

# The Attack on Gozo of 1551 and its Effects on the Gozo Population – Part I<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Gozo's history can be divided into two: pre-1551 and post-1551. For the island itself, the event of 1551 was so devastating that various aspects of life had to begin anew in the decades that followed. Writings about this experience have tended to be in the form of short contributions here and there, sometimes as short dedicated articles and in other instances as paragraphs within studies dealing with wider subjects. The chronicler of the Order, Giacomo Bosio, describes 1551 at some length and there are the important and modern contributions of Mgr Dr Joseph Bezzina and Professor Stanley Fiorini.

This article adds to this subject matter by providing a better understanding of what really happened following this infamous event in Gozitan history. This ensures a better prospective of the daily life of the remaining inhabitants and of those who moved afresh to Gozo following this event. With this in mind, I hope to be able to provide a more realistic rendering of the episode. My other aim is to create a single work on this topic by merging all the different sources of information into one work. The Gozo Archives and the Bishop's Curia in Victoria proved to be a mine of information with regard to the subject. Both Mgr Dr Bezzina and Dr Buttigieg helped me in this respect by suggesting books and primary sources which I should go through. First I started with secondary sources, mainly the book *Victoria* by Mgr Dr Bezzina and the collective works *Focus on Gozo* and *Gozo and its culture*. These proved to be very useful as they had a lot of relevant material by several authors on the subject. Following this I started to go through several primary sources. The first were Bosio's and Dal Pozzo's books which gave me a comprehensive insight into the events of the attack of 1551 and their aftermath. Then

I consulted two volumes from the *Documentary Sources of Malta* entitled *Documentary Sources of Malta History Part V Document in the Curia of the Archbishop of Malta Number One Registrum Foundationum Beneficiorum Insulae Gaudisii, 1435-1545* and *Documentary Sources of Malta History, Documents in the Vatican*. In this way I gained a general idea of how life was before 1551 and what occurred afterwards through the report of Mgr Dusina's Apostolic Visit. These highlighted the position of the Church in Gozo especially through the *Registrum Foundationum Beneficiorum Insulae Gaudisii*. The article by Cassar-Pullicino was also an important primary source with regard to Dusina's visit. The next step was to look into primary sources which had to do with the post attack situation; the register of the Matrice Church which was published by Horatio Ceaser Vella under the title *Earliest Church Register* and the *Archivum Episcopale Gaudisiense* of the Victoria Curia. Meanwhile I collected more information from other secondary sources in order to better my work of synthesis.

## Gozo c.1530 - c.1551

This first section focuses mainly on Gozo and the impact of the Knights on the island after their arrival in 1530. It also dwells briefly on the events surrounding July 1551. To provide a better historical perspective, the administration of Gozo before 1530 is also considered. This section serves as the technical inception of the work which deals with the background of Gozo within the period of 1530 - 1551. This is followed by a literature review and an analysis of the sources being used throughout the dissertation. Contemporary and later debates regarding the events of 1551 and whether this episode should be called, an attack or a siege, are evaluated.

<sup>1</sup> This article, and the two articles which follow as sequels, are adapted posthumously from a dissertation submitted by the author in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in History at the Faculty of Arts University of Malta in 2014.

## Arrival of the Order in the Maltese Islands

The Maltese Islands together with Tripoli were officially given to the Order of the Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem on 24 March 1530 by an act which was signed in Castelfranco in Bologna. This act was accepted by the Order in the Chapter General on 25 April and confirmed by the Pope (Agius De Soldanis, 1999: 111). The Knights were obliged to give a falcon to the Viceroy of Sicily every 1st of November (Bezzina, 1989: 66). Subsequently two Knights, Frà Ugone de Copons and Frà Bonifazio Bali of Manoasca were sworn in by the Viceroy of Sicily, Pignatello di Monteleone, as his representatives on 29 May (Agius de Soldanis, 1999: 111). These Knights then left for Malta together with the commissioner of the Viceroy. Once in Malta they crossed over to Gozo where they received a hearty welcome by the people of the island and again were sworn in as the representatives of the Order, promising that they would respect the rights of the people of Gozo. The *Hakem*, Alfonso Montagnes, and the four jurats acknowledged for the first time the Grand Master as the Prince of Gozo. When these Knights went back to Sicily, two Gozitan noblemen, Francesco Platamone and Pietro Mannara, chosen by the *Università* of Gozo, went with them and took an oath of obedience to the Grand Master L'Isle Adam (Ibid: 112). The Grand Master finally arrived on the islands on 26 October. First he visited Malta and then proceeded to Gozo where he was a guest of the Gozitan nobleman Indri Mannara (Ibid.). An installation ceremony of the Grand Master took place as well. With this ceremony he became the heir and lord of several lands in Gozo which included: Qasam ta' Bordin, Comino, Cominotto, Ta' Hamet, Tal-Hamrija, Tal-Barmil and several other pieces of land (Ibid: 113).

