4 April 1540 as 'fons madendi lini' (166), and with *hayn chiten* or *Ghajn Kittien*, flax fountain or spring, described on 27 June 1559 merely as a 'viridarium arboribus plantatum in contrata ta sanct Jeorgi tal gadir' (167), especially as *tel gadir* was itself referred to on 9 June 1542 as 'lu abunaturi seu stagnoni di lu lino' (168). Though Malta is generally regarded a dry place, other *ghadir* place-names are recorded at Bir Ghiża, Hal Tmim near Zejtun and Hal Safi, and *ghadir* at Hal Kibir, Hal Fuqani, Hal Saflieni, Wardija ta' Sant'Iermu as well as Mellieha Bay in Malta and at Qortin in Gozo, and the same words form component parts of several other place-names (169): Ghadir Bir Ferha, Ghadir il-Burdi at Lija, Ghadir Marsaxlokk, Ghadir Qumi at Brolli, Ghadir ir-Roogha, Ghadir tat-Torri ta' San Tumas at Hal Safi, perhaps identical with the one at Hal Safi already indicated, Ghadir it-Triq at Haż-Zebbuġ, Ghadiriet il-Hmir at Tabrija and Ghadiriet ix-Xurref. There was also a retting place called Ghajn Selmet which was described as 'the retting place of the district of Benwerrad' (170).

Other retting places are probably recorded by place-names in *menqa*, water enclosure or pool, *mnejqa*, small water enclosure or pool, and *mnejqat*, several small water enclosures or pools. At Hal Millieri not only was there a field called il-Menqa but, a short distance away towards Zurrieq, there was another called il-Kittenija, the flax-field. With Malta's then very imperfect drainage system for storm water one can easily understand the existence in such places of stagnant water, especially at the head of the numerous ports, bays and inlet. As late as 1581 the government was still leasing out for three years 'locum dictum l'bonatore de Marsamuxet detto il Miside, sive locum ubi solet infundi linum', for the sum of five uncie (171). Unfortunately, the stench produced in the retting process was mistaken as the cause of malaria, and the retting ponds were consequently progressively legislated out of existence. As early as 28 July 1519 a public proclamation forbade the retting of flax in unusual localities and within one mile of inhabited places, especially at the springs of Gnien is-Sultan, Gheriexem and the Bishop's fief (172). In 1526 the valley of the bishop's fief and Laurenti Spring at Tabrija were both expressly forbidden for retting, the flax already

166. Contract, 4 April 1540: Not. P. de Alaymo, NAV, Ms. 779, fol. 47.
169. For reasons of convenience precise references for these place-names will not be given here but in my 'Early Maltese and Gozitan Place-names', in course of publication.
172. Proclamation, 28 July 1519: NLM, Univ. 12, fol. 125.
in the water having to be removed within six days (173). Presumably partly at least as a result of similar legislation, the growing of flax was discontinued completely on both Maltese islands (174).

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Farm animals, both large and small, played a most important part in the structure of Maltese agriculture. After the great Moorish invasion of 1429 both in Malta and in Gozo complaints were made that the mortality and consequent scarcity of farm animals was making it impossible for the fields to be worked and sown (175). In 1469 the great lack of rain brought about the failure of the crops of wheat and cotton (176),

and what is worse in this great sterility, the like of which in this island [of Gozo] has almost never been seen, cattle and other animals, not finding pasture, died and perished, without which animals cultivation and ploughing cannot be carried out, and it is therefore impossible for the same Andreas the petitioner to cultivate the said territory for the present and for future years, as hardly any cattle have survived.

Oxen appear very often in surviving contracts of sale, in wills and inventories, and they seem to have been the main draught animals used almost entirely for ploughing the fields and probably for treading the wheat out of the chaff in preparation for winnowing, assisted by such other major animals as the farmer might have.

Malta has always possessed fairly large areas of karstic table-lands suitable only for very rough grazing (177). In the fifteenth century these areas, then still just about entirely unenclosed, were considered to be common property open to the animals of all. To them can be added large areas of slightly better land which have since been turned into arable, areas like Mżieb ir-Rih and around Mellieha, most of which, however, have reverted back to grass. Every village seems to have been within reach of a stretch of such common land, and the importance of animal husbandry is well brought out by the records of their strenuous efforts to prevent the appropriation of portions

