

The Attack on Gozo of 1551 and its Effects on the Gozo Population – Part II¹

The Aftermath of 1551: Economic Aspects (till c.1600)

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Introduction

One very important aspect to consider following the events mentioned in the previous article is the economic aspect. The attack, besides resulting in the enslaving of many of the inhabitants had also a huge economic effect on the island and its inhabitants including claims to untitled lands which eventually led to quarrels between people. This aspect, along with the power of the Church, is analysed with special reference to the *Registrum Foundationum Beneficiorum Insulae Gaudisii* (in short RFBIG). The administration's efforts to revive the island economically are also considered. A fundamental part of this article deals with the ways by which Gozo remedied its demographic deficit. The decisions of the Order played a fundamental part in repopulating the island and thus preventing it from being used as a base by the Muslim corsairs.

The Church and its Lands in Gozo

A major force to reckon with was the Church which was a very powerful institution since the absolute majority of the population followed its lead. Besides being very powerful spiritually, the Church was also an economic force as well, since it possessed a lot of lands in Gozo. The RFBIG and Dusina's report provide ample information regarding the benefices linked to Gozo. A Church benefice is often referred to as an *animagium*. This was the practice of clerics, mostly priests, to get compensated by property in return for spiritual obligations such as celebrating masses (Aquilina and Fiorini, 2001: 457). These individuals had the right to choose a person to serve as heir once the person who had founded the benefice passed away.

Anoteworthy feature in the RFBIG is the considerable amount of priestly vocations at the time. The register refers to a large number of priests and *clerici* still undergoing training to become priests. A few names found in this register are Andreotta Caxaro in 1537, Antonellus de Manuelli in 1540 and Cerbonius de Plathamone also in 1540 (Fiorini, 2006: xlvii). Evidently there was a healthy and stable religious environment. However, it is pertinent to ask about the real motivation behind so many vocations on the island of Gozo. Was the reason purely spiritual or was it an attraction to a lucrative career due to the lands which priests inherited at the time?

The testators of these benefices were rather choosy regarding the type of priest to whom they would give the benefice. The reason behind the offering of these benefices was to have someone who could intercede on behalf of the testator before God when the testator passed away. In most cases they preferred to give it to the poorer priest who led a celibate life. In fact, the conditions imposed for giving these benefices, is attested by the caveat: *Animagium conferendum sacerdotibus si qui forent virtuosi et hon* (the benefice would be given only if the priest was honourable and virtuous) found in Document 12 of 1506 of notary Pinus Saliva. Another example found in document number 90 of 1544 by notary Don Laurentius de Apapis is the condition *Sacerdotes debeant esse pauperes, modeste et honeste vite et non aliter alio modo* (the priests ought to be poor, leading an upright life of modesty and honesty, and not otherwise) (Ibid).

Professor Wettinger in his research on concubines in 1545 draws up a list of 14 Gozitan clergy men who ended up having children. Some of them feature

¹ This article is 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.

in this register, including Don Antonius Mannara, Don Johannes Chappara, Don Julianus Farrugia and Don Johannes de Naso (Ibid: 48). Thus this register not only documents the land accumulated by the Church but also the general attitude towards priests. The cleric Andreas de Bisconis was accused of sexual assault on a certain Jacoba while she was praying at the Church of Saint James situated in Independence Square. Charges were filed against him with the vicar bishop of Malta Don Matheo Brunetto in 1486 (Wettinger, 2005: 161). This also shows that not all priests followed their vocations accordingly by living a life of celibacy.

In this register we also find evidence of the religious orders which were present on the island upon the arrival of the Knights. One order was the Augustinians. This is evidenced by the 1465 bequest of five florins to have a bell made. This request for the purchase of a bell was upheld by Antonius de Naso who, in his will signed on Thursday 5 December 1465, bequeathed five florins to the Augustinian priory (Fiorini, 2006: 60). The Franciscans were also present and this is evidenced by the fact that their Church in Rabat was functioning regularly by 1511 as shown in document 16 of notary Pinus Saliva. In the will of the couple Orlandus and Victoria Caxaro, created on Friday 7 November 1511, the Franciscans were bequeathed two tumina of arable land (Ibid: 21). Another aspect of Gozitan religious life which emerges from this register is the importance of being affiliated to a confraternity. The earliest one dates to 1441, mentioned in document 52 of notary Andreas de Beniamin. This collection of documents refers to a later one under the patronage of St Antoninus as can be seen in document 73 of notary Petrus Mannara (Ibid: 49).