The arrival of the Order was not easily taken in by the Gozitans. The islands usually had the tradition of ruling themselves after a long conflict with the Viceroy of Sicily in order to obtain this grant. The *Università* had a lot of independence and was not willing to allow itself to be ruled (Galea, 2011: 7).

One important aspect to consider is what the Knights found in Gozo upon their arrival. Although Gozo was more fertile than Malta and its farmers could find a ready market in Malta to sell or barter

their goods, the island had several risk factors. One main menace was that Gozo was bearing the brunt of corsair raids. Records show that Gozo had been experiencing raids as far back as 1410 (Fiorini, 1996: 74). These attacks were reducing the island to near extinction. The island's administrators were trying to collect funds in order to build a tower on Comino to prevent the smaller island from being used as a hideout and rallying point. The constant attacks by corsairs forced the inhabitants to cluster around the better protected citadel in the centre of the island. This accounts for nearly the total absence of any villages around Gozo. The first villages of Xewkija and Għarb would start to take shape much later in the seventeenth century.

## The Economy of Gozo

At the time the economy was mostly based on agriculture and other related activities. One activity which the Knights of St John brought over with them to Malta was the maritime industry. However, while the inhabitants of Malta shifted their focus on the profitable maritime sector, the Gozitans, ingrained as they were in the agricultural sector, became even more dependent on animal husbandry and crop cultivation (Vella, 2012: 30). Nonetheless, there were instances where Gozitans went to Malta to participate in corsairing. One such case was that of Micheli Zarbu from Gozo who was recruited on the corsair ship of Dalmau Buglin and Magnifico Nobili Antoni (Fiorini, 1993: 177). Otherwise, animal husbandry produced meat for the consumption of the inhabitants. This allowed for the stabilisation of meat prices till 1530. However, after 1530 there was a sharp increase in the price of meat for both Malta and Gozo (Ibid: 166). Naturally, as would be expected in view of this concentration of agricultural activities, the diet of the people of Gozo was mostly based on the produce of this industry throughout the year. The normal diet would consist of bread and vegetables such as beans and onions. Meat was only eaten a couple of times during the year (Ibid: 170). The economy therefore depended mostly on products such as cash crops, cotton, wheat, barley, legumes, fruit and wine. Cash crops and cotton were exported directly to Sicily. With the income derived from these products the islanders were able to purchase the main necessities from abroad. Up to the arrival of the Knights a similar situation was occurring in Malta but this changed completely

thereafter. Gozo enjoyed the privilege of not paying custom duties on its imports and exports to Sicily (Wettinger, 1990: 60). Activities such as spinning and weaving were widespread throughout the island as sailcloth could be produced from cotton. It created employment for women and children as well. Sailcloth could be exported to Syracuse. This is confirmed by a contract of notary Nicolai Vallona where two Gozitan inhabitants, Petrus de Lucia and Matheus Bacbac, agreed to sell sixty canne of cotton cloth used for sails to Johanes de Finara of Syracuse (Ibid: 61). An important byproduct was cotton seed which was the principal animal fodder on the islands. The cotton industry, however, was very fragile mostly due to the frequent outbreaks of plague when all the ports of Europe would close the doors to Maltese exports. This industry received a further set back when Sicily had a political issue with Malta and it closed down its ports for Gozitan produce, greatly damaging the industry (Blouet, 1965: 35-36).

### The Administration of Gozo

Upon their arrival the Knights found that the administration of Gozo revolved around the *Università Gaudisii* which acted on behalf of the Viceroy of Sicily. The arrival of the Knights brought about some changes such as the appointment of a governor for Gozo.