173. Proclamation, 3 August 1526: ibid., fol. 414v.
174. On anti-malaria legislation in Malta see P. Cassar, Medical History of Malta (London, 1965), Ch. 17.
of such land by private individuals, whether fellow peasants or the substantial landholders of Mdina. Protests were made as early as 1410 in the earliest known extensive set of popular grievances (178): all such alienated land was to be restored to public ownership. In 1436 the inhabitants of the hamlet of Targel (i.e. Tarxien) complained that the spacci or open grazing grounds and other properties of the neighbouring uninhabited village of Allum had been leased by the royal officials to some inhabitants of the Castle-by-the-Sea and others, rendering it difficult for them to trust their animals out on the grazing lands because of inevitable accusations of their straying on to these lands (179). They were able to obtain a revocation of the original lease of the lands and a re-granting of it in their favour. Only ten years later, some inhabitants of Zurrieq obtained the revocation of similar grants of public land, eventually getting an order from the viceroy that the secreto, Antonio Desguanes, holder of three fiefs and several other properties, should take action on the matter (180). In 1526 Nicolaus Chantar of the same village accused Angarao Inguanes, really Jacobus Angarai Desguanes, great grandson of Antoni Desguanes, not only of alienating in his favour a portion of the common land of the village but of envying him into his house and there incarcerating him and beating him mercilessly with a strap and a cane for having opposed him (181). In 1529 Desguanes was still being opposed by the inhabitants of the four villages of the parish of St. Catherine, i.e. Zejtun, for his tenure of Lippia, originally obtained from the royal government by his son-in-law Diego Zavaglio (182). In 1527 several inhabitants of Birkirkara caused the public authorities to cancel alienations of common land of that village to individual inhabitants of the same village (183).

Antoni Desguanes in the middle of the fifteenth century raised a furor of opposition by his persistent efforts to appropriate and enclose, with royal permission, extensive portions of common land mostly in the north and west

180. The magister Racionalis of Sicily to the secreto of Malta Anthonio Desguanes, 10 January 1447: NLM, Univ. 4, doc. 18. The date has been established by reference to the Indictional number of the year (the Tenth) and to misser Johanni Sabia as Regius commissarius since the letter of appointment of the latter is dated 27 December 1445: ASP, Protonotaro, vol. 37, fols. 111v-112.
181. The Viceroy to the town mayor of Malta and his judge, 6 March 1526: Cath. Mus., Md., Cath. Arch., Ms. 28, pp. 400-403. See also NLM, Univ. 12, fol. 429v, meeting of the town council, 9 March 1527.
183. NLM, Univ. 12, fol. 446rv. Numerous similar incidents occurred in other localities.
of the island. In 1458 the town authorities complained that his appropriation of Mizieb ir-Rih was extremely prejudicial to the community (184):

the said Messer Antoniu [Desguanes] should not and cannot... make use of the said spaces according to his own will to the great harm of the republic, as it is very prejudicial to the said community in general and in particular, because the rest of the other areas called di la Millacha, without which the people of the said island cannot survive owing to the thorns for fuel and pasture for animals to be found there, the people could thenceforth make little use of it because the said area of Mizieb ir-Rih... is across the route to these areas of Millacha and large numbers of beasts usually pass by for pasture, and after misser Antonio obtained Mizieb ir-Rih none dared keep their beasts in the district of the said Mellieha in order not to get involved in accusations of damages since it is virtually impossible for those having animals in those places not to do harm to the said lands of Mizieb ir-Rih, and thus the island suffers in not having even meat at the butchers' as it used to have before the cession of the said area.

Messer Antoni Desguanes also got himself into trouble in the same year 1458 over his appropriation of commons at Wied Geržuma because 'in the said areas it was usual for large numbers of animals to be led by their owners for pasture and watering' (185). His ambitions were inherited by his numerous progeny both at Mizieb ir-Rih and at Ghajn Zejtuna, where they extended one of the boundaries without authorization arousing immediate protests (186).

As one can see, frequent disputes were likely to arise over animals allegedly staying from their proper pastures into the sown areas belonging to a private person. These matters were the responsibility of the baiulo, who earned a substantial income in fees and much unpopularity. As early as 1366 the baiulo was instructed that he had to follow the normal custom of exacting a fee from those on behalf of whom he took action and not from those against whom he proceeded on whom, no doubt, fines were eventually imposed (187); the complaints had apparently been made by the inhabitants of the town, the villages, hamlets and other places of Malta and Gozo. In 1432 the baiulo was told that the fines he imposed were to be proportionate to the harm done by the straying animals (188). In 1458 complaints were made that those to whom the office of baiulo had been farmed out were permitting unreliable

185. Ibid., p. 433.
186. Town Council, 28 May 1479: NLM, Univ. 11, fols. 397 bisv-398v.
187. 17 April 1366; ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 9, fol. 49v.
188. Capitoli, 30 October 1432: Giambruno & Genuardi, p. 392. Owing to the damage and disruption caused by the Moorish invasion of 1429 the office of baiulo of Malta was suspended for a year on 5 February 1430 except for the punishment of owners of straying animals: Cath. Mus., Md., Cath. Arch., Ms. 28, p. 50.
men to impose ten times the damage done on owners of straying animals (189). In 1475 it was said that the baiulo imposed penalties on animal owners leaving it for them to obtain redress from their accusers if they were innocent of the charge and, in spite of government attempts to stop this practice, similar complaints were made in 1507 and 1526 (190). Another abuse of the baiulo was to keep animals caught straying on other persons' land in an animal compound at Marsa instead of the one at Rabat from where they could more easily be recovered by their owners (191).

