

# MAPS OF MALTA AS POSTCARDS

By Giovanni Bonello LL.D.

From their earliest historical beginnings, picture postcards chiefly relied on landscapes and townscapes for the illustration. Topographical information was paramount. What more basic physical message from a town or country, than its map?

Yet, despite this, postcards showing maps seem to be rather scarce. Few publishers thought it profitable to combine the function of communicating a message with that of providing a handy pocket map. In fact, perhaps the first postcard sporting a distinctly identifiable map of the Maltese Islands dates as late as 1913, one of the hundred artistic, and not so artistic, cards which flooded the local and foreign market on the occasion of the 24th International Eucharistic Congress held in Malta in April.

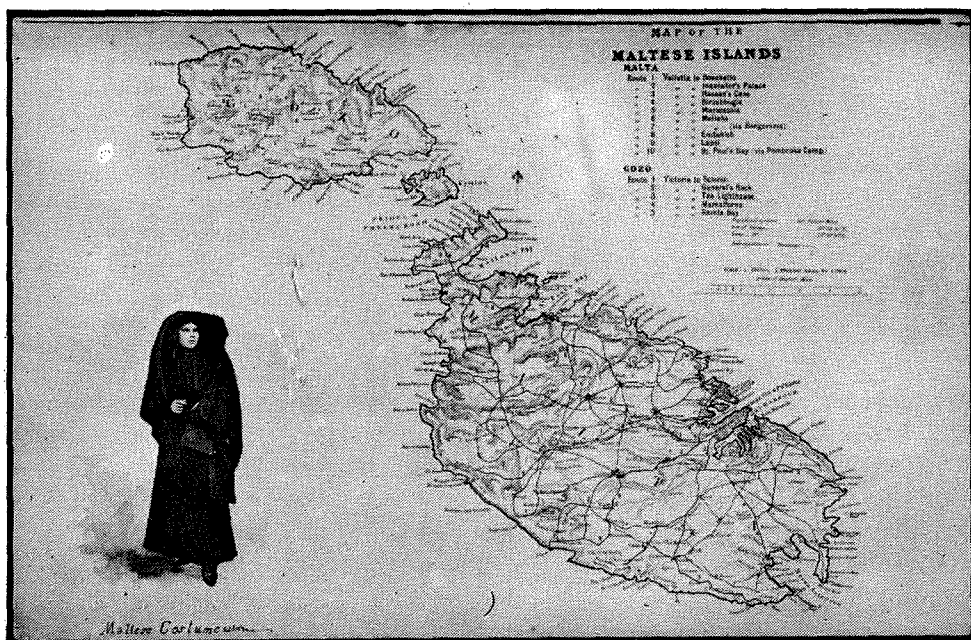


The mysterious Goetz, F.J. and E.P., produced elaborate black and white souvenir postcards of that event, in one of which the map of the Islands occupies the central part (fig.1 above).

Paradoxically, it had to be the First World War (1914-19) which saw the greatest outcrop of local maps as posterds. I say paradoxically, as any information likely to be of assistance to the enemy was ruthlessly suppressed by the postal censors. I have seen harmless stock illustrations of ships in the Grand Harbour refused permission to circulate, on the ground that they constituted a security risk. No "Passed by Censor" on these. On the contrary, an emphatic "Objected to" in colour.

## The First World War

Three rather similar map cards were issued by different publishers at about this time. Their virtual identity speaks rather lowly of the inventive genius of those which came later, and of the efficiency of the copyright laws. They all show a detailed and accurate map of Malta occupying most of the surface, with a lady in faldetta on the left. Their only tribute to originality is that the lady seems to be different each time. I cannot establish which of the three appeared first. The map they use presumably comes from an official publication.



My grandfather, the painter Giovanni Bonello, published one such composition under his imprint "The Art Magazine". It forms part of the 'black' series (there is a 'blue' series too) and carries the number 28031 on the back. The map, extremely detailed, is enhanced by a scale, and includes the web of the bus routes. I have seen this series postally used between 1917 and 1931, but these dates are, of course, only indicative (fig.2 above).