The main church at the time of the arrival of the Knights in the Maltese islands was the *Ecclesia Sancte Marie Matricis* (being the Cathedral Church of today) dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. References to it are already available from the first half of the fifteenth century. The earliest available record is the last will of Nuncius de Episcopo of 1435 (Borg, 2008: 337). In most of the wills of the RFBIG, the *Ecclesia Sancte Marie Matricis* would be mentioned as the place where one would be buried upon his death. The Church is also associated with the bequest of land to ensure right of burial. A case in point is the will

of Gabriel de Anastasio who ensured his right of burial in the *Matrice* by bequeathing half of his land known as *Tal-Bajjada*. This will was created on 9 October 1504 (Fiorini, 2006: 14). The *Matrice* is also mentioned as the church where masses were celebrated on specific days for a purpose. One such example is the will of Donnus Antonius Apap which was created on Friday 22 February 1510 who gave his land to his nephew Don Lanceas Apap in return for a celebration of a mass every Sunday in this church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Ibid: 17). Also this was the church where *animagium* masses were prescribed together with donations of money or goods such as in the case of the will of the couple of Paulius and Jacoba de Girardo where they bequeathed a yearly quota from their vineyard and of grain in case the vine failed to produce anything in order to get buried in this Church. It bears the signature date of 21 May 1519 (Ibid: 37). On the other hand during his visit Dusina ordered that the sacred place where the Blessed Host was kept had to be replaced by a newer one made from wood (Aquilina and Fiorini, 2001: 135).

Over the years this church became simply known as the *Matrice* church. It was also clearly the preferred church of most Gozitans as one can see through these various examples of wills. Also the upper crust of society preferred to build side chapels inside it for their own burial purposes. In fact, this register refers to the Pontremoli family chapel (although it is not certain that it was ever built) mentioned in the will of Francia Pontremoli where she declared her intention of wanting to be buried in this chapel that still had to be built (Borg, 2008: 100-101). Dusina's report of 1575 lists other such chapels such as that of Saint Catherine and Saint Lucy. Nobles also built chapels in other places such as the Rabat cemetery as in the case of the Magistrate Nucius de Episcopo, who in his will signed on Monday 14 November 1435, donated two pieces of land in *Zebbuġ* to the Chapel of St Paul in this cemetery which he had built. The document specified that half of their fruits would go to its maintenance and the other half to the rector (Ibid: 43).

In Rabat there were three other churches besides the *Matrice*. The first one was that of Saint George which was already in existence during the fifteenth century. It was chosen to fulfil the requirements of the 1450 Jubilee (Aquilina and Fiorini, 1994: 14-



The medieval Cittadella and the Matrice. Graphical reconstruction by Stephen C. Spiteri.

16). Another church was that beneath the Citadel which was known as *Ta' Savina* dedicated to the Nativity of Our Lady. The earliest document linked to it goes back to 1479. The other church that of St James was also included in the 1450 Jubilee requirements. It is situated opposite the *Savina* Church in Independence Square (Borg, 2008: 342-344).

Several other small churches situated both in Rabat and in the countryside are also mentioned in the RFBIG and Dusina's report. Many small chapels can be found at the Rabat cemetery situated in its outskirts such as the Saint Nicholas chapel referred to in the will of Petrus Cabrera created on Sunday 9 November 1516. He chose this cemetery as his place of burial for which (chapel) he left money for its maintenance (Fiorini, 2006: 32). There was also the chapel of the Conversion of St Paul in this cemetery of which De Apapis was the rector as mentioned in Dusina's report (Mizzi, 1997: 242). Another very important church in this place was that of St John the Evangelist which Dusina visited. Its beneficiary was a priest called Leo Pontremolus, a very prominent prelate in the Maltese Cathedral who was obliged to celebrate two masses per week. However, with the excuse that it was *costructa in loco solitario* he passed this to *ecclesia majori castris*.

Chapels and small churches in the countryside include the *San Dimitri* chapel found in *Għarb* which is still standing up to this day. It is referred to in document 17 of notary Pinus Saliva in 1514

together with the church known as *Santa Marija tan-Nasi* also in *Għarb*. The *San Dimitri* chapel had an income of five *ewwieq*. Dusina ordered repairs from its income or else its rector would face a penalty of twenty scudi. These repairs included a door and the rebuilding of one of the sides of the chapel. Its rector also gave 1.6 kg of candles each year to the treasurer of the Cathedral of Malta (Aquilina and Fiorini, 2001). Evidence of its existence can also be found in the will of Ventura De Pontremoli created on Thursday 26 January 1515 who bequeathed to this church a fertile land called *Ix-Xagħra* in *Wied il-Mielah* for its maintenance (Fiorini, 2006: 22). The existence of the Church of St George in Rabat is also noted in several wills such as the one of Johannes Bonnici who gave this church a field at *Il-Qortin* on the condition that he would be buried in that church. This will was signed on Monday 28 September 1506 (Ibid: 89-90).