Stock-yards or animal farms are frequently referred to in the documentation of the period by particular words like mandra, mnajdra, mandretta or receptum (cp. Maltese razzett). These were mainly to be found in the hilly parts of the island, in and around uninhabited villages, near the coasts and places of marginal cultivation. They frequently also made use of any available caves in the neighbourhood (192).

Baqar, il-mandra
Dejr il-Baqar duas mandras in contrata di...
Gnejna, il-mandretta seu viniola vitibus in contrata lachfar
Ghar Mejmun et Hal Tmn duae clausurae simul conjunctae cum una area et sex clausunculae seu mandris secum conjunctis et cum una domo ... ac una c'isterna in contrata hued Izzit
Ghar tal-Qallelija locum sive receptum cum suis mandris, gructis et aliis in contrata Callelia
Gherien Palermo mandrettae et criptae (at Pwales)
Hal Dragu mandre et casa a racha! Dragu
Hal Ghul locum rusticum cum suis mandris, griptis, spaciis at Wied Hażrun
Hal Tm:n Chirba seu mandretta

189. Viceroy of Sicily to the town mayor of Malta and his judge, 25 April 1458: late copy in NLM, Libr. Ms. 494, fols. 34v-35v.
191. Proclamation, 23 June 1521: NLM, Univ. 12, fol. 270v. See also the petition of Hyeronimo and Bernardo Camenzuli of Mdina, and the magisterial decree, 15 December 1587: NLM, Univ. 14, fol. 687rv. On 15 May 1522 the pretensions of the administrator of the bishop's fiefs and of the income of the cathedral to punish the owners of animals trespassing over territory of the bishop or the Church were confirmed in a letter from the viceroy to the captain-at-arms in Malta: Cath. Mus., Md., Cath. Arch., Ms. 2, fols. 170-172.
192. Dejr il-Baqar: contract, 11 March 1496, Not. Graciano Vassallo, NAV, R 464/1, fol. 54; Hal Dragu: contract, 15 July 1520, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/8, fol. 120v; for the rest see 'Early Maltese and Gozitan Place-names'.
LATE MEDIEVAL MALTESE AGRICULTURE

Gozo had quite a few:

Muxet in Marsamxett probably refers to similar localities for animals and not for ships as has been inferred by others so far. There was a Wied il-Mixta in the extreme south of the island between Ghar Hasan and Binghisa and another such wintering place near Baqqari is referred to in the place-name Rqajja' l-Mixta. Gozo also had a Mixta ta' Kalmet at Gnien Musfar.

In 1240 Giliberto Abate recorded that the royal estates on Malta contained the following serfs who were employed solely in the rearing of animals (193):


No statistical information of any kind is available for any later period. In the fifteenth century the royal estates had been largely alienated or were, in any case, leased out on a rental or census paying basis obviating the need to employ anyone to care for the livestock. Exports of animals were sufficiently important to be mentioned several times in the complaints so regularly sent by the town authorities to their superiors at Palermo; they wanted the removal of the export duties on animals. In 1410 they complained that the old tax had been increased in effect by fifty per cent, and they asked for a return to the old rates (194). In 1432 a complete exemption from such taxes was requested for the animals which were taken out of Malta by those who travelled to Sicily in order to obtain wheat or barley for the island’s inhabitants (195). In 1439 they asked for the complete removal of the taxes because, what with freight charges and the export duties, little remained to the owner of the price he charged the purchaser ‘and thus these animals would remain on the island and the royal court would therefore get no profit, nor consequently would their owner’ (196).

