

Musings of Recovery: The Microhistorical Journey of a Jesuit Convalescent (1898–1918)

Project brief

Research in the Archivum Conventus Carmelitarum Notabilis (ACCN), brought to light a diary spanning from January 1, 1898 to April 9, 1911, and a sole entry in 1916 complemented by a short entry on 1916-1918. Found in a very good condition, the diary is written in English — with the exception of some entries in Italian — and presents detailed accounts of the life and encounters of an anonymous Jesuit, who seems to have been in Malta in convalescence from ill health. Mention of Casa Leone XIII and The College, situate the diary in the context of the Jesuit College founded in 1877 in Bel-Vedere, St Julian's, and the establishment of a home for the sick in 1894. Entries to visits in Gozo with fellow Jesuits, situate the diary in the context of Jesuits assuming leadership (1865-1909) of the Seminary and the school erected by the Bishop of Gozo. Unfolding in 498 pages, the diary is embellished with colourful pencil drawings of religious motifs and architectural designs.

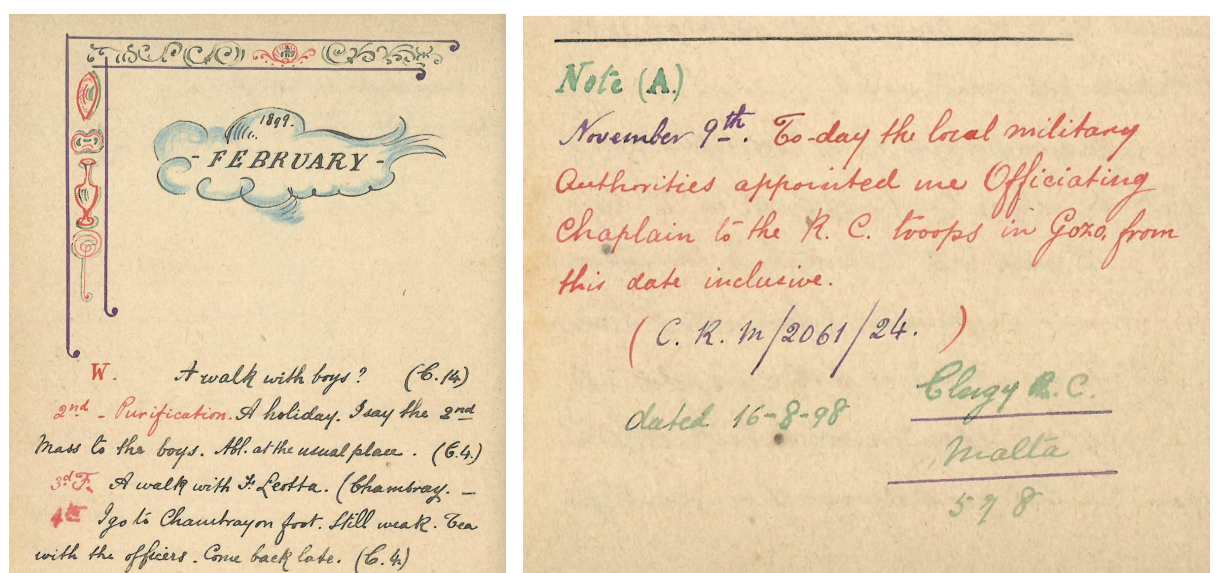
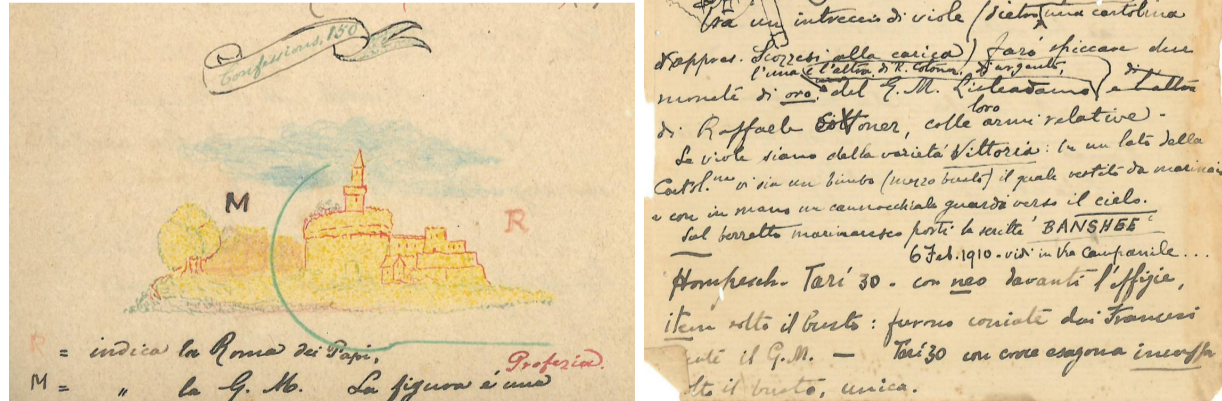
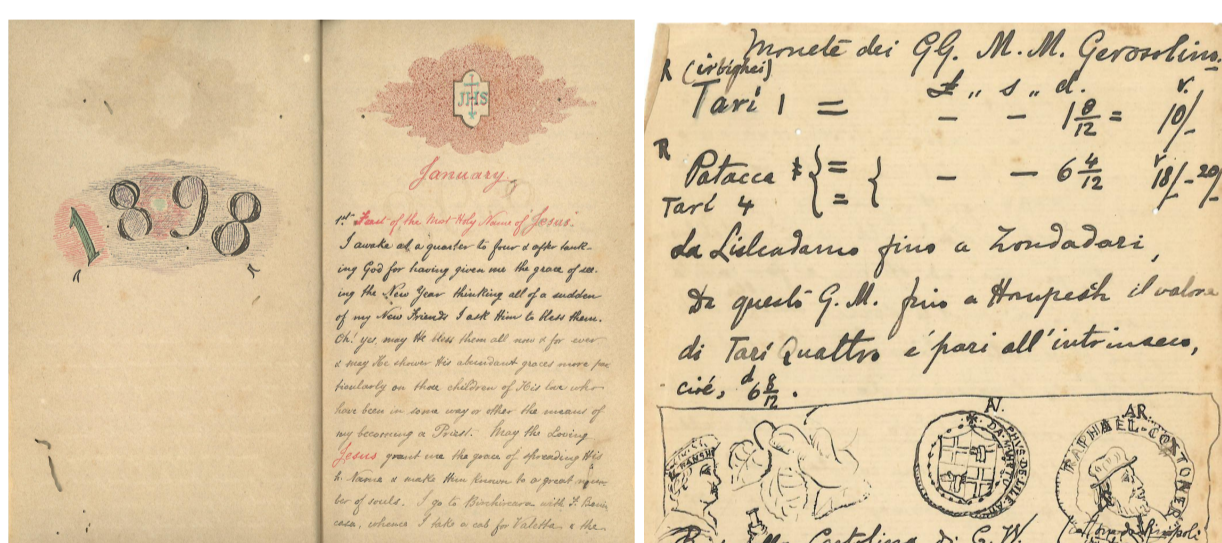
Aims & objectives: Transcription and Preservation; Microhistorical Analysis; Interdisciplinary Approach; Ecclesial Microhistory; Deciphering Codes; Uncovering Lived Experiences.