In Dusina's report we also find several other benefices related to Gozo. One such benefice was in favour of Don Leonardo Dallo the rector of the small church of Saint Catherine in Marsalforn made by Giovanni Castelletti on 7 January 1543 which carried the obligation of the celebration of a mass every certain period of time (Aquilina and Fiorini 2001: 401). Dusina ordered that repairs were to be made to this church within a month otherwise a penalty of five scudi would be imposed (Ibid: 189). Dusina even mentions some benefices related to De Apapis such as the chapel of St Paul in the Victoria cemetery mentioned previously (Ibid: 402). De



The San Dimitri Chapel.

Apapis also benefitted from a benefice in relation to the chapel of St Mary in Qala which is still extant (Ibid: 408). Dusina also mentions how the *Matrice* Church got some of its income from land it rented out to people. He refers to several pieces of land such as *Tal-Qortin* in Nadur, *Tal-Għasfur* which is situated under the walls of the Citadel and *Ta' Dbiegi* which is located in San Lawrenz (Ibid: 449). He calculated that this church's income was of eight *uqija* (Ibid: 138).

The Administration After 1551

The administration of the Island also contributed to the economic revival after the siege. It revolved around the *Università Gaudisii* which ruled the island hand in hand with the Grand Master and his Council. The attack of 1551 also affected it, particularly with a change of officials since many members of the previous administration had been taken away into slavery. It brought about some changes within the administration itself as well.

The day-to-day running of Gozo remained as before in the hands of the *Università* made up of two or four *giurati* who were assisted by several officials. What changed was the governor since the Grand Master appointed a certain de Olivares as the new one in 1553.

One can say that by 1560 the *Università* was better organised than before because it was made up of ten officials in total.² There were two *giurati*, in 1560 these being Giacomo Poco Robba and Antonio de Mazara, who were elected annually subject to royal approval (Ibid). One of them trained as a lawyer or notary and acted as the town judge with jurisdiction over both civilian and criminal cases. The *tesoriero*, who in 1560 was Carlo Cassia, administered the income and expenditure of the Island. Income was generated from excise duty and from taxes levied on shops and such. Much of this income was then used on the fortifications mostly to repair damage which had not yet been taken in hand after 1551. There were two *cattapani*, Cola de Federico and Mariano Burlo who were responsible for the markets and the hygiene of the *Castello*. They also checked the correct usage of weights and measures and they also supervised prices to protect the consumers. There were two *giudici idioti* in 1560, being Petro Sanson and Andrea Santor who were judges in civil cases. They were called so because they were not expected to be literate. Finally, there was also the maestro di Piazza who was a sort of local sheriff whose responsibilities were to organise the local militia known as the *Dejma* to be ready for deployment whenever the enemy landed. In 1560 Giovanni Dallo was the *maestro di Piazza* (Bezzina, 2012: 50-51). One can note that some functions and official posts remained the same as before 1551 while some posts and responsibilities were new.

The several transactions of the *Università* showed that gradually from 1560 onwards it was returning to normality just like it used to be in pre-1551. For example, by 1564, the granaries were being filled up to capacity regularly.³ By 1568 the governing body had cleared the fortress of all sorts of debris and rubble resulting from the attack.⁴ In 1573 the *Università* created a school within the walls of the *Castello* and appointed the Augustinian friar Marco

2 National Archives Gozo, *Universitas Gaudisii*, 01/01, f.10r quoted in Briguglio and Bezzina, 61.

3 NAG, UG, 01/01, f. 41r-v quoted in Bezzina (2012), 51.

4 NAG, UG, 01/01, f.44v quoted in *ibid*.

Gandolfo as the headmaster.⁵ He was paid by the same body an annual salary of five scudi. He started from 1 December 1573.⁶ Another school was run by the *Matrice* Church but was tailored for clerics who wanted to become priests with the Dominican Batholome Chaber as its headmaster. By September 1591 he was running it for the *Università*.⁷ From the apostolic visit of Dusina we know that the *Matrice* church gave ten *scudi* to the headmaster of this school.⁸ This was a good sum for the time. The *Università* also placed a commemorative inscription on the door of the house of Bernardo De Opuo in July 1579.⁹ One can argue that the devastating attack of 1551 was still in the memories of the people of Gozo.