Though the ownership of cattle was fairly widespread, as is only to be expected in an agricultural community which relied extensively on the use of ox-labour, the limited documentation available indicates that some landowners, mostly members of the Desguanes family, together with the notaries, lawyers, some priests and other better-off persons, had a pre-eminent, if not a dominant, status among the Maltese dealers in cattle. The earliest eight surviving sales of cattle (1467) show that all eight purchasers lived either in the villages or at Rabat: Qdieri (one), Siġġiewi (two), Zebbuġ (two), Rabat (one), Lija (one), and Grigori (one) (197). On the other hand, seven of the eight sellers lived at Mdina: Julianus Farrugia (two sales), nobilis Gofridus Desguanes (four, possibly five, sales), and Angelus Michallef of Birkirkara (one sale) (198). About half the sellers in the eighteen contracts of sale examined

196. Capitoli, 19 July 1439: Giambruno & Genuardi, p. 408.
197. Contracts dated 10 September (three), 15 September, 9 October, 14 October, 16 October (two), all 1467: NAV, Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, fols. 12, 12, 12rv, 15v, 25, 28v, 31 and 31v respectively.
for the period 1486-1550 also lived at Mdina, the rest residing in one or other of the
villages: Tarxien, Musta, Kirkop, Naxxar, Mqabba (twice) and Qdieri (199). The purchasers belonged to Rabat (three of them), Qdieri, Millieri, Axaq, Zebug (two), Naxxar (two) and Gozo (two), the origin of the remaining five remaining unknown. Practically none of the sales individually involved more than two or three head of adult cattle, and they must have been typical of cattle sales in a peasant community. Almost all the bulls and oxen were sold outright to their new owners.

Most of the cows and their calves were sold on a half-share basis, half the price being borne almost invariably by an inhabitant of Mdina, in most cases a notary, lawyer, priest or nobleman, whose half of the price was offset by the labour put in by the actual farmer who saw to the well-being of the cow and its offspring, townsman and farmer sharing the profits on an equal basis, the partnership having to last for a set period, usually for four years (200). Thirteen contracts of this type have been examined (1467, 1486-1530) (201). Sleeping partners included notary Bartholomeo de Sillato (three cows) (202), notary Ingomes de Brancato (two cows in Gozo, one cow and one calf at Naxxar) (203), the nobleman Nardu Calava who belonged to a legal family (one cow and its calf at Musta (204), three cows elsewhere), the wife of the nobleman Johannis de Habica (one calf in partnership with Bertus Mintuf of


200. Examining the documentation cited in the immediately preceding and succeeding footnotes one finds that 5 oxen, 2 bulls and 1 cow were described as black, 2 oxen and 3 cows were white, 3 oxen and 2 cows were red, 1 ox was of orange colour, another 2 were chestnut, and 1 was of mixed colour, while 1 ox and 3 cows were obscurely described as idibus (?), and another cow is indichelli (?). The colour of the rest was not given.

201. Contracts dated 1 August 1486, 28 March 1487, 22 June 1487, 31 October 1494: Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; 10 July 1498: idem, NAV, R 494/2; 29 April 1500: idem, NAV, Ms. 1132; 4 November 1500: Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/1, fols 35v et seq.; 16 July 1518: ibid, NAV, R 140/7, fol. 192v; 27 January 1518, 19 February 1518 and 4 September 1521: J. Bondin, NAV, R 69.

202. Contract, 22 June 1487: Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; 11 September 1499: idem, NAV, R 494/2; 29 April 1500: idem, NAV, Ms. 1132.


Gozo (205), the prominent priest Nicolaus de Falzono (two cows and two calves in partnership with a farmer at Ghadir il-Bordi, north of Lija) (206). Such partnerships enabled the richer persons of Mdina to help the peasants in financing the relatively expensive and perhaps hazardous operation of cattle rearing in Malta where money was always scarce. However, half-sharing was also resorted to by older peasants planning their retirement. This most probably was the case when Lemo di Famagusta of Siggiewi leased out on 4 September 1467 on a half-share basis the whole of his farm to Paulus Axac of Żebbuġ, including seven oxen, a bull, a cow and its calf, sixteen sheep and two goats, as well as the lands which he held on a share-cropping basis from various persons; lands which he held on a rental basis would be taken over on the same arrangement (207). Obviously, also, Lemo di Famagusta was one of the richer peasants of Siggiewi.

Horses were relatively scarce. Hardly any sales have been encountered in the notarial records, and horses were certainly very much less important than oxen in Maltese agriculture. In fact, horses are mentioned much more frequently in relation to their military use. Several of the fiefs, even back in the fourteenth century, were granted on condition of military service by one or more armed men on horseback in the king’s forces: Dejr il-Bniet (one), Buqana (one), Hemsija (one) (208). In fact, militia and cavalry records provide most of the available information on horses, though the use of the word giumenta, a mare or female donkey, mule or horse used as a pack animal, complicates its precise interpretation (209):

Table 2. Horses and other equines indicated by the symbol ‘C 1’ in the militia lists of 1419/20 and ca. 1425