The day to day administration of the islands which fell in the hands of the *Università Gaudisii*, was always done on behalf of the Spanish Empire which controlled Malta at the time together with Sicily. The Knights found that the island was independent from Malta and even had its own consul in Palermo. Members of this governing body included the captain of the rod (known as *ħakem*) who would be appointed by the Viceroy of Sicily and who was responsible to keep public peace, four jurats, who were directly responsible for the day to day administration of the island, a *Judex Literatus*, two *Judices* and a notary. Other officials included two *cattapani* who were consumer protection officers and controlled prices, hygiene and measures and the *supramarammerius* who regulated public works. A policeman, a sanitary official and town carriers, whose role was to announce pricelists to the public, were also appointed (Fiorini, 1993: 131). All of the officials would be elected on 1 September and

could not be re-elected for more than two successive years. These members were chosen every year by the Viceroy of Sicily (Ibid.). The main sources of income for this administration were mostly derived via the revenues gained from *gabellas*, fines and the leasing of warehouses (Ibid: 133). This money was then used to purchase essential supplies from Sicily, invested in the defence of the islands, for public works such as to maintain city walls and to pay the salaries of the various officials. This institution was also empowered to inflict a wide range of penalties on people who transgressed the law. These could vary from small fines for minor offences and even the death penalty for serious crimes. It was also responsible for the provision of food supplies needed for Gozo. It created a borrowing system to get money from the locals. This was called the *Annona* (Galea, 2011: 17). Part of the money was used to buy corn and the rest was paid to the farmers to sell their produce.

As early as June 1530, which was only a couple of weeks after Malta and Gozo were handed over to the Knights, the *Università* of Malta and its counterpart in Gozo sought the Grand Master's confirmation of their rights and privileges. They also insisted that the *Università* was to be placed under his special care. On 11 July the *Università Gaudisii* met to express its own reaction to the donation of the islands. The four jurats for Gozo: Vito Vagnolo, Jacobo Inguanes, Valluria de Algaria and Andriotta Mannara presented a *capitulum* to the Grand Master. A *capitulum* would contain a demand or complaint which the *Università* would have previously sent to the King or Viceroy of Sicily. Normally it used to voice the demands of the elites. The Gozitan *capitoli* would normally follow those of Malta. In fact a *capitulum* had been presented in October 1432 by the Maltese *Università* asking for offices to be filled by a vote. The next day the Gozitan equivalent replicated the same demand word by word (Ibid.). The *capitulum* presented on 11 July 1530 contained several demands: a) that the Gozitans be placed under the care of the Grand Master; b) any Gozitan who wanted to enter the Order would be treated as a prospective of the Italian Langue; c) that they be exempted from the *corvee* work on the citadel walls and militia duty called *mahares* which they had been performing for the past forty eight years at their own expense; d) that the governors of Gozo were not to interfere in the administration of justice except when a public official abused of his

office, thus impeding justice from taking its normal course; e) there should be a general pardon for crimes committed in the past except for the rights to justice of private individuals; f) the Gozitans should have their liability to the payment of tithes remitted; g) the Grand Master should prevent the town mayor and his judge from imprisoning persons simply in order to obtain payment of a fee; h) the court sessions should be held regularly three times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays as in former times; i) all who wanted to leave the island and go to Sicily or elsewhere should be free to do so without having to obtain a license from somebody; j) the governor should take over the role of the *sindicaturi* who were sent from Palermo (Wettinger, 1990: 64). In this way the Università was fulfilling its role of acting as a mediator between the interests of the rulers and of the Gozitans.

On 18 July 1530 Grand Master L 'Isle Adam did in fact meet some of their demands (Bezzina, 1995: 60). This however did not mean that the Knights did not create their own posts to represent themselves in the running of the islands. In fact the Grand Master inherited the right to choose the head of the *Università* and he elected a knight as the Governor for Gozo with effect from 1 December 1530 (Bezzina, 2012: 47). He chose Frà Giloramo de Aldovera (Galea, 2011: 7).