The rise in population was reflected in the necessity to import more grain to Gozo. This was usually bought via an agent in Licata, Sicily.¹⁰ From there it was shipped to Marsalforn and then stored in the granaries of the Citadel.¹¹ The importation of wine also reflected the gradual recovery of Gozo. The import license was given to the bidder who offered the highest percentage of import duty.¹² This was a very good source of income for the administration since the Gozitans drank a lot of wine. Another indicator of the return to normality was the greater attention given to the upkeep of the Citadel with the issuing of several *bandos*. Trespassers were also fined.¹³

From the proceedings of a meeting of the *Università* of 10 July 1587, which meeting was headed by Frà Pietro Spina as its Governor, it is evident that the Island was enjoying good times as reflected in the activities held by the administration. The donkey and horse races organised on the 15 of August, the feast of Santa Marija, were discussed and they attracted a lot of people even from Malta. It was decided to increase the number of prizes. Indeed, social life on the island was getting back to normal after the devastating attack of 1551.

The Economy After 1551

The economy itself must also be analysed in order to see how it fared after the attack and how it got back in line. One subject linked to this argument is that of the land, with special reference to agriculture, which was an important part of the economic aspect. In the second volume of the *Acta* of the *Università* a particular document mentions a problem with regard to a piece of land near the chapel of San Dimitri.

The Turkish raid of 1551 not only wrecked the economy of Gozo but it also had an adverse effect on mainland Malta as well. Indeed, under the rule of the Knights, Gozo found a guaranteed market for its agriculture. This was so because the Gozitans sold their agricultural products in Malta and thus always had a secure market (Blouet, 1965: 35). The main effect on agriculture was the void created by the five thousand people who were taken away into slavery, most of whom came from the farming community of the Island. Thus in the period directly after the attack there was no manpower to work the land. As a result, Malta had to increase its imports from Sicily so to balance the reduced amounts it previously got from Gozo. In 1587 due to the lack of manpower, Gozo produced only seven thousand salme of grain which was much lower than its pre-attack output. It was only when the population started to recover gradually that Gozo start reproducing the level of foodstuffs it produced before the attack. The population rise was thus reflected in an increase in the production of agriculture.

Over a century later, around 1661-1662, Gozo started to export enough quantities and also to produce enough to feed its increased population. Animal husbandry moved hand in hand with agriculture. The cotton industry was another important part of the Gozitan economy which was suited to the Island due to its very fertile fields. This industry was also adversely hit by the attack as a result of most of the farming community being

5 NAG, UG, 01/01, f.98v quoted in *ibid*.

6 NAG, UG, 01/02, f. 81v.

7 NAG, UG, 01/02, f.438r-v.

8 Archivum Episcopale Gaudisiense, AP-Baptisma-Matrice, f.197 quoted in Bezzina (2012), 51.

9 NAG, ZM-Miscellanea, 01/01-Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis, *Il Gozo Antico-Moderno e Sacro-Profano* quoted in *ibid*.

10 NAG, UG, 01/02, f.435v quoted in Bezzina (1995), 61.

11 NAG, UG, 01/02, f.436v quoted in *ibid*.

12 NAG, UG, 01/02, f.64r quoted in *ibid*.

13 NAG, UG, 01/02, f.44v quoted in *ibid*.

taken into slavery. With the repopulation of the Island there was an increase in the production of cotton although this industry never reached its full production capacity and continued to decline until it was totally wiped out mostly due to the competition from other countries (Ibid: 35-39).

Several problems arose in connection with the title of lands and properties in Gozo due to the *razzia* of 1551. Since most of the inhabitants of the island were dragged into slavery there were several pieces of land which no one knew to whom they originally belonged and were encroached on by other people. When some of the captives came back they found their land occupied by others. These problems featured as a common impasse in the *Acta* document after the attack of 1551 and similar issues were either solved centuries later or not resolved at all. One such document, dated 19 February 1597,¹⁴ had to do with the Gozitan Leonardu Bongabino who had a problem about a public piece of land adjacent to the chapel of San Dimitri. He knew that this land was adjacent to the property of a Gozitan family living in Sicily known as *tal-Qamri*, to a public road and to the chapel of San Dimitri. The first witness was another Gozitan Ioannes Hajus who remembered this land as being of public ownership and frequently he had led his animals to graze on it. Several other witnesses were called to give their testimony. This document confirms as well the existence of the San Dimitri Chapel which most probably was the same one which still stands to this day and even the street referred to is still there. This is just one example of the long lasting problems resulting from the attack.

Another problem related to the ownership of land occurred after 1551 when the Grand Master sent over a colony of Maltese workers to work the fields. These took over lands previously owned by Gozitans. On their return from slavery the Gozitans did not like the situation at all with the Maltese having had taken over their lands. Given the circumstances, the Grand Master had to send twelve lawyers over from Malta to handle these disputes free of charge due to the large amount of lawsuits which were being filed (Camilleri, 1996: 106).

