

Book Review:

Mill-Ġrajja Għall-Ballata

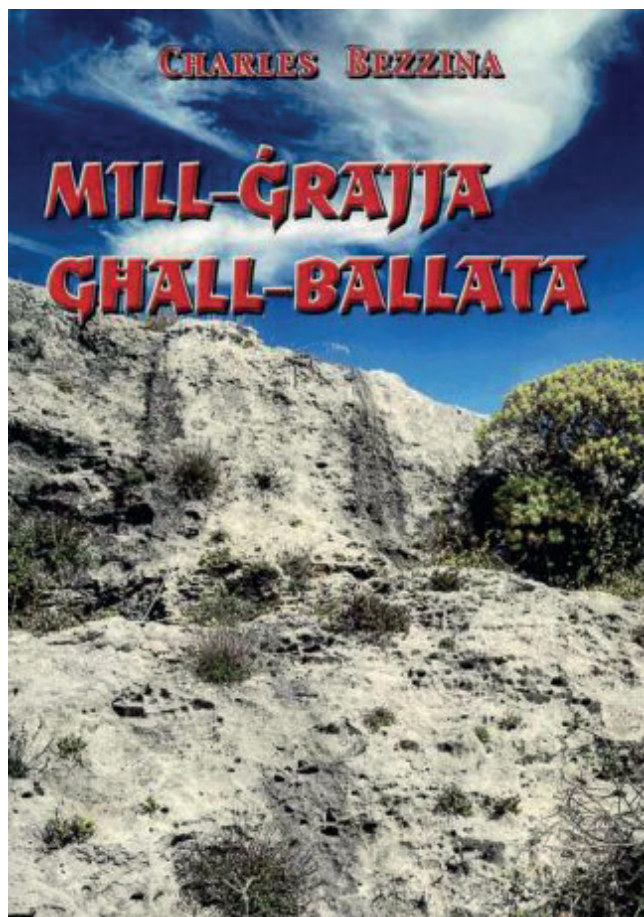
Charles Bezzina

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REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

There are many ways how History can be written and presented to the general reader; these vary from a mere chronology of events to a detailed analysis of what caused events to happen and how they changed the course of history. There are however other colourful ways how to narrate historical occurrences without the use of prose. I have in mind the ballad, which is basically a poem or song narrating a story in stanzas. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Oscar Wilde’s “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” are two of the most renowned ballads in English history.

In remember when I was a student in secondary school, our teacher of Maltese language introduced us to Dwardu Cachia’s *Katrin tal-Imdina*. The last ballads published on our islands was 51 years ago by poet Anton Buttigieg in 1972. In the foreword to his latest publication, *Mill-Ġrajja Għall-Ballata*, a collection of superb ballads featuring historical, semi-historical and legendary stories from Gozo’s past, Charles Bezzina introduces the reader to the concept of the ballad by mentioning the most renowned poets in European and world literature who wrote them. Patrick Sammut’s detailed introduction – which is in fact a study of stylistic elements and lexicon employed in the ballads – helps the reader to appreciate the choice of words the poet makes to narrate his stories in such a flowing manner. Being so familiar with the history and folklore of his native island, Bezzina is the ideal person to provide us with these colourful ballads which leave no stone unturned to express the feelings and emotions of his protagonists. These become once again living characters in spite of the time that elapsed since the events took place. Charles Bezzina’s *Mill-Ġrajja Għall-Ballata* is a literary feat in itself and a book to be cherished by all those who appreciate Maltese literature in



general. It is also a memorial to those individuals who never made it back home after being at sea or who disappeared without a trace leaving the surviving members of their families distraught and frustrated and not being able to go back to them – not even notionally – due to the lack of a last resting place or tombstone. Bezzina’s book is a reminder to us all that a poet can still narrate a story through a medium that some may have relegated to ages past.

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