This appointment was opposed by the members of the *Università* fearful that this official would overtake their leading role and insisted that their *Capitano* should be a Gozitan (Bonello, 2006: 41) in line with an ancient privilege given by the King of Sicily (Galea, 2011: 7). According to de Soldanis, L 'Isle Adam did not want to undermine the already shaky relationship with the Gozitan inhabitants and thus appointed Giovanni De Soria as the *Capitano* (Bezzina, 2012: 47). However De Soldanis contradicts himself in claiming this. According to him, when the Knights placed their own Governor in 1551, misfortune struck. This mis-matching of dates probably stems from De Soldanis's patriotism. In fact the earliest recorded Governor was Frà Gio Battista Scinesi in November 1534 (Bonello, 2006:40-41). According to Giovanni Bonello several other governors would follow.

The role of this governor was to represent the Grand Master on the island and to supervise the

administration which remained in the hands of the *Università Gaudisii*. Before starting his work, the Governor took the oath of office and he had a salary of 300 *scudi* (Agius De Soldanis, 1999:129). He had the right to choose his own Lieutenant as well. One did not need to be a Knight to occupy this post and could also be a Gozitan. He was responsible to train the military and supervise the watch towers (Galea, 2011: 14). The Governor resided in the square near the *Matrice* Church.

## Society and Population

In order to understand Gozo upon the arrival of the Knights in 1530, one should also take a look at society in general. This did not mean that Gozo and Malta were totally different from each other because what applied to Malta in many respects was also true to Gozo.

In line with late-medieval Europe, Maltese society was segmented in three main strata, the first being the class of the nobles better known as the *gintilhomini* or *homini facultusi*. Among this class were the noble families and feudal lords, most of them being foreigners who had been given some land. These families included the Gatto and Falzon families, amongst others. With regard to Gozo, the Platamone was one such family. In comparison to the other groups this was a very small group but it controlled more than half of the islands including Gozo (Fiorini, 1993: 142). The rest of the islands were in the hands of the *biduini*, being the peasants who owned small fields around the villages. These people were mostly of Arab descent that had converted to Christianity and were allowed to hold on to their belongings (Ibid: 143).

The second class consisted of the artisans and craftsmen known as *ministrali*. In contrast to the other sectors of society they owned nearly no lands. These can be regarded as the sort of middle class in today's society. The third class was formed out of slaves living in the Maltese community. Although by the end of the fourteenth century no vestiges of serfdom were left, there was still the presence of a number of slaves belonging to the nobles and better-off peasants. This can be proved by the several slave sale contracts performed by notaries such as that by notary Zabbara in 1495. With regard to education there was no school recorded in Gozo upon the



arrival of the Knights. The first school is recorded much later in 1573. Education remained backward (Galea, 2011: 21).

An important part of this dissertation is the population argument. It is vital to determine what the population was before the events of 1551 which (event) had a tremendous impact on the population figures on the island since most of the inhabitants were taken into slavery.

The arrival of the Knights in 1530 created serious hardships for the Gozitan inhabitants mostly by the increase of corsair raids. On Gozo alone the Order's chronicler Giacomo Bosio records incursions in 1533, 1540, 1541, 1544, 1545, 1546, 1547, 1550 before the great attack of 1551. Thus at least eight major raids were carried out on Gozo most of them being lead by Rais Dragut (Fiorini, 1986: 203). Comino was the hiding place of these corsairs as noted in Bosio. In 1553 ten of their ships hid in Comino for three days (Bosio, 1602: 127-128). In the 1540 raid by Dragut, 50 Gozitans were taken as slaves (Ibid: 191). In the 1544 raid Dragut's brother was killed after being attacked by the Governor of Gozo Giovanni Ximenes. This could have been the reason why he kept attacking Gozo as a means for revenge (Ibid: 236-237). One might even dare say that it was as if Dragut owned this place because he landed and left whenever he liked. Bosio claims that there were around 8,000 people living on the island before 1551. Estimates of the population were taken at regular intervals. These were recorded because the islands were allowed to draw out grain duty free from Sicily (Ibid: 96).

### **The July 1551 Attack**

In the early days of July 1551 news reached the Order that a large Ottoman force led by Sinan Pasha, Rais Dragut and Kambil Bey was heading westwards. This news got to the Order thanks to the Viceroy of Sicily Giovanni de Vega who sent two Knights on separate dates to warn the Grand Master. This army landed at Augusta. With several slaves managing to escape to Syracuse, it was learnt that Malta and Tripoli were the targets (Ibid: 295). By 16 July, 1551, this had been confirmed by the Knight Antonio Gotto (Ibid.). On 18 July around 145 vessels were sighted. On that same day troops landed on the eastern part of Malta and started moving inland to



Turgut Reis, popularly known as Dragut, in a portrait by Turkish artist Ali Sami Boyar (1880-1967).

attack Mdina as it was less defended. The people who had moved to Mdina were arrayed on the walls to make the Turks believe that there was a large army inside. This worked because by 21 July the Turks retreated (Ibid: 296-302).