Regarding properties, such as buildings, there were several problems created by people who tried to

establish close connection with the poor victims taken away into slavery. In several court cases which dragged on for decades they tried to be appointed as trustees and then eventually heirs of the property of the captives. A fragment of a *bando* by Grand Master de la Sengle dated December 1553 stated that the Grand Master gave permission to the close relatives of the captives to move over to Gozo in order to take possession of these properties.

The Repopulation of Gozo After 1551

One must keep in mind that Gozo was utterly depopulated following the *razzia* at the hands of the corsairs lead by Dragut. At first it seemed that the fate of Gozo would be similar to that of its neighbouring Comino, which had become practically deserted. However, due to several reasons Gozo was eventually repopulated.

One important argument about the broader population aspect after the attack of 1551 is the fate of the people who were taken away by the Turkish raiders into slavery. One has to keep in mind that these captives numbered around five thousand and this was a very big number at that time, more so, since it nearly comprised the entire population of the island of Gozo.

The first issue is to establish where these Gozitan captives ended up. Most of the evidence collected shows us that Constantinople was the city where most of the Gozitans were sent to. In one specific court case, Adam La Porta testified that, he was held in Constantinople (Wettinger, 1978: 428). Joannes Axae, another captive, testified that he was also held in the same place together with all the Gozitan captives (Ibid.). It is known that Federico Fruntina died in slavery in Constantinople along with many others such as Antonia de Manuele. Petrus Saliba tried to redeem his daughter Angela who was being held as a slave in Constantinople as well (Fiorini, 1996: 79). The Canon of the Cathedral in Rabat during a court case of Fantino vs Ferriolo claimed that he had spent fourteen years as a slave in the same city. Another witness in this same court case claimed that he had spent ten years there (Ibid). That some Gozitans however were taken elsewhere cannot be doubted. For example, in the court proceedings of

14 NAG, UG, 01/02, f.482v quoted in Joseph Bezzina, 'Kwistjoni fuq Art Fejn San Dimitri', *Hajja f'Ghawdex*, March (1997), 14.

Paula Chappara, she testified that she ended up in Tagiura and subsequently in Tripoli where she was bought by a Turk. Eventually she ended up loving her master from whom she had children and converted to Islam. Paula Chappara certainly was not the only one to do so. Under pressure for survival, Mariana de Frederico followed a similar path (Ibid: 81).

A tradition developed over time that these captives were taken to Tarhuna which was situated around 40 to 50 miles south-east of Tripoli. During the course of time these slaves were absorbed into the local population. Father Costanzo Bergna wrote about this in one of his books in 1925 (Wettinger, 1978: 427). He claims that the people living there had characteristics which resembled those of Christians not Muslims who lived around them. Another monk who was born in Tripoli in 1873, claims in one of his publications that, over time, the Gozitans taken to Tarhuna had converted to Islam. The way they spoke was very different from that of surrounding Arabs and they used a lot of Maltese words and expressions. Whenever quarrels arose it was common for the Arabs to tell them that “they were of Maltese descent of Christian origin” (Ibid). Another monk states that he once heard a Maltese from Tripoli say that his grandfather was one of the Gozitan captives (Bezzina, 2001: 4). Prof. A. Vella mentions another Maltese inhabitant of Tripoli who said that the Turks had landed to the west of Tripoli and marched the captives to Tarhuna (Wettinger, 1978: 429). Although the evidence indicates that Constantinople was the most likely place where the majority of Gozitans were taken, it appears that when the Turks landed in Tagiura after the raid, they sold some of the slaves over there. After taking Tripoli from the Order of St John in 1551 as well, the Turks sailed to Turkey with the slaves they had captured including those from Gozo.

In this context one of the arguments would be whether something was done in order to help these poor souls get back to their native island. Collection boxes were put in every parish church of the Islands with the hope of gathering enough money to be able to ransom a large number of those who were taken away into slavery. The bishop of Malta also conceded a special indulgence from the Pope to

whoever gave money to help ransom these slaves. However, when these boxes were opened in April 1552 only fifty-one *uncie* were found within.¹⁵ This was not a small sum for the time but it did not measure up the required sum for the release of all captives. Only four captives could be ransomed with that sum. Two months later another five *uncie* were collected. This was still not enough to free the Gozitan slaves. The interest in these poor Gozitan slaves diminished steadily. However, there were some Gozitans who were able to ransom themselves because they had enough money to do so, such as Damma Rapa who did so in 1555 (Fiorini, 1996: 79). This is seen in her will which was published by Don Laurentius de Apapis who was also taken into captivity. However, like most well-to-do Gozitans he was able to ransom himself. He was back in Malta by October 1553 when he published the will of the Gozitan Guillelmus de Manuele (Montanaro, 1996: 96). People such as Damma Rapa were very lucky because there were a lot of captives who remained unransomed in Constantinople like Don Johannes Rapa who was the Canon of the Gozo Cathedral. Not even the Order had enough funds to liberate the captives. In 1553 Dragut captured the best galley of the Order’s navy and took it to Girba. The Order had to pay three hundred scudi for the liberation of every crewman (Bezzina, 2001:11). This gives us an example of the funds needed to liberate all the captives. Many of them ended up dying in slavery far away from their own home.

Some Gozitans managed to escape from being captured and taken as slaves by the Turks. Around 40 old men were spared by the Turks. A number of others had managed to climb down the walls of the Citadel at night and went to hide in caves until the Turks went away. Professor Fiorini draws up a list of several surnames representing those who managed either to escape or else belonged to rich families and could have redeemed themselves easily from slavery, such as Bonnici, Navarra, De Apapis and De Caci. These were all surnames of well to do families who appear in early documents after the attack in the deeds of the notaries De Apapis, Gauci and Ciappara.¹⁶ In another list, surnames are described as *Gaulitanus* instead of *Melitensis* in notarial and court records composed by the two Maltese notaries. They thus

15 Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Cathedral Archives, Ms. 4, ff. 173-179 quoted in Wettinger (1978), 428.

16 NAV, R203 Notary L. De Apapis, f. 90 quoted in Stanely Fiorini, ‘The Resettlement of Gozo after 1551’, in *Melita Historica*, Vol IX, 1986, 207.

represent those who either escaped capture or were redeemed, including Cefai, Cini and Vella. Then there are several other surnames such as Sammut, Zabbar, Farrugia and Falzon who, after the attack of 1551, never reappear in any sort of records. One can safely conclude that these people unfortunately ended their life in slavery.¹⁷

A pertinent question in this regard would be, what was the fate of those who either escaped or were ransomed from slavery? A lot of them decided to leave Gozo for good after the tragic event. They were fearful of other attacks by the corsairs. Those who had the means decided to go to Sicily and thus emigrated from Gozo for good since they figured it out that Sicily was more secure. This can be seen from several notarial records. These include Petrus Subtili and his family who moved to Licata.¹⁸ The noble Petrus Bacbac moved to Agrigento.¹⁹ There were two main reasons for this movement to Sicily. After 1551 the Order issued several *bandi* between 1561- 65 encouraging people who were not fit for combat to go to Sicily. The other reason was that a number of Gozitans had family connections in Sicily. With regard to the first reason a number of Gozitans were evacuated to Sicily before 1565. These were offered a free passage out of the islands. Out of the 765 who left in 1564 only nine could have been Gozitans according to Fiorini (Fiorini, 1986: 212). Secondly these connections were established by Sicilians who had been exiled to Gozo. This occurred mostly in the pre 1530 years. Some of those exiles settled in Gozo and established their own families. One such example was Nicolaus de Lucia.²⁰

Other Gozitans decided to look for safety behind the fortifications of Malta which were far stronger than those of Gozo. There are several examples of people who did so, including Antonella de Amfasino and Nicolaus Petrus Balistrera who went to Vittoriosa.²¹ Matheus Machnuc went to Rabat.²²

A look at several records after 1551 reveals that Gozo was characterised by a steady flow of Maltese and Sicilians who moved in to fill the void created by the Gozitans taken into slavery. Sicilians were especially the ones who came to Gozo. The reasons for this immigration are discussed later in the chapter. As early as 1557 we find Sicilians such as Jacobus Pocurobba who came over to live in Gozo.²³ Another example is that of Nicolao Chirino who came over in 1569.²⁴ This does not mean that foreigners came only from Sicily. For example, the noble Joannes Maria Pariscandalo came over from Naples in 1568.²⁵ Other foreigners came from other parts of Italy including from Verona.

We also find an abundant list of Maltese who came over permanently to Gozo. Those who came over for good were described as *habitor hujus terre et Insule Gaudisii* in notarial records. For example, while Pasqualis Grima came over from Balzan,²⁶ Simon Canchun came from Gharghur.²⁷ The biggest number, around 60% according to Fiorini, came from three main regions; the first being Naxxar, Mosta and Ghargur, the second being Żebbuġ and Siggiewi and the last being from Żurrieq, Safi and Qrendi. These brought with them several new surnames which did not exist in Gozo before such as Agius, Cassar, Bezzina and Spiteri (Fiorini, 1996: 86).

The fact that a good number of immigrants crossed over to settle in Gozo, poses the question about what actually pushed them to come over to this place which had just suffered a huge catastrophe. We have several records on the way of life these immigrants led when they were in Gozo which can shed some light on the true reasons behind their move. One must keep in mind as well, that, the initial reaction to this attack by the Grandmaster Juan d'Homedes and his Council was to abandon Gozo for good, but home attracted back many Gozitans who manage either to escape or to ransom themselves from

17 NAV, R287/5(I), f. 199v quoted in *ibid*, 209.

18 NAV, R287/5(II), f. 54v quoted in *ibid*, 241.

19 NAV, R287/5(II), f. 53 quoted in *ibid*, 240.

20 NAV, R203, f.88 reproduced in Stanley Fiorini, 'The Resettlement of Gozo after 1551', *Melita Historica*, Vol IX 1986.

21 NAV, R287/5(I), f.82 reproduced in *ibid*, 242

22 NAV, R229/1 Notary G.S. De Lucia, f.517 reproduced in *ibid*.

23 NAV, R287/1(I), f.4 reproduced in *ibid*, 214.

24 NAV, R287/5(I), f.338 reproduced in *ibid*

25 NAV, R287/4(II), f.48 reproduced in *ibid*.

26 NAV, R287/6(I), f.251 reproduced in *ibid*, 216.

27 NAV, R287/3(I), f.347 reproduced in *ibid*.

slavery. They persuaded the Order to change its mind, even in view, of the massive immigration from Malta and Sicily to Gozo. Also the Order figured out that if it abandoned Gozo, the island would become its Achilles heel since the corsairs would use it as a haven like they did with Comino when Gozo was actually much bigger than Comino. On 4 April 1554, the new Grandmaster, Claude de la Sengle, issued a decree that all those who went to live in Gozo with their wives and family were not to pay any of their debts for four years except in the case of those who owned money for the rent of feudal property, vineyards and other land (Wettinger, 1990: 65).

Soon after 1551, those Gozitans who had the means to ransom themselves were also those who had most property in Gozo. The will of Guillelmo de Manuelo, a well know Gozitan noble, published by de Apapis, listed around 26 different properties in Gozo for example.²⁸ This goes on to show that a large amount of property belonged to a few members of the nobility. These continued to accumulate property and land because those Gozitans who escaped to Sicily sold all their possessions which were bought by these nobles who came back. The Magistrate Matheus Grego who went to Agrigento sold all his belongings to his uncle Antonio Grego for example.²⁹ It was also a custom that, those living in captivity, although still holding on to their lands and properties, left them to be administered by procurators in Gozo. Grandmaster de la Sengle himself with his decree of 1554 appointed procurators on the bases of their connection to respective captives thus removing the possibilities of unrelated people taking over their properties. However, quite a few, figured a way out to take over a fortune which did not belong to them. Until 1570 many Maltese girls married Gozitan men, but after that year this changed. This points to the fact that the Gozitan society after 1551 was mostly composed of males (Fiorini, 1996: 87). Thus, Bartholomeo Gamich a Gozitan man, married Malgraita Burg from Żebbuġ in Malta.³⁰ There were also cases were Gozitan women married immigrant foreigners such as in the case of Elena Stivala, a Gozitan woman, who married Sanctorus Cantello



Claude de la Sengle, Grand Master of the Order of Malta, 1553 - 1557.

from Sicily. These immigrants came to Gozo in the hope of being able to take over property in some way or another at the expense of the poor souls who were taken away into slavery.

But the main reason why they came over to Gozo was in search of work mostly related to agriculture. Previously the three main regions where the Maltese immigrants came from were mostly populated by the rural community of Malta, so there were rarely any instances where people came from the Three Cities, for example. These came over to Gozo in the hope of finding land for cultivation. Other Maltese offered their services on the fields of the noble Gozitans in return for a wage. This included child labour as well. One such case is revealed in the deed published by the notary Guaci where Hieronymus Zarb was obliged to work for Antonio Gentil for one year.³¹

The Maltese who crossed the channel took over land in Gozo for short leases usually of four

28 NAV, R203, f.108 reproduced in Melita Historica, Vol IX, 1986 ,226.

29 NAV, R203, f.108 reproduced in *ibid*.

30 NAV, R287/3(I), f.136 reproduced in Melita Historica, Vol IX, 1986, 236.

31 NAV, R287/5(I), f.439v reproduced in *ibid*, 230.

years, renewable after the end of the lease period. Subcontracting was also common at the time in which one Maltese would take a field and give it to another to work it for him for example. They would not only lease the fields but also the house where the subcontractor would live with his sheep and goats, although the renting of husbandry was not very common. One such contract was between the notary Carolo Cassia who obtained a lease of some fields in Gozo. In return he subcontracted the land to Salvo Biscon and Georgio Haius.³² What was also common in this type of lease was the forming of partnerships known as (*soccida*) between the two sides. For a number of years the owner would give stock to the farmer and in return the farmer would see to the labour and management of the land. Profits would be divided equally after first removing the expenses of the lease. One such case was the partnership between the Gozitan Stephanus Bigeni and the Maltese Dominico Spiteri.³³

Another important aspect of the population changes has to do with births, marriages and deaths which gives an idea on population trends after the attack of 1551. Besides the work by Fiorini, the book 'The Earliest Church Register' by Horatio Vella, provides interesting insights based on the earliest church register in Gozo, that of 1554. First of all this register was endorsed by the parish priest of the *Matrice* Church Leonard Decace in 1554. This proves that a mere three years after the attack of 1551 the damage to the church was repaired and the church was functioning again. This register also belongs to the other church in Gozo, being that of St George, thus combining the information of both and stretches from 1554 to 1628. Today this register is found at the Bishop's Curia in Victoria Gozo.

By 1554 the *Matrice* Church was functioning again as confirmed by the first recorded baptism of Joanne Manuelli daughter of Nicholas.³⁴ Another example of a baptism is that of Peter Paul Ciascun son of William and Angelina.³⁵ By 1600 around 752 children had been baptised. It was also common to baptise slaves such as Marius belonging to Sigismund and Agnese Baglio who was baptised

on 20 November 1567 and also to baptise children of slaves who were born into slavery (Vella, 2012: 73). In total, between 1554 and 1600, 21 slaves were baptised as well. Newborn males were more numerous than females. One must keep in mind that nearly every family was Christian and had its newborns baptised. In this respect the numbers suggest a very low rate of growth. After 1551 these families were living in difficult times and were still settling in. Also families coming from Malta or Sicily could have already baptised their children before coming over so their baptism would not be recorded. Records of deaths of babies which unfortunately, were very common at the time, was not well kept and thus they were never registered since the registration of newborns did not occur immediately but took weeks or months after the birth.

From this church register one can also get an idea of the marriages which were recorded on the island. Between the period 1554-1600, 112 marriages were celebrated in Gozo with the first marriage being that of John Curmi who married Angela Muscat on 25 December 1556.³⁶ One notes the age of marriage was low for both the bridegrooms, being mostly between 19 and 27 and for brides between 15 and 28. The most common surnames for men were Spiteri and Vella. Another integral part of this register relates to deaths. This also gives us an idea of the flux in the population of Gozo during the relevant period. The first death in this register is very late when compared to other dates. It was registered on 11 December 1591 being that of a certain Marguerite.³⁷ It was common for death records to start after baptisms and marriages. From the start of this death register till 1600 around 37 people had died, most of them being female. This continues to explain the predominance of the male population in Gozitan society. Also the register reveals the presence of several prominent people on the island at one stage or another such as Bishop Gargallo who celebrated a confirmation on 2 July 1579 (Vella, 2012: 187). Several Governors of Gozo, notaries, doctors and soldiers are also mentioned. There is even the mentioning of prostitutes.

32 NAV, R287/5(I), f.163v-169v reproduced in *ibid*, 231.

33 NAV, R287/5(I), f.181 reproduced in *ibid*.

34 AEG, AP, 01, f.1.

35 AEG, AP, 01 f.50v.

36 AEG, AP, 01 f.102.

37 AEG, AP, 01 f.122.

It is clear, therefore, that the population of Gozo after 1551 was mostly composed of males who managed to escape the corsairs and those who ransomed themselves from captivity and went back to Gozo jealous of their possessions being taken by others. Other Gozitans went to Malta and Sicily to get a feeling of security. The Gozitans who stayed in Gozo did not want others to take over their possessions and this can be seen from the procurators of the captives who were almost all Gozitans. The foreigners only managed to penetrate through intermarriages and even in the sale of property by Gozitans, although it was mostly other Gozitans who bought it. However, the immigration of Maltese and Sicilians was vital because the locals could not cope with the void left by those taken captive by the corsairs.

Conclusion

It appears, therefore, that although at first the island was affected in a negative way, it managed to get back on its feet at a steady pace. The main contributors to this economic revival were the Order of St John, with its granting of incentives to the Maltese and foreigners to go and live and work in Gozo and the important role played by the *Università*.

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