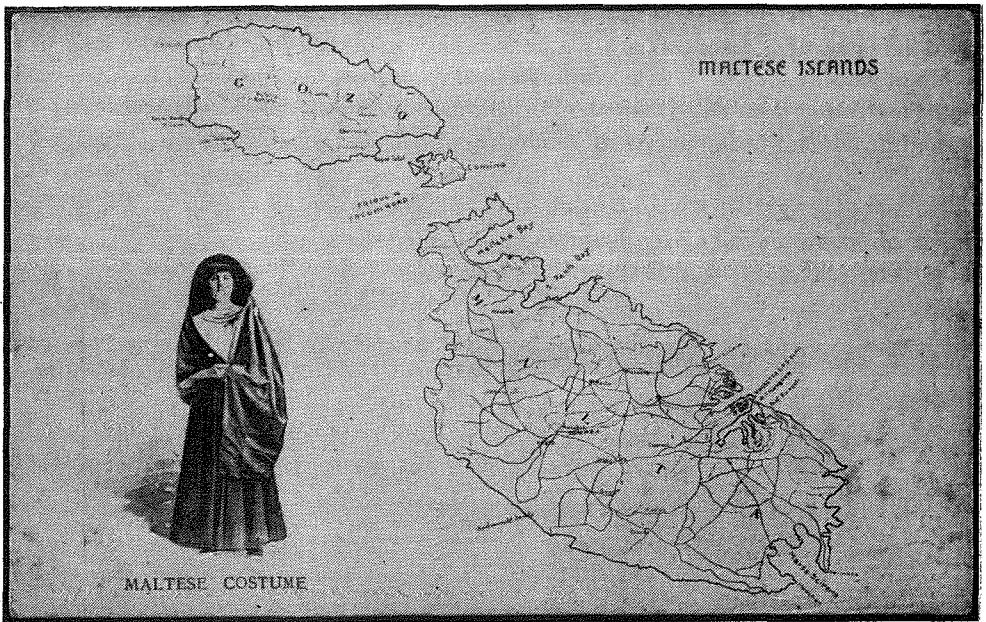


Fig. 3

The prolific publishers of the “Numbered Series” cards, included a very similar composition in those sets numbered ‘48’, ‘268’ and ‘487’; possibly this map recurs in some other similar sets too. The ‘47’, ‘48’ and ‘240’ runs are quite distinctive as, differently from the others, these cards are printed in brown on a yellow background, or, more likely, have a yellow glaze over them. I have seen the cards of this series postally used in 1916 (fig. 3).

### For the Royal Navy

Another anonymous publisher cannibalised some previous postcards to produce a composite “Map of Malta” card, photographically printed. The map is identical to the previous two. An elegant lady in silk faldetta looks from the left, over a reduction of a ‘chapel of bones’ card. The fancy and witty ‘greetings from Malta’ was cut out from another old postcard. I have not seen this item postally used, and, on considerations of style, would not be surprised that it predates the Great War (fig.4).

That important publisher, Critien, also produced a “Map of Malta and Gozo” for his postcard series. Actually, this card seems to be a one-off, and does not strictly belong to any other of his long and picturesque sets. The imprint number says 12 64462. If my theory is correct, the first two digits in these and similar cards, stand for the calendar year: 1912. That would make this card the forerunner of all the other ‘Map’ cards. Two corners, enlivened by a Grand Harbour view, adapt in monochrome one of the painter Luigi Maria Galea’s compositions for postcards (fig.5).