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>1419/20</th>
<th>ca. 1425</th>
<th>1419/20</th>
<th>ca. 1425</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tartarni/Dingli</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Axac</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumerinu</td>
<td>1 0</td>
<td>Gudia</td>
<td>4 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragu/Gazara/Maricatu</td>
<td>4 7</td>
<td>Mitarxen</td>
<td>4 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisse (Pessa)</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>Luqa/Farrug</td>
<td>1 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grigori/Samud</td>
<td>5 8</td>
<td>Mqabba</td>
<td>1 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naxxar</td>
<td>9 15</td>
<td>Safi</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

205. Contract, 1 August 1486: Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.
207. Contract, 4 September 1467: Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, fol. 9rv.
208. NLM, Univ. 206, fols. 223v, 225 and 225v.
Both lists om t the horses provided by the inhabitants of Mdina, particularly the fief-holders. This would explain the note at the end of the list of ca.1425 that the total number of horses was 214, though a careful count of the horses actually indicated gives a total of 171 only, the rest presumably belonging to Mdina (210). One has also to remember that though the symbol 'C l' in both lists undoubtedly refers to 'Cavallus', a horse, the almost contemporary militia roster (1417, perhaps 1416) constantly speaks of *jumenta* (211). In fact the cavalry lists of 1492 and 1529 use both words *cavallus* and *jumenta* with obvious deliberation and care (212).

Table 3. 'Horses' kept by the well-to-do for defence purposes, by place of residence of their owners in 1492 and 1529.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1492 cavalli</th>
<th>1492 jumenta</th>
<th>1492 armata</th>
<th>1529 cavalli</th>
<th>1529 jumenta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mdina</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naxxar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birkirkara</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balzan</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lija</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdi</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attard</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qormi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

212. The cavalry list of 8 May 1492 is in NLM, Libr. Ms 670, fols. 20-21v. That of 30 October 1529 is in NLM, Univ. 12, fols. 523-526.
The lists of 1492 and 1529 are not strictly comparable with that of the ‘horses’ of the militia forces of 1419-20 and ca. 1425 or the roster of ca. 1417. The figures in both later lists represent government expectations from persons judged sufficiently rich to be able to maintain a horse or armed mare; they do not represent the actual numbers of horses or mares in existence. One notes that the relative burden of village people increased very considerably between 1492 and 1529. All lists indicate most strongly that (a) horses suitable for battle were mainly owned by persons from Mdina, and (b) mares, useful mainly for logistical purposes, were to be found chiefly in the villages, but were certainly far fewer than oxen and completely insufficient for the needs of ploughing and other farm work.

Mules and donkeys were the normal beasts of burden, the latter being particularly numerous and hardy. In the complete lack of smooth road surfaces, pack-saddles and panniers rather than carts were the normal means of transporting goods. Mules and donkeys appear frequently in contracts of sale, but statistical information is lacking. Archdeacon Lanza Desguanes was riding a mule, not a horse, in 1462 when he assaulted Danza Frendu for cutting down his pumpkins or long marrows (213), and the Augustinian friar Johannes Zurchi, once a poor man but in later life the wealthy proprietor of a vineyard with several beasts in his stable, was in fact riding his mule when he met with a serious accident in 1476 (214). Mules were much in demand especially for driving the mills that ground the wheat and barley before the introduction of wind-mills. Of course, they were also quite suitable for much of the work in the fields, but there oxen were far more important (215).

Practically everyone must have owned a donkey, and most persons who did not need stronger animals for work in the fields were content to own one. Donkeys were also used for transporting goods by professional carriers. On 4

215. Mules are referred to in connection with mills both at Żabbar and at Safi in contracts dated 6 November 1503 and 13 November 1503: Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/2, fols. 18 and 21.
April 1497 Lemus Raficano and Johannes Nicolaus de Barberio entered into a partnership for the transport of goods for a whole year each providing two asses, the former leading them in person assisted by an employee of the latter (216). Travellers arriving at Birgu from abroad could hire donkeys for their walk up to Mdina, eight miles inland. Thus in 1466 Nerius de lu Presti of Messina hired a donkey from a priest at Birgu leaving it at the stables of his fellow-citizen Jacobus Floccari at Rabat together with the donkey hired by Johannis Matheus Calogiri; both donkeys suffered burns that night from a fire that devastated the stables (217).

For equines as for bovines, metayage arrangements were restricted to females of the species during their years of fertility. Five such contracts have been found for donkeys for periods ranging from four to six years (218). In three of them the lawyers Nardus Calava and Gregorius Xerri were the sleeping partners (219). Among sellers of donkeys appear other lawyers like Nicolaus de Caxaro and Andreas de Falczono (220). Peter Caxaro is also recorded to have owned one (221). Nobles and other wealthy persons kept more expensive animals like horses or mules, but the noble Goffr:duS de Burdino is recorded to have bought a donkey and its foal from a fellow citizen in 1495 (222).