Methodology

The microhistorical method will be applied for the research analysis of this diary. Starting from transcription and preservation of the volume, the analysis will then pass on to annotate themes and cross-referencing to historical details and contexts which emerge from other sources to connect the micro-history of the individual and his connections to the socio-political and religious macro-history of the island. The interdisciplinary approach will be used. The analysis will also include a detailed study of individuals mentioned by name, specific events, and localities within their historical context, providing a close-up view of history through the personal witness of the unknown author. Research analysis on this diary aims at uncovering the lived experiences of ordinary people, offering a deeper understanding of this particular historical period. Since the author is a member of the clergy, the analysis will also throw light on ecclesial micro-history, offering a more nuanced understanding of the past. Research analysis will also highlight a unique feature of this diary: a number of intriguing codes inserted in the main entries, awaiting to be deciphered.



Results & conclusions



1. Author Identification

– anonymous Maltese Jesuit priest. Personal identifiers enabled the deciphering of his name: Alwigi Albanese and to calculate his date of birth: 9 December 1867. Personal details: newly ordained; teacher in Gozo; military chaplain at Fort Chambray; health practitioner (?); left Jesuits because of health and became Vice-Parish priest in Cospicua. From other sources it appears he was Rector of the Holy family Chapel in Birzebbuga in 1907.

2. Historical Context and Details

– Victorian era closely-knit Malta rich in religious, educational, and socio-political activity.
– Mentions of Casa Leone XIII, the Observatory, the College, the School and San Calcedonio link the diary to ecclesiastical leadership, pastoral care, Jesuit meteorological observation, etc...

3. Microhistorical Insights

– Intimate view of the author's life: convalescence from a mental condition [phantasia; neurasthenia] perhaps triggered by a traumatic event; therapy: long walks, bathing, journaling, etc... ; teaching, and chaplaincy, revealing the lived experiences of clergy and their community roles during this period; 'spiritual' phenomena (link to Alberto Polizzi?).

– Deciphered codes: "C" = Holy Communion; "P.S." = Prophetical Sign, others to be deciphered; suggesting layered textual complexities and possible liturgical or pastoral functions and hidden messages.

4. Interpersonal Connections

– The diary includes a network of names, some yet to be connected or fully contextualised, hinting at extensive personal and professional relationships.
– Some of these names might represent key figures in Jesuit education, local governance, or military chaplaincy. E.g.: Mention of Fr [Manwel] Magri, S.J. linked with the archeological discoveries in Gozo.

5. Pastoral and Artistic Elements

– Pastoral activities appear central.
– Artistic embellishments include religious motifs and architectural drawings, demonstrating the author's reflective and creative engagement.

Possible prototypes

1) Annotated Database of names, locations, codes and cross-referencing with historical records; **2) Interactive Map:** geospatial representation of sites in Gozo and Malta mentioned in the diary, including unheard-of site names, to visualise the author's movements, activities, and significant locations; **3) Code Deciphering Toolkit:** to analyse and interpret codes, Incorporating historical context to hypothesise the meaning of other codes; **4) Exhibit Prototype:** multimedia presentation combining diary excerpts, drawings, and historical background, highlighting the author's dual role as a teacher and chaplain and his convalescence journey until his leaving the Congregation and settle as vice-parish priest in Cospicua on March 23, 1905.