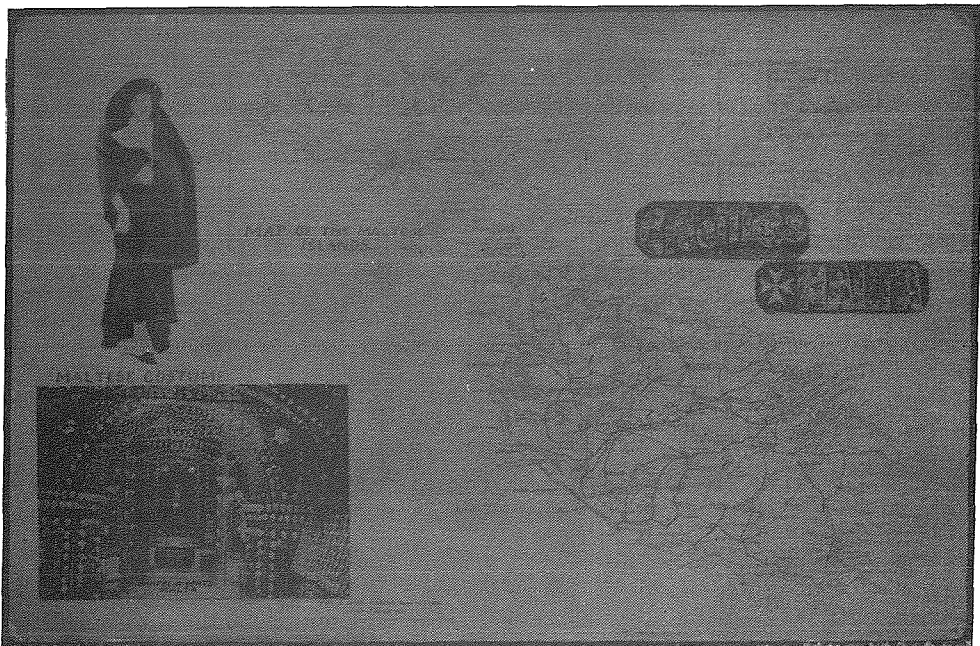


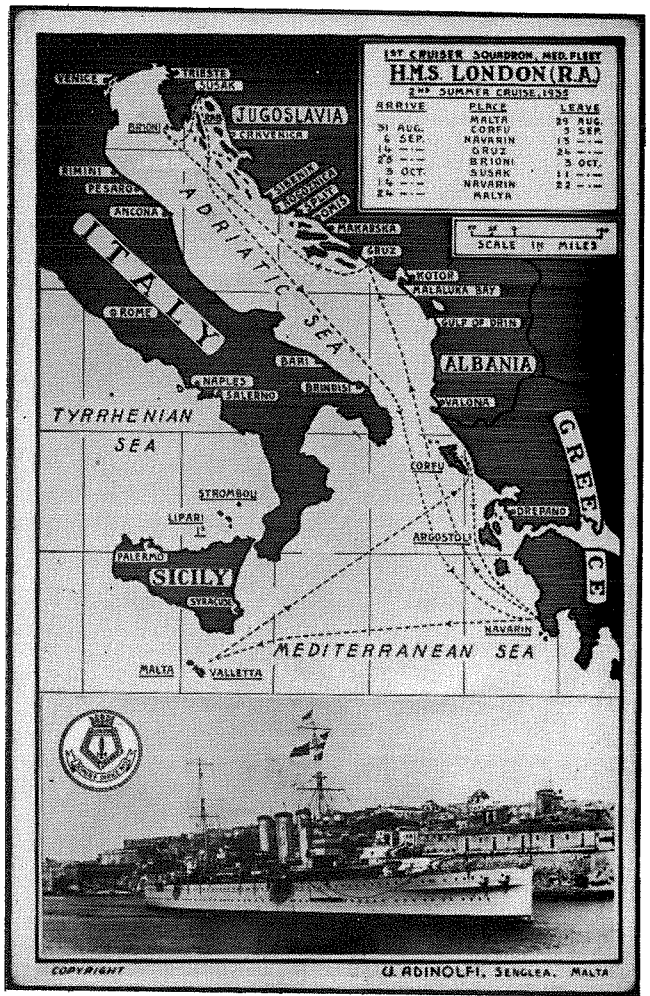
Fig. 4



Fig. 5

The photographer Umberto Adinolfi from Senglea kept himself busy issuing cards for the Royal Navy cruises in the Mediterranean. Quite a few of his varied productions for Malta, Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean have been traced. Adinolfi seems to be perhaps the only Maltese publisher who gave an international dimension to his postcard business.

These Adinolfi cards for the Royal Navy, reproduced photographically, include three elements; the photo of a named warship, a map showing an itinerary of the cruise and a timetable of the various stops in the Mediterranean ports. A low-scale map of Malta features regularly in these compositions. Fig. 6 (right) was issued on the occasion of the second Summer Cruise of 1935.