It would seem that the traditional picture already existed of every peasant family keeping a few sheep and goats, but whole flocks were sometimes owned by towns-people, canons of the cathedral, notaries and others, who had special arrangements, recorded by notarial deed, with shepherds who undertook to care for all the needs of the flock at a fee payable by the latter normally out of the produce of the herd at an agreed price or that established by the town authorities. The shepherd, of course, must have made his living out of his profits from the sale of the rest of the produce of the herd.

217. Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, AO, vol. 9, fol. 231, 18 June 1466, the year being determined by its indictional number as given, the thirteenth, and by the fact that the name of Jacobus Floccari appears on 31 October 1467 in the deeds of Notary P. Bonello: NAV, Ms. 588, fol. 40.
221. ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 130, fol. 513v.
Here one can see once more another way in which the economic life on the farm was, in fact, largely controlled by the inhabitants of Mdina, who also received much of the profits. On the other hand, it should also be said that without their participation the shepherds would not have had enough sheep and goats to tend. Frequently the sheep-fold itself and its attendant building also belonged to one or other of the townpeople. This is made
clear by the contracts of 23 October 1494 and 29 July 1496 when Nicolaus
de Caxaro of Mdina rented such a place at Ghajn Rihana to his shepherd
Randinus Busuttil (223). Payment was to be made at the rate of 11 tareni 4
denarii for every sheep and 8 tareni for every goat, a rate that was not
very different from that found in the other contracts, and was to be effected
in kind:

- 2½ cantara of soft cheese in two equal lots at the official price
- 20 ubara of salted butter, *manteca*
- 1 ubara of another type of 'butter' at 15 grani per ubara
- 25 male lambs at 15 grani each
- 25 female lambs at 15 grani each
- 6 male kids at 15 grani each
- 2 female kids at 15 grani each
- any others required by Caxaro for consumption in his household at 10 grani each.

The lambs' wool was to go entirely to the shepherd, that of the wethers to
the owner, that of the sheep also to the owner except for 6 *pisi* (ie. wiżniet)
which went to the shepherd. The latter could also keep in the same fold 24
sheep and goats of his own together with two sows. For any others he had
to pay one tareno a head for grazing rights to Caxaro, who also supplied him
with a stated amount of wheat at the official price, and leased him some land
ad cuctaniam. In 1488 Caxaro had kept a herd at Tabrija, west of Siggiewi (224).

THE FARMER'S WORLD

In an analysis of agriculture based mainly on land-leases, crops and farm
animals, one could easily lose sight of the farmer himself, on whose activity,
skill and foresight everything so largely depended. Actual farming operations
themselves are hardly ever recorded. One fragmentary source speaks of 'up­
rooting the cumin plants and gathering them in an assigned place' for cleaning
of the useless stalks and leaves, and of the first and second ploughing of
the cotton fields and of removing of the weeds growing among the cotton
plants (225). A tenant in another document promised to 'cultivate, tend and
irrigate properly the said garden and not to keep crops harmful to the trees,
and to plant every year for the said four years [of his tenure] fifty seedlings,
and to ... gather their grapes at the proper time according to the custom of
Malta' (226). The new tenant of Dejr is-Saf in 1499 promised to plant 25
seedlings every year at places indicated to him by one of the landowner’s men (227). Court witnesses frequently described the farmer at his daily tasks. In 1529, for example, Bartholomeus Calleye testified that (228):

Nicolaus Vella produced by Franciscus Gaudisi as a witness keeps a pair of oxen with which he works and ploughs together with the said Franciscus Gaudisi in the said benefice [lands]; he does not know however whether he has a share in the lease of the said benefice but the witness himself has seen him leading the said pair of oxen in the said benefice: Angelus Bertelli and Simon Sammut, witnesses similarly produced by the said Franciscus, are also partners who led their pairs of oxen and tirano lo raperti (?) as partners according to the custom of Malta.

He also subsequently testified that ‘he knew only that at the season one should sow cotton, that is in the month of March, he had seen the said Simon sow the [land of the] said benefice with cotton’. On 8 May 1530 Ysabella Muscat testified that (229):

Last February, that is on the first Sunday of that month, while she was going for a pail of water from the well called Biar de Lihudi [Jew’s wells], after she filled her pail she saw the said Micheli together with the said priest Johanni Pisano approaching. Micheli entered the field Ta Deguger and chased out the pigs which belonged to Nicolao Bezine and the said Don Johanni, dismounted and helped him to drive the pigs out on to the road; once there, Micheli himself set them going on their way, handing them over to Don Johanni, who got on to his beast again and drove the pigs before him towards the village of Attard, the witness herself in the company of the said Micheli Vassaldo going to the village of Bordi where she stayed, while Michaeli Surdo [sic] went to the village of Lia where he lived.