On the next day the Turks landed in Gozo. A certain Paolo di Nasis was sent by the Governor de Sessè to ask for help however he was captured along with several soldiers and bombardiers. This was a turning point because there was only one bombardier left in the Citadel (Ibid: 304). Dragut was no foreigner to the island. He convinced Pasha to attack Gozo even though during his interrogation di Nasis lied and told them that Gozo was heavily defended. The southern part of the Citadel walls was the target of the attack. Half of the guns were placed were one finds St George's square and the rest in the area of Putirjal Street. Since the northern part of the Citadel was not one of the Turkish targets, on midnight of 23 July many Gozitans slid down the walls and hid around the island of Gozo. Some three hundred managed to escape in this way (Ibid.).

The real attack began half an hour before dawn on Friday 24 July and dragged on till the following day. The Governor did not yet know that di Nasis

had been captured and still hoped for help from Malta. He only had one bombardier to fire the cannons but he was killed in the early part of the attack. Learning later that reinforcement would not come, de Sessè consulted the elite and it was decided to try and seek a truce (Bezzina, 2000: iii). They decided to surrender if Pasha left 200 of the wealthy free with all their possessions. Father Bartolomeo Bonavia, an Augustinian monk, was lowered with ropes from the walls and went to talk to Sinan Pasha. However Pasha would not listen because he knew that he was on the winning side. To show his mercy he agreed to leave 40 people free as long as the doors were opened immediately. The Governor and the elite decided to agree to the terms and the doors were swung open on Sunday 26 July. The Turks rushed in and started ransacking everything and rounding up Gozitans. In total around 5000 Gozitans were taken away including the Governor. Only 40 old men were spared this fate and a mother and child who were freed thanks to Father Bartolomeo's efforts (Bosio, 1602: 305). Following the departure of the Turks the Grand Master sent a frigate to shadow them to see where they were going and he also sent several ships to Gozo to pick up any survivors.

### **The Role of the Governor de Sessè**

The role played by the Governor of Gozo Frà Galiziano de Sessè during the events of 1551 created a lot of controversy. Once the gates of the Citadel were opened, the governor, against all expectations, was one of the first to be captured and was forced to carry a cart filled with his riches. On 12 August 1551 a few weeks after the event the Grand Master wrote a letter to Charles V the king of Spain telling him how Tripoli was lost and Gozo destroyed. At the end of the same month an inquiry was set up to investigate the role of de Sessè and the Knights he commanded. This matter dragged into 1557. By this time de Sessè had freed himself by paying a ransom.

In his account Bosio insists that the governor had only one gunner, an Englishman, who was killed during the early part of the assault. The public prosecutor argued that de Sessè, who was absent, should have rather died than surrender to the Muslim. The prosecutor, Gonzalez Diaz, asked for his expulsion from the Order. The Grand Master at the time, d'Homedes, wanted the knights

responsible for the fall of Tripoli and the defeat in Gozo to be put to death. However d'Homedes was replaced by La Sengle who took a calmer view of events (Bonello, 2006: 44). The Council reasoned that no one could be judged in *absentia*. Eventually de Sesse returned home in 1556 and was arrested. He was released on 14 August 1557 and all charges against him were dropped (Bosio, 1602: 305). De Sessè had not betrayed the Order and as proof he showed his hands which had the marks of five years of rowing (Bezzina, 2001: 11). Evidently, the governor was a victim of the wider situation because there was not much he could have done against a superior force.

### **Debates About the July 1551 Event**

An important aspect of the historiography related to this event is to determine how information and details have evolved over time and how this is reflected in today's society. There is much controversy with regard to which title, among the three words "attack", "siege" and "holocaust", suits this event best. Several authors have their own view about this. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* "attack" means when one takes aggressive action against someone or something. "Siege" is described as a military operation in which the enemy forces surround a town or building cutting off essential supplies with the aim of compelling the surrender of those inside (Ibid.). "Holocaust" is the destruction or slaughter on a mass scale as happened during World War Two (Soanes and Stevenson, 2004).