### Commemorative Cards

St Aloysius College documented each scholastic year by producing a composite map of Malta made up of hundreds of little photos – the Rector, the teaching staff and each and every pupil. In 1938-39, this composition was turned into a postcard, printed typographically. Beside the mug-shots, it included a photo of the College, and the photographer’s signature – J. Cassar of Hamrun (fig. 7).

The Capuchin community celebrated the first centenary of the erection of their Maltese Province (1840-1940) shortly after the outbreak of World War II. A charming photographic postcard, including a map of Malta which pinpoints the

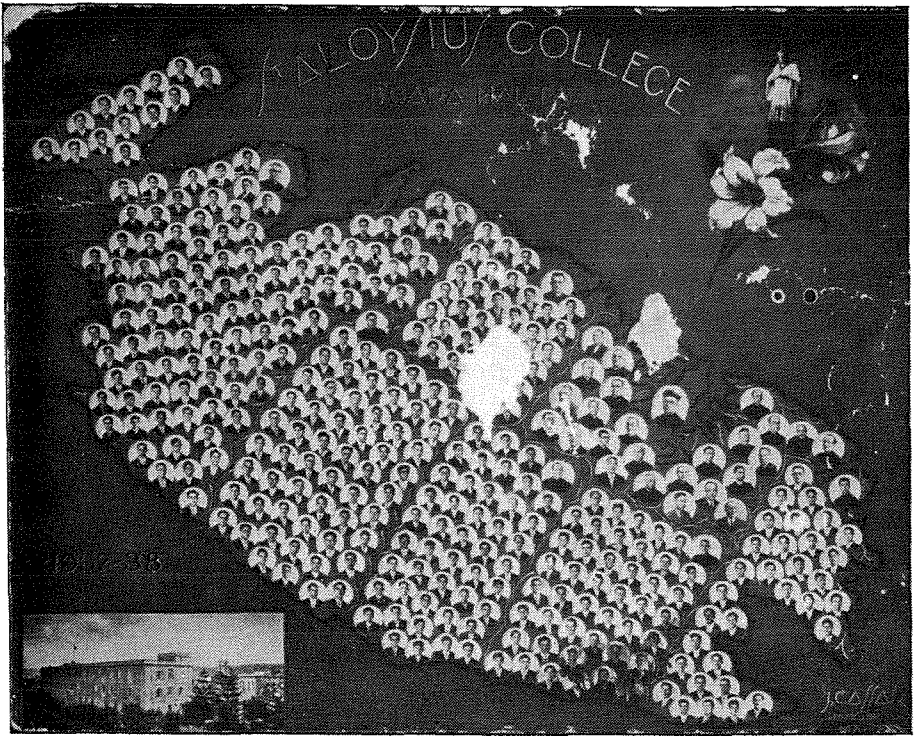


Fig. 7

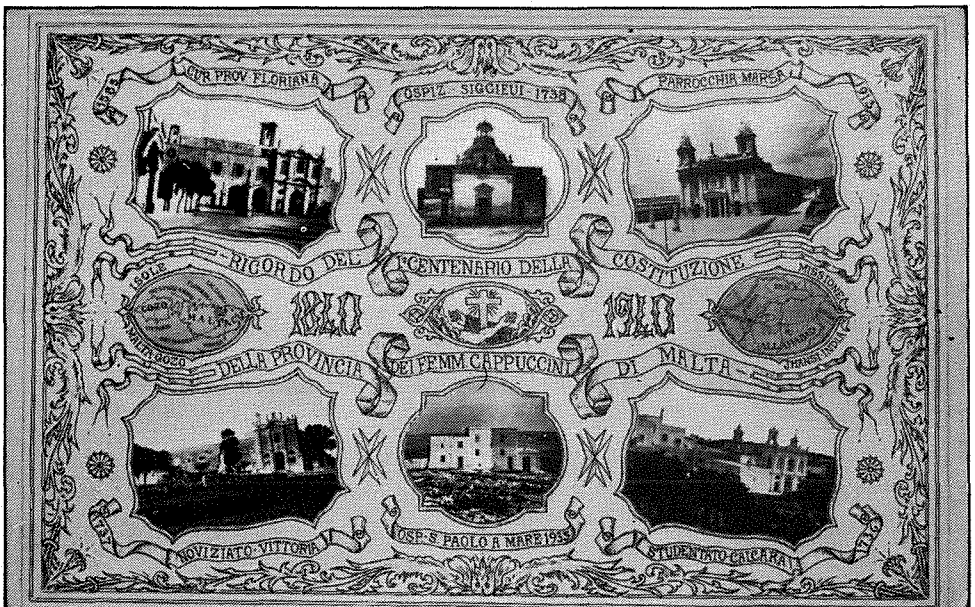


Fig. 8

Capuchins' six seats in Malta, remains to bear witness to these celebrations (fig.8).

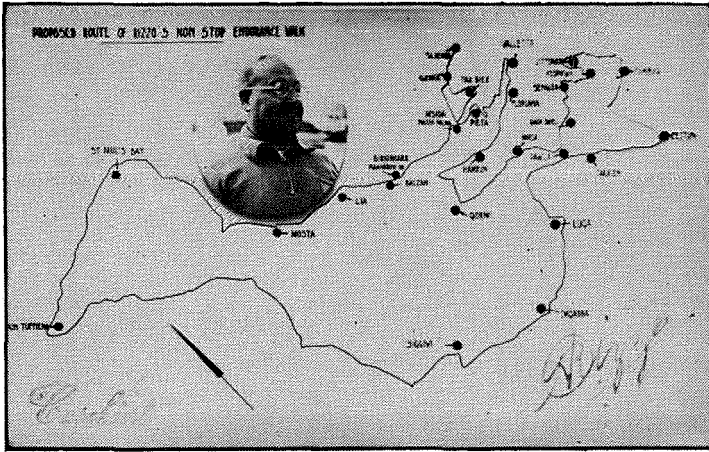


Fig. 9