On another occasion, Leo Gabeyr testified how (230):

In this island of Malta it was and is the custom for the ayri [threshing floors] to be given to the watchmen before the harvest, sometimes in the month of March, sometimes before and sometimes slightly later, such that when harvest arrives the farmers, wanting to harvest the barley and collect the flax and other legumes, shall find the ayri ready, enabling them to carry and store their victuals of wheat, flax, beans and other products, and after them the wheat, under the care and in charge of the watchmen, and he says that he knows this because the witness has seen and been present in all this for all the time of his memory, being fifty years old or thereabouts.

227. Contract, 8 November 1499: idem, NAV, R 494/2.
229. Ibid., vol. 8B, fol. 652.
230. The date has not survived but it would seem to pre-date 1500: Ibid., vol. 3, fol. 394.
Michael Xerri said (231):

It is the custom of countrymen in this island, illiterate persons, to say and to believe that the year is divided into two parts, that is, into winter and summer, and they count winter from when it starts to rain until it ceases, and summer from when it stops till September. That is what countrymen customarily think; the witness himself believes, and has seen and heard it said, that the year is divided into four parts, that is into autumn, winter, spring and summer.

He described how:

The previous winter had been hard and very rainy such that where it was dusty through little water the tenants prepared the land for cotton and in March they could not work the land for cotton owing to the excess of water; he knew this as a tenant and farmer of five arable fields of his own.

Jacobus Seychel in 1536 said that (232):

He himself, as one of the partners of Jacobo Galie, ploughed the lands called tal-Mentna, and sowed barley and then, at harvest time, they reaped it and carried the barley to the ayra belonging to Peter Chardun's sons, who were nephews of Lemo, and they left it there, keeping it separate [from the rest] until they could find out how much that land produced to enable Lemo to obtain his share of that produce, because Lemo said that half of it came to him, and they litigated over this in the bishop's court.

In 1527 Johannes Manjuni alias Gauchi said that (233):

Some fifteen years ago he himself employed by the Reverend Don Amaturi [Zammit] on his farm, and as far as he could remember at that time that priest had, and kept, on his farm six oxen and one cow and he knew nothing of the sheep whether he kept any, but he understood from others that he had kept sheep in the sheepfold called Ta Rachal Nicoluz... At the time he was with Zammit he also kept a brown horse and a female donkey.

Slightly later evidence concerning farmers alive in 1530 provide information which is certainly relevant to pre-1530 years. Thus on 15 February 1544 Julianus Farruge of Mqabba testified that (234):

In this island of Malta there are several inhabitants of the villages, namely Georgio Farruge of Qrendi, Simuni Grima of Luqa and Pasquali Hais of Mqabba who he thinks, are past sixty years of age and, in spite of their advanced age, up to

231. Ibid., fol. 396.
234. Ibid., vol. 23B, fol. 399.
Now do all the work that may be necessary on the farm, working personally, ploughing, sowing and doing anything else that may be required of them with their own hands.

Other witnesses, produced by adversaries in the dispute before the court, did not agree (235):

No person aged sixty is any longer capable of farm work, and cannot work by the day but can only perform some slight task, as farm work is almost beyond the strength of young persons owing to its continued motion with one leg and one hand both on the plough, and he declared that one who was aged sixty or above can [only] work for an hour or two a day, [a fact] which he knew as one experienced in farm work in Malta since the time he was sixty years old being now above that age.

This was spoken in court by Bertus Dingli of Siggiewi. Augustinu Camilleri of Rabat and Zaccarias Caruana of Xluq merely confirmed all he said in more extreme terms (236). Their testimony formed part of court proceedings concerning the amount of damages awardable to a farmer who had been beaten up and allegedly incapacitated for further work on the farm. A similar case involved Simon Gauchi in 1549 who said (237):

At the time of the said assault in which he was wounded he was the gardener in the orchard called Deir Ysaf [later known as Buskett] belonging to the archpriest of the cathedral of Malta, at which time his daily wage amounted to two tareni; in view of the fact that the major value of the tenancy and profit of the said orchard lay in oranges which, through the incapacity caused him by his injury, he was unable to hawk or collect, and which oranges [therefore] matured and fell off and he did not have anyone who could see to their sale, and for this reason he said he lost much of the fruit.