The term which fits best is "attack" as this episode in Gozo's history lasted only a mere three days from 24 to 26 July. According to Roads Murphy similar raids often include the last minute hidden agendas of opportunists seeking their own gain. The main characteristic of this type of raid was that they targeted poorly defended places to avoid hard resistance (Pisani, 2001: 6). The term "siege" refers to a long period in which a castle is surrounded and attacked. Available literature suggests that sieges tend to last more than three days and are very bloody, far beyond what occurred in Gozo. The term "holocaust" is somewhat over the top because during recent holocausts which occurred during the wars in Yugoslavia and the preceding examples of World War Two a particular ethnicity was wiped off by an opposing faction. A holocaust refers to men,





The northern side of the Citadel from where many Gozitans manage to slid down the walls on midnight of the 23 July 1551. (Photo: Joseph Calleja).

women and children being killed indiscriminately, and this did not occur during the attack on Gozo because the Turks were only after booty and slaves.

A look at several key authors with regard to the events of the attack itself reveals some conflicting reports. For example Bosio states that 5000 people were taken away into slavery (Bosio, 1602: 305). In his book *Gozo Ancient and Modern Religious and Profane* De Soldanis states that the Turks took away between 6000 and 7000 people (Agius de Soldanis, 1999: 135). Another interesting contention between the two is that Bosio states that the bombardment of the walls was at intervals (Bosio, 1602: 304). De Soldanis, on the other hand states that the cannon fire was constant (Ibid.). There is also disagreement over the number of Gozitans who escaped down the walls with ropes. Bosio recalls that some three hundred managed to do so while more modern authors such as Fiorini state that some seven hundred escaped (Fiorini, 1993: 301). Another

controversy not linked essentially to the “attack” is that regarding who was the first Governor. De Soldanis argues that it was only in 1551 that Gozo had its first Governor while the contemporary author Bonello found several records which state that there were previous Governors (Bonello, 2006: 41-45). There are some monuments in Gozo which remind us of this tragic event. In the Citadel next to the house where the famous Bernardo de Opuo lived there is a commemorative inscription to honour his heroism. During the final stages of the attack he killed his wife and children to prevent them from getting captured and then he killed as many Turks as he could before he was killed. In 2013, following the refurbishment of the Villa Rundle Garden in Republic Street, Victoria, a mosaic monument in remembrance of the event, made by children under the direction of the Gozitan mosaic artist Mary Portelli, was inaugurated.<sup>2</sup> A car parking space near the Villa Rundle Garden which is called *Pjazza l-Assedju*. Another interesting place name which

2 Retrieved on 21st December 2013 from <http://gozonews.com/40984/mosaic-in-the-villa-rundlecommemoratesgozos-tragic-seige>.

some say derives from the attack of 1551 is *Ras in-Newwiela* near Mgarr ix-Xini. It is said that the place got its name as the captives were taken there to be boarded onto the Turkish vessels. This phrase in Maltese/Arabic: *Newwel, newwel, erga newwel*, meaning bring over or pass on refers to the captives (Ciantar, 2000: 70). In 2013, which was the 462nd anniversary of the attack, actor Mario Micallef presented a monologue written by Alfred Palma on 12 July highlighting the life of Michelangelo Merisi di Caravaggio in the Gozo Citadel. Every year, the Ministry for Gozo as the highest public office in Gozo, commemorates this tragic event as well.

Indeed Gozo surely needs a more pronounced monument to remind us of this particular event in its history. It now seems that the 1551 event will get its most deserved monument within the Citadel confines as it has been included in the Masterplan of the Cittadella which (masterplan) aims to renovate the site.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to draw a picture of the situation in Gozo in the period between c.1530 to c.1551, highlighting continuities that can be traced back to Gozo's medieval experiences and the changes brought about as a result of the inception of the Hospitaller rule. The Knights changed certain practices whilst others were left untouched. The main direct effect of this new rule was a negative one for Gozo however, because Gozitans had to bear the brunt of the corsair raids on the island. This negative aspect led to the infamous *razzia* of 1551 due the vast amount of people who were taken into slavery by the Ottomans. Besides providing a picture of the background at the time, this gives an insight on the sources and the rationale behind their use and a look at current debates regarding this black episode.

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