Sliema-Zejtun-Siggiewi-Ghajnsielem-Birkirkara-Sliema. To record this event, and possibly for fund raising purposes, cards with the route, and with an inset of the now portly Turu were issued, each individually signed by the athlete (fig.9). I believe these cards to be quite scarce.

To close, an early post-war card, showing in light colours the contours of a "Map of Malta G.C.". The design, which included sailing ships from three epochs, is by Ralph Laver. The composition still tries to be tasteful (fig.10). After that, a deluge of sunny-coast, Reckitts-blue-seas vulgarity.

The renowned Maltese sportsman Arthur 'Turu' Rizzo (1894-1961), besides a merited fame for his outstanding aquatic endurance feats, also defied the limits of physical fatigue on land. On April 3, 1938, when 46 years old, he organised a non-stop walk round Malta:

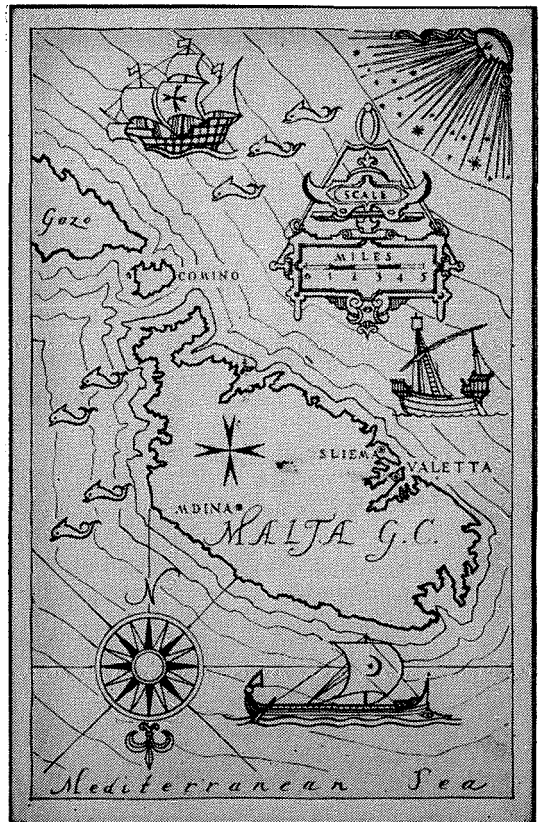


Fig.10