What particularly troubled the farmer then, in Malta as elsewhere, was the price which he obtained for his products and that which he paid for seed, oxen, and the other things he needed for himself. People then believed in a 'just price', defined as the current price for particular articles, almost all fixed once a year in September by the town authorities. However, all sorts of excuses were found, and tricks adopted, for charging more than the established price. This frequently happened whenever a delay in payment happened, but was not felt to be thereby justified. In Gozo in 1449 Lanceas de Pontre-

235. Ibid., fol. 363v.
236. Ibid., fols. 363v-364.
237. Testimony, 11 December 1549; ibid., vol. 29, fol. 83.
LATE MEDIEVAL MALTESE AGRICULTURE

mu'o, years after his capture by the Saracens, was still spoken of by one witness of (238)

being a habitual usurer... In the year he was captured by the Saracens when ginned cotton was priced at nine or ten florins a cantaro cash, the said Lanza sold me one cantaro of ginned cotton on credit for sixteen florins, which money I paid to his brother Johanni after his capture by the Moors.

But a worse case occurred whenever the farmer was forced by circumstances to sell his crop before it ripened in the field for delivery after harvest (239):

The said Lanceas de Pontremulo was in the habit of exacting usury... for two years before he fell into captivity of the Saracens, that is some sixteen years ago [ie. ca. 1433] he bought one cantaro of ginned cotton ante tempus, that is before it had ripened, for eight florins,... he sold to the witness two or three cantara of ginned cotton on credit for sixteen florins.

The laws of the Church in Malta as elsewhere condemned such practices most severely. Money obtained in that way had to be returned to its rightful owner, and 'bur:al was refused [in consecrated ground] to them and they cannot be buried unless they restored what they wrongfully obtained' (240). And for Frankinus Chantar, a peasant from the village of Xluq, 'usury is none other than when a person sells something at a higher price than what is currently required' (241).

In this regard extraordinarily instructive is the detailed accusation made by Don Amatore Zammit, the parish priest of Siggiewi, in 1523 against one of his parishioners, Petrus Pachi, a well-off farmer, the tenant-in-chief of the fief of Tabrija (242). Zammit said that for the previous twelve years people had been complaining that Pachi was a usurer, begging him to admonish him and ask for restitution. Pachi sold cumin at 24 tareni when it was worth 13, giving it in part payment for a field at that price. He also always sold wheat, barley, mahlut, and ginned cotton at a fourth dearer than what they obtained in

240. Pleadings in favour of notary Jacobus de Falczone, 4 February 1499: ibid., fol. 110v.
242. Papers of the case Jorlandus Dingli contra Petrum Pachi are in Cath. Mus., Md., CEM, AO, vol. 7A, fols. 109-119v and 136-173v. Amatore Zammit's accusation, March 1523: ibid., 149-150. Amatore Zammit formally denied that he was 'an enemy of the said Petrus or of anyone of his parish but he was against the bad life of the said Petrus because he was incorrigible': ibid., fol. 150v.
the public square. In spite of frequent promises at the time of confession he never made any restitution. The parish priest therefore refused to accept first fruits or anything else from him and he also refused to confess him or offer him Communion as a man of bad conscience. Though he had accepted money from him on Sundays in order not to humiliate him before the whole congregation, he had always told him that he did not want anything from him so long as he practised usury, especially towards his workers. The latter he paid at the rate of one uncia for six months' work while others paid them two uncia, and he paid them in kind at a rate which in the end left them with only four florins (instead of six). Several poor men were engaged to hoe the cotton field for half a day's work: he kept them for an hour or more above the normal time, and hardly paid them what was due to them for their work. He refused to sell to poor men or women as others do at a price somewhat cheaper than normal wheat or other grain before its removal from the estate which he had leased from a Sicilian baron, but he stored it up until Christmas when it became scarce and he was then able to sell it at a substantially higher price. The fief itself produced some 300 salme the previous year. It was not enclosed and he charged four times the price for any damage done by straying animals.

It is true that the whole of this is an ex parte accusation by one who had been quarrelling with the accused at least since 1502 (243). Pachi denied the bill of charges when it was finally presented to him, even that he heretically said and believed that the excommunication uttered by the bishop or vicar of Malta had no validity since only that of the Pope really counted. He also denied that he had ever said that 'Whether he went to Paradise or to Hell, he would find people there!' (244) In spite of that, the charges, denials and counter-charges were obviously very much a real part of the everyday life of the farmers of Malta at the time (245).

245. Enough documentation survives for brief accounts of such products as honey, canes, pigs and dried thorns for use as fuel. More also could also have been said about manuring. But on vegetables, peas, beans as well as farm tools practically